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**WHY JOAN?**



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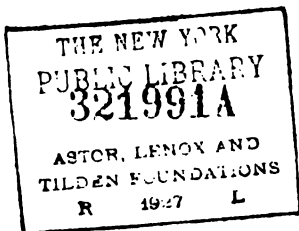
# WHY JOAN?

BY  
**ELEANOR MERCEIN KELLY**  
Author of "KILDARES OF STORM," etc.



NEW YORK  
THE CENTURY CO.  
1919





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*Published, March, 1919*

XROY WREN  
JULY  
YRASELL

TO  
MRS. RICHARD W. KNOTT

friend and neighbor to many young women such as JOAN, whom she has helped to find the why of themselves; and whose life principle may be summed up in Virgil's phrase:

*Paulo majora canamus—*  
(Let us sing of higher things.)



## FOREWORD

Some time since, the author had the temerity innocently to publish a book ("Kildares of Storm"), which, like this one, employed for background the country with which she happens to be most familiar, the State of her adoption and of her affections. And great was the scandal thereof. Neighbors insisted upon recognizing themselves in it, to their horror—or to their complacency, as the case might be. They also recognized the house described; although if one heard with impartial ear, the house appeared to possess as many different identities as localities, and despite the fact that the author, in order to guard against this very contingency, had taken many liberties with geography, even to the extent of moving mountains—imagination being on occasion almost as powerful as faith.

That history may not repeat itself, the author now hastens to assert that no self-respecting creative instinct, with the whole world of fancy at command, would care to inhibit productivity by the limitations imposed upon photography, invaluable as that science is in its place—which is not fiction. Ours the happy privilege of, for the moment at least, "shattering the world to bits and remolding it nearer to the heart's desire."

There is also among the craft an unwritten law against the holding up for public inspection those people with whom one has broken bread, so to speak; and as one is apt, in Kentucky, to have broken bread with all one's acquaintance, neighbors, friends and *enemies* may alike consider themselves



## FOREWORD

safe from the present pen. If any think to recognize themselves in this book, let them recognize themselves quite as readily in the living people about them. For we are, after all, of one substance, varying only with circumstance and the different stages of development. And it is with these things only—with circumstance and the stages of development, with truths rather than facts, with men and women rather than personalities—that this author at least chooses to concern herself.

ELEANOR MERCEIN KELLY.



**WHY JOAN?**

**Aime-moi, parce que j'ai besoin de ton amour pour mes chansons,  
Va t'en, parce que j'ai besoin de pleurer pour mes chansons,  
Meurs, parce que j'ai besoin de chanter la mort pour mes chansons,  
Car je suis le Cobzar.**

*Quoted by Pierre de Coulevain from source unknown.*

**Rough translation:**

**Love me, because I have need of love for my songs,  
Leave me, because I have need of tears for my songs,  
Die, for I have need to sing of death in my songs,  
For I am the Cobzar.**

# WHY JOAN?

## CHAPTER I

**Y**OUNG Joan Darcy leaned back luxuriously upon a cushion offered by the obsequious porter (servants were usually obsequious with Joan, though she was not at all beautiful and rather too shabby to promise much in the way of largesse), watching the world go by with a dreamy, detached, yet oddly observant gaze that missed no detail of the landscape through which she passed and registered it in her subconscious mind for future reference. It was a convenient receptacle, her subconscious mind—a sort of strong-box into which went many things valuable and valueless, to be brought forth when occasion required, quite intact. She tucked away in it now not only the rushing landscape but the various people about her in the Pullman: a dapper person, probably a necktie drummer, who had for some time been discreetly taking notice and whom it was her pleasure to occasionally regard as if he were so much thin air; an elderly lady who beamed wistfully whenever their eyes met, and who, Joan decided, would presently summon up courage to inform her that a little daughter, had she lived, would have been about Joan's age; also another girl, dressed as Joan would have liked to be dressed herself, who cast occasional glances of indifference in her direction, noting, it was to be hoped, the affluent litter of magazines and papers that surrounded our heroine, the fading bouquet tucked into her belt, and the expensive box of chocolates which lay open upon her knee, exposing to the world at large a masculine card on top.



Joan discovered within herself a certain impersonal, appreciative antagonism toward strange young women, such as knights may have felt who met for combat upon the jousting field. Envy was the one tribute which most assuaged her vanity.

She would have liked to sample the box of candy—a parting tribute from a family friend who had a most discriminating taste in chocolates—but she feared that it would place her hopelessly in the class of school-girls, from which she had just emerged, as world-wise, as sophisticated, as completely finished a young person as ever a convent turned loose upon the unsuspecting world. “Tess of the d’Urbervilles” was her favorite novel; she had smoked her maiden cigarette—in fact, two of them; and she no longer subscribed to the stork-and-baby myth, which seemed to her puerile.

She was still able, however, to savor keenly in advance the moment when the Pullman would empty itself into the dining-car and she would be free to approach her chocolates in the manner favored by true *bon vivants*: i.e., by nibbling off one end, extracting the contents bit by creamy bit with the head of a pin (preferably a large white-topped pin), and finally crushing the emptied shell deliciously upon the tongue. Conserved in this manner, one chocolate might be made to do the duty of many chocolates, an advantage not to be despised where pocket-money is limited to twenty-five cents a week.

The moment was not yet, and reflecting sedately that self-control is good exercise for the character, she gave herself over to the pleasures of recollection.

What a beautiful parting it had been! What floods of tears and kisses and promises! Seven—no, eight—girls weeping around her while they exchanged dramatic farewells; firm Sister Mary Joseph, the out-sister who conveyed pupils to shops and trains and so forth, leading her aside at the last moment to press upon her, heretic though she was, a tiny

medal of St. Joseph, known to bring good husbands to his adherents; two youths from the near-by college (mere brothers of friends, but still masculine); and, for *pièce de résistance*, Stefan Nikolai, famous though elderly, who had run over from China or Egypt or somewhere to see her graduate. This was an attention Joan took quite for granted—he had been a friend of her mother's, and distance seemed nothing to his habit of life. But its effect upon her schoolmates, and even upon Sister Mary Joseph, was gratifying in the extreme. With his dark, fine features, and his foreign-cut clothes, he had not looked particularly elderly that day. His eyes, Joan recalled, had always been peculiarly expressive, like the eyes of a setter dog, which probably has nothing to express at all; and she chuckled to recall how the out-sister's gaze had wandered inadvertently toward the unconscious gentleman as she tendered her medal of St. Joseph.

Joan was fond of Mr. Nikolai, and grateful to him. She even read his books, though she preferred his letters, which had a good deal in them about herself. His presence at her graduation, his chocolates, the little sea of papers with which he sought to beguile the tedium of her journey, had all helped to comfort her for the absence of her father. He was, she thought warmly, almost as good as a father anyway; and far more generous! Everything nice she had was a gift from Stefan Nikolai. Her lovely Chinese shawl, her carved jade ring (Joan wished secretly that there had been a diamond in it somewhere), the odd piece of clear blue aquamarine he had brought her for a graduation present, that just matched her eyes; books too, in beautiful covers, and some old prints that were anything but beautiful, and a white bear-skin for her room. She would have liked to suggest to him that, in place of such costly trifles, occasional dresses might be acceptable, of the sort that come from Paris; also frilly things, hand-embroidered, *which he would not have to choose him-*

self, of course—there being women clerks for the purpose. She was a little surprised that he had not thought of it himself, aware as he must be of the scarcity of such desirables in the Darcy family.

Still, one must not look a gift-horse in the mouth; and had he not been such a lifelong friend as to be almost a relation, Joan would have chafed a little, as it was, under her sense of obligation to Mr. Nikolai. Her mother's daughter did not take kindly to a sense of obligation.

It was not he, however (ah, by no means he!) who had provided the flowers which drooped at her belt. For one moment the absence of the donor of these flowers had threatened to spoil the pleasure of her parting; and then had arrived, breathless, a messenger and a note. Joan was able philosophically to reflect that if the gentleman had come in person she would never have had the note. And there is something delightfully tangible and lasting about a love-letter—if, indeed, it was a love-letter?

That was one of Eduard Desmond's great gifts: elusiveness.

She put her hand to her blouse and felt the responsive crackle therein; and the words of the note danced before her eyes in the form of little cupids, bearing garlands:

My flowers must tell you what I dare not, dearest little girl of my heart. You will understand why I cannot say good-by. Truly, "To part is to die a little." Forgive me!

EDUARD.

Joan had done her thrilled best to understand, since it was expected of her, but she felt rather puzzled. Was it that he feared his emotions at parting might get beyond his control? Joan sighed. She could have borne that. Or was it—here she frowned importantly—that his habits were already resuming control of him, now that her hand was, so to speak, off the rudder?

Eduard Desmond, as all the Convent knew, was a man of the

world, with a past. He was also in his lighter moments an artist. The Convent was rather vague in its mind as to the form of art he pursued; but that it included habits was unfortunately certain, and his young niece Betty had vouched personally for the authenticity of his past. It had had to do with a married woman. The Convent frequently prayed for him; though unknown to the nuns.

Occasionally this distinguished-looking, fascinating, rather melancholy young man came to take Betty and a few chosen friends to a matinée, out of the kindness of his heart. Perhaps it was not pure kindness of heart that had called to his special attention young Joan Darcy, with her square chin, and straight black brows beneath which the eyes looked out at you with an odd intensity; unless she smiled, when they danced like blue water in the sun. She was not pretty, Joan, and boys rarely noticed her, somewhat to her chagrin; but Eduard Desmond was no boy, and his past perhaps had made him perceptive. The acquaintance between them ripened to a degree unsuspected by the good sisters at the Convent, if not by his family, who aided and abetted it, feeling that a young girl might be rather good for Eduard. Doubtless she was. She entered into the duty of "reforming" him with a conscientious thoroughness that might have been trying to an artistic temperament, had he not got a good deal of genuine interest out of the process himself; interest, and even more. She had soft little confiding ways, like a friendly child's, combined with the queerest flashes of cool understanding, anything but childlike, which kept him rather in awe of her innocent vision. Indeed, that the affair went no further than it did was due perhaps to Joan's perfectly unconscious habit of withdrawing herself to see what was going on, of being "not there when wanted," as Eduard put it to himself, annoyed. He thought it deliberate, the reserve of the prude, or of the embryo coquette; whereas it was really one of the

crosses of Joan's life, dreaded by her as the self-conscious dread attacks of shyness.

So far she had come out of what might have been an illuminating experience bearing only two small trophies of the sort girls love to whisper about together in bed after dances when the lights are out; one rather lingering kiss upon her slim, brown paw (which did not startle her at all, but made her want to giggle); and now this love-letter—if it was a love-letter.

Again Joan sighed. She regretted with all her heart that queer aloofness which came upon her in critical moments, making her notice that a man's ears were put on wrong, or that her own finger-nails needed shining, when she should have been surrendering her whole soul to emotion. Was it always going to keep her from plumbing the depths of life?

"Oh, but it sha'n't!" she insisted to herself. "*I will not* be an innocent bystander! Things must happen to me; they must. All kinds of things!"

It was the sort of challenge to which Fate is apt to give attentive ear.

Presently, out of facts and recollections she slipped, as was her wont, into a game of Pretend, which had been a sort of accompaniment to Joan from her cradle; growing as she grew, changing as life changed its aspect to her eyes. She was no longer plain little Joan Darcy, returning from school in a shabby suit which she had outgrown, to a shabby home which she had also somewhat outgrown. She was a glorified young person of the singer or actress variety, returning from a career of conquest in foreign parts, with her maid Fifine traveling second class in the coach behind, as they do in all the better novels. Her father, not much altered from real life except that there were no spots on his clothes (the Major's manner being grand enough for any circumstances), would be at the station with the victoria and pair—or perhaps the

limousine—and would murmur to the second footman, "Home, James"; and at the door of the family mansion, a pillared, fan-lighted door (Joan's mind lingered lovingly over architectural details even in her haste to reach the people in the doorway) would be Ellen Neal first, dropping respectful curtsies—quite a stretch, this, even for Joan's imagination!—and beyond her, in a lovely tea-gown, all silk and lace and newness, would stand her mother with outstretched arms, waiting. . . .

Here Joan became suddenly aware that she was dropping large, hot tears upon her precious chocolates—she who had sworn never, never to cry any more in all her life, because tears are only useless things that make the nose red!

"But *why* am I crying?" she demanded of herself, puzzled, still mazed with her game of Pretend.

It was because her mother would not be in that doorway, waiting; nor anywhere ever again—unless there really is a Heaven.

Joan sat there, too proud to bury her face in her hands or to search for a handkerchief, intensely conscious that people were glancing her way, praying wildly to all her gods to keep her from blubbering aloud; and she looked so like a haughty infant in distress that the young man opposite, he whom she had characterized as a necktie drummer, could not long restrain active sympathy.

"Pardon *me*," he said awkwardly, leaning toward her. "Are you in some sort of trouble? Anything I can do?"

Joan summoned all her scattered forces to meet this emergency in a manner that would do credit to the precepts of Sister Mary Joseph. She elevated her small red nose, and lifting her eyes to about the level of his scarf-pin (a rather cheap scarf-pin) remarked: "You can go away. I am telling myself sad stories of the death of kings."

The necktie drummer retired, permanently, to the smoking-car.

This victory cheered Joan into momentarily forgetting her mother. Already an adventure to write to the girls! She wished that she had looked a little farther up than the scarf-pin.

Shortly the old lady whose daughter might have been Joan's age if she had lived, invited Joan to be her guest in the dining-car, and was repulsed, coldly and firmly. One hears such tales of wicked old harpies on trains leading trustful girls into the most frightful predicaments!

"No, thank you," said our heroine. "I never have much appetite on trains."

Soon the car was quite empty, and Joan, mopping the last of the tears from her eyes, selected the largest of the chocolates and drew from some recess of her person a white-headed pin. There was also, to be discussed later, a packet of sandwiches, typical Convent affairs—large slabs of bread embracing pale and clammy ham. Joan thought of these with resignation. The odor of broiling beefsteak came back from the car ahead rather poignantly. Joan had lied to the old lady. At eighteen, with every nerve and organ in healthy coöperation, appetite is not likely to fail, on trains or elsewhere. Nor was it as if she did not have the necessary dollar in her pocket. Major Darcy always managed to rise to the occasion somehow when the ladies of his family went traveling. He had a horror of gentlewomen finding themselves among strangers temporarily embarrassed for funds—quite a different affair from a permanent condition of the sort when in the home circle.

She knew that it was expected of her to spend her dollar in riotous living; but she could not forget (the Joans of the world never can forget) that a dollar is the price of a pair of white gloves or a pair of silk stockings. And so she munched her sacrificial sandwiches with a considering eye on the future.

## CHAPTER II

LATER, as she lay propped up in her snug little berth (far the pleasantest part of the journey to Joan), with her shade up for fear of missing anything of the mysterious night that passed outside—strange, silent ties, isolated farms asleep in the starlight, the glow of melting fires as they flashed by, like a startling glimpse into the infernal regions—it suddenly occurred to Joan that her father had been unprecedentedly lavish in his provision for her journey home.

“Money for good-by presents to all the girls; money for ticket, and sleeper, and tips, and ten dollars besides—goodness! Dad must have struck something!” she mused, deciding that it was really business that kept him from coming to see her graduate, and not, to put it delicately, the lack of business.

In the Darcy family things were always put delicately. The mention of cost was deprecated. One never said rudely that a thing could not be afforded. One “preferred not to bother about it just then,” or one “liked last year’s at so much better than any in the shops,” or one “enjoyed the freedom of being without servants for a while—it was relief.”

Occasionally Joan’s mother, before she overcame the counter speech of the North, had offended the family taste with plain statements about prices and possibilities. Joan, a servant from her cradle, drew her own conclusions from the expression of wincing deprecation these *faux pas* produced upon her father’s face, or upon that of the cousin



or aunt or what-not in the way of Darcy relation that was usually visiting them.

"Mamma," she had asked once in the murmured intimacy that preceded sleepy time, "is n't money a very *nice* thing?"

"A very nice thing indeed, babykins," answered the lady with a faint sigh.

"Then why must n't us never speak about it?"

It was not the only one of her daughter's questions that the harassed woman had been obliged to parry with what skill lay at her command. Honesty always came more easily to Mary Darcy than subterfuge.

Joan grew up into the family habit of euphonious speech; but, thanks to a certain inheritance from her mother, facts had a way of presenting themselves to her inner vision with a clarity, a brutal frankness of outline, quite unprecedented in the mind of a Darcy.

Her facility in the valuable game of Pretend came from the paternal strain. Richard Darcy was one of those fortunate spirits who move through life to the sound of an invisible drum corps—a procession of one, affably ready for whatever honors Fate chose to thrust upon him. Joan, too, was quite prepared for the best the world had to offer. Nevertheless, unlike her father, she was never unaware of the difference between pretense and reality, nor of the fixed line dividing them. When she lied, it was deliberately, with her eyes wide open.

Just now she chose to step over the dividing line firmly into reality. Perhaps her dinner may have had something to do with it; a diet of chocolates and ham sandwiches not being conducive to glamour of thought, even at eighteen.

Joan wished, soberly, that she were happier at the idea of going home. She wished that she were not haunted by a vague dread of it. . . .

The Convent—with its daily round of prescribed duties and

asures, its fixed intimates and enemies, its atmosphere of ample piety, its guardian nuns, striving conscientiously for that "detachment from place" which is enjoined upon them, lavishing all the pent-up mother-passion of their hearts on the young creatures in their care—Joan, young as she is, visualized the place she had left as a sunny haven, a little quiet eddy in the whirlpool; sheltered, secluded, safe. She frowned at the adjective. Surely her own home was safe," too! Surely the vague dread she felt had nothing to do with her father, for instance—her own dear, splendid, so handsome despite his frayed and spotted clothes, with that courtly manner that had won both nuns and girls to awe-wreck admiration, and that gave him far more distinction than the fathers of other girls who did not wear frayed and spotted clothes. No, it could not be her father she dreaded! And it was certainly not Ellen Neal, the elderly woman who had followed the Darcy fortunes in their waxing and waning for many a year—part servant, part mentor, always steady; declining to be shaken off even in those crises when Mr. Darcy "enjoyed doing without servants"; supporting herself during such financial depressions by means of a skillful needle—supporting, Joan sometimes suspected, others in herself. The girl recalled one significant incident of her early childhood; her mother, pale and anxious, arguing the door with a rude man who declined to leave without anything she seemed unable to give him, until Ellen appeared, half running up the street, opening her shopping-bag as she came. And when she had thrust something into the rude man's hands and slammed the door in his face, Mrs. Darcy had turned silently to the servant and kissed her. Joan's feeling for Ellen was one of the few she had never tried to analyze. It was simply there, like her breath, her very sight. She could not be said to love her—there was nothing attractive about Ellen Neal; yet her only quarrel with

her father (if anything so one-sided could be called a quarrel) was on the subject of Ellen. Once during Joan's previous summer vacation, the Major, who disliked familiarity in servants, had taken occasion to remind Ellen most kindly that his daughter was almost a young lady now and should be spoken to as Miss Joan, no longer as "Joie" or as "Baby." Joan had thoroughly concurred in this opinion; until, happening to glance at Ellen as she left the room, she saw that the servant's compressed lips were trembling. She had cried out unaccountably: "No such thing, Nellen! You're to call me anything you like, always!"—and then she had turned upon her father, scolding, stammering out astonishing reminders, raising her voice, altogether behaving in a manner most unbecoming a gentlewoman and a Darcy—as her father quite obviously forebore to suggest to her. The quarrel had been altogether a most unsatisfactory one. During her tirade the Major had sat with poised carving-knife, regarding his daughter under mildly raised eyebrows. When she had stormed herself out, he remarked quietly, in quotation marks:

"Her voice was ever soft and low,  
An excellent thing in woman."

But the matter of "Miss Joan" was, by tacit consent, never resumed between them.

No, it was decidedly not Ellen Neal who was responsible for her vague dread of home-coming. The girl, who had an odd dislike of anything vague in her mental processes, pursued the fugitive sensation to its lair with relentless precision.

Was it the poverty of home she feared, then? Surely not, for poverty was a condition quite as much with her elsewhere—rather more with her elsewhere, for among strangers it was impossible to practice those useful little economies of ragged underwear and worn-out shoes which in the privacy of home-life made an occasional extravagance possible. Joan

rather looked forward to the time when she no longer need be on dress-parade, so to speak, at every hour of the day.

"If I wear cheap night-gowns, I can buy myself a good hat," was her thought—a thought which may be said to sum up the philosophy of the Darcy family.

And although it seems customary among novelists to gage the refinement of their heroines by the daintiness of their taste in underlinen—no matter if her outer wear be sackcloth and ashes, the lingerie of a true fiction lady is invariably above reproach—one would like to submit that an almost equal refinement may be indicated by the present heroine's determination to make as brave a showing as possible before her world with as little strain as possible upon her father's income. . . .

Was it her mother's absence she feared then—still? Forewarned, Joan resolutely kept back the nervous tears that threatened to rise again at the thought of her mother; and she faced the possibility calmly.

During the summer before, alone with her father and Ellen, Joan had been given plenty of time to get used to her mother's absence. Indeed, it seemed to her suddenly that during the several years previous she had been given time to get used to her mother's absence. It was as if Mary Darcy, knowing that the hand of death was upon her, had deliberately, gradually, withdrawn herself from the child she loved, in order to make the final separation easier.

"That would have been like Mother," said Joan, nodding.

She understood, in that moment of clear vision, why she had been sent away to boarding-school, despite her father's amazed protests—it was unprecedented that Mrs. Darcy should remain so firm in the matter of incurring unnecessary expense. She understood, too, why the narrow, bleak house in Louisville, which was the latest of their many homes, had taken on none of the look of her mother—that intimate,

friendly, stay-awhile air which Mary Darcy, with the aid of long practice, managed to produce among the most unlikely surroundings within a few hours of occupancy. True, the old furniture made its faithful reappearance there, part of Joan's earliest recollections—the parlor suite of rosewood with blue velour, the little cottage piano, the great bed in which she, and her mother, and her mother's mother had been born, shorn long ago of its tester to accommodate altered circumstances—all looking a trifle shabbier, a trifle more battered after each adventure with fortune, but still dignified and "good," with the unmistakable mien of gentlefolk in reduced circumstances. For once, however, Mary Darcy had not been able to accomplish her usual miracle with this furniture. Chairs, sofa, tables, stood stiffly wherever the moving-men had chosen to place them, making no attempts to hide the spots on the wall-paper; the thread-bare velvet portières which had separated parlor from hall in every home that Joan remembered had never been altered to fit this one; stranger still, there were no green growing things in the window-sills, nor even in the can-strewn, sooty backyard. Joan could not recall any other home she had lived in without some attempt at a garden, were it only a few geraniums in the window-box.

"Mamma must have been very tired," she thought, soberly; and realized that, far from dreading her mother's absence in that dingy, dreary house, she was almost glad of it. When one is as tired as Mrs. Darcy, rest is the great boon—rest from hopeless hoping, rest from making homes out of patience and courage and a few old sticks of furniture, rest from the anxious sorrow of loving.

Joan was young to understand such things; but at her birth the fairies had given her the cruel gift of seeing out of the eyes of others. . . .

She came to the conclusion at last the thing she had been dreading was simply responsibility. Her play-time was over.

No stretch of imagination could make her a little girl again—not with her hair well up on her head and a love-letter crackling deliciously under her pillow! Hereafter it was hers to create the home her mother had relinquished; hers to make ends meet somehow, if only in the accepted Irish way of “cutting a piece off one end and tying it onto the other”; hers to keep out of her father’s eyes a certain baffled, hunted look which Joan associated with men who came to collect bills, referred to grimly by Ellen as “the Indians.” No family of pioneers on the long-ago western frontier ever lived in greater fear of Indians than did Richard and Mary Darcy and their child Joan.

The girl sighed, bracing her slight shoulders. But still thinking of her mother, she rehearsed sleepily one tenet of the little creed she had made long since to fit her necessities:

“It does not pay to be too unselfish.”

### CHAPTER III

**F**RIENDS of Mary Darcy, in the distant days before they forgot to discuss her surprising marriage with a promoter from who knows where, were wont to say "At least he makes a devoted husband and father!"

Which was perfectly true. His little family had always been, as he often said, a passion with Richard Darcy. Perhaps his facility in saying things of the sort was what had appealed in the first place to the shy, undemonstrative North-erness of Mary. Though he was one of several who had professed their willingness to live for her, he was the only suitor who had offered to die for her—an attention she could not but appreciate.

It was entirely for his child's sake (and, indeed, at some personal risk to himself, had Mary but suspected it) that two years before Major Darcy had so arranged the mysterious affairs he called Business as to be able to return to the State and city of his illustrious birth; "where," he explained with proud humility, "we are not quite nobodies, my darling!"

(The "who knows where" on the part of Mary's friends had been sheer arrogant affectation; for nobody could have talked with Richard Darcy for five minutes without learning that he had been born and raised and hoped to die in the great Commonwealth of Kentucky.)

Joan had been quite as eager about the prospective move as her father, marveling at the apathy of her mother, who said "I never mind being 'nobodies,' Richard, so long as we have each other."

Romantic visions danced through the girl's head of stately

pillared mansions, of faithful negro servitors, of fascinating belles and gallants on horseback (her mental language became quite stilted and ante bellum to suit the picture), riding to hounds through meadows as blue as the skies above.

"Though I don't suppose there's much bluegrass right around Louisville, is there, Daddy?" she demanded, with the passion for truth that was in her.

"Plenty of it, Dollykins, plenty of it—though of course Louisville is not really in the bluegrass region, you remember. It belongs to the beargrass district." (Joan nodded. Thanks to her father's powers of reminiscence, she was well up on her Kentucky.) "Still, it is n't like one of these soulless Northern cities, which regard land as so much waste space on which to build monstrosities!" He glanced out truculently upon the streets of Chicago, which had managed in some way to incur the Major's displeasure. "No, no, there's plenty of bluegrass about the old town still, plenty of space, plenty of room to breathe. And how my old friends will take you to their hearts and love you! None of this blighting Northern indifference to everything except the chink of money. Money—*bah!*— It is God's country down there, my child—gentleman's country."

This was not anti-climax on the Major's part. He visualized God at His best as a superior sort of Christian gentleman, who, had America been discovered at the time, would doubtless have chosen the Southern portion of it for the scene of His nativity.

Of course the girl's anticipations of "God's country" were too glowing not to foredoom her to disappointment. The bluegrass itself was a flat failure; mere meadows of ordinary green, above which hung in seedtime a purplish tinge, like smoke from burning leaves. Louisville, too, did not quite meet the rosy expectations of a young person rather experienced in cities.



They were received at the station, not by a deputation of the old friends who were to take them to their hearts and love them, but merely by a cousin, one of three Misses Darcy who had paid lengthy southern visits to the various places Joan had hitherto called home. By this lady they were conducted volubly in street-cars (Joan had hoped for a long-tailed carriage-pair) to an ancestral mansion which had loomed large in the Major's reminiscences, but which, as he himself admitted, appeared to have shrunk strangely, after the way of houses one has known in early youth. It was one of a row of duplicate tall marble fronts, stained and yellowed, unpleasantly suggestive to Joan's too-vivid imagination of neglected front teeth.

From this shelter the Darcys soon departed. The cousins, while most cordial, were under the necessity of letting their spare chambers to paying guests, under which category their Cousin Richard could not with any certainty be classed.

Joan recalled vividly the family search for a house that suited both her father's taste and her mother's pocket-book. The streets had seemed to her gray, endless cañons, from whose pavements the heat arose and eddied in dizzying waves. From within dark doorways women in dressing-sacks, waving palm-leaf fans, gazed out at them languidly. Block after block they traversed of houses that seemed as afraid of differing from each other as men in evening dress; again they came to neighborhoods where each dwelling stood at a bias angle from the street, as if hoping to achieve an impossible privacy by turning a cold shoulder upon its neighbor. And everywhere they huddled together as close as possible, presenting a solid front of masonry to repel invasion. Where was the space her father had boasted, the room to breathe?

Joan had gazed longingly down certain vistas of tree-lined avenues, lined with pleasant mansions; or into compact green courts where there were smaller homes, with gardens. But

these the elders passed without inquiry. They were as quick as house-agents at guessing rents.

At last an abode was found that seemed to the Major suitable upon all counts. Mrs. Darcy, gazing up at its tall, narrow brick front, said with a slight sigh, "Isn't there a good deal of it to keep clean, dear?"

It was the first time Joan had noticed her mother's new little air of weary indifference.

"Ah, but in the South one cannot be cramped for room," replied the Major largely. "There is hospitality to be considered! You must remember that our daughter's *début* into society will take place from this house, my love. Who knows?—perhaps her wedding!" He pinched Joan's cheek playfully. "How do you like it, Dollykins?"

"Not at all," she replied, too discouraged to be euphonious just then. "It's hideous, and there's a grocer-shop opposite, and Mother 'll never sleep with these horrid cars jangling by. Why can't we have a house in one of those pretty green courts, Daddy?"

The Major looked pained. Mary came to the rescue. A few years ago she would have explained bluntly that they could not afford one of the pretty green courts. Now she said with a rallying smile, "What! Not a banal, stupid, uninteresting new bungalow such as one might have in Pittsburgh, or Oshkosh, or Kalamazoo, Michigan! Where's your sense of local color, child? The atmosphere would n't be right at all!"

Joan thought that the atmosphere of this neighborhood seemed to be largely compounded of soot and sewer-gas; but she did not say so.

Richard Darcy, brightening, pointed out that while the house indeed faced a grocery-shop (so convenient for Ellen!), its rear was separated only by an alley from the rear of a house which faced upon a very fine avenue indeed; a back-

yard in which at the moment lingerie of a faint flesh-pink disported lacy ruffles and kicked airy silken limbs upon a clothes line. (Of this lingerie more anon.)

"Evidently," pronounced the Major with an unconscious eye upon it, "a desirable neighborhood in every way."

So the lease was signed, and Ellen Neal and the furniture sent for, and the first month's rent paid in advance; and these feats having been accomplished, Mary Darcy took to her familiar bed and died there, promptly and unobtrusively as was her way, without leaving any inconsiderate doctors' and nurses' bills behind her.

That first summer in Kentucky was a strange time to Joan. It was filled with dim memories of the books she read aloud to her father day after day, in the futile effort to be a companion to him; of long walks she took with him in the cool of the evenings, through streets and parks and suburbs that were as strange to the man who had come back to them, Joan suspected, as to herself; and far more desolate. For the ghost of a boy haunted them; a mischievous, headstrong, innocent lad who had meant no harm to the world, nor to himself, in those days.

Sometimes in the older streets he pointed out to her houses which came near to fulfilling her best hopes of pillared Southern mansions.

"Tim Throckmorton used to live there," he would say, forlornly; or "Many's the time I've courted pretty Sally Field in that parlor!"

Now there were "Furnished Room" signs in the windows, or shops in the lower floors, or, worst degeneracy of all, signs of negro habitation. For many a day the two hunted for a certain dearly remembered pond where a boy named Dick and his friends had been wont to repair for fishing and swimming and many a feat of derring-do. But they never found

it; only houses already old, and even office-buildings, in the place where it might have been.

And in those long and lonely walks they met no friends. It was as if for Richard Darcy the streets of Louisville were peopled by the dead.

Joan had suffered for her father even more than for herself. Somehow she felt that she was better able to bear things than her father. And in her inner consciousness, lonely as she was for her mother, and must always be, she knew that the misery in her heart was a thing that would pass. She was too young to be so sad for long.

Old Ellen wisely kept her busy with her preparations for boarding-school, her father having announced his intention of complying scrupulously with his dead wife's wishes, no matter at what cost to himself. Joan thought this very generous of him, although the cost was figurative rather than literal, as Mrs. Darcy's little property was willed to her child, with himself as guardian. Sometimes she had been a little ashamed of herself for the willingness with which she prepared to leave him, the eagerness with which she longed for the merry companionships and irresponsibilities of school again. But perhaps it was natural enough, considering that throughout that dreary summer her sole companions had been her grief-stricken father, the servant Ellen, and the sympathetic maiden cousins, who would have felt it indelicate to so much as smile in the presence of such deep mourning.

Toward the end of the summer she made one other acquaintance, thanks to the above-mentioned lingerie. One of the sudden summer wind-storms which occur sometimes in the Ohio Valley landed in their yard one Monday morning a garment that had strayed unmistakably from the clothes line across the alley; a trifle of palest silk and lace and blue ribbons which Ellen Neal eyed with dark suspicion, but

which Joan privately determined to copy for herself so soon as finances permitted.

Monday being the day when Ellen's temper was at its most difficult, Joan decided to abate her dignity to the point of returning the article herself; and so she made her way, looking very young and touching in her homemade black frock, to the front entrance of the house across the alley. And there by good luck she met, just alighting in her portecochère from a most imposing limousine, a person who was indubitably the owner of the strayed garment; a plump, blonde, dimpled lady who suggested pink *crêpe de Chine* and blue satin bows all over her. She greeted Joan with an effulgence that seemed out of all proportion to its cause, until in the course of conversation it transpired that she, like the Darcys, was a newcomer in Louisville, and rather lonely. Her name was Mrs. Calloway, and she came, as she vaguely explained, from "across the river."

"It is n't as easy to get acquainted here as I thought it would be," she admitted naïvely. "Still," she added with her dimpling smile, "I expect folks will be friendly enough, once they get to know me, don't you think?"

"Of course they will!" murmured Joan quite sincerely; for despite the woman's patent vulgarity, there was something attractive about her. One felt above all things that she was kind; and just then kindness meant a good deal to the lonely girl.

This kindness began at once to manifest itself. Elaborate desserts and salads, in very ornate dishes, made their way across the alley to the Darcy table; obligations scrupulously returned by Ellen with pickles and preserves of her own making. There were other generousities, more difficult to return in kind; candy, automobile drives, hothouse flowers, the latter evidently meant for the grave where Mary Darcy lay among strangers.

Over these attentions Ellen Neal grumbled frequently. "Your pa certainly ain't noticin' much these days, or he'd never let you get so thick with a strange woman we don't know nothin' about, Joan."

"A strange *lady*, Ellen," corrected Joan with dignity.

"Humph! Lady is as lady does. Look at her face, all painted up like a sign-board!"

"Southern ladies quite frequently rouge," said Joan out of her recent observations; but she did not pursue the subject, for she herself had doubts as to her father's approval of this new acquaintance. Richard Darcy was no democrat. He had been heard frequently to state, as one rather proud of the confession, that he had no use whatever for the *canaille* (which he pronounced "*canile*.")

Hence she was a little embarrassed and uneasy when, one Sunday morning as she and her father were starting on their weekly visit to the one bit of his native soil owned so far by Richard Darcy—his wife's grave—a limousine drew up at their door, out of which beamed the face of Mrs. Calloway, beneath a broad pink hat.

"I suspected you'd be off to the cemetery this fine morning," she called out cheerily, "and I thought I'd come and take you, you and your father. Hop right in, both of you. No, it won't be a bit of trouble. I've nothing else to do, and I always did love a cemetery anyway—it's the first place I go to whenever I strike a new town."

Joan glanced nervously at her father, wondering how he would take this initial encounter with Mrs. Calloway. But after a moment's pause of sheer astonishment, the Major's native gallantry came to the rescue, and he advanced for the introduction with all the manner of one about to be presented at court.

They found themselves bowling along at a smart clip among the churchgoers and the more lively joy-riders, out

for a Sunday's pleasure, which thronged the avenue that sultry August morning.

"Now isn't this better than a poky old street-car?" demanded Mrs. Calloway archly.

The Major responded in kind. "Undoubtedly! Particularly in the matter of company."

Joan's liking for her kind-hearted neighbor had suffered a sudden eclipse. Ellen was right about her— "Lady is as lady does." It was worse than vulgar to force herself upon them at such a time—it was unfeeling, indecent. She envied her father's poise. She had never seen him appear to such advantage as upon this trying occasion, in his new, cheap black suit which had not as yet had time to acquire spots and wrinkles, his fine features showing the ravages of sorrow, his handsome gray head bent courteously toward this voluble companion as though her every word were priceless. Manners, she reflected, cannot be assumed on occasion like garments, but are a part of the very texture of a personality. She could not imagine her father anything but suavely courteous, even under the most untoward circumstance.

Nevertheless, beneath her pride in him lingered an odd fear lest, now that he had an audience, he might be moved to oratory over her mother's grave. With Richard Darcy emotion and the expression of it were usually simultaneous. Joan's unresponsiveness (a trait which she hated in herself, but could not help) had hitherto kept her father somewhat in check; but in the presence of a kindly warmth of sympathy like Mrs. Calloway's there was no telling what might happen.

The Major, however, contented himself with murmuring, as he approached the grave, "She was very, very dear to me!" in so touching a voice that Mrs. Calloway openly wiped her eyes, exclaiming, "You poor man! Don't you think I understand—I, who've laid away two of them?"

Joan moved hastily out of earshot, leaving the pair to

reminiscence. Talk of things that hurt was to the girl like pouring acid upon an open wound; but if it helped her poor father, by all means let it help him. She had never made the mistake of thinking that because his grief was facile it was any the less strong and real. His utter helplessness, his stunned amaze that the wife he so sorely needed could have gone away and left him to bear the vicissitudes of life without her, were as piteous to his daughter as the wailing grief of a child. If she could have comforted him in any way other than by speech she would have done so. In the presence of great emotion she was dumb—though she sometimes thought she might be able to write him what she felt. Often at night she lay awake for hours, wondering how she could drive out of his eyes that baffled, frightened look which always came when things went wrong with him, and which only her mother had been able to banish. . . .

It haunted her all through the months which followed, that look of her father's; and sometimes in the midst of school-girl gaities she would fall suddenly silent, thinking that she had no right to enjoy herself because he was there alone in the city of his childhood which seemed to have forgotten him. Joan was not yet quite the hard young egotist she intended to become.

And so when toward the end of her journey the train slid into a pleasant country, mellow with the evening sun, long reaches of rolling pasture and hill and fertile bottom-land that meant Kentucky, something welled up in the girl's heart deeper than glamour of place, stronger than regret for her sheltered little past, than fear and hope for her unguessed future; perhaps the deepest and strongest feeling life plants in the human soul—the blood-tie. Weak or brave, fraud or fool or honorable gentleman—perhaps a little of all these things—it was her father who waited there for a woman to come and make him a home again; and Joan was ready.



## CHAPTER IV

**T**HE fellow-traveler who had incurred Miss Dar's displeasure by a too-active sympathy was much pleased, being of a sentimental turn of mind, to witness a family reunion which presently took place in the station at Louisville. A tall, slender gentleman of a youthful Confederate colonel type—gray mustache and imperial with a soft hat set very slightly to one side of his head—detached himself from the crowd with a cry of, "Egad, I am, Dollykins!"

Whereupon the girl dropped all her belongings, and threw herself upon him speechless, to be lifted well off the ground and hugged and kissed very thoroughly.

"Fine! She's got a father, anyway, and a bully bird at that," thought the young man, who had never known either father or mother or much of anything else that he could remember. It was his further privilege to hurry the pair with a suit-case, some magazines, and a box of cigars which both had characteristically forgotten.

He was thanked by Major Darcy with an affable smile, and by his daughter with a curt, impersonal nod of dismissal after Sister Mary Joseph's best manner; which also pleased him, for he was by no means a thin-skinned young man, and he preferred his gentlewomen haughty. He followed the pair far enough to observe the vehicle to which the father was vigorously conducting her.

"Humph!" he said to himself; "rich people!" and turned away, rather disappointed. (Why this should be, the writer cannot say, being merely a chronicler of facts.)

Joan's flow of excited babble paused as she herself saw this vehicle. "Goodness! Are we going home in a taxicab? What grandeur!" she murmured, mentally figuring out the tariff. Then the monogram on the door enlightened her.

"Oh, it's Mrs. Calloway's," she said, relieved, a little ashamed to have quite forgotten the existence of their well-meaning neighbor. "How good of her to send it for me!" she added with a giggle, recalling her recent game of Pretend. "All you need to do to complete the picture, Daddy, is to say, 'Home, James!'"

Major Darcy obligingly murmured, "Home, James!" The chauffeur touched his cap, and enclosed them in the perfumed elegance of the limousine.

Joan gave a crow of laughter, and rubbed her cheek affectionately against her father's sleeve. This was like old times indeed, happy old times, when in his lighter moments the Major had frequently entered into the spirit of her play. The contact of his sleeve was unusually soft, and she suddenly held him at arm's length to see him better.

"Why, Major Darcy! If you haven't gone and bought yourself a new suit in honor of the occasion. A beauty, too!"

He surveyed what he could of himself complacently. "The fellow has given me rather a good fit, I think."

Joan gasped. "'The fellow!' Then it's not a ready-made—you've actually been to a tailor for it! Oh, Daddy darling!" she cried excitedly, "have you been making money?"

The Major's eyebrows lifted. "I believe," he remarked, "that I have usually made money, have I not? Sufficient, at least, to keep my family comfortable."

Joan was reminded with a jerk of Darcy traditions. "Of course!" She flushed. "I did n't mean—"

And suddenly she realized that the look she had been so long dreading to see in his eyes, that expression of anxiety

which was almost fear, had quite disappeared. There was an air about him of security, of nonchalance, as one would say, "Bring on your Indians! Who's afraid?" (that the Major would have condescended to know the meaning of the family expression, "Indians.")

Joan gave his hand a quick little squeeze that was of maternal. "I'm so glad, Dad," she said quietly; and went on to speak of other things.

They turned into the street where home was. Silence fell upon her. The prospect of facing her mother's absence was more difficult than she had thought it would be. At least there was Ellen to comfort her; gruff, matter-of-fact Ellen, always at her cross-eyes when most deeply moved. Her thoughts were pinned to Ellen.

The Major's recent prosperity seemed not to have affected his dwelling-place as yet. As they drew near, Joan saw in the dusk that the little lawn in front needed attention, nor was there so much as a light in the window to guide her—Ellen was always so careful about the gasbill. Though as the limousine did not stop, she realized the "For Rent" sign on the door.

"Why, Dad, we've moved!" she cried with an odd pang at her heart. "Oh, but where?"

"Wait and see. 'Lay-lows for meddlers,'" he smiled, pleased with his little stage-effect.

The limousine bowled smoothly around the corner into the fashionable avenue beyond; and Joan thought, with a habit of anxiety beyond her years, that the new money would not last long if they were to live in such a neighborhood as this. But they stopped at a door she remembered, an imposing one with a porte-cochère, where, still as in her game of Pretend, a lady in a tea-gown stood waiting for them. Not, however, her mother.

"Here you are at last, girlie!" cried the cheery voice

Mrs. Calloway; and she was received into a voluminous pink chiffon embrace, highly scented with the latest thing in perfumes.

Joan fought her way quite rudely out of this embrace, feeling suffocated. Her knees had begun to tremble.

"Are—are we visiting you?" she quavered, piteously putting off the inevitable.

The lady laughed, a laugh as plump and soft and cushiony as the rest of her. "There, now, Dickie; I don't believe you've had the nerve to tell her yet!"

She rustled over and stood beside the Major, slightly in front of him, so that she could lean back archly against his shoulder; a position which seemed to bring an arm automatically into position about her waist.

"Dollykins," said Richard Darcy, clearing his throat and not quite meeting the girl's wide gaze, "this is my—my graduation gift to you. Your new mamma!"

## CHAPTER V

JOAN was alone at last in such a bed as she had never occupied in her life, even in her most luxurious game. Pretend. To her inexperience the sheets felt as if of softest silk—at its crest the Darcy establishment had run to fine linen—and they were edged with lace which longed frugally to transfer to a best petticoat; only there seemed no need for her to trouble further about petticoats, nor about anything else. Under the eager guidance of her “new mamma,” drawer after drawer in the room occupied had been opened to disclose piles of exquisite things, of the sort Joan had first encountered upon Calloway clothes lines, except that these were white instead of pink.

“Pink’s *my* color,” explained the former Mrs. Calloway. “Besides, white lawngerie seems sort of better for a girl that never been married, don’t you think? Even if it is a little becoming. ’Tain’t as if there was anybody to see her in it,” she added, with a conscious blush.

Joan found no suitable comment to make upon this treasure-trove. Her lips would not utter anything beyond a functory “Thank you,” even when further investigation uncovered a closet hung with dresses of every sort, peignoirs, with motor-coats and dainty wraps, with everything in the way of finery which every girl alive hopes at some time to possess, but which the daughter of Richard Darcy had learned to look upon from afar with an air of indifference.

“Are these all for me?” she asked dully.

"Of course they are! Just a few little models I had sent up on approval." (The ex-Mrs. Calloway invariably referred to her costumes in affectionate diminutives, as "little gowns," "little negligees," "little hats," etc., though the adjective could rarely be said to fit them.) "If these don't suit we'll get others—though anything ought to look good on your form, dearie." She added, clasping her hands, "It certainly is fun shoppin' for a daughter of your own!"—an outburst which might have struck some responsive chord in a heart less young than Joan's, less hard and tight and bitter with the tears that would not come.

Major Darcy had observed her apathy under this rain of largesse with some disapproval. It was not the first time he had secretly wished that his daughter might have inherited a trifle more of the Darcy manner. At length, as the girl stood looking about her new room silently, still with the strange lack of comment that seemed like indifference, he ventured a remonstrance.

"I don't think you quite realize how much time and thought and trouble your—er, your mother and I have expended on these little surprises for your home-coming, Dollykins. Or you would be more appreciative."

"*My mother!*" repeated Joan to herself with a sick gasp.

It was the bride who came to her rescue. "She's tired out, Major, that's all. And no wonder! She hardly ate a bite of dinner. You go right to bed and sleep, girlie," she advised comfortably. "In the morning you'll be better able to enjoy all your pretties."

So Joan was at last alone, wondering whether she would ever be able to enjoy anything again; alone in a strange room crowded with large blond bird's-eye maple furniture which reminded her oddly of her step-mother; with pale blue walls, a blue rug, blue silk covers on chairs and bed, blue stationery spread out on the desk, all to match. There was nothing,

not a chair, nor book nor picture, to remind its forlorn inhabitant of home; until suddenly, lost amid the glitter of the silver on the dressing-table, she discovered a faded photograph of her mother which her father had for many years carried in his pocket. This she jerked out of the opulent silver frame that disguised it, and held hungrily to her cheek, going to bed with it finally under her pillow. It did not occur to her to wonder who had put it there. (But it was not Richard Darcy.)

Yet still the tears would not come. She lay staring into the dark with hot, dry, aching eyes, repeating agonizingly to herself the questions she had not found courage to ask her father—foolish, trivial questions that seemed almost irrelevant in the face of this overwhelming calamity. . . . What had he done with the furniture, their furniture, the dear, shabby tables and chairs and hangings which were part of the home Mary Darcy had given her life in making? . . . And where was Ellen? What had he done with Ellen? Was there to be nothing left?

Once she whispered aloud, "How *could* he?"—but resolutely turned her mind away from that. It did not bear thinking of. The luxury of the room seemed to crowd upon her, choking her. . . . The price of her father's shame! . . .

It seemed to her near morning when her door opened, softly. She began to shiver, thinking it must be her father come for the intimate explanatory talk which was inevitable between them. What could she say to him? How could she ever find anything to say to her father again?

But it was not Richard Darcy who tiptoed in. The lamp beside her bed clicked on, revealing a good deal of the former Mrs. Calloway in a marvellous nightgown, her golden head as carefully coiffed as for a ball.

"Major 's off and going strong," she announced, "so I slipped away to see how you were gettin' on, dearie. I had

a kind of feelin' you would n't be asleep yet. I'm like that myself in a strange bed. . . . Look here," her voice changed as she saw the white and miserable face among the pillows—"you are n't holding it against your papa and me, girly, because we sprung this on you as a surprise! I *told* Major we ought to wait till you came home! But it was you who introduced us, you know; and I knew it would be all right as soon as we got to know each other better. And Major would n't hear to waiting, was bound and determined to have me just as soon as he could get me. Men,"—she laughed her plump, merry laugh—"are such babies when it comes to havin' what they want right away, ain't they?"

"Are they?" said Joan dully.

"You take it from me they are! A man that does n't want you quick don't want you at all. And I must say your father needed marryin' more than any one I *ever* saw! Spots all over his clothes, and that shiny in the back you could see your face in him. Your mother must have had a time keepin' that man neat! Besides, if we'd waited till you came, what would we have done with you on the honeymoon? Not," she added coyly, "that it's over yet, by any means! When he was on his death-bed Calloway said to me, says he, 'Effie May, our honeymoon never has been over, has it?' Some women are that way, just naturally affectionate and fond of makin' men feel at home. And both of us were real lonesome. . . . You don't blame me for marrying Major, do you?" she finished rather wistfully.

Joan said after a long pause, "No, I don't think I blame you, Mrs. Calloway."

The other gave an unexpected squeal of mirth. "Goodness' sakes, don't call me *that*! If you don't feel like callin' me 'mamma' yet"—(there was a hopeful pause, which Joan did not fill)—"then you might as well call me Effie May. I'm not so awfully *much* older than you, I guess—I was only



sixteen when I eloped with my first. But there's one thing I wanted to tell you"—(her voice lost its confident note and became rather shy). "I married your father as much to get you as to get him, dearie. A man's easy enough to pick up anywhere, goodness knows! if you've got the looks. But a child—" she sighed. "That's something else again. I used to think I'd like to adopt one, only Calloway didn't want to be bothered—Say, it was more fun than anything I've ever done in my life, shopping for lawngerie and little models and all, and telling the girls in the stores they were for my little girl just coming home from boarding-school!" . . .

At this juncture, for some inexplicable reason—perhaps the warmth of a kindly human presence, perhaps sheer rage with the vulgar, impossible creature who, having purchased her father, expected also to purchase her—whatever brought them, Joan's tears suddenly arrived—a torrent, a deluge of them; in the midst of which her new mamma, with more tact than might have been expected of her, disappeared.

## CHAPTER VI

GET up, Jo! Time you was gettin' up. Come, come—it's ten o'clock!"

A familiar, relentless voice penetrated Joan's consciousness at last, and she screwed her swollen eyelids tighter and even managed a reproving snore, wondering whether the halcyon days would ever come when she might be allowed to sleep her sleep out in the morning. Probably so long as Ellen Neal was within calling distance. The woman had a horror of what she called shiftless ways. Once in a moment of special exasperation she had been heard to say, "That's the chief thing that's the matter with papa—he's never ready to get up in the morning!"—a remark which had remained in Joan's memory.

When the sheets were suddenly jerked off her, and the relentless voice continued, "No use pretendin' you're asleep—you ain't. Here's your breakfast they've sent up to you, child, just as if you was sick a-bed. Humph!"

Instantly reality came back upon her with full force—undeniable reality; and she jumped up in bed and flung her arms around the old servant's neck, clinging tight, as she had done many a time before when something frightened her.

"Oh, Nellen, Nellen!" she moaned. "It's you! I thought you had deserted me, too!"

The woman stood immobile in this embrace, making no effort to return it. But her eyes blinked a little.

"Oh! What would I want to do that for? Don't be afraid—Look out! There now, if you have n't gone and upset

the coffee all over them fancy sheets! Coffee's hard to get out, too. That's what comes of havin' your vittles in bedrooms, where they don't belong."

The tears, which had threatened to take possession of Joan again, turned into a burst of wild laughter. "No matter! Plenty more where they come from, Nellen. What a lace-trimmed sheet to my new mamma? I expect the very dishcloths are hand-embroidered. Behold the abode of cash! Ellen, cash! Isn't it grand? Oh," she cried, her voice breaking, "*why* did n't you come to me last night? Didn't you know how I'd need you?"

"I did n't know you was here, child, till I come this morning to see when him and her was expectin' you."

The girl's face fell. "Why, Ellen! Aren't you livin' here?"

"Me? In this house? I would n't so demean myself as to say so," she said primly.

"Do you mean to say?"—Joan's cheeks were hot—"that after all these years, and everything you've done for us, my father has *let you go*?"

Ellen tossed her head. "'Twa n't none of his lettin', child. I told him that all things considered I'd ruther sew for my livin' And so I would. Your time's your own that way, and you see more of folks. I like folks. I must say," she added conscientiously, "that woman—your pa's wife—was a real kind about offerin' to get me work with a dressmaker. But Ellen Neal don't have to be beholden to nobody, thank you!"

"And where do you live?"

A mysterious smile twinkled in the woman's eyes. "Some day when you're good and sick of all this fancy flubdubbery (she indicated with a disparaging hand the elegancies of the blue chamber) "you come and see where I live, Jo, and come often. I've got me two as nice rooms as ever you see

And—I got my own furniture for 'em, too, real grand furniture I bought up cheap at an auction room. There's some carved chairs, and a walnut desk with a bookcase on top, and some blue velvet porteurs, and a mahogany bed with the tester sawed off—”

Comprehension dawned on Joan. “Ellen! *Our* furniture!” she cried.

Ellen nodded. “Some of it. As much as I could git. I'm keepin' it for you till you git a home of your own to put it in, Joie. I sort of thought your ma would want me to.”

Joan was weeping again, not the devastating flood of the past night, but sweet and healing tears, as good for strained nerves as a summer rain is good for flowers.

“You old wretch!” she gulped. “Where did you get the money?”

The other grinned. “Any time Ellen Neal gets caught without plenty in her stockin'-fut, you may be sure the Scots blood is failin' her! I'm a whole lot richer than I'm willin' to let some folks know. Why, I could set idle, if I'd a mind to, the rest of my life—only I don't hold with settin' idle just because you got a right.” (Long afterwards it occurred to Joan that Ellen, who was not given to discoursing on her own affairs, must have had some reason for thus bragging of her unsuspected riches.) “There's nothing,” she added rather irrelevantly, “that makes a person contented with the place she's in like knowin' she can go somewhere else if she's a mind to.”

What barrier there had been between servant and mistress—a fluctuating barrier at best, dependent upon Joan's varying conceptions of her own dignity—had gone down forever under that rain of grateful tears, and Joan felt free to ask some of the questions of which her heart was full—how, for instance, the affair between her father and Mrs. Calloway had begun.

"How!" repeated Ellen grimly. "Well, when a lone female and a lone he-male ain't got nothin' to keep 'em apart but an alley-fence, and her with paint on her face till she looks like a fat sixteen, and food on her table every day as good as a two-dollar table d'hôte, what can you expect? I wa'n't surprised myself. Nor," she added quietly, "I don't believe your ma would be, Joan."

"Oh, but how it must have hurt her!"

Both spoke in low tones, as if the spirit of Mary Darcy might be lingering near enough to overhear.

"I ain't so sure about that," mused Ellen. "I ain't so sure! Your ma always set great store on havin' the Major comfortable— 'Ellen,' she said to me that last day, when we knew what was comin'— 'Ellen, be sure to keep him *comfortable* here at home, so he won't be lookin' for it somewheres else.' There's worse things can happen to a widow-man than gettin' married again."

"Oh, but if I'd been here to look after him myself!" wailed Joan. "If you had only told me what was happening! I might have come back and stopped it!"

"About as much chance as stopping a fire-hydrant that's blown the top off. You're a smart child, Joan, always was; but you don't stand a show against that woman your pa's married—nor I would n't want you to," she added cryptically. "You was n't raised that way.— Anyhow it was n't none of my business. And just remember this, child, it's none of yours. It's none of yours!"

After she had gone, a sense of something heartening and bracing remained with Joan; and as she brushed out her straight, heavy hair with new silver-backed brushes which bore her own initials, a typical Ellenism recurred to her: "There's nothing that makes a person contented with the place she's in like knowing she can go somewheres else if she's a mind to."

"At least," she thought suddenly, "I 'm independent of father. Mother left her property to me—I can get it whenever I ask for it. . . . And now I understand why!"

Mary Darcy had been a very far-sighted woman.

## CHAPTER VII

**I**T was long before Joan recovered from the dazed sensation her father's little surprise had produced in her mind. Perhaps she never did quite recover from it. Something died within her; a naïf belief in the wisdom of her elders, the ultimate rightness of existing things, which once gone never returns again. If it is true that we live in experience rather than in years, Joan came to her majority over night.

It was her father's attitude which amazed her most. Had he seemed in the least apologetic, in the least ashamed or embarrassed by the quality of the woman he had put into her mother's place, she would have been ready to pity and console and help him make the best of a grave mistake. But the Major's attitude was that of the cat which has not only eaten the canary, but digested it and found it extremely beneficial to the system. Far from seeming apologetic, he appeared rather proud of his performance. There was something almost pathetic in his content with his new prosperity, with the ease and luxury of the establishment of which he found himself head.

Joan sometimes thought, with a scornful sort of pity, "How Dad must have *hated* to be poor!"

Certainly he took to wealth, to which he had always professed himself indifferent, with an alacrity which surprised his daughter.

She had opportunity to notice, too, for the first time in action, Richard Darcy's chief and perhaps sole equipment for the unequal battle of life; his talent for making friends.

Not for keeping them—that is a separate art, calling for certain efforts, certain reticences, above all certain abstentions of which Richard Darcy was temperamentally incapable. But in the art of creating admiring and useful acquaintances out of raw material he had few equals, even among his own profession.

Mary Darcy had kept herself and her child for the most part aloof from these easily acquired friends of her husband, though they were invariably quite presentable—(as has been hinted, the Major had no use whatever for what he called “the canile”). Possibly this was owing to some odd Puritan scruples on Mary’s part about combining business with pleasure. . . .

But now that business had no longer to be combined with pleasure, Richard Darcy was free to exercise to the full his gift for being agreeable, without afterthought. It was perhaps fortunate that his new wife had made few friends of her own, a fact which left him unhampered in the matter of what he called quite seriously “resuming his position.”

Joan found that he was no longer forgotten in the city of his youth. The older residents had already been made aware by means of engraved and crested announcements that Richard Throckmorton Darcy had returned to their midst for the purpose of wedding one Effie May Smith Calloway, and that the bridal pair would be at home after a certain date at a very good address on Elmtree Street. Whither quite a respectable number of them hastened, if only out of curiosity, to leave cards.

What they found was an extremely affable, leisurely, and prosperous-looking host, an establishment which appeared able and willing to maintain those traditions of Southern hospitality which have latterly fallen somewhat into disuse, and a rather silent young girl whose manner atoned for the perhaps excessive cordiality of her step-mother. Some of the



callers did not come again, even under pressure; but on the whole Joan realized that the old friends in whom she had almost ceased to believe were about to take the Darcy family belatedly to their bosoms, indifferent to the substitution of a Mrs. Calloway for her mother.

It was the girl's first experience of the omnipotence of money; an experience which if it comes young enough will make a cynic out of a congenital optimist, which Joan was not.

To do the new Mrs. Darcy justice, she was an adaptable and, in her way, a tactful creature who had already in her admiration of the Major and his daughter, learned to modify her speech and behavior rather touchingly. And her frank delight with what she called "breaking into society," may have been rather disarming to society; or to such portion of it as found its way to the imposing house on Elmtree Street. She was extremely cordial to her guests, urging them to come often, to have more iced tea and cake, to take candy home to the children, to try the Major's cigars and whisky, for which he had an undoubted palate. If the women looked at her a little askance, the men were loud in her praises, and obeyed her urgings to come often.

Effie May, encouraged, began shortly to seek new worlds to conquer.

"Well, what next?" she demanded one night at dinner, after an afternoon of callers, stifling a wide pink yawn with the palm of a much beringed hand. "Your old families are all very well, Dickie boy, refined and classy and all that—but, my God, they ain't exciting! Now are they? Isn't there anybody in Louisville born since the Civil War?"

"If there is, I'm afraid I don't know it," admitted the Major, smiling indulgently. "You see the people who were young when I left are young no longer."

"So we've noticed," murmured his bride, making a com-

ionable grimace at Joan. "But we don't want to spend rest of our lives in the baldhead row, do we, girlie? I've got to find us something under sixty to pal around with, Hubby mine, that 's all there is to it. See?"

One of her step-mother's most unbearable traits, to Joan, was her habit of calling the Major absurd comic-supplement names. But his dignity seemed not to suffer from it. In fact he expanded visibly under the treatment, like a dog whose ears are being tickled.

Your commands are law, my angel," he said. "Just how would you suggest that I go about it?"

Effie May ruminated, while the two Darcys watched her—she, however, somewhat varying expressions. The Major seemed to be admiring, indeed gloating over, the appearance made at the head of her bountifully appointed table, in a way not niggardly in its display of her bountifully appointed ornaments. His eye followed appreciatively the curve of her limp arm as it disappeared into enveloping laces.

Joan, on the other hand, watched her step-mother warily. There was something about the woman she could not fathom, beneath all her surface simplicity. She felt, beneath the other's careless, easy good-nature, a certain force, a driving power, the grip of which she and her father were mere helpless objects. Effie May would use them always for her own ends—whatever those ends might be. Why had she chosen to saddle herself, free and rich and independent as she was, with an impoverished gentleman and his grown-up daughter? Certainly at that age, thought Joan (Effie May was in the neighborhood of forty), people could not possibly fall in love! No, there was something mysterious about her step-mother. . . .

"I have it," said the lady suddenly. "The Country Club! I see in the society column that everything nowadays is going to be at the Country Club. We'll have to join that."

"I believe," interposed Joan, flushing, "that people have to be invited to join a club, don't they, Father?"

"All right— We'll *be* invited. Won't we, Dickums?" said the bride, with a ravishing smile in the Major's direction.

He rose to the occasion. "Certainly, my love," he replied.

And they were invited. At any rate, a week or two later found the Darcy family dining alone at the Country Club, among various other little table groups, all of whom seemed to know each other intimately.

To be in and not of this friendly assemblage filled Joan with that most miserable of all sensations, crowd-loneliness. Even the Major wore a rather fixed and nervous smile, and mentioned to his wife and daughter at intervals that Louisville society had changed very much since he used to frequent it. Only Effie May seemed quite unperturbed, gazing about her smilingly, and tapping her slippered foot, and nodding her head in time to the music; meeting the curious glances which strayed in their direction with a frank interest of her own which might have seemed bold if it were not so like a pleased child's.

Joan, intercepting one or two of these glances, looked her step-mother over critically, and to her relief found her less flamboyant than usual. She was dressed in white—"Handsome white, not girly-girly muslin like yours. I'm too stout for that," she had said wisely to Joan— The girl reflected that it is difficult to look vulgar in white. Mrs. Darcy was not appreciably different in appearance from many another rather overdressed matron there, even in the matter of rouge and touched-up hair.

As for her father—Richard Darcy would have been a distinguished figure in any assemblage he chose to enter, with his six feet of gallantly carried avoirdupois, his finely modeled head, his gray mustache and imperial concealing a mouth that might otherwise have left something to be desired. He wore

that night—and wore well—clothes of the palest gray flannel, with socks and buckskin shoes to match, and a gray stripe in his white tie, and a gray monogram embroidered upon the exquisite cambric of his handkerchief. This was the parent who a few weeks ago she had associated irrevocably in her mind with spots and frayed collars! She found herself wishing that her mother could see him now—she would be so proud of him! . . .

To her own appearance Joan gave little consideration. She had discovered that the great advantage of good clothes is that you no longer have to think about them. She was quite unaware of the value in contrasts she afforded—her small, dark, smoothly combed head lifted proudly on its long neck, the awkward grace of her thin young body, the pale oval of her face lit by surprisingly vivid eyes, of the sort that are dreamy and shadowed until excitement turns them into soft blue fire. She was excited that night, a little frightened. She did not smile at all, but there was that about her lips—sensitive, wistful, faintly drooping—that made more than one person who glanced at the Darcy table wonder what the smile would be like if it came.

When the dancing began, Effie May's exuberance could no longer contain itself.

"This is something like!" she cried. "This is what I call life! Come on, Dick— 'Waltz me around again, Willie, around, around, around!'"

"But," protested the Major, "it is some time since I have waltzed, my love—"

"Never mind, you'll waltz with me! Anybody can dance with me. The boys used to call me Light-foot Ef— Oh, but you'll have to get a partner for Joan, first, of course; I forgot we had a family along."

The girl flushed, aghast at the thought of her father whirling in the midst of that whirling throng. "No, no, Effie May,

please—!" she urged. "Let 's just sit here quietly and look on."

The other laughed aloud. "Naturally! That 's what we 've come to a dance for, to sit against the wall and look on— Nonsense! Go and find your child a partner, Dick, and hurry back. My feet just won't keep still." She was humming gaily in time with the orchestra.

The Major, gazing a little blankly at the crowd of strangers before him, obediently went forth to do her bidding, and Effie May seized the occasion to give a little womanly advice.

"Don't you fret, Joan—remember there 's as many young fellows in the world crazy to know girls as there are girls crazy to know them. And dearie"—her voice sank to a friendly whisper—"warm up to 'em a little, can't you? Jolly 'em along. Hot air, you know, talk! No matter what you say, just keep talking. That don't-touch-me, butter-would n't-melt-in-my-mouth air may be all right with the nuns and the old families but it won't go down with the men. Believe me, dearie! I know."

It was a well-meant effort, which had the effect of congealing the already subdued Joan into something resembling a marble effigy.

The Major shortly returned, bearing urbanely in his wake a blond young man who seemed not too unwilling.

"I want you to meet my wife, sir," he was saying. "I want to have the pleasure of presenting you to my daughter. Fancy the coincidence, my dears—this gentleman turns out to be the son of an old schoolmate!"

Effie May welcomed them with enthusiasm. "Good for you! I had my money on you, Dickums! Five minutes, and the son of a schoolmate! It 's a record!—Ta-ta, young people! Enjoy yourselves," was her valedictory as she whirled the Major away, waving her hand over his shoulder.

Joan stared aghast at the blond young man, who said, "She is an awfully jolly sort, your mother, is n't she?"

"Very jolly," agreed Joan faintly. "But she's not my mother."

"Oh!"

A silence fell. He seemed to be waiting for her to break it. She gulped, and said in a firm voice, "Did you come to ask me to dance?"

The young man indicated politely that such was his intention.

"You could n't very well help yourself, could you?" she remarked, and suddenly burst out laughing—rather hysterical laughter in which the young man joined embarrassedly.

"Of course if you'd rather talk—" he murmured.

Joan jumped to her feet. "Oh, but I would n't! I'd rather do *anything* than talk—no matter what I say, just talk, warm up to 'em, hot air—I mean," she explained desperately, "I'm much too shy to talk!"

"You don't sound very shy."

"I know—they're the worst sort, the ones who hide it."

They commenced silently to dance. Presently he confessed, "I'm rather—shy, myself."

"Goody!" she exclaimed with relief. "Then we need n't bother to talk at all."

They parted quite reluctantly when a whistle blew for the "circle"—a useful innovation for breaking up relations, by whose aid Joan found herself exchanging partners at intervals throughout the evening without finding herself too long on the hands of any. She blessed the inventor of the circle. Youth and a pair of winged feet came to her rescue, and she forgot her strangeness in sheer joy of motion. The people she danced with that night were not men; they were as trees walking, for all the personal memory she kept of them.

But when the music finally thumped itself out, and Effie May, a trifle blown and moist about the brow, again resumed charge of her scattered family, saying, "Well, dearie, you 've had a pretty good time, have n't you?"—Joan was able to answer with some surprise that she had.

"Dancing," commented the Major, puffing, "is a very healthful exercise; indeed, an esthetic exercise. The Greeks practised it, as I recall, extensively, even in their riper years. My love, with a little experience I think I shall easily master that step you call the fox trot."

"Sure you will," encouraged she who had been called Light-foot Ef, patting his cheek maternally.

## CHAPTER VIII

**T**HE Darcys' social career appeared to be well launched. Each Saturday night found them at the Country Club, and no longer dining in loneliness. Effie May speedily collected about her a group of congenial spirits, for the most part young people, among whom she was extremely popular—far more so than was Joan, who sometimes felt as if she were the only elder present. Theirs was usually the most hilarious table in the room. Corks popped freely, and there was much horse-play, and throwing about of bread, and at a certain stage of the evening rather frank persiflage in which, to Joan's relief, her step-mother took no part. She laughed her cheery, plump laugh, and made no comment; but more than once with a glance at her step-daughter, she managed quite deftly to steer the conversation into other channels. Joan came to the gratifying conclusion that her father's wife was afraid of her.

The Major at his end of the table devoted himself assiduously to his duties as host, seeing that glasses were filled, distributing gallant remarks among the ladies, constantly signing tickets. He was in his element; expanding, positively glowing, with hospitality.

“Another cigar, my boy? Try this brand! Take several! Fill your pockets with them. I can recommend them personally!”

There came to be several brands which he could recommend personally, several vintages as well. The waiters hovered about him like cherubim about the throne of grace, and he knew them all by name, and took an interest in their families.



This lavish generosity, Joan reflected, was the spirit which gave the old South its glamour, its traditions—to say nothing of its consequent poverty. There was something rather fine and large about the Major's apparent obliviousness of the fact that the money he spent so royally did not belong to him.

"If Effie May does not worry, why should I?" argued his daughter with herself. Her father's affairs were no longer her concern; if indeed they had ever been. But she could not help taking a certain uneasy interest in them.

"How do you happen to know enough people to invite to all these parties of yours?" she asked Effie May, aware that the Darcy family was doing rather more than its share of entertaining.

"Oh, you don't have to know people well to ask 'em to parties," explained the other innocently. "And once they eat with you, they 're your friends."

"That depends upon what you give them to eat!" interjected the Major, chuckling.

It seemed a primitive conception of social relationships, but not on the whole a false one. Joan thought of the Arab and his salt. . . .

"Food," she wrote to Stefan Nikolai, "appears to be the Tie that Binds."

"What about drink?" he inquired on a post-card. (They did a good deal of this staccato correspondence, Joan liking to exchange deep thoughts with him, as she expressed it, "while they were hot.")

"Drink," she replied on another, "is the Tie that Loosens!"

. . .

Stefan Nikolai was the only one of her friends with whom she had found courage to discuss her father's marriage. Writing things out to him was almost like writing them out to herself. It served somehow to clear her mind. It is probable that Mr. Nikolai, a student of various phases of the

human problem, got a good deal of valuable vicarious experience out of young Joan's letters. Certainly he encouraged them.

It was to him that she confided her discovery that social life is far more pleasing after dinner than before. She was learning to count, as surely as does many an experienced hostess, upon the help of the Tie that Loosens. While she herself had not as yet developed her father's palate for cocktails and fine vintages she appreciated their effect upon her partners—for to her men so far were merely partners.

It was after dinner that Joan's part of the evening began. Then, thanks to the Tie that Loosens, there was no longer need to make banal conversation nor to listen to it, no need to pretend friendly interest in young men to whom she was incurably a stranger, no need of anything but to yield herself to the music and the first pair of arms that offered, and float away into Dreamland.

There was something curiously sensuous to Joan about dancing. It acted like a drug upon her fancy, stimulating, soothing. She was hardly aware of whom she danced with, if he could dance. If he could not, she stopped. This odd impersonality of hers was rather piquant to her partners. Many a youth who was afraid to talk to "that quiet Darcy girl—you never know what she's thinking about!"—was not afraid to dance with her, whenever he got the chance.

At such times Joan had her rare moments of beauty. With flushed face, loosened hair, and wide, dreaming eyes, she was as graceful as one of the three circling maidens in the Primavera—the one who looks wistfully over her shoulder at the oblivious youth. Unfortunately her lot was cast among people who did not think in terms of Botticelli. Her step-mother wondered sometimes whether curling-tongs and perhaps a little rouge would make her look more like other girls. . . .

Sometimes people came to the club who attracted Joan's attention—quieter people than Effie May's friends, more simply dressed, who never seemed to join in the accentuated hilarity after dinner. Once in such a group she recognized the girl who had eyed her aloofly on the train coming home from boarding school. Joan suddenly yearned to do some aloof eyeing on her own account, now that she was no longer shabby but wore a frock as smart as any in the room.

She watched her opportunity, and followed the stranger into the dressing-room with some such truculent idea in view; but was disarmed by the courtesy with which the other made room for her at a mirror, where they powdered their noses side by side in amity. As she was leaving the room, however, she heard the aloof one murmur to a friend: "What a lot of strange people one sees at this club nowadays! I wonder where they all come from? It's getting very mixed."

Joan went white with anger. She struggled with the temptation to explain proudly that she was not a strange person, that her name entitled her to any society she chose to enter, that it was her step-mother who was "mixed," not she. . . .

And then she remembered that it was only thanks to her step-mother that she happened to be there at all.

For the moment this encounter with the enemy took away Joan's heart for dancing. Crowd-loneliness got her by the throat. Was there always to be just one of her, and so many of everybody else?

She slipped out on to a terrace that overlooked a valley with the great river gleaming far off, still holding some faint glow of the sunset's aftermath. There was a bench at the far end, lost in shadow, and she was about to seat herself there when she saw that it was already occupied.

"Oh," she said, drawing back. "I did n't notice you!"

"Women rarely do," remarked a plaintive voice with a smile in it. "I'm used to that. And yet I notice them, dreadfully!"

Joan laughed a little, and retreated. "I won't disturb you," she murmured; but the voice held her.

"Oh, please! Please do. I want to be disturbed. I simply came here to see my moonrise." A shadowy arm pointed out a dim glow over the trees to eastward.

"Why *your* moonrise, especially?"

"By right of discovery. I seem to be the only person aware of it. . . . May I share it with you?"

"You are sure you would n't rather see it alone?"

"Goodness gracious!" cried the voice quite querulously, "what human being ever wanted to watch a moonrise alone?"

Joan chuckled, and sat down to the first conversation she had enjoyed since her last one with Stefan Nikolai—one of the few real conversations, she thought afterwards, in her life.

Yet it was difficult to remember the many things they talked about. Smoke, for one. He pointed out the dim loveliness of the city below, towers and battlements and the airy span of a bridge against the gray-gold sky.

"'Many-storied Camelot town,'" he said, musing. "Without the shrouding smoke, what would it be? Factory chimneys, iron smoke-stacks, a filtration plant— Ugliness, ugliness! Yet there are people in that town who want to rid themselves of those billowing mists of rose and violet and silver."

"I suppose," said Joan, "the beauty of smoke depends upon whether you're down in it, getting smuts on your nose, or looking on from a hilltop."

"A question of perspective, you think? Hmnn—yes.

Well, then" he said reasonably, "by all means *get* your perspective. Stick to the hilltop—especially at sunset."

"We have n't all got wings to reach a hilltop with, you see. Nor yet automobiles."

"I have n't, myself," he said. "I use trolley-cars. . . . Did it ever occur to you what a marvel the trolley-car is? For a nickel—or at most a dime—all Nature is yours to command; beechwoods in their autumn field of the cloth of gold; little whispering streams breaking their winter silence, fireflies dancing—to the tune of the 'Merry Widow' waltz," (as that melody of the moment made itself audible from the house beyond). "What a twilight! Fireflies, an afterglow, and the moonrise set to music, all at once," he said under his breath. "And some one to share them with!"

Joan was silent, flattered by the knowledge that this whimsical gentleman was letting her into his thoughts.

"The beauty of such a moment is that one never loses it," he mused. "One puts it away as people press flowers in books, to be looked at when—when pleasant things need remembering. I thank God for a mind well stocked with beautiful occasions!"

"Wild Evenings I Have Known," murmured Joan, frivolously, because for some reason she was rather touched.

He nodded, "With wild people in them. Like you."

"Me! Wild?"

"Oh, I know on the surface you 're a demure, well-behaved young miss, but underneath—good gracious! You 'd shock these people to death!"—he indicated certain hilarious couples who had waltzed onto the terrace near them. "Yes, you 're quite untamed, my dear. Wild as a—chipmunk."

Joan leaned toward him, "How did you guess?"

"I 've watched you dance. And then—well, I 've never quite got used to the cage myself, perhaps." He began to hum under his breath a tuneless little ditty:

"It is a very dreadful thing  
To be so fat a child,  
To have to sit around all day  
And yet to feel so wild."

"At least," laughed Joan, "I'm not fat!"

"No!" he said soberly, "never get fat. It is the beginning of the end. . . . By fat I mean old. And cautious. Ugh!"

How the conversation came about to apple-trees, Joan never was sure; but he told her about one he had discovered somewhere in the deep woods, all in bloom, a little old gnarled affair hidden among giant first growth sycamores and elms and beeches.

"An apple-tree lost in the woods! How do you suppose it got away from civilization?" wondered the girl.

"Some bird, perhaps; or Johnny Appleaseed."

"Who was he?"

"Fancy living in Kentucky without knowing about the first and greatest of our pioneers! He was a daft old creature—an innocent, as the kind phrase goes—who used to wander away from the settlement where he lived into the wilderness, scattering apple seeds. All over this Ohio Valley he journeyed, sowing his orchards for the benefit of those who were to follow. The Indians let him pass, the wild animals did not harm him; only his friends locked him up whenever they could catch him, because it seemed such a silly thing to do. Friends are that way. . . . Years later, when the pioneers fought their way at last over the mountains to stay, they found here and there apple-trees blossoming and fruiting in the great, lonely wilderness; and wherever that happened their wives made them build cabins and settle down, for of all things that grow an apple-tree most suggests home. So mad old Johnny Appleaseed was the founder of many cities."

"And yet there is no monument to him!"

"Except the cities." . . .

Here a young man appeared to claim Joan for the next dance—the blond young man with whom she had commenced her dancing career, and who had formed quite a habit of looking for her whenever the music played.

She rose with reluctance. "I wish *you* 'd come in and dance with me," she said to her new friend. "I'm sure you could!"

"I'm sure I could, too," he replied, "if I had n't my body with me. As it is, I'll just sit out here and make believe I'm dancing with you— In a starlit glade. With the other young nymphs and dryads . . ." the whimsical voice followed her.

The blond young man stared. "Of all the assorted nuts!" he remarked, when they were out of earshot.

"Yes—but who is he?" demanded Joan eagerly.

"Something on the stock exchange. I see him there every day."

"The stock exchange!"

"Yes. Oh, he writes poems and things for the papers, too, I think. Quite a literary guy." He mentioned the name.

It is a name known and remembered wherever there are moonrises and fireflies, smoke against the sunset, apple-trees in bloom—all the everyday lovely things people forget to see unless there are poets to remind them. . . .

It gave Joan quite a new zest in living to realize that at any moment, even at Country Clubs, it is possible to run across a poet.

## CHAPTER IX

**R**ICHARD DARCY was accepting the change that had come into his life much as he had accepted others of a less fortunate trend. He had become at last what Nature had always intended him to be, one of the world's chosen, a rich man—or, what was even better because less troublesome, the husband of a rich woman. He was also once more an honored citizen of his native commonwealth—where he had not always been entirely an honored citizen, owing to one of the unfortunate mistakes to which youth is liable. There had been some disagreement with an early employer about the right of employees to divert the firm's funds, temporarily of course, to private uses. Only family influence had prevented this misunderstanding from resulting in truly disastrous consequences, which he shuddered to this day to contemplate. But it had prevented; and the early employer was dead (as Richard Darcy had taken pains to ascertain before returning to Louisville), and the few who knew of this painful episode at the time appeared to have forgotten it.

Very good! He was quite willing to forget it himself. It was Richard Darcy's creed that a gentleman takes whatever comes in his stride, without too many backward glances; and his stride was just now adapting itself gracefully to the one-step.

Joan, watching her father sometimes with a faint recrudescence of pride in his sheer good looks, decided that he was the only stomached person she had seen who could perform the one-step *without* loss of dignity. He footed the



measure indulgently, as a bishop or a cardinal might have footed it, with an air of spiritual detachment, as it were, while yet seeming to receive and to bestow a priceless privilege. Even lively young girls liked to dance with the Major. It made them feel uplifted. If he pressed the hand or the waist of his prettier partners more closely than necessary, the pressure seemed almost impersonal, a mere tribute to a sex which he could not but regard with tenderness, being himself a husband and a father.

In addition to this valuable social acquirement, the Major further fortified his popularity by inventing and promoting (uncommercially, of course) a beverage which shortly bade fair to make him famous, and which was christened by grateful habitués of the Country Club the "Dick Fizz." Its ingredients were—but that is a secret not at the author's disposal. Suffice it to say that the "Dick Fizz" achieved results that were all and more than could be expected of it. (Among others, the Major's election to a certain gentlemen's club which had hitherto remained annoyingly unaware of him. So much for the power of the Tie that Loosens!)

It was thanks to the "Dick Fizz," too, that there presently came about between Richard Darcy and his daughter that heart-to-heart interview which had been postponing itself from week to week, with the tacit consent of both parties; an interview dreaded by Joan perhaps even less than by her father.

They were returning one night from one of their most successful evenings; Joan as usual on the front seat beside the chauffeur, where she might enjoy the rush of the cool night air upon her face, and hear as little as possible of the billing and cooing of the honeymooners in the tonneau behind. There seemed more of this than usual, little giggling exclamations and audible embraces which made the girl wince *and the chauffeur grin surreptitiously.*

"Really, Father!" protested Joan over her shoulder. It was something physically nauseating to her in those husky echoes from the tonneau. No wonder servants laughed! It made of love a travesty and a mocking.

She was glad when they reached home. The Major stepped out gallantly to assist the ladies, but miscalculated his strength, and after a series of complicated manoeuvres brought her down upon the curbstone. The chauffeur burst into an uncontrollable guffaw, in which his mistress heartily joined. "Oh, you Dick Fizz!" she laughed, wiping her eyes. "I hope it would get you yet. *Look* at your funny papa, dearie! He looks like a Christmas-tree!"

The Major murmured something reprovingly about the lack of hospitality, which he found some difficulty in pronouncing; but once upon his feet, he gave an arm to each lady and managed the steps without further mishap.

In the hall Joan, who had not laughed, said to her step-father in a low voice, "Is he—drunk?"

"Oh, not enough to hurt," replied the lady, still laughing. She murmured to Joan that she herself was a little flushed and nervous. "I can handle him, all right. Don't you worry! You always know a gentleman by the way he carries his liquor." "So do you?" said Joan.

"Sure thing! And Major's a perfect gentleman always. Don't fret."

She then mounted quietly to her room, and undressed in the privacy of her chamber.

She did not want to see her face in the mirror, afraid of the disgust, the loathing, that must be reflected there—father—drunk! The man to whom her mother had given her love and her life, tipsily furnishing amusement for a moment to a man who judged gentlemen by the way they carried their liquor! . . .

She recalled one other time when she had seen her father in his present condition. She remembered her mother's

stricken, tragic face as she hurried him out of sight, explaining tremulously, "Daddy's ill, darling. No games with Daddy to-night—he's ill."

"But he wants to play! Look, mamma, he *wants* to play!" the small Joan had insisted, to no avail.

And when this strangely interesting Daddy was safe in bed, with Ellen Neal mounting guard, Joan had been hurried out to the nearest church (which happened to be a Catholic one, for Mary's was a casual sort of religion that boasted neither creed nor prejudice); and there, before a statue where little lamps burned, the child had prayed hard, as she was bid, that her father might never be ill in just that way again.

"God may listen to you, even if He's tired of listening to me!" the mother had whispered, desperately.

It was because God had listened that Joan was sent later to a Catholic convent. Mary Darcy's was not the nature to forget favors; and it occurred to her that there might be worse protectors for a girl who must one day be motherless than Our Lady of Sorrows. Not every faith is strong enough to go through life without some creed to cling to. Mary had offered her child what she could.

Lying there in the darkness, Joan understood. She wished that she might have been able to take what her mother offered. She yearned for the anodyne of simple, unquestioning prayer, for the mesmeric comfort that comes to the believing from the slipping of rosary beads between the fingers; above all, for the right to kneel unrecognized in a quiet confessional and learn from some priest wiser than she in the ways of men where her duty lay and how she was to follow it. The confessional is perhaps the secret of the hold the oldest of Christian churches keeps upon a world which would seem to have outgrown it. That is a self-reliant nature indeed which does not sometimes feel the need of guidance at once human and detached.

But Joan's creed and confessional alike were contained in her troubled young head; and where a happier woman would have wept and said her prayers, she set herself sternly to the task of thinking. It seemed to her that throughout the past weeks she had been shirking an issue, deliberately drugging her wits with anything that came to hand. Now she faced conditions squarely. There must be no more drifting.

She focused an unsparing vision upon her father. Already there were changes apparent in him, signs of deterioration not entirely physical. His features seemed slightly blurred from their fine chiseling, there was a relaxed look about the lips and chin, about the very poise of his figure. He had lost a little of that indefinable something which gave him distinction, even in the days when the women of his family tried in vain to keep him pressed and unspotted. Prosperity was not going to be good for Richard Darcy.

Joan pronounced ruthless judgment upon her father:

"He's done for!"

And, as Ellen had warned her, it was none of her business. . . . What then was her business? Clearly, to keep from being "done for" herself.

She saw quite clearly that she had been in danger of this. There was something curiously enervating about the atmosphere of her step-mother's house, a *laissez-faire* that was almost—the girl sought for the word and decided upon "lascivious." Luxury, ease, pleasure—these were the ends for which her step-mother strove—or rather accomplished without undue striving, an ability to which the girl gave full due. She knew that it must take more than mere money to keep so elaborate a household running without apparent effort. The servants were efficient and unobtrusive, the accounts scrupulously kept, every nook and cranny clean and in order. Even Ellen Neal, who knew whereof she spoke,

admitted that the ex-Mrs. Calloway was a housekeeper of parts. But . . .

Joan tried conscientiously to fathom the meaning of her "but." She decided that the house was too like its mistress—over-bathed, over-perfumed and dressed and manicured—to be quite nice. The windows were too fluffy with lace, the drawing-room too pretty and satiny, the library too red. ("Why is it," she had written to Stefan Nikolai, "that people who never open a book invariably have a red library?")

A fantastic thought came to her. She wondered whether those strange houses which are sometimes whispered of even among convent girls, those palaces of horror where women's bodies are bought and sold, might not perhaps resemble this home to which her father had brought her . . .

Then she smiled at herself. Vulgar, her step-mother might be; hopelessly underbred; doubtless in some previous manifestations a shop-girl, a dress-maker; possibly one of those anomalous beings known in race-towns as "race-horse women." But she was unmistakably respectable. There was not a picture on her walls, nor a novel on the shelves of the red library, which was not, as she herself once remarked to Joan complacently, "perfectly refined." The girl recalled her evident uneasiness when sometimes at the dinner-table the talk had waxed a little too free. She did her step-mother the justice to believe her a quite decent woman.

Perhaps the curious sense of enervation was due only to the heat of midsummer in a Southern city. Now and then the elder Darcys spoke vaguely of going away, only to decide that it was too much trouble. It was easier to stay where they were. In a Kentucky July, one follows the line of least resistance.

Joan, like the others, slept late into the mornings, and had her coffee in bed, or went down to the dining-room for it with

a negligée over her nightgown. (Her father had become quite reconciled to negligées, which at first startled him, accustomed as he was to the neat morning gingham of his Mary.) Sometimes she found him departing reluctantly for the mysterious place he called the Office. Later, people would arrive connected with the rites of the toilet—the hair-dresser, the manicure, the masseuse—a chatty person who performed on Effie May what she called her “facial”; and other things. Cleopatra herself could have devoted no more time to the care of her body than did the ex-Mrs. Calloway.

“You ’ve got it to do if you ’re risin’ forty and like to eat,” she explained once to Joan, simply.

After luncheon, which was brought on a tray—a large tray—to wherever it happened to be convenient, the ladies once more resumed nightgowns, if indeed they had ever discarded them, and napped and read until the sun was low in the sky; when the house like the city woke into animation, and they prepared to fare forth like fireflies to the evening revel. Then there were automobile drives to little beer-gardens, where they ate and drank and sat about among whitewashed tree-trunks, feeling Bohemian; pleasant moonlight excursions up the Ohio in launches, with a picnic provided which consisted largely of thermos-bottles; and the Country Club, always the Country Club. Joan wondered what people had managed to do with themselves in summer before the days of Country Clubs.

It was a life that somehow suggested the Orient, women of the harem coming forth at sunset to bask on the roofs of the houses; a placid existence; aimless, perhaps, but pleasant enough. Joan was puzzled to find the harm in it. Yet that harm was there, she knew. The touch of Puritanism in the girl told her that to live from day to day with no duty but pleasure made of pleasure something akin to vice. . . . And often in the midst of this harem life she remembered almost

with passion that out beyond her shuttered windows, beyond the clangor of trolley-cars and the hum and clatter of the dirty streets, was summer—summer, the loveliest of the year's phases; leaf-shadows on wimpling water, lush meadows sparkling with the sunrise dew, green-gold glades of the wood delicious with the smell of warm pine-needles; all the world at fullest bloom, open like the heart of a rose, waiting.

It was a sort of nostalgia that took her then for the country she had never known, not Country Club country, nor the conscious, well-kept wildness of the parks which give the old river town its only claim to beauty—but simple wood and meadow and field, where homely folk live close to the soil they till, concerned with crops and the breeding season. It was this country her father had meant when he bragged about Kentucky. It is this country which, deep down under the surface things, means home to all people of Saxon blood, no matter how far astray they wander. . . .

And as she lay there, as if her wistful thoughts had conjured it into being, came a whisper of song from the leaves of the magnolia tree just outside her window; a murmur that died away, and began again, and rose and soared, melody on wings, above the clang of a trolley-car and the honk of passing motors. It was a mocking-bird, that voice of the Southern summer, singing in the glare of the arc-lamps, mistaking it perhaps for moonlight.

Joan tiptoed to the window and listened, an aching lump in her throat. It was her first mocking-bird; she had not known they sang at night.

"You lovely thing!" she whispered to it. "What are you doing in this place? . . . And what am I?"

Then and there she made her plans to get away.

The thought frightened her a little. She had, despite the ups and downs of her father's fortunes, led hitherto a very sheltered life. Fortunately there was her mother's money,

hers whenever she chose to ask for it. She would not be quite penniless. But where to go?

She thought first of the Misses Darcy, her father's cousins, who had been most affectionate and kind, particularly since her father's remarriage. Sometimes she wondered whether this was because they sympathized with her, or (with a touch of her new cynicism) because they did not. Effie May had been very generous to the Misses Darcy, remarking once that she knew what it was to be poor herself. They came frequently to dine at her lavish table; they appeared occasionally in *chic* black costumes, as good as new, which Joan recognized as having served to mourn the late Mr. Calloway; the limousine was often at their disposal; and a limousine with a liveried chauffeur was a touch of distinction hitherto lacking to the Darcy fortunes, even at their palmiest.

Joan suddenly doubted whether her father's cousins would welcome her under their roof at the risk of alienating that limousine. She did not blame them—poor, anxious ladies to whom life had not been very kind. She simply realized that they were of her father's blood, not her mother's.

Her mother's people she did not know. Mary Darcy had managed somehow in her wanderings to loosen all the ties that bound her to her youth. It was as if she had deliberately lost herself, hidden herself away with husband and child from the loving eyes that are too quick to see. . . . It was the sort of pride Richard Darcy was quite incapable of understanding, though pride was a word often upon his lips. But Mary's daughter understood. Never through her should the quiet tragedy of her mother's life be revealed to those from whom her mother had chosen to hide it.

She wished that Stefan Nikolai were not a man; or that, being a man, he had a home to which she might have invited herself. But he was a confirmed wanderer, and Joan felt that a young lady companion, desirable though she might be



as a solace for his declining years, would undoubtedly hamper his movements.

It left only Ellen Neal to rely upon. Perhaps there would be enough money to take a little flat somewhere, with Ellen Neal for servant and chaperone. A bachelor maid, with a latch-key!—the prospect was rather alluring. But not in Louisville. She could not leave her father's home and set up an establishment of her own in the same town without creating "talk," and, to Joan's training, "talk" was the one thing impossible.

They would have to go away somewhere, she and Ellen. And study something, she decided vaguely. Music, art, social service—whatever it was people did study. Her eye began to kindle. She was the true child of Richard Darcy, rolling stone by nature and profession; and to such, "the grass is always greener down the road." New York, Boston, swam before her dreamy vision; even London, Paris, Rome. . . .

She brought herself back to the ungrateful consideration of ways and means. She feared the money would not run to much in the way of travel. "A mere pittance," her father had once scornfully called it. But she knew, or guessed, that all three of them had managed to live on the income from this pittance during many a period when the Major's star was not in the ascendant, and she thought that what had provided, however scantily, for three might be made to provide well for herself and Ellen. She wished that she had asked questions at the time her mother's will was read to her. It had seemed so unimportant then. What was hers belonged surely just as much to her father, guardian for the little property until such time as she chose to ask him for it.

Now that the time had come, Joan faced it with some dread. How could they talk about money, she and he—about her mother's money? It seemed indelicate, unfeeling,

a desecration of sacred things. Nevertheless she faced it. She solemnly promised herself that not another day should pass without a complete understanding between herself and her father.

Possibly she was the only one of Richard Darcy's creditors who ever managed to put this promise into execution.

## CHAPTER X

**I**N the heat of the following afternoon, while Effie May dozed unaware beneath an electric fan, with a box of chocolates convenient to her drowsy hand, Joan slipped out of the house very quietly and went down town. She had an odd feeling of exhilaration, as if she had already escaped—from what, it would have been difficult to say.

More than one glance of approval followed her slim figure as it flitted through the sweltering streets, the dark and grimy corridors of the office building which Richard Darcy had chosen to honor with his patronage. This, thought patient men as she passed, was as a girl should look on a July afternoon, all in cool white from her silver-buckled pumps to the wide hat with a big lace butterfly perched airily upon it. Surely it was fitting, they thought, that men should slave at their desks through the endless summer days in order that visions such as this might flit about the world in dainty idleness; and forthwith applied gallant noses once more to the grindstone. In the South the idea of economic independence for women will never be popular.

Joan, under these friendly glances, was conscious of blossoming into real prettiness. It was not the first time she had got this pleasant little sensation out of so simple a matter as going down town. She wondered whether in any other city of the world it was possible for a girl to walk the streets alone, receiving from every man who passed—be he gentleman, clerk, coal-heaver, or small, knowing news-boy—glances of commendation which were neither impertinent, nor

bold, nor even personal, but simply, as it were expert; an appraisal which flattered without offense. It was as if, at the sight of a pretty woman, the town as one man lifted its glass to the toast:

“The Ladies, God bless ’em!”

It was this spirit, she thought, which had perhaps given Kentucky its reputation for feminine pulchritude. To be a beauty is not difficult where every one encourages the idea, where feminine charm is regarded as in itself an end and a purpose, to be fortified by every means at the command of art or nature. . . . Joan fluttered along with the best, modestly unconscious of the eyes that paid her homage, but aware nevertheless of her occasional reflection in plate-glass windows; and it should be recorded that before she went to her father’s office she made the purchase of a stick of pink lip-pomade and a cake of solid face-powder, with a little puff and mirror included. Why these articles should have given her increased courage for an interview with her parent, is difficult to state; but the fact remains that they did.

She came presently to a doorway upon which was printed in large gold lettering: RICHARD DARCY. LOANS AND INVESTMENTS. Joan was secretly impressed. Perhaps the Office was not the mere figure of speech she had sometimes fancied it.

She knocked. No answer came. Listening, she heard inside the familiar whirr of an electric fan mingling with a sound she could not for the moment place—a buzzing as of many flies, but rising and falling at more rhythmic intervals.

She turned the knob. Within, drawn by an open window through which might be glimpsed the broad Ohio rolling drowsily, stood a decrepit Morris chair which Joan recognized as an old friend; wherein lay sprawled at comfortable length the Major. At his elbow stood a bottle and a glass, both empty. His handsome nose, forgetting for the moment all

acquaintance with the grindstone, was tilted at the angle of least resistance, and from it issued the rhythmic buzzin that had puzzled his child.

"Daddy!" she said reluctantly. Somehow the Major asleep, with a plump leg draped over the arm of his chair and his mouth slightly open, made up in disarming appeal what he lost in impressiveness. He was like a gray-haired little boy, tired out with playing.

But, "Father!" said Joan more loudly. "Wake up, please. I've come to see you on business."

He opened his eyes with a jerk. "Eh? What's that? What's that, what's that? Tut, tut! Must have dozed off. What's that?" The eyes tried to close again, but he was firm with them, and presently recognized his daughter. "That you, Dollykins? Well, well, well! Come down to pay Dad a visit, eh? That's nice, that's nice!"

Suddenly he got to his feet and brought her a chair, reaching at the same time for his coat. Richard Darcy could not possibly have remained in a lady's presence coatless, no matter what the temperature. Her attention was caught by the garment into which he struggled, muttering apologies throughout.

"Why, Dad," she cried, "*what* are you putting on?"

It was not the immaculate gray flannel in which he had started that morning for the marts of commerce, but a threadbare, shapeless, densely spotted garment which Joan recognized with a pang.

"Your old second-best!" she exclaimed.

Her father grinned a little sheepishly. "Why—why yes, keep it here as an office coat, to save the others, you see. I'm sort of used to it," he added explanatorily. "It seems to fit into my curves. The new ones don't. One is supposed to fit into theirs!"

Joan patted the sleeve of the second-best affectionately

Her eyes were moist. She felt nearer to her father than she had for weeks. He had kept the old chair out of their home equipment; he had kept the old coat. Was he after all not so obliviously content as he seemed in his fine new surroundings? Did he remember, too, and was he homesick as herself for the shabby days when he and she and her mother had made a little world of their own, happy in spite of everything?

She said with a smile, "You 'd better not let Effie May catch you wearing such a garment!"

"Heaven forbid!" he exclaimed. "I may confess that it was with some difficulty I rescued this coat from the ashman, to whom your mother had given it."

But his use of the phrase, "your mother," hardened Joan out of her momentary tenderness. Invariably he spoke of Effie May to her as "your mother," and of her real mother only as "Mary." The girl was too young to realize that this may have been because the name meant things to him which the phrase never would. Mary was something more to Richard Darcy than Joan's mother. . . .

"I have come to talk to you," said Joan, "about business, Father."

"Business?" The Major's eyebrows lifted. Business meant money, and the ladies of his family never cared to talk about money! remarked those eyebrows. Though, to be sure, they sometimes found themselves under the necessity of asking for it— His hand went instinctively to his pocket.

"I suppose you are out of pin-money?" he interpreted. "Stupid of me not to have realized it, Dollykin, though I sent you rather a good deal to the convent, you remember?" He brought his hand out, filled with silver. "There! Spend it 'not wisely but too well'—not that one need give any girl advice on that subject! Dear, dear, how women can make the money fly!" humorously sighed the Major (whose debts had

probably been paid by women ever since he had been old enough to make them).

"I should like a chance," said Joan soberly, "to make the money fly, Father. My money, you know."

He stared at her, really bewildered.

She refreshed his memory, flushing. "The money Mother left, with you as guardian—that I was to have whenever I asked—"

"Not that she ever expected such a contingency to arrive!" commented the Major with a sudden accession of stiffness. "You are not of age yet, my child."

"Was there any provision in her will about my being of age?"

"No," he admitted. "Owing to what was of course purely a technical error, I think there was not. My poor Mary was quite unaccustomed to the terminology of wills, naturally, and as she and a servant drew it up between them, you may imagine—" he shrugged indulgently.

Joan moistened her lips. She was finding the interview even more difficult than she had imagined. Her father's manner managed to put her somehow in the wrong. But she held to her purpose.

"I do not think it was an error, Father. Mother was n't the sort who says things she does n't mean. I believe she foresaw that—that something might occur which would make me wish to be independent, even if I was not of age. She could trust my judgment a little. She knew that I'd never dream of asking for her property unless I had a good reason— I have a good reason now, Father— I want to be independent." Her voice trailed off miserably. What she really wanted was to put her arms about his neck and have a good cry.

Unconsciously the Major discouraged the impulse. "What is this nonsense about independence?" he demanded. "My

dear Joan, you sound like a New Woman!" On his lips the phrase was a scathing denunciation.

Joan explained faintly that she wanted to go away some where, to live. . . .

The Major was honestly aghast. "Leave your father's roof?" he cried incredulously. "My child! What is this folly? Never with Richard Darcy's consent shall a daughter of his leave her father's roof except for the roof of her lawful husband." (In moments of emotion, the Major was always liable to these attacks of circumlocution.)

Joan pointed out to him, still faintly but determinedly, that it was not her *father's* roof she wished to leave. . . .

Even under his armor of complacency this shot told. He winced. "Have you been made to feel that? Has my wife ever caused you to believe that you were an unwelcome member of our household?" he demanded sharply, in a voice that boded ill for the present Mrs. Darcy if such were the case.

"No, Father! I shall never give her the chance to make me feel unwelcome. That is why I want my mother's money."

The Major toyed with a pen, and seemed to be thinking. "I am not at all sure," he said presently, "that the will Mary left was legal, my dear; whether it would stand in the courts—"

"What does that matter?" interrupted Joan, "when you and I know what Mother meant?" Something impelled her to add, "And when Ellen Neal knows, too?"

The Major looked quickly at her, and looked away. "Perhaps you are not aware that regardless of any will whatsoever the law entitles me to one-third of my wife's estate?"

Joan flushed with an embarrassment that was more for him than for herself. "You're welcome to it, Daddy; you're perfectly welcome to it, of course! It isn't that I want to



take anything away from *you*. It's—oh, won't you *please* understand, and not be hurt with me?" she implored. "I only want to know how much there is, how much money I can count on getting every month to live on. Just income, you know. I would n't think of touching the—principal, don't you call it?"

Richard Darcy rose abruptly and went to the window. It was a fine view that spread before him—a soothing, mellifluous landscape of golden river and hazy blue Indiana hills. Indiana, as he sometimes remarked, was delightful as a background though undesirable as a dwelling-place. He said so now. He had taken this office entirely for its view, he informed his daughter. The Major patronized Nature extensively, and believed that all gentlemen should do so; especially Kentucky gentlemen, to whom Nature has been so particularly lavish.

Meanwhile Joan waited. He recalled that her mother used to have the same habit of silent waiting. Some minds seem incapable of pleasant digression.

He sighed, and resumed the subject under discussion. His manner had changed somewhat, however. He spoke in the persuasive, frank, "he 's-a-good-fellow-and-'twill-all-be-well" tones which he reserved for directors' boards, stockholders' meetings, and like courts of last resort, when things unpleasant had to be told and he was the one to tell them. It should be said in all justice that he rarely side-stepped these meetings, as he might have done, and allowed the unpleasantnesses to disclose themselves through others. Nobody could say that Richard Darcy was a coward.

"Well, about this little business affair of ours, Dollykins—Of course the property was never large, though properly invested it might have brought us in a decent income instead of the trifle Mary was content with. The merest pittance I assure you, the merest pittance!"

Joan nodded. She had heard before about the mereness of the pittance.

"Often during my wife's lifetime I took occasion to point this out to her. The question of securities and investments being one to which I have devoted the greater part of my business career, I think I may say without undue vanity that I am qualified to give advice on such matters! But Mary had a certain sentimental reluctance about changing investments which her father had made for her, and sentiment is a thing which I am always able to respect."

("Good for mother!" said Joan to herself.)

"However, after her death—" he paused to pay his Mary the tribute of a sincere though dramatic sigh—"I began at once to look about for a means of providing my little girl with more affluence than had hitherto been at my disposal. The best," he smiled, patting her hand, "is none too good for my Dollykins! And an opportunity shortly presented itself, a quite exceptional opportunity, not only of increasing our income materially, but of assisting to develop the resources of my native commonwealth." He expanded suddenly with public spirit. "What a State! Fortunes have been made here, but nothing compared with the fortunes which shall be made. People have dared to call us a 'pauper State'—'pauper,' if you please!—with wealth at our command, untouched, unguessed resources lying just beneath the surface of this beautiful soil, which would make Aladdin's cave look like—like—"

"Thirty cents," supplied Joan, in an anxious effort to get to the point. "I know, Father!—but what did you buy with the money?"

"Oil-fields!" he said largely. "Oil-fields! Or, to be exact, stock in a company formed for the purpose of purchasing oil-fields, in which by good chance I happened to be let in on the ground floor (as we say in commercial parlance, Dollykins. It is not an expression I should care to hear you use.) You are

the part possessor of something like one thousand acres of virgin Kentucky soil!" He leaned back in his chair and beamed on her.

"Am I?" said Joan dubiously. "It sounds promising."

Something of her father's elation disappeared in a sigh. "Promising, yes!—but so far only promising. Oil has been struck all about us, but none as yet on our holdings. I have by no means given up hope, of course." (Richard Darcy had never given up hope in any of his lost causes.) "But I must confess that I have been disappointed. Worse than disappointed. For a while I was—well, really, desperate!" He smiled deprecatingly.

The smile did not for the moment touch Joan's heart; but it told her the truth she had dreaded. "Father! You mean you have *lost* the money?—There's no income left!"

"Income? Alas, no. And even the principal—Still, the land is there, one thousand acres of it, and that cannot escape!" he added, brightening. "There were times when I thought of going to live on the land. Though my experience of agriculture has been practically nil, many of our ancestors were planters and stock-breeders, and, as you know, I am a firm believer in the power of heredity. However, I was credibly informed that the property would not lend itself to agriculture. I was at my wit's end. Fancy the position!" (The Major was beginning rather to enjoy his woe in the retrospect.) "Here was I not as yet firmly established on my feet (as we say in business parlance); deprived alike of helpmate and companion, with my child at an expensive boarding-school where I had promised my dead wife she should remain until the completion of her education—and I without a dollar I could call my own! Frightful! There were certain obligations to tradespeople as well. . . . I am sure I do not know how for a while Ellen Neal managed to provide us with necessities!" (Joan thought grimly that she knew how.) "It

became necessary to—ah!—realize on my possessions. First the silver went—I daresay you have wondered what has become of our family silver, my child? It was sacrificed to keep a roof over your head. Then the more valuable pieces of furniture—”

“Oh, don’t!” groaned the girl in a sort of angry pity. “Why did n’t you tell me? Oh, *poor* father!”

“You may well say, ‘poor father.’ It was for you I suffered most, for you I was afraid. A man alone can always manage to subsist in some fashion, but a man with a helpless female dependent on him—! Thank heaven,” he said earnestly, “you can never know what it is to be a father! I thought constantly, ‘What a home to bring a young lady into! What a situation for my child!’ I may confess that I prayed—no gentleman need be ashamed to pray when he is in distress. And then like light in darkness the answer came to me. At whatever cost to myself, whatever sacrifice, I must provide comfort for Joan, a home suitable for the reception of a young gentlewoman. There was nothing left to offer except—myself. Therefore—”

His face shone with a noble sadness, and he waited for the generosity of his sacrifice to sink in.

“You mean,” said Joan slowly, “that it was for my sake you married Mrs. Calloway?”

He bowed assent. “Why else? She is an excellent woman, a kind and excellent and devoted woman. But under happier circumstances, a man of my position, my traditions, my—shall I say fastidiousness?—” He shrugged, and allowed the ungallant suggestion to complete itself without words.

“I think,” said Joan quietly, “we ’d better not say ‘fastidiousness.’”

She was struggling, struggling so hard that her hands were clenched, to do justice to her father. Had she misjudged him?

Was his marriage after all not the horrid thing she had thought it, but an honest effort to atone to the child he had beggared? Something within her cried "No!" Her father had sacrificed nothing in the marriage. He had simply yielded, without a struggle, to the lure of the flesh-pots. Worse than this, the girl recalled honeymooning incidents that often made her shudder with mental nausea; certain billing and cooing which she had not always been able to avoid. It was not only the flesh-pots that had lured him. . . .

"Cad!" she cried to herself fiercely. "Cad and liar!" And the terrible thing was that he did not seem to know he was being a cad and a liar.

Aloud she said, "And what did Mrs. Calloway get out of the bargain?"

The Major stared at her, astounded. It was a question so absurd that he literally could not answer it. Quite unconsciously his eyes strayed beyond her after a moment to a mirror, as if for reassurance.

Joan burst out laughing. The laughter was so palpably close to tears that her father forgave it, and held out his arms to her. "There, there, my poor child! You're overwrought," he murmured. "Come to Daddy!"

She had lost all desire to weep on his shoulder now, however, and Richard Darcy shrank from the look she gave him, as a more innocent man than he might have shrunk; so level it was, so keen and without mercy. She saw her father in that moment not only as cad and liar, but as something very close to a thief. As surely as if she had been told in words, she knew why her mother, after fighting for years to keep her bit of property safe for her child, had at the last left it to the guardianship of her husband. It was to show him she trusted him, to put him on honor, as it were; to bolster up his waning self-respect by this final supreme act of faith in him. And he had betrayed her.

Joan shrugged, and turned to go. Her head hung in shame, and Richard Darcy knew that the shame was not for herself. What passed through her brain then was for the moment clear to him, as it is sometimes with people of one blood.

"I dare say," he said very low with a sort of dreadful questioning, "that the law might—might hold me responsible as guardian of your property, my daughter. If you cared to—if you wished to—make an issue of it?"

"What good would that do?" she replied brutally. "The money 's gone, is n't it?"

Then, glancing back, she surprised in his face that look she had almost forgotten—the frightened, baffled, anxious expression which she associated with the days when, as Ellen Neal put it, "the Indians were after him."

Instantly the reaction came. It was she he feared now, not "Indians"—she, his own little girl, Joan!

She ran and put her arms around him tightly, protectingly. "Nonsense!" she cried, her voice beautiful with the instinct of all the mothers who had made her. "The law 'll never know a thing about it. What has the old law got to do with you and me? You 've done the best you could, Daddy, I 'm sure."

Richard Darcy answered humbly, like a repentant child, "I have, daughter, truly I have. I 'm sorry." . . .

Later, as she walked wearily homeward through streets that no longer exhilarated her, no bachelor-maid now with a latch-key, nor yet an independent young traveler in foreign lands, but merely a poor relation dependent on the bounty of a step-mother, Joan made for herself a new beatitude:

"Blessed are the weak," she thought stoically, "for they have got to be taken care of."

## CHAPTER XI

**T**HE two rooms in which Ellen Neal had established herself were on the second floor of a house that had gone some decades since into a state of senile decrepitude. But such was the fashion of building in its day that it showed no particular signs of its approaching end beyond a slight tilt to leeward and the rather eczematic effect of its stuccoed brick facade. A high-waisted door surmounted by a fine fan-light and supported by slender columns which had once been white led into a square panelled hall from which curved a staircase of exquisite proportions. These things in a city of larger growth and greater sophistication would have marked the house as the natural abode of artists and their ilk; but in Louisville, where art is yet chiefly a thing to be taken in courses by the elect, it let itself out in rooms for light housekeeping and other humble purposes. The slender columns were defaced by such signs as, "Feather Cleaning and Artificial Flowers,"—"Furniture Upholstered,"—"Plain Dressmaking," etc.

The neighborhood, except for this one decrepit mansion standing well in from the sidewalk with an ancient sycamore for company, had long since forgotten its former claims to fashion; but it was still respectable. Trust Ellen Neal for that! She had the same flair for respectability as had the Misses Darcy for gentility. No doubtful character, whether in house or individual, could fail to yield up its weakness to the corrosive rectitude of Miss Neal's shrewd eye.

Joan liked to come to this house, not only because Ellen and the familiar home furniture were there, but because it carried

her romantic fancy back into the Louisville her father sometimes talked about, the old South with all its lost glamour of gallantry and derring-do. "*Les belles dames du temps jadis*" was a phrase that invariably came to her mind as she entered the graceful, defaced portal. Nearby stood a street-pump where an actress who was one day to make the charm of American women world-famous, used to come each morning to draw water, in her shabby little slippers with a rope of hair over each shoulder—a lovely young Rebekah at the well. Around the corner stood another old mansion, now debased to commercial uses, in front of which the townspeople used to gather daily at a certain hour to watch the languid progress from door to carriage of a beauty so widely heralded that her name and her many love-affairs have become history. Here and there in a neglected fence-corner a ragged rose-bush, or a clump of larkspur bravely in bloom, spoke to a few observers, such as Joan, of gardens which had been the lovely setting of lovely ladies long since dead and dust.

Twilight was the hour for that neighborhood. Joan liked to fancy Ellen's house as the darkness fell, with candle-light streaming from the wide-flung windows, and glimpses within of bells in crinoline and beaux in tight wrinkled trousers, dancing a quadrille. Among them moved negro servitors with trays of frosted silver cups, and syllabub (though she had no slightest notion of what syllabub might be), and black cake, and small, pricked, beaten biscuit with ham in their insides. And there would be carriages stopping constantly at the door, to emit more belles and gallants, girls hoop-skirted and beshawled, who ran lightly up the curve of the long staircase, with apologies to the couples they disturbed in passing. . . .

Always the house brought such fancies to Joan, and so clearly that she sometimes wondered whether they were less fancies than race-memories, souvenirs of Darcys who might



have lived and made merry there in the halcyon days when the old gray river-town was at its zenith; truly, as it boasted, the Gateway to the South, stopping-place for all travelers on these floating palaces which no longer ply their leisurely journeys down the Ohio and the Mississippi to the Gulf.

Once she had questioned her father about it. "No, that's not one of our houses, I think," he replied interestedly. "Though it might have been. Your ancestors were very fond of change, Dollykins—as I am myself. We seem to have lived in half the houses in Louisville, at one time or another. But that one has been shabby and tumbledown ever since I can remember. In my boyhood it was a cheap boarding-house, for actors and people of that sort, I believe. I knew no one who lived there."

Joan was disappointed. She would have liked to claim the old mansion as a relative.

As she went wearily homeward from her disastrous interview with her father, Joan suddenly bethought herself of this house, and of Ellen. She was in no mood just then for the cheerful vulgarities of her step-mother. On the impulse, she went into the nearest drug-store and telephoned that she would not be home that night for dinner.

"Ellen shall cook me some pancakes, and I will help her," she decided, comforted by the idea. It must be remembered that Joan was only nineteen.

Inhabitants in suspenders and dressing-sacks, seeking air on the doorstep, stared at the girl inquisitively as she entered; but once within the dimness of the panelled hall she was able to forget these anachronisms. The quaint elegance of an earlier day was proof against even Expert Feather-curling, and Upholstery Done Here.

From above came a sudden tuneless whistling, and then a thump on a door and a man's voice calling, "Say, Mrs. Neal! Here's a bushel of fine assorted socks for you, and if you can

get enough out of the lot to keep my feet off the cauld, cauld ground till pay-day, I 'll be yours truly."

She heard Ellen's voice replying in more muffled tones, "All right, sir, just dump 'em in the door, will you? My hands are in the dough."

Joan was amused to hear Ellen Neal called "Mrs."—she who was so unmistakably and truculently a spinster; also she was surprised at the politeness of her "sir" in response, for Ellen was not given to the small amenities of social intercourse. The Major himself was rarely "sir" to Ellen.

The whistling resumed itself, coming rapidly nearer; and around the curve of the stairs, which he took two at a time, bounded a young man, who brought himself and his whistling to a full stop just in time to avoid carrying Joan with him in his downward course.

"Whew!—just missed you!" he exclaimed aghast. "You startled me. For a minute I thought you were a ghost!"

"Perhaps I am," murmured Joan, and demurely passed on up the stairs.

He turned and stared after the white ascending figure. She was aware of his eyes following her. Suddenly he chuckled, "I knew I'd find you again. And I found the quotation, too! 'Richard the Second,' by William Shakespeare."

Joan glanced over her shoulder. "I do not know what you are talking about," she said frigidly, "and I do not know you from Adam!" She had brought the impertinence upon herself, but she felt quite able to handle it—particularly with Ellen Neal just a few steps away.

Even as she spoke, however, she was aware that she did know this young man. Something in his voice, in his awkward, deferential manner, brought back to her memory the too-sympathetic drummer on the train. She lifted her eyes from his necktie to his face, remembering past regrets. His ears stuck out.

"Like the Yellow Kid's!" she thought disgustedly.

There is nothing in the least romantic about a man whose ears stick out. He might as well be fat. . . .

"Sad stories of the death of kings," he was explaining eagerly. "I looked it up myself. Sort of sounded like Shakespeare."

"Oh! I thought it was 'Alice in Wonderland'!" Joan was surprised into speech.

"That's a new one on me—'Alice in Wonderland,'"—commented the young man. "Is it good stuff?"

"You've never read 'Alice in Wonderland'? What a queer childhood you must have had!"

"Did n't have any," he replied, smiling up at her. Then he removed the smile, made a respectful little bow, and went on out the door.

Joan found that she was blushing, hotly; and no wonder. She was shocked by herself. She, one of Sister Mary Agnes's best exemplars of decorum, had deliberately started and continued a conversation with a strange young man met by chance on the dark stairway of a house where assuredly gentlemen did not live. ("Unless very poor gentlemen," she amended; for, ears or not, he seemed somehow to belong in the category of gentlehood.) Nor had she even terminated the conversation. It was he who had done that. He had shown more sense of the fitness of things than had she, Joan Darcy!

It was all the effect of the hospitable old hall, Joan decided. The house, like the roof of a friend, had introduced them. But what was he doing in such a house? It was not the sort of abode that would appeal, she fancied, to necktie drummers.

She opened Ellen's door without knocking. "Hello, there! Who's that I met on the stairs, and why does he call you 'Mrs.,' you giddy old fraud?"

A spoon dropped to the floor with a clatter as Ellen turned,

beaming. "Land sakes! You might as well kill a person as scare her to death," she complained, far too pleased to admit it. "What you doin' down town this time o' day, all dressed up like lady-come-to-see? What do you want, eh?"

"Pancakes," explained Joan, ripping off her long gloves. "I 'm going to stay to supper, Nellen, so get me an apron and let 's begin."

Ellen's smile widened. "Pancakes! On a hot night like this?"

Joan nodded. "Um-humm! And lemonade," she said, "and anything else you can think of that 's indigestible. Got any pickles?"

"What would a lone woman be doin' keepin' house without pickles?" replied Ellen scornfully, producing them. "And there 's a batch of cinnamon rolls in the oven this minute, just as if I was expectin' you."

With a sigh of content, the girl reached down a yellow crockery bowl out of the cupboard—she was on quite intimate terms with Ellen's cupboard—and tying a gingham apron about her neck, proceeded to stir batter. It was the same crockery bowl, and perhaps the same gingham apron, in which she had stirred batter so long ago that she had been obliged to stand on a footstool in order to reach the kitchen-table. There was something substantial and fixed and unchangeable about Ellen Neal and her possessions, something that spelled home, though it was only home for other people.

"But you have n't distracted my mind," said Joan judiciously, "from the fact that a young man of your acquaintance calls you 'Mrs.' without correction. You have n't eloped or anything lately?"

Ellen Neal bridled. "How you do go on, Joan! It makes it look better for a lone woman to be livin' by herself if she 's called 'Mrs.' Men ain't so apt to get fresh with her."

"No!" murmured Joan. She gazed at Ellen's gaunt unloveliness with twinkling eyes. "Don't tell me men have been getting fresh with you, Nellen!"

The other's jaw snapped. "They have not, and they better not try it."

"Don't you think it's rather a risk darning their socks, then?" murmured the girl wickedly. "It might give them false ideas."

"I only do it for one of 'em, and he pays me good. Anything's proper so long as you get paid for it."

Joan laughed aloud. "Why, Mrs. Neal, Mrs. Neal, you shock me! What a perilous idea!"

"You're awful smart, guyin' me, but I'd be ashamed to think the kind of thoughts you're thinkin' now," said Ellen Neal, unsmiling. "And you a spinster yourself! Thoughts are as bad as deeds, any day—worse, 'cause they come easier. That's one thing I've noticed about you lately, Joan. You seem to know about things that ain't ladylike, somehow. Something's happened to you, child. You ain't the nice little girl you used to be."

"No," admitted Joan, "I'm not. And the world's not the nice little world it used to be, either." She went over and laid her head on her friend's bony shoulder. "Don't scold me to-day, dear. You're right, but— Oh, Nellen, father's lost our money! And there's nothing in the world I can call my own. Just absolutely nothing!"

A silence fell. "So," said the old woman. "You've found out, at last, have you? I've wondered how long it would take. And now what you goin' to do about it?" she demanded suddenly. "Are you goin' to law?"

Joan shook her head. "You know what Mother would say to that."

Ellen sighed. "I suppose she would n't hear to it." It was a curious fact that when these two spoke of Mary Darcy,

they always spoke as if she were still alive, and near them. "Anyway, you can't squeeze blood out of a turnip—though I must say I'd like to see *some*thin' squeezed out of them kind of turnips, if it's only insides!" she added quite blood-thirstily. "Oh deary me, deary me! How often I've begged your ma to sneak what there was left out of his reach and put it away where I keep mine."

"Where 's that, Nellen?"

"In an old stockin'-fut under my bedtick, where you can bet no man on earth ever laid eyes on it, or ever will!"

The smell of scorching bread suddenly filled the room. "Land sakes, my cinnamon-rolls! And I'd promised that boy to save him some for breakfast."

"Breakfast?" exclaimed Joan, glad enough of a diversion from discussing her undiscussable father. "You mean to tell me you're not only keeping your young man darned, but breakfasted? Nellen, I'm positively jealous!"

"You would n't be if you could see him eat," said the other seriously. "Acts like he ain't had enough food to fill him sence he was born. He was gettin' all his meals out to a restaurant before I come, a place he calls 'The Sign of the Dirty Spoon.' Jokin', I suppose—he's a great one for jokes. But he looked so skinny, and was always takin' something for dyspepsy, so I told him I'd give him a good breakfast anyway, just to start the day on. Say, Joan, you ought to see him put it away! He says once, 'I 'spose this is what you call home-cookin', ain't it?' 'Land, sakes,' says I, 'don't you know home-cookin' when you see it?' 'I ain't never seen it before!' he says, laughing."

While she talked Ellen was bustling capably about, laying a cloth, getting out dishes, dropping Joan's batter into a sizzling saucepan, from whence arose dense, pleasing vapors.

"Here, Joan, mix some cinnamon in that sugar, 'less you'd ruther have molasses on 'em. You ought to see the room he's

got. Nothin' but books, all over the tables, piled up on the floor, even on the window-sills—"

"Books?" said Joan, pricking up an ear. She had not imagined the wide-eared young man in his dapper clothes a student.

"Whatever people want all them books around for I can't see," said Ellen. "Dust collectors, I call 'em; but he says they 're his college career. Always will have his joke! And the dirt—! He had a colored woman in to do for him before I come, and guess what she used to do with her dust?" She paused dramatically, arms akimbo.

Joan admitted her imagination unequal to the task.

"Swept it under the bed and left it there! Land!" said Ellen Neal, "how I do hate a nigger! You can bet I got that place to rights in a jiffy."

"I can indeed," murmured Joan, "and I can also bet he could n't find a thing belonging to him for a week afterwards."

Ellen grinned. "You 've the truth of it. There was n't a morning for about a week but what he 'd thump on the floor and yell down the chimney, 'Mrs. Neal, oh, Mrs. Neal! For heaven's sake where is my blue neck-tie?' or, 'In the name of Jehoshaphat, what have you done with my other pair of pants?' It kind of reminded me of your pa," she said, sighing. "I been lookin' after him ever sence. There now, ain't you goin' to eat your pancakes now you 've got 'em?"

Joan drew up her chair to the oil-cloth covered table, and, despite the heat and her troubles, made such a meal as she had not eaten for weeks at her step-mother's elaborate board. Ellen sat opposite her, with no servant-and-mistress nonsense to complicate the pleasure of hospitality. Sometimes the old woman waited on Joan, and sometimes Joan waited on Ellen, all in a friendly democracy that would have caused Major Darcy's hair to rise on end. It had been his conscientious

effort for years to keep Ellen Neal "in her place." The difficulty was in the ups and downs of the Darcy menage to know just what might be considered Ellen's place.

Not troubling themselves with any such niceties of status, the two ate their pancakes and drank their lemonade and otherwise courted indigestion contentedly, meanwhile chatting about the young man from upstairs, who for some reason began to appeal to Joan's imagination. His name, it appeared, was Archibald Blair.

"Archibald Blair! Nellen, how romantic! Like an English novel. Young Lord Toodledeboots ruined at Monte Carlo, hiding his poverty and a broken heart in lodgings. I suppose these might be called lodgings? If only his ears had been made to fit him!"

She no longer thought of him as a necktie drummer. The books made a difference. It seemed unlikely that necktie drummers would be on terms of first-name intimacy with Shakespeare. Moreover, his awkward yet somehow easy and unassuming air, like that of a friendly young dog who takes for granted that the world will be glad to see him, marked him as one not belonging to what her father called "the canile." No, he was a student and a gentleman, stranded by some freak of fortune in this near-slum, a youthful Beloved Vagabond. (It was the year when Locke's great book cast a glamour over all strange men in shabby clothing.) Although Archibald Blair was by no means shabby; on the contrary, rather appallingly dapper.

"I wonder how he happens to be living in a house like this?" she ruminated aloud.

"And why would n't he be living here?" demanded Ellen tartly. "It's cheap and decent, and there's some folks that don't like to go forever hoppin' from one place to another, like fleas on a dog's back. He's lived in that same room upstairs ever since he can remember."



"Oh, has he?" Joan's eye kindled. It occurred to her that the young man's history might have some connection with the history of the house itself. "Ellen, I have it! It's the old family mansion, belonged to his father and grandfather and great-grandfather, and *of course* he wants to go on living in it. I would myself!"

Ellen grinned. "If there's a romantical notion to be found, trust you for finding it. But if you really want to know, folks do say—" She hesitated, under the hallucination (which many virtuous women share) that she disliked to repeat gossip.

"Yes, yes? Do go on, Nellen!"

"Well, they do say that if he's got a father at all it's more than he knows, let alone a grandfather, and great-grandfather. I had it from a woman downstairs (her that curls feathers, and she got it straight from somebody who used to live in the neighborhood when this was a actors' boardin'-house), that he got left here when he was a little boy, by his mother, in hock for her board-bill. And she never come back for him."

Joan gave a gasp. "Oh," she cried. "Oh! poor woman!"

Ellen eyed her curiously. "Poor *woman*? I should think you'd say 'poor child'!"

"Poor both of them! But can't you see how much greater the tragedy must have been for the woman, who knew—who was to blame? Imagine how she must have dreamed of that pitiful little boy with his nose pressed against the window-pane watching for her—and she not able to come for him! Ellen— That's what he's doing here now! Waiting for his mother to come back!"

"If he is, I hope it's with a club in his hand," muttered the other angrily. "Why was n't she 'able to come,' I'd like to know?"

"Perhaps she died. Or, she could n't get enough money, or

oh—oh, Ellen, don't you *see*? She did n't dare to come for him! He was getting too big, noticing things. For his own sake she had to give him up!" There were tears in Joan's eyes, ready to spill over.

Ellen paused and stared at her. "Well!" she said at last. "If I had your imagination, Joan Darcy, I'd go to a hospital and get it cut out. It ain't safe! Here you are blubbering over the troubles of a woman who maybe never lived, and probably was a bad lot if she did—and a'most making me blubber over her myself!"

Joan laughed and jumped up. "Here, let me help with the dishes. You wash and I'll wipe. But what a funny, pitiful little boy he must have been with those stick-out ears and those big, innocent-looking front teeth of his! I wonder why it is that big front teeth always do make a person look so innocent, Ellen?"

"Seems to me you noticed a lot to have seen Mr. Blair only once."

Joan did not think it necessary to mention that she had seen him more than once.

"I always notice things—I can't help it. Anyway, I'm glad you keep the poor thing darned and comfy! It's only charity."

"Charity nothing. He pays me good, and prompter than I ever got paid before in all *my* life," disclaimed the other rather tactlessly.

While she washed and put away her dishes, the girl made a tour of inspection about the rooms that were so full of associations to her. She smiled and nodded at the two familiar Landseer dogs on the wall, which had been a familiar part of every dining-room she remembered. She patted the worn chairs affectionately, and went in to pay her respects to the shorn four-post bed, which looked more at ease in its present surroundings than in others where she had seen it. The

panelled walls, as nearly white as scrubbing could make them, the wide-silled windows with arched casements, the tall mantel-shelf, the finely molded ceiling which years of coal soot and cobwebs and general neglect had not sufficed to rob of dignity, all made a more suitable setting than Ellen guessed for her mistress's household gods; and to Joan these two bare and shabby rooms had become a haven of refuge. Tenement though it was, there was more of genuine beauty in the place where Ellen did plain dressmaking for very humble customers than in all the elaborate establishment with which Richard Darcy had managed to provide his daughter. Joan was very dependent upon beauty.

Later, Ellen walked out with her through the languorous summer evening to the house which she never called home. Nothing more had been said between them of the loss of her independence; but the girl felt soothed and comforted, strengthened as the heart is always strengthened in the presence of a deep though inarticulate devotion. She slipped her hand into the other's thin arm, and so linked they walked along without much talk between them, listening as they passed to pleasant sounds from many a shadowed porch and garden, guitar music, singing, the inevitable hushed murmur of boy and girl voices commingled, which is as natural to a summer gloaming as the twitter of birds in spring.

There came again to Joan, for the first time in weeks, something of the glamour, the sense of promise, which had touched her in the summer past when she walked at night with her father through the strange city where he had once been young. It was as if Romance brushed her in passing with shadowy skirts, and Joan felt that she must catch at them, cling to them, before it was too late. Youth is so short, so short! . . .

Ellen, too, felt the witchery of the soft night; but to the Ellens, Romance comes only vicariously.

"Joie," she said after a long silence, "ain't it time you was having some steady company yourself, child?"

The girl did not smile at the phrase. It voiced too well her own secret thoughts. There had been something strangely unreal, unnatural, about the past weeks. She had brought nothing out of her experience with life so far, not even a friend—for Stefan Nikolai was merely an inheritance.

"You 're right," she said soberly "I suppose I ought to have a 'steady company' at least by this time. That ought to be simple enough!—Marriage is about the only thing left for a girl in my position, is n't it?"

"Who's talking about marriage? You don't have to marry every fellow you walk out with, I should hope," said Ellen surprisingly. "I 've walked out with quite a few myself! . . . But as to gettin' married, Jo—it's about the only thing for a girl in any position, I guess, even if she finds out afterwards that she 's picked a lemon. Lemons are better than nothing."

"Why, Mrs. Neal!" laughed Joan. "What sentiments from a confirmed spinster-person!"

To which Ellen replied quietly, "It's the spinsters who know."

## CHAPTER XII

**T**HE discovery of her dependence upon her step-mother marked an end to one period of Joan's existence: the apathetic period. Heretofore she had allowed their daily life, their amusements, their acquaintanceships, to remain in the hands of Effie May. If that lady chose, as she naively put it, to "break into society," and society was willing, Joan was amenable, though a little dubious as to society's taste. She was amenable, that is, so long as she was not called upon too actively to assist in the process. Pride forbade her making any effort to interest or to be interested in people who chose to accept the present Mrs. Darcy as one of themselves. To the Louisville she knew so far, she was merely the appendage of her parents, a captive chained to the triumphal chariot-wheel of her step-mother.

That was all very well so long as she knew that she might snap the chain at any moment and be free. But a dependence that seemed likely to continue indefinitely was not to be borne by what the Major would have called "the proud spirit of a Darcy." Joan, waking in the early dawn, rose and dressed (not in negligée), demanded breakfast at an hour when the astonished servants were barely awake themselves, and proceeded to clear her decks for action. . . .

Ellen had sowed a useful suggestion in her brain. There was one freedom open to all young girls who were not too exacting in their demands: the freedom of marriage. Joan decided to marry. She also selected the victim.

It was the first time she had thought of him for weeks; or of "the girls," those heart's companions with whom she had

shared for two years her inmost hopes and desires (to say nothing of hats and gloves and handkerchiefs); with whom at parting she had exchanged vows of lifelong fealty. Their letters had accumulated unanswered. In the shock and shame of her father's marriage, she had put away childish things, among them her schoolmates, who seemed in the retrospect immature and puerile. Even Eduard of the interesting past had been put away for the moment with outgrown things, and had remained (fortunately) unthanked for his parting flowers. As for the love-letter which had accompanied them—Joan wondered with a start of dismay what had become of it.

She found it neatly smoothed of its tell-tale wrinkles (the reader will remember that for a day and a night it had reposed against Joan's heart), filed among the letters in her desk, where it had been duly placed after being duly read, doubtless, by one of Mrs. Darcy's efficient house-maids.

The girl studied it with a more dispassionate eye than she had brought to its first perusal:

My flowers must tell you what I dare not, dearest little girl of my heart. You will understand why I cannot say good-by. Truly, "to part is to die a little." Forgive me!

EDUARD.

Joan decided that this could not, after all, be called a love-letter; or if so, it was of a noncommittal type distinctly piquing to the vanity. She had given a good many of her precious holidays to the reforming of Mr. Desmond.

"So!" she thought, with a small gleam in her eye. "I was merely a child that amused him for the moment! He was probably laughing at me. . . . I wonder if he would laugh now!"

She went to her mirror and examined the reflection within impartially.

Something of what she had always candidly recognized as her plainness seemed to have disappeared. She was no longer scrawny, for one thing. Her lazy life of the past weeks, and possibly Effie May's beauty experts, whose ministrations she accepted so ungratefully, had put a gracious covering over her young bones, and she discovered with some excitement the rudiments of a figure. Her straight, burnished hair (she had so far resisted all temptations to "marcel" it) gave her what she fancied a rather *distinguè* air, and her skin had that rare, pale transparency of perfect health which is lovelier even than rosiness. Her eyes had always given perfect satisfaction. She nodded to them in affectionate fashion, as to good friends (she had always fancied that one of them was her brain and the other her soul, and even suspected which was which—the left wearing rather a twinkle, in comparison with the right, which had a mild, innocuous expression). Her mouth was too large.

"But then," she reflected, "large mouths are very much worn by heroines nowadays, and mine is n't mushy or loose at the corners, anyway. There's a draw-string to it."

Of the nose the less said the better. It was merely a nose.

On the whole, standing there in her pretty morning dress, with the grace and freshness of nineteen years about her like an aura, young Joan decided in all modesty that she was one of the women who have their moments, and that such moments ought not to be wasted.

She sat down at once and indited a little note to Eduard Desmond expressing gratitude for "flowers which had meant so much to her," and explaining that she had not written before "because it had seemed best not to"—the inference being that now danger was past, and time had made it safe for her to think of him.

"That," mused Joan nibbling her penholder, "ought to make him sit up and take notice, I should think?" She had

been from her cradle something of a student of her fellow-creatures.

She wrote to his niece, her friend Betty, as well; a long, confidential screed, mentioning the fact of her father's marriage without comment and allowing her friend to read between the lines. Betty had an adored mother of her own.

Then Joan rested on her oars and awaited results, which were prompt in coming. Not for nothing had she been the prize letter-writer of her school, entrusted by friend and foe alike with the handling of anything that was most delicate in the way of correspondence.

A few days later she was able to remark to her family that she had been invited to visit her schoolmate, Betty Desmond, at the Desmond country place near Philadelphia.

"The people you spent the Christmas holidays with in Washington? A fine old Irish name," commented the Major, who made something of a specialty of names. "I have not the pleasure of their acquaintance, but I am sure the good Sisters would not have permitted you to visit them if they had not been—ah! desirable acquaintances."

"They are quite rich, if that is what you mean," said his daughter bluntly. Her manner to her father had latterly undergone a change which was not altogether nice.

The Major's eyebrows shot up in pained surprise. "Joan! That is certainly irrelevant, not to say—"

"And there 's an eligible young man in the family," continued the girl imperturbably.

He stared at her, speechless. "My child!" he exclaimed after a moment. "One would suppose you were actually—"

"Hunting for a husband? I am," she finished. "What else did you expect me to do?"

A burst of laughter from Effie May relieved the situation. "Of course she 's hunting for a husband! All girls are, unless they 're lookin' for trouble. Good for you, dearie!



You 'll land him, too, I 'll bet my hat. Men? Lord," she cried, "they 're as easy as fallin' off a log, once you get the hang of 'em!"

But the Major continued to gaze at his daughter incredulously. "To think," he murmured, "that I should live to hear *my daughter* speak in such a manner!" It was evidently not the idea which shocked him, so much as the indelicate expression of it.

Joan rose suddenly and left the table.

Effie May came to her afterwards, intent on comforting. "There, there, girlie, you must n't mind what your papa says; he 's just a man. Besides, he 's so genteel in his instincts he 's hardly human. Your mamma would have understood, just like I do. *She* would n't of thought you 'd said anything unrefined!"

"Thank you," muttered Joan bitterly.

"Why, it 's the most natural thing in the world that a girl wants a house of her own, and a man of her own, and so forth! Only most of 'em ain't honest enough to come out flat and say so. . . . I 'm for you, dearie. You 're to have the trip, of course, and anything else you want, just let me know. As if I was really your mother—I mean it!"

"Thank you," said Joan again.

It was not the first time she had been disconcerted to find the enemy fighting her battles. What is to be done with an enemy which will not keep its proper place?

Effie May concerned herself in the preparations for departure with a whole-hearted generosity which occasioned Joan some secret pangs of remorse. As a step-relative she knew that she herself had left much to be desired. In vain the girl protested that she had already too many clothes, too much finery.

"Nonsense! A girl can't have too much finery," was the rejoinder. "Even if you don't get to wear all your pretties,

it makes you feel sort of easy, sort of good-as-anybody like, just to know you 've got 'em in the closet."

With her own hands she ran ribbons and rearranged trimmings and packed, to the secret jealousy of Ellen, keeping up a constant stream of shrewd comment and advice, some of which Joan found worth remembering.

"The trouble with you is, girlie, you think too much," was one of the pearls that fell from her lips. "Just let go and have a good time, and don't take yourself so hard. You can feel as different as you like inside, just so folks don't know it. Folks are sort of leery of what they are n't used to. See?"

Joan often wondered in what school of experience her step-mother had gleaned her curious wisdom.

Ellen Neal was the only one of the three elders who watched her going with any uneasiness.

"Look here, Joan," she said once, abruptly. "When I spoke like I done about marriage being the best thing for a girl, I meant marriage with love, child—marriage *with love*. Like your mamma's."

The simile was unfortunate. The eye that Joan believed to be her brain twinkled mockingly. "Do you mean to insinuate that marriage and love are not always synonymous? Why, Mrs. Neal, you put so many strange ideas into my young head lately! Seriously," she added, seeing that the other's anxious gravity did not relax, "I don't believe it would be hard to pump up a little love in return for—lots of it, say, and a place of your own in the world, and independence."

"Where there 's love there ain't apt to be much independence, I 've noticed," remarked the other.

"All the more reason to do without love, then!" cried Joan, with triumphant logic.

But she hugged Ellen remorsefully, glad that the good woman could only guess at what was going on at the moment in her nursling's brain.

Her step-mother's casual advice and her own inner music had resulted in one firm determination. If she missed romance, experience, all the real things of life, it would be for lack of meeting them halfway. She would be no longer a passive agent. She would be bold and reckless—even necessary a little Fast; though how to go about being Fast was somewhat of a puzzle to Mary's daughter.

"If people want to say things, or squeeze my hand, or a thing like that," she told herself rather vaguely, "I must remember not to hold back and be standoffish. . . . How I know what I like unless I try?"

But while the noun on her tongue was plural and indefinite the noun on her mind was single and masculine and very definite indeed. It behooved Mr. Desmond to look to him-

### CHAPTER XIII

**J**OAN, already exhilarated by a foretaste of independence, and enjoying to the full what Turgenev calls "that carelessness, that deuce-take-it air which comes out so naturally in foreign travel," changed at Broad Street for a local train that stops at all the smart little flower-bedecked stations which make the environs of Philadelphia so charming to the eye. Neat turnouts were waiting at most of them, dog-carts with dapper grooms at the horses' heads, big machines driven by bare-headed young people in sports clothes; here and there a quietly elegant brougham or limousine with men in livery on the box.

As her train passed, she caught glimpses of mellow, red-brick houses that gave the effect of age without decadence; tree-lined avenues, hot-houses, gardens, velvet lawns. It was country that lacked the broad, picturesque loveliness of Kentucky landscape, but it had a definite charm of its own—a well-ordered, leisurely, finished permanence which reminded one that not only American history but American society had its stronghold here, changing less than elsewhere in our adolescent land. There was no suggestion, as in the South, of having seen better days; no raw, temporary promise of the future as in the Middle West. Joan remembered having heard that many people who danced in the Philadelphia Assembly of to-day bore the same names as those who danced in it when Philadelphia was the country's capital, and Mr. Washington its first President. She wondered hopefully whether Desmond was one of those names. . . .

People got in and out of the train, carrying golf-bags and tennis-rackets. Joan smoothed the skirt of the "little model" Effie May had provided for traveling purposes; a fawncolored crêpe with lacy cuffs and collar, which had at first given her qualms of uneasiness. There was a long cloth coat to match, and a hat of the costliest simplicity; and she was not used to traveling dressed as for a party. Now, however, she was grateful for her step-mother's insistence, with a gratitude which increased in proportion to the distance between them.

"Always dress up on a train," was Effie May's sage counsel, "so that people will notice you're a lady, and treat you according."

People had undoubtedly noticed, and she had been treated "according"; and now toward her journey's end it was particularly agreeable to feel that among these fellow-travelers on pleasure bent she need have no qualms as to her personal appearance, at least. Underneath she might know herself to be plain, poor little Joan Darcy, an adventuress in search of a husband; but on the surface she was as affluent a young lady as ever rang for the porter to lower a shade that was within two feet of her hand.

It may be premature to state that our heroine had already adjusted her future to her present pleasing environment; but the fact remains that when the train stopped at the station for which her subconscious mind had fortunately been listening, Joan was just in the act of moving Ellen Neal and her mother's furniture into a large Quaker house with a gambrel roof. . . .

Betty was waiting for her in a dog-cart; brown as a berry, with sleeves rolled up, and a bare, tousled head, quite a different young person already from the shy little girl who had been her slave at the Convent.

"Hurry up, old Joie!" she called, wrestling with the cob, who rose on his hind legs to snort at the snorting engine,

while a diminutive groom tried with frantic leapings to reach his head. "The Rabbit hates to stand! Run and get Miss Darcy's things, Jenks" (this to the groom) "and be quick about it, will you? You see," she explained as Joan climbed perilously aboard and was duly kissed, "when I left, Mother was two up and four to play, and it's the finals, and she's already got a leg on the cup. Great, isn't it? We'll have to gallop all the way to get there before it's over!"

"What *are* you talking about?" asked mystified Joan. "A leg on the cup—!" Hitherto golf had not entered into her vocabulary; though she had gazed at it from afar, wondering at the strange ways men choose to waste their golden hours.

"Why, the tournament, of course! Did n't I write you? We're deep in it. Where are your clubs, by the way?" She glanced at Joan's bag and parasol-case. "Oh, dear! Have you left them on the train?"

"Clubs?— You mean golf-sticks?" asked Joan, with misgivings. "Why, I have n't any. I don't play golf."

"*Don't play golf!*" cried Betty in genuine dismay. "What ever will you do with yourself here? And how on earth do you amuse yourself in Kentucky? Just ride!"

"Why, yes," said Joan feebly, "we—we ride."

Once, indeed, during a period of comparative affluence, the Major had possessed for a while a horse of the family type; and under his instruction Joan had occasionally mounted the complaisant beast and propelled it fearfully about back streets, feeling that something was due her Kentucky traditions. But suppose she were expected to mount, for instance, some such fire-eater as the Rabbit!

"I don't believe I've brought my riding-clothes," she murmured hastily.

"Goose! Why not? But I dare say Mother can fit you out with trousers," said Betty, glancing casually at her

friend's slim length of limb. "Mine 'd be too short. With trousers and a sweater you 'll be all right."

Joan's eyes opened wide, but her mouth remained closed. After all, she was out for experience. If it included meeting a violent death while clad in trousers and a sweater, so be it.

"Uncle Neddy 'll find you a decent horse somewhere," Betty was running on. "He 's awfully keen about your coming, Jo. I 'm afraid you 're going to have him on your hands a lot, especially if you don't play golf."

Joan brightened. "Why? Does n't he?"

"Lord, no! Too much of a duffer. Likes to do lazy things, like riding, and fooling around in a canoe, admiring nature. With widows and such!" She made a face.

"Widows?" Joan pricked an ear.

"Grass or sod. It 's all one to our Neddy," murmured his flippant niece. "Girls are not grown up enough for him, of course— Except you. He always did take notice when you were around. I remember. But then you were always more grown up than the rest of us, somehow." She gave her friend a glance full of the old shy admiration. "Do you know, you 've gotten to be awfully pretty too. Perhaps it 's all those grand clothes!"

"Perhaps it is," smiled Joan, flushing.

At school she had been the poor girl of her group, the one who had most often to borrow and least often to lend the simple fineries current among them for special occasions. Now under her friend's appraising eyes she was a little uncomfortable, wondering whether the dress she had on was perhaps a little too "grand" by comparison with Betty's plain linen. Linens she owned herself, but braided, embroidered, lace-inserted out of all recognition as such. It was a physical impossibility for Effie May to select anything plain. Under her manipulation, the merest shirt-waist became what the salesladies refer to majestically as a "bloom."

Sartorially Joan was entirely in her step-mother's hands.

"But Southern girls always do dress up a lot, don't they?" said Betty, innocently continuing her line of thought. "You ought to have seen the one the Ritters had visiting them last month! All ruffles, and parasols, and chiffon veils. Could n't swim or go for a ride or do anything on account of her complexion. All she did was to dance and sit out in corners with people. It was disgusting!"

"And did n't your uncle take notice even of *her*?" murmured Joan.

"Oh, of course. She was as good as a widow, you see—she 'd had so many affairs. The men simply flocked. Whenever she came on to the tennis-court she 'd break up the game, and we could hardly find enough men to make up a foursome, they were all so busy hanging around. It was too queer! I never could see the attraction in rolling your eyes, and flashing your dimples, and dropping your r's like a colored servant, could you?—Not," she added hastily, "that *all* Southern girls are that sort, Joie dear! You, for instance!"

"I should hope not," murmured Joan; who had decided on the instant to be exactly that sort herself, so far as in her lay. It suited the elaborateness of her wardrobe; it saved her from golf and tennis and other amusements which bade fair to be terrifying in this sporting community—particularly the embarrassments of horseback riding. Joan was too much of an egotist to enter willingly into competitions where she had no chance to excel.

No; the languid beauty was her rôle for the next few weeks; and she flattered herself that after several months of Louisville she ought to be able to drop her r's and roll her eyes and flash her dimples with the best, particularly if the audience were not too experienced in Southernism. In school theatricals she had always distinguished herself. Moreover,



she had the advantage of a lifelong model to work from; for Richard Darcy was one of those sons of Dixie whose characteristics become more markedly Dixotic the farther they travel from base.

Let the Ritters' guest look to her laurels!

By way of preparation Joan got out her lip-stick and her powder-puff and did what she could to improve on nature, Betty watching her the while in amused respect.

"I 'm glad *I* don't have to mess my face up with things like that," she commented frankly. "But I suppose when one goes in for a real complexion it 's got to be taken care of."

Joan murmured something explanatory about the ravages of a Southern sun; and so entered upon her brief and eventful career as a Kentucky beauty.

## CHAPTER XIV

**J**OAN'S respect for the sterner sex, never very exaggerated, was not increased by the avidity with which they swallowed, one by one, her inexperienced hook, bait and all. Evidently her fellow-men had very little use for nice, intelligent, modest young girls in comparison with the Brazen Hussie. . . . For Joan had no illusions about herself, either. She had joined, temporarily it is true, and for what seemed to her legitimate reasons, the order of the Brazen Hussies.

She put into practice as many of her step-mother's precepts as she could recall, and found that they worked astonishingly well. She also cultivated a beauty-manner, modeling herself on a certain Louisville belle whose manœuvres she had observed with interest. She became helplessly sweet and very, very feminine; and she smiled whenever there was an excuse for smiling. It was a new smile she had practised before the mirror; an intimate, confiding, personal affair that crinkled up her long eyes charmingly, and showed at least two thirds of her good white teeth. Eduard Desmond occasionally referred to these teeth as "pearls," though they were hard and sharp and strong as a young squirrel's: Eduard being the sort of person who takes his similes ready-made out of poetry.

Surprisingly enough, considering the sporting nature of the community in which she found herself, Joan heard a good deal of poetry during this visit. The moon happened to be full, and Longmeadow edged upon a river; one of those pleasant, cosy little streams that are designed by an all-wise

Providence for canoes to float upon in summer evenings. By day other girls had their innings on golf-links and tennis-court (though even by day our heroine was not idle). But at night with the moon she came into her own. She made her canoe engagements days ahead, not too frequently with Edward; and she came to the conclusion that just as infants at a certain stage must go through the teething period, so somewhat later they must go with equal painfulness through the poetry period. It gave her quite a motherly feeling toward her admirers; which fortunately she was able to dissemble.

By contrast with the sportsmanlike young women of the community, Joan, in her frills and wide hats and small, beaded, high-heeled slippers, seemed to fill a long-felt want. Her rôle was by no means an uninteresting one. Occasionally in the course of events she got almost, if not quite, kissed; and she became expert in deflecting the course of inconvenient emotion.

"It's suggestion does it," she wrote to her friend Mr. Nikolai. "Given a moon, fluffy ruffles, and the Kentucky-belle tradition—and they seem helpless, poor dears!"

But perhaps it was not entirely the power of suggestion that made her success. Joan was enough of an artist to do whatever she did with a certain finish.

Her difficulty, however, in the heady game she played, was to concentrate on the purpose in hand. At the end of two weeks, she began to fancy a slight diminution of cordiality on the part of both Betty and her mother, and she realized that her visit was growing longer than seemed usual. Other guests came and went, remaining only a few days before going on to the next engagement. Accustomed to the indeterminate visits of the South, she had not thought to set any definite time for her departure; but now she felt uncomfortably that the hour had come to bring things to a climax. She gave herself one more week at Longmeadow. Surely

three weeks is a short enough time in which to provide oneself with a future and a husband!

She was by no means counting without her host. From the day of her arrival Eduard had taken no pains to hide the fact that he considered her his especial property. While his manner was still that of one who would not willingly brush the bloom from off the peach, there had always been in it a disturbing hint, a slight flattering suggestion, that peaches are tempting even to the jaded appetite. Lately his air of possession had become, to Joan's amusement, decidedly tinged with jealousy. He viewed his more youthful rivals with no attempt at equanimity.

Joan was aware that people were beginning to discuss the affair, and to watch her curiously. It put her on her mettle. She intended to satisfy their curiosity very shortly; but—she wished the thing might be managed without the necessity for so many tête-à-têtes.

It was not that she did not like her future husband. On the contrary she liked him so well as to find herself a little shy with him. She preferred his attentions to take place against a background of society; as for instance, at a dance, when his eye could be as significant as it chose without alarming her; or at table, where under cover of the general conversation, they managed some moments of real intimacy.

There was much to be said, thought Joan, for the French method of vigorously chaperoning young love up to the very threshold of matrimony.

As it was, his foot seemed uncomfortably prone to rest on hers beneath the table; and once when he stooped to recover a dropped fan, his lips had brushed like a touch of delicate flame along the bare length of her forearm— But these indications of what was to come the startled girl was able to ignore as accidental. (She had decided, it will be recalled, to be if necessary a trifle Fast.)

At last she steeled herself firmly to the necessity for tête-à-têtes, realizing that even so finished a performer as Mr. Desmond could not well manage a genuine proposal during the intricacies of the tango, or at dinner between the soup and the entrée. There were certain accompaniments, she fancied, that made the idea of a proposal in public impracticable—Joan's imagination was frequently as useful to her as experience.

She had managed to escape the perils of horseback riding by an inspired expedient. Duplicity, she found, came easily with practice.

"Straddle a horse? Oh, honey, I could n't!" she had murmured at her most Southern, when informed that there were no side-saddles in the Longmeadow stables.

"Why," protested Betty, "there's not a side-saddle to be had this side of Kentucky, Jo—they're as extinct as the Dodo! And even if there were, papa would never allow one on any of our horses. You have n't your habit here, anyway. Do be sensible, dear. I'll let you ride the Rabbit!"

Joan shook her head, regretfully but firmly. "If my father were to see a lady of his family straddling a horse, in trousers," she said, "I think he'd have a stroke!"—which was doubtless true.

It was necessary, therefore, for Eduard's increasing desire for solitude to take the form of canoeing, or driving in the dog-cart without a groom; or preferably, strolling through a certain bit of near-by woodland.

Here he liked to fling himself at his handsome length on the moss at Joan's feet, and read to her chosen bits out of the "Rubaiyat": a work much in favor at the moment, which would appear to have been translated by Mr. Fitzgerald for the express purpose of uttering Mr. Desmond's sentiments.

Joan murmured "Um-m-m!" and "How true!" and "Ex-

quisite!" in the right places; but she was not often listening to him. She was watching the play of light and shade on his fine, waving hair; she was studying more keenly than she knew the chiseled features, bearing those slight marks of manly dissipation which are for some reason never wholly displeasing to the young feminine eye; she was noticing the smallness of his hands, the really beautiful cut and quality of his clothes.

What sort of person was he under the agreeable surface, this chosen husband of hers?

An artist, people had called him: but Art in his case seemed not the exacting mistress she had fancied it. Or perhaps the artistic temperament required long periods of recuperative leisure. . . . She had decided that it was wiser not to fall in love, at least till after marriage: but she did choose that her husband should be the sort of person it was possible to fall in love with; well-bred, fastidious, cultivated, thoroughly a man of the world. All these Eduard Desmond was, and more. He had a real and unaffected taste for music, books, nature—for what Joan called to herself "the real things." It argued well for future companionship.

There was, to be sure, the disability of what she thought of vaguely as his "habits." But there had been no sign of them in the two weeks she had lived in the same house with him; and even if he had not as yet completely overcome them, there was no reason why he should not do so later, with a watchful wife to help him. On the whole their chances for happiness together seemed quite as good as those of most people she knew, thought Joan, with unconscious cynicism.

The material side of the arrangement did not occur to her. For all her calm calculations, Joan was not mercenary. All she asked was a place of her own in the world, a sense of permanence; she longed quite wistfully for a background that "stayed put." Romance was a thing she felt she could

do without forever, in return for independence from her step-mother, and perhaps a little home of her own with a garden to it. She believed that to any man who would provide these few essentials she could be a faithful and a loyal wife.

What would he expect of her in return? Would she have to go on all her life being Southern and winsome and alluring? Would he prefer her, after the honeymoon, say, to go in heavily for sports, like the women of his set? Or might she presently venture to be just herself again—just Joan, whatever that might be! The gayest of rôles becomes a trifle wearing for everyday use.

She sighed; and looking up from the Rubaiyat, he caught her eyes fixed upon him, wide and speculative.

“What is the little girl thinking of?” he asked tenderly.

She answered at once, with a return of her gay daring, “You—of course!”

But under his intensifying gaze her own dropped, and he went on reading; in a voice that shook, however.

“Now for it!” said Joan suddenly to herself. She dropped her hand negligently on the leaves, close to his.

She resisted the temptation to jerk it back as soon as she was aware of its contact with another. Very slight the contact was, no more than the touch of a leaf. She pretended not to notice it; but the blood sang in her ears, her cheeks burned—she wished suddenly that he would take her hand, if he was going to; hold it tight. . . .

Heavens! What was happening to her? She *wanted* the touch of his hand; she liked it! Did she care for him, then? Was this being in love—already?

“Joan,” he whispered. “Look at me!”

The spell was broken. She jumped to her feet. “Come, we must be getting back,” she said hurriedly. “It is late.”

“Ah, but how cold you are!”

"Yes, I am, a little," she said innocently. "These woods are damp."

But all the way home, beneath her relief, lingered a sense of annoyance, of disappointment.

"What a prig I am," she thought disgustedly. "It would be all over now if I 'd only—let him!"

That night she wrote at unusual length to Mr. Nikolai. It was almost like writing to herself; and Joan frequently felt the need of seeing what she was about set down in black and white, for greater clarity.

She had not meant to tell Mr. Nikolai of her imminent engagement till the thing was *fait accompli*; but she knew that everything would be settled by the time her letter reached him. She wanted to be reassured about her odd and unexpected emotion during the contact of her hand with Edward Desmond's. Was it so, then, that people fell in love, just suddenly without any warning? And had the mind nothing to do with it whatever?

For mentally she was not altogether pleased with herself.



## CHAPTER XV

**T**HE idea that Betty and her mother were eyeing her somewhat askance troubled Joan not a little. In her heart of hearts she preferred women to men, and believed their friendship more of a compliment. She would have liked to make a friend of Mrs. Desmond, had there been time, envying Betty's camaraderie with her mother; although Mrs. Desmond presented a golfing, bridge-playing, sporting type of motherhood quite new to her experience.

There was a peculiar intimacy and freedom among all this group of people, who seemed to spend most of the year together either in Philadelphia or Aiken or Ormond or these long-established country-places surrounding the Longmeadow Hunt Club. It was like a curiously ramified family, in which husbands and wives seemed to have changed partners rather frequently, and were still in process of changing. It was Joan's first glimpse of a society in which married women hold the center of the stage rather than young girls, and she was just a little shocked by it.

There appeared to be no age limit here. It was not so much that these women concealed their age, after the rather obvious fashion of Effie May, as that they simply ignored it. Even Mrs. Desmond, dignified and well-bred though she was, had a devoted attendant or two, spoken of casually by Betty as "mamma's flames," and during Joan's visit at least Mr. Desmond remained merely an abstraction. Conjugal affection was distinctly not the fashion in the Desmond circle.

But this casualness of relations did not extend to the young

girls. They had no such freedom as Joan was accustomed to in the South. Betty, at eighteen, was as carefully guarded as if she were still a child. She was not permitted to go into the city without a maid or an older woman; she neither drove or canoed alone with men, nor "sat out" with them at dances. And it did not occur to her to protest.

"That sort of thing is n't good form," she explained once to Joan. "For us, at least— Of course with Southern girls it's different."

But Joan began to suspect that even Southern girls were expected to hold in regard this one fetish they had elected to worship, Good Form; and that according to this standard she had already been condemned.

At first the younger women had made some effort to include her in their various activities, golf, bridge, tennis. But latterly they had left her alone, not severely but tolerantly, as one dedicated to other pursuits.

"Miss Darcy? Oh, she's from the South, you know— awfully busy with the men," she overheard one of them explain to a newcomer; and she had resented the remark keenly, not only for herself, but for the women of her adopted home, who at least are rarely "busy with the men" after marriage.

The person who made this remark was a Mrs. Rossiter, a pretty, boyish creature, already divorced and remarried at thirty, and bearing her present conjugality rather lightly. She was on terms of great intimacy with the Desmond family, Eduard included; and Joan fancied that she might have been one of the "widows" mentioned by Betty as her uncle's chosen companions.

But if it had been so, her day was done. Eduard had palpably no eyes for her now, and Joan could afford the generosity of admiring Mrs. Rossiter. She was so natural and frank, and so royally indifferent to others' opinion. Joan, who had a fatal propensity for acting as the people about

her expected her to act, envied her this assurance, and wished that she could make friends with her.

The truth was that the girl, despite her success, felt utterly lonely. She saw very little of Betty. Mrs. Desmond was an experienced hostess who made no attempt to regulate the comings and goings of her guests, and the girls made separate engagements. Even bedtime confidences had ceased, owing to the fact that when Joan came up to her room, Betty was usually asleep.

But on the night of her illuminating afternoon in the woods with Eduard, Betty appeared to be waiting up for her. She came yawning into Joan's room to watch her friend undress, and established herself sleepily on the foot of the bed.

"What a pity you can't wear your hair down all the time, Jo! Men adore hair, don't they? And yours has a regular patina on it, like old bronze."

"Not greenish, I hope," laughed Joan.

"No—sort of orangish. Dark, with an orange lining."

"Betty! It sounds horrible!"

"Well, you know very well it is n't.—May Rossiter thinks you are awfully clever to wear it that simple way, too, so straight and plain, when the rest of us stick out like mops. She says you're awfully clever about lots of things—too smart for the likes of us."

"Does she?" Joan was a little startled and not quite pleased. She had not intended to give the impression of cleverness. It was out of her present rôle entirely. "I wonder what Mrs. Rossiter meant by that?"

"Oh, men, of course," yawned Betty. "You see you've annexed a few of hers, which naturally makes her peevish."

"Have I?" murmured Joan. "Who, for instance?"

"Well, Uncle Neddy, for one."

"Oh! So she *was* one of his flames, then?"

Betty sat up. "You mean to say you did n't know it? One of them! *The* one, my child! Surely you remember about his broken heart?—the married lady he was recovering from in Washington last year? Well, May's it. Of course I'm not supposed to know, being an *ingénue*—but our Neddy was frightfully gone on her, and she returned it, and the husband she had then got jealous (rather a bounder he was, not one of us, you know), and there was some sort of excitement, and she divorced him. Every one thought to marry Uncle Ned, of course. But instead she upped and married Mr. Rossiter! Joke on Neddy, was n't it?"

Joan's lip curled. "What a romantic love story! Why do you suppose she married that old Mr. Rossiter?"

Betty shrugged in a worldly-wise manner. "Awfully rich, my dear. And Neddy is n't."

"But they seem friendly enough still, she and Mr. Desmond?"

"Oh, of course. Why not? It would be frightfully uncomfortable for the rest of us if they glowered and did n't speak and all that, like quarreling servants. And Uncle Neddy seems to be consoling himself!" She twinkled at Joan. "That evens things up, you see. But,"—she suddenly grew grave—"what do *you* get out of all this, Joan? You could n't possibly *like* seeing so much of Uncle Neddy! He's such a—softy. And such a bore, too, with his art and poetry and stuff."

"You mean," smiled Joan, "he's too mature for you, dear."

"Too mature for you then, too! You're only a few months older."

The other gave an unconscious sigh. "Oh, me—I'm different."

Betty rounded upon her. "You certainly are! I've never seen such a change in any one as a few months have made

in you! Sometimes I hardly recognize you for the Jo I used to know at school—so funny and larky, and yet paying no more attention to the boys we used to make eyes at over at the College than if they did n't exist."

"College boys *don't* exist," said Joan gravely. "They're like tadpoles, just a transition state. And rather disgusting."

"Not half as disgusting as the Uncle Neds! Look here, Joan," Betty blurted out, "you're not—wanting to get married, are you?"

Joan went as pale as the other was flushed. "No," she said in a low voice, "I'm not!"

Betty heaved a sigh of relief. "There! That's what I told 'em." (She did not mention whom.) "The Ritters' guest was different. She *had* to get married, because she'd been visiting 'round for years, and people were getting tired of it, and she could n't pay for her clothes. But you, at your age, with all the beaux you must have! Why, you would n't touch Uncle Neddy with a ten-foot pole."

Joan bit her lip. "Why not, Betty?" she asked, quietly. "What's wrong with your uncle? You mean—because he drinks?"

Betty looked uncomfortable. She was more of an *ingénue* than she thought, and found herself getting into deep water.

"I don't know exactly," she confessed, "but there's *something* wrong with him. I don't think he drinks; not more than everybody does, anyway. He's too fastidious—and I'd have noticed if he did. But there are other ways of being dissipated—are n't there?"

"I see!" said Joan, wisely; though she saw with some vagueness. Chorus girls, she fancied, models, the artistic temperament, and all that. . . . On the whole, she felt rather relieved.

"That sort of thing ought to be easier to cure than drinking," she mused aloud, "if a man were happily married."

"If!" repeated Betty. "The question is, could it be done? Well, thank Heaven, *we* don't have to do it, anyway. I'd hate the job of keeper to Uncle Ned's roving eye! . . . Ugh, let's not talk about it! Years before you and I have to think of horrid things like marriage— Good night, you bad old flirt," she murmured, kissing her friend.

Joan was left with the subtle impression of having been warned.

The impression was repeated the next morning when Mrs. Desmond, meeting her on the stairs, remarked with a friendly pat of the arm in passing, "I do wish you'd teach Betty something of the fine art of keeping them guessing, Joan. It's quite wonderful the way you play them all off against each other, and so good for them—particularly Ned! He's rather spoiled, I'm afraid—used to monopolizing his favorites." . . .

Evidently the Desmonds did not intend to take her affair with Eduard seriously. For the first time it occurred to her that this might be because they did not wish to. She was certainly not, to use Betty's significant phrase, "one of them."

The girl's head lifted haughtily. She was a Darcy of Kentucky. Surely that was sufficient?

Once in her childhood she had heard her father remark in a moment of especial grandiloquence that Darcys were entitled to the society of kings and queens; and Joan had never doubted the truth of the statement. Something within assured her that she would feel perfectly at ease with any kings or queens who chanced to cross her path. In fact the only people with whom so far she had not felt at ease were snobs and parvenues, under neither of which categories the Desmonds could be placed.

Now she wondered suddenly to what she and her father owed this comfortable sense of lofty destiny. True, theirs was "an old Southern family"; but living in a part of the

world that seems entirely populated by such families, this was no distinction. Darcys, she knew, had fought and died for their country whenever occasion offered, but so had quite simple people named Smith or Jones. She racked her brain to think of anything else they might have done for their country, or even for themselves. Genius had never made its appearance among them, nor wealth, nor even beauty, to any noticeable extent. They were rich in one thing only: self-esteem.

Fortunately, however, Joan had her share of that; and upon further reflection she decided that "Darcy" was at least as distinguished a name as "Desmond." Doubtless their ancestors had been kings in Ireland together.

The question of her poverty occurred to her for a moment, only to be dismissed as negligible. The Desmonds were too well-bred to be mercenary. Eduard was not rich himself; and if, as Betty intimated, his reputation was a trifle tarnished, he could not be too exacting in his demands. He could not expect youth, and charm, and wit, and a dowry as well! thought Joan complacently. No: Eduard would be getting quite as much as he gave. . . .

It was in rather a defiant mood that she appeared at dinner that night in a blue chiffon frock which the observant Eduard had pronounced his favorite; and though some people were expected afterwards for dancing, she deliberately accepted his murmured suggestion that they row up the river to see the last of the harvest moon.

## CHAPTER XVI

**T**HERE had naturally been some discussion at the Convent as to the most desirable setting for proposals, the consensus of opinion being in favor of Miss Alcott's little water-scene between Amy and the faithless Laurie. Laurie, the reader will remember, is rowing Amy about in the romantic region of Chillon (still with regretful memories of Jo hovering in the background, however), when she catches him eyeing her with an expression which

"makes her say hastily, merely for the sake of saying something:

"You must be tired; rest a little and let me row," etc.

"I'm not tired, but you may take an oar if you like," etc.

"Feeling that she had not mended matters much, Amy took the offered third of a seat, shook her hair over her face" (Joan personally suspected that Amy belonged also to the order of the Brazen Hussies) "and accepted an oar.

"How well we pull together, don't we?" said Amy, who objected to silence just then.

"So well that I wish we might always pull together in the same boat. Will you, Amy?" very tenderly.

"Yes, Laurie," very low.

"Then they both stopped rowing, and unconsciously added a pretty little tableau of human love and happiness to the dissolving views reflected in the lake."

This classic scene was not absent from Joan's mind as she seated herself and her blue chiffon recklessly in the prow of Eduard's canoe; though the details of stage-management troubled her somewhat. Suppose the proposer chose to kneel at the feet of the proposee—since there was no seat to share with her? And suppose the proposer lost his head (as might



properly be expected of him) and embraced the proposee madly—what was to prevent so precarious a thing as a canoe from tipping over? It seemed to call for great presence of mind on the part of the proposee. Joan felt rather nervous.

Mr. Desmond, however, let the opportunity pass. Perhaps he had not read "Little Women."

Amid talk so casual that it might as well have been silence, they slipped along between the wide gray of earth and sky, afloat on a stream of silver. They came presently to an overhanging willow, where he tied the boat, and helped Joan ashore. He led her, with an air of one performing a ceremony, up a slight rise of land topped by a great beech-tree, whose widespread roots made a sort of armchair, after the hospitable fashion of beech-trees.

"Queen Joan on her throne, viewing her domain," he murmured.

He had not brought her to this place before, and she realized that he had been saving it for a special occasion. There was a view before her of shadowy, dreaming country, with a hint of stars to come, and sheep-bells tinkling in a distant field, and lights gleaming here and there from half-hidden houses.

Eduard began to murmur softly:

"When the quiet-colored end of evening smiles,  
Miles on miles  
O'er our many-tinkling meadows where the sheep  
Half asleep,  
Wander homeward through the twilight, browse and crop  
As they stop—"

A sudden impatience seized Joan. How like him to arrange this setting, to bring things carefully to a climax, and then—to spout Browning at her!

But she said, as he paused, "Beautiful! 'Love among the Ruins,' is n't it?"

"Yes— And I," he sighed, tapping himself on the chest, "I am the Ruins!"

Despite the bombast of his tone, there was something in his sigh that struck her as genuine.

She said consolingly, "At least you're a well-preserved ruin, very popular with tourists. . . . I wonder what makes you feel so particularly ruinous to-night?"

"The fact that you're so damnably young," he muttered.

She made a little face at him. "I'm not, really. I'm one of those persons who are born grown-up, you know. Besides, it's a fault that will disappear in time."

"Exactly! And before you know it, my dear.

"The nightingale that in the branches sang—ah, whence and whither flown again, who knows?"

"You ought n't to be here with me," he said abruptly. "You ought to be back there, playing with the little boys and girls."

"But if the boys and girls bore me—?"

"Do they?" he demanded. "Those chaps you dance and flirt with—?"

Joan made him the present of a very special smile. "Perhaps that was to make other people—jealous."

"You darling!" he said under his breath; but still he did not touch her.

"'Love among the Ruins' really is n't very beautiful," he said after a moment, "or very natural, either—as my sister-in-law was very good to point out to me only this morning!"

Joan flushed. So Mrs. Desmond was taking not only a passive but an active interest in her affairs!

"Your sister-in-law is needlessly solicitous. I'm not a child like Betty. I know exactly what I am doing."

He leaned toward her. "Do you? Do you, I wonder? Joan! Look at me! Do you know what you are doing—to me?"

The darkness left only the white outline of their faces visible to each other. He struck a match, in order to see her better.

For a moment she tried to meet his eyes. They frightened her even while they drew her. The blood began to sing in her ears, as it had when he touched her hand. She wanted him to take her in his arms, to hold her—and at the same time she wanted to run away and hide. Their long gaze seemed to let down some barrier within her, to loosen curious impulses. . . . Why did he not take her, and have done with it?

“No,” he muttered, as if she had spoken. “Come!”

Her body made a helpless movement toward him. . . .

Then the match burnt his fingers and he dropped it.

“I—I thought you said you had a present for me,” she quavered, with a little breathless laugh. She suspected what the present was, and she wanted to get this queerly painful scene over.

But the velvet case he drew out of his pocket was too large for a ring. It contained a flexible chain of platinum for her wrist, set with jewels which glittered in the dusk.

“Oh!—oh, how lovely!” she exclaimed. Even Stefan Nikolai had never given her anything as splendid as this.

“May I put it on?” asked Desmond quietly.

She held out her hand in delight; and suddenly he had seized it and pushing her sleeve out of the way, was pressing his lips to her inner arm above the elbow, kissing it hungrily, fiercely, as if he could never have done.

She gasped and shrank a little. Getting engaged was not at all as she had pictured it.

“Wh—what a funny place to kiss me,” she heard herself quavering, “when I’ve got a perfectly good mouth!”

After that she ceased for once to analyze her sensations. . . .

A gibbous harvest-moon was gazing down at them with its wry face when the two awoke to the fact that the hour was late and cold, particularly for a girl dressed airily in chiffon. Joan gazed ruefully at the wreck of her prettiest gown, limp with dew and crushed beyond recognition. She felt rather limp and crushed herself, though withal triumphant. One does not get engaged every night, and it was fitting that certain sacrifices honor the event.

The lovers had little to say to each other, as the canoe slipped back down the whispering river under that gibbous moon. For once Eduard found no poetry to suit the occasion. Joan, busy with her tumbled hair, hoped and even prayed that she might be able to slip into her room unobserved. She hurried nervously out of the dark boathouse, despite entreaties to wait, and was half way to the house before he caught up with her.

"Oh, hurry!" she whispered. "They 've all gone—every light in the house is out! It must be after midnight. Ned, what if they 've locked the door?"

"They have n't. My sister knows we 're still out—trust her for that!"

"But suppose she 's waiting up for us?— Oh, Ned, whatever shall I say?"

"You might tell her, Beautiful," he teased, "that I 've had you up under the beech-tree, kissing roses into your cheeks and stars into your eyes!—though I think any one who saw you just now might suspect that without being told."

She turned suddenly and clung to him. Something of Joan's independence had already slipped away from her, now that she had some one to cling to. "Ned, she does n't like me! How am I ever going to win her over?"

"Kiss her," he suggested promptly. "Kiss her as you 've been kissing me. It could n't fail!"

"Don't tease!" She lifted serious, wide eyes to his, and

he saw that they were wet. "Don't you know that I shall never, never in all my life, kiss anybody else as I have kissed you?"

Touched, he drew her closer. She looked just then singularly childish and confiding. "Dear little girl, that thought herself so grown-up!" he whispered, his cheek on her tumbled hair.

When she stirred in his arms he still held her. "What's the use of hurrying now, Beautiful! The fat 's in the fire—and who knows when we shall have another night like this, all to ourselves?"

But she would not stay. She felt, obscurely, that they had been engaged enough for one evening.

She found herself at last safe in her room—"safe" was the word in her mind—sitting on the edge of her bed, staring down at her ruined finery with eyes which did not see it. Her knees felt queerly weak under her, her lips were bruised, her cheeks and throat and arms burned still with remembered kisses— She said to herself, like the old woman with a shorn petticoat, "Can this be I?"

What had become of her powers of observation, her cool intelligence, her impersonal decision that it was wiser not to love the man you marry lest he be given power to hurt you? There was nothing impersonal left in her feeling for Edward Desmond! The change had come as suddenly as a summer thunderstorm. At one moment she was waiting, nervous, a little afraid, for the event that she had brought to pass. The next, he and she seemed to have been thrown into a sort of vortex, where they clung to each other madly, desperately, as if to escape destruction. And she had been quite as frantic about it as the man. . . .

She thought, dazedly, that there was a good deal she would be able to tell the girls at the Convent now on the subject of proposals—yes, and Miss Louisa M. Alcott, too! Except that

school-girls and literary old maids were not exactly the people with whom one would discuss such phenomena—

They had fancied, she and Betty and the rest, that some sort of formula was necessary to the occasion, a definite question asked and answered, a more or less formal, "Will you, Amy?" and "Yes, Laurie." Foolish innocents! She and Ned had not exchanged a sensible word from the moment they found themselves in each other's arms. Yet the understanding between them was unmistakable. They were completely engaged—almost, Joan thought with a shiver, as good as married!

This, then, was love. A very different thing from what she had expected! A beautiful, rather terrible thing. . . . The touch of Puritan in the girl made her wonder whether anything so beautiful and terrible could be quite nice.

She slipped to her knees; not to pray, but simply to remember her mother. The vision of her mother always came better when she was on her knees—perhaps because of the old-time association of prayers with bedtime—and Joan felt a desperate need of her just then. She wanted to be assured that her mother understood, and had been through it all herself, and had come out of it—just her mother. She held out her jeweled bracelet childishly in the dark, as if for somebody to see. She knelt there tense, every nerve and fibre straining, whispering under her breath, "Mamma, are you here? Do you know?"

But the vision failed her. She had instead the warmth of a man's breath on her closed eyes, the roughness of his cheek on her throat. . . .

She dropped her head in her arms and began to sob. She was very happy.

## CHAPTER XVII

**I**T was well into the middle of a fine blue and g morning when Joan awoke, to find her coffee cold the tray beside her bed. She had slept through the entrance of the maid who called her; she who had expected not to sleep at all! An engaged girl, with her lo waiting—in the garden, perhaps, or down beside the river: their river!

The happiness of the night before came to her with a ru and with it an enormous sense of relief. The thing was do accomplished!

She ran to the window and peeped out eagerly, hoping might be watching her window. But only the old garde was in sight, pottering about among the roses. She bl a kiss from her finger-tips—whether to the gardener, the ro or the sparkling water beyond she did not know—and beg hurriedly to dress.

Singing under her breath, she tripped down the sta The big, sunny house was very still. Joan, going from ro to room, gazed about her appreciatively. Hitherto the hot the garden, the wide, pleasant countryside had all ser merely as a background, of which she was vaguely aw. as actors are of a suitable setting for the play they produ Now she felt that she really had leisure to enjoy her s roundings, which were usually very important to Joan.

She paused to examine a hunting-print, lingered over fine etching, patted affectionately the soft, gay chintzes the morning-room. What a relief after such an artific house as her step-mother's! Nothing here in the least p

tentious, no striving after periods, or artistry, or even originality, but everything good, well-chosen, used: luxury in abeyance to comfort; everywhere evidence of travel and culture, and the long habit of these things.

Joan drew a breath of satisfaction. Just such a home she hoped to make for Eduard, though on a smaller scale, perhaps, and with the addition of a little beauty; since it takes more than wealth to provide that.

She thought to find him in the billiard-room, or perhaps in a certain little vine-hung balcony where they sometimes met. But both were empty.

"Where's everybody this fine morning, Molly?" she asked a housemaid she met in the hall.

"Gone over to play golf, like as usual, Miss—'cep'n Mr. Eduard," added Molly, (the pantry having eyes of its own). "He took the first train to town—no 'm, I guess it was the second train. Anyway it was real early for Mr. Eduard to be up."

"Oh," said Joan, blankly.

Then it occurred to her why he might have felt the sudden need of running into town. Bracelets are all very well in their way, but they are, after all, noncommittal. She glanced down at her ringless hands, and laughed.

The maid smiled, too, as if in sympathy. "That's an awful pretty bracelet you got on, miss," she was emboldened to say.

"I like it myself, Molly," she confessed, holding it off at arm's length the better to admire it.

She wondered how long it took to get into Philadelphia and back, if one were in a hurry. . . .

Presently some of the golfers came in, ravenous for luncheon. In a sudden accession of shyness, Joan hid her bracelet in her pocket. She surprised them by offering to go back with them later to the golf-links.



"Perhaps I 'll catch a golf-germ," she explained.

"What, no engagement for this afternoon? Where 's our Eduard?" murmured Mrs. Rossiter, who was one of the party.

But Joan had learned long since to meet impertinence with a non-committal smile.

After an hour or so of polite attention to the game, however, her interest flagged. She knew that when Eduard got home he would come to look for her, and she had a sudden dread of their first meeting before others, under the observant eyes of May Rossiter in particular. She made an excuse of letters to write, and walked back through their favorite woodland, on the chance of his meeting her there. Eduard had rather an instinct for that sort of thing.

But when she reached Longmeadow, there was no sign of him. Nor did he appear that night at dinner. No comment whatever was made upon his absence.

Joan became uneasy. Surely it was very strange that he should leave her for so long a time just now, without explanation!

An explanation offered itself that drove the blood out of her cheeks— His habits! What did Betty know about them? Men who drink do not always choose the bosom of the family in which to indulge their weakness. In the reaction of emotion upon an artistic temperament, anything might be happening!

The thought roused in Joan one of her finest traits: an immediate response to any call upon her protection. That he had so soon failed her was no reason for her to fail him. She must try to understand, and wait. . . .

People dropped in after dinner, among them as usual Mrs. Rossiter; and Joan, chatting rather abstractedly with one of her admirers in a corner of the porch, caught fragments of

conversation from the room within, between Mrs. Rossiter and her hostess.

“So Ned ’s torn himself away at last!”

“Yes, thank Heaven! The Arnolds have postponed their cruise three times, waiting for him. Why people put up with his shilly-shallying, I ’m sure I don’t know!”

“Oh, Ned has his uses. They say Fanny Arnold. . . . But what do you suppose the Darcy girl. . . .”

Their voices dropped lower, and Joan heard no more. . . .

She felt for the moment absolutely numb. She was like a person who has been shot, without having time to ascertain where. All the pride in her gathered to meet this blow without flinching. People must not suspect—they must not suspect.

She went on chatting, laughing, jesting. . . . He had gone away for good! Without a word to her, he had gone away. He had known last night that he was going, and that he would not come back. She, Joan Darcy, had been jilted. She, too proud to live on a stranger’s bounty, had offered herself, unasked, to a man who did not want her! . . .

Somebody begged her to sing, and brought a guitar. Hers was a slight voice, uncultivated, but with something about it, as about Joan, that attracted attention. People listened to her. She had that curious *élan*, that sense of being borne on some outside power, that comes to certain natures from the response of an audience.

Joan touched heights that evening. To some brains, suffering is an incomparable stimulant. Even Betty, with the remembrance of certain wild orgies at school, when quiet Joan Darcy had amazed nuns and girls alike by a sudden transfiguration, had never gaged to the full her friend’s possibilities. She sang for them daringly whatever came into her head, negro catches, rollicking Irish lilt, wicked little songs

of the streets and alleys. Under Betty's urgings, she exhibited a talent for mimicry which had occasionally reduced the good Sisters almost to apoplexy.

She showed them her father during a political campaign addressing his constituency under the handicap of a bump in the head. One could see the Major's urbane periods, mellifluous hand, his tossing topknot— She showed them Mother Superior, called in to quell a dormitory riot, endeavoring while dodging pillows to maintain proper religious "detachment from place." As an encore she showed them Eduard Desmond, conducting a sunset *à deux*, with assistance from the poets—a bit of recklessness that brought shouts of joy from the audience, and produced in Mrs. Rossiter's mocking eye something like respect.

"*Jolie, how dared you!*" cried Betty, breathless with laughter, as she went upstairs with her arm around her friend. "It was Uncle Neddy to his hands; that way he has of touching people inadvertently if it were quite by accident. You ought to have seen Rossiter's face!"

"I did," said Joan grimly.—Something of the sustaining force had begun to leave her, and all she asked of life at the moment was to be left alone.

But Betty was too delighted with her friend's triumph to be easily quenched. "It was like old times!" she said. "Dear old times at school, when there weren't any rules about to spoil things, and the nuns let go and had time like anybody! . . . Nobody here 'll ever think of me again as just a flirt and a man-grabber! Why, do you know what that man who came in with Mrs. Jameson said of me? He said I was a clever person, a professor or something.) He said, 'Mrs. Desmond, that girl's got a touch of genius for what—making believe? Much good it does her.'"

"Genius for what—making believe? Much good it does her," said Joan bitterly. . . . Would the other nev-

Betty hugged her. "And to think we were afraid you'd take Uncle Neddy seriously! Oh, if he could only have seen you!—Jo, I know why you were in such wild spirits to-night. I'm not going to ask any questions, because Mother made me promise not to. But you can't deny there is a sort of coincidence between the fact that you spent the evening up the river with him, and that to-day he's gone!—now can you?"

"No," said Joan, "I can't deny that there's—a sort of coincidence."

"'Good-by forever! Good-by-yi-yi forever,'" warbled Betty after Tosti, somewhat infected by her friend's recent performances. "Fancy the Irresistible coming another cropper, and at the hands of a mere infant like you! I suppose I ought to be sorry for him, but I'm not. It'll teach him to keep his hands off *my* friends, anyway!" she exclaimed vindictively.

"I gather," murmured Joan with a pale smile, "that you did not altogether fancy me as an aunt?"

"Rather not! I prefer you 'as is.' Plenty of aunts in the world, and not so many Joans."

She went at last, leaving the heroine of the evening to a sleepless night.

## CHAPTER XVIII

**M**ORNING did not bring the word from Eduard Monday that Joan told herself must surely come; explanation, the excuse, no matter how bald, which she might go through the form of accepting. Nor did the day following bring any message.

On the third day, however, came a basket of candy—a superlative affair of blue straw, tied with wide blue ribbons and quite realistic forget-me-nots. Within was the expected communication:

I never say the ugly word "good-by," if I can help it, Beautiful. Better to keep intact the memory of our last evening together.

From my heart I thank you for what you have given me. Such experiences do not come twice in a lifetime.—I have learned.

And you, sweetest of them all, what have you learned? At least remember me, I hope!

EDUARD

Joan read this over and over, incredulously—the cruelty of it, the sheer, epicurean viciousness, appalled. She said to herself, like the man in Hedda Gabler, "people don't do such things!"

Evidently they did, and escaped unscathed. She clenched her hands helplessly. Oh, to be able to tell her father! A rush of primitive feeling came over her, almost of blood-lust. She wanted vengeance on the man who had surfeited him with her innocence, her youth, it seemed to poor Joan very soul—and had made amends by sending her a box of candy! The candy seemed somehow a worse insult than the jewel he had given her. It mocked her with its trivial Bon-bons in return for—what?

With a groan she swept the offering off the table on to the floor; and treading confections underfoot at every step, she fled across her room to the shelter of her bed, where she flung herself face downward.

*Why? Why?* was the despairing cry of her spirit. How had he dared to treat her so lightly? What had she done?

The answer was not far to seek. With a shudder she remembered her careful study of the rôle she had chosen to play, her considered coquetries and sophistications, even her dressing, the display of silken ankles, of bared arm, her modest décolletage—all weapons she had employed not quite in ignorance. Precocious instinct and the comments of her step-mother had taught her much. She had deliberately, and for her own ends, joined the order of the Brazen Hussies—With this result!

Joan faced her lesson squarely. But she felt sick, degraded, literally soiled. This was the sort of thing that happened to girls who “fell.”

She had, for all her reading, a quite hazy idea of what “falling” meant. For a frantic moment (it must be remembered that Joan’s education had been conducted by religious ladies who paste decent tissue-paper skirts over offending illustrations in the physiology books)—she struggled with a nightmare horror that she had perhaps “fallen” herself, that such a degradation of the spirit might even have physical results. . . .

“No, no, *no!*” gasped Joan, “not when I hate him so! It’s impossible!”

For if, according to a rather touching convent theory, it is love alone which calls children into being, surely hate must have the opposite effect?

Joan had not pursued this line of mental research to her usual lengths. Certain things, it appeared, such as miracles and the power of prayer and all phenomena embraced under

the generic title of Love, were better taken entirely on t

With ashen cheeks and a heart thumping with terror, she put her hands over her ears to shut out the sound of her thoughts. It was the first time in her life she had come face to face with the meaning of the word "fear." That the fear was childish, made it none the less real. Nineteen, not ninety, is the age of tragedy. There are suicides among the old. . . .

She did not hear a rap twice repeated, nor the opening of the door. Somebody peeped in, saw the sobbing figure on the bed, the scattered bonbons, the crumpled note on the floor. Then came a louder knock.

Joan sat up, and cried in a panic, "Don't come in!"

But Mrs. Rossiter chose to misunderstand her. "Did you say come in?" she inquired cheerfully. "I hope so, because nobody else seems to be at home, and I'm pining for company."

She paused as Joan sank back in despair, hiding her ravaged face in her handkerchief.

"What's the matter, dear? Headache?" she questioned kindly, adding with a glance at the overturned basket, "Too much candy, perhaps?"

"Yes," gulped Joan, fighting for self-control. "Too much candy!"

Mrs. Rossiter selected a *marron* from the floor with care and wiped it daintily, and began to eat. "This looks," she said, "like one of Ned Desmond's offerings. He's such an expert about everything! Who but he would have thought of selecting a basket to match your eyes?"

Joan lay still, and hated her. She thought of several bitter remarks she might make to this woman who had come to gloat over her; but unfortunately she could not yet find her voice to utter them.

"So you sent him away after all?" continued the v

smilingly. "Led him on, and made a fool out of our poor dear Ned, and then sent him about his business? Naughty Joan!"

Something impelled the girl to utter frankness. She was done with acting. "I did n't, and you know I did n't," she gulped. "I accepted him. I was engaged to him!"

"Engaged?"

"Yes!—and then the next day he was gone."

"Stole away," murmured Mrs. Rossiter amusedly. "That was rather crude of Eduard. He does n't usually run to such lengths. . . . You mean he actually in so many words invited you to *marry* him?"

Joan covered her eyes again. "I suppose not," she said in a small, miserable voice. "No, he did n't. But he—he kissed me as if we were engaged, and I kissed him back!"

"Oh," murmured the other. "You find engaged kisses so very different, then, from the other kind?"

Joan cried indignantly, "I don't know anything about the other kind! I've never kissed a man before in my life."

"No? 'More kissed against than kissing,' perhaps?"

The girl lifted her chin as haughtily as it is possible to lift a chin that is quivering with held-in sobs. "I have never been kissed either—except on the hand or the ear or something, which does n't count."

"No, that hardly counts," agreed her inquisitor, looking at the girl quite curiously. "See here," she asked in another tone, "how old are you, Miss Darcy?"

"Nineteen."

"Hmnn! Younger than I thought. Still, a Southern girl—"

"Can be just as decent as any other kind!" cried angry Joan. "Anyway, I'm only part a Southern girl. But I know! Lots of them are just as nice about such things as Betty, for instance."



"Nice, of course," agreed Mrs. Rossiter. "And tremendously attractive. But just for that reason a little more—well, experienced, don't you think? We get our experience later, perhaps. . . . And you seemed particularly well-seasoned, able to take care of yourself, playing them off against each other like a little veteran. I've told Jane Desmond so more than once. She wanted to warn you—but I told her you knew the ropes."

"I did n't," said Joan tremulously. "Warn me of what?"

"Why, of Ned. She was afraid you might really land him. The wariest of fish takes the hook at last!"

Joan winced at the remark, but she was too busy getting to the bottom of things to resent it.

"Why did she object to my marrying him?"

Mrs. Rossiter stared. "Good Lord! Well, because she's got a girl of her own, for one thing. Because she's married to a Desmond herself, for another. She knows the breed, poor Jane!"

Light was breaking on Joan. "You mean—she objected for *my* sake?"

"Of course!" said Mrs. Rossiter rather impatiently. "Ned's all right as a brother-in-law, useful to have about, to run errands, etc. One has to have a man in the house, and she's really rather fond of him. But to marry him off to a fresh young girl like you!— No, no, Jane's not that sort."

"Oh," said Joan faintly. She began to realize that instead of antagonism, it had been friendliness that watched her, motherly, anxious kindness, which she had been too blind to understand.

"Oh, Mrs. Rossiter," she cried tremulously, "I've been horrid!"

"Bless you, no. It's Ned who was horrid, I suspect—men are. Votes for Women, eh? Be glad you've found it

out in time. . . . But you fooled me, you know; and to do Ned justice, I think you fooled him. He 's not altogether a bad. I've never known him try cradle-snatching before. He usually prefers to play the game with people who understand, married women or widdy-ladies of mature years, or—well, the professional charmer."

"Ugh! You speak as if there 'd been dozens of us!"

"So there have. Dozens! And there are dozens of him, too. Amorists, you know, dilettantes, non-eligibles—the bane of all good chaperones. 'Gather the rosebuds while ye may' effect. They make quite a business of it, I assure you; or rather an art. 'The secret of enjoyment is to know the exact moment when one has attained the maximum—and to stop there!' Haven't you heard him say it?" She laughed rather mirthlessly, and Joan did not join her.

After a moment the older woman left the arm of the chair where she had been perched boyishly, with swinging leg, nibbling her *marron*. She walked about the room, and then came and sat beside Joan on the bed. Her voice had become rather shy.

"Joan," she asked, "did you—care, my dear?"

The girl turned her burning face away. "I don't know," she whispered. "How does one know?— I thought about him all the time, and sometimes I didn't want him at all, and sometimes—I did.—And now I wish my father would kill him!"

The other shook her head. "That 's not it, then. You'd know! Even at the worst," she said quietly, "if my father had killed him, I should have wanted—to kill my father."

Joan forgot herself in sheer astonishment. "You!" she cried. "But I thought it was you who declined to marry him, even after you 'd got a divorce to do it?"

Mrs. Rossiter smiled queerly.

"Did Ned tell you that?"

Joan, much embarrassed, explained the Convent impression of Mr. Desmond and his broken heart.

The other laughed. "So that's the idea he has allowed to get abroad? Nice of him. Ned always was a gentleman—and I suppose it does put him in a better light, too— But unfortunately the facts of the case are otherwise. I did get a divorce to marry him—not that he suggested it, oh, dear, no! That would have been too crude. It simply seemed to me the honest thing to do, and my husband agreed with me— So I took up my residence in Dakota. And when I came back, quite free and marriageable, Eduard happened to be in Brittany, painting."

"And then?" prompted Joan, round-eyed at this little glimpse behind the scenes.

"That's all. There was n't any 'then.' Eduard remained in Brittany, painting. The episode was over, you see. Presently I married Rossiter. One could n't pine away like a love-lorn housemaid!"

"Don't laugh," said Joan hoarsely. "It's too awful!" Her hand gripped the other's. "Oh, how can you bear to *speak* to him?"

May Rossiter shrugged. "You don't suppose it lasts, you funny innocent? Besides, though he did cost me a few illusions and some suffering and a reputation (what's a reputation among friends?), I owe Ned Desmond one very good turn. Jim Rossiter's the best husband of my acquaintance."

She leaned over swiftly and kissed Joan on the cheek.

"So you see you're not the only silly little simpleton who learns her ropes by tripping on them. Makes you feel better, does n't it? Of course! That's why I told you. . . . Look here, what's the use of wasting all this perfectly good candy? Jane's floors are above suspicion. Let's pick it up and take it downstairs and make a Roman holiday, shall we?"

Between them, with some laughter and a very real sense of comradeship, they restored Eduard's peace-offering to its basket. Then Joan remembered her bracelet.

"What shall I do with it?" she asked, aghast. "If I return it now, it will look—offended, as if I had taken him seriously!"

"Which would never do," Mrs. Rossiter was quick to agree. She examined the bracelet with interest. "Sapphires, emeralds, nice little diamonds—dear, dear! And a Chartier setting. Ned must have had it rather badly. He never gave *me* anything so compromising! Keep it, of course," she advised cynically. "It's a nice bit of jewelry, and you may as well have something decent for a souvenir."

But Joan's hardihood was not equal to that.

"Well, then"—the other's eye sparkled with sudden malice—"why not give it to me for a parting present? Splendid! Fancy his expression when he recognizes his *gage d'amour* glittering on my wrist, of all wrists in the world! And, believe me, he shall recognize it—What ho! Votes for Women!"

She laughed until she cried.

When Joan said good-by to Longmeadow some days later—not so soon as to give her departure the appearance of flight—she left trailing clouds of glory. The rumor had got about, thanks perhaps to Mrs. Rossiter, that the redoubtable Eduard had met his Waterloo at the hands of the Kentucky girl, which seemed not to detract from her popularity among Eduard's friends, male or female. She became quite legendary in the countryside.

Betty, fully restored to her earlier allegiance, parted from her with tears, and Mrs. Desmond made her promise to visit them soon again.

But it was a promise Joan knew she would not have the

courage to keep. And when she had waved her last gay farewell, and thrown her last kiss impartially out of the window to the group who had come into town to see her off, she settled back in the train which had brought her with such high hopes to her first failure, and said aloud, "Thank goodness that 's over!"

"Pardon *me*—did you speak?" murmured a young man in the seat in front of her, turning round with a start; a wide-eared young man whom Joan recognized.

"Goodness!" she said in some dismay. "You seem to dog my footsteps, Mr. Blair. There 's no escaping you!"

"Looks that way, don't it?" he grinned apologetically. "I 've been in Philadelphia on a big order— Landed it, too!" he added in irrepressible triumph.

"Which is more than I did," sighed Joan; and guessing from her expression that a jest was intended, Mr. Blair laughed long and loudly. He was always very keen on the scent of a jest.

## CHAPTER XIX

**I**T was owing to this fortuitous train journey that one night, some weeks later, Mr. Archibald Blair found himself moving in what he considered very high society indeed. In the years when he had peddled papers on the street corners, or padded around with them on thin and sturdy legs of a Sabbath dawn, so that the world might have its news with its coffee and griddle-cakes for breakfast, Archie had amused himself and added to his mastery of his native tongue by reading an occasional account of a Galt House Ball.

“Social Event of the Season  
Magnificent Affair Given Last Evening  
To Mark  
The Début into Society of” etc., etc.

And here he was himself, part and parcel of a Galt House Ball! It was quite amazing.

Archibald Blair was no snob; but to him, as to many another of the world's workers, “Society” represented a world apart, a sort of fairyland in which creatures of an order far superior to ordinary humans lived and moved and had their lovely being—feminine creatures, of course. About the male of the species he had no illusions. They were merely the same Charlies, Toms, and Georges one knew down town, and with whom one had played baseball or marbles or shinny, transformed by glad rags (the language is Archie's) into temporary black-tailed butterflies. They did not fool him for a moment. When he caught a familiar and surprised eye

belonging to one of them, which he did more than once, he grinned and winked. In return, the owner of the eye called out, "Why, hello, Arch!" or, "Glad to see you, Blair!" in very friendly fashion, for Archibald was a popular youth among his acquaintance.

But they did not introduce him to their girls.

Archie was not chagrined. On the rare occasions when he took Miss Emma from the cashier's desk, or Miss Grace, the prettiest office stenographer, to a dance-hall, he was careful himself about whom he introduced to them. Fellows were often well enough with fellows, when they would n't do for one's lady-friends. Girls had to be choosy. (Again the language is Archibald's.)

He stood alone on the edge of the whirling throng with a pleased, unconscious smile on his face, watching for the girl he had come to see, wondering if it would be all right if he asked her to dance. In the society he had hitherto frequented—or rather sampled, and found not altogether satisfactory—a fellow danced only with the girl he had taken with him, or perhaps, if it had been arranged beforehand, with the partner of some friend, who in turn danced with his partner. Here things seemed to be done differently. A line of young men hovered on the edge of the dancers, and every now and then one would swoop in amongst them and seize the lady of his choice away from her partner seemingly by main force, a sort of modern Rape of the Sabines.

"Gee!" said Archibald to himself, watching. "Gee! But that takes a nerve."

However, life on the whole does take a nerve, as he had long since discovered.

He had, he supposed, as good a right to try it as the rest. The engraved card of invitation was in his pocket—nobody had taken it from him at the door. His broadcloth tails were as long and as neatly fitting as anybody's—the

invitation having arrived at a fortunate time when the order he had landed in Philadelphia made it possible to buy himself a hitherto unnecessary dress suit. It is true that he had used up almost a box of lawn ties before he could get the proper touch to his bow, and even now the result should have proved indubitably that he was not a neck-tie drummer. He made a mental note to ask his friend Jakie Florsheimer of the Gents' Furnishing at Morehouse's what he could do to keep the blamed thing from riding up on him. Still, his final view of himself in the washstand mirror had not been discouraging.

"Some boy," he had murmured to himself, in the absence of a less partial critic.

So now he tensed the muscles of his jaw, and waited his chance, nervously.

How wonderful they were, these slim, delicate creatures whirling by, with their white arms and backs, their tiny feet slippered in silver and gold, their soft laughter, their eager, luring eyes smiling over the shoulders of the fortunate youths who embraced them! Archibald grew quite dizzy with the scene, and stood at gaze as certain dazzled mariners may have gazed upon the Lorelei, to their undoing.

"This is the life!" he said to himself, decidedly. There was not a pay dance-hall in town that could touch it.

Other connoisseurs more experienced than Archibald Blair have looked with delight upon a Galt House Ball—and will look no more, alas! Along the broad corridor behind the ballroom picked experts were wont to congregate early in every season to inspect Louisville's latest contribution to the beauty of the race, comparing points and conformation, class, speed, and endurance, as knowingly as such things are later discussed at Churchill Downs. Indeed, Louisville may be said to be, in some matters, a city of experts. The youth who sells you your cigar, the newsie who provides you with an



evening edition, should without a moment's hesitation be able to tell you the name of two things on demand: the Derby winner and the season's beauty.

So Archibald was in a measure prepared for what he saw. Anticipations of it had kept him awake at night. His trouble was in the midst of so much loveliness to fix his ravished attention upon the finding of one face.

When he found it at last, however, his eye did not again wander. He was a young man whose head rarely contained more than one idea at a time—a fact which perhaps accounted for his growing success in the selling end of the business.

He let her pass the first time out of sheer pleasure of the sight of her in motion. Joan was wearing, as she usually wore nowadays, an odd shade of blue, very much the color of the orchids at her waist. In the hand on her partner's arm she carried another bouquet, of violets; and the second time she passed she had exchanged this for a third, of pink roses. From which it may be gathered that Louisville was at last waking up to the attractions of our heroine.

Archibald wished suddenly that he had sent her a bouquet himself, but decided that she might have thought it "fresh."

"Unless I was to send it just 'From a Friend'!" he thought, his eye brightening.

She had changed partners on each appearance, as well as bouquets; and the third time she was dancing with a portly gentleman who one-stepped so majestically, so benignly, that their passage down the room was a sort of royal progress.

"Why, the gay old guy!" thought Archibald, surprised; and decided that this was the moment for his grand coup. Girls like that should not have to dance with parties old enough to know better.

He stepped up to the couple as he had seen others do, and slapped Major Darcy on the back, remarking with the ex-

cessive nonchalance which is the result of nervousness, "So long, old top! Back to the tall timbers for you."

The Major turned and stared, really uncertain as to whether it could be himself who was thus addressed.

"It's Mr. Blair, Dad," explained Joan hurriedly, "who was so nice to me on the train; don't you remember?"

The Major still stared. But innate hospitality triumphed: and perhaps there was something disarming, too, in the wide-apart front teeth of Mr. Blair, which, as Joan had previously observed, gave him an oddly innocent expression.

"Very well, young top!" he murmured courteously, "I surrender my daughter to your mercies."

The two danced away, Blair holding his prize as if he did not know quite what to do with her now that he had got her.

"For goodness' sake, take *hold* of me!" she instructed after a moment. "I feel as if I were about to float out of your grasp. I won't break, you know!"

Archie obediently held her tighter, murmuring, "Pardon me!"

He danced surprisingly well, as if he were really listening to the music, Joan thought. She did not trouble to talk to him, therefore.

"So that was your father," he said after a long and anxious silence. "Why, he's a peach, hopping around like that at his age!"

"Rather more of a pear, don't you think? As to figure?" suggested Joan; for the Major's tendency to *embonpoint* had increased remarkably since his marriage.

Blair threw back his head and gently roared. He was one of the people who always made Joan feel herself a wit of the first water.

Yet she was a little sorry he had come to-night. She had sent him the card to her *début* ball by way of repaying an obligation. He had been very thoughtful on the train about

getting her fruit and papers—almost too thoughtful; and had insisted, somewhat to Joan's embarrassment, on paying for the two meals they had taken together in the dining-car. She did not care to remain in debt to a stranger; hence the invitation. But she had not, somehow, expected him to take advantage of it.

Since he was here, however, she must do what she could for him. She knew what it was to be a stranger in a gay throng.

"Do you know any girls?" she asked.

"Not to speak to—though I've seen some of the young ladies on the street, of course. This is the first time I've ever been out in Society," he explained simply.

"Yes? I'm a *débutante* too, you know. And how do you like Society, so far?"

"Fine, fine!" he told her. "Better even than I thought it was. Makes the movie pictures of it look sort of silly."

"You ought to go to the Horse Show next week if you find this sort of thing interesting. I hear it is to be something splendid!"

"I will," he assured her, earnestly.

"And now I'd better introduce you to some other people." She shook her head smilingly at a youth who was about to touch him on the shoulder. After all, one owes something to the duties of hospitality. "Though really you don't have to *meet* girls at a thing like this before you ask them to dance. I don't know the names of half the men I dance with."

"You don't?" he repeated incredulously, wondering what Miss Emma or Miss Grace would think of that! He decided not to tell them. "I reckon I'd rather be introduced first though, if you don't mind," he murmured— "I—I would n't know just what to call 'em."

Laughing, she stopped with the music, and on an impulse of

sheer mischief guided him toward the exclusive young person who had once made her unhappy at the Country Club, one Miss Emily Carmichael. She was not too exclusive, it appeared, to come to the Darcy ball; which she did not seem to be thoroughly enjoying, however.

"Ask her to dance—she needs it," murmured Joan *sotto voce* as they approached.

"Sure thing," replied Archibald; and as soon as Joan had pronounced the formula: "Miss Carmichael, Mr. Blair," he said promptly, "Be pleased to have the pleasure of the next turn, Miss Carmichael."

Joan went off with another partner, chuckling. She felt that scores were even.

Blair's face fell at this desertion. "Oh, but say," he called after her, "can't I dance with you any more?"

"Whenever you like! Just come and tap my partner and carry me off as you did before. But," she added with a parting twinkle, "I don't believe I'd call him 'old top' again!"

Archibald flushed and understood. "All right," he said meekly. "I'll just call him 'Say,' instead."

He tapped her partner with some frequency after that, though not often enough to be annoying; and Joan also noticed amusedly that he danced a great deal with Miss Carmichael, who seemed quite willing. Exclusiveness was evidently in abeyance at a ball.

Sometimes when they passed each other she called out pleasantly, "Having a good time, *débutant*?" and he answered in the vernacular of the moment, "Fine and dandy!"

She said, during one of their brief turns together, "You seem to be getting on beautifully with that girl I introduced you to."

"Who? Miss Carmichael? She's all to the mustard, isn't she! Asked me to come and eat supper with her to-night."

"She did?" exclaimed Joan, surprised.

"Yes. You see I know her brother—put on gloves with him sometimes at the Y. M. C. A. And it seems he 's told her about me," explained Archie.

"Oh!" Joan looked with new interest at his broad shoulders, his straight, supple back. She understood suddenly the lift and spring and untiring ease of his dancing, which was not grace exactly, but something just as good. He was an athlete. She began to feel quite pleased with her protégé. With a little pruning as to speech and general behavior, he would make a rather presentable ballroom adjunct. His manner with women was really nice.

One other besides Joan watched Archie's progress with interest. At the door of the dressing-room Ellen Neal, in her Sunday costume of claret-colored serge with collar and cuffs of homemade Battenberg lace, gazed proudly out upon the scene of her nurseling's triumphs, having been unable to resist Mrs. Darcy's invitation to assist on so memorable an occasion. She had removed countless evening wraps and carriage slippers, assisted deftly, albeit with prim lips, at the powdering of countless backs and bosoms, and now followed with adoring eyes a certain slim blue figure that appeared and disappeared among the dancers.

"Land," she thought. "If her mama could only see her now! The swellest among the swell! And with a dress on her little back that cost that woman a hundred dollars, if it cost a cent. She 's got as many partners as any of 'em—and why would n't she, then, I 'd like to know?"

Archibald had promised to look her up during the evening, but boylike had forgotten the old friend in quest of the new. She forgave him for it, though she would have liked very much to exchange impressions with somebody. Her pride was bursting for utterance.

Presently he came and stood quite near her, with only

the width of the corridor between them. His back was turned as he stood looking out over the ballroom floor.

"Sst!" called Ellen. "Psst! Mr. Archie!" She dared not leave her post for fear people would come for wraps or powder, and find only a colored woman to wait on them, which would never do. (Ellen continued to regard the colored race as a cross between the monkey and the magpie, with leanings toward the magpie.)

"Psst! Hey there!" she called.

But Archie's mind was far away from Ellen Neal, and he did not hear her. He was anathematizing Jakie Florsheimer of the Gents' Furnishings at the moment for not having suggested white kid gloves to him. More than once his clumsy bare hand, struggle against it as he might, had come in contact with the delicate bare shoulder of one of his partners; and Archibald felt that if such a catastrophe should occur when he was dancing with Miss Darcy, the earth might just as well open and engulf him permanently. She would never forgive him—and indeed why should she? A man ought to have known by instinct about those reverential gloves.

So he stood frowning out upon the ballroom, heedless of Ellen's hisses; and in this way the old woman happened to be the unnoted witness of a rather curious scene.

Mrs. Darcy came tripping down the corridor alone, for the moment, having been out to inspect preparations for supper. She did not believe in leaving so important a matter as supper entirely to the hands of paid assistants, no matter how well paid. She was resplendent in rose brocade and spangles, her small plump feet encased in cloth-of-gold, a little fishtail train of cloth-of-gold whisking behind her. Her hair positively glittered, it was so golden, and her face was overspread with a rosy bloom that always intrigued her step-daughter because of its unnatural evenness, as if she had not simply rouged, but dipped her face in a permanent elixir of youth that outdid

youth itself. Joan had never caught her with her face bare, as it were, even at the most unlikely hours.

Mrs. Darcy paused at sight of a young man standing by himself, gazing out with a wistful frown at the gaiety before him; and her hospitable heart smote her. She tapped his arm with her fan.

"Kind o' lonesome?" she said. "Come on in and dance with me."

He turned with a start. His eyes took her in from top to toe, and suddenly narrowed. "No, thanks," he said curtly. "What are *you* doing here, anyway?"

Effie May drew back. She looked, as Ellen expressed it to herself, "flabbergasted."

"Why! Who do you think I am?"

He continued to stare at her with those narrowed, steady eyes.

"I don't know, and I don't care. It's easy enough to see *what* you are! You'd better go, had n't you?" suggested Archibald grimly. "This is a private affair. Invitation only."

By this time the startled lady had recovered her poise. "You're making a mistake, young man," she replied quietly. "This happens to be *my* private affair. I am Mrs. Darcy."

It was his turn to be flabbergasted.

"*Her mother?*"

"Miss Darcy's step-mother," said Effie May, with some dignity.

She continued to meet his gaze, which did not lower, though he had gone quite pale.

"The joke's on me," he muttered at last. "It's I who'd better go, I guess. Pardon *me!*"

She inclined her head without speaking.

He still continued to look at her, as if puzzled. "My

mistake," he said again. "If your husband wants me at any time, my name is Blair, Mrs. Darcy—Archibald Blair."

"He won't want you," said Effie May. "Good night."

Ellen Neal, aghast, watched him turn on his heel and leave.

"Land!" she said to herself. "Land sakes! He's gone and done for himself now, the young idjit!"

When she turned again, she saw Mrs. Darcy refreshing herself with a glass of "Dick Fizz" at the punch bowl. She seemed to need it.



## CHAPTER XX

**B**UT Effie May's amiability was proof even against this trying episode. She said to Joan, the day after the ball, when they were talking things over in unusual intimacy, "By the way, who's the young fellow that danced so much with you last night—a sort of broad, odd chap he was, with ears? I don't think I've seen him before."

"Oh, Mr. Blair," Joan smiled at the description. "He danced with me so much because he didn't know any one else."

"A stranger here? Where does he come from?"

"I don't know—the slums, I fancy. Ask Ellen Neal. He's a pal of hers. But he's a Louisville product, I believe."

Effie May glanced at her casually, "Didn't you like him, dearie?"

"Oh, well enough. Did you?"

"Yes," said the other, "I did. He's honest, and he stands up so straight—does n't sort of droop over a girl as if his spine was feeble, like some of 'em do. I like a chap to stand up on his own two pins."

"But his ears, Effie May!"

"Oh, well, what's ears? Just means that his mother forgot to tuck 'em into his cap when he was a baby. Now if his eyes bulged out, that would be another thing. You look out for any man with a bulging eye, Joan."

"Very well," she agreed, "I will. What's dangerous about a bulging eye?"

"Stoopidity, girlie. Just plain boneheadedness. And if

there's anything in the world more dangerous than that, I don't know it!— Let's ask your eary young man again to something, shall we?"

"I begin to think he's *your* eary young man!" smiled Joan.

Sometimes she almost forgot herself and liked her step-mother. There was something so human about the woman. . . .

So it happened that Mr. Blair was delighted and amazed and a little perturbed to receive a few days later a note from Joan Darcy, inviting him to sit on a certain evening in the Darcy box at the impending Horse Show. One of the Darcy guests had failed at the last moment, and Joan had accepted the suggestion that she ask her protégé.

He rushed downstairs to spread the glad tidings to Ellen, who was in turn surprised and a little perturbed. She had not imagined "that woman" so forgiving. But then Ellen was a person who did nothing by halves. Justice to the enemy was not in her creed. Where she hated, she hated.

"Just look at it!" exulted Mr. Blair, exhibiting his note. "She asks for 'the pleasure of my company'! She 'hopes a previous engagement won't prevent'! (It won't.) All in her own hand, mind you!"

"What did you expect—type-writing?" commented Ellen, a little tartly. She was always tart when pleased.

Next arose the question of what to wear. Those people who fancy that this question confines itself to the lighter-minded sex have much to learn. They have not watched a youth of twenty-five—or thirty-five—or sixty-five—trying to ascertain in advance whether long or short tails shall grace a particular occasion. And if there is a more pitiable spectacle than the misery of a man appearing, say, in sack-suit and brown boots, where others of his sex gleam as to bosom and foot-gear, the author has yet to see it. Whereas any woman worth her salt,

who happens to be dressed in hat and jacket among much décolletage, can manage to make the other women present feel immodest.

Ellen Neal was of no help to Mr. Blair at this crisis. He consulted once more the oracle, Jakie Florsheimer. Archie had been to the Horse Show before, of course, but merely to see horses. This was a very different matter. Even Mr. Florsheimer admitted himself doubtful.

"You see, it's like this," he said, scratching his curly head. "If you was to go in a sporting way, y' see, I'd say a natty little sack, checked maybe, with one of our \$3.99 plaid vests, and a Derby hat. But sitting in one of them boxes with society girls, all dolled up like they are, y' see—honest, I don't know would it be better to wear your swallow-tail or yet a frock with light stripe pants. Search me, Arch! You got me guessing."

Mr. Blair raised the question among his fellow employees without obtaining satisfaction, and at last in his desperation actually tackled the head of the firm, whose name sometimes appeared in the newspapers as among those present.

Thanks to this gentleman's surprised advice, Archibald made a most proper appearance on the night appointed, and this time gloves were not forgotten. Also, during the course of the afternoon, Joan received a mysterious bouquet of roses bearing the legend, "From a Friend."

She chuckled over this quite affectionately. "He's funny," she thought, "but he's really a dear!"

Archibald was very much surprised when she thanked him for the roses, and deeply relieved that she did not seem to think him "fresh."

"How did you guess it was me?" he wondered.

"Well—I have n't so many 'friends' whom it might have been."

"*You?*"— His incredulity was flattering.

She smiled. "Not many who would not want their generosity known, Mr. Blair. Usually in our world, when people do things for one they like to get full credit for it. They even expect a return in kind!"

Lightly as she spoke, her tone troubled him. Glancing at her furtively, he realized that this was not the little girl he had first seen in haughty tears on the train, and yearned over because she seemed too young to know the meaning of trouble. Now she was infinitely more approachable, but also, somehow, infinitely farther away. If he was not mistaken she had learned very thoroughly the meaning of trouble. There was a listless droop of the lids, a slightly weary inflection of the bright voice, that did not "belong." He remembered her as serious and dreamy. She had become gay and wary. It was a change he did not like.

But he liked Joan. He liked her almost too well. Never did a heart more chivalrous beat beneath a \$3.99 waistcoat; and if he had not long ere this become a notable squire of dames, it was simply for lack of the opportunity. Most of the dames he knew seemed so amply able to take care of themselves.

The evening under these conditions became almost as glorious an occasion as the ball had been. True, he saw little of Joan, because other men came and went constantly in the box, and frequently took her away with them to stroll around the ring. Despite Mrs. Darcy's seemingly oblivious amiability, he could not talk to her with any comfort. He had no skill to hide the stiffness with which her presence affected him, and after a few kindhearted attempts to put him at ease, she left him to the Major entirely. But that suited Archibald very well. He admired the Major tremendously, aside from the fact that he was Joan's father.

"A perfect gentleman," he pronounced him inwardly, taking envious note of his manners, his well-fitting, soft-bosomed shirt, the mellifluous tones of his really beautiful voice.

Major Darcy, always at his best before an admiring audience, produced some of his neatest anecdotes for this appreciative guest, and they presently entered into a learned and congenial discussion of the Horse, expert knowledge of which was part of their mutual birthright. It was a proud young man who later strolled out to the bar for liquid refreshment with Richard Darcy's arm thrust carelessly through his. Archibald had within him great possibilities for hero-worship.

It may have been the liquid refreshment which finally gave him courage to propose to Joan that she stroll with him around the ring, as she had strolled with others. At any rate, he shortly found himself part of that meandering show of *débutantes* and others, which rivaled, if it did not eclipse, the exhibit on the tanbark. He, Archie Blair, in a high silk topper, escorting a vision in a picture-hat with a plume, and a long gray velvet coat, and silvery furs around her neck, the price of which would almost have bought him an education!

He felt that at any moment a bouncer might discover him, and walk up to murmur sinisterly in his ear, "Out this way!"

But none did. Now and then Joan stopped and introduced him to other visions, who gushed and babbled, asking whether she was going to So-and-so's luncheon, and who was taking her to such-and-such a cotillion, and what she was going to wear to the next costume ball. He noticed that she neither gushed nor babbled in return, but seemed pleasantly aloof, a little *distract*, as if she were an older woman listening to children.

"Business of being a society girl," he commented once, half to himself.

She gave him a smiling glance. "Yes," she said, "it has a lingo like any other trade."

"But *you* don't speak it."

"I think perhaps it's not my trade."

He asked, greatly daring, "What is, then?"

"I don't know," said Joan, "yet."

Just then a rather dissipated-looking boy with his hat on the back of his head passed them, and paused.

"Oh, Blair!" he said, lifting his hat to Joan.

"Hello, Carmichael!" Archie greeted him.

"My sister told me to tell you you'd better come to our box and apologize. She says you were to take supper with her at some ball or other, and never turned up."

"Oh, gee!" exclaimed Archie, remorsefully. "I forgot it; clean as a whistle!"

"Better come and grovel, then," grinned the other, and passed on.

Joan looked at him in amusement. "Do you mean to say you never took Emily Carmichael out to supper after she had asked you to? What are you going to say to her?"

"That I forgot," said Archie simply. He certainly could not explain that the cause of his forgetfulness was the *contretemps* of having requested his hostess under a misapprehension to leave her own entertainment!

Joan chuckled. "Well! I'm certainly glad I did n't ask you to have supper with me!"

"I would n't have forgotten that," said Archibald.

She looked at him out of the corner of her eyes. It was said neither shyly nor gallantly nor boldly, simply as a statement of fact.

Joan was very tired of flirtation just then. She shied away from any hint of the personal like a burnt child in the vicinity of fire. She had no desire for further victims of her bow and spear; but she did want friends. It occurred to her that this frank, tactless, simple young man might do very well in that capacity.

"Take me right back to our box," she commanded, "and go

and make your peace with Miss Carmichael! Don't you know you can't afford to antagonize such a power at court?"

He obeyed meekly. With quite a proprietary interest, she watched his awkward entry into the enemy's country, his introduction to Carmichael *père* and Carmichael *mère*, a lady who looked on life (the Darceys included) through a rather invidious lorgnon. This lorgnon trained itself on Archibald at close range.

"Poor Mr. Blair!" thought Joan.

But a little while later she was surprised to see that her protégé and Mrs. Carmichael had joined the ranks of the strollers and were chatting and laughing together with quite an air of old friendship. He looked up at her as they passed, shyly, and Joan clapped her hands softly to indicate approval.

The last ring of horses was showing when he finally returned.

"Well," Joan rallied him. "I thought you'd gone over to the enemy for good!"

"Judge Carmichael and I were talking over old times when I used to sell him papers," explained Archibald. "I reminded him of a day when he treated me to a pair of shoes because he said my toes sticking out made him feel chilly. . . . But are they your enemies?"

Joan bit her lip. She did not like her self-consciousness about the Carmichaels. "Really, I don't know," she said indifferently. "They certainly are not my friends."

"I think they'd like to be, though!" remarked the unexpected Archie. "Miss Carmichael said you were the only one of the *débutantes* who looked worth while, and she asked a lot of questions about you and your father, and said she would have been to see you long ago, except for—" He stopped abruptly. He had almost finished the quotation *verbatim*.

Joan flushed. "I trust you were able to give her a good account of us?" she remarked haughtily.

Archie answered in all innocence. "I told her Mrs. Darcy was your step-mother."

Despite her annoyance, Joan had to laugh at that. After all it was too absurd, this protégé of hers, this discovery out of the slums, standing sponsor for the Darcy family with the Carmichaels! . . .

It did not occur to her to invite him to call. She had not as yet plumbed the depths of his social ignorance. He stood down-cast throughout the leave-takings, the remarks of "See you to-morrow," and "One o'clock lunch, did you say?" realizing that this wonderful evening was over, and not daring to hope that such luck would come his way a third time. He looked rather like a big, humble puppy that is about to be shut out of the house at night.

It was Effie May who noticed the resemblance. "Be sure you pay your two party-calls promptly, Mr. Blair," was her parting suggestion. "And if you happen to be at the Horse Show any other night this week, drop in at our box, you know."

"Yes 'm! yes 'm, I certainly will," he replied to both these hints—stiffly, because it was the only way he could manage to speak to this lady. But his ears were quite pink with pleasure.



## CHAPTER XXI

**O**N JOAN'S return from Longmeadow she had found her family already beginning to prepare for what was by far the most ambitious effort undertaken by Effie May as yet: her formal *début* into society. Joan, rather alarmed, protested. She wished nothing so much at the moment as to be allowed to slip into some inconspicuous corner and recover her lost confidence. She was in no mood for a continuation of an empty social career, particularly under the aegis of her father's wife. Other plans were beginning to formulate vaguely in her head, and she wanted leisure to perfect them.

But here for the first time she came into direct contact with the amiable, easy-going, unescapable persistence she had before suspected in her step-mother, and which made her feel as helpless as a caged rabbit; a much indulged and petted rabbit, to be sure, in which it was sheer ingratitude not to love its cage. Effie May used neither argument nor explanation. She simply went her chosen way, and the rest of the household perforce accompanied her.

Joan, herself not unaccustomed to pursuing her own path did not submit without a struggle. The difficulty was to bring the matter out into the open. Effie May had a habit of taking things for granted that made discussion gratuitous.

"Father," Joan said determinedly one night at dinner when the two elders were discussing the details of the impending ball, "why do we give a ball, anyway? It's not as if we were under many obligations to people—rather the con-

trary. And what's the point of entertaining for me in this wholesale way, when I do not wish to be a *débutante*?"

"Don't *wish* to be a *débutante*?" cried the astonished gentleman. "Why, my child, the pollywog might as well decide that it does not wish to be a frog! At a certain age young women of a certain position naturally have to be presented to society. What else is there for them to do?"

"Oh, lots of things," said the girl with impatient vagueness. "They can be teachers or librarians, or—stenographers, or journalists—something useful, you know."

"Never," said the Major with pained emphasis, "while I am alive and able to support her, shall a daughter of mine step out of that station in life to which it has pleased God to call her! No lady of my family has yet, I thank God, been under the necessity of becoming anything 'useful'—Useful! Absurd!"

(Joan had a momentary vision of her frail mother at sewing-machine and housework; the three Misses Darcy struggling to make ends meet by means of paying guests who did not always pay.)

"May I ask," continued her father with a dignity that verged upon acerbity, "the reason for this sudden desire on your part to be 'useful'? It is a desire usually confined, I think, to ladies who have ceased to be ornamental," he added, with a gallant inclination in her direction.

"Oh, Dad, you know what I mean!" she said rather desperately. "I simply want to be independent."

"And where can you be more independent than under your father's roof?" he demanded. "Free to come and go as you choose, free to entertain your friends as you like, to make what purchases you will, to run up accounts at the shops—"

"And without a penny I can call my own!" blurted out Joan.

“As to that,” he remarked with a shrug of distaste, “you have merely to come to your father, my child.”

“Exactly,” said Joan bitterly.

Here Effie May entered the arena, fighting as usual upon the side of her victim. “The girl’s right. She ought to have her own allowance—as you were saying only last night, Dickie.”

“Was I?” murmured the Major. “Yes, yes, so I was! An allowance of— How much did I say, my darling?”

“Two hundred dollars a month,” prompted his darling. “Do you think you could manage on that, Joan?”

The girl lifted shamed eyes to her step-mother. She could not bear to look at her father, puffing himself out with conscious pride.

“Very well,” she said in a low voice. “I’ll be a débutante since you wish it—I’ll spend the money and wear the clothes you provide, and eat the food you give me—but understand me! I’m only doing it because I have no choice.”

She suddenly turned and ran out of the room. The Major stared after her, blankly.

“What’s come over the child? She used to be so sweet-tempered and reasonable, grateful for everything. All this nonsense about independence! What does she mean by it, anyway?”

“She simply means she wants a man of her own, like every blessed mother’s daughter of us,” explained Effie May comfortably, “and that’s what I’m trying to help her to, and it makes her sort of ashamed because she’s got to be helped. That’s all! . . . Say, old pet—” she seated herself upon his knee, as was her cosy custom when opportunity offered—“who’s this chap Nikolai, anyway, that’s always writing to her? He gives her some pretty good presents. That piece of aquamarine he sent her when she graduated—it’s worth a lot of money. Is he rich?”

"He 's a very successful writer, I believe."

"Hmm! Old? *Too* old, I mean?"

"For what?"

"Why, for Joan, old duckie."

"Joan?" repeated the Major vaguely. He had for the moment lost interest in his daughter's affairs. The ex-widow Calloway made rather a luscious armful. He roused himself to the required attention, however. "For Joan? Why, good gad! the man 's old enough to be her father! He was a friend of Mary's."

"Before she married you?"

"Oh, no, afterwards. She picked him up somewhere when Joan was a baby."

"*Oho!*" murmured Effie May with an indescribable expression. "I did n't know Mary was the sort to have friends after she was married!" (It is just possible that the bride was rather fed up on the virtues of her predecessor.) But a sudden stiffening of the arms that enfolded her warned her of rocks ahead, and she finished smoothly, "I thought she was too interested in you to know that any one else existed."

"By no means," smiled Richard Darcy, mollified. "On the contrary, she took an interest in many people whom I found tiresome in the extreme. Her lame ducks, I called them. Mr. Nikolai was one of those."

"Why lame?"

"Well, at the time we first knew him it seems the girl he was engaged to had just thrown him over because she found out that he was a Jew."

Effie May gave a little squeal of horror. "A Jew! Well, I don't blame her for shying at the altar! Of all the men I've known in my day, I never *did* go with any Jew!"

"I confess I have something of the same prejudice myself," admitted the Major, "Jews and the canile. . . . But Mary was different, somehow. Not democratic exactly—she was

one of the most fastidious women I have ever known. E people were simply people to her, particularly if they were trouble. She and Nikolai became great friends. And course since then he had grown to be quite a distinguished p son, Jew or no Jew."

"I should n't have thought you 'd have wanted him rou the house, though!" mused Effie May, as though Mr. Nikola Judaism might have been contagious.

"Oh, well, he was so devoted to the child, and so gratef and in fact made himself useful in so many ways," explain Richard Darcy with a slight blush, "that I had not the he object to his presence. Besides, as he is not robust, and l no progeny of his own, I thought that in time perhaps Joan You see?"

"I see! Of course Jew money is as good as any mon especially when the Jew 's dead." She nodded thoughtful "But it puts him out of the question as a husband for Joan

"My darling, he has never been *in* the question as a husba for Joan! What an idea! Was it so happy in its own lit nest that it wants to find nesties for all the other lit birdies?" cooed the bridegroom, impatiently drawing l down into his arms again.

"Um-m-m!" responded the bride, yielding without und reluctance.

And so Joan found them as she came remorsefully dow stairs some time later, two mature love-birds perched upor single twig, as it were, oblivious of time and the grins of pa ing servants; and she turned away hastily to shut out t horrid sight.

## CHAPTER XXII

**O**NE thing almost reconciled her to the distasteful idea of entering further into the social world under the wing of her step-mother, and that was the gratification, the artless delight, taken by her father's cousins in the idea of assisting at a Galt House Ball, almost in the capacity of hostesses. There was something piteous to the girl, though humiliating, about the three little spinsters' unflagging interest in the amusements of people who had forgotten, if they ever knew of, the Misses Darcys' existence. Despite their long retirement from what they called "the polite world," these ladies were inveterate students of the social column, and constituted in themselves a complete local edition of "Who's Who."

Whenever Joan went to see them—which was rather often nowadays, for her late experience had had the not unusual effect of softening her comprehension, while it hardened her surfaces—they greeted her with eager gossip, such as: "I see the little Jones girl is to be married at last!" or, "The paper does n't mention your name at the Smiths' cotillion last night. . . . Surely you were there?"

In their eyes she was evidently a most romantic figure, the embodiment of gaiety and youth and of all they had hoped but somehow failed to be. They exclaimed with quite personal delight over her frocks, her pretty underthings, her dainty shoes, the silver-fox furs Stefan Nikolai had sent her from Siberia.

"You're going to be one of the belles of the winter!" prophesied Miss Virginia raptly. "I can tell from the way

the paper speaks of you already! 'Miss Darcy, the fascinating daughter of Major and Mrs. Richard Throckmorton Darcy, lately returned from the East'—etc. Clothes do help so much," she added wistfully. "I sometimes think that if dear papa had been able to manage better dresses for us—" She left her remark unfinished, a conversational characteristic of all the Darcy ladies.

"You must remember that dear papa had three of us to provide for, whereas Cousin Richard has only one," reminded Miss Iphigenia loyally. "Besides, you were too pretty to need anything but the simplest white muslins, Virgie. Fine dresses would not have been half as becoming."

"What nonsense, Genie!" blushed her sister. "I'm sure you did n't need clothes any more than I did, with all your beautiful hair."

Joan's evil imagination pictured her Cousin Iphigenia frequenting the polite world clad, like the Lady Godiva, chiefly in hair, and she chuckled; but at the same time she kissed both ladies impulsively.

This was one of the things that brought her to the dingy house so frequently; the atmosphere of affectionate appreciation that warmed it. In her father's family—and it was one of the Darcys' undoubted charms—all geese were swans, and they put not only their own but each other's best foot foremost with a touching unanimity. The three sisters regarded each other as paragons, exceeded in degree only by their first cousin Richard, who, in addition to being a Darcy, was likewise a man, and by their first-cousin-once-removed Joan, who in addition to being a Darcy was young. As to their cousin Richard's new wife—the name she had assumed in marriage banished before birth any qualms they might have felt as to her inborn qualifications for the polite world. A Darcy could naturally do no wrong.

One of the things Joan liked best in Effie May was her con-

sistent kindness to these rather tiresome and unimportant spinsters. "Buying them!" she had thought at first. But after all why should any one trouble to buy them? Hers was not entirely a material kindness, either. She consulted them faithfully in social matters, even in household matters (though the Misses Darcy were not notable housekeepers). She and the Major and the limousine accompanied them occasionally to church, the only form of social dissipation in which they still indulged. Altogether she exhibited in dealing with them a tact which in anybody else Joan would have attributed to good breeding.

One morning, when the girl stopped in to make her cousins a visit, the opening door revealed an unusual amount of chatter coming down from the floor above; soft, pretty chatter (like her father, the Darcy ladies had charming voices), mingled with the steady hum of a sewing-machine.

"What 's up, Susy?" she asked the languid colored slattern who let her in.

"De ladies is gittin' ready fo' de ball, I 'specks, Miss Joan, fittin' on dey new dresses."

"New dresses? A ball?" repeated the surprised Joan, who did not connect these activities with her own *début*, scheduled to take place a month or so later. "I must investigate!" and ignoring Susy's best efforts to toll her into the parlor, she pursued the chatter to its source.

She avoided that parlor whenever possible, having earlier exhausted its charms. It was a rather dismal chamber, with shutters always closed against a too-revealing sunlight. Innumerable small tables and a double mantel-shelf were crowded with articles of *vertu* in the shape of hand-painted vases, and ginger-jars, and marble hands. On the walls, concealing as much as possible of the original decoration, hung specimens of all the artistic aspirations of the Darcy family and friends; "Yards of Pansies," still-life studies of a fan in



interesting juxtaposition to a coal-scuttle, and the like. Concealment seemed to be the motif of the decoration-scheme. The fireplace was concealed by moribund cat-tails, the former usefulness of a spinning-wheel was concealed by gilt paint, the function of the lamp was concealed, if not permanently impaired, by a ruffled blue silk petticoat reminiscent for the best of reasons of a certain blue silk party-dress that had once done yeoman's service in the family.

The elegance of their parlor enabled Joan's cousins to ask several dollars more a month for their rooms than did any other house in the square; but Joan, who, had inherited from the maternal side a strain of practicality, positively ached in her joints at the thought of the hours it must take to thoroughly sweep and dust it—if indeed it ever were thoroughly swept and dusted.

She poked her head around a door that stood ajar on the third floor: "May I come in?"

The three turned startled faces to greet her, two in dressing-sacks whose fronts bristled with pins, the third in a costume which seemed vaguely familiar, a dress which glittered with jet sequins and was cut so low that it was perhaps fortunate Miss Euphemia had neglected to remove her gray flannel underwear.

"Why, Joan!" they chorused, dismay mingling with their welcome. (Even in conversation they were a most united family, speaking usually all three at once.) "However did you find your way up here? That stupid Susy should have shown you into the drawing-room!—or at least have announced you, so that you would not have caught us like this."

"Nonsense! Susy tried to shoo me into the parlor, but I would n't be shooed; and as for 'announcing' me—she did howl up the stairs. But you were too engrossed to hear." The naïve respect with which they treated their prosperous young cousin always mortified Joan. She had her own con-

ception of the family dignity. "You 'd suppose I 'd never seen a dressing-sack or a sewing-machine in my life, whereas I was raised on 'em.—My word, Cousin Euphie, how grand you are!"

"Am I, dear? The dress is grand, I know," said Miss Euphemia doubtfully, "but I 'm not sure it 's quite in my style. The others thought I 'd better have it because I 'm plumpest, in the—in the chest, you know. But really, the waist!—There simply is n't any, Joan! What would you suggest?"

"A yoke," said the girl gravely.

"Just what I said!" twittered Miss Iphigenia. "Yokes *are* being worn, or I 'm certain Joan would n't have suggested it. A guimpe of black net perhaps—tucked, would you say, Joan dear?—and long wrinkled sleeves of the same. Which would do away with the necessity for long gloves, girls!"

This happy thought was greeted with acclaim. "How clever of you, Genie! We can *all* have guimpes and long sleeves! You see, three pairs of long white gloves—" they explained to Joan.

"Of course!" she said hastily, making a mental note to supply her cousins with long white gloves if she had to ask her step-mother for the money.

They showed her the other dresses eagerly; an amber-colored satin—"With slippers to match, my dear!"—and one of old-rose brocade which Miss Virginia almost kissed in her affection for it.

"I sometimes think if I could have had a dress like this earlier—" she murmured. "Though of course my real color, like yours, Joan, was blue. A blue sash, and a pink rose in the hair. As General Fitzhugh Lee once said to me at a Galt House ball—"

"No, was n't it at the Governor's Inauguration, sister?" interposed Miss Euphemia.

In the gentle altercation which ensued, Joan never heard just what the gallant general had said to her cousin Virginia; but she suspected it of having some connection with blue eyes.

"You 're a lucky girl to be presented at a Galt House ball!" they exclaimed presently, returning to the subject in hand. "And Cousin Effie May has really been *too* sweet about it. Insists, simply insists that we shall all three of us stand up with her in the receiving line! Says she 'd be terribly shy without us." (Joan smiled faintly at the picture of Effie May being shy.) "We said to her, 'No, my dear, one of us is *quite* enough. We 'll draw straws for it, as we always used to.' Dear papa never let all three of us go to the same party. As he said, 'It 's too much of a good thing!' (Slang, you know.) But she assured us that she had three evening dresses she could n't get into,"—it was Miss Euphemia speaking at the moment, quite unaware of any naïveté in the sequence of her remarks,—“and that it would be a real kindness on our part to take them off her hands. You know, dear, Cousin Effie May really *is* getting a little stout. And she says it 's such a problem to know what to do with outgrown party dresses.”

"It certainly is!" agreed Miss Iphigenia, as if it were one that weighed upon her heavily. "You simply can't give things of that sort to the poor."

"Why not?" murmured Joan, "if the poor would enjoy them?"

They all rounded on her. "Why, but dear child, it would n't be suitable! It would give the poor ideas beyond their station. Fancy presenting a spangled net evening-gown to—Susy, say! It would never do!"

"I suppose not, because she would certainly burst with joy. But think," mused Joan, "what an enviable death!"

The Darcy ladies looked at her uncertainly. They were never quite sure whether their young cousin was jesting or

not. They preferred people to laugh when they joked. It made things clearer.

“Never mind,” the girl added hastily. “Susie ’s not going to get these magnificent costumes, anyway!—and I am so glad you are coming to my ball, dears. We ’ll be a whole family of *débutantes!*”

Afterwards she realized soberly how near her pride had come to depriving these innocent ladies of a real pleasure. Pride, she reflected, may be very close kin to selfishness. She postponed her own plans a while longer.

## CHAPTER XXIII

**T**HESE were at their best vague plans. Only one thing was definite about them. They were to include no more make-believe. Whatever came hereafter, Joan intended to be herself. The world must accept her on her own terms; in the phrase of her childhood "like her or lump her!"

The difficulty was to decide just what that self might be. Hitherto it had altered obligingly to suit different situations; blowing now hot, now cold, according to the wind of circumstance. But surely underneath there was a definite entity, which did not chop and change and adapt itself, but remained Joan?

At school she had shown no particular aptitude that would help her now—or rather had shown an aptitude in so many directions as to give rise to a widespread impression that "Joan Darcy would get somewhere some day," but which had caused more than one of her teachers to shake her head and murmur something about Jack of all trades being master of none. She herself had found this facility convenient, not in the pursuit of study but in the avoidance of it. She had managed to slip through the brief period allotted by Richard Darcy for the necessities of a young gentlewoman's education, with the minimum of work combined with the maximum of pleasure. It seemed to her then, and afterwards, the wisest possible use to make of a superior brain. Possibly the mental diet offered for her consideration was not altogether suited to Joan's peculiar requirements.

Certainly she came away from school with little more

knowledge than she had taken into it, even with regard to herself. Vague yearnings she was aware of, vague inhibitions and promptings; together with tastes and distastes that were not vague at all. She put the latter down on a bit of paper, in an effort to come to a clearer understanding of the girl who was Joan Darcy.

She liked:

1. Books. On any subject whatever, provided they did not try to teach anything and came up to her rather exacting standards of style.

2. Dancing—if people kept in step with the music and did not hold her too close.

3. Out-of-doors, especially when the wind was blowing.

4. Music, if there was no one around to discuss it or analyse it.

5. Children, without their families.

6. Almost any sort of a dog, particularly if it did not seem to belong to anybody. Strays regarded her as their own.

She disliked (and here there were no qualifications. It was never hard for Joan to say what she disliked!):

1. Debt.

2. Effusiveness.

3. Humility.

4. Vulgarity—under which heading she included everything her step-mother did, or said, or thought, or wore, or was. Yet she did not quite dislike her step-mother.

This exhaustive survey left her with the impression of a hypercritical, overconfident, extremely unpleasant young ego, which intended to get as much out of life as possible with as little given in return, and which so far had got about what it deserved. She was glad that no one of her acquaintance was clever enough to see her quite as clearly as she saw herself.

Except, of course, Mr. Nikolai: and he did not count.

There was something odd about Stefan Nikolai's attitude

toward his fellow-men. He seemed to regard humanity as if it were a vast picture puzzle which it was his privilege to take apart and put together again for his amusement. He asked nothing of any piece of the puzzle except that it fit eventually into the spot where it belonged. Joan had a comfortable feeling that he would presently find her spot for her in case she failed to find it for herself. But she preferred to find it for herself, if possible.

His letter in response to the one in which she informed him of her impending engagement to Eduard Desmond had confirmed her faith in his uncanny insight. She did not realize how vividly her untrammelled descriptions made people and conditions about her known to a student of human kind. If she always saw things more clearly herself after she had set them down in black and white, the clarity doubtless extended to other vision.

He wrote from Russia, where he had been living for a while among the mouzhiks in order to understand how mouzhiks live. His curiosity about such things was insatiable.

"I also have a wish to see how Tsars live, since it is an order that is passing," he added casually. "But I fear for one of my race that will be difficult. Mouzhiks have less reason to fear us Jews than have Tsars."

Then he went off at one of his usual tangents, and described to Joan briefly the theory of vaccination. "It is a question of phagocytes, you understand. Metchnikoff's idea is that when a disease manifests itself a certain number of phagocytes detach themselves from the blood to fight it. The stronger the virus injected of that disease, the greater the number of phagocytes formed; and it is the presence of these detached phagocytes after the virus has run its course that render the patient immune from further attack."

("What," wondered bewildered Joan, "is the man talking about? It sounds like a medical almanac!")

But as there was usually some method in Mr. Nikolai's tangents, she read on. At the end of the last page he enlightened her, and disposed of the affair with Eduard Desmond in two sentences.

"By this time you will be recuperating from your first love-attack. Severe, doubtless, but so much the better. More phagocytes!"

It was his only reference to her revelations with regard to Eduard Desmond. Evidently to the scientific mind love in its various manifestations was merely a form of mal-ease to which humanity is subject.

Joan sincerely hoped that enough of the phagocytes had been released by the inoculation to render her immune from further attack forever.



## CHAPTER XXIV

**S**Ocial life, in a small American city that prides itself upon traditions of social life, may be as absorbing, if not as profitable, as that in any of the world's great capitals—perhaps more absorbing. For while it is possible in Paris, Rome, London, New York, to disappear at will out of the current and no questions asked, such a procedure would be as impracticable in one of the self-sufficient societies of our South or East as for a diving duck to remain ad libitum in the bottom of the duck-pond. He may remain, to be sure, even until he drowns; but his corpse need not expect a welcome when it returns to the surface, nor will there be any attempts to resuscitate him. It behooves a socially-inclined duck to hug the company of his fellows.

Joan was caught up presently into a whirl of little events which effectually precluded introspection and even thought. Dance followed dance; there were teas, luncheons, dinners—above all Bridge, which was just beginning to oust euchre from a society that must have its gambling, even if the stakes be merely cut-glass fern dishes. The time was not yet, in the South at least, when gentlewomen appeared at card parties purse in hand; but certain hostesses, notably our Effie May, soon learned to offer prizes that made attention to the game worth while. Mrs. Darcy's Bridges were invariably successful.

There began to appear, even among the freshest of the débutantes, an expression described by Joan to her friend Nikolai as the Bridge Face—an eager, grim look of do-or-die,

which Joan did not find becoming. (Perhaps this was because she herself never learned to play the game, except with her hands.)

A wave of interest in things equestrian followed the Horse Show for a time, too, and Joan was one of several who rode out two or three days a week with a riding-master on hired horses, feeling very picturesque and Kentuckian. She was determined never to be caught napping again as she had been at Longmeadow.

Effie May also signified her intention of joining the equestriennes, and actually appeared on two occasions in a habit which fitted her as its cover fits a pincushion. But her misery was so apparent, though silent, that Joan presently advised her to give it up.

"I guess I never was intended for a horseback rider," she admitted with a sigh. "No, I 'm not exactly scared, dearie—who 'd be afraid of old trained sheep like them? You ought to have seen the trotters Calloway used to drive! Nothing ever come too fast for Calloway. But somehow it 's different when you 're on top of 'em, with nothing to hold on by. And then those bones in front. It was something fierce!"

She exhibited to the puzzled Joan certain injuries to her person which made her efforts at equestrianism seem nothing short of heroic.

"But why not go without bones in front, as I do?"

Effie May grinned. "Ever see me without a corset, hon? And you never will! No woman of my weight should ever be seen in public in her natural figger, not even in her coffin. Say, Joan, promise me you won't let the undertaker lay me out without a corset on!"

Joan promised—of which promise more anon.

She herself shortly became the riding-master's best pupil, a fact in which her father took great pride.

"A matter of inheritance, doubtless," he said modestly.

"As you know, Dollykins, I am a believer in the power of inheritance."

And though he declined himself to join in the exercise (possibly not wishing to put too great a strain upon the power of inheritance), his Christmas present to his daughter was a beautiful little gaited saddle-mare, especially selected, trained, and—such was his intimation—bred for her use by a horse-raising cousin in the heart of the Bluegrass.

It was a docile, friendly creature, christened by its donor "Pegasus," in order not to lay too much emphasis on its sex (the Major was rather nice in such matters). And it soon learned to nuzzle Joan for sugar and follow her about the yard like a big dog, looking quite injured and surprised that she did not take it into the house with her. In her delight and gratitude, Joan almost forgot to wonder whether the horse-raising cousin had been paid for Pegasus, and by whom.

The possession of a horse automatically increased her acquaintance with human nature, introducing her to an element of Louisville society hitherto unknown to her except at a distance—the negro. Mrs. Darcy employed, with the exception of a chauffeur and a yard-boy, what she designated as "white help." She, like Ellen Neal, had an inherent distrust of a black skin. But wherever there is a good horse may also be found, drawn by an irresistible affinity, all the male negroes of the vicinity.

Joan, advised and assisted by the chauffeur, the yard-boy, and innumerable colored acquaintances from the alley, soon learned more about horses and horsemanship than could have been taught her in all the riding-schools in the world. Pegasus was brought up literally by hand. The yard-boy proved himself particularly adept, though how he came by so much knowledge of horse-flesh in his eighteen ragged years of cutting grass and whitening front steps and washing windows, was a puzzle to Joan. She asked him once.

"Huccom I knows how to do wif *hawses?*" he repeated, scratching his head. "Laws, Miss Joan, I dunno! Huccom I knows how to chaw *terbacca*, or to w'istle thoo my teef? Reck'n I was jes' natchelly bo'n dat-away."

She wondered what, with the gradual disappearance of the horse, would become of his friend the negro. Perhaps both, like the Indian, were doomed soon to become a legend in the land. . . .

Richard Darcy formed quite a habit of dropping in at the stable himself to give Joan the benefit of his advice and inexperience; and his attitude toward their colored visitors was a source of never-failing interest to her. He treated them with an off-hand casualness quite impossible to his daughter, to whom they were a race apart, to be pitied and dealt with gently. The Major dealt with them anything but gently. He bullied them, swore at them, ordered them around as if they were still goods and chattels, and apparently they loved him for it. One and all they sprang to his least suggestion, from the humblest alley-rat of the neighborhood to the haughtiest chauffeur—and there is nothing haughtier in the world than a colored man in livery. At the same time, they felt quite free to confide in him the most intimate details of their private lives; and they asked without reserve for anything of his that took their fancy. His cigars, his small change, the very clothes on his back, were not sacred from their requisition.

"Please, Major, gimme two-bits?" one of them would suggest tentatively.

"What do you want two-bits for, you infernal beggar?"

"To buy me a drink with, please, suh. My th'ot 's dusty."

"A damn good reason for a damn impudent request," Richard Darcy would grumble, his hand going into his pocket.

Once Joan heard a dressy youth, who was at the moment rubbing a special polish onto Pegasus, remark: "Dat 's a

mighty fine tie you-all 's wearin' dis mawnin', suh. Gimme hit?"

"Well, of all the infernal cheek!" cried the Major.

"Gimme hit when hit 's done worn out, den?"

"D' you think I 've nothing better to do than watch my clothes for signs of wear so that I may present them to *you*, you ugly rascal? I will not!"

But some days later Joan recognized on the negro's neck the tie in question, which appeared to have worn out with unprecedented rapidity.

From signs like this Joan came to the conclusion that there existed between Richard Darcy and the negroes something of the same affinity as between the negro and the horse. They were all part together of a day that has passed. It was another of the records of the old South for which she was constantly looking; and a far finer, truer relation it seemed to her than the mistrust and dislike which independence has latterly fostered between the races. She recalled that her father had never in his life spoken of his family's servants as "our slaves," but always as "our people." To him all negroes were still "our people"; a responsibility and a charge, to be kept in order, bullied perhaps, but protected, too, because of their great need of protection. And to all negroes, if to no one else in the world, Richard Darcy was a great man, one of the masters.

She tried to express something of this idea once to Archie Blair, who was always so eager to follow her mental excursions that she sometimes made the mistake of believing he did follow them. But for once he disagreed with his oracle utterly.

"Niggers are the curse of the South," he announced. "Always have been and always will be."

She attempted to make him explain this peremptory point of view, but Archie was not very good at explaining. He was one of the people who know what they know without knowing

why they know it (blood-brothers to those art-critics who are always aware of what they like when they see it). Such do not shine in debate. He could only shake his head and repeat his conviction that niggers were the curse of the South.

She changed the subject rather impatiently. She would have liked to retort that well-bred people at least do not call them "niggers." But somehow Archibald was not fair game.

She was seeing rather more than she had expected of her protégé. In Louisville there is a certain catholicity in the matter of big entertainments. That portion of the population which possesses the inborn or acquired right to call itself "Society" is not large enough to supply a sufficient number of dancing-men to sustain the true belle's boast that she never dances more than once around a ballroom with the same partner. Indeed, in the matter of belles themselves there is a certain catholicity. Every pretty girl who grows up in the old town with any pretensions to grammar and respectability and polite behavior has one chance in her lifetime to foot it with the best. She may, if she so wishes, enroll herself among the season's débutantes.

If her family can afford a certain amount of entertaining to support this pretention, well and good. If not, she must manage as best she can with the friendly aid of the society column—no small power in the land. Let the would-be débutante but supply herself with presentable dancing frocks and slippers, and Louisville will do the rest.—For one season. During that brief time, however, she must make good her footing by means of matrimony or otherwise, or back to the chimney-corner for her, like Cinderella when the cock crew. The town is full of disappointed little Cinderellas, comforting themselves with good works or a humble domesticity, dreaming who knows what dreams of the Might-Have-Been.

They do not all return to the chimney-corner, however. Sometimes they stay. Sometimes they fare forth joyously

into a larger world, and their names lend luster to greater events than are chronicled in our society column. One, at least, trails gracefully through ducal halls, and the strawberry leaves are almost as becoming to her pretty hair as the rose she wore to her first Galt House ball.—Perhaps Louisville, with a reputation to sustain, is wise to give her unknown Cinderellas the benefit of the doubt.

The male Cinderellas, if they are not welcomed with quite the same interest, are at least not as soon thrust back into the limbo of things forgotten. Once their names appear in the list of presentable dancers, they may arrive year after year at the larger balls, eat, drink and make merry, select such partners as please them, and retire into their lairs again until the next entertainment, with no further obligation on their part than perhaps a perfunctory handshaking with their host and hostess. Not even that, if modesty forbids. Nor need anything bar the gates to them except age, conspicuous behavior, or the lack of a long-tailed coat.

Archibald Blair presently got used to the surprise of receiving frequently in his mail engraved invitations from people who did not know him, and began to look upon them as a special dispensation on the part of Providence to favor his pursuit of Miss Joan Darcy.—If anything so entirely self-effacing could be called a pursuit! His wish was merely to see her whenever possible, to listen to her whenever possible, and if absolutely necessary to talk to her till somebody more worthy came to take his place. And having made, a week apart, his two party-calls as suggested by her inexplicable but obliging step-mother, he would have been at a loss as to how to manage further encounters if it had not been for the assistance of these providential invitations.

Archie also, being quick to take a hint, made prompt party-calls on the providers of the invitations, a fact which set him apart among dancing men; so that presently he began to see

Joan not only at large balls but at smaller buffet suppers and the like, even at theater parties, when a hostess's need was desperate. All of which surprised Joan far more than it surprised him. He accepted the whole thing as a miracle, part of the incredible good luck which had begun to happen to him when he landed his first big order in Philadelphia, and got on to the train for home to find the One and Only sitting in the chair behind him.

"Whoops, my dear! I've got 'em locoed," said grateful Archie to himself; referring presumably to the Fates.



## CHAPTER XXV

**H**IS luck did not confine itself to social matters. One day the president of the firm, a Mr. Moore, greatly admired in the office because of his hauteur with employees, sent for Archie for no apparent reason except to chat about life in general and business in particular. Now business was a thing which Archibald enjoyed as some men enjoy golf. Getting about among all sorts of people, making them like you whether they wanted to or not, persuading them that the varnish or glue or wax or what-not you happened to be selling was just a little better than any other on the market (which Archie certainly believed it was), overcoming the natural reluctance of human nature to try anything with which it is not familiar, and finally retiring with a fat little order in his vest-pocket—all this was as exciting to young Blair as the hazard of the highway may have been to earlier Knights of the Road. With the additional advantage of being honest. Archie always preferred, when it was possible, to be honest. So that he had a good deal to say to Mr. Moore.

He liked the president, too—a stiffish old boy whom lately he had met around quite often at the Horse Show and such places and who seemed to eye his employee on such occasions with an oddly proprietary interest. If Archie had ever chanced to read of Benjamin Franklin's discovery that the way to propitiate the enemy is to ask a favor of him, he might have understood this personal interest on Mr. Moore's part. But he had quite forgotten that he had once committed the solecism of asking that gentleman what to wear to the Horse Show.

Mr. Moore presently mentioned in the course of conversation that Smith, the sales manager of the varnish department, was about to leave the firm.

"Gee! What for?" said Archie sympathetically. "Is he sick?" It did not occur to him that any one who had attained so exalted a position would willingly leave it except for mortal reasons.

"He goes over to the Lidden people, who've offered him more money."

"Why, but— He's been with us since he was a boy!"

This comment pleased Mr. Moore. "Loyalty's as rare in business as elsewhere, Blair. I'm not sorry to let him go. He has n't done what I hoped he would do to put that new polish of ours on the market. Rather fallen down there."

"It's a peach, too! One drop and your table-top shines like a reflector in the sun," murmured Archie perfunctorily, from sheer force of habit. A premonition had struck him of what was coming next.

It came. "How would you like to take charge of that end yourself?"

For a moment Archie was speechless. He, as sales manager!—He, one of the youngest men in the firm, put over the head of the good old boys who had taught him the business!—Very red as to the ears, he stammered something about lack of experience.

"You've had a good deal of experience, Blair," said Mr. Moore. "You were a salesman, and a successful one, at the age of—eight, was n't it? Or six? And then you've a sort of a knack of getting on with people. That's as useful in handling men as in handling sales. In fact, Smith says you're one of the best we've got. Should n't be surprised if he tried to take you over to Lidden's with him."

"He need n't!" cried Archie hotly.

"Then you'll take the job?"

Archie's grin began to grow until it communicated itself to the president, to the interested stenographer, to the very clock on the wall behind him.

"Like a mice!" he murmured cryptically at last; but Mr. Moore appeared to understand him. . . .

It was perhaps fortunate that Ellen Neal was at home when he came bounding up the stairs that evening, or he might have burst with his tidings. As it was she thought he had been drinking, and began to prepare surreptitiously a good strong cup of black coffee. (She had had some experience with antidotes, had Ellen.)

"A salary *and* commissions—do you get me, wench?" he repeated for the third time. "I 'm to run the whole shebang, advertisements and all, and put what boys I like on the road with it, while I sit back in me office like a young Pierpont Morgan directing operations! La-la-laihoo!" he yodled, suddenly seizing Ellen about the waist and one-stepping her across the room, to the imminent peril of the chandelier below.

"Mr. Archibald, behave! Me, a respectable spinster woman—" she panted.

"True! 't is pity 't is, 't is true! Away with frivolity now! I must remember the dignity of me office!" he declaimed, releasing her and striking the attitude of Napoleon crossing the Alps.

"It means better wages, don't it?"

"Wages, woman? A salary *and* commissions! Ha!"

"And you 'll be getting too rich and grand for the attic now, I suppose." She sighed. "You 'll be setting up at some swell boarding-house, maybe, or perhaps at that club where all the young society fellows live?" (Since the Darcy début into society, Ellen was almost as conversant with its inner life as were the Misses Darcy.)

Archie's eye glinted. "The club!—why not? I had n't thought of that." But then he grinned, "I can see 'em hail-

ing me—'Yere 's yer paper, sir!—yere 's yer five o'clock edition! All about de mysterious moider on de Island!'—No, I guess it won't do. The little old Y. M. C. A. 's club enough for me. And as for leaving my attic, Mrs. Neal—" he shook his head. "Why, it 's home to me. I reckon I 'll be here till the roof falls in—which it 's likely to do at any moment in a favorable breeze."

"Pooh! You 'll be getting married before long, and you won't marry the sort of wife who 'll want to live in a garret, neither!"

"Why not?"

"A book of verses underneath the roof,  
A cup of coffee and an egg in troof,  
And Mrs. Neal to cook it up for us—  
Ah, attic life were Paradise enoof!"

he warbled; and promptly encored himself amid peals of pleasure. It was his first attempt at composition, and he liked it. (One of the young ladies at the Library had recently introduced him, as may be suspected, to the Rubaiyat. Eduard Desmond was not the only young man who found in the Persian a kindred spirit.)

"Well, of all the crazy galoots!" muttered Ellen, deciding that coffee would do no good here. "You 'll have to go now, Mr. Archie; I 'm expecting company. Land sakes, six o'clock! and me without my biscuits in the pan."

He observed that the table was set for two, quite magnificently, with a celery glass containing five red carnations in its center.

"Floral decorations! A genuine entertainment—and I not asked! Who, who is the lucky fellow?"

"Go on with your impidence. 'Tain't a fellow. It 's—Never you mind who it is! And you need n't think you 're going to be discovered here by accident-like, either!"— She was pushing him toward the door as she spoke.

Light dawned upon Archie. "Mrs. Neal! Not *her*?" He knew that the One and Only sometimes dropped in to take tea with her old servant, a goddess descending to mortals; but he had never been lucky enough to catch her in the act.

"Yes, it is," replied Ellen, who needed no niceties of grammar to realize the identity of Archibald's "her." "So now will you hurry?"

He hurried; but once in the hall he paused in the grip of a daring idea. Success had rather gone to his head.

"Say! *Who's going to see her home?*"

Ellen tossed her head. "Me, of course. You don't suppose I was going to let the child go off through them dark streets all by herself?"

"They *are* dark streets," he said earnestly. "Very dark streets! Murders happen in them, frequently. Pickpockets; rats!— Really, Mrs. Neal, two women alone would hardly be safe in them."

"Perhaps I'd better get me a policeman, then!" She shook her head grimly, torn between affection for her new charge and devotion to her old. "Look here, Mr. Archie, there's no use hangin' around like you been doing lately. Oh, I know! You can't fool me. I was born with eyes all over me, I was, like that critter in the antiquarium at the Fair— You're a real nice young fellow, but a girl like Joan Darcy would n't so much as look at you. She's proud, proud as the queen's cat. And her pa's prouder still. They'd just as lief walk over you to their kerridge (which it's an automobile) as if you was Sir Thingumbob's coat in the history book."

"Fortunate coat," murmured Archie, grasping the allusion. "But who's asking her to look at me, Mrs. Neal? I'd rather she would n't, really! I'd much rather look at her. When you come right down to it, I'm sort of proud myself!— But if I just happened to be at the front door when you start out,"

he wheedled, "you would n't really object to my simply—well, to my merely—"

"Making a fool of yourself? Go as far 's you like!" interrupted Ellen tartly, closing her door in his face.

So it chanced that as Joan stood at the threshold sometime later waiting for Ellen to follow downstairs, making an unconscious picture in her sweeping hat and her soft furs between the graceful pillars of the lintel, Mr. Blair appeared nonchalantly before her. And the effect of the encounter was so great that, intending to lift his hat and toss away his cigarette with a Chesterfieldian carelessness, he instead tossed his hat and lifted his cigarette,—a catastrophe that robbed him for the moment of the powers of speech and motion. He had not expected to follow out Ellen's program quite so literally.

Joan's training stood her in good stead. Her lips twitched but remained in control. The elaborateness of his surprise, together with Ellen's rather guilty countenance, had already informed her that she was the victim of a plot, into which she walked obligingly.

"Well met, Mr. Blair! I wonder whether you have anything very important to do? If not, *would* you be good enough to take me home? Ellen really ought not to go out in the night air with her rheumatism."

"Dee—lighted," murmured Mr. Blair dazedly, in the language of his favorite hero. He recovered his hat, and with it some of his former aplomb. Indeed, as he walked away with his prize, solicitously steering her by one elbow, he was able to wink back over his shoulder at his fellow-conspirator.

It was the first time that he had been really alone with the One and Only. Hitherto their conversation had taken place against a background of other conversations, which were somehow helpful. Even when he had paid his two party calls in rapid succession, there had been others present; and though

the inexplicable step-mother had quite obviously made opportunities for him to cut her out of the herd, so to speak, his nerve at the critical moment had always failed him.

It failed him now. He strolled beside her gloriously, as if on air, but in utter silence. He racked his brain for suitable conversation to offer, and for suitable language to offer it in. Somehow her crisp, cleancut speech (Joan had quite abandoned Southernism) made his own seem hideous, drawling, uncouth.

Again Joan came, more or less, to the rescue.

"Mr. Blair," she suggested gently, "if you don't mind I'd rather not be helped along quite so much. My elbow, you know!— I sha'n't stumble, I think. The sidewalks seem quite smooth."

He withdrew his hand as if it had been stung.

"Pardon *me!*" he gasped. "I did n't mean—"

"I know—some girls like to be assisted," she said rather remorsefully (but after all a protégé must be taught!) "You 'll find most of us, however, rather prefer our independence."

"Votes for Women?" he suggested in all respect.

Joan dimpled, thinking suddenly of Mrs. Rossiter. "Well, something like that. Elbows for women, anyway!" she murmured nonsensically.

Again the conversation languished, being confined on Archie's part entirely to Yea, yea and Nay, nay.

Joan was both amused and bored. It had been for some time quite evident to her that this simple soul was not indifferent to her charms; but there was something so boyish about his devotion, so grateful and unobtrusive, that it did not trouble her in the least. Rather the contrary. It reminded her of "cases" the younger girls at the Convent got up on older girls, who were in turn expected to act toward their satellites as guide, philosopher, and friend. Joan had

always been very nice to her satellites. This one should come to no harm through her. Indeed, she intended that he should come ultimately to much good, for she really liked him. But this first tongue-tied stage of his admiration was a little trying to both, and she was relieved when the Darcy house came into view.

Not until then, with their parting imminent, did he summon up sufficient ease to tell her of his recent stroke of fortune. She received it pleasantly, as a teacher listens to tales of prowess on the part of a pupil.

“Sales-manager!—is n’t that nice, Mr. Blair? I must get my step-mother to try some of that polish of yours. She loves things to glisten. And you ’ll have a lot more money, won’t you? Splendid! So now,” she suggested, as Ellen had suggested, “you ’ll probably be moving somewhere else.”

She had her eye on him, though, for it may be remembered that Joan had a theory of her own as to why this up-and-coming young man continued to live in an attic in the slums.

He shook his head. “I ’ll stay in the old place. Even if I had n’t lived there ever since I can remember, I think I ’d stay anyway.”

“Why?” asked Joan, walking more slowly.

“Well, there ’s something sort of homey about it. I ’ve got a fireplace in my room, you see, and I like the little panes in the windows, and the big sills—they ’re just as good as tables— And that funny old twisty staircase. Sometimes at night when everybody in the house is asleep you can hear the steps creaking, as if people were coming up and down. I like that. And the old tree outside taps on the roof as if it were saying, ‘Here I am, kid. Go on to sleep!’”—He broke off apologetically. . . “You ’ll think me a nut, Miss Darcy, talking like this! But you see everything that ’s ever happened to me happened in that room, and I feel as if—well, as if I were n’t exactly alone in it.”



Joan nodded, her eyes bright with understanding. She had not expected him to share her feeling for the old house, or to be so sensitive to the influence of environment. She walked still slower. It was too bad their talk should come to an end just as it was showing signs of life.

"Were you born there?" she asked craftily.

"Oh, no. No, I don't know just where I was born. On the road, I reckon. You see my mother was an actress—"

But despite her lagging feet they were by this time at the Darcy door, which was promptly opened by an attentive parlor maid.

"I'm so sorry I can't ask you in," said Joan.

"No, indeed!—I didn't expect that," answered humble Archie.

Joan frowned. It may be recalled that humility was one of her dislikes.

"It's just that I happen to have an engagement for the evening," she explained; for in Louisville fashion she portioned out her free nights among certain admirers who are known in the vernacular as "fireside companions"—gentlemen who for reasons of poverty, or thrift, or especial devotion, do not offer the ladies of their choice any other form of entertainment than their company. Only on Sunday afternoons are the youth of a Southern city free to call unheralded and *en masse* on girls with any pretensions to popularity.

Joan explained this custom to Archibald, remarking with an encouraging smile, "So you see if you really want to talk to a girl alone, your only chance is to engage an evening in advance."

"I see," said Archie.

And not until the door had closed behind her did he suddenly smite himself upon the brow, ejaculating, "Dumbhead! Boob! Ivory above the neck, pure, solid ivory!"

For it penetrated to him that out of the kindness of her

his lady had made for him an opening, an opportunity, would certainly never occur again.

“The fact is,” he muttered, turning away from that closed door, “I ’m about as well fitted for society as Balaam’s ass!”

“The opinion in which at the moment Miss Darcy would have highly concurred.”

## CHAPTER XXVI

**R**ELATIONS between them might have ended then and there, for Joan was not in the habit of casting her pearls before swine, and the confidence was rather crushed out of Archibald by a realization of his gross stupidity.

But Effie May was as persistent in her fancies as in other matters.

"Where 's the eary one?" she asked Joan one Sunday afternoon following the usual influx of visitors. "He has n't been around since I don't know when."

"How should I know? Probably towing some lady-typist by her elbow to a church social," replied Joan, yawning.

"You may be sure it 's a *lady* typist, then, and not the other sort," commented her step-mother. "I like that boy!"

"You seem to," murmured Joan, reflecting idly that it was a compliment Mr. Blair did not appear to return; which had been one of the few things in common between them.

But later Effie May had something to say on the subject that interested her more. She said it to her husband in Joan's hearing.

"You remember that young chap we had at the Horse show one night, whom Joan met on the train? Name of Blair?"

"Certainly, my love. An agreeable fellow, though not quite, I should say, to the manner born? However, he had a respect for his elders quite unusual nowadays," said the Major affably, recalling his personal success with the young man. "And a keen sense of humor, as I recall, very keen!"

That, as it happened, was one thing Archibald did not possess. He had in its place a hearty laugh, a passion for "jokes," and a generous appreciation of jesting intentions on the part of others, which doubtless served him quite as well.

"That 's the chap. Well, some of the boys who were here this afternoon were telling me that he 's quite a scrapper. Seems some of the young sports about town have been putting the gloves on with him, down to the Y. M. C. A.—Johnny Carmichael and that lot—and the other night they got up a match between him and a regular pug, just to see how good he was. Seems he stood up to him three rounds, and come out of it with his nose a pulp and his front teeth gone, askin' for more!"

"Heavens!" murmured Joan. "Those infantile front teeth?"

"Oh, I guess they stuck 'em in again," said Effie May, "but I sure would have liked to see that match! The boys were quite enthusiastic."

"Did he win?" asked Joan.

"Win?—against a professional? Lord, child, he was doin' well to stand up to him one round, let alone three! It was Dan McCabe, Dick."

"McCabe? You don't say," repeated the Major, highly interested. "Blair must be pretty good, then!"

In his younger days Richard Darcy had been something of a devotee of the gloves himself, and still kept up an interest in ring affairs. Boxing, he held, was one of the few exercises really becoming a gentleman; and he had sometimes modestly called the attention of this decadent golfing-generation to a figure any boy of them might well envy, as a result of the sport of kings.

Not latterly, however. Of the Major's more recent figure, the less said the better. Even the mild exertions of the one-

step caused him to perspire and puff audibly, and he had requested that the cheval mirror be removed from his dressing-room—a rather serious sign with Richard Darcy. His wife in vain suggested riding, golf, massage. The Major preferred the expedient of doing without his mirror.

She had in mind this growing *embonpoint* when she spoke of Archibald's accomplishment—as well as several other matters, being a woman who thought nothing of killing two and even three birds with one stone.

"Dickie, I been thinking how nice it would be if you were to put on the gloves with young Blair sometimes? I've always wanted to see you box."

"Pooh," he murmured, flattered, however, by the suggestion. "I could n't interest him now. And before all those young whipper-snappers at the gymnasium? I'd be a laughing-stock!"

"Why not get him to come up here? Fix up a sort of gymnasium in the attic?"

"Oh, do!" urged Joan, who had been not a little troubled by the recent change in her father. "It will be just what you need, Dad, and such fun! I'm sure you could 'interest' him still."

The Major's eye kindled a little. He was always responsive to any belief in himself. "You think so, Dollykins? Well, possibly, possibly— But you speak as if Blair were to be had for the asking, my love!"

"Well, I think he is," remarked Effie May with a twinkle at her step-daughter. "Depends upon who does the asking—What do you say, Joan?"

"It would have to be done in words of one syllable," murmured the girl unkindly, "but I'll try."

So that again Archibald had occasion to shake hands with Fate; and found himself regularly every Saturday afternoon at four o'clock beneath the roof of his One and Only, gently

ising her parent, with every likelihood of tea to follow. At that Archibald had any liking for tea. On the first vision of his accepting it, he had asked for four lumps of sugar in his cup, explaining that plenty of sweetness took the worst of the taste away. But he had firmly declined the doctor's sympathetic suggestion to substitute a highball, having his own quaint notions of the proprieties. One of them was that no gentleman drinks liquor in the presence of a lady. It was a genuine shock to him to find that Major Darcy drank so, freely: and what he felt when Mrs. Darcy joined her husband and in the act, he was fortunately able to dissemble. It merely confirmed an earlier impression.

Joan gave up riding on Saturday afternoons to stay at home and umpire the boxing matches. She felt that her father ought to be encouraged. Besides, it rather interested her to see her protégé in a new light. Once stripped to the waist and gloved—(she soon got used to the sight of her father in a pink silk undershirt and Archibald in no shirt at all), the young man lost all his awkwardness and shyness and appeared quite a different person, confident, masterly.

"Look out, Major! I'm after your nose this time," he would smile. "Guard yourself. Here's where I get it!" "Damn'd if you do!" the other would cry, feinting desperately, but without avail. Archie always got it.

At first the girl gasped with alarm whenever his glove came into smart contact with her father's face or body; she soon saw that only the skill of the younger man went down these blows, never his strength. Richard Darcy saw it and was mortified.

"You're playing off on me, damn your young hide!" he would pant. "You wait— I'll show you yet, I'll show you yet."

And when on one proud occasion he did "show him," the extent of bringing an unexpected trickle of blood from

Archie's nose, Joan let out a cheer of triumph—in which victim joined with a will.

"Bully!" he cried. "That was a sockdollager! Dare to do it again, Major! Doubledare you!"

Seeing him so, the play of powerful muscles under as white as a girl's, the joyous grin on his big, plain face, sheer good-nature of him, intent on giving an older what he called a "run for his money," and yet as controllable gentle with him as a great dog playing with a child, began to understand why Johnny Carmichael and his friends were enthusiastic over Archie Blair. He was that rarest finds, a good playfellow.

The companionship of men with men was something suddenly envied. Why could n't women put on gloves and knock some of the pettiness out of each other, the spite and vanities and jealousies? She would very much have enjoyed letting a little blood out of the nose of, Emily Carmichael! In a perfectly friendly spirit, of course. . . .

The boxing matches accomplished several results. They were extremely good for the Major, reducing his waist several inches and so increasing his staying-powers that he could eat his way through dinner from *hors d'œuvre* to *crème de menthe* without losing breath. They were good for Joan, giving her a new perspective on male human nature which since the episode of Eduard Desmond she had been in danger of regarding rather cynically. And if they were altogether good for Archie Blair—well, Archibald was a young man quite accustomed to taking care of himself.

He would have faced greater perils than he did for the privilege of spending a glorious hour under the same roof with Miss Darcy—whom he continued to call "Miss Darcy" even in his secret thoughts, though she had lately for the delightful habit of addressing him as "Archie."

She had also presented him kindly with a small photograph of herself on a post-card, taken for the purpose of showing Stefan Nikolai the furs he had sent her, and incidentally the ringless condition of her left hand. (It was her answer to his letter about the phagocytes.)

Archie did not exhibit this treasure, even to his friend Ellen Neal, regarding it in the nature of a sacred trust. He had made for it a frame with a little door which locked, and which greatly intrigued the good woman for several days; until she found that the back of it came off quite easily.



## CHAPTER XXVII

**I**N their weekly chats over her tea-table (from which the Major early excused himself, possibly under wifely suggestion), Joan got into the way of being quite confidential with Archibald. She told him one day how lonely she was for women's companionship.

"At school I had too many chums, and here I have n't any," she complained. "I really don't know why!"

"Maybe they 're sort of jealous," was his suggestion.

"Why, Archie! You 're getting positively subtle with your compliments," she laughed. "No, it can't be that. I 'm no 'man's woman!'— I 'm done with that forever! They 're welcome to every beau in town for all of me, and I *never* flirt with other people's property. I 'm really the ideal companion nowadays—no family complete without me. . . . Of course I see a lot of girls around at parties, and they 're friendly enough, even make rather a fuss over me. But—that 's all! Somehow we don't seem to be playing the same game."

"Ish ga bibble," murmured Archie, consolingly if cryptically. "What do *you* care, when you 've got 'em all nailed to the mast? But I know just what you mean, Miss Darcy. Used to feel sort of that way myself when I went with Miss Gracie or Miss Ella, or any of them from the office. Before I knew your sort."

"So you think," said Joan, amused, "it 's the sort that 's wrong, not me?"

"Nothing wrong with *you!*" he declared, with a comforting finality.

Being a person with whom sympathy was always active rather than passive, however, he took her case earnestly under consideration; with rather surprising results.

Some days later—it was one of the still February mornings that come to Kentucky as an earnest that spring is on the way, with cardinals fluting from the evergreens and a rusty bluebird or two on the lookout for summer quarters—Joan was called to the telephone to speak to no less a personage than Miss Emily Carmichael.

“I hear you ’ve been riding all winter, Miss Darcy,” she said. “I ’m so sorry not to have known it before, so that we might have gone out together. So much pleasanter than riding with a groom, don’t you think?”

Joan agreed that it would have been.

“Why should n’t we make up for lost time at once—this morning, for instance? Shall I come by for you at eleven o’clock? Very well.”

Joan hung up the telephone, mortified by her own pusillanimous behavior. Here was a golden opportunity to snub the girl who had found her “mixed,” and instead of doing so she had meekly consented to be patronized. But at the word her head went up with something of the Major’s dignity. Miss Carmichael would find it rather difficult to patronize Miss Darcy!

Miss Carmichael, however, seemed to have no intention of trying. She exclaimed with delight over the pretty Peggy, sleek as satin despite her winter coat, and dancing with pleasure to be out once more in equine society. (With the first approach of winter, the class in equestrianism had disbanded).

“Mr. Blair was telling me the other day about your father’s wonderful Christmas present to you,” she said. “It must be pleasant to be able to afford a real saddle-horse! My good old Dobbin has to pull Mother’s station-wagon, too,

you know, which is bad for his gaits. It's *horrid* to have only one horse in the stables!"

"You speak as if you were poverty-stricken," smiled Joan, thinking of the great Carmichael house, with its walled court and double galleries and outbuildings sufficient to house a retinue of servants.

"Oh, we are," sighed the other. "Absolutely! Why, do you know, I've never been to Europe in my life?"

Joan wondered what this girl would think of real poverty, which yearned in terms, not of trips to Europe, but of new shoes and unattainable spring bonnets!— And then she happened to notice, standing at the curb as they passed, a girl of about her age with a shawl over her head, a baby on one arm and a child dragging at the other, gazing listlessly at the fortunate ones who had time to be young.

Joan hastily abandoned comparisons.

"If you've only one horse, what does your groom ride?" she asked, having been rather impressed by the mention of a groom.

"A bicycle," smiled Emily. "Of course he's not a real groom, only our houseboy, Joe. It's terribly mortifying to his pride. 'Miss Em'ly, s'posin' we was to meet some one what knows us?' is his constant plea; so I ride in out-of-the-way roads to spare his feelings. If we do meet acquaintances, he drops far behind and pretends he is n't with me. When old Dob feels his oats, poor Joe has a fearful time keeping up. I hear him panting and gasping behind me, 'Woa thar, woa thar, Dobbin! Gawd sakes, Miss Em'ly, don' you know a bicycle wa'n't never *meant* to gallop!'"

Joan was both astonished and amused. She could not fit the picture into her conception of the Carmichael elegance. "I should n't bother with a groom at all," she murmured.

"Of course you would n't! But you see I've got old-

fashioned parents who can't imagine a young girl being able to go about alone in safety. They suspect a bandit of lurking behind every bush for the purpose of carrying off their precious Emily. So far no bandit has had the courage to attempt it!" she sighed. "Do you know, what I envy you most is your independence?"

"My independence? But that's just what I wish I had!" cried Joan, and presently found herself confiding in this stranger something that she had hitherto kept to herself—her determination to earn her own living.

The other girl listened with sympathy, too well-bred to ask questions, but quick to understand.

"It does n't seem fair," she sighed. "We girls have n't a chance at all. If you were a boy you would have been prepared in some way, of course. In our family, for instance, my brother Johnny, who is n't half as intelligent as I am (and that's not bragging, either), was put most unwillingly through college, and given three extra years at law, and sent around the world—all to prepare him for a career of horse-racing and wild oats generally. He's a dear, you know, but he must have his little wild oats. . . . And what did I get? Two years of an Eastern finishing school, where I learned to dress better than we can afford, to sing and play a little, and to speak French with a fair accent! I was n't even prepared for—the thing that's expected of us," she added, flushing. "I've never cooked a meal nor made a bed in my life, Mother proceeding on the theory that if you learn how to do such things you'll have to do them—No fear! No sensible, practical, poor young man would ever have the courage to ask such a useless thing as me to share his humble lot!"

Joan looked at her curiously. She was a tall, rather statuesque type, as so many Kentucky women are; not beauti-

ful, but with a splendid figure, a gallant poise of the l  
an air of race and elegance that associated oddly with  
idea of cooking and bedmaking.

"You 'll simply have to choose the sort of husband  
has n't a humble lot," Joan suggested.

"Choose?" the other shrugged. "Where am I to  
him? Not in this part of the world, evidently. You  
I've been out several years, my dear. And Mother's  
too well-bred to take me about husband hunting, even if  
were able to afford it— No, no, I shall simply subside g  
fully into old maidhood, as so many of us do nowa  
Have n't you noticed the numbers of old maids about he  
charming, cultivated women who have waited too long f  
possible partner to come and discover them? Filling  
lives with Bridge and charity and committee work! Usef  
suppose, and contented enough, but— It is n't what  
dreams of! Mere *pis aller*. . . . And I don't see how  
ballot's going to help, do you?"

"Except by changing the fashion in female educati  
mused Joan. "Meanwhile we've just got to help ourse  
Pull ourselves up by our own boot-straps."

"And we have n't even got the boot-straps!" laughed  
other, ruefully. . . .

This was not the last of their rides together. The u  
pected understanding of this girl, whose lot in life Joan  
long secretly envied, broke down the artificial barrier  
tween them, and paved the way for a real and lasting fr  
ship. Between them they settled many problems of the  
verse, while Dobbin and Pegasus respectively trotted  
singlefooted about the parks or along a road where the  
swept, swollen with the winter's snows, almost on a level  
them, overlooked by splendid cliffs where the city's rich  
been wise enough to build homes that would do cred  
the chateau country of France.

Sometimes Emily took her into one of these houses for a cup of tea, occasions which filled Effie May with a candid gratification; for hitherto the Carmichael circle had remained impregnable to her siege.

"It certainly was a good idea of yours, getting the child that horse!" she commented to her husband. "There 's something genteel about a riding-horse—more so than a limousine, though I 'm sure I can't see why. Heaven knows it 's cheaper! But even that old plug the Carmichael girl rides has a kind of air about it."

"Horses," replied the Major sententiously, "are the only aristocrats left in the modern world."

Effie May presently suggested to Archie that he purchase himself a horse and try riding, since he was so fond of exercise. But Archie put the tempting idea away from him. What time had he for the diversions of the idle? Business before pleasure! He had recently, and for reasons that were a little vague in his own mind, decided to become rich.

Joan was so preoccupied with her new friendship that she had rather neglected the boxing matches of late, which presently languished. The Major missed the stimulating presence of a young feminine audience. So that Archie spent no more glorious half-hours over a tea-table.

But he did not complain. It was something to know that he had presented his lady with the thing her heart most craved. He could, had he so chosen, have tagged the unconscious Miss Carmichael with a card such as sometimes came to Joan in modest boxes of flowers, bearing the inscription: "From a Friend."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

**M**ISS CARMICHAEL presently invited Joan to a meeting of an organization which she had occasionally referred to as "The Jabberwocks" though it had been christened by a more imposing name; a group of girls and young married women who met fortnightly for the apparent purpose of talking all at once about anything that came into their heads. And as a great deal came into their heads, the bewildered guest decided that its present name was aptly chosen. However, though the talk, disconnected and inconclusive, came out for the most part "at that same door wherein it went," it was to Joan like hearing a native tongue spoken in a foreign land. She listened eagerly. Ideas came up for discussion, books, plays, music, even politics, had a turn; instead of the usual, "Who is asked to So-and-so's dinner?" and "What are you going to wear at such-and-such an affair?" which she had begun to consider the chronic conversation of her sex and age.

Yet the Jabberwocks were by no means bluestockings (a class of persons which Joan held in some dread). They frequently were invited to So-and-so's dinner, and usually managed to appear extremely well-clad at such-and-such an affair; and the passion they evinced for bon-bons and weak tea would alone have protected them from the charge of over-seriousness.

Joan, after politely maintaining silence till she could bear it no more, presently burst into a certain discussion with an apt quotation on the subject from Stefan Nikolai. She was unprepared for the respectful silence that greeted her remark.

"You say," murmured somebody, "that Stefan Nikolai told you that? You know him, then, Miss Darcy?"

"Oh, yes. Very well indeed."

"How perfectly wonderful!" sighed the Jabberwocks.

"You see," explained Emily, "we 've been studying him all winter. Oh, if we 'd only known about you earlier!"

Joan laughed. It had not occurred to her that her friend was a person people met in solemn conclave to "study." (Why it should be that personal acquaintance with a celebrity invariably dims his luster to the affectionate eye is a puzzle which may be left to the psychologists.)

"Do tell us what he looks like!" demanded the Jabberwocks in unison. "Is he handsome?" (From which it may be gathered that the club did not devote itself to things intellectual, exclusively.)

"Why, yes—yes, I suppose he is," said Joan, pausing to reflect. "He 's distinguished-looking, quite foreign, you know; with very expressive eyes and a fine, sensitive sort of face. He 's not like our men exactly—and yet he does n't look Jewish. You know his mother was a Christian. But his father was born in the Ghetto, somewhere in Russia, and Stefan actually worked in a sweat-shop when he first came to this country.—He was the son of a rabbi, though."

"They always are," murmured Emily *en passant*. "Rabbis always seem to have such large families. Rabbis and rabbits—did you ever notice?"

The Jabberwocks sprung upon her tooth and nail. "Don't be coarse!" "Yes, Em, it 's really too bad of you!—you 're always spoiling things with your sarcasm." "Do go on, Miss Darcy!— It 's so romantic."

One little placid-faced girl, stitching on a baby-dress, said quietly, "We ought to be nicer to Jews than we are, I think, girls. They 're really wonderful!—so clever, you know."

"Yes," agreed Joan, "they are rather wonderful. There



seems to be an intellectual force about them, a curious inner fire, that nothing can dampen, not even sweat-shops— I sometimes wish I were a Jew myself."

They stared at her in utter astonishment. "Wish you were a Jew? Why, Miss Darcy! Have n't you any prejudice against them at all?"

"Prejudice—against a race of several billion people!" Joan was astonished in her turn. A singularly tolerant mother, and later, life in a little conventual world which had its own standards and viewpoints, had sheltered her from much of the contagion of current opinion. "That *would* be a large order!" she smiled. "No, I can't seem to do my prejudicing in wholesale lots. But of course I have seen Jews one could cheerfully do without—the oily sort. And Christians too—have n't you?" She dismissed the subject with a shrug. "Since you're so interested in Stefan Nikolai, I wonder if you'd like to hear a letter from him. There's one in my muff that the postman brought just as I started."

The Jabberwocks were enchanted.

"You won't mind if it's quite personal? They sometimes are."

"So much the better!" . . .

It seemed to be distinctly personal, as Joan realized after she had got well into it. Mr. Nikolai wrote to thank her for the little picture of the furs and the ringless hand.

The fox who rendered up his life to furnish forth a tippet would cry, "O death, where is thy sting?" if he could see himself now!—By the way, what color have your eyes become? Do they still match my aquamarine, or must it be gray sapphires the next time?

("Dear me," murmured Joan, "perhaps I'd better skip!")

"Not a word!" breathed the Jabberwocks, sitting forward.)

She read manfully on, wondering what had come over her friend to make him so particularly—well, personal was the

word. The ringless hand seemed especially to take his fancy. He referred to it several times, and Joan could not well explain these references to her audience. She left them to draw their own conclusions; which they did, with some exchanging of glances.

There was an audible breath after she had finished. Emily Carmichael voiced the Jabberwocks when she asked casually, "Did you say he was young, Joan?"

"Oh, dear, no! Quite old. Forty or fifty, or thereabouts. An uncle-ish sort of person."

"Goodness," murmured somebody. "Fancy having an uncle like that!" . . . .

Joan was asked to meetings of the club again. In fact, she was shortly invited to become a Jabberwock herself, having, without quite realizing why, been promoted from the rank of mere *débutante* to that of Interesting Person. In this way she came into contact with a phase of Louisville society strange to her father, strange even to the Misses Darcy, expert as they were in the ways of the best people. She learned that lately many little groups such as this club had come into existence, formed of women who had grown tired of more superficial forms of amusement, and had come together in the vague pursuit of something better.

"Do you know, I think we're rather in a transition state nowadays," explained Emily Carmichael. "It's as if we were waiting for something real to happen, marking time. The town's growing up, just as people grow up, and getting tired of childish games— Of course there's always been plenty of intellectual life here, as there is in most old Southern places where people have had leisure for books. We've even produced our share of literature."

(Joan nodded, recalling her poet at the Country Club, and remembering several names which are usually associated less with Louisville than with the world of letters.)

"But heretofore the intellectual people have been privileged characters, set apart and labeled, and expected to be a little odd about their clothes and hair—you know! It's only lately that we ordinary folk have concerned ourselves with—well, culture, I suppose it is, though one hates the word! And there is something almost pathetic in the way we herd together to pursue it, as if to give each other countenance!"

"Not half as pathetic as trying to pursue it alone," said Joan, who knew.

"Anyway, it's distinctly smart nowadays to read and have opinions and know something, even in our most frivolous circles—thank heaven!"

"'Business of being a high-brow,' as Archie Blair would say," smiled Joan.

"Oh, Archie Blair! Is n't he absurd?"

Joan suddenly found herself on the defensive. It was all well enough for her to laugh at her protégé, but she did not intend to extend the privilege to others.

"I like him very much," she said, with decision. "He's honest and nice. I believe I like him better than any man I know."

"So do I," said Emily Carmichael unexpectedly. "But that does n't keep him from being funny!— Do you know, Joan, often as we have him to dinner, and promptly as he pays his party-calls (who taught him that, I wonder?) he has never once set foot in this house just casually, of his own accord! I believe he thinks it would n't be 'respectful' of him. And yet I don't seem to awe him particularly, and it certainly is n't Mother's lorgnon—he positively teases her, and she likes it! The big house and that sort of thing would n't impress him—he's not enough of a snob. And yet he will not come to see me. Queer, is n't it?"

Joan admitted the queerness, though she was conscious of a slight feeling of gratification. She believed she understood,

having once heard Archibald express rather forcibly his opinion of the sort of man who "went with" more than one girl at a time. While he could hardly be said to be "going with" herself, he had made little concealment of the fact that he was entirely at her disposal. She liked him the better for not being at Emily's as well.

"So you 've been having him to dinner?" she murmured. "He never told me that!"

"Oh, no, he would n't. Have n't you noticed that for all his artlessness, he never really does tell much about himself? Or about anything else! That 's one reason he 's so popular with Johnny and all of them, I think. He 's a sort of confidential agent to the crowd. I know that when Father can't find Johnny sometimes" (she blushed, and Joan nodded sympathetically) "he always calls up Archie Blair, who presently produces him. Sometimes he does n't bring him home for several days, and telephones that he 's got him at his rooms—recuperating, I suppose. Johnny swears by him, of course. I 've heard of the wonderful Archie for years, but never saw him until that night at your ball. . . . It was splendid of you to have him there, Joan!—one of the things that made me want to know you better."

Joan waived this compliment. One would suppose him Emily's discovery instead of her own!

"How did your brother happen to know him?"

"Oh, boys always know each other—they 're so much more democratic than girls. Horrid little snips we used to be, remember?—turning up our noses at any other children who did n't go to dancing school?"

"I did not go to dancing school myself," remarked Joan quietly. "My mother taught me."

"Then your mother must have been Queen of the Fairies!" said her friend, rather prettily. "Johnny and Archie first met, I believe, upon the field of battle. There used to be a

continuous warfare on in this neighborhood between what were known as the Alley Gang and the Av'noo Kids. We expected Johnny to be brought in any day a mangled corpse—he being the leader of the Av'noo Kids. One day the Alley Gang caught him and his cohorts rather depleted as to numbers, and were naturally engaged in wiping them off the face of the earth, when the paper-boy came up on his wheel. With a whoop he dropped wheel and papers and joined in the fray. The Alley Gang were getting the worst of it when policemen arrived—it seems some windows had been smashed. The other boys scattered, but the rescuer dared not desert his papers and so got caught; and Johnny came panting home to get Father to bail him out of jail. That's the first we heard of Archie Blair."

"Odd that he did n't side with the Alley Gang, was n't it?" commented Joan.

"Why, don't you see?—the Av'noo Kids were getting the worst of it. That's Archie!" . . .

Joan decided to be a little kinder to her protégé the next time she saw him. It is an odd fact that we frequently do not appreciate our possessions until others appear to value them unduly.

## CHAPTER XXIX

**T**HEIR next meeting occurred at the Carmichael house at dinner. Emily, with the approach of the Easter season, had one day announced her intention of giving a dinner in Joan's honor, greatly to the younger girl's pleasure. It meant that she had won not only the friendship of Emily, but that of her mother as well; a rather more difficult feat.

Major Darcy was equally pleased with this compliment, which he characteristically accepted for himself.

"It is very gratifying to have old friends take one's child to their hearts in this fashion—very gratifying! There are no better people in the State than the Carmichaels, my dear. It is true that I have seen less of the Judge than I could have wished since my return—we were school-boys together. But I felt that soon or late there was bound to be some recognition. A fine fellow, and a most able lawyer! Yes, yes. And his wife—charming, charming! Though a trifle stiff for my fancy. A *little* more suavity of manner. She was a Dillingham, you know. Her father represented us at one time at the Court of St. James."

"Oh! Is that why she 's so airy?" commented Effie May. "Well, I don't mind airs if people have got a right to 'em, and nobody needs call on me who don't want to. I 'm real glad you 're getting in with that crowd, Joan. They 're better than most 'old families'—they 're still alive and kicking and right at the top. And you 've done it all by yourself, too! Parties don't seem to do no good with their kind. . . . That 's what comes of being born a lady yourself."

Something both wistful and generous in this speech touched the girl.

"I had forgotten Mrs. Carmichael has not called on you, Effie May," she said quickly. "Of course that makes it impossible for me to accept their invitation. I'll tell Emily."

And neither the Major's hasty reassurances or her step-mother's remonstrances sufficed to alter her decision. She declined Emily's invitation, and told her why.

"You're quite right, and Mother'd be the first person to tell you so," said Emily in instant approval. "I'll see what I can do. You know—" she hesitated—"it is n't that there's any *reason* for her not to call. Of course everybody knows who your father is, and he's perfectly delightful. too! It's just—"

"I understand," said Joan quietly.

Emily put an arm around her. "My dear, I hope you do—This is such a small puddle that the big frogs in it take themselves rather seriously. And it's changing lately. It used to be that in the South money or the lack of it meant almost nothing at all. Now it means a great deal—more, I fancy, than in places where there's more of it. It does n't seem to take even one generation to make a gentleman nowadays—or what passes for a gentleman. And so the old guard feel that they have to be especially wary, to make a decided stand, in order to retain their own identity. They're horribly afraid of being—not exterminated exactly, but—"

"Mixed?" suggested Joan. "I remember you called me 'mixed' the first time you deigned to notice me."

"Not the first time—the second," laughed Emily, blushing. "The first time was on the train, and you had flowers and a box of candy, and I had n't.—The second time you were such a haughty little minx, with your Eastern airs and your lovely clothes, and so utterly unaware of my provincial existence, that I simply *had* to snub you somehow!"

"Well!" gasped Joan. "That is exactly the way I felt about you!"

"And there we were bristling our hackles at each other like two strange puppy dogs, each waiting for the other to wag a tail. Anyway, I wagged first!" cried Emily, kissing her friend. "And I'm not going to lose you now, simply because my family has n't been polite to your family."

"You could n't!" said Joan rather shyly, kissing her in return. . . .

As a result of this understanding, some days later the cards of both Judge and Mrs. Jonathan Carmichael appeared on the Darcy hall table (from which they were not removed until gray with age and exposure); to be followed by an even more unequivocal bit of pasteboard which informed Mrs. and Miss Darcy that Mrs. Carmichael would be at home on a certain afternoon in April from four until six.

Effie May's innocent joy in this trophy, and the frequency with which it figured in subsequent conversations, filled Joan with a combination of embarrassment and satisfaction. She felt that she had at last done something to repay, in part, the obligation she owed to her father's wife. . . .

She was not surprised to find Archibald at Emily's dinner. It was the first time she had seen him under quite such a strong social light, however, and she was a little nervous as to what the evening might bring forth. "The Sign of the Dirty Spoon," did not sound like the most reliable school of table manners.

He sat opposite her, between Emily and a *débutante* of the type that makes conversation an act of supererogation, and she was able without seeming to do so to keep her protégé under a watchful eye.

But to her relief he neither swallowed his spoon nor grasped his fork with undue firmness, and seemed not at all perturbed by the variety of the silver implements beside his



plate. Joan was quite mystified by his prowess; until she happened to notice that Emily also had him under a watchful eye. With each course Emily promptly and ostentatiously selected the proper implement, and Archie, after one glance out of the corner of an eye, followed suit. It was perhaps fortunate that Emily was his leader instead of the more impish Joan, who would have been impelled by sheer force of circumstance to attempt her fish with her coffee spoon.

What surprised her even more than Archibald's table manners was his conversation; a flow, a positive torrent, which poured on in a constant stream, pausing only for the extreme exigencies of mastication, and not always then. In the intervals of her own talk, Joan caught occasional bits of this monologue. During the soup course it apparently concerned itself with the South American armadillo, habits and habitat. During the dessert it still appeared to linger about the armadillo.

Now and then Emily cast a puzzled glance across at Joan, and the *débutante* on his other side had long since been reduced to "Oh, really?" and "I can hardly believe that!" But the armadillo went on and on.

Joan had not suspected him of a concealed passion for natural history. She could hardly wait for dinner to be over to investigate this new development. But she had to call him to her side in so many words before he ventured to join her. His eyes had been upon her most of the evening, removing themselves hastily whenever they caught hers; but he did not wish to intrude. It was quite sufficient for him to be in the same room with her.

She began at once, "Why and whence the armadillo, Archie? You sounded like a University Extension lecture!" "Did I?" he grinned. "Was it all right? There were some things I forgot to tell 'em. About the—"

"Never mind!" said Joan hastily. "What I want to know is how you came by the armadillo, anyway?"

"I 'm taking a correspondence course," he confessed.

"In—in armadillos?"

"No, in conversation," he said seriously. "Subjects of General Discussion Suitable for Social Gatherings. I thought, seeing as I 'm going out in society so much these days, I ought to work up a different line of talk than a fellow needs in business. The sort of things *you* like, you know—not learned, exactly, but sort of high-brow.—Books and all.—They send us out a subject once a week. 'All about the North Pole' it was once. 'The Infant in Portraiture,' another time. Last week it was 'The Armadillo and Its Ways.' Great scheme, ain't it?"

"Stupendous!" murmured Joan. "But, Archie, suppose you meet a fellow-student at some—er, social gathering who happens to be pursuing the same line of cultivation? Might n't that be rather embarrassing?"

"Give me away, you mean? What 's the dif? I would give him away, too, and we 'd have something to talk about! Anyway, to know all about something 's a mighty fine idea, even if you don't get a chance to tell folks."

Joan did not smile. She realized that here, manifesting itself no matter how uncouthly, was the true spirit of research, a thing which she respected above all other impulses of the human brain.

She said softly, "Keep on with your correspondence course by all means!—only, Archie, don't talk about it to other people, will you? They might not understand."

He gave her a quick little grin of comprehension. "Not on your life! It don't pay to wise people up to what a boob you are.—Except you. I guess you know, anyway!"

## CHAPTER XXX

**J**OAN, in yielding to family pressure temporarily, had by no means given up the idea of what she had learned recently to call her economic independence—a subject discussed frequently, if not very fruitfully, by her friends the Jabberwocks, who preached rather more radically than they practiced.

“You see,” as they explained when reproached by Joan with inconsistency, “we believe in that sort of thing, of course! but it is n’t as if we really *needed* it.” (Which was likewise the Jabberwockian attitude toward suffrage.)

Joan, however, not only believed in economic independence, but needed it—as she reminded herself at gradually increasing intervals. She was in danger, and knew it, of going over to Mammon. She had found it far easier than she expected to live along from moment to moment, accepting life as it came, enjoying the surface without questioning the depths. The habit of mere material luxury is an insidious thing that fastens upon one unaware; and Joan had all her father’s taste for the good things of life.

She had begun to form many little extravagant ways, such, for instance, as wearing silk stockings under her heaviest shoes, using a towel only once before casting it aside, having her hair shampooed down town when she was perfectly able to do it herself in her own bathroom. Not very reckless extravagances, perhaps, from the point of view of her new friends; but the sort of thing which the Misses Darcy observed with something like awe.

*“I often think that if dear papa had been able to allow us*

to be less careful—"; sighed Miss Virginia. "But of course in our day a silk stocking was a silk stocking."

"Indeed it was! Do you remember the lovely pair Aunt Sara Miggs brought from abroad when she made the grand tour? White they were, Joan; and when they began to get a little yellow with washing, she gave them to me; and when I'd had plenty of use out of them, they were dipped pink for Sister Euphie; and by the time Sister Virgie got them they had become black."

"With age?" asked Joan, rather startled.

"Oh, no, dear. With dye."

"Where are the stockings of yester-year?" murmured the girl. "You can't buy good old family standbys like that nowadays, not at any price. Nothing but these miserable sleazy affairs that run if you look at them—the cowards!"

The Darcy ladies exchanged puzzled glances.

"Cowards—stockings?" repeated Miss Iphigenia. "I'm afraid I don't quite see the connection—"

"There is n't any—don't mind me! And really it's quite a distinction to wear cotton ones nowadays," hurriedly said Joan, who hoped sincerely never to possess a cotton stocking again in all her life. And at the same time planned to earn her own living in any honest fashion available, no matter how lowly! Inconsistency was not a fault with which she had the right to twit her fellow Jabberwocks. . . .

But she never quite forgot her destination in the pleasures of the wayside. She did a good deal of quiet investigating, in a desultory way. Teachers, librarians, bookkeepers, stenographers, all came under the head of skilled labor, as she soon discovered, and required a course of training—which Joan's step-mother would have to provide. It put these professions out of the question.

There were various small establishments in Louisville conducted by acquaintances of hers, those "ladies in reduced cir-

cumstances" of which every Southern town is full; tea-rooms, hat-shops, lingerie-shops, and the like—a state of affairs which gave Major Darcy acute distress.

"Imagine the daughters of my old friend Colonel Dinwiddie selling bibelots to any vulgarian who has the effrontery to purchase them! What can their brothers be thinking of!" he would groan. "Of course you will be careful never to enter the shop, my dears! The poor ladies shall not be embarrassed by having to wait on *my* wife and daughter, at least."

But aside from her father's peculiar but not unique point of view, these ventures required capital; which again put them out of the question.

She heard now and then of certain well-paid positions in connection with social service of various sorts; but these again seemed to require a special training, or a special aptitude, which Joan did not believe herself to possess. The very words "social service" had to her a chilling, impersonal, busybodyish sound, almost as ugly as "philanthropy." She was not of those to whom a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. "Charity" sounded to her Christian, and warm, and friendly; but she dreaded to offer "philanthropy," or "social service" to the unfortunate almost as much as she would have dreaded to receive such things. She decided that her *metier* was not good works.

Clerks in stores, she learned, do not for the most part earn a living wage. They are expected evidently to live at home, or to supplement their salary in some other fashion (just how Joan was not sure, but she entertained uneasy suspicions). By the time they become expert—heads of departments, buyers, chief milliners, etc.—they are of course more than economically independent. But in the meanwhile. . . .

It was the meanwhile that troubled Joan. When she broke with her family, she intended to do so with a magnificent completeness.

Only two alternatives seemed open to her inexperience; the stage and journalism. She weighed them one against the other without being able to come to a decision. Joan was rather fond of making her own decisions, and had all the impatience of her nineteen years with mature advice. But at length she consulted Stefan Nikolai.

"Please write me by return mail," (she commanded), "which you think would offer me the most advantageous career, the stage or journalism."

He obeyed on a post-card marked Christiania (his postmarks were frequently the only indication of his whereabouts):

"I should suggest the usual course in matrimony as a preliminary to any career."

Joan stamped her foot over this banality. It was something she might have expected from a man of her father's generation, but hardly from Stefan Nikolai. Particularly when he knew about Eduard, and must certainly realize that her interest in man as a sex was over!

Useful she still found them as dancing partners, to be sure, as providers of candy and flowers and theaters, even to a certain extent as companions, since one cannot very well sit about after nightfall conversing with women, if only for appearance' sake. One or two she might admit to her friendship, provided they remain sufficiently "in their place," like Archie Blair. But as lovers, husbands! Never again. Fortunately, sufficient phagocytes had been released to take care of that.

Hers was an attitude of mind which if generally entertained would, she realized, mitigate against the welfare of the race; but judging from the people about her, it would never be generally entertained—particularly in Kentucky, and in Springtime.

It is a season when matters of pairing off that may have hung fire throughout the winter are apt to come rapidly to a climax. Each Sunday paper brings forth its batch of Spring

engagements; and Joan herself was under the pleasing necessity of chilling off two of her admirers in quick succession. One was a youth of the fireside-companion type, who recently fancied that there might be room for one more under the hospitable Darcy roof. The other was the blond young man who had been Joan's first partner, and who, having danced her successfully through the season, saw no reason why he should not dance her successfully through life.

They met with small mercy at her hands. "Off with head!" murmured Joan cheerily to herself on each occasion, thinking of a certain evening under a beech-tree by the light of the gibbous moon. . . .

These two unfortunates were not the only ones in her life who were to suffer vicarious atonement for the sins of Edmund Desmond (and obscurely of Richard Darcy as well).

## CHAPTER XXXI

**I**T was in April that Archie Blair conceived the happy idea of purchasing an automobile, thus combining business with pleasure most practically; a modest second-hand affair of three good cylinders and one that missed, but it shone (Archibald being in the paint and varnish business) with a glossiness that advertised its owner afar off. And like the bicycle in the song, it was "built for two."

Archibald had no wish to intrude; still, an automobile is an automobile, and it seemed to him that on a fine Spring evening almost any young lady might like to ride in one, even if accustomed to limousines.

Joan first became aware of this acquisition one fine day when it appeared and reappeared and once again appeared passing the window where she sat reading. Three times, like Hector about the walls of Troy, it circled the block, smelling of its new paint and complaining loudly of its missing cylinder; and at last Joan, puzzled by this persistence, thought to glance at its driver. Clutching the wheel in a death grapple, taking his eye from the traffic only long enough for a hopeful glance at the house front as he passed, she recognized her friend in all the proud modesty of ownership.

Joan promptly put on a small hat and a large veil, and went out to take a walk.

"Miss Darcy! Say, Miss Darcy!" (Honk-honk—or rather Ooo-ooga-ooga!) "Look who 's here! Mine! Bought it myself!—I was just hoping I 'd run across you somewhere."

"I trust you won't," murmured the lady.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" roared Archie, recognizing a jest. "Look



out, or maybe I will yet! Perhaps the safest place is inside," he suggested craftily, and with some truth. Joan accepted the hint.

"Learnt in three lessons!" proclaimed Archie, unable to resist the temptation to brag a little. (An automobile of his own, all paid for, and the One and Only beside him on its seat—who can blame the man!) "Only got it last week, and if there 's a part of little old Lizzie I don't know about, it 's because it is n't there, that 's all! Of course I can't take my eye off the road yet—" (this as a family party narrowly escaped annihilation)—"but you won't mind my talking sort of over my shoulder?"

"I won't mind your talking any way at all—so long as it 's not about armadillos."

Archie grinned. "Now you 're joshing me!"

"I never was more serious in my life. What 's the subject this week?"

But he declined to be drawn. "All that 's just for social gatherings. People don't have really to converse out-of-doors, do they?—Say, what if we go out in the real country somewhere!—not parks, where there's always so many things around, but a good straight empty road, where I can step on her tail and let her rip—eh?"

The idea seemed good to Joan. It was the sort of day when cities are an abomination, and the soul of the veriest urbanite yearns to follow a gipsy pateran.

Once out of the complications of traffic, Archibald lost his caution, and stepped on her tail and let her rip. The song of the birds, the neigh of startled colts in the fields as they passed, the rush of the golden air itself, all were lost in the roar of the willing little engine.

"Thirty-five, thirty-eight, forty-two—" chanted Archie with a proud eye on the speedometer. "Go to it, Lizzie! Good old girl!"

Joan had no fear. Somehow the car seemed safe in his big, powerful hands—as safe as she was herself. Off came her hat, and the wind did its pleasure with her hair. Rushing along so close to the ground, dust in their faces, trees and meadows passing in long green streaks, she got quite a different sense of motion from any she had known before. It was a more personal thing, more of an individual effort, as if she and her companion were really flying like birds, with the little car for wings.

“Oh, don’t stop! It’s glorious!” she cried as he suddenly slowed down.

He explained, quietly, that her hair was blowing in his eyes.

“What a nuisance!” She tucked the offending strand into place.

“I—did n’t mind,” said Archibald, in a rather queer voice.

Joan, with a glance at his face, decided that they would have to be turning back. But as she bade him good-by she said suddenly, “Teach me how to run Lizzie myself some day, will you, Archie?”

“You mean you’ll go out with me again?” he demanded, radiant.

“Of course,” promised Joan, reckless with speed and the Spring air. “Whenever you like!”

Archibald tooled his Lizzie back to her shed with the air of Phœbus driving the chariot of the sun. He warbled aloud, he wore his hat on one ear, he presented a small darky, who helped him to groom and tend Lizzie, with a silver dollar.

But that night as he lay in bed, with an April rain making music on the roof above him, he told himself soberly that he must be careful. There had been moments to-day, especially with her hair blowing across his face, when a fellow almost forgot! . . . He conjured himself by all his gods to be a wise little ostrich and keep his head well tucked into the sand.

And Joan, listening to the same soft rain, so full of sug-

gestion and race memories and the call of the year, also reminded herself that she would have to be careful. She thought of his humble, adoring, happy eyes, and her heart smote her. This one was not quite as other men. To hurt an Archibald was a trifle beneath one's dignity.

## CHAPTER XXXII

**T**HE career of Lizzie (whose surname may perhaps be guessed by the intelligent reader) was short, and her end untimely; but even so she served her part in the inscrutable purposes of Fate.

It came about in this wise.

Archibald had formed quite a habit of calling for his lady, not only on fine afternoons after five, but sometimes in the balmy spring nights after dinner, when all the world meandered two by two, occupying the benches in the little park opposite Joan's house, and filling the roads with a streaming procession of motors and traps and buggies, of anything that went on wheels; even perambulators.

Joan rather enjoyed being part and parcel of this murmuring, meandering community. She liked to feel in touch with the people about her, like any Miss Gracie or Miss Ella with a beau—particularly when it cost no effort. She had but to lend her company, and Archibald would do the rest. He asked no more from her than her presence.

Each time he came for her, Lizzie had acquired some new elegance; dust-covers, a side-mirror, a voice that sounded like a Packard's, at least. Not a car on the road exhibited brighter brasswork than hers. If the chariot was not altogether worthy of the lady, it was through no fault of Archie's. Lizzie, like her owner, strove to please.

Sometimes, if they started in the afternoon, Effie May would insist upon providing one of the little picnic lunches that were her specialty.—“So 's you won't have to come home till you get good and ready,” she explained, twinkling at Archie. ~~U~~

was perhaps a little ungrateful of him not to meet her overtures half way, since it was evident that she suspected his secret and was deliberately aiding and abetting him.

But Archie cared nothing for her aidings and abettings. Hope did not enter into his calculations at all. He entertained no false illusions. All he asked was to be allowed as much as possible of Joan's company, for as long as she was willing to grant it.

His present streak of luck could not last, he knew. Some fellow would come along soon with a larger, finer car, or perhaps with a saddlehorse, or a coach and four—at any rate with something more suitable than he, Archie, had to offer. But meanwhile there was now; and if she was never allowed to suspect the inner state of his feelings, the glorious now might be prolonged indefinitely. Archibald was nothing if not an opportunist.

So he was very careful. And Joan was very careful. No more hair blew into eyes. They remained matter-of-fact and chummy and impersonal, even when they picknicked together under a twilight sky, one on either side of a spread napkin, as if they had set up housekeeping together in the wilderness—a situation which, as people know who are far less wise than Effie May, is usually provocative of results. Nothing occurred, however: until the day that marked the passing of Lizzie.

They were on their way home in the gray of a late evening, Archibald driving, with half an eye on the whiteness of certain hands as they deftly stowed away the remains of tea in the picnic-box. Which may have been the reason that when he came to a railroad crossing, he was less careful than usual.

It was a switching track on which a freight train stood, heavily panting. Lizzie safely negotiated this, and was going on to a second track beyond, when something jerked Archie's eyes around in time to gaze full into the headlight of an ap-

proaching passenger train. He had not enough speed on to cross the track ahead of it. He had too much to stop where he was.

"Gee!" he grunted; and with a powerful wrench of the wheel, turned into the track just ahead of the rushing engine.

Joan meant to scream, but forgot in sheer excitement. Behind sounded a frantic grinding of brakes, a hiss of steam, and the locomotive let out shriek after shriek.

"Oh, I hear you!" muttered Archie. "I'll get out of your way the minute I can, old top! None too soon to suit yours truly."

He stared into his side-mirror. Down the ties pounded will-ing Lizzie at thirty, forty, fifty—with a pop a tire blew out.

"Get that door open," he shouted at Joan, above the hissing steam. "Don't jump till I say the word. Trying to make a flat place. You hear?"

Joan nodded. There were deep gullies on either side. She glanced over her shoulder. The engine seemed almost on top of them— But Archie kept his eye on his mirror.

"Can't make it," he said suddenly. "All ready? Now! Jump!"

To the after mortification of her entire life, Joan could not move. She understood the necessity, her head was quite clear and calm, but her limbs refused her bidding.

The next instant he had seized her, tossed her out like a bundle, she was falling—falling . . .

There came a crash, the splintering of glass and iron.

Long after she was able to, Joan dared not open her eyes. She fought back the coming of consciousness, tried not to think.

She was on a moving something—a wagon perhaps, or a train. There was murmuring of voices near her. She strained her ears. The voices were strange.

She wanted to pray, but could not remember God's name.

She was lying on some sort of lounge—a leather lounge. She lifted her lids very, very slowly. She was in the smoking-compartment of a train—alone! Where was he? She tried wildly to sit up—to call out—

And then something moved beside her on the edge of the couch. It was a head, a bowed, curly head which she recognized and which belonged to a figure that knelt beside her in an attitude of utter despair.

“Oh, Archie, Archie!” she whimpered. “Then you *are n't* killed!”

The head jerked up. The next instant she was in his arms, her face against his. She was being kissed and kissed again—eyes, lips, cheeks, hair—whatever he could reach. She could not stop him. She did not try to stop him. Indeed there was something consoling, comforting in those frantic kisses, all wet with tears, and fiercely tender with the passion of one who has brought his treasure single-handed out of the jaws of death.

“My God! My God! My God!” said Archibald; and nothing else.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

TWO days later he came to see her, with a good deal of court-plaster about his face, and limping on a sprained ankle; and found Joan in bed with a red shoulder, otherwise unhurt. Effie May convoyed him upstairs and left him there, to his intense per-  
son. He stood sheepishly beside the door, hardly daring  
at the pale, laughing face among the pillows—that face  
which he had taken such amazing liberties.

in a *peignoir*, with her hair in a great braid on either  
side, looked more like the little girl he had first seen weep-  
ing on the train, than the composed young lady of ball-  
and horse shows. Yet his awe of her was not lessened.  
On the contrary. Once before, when she lay thus helpless  
in his arms, he had forgotten himself. Suppose his emotions  
formed the habit of running away with him? He  
held his hands hard.

His timidity on his part did much to restore her own shat-  
tered composure. She had been rather dreading this inter-  
view which she had steeled herself. Better to get it over  
with, however, since the thing was inevitable. She  
could not quite ignore what had passed.

"You might come closer," she suggested. "I really don't  
feel strong enough to-day to converse with you through a  
screen."

He seated himself gingerly on the edge of the chair she in-  
dicated, looking everywhere but at Joan.

"Archie!" she cried, suddenly tremulous, "was n't it  
horrible?"

He started. "Terrible" was not the word in his mind.



"Outrageous," perhaps—but by no means terrible! "W-what?" he said.

"Why, the accident! Poor, poor Lizzie! Was there anything left of her at all?"

He found his voice. "Oh, Lizzie! Well, not much except her license tag."

"Her poor precious little license tag! . . . Well, that will be useful anyway, for the new machine."

He shook his head. "I guess there is n't going to be any new machine."

"Oh!" she flushed with quick sympathy. "You mean you—you can't afford another?"

"Why, I guess the railroad company 'd help to buy me another if I wanted it—the engineer did n't signal for that crossing. But—I don't. You see," he murmured, looking down, "there were—well, there were sort of associations with Lizzie."

Joan understood. Her flush deepened. "I suppose you feel about her as I do about Peggy," she said quickly. "My first horse! If anything were to happen to her, I 'd never feel the same about another.— I 'm sorry, Archie! We 've had great fun out of the little car."

He shook his big shoulders as if trying to rid them of some burden. "Oh, what does the machine matter?" he said roughly. "What gets my goat is what you must be thinking of me, what your father must be thinking! Of all the dod-blasted he-idiots! Not to be able to take better care of a woman than that!"

"I think, and so does my father, that you took wonderfully good care of me! If it had n't been for your nerve, your quickness. . . . Ugh!" she shuddered. "Dad says that not one man out of a thousand would have seen what to do in time to do it. In fact, he 's waiting in the library to make you a speech before you go. Eloquence-with-gestures. Do you

know, I never realized before that in some ways man is really woman's superior! You've got yourselves better in hand, your muscles do what you tell them to. It was a good lesson for me." She smiled up at him. His miserable eyes touched her, and she held out her hand. "Why, Archie! what makes you look so ashamed?"

He ignored that friendly hand. "I'm thinking that if your father knew *all* I'd done," he muttered, "he'd do something more to me than make a speech. Eloquence-with-gestures, all right! Gestures of the foot."

Joan decided to take the bull by the horns. "You mean when I came to, and you—kissed me? Why did you do that?" she asked, gravely. ("There! Now the tooth is out," she thought.)

"Because I was a damn fool," he groaned.

Joan's lips twitched despite herself. "Really, you're not very complimentary!"

But Archibald was beyond considerations of mere politeness. "Because I had n't the decent horse-gumption to keep my feelings to myself! Had to go spilling 'em all over the place, insulting you with 'em!"

There was a pause. "You care for me, then?" prompted Joan.

Archie grinned, miserably. "Well, what do you think?"

"I'm afraid you do."

"You're dead right," he said.

Another silence followed this admission, and then he rose to go. "I guess that'll be about all from me!— Only I want you to know, Miss Darcy, I—I never meant to do such a thing—I never knew I had it in me! Good Lord! When I saw you all crumpled up there in that gully, not moving at all, even when the train-gang came to pick you up— When I knew that I had done it, I—! And then you opened your eyes and looked at me. . . . Oh, hell, what's the use?"

He turned blindly toward the door.

She had to catch at his coat-tails to stop him. "Archie! Wait a minute.— I'm going to make you a speech myself. In the first place, Archibald Blair, your sort of 'feelings' would n't insult anybody. They could n't! I'm proud to have you care for me, and I'd be glad, too, if only I could— But it's not as if you were asking anything in return, is it?"

"Me?—*asking?* Good Lord, I'm not such a mutt as that!"

"Some day you will be 'asking,' Archie dear—a worthier girl than I am, I know—and she won't think you a mutt at all!"

He shook his head. "No, Miss Darcy. You've sort of spoiled ordinary girls for me."

She cried honestly, "I hope not! Oh, I do hope not! Because I was going to beg you to stay friends with me—I need friends. And I *can't* keep you if you're going to go on feeling that way!"

"Sure you can," said Archie, his eyes lighting. "Just try me and see! I'll make one of the best little old pals you ever saw, if you'll just forgive the fool way I acted. Now that the steam's sort of blown off, we—we understand each other."

"You're certain that we *do* understand each other?" Her gaze met his squarely. "You're not going to expect things that can't ever be?"

"No, ma'am," said Archie.

Tears suddenly came into her eyes. There was a quality in this faithful, doglike devotion that made her feel ashamed. It deserved response; it deserved something better than mere affectionate gratitude. But that was all she found herself able to give.

With a demonstrativeness rarer than he guessed, she caught his big hand in both of hers and held it for a moment to her cheek. When she let it go there was a tear on the back of it;

which Archie, gazing at wonderingly, suddenly lifted to his lips.

It was in acts like this, little untaught gestures of pure reverence, that the boy belied his slang and his big ears and his general clumsiness, and harked back to the age of chivalry, when a gentleman was not ashamed to dedicate himself to the service of his lady, and be her very perfect knight. . . .

After he had gone, Effie May wandered into Joan's room with a slight air of expectancy about her which the girl was too preoccupied to notice.

"You 're lookin' sort of white about the gills, dearie," she remarked. "Does the shoulder pain you?"

"No. But something else does, and I don't know just what. Oh, Effie May, what's the matter with me, anyway?" she burst out. "Sometimes I think I'm not a human person at all, but just a big inflated Ego, floating around like an observation balloon, taking notes!"

"Well, well, is that so?" murmured her step-mother, who had her doubts as to what an Ego might be. "I expect what you need for that floaty feeling, dearie, is a good dose of calomel—" and she hurried away to prepare it.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

**T**HERE is a certain period of the year when all its widely scattered children home to Kentucky as surely as bluebirds home to the hollow stumps in March. It is the season of the May race meet.

All her life Joan had heard of the Kentucky Derby, and she looked forward to it with almost as much eagerness as her father. Derby Day means more to the Kentuckian than the running event that has become classic. It means the reunion in street and club and hotel-lobby of neighbors from the various towns of a State where neighborliness is cultivated to the point of a fine art; of men who have been boys together; of friends whose ways have drifted far apart (for your Kentuckian is a great wanderer), and who have years to make up over the clinking glasses. During the spring race meet, Louisville ceases to be merely Louisville, and becomes Kentucky, the great old mother-home that leaves its stamp upon its children even into the third and fourth generation.

There is a good deal of sentiment about the Derby, a good deal of tradition; and there is as well a certain spirit of care-free, sporting, joyous *bonhomie* whose like is not to be found perhaps on any other race-course in the world.

Joan, who loved crowds, got much pleasure out of the streets at this time. She took appreciative note of self-conscious belles from up-State, in picture-hats and peek-a-boo blouses, with a predilection for wearing long-stemmed roses pinned to their belts. She noted the young farmers who accompanied them, big-shouldered, square-chinned, clear-eyed, crimson with the sun—a sturdy, virile type, clumsy in their country-

made clothes, but with well-stuffed wallets bulging their hip pockets. There is no poverty in the farming regions of Kentucky.

She learned to recognize the professional racing people, men in loud-checked clothes talking an incomprehensible jargon; shabby touts offering confidential tips to anybody who would listen; women wearing diamonds as large as peas, overdressed, coarse-voiced, not easily distinguishable from their sisters of the underworld, except that their men accompanied them openly.

People of the larger world there were, too. The narrow streets were congested with great touring-cars bearing unfamiliar license tags; New York, Michigan, California. Once, hearing crisp Eastern voices at her elbow, Joan turned just in time to see some people she had met at Longmeadow disappearing into a hotel. For a moment her heart stood still. She thought Eduard Desmond was among them. But it proved to be another man, and Joan mingled hastily in the crowd, relieved that they had not noticed her.

In all this preparatory excitement Major Darcy was, as his wife put it, "busy as a bird dog." There were kinspeople from the Bluegrass to be welcomed, cousins from Paducah, Maysville, Fayette County. Joan, who did not altogether share her father's enthusiasm for the ties of kinship, rather admired her step-mother's skill in side-stepping the Major's abounding sense of hospitality. Effie May had taken the precaution to fill her house with paper-hangers.

"What a shame! You'll have to take your cousins and things to the hotel, Dickie, or put 'em up at the Country Club, won't you? If I'd only thought!—" she murmured innocently; but catching Joan's suspicious eye upon her, she winked.

Joan returned the wink. She remembered her mother's patience under the constant influx of Darcy relatives. She

had also seen the unfortunate Misses Darcy almost turned out of doors by the daily increasing numbers of their kith and kin. The bookcase in their parlor had become, surprisingly, a bed; and Miss Euphemia, the plump, as the one best fitted by nature for this ordeal, was spending her nights on a packing-box sparsely mitigated by pillows.— Not that the Misses Darcy complained, however. They were long inured to the hospitalities of Derby week.

Effie May, indeed, was the only person of Joan's acquaintance who seemed unaffected by the general excitement over the Derby. She heard with apparent indifference that the Major had been able to secure a box directly opposite the judges' stand, and she declined to rise early enough to accompany him and Joan to Sunday morning breakfast at the Jockey Club, where enthusiasts met regularly to inspect and pass critical judgment on the offerings of the past week.

"Lord, child!" she said once in answer to Joan's surprise at this indifference. "Horses ain't no treat to me. You see, they used to be my bread and butter."

It was one of her few references to a past that rather intrigued her step-daughter.

"Were both of your husbands turfmen?" asked the girl, curiously.

Effie May gave a brief nod; and Joan did not somehow feel encouraged to further questioning.

Derby Day dawned bright and sunny.

"A fast track, Dollykins," cried the Major in great glee. "We ought to break a record to-day!"

"That means the Long colt," said Joan learnedly. "The Camden entry's apt to prove a mud-hen."

She had in the past week made an exhaustive research into the race-horse question. Breeding and pedigree, record and past performance, rolled trippingly from her tongue. Joan was what the theatrical profession call "quick study."

The Darceys had been invited to go out to the tracks in the approved fashion, on top of a tallyho coach, tooled by Johnny Carmichael—who was not quite as sober as might have been wished. But his four-in-hand seemed aware of the fact, and took no ungenerous advantage of him.

Effie May had awakened that morning with a bad headache, and proclaimed her intention of staying at home.

“What! Not see the Derby run?” cried her husband incredulously.

And when with a great shouting and tooting of horns the tallyho drew up under the porte-cochère, her determination weakened.

“Oh, do come on, Mrs. Darcy! The air will do you good, and we shan’t have half as much fun without you!” cried several voices, for she was very popular with young people.

She hesitated. Joan decided the matter.

“Put on a heavy veil to shield your eyes from the glare,” she suggested; and Effie May yielded. It was not often that her step-daughter asked for her society.

They became part of a procession that had been filing steadily past the Darcy house since sunrise. Every vehicle in town and the surrounding country, horse-power or motor-power, was on its way to the races. Street-cars passed in a solid line, with passengers hanging to the straps, bulging out of the windows, crowding on to the roofs. There was a steady throng of foot-passengers, all heading in the same direction, which hailed the tallyho as it passed with shouts of greeting and good luck. The tallyho responded with tooting horns and waving parasols.

It was a friendly, intimate, highly democratic gathering such as may be found only south of Mason and Dixon’s line; never pushing or jostling, but good-naturedly determined to enjoy itself. At the gate humanity was packed in a dense, immovable mass as far as the eye could see, and Joan,



descending from her elevation, looked at the crowd in mild alarm. But the cry arose, "Make way for the ladies!" and instantly a lane appeared as if by magic, through which she and her companions made royal progress, laughing at the personalities which greeted them as they passed.

"Nobody ever minds what happens on Derby Day!" explained Emily Carmichael.

Once in the box, the men of the party deserted in a body for the betting ring, and Effie May promptly hailed a messenger. Her interest in racing seemed to have revived.

"Let 's see your tips, girls—anything good?"

She looked over their various lists in a businesslike way, approving this, discarding that, displaying a knowledge that put Joan's recent learned discussions to shame.

"Will-o'-the-Wisp, Satyr out of Firefly. Umm! Ought! to be worth taking a shot at. Who's up—Casey? No. Won't do! They'll can that crooked little jock yet—" etc. etc., while her companions eyed her with respect, and the messenger consulted with her laconically as with an equal.

"You want to play 'em straight across the board, dearie;" she admonished Joan. "That's the only way to win. No piking!"

But Joan declined to play them straight across the board, or in any way at all. For one thing she had brought no purse. For another she was far too busy with the people about her.

Faces rose behind her in a packed mass to the top of the grandstand—women's faces for the most part; school-girls, nice old ladies, mothers of families (who occasionally fed their families under the casual shelter of a shawl), gum-chewing shop-girls, houris of every variety, respectable and otherwise, all chatting together with the utmost simplicity under the spell of a common interest. In the boxes, and on the clubhouse porch, were girls and women most of whom she knew,

dressed as if for a garden party. Chiffons fluttered in the breeze, plumes waved, there were bared throats, and lace-covered arms, and dainty white slippers. Here and there appeared the more conventional tailored dress, looking almost conspicuous in its severity. For on Derby Day, Louisville harks back to a custom as old as itself, and frankly looks its loveliest.

Just behind Joan in the front row of the grandstand sat a respectable, gray-headed little old woman with a bonnet tied under her chin, quite alone, who looked as staid and out of place as Ellen Neal would have done in these surroundings. But she had a professional-looking pair of fieldglasses at her eyes, and Joan noticed that her lips were constantly moving and muttering. The girl turned her back on the Derby to watch this odd figure.

At first she thought the old creature was praying; but the syllables that reached her ears were not prayer.

"Come on, you Will-o'-the-Wisp! Hop it, baby! 'Ata-boy! Step, darlin', step lively! Oh, you Will-o'-the-Wisp!"

Joan saw that she was not merely watching the great race, she was riding it, with whip, and knee, and voice. And at a certain moment the girl saw that she had lost it. There was a shrug, a little despairing gesture of the glasses, and the muttering ceased.

An explanation suddenly occurred to Joan. She nudged Effie May. "Look at this funny old soul behind us! She's evidently the mother of the jockey that's riding Will-o'-the-Wisp," she whispered.

Effie May glanced briefly over her shoulder, and smiled. "Mother nothing! That's Texas Nell, who's been following the ponies since the day of Molly McCarthy. She's lost and won more money, I guess, than any woman in the business."

A little later she suggested that they all adjourn to the Club House for refreshments; but Archie Blair had come with

the promise of taking Joan down to the paddock later, and she decided to stay where she was.

Archie, who seemed to know everybody, pointed out various celebrities who were present; fine old General Dutton, down from Lexington with his flock of famous though still unmarried daughters; Nick Sanders of the Pisgah neighborhood, who had just escaped conviction for manslaughter because of the unwritten law; Mrs. Kildare of Storm, a splendid-looking woman in mannish hat and driving coat, here to see one of her colts go to the post in the Derby—though of late years Storm was raising mules instead of race-horses.

"A shame, too, when it's one of the oldest stud-farms in the State," commented Archie. "Racing's on its last legs when people like the Kildares turn to breeding mules!"

But racing did not appear to be on its last legs that day. The eagerness, the wild enthusiasm, above all the joyousness of the crowd, struck an answering chord in Joan. For the first time she really understood the devotion of Kentuckians to their State and to each other. It is never their work that endears a people to each other; it is their play. In a world that takes itself overseriously, Kentucky still knows how to play.

She followed Archie presently down toward the paddock where the winner was to receive his ovation; but as they reached the foot of the staircase, suddenly there was the sharp explosion of a pistol. Instantly the crowd surged in the direction of the shot.

Archie, placing her behind him, forged his way through the struggling mass to the nearest wall, where he stood her, breathless and disheveled, but undismayed.

"Goodness! This is local color with a vengeance! What's happening? Do you suppose it's your man-eating friend from Pisgah?"

“Just an old woman shot herself, they say,” volunteered a friendly voice near by. “Cleaned out, I reckon!”

One of the intuitions to which Joan was liable came to her. Glancing up at the grandstand, she saw the seat just behind hers was empty.

“Oh, Archie! It’s *my* little old woman!” she cried pitifully. “Go and see, will you?—a shabby old thing with a bonnet tied under her chin.”

He hesitated. “I don’t like to leave you here alone. Suppose somebody should speak to you?”

“Then I shall most certainly speak back!” she said, and he reluctantly obeyed her wish. Indeed, with Archie, her wishes were apt to assume the form of commands.

The gaiety of the scene was gone for Joan. She had got her glimpse of the grim reality that lies beneath. She was to have another glimpse of it.

As she stood there, buffeted by the passing throng, she caught sight across the wide passageway of her step-mother, in conversation with somebody who for a moment she did not see. Joan started across to join her. Effie May’s back was toward her, and not until Joan was within hearing distance did she notice the man to whom her step-mother was speaking. Then she stopped where she was, startled.

He was a dissipated-looking creature, hardly better in appearance than a racehorse tout, flashily dressed, wearing a large diamond in his tie—altogether one of the least desirable types of those who follow the races. But he was not only talking with evident familiarity to Mrs. Darcy, he had taken hold of her arm. It came to Joan in a flash that the man was doubtless some relative, possibly her brother. What did they know of Effie May’s family?

Joan stood still and frankly listened.

“No, no, you don’t put that over on me, old girl,” this

person was saying in a low but carrying voice. "You 're not going to slip away on me again *that* easy!"

Her step-mother's rejoinder did not reach Joan's ears, but she saw her glance round uneasily. Joan did not blame her for not wishing to be seen with her present companion. She quietly slipped behind the shelter of a pillar.

"Married, eh?" repeated the man's voice. "Come, that 's a good one! I 'm from Missouri, I am. You 'll be sayin' Calloway married you next. Oho! he did, eh? A bigger fool than I took him for! If that 's the case—" his voice sharpened—"you must a' come in for a pretty good thing when he croaked. You 'll have to come across, old sport. No going back on a pal!"

The color suddenly went out of Joan's cheeks. She leaned against her pillar, feeling rather queer. She wished she were not there—and yet she listened.

Effie May's voice reached her, speaking quite steadily, "Not one cent, Joe! You 're no pal of mine. When I left you it was for good and all, and you know why!"

"Humm! Well, we 'll see what your new husband thinks about it, eh?"

"No, you don't!" It was a sort of gasp; but instantly the voice steadied again. "You 'll never lay eyes on my husband, Joe. He does n 't live here. I—I just happened to come over for the races."

The man grinned. "That 's easy enough! I seen you drivin' in with your swell friends, and sittin' in a box and all. Recognized you right away, too, for all that thick veil. You ain't the sort a man forgets easy, Ef," he leered. "Not when he 's knowed you like I have! I 'll get your name before you leave this stand, and then— Better come across, kiddo!"

"I—let me go now, Joe! I 'll think it over."

The man chuckled. "Afraid somebody 'll see you talking to

me, eh? You can bet your sweet life you 'll think it over, and damn quick, too! See?"

His grip tightened on her arm. Effie May glanced this way and that, nervously. Joan stepped out from behind her pillar. After all, the woman was her father's wife! She must be protected. . . .

Just then she saw Archie coming, and hurried to him.

"It was an old lady with a bonnet tied under her chin," he told her soberly. "She 's dead."

But Joan had no ears for the earlier tragedy.

"There 's a man frightening Mrs. Darcy," she said breathlessly. "He seems to be somebody she knows. He 's—threatening her! Oh, Archie, what shall we do?"

The meaning of it, the incredible sordid horror of the thing she had half learned, began to come home to her. Her father's wife!

"Threatening?" Archie's jaw set. "Here, that won't do!"

He strode forward, Joan following. They both heard the man say with leering distinctness, "It ought to be worth a *little* cash to a loving husband to learn the sort of woman he 's married up with, Ef, old girl!"

Then Archie's hand fell on his shoulder.

Joan never forgot the face her step-mother turned upon them— She made a desperate attempt to rally.

"Why—why, dearie! is that you? A—an old friend of mine 's been giving me a tip."

"Get out," said Archie to the man. "Get out, quick!"

"Hold on there, kid— So, you been robbing the cradle this time, Ef?" He grinned at her evilly. "Wait a minute, mister, there 's a few things I might be able to tell you about this party—"

"Nothing I don't know already," muttered Archie, his grip tightening. "You 've got five minutes to get off the

grounds before I tell the police. Blackmail 's a penitentiary offense in this State."

The man hesitated, looked at Archie's grim jaw, and went. . . .

Joan and her step-mother gazed at each other. The woman's face had a curious gray look under its perennial bloom, and she moistened her lips with a dry tongue.

"You—you heard?" she said at last.

Joan nodded. She could not speak.

It was Archie who remarked quietly: "You 'll want to be going home, I guess. I 'll get a taxicab."

Then sheer pity overcame the horror in the girl's mind. "Yes, Mother. Come home with me!" she murmured.

For the first and last time in her life she had called her father's wife "Mother."

## CHAPTER XXXV

**I** GUESS you 've got to have the whole story now, though it ain't a very pretty story to tell a girl," said Effie May wearily. "I don't know as your papa would much want you to hear it, Joan." . . .

To the girl the whole episode seemed unreal, part of that strange day, with the holiday crowds, the brief, hectic excitement of the races, followed by the pistol-shot that meant the death of a ruined old woman. She could not believe that she, Joan Darcy, convent-bred, the daughter of reserved and fastidious people, could be actually participating in this impossible melodrama.

"What my father would wish hardly matters now, I think," she said, more frigidly than she realized. "Please say what you have to say."

All the way home her step-mother had wept, steadily and hopelessly, with ugly snuffling noises that took away what dignity there might have been in her grief. Joan, always helpless in the face of uncontrolled emotion, made no effort to comfort her. Her impulse of pity had already died into disgust. She could not look at that swollen, grayish face, of whose careful complexion tears made strange havoc.

The woman sighed. "If only you were n't so young!— I suppose you think I 'm a bad lot—bad as they make 'em. But I 'm not. I never was. Oh, I know I 've done things ladies don 't do!—but then ladies ain't often asked to do 'em, dearie. You got to remember that."

Joan shrugged, and resigned herself to hear what she was to hear.



"I guess you know I was n't born a lady, nor raised like one, though I've tried. . . . Well, never mind that!— Pa had a little cash-and-carry grocer store over to Indianapolis, and we lived upstairs, all of us in two rooms. . . . It was the dirt I could n't stand, and the crowding. It ain't *right* for a whole lot of children to live like that, all mixed in so! The others did n't seem to mind, but I was always sort of nice in my ways. Maybe because I was born before Mom took to the coke."

"The what?"

"Coke—dope, you know. It was the only thing that seemed to keep her going, poor Mom! and I'm glad she had it."

"Was your mother an invalid?" asked Joan, a little startled by this breadth of tolerance.

"Oh, no. But kids come along once a year regular, and she was n't ever, so to speak, well. I made up my mind when I was n't more than ten never to get myself in the fix Ma was in! . . . My two older sisters felt that way, too, I guess. They always had fellows, but not the sort that 'd do to marry. Men like Pa, you know. No 'count— One of the girls worked at a dressmaker's, and sewed till her eyes were red all the time, and her shoulders stooped and she coughed. The other—well, the other did n't keep straight, dearie. Awful few of the girls I knew did keep straight. But Mame went into one of those houses—you know!—and had a lot of swell clothes, and jewelry and all. I remember all us younger ones used to envy her. But she did n't last long at it, and she died—horrible."

Effie May's eyes were fixed on strange places, and the tragedy of the world was in them.

"She used to be a pretty thing, Mame; and sweet, too. . . . Well, it seemed to me there ought to be *something* better for a girl than marrying a man like Pa and slaving, or getting a good job like Jule's and slaving, or going wrong like Mame

and slaving worst of all! Once when I was out delivering dresses for the dressmaker where Jule worked, I saw what I was looking for. Society women. Ladies.

"That's what I'm going to be," I says to myself, "a Society woman! (I was about twelve then.) You don't have to work, you live in a fine house and wear swell clothes, and you can keep as straight as you like.

"The others used to laugh at me, but Mom never did. She was real ambitious for her children, Mom was. 'You keep on thinkin' so and you 'll get there,' she used to say. 'You're smart and pretty enough for anything!' And so I was, then!" Effie May gave a sigh.

"A fellow come along presently that looked pretty good to me. I met him over to Casey's dance-hall, I remember, and from the first it was all up with him. He was better than the fellows I'd been running with; a good dresser, always flashing his roll—you know race-horse people used to make good money before the Pari-Mutuels— And when he wanted me to come over here to Louisville with him—well, it looked to be my chance— Imagine starting out to be a lady, in company with Joe Markheim!" said Effie May grimly.

Joan exclaimed, "Not that dreadful-looking creature you were talking with to-day?"

The other nodded. "Only he was n't dreadful-looking then. He was real handsome—or he looked that way to me. You see I was only sixteen," she sighed. "Almost anything in pants that'd take me away from home would have looked good to me then, I guess!— But I talked to Mom about it, and she thought I'd better take a chance, too. So I went."

The girl had begun to shiver a little. "You mean—you married him?"

Effie May gave her a queer look. "Well, yes. As rear as I could. You see he had a wife at the time."

"He—betrayed you, then?" gasped Joan.

"Oh, no, dearie, I knew. So did Ma. But we thought I'd better take a chance. . . . You see, things like that depend on how you're raised. To us it was almost the same as being married. Not like poor Mame, you know. There's a whole lot of difference between a kept woman, and *her* sort."

"Is there?" said Joan with stiff lips.

"My, yes! Sometimes if the man sees you're straight, he marries you after a while. . . . But Joe did n't. I'm sure I don't know why I stuck to him as long as I did, except, that I'm sort of an affectionate disposition and don't like to change," she ruminated. "And then he began to play in pretty bad luck, too, and that's not the time to leave a man, when he's down and out. I guess I'd have been sticking yet, if he'd acted decent— I ain't going to tell you what he asked me to do once when he got on his uppers," she said, darkly flushing, "but it was something no gentleman would have proposed to a woman who'd stuck to him through thick and thin for years! That's when I left him for Calloway."

"Did—did Mr. Calloway marry you?" asked Joan faintly.

"Sure he did! Just before he died. He got religion, and the priest told him he ought, so as he could leave me his money without any fuss. He was a good old sport, that priest! And so was Calloway. Never turned a hair. 'Wish I'd done it before!' says he— Don't you think that's a pretty good recommendation for a woman, when a man's willing to marry her after living with her for fifteen years?" she asked wistfully.

"I suppose so," murmured Joan— The usual thing was happening to her. Old standards receded. Inevitably, irresistibly, she was beginning to see things through the other's eyes. This was Joan's great weakness—though there were people who considered it her strength.

"Calloway was pretty near to being a gentleman—not a born one, like your papa, dearie, but real genteel in his in-

stincts, and he did a whole lot to make a lady of me. He always insisted on us having the best of everything, company especially. When he knew he had to die, poor boy!"—her lips trembled—"he says to me, says he, 'Here 's your chance, old girl! Take the money, and go somewhere and make a fresh start,' he says. 'You 'll do! You 're good as any of 'em.' His very words, dearie! 'You 're good as any of 'em.'"— She wiped her eyes.

"And so you came here?" prompted the girl.

"Yes. I 'd always liked the place. It seemed sort of friendly and homelike, and it 's small enough so that your money counts for something. It would n't be lost, I thought, like in New York or Chicago— But I was kind of lonesome at first—always been used to having a man around—and I did n't know anybody. And then your mama died, and I saw my way clear. You did n't know I knew your mama, did you, dearie?"

Joan was rather startled. She had not realized quite how early her life and her father's had been swept into the stream of this woman's ambition.

"Well, I did. Not to speak to, of course. But I used to watch her out of my back windows, and think what a lady she was to be so poor, and wished I knew how to scrape acquaintance with her. And once she caught me watching her, and smiled up, just as sweet, as if she 'd known me always and liked me. (Sort of the way *you* smile, dearie, when you 're real pleased.)— And when she died the idea came to me, all of a sudden, that I was the person to look after them she 'd left."

Suddenly she buried her face in her hands and began to weep again. "Oh, Gawd! Think of where I 'd got to, and look where I 'm at now!"

Joan moved restlessly about the room, conscious of the ache of tears in her own throat. She pictured that child of the

streets and dancehalls, poor little "Lightfoot Ef," as they called her, struggling to better her condition, sturdily trying to find some tenable place of her own in life, even as she, Joan, was trying—but under what hopeless handicaps! She thought of the cocaine-drugged mother with ambitions; of the evil, treacherous creature with whom the child had chosen to "take a chance"; and it began to seem almost a miracle that Effie May should be what she was. Joan looked at her with something like respect.

"But I heard you tell my father you had buried two husbands!" she said sharply. "If you really felt that you were 'good as any of them,' that—that you had practically been married—why did n't you make a clean breast of it all?"

"Because I 'm no fool!" gulped Effie May. "There are some things a man won't stand for—though God knows why *they* should be so all-fired particular! And it seemed the only chance I 'd ever get to marry a real gentleman. Besides, there was you."

"Me?"

"Why, yes, dearie. I 'd never had any children, and I always thought if I could have I 'd like 'em all to be girls, that I could dress up, and do for, and bring up nice. . . . Oh, Gawd, Gawd!" she moaned, suddenly flinging herself across the bed, face down. "Here I am in a grand house, with a limousine, and servants of my own, and a husband like a king, and a young lady daughter in society, and me giving parties to the pick of the land! . . . And now to go down again, back to the gutter!" She beat the bed with her fists.

There was something appalling in the utter abandonment of this woman whom Joan had never before seen otherwise than cheerful and poised.

"If I 'd never gone to the races! Oh, Gawd! If I 'd never gone! I had a hunch. I knew I 'd meet up with that skunk Joe again somewheres, and I 'd ought to have kept out

of his way! There is n't a soul in this town could 'a' told on me unless it was that boy Blair."

"Archie?" repeated Joan, surprised.

"Yes," she sobbed. "He spotted me the first time he saw me—I don't know how. But I could 'a' kept *his* mouth shut all right!—I was fixing him so he 'd never tell. . . ."

In her abandonment Effie May might have said rather more than she meant to say, if at that moment a great honking of horns and shouting of gay farewells had not announced the return of the tallyho from the Derby.

She sat erect with a gasp. "It's *him!* For goodness' sake don't let your papa catch me like this!" She flew to her dressing-table, reaching for cold cream, powder, rouge. "Keep him off," she besought the girl. "Quick!—pull down those shades—there, that's better. Help me into a negligée—no, no, not that green one, for heaven's sake!—a pink one. Now some perfume. Tell him he must be very quiet because of my headache—don't forget, that's why we came home. There!—how do I look?"

She leaned back languidly in a chaise-longue, with a handkerchief dipped in cologne hiding her swollen eyes.

Joan, rather dazed, had assisted at these hasty rites, marveling at the triviality of a mind which could turn in one second from the catastrophe of a wrecked life to considerations of vanity. And then the sheer desperation of the thing struck her. Effie May was not done yet. She meant to go down fighting.

There was something in the girl that always responded to gallant effort.

"Good luck," she said queerly, and went to the door.

"Wait!" gasped the woman. "Joan! *Are you going to tell him right away?*"

"Not—right away," said the girl slowly.

There came a little rush behind her. Effie May had caught up one of her hands, and kissed it. . . .

## CHAPTER XXXVI

**T**HE girl had a difficult problem before her. She wrestled with it throughout a sleepless night. She felt like Fate, with human destinies in her control.

At one moment her course seemed clear beyond the question of a doubt. It was unthinkable that her father should continue to recognize as his wife—her mother's successor!—a woman who had led an immoral life, who had earned the very money that supported them by living for years as the mistress of another man. Joan's cheeks burned with the thought.

At the next moment, she wondered what her father would do without the woman. She had no illusions left regarding Richard Darcy. He had never in his futile life stood on his own two feet. He was one of the inefficients, who must be cared for. Now, weakened morally and physically by the habit of luxurious living, he was less able than ever to take care of himself. Age was coming upon him rapidly. In the struggle of life, he must go down utterly to defeat— Unless his daughter could help him; and so far his daughter had been unable even to help herself.

The girl wondered, too, her heart sick within her, whether he would consent to give up the luxury he loved when he learned the shame that went with it. . . . Not that he would be able to forgive the woman! She knew his fixed standards, his pride of race, too well to expect of him any such magnanimity. The vulgarity of Effie May had been quite enough for him to swallow, as it was.

Joan thought that if, knowing his wife's past and utterly despising her, he yet kept her because of material benefits, it

would be a shame she personally could not bear. Better, perhaps, that he be not put to the test.

And yet—in her mother's place, a woman of the town! (The girl was not able to make the fine distinctions in vice suggested by her step-mother.)

There had to be considered, also, the fraudulency of continuing to inflict such a woman on society in the guise of a lady.

The word brought back a rush of pity to Joan's heart. Effie May had done her best to be a "lady," poor creature, even to the extent of vainly trying to remodel her speech and her manners on those of her new family. . . .

Joan, very white and drawn about the lips, ordered her horse in the early morning and went for a long gallop, hoping to clear her brain. When she returned, with nothing decided, she found Archie Blair in the library waiting for her.

She had never before been so glad to see him. It came upon her, with a rush of relief, that here was somebody with whom she could discuss her problem, whose advice she could ask. Archie knew! He was not very clever, perhaps, never subtle nor quick in his mental processes; but there was something sure about him, something utterly honest and dependable.

Evidently he had given others the same impression.

"Mrs. Darcy sent for me to come out and talk things over," he said gravely. "She wanted me to speak to you. She thought maybe I could make you understand better."

"Sent for *you*? Why, but you 've never been one of her friends. You 've never even pretended to be!"

"No," he said simply. "She is n't my sort, and she don't belong here. She 's too flossy. But since she 's here, I 'm sorry for her— Now that you know, what are you going to do about it, Miss Darcy?"

Joan laid her problem before him with a frankness she would not have believed possible. She told him about her



father. Never before, not even to Stefan Nikolai, had she disclosed Richard Darcy quite as she had come to know him latterly. It was an analysis that would have looked too brutal set down in black and white.

Archie listened thoughtfully, and with no appearance of embarrassment or consciousness that the conversation was unusual. There was something in his masculinity that never suggested sex.

"I get you," he said at last. "You can't make up your mind whether to upset the apple-cart and ease your conscience, or keep your mouth shut and let everybody live happily ever after."

Joan looked at him quickly. She had not expected quite such a lucid summing up of the situation from Archie. But he seemed unconscious of epigram.

"Did I ever tell you," he asked irrelevantly, "about an old gentleman that took our room after—well, after my mother went away—and let me go on living with him because he said I was too small to make any difference? A queer old bird he was, drinking himself to death as fast as he could, but mighty good to me. It was him—he, I mean—who taught me to read, and started me going to night school, and got me my first job. When he was about half-lit he used to talk to me as if I was just his age, about all sorts of things, life and books and folks—and one of the things he used to say kind of stuck in my head. 'When in doubt, Archibald' (he was the only person I ever knew who called me all of it!), 'when in doubt, always be a little kinder than necessary.' . . . Pretty good dope, I think."

There was a long silence.

Then Joan said slowly: "Thank you, Archie! Yes, it is pretty good dope. And your old drunkard must have been a good deal of a man. You must tell me more about him some day."

She gave her shoulders a little shake of relief.

“Very well!—I won’t upset the apple-cart. I did n’t much want to, anyway!”

Archie smiled at her widely. It was a smile that said, “I knew it!” and “Good girl!” and a number of other things that made Joan blush. She had come by insensible degrees to value rather highly the good opinion of her protégé.

“But there ’s one thing sure,” he said, sobering. “You ’ll be wanting to get out of the apple-cart yourself!”

That, too, Joan had faced in her long night’s vigil. The question of her future was no longer hovering in space. It was here, immediate, urgent. She would have liked if possible not to spend another hour under the roof that had been supplied by the late Mr. Calloway.

They discussed the matter of her living in every aspect.

“You mean you have n’t got a red cent to your name, Miss Darcy? Gee!” muttered Archie. “What was the old chap thinking of? Oil stocks! Might as well have put the money on the races.” Even in his loyal mind the Major had undergone something of an eclipse.

“Better, because then we could have seen it run,” sighed Joan. “However, it ’s gone, and now I ’ve got to get busy!” (Archibald’s language was rather contagious.)

She told him of her two alternatives. The stage he absolutely vetoed.

“It ’s no place for a lady,” he said stubbornly, and would listen to no argument. Joan suddenly remembered that his mother had been an actress. She did not pursue the question.

“Newspaper work might do,” he admitted. “A society reporter with the pull you ’ve got ought to be worth some money.”

“A society reporter!— You mean I ’d have to go to my friends’ houses and publish what happens there? Oh, Archie, I ’m afraid I could n’t do that.”

"Why not?" he said innocently. "They like it."

But Joan persisted. "I'm willing to report *anything* except society."

"Murders? Police courts?" he suggested grimly.

"Yes, if I must."

"Well, I guess not!" said Archie.

She laughed a little helplessly. "But, Archie, you veto everything I suggest! Really, you're not very helpful. Don't you understand that I've *got* to earn my living, right at once? I'm unskilled labor. Beggars can't be choosers. You'd suppose nothing was good enough for me!"

"And it is n't! . . . Gosh!" he said miserably—(she saw that his big hands were shaking)—"The idea makes me right down sick! A little delicate thing like you, out in the scramble with the rest of us—! I know what it is, you see. Bad enough for a fellow, sometimes. I know the things a working girl has to do and stand for. Honest to God, I'd rather see you married!" he groaned.

Unselfish devotion could go no farther, and Joan knew it.

She suddenly found herself on the verge of tears. She was tired out, mind, soul, and body. She would have liked to put her head down on his shoulder and simply cry till she was comforted. It was such a big, broad shoulder, so amply adapted to the bearing of burdens. She could make him happy, too, poor boy! One and all, people seemed to expect nothing of her but marriage—her father, Effie May, Stefan Nikolai, and now Archie. Perhaps they knew best. They were many and she only one. Temptation beset her—or was it inspiration? She did not know. . . .

Meanwhile Archie was elaborating his forlorn idea. "Is n't there *somebody* who would do?" he urged. "Surely of all the fellows who've been hanging round, there ought to be one decent chap who'd give his head and ears to keep you out of *this*—to take you away from here himself?"

Joan made her decision.

"I think there is," she said tremulously. "Only—he won't say so."

"The big mutt!" cried Archie—and then paused. Her expression, the significance of her voice, began to penetrate his humility.

"You—you're not joshing me?" he gasped.

Joan put out quick hands as though to ward him off, suddenly afraid of the glow she had kindled in his face.

"Wait, Archie! I don't love you—you know that. Not as you love me, I mean. I don't believe I ever will love anybody that way. I—perhaps I'm not fine enough— But I do like you and trust you more than anybody else in the world. And so—if that's enough— If you want me—"

"Do I want you?" Archie gripped the edge of his chair to keep himself anchored to *terra firma*. "Say, Miss Darcy, I—I—"

"Don't you think," she suggested with a quivering smile, "that as we are about to become engaged, you might begin to call me 'Joan'?"

At that, with a great cry of "JOAN!" he gave up hold on the chair and *terra firma* together.

The sound of the overturned chair brought Effie May on a reconnoitring expedition to the upper landing of the stairs, which commanded an unsuspected view of the library. What she saw caused her to tiptoe away, smiling to herself a little sadly.

"His mouth's stopped all right—" she thought (with perfect truth)—"now that it does n't matter!"

## CHAPTER XXXVII

**T**HERE were those, notably among the Jabberwocks, who felt that in availing herself of the age-old solution of handing her burdens over to a man to bear, Joan had rather hauled down her colors. Perhaps she felt so herself, after the first glow of relief was over.

But if she needed solace, she got it in the radiant, incredulous, blissful attitude of Archibald. He could not believe the marvelous thing that had happened to him. A dozen times a day he was obliged to glance at the ring he had given her (a solitaire inevitably, small but of good water) to make sure that he was not dreaming.

He began at once, following the example of the birds about him, to prepare for the coming event; "twigging" as Joan called it to herself, amusedly. He was as mysterious about it, and quite as obvious, as any robin darting about with a straw in its beak. He called her to the telephone frequently to ask such questions as how many drawers a "chiffoneer" ought to have; and when she asked him why he wanted to know, the reply was a joyous, "Never you mind!"

He listened with the stealth of a Sherlock Holmes for any expressions of preference on her part, putting them secretly down in a note-book; and Joan grew afraid to mention any object, no matter how unlikely, for fear it would become part of the procession of packages which Ellen reported as filing daily past her door to the room upstairs.

"A rocking-chair come this morning," Ellen would report. "Golden oak, all carved! Yesterday it was one them new-

fangled electric-lamps with brass chain hanging down like fringe. Real tasty. The day before it was a statute."

"Heavens, Nellen— Not a statue?"

"Sure! A nigger woman brandishin' a spear. I poked a hole in the wrappin's to get a good look at it."

(Joan had once unguardedly envied the Carmichaels their rare old bronzes.)

She was touched but alarmed, and decided that she would better hasten the wedding if only to put a stop to this indiscriminate twigging.

Others were almost as pleased with the engagement as Archibald; her father, for one, who had not expected quite so early a release from parental responsibility. Joan, while a creditable child, had proven a rather difficult one, especially since his marriage.

"Not that it is quite such an—er—ambitious arrangement as I could have wished, Dollykins,"—(a ducal alliance would have been more in accord with Darcy inclinations). "But young Blair is an excellent fellow, an excellent fellow. And after all, in this world virtue is the thing that counts!" He appeared to indicate that in the next world things might be arranged more satisfactorily.

Ellen was as proud of this unexpected *dénouement* as if it were an egg of her own hatching.

"I did n't believe you had the gumption!" she said unflatteringly. "I thought you was too highminded to know a real man when you seen him.— And now, praise the day! you 'll be needin' your mamma's furniture back again."

"Oh, but, Nellen darling, what will you do without it?"

"Me?" The old woman's face fell. "Why, I kind o' thought you 'd be takin' me along with the furniture. Unless I'm too stiff and plain to be makin' you a fancy servant like you're used to nowadays!"—she tossed her head angrily.

Joan hugged her. "I 'd rather have you than all the fancy

servants in the world, and you know it. But I thought you preferred being an independent modiste in lodgings. And then—you see, dear, I'm not quite sure whether Archie can afford a servant."

She had not so far been able to bring him down from the clouds long enough to discuss ways and means.

"Sho! He can afford *me* all right. I'll save him money—And you don't suppose he's going to let you spoil them white hands of yourn with housework and cookin'? Not if I know Mr. Archie!" . . .

The Misses Darcy were almost tearful with gratification, and received Archie with the sort of romantic respect younger girls accord to heroes of the matinée.

"What did I prophesy?" cried Miss Virginia. "Only one season out, and already—! Such a beautiful name too,—'Mrs. Archibald Blair.' Not a Kentucky or Virginia one, of course. However, there *are* other States, Maryland, or South Carolina, or even Massachusetts. Where did you say he was from, precious girl?"

"Louisville."

The sisters exchanged startled glances. "Louisville? But that's impossible. We do not know his people!"

"He has n't any people."

It was Miss Euphemia who recovered herself first. "So much the better," she murmured. "I mean— Not that one would wish them to have died, of course! But really, you know, in-laws—"

"And so often I think a self-made man—" Miss Iphigenia took up the parable. "So many of our Southern families seem to run largely to girls nowadays. What I mean is, a little good red blood—"

"Sister!" murmured two shocked voices. Everybody blushed.

"I'm afraid Archie is n't even a self-made man, yet,"

smiled Joan, mentally struggling to fill in the gaps. "I shall have to help make him."

"Ah, yes! A woman's touch, as dear papa used to say—"

Joan reflected that the late Mr. Darcy must have known a good deal about the power of a woman's touch. . . .

Her friend Emily's congratulations were something on the same order, though more frankly expressed. There was a wholesome attitude of frankness always between the two girls.

"I think it's dear of you, Joan," she exclaimed, "and so brave!"

"Just why 'brave'?"

Emily answered, despite embarrassment, "Why, to marry a man without antecedents, without position, and without money, seems to me very brave. I know I should never have the courage to do it, even if I cared for him. In fact, I should be mighty careful not to care for him!— But then I've never had your spirit of independence."

"Perhaps because you've more to lose," said Joan quietly. "If either of us is brave, I think it's poor Archie."

She often thought of her lover so; tenderly, even lovingly, but as "Poor Archie!" . . .

Effie May was the only one of Joan's immediate environment who seemed to look with any doubts upon a situation she herself had largely brought to pass.

"Look here, girlie," she said once abruptly. "You don't love that boy. At least you ain't in love with him—and there's a difference. Why do you do it, anyhow?"

Joan, taken by surprise, was not immediately ready with her reply.

"Is it because you want to get away from me?" asked the other.

Still Joan was not ready to answer, and Effie May sighed. "You need n't have gone so far as that," she said, "I'd have fixed it for you somehow— I'm not going to forget what



you 've done for me, Joan. Not telling, treating me just as if—it was all right. You 're a bigger woman than you know you are," she added, gravely. "I 'll make it up to you some day, see if I don't."

Joan gave her a quick, straight look. "If you mean money, Effie May, and I think you do, we 'd better come to an understanding at once. I 'm keeping my counsel about—about your affairs; I 'm helping you commit a fraud, you know—entirely on my father's account. For myself—that 's another matter. I appreciate your kindness, I know you have meant to do your best, but—"

"But you 're done with me?" finished the other.

"Yes. I shall only see so much of you hereafter as is necessary to keep Father from suspecting anything. As for your money,"—the girl's voice shook—"neither I nor my husband will ever touch a cent of it under any circumstances. Do you understand? We do not forget how it was—earned."

The other sighed again. "Well, dearie, don't forget that it *was* earned, good and plenty!— And I 've done you one good turn already," she remarked *sotto voce*, as the girl turned away to greet her fiancé.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

**J**OAN and Archibald were married two weeks later, very quietly, before only her family, resisting all the Major's importunities to make an occasion of it. Nor would he girl accept a trousseau.

"If I need any more clothes than I've got already, Archie will buy them for me. Won't you, old boy?" she said, slipping her hand into his.

Archie, with the happy consciousness of a rapidly growing business and several years' savings in a Building Association replied proudly that he would.

One comment she had missed on her engagement; Stefan Nikolai's. She had written to him at once (her first letter since his post-card advising a preliminary course in matrimony), saying in effect, "Now I hope you're satisfied!" but as no reply came, she reached the correct conclusion that he was on the wing again, with her letter following him from address to address, unread.

Ten minutes after the little ceremony that left her no longer Joan Darcy, a cablegram was brought to her from London.

"Wait. Coming. Nikolai."

To which she replied with reckless extravagance:

"Too late. Sorry. Come anyway." . . .

Alone at last with her husband in a carriage (to which the negro yard-boy, feeling with the Major that something was aching to the occasion, had generously attached one of his own shoes), Joan asked rather listlessly where he meant to take

her. She had a conviction that it would be to Atlantic City, or to Niagara Falls.

For Archie was everything that was most correct in the way of bridegrooms. His bulldog toes, his padded blue serge, his near-Panama hat, his very socks, were so palpably bought for the occasion that Joan felt that to match him she ought to be wearing dove-gray and a shrinking manner.

But she did not feel particularly shrinking; merely relieved that the die was cast, and tired enough to be glad of the arm that stole tentatively around her.

“What train are we catching, dear?” she asked.

“No train at all.—Oh, Joan,” he said tremulously, “I hope you won’t mind! It’s just for to-night—just a foolish idea of mine.”

“What is?”

“Wait and see!”

She waited rather apprehensively. She was a little nervous about surprises, since her father’s recent effort in that line.

But the carriage was traversing a street she knew well, and it presently stopped in front of the house where Ellen lived. There was still a tinge of afterglow reflected in its many-paned windows, and among the young feathery leafage of the old sycamore sparrows were preparing to go to bed. Two or three of the denizens of the lower floors were taking a breath of air on the doorstep. They stared at the carriage with interest.

“None of ’em know about us yet,” reassured Archie in a whisper. “Just bluff it out.” Aloud he said to one of them (it was the lady who expertly curled feathers): “Do you know whether Mrs. Neal is in, Mrs. Higgs? We’ve come to see her.”

“I don’t know as she is, Mr. Archie,” replied the other, her eyes taking avid note of Joan’s smart tailor-made dress and traveling hat. “But I know she’s expectin’ company all

ight, 'cause I been smellin' comp'ny cookin' all day! Go right up and make yourselves to hum," she urged, with the never-failing hospitality of her class.

Archibald led his wife up the dim, curved stairway that had doubtless known the reluctant feet of many another bride before her, and opened Ellen's door with a key.

"You *are* honored," murmured Joan. "I did n't dream that Ellen had got to the point of trusting gentlemen with her watch-key!"

"Look!" said Archie proudly.

The room was gay with flowers, truly a bridal bower; and in its center stood the old round walnut table she had known all her life, much battered by the kicking of her own youthful shoes, set for two, and laden with delicacies. There was a small but magnificent wedding-cake, there was chicken-salad, crisp pink tongue, pickles, chocolates of Joan's favorite brand, and resting in a pail of ice-water, its neck swathed in a napkin, a bottle of champagne.

"Cinnamon-rolls keeping hot in the warmer, butter in the ice-box right-hand side, and I'm only to light the jet under the coffee-pot, and leave it to bubble ten minutes—" murmured Archie, as one reciting a well-conned lesson.

Joan's listlessness suddenly disappeared. She hugged him.

"What a perfectly *beautiful* wedding-supper!" she cried. "Was it your idea, or Ellen's?"

"A sort of combination, I guess. She thought you might feel more homelike here with your mother's things, and I—well, it's my home too, you see!— So you don't mind?"

"Mind!" she winked hard to keep the tears back. "Archie, let's have pancakes, too!" she cried.

They had pancakes. They also had eggs, in the scrambling of which Archibald was quite expert. Afterwards they washed the pans and dishes together, with two of Ellen's aprons tied around their necks, amid much merriment.

"I had no idea married life was so pleasant!" she sighed. "Archie, let 's always do our work like this, together!"

"Work?" He picked up one of her hands and examined it reverently. Joan had rather beautiful hands, sensitive and lithe, delicately white, with rosy palms and finger-tips. "I 'll let you play at work now and then," he said soberly. "But work is for us men, my Joan, not for our women!"

"It 's fortunate the cooks and housemaids of the land don't agree with you," she teased; "or perhaps they do, and hence the servant problem!"

Later, they locked Ellen's door and put the key under the mat, and went up a flight higher. Joan entered Archie's room with some curiosity. To her, people's environment spoke a clear language; and sometimes she realized, with a little shock, that she knew nothing at all of the man she had married.

It was a long, low attic chamber, whose ceiling sloped cosily down over casement windows with wide sills. There was a fine fireplace, marred, however, by a small stove showing evidences of occasional culinary efforts.

The results of Archie's twigging were very apparent; notably the golden-oak rocking-chair, the "chiffoneer" surmounted by the bronze lady with a spear. But she was more interested in the things which had belonged to him.

As Ellen had told her, the place was littered with books, shelves, tables, and even window-sills. Joan examined these eagerly. There was a very shabby Shakespeare in a good edition, an old pocket Emerson, a new Rubaiyat, a brand-new "Alice in Wonderland" (which made her smile); but it was no scholar's library. Archie's tastes were not what he would have called "high-brow." The works of Marie Corelli and Conan Doyle predominated, with several school geographies and histories, and various treatises on the psychology of salesmanship. She found something rather touching in

this collection of books, remembering that he had referred to it as his college career.

She looked next for his pictures, those other sure indications of the inner man. But there were none, except the small photograph of herself in its elaborate frame, with a little vase attached holding fresh flowers.

"Archie!" she protested, laughing, "I look like a Madonna in a shrine!"

"One of those namby-pamby parties with a dinner-plate behind her head? Never saw one of them that could touch you!" he pronounced candidly.

"I fear your correspondence-course has been neglecting Art," she murmured. "There was a fellow named Botticelli who did some very neat little things in that line. But come now, surely you've got some other pictures hidden away somewhere? No naughty ballet-girls kicking up their limb-legs? No bareback ladies? Or Parisiennes exhibiting wicked garters? Honest Injun?"

He grinned sheepishly. "I did have," he admitted. "But I sort of lost my taste for 'em when you gave me that picture of you."

She kissed him.

"That's a prettier compliment than the little vase of flowers before my picture, dear!" . . .

Archie had been standing at the door, watching her progress around his room with eyes that were almost incredulous. His room!—and she in it! . . . He felt that if he opened a window she might flutter out again, back into the world from which she came. Once, when he was very small, he had found a belated autumn butterfly in the street, and brought it home, and put it on a geranium-plant he had in the window, hoping it might like to spend the winter there. But in the morning it lay dead against the pane. Archie remembered that butterfly now, and shivered. She saw him.

She ensconced herself in the largest and shabbiest of his three chairs and patted the arm of it invitingly. "Come over here, and let 's really talk!" she commanded.

He obeyed. "What shall we talk about?"

"Tell me about your mother," said Joan.

He told her what he could remember. It was not much except a voice—a soft English voice; and the feeling of arms that held him close; and quite clearly the sound of sobbing beside his pillow whenever he woke suddenly at night.

"Nothing was ever heard from her after she left you here?"

"Oh, yes. Money came once or twice to the landlady for my board—this was a boarding-house, then. But after a few months it stopped coming."

"And have n't you *any* idea what became of her?"

"She died, of course," said Archie simply. "Or she 'd have come back for me. There were people who thought—" he swallowed hard—"that she left me here on purpose, and never meant to come back. That is n't so. I don't know much about her, but I do know that she loved her child. You can't fool a kid about that! . . . And there were people who thought she killed herself. But I don't somehow believe she was a quitter. What do *you* think?"

He had taken a photograph out of his pocket, and handed it to Joan, who studied it closely. Despite the unbecoming "fringe" and jersey of an earlier day, it was a lovely face she saw, without a hint of folly or weakness or worse. The chin was firm as Archie's, the features strong as they were delicate. The face was still rounded and soft with youth, yet out of it looked a pair of haunted eyes.

"No, your mother was no coward," she said with conviction. "But she was a very unhappy woman. And Archie—she was a lady!" The look of race seemed to her unmistakable.

He drew a great breath. "I think so, too," he said gladly, "I've always thought so. That's how I dared—" Sud-

denly, passionately, he drew her up into his arms. "Oh, my Joan, do you see why I wanted you here in my own home? It's all the home I've ever had. Anything that's happened to me has happened here. I've lain here at night trying to be a man when I was nothing more than a kid. I've sat here listening, listening— Oh, for years I used to think I heard my mother coming up the stairs to get me, long after I was old enough to know she never would! And sometimes I thought— Do you believe in ghosts?"

"Yes!" said Joan. "Ghosts of people that love us and want to help—"

"That's what I mean! And that's why I wanted to stay on in this room, where—she could find me. It's a horrible thing not to belong anywhere, nor to any one, like any little fyst dog in the streets. I've never said this before—"

"I know!" whispered Joan.

"And now that I do belong to some one, I wanted my room to know it. I wanted—in case there *were* any ghosts—"

"I know," whispered Joan again, her lips against his.

There was a taste of salt on them, and she held him close and closer, this great, lonely child who should never be lonely again. If, as she had warned him, she was not capable of offering deep love, Joan could at least offer deep understanding, which perhaps is rarer. . . .

And presently as she held him so in the quiet of his old room, with the house settling into drowsiness about them, and the sycamore tapping its friendly signal on the roof close above their heads, Joan's identity seemed to be slipping, merging, into that of some one else. She ceased to be Joan the girl. She felt, in that strange moment of transition, partly the wife, and partly the mother; but most of all the woman, whose mission is to give.



## CHAPTER XXXIX

**T**HERE is, among the wives and mothers of what the Misses Darcy were wont to call the polite world, a general conspiracy of silence on the subject of honeymoons. The theory is allowed to go unchallenged that a honeymoon is invariably a period of bliss and romance unalloyed; the conspirators apparently subscribing to the ideas of the stoical parent who teaches his child to swim by throwing him unexpectedly into the water. If he manages to keep afloat, well and good; if he drowns, regrettable; if he comes out alive but with a shrinking cowardice with regard to water that never afterwards leaves him, perhaps it is no concern of his parent's. And again, perhaps it is.

Joan and Archibald Blair returned from their honeymoon not quite as close friends as when they embarked upon it. Joan's manner had gained a certain kindness, a gentle consideration that was akin to sympathy; whereas Archie, with puzzled eyes and a smile that beamed rather uncertainly, almost evinced his desire to propitiate by rolling over at her feet and holding up four paws to heaven. (Which was no way to propitiate our heroine.)

Honeymoons, however, do not last indefinitely; and by the time Ellen Neal and her furniture and the results of Archie's "twigging" were moved into a certain modest house that simply cried aloud to be purchased (on the installment plan), Archie had grown almost accustomed to the sight of the One and Only seated at his breakfast table *en negligée*, pouring out his coffee, with a preoccupied word from him now and then as she glanced through the morning paper. (It was characteris-

tic of that household that Joan was the one who read the morning paper.) He kissed her whenever he liked without asking leave; and in return she rumbled up his hair deliciously, and called him "Goose!", and reminded him to bring oranges from downtown because the neighboring grocery had such poor ones.

Joan entered upon the domestic rôle with her usual thoroughness. At first she had been rather afraid of the expenditure the purchase of a house involved. It sounded to her too much like the large and not very practical ideas of her father. But when Archie pointed out to her that even day laborers managed to own their cottages, thanks to building-associations, and that purchase on this plan was merely a way of saving money, she yielded without undue reluctance. After all, there was not only his salary to be relied upon, but his commissions, dependent upon his own energy, which seemed boundless. Like many poor girls, she was quite ignorant of the value of money. Beyond the purchasing power of a concrete sum, say one thousand dollars, money meant nothing to her at all. Ten thousand dollars, twenty thousand dollars—they seemed very much the same.

The house was its own best advocate; one of the charming English cottage types that are beginning to make home life not only comfortable but dignified for the small householder in our American cities. The neighborhood was excellent, one of the pretty green courts she had long ago coveted; and there was a small garden artfully arranged into vistas and quite an air of privacy by means of shrubbery, and overlooked by a secluded porch whose coolness seemed like paradise to Archie, hurrying to it out of the hot city.

The garden was his part of the establishment; and there he might be observed any morning shortly after sunrise, digging, pruning, whistling tunelessly between his teeth, with one eye on a window whence would presently issue the drowsy voice of Joan, calling, "Good-morning out there, Adam!" Then

with a rush Adam would disappear from his garden, leaving spade or hose where he happened to drop them, lest Eve need assistance with buttoning a blouse or tying a shoe.

It was a glorious time for Archie. He was almost painfully happy.

The Jabberwocks and others took a good deal of critical interest in Joan's house. She had always been suspected of being a little odd, and her house proved it indubitably. At a period when Louisville was graduating out of the green-wall-and-mission-furniture period, through Coloniality, into a more catholic appreciation of possessions which express the personality of the possessor, Joan's house was still rather a shock to all preconceived notions of decoration. There was none of the white woodwork and panelled severity which sounded the correct and most recent note. Joan's woodwork and walls were alike a soft, practical gray—"Soot-color," she explained placidly—and the plaster had been left rough-cast. Against it, instead of the accepted pictures of the day, hung two or three rare prints, a cast of the Parthenon frieze, and a fine strip of Persian embroidery. On the floor were black skin rugs. A green vine, growing out of an ancient yellowed marble jar, wandered at will across one wall and up the brick of the chimney-place.

"You got that idea in Italy," commented one visitor.

But the undoubted charm of Joan's house was that she had taken no ideas from anywhere. She simply had about her the sort of things she liked. There were ferns growing in the window-sills, and no curtains whatever except two lengths of heavy pumpkin-colored silk which might be drawn across the panes at will, but rarely were.

"People will be able to see in when the lamps are lighted," protested her step-mother.

"What of it? They won't see much over those ferns," said Joan, "and I always love to peep in at lighted windows

myself, don't you? Haven't you ever noticed how much nicer the houses in this part of the world look when they're undressed for the summer? Personally, my taste has never run to lingerie in household decoration."

Effie May, who was nothing if not receptive, went home and meekly took down her point-lace curtains.

What troubled Louisville most about the Blair house was its lack of a dining-room. There was no chamber held sacred to the rites of nourishment, with chairs sitting primly against the wall and a center table with a centerpiece upon it, bearing a fernery or—what was more recently affected by the really up-to-date—a dish containing imitation fruit. ("So much smarter than the real kind," explained her neighbor, Mrs. Webster, who had quite a taste for the correct in art.) There was no sideboard for the display of wedding-silver, no china-cabinet containing the best glassware in glittering serried rows. What was the use of having nice things, thought many a troubled housewife, if they were to blush unseen in pantries?

But Joan did not understand, and frankly said so, why in a small house one room should be set aside for use only three times a day. She needed the extra wall space for her books. Besides if there was a dining-room people seemed to feel obliged always to eat in it, instead of in the garden or the porch, or on a table drawn close to the window, where one might look out into the world while one ate, as in a pleasant restaurant.

"I'm like the Irishman," she remarked, "who said that he was glad he did n't like strawberries, because if he did he'd have to eat them, and he hated the damn things.— Try having your meals served about in different places, and see if you have n't a better appetite for them!"

Even the admiring Jabberwocks felt that this was carrying oddity to the extreme. They always took strangers, however, to see Joan's little house, and incidentally Joan herself. *Mc.*

Nikolai had sent her recently several Mandarin costumes, unique in the history of Louisville for domestic wear, in which she appeared comfortable, piquante, and quite exotically feminine.

"Fancy! Trousers on a bride! And at such a time, too," murmured the ladies of the neighborhood among themselves.

But as Effie May pointed out to the Major, himself a trifle shocked by this eccentricity of costume in a lady of his family, "She 's slim enough to wear 'em, Dickie, and those full silk pants are certainly becoming to the feet. Wish I had some myself— Don't you worry," she added, chuckling over the Major's expression, "I have n't! Pantaloon were n't meant for the pincushion style of figger."

Archibald, of course, found the Mandarin costume adorable. He would have found any costume of Joan's adorable, even a Mother Hubbard, or its lineal descendant, the bungalow-apron.

Altogether, Joan had a rather happy aftermath to her honeymoon. "The pasture-time," she called it, during which she was as placid and content as a cow in a clover-field. For the first and possibly the last time in her life she was quite free from worry. That was one of the things Archie took completely out of her hands. He would have liked to take everything out of her hands that might be irksome to her—her thinking, her very sleeping and eating, had it been possible. But worry at least was something he could take upon his own broad shoulders.

Her personal allowance and the allowance he made her for household expenses were paid regularly into her account—an arrangement Joan had insisted upon, despite his protest.

"Why should you be bothered with the paying of bills, darlingest?"

"But I *love* to pay bills, Archie," she had replied, rather piteously to one who had known anything of the earlier Darcy *ménage*. "It 's a real pleasure to get them all out of the way

before the tenth of the month!" And it was a pleasure she attended to religiously, even after she began to grow a little lax and indifferent about other household matters. There were to be no "Indians" in the annals of the Blair family.

Joan had never been so sluggish mentally as in these first months of married life; yet she felt almost abnormally normal, close to the great heart of existence, at one with the physical world about her, content with the content of a cog which fits well into the wheel where it belongs.

Long afterwards some would-be cynic asked her whether she believed that marriage *per se* was an experiment which paid.

"Yes!" she answered without hesitation. "If only for the moment when you tell your husband that he is to have a child."

## CHAPTER XL

**H**ER father took a satisfaction in Joan's house and husband and general condition of modest prosperity which surprised and rather touched the girl. It was as if he found in her well-being a justification of something that needed justifying. "I may have my weaknesses," his manner seemed to say, "but observe how well I have provided for my child!"

He dropped in almost daily for his afternoon julep on the shaded porch that overlooked her garden. Effie May had the tact rarely to accompany him, and Joan found herself seeing more of her father than she ever had under his own roof.

"I don't know just what it is, my dear," he once said, musingly. "Possibly the familiar furniture, or the presence of Ellen Neal (quite a fair cook, Dollykins, though her manner leaves something to be desired). But somehow in this little establishment of yours I always feel as if—well, as if Mary were about somewhere." He sighed sentimentally. "I feel as if she might at any moment sit down beside us and take out a bit of sewing. She was rarely without sewing, you remember?"

"I remember." Joan patted his hand, a demonstration rare with her. "I am glad you feel that way, Father. Mother always does seem very close to me—especially just now." An odd feeling of sorriness for her step-mother came over Joan. "You are sure," she asked on an impulse, "that Effie May does not object to your coming here so much without her?"

"Object? To my visiting my daughter under her own vine

and figtree? It would hardly be within her province to object," he commented regally. "But, as it happens, she is the one who frequently suggests my visits. She quite understands that under the—er, the happy circumstances—you cannot come much to us, not caring naturally to appear any more often than is necessary in public." The Major adhered rigorously to every tenet of the old school.

He had recently presented his daughter with a low, comfortable phaeton of the sort which, as he explained, the gentlewomen of his day were accustomed to drive; and Pegasus was learning to adapt herself demurely to the rôle of a family horse. Joan found this phaeton a great convenience for shopping and marketing and her rare visiting (she saw very little of her friends that summer); and in the evening she and Archie went for long drives about the parks, covering less ground than they had covered in the ill-fated Lizzie, but making up for this by a more intimate knowledge of what they passed.

"It's good to go slowly enough now and then to see the wayside flowers, and smell the fern, and hear the bird-calls, isn't it?" she said once as they jogged along.

"Sure it is! Now and then," replied Archie guardedly. A rising young business man of the present time could hardly be expected to find phaetoning an exhilarating means of locomotion. But "anything goes just now," as he said to himself, happily.

He was not able to take as many of these drives with her as he should have liked. The cares of business were beginning to sit upon him with increasing heaviness. "A man's business has got to grow with his family," he was fond of saying, importantly; and Joan was left alone sometimes, even on Saturday afternoons and after supper in the evenings—those periods sacred in these our States to the uses of domesticity.

But she did not complain. She was even, secretly, a little



glad, for she had always enjoyed being alone. There were so many books to be read, letters to be written, thoughts to be thought in which Archie, for all his loyal efforts, could not quite share; and there was her music. One of her step-mother's several wedding presents had been a small grand piano, as companionable to Joan in this "pasture-time" as a dog is to some women.

Archibald, too, loved music. He frequently urged her to play and sing, and was as proud of her rather indifferent performances as a *maestro* of a star-pupil. But he had an innocent, disconcerting habit of patting time with his foot, or bursting into the air at unexpected moments in a large, booming tenor that never by any accident quite found the key. Music was one of the things Joan found herself unable to share with her husband.

She objected sometimes to his growing preoccupation with business, on his own account. He began to look a little thin and fine-drawn; the typical American husband, she told him reprovingly.

"You're neglecting your exercise, Archie dear! You never go to the Y. M. C. A., or play around with the boys any more."

"Got something better to do," he beamed at her.

"Goose! But it is n't good for a man never to have any fun at all. 'All work and no play'—"

He took her in his arms. "Fun! What do I want with fun?" he exclaimed quite fiercely, lifting her face to his. But before their lips met, he let her go.

"No rough stuff," she heard him admonish himself under his breath.

He kissed her hand instead. . . .

The Darcys too, were spending rather a quiet summer. Now that they had no *débutante* daughter in prospect, their

names figured less prominently in the social column. With his growing avoirdupois, the Major appeared to be abandoning the one-step in favor of the easy-chair, which was to be found in greater perfection at home than at the Country Club. If his bride regretted this lapse into settledness, she showed no signs of it. Her avoirdupois, also, was getting rather out of hand, despite constant attention to massage and sporadic attempts at dieting.

"It ain't how *much* I eat, seems like—it's *what* I eat," she said once plaintively to Joan. "Everything tasty turns to flesh on me; and God knows, I hate a poor table!"

But Joan realized that it was not entirely physical inhibitions which were retiring the Darcys from the social arena. Her step-mother had delicacy enough to understand that her place was not among Joan's acquaintance, now that the girl had discovered her history. Joan liked her the better for it. She was punctiliously careful to invite Effie May to her house at frequent intervals, and always accepted such invitations as the other offered in return. The Major, never observant, was quite unaware that the relations between his wife and daughter had suffered any change. As he once remarked impersonally, "You and my wife would naturally find very little in common, excellent creature though she is. Why should you, indeed? Your antecedents, your early environment, have been entirely different. And as one grows older, those are the things that really matter," he added, with a complacency that sat rather oddly upon him in the circumstances— On the whole, Joan began to feel distinctly sorry for her step-mother.

The older people came sometimes to take her for long automobile drives into the State; expeditions which Joan enjoyed thoroughly. Her father's imperturbable good manners and Effie May's amiability made them excellent traveling-companions, proof against all hazards of the road; tire trouble,

bad going, even delayed and poor meals. And they both treated Joan with a new consideration, oddly wistful on the woman's part, to which she responded gratefully.

It shamed her somehow to see how kind the world was to her nowadays; as if, in following the line of least resistance, she had done something very commendable indeed.

## CHAPTER XLI

THESE long automobile rides familiarized her as nothing else could not only with the State but with her father. She came to understand and share his lier, proprietary interest in the lovely Kentucky country. He pointed out to her its beauties of wood and hill and ure like the owner of some vast estate exhibiting it to vis- s, with a frank and pardonable pride. It is a habit of d not unusual to the native of certain localities—notably ginia and Maryland and Kentucky; but in her wandering, nportant old father it seemed to Joan a little piteous, as e had sunk his small identity into that of his great State, ent to make its history his history, its glory his.

Here," he would say reverently, "is the spot where we le our final victorious stand against the Indians. Sacred ind, my daughter!" Or— "This is the place where our en went down to the spring for water, risking their lives, s their hearts! because the men could not be spared from defense of the stockade. You should thank God that you a Kentucky woman!" He sometimes forgot in his en- siasm that she had not been, so to speak, born to the purple ough that fact, as he once explained to her, was merely an dent, due to a certain miscalculation of dates.

oan came to realize in this new intimacy with her father : his futility was owing in large part to circumstances over ch he had no control: notably the times in which he lived. had been born a little too late or perhaps a little too early. re is no need for men of his type in the piping times of ce; but had his prime chanced to occur during some con-

vulsed period of the world's history, it is conceivable that Richard Darcy might have rendered a great account of himself. He was a born leader of men, with unfortunately little opportunity to exercise his talent. During the only war that came within his range of vision (our late unpleasantness with Spain), he had chanced to be involved with certain trusting friends in a financial situation so acute that the affairs of the nation had been obliged to stand aside until he extricated himself; by which time, to his lasting regret, the war was over.

He had, of course, no right to his title. It had simply accrued to him as titles often do accrue to men of his type, particularly in the South; partly by inheritance, growing as he grew, beginning with a modest lieutenantancy in the State Guards, which had been his one and only taste of the career for which he had been created. He never spoke of himself as "Major"; but from the habit of years he had perhaps come to think of himself so, accepting the unsought honor gracefully as he accepted whatever else came his way, whether of good or evil.

It is a pity that he could not have fallen asleep, say, at twenty, in his clean, brave youth; and awakened in the month of August 1914, ready for the day's work. . . .

The Darcys and Joan were running home after a long trip in the Bluegrass one evening, slipping along without lights in the glow of an October aftermath, when at the turn of an unfrequented lane they came suddenly upon a crowd of people collected about a bridge. The chauffeur brought the car to an abrupt stop. It was at once surrounded by several men with handkerchiefs tied over the lower parts of their faces.

"What the devil—" cried Major Darcy.

"Highwaymen!" gasped Joan.

A man with a pistol in his hand said laconically, "No, we ain't highwaymen, lady. We was n't expectin' comp'ny, but

sence you 've come, you 'll hev to stay. Set right where you are and don't look. We 'll be through this job in a minute."

"Nonsense! Let us pass at once," said the Major indignantly. "Drive on over the bridge, James!"

"Better not, James," drawled the laconic one. "We 're usin' that bridge ourselves just now."

The chauffeur hesitated, walling his eyes in fright. Joan, who was seated beside him, reached for the ignition switch to start the engine, but turned on instead the lighting-switch. The sudden glare of the headlights revealed some twenty or thirty roughly dressed men of the farmer class, and in their midst, bound hand and foot with rope, a cowering negro.

"My God! It 's a lynching," quavered Effie May.

The Major had by this time collected his startled wits.

With a sudden oath he jerked open the door and got out.

"What are you up to here, men? Don't touch me, sir!" —this to one who had laid a hand on his sleeve.

There was a quality in her father's voice that sent a thrill through Joan. She had never heard it before. The man removed his hand.

"We 're just stringin' up a nigger for the best of reasons," he explained. "'Tain't no business of yourn, stranger."

"I 'll make it my business," said Richard Darcy sternly. "You 're not going to disgrace this State while *I* am here!"

The effect was histrionic; and yet Joan realized that her father was not blustering. He meant it.

There came a wail from beyond that made her shiver, the cry of a man in mortal terror. "I ain't never done it, 'fore Gawd I ain't never tetched that woman. Oh, Boss! O-o-oh, Boss!" It was like the cry of a damned soul to God. "*Don'* you let 'em git me!"

There was an agony of hope in the appeal, as of one who sees at hand unexpected deliverance.

The Major responded to it, speaking in quiet reassurance as she had sometimes heard him speak, years ago, when she had wakened out of some nightmare in the little bed beside her parents'.

"All right, boy. They sha'n't get you."

He strode through the crowd, putting men out of his way right and left. In sheer surprise they let him pass till he reached the negro, who cringed to him, catching at his hand.

Then a voice cried out, "Here, we 're wastin' time. Muzzle the old boy!"

The Major turned and stared magnificently in the direction of his voice, nettled by the term "old boy."

"Evidently," he remarked, "the gentleman does not know who I am!"

Joan was seized with an hysterical desire to laugh. At such a moment the bombast of it was too much. Suppose they should inquire minstrel-fashion, "Well, then, Mr. Johnsing, who *are* you?"

But the crowd was not as used to her father as she was. They hesitated, impressed by his hauteur, his fine clothes, the waiting limousine. They stirred uneasily. A voice near her murmured, "Mebbe it 's the Governor!"

Richard Darcy took instant advantage of the impression he had created, and began to speak. It was not the first time she had heard him make a speech, for he was frequently called upon to aid some friend in turning the tide of political battle. The Major, indeed, had rather a reputation for assisting his friends into office— It was typical of Joan that she listened critically despite her thumping heart; that she watched what she could see of the faces about her, picked out by the lights of the car; that she missed no expression on the gray, working features of the negro, darting wild glances about him like a newly caged wolf she had seen once at the Zoo, frantically eying the people who stood to stare at it.

Her father's voice poured out in a golden flood, running the amut from anger to gentle suasion. It was the voice of the atural orator, which depends very little for its effect upon ords. Once, passing a negro church, Joan had heard just ich a voice rising and falling within, and though not a word f the sermon reached her, after a few moments she had been lmost ready to sway and moan with the congregation as it uttered, "Yas, good Lawd!" "Be mussiful to us po' siners!" "Come, Jesus, come down and take me home!"

Some such effect began to be visible on the Major's audience. here were stirrings and murmurings that suggested applause. le rose to them. The eloquence that lies so close under the rin of Southern-born men—certainly of all Southern-born en of Irish stock—came to the surface and flowered. He owed this handful of rough farmers what it should mean to em to be natives of so great and glorious a commonwealth " 'Commonwealth'—what a splendid word, my friends! "); earing in her bosom all the riches of the earth, nourishing at hat bosom a race of supermen ("And superwomen, my iends! superwomen!"); carrying in her womb the greatness f the country's future.

"Statesmen we give to the world—law-makers, not law-reakers! Soldiers we give, not midnight marauders and as-ssins!" (If he borrowed freely from a certain greater Kentucky orator who speaks only with his pen, the Major was aware of plagiarism.) "Show me the fools who say Ken-ckians are lawless! We make our laws as we need them, entlemen—and we obey them! Perhaps the greatest of our ws is this: 'Never kick a dog when it is down.'" His vice sank to a warm and personal friendliness. "I ask you, entlemen—is there any dog more down than the negro? It not his fault that he is here where he is no longer wanted. is not his fault that he brought with him when he came the ays and the intelligence of the jungle. It is ours, perhaps,



that he has kept them. We shall never tame the negro by proving ourselves savages!—My friends, you and I here in Kentucky pride ourselves on breaking our horses and our dogs by means of kindness. Shall we do less for our unfortunate black brother?"

A voice in the crowd remarked, "You can claim kin with him ef you want to, Jedge— I ain't!"

A ripple of laughter greeted this sally, and Joan's tension relaxed. She felt intuitively that a crowd which laughs does not kill.

While he spoke, her father had more than once caught her eye over the heads of the others, urgently, meaningly. Now he nodded to her. Joan suddenly caught the message he was trying to convey.

"He wants us to go to him. Quick, James! Start your engine. Quietly!"

In his nervousness, however, the chauffeur started the car with a jerk, and many faces moved in their direction. The Major turned on the full tide of his voice, and rose to his climax.

"My friends," he asked solemnly, "have you thought to take into your hands the privilege of the Most High, who saith, 'Vengeance is mine'? Perhaps you have called vengeance 'justice'? Even so there is a finer thing than justice. There is mercy. And there is something we may give even greater than mercy—something to which each of us poor souls has a human right. I refer, gentlemen, to the benefit of the doubt.

"Some day every one of us here present—who knows how soon?—must stand before the Judgment Seat, cowering as this wretch is cowering now. And what we dare to ask then will be perhaps not justice, nor even mercy—but simply the benefit of the doubt."

Tears came into Joan's eyes. It seemed to her that for a

moment her father had forgotten his purpose there, and was speaking not for another but for himself. . . .

His mind, however, had not left the business in hand. After a slight and telling pause, he said in his ordinary conversational voice, "Now I am going to take this negro with me, gentlemen, if you don't mind. I have at hand a safe conveyance, as you see. I pledge you my word to deliver him in person to the sheriff of this county."

He beckoned to Joan.

The spell was broken, and pandemonium reigned. "Look out—he's makin' a get-away!"

"Aw, what's the use? Leave him go!"

"By God, it was *my sister*—"

"Let me at him"—

"The gen'leman's right, I tell you!"—

And penetrating all a laconic drawl, "Stranger, leggo that nigger, and leggo quick."

Joan, on tiptoe, saw her father's head and beckoning hand above the crowd.

"Go on, James!" she said tensely. "Never mind if you run them down—"

"Stop!" gasped Effie May. "Don't you see those pistols? They mean to shoot!"

The terrified James did not know which to obey.

"Here, give me the wheel," ordered Joan. "Be quiet, Effie May!" Into her mind came scornfully one of her father's sayings, "The canaille are invariably timid."

Effie May suddenly screamed again. "They're going to *shoot!*"

And as if at a signal for which they had been waiting, two shots barked out.

The Major, still finely erect, thrust the negro behind him, and at the same moment Joan sprang out of the car to go to his defense; two instinctive acts which proved them fathers

and child, and also proved indubitably the Darcy right to pride of race.

His steady voice reached her again as she struggled through the milling crowd; "You poor fools, look to what your folly has already led you! You 've shot the wrong man. You 've shot *me!*"

There was a second of appalled silence. Then a man muttered "Golly!" and turned and fled. His panic was contagious. One after another, by twos and threes, the lynchers melted hastily away. When Joan reached her father he was seated on the ground, leaning for support against the bridge railing, alone except for the shackled negro.

He still had command of the situation. "Take my pen-knife, Dollykins, and set this boy free so that he can run," he ordered.

Joan cut the ropes, sick with relief. He was so calm that she thought he must have been bluffing the crowd.

"Dad! Dad! You 're not really hurt, then?"

He smiled up at her. "Not hurt, my child. Killed," he said, dramatic to the last. . . .

The negro did not run. In return for his defender's heroism, he performed a small act of heroism himself—not so small either, perhaps, considering that his life depended upon what use he made of the next few hours.

"I 'll tote him to de car, lady," he offered, pantingly; and delayed further to give the paralyzed chauffeur instructions as to where to find the nearest doctor.

Joan sat on the floor of the limousine with her father's head in her lap, only half aware of his labored, fluttering breath, of the blood upon her dress, of her step-mother's wild pleadings with him just to look at her, just to say one word to his Effie May, who loved him—

She was strangely exalted. Her mind seemed to have slipped into a region of consciousness where things were made

suddenly clear to her, troubling questions answered, doubts set forever aside.

"A gentleman," she kept repeating to herself. "A gentleman!"

It seemed to her in that moment a great thing to have been born a gentleman, even if one became nothing more; to know that whatever the fortunes of life, one would be able to meet them gallantly and unafraid, because of a something within stronger than personal will or habit: the sum of the wills and habits of many ancestors. She was sorry for the *canaille*, the Effie Mays, who had no such inner power to rely upon. . . .

As they carried him into a doctor's office, Richard Darcy's eyes opened. They passed the face of his frantic wife unseeing, and came to rest upon Joan in some anxiety.

"You all right, Dollykins? Must not allow—mere trifle like this—upset—"

"Nothing shall upset me, Father," she said, smiling at him.

"Children so necessary—family traditions—"

She bent close to him. "My son is going to be proud to carry on the family traditions, dear."

His face cleared. "Good girl!" There was a little bubbling breath. "I promised Mary—"

But Joan never learned what promise it was that he had made, and doubtless broken, to his Mary.

## CHAPTER XLII

**J**OAN herself, like other self-reliant people, sometimes made promises which she was unable to keep. She had made such a one to her father. Despite her best efforts, the fact and manner of his death did manage to upset her, disastrously.

The day came not long afterwards when for hours, years, they seemed to her, Joan was aware of nothing but pain, and of the fact that miserable, terrified Archie must somehow be got out of the way before she lost control of herself. She thought that when she could get enough breath to do it, she would ask him to go down town and bring her some ice-cream or something; but when she did open her lips they emitted, entirely without permission, a queer sound that was somewhere between a yelp and a croak.

“Goodness! This is no way for a gentleman to behave,” she said to herself oddly; and must have spoken aloud, for the voice of Ellen Neal responded.

“There, there, my lamb! Yell all you want. You ain’t no gentleman, thank goodness! but just a poor little girl who’s got a right to holler all she likes. That’s *one* right the men-folks ain’t going to deny us and get away with it—not them!”

Ellen as she spoke glared truculently at the doctor. It was not the first accouchement at which she had assisted, and at such moments she became feministic almost to the point of violence. Even Archie found it safer to remain out of reach of her accusing eye.

But long, very long afterwards, Ellen herself admitted him once more to the Presence, for the sake of the burden he carried—a subdued, queerly gentle Ellen, with all the acerbity gone from voice and manner, and in its place something rather beautiful. It was motherhood that glowed in her, had any one cared to notice; motherhood come by vicariously, as Ellen Neal came by all the loveliness in life.

“See, my lamb,” she murmured, bending over the bed. “Open them pretty eyes and look who ’s here! Come close, Mr. Archie, and show her the present you ’ve brought her. Quiet, now!—she ain’t up to much. It ’s a surprise, Joie. Open your eyes and look!”

It was a surprise, indeed. Joan, by great effort, managed to focus her gaze on Archie’s burden. She shut her eyes quickly, and opened them again. They were still there; not one, but two little wrinkled, fuzzy heads.

“Can you beat it?” demanded Archie, shakily. “Some little present, eh?” He held them out to her.

Joan’s lips moved, twitching. “From a Friend,” was what she said; and Archie, recognizing a jest on sight, let out such a roar of joy that the twins awoke with pin-prick wails, and a nurse came running, and he was thrust once more into outer darkness.

There a message was brought to him. “Your wife says why don’t you telegraph President Roosevelt about it?”

And literal Archie did so. . . .

But this was the last laughter heard in the house of Blair for many a weary week. Twins require more strength for their bearing and rearing than Joan, taken so unawares, was able to provide. The Major’s final act of gallantry cost a good deal in the way of human life, which may, or may not, have been of more value than the life he saved.

Afterwards, when she was able to think again, Joan sometimes wondered whether his death was not perhaps an even

more futile thing than his life had been; yet she would not have had it otherwise.

His widow had caused to be erected to his memory the finest granite monolith obtainable for money, bearing the inscription, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"; and Joan, after her first startled distaste for the grandiloquence passed, was able to appreciate how deeply the memorial must gratify the proud spirit of a Darcy, if it lingered near enough to know.

## CHAPTER XLIII

Through the dim corridors, the silent halls  
Of Yesterday, the nuns move, whispering  
Their rosary. Without, a robin calls  
A drowsy blessing to his little mate,  
For it is late,  
And chapel aisles are filled with peace and prayer,  
And Christ is there.

Ah, dreams that haunt these keys of ivory—!  
*Et verbum caro factum est*, they sing,  
And lo! the years are as a day to me.  
I kneel among the quiet ones again  
To lay the pain,  
The joy of life, where light and shadow meet  
At Jesus' feet.

SOME time earlier, during the period when girl-emotions translate themselves into verse as naturally as bird-emotions translate themselves into song, Joan had composed these lines, with the odd prescience that frequently came to her when she "took her pen in hand." She had stepped aside from a heated game of handball one day to jot them down; and her playfellows, evincing no particular surprise, had murmured to each other, "Leave Joan alone. She's writing Poetry." For poetry is as much a part of convent school-life as is handball.

Now she was back among "the quiet ones" again, fulfilling her own prophecy, come to lay her burden of pain and joy, if not at Jesus' feet, at least in the safekeeping of his handmaidens. In her plain black frock, such as convent girls wear, with her hair down in a braid and a small apron tied



about her waist to protect her skirt from embroidery-floss, the nuns found it hard to believe it was Joan Blair who had come back to them out of the world, and not Joan Darcy. Only this was a Joan who played harder than her younger self had ever played, entering into the gaiety of the school, the basket-ball, the charades, the skating-matches, the fancy-dress impromptus, with a feverish eagerness which saddened the good ladies to see. Strange, vivid, restless young creature—what she had learned of life in the short while she had been away from them! Love, motherhood, and loss—the loss that is saddest of all losses to women, be they wives or maids or *religieuses*. While they in their silent corridors and hidden gardens had listened to month after quiet month rung away by the bells, praying, dreaming, working; tending the young life about them into blossom, sometimes carrying with candles one of their number back to a still place beyond the children's playground, sometimes—not often now—receiving into their ranks one who had done with the world's ways even before she came to know them. Truly "the quiet ones," blessed with the peace of those who resign their wills to the will of God.

Joan, gazing into their serene, pure, almost childlike faces, envied them from her heart; but, being Joan, she asked herself wonderingly how they could be so sure it was the will of God to which they resigned themselves. Intelligent, fine-natured women, deliberately turning their backs on life, deliberately closing eyes and ears to what went on in the street just outside their cloister, lest it distract them from contemplation of their immortal souls—Joan shook her head sharply; and putting a veil over her hair, slipped into the chapel, where a voice behind the cloister-screen was repeating the rosary of the Sacred Heart:

"Oh, sacred heart of Jesus, burning with love for us,  
Inflame our hearts with love for Thee."

The beautiful voice rose and fell in almost passionate cadence, as if it were pleading. It ceased abruptly; and another, older voice took up the words, with mystic tenderness. There was a faint fragrance in the place—indeed throughout the old building—of incense and dying roses, which Joan always called to herself “the odor of sanctity.” It came back to her sometimes poignantly in the most unexpected places.

A very old lay-sister, in a white coif and shoes that creaked a trifle, pattered about among the statues of the saints, arranging small lamps and vases of flowers, always dropping as she passed the altar a business-like little curtsey. Now and then a child with a veil over her head would slip in at the door, and genuflect, and sink to her knees for a moment’s prayer. Sunlight streamed in, multi-colored, through ruby and purple and amber glass, across the white marble Christ who stood with hands outstretched and head bowed, suffering little children to come unto Him. . . .

Joan, who had been reading Rénan (a fact which would have certainly caused her expulsion from that place had it been known), quoted to herself:

“In our bustling civilization, the memory of the life of Galilee has been like the perfume of another world.”

It seemed to her one of the true miracles that it should indeed have persisted through our bustling civilization, through persecution and indifference, through crass hysterical religiosity, even to this day; if only in such places as her convent school, and little country churches here and there, and in the homes of the very poor. That lovely, pastoral, gentle life of Galilee, exquisite as the name itself—who could not have been good in Galilee?

“If Archie had lived then, he would have followed Christ,” thought Joan suddenly. “Followed him, and fought for him, too. And he ’d never have let the Jews get hold of him!”

It was the first time she had thought of her husband in many days. . . .

Archie's letters came with faithful regularity, but he was one of the personalities who do not carry well by letter. He informed her that he missed her, but she was not to hurry home on his account; that Ellen was keeping down the grocer-bill nicely; that the new man he had put on the road was n't doing well and he thought of putting Johnny Carmichael in his place; that one of the water-pipes had burst and made a spot on the wall, but nothing to fret about; and that if she needed more money be sure to let him know. Or words to that effect.

Archie, somehow, was never quite in the picture. She was better able to reconstruct her lost girlhood without him.

And Archie understood. It was he who had suggested the Convent when Joan's doctor admitted himself dissatisfied with her condition, her slow return to normality.

"You've got a peculiarly sensitive nervous organism to deal with here," the doctor said. "It takes very little to throw such natures off the balance. You say she never speaks of her babies at all? I don't like that! I'd rather have her crying about all over the place."

"So would I," said poor Archie. "Then she'd cry on me, and I could comfort her. Now I don't dare!"

"I would n't," advised the doctor, frankly. "Better let her alone."

So Archie, out of the wisdom of his love, wrote secretly to the nuns and asked them to invite her to the Convent for awhile; and because of the tragedy involved, the good ladies waived their rule of never permitting married women to live in the community. They welcomed her casually, as if her coming were no strange thing, gave her work to do, made her useful running errands and taking the smaller girls about; for in a religious community no one is ever idle.

And Joan proved Archie's wisdom by gradually losing her tenseness, her frantic clutching at amusement, and growing daily in strength and poise until at last she was able to enjoy again solitude and thought, two things of which she had for some time been afraid.

Indeed, Archie's experiment was almost too successful; for the simple, orderly routine of the Convent was so soothing to her that she dreaded the idea of leaving it. Days slipped into weeks; and still she postponed the thought of going back to her empty house, to Effie May's uncontrolled mourning, to that nursery which had been so happily prepared for the little occupants who never occupied it.

She was frightened sometimes to realize how utterly she seemed able to forget her husband when he was not with her. If Archie was rather frightened, too, he never admitted it, even to himself. After all, Joan was his wife; and in his simple creed wives were bound to love their husbands, else how could they remain wives?

"She's had an awful shock," he reminded Ellen, who was growing restive. "We've got to give her plenty of time to get over it."

"Humph! and what about you? I suppose you ain't had a good deal of a shock yourself!" muttered the old woman, savage with sympathy. "Wasn't you bringing home toys and truck every day of the world, trains and dolls and I don't know what all—and them not a week old yet? Your top chiffoneer drawer's full of toys this minute."

"Better give them away to the children in the neighborhood before she sees them."

"No such thing! I'll be savin' 'em for the next," said Ellen, stoutly. . . .

Oddly enough, Joan was presently restored to her husband and her duty through the medium of no less a person than Eduard Desmond.

She was chaperoning some of the younger girls in town one day, when she met him on the street. She was surprised by the encounter, for she had not known he was in Washington; and she bowed uncertainly, expecting him to be a little embarrassed.

But he stopped, and held out his hand with evident pleasure. "Mrs. Blair! you!" he exclaimed. "What wonderful luck brings you to Washington? and where are you stopping?"

Joan briefly explained.

"Then," he said with a notable accession of eagerness, "Mr. Blair is not with you?"

Some long-slumbering imp of malice awoke and stirred in Joan. His expression as he looked her up and down was unmistakable. Evidently matrimony had detracted nothing from her in his eyes. On the contrary.

"No, Mr. Blair is not with me," she replied demurely. "I am on a vacation. Why should one carry a husband about on a vacation?"

This was Longmeadow language, the native tongue of Mr. Desmond.

"Why, indeed?" he murmured. "And when am I to come to see you?"

"I'm not sure you are to come at all. We're not allowed masculine callers at the Convent, I think; are we, dear?" she asked the young girl nearest to her.

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Blair!—on Wednesday afternoons, if they're brothers or cousins or anything like that," replied the child shyly.

Eduard smiled. "I am not a cousin or a brother—fortunately—but perhaps I may be called 'something like that!'—Next Wednesday afternoon, then?"

"I'm not really sure that I shall be able to see you," she demurred.

"I am!" replied Eduard calmly; and, lifting his hat, he passed on.

He proved himself a true prophet. Joan could not deny herself the bitter satisfaction of seeing at what a small fire she had managed so to scorch her young wings.

He had been waiting half an hour in the convent parlor when she came to him, however; and half an hour in a convent parlor is an ordeal few forget. It was a large, bleak room divided midway by a grille, on the inner side of which sat a lay-sister, knitting. The other side was left for the reception of male relatives and connections; and a tongue-tied, uneasy lot they were, slipping about on the horsehair sofas, staring furtively at the undecorative saints who adorned the walls, conducting their conversation obviously with a view to the other side of the grille.

"For heaven's sake, get me out of this!" murmured Desmond as Joan approached. "I feel as if the eye of God were on me constantly!"

"It's only the eye of Sister Veronica," reassured Joan, "and more her ear than her eye, I fancy."

"You don't mean that she can hear what we are saying, in there?"

"I've been told there's a sounding-board concealed about this room somewhere. It may not be true, of course; but it's wonderful how much does get back to the Convent from the parlor."

Eduard shuddered. "There's goose-flesh up and down my spine! Do come out for a walk somewhere."

She shook her head, smiling. "Can't be done! But of course you have n't anything to say to me that Sister Veronica should n't hear."

"Have n't I, just?" he muttered.

The imp of malice stirred in her again. She asked softly, "What, for instance?"

He gave her a quick look, glanced toward the grille, and plunged, albeit in a very low voice.

"For one thing I want to tell you how lovely you've grown!"

"Louder, please?" said Joan, "I missed that."

He repeated it, with additions. "And you need not pretend you did not hear me, either, you witch. What's happened to you, Joan? I always knew you'd be a wonderful creature some day, but already!— Those exquisite shadows under the eyes, the hollow of your cheek, your lips— What I'd give to paint you now, my dear! Only that it would waste our time together. How much time have you, by the way? For me, I mean?"

"You find me improved, then?" she enquired, demurely.

"Improved! I find you—never mind what I find you! There's a subtlety, a fascination— But I can't express it."

"There must be a subtlety indeed if *you* can't express it," she commented; and added, "How is Mrs. Rossiter?"

If she expected to disconcert him, she was disappointed. He informed her at length as to the health, appearance, and conjugal felicity of Mrs. Rossiter.

"They're actually pulling it off," he said interestedly. "They're making a go of it. I've always had the theory that once a divorcée always a divorcée—the old-fashioned gentlewoman is more to my taste. Divorce always seems to me so—so unnecessary— But in this case it appears I am mistaken, and nobody is happier to admit it. They positively fancy each other, Philemon and Baucis, all that sort of thing!— By the way, I had no idea you had made such friends with May. You gave her my bracelet, it seems. Cruel of you, Joan!

"Did it hurt your feelings?" she murmured, dimpling.

"Oh, frightfully. How did you have the heart? She positively gloated over me."

"Father would never have allowed me to accept anything so handsome from a passing acquaintance. One had to do something with it, you see, so—"

"Passing acquaintance!" he interrupted, reproachfully. "Surely I was more to you than that? Our evening under the beech-tree—shall I ever forget it?"

Joan, paling a little, remarked, "Sister Veronica appears interested."

"Damn!" muttered Eduard, and shortly took his leave. But first he gave her a note from Mrs. Desmond urging her to dine with them on any evening she cared to name.

"Betty is abroad," wrote Mrs. Desmond, "and I know you have no heart for gaieties just now, so there will be only the four of us, a family party."

Joan hesitated.

"Of course we all realize that you are not in a mood for gaiety," said Eduard with a sympathetic glance at her black. "But I *must* see you somehow!—and among old friends, who understand—"

To ward off any mention of things that hurt, she hastily agreed to dine with the Desmonds on the following Saturday.

Sister Veronica, (who happened to be quite deaf) wondered what could have occurred to give the poor child such an expression of—not exactly pleasure. It was more like triumph. She would have made no sense of what Joan was muttering under her breath, Salome-wise, as she left the parlor: "Off with his head! Oh, off with his head, *and step on it!*"



## CHAPTER XLIV

**N**OT only the older girls, but more than one of the nuns, made some excuse to come into Joan's little room when she was dressing that Saturday evening. The rumor had gone forth that their charge was beginning to take interest in worldly affairs again, and the good ladies congratulated each other. While they themselves had forsworn the pleasures of the world, they were quite aware that for some these had their uses, if only as an anodyne. They took, too, a quite feminine pleasure in Joan's frock, a simple black chiffon with transparent sleeves, which she had cut out a little at the neck to make it suitable for the evening.

"I suppose," said the Reverend Mother, making her turn round and round for inspection, "that this is what they call in the world a décolleté basque, is it not? And very becoming, too! Only"—she added with the frank conventual innocence that occasionally startled Joan, "does not such a display of the person tend to encourage lust of the eye, my child?"

Joan laughed a little. "Let us hope so, Mother!" she murmured. "We strive to please"—a remark which the old lady trusted that she had misunderstood.

Her striving on that occasion was by no means in vain. There seems something peculiarly alluring to the masculine taste (as women of the oldest profession in the world are quite aware) about black. Joan, with nothing to relieve her somberness except a cluster of white gardenias at her breast, would have held the gaze of any man who saw her as surely as she held that of Eduard and of Betty's father, who had

hitherto not known his daughter's friend and openly regretted his missed opportunity. She was one of the women whom motherhood, even denied and thwarted motherhood, gives a momentary poignant beauty, of the sort that Leonardo loved to paint. Betty's father was indeed so regretful of his missed opportunity that it was with some difficulty Eduard secured the tête-à-tête upon which he had counted.

"At last!" he sighed when he had finally manœvered her into the conservatory to admire orchids. "I began to think this was going to be another wasted hour, like my ghastly experience of the monastic life.— Do you realize, my dear, that I am entitled to a little praise and comforting on your part?"

"Just why?"

"Why? Why, because of the discretion, the magnanimity, in fact the utter damn-fool quixotism of my late conduct! At Longmeadow, you know. Leaving you—when I might have stayed!"

Joan was rather startled. She had not expected him to carry the war into the enemy's country to such an extent as this.

"That makes twice," he murmured, leaning over her, "that I've let you go unscathed, my dear. When you left school—and when you came back to me. But—Fate is too strong for us. You're not expecting me, I hope, to let you go a third time?"

"In just about five minutes," she smiled, glancing at her wristwatch. "I've ordered my taxi for ten o'clock."

He gave a little exclamation, and caught her hand. "Don't pretend to be so cool and indifferent, you witch! I know you better than that. You—cool and indifferent! Have I forgotten that night under the beech-tree? Have you?"

Joan suddenly blazed out at him, white with anger. "No! I've not forgotten that. Nor afterwards."

“Afterwards?”

“Will you be good enough to tell me in plain language what was your idea in running away?”

He eyed her appreciatively. He liked a touch of temper in a woman. It gave them a zest your amiable creatures lack.

“Why, Beautiful, what else as a man of honor could I do? A thing like that does n’t stand still, you know! The flare dies out—or it goes further. Our flare would not have died out.”

Her lip curled. “And as ‘a man of honor’ it never occurred to you that we might preserve our flare, as it were, in marriage?”

He sighed ruefully. “Oh, yes, it did! That temptation, too, I had to fight. For you see, my dear, I don’t believe in marriage. I’ve seen too much of it (vicariously). Believe me, it preserves no flares! It quenches them. The thing’s as fatal as death—though not, thank God, as inevitable! I will not put a relation I value to a test it will not bear,” he explained, evidently in earnest. “What!—tie a creature of spirit and fire like yourself to the duty of forever loving one man, obeying one man, giving yourself into his hands to break at his leisure? Can you think of any surer way of killing love than to make a duty of it? ‘Duty’—the most hideous, cold, Puritanical word in our hideous, cold, Puritanical language! The French put it better. *Devoir* suggests something that is by no means cold. Therefore, dearest girl”—he kissed her hands—“let me pay you my *devoirs* always, and be sure that I shall never trouble you with anything so unpleasant as a ‘duty.’— Why, suppose I had taken you then, bound you hand and foot to me by law—think how bored we should be with each other already! It would be from me you would be taking a vacation, instead of from the unfortunate Blair.” (Joan winced.) “As it is—”

"Well?" she prompted, veiling her eyes. "As it is—Eduard?"

He drew her toward him with little inarticulate murmurs. She took a fleeting glance at the face approaching hers. It was flushed, the eyes a trifle glazed as if he had been drinking. He breathed hard.

"How unbecoming it is to them!" she thought; but without resisting. (The reader who happens to like Joan would do well to skip this paragraph. It is not our heroine at her best.)

"As it is," said Eduard rather hoarsely, "we have each other for all time, my Beautiful! Nothing to bind us, nothing to hold us, except our sacred—er—"

"Flare?" prompted Joan, helpfully.

But he was not paying his usual attention to words just then. He lifted her face to his, and closed his eyes the better to savor what was coming. . . .

An unexpected sound caused him to open them again. It was laughter, issuing from the very lips he was about to enjoy; not hysterical, nervous laughter such as might have been pardoned under the circumstances, but cool and sweet, and unimpassioned as the tinkling of ice in a pitcher.

"You're not really trying to warm it up and serve it over again?" protested Joan, as she extricated herself from his embrace. "How absurd! I thought you were too much of an artist for that. And at your age, too!"

She sauntered back to the others, still laughing over her shoulder. He did not follow.

Which may be said to have been the end of Eduard Desmond, so far as this chronicle is concerned. . . .

But it was also the end of what Joan had disloyally spoken of to him as her vacation. The word stuck in her memory, and she was ashamed of it. Her heart yearned toward Archie.

The nuns bade her a delighted farewell; and all the way home she made amends for her long neglect of him by thinking of her husband constantly. By contrast with Eduard's smooth hair, his slim hands, and well-modulated, expressive voice, Archie appeared to her the very epitome of manliness. She idealized his defects into beauties, big ears, clumsiness, and all. She remembered with a thrill how easily he carried her upstairs when she was tired, how he went tiptoeing squeakily about the house in the morning for fear of waking her, whispering in tones that would have roused the dead—Blessed, funny old Archie! She could hardly wait for the sight of him.

Yet when she did see him, through the car-window, watching the platform for her appearance as tensely as a terrier watches a rathole, Joan shrank back with a faint gasp. He was looking quite appallingly dapper, with shiny new shoes and a Derby hat—an article of wear not designed for people with badly adjusted ears; and his mouth hung slightly open in his eagerness, showing the infantile front teeth, through which issued (she could almost hear it) a sort of a tuneful hissing, as was his way in moments of emotion, just to show that he was not nervous or excited in the least.

Joan shrank back, the last person to leave the train. And as she passed a mirror, catching a glimpse of her pale face within it she whispered piteously, "Oh, Joan Darcy, what have you done?"

## CHAPTER XLV

**F**OR the modern woman there lies, fortunately, a life between the two extremes of domesticity and frivolity, both of which Joan had tried and found wanting. Or rather she had not found domesticity wanting so much as temporary—a period of tranquil suspense, as it were, leading up to an inevitable climax which had somehow failed to come off. Even had her babies lived, it is to be doubted whether Joan could have long satisfied herself with domesticity pure and simple; and she could no more resume it now than a cocoon may be resumed by a former occupant which has sprouted wings.

As for frivolity, plenty of that offered itself to a young matron with a charming house and a husband who was generally spoken of as a rising young business man. (“Rising,” Archie certainly was; he had to be, to keep up with his rising expenditures.)

But Joan asked perhaps too much of frivolity. She had been heard to remark that “nothing made the social game possible except flirtation and real talk; neither of which were to be had in Louisville by people who valued their reputations”; a rather sweeping comment, of the sort which soon made Joan’s tongue a trifle over-famous. Simple, unexacting folk who liked a good dinner with a game of cards afterwards for modest stakes, and now and then a little dancing with each other’s spouses, just to keep in touch with the new steps, began to be rather afraid of young Mrs. Blair. And Joan was equally afraid of them. She had a morbid suspicion that dullness might be catching.

There was something appalling to her, too, in what has been somewhere called "the infinite littleness of social life." It seemed to have a strangely flattening effect upon its devotees—promoting some, demoting others, all to the same unstimulating level, while the wheels within wheels shifted and reformed kaleidoscopically. These wheels within these wheels puzzled Joan. "Climbers," such as her stepmother, she was able to understand and even to sympathize with. It seemed to her quite natural and thoroughly American for water to seek a higher level than its own. That was merely progress, merely self-respect made visible. To "get on" appeared a quite legitimate ambition; but to "get in"—that was another matter. Snobbery, that word of many interpretations, meant to Joan the extreme form of self-confessed vulgarity.

"If it were friends they were after, I could understand," she said to Emily Carmichael. "Everybody wants friends—we're all lonely. But you have got to select your real friends one at a time, not in assorted clumps, like bananas. And one's real friends so rarely happen to be friends with each other—you've noticed that? Why this passion for organizing ourselves into group-formation, anyway?"

"For purposes of offense and defense," explained Emily. "So that we may leave the Mrs. Websters out, and let the Joan Darcys in, of course."

They had been discussing Joan's near neighbor, a well-bred, sweet-mannered, adaptable young woman who had recently laid siege to the town, and with whom Joan was forming one of those propinquity friendships which are destined not to last. None of Mrs. Webster's friendships appeared to last. She had used acquaintance after acquaintance gracefully as a stepping-stone to higher things, leaving, however, not a single enemy behind her. It was the fashion in the various circles through which she had passed to say how charming Mrs. Webster was, even after she seemed done with

them. And now, through Joan, she was laying tactful but so far unsuccessful siege to the Jabberwocks; cleverness (in moderation) having become quite the smart thing nowadays.

"It is not our massive intellects which attract her, however," commented Emily. "It is—well, modesty forbids me to say just what it is. The sign *verboden* is to some natures as a red rag to a bull. They simply must have it to play with."

"Well, but why should anybody be *verboden* to Kathy Webster?" defended Joan. "She's charming, and perfectly intelligent, and unmistakably a lady—which is more than one can say with confidence of some of our most indefatigable social leaders. Look at Mrs. Gunther, for instance!—did n't you tell me her father used to deliver meat at your door out of his own cart?"

"Excellent meat it was, too. Father says we have never had a decent butcher since."

"And lo, what house more exclusive than theirs?"

"Naturally! It has to be. People like that seem to develop a sort of protective instinct which guards them from any possible contact with vulgarity until such time as they shall have accumulated enough refinement to be immune. Not for them the company of any chance newcomer like Mrs. Webster! They have to be careful."

"But should n't you think they'd have a sort of fellow-feeling for the new arrivals?"

"Dear me, no! What's the good of attaining a pinnacle if you're going to share it with somebody who might push you off?"

Mrs. Webster's pursuit of Joan was not entirely opportunism. There was a good deal of admiration in it, mixed with a sort of malice which the larger nature had difficulty in comprehending. Joan found herself entered most unwill-



ingly into an undignified petty rivalry with her neighbor. If she entertained some of her friends at luncheon without Mrs. Webster, the other instantly retaliated by giving a luncheon herself without Joan, sending in dessert and decorations afterwards to press home the point. If the Blair house in Spring put out new awnings, the Webster house erupted not only into awnings but into flower-boxes as well, with a corresponding air of triumph in its mistress. If Joan received some invitation which the other did not, there arose between them a slight, unmistakable coolness; whereas, if the contrary occurred, Mrs. Webster became modest and cordial again.

Yet when this unpleasant rivalry lay dormant, the two had many a friendly, neighborly time together over their sewing and their gardening; and once when Joan was taken suddenly ill the other showed herself genuinely kind, quick with womanly help and sympathy.

Joan could never quite make up her mind whether it was the pettiness of Society which makes the Mrs. Websters, or the Mrs. Websters who make the pettiness of Society. In any case, she lost what little taste she had for a purely social career. It was not good enough.

And so she turned the pent-up energies of her nature into those activities which are summed up nowadays under the general title of Clubwork. Investigations, commissions, agitations of all sorts came in for their share of her attention. She soon created for herself quite a following of less daring spirits, among them Emily Carmichael and others of the Jabberwock group who had graduated from the cocoon. It became known that whenever young Mrs. Blair undertook a thing, it went with a rush, not so much through her own efforts as through those of her henchmen. She was recognized in club circles, despite her youth, as something more valuable than a mere worker; she was an executive— All

which fed her vanity and her sense of usefulness; and left nowhere within her an aching void of dissatisfaction.

Suffrage-work came nearer filling this void than had anything else, and that, it must be confessed, for a rather ignoble reason. It gave her a chance to make speeches. In the back of her mind, with the very real conviction that the ballot is a necessity which women are unjustly denied, lurked also a suspicion that the world is already aware of the fact without any further need of agitation. Nevertheless she continued to agitate, because she liked to exercise an ability which otherwise might have remained forever undiscovered—there is no pleasure in life equal to that of employing skillfully the talents that have been given us.

She made the discovery of her gift quite by accident. At the woman's meeting, a lady who was to have spoken on the subject of the Federal Amendment failed to appear, and a man, who had recently read up on the matter (it may be remembered that she was what the actors call "quick study"), volunteered to take her place, meaning simply to give the gist of the matter and thus relieve a harassed chairman. It was when she found herself on the platform facing interested and expectant faces, something happened that had occasionally happened before when she "play-acted" for the girls at school. Joan left herself, and became a part of the audience.

She listened to her voice going on and on, with amused approval. It was a voice rather like her father's, carrying and flexible, and peculiarly rich in its intonations.

"It doesn't really matter much what I say," thought Joan, listening to herself; "it's how I say it. If I drop my voice a note here, they ought to frown." (They did.) "Now I'll have them smile a little, perhaps chuckle. After I stop, applause, I think—just a nice, thoughtful silence." (All of which came faithfully to pass.)

When she stepped down from that platform, her reputation as a public speaker was made. Thereafter she delivered speeches whenever and wherever she was asked, to the incredulous delight of Archie.

"Say, come over and hear the wife do her little spiel to-night!" he would urge upon all his acquaintance. "It's a treat!—stands right up and hands it to 'em hot off the reel, without a note or anything. You can see her little old brain workin' while she talks—and lookin' pretty as a picture all the time!"

His pride in her was such that he presented her with a successor to Lizzie, a more pretentious member of the Lizzie family, in fact, in which to get about to her numerous committee meetings.

"Of course we can afford it," he said in answer to her demur. "Have n't all your friends got automobiles? Well, then!"

Joan accomplished much in the way of by-product to this satisfaction of her vanity. Her youthful charm and her good breeding got her a hearing frequently where more strenuous representatives of the cause had failed; and through her many hitherto uncertain lambs were gathered safely into the fold. On one occasion, to her astonishment, Joan discovered the three Misses Darcy in her audience, wearing expressions of shrinking alarm. But if they had come—not to scoff, they were too polite for that: let us say to deprecate,—they remained to join.

"I declare it's *shameful* the way we women have been treated all this time!" cried Miss Iphigenia afterwards, truculently signing the card which made of her a suffragette. "I'd no idea! Not allowed a word in edgewise, the gentlemen spending all the money and making all the laws, ordering us about like we were so many white slaves—"

"I don't recall that darling mama was ever treated in

just that way by dear papa!" interjected Miss Virginia, uncertainly.

"Pooh! Exceptions," snorted Miss Iphigenia (if one so gentle could be said to snort). "Exceptions can be made to prove anything, can't they, Joan? Why, we have n't even had a say-so as to whether we should marry or not. Simply had to sit back and say 'Thank you, sir!' to any gentleman who was kind enough to ask us!"

Here Miss Virginia was able thoroughly to concur. "And if nobody *was* kind enough to ask us— Oh, my dears, I begin to think that if we could have had the ballot in time—!"

"What's more," cried Miss Iphigenia, inspired, "I mean to bring our Susy to hear you the next time you make a speech, Joan. Yes, I do! If they try to keep her out, we shall say she is there as our maid. If we are all to be allowed to vote about things, colored and white alike, it's time for the colored women to be taught how!"— Which Joan justly regarded as a signal victory.

But at the same time she chuckled inwardly over the mental vision of an audience of colored lady voters, swaying to and fro with occasional unctuous shouts of, "Bress us, dat's so! Um, yas, my Lawd! Come down, come down and gadder us sinners into de fold!"

Occasionally, in the pursuance of her various public successes, Joan was thrown into contact with people whom she classified under the heading of *Intelligentzia*. There were plenty of these in Louisville, thinkers and students and writers, a growing number of names which were rather better known away from the city than in it. But of these Joan fought a little shy. She cared more for books than for the making of them, had no wish to peep behind the scenes for fear of losing her illusions. She got the impression, too, that professional thinkers and writers were so busy observing and interpreting the life about them as to have somehow

lost human touch with it. And Joan was nothing if not a humanist. She had a youthful horror of being classified among the *bas bleux*.

"Men do so hate a bluestocking," she said once pensively to her friend Emily.

"Men? Well, what of that? Yours doesn't!—and you don't want anybody else's men, do you?"

"None that I have seen so far," admitted Joan. "But you never can tell. They say it's in the dangerous thirties that we really begin to sit up and take notice— Anyway, I shall *never* be married and settled enough to relish the idea of men running away from me as if I were something catching!"

So she continued to avoid, rather than to cultivate, the company of the *Intelligentzia*, thereby denying herself her birthright.

And at twenty-five, a leading citizeness of her community, with engagements so thick on her calendar that there was barely time for an occasional meal at home, she woke every morning with the thought, "If something does n't happen to-day, I shall scream!"

## CHAPTER XLVI

**A**T that stage of life, something usually does happen. . . .  
Joan, coming home from a late committee-meeting one afternoon, realized with a sort of pang, as she turned into the court where she lived, that Indian summer had come and almost gone without her being aware of it. The golden rain of leaves falling about her, the oddly wistful smell of autumn smoke in the air, gave her a twinge of something like homesickness; of sorrow because so many such evenings had come and gone unnoticed. Words of Fiona McLeod came to her mind

“We are a perishing clan among the sons of God, because of the slow waning of our joy, of our passionate delight, in the Beauty of the World.”

“How *can* one enjoy the Beauty of the World alone?” asked Joan suddenly of herself. . . .

Through the windows of some near-by house came a man’s voice singing a little Russian lullaby that she had not heard in many years. Her mother had once made an English version of it:

“Hush, my dear one, hush, my baby,  
(Byushky, byu),  
Smiles the moon upon thy cradle,  
Smiles thy mother, too.

“Cossack art thou in thy dreaming,—  
(Byushky, byu).  
Blood and tears and fear and glory  
Shall I know through you.

"But to-night thou art my small one,  
(Byushky, byu),  
With the moon to bless thy slumber,  
And thy mother, too."

Joan walked slowly and listened. For all the simplicity of the air and accompaniment, it was an artist who sang, and he sang in Russian.

She was hungry for music. It was one of the things she had deliberately done without of late, pronouncing it to herself for some odd reason "not safe." She thought the voice came from the house of a neighbor who occasionally entertained musicians— But she was mistaken. It came from her own house.

She opened her door, and stood there staring into the twilight room, her slim grace outlined against the golden rain of falling leaves outside. Stefan Nikolai gazed at her over the top of the piano with a quiet smile of welcome, and finished his song. Joan burst into tears.

Had Archie been there, he would have rushed to the rescue, comforting, exclaiming, asking questions; and these methods failing, he would have called anxiously upon Ellen and the bottle of valerian.

But Archie was not there. . . . Nikolai went on playing softly, until the tears had spent themselves. Then he said as if they had parted yesterday: "I came to see why you no longer write to me, my dear. Is it because you are too happy?"

Joan began feverishly to light lamps and candles. "You must think me a f-fool, Stefan!" She was dabbing at her eyes. "It's just— Mother used to sing that song, you know."

"I know. She learned it from me when you were very little— One is never a fool to weep, Joan. It is only the fools who do not weep."

"Now," she cried, turning in the lamplight. "Stand there and let me look at you!"

He stood where she bade him, a slim, erect, very distinguished figure in foreign-cut clothes, with a rather Mephistophelian close clipped beard, and singularly black eyes, eloquent in an otherwise impassive face. They met her gaze now so tenderly, so caressingly, that something seemed to melt in her heart which had long been pent there. She held out both hands.

"Oh, Stefan, Stefan! I am so glad!— And how handsome you are! I had forgotten that."

He laughed a little, and bent over her hands, kissing them lightly.

"Why, you 've never been so formal as that before!"

"You have never been a grown-up married woman before."

"I see! You mean that we 've become the same age now?" She looked at him more closely. "And we have! Why, Stefan, you 're nothing like as old as I used to think you!"

"I never have been," he smiled. "I rather fancied you might discover that fact some day. But—you would n't wait, my dear." He turned to some packages on the top of the piano. "Have you become too grown-up and married to like presents?"

The brief moment of awkwardness passed before Joan was quite sure it had been there. She clapped her hands. "Presents—for me? Oh, and for Ellen Neal, and even for Archie, whom you don't know! Stefan, how dear of you!"

"Your people are my people," he said. "Also, I wish to propitiate them into allowing me the freedom of your company, you see."

"Then you 're going to stay for some time?" she cried, delightedly.



"As long as I am allowed to— 'Home is the sailor, home from sea, and the hunter home from the hill'—"

"Till he begins to feel an itching in his wanderfoot again," said Joan, making a little face at him. "I know you!"

At that moment Ellen came in to light the lamps. "Oh, you've come, Miss Joan, have you? I thought it was about time! Mr. Archie 'll be home before long," she said primly, and was about to withdraw when Joan cried to her, "Nellen, have you seen Mr. Nikolai?"

"Sure I have. How else did you s'pose he got into the house? I'm puttin' a place on the supper-table for him," she replied, tossing her head.

With years Ellen's temper did not become less difficult; but Joan was at a loss to account for its present manifestation.

"Of course you are," she murmured soothingly. "But I don't believe you've seen the lovely present he's brought you all the way from—Shanghai, is it, this time?"

Ellen drew near, fascinated by the shimmering length of purple crêpe. "Silk! For me? Shucks, what would I be doin' with stuff like that? It's much too fine for the likes of me!"

"Nothing is too fine for the likes of you," replied Nikolai, with quiet sincerity.

"Why, you'll be perfectly grand in it, Nellen, with the Battenberg collar and cuffs!"

She muttered, mollified, "I don't know as a single woman ought to accept such things off a gentleman."

"It's all right if her chaperon says she may," reassured Joan, keeping a straight face.

But when the old woman had gone, she said to her friend, "I'm ashamed of her, Stefan! I can't think what gets into her cranky old head!"

"It is always so at first. I have to win her confidence

afresh each time. I think the faithful soul regards me as a wolf menacing the safety of her sheepfold."

"That 's because you are what she calls a 'for'ner.' "

"It 's because I am a Jew. Few really practising Christians can find it in their hearts to trust a Jew."

"But you 're only half a Jew!"

"You might as well say 'only half a negro,' " he remarked without bitterness. "It is the blood that counts, not the amount of it." . . .

He had brought her the gray sapphires he once promised her, a long string of them with pearls between, and a tassel of pearls at either end.

She exclaimed with pleasure, "What an exquisite jewel!" (She had learned more about such things than in the days when she secretly scorned her aquamarine because it was not set in diamonds.) "How the pearls bring out the color of the stones, and how wonderfully they match, Stefan!"

"Do they?" He looked critically from the stones to her eyes. "Yes, they are darker now than the aquamarine. Shadows have come into them— The sapphires are better."

She patted his hand. "It is so nice to have somebody about again who notices whether I have eyes or not!"

"Surely your Archibald notices?"

"If he does he never mentions them! He would think it rather indelicate, like praising something of his own, you know."

Nikolai smiled, gravely. "That is a very safe state for a husband to be in— I hope you do not take advantage of it, Joan?"

She gave him a quick glance. "I wonder what you mean by that?"

But Nikolai did not explain. He said instead, "I am sorry you have no children."

She stiffened. Among her friends it had come to be understood that children were best not mentioned to Joan. There was a hidden bruise which time seemed to have left unhealed.

Nikolai, however, chose not to heed the warning of her expression.

"A home without children in it," he added, "seems to us wandering folk only half a home."

Joan stood up, a hand at her throat. "What do you think," she said in a stifled voice, "it seems to us who are not wandering folk?" . . .

In three questions Stefan Nikolai had discovered about the Blair household all and more than he wanted to know.

## CHAPTER XLVII

**A**T that moment there was the sound of a latchkey in the door and Archie came in; a weary, cheerful Archie, not quite so dapper as of old, but rather the better for that, perhaps.

“Hello, darlingest!—‘Late as usual.’ There—I said it first! Things do sort of pile up on a person. Why, look who’s here? Wait! I know you—” he extended an eager hand of welcome to the man who rose to greet him. “I’ll bet my hat it’s Joan’s pal, the author. Guessed you, did n’t I? Only you said he was an *old* chap, Joan!— Well, well, well! Welcome to our city. I thought you were projickin’ round, as the darkies say, in Mesopotamia or Timbuctoo or some such spot. Gee, it’s been good as a geography lesson just to read the postmarks on your letters, sir! You’ve come to stay with us, of course? Hotel—nonsense!”

The two shook hands warmly. Despite the breeziness of her husband’s manner, Joan detected in it a respect which pleased her. This was no mere family friend Archie was welcoming to his city; it was Mr. Nikolai, the Author. She loved his little boyish bursts of hero-worship.

“Look at my beautiful present,” she said, slipping her hand through his arm and exhibiting her necklace. “You’ve got a present, too. It’s like Christmas!”

Archie was pleased as a child with his gift, a lacquer box surmounted by an ivory monkey which, when a handle was turned, reached down into a box and lifted out a cigarette.

“Ain’t they a wonderful little people, though, the Japan-

ese?" he demanded originally. "Who but them would have thought of such a trick?"

"'They!' dear," murmured Joan.

"'They,' then," he repeated, unabashed. "Can't be grammatical till I've had my supper. I'm dead beat."

It was not the first time of late that Archie had come home "dead beat," though he did not often admit it. The treasurer of his company was ill, and Archie, upon whom Mr. Moore was growing to depend for many things, had volunteered to undertake the treasurer's work in addition to his own. But he had not the same gift for finance as for salesmanship, and took little joy in his new honors; except for the additional increase in his salary. Joan, to whom money meant nothing so long as she could pay her bills promptly, was rather troubled by the growing mercenariness of her husband. He seemed to be always thinking in terms of dollars and cents.

But Archie lost his unwonted air of fatigue during dinner in his interest in the tale of Mr. Nikolai's travels. Nikolai had the writer's gift of accumulating odd experiences, so that even Ellen lingered unduly about the table. Archie was enthralled.

"Is n't it just as good as a geography book to hear him?" he demanded several times. "To think of the natives of Yezo tattooing blue mustaches on the girl-babies to make sure they'll catch a husband! Ho, ho, that tickles me! There's a tip for Cousin Virginia, Joan."

Here Ellen, who had been making her fourth unnecessary round with the potatoes, suddenly spluttered and retired to her pantry.

("The ice," remarked Nikolai to Joan, "is beginning to break.")

"I've always thought," mused Archie, "that I'd like to see the world a little myself some time. Armadillos on their native heath, Esquimaux eating tallow candles, the Latin

Quarter in Paris whooping it up—things like that. But now," he finished with a happy glance at his wife, "I'm glad enough to be allowed to stay just where I am."

"Who would n't be?" murmured his guest. "With such a charming home—"

"You ought to have been here when my garden was growing," said Archie, highly gratified. "If I do say it myself, there's not a farmer in the State raises better bib-lettuce than I do. As for our asparagus—yum-yum! Simply melts in the mouth."

The other looked at him very kindly. "Was that also one of your earlier dreams—to be a farmer?"

Archie nodded. "It's always seemed to me about the finest thing a man could do, if he were able to—live on the land as he was intended to, raise what he needs to eat and a little more for his friends; chickens and pigs and a cow, and perhaps a little blooded stock if he could manage it—" He broke off with a faint sigh.

"Why, dear," cried his wife, surprised, "I never suspected you of these bucolic ambitions!"

"I reckon most men have 'em, if they'll own up to it—don't they, Mr. Nikolai? Look how all boys love to dig in the dirt! . . . But you need n't worry, darlinest. I'm never going to take *you* off and bury you in the country. I know better than that!"

It was late when Nikolai rose to leave them, declining an urgent invitation to occupy their guest-room.

"No, I must get back to the hotel and relieve Sacha's mind. If I do not he will certainly set out to find me, and as he has no language but Russian, that might lead to complications."

"Who," demanded Joan, "is Sacha, pray? Have you been stylish enough to set up a valet?"

"It is Sacha who appears to have set me up. I had occasion once to do him a kindness, and he thereupon attached himself

permanently to my person. There is no creature on earth so grateful as a grateful Russian."

Joan took him by the arms and made him sit down again. "Not a foot do you stir till you tell us all about it!" she proclaimed, scenting a story.

"About what? Sacha? Well!— In a village where I stopped for awhile a young mouzhik had been very badly beaten and thrown into prison to await trial, and things promised to go rather badly with him. So—"

"Wait a minute. *Why* had he been beaten?"

"For murder," said Nikolai calmly.

His audience gasped.

"Only the murder was not successful," he continued. "Sacha was unfortunately interrupted before he had completed the job."

"Unfortunately!"

"Yes. The headman of the village had taken Sacha's little sister against her will, and the boy did what he could to avenge her. The law is not of much use in such cases— to peasants, at least. The night before I left, some of his friends liberated him from the village jail, and brought him to me. Their trust in the power of learning is piteous. They demanded that I take him away with me to America. That was a little difficult without a passport, but I managed to smuggle him over the border."

"How?" demanded Archie, round-eyed.

"In my trunk," replied Nikolai, as if this were an every-day occurrence. "I had arranged with a carter to drive me and my luggage early the next day to the railroad. Instead, he drove me to the border, fortunately not very far distant. My luggage was almost smothered by the time we got there, however, despite the air-holes we had bored in the trunk. Poor Sacha!"

"But did nobody examine your luggage?" asked Joan.

Nikolai shrugged. "As I told you, in Russia there is great respect for learning—also for roubles. I am not without friends in high places. Such officials as I encountered quite understood that a man of learning like myself would naturally travel with a heavy trunkful of books, ventilated by air-holes— But I have been warned that it will not be safe for me to return to Russia. Thanks to this episode, in connection with recent writings of mine, I am no longer *persona grata* there." He shrugged again.

Archie's eyes were round. "Whew!" he commented. "That's what I call life! Sounds like Michael What's-his-name, the Courier of the Czar!"

"I assure you," murmured Nikolai, "that I am anything but a courier of the Czar!" . . .

Later, when they had gone upstairs, Joan came upon Archie examining her string of sapphires, with an expression that puzzled her. It was grave, and not very happy.

"Dear," she said suddenly, "would you for any reason rather not have me accept this present from Stefan? It is very handsome, I know. But he is a rich man, my oldest friend, and he has been giving me things of this sort ever since I was a baby."

He turned on her a look of pure astonishment. "Not accept it! Why, sweetheart, I'm tickled as I can be that such a beautiful thing should be given to you. It looks like you, too, somehow, as if it had been specially made for you. I was only wishing—" he sighed faintly—"that I could give you things like this myself. And those Mandarin coats, and laces and all he sends you, and—oh, life generally! *You* ought to see the world, Joan, like he does. Maybe you can," he added hopefully, "as soon as I get a little ahead."

She hugged him. "Why, you old goose! you're always giving me beautiful things. My pretty engagement-ring, and the house, and the new Lizzie, and— You see Stefan does n't



have to provide me with dresses and three meals a day, and put up with all my whims and megrims."

"I'll bet he wishes he did!" exclaimed Archie, with one of his occasional flashes of insight.

She pulled his ears. "You think because you're in love with me yourself that everybody else is, too! Stefan's about as much in love with me as he was with—baby Joan. It's simply gratitude. Mother was very sweet to him always—I've heard her say that it had been her job, and not an easy one, to restore his faith in women. It seems that he was engaged once to marry a girl who quite understood about his Jewish blood. But when he took her down to the East Side in New York to see the old aunt who had brought him to America, she couldn't stand it. She broke with him, not because of any difference in religion, but because the aunt spoke Yiddish and wore a horsehair wig!—Mustn't she feel like a fool, now that he's become so famous?"

"Well, I don't know," said Archie doubtfully. "I'd kind of hate to have Yiddish and a wig in the family myself."

She looked at him in surprise. "Archie! I didn't know you were such a snob! So long as Stefan doesn't wear a wig or speak Yiddish, what does the aunt matter? And the funny part of it was that the aunt rather looked down upon poor Stefan because his father had married a Gentile! So he came to regard mother and me as his only family. . . . Now run along to bed." She kissed him on his eyes, a caress that Archie loved. "I'm going to take a dose of valerian and have a good night's sleep. It is exciting having your best friend drop down on you from who knows where!"

## CHAPTER XLVIII

**I**T proved exciting not only to Joan. Some years earlier the arrival of so distinguished a visitor unadvertised and unpressaged would have caused little more than a ripple, except perhaps among what Joan called the *Intelligentzia*. But now that *belles lettres* were coming quite into fashion, the chance of knowing personally a friend of Tolstoi and Maeterlinck, whose articles appeared in all the more intellectual magazines, whose recent book of plays had been published simultaneously in five languages and censored off the American stage into every up-to-date home in the land, was one that could not be ignored.

The Russian servant, too, was a picturesque addition; a great, bearded fellow with eyes like a child, a tall sheepskin *papaoha* on his head, and his trousers tucked into wrinkled boots. This exotic apparition frequently opened the Blair door to visitors, and even waited on them at table, Sacha having without the aid of language won his way somehow to the rather uncertain heart of Ellen Neal; possibly because of his infantile appetite for sweets. He followed his master about like a dog, and whenever Nikolai was in the front of the house, Sacha's broken English and sudden high laugh were frequently to be heard from the rear. There were a good many callers at the Blair house in those days.

The Blairs, and incidentally their friend, also found themselves deluged with invitations, many of which Joan accepted. She rather enjoyed showing off her lion, whose simple dignity was quite impervious to lionizing. His social successes amused her by their unexpectedness; for Nikolai had no small talk and pretended to none. He paid his chance companions

the compliment of believing them to be interested in whatever interested him; and very often they were.

Once, Joan, overhearing him enlarging to an audience composed of Archie, Emily Carmichael, and a particularly frivolous young divorcée of their acquaintance, on the Ostwald formula for happiness, felt called upon to come to the rescue; and received for once in her life a decided snubbing from her husband.

“Don’t interrupt, Joan, please!— Mr. Nikolai ’s telling us something mighty interesting. Go on, sir—  $G=E^2+W^2$ — I did n’t quite get you about the Hüttengluck and the Hel-dengluck?”

“G,” explained Nikolai, “is as you know Gluck (happiness). E stands for Energetics; meaning activity, health, ambition, etc. W stands for Widerwillig, one of those comprehensive words one finds only in the German, meaning everything that runs counter to happiness, all the by-products of activity—opposition, fatigue, trouble, etc. There are philosophers who hold that by reducing E (the activities of life) one also reduces W (the unpleasantnesses), thereby attaining happiness. Renunciation, you understand;—the simple life, such as that of Diogenes, who threw away his one utensil, the cup, when he saw a man drinking satisfactorily out of his hand.

“But the danger is that in generally reducing the formula, G also is reduced, and may even become minus. At its best the happiness attained in this way is what Ostwald calls Hüttengluck (hut-happiness). He advocates instead the Hel-dengluck (hero-happiness). Square, he says, both your Energetics and your Widerwillig, and the result will be a doubled happiness, robust, vital. In other words, live to the top of your powers, suffer to the top of your powers; and you will be able to enjoy to the top of your powers.”

“Sure!” said Archie. “I see that. Me for Ostwald!”

The little divorcée remarked in an aside to Joan, "He certainly does make you think, this high-brow beau of yours! But I *like* to think, sometimes."

It taught Joan a lesson. She recalled a sentence of Trevelyan's: "A man who has too much sense to overrate his own qualities will often make amends to his self-esteem by underrating his neighbor's."

She realized that she might have been making such a mistake herself. If, as she had complained, there was no real talk to be had in society, were not she and people like her responsible?

If a scholar such as Stefan Nikolai found it worth while to give of his best to simpler comprehensions, was it not pretentious and even ridiculous of a Joan Blair to "talk down" to them, tactfully adapting herself to their limitations while concealing yawns behind her hand? She had the grace to blush for herself. . . .

The companionship of Joan and Nikolai was, as Louisville interestedly suspected, not an entirely intellectual one, however. Like all people who work hard with their heads (and Nikolai spent many hours at his desk daily, even in holiday seasons), he knew the full value of play, and had always been to Joan the most delightful of play-fellows. In her childhood he had often borrowed her for what they called "expeditions"—visits to circuses, zoölogical gardens, museums; boat-journeys, picnics—always to the surprise of Major Darcy, who regarded a child as a desirable addition to any family, something to be petted, and instructed, and even romped with in moderation, but by no means to be made a companion of.

These expeditions renewed themselves now in modified form. The two were constantly to be met with in the most unexpected places—tramping about the parks in the rain, making tea over a gipsy fire by the roadside, climbing, their pockets bulging with books and apples, to the top of a certain hill whence miles of wild rolling country were to be seen, and the city

behind them was as if it had never been. Joan had no longer to enjoy the Beauty of the World alone. The hill became their favorite haunt; and all through the open winter they climbed to its top almost daily, where in the shelter of the cliff they built themselves a little fire and sat, their backs to the world, reading and munching apples, and talking, talking endlessly.

Joan never felt that any subject had been exhausted between them. It seemed to her that the thoughts of a lifetime had been accumulating in her mind, waiting for him to pass judgment upon them; and to him it was no less than a miracle to watch her brain expanding, enlarging, visibly blossoming under the nourishment he supplied.

Perhaps her brain was not the only thing Nikolai loved to watch about Joan. He usually managed to seat himself a little behind her, out of her range of vision, so that his own might rest where it chose, unobserved. But he asked no more; having learned of life to practise the Hüttengluck which he did not preach.

Sometimes Archie made a third on these expeditions; for he had developed a great enthusiasm for Joan's famous friend, and occasionally neglected business to sit at the feet of wisdom. Not often, however. Business had reached a point where it declined to be neglected (the depression of 1913 was at hand); and besides Archie, despite their affectionate welcome, felt rather *de trop* with the pair.

"I'm no high-brow, and there's no use pretending I am," he confessed once to Emily Carmichael. "But that don't keep me from appreciating high-brows when I see 'em. It's as good as a correspondence-course in literature to hear those two go on. I'm as much out of it, though, as if they were talkin' the French language—which they sometimes are, at that!"

"Archie," asked Emily, hesitating, "are you never the

least little bit—jealous?” Her friendship for Joan was too unquestionable for the remark to sound feline.

He laughed. “Me jealous? What for? I’ve got her, have n’t I? And he has n’t, poor chap! Glad to share what I can.”

It happened that at the same time this conversation occurred—it was a chance meeting down town, and Archie, always the soul of hospitality, had invited Emily to join him in a cup of hot clam-broth at a soda-fountain—that the pair on the hilltop were not indulging in either literature or the French language. Joan, ensconced upon a bed of leaves with her back against the sheltering cliff and her face warm with fireglow, remarked dreamily:

“Stefan, how have I ever managed to live here so long without you?”

His smile did not reach his eyes; those beautiful, speaking, somber eyes which reflected in them so much of the history of his race. He said, “And how shall you manage when I am gone again?”

She turned quickly to look at him. Something in his voice troubled her. “Gone— Why, Stefan, you’re not thinking of going soon?”

“My book has made great progress here. It is a pleasant place for writing— I have nearly finished.”

She gave an exclamation of something like anger. “You said you were going to stay ‘as long as possible.’ And after all it was only to finish another book!”

“Not quite ‘only,’ Joan.”

“Then,” she demanded impatiently, “why do you talk about going? I am still here, whether the book is done or not! Are you tired of me already?”

“What do you think?”

“Have you become such a gipsy that you can’t stop anywhere more than a few months?”

"I wish," he said soberly, "that I might put my roots into this hillside like a tree, and never, never stir again, except to the winds, and the sap in my branches, and the seasons as they come and go—"

"And me beside thee singing in the wilderness?" she smiled, as he did not continue. "Say you 'd need me here somewhere, even if you were a tree!"

"Every tree has one bird who lives in its branches. I should keep a nest safe for you, my dear—you and your Archie." He broke off. "But I am not a tree, merely a Wandering Jew to whom the time must come again to wander."

"But why, why? It is not as if you belonged anywhere else!"

"Nowhere else in the world, nor yet in Picardy,"

he said. "I have always meant, when I grew old, to come to wherever you may be, and settle down, and grow up again with your children. But it seems the time is not yet. I am—not old."

"You? of course not! You're not even fifty, are you?"

"No," he sighed, "not even fifty. Oh, to be eighty or thereabouts, with the dross burnt out and only the spirit left, free—!"

"I'd hate you to be all spirit, Stefan! Such an uncomfortable, unnatural person to play with; like one of those cherubim, with only wings and no *de quoi* at all.—(You remember the miracle that happened once, when the Sistine Madonna said to the little angels in the picture with her, '*Assaiez-vous, mes enfants.*' And they answered, '*Mais, Madame, nous n'avons pas de quoi!*'—) I never could understand people wanting to be old." She made a restless movement. "Perhaps you've had enough out of life to satisfy

you, but me— Why, I feel as if I had not yet begun to live!”

“Nor have you,” he said quietly.

“*Why, Stefan!*” she demanded, facing him. “Why don’t I begin, then? Surely enough has happened to me, more than to most people. I fling myself into whatever comes along with all my heart. And yet—I don’t seem to be there at all! It is as if the real me were looking on at somebody else who struggles and amuses herself and suffers. I’m tired of looking on, tired!”

“Who is n’t?” he said musingly. “We want to be in the thick of the fray, people like you and me, even if it kills us. But—we can’t choose. A good deal is chosen for us before we’re born—the color of our hair, the shapes of our noses” (he smiled and sighed), “doubtless the kinks in our brains—Come, the fire is out, and if I allow you to take cold, Ellen Neal will surely banish me from Eden with her flaming sword.”

As they walked briskly home in the early February twilight, she said after a long silence, “See here, Stefan, if you really are going when your book is finished, let’s not waste any more time going about to silly parties and all that. You only do it to please me, and I only do it to show you off. Why should we pretend any longer?— Let’s be together as much as we possibly can without bothering about anybody else! Shall we?”

He looked rather startled.

“I mean,” she continued calmly, “to make no more engagements at all; and you need n’t either—unless you wish to?”

“I shall not wish to.”

“I thought not! There’s really nobody here you care about talking to except me, is there? And there’s nobody in the world I’d willingly waste a word on if you were about. So there, that’s settled!” she said with a little breath of satis-



faction. "It's a good thing you're old enough to be my father, Stefan, or I suppose people would begin to talk about us. Still," she added, "I'm glad you're not eighty!"

Meeting her candid, clear, affectionate gaze, Nikolai managed to summon up a smile of his own that was quite grandfatherly.

## CHAPTER XLIX

**J**OAN was not the judge of human nature she fancied herself if she believed that a disparity in age would render gossip innocuous. The disparity was not as apparent as she believed. Nikolai was, in his dark, impassive way, a singularly handsome man, and the stories of his early ghetto life and later experiences made of him a romantic figure to more eyes than Joan's. In vain the Jabberwocks rallied around her to a girl. In vain Effie May, whose shrewd ears heard usually whatever was to be heard, even in her retirement, casually spread abroad the story of Mr. Nikolai's devotion to the first Mrs. Darcy.

Joan's attitude was discouraging to her most loyal friends. She seemed quite unaware that she was being defended and rallied around. It rather relieved her when invitations began to dwindle in number; she was thus saved the trouble of declining them. She entered into their growing solitude *a deux* with the same single-mindedness she had brought to bear upon her frivolous period, her domestic period, and her brief career of publicity; being one of those natures which can do only one thing at a time, and that very hard.

When she thought about their relationship at all, it rather pleased her to fancy that she was playing Mrs. Thrale to Nikolai's Dr. Johnson. Unfortunately the people about her were for the most part unaware of this classic relationship; and had they known of it would have doubtless regarded it with one eye knowingly closed.

Much of the town's attention fastened itself upon Archibald. Scandals there had been before this, even in its upper

circles; but they had maintained hitherto a decent surreptitiousness, had veiled themselves beneath a more or less transparent cover of secrecy, until some climax occurred in the way of pistol-shot or divorce-proceeding. The *tertium quid*, acknowledged and accepted, was new to the experience of Louisville; and very interesting.

Meanwhile Stefan Nikolai, all unconscious of the stimulus he was offering to general conversation, spent all of his free hours with Joan, having long since faced and discounted the risk of it so far as he was concerned. The risk Joan herself might run appeared to his experience negligible. He had never even in his youth attracted women as less intellectual men attract them.

Doubtless even had he been aware of the town's talk it would not have troubled him. For all his knowledge of humanity, he was no man of the world, in the accepted sense of the term. He lived too much beyond it to attach great importance to its opinion. In only one person he recognized any right of criticism. That was Joan's husband, with whom long since he had come to an understanding.

It is a pity that neither Joan nor Joan's world ever came to know of this understanding, which would have added to the affair a distinct flavor.

Mr. Nikolai had taken a small apartment, where Joan and her husband and occasionally others dined with him, or dropped in for a glass of tea in the Russian fashion and an hour of two of music afterwards. Nikolai, true to the instinct of his race, never made even a temporary home without music in it. He had, in addition to a piano, various instruments collected in different lands, among them a balalaika upon which the servant Sacha could sometimes be induced to play a shy accompaniment to peasant ballads.

But Archie had never come there without Joan; and so one day when he dropped in alone, ostensibly to "hear the

Rooshian pick his banjo," Nikolai felt a surprise that he was careful not to show. His trained eyes detected signs of distress in Archie which others, including his wife, had failed to notice. The beaming smile did not conceal from Nikolai a little anxious pucker between the brows, a nervous twitching of the big freckled hands.

The writer was not unused to being taken into the confidence of troubled people. It was one of the things that compensated for the enforced solitude of his life, such an occasional glimpse into the secret hearts of his fellowmen. It is an odd fact that writers and philosophers and even poets, all people who live necessarily a little apart from their kind, are frequently chosen as confessors by those who feel the need of confession.

So Nikolai asked no questions, sure that a friendly silence and a good cigar would produce results. Nor did he ring for Sacha and the "banjo." At length Archie blurted out without preliminaries:

"Joan is n't happy, Mr. Nikolai. I guess you 've noticed that? She has n't been for a long while. I'm not sure she ever was.—I s'pose I was a fool to think a man like me could make her happy."

"It is a large order for any one human being to make another human being happy, Blair."

"But you could have!"

Neither spoke for a few minutes. Nikolai made no pretense of not understanding. Only a slight flush came momentarily into his face, and left it paler by contrast. "I am not sure," he said at last. "But I should have liked to try."

"Of course! I knew that when you cabled us to wait till you came— But Joan don't know it yet. Funny, is n't it, when she 's so smart? She thinks you feel toward her like a cross between a teacher and a fond father.—'Father'—my eye! She don't catch you lookin' at her sometimes the way I do!"

"Do I—look at her?"

Archie nodded expressively. "I suppose I understand, because I 'm in love myself. And she don't"—he swallowed hard—"because she is n't."

"Not yet, perhaps," said the other slowly. "Give her time, my boy."

"Time? I 've given her time." Archie heaved a great sigh. "Now I mean to give her something else. I mean to give her a chance. She never really had a chance before, Mr. Nikolai. I—I kind of got her off her guard, when she was takin' the count. It was n't sporting of me."

The other, moved, laid a hand on his knee. In moments of emotion the foreign blood showed in such slight demonstrativeness. But Anglo-Saxon Archie stiffened, and the hand was at once removed.

"She 's too fine for me, you see," he went on. "Too sort of delicate.—I read somewhere that china vases and brass vases could n't float down a stream together without the china ones getting smashed (though why vases would be floating down a stream anyway, I don't know!). But I 'm brass, you see, and she 's china. I thought it might be all right after the twinnies came. I still think it might have been, if they—" Again he swallowed hard.

Nikolai nodded.

"Their hearts are wild  
As be the hearts of birds, till childer come."

But, my dear boy, you speak as if the twinnies had exhausted the available supply!"

Archie's eyes dropped. Then he lifted them again in a frank gaze. "I almost lost her, sir. Do you think I 'd put her through a thing like that again? God!—her little frantic hands clutching at us! And her voice, hoarse as a fierce ani-

mal's—!" He jumped up and crossed to a window, where he stood with his back to Nikolai, his face working.

After a moment the other followed, and this time Archie did not stiffen under his touch.

"So," said the Jew, "in your love you would deny her the woman's privilege of suffering?"

"Yes! Suffering on account of me—yes! Every time. It ain't fair, women having to stand the whole business. If I could help, if I could bear one single pain of it— But I can't."

"No," said Nikolai, his lips twitching despite the sadness about them. "No, I am afraid you can't. But—"

"And it's not," interrupted Archie, reverting doggedly to his theme, "as if I were the right man, you see!"

They were silent again.

"You are so afraid of losing her that you will not give her children," mused Nikolai presently. "And yet if I understand you you are willing to lose her—otherwise?"

"To the right man," said Archie directly. "To you— Because I think you are the right man. She's been more contented since you've been here than I ever knew her to be. Of course you're twice her age, but that don't count with brainy people. And you could give her everything I can't—not just *things*; you know what I mean! Travel, education, all that. She's in your class, sir, not mine.—Will you do it?"

Nikolai looked rather bewildered. "Do what, Blair?"

"Oh, I don't know. Be nice to her all you can, read poetry to her, get her to care for you. Make love to her, if you want!— You can bet I would n't say that to many men—" he laughed forlornly—"but you're different, somehow. I can trust you."

"Thank you." Nikolai's face lit with a very charming smile. "Yes, I think you can trust me— And in case your

scheme were successful, if I should prove to be 'the right man'—what about you?"

"Oh, me? Why, I'd just naturally fade out of the landscape."

"How do you mean?"

"There're lots of ways. A cramp in swimming, or an accident when you're cleaning a gun, or a dose of the wrong medicine—"

Nikolai's brows met sharply. "You mean suicide?"

"Sure! Why not? It's done every day, and done so the insurance companies can't prove a thing, too."

Nikolai rose and stood beside him. "You, who say that you love her," he said sternly, "you who cannot bear that she should suffer even to obtain happiness—you would condemn her to a lifetime of grief and remorse? You might perhaps deceive others. Do you think you could deceive Joan! Happy or not, you know that she cares for you, Blair!"

The other's face softened. "Why, yes, I reckon she does, in a way. Once when I had a bad cold and she was scared for fear it was going to run into pneumonia she was awfully upset. I guess you're right," he mused. "It would n't do for me to do that. Why, her father's death almost killed her, and he was a mighty worthless old scamp, and she knew it, too! Joan's a deeper feeler than you'd think—Say, I might do something to make her get a divorce?" he suggested, brightening.

"What, for instance?"

"Oh, other women,"—he made a face of distaste. "I'd hate it—a low woman certainly does get my goat! Still—"

Nikolai smiled. "Do you think you could deceive Joan about that, either? You might succeed in hurting her, perhaps; but she would not admit it. Joan is proud."

"Lord, don't I know it! Proud as Lucifer! No, I've got to think of something to do that would n't be any reflection on

her," he mused, "and yet that she would n't stand for. Actionable, as the lawyers say—"

Nikolai burst out laughing, and taking Archie by the shoulders shook him to and fro.

"My dear boy, I fear I cannot enter into this nefarious little plot of yours. I am not going to make love to your wife—I should not know how! Nor yet am I going to lure her from you with poetry and fine words. But—" he added, sobering, "I think with you that she has not yet found herself. There, perhaps, I can help. I can at least offer her my own recipe for happiness."

"You mean that formula thing?" said Archie doubtfully.

"No formula, Blair. Simply—work."

The other's face fell. "Joan never has been one of those idle society girls you read about," he said, defensively. "Sewing, and house-keeping, and civics, and suffrage, and going around giving advice to the poor— She 's tried 'em all, Mr. Nikolai."

"And found them all other people's work, not hers.—But, Blair, I must warn you," he added gravely, "that when she does find her *metier* you are in far more danger of losing her to it than to—me, for instance."

"No danger of losing what you haven't got," sighed Archie.



## CHAPTER L

**P**EOPLE who know life only on its surfaces were apt to pronounce Joan Blair a rather hard young person. She would herself have admitted to a certain hardness, secretly aware, however, that it was a trait she had deliberately cultivated for protective purposes. Hers was one of the unfortunate natures that are more attuned to the minor than the major chords of life.

Once in her childhood she had confessed to her mother, with a burst of sobbing, that she never expected to be entirely happy because of all the stray dogs running about the world, hungry and lonesome. As she grew older she discovered that it is not only the stray dogs who go hungry and lonesome.

She often wondered impatiently why it was that every one with whom she came into close contact seemed soon or late to develop a marked quality of pathos: her futile father, the struggling Misses Darcy, gruff old devoted Ellen, Effie May, Archie—and now more than all Stefan Nikolai. Despite his renown, his wide experience, his phenomenal rise in life from so handicapped a beginning, her friend seemed nevertheless to her a rather tragic figure, belonging to nobody, product of two countries and native of neither, without even a race to which he could claim complete allegiance. For his mother had been a Christian girl of high birth, outcast by her family because of her marriage with a Jew; who had been in turn rejected by his own people because of her.

Both had been killed in a *pogrom*, one of those appalling man-hunts that still take place in the Russian pale in the name of Christianity; and his father's sister, escaping to a

land where there are no pogroms, had brought the child Stefan with her. It must have been a forlorn boyhood for a sensitive, gifted, half-alien lad, none too welcome in a poor and growing Jewish family of the slums; working his brilliant way through school and university, only to meet a crushing rebuff in this land of the free and equal at the hands of a girl who was afraid to marry him.

Joan understood why her mother had taken the hurt and lonely youth into her rare friendship. Aside from Nikolai's charm of companionship and her gratitude to him, she felt it an inherited duty to "make it up" to him for the sadness of his past. And where Joan gave, she gave unstintingly. . . .

She did not pursue her headstrong course without receiving faint inklings now and then as to its effect upon the community. The warnings began with Ellen.

"I ain't sayin' he's not a quiet, pleasant-spoken enough gentleman, as free with his money as if he was a Christian—Most *too* free, if you ast me! What's he want out of it all? After all, a Jew's a Jew."

"Even if he happens to be a Unitarian?" (Nikolai, during his college life, had chanced to adopt that creed.)

"More 'n ever then," muttered Ellen darkly, "because his Jewness is all bottled up in him, ready to burst out on you unexpected, like a Jack-in-the-Box— You need n't laugh, Joie—you kin see it all in that eye of his. The rest of him don't look so Jewy, but if ever I see a Sheenier eye—! I don't hold with an eye that shows all it feels that way, myself. Seems sort of shameless."

"Indecent exposure of the eye," murmured Joan, "does not confine itself to the Semitic race, Nellen. It seems common to all people who do a good deal of thinking. One can't seem to mask the eye. The more that goes on behind it, the more it reflects— As witness my own," she added complacently.

Her next warning came from a higher quarter. Happening

to encounter Mrs. Carmichael in the shops one day, that lady invited her to drive home in her carriage, where she proceeded to catechise her with tongue and lorgnon.

"You are looking very charming, dear child—one wonders at not seeing you about more? I hear your interesting friend is still in town, however. Perhaps it is he who absorbs so much of your time."

Joan admitted the imputation.

"Oh, really? Your husband is very complaisant!— Still, Mr. Blair would naturally be democratic in his point of view."

"Democratic? I think I don't understand."

The older lady shrugged; an Anglo-Saxon shrug, portentous in effect. "Oh, these writing-people—it's so difficult to tell who they are, isn't it? But Emily tells me you've always been singularly courageous."

"It does not take a great deal of courage," said Joan, flushing, "to continue my mother's friendship with the most brilliant man I know. There even seem to be people who envy me the opportunity."

(This shot told, Mrs. Carmichael having been one of the first and most eager to entertain the visiting celebrity.)

"Doubtless he is brilliant as a writer," she conceded. "That is his profession. But even as a writer (I know nothing of him, of course, otherwise!) do you consider him quite safe, my dear? Those plays, for instance."

"Have you read them?" asked Joan bluntly.

"Why, not yet. I bought them, of course—one does. But one has so little time for reading. I am told, however, that in one of them a child is born practically on the stage. At least the characters converse about it quite openly."

"Shocking of them," murmured Joan. "Those things should be managed by means of asterisks. But it's so hard to find actors who play asterisks acceptably."

Mrs. Carmichael's lorgnon busied itself. "I should be sorry," remarked its owner, "to think that any friend of my daughter's would care to encourage indelicacy, whether in literature or—or in life."

"Dear me, yes!—life is indelicate enough anyway, without our encouragement, is n't it?" murmured Joan.

She felt, perhaps justly, that she had come out of this encounter with the honors of war. But Joan could ill afford to make enemies. . . .

The finish of Nikolai's book postponed itself from week to week. Spring came, and early summer, that most witching of seasons in the middle South, languid with the scent of magnolia-blossoms, gay with the bright parasols and fragile muslins that flutter forth like butterflies at the first touch of sun. With Nikolai to share it, the gray old town regained something of its former glamour for Joan. She had many favorite spots to show him—a quiet tree-arched street of patriarchal mansions in the midst of warehouses, with all the charm and old-world dignity of a London square; a certain secluded nook low on the bank of the slow, yellow river, undiscovered save by an occasional working-girl and her shirt-sleeved "gentleman-friend," with whom Nikolai conversed as pleasantly as with old acquaintances. He had not the Major's elegant distaste for the *canaille*.

Through his trained eyes, Joan began to note again certain picturesque touches which had charmed her when first she came to Louisville; a primitive, two-wheeled cart bobbing along a crowded street, drawn by mules hitched tandem-fashion, on one of which a dusky muleteer perched sidewise, singing. ("That might be Spain," said Nikolai.) Or perhaps two mulatto women, dressed in the extreme of fashion even to rouge and face-veils, greeting each other with lifted, outflung hand—a gesture as savage and typically African as if they

were only a few weeks out of the jungle, instead of a few generations— Joan found that with Nikolai it was possible to do a good deal of traveling right at home.

Meanwhile the scandal of their association grew and spread; and at last Emily, distressed at the magnitude of the storm of which her friend was the center, decided to interfere. Not with words, however. Long social experience had given her tact, if not wisdom.

Thereafter it began to be noticed that Mrs. Blair and her distinguished friend were not to be seen so often alone together. There was usually a third on their expeditions, and frequently a fourth, whenever Archie could be pressed into service.

“Now that I’ve got some one to talk to myself, I don’t feel so in the way,” he confessed naïvely.

Emily formed a habit of dropping in at the Blairs’ in the early afternoon (just at the finish of writing hours), so that she had naturally to be included in any plans that were afoot.

“I don’t know what’s come over you, dear,” remarked Joan once, half laughing. “You’re positively rushing me nowadays!—or is it Nikolai? I begin to suspect you of designs upon Stefan.”

“And why not? He’s perfectly eligible. We old maids have to keep a weather eye out, you know— But how do you know it is n’t Archie I’m pursuing?” asked Emily calmly. “I appreciated him long before you did, you know.”

“Emmy, Emmy, such indelicacy!” sighed Joan. “And him a married party, too! What would your mother say?”

“I’m feeding her Shaw lately in broken doses. She’s prepared for almost anything— You don’t really mind my trailing you about this way, do you, Joan?” she asked, sobering. “I love hearing you two talk. Am I in the way, if I just keep quiet as a mouse?”

"Mind? Of course not!" Joan kissed her. "You and Stefan are my two dearest friends, and I *love* to have you friends with each other. Besides, he says you have an 'interesting mind,' my dear. Welcome to our city!"

So Emily continued to make a courageous third in their walks and talks and studies; accepted by Nikolai with his usual courteous friendliness, and by the gossips with feelings which were not unmixed.

"It's the husband's doings—he's awake at last!" declared one faction.

"Men are so fickle. He's had a good deal of her—and Emily Carmichael is looking particularly well this year. Poor Joan!" murmured the other faction, composed of her more intimate acquaintances.

Joan's feelings on the matter were also not unmixed. She loved Emily; her presence was always a pleasure; she had assuredly nothing to discuss with Nikolai that could not be discussed before so devoted an audience. And yet—

Stefan came to take the other girl's company so much for granted that one evening, when Joan suggested a row up the river for their next day's outing, it was natural enough for him to say, "That sounds charming! and I think Miss Carmichael will enjoy it, too."

This innocent remark produced surprising results; as surprising to Joan as to himself. She jumped to her feet. "Look here, Stefan! If you want Emily so much, why don't you take her by yourself?" she cried, and bursting into tears she fled from the room.

Nikolai stared blankly at Archie.

"Will you tell me *what* I have said?"

For once the other was the first to understand.

"Don't you see?" he replied with his patient smile (and there is nothing sadder to see in life than patience on the face of a young man). "It's come about just as I thought it

would, Mr. Nikolai. She 's—she 's jealous of you. That 's all."

That night Stefan Nikolai, usually very regular in habit, sat so late by his open window that the servant Sacha emerged at intervals to investigate.

"Is Excellency ill, that he neither sleeps nor reads?"

"Not ill, Sacha. Go to bed."

There was a lilac-tree blooming below the window, and the scent of the young summer came in to him, flooding his heart, his senses—

The servant appeared again.

"Has Excellency sadness?"

"Not sadness, Sacha. I think—it is happiness."

"And yet he sighs?"

Nikolai stirred, and got to his feet.

"That is because our wandering begins again. The book is done. In a few days we go."

The servant took an eager step toward him. "Not alone?"

Nikolai started. He had forgotten, as so many forget, the watching eyes of those who serve us. "Certainly, alone!" he said sharply. "Am I not always alone?"

Sacha's eyes dropped. "In my country," he suggested gently, "when we see a woman which we need, we take her."

The other smiled. The two had been through much together. "And if she chances to belong to some one else?"

"Then"—with an eloquent thrust of the hand—"we kill!" But seeing that the hint was unlikely to bear fruit, he added dispiritedly, "Excellency is not, however, a peasant. Sometimes to be a peasant is good."

## CHAPTER LI

**T**HE storm which burst in August, 1914, had the effect of blotting out smaller storms into nothingness. It brought in its wake different things to different natures: to some apprehension, sheer personal terror, to others the quickening sense of high adventure, to others yet sick disillusionment with a world that was still capable of such gigantic folly.

To Joan, in the dead blankness that followed the departure of her friend, the great war seemed strangely like a godsend. It was as if she had cried in desperation to Providence. "What next?" and Providence had answered, "This!"

Perhaps she was not the only woman to whom the sudden extraneous demand for all that was in her came as a godsend.

She flung herself head, hand, and heart, into the organization of relief work. As the Germans pursued their incredible way through Belgium, it seemed to her that every frantic mother, every maimed child, every desperate father, the very roofless houses and ruined orchards, cried aloud upon her, Joan Blair, for help. She could not understand why others did not seem to hear the cry, how those about her could pursue the usual course of life unheeding— Joan was one of the first Americans to declare war upon Germany.

But those about her heard better than she realized. Gradually as the change came, it came. Hers was not the only blood in the old border State to thrill to the call of drums. And as in the earlier days, while the men got down their fire-arms to clean them, the women rolled up their sleeves and settled down to work.

Under the impetus of Joan and others like her, Bridge



quickly gave way to bandage-making, the click of unaccustomed needles drowned the chatter of clubrooms and tea-table, and the Jabberwocks in a body abandoned the pursuit of culture for a course in hospital assistance. "So that we shall be ready by the time our own boys need us," explained Joan.

"But, Mrs. Blair, you ought to curb those firebrand sentiments of yours!" protested Judge Carmichael to her after one of her public utterances. "It is enjoined upon us Americans to be strictly neutral."

"Neutral?" cried the daughter of Richard Darcy. "Neutral? Have you ever seen a pit-terrier jump on a respectable little poodle-dog out in the front yard protecting his household—and were you able to remain *neutral*? I know my country better than that!"

In keeping up with Joan's new activities, the town quite forgot to look at her askance.

Nikolai, too, was making of the war a personal matter. He wrote that he, with other writers in New York, was financing a hospital unit with which he intended to go to France in any capacity where he would be useful. He had been in his youth, among other things, a student of medicine.

"Isn't it fine, Archie?" she cried, thrilling to this letter. "Oh, if we could only do something ourselves! I'd like to send him a contribution for his unit, anyway. May I?"

Archie hesitated. "How much, dear?"

Joan flushed. It was the first time he had failed to give her without question whatever she asked of him.

"Sorry to have to ask," she said, rather stiffly. "But I've given the last cent I had to the Red Cross. Could you spare me fifty dollars, say, and take it out of my next allowance?"

Archie silently got out his check-book.

It troubled her to notice in him something almost like apathy toward the war. The startling headlines, the grow-

ing report of horrors, even the eleventh-hour miracle of that stand upon the Marne, moved him to no more than a pre-occupied attention. He appeared to concern himself far more with the uncertain state of the stock-market, which he studied assiduously. Joan could not accustom herself to the idea of an Archie commercialized: interesting himself at such a crisis in the world's history merely with money.

An explanation at last dawned upon her. "My dear," she accused him one day, "I believe you've been speculating!"

"Who—me? Oh, every man speculates, sweetheart. Business itself is a good deal of a speculation nowadays. Nothing to worry your precious head about, though."

"Would you like me to economize, Archie, more than I usually do?" she asked.

"Oh, no. You're never extravagant. A little more or less can't matter."

Preoccupied though he seemed, he was never too preoccupied to show her the special consideration and gentleness she had noticed every since Nikolai left.

"As if he were trying to comfort me!" she thought uneasily. Her queer outburst of nerves with Stefan was something she never allowed herself to think of. She did not quite understand it; and Joan dreaded things she could not understand.

Archie seemed to be developing nerves himself of late. When the doorbell or telephone rang suddenly, he jumped as if he had been touched; and he went to his office almost every evening, coming home late and very tired.

"You're working too hard, old boy," protested Joan. "I'll be glad when the treasurer of your company feels well enough to come back from Saranac and take his old job again."

"He's back now. I expect to turn the books over to him in a few days."

"Good! I'm glad of it."

"Are you?" asked Archie, rather queerly.

"Of course!—though it means less salary, does n't it? What do we care? We had enough before. You know, dear, money simply means *nothing* to me, so long as the bills are paid."

"I know," he said soberly.

Perhaps if she had been less obsessed with the war, Joan might have been better prepared for what was coming. . . .

One day, on her way home from the Red Cross rooms, she bought herself an early edition of an evening paper, and was looking over the headlines when she came across the following:

#### SHORTAGE DISCOVERED

#### BOOKS OF MOORE AND COMPANY IN HANDS OF EXPERT

Farther down, aghast, incredulous, she read the name of her husband.

When she reached home, he was already there. Johnny Carmichael and Ellen were with him, both talking at once. They stopped as Joan came bursting in.

"Archie! This can't be *true*?"

He had risen to go to her. Now he sank back in his chair, nodding.

"I been tellin' him he 's got to git out while the gittin 's good," muttered Ellen Neal, her language consorting oddly with the tense fear in her face. "Here 's plenty of money"—she held out a battered pocket-book. "He can hop on the L. & N. train as it passes Fourth Street. They ain't a minute to waste! The main thing 's to git him away before they—take him!"

"She 's right!" insisted Johnny Carmichael, stuttering with excitement. "Once he 's out of the way, my father 'll get *everything* fixed. He 's closeted with Moore now. We 've

stopped that beastly article in the paper—lots of people won't have seen the first edition. Father's taken on the case—Mrs. Blair, you've got to make Archie *wake up!*”

But Joan could not speak.

Archie rose to his feet again. He seemed invested with a new, quiet dignity. He put a hand on each of their shoulders.

“I'm not going to run, of course,” he said. “Thank you just the same. Now cut along, will you? I want to talk to my wife.”

## CHAPTER LII

**A**LWAYS afterwards, in thinking of that nightmare, Joan remembered with a stab of remorse that when he held out his arms to her she had not gone to them— He did not make the mistake again..

In the hour they had together before others came, he made things as plain to her as he could. The sum was not large as defalcations go. Moore and Company would not suffer for it—they were a rich firm; and later when he had served out his term he would be able to pay them back. This he repeated over and over.

The trouble had commenced with the purchase of the house. It was too ambitious. Archie, struggle as he might, had begun shortly to fall behind with the payments, and had borrowed more money on it to meet them. (Joan recalled signing the papers, which meant nothing to her; merely “business.”) Somehow, what Archie made never went quite far enough. Not through her fault!—this, too, he insisted upon again and again. How was she to guess how things were so long as her own and the household allowances were paid to her regularly?

“Oh, but why did n’t you *tell* me?”

“A fellow don’t like to admit that he’s bitten off more than he can chew, till he’s sure.”

So he had tried a little speculating, and won; a little more and won again. (It was at this time that he bought Joan her modest automobile.) After that, the story is too trite to need repeating. There came the depression of 1913, later the cataclysm of the war; and Archie with the finances of

Moore and Company at his disposal. He lost, heavily, and borrowed to protect himself; recovered enough to replace his borrowings; went in deeper—and was caught with no means of making good—me \$15,000.

“Our house?” suggested Joan, trembling.

“Mortgaged up to the eaves. Our equity in it would n’t be a drop in the bucket.”

“What about your stock in that Building Association?”

He laughed. “Swallowed up so long ago I’d forgotten I ever had any. . . . No, dear, I’m done. I took a long chance, and I took it once too often. Nothing for it but to serve out whatever term they give me, and then come back and—show ‘em.” His set jaw quivered a little.

“‘Serve out’—Archie! You don’t mean *jail*?”

He nodded, still with his amazing quietness. “I want to. It’s coming to me. And I’m young yet. You’ll see! . . . But that don’t mean *you’re* to be mixed up in it,” he added, slowly. “When I go to the Pen, that lets you out, dear. You get your freedom. Nobody will expect you to—to stay married to a criminal.”

He was watching her closely, and she stared back at him. He had proposed the monstrous idea seemingly in all seriousness, as if it were one to which he had given long consideration.

“Don’t talk that way!” she said, with sudden sternness. “Of course you are not to go to jail. I’ll fix that somehow—I’ll get the money.”

But still she could not go to him, could not offer him any comfort. She was too stunned. This did not seem to her Archie, this quiet stranger who spoke so casually of penitentiaries and criminals and divorce.

They were glad when people came to interrupt them.

And people did come, in a steady stream. It seemed as if half the town had read that hastily suppressed news-item,

and were determined that Archie Blair should not go to prison.

"It's most worth while getting into trouble to see how many friends you've got you never knew about!" he sighed.

The rescuers began with Effie May, check-book in hand and panting with distress, so upset that she had forgotten to rouge her face; and it ended with Mr. Florsheimer of the Gents' Furnishing, who intimated that if a couple of thou' at the usual rate of interest would be of any use to Archie, they were his.

The offer that perhaps touched him the most deeply came from the Misses Darcy.

"We happen to be at the moment temporarily embarrassed for funds," explained Miss Iphigenia, at her stateliest, (and looking curiously like her Cousin Richard). "But it will be a simple matter to arrange another mortgage on our house. Dear papa did so frequently, I remember. And of course in a—an accident of this sort— Why, my dear boy, that is what houses are for!"

But to all these suggestions Archie was able gratefully to explain that his wife had already arranged matters. For as soon as she collected her numbed faculties, she had telegraphed to Stefan Nikolai, and he had replied within the hour: "Draw on me to any amount."

"There," she remarked to the weeping Ellen. "That's the Jewness coming out in him, just as you said it would!" . . .

Ellen did all the weeping that was done in the Blair household during this crisis. The shock seemed to have quite broken her, so that it was the mistress who had to comfort the servant.

"I'd ought to have known," she wailed, "with him lookin' so peakid and all! But I thought it was—something else. Oh, why could n't he have *told* me? I could have kep' the *bills* down more, had pot-roasts instead of fancy-cuts, and

hearts—you know how tasty beef-hearts can be, Joan, when I set my mind to 'em! 'Taint as if I was n't an old hand at makin' things do. But you always had such rich ways, just like your father. And I let it fool me. . . . Oh, the poor boy, the poor, scairt, lonesome boy, tryin' to go ahead all by himself!"

Joan's heart ached for her husband, too, as much as a heart can ache that seems turned into stone. She felt physically numb all over, except in her brain, and that worked mercilessly as ever—merciless not only to him but to herself. She did not hesitate to put the blame where much of it belonged.

"I have been utterly selfish, one of the vampires that sap a man's strength, his ability, his very decency, and give nothing in return. Yet—does any one but a fool yield to vampires?"

She tried to make for him every excuse he had not made for himself.

"It was all for me, to give me what he thought I wanted, the things my friends have. He could not bear to deprive me of anything."

Yet he had deprived her of the thing she valued most in life: her pride. He had committed the sin unpardonable. He had, as the English put it, "let her down." She, Joan Darcy, in whom pride was the dominant trait, pride of race, of intellect, of character—she was the wife of a defaulter, a common thief!

Despite people's marked kindness and consideration toward her, she fancied she knew what they were saying: "An extravagant wife. A woman who neglected her home and her husband."

But of the charge of extravagance at least she was able to acquit herself. The iron of poverty had entered too early and too deep into her soul for that. She knew that dressing, for instance, cost her far less than it cost any woman of her



acquaintance. She had always made taste and skill take the place of money there, and in other ways. Much that was unusual in her little house she had done herself, staining walls, painting woodwork, covering furniture. Where her neighbors employed several servants, she did very well with one; and if she left much of her household management in Ellen's hands, it was because she knew them to be more experienced than her own.

"No," she told herself, puzzling the thing over, "we have simply cut our coat according to other people's cloth— And how was I to know!"

It is the cry of many a startled wife whose husband has tried to keep on his shoulders the burden two should share: How was I to know?

She was comforted to think that no tradespeople at least were suffering from their catastrophe; she owed not a dollar in the world. . . . Here Joan winced, recalling her determination that there should be no "Indians" in the annals of the Blair family. Archie, in order that she might pay bills promptly, had allowed her to pay them with other people's money!

His own attitude was incredible to her. He seemed not particularly ashamed, nor even downcast; if anything, rather relieved that the strain was over. The enormity of the thing he had done did not appear to impress him. He was more like a man who has bet too heavily at the races, but means to show himself a good loser. For the first time Joan considered seriously the mystery surrounding his birth. Emily Carmichael had been right—it was "brave" to marry a man of such doubtful antecedents. Who knew what handicaps were his to fight, what heritage of moral obliquity?

There was after all a certain safety in good birth, she thought—forgetting that traditions and fine breeding had *not* sufficed to keep her own father from a slight moral

obliquity, such as had permitted him to speculate with trust-funds. (Of the Major's earlier misadventure she never learned.)

And then a sudden rush of reaction came over her. Archie—and moral obliquity! It was as impossible to associate the two as to associate a fine dog with treachery. He had simply, for her sake, chosen to take his long chance and abide by the consequences. An act more gallant, more blindly, foolishly, needlessly sacrificial, had never been laid upon the altar of love. And yet—she could not forgive him for it.

“It must be because I do not care for him,” she told herself stonily; and was glad in her heart that his children had not lived.

## CHAPTER LIII

**B**UT if she could not offer Archie the tenderness he craved, she gave him at least all the other assistance in her power. Her executive ability stood them both in good stead.

It was she who interviewed Mr. Moore, far more successfully than Judge Carmichael had done, persuading him not only to hush the matter up but to retain Archie in his employ. "If I can afford to take another chance on him, surely you can?" she insisted; an argument which the dazzled old gentleman found quite unanswerable.

Within a week she had procured an excellent tenant for the house, furnished, with privilege of sale at a month's notice. She had disposed of her little car at a good price, and placed Pegasus for the time being in the Carmichael stable.

"I can't sell her, of course, nor give her away—it would be like selling or giving away Ellen Neal! But if you 'll just ride her, Emily, and play with her sometimes? She 's used to a good deal of attention."

"I 'll probably spoil her to death," promised Emily, deeply touched by this first sign of sentiment she had seen in her friend during that tragic time.

Joan moved about her pretty house, cleaning, packing, getting things in order for the tenant, as calmly as if she were not leaving it forever. Even in the nursery she was perfectly composed, until she came upon the toys Ellen had hidden there. Then she locked the door for awhile, and neither Emily nor Ellen dared go to her.

"But what are we going to do ourselves?" moaned Ellen,

rocking helplessly to and fro in her kitchen. All her self-reliance had deserted her. She was suddenly an old woman.

"I have n't decided yet, dear. One thing at a time," replied her mistress, steadily. . . .

But in the end it was Archie who decided.

He had acquiesced without comment in all Joan's arrangements. Only once had he protested. It was when she telegraphed Stefan Nikolai for the money.

"Not that, Joan—not that, *please!*" he said, with a quick flush. "I'd rather go to the Pen than that— Really, the Pen will be quite a rest for me," he added, piteously.

"Nonsense!" she replied; and he said no more.

But for all his acquiescence, he did not seem to be numbed by the thing, as Joan was. Though she often heard him walking up and down his room at night, and suffered for him, at times he appeared almost happy.

"I can't get over how *good* people are!" he said once. "Think of Mr. Moore being willing to take me back! Not as manager, of course—the boys would n't be wanting to take orders from me yet awhile. Nor I could n't expect to handle money. But he sent for me, and said I was the best salesman he'd ever had, and offered me the old job back on a commission basis! Pretty nice, what?"

"Shall you take it?" she asked, curiously. She herself could not have faced disgrace with any such meekness.

"Take it! Why, I jumped at the chance!"

Joan flushed.

"Archie," she said suddenly, "do you realize that there's a war going on over there in Europe? Do you realize that there is need in France for every able-bodied man that's got a life to spare?—Have you thought of that?"

She was startled by the change in his face. The veins stood out on his forehead, and his hands clenched. "Have I thought of it? God, girl, what else do you suppose I've

been thinking about the past year? I'd give the soul out of my body to slip away from this—this grab-bag, and get into a good clean fight— Those damned baby-killers! Gosh!—fight? Just give me a chance at that dachshund of a Kaiser with my two bare hands! But"—he made the little gesture that she realized was becoming characteristic of him—a gesture of renunciation—"I've got to stay here now. There is n't any money in soldiering."

Her flush deepened. "Money! I never want to hear the word again. Haven't you had enough to do with just 'money,' Archie?"

"Not on your life," he said doggedly. "I've got to make a heap of it before I'm through. Fifteen thousand dollars!—That reminds me," he went on in another tone. "You say they need able-bodied men over there—don't they need women, too? D'you suppose your friend Nikolai could find something for you to do in that unit of his?"

He caught the sudden gleam in her eye.

"That would please you, would n't it?" he said quietly. "Of course it would mean hard work, dangerous work, too, perhaps—but it's a great chance for you, for anybody! To sort of help make history. . . . Mr. Nikolai was talkin' to us once about those two kinds of happiness, Hüttengluck and Heldengluck—remember? Well, I don't believe you're the sort to be satisfied with any Hüttengluck—nor I would n't want you to be. Take your chance, Joan—and don't lose it." His voice shook a little. "I'd like mighty well to have somebody of my name mixed up in this war somehow!"

She put her hand on his—almost her first demonstration of tenderness since the shock came; but the gleam had already died out of her eyes.

"That's dear of you, Archie—fine and generous. But if your place is here, mine is, too. I am not going to desert you. How can you think such a thing? I mean to be a better wife

to you than I have been. We 've got to start again, and start right. I want to help you." . . .

And then inexplicably, unbelievably, the worm turned. His nerves had strained too far. He shook off her hand as if it burned him.

"Help!" he said roughly. "Help? A hell of a lot of help *you* are! Going around like a martyr, with a don't touch-me, how-dare-you look on your face, as if I 'd done the thing just to spite you! My God! A woman with any guts to her—" "*Archie!*"

"Oh, yes, that shocks you—such a fine lady as you are." He seemed to be working himself up, like a woman in hysterics. "So grandly indifferent to money, too!—just so 's you 've got enough of it. Who spent the money, anyway!—tell me that! Was it me, who have n't bought myself so much as a new pair of pants in three years?"

She stared at him, mutely. "*So this,*" she thought, "*is the real man!*" His ears, his great, coarse hands—they meant something after all.

Her white look drove him into a further frenzy. "Oh, yes, glare at me, if I 'm good enough for you to glare at!—Let me tell you something—if it 's on my account you 're staying, you need n't. That 's all! It 's a *wife* a man wants at a time like this, not any marble image, not any tragedy-queen! Not any noble character that watches him out of the corner of her eye, and if he 's real good—pats him on the hand! I 've had enough of that!— Go on with your friend Nikolai," he cried violently. "Try him out for six months or a year, and if he suits, and you don't want to come back here—by God, you need n't!"

"Archie," she said, trembling in every limb, "I shall leave your house to-morrow."

"Good!" he cried. "Good! And I 'm going to beat you to it!"

He strode to the kitchen door and flung it wide. "Come here, Ellen Neal, and bear witness that I'm leaving this house first."

The front door banged behind him. . . .

The two women stared at each other.

"Was that—was that *Mr. Archie?*"

"Yes," said Joan, still trembling, "it was!— Come upstairs and help me pack my trunk."

## CHAPTER LIV

**T**HERE is little to be said here about Joan's experiences in France. The story of those is better told in her own remarkable letters, which began shortly to appear in certain magazines; and in the book that followed.

Stefan Nikolai had found her shelter with a friend of his, Lady Arbuthnot, a clever old Englishwoman whose long horse-face and charming voice and odd combinations of tweed skirt and evening blouses were known and loved in every institution of mercy about Paris. Under Lady Arbuthnot's guidance Joan found use for not only her Red Cross training but for everything else she had, whether by gift or acquirement. Singing, story-telling, "play-acting," letter-writing, even dancing, all seemed as important a part of her equipment as the regulation sewing, bandage-making, and cookery. She tried an inexperienced hand at washing dishes and scrubbing floors. She also tried her hand at mending shattered nerves and even broken hearts; and at none of these things was she entirely unsuccessful. There was a certain power of concentration in Joan that made failure unlikely in whatever she undertook.

It was a wonderful time to her. She never got nearer the trenches than Paris; but there the trenches came to her, with all their horror, their sordid hideousness, their sheer, soul-stirring grandeur. She saw shattered men struggling back to life that they might offer it again, with eagerness; she saw philanthropists living in comfort on money that had been obtained to feed starving refugees; she saw girl-children, who



had been forced to bear German babies, loving those babies with a passion of maternity piteously beyond their years. Priests labored side by side with panders; women of the great world, such as Lady Arbuthnot, shared bed and board and ceaseless effort with W. C. T. U. workers from Kansas, with missionaries out of China, with ex-courtesans from the Paris streets, with those most sheltered of all aristocrats, the women of the upper French bourgeoisie.

It was humanity with all barriers down, all contacts clean and clear. And Louisville, Kentucky, seemed as far away and negligible as the planet Earth may seem to possible dwellers on the moon.

Sometimes she had word from there—not often, for Ellen Neal was no letter-writer, and even Emily Carmichael's loyalty had been strained by Joan's unexplained desertion of her husband in his trouble. Once her cousin Miss Iphigenia Darcy wrote, and from her letter Joan gathered some impression of the effect of her sudden departure from Louisville.

In my day girls were taught that their first duty was to the *Home*, married or not. But I daresay this is a very old-fashioned notion, and with all those poor, unfortunate French needing help—Sister Euphie and Sister Virgie and I have frequently discussed offering our services. It is strange to have a war going on without any Darcys in it! (You haven't the *name*, you see, although a *true Darcy* in every other particular.) However, it does not seem the place for *unmarried* ladies just now, with so many men lying about in the hospitals not fully clothed, and those unfortunate Belgian victims (you know what I mean)! As I tell everybody, "Advanced young matrons like Joan are the ones really needed over there." But you know how narrow people are, my dear! I sometimes think our city is growing a little *provincial*.

Joan smiled and sighed over this communication; and then forgot it.

From Archie she had no word, except an occasional line or two with the money-order that came regularly on the

first of each month, and was as regularly returned. The magazine connections Stefan Nikolai had made for her provided what money she needed, and she had not yet sufficiently forgiven Archie to be willing to accept anything from him.

At first she wrote to him, not so much from any sense of duty, as from pity. She did not forget what had passed between them, she made no attempt to ignore the fact that he had failed her utterly in every way. But she no longer had time to brood upon her own affairs. In the vortex of life where she now found herself, personal troubles seemed somehow to disappear into the common whole. Constant association with others' sorrow developed her quality of sympathy to an almost painful extent; and though she knew that Ellen Neal was making Archie comfortable enough in the old rooms on Poplar Street, his loneliness, his humble acquiescence in disgrace, hurt like a bruise on her heart. So she wrote to him, impersonally but kindly.

Since he so rarely replied, however, her letters gradually ceased. Evidently Archie, like many others, found it difficult to forgive where he had wronged. Joan shrugged—a little gesture she had learned from Nikolai—and dismissed her husband as much as possible from her mind.

There was much else to occupy it: not only in the way of work but of pleasure. Paris, even in her grief, did not forget the human necessity for pleasure, nor did Stefan Nikolai. She saw rather less of him than she had expected to, for he was frequently absent for weeks at a time on unexplained journeys, about which Joan had learned to ask no questions. But whether he was near her or not, she was always conscious of his enveloping care, his devoted watchfulness. He gave her, too, many friends besides Lady Arbuthnot.

Once Sacha, always left on guard over Joan during these absences of Nikolai's, betrayed the fact that his master had gone into Russia. Joan taxed him with it when he returned.

"Russia is not safe for you, Stefan!—you told me so yourself."

"Surely you would not have me at such a time seek only places of safety?" he smiled.

"Why can't you stick to the hospital work you came over for, instead of gallivanting about all over the place?" she demanded, with a petulance that concealed anxiety.

"One goes where one is useful," he replied quietly. "There are many who know more about medicine than I, but few who know more about Russia—except in Germany, perhaps! My countrymen are very susceptible to the spoken word."

It was his only explanation of his frequent disappearances; but Joan, understanding that wars must be won not only on the battlefield, uttered no more protests, and made the most of her friend when she had him.

For the first time in her life, she came near to the innermost meaning of the word happiness. It was not the placid content of her "pasture-time," nor the feverish, half-guilty ecstasy which had come to her for a brief hour through the unworthy medium of Eduard Desmond. It wrapped her round warmly like the consciousness of some beloved presence—which indeed it was, though Joan for once did not quite dare to analyze the sensation. She only knew that here, among strangers speaking a strange tongue, she was for the first time in her experience utterly at home. And she was curiously at the top of her powers. In that atmosphere, nothing seemed impossible of accomplishment. There was a sense of personal possession and being possessed—"By Paris," she told herself; but in her heart another name echoed.

Unaware, the great experience, the thing for which she had blindly groped, had come upon her; not with a sudden leap to which her nature leaped in response, but with a slow, quiet, *irresistibly* gathering force, like a great stream that bore her

upon its breast, without volition, without struggle, toward some bourne of which she had no knowledge. And no fear.

Joan might have said with Browning:

“Let us be unashamed of soul . . .  
Is it in our control  
To love or not to love?”

It is always the body that suggests shame; and the body had ever been a negligible part of Joan's make-up. She felt as independent of it now as if she were already spirit, floating about in space—always with the certainty of meeting there another spirit, however, and mingling with it.

This spiritual mingling was a matter she never discussed with Nikolai—the only thing in the universe, perhaps, which they did not discuss. Theirs was an understanding too close for words, and beyond words. . . . But sometimes, when Joan remembered that she had once feared love, believing it one of those things that are better done without, she smiled to herself; an inner, brooding smile that gave the final touch of the chisel to her features, and made her much sought by painters.

Paris seemed more than usual that year the rendezvous for people who had won distinction in the arts and sciences, and who came to render their patron city in her hour of need what assistance was in their power. Among these people Nikolai was made welcome with an eagerness, and even a deference, which delighted Joan, and a little surprised her; for his simplicity made it easy to forget that he belonged among famous folk as a matter of right.

On his account, perhaps a little on her own as well, Joan also was welcomed by them. She was not at all abashed by the company of greatness, having inherited from Richard Darcy the naïve conviction that the best was good enough for her; and moreover she found among them the keen power

of enjoyment that invariably accompanies high mental development. She had long since suspected, and now proved, that only thinking people know how to play.

It was a great relief to her, just then, to be with strangers who accepted her entirely at face-value, with neither curiosity nor demand. An unquestioning, simple freedom prevailed in these upper reaches which Joan fancied might be dangerous enough (unless it had the effect of putting people, as it were, on honor). Nobody enquired whether she had a husband, for instance, or where he was. It seemed quite sufficient that she was the young friend of Stefan Nikolai; "*Spiritosa e simpatica*," as a certain great Italian tragedienne pronounced her. Their relations were taken as a matter of course. The two were always included together in whatever plans were afoot, and Joan noticed other such companionships among them which passed equally unquestioned. She was nominally under the care of Lady Arbuthnot; but that widely experienced noblewoman displayed a carelessness of chaperonage that would have caused hair to rise on the head of, say, Mrs. Carmichael.

Joan was at perfect liberty to spend with her friend every hour that either could spare from the day's duties, and did so. "Why not?" appeared to be the attitude of a company which concerns itself more with matters of the spirit than of the flesh. . . .

In Louisville speculation was once more rife and lurid, sharing interest only with the war headlines and with Joan Blair's latest letter to the magazines.

"We appear to have been nourishing Genius in our bosom unawares!" remarked the Jabberwocks to each other; not altogether pleased, as is the immemorial way of friendship.

"I don't know why you were unaware," commented Emily Carmichael, quietly. "She has always shown every earmark

of genius, even to neglecting the best husband that ever lived!"

The Jabberwocks exchanged surprised and meaning glances.

## CHAPTER LV

**I**NTO the busy abstraction of Joan's Paris life came presently one of her step-mother's rare letters. It was a round, childish, yet curiously firm scrawl written on lavender paper (Effie May having abandoned pink effects in honor of her widowhood), which for some reason brought home to Joan her father's little city so clearly that she could almost smell it; a distinctive summer smell compounded of hot asphalt, blossoming ailanthus trees, and a suggestion of the glue-factory.

Folks here are making bets as to whether you ever mean to come back again,

(wrote Effie May).

And why should you? is what I say. I keep thinking how pleased Major would be to have you hobnobbing with lady earls and famous characters and high life generally. It's just where you belong, and so did he.

Archie comes to see me real often, and he don't look so poorly as he did at first. He's got him up a regiment, mostly Y. M. C. A. fellows and a few old boys with stummicks and bald heads, and I hear they drill real cute. He goes horseback riding a good deal with the Carmichael girl, too, and I guess it does him good. Ellen says he seems more peckish for his meals.

(Here Joan laid down the letter, thoughtfully. "Emily!— Well, why not? She always did like him. I'm glad," she mused. She certainly was not going to begrudge her husband the freedom she asked for herself.)

Ellen comes in every day to look after things for me, now that I'm laid up. She don't like me any better than she used to, and I ex-

pect she just thinks it's a family duty, but I'm glad to have her anyhow. I keep nigger help now, the white ones being so hard to get, and I'm not the hand with them your father was. I never saw any one get as much out of niggers as Major could!—out of white folks, too, for that matter, could n't he?

Of course I'm not so sick as the doctors make out (they got to earn the money somehow), but it's hard to sleep sitting up this way, and sometimes at night I get to thinking. So I made a will. I knew you'd never touch Calloway's money with a ten-foot pole, but I thought maybe you would n't mind seeing it got spent right. I want it to go to one of those shelters you told about in the magazine, for little French girls with babies and no husbands. Seems only fair, when I've had more than my share of husbands and no kids.

Paris seems awful far away, and I guess I better let you off that promise you made me to see that I did n't get laid out with no corset on. They probably could n't get a corset on me now, anyway, I'm that fleshy. Not that I'm ordering me a coffin for anytime real soon, dearie! but sometimes at night a person gets to thinking.

Joan was rather startled by this letter, and sent for Nikolai.

"What do you make of it, Stefan? That part: 'It's hard to sleep sitting up this way'—what does it mean?"

"I am afraid," he said gravely, "it means something serious— Advanced heart-disease, probably. A woman of her weight would be liable to it."

Joan gave an exclamation of dismay. In that moment she discovered that she not only did not dislike Effie May; she was fond of her. The thought of never again seeing the vulgar, cheery, friendly soul was unexpectedly distressing.

"Poor woman!—all alone there with her 'nigger help!' and Ellen sourly doing her duty— Or is it *my* duty?" She was not thinking entirely of Effie May. . . . "Stefan"—her face blanched. "She was my father's wife. She tried her best to be a mother to me. I owe her a good deal. Has the time come to repay it? Does this mean— Oh, Stefan, do you think this means I ought to go back? I've been so happy here, so useful! For the first time in my life I have felt



that I really 'belonged.' These people who are doing things—"

She gazed at him beseechingly. It gradually dawned upon her that what she dreaded so to leave was not these people who were doing things, not that larger, freer life to which Nikolai had given her the key; not even the Spirit that met her Spirit there in space. It was Nikolai himself, the man, the comrade—the lover.

Her whole being seemed to rush out to meet the need that suddenly gazed at her from Nikolai's eyes. . . .

"Stefan," she said very low, "must I go back?"

For a moment he did not answer. Then he said, his voice not quite under control "You expect me to decide that for you? My dear, you ask too much."

He took his hat and left; but Joan knew that he had decided.

They walked up and down the *quai* for an hour or so before the gangway was drawn in. Joan always afterwards remembered what they said, as one recalls the least syllable of the dying. There was a sense of finality about this parting, against which she struggled in vain.

She filled her eyes with him as if she had never seen him before, and would not again. She noted little physical details which had hitherto escaped her—the fine cameo cutting of his features, the long, sensitive, expressive hands, the air he shared with many Europeans of belonging to an older, more finished race than her own. In his calm impassivity there was a suggestion of Slavic fatalism, combined with the tragic patience of the Jew. Only his eyes smoldered with an unquenchable spark that flamed to hers.

She knew that the Romance which had always eluded her was here at her side, in the person of this perfect comrade. *this shadowy, insistent influence in her life which was about*

to withdraw into the shadows again. Perhaps she understood, too, that Romance to remain Romance must be elusive. Seized and held, it changes into something else. Yet she tried to cling to it.

"You will be right here waiting on this spot when I come back, won't you, Stefan?—For I *will* come back," she exclaimed as he did not answer. "Say that you know I will!"

"I know that you will do whatever seems to you right."

She made a mutinous face at him. "That's more than I know! I'm much more likely to do whatever seems to me nice— Oh, Stefan, why will you persist in believing in me always, no matter how badly I behave?" Lightly as she spoke, her eyes were fixed on him, telling him consciously what her lips could not utter.

He answered at one of his usual tangents. "Do you not know that every splinter of a genuine Cremona violin vibrates to the bow on as true a tone as did the unbroken instrument?"

"You mean—Mother," she said. "Oh, but I'm not all Cremona! I think there's a good deal in me of the fiddle Nero played while Rome burned. It's not *fair* to be expected to live up to a self-sacrificing mother! If you don't, you have failed her; if you do, she gets the credit— Besides, I'm needed here just as much as I am in Louisville. More! Not only these poor people need me, but—you do, Stefan."

She had brought it into the open at last, the one thing which they had never yet discussed in their discussions of everything under the sun; that eternal human question of Thou-and-I. She was a little frightened, dreading yet eager for the answer.

It was long in coming. Nikolai understood the crisis they had reached. He knew that it was his to put out his hand and hold her, to keep forever in his life this one gift of the gods he craved, the fulfilled hope which had been his beacon

through many a lonely year. Once before because of a mistake in judgment he had lost her, to her own unhappiness. There must be no more mistakes in judgment.

But the habit of truth in thought and word was too great for him.

"No," he said at last, "I do not need you."

He saw her wince.

"I do not need you," he repeated steadily, "and you do not need me, Joan. People like us get on quite well alone. Better, perhaps. It is not good for us to be too happy— Besides, what we already have of each other cannot be affected by time or space. You know that? The rest—is extraneous. Tell me this: Have you ever in any important moment of your life forgotten me, have you ever failed to be conscious of my presence, no matter what the distance between us?"

She looked deep into the luminous eyes fixed upon hers.

"Never, Stefan. Even in my unthinking school-days, even in that strange time after I lost my babies and could not write to you, I have counted upon you always. Everything that has come to me, good or bad, big or little, I have shared with you in my thoughts. Only—I did not realize it."

"That," he said quietly, "is marriage. Your mother realized it. She knew when you were only a child of the tie between us— But she and I thought that I must keep away from you until the accident of time corrected itself. You see we have been sent into this incarnation rather far apart."

"You kept away too long, Stefan!"

"I know. But what does it matter?" He spoke half to himself, with his little shrug. "This manifestation or the next—we shall not be apart always."

"No, no!" she cried, catching at his hand. "That is too ethereal, too mystic for me—I can't bear it, Stefan! I want the people I love with me *now*, in this 'manifestation,' as you call it, where I can talk with them, and touch them, and hold

on to them— I am not all spirit. I thought I was, but— I 'm not. Oh, my dear, are n't you human *at all?*”

He did not reply; and Joan, looking at him through swimming tears, saw that it was because he could not.

She dropped his hand. “Forgive me!” she whispered. “I will try to climb up to you—since you will not come down to me. . . . But you must help me.”

“I will help,” said Nikolai.

They spoke a little later of Archie, who had been all the while at the back of their thoughts. Both knew it was to him she was returning, rather than to her step-mother.

“You expect too much of him, Joan—you always expect too much of people. Try to take them as you find them. He is one of the many who think better with their hearts than with their heads.”

She commented with a faint smile, “My step-mother once told me that there was nothing in the world so dangerous as what she called ‘bone-headedness.’”

“Exactly!—especially to the bone-headed— Your Archie is no fool, however. There are perhaps fewer convolutions in his gray matter than in ours, that is all. He has made mistakes with his head, and will again. But with his heart— never.”

“You are not condoning,” she asked slowly, “what Archie has done?”

He answered after a little pause, “To me there seems nothing unforgivable, nothing utterly vicious, except selfishness. There is no self in Archie Blair. Not enough self.”

Joan told him then reluctantly of something she had never before mentioned: her final incredible scene with her husband. She was curiously ashamed of that scene, as though it were she who had betrayed herself, instead of Archie. “Should you not call that a mistake of the heart?”

But Nikolai did not appear to be particularly shocked by it.

"I had no idea," he commented, "that Blair was so good an actor."

"An actor!— You think that scene was not genuine?"

"I think, in fact I know, that your husband would hesitate to sacrifice nothing to what he believed your happiness; even your respect— I love that man," he said simply. "And so do you, Joan. Otherwise he would have been powerless to hurt you."

Her eyes widened. She asked, as so many before her have asked, "Is it possible to love—two people at once?"

"Two? A dozen—a hundred! Does a mother love two children at once?— Surely that depends upon the stage of the soul's development."

"But always one best," she said quite fiercely.

"Always one best," he repeated. . . .

The parting had come. Staring at him desperately, she saw in his eyes a depth of pain and loneliness that made her own for the moment insignificant. So much of his life was done; so much of hers, after all, only beginning.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" she cried in a sort of bewilderment. "What is it all about? Is there a purpose somewhere in this muddle of things? Why do you say it is not good for people like us to be happy, when others go to the end of their days in calm security? I do not want any—wicked things, Stefan! I only want to be with you always. To take care of you if you are sick, to mend your clothes, and make you comfortable, and—love you. I want us to grow old together, not alone. Oh, my dear, all your life you have been alone; and I can't bear it!— What is the good of this thing that has waked in me at last, if I am not to use it?"

"You are," he said steadily. "Emotion to be safe must, *must* translate itself into action."

"But how, how? By doing for others, you are going to say—but it's such a thankless task, Stefan! A red-

blooded woman like me to take to altruism, as some take to drugs!— Why must some of us live so intensely, so conscientiously, only to be denied again and again the fulfilment that we crave? Sinking our lives into those of lesser people, always of lesser people!”

He answered gently, “‘*Car je suis le Cobzar.*’— It is time you understood. . . . You know what a Cobzar is?”

She shook her head; and he told her.

“In the more remote Magyar villages, news of the world comes to the people by means of a sort of minstrel who is called the Cobzar. He is to them not only newsbringer, but historian and poet and philosopher as well. He is treated with respect, they reward his singing with food and wine and a place beside the fire, for it is an honor to be born a Cobzar. But not always a happy honor, Joan. People do not listen to singing that comes out of an empty heart. It is the Cobzar’s duty to tell them the story of themselves, and that is only the story of himself, wrought into many forms. Their fears and joys, their failures and their suffering and their hopes—he must be part of it all, and yet apart, that he may not only understand but watch, remembering always his mission to bring life to the knowledge of those who live.”

He quoted for her then some lines which Joan never forgot:

“Aime-moi, parce que j’ai besoin de ton amour pour mes chansons,  
Va t’en, parce que j’ai besoin de pleurer pour mes chansons,  
Meurs, parce que j’ai besoin de chanter la mort pour mes chansons,  
Car je suis le Cobzar.”

The water widened between them. . . .

## CHAPTER LVI

**A**LL during her homeward journey Joan had the feeling that she was waking slowly from a long dream; such a dream as ether gives, more vivid than reality itself but impossible of recapture. As he came literally nearer, Archie grew to be the dominant figure in her thoughts rather than Nikolai, though Nikolai was always there; Archie under the new light her friend's parting words had shed upon him. It mortified her to realize that another, almost a stranger to him, should have read her husband better than she did. It occurred to her, too, that with Nikolai she had not left behind her all Romance. A man who was capable of such a sacrifice as Archie Blair's could not be entirely commonplace. Her eyes had been suddenly opened.

Perhaps this was part of the help Nikolai had promised.

Indeed, her sentiments toward her husband became rather puzzling, being composed so far as she could decipher them of a desire to comfort him for the loss of herself, combined with a desire to be comforted by him for the loss of Stefan. . . .

Her fellow-travelers eyed Joan with more than the usual interest she invariably excited among strangers; but to no avail. It was a time when what few barriers exist on ship-board at best went down in the sharing of a common peril, the menace of the submarine. Not so with Joan, however. She seemed unaware of friendly advances or invidious criticism; wrapped in a curious aloofness, from danger and from her fellowman alike. Nor was it an aloofness that would pass.

She had her great renunciation to make, and faced it; a renunciation which took the most difficult form, of dedication. Loneliness was upon her, not loneliness as she had known it before, a groping restlessness, a dissatisfaction. There was nothing left to grope for. She knew quite well now what she wanted, had always wanted, and might never have; but she knew, too, that on this solitary road of life, the warm human clasp of hands is something, the warm human touch of lips. . . . Thinking of Archie as Nikolai thought of him, her heart seemed to be stretching, literally expanding, with growing-pains; so that there might be room in it for two—or for a dozen, a hundred, as he had promised.

And presently she was able to return in spirit to the first night of her marriage, when for a little interval of time she had lost Joan the individual, and become simply the woman, whose mission is to give. . . .

She had thought so much of her husband that she was quite prepared to find him waiting at the dock for her, yellow boots, Derby hat, and all. But he was not there, nor yet at the station in Louisville, though she had wired him from New York the date and hour of her coming.

Only two of the Misses Darcy were there to meet her, in Effie May's limousine, their manner nicely adjusted between melancholy, importance, and the *empressement* due a distinguished relative returning from foreign parts.

"Yes, my dear, she is low, very low! Restoratives have to be administered constantly," sighed Miss Virginia. "What a charming hat! Paris, I suppose? I always have maintained that the French touch— So that is why Sister Iphigenia is not here to meet you. We three take turns at watching with her. Your husband comes every night, and Ellen Neal makes herself useful, though why she should, with two nurses— No expense spared, of course. So pleasant to be able to die in such luxury, is n't it? She has been watching



for you every day—seemed to be quite certain you were coming, even before she had your cablegram.”

Joan interrupted this lugubrious chatter to ask the immediate whereabouts of Archie. The sisters exchanged uneasy glances.

“Cousin Effie May happened to mention that he was out riding this afternoon. Doubtless he had made some engagement before your letter came, or I am sure—” Miss Euphemia nudged her visibly into silence.

“I see,” said Joan, flushing a trifle. . . .

If Effie May was as “low” as reported, she showed little sign of it. She welcomed Joan in her usual loud and cheery tones, magnificent in a new lavender tea-gown, as pink-cheeked and carefully coiffed as ever. At her elbow was a box of chocolates.

“I knew that letter ’d fetch you!” she chuckled. “Sort o’ pitiful, was n’t it? People were mighty surprised to hear you were coming back. But not me. You ’re not so hard-shelled as you try to be, girlie!”

Like the Misses Darcy, she displayed immediate interest in the Paris hat.

“Chick as it can be,” she pronounced approvingly. “I certainly am glad you ’re not high-brow enough yet to neglect your looks. No woman on earth is smart enough to be able to wear a hat that don’t become her.”

“There ’s a love of a hat in my trunk for you,” laughed Joan, a weight lifting from her heart. (She decided that her hasty and dangerous journey had been a wild-goose chase so far as her step-mother was concerned. This was not her idea of a death-bed interview.) “A black crêpe poke with a white lining, Effie May. Paris still does her mourning ‘chickly’—poor Paris!”

The invalid’s eye gleamed. “I might be trying it on when the doctor comes. . . . Oh, yes, dearie, he ’s taking notice!”

Her several chins quivered with mirth. "But nothing doing. My heart 's in the grave with Major— And Calloway," she added, dreamily. "I been thinking about the two of 'em so much lately that I declare I get 'em sort of mixed in my mind!"

She made Joan sit down beside her and tell her at once all about Paris, and how many noblewomen she had met, and what they wore, and whether it was true that Frenchmen took more notice of married women, even of middleaged ones than of girls.

"Paris is the burg for me!" she sighed.

But in the midst of Joan's liveliest recital, her head dropped suddenly forward and she fell asleep. It was the other's first intimation that she had not come after all upon a wild goose chase.

She sat for a moment looking at this woman who had tried to be a mother to her, with her absurd golden head and be-tinged, puffy hands. Then, following an impulse rare with her, she stooped and kissed the painted cheek very tenderly. It was a pity that Effie May did not know.

She slipped away to the telephone and called up the Carmichael house. The maid told her that Miss Emily was at home.

("So *she* 's not out riding with him!" thought Joan.)

Emily appeared politely surprised by her friend's arrival.

"Yes, Archie tells me how ill your step-mother is. I am so sorry! You say you will be here some time before you go back? I shall hope to see you, then."

"I hope you may," replied Joan even more politely, "but unfortunately I shall be very busy. . . . Look here, Emily Carmichael, what's the matter with you anyway? Come right over here and explain."

Emily came.

When the two had had their talk out and parted, tear-

stained but reconciled, Joan went once more to the telephone and called up her husband.

His familiar voice over the wire gave her an unexpected thrill. She had forgotten how big and warm it was, even when he sang out of tune.

"Archie," she asked directly, "why weren't you at the station to meet me?"

He stammered out some rather breathless excuse.

"Yes, I know all about that—Emily told me that she often gets you to exercise Pegasus for her when she has n't time. But why to-day particularly, when you knew I was coming?"

His voice was under better control now. "Why, you see, I did n't think it would look well for us to be seen together just now—"

"Would n't look well!"

"Why, no, Joan. You've got a pretty good case of abandonment—I left the house first, you know—but if we were to be seen together the minute you get home, sort of friendly-like, it might get to the ears of the Judge and prejudice him. When the whole thing's settled, of course, then—"

Joan gasped.

"What do you mean," she interrupted, "by a case of abandonment?"

"You would n't care to bring suit on any other grounds, would you?" he asked anxiously. "The fact is I'm afraid you could n't, Joan. There *are n't* any other grounds."

"Oh," she said blankly. "I understand. . . . Well, my dear, I'm sorry you feel that you can't come and say at least hello to me—'sort of friendly-like.'"

"So am I," he answered, gently. . . .

Joan wandered back to her step-mother's room, feeling queer and dazed. She had never before realized that anything other than death might be irremediable.

During all her months in Paris she had not even contemplated the possibility of divorcing Archie. She was blindly content with things as they stood, and it had not occurred to her that Archie might be otherwise, that he had seriously meant, for his own sake, perhaps, the suggestion he had once made to her. She was so used to doing his thinking for him.

Divorce!—that refuge of the foolish, the frail, those so lacking in pride as to be willing to confide their failures to the world!

“It is so—so unnecessary,” she protested aloud, wondering vaguely why the phrase was familiar to her. Then with a start she recognized it as one of Eduard Desmond’s.

The hot blood rushed into her face. Did they—Emily, Effie May, even Archie himself—believe her capable of the sort of thing Eduard Desmond meant? Dropping one husband to take on another—or perhaps taking on another without dropping the first? Was this the interpretation that had been put upon her life abroad, her precious companionship with Nikolai?— She shivered. No wonder Archie had not cared to come to see her!

For once the thought of Nikolai was of no comfort to her. She put it from her almost with horror. It seemed to her that their relationship was irreparably smirched, degraded, by the touch of profane hands. . . .

She hoped that Effie May had awakened from her doze, so great was her need just then of the shrewd, tolerant, entirely human counsel of her step-mother.

But Effie May had not awakened; nor did she wake again.

## CHAPTER LVII

**T**HE funeral did great credit to the Misses Darcys' experience in such affairs. A crowded, beflowered church bore witness to the fact that Darcy was still a name to be reckoned with in the community. Not only the best people were there in quite sufficient numbers, but many of those lesser folk whose duties bring them happily into touch with the best people; milliners, modistes, clerks in the better shops, and so forth.

As Mr. Florsheimer of the Gents' Furnishing remarked to Miss Murphy of the Silks: "Such a loss to trade, ain't she?"

Among these humbler friends not a few genuine tears were shed, however, for Effie May had scattered her kindness impartially

Joan, in solitary state as chief mourner, with the Misses Darcy sadly rustling in the pew behind her, was conscious of many curious glances turned her way. Perhaps her husband was the only person there whose eyes never turned in her direction. She was glad of her heavy veil, through which she might study him unobserved.

He sat just opposite among the other pall-bearers, grave and quiet, with the odd dignity still about him which had come at the time of his disgrace. She noted new lines in his face, an unexpected touch of gray in his boyish, curling hair. The ears, the freckles, the great, clumsy hands were still much in evidence; but somehow Archie had lost forever his slight touch of the ridiculous. Declining to run away from disgrace, facing his music, humbly but unafraid, it occurred to Joan that her husband was approaching rather nearly her own and her father's standard of gentleness.

“Blessings brighten,” she reminded herself, grimly, “as they take their flight!” . . .

She came presently under the soothing spell of the old cathedral, a shabby, not very beautiful edifice left stranded in a neighborhood no longer its own, but whose pews still bore the names of the town's first citizens, gentlemen who had been her father's boyhood playmates, and whose fathers had worshiped there with his father. Oddly enough, considering how little time she had spent within its walls, the echoing dimness of it gave Joan her first sense of home-coming. This old house of God, that had witnessed so many ends and so many beginnings of human endeavor, had gathered into itself the heart of a city.

A warm heart, it was, thought Joan; despite those speculative glances fixed upon her. She recalled people's kindness to Archie in his trouble, their quick response to any call upon their sympathy, their willingness to give every stranger his chance. She remembered their invincible hospitality, whether in wealth or poverty; the ardor with which they entered into the interest of the moment, be it work or play, their generous admiration for any fellow-citizen who made a success in the world. A warm heart, she thought, and a loyal one.

She understood in that moment why it was that the people of this little city rarely drifted too far away to come back again. Just as the human body claims in the end its six feet of earth for a resting-place, so must the human spirit claim its bit of the world for a resting-place, a Neighborhood. The tragedy of a wandering life such as Nikolai's was, she saw, in its detachment from common human interests, from a Neighborhood. Better a tree, with its roots in friendly soil, as he had once said.

Cast her out though it might, Joan knew that her Neighborhood was here, here among her father's people. . . .

A trolley-car clanged past, and the challenge of the peanut-

man came cheerfully in at the open door. "Pop-corn, Lady! Yere 's your fine fraish roasted peanuts, right off the hopper!"

The little lads in the choir stirred restlessly to this voice of the summer outside. "Lead, Kindly Light," they warbled in a piercing young treble, with now and then the Bishop's robust tones added in a hospitable effort to make the thing go.

Joan's irrepressible fancy recalled the last occasion on which she had heard this noble anthem. It was at the Country Club, where some irreverent wag was playing it in rag-time; and Effie May had danced to it merrily, Lightfoot Ef with her indulgent Major. Joan wondered whether Lightfoot Ef might be remembering, too, and smiling perhaps in her coffin. . . .

But out at the cemetery her queer sense of elation vanished. Here, in the shadow of her father's monolith, with Mary's modest headstone on one side, a yawning grave on the other, at her feet two mounds so small as hardly to be noticed, the aloneness of the human soul suddenly smote her with such force that she could not stand under it. Was she never to know again that human touch of hands and of lips? Was her only neighborhood after all to be this quiet city of the dead?

She went quite dizzy and might have fallen, but for the quick arm that supported her; whose in that bitter moment she neither knew nor cared. But she was not surprised to find herself presently alone in a carriage with Archie.

"I guess I ought n't to have done this," he apologized, when he saw that she could listen to him. "I just did n't think—out there. I 'll go as soon as you feel better, dear. Where do you want the driver to take you?"

"Home," she said. It was no more than a whisper.

"You mean to Mrs. Darcy's house? Won't that be pretty gloomy for you just now? Better let him take you to your cousins'—or to Miss Emily's. How would that be? I know she 'd be mighty glad to have you."

Joan gathered herself together for an effort. It seemed to

her, faint as she was, that much depended upon this moment. But for once her eloquence failed her. She could only repeat that she wanted to go home.

Archie understood her trembling better than her speech, perhaps. He, too, began to tremble.

"I—I have n't got any home now, Joan. Only the old attic-room in Poplar Street—"

She cried out, painfully, "Archie! don't you *want* me any more?" . . .

In his arms at last, her face pressed roughly against the familiar roughness of his coat, words returned to her. She quoted her husband's sole adventure into poetry:

"A book of verses underneath the roof,  
A cup of coffee and an egg, in troof,  
And Mrs. Neal to cook it up for us—  
Ah, attic life were Paradise enoof."

Archibald did his faithful best to laugh; but the effort was not successful.

So it happened that they were received from a funeral as they had once been from a wedding, into the portal of an ancient, friendly mansion whose stairway still creaks to the tread of ghosts and broken people, with now and then a happy footstep to remind it of its youth. And there Ellen Neal, mounting stiffly and wearily with the aid of the curving banister, was hailed by a loud whisper from the floor above.

"Hsst! Come on up and look who 's here."

A radiant Archie led her to his door, and exhibited the One and Only, clad in his bathrobe, curled up asleep upon his bed.

"Humph!" gulped Ellen through her tears. "I *knew* that woman 'd manage to fix things somehow!" Which was a final reluctant tribute to the force of kindness that had been Effie May.



## TWO YEARS LATER

**A** DISTINGUISHED, foreign-looking gentleman with pointed gray beard got off an interurban car in the vicinity of Louisville, and stood gazing about him uncertainly. It was not the suburban neighborhood he had expected to find, but a distinctly rural one. Here and there smoke was visible above the tree-tops, but the only house within sight was a small farm-cottage of red brick, which had doubtless stood there among its gnarled fruit-trees at a time when the turnpike that passed it was a postroad leading from the metropolis of Middletown (now half a hundred houses strung along the pike) to the little port of Louisville on the Ohio.

There was a big chimney at either end, in the picturesque but impractical early fashion, and a bricked-up terrace across the front overflowing with simple flowers: petunias, snap-dragon, larkspur. Upon the lawn grazed a rather stiff-kneed thoroughbred, apparently under convoy of a pair of infants. One of these, the smaller, got about on all fours with astonishing rapidity, and seemed imbued with the spirit of investigation. The other, slightly larger, was extremely black as to color and extremely capable as to manner.

"Tek keer, you Steffum!" Mr. Nikolai heard this one admonish. "Don't you go so near his mouf, you heah me? Dat hawss could snap you up jes' as easy as nippin' off a dandelium!"

The visitor leaned over the fence in sudden interest. "Can you tell me, young person, whether Mrs. Blair lives here?"

At sound of his voice the investigatory infant, in an excess

of hospitality, rose to its legs and teetered eagerly toward him, only to come to earth at Mr. Nikolai's feet. Nothing daunted, however, it gazed up at him from this lowly position with a mixture of Archie's grin and the droll, blue, wistful twinkle of Joan.

"Dar you goes, Steffum!" cried the guardian, in hot pursuit. "Dirtyin' up anodder clean dress so 's Miss Ellen gwinter whup me good— He 's always a-fallin' over on his face dataway," she complained, while maternally repairing damages with the skirt of what appeared to be an only garment. "I b'lieve he goes and does it a-purpose!"

"To gain experience, perhaps?" suggested the visitor.

"I reck'n," assented the other, doubtfully. "Yassuh, Mis' Blair she *libs* heah, but she 's playin' on de type-writer dis mawnin'. Will I run an' tell her comp'ny is came?"

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed the gentleman. "Not if she is playing on a type-writer."

"Mr. Archie, *he* libs heah, too, when he ain't a trabelin' on de railroad train," volunteered the black one. "He 's out behine, makin' him a little house to put a hawg in. Heah him?"

Mr. Nikolai nodded. There was a good deal of intermittent hammering and whistling going on in the background.

"You need not announce me, thank you. Perhaps my namesake will lead me to him?"

He held out a forefinger to the younger Stefan, who examined it, found it good, and clasped a trusting fist about it. So linked, the two moved off at a pace suitable to experimental footsteps.

In this slow progress they presently came upon a somewhat nondescript figure at work in a potato-patch. It wore blue jeans overall trousers, surmounted by what had once been a leghorn picture-hat, from which straggled a lock or two of sparse gray hair.

Mr. Nikolai stared at this figure for a puzzled moment; and then burst out laughing.

"Why, Ellen Neal! I did not recognize you as a farmerette."

"Land sakes!" She sat down abruptly among the potato-plants, whether out of surprise or for purposes of concealment it is impossible to state.

But her welcome when it came was for once not grudging. Perhaps she recalled a certain timely offer of help; or perhaps this graybeard, with his slight, tired stoop and his lined eyes, no longer seemed to her a menace to the sheepfold. Be that as it may, her greeting was not outdone in warmth even by Archie's.

"I've simply *got* to tell Joan!" cried Archie. "She'll never forgive me if I don't interrupt her just this once."

"Not when it is coming like that," forbade Nikolai, listening to the rapid click of a typewriter from the house beyond. "Neither battle, murder, nor sudden death must be allowed to interfere with a flow of thought that is coming a hundred words to the minute."

"Well, I suppose you know," conceded the husband, reluctantly—

An hour later, however, Ellen took matters into her own hands. She appeared at the kitchen door (dressed, Nikolai was flattered to observe, in a costume of purple crêpe with Battenburg touches), and loudly rang a dinner-bell.

"That'll fetch her! Joan ain't ever too much up in the clouds to hear a dinner-bell; and I don't mean to have my jelly-omelette kep' waitin' on no flows of thought," she remarked.

Joan came out to them, a little untidy as to dress and hair (why is it that the Muse can never be pursued in perfect neatness?) and moving vaguely, as if half in a dream. There was a faint vertical wrinkle between her brows which was new

to Nikolai, but her pallor had given place to warm tan, and both face and figure showed a slight suggestion of fullness, a little matronly poise that was more charming than her Botticelli *maigre* had been.

As she passed her son, she swooped down upon him and lifted him with a fine free swing onto her shoulder.

"Hi there, old Dirt-in-the-Face! Where's your Dada?"

Mother and child made a memorable picture as they approached, the long lifting lines of the woman's body, her laughing face upturned to the boy, who straddled her shoulder unafraid of his high position, chuckling and kicking fat legs as she tickled him.

The two men who loved Joan exchanged a sympathetic glance. "Mine!" said each in his heart; the one triumphantly, the other with the little shrug that was habitual to him.

Not until she was close upon them did she realize who waited for her there beside Archie. She stopped short. Then, without a word, she put down her child and went to Nikolai and kissed him.

If that kiss, so impulsive and without self-consciousness, was like a stab in Nikolai's heart, he did not show it. She had not dared to kiss him when they parted.

There came back to him in that moment an echo of a certain prophesy he had once made to Archie: "I must warn you that when she does find her *metier*, you are more in danger of losing her to it than to me."

Was she lost to both of them, already? . . .

"Oh, but Stefan, dear, how tired you look!" ("And how old!" her thought finished.) "You've been working too hard over there!"

"One does. It seems the least one can do."

"Too much work and not enough exercise," pronounced Archie, casting a semi-professional eye over him. "Nothing

ages a man so quick as to let his muscles sag on him—but you brainy people always forget you've got muscles except in your heads. I'll have to make you hoe the garden and put on the gloves with me now and then, like I do Joan."

"No wonder she is able to hoist fat sons about as if they were feathers!" commented Nikolai.

It was a happy luncheon they had together, and a garrulous one. The Blair family talked all at once, including the youngest, who had three words at his command and liked to practice them. Ellen also joined freely in the conversation as she waited upon them. Nikolai was the only quiet one, seeming content to look and listen.

He had to hear all about the finding of the Farm, as Archie called his two acres and a cottage. When the reunited Blairs had been looking about for a place they could afford to live in—"And raise a family," added Archie happily—they had come across the little place, weed-grown and deserted, and rented it for almost nothing.

"The chickens and the garden alone practically pay the rent," boasted Archie, "and this summer I'm going to set up a hog. Real money in hogs, Mr. Nikolai! Of course the house is pretty old-timey and plain,"—he indicated the low ceilings and deep-set, many-paned windows—"but Joan likes old-timey things. She says this is a country cousin to that old place I used to live in on Poplar Street. Says a house without any ghosts in it is as uninteresting as a house without any books in it." (Archie was always fond of quoting the sayings of his Joan.)

"You do not miss people?" Nikolai asked her, recalling how easily the young American had made her place in what is perhaps the most finished society in the world.

"I have no chance to. We have neighbors enough—nice

country women who exchange patterns and recipes and cuttings with me, and even a book now and then. If I want another sort, it is easy enough to run into town—or even on to New York, now that I've the excuse of publishers to be seen! And lately the town has begun to come out to me. Not at first. Emily and the others had a good deal to say about the folly of burying oneself in the country. You see this is not Country Club or golf-course country. But now I notice that they're glad enough to come whenever I ask them—even when I don't!— Oh, the peace of it, Stefan! At night you can positively hear the silence."

"Amid the darkness that we feel is green,"

he said.

She nodded. "And no formal callers to interrupt, and no ridiculous competitions with Mrs. Websters— I think people are more themselves in the country, somehow. Kentucky people, at any rate. Your Kentuckian does not run quite true to type herded in masses."

"Hear the wise authorine!" beamed Archie.

"Perhaps that is true of all Anglo-Saxons," she went on, unheeding. "They need to get their roots into the soil."

"Not only of Anglo-Saxons, Joan—of Semitic people, of all people, I think," said Nikolai. "Humanity began in a garden, if we may believe our myths. And with all races the dream of the ultimate Paradise is a garden."

"Why don't you put some roots out yourself?" asked Archie, eagerly. "There's a lot of good land about here for sale cheap. Why don't you buy some and settle down near us?"

"Oh, do!" urged Joan. "What a splendid idea!"

He looked from one to the other, the slight flush that had risen to his face dying away.

"Thank you," he said quietly. "Thank you, my friends. Perhaps—some day."

Joan remembered that he had spoken once of his intention to settle down near her and grow up with her children, "when he was old enough."

Surely, she thought (quite unaware of any cruelty in her thought) he was old enough now!

Her eyes had been making their usual running commentary on the conversation, quick blue flashes, grave or merry or reassuring, that always spoke to Nikolai more clearly than her words. But presently he noticed in them a return of the preoccupation, the vague dreaminess, that had been about her when she first appeared.

"Your mind is at that typewriter," he accused her suddenly.

"Of course it is," complained Archie. "She 'd be at the thing all day long, if I did n't drag her out in the fields occasionally to work!"

"Archie thinks writing is not work," she interpolated, "merely an elegant way of passing a lady's leisure, like embroidery or crocheting!— But I 'm not always as bad as this, Stefan," she apologized. "It 's just that a crisis is on the way, and thoughts seem to come faster than I can get them down.—Luckily for you I 've got a public now to spill them onto, instead of you!"

"Do you find the public as responsive?"

"Does she!" cried the proud husband. "Letters in every mail, and requests for autographs—why, she 's a public character! The other day in a street-car— Tell him what happened the other day in the street-car, Joan."

She pulled his hair, laughing. "Ain't I the most wonderfullest boy?— Well, the other day in a street-car, Stefan, a perfectly strange man came up to me and said, 'Are n't you the Mrs. Blair who writes? Say, what business have *you* got

knowing how scared a man is of his grown son? You 're only a girl.' ”

“I congratulate you,” said Nikolai. “Yes, that is response. Taking the world into your circle of intimates—that is the thing that makes the game worth while for people like you and me.”

“Don't include me with yourself,” she protested in quick deprecation. “I'm not and never shall be 'literary.' Human nature is all I'm after, Stefan. Villains who won't stay villains; heroes with fatal flaws of character; good, fine, noble natures who spread havoc all about 'em—that 's the sort of thing I want to do; never 'literature'!”

He smiled, nodding. “Spoken like a true Cobzar!—But at that rate you 'll find it difficult to escape literature, my dear.” He rose to leave, against protests. “No, no, I have no intention of sharing honors with a Climax. Let me come back to-morrow, when the crisis is out of her system. I know how that is!”

“You always know how things are,” murmured Joan gratefully, pressing his hand. . . .

Archie walked with him to the car-station.

“You think she 's looking well, sir?” he asked as soon as they were out of earshot.

“Better than well, Blair. Content.”

The husband sighed with satisfaction. “I think so myself—though of course it 's the kid who 's done that, not me— Mr. Nikolai, I 've got to talk to you on business. How big a hurry are you in for that money you lent me?”

“None at all,” answered the other pleasantly. “I 've accumulated a good deal of moss for such a rolling-stone—a racial trait, perhaps! Take your time. You 've already paid me more than half, I think.”

“Joan's book did most of that, not me,” admitted Archie, flushing. “Though of course I 'm going to pay her back.”



"Don't," said the other.

"*Don't!* Why not?"

"Our only hold upon such as Joan is—our need of them."

Archie ruminated upon this in silence. "I get you," he said at last. "Let 'em think we 're sort of helpless, like—like children, eh? But it 's pretty hard accepting money from a woman!"

"Why? when we have consented to accept life itself from a woman— Where there is love there is no debt, Blair!"

"I guess that 's right," said Archie slowly. "What 's mine is hers of course; and so what 's hers is mine— But speaking of the war—"

It happened that they had not been speaking of the war at all, though it hung in the background of their talk, grim and menacing, as it hung in the background of all talk just then.

"Yes, Blair?"

"We 're getting into it at last, thank God! And as soon as we do, I 'm going."

"Of course," said Nikolai.

Archie turned to him eagerly. "You think I 've got a right to go?"

"So much of a right that I 've come out here largely to see how I can help you— Of course you know," he added after a moment's hesitation, "that anything I have will go some day to my namesake Stefan?"

"Say, that 's great!" cried Archie, beaming. "That makes me mighty easy about the future! And the present 's all right, too. I 'm pretty sure of getting a commission, and Joan makes more money than I do now. The thing that 's been troubling me is wondering how *you 'd* ever get paid back. . . . I 'm pretty tall for the trenches," he explained. "And I seem to get sort of careless when I 'm excited—the Irish coming out on me, I reckon. The chances are against

my coming back. And in that case all you 'd get would be—Joan."

A silence fell.

"And the kid, of course— He 's a pretty nice little fellow," Archie added tentatively. "I don't suppose he 'd be much of a—drawback?"

"On the contrary," said Nikolai. "I think he might be considered interest on the investment!"

Archie laughed with relief.

"I tell you, it makes me feel pretty comfortable to know that whatever happens to me they 'll be safe! And to know that you 'll be taking care of her, sir. She needs a good deal of taking care of, too—though she don't know it. Thinks she 's as independent as a little pig on ice. But they 're none of 'em independent, Mr. Nikolai—take it from me! They 've got to be humored, and teased, and exercised, and petted—and the smarter they are the more petting they need. This high-brow business seems to leave people sort of lonesome in their hearts—you know what I mean?"

"Yes," said Nikolai, "I know what you mean— I shall accept your legacy gladly, Blair, if I am here to accept it. But—I am going to the war, myself. Not into the trenches, no. Into Russia."

Archie protested as Joan had. "But I thought Russia was not safe for you!"

"It is not. Nor for anybody else just now. There is something brewing there. You will see. And I think perhaps I can do a little something for both my countries, the new and the old. That is why I have come to America; to arrange my affairs, and to—say good-by."

"I get you," said Archie, simply, and held out his hand. His face had fallen. "Gee, supposing neither of us comes back? What will she do then?"

Nikolai gravely smiled. "Listen!" he said.

Through the hush of the still afternoon came to their ears, faint but distinct, the steady clicking of a typewriter.

"That is what she will do, my friend, with us or without. She has graduated from you and me—from herself as well. She has turned from men to Man; and of him the supply is inexhaustible."

Archie sighed, a little jealously. "You gave her that! You've given her almost everything she values, sir, have n't you?"

"Not quite everything, Blair."

Archie's eyes brightened. He remembered then the thing the other had not given her: their boy.

It was a scene that etched itself upon Nikolai's memory as he stood there waiting for his car, one of those pictures the heart carries with it into far places, and forever; the pleasant, homely cottage among its flowers and gnarled apple-trees, children's voices prattling about, the smell of cooking pickle in the air, Archie's cheery, retreating whistle, and dominating all the eager clicking of a typewriter.

His eyes followed the broad shoulders of the younger man, swinging along the road to the brisk, martial tread all young men have learned latterly. . . . Nikolai's life had thrown him into contact with all phases of the human problem, low and high. He knew how inextricably the two are mingled. Heroism, self-sacrifice, he had found in the most unlikely places, and thrilled to them as a fighting nature thrills to the drum. It hurt him to realize that the finest heroism, the most exquisite sacrifice, must always be hidden things, hidden often even from the eyes of him who sacrifices. Archibald Blair, failure in all that the world finds important, would have called himself undoubtedly a poor stick. Only to the occasional eye did he loom a hero.

Nikolai looked after him sadly, listening to the steady click of that typewriter. At last he quoted to himself, with a shrug,

“Meurs, parce que j'ai besoin de chanter la mort pour mes chansons.”<sup>1</sup>

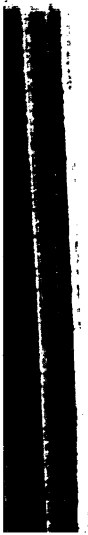
Between them, he knew, they would manage to serve Joan's needs to the end.

THE END

<sup>1</sup> “Die, for I have need to sing of death in my songs.”















NOV 29 1940

