

Winnie Childs eBook

Winnie Childs by Alice Muriel Williamson

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THE SHOP GIRL

CHAPTER I

THE DRYAD DOOR

It was a horrible day at sea, horrible even on board the new and splendid *Monarchic*. All the prettiest people had disappeared from the huge dining-saloon. They had turned green, and then faded away, one by one or in hurried groups; and now the very thought of music at meals made them sick, in ragtime.

Peter Rolls was never sick in any time or in any weather, which was his one disagreeable, superior-to-others trick. Most of his qualities were likable, and he was likable, though a queer fellow in some ways, said his best friends—the ones who called him “Petro.” When the ship played that she was a hobby-horse or a crab (if that is the creature which shares with elderly Germans a specialty for walking from side to side), also a kangaroo, and occasionally a boomerang, Peter Rolls did not mind.

He was sorry for the men and girls he knew, including his sister, who lay in deck chairs pretending to be rugs, or who went to bed and wished themselves in their peaceful graves. But for himself, the wild turmoil of the waves filled him with sympathetic restlessness. It had never occurred to Peter that he was imaginative, yet he seemed to know what the white-faced storm was saying, and to want to shout an answer.

The second morning out (the morning after the *Monarchic* had to pass Queenstown without taking on the mails or putting off enraged passengers) Peter thought he would go to the gymnasium and work up an appetite for luncheon. He had looked in the first day, and had seen a thing which could give you all the sensations and benefits of a camel ride across the desert. He had ridden camels in real deserts and liked them. Now he did not see why waves should not answer just as well as dunes, and was looking forward to the experiment; but he must have been absent-minded, for when he opened what ought to have been the gymnasium door, it was not the gymnasium door. It was—good heavens!—*what* was it?

Peter Rolls, the unimaginative young man, thought that he must be in his berth and dreaming he was here. For this room that he was looking into could not possibly be a room on a ship, not even on the *Monarchic*, that had all the latest, day-after-to-morrow improvements and luxuries. The very bread was to-morrow’s bread; but these marvellous creatures could not be supplied by the management as improvements or luxuries of any kind. Peter seemed to have opened a door into a crystal-walled world peopled entirely by dryads.

He thought of dryads, because in pictures, beings called by that name were taller, slimmer, more graceful, more beautiful, and had longer legs than young females of mortal breed. There were five of them (at least he believed there were five), and though it was eleven o'clock in the morning, they were dressed as if for the prince's ball in the story of "Cinderella." Unless on the stage, Peter had never seen such dresses or such girls.

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He heard himself gasp; and afterward, when he and a wave together had banged the door shut, he hoped that he had said: "I beg your pardon." He was so confused, however, that he was not at all sure he had not blurted out "Good Lord!"

For a moment he stood as still as the sea would let him in front of the door, burning to open it again and see if the girls were really there. But, of course, he could not do that. He would have been almost inclined to believe they were wax figures if they had not moved, but they had moved.

They had been—sprawling is not a word to use in connection with dryads—yet certainly reclining, in easy chairs and on sofas, and had started up as the door opened to stare at him. One had laughed. Peter had shut the door on her laugh. He had brought away a vague impression that chairs, sofas, and carpet were pale gray, and that the dryads' dresses of wonderful tints, sparkling with gold and silver and jewels, had been brilliant as tropical flowers against the neutral background. Also, when he came to think of it, he wasn't sure that the walls were not mostly made of mirrors. That was why he could not be certain whether he had seen five dryads or five times five.

"The dryad door," he apostrophized it romantically, keeping his balance by standing with his feet apart, as old men stand before a fire. It was a very ordinary-looking door, and that made the romance for Peter in giving it such a name—just a white-painted door, so new that it smelled slightly of varnish—yet behind it lay dreamland.

Of course Peter Rolls knew that the tall, incredibly lovely beings were not dryads and not dreams, although they wore low necks, and pearls and diamonds in their wonderful, waved hair, at eleven o'clock of a stormy morning on board an Atlantic liner. Still, he was blessed if he could think what they were, and what they were doing in that room of mirrors without any furniture which he could recall, except a very large screen, a few chairs, and a sofa or two.

The next best thing to the forbidden one—opening the door again to ask the beings point-blank whether they were pipe dreams or just mermaids—was to go on to the gymnasium and inquire there. Toward this end young Mr. Rolls (as he was respectfully called in a business house never mentioned by his sister) immediately took steps. But taking steps was as far as he got. Suddenly it seemed a deed you could not do, to demand of an imitation-camel's attendant why five young ladies wore evening dress in the morning in a room three doors away.

After all, why should a camel attendant dare to know anything about them? Perhaps they were merely amusing themselves and each other by trying on all their gladdest clothes. There might be girls who would think this a good way to kill time in a storm. Yes, conceivably there might be such girls, just as there might be sea serpents; but, though Peter Rolls was too shy to have learned much about the female of his species, the explanation did not appeal to his reason.

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His mind would persist in making a mystery of the mirror-walled room with its five dazzling occupants, and even the bumpings of the imitation camel could not jerk out of his head speculations which played around the dryad door. He was as curious as *Fatima* herself, and with somewhat the same curiosity; for, except that in one case the beautiful ladies had their heads, and in the other had lost them, there was a hint of resemblance between the two mysteries.

Peter Rolls wondered whether he would like to ask his sister Ena if she knew the visions, or even if, being a woman, she could form any theory to account for them. It would be interesting to see what she would say; but then, unless she were too seasick, she would probably laugh, and perhaps tell Lord Raygan.

As for the visions themselves, only one had spirit enough left in her to be able to laugh at being thought a dryad or a mystery. She alone of the five would have known what "dryad" means. And she could always laugh, no matter how miserable or how sick she was.

That day she was very sick indeed. They were all very sick, but she could not help seeing, at her worst, that it was funny.

"For heaven's sake, what are you giggling at?" snapped the longest, slimmest, most abnormal dryad, diaphanously draped in yellow, when she could gasp out an intelligible sentence after an exhausting bout of agony.

"Us," said the girl who could always laugh, a vision in silver.

"Us? I don't see anything funny about us!" groaned a tall dream in crimson and purple.

"Funny! I should think not!" snorted a fantasy in emerald.

"It makes me worse to hear you laugh," squealed a radiance in rose.

"I wish we were all dead, *especially* Miss Child," snarled the last of the five, a symphony in black and all conceivable shades of blue. Because of this combination, the Miss Child in question had named her the "Bruise."

"Sorry! I'll try not to laugh again till the sea goes down," Miss Child apologized. "I wasn't laughing at any of *you* exactly, it was more the whole situation: us, dressed like stars of the Russian ballet and sick as dogs, pearls in our hair and basins in our hands, looking like queens and feeling like dolls with our stuffing gone."

"Don't speak of stuffing. It makes me think of sage and onions," quavered the tallest queen.

“Ugh!” they all groaned, except Winifred Child, who was to blame for starting the subject. “Ugh! Oh! Ugh!”

When they were better they lay back on their sofas, or leaned back in their chairs, their beautiful—or meant to be beautiful—faces pale, their eyes shut. And it was at this moment that Peter Rolls burst open the door.

As he had observed, the waxlike figures moved, sat upright, and stared. This sudden disturbance of brain balance made them all giddy, but the surprise of seeing a man, not a steward, at the door, was so great that for a moment or two it acted as a tonic. Nothing dreadful happened to any one of the five until after the smooth black head had been withdrawn and the door closed.

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"A man!" breathed Miss Devereux, the abnormally tall girl in yellow chiffon over gold gauze.

"Yes, dear. I wonder what he wanted?" sighed Miss Carroll, the girl in rose.

The one in green was Miss Tyndale, the one in black and blue Miss Vedrine, all very becoming labels; and if they had Christian names of equal distinction to match, the alien known at home simply as "Win" had never heard them. They called each other Miss Devereux, Miss Carroll, Miss Tyndale, and Miss Vedrine, or else "dear."

"I wish we could think he wanted to see us!" remarked Miss Tyndale.

"I hope he didn't notice the basins," added Miss Vedrine

"I think we hid them with our trains," said Miss Carroll.

"Was he nice looking?" Miss Vedrine had courage to ask. She had wonderful red hair, only a little darker at the roots, and long, straight black eyelashes. A few of these had come off on her cheeks, but they were not noticeable at a distance.

"I don't know, I'm sure, dear," replied Miss Devereux, a fawn-eyed brunette, who was nearest the door. "There wasn't time to see. I just thought: 'Good heavens! have we got to parade?' Then, 'No, thank goodness, it's a man!' And he was gone."

"What should we do if a woman did come, and we had to get up?" wondered Miss Vedrine, whose great specialty was her profile and length of white throat.

"She wouldn't be a woman; she'd be a monster, to care about clothes in weather like this," pronounced the golden-haired Miss Carroll. "Parade indeed! I *wouldn't*. I'd simply lie down and expire."

"I feel I've never till now sympathized enough with the animals in the ark," said Miss Child, who had not chosen her own name, or else had shown little taste in selection, compared with the others. But she was somehow different, rather subtly different, from them in all ways; not so elaborately refined, not so abnormally tall, not so startlingly picturesque. "One always thinks of the ark animals in a procession, poor dears—showing off their fur or their stripes or their spots or something—just like us."

"Speak for yourself, if you talk about spots, please," said Miss Devereux, who never addressed Miss Child as "dear," nor did the others.

"I was thinking of leopards," explained the fifth dryad. "They're among the few things you *can* think of without being sick."

"I can't," said Miss Devereux, and was. They all were, and somehow Miss Child seemed to be the one to blame.

"We were just getting better!" wailed Miss Vedrine.

"It was only a momentary excitement that cheered us," suggested Winifred Child.

"What excitement?" they all wanted indignantly to know.

"That man looking in."

"Do you call that an excitement? Where have you lived?"

"Well, a surprise, then. But *would* we have been better if it had been madame who looked in?"

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The picture called up by this question was so appalling that they shuddered and forgot their little grudge against Miss Child, who was not so bad when you were feeling well, except that she had odd ways of looking at things, and laughed when nobody else could see anything to laugh at.

"Thank heaven, she's a bad sailor!" Miss Devereux cried.

"Thank heaven, all the other women on board are bad sailors," added Win.

"If madame was well she'd think *we* ought to be," said Miss Carroll. "She'd dock our pay every time we— Oh, *this* is bad enough, but if she was well it would be a million times worse!"

"Could anything be worse?" Miss Tyndale pitifully questioned, for just then the ship was sliding down the side of a wave as big as a millionaire's house.

"Yes, it would be worse if we were wearing our waists slender this year," said Win.

"Down, down, wallow, wallow, jump!" was the program the *Monarchic* carried out for the twentieth time in half as many minutes. Slender waists! Oh, horrible to think of, unless you broke in two and death ended your troubles!

"Let's try breathing *in* as she goes up and *out* as she goes down. I've heard that works wonderfully," said Win.

They tried, but it worked disappointingly that time. Perhaps it was the ship's fault. It was impossible to time her antics with the most careful breathing.

"Oh, why did we leave our peaceful homes?" moaned Miss Vedrine.

"I didn't," whispered Win.

"Didn't what?"

"Leave my peaceful home. If I'd had one I shouldn't be here."

This was the first time she had volunteered or had had dragged out of her a word concerning her past. But at the moment no one could be keyed to interest in anything except preparation for the next wave.

In the veranda cafe Peter Rolls was asking his sister Ena if she knew anything about five incredibly beautiful girls in evening dress shut up together in a room with walls made of mirrors.

Ena Rolls was not in a mood to answer irrelevant questions, especially from a brother; but Lord Raygan and his sister were there, and pricked up their ears at the hint of a mystery. She could not be cross and ask Peter kindly to go to the devil and not talk rot, as she would have done if the others had been somewhere else. But then, were it not for Lord Raygan and his sister and mother, Miss Rolls would be flat in her berth.

“Five incredibly beautiful girls in evening dress!” repeated Lord Raygan, who, like Peter, was a good sailor.

Ena Rolls wanted him to be interested in her, and not in five preposterous persons in evening dress, so she replied promptly to Peter’s question: “I suppose they must be Nadine’s living models. We all had cards about their being on board and the hours of their parade to show the latest fashions. You saw the card, I suppose, Lady Eileen?”

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"Yes," returned Lord Raygan's flapper sister. "It's on the writing-desk in that darling sitting-room you've given Mubs and me."

Ena felt rewarded for her sacrifice. She and Peter had engaged the best suite on board the *Monarchic*, but when Lord Raygan and his mother and sister were borne past Queenstown in most unworthy cabins (two very small ones between the three), Ena had given up her own and Peter's room to the two ladies. It was a Providential chance to make their acquaintance and win their gratitude. (She had met Raygan in Egypt and London, and sailed on the *Monarchic* in consequence.)

"The stewardess told me before I moved down," she went on, "that *Mme. Nadine* had taken the ship's nursery this trip for her show, and fitted it with wardrobes and mirror doors at immense expense. I'm afraid she won't get her money back if this storm lasts. Who could gaze at living models?"

"I could, if they're as beautiful as your brother says," replied Lord Raygan, a tall, lanky, red-headed Irishman with humorous eyes and a heavy jaw. He was the first earl Ena had ever met, but she prayed fervently that he might not be the last.

Peter somehow did not want those pale dryads sacrificed to make a Raygan holiday. He regretted having remarked on their beauty. "They looked more like dying than living models when I saw them," he said.

"Let's go and see what they look like now," suggested Raygan. "Eh, what, Miss Rolls?"

"I don't know if men *can* go," she hesitated.

"Who's to stop them? Why shouldn't I be wanting to buy one of the dresses off their backs for my sister?"

"What a *melting* idea! You do, don't you, dear boy?" the flapper encouraged him.

"I might. Come along, Miss Rolls. Come along, Eily. What about you, Rolls? Will you guide us?"

"Let's wait till after lunch," said Ena. She hoped that it might disagree with everybody, and then they would not want to go.

"Oh, no!" pleaded Lady Eileen O'Neill. "We may be dead after luncheon, and probably will be. Or Rags'll change his mind about the dress. Nadine's dresses are too heavenly. I've never seen any except on the stage, worn by wonderful, thin giantesses. All her gowns are named, you know, Rags: 'Dawn,' or 'Sunset,' or 'Love in Spring,' or 'Passion in Twilight,' and poetic things like that."

“Can’t be very poetic bein’ sick in ’em, by Jove! for those girls in the nursery,” remarked Rags, “especially if they’ve got a sense of humour.”

(One of them had. The shimmering sheath of silver and chiffon she wore to-day, as it happened, rejoiced in the name of “First Love.” It was all white. She was being very careful of its virginal purity; but it occurred to her that unless the sea’s passion died, the frock would soon have to be renamed “Second Love,” or even “Slighted Affection,” if not “Rejected Addresses.”)



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Urged by Eileen, who would think her a “pig” if she refused, Ena reluctantly uncurled herself from a safe and graceful position on a cushioned sofa. The result was alarming. Her swimming head warned her that if she did not instantly sit down again something too awful to think of in the presence of an earl would happen.

“You’d better go without me. I’m not very keen,” she faintly explained, appealing to Peter with her eyes.

He contrived to understand without asking stupid questions, as some brothers would, and hurried the others off to the room of the mirrors. No longer was it a room of mystery; yet romance, once awakened, cannot be put to sleep in a minute, and Peter Rolls’s heart beat with excitement or shyness, he was not sure which, as Lady Eileen O’Neill knocked at the dryad door.

CHAPTER II

BALM OF GILEAD

It was the worst possible moment for the dryads. But when their tear-wet eyes beheld a girl and two men, some deep-down primordial pride of womanhood rushed to their rescue and, flowing through their veins, performed a miracle beyond the power of any patent remedy. The five forlorn girls became at need the five stately goddesses *Mme. Nadine* paid them to be. (Winifred Child, by the way, was not paid, for she was not a goddess by profession. But she got her passage free. It was for that she was goddessing.)

Miss Devereux was the leader, by virtue, not of extra age, no indeed! but of height, manner, and experience. She apologized, with the most refined accent, for *Mme. Nadine*, who was “quite prostrated”; for *Mme. Nadine’s* manageress, who was even worse; and for themselves. “I’m afraid we must do the best we can alone,” she finished with unconscious pathos.

“It’s a shame to disturb you,” said Peter Rolls.

Miss Devereux and her attendant dryads turned their eyes to him. They had fancied that he was the man who had burst in before and burst out again; now they were sure. If he had been a woman, they would have borne him a grudge for coming back and bringing companions worse than himself; but as he was a man, young, and not bad looking, they forgave him meekly.

They forgave the other man for the same reason, and forgave the girl because she was with the men. If only they could behave themselves as young ladies should through this ordeal! That was the effort on which they must concentrate their minds and other organs.

“Not at all,” returned Miss Devereux, every inch a princess. “We are *here* to be disturbed.” (Alas, how true!)

She smiled at Lady Eileen, but not patronizingly, because a mysterious instinct told her that the plain, pleasant young girl in Irish tweed was a “swell.” The men, too, were swells, or important in some way or other. One exerted one’s self to be charming to such people and to keep the male members of the party from looking at the other girls. “Would you like to see something else, different from what we are showing? Evening cloaks? Day dresses? We have a number of smart little afternoon frocks——”

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"I think that white dress is the *meltingest* thing I ever saw," said Lady Eileen, who had walked into the room without waiting for Miss Devereux's answer to Peter Rolls's objection.

She was a kind-hearted girl, but, after all, living models were living models until they were dead, and she wasn't going to lose the chance of getting a dreamy frock out of Rags! All the goddesses were on their mettle and their feet now, though swaying like tall lilies in a high wind and occasionally bracing themselves against mirrors, while Lady Eileen was in the biggest chair, with Raygan and Peter Rolls standing behind her. The men also were offered chairs by Miss Vedrine with a lovely play of eyelashes, but refused them: the chairs, not the eyelashes, which no man could have spurned, despite their scattered effect.

"The white dress, *moddam*?" (It thrills a flapper to be called "*moddam*.") "It is one of the latest designs and considered perfect for a debutante. No doubt you know it is *Mme. Nadine*'s custom to name her inspirations. Come here, if you please, Miss Child! This is 'First Love.'"

"Looks like it," remarked Lord Raygan, as Miss Child obeyed. He might have meant the wearer or the dress. Peter Rolls flashed a gimlet glance his way to see which. He felt uncomfortably responsible for the manners of the visitors and the feelings of the visited. But the face of Rags was grave, and no offence could be taken. Peter Rolls withdrew the glance, though not before Winifred Child had it intercepted and interpreted.

"I believe he's a nice fellow," was the thought that slid through her mind as, like a chicken on a spit, she turned and turned to let Lady Eileen behold "First Love" from every point of view.

"Rippin', but a foot too tall for you," said Rags, more because it amused him to prolong the scene than through a real desire to criticise. "*You* don't go in for bein' a sylph."

Another backhanded compliment for the wearer, if she cared to accept it; but she was beautifully unconscious and, for once, not laughing. Her eyes looked miles away. Peter Rolls wondered to what land she had gone.

The girl appeared to be gazing over his head; but, as a matter of fact, she could see him perfectly. He had black hair and blue eyes, shrewd perhaps, yet they might be kind and merry; just now they looked worried. She thought him not handsome, but tanned and thin (she detested fat men) and somehow nice. Win wondered if she were taller than he. She hated being taller than men, though she owed her present engagement to her height and length of limb.

Miss Devereux respectfully argued that appearances were deceitful. *Moddam* was quite as sylphlike as the model. Might the dress be sent to *moddam*'s cabin to try? Then it

came out that *moddam* was Lady Eileen O'Neill, and the four tallest dryads visibly brightened, not so much for the owner of the name as for her brother.

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Their dull days had been dimly lightened by gossip on the ship, brought to them by a stewardess from Lord Raygan's native isle, who knew all about him: that he was an earl, that with his mother and sister he had booked from Liverpool to Queenstown, but, owing to the ferocity of the sea, had been unable to land and was being carried to America. Also that a rich young American and his sister had given up their suite to the ladies. This American was said to be of no birth, the son of some big shopkeeper, and far, far outside even the fringe of the Four Hundred; therefore the tallest dryads did their best eyelash work for Lord Raygan. They were born British, hailing from Brixton or other suburban health resorts, and now they knew he was a "lord" the nickname of "Rags," which had sickened them at first, seemed interesting and intimate as a domestic anecdote about royalty.

Rags consented to buy the dress for his sister if it fitted and didn't cost a million pounds. The dryads thought this adorably generous, for the stewardess, who knew all about Lord Raygan, said that the "family had become impoverished; they were not what they had once been except in name, which was of the best and oldest in Ireland." Stewardesses can tell all the things that Marconi does not mention.

When the sale was settled Miss Devereux turned to Peter Rolls. "And you, sir?" she asked, slightly coquettish because he was a man, though not of the Four Hundred. "I suppose there's nothing we can do for you?"

"I suppose not," Peter was echoing, when something occurred to him. "Unless," he amended, "my sister would like to buy a dress. She's on board."

"Would she care to look at *Mme. Nadine's* designs?" suggested Miss Devereux. "We have wardrobes full of marvellous inspirations."

"The trouble is, she feels queer if she walks around much," said Peter.

"Perhaps she would trust you to pick out something she might see in her own room? Is she tall or short?"

"Not so tall as any of you."

"Things which would fit *this* young lady would be the best, then. Miss Child, Miss Vedrine will help you out of 'First Love' behind the screen and put you into the 'Young Moon.' What"—*sotto voce*—"are you laughing at *this* time?"

"Nothing," said the smallest dryad meekly, though she gurgled under her breath.

"We'd better go now, and I'll come back," hastily suggested Peter. "Don't bother to change behind the screen for us, please. I must ask my sister about the dress."

He got the others out, which was not difficult as far as Eileen was concerned. She could hardly wait to try "First Love."

Rags was determined to ask Miss Rolls if he shouldn't choose a frock for her. But she said no, she didn't want one. This would have seemed to settle the matter, and did for Lord Raygan, who sat down beside her, abandoning further thought of the dryads. Peter, however, returned in due course to the room of the mirrors, because Miss Child could not be allowed to get into the "Young Moon" in such weather for nothing.

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She was in it when he arrived. And pluck, mingled with excitement, having had a truly bracing effect on the girls, in the absence of the peer they were nice to the plebeian. The girl in the “Young Moon,” to be sure, had scarcely anything to say, but she had a peculiarly fascinating way of not saying it.

By the time Mr. Rolls had bought the “Moon” for his sister, he had become quite friendly with the other dryads, on the strength of a few simple jokes about green cheese and blue moons and never having dreamed he could obtain one by crying for it.

“I was wondering,” he said at last, when he was about to go, “whether you’d care for me to bring you some Balm of Gilead?”

“Balm of Gilead?” all five, even the girl in the “Moon,” exclaimed.

“Yes. Stuff for seasickness. Not that you *are* seasick of course. But the balm’s a good preventive. Did you never hear of it?”

They shook their heads.

“It’s the great thing our side of the water. I don’t need it myself, but I know it’s all right, because it’s making my father a fortune.”

“Did he invent it?” inquired Miss Carroll.

“No. But he named it and he sells it. It’s the men who name things and sell things, not the ones who invent them, that get the money. My father is Peter Rolls, and I——”

“I hope you spell Rolls with an ‘e,’” broke in Miss Vedrine. “Else it would remind me of something I want to forget.”

“Something you—But maybe I can guess! What the ship does now?”

“Don’t speak of it!” they groaned.

“I won’t! Or my name, either, if you’d rather not, especially as only my sister spells it with an ‘e.’ I mentioned the name on account of the balm. The barber has no end of bottles. I’ll go and buy you one now. It tastes good. Back in ten minutes.” And he was gone.

“His father must be a chemist,” sniffed Miss Devereux, as she unhooked the “Young Moon.”

When Peter returned Miss Child was wearing a robe like an illuminated cobweb on a background of violets. This was the “Yielding Heart.” Peter had brought a bottle and a

clean napkin and five teaspoons. "I got these things off a dining-room steward," he explained.

"Sounds like a conjurer," murmured the girl who laughed.

"How rude of you!" Miss Devereux scolded in a whisper. "Don't mind her, Mr. Rolls. She isn't a bit like the rest of us."

Peter had noticed that.

"She's always laughing at everything, and everybody, too," went on Miss Devereux.

"She's welcome to laugh at me," said Peter. "I enjoy it."

"Ladies don't. She'd never do for a *permanence* with *Mme. Nadine*. Clients wouldn't stand being grinned at by models."

"I don't laugh at people. I laugh at the world," the model defended herself.

"Why?" inquired Peter, with a straight look at the queer, arresting face.

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"To keep it from laughing at me first. And to make it laugh *with* me—if I can."

"Do you think you can?"

"I shall try hard—against the biggest odds. And whatever it does to me, I shan't *cry*."

"I shouldn't wonder if that wasn't the whole secret of life!" said Peter Rolls, continuing to look at the face.

Suddenly it flashed a smile at him. "Shouldn't you? Give *me* the Balm of Gilead, and the rest would be easy!"

Peter was not stupid as a rule, yet he could not be quite sure what she meant. If he guessed right, the rest wasn't as easy as she thought. Yet the words made him wish that he could give the girl who laughed—the girl who was not to be a "permanence" with Nadine—more than a teaspoonful of balm.

CHAPTER III

AN ILL WIND

While the storm held, Peter Rolls went several times each dreadful day to the room of the mirrors and dosed his dryads with Balm of Gilead. The medicine—or something else—sustained them marvellously. And it occurred to Peter that they would make a magnificent advertisement, if there were any way of using them—the kind of advertisement his father loved.

It was well that Peter senior was not on board, or he would certainly propose a new feature for the balm department: scene, richly furnished salon on a yacht; five fair effects in ball dresses sipping Balm of Gilead; the whole arrangement on a rocking platform, with mechanism hidden by realistically painted waves. But the dryads were previously engaged by the prostrate Nadine—all except one.

When they were sufficiently restored to take an interest, Peter smuggled grapefruit, chocolates, and novels into the nursery. The novels his sister had brought with her to kill time during the voyage; but as it happened, she was killing it with Lord Raygan instead and never missed the books.

Nadine had been obliged to take first-class tickets for her models; otherwise the rules of the ship would not have allowed them past the barrier, even in the pursuit of business. But they sardined in one cabin, near the bow, on the deepest down deck allotted to first-classhood, and their private lives were scarcely more enjoyable than the professional. They were, to be sure, theoretically able to take exercise at certain hours, weather permitting; but weather did not permit, and four of the dryads, when free, sought

distraction in lying down rather than walking. It was only the fifth who would not take the weather's "no" for an answer.

She had a mackintosh, and with her head looking very small and neat, wound in a brown veil the colour of her hair, she joined the brigade of the strong men and women who defied the winds by night. From eight to ten she staggered and slid up and down the wet length of the least-frequented deck, or flopped and gasped joyously for a few minutes in an unclaimed chair.

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Being “not a bit like the rest” of her sister dryads, she refrained from mentioning this habit to Mr. Rolls, whose prowling place was on higher decks. Not that she was still what he would have called “standoffish” with him. That would have been silly and Victorian after the grapefruit and chocolates and novels, to say nothing of balm by the bottleful. The last dress she had worn on the first day of their acquaintance, the “Yielding Heart,” had to a certain extent prophesied her attitude with the one man who knocked at the dryad door. Miss Child not only thought Mr. Rolls “might be rather nice,” but was almost sure he was. She was nice to him, too, in dryad land, when he paid his visits to the sisterhood, but she did not “belong on his deck.”

By and by, however, he discovered her in the mackintosh and veil. It was one night when a young playwright who had seized on him as prey wished to find a quiet place to be eloquent about the plot.

“There’s a deck two below,” said the aspirant for fame, “where nobody prowls except a young female panther tied up in a veil.”

Five minutes later Peter Rolls took off his cap to the female panther. The playwright noticed this, but was too much interested in himself and the hope of securing a capitalist to care. In sketching out his comedy he was blind to any other possibilities of drama, and so did not see Peter’s eagerness to get rid of him. He was even pleased when, after a few compliments, Rolls junior said: “Look here, you’d better leave me to think over what you’ve told me. I fix things in my memory that way. And maybe when I’ve got it straight in my head I’ll—er—mention it to a man I know.”

As the playwright was shivering, he obeyed with alacrity; and in the warmth of the smoking-room revelled in the picture of his tame capitalist pacing a cold deck, lost to the sea’s welter in thoughts of that marvellous last act.

But it was a first act which was engaging Peter Rolls’s attention, and he, though the only male character in it (by choice), had to learn his part as he went on.

The play began by his joining the leading lady. (This has been done before, but seldom with such a lurch and on such sloping boards.)

It would have been a mockery to say “good evening” on a night so vile, and Mr. Rolls began by asking Miss Child if he might walk with her.

“Or tango,” said she. “This deck is teaching me some wonderful new steps.”

“I wish you’d teach them to me,” said Peter.

“I can’t, but the ship can.”

“Did you ever dance the tango?” he wanted to know.

“Yes. In another state of existence.”

This silenced him for an instant. Then he skipped at least two speeches ahead, whither his thoughts had flown. “Say, Miss Child, I wish you’d tell me something about yourself.”

“There isn’t anything interesting to tell, thank you, Mr. Rolls.”

“If that’s your only reason, I think you might let me judge. Honestly, I don’t want to intrude or be curious. But you’re so different from the others.”

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"I know I'm not pretty. That's why I have to be so painfully sweet. I got the engagement only by a few extra inches. Luckily it isn't the face matters so much," she chattered on. "I thought it was. But it's legs; their being long; *Mme. Nadine* engages on that and your figure being right for the dresses of the year. So many pretty girls come in short or odd lengths, you find, when they have to be measured by the yard, at bargain price."

Peter laughed.

"You're not meant to laugh there," she said. "It's a solemn fact."

"But *you* always laugh."

"That's because I'm what you'd call 'up against' life. It gives me such a funny point of view."

"That's part of what I want to talk about. Please don't keep trying to turn the subject. Unless you think I have no business seizing the first chance when I find you alone, to ____"

"It isn't that," said Win. "I think you're very kind to take the slightest interest. But really there *is* nothing to tell. Just the usual sort of thing."

"It doesn't seem exactly usual to me for a girl about nineteen years old—"

"Twenty!"

"—to be leaving home alone and starting for a new country."

"Not alone. *Mme. Nadine* might be furious if she were spoken of as my chaperon; but she is, all the same. Not that an emigrant needs a chaperon."

"You an emigrant!"

"Well, what else am I?"

"I've been thinking of you as a dryad."

"A poor, drenched dryad, thousands of miles from her native woods. Do you know, my veil is *soaked*?"

"I'll get you a sou'wester hat to-morrow."

"Does the barber keep them as well as Balm of Gilead?"

"No, but my sister does. She keeps one. And she doesn't want it. I shall annex it."

“Oh! I couldn’t take it!”

“If you don’t, I’ll throw it overboard.”

“Were the chocolates hers?”

“Yes.”

“And the books?”

“Some were mine. But not the ones Miss Devereux says are pretty. Look here, Miss Child, another thing she says is that you are not with Nadine as a permanence. What does that mean, if you don’t much mind my asking?”

“Not what you think. I’m not going to be discharged. I was engaged only for the voyage, to take the place of a prettier girl with still longer legs who fell through at the last moment—literally. She stepped into one of those gas-hole places in the street. And I stepped into her shoes—lucky shoes!—sort of seven-league ones, bringing me across the sea, all the way to New York free, for nothing. No! I hope not for nothing. I hope it is to make my fortune.”

“I hope so, too,” said Peter gravely. “Got any friends there besides me?”

“Thanks for putting it so, Mr. Balm of Gilead. Why, I’ve heard that everybody in America is ready to be a friend to lonely strangers!”

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"I guess your informant was almost too much of an optimist. Couldn't you be serious for just a minute? You know, I feel quite well acquainted with you—and the others, of course. But they *are* different. And they *are* 'permanences' with Nadine. That's the kind of thing they're fit for. I don't worry about them, and I shan't worry about you, either, if you tell me you have friends or know what you are going to do when you land."

"I can't tell you that," Win answered in a changed tone, as if suddenly she were weary of trying to "frivol." "But I have hopes; and I have two letters of introduction and a respectable, recommended boarding-house and a little money left, so I really believe I shall be all right, thank you. My people thought my wanting to come showed 'my wild spirit,' so I'm anxious to prove as soon as I can—not to them any more, but to myself—that I can live my own life in a new world without coming to grief."

"Why not prove to them any more?"

"Oh—because no one is going to care much. As I said, my native woods are far behind, and most of the trees are cut down. Not a dryad of the true dryad family left, and this one is practically forgotten already. Her niche was all grown over with new bark long ago, so it was more than time she ceased to haunt the place."

"I'm afraid you've had a great sorrow," said Peter.

"It was hardly big enough for that word—this thing that's sent me seeking my fortune—though it began with a sorrow long ago."

"Some one you loved died?" Peter had a simple, direct way of asking questions that led you on.

"My mother. When I was fourteen—not old enough to be of much use to my father and the baby brother. So my father had to get some one to be a kind of housekeeper and superior nurse. He's a clergyman. I don't look like a clergyman's daughter, perhaps—and he thought I didn't behave like one, especially after the housekeeper came. She's the kind who calls herself 'a lady housekeeper.' I don't know if you have them in America. She and I had rows—and that upset father. He didn't want to get rid of her because she managed things splendidly—him and the baby and the vicarage—and influential old ladies said she 'filled a difficult position satisfactorily.' So it was simpler to get rid of me. I went to boarding-school."

"Did you like that?"

"I loved it. After the first year I didn't go home even for the holidays. Often I visited—girls were nice to me. But I didn't make the most of my time—I'm furious with myself for that now. I learned nothing—nothing, really, except the things I wanted to learn. And those are always the ones that are least useful."

“I found that, too,” said Peter, “at Yale.”

“It didn’t matter for you. You have the Balm of Gilead.”

“That’s my father’s.”

“What’s his is yours, I suppose.”

“He says so. But—we all have our own trouble. Mine’s not living up to my principles, or even knowing exactly what they are—being all in a turmoil. But it’s yours I want to talk about.”

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"I've forbidden myself the word 'trouble.' It builds a wall. And I've just broken through my wall. I could have done it sooner and better if I'd learned more difficult things, that's all. When I wanted to do something for myself—why, I couldn't do a *thing* that was any good in a busy world. I'd had no training except for my voice."

"There! I thought you sounded as if you had a voice!"

"I thought so, too. But that was another of my mistakes."

"I bet it wasn't."

"You'd lose your money, Mr. Rolls. I spent most of mine before I found out. You see, my mother left a little. It wasn't to come to me till I was twenty-one, but all sorts of things happened. My father kept me at school till a year and a half ago because he didn't know what to do with me. Then my little brother died. I ought to have cared more, but I hardly knew him. His coming killed my mother; and he loved *that woman*. I don't see how he could!"

"When he was gone, people might have gossiped about her and father perhaps. I believe she suggested it to him and said she must go away, to make him think of marrying her; but all he did was to send for me. I stood it for six months. It was horrid for all three. I dare say I was to blame. I had a scene with father, and told him I'd made up my mind to go to London for singing lessons so I could support myself: I couldn't live at home. That forced the situation! Before any one—except the 'lady housekeeper'—knew quite what was happening, father had asked her to be his wife—or she'd asked him. I went before the wedding. I'd worshipped my mother! And—but that's all the story."

"I call it only the preface. What about London?"

"Oh, father gave me my money ahead of time, for the lessons. He didn't approve, on principle, but he would have had no peace with me at home, and he likes peace better than anything. I had to promise I wouldn't go into musical comedy. That makes me laugh now! But I thought then I'd only to ask and to have. I took lessons of a man who'd been a celebrated tenor. He must have known that my voice was nothing, really, but he buoyed me up. I suppose they're all like that. It's business."

"When the money was two thirds spent I dared not go on, and I asked him to find me something to do. He'd often said he would when the right time came. Apparently it hadn't come. He made the excuse that I ought to have stayed with him longer. It would hurt his reputation to launch a pupil too soon. So I had to try to launch myself. And it didn't work. One manager of opera companies on whom I forced myself tested my voice and said it wasn't strong enough—only a twilight voice for a drawing-room, he called it. I was broken up—just at first."

“Poor child!” Peter muttered, but the girl’s quick ears caught the words over the roar of that “ill wind” which had brought them together.

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"Child is my surname, and it's not polite to call me by it." She brought him to his bearings by suddenly "frivolling" again. "They call militant suffragettes and housemaids sent to prison for stealing their kind mistresses' jewels by their surnames. I'm not a militant; and I've not been a housemaid yet, though I may be, if New York isn't kinder to me than London."

"I hope it will be—kind in just the right way!"

"My friend who gave me the two letters of introduction says it will: that Americans *love* English girls, if they have the courage to come over. She says there are heaps more chances as well as heaps more room for us in that country than there are at home."

"That's true, but——"

"Please don't discourage me!"

"Not on your life! Only——"

"'Only' is as bad a word as 'but.' I've got a letter of introduction to the editor of a New York paper, *To-day and To-morrow*, and one to the organist of a Higher Thought church. Maud Ellis says they're both splendid men and interested in women's progress. Something good ought to come from one or the other. Getting this chance of my passage free seems a happy omen, as if I were *meant* to take this great adventure. I'm not one bit afraid. I feel boiling with courage—except when the ship pitches and rolls at the same time."

"That's right. You're bound to make good, of course. I wouldn't discourage you for the world. All I meant to say was that I'd like you to think of me as a friend. I don't want to lose sight of you when we land. I might be able to help in some way or other or—my family might. Before we get off the ship I'll introduce you and my sister to each other."

"Oh, thank you! You're very kind," the banished dryad said for the third or fourth time.

"But I should be sorry to trouble Miss Rolls. She wouldn't——"

"Yes, she would," insisted Peter. "She'll be awfully interested when I tell her about you, Miss Child, and very pleased to know you."

Win was silenced, though not convinced. It is not safe for a brother to judge his sister by himself.

CHAPTER IV

THE KINDNESS OF MISS ROLLS

Peter found it not so easy as he had expected to snatch an opportunity of interesting Ena in Miss Child. His sister was even more than ordinarily interested in her own affairs, which had reached a critical stage, and if Peter, having run her to earth in her cabin, attempted to talk of any one save Ena Rolls or Lord Raygan her eyes became like shut windows. He could almost see her soul turning its back and walking away behind the panes of opaque gray glass.

There had been another evening prowling with the young female panther before the evasive chance was grasped, and the storm-tossed, overdue *Monarchic* hoped to dock within eighteen hours.

Things were growing desperate for Peter. He was not, of course, in love with the "queer, arresting face," but he could not bear to think of its arriving alone and unprotected in New York. Something must be done, and he resorted to bribery.

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"Look here, Sis," he began, "I've just thought there may be reasons why Raygan can't make up his mind to visit a bit on our side, now he and his family are here."

"He hasn't said he won't do it," Ena cut in.

"No, but he hasn't said he will, has he?"

"Not yet. I daren't seem too eager."

"To save my life, I don't see why you *should* be eager. But as you are, I've been giving my mind to the subject." (This was subtle of Peter.) "I've come to the conclusion that the man would like to stay. I'm sure his sister would. Perhaps you can answer for the mother. The trouble may be money."

"Perhaps. I've thought of that. But what can we do? We can't go to him out of a clear sky and offer to lend."

"I might propose to put him on to a good thing."

"Oh, Peter, *would* you help me like that, in a man's way?"

"I would, if you'd do me a favour, in a woman's way."

"What is it? But whatever it is, I'm sure to!"

They were in Miss Rolls's cabin, the one she had generously taken over from Lady Raygan and Eileen. Ena was sitting on the seat under the window; Peter was looking uncomfortable on a camp-chair. It was a small cabin, boiling over with dresses, though the "Young Moon" had not yet been added to their number. Peter had never found his sister in a propitious mood for the gift, and had been keeping the "Moon," figuratively, up his sleeve till the right moment came. Now, perhaps it had come.

Ena had been lying down after luncheon. She had given herself this little rest because she knew that Raygan was going to play poker in the smoking-room. She had learned bridge—though cards bored her—just as she had learned tennis and golf and all sorts of eccentric dances, in order to be popular, to be in the swim, to do just what the fashionable people were doing—the people at the top, where she wanted to arrive.

But she could not play poker! And if she could, it would have been impossible to go with Lord Raygan into the smoking-room. Luckily no other girl would be there, so Ena resigned herself to the loss of valuable time on her last day.

"Why, yes," Peter answered. "I believe you *are* sure to! It won't be a hard favour to do, Sis. It's only to let me introduce a girl, a very nice girl, and then to be kind and help her if she needs it."

Ena laughed. “Is that all? I guess—I mean, I fancy—I can promise that. Girls don’t need much help nowadays Who is she? Have I seen her?”

“No. You haven’t seen her.”

“Is she pretty?” Peter had expected that question. Ena, and all the other girls he knew, invariably asked it. But he did not quite know what to answer.

“She’s awfully attractive,” he said. “The sort you’d turn and look after in a crowd. She hasn’t got what you call features, but—you can’t take your eyes off her somehow. She looks—she looks—well, a tiny bit like a—a—perfectly gloriously fascinating—golliwog.”

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"A golliwog!"

"Great big, wide-apart eyes, I mean; dark, floating ones, with immense eyelashes that curl up and stick out when you see her profile. She's got a short, round face—no, kind of heart-shaped, I guess, and a little, delicate, turned-up nose, like the Duchess of Marlborough's; and a lovely mouth—yes, her mouth *is* lovely, no mistake! She's nearly always laughing, even when she isn't happy. She's got a long neck, like a flower stem, and long legs——"

"Good gracious, what a description! For heaven's sake, who is the girl?"

"Oh, I know it must sound queer; but she's the most fascinating thing you ever saw, and any man would say so. She's a Miss Child——"

"There's no Miss Child on the passenger list."

"Maybe not; because she's one of Nadine's models, and I bought you a gorgeous dress off her. I've been—saving it for a surprise. It's called the 'New'—no, the 'Young Moon.'"

Ena forgot for a moment that she badly needed help from her brother and began sharply to catechize him. "*When* did you buy me a dress? The day Lord Raygan offered to go back to that room and choose me one and I said no, I didn't want a dress?"

"Yes. That was the day. I couldn't let her try it on in vain."

"Oh, you bought it to please *her*—the girl like a golliwog?"

"She isn't like a golliwog, really. That's not fair. And I bought the dress to please you, of course. It's mighty pretty. I've got it in my room."

"I wonder what your steward thinks? Well, I'll thank you when I see it. But what an idea, to introduce one of those girls to *me*! Lord Raygan said they were all bleached and painted, except the one who wasn't pretty."

"That's my one. But I think she is pretty, and better than pretty. Her eyes—and her smile——"

"Never mind her eyes and her smile. I *can't* be introduced to a model, Petro. I *won't* know a dressmaker."

"Mother was one. And father's mother was a washer——"

"Be still, for the love of heaven! If any one should hear!"

"I'm not ashamed of——"

“Well, I *am*! Oh, Petro, don’t be horrid, just when I really need you to be nice. And you can be nice—very nice. Don’t let’s even think about the family past. It’s awful! It’s a blot! But it can’t be helped. We must try to live it down. And we can, with our money. We can and we must. A great chance has come to us. All the more because of—of what you reminded me—we must be careful of the sort of people we mix ourselves up with—”

“This girl is a lady.”

Then Ena lost her temper. “They all are,” she snapped. “I suppose she’s a clergyman’s daughter and her parents are dead.”

“Her mother is,” Peter admitted.

“She *would* be! What does the girl want help for? Doesn’t Nadine pay her wages?”

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"She only engaged with Nadine to work out her passage."

"Oh! They say girls from all over the world are bearing down on poor little old New York since Owen Johnson wrote 'The Salamander.'"

"Jove, Ena, I never knew before you had anything of the cat in you!"

This, and a flash in the eyes which were bluer than hers, brought Miss Rolls to her bearings. She remembered the reason for going softly with Peter. Luckily she had done no great mischief yet.

"Can't you take a joke, Petro?" she teased him, laughing "I'm not a cat, or a pig, either. But you do scare me a little. You don't *like* this girl, do you?"

"Of course I like her."

"You know what I mean by 'like.' And I hope I know what *you* mean. You always yearn over every creature who hasn't as much money as we have and needs ours. *Sure* it's no more than that this time? It would be—just the limit, the outside edge and down the other side, if you fell in love with a dressmaker's model. It would be like—like reverting to type. We must climb, not—*root*."

Peter laughed—nervously, his sister feared. "What a girl you are! You needn't fash yourself about my feelings for Miss Child. All I want is to help her to get on."

"Oh! To help her get on? Well, then, you may introduce her to me, if it can be done without taking up too much time. You know, Petro, it's my last day on board, and I have my feelings as much as you. How can we manage it? Can you bring her here?"

"I can't 'bring' her anywhere," Peter retorted rather gruffly. "She isn't a servant looking for a place. I've told you she's a lady."

"Oh, all right. What do you suggest?"

"She hasn't much time to herself. Since the weather improved, business is brisker. But after her dinner she gets in a walk down on B deck, where nobody else goes. I could take you there about half-past eight."

"Very well. That's the program." Ena spoke with regained cheerfulness, because no one need witness an introduction effected on B deck, and because a sentence of Peter's had been like a bull's-eye lantern directing a ray along the right track. "I'll be ever so nice to Miss Child to-night—and afterward, too, in New York, if you can bring anything off with Lord Raygan about the visit. Are you playing poker with him this afternoon?"

“Yes. Some chaps wanted——”

“I know. He told me. But he didn’t mention you. Afterward, will you work right up to the ‘good thing’ you can put him on to? He’ll be in just the mood—if he loses. And he says he always does lose.”

“Yes. I’ll let him see that he might do well for himself by staying. Gee! Think of a fellow needing a bribe to spend a couple of weeks in God’s country!”

“He doesn’t know yet that it is God’s country. We must show him. Oh, Peter, won’t the Van Raaltens and the Arlingtons fall over themselves with rage if the Earl of Raygan and his mother and sister stop with us for a fortnight!”

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"Stop with us for a fortnight!" mimicked Peter, scornful yet affectionate now. "You get more British every day in your accent and conversation, my kid."

"Well, I try hard enough! I *do* like their way of speaking. They make our voices sound grating and our expressions crude."

"*Our* ways for mine!"

"You can have them. Now run away, Petro. I'll see the 'Young Moon' later. I need a nap. Lay awake last night worrying!"

But when he had gone she lay awake planning. This golliwog was undoubtedly dangerous. The absorbed look in Peter's eyes when he described her singular attractions contradicted the statement that his feelings were Platonic.

He "only wanted to help!" Pooh! Still Ena was glad he had said that, because it had given her a brilliant idea. It was also rather a cruel idea, but all is fair in love and war: and this might be both.

Of course, if the girl were coming to New York to be a Salamander, the weapon would be useless. Ena must find another. She could not be sure until she had met Miss Child; but she told herself that no glorified golliwog, however sly, could fool *her* for five minutes! She would soon know whether Peter were right or wrong about this daughter of a clergyman whose mother was dead.

Poor Petro, he was such a fool about people—such a dear, nice, but sometimes inconvenient fool! Just mother's disposition over again, with a touch of father's cleverness splashed in here and there where you'd least expect it—but *never* in the place where it would be most useful.

As Ena reflected thus, she was vaguely pleased with herself after the fashion of an earnest student who suddenly finds himself actually thinking in French. Before she Went to *Mme. Yarde's* Finishing School for Young Ladies, she had been so accustomed to saying pa and ma that it had been very difficult to overcome the habit. Even now, once in a while, she—but, thank heaven, not *once* since meeting Lord Raygan; she was sure of that. He had said, "You talk quite like our girls." And all the rest of the day she had been happy; for sometimes, in a good-natured sort of way, he made fun of what he absurdly called "the American accent."

Ena shut her eyes and composed herself to lie down without ruffling her hair. But she could not sleep. She made pictures of Lord Raygan and his mother and Lady Eileen visiting at their house on Long Island.

Would they think it more "swell" of the Rollses to be living in the country than in New York? She hoped so, and almost believed they would, for she understood from novels

and what she had learned in London, that the “smart people” only “ran into town for the theatre and that sort of thing” in winter. Now it was October—almost winter. And in the automobile it was only an hour and twenty-five minutes from Sea Gull Manor (Ena had named the new place herself) to New York.

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Besides, in the country the visitors wouldn't so easily find out that the family hadn't got "into" things—the things that mattered. Of course they could see what the family was. They could see that anywhere, alas! But poor father and mother were better against a country background. And foreigners might attribute some quaint tricks of manner and speech to their being Americans, just as she and Peter hadn't known how awful the cockney accent was until they had been told by English people.

Oh, it was lovely over there! Nobody snubbed her. She would give anything to live on that side all her life, married to a man of title, and go home occasionally, to pay back the proud cats who had scratched. Meanwhile, it would be a step on the golden ladder to flaunt Lord Raygan and his mother and Eileen as guests. Then, if Rags could swallow the family and propose (as sometimes she thought he contemplated doing), how wonderful it would be! Her ideal accomplished!

No golliwog on earth should be allowed to defeat this end. For the addition of a model, dressmaking golliwog to the family would be the final obstacle. Lord Raygan was now undecided. He was perhaps waiting to see how the rest of the Rollses shaped up. If he could stand them as relations, all would be well. *All must be well!*

That night Win wore for her walk a long blue coat in place of the mackintosh. It was shabby, but becoming; and her dark hair was tucked into a close-fitting cap of the same blue as the cloak. She knew what was due to happen at half-past eight, and though grateful to Mr. Balm of Gilead, dreaded the result of his kindness.

Miss Rolls would be the first American girl she had ever met; but she knew how an English girl would feel about being introduced to a vague waif picked up by a brother in a dressmaker's showroom on shipboard. It would have been ungracious to refuse the offered introduction so well meant, but the fifth dryad was not looking forward to it with pleasurable sensations.

When she saw the brother and sister coming toward her, however, the smile on Miss Rolls's face was encouraging. It was dimly like Peter's smile, and there was a certain family resemblance about the faces: both dark, with eager eyes that seemed light in contrast with dead-black hair, but the eagerness of Miss Rolls's look was different from the eagerness of her brother's. His was slightly wistful in its search for something he did not yet know. Hers was dissatisfied, searching for something she wanted and had not got.

He was a lean young man, not very tall, but with rather the air of an ex-college athlete. She was a plump, short girl, somewhat square in build, but distinctly handsome, showing beautiful teeth in her cordial smile. If the smile had been less cordial Miss Child might have conceived the catty idea that the magnificent ruby-velvet hooded evening cloak had been put on to impress the humble new acquaintance. However, it

would have been mean to suspect a sister of Mr. Balm of Gilead of such a snobbish trick. And there *was* the smile.

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"Miss Child, I'm very pleased to meet you," said the handsome girl warmly, just as her brother had hopefully prophesied. "Peter's told me quite a lot about you. I think you're awfully brave."

"Perhaps one doesn't deserve much credit for courage in doing a thing one wants to do," answered Winifred, her slim, ringless hand responding to the kind pressure of the plump one wearing too many rings. (They were all rubies to-night. Miss Rolls had read about a wonderful Russian woman before whom men went down like ninepins and who always matched her dresses with her jewels.)

Yes, Ena thought, Peter was right; the creature was a lady. She had a soft, throaty voice, like a blackbird when it talks to itself, and oh, a *creamy* accent! Miss Rolls would have given anything to extract it, like pith, from the long white stem in which it seemed to live. She would have been willing to pay well for it, and for Miss Child's length of limb, so necessary to show off the latest fashions. She saw and appreciated the odd, golliwog charm of wide-apart eyes under high arch of brow. And the full, laughing mouth, with the short upper lip, was beautiful, like the mouths of marvellous girls on magazine covers. The creature looked brave and rather sweet, and Miss Rolls was quite sorry for her; but the thing had to be done.

"Petro, you go away and let us have a talk," said Petro's kind sister gayly. "Two is company; three's none."

And Petro went, thinking Ena the grandest sort of a pal. He had done his best for her already. Raygan and the two ladies had graciously agreed to stay for a fortnight at least in the country upon which Providence had thrust them. Peter had Marconied home, and home would certainly Marconi back an invitation to Sea Gull Manor. As he had said to Ena, he had pressed the button; she must do the rest. But he felt now as if he would enjoy doing a great deal more for her than he had yet done.

"And just what do you want to do in New York, Miss Child?" inquired Miss Rolls, as they began slowly to pace the otherwise deserted deck.

"I have wild hopes of getting newspaper work of some sort through one letter of introduction I have," answered Win, "or into a choir as contralto from the other. If not—oh, well, every one says America's the country for women."

"Yes, it is. We have splendid fun," Ena assured her. "The men are so kind to us."

"I think they must be," Win agreed. "Mr. Rolls has been very kind. Are all the rest like him?"

"I—suppose they have different ways of being kind—some of them. Some may be *safer* than others. I hardly know how to put it!"

“I think I understand.”

“I—wonder if you do. Oh, Miss Child, I *wish* I dared speak to you frankly!”

When people begin thus there is invariably something disagreeable to follow; but Winifred Child braced herself and said calmly: “Please do.”

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"It's very difficult. I'm quite afraid of you."

"It's I who ought to be afraid of you."

"Don't be! I wish I could make you trust me. Can I?"

"Why not?"

"I'm throwing things at you so suddenly. But what else can I *do*? We haven't much time. My brother'll come back and join us. And—it's about him I want to speak. He's so—interested in you."

"That's very nice of him." Winifred's voice was as cold and bright as a very small icicle.

"It ought to be! *But*—well, he's a dear brother and a splendid fellow in many ways. I hate to say anything against him. Yet I'd hate still more to have you—disappointed. His one fault is—he's rather foolish about women, especially those not exactly in his own set. Do you see what I mean? It's so hard for me! He said to-day he was going to try to help you. That frightened me a little. I felt I must give you this tiny warning, for Peter has such a *trustworthy* air, hasn't he?"

"Yes, indeed he has," answered Win, loyal still to Mr. Balm of Gilead, *alias* Peter Pan. But the night had grown colder.

"I'm his sister. I can't help feeling responsible for him. And, in a way, I feel responsible for you, too, as it's through him I've met you—and you'll be a stranger in our country. That's why I shouldn't have *dared* let this chance pass without speaking. Yet I keep rambling on without the courage to say much."

"It isn't necessary to dot all the i's and cross the t's," returned Winifred, trying not to let her voice be sharp or her tone bitter, for she had to believe that this girl was sincere. A sister would not blacken the character of a brother for the mere pleasure of hearing herself talk!

"You do take this as I mean it, don't you?"

"I think so."

"Thank you so much. It's very sweet and generous of you not to be angry with me and think me a busybody meddling in other people's business. But it *is* my business to see that my brother doesn't hurt a girl who trusts him—a stranger in a strange land. All I want you to promise is that instead of letting *him* help you, when he offers to, as he's sure to do—if he hasn't already—you'll let *me* do it."



"I'm hoping not to need help, except from the friends of my friend who has given me introductions," Win justified her pride of womanhood.

"I don't suppose you will need anything else. You look as if you could get along *anywhere*. But if you do need a push, promise you won't accept favours from my brother, or let him come into your life at all. It's entirely for your own sake I ask."

"I understand that, Miss Rolls. What other reason could there be?"

"There couldn't be any other. Do promise. I'm so frightened for you."

"I shall certainly accept no help from Mr. Rolls."

"That's good! It relieves my mind. And swear you won't let him dream that I've said anything or interfered with his plans."

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"His plans!"

"Well—when a man with Peter's *one* fault offers to help a girl get on in New York—
Please don't be offended"

"I am not. Of course it goes without saying that I won't let him know I've had a warning from you."

"He'd never speak to me again if you even gave him a hint."

"Don't be afraid. I won't; not the faintest. Why, we're landing to-morrow morning early! There won't be a chance to say more than 'Good-bye.'"

"There's to-night, after I go in. He'll be back——"

"I'm going in, too. I shall go when you go."

"Perhaps it would be better. Oh, you don't know what a weight is off my mind!"

"I'm glad it is gone."

"And you'll write to *me*, won't you, and let me know how you get along? Write just what you need. I'll be delighted——"

"If I need anything—thank you."

"My address is Sea Gull Manor, Old Chesterton, Long Island. Shall I write it down?"

"No, please don't trouble. I can always remember addresses. You're really very good—to take an interest. And—and I know it must have been hard for you to—to feel you had to speak."

It was also hard, desperately hard, for Win to pay this tribute to Miss Rolls's unselfish interest in her moral welfare. She tried to be grateful, to feel that her late friend's sister had been brave and fine and unconventional thus to defend a strange girl against one so near. But despite reason's wise counsel, her heart was hot within her. She felt like a heathen assured by an earnest missionary that her god was a myth.

She disliked kind Miss Rolls intensely, and would have loved to let loose upon her somewhat obtuse head the sarcasm of which at that moment she felt herself a past mistress. She wanted to be rich and important and have Miss Rolls, poor and suppliant, at her mercy. Horrified, she saw by the searchlight of her own anger dark depths of cruelty and revenge in her own nature. She longed to rush to Peter and tell him everything, and believe in him again, for it was hard to lose a friend—an ideal ewe-lamb

of a friend. She wished she might wake up in her overcrowded stateroom and find that this hateful conversation had been a dream.

But she could not do any of these brutal, silly, or impossible things. She was not dreaming. All was true. Miss Rolls had meant well, and Mr. Balm of Gilead did not exist. He was only Peter Rolls, a rich, selfish fellow who thought girls who had to work fair game. His sister must know his true inwardness. Probably she had learned through unpleasant hushed-up experiences, through seeing skeletons unfleshed by Peter stalk into the family cupboard.

"You ungrateful beast, behave yourself!" Miss Child boxed the ears of her sulky ego and shook it.

The throaty quiver in the blackbird voice of the dangerous golliwog went vibrating through Miss Rolls's conscience in a really painful way. She felt as if she had had a shock of electricity. But, thank goodness, the worst was over, and now that she had grasped safety (for instinct said that the girl would not betray), she could afford to be generous.

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She reminded herself that she had acted entirely in self-defence, not through malice, and she had not told a single lie about Peter. She had but said—in words—that some men were safer than others, which every one knew to be true; that Peter was rather foolish about women (so he was—ridiculously soft, not modern in his ideas at all!), and that it would be better for the girl to accept help from her—Ena—than from a young man. It was very good advice, and nothing Peter ought to be angry about, even if he should ever hear—which, pray heaven, he might not! As Ena reminded herself how wise and tactful she had been, a faint glow stole into the chilly zone round her heart, just as you can heat a cold foot by concentrating yourself on telling it that it is warm.

“I want to be your *friend*,” she went on sweetly. “Perhaps you aren’t very rich? As girl to girl, let me offer you a little, little present—or a loan—a hundred dollars. I’ve got it with me——”

“Oh, thank you many times, but I couldn’t possibly!” cried Win. “I don’t need it. I have lots of money.”

“I’m glad—though I should have liked the pleasure,” said Ena. And she genuinely would, because the act of giving would have pumped warmth into the cold place without waiting for time to change the temperature.

“There’s one thing you must let me do, anyhow,” she persisted. “That dress—the ‘Blue Moon,’ isn’t it?—that you tried on and my brother bought for me, I want you to accept it. Oh, don’t say no! It’s miles too long for me” (she couldn’t have brought herself to confess that it was hopelessly small for waist and hips), “and I never enjoy altered dresses—the style’s lost. So you’ll not be robbing me. If you won’t have it, I shall believe it’s a sign that you’re offended at my interference.”

Winifred thought for an instant and drew a long breath. “Then I must take the dress,” she said. “It’s more than good of you, of course. I shan’t be in the kind of world where I can wear it, but——”

“Keep it to remember this evening—I mean, to remember me,” Miss Rolls hastily amended.

“I will,” said Win simply. But there was no danger that she would ever forget Miss Rolls—or her kindness.

CHAPTER V

SCENES FOR A “MOVIE”

When Peter thought that he might decently return to B deck without breaking into charming womanly confidences, it was deserted. The moon was struggling out through black clouds and pouring silver into the sea's ink, but the girl in the moon was gone.

When he found Ena again—which was easy because of the ruby cloak—she was sitting between Raygan and Lady Eileen on the boat deck. He knew that she would be annoyed if he mentioned Miss Child in this distinguished company, and, in any case, he would not have cared to speak of the girl there.

Realizing that he had kept away too long and lost his chance of seeing Miss Child again that night, he consoled himself by knocking at Ena's door when she had evaded him and sought sanctuary in her cabin. She let him in at once, not because she wanted to do so, but because he would "turn suspicious" if she made an excuse to keep him out.

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"Well?" said he. "What did you think of her?"

"Miss Child? She seems a very nice girl, and you're perfectly right—she is a lady. I don't know if she's quite as young as you think, and I don't call her pretty; but she is attractive in spite of being so awfully tall. We had a pleasant talk, and I offered to do anything I could. I gave her our address, and she is to write."

"Did you tell her you'd invite her down?" Peter put this question diffidently.

"I—intimated it. She was rather independent but very nice, and said she was grateful, especially after I insisted on giving her that 'Moon' dress, which now I've sent to her cabin. You know, she *has* friends in New York, and seems to know just what she wants to do, so I couldn't thrust myself upon her. But I think I did the right thing."

"I'm sure of that, you dear girl," said Peter.

And so was the dear girl herself.

Next morning the room of the mirrors was destitute of dryads. Its once crowded wardrobes were empty; the huge screen was folded and leaning against the wall. The dryad door stood open (as Peter Rolls observed when he "happened" to pass, about the time the *Monarchic* neared the Statue of Liberty) and nothing reminiscent remained save a haunting perfume of "Rose-Nadine" sachet powder, a specialty which might have been the lingering wraith of a dryad.

As the visions had vanished with all their belongings, Peter thought it probable they would be on some deck or other watching for the New York skyscrapers. And he was right concerning four of his model acquaintances. The fifth was not visible, and Miss Devereux explained her absence by saying that she was "lazy."

"She's on her own now, you know," she added, "and can sleep as late as she likes. But I wouldn't miss the first sight of New York for a pound! Some people have no romance in them."

Up till the last minute Peter had hopes of B deck; but they were blighted and disappointed, even depressed; he had to land with Ena and her friends without having seen Miss Child. Still, there was the pier, crowded with people who had come to wave welcome to the *Monarchic*. There appeared to be a fearful confusion, and this was Peter's first return from his first trip abroad; but he knew that the excited throng would soon be sorted out under letters of the alphabet.

Peter senior had come to meet his returning children and the distinguished guests Marconi had bestowed on him (a little, dry, thin man, who looked as though a lost resemblance to Peter might come out if he were freshened up by being soaked for a long time in warm water), and he had already secured a tame official to glance

graciously into the luggage. After shaking heartily the small bag of bones that was his father's hand, and saying "Hello, Dad! How's yourself? How's mother? How's everything?" Peter was free for a few minutes to sprint from "B" to "C."

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His spirit rose at the comparative dearth of "C's." Not more than a dozen of the crowded *Monarchic's* passengers were dancing with impatience beneath the third letter of the alphabet, and Mr. Rolls, Jr., walked straight up to tall Miss Child without being beaten back by a surf of "C's." To be sure, Miss Carroll was under the same letter, and observed the approach of Peter with interest, if not surprise; but she was seated on a trunk at some distance key in hand.

"Well, I'm mighty glad to find you!" exclaimed Peter cordially. "I began to think it must be a trick of dryads to wait themselves ashore without waiting for the clumsy old ship to dock."

"I was busy packing this morning," replied the alleged dryad, with a hard, undryadic expression on her "heart-shaped" face.

"You disappeared so early last night, I'd an idea you were doing your packing then so as to be up with the dawn and get a good look at the harbour."

"I could see a great deal from our porthole."

"I shouldn't have thought you were the kind of girl to be satisfied with portholes," said Peter, hoping to wake up one of her smiles. Her voice sounded rather tired.

"Beggars mustn't be choosers," was the dry reply.

"But dryads may be," he encouraged her.

"I've left my dryadhood hanging up behind the door." She spoke sharply, almost irritably, it seemed. "I shan't need it in New York."

"Oh, won't you? That's where you're mistaken! There'll be lots of times when you'd rather have it than the grandest opera cloak."

"I shan't need an opera cloak, either."

Peter was still smiling, though less confident of the old friendly understanding which had given them a language of their own with words which would have been nonsense for others.

"We'll see. Anyhow, I shall ask you to go to the very first worth-while opera that comes along. Consider it a formal invitation."

"Very well, I will, and answer it formally. 'Miss Child thanks Mr. Rolls for his kind invitation, and regrets that a previous engagement makes it impossible for her to accept.'"

“By Jove, that does sound formal enough! How do you know you’ll have a previous engagement?”

“I’m perfectly certain I shall.”

This was the real thing! There was no joke in the bottom of the medicine glass.

Peter’s face grew red, like a scolded schoolboy’s. Winifred (who was looking at Miss Carroll’s trunk, but saw only Mr. Rolls) thought that he was going to speak out angrily, and perhaps give her a glimpse of his black heart. She hoped he would, for it would have been a relief; but he did not.

“Have I done anything to offend you?” he asked with a straight look; and though he spoke in a low tone, it was not a secret tone at all.

“No, certainly not,” she answered, opening her eyes at him. “Why do you ask?”

“Because—you weren’t like this on the ship.”

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"I've left my ship manners hanging up behind the door with my dryadhood. I shan't use them in New York, either!"

"Well—I'm sorry!"

"I don't know why you should be." If she had not stared hard at Miss Carroll's trunk, and tried anxiously to make out the name on a very small label, she would have done what she had boasted of never doing, whatever the world did to her: she would have cried. As it was, she wore the expression of a budding basilisk.

"*Don't* you know? Well, then, you didn't realize what it meant to me to have you for a friend."

"I really didn't think much about it, Mr. Rolls!"

"Evidently not. But I did. Look here, Miss Child. Did my sister put you against me—or our friendship—in any way?"

"What an extraordinary idea!" sneered Winifred. "She spoke very nicely of you, as far as I can remember, and said you were a dear brother."

"Then why are you so unkind to me now after being nice on the ship?"

"Oh, *that*! It was for a cinema, a motion picture. Didn't you understand?"

This slapped Peter in the face: that she should retort with flippant slang, when he was earnestly begging for an explanation. At last she had succeeded in freezing him.

"I'm afraid I didn't quite understand," he said in a new tone which she had not heard before. Mr. Balm of Gilead, *alias* Peter Pan, had suddenly grown up, and as Peter Rolls, Jr., was all politeness and conventionality.

"I do understand now, though. Well, Miss Child, I must—thank that 'cinema' for some very pleasant hours. Here comes a man to look at your baggage. Just remind him that you're a British subject, and he won't make you any trouble. Neither will I!" Peter's hat was off, but his smile could have been knocked off only with a hammer.

"Good-bye," replied Win hastily, frightened at her own appalling success as a basilisk. "And thank *you*—for your part of the cinema."

"I'm afraid I don't deserve any credit. Good-bye. And good luck."

He was gone—but no, not quite. Without turning round to look at her again, he was stopping to speak with the Irish-faced servant of the customs. The latter nodded and even touched his cap. Peter Rolls certainly had a way with him. But Win already knew

this, to her sorrow. She was *glad* she had thought of that horrid speech about the cinema. The man deserved it.

"That's the last I shall see of him!" she said to herself almost viciously, as the Irish-American official spied upon her toque the wing of a fowl domesticated since the ark. Yet for the second time Peter came back, stiffly lifting his hat.

"I only wanted to say," he explained, "that, cinema or no cinema, I hope, if I can be of service now or later, you will allow me the privilege. My address——"

"I have your *sister's*, thank you," she cut his words short as with a pair of scissors. "That's the same thing, isn't it?"

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"Yes," he answered heavily—perhaps guiltily. And this time he was gone for good.

"What a neat expression," thought Winifred. "Gone for good!"

It sounded like a long time.

CHAPTER VI

THE HANDS WITH THE RINGS

Peter Rolls, Jr., unlike his father, had practically no talent for revenge. In common with every warm-blooded creature lower than the angels, he could be fiercely vindictive for a minute or two—long enough, when a small boy, to give a bloody nose and to get one; long enough, at all ages, to want to hit a man, thoroughly smash him, perhaps, or even to kick him into the middle of next week; long enough to feel that he would like to make a woman sorry that she had been rude.

But there was always a spiritual and mental reckoning of a painful description: a soul's housecleaning which turned him out of doors a miserable waif; and it invariably came too soon, before he had had time to gloat over the blood on another boy's nose, or a man's humiliation, or a woman's repentant blush. Instead of heartily disliking people for the spiteful things they sometimes did, he was apt to turn round and wonder if the fault had not been his; if he were not the abysmal beast.

He had not half repaid Winifred Child for her rudeness with his coldness, yet no sooner was he in the huge gray automobile—which could comfortably have seated eight instead of six—than he felt a pang of remorse, exactly like a gimlet twisting through his heart from top to bottom.

"I oughtn't to have left her like that!" he reproached himself. "I ought to have hung around and seen that everything went all right. She said she had the address of a good, cheap boarding-house. But it may have changed. Or it may be full. And, anyway, how will she get there? She ought to take a cab. But will she? And if she does, won't she fall dead at the price? I ought to have warned the poor child. There are shoals of tips I might have put her up to if I hadn't always been talking about myself. What if she was cross? There must have been a reason. I must have done something she didn't feel like pointing out when I asked. What I don't know about women would make three encyclopedias."

It was too late, however, to act upon second thoughts which might or might not be "best." Peter was in the automobile, and it had started. Even if he went back, it would doubtless be only to find Miss Child gone. He tried to console himself with the fact that Ena had been nice to the girl, and that Miss Child had said—or anyhow intimated—that she would write. If she didn't, he could, at worst, find out her whereabouts by going to

Nadine. Superior as Miss Child was to the other dryads, she would surely keep up communication with them. Miss Devereux was the sort who might lunch with him on the strength of "old friendship." He would give her oysters and orchids, and find out how things were going with the girl who had left her dryadhood behind the cabin door.

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He tried to console himself with these arguments, but the pleasure of homecoming was spoiled. Father did not show any very exuberant joy at seeing him again, and it was disappointing to a warm-hearted nature if people were not exuberant, even for a minute, when you had been away for months.

The automobile, with its gray-silk cushions, its immense plate-glass windows, its travelling boudoir of mirrors, gold scent bottles, and other idiocies, its bouncing bouquet of fresh violets, its electric fittings, its air pillow embroidered with silver monograms and crests, its brocade-lined chinchilla rugs, tricky little extra seats, and marvellous springs, struck Peter as disgustingly ostentatious.

He wondered what Raygan and his mother and sister would think of folks in a democratic country using chinchilla for automobile rugs; and he was sure they must be having interior hysterics over the Rolls coat of arms—a dragon holding up a spiky crown of some nondescript sort on a cushion. The dragon looked rather like a frog rampant, and the crowned cushion bore a singular resemblance to a mushroom with an angry ladybird on its apex. How this family insignia had been obtained Peter did not know. His ribald questions had been treated by his sister with silent scorn. He would not be surprised if Ena had designed the thing herself!

As the car smoothly bowled Peter out of Winifred Child's life, away toward the Long Island manor house and the welcome mother would give, the deposed dryad was having her first experience of New York.

She parted company on the pier with Nadine (in private life Lady Darling), Nadine's manageress, Miss Sorel, and the quartet of models. They had almost forgotten her before they had gone two blocks "uptown"; and she had no reason to remember any of them with affection, except, perhaps, Miss Sorel, a relative of her one-time dressmaker who had "got her the job."

Win had heard that the cost of cabs was "something awful" in America, but she said to herself: "Just this first time I *must* have one." A bad night and the scene with Peter had dimmed the flame of her courage, and she felt a sinking of the heart instead of a sense of adventure in the thought of taking a "trolley." She would be sure to lose herself in searching for the boarding-house.

Her luggage—checked and in the hypnotic power of a virile expressman—had already vanished. It would arrive at its destination ahead of her. Perhaps there was no room there. In that case it would be sent away. Dreadful picture! False economy not to take a cab! Win supposed that a taxi would be no dearer than the horse variety and one would sooner learn the secrets of the future.

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One of these secrets began to hint at its own hideous nature with every convulsive tick of the metre. It hiccuped nickels, and as Win's terrified eyes, instead of taking in New York, watched the spendthrift contrivance yelping for her dollars, she remembered that she owned but two hundred. She had had to be "decent" about tips on board. But forty pounds—two hundred dollars—had looked magnificent in her hand bag that morning. Paper money spread itself in such a lordly manner and seemed able to buy so many separate things. But by the time the merciless taxi had bumped her through devious ways up to Fifty-Fourth Street, three of the beautiful green dollar bills were as good as gone.

She longed to pray "Oh, *do* stop taxying!" at the doorstep before she darted up to inquire whether Miss Hampshire still kept the boarding-house; and it was maddening to hear that "teuf, teuf" desperately going on, chewing its silver cud, in the long pause before an answer came to the bell.

A black woman who flung open the door was startling as a jack-in-the-box for the English girl. Win had thought of American negroes but vaguely, as a social problem in the newspapers or dear creatures in Thomas Nelson Page's books. What with the surprise and the nervous strain of the disappearing dollars, she asked no further questions after the welcome news that Miss Hampshire existed and had a "room to rent." Hastily she paid off the chauffeur, adding something for himself (it seemed like tipping the man at the guillotine) and breathed again only when her trunk and dressing-bag blocked the narrow hall.

"I'm sure I don't see whoever's goin' to tote them things up to the third story," sighed the female jack-in-the-box, who was, after all, more purple than black when you looked closely, an illusion produced by a dusting of pink powder over a dark surface. "And how do I know Miss Hampshire'll *take* you?"

"But you said there was a room." The freeborn independence of a whole nation, irrespective of colour, shocked the effete stranger's breath away. She gasped slightly.

"Yeh. But that ain't to say you can have it. Miss Hampshire's mighty pertickler about her woman boarders," explained the purple lady. "You caught me all of a heap or I wouldn't o' let that feller slam yer things into the house and git away. You'll have to wait till I call Miss Hampshire. *She'll* talk to you."

"Tell her I was recommended by Miss Ellis, from London who boarded here three years ago," Win desperately tossed after a disappearing figure.

It was a mortifying commentary upon her personal appearance not to be invited to wait in the drawing-room, and Miss Child wondered what foreign strangeness in hat, hair arrangement, or costume had excited suspicion. She did not know whether to be more

angry or amused, but recalled her own motto, “Laugh at the world to keep it from laughing first.”

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Suddenly the episode became part of an adventure, a great and wildly funny adventure, of which she was dying to see the next part. How she would love to tell Mr. Balm of Gilead! How his eyes would twinkle! But—there was no Mr. Balm of Gilead in this or any world. It was a dreary hall she stood in, with varnished brown paper pretending to be oak panels, a long-armed hatrack that would have made an ideal scarecrow, and ghosts of past dinners floating up from below with gloomy warnings.

From the same region came Miss Hampshire, smelling slightly of Irish stew. She was pale with the pallor which means shut windows and furnace heat, a little sharp-nosed, neat-headed woman in brown, whose extraordinarily deep-set eyes were circled with black, like spectacle rims. She was graciously willing to accept a guest recommended by Miss Ellis, hinting that, as she was of British ancestry, the English for her came under the favoured nation clause.

“To *you* the room with board’ll be ten dollars a week,” she said with flattering emphasis. “A well-known poetess has just left it to be married. It’s not large, but, being at the back of the house, it’s nice and quiet.”

When Win was shown the third-floor back hall bedroom she saw that even a poetess of passion might have snapped at her first proposal. As Miss Hampshire said, it was not large; but there was the advantage of being able to reach anything anywhere while sitting on the bed, and unless the people six feet distant in a back room of the opposite house snored at night it ought to be quiet.

Win christened her room the “frying pan,” because to search for another boarding-house might be jumping into the fire. And luckily her trunk would just squeeze under the bed.

“I suppose it would be no use calling on a business man before three o’clock?” She applied to Miss Hampshire for advice when she had unpacked her toothbrush and a few small things for which she could find niche or wall space.

“Before three? And why not?” The pale lady opened her eyes in their dark caverns.

“Why, I only thought they wouldn’t be back in their offices from luncheon,” explained the English girl.

“When you know a little more about N’York,” replied Miss Hampshire, whose manner was involuntarily less mellow when she had hooked a fish, “you’ll see why it could never be run as it is along *those* lines. Many of our most prominent business men consider a piece of pie with a tumbler of milk a good and sufficient lunch, and it takes them five minutes to swallow it.”

Primed with this information and intricate instructions concerning street cars (a child once burned dreads a taxi), Winifred started out soon after her own midday meal, eaten in a basement dining-room.

She went first to see the editor; for somehow newspaper reporting seemed more congenial to the vivid New York climate than singing in a church choir, and the hugeness of the *To-day and To-morrow* building turned her again into a worm. It did not so much scrape the sky as soar into it, and when she timidly murmured the words "editorial offices" she was shot up to the top in an elevator as in a perpendicularly directed catapult.

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When the fearsome thing stopped she had the sensation that her head alone had arrived, the rest had been shed on the way, but in a large open space furnished with roll-top desks and typewriters and men and girls she was looked at as though nothing unusual had happened.

"A letter of introduction for Mr. Burritt?" repeated a young man with a whimsical expression. "I'm afraid you'll have to go higher up to deliver it."

"I thought I'd got to the top," said Win. "Or"—and she tried to catch the office note of sprightliness—"does he inhabit a roof garden?"

The young man smiled. "He used to be fond of them after office hours. But not being a spiritualist, I haven't heard from him concerning his present habits."

"He is—dead?"

"That's about it," said the young man. "A year ago. But he was only our city editor, so maybe he didn't get a black border in your English papers."

Miss Child did not ask how one knew that she was English. She recovered herself, thought of taking leave, and then decided not to be precipitate. Instead, she inquired if she could see any other editor.

"Which other have you got a letter to?" the young man temporized.

"None. But—"

"Then I'm afraid it's no use without an appointment. Anyhow, this isn't the right hour to snapshot editors of daily papers. They're night-blooming flowers. Would you like to try for an appointment with Mr. Shaw, Burritt's successor?"

Win thanked him, but thought it would be no use. She would have liked to walk down, only there seemed to be no stairs. A merry youth who ran the nearest elevator asked if she would care to use the fire-escape.

The address of Mr. Noble, the organist, was that of a private house. It was a far cry from *To-day and To-morrow*, up in the hundreds, and Miss Hampshire had told Miss Child to take the elevated. Easier said than done. You could go up the steps and reach a platform on top of the improved Roman viaduct, but there were so many other people intent on squeezing through the iron gate and onto the uptown train—people far more indomitable than yourself—that nothing happened except the slam, slam of that gate in your face.

At last, however, Miss Child was borne along with a rush from behind and found herself swinging back and forth like a pendulum on a strap which she clutched wildly. Men in



America were supposed to jump up and give women their seats, but there were no men in this train. It was peopled with women who had been shopping, and who carried bundles. Many went on so far that Win began to believe they were taking a jaunt for fun, especially as they did not seem at all tired, but chewed something unremittingly with an air of calm delight. This was, perhaps, what Americans called a "joy ride!"

There seemed to be no end to New York, and vistas of cross streets looked so much alike that Win did not wonder they were named only with numbers. She wanted One Hundred and Thirty-Third Street, and Mr. Noble's house was a long way from the elevated station. When she found it at last it was only to learn that six months ago the organist had accepted a position in Chicago. And New York seemed twice as big, twice as absent-minded, when both letters of introduction had failed.

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Win had often tried to check her tendency to over-optimism by telling herself that neither Mr. Burritt nor Mr. Noble might have work to give. But Miss Ellis (now comfortably married in London) had said they were kind men. If they had nothing to offer, they would certainly introduce Miss Child to some one who had. It had never occurred to her that they might thoughtlessly have died or gone elsewhere. Editors and organists seemed so importantly permanent to the lay mind.

This was indeed being alone in New York! And at the very thought—now she could guess what it might be like—her one hundred and ninety-six dollars and twenty-eight cents seemed to be shrinking in the wash.

“Nonsense!” said she, on the elevated again, tearing downtown. “Don’t be a silly. Any one would think you were the leading lady in a melodrama, turned out of the house without your hat, in a snowstorm that followed you round the stage like a wasp! You’ll be all right. Miss Ellis told you they *loved* English girls in New York. Just you wait till to-morrow, my dear!”

The rest of the day she spent in the frying pan, “pulling herself together,” and “seeing where she stood,” a process consisting mostly of counting her greenbacks and comparing them with their equivalent in English money. After all, there was not too much time for this mental adjustment of things, because, being late in October, darkness fell early, and Miss Hampshire’s boarders dined at six-thirty. Promptness was obligatory if you were a female. A little more latitude—a raising of the eyebrows instead of a frown—was granted if you were fortunate enough to be of the opposite sex. Miss Hampshire’s sad smile seemed to concede that men had temptations.

There were bank clerks and schoolteachers and translators though no more poetesses; and everybody was kind to the new boarder, the Englishwoman, especially in telling her all about New York.

“What do you think of Broadway?” asked her neighbour a handsome young German Jew, who was more insistently American than any of those native born.

Win was shamefacedly not sure whether she had seen it.

“Not sure whether you have seen *Broadway*!” exclaimed Mr. Loewenfeld. “Wait till you’ve been on the Great White Way after dark. *Then* I guess you won’t make any mistake.”

“Is it so wonderful?” she asked.

“I should smile! There’s nothing like it on earth. Would you like to walk out and see it to-night? Miss Secker and I’ll take you, if you would, won’t we, Miss Secker?”

“Only too pleased,” rather shrilly replied a fair-haired girl on his other side—a pretty girl in eyeglasses who, Miss Hampshire had announced, was “translating secretary” for a firm of toy importers. Somehow the tone suggested to Win an incipient engagement of marriage and jealousy of new importations.

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But Mr. Loewenfeld had spoken no more than the truth. Broadway at night, seen as a pedestrian at the side of Miss Secker, was astonishing, was marvellous, was unique. The whole sky was alight and pulsing with its magnificence. Twenty moons would not have been noticed. Everything that could happen was happening by electricity. It was Crystal Palace Fireworks, and the Lord Mayor's Show, and Coronation, and Mafeking, and naval manoeuvres with searchlights, all flashing and flaming, blazing and gyrating at the same time. Broadway gleamed white as the north pole, jewelled with rainbow colours, amazing rubies, emeralds, topazes, grouped in letters or forming pictures on invisible frames rising high above tall buildings or appearing on their facades.

Green sea waves billowed brightly, a giant cat winked golden eyes, two brilliant boxers fought an endless round, a dazzling girl put on and took off illuminated gloves; a darky's head, as big as a balloon, ate a special brand of pickled melon; a blue umbrella opened and shut; a great gilded basket dropped ruby roses (Buy them at Perrin Freres); a Japanese Geisha, twice life-size, told you where to get kimonos; a trout larger than a whale appeared and disappeared on a patent hook; and above all, brighter than all, rose against the paling sky from somewhere behind Broadway a pair of titanic hands.

These hands fascinated Win. They beckoned her gaze and held it. Slowly they came up and drew attention to themselves, silently filching it from Broadway's emblems of business success. The stranger in New York stopped involuntarily as if hypnotized, watching for the ten colossal outspread fingers to materialize on their unseen frames; to become hands, with wrists and upraised arms; and then to drop out of sight, like the last appeal for help of a drowning Atlas who had lost his grip on the globe.

Yet this immense, arresting gesture was never the last. Three seconds gone, then blazing back again, came fingers, hands, wrists, arms. And on every one of the ten fingers (including thumbs) flashed a huge ring, each different from the other in colour and design. Each ring was adorned with a jewelled letter, and as the hands reached toward the zenith the colour of the rings changed rapidly twice. It was impossible to remove the eyes from this sign until the gesture pageant had completed itself. To the lost dryad New York seemed dominated by Peter Rolls's Hands.

CHAPTER VII

THE TWO PETERS

The hands of Peter Rolls!

They had Winifred Child's imagination in their grip. Sleeping and waking, she saw the glitter of their rings. For on her first night in New York Mr. Loewenfeld told her a story about the hands.

They were the hands of Peter senior. His commercial genius had spread them across the sky to beckon the public to his great new department store on Sixth Avenue. Just as at the beginning of the gesture you saw only the tips of the fingers, so Peter Rolls, Sr., had begun with a tiny flicker, the first groping of his inspiration feeling its way to success.

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Everybody in the United States had heard of Peter Rolls, or it was not the fault of the magazines and Sunday papers. Peter Rolls had been for years one of the greatest advertisers in America. Mr. Winfield didn't see how, even on a remote little island like England, Miss Child could have escaped hearing about Peter Rolls's hands. This had now become the snappy way of saying that you intended to shop at Peter Rolls's store: "I'm going to the Hands." "I'll get that at the Hands." And Peter Rolls had emphasized the phrase on the public tongue by his method of advertising.

Each advertisement that appeared took the same form—a square space heavily outlined in black or colour, held up by a pair of ringed hands, facsimiles in miniature of his famous sky sign. And the several thousand salespeople in the huge store were slangily nicknamed "Peter Rolls's hands." But naturally these insignificant morsels of the great mosaic were not spelled with a capital H, unless, perhaps by themselves, and once when a vaudeville favourite sang a song, "I'm a Hand, I'm a Hand." It was a smart song, and made a hit; but Peter Rolls was said to have paid both the star and the management.

Apparently nothing concerning Peter Rolls, Sr., and his family was hidden from Mr. Loewenfeld and Miss Seeker, although they claimed no personal acquaintance with the great. Probably, if Win had asked, they could have told how many servants Mrs. Rolls kept and how many cases of champagne her husband ordered in a year. But questions were unnecessary. The subject of a self-made millionaire was a fascinating one to the lately naturalized German.

Peter Rolls, Sr., had emigrated from the north of Ireland as a young boy. He had contrived to buy a few cheap odds and ends likely to attract women buried in the country far from shops. He had somehow known exactly what odds and ends to select. That was genius; and he had coined money as a peddler. In his wandering life he made acquaintance with many tramps and saw how he might make even the lowest useful. After a few years he scraped up enough capital to start a small store in New York, far downtown, where rents were cheap.

Like his peddler's pack, the store was stocked with odds and ends. But again they were just the right odds and ends, the odds and ends that every one in that neighbourhood wanted and had never been able to obtain under one roof. No article cost less than five cents, none more than a dollar, and it was marvellous what Peter Rolls could afford to sell for a dollar.

"I Can Furnish Your Flat for Ten Dollars. Why? Because I Work with My Own Hands," was Peter Rolls's first advertisement. And the Hands had never lost their cunning since.

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He could undersell any other shopkeeper in New York because he got his salesmen for next to nothing. They were a judicious selection from among his friends, the tramps. Any man who could recall enough of his schooling to do a little sum in addition was eligible. He was fed, clothed, tobaccoed, judiciously beered, watched all day while at work, and shut up at night in a fireproof, drink-proof cubicle. The plan proved a brilliant success. The little store downtown became a big one, and grew bigger and bigger, swallowing all the other stores in its block; and it was now ten years since the great Sixth Avenue department store, which could call itself the largest in New York, was opened under the benediction of the Hands.

Winifred had fancied, because of the balm which was making a fortune, that Peter Rolls, Sr., was some sort of a glorified chemist. But Mr. Loewenfeld roared at this idea. The Balm of Gilead was only one of the lucky hits in the drug department, in itself as big as a good-sized provincial store. The Hands sold everything, and though the tramps were long ago dead or abolished, Peter Rolls still undersold every other store in New York. How did he do it? Well—there were ways. The hands without a capital H might tell, perhaps; but they did not talk much. Peter Rolls never had any difficulty in obtaining or keeping as many of them as he wanted, and could get double the number if he liked.

“Does he still ‘work with his own hands?’” quoted Win at last, feeling half guilty, as if she ought not to ask questions about Peter’s father behind Peter’s back. But the affairs of the Rolls family seemed to be public property. Mr. Loewenfeld and Miss Seeker both laughed.

“I should love,” said the latter, “to see Ena Rolls’s face if her father *did* work! She spells their name with an ‘e’—R-o-l-l-e-s—and hopes the smart set on Long Island, where their new palace is, won’t realize they’re the Hands. Isn’t it ridiculous? Like an ostrich hiding its head in the sand. She runs her father and mother socially. I guess the old man hardly dares put his nose inside the store, except about once a year; and Ena and the old lady never buy a pin there. As for the young fellow, they say he doesn’t bother: hates business and wants to be a philanthropist or something outlandish on his own. I should say to him, if he asked *me*: ‘Charity begins at home.’”

Those last two sentences spoken by Miss Emma Seeker on Winifred Child’s first night in New York had as direct an effect upon the girl’s life as if the ringed hands had come down out of the sky and clutched her dress. She did not attach much importance to the words at the time, except to think it snobbish of Miss Rolls and weak of her mother never to show themselves under the roof where their fortune was being piled up. Also, she thought it disappointing of Peter junior not to “bother” about the business which had been his father’s life work. But then Peter was altogether disappointing, as Miss Rolls (with an “e”) had disinterestedly warned her.

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It was not until Win had been in New York for a month that the influence of Miss Seeker's words made itself felt, and the Hands gave their twitch at the hem of her dress. They had been on her mind often enough during the four weeks—morning, noon, and night—but she had never known that she was physically within touching distance.

The “happy omen” of getting her passage to New York free had stopped working on the *Monarchic*. Since then bad luck had walked after her and jumped onto her lap and purred on her pillow, exactly like a cat that persistently clings to a person who dislikes it. All the positions which she was competent to fill were filled already. Only those she could not undertake seemed to be open. She tried to sing, she tried to teach, she tried to report news, she tried to be a publisher's reader, and to get work in a public library. She tried to make hats, she tried to act, but nobody wanted her to do any of these things, unless, perhaps, she went away and trained hard for a year. When matters began to look desperate, and not till then, she applied to Nadine.

But Lady Darling had gone back to England, and Miss Sorel, not having recovered her health after the great tossing at sea, had been replaced by a brand-new American manageress. No more models were wanted. There was nothing that Miss Child could do, and the only result of her visit was delight in the heart of Miss Devereux because “that queer Child girl was laughing on the wrong side of her mouth.” The new manageress was so preoccupied in manner and so sure that Miss Child's services would not be needed that Win did not even leave her address. Besides, as it happened, she had given Miss Hampshire “notice,” and had not yet found another boarding-house.

“I think I ought to try to get into a cheaper place,” she explained. And that was a reason; but another, just as important, was pretty Miss Seeker's jealousy because Mr. Loewenfeld talked too much to the English girl at the table.

After all, the best that Win could accomplish after three days' dismal search was a saving of two dollars a week. For eight dollars she secured a fourth-story back hall bedroom half as big and half as clean as Miss Hampshire's, and she laughed aloud to find herself feeling desperately homesick for the “frying pan.” For Win could still laugh.

It was counting her money, the day after a servant at the new boarding-house stole twenty dollars, that whisked Miss Child's skirt within reach of the Hands. Things could not go on like this. She must get something to do at once—no matter what. Another girl in that house bought newspapers for the sake of the employment notices. Winifred borrowed the papers and answered many of the most attractive offers in vain. Next she tried the less attractive ones. When they were used up—and she also—she came down to what she called bed rock.

In bed rock were advertisements of several large stores for extra help through the holiday season. Of these Peter Rolls's store was at the head. “The Hands want

hands,” was part of the appeal, and Win instantly turned to something else. It was not until she had applied for work at six other shops, and found herself too late at all, that it began to seem faintly possible for her to think of going to Peter Rolls’s father’s store.



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When the idea did knock at the door of her mind hesitatingly as Peter junior used to knock at the dryad door, the Hands' advertisement for help was the last of its kind in the papers. The Hands needed more hands than any of the other stores.

When Win was just about to say to herself, "That's the one thing I couldn't do," she remembered Miss Seeker's words. Miss Rolls ruled her father and mother socially. Peter senior was allowed to show his nose in the place only about once a year. Mrs. and Miss Rolls never bought a pin there. Young Peter didn't bother, but wanted to be a philanthropist. In fact, you would, apparently, be far more likely to meet a member of the Rolls family in any other shop than their own.

Instead of saying that she could not, Win said: "Why shouldn't I?" She told herself that in a vast house of business which employed over two thousand salespeople she would be a needle in a haystack—a needle with a number, not a name. "I'll go and ask for a place," she answered her own question.

But almost she hoped that she would not succeed. If she tried, failure would not be her fault.

CHAPTER VIII

NO. 2884

Morning and girl were gray with cold as Win hovered before the vast expanse of plate glass which made of Peter Rolls's department store a crystal palace. Customers would not be admitted for an hour, yet the lovely wax ladies and the thrilling wax men in the window world wore the air of never having stopped doing their life work since they were appointed to it.

But then they had a life work of the most charming description. Winifred envied them. It was indeed their business to make all men, women, and children who passed envy them enough to stop, enter the store, and purchase things to make real life as much as possible like life in the window world.

All the nicest things which could be done in the strenuous outside world could in a serene and silent way be done in window world. And the lovely ladies and their thrilling men had not to hustle from one corner of the earth to another in order to find different amusements.

In one section of plate-glass existence beautiful girls were being dressed by their maids for a ball. Some were almost ready to start. Exquisite cloaks were being folded about their shoulders by fascinating French soubrettes with little lace caps like dabs of whipped cream. Other willowy creatures were lazy enough to be still in filmy "princess" petticoats and long, weblike, silk corsets ensheathing their figures nearly to their knees.

A realistic dressing-table, a lace-canopied bed, and pale-blue curtains formed their background. Instead of having to rush half across New York to the dance, it was apparently taking place next door, with only a thin partition as a wall.

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In a somewhat Louis Seize room several wondrous wax girls and the same number of young men, with extremely broad shoulders and slender hips, were dancing a decorous tango. But, if they tired of that, they had only to move on a section, to find a party of four young people playing tennis in appropriate costumes against a trellis of crimson ramblers. Strange to say, a mere wall divided this summer scene from sports in the high Alps. There was gorgeous fun going on in this portion of window world, where men and girls were skeeing, tobogganing, and snowballing each other in deep cotton snow. Next door they were skating on a surface so mirrorlike that, in fact, it was a mirror.

A little farther on a young wax mother of no more than eighteen was in a nursery, caressing an immense family of wax children of all ages, from babyhood up to twelve years. A grandmother was there, too, and a hospital nurse, and several playful dogs and cats. In another house they were having a Christmas tree, and Santa Claus had come in person to be master of ceremonies. How the children on the other side of a partition, engaged in learning lessons at school desks, must have envied those whose Christmas had prematurely come! But best of all was the automobile race; or, perhaps, the zoo of window world, where Teddy bears and Teddy monkeys and Teddy snakes and Teddy everythings disported themselves together among trees and flowers in Peter Rolls's conception of Eden.

Win had often glanced into these windows before, hurrying nervously past, but now she lingered, trying to fill her heart with the waxen peace of that luxurious land of leisure. She walked very slowly all around the great square, three sides of which were crystal, the fourth being given up to huge open doors, through which streamed men and parcels and hurled themselves into motor vans. The idea flashed into the girl's head that here was the cemetery of window land. In those big boxes and packages that men furiously yet indifferently carried out, were the dolls or animals that had smiled or romped behind the plate glass, or the dresses and hats, the tennis rackets and toboggans they had fondly thought their own.

This promenade of inspection and introspection put off the evil minute for a while; but the time came when Win must hook herself on to the tail of a procession constantly entering at an inconspicuous side door, or else go home with the project abandoned.

"*Of course* I shall never see Peter Rolls or his sister here," she told herself for the twentieth time, and passed through the door almost on the back of an enormous young man, while a girl closed in behind her with the intimacy of a sardine.

"Gee! Get on to the tall Effect in brown!" murmured a voice.

"Ain't she the baby doll?" another voice wanted to know.

Winifred heard, and realized that she was the Effect and baby doll in question. She flushed, and her ears tingled. She thought of the Arabian Nights tale, where the

searcher after the Golden Water was pestered by voices of those who had been turned to black stones on the way.

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When the cue of tightly packed men and women had advanced along a corridor on the other side of the doorway, it began mounting a fireproof staircase. Up and up it went, slowly, steadily rising from story to story, but it did not spread across the whole width of the wide, shallow steps. Other men and women, in single file and with no attention to order, pushed themselves down, the ascending gang flattening them against the varnished, green wall as they sneaked hastily past. No one spoke to Win or told her anything (though the big fellow in front threw her a jovial glance when she trod on his heel, and she herself ventured a look at the rear sardine), but she knew somehow that the irregular, descending procession was the defeated army in flight; those who “would not do.” She wondered if she should be among them after a few hours of vain waiting and standing on her feet.

Seven flights of stairs she counted, and then she and those in front and behind debouched into a corridor much longer than that at the entrance on the ground floor.

“They might have shot us up in the customers’ lifts!” snapped the sardine who had just detached herself from Winifred’s spine. “’Twould have saved their time and our tempers.”

“They don’t spend money putting up fireproof staircases for nothing,” mumbled a voice over the sardine’s shoulder. “They want to give us a free exhibition of an emergency exit. But it’ll be the only thing we ever will get free here.”

“Except maybe the sack—or the bounce,” tittered the sardine.

There was something likable about that sardine. Win felt drawn to her, which was fortunate in the circumstances.

Nearer and nearer they approached, with a kind of shuffle step, to an office whose whole front consisted of window. This window was raised, and electric light streaming out brightened that distant end of the otherwise economically lit corridor. The advance guard of would-be hands stepped one at a time in front of a counter which took the place of a window ledge. Now and then a girl or a man was kept for several moments talking to a person whom Win could not yet see; a kind of god in the machine. This halt delayed the procession and meant that a hand was being engaged; but oftener than not the pause was short, and the look on the late applicant’s face as he or she turned to scurry back like a chased dog along the corridor told its own story.

Win read each human document, as a page opened and then shut forever under her eyes, with a sick, cold pang for the tragedy of the unwanted. She ceased to feel that she was alien to these young men and women, because they were American and she English. A curious impression thrilled through her that she and these others and all dwellers on earth were but so many beads threaded on the same glittering string, that string the essence of the Creator, uniting all if they but knew it.

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The realization that hearts near hers were beating with hope or dread, or sinking with disappointment, was so keen that the heavy air of the place became charged for Win with the electricity of emotion. She felt what all felt in a strange confusion; and when a stricken face went by, it was she, Winifred Child, who was stricken. What happened to others suddenly mattered just as much and in exactly the same degree as what might happen to her. The weight of sadness and weariness pressed upon her. The smell of unaired clothes and stale, cheap perfumes made her head ache.

"Tired, girlie?" inquired the big young man on whose broad back Win had involuntarily reposed on the way upstairs. She was startled at this manner of address, but the brotherly benevolence on the square face under a thick brushwood of blond hair reassured her. Evidently "girlie" was the right word in the right place.

"Not so very. Are you?" She felt that conversation would be a relief. It was intensely cold yet stuffy in the corridor, and time seemed endless.

"Me? Huh! Bet yer my place yer can't guess what my job was up to a month ago."

He turned a strongly cut profile far over his shoulder, his head pivoting on a great column of throat above a low, loose collar that had a celluloid gleam where the light touched it. Only one eye and the transparent gleam of another cornea were given to Winifred's view, but that one green-gray orb was as compelling as a dozen ordinary seeing apparatuses.

"If I guessed what's in my mind, I'm afraid it would be silly," said Win. "You look as if you might be a—a boxer—or——"

"Or what?"

"Or as if you could train things—animals, I mean——"

"Gee-whittaker! If she ain't hit it square in the jaw first round! Go up ahead, little girl. This is where I move down one."

The sardines were now so loose in their partially emptied box that they could wriggle and even change positions if they liked. The big young man wheeled, passed his arm round Winifred's waist as if for a waltz, half lifted her off her feet, and set her down where he had been.

"Good gracious!" she gasped.

"That's what you get for bein' a bright child," he explained "The place is yours. See? If Peter Rolls wants only one more hand when your turn comes, you're it, and I'm left. I was lion man in Jakes's and Boon's show, but my best lion died on me, and that kind o' got my goat. Guess my nerve went; and then brutes is as quick as fleas to jump if they



feel you don't know where you are for once. That shop is shut for yours truly, so I'm doin' my darnedest to get another. If Peter Rolls can use me, he can have me dirt cheap. I want to feed my face again. It needs it!"

"You give Father one straight look between the eyes," suggested the sardine, now at his back, "sort of as if he was a lion, and I'd bet my bottom dollar, if I had one, he dasn't hand you the frosty mitt."

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"Who's Father?" the lion tamer threw over his shoulder Win had longed to ask the same question, but had not liked to betray herself as an amateur.

"Oh, I forgot this was your first party! Wish 'twas mine. Father's what the supe—the superintendent, the gent in the window—gets himself called by us guyls."

"Wipe me off the map! I'm some Johnny to cost you all that breath. But gee! the thought of standin' up to him gets my goat worse 'n twice his weight in lions. I'm mighty glad this young lady's gotta go through with it in front of me. Say, maybe you'll push the right bell with him, too."

"I hope we both may," answered Win fervently. "It's more than kind of you to give me your place, but really I——"

"Ain't we the polite one?" remarked the lion tamer. "Say, girlie, you've made a hit with me. Where did you buy your swell accent?"

"Don't make fun of me, please, or I shall drop!" exclaimed Win with a laugh nipped in the bud, lest it should reach the august ear of Father.

This way of taking the joke appeased those within hearing, who had perhaps believed that the tall Effect in brown thought a lot of herself and was putting on airs. Her seeming to imply that she might be considered ridiculous inclined censors to leniency.

"Have a spruce cream?" asked a girl in front, screwing her head round to see what the Effect was like, and offering a small, flat object about an inch in width and two in length.

"Thank you very much," said Win.

Every one near tittered good-naturedly. Perhaps it was that accent again! Funny, thought Win. Her idea had been that Americans had an accent, because they didn't talk like English people who had invented the language. Americans appeared to think it was the other way round!

She put the flat thing into her mouth and began to chew it. At first it was very nice; sugary, with a fresh, woodsy flavour which was new to her. Presently, however, the sweetness and some of the taste melted away, and instead of dissolving, so that she could swallow it, the substance kept all its bulk and assumed a rubbery texture exactly like a doll's nose she had once bitten off and never forgotten. She coughed a little and did not quite know what to do.

"Good heavens', she's goin' to absorb it!" ejaculated the girl in front, still twisting to gaze at the tall Effect. "Didn't you never chew gum before?"

“Only millionaires can afford it in my country,” said Win, recovering herself. The laugh was with her! But every sound made was *piano*. There was the feeling among the mice that this was the cat’s house.

The girl in front who had offered the chewing gum was small and just missed being very pretty. She had curly hair of so light a red that it was silvery at the roots. Seeing her from behind, you hoped for a radiant beauty, but she had pale, prominent eyes and a hard mouth. Win imagined that the muscles in her cheeks were overdeveloped because of chewing too much gum.

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At last the procession had moved on so far that this girl arrived at the lighted window. Win's heart, which had missed a beat in a sudden flurry of fear now and then, began to pound like a hammer.

For the first time she could see the god in the machine, the superintendent of Peter Rolls's vast store, a kind of prime minister with more power than the king. She had fancied that he would be old, a man of such importance in a great establishment, a person who had the nickname of Father. But her anxious gaze, as she carefully kept her distance, told that he was not even middle-aged. He was, it seemed, a curious mixture of cherub and Mephistopheles in type: round faced, blue eyed, with smooth cheeks that looked pink even in the cruel electric light. His hair and brushed-up eyebrows were thin and of a medium brown; but he had a sharply waxed moustache and a little pointed goatee or "imperial" so much darker in colour that they were conspicuous objects.

He was talking to the girl in a high-keyed yet somewhat blustering voice, asking questions which Win could not and did not try to hear. The answers were given purposely in a low tone, and the girl laid on the counter several papers from a little black bag at her waist. These the superintendent took up, unfolding them with plump, dimpled fingers, like those of a young woman.

With his bright, glancing blue eyes he skimmed the contents of each paper—probably references, thought Win—and then returned them to their owner.

"These are no good," he pronounced in a louder voice than before. "And you don't look strong enough for Christmas work——"

Suddenly the red-haired girl darted her head forward, like that of a pecking bird, hastily muttered a few words, and drew back, as if hoping that those not concerned might fail to notice the manoeuvre.

"Oh—er—that's different," said the superintendent in an odd, uncomfortable tone, with the hint of "bluster" still in it. Win fancied she heard him add: "What salary?" In any case, the girl mentioned the sum of eight dollars, and at the same time scribbled something on a printed paper form pushed over the counter.

"Bet that ain't *your* line, kid," there came a murmur round the corner of a velvet bow on Win's hat. So faint was the murmur that she might almost have dreamed it; but, if uttered, it must have dropped from heaven or the lion tamer's lips.

Win was burning with curiosity. What two or three talismanic words could the red-haired girl have whispered so quietly, so secretively, to change in a second the superintendent's decision? It was almost like freemasonry. You whispered to the hangman, and he, realizing that you were a member, took the noose off your neck!

Alas, if Father refused her services, as he almost surely would, she had no such magic charm to make him change his mind! There was certainly a mystery, a secret password that did the trick; but the lion tamer, though a newcomer in this business like herself, appeared to know or guess, and bet that it “wasn’t in her line.”

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Too late to ask questions! Her time had come. The red-haired girl, looking prettier than before because of a bright flush on her sallow face, pranced away, head triumphantly up, and a key and a queer little book in her hand.

Before Win realized what was happening she stood before the big, lighted window, longing though not daring to rest her trembling elbows on the counter. The cherubic yet keen blue eyes were staring into hers with the oddest expression she had ever seen. If the man had not been an important official, far above her (he would have thought) in position, Win might have fancied that he was afraid of her, afraid of something which he half expected, half dreaded, wishing to avert it, yet likely to be mortified if it did not come.

"I must be out of my mind," she told herself, at the same time telling him that she desired an engagement as an extra hand.

"What references?" he inquired, with the mechanical intonation of one who has put the same question thousands of times.

"I—haven't any," stammered Win. "I'm lately over from England—"

"You don't need to mention that," broke in the superintendent. "I know London. Have you worked in any of the big department stores there—Harrods' or Selfridge's?" He looked, Win thought (clinging to a straw of hope), as if he were not unwilling to help her.

"No, none. I was a model for Nadine. I'm quick at doing figures—"

"The figures that models *cut* are more to the point, I guess!" The cherub Mephistopheles smiled at this joke and did not seem to care just then that his every extra word kept the procession back an extra instant. "We're not wanting models at present. But if you've had any experience as a saleslady—you look all right—well, see here, I'll try and give you a chance. It's up to you to make good, though. What money do you want? Write it down."

He indicated one of those forms which Win had seen. She hesitated, then felt that the blue eyes were watching her keenly. Hesitation was not the way to succeed in this home of hustle. She remembered that the red-haired girl, though she must have had experience or she would not have possessed references, had said something about eight dollars. "I'll say seven," Win told herself, and wrote accordingly on the paper.

"We can't pay seven dollars per week to a girl without experience," pronounced the superintendent promptly. "If you want to take six, I'll give you a test of character. You ought to be thankful for six. By and by you may work up into one of the departments where we pay commissions."

"I'll take six," Win said.



Though already she knew something of the expense of living in New York, six dollars a week certainly seemed generous compared with shop-girls' wages at home. She had been told that there they got only twelve or fourteen shillings, and sometimes less. Of course, in England, you "lived in." Win had heard that expression, and was aware of its meaning. She was not yet quite sure what you did in America, for she had talked to none of her very few acquaintances about the need she had to look for work in a department store. There was only one thing she did know in that connection: it would be unwise to ask Father questions.

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She must appear to be “all there,” and trust to finding out the routine of a New York shop-girl’s life from one of themselves. She hoped the sardine would be engaged—nice, trim little sardine with smooth black pompadour, small white face, jewel-bright eyes, pugnacious nose, determined chin! A snappy yet somehow trustworthy sardine.

Still the superintendent was observing her, as if to see whether she were warranted sound and kind. “I’m going to put you into a bargain square,” said he thoughtfully. “Do you know what that means?”

“I can guess,” said she.

“One of our two-hour bargain sales will tell better than anything else whether you’ve got stuff in you,” he went on. “Have you ever seen a check book?” was the question now flashed at her.

Win had just sense enough left not to blurt out any nonsense about a bank. In an instant she realized that the pads upon which salespeople did hasty sums must be called check books, anyhow in America. She answered that she had seen one.

“Know what to do with it?”

“On principle. I can soon learn the method.”

“Soon’s a long word. You may have time for it, *your* side. We haven’t. Things have gotta be learned on the nail. See here, what about your dress? Are you wearing black under that jacket?”

Win’s heart jumped. She had not expected, if engaged, to begin work the next moment. She had supposed that she would be told to return the next morning before the opening hour for customers; otherwise it might have occurred to her that it would be well to get a ready-made black dress. But she must not throw away this chance which seemed to be hanging in the balance.

“No,” she answered quickly. “I thought it would be better to buy something here when I knew just what was wanted. I can find a dress which will fit, I know. I always can, and I can be in it fifteen minutes from now.”

“Well,” the superintendent said with half-grudging approval that lit a faint twinkle in his eyes, “you’re no slow coach for an Englishwoman. You may do. We sell 10 per cent. off to our employees. Here’s the key of your locker. Here’s your check book. When you’ve got your dress, ask for the schoolroom. Take fifteen minutes’ lesson on the blackboard for making out your checks, and the rest’s up to you. But look sharp. We’ve been open to customers for half an hour now. At ten-thirty a two-hours’ bargain sale of blouses, sashes, and ladies’ fancy neckwear opens on the first floor. That’s yours. You

must be in the square more than half an hour before the sale begins, to see stock and learn your job.”

He eyed her sharply to see if she were “feazed.” But Win had the feeling that a “stiff upper lip” was needed for the honour of England and the pluck of its womanhood. She remembered one of the stories she had loved best as a child—the story of the task Venus set for Psyche before she could be worthy of Cupid, the lover whose wings she had burned with a drop of oil from her lamp. Now the girl, grown out of childhood, understood how Psyche had felt when told to count the grains of wheat in Venus’s granary within a certain time limit.

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"Well, anyhow, Psyche didn't ask questions, and I won't," she said to herself. "The kind ants came and told her things: maybe the sardine will come to me."

Looking almost preternaturally intelligent and pleased with life, Win accepted the key and check book, and learned with a shock that, as one of Peter Rolls's hands, she was No. 2884.

CHAPTER IX

THE TEST OF CHARACTER

The sardine's ears must have been sharp, for although the lion tamer was between her and Win (like a thick chunk of ham in a thin sandwich), she had heard something of the conversation at the superintendent's window.

"Try the basement bargain counters for your dress; you'll get it cheaper," she flung after the tall Effect in a shrill whisper as the newly engaged hand flashed by.

There wasn't a second, or even half a second to lose, yet Win slackened her pace to say "Thank you. I do hope we shall meet again."

Even the lion tamer threw her a look, though already he had taken his turn at the window; but Win did not see the admiring glance. She was flying down the stairs she had come up so slowly, and did not pause for breath until she was in the basement. There it was so crowded and so hot, though the store had been open to customers not quite an hour, that there seemed little air to breathe, even had there been time.

Win could see no means of ventilation in the immense room, which was brightly and crudely lit by pulsing white globes of electricity. There were no partitions to divide one department from another, and it seemed as if samples of every article in the world were being sold on these rows upon rows of heaped-up tables.

Taking her for a customer, a floorwalker saved the bewildered girl from wasting more than a minute of her valuable time. The thermometer of his manner fell a degree when he learned that she was an employee; nevertheless, he directed her to the bargain counter where black dress skirts were being sold. There was another nearby which offered black silk and satin blouses. The man asked if she had been told that extra hands, if on probation, must give money down for anything above the first week's wage, and looked impressed when the tall girl answered that she preferred to pay cash for the whole.

"Princess, queen!" he murmured *sotto voce*, and Win might have had the privilege of exchanging a smile with him on the strength of the joke, but thought it might be wiser not to have heard.

Luckily black skirts and blouses were not the craze of the moment. Women were besieging a beehive of corsets and a hotbed of petticoats, reduced (so said huge red letters overhead) to one third of their original price. In less than five minutes Win had secured a costume with the right measurements, and for the two portions of which it consisted, had paid exactly one week's salary.

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With an unwrapped parcel rolled under one arm, she battled her way back to the staircase she had descended (not daring to squeeze her unworthy body into a crowded elevator), and toiled up to the eighth floor. There, she had been told, were dressing-rooms as well as lockers; a rest room (converted into a schoolroom from the hour of eight until ten), and the restaurant for women employees.

Lightning change act first! Black Effect to take the place of brown, a rush for the dressing-room, vague impression of near marble basins and rows of mirrors; tall, slim girl in front of one, quite the proper "saleslady" air, in new, six-dollar black skirt and silk blouse lightened with sewed-in frills of white, fit not noticeably bad; dash along corridor again for locker room, but sudden wavering pause at sight of confused group: half-fainting girl in black being handed over to capped and aproned nurse by two youths at an open door, glimpse of iron bedsteads etched in black against varnished white wall, door shut with slap; youths marching light heartedly away, keeping time to the subdued whistle of "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee."

Girls sometimes faint here, then, before ten o'clock in the morning! And quite a matter of course to shed them in the hospital room, otherwise one wouldn't try one's tango steps going away. But never mind; laugh first, or the world will! Life easier for Peter Rolls's hands as well as other people if they can live it in ragtime. Your turn to fall to-day. Mine to-morrow. "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee!" And whatever you may think, don't lose a minute.

Winifred did not. Perhaps she, too, was beginning to think in ragtime. She was telling her number to the doorkeeper of the locker room as the slap of the hospital door ceased to vibrate through the long corridor on the eighth story.

The locker room had countless rows of narrow cells with iron gratings for doors; and the gimlet gaze of two stalwart young females pierced each newcomer. It was their business to see that Peter Rolls's hands did not pilfer each other's belongings. The gimlet eyes must note the outdoor clothing each girl wore on arrival, in order to be sure that she did not go forth at evening clad in the property of a comrade. Being paid to cultivate suspicion had soured the guardian angels' tempers. One had a novel by Laura Jean Libbey, the other an old-fashioned tale by Mary J. Holmes, to while away odd minutes of leisure; but it appealed to the imagination of neither that any or all of the girls flitting in and out might be eligible heroines for their favourite authors, stolen at birth from parent millionaires, qualifying through pathetic struggles with poverty to become the brides of other millionaires, or, perhaps, to win an earl or duke.

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All the regularly engaged hands had long ago shut up their hats and cloaks in prison and gone about their business. It was only the extras who were arriving at this late hour to show their numbers and claim their lockers. There were comparatively few amateurs. Most of the girls had had shop experience, but greenhorns betrayed ignorance as they entered. To them, shortly and succinctly, were explained the rules: the system of “stubs” dealt out to newcomers as they gave their numbers and had lockers assigned them—stubs to be religiously kept for the protection of property from false claimants; the working of a slot machine, in which must be slipped a card, and the moment of the morning and midday arrival thus recorded with ruthless exactitude (twenty-five cents docked off your pay if you were late), and other odds and ends of routine information, such as the hours at which lockers might or might not be opened without the presentation of special passes.

As Win fitted her key into the grated door which would in future pertain to No. 2884, into the locker room bounced the sardine.

“Hello, Lady Ermyntrude!” said she. “I thought I’d pick you up some place. Just a jiffy, and we can skip to the schoolroom together, if your ladyship pleases.”

“I am glad!” said Win, and as they went out side by side she ventured to add: “Please do tell me why you call me Lady Ermyntrude. I hope I’m not like anything so awful as that?”

“Oh, there’s always a Lady Ermyntrude in every English book you read, and you look as if you’d walked out of one. I don’t know why, but you do. I kind of like you, though.”

“So do I you,” said Win, but did not tell her that she was a sardine. This might be a worse epithet in a foreign language even than Lady Ermyntrude.

“I’m for the toy department. What are you?” rapped out the clear little voice that matched the clear little personality—a personality which, at the top of its pompadour, did not reach the tip of Win’s ear.

“Mine is called a two-hour bargain sale——”

“Heaven help you! Basement?”

“No, ground floor.”

“Thank your stars. That’s a cut above. Most amatoors start in the basement bargain sales. If they live through the first day of that—*well!* But you’re all right. You’ve got the look of the ones who win.”

“That’s my name—‘Win’—Winifred Child.”

“If you ain’t the Champion Giant Kid! I’m Sadie Kirk. Here’s the schoolroom. When it ain’t that, it calls itself the rest room, you know. I’m here only because there’s a little difference in Rolls’s check system from Bimgel’s, where I worked till the grippe laid me low and my place was filled. I thought I’d try the Hands for a change, though they say it’s the *limit* and down the other side. So me for the school! We’ll sit together, and if I can help you I will.”

“You’re a dear,” whispered Win.

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"You're another. Go there yourself," was the swift retort.

The rest room was really very nice, if there were ever a chance to rest in it—which, Miss Kirk whispered, was not likely to be the case. There were wall bookcases with glass doors, a few oak-framed engravings with a pale-green, "distempered" background, several chintz-covered sofas with cushions, and plenty of easy chairs.

On small tables lay very back numbers of illustrated papers and magazines. The high windows had green curtains which softened their glare and (said Sadie) prevented dust from showing. The brown-painted floor had decorative intervals of rugs, like flowery oases. Altogether the room would have been an excellent "show place" if any influential millionairess began stirring up public interest in "conditions of shop-girl life."

One end wall of the long, narrow room was almost entirely covered by an immense blackboard, supposed to represent a check book. In front of this stood a pale young man with a timid air, who coughed and cleared his throat a good deal as he explained to a group of girls Peter Rolls's specially simplified, modernly improved system of adding up the prices of purchased "goods" in the quickest and most scientific manner. Win listened intently, easily catching the idea, but wondering if she should get "rattled" when she had to put it into practice in the coming "two-hour bargain sale." Miss Kirk, however, soon saw that the difference between this and other systems was not complicated enough to trouble her, and let her wits wander from one subject to another.

"That's a salesman teaching," she whispered up to her tall protegee. "He's new to the job, I guess, and scared of us guyls; but I bet he bullies men when he gets the chance! He'll tuyn out another Father."

Win, not having forgotten her curiosity concerning the red-haired girl's mysterious murmur to the superintendent, longed to question the sardine, who had the air of knowing everything she ought and ought not to know. But the newcomer could not afford to lose a word that dropped from the nervous teacher's lips. "Do tell me about it later," she pleaded. "I must listen to this."

"All right. Are you lunching in or out?"

"Oh, in, I suppose."

"So will I, then, though I hear it's filthy and the grub vile. We'll try and make a date."

Win dared not answer. With difficulty she caught the last part of the lecture. Then her fifteen minutes of schooling were over and the real battle of life as one of Peter Rolls's hands was to begin.

No time for the luxury of luncheon appointments. The two girls must meet or not, as luck ordained. The toy department was on the sixth floor, so the parting came almost at once, and Win went down to meet her fate alone.

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A floorwalker, or “aisle manager,” showed her the place where the “great two-hour bargain sale of coloured blouses, sashes, and ladies’ fancy neckwear” was advertised to begin at ten-thirty. As he steered the girl through the crowd he looked at her with interest, and she would have looked with interest at him could she have done so without his knowing it. She had vaguely heard that shopwalkers in England could make or break the salespeople. Probably floorwalkers in America were the same, or more powerful, because everybody in this free country who had any power at all seemed to have more than he could possibly have anywhere else.

This man was extremely handsome she saw in the one quick, veiled glance which can tell a girl as much as a boy is able to take in with a long stare. He was tall and dark and clean shaven, with polished black hair like a jet helmet, and brown eyes. Few princes could hope to be as well dressed, and if he had been an actor, only to see his shoulders would have made a matinee girl long to lay her head upon one. *Why* wasn’t he an actor, then, at many dollars a week, instead of a floorwalker at a few? It must be that his fairy godmother had forgotten to endow him with some essential talent.

Seeing that he looked at her sympathetically with his rather sad, dark eyes, Win ventured with all respect to beg a little enlightenment as to a two-hour bargain sale.

“It means that certain things are marked down for two hours,” he explained, “and after that anything left of the lot goes up to the old price again. It’s a pretty hard test for one who’s new to the whole business. The superintendent, Mr. Meggison, has put you on to a pretty stiff thing,” he added. And then again, after an instant’s pause: “You’re going to land in a wasps’ nest over there. There’s some electricity in the atmosphere this morning. But keep your head and you’ll be all right.”

They came within sight of a hollow square formed by four long counters. Above it was a placard with red and black lettering which announced the sale to begin at half-past ten; everything to be sold at bargain price till twelve-thirty. Within were six saleswomen, two for each side of the square; and the question flashed through Win’s head: Why had she been imported to make an odd number? It was an exciting question, taken in connection with the floorwalker’s warning.

Until sale time these counters were out of the congested region; and the six saleswomen were taking advantage of the lull before the storm to put finishing touches on the arrangement of the stock. The instant that Win was inside the square it was as if she had been suddenly swallowed up in a thunder cloud. The head saleswoman (she must be that, Win thought, judging from the attention paid her by the rest) was in a black rage—a beautiful Jewess, older than the others, and growing overplump, but magnificently browed, and hardly thirty yet.

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"It's damnable!" she panted, full breast heaving, throat swelling with stifled sobs, "to put this onto me! Anybody with half an eye can see through the trick. The Queen of England couldn't get rid of these nasty rags at a charity bazaar."

She went on without noticing the newcomer, except to flash across Win's face and figure a lightning, Judith glance which seemed to pitch a creature unknown and unwanted into the bottomless pit where all was vile. Her satin-smooth olive hands, with brilliantly polished coral nails, trembled as, gesticulating, she waved them over the stock which littered the four counters. She seemed to be throwing her curse upon blouses, sashes, and ladies' neckwear; and had she been a witch, with power of casting spells, the masses of silk and satin would have burst into coloured flame.

"Oh, Miss Stein, don't feel that way about it," pleaded a thin girl who looked utterly bloodless. "The things are marked down so low maybe they'll go off."

"Look at them—*look* at them!" broke out the Jewess. "Is there anything you'd take for a present, one of you? They might as well have sent me to the basement and be done with it. But I'll show *him*, and her, too, how much I care before the day's out."

So fierce was the splendid creature's emotion that Win felt the hot contagion of it. What had happened she did not know, though evidently the others did and sympathized, or pretended to. But even she, a stranger, could spring at a conclusion.

Miss Stein was called upon to sell things which she thought no customers would buy. Somebody in power had put her in this position, out of spite, to get her into trouble. There was another woman in the case. There must be jealousy. This tigerish Judith was suffering as keenly as a human creature could suffer, and all because of some blouses, some sashes, and ladies' fancy neckwear, which certainly had an unattractive appearance as they lay on the counters in confused heaps.

"He says, 'it's up to you, Miss Stein!'" the quivering voice jerked out in bitter mimicry. "Up to *me*, indeed! And he gives me this rag bag!"

"It'll be nuts to *her* if you're downed," remarked a girl with a round, pink face.

"Don't you think I *know* it?" Miss Stein demanded fiercely. Her eyes filled with tears, which she angrily dried with a very dirty handkerchief that looked strangely out of keeping in the manicured hands. "There's nothing to do, or I'd do it, except to give him a piece of my mind and throw up the job before they have the chance to fire me."

"You wouldn't—just at this time!" cried the anemic girl.

"Wouldn't I? You'll see. I don't care a tinker's curse what becomes of me after to-day."

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Win's ears were burning as if they had been tweaked. The minutes were passing. She could ask no help, no information concerning her duties. If she put a question as to what she was to do she would be snubbed, or worse. Could the far-away and almost omnipotent Mr. Meggison have had secret knowledge of this lion's den into which he had thrown her? He had said the bargain square and the two-hours' sale would be a test of character. At this rate, she would fail ignominiously, and she did not want to fail. But neither did she want the beautiful Jewess to fail. Her anxiety was not all selfish. "A test of character!" Was there nothing, *nothing* she could do for her own and the general good?

Suddenly her spirit flew back to the ship. Peter Rolls's face came before her. She saw his good blue eyes. She heard him say: "If ever I can help——"

How odd! Why should she have thought of him then? And no one could help, least of all he, who had probably forgotten all about her by this time, Miss Rolls having spoiled his horrid, deceitful game. She must help herself Yet it was just as if Peter had come and suggested an idea—really quite a good idea, if only she had the courage to interrupt Miss Stein.

She and Peter had chatted one night on B deck about the Russian dancers and Leon Bakst's designs. She had lectured Peter on the amazing beauty of strangely combined colours, mixtures which would not have been tolerated before the "Russian craze." Now Peter seemed to be reminding her of what she had said then, a silly little boast she had made, that with "nothing but a few rags and a Bakst inspiration" she could put together a gorgeous costume for a fancy-dress ball.

"When you want to set up for a rival to Nadine, I'll back you," Peter had retorted, and they had both laughed.

Now, with the immense but impersonal "backing" of Peter Rolls, Sr.'s, great shop, she had the Bakst inspiration and the tingling ambition to set up (in a very small way) as a rival to Nadine.

"I beg your pardon," she stammered to Miss Stein, and hastened on as a fierce, astonished look was fastened upon her from under a black cloud of stormy brow. "I—I hope you'll excuse my interrupting, but I've been a model of Nadine's, and—and I have an idea, if you'll allow me—I mean, you don't seem to like these things we have to sell. I believe we could make something of them if we hurried."

All through she had the feeling that if she could not hold Miss Stein's eyes until she had compelled interest, hope was lost. She put her whole self into the effort to hold the eyes, and she held them, talking fast, pouring the magnetic force of her enthusiasm into the angry, unhappy soul of the other.

“What do you mean?” asked Miss Stein, abruptly taking the sharp, judicial air of the business woman. Half resentful, half contemptuous, she could not afford to let slip the shadow of a chance.

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"I'll show you, if I may," said Win.

She, the outsider, the intruder, suddenly dominated the situation. The others, even Miss Stein herself, gave way before the Effect in black as it came close to one of the counters and with quick, decided touches began manipulating those blouses, sashes, and ladies' fancy neckwear which the Queen of England could not sell at a charity bazaar.

A box of steel pins of assorted sizes lay on a cleared corner of the counter which Win had approached. It had been brought, perhaps, for the pinning of labels onto the newly repriced stock. Win took a purple sash and draped it round the waistline of a dull-looking, sky-blue blouse. Quickly the draping was coaxed into shape and firmly held with pins. Then under the collar was fastened a crimson bow ("ladies' fancy neckwear!") which had been hideous in itself, but suddenly became beautiful as a butterfly alighting on a flower.

"My!" exclaimed the anemic girl, and glanced cautiously from under her eyelids to see whether approval or disgust were the popular line to take.

But Miss Stein—still resentful, and now beginning to be jealous of a green hand's originality and daring taste—was not an Oriental for nothing. She didn't possess the initiative ability of a designer, but she could appreciate the crashing music of gorgeous colours met together on the right notes. Love of colour was in her Jewish blood, and she was a shrewd business woman also, animated with too vital a selfishness to let any opportunity of advancement go. She seized the new girl's idea at a glance, realized its value and its possible meaning for herself.

"That's queer, but it's smart," she pronounced, and five anxious faces brightened. "I'd 'a' thought o' that if I hadn't been so awful worried; my head feels stuffed full o' wadding. I don't seem to have room for two ideas. Me and you can tell the guyls what to do, and they'll do it. See here, as fast as we get those things fixed we'll hang 'em up on the line and make a show. Gee! they'll draw the dames a mile off, just out of curiosity and nothing else."

"And when we get them we'll get their money, too," Win prophesied cheerfully. "We'll christen these things Pavlova Russian Sash-Blouses, and say it's the latest dodge only to *pin* them together so purchasers can change the drapery to fit their figures. When we've sold all we can finish before ten-thirty we'll make a point of pinning on drapery and neckties in the customers' presence to suit their taste. I can undertake that part, if you like."

"You do think you're *some* girl, don't you?" was Miss Stein's only comment. But Win saw that she meant to accept the scheme and "work it for all it was worth."

A light of hope and the excitement of battle shone down the dull flame of anger in her eyes. There was no gleam of gratitude there, and if Win had wanted it she would have been disappointed; but just at this moment she wanted nothing on earth save to push that beautiful Jewess to a triumph over "*him and her*" and to make the two-hour sale of Pavlova Russian Sash-Blouses a frantic, furious success.

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CHAPTER X

PETER ROLLS'S LITTLE WAYS

Something strange had happened in the ground-floor bargain square. The wasps' nest had suddenly turned into a beehive. The buzz of rage had lulled to the hum of industry. Fred Thorpe, the "aisle manager," was blessed with the tact which only some secret sympathy or great natural kindness can put into a man; and it had kept him at a distance from Miss Stein that morning. He knew the inner history of that particular bargain sale, and there were reasons why he should understand with peculiar acuteness the humiliation she had been doomed to endure. His presence on the scene would make matters worse, and he had obliterated himself as much as possible.

Nevertheless he saw all that went on in that direction, and the sudden and remarkable change which took place immediately after the tall English girl's arrival amazed him. He did not know what to make of it, but it was so evidently a change for the better, and the time before the sale was so short, that he decided to sink conventions and let the saleswomen alone.

The floorwalker had plenty of other things to keep him busy, but his subself eyed the strenuous, mysterious preparations for the coming two-hour sale of blouses, sashes, and ladies' fancy neckwear. Five minutes ago the unfortunate stock (which finished the latest chapter of Stein-Horrocks-Westlake-Thorpe inner history) had laid in neglected heaps on the four counters which walled in the hollow square. Miss Stein and her five companions had confined their energies to examining labels, and that in a perfunctory manner, a mere cloak for feverish whisperings. The sale was doomed to failure—had been doomed from the moment that Mr. Horrocks, the manager of the department (who was also a sub-buyer), had "dumped" a disastrous purchase from a bankrupt sale onto the girl whom every one knew he had jilted for Miss Westlake. There was far more in it than that; an intricate intrigue of shop life. But so much at least was common property in the department; and the elevation of Miss Westlake, the humiliation of Miss Stein, could be seen by all, for Miss Westlake close by was selling the most entrancing new fichus which had begun the day with a *succes fou*.

No use advising Miss Stein to buck up and do her best. Anything Fred Thorpe could say on the subject would be bitterly misconstrued. He realized that her conception of the part to play was to make the worst of things instead of the best and snatch what satisfaction she could from a flare-up. That was what Horrocks wanted, of course, but she was past caring, or so it seemed until the sudden change took place after the appearance of the new girl.

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Soon Thorpe began to understand the scheme. With an eye for colour and a swiftness of touch that was almost incredible, unsympathetic blouses were changed into daring yet dainty “confections.” As fast as the girls finished draping the sashes and pinning on fantastically knotted ties of contrasted colours, they hung up the most attractive of their creations on lines above the counters which had been meagrely furnished forth with a few stringy, fringed sashes. While some girls worked like demons in transforming “stock,” others arranged it on the lines and counters. Complete “Pavlovas” only were displayed in prominent places. Such things as could not be ready in time for the sale opening were grouped as prettily as possible, according to colour schemes, on the two less conspicuous of the four counters—those which faced away from the more frequently occupied avenues of approach.

This was doubtless Miss Stein’s experienced contribution to the plan of battle; but, clever saleswoman as she was, when brain and heart were cool, Thorpe realized that all credit for originating the scheme should be given to the new girl. “She’s a live wire,” he said to himself, though his deepest sympathies were for Miss Stein. And he saw the “smartness” of Mr. Meggison in “spotting” No. 2884 for this place.

Meggison was, of course, “onto” the situation, for the whole secret of the man’s sudden rise lay in his capacity for knowing and keeping track of every current and undercurrent of life in each department. With Miss Stein at their head, her five assistants would not put the energy of one into disposing of the hated stock, therefore Meggison had sent an “extra.” He had chosen a new girl because she would not “take sides,” and a girl who looked as if she might hold her own against odds, because she would need all her “ginger” if she were to “make good.” Besides Thorpe said to himself, Meggison might have his eye upon her, perhaps, as something out of the common run of extras merely hired for the holidays and intend to test her.

Somehow all the department managers and floorwalkers and head salesmen smiled dryly when they thought of Meggison (who had lately been promoted) in connection with any girl. They seldom put into words what lay behind the smile, for you never knew who might be a spy—a “sneak” or a “quiz.” But all the men knew his one laughable weakness, and would rather get hold of a “sample” of it than be treated to a champagne dinner at the Waldorf.

Long before half-past ten women who wanted blouses and had seen the newspaper advertisements of the two-hour bargain sale began to inquire where it would be held. Thorpe was constantly obliged to direct them, and watching them group where they could see the decorations of the square, his ears were sharpened for comments.

The quick minds of American women soon caught the idea which the colour arrangement conveyed. “Why, it’s like the things the Russian dancers wear!” said one.

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"It's the newest trick I've seen yet," said another.

Thorpe could not help thinking of the difference between these exclamations and those he had expected to hear when the advertised blouses first burst on the beholders eyes.

At ten-thirty to the second the waiting women pounced. Win's nerve failed her for an instant in the hot forefront of her first battle, but she caught at Miss Kirk's remembered words: "You've got the look of those who win," and the floorwalker's advice: "Keep your head and you'll be all right." She mustn't be a coward. She mustn't fall at her first shot.

Soon she realized that she need expect no help from Miss Stein or the five satellites who took their cue from her. The Russian inspiration had happened to be acceptable but she was to be shown that she mustn't take advantage of her start. The question or two she began to ask had for an answer: "Good Lord, don't bother *me*!" "If you can't see for yourself, what are your eyes for?" or "This ain't the schoolroom, I *don't* think!"

Maybe, she told herself, the girls were not always like this. To-day they were desperate, and no wonder. She mustn't mind a few snubs. They hardly knew what they were saying. The check book was more formidable than it had seemed on the blackboard, and she envied the others their quick, almost mechanical way of adding and subtracting. Would she ever be like that? Meanwhile the thing was to keep the entries in her check book correct.

She was saved, perhaps, by the need which soon arose for one girl to put in shape for customers the blouses, sashes, and ties which had not been pinned together. Just as her brain began to reel over a difficult calculation which must be made in a clamouring hurry, Miss Stein commanded a change of work.

"As soon as you're through with this customer," was the order.

Win took time to draw breath and finished the sum correctly "I should have gone flump over the next!" she thought, with a thankful sigh, for she was in her element, choosing colours and draping sashes to suit customers' "styles." Miss Stein grudged her the distinction, but granted it for the sake of business. If the girl showed signs of "uppishness" when the sale was over she should soon be made to see that it wouldn't pay.

Even as it was, Win used up one whole check book, containing fifty order forms, and also her own vitality. She had no time to realize how tired she was until half-past twelve brought the sale to an end. Even then a thing that happened pushed away thought of self for a few more moments.

Walking beside Mr. Thorpe, the aisle manager, came a big, auburn-haired, red-moustached man of thirty three or four, with a particularly pleasant, smiling face of florid

colour and excitable blue eyes. He looked boyishly obstinate, and yet, Win thought, as if he might be easy to “get round,” unless some prejudice kept him firm. She would not have thought of him at all had not the flush which suddenly swept over Miss Stein’s face suggested that this was “he.”

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Win was instantly sure that here was the man in the case; now, *cherchez la femme!* And she had not to search far.

The two men did not come to the bargain square, but he of the red moustache slowed down to throw a glance of intense interest at the denuded counters and the customers who lingered, though the sale was ended, to buy “Pavlovas” at their suddenly augmented price. He spoke to the floorwalker, and got some answer which Miss Stein would evidently have given at least a week out of her life to hear. Then the pair passed on, but only to pause again plainly—too plainly—in sight of all eyes in the hollow square.

The red-moustached man parted company with his companion and went straight to a counter where lace scarfs and fichus and wonderful boudoir caps were achieving a brilliant success. Instantly a fairy-like brunette with cherry lips and a bewitching, turned-up nose came forward with a sweet meekness that was the subtlest kind of coquetry. Whatever he had to say was said in a second or two, and the girl answered as quickly. But she went back to work with a conscious look which would to any watching woman announce that she considered the man her property.

“Little pig!” Win said to herself. “She’s purring with joy because Miss Stein saw. (*Do pigs purr?*) Anyhow I *am* glad we’ve made a success. That must be some comfort! Why, at the Hands it’s like a big theatre with a lot of different stages, where the curtains go up unexpectedly and give you a glimpse of an act.”

But exciting as the plays were, the one in which she herself had a part began to seem very long drawn out when the first wild rush of the two-hour act was over. Miss Stein, without a word of appreciation to the new recruit who had saved the day, went off with the anemic girl to lunch. Two others left at the same time, and only a couple of the old guard remained to hold the fort with Win. Three were quite enough, however, to cope with the diminished trade. Customers, as well as saleswomen, were thinking of food; and as the crowd in the shopping centres of the great store thinned perceptibly, no doubt it thickened to the darkening of the air in the famous Pompeian restaurant on the top floor.

Most of the best “confections” in the hollow square were sold, and Win was aware, as interest slackened, that she felt “rather like a hollow square” herself.

There was a little “flap” chair turned up against each of the four counters, and at ebb-tide of custom Win looked at them wistfully.

“I suppose we’re allowed to sit down for a minute when there’s nothing to do?” she inquired of a plump, dull-eyed girl who was furtively polishing the nails of one hand with the ball of her other palm.

“We’re legally allowed to, if that’s what you mean,” replied the other. “But we’re not encouraged to. I wouldn’t, my first day, anyways, if I was you.”

“Thank you very much,” said Winifred. “It’s good of you to tell me things. I won’t sit down, since you advise me not. But it is hard, standing up so long, especially after such a rush as we’ve had, isn’t it?”

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"Oh, if you think *this* is hard!" echoed the plump girl, Miss Jones. (Win noticed that the saleswomen called each other by name, though officially they were numbers.) "You ain't bin three hours yet. Wait and see how you feel to-night when ten o'clock comes."

"Ten o'clock!" gasped Win. "I thought we closed at six."

"We're supposed to shut up then, but folks won't go these busy weeks. They can't be chased out. And we have to stay hours after they *have* gone, putting away stock and—oh, shucks of things. Little do the swell dames care what happens to *us* once they're outside the doors. I guess they think we cease to exist the minute they don't need us to wait on them."

"I've always heard that rich American women took such an interest in the working—I mean, in us, who work," Win hastily amended.

"Oh, when they're old or sick of their diamonds and their automobiles they think it'll be some spree to come and stir us guyls up to strike against our wrongs. But when we've struck it's just about their time for getting sick of us. I got caught that way once when I worked in a candy-box factory. I bet I don't again! See here, I'm kind of sorry for you if you thought the Hands was a party where they asked you to sit down and have afternoon tea. Fred Thorpe, the floorwalker in this depart, is a real good feller, and he'd be glad to give us a rest—a big difference between him and *some* I've knowed! But he dasn't treat us as white as he'd like. In this show every *Jack* and *Jill* is watched from above. There ain't nobody except Father himself das' call his soul his own. If a chap thinks he's safe to do some tiny thing his own way, gee! a brick falls smack on his head. That's one of Peter Rolls's little ways."

Win shivered slightly to hear that name thus used, but Miss Jones was absorbed in her subject.

"Us guyls ain't even supposed to talk to each other, except about business," she went on. "But that's just the one thing they *can't* stop, and they know they can't, so they have to wink at it. You see, though, the way I keep folding the goods or pretending to look for something every instant, so you'd most think I'd got the St. Vitus's dance? Well, that's because if we just stood with our heads together poor Thorpe would have to come careering over here and inquire what was the subject of our earnest conversation. He'd hate it like poison, but he'd do it all the same, or the feller above would know the reason why."

"I thought he seemed kind and nice—I mean Mr. Thorpe," said Win.

"No use trying to mash him! He's gone on Dora Stein. Say, did you get on to the *sale* job? I somehow thought you did."

"I saw there was some trouble," Win hesitated.

"Trouble? There's nothing but trouble. Anybody'd think we was asking for it! This blessed depart is upset from way back since the promotions began. Our last superintendent got the sack through his drunken wife coming around the place makin' scenes. And Mr. Meggison was put over another man's head. That made t'other feller so mad he blowed out his brains. 'Twas in the papers, but it got hushed up mighty quick. The news, not the brains, I mean! Old Saint Peter knows some tricks of hushin' up.

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"Well, anyways, that set the ball rolling, and our head salesman was jumped up to be department manager and buyer right over Thorpe's head. 'Twas too much for him, and he gave Dora Stein the toss. Now he wants her out of his shine, and he dumped some jay stuff he bought in a bankrupt sale on her to get rid of. The head buyer give him beans for bein' fooled over a snide lot of trash like that, so what he does is to visit it on us. He hoped Dora'd get mad and clear out so he wouldn't see her eyes on him every time he walked past to give Miss Westlake, his new guyl, the glad eye. But I guess now Miss Stein's made such a big success where he hoped she'd fail, she'll stay pat."

As Miss Jones finished her story she watched Win's face to see if it changed, but there was no sign that the newcomer grudged Miss Stein the credit. She was actually smiling.

"There's something *queer* about that girl," Miss Jones presently murmured to Miss McGrath at the other end of the square, as Win was called upon to serve a lady who had been told at luncheon about the Pavlovas. "She ain't *natural*. What'll you bet she's a spy? I'm goin' to ask Miss Stein what she thinks."

CHAPTER XI

DEVIL TAKE THE HINDMOST

Miss Kirk was almost ready to go from the restaurant to work again when Win appeared, a three-cent entrance ticket in her hand, to face an atmosphere crowded with sundry uncongenial members of the vegetable kingdom.

"Hello, 2884 England!" Sadie feigned facetiously to call her up by telephone. "Got yer number, all right, you see! I begun to think they'd rung me off, so I wouldn't get onto you again this side heaven. And say, that reminds me: heaven looks a long way from here, don't it?"

Win smiled.

"Good thing! You ain't got yer smile rubbed off yet. Stick to it if y'can. It's a fine prop. I otta go in a minute, but you're such a chicken if I don't watch out for you y'might get lost in the wash. Any one put you wise on that three-cent billy doo?"

"The girl at the door told me I was to buy it of her," said Win, "and then I could divide it up for three different things to eat. But *can* one get *three* different things to eat for three cents? It seems wonderful!"

"You won't be so much surprised when you've got 'em et. *I'd* try a soup, a mutton sandwich, and a cuppa cawfee for *eight* cents, if I was you. But see here, I ain't goin' to feed my face in this ranch after to-day. I knowed pretty near how punk 'twould be from

things guyls told me about the Hands, and I only took a meal so as to see you and ask how the Giant Child was gettin' along. No more o' this grub for mine! And if I was in your place I'd go out to eat. You get a breath o' fresh air; and a cuppa hot chocolate for a nickel at a drug store, with a free lunch o' crackers thrown in, 'll do you a sight more good than the best there is in *this* dope shop."

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Long before Miss Kirk had finished pouring out advice, the eight-cent lunch of soup, sandwich, and coffee had been slapped down on a dirty tablecloth by a frantic rabbit of a waitress. The big restaurant was dim, even at midday, because its only windows gave upon a narrow court which separated that part of the building from another part of equal height. It was so dark that perhaps the hard-worked females who cleaned it might be excused for passing blemishes sunlight would have thrown into their faces.

One did not exactly see the dirt (except on the cheap, unbleached “damask” flung crookedly over the black oilcloth nailed onto table tops); but, like a cowardly ghost that dares not show itself, in some secret, shuddering way the squalor was able to make its presence felt. Now and then a black beetle pattered across the oilcloth-covered floor; and though a black beetle may happen anywhere, it patters only where it feels at home, otherwise it scurries about in desperate apology for living. The soup was cold and greasy and tasted of an unscoured pot. The mutton sandwich, as Sadie remarked, would have been better suited to the antique department; and the coffee, though hot, might as easily have been tea or cocoa, or a blend of all three.

“What a shame to feed their people like this!” exclaimed Win, who had thought she was hungry, but now found herself mistaken. And again the eyes of Peter Rolls, Jr., seemed to be looking straight into hers. No wonder he was what his sister hinted at if he knew all about this and had not the heart to care! And if he didn’t trouble to know, it was just as bad.

“They don’t want to feed us, you see,” said Sadie, slowly finishing a baked apple which looked like a head-hunter’s withered trophy. “On the low prices they’re obliged to charge they can’t make a cent offen us. Besides if all the guyls et in the house they’d have to give up more of their valuable room. They’d rather we’d go out, so long as we’re back in time. Only the poorest ones, who have to look twice at every cent, feed in the restaurant as a reg’lar thing; or the weak ones, who’re so dead tired they can’t bear to take a nextra step. And oh, by the way, talkin’ o’ that, you’ll need foot powder. Your first week your feet’ll hurt that bad you’ll be ready to bawl. But if you can stand it and your back bein’ broke in two at the waist it’ll be better the week after, and so on, till you won’t notice so much. Now I *must* go or I’ll be docked, and I ain’t the betrothed of a millionaire yet. But tell me where you live. Me and you might see something of e’ juther, if you feel the way I do.”

“I liked you the minute I looked round the corner of my shoulder and saw you plastered onto my back!” laughed Win, already revived, not by the food, but by some subtle emanation of strength and sympathy from the more experienced girl. “I wish I could live near you. The boarding-house where I am is too expensive, and I’ve given notice to leave on Saturday.”

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"My! You'd turn up your nose at Columbus Avenue, I guess," said Miss Kirk. "That's where I hang out. It ain't a boardin'-house. What's the use shellin' out for meals and not bein' home to them? I'd like awful well to have you in the same movie with me. There ain't a guyl I care to speak to on the film! But the 'L' runs past the place, and some folks say it otta be spelled with 'H.' The noise pretty near drove me bughouse at fyst, but I'm settlin' down to it now. And oh, say, that big feller whose best lion died on him (good thing 'twasn't his best guyl!) he told me he's come to Columbus to room with the chum w'at put him onto wuykin for the Hands. He's in the toy department with me and feels real at home with the Teddy bears. I could get you a room in my house for two dollars per."

"Per what?" Win was obliged to ask.

"Per week. Per everything. And if you take my tips about grub, and do your own waists and hank'chiffs Sundays—laundry 'em, I mean, instead of wallerin' in bed like a sassiety bud, you'll have money to burn or put in the mishrunny box."

"I'll come!" exclaimed Win. "Please engage the room. If it's good enough for you, it's good enough for me, and I'll put up with the noise for the sake of your society."

"My! Thanks for the bookays and choclits! Ta, ta! I'll wait for you to-night at the stage entrance with the other Johnnies."

She was off with the promptness of a soubrette after an "exit speech," and Win was left to sip her stale coffee or spend what remained of her "off time" in the rest room next door.

Legally, Peter Rolls was supposed to give his hands an hour for the midday meal, but in the rush of the holiday season a way had been found for whipping the inconvenient little law devil round the post. Employees were asked to "lend" the management half of the legally allotted hour, the time to be repaid them later, so that after Christmas they might take once a week an hour and a half in the middle of the day instead of an hour. Those in the know had learned that, as on Christmas Eve most of the extra hands received with their pay envelope a week's notice to quit, they, at least, never got back the half-hours lent. As for the permanent hands, it would amount to a black mark secretly put against their names if they dared lay claim to the time owing. Win, however, was blissfully ignorant of this, and though she was tired, the arrangement seemed fair to her. As she got up from the table to spend fifteen minutes in the rest room she was almost happy in the thought of having the sardine for a neighbour.

Two of the girls who had come up from the bargain square with her, on the return of Miss Stein and their other seniors, looked after Win as she passed out of the restaurant.

“There goes Miss Thank-you-I-beg-your-pardon,” said the young lady who had wondered if 2884 were a spy. “She’s got a smile as if she was invited to tea with the Vanderbilts.”

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"By this time next week I bet she smiles the wrong side of her mouth if she puts on any airs with Dora Stein."

"Hum-m, yeh. Unless what you think's so, and she's on the right side o' Father."

It was true, as the girls had warned the new hand, when six o'clock—closing time—came, you "couldn't chase the dames out." The salespeople began to put things away, and some even ventured to remind customers that the shop shut at six; but ladies who believed themselves possessed of the kindest hearts on earth pleaded that they must have *one* more thing, only *just* one, to complete their list for that day. Those who were too cross and tired to think about hearts or anything else except their own nerves, made no excuses at all, but demanded what they wanted or threatened a report to the floorwalker if a saleswoman were "disagreeable."

"Look at them!" snapped Miss Stein, maddened by a consignment of more blouses from the bankrupt sale (which had brought upon Horrocks the gibes of the head buyer), blouses without sashes, which not even Poiret could have turned into "Pavlovas." "Look at them, the fat, old, self-satisfied lemons, with their hats and their dresses and their squeezed-in corsets and shoes, and even their back hair, bought in sweat shops like ours! Pills, going to their homes to say their prayers, and then, full o' dinner, to the meeting of the Anti-Sweats. I know em! Maybe *they'll* do some o' the sweatin' in kingdom come!"

Already Win had learned that a "lemon" or a "pill" was a customer who made as much trouble as possible for as small as possible a return; but it gave her a stab to hear Peter Rolls's great department store called a "sweat shop." Again she saw the eyes. Was she never to get rid of the memory of those hypocritical blue eyes?

Nobody thought of being ready for home until nearly ten o'clock; and long before that Miss Stein's nerves felt as if they had been run, like threads, through the eyes of hot needles. Again Win had helped her in the afternoon by placing blouses of congenial colours together on the counters instead of letting them lie anyhow, as Miss Stein, in her recklessness, would have done. But less than ever had the elder girl seen reason for thanking Miss Child when the second instalment of "punk" goods was brought out of "reserve."

If the first lot had not gone off so soon they would not have been saddled with this, and so 2884 had, in Miss Stein's estimation, done nothing at the end of the day except "show herself off" and make everybody work twice as hard as necessary. She would not tell Win how to put things away, or let anybody else help her out.

"You gotta learn for yourself or you never will," she said sharply, all the more sharply because Fred Thorpe, the floorwalker, happened to be within earshot.

"I don't care what he thinks of me!" she said fiercely to herself, knowing that Thorpe would understand and disapprove her injustice to the new girl. But it was only half true that she did not care.

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She was longing desperately for somebody to love her; and though she could not in decency have accepted, after the way she had treated him, she wished that Thorpe would ask her to have supper with him that night. The Westlake pig, she knew, was going to Dorlon's for a pan roast with Horrocks, for the creature had told all the girls who were sure to run with it to her, Dora Stein. Thorpe would have been a faded flag to flaunt in the face of the enemy—a floorwalker, to one who had mashed a department manager! Still it would have been comforting to know that she still had attractions for some one, and at least she would have liked the chance to refuse an invitation.

Thorpe, on his part, would joyfully have asked her, for he could not quite “unlove” the beautiful face he had once adored, though he knew now exactly what a fierce spirit lived behind it. He was well aware of his own weakness and was humble enough to confuse with it the kindness of heart which permitted such treatment as he had received.

No girl, not even Dora Stein herself, would dare risk offending any other of the floorwalkers, men able to break a saleswoman if they “got a down” on her. But Dora knew only too well that he would not demean himself to take revenge on her or any one. And probably she believed that he would not punish or even “call her down” for injustice to a newcomer.

Thorpe was miserable that night, for he had missed few incidents of the day in Dora's neighbourhood. He recognized a “live wire” when he saw one, and he did see that 2884 had “stuff” in her. She deserved to be praised, and encouragement was all that she needed to turn her into a valuable saleswoman, one who might become a “real winner” some day. He could help her by speaking a few kind words, but Miss Stein would think them spoken on purpose to spite her, and that wouldn't do 2884 much good if she stayed in the blouse department. Also he could help her by mentioning in the right quarter her generalship in the matter of the “Pavlovas” instead of letting Dora take the credit. But if he did the girl any sort of justice he would be harming Miss Stein.

“I don't know what to do! I guess I shall have to leave the thing to Providence—and the devil take the hindmost!” he thought gloomily.

It seemed to Win, as she went out at last, a week since she had come in by the same door. It was like a play she had seen, where, in the second act, the people who had been young in the first were middle-aged when the curtain next rose; and in the third they were old, all in the course of a few hours. But a year or two seemed to drop from her shoulders when she caught sight of Miss Kirk waiting for her in the street. Beside Miss Kirk, to the surprise of 2884, towered the lion tamer.

“Well, I thought you'd never come!” was the greeting of Sadie. “But all's well that ends well. And Mr. Teddy Lion here wants to take us some place for a little supper.”

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"That ain't no way to interdooce me to the lady, kid," said the big fellow. "She won't look my way if you treat me light like that. My name's Earl Usher. Honest truth, 'tis, off the bills! Y'll come along, won't you?"

"You're very kind," Win began in the conventional way that he had laughed at in the morning. Then, afraid of being teased again, she said that she must go home.

"I don't know what my landlady will think," she excused herself. "I walked out early this morning, never dreaming I should be gone until late at night."

"Well, she can't kill you," suggested Miss Kirk, "and, anyhow, you're leavin' the end of the week. I think you'll be real mean if you won't come. I know what your reason is, and so does *he*. He ain't nobody's fool. Do you s'pose I'm the sort would do anything myself, or ask you to do anything, that wasn't all right? We ain't in the Four Hundred, nor yet in court circles, I *don't* think. And this ain't London nor it ain't Boston. Thank Gawd it's little old N'York."

"But——" Win persisted, and stopped.

"I know what's got her goat," said Earl Usher. "It's that slush o' mine this morning about not bein' a millionaire and my face needin' to be fed. I thought afterward 'that's no talk for a gen'leman to use before a lady.' Well, I may not be a millionaire at present, but I can see my way to feedin' our t'ree faces and not feel the pinch."

"Ain't you the fresh guy?" exclaimed Miss Kirk. "Our faces are our own, thank you *just* the same, and this is a Dutch treat. You might 'a' knowed we'd stick *that* close to ettiket. I can run to fifteen cents, as far as I'm concerned How is it with you, Miss Child?"

"I can run to that, too," said Win.

"Same here," announced the big young man; "though I'd set my heart on t'other kind o' treat. Where shall it be? I suppose we mustn't think o' the Waldorf—what?"

"Huh!" snorted Miss Kirk, "not for mine, if I owned the mint! I bin to the Waldorf wunst, of course. I went just out of curiosity to see how the swells et. Wunst is enough, like goin' to the menagerie. Y'owe it to yer intelligence to see all the different forms of animal life the good Lord has created, behavin' accordin' to their kind, and then come back to your own, thankin' Gawd you're not as they are. We'll eat at Ginger Jim's, where we can lean our elbows on the tables and get perfectly good oyster soup for ten cents a head!"

They walked for a while, Earl Usher insisting on the two girls taking his arms, one on either side. By and by they got into a crosstown car, and it was when Win was being helped out by the lion tamer that a motor dashed past. The existence of people who



went about in splendid gray motor cars seemed to Win so far away from her own just then that, standing in the street, her hand in Earl Usher's, she gazed into the large, lighted window of the automobile as she might have gazed through a powerful telescope at a scene of family life on Mars.

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There were two girls in evening dress and two young men in the illuminated chariot. It flashed by like a Leonid, but left a gay impression of flower-tinted velvet cloaks and ermine and waved hair with a glitter of diamonds and oval white shirtfronts and black coats. Also a pair of eyes seemed to look for the twentieth part of a second into Winifred's.

"I don't believe it was he!" she said to herself when the motor had gone by.

CHAPTER XII

BLUE PETER

Peter Rolls, Sr., and Peter junior were both unhappy in vastly different ways. One difference was that Peter junior knew he was unhappy and suspected why. Peter senior had no idea that what he suffered from was unhappiness. He thought that it was indigestion, and he supposed that feeling as he felt was the normal state of men passing beyond middle age. When you were growing old you could not expect to keep much zest or personal interest in life or to enjoy things, so he had always been told; and dully, resignedly, he believed what "they" said.

If any one had told him that he was a miserable man he would have been angry, and also surprised. Why the dickens should he be miserable? He considered himself one of the most successful men in New York, and his greatest pleasure was in recalling his successes, step by step, from the time before he got his foot on the first rung of the ladder all the way up to the top.

Often he lay awake at night pondering on those first days and first ambitions. If he began to think of them when he went to bed it was fatal. He became so pleasantly excited, and the past built itself up so realistically all about him, that he could not go to sleep for hours. What a sensational "bed book" is to some tired brains, that was his past to the head of the Hands. Besides, he had everything in the world that he or anybody else (it seemed to him) could possibly want. Perhaps it was a little irritating when you could have all you wanted not to know what to want. But, he consoled himself, that must be so with all rich people. The best thing was not to think about it.

He was convinced that he loved mother as dearly as ever a husband had loved a wife. They were uncomfortable together, but wretched apart. That was marriage. There was nothing more in it.

They hadn't much to say to each other. But you never saw husbands and wives chatting together like love birds after the honeymoon. You wanted a bright-cheeked, laughing girl, and you got her. If you were faithful to each other, and didn't have rows, it was an ideal match, especially if there were children.

Peter Rolls was very fond of his children. When they were little they had been the joy of his life; the thought of them had been the only one that warmed his heart and gave him almost superhuman energy to take the future by the horns like a bull and force a ring through its bleeding nose that it might be ready for them to ride when they grew up.

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Now they were grown up, and they were riding; and it was natural that the fire of the heart should have calmed. He was proud of the pair, very proud. Pete (no, he mustn't call him by that name. Ena didn't like it, said it sounded common) Peter—or Petro, if he preferred—was a gentleman and made a good show for every dollar that had been spent on him. Put him with an Astor or a Livingston and you couldn't tell the difference!

Once, a long time ago, old Peter had dreamed of a young Peter succeeding him in the business; but Ena had made him see what a foolish dream that was—foolish and inconsistent, too—because, what was the good of slaving to satisfy your ambition, and then, when you reached the goal, instead of profiting by what you'd got, ordering your heir down to the level you'd worked to leave behind?

Peter senior had entirely come round to Ena's view, and instead of regretting that Peter junior hadn't in him the making of a hard-boiled man of business who'll do anything to succeed, father stopped Peter abruptly whenever he showed an inconvenient sign of interest in the Hands and what went on under the glitter of their rings. Nor was Peter's interest of the right kind. It was not what Peter senior called practical.

Ena, now! There was a girl to be proud of. Father was so proud that pride of his splendid daughter had frozen out or covered with ashes the glow which used to fill his heart at the thought of her. But pride was the right thing! That was what he had worked for: to make of his children a man and woman to be proud of when the top stone was on his pile.

Ena was *more* than a lady. She was an orchid, a princess. She ruled father with her little finger—a beautifully manicured, rose-and-white finger, such as he had hardly seen when he was young. There was so much of himself in Ena that Peter yielded to her mandates as to the inarticulate cry of his own soul translated into words. The princess in whose veins his blood ran must understand what he ought to want better than he himself could understand.

She said: What was the fun of having money if you couldn't know all the best people everywhere, and be of them as well as merely among them? She began saying this even before she came home “for good” from school. It was a school for millionaires' daughters, and the daughters of other millionaires had showed her the difference between her father and theirs, oil magnates and steel and railway magnates, and magnates who magnated on their ancestors' fortunes made in land or skins of animals.

Nothing really worth having—nothing really worth father's years of hard work—could come to them as a family until Peter Rolls ceased to identify himself personally with the Hands, Ena had pleaded, and at last the head of the establishment engaged an official “understudy” to represent him every day in the gorgeously furnished office which had seemed to old Peter what the body is to the soul.

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Rolls senior and Henry Croft, the man he appointed as dictator, corresponded daily, by letter and telephone, but Peter Rolls himself was not supposed to enter the great commercial village he had brought together under one roof. Ena was able to say to any one rude enough to ask, or to those she suspected of indiscreet curiosity: "Father never goes *near* the place. He's tired of business, and, luckily, he doesn't need to bother."

She would not much have cared whether the statement were true or not if she were sure that the carefully careless sounding words were believed. But it would have been distressing to have any one say: "Ena Rolls pretends that her father doesn't work in the shop any more, but I know for a fact that he goes every day." So it comforted her to feel sure that her arguments had really impressed father and that he never did go to the Hands unless, perhaps twice a year or so for important meetings. It pleased her that he had joined a rich club in New York which had enough "swell" members to make it pleasant for her to remark casually, "Father belongs to the Gotham."

When father went to New York in the evening, as he often did, not returning to Sea Gull Manor till late, and sometimes staying away all night, he used to say as an excuse to mother or Ena: "I'm going to the club." After a while it was taken for granted, and he made no excuse at all. But if Ena had known the mystery of those late evenings she would have been struck with fear—the fear which comes of finding out that those we think we know best are strangers to us.

Of all the sad millionaires of New York who pin together the pages of certain mysterious life chapters not to be read by eyes at home, perhaps no other had a mystery like that of Peter Rolls. It was now the one thing that he intensely enjoyed; but it was a guilty, furtive enjoyment which made a nervous wreck of him and ruined a stomach once capable of salvation.

Peter junior had never been entirely happy since he left Yale at twenty-three. It was only then that he began to look life in the face and see the freckles on its complexion. The minute he saw them on that countenance which should be so beautiful, he wanted to help in some way to rub them off. To help—to help! That was the great thing.

He didn't care much for business, but he felt that, being Peter Rolls's only son, it was his duty to care. He imagined father deeply hurt at the indifference of his two children to that which had been his life—hurt, but hiding the wound with proud reserve. So Peter junior determined to sacrifice himself. He offered to go into the shop, to begin at the bottom if father wished, and in learning all there was to learn, gradually work up to a place where he could be a staff to lean upon.

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It was in the “library” that they had this talk—an immense and appalling room, all very new oak panelling and very new, uniform sets of volumes bound in red leather and gold, with crests and bookplates, bleakly glittering behind glass doors. Peter senior tried to kill time there, because a library seemed to his daughter the right background for a father, and Peter junior, who had saved mother’s poor old furniture for his own rooms, found it singularly difficult to open his heart between walls that smelled of money and newness. However, he did his best to blunder out the offer of himself; while the chill gleam in his father’s eyes (so remarkably like that of the bookcase glass doors) made him feel, as he went on, that he must have begun all wrong.

“So you don’t trust your own father?” was the answer he got when he stopped, as one might be stopped short by the sharp edge of a marble mantelpiece when trying to find the way across a dark room.

“Don’t—trust you?” stammered Peter, sure now that he was a fool not to understand, not to have made his father understand.

“You think the old man’s got past running his own business, and if you don’t want your money to go to the dogs you must look after it yourself.”

“Good heavens, no!” Peter broke out. “You can’t dream that any such thought entered my mind! I—why, Father, I’d rather die than have you believe that of me.”

“Prove I’m wrong, then,” said the elder dryly, pulling, as was his habit, a thin, grizzled beard with thin, sallow fingers. “You can do it easy enough.”

“How? Only tell me.”

“By turning your attention to other things, my boy. Leave me alone to manage what I know how to manage. You let me do it my own way, without shoving in your oar, and don’t you listen to what any of your highbrow friends say about me and my methods behind my back.”

“As if I would!”

“Well, I wasn’t sure. You go with a set of raw boys who think they know better than their fathers how to run creation; and now and then you blow off some of those soap-bubble ideas in your conversation. I’ve been kind of hurt once in a while, though I didn’t let it out. But now we’re on the subject I will say: if you’ve got faith in the old man, hands off the Hands!”

“That settles it, Father,” returned Peter heavily. “I never meant to hinder, only to help if I could. From now on the watchword is, ‘hands off the Hands!’”



This was a promise, and he kept it scrupulously. But the steady fire in his heart was scattered as a flaming log is broken into many embers by the clumsy stab of a poker. He had no longer a settled aim in life. He saw no niche which he could fill, and felt that the world had no particular use for the second Peter Rolls. The one thing he had longed for as a boy, which did not now in his young manhood appear stale and unprofitable, was a journey round the world and a glimpse of the East. When his father said uneasily: "Why don't you travel, my boy?" Peter answered that perhaps it would be a good thing.

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The subject was broached to mother, and mother did not object. She had learned long ago, when she was first married to Peter, never to object to anything that he proposed. When she smiled and agreed with every suggestion she was a dear little woman, and so she had spent her existence in being a dear little woman until her hair turned white. With her sunny nature, it had not needed a very great effort; but sometimes, since Peter had begun to grow up, he had dimly fancied a look of wistfulness in her ever-young blue eyes—eyes of a girl gazing out from the round, rosy-apple face of a middle-aged woman.

She was always the same in her ways and manner, if it could be called manner: comfortable and comforting, contented with life as it was, happy in her children, and putting up gently with her husband; but—when you had said good-bye to her you remembered the look which always changed instantly into a smile when it met yours. You remembered, and seemed to see another woman hovering wraithlike behind mother's plump figure, as she sat contentedly crocheting those endless strips of trimming for towels and things—mother as she might have been if no dominating nature had ringed hers in with an iron fence.

When Peter was up the White Nile, in elephant and lion land, he used suddenly, mysteriously, to see an irrelevant vision of his mother just stretching out plump arms to say good-bye to him in his own room which he had furnished with the mahogany odds and ends that had started her bridal housekeeping. She had smiled and had not seemed to mind very much his going—not half as much as a hen mother minds its duckling's first dash into water. And yet her eyes—There are some things it hurts and at the same time warms your heart to think of at the other end of the world.

Peter had gone up the White Nile to shoot big game; but when he met it face to face, on a social equality, so to speak, he wondered how he could ever have harboured so monstrously caddish a design. He found the animals he had thought he wanted to kill so much handsomer and more important than himself that he felt like begging the alleged "game's" pardon for calling on it without invitation in its country home (as if he'd been a book agent), and bowed himself away with only a few photographs to remember it by. While Ena was working up conversations to the point of mentioning "my brother, who is such a great shot, you know, and is shooting big game in Africa," Peter's only shots were snapshots, and he was too stupidly conscientious to atone for his weakness by obtaining elephant tusks and lion skins with coins instead of bullets.

He wished he had saved Egypt and its temples for his honeymoon, in case he should ever find exactly the right girl, for the mystery and wonder made him sad because he had nobody to feel it with him. It was the same in India and all the East, and there were thousands of thoughts imprisoned in his breast (which he hardly understood and dared not let escape) by the time he arrived in England to meet Ena.

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They were still struggling in prison when he went on board the *Monarchic*, but there a light shone fitfully through the keyhole of the cell. It was a beautiful light, almost beautiful enough to be a light Peter had read and dreamed of which was said never to shine on land or sea. Then, suddenly and surprisingly, it went out. The prison, full of thoughts, was left a place of dark confusion.

This was the inner state of Peter Rolls, Jr., when he arrived at home after his long absence. But outwardly he appeared to be much as usual, and was so nice to the Irish guests that Ena was grateful, though never remorseful. Indeed, she had so much to think about that she almost forgot her little act of diplomacy in eliminating an undesirable sister-in-law.

She was on tenterhooks lest Lord Raygan and his mother and sister should be finding the *menage* at Sea Gull Manor “all wrong,” and laughing secretly at father and mother. If there had been that fear about the dressmaker’s model on top of the rest of her anxieties she would have broken down with nervous prostration. But, thanks to her for saving him (without his knowledge), Peter seemed to have got over his silliness and was able to stand by her like a brick.

Lady Raygan, a singularly young-looking, red-faced woman of boyish figure, and with stick-out teeth, was a leading militant suffragette. When she embarked hastily for Queenstown she had just been rescued by her son from the London police. At first she had been too seasick to care that she was being carried past her home and that a series of lectures she had intended giving would be delayed. Now, in America, she had determined to make the best of a bad bargain by sending the fiery cross through the States.

She stayed in her room and jotted down notes. Also, she conscientiously tried to make Mrs. Rolls a suffragette. About most other things she was absent-minded; therefore Ena did not waste gray matter in worrying over the impression that Sea Gull Manor was making on Lady Raygan.

It was Rags and Eileen whose observing eyes and sense of humour had to be feared. Eileen, for instance, had a little way of saying that anything she considered odd was “too *endlessly* quaint.” Things she admired were “melting.” If only Ena had known enough about earls and their families to be sure whether Lord Raygan and Eileen would, in their secret hearts, think the ways of the Rollses *endlessly* quaint or *melting*, she might have been spared sleepless nights. Because the difference between those two adjectives would mean the difference between ecstasy and despair for her. Rags might be poor for an earl, even an Irish earl, but he was hardly the sort to propose to a girl his sister could speak of as “*endlessly* quaint.”

Twelve days after they had arrived at Sea Gull Manor, Eileen wrote a somewhat ungrammatical letter to a rich cousin in Dublin who had once refused Rags, and in which she said:

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DEAR POBBLES:

I wish you were here to pinch me. Then I would be sure whether I'm asleep or awake. You'll know by the papers (s'pose poor old Rags *is* worth a paragraph; anyhow Mubs is, now she's turned into a suff) how we got carried on in the *Monarchic* to New York. It won't be the fault of American reporters if you've missed our news! They got at us on the dock. Mubs loved it. Rags didn't.

Well, if you know a thing about us, since we were swept past Queenstown by a giant wave that carried us on its back all the way to America, you know we're staying with a family named Rolls. Rags met Miss Rolls and her brother in London. And afterward they happened to be on board our ship, so we chummed up, and Miss Rolls *would* give up her melting suite to poor half-dead Mubs and me. What a beast the sea is! I don't know if I shall ever have the courage to go on the disgusting old wet thing again. We came here to stay a fortnight, but it's almost that now, and we couldn't be driven away with a stick.

We're having the time of our lives (I'm learning lots of *creamy* American slang), and the Rollses are awfully kind. Ena is very nice, when she doesn't try to talk as if she were English, and quite handsome, with fine eyes, though not so good as her brother's. And he—the brother, I mean—is the dearest thing in the shape of a man you ever saw. Not that he's wonderfully handsome or anything, but, as they say over here, he's just IT. I don't know what there is about him, but—well, if I go on, I suppose you'll think I'm being *silly*.

I don't care; you were only a year older than I am now when you told Rags kindly to go to the dickens. You said he cared only for your money, poor Rags! That wasn't true. But now (I know you won't tell) Ena R. is going for him for all she's worth. Mubs doesn't notice anything about women except their being suffs or not; and I'm supposed to be too young to twig what's going on. I need hardly mention, however, that very little gets past yours truly. I shouldn't wonder if Ena'd *bring it off*. Rags asks me sometimes in a sheep-faced sort of way what I think of things here, and I would have a joyous laugh with him if it weren't for the brother.

Goodness gracious, but they're rich, these Rollses! I could make a pun about their name and their money, but I won't, because it would be cheap, and nothing is cheap at Sea Gull Manor. You can get a faint idea what the house and the view are like from the hand-painted sketch at the top of this paper on the left of the fat gold crest. This stationery is in all the guests' private sitting-rooms in case any one wants to make distant friends envious of their surroundings. Mr. Rolls, Sr., told me he kept a tame artist painting these things at a salary of ten thousand dollars a year, dinner and luncheon *menus* thrown in. Ena's idea. She wanted something original, and what she wants goes! So says Mr. R.

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He's a poor little, yellow shrimp of a man, with dead-black hair, where it isn't gray or coming off, and the same kind of beard goats have. His eyes may have been nice when he was young, but nothing like his son Peter's. Young Peter is altogether different from old Peter, and he has blue eyes like the quaintest and most melting mother you ever saw.

She does nothing but crochet trimming for sheets and things, world without end, and if you admire it she gives you some. But she was just *born* to be a mother, and even having her sit crocheting in a room where you are makes you feel good. She has eyes as blue as bluebells, and as young, an apple face with a smile that longs for something it's never known, and any amount of smooth white hair, which she does in just the wrong way, pinched into tight braids. The one thing she won't do for her daughter is to have a maid of her own, and Ena keeps apologizing for it.

Mr. Rolls is a terrible dyspeptic, and the only things he can digest (he has told me and Rags several times) are soft-shelled crabs, devilled, and plum pudding or cake. When he has a pain he paces floors like a tiger, but does not roar.

I haven't met many Americans here yet because the Rollses somehow don't seem to know the right ones, and Ena makes excuses for that, too. I wish she wouldn't. It gets on my nerves, and Rag's nerves as well, I fancy, though he doesn't say so, and he's thinking a lot about whether she'll *do*. Because I haven't met many others, I don't know whether or not the Rollses are just like all American millionaires who don't come abroad, or unique. But I have an idea they're *unique*.

This is the most enormous house, built and named to please Ena, though it's no more a manor than the Albert Hall is. I don't believe she knows what "manor" means. Every bedroom I've seen (and I *think* I've been shown all, if I haven't lost count) has its own bathroom adjoining, and a sitting-room as well. In each bathroom there are several different kinds of baths, and a marble one you step down into, but it's bitterly cold on your spine—the only cold thing in the house, which is so hot with a furnace that even the walls and floors feel warm, although I keep my windows wide open day and night.

The pillow-cases and sheets are made of such rich, thick linen, and are so smooth and polished that you slip down off your pillows with a crick in your neck, and the sheets slide off you, just as if they were made of heavy silver, like lids of dishes. Perhaps the monograms and crests drag them down. It's awful, but it's grand. And I should think there are at least twenty footmen with—if you'll believe me—powdered hair!

Of course, poor Ena took a fancy to it in England. I don't think she stayed at any houses, but she was at some hotel where they have it, so she didn't see why not. If you ring a bell, dozens of these helpless-looking, white-headed creatures in black and yellow simply swarm from every direction, like great insects when you've poured hot water into their hive—or hole.

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If any really nice people happen to stop in their motor for any reason at the house in the morning, say about eleven o'clock, they are offered magnums of champagne, as if out of gratitude for their coming. They hardly ever seem to do more than sip, so perhaps the black and yellow insects get the rest. There's an English butler, and it would make your heart bleed, or else you'd want to howl, if you saw his agonized, apologetic look whenever you, as a British person, knowing about other ways of running a house, happened to catch his elderly eye.

Mr. and Mrs. Rolls get up at goodness knows what hour and have breakfast together, so does Petro—that's the nickname for the son. But Ena and Mubs and Rags and I can wallow as long as we like and have gorgeous breakfasts in our rooms. Mubs thinks Mrs. R. is a fool, because she can hardly understand what a woman wants with a vote, but I think she's a dear. She sends cartloads of flowers to hospitals, and if you speak of a charity she hauls handfuls of dollar bills out of an immense gold chain bag she always carries on her arm because Petro gave it to her for a birthday present, and it, and Ena's one, a size smaller, has the fat air of containing all her luggage ready to start off from Saturday to Monday at a moment's notice. I suppose it's money that looks so plump.

Now *do* you think Rags ought to resist the daughter of such a house when church mice have long ago cut our acquaintance? Of course, Rags is lucky at bridge (he gave me a lovely dress on board ship), but he can't live on it regularly. So far it's a toss up. I'll let you know how things go.

Mubs is writing an article for an American newspaper which has offered her fifty pounds. This is the first fun she's ever got out of being a countess—and now I shouldn't wonder if she'd be a dowager soon! As for me, I'm trying to flirt with Petro. No, to be honest, that isn't *quite* true. I'm not exactly flirting. He's too good for that. Ena says he's "glue," because he has no interest in life, and that it'll cheer him up if I encourage him to talk to me about some philanthropical schemes he has.

One is a "Start in Life Fund" for deserving and clever young people who need only a hand up to get on. I wish I could go in for it myself—but perhaps I'm not deserving or clever. Anyhow Ena says her brother likes me *awfully*, better than any girl he ever saw before, and that he thinks me pretty. Did you *ever*? No wonder I like him! I shouldn't mind his knowing that I do, as Ena says he thinks no girl could care for him. That sounds pathetic. I let her know that, as he's so despairingly modest, she might break it to him that I enjoy his society. Since then he's been much nicer, though, perhaps still a little absent-minded, which may come from being "blue." I should like to know what Ena said to him! But I suppose it's all right!

Your chum and cousin,
EILY.

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P.S. They've got a shop in New York. I forgot to tell you that—a huge shop. It's never mentioned here, but Petro told me. He's not ashamed, but rather proud of the way the money came. Rags wants him and Ena to take us to the place.

What Ena did say to Peter was, "Poor little Eileen is falling in love with you." Peter didn't believe it. But it put a strange idea into his head.

CHAPTER XIII

ONE MAN AND ANOTHER

"No. 2884 Child, W. Pay Envelope. Details under flap," Winifred read on the neat, pale-brown packet put into her hand the night when she had served Peter Rolls for a week—or was it five hundred weeks? "READ THE OTHER SIDE" was printed in capital letters of white upon a black background on the flap which must be torn open to get at the contents and "details." The latter consisted of "Deductions, Absent, Late Fines, Keys, Mdse., Stamps, Beneficial Ass., and Sub. Slips."

But Win had been neither absent nor late. Being an extra hand only, and liable to be "dispensed with" at the end of the holidays, she had not needed to subscribe her hard-earned pennies to Beneficial Assurance, that huge fund made up of weekly coppers, whose interest was to Peter Rolls almost what "Peter's Pence" are to the Pope. Thanks to her good health and good behaviour, "Cash Enclosed" (as secretly mentioned under the flap) was practically intact. But it had been a nightmare week which seemed longer than all the past weeks of her life added together and if she had earned a hundred dollars instead of six she would not have felt too highly paid.

She moved wearily away from the office window, obeying the directions to "read other side," and as she walked down the long corridor (her sore feet causing her to limp slightly) the words "*if sick or disabled, notify employment bureau at once*" sang through her head, keeping time with her uneven steps.

She was "reading the other side," the other side of life which appeared to her as separate from the side she had known as the bright was separate from the dark side of the moon; the side about which people seldom troubled and never saw. A few weeks ago, before that "wild spirit" of hers lured her half across the world to find independence, she would have thought, feeling as she felt to-night, that she was both sick and disabled. But now she knew that hundreds of other girls under this very roof felt just as she felt, and that they took it for granted as a normal condition of life. They hardly pitied themselves, and she must be as stoical. If once she lost courage, she might do the thing she had boasted to Peter Rolls, Jr., that she would never do—cry.

She thought to find a tonic effect from the sight of money earned, and in taking out her six dollars, she let fall a slip of white paper from the pay envelope. It fluttered away, to alight on the floor, and Win's heart beat as she picked it up.

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Her discharge already? What could she have done to be sent off at the end of a week—she who had tried so hard? And how strange that, tired and disheartened as she was, she should actually *fear* discharge! A minute ago she had been asking herself, “How many weeks like this can I live through?” and wishing that an end, almost any end, might come. Yet here she was dreading to turn the slip over (she had retrieved it blank side up) and read her doom.

“You are requested to call at the superintendent’s private office Monday, twelve forty-five,” was neatly typewritten precisely in the middle of the paper.

Win did not know whether to be relieved or alarmed.

“I’ll ask Sadie what she thinks,” was her quick decision. But Sadie was not available this evening. An “old chum” had asked Miss Kirk out to supper, and Miss Child having snubbed her faithful lion man for reasons which had appeared good at the time, had no one to give her the key to those dozen mystic words which might as well have been written in cipher.

“And even Sadie can’t tell for certain,” she reflected. “I can’t possibly *know* till Monday noon.”

All the fatigue and nerve strain of six dreadful days and six appalling nights seemed suddenly to culminate in a fit of overpowering restlessness. Worn out though she was (or all the more because of that, perhaps) she could not go “home” to Columbus Avenue, where the “L” that Sadie said should be spelled with an “H” ran past her window.

She was sure if she sat down or went to bed she should think more about her aching back and burning feet than if she walked. She longed for the sweet, kind air of heaven to ripple past her hot cheeks like cool water. She longed for stars to look up to, and for the purple peace and silence of night after the clamour of the store and before the babel of Columbus Avenue, into which presently she must plunge.

“I’ll walk in the park,” she proposed to herself. “It will do me good. When I’m too tired, I can rest for a few minutes on one of the seats and hear myself think.”

That was one of the many disadvantages of “home.” There you could hear at the same time almost every other sound which could be produced in the world, but you could not hear yourself think.

Earl Usher was not to be seen as she came out into the street, and Win was glad. Once or twice to-day she had half repented the snub which, perhaps, he had not meant to deserve, but now she thanked it for his absence. Swiftly she walked away, though

still with the just perceptible limp that most shop girls have in their first few weeks of “business.”

She did not look up at the giant Hands with their blazing rings, as she had looked at first, half admiring, half awed. Their gesture now seemed greedy. They were trying to “grab the whole sky,” as the lion tamer said. Rather would one hurry to escape from under them, and go where the Hands of Peter Rolls could not reach.

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It was exquisite in the park, and she was thinking how a delicate, floating blue curtain appeared to shut her away for a little while from all the harshness of life, when a small and singularly silent automobile glided by. A lamp showed her the forms of two men in the open car, one in front, who drove, and one behind, who sat with arms folded.

"How heavenly to have the air and lean back restfully without needing to walk," thought tired Win.

She was envying the comfortable figure with its arms folded when the little car turned and, to her astonishment, drew up close beside her. Involuntarily she stopped; then, as one of the men jumped out, she regained her presence of mind and walked on at top speed.

The man strode along after her, however, and spoke.

"Don't you remember me? That's very unkind. You might wait a minute, anyhow, and let me remind you where we met. I recognized *you* as I went by, that's why I came back."

Wondering if it could be possible that they *had* met, Win ventured a glance at the face on a level with her own. She knew instantly that never had she seen it before.

"You're mistaken," she said. "I don't know you. Please go."

"Logan is my name," he persisted. "Jim Logan. Now don't you remember? But you didn't tell me your name that other time."

Win took longer steps. This active hint did not, however trouble Mr. Logan. He was an inch or so taller than she, perhaps, and kept step with the utmost ease.

"You and I might have been at the same dancing school," said he. "I'm doing the newest stunt—the wango. Is that what you're doing, too? Or is it the y-lang-y-lango? I could go on like this all night! I hope you're not engaged to anybody else for the next dance?"

"As a matter of fact, I am," said Win sharply, though it was all she could do not to laugh. "My partner will very much object to you."

"That's all right. It's not likely he knows jiu-jitsu as well as I do," cheerfully replied the man, still hurrying on at the same pace. He kept half a step in advance of the girl, as if to be prepared in case she should begin to run; and thus, without seeming to look, Win could see him in profile.

He was so smartly dressed that, in England, he would have been called a "nut." What was the American equivalent for a nut, she did not know. He had a hawk-nosed profile

which might have been effective had not his undercut jaw stuck out aggressively, suggesting extreme, hectoring obstinacy, even cruelty.

She had time to see that his hair was an uninteresting brown, and his skin the ordinary sallow skin of the man about town. But suddenly he took her unawares, turning to face her with disquieting abruptness. She caught an impression of eyes sparkling in the lamplight; small and set close on either side of a high-bridged, narrow nose, yet bright and boldly smiling. His voice was that of an educated person and not disagreeable in tone, but Win was anxious to escape hearing it again.

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He seemed to wait for an answer, and when it did not come, he went on:

"You ought to go in for an Olympic race. You're all for them in England. I'm out of training, but I can stand this as long as you can, I bet. The only thing is, I wanted to take you for a run in my auto, it's such a nice, crisp night. I'll drive you home, if you say the word."

"The thing wished for comes when your hands are tied," says the Turkish proverb. Win had been yearning for a spin. She kept silence and sped on, wondering whether she could surprise the enemy by executing a sudden right-about-face.

"Have you been in this country long?" he inquired.

No answer.

"Oh, indeed, is that so? I *thought* you hadn't! Are you living in New York at present? Don't be afraid to tell me. Even if you are, that won't drive me out of the little old burg. See here, you're mighty restless. And you do hate to part with much of your conversation at one time, don't you? You're a peach, all right, but a spiced peach preserved in vinegar."

Winifred wheeled and began walking east even faster than she had been walking west. In the distance a tall—a very tall—figure was approaching, like a ship under full sail. Could it be— Yes, it was! Bless the light of the lamp that showed him! Now indeed she dared to laugh.

"Here comes that partner of mine at last!" she exclaimed and almost ran to meet the lion tamer.

"Good Lord! Very well, I can't hope to compete against cigar signs," replied Mr. Logan. "I was unprepared for Goliath. Little David will fade away till he gets his sling. You make me forget my name and telephone number, but this is where I get off at. Please remember *me* next time."

"I will, when next time comes!" Win was tempted to toss after him impudently as, lifting his cap, the motorist took a hasty short cut to the motor. Win was actually laughing when Earl Usher joined her. She felt safe, and not even tired. The little adventure had had its uses, after all! It had been, she thought, just as beneficial and not nearly so expensive as a tonic or a Turkish bath.

"Was that mutt a gentleman friend of yours, kid, or was he some fresh guy? 'Cause, if he was playing the fool, I'll break into the game and go for his blood," remarked the rescuer.

"It was a Mr. Logan," replied Win hurriedly, making up her mind that she must avoid any chance of trouble. "But—but I don't like him much," she added. "I was very glad when I saw you. And I'm not going to scold you for following me, because I know you meant well—and, as it happened, it's *ending* well. For a reward, I forgive you everything. And I've just thought of a new name for you, Mr. Usher."

"Hope it's some better than Sadie Kirk's."

"What—Teddy Bear? Yes, it's better than that. Did you ever read 'Quo Vadis?'"

"Not on your life. Sounds like a patent medicine."

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"It's a novel. And in it a great, good giant of a young man devotes himself to rescuing a maiden named *Lygia*. His name was *Ursus*, and he was so strong he could bring a bull to its knees——"

"Why, you silly little kid, that's a movie, not a novel. I've seen *Ursus* and his bull, all right. You're makin' me stuck on myself. I feel as if I was it."

"Well, you are it. I christen you *Ursus*. And thank you very much for taking so much trouble about me."

"I didn't take trouble," protested *Ursus*, half afraid that he was being "kidded." "All I did was to beat it after you at what the swell reporters call a respectful distance just to see you safe home if you meant to hoof it. When you shot into the park, thinks I, 'maybe she's made a date to chat with a gentleman friend, so I'll hang back.' But——"

"It was quite an accident, meeting Mr. Logan, I assure you, *Ursus*," said Win, still unwilling to confide in him the details of the late encounter, which seemed ridiculous now it was over. "I wanted a breath of air. I've had it, and if you'll be very good and never use such a word again as you did night before last, you may walk home with me if you like."

"What word do you refer to? Cutie?"

"Yes. And another still more offensive."

"Sweetie?"

"Yes. Disgusting! 'Kid's' bad enough. But I thought you mightn't know any better. I draw the line at the others."

"All right," said *Ursus* rather sulkily, sure that he was being made fun of now. "But when a chap's a girl's friend what *is* he to call her?"

"'You' will do very well, if 'Miss Child' is beyond your vocabulary."

"I don't call that bein' friends. Say, is that your mutt's automobile sort of following along in our wake?"

"I don't know, for I don't want to look back," said Win. (They were out of the park by this time.) "But—I've changed my mind about walking all the way. Let's hurry and take a Fifty-Ninth Street car!"

* * * * *

By day, in the shop, Win could laugh when she thought of the Columbus Avenue house where she and Sadie “hung out.” But at night, in her room, trying desperately to sleep, she could not even smile. To do so, with all those noises fraying the edges of her brain, would be to gibber!

In that neighbourhood front rooms were cheaper than rooms at the back. Lodgers who could afford to do so paid extra money for a little extra tranquillity. Neither Sadie Kirk nor Winifred Child was of these aristocrats. Their landlady had thriftily hired two cheap flats in a fair-sized house whose ground floor was occupied by a bakery, and whose fire-escapes gave it the look of a big body wearing its skeleton outside. She “rented” her rooms separately, and made money on the transaction, though she could afford to take low prices.

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In the street below the narrow windows surface cars whirled to and fro and clanged their bells. In front of the windows, and strangely, terribly near to the six-inch-wide balconies, furnished with withered rubber plants, roared the “L” trains, jointed, many-eyed dragons chasing each other so fast that there seemed to be no pause between at any hour of the day or during most hours of the night. Private life behind those windows was impossible unless you kept your blinds down. If you forgot, or said wildly to yourself that you didn’t care, that you *must* breathe and see your own complexion by daylight at any cost, thousands of faces, one after the other, stared into yours. You could almost touch them, and it was little or no consolation to reflect when they had seen you brushing your hair or fastening your blouse, that these travellers in trains would never hear your name or know who you were.

As for a bath—but then the great, magnificent advantage of living at Mrs. McFarrell’s was the bathroom. It was dark and small and smelled of the black beetles who lived happily around the hot-water pipes. You were not expected to take more than one bath a week, and for that one bath towel was provided free.

“Oh, I thought you’d *had* your bath this week!” was the answer Win got on her second night, when mildly asking for a towel which had disappeared. But if you were silly enough to pay thirty cents extra for putting water on your body every day, you could do so. And, anyhow a bathroom was a splendid advertisement. One lodger told another: “The use of the bathroom is thrown in.”

That night, when Win had bathed and laid herself carefully down in the narrow bed which shook and groaned as if suffering from palsy, it seemed more impossible than ever to go to sleep. Each new train that rumbled by was a giant, homing bee, her brain the hive for which it aimed. Her hot head was crowded with thoughts, disturbing, fighting, struggling thoughts, yet the giant bee pushed the throng ruthlessly aside and darted in. Each time it seemed impossible to bear it again. She felt as if she had caterpillars in her spine and ants on her nerves.

Win thought about the superintendent, Mr. Meggison, and wondered again and again whether she would be discharged or whether he had merely “taken a fancy” to her looks and wished to see if she were flirtatiously inclined. She knew now, from Sadie, that Meggison’s desire was to be a “gay dog,” though his courage did not always march with his ambition.

The red-haired girl, Sadie supposed, had perhaps come to the Hands armed with an introduction from some “lady friend.” This theory would account for Meggison’s mysterious murmur of, “That’s different.” What should she—Win—do if Father invited her to dine with him, as it seemed he did invite some of the girls? Sadie said that if such a thing happened to her she would accept, because she wasn’t afraid of Father. She “could scare him more than he could scare her,” and an extra hand might “get the push” if she refused a civil invitation.

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With Mr. Croft, “Saint Peter’s Understudy,” it was more dangerous. You had to beware of him. If you were a “looker,” like Win, the best thing that could happen to you was never to come within eyeshot of Henry Croft. He lived in the suburbs, was married, and the superintendent of a Sunday school. His name was on all the charity lists. He was so tall and thin and sprawling that he looked like a human hatrack, and his solemn circle of a face, surrounded with yellowish whiskers, had a sunflower effect. He had written a book, “Week-Day Sermons by a Layman”; nevertheless, he was a terror.

There were, according to Sadie, girls in the store who were of no more use as saleswomen than baby alligators would have been, but they “gave the glad eye” to Mr. Croft, and accepted his flowers and invitations for moonlight motor rides. Nearly every one knew, but nobody told.

What use? Who was there to tell? Croft was “up at the top and then some.” Only Saint Peter himself stood above. And who would dare complain to Saint Peter about his respectable right hand? Even if there were any chance of getting near P.R., which there wasn’t. He came mostly at night, as if it were a disgrace to show himself in a shop, even if it was his own. If ever he did any “prowling” in business hours, it was with the understudy glued to his side.

As for “sweating” and “grinding” there wasn’t a cent’s worth of difference between Croft and Meggison, said Sadie. Nevertheless, Win was feeling thankful, as the “L” train bees boomed through her brain, that at worst it was Mr. Meggison who had mysteriously summoned her, not Mr. Croft.

If only she could go to sleep and forget them both, and the trains and the cars and the man in the park and Miss Stein, who still had against her a “grouch.” If only she could forget even big, blundering Ursus, who wanted to treat her to oyster stews that he couldn’t afford and take her to a dance hall next Sunday! And Sadie, too, who knew such strange and awful things about the world and life, although she was so good.

But no. Impossible to stop thinking, impossible to forget, impossible to sleep. All New York seemed to be about her ears. She could hear the frantic rush of everything which true New Yorkers love, and she could feel its sky-scrapers closing in around her like an unclimbable wall. As she thought of the great, noisy city she saw it consisting entirely of vastly high towers, with inhabitants who spent their time in tearing about—people who looked at her in the street as if she were not there, or, if she was, they would rather she were somewhere else.

She dared not picture the ship sailing for England nearly every day of the week. If she were free to do what she liked—or almost what she liked—she would go at least as often as every Saturday to watch a big liner move out from the dock, just for the delicious torture of it.

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And yet—did she want to go back home? Whenever she asked herself this question—and it was often—invariably for some silly reason, she saw the blue, wistful eyes of that hypocrite, the younger Peter Rolls. Also there came upon her a choking sense of homelessness, a mother-want in a lonely world. But, as Sadie Kirk agreed with her in saying, “What was the good of squeezing juice out of your eyes just because you happened to be low in your mind?” No, she would not cry!

Then, after all, she dropped asleep in a minute’s interval between trains, and dreamed that she was lost in Fifty-Ninth Street. It was as long as the way to England, and a ghastly street to be lost in. Its sky line—if it knew anything about the sky—was as irregular as a Wagner dragon’s teeth—high buildings and low buildings, and shanties where coloured families lived; little, sinister-looking houses where people could be murdered and their bodies never found, shops where you could buy everything you didn’t want and nothing that you did.

In the dream black and white children were fighting and skating on roller skates over the pavement. Cars were clanging bells. Everybody and everything was making a noise of some sort. Win was trying to get past the skaters and catch a car. She must, or she would be late for something! But what? This was horrible. She was going somewhere, and could not remember where or what she had to do. She was lost forever, and had forgotten her name and the name of the street where she lived. A roller-skating boy with the face of a black monkey threw her down, and a surface car and Peter Rolls’s automobile were about to run over her when she waked with a jump that shook the palsied bed. Another “L” train booming by!

Despite lack of sleep and a tiredness of body that Sunday could not cure, Win had never looked more attractive than when, at precisely twelve forty-five on Monday afternoon she presented herself at Mr. Meggison’s door.

This was his private den, and a visit there, even on a less alarming errand than hers, was far more formidable than pausing for inspection at an office window. Sadie, with the best intentions, had been able to give little encouragement There must be scolding or else flirting in prospect. And Winifred’s eyes were bright, her cheeks pink, her head high, as the superintendent’s voice bade her “Come in.”

CHAPTER XIV

FROM SCYLLA TO CHARYBDIS

She went in. Mr. Meggison sat in front of his roll-top desk. No such world-shaking event as his rising to receive her took place. His stenographer’s chair was vacant. The cherubic aspect had for the moment dominated Mephistopheles. Mr. Meggison was smiling. But Win did not know whether to fear the smile or to thank her stars for it.

Little girls—and sometimes big ones—should be seen and not heard, so Win waited in meek, flushed silence for the great man to speak.

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"Shut the door, please, Miss—er—Miss Child," said he. And the cherubic eyes gazing from under the fierce contradiction of heavy eyebrows up to the tall girl's face conveyed to her mind that "please" was a tribute. Also, she suddenly knew that the superintendent had hesitated over her name on purpose. A man in a high position may wish to be agreeable to a girl beneath him, at the same time informing her that she is of no vast importance.

With a certain stiff young dignity Win shut the office door.

"You may as well sit down. I want to talk to you."

She sat down in the chair of Mr. Meggison's absent stenographer. By this time the pink of her cheeks had deepened to red. She was wondering more than ever what he was going to do, and what she would do when he had done it. But as she sat facing him she realized that she was no longer afraid. She felt a sense of power and resource.

"Are you surprised that I remember your name, Miss Child?" he asked.

"I don't know the custom," she replied primly. Would he expect her to say "Sir?" Anyhow, she wouldn't! She compromised with a dainty meekness which might be interpreted as respect for a superior. Mr. Meggison fixed her with a sharp look which would have detected the impudence of a lurking laugh.

"That's a funny answer," said he. "You 'don't know the custom!' Well, my idea of you is, you don't know much about any business customs, on our side of the water or yours either." As he spoke he watched her face to catch any guilty flicker of an eyelid. "I want you to tell me what was your idea in going for a job with us."

"I saw your advertisement for extra hands."

"The woods—I mean the papers—are full of advertisements. What made you pick out ours?"

"I'd tried to get other things and failed."

"So we were a last resort, eh?"

"I thought first of being a governess or a companion or getting into a public library or—things of that sort."

"Why not the stage? You're a good-looking girl, with a figure."

"I promised my father I wouldn't go on the stage. But, anyhow, I don't suppose I could have got on—an amateur like me. Every place in New York seems full up. And I have no training of any sort."

“Just a young lady, eh?”

Win smiled. “I never thought of it as a profession—or a label.”

He looked slightly puzzled, and when Mr. Meggison was puzzled by an employee, he was generally annoyed. This case seemed, however, to be an exception. He kept his temper, and even condescended to grin.

“I don’t want you should think I’m asking all these questions because we have any fault to find with you,” he said. “You’ve done very well. I always know what’s going on all over the place. I keep track of everything in every department. I wouldn’t be where I am if I wasn’t up to that. I called you here partly to compliment you on your smartness in that little stunt of the first day. And you’ve gone on all right since, *all* right. These things don’t get lost in the wash. But before I come to that I’m bound to tell you that the report’s come up to me you’re a spy.”

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He threw the cap at her in a way to make her jump if it fitted. But Win did not flinch. What she had overheard on the first day saved her now from a shock of surprise.

"I caught that word about me from one of the girls," she admitted frankly. "I wondered what made her think me a spy, and I'm wondering still."

"I guess she thought you looked a sort of swell, and any one could see you weren't used to work."

"But—there must be lots of girls like me in your big shops, just as there are at home."

"No, that's where you're mistaken, Miss Child. There's more chances with us for women than with you, and more places for 'em. We don't get many of your class in the stores. They can do better for themselves. You, being a stranger, though, had no pull. And maybe you haven't been over here long."

"I haven't been long. But my money ran short," smiled Win, encouraged now, since neither of Sadie's prognostications seemed likely to be fulfilled. "Still, I don't see why it should occur to anybody that I was a *spy*. What would a spy do in a shop?"

"That depends whether the job came from outside or in."

"I don't understand!"

"Well, there's a set of smart Alecks who've banded together and call themselves the Anti-Sweat League, or Work People's Aid Society, or any old name like that. They smell around to see what goes on behind the scenes in a department store, and drop on us if they can."

"Oh, I see! And you thought they might have hired me——"

"I *didn't* think so, as a matter of fact. I pride myself on spotting folks for what they are the minute I lamp them. There's something about 'em I can *feel*. I was sure you weren't one of that bunch. But I felt bound to mention the report. Now that's finished—breakfast cleared away! We'll go on to the next thing."

Again Win waited. And her heart missed a beat, for Mr. Meggison was looking at her as if he had something very special to say.

"Most of the extra people we let go the week after Christmas," he went on slowly. "Even if they're smart, we have enough regular ones without 'em. But perhaps we can keep you if you make good. And if you want to stay. Do you?"

"Yes, thank you. As far as I can tell now, I should like to stay, if I give satisfaction," Win answered with caution.

“Well, we’ll see. It’s up to you, anyhow. I told you I was going to test your character. That’s why I put you where I did. I knew what you’d be up against. Now the idea is to test you some more.”

He paused an instant. This was a catch phrase of his: “the idea is.” He often used it. And when he said: “It is my habit,” or “My way is,” he spoke with the repressed yet bursting pride of the self-made man who has suddenly been raised to a height almost beyond his early dreams.

“I may change you into another department next week,” he went on, “where you’ll have a better time and less work. What do you say to *Gloves*?”

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Win felt very stupid. "What ought I to say to Gloves?" she inquired helplessly.

Then the great Mr. Meggison actually laughed. "Gee! You *are* an amateur, Miss Child. Why, the girls all think the Gloves are the pick of the basket. What your London Gaiety is to actresses, that the glove department is to our salesladies. It's called the marriage market. Ladies' *and* gents' gloves, you understand. Now do you see the point?"

"I suppose I do," Win rather reluctantly confessed, faintly blushing.

"Some of the best lookers in our Gloves have married Fifth Avenue swells. It's pretty busy there just now. The young fellows buy gloves by the dozen for their best girls at Christmas time when they want to ring a change on flowers. Maybe I'll put you into Gloves, if you'll agree to make yourself useful."

"I'll try to do my best wherever you put me, Mr. Meggison" said Win, sounding to herself like a heroine of a Sunday serial, and feeling not unlike one in a difficult situation at the end of an instalment. At home, in her father's house, she had occasionally been driven to read Sunday serials on Sunday. They were the only fiction permitted on that day.

"That's all right. But now I mean something in particular" explained Meggison. "I told you what they were saying about you in your department to see how you'd take it. Well, you didn't seem desperately shocked at the idea of being engaged by a so-called charitable society to watch out for any breaks we might make. Not that we do make any, so your trouble would have been wasted. We give our girls seats and every living thing the law asks for, and our men make no complaints that we hear. But, of course, we ain't omnipotent. Things are said, things happen we don't get onto, little tricks that cost us money. Folks shirking, and even stealing; we have to keep a sharp lookout. We can't turn the spotlights on to everybody at once. So when we come across a pair of lamps that are bright, a long way above the average we sometimes make it worth their while——"

"Oh, Mr. Meggison, please don't go on!" Win cut the great man short. "I'd rather you didn't say it, because—I don't wish to hear. I—I don't want to know what you mean."

It was his turn to flush. But the change of colour was only just perceptible. He had himself under almost perfect control. His eyes sent out a flash, then became dull and expressionless as blue-gray marbles. He was silent and watchful. Win, after her outburst, was breathlessly speechless.

"Good!" said he at last. "Very good. That's the second test. And it's all right, like the first. Now do you understand?"

"I—I'm not sure. I——"

“You just said you didn’t want to know what I meant. But I want you to know. I was testing your character again. I’m sure now you’re straight. You’re a good girl, as well as a smart one, Miss Child.”

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Suddenly, just as she had begun to feel so relieved that tears were on the way to her eyes, Meggison bent forward with an abrupt movement and laid his hot, plump hand heavily on hers. Up jumped the girl and down fell the hand. She seemed to hear herself excusing herself and explaining her rashness to Sadie: "I couldn't stand it. I wouldn't! I didn't care what happened."

"What's the matter?" he asked, blustering, his face now very red. He kept his seat and looked up at her with a bullish stare.

"Nothing is the matter, Mr. Meggison," she said. "Only I think I've troubled you long enough. You—will be wanting me to go."

As she spoke she gazed straight and steadily down into his eyes, as if he were an animal that could be mastered if your look never let his go. She remembered how Sadie had said that Meggison wanted to be a "dog," but his bark might be stopped if you showed him in time that you were not afraid. Winifred was afraid, but she acted as if she were not, which was the great thing. And the "stunt," as Sadie would have called it, seemed to work—if only for the moment.

When his face had cooled, he said: "Yes, you can go, Miss Child. I've nothing more to say to you—at present. Except this: it won't be the Gloves."

* * * * *

Tingling, burning, whirling with the excitement of her interview—fully felt only after it was over—Win started to hurry back to work. It was not a crowded time of the day in the shopping world. Many ladies were lunching not buying, and employees, if on business, were permitted to use the elevators, white light going up, red light down. Only the boy in smart shop livery, who rushed the lift from roof to basement, was in the mirrored vehicle when Win got in at the superintendent's floor.

"Hats, Children's Wardrobes, Games, Toys, Books, Stationery!" shouted the strident young voice mechanically as the doors whizzed back in their groove at the story below.

In streamed some jaded mothers and children, for whom Win backed humbly into a corner, and then, just as the doors were about to snap shut once more for a downward plunge, a young man and woman hurried laughing in. Winifred Child shrank farther into her corner, plastering herself against the wall of the elevator, and turning her face away, for the newcomers were Lord Raygan and Ena Rolls.

As the wall consisted entirely of mirrors, however, turning away gave little protection. The mothers, refusing to retire with their young before the latest arrivals, "swell" though they might be, Miss Rolls and her companion were forced to push past the forms which kept the door, and by the time the elevator had shot down a story or two farther the pair

were close to Win. Still she kept her face twisted as far over her shoulder as it would go, at risk of getting a cramp in the neck, and her heart was beating with such loud thuds under the respectable black blouse that she feared lest they should hear it.

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"Why, hello—it's the Lady in the Moon!" exclaimed Lord Raygan gayly, just when Win had begun to hope she might reach the ground-floor level without being discovered.

Involuntarily Ena turned with a slight start, recognized Win, pretended not to, and presented the back instead of the side of a wonderful hat. An aigret jabbed viciously at the tall shop-girl's eye, and Miss Rolls said hastily: "What Lady in the Moon? I don't know whom you're talking about, Lord Raygan. But oh, here's our floor! This is where I want to get out."

"Never mind, let's stop in and come up again," commanded Raygan in the masterful way which Ena loved for its British male brutality—when it didn't interfere with her wishes. "It's Miss—oh, *you* know, from the *Monarchic*. Don't you remember her in the moon dress? How do you do, Miss—er—er? Who would have thought of meeting you here?"

They were crowded almost as closely together in the lift as sardines in a box, and it was impossible not to answer.

"How do you do?" responded Win desperately, and Miss Rolls, making the best of a bad dilemma, found it obligatory to recognize Miss Child. If she had not done so Lord Raygan would have thought her snobbish, though it was not entirely from snobbishness that she had wished to escape the girl of the *Monarchic*.

Her heart was beating almost as hard as Win's. Her brother Peter and Lady Eileen were somewhere in the shop. This was the day chosen for the sightseeing expedition insisted upon by Raygan. Ena had hated the idea of it, hated having to be associated in Raygan's eyes with the Hands. She had felt a presentiment that something horrid would happen, but she hadn't supposed it would be quite so horrid and upsetting as this.

A dozen times Petro had asked if she'd ever heard from Miss Child. Only day before yesterday—the silly fellow *never* seemed to forget! And any moment now he and Eileen might come. They had made a rendezvous at the jewellery department, not far from this row of elevators, on the ground floor. Hang the girl! How little delicacy she had shown in taking a place in Peter Rolls's father's store after that conversation on the ship! And how was she to be got rid of in a desperate hurry without making Lord Raygan cross?

CHAPTER XV

THE LADY IN THE MOON

It was a difficult situation for Miss Rolls. Dimly it had dawned upon her more than once that Rags regarded certain speeches and ways of hers as "snobbish"—speeches and

ways which to her had seemed aristocratic. Neither Rags nor Eileen nor Lady Raygan had ever so much as mentioned the word “snob” in connection with any member of the Rolls family or their friends. But they had lightly let it drop in connection with others, and Ena’s extreme sensitiveness on the subject her extreme desire to be everything that Raygan liked, made her quick to put two and two together.

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She began to see that many of her favourite tricks at home and abroad—with servants, with her parents, with acquaintances, and the public in general—were not proofs, in Raygan's eyes, that she was to the manor born, rather the contrary, and that hurt. She was straining to understand and observe the finest *nuances*. Never had it been more difficult than to-day, during this visit she detested to the great department store of Peter Rolls. If she had declined to come, that would have been snobbish. If, having come, she refused the "glad hand" to one of her father's shop girls whom Raygan chose to greet as an equal—that, too, would be snobbish. And to be snobbish was, in Raygan's language, to be "beastly vulgar."

If she were not snobbish—if she treated Miss Child with warm cordiality, asked her a dozen questions, and listened kindly to the answers, Petro would come with Eileen and find his long-lost friend. Would Lord Raygan go so far in his dislike of snobbishness as to welcome an assistant culled from his bride's father's shop as a sister-in-law? Ena thought not. Besides, she was not sure yet that she would ever be his bride, and any risk she took might turn the scale against her, so uncertain seemed the balance. Just at present the danger was that she might fall in the slippery space between two high stools.

"Why, yes, of course, Lord Raygan," she said, able in the midst of alarums to enjoy the repetition of his title, which made people stare. "We'll stay in the elevator and talk to Miss Child, and go up again when she has gone. Are you really working here in the store, Miss Child, as—as—a—"

"Yes, I'm in the blouse department," Win replied, quite as anxious to escape as Miss Rolls was anxious to blot her out. "I've been up to see the superintendent on business, and now I'm hurrying back to work."

"You never wrote me," said Ena, thinking it was better to chatter than let Lord Raygan talk, perhaps indiscreetly. And there were still more floors at which the elevator must stop before reaching the ground level. "I—I do trust you *would* have written if you'd wanted anything done that I could do." Her tone tried not to be too patronizing, lest patronage should be considered to verge on snobbishness.

"Thank you. I never did want anything that you could do. Though it was kind of you to offer," Win returned, and was aware that every one was listening.

Oh, why had she believed Mr. Loewenfeld when he vowed that the one secure sanctuary against the Rolls family was in Peter Rolls's store? If only she had not come here; by this time surely she would have found something else and all would have been well.

"Well, it's very nice to see you again, Lady in the Moon," said Raygan. "Do you like this place better than Nadine's?"

“There’s more variety,” replied Win.

“Not homesick yet for our side of the water—what?”

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"I haven't time to think about it," she fibbed. "Now I must say good-bye. We're coming to the ground floor."

"Let's go along with her, Miss Rolls, and see her home," suggested Rags. "I want to know whether the blouse department beats that *Monarchic* room with all the mirrors—what?"

Ena's face showed distress. Her eyes actually appealed to the cause of it to save her, and Win was only too ready to respond.

"Please don't come," she protested earnestly. "It wouldn't do. It's against the rules to talk to—to any one you know, except on business. I'm new here still, and I'm sure you wouldn't want to get me into trouble. I'd much rather go alone, though it's very nice of you to offer. Good-bye!"

The lift had at last reached the ground floor, and all Win had to do was to let herself be borne out on a warm tide of females. Ena pressed her body against the wall, and Lord Raygan must, perforce, stand by her.

"Good-bye!" she cried. "We have to go up again, you know."

"We'll sail by, anyhow, and see where you hang out later," Raygan called after the disappearing form in black. "And we'll bring Rolls and my sister."

By this time the elevator had emptied itself, save for those bound for the basement and Ena and Rags. It was impossible for Win to forbid the party to "sail by," or to make any answer at all, over the decorated heads of many women. But she felt as if she would rather die than have Peter Rolls see her working in his father's store. He might easily think that she had taken a place there because of knowing him, and that, regretting the snub delivered at parting, she had hoped he might some day find her in the Hands.

"I just can't bear it," she said to herself. "I'll have to pretend to be ill, and get permission from Mr. Thorpe to leave the floor again—to go to the hospital room—anything to get away."

But—wouldn't that be like the ostrich hiding its head in the sand? Evidently Lord Raygan and Lady Eileen were being shown things. If they hadn't been there already they would be sure to take a peep into the hospital as well as the rest room. Not the restaurant perhaps! If Mr. Rolls junior and his sister had any idea what that was like, they would avoid it with their distinguished guests. Still, even there one would not be safe. The only sure escape would be to go home, and she would have to look very ill indeed before she could obtain leave of absence for the rest of the day.

Wondering what on earth was to be done, Win suddenly recalled the look in Ena Rolls's eyes, which had said as plainly as spoken words: "For heaven's sake get me out of this

scrape, and do or say something to put Lord Raygan off dragging me with him to your horrid old blouse department.”

“She won’t let them come!” Win told herself. “Somehow she’ll prevent it. I’ll stick to my guns.”

So she went back to her place as if nothing had happened and returned to Mr. Thorpe the permit he, as aisle manager, had given her to leave her duties and go off the floor on which they were carried out. It was a small paper slip signed by him, and Thorpe would have been responsible had she overstayed the time asked for. But she was safely within it, and she had herself well enough in hand, after her adventure, to answer his kind, sad smile with gratitude.

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"What will Miss Rolls do to stop Lord Raygan from wanting to come—and from saying anything about me to the others?" she wondered. She could not guess. Yet she grew more and more confident of Ena's finesse as the long afternoon wore on.

What Miss Rolls did was very simple, if you had the clue. But the clue was what Win lacked.

"I thought we were due to meet Eily and Rolls about this time, and look at those wonderful pearls your father says he gets straight from the fisheries," Rags reminded Ena when the elevator dropped to the basement and began to bound up again.

"So we are," she admitted, "but there's something I *must* tell you before we see Petro. That's why I made the excuse about getting out—only, of course, you didn't understand. You couldn't! Any floor will do, really—but we'll think of the one likely to be the least crowded. I can't explain if creatures are pushing us about. Oh, 'Upholstery and Furniture!' They'll do."

The two wormed their way out of the lift, which was becoming more congested at each stopping place, the legitimate hour for luncheon now being over. The floor chosen by Ena had a series of "Ideal Rooms," furnished according to periods, and she led Raygan into a Dutch dining-room with a high-backed settle which, if they sat down upon it, would screen them from passers-by outside the open, welcoming door. Besides, the old oak made a becoming background for a blue velvet dress and silvery ermine stole.

"It's about that girl I want to speak," she said, when she had enticed Lord Raygan into this secluded retreat.

"Who, the Lady in the Moon?" He was staring at delft plates on panelled walls.

"Yes. I wished for a minute she'd been the Lady in Jericho. Perhaps you noticed that I didn't seem overwhelmed with joy at sight of her?"

"Well, it did occur to me that you might have been more enthusiastic if she'd been a Miss Vanderbilt."

"It wasn't that at *all*," Ena assured him eagerly, almost piteously. "I didn't mind having to speak to her because she's a shop girl, but because I was afraid if we stopped and talked, my brother might come along. I wouldn't have had that happen for anything."

"Why on earth not?"

"I can't tell you, Lord Raygan. Please don't ask me. You'll embarrass me very much if you do. But will you just trust me that it would be a very bad thing if they were to meet, and not insist on our going to look her up at the waist counter or wherever she is?"

“Certainly I won’t insist,” said Rags. “I don’t care, you know, whether we look her up or not. Only she was Rolls’s chum on the *Monarchic*, and I thought if he——”

“Dear Lord Raygan, please don’t think about it any more. And if you want to be very kind, and make me real happy and comfortable, don’t tell Petro we met the girl—or even mention her. You *will* promise not, won’t you?”

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"Of course, if you ask me, that's enough," said Rags, looking rather sulky. He was curious to know what she actually meant, but, of course, could not ask, and somehow the whole affair—Ena's deep solemnity and secrecy, her hints which mustn't be questioned, began to seem silly and even rather repulsive. He had never liked her less.

Vaguely conscious that she was not "making a hit," and more than ever angry with the hateful necessity for this excursion, which was to blame for everything, Ena rambled on, "hoping he wouldn't misunderstand," and floundering into half explanations which made the situation less comfortable every minute. At last, when the subject was torn to tatters, and Raygan had begun to betray impatience, she got up to go.

"Petro and Lady Eileen will be waiting for us in the jewellery department now, I expect," Ena said drearily. "Let's hurry and meet them, and then we can get away. I'm bored to death with the stuffy old place, and you must be, too. I can't bear anything commercial. If there's a lovely concert or a tango tea somewhere to finish up the afternoon, it will be nice. Or almost anything!"

There was a tango tea, and it was nice. Rags, however was far from nice. He did not seem at all himself.

"I'm afraid the poor old store wasn't as much fun as you thought it would be," said Petro, half apologetically, when he began to realize that Rags had a "grouch." Petro had liked the plan to visit the Hands, and had liked the visit, too. The place had seemed a beehive of industry and the bees—selling bees and buying bees—had all looked happy and prosperous enough. On the surface, dad's methods appeared to be the right methods. But Peter wondered if it would be a betrayal of his promise if he wandered through the store alone sometimes, when it was less crowded and things more normal. He had surrendered his conviction that he "ought to help," and as Peter senior had stipulated for no interference if Peter junior truly trusted him, one must be careful about interpretations.

Petro's ideas for a "Start in Life Fund" were occupying a great deal of his attention and were crystallizing into concrete form. He hoped that he might soon cease to be a drone, and end by being of some real use in the world. But as Peter junior passed out of the shop, his promise to keep "hands off the Hands" seemed one of the things to regret, whether selfishly or otherwise. He would have liked to know more of the place, so passionately interesting to him, apart from its business side; and he was unable to understand how Raygan, the one whose curiosity had drawn all four to the Hands that day, could have managed to be bored.

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"Blouses" pulsed with excitement. Miss Ena Rolls and her brother were said to be "showing their father's shop to an English lord." How the thrilling tale began to go the rounds nobody in "Blouses" could tell. But whenever any famous personage—a millionaire's daughter or an actress, a society beauty or the heroine of a fashionable scandal—enters a big department store, the news of her advent runs from counter to counter like wildfire. In some shops the appearance of an Astor, a Vanderbilt, or a Princess Patricia would send up the mercury of excitement forty degrees higher than that of a Miss or Mr. Rolls. But at the Hands, Peter the Great's son and daughter would have drawn all eyes from the reigning Czar and Czarina of Russia.

It was rumoured that they had lunched early in the Pompeian restaurant. The waitress who had served them had not known until too late. She would regret this all her life. Mr. Michaels, of "Jewellery," who had been honoured by showing them pearls, was envied by all his fellows, and the same with Miss Dick, of "Candy," and Miss Wallace, in "Perfume." Girls in all departments grew quite jumpy in expectation that the party might appear, and under the intense nervous strain of trying to recognize them in time.

"Rubberneck!" one hissed to another, and giggled if she made her start.

Even Miss Stein, now somewhat resigned to fate and looking more kindly at Fred Thorpe, became condescending and communicative in the general flurry.

"Keep your eyes peeled for a good-looking, short guyl in blue velvet, with an ermine muff and stole that's a beaut from Beautville," she said to Win. "Thorpe saw her. He's had her pointed out to him at the theayter, so he knows. Her brother's dark and thin, but blue eyed. I saw in the Sunday supplement he's goin' to marry the sister of that lord."

* * * * *

There was a dinner at Sea Gull Manor that night in honour of the Rolls's guests, and just as Eileen had finished dressing, her brother Raygan knocked at her door.

"Want me to say your tie's all right?" she chirped.

"No, my child, I do not," said Rags. "I wouldn't trust your taste round the corner with a tie. You're looking rather pleased with yourself—what?"

"I'm pleased with myself and everybody else," replied Eileen. "This is one of my happy nights."

"I wonder why? There's sure to be a dull crowd at dinner. I've found out now the Rollses know all the wrong lot."

"I found that out *long* ago. But I don't care. And I'm going to sit by Petro. So I shall be all right."

“You’ve jolly well been with him the whole blessed day. Aren’t you sick of his society yet?”

“No. And I shouldn’t be till doomsday. He talks to me of such interesting things.”

“Has he ever by chance said anything to you about the Lady in the Moon?”

“Good gracious! no, nor the man either. Nor the green cheese it’s made of. Is that the sort of conversation Ena’s been treating you to? If it is, no wonder you look bored stiff. You never could stand romance from any one but darling Pobbles.”

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"Don't speak of Kathleen in this house. It makes me want to bolt for home. Not that she'd look at me if I did. But the contrast between her and Ena Rolls—good Lord, it doesn't bear thinking of! Nothing doing about the Lady in the Moon so far as I'm concerned. It's Rolls who got moonstruck—according to his sister. Now can you guess whom I mean?"

Eileen's pleasant, plain little face flushed up.

"Oh, the Nadine girl on the ship! The one who looked so nice in the Moon dress. Petro bought it—for Ena. And she gave it to that fascinating girl. She—Ena, I mean—told me all about it."

"And about the girl, too?"

"What was there to tell?"

"Blamed if I know. But Ena was hinting dark things this afternoon. That's why I was wondering whether he'd opened out to you. You're such pals."

Eileen shook her head. She was not looking quite so bright as when Rags had first come into the overheated, overlighted, overdecorated room. But perhaps this was only because he had set her to thinking intently. "No, he's never spoken of the Lady in the Moon. Let me think—what was her name?"

"Miss Child."

"*You* seem to remember very well—you, who mix up all the wrong names with the right faces."

"But I saw her to-day. I forgot—I haven't told you of that yet, have I?"

"No. Where was it?"

"Wait a minute. Strictly speaking, I oughtn't to tell you, I suppose. All the same I will—for a reason—if you'll promise first not to mention it to Rolls. Never mind why not, but promise, if you want to know."

"Of course I want to know. You make me fearfully curious. I'll promise not to breathe a word to Petro."

"Where the girl is or anything about her?"

"'Where the girl is, or anything about her.' Honour bright. Is that enough? Well, then—go on!"



“She’s in the shop—employed there, it seems. We met her in the lift, Ena and I. It was a surprise all round. Ena wasn’t overjoyed. No more was the Lady in the Moon. They got rid of each other quickly and skilfully. Afterward, Ena buttonholed me and sat me down on a hard settee in a beastly furnished room like a rathskeller, with price tags on everything, and made me solemnly swear not to split to Rolls.”

“About your meeting Miss Child?”

“*Ra-ther!* And all the rest of it.”

“What rest?”

“A lot of rubbish. I don’t know what she was driving at, I’m hanged if I do. But if I didn’t like Rolls, I’d suspect.”

“But you do like him. And so do I.”

“I’ve noticed that. So would Mubs, if she ever noticed anything that didn’t wave suffragette colours.”

“And I shall go on liking him—’right straight on,’ as he’d say himself. Nothing that Ena or anybody else could tell me would make me believe a word against him. And the girl’s nice, too. I’m sure she is. But how too endlessly quaint she should be in the shop.”

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"She intimated politely, when we asked her questions, that it was a last resort."

"I should think so, indeed! She was—well, not a beauty exactly, but too weirdly fascinating."

"She hasn't changed. Only she looked scared at the sight of us. And she's thinner in the face. Her eyes seemed to have grown too big for it. Ena said Petro mustn't find out where she is. Rather rum—what?"

"Is this the thing that's made you so grumpy ever since?"

"I don't know that I've been grumpy. Only a bit reflective. The fact is——"

"What?"

"Never mind. It wouldn't sound very nice."

"Who cares how it sounds? You might tell me, now we've got so far."

"Well, then, sometimes I wonder whether—the game's worth the candle. Whatever the rotten old proverb means!"

Eileen had no difficulty in understanding the allusion.

"She's got heaps of good things about her," the girl reminded him, being as loyal as was humanly possible to her hostess.

"Heaps. They're simply piled up in the corners of her nature. But I seemed to have wandered into an empty place to-day. By Jove, Eily, I thought I'd made up my mind. I'm fond of the old place at home, and I'd like, to see it done up properly. It isn't as if I'd ever care tuppence again about any girl on earth after—Kathleen. So what does anything of that sort matter? At least that's what I've been asking myself."

"I'm afraid Ena thinks you'll soon be asking *her*."

"Heavens! I suppose she does. Not that I've said a confounded word. I'm hanged if I know what to do! I tell you what. I'll wait and see how things go to-night. And then—maybe I'll toss up a penny."

"We ought to go down now, anyhow," said Eileen, still very thoughtful.

"Come along, then, and face the music."

"You go. I'll follow in a minute. I want to put this wonderful pink orchid in just the right place in my dress, and I shall be nervous if you watch me."

“What a ripper! Where did you get it?” Rags pretended that he cared to know the history of a wonderful, live-looking flower that lay on his sister’s dressing-table.

“Petro. He bought it for me in the florist department of his father’s shop. He said it was the latest addition—the department, not the orchid.”

“Don’t you get thinking too much about Rolls,” grumbled Lord Raygan. “There *may* be something in that affair, after all. One can never be sure. Anyhow, I thought I’d tell you.”

On that he closed the door, shutting himself out.

“Petro—and the Lady in the Moon,” Eileen whispered, just above her breath, as she found the right place for the orchid.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SEED ENA PLANTED

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Ena was glad when she saw Eileen wearing the orchid that Petro had bought for her in the gorgeous new department at the Hands. Rags had at the same time purchased some gardenias for Miss Rolls, she having mentioned that the gardenia was her favourite flower. Both girls tucked these trophies into the front of their coats, and wore them home. Also, they wore them again for dinner, a far more conspicuous compliment to the givers. Ena meant it to be taken as such, and faintly hoped, in spite of the afternoon's failure, that the thing she prayed for might happen that night. Perhaps Lord Raygan needed a little more encouragement, for, after all, she was rich and he was poor, and men did hesitate about proposing to heiresses—in novels.

Nothing did happen; but there was still time, for the guests were staying on for a cotillon, and there was a meeting at which Lady Raygan had faithfully promised to speak. It was a shame, however, that the effect of the orchid as well as the gardenias should be wasted, and the morning after their visit to the Hands, Ena made an opportunity of speaking to Petro alone.

He was in his own “den,” one of the smallest rooms in the house, meant for a dressing-room, and opening off his bedroom. He had fitted it up as a nondescript lair, and indulged in ribald mirth if Ena tried to dignify it with the name of “study.” All the pictures of the big animals he hadn't killed were there—beautiful wild things he felt he had the right to know socially, as he had never harmed them or their most distant relatives. In an old glass-fronted, secretary bookcase of mahogany, the first piece of “parlour furniture” his parents had ever bought, were the dear books of Petro's boyhood and early youth, and above, on the gray-papered wall, hung a portrait of mother, which her son had had painted by an unfashionable artist as a “birthday present from his affectionate self” at the age of sixteen. An ancient easy chair and a queer old sofa still had the original, slippery, black horsehair off which Petro and Ena had slid as children. Petro had named the sofa “the whale,” and the squat chair “the seal.” Both shiny, slippery, black things really did resemble sea monsters, and had never lost for Petro their mysterious personality.

There were some cushions and a fire screen, the bead-and-wool flowers of which mother had worked in early married life, and on the floor, in front of the friendly wood fire which Petro loved, lay a rug which was also her handiwork. It was made of dresses her children had worn when they were very, very little, and some of her own which Petro could even now remember. Nobody save he, at Sea Gull Manor, cared for a grate fire; or if mother would have liked one, instead of a handwrought bronze radiator half hidden in the wall, she dared not say so. But she came and sat in Petro's den sometimes, crocheting in the old easy chair, when he was self-indulgent enough to have a fire of ships' logs. The rose and gold and violet flames of the driftwood lit up for him the secret way to Dreamland and the country of Romance. What it did for mother, she did not say; but as her fingers moved, regularly as the ticking of a clock, her eyes would wander over the old furniture she had loved and back to the fire, as if she were trying to call up her own past and her son's future.

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This morning Petro was not in a good mood, for he had been reading in the newspaper an interview with him which he hadn't given. It was all about the "Start in Life Fund," and sounded as if he were boasting, not only of the idea, but of the way in which he meant to carry it out. Nobody likes to be made to appear a conceited bounder when his intentions are as modest as those of a hermit crab, and a hundred times more benevolent.

Therefore, when Ena came, using as an excuse a dire need of notepaper, and stopped to dawdle, lighting one of his cigarettes, Petro felt an urgent desire to be cross. She had on some perfume which he hated, and a split skirt, and was altogether so inconvenient and uncongenial that disagreeable things to say sat on the end of his tongue. He bit them back, however, for he knew he should be sorry afterward if he were a beast.

"You look as if you'd like to snap my head off," said Ena, fumbling among his cigarettes.

"So I would. But I won't," said he. "It isn't you I mind. It's only something that Raygan would call bally rot in the paper."

"Something about us?" Ena was alert in a moment.

"Only about me."

"Is *that* all! You're so silly about having things in the paper! Almost anything's better than nothing, I feel, as long as they don't go raking up father's and mother's past. Oh, I know you think their past's the best thing about them. Let's not argue. Does it say again that you're engaged to Eileen?"

"No, thank heaven. I don't want to punch heads in her defence."

His sister laughed, and tried to make herself comfortable by putting her feet up on the slippery whale. The split green cloth skirt fell apart and showed a pink ankle clad in a tight-fitting film of green silk stocking. Ena gazed at it appreciatively and liked the look of her foot in a high-heeled green suede shoe with a gold buckle.

"My private opinion is that dear little Eileen was tickled to death by the mistake. The only thing she didn't like about it was—its *being* a mistake."

"If you talk like that, I'll wish the whale was Jonah's," said Petro.

"She does love you!" Ena got out hurriedly, fearing to be stopped, or caught up in the surprisingly strong arms of Petro, and gently set down on the wrong side of the door. "She does! She does! I've thought so a long time. Now I know it. I mustn't tell you how."

“You oughtn’t to tell me how. It isn’t true and it isn’t kind—to either of us. I hate hearing such darned nonsense about a girl who likes me as a friend. And she’d be mad as the dickens if she could hear.”

“Perhaps she’d be mad,” Ena admitted, “because it *is* true. If it weren’t she’d only laugh. You’re a simple Simon not to see. Everybody else with eyes does see. And they’ll all be sorry for her if you don’t speak.”

“Any one would think I was a dog and she was a bone,” growled Petro. “Speak, indeed! I wish you’d mind your own business, Ena.”

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"I am minding it as hard as I can," said his sister, "and you ought to thank me for taking an interest in yours, too. Don't you *like* poor little Lady Eileen?"

"Very much; same way she likes me. We're good chums."

"If you don't believe what I say, Petro, there's a splendid way of finding out. Ask her."

"See here, my dear girl, haven't you got anything better to do this morning than to loll all over my sofa and talk drivell when I want to write a letter blowing up somebody? I felt a fool when you came in. Now you've made me feel a double-dyed idiot. Kindly go away and dig a hole in the ground with yourself."

Ena went. But she felt that, despite discouragement, she had already dug a tiny, tiny hole in very hard ground, not for herself, but for a little seed which might perhaps send out its shoots later.

It did not precisely do that; but as the ground raked over was Petro's heart, the seed his sister had left made him uncomfortable. It burned and stung and felt alive, and something had to be done about it.

Of course Ena was wrong. He was the last fellow in the world a girl could care for. He had learned that to his sorrow. A girl couldn't even like him. There was something about him that bored her nearly to death as soon as she began to know him fairly well, and made her want to bolt. He was as sure, he told himself, of the exact nature of nice little Lady Eileen's feeling for him as of his for her. Nevertheless, that night at a dance, when he and she (for the best of reasons, they didn't know how) were sitting out the tango, he found himself becoming confidential.

This was strange, for Petro had one of his father's characteristics if no other—he did not confide things in people. Peter senior kept his own secrets because it was wise to keep them. Peter junior kept his partly because he thought they would bore every one save himself. So even where the two were alike, they were miles apart. For some vague reason, however—which, if he had stopped to define it, would have convinced him that he was disgustingly conceited—Petro was moved that night, in a new-fashioned conservatory resembling a jungle, to tell Lady Eileen one or two things about himself.

How it started he was not quite sure, but with some awkwardness he had tried to lead up to the subject, and suddenly Eileen had begun to help him out.

"I used to think a man would have to know a lot about a girl," he said, "before he could be sure she was the sort he could fall in love with. I thought love at first sight wouldn't be love at all, but only infatuation. Now I see that I didn't know what I was talking about. It isn't a question of whether you *could* love her. You've just got to. You can't do anything else. It's like seven devils or seven angels entering into and possessing you."

There they are before you know what's happened. Afterward, when you find out what's struck you, maybe it's too late. Or maybe there'd never have been any hope, anyhow."

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“While there’s life, there’s hope,” quoted Eileen.

“But what if life’s parted you from her?”

“I wouldn’t let it, if I were a man. I wouldn’t allow the girl to go out of my life. It doesn’t sound a *strong* thing to do.”

“It might be, though, in some circumstances. For instance, if a girl showed you very plainly she couldn’t be bothered with you, it would be weak to run after her, wouldn’t it?”

“I wonder,” said Eileen, “if a man’s a good judge of why a girl does things that she does? Of course, I don’t *know* much. But I feel he mightn’t be. It’s so difficult for girls and men to understand each other, really. Now there’s my brother Rags and our cousin Pobbles—I mean, Portia. Pobbles is her nickname. You know we’re great on the most endlessly quaint nicknames in our family. She’s quite a distant cousin of ours, otherwise she wouldn’t have such lots of money as she has. *We’re* church mice. We’d be church worms if there were any! But Rags was in love with Pobbles for years, and she wouldn’t believe it. She thought, because she’s not exactly pretty, it must be her money he wanted. They never understood each other a bit. You mustn’t say anything about this, and I won’t say anything about what you tell *me*. You *will* tell me about the girl, won’t you? Maybe I can help. You see, though I don’t know so very much about men yet—except Rags—I know a whole lot about girls.”

“There isn’t much to tell,” said Petro. “I met a girl in rather a queer way—sort of romantic, it seemed to me. And the minute I saw her she stood out quite different from any one else I’d ever seen, like a red rose in a garden of pale-pink ones. I couldn’t get her face out of my mind, or her voice out of my ears. She was like my idea of a dryad. It seemed she might turn into a tree if a man looked at her too long. But I didn’t know I was in love. I thought she just appealed to me, fascinated me somehow or other. And I wanted to do things for her all the time. I was always thinking of some excuse to be where she was. I was looking forward to doing a lot more things—I suppose it was only selfishness, because I wanted to make her like me, but I didn’t realize that till after she was gone.”

“Gone?” Eileen encouraged him.

“Yes. She didn’t want me to do those things I’d been planning for her. She wouldn’t have what I could do, or me, at any price.”

“Did you—had you—told her you *cared*?”

“Great Scott! no. I hadn’t got nearly so far as that. I told her I hoped to see her again, that if there was something I could do to help, I—but she wasn’t taking any. She seemed friendly and kind before that, which made it worse when she turned me down

so hard. I suppose she hadn't minded much at first, but the more she saw of me the more she couldn't stand for the shape of my nose or the way I talked, maybe. She just got to feel that the sight of me hanging around would poison New York for her, and she intimated that her health would be better if I kept at the other end of the city. You wouldn't have had me continue to butt in, would you?"

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"I don't know. What happened then?"

"Oh, she went away."

"You let her go?"

"What else could I do?"

"You could have found out where she went in case she changed her mind. But perhaps you did find out?"

"No. For she didn't seem like the kind of girl who would change her mind about a kind of fellow like me. Besides, I was sort of stunned by the difference in her manner just at the moment. When I came to myself—I mean, about wondering if I could have done anything better, and realizing what a terrible lot I cared, she was gone. Then I hoped Ena would hear from her. I think she promised to write. But it appears that she never did so."

"Is she in New York still?"

"I wish to heaven I knew!"

"Couldn't you find out?"

"I might, if I wanted to be a cad."

"Why—what do you mean?"

"I dare say a private detective would undertake the job. Sometimes I've been tempted—yet no, I don't believe I ever did come near to playing the game as low down as that."

"But it might be for her good——"

"That's the way I argued with myself. I almost got myself convinced sometimes. But I knew in my heart it was only sophistry. You see, it isn't as if she would let me do anything for her, even if she wanted anything done, which I've no particular reason to suppose she does. She's English, and a stranger over here, but she told me—when we were friends—that she had letters of introduction to good people and that she'd plenty of money till they found her a job. I can't bear to think of her needing a 'job' when I—but I'm helpless! No doubt she's all right, and getting along like a house on fire. She was the sort of girl who would. Or maybe she's engaged by this time to some chap worth ten of me. But I can't forget. I think of her by day, and I dream of her by night."



“What do you see her doing in your dreams?” Eileen asked in a new tone of voice. Not more interested, for she had shown deep interest before, but with a quaver of excited eagerness.

“Dreams go by contraries, luckily,” said Peter, “otherwise I should worry. I always see her in some kind of trouble. If it isn’t one darned thing it’s another. And I look for her by day when I’m up in town. I think, what if I should see her face framed in some car window? This afternoon I even looked for her in our store—though feeling to me the way she did, it would be the *last* place where she’d go to spend a cent, if she associated the name of Rolls with mine. I bet she’d rather go without a cloak on a cold day than buy it there!”

“Our dance, Lady Eileen,” said another man, who had tracked a missing partner through the tropical jungle.

Eileen rose reluctantly, but graciously, throwing Petro a good-bye look. There was a sympathetic, understanding smile on her pleasant, freckled face which seemed to say: “Don’t give up. You may find her yet. And girls *do* change their minds about men. Anyhow, I’m glad we’ve had this talk.”

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She was glad, though she was sad, too—just a little sad. It would pass, she knew, for she had not let herself go far. In spite of all that Ena had said, it had never felt true that Peter cared for her. She could have loved him, and been happy with him, and have made him happy, she thought, but since he didn't want her, she must set herself to work hard not to want him. She must take her mind off the little deep-down, bruised hurt in her heart by thinking of a way in which she could make him happy—a way in which, by and by, he might recognize her handiwork and send her his thanks across the sea.

"I should like him to know I did it," she said to herself. "And then through all his life he would have to remember me because of his happiness, which, without me, he might have missed."

Of course, Petro had mentioned no name, and Eileen had asked no questions. If it had not been for Raygan's revelation she might not have guessed; but now she did guess, and was almost sure. It seemed to her that a girl who could have Petro's friendship and then drop it like a hot chestnut didn't deserve him for a friend, much less a lover. But there must have been some reason. It wouldn't have been human nature, to put things on their lowest level, for a girl in Miss Child's position to "turn down" a young man in Peter Rolls's for a mere whim.

Could Ena have done something to put them apart? Eileen wondered. It would—she had to admit—be like Ena. And if Ena had been treacherous or hateful, then it would be a sort of poetical justice if she lost Raygan through making her brother lose his dryad. Even now Eileen did not know what Rags would do; and since their day at the Hands, he had seemed somehow "off" the affair with Ena. But whatever happened in the end—which, one way or the other, must come soon—between Ena and Raygan, Peter mustn't lose the Lady in the Moon because of a stupid promise exacted and made to get his sister out of some scrape.

Eileen wouldn't break the promise, because a promise was one of the few things she and her brother Rags had never broken. Raygan wouldn't release her, even if she begged him to do so, but there might be another way—a way which might lead Petro straight to the Lady in the Moon, if he were really in earnest about finding her. That was the clever part of the inspiration which suddenly came to Eileen that same night after starting up from a dream which was "endlessly quaint."

"I'll do it when I say good-bye to Mrs. Rolls," she told herself. And the idea seemed to her so original, so filled with possibilities of romance, that it was as soothing to the bruise in her heart as an application of Peter Rolls's Balm of Gilead.

She guessed that he had put aside his reserve and told her about the "dryad girl" because Ena had put him up to think that she—Eileen—had "begun to care." The mortifying part was that it had been—almost true. But Eileen wasn't going to mind. She

was going to say to herself, if ever the pain came back: "If I can do this for him, surely, when he knows, he'll be glad he told me, and glad that I cared enough to help."

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It was only next morning, when the world showed its practical side, that she realized how seldom in real life romances can be worked out to a happy ending—or, at all events, the kind of happy ending the people concerned are striving after.

“I’ll do my best, though,” she reiterated, “for Petro’s sake and for mine.”

For her the lost dryad was but a shadowy figure in the background, necessary to the picture, perhaps, yet not of poignant, personal interest. It was only of Petro she thought.

CHAPTER XVII

TOYLAND

From her own point of view, the lost dryad was a prominent figure in the middle of the foreground; for life was strenuous for those in the grasp of the Hands, and it was only at night, when her body could lie quiet while her brain was still terribly active, that other figures assumed their due importance for Win in the great, bright picture of New York.

It was something to be thankful for that she had escaped Peter the day of that visit of inspection to the store. Not that she was afraid of him or anything he could do if they should meet. That would have been too silly and Victorian! Girls were not like that nowadays, if they had any sense, no matter how “dangerous” men might be. But she had liked him so much, and had been so bitterly disappointed to learn from his own loving sister that he was not the “Mr. Balm of Gilead” created by her imagination that it would be unbearable to meet him again, to see him “giving himself away,” and thus proving his sister right.

To be sure, after seeing Miss Rolls in the lift, certain kind protestations of friendship had been contradicted by a frozen smile, a cold, embarrassed eye. If Peter’s sister were insincere in one way, why not untrustworthy in others? This was one of the questions that darted into Win’s brain at night through one of the holes made there by the giant bees of the “L” road. But the answer was obvious. Miss Rolls might be superficial, insincere, and snobbish enough to dislike claiming acquaintance with a girl of the “working classes,” but there was no motive strong enough to make her traduce her brother’s character. Even untrustworthy people told the truth sometimes.

It was rather fortunate, perhaps, that Win had another exciting thought to engross her attention at this time, though it was no more agreeable than the thought of Peter Rolls. After her conversation with Mr. Meggison, she confidently expected to find her dismissal in the next pay envelope. It was not there; but, suddenly and without warning, she was dragged out of Blouses and Neckwear and dumped into Toys.

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This was as great a surprise to Sadie Kirk and Earl Usher as to Win herself. She dropped upon them as if she had fallen out of the sky—or at least from the top floor. And nobody knew why: whether it was a punishment or a reward. For Toys gave harder work for the hands without a capital H than Blouses and Neckwear, even when Miss Stein was badly “peeved.” Also, Mr. Tobias, the floorwalker concerned with the toy department was “a spalpeen and a pie-faced mutt from ‘way back,” whereas Fred Thorpe was a well-known angel. Yet, on the other hand, not only were more than half the toy assistants men, but many of the customers also were men. This made the department more lively to be in than Blouses, and some girls considered Toys next best to Gloves.

It was almost like coming into a strange shop when Win arrived with Sadie before eight o’clock in the morning for her first day in Toyland, as Earl Usher facetiously named it. The December morning hardly knew yet that it had been born, and though already there was life in the Hands—fierce, active life—those pulsing white globes which made artificial sunshine whatever the weather, had not yet begun to glow like illuminated snowballs. Shadowy men were lifting pale shrouds off the counters. Voices chattering in the gloom were like voices of monkeys in a dusky jungle—a jungle quite unlike that fairy place where Peter Rolls had talked of Win to Lady Eileen. Out of the gloom wondrous things emerged to people, a weird world—the Hands’ world of toys.

As Win strained her eyes to see through the dusk, forth from its depths loomed uncouth, motionless shapes. Almost life-size lions and Teddy bears, and huge, grinning baboons as big as five-year-old boys, posed in silent, expressive groups, dangerously near to unprotected dolls’ houses with open fronts—splendid dolls’ houses, large enough for children to enter, and less important dolls’ houses, only big enough for fairies. Dolls’ eyes and dolls’ dresses and dolls’ golden curls caught what little light there was and drew attention to themselves.

Some of them stood, three rows deep (the little ones in front, like children watching a show), on shelves. Others were being fetched out by the chattering shadows, as if they were favourite chorus girls, to display their graces on the counters. They were placed in chairs, or motor cars of doll land, or seated carefully in baby carriages. There were walking dolls and talking dolls and dolls who could suck real milk out of real bottles into tin-lined stomachs. Some exquisitely gowned porcelain Parisiennes, with eyelashes and long hair cut from the heads of penniless children, were almost as big and as aristocratic as their potential millionaire mistresses. Humbler sisters of middle class combined prettiness with cheapness, and had the satisfaction of showing their own price marks.

These delicate creatures, lovely in pale-tinted robes or forlorn in chemises, were the bright spots in the vast, dark department, shining out through the dusk as stars shine through thin clouds. As Win became one of the band of shadows, under Sadie’s

direction, gradually she grew accustomed to the gloom, and her gaze called many of the strange objects forth into life.

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She found long-haired Shetland ponies big enough to ride, glorified hobby horses clad in real skins, and unglorified ones with nostrils like those of her landlady in Columbus Avenue. Biscuit-coloured Jersey cows, which could be milked, gazed mildly into space with expensive glass eyes. Noah's arks, big enough to be lived in if the animals would move up, seemed to have been painted with Bakst colours. Fearsome faces glared from behind the bars of menagerie cages. Donkeys and Chinese mandarins nodded good-morning and forgot to stop. Dragon broods of miniature motor cars nested in realistic garages.

Dramatic scenes from real plays were being enacted in dumb show on the stages of theatres apparently decorated by Rothenstein. The Russian ballet had stopped in the midst of "Le Spectre de la Rose." Suits of armour, which Ursus called "pewter raincoats," glimmered in dark spaces behind piled drums and under limply hanging flags or aeroplanes ready to take flight. Almost everything was mechanical—each article warranted to do what it pretended to do in order to have its appeal for the modern child.

Win was a child of yesterday; yet the big girl has always the little girl of the past asleep in her heart, ready to wake up on the slightest encouragement, and she felt the thrill of Toyland. If when she was small she could ever have dreamed of spending her days in a place like this, she would have bartered her chance of heaven for it—heaven as described in her father's sermons. It was another of life's little ironies that her lot should be cast in a world of toys when she was too old to prefer it to Paradise.

Sadie and Ursus had used up the little time they had in warning her what she would have to expect in Toys.

"There are some punk fellers who'll try it on with you—pinch or tickle you as you pass by, and say things not fit for a dandy guy! like you to hear," the lion tamer had hurriedly explained. "But don't you stand for it. You don't have to! Just hand 'em along to me, and I'll make 'em sorry their fathers ever seen their mothers."

Sadie's story of girl life in Toyland was on the same lines, but with a different moral.

"Don't you tell tales out o' school, no matter what any of the chaps *do*," was her advice. "I kin hold my own, and I bet you can. You may be a looker, but you ain't anybody's baby doll. If a feller calls you 'childie' or 'sweet lamb' or tells you you're the peacherino in the peach basket, don't you answer back, but just smile and wend your ways. If he goes so far as to put his arm around your waist or take a nip with his nails out of your arm or hip, why, then you can land him one on the napper if nobody's lookin'. But all the same, the chaps mostly ain't so black at heart. They just try to decorate their gray lives a bit, and if those sort of things didn't happen to me once or twicet a day, why I'd be discouraged and think I'd lost my fatal beauty."

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For some subtle reason, however, “chaps” did not pinch or tickle Win or slip arms around her waist. One confided to another that he guessed there was nothing “didding” in that direction, and he’d as soon make love to the Statue of Liberty as an English Maypole; which was as well, for from the first moment of her entrance on the scene, the lion tamer kept his eyes open. There were all sorts and conditions of men in Toys, but he was among them as a giant among pygmies; and even if the ex-ship’s steward, the ex-trolley driver, the conjurer out of a job, and the smart young men who had been “clerking since they were in long pants,” had wished to try their luck with Win, Earl Usher would have shown them the wisdom of turning their eyes elsewhere.

The news soon ran round Toyland that “Winsome Winnie” was Usher’s girl. The male “assistants” did no worse than call her by her Christian name (they must have caught it from Sadie), and that was no cause of offence to girl from man in a department store. Every girl in a department shared by men was “Kitty” or “Winny,” “Sadie” or “Sweetie,” while the men expected to be addressed as Mr. Jones or Mr. Brown, except by their own particular “petsies.” Sadie was popular with all, even the “permanences,” who considered themselves above the “holiday extras.” The ex-steward, a good-looking young German, had offered to get her a dandy place as stewardess when he felt ready to sniff salt water again, and though she wasn’t “taking any,” and often boxed his ears, she made “dates” with him for dance halls after business hours, especially one called Dreamland, which was too lovely for “wuyds.” There were movies, and you could dance till ’most morning. Real swell gentlemen, who wore red badges to show “they was all right,” came up and asked if they could “interdooce” other gents to you, in case you’d come in alone and didn’t have friends. But Sadie always did have friends.

The red-haired girl, who had from the first been a haunting mystery for Win, was in the toy department. Her name was Lily Leavitt, and—as Sadie had already told Win—she was “chucking herself” at Earl Usher’s head. At first Miss Leavitt “lamped” Miss Child “something awful.” But on the English girl’s third Toy day a thing happened which converted the enemy into a friend—an all too devoted friend.

It was now so near Christmas that in the department devoted to toys and games you could not have placed a sheet of foreign notepaper between mothers (with a sprinkling of aunts and grandmas) unless you wanted it torn to pieces before you could count “One!” Children were massed together in a thick, low-growing underbrush, and of their species only babies were able to rise, like cream, to the top. The air, or rather the atmosphere (since all the air had been breathed long ago), was to the nerves what tow is to fire. Nobody could be in it for ten minutes without wanting to hit somebody else or push somebody else’s child, little brute! out of the way.

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What with heat, the rage for buying, impatience to get in and impatience to get out, the fragrance of pine and holly decorations, the smell of hot varnish and hot people and cheap furs, the babble of excited voices and shrieks of exhausted children, it was the true Christmas spirit. Peter Rolls's store in general, and the toy department in particular, were having what would be alluded to later in advertisements as an "unprecedented success."

Before Win came the folding chairs for "assistants" had all been broken or out of order. But (no doubt, said Sadie) because of some lingering suspicion that she might, after all, be an anti-sweat spy, the springs or hinges were mysteriously repaired throughout the department. By law any girl could sit down. By unwritten law she mustn't, yet there were the chairs as good as gold and fresh as paint. They were even pointed out to Win, but in the whirl of things the moment after she forgot their very existence and never had time to remember it again.

That third day in Toys was the most appalling she had known of all the long, wild days at Peter Rolls's since coming in as an extra holiday hand. Dozens of customers clamoured for her at once. Each female creature seemed to have as many hands as Briareus, all reaching for things they wanted, or gesticulating and brandishing money, or snatching for change. If each distracted girl had had half a dozen highly trained astral bodies with which to serve these terrible ladies, it would not have been enough. More ladies would have come.

Yet (Win noticed with wondering admiration) some of the girls, those most experienced and less easily rattled, did find opportunities to polish their nails and pat their hair. They would turn as if to find something "in stock," stoop quickly, taking advantage of the crowd behind the counters, snatch out of their stockings tiny mirrors and bags of powder or rouge, and "fix themselves," while their anxious customers supposed they were diving for a toy. These were the girls who kept their own perfumed soap and scent bottles in their lockers and could afford becoming hats, whether or no they had money to buy new underclothes and stockings when the old ones gave out.

Win, however, had neither experience enough nor desire to find time for personal matters. She gave her whole soul to her work and wore that pleasant Christmas smile which floorwalkers wish to see on salesladies' faces. But her smile was only skin deep. She had never liked her sister women less—cross, silly, snapping, inconsiderate things, strutting and pushing about in skins and plumes of animals far more agreeable and beautiful than themselves! Dangling all over with poor little heads of dead creatures, just as if they were moving butcher shops, and apparently without a sense of humour to tell them what idiots they looked.

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Yes, idiots! That was the word. And if they had enough humour to put on a thumb nail, *could* they wear the stick-out and stick-up ornaments on their hats they did wear, to prod each other's eyes? No, they couldn't! And what with feathers standing straight out behind, and long corsets down to their knees, they could never lean back against anything, no matter how tired they were. So, what with tight dresses and high heels and thin silk stockings and low shoes and blouses on winter days, no wonder men wouldn't let them have the vote!

Win turned from an incipient suffragette into a temporarily venomous woman hater when a customer made her show nine dozen dolls, and then minced away saying that Peter Rolls never did have anything worth buying. Another patronizingly bestowed five cents upon Win for her "trouble" after making her change three toys bought yesterday and taking half an hour over it. Altogether, when Winifred Child happened to think of Mrs. Belmont's building with the great figure of a woman falling down the front of it, she would have liked the statue to drop to earth with a crash.

Once in a while, contriving to pass near, Ursus tried to whisper a word of encouragement:

"You're a Wonderchild, you are! Say, it don't spoil your looks bein' tired. You're the picture postal, you are! Never you mind these dames. Say the word and we'll make up with a large time to-night. I'll blow you through all the best movies and stake you to an ice-cream, soda. Do you get yes?"

Despite his well-meant solicitude, however, Win's vitality was at an exceedingly low ebb toward five o'clock in the afternoon of the third day. There had been no time to go out for an alleged luncheon and a breath of fresh air. She had eaten nothing since her breakfast of hot chocolate at a soda fountain, save a poached egg in the employees' restaurant, and, as Sadie said, it wasn't safe to accept an egg from the Hands unless you'd met the hen socially and knew her past. Since four o'clock the exile had been thinking passionately of England, with its millions of women sitting down—actually sitting down!—to tea. And then, suddenly, a man pushed aside a female thing who was being cross because she couldn't find a doll that said "Papa" and "Mama" in German.

"As you can't get what you want, madam, I'm sure you won't mind my taking your place," apologized a cheerful voice. "Madam" was so dumfounded that she gave way. And Win, thankful for a change of sex in her customer, had put on her polite saleslady air before she realized that she was face to face with Jim Logan, her motoring acquaintance of the park.

"Howdy do?" he inquired, and hastily added: "I want a doll. I don't care whether she can talk German or not. Though I do want a little conversation—with somebody."



Money could not be lost to the house of Rolls because one of its female servants wished to snub an admirer. Mr. Logan was even better dressed than when Win had seen him before. He looked rich enough to buy Peter Rolls's star doll, price five hundred dollars, with trousseau. Nevertheless Miss Child determined to outwit him.

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"What kind of a doll?" she asked in a business-like tone, showing no sign of recognition. "For a small girl or a large girl? And about what price do you wish to pay?"

"Doll for a middle-sized girl," replied the customer, his twinkling eyes on the young woman serving him. "I like large girls best, girls exactly your size and age, twenty at most, and warranted to look seventeen if given a day's rest and a pretty hat and a supper at Sherry's—with the right man. I don't mind how much trouble I take looking for a doll any more than I mind the trouble of looking for a girl. This is a little sister of mine who has to have a doll. I like other men's sisters better, but——"

"I think I know just what you want," said Win briskly. "If you'll be good enough to wait here half a minute; I'll see that you get it."

Like a flash she was off, looking for Sadie. But Sadie was too far away. Win didn't want the redoubtable Tobias to scold her for neglecting customers, as she had heard him scold Lily Leavitt the day before, when Lily was trying to flirt with Earl Usher. Close by was Miss Lily Leavitt herself, looking bored to the verge of extinction by an old lady who wished advice in choosing five presents for five grandchildren. "Miss Leavitt," Win whispered, "would it be possible for you to take my man, who wants a doll for a middle-aged sister—I mean, middle-sized—and let me attend to your customer?"

Miss Leavitt threw a green-eyed glance at the man indicated, and said: "Ginks! Ye-h!" as quickly as she could draw breath.

The immediate and brilliant success of the stratagem was as reviving to tired Win as the encounter in the park had been. Her splendid vitality came bubbling to the surface again, and she showed such an interest in selecting the five grandchildren's presents that the old lady thanked Providence for the exchange. No time, no trouble, was too much, and grandma joyously wallowed in layers of toys produced for her inspection.

Now and then, when the old lady was choosing between an aeroplane and a train of cars, or a schoolroom and a Noah's ark, Win took an eyelash-veiled look at Miss Leavitt and her customer. He had apparently bought one doll, veiled like a harem woman, and was hesitating over another. The grandmother of five was not the only person needing advice, it seemed. The brother of one middle-sized sister was evidently demanding it from Miss Leavitt.

In any case, their heads were close together over a Tango Tea doll who tried to look as if she had been dressed by Poiret. It stood to reason that a man might want a woman to tell him whether that was the sort of thing a middle-sized child would like, but though their heads were bent over the doll, their eyes turned occasionally toward Miss Child.

“Keep the change and buy yourself and your friends some little thing for Christmas,” Win heard Logan say at last when, discouraged by the interminable length of grandma’s visit, he had resigned himself to go away.

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The girl glanced involuntarily at Miss Leavitt's hand, which was clenched into a fist. In it was a crisp-looking new greenback on which at one end she thought she saw the word "Ten."

Ten dollars! The man had made Lily Leavitt a present of ten dollars, and she had accepted it! Would he have tried to do the same with *her*, or would he have attempted to be even more generous if she had not been chaperoned by the grandmother of five? Also, was it just the Christmas spirit, or had Lily done something special to earn the money?

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BIG BLUFF

Lily Leavitt's gratitude was immense. She was a changed girl from that moment. Not that she ceased to like Earl Usher, who awkwardly resented her overtures and was boyishly ashamed of them, but her jealousy seemed, after the handing over of Mr. Logan, to lose its bitterness.

She no longer glared and talked "at" Miss Child, asking if she "wore her hair that way for a bet," and "why some people wanted to take up all the room clerking in stores when they could get better money doing giantess stunts in a Bowery show?" Instead she did her best to make friends with Win and her smart little watchdog, Sadie Kirk.

She brought them presents of hothouse fruit and chocolates, which Win refused and Sadie nonchalantly accepted, wondering "where the Leavitt creature picked 'em up. They didn't grow on blackberry bushes, no fear. And *she* wasn't going to let 'em spoil!"

As the desperate days before Christmas raged furiously on, Win was still unable to guess Mr. Meggison's real motive for putting her into the toy department. Her duties were more exhausting than they had been downstairs. That suggested penance. On the other hand, they had more variety and amusement, for there were five hundred different kinds of toys to sell to five hundred different types of people. That suggested benignity.

Perhaps, thought Sadie, Meggison wanted to see how much the new girl could stand. Perhaps he wished to "sweat out of her" all the work of which she was capable, the full wage worth she could give to Peter Rolls before casting her aside forever.

Or—it was just possible that, instead of exciting resentment she had won his respect by "cheeking" him. That had been known to happen in the most unexpected, though now historic cases. And girls who had awaited their discharge had been promoted, mounting slowly higher and higher over the bodies of those who fell by the wayside, until they had become head buyers, receiving ten thousand dollars a year and a trip to Paris every summer.

In any case, Win liked Toys better than Blouses, though Mr. Tobias (whose hair “left off where it began,” and who wore his eyes in bags) was a very “different proposition” from Fred Thorpe, the kind and handsome floorwalker who loved Dora Stein, yet was fair to her rivals. If Tobias saw a young woman stop to breathe he came up and reminded her that this wasn’t a matinee—they weren’t having a party that day nor serving five-o’clock tea.

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The girls, too, were often rough in their ways and pushed each other rudely about. They were surlily suspicious sometimes and seemed temperamentally unable to trust one another, but they were good-natured at heart. "Snap and let snap" was the unwritten law in Toyland, and though they all squabbled among themselves, if a girl were ill or had bad news her companions were ready in an instant to help or console.

They mimicked Win and gave her the same nickname she had gained downstairs, "Miss Thank-you," "Beg-your-pardon," and "If-you-please." But soon she found herself popular, and saw the girls, and even the men, adopting the gentler ways she brought among them. They seemed half unconsciously to fall into the soft manner they made fun of, which was a score for Win. Besides, there was Cupid, and he alone, she thought, would have been worth the move from Blouses into Toys.

Cupid was an errand boy, employed to run with messages from one department to another; but, though in Toyland there were some dolls larger, there were none more beautiful than he. His real name happened to be Billy Slate, but he rejoiced in several others more appropriate such as "Bud," "Christmas Card," and "Valentine" That of "Cupid" was added to the list by Miss Child, who had more scientific, mythological knowledge of the youth in question than any one else at the Hands perhaps, though most of the others could boast a more intimate personal acquaintance with him in modern life.

Billy, *alias* "Bud," *et cetera*, was a permanent fixture at Peter Rolls's, having been in his present position for some time and possessing no ambition to better it, though he had reached the mature age of "twelve, going on thirteen." He had resisted the blandishments of all the prettiest girls in the store, but for some reason fell a victim to Miss Child at first sight; perhaps because she was English (his parents came from Manchester), or perhaps because she treated him, not like a little boy, but like a man and an equal. He adored her promptly and passionately, and she responded, out of which arose a situation.

Cupid sometimes received presents of violets or Malmaison pinks from admiring customers, gifts which he spurned with the weary scorn of a matinee idol for love letters, but had been willing to barter for sums varying from one cent to five, according to the freshness of the flowers. When Win drifted into his life, however, all tribute which Cupid received was laid upon her altar. He would take no money—her smiling thanks were worth more to him than the brightest copper coins from others—and an offer of candy was politely but firmly refused.

"Pooh! Miss Child, I can get all of that stuff I want, on my face, off the girls in the candy dep," he explained with a blase air. "You keep it for you and your friends, and I'll get you more. I'm tired of sweet things myself."

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And from that time on Win's attenuated meals were eked out by Cupid's presentation chocolates and marshmallows. Of the latter—a novelty to her—she and Sadie were very fond. They seemed nourishing, too, or, at all events, “filling,” and came in handy when you had allotted yourself only five cents for luncheon. As soon as Cupid learned his loved one's penchant for marshmallows he contrived to produce a few each day, even if he had to “nick” them when the “candy girls” weren't looking.

The morning of Christmas Eve (the day which, Win knew, would decide her fate at the Hands) Cupid appeared with a whole box of her favourites instead of the five or six crushed white shapes he generally offered in a torn bit of clean paper.

“Why, Cupid, how did you come by this gorgeousness?” asked Win, who had half a minute to spare in the luncheon lull.

“Don't you worry and get a wrinkle, kid,” replied the youth, who had permission to apply any pet name he pleased. “The stuff's mine, all right. And now it's yours. Unless you think I sneaked it. Then you can chuck it away, box and all. See?”

“Of course I don't think you sneaked it. You wouldn't do such a thing. But—ought I to take it? That's the question.”

“‘It's foolish question 786245,’” quoted Cupid with his weariest sneer. “I'm the guy what put the nut in cokernut! I guess there'll be more where this come from in the sweet by and by.”

Win eyed him anxiously. Now where had she heard that quotation about the “foolish question?” Why, it was a slang phrase of Mr. Logan's. He had used it only that morning, about half an hour earlier, in gay, bantering conversation with Miss Leavitt. He “blew in,” as he called it, nearly every day now to buy something more for his “little sister's Christmas tree,” something that he had forgotten yesterday, or to inquire earnestly after the sale of a mechanical frog, which he claimed as his own invention and patent. He had never succeeded in getting Win to serve him, but he was as free to look at her as a cat is free to look at a king.

Apart, however, from telling glances which Miss Child never seemed to see, Mr. Logan appeared quite satisfied with the attentions of Miss Leavitt or Sadie Kirk, who had waited upon him once or twice when Lily was not available.

Suddenly an idea flashed into Winifred's head.

“Did a man give you this box for me?” she inquired.

“Ain't I man enough?” Cupid tried bluff to hide a flush that mounted to his yellow curls.

“Answer me. You *must*.”



"Ain't you some chicken to go on askin' silly questions about a good thing? You just take it, kid, and be thankful"

"I can't, Cupid. I thought you liked me."

"You bet I do, sweetie."

"Then you wouldn't want to cheat me about such a thing, would you? I'm fond of you, Cupid, and we're friends, so I can accept presents from *you*. But I don't take them from strange men, and I should hate to feel you cared little enough for me to play such a joke. It would get me misunderstood."

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Flattered by this appeal to and acceptance of his manhood, Cupid confessed.

"Well, don't have the nasty old stuff, then," said he. "I thought I was doin' you a good turn. Thought gells liked strange men makin' 'em presents. The feller said 'twould be good business for you as well as me. And he tipped me fifty cents to pass you on the box. Suppose I must hand it back to him now."

"Do, Cupid dear," urged Win. "But you shan't lose by that. I know you meant no harm, and I'll give you fifty cents myself when I get my pay."

"What kind of a jay do you take me for?" snorted Cupid. "Men don't accept no lucre from ladies where I live. I'll go chuck the guy back his marshmallers and his dirty money, since you put it that way, my baby doll."

"Where is he? Waiting for you somewhere to hear the news?"

Cupid tossed his curls in the direction of the moving staircase, which in Toyland was known as the "Oscillator." A bored-looking youth was stationed officially at the top in order to catch any ascending lady who might threaten to fall; but as only the oldest and frailest ever did so, his bored expression had become chronic.

"Chap's down at the foot o' that," confessed the boy. "But say, won't you just look and see if there's a note under the cover? Maybe he's slipped in a Christmas gift of a hundred-dollar bill or a diamond tiarey."

"I've no curiosity," said Win. "You may tell your friend that, and——"

"Oh, I know! Tell him he'd darned better not try the same snap again."

"Yes," laughed Win. "Exactly."

Cupid darted away with the box, striding down the "osculator" as it came rolling up, a feat forbidden. But the boy was a law unto himself and was seldom scolded. When he had gone Win wished that she had thought to ask how the man had found out her liking for marshmallows. But perhaps he had invited a suggestion from Cupid. Or the marshmallows might be a coincidence.

She did not for an instant doubt that the would-be giver was Mr. Logan, and she half hoped there was a note inside the box, in order that he might feel the mortification of getting it back unopened. She hoped, also, that the disappointment might be a lesson which Mr. Logan would take to heart, and—unless he were prepared to transfer his attentions to Miss Leavitt or some one else equally ready to receive them—that he would not again invade the busy land of toys.

An hour later, however, he returned and loitered about, ostentatiously waiting until Miss Leavitt should be free to serve him. Win was showing dolls to a fussy woman who could not be satisfied with the most beguiling porcelain or waxen smile. At last, having looked at several dozens, she flounced away, announcing that she would go to Bimgel's. This threat, being uttered in a voice intentionally shrill, was overheard by the hovering floorwalker, Mr. Tobias.

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He had never yet had occasion to scold No. 2884; and, as a matter of fact, had noted her as a “lively proposition.” He had seen that if 2884 had a few minutes to spare, she usually occupied them, not in polishing her nails or talking about last night’s dance, as not a few of the girls did, but in “looking over stock,” peeping into boxes, and peering into the background of shelves in order to see for herself what was available without having to question salespeople who had been longer in the department than she.

This was the sure sign of a “winner”; and besides, 2884 had the right way with customers. She kept her temper, even with the most irritating “lemons.” Her charming enthusiasm about the toys and her knowledge of their mechanism (when they had any) often hypnotized customers into buying expensive things they had not intended to take. With remarkable quickness she had picked up slang danger signals by which one “assistant” can warn another of impending trouble.

She understood the warning cry of “ishra ankra” for a “crank,” and could give the pencil taps telegraphing from counter to counter that a notorious “pill” or an “I’ll-come-back-again” was bearing down on the department. She seemed to know by instinct when she could offer to send a toy C.O.D. for a stranger without fear of “cold pig”—having the thing returned unpaid—and she could give enough of her own vitality to a tired woman to make her want to buy.

All these virtues Mr. Tobias had discerned in 2884, and with such heart as he had, he admired her. He intended, if she went on as she had begun, to “set the good word going” which would reach those “at the top.” But now, at a moment when he happened through acute indigestion to be in a particularly fretful mood, he believed that he had found out the “bright girl” in a grave fault.

It was too late to inveigle the lost client back, but while Win was hastily replacing dolls in boxes before taking another customer, Mr. Tobias pounced. “Why did you let that lady go without showing her any of our best dolls?” he inquired, angling for guilt in her soul’s depths with a fishhook glare.

“I showed her everything of the price she wanted, and even some a little higher,” 2884 excused herself.

“What about the doll you all call ‘Little Sister?’” Tobias threw out the question as if it were a lasso. “I hear you’ve said that you won’t part with that one if you can help it.”

Win grew pink, though she firmly gave him back look for look. Little Sister was her favourite doll, and it was an open secret that Miss Child didn’t wish to sell it unless she could be sure of finding it a suitable and happy home. In fact, she hated the thought of a sale. Many Teddy bears and other interesting personalities she had learned to like, and to miss when they went the way of all good Teddy animals; but Little Sister she loved, and to barter that adorable sunny head, those laughing brown eyes and dimples,

for money seemed almost as bad as the auctioning of a child in the slave market. If she had had twenty dollars to play with she would have bought the doll for herself. As it was, she had to plead guilty to Mr. Tobias's charge.

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She changed her look of self-defence to one more deprecating yet half mischievous; not the look of a scolded girl to an accusing floorwalker, but that of charming young womanhood to man.

"I'm so sorry," she said. "I didn't forget; but I felt sure that lady wouldn't spend twenty dollars for a doll. And I *know* I can find a better—I mean, I know I can get some one to buy it."

"I'll buy it," said Mr. Logan, stepping up.

This time he had safely caught his tantalizing rainbow trout, which had not a chance even to wriggle. There was 2884 without an excuse in the shape of another customer, and there was Tobias, with whom, on the strength of the alleged "invention," Mr. Jim Logan had already scraped acquaintance.

The eyes of the girl and the man met. Logan saw that Miss Child had already guessed what he meant to do, or that she thought she had. But he believed that he had a card up his sleeve whose presence even her sharp wit had not detected. He looked forward joyously to the scene about to begin.

"Get the doll I spoke of and show it to this gentleman," commanded Mr. Tobias, lingering to see that he was obeyed, for there was that in the flushed face of 2884 which told him she was capable of a trick.

Little Sister lived in a large, open-fronted box lined with blue silk and fluffy lace, in a desirable but not too conspicuous (Win had seen to that!) corner of a shelf devoted entirely to dollhood. There she stood now, the sweet, smiling child, the image of the ideal two-year-old baby which every girl would like to have for her own "when I'm married."

In reaching up her hands to take down the box Win hesitated. Next but one was another doll, not unlike Little Sister to the casual eye, especially the casual eye of a mere man. Its dress was also white; its hair was of much the same gold, though not quite so radiant; its eyes were as brown, if more beady; and it was larger, more elaborately gowned, therefore more expensive. If Mr. Tobias recognized the difference, would he not praise rather than blame the saleswoman, since instructions were to force high-priced articles on customers whenever possible?

Win darted a cornerwise glance at Tobias to see if he were suspiciously watching her. He was, with the expression of a cloud about to emit a flash of forked lightning. Little Sister must be sacrificed!

Just then, as Win reluctantly placed the box on the counter for Logan's twinkling inspection, Cupid went by on one of the endless errands which, as he said, "kept him



jerking up and down all day like a churn.” He knew Little Sister, for had not his beloved “Kid” ruffled his feelings by remarking on a likeness between her pet doll and himself? *Infra dig* as was the comparison, he had forgiven it when the Kid explained her affection for the type. Now that Fresh Guy who had nearly “got him disliked” for fifty cents was going to buy the doll!

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Cupid “spotted” the trick at once and saw its cleverness. The boy “made big eyes” at Win as he stumped past, and wondered whether she “was fly enough to catch on” to what he wanted them to say.

She was not. At that moment, when she found herself outwitted by Logan, Cupid’s big hazel eyes and yellow head seemed irrelevant.

“The price is twenty dollars,” she announced mechanically. These were the first words she had uttered to Logan since passing him on to Miss Leavitt the day of his first appearance in Toyland.

“That’s all right,” said her smiling customer. “Rather cheap for such a handsome doll, isn’t it? I think the young person I intend to give it to will be pleased, don’t you?”

“I can’t say, I’m sure,” returned Miss Child with aggravating primness, her eyes cast down.

“Why, you might give me your advice!”

The glare of Mr. Tobias was turned upon her again, like a two-dollar electric torch.

“It’s quite one of our prettiest dolls,” she admitted under the searchlight.

“Good! I’m glad you think so. Well, here’s the money, all in small bills, I’m afraid. Would you mind just counting it over? I’ve got on my gloves.”

She had to take the money from him, which gave him a chance to touch her hand, and he made the most of it. If Mr. Tobias saw what was going on, he ignored it tactfully, for the great thing was to keep a good customer at any price. If the price were a flirtation, why all the better for the girl, provided the man were chump enough to give her a good restaurant dinner now and then. Peter Rolls had to think of his dividends, since he and his manager were not in business for their health, and to make them satisfactory salesfolk had to be got cheap. It was “up to” the girls to take care of themselves. What they did out of business hours, Peter Rolls and Mr. Tobias did not care and didn’t want to know.

No. 2884 required the address, which Mr. Logan seemed eager to give.

“Write clearly, please,” he gayly commanded. “Miss—Winifred—Child. And now the number of the house. I know it as well as my own.”

“I can’t accept this,” she said, not taken by surprise, because she had been sure all along of what he meant. Only it came as a slight shock that he should have found out her whole name and the street and house where she lived.

“But see here,” argued Logan, still in the low tone to which both voices had fallen, “I bought the doll for you when I heard you liked it. Why not? No harm in taking a doll from a friend.”

“You’re not a friend,” she broke in.

“I want to be. What will that floorwalker chap say if Little Sister is thrown back on Peter Rolls’s hands? It might get you into trouble.”

“I can’t help that,” Win was beginning desperately, when Earl Usher came hurrying up from the other end of the department, where he had been selling automatic toy pistols.

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"Excuse me, Miss Child," said he briskly, "but that doll is sold. I ought to have marked it, but forgot. My fault. While you was away to lunch it happened. The purchaser is going to look in to-night, between six and six-thirty, to pay and take the parcel away."

Mr. Tobias, hearing this announcement, came bustling into closer earshot again.

"Very remiss—very remiss not to have marked the doll as sold," he sputtered. "I don't think we can let the deal stand. *This* gentleman has offered to purchase in good faith, and here's his money. Your customer may as like as not go back on the bargain."

"He won't," said Ursus firmly. "It's a man. He's often here doing business. He'll be awful mad, and we'll lose him certain sure if we throw him down like that. I'll be responsible."

"You!" sneered Tobias, impressed nevertheless. "Why, you ain't more than a ten-dollar man, if you're that. This doll costs *twenty* dollars."

"I know, and I don't pretend to have saved up a million. But this mix-up is my fault, and the man was my customer, so I ought to stand the racket. Look here," and he proudly drew forth from some inner pocket on his enormous chest a handsome gold watch destitute of a chain. "Presentation," he announced. "You can see my name *and* the date. I've hocked this more'n once and got forty. Will you keep it till my customer turns up?"

"No," returned Tobias magnanimously. "If you're so sure of your man, I guess it's all right, and the sale'll have to stand. I'm sorry, Mr. Logan. But you see how it is. Can't one of our young ladies show you something else?"

"No, thank you, not to-day," said Logan, his long, sallow face red and the twinkle gone out of his eyes. "It was Little Sister or nothing for me."

But though he gathered up his mass of greenbacks and stalked away with his smart hat on the back of his incredibly sleek head, Tobias was not greatly worried. The young swell was sweet on Child, and wasn't above a flirtation with red-haired Leavitt at the same time he was trying to spoon the English girl. He would come back, and soon—no fear!—to see how his invention was going.

"Lordy! but that was a big bluff I put up!" sighed Earl Usher to Cupid, as he slid his watch into the little boy's hand. "If Tobias had taken me, I'd 'a' bin up a tree! Sure you can get off, sonny?"

"Dead sure, for they'll be sendin' me out. They always do. I'll manage the biz for you."

"Good Bud! You get a quarter for yourself, see?—for puttin' me on to the job in time."

Mr. Tobias happened to be at a distance when Usher's customer came in and paid. But when the floorwalker inquired, at six-thirty—characteristically remembering a small detail in the terrible Christmas rush—the transaction had been completed and Little Sister was gone. Even Win had not seen the purchaser. Ursus had come in a hurry, his client's twenty dollars in hand, and had taken away the box that contained the doll. There had not even been time to ask if the man who had bought it looked kind and rich; but Win was too thankful to have been saved from her "scrape" with Logan to care passionately, after all, for Little Sister's fate.

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That night, a few minutes before ten o'clock, the employees of the various sections were lined up (men in one aisle, girls in another) to receive their pay envelopes and, in most cases where the "holiday extras" were concerned, their dismissals. Just in front of Winifred Child was Sadie Kirk, and Win knew that for her friend it was a question almost as important as that of life and death whether she were to stay or go.

After holiday time it was dreadfully difficult to get work, she not being the stuff of which stewardesses are made, and Sadie had more pluck than physical strength. Never had she entirely recovered "tone" after that attack of grippe which had lost her a good position, and the strenuous work during these weeks at Peter Rolls's had pulled her down. If she were to be "out of a job" things would be very bad for her; yet, as she moved up slowly, step by step, to the desk of destiny, she was reading a novel, calmly straining her eyes in the trying light. Over her shoulder Win could see the name of the book, "*Leslie Norwood's Wife*." Page after page Sadie turned, not with a nervous flutter, but with the regularity which meant concentration. She was bent on finding out what happened to *Leslie Norwood's* wife before the moment came to find out what was about to happen to Sadie Kirk.

She was near the end now. But was she near enough? Win began, in her nervous fatigue and anxiety on her own account, to wager with herself as to whether Sadie would finish that book before her turn came to take the fateful envelope. Would she? Would she not? "I bet she *will*!" Win thought. "If she does, it'll mean luck for us both!"

And she did. Just as the girl ahead of Sadie clasped her pay envelope with a slightly trembling hand, Sadie read the last word on the last page, shut the volume, and tucked it under her arm. Then she took her envelope and gave place to Win.

They were among the few lucky ones out of the extra two thousand. Most of the others received with their pay little printed slips signed "Peter Rolls," announcing that it was "necessary to readjust our force down to the normal at this time." Those dismissed were politely informed that their record was on file. Should vacancies occur where they might be placed in future, they would be "notified to that effect." Meanwhile they were thanked for loyal service. And—that was the end of them as far as Peter Rolls was concerned.

He still had use, however, for Winifred Child, Sadie Kirk, Earl Usher, and two or three other "live" workers in Toyland. They compared notes joyously; but despite her sense of relief, Win's heart was heavy for those left out in the cold. The girls who were disappointed hurried away in silence, but many of the men whom No. 2884 had not thought of as friends, scarcely as acquaintances, came up to say good-bye. They held out their hands and remarked that they were "glad to have known her."

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Some of her ways and some of her sayings were pretty good, they guessed, and they wouldn't forget her, although they didn't suppose that they'd ever meet again. Suddenly Win realized that they had been kind and pleasant, so far as it had lain in their power, and she, staying on, would miss the faces that were gone. She choked a little over these men's appreciation of the difference between her "ways" and those of some other girls, and was half ashamed that it should surprise her.

"I expect I'll have to take to the sea again," sighed the ex-steward. "I wanted a little more time on land, but it ain't to be. Don't forget, you and your friend Sadie, that I can get you jobs on one of the big greyhounds."

"What a Christmas Eve!" Win said to herself aloud, as she almost fell into her room at eleven-thirty. "In half an hour more it will be Christmas, and I don't suppose there's one soul with a thought for me in all Europe or America!"

But on the ugly red cover (warranted not to betray dirt) of the rickety bed were two parcels—a big box and a little one. Somebody must have been thinking of her, after all!

Revived, she cut the strings on both boxes and opened the little one first, on the childlike principle of "saving the best thing for the last."

"Lilies of the valley! Why, how lovely! Who could have sent them?" There was no name, and a question asked itself in Win's mind that spoiled all her pleasure—but only for a moment. She unwrapped the big box, and on the cover (which looked curiously familiar) she read, evidently scrawled in furious haste, with pencil: "From Ursus to Lygia, with respectful regards and wishes for a merry Christmas. Also please accept lilies."

(Miss Leavitt had testified her admiration for the blond giant by sending him a box of her name flowers, bought with some of the "change" Mr. Logan had told her to keep. The admired one had promptly "passed them on." But Win did not know this, and he didn't see why she ever should. Anyhow, flowers were flowers!)

The girl was so pleased to know that the lilies came from Ursus, not another, that she could almost have kissed them—but not quite. Then, in her relief, she lifted the cover of the large box and gave a cry which was not unlike a sob. There, in silk and lace, with eyes closed and smiling lips, lay Little Sister.

"Oh, his watch—his presentation watch!" she gurgled. And sitting on the bed, with the great doll in her arms, she let fall on the unresponsive head a few tears of grief and gratitude. She understood everything now, even the "big bluff."

What had been or had not been in Miss Leavitt's pay envelope Win did not know until the morning after Christmas, that strangest Christmas of her life, which she spent

resting quietly in bed. Returning next day to Toyland, where everything looked half asleep in the early gloom, she saw the glitter of red hair.

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"Hello!" said Miss Leavitt. "Here we are again! Did you have a merry——"

She stopped short, her eyes fastened on a tiny spray of pearly bells half hidden in the folds of the other's black silk blouse. For an instant she forgot what she had meant to say, gasped slightly, closed her lips, opened them as if to speak, shut her teeth together with a snap, swallowed heavily, and went on where she had broken off—"Christmas?"

Win thanked her, said "Yes," and asked politely how Miss Leavitt had spent her holiday. This gave the girl with red hair time to control the temper which accompanied it. But if, in that brief interval of uncertainty, she had burst out with the fierce insult which burned her tongue, never again could she have ventured to claim friendship with Winifred Child. And if she had lost her right to claim it, all the future might have been different for one of them.

CHAPTER XIX

"YES" TO ANYTHING

At last it was July, and New York felt like a vast hermetically sealed Turkish bath into which all were free to enter, but once in, must remain, as there were no exits and no closing hours. Most of the people you read about in the Sunday supplements (except those who commit murders and such things) had escaped to the sea or mountains before the Turkish bath opened for the summer. But there is never anything in Sunday supplements about the assistants in department stores, for they are fashionable only in restricted districts, and they do not commit murders and such things, though they might occasionally enjoy doing so.

It had been, said the newspapers, an exceptionally gay winter and spring. Seldom had there been so many beautiful and important debutantes. Lovely girls and admiring men had decorated each page of the calendar, like rose petals. There had been cup races for automobiles, and football and baseball matches for men and girls, and other matches less noisy but almost as emotional. There had been dinners and balls, first nights at the opera, Washington's Birthday week-end house parties in the Adirondacks, and Easter church parades for those who had not gone abroad or to Florida. Among those who chose Florida (there had been a great deal about this in the Sunday supplements) were Miss Rolls and her brother. Ena had collapsed under an alleged attack of grippe after Lord Raygan went away and his engagement with Portia (*alias* "Pobbles") Gregory—the rich Miss Gregory—was announced. Some people were mean enough to say that it was not grippe but grief which laid Ena low in the height of the season; and if there was anything in this gossip, the grief would have been greater had Miss Rolls known that she herself was (indirectly) responsible for the happy ending of Raygan's romance.

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A letter written by Lady Eileen while at Sea Gull Manor to her cousin Pobbles had (so Pobbles confessed later) suddenly opened the lady's eyes to her own true feelings. She began to wonder if Rags had loved her "for herself," after all. And, anyhow, she didn't want a girl like Ena Rolls to get him. So she met the ship on which Lady Raygan, Rags, and Eileen returned to Ireland, in order to "make a dead set" at the man she had once discarded. An engagement was the consequence, and in the first letter Rags wrote to thank his kind host and hostess on Long Island, he asked for congratulations.

It was the same day that Ena began to sneeze so dismally that the only place for her was bed. And when she could leave its seclusion the next only place was Palm Beach. She said she would die unless she could go to Palm Beach, so mother took her, and Peter took them both, not to speak of Ena's maid.

He did not wish to play courier. To turn his back on New York interfered seriously with his plans and half plans and hopes and half hopes. But father would not go, and mother and Ena could not without a man. Peter was the only one available at the moment, and it was April when Ena felt well enough to face the North again. By this time the news of her engagement to the Marchese di Rivoli had been copied from all the principal papers into the little papers, and even the most confirmed cats must be acknowledging far and near that to lose an earl and gain a marquis is a step up in life.

It was, of course, not ideal that the Marchese di Rivoli had no remaining family estates of which his *fiancee* could talk, and there were creatures ready to swear not only that he had come to Palm Beach to pick up an heiress, but that the penniless princess who introduced him to Miss Rolls had received a commission. Still there are always family estates in the market, and where a coronet is there is gossip also. Only the cat tribe start or believe it, and even cats purr to a *marchesa*, lest they may want to visit Italy next year.

In the Turkish bath which was New York that July, Peter Rolls's department store was one of the hot rooms. Miss Rolls did not come over from Long Island to choose her trousseau there, as a badly informed newspaper announced that she would do. She went to London and Paris instead, because it was cooler as well as smarter to put the Atlantic between her and "New York with the lid off." She ran over with the divorced Italian princess who had made her acquainted with the Marchese di Rivoli, and mother and Peter were released.

No doubt other big stores were as hot or hotter than Peter Rolls's that July; but it seemed to Winifred Child that the Tropic of Cancer might have breezes which the Hands missed. Those of the salespeople who did not look as if at any moment their eyes might come out and all their veins burst, were living advertisements for Somebody's Anti-Anemia Mixture before the mixture was taken. Win was of the latter type. She had become so pale and thin that Sadie Kirk compared her to a celery stalk. Sadie herself had, according to her own criticism, "shrunk and faded in the wash," but

the two girls had now few chances of “passing remarks” on each other’s appearance, for, though Sadie was still in Toys, Win had been put into Mantles.

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This in itself was a solution of the Meggison mystery. The girl's "cheek" had frightened the would-be "dog" and reminded him that a model superintendent must never lose a born saleswoman. But he had not sent for Win again, and Gloves were not for such as she.

Sadie, having "sauced" her landlady, found it wise to change her quarters. She had taken a room in an apartment house two blocks removed from her former home, and Win, not being able to afford a "flit," remained at the old address. At first, when her pay was increased by two dollars a week, she had intended to save and follow Sadie. One had, however, to live mostly on ice-cream soda in the hot weather, which cost money. Besides, even had she possessed the dollars, she lacked energy of late. It was easier to keep on doing what one had done than do anything new. And, in any case, nothing that one did seemed to matter.

As for the lion tamer, Peter Rolls's shop saw him no more. He had "got his nerve back" and had returned to lion taming, not because the old life drew him irresistibly, but because there was far more money in dominating real lions than in selling Teddy ones.

In the birth of Earl Usher's adoring love for Win the demise of the animal who had "died on him" was forgotten. "Nerve" and courage and love and the desire to conquer were one in his heart. When a "good summer job at Coney" came his way, through an old friend in the "show business," he took it.

Reluctant as he was to leave Peter Rolls, which meant leaving "his girl," a change of position offered the only hope of obtaining her in the end. And despite every discouragement from his Lygia, Ursus did secretly cherish this hope. As she no longer lived in Toyland when he went, the wrench of parting was not what it would have been to leave her at the mercy of any man who could afford to buy a doll. There was no excuse for men to "butt into" Mantles, unless accompanied by female belongings, and thus accompanied, their sting was gone.

At Coney Island Ursus was earning thirty dollars a week instead of ten, and was encouraged by crowds of admiring girls (who watched his performance and bought his photographs) to consider himself exceedingly eligible on that income. Many indeed made it plain to him that he would have been worth taking for his face, his muscles, and his spangled tights alone.

Sometimes on Sundays Sadie Kirk persuaded Win to "go to Coney for a blow." The crowd on the boats was alarming and on the beach when you got there, but the air was splendid, and poor Ursus beamed over his lions' heads with pride and pleasure. These few excursions, however, had been Winifred's only outings, except a play or two seen from a gallery, since she came to make her fortune in America; and as each day the heat pressed more heavily upon her with its leaden weight, she felt that she would

collapse and “do something stupid” if she could not have a change. Anything—anything at all that was different and would break the monotony!

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Lily Leavitt, who was in the Mantles, too, had never ceased to be friendly, and had often invited Win to go out with her in the long summer evenings, but always in vain, month after month, until one day in mid-July, when the heat wave had surged to its record height. It just chanced—if there be such a thing as chance—to happen on the day when the girl's craving for a change had become an obsession, almost an illness.

It was a little past noon, and the seniors in Mantles had gone out to lunch. They were rather by way of being aristocrats, these seniors, for the mantle department, Jewellery, and some others worked "on commission." Salaries were no larger than elsewhere, but a handsome percentage was paid on sales; and those tigers and tigresses who were strong and ferocious enough to grab meat from under their weaker comrades' noses did extremely well. The Mantles girls who had gone out were champion tigresses. They could afford to eat at something like real restaurants, and as there was nothing worth rushing back for, they would not return until the last moment.

Lily Leavitt, who was qualifying as a tigress, had just snatched a sale which ought to have been Win's, but that did not count in their private relations. It was business, and Win was "welcome to play the same game"—if she could. Only, there was no danger that she would. Win was not of the stuff from which tigresses are made, and was incapable of seizing for herself anything—be it a seat in the subway or the chance to sell a mantle—which some other human creature was striving to get.

Win bore Lily no grudge for having "bagged" her customer and gained in three minutes three dollars which should rightfully have found their way to her purse. She listened without resentment to the description of a hat which Lily intended to buy with the money—a "sticker" it had proved in Hats, and was now marked down to half price. Lily had had an eye on it for some time, and would, of course, get it "ten per." off.

"I bought me a sweet party dress last week—a bargain," Miss Leavitt went on, seeing that Win had no intention of "slanging" her for what she had just done. "It came outta commission on that green chiffon evening cloak and that white yachtin' I snapped off Kit Vance when she was daydreamin' and let me catch onto her customer like you done just now. Things is down to no price this hot weather. It's an ill wind blows no one good, and now is us guyls' time to get a bit of our own. P.R. always manages to make his hay, rain or shine. And even with our ten per. off, it's forty per. profit for him. When you think there's two thousand folks forced to buy on the premises, you savvy what he squeezes outta us! If we do pick up a bargain, it's a rare chance. I wonder you don't hustle more'n you do and make enough com to buy yourself sumpin' nice. Your sheryt waists are the wuyst in the dep, if you don't mind my sayin' so, and the guyls speak of it. Now if you had a party dress to doll up in, I could give you the time of your life to-night."

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"Could you?" echoed Win, more in the desire to turn Miss Leavitt's attention from her "shirt waist" to something else than because she wished to hear about the great opportunity.

Miss Leavitt had offered her numerous opportunities of alleged entertainment, none of which, though glowingly described, had ever tempted her to acceptance. At first she had been afraid of Lily's fruit and chocolates and theatre tickets, which, like the marshmallows, might have come from Mr. Logan. But for the last three or four months, since the two girls migrated together into Mantles, Logan had been conspicuously absent. Apparently he had not invented a cloak as well as a toy! Win no longer connected Lily Leavitt's occasional invitations with him. Her refusals were prompted merely by a disinclination for Lily's society out of business hours and the conviction that her friends would be no more congenial than herself. Winifred now, however, particularly wished to show her companion that she bore no animosity for the filched commission, therefore she became loquacious.

"I don't need to spend my hard-earned dollars on a party dress, as it happens," she said. "I can save all my pennies for the hire of my typewriter, which is going to lead me from the Hands some day along the road to fortune. I've got the most gorgeous gown you can possibly imagine. I don't believe *Cinderella's* godmother could give her anything better. There's only one trouble. I shall never be invited to a party good enough for it."

"I've invited you to as swell a party as there could be in little old New York," boasted Miss Leavitt. "I ain't foolin'. That's straight. Honour bright, cross my heart."

"Oh, but you didn't invite me. You said you would if I had a dress. You've got only my word for that," Win reminded her.

"I meant to invite you all the same, dress or no dress," Lily confessed, "I'd o' lent you one. Have you really got something swell? If you have, now's your chance to show it off. It's an artist gives this party. I sit to artists sometimes, Sundays, for my hair. I guess you often seen it on covers o' magazines. This artist friend o' mine's the best o' the whole bunch."

"Man or woman?" Win wanted to know.

She expected the answer to be "man," but Lily did not seem to hear. Her face looked dreamy.

"It's the loveliest house where the party'll be," she said. "'Tain't the artist's own. It's some relation's that's lent it for the summer while they're away at the seashore. I bin there. It's in the Fifties, just off Fift' Av'noo. Tonight it'll be cool as snow, and everything'll be iced for supper. Iced consummay, chicken salad cold as the refrigerator,

iced champagne cup flowin' like water; ice-cream and strawb'ries, the big, sweet, red ones from up north, where they keep on growin' all summer, and lilies and roses from the country to give away to us when we go home."

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Win forgot the question that had not been answered. She seemed to see those strawberries and to smell the sweetness of roses and lilies in a house “as cool as snow.”

“Heavenly!” she sighed. “I didn’t remember there were such things in the world!”

“Well, come with me to-night and remind yourself,” coaxed Miss Leavitt. “You needn’t be afraid, because I said it was artists, to butt into some rowdy crowd. They’ll be as quiet and refined as mice. They’re more your kind than mine, I guess.”

“But who invites me?” Win made another bid for information.

“My artist friend said I could bring any one I wanted to bring, and I want to bring you. I don’t just know who all’ll be there, but I guess not many, and it’s a real swell house to see. You always refuse everything I ask you to, but I do think you might say yes this one time and show you’re not proud and stuck up. It’d do you good!”

“I believe it would, and I’ll go!” cried Win. She was in the mood to say “yes” to anything.

“Hully gee! That’s the best thing’s happened to me since the measles!” exclaimed Miss Leavitt jovially. “I’ll call for you at your place half-past nine this evening, so you can have a good rest before you begin fixin’ yourself up.”

“It’s an engagement,” said Win, with a kind of self-defiance.

She had wished for a change, “anything for a change,” and presto! her wish had been suddenly granted by fate. Rather spitefully granted, it would seem, because to go to a “party” with Lily Leavitt was the very last thing she would have chosen. And spitefully, also, as if to punish her own foolishness in wishing, she accepted such goods as the gods had mischievously provided.

“You’ve said yes, and now you must stick to it,” she told herself in preparation for a wave of regret, but to her surprise the day wore on and the expected tide of repentance did not set in.

The girl realized that she was looking forward, actually looking forward to the evening. It would be like walking wide awake into the Hall of Dreams to put on a dress beautiful enough for a princess, and eat ice-cream and big red strawberries in a house “cool as snow” instead of sitting in her hot bedroom practising on the hired typewriter or panting on her bed, dead to everything in the world except a palm-leaf fan.

When she had been a little girl, invited to children’s parties, it had not been of the slightest importance whether she liked the child or not. The party was the thing. Now history was repeating itself in her nature. The blank monotony of life and work had given back that childish eagerness for fun, no matter whence it came. She did not care whose ice-cream and strawberries she was going to eat, provided she got them and

they were good. Besides, it would be like finding an old lost friend to look into her mirror (it was cracked and turned one's complexion pale green, with iridescent spots; but that was a detail) and see a bare-necked, white-armed girl in evening dress.

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There was a new way of doing the hair which Win had noticed on a smiling wax beauty in Peter Rolls's Window-World and had dimly wished to try for herself. Only dimly, because if her hair were glossy and trim it suited those plain, ninety-eight-cent shirt waists better than the elaborate fashions affected by Lily Leavitt and one or two of the more successful tigresses who cheaply copied expensive customers. Now there was an incentive for the experiment and Win laughed at the eagerness with which she looked forward to the moment of making it, laughed patronizingly, as she might have laughed at a child's longing for Christmas.

"Anyhow, it's something that I *can* laugh," she thought, recalling, as she often did, her boast to Peter Rolls, Jr. "And I haven't cried yet!"

She had not guessed how vividly the sight of the Moon dress and putting it on would bring Mr. Balm of Gilead to her mind. But as she stood gazing into the greenish glass, with her hair very successfully done in the new way and the Moon gown shimmering night-blue and silver, it was as if Peter Rolls came and looked over her shoulder, their eyes meeting in the mirror.

Yes, she saw him for an instant as clearly as that. He was there. He was her friend, the nicest, most altogether delightful man she had ever seen; the one she knew best and needed most, though their actual acquaintanceship was but a few days old. The kind blue eyes were true and brave, and said: "I dare you not to believe in me, as I believe in you!"

Then the vision (it had almost amounted to that) was gone like a broken bubble. Win felt physically sick, as if the one thing worth having in the world had been shown her for a second, then suddenly snatched away forever.

The silvery sheen and the faint, lingering perfume of that Nadine model gown had woven a magic carpet of moonbeams and transported her back to the mirrored room on the *Monarchic* for an instant. But it was only for an instant. Then the Columbus Avenue bedroom, with its window open to the roar and rush of the "L," had her again, and made the Moon dress and the Moon-dress dreams seem ridiculously unsuited to life.

Win touched a switch which shut off light from the one unshaded electric bulb hanging like a lambent pear over her head. Then, palm-leaf fan in hand, she sat down in the blue summer darkness to await the coming of Miss Leavitt.

For the first time she repented her promise to go out. Monotony was preferable to the party as she pictured it—a silly, giggling crowd of crude young people among whom she, the stranger, would be like a muted note on a cheap piano. Should she stay at home, after all, and tell Lily that the heat had made her too limp to stir? It would be quite true. But no. If she stayed she would not have the courage to undress for a long, long time. She would just sit there in the dark by the window in the Moon gown, its

perfume surrounding her with the past, shutting her up, as it were, in the mirror room with Mr. Balm of Gilead who had never really existed.

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Yet, had he not? What had the eyes in the cracked glass said just now? Why shouldn't she believe them instead of Ena Rolls's dreadful hints? Why might not a sister, even with the best intentions, be mistaken about a brother?

These were exactly the sort of questions that were upsetting and altogether useless to ask one's self, and Win jumped up to turn on the electric light again. She *would* go with Lily Leavitt!

Five minutes later a taxicab—a real, live, magnificent, unthinkably expensive taxicab—stopped and chortled in front of the apartment house in which Mrs. McFarrell's flat was one of many. Heads flew out of windows, for the thing was unbelievable, and among other heads was Win's.

Instinct cried that the chortling was for her. The balcony where the rubber plants had died and mummied themselves, being scarcely more than a foot wide, she was able to see a face, crowned with red hair and white as a *Pierrette's* in the lights of the street, looking anxiously up from the cab window. Its expression implored the guest to hurry down, because each heart-throb meant not a drop of red blood, but several red cents. Win caught the message, and seizing the ancient though still respectable evening cloak which had spent months in a trunk with the "New Moon," she flew downstairs.

"What an extravagant creature!" she gasped, breathless when after a wasted sixty seconds at most the taxi was *en route*.

"I had a present from a gentleman friend," said Lily in a self-satisfied voice, adding hastily, in deference to Miss Child's "stuck-up primness," "a filopena present, to choose myself anything I liked with. I thought us bein' in party dress, and you sort o' tired out, a taxi'd be just about the best thing goin'."

This reduced Win to the necessity for gratitude, and after months of the "L," the subway, and the crosstown car, the girl could not help revelling in a taxi. She refused to be depressed by the gloomy spectacle of lower-class New York in the throes of a heat wave—pallid people hanging out of windows or standing at corners to be eased of their torture by the merciful spray from fire hydrants; barefooted half-naked children staring thirstily at soda fountains in bright, hot drug stores they could never hope to enter—every one limp, lethargic, glistening unhealthily with horrid moisture, all loathing themselves and indifferent to each other. Sometimes Win felt that these were her true brothers and sisters, the only ones who could understand, because they were the only ones who really suffered; but to-night she dared not think of them. If she did, because of what they endured she could not enjoy the ice-cream and strawberries in the snow coolness of the artist's borrowed house.

New York not being her own city, its different divisions lacked for her the meaning and importance they had for those at home; therefore she was disappointingly calm when

Lily made the taxi stop in front of a house only three or four doors off Fifth Avenue. Miss Leavitt had the fare ready, with a small tip for the driver, and the two were out of the cab, standing in the street, before Win noticed a thing that struck her sharply and quickly as being very strange.

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"Why!" she exclaimed, "we must have come to the wrong place. All these houses are shut. Their doors and windows are boarded up!"

CHAPTER XX

THE CLOSED HOUSE

"It's all right," said Lily. "Don't you remember I told you the house was lent to my artist friend by the folks who own it and who've gone away for the summer to the seashore? The front door and windows were boarded up, I guess, like they always are, before the house was lent. My friend lives in the back part, and the caretaker looks after everything, but it's awful nice. You needn't be afraid you're goin' to waste your grand dress. Say, it's some swell street, ain't it?"

Lily talked fast and slid an arm through Win's in the thin silk kimono cloak, encouraging her to mount the steps. But Win objected to being hustled. She paused to look up at the house front which—like all its neighbours except a big, lighted building at the corner, that had the air of being a club—had apparently been put to sleep for the summer months.

The dark-brown facades were expressionless as the faces of mummies. Smooth boards had been neatly fitted into the window frames and made to cover front doors. There seemed at first glance to be no way in, but as Winifred slowly ascended the steps of the fourth house from the corner, she made out the lines of a little door cut in the boards which protected the big one. There was no handle to break the smooth, unpainted surface of wood—old, well-seasoned wood which had evidently served the same purpose year after year—but there was a small, inconspicuous keyhole, and into this Miss Leavitt deftly fixed a key which she took from her hand bag.

"My friend sent me this," she explained, "to save us waiting, 'cause there's only one servant, and he might be busy. Say, this is real fun, ain't it?"

"It's—it's quite like a sort of adventure," Win answered "I had no idea the house would be shut up, or——"

"It'll make it all the cooler," said Lily. She had got the little door open, and the space between it and the house door it protected could be seen in the street lights, like a miniature vestibule. "Squeeze in and feel around till you find the electric bell," she went on. "Some one'll open the real door, and I can lock up behind us."

"Why lock up?" argued Win, hesitating. "Aren't there others coming?"

“My, yes, unless they’re all here. But it wouldn’t do to leave a cover-up door like this standing open. If the police happened along and saw, they’d think there was something wrong and make my friend a whole lot of bother.”

Win saw the force of this explanation, and stooping to pass through the low aperture, found herself close to a pretentiously carved portal. The electric bell revealed itself to groping fingers, and to her surprise a few seconds after she had touched it, without hearing a sound, the door opened.

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In the dimness of a hall or large vestibule the figure of a man loomed black against dark gray. Win could see of him only that he was tall and straight and prim, like a well-trained servant, and his voice was a servant's voice as he said: "Please be a little careful, miss, not to trip. We have to keep it rather dark here, but there's plenty of light inside. Let me show you through the hall."

Win thanked him, but turned inside the door to ask: "Aren't you coming, Miss Leavitt?" (They had never been upon Christian name terms.)

"Yes, I'm just turning the key," replied Lily. "Go along. I'll follow."

Win went on through the dusk, dimly seeing panelled walls. She heard the door shut sharply behind her and supposed that Lily had come in, but at the same instant another door opened ahead and a soft wave of rosy light flowed out.

"Walk in, if you please, miss," requested the tall servant standing attentive, and mechanically Win obeyed.

Lily Leavitt had not exaggerated—this was a "swell house," and "cool as snow." The room into which she had been ushered was a dining-room, and at first glance was all one rosy glow—walls, drawn curtains, thick, mossy carpet, brocade-upholstered furniture, lamps and candle shades. The table was a shining bunch of lilies in a garden of deep-red roses seen at sunset, and the glitter of silver and gleam of glass was a bright sprinkle of dewdrops catching the red western light.

It was so long since Win had been in a pretty room or had seen a charmingly decorated table that for a few seconds she lost herself in the sheer joy of beauty. The sunset-garden simile flashed into her mind and pleased her. She was glad that she had come. The guests might be uninteresting, of the Lily Leavitt sort, and the artists might be so called only by themselves. The room might be over-gorgeous by daylight, but it was beautiful thus lighted, with a rosy radiance from above, bringing out the whiteness of damask, the snow purity of camellias crowding a crystal bowl, and the ruby splendour of strawberries piled on their own leaves.

What a wonderful sight after months of the Hands restaurant and free lunches with five-cent chocolate in busy drug stores! Oh, yes, she was glad she had come, and she must look, look, look at this beautiful picture, so that she might remember its details and hold it before her eyes, like a delicately painted transparency, in front of future realities.

But it was in carrying out this intention, in taking in the details, that Win's heart suddenly bounded and then missed a beat. The table had two chairs drawn up to it. It was small and round, and on it only two places were laid.

Win turned her head and looked for Lily Leavitt. Lily was not there, neither was the tall, respectable servant. But a smiling man in evening dress was just coming into the room with the ingratiating air of one who is a little late for an appointment.

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"How do you do, Miss Child?" Jim Logan cordially inquired, holding out his hand. "This is mighty good of you!"

A thousand thoughts whirled after each other through the girl's head, like the mechanical horses on a circular toy race course, such as she had often sold at Peter Rolls's. Round and round they wildly turned for an instant, then began to slow down.

This house was closed for the summer. The front was boarded up, and perhaps the back windows also. No lights could be seen, and probably no sounds heard. Two places only were laid for supper. Lily, then, had gone—had always meant to go and leave her here, had been bribed to bring her and go. Oh, but it must have been a big bribe this time, for surely Lily Leavitt would never dare look her in the face again! One of them would have to disappear from the mantle department of the Hands. Was Logan giving Lily enough money to make up for a sacrifice of all those commissions, or did Lily think that after to-night she—Winifred Child—would never come back to Peter Rolls's?

As that question asked itself loud bells jangled in Win's head. She felt as if she were losing her senses. But no, she must not—must not do that. Never in her life had she so much need to keep them all as now, in this locked house, where she had no help to hope for save what her own wits might give, and no one could hear or see what happened to her except this smiling man and his well-trained servant. For all outside this was an empty house.

She steadied herself, the more readily because something in the narrow eyes twinkling into hers said that Jim Logan had expected her to scream and make a scene. Never until now had she imagined it possible to be afraid of him. In the park, when he had stopped his car to follow and speak to her, she had been a little startled, a good deal annoyed. Then, when Ursus had opportunely arrived to frighten him away as easily as the *Spider* frightened *Miss Muffet*, she had been impishly amused.

In Toys at Peter Rolls's she had been vexed, irritated, but never hotly angry. The young man's persistence had not seemed serious enough to call "persecution." She had rather enjoyed "shunting" him off upon Lily Leavitt, and thwarting him through Cupid and Earl Usher. It had never occurred to her that behind the unfailing smile and the twinkling gray eyes the brutal ferocity of the animal might lurk.

She had thought that he had forgotten her long ago and turned his attentions elsewhere. What girl, unless silly and Victorian, would be afraid of a dude who lived for the sleekness of his hair and the spick-and-spanness of his clothes? Yet now Win was afraid, and she did not think it was because she had suddenly become silly or Victorian. This aquiline-faced young man with the prominent jaw was looking at her as the primitive brute looks at the prey under his paws, and if he smiled and twinkled, it was but as the primitive brute might purr.

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Winifred thought of this, and she thought, too, that when the prey had presence of mind to feign sleep or death the brute was said not to kill, after all.

She did not put her hand into the hand that Logan held out, but neither did she turn to run from him. "This is quite a surprise," she remarked quietly.

"A pleasant surprise, I hope," he suggested.

"A sort of practical joke, I suppose," the girl said.

"Well, yes, that's just what it is," Logan smiled, evidently wondering at her calmness and not sure whether to take it as a good or bad omen. "It seemed to be the only way I could get you to accept any invitation of mine."

"Rather a high-handed way!" said Win, shrugging her shoulders. "Still—here I am. This seems to be a nice house. Is it yours?"

"It's my father's. We're all supposed to be somewhere else for the summer. But I run in sometimes. My servant looks after me. He's as devoted as the servants in books. I pay him to be. There's nothing I want done that he wouldn't do."

"He appears to have made you a very nice supper." Win's eyes rested on the table.

"Nothing could be too good for you. If I've got you here—well, sort of under false pretences—there'll be no false pretences about anything else now I *have* got you. There's a little surprise in those flowers by your plate. I hope you'll like it."

"A peace offering?" suggested Win lightly.

"Yes. And a love token. You know I've been in love with you, you bewitching thing, just madly in love, since that night in the park. I never rested till I saw you again at Peter Rolls's. And then I knew I couldn't rest until—"

"Wait!" exclaimed Win, putting out both hands to hold him off as he came close. "Wait—*please!*" She still spoke lightly. "I'm your guest. I quite understand that 'might makes right!' But there's another law—the law of hospitality, isn't there? This is—a great adventure. Let me get into the spirit of it before you say or do any more. Give me time—to breathe. Where may I put my cloak? Perhaps you've a long mirror somewhere? I want to see if I'm beautiful enough for my background."

Logan yielded to the hands which pushed him away. It charmed him that this tall, spirited creature was taking things in a debonair way. He thought it splendid that she should talk of an adventure and of entering into the spirit of it. If she had made a fuss and tried to escape and refused to eat supper with him, there would have been some pleasure in conquering, but not the same pleasure there would be in a jolly little supper

with a pretty girl who gayly acknowledged that the “joke was on her,” and then making love to her afterward.

Not that he quite trusted the strange creature yet. She might be like a kitten that submits to be petted while lying in wait for its chance to spring. But this kitten might lie in wait as long as it liked. The chance to spring wouldn't come. By and by the kitten would discover that fact if the hope were in its mind, for he meant business this time.



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"There's a room next door my mother and sister use for their boudoir," he said graciously. "It's full of long mirrors, and you can have all the electric light you want, but the furniture's covered up. The dining-room and my den are the only places that are shipshape, I'm afraid."

Logan walked out into the hall and threw open one of the doors that opened into it. "Here you are!" he announced, switching on a blaze of electric light that showed a small room shrouded in white covers. "The first thing you see is a life-size picture of yourself. I guess that's what you want."

"You have guessed right. You deserve a prize," Win answered.

In the lighted boudoir a mirror faced the door.

"Will you give me a few minutes to myself?" she asked. "I may just as well confess that this surprise of yours has—gone to my head a little, as your champagne probably will—when I drink it. The hot weather has been taking it out of me horribly, and I'm not very strong. If I may sit still for five minutes and shut my eyes and think, why—I'm sure I shall be a more amusing guest at supper."

Logan, who had touched the electric-light switch inside the door, stood on the threshold, barring the way. Win did not try to push past him, nor did she show any impatience, nor even eagerness. He stared her in the eyes as if to ask: "What trick do you hope to play, I wonder? Do you think I'm such a blamed idiot as to leave a way out open after all the trouble and expense I've put myself to on your account?"

But being perfectly sure that there was no way out, no trick in her power seemed worth worrying about—unless she had some melodramatic little bottle of poison concealed about her which she would drain and die, like the heroine of an old-fashioned play. He was certain that the brave, vital young creature who had seized his fancy would do nothing of the kind, however, and he felt that it was safe to humour her.

"You can even go to sleep on the sofa, if you like, provided you'll promise to dream of me," he said, "and if you'll let me come and wake you up. Oh, I've caught you looking at the keyhole! There's no key in it, you see, for me to lock you in—or for you to lock me out."

"Neither of us would be so medieval, would we?" she laughed. "That would be a silly way to begin the evening. Now that I am here I am going to make the very, very best of it, I promise you!"

"That's right! You're the girl of my heart!" said Logan, and, stepping away from the door, let her walk into the lighted boudoir.



Gently and slowly, almost coquettishly, she shut him out, smiling into his face until the oak panels had closed between him and her.

CHAPTER XXI

THE TELEPHONE

The boudoir was stuffy and smelled of moth powder With its ivory-white walls and masses of sheeting it looked crudely bright in the glare of electricity switched on by Logan. A glance at the closed bay window showed that outside the glass was a screen of unpainted wood. There was no door save that through which Win had just entered.

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All the furniture was pushed against the walls, except a writing-desk with gilded legs, which stood in the embrasure of the big window, and to this the girl ran softly, on tiptoe, across the bare parquet floor. It was covered with sheeting, which she turned carefully back that nothing might be disturbed and, in falling, make a noise. Almost she had reached the limit of her strength and had no breath even to whisper the “Thank heaven!” she felt, seeing what she had prayed to find—a telephone and directory.

It was the hope of this that had upheld her through the scene which already seemed dreamlike. But though telephone and book were here, she was far enough yet from being out of danger. She had not seen the house number, as the boards which covered the front door covered it also. Knowing the street and the name of the man who owned the house (if Logan had told the truth), she could find the telephone number in the book, but it meant a waste of time.

And then, Logan might have lied. This might not be his father’s house. Or, if it were, the telephone might have been cut off for the summer in the family’s absence. She could not be sure of that till the last moment, for the instant Logan heard her talk he would try to tear her away from the telephone. If only there were a key or a bolt—the frailest, slightest bolt, just strong enough to keep the man out for five minutes! But it was useless to wish for what could not be. She must do her best with the ammunition at hand, and be quick about it, for here was her fort of refuge, and she must hold it while she fired her one shot.

On the desk lay a large tortoise-shell paper knife. That, thrust under the door as a wedge, would be almost as good as a lock. At least she might count on it to protect her for those so necessary five minutes. But if she pushed it through to the other side Jim Logan would see the flat, brown blade stick out like a defiant tongue over the door sill, if he were in the hall keeping watch. Knowing that she could not escape, perhaps he had returned to the dining-room, perhaps he was giving instructions to his servant—perhaps any one of a dozen things, yet she could not count on any of them!

She took the paper knife, and holding it firmly by its carved handle, she put the blade under the sole of her foot and thus snapped it off short.

The thick end, still attached to the handle, was just not too thick to push part way under the door. Win could only hope that it might hold when need came.

Now for the book! As she began turning over the pages she found that her hands were trembling. She had to repeat the alphabet from the beginning before she could remember where the letter “L” came in.

Yes, there was the name—Logan. There were many Logans, but only one in this particular street. With a blunt pencil attached to a small writing-pad she scribbled down

the telephone and house number to have them before her eyes, lest in her frantic excitement she might confuse the two in her mind.

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These preparations made, the girl's heart quickened as the fateful moment came. The prompt response from Central was heavenly music. The Logan family had not studied economy and cut off their telephone. "Give me the nearest police station quick!" she added to the number, and at the sound of an hysterical note in her voice Logan's hand was on the door knob.

If the wedge failed she was lost. But bending over the desk, the receiver at her ear, she dared not turn to see what was happening.

"You young devil! Let me in, or you'll be sorry all your life!" Logan shouted through the door, giving the heavy oak panels a kick.

"Is that the police?" Win spoke loudly that Logan might hear. She gave the number of the house, then hurried on: "For God's sake send at once. The house is shut up, but by a trick a girl has been brought in by young Mr. Logan. She's in great danger. It's she who is calling—begging for help—quick—quick—he's here!"

Crash! The door flew wide and banged against the wall, Logan almost falling into the room as the wedge shook loose. Slipping on the smooth parquet, he lost his balance for an instant, and before he could reach the girl to snatch the receiver from her hand, she had dashed through the door and into the hall. There she would have been stopped by the servant if she had not dodged under his arm and darted into the dining-room. Once in, she slammed the door shut in the face of Logan's man, and fumbled wildly to turn the key her trembling fingers found.

Something was wrong—or else it was the fault of those shaking fingers. The key would not turn. Win set her shoulder to the door and pushed against the panels with the whole strength of her slim body. But it was not enough. The door gave and pushed her back. Then, realizing that she could not hold it against superior force, she suddenly let go and ran to stand at bay behind the table.

When Jim Logan, all the latent brutality in him wide awake, came bounding over the threshold she faced him across his silver and flowers and glittering glass.

"Come here!" he said in a voice curiously unlike the jovial tones she had known as his.

"No!" she panted. "I'll stay where I am till the police arrest you as a kidnapper."

"You'll not stay!" he flung at her. "If you won't come out of that, I'll fetch you."

The girl stood behind one of the two chairs drawn up to the table and both hands convulsively clutched the high, carved back. But seeing him spring toward her, she lost her nerve for the first time. Trying to make a screen of the chair, she felt the floating gauze of her dress catch on some unseen nail or splinter of broken woods struggled to tear it free, and found herself in Logan's arms. The shrill sound of ripping stitches and

tearing gauze mingled with the sharp blow of the girl's palm on the man's ear, and his oath breathed hot on her cheek.

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"You fool, do you think I wish to keep you after what you've done?" he blurted out. "All I ask is to be rid of you before those fellows get here. I thought I'd have one kiss—but I wouldn't take it now if you gave it to me. Sims, run down into the basement and let her out that way. Now, you young devil, after him, if you don't want to be choked and buried in the cellar."

Hardly knowing what she did, Win obeyed. Tripping in the rags of her torn gown, she followed the man, who opened a door that led to a narrow stairway. Next came a vague vision of a basement corridor and a disordered kitchen. A minute later she was pushed into a dark area, a door was shut behind her, she was stumbling up some stone steps; then, hurrying along the street as fast as she could go, conscious only that danger was behind her, that she must fly from it and put a long distance between her and that closed house.

If Win had known that the door had shut upon Jim Logan also, and that he had walked out of the house almost on her heels, she would have hurried even faster. But she did not know. And luckily he took the opposite direction, making straight for the New Cosmopolitan Club at the corner, which she had noticed when passing in the taxi.

Hardly five minutes after he had interrupted his guest in her call to the police, Jim Logan was inquiring of the hall porter whether Mr. Fred Fortescue had come in that evening.

"He came, sir, but has gone out again," replied the man, thinking that the immaculate Mr. Logan—one of the best-dressed, best-groomed members of the New Cosmopolitan—appeared to be feeling the heat severely.

"Jove, I'm sorry to hear that," and Logan's expression confirmed his words. "I wanted to see him badly. Let me think. Who else is here? What about Mr. Pindar?"

"Hasn't been in, sir, for weeks," was the reply.

"Gee!" muttered Logan. He seemed worried, and in the brilliant light of the fine hall—white-panelled, and hung with clever caricatures of well-known men—his face was pale and even drawn. He looked, it occurred to the hall porter (a man of imagination), rather like a caricature of himself, not so well coloured as those on the walls. Evidently conning the names of friends who might be useful in an emergency, Logan's eyes were fixed on the stairway, as if thence inspiration or salvation might come. He had the air of having sent his astral body hastily upstairs to reconnoitre the reading and smoking room, but at that minute Peter Rolls, Jr., appeared on the landing, and Logan and his astral body joined forces again.

"Hello, Rolls!" he called out. "You're just the man I want. Will you do me a great favour in a big hurry?"

Petro, whose inmost self had also been absent on some errand, came to earth again with a slight start. "Hello!" he echoed, hastening his steps.

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He did not care much for Logan, who had been a classmate of his at college, and whose acquaintance he had not cultivated since. Still he had nothing against the fellow except that he was a “dude” and something of an ass, whose outlook on life was so different from Petro’s that friendship was impossible. They met occasionally at the New Cosmopolitan Club, of which they had both been members for some years, and at houses where their different “sets” touched distantly. If they talked at all, they talked of old times, but each bored the other. Petro, however, could never bear to refuse any one a favour, even if granting it were an uncongenial task. This peculiarity was constitutional and too well known for his comfort.

“What do you want me to do?” he asked in a tone polite, but void of personal interest.

“To come home with me quick and get me out of a horrid scrape. No trouble for you—but a lot for me without a pal to see me through. I won’t keep you more than a few minutes, if you’re engaged anywhere.”

“I’m not engaged. But—” Petro began, only to be cut short.

“Come along, then, for the Lord’s sake. Tell you everything when we’re there.” And taking Rolls affectionately by the arm, the other rushed him out of the club.

“House shut up, you know. But I stay there. My man’ll let us in the basement way, if you don’t mind,” Logan explained disjointedly as they hurried along the street to the dwelling four doors away.

Sims, obedient to instructions flung at him over his master’s shoulder when the girl had been let out, now awaited Logan’s return at the tradesmen’s entrance. The two young men were admitted and the door locked behind them. A minute more and they were in the rosily glowing dining-room, where the white table still offered attractive refreshment.

“Sit down,” said Logan, and as he said it a great knocking began somewhere.

Listening in surprise, Petro forgot to accept the invitation—which might have been more tempting if he had not, about half an hour ago, finished dinner. Logan repeated the words, however, and even pulled out a chair for Petro, who took it. Logan seized the other, and Petro, following his host’s example, drew up to the table. Still the pounding went on, more loudly than before, if possible. It began to seem rather like something in a play when you had missed the first scene and didn’t quite understand what it was all about.

“I think, sir, it’s some one at the door,” calmly announced Sims, raising his voice decorously, to be heard over the noise. “Shall I see who it is, or shall I let them knock and go away?”

“See who it is, and if it’s the police, make no objection to their coming in. Be surprised, but not frightened, and say Mr. Logan has a friend supping with him. Savvy?”

“Yes, sir,” responded Sims, and vanished.

“No time to let you into this stunt on the ground floor,” went on Logan. “But I will as soon as the turn’s over. For all sakes, keep mum while I talk.”

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Before Petro could answer, if he had an answer ready, there were deep voices in the hall. Then the door was opened by Sims, and two plain-clothes policemen stepped briskly in.

"Hello! What's up? House on fire?" exclaimed Logan, pausing in the act of handing a dish of iced caviar to his guest.

"We're not from the fire department," said the elder and smarter looking of the pair, civilly, yet with a certain grimness. "I guess you know that well enough. We've been sent here on a hurry call on your 'phone to the police—a girl supposed to be detained in the house against her will." And keen eyes took in the details of the room.

Logan broke into a jovial guffaw. "Girl? Well, of all—the freak—stunts!" he chortled. "Say, Rolls, are you the great female impersonator? Ha, ha!"

"Sorry to interrupt you and your friend," remarked the detective, still grimly, though he had caught and been slightly impressed by the name of Rolls, as the speaker had, perhaps, intended. Logan as a name also carried some weight in New York. One was not rude to a Logan until sure how far and fast duty compelled one to proceed. "But I gotta ask you straight whether there's a girl in this house, and you'd better answer the same way."

Logan stopped laughing. "Really, I thought at first you were some of the fellows from the club got up in disguise for a joke," he said. "Of course I'll answer you straight. There's no girl in this house so far as I know, and hasn't been since my sister went away with the rest of the folks, 2d of June. I can't think how such a—but gee! yes, I can! The silly old sucker! I bet it's a put-up job."

"What d'ye mean?" the plain-clothes man wanted to know.

"Why, does the name of Frederick Doland Fortescue mean anything to you?"

"We know who he is."

"Well, then, I guess you know he's the champion practical joker of this burg. He was here a while ago—hasn't been gone a quarter of an hour. Went just before Mr. Rolls came in. Asked if he could use the telephone. I said yes, and my servant showed him into my mother's boudoir next to this room. I heard him ring up some one, but didn't get what he said. I noticed when he was through he came out chuckling, and then he was off like a shot—told me he had a date uptown somewhere. That's all I know, but it would be like him to play just such a fool trick on you and me."

"Seems 'twas a woman's voice at the 'phone."

“Gee! I did sort of get onto it, he was mimicking a girl! Sounded kind of shrill, but I didn’t pay attention. He’s always up to some lark. You’re welcome to go over the house, though, if you don’t believe me.”

“It ain’t a question of believing or not,” said the detective. “But we’ll have to look around.”

“All right!” returned Logan, still with that perfect good nature which was having its effect on the two intruders. “Would you rather do the job by your lones, or shall my man show you the way? I suppose you don’t mind us going on with our supper if I spare you Sims and we help ourselves to food?”

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"You can stay where you are," was the answer.

"Thanks. But when you're satisfied that a mosquito or so's the only live stock on the premises, I should like you both to crack a bottle of champagne with us."

"It wouldn't be quite in order——"

"Hang order! The police and I are pals. Now you'll do me proud if you'll look in on your way out. Bring the girl, if you find her!" And Logan laughed at his own joke.

"Don't think I've let you in for anything!" he turned to Rolls as the door shut. "They'll find no one, for the good reason that there's no one to find. All the same, I should have been in a mess if you hadn't come right along like a brick and helped me out."

"I don't quite see yet how I have helped you," rather dryly remarked Petro.

"But I guess you're guessing."

"If I've guessed right, I'm not enjoying the joke."

"Then maybe you *haven't* guessed right! Give me the benefit of the doubt till those good men and true are the other side of the front door, will you? I'm as rattled as they make 'em now! Say, this is a raid, ain't it? Wonder if they've got the Black Maria outside? Can't you eat any caviar? Wish you would. Well, shall we skip along to the consomme?"

"I've just got down my dinner," said Rolls, who was guessing too hard to taste anything with salt in it, in his old classmate's house.

"Well, a little of this champagne cup, anyhow? It's girls' drink, but not bad this weather, and old Sims is a nailer at mixing——"

"No, thanks, nothing at all."

"You must let me half fill your glass, or those chaps will get onto it that you're playing dummy!" As he spoke Logan poured champagne cup into Peter's tall tumbler and his own. The latter he filled with the ice-cold, sparkling liquid which, as he said, was "girls' drink," and then, seizing the glass, emptied it in one long draft.

It was he who did most of the talking that whiled away time till the policemen returned from their tour of the house; and when they opened the door of the dining-room once more he was eating chicken salad while Peter crumbled toast.

"I don't see the lady!" Logan exclaimed facetiously, with his mouth full.

“Neither did we,” said the man who had taken the lead.

“Hope you did the thing thoroughly while you were about it! Garret to cellar and all the rest?”

“You bet we did,” returned the policeman, allowing himself the relief of a grin now. “I guess you was right about the practical joke. But you must excuse us if we look behind these curtains.”

“Under the table, too!” laughed Logan, jumping to his feet. “Stand and deliver, Rolls!”

Petro obeyed rather reluctantly, feeling that he had been made a fool of, at best, in his stupid wish to be good-natured. It might be a joke, as Logan insisted, but something told him it was not. The look on the fellow’s face as he gulped down the champagne cup had not been funny. It was in Petro’s mind that he had been brought in to cover up with his presence an unpleasant incident and ignorantly to trick the police.

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Of course, if there were a girl in the house, the police would have found her. But—there was something queer. He meant to have it all out with Logan when the police were gone. Meantime, however, he behaved loyally and stood up to leave the table clear while one of the detectives did actually bend down to peer under it. As the policeman stooped Peter mechanically pulled the chair back, and doing so he caught sight of a thin blue streak lying, like solidified cigarette smoke, across the red brocade cushion. In this smoke-blue streak there were little things that glistened—little silver things shaped like crescent moons set at regular intervals from each other. Peter had been unconsciously sitting on the smoke wreath, and as the policeman rose he deliberately sat down on it again. He felt suddenly sick, and his heart was large and cold in his breast, where it did not beat, but floundered like a caught fish.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FRAGRANCE OF FRESIAS

Winifred Child had been in this house, or else she had sold or given the Moon dress to another girl who had been here.

Thoughts were flashing through Peter's brain with the sharp quickness of motion pictures following one another to a far conclusion. Of the girl he could not be sure. The lost dryad, needing money more than she needed a smart evening gown, might well have disposed of Ena's gift. And yet Petro had—strangely enough it had seemed to him then—thought of Winifred and the mysterious "dryad door" on the *Monarchic* the moment he came into this place.

The perfume of the mirror room was here—the perfume which made all Nadine's model dresses delicately fragrant of spring flowers; fresas, the youngest dryad had said they were; and since then Peter had asked for fresas at the florist's, requested the Scottish head gardener to plant fresas in the garden, and had kept fresas in his room to call back old dreams. If the dryad had sold her dress, would the fresa fragrance haunt it still? Petro thought not. The other woman would have given it her own special perfume. Only in the possession of a dryad would it have retained this scent.

Winifred Child had been here, then—in Logan's dining-room, near Logan's table laid so alluringly for a supper *en tete-a-tete*!

This idea, passing through several phases, had shaped itself clearly in Peter Rolls's mind by the time the policeman's round black head had come up from under the table. And it was because of the idea that he sat down deliberately on the film of chiffon. He did not want questions to be asked, or Winifred Child's name to be mentioned in this business, at all events, until he had made up his mind what to do.

There was still time to make it up, and speak, if necessary while the detectives were on the spot, for Logan had offered them champagne and they had accepted now they were sure that all parties had been victimized by a practical joker. "Girls' drink" was not for the guardians of New York, and Sims was opening two frosty-looking bottles of the "real thing" just produced from some household iceberg. The men would not go for several moments yet.

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Winifred Child had listened to Ena Rolls's warnings and had taken them deeply to heart. It had seemed to her impossible that a sister could, for any motive whatever, calumniate a brother whom she loved. And then, Win had reminded herself that her own ignorance of men was profound. They were said to be "all alike" in some dreadful ways, even those who seemed the noblest, the most chivalrous—or more especially those. So she had believed Ena's words, against her own instinct, and had not told herself that she lacked her favourite virtue—loyalty.

But with Peter it was exactly the opposite. He trusted his instinct before everything, and though he thought that his lost dryad had been in this shut-up house with Jim Logan, he knew that she had come innocently.

Somehow Logan had met her, admired her (that went without saying), and tricked her into the place. When she had understood the trick she had, of course, tried to get away. (Why, if proof were needed, was not the torn wisp of chiffon enough?) Her quick intelligence had suggested the telephone, and somehow she had contrived to call the police before she could be stopped by Logan.

Yes, that was like her! Then Logan had been scared and let her go, lest she should be found and he should get into disgrace. This was the natural thing for such a man to do in the circumstances, and equally natural that he should dash out to find a supper companion—some accommodating fellow whose presence would account for the table with its two places.

But that he—he, of all men in New York, should be the accommodating fellow found to screen the beast from punishment! This was the astounding thing—the terrible thing—and yet, the providential thing. Through Logan and the coincidence which had brought them together at a certain moment in the hall of the New Cosmopolitan Club, Petro told himself that he would by and by reach Winifred Child. It was a hateful combination of circumstances; but finding her thus would be no worse than discovering a rare jewel in a toad's head.

While the two detectives tossed off their champagne Peter Rolls sat still, his thoughts flashing on behind a face deprived of all expression, as a screen of motionless dark trees can hide the white rush and sparkle of a cataract. His vague contempt for Jim Logan had turned in the last few minutes to active loathing, even to hatred. He wanted the fellow punished, as he would have wanted a rattlesnake to have its poison fangs drawn. He wished to speak out and tell the now laughing policemen the brief story of Logan's hurried visit to the club.

Down would go the half-full champagne glasses on the table. The cheerful grins would be wiped from the two strong faces as by an artist who, with a stroke, changes the expression of a portrait. Peter Rolls's word was at least as good as Jim Logan's. Questions would be asked. Jottings would be made in notebooks. Perhaps they would

both have to go to the police station. The girl's name would be demanded; Logan might be forced to tell it. That would be one way of finding Winifred—but it would be a way intolerable.

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If only Peter were certain—as certain as he was of her innocence—that she wasn’t hidden in the house, he would let the detectives go quietly and get the truth out of Logan himself afterward. But—could he be certain? Had he a right to take such chances when the girl’s safety might depend on police knowledge of her whereabouts?

It was reasonable to suppose that Logan had put her into the street after the giving of the alarm and before he ran to the club. Yet he might not have done so. She might be fainting, or even dead. The most terrible, melodramatic things happened every day in New York. One saw them in the papers and felt they could never come into one’s own life. Supposing there were some hiding-place?

The fishlike flopping of Peter’s heart slowed down as if the fish were losing strength. The thought was too hideous to finish. Yet he would not dismiss it until he had played his hand in the game.

So far he had hardly spoken since the sight of the blue smoke wreath on the chair had set his brain whirling. But when Logan suddenly challenged him to drink a health to the New York police, he took the glass of champagne Sims offered.

“Here’s to you!” he said. “I never had such a good chance to appreciate the thoroughness of your methods! By Jove! think of looking even under the table! Now that would never have occurred to me.”

“I guess it would,” one of the men encouraged him, “if you had our experience. It gets to be second nature to be thorough. We never, so to speak, leave a stone unturned”

“Well, it’s mighty smart of you, that’s all I can say!” young Mr. Rolls went on. “What do you call being thorough—not ‘leaving a stone unturned?’ Here, for instance how can you be sure you’ve looked in every hole and cranny where Mr. Logan might have stowed a young woman in a dead faint, if he wanted to fool you?”

Both men laughed. “You ought to bin with us when we went on our trip around the house!”

“I wish I had! It would have been a sort of experience,” said Peter. “I sometimes read detective stories and wonder if they’re like the real thing. When you were out of the room I was thinking if we’d had a girl hidden in here—behind the curtains, for instance—we might have sneaked her away when you were upstairs or down in the basement.”

They laughed again, patronizing the amateur. “You must take us for Uncle Ezras from Wayback!” genially sneered he who claimed leadership. “We didn’t ‘both’ go upstairs—or in the basement. While I waited in the hall my mate slipped down and locked the door that lets into the area and brought away the key on him. What’s more, he did something to the keyhole—a little secret we know—that would have told us if any one

had used another key while we were gone. But no one did. Good guard was kept, and if a mouse had tried to slip by we'd 'a' caught it."

"But what if a mouse had tried to hide?" suggested Peter Rolls.

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"We'd 'a' found it. There ain't a closet or a pair o' curtains or a shower bath or bookcase or a screen or bureau or table or bed that's had a chance to keep a secret from us——"

"Did you ever hear the song of 'The Mistletoe Bough?'" inquired the doubter.

"You bet we did. You don't have to show us! We snooped all around the trunk room and rummaged in every box big enough to hold a dwarf. None of 'em was locked, but if they had been—why, we go around prepared."

"You don't look as if you'd done much prowling in the coal cellar, anyhow!" laughed Peter.

"That's because there ain't enough coal in it to dirty a dove," explained the policeman. "Why, we even had a squint into the wine bins and the kitchen pantries and under the sink and into a laundry basket. There ain't a fly on the wall in this house but we wouldn't know its face if we met it again!"

They all laughed once more, and none more loudly than Logan, though he had given Peter Rolls a puzzled glance for each new and apparently aimless question.

"If I wrote those detective stories, I'd use this for a plot," Petro went on; "but it wouldn't be much good to the magazines the way it's turned out. I think I'd have a girl hidden behind a sliding panel, or a picture that came out of its frame, or something, and the hero find her."

"Then you mustn't lay your plot in this house," retorted the officer. "There ain't any pictures a full-sized cat could crawl through, and as for Mr. Logan's panels, they look real nice, but I guess they're the kind you buy by the yard. And there ain't a room with a wall that could open to hide anything thicker than a paper doll."

He earned a laugh again on that climax. Peter said that he would have to go to some old country on the other side to write the kind of story he meant. The men finished their champagne and had more. Then they finished that with a gay health (proposed by their host) to Freddy Fortescue. And at last there was no doubt that the time had come to go.

Logan shook hands with both and pressed gifts of cigars and cigarettes upon them. If Peter intended to give Logan away, now was the latest, the very latest moment. But he said not a word. Satisfied that the girl could not possibly be concealed in the house, her name must not be risked. While Logan accompanied the guardians of the law to the front door, opened by Sims for their benefit, Peter annexed the blue smoke wreath. A splinter of wood (the furniture was only imitation Jacobean) had impaled the rag of chiffon, and almost tenderly releasing it, Rolls folded the trophy away in a breast pocket.

His imagination had not tricked him. The stuff did smell of fresas—which he proved by holding it to his lips for an instant—the very scent that had come out to him whenever

the dryad door opened, in reality and memory, the scent he had grown intimate with while the Moon dress hung in his wardrobe during those days when he had awaited a chance to present his offering to Ena!

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When Logan came back he turned to tell Sims at the door that he would not be needed again, at any rate, for the present. Then he shut himself and Peter into the rosy glow of the dining-room.

"At last!" he exclaimed, sinking contentedly into the chair opposite Rolls. "I feel as if I'd earned a whole bottle of drink. But all's well that ends well."

"It hasn't quite ended yet, has it?" remarked Peter. "No, thank you, no champagne!"

"Not ended?" repeated Logan, bottle in hand. "Oh, I see what you're at!" and he began filling his own glass, already emptied half a dozen times during the visit of the detectives. "You mean you want an explanation of this hanky panky. Well, I promised it to you, didn't I? I said you must give me the benefit of the doubt till those chaps were out of the house. I hope you have. But I thought once or twice you looked a bit thick, as if you weren't sure what I'd let you in for. But I'm not the kind of chap to get a pal in a fix to save my own face. I'm going to explain, all right. Only first I want to thank you again for——"

"You needn't," said Peter.

"Sure you won't change your mind and take a little fizz? We've been through some hot work for this weather."

"*You* have. No—not any!"

"One go at mine, then, and I'm yours. A-ah! that was pretty good. Well—there *was* a girl, of course. But she came because she wanted to come. Then the trouble began. There was a little misunderstanding about a pearl dog collar she admired in a jeweller's window. She seemed disappointed to find that this wasn't to be the occasion of a presentation. Said I'd promised. I hadn't! I never do promise beforehand to give girls things. Girls would love to have the same effect on your money the sun has on ice. Not that this one's like all the others. She's worth a little expenditure. A real stunner! Any fellow'd be wild over her. An English girl, tall and slim, but gorgeous figure: long legs and throat, and dark eyes as big as saucers. You'd turn and look after her anywhere! A lady, and thinks herself the queen, though she works in a New York department store. I've been running after her since one night we made acquaintance in the park—great chums—called each other Jim and Winnie and held hands from the first.

"But to-night, just because I said I'd never promised a dog collar or anything like one, she went mad as a tiger cat and took revenge by ringing up the police with a beast of a story that I'd kidnapped her. She got it out before I could make her stop, and for just a minute I was in a blue funk. New York's rampagin' so just now on the subject of kidnappers. But I had wit enough to chuck her into the street and run to the club for help. I thought of Freddy Fortescue (by the way, I must get him to stand by me with a

story in case he's questioned. I can count on him every time!), but he wasn't in. I tried another man or two, same result, and just then I saw you coming downstairs—ram caught in the bushes.”

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"For the sacrifice," Peter finished.

"Well, not too much of a sacrifice, I hope," Logan temporized "You don't regret standing by?"

"No, I don't regret it."

"Yet your tone sounds sort of odd, as if you were keeping something back. I don't see why, either. I've kept my promise. I've explained—put the whole story in a nutshell, not to bore you too much with my love affairs gone bad. And what I've told you is the Gospel's own truth, old man, whether you believe it or not."

"I don't believe it," said Peter. "I know it to be the devil's own lie."

As he spoke he rose, and Logan jumped up, hot and red in the face.

"By Jove!" he sputtered. "I don't know what you mean."

"You know very well," Rolls insisted. "I mean—that you're a liar. A damn liar! The girl didn't come here because she wanted to come. And she wouldn't take a pearl collar or a *paper* collar from you if you went on your knees."

"You must be crazy!" Logan stared at him, paler now. "If you weren't my guest, in my house, I—I'd knock you down."

"Try it," Peter invited him. "This is your father's house, I believe, not yours. And I don't call myself your guest. Neither need you. I'm a sort of out-of-season April Fool. At least, I was. I'm not now."

"I tell you—you're bughouse!" stammered Logan.

"You stand up for a girl you don't know a damn thing about——"

"I'd stand up for any girl against you," he was cut short again. "But I do know this girl. I won't say how. I know you're the dirt under her feet, and if I hadn't made sure every way that she was out of the house, I'd have set the police onto you as—as I *wouldn't* set terriers onto a rat."

"You—you can't tell me her name—or anything about her—I'll bet!"

"You won't bet with me. And neither of us is going to speak her name here. Shut your mouth on it if you don't want it stuffed down your throat and your teeth after it. You've been a villain. That's the one thing that stands out in this business. God! do you think you could make me believe anything wrong about that girl—you? Why, if an angel

looped the loop down from heaven to do it I wouldn't. Tell me what store she's working in. That's what I want to hear about her from you, and nothing else."

Logan was not red in the face now. He had grown very pale. In truth, he was frightened. But he was angry enough to hide his fear for the present. He determined that Rolls should not get a word out of him.

"That's *all* you want to hear, is it?" he mimicked. "If you know so much about her, you can jolly well find out the rest for yourself or keep off the grass. I don't intend——"

The sentence ended in an absurd gurgle, for the hand of Peter Rolls was twisting his high collar. It was horribly uncomfortable and made him feel ridiculous, because he was taller and bigger and older than Rolls. He tried to hit Peter in the face with his fist, but suddenly all strength went out of him. The hated face vanished behind a shower of sparks.

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"You're murdering—me!" he gasped. "I've—got—a weak heart."

Peter let go and flung him across the room. He tottered toward the door. And his servant, who had been breathlessly listening outside, opened it opportunely on the instant. Logan saw his chance, as Sims meant him to do, half fell, half staggered out, and the door slammed in Peter's face.

It took the latter no more than thirty seconds to wrench it open again and drag Sims, who was holding desperately to the knob, into the dining-room. "Don't hurt me, sir!" the man pleaded. "I only did my duty."

"Hurt you!" repeated Rolls with a laugh. "Don't be afraid. Where's the other coward?"

"If you are referring to Mr. Logan, sir," Sims replied politely, "he is gone. If you look for him, I think you will find he has *quite* gone. I had the front door open, all ready, in case it should be needed."

Peter reflected for an instant, and then shrugged his shoulders.

"Let him go!" he said. "I'd as soon step twice on a toad that was hopping away as touch him again. *Br-r!* This place is sickening. I'll go, too—but not after him."

"Yes, sir, certainly," returned Sims with alacrity, slinking along the hall to the vestibule. "I'll open the front door for you. This," he added with a certain emphasis "will be the fourth time I've done so to-night. Once to let Mr. Logan in, once when the young ladies came, and——"

"Ah, there were two of them!" Rolls caught him up.

"Yes, sir. And though I did my duty just now helping Mr. Logan—if I may say it, sir, without offence—helping him out of *danger*, I am ready to assist you, sir, by answering any questions you may wish to ask. I do not consider my doing so disloyal to my employer. My statements won't hurt him, I assure you. And if you would—er——"

"Would 'make it worth your while,' I suppose you're trying to get out," Peter disgustedly prompted him.

"I have a wife to support, sir, and a child. I keep them in the country, and it comes expensive."

"Give me ten dollars' worth of talk," ordered Peter, "and I'll believe as much as I choose."

He was half ashamed of himself for stooping to bribe the fellow who perhaps, after all, was only trying to delay him. Yet he might have something worth hearing. He could not afford to lose a chance.

“Two young ladies came as far as the door, sir,” said Sims, pocketing the greenback, “but only one came into the house—a tall, handsome young lady, different looking from most, with a thin yellowish silk cloak over a blue dress. She walked right in, but when she found her friend was gone she seemed surprised, and the next thing she was in the boudoir telephoning. Mr. Logan went in and she came out. They had a little dispute, I think, and though he’d been expecting her to supper, he told me to get her out of the house as quick as I could. I showed her through the basement, and

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she walked, rather briskly I should say, sir, down the street, while Mr. Logan went in the other direction—toward the corner, where the club is. As for the young ladies themselves, I can give you no information, except that the one who didn't come in to-night has been here before on several occasions. The one who came in and—er—used the telephone, I have never previously seen. That's all I know which you don't know yourself. But I hope I've been of some assistance to make up for doing my disagreeable duty, sir?"

"I've had ten dollars' worth, thank you," said Peter. "And now for the fourth time of opening that door."

He went out, satisfied that he was carrying with him the only trace of Winifred Child from the shut-up house. To-morrow he would begin with the opening of the shops and look through every department store until he found her.

CHAPTER XXIII

MOTHER

Peter Rolls, as it oddly happened, had run up to New York that hot night in order to see a girl do a "turn" at a vaudeville theatre—an English girl about whom he had read a newspaper paragraph, and who might, he thought, be Winifred Child. The girl's stage name was Winifred Cheylesmore. The newspaper described her as "tall, dark, and taking, with a voice like Devonshire cream."

She was a new girl, of whom nobody had heard, and Peter had been thrilled and impatient. Her "singing stunt" was to be heard at ten o'clock, and Peter had dined at his club, meaning to be early in his seat at the theatre. But a man he knew, sitting at a table near, was a budding journalist, an earnest amateur photographer. He began passing samples of his skill to Peter Rolls, calling out rather loudly the names of ladies snapshotted. Among them was Winifred Cheylesmore, whom he had interviewed. She was no more like Winifred Child than Marie Tempest is like Ethel Barrymore. Consequently Peter gave his ticket away and sat longer over his dinner than he had meant.

If he had started out even five minutes earlier he would have missed Jim Logan and the adventure in the shut-up house. He would not have known that there was hope—indeed, almost a certainty—of finding the lost dryad in one of New York's great department stores.

He was excited, and would have liked to spend half the night walking off his superfluous energy in the streets or the park where that lying beast said he had made Miss Child's acquaintance. Peter would have felt that he was marching to meet the dawn and that the day he longed for would come to him sooner if he walked toward the horizon. But father was in town that night—presumably at his club, and Peter did not like to leave mother alone. She had exacted no promise—she never did exact promises, for that was not her way. Peter had said, however, that he would motor home after the theatre, and though mother mustn't sit up, she would know that he was in the house.

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He determined to keep to this plan, which, of course, would not prevent his returning to New York early enough next day for the first opening of the first shop. He wished there were not so many shops. Unless luck were with him on his search, he might not reach the dryad for days.

In spite of all that had happened, midnight was not long past when Peter tiptoed softly through the quiet house at home and opened the door of his own den. He had expected to find the room in darkness, but to his surprise the green-shaded reading lamp on the book-scattered mahogany table was alight, and there in the horsehair-covered rocking-chair sat mother with her inevitable work. Close by the window was wide open, and the night breeze from over the Sound was rhythmically waving the white dimity curtains.

The sweetness of home-coming swept over Peter with the perfume of wallflowers which blew in on the wind—a sweetness almost as poignant as that of fresas. Half unconsciously he had been wishing to see his mother—perhaps not even to speak, but just to see her placid face in its kind womanliness. It was almost as if his wish had been whispered to her telepathically and she had answered it. She made a charming picture, too, he thought, in the shadowy room where the pale, moving curtains in the dimness were like spirits bringing peace, and all the light focussed upon the white-haired, white-gowned woman in the high, black chair seemed to radiate from her whiteness.

Mother looked up, pleased but not surprised, as the opening door framed her son.

“Howdy do, deary!” She smiled at him. “I thought you’d be coming along about this time.”

Peter threw his hat and coat at the whale, whose large, shining surface hospitably received them. Mrs. Rolls’s small, plump feet in cheap Japanese slippers rested upon a “hassock” on whose covering reposed (in worsted) a black spaniel with blue high lights. This animal she had herself created before the birth of Peter or Ena, but it was as bright a beast as if it had been finished yesterday. No one at Sea Gull Manor except Peter would have given Fido house room. But he liked the dog, and now sat down on it, lifting his mother’s little feet to place them on his knee.

“You oughtn’t to have waited up,” he remarked, having kissed her snow-white hair and both apple-pink cheeks and settled himself more or less comfortably on Fido.

“I thought I would,” she returned placidly. “I like being here. And I had just this to finish.” She held up a wide strip of crocheted lace. “It’s ‘most done now. It’s go’n’ to be a bedspread for Ena. But I don’t know if she——”

Mrs. Rolls did not finish the sentence, but it was a long, long ago established custom of hers not to finish sentences. Except when alone with Petro, she seldom made any

attempt to bring one to an end. It was life at Peter senior's side which had got her out of the habit of trying to complete what she began to say. As he generally interrupted her when she spoke, even in their early years together, she had almost unconsciously taken it for granted that he would do so, and stopped like a rundown mechanical doll at about the place where her quick-minded husband was due to break in.



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Peter junior, who never interrupted (though he, too, had a quick mind), knew as well as if she had gone on that his mother meant: "I don't know if Ena will think a homemade coverlet of crocheted lace smart enough for a real, live *marchesa*, but I feel I should like to make my daughter some bridal present with my own hands."

"Oh, yes, she's certain to. It'll be beautiful, if it's anything like the one you did for me," Petro assured her when the long pause had told him that mother had no more to add. "Just think of Ena getting married!"

"Yes, indeed," sighed Mrs. Rolls. "And it seems only a little while since you were both ____"

Peter knew that the missing word was "children." "Anyhow, she's happy, I think," he reflected aloud, a far-away look in his eyes.

"I guess so," mother agreed. "She'll like real well being a—— I wish——"

"*Marchesa*" was easy for Peter to supply mentally, and would have been much easier for him to pronounce than it was for Mrs. Rolls, who had had small education in the management even of her native tongue.

She made dear little, cozy, common mistakes in grammar and other things. Peter adored her mistakes, and Ena was ashamed of them. But in those good manners which are taught by the heart and not by the head, no queen could have given Mrs. Rolls lessons.

As for the next sentence, beginning with "I wish——" and ending in the air, that was more difficult. Even mother, so placid, seemingly so contented, must have many wishes. And so Petro ventured on a "What?"

"I wisht I could be just as sure *you*——"

"As sure that I'm happy?"

"Yes, dear."

Peter had been looking at his mother's feet in those blue Japanese slippers, whose cheapness was rather pathetic. (With all their money, she never enjoyed wearing expensive things herself. It was as if she felt lost and un-at-home in them.) But suddenly he glanced up. The pink-and-white face was as calm as usual, yet her tone had meant something in particular. A chord seemed to vibrate in his soul, as if she had softly, yet purposely, touched it with her finger.

"Don't you believe I am happy?" he asked.

“Not—just like you used to be,” she said. Their eyes met as she lifted hers from her work and began rolling it up, finished. She blushed beautifully, like a girl.

Peter pressed both the little feet between his hands, pressed them almost convulsively. He did not stop to think how strong his fingers were, though Logan had had cause to realize their strength two hours ago. The pressure hurt the small toes so lightly covered. And the mother of this strong, though slight, young man gloried in the hurt. She was proud of it, proud of Peter, the one thing in the world she felt was really hers.

“Mother!” he said in a low, tense voice. “*What* told you?”

“Why—just bein’ your mother, I guess. I was wonderin’——”

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"Wondering what?"

"Whether some day you'd say something."

"I wanted to. I wanted to talk to you about—about it all. But I was afraid it might make you sad. I like to think of you always happy, dearest. And I couldn't bear to be the one to chase away your smile I love so much."

"It's thinking of you helps me to smile, Petie," said his mother, reverting to the pet name of his childhood as she stroked his smooth, black hair. "If 'twasn't for knowing I've got you—and your loving me—I do believe I could never smile."

"You're not unhappy?" Peter cried out, startled. It would be a dreadful pain to know that the placid reserve of this sweet, loved woman meant unhappiness.

"Not while I have *you*. But——"

"You must go on, dear. Tell me what you feel. We're here together, all alone in the night, talking out our hearts. It seems as if it was meant to be—my finding you waiting here."

"I guess maybe it was, Petie. Something kind of said to me, 'You wait up for him. He wants you.' And I—why, I always want you, boy."

"Darling! We've got each other fast."

"Thanks be, dear! My! You don't know the times I've sneaked in and set in this room when you was away. And even now, if you're go'n' to be out pretty late, I bring in my work 'most always when your pa's out. I generally slip back to my room before you come in, because I know you think I oughtn't to be sittin' up. You mightn't just understand that 'twas because this is my only real home."

"Your only real home? Why, Mother!"

"The rest of the house is so big—and so *awful* new-fashioned and grand. Not like me a bit," she apologized meekly—but not with the flurried meekness of her apologies to Peter senior. "Here you've saved all my dear old things I had in the days before everything was big. I never *can* get used to it, and I never will now. It's the bigness, I guess, that's seemed—somehow—to take your pa and Ena away from me—long ago. But I've got you. And you let me come here. So I am happy. I'm a real happy woman, Petie. And I want you to be happy the way you used to be—or some better way, not all restless like you are now. I guess if there was some one you loved different from me you wouldn't make a new life for yourself without a little place in it for mother, would you—just a weenty little place I could come and live in sometimes for a while?"



"I'd want you in it always," said Peter. He leaned up and wound his arms around the plump, formless waist in the neat dressing-gown. "So would *she*—if there were a she. I hate the 'bigness,' too—the kind of false, smart bigness that you mean. We'll have a little house—she and you and I. For your room will be there, and you'll be in it whenever father'll spare you. But I'm running away in what I used to call my 'dreamobile!' I haven't found her yet. That is, I found her once and lost her again. I'm looking for her now. Mother, do you know what a '*leitmotif*' is?"

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"No, dear, indeed I don't. I'm afraid I don't know many of the things I——"

"There's no reason why you should know this. In Wagner's operas, which I don't understand, perhaps, but which I love with thrills in my spine—and that's a *kind* of understanding—whenever a character comes on the stage he or she always is followed by a certain strain of music—music that expresses character, and seems even to describe a person. Well, wallflower perfume might be your *leitmotif*. Can't you *hear* perfume? I can. Just as you can seem to see music—wonderful, changing colours. The wallflower scent's all around us now. It's you. But through it I imagine another perfume. It's here, too. It's been with me for months. Because I've got to feel it's her spirit, her *leitmotif*. The perfume of fresas. Do you know it?"

"I thought maybe she liked it," mother said calmly.

"What put that idea in your darling head?"

"Why, because you've been havin' fresas planted in the garden—and in your room—as long as they lasted through the spring. You'd never thought of 'em before as I know of."

"You witch! You notice everything. Who'd believe it, you're so quiet?"

"Of course I notice things about you. I wouldn't be fit to be your mother if I didn't. Now, do you feel like tellin' me things about her?"

"I'm longing to," said Peter.

They forgot it was late at night. He told her everything, beginning at the moment when he had plunged through the dryad door and going on to the moment when he had lost, not only the girl, but her friendship, though he said nothing of the Moon dress or the shut-up house. Even then he did not stop.

"I must have done something inadvertently," he went on, "to make her stop liking me all of a sudden. For she did like me at first. There was no flirting or anything silly about it. I felt there was a reason for her changing, and ever since, every day and every night, I've been trying to make out what it could have been. I've thought the idea might come to me. But it never has. That's partly why I'm so anxious to find her—to make her explain. I was too taken aback, too—sort of stunned—to go about it the right way when she changed to me at the last minute there on the dock. Once I could understand, why, I might start with her again at the beginning and work up. It would give me a chance—the chance I once thought I had, you know—to try to make her care. Maybe it would be no use. Maybe I'm not the kind she could ever like that way, even if things hadn't gone wrong. But—but, Mother, it's been just agony to think that all this time she's hated me through some beastly misunderstanding which might easily have been cleared up."

“My poor boy!” the kind voice soothed him. “I guess that’s the worst pain of all. I knew there was something hurting you, but I didn’t know ’twas as hard a hurt as this. But ’twill come right. I feel it will—if she’s really the right girl.”

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"She's the only girl!" exclaimed Peter. "You'd love her, and she'd adore you."

"Tell me just what she looks like," commanded mother, shutting her eyes to see the picture better.

Peter excelled himself in his description of Winifred Child. "Nobody ever even dreamed of another girl who looked or talked or acted a bit like her," he raved. "She's so original!"

"Why, but that's just what somebody *did*!" mother cried, throwing off the cloak of her placidity. "Lady Eileen."

"Lady Eileen did what?"

"Dreamed about such a girl. It must have been a real interesting dream, because she couldn't get it out of her head and told me all about it. She saw a tall, dark girl, with wonderful eyes and a fascinating mouth and graceful sort of ways like you've been telling me about. Hearing Lady Eileen talk was almost like seeing a photograph. In the dream you were in love with the girl—English she was, too, like the real one—and ransacking New York for her, while all the time she——"

"Yes—yes, dear! All the time she——"

"Lady Eileen said particularly I was to tell you about her dream and let you know she wanted you to hear it, because it seemed kind of dramatic and made her almost superstitious, it was so real every way. But she made me promise I wouldn't say a *word* unless you spoke first about such a girl as she dreamed of—and told me you loved her and wanted to find her again. If I began, it would spoil the romance, and there wouldn't be anything in it. That was how Lady Eileen felt."

Peter listened, but his spirit had rushed on past these explanations. Lady Eileen had chosen this method of leaving a message for him. It was a strange method, and he did not understand why she had not herself told him of the dream. But she was a kind and clever girl, a true friend. There must have been a good motive for the delay. Loyal himself, he believed in her loyalty and was grateful. But he could not stop to think of her now.

"Where did Lady Eileen see my dryad girl—in the dream?" he asked.

"At father's place," said mother simply. "At the Hands."

CHAPTER XXIV

THINGS EXPLODING

Lily Leavitt did not come back to Mantles next morning. She sent no word, asked no leave for illness—and the rule at the Hands was discharge for such an omission. If she appeared again her place would be filled—unless she had a strong enough “pull” to keep it open.

Win, who arrived promptly, as usual (just as if last night’s adventure had been a black dream) heard the other girls talking about Lily. She listened and said nothing; had no opinion when asked what she thought. But not a soul pitied Miss Leavitt. The general idea seemed to be that she was one “who knew which side her bread was buttered.” She would not be stopping away without notice unless she had done better for herself. Probably she had secretly married one of those swell beaus she was always boasting about!

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Win, pale and absent-minded (but that might be the heat), was giving the finishing touches to a cloaked group of figurines when a letter was brought to her by a messenger boy. It was not yet time for Peter Rolls's doors to open to the world, but the girl had to finish her task before reading the note. A glance at the envelope showed Sadie's handwriting, and as Sadie ought at that moment to have been making the toilets of dolls upstairs, Win realized that something unexpected must have happened.

Perhaps Sadie was ill and wanted her to explain to the management. She must make short shrift with the figurines and be ready to help Sadie before strenuous life began.

Five minutes later five headless ladies in perfectly draped wraps were showing off their finery to the best advantage, and their tiring maid was standing as still as they, an open letter in her hand.

"What's the matter?" asked a pretty, snub-nosed girl who laughed oftener than Win in these days. "You look as if you'd lost your last friend."

"I'm afraid—I have," Winifred replied in a strange, withdrawn voice which made Daisy Thompson's eyes widen.

"Say! I'm real sorry! I hope it ain't your beau."

Win did not answer, because she did not hear. Sadie! Sadie! The dear little old sardine!

"Good-bye, deerie," she read again. "I coodn't of said this to yure fase. I only noo for shure yesterdy. Its cunsumsion and they won't have me back for fere of my giving it to others. I gess thats right tho its hard luck on me. It aint that I care much about living. I dont, becawse theres sum one I love who loves another girl. Shes a lot better than me and werthy of him so thats all right too but it herts and Id be kind of glad to go out. Dont you be afrade of me doing anything silly in the tabloyde line tho. I wont. Im no coward. But I got to leeve this house for the same reeson as the Hands. I mite give my truble to sum one else. Its a good thing we found out in time. Ive hurd of a noo plase where they take consumps for nuthing, and Ive got to steer for it. Its in the country but I wont tell you where deerie or you mite try to see me and I dont think I cood stand it the way I feel now. But I love you just as much. Good-by. Yure affecshunate Sadie."

Win was overwhelmed. Lately she had seen little of her friend. Neither girl had much time, and the weather had drunk all their energy. She ought to have guessed from Sadie's thinness that she was ill. She ought—oh, she ought to have done a dozen things that she had not done! Now it was too late.

But no, it mustn't be too late! She would find out where Sadie was. It ought to be easy, for the verdict which had sent the girl away from the Hands must have been that of a

young doctor who attended the employees. There were certain hours when he came to the hospital room which Win had seen on her first day at Peter Rolls's. One of these hours was just before the opening of the shop. Perhaps he hadn't yet got away.

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The floorwalker who controlled Mantles was one of the smartest men in any department, somewhat of a martinet, but inclined to be reasonable with those who had any “gumption.” Miss Child had gumption, and though it was nearly time for the public to rush in (there was a bargain sale that day) he gave her a permit of absence.

“Nothing worse than a headache, I hope, takes you to the H.R.?” he questioned, scrawling his powerful name. “We need everybody to get busy to-day.”

“I’m going to beg for some *sal volatile*,” answered Win, and determined to do so, as even white fibs were horrid little things, almost as horrid as cowardly, scuttling black beetles.

Poor Sadie had giggled the other night: “You stick even to the *truth* this hot weather!”

The doctor had not gone, but he did not know of the new place Sadie referred to, and, not knowing, didn’t believe in its existence. He had told Sadie Kirk yesterday that her lungs were infected and that she had become “contagious.” Of course she had had to be discharged. These things were sad, but they were a part of the day’s work. It was a pity that Miss Kirk hadn’t been longer with the Hands. Her insurance money wouldn’t amount to much.

“Do you mean to say that they’ve sent her away to die and haven’t given her anything?” Win gasped.

“Not to die, I hope,” said young Dr. Marlow. “She’s curable. But she wouldn’t get more than a week’s salary with her discharge, I’m afraid. Old Saint Peter isn’t in this business for his health.”

“Or for any one else’s,” the girl retorted.

Marlow shrugged his shoulders, bowed slightly to the pretty but unreasonable young woman, and went away.

Winifred also should have gone. She had got her *sal volatile* and her information. But life was lying in ruins around her—Sadie’s life, if not her own—and she did not know how to set about reconstructing it.

“What man does she love who loves another girl?” she asked herself.

Then, suddenly, she knew. It was Earl Usher, and he loved her, Winifred, who could never be more to him than a friend.

Win had heard of a “vicious circle.” It seemed that she and Sadie and Ursus were travelling in one, going round and round, and could never get out.

“But I must go down,” the mechanical part of herself kept repeating.

She had involuntarily paused near the door to think things out in peace. There were no patients for the two narrow white beds, and the nurse—a small, nervous woman with sentimental eyes—was heating water over a spirit lamp. She suffered from headache and had prescribed herself some tea. The water had begun to boil, and despite the throbbing in her temples she hummed monotonously: “You Made Me Love You.”

Winifred heard the tune through her thoughts of Sadie and Earl Usher, and it seemed to make everything sadder and more hopeless. But suddenly the singing broke off—the thin voice rose to a shriek, and was lost in a loud explosion.

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In the act of going out Win turned, bewildered and expecting horror. Head down, her hands covering her burned face, the nurse came staggering toward the door. Hair and cap were on fire. All over the white dress and apron were dotted little blue tongues of flame that had spouted out from the bursting lamp.

Often such an accident had been lightly prophesied by this very woman. The spirit sent up for the hospital was of the cheapest. Peter Rolls was “not in business for his health!”

Dazed by the deafening noise, and shocked to the very heart by the woman's shriek of pain, Win was not conscious of thought. She did not tell herself to spring to the nearest bed, tear off the covering, stop the nurse before she could rush wildly into the corridor, and wrap her in the blanket. All she knew for a moment was that she had done and was doing these things, that she was using her strength to hold the maddened creature, and all the while calling out for help.

The doctor had not yet reached the end of the long corridor, and the explosion and cries brought him and others running. Vaguely Win was conscious that there were women there, maids who cleaned floors and windows, and that there were two or three men besides Dr. Marlow. She thought that he ordered some of them out and gave directions to others, but the scene sharpened into detail only when she heard herself told to stay and give assistance.

She aiding the doctor, the nurse's burns were dressed. The little quivering creature, hastily undressed, was put to bed, face, head, arms, and hands covered with oil and bandaged. It was not until another nurse—telephoned for from somewhere to somewhere—had arrived, and the invalid had been given an opiate, that Win realized the tingling pain in her own fingers.

“Why, yes, so I *am* burned a little!” she exclaimed when the doctor asked to see her hands. “But it's nothing to matter. I can go back to work now. Nurse is all right.”

“No, it's nothing to matter, and you can go back to work, all right,” briskly echoed Marlow, who was no coddler of any hands at Peter Rolls's; “that is, you can when I've patched you up a bit. And nurse isn't going to be bad, either. She won't be disfigured, I can guarantee that—thanks to you.”

“Thanks to me?” Win echoed.

“Yes, just that. Perhaps you don't realize that you probably saved her life.”

“No. I—I don't think I've realized anything yet.” She found herself suddenly wanting to cry, but remembered a day on the *Monarchic* (as she always did remember if tears felt near) and swallowed the rising lump in her throat.

“Well, don’t bother about it. You can get conceited later. Here, drink this to quiet your nerves in case you feel jumpy, and now run along. It’ll be all right for you downstairs. The news will have got to your dep by this time and they’ll know why you’re late.”

Win “ran along” and found the doctor’s prophecy correct The news had bounded ahead of her.

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"I hear you've been distinguishing yourself," said Mr. Wellby, the floorwalker. "Let's see your hands. Oh, I guess they won't put you out of business, a brave girl like you."

"I'm as well as ever, thank you," said Win.

Stupid of her, wanting to cry again just because people were paying her compliments! But perhaps she hadn't quite got over last night and not sleeping at all. And then Sadie's letter. Things had piled on top of each other, but she mustn't let herself go to pieces. She must keep her wits and think—think—think how to get at Sadie and what to do for her.

Dr. Marlow had covered Win's fingers with something he called "newskin," since it would not do for a "saleslady" to disgust customers by serving them with bandaged hands. It was like a transparent varnish and made her nails shine as brightly as those of the vainest girls who spent all their spare time in polishing. But the redness showed through, as if her hands were horribly chapped. She saw a lady who had asked her to try on a white lace evening coat staring at them.

"What's the matter with your hands?" The question came sharply.

"I scalded them a little this morning," Win explained.

"Oh! I'm glad it isn't a *disease*."

The girl blushed faintly, ashamed, glanced down at the offending pink fingers, and turning slowly round to display the cloak, suddenly looked up into the eyes of Peter Rolls.

She could not help starting and drawing in her breath. For half a second her brain whirled and she thought that she imagined him, that it was just such another vision as those of last night when she had put on the Moon dress.

His eyes were looking at her as they had looked then, and they were the good blue eyes of Mr. Balm of Gilead. It could not be that he was really here gazing at her. It must be some other man like him. But no! He had taken off his hat. He was saying something in the well remembered—too well remembered!—voice.

"How do you do, Miss Child? When you've finished with this lady, I shall be so much obliged if you can speak to me for a minute."

She bowed her head—quite a polite, ordinary sort of bow, just like that of any well-trained saleslady to a prospective customer intending to wait till she was free. But really it did not mean politeness at all. It meant that she had to hide her face, and that it was taking every square inch of nerve force she had to behave in the least like a saleslady.



It was seeing Peter Rolls suddenly—Peter Rolls in flesh and bone and muscle and magnetism of eyes, which told her in a devastating flash a thing about herself she had feared for months—ever since the day she turned her back upon Mr. Balm of Gilead and the *Monarchic*.

She was in love with him. Hideously, desperately, overwhelmingly in love with him, just as ridiculous girls always were with men they oughtn't to think of. Probably he had tried to make her so at first with his friendly, chivalrous ways that hid blacknesses underneath.

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She had escaped, thanks to his sister. And it looked as if those horrid hints had indeed been true, otherwise he would not have troubled to persist after his snubbing. For he had persisted. Some glint of blue light in the steady eyes told her that. This was not a coincidence. Mr. Rolls had the air of having found her at last. She must make him sorry for it. Because, after her experience of the other man who had persisted—though she thought herself forgotten—why should she hope against hope that this man was different?

At last the customer, who did not hurry in the least—rather the contrary—wore all excuses for lingering to shreds, she waddled fatly away, carrying the lace cloak with her; and Win, not shirking the ordeal as she had done when Jim Logan haunted Toyland, turned to Peter Rolls.

CHAPTER XXV

A PIECE OF HER MIND

“Miss Child, I’ve been looking for you for months!” were Peter’s first words when he had her to himself.

Instantly she knew what her pose ought to be. Not prim stiffness, not suspicious maidenly dignity, but just smiling civility, a recognition of past slight acquaintance. This would do for the beginning. This must surely show him that the tactics Ena credited him with were useless here.

“Have you? How nice of you to say so,” she braced herself to reply with gayest indifference. “Well, I’ve been in this store for—a long time, migrating from one department to another and learning the business. I’m quite a fair saleswoman now, I assure you. Are you going to buy a cloak? Because, if not—this is a busy morning.”

“Yes, I’ll buy one as a present for my mother,” said Peter. “I should like you to choose her something. I described her to you once, but I suppose you’ve forgotten. She’s little, and rather plump, and has beautiful white hair and a rosy complexion. But, Miss Child, I want to talk to you, not about cloaks, about yourself. I’ve asked permission, and they know who I am, and it’s all right. I said you and my sister were friends. That’s true, isn’t it?”

“Oh, yes!”

“I believed we were friends once. And we were, too. The more I’ve thought of it, the surer I’ve been. Something happened to make you change your mind about me. I was struck all of a heap at first. I didn’t have the sense to know what to say or do, to try and put myself back where I had been. I let you go. And I lost you. But I’m not going to lose you again. You can see how much in earnest I am when I tell you that I haven’t

stopped looking for you for one single day after I realized you wouldn't keep your promise about writing my sister."

"It wasn't a promise," breathed Win. "I—never meant to write to her."

"I thought so!"

"Why should I? It was very kind of Miss Rolls to suggest it, if I should ever want help. But I didn't want help. All I wanted was to get on by myself."

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"I know you mean me to understand from that, Miss Child, that you don't think I've any right to force myself on you after you showed me so plainly you thought me a bounder," said Peter, not mincing his words or stumbling over them. "But I'm not a bounder. There must be some way of proving to you that I'm not. That's why I'm here for one thing, though there's another——"

"What?" Winifred threw in, frightened, and thinking it better to cut him short in time.

"I want you to meet my mother and let her help you to get some kind of a position more—more worthy of your talents than this."

Win laughed aloud. "You run down your father's shop?"

"It's not good enough for you."

She flushed, and all her pent-up anger against the House of the Hands tingled in that flush.

"You say so because I once had the great honour of being an acquaintance of yours—and your sister's," she hurried breathlessly on. "For all the rest of the people here, the people you don't know and don't want to know, you think it good enough—too good, perhaps—even splendid! It does look so, doesn't it? Magnificent! And every one of your father's employees so happy—so fortunate to be earning his wages. They're worms—that doesn't matter to rich men like you, Mr. Rolls. Unless, perhaps, a girl happens to be pretty—or you knew her once and remember that she was an individual. Oh, you must feel I'm very ungrateful for your interest. Maybe you mean to be kind—about your mother. But give your interest to those who need it. I don't. I've seen your name in the papers—interviews—things you try to do for the 'poor.' It's a sort of fad, isn't it—in your set? But charity begins at home. You could do more by looking into things and righting wrongs in your father's own shop than anywhere else in the world."

She stopped, panting a little, her colour coming and going. She had not meant this at first. It was far removed from smiling civility, this—tirade! But, as Sadie Kirk would say, "He had asked for it."

He was looking at her with his straight, level gaze. He was astonished, maybe, but not angry. And she did not know whether to be glad or sorry that she had not been able to rouse him to rage. His look into her eyes was no longer that of a young man for a young woman who means much to him. That light had died while the stream of her words poured out.

For a moment, when she had ceased, they stared at each other in silence, his face very grave, hers flushed and suggesting a superficial repentance.

“Forgive me,” she plumped two words into the pause, as if pumping air into a vacuum.
“I oughtn’t to have said all that. It was rude.”

“But true? You think it’s true?”

“Yes.”

“You have been working here in my father’s store for months, and you say I could do more good by righting the wrongs here than anywhere else in the world. That sounds pretty serious.”

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"It is serious. Whether I ought to have spoken or not."

"I tell you, you ought to have spoken. It was—brave of you. That's the way I always think of you, Miss Child, being brave—whatever happens. And laughing."

"I don't laugh now."

"Not at other people's troubles—I know. But you would at your own."

"I'm not thinking of my own. To-day of all days!"

He wondered what she meant. His mind flashed swiftly back to last night and all that had happened. He could have kissed the hem of her black dress to see her here, safe and vital enough to fling reproaches at him for his sins—of omission. Yet he must stand coldly discussing grievances. No, "coldly" was not the word. No word could have been less appropriate to the boiling emotions under Peter Rolls's grave, composed manner.

He let the baffling sentence go—a sentence which framed thoughts of Sadie Kirk.

"I should like to hear from you the specific wrongs you want righted," he said. "I know a girl of your sort wouldn't speak vaguely. You *do* mean something specific."

"Yes—I do."

"Then tell me—now."

"You came to buy a cloak for your mother."

"I didn't come for that, and you know it. I came for you. But you put a shield between us to keep me off. When you have emptied your heart of some of these grievances that are making it hot—against me, maybe you won't have to put me at the same distance. Maybe you'll let me be your friend again, if I can deserve it."

"I don't want to talk or think of ourselves at all!" she broke out.

"I don't ask you to. All that—and my mother's cloak, too—you needn't be getting down that box!—can wait. If you won't be my friend, anyhow show me how to help your friends."

"Oh, if you would do that!" Win cried.

"I will. Give me the chance."

Despite his injunction, she had taken from its neat oak shelf a box of summer wraps and placed it on the counter behind which she stood. Now, not knowing what she did, she lifted the cardboard cover and seemed to peep in at the folds of chiffon and silk.

Peter looked not at the box, but at her pitiful, reddened hands on the lid. The blood mounted slowly to his temples and he bit his lip. He, too, was standing, though any one of several green velvet-covered stools was at his service. He turned away, leaning so much weight on the bamboo stick he held that it bent and rather surprised him.

Suddenly the scene struck him as very strange, almost unreal—Winifred Child, his lost dryad, found in his father's store, separated from him by a dignified barrier of oak and many other things invisible! This talk going on between them—after last night! The hum of women's voices in the distance (they kept their distance in this vast department because he was Peter Rolls, Jr., as all the employees by this time knew) and the heavy heat and the smell of oak seemed to add to the unreality of what was going on. Fresias would have helped. But there was nothing here that suggested help—unless you wanted advice about a cloak.

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Win had been marshalling her ideas like an army hastily assembled to fight in the dark.

"That is a favour I couldn't refuse to take from you, even if I would," she said in a low voice, "to help my friends."

"It is no favour. You'll be doing me that."

She went on as if he had not spoken.

"I don't know about any shops in New York except this one—only things I've heard. Some of the girls I've met here have worked in other department stores. They say—this is one of the worst. I have to tell you that—now I've begun. There's no use keeping it back—or you won't understand how I feel. There are real abuses. The Hands don't break the laws—that's all. About hours—we close at the right time, but the salespeople are kept late, often very late, looking over stock. Not every night for the same people, but several times a week. We have seats, but we mustn't use them. It would look as if we were lazy—or business were bad. We 'lend' the management half the time we're allowed for meals on busy days—and never have it given back. The meals themselves served in the restaurant—the dreadful restaurant—seem cheap, but they ought to be cheaper, for they're almost uneatable. Those of us who can't go out get ptomain poisoning and appendicitis. I know of cases. Hardly any of us can afford enough to eat on our salaries. I should think our blood must be almost white!

"But nobody here cares how we live out of business hours, so long as we're 'smart' and look nice. When we *aren't* smart—because we're ill, perhaps—and can't any longer look nice—because we're getting older or are too tired to care—why, then we have to go; poor, worn-out machines—fit for the junk shop, not for a department store! Even here, in Mantles, where we get a commission, the weak ones go to the wall. We must be like wolves to make anything we can save for a rainy day. But any girl or man who'll consent to act the spy on others—*there's* a way to earn money, lots of it. A few are tempted. They must degenerate more and more, I think! And there are other things that drive some of us—the women, I mean—to desperation. But I can't tell you about them. You must find out for yourself—if you care."

"If I care!" echoed Peter.

"If you do, why haven't you found out all these things, and more, long ago?" she almost taunted him, carried away once again by the thought of those she championed—the "friends" she had not come to in her story yet.

"Because—my father made it a point that I should keep my hands off the Hands. That was the way he put it. I must justify myself far enough to tell you that."

"But—if one's in earnest, need one take no for an answer?"

“I suppose I wasn’t in earnest enough. I thought I was. But I couldn’t have been. You’re making me see that now.”

“I haven’t told you half!”

“Then—go on.”

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"You really wish it?"

"Yes."

"The floorwalkers and others above them have power that gives them the chance to be horribly unjust and tyrannical if they like. There are lots of fine ones. But there are cruel and bad ones, too. And then—I can't tell you what life is like for the under dog! And cheating goes on that we all see and have to share in—sales of worthless things advertised to attract women. We get a premium for working off 'dead stock.' Each department must be made to pay, separately and on its own account, you see, whatever happens! And that's why each one is its own sweatshop——"

"I swear to you this isn't my father's fault," involuntarily Peter broke in. "He's not young any more, you see, and he worked so hard in his early years that he's not strong enough to keep at it now. Not since I can remember has he been able to take a personal interest in the store, except from a distance. He leaves it to others, men he believes that he can trust. Not coming here himself, he——"

"Why, he comes nearly every day!" Win cried out, then stopped suddenly at sight of Peter's face.

"I—am sure you're mistaken about that one thing, Miss Child," he said. "You must have been misinformed. They must have told you some one else was he——"

The girl was silent, but Peter's eyes held hers, and the look she gave him told that she was not convinced. "You don't believe me?" he asked.

"I believe you don't know. He does come. It's always been toward the closing hour when I've seen him. The first time he was pointed out to me was by a floorwalker on Christmas Eve. I was in the toy department then. He was with Mr. Croft. How strange you didn't know!"

"If it was father—perhaps I can guess why he didn't want us to find out. But even now I—well, I shall go home and ask him if he realizes what is happening here. Somehow I shall help your friends, Miss Child."

"I haven't told you about them yet," Win said. "It was really one friend who was in my mind. There may be ever so many others just as sad as she. But I love her. I can't bear to have her die just because she's poor and unimportant—except to God. Dr. Marlow thinks she's curable. Only—the things she needs she can't afford to get, and I haven't any money left to buy them for her; just my salary, and no more. There's one thing I can do, though! I'll learn to be a wolf, like some of the others, and snatch commissions."

“Don’t do that!” Peter smiled at her sadly. “I shouldn’t like to think of you turning into a wolf. Your friend is sick——”

“She was told by the doctor yesterday that it was a case of consumption. I had a letter from her this morning—bidding me good-bye. You see, she was discharged on the spot, with only a week’s wages.”

“Beastly!” exclaimed Peter. “There ought to be some kind of a convalescent home in connection with this store—or two, rather, one for contagious sort of things and the other not. I——”

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"She wrote in her letter that she'd heard of a place where consumptives were taken in and treated free," Win went on when he paused. "But she wouldn't tell me where it was. And Dr. Marlow says there is nothing of the sort—"

"Oh, he can't have read the newspapers these last few days. It's been open a week."

"Then *you* know about it?"

"Yes. You see—it's a sort of—friend of mine who's started the scheme. The house is not very big yet. But he'll enlarge it if it makes a success."

"Quite free?"

"Yes. Anybody can come and be examined by the doctor. No case will be refused while there's room. I—my friend lost his dearest friend years ago—a boy of his own age then—from consumption. It almost broke his heart. And he made up his mind that when he grew up and had a little money of his own, he'd start one of those open-air places in the country free."

"I believe you're speaking of yourself!" exclaimed Win, her face lighting. Then Ena Rolls's brother couldn't be all bad!

"Well, I'm in the business, too. This must be the place the girl is going to. She shall be cured, I promise you. And when she's well she shall have work in the country to keep her strong and make her happy. Will that please you?"

"Yes," Win answered. "But—it doesn't please me to feel you're doing it for that reason."

"I'm not. Only partly, at least. I'm thankful for the chance to help. And this shan't be all. There'll be other ways. Please don't think too badly of me, Miss Child. I trusted my father, as he wished. And he trusts Mr. Croft—too completely, I fear."

Again Win was silent. She had heard things about Peter Rolls, Sr., which made her fancy that he was not a man to trust any one but himself. And she did not yet dare to trust his son. The look was coming back into his eyes which made her remember that he was a man like other men. Yet it was hard not to trust him! And because it was so hard she grew afraid.

"Give me the address of that convalescent home," she broke her own silence by saying. "I want to write to my friend, Sadie Kirk—and go to see her—if she's really there. Mr. Rolls, I shall bless you if she is cured."

Petro had taken out his cardcase and was writing.

“Then, sooner or later, I shall have my blessing,” he said quietly. “Couldn’t you give me just a small first instalment of it now? Couldn’t you tell me what changed you toward me on the ship? Had it anything to do with my family—any gossip you heard?”

“In a way, yes. But I can’t possibly tell you. Please don’t ask me.”

“I won’t. But give me some hope that I can live it down. You see, I can’t spare you out of my life. I had you in it only a few days. Yet those days have made all the difference.”

Win stiffened.

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"I can't let you talk to me like that," she said almost sharply, if her creamy voice could be sharp. "I hate it. You'll make me wish—for my own sake—if it weren't for my friend, I mean—that you hadn't found me here. I thought—I don't see why I shouldn't say it!—when I asked for work in your father's store that none of the family would ever come near the place. I was told they never did. But it wasn't true. You all come!"

"You mean my father and I?"

"And Miss Rolls, too——"

"She came?"

"Yes, with Lord Raygan, and—and I think you and Lady Eileen were here, too."

"We were," Peter said. "And so—you were in the store even then? Nobody told me."

"I hoped they wouldn't."

It was his turn to be silent, understanding Eileen's dream. Raygan must have talked to her about the girl. But there would have been nothing to say, if Ena had not said it first. Ena had "explained things" to Raygan, perhaps—and then——

An old impression came back to Peter. He remembered Ena's protest against his friendship for a "dressmaker," and her kindness later. He remembered asking himself on the dock if Ena could have made mischief. He had put the thought away as treacherous, not once, but many times. Now he did not put it away. He faced it, and wondered if he could ever forgive his sister. It seemed at that moment that he never could.

"Will you choose the cloak for Mrs. Rolls?" Win was asking in the professional tone of the obliging young saleswoman.

"I—er—yes, I suppose so. Which one do you suggest?"

"Any of these would be charming for—the lady you've described. She'd like it better, I'm sure, if you chose it yourself."

"No, I want you to choose, please. I've already told her about you. If it hadn't been for her I shouldn't have found you so soon. She advised me to try the Hands. No matter what you may think of me, there's only one opinion to have of mother. And you can't object to meeting her. You choose the cloak and I'll bring her to see you—in it."

Win kept her eyes on the assortment of silk motoring and dust coats which she had arranged on the broad counter for Mr. Rolls's inspection. Suddenly a great weight was lifted from her head, as if kind hands had gently removed a tight helmet.



Would such a man as Ena Rolls had sketched in her shadow portrait of a brother bring his mother to meet a shop girl whom he fancied? It seemed not. Yet men of that type were the cleverest, as she already knew. Maybe he didn't really mean to bring Mrs. Rolls. It would be easy, from time to time, to postpone her visit. And Win was very proud. She thought of Ena's annoyance at happening upon her in the elevator, and how reluctantly Miss Rolls had taken up the cue of cordiality from Lord Raygan. Oh, it was best—in any case—it was the only way to keep personalities out of her intercourse with the man who had once been Mr. Balm of Gilead.

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"This silver gray is one of the prettiest of the new wraps," she glibly advertised her wares.

"Very well, if you like it, I'll marry—I mean, I'll take it. Tell me how you hurt your hands."

"There's nothing to tell," she put him off again, visibly freezing—an intellectual feat in such weather. "And—really, as I said before, I don't care to talk about myself."

Her look, even more than her words, shut Peter up. The cloak saved the situation during a few frigid seconds. But as a situation it had become strained. The only hope for the future was to go now. And Peter went. He went straight back to Sea Gull Manor and to his father.

CHAPTER XXVI

WHEN THE SECRET CAME OUT

Father was in the library when Peter got home. One did not open the door and walk straight into this sacred room. One knocked, and if father happened to be engaged in any pursuit which he did not wish the family eye to see, he had time to smuggle it away and take up a newspaper, or even a book, before calling out "Come in."

To-day, not being well, he was allowing himself the luxury of a jig-saw puzzle, but as he considered the amusement frivolous for a man of his position, at the sound of his son's voice he hustled the board containing the half-finished picture into a drawer of his roll-top desk. In order to be doing something, he caught up a paper. It was *Town Tales*, and his eye, searching instinctively for the name of Rolls, saw that of the Marchese di Rivoli coupled with it and a slighting allusion. A wave of physical weakness surged over the withered man as he asked himself if he had done wrong in sanctioning his daughter's engagement to the Italian.

"What do you want?" he greeted Petro testily.

He was invariably testy when indigestion had him in its claw, and his tone gave warning that this was a bad moment. Still Petro was bursting with his subject. He could not bear to postpone the fight. Instead of putting it off, he resolved to be exceedingly careful in his tactics.

"I want to talk with you, Father, if you don't mind," he began pleasantly. "I hope I'm not interrupting anything important?"

"I am supposed to be left to myself in the mornings," said Peter senior, martyred. "Though I don't go to the store, I must read Croft's reports and keep in touch with things."



"It's about the store I'd like to talk." Peter was thankful for this opening. He perched hesitatingly on the arm of an adipose easy chair, not having been specifically invited to sit.

"Why, what have you got to say about the Hands?" Defiance underlay tone and look.

"It was in this very room I promised you I'd keep my hands off the Hands," Peter quoted. "But I want you to let me take the promise back."

"I'll do nothing of the sort!" shrilled Peter senior. "What do you mean?"

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"I need to work. I've tried other things, but my thoughts always come back to the Hands. I'm proud of your success you know. I want to—to batten on it. And I want to carry it on. I have ideas of my own."

"I bet you have, and damned poor ideas, too," snapped the old man. "I'm not going to have them tried in my place while I'm alive."

"Let me tell you what some of them are, won't you, before you condemn them?" his son pleaded, refusing to be ruffled.

"No. I won't have my time wasted on any such childishness," growled Peter senior. "You ought to know better than to trouble me with every silly, trifling idea you get into your head."

"To me this is not trifling," Peter argued. "It's so serious that if you refuse to take me into your business—I don't care how humble a position you start me—I shall begin to make my own way in the world. I can't go on as I am, living on you, with an allowance that comes out of the Hands, unless you give me some hope that I can soon work up to having a voice in the management."

"I suppose what you are really hinting at is a bigger allowance under a different name," sneered old Peter. "Now you're turning socialist—oh, you don't suppose I'm blind when I come to your name and your quixotic schemes in the newspapers! You don't like the red-hot chaps raving about 'unearned increment,' or whatever they call it."

"No, it isn't that," Peter said simply. "I don't much care what people say, so long as I can help things along a bit; though, of course, I'd rather it would be with my money than yours, no matter how generous you are about giving and asking no questions. I don't ask for more, or want it. But I do want to feel that—forgive me, Father!—I do want to feel that on the money I handle there's no sweat wrung out of men's bodies or tears from women's eyes."

Peter senior had sat only half turned from his desk, as if suggesting to Peter junior that the sooner he was allowed to get back to work, the better. But at these last words, unexpected as a blow, he swung violently round in his revolving chair to glare at the young man.

"Well, I'm damned!" he ejaculated.

Peter sincerely hoped not, but felt that silence was safer than putting his hopes into words.

"This comes of turning socialist! You insult your father who supports you in luxury——"

"I don't mean to insult you, Father, and I don't want to be supported in luxury. I want to work for every cent I have. I want to work hard."

"I never thought," Peter senior reflected aloud, abruptly changing his tone, "to hear a son of mine spout this sort of cheap folderol, and I never thought that any one of my blood would be weak enough to come crawling and begging to break a solemn promise."

"It means strength, not weakness, to break some promises—the kind that never ought to have been made," Peter junior defended himself. "I'd break it without crawling or begging if I thought you'd prefer, except that it would be no use. Unless I had your permission, I couldn't get taken into the Hands."

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"Well, you don't get it. See?" retorted the head of the Hands as rudely as he could ever have spoken in old days to his humblest subordinate.

"Then, Father, if that's your last word on the subject," said Petro, rising, "this means for you and me, where business is concerned, the parting of the ways."

The old man's sallow face was slowly, darkly suffused with red. "You're trying to bully me," he grunted. "But I'm not taking any bluff."

"You misjudge me." Petro still kept his temper. "I'd be a disgusting cad to try on such a game with you, and I don't think I am that. I'm more thankful than I can tell you for all you've done for me. You've had a hard life yourself, and you've secured me an easy one. You never had time to see the world, but you let me see it because I longed to—when I saw you had no use for me in the business. You let me give money away and, thanks to your generosity, one or two schemes I had at heart are in working order already. There's enough saved out of my allowance for the last few years to see them through, if I never take another cent from you. And I never will, from this day on, Father, while you run the Hands on present lines."

"You're a blank idiot!" snarled the old man; but a strained, almost frightened look was stretched in queer lines on his yellow face. He was thinking of Ena and of the newspapers. He could hear the dogs yapping round his feet.

"Young Peter Rolls breaks away from home. Earns his living with his own hands, not father's Hands. What he says about his principles"—or some such rot as that would certainly appear in big, black headlines just when Ena and her magnificent *marchese* were searching the columns for gush over the forthcoming marriage. It would spoil the girl's pleasure in her wedding.

Old Peter was furious with young Peter, but began angrily to realize that the matter was indeed serious. He desired to be violent, but fear of Ena dashed cold water on the fire of his rage. Against his will and against his nature he began to temporize, meaning later to revenge his present humiliation upon his son.

"Who the devil has been upsetting you with lies about the Hands?" he spluttered.

"I'm afraid we must take for granted that what has 'upset' me isn't lies." Peter let his sadness show in face and voice. "I don't wonder you're surprised and perhaps angry at my coming to you and suddenly throwing out some sort of accusations, when year after year I've been receiving money from the Hands as meek as a lamb without a word or question. I don't defend myself for lack of interest in the past or for too much now. Maybe I'm to blame both ways. But please remember, Father, you said that unless I distrusted you, I was to stand aside. After that I was so anxious to prove I trusted you

all right, that I hurried to promise before I'd stopped to think. Since then I've been made to think—furiously to think—and——”



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"I was brought up to believe there was *no* excuse for breaking a promise," Peter senior cut him short severely. There was Petro's chance to score, and—right or wrong—he took it.

"Then things have changed since the days when you were being brought up," he said, with one of those straight, clear looks old Peter had always disliked as between son and father. "Because, you know you promised Ena you would give up going to the store except for important business meetings once or twice a year. And you haven't given it up. You go there nearly every night."

Peter senior physically quailed. His great secret was found out! No use to bluster. Somehow young Peter had got hold of the long-hidden truth. He was, in a way, at the fellow's mercy. If Petro chose to tell Ena this thing she would fancy that every one except the family knew how old Peter's grubbing habits had never been shaken off; that with him once a shopkeeper, always a shopkeeper, and that behind her back people must be laughing at the difference between her aristocratic airs and her father's commonness.

The old man's stricken face shocked Peter. He was as much ashamed of himself as if he had kicked his father.

"I oughtn't to have told you, I know," he stammered. "Anyhow, not like this. I'm sorry."

Peter senior gathered himself together and feebly bluffed.

"You needn't be sorry," he blustered in a thin voice at the top of his throat. "What do I care whether *you* know or not? There's no disgrace in looking after my own business, I guess! To please Ena, I've made a sort of secret of it, that's all. I never 'promised.' I only let her and other folks it didn't concern suppose I lived in idleness, like the lords they admire so much. No harm in that! As for you, you're welcome to know what I do with my time when I go to New York. But it's none of your business, all the same, and you'd better keep still about it, or you'll regret your meddling. Who told you? That's what I want to get at. Who stuffed you up to the neck with all that damned nonsense about 'sweat and tears?' I bet it's the same man who tried to blackmail me with my own son about my going to the Hands nights."

"It wasn't a man who told me," said Peter, "it was a woman—or, rather, a girl. It was *me* she was blaming, not you. She thought I was responsible for the wrongs she and other employees suffer from. She didn't know it was a secret, your visiting the place. She simply mentioned it as a fact——"

"And you, a son of mine, stood quietly listening to abuse of your father and the house that's made his fortune—his fortune and yours—from a pert young clerk in his store!"

At last Peter senior could speak with the voice of injured virtue. He could reach Peter junior with the well-deserved lash of reproach. But no! The lash striking out, touched air.

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"Father, I listened because I love the girl," Peter answered "Wait, please! Let me explain. I fell in love with her on the *Monarchic*. Then something happened and I lost sight of her. Yesterday I found her at the Hands. I wanted to talk to her about love, but she made me listen to her instead. She said sharp things about the store that cut like knives. Don't think I'm accusing you if the Hands is a sweatshop. You trust Croft, and he's abused his trust. That must be it. For God's sake, give me a chance to help you put things straight."

For a moment—a long moment—Peter senior did not speak, and Peter junior would have given much to know where his thoughts had gone. They were away somewhere—with the Hands or with the girl who had made Petro listen.

"Will you do it, Father? Will you give me a chance?" his son repeated.

Old Peter started. "Old Peter" seemed the only name that fitted him just then.

"One of my children is going to marry a marquis and the other wants to marry a clerk behind my counters," he almost whimpered.

Then Petro knew, without telling, which direction his father's thoughts had taken.

"Don't be afraid that she isn't a lady," the young man humoured the old man's prejudices. "She's English and beautiful and clever and brave. She saved a woman from being burned to death to-day at the Hands. She didn't tell me that story, but I heard it. God made her to be a princess. Misfortune put her behind a counter in our store. Oh, no! *not* misfortune. Though she's had a hard time at the Hands, and shows it in her face, I believe she'd say herself that she's glad of the experience. And if through her those that have suffered wrong from us can be—"

"Don't talk to me any more about all this just now, my son," Peter senior suddenly implored rather than commanded "You've given me a shock—several shocks. I—I'm not fit for 'em to-day, I guess. I told you I wasn't well. I'm feeling bad. I'm feeling mighty bad."

His looks confirmed his words. In the last few moments since the angry flush had passed, the old man's face had faded to a sicklier yellow than Petro had ever seen upon it—except one day, long ago, when Peter Rolls, Sr., had tried to be a yachtsman in order to please Ena—and the weather had been unkind. The young man was stabbed by remorse. Reason told him that now was the moment to press his point home. But compassion bade him withdraw it from the wound. It was true that his father was not well and had warned him of the fact at the beginning of their conversation. Petro had gone too far.



"I'm sorry, Father," he apologized. "I meant to stir you up, but I didn't mean to give you a shock. Shall I ring? Is there anything you want?"

"Only to be alone," replied the other. "I'll lie down here on the sofa. By and by, if I don't feel better, I'll go to my room maybe and make it dark and sleep this headache off. I don't remember when I've been so bad. But don't say anything to your mother."

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"You mean about your going to the Hands? She knows about the girl."

"No, I mean about my head. I don't care whether or no your mother hears that I go to the Hands. It's Ena and outside folks I care for, and them only for Ena's sake. She's so proud! And when she gets home from France—"

"Not a word to her, I promise. Nor to any one outside. But do you know, I believe mother would be glad to hear that you sometimes go to the store? She'd think it was like old times. And she loves the old times."

"Tell your mother anything you like. She's got a still tongue in her head." Peter senior gasped out his words with the desperate air of a man at the end of his tether. "Only go now—go, and let my head rest. You and I can discuss all these things later. That'll be best for us both."

Peter junior was silenced, though he thought he knew his father too well to draw great encouragement from an offer of future discussion. The old man assuredly did feel ill, and it would have been brutal to force him into further argument. The only thing was to go now and attack him again before the sensitive surface of his feelings had had time thoroughly to harden.

Young Peter and his mother lunched alone together at the stately English hour of two which Ena had decreed for the household. Old Peter had ordered a cup of hot milk and had sent word that, his indigestion being rather worse than usual, he intended to spend the afternoon lying down. This had often happened before, and mother, though distressed, was not alarmed.

She would not have admitted it in words to herself, but she was happy in her *tete-a-tete* with Petro. He had his place moved near hers. They dared to dismiss the dignified servants and help themselves to what they wanted. Or, rather, Petro jumped up and helped her, whether she wanted things or not. They talked about Miss Child, and Petro related his adventure at the Hands, which he had not, until the luncheon hour, been able to describe in detail.

He told his mother again, several times over, how wonderful Win was, and mother was not bored. She listened with a rapt smile, especially to the part about the fire in the hospital room and the girl's quick presence of mind, Win having refused to confess how she had hurt her hands, Petro had used the influence of his name to find out tactfully from another source, all that had happened. And he made quite a good story out of it for his mother. The latter promised gladly to go and see Miss Child and to wear the pearl-gray wrap, which she thought very pretty, reflecting marvellous credit on the taste of the chooser.



Petro did not touch upon Miss Child's indictment of the Hands. It seemed unnecessary to distress mother just when she was interested and even delighted (not at all shocked or startled) at having father's secret broken to her.

"It's more natural," she said, "that he should take an interest in the Hands. More like he used to be. I often wondered——"

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Another sentence which she did not need to finish!

For a while Petro's whole soul was so steeped in the joy of mother's sympathy, and in plans for the future, that he forgot the faint uneasiness which had stirred within him at father's message about the milk. Something had seemed to whisper: "It's only an excuse." And his asking not to be disturbed all the afternoon, "can it mean that he's got a special reason for wanting to be let alone hour after hour?"

But Petro and mother had been deep in conversation before the whisper came. In the very midst of it she had asked a beautifully understanding question about Win, and in answering Petro forgot everything else for a time.

They talked intimately in the big, unfriendly, imitation Elizabethan dining-room which for once they had to themselves. And then they continued their talk still more intimately in the "den." It was only the grandfather clock striking four that reminded Petro of his uneasiness and of the whisper.

Why it did remind him he could hardly have explained, except that the clock had a very curious individuality for him. It had belonged to his great grandmother and had come down through her to his mother. Even as a little boy he had felt that it was *more* than a clock: it was an old friend who had ticked through the years, keeping time with the heart-beats of those for whom it told the passing moments of life and death. Often he had imagined that with its ticking it gave good advice, if only one could understand. Now, when it struck four, it seemed to Petro that it did so in a dry, peremptory manner intended to be arresting, to remind him of something important that he was in danger of forgetting.

This pause in his thoughts left room for the whisper to come again. It came, adding to its first suggestion: "Don't you know that while you and mother were lingering so happily over your lunch, father stole away and went off to make mischief between you and the girl?"

Petro sprang up. He was ashamed to harbour such a thought of treachery, but it was there. He could easily learn whether father had gone to New York by inquiring if one of the motors had been taken out. But it was hardly worth while to ask questions. Peter *knew* that his father had gone, and why.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE BATTLE

All the morning Win was in a state of strange, almost hysterical, exaltation. Again and again she warned her spirit down from the heights, but it would not hear, and stood there in the sunshine singing a wild song of love and joy.



Wonderful, incredible pictures painted themselves before her eyes. She saw Peter, impressed with her words—as indeed he had seemed to be—and remembering them nobly for the benefit of the two thousand hands within the Hands. She saw herself as his wife (oh, bold, forbidden thought, which dared her to push it from her heart!) helping him reach the ideal standard of what a great department store should be, planning new and highly improved systems of insurance, thinking out ways for employees to share profits, and of giving them pensions.

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She, who knew what the hands suffered and what they needed, could do for them what no outsider could ever do. With Peter's money and power and the will to aid, there would be nothing they two could not accomplish. Their love would teach them how to love the world. She saw the grand Christmas parties and the summer picnics the Hands would give the hands, and Peter's idea for a convalescent home should be splendidly carried out. She saw the very furniture and its chintz covers—then the picture would vanish like a rainbow—or break into disjointed bits, like the jig-saw puzzle Peter senior had hidden shamefacedly in a drawer.

For some moments Winifred's mind would be a blank save for a jumble of Paris mantles and warm customers, then another picture would form: she would see Peter and herself sending Sadie Kirk to the mountains, where the girl would be even happier and healthier than at the new place which was "free for consumers." Sadie would be Win's own special charge, her Mend, for whom she had the right and privilege to provide. No more work in shops for Sadie! No more work at all till she was cured. Perhaps a winter in the Adirondacks, then such radiant health as the "sardine" had hardly ever known.

Meanwhile the thoughts of Ursus must be turned from the girl who could never love him to the girl who already did. He and Sadie had been good chums since the day when all three marched in procession toward Mr. Meggison's window—how long ago it seemed! The big heart of the lion tamer was easily moved to pity, and pity was akin to love. When she—Win—gently broke it to him that she was going to marry Peter Rolls, whom she had loved before she ever saw her poor Ursus (of course she had loved Peter always! that was why it had hurt her so cruelly to believe Ena) the dear big fellow, pitying Sadie's weakness, would turn to his "little old chum" for comfort.

Oh, yes, everything would come right! warbled the disobedient spirit singing on the heights. Then the common sense and pride in Win would pluck the spirit's robe, and presto! another picture would dissolve into gray cloud.

Going out to luncheon (ice-cream soda and a sponge cake) somehow broke the radiant charm. Common sense put the singing spirit relentlessly into its proper place, where, discouraged, it sang no more. Ugly memories of last night's danger and humiliation crowded back into the brain no longer irradiated by Peter's presence. Win felt dully that none of the glorious fancies of the morning could ever come true, though she still hoped that her words might have some living influence upon the future of the Hands.

Even if Peter really and truly wanted to marry her (which seemed incredible), and his sister misjudged him (also well-nigh incredible), Ena Rolls and Ena Rolls's father would bar the way to any such happiness as the magic pictures had shown. It would be hateful to force herself upon a snobbish family who despised her and let her see that she was unwelcome.

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The girl was suddenly surprised because she hadn't seen, the moment Peter's back was turned (even if not before), that the one self-respecting thing was to give up her place at the Hands. It would be decent and rather noble to disappear as she had disappeared before, so that Peter, when he came again (as he surely would), should find her gone.

This thought made so gloomy a picture in contrast with the forbidden bright ones, that Win was nearer tears than she had been in the hospital room.

"Laugh—laugh—if you laugh like a hyena!" she was saying to herself between half-past four and five, when other girls were thinking of the nice things they would do when they got home.

Win envied them. She wished the things that satisfied them could satisfy her. Yet, no, she did not wish that. Divine dissatisfaction was better. She must keep that conviction before her through years which might otherwise be gray. For now she was quite sure that nothing beautiful, nothing glorious, nothing even exciting, could ever happen to her. And it was at this very moment that she received a peremptory summons to Mr. Croft's office.

"It'll be about the fire, maybe," the nicest girl in the department encouraged her. "I shouldn't wonder if they're going to give you a reward. If there was anything wrong, the word would come through Meggison sure."

Win smiled thanks as she went to her fate; the girl was kind, not of the tigress breed. But she couldn't guess how little any paltry act of injustice from the Hands would matter now.

Miss Child had never before been called to the office of the great Mr. Croft, but she knew where it was, and walked to the door persuading herself that she was not in the least afraid. Why should she be afraid when she intended—really *quite* intended—to leave the Hands of her own accord?

There was an outer office guarding the inner shrine, and here a girl typist and a waxy-faced young man were getting ready to go home. It was now very near the closing hour. The waxy-faced youth, a secretary of Mr. Croft's, minced to the shrine door, opened it, spoke, returned, and announced that Miss Child was to go in. He even held the door for her, which might be a sign of respect, or of compassion for one about to be executed. Then, as the girl stepped in, the door closed behind her, and she stood in an expensively hideous room, looking at a little, dried-up dark man who sat in Mr. Croft's chair at Mr. Croft's desk. But he was not Mr. Croft. He was Peter Rolls, Sr.

Win recognized him instantly and knew not what to think. Luckily he did not keep her long in suspense.

“You Miss Child?” he shortly inquired, holding her with a steady stare, which from a younger man would have been offensive.

“I am, sir,” she said in the low, sweet voice that Peter junior loved. Even Peter senior was impressed with it in spite of himself, impressed with the whole personality of the young woman whom Petro had said was “made to be a princess.” She looked a more difficult proposition than he had expected to tackle.

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"Know who I am?" he continued his catechism.

"You are Mr. Rolls."

"What makes you so sure of that, eh?"

"You were pointed out to me one evening last winter, when you were inspecting the shop with Mr. Croft."

"Nobody had any business pointing me out. Who did?"

"I'm afraid I've forgotten," said the girl, more calmly than she felt. "It was so long ago."

"You seem to have been dead certain he was right."

"I took it for granted."

"That's dangerous, taking things for granted. I advise you not to do it, Miss Child."

Still he stared as she received his advice in silence. Not a feature of the piquant, yet proud, arresting face, not a curve of the slim figure, did his old eyes miss.

"I guess you haven't forgotten who pointed me out," he persisted, after a pause. "Now think again. *Have* you? It might pay to remember."

"I do not remember, sir." She threw up her head in the characteristic way which the other Peter knew.

"Sure nothing could make you remember?"

"I'm sure nothing could."

"Very well, then, we must let that go for the present. Now to another subject. I hear you showed a good deal of pluck this morning in putting out a fire."

"Oh, after all, it may be only that!" Win thought.

She ought to have been relieved. But she was not certain whether relief was her most prominent emotion. The girl did not quite know what to make of herself, and the man was not giving her much time for reflection.

"The little I did was done on the spur of the moment," she said. "I don't deserve any credit."

"Well, I may be inclined to think different when it comes to settling up. That depends on several things. We'll come to 'em by and by. You're English, ain't you?"

“Yes.”

“H-m! You look as if you ought to have titles running in your family. Have you got any?”

Win fancied that this must be her employer’s idea of a joke, but his face was grave, and even curiously eager. “Not one,” she answered, smiling.

“No connections with titles?”

“Why, yes, we have some cousins afflicted in that way,” she lightly admitted, beginning to be faintly amused as well as puzzled. “Almost every one has, in our country, I suppose.”

“What sort of title is it?”

“Oh, my father’s second cousin happens to be an earl.”

“An earl, is he? That stands pretty high, I guess, on your side. Any chance of your father inheriting?”

This time Win allowed herself the luxury of a laugh. What a strange old man! And this was Mr. Balm of Gilead’s father!

She was still in the dark as to why he had sent for her. But it must be on account of the fire. His curiosity was very funny. In any one except Peter’s father she would have considered it ridiculous. Maybe he wanted to work up a good “story” in the newspapers. Very likely it could be turned into an “ad” for the Hands if the cousin of an English earl had saved a fellow employee from burning up, and it would be still more thrilling if the heroine might some day turn into a haughty Lady Winifred Something. She shook her head, looking charming. Even old Peter, staring so intently, must have admitted that.

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"There's not the remotest chance," she replied. "Our cousin, Lord Glenellen, has six sons. Four are married and having more sons every year. I don't know how many there are. And I'm sure that they've forgotten our existence."

"Well, there ain't much show for you in that connection!"

Mr. Rolls reluctantly abandoned the earldom. "What's your father, anyhow?"

"A clergyman," said Win. "A poor clergyman, or I should never have seen America."

"I suppose you'd have married some fellow over there. What did you do for a living on your side?"

"I hadn't begun to do anything till I engaged with Nadine—the dressmaker, you know—to be one of her models on board the *Monarchic* so as to get my passage free. I thought I should be sure to make a fortune in New York."

"Yes, I guess that was your point of view. You're frank about it, ain't you?"

"One may be about a lost illusion."

"There's more than one way for a girl to make a fortune. Maybe you and I can do business. So you were one of those models when you first met my son?"

Win would not have been flesh and blood if that shot had not told, especially after the old man's funny catechizing had lured her amusingly away from suspicion. She quivered, and a bright colour stained her cheeks. Nevertheless those peering eyes found no guilt in her look.

"Yes," she answered bravely. "He bought a dress from us for his sister."

"One excuse is as good as another for a young fellow. What else did he do?"

"Gave us patent medicine. We were all dreadfully seasick."

"You don't mean to tell me he fell in love with you when you were seasick?"

"I don't mean to tell you that he fell in love with me at all, Mr. Rolls."

"I guess you didn't mean to. But, you see, I made you own up."

"There was nothing to tell."

"Well, the murder's out, anyhow. And that brings us back to a point I want to make. Now that affair of this morning. You say you're entitled to no credit. But I've been thinking I'd like to make it up to you by giving a reward."

"I couldn't think of taking it!" cried Win.

Strange that he should break off suddenly from the subject of his son (which, apparently, he had intended pursuing to some end), and jump back to that of the fire! He must have a motive—he looked a man to have motives for everything. She felt that he was laying a trap for her, if she could only find it.

"Wait a minute. Give me time to make myself clear," he went on. "I'm not talking about medals or locketts or silver cups for good girls. I mean a thumping sum, a big enough stone to kill two birds. Folks not in the know would think that it was for saving life. Those *in* the know (meaning me and you, and nobody else) would understand that it was for saving my son. No disrespect to *you*. I want to put it delicately, miss. Saving him from a *mistake*."

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Win had always thought “How dare you?” a very silly expression, no matter what the provocation. Yet now she was tempted to use it. Only her subconscious sense of humour, which warned her it would be ridiculous from Peter Rolls’s “saleslady” to Peter Rolls himself, made her bite back the words that rushed to the end of her tongue.

“You have a strange idea of putting things delicately!” she cried. “You offer me a reward if I—if I—oh, I can’t say it!”

“I can,” volunteered the old man coolly. “And I’ll tell you just how much I offer. Maybe that’ll help your talking apparatus. I’ll give you ten thousand dollars. Wouldn’t that be something like making your fortune in New York?”

“If it were ten millions it would make no difference,” the girl flung at him. “I—”

“Say, you set a high value on my son Peter. But if he marries you, my girl, he won’t be worth any millions, or even thousands, I tell you straight. He won’t be worth a red cent. You’d better pick up my offer while it’s going, and drop Peter. Maybe with ten thousand dollars of your own, one of your young cousins, the earls, might find you worth while.”

Never had Win even dreamed that it was possible for a human soul so to boil with anger as hers had now begun to boil. She wanted to scald this hateful old man with burning spray from the geyser. At last she understood the rage which could kill. Yet it was in a low, restrained voice that she heard herself speaking.

“Please don’t go on,” she warned him. “I suppose you don’t quite realize how hideously you’re insulting me. A man who could say such things wouldn’t. And only such a man *could* misunderstand—could think that instead of refusing his money I was bidding for more. I wanted to say that you could save your son and your pocket, too. Neither are in danger from me.”

“That ain’t the way the boy feels about it,” Peter senior slipped the words in slyly. “If he did, I wouldn’t have sent for you.”

This was the last drop in the cup.

“What?” cried the girl, towering over the shrunken figure in the revolving chair. “*Your son asked you to send for me?* Then he’s as bad, as cruel, as you are.”

A red wave of rage swept over her. She no longer knew what she was saying. Her one wish—her one object in life, it seemed just then—was to hurt both Peters.

“I hate him!” she exclaimed. “Everything I’ve heard about him is true, after all. He’s a false friend and a false lover—a dangerous, cruel man to women, just as I was warned he was.”

“Stop right there,” broke in Peter’s father. “That’s damn nonsense, and you know it. Nobody ever warned you that my boy was anything of the kind.”

“I was warned,” she beat him down, “that it was a habit of your son to win a girl’s confidence with his kind ways and then deceive her.”

“Then it was a damned lie, and no one but a damned fool would believe it,” shouted Peter Rolls, Sr. “My boy a deceiver of women? Why, he’s a Gala-what-you-may-call-it! He’d die any death sooner than harm a woman. I’m his father, and I know what I’m talking about. Who the devil warned you? Some beast, or some idiot?”

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"It was neither."

"Who was it, then? Come, out with it. I dare you to. I'll have him sued for slander. I'll ____"

"It wasn't a he. It was a woman who ought to know at least as much about him as you do."

"There's no such woman, except his mother, and she worships the ground he walks on. Thinks he's a kind of up-to-date Saint George, and I'm hanged if she's far wrong. Why, since Peter was a boy he's never cared that"—and a yellow thumb and finger snapped for emphasis under Win's eyes—"for any woman till he got silly over you."

The girl laughed a fierce little laugh. "You tell me this? You defend him to me? Is that policy?"

Peter senior suddenly looked foolish. He had straightened himself to glare at the upstart. Now he collapsed again.

"No, it *ain't* policy," he confessed, "but I guess it's human nature. My blood ain't quite dried up yet, and I can't sit quiet while anybody blackguards my own flesh and bone. You tell me who said these things about him!"

"I will not tell you."

"Don't you know I'm liable to have you discharged for impudence?"

"You can't discharge me, for I've already discharged myself. I'd rather starve than serve one more day at your horrid old Hands."

"Horrid old Hands, eh? I can keep you from getting a job in any other store."

"I don't want one. I've had enough of stores. I am not afraid of anything you can do, Mr. Rolls. Though they do call you 'Saint Peter' behind your back—meaning just the opposite—you haven't the keys of heaven."

"You're an impudent young hussy."

"Perhaps. But you deserve impudence. You deserve worse, sir. A moment ago I hated you. I—think I could have killed you. But—but now I can't help admiring something big in you, that makes you defend your son in spite of yourself, when it was policy to let me loathe him."

“‘Loathe’ is no word to use for my boy,” the old man caught her up again. “I don’t want you to marry him, no! But, whatever happens, I can’t have you or any one else doing him black injustice.”

“Then, ‘whatever happens,’ I’ll admit to you that never in the bottom of my heart did I believe those things. I didn’t believe them to-day, but I—you were so horrible—I had to be horrible, too. There! The same motive that made you defend him against your own interest has made me confess that to you now. But you needn’t be afraid. I don’t think in any case I could have married him knowing how his—his family would feel. Still I might, if he’d tried to persuade me; I can’t be sure. I might have been weak. As it is, though—after you’ve insulted me in this cruel way, I believe nothing would induce me to say yes if he asked me. And he never *has* asked me.”

“Never has asked you?” echoed Peter senior, dumbfounded.

Some one had begun to knock at the door, but he did not hear. Neither did Winifred. Each was absorbed in the other. Insensibly their tones in addressing each other were changed. Some other ingredient had mysteriously mingled with their rage; or, poured upon its stormy surface, had calmed the waves. They were enemies still, but the girl had found the man human; the man, because he was man, found himself yielding to her woman’s domination.

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Petro said God had made her a princess. She was only a shop girl, and the vain old man wanted her out of his way—intended to put her out of his way, by hook or by crook; but all the same in look and manner she was his ideal of a girl queen, and he could understand Petro being a fool over her.

“He never has asked you? But I thought——”

(*Tap, tap*, for the second and third time.)

“I know what you thought. You wouldn’t listen when I tried to explain.”

(*Tap, tap, tap!* No answer. And so the door opened.)

“It isn’t only that your son hasn’t asked me to marry him, he hasn’t even told me he cared.”

“But he does both now,” said Peter Rolls, Jr., on the threshold.

As he spoke he came into the room with a few long, quick steps that took him straight to Win, as if he wanted to protect her against his father if need be. And timidly, yet firmly, he was followed by Mrs. Rolls, wearing the new gray wrap.

“I’d have told you long ago if I’d had the chance,” he went on. “I told father this morning that I’d loved you ever since the first minute I saw you, and that you were the only girl who ever was or ever would be. I don’t know what he’s been saying to you, but I felt he meant to—to—see what you were like. So I came. And nothing matters if you can care a little and have faith enough in me to——”

“That’s just what she doesn’t do and hasn’t got!” interpolated Peter senior. “The girl’s been calling you every name she could turn her tongue to. Said she was warned against you by some woman—she wouldn’t tell me who it was——”

“I know who it was,” put in his son.

“You do? We’ll send her a writ, then——”

“We can’t. She isn’t in the country just now.”

“I did say the most hateful things,” Win admitted, “because your father made me so angry. And—he *defended* you against me! He said nobody but a fool could ever for a minute have believed such things were true. And he was perfectly right. Can you forgive me?”

“Why, I love you, you know,” said Peter. “And whether you ever believed anything wrong of me or not, I—I almost think you love me a little now to make up. You couldn’t look at me like that if you didn’t, could you? It wouldn’t be fair.”

“I mustn’t look at you at all, then,” Win answered, pushing him gently away as he tried to take her hands. “Please let me go. I can’t—”

“I wouldn’t let you go, if he did, my dear,” said a gentle voice that had not spoken yet. “I guess a girl that saves people from themselves when they’re on fire, burning up, and don’t know in the least what they’re doing, would be just the kind of new daughter we would like to have now when we have to let our own leave us. Why, you would be worth your weight in gold at our house. Isn’t that so, Father?”

For once mother had finished four consecutive sentences in her husband’s presence. But this was an unusual occasion. It seemed to her that its like could never come again, and that here was her chance of a lifetime to stand by Petro.

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"H-m!" grunted Peter senior. "The girl ain't a coward, anyhow. She stood up to me like a wildcat. Said she hated me. Said she wouldn't take Peter if I paid her to—or words to that effect. Well, I didn't exactly offer to pay her for doing that, rather the other way around. But when she had the gorgeous cheek to up and say, after all, that she *liked* me for defending you, why, I—well, I don't know how it was, but all of a sudden I weakened to her. She *got* me same way as she got you, Peter, I suppose. Maybe it was with one of her laughs! Anyhow—look here, miss. If you'll take back *your* words, I'll take back *mine*. Cut 'em right out."

"Which words?" Win cautiously wanted to know.

"The whole lot, while we're about it. I guess a sister-in-law who's got earls for cousins ought to be good enough for a *marchesa*. You've *got* me, I tell you! And you can have Peter, too, if you want him. Do you?"

"I do," answered Win—and laughed again, the happiest, most surprised, and excited laugh in the world.

"Then we've got each other—forever!" cried Petro. "And, Father, you and I will have each other, too, after this, as we never had before. You shall bless this day as I do, and as mother will."

"All right," said old Peter. "We'll see about that. Anyhow, shake hands."

Petro shook.

"And you, too, girl."

Winifred hesitated slightly, then held out her burned fingers.

Peter senior gave them deliberately to his son.

"There you are!" he exclaimed. "Now we're all three in the business."

"And this is the way we're going to run it in future," said Petro. "With love."

THE END