MAKING OVER MARTHA

Title: Making Over Martha

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Release Date: July 28, 2016 [eBook #52668]

Language: English

Produced by Al Haines.

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Cover art

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MARTHA BY-THE-DAY,
MARTHA AND CUPID

NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

Published October, 1913
Reprinted November (twice), December, 1913
May, August, October, 1914
October, 1915

MAKING OVER MARTHA

CHAPTER I

Martha Slawson sat at her sewing-machine, stitching away for dear life. About her, billowed yards upon yards of white cotton cloth, which, in its uncut length, shifted, as she worked, almost imperceptibly piling up a snowy drift in front of her, drawn from the snowy drift behind. This gradual ebb and flow was all that marked any progress in her labor, and her husband, coming in after some hours of absence and finding her, apparently, precisely where he had left her, was moved to ask what manner of garment she was making.

"'Tain't a garment at all, Sam. It's a motta."

"A motto?" Sam fairly gasped.

Martha put on more speed, then took her feet from the treadle, her hands from the cloth-plate.

"I guess you forgot what's goin' to happen, ain't you?" she returned, sitting back in her chair, looking up at him amiably.

Sam squared his great shoulders. "Going to happen? Oh, you mean—you mean—Mr. and Mrs. Ronald coming home?"

"Sure I do!"

"Well, but I don't see——"

"I didn't suppose you would see. Men ain't much on *seein'* where sentiment's concerned. They go it blind, an' that's a fack. I s'pose a *man* would let a gen'lman an' lady come back from their weddin'-tour (which they been gone 'most a year on it), and never think o' givin' 'em a welcome home, any more than to find their house an' grounds kep' up, an' their bills kep' down, an' everything in tip-top order. But, with a woman it's different. *I'm* goin' to give Miss Claire an' Lord Ronald a reception that *is* a reception. Somethin' they won't forget in a hurry. I'm goin' to have lantrens in the trees, an' a arch of laurel over the gateposts, an' then, as they come on in, they'll see my motta strung acrost the driveway—

HAIL TO THE CHIEF!

in big yella letters, hemmed down on this white. An' the childern, all four of 'em, is to sing it, besides. Don't you remember, they learned it at school down home—I should say, in New York, that time the president come back, an' all the public-school childern sung'm a welcome?"

Sam bit his lip. "Yes, but that was a little different. Somehow, I think HAIL TO THE BRIDE might be better, don't you?"

"No!" said Martha, with decision. "First place, she ain't exackly a bride by this time. When a lady's been married almost a year, an' traveled 'round the world in the meanwhile, I wouldn't call her a bride. An', besides, it wouldn't be polite to single her out, an' sorta leave *him* in the cold. Everybody knows

bridegrooms don't cut much of a figga, but you needn't rub it in. No, I thought it over careful, an' HAIL TO THE CHIEF is what I decided on. HAIL TO THE CHIEF lets us out on responsibility. It's up to them to prove which it hits, see?"

Whether Sam did or didn't, he made no further comment. He went and sat himself down in his own particular chair, took up from the center-table the latest number of *The New England Farmer*, and commenced studying it assiduously.

A second later, the machine was in motion again, running with great velocity, impelled by Martha's tireless foot.

Mrs. Slawson did not look up, when the eldest of her four children, just home from school, came in, and made straight for her side.

"Mother-r-r!"

No answer.

"Say, mother-r-r!"

"For goodness' sake, Cora, let go that R. The way you hang on to it, you'd think you was drownin', an' *it* was a lifeline. Besides, d'you know what I decided to do? I decided to strike. For the rest o' this week, I ain't answerin' to the name o' 'Mother-r-r.' See? There ain't a minute in the day, when some one o' you childern ain't shoutin' it—you, or Francie, or Sammy, or Sabina—an' it's *got on my nerves*, as Mrs. Sherman says. You can call me 'Martha' or 'Little Sunshine' or anythin' else you got a mind to, but 'Mother-r-r,' not on your life."

"Say, moth——!"

"Look out, now!"

"What you sewin' on?"

"The machine."

"Pooh, you know I don't mean that. What you making? Anything for me?"

"No, ma'am."

"Well, what *are* you, then?"

"I'm a perfeck lady, an' I'm makin' a motta that proves it."

"Mother-r-r, I think you're real mean. All the girls at school have fancier clo'es 'n I got, an' I think you just might make me some new ones, so there!"

"Sure I might!" admitted Mrs. Slawson blandly.

Cora's lip went out. "Then, why don't you? You got as much time as any other girl's mother. Ann Upton's mother makes all Ann's dresses 'n' things, an' she's got twice's many as I got. She had a new dress, when school took in, in September, an' she got another new one, 'round about New Year's, and now she's got another new one for summer."

Martha stroked down a seam with deliberation. "That's nice for Ann, ain't it, havin' so many? She can *spell* 'm, as they say here. When she gets tired o' wearin' one dress, she can change to another, an' look like one o' them fashion-plates from mornin' till night, an' feel like——"

"I been wearing the same old thing ever since I was born," continued Cora, disregarding her mother's irrelevant remark, continuing her lamentation as if it had not been interrupted.

"Which shows it was good mater'al to begin with," retorted Martha. "Ann Upton's mother prob'ly buys cheap goods with no wear in 'em."

"She don't either. It's just she wants to have Ann stylish. *You* don't care a bit if I ain't stylish."

"Certainly I don't. I got other things on my mind. I don't care a fig if you're stylish or not. I never was much on style myself, an' I get along all right. I mixed with the best s'ciety in New York City, I can tell you, young lady. Nobody coulda went to the houses o' tonier folks than I did, an' was made welcome too, an' don't you forget it. An' the complaints, if I missed a day! You'd be surprised! These young ladies that think o' nothin' but style, you can take it from me, their outsides is all there is to'm. They got nothin' else to think of, an' nothin' to think of it with, if they had it."

"Well, I don't care, I wisht you was like Mrs. Upton!"

"Now, what do you think o' that! D'you hear what Cora says, father? Cora don't like the style o' mother you picked out for her. She's just fairly disgusted with your taste in ladies."

Sam Slawson did not hear, or, if he heard, did not heed, and Cora proceeded, unabashed:

"Mrs. Upton does her own work, an'——"

"That all? Most anybody could do their own work, seems to me. That's dead easy. It's when you do your own work, an' sever'l other people's besides, that you're ap' to be some occupied," observed Mrs. Slawson.

"Well, I don't care what you say, I just think I might have a new dress—Dutch neck, with short sleeves."

"Before you wanta wear a Dutch neck, you got to *have* a Dutch neck. *You* ain't a modern bathroom, that you must show you got exposed pipes. Better cover up your bones, an' think less about what you're wearin'. I got more to do than waste time fussin' about such trivolous things, so you better make up your mind you're goin' to skip this fashion."

"Well, I wisht you'd make me a new dress," wailed Cora, returning to her muttons undaunted. "You ain't too busy. Last night, before I went to bed, I saw you *sittin' down*, an' you weren't doin' anythin', either, only mendin' Sammy's pants."

Sam Slawson raised his head.

"That's right, Cora. Make your mother be busy! She don't work hard enough, as it is. Get a hump on, mother! Get a hump on."

"If I get another hump on, besides the one I already got, I'll be a drumed-

erry," observed Mrs. Slawson imperturbably, while Cora left the room in tears, her sense of injury swelling beyond her power of control, when her father's irony proved he was siding with "mother" against her.

"The next time Cora gets fresh, and calls you down, Martha, I just wish you'd turn her over to me, and let me give her what she deserves," suggested Sam, as soon as the door was shut.

"Give her what she deserves? You couldn't. It'd take too long, besides exhaustin' you too much. But, I thank you kindly for offerin'. Barrin' a few airs an' graces, Cora's all right, an' when she ain't, I'm not too delicate yet, with easy livin', but what I can give her a lickin' that'll dust some of her fancy frills off'n her. When young 'uns gets along to a certain age, they're apter than not to get outa sorts an' feel they didn't have a fair show on parents. I been there myself, an' I see it work in other fam'lies. It may surprise you, Sam, but the young is hard, hard as nails. Only, nails has the advantage. Nails has *heads*. You got somethin' to tie to with *them*. But young folks is smooth *and* hard, an', when you think you got'm trained good, that's just the time they slip out from under your fingers, an' go spinnin' off, goodness knows where, away from you—like them pretty-appearin' candy balls that *looks* sweet, but you break your jawbones tryin' to put a tooth in'm. All you can do is lick'm oncet in a while. An' it's just the same with childern."

"Well, I won't have Cora giving you impudence, mother. If she hasn't the sense to appreciate you, at least I won't stand by and hear her tongue-lashing you."

Martha bowed. "'Thank you—thank you, sir, she said, your kindness I never shall forget!' All the same, I'll tell you this, right now, Sammy, I certaintly got to set to an' begin puttin' in some modren improvements onto me, for I begun to notice, I don't really suit nobody but you, the way I am. I'm too old-fashioned or somethin', to please, nowadays. Quite a lotta people has delicately hinted to me, lately, I'd be a whole lot more satisfactory, if I was altogether differnt. There's my childern. As I just told you, I don't seem to be the style o' mother they'd select at all, if they was out shoppin' for mothers, an' had what Mrs. Sherman calls Carte Blanche with 'em—whoever *she* is. An' it's the same with Ma. I never really did suit Ma for a daughter-in-law from the start. She could tell you (an' *does*) a hunderd ways I'd be better, *with alterations*, only I been that took up, tendin' to her wants, ever since you an' me was married, I ain't had time to put the alterations in. An', then, there's——"

"Say, Martha," interposed Sam, lowering his voice to an almost inaudible whisper, "here's Mrs. Peckett coming up the walk. If you've got anything 'round you don't want advertised all over the place, you'd better put it out of sight, hadn't you?"

For answer Mrs. Slawson leaned over, plucked up the material next her, at its nearest available point, and gave its length a flourish that sent it billowing conspicuously half across the floor. Sam shrugged.

"My, my!" ejaculated Martha, looking around, and speaking with loud distinctness, "if here ain't Mrs. Peckett!"

Through the open, screened window, Mrs. Peckett inquired, with elephantine playfulness (physically, she was built on almost as heroic a scale as Martha herself), "Got any place for a tired little girl to rest?"

"Sure we have," said Mrs. Slawson. "Come right along in!"

Another moment, and Mrs. Peckett had obeyed.

"Take that chair there, the one alongside the table, with the cushion in. It's the comfortablest we got—just suits that holla in your back, that, Ma says, hers always needs restin'—an' Ma's a champeean on restin'. She knows how to do it in seven differnt languages. You'll excuse my goin' on with what I'm doin'? I can talk while I work."

Mrs. Peckett lowered herself gradually into the proffered chair with the air of one accustomed to distrust the good intentions of furniture.

"Certainly, I'll excuse you. What you doing?"

"Sewing," said Martha agreeably.

"Sheeting?" Mrs. Peckett inquired.

Martha considered. "Well, I s'pose you might *call* it sheeting," she admitted. "Down home—I should say in New York City—we call it muslin, but up here it's cotton-cloth. I'm trying to remember the differences. I don't believe in lettin' things go into one eye, an' outa the other ear, so you never profit by your exper'ences. I believe in livin' an' learnin', if you die in the attemp'."

"This ain't very fine quality," observed Mrs. Peckett, stooping and picking up an end of the material to examine it critically through her thick-lensed spectacles.

Martha sighed. "Dear me! how sorry I am. But I never was much of a cornersewer, as Mrs. Sherman says, on white goods, an' that's a fack."

"I'm afraid you won't have much wear out of it," pronounced the oracle. "You'll have to get new sheets in no time. These'll go through before you know it. The next time you want to buy sheeting, or anything of that sort, you just come to me. I'll advise you."

"Thank you," said Martha.

"I always heard tell, city folks wa'n't much of any in the housekeeping line, and I suspicion it's true. They're too busy gallivanting the streets to look after their houses. For myself, I don't mind telling *you*, I don't set much store by city folks."

"You don't say!"

"We get a good mess of 'em up here, summers. Rich and poor, and if we 'natives,' as they call us, ain't glad to see them go away every fall, I wouldn't say so. *I don't like 'em!*"

"What's your objection?"

"Well, the rich ones are stuck up, and the poor ones are low down. You never saw such nuisances as those Fresh Air children! Several of our ladies take them in, every summer, for a spell, but *I* wouldn't have one of them in *my* house, tracking mud and dirt in on my clean floors—not for anything I can think of. Mrs. Fred Trenholm, who lives down at Milby's Corners, she took in three last season. You should have seen them at church. Ungodly don't express it! Didn't know the creed even. Couldn't sit still through divine worship, on the Sabbath, like Christians."

"Likely that's because most of'm's Jews," Martha observed calmly. "But that's as far as the difference goes. Their lungs needs just as much good air to breathe as little Christians' lungs. An' their stummicks call for the same sorta nourishment. My childern can say off the creed, an' their colic, fine, but I wouldn't wanta have my life depend on bein' able to tell the dirt on their shoes from the dirt on the little Sheenies'. Nor I wouldn't want to die for the number o' times mine wriggle less than they do. Childern is childern, the world over, an' this idea of your bein' nearer heaven when you was a child, like Cora's piece says, is rot—I beg your pardon!—nonsense! There's where lots o' folks slip up on childern. They go on the idea that young 'uns are angels to begin with, an' they break their hearts to see 'em runnin' down, as they grow up. The truth is, it's just the other way 'round. Childern is little animals at the start. You got to housebreak'm, an' train'm, till they learn the tricks o' decent people, an' it's only little by little they get sense to *know*. Every time I lick my young 'uns, I feel kinda mean. They're doin' *almost* as good as they know how, like the rest of us. Only o' course it can't be helped. You got to lick'm some, to make'm understand. Their constitutions seem to demand it. I try to bring mine up the way, it looks to me, as if the Lord was tryin' to bring up us. Lick'm thora, when necessary, an' then, bear no malice. As I make it out, that's His way, an' I don't see how to improve on it much. But I interrupted you. You was talkin' about how you don't like city folks, an' you'd got as far as the childern."

Mrs. Peckett's nearsighted eyes searched Martha's face shrewdly, for a second.

"I was just thinking that city folks' ways ain't our ways, that's all. Now, I'd think pretty poorly of myself to go out of my gate, of a morning, and not pass the time of day with a neighbor. But I hear tell, that's what city folks do. They would let you live next door—in the same street with them, for a year, and never know you."

"Sure!" said Martha cheerfully. "I lived in the same house over five years, before I come up here, an', with the exception of a Dutchman gen'lman an' his wife, acrost the hall, I wasn't on visitin' terms with any of the tenants. I was too busy tendin' to my own affairs. The way I come to know the Dutchman gen'lman was kinda accidental,—on account o' circumstances over which he had no control at the time, but did later on. Him an' me grew to be real chummy, after he oncet got on to it I meant business. He gave me our cat Nixcomeraus, that's a boss mouser now, which it was only a kitten then. But, as a gener'l rule, we kep' ourselves *to* ourselves."

"Well, I don't call that Christian conduct," pronounced Mrs. Peckett. "It looks heathen to me, and it certainly ain't according to Scripture. We are all brethern and——"

"Cistern," Martha suggested benevolently.

"And we'd ought to live as such. I like to know what's going on, and keep in touch with the folks I'm living amongst, but do you think those city folks encourage a body's running in and out freely? Well, I should say *not*. They're a stiff-necked generation—summer folks. Nobody can say I'm a busybody, or pushing, or the like of that. Time and again I say to Mr. Peckett, 'Folks do altogether too much mixing in with other folks' affairs.' You wouldn't believe the way Mr. Peckett and I are bothered, all the time, with people calling on us for charity, to help them out of their troubles—just because it's known to all we are forehanded, and have property. But I always say to Mr. P., 'Now, don't be too quick. Just wait till the—till the——'"

"Clouds roll by," supplied Mrs. Slawson again.

"And, sure enough, the next time we see the party, ten to one, somebody else has helped them out, and there's no need of our mixing in at all. No, nobody can say I want to push myself. I always tell Mr. Peckett I ain't a mite curious, but I confess I *am* terribly *interested*, which is altogether different, and what the Bible tells us to be."

"Well, well! Now, what do you think o' that!" said Martha. "I wouldn'ta known the difference."

Mrs. Peckett paused, as if to weigh her words. "I tell you what I'll do," she announced with the air of fully appreciating the measure of her kindness, and wanting Mrs. Slawson to appreciate it, too, "I'll take you in hand. Whenever you want to know anything, all you have to do is come to me, and I'll tell you. I'll consider it a pleasure. I can see where there's a lot for you to learn. The city is a poor place to be brought up and live in, all your life, with its vice, and its selfishness, and the like of that. But, now you've come here, you'll see something different. Why, you'll feel made over, when you've learned our honest, generous country ways."

Seeing Mrs. Peckett rise cumbersomely, in preparation for departure, Martha also got upon her feet.

"Well, I declare," she ejaculated blandly, "just before you come in, I was tellin' my husband the time had come when I'd got to do somethin' or other, so's I wouldn't be so old-style, an' shame my fam'ly. An' here you are, offerin' to improve me, free grates for nothin', as Miss Claire, bless her! says. It's like Providence's finger in the pie, an' no mistake. But I'm afraid I'll be puttin' you out too much. They say, it's hard to learn an old dog new tricks."

Mrs. Peckett was a fleshy woman; all her movements had a certain air of unctuousness. She shook her head, with reassuring, easy patronage.

"Not at all," she said, "I'll admire to——"

The door banged open, interrupting her unceremoniously, and the Slawson son and heir, Sammy junior, heated and perspiring, breathless but communicative, burst noisily into the room.

"My, my!" ejaculated Martha. "I guess you think you're a en*gine*, don't you? Pantin' like that, 's if you was luggin' a train o' cars behind you? Hats off to ladies. Don't you see Mrs. Peckett? Say how de do, like a gen'lman."

Sammy bobbed an awkward pate. "Say, mother-r-r," he stammered.

"Well?"

"There's that big place, 'way along up the little side street, I mean road, past the cimiterry. You can't but just see the house, it's so far back, an'——

"He means old lady Crewe's, I reckon," explained Mrs. Peckett. "She's one of the summer folks, I've just been telling you about. Rolling in money, but as hard and close as a clinched fist. Nobody knows how much she's worth."

"P'raps she's the kind that don't let her right hand know what her left hand's got."

"Well, I don't know about that, but she has considerable of a place. Enough to keep a whole regiment of regular hired help busy, an' every summer she comes up from the city, with just her young gran'-daughter, and they make out to get along, as best they can, trusting to get hold of parties, hereabouts, willing to accommodate. That's no proper way to do."

Martha smoothed back the hair from Sammy's damp forehead, making it out, somehow, that he had more to say, and calming his impatience to say it.

"An', mother-r-r, I was walkin' along the road, an' a awful pretty lady, she called out to me from the garden, an' I went, an' she said her gran'ma was took sick, or somethin', an' there wasn't nobody she could send to get the doctor, but 'ceptin' me, coz I was goin' along, an', I said I'd tell the doctor, an' she said——"

"I don't envy you your job," Mrs. Peckett interposed. "It'll be like hunting a needle in a haystack to find Dr. Driggs, this time of day. He may be 'most anywheres out in the open kentry. But one thing's pretty certain, he won't be

home."

"Is he the one lives down in the village, on the main street, with a office which the door is 'round the corner as you go to the station?" Martha inquired. "We're such a husky crowd, the lot of us, we don't ever need a doctor, and I wouldn'ta knew, except I happened to notice oncet, passin', he had such a funny doormat. There was *Salve* done into it—white pebbles stuck in the wire nettin'. Now, what do you think o' that! It didn't say what kind, either. Just *Salve*. Wouldn't you think *Pills* woulda been better? There's more pills used, any day in the year, 'n salve. But, if he's stuck on salve, why, he's the doctor! Only—that don't help us get him, does it? You won't mind my runnin' off, an' leavin' you, Mis' Peckett? But I guess I better be movin' in the direction o' the Crewe place. An', father, s'pose you get a move on, like a good fella, an' see if you can't scare up somethin' somewheres that'll answer to the name o' doctor, when you call it. If you use the auta, you'll make better time, an' you might overtake me, walkin'."

Mrs. Peckett laid a restraining hand on Martha's shoulder. "Now don't you stir a step," she admonished. "It's full two miles to walk to the Crewe place, and the traveling's heavy, on account of the dry spell. By the time you get there, most likely somebody else will have passed with a team, and you'll have your trouble for your pains. It won't hurt *them* a mite to go out of their way, if they're driving. That's what I say to Mr. P. 'Don't be too quick offering. Give other folks a chance.' Now, here were you, not half an hour back, saying you'd like I should improve you. Well, this is your first lesson. Stay where you are, and let some one nearer to, do the helping."

"Good idea!" vouchsafed Sam Slawson senior, speaking for the first time.

As soon as Mrs. Peckett was well out of sight and hearing, Martha turned reprovingly upon her husband.

"Sam Slawson, what d'you mean by——?"

Sam composedly pulled on his boots.

"Only way to get rid of her," he answered succinctly.

"Oh!" said Martha, going to the cupboard, where she kept her store of simple home remedies. "Now, if *you're* ready, *I* am. An', young Sammy, you run, an' tell your gran'mother to give you childern bread an' milk for your suppers. Your father an' I are goin' out. We mayn't be back till late."

CHAPTER II

It was dusk when Martha reached the Crewe place.

As she turned in at the entrance-gate, she thought she saw a spark of light prick out through the darkness of one of the upper-story windows, but the next instant it disappeared, and the gloomy house stood formidably looming up against its background of dense foliage, facing her, as with a challenge, as black as ever.

Martha Slawson was not one to be intimidated. She plodded steadily along the driveway, regardless of the strange sensation of shifty gravel crunching beneath feet used to hard city pavements, the thickening shadows to eyes accustomed to the glare of electric-lighted streets, and the soft, surreptitious stirrings of she-knew-not-what among the underbrush to ears familiar with the roar of the Elevated, the clang and dash of passing surface cars.

"I don't see the use o' them sheds they build to the front doors o' some o' the houses, in these parts, which they call'm *port co-shares*, Sam tells me. You can take it from me, they're like to break your bones, mountin' the high step o' them," she mused, panting with the effort it had taken to hoist her heavy frame from the level of the ground to that of the house-door.

"Them swell ladies must be considerable of acrobats, to do it graceful. I know *I* couldn't."

She smoothed down her disordered garments, and dusted off her grimy palms, before venturing to search, in the darkness, for the bell. She found it readily enough, but it was some time before she heard the chain-bolt withdrawn from within, a key turned in a resisting lock, a door unlatched. Then, the door swung open inward, on its heavy hinges, and Martha found herself face to face with what she described next day to Cora as, "the livin' image o' that marble statute in the Metropolitan Museum, down home. The girl in the flowin' robes, holdin' a queer-lookin' thing, which its own mother wouldn't reco'nize it for a lamp, in her hand. You told me her name. Sykey, you said it was, though not spelled that way on the slob she stood on, I noticed. But, I take your word for it. Well, if this young lady wasn't just like Sykey, lamp an' all! You'd never know the difference, exceptin' for complexion."

"I'm Mrs. Slawson," Martha announced at once. "You told my boy, Sammy, you'd like him run for a doctor."

Sykey paused a moment, bewildered. "Oh, yes. This afternoon. I remember, now. I thought he had forgotten." She spoke in the subdued voice one uses when there is sickness in the house.

"No, he didn't forget. My husband is fetchin' the doctor. But I come on ahead to see if I couldn't help out some, in between times. My husband an' me is superintendent for Mr. Frank Ronald, two miles or so down the main road. You know'm prob'ly."

The girl nodded. "My grandmother was taken sick at about four, this afternoon. She seems stiff on one side. She can't move her arm, or her leg, and when she talks it sounds as if her tongue were thick. I got her to bed as well as I could, and I haven't dared leave her since for more than a minute at a time. We've no telephone. This little branch road is out of the line of general travel, and we've no one to send on errands. I've sat at the window all the afternoon, hoping a team would pass, but nobody went by but your little boy. I thought I saw you come in a while ago, and I hurried down to the door, to let you in. But when you were nowhere to be seen, I gave up in despair. I thought my last chance was gone. I'd have to spend the night alone with grandmother, and——"

"The door? Ain't this the right door to come in by?" queried Martha.

There was a moment of hesitation before the answer came. "Oh, yes. It's the right door for *carriages*. People afoot generally prefer the front way—on account of the veranda-steps, you know."

Martha gazed at her companion a moment in silence, then quietly doubled over, in a fit of irrepressible merriment.

"If you'd just as lief, I'd prefer you wouldn't tell Sammy, I mean Mr. Slawson," she said, when she could enunciate. "He'd never get over my thinkin' I'm carriage-comp'ny. An' he'd kill himself laughin' at the sight o' me, climbin', hands an' knees, up your high stoop-with-no-steps, which the back view, lookin' at me from behind, certaintly musta been funny. But I've no business detainin' you away from your gran'ma. D'you think she'd think me pushin', if I give her a hot bath, an' a brisk alcohol rub? Sam may not get the doctor right off, an' a bath an' a alcohol rub is as good as anythin' I know of for a str—for a——"

Katherine Crewe searched her face. "For a *what*?" she demanded uncompromisingly.

"A poor circulation," Martha returned imperturbably.

"I've no alcohol. There's no running water in the house. I let the fire in the kitchen range go out hours ago."

"Never you mind about that. I got some alcohol by me, an' if you show me the kitchen range, I'll show you a fire in it, all right, all right."

"I don't know how it is," sighed Miss Crewe, leading the way through dark passages, past shadowy doors, "but, somehow, a great load seems lifted off my heart, now you're here. I've never seen you before, but I feel you're able to set everything right."

"You go on feelin' that way. It'll help me no end with the *settin'*. An', now, don't you wait here. You run on up to the ol' lady, an' I'll be along presently. I'm used to kitchens. I can find all I need in'm, an' when I got the hot water, I can find my way out."

"I'm afraid you'll think the floor isn't very clean," the girl observed regret-

fully, pausing, with her hand upon the doorknob, to gaze back dubiously. "I suppose it needs a long-handled scrubbing-brush, and——"

By the light of the lamp Miss Crewe left behind her when she went, Martha made a quick survey of the premises. "'A long-handled scrubbing-brush,'" she quoted quizzically. "A long-handled Irish woman, more likely. My, but it's a caution, if you turn up your nose at work, how the dirt will gather under it. It's like to take me all night to make a impression on this place. The grate chock-full o' clinkers, an' the *kettles*—say, but I didn't say I'd give the ol' lady a hot *mud*-bath."

For a few moments the kitchen resounded with thunderous echoes to the vigorous efforts of Mrs. Slawson toward reconstruction. Then followed other sounds, those of crackling wood, igniting coals, bubbling water, escaping steam. In the midst of it all, Sykey appeared in the doorway.

"Oh, Mrs. Slawson," she deplored, before she had fairly crossed the threshold. "I'm afraid it's no use. Grandmother won't have it. I told her about your coming and offering to help, and—she won't have it."

Martha nodded reassuringly. "Well, we won't worry her talkin' about it, an' we won't worry our-selves *thinkin'* about it. Have you gotta bath-tub handy?"

"Yes, but——"

"Plenty o' towels—bath-towels? The fuzzy-wuzzy, warm kind which they call'm Turkish or Russian, I don't know which, but that gets up a gentle irritation when applied, just like some folks."

The girl nodded.

"Then, the best thing you can do is, get'm ready. It'll keep your mind off'n her not bein' willin'. We want everything laid out handy, so's we won't have to go on a still-hunt the last minute. I got plenty o' water, steamin' hot. If you'll go along up, an' kinda *perpare for the worst*, I'll folla along presently, an'—we'll *have* it."

A single shaded lamp left the great bedroom in partial shadow, but as Martha approached the majestic four-poster, about five minutes later, she made out the figure of a diminutive old woman, stretched full length beneath the spare coverings. There could be nothing formidable in such a tiny figure. It was only when Mrs. Slawson looked down upon the face, that she met a pair of eyes that fairly held her at bay.

"I'm Mrs. Sammy Slawson," she announced, a shade less confidently than usual. "I live down the road a ways—superintendent for Mr. Frank Ronald, me an' my husband is."

The little body on the bed might be half dead, but the great eyes were fiercely alive. They measured Mrs. Sammy Slawson from head to foot, with a stare of icy insolence.

Martha did not quail. She met the stare with a perfectly unflinching gaze, then went on talking as she worked, as calmly as if she were not being challenged in mortal combat.

"I s'pose you don't like the idea of a trained nurse? Many don't. I ain't *trained*, but I'm a nurse all right, all right, an' if not one of the red, cross kind, why that's only because, as I tell Sammy, I had so much exper'ence with Ma an' the childern that, be this an' be that, I learned to keep my shirt on, an' not fly out, when tried. Folks that's ailin' has enough bother on their chests, without havin' to be pationate, into the bargain. It's up to them that's tendin'm, to do the pationate ack. Now, take me, for instance. You couldn't ruffle *me*, if you took a flutin'-iron to me. That's what come o' bein' sixteen years married, with a mother-in-law threw in, for good measure. It learns you to keep your temper. You might need it for the nex' time. I don't blame *you* a mite if you feel like bitin' the head off a tenpenny nail. To have your circulation go back on you, like, is a kind of nuisance, no doubt about it. But, sakes alive! It might happen to anybody, as Ma always says when she breaks things she hadn't oughta touched, in the first place. The best thing I know of, for poor circulation, is a hot bath, an' a alcohol rub—just for a starter. I got plenty o' hot water handy, an'—now don't you stir, nor bother your head worryin' about givin' your gran'daughter an' I trouble! We got the bath-tub all ready, an' yes—them towels is just the right things! Couldn't be better! An'—here goes!"

Martha averted her face, as she bent over the helpless form, to escape the furiously battling eyes. She felt as mean as if she had been taking base advantage of a defenseless creature to do it harm, instead of good; but, in spite of this, and in spite of the inarticulate sounds that came from between the twisted lips at the touch of her hands, she gently lifted the old woman in her strong arms, stripped her, as she would a baby, and put her in the tub.

Tears of helpless rage oozed from between the closed lids, but Mrs. Slawson pretended not to see. She kept up a cheerful babble, what time her poor little antagonist simmered, and again during all the time her firm, strong fingers were plying away at the nerveless flesh.

"Don't you try to lug that heavy tub, Miss Crewe, dear. Wait till I can lay hand to it. If you must be doin' somethin', s'pose you smooth down the sheets, an' see there's no crumbs in the bed. There's nothin' like crumbs in the bed for keepin' you from feelin' lonesome, but I guess your gran'ma willa had enough comp'ny, by the time she gets rid o' me. Poor ol' lady! I been like a grain o' sand in her eye, which it don't help her none, to say I'm sorry.

"'Little drops o' water, little grains o' sand.'

"Guess she'll think she's had her dose o' both, to-night, all right. Say! Hark! Is that a auta-horn? Sounds like Sammy's."

"Then he's brought Dr. Driggs!" Kate Crewe cried joyously.

"Well, you can take it from me he's brought Dr. *Somethin'*. It mayn't be Dr. Driggs, but Sammy wouldn't have the face to come to me, 'less he'd got somethin', that'd, at least, pass for what I sent'm out for," observed Mrs. Slawson suavely.

As it happened, it was not Dr. Driggs whom Sam had brought. Kate Crewe, going to the door to admit them, saw, even in the dark, that neither of the men before her was of the familiar build of the old physician she knew so well. But there was no time for regret, and, after a few brief words of self-introduction, she led the way upstairs.

Meanwhile, Martha had made what she called "a fist" at clearing away all traces of her recent ministrations, so, when the doctor appeared, he found an orderly room, from which she quietly slipped as he entered.

Downstairs she found Sam.

"You see, Dr. Driggs was off somewheres, up the mountain, and no one could find him," he explained. "I couldn't make out to get him, the best I could do. Then I asked wasn't there some other doctor in the place, but short of Burbank, twenty-five miles off, there wasn't. Dr. Driggs has all the practice 'round these parts. Then, all at once, somebody happened to think of a young fellow from Boston, here for his health—same as I, I guess. He's a M.D. all right—laid up for repairs, as you might say. He's boarding at the Fred Trenholm's. A wink's as good as a nod to a blind horse, and off I went to Milby's Corners. At first, Dr. Ballard—that's his name—said he didn't know about coming. But, after a bit, he decided he would. He's a fine, outstepping young gentleman, as ever you saw. You'd never think his lung had a spot in it, more's the pity."

"Neither would you think yours has," Martha rejoined simply.

Sam searched her face for a moment. "Say, you're not worrying about me, are you, mother?" he put to her gently.

Mrs. Slawson turned to fill her scrubbing pail with hot water from one of the kettles on the stove.

"Worryin' about you? Sure I'm not. What'd I be worryin' about you for? You're chesty enough, ain't you, goodness knows. An' your cough has almost went. *I* like sleepin' outdoors nights. The wide, wide world ain't too big a bedroom for me. An' this air certaintly is more healthy for the childern, than down home—I *should* say, New York."

"Only—you kind of miss the old town, eh, mother?"

Martha scrubbed away in silence for a moment. "Well, not as you might say *miss*. Certaintly not. But I guess I'd find it hard work to live in any place else,

so long as I lived in New York (havin' been born there), an', that bein' the case, a body thinks back to it oncet in a while—which, of course, *thinkin'* is by no means *missin'*."

Sam considered. "How'd you like to take a day off, and go down with me, after Mr. Ronald gets back? There's some things he wants me to see about, I'll have to look into myself in the city, and you might as well come along. We'll leave the children with Ma, and just go off on a spree—us two."

Martha sat back on her heels, and looked up at her husband out of a face that glowed.

"Say, Sam, *could* we? Somehow, it don't seem as if we could. We two never been alone any time, since we begun keepin' comp'ny. Firstoff, there was Gilroy! He wouldn't believe I perferred you to him, till the marriage-lines was ackchelly read over our heads. He was always hangin' 'round. Then, there was Ma, an' then come the childern. So, take it all in all, we certaintly been, what Mrs. Sherman 'd call, '*carefully chaperoned*.' Are you sure it'd be *proper*, the two of us goin' off alone, like that?"

Sam grinned.

"Let's us go," said Martha. "It'll be like the weddin'-tour we didn't have, when we was married."

Again Sam smiled. "Sure we'll go. You fairly earned a day off, mother. All these sixteen years, working like Sam Hill, and never a grouch out of you. Yes, we'll go—and, I tell you what's more, we'll spend some. We'll just let go for once, and spend some, on something we don't *have* to. I haven't made out to do as well by you as Peter Gilroy would, Martha. He used to say, if you'd marry *him*, he'd put velvet under your feet. It's been more than I could do, sometimes, to put good shoe-leather."

"Well, I never been Little Barefoot, yet, have I?" inquired Martha blandly.

Sam shook his head. "Since we been up here, we made out to save a bit and, by this and by that, we got more coming to us. We never could seem to fix things, before, so's we could lay by. Couldn't square the bills, *and* save, but——"

"It's a kinda stunt to square your bills, *an'* lay by when, every week, nothin's comin' in."

"Sure," said Sam.

Martha meditated in silence for a moment. "If Cora knew what's goin' on inside me this minute, it'd be my finish in the bossin' business, so far as she's concerned. She's almost got to the place, now, where she feels she could give Moses points on the Fifth Commandment. She's pretty near caught on to the little game that parents is a grand bluff, an you're wastin' time to bother with their figaries. But she'd do it sure, if she knew how I feel at present—just as much of a silly kid as her."

Sam's satisfaction broadened. "Good work!" said he.

"An' talkin' o' work," his wife took him up quickly, in an altered tone, "we better get busy on ours, or we won't be done this side o' mornin'. You get a move on, Sammy, an' bring in a good stock o' wood, out o' the shed there. An' when you got that done, we'll talk about coal from the cella."

"What's the matter with the old lady hiring her own help?" inquired Sam practically. "She's got money to burn, hasn't she?"

"Sure. But, she don't burn it. It's to keep the young lady from a wintry chill, I'm lendin' a hand. An' if it comes to that, a body as close as ol' lady Crewe, you'd have to feel sorry for her, on her own account. She must be cold comfort to herself, with a heart like that inside her. Them kind, that's so wrapped up in their money, some part of'm's bound to go bare. A thing like money won't reach all the way 'round a human creature, not by a long sight, an' you can't make it. Them kind needs help in their nakedness, as much, an' more, than the rest of us."

Sam making no attempt to dispute it, the two worked on in silence, until they were interrupted by the abrupt opening of the door.

"Mrs. Slawson!"

Martha raised herself slowly from her kneeling posture, at sound of Katherine Crewe's cry of appeal.

"The ol' lady—she ain't—*worse*?"

"Not worse, but—unmanageable. She won't let Dr. Ballard go near her. We can't do a thing with her. Won't you, please, come up and try what you can do. You made her mind about the bath, you know."

Martha rinsed off her soapy wrists with soapier hands in a gesture, as of one preparing for the fray. "Now, what do you think o' that!" she observed calmly. "The size of her! No bigger than a minute, an' gettin' the best of a able-bodied pair, like you an' that fine-appearin' young gen'lman upstairs. Don't it beat all?"

Katherine did not stop long enough to admit that it did, but hurried on ahead, leaving Mrs. Slawson to follow closely in the rear, pausing outside the sick-chamber door, where the doctor stood like a sentinel on guard. Martha passed them both without a word, entered the room, and made directly for the bed. She slid a gentle arm beneath the narrow old shoulders, drew out the pillow, and replaced it, shaken into more comfortable shape.

"There! That's a whole lot better, ain't it?" she inquired amiably.

No answer. The old woman glared up at her hostilely, but it was noticeable that the worst fire had been drawn from the angry eyes.

Martha picked a thread from the carpet, and, winding it neatly about her forefinger, put the tiny coil into her apron pocket. Presently she plunged an exploring hand beneath the bed-covering.

"Say, them hot-water bags ain't been a mite o' good to you. Your feet's

like two lumps o' ice. They extend clear up to your knees. Did the doctor know, before he went, you had cold feet like that?"

No answer.

"He can't be much of a doctor, an' no mistake, to go off, an' leave a patient with such a chill on 'er, so even arthurficial heat couldn't get in its fine work. I'm surprised! My husband was the one brought'm here, I must confess. He couldn't do no better, I guess. Dr. Driggs wasn't home, an' poor Sam took what he could get. When nothin's left, the king can't choose. But wouldn't you think any fella that called himself a doctor would know enough not to leave a lady, so the ones about her wouldn't know how to handle her case, an' she'd get worse by the minute, so to speak, for want of a stitch in time, that'd save her nine—meanin' doctors from the city, per'aps, an' trained nurses, night *an'* day, so the expense alone would kill her, not to mention other complercations. *I* call it a shame!"

It was not impossible for a shrewd observer to follow the mental processes of the active old brain, for they were clearly enough revealed in the passionate, too-expressive eyes.

Mrs. Slawson, appearing to notice nothing, bided her time, while, little by little, her "ol' lady" betrayed herself, in all her mean guises of misanthropic distrust, growing self-doubt, and, last—overwhelming all—susceptibility to the suggestion of fear, response to the stimulus of—*money*.

"Call—that—man!"

The words were rapped out with the brevity and precision of a military command.

"Eh?" said Martha, appearing to rouse from a spell of complete inattention.

"Call—that—doctor!"

Mrs. Slawson moved her massive frame slowly in the direction of the door.

"Miss Katherine! Miss Katherine!" she shouted past the two silent figures, just outside the threshold, "Say, Miss *Katherine*! Are you downstairs? Yes? The doctor gone yet? Say, hurry! Get Sam to go after'm, an' see can he call'm back! Your gran'ma wants'm!"

CHAPTER III

Katherine Crewe awoke next morning to find Mrs. Slawson standing by her bedside, bearing a breakfast tray.

"It's earlier than I'd 'a' chose to disturb you," Martha explained apologetically, "but I gotta go home an' feed my fam'ly, an' see the raft o' them gets a good start for the day."

"But you haven't had any rest! You made me go to bed, but *you* must have sat up all night." The girl spoke with compunction, looking regretfully at Mrs. Slawson's heavy eyes.

"Me? Now, don't you worry your head about me," Martha returned, as she placed the tray in a convenient position, and arranged the pillows back of Miss Crewe, so they gave her comfortable support. "*I* got along all right. An' your gran'ma slep' fine. I went parolin' 'round, every oncet in a while, to see if she'd need anythin', an' each time she was breathin' as peaceful as a baby. You'll think I'm awful, but whenever I remember las' night, an' me carryin' things with a high hand against her will, I almost kill myself laughin'. Poor ol' lady! the way she looked at me! It was like a song they learn the childern to sing, down home—I should say New York, in the high school Cora went to.

"'Drink to me only with thine eyes——,' whatever that means. With your gran'ma it was, *Cuss at me only with thine eyes.* She didn't open her head to say a word, but what she meant was plain as preachin'—only not quite so pious."

Miss Crewe bit her lip to keep from smiling. "You've been very kind to us, Mrs. Slawson. I don't know how to thank you," she said.

When Martha had gone the girl rose, hurriedly bathed and dressed, then made her way to her grandmother. She did not know much about nursing, but she knew she must not carry a long face into a sick-room, and the question was, how to help it. Her heart was very heavy. Ever since the attack yesterday afternoon, her mind had been going over and over what this sickness was bound to entail. Things had been hard enough before, but she saw how this might add intolerable burdens, and, in the face of it, she must look cheerful, give no sign of the discouragement she felt.

That was the way it was with everything in her life, she brooded. She was continually under some sort of crushing necessity to hold in, and hold back. She had never been free, as most girls of her age are, and there seemed no prospect that she ever would be. On the contrary, there was every likelihood she would be more and more confined and restricted, as the years went on, if, as the doctor had said, this was but the beginning of the end. The future looked desperately black. As for the past, she could remember a time, away back, when she was a little girl, when things had been very different.

A child's mind does not measure and weigh according to scale, and Katherine could not fix the precise degree of her mother's grace, her father's dashing beauty, the luxury of the home in which they, all three, lived. But she had more than her memory to rely upon. There were likenesses, there were relics, there

were the continual jibes of her grandmother through recent years, to the effect that she "had been brought up like a fool; it was time she learned better."

At her mother's death, her father had carried her to his parents' home. Looking back, she had no sense of having suffered surprise or disappointment by the change. The new home must have compared favorably with the old. She could remember her grandfather's *table*—a most formidable function, to which she was conducted, at dessert, by a nervous nurse, "afraid of her life there'll be a to-do if you don't look right, an' hold up your head, an' speak out when you're spoken to, Miss Kath'rine."

Her father's sudden death had made no change in outward conditions. It was when her grandfather passed away that there was a difference. Then, suddenly, she seemed to wake one morning to a realization of lack. She could not be at all certain her impression was correct. The alteration might have been so gradual, she had failed to notice it, and it was her consciousness of the fact, and not the fact itself, that came upon her abruptly. The way did not matter, the fact did. It all summed itself up to this, that the grudging hand was certainly not her grandfather's, much less her father's. They had been open-handed to a fault. The one who stinted, of whom the country-people 'round about said: "She'll pinch a penny till the eagle screams," was—

"Katherine!"

The girl started guiltily at the sound of the thick, labored syllables.

"Yes, grandmother." She was at the bed's side in a moment.

"That doctor—— He's not to come again, understand? Call Driggs."

"Yes, grandmother. But perhaps Dr. Driggs will refuse to come. You found fault with his bill last time, you know, and he didn't like it very well."

"Tush! He's forgotten that by this time. But——"

"Well?"

"If he *should* refuse, and I have to have—the other, understand, you're not to have anything to do with him. I forbid it!"

"Yes, grandmother."

"Ballard! I know the tribe. Leave him alone, and see he leaves *you* alone."

"Please don't excite yourself, grandmother. I'm sure the doctor wouldn't want you to."

"Where's that woman?"

"You mean Mrs. Slawson? Gone home. She has a family to see to. She told you, didn't she, she's the wife of Mr. Ronald's new superintendent?"

"How much'll she charge?"

"Us, you mean? For what she did last night, and this morning?"

"Uh-huh."

"Nothing, grandmother."

"Nonsense! Compel her to set price. If she won't, it's because she hopes you'll pay more than's the custom. I know the trick. Don't be caught. Pay her regular price, and say she mustn't come, 'less we send. Won't pay, when we don't send."

Katherine felt herself flushing furiously from neck to forehead. "I wouldn't dare offer Mrs. Slawson money, grandmother. I can't imagine what she'd do, if I did. She came to help us out of pure friendliness. She did more than we could ever pay her for. She's put me under deep obligation."

"Pooh! Obligation! One in that class! When you've paid her, you've paid her."

Katherine turned her face away. "Let's not discuss it, grandmother. You oughtn't to talk much, just yet. Let's see! First, I'll get a basin and warm water, and give you a lovely bath, and afterwards, you can have your breakfast. I'll go down myself and prepare it, as soon as——"

Madam Crewe gave vent to a sound Katherine was painfully familiar with—something between a sneer, a snort, and a groan of exasperation.

"How many *lovely baths* d'you calculate I can stand in twelve hours? One last night. Another five A.M. and, now, *you* want to give me a third!"

"Mrs. Slawson bathed you before she went?" Katherine demanded incredulously.

"Yes, and what's more, gave me breakfast. *Good* breakfast! Better than *you* can p'pare."

"She couldn't have slept a wink all night," the girl mused self-reproachfully.

Madam Crewe made no rejoinder. Apparently, she did not consider it necessary for one in Mrs. Slawson's class to sleep a wink all night.

Katherine turned away, pretending to busy herself with setting the room in order. In reality, she was very differently employed. Her stern young mind had constituted itself court, counsel, and jury, to sit in judgment upon her grandmother, and, according to the findings, convict her without privilege of appeal. She could see nothing that was not contemptible in the old woman's mode of living, her view of life. If she were poor, it would be different. There might be some excuse then, for this paltry measuring of everything by the standard of a copper cent. But, her grandmother had plenty, and more than plenty. If she stinted, it was merely to add more to an already ample fortune. And, meanwhile, youth, hope, dreams, all were vanishing. The best of life was being wilfully sacrificed to a mean whim. She knew the people 'round about, the "natives," turned up their noses at "ol' lady Crewe," and pitied her, Katherine, for being the granddaughter of a "tight-wad." It made her shrink from meeting the commonest acquaintance, when she considered how odious her position was, and how well every one knew it.

The doctor came early, while she was still smarting with a sense of her wrongs.

"I've brought a battery," he explained, indicating the instrument Sam Slawson was assisting him to unearth from the bowels of the runabout. "It's not my own. Dr. Driggs kindly lent it. I had a chat with him over the 'phone last night, after I got home, and he agrees with me that electricity will be——

"If Dr. Driggs is back, why didn't he come himself?" Katherine interrupted, so sensitively on edge that the most innocent suggestion jarred.

The young man before her looked blank for a moment. Then a tolerant smile stole into his fine, wholesome face.

"Precisely the question I put to him. But, he said he'd thank me kindly if I'd go on with the case."

Katherine winced. She knew why Dr. Driggs was not keen on coming to Crewesmere.

Dr. Ballard noticed the painful twitching of her brows, and instantly regretted his reply. To mend matters he began, at once, to explain why he was obliged to borrow of a fellow-practitioner, and to call upon Sam Slawson to be his charioteer.

"You see, I'm not here in the village in my official capacity. I only came for—well, on a sort of venture. But I like it, and I've sent for my—I mean, I've sent for a machine to get about in, by myself. I was feeling a bit seedy. I'm here for repairs. I belong in Boston—my office is there, and my heavy artillery's in it. But if electric treatment seems to agree with Madam Crewe, I'll send, and have my portable battery shipped on with the motor. It's quite at her service, as *I* am. It's rather more modern than this, and—more—effective."

As Sam Slawson remarked to his wife later, he was surprised at the manner in which Miss Crewe received the doctor's friendly advance.

"She gave him a look, like he'd trod on her toes, and hurt her bad, besides taking the shine off her patent leather."

Martha smiled. "Anybody'd know you'd been a strap-hanger, Sam Slawson. You give yourself dead away."

"Well, she gave him the look, and said she: 'Thanks, but please don't send. My grandmother is much improved. She may not require the services of *any* doctor, very long.'"

Mrs. Slawson nodded. "She's sore on the subjec' of her gran'ma. She knows her peculiar-rarities, an' she knows she's got to stand by the ol' lady, but it kinda gives her a turn, every time she thinks anybody's noticin' her doin' it. If Dr. Ballard wasn't such a great innercent of a fella, he wouldn't 'a' give it away that Dr. Driggs is *on to* the little madam, and just as lief dodge her, if convenient. A party with more tack to'm than Dr. Ballard would 'a' kep' that dark. But there's

where you can't have everything at oncet, in human bein's. If a fella's got a lotta tack, an' the kind o' light fantastic toe that, every time he opens his mouth, he don't put his foot into it, he's more than like to be the kind that thinks twicet before he speaks, which, it may be wise, but ain't as hearty, an' uncalkerlatin' as *I'd* like in a husband. On the other hand, a fella that speaks, without stoppin' to count the costs, why, it's ten to one, a woman'll have to pay 'em, in the end, but anyhow she'll have the comfort o' knowin' his heart's in the right place, which, it ain't forever takin' the elevator up to the top floor, to consult with his brains. I'm sorry them two young things *got in* wrong as regards each other. But it won't stop the course o' human events, so far as they're concerned, even if it does delay it some. I'm not a bit worried."

Sam paused in the act of pulling off a boot.

"Say, Martha, you don't mean you're at it again?"

"'At it'! Me? No! What I mean is, Nature's bound to get in her fine work, no matter what kinda mater'al's handed out to her. You remember Miss Claire an' Lord Ronald? They started in complercatin' the pattren, as hard as they could, but 'twas no use. They couldn't get the best o' Nature, an' the consequence is, we're lookin' for 'em home from their weddin' tour any time now, an' if we don't get busy, the decorations won't be ready for my celebration proceeding."

The morning of the great day on which the Ronalds were expected to arrive, Martha was astir at sunrise, summoning her brood with the call: "Miss Claire's comin' home! Miss Claire's comin' home!"

"I'd call her *Missis*, considering," suggested Sam, yawning as he tucked his pillow more comfortably beneath his rough cheek.

"All right, call her it, if it's a comfort to you. Only get a move on," his wife replied, plucking the pillow unceremoniously out from under, giving it a mighty shake, and setting it across the sleeping-porch rail to air.

"You can take it from me, my hands is full this day. I've no time to parley, fussin' over my articles of speech. Besides, Miss Claire knows me an' my ways. If I was any diff'rent from what she's used to, she'd be disappointed."

"I thought Mrs. Peckett was making you over. To say nothing of Cora, and Ma. Perhaps Mrs. Ronald will take a hand at it, too. You never can tell."

"True for you, you never can," Martha admitted. "Who'd 'a' thought, now, ol' lady Crewe would ever be troublin' her head about me, an' yet one o' the first things she said, when she got her power back, an' could pronunciate clearly, was—'You'd oughta keep a cow!' Knowin' the risks run by those that does, from the effects o' hoofs an' horns, an' simular attachments, I mighta thought she wanted to see my finish, because o' the way I lit in, an' give her a rub-down against her will, the night she was took sick. But she didn't. She don't bear no ill will. It was just she thought keepin' a cow would be cheaper for our fam'ly,

than keepin' the milkman. She wants to turn me into a farmer, an' who knows! You never can tell, as you say. That's what I may turn into before I'm done. But what I'm occupied with at the present moment is—did you get that la'nch fixed up good last night, like I told you to? As soon as the breakfast dishes is washed, I wanta take the childern, an' go acrost the lake to get laurel for my decorations."

Sam paused in the act of shaving, to turn his lathered cheek toward her.

"The launch is O.K., but I'm uneasy every time you take her out on the water alone, mother. I'm not sure you understand the motor. And if a squall blew up sudden——"

"Now, don't you worry your head over me, that's a good fella. I understand that la'nch, an' the auta, as good as if all three of us hada been born an' brought up by the same mother. The things I can't seem to get a line on is animals. Hens, an' cows, an' so forth. *They* take my time! O' course, to look at 'em, you'd know hens ain't very brainy.—Look at the way they behave in front o' autas, or anythin' drivin' up! They're as undecided as a woman at a bargain-counter, thinkin' will she buy a remlet o' baby-blue ribbon, or go to Huyler's an' get a chocolate ice-cream soda. They're hippin' an' hawin', till it'd be a *pleasure* to run 'em down. Cows ain't got that trick, but they're queer in their own way, an' the both o' them is too, what Mrs. Sherman calls, *temper-mental* to suit me. Now, who'd 'a' thought all them chicks woulda died on me, just because they got damped down some, that cold, wet spell we had along in March? If they'd 'a' told me they wanted to come in outa the wet, I'd 'a' fetched 'em indoors, or I'd 'a' went out an' held their hands. Anythin' to oblige. But not on your life! They was mum as oysters. They just up an' died on me, without so much as a *beg to be excused*—the whole bloomin' lot o' them. The Lord tempers the cold to the shorn lamb, but I notice it aint reggerlated much of any in the case o' chickens. An' talkin' o' chickens, I wonda if that same Sammy done what I told'm an' whitewashed the henhouse thora inside. Mrs. Peckett says you gotta do it every oncet in a while, to keep the vermin down. The quicklime kills 'em."

Breakfast well under way, Mrs. Slawson went out on a tour of inspection. Evidently what she found did not satisfy her, for, when the family had had its meal, and was about to rise and disperse, she held Sammy back with a detaining hand.

"Say, young fella, how about that henhouse you was to fresco with whitewash yesterday?"

"I did it, mother."

"Well, you let the brush kinda lick down the walls, but what I call a thora coat you did not give it! Now, I like my jobs done thora. There's a good pail o' whitewash waitin' for you outside, to say nothin' o' the brush to lay it on with. An', while the girls an' me goes over to the other side o' the lake to get laurel,

you get busy on the inter'or o' that hen-residence, my son. An'——"

"Oh—oh, mother-r!" Sammy's wail came from a stricken heart.

It failed to make the slightest impression apparently.

"You knew you was botchin' all the time," Martha pulled him up short. "After a while, you'll get on to it that you can't palm off careless work on me—I know too much about it."

"I did what you told me, mother," the boy managed to bring out, between heavy sobs.

"What did I tell you?"

"You told me—*do the inside o' the henhouse, an' I done it!*"

"Yes, but how about the roosts? You never touched brush to the roosts. It's a pity if a child o' mine's gotta be told do every last thing, when he knows better. You can take it from me, I ain't bringin' you childern up to be the kind o' household pets servants is, nowadays. I wanta learn you to think for yourselves, sometimes, an' do a thing the right way, because it's right to do it that way. Never mind if anybody sees it, or not. Now, you listen to me, since you're so partic'lar: You go into that hen-house, with your pail, an' your brush, an' you whitewash down every last thing in it, roosts an' all. Don't you leave a thing go free. Do you understand me?"

Sammy's pitiful face moved his father to raise a voice in his behalf.

"Say, mother, Sammy knows he's been a bad boy an' he's got to take his punishment. He's got to do the henhouse over. There's no doubt about that. But suppose he passes his word of honor to you, as man to man, that he'll do it thorough next time, will you be easy on him, for this once, and let him go across the lake with you and his sisters, and do the whitewashing later?"

Martha shook her head.

"Sorry I can't accommodate you, but when anythin's to do, there's no time like the present. If Sammy learns his lesson this trip, he won't have it to learn again, on another occasion, when p'raps he'd miss more than goin' acrost the lake. Besides, he's got some other little trifles hangin' over'm, I let him off easy on, at the time. We'll just settle up his account now, for them *an'* the henhouse, all together, an' call it square."

There was a terrible finality in his mother's words and aspect, that dried Sammy's tears, quenched his sobs. Where was the good of struggling? Sammy was a small boy, but he had sagacity enough to realize he was face to face with fate. He turned away mournfully, and disappeared in the direction of the hen-house.

Mrs. Slawson's severity fell from her, as if it had been a mantle.

"The poor fella," she said commiseratingly. "I'd give a lot to leave'm go along. But with childern, you got to strike while the iron is hot, or you'll be

forever warmin' their poor little hides, which constant naggin' is death to their dispositions. But if I'd 'a' had my choice, I'd 'a' selected a differnt way to punish'm. For, firstoff, I won't enjoy the fun, knowin' he's left behind, an', second, I really need his help with the laurel *and* with the la'nch. But p'raps I need a punishment on my own account, for leavin'm grow to this age without knowin' he can't string his mother. If I do, you can take it from me, *I got it*."

CHAPTER IV

Miss Claire's entry into her new domain was triumphal.

As the motor approached the lodge-gate, she plucked impulsively at her husband's sleeve.

"Look, Frank, look! See! An arch of pink laurel! Flags! And—and—what's this?"

A quartette of children's voices singing brought the motor to a halt on the hither side of a wonderful, lettered strip, stretched, like an unrolled scroll, to span the driveway, from the tips of two lofty uprights. Mr. Ronald bent forward attentively. Immediately his firm jaw began to twitch, and, as he spoke, his lowered voice betrayed a treacherous tremolo.

"They're singing *Hail to the Chief*. But its own mother wouldn't know it."

Claire threw him a reproachful glance, as, to the consternation of the new footman, she flung open the door of the car herself, alighted unaided, and impetuously clung about Martha Slawson's neck.

"Oh, Martha, Martha!" she cried.

There were tears of joy in Martha's eyes.

"God bless you, Miss Claire, ma'am! God bless you, dear."

"I say, Martha, which of us are you hailing? Which of us is *Chief*?" broke in Mr. Ronald lightly, nodding a salutation toward Sam, Ma, and the children drawn up by the driveway in martial array.

Martha laughed. "Between youse be it, sir. Time'll tell. Sam didn't want me put it up, but I says to him, you both started in with a fair field, an' no favor, an' let the best man win. Guessin' which of you'll come out ahead, maybe'll relieve the monoterny of married life for you some."

If Sam Slawson had been a boy, he could not have felt more eager to "show the boss" what he had made of the place during his absence. While the two of

them were exploring, the children and Ma busy with the treasures their fairy princess had brought home to them from the other side of the world, Martha devoted herself to "mothering" Miss Claire.

"My! To be brushin' your hair like this takes me back to a Hunderd-an'-sixteenth Street, an' no mistake!"

Mrs. Ronald's eyes, peering through her bright veil, met Mrs. Slawson's in the mirror.

"Tell me, Martha, you miss the city sometimes, don't you? Would you like to go back?"

Martha's reply was prompt. "I *am* goin' back, for a day or two, with Sam, when Mr. Ronald sends'm down on business next month. That is, I'm goin', if I can raise the price o' my ticket. We're goin' on a spree. Just us two, all alone by ourselves."

Mrs. Ronald clapped her hands. "Good!" she cried enthusiastically. "But you haven't answered my question. I'll put it another way. Do you feel quite contented up here? Does the country suit you?"

This time Mrs. Slawson paused to consider. "I like the country first-rate," she brought out at last. "I like it first-rate, notwithstandin' it ain' just exackly the kinda pure white, Easter-card effect it's gener'ly cracked up to be. When you think o' the country, you naturally think o' daisies, an' new-mown hay, an' meddas, an' grass which it don't have signs all 'round to keep off of it, an' blue skies you ain't gotta break your neck peekin' out o' the air-shaft ground-floor winda to see. Well, true for you, the whole outfit's here all right, all right, but so's more or less o' human bein's, an' whenever you get human bein's picnicking 'round, complercations 's sure to set in. Human bein's, if they ain't careful, clutters up the landscape dretful. An' they do it in the country, same as down home. You're goin' to slip up on it fierce, if you think the city's got a corner on all the rottenness there is. There's a whole lot o' news ain't fit to print is happenin' right up here in this innercent-lookin' little village. You wouldn't believe it, unless you *knew*. There's parties bein' bad, an' other parties bein' good. Folks doin' mean tricks, an' folks doin' the other kind. It's all just about the same's in the city, when you get right down to it. Only, there ain't so much *of* it. But it makes me tired to hear Mrs. Peckett behavin' as if the country was the whole thing, an' New York wasn't in it. New York *is* bad in spots, but it's good in spots too, an' don't you forget it!"

Mrs. Ronald smiled. "You're a loyal soul, Martha. But you'll love the country better, when you know more about the birds, and the insects, and the flowers. I'm going to set about directly teaching you. I'm going to make a naturalist of you, do you know it?"

Mrs. Slawson's smile was large, benign. "Certaintly. I'd like to be a nater-

alist. Mrs. Peckett's goin' to make a New England housekeeper outa me, an' ol' lady Crewe is tryin' to turn me into a farmer. If I get all that's comin' to me, it looks as if I'd be goin' some, before I get through."

"'Old lady Crewe'?"

"Why, don't you remember? That little ol' party looks like a china figga you'd get at Macy's, down in the basement. They have'm leanin' against tree-stumps, for match-boxes, an' suchlike. White hair, an' dressed to beat the band, in looped-up silk, with flowers painted onto the pattren. Ol' lady Crewe reminds you of one o' those. She was 'born a Stryker,' they tell me—whatever *that* is—an' her folks owned about all the land in these parts Lord Ronald's folks didn't, in the ol' days. She's got no end o' money, but——" Martha hesitated.

"Oh, I recollect now. She's the one they say is a miser."

"Now, I wouldn't call her that," said Mrs. Slawson slowly. "I kinda hate to clap a label onto a body. It's bound to stick to'm, no matter what. It's like a bottle. Oncet it's had POISON marked on it, it's under suspicion, an' you wouldn't make free with it, no matter how careful it's been washed. Ol' lady Crewe certainly *is* savin', that no one can deny, an' I'm sorry for Miss Katherine, but——"

Again Mrs. Ronald let her curiosity escape in the repetition of the name Martha had just mentioned. "Miss Katherine?"

"Miss Katherine's the ol' lady's granddaughter, an' you can take it from me, you wouldn't see a han'somer in a day's travel."

"Oh, Martha, Martha!" cried Miss Claire, pretending jealousy, "I've got a rival. I see it! I know it! You don't like me best any more."

Mrs. Slawson laughed. "'Like you best'! Well, I guess you won't have to lose no sleep on that account, Miss Claire. But Miss Katherine's certaintly good-lookin', I'll say that for her. When I come home the next mornin', after seein' her firstoff, Cora says to me, 'What did she look like? was she anything like Miss Claire?' An' I told her: 'Miss Katherine's the han'somest appearin', but Miss Claire is the delicatest. Miss Claire's the most refinder-lookin'. An' that's God's truth. Miss Katherine's tall. The sorta grand, proud-lookin', I-would-n't-call-the-queen-my-cousin kind. An' *you*——! Well, you'll know how a body feels about *you*, when the blessed lamb comes home in August, which, believe *me*, the news of it is the joyfulest ever I heard in my life. You'll know how a body feels about *you*, by the way you feel about *it*. Like pertectin' it, an' caressin' it, an'—an'—keepin' harm away from the innercent heart of it. If you don't believe me, ask Lord Ronald."

"'Ask Lord Ronald,' *what*?"

Mrs. Slawson turned composedly to face the master of the house, as if his appearance in the doorway, just at that precise moment, had been "according to specifications." "I was tellin' Miss Claire—beggin' your pardon, *Mrs. Ronald*—

about ol' lady Crewe, up-the-road-a-ways."

Mr. Ronald disposed of his long person in a cretonne-covered lounging chair.

"Do you know her, Frank?" As Claire spoke she slipped into her adjoining dressing-room, to arrange her hair and put on a fresh frock.

"Why, yes—and no," he replied. "Of course all the neighborhood knows about Madam Crewe. I used to hear my father talk about her. But she is rather a formidable little person. She is not to be approached lightly. I doubt if any one *knows* her. She was Idea Stryker. An only child. 'Very beautiful,' the governor said,—'a great match.' Her father was exceedingly high and mighty. An English *younger son*, with feudalistic notions. Nobody over here was good enough for him, except my father, with whom he was uncommonly friendly. Stryker was difficult, a choleric, fiery-tongued individual, much disliked in the state, though, my father always said, he meant well."

"Somehow, I ain't no use for folks that mean well," observed Mrs. Slawson. "That is, o' course, I don't mean I ain't no use for'm, but I think they're kinda nuisances. When you have to explain that a fella *means well*, you can take it from me, he ain't makin' himself very clear on his own account."

Mr. Ronald laughed. "Well, perhaps that's true. In any event, Squire Stryker made himself so cordially disliked that when, one day, he and his bailiff, as he called him, had a big scene, and Ballard, the bailiff, was turned out, neck and crop, public sympathy was all on his side, though no one knew anything about the facts in the case. My father said Squire Stryker spoke of the man as 'scamp' and rapscallion,' but, he never really openly accused him of misdemeanor. There was the scene, and the next day Stryker closed his place, and took himself and his girl off, to parts unknown. The dismissed bailiff, a handsome, prepossessing chap, my father said, disappeared, and nothing more was heard of him. Idea married, and came back Mrs. Crewe. Young Mrs. Crewe, in those days. 'Ol' lady Crewe up-the-road-a-ways,' now."

"Well, what do you think of that!" ejaculated Martha. "So that's the reason why, when she hears it, the name Ballard's like a rag to a red bull! Now, what do you think of that!"

"What do you mean?" Mr. Ronald asked.

"Why, the ol' lady was took sick suddently a few weeks ago, an' Sam, he couldn't get Dr. Driggs, who was out at the time, an', besides, wasn't achin' to go to the poor ol' body, anyhow, to have his head snapped off, an' then haggle over the bill, into the bargain. So he took the best he could get, meanin' Sam did, which was Dr. Ballard, a fine young fella from Boston. The minute the ol' lady clapped eye to'm, an' heard his name, she up an' had a kinda Dutch fit. Wouldn't see'm. It was all I could do, what with talkin' an' contrivin', to make her, an'

then she set about layin' down the law to Miss Katherine, forbiddin' her parley with'm, or see'm at all, which is as good as sayin', 'Bless you, my childern!' over their married heads, if she but knew it!"

Frank Ronald laughed. "The wisdom of Socrates! I tell you what it is, Martha, we'll make a philosopher of you, yet!"

"Anything you like, sir. Sever'l has lately mentioned wantin' to make things outa me. The more the merrier. An' if, in the end, I ain't good for nothin' else, maybe they'll hire me in a circus, for a side-show freak.—THE MADE OVER LADY. WHICH, SHE WAS ONCET JUST PLAIN MARTHA SLAWSON. BUT IS NOW SO MANY DIFFERENT THINGS, IT'D MAKE YOU DIZZY TO LOOK AT HER. But I must be goin'. Them childern o' mine will 'a' turned the house upside down with their rapchers over the presents you brought'm."

Mrs. Ronald laid a hand upon her husband's shoulder. "I'd like to take a walk, Frank. Won't you come?"

"An' on the way I'll show you my new hen-house," promised Martha. "One o' the things I'm learnin' to be, is a chicken-raiser. I'm learnin' hard, an', you might say, the chicks is learnin' harder. But it'll all come out right in the end, if both parties hang on, an' keep a stiff upper lip. The first time a brood died on me, I 'most fretted myself sick. But now I learned not to hitch my heart to no hen. I do the best I can by 'em, an' leave the rest to proverdence, an' the inkerbater. Only, you can take it from me, them inkerbaters may be a improvement on the old way, but they certaintly is death to the mother-instinc' in hens. Hens is like women. The less they have to do, the less they do, especially if they keep well. The minute you begin turnin' your offsprings over to other parties, to be brought up, that's the time your sect is goin' to run down. An' the chicks don't grow up with no more feelin' o' reverence for their elders, an' them that bore'm, then the childern we're raisin' nowadays. It's all wrong, these modren contrivances is. We think we're smart, shovin' our ways in, ahead o' nature's, but just you wait, an' see what comes o' this generation o' kids, give'm time to grow up to be men, an' women, an' so forth. You can take it from me, George Washin'ton an' Abraham Linco'n wasn't brought up in cotton-wool, so that every time somebody crossed'm, an' they got red in the face with temper, there'd be a trained nurse to pop a the'mometer under their tongues, to see if they had a 'temperachure.' What kep' their childish fevers down was a good fannin' with mother's slipper, an' they grew up to tell the truth an' fear the devil, along with the other grown-up members of the fam'ly. But, these days, everything's for the kids, an' they know it. Believe me, my heart bleeds for my grandchildern. An', talkin' o' grandchildern, here's the model henhouse o' New England. Internal decoratin' done by Mr. Sammy Slawson's son, junior."

Martha held her little party back long enough to relate the tale of Sammy

and the whitewashing.

"An' I told'm," she concluded, "he could walk his little self back, with his little pail o' whitewash, an' his little brush, an' get busy an' *keep* busy, till every last thing in the place got a good coat. I told'm, 'Don't you leave a thing go free, young man!' so I guess we'll see a thora job *this* time, or I'm mistaken."

A spotless interior, gleaming, white, proved her surmise correct. Sammy had evidently made "a thora job" of it this time.

Claire would have been satisfied with a brief glance, but her husband detained her.

"I say, Martha," he addressed Mrs. Slawson, "what is it you told young Sam? 'Not to let a thing go free'?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, he's a model boy. He has obeyed you to the letter. Look here!"

Martha, looking in the direction indicated, saw a bunch of animate white, huddled disconsolately against a far corner of the white wall.

"What is it?" she asked.

Mr. Ronald made a clucking sound, and the bunch separated sluggishly, proving itself to be two very thoroughly whitewashed hens.

Martha stared a moment aghast. Then gradually, as the truth dawned upon her, her broad shoulders began to shake.

"The joke's on you, Martha!" Mr. Ronald said, smiling quizzically.

Martha turned grave in a moment. "Beggin' your pardon, sir," she returned, "I'm afraid it's on the *hens*. But, what'll I do to Sammy? He's a young villain, o' course, only I ain't a leg to stand on, for to punish'm. He's just been mindin' his mother."

"'And the moral of that is,' as Alice would say, that even obedience can sometimes be too complete," observed Mr. Ronald with relish.

Whatever misgivings young Sam might have entertained, nothing in his mother's demeanor, when she, Miss Claire, and Lord Ronald arrived at the Lodge a little while later, seemed to justify them.

Perhaps she hadn't seen the hens. Perhaps the hens had licked or lapped the whitewash off, an inspiration derived from his experience with Flicker, the dog, and Nixcomeraus, the cat. In any case, Mrs. Slawson was apparently undisturbed, standing by (young Sam noticed his mother never sat in the presence of ladies and gentlemen "like Mr. and Mrs. Ronald, Dr. Ballard, or Miss Katherine") as Miss Claire inquired after Ma's health.

"Fair-rly, fair-rly, thank you kindly," the old woman was responding, "I'm thryin' a new remidy, now, an' I think it's goin' to help me. Ol' Mis' Harris says, 'no matther who ye a-are, or what ails ye, if ye get a nutmeg, an' bore a hole through't, an' string it on a white-silk t'read, an' a black-silk t'read, an' hang't

'round your neck, ye'll be surprised,' ol' Mis' Harris says."

"I'd be surprised anyhow," observed Martha. "I'm always surprised."

"And you like living up here?" Mrs. Ronald gently put to the old woman.

"Well, tolerabl', tolerabl'. I don't mind the livin' in it, as ye might sa', but—_"

"Ma means, as long as she lives she'll never die in the country," Martha supplied.

"Well, if it comes to dyin' itself, I'd rather die where there was moar to be folla'in' me. I sa' to me son Sammy's wife, often an' often, 'When I die don't ye go to anny gr'reat expense for me funerll. I should want ye lay me out decent, but plain, an'——'"

Martha shrugged good-naturedly. "An' I always answer back, 'Don't ye trouble yourself. In such cases they ain't accustomed to consult the corpse.'"

"But you're not thinking of dying yet," Claire said. "I'm sure you're not."

The old woman shook her head. "No, I don't wanta die—not while the sun shines so bright, an' the evenin' star's so pretty."

"Of course you don't. And you're not going to die for ever and ever so long. You only feel a little low-spirited sometimes, perhaps. Isn't that it? The country seems strange to you, I have no doubt. Why don't you make some visits to your other sons and daughters?" Mrs. Ronald suggested craftily. "That would be a fine plan, I think. How glad they would be to see you after your long separation. And, oh, Martha, talking of visits—you know the visitor I told you we are expecting in August? I'm thinking of fitting up a little room especially for—for her. I have sent to Grand Rapids for all my dear old things, because I've a fancy they'll help to make her feel as happy as they used to make me, and perhaps then she won't get homesick, and want to slip away from us as—as visitors do, sometimes. My curtains were lovely, but I think they need a stitch here and there. If you will put them in order for me—mend them thoroughly, and launder them in your finest style, I'll give you—let me see! the cleaners in town asked me fifteen dollars. I'll pay you fifteen dollars."

Fifteen dollars! Martha's eyes gleamed. Here was her opportunity to earn the price of her ticket to New York and back.

"You'll do it?"

"You betcher—I'll do it with pleasure, an' thank you for the chance, Miss Claire. An'—my! but if here ain't Dr. Ballard, comin' up the walk!"

Martha performed the act of introduction with dignity, then quietly effaced herself, silently signaling her family to "fade away, an' make room for your betters."

Claire "took" to the newcomer at once, predisposed in his favor by a certain shadow of resemblance she saw, or thought she saw, to a friend of her youth, a

certain Bob Van Brandt who, once upon a time, had laid his heart at her feet. There was the same manly frankness, the same touch of boyish impetuosity. She wondered if there were the same fatal lack of determination.

What time she pondered, her husband was harking back to otherwhiles, when a Ballard had lived in the neighborhood.

"My grandfather," the young man said quite simply. "He was bailiff, as they called it in those days, to Squire Stryker."

Frank Ronald liked that. It rang true.

Martha was not listening to the conversation. Her mind was full of the thought that now she could conscientiously go honeymooning with Sam.

"It wouldn'ta been right to take the money outa the little we got saved," she ruminated. "That's gotta stay where it is, no matter what. But if I do the curtain-job, I'll have my own cash. I can go with my own man, an' I wouldn't call the queen my cousin."

When, at length, the Ronalds took leave, Dr. Ballard, lingering, said:

"I'm in a hole, Mrs. Slawson." He paused, hesitated, then colored. "I say I'm in a hole—really it's Miss Crewe. My difficulty is, I want to help her out, and, up to date, haven't been able. Madam Crewe is fretting herself into a fever because the fruit on the place is going to waste. Confound it! She's making Miss Crewe's life miserable, teasing her to 'do it up.' Miss Crewe doesn't know how to do it up, she tells me, and, there you are!"

"What about Eunice Youngs? The girl I got to *accommodate* for'm, at four dollars per," inquired Mrs. Slawson.

The doctor laughed. "Nothing doing, I gather, else Miss Crewe wouldn't be in so deep. This morning I managed to kidnap her—Miss Crewe, not Eunice. Took her for a drive. She needs fresh air and change. I took her to Mrs. Peckett's, because I knew Mrs. Peckett boasts she's the best housekeeper in New England."

Martha folded her arms across her bosom, and half closed her eyes.

"'If I do say it as shouldn't,'" she repeated in Mrs. Peckett's fat, self-satisfied voice. "'If I do say it as shouldn't, no one can beat me on jells and perserves. My jells and perserves have took first prize at the country fair, as far back as I can remember.' I ran in oncet to ask, would she give me a helpin' hand, or, rather, a helpin' tongue, on the perserve question. 'Why, certaintly,' says she. 'I'm always delighted to oblige, I'm sure. My rule is simple as ABC. There's no art in it at all. It's just *my* way o' doin', I s'pose, for every time I give my rule to anybody else, it never comes out right.' An' then she give me her rule, an' I knew the reason why.

"'You take what you're goin' to jar, and you wash it, if it's berries, or pare an' cut up if it's pit-fruit. Add water, an' set on the stove in a kettle till you come to a boil. Add sugar an'——'

"'How much sugar?' says I.

"'Accordin' to conscience,' she says.

"'How about if you haven't got a conscience?' I says. Mrs. Peckett looked like she'd drop in her tracks with shock. 'Why, *Mrs. Slawson*!' says she, 'everybody's got a conscience.'

"'Oh,' I says. 'You see, comin' from the city I didn't know. I suppose some keeps theirs just to measure by, when they're puttin' up fruit,' for I was tired o' seein' her dodge from the table to the stove, always tryin' to shut me off from seein' how she done things. As if she couldn't o' refused firstoff, if she didn't want to help. *I* wouldn't 'a' minded. If she done the same to Miss Katherine, I don't wonder she's just about where she was before—in the same old hole."

"That's just where she is," Dr. Ballard admitted. "Have you any suggestions for getting her out?"

Martha pondered a moment. "Well, I never took a prize at no country fair, or city one either, for my jells, or perserves, or anything else. I ain't a boss housekeeper, an' I don't pertend to be, but my suggestion is—bright an' early to-morra mornin', me an' my perservin' kettle will wanda out to Crewesmere, as they call it. I'll bring Sammy with me to pick, an' sort the fruit, an' Cora to wash, an' heat the jars. They're used to it. An'—you just tell Miss Katherine, if you'll be so good, that she can heave the perserve-trouble off'n her chest. Tell her don't worry. Mrs. Peckett ain't the only one's got a 'rule.'"

CHAPTER V

The day had been sultry, and sunset brought no relief. Evening fell windstill, breathless.

For once Katherine was glad to obey her little martinet grandmother's arbitrary regulation: Lights out at nine. She sat by her bedroom window looking out over a white, moonlit world, thinking black thoughts. Suddenly she rose, for no better reason, apparently, than that a quick, inner impulse of impatience against herself, must find vent in some outward act.

"It's dreadful! I'm growing bitter, hard, deceitful. I'm living a lie. Acting as if I were obedient, and respectful to her, and—feeling like a rebel every minute in the day. I've got to end it, somehow. I can't go on like this any longer."

Just outside her window a little balcony (the railed-in roof of the porte-

cochère) shone like a silver patch against the darker foliage. The shadows of leaves cast an intricate pattern upon the moonlit space, and Katherine gazed at it abstractedly until a moving speck in the motionless night caught her attention, and fixed it. As she watched, the speck became a shape, the shape an automobile moving rapidly, almost noiselessly, toward the house, along the white ribbon of a driveway. Just before her window it stopped.

"Hello!" called Dr. Ballard softly.

Katherine hid a radiant smile in the folds of her shadowy curtain. "Sh!" she cautioned. "You'll wake grandmother."

"Then come down. I've something to tell you."

"No. Too late!"

"Nonsense!"

"I can't."

"Oh, very well."

His instant acceptance of her negative was not altogether agreeable.

One moment, and he was bending over his steering-wheel, busying himself with the gear, probably preparatory to driving on and away. The next, he was out of the car, had scaled the porch-pillar, vaulted the low railing, and was calmly sitting not two feet away from her, Turk-fashion, upon the balcony floor.

Katherine laughed. "I didn't know you could climb like that."

"I can't. That wasn't a climb. 'Twas a scramble. Bad work. But I'm out of practice."

"You mustn't stay. Grandmother wouldn't like it. Remember, she forbade my having anything to do with you."

"Sorry, but I don't feel obliged to conform, on that account. If *you* don't like it, that's another story."

Katherine was silent.

Dr. Ballard did not press the point.

"You said you had something to tell me."

"On second thought I'll postpone it."

"Why?"

"The moonlight suggests mystery. Let's leave it a mystery."

"I hate mysteries."

"As I diagnose your case, you're by way of 'hating' most things, nowadays. Come. Confess. Aren't you?"

Katherine nodded mutely.

"Don't do it," advised Dr. Ballard.

"I can't help it," she burst out with quite uncharacteristic impetuosity. "So much in life is hateful. Sometimes, I feel one isn't bound to endure things, when they make one so detestable. I was thinking about it just before you came. Think-

ing about the sort of thing life can make of one. Everything one oughtn't to be. I hate *myself*, along with all the rest."

Dr. Ballard sat with his hands clasped around his knees, and gazed straight up above him into the great stretch of dusky sky, spangled over with constellations.

"I wonder what Mrs. Slawson would say to that?" he ruminated.

Katherine started. "Mrs. Slawson?"

"Yes. I've made it out that she's rather a specialist, when it comes to life, and that sort of thing. Really, I think it might pay you to consult her. By the way, she asked me to say that you 'can heave the perserve trouble off'n your chest.' She is going to see you get a 'rule,' or something."

"Oh, good! That *is* a load off one's mind. And, speaking of chests, it can't be very good for yours, to be doing heavy gymnastics, such as climbing porch-posts. Can it?"

"Why not? My chest's O.K. Nothing in the least 's the matter with my chest."

"Oh,—I thought——" blundered Katherine awkwardly.

"What?"

"Somebody told me—I don't recollect who—that you had a 'spot' or something, on your lung. I'm so sorry."

Dr. Ballard flung back his head with a low, boyish chuckle.

"Somebody's got hold of the wrong case. My nerves, mixed with another chap's bellows. No, I'm not up here on account of any one *spot*—it's the whole rundown machine that needs repairing. I'm used up. Tired out."

"Tired out—waiting for patients?" asked Katherine mischievously.

Dr. Ballard gave her a quick look. "That's it. Waiting for patients," he quoted with perfect good humor.

"I suppose it's hard work building up a practice in a city as big as Boston."

"Quite hard work."

"Don't you get discouraged?"

"Why should I?"

"Oh, there must be so many obstacles, hindrances. Even if you are clever, there must be so many older men with established reputations. Great physicians, great surgeons."

"Precisely. That's the fun of it. The game wouldn't be worth playing, if 'twas easy to win out. It's hard. That's why I like it."

Katherine rose slowly, and stood in the window embrasure, looking down upon him thoughtfully.

"You've given me something to sleep on," she said. "I'll remember what you've said. 'The game wouldn't be worth playing, if 'twas easy.' And I have

been whining because it is hard."

"Katherine!" shrilled a petulant voice, breaking rudely through the soft evening hush.

"Coming, grandmother."

"*Good* night!" exclaimed Dr. Ballard with slangy intention.

The next moment, Katherine saw his agile figure disappear over the rim of the balustrade. She turned quickly to answer the imperative call, all the old miserable feelings returning in a rush.

"I want a drink of water."

If Martha Slawson had been in Katherine's place, the mother-heart in her would have understood that childish call at once. But the girl had no experience that would help her to interpret the meaning of it. She supplied the drink with as much promptness, and as little sentiment, as a nickel-in-the-slot machine.

Madam Crewe drained the glass thirstily.

"It's a warm night," she observed socially.

"Very warm."

"Queer the way my head acts," continued the lonely old woman, obviously making conversation to detain Katherine. "Sometimes it seems full of sounds, so I think I hear real voices speaking. A little while ago, I heard a man's laugh, as clear as could be. You weren't downstairs with a caller, were you?"

"I haven't been out of my room since supper-time, grandmother."

The words seemed to Katherine to burn her lips, as she uttered them. She turned abruptly to the door. Her grandmother called her back.

"You know what I've been thinking?"

Katherine stood at attention, but silent, unequal to the task of counterfeiting interest.

"I've been thinking, I'm going to give the cow to Slawson. It bothers me when I can't pay my debts, and the woman won't take a cent for what she's done. Besides, it's expensive keeping live-stock these days, with fodder so high, and labor even worse. We don't need a cow, just you and I. Cheaper to buy milk than feed the creature through the winter, and hire Peter to come and milk. It counts up. Slawson can keep her, and turn an honest penny letting us have milk at lowest price. See?"

"Yes, grandmother."

"You don't like the plan?"

"Giving the cow to Mrs. Slawson is very nice, I think, but I always hate presents with strings to them. Having to supply us with milk takes the cream off the cow."

"Pooh! That's nonsense. You've altogether too big notions. They'll get you into trouble, if you don't take care. I can see you making ducks and drakes of a

fortune in no time, if you didn't have some one to hold a tight rein over you. By the way, how about those preserves?"

"I'll put them up to-morrow, grandmother."

"See you do. Else, first thing you know, the fruit will be gone. Rotted on the trees."

"I promise you, I'll put it up to-morrow without fail," Katherine repeated very distinctly.

Back in her own room she laughed bitterly, while two hot tears slipped down her cheeks. "*Promise*! Poor thing! and she believes me! She thinks my word is as good as my bond. So it is—and neither of them is worth a rush," she assailed herself. No, she had forgotten. She was telling the truth about the preserves, at least. Mrs. Stewson was going to let her have a "rule." But the false impression she had deliberately conveyed about the caller still "stuck in her crop," as Martha would have said. And yet, what right had her grandmother or any one else, to tie her hand and foot, so she must resort to subterfuge if she wanted to move a muscle?

It wasn't fair that one life should be crippled to serve the whim of another. If her grandmother insisted on cutting her off from all natural pleasures, let her take the consequences. She fell asleep at last, nursing her sense of injury, brooding over her wrongs.

The next morning, while the casual Eunice was clearing the breakfast table, Katherine heard a sound outside, which caused her to hurry to the window. The sound was familiar, but the time for it unusual. The doctor's car was not due at Crewesmere so early in the day. Yet there it was, and, as Katherine gazed, from it issued, as if in installments, Mrs. Slawson, a small boy, a big girl, and—a huge, granite-ware preserving-kettle.

In less than a minute the *tempo* of the house was changed. Things moved *vivace*.

"Sammy, you go out with this basket, an' strip them trees as fast as you can put. Cora, you show'm where to go, after Miss Crewe she tells you, that's a good girl. Eunice, get me every one o' them perserve-jars off'n the top pantry-shelf, an' when you wash'm, see the water's good an' hot, but not so's it'll crack the glass. We'll need them scales, Miss Katherine. I knew you had'm, or I'd 'a' brought my own. If you watch me measurin', an' write down what the perportions are, an' how I handle'm, you'll have a 'rule' for future use, which, if it never took a prize like Mrs. Peckett's, certainly never poisoned anybody yet, that ever et it, so far as *I* know."

It was wonderful how the load lifted from Katherine's heart.

"I don't know how it is, Mrs. Slawson," she said at length, "but whenever you're here, I feel about twice as strong and brave, as at any other time. It isn't

alone that you *do* so much, but you make me think I can do things too; things I know I'm not equal to, otherwise."

Martha smiled. "Believe *me*, you don't know what you're equal to, an' don't you forget it. No more do I. We ain't done up in bags, like seven pounds o' sugar, we human bein's, so's we know what we're equal to. The heft of us comes out, accordin' to the things in life we got to measure up to. When I was married, firstoff, I thought I wasn't *equal* to livin' with my mother-in-law, an' puttin' up with her peculiar-rarities. But, laws o' man! I found I was. An', what's more, I found I been equal to one or two other little things since, worse than her, by a good sight. What helped me some, was realizin' I got peculiar-rarities of my own other folks has to be equal to."

Katherine caught her under lip between her teeth, as if to hold back words trying to come out. A minute, and they came.

"But, I don't see why some people have a right to make others unhappy."

"They haven't. No more than a body has a right to make herself unhappy. But they do it, all the same."

"One wouldn't mind making one big sacrifice, or two, or three, in a lifetime, if that were all. But, it seems, nothing is ever enough. You think you've vanquished one thing, and, before you know it, you've got it all to do over again. Has your life been that way, Mrs. Slawson? Does one never get through having to give up one's own wishes and will to the wishes and will of others?"

Mrs. Slawson stirred in silence for a moment the delicious brew simmering on the stove.

"Did you ever scrub a floor?" she asked, at length. "No, o' course you didn't. Mostly, ladies thinks scrubbin' floors is dretful low work. Well, it ain't. Scrubbin' floors'll learn you a lot o' other things, if you let it. In the first place, there's a right an' wrong way to it, same's there is to tonier jobs. If you're goin' to begrutch your elbow grease, an' ain't willin' to get down on your marra-bones, an' attend strictly to business, you ain't goin' to succeed. Well, we'll say, you scrubbed a spot, good an' clean. That ain't all. You got to keep goin' back on yourself, scrubbin' back over the places where you left off, else there'll be streaks, an' when your floor dries on you, the streaks'll show up, for all they're worth, an' give you dead away. As I make it out, it's just the same with livin'. If you begrutch takin' pains, an' keep your eye out, all the time, for fear you'll do a little more'n your share, why, you can take it from me, you're goin' to show streaks. You better never done it at all, than done it so's it'll be a dead give-away on you. You can't scrub clean with dirty water, an' you can't *live* clean, 'less you keep turnin' out all the messy feelin's you got in you, an' refillin' your heart with fresh, same's you would your water-pail. But, even when you've done your job right, oncet ain't goin' to be enough. You couldn't keep clean with one scrub-

down, no matter how thora. It's got to be done over to-morra, an' the next day, an' so on. If a body don't like it, why, that don't change the fax any."

"But all of us don't have to scrub floors. And I don't see why, if one had what you call a *job* one didn't like, he couldn't change it. Just say: I won't live like this any longer. I'll have something better. If there aren't ways of breaking loose from things one hates, and making happiness for one's self, there ought to be. We should invent them."

"Well, p'raps you're right. They certainly do a lot o' inventin' these days. They invented a way o' flyin' above the earth. But there's no way *I* know of you can sail over your own particular place in the world. After all's said an' done, you gotta come back home, an' just stand flat, with your two little feet planted square in the middle o' that state o' life onto which it's pleased the Lord to call you."

"Then you don't believe people have the right to make their own happiness?"

"Certainly I do. I don't only think they have the right to, I think they gotta. People have the right to make their happiness out o' every last thing comes in their way. Every last scrap an' drop they find anywheres about. Same's you'd make a perfectly good patch-quilt out o' the rag-bag, an' A1 soap out o' drippin's. Any gener'l houseworker at five dollars *per*, can make a roast out o' a prime cut o' beef. Any fool can be happy, if they're handed out happiness in chunks. But it takes a chef-cook to gather up all the sort o' queer little odds an' ends in the pantry, an' season'm here, an' whip'm up there, an' put'm on a dish, garnished with parsley, or smothered in cream, an' give'm a fancy French name on a menoo-card, so's when they come on the table, you smack your lips, an' say 'dee-licious!' an' feel you got your money's worth."

"But if one has tried and tried? And it was no use? Things only got more tangled?"

Martha pondered for a moment. "Sometimes, with a new spool o' thread, you get aholt o' the wrong end, an' then you can pull an' pull, an' tug an' tug, till you're black in the face, an' the more you do, the more your cotton gets tangled on you. But if you'll go easy, an' wait till you find the right end, it'll run off as smooth as grease. D'you mind takin' a sip o' this licka, to see if you think it's sweet enough to suit? Taste differs, an' some likes more sugar'n others."

* * * * *

"Well," said Dr. Ballard as, toward the close of the day, he was taking leave of Katherine, having fulfilled his professional duty to his patient upstairs. "Well, mademoiselle, was Mrs. Slawson of any use? Was she a help?"

Katherine threw him a grateful glance. "A help? Rather. More of a help than you'll ever know."

"The preserves are made?"

"You should view the shelves. They're a wonder. I believe we've a stock that'll last us for the rest of our natural lives."

"And, you say, the Preserver has gone home? I expected to take her with me."

"That's what she expected. But, about an hour ago, Mrs. Frank Ronald drove up. She came to call, though, of course, it was my place to go see her first, as she's a bride, and a stranger. She brought grandmother an armful of roses. The loveliest things! Long-stemmed ones, almost as tall as she is herself. Have you ever seen her? Mrs. Ronald? She's the daintiest creature! She makes me feel a giantess. And so unaffected, and cordial. So different from Mrs. Sherman, who was Katherine Ronald. Somehow, I feel as if her being here, were going to make things pleasanter. I'm happier, more contented, and hopeful, than I've been for ever so long."

"And Mrs. Ronald sent her car for Mrs. Slawson?"

Katherine Crewe laughed. "'Not on your life,' as Mrs. Slawson says. Mrs. Ronald just took her along in the car with her, preserving-kettle and all. You should have seen the footman's expression! I had told Mrs. Ronald about the preserving, and, as soon as she heard, she proposed taking 'Martha,' as she calls her, back with her when she went. She's evidently a democratic little person. I wonder how such goings-on will please Mrs. Ronald, senior, and Katherine Sherman. They're so frightfully what, when we were children, we used to call 'stuck up.' I know grandmother would be horrified. She, also, is stuck-up, as perhaps you may have gathered."

"Yes, she has made no attempt to hide it. But, I'd really like to know why *I* come in for such a large share of her disapproval. To forbid you to have anything to say to me, now, is really—— If she weren't such a poor, helpless little old body, I'd have it out with her. Have you any idea what the trouble is?"

Katherine flushed. "It's all too absurd. A man by the name of Ballard was bailiff to her father, when she was a girl."

"I know that. My grandfather. What then? A bailiff's is a perfectly good job. Look at Slawson. He's all right, isn't he? But, anyway, things haven't stood still since those days. *I'm* not a bailiff. I'm a physician. What's the matter with that?"

"Nothing—only——"

"Only—what?"

"She says——" Katherine hesitated.

"Out with it," urged Dr. Ballard.

"She says you've no practice. No income."

He laughed aloud. "How the deuce does she know?"

"You're so young."

"Oh, I am, am I? Well, I'll tell you a secret: I'm not quite so young as, apparently, I look. I don't wear my hair a little thin on top because I like that style, particularly. But, even if she's right, and I have no practice—no income—how could that——?"

Katherine turned her face away, unable to meet his searching eyes.

He spoke again at once. "The fact is, you're not giving it to me straight. You're trying to soften the dull thud, or something. Now, be honest. Speak the truth, like a little man. What's the reason I'm *persona non grata* with Madam Crewe? Speak out. It'll be over in a minute, and then you'll feel much better, and so shall I."

"It's too humiliating to have to repeat it," Katherine fairly wailed. "She's old. She doesn't realize how things sound. She said—I'm quoting, word for word—repeating every foolish syllable, but you *will* have it. She said: 'I know the Ballard tribe. I knew it, when I was young. It injured me and mine, and it will you, if you don't leave it alone. Leave this fellow alone, and see he leaves you. Understand?'"

"So! Well, that sounds 'kinda moreish,' as Mrs. Slawson says. I wish you'd go on. She didn't tell you what *the Ballard tribe* was guilty of? No? Then I'll have to look into it, and find out for myself. I never was much on genealogy, but if we've a real, sure-nuff villain in the family—a villain whose yellow streak is like to crop out unto the third and fourth generations—why, I'm on to his trail. I'm going to hunt him down. It'll be something to amuse me, while, as you say, I'm *waiting for patients*."

CHAPTER VI

"You take up every little point in the edge, an' pin it down to the frame, like this. See! Doncher stretch the lace so tight it'll tear on you. Gentle now! Watch me, an' then you folla suit."

Martha had pressed Cora into service, to do apprentice-duty; and was instructing her in the gentle art of curtain-cleansing.

From a far corner of the garret-room, where, for convenience and safety, the frames had been set, Flicker, the dog, sat watching with intent expression.

Occasionally, when one or the other of his friends seemed on the point of noticing him, he wagged an impartial, responsive tail.

"I want to do this job so good it couldn't be done better," Mrs. Slawson observed, her skilful fingers plying away busily as she spoke. Cora sniffed.

"Seems to me you always want to do every job 'so good it couldn't be done better,'" she grumbled. "I never saw anybody so particular as you. Ann Upton's mother ain't. Ann Upton's mother says it's wastin' time. That's the reason she can make Ann such stylish clo'es, 'cause she don't waste time. She says she does things *good enough*, an' if folks don't like it, they can lump it."

"Well, Mrs. Upton certaintly's got a right to her own opinion. Far be it from me to deprive her of it. But her opinion an' mine don't gee, that's all. One thing I know—if you only try to do *good enough*, you're goin' to get left in the end, an' don't you forget it. You can take it from me, you won't find any admirin' crowds lingerin' 'round *your* doorstep, young lady. Did you never hear the sayin': Leave good enough alone? Well, that's how they leave it, because everybody is hurryin' to get the fella can be depended on to do the *best* work for the money. If you're satisfied to do things *good enough*, you're goin' to be left alone, an' if *you* like that kind o' solitary granjer, you're welcome to it. That's all I got to say—on this subjec'."

For a time there was silence, while Martha worked industriously, and Cora fumbled along with just enough appearance of energy to escape being "hauled over the coals" for laziness. Presently, however, Mrs. Slawson paused.

"Do you know," she announced cheerfully, "I believe you'd feel a whole lot more like attendin' strickly to business if I kinda relieved you o' what you got under your apron."

Cora looked scared. "Wha-at?" she stammered.

Her mother's expression continued bland. "Yes. It won't trouble *me* a mite, an' it's just a-burdenin' you. Nobody can give her mind to a job when she's hankerin' after somethin' else. Is it a book, now, or what is it?"

Cora began to cry. "I think you're real mean. I ain't doin' any harm. I'm workin' all right. I can't have a single thing, but you want to see it."

"Sure you can't," admitted Martha imperturbably. "You mayn't believe it, but a mother's got a reel sorta friendly interest in her childern. If a mother *keeps in touch*, as Mrs. Sherman says, with her childern's minds, it saves her a lot o' keepin' in touch with their bodies, by the aid of a switch, or the flat of her hand, as the case may be. Now, your mind's on what you got under your apron, so let me get right in touch with it, like a little lady."

With a dismal wail that caused Flicker's ears to prick up apprehensively, Cora thrust her hand under her apron, and brought forth an illustrated periodical.

"Hand it over!" commanded her mother serenely.

Cora handed it over.

Martha examined the title-page.

"'THE INGLE-NOOK'! Now what under the sun is a Ingle-Nook, I should like to know! 'THE INGLE-NOOK. Containing Dora Dean Beebe's Greatest Story: SWEET SIBYL OF THE SWEAT-SHOP, or, THE MILLIONAIRE'S MATE.' Dear me! Where'd you get aholt o' this treasure? Sund' School Lib'ry?"

"No!" blubbered Cora, recognizing the fact that her mother's question was meant to be answered.

"Where?"

"Ann Upton. Ann found it up to her house. It b'longs to her mother."

"Ho!" exclaimed Mrs. Slawson. "No wonder Mrs. Upton makes Ann stylish clo'es. If this is the sorta litherchure she improves her mind on, I can see why she feels about a good many things the way she does. The name of it, alone, is enough to make you neglect your work. I don't wonder you're longin' to shake Miss Claire's curtains, for to be findin' out about sweet Sibyl an' how she got a-holt o' one o' them grand millionaire gen'lmen, that's always hangin' 'round sweat-shops, huntin' for mates. It's bound to be a movin' story. It couldn't help it. Lemme see! What's this?

"'The ruffian eyed sweet Sibyl men'"—Martha hesitated before the elaborate, unfamiliar word confronting her—"'men-*ac*ingly. "Have a care!" he hissed through his clinch-ed teeth.' (Doncher worry, I got one, an' then some! I'd 'a' said, if I'd 'a' been Sweet Sibyl.)

"'Sibyl turned, tears gushin' to her violet eyes, an' coursin' down her blush-rose cheeks. "I will not do it!" she cried, her lovely, musical voice tremblin' with emotion. "I will not do it. Even a worm will turn."' (Well, what's the matter with that, so long as the worm's got plenty o' room to turn in, an' turnin' don't make it dizzy?) Do you know what *I* think? I think this little story is 'most too excitin' for young girls like us, Cora. I think your father wants to read it, instead of *The New England Farmer*, an' if he finds it won't keep us awake nights or won't harm our morals none, maybe he'll give it back to us."

Cora wept.

"In the meantime, now this curtain's stretched good an' firm, let's kinda go over it careful, to see does it need a stitch anywheres, just to take our minds off'n Sweet Sibyl, an' that Millionaire Mate o' hers with the gen'lmanly taste for sweat-shops. Say, Cora, come to think, p'raps he ran the sweat-shop. P'raps that's how he come to be a millionaire. You never can tell. My! but ain't this a lovely job! I never stretched a curtain smoother, or straighter, in my life. It's as even as——"

In her enthusiasm Martha's arm swung out, in a vigorous gesture, which, somehow or other, Flicker's alert intelligence interpreted as a command. With a

bound he leaped from his sequestered corner, landed, with geometrical precision, in the center of the curtain, and went through, as if it had been a paper-covered hoop.

For a second Cora was so dumbfounded that her sobs caught in her throat.

Martha gazed at the destruction of her lovely job in silence. Then, Cora, scared by the suddenness of the performance, seeing in the accident only another avenue of bondage for herself, began to cry afresh, aloud.

Her mother lifted an undaunted chin. "Well, what do you think o' that!" she ejaculated. "Don't cry, Cora. You ain't hurt. You're just flabbergasted. Flicker didn't mean no harm, did you, Flicker? He was just dreamin' he was one o' them equestrienne bareback ladies, that rides horses four abreast in the circus, an' jumps through hoops. Flicker's prob'ly got ambitions, same's the rest o' us. An' it's all right to have ambitions, only you wanta be sure you're suited to the part, if you got it. Sometimes the ideas *we* got on that subjec' an' the ideas God's got don't kinda gee. That's why, when we get to hankerin' after what we wasn't intended for, we so frequent land in the middle an' fall through. Readin' such little stories as Sweet Sibyl, gives a body wrong notions o' that very kind. Now, it wouldn't be healthy for me, or for you either, to dream we was Sweet Sibyls. We ain't that typical type at all, so's even if we got a gait on, an' caught up with the millionaire before he got away from the sweat-shop (which it would be a stunt to do it, outside o' THE INGLE-NOOK), he wouldn't reco'nize us for his mate, on account o' our eyes not bein' vi'let, or our cheeks blush-rose, or our voices musical with 'motion. Looka here, Cora, d'you know what we're in? We're in luck! The lace part ain't harmed a mite. It's just the bobbinet Flicker went through. Acrow bobbinet can't be hard to match. I'll get a len'th of it, when I go to the city, an' sew the lace on again, as easy as can be. *We're* in luck!"

But, even as she spoke, Martha was calculating how much the *len'th* would cost, and to just what extent her precious fifteen dollars would be depleted thereby.

"You goin' to tell Miss Claire?" asked Cora inquisitively.

"No, ma'am. What'd be the use? What she don't know won't fret her, an' it wasn't nobody's fault. When I've made it right, it'll *be* right. The less said, the sooner it'll be mended. 'S that Sammy callin'?"

"Mother! Mother!" the boy's strident voice was heard shouting through the house.

Martha composedly made her way to the stairhead.

"Say, Sammy," she addressed him, "I ain't dead, but if I was you'd 'a' waked me, sure. Now, what is it?"

"Mother! Whatcher think! You got a cow! Ol' lady Crewe she made you a present of a cow! A man, name o' Peter, he's brought the cow. 'With the

compliments o' Madam Crewe,' an' she's light yella, an' she switches her tail like anything."

Martha sat down upon the top step of the flight. "Well, what do you think o' that!" she murmured. "This is my busy day, an' no mistake. But who'd 'a' thought I'd 'a' had two such blows comin' on top of another before noon? P'raps it ain't true."

But when she got downstairs she found it was true. She regarded the cow dubiously.

"If it was a question o' givin' her a good scrubdown," she observed, "I wouldn't hesitate a minute. Or even layin' a hand to her horns, to polish'm up a bit, which they certaintly do look sorta like they needed it. But *milk* her! I'm afraid her an' me won't understand each other on the milk question. There might be differculties, meanin' no offense on either side."

"She's a good cow," declared the Swedish Peter. "She is what they call Alderney, and her milk it is boss milk, thick mit cream. You will relish her milk."

Martha's face was grave. "I don't doubt your word, young fella," she assured him meditatively. "What I'm wonderin' is, when her an' me has wrastled through our first round, will my injuries be such as I'll ever relish anything, any more?"

Sam senior smiled. "I'm afraid you're taking her hard, mother. You'll soon get the hang of her."

"No sooner than she's like to get the hang o' me," returned Martha. "She ain't like hens. You can tell by their slopin'-back foreheads, hens ain't much of any, on intellec'. But this cow's differ'nt. I wouldn't like to bet, now, I got a mite more sense'n her, if it come to a argument between us. An' she certaintly has the best o' me, so far as fightin' qualifercations goes."

"Well, anyhow, you've got to thank Madam Crewe," Sam Slawson mildly dictated. "She's given you a big present, and you must show her you're grateful."

"Certaintly. I'll go out there this very afternoon, an' show her," replied his wife obediently.

So it was, that the tiny old lady, sitting up that afternoon for the first time since her seizure, saw through the open window, beside which her chair had been placed, Mrs. Slawson advancing along the driveway. A quick gleam of satisfaction lit up the unanimated little mask for an instant, while the Madam gave a low grunt of approbation.

"Decent creature. Comes to thank at once. That's mannerly, beyond her station," she observed to Katherine. "Have her up."

Not for the world would Madam Crewe have admitted to herself, much less to her granddaughter, that she had grown to like this "creature" made of such different clay from herself. She was willing, not glad to see her, but her willingness caused a gentle glow to permeate her cold little frame.

"So you like the cow? That's good. I hope you'll treat her well."

Mrs. Slawson smiled. "Certainly, I'll treat her well, providin' she gives me a show," she promised cordially. "I'll treat her well, an' I hope she'll treat me the same."

"You're not afraid of her?"

"No'm. Certainly not. But, by the same token, she ain't afraid o' me. Till the one gets the upper hand o' the other, neither of us won't know where we're at. An', meanwhile, we're both lyin' low. I guess animals is some like childern. They like to try it on, oncet in a while, an' if, be this or be that, you don't master'm at the first go-off, they'll be no earthly good to you. Even when you got'm trained, they're like as not to get skittish. Take my girl, Cora, or our small dog, for instance. Now, Flicker's as steady a little fella as ever drew breath. But this mornin', if he didn't suddently get gay, an' lep' right through one o' the curtains I was mendin' for Miss Claire—I *should* say, Mrs. Ronald. Now, it's up to me to buy a new half o' bobbinet, an' all for the sake o' Flicker dreamin' he'd like to go on a tear."

Madam Crewe drew down her lips primly.

"I have no doubt repairing the damage will cause you considerable trouble," she said.

"I don't mind the trouble. It's the bobbinet *I* mind. I wonder, now, how much you'd have to give a yard for fine, acrow bobbinet."

"Katherine," exclaimed Madam Crewe, summoning the girl to her so abruptly that Martha was alarmed.

Miss Crewe was at her grandmother's side in an instant, bending her head to catch the whispered words the old woman strained forward to breathe in her ear.

"I guess I must be movin'," said Martha, after Katherine had left the room. "The childern need me, an' I've already tired you out with my long tongue."

"No. Stay. Sit down!"

Mrs. Slawson sat, though after her little fusillade of commands, Madam Crewe did not deign to address another syllable to her, and made plain that she could dispense with conversation on Martha's part.

The silence had become oppressive when, at last, Miss Crewe reappeared. With her was Eunice Youngs, and between them they laboriously lugged a sizable chest. Madam Crewe waited until the box had been set down before her, then imperiously waved Eunice away as if she had been a bothersome fly. As soon as she had disappeared, fresh commands rapped out thick and fast.

"My keys. In the basket hanging behind the hamper in my closet. On the first hook. Yes, that bunch. Now, *that* key. No, not that one, *that* one!"

Before Katherine could fit the key in the lock, Madam Crewe stopped her

with a gesture.

"Wait. I've something to say. When I was young, a girl got proper plenishing," she observed dryly. "In those days a bride's outfit didn't consist of bows of ribbon on rags of lace—layers on layers of nothingness, as if she were a ballet-dancer, or worse. My outfit—('twas a good English outfit, no flimsy French trousseau!) my outfit will outlast me and you, young lady, will reap the benefit of it, if you marry to please me. But not a yard or an inch, mind you (Slawson is here to bear witness to what I say!), not a yard, not an inch, nor a penny of my money, if you marry otherwise. And that reminds me."

The old woman's eyes grew shrewd.

"Sometimes wills are contested. Attempts are made to break them on the ground of the testator being old, sick, of unsound mind. If any such thing were to happen in my case, I'd like you to be able to speak up for me, Slawson. Do you see that chest? It has not been opened for sixty-eight years, yet I can tell you, to the last yard, what's in it. I was seventeen when I locked it fast, and the key's never been turned in it since. Now, listen! so you can prove if my mind's intact, my memory good."

She reeled off a long table of contents, with hardly a pause. "Now open!" she dictated.

The raised lid revealed a mine of treasure, corresponding in character, if not precisely in order, to the given list. India mull, fine as a web, creamy as ivory. Matchless napery in rare old weaves. Bed-linen in uncut lengths.

"Enough to make you shiver to think o' lyin' between'm," Martha ruminated.

Katherine's hands were almost reverent as, obeying her grandmother's silent bidding, she lifted bolt after bolt, and laid it aside.

"There! That's what I'm after," exclaimed the old woman at last. "Now, unwrap that blue paper. Careful! Don't tear it! Is this the sort of *bobbinet* you mean, Slawson?"

Martha leaned forward, her eyes glowed. "I guess Miss Claire's ain't the quality this is, but——"

"Probably not. *This* quality isn't made nowadays." Madam Crewe spoke proudly. "But if you think you can use it (it's what you call *acrow* with age instead of dye) you may have enough for one window, and save your money. Katherine, get my yardstick, and the shears, and measure it off where I can see. Give good measure, as I tell you, but no waste. If one window is complete, the difference from the others won't be noticed."

For once, Martha was fairly silenced. The madam appeared too occupied to notice.

"Girls are fools," she ruminated. "When I shut that chest I was a girl. I

vowed to myself I'd never open it again. I thought it was the coffin in which my happiness was buried. Well, I haven't opened it. My granddaughter has opened it. Rather a joke, when one thinks of it! Dear, dear, how it all comes back! The anger, the disappointment, the——" her voice grew vague. She pulled herself up sharply. "Before you replace that mull, child, if you'd like enough for a frock, you can have it. In for a penny, in for a pound. 'Twas a fool-girl vow, anyway, made in passion—a lifetime ago.... They're decking themselves out in lank draperies now, so you'll be in the style, Katherine. This mull is better and costlier than most of the shoddy silks the shoddy people are wearing these days. It will prove you are no *nouveau riche*. You don't know what *nouveau riche* means, do you, Slawson?"

Martha paused. "No'm. But I always thought I wouldn't mind bein' the *nouveau*, whatever it is, if I just had a try at the *riche*."

Madam Crewe drew down her lips in what Mrs. Slawson had grown to call her "Foxy gran'ma" expression. She turned again to Katherine. "I'll give you a fichu to wear with the mull. A French thing, handworked, trimmed with Mechlin, rather good Mechlin, as it happens. I never wore it. 'Twas too large. Swallowed me up. But the long ends won't trail on *you*. There, there! Don't thank me. I hate sentimentality. And I've almost been sentimental myself—after sixty-eight years. I know you're pleased. I understand my sex. We're sirens, all of us, at heart—when we have any heart. I've not the slightest doubt, now, but if Slawson put on a pair of silk stockings and a lace petticoat, she'd feel as coquettish as any of us. No matter how plain we are, we all have the *instincts* of beautiful women. We're made that way.... Now close down the lid. See you turn the key all the way 'round. I recollect the lock is tricky. Slawson, help Miss Katherine carry the chest back where it came from. Put it away where you found it, and be sure to fasten the trunk-room door, and bolt it securely. And, Slawson, you needn't come back here, when you've done. Just take your acrow bobbinet, and march home to your husband and children, where you belong. I'm tired."

Something "Slawson" could not have analyzed kept her silent after she and Miss Crewe left the room. Katherine was singularly mute. Martha had waved the girl aside, and, grappling with the chest single-handed, triumphantly had carried it off, the little madam watching the performance covertly, with eyes glistening appreciation.

Her feat successfully accomplished, Martha went her way, clasping her precious bundle. She was home before she was aware. Sam met her at the door, his face revealing, to her who knew it, a secret delight.

"I'm to go to the city next week, mother. So, pack your bag and get ready for your *wedding-tour*," he greeted her with sober fun.

"Have you told Ma and the childern?"

"No. I thought you'd better."

"Good. No hurry. Time enough later. I hope Ma won't kick. It'll mean some work for her, while I'm gone—*if she does it*, but nothing she can't reel off easy enough, if her spirit is willin'. I got a present, Sam. From the ol' lady."

"Yes, I know. The cow."

"No, I mean somethin' else. The ol' lady give me a surprise. She give me a front seat to see her do a new turn, an' she passed out soovenirs to the audience, besides. I got mine here."

"What is it?"

"What'll take me with you down home. I mean, New York."

"Money?"

"As good as. It'll be money, when I'm done with it. Only, from now on, for some days to come, I'm goin' to be *Little Martha the Lace Mender*, or, *The Postponed Bride*, an' a buzz-saw will be safe for anybody to monkey with by comparising."

It was a proud day for Martha when, her stint completed, she was able to carry the curtains, exquisitely cleansed and mended, to Miss Claire.

"Now I've the money ackchelly in my pocket, I'll tell Ma an' the childern," she said to Sam, who was washing his hands at the sink, preparatory to sitting down to his midday meal.

"I wonder if Ma'll kick?" he pondered solemnly.

"Nothin' like tryin', an' findin' out," Martha returned, "dishing up," with energy, as one after the other of her hungry brood appeared, responding to her resounding call of "Dinner!"

"Say, Cora, doncher attempt to come to the table with that shaggy-lookin' head on you. Go smooth your hair back proper, like you always wear it. I don't mind most things, but to set down to eat alongside somethin' looks like a skytearer dog, *I will not*! Sammy, take your hands outa your pockets, like a little gen'lman, an' help Sabina tie her napkin on an' get into her high chair. Sabina, you leave your brother tie your napkin on, when he offers to do it! I'm busy. Say, Francie, when I told you trim the lamp this mornin', I didn't mean cut the wick in *scollops*. Lucky I happened to see it, or we'd 'a' been smoked out o' house an' home. Now, Ma, if you're ready, we'll sit."

Ma being ready, they sat, and the meal progressed, notwithstanding the fact that Cora, reappearing, shorn of her modish coiffure, was in no mood for merry-making.

"I hate my hair this way!" she announced for the benefit of whom it might concern.

"Ringlets is one thing, *stringlets* is another," said Martha, unreproachfully. "At least, *now* you don't look like somebody'd been woolin' the head of you. Have

some stew?"

"No, I hate the very name o' stew."

"Call it rag-goo, then, same's Miss Claire's grand chef-cook does. Have some, anyhow, for luck. Here, cheer up, Cora! When I was a kid, I was one o' nine childern, an' you can take it from me, we wasn't thinkin' half so much, in them days, what we'd eat as *where we'd get it.* When I was twelve—two years younger than you—I went to live out scullery-maid with Mrs. Underwood, God bless her! where my mother'd been cook before me. From that day, I never went hungry no more, nor the ones at home either. But I don't like to see my childern turn up their noses at good food. It ain't becomin'. Now, eat your rag-goo like a lady, an' we'll call it square. Say, Ma, you know what Sam an' me's goin' to do?"

Ma shook her head, after the fashion of a mild bovine chewing the meditative cud.

"We're goin' to play hookey. We're goin' to fly the coop, for a couple o' days, an' go back home, to New York. Sam's gotta—on business, an' I'm goin' ta, on pleasure."

The moment following Martha's announcement was one of intense silence. The children and Ma were too amazed to speak. The idea of *Mother* deserting, even for a few days, was hardly conceivable. Then, as the monstrousness of it began to percolate, there rose a chorus of protest.

"O—oh, mother-r! What'll we do?"

"I wanta go too!"

"No, take *me*, mother!"

Cora's voice, at last, dominated the rest.

"Hush! Mother, can't you make them hush? *I* wanta say something!"

Martha checked the tumult with a warning hand. "Cora has the floor, childern. Let her have her say, an' then you can have yours."

"Silence in the court-house, the cat's goin' to preach!" Sammy disrespectfully whispered in Francie's ear.

"I think it's *nice* mother'n father 're goin' down to New York," Cora announced. "It seemed kinda funny, firstoff, but I think it's *nice.* An' they'll have a good time. I'm glad they're goin'."

Sam senior and Martha exchanged a look.

"Good for you, Cora! You're a good girl!" said Sam.

With the eldest sister approving, and praised for doing so, the ground was cut from under the younger children's feet. They had nothing to say.

"Well, Ma?" suggested Martha.

"*I'm* glad you're goin' too," observed the old woman, "for I ben thinkin', a long time, I do be needin' a change meself, an' I wouldn't dare for to be venturin' on the r-railroad alone. So, when the two of youse goes down, why, I'll just fare

along wit' chu."

"But Ma," objected Sam gently, "we can't make out to take you. We've barely enough to take ourselves. Mr. Ronald pays my expenses, but Martha's goin' to buy her own ticket with the money Miss Claire paid her for the curtains."

"You got somethin' laid by," suggested Ma shrewdly.

"But we can't touch it. It's the first we ever been able to save, an' I wouldn't lay finger on it for anythin'." Martha answered with unusual feeling.

Ma was not disturbed.

"Well, between youse be it!" she declared. "I d'kno' how you'll settle it, but this I kno'—I've bided here the longest I'm abl'. I can thole it no longer. I'm goin' to the city. The heart in me is wastin' awa' to see me dear sons an' daughters down there. So let there be no colloguin'. I'm goin' to the city."

CHAPTER VII

It was late that night, and Martha and her husband were still engaged in whispered conference.

"Ma's mind's like a train," Mrs. Slawson observed at length, "when it's oncet *made up*, you can take it or leave it, but *it's* goin' its way, weather or no. There's no use strivin' with her, Sam. We're bound to give in, in the end, an' we may as well do it firstoff, an' save our faces. What's the good kickin' against the bricks?"

"But for her to use your hard-earned money just to gratify a whim!" Sam fairly groaned.

"Well, wasn't that what *I* was goin' to use it for? An' after all, she's old. Let her have her bit o' fun. God knows I don't begrutch it to her. She don't get much joy outa her life."

"She has as much as you have."

A wonderful look irradiated Martha's face. "I have you, Sam," she said in a voice that matched the look. An instant, and both were gone. Martha was her old self again. "An' I've the childern—an' the hens—an' the—*cow*!"

"Ma acts like a child sometimes, and a bad child at that."

"Certainly she does. I sometimes think it's a kinda pity a body can't lick her good, an' put her to bed 'to await the results of her injuries,' as the papers says. But what's the use o' growin' old, if your white hairs don't bring you the

respec' your black ones didn't? No, we gotta bear with Ma, Sam, an' it's better grin than groan, while we're doin' it."

So, when the appointed day arrived, it was Ma, not Martha, who accompanied Sam to New York on his "wedding-tour."

"My! I bet it's hot on the train!" exclaimed Cora, appearing after a prolonged absence, seating herself on the doorstep, from which the late afternoon sun had just departed, fanning her flushed face with her hat.

For the first time during the busy day, Martha paused long enough to listen.

"I guess it's a hunderd in the shade," she observed. "But then, o' course, you don't have to stay in the shade, less you wanta."

Literal Cora, taking her seriously, came in out of the shade. "Mother, do you know something?"

Martha considered. "Well, when I was your age, I thought I did. But now, the only thing I know, is, I *don't*."

Cora pursed her lips. "Do you know, I think Dr. Ballard likes Miss Crewe a lot."

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, the other day, I saw'm walkin' together down Cherry Lane. An' today I saw'm again. An' I think it looks awful loverish to be walkin' in Cherry Lane, where the trees branch over so, an' it's all quiet, an' green, an' lonesome, an' nobody hardly ever comes, exceptin'——"

"Snoopy little girls who've no business there," supplied her mother genially.

Cora sniffed. "Well, I guess you'll be glad I was there, when you see what I got. An' I guess they'll be glad too. One of'm dropped it an' never noticed, an' went off, an' left it lyin' in the middle o' the lane. After they'd gone, I saw somethin' kind o' like a yellow spot sittin' up in the grass, an' I went an' picked it up, an' it was a bunch o' letters, tied with a pink ribbon. The ribbon's so old it most frays away before you touch it."

Martha extended a quiet, but coercive palm. "Hand it over."

Cora obeyed, craning her neck to see the last of the fascinating sheaf.

"Ain't it funny writin'?" she inquired. "'Mifter Daniel Ballard.' What does *Mifter* mean, mother? She don't call him *Mifter* inside. She calls him, 'Beloved Daniel.'"

"How do you know?"

Cora hung her head. "I peeked," she confessed.

"How many of the letters did you peek at?"

"All of 'em. An', oh, mother, it wasn't any harm, 'cause they're fearful old. Eighteen-hundred and forty-four, they have written on 'em. An' the one who wrote 'em, her name was Idea Stryker. She must be dead an' buried long ago, mustn't she, mother? I guess p'raps she died because her beau, he didn't answer

her letters, or come to meet her 'down Cherry Lane' like she begged him to. She felt simply terrible about it. She liked him a whole lot, but he got mad at her, or something, and wouldn't answer her letters, or meet her, or anything. When I get to be a grown-up young lady, I'd like to write such elegant love-letters to somebody."

"He'd prob'ly go back on you, if you did. You see what happened to this poor lady, an' hist'ry repeats itself, like Mrs. Peckett. But what I wanta tell you, Cora, is this: You done a wrong thing. You had no business snoopin' into what wasn't your concern. Never you do so, no more."

Cora's voice sank. "I didn't know 'twas wrong, mother."

"Did you know 'twas *right*?" Martha demanded. "A good way to do, when you don't know a thing's wrong, is, stop a minute, an' make sure it's *right*. See you folla that rule after this. Meanwhile, doncher let a hint out o' you, to Ann Upton, or anybody else, about these letters. D'you hear?"

"Why?" asked Cora inquisitively.

Martha cast about for a reason potent enough to silence the childish, chattering tongue.

"You don't want to be disgraced, do you? Havin' folks know you pried into things wasn't meant for you? Such scandals is sure to leak out, if you whisper'm broadcast. If Mrs. Peckett oncet got a wind of it, you'd never hear the last."

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Slawson's mind was concerned much less with Cora's reputation, just at that moment, than with the letters she had obliged that reluctant young lady to hand over. Now they were in her own possession what should she do with them? To whom, by, rights, did they belong?

"The letters's signed Idea Stryker, which, I remember, Mr. Ronald said that was ol' lady Crewe's queer name, before she was married. But she wrote'm to somebody by the name o' Ballard, which, I bet, he was the doctor's gran'pa, or somethin'. Now, who the lawful owner of them letters is, it certaintly takes my time to decide. P'raps I better wanda over to Miss Katherine after supper, an' give'm to *her*. An' *then*, I may be wrong."

The children, properly fed, cautioned "not to light the lamp, but set outdoors like little ladies an' gen'lmen, an' get the air, an' cool off, an' listen to the katy-dids doin', till I come back," Martha proceeded to wander over to Crewesmere.

Katherine had not yet gone upstairs, when she spied the familiar form approaching through the waning light.

"Oh, Mrs. Slawson," she said, going down the garden-path to meet her. "I'm so glad you've come. I've been thinking about you, ever since you were here last, because I'm in trouble, and, I feel, somehow, you can help me out. You've helped me out before, you know."

Her wistful attempt at a smile went to Martha's heart.

"Well, my dear, helpin' out is my speciality. Reg'lar service I have not done since I was married, but helped out by the day, as there was need. So, here I am, an' if I can be of use, I never counted my *day* by the clock, an' if the childern fall asleep on the grass itself, it won't hurt'm none. It's too hot to rest indoors, anyhow."

"We'll go to the back porch, where our voices won't disturb grandmother," explained Miss Crewe, leading the way.

"P'raps I better tell you right off what brought me," Martha began, taking the lower porch step to sit upon in preference to the more comfortable chair, on the level with her own, which Katherine indicated.

"No, please don't!" Miss Crewe protested. "Let me speak first. I'm so afraid something may happen to interrupt, and I know mine is more important. I *must* tell some one."

The girl did not pause, except to take breath between her difficult sentences.

"You remember the day grandmother had me bring her her linen-chest? It all dates from that day, I mean my trouble. I thought I knew before, what trouble was, but *real* trouble is only what one has to account for to one's own conscience."

Martha pretended not to notice the sobbing breath, on which the last syllables caught, and were choked out.

"Grandmother never took her eyes off the chest while I unpacked it," Katherine labored on gallantly. "Never, except once. She said she knew everything that was in it. But she didn't. There was something she didn't mention. I came on it, lying almost at the bottom of the chest. An odd, old-fashioned pocket, hung on a strap, as if it had been suspended from a belt or a sash, and the strap was snapped—torn. A tiny bit of a shred was caught in the lock of the chest. I saw it, as soon as I opened the lid. As my fingers touched the pocket, something inside it crackled. My heart fairly leaped, for I thought 'twas money. And—oh, Mrs. Slawson, I need money! You mayn't believe it, but I do. I never have a cent I can call my own, and I'm not allowed to try to earn anything. You know—my father had plenty, and I ought to have plenty, if I had my rights. I've sat here evening after evening, thinking, thinking, what I could do in case of need—in case a time came, when I couldn't endure it any longer. And when I felt what was inside that pocket, when I felt it crackle, I thought it was money, and—it was like a gleam of hope. I watched for my chance. It came at last—the one time when grandmother glanced away. I grabbed the pocket, and hid it in my dress. I didn't stop to think what I was doing. But if I had, I don't believe it would have made any difference. I didn't care if I *was* stealing. I *just wanted that money*! It's shameful to sit here, and face you, and tell about it, but—I guess I'm past shame. And then she gave me the mull, and was kind. I'd have put the money back then,

but it was too late. She never took her eyes off me again, nor the chest. And then—later—after you'd gone, I stole away to my room, and—what was in the pocket wasn't money at all, but letters! Old, useless, miserable letters!"

"Did you read'm?" asked Martha to cover the painful effort the girl was making at self-control.

"No, I didn't read them. After I'd taken the pocket, believing it held money, and found only letters, I was too *honorable* to read the letters."

She spoke with bitterest self-contempt.

"I carried them in my dress, because I didn't dare leave them anywhere else. And to-day I—I—lost them. I know they were letters written by my grandmother, when she was a girl. Her handwriting hasn't changed much, and I know if she dreamed they were lying about loose, lost, perhaps had been found by some busybody, who would publish them all over town, she'd——"

"That's just what I come to tell you," Mrs. Slawson announced with a breath of relief. "Thanks be! 'twas my girl, Cora, found the letters, an' she brought'm home to me. Not a soul besides us two has laid eyes on'm. Cora don't know any more than the angels above, that the one wrote'm ain't dead an' gone, with a antapsie held over her remains, this many a year. So, for all I see, your troubles are over, you poor child, an' you can lay your head on your pilla, an' sleep sound this night, if the heat, which it certaintly *is* prosteratin', don't pervent. Here's the letters."

Katherine smiled faintly as she took the little packet.

"If I may make so bold, did you mean to be givin' the letters to Dr. Ballard?" Martha inquired, after a thoughtful pause. "I own up to you, I ain't been so fussy as not to read the name on the envelopes."

Miss Crewe winced. "Of course. That was right. No, I hadn't planned to give him the letters. At first I thought I would, but then I was afraid I might be obliged to tell him how I came to have them, and—I'm a coward. I couldn't bear to risk it. Do you think it's my duty to tell Dr. Ballard, Mrs. Slawson? Tell me what you think I ought to do."

"When a body sets out to tell another body what she'd ought to do, he better be careful," replied Martha gravely. "You never know what you're up against. For instance, if you're tellin' a fella *love his neighbor like himself*, that's all right, only you wouldn't be countin' on his bein' one o' the kind thinks he's a little tin god on wheels. Bein' as he was that sort, you'd be tellin' 'm make a graven image of his neighbor, which he'd be constantly fallin' down before'm, an' worshippin' 'm, like a heathen idol. You can take it from me, tellin' people what they'd ought to do is a delicate job—too fine for the likes of Martha Slawson. But I'd just as liefs tell you what you hadn't ought to do, one o' which is, lie awake grievin' over spilled milk that's past an' gone. You mustn't lug your mistakes along with you, every

place you go, like they was a basket o' dirty clo'es. Now lots besides laundryesses has dirty clo'es to wash, believe me. But if you pack'm up respectable in nice, clean wrappin' paper, with a stout string, or a decent telescope bag, nobody'll be the wiser, an' your neighbors won't objec' sittin' beside you in the cars. It's when you force your dirty clo'es under the noses of the other passengers, an' make'm uncomfortable, they've a kick comin'. No, if I was you (beggin' your pardon for the liberty) I wouldn't tell Dr. Ballard a thing 'twouldn't be a pleasure to'm to hear. I worked for a lady, Mrs. Sherman, an' she used ta wait to do things for, what she called—now, do you believe me, I can't remember the name of it! It was some kind o' *moment*. She talked about it frequent. The—the—sy——" Martha racked her brains laboriously.

"Could it possibly have been the psychological moment?" suggested Miss Crewe.

"The very one!" Mrs. Slawson took her up triumphantly. "The sykeylogical moment! Mrs. Sherman was dead stuck on it. She used to talk to her brother, Mr. Frank Ronald, about the sykeylogical moment, till you'd think it'd stop the clock. Now if you know what a sykeylogical moment is, an' reco'nize it when it comes along, why, you can take it from me, that'll be a good chance for you to give the doctor the letters in, but not before."

Katherine laughed. "I'm sure you're right, Mrs. Slawson," she said. "I'll wait for the psychological moment. And I'll wash my soiled linen alone, too. You've given me a lot of good advice. I'm much, *much* happier than I was before you came."

"Well, good-night then, an' God bless you!" said Martha, rising. "Now I'll go back to my—*other* childern."

Halfway between Crewesmere, and the main road, she came to a standstill.

"Hello!" exclaimed Dr. Ballard. "What are you doing so far from home at the witching hour of eight o'clock? It looks suspicious. Don't you think you'd better stand and deliver?"

Martha beamed, as she always did at sight of those she liked.

"I'll *stand*, all right, all right, sir, but you can search *me* for anything to deliver. My husban' he went to New York this mornin', an' before he went, with all my worldly goods I he endowed, accordin' to Scripture, as Mrs. Peckett says."

"Ho! Slawson's gone to New York, has he?" Dr. Ballard exclaimed. "Well, I'm off for Boston, myself, to-morrow. I'm on my way now to tell—Madam Crewe."

Martha nodded.

"Certaintly you are. You'll find Miss Katherine on the back porch, if you hurry. But the ol' lady makes her close the house at nine sharp, so you've not much time to waste on me. Good luck to you, sir. A safe journey, an' quick

return."

The doctor chuckled as she left him.

"That woman's a *case*!" he said to himself, but under the stimulus of her suggestion he hurried his steps.

"Going to Boston?" Katherine repeated, her brows contracting in a troubled, triangular way which always gave a touching, childlike look to her fine eyes. "Isn't that rather sudden? You didn't tell me anything about it this afternoon—down Cherry Lane."

"No, I'd not made up my mind then. The resolve came later."

"You'll return?"

"Oh, yes. Very soon, if I get what I'm going after. Less soon, if I don't."

Katherine turned her face away.

"That sounds mysterious. But I remember you like mysteries."

"'Sure I do,' as Mrs. Slawson would say. I like mysteries for the fun of clearing them up. It's to clear up a mystery I'm going to Boston."

Katherine withheld the question on her lips.

"You don't ask what mystery."

"If you wanted me to know, you'd tell me."

"Well, then—I'm going *to discover the secret of me life.* In other words, I'm going to see if I can get a line on my grandfather—the unfortunate gentleman—no, of course he couldn't have been a *gentleman*, because he was a bailiff!—the unfortunate beggar who got himself disliked by his employer, and Madam Crewe. Personally, I've no social use for defunct forbears. It's a bit curious, because I'm a Bostonian. But professionally I'm all right on them. They have their uses scientifically. If my grandfather had a bug—I mean *germ* (disease or vice germ) I needn't necessarily inherit that particular insect, but there's no denying that if it happens along, I'm more open to infection, than a fellow whose grandad hadn't specialized as an entomologist. I've a notion I'd like to read my title clear. So I'm going to Boston to dig up dead deeds—in both senses, and see what I have back of me."

"I'd much rather see what I have ahead," Katherine laughed mirthlessly.

Dr. Ballard's chin went up with a jerk.

"Oh, I'm not afraid of what's before me. I'm willing to stand and face the future. If a fellow's straight goods on his own account, he has nothing to fear. He'll win out, somehow. But I wouldn't care to look forward, if I'd lied, or was a coward, or taken what belonged to some other fellow, or had any other sort of dirty rag of memory trailing after me. You never can tell when such a thing will trip you up. I say, you're not cold this broiling night, are you?"

"No. Why?"

"You shivered."

"Did I? It makes me nervous to hear you talk about 'dirty rags of memory.' I didn't suppose any one lived who hadn't regrets. I know *I* have."

"No doubt. I can imagine what for. *I'm* talking of real offenses. The sort of thing Madam Crewe hints at in connection with my grandfather. By Jove, I wonder what the poor old duffer was guilty of. Perhaps, to put it euphemistically, he appropriated funds not his own—swiped from *your* great-grandfather's till. Seriously, that's no joke! I can imagine that even if a chap didn't care much about his family-tree, it might be a rather scorching reflection to know you'd descended—*fallen*—from a rotten apple of a thief, or something. You'd be forever looking for some taint of it to crop out in you. I confess, it wouldn't rejoice even my democratic soul. But that's what I'm going out for to discover. So, when next you see me, perhaps you won't."

Katherine's hand went toward him in an impulse too strong to resist.

"You know better than that," she said in a voice not wholly steady.

Dr. Ballard's large, firm grasp closed about her slender trembling fingers.

"I know better than that," he repeated gravely. "But there's something else, not your friendship, I can't be so confident of. When I come back, if everything's all right, as I believe it will be, I hope you'll be kind to me, and set my heart at rest about that too."

Katherine could not answer. After a moment of silent waiting, the doctor gently released her hand.

"I met Mrs. Slawson as I came along," he said in his usual manner. "She's a trump, that woman. The most normal human creature I've ever met."

"Her English isn't normal," Katherine said, trying to control the helpless trembling that was shaking her from head to foot.

"She's an impressionist. That's what's the matter with Hannah!—I should say, Martha. She gets and produces her effects in the large. She doesn't trouble with details. After all, I wonder if we'd like her better, given the possibility of making a grammarian of her."

Katharine smiled.

"She told me, the other day, that she was being made over. She mentioned the people concerned in it, and the different things they were making her over into. I don't recollect that grammarian was in the list."

"If the rest succeed as well in their efforts as I would in mine, if I attempted to make a Lindley Murray of her, I don't think we need worry. She'll progress along her own lines. But she's not various. You can't make a complex organism out of an elemental creature like Mrs. Slawson, any more than you could make a contemporaneous 'new woman' out of Brunnhilde."

"Fancy *Martha* mounted on a celestial steed, bearing the souls of dead heroes to Walhalla!"

Dr. Ballard laughed.

"Well, I can tell you this, if she saw 'twas for the good of the souls, not the celestial steed, nor the dead heroes, nor Walhalla itself, would faze her. If you ever should need some one to stand by in an emergency, I couldn't think of a better than Martha Slawson. I hope you'll remember that, when I'm gone."

A moment, and he was gone, had turned abruptly, and left her without even so much as good-by.

Katherine bent her head to look down at the hand he had held, on which presently two tears plashed.

"She'll shut me off from that, too," she murmured bitterly. "She'll shut me off from that too—*if she can*!"

CHAPTER VIII

"Say, mother," Francie called in through the kitchen screen-door, "Miss Claire, she wants you to come on out. She says she wants to show you a very ol'."

"A very ol' *what*?" inquired Martha, turning from her stack of washed breakfast dishes, to wipe her hands on the roller-towel.

"I d'know. Only it's up a tree, an' she wants to show you it."

Martha went out at once.

Mrs. Ronald was standing, not far away, gazing intently up into the branches of a splendid spruce.

"Sh!" she cautioned, as Mrs. Slawson drew near.

"What is it?" asked Martha.

"Look!"

Martha's eyes, taking the direction indicated by Miss Claire's pointing finger, saw nothing.

"Do you see?"

"No."

"Quick! Look! O—oh! There he goes! He's flown away!"

"You mean that—bird?"

"Yes—a vireo."

Mrs. Slawson's interest relaxed. "Oh," she said with obvious disappointment.

"What did you think I wanted to show you? Didn't Francie tell you 'twas

a vireo?"

"Certainly she did. But she didn't say 'twas a very ol' *bird*. Nacherly, I kinda pictured to myself somethin' like Gran'pa Trenholm, or ol' lady Crewe a-sittin' up there, needin' immediate assistance. I thought to myself, that I never have clumb a tree, but if the need was great, there's no knowin' what I *could* do."

Mrs. Ronald laughed. "Oh, Martha," she said, "I don't believe you'll ever make an ornithologist."

"Without knowin' what that may be," Mrs. Slawson returned affably, "I don't believe I ever will, though I'm ready to try."

"Yesterday, early, early, I got up, and went out, before any one else in the house was awake. I went down to the ravine, and oh! I wish you could have been there with me. It was so beautiful! It's not quite so early now, but, still, I think, maybe, we might hear the veery. Do you want to come?"

"Certainly," said Martha.

For a time they walked on in silence, through the fragrant freshness of the new day. The full chorus of ecstatic bird voices had somewhat diminished, but, even so, the air seemed set to music.

Mrs. Ronald gave a great sigh. "Oh, Martha, isn't it lovely? When I think what happiness life holds, and how beautiful the world is, I wonder anybody can be discontented, or restless, or sorrowful."

Martha seemed to ponder it.

"Well, I guess a good deal depends on the body," she brought out at length. "As I make it out, the world it goes a-grindin' 'round steady an' sure, like a great, big coffee-grinder. We all got to feel the twist, first or last, before we're turned out fine enough to suit. Some folks feels the twist more'n others. I suppose it's nice to live easy, but there's this about not bein' too soft: you ain't likely to get hurt so much. D'you remember, oncet or twice, when I wasn't by, you tried to pull up the dumb-waiter, down to a Hundred and Sixteenth Street? An' the coarse rope, it got splinters into your soft little hands. Now, mine's so hard I could pull till the cows come home, an' nary a splinter. Yes, it's good not to be too sens'tive. If you are, you're bound to get all that's comin' to you, an' then some."

"Do you know anybody in particular, who is feeling the *twist* especially, just now?" asked Mrs. Ronald with interest.

Martha nodded. "I was thinkin' of Miss Katherine," she replied. "She's right up here, in the middle of all this, same as you and yet—you're happy, an' she ain't."

"Could I help?"

"I don't know *yet*. I'm keepin' my eye out. If I find you can I'll let you know."

"Good!" Claire approved. She walked on a step, then suddenly stood at attention. "Hark!" she whispered. "The veery! the Wilson thrush!"

Mrs. Slawson, halting too, strained her ear to listen. At first her face expressed only the gentle interest of one willing to be pleased, but presently her eyes became luminous, her great chest rose and fell to deep, full breaths of keenest appreciation.

When the wonderful performance was at an end, and the veery had taken wing, Claire turned to her silent, but questioning.

Martha considered a moment. "When a cow lifts up his head, an' gets ready to bella, what with its size an' stren'th, you're prepared for the worst, an'—you get it. But when a tiny little fella, as innercent-lookin' as that very bird you say is the Wilson's thrush, when *he* sits up an' lets a flute-sola out of'm, as elegant as the man in the band, down to the movies, well, it certaintly *is* surprisin'. It somehow hits you right in the pit of the stummick. My! but I bet the Wilsons is sorry he flew away on'm."

Mrs. Ronald turned quickly to examine a bit of lichen, decorating a tree-trunk near at hand. When she faced Martha again, her cheeks were quite crimson.

"Say, you hadn't ought to bend down like that a hot day like this," cautioned Mrs. Slawson. "You got a rush o' brains to the head, I should say blood. You want to go easy such hot wather. I guess the walkin' took it out o' you."

"Oh, no," Claire assured her heartily. "I'm not a bit tired. And I tell you what I want to do some day soon. I want to go across the lake to the South cove. They say there's a blue heron there. I'm crazy to see him."

Martha nodded. "Well, if Lord Ronald is willin'——"

"He says he'll take me over in the launch, and you can go too, and the children. We'll have a beautiful picnic some day very soon, and, if you thought she would go, we might ask Miss Crewe, and——"

"She couldn't leave her gran'ma for so long. P'raps if you'd put it off till the fall——"

Miss Claire shook her head. "No, I'm going now," she said determinedly.

"Well, I'll go any day you say, then—so Lord Ronald's willin'. I can help'm with the la'nch. I know all about *The Moth's* machinery, if I don't about the cow's. An' when it comes to that, I could milk all right, all right, if I only knew what to turn on to make the milk come. It's on account o' the cow's not havin' her gear arranged so's a body can push a button, or pull a crank like a Christian, I have so much differculty. You can take it from me, autos an' la'nchs is simple by comparising. But what's really on my mind to say is, any mornin' you wish to see your red herrin', just say the word, an' I'll take you, though I tell you frank an' honest, if I was you, beggin' your pardon for the liberty, I'd stay on dry land myself, these days, an' not be botherin' my head over delicatessens, which you can get'm sent up, canned, by Park an' Tilford any day, with your next order."

"Mother! Mother!"

Francie's shrill, childish voice announced her but a second before she herself appeared around the tangle of bushes hedging the mouth of the ravine.

"Mother, mother!" she repeated, even after she saw the familiar form she sought.

"Well?"

Martha spoke calmly, undisturbed either by the child's heated face or manner.

"Mother—say—Mr. Ronald, he was over to our house, huntin' for Miss Claire. I guess he's fearful worried."

"Did he say he was worried?"

"No, he didn't, but he ast if I seen her, an' he said it was past breakfast-time."

"Now, what do you think o' that!" exclaimed Martha. "Francie's a little woman, ain't you, Francie? She knows, when a gen'lman thinks it's past meal time, it's up to ladies to get a move on."

Claire laughed. "I'll go at once," she returned obediently.

As Martha and Francie made their slow way back to the Lodge, Francie caught hold of her mother's hand in a sudden access of childish affection.

"Say, mother, I'm glad I'm your little girl, instead of anybody else's," she brought out impulsively.

"'Thank you, thank you, sir, she sayed. Your kindness I never shall forget!' I return the compliment," Martha announced with much manner.

"Mother, why does God want His name to be Hallow?"

"I didn't know He did."

"Yes, He does. At the beginning of the Lord's prayer, it says, 'Hallow would be thy name.' Don't you remember?"

"Certainly I do, now you mention it. But if you ask me why, Robin, I got to give in, I can't tell you."

"I thought mothers knew everything," Francie said pensively. Martha's response was prompt.

"Well, be this an' be that, they do. Takin' mothers all together, they certaintly do. But, each one has her own speciality, *an'* if you ask *me* questions about God, I tell you, truly, I ain't got the answer, like I would have if I'd been to college, an' belonged to the lemon-eye, same's Miss Claire. On the other hand, *I* may know things *she* don't, about other matters nearer home. You never can tell."

"Cora says you don't know what's stylish. She says our clo'es are awful plain."

"Now, what do you think o' that! So Cora says I don't know what's stylish. Well, if *I* don't know what's stylish, I don't know who does, seein' I was in an' out o' the toniest houses in New York City, an' was personally acquainted with

their dresses an' their hats. That same Cora is called after one of the stylishest ladies ever you saw, Mrs. Underwood, which she is dead now, but, when she was alive, looked like a duchess. An' you, yourself, are called after her daughter, Miss Frances, who married a l'yer, Judge Granville, but *could* 'a' had the pick o' the land. Never fear, I know what stylish is. Only, I know the differnce between *ladies'* stylish an' ladies'-*maid's* stylish. I seen both. Style's one thing. Loud's another. I want my childern to be seen but not heard."

"Mother, are you sorry Ma's gone away for good? She told Cora, 'fore she went, that you didn't know she ain't comin' back, but she ain't. She said her heart was broke with the quiet up here. She said she's goin' to live with Uncle Dennis after this, or Uncle Andy, where it's lively, an' there's more comin' an' goin'."

Mrs. Slawson suffered the full significance of Francie's revelation to sink into her consciousness, before she attempted to reply.

"Well, well," she said at last, with an air of brave resignation, "so, Ma's gone away for good, has she? An' she didn't want for me to be breakin' my heart with the news o' it. It certaintly is a shock an' no mistake. But a body must do the best she can, when she can't do no differnt. I'll try to bear up under it, Francie, much as I mourn my loss. In this life we got to go about with a smilin' countenance, no matter what our private sorras are. It won't do to let the world see your sufferin'. The world has troubles of its own. By the way, I wonder if Sammy's got back from takin' the mornin's milk to Madam Crewe's yet?"

Not only had Sammy got back, but he was the bearer of news.

"Say, mother, they got comp'ny to ol' lady Crewe's. A gen'lman, he come up with a bag. In a rig, from over to Burbank. The fella drove the rig, he was comin' back our road, an' he saw me, an' he says: 'Say, bubby, jump in an' I'll carry you a ways,' an' I did, an' he did."

"My, my, but ain't you lucky? To get a free ride so early in the mornin'. That was a kind ac' to do, wasn't it? Now, it's up to you to return the compliment. One good turn deserves another. Keep your eye out for that young fella, Sammy, so's if he goes past again, on his way back to fetch ol' lady Crewe's comp'ny an' carry'm to the station, you can call me, an' I'll give'm a glass o' cold lemonade to cool'm off."

"He ain't comin' back. The comp'ny ain't from Burbank. He's from New York. He come up last night on the Express, an' he's goin' back when he's ready, but he don't know when he'll be ready, so he couldn't tell the fella with the rig. An' the fella with the rig, he couldn't wait anyhow. He has to go back to Burbank, an' then 'way out another way, miles an' miles, to get a party wants to catch a north-bound train goes out the middle o' the night. One o'clock it goes out, the fella said. An' if they don't catch it, there ain't another till to-morra mornin', so

they got to catch it. The fella with the rig tol' me, he guessed ol' lady Crewe's comp'ny was a lawyer. He said he could tell by the cut of his jib. What's the cut of his jib, mother?"

Mrs. Slawson shook her head. "That's a lazy, shif'less way o' learnin' knowledge, Sammy, to be askin' it off'n parties that had to work hard themselves to get it. Since we got that grand dickshunerry-book Lord Ronald give your father, there ain't no excuse for any of us not knowin' things any more. Lord Ronald said: 'The dickshunerry habit is a good thing. When you don't know a word, look it up.'"

"How do you spell *jib*?"

The glance Mrs. Slawson cast on Sammy sent him off flushed with shame at having exposed an ignorance so dense.

At Crewesmere, meanwhile, the newcomer was calmly eating his breakfast, Katherine doing the honors with what grace she could.

Mr. Norris was no stranger to her. She knew him, had always known him, in fact, as her grandmother's man of affairs, a lawyer of repute. While she had no cause to distrust him, the fact that he was in a position to advise in questions closely affecting herself, affairs she was kept in total ignorance of, gave her a feeling of resentment toward him, as toward one who, voluntarily or not, held an unfair advantage.

"See he has a good breakfast," her grandmother had directed. "Let him eat and smoke his fill, but don't send him up to me with any unsatisfied cravings. A man's mind is a little less apt to be vacant if his stomach is full."

During the succeeding long hours of the forenoon, the two were closeted in Madam Crewe's sitting-room. Katherine could hear the incessant, low drone of their voices as she sat on the shaded veranda, trying to employ her mind so it would not dwell on the enervating heat and the fact that now, at this moment, her grandmother might be creating conditions that would irrevocably cripple her future and she was powerless to prevent it.

At luncheon-time Madam Crewe summoned Eunice Youngs.

"While Miss Crewe and the gentleman are at table, I want you to go to Mrs. Slawson's and tell her I must see her at once. Understand? *Madam Crewe says she must see Mrs. Slawson at once.* Say, she's to come in that motor-car Mr. Ronald gives her and her husband the use of. Say, Madam Crewe wishes her to take a gentleman to the railroad station in time for the five-forty-five train. Have you brains enough to repeat that straight? Or, shall Miss Katherine write it down for you?"

"Oh, grandmother," expostulated Katherine, when Eunice had gone to "tidy up" for her errand, "I don't think we can order Mrs. Slawson about like that. She's done a lot for us, already, but we have no claim on her, and to send for

her to come, in all this heat, and bring her motor, and take Mr. Norris to the station—it's exactly as if——"

"My dear, don't bother your head over what doesn't concern you. Slawson and I understand each other—which is more than you and I do, I'm afraid," the old woman pronounced with biting distinctness.

The meal was barely over when Martha arrived.

"Now, Slawson," Madam Crewe greeted her, "I've sent for you on *business*, so I want you to stop looking benevolent, if you can, and attend to what this gentleman has to say."

"Yes'm," said Martha.

Mr. Norris adjusted his eye-glasses with professional precision. "Have you ever had any experience with the law, or lawyers?" he asked, regarding her steadfastly through his polished lenses.

"Certainly, I have. Oncet, I worked out for a lady who got a divorce off'n her husband, on what they call statuary grounds, an' the first she knew, he up an' off, an' married the—statue. He was a railroad magnet. The kind draws more'n more to'm, all the time. So, o' course, the law never so much as laid a finger on'm. An' about two years ago, my little girl, she got run over by a auta, but, though Mr. Frank Ronald he tried to get'm to pay us a little somethin' for our trouble, we ain't seen a cent o' money yet. Oh, yes. I know about the *law*!"

"I mean, do you understand that when you are brought as a witness before the law, you are held responsible for the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?"

Martha cogitated. "No, sir. I can't say I do, that is, *did*. I never knew the law had so much to do with *truth* before. But, if you say so, I'm willin' to take your word for it."

Mr. Norris pulled a long upper lip.

"My client, Madam Crewe, has called you here for two purposes. First, she wishes you to be present whilst I ask her granddaughter a few important questions. Second, you and the maid—a—Eunice Youngs, are to write your names as witnesses upon a certain paper I have drawn up for my client. Are you willing to act for Madam Crewe in these matters?"

Martha shot a quick, inquiring glance at Katherine. The girl nodded in response.

"Yes, sir!" Mrs. Slawson answered promptly.

"Then, see that you charge your mind seriously with what you have undertaken. Your memory must be exact. Now, Miss Crewe——"

Katherine inclined her head, smiling faintly. But Martha noticed she was very pale.

"Your grandmother would like to know, from your own lips, the extent of

your acquaintance with Dr. Ballard, the physician who has been in attendance on Madam Crewe since her late illness."

Katherine hung fire a moment, while the blood slowly mounted to her cheeks, her temples.

"My grandmother forbade me to have anything whatever to do with Dr. Ballard," she parried the question.

"Did you obey her injunction?—Attend, Mrs. Slawson!"

"No!"

"Why not?"

"I didn't think she had any right to control me so."

"Not when she intimated there were reasons?"

"She told me things about Dr. Ballard—his people, rather, but I didn't, and I don't, consider them *reasons.* She has no proof, or, if she has, she certainly hasn't presented it. I don't consider it worthy of notice when a person says things about another which are not backed up by proof."

"As a matter of fact, then, you do know Dr. Ballard, in spite of your grandmother's prohibition?"

"Yes."

"You know him very well?"

"Quite well."

"My next question, Miss Crewe, you will answer notwithstanding its peculiarly personal and intimate character, because (I am authorized to tell you) upon your answer important issues hang. If Dr. Ballard asks you to marry him, is it your intention to accept him?"

For a long moment there was no sound in the room, except such as came, muted, from out-of-doors, and the leisurely ticking of the tall clock in the corner.

Then Katherine, rising, impetuously faced the lawyer and Madam Crewe.

"I will *not* answer that question, no matter what issues hang on it," she retorted hotly.

"Miss Crewe, I have your interest at heart, believe me. I strongly advise you to answer."

"No."

"You mean you will not accept him."

"I mean no such thing. I mean I refuse to answer."

"Why?"

"You ought to know. The question is—indelicate. When—*if* Dr. Ballard says he wishes to marry me, it will be time enough for me to answer—*him.*"

"He has already said so."

Miss Crewe started. "What do you mean?" she demanded imperiously.

"Dr. Ballard has already told your grandmother he wishes to marry you.

Madam Crewe would like to know your intentions."

"I wish my grandmother had chosen a different way of obtaining my confidence," the girl broke out, almost broke down. "It seems very strange to me that she should choose such a method as this. It seems—almost—disgraceful."

The old woman, sitting erect in her high-backed chair, did not attempt to defend herself.

The lawyer, ignoring Katherine's outburst, continued his dry-voiced interrogation.

"You would accept him?"

"If Dr. Ballard wishes to marry me," the girl answered with marked quiet of voice and manner, in strong contrast to her outbreak of a moment ago, "if Dr. Ballard wishes to marry me—I will marry him."

"In opposition to your grandmother?"

"I don't *want* to oppose my grandmother, but if she tries to spoil my life for the sake of a groundless prejudice I will—yes—I will marry him *in opposition* to her."

"Think well, Miss Crewe. Take your time. Answer cautiously. If you were told Dr. Ballard is a struggling young doctor, with no present means of support, to speak of, and a perfectly problematic future. If you were told that he would never be able to provide you with more than a bare living income——"

"I would marry him."

"If you were told that, in case you do so, your grandmother would divert her property from you (as she has a perfect legal right to do) and dispose of it elsewhere——?"

"Still—I would marry him."

"Nothing would dissuade you?"

"Nothing."

"The inquisition is over."

It was the old woman who spoke. Her face was as impassive as ever, but Martha Slawson noticed that her tiny, emaciated fingers clutched the arms of her chair with a vise-like grip.

"For all the world like a bird I seen last Spring," Martha mused, "which somethin' had broke its wing, an' its claws was holdin' on fierce, for dear life, to the branch o' the bush it was clingin' to—as if *that*'d save it!"

"May I go now?"

As Katherine made the appeal, she turned toward her grandmother, but her eyes were kept resolutely averted.

Mr. Norris raised a detaining hand. "One moment, please. I assume you entertain no doubt of Madam Crewe's mental competency? That she is of sound mind, capable of acting rationally on her own behalf? That any will and tes-

tament she might choose to execute at this time would be above suspicion of mistake, fraud, or undue influence?"

For a moment Katherine seemed to consider. Then her lip curled.

"If you mean, am I likely in the future to contest any will my grandmother may now make to my disadvantage, I say no. I will never dispute her course, whatever direction it may take. All I ask is that she will not dispute mine. I am only sorry that they seem to diverge so completely. I am sick of the name of money. I would say I am sick of the sight of it—but I have never seen any——" with which parting thrust, the girl turned on her heel, and left the room.

She went none too soon, for the moment the door closed upon her, her self-control gave way, and she groped stumblingly to her own chamber blinded by tears, choking back the sobs that were in themselves a humiliation.

The three she had left, were silent when she had gone, until Mr. Norris drew an important-looking sheet from under a mass of papers at his elbow, and addressed Mrs. Slawson.

"As a general rule I strongly advise you, or any one, against placing your signature to any instrument which you have not previously read and do not fully understand. In this case, however, there is absolutely no harm. Please call the other witness."

Martha took a step toward the door.

"If I put my writin' on that paper, it won't mean I'm injurin'—anybody?" she demanded firmly.

"You have my word as to that."

"I'd never sign it, if it was to hurt Miss Katherine."

"Your placing your signature there cannot affect Miss Crewe's interests one way or the other."

Martha summoned Eunice Youngs, and the two, in their best manner, literally with great pains, proceeded to affix their names as witnesses to the last and testament of Idea Stryker Crewe.

CHAPTER IX

It was late one evening at the end of the week, when Sam came back, to Martha's surprise, alone.

"Ma just wouldn't leave the city," he explained. "She's staying at Dennis's

now, but Sarah told me she couldn't keep her above a week or so, at the longest. She said Andy, or Hughey, or one of the girls would be better able to look after her than Dennis and herself, who have all they can manage paying off on their house in Yonkers, and the children to educate besides. Sarah was quite short with me on account of Ma. She said she was real put out. We'd no business leaving an old woman, Ma's age, away from the country such hot weather, especially when we were just getting on our feet now, and were well able to give her a home without feeling it."

Martha smiled tolerantly. "There'd be no time o' year'd suit Sarah for takin' any more trouble than she's got to," she observed, pouring her husband's tea.

"It's a nice little place they've bought," Sam informed her, between bites of cold ham and potato. "Dennis travels down and up every day, which is, what you might call a stunt, but he has the satisfaction of knowing the roof over his head is his own."

Martha set an ice-cold cup-custard at Sam's plate.

"From Yonkers to the Battery *is* a kind o' long stretch, but—where there's a will there's a—sub-way, I s'pose. Would he be with the same steamship company he was with, since I first knew'm, I wonder?"

"Yes, and they gave him a raise last month. He's doing *all right*, Dennis is. You ought to see the way Sarah's got the house fixed. They pay off for the new furniture every month, so they don't feel it, Sarah says."

"Well, Sarah mayn't feel it, but you can take it from me, *I* certainly would, in her place," Martha observed. "Gettin' things on the excitement plan, would wrack my health. I hate the thought o' owin'. Payin' for a dead horse never did *appeal* to me, as Mrs. Sherman says. How's Andy doin'?"

"Andy *was* succeeding great, but something went wrong, somehow, all of a sudden, and his scheme fell through. He explained it to me, but I forgot the particulars, to tell the truth. He'll be on his feet again in no time. Andy always was the smart one of the family."

Martha ruminated. "Wouldn't you wonder how anythin' gets done in this world, when nothin' anybody ever tries seems to succeed? Is Nora as gallus-lookin' as ever? Or is she holdin' in her horses some, now her husban's kind o' down an' out, for the time bein'?"

"Nora's just the same, as far as I can see. *Our* Nora says Nora-Andy is distroying Andy with her extravagance. She says the way she dresses, alone, it's no wonder he is always in and out of some get-rich-quick scheme, that'll land him in the poor-house, or worse, if he don't look out. But then, our Nora never did have the appearance of Nora-Andy, I must say that, if I am her own brother. Our Nora is kind of sharp, and she looks it."

"Well, I guess marriage'll bevel some of the edges off'n her, all right, all

right," said Martha. "Were you surprised when you heard she was keepin' company with McKenna?"

"Yes, I was. I never thought Nora'd marry now—at her age."

"Nora always wanted to marry, an' when she saw her chance she grabbed it by both horns."

Sam's serious expression relaxed a little. "That sounds as if McKenna was the devil and all of a fellow. He's not that at all, and he certainly ain't much to look at."

"Oh, well," Martha responded, "nobody but her'll have a call to look at'm much, oncet he's married."

"I told her I thought she was taking a risk, throwing up a good place she'd been in, for so many years, parlor-maid, to live out general-housework with a stranger," said Sam. "I thought that was a joke. But it made her mad. She said, 'God knows it's no joke!' She said she had as much of a right to live her life as I have, which of course it's true. She said 'every dog has its day!'"

"True for you. So he has, just like s'ciety ladies. But that ain't to say there'll be anybody'll come. An' I sometimes think there's more dogs, 'n days, anyhow."

Sam looked up. "Say, mother, you ain't down-hearted, are you?"

"No. Why? What'd make me downhearted, I should like to know?"

"I just thought you might be," her husband answered. "I never heard you speak that doubting kind of way before. And, we've no call to think ill of the world, with all the luck that's come to us."

"Certainly. An' if luck don't stay with us, itself, it won't be because we ain't set her a chair, an' done every mortal thing we know of to make her comfortable. I've no kick comin', nor ever had. I like life all right, the hard part along with the soft part. If you didn't have the one you wouldn't know how to relish the other. But, speakin' o' Nora, I never looked to see her sportin' a 'finity of her own, I can tell you that!"

""Finity'?" questioned Sam.

"Genteel for fella," Martha answered. "I often heard Mrs. Sherman speakin' of'm. You can take it from me, I never looked to see that same Nora get a-holt o' one."

"Nor I. And I said as much to Ma. Ma told it back to Nora, and Nora was as mad as could be. She said if it came to that, she didn't see as she was the worst-looking one in the family, when a body counted in what some of us had married."

"Meanin' me," observed Martha appreciatively.

"She said she 'didn't see why folks should be so monstrous surprised that she got a husband. Every Joan has her Jack.' The very words she said."

"Sure they have. But only it ain't told what kind o' Jack. So did Balaam

have a jack, if she wants *that* kind. But, p'raps McKenna is a prize-package. *We* don't know. I wonder will he take kindly to Ma?"

Sam shook his head. "One of the first things he told me was, 'We couldn't look to him to give my mother a home. He had troubles of his own.' It stirred me up so, I almost lost my temper. I said I didn't look to him to give my mother a home. If he gave my sister one, now he'd contracted to marry her, I'd be glad."

"Why, Sam," said Martha looking at him with mock-reproach, "I wonder at you, I do so! To speak up that fierce! You hadn't ought to be so violent, an' use such strong language to a party just gettin' ready to come into the fam'ly. It might scare'm off. He must think you're a dretful bully."

"Nora told Ma, before I left, that Ma was foolish to stay back in New York. She said she and McKenna, starting out, young married folks——"

"God save the mark!" murmured Martha.

"She said they couldn't offer her a home, much as they'd like to. But Ma said her heart was broke with the country. She wanted to live in the city where something was going on."

"It's one thing what you *want*, and another what you *must*. Poor Ma! I'm sorry for her. When she comes back she'll know a thing or two more'n she does now. We'll have to be kind o' gentle with her, to make up. But come on now, Sam. If you've et all you can, I'll do my dishes, while you lock up, an' then we can go to bed. You look plain wore out."

"I'm glad to get home," Sam answered her, and though he said no more Martha understood him.

Long after he was asleep she lay awake in the white moonlight, thinking. "Down home," she knew it was stifling. Sam had told her that the hot wave was breaking all records for intensity and duration. And yet, somehow, her soul yearned for the stretches of sun-softened "ashfalt" with its smell of mingled dust and tar, for all the common city sounds and sights amid which she had been born and bred; all the noise and commotion that spelt *Home* for her. She could understand Ma's feeling, and her heart softened to the poor old woman.

"It's all right up here," she admitted to herself. "I like the folks first rate, such as they are an' what there is of'm, only they ain't what a body is used to. I never see nicer parties than the Trenholms, an' the Coleses, an' the Moores. That time Hiram Black's house burned down, if every mother's son of'm didn't turn out an' lend a hand. Got the Blacks fixed up fine an' dandy, in no time, in a new place, with what they called 'donations.' Down home you wouldn't find your neighbors givin' you furnitur', an' bricky-braw things like that, not on your life! An' when you'd paid the insurance money itself, the Company'd kick before it'd give you the price o' your losin's. An' yet, I know how Ma feels. If young Luther Coles had 'a' had the fever down home he had up here last fall, they'd a-yanked'm

away from his own flesh an' blood to the pest-house. An' here his mother was let take care of'm, an' the meals was got by the neighbors, which she hauled'm up in a basket, three times a day, an' et'm hot an' fresh from the oven, without havin' to raise her hand, only take'm out from under a clean napkin. You'd go hungry a long time in New York City, before the folks acrost the air-shaft from you, would know your boy was dyin' on you, much less sneak in a bite an' a sup, from time to time, through the dumb-waiter. But—all the same—*I know how Ma feels.*"

Martha had reached this stage in her musings when a faint knock sounded on the door below. She waited, listening. The knock was repeated. As quietly as she could, which was not very quietly, she slipped from her bed, threw on her light cotton kimono, which always lay ready at hand in case of emergency, and hastened downstairs, leaving Sam asleep and snoring, worn out by the city heat, his sense of responsibility in connection with Mr. Ronald's commissions, and the long day's journey home, with its fatiguing delays and tiresome changes.

She shot the bolt back, turned the key with resolute hand. She could not imagine what had happened that would account for this unusual disturbance, but whatever it might be, she braced herself to meet it.

On the doorstep stood the shivering figure of a girl, clad only in her night-dress. She was shivering with excitement, not chill.

"Mrs. Slawson," she managed to bring out, before words became impossible, drowned in the torrent of her tears and sobbing.

Martha placed a motherly hand about the frail shoulders.

"Come now, come now! Don't cry like that. You'll shake yourself to pieces. I don't know what's the matter, but it'll be all right, anyhow, never fear. You're Ellen Hinckley, ain't you? I think I seen you a couple o' times at church."

As Martha talked, she drew her visitor into the house, automatically locked and bolted the door, and settled the girl in Sam's chair in the sitting-room.

The moonlight, streaming in through the windows, made the place almost as light as day, but for some purpose of her own, Martha was about to strike a match, when Ellen Hinckley stopped her with a quick cry.

"No, no! Don't do it! I've run away. I've left my mother's. My stepfather'll follow me when he finds I'm gone."

She drew a long painful breath, then panted out her story in short, labored gasps.

"I've never had a home. You mayn't believe it, but mother don't care a scrap about me, except for the work I can do. I've tried and tried for years to bear it, but it's got to be too hard. I can't live that way any longer. You know,—Mr. Wedall——?"

Martha nodded. "The pasture?"

"Yes, he's my minister. He knows all about me. He told me to do my best, but if the time came when I just couldn't bear it another minute I might go. He said *he* couldn't help me run away, because—because—–"

"Certainly he couldn't!" said Martha.

"But he said, if ever I *had* to do it, the Lord would raise up some one who could. Mother's never liked me. I've not been happy a minute since my father died. *He* wasn't happy. He had no peace of his life. He used to tell mother she'd get her come-uppance some day, and she's got it now, for Buller, that's her second husband, he beats her. He's got her money and mine too, what father left us, and he's afraid I'll law him, now I'm of age and can. I tried to run off yesterday, but he caught me and took away my clothes, and locked me in my room. I had some money I'd got hold of. 'Twas my own—and when he caught me, and he and mother stripped me and locked me up, I held on to it, all through, though he beat me black and blue with his belt-strap."

She spread her poor little trembling palm, disclosing a fistful of crumpled bills.

"See? And here's where he beat me—and *she* stood by and let him!"

As she spoke, the girl drew back the coarse night-dress from her breast, displaying shoulders and back seamed across with cruel wales.

Martha drew in her breath shudderingly, shielding her eyes with her elbow in a quick, instinctive defensive gesture.

"I'd know you speak the truth without—*that*!" she said.

"After they left me, and locked me in—when I could *think*—I remembered what Mr. Wedall said about the Lord raising up help for me, and it made me mad, for there was no one to lift a hand for me. And then, all at once, somehow, you came into my mind. I saw you help a dog once, nobody else would touch. D'you remember? All the rest were afraid. They said he might be mad. But you said, 'Of course he ain't mad.' And you took him up, and took him home, and—you weren't afraid."

"No, I'm not afraid," said Martha.

"After you came into my mind I never rested till I found a way to get out. I waited till everything was quiet. They'd gone to bed. Then I managed it—through the window—down the grapevine trellis—I—–"

Martha made her way to the corner cupboard. "I'll fix you up with arnica an' water inside and out," she explained. "An', while I'm doin' it, you tell me what you've planned."

"Nothing. I've planned nothing. Buller says I'm looney. Perhaps I am. I can't seem to think."

"Have you got any folks anywheres? I mean, on your father's side?"

"I've an uncle. Father's brother. But he lives in Montreal."

"Montreal! Where would that be, I wonder?"

"In Canada. Up north."

Mrs. Slawson bound on her soothing compresses in silence. Suddenly she paused, alert, listening. Then, quick as a flash, she caught her visitor by the sleeve, drew her back in to the entry and pushed her into a small closet under the stairs.

"Hush! I hear a horse. Don't you breathe till I come an' tell you."

A moment later she was lying in bed, as still as though she, like Sam, were fast asleep and dreaming.

Presently Sam stirred, sat up drowsily, and listened.

"Say, mother, you asleep?"

No answer.

A voice from below in the garden called up hoarsely:

"Hullo, there!"

"What's wanted?" demanded Sam.

"I'm Buller, from Milby's Corners. My wife's daughter has wandered off in the night. I'm out hunting for her, to take her home. She ain't all there in the upper story. I thought, maybe, she'd come in here. The last I saw of her, she was making this way. She's in her night-shift. I could see her plain as day, far ahead of me."

Sam was so obviously but just-awakened, that Buller from Milby's Corners turned his horse's head, as if to make a quick departure, when Mrs. Slawson, yawning, leaned over the rail of the sleeping-porch and spoke.

"Say, wait a minute. The poor thing! Wanderin' about in the night,—an' her light-headed—away from your pertectin' love an' care! Ain't it awful! My husban' an' me'll get up, an' be dressed in no time, for we'd like to help her, if we can, poor creature! In the meantime, seein' you ain't found her here, I s'pose you'll be goin' further. Out in her night-clo'es! My! I wonder—— Say, Sam—do *you* see somethin' white flitterin' along towards the south—down the valley road d'rection? Seems to me *I* do!"

Sam thought maybe he did.

Buller kicked a heel into his horse.

"G'long! I'm off down the valley road. I bet 'tis her. I'll have her yet, the d—the poor dear!"

The instant he was gone, Martha dragged Sam into the house.

"Quick! Dress you! An' go down get the auta. I have the girl hid in the entry closet. I'm goin' to take her out o' harm's way, which is that brute beast's."

"But, Martha——" remonstrated Sam.

"Sam Slawson, do as I tell you! Or you'll have to *shove* us into Burbank in your present gob, which, believe *me*, it ain't bewitchin'. You can take it from

me, lad, I'm goin' to catch that north-bound express that leaves Burbank at one o'clock this night, which, if we don't make it, there ain't another till to-morra mornin'. So we *got* to make it, or I'll know the reason why!"

Impelled by a motive power so irresistible, Sam dressed and went about his business without venturing another word.

Martha clothed herself in the brief intervals when she was not attending Ellen Hinckley, giving her bread to eat, milk to sip, enveloping her in garments gathered from everywhere, anywhere, a conglomerate assortment that would have been grotesque if it had not been touching.

"No one'll mind your looks," Martha reassured her. "Just you sit tight, an' keep your own counsel, an' not a dog'll bark after you. Ma's veil tied down over Cora's hat is quite stylish, an', be this an' be that, you've got as good a motorin' costume as any. They all look like Sam Hill. So now, I guess, we might be movin'!"

"It's a crazy scheme," Sam whispered in his wife's ear, as she bent to him to deliver last instructions, while he was cranking up. "Suppose a tire bursts?"

"It ain't goin' to," she assured him with perfect confidence.

Out of the gate they sped, then along the hard, white high-road. Even Martha's garrulous tongue was stilled.

The world, bathed in this silver, ethereal light, seemed unfamiliar, remote, the sky to have withdrawn, in infinite cool reaches, beyond the burning little tragedy they were enacting. After a considerable period of silence, Martha turned to ask Ellen Hinckley if she were comfortable. The poor creature had fallen asleep, lulled by the motion of the car, the soft night air, but more than all by the sense of blessed security under Mrs. Slawson's protecting wing.

Martha was about to nudge Sam to look, when he turned a three-quarters profile toward her.

"I hear something back of us. Can you see?"

"No. If I stir she'll wake. You don't think it's him?"

"It may be. Joe Harding's place is down the valley road. He has a car. Buller mayn't suspect we're helping the girl, but when he didn't find her in that direction, Harding may have offered to take a hand in the game."

"Would any man o' conscience help a fella like Buller, who all the neighborhood knows the life he's led this poor creature—him an' the mother, which she's a disgrace to the name."

"No, but Harding ain't a man of conscience,—not so you'd notice it, as you say. If Buller's out on the still-hunt, Harding'd join in for the pleasure of the chase."

"Put on power," directed Martha.

Again that swift, silent progress through the night.

Once Sam whispered: "I guess we were stung. I can't hear anything back

of us any more, can you?"

"No," said Martha. "But stung or no stung, keep a-goin'. We ain't takin' no risks."

Ellen Hinckley slept fitfully, but even in her waking moments she was not aware of the dangers the others had feared.

"Let her rest," Martha meditated. "After she's made a clean getaway, she'll have all that's comin' to her, in the line o' excitement an' strain. I don't believe'm when he says she ain't all there in the upper story. But that's not meanin' I think she's furnished as handsome as some. She may have all her buttons, an' yet not be the brainiest party I ever come in contract with. Why didn't she up an' open her mind an' give Buller a piece o' it long ago? There's many things a married woman's got to shoulder, God knows, but chas*tise*ment, hot off'n his griddle, as you might say, not on your life, even a married woman needn't stand, much less a unmarried maiden-girl. It ain't decent. If a man oncet took the strap to me, I'd fix'm so's the doctor'd have to hunt for the buckle o' his belt behind his internal workin's, in back among his spine. An' I'd be proud o' the job."

When they were within about five miles of Burbank Sam gave a low whistle.

"I was wonderin' if you heard it too," Martha responded promptly. "Firstoff I thought 'twas my imagination, but it ain't. Somethin' certainly's follain' along in our tracks."

"The first was a false alarm. So may this be," said Sam.

"Sure. But, could you speed up some? Just for luck?"

Presently Martha heard another sound.

"Now, Ellen," she announced firmly, "you got to brace up. Cryin' won't do you a mite o' good."

"He's following. I know it. He's got a car. He'll get me and take me back and—*kill* me!"

"He will if you don't do as I say. But not on your life he won't, if you mind your aunt Martha. Firstoff, have you got your money safe an' handy?"

"Yes. Here."

"That's right. See you don't lose it, when I assist you onto the train. There mayn't be much time to spare, but if the brakeman's any good on the catch, I'm up to handin'm a neat throw, an' between us you'll get there!"

"But my ticket——"

"This is no time for thinkin' o' tickets. Let the conductor be glad if, after the train is on its way, you got the price o' one o' them long, floatin' streamer-effec's he carries in his vest-pocket, to amuse 'mself punchin' holes in it."

They sped into Burbank under all the power Sam dared put on.

"Thank God!" sobbed Ellen Hinckley.

But when they reached the station, no train was in sight, the place was

virtually deserted.

Sam drew up beside the platform and, for a moment sat quite still, evidently cogitating.

"No such thing! The train ain't gone!" said Martha, as if he had maintained it had. "It's only five minutes to one."

"It might have been ahead of time."

"Did you ever know one was?" inquired his wife.

He got out and made his way to the waiting-room. A moment and he was back.

"There's been delays back along the road. The train's two hours late. It won't be here till three, or after."

"Well, what do you think o' that!" said Martha.

The next instant she was dragging Ellen Hinckley into the waiting-room, through it, and on into the telegraph-operator's booth.

"Say, young fella," she addressed him bluntly, "this party here's in danger of her life. Me an' my husban' is gettin' her out o' harm's way, which he's hot on our track. He'll be along any minute. Think o' your mother, if you ever had one. An if not, think o' some other female o' the same sect, only younger. Lend a hand, anyhow, to help us out, will you?"

The youth eyed Mrs. Slawson dubiously.

"How do I know——?" he began objecting.

"You don't. But, by the time I get through with you, you will. Only this ain't the *time*, see? Come now, step lively, like they say in New York. Put this party away, out o' sight. No matter how crampin' the place. An' be quick about it!"

The young man gazed about his booth helplessly, shook his head, then got upon his feet. He drew a key from his pocket, as if acting under hypnotic suggestion.

"I'm taking your word for it," he grumbled. "If it gets me into trouble——"

"*I'll* get you out," answered Martha confidently.

Without further ado he led them through the waiting-room, unlocked the baggage-room door and, in the semi-darkness, he and Martha walled their captive in behind a barricade of freight and baggage.

"Try to be contented till train-time," Mrs. Slawson admonished Ellen. "Don't you be scared. We won't forget you, nor we won't let your stepfather get you, 'less it's over this young-man-here's dead body an'——"

"Oh, I say!" objected the telegraph-operator plaintively.

Martha shook her head at him. "I only wanted to cheer her up," she whispered, as they passed out into the waiting-room, he locking the door behind them.

Sam came forward to meet her.

"I guess we had our scare for nothing," he observed. "If that'd been Buller behind us, he'd have got here before now."

"Not if he'd had tire-troubles. But prob'ly you're right," said Martha.

Sam considered. "Then what's the use of keeping the poor girl hid?"

"It won't hurt her. An' a ounce o' pervention is worth a pound o' cure."

Later the telegraph-operator took the trouble to shove up his window and address Martha through it. His tone was loftily supercilious, ironically facetious.

"Nothing doing! You've been stringing me, I guess!" he sagely opined.

Mrs. Slawson regarded him blandly.

"Certaintly. My husban' an' me, we come twenty-five miles streakin' through the night on purpose to do it. Such a precious jewel of a fella as you, anybody'd want to string'm, for safe-keepin', so's he wouldn't fall down an' roll away an' be lost in a crack o' the floor."

The telegraph-operator grimaced.

"Say, now, no joke! You said you'd tell me the whole story, so I'd know what I was in for. I ain't hankering to be called down by the Company for outdoing my duty."

Mrs. Slawson smoothed her dress over her knees. "Come an' sit on my lap, sonny-boy, an' I'll tell you all about it. Only bein' so young, an' havin' such a tender conscience with you, it might keep you awake in your crib nights. Did you ever see weels, as thick as my thumb, on the white skin of a young girl's shoulders? Well, I could turn back the waist o' that one in there, an' show you such. Raised by the leather-belt o' her mother's second husban', which they're perfect ladies an' gen'lmen, o' course, bless their hearts. They will be after her like mad, when they know she's given'm the slip. Good lan'! If young fellas was reely young fellas nowadays, you'd be glad of the chancet to pour some o' the Widow Cruse's oil on a poor ill-used child's troubled waters. An' not be thinkin' o' yourself all the time—if it'd harm *you* to help her, or if the Comp'ny would objec'."

The youth regarded her with level eyes.

"You can count on me," he said. "I'm with you in this, no matter what."

"Good bey!" said Martha.

The hours dragged wearily along. One by one disappointed travelers who had strayed off to kill time at the hotel, returned to meet their delayed train.

Martha had advance information concerning its coming, the lad at the wire furnishing it gratuitously.

"It'll be along now in five minutes," he said, "and I've put the baggage-man wise, so he's ready to help you get her off, as fine as silk, even if——"

Just then Martha saw Sam approaching. Though his step and manner were, to all outward appearances as usual, she instantly knew something was amiss.

"What is it?" she asked calmly.

"He's come. Him and Harding are here. They haven't seen me nor the car yet. I put that beyond, under a shed, where it wouldn't be conspicuous. But we can't dodge them long, and——"

"This way, ma'am!" summoned the baggage-man, touching Martha's elbow. "I got the young lady ready for you—and the train's coming."

"Take care of yourself, Sam," Martha cautioned him, following her leader.

The train thundered up. Before it had fairly come to a halt, Buller sighted Sam. He made a rush toward him, brandishing a menacing arm.

"Keep cool," advised Sam. "And keep off!"

"You've got the girl!" Buller roared. "We know you have, from them as saw you coming over here, three in the car. Where is she?"

"Find her," said Sam.

Buller turned to Harding. "*You* handle him, Joe. I'll tackle the woman."

Martha stood at the baggage-room door, as Buller came pounding down the platform.

"Hand over that girl!" He spoke with sinister calmness.

"Certaintly," said Martha. "That's just what I'm waitin' to do."

The engine whistled. Buller started toward Martha, getting in the way of the baggage-man, who was pushing a loaded hand-truck before him. His elbow sent Buller reeling. In that instant, through a maze, Buller saw Martha lift what had looked like a piece of burlap-covered baggage from the truck, and toss it, with sure aim, to the brakeman on the platform of the slow-moving car. The brakeman caught it deftly, and set it on its feet. The train slid past.

"Ellen!" Buller cried. Then, turning on Martha, "You—devil!"

Mrs. Slawson bowed civilly. "Same to you, sir."

"I'll—I'll do you up yet. You're not done with me, not by a long shot."

"I haven't a doubt o' it. I'm ready for you, any time. Likewise *Mister* Slawson. Only, I advise you, take it out on me. My husband might hurt you too much, if he got goin'."

As they were driving home through the waning light, Sam told Martha he faintly remembered hearing Ellen's knock on the door—"only he was too tired to get up."

"You were smart to hear it through your own snores," she returned pleasantly. "But when we get home, you must turn in, an' take a real sleep. I'll wake

you when Buller comes."

CHAPTER X

Dr. Ballard had been absent a fortnight or more, and July was drawing to its close, when one afternoon Katherine heard the sound she had been longing for all these days, the familiar musical notes of his motor-horn.

Looking ahead expectantly, he spied her at once, and gave salute, as the car swept up to the porch, a silent military salute. Alighting, he passed directly upstairs to Madam Crewe's sitting-room.

Katherine followed after, drawn as if by the sense of something pending, something too interesting to miss.

Madam Crewe glanced around as the doctor entered.

"Oho, so *you're* back, are you?"

Dr. Ballard took a chair without waiting to be invited and said lightly, as he seated himself facing his patient:

"You speak the truth."

The old woman raised her chin. "Thank you, young man. You flatter me!"

"Not in the least," came the prompt retort. "I haven't come with any such intention. I've come—and I may as well out with it at once—I've come to tell you that I have found the reason for your dislike of 'the Ballard tribe.' I've discovered the case you have against us. I've been ferreting about among my grandfather's effects, and I've unearthed his Journal. Curious, isn't it, that a *bailiff* should have kept a Journal?"

Madam Crewe deigned no response.

After a pause lasting several seconds, Dr. Ballard continued: "I presume you would feel seriously affronted if I were to take the liberty of supposing you might be interested."

"Fudge! Have you the Journal there?"

"Yes."

"You have read it?"

"Quite so."

"Then you—know?"

"Yes."

"Well? And what then? What are you going to do about it?"

"I am going to read my grandfather's Journal aloud, now, here—I mean, that portion of it that relates to you."

Madam Crewe straightened to a military stiffness. "You are going to do nothing of the sort," she averred stoutly.

"Indeed I am."

"I'll not permit it. I'll send Katherine from the room."

"Oh, no you won't. You are too just to do that. You have made certain charges against my grandfather; now, the only fair thing, is to give him a show—to let him state his case, from his side."

"No. He wouldn't tell the truth. He falsified once. He'd falsify again."

"You haven't proved it."

"You have my word."

"Your word is all very well, as far as it goes. But even you would hardly claim that it goes all the way 'round the truth, and then tucks under, like Dick's hatband. My grandfather has a word too, and I'm going to see that he has a chance to get it in edgewise, and—what's more, that you listen."

Madam Crewe turned her body stiffly toward Katherine.

"Come here. Sit down!" she commanded autocratically.

Dr. Ballard took up his book, opening it at an obviously marked point.

"The first entry bearing any reference to you or yours was written in 1844. In the spring of that year he mentions going to see one Squire Stryker, in connection with the stewardship of his estate. I'll skip all the non-essentials and——"

"Skip nothing. Since you *will* read, read!"

"Very well.

"'Boston, February 6th, 1844. This morning saw Squire Stryker. He wishes to engage a bailiff. A hard man, I judge him to be. Not easy to please, because he is exacting, arbitrary, without judgment or justice. He is ruled by passion, not principle.

"'Feb. 10th. I have made my decision. For good or ill, I go to Squire Stryker's, in New Hampshire, to-morrow.'

"Following are several pages given over to notes and data connected with the estate. Its acreage, its possibilities, its limitations. Nothing else. They carry one to April, and—this:

"'A strange thing has happened. No, not a strange thing. The thing is simple, the strangeness is in its effect on me. There is a lane hard by, called Cherry Lane. 'Tis part of the estate. At this season the trees are in full blossom. I went there to estimate the probable yield of fruit, and the condition of the trees, and—underneath the white and pink boughs stood a white and pink maid. She looked at me and smiled. She told me she was Squire Stryker's daughter. She knew I was the new bailiff, she said.

"'April 14. I have seen the child again. Yes, again and again. Many times, in fact. I call her child because so indeed she seems to me, who am, at least, fifteen years older. She tells me she is seventeen. 'Tis hard to believe for that in stature she's no higher than my heart, and her eyes are as open and unconscious as a child's except when—— But that is my fancy! I am sure 'tis my fancy.

"'June 1st. 'Tis many weeks since that was written. Not that I have naught to say. Rather, too much. I find I cannot set down what is in my heart. *Idea Stryker and I are betrothed!*

"'June 14. Every afternoon towards sundown my little sweetheart and I walk in Cherry Lane. I wish she had a mother. I do not like these clandestine meetings. Sometimes I doubt myself. Not my love for Idea, God knows, but my power to make it tell for her best good. To-day I told her my conscience troubled me. I am no friend to untruth or furtive acts. Idea put on a look of high contempt, aping her father. She scowled at me, folded her arms across her bosom and, measuring me up and down, in his own manner to the life, said: "Deuce take your conscience, sir! I'll have none of it." Then, suddenly changing, she clung to me crying, "I'll have nothing but your love, Daniel! But, your love I'll die to have, and to hold." I let my heart direct me rather than my head, and gave way to her. But I still feel the better course would be to tell her father and make an end of this deceit.

* * * * *

""Tis many a long day since I have taken up this book to write in it. Now that I do, 'tis in a different year and place. Yet I have often thought 'twas cowardly to shun the setting down in black and white of what will always be the deepest record of my heart. I have said Idea and I were at variance upon the point of telling her father what was between us. Again and again I tried to tell her 'twas unworthy of us both. But she always overruled me. I gave way. Then, one day when I spoke of it, she suddenly burst forth in such a passion as I have never seen. Poor child! 'Twas her father's fury, but not, this time, done in mimicry. She told me she was weary of being preached to about the truth, deceit, and duty. She would have me know she'd as good a sense of propriety as I. Nay, better, for, after all, who was I but her father's servant, she would like to know. "How dare you criticise me?" she blazed. "You forget I am your master's daughter."

"'I can see her now, standing there stamping her foot at me, her eyes flashing, her cheeks like flame. The rage in her flared up, then died down as quickly. That was her way. The heat in *me* has a different habit. It smolders and grows until it seems to freeze me with its white intensity. It is my bosom-enemy which I am trying to conquer. I had not done it then. "You are right," I said. "I had

forgotten. I had forgotten everything except that you are the girl I loved, who I thought loved me. You have done well to remind me of my place. I will never forget it again, or that you are *my master's daughter*."

"'With that I turned, and left her standing, stunned, bewildered, in Cherry Lane. I could see she did not realize what had happened. She thought I would come back. She waited for me. And so I did come back, but not to let her see me. Only to watch over her, that no harm should befall, for the spot was lonely and far from the house, and dusk was about to fall. When the first star showed, she went home. I could hear her crying softly, all the way. She would cry, then stop to dry her tears, and call me names through her sobbing.

"'There were no more meetings after that, though she *got in my way* more than once, as I went about my duties. I knew very well what she wanted, but I could not relent. What my dear mother used to call my dumb demon had taken possession of me. It would not let me speak. Would not let me write to answer any of the letters Idea sent me begging me to meet her when the sun went down.

"'Then, one day, I was summoned before the Squire. She had told him.

"'He was waiting for me in his library, clad in his riding-clothes just as he had come from horseback. He carried a riding-crop. His face was of a dull reddish color, his eyes green. He began, the moment I entered the door, to assail me, standing with his back to it, his legs planted wide.

""You miserable beggar!" he brandished his crop in my face. "First, you have the insolence to make love to my daughter, then you insult her by refusing, when she *stoops* to offer you her hand in reconciliation."

""That is precisely the point," I heard myself say. "'Tis because she *stoops*."

The words were no sooner out, than Idea was clinging to me. "I'm not proud any more, Daniel," she cried. "I'll never stoop again. If you'll only forgive me this once, I'll promise never to vex you any more. Please, Daniel, please!"

"'The Squire snatched her wrist. "Silence!" he thundered, and would have swung her violently aside, but I prevented it. I saw the old look in her eyes.

""Then come with me," I said, "now—this hour. Marry me and——"

"'Her father flung himself between us, when she would have come to me. He swore he would disown her. No shilling of his should she ever get. She should be a beggar—married to a beggar.

"'I saw her shrink. She could not face it. When I saw that, I turned to go, but the Squire stopped me.

""Not so fast, my fine fellow! You've not returned the letters, yet. D'you think I'd let you keep them, you low dog, to use against her fair name, for a price?"

"'I had forgotten the letters. I turned to Idea, and it was as if I had not seen her before, so clear her image stood out, now. She was clad in some flowery stuff

("dimity," she had once told me 'twas) with a sash about her waist, and on the sash a pocket hung suspended by a strap. 'Twas to hold her handkerchief, but her handkerchief had to hold her tears now—and the pocket hung empty. I went to her and held out the letters. She would not take them.

"'"Here are your letters," I said.

"'Still she would not touch them.

"'Her father cursed us both. I felt my self-control slipping from me. If I let it go to lay my hand upon the man—God help him—and me. But I could not escape until Idea had the letters. Again, she would not take them. With a quick movement I thrust them in her pocket. She did not seem to understand what I was doing. She thought I was trying to grasp her hand, I think, for she flung it out to me imploringly. But I only dimly saw that as I wheeled about, and so, off and away. That day I left the place. Later, I learned, the Squire and Idea went too. But before they did so he caused his man of law to follow me, again demanding the letters.

"'"The letters have already been returned," was all I could say. "She has them. I gave them back. When she would not take them, I thrust them in her pocket."

"'With that the lawyer had, perforce, to be content. At least he has not troubled me since. So I close this book. A closed book, too, the story of my love. A book I know I must never open if ever I am to be at peace with life. For I will say it once and so be done, Idea is my mate—the one woman in the world whom only I love, or ever shall. I have lost her, but the memory of her I must keep until I die—my passionate, headstrong, struggling, loving child. May God be with her, true and loyal little heart, wherever she may go.'"

Dr. Ballard looked up, as he closed down the cover.

"You see, he *did* give back the letters," he said.

Madam Crewe clutched the arms of her chair, sitting forward, gazing fixedly into space. When she spoke it was as if she spoke in a dream, filling out the bailiff's tale.

"I had no letters and, as for the pocket, 'twas never seen from that day on. My father insisted 'twas a ruse on my—the bailiff's part, his offering to return them. He said he had kept them to use as a means of blackmail. I was too desperate to care. My father swore the man would presently show his hand, but he did not, nor his face either. I never saw him again. At first I would hear no ill of him, but my father and the attorney told me I was too young, too ignorant of the world, to know how base the creature was, what a narrow escape I had had. There were nights—many and many of them—when, here and abroad, I cried myself to sleep, regretting my *escape* hadn't been narrower.

"Now, sir, you know the story of your grandfather and me. It is all very

long ago. The wonder is, the memory has stayed by me all these years."

For the first time within her recollection, Katherine felt herself drawn to her grandmother. It was as if a means of communication had been opened up between them. She would have liked to go to her and lay her arms about her shoulders lovingly.

Dr. Ballard broke the silence.

"The truth lies between your word, and my grandfather's. *I* believe he was honest. You believe the contrary."

Madam Crewe was silent.

The doctor continued. "Now, as you say, all that took place very long ago. Even granting my grandfather's motives to have been the worst, I count myself out of the tangle. I stand on my own feet, don't I? If I have built up my life on honest principle, I can't see how you can reasonably hold me to account for the sins or fancied sins of my forbears. Our democracy isn't worth the name, if it doesn't admit a man's a man for a' that. I love your granddaughter. I wish to marry her. I ask your consent."

Katherine could not see her grandmother's face for the sudden mist that had gathered to trouble her vision. But she heard the familiar voice distinctly enough.

"Wait a moment. Hear me out. Then repeat your declaration, if you choose. They say I'm avaricious. Rich, grasping, penurious. Suppose I told you I'm poor? That the bulk of my fortune was squandered long ago? That I've had a hard time to keep my nose, and this girl's here, above water? Would you wish to marry her, still?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"You say that because you don't believe it's true."

"I say it because, saving your presence, I don't care a continental whether it's true or not. Your money or the lack of it, is nothing to me. I care for *Katherine*!"

"Suppose I told you Katherine's grandfather, the man I married, was a coward and a liar, as they said your grandfather was? Suppose I told you her father, my son, followed in his father's footsteps?"

Dr. Ballard shrugged impatiently. "It's Katherine I want for my wife. It's not her dead and buried ancestors. I have to deal with Katherine's faults and virtues, not those of her family."

"You hear that, Katherine? It's *your* faults and virtues he——"

Madam Crewe put the question with a sort of bravado, but her utterance was slightly unsteady. She did not conclude her sentence.

Katherine had grown very white.

When she did not respond, the old woman demanded peevishly, "Well,

well? What have you to say for yourself? Can't you speak?"

"I say—I can't marry—Dr. Ballard." The girl rose and stood holding on to the back of her chair with two cold, trembling hands.

Her grandmother fairly raised herself up in her seat. "What do you mean——? 'You can't marry Dr. Ballard?'" Her voice rose to a sharp falsetto.

Katherine shook her head.

"Nonsense! Whim!" The old woman spoke with unaccountable passion.

Dr. Ballard laid a firm, warm hand on Katherine's cold ones. His face was rather pale, but his tone, when he spoke, was quite composed.

"Forgive me," he said. "I see I've got in all wrong on this. I didn't mean to distress you. Let us drop it now, and later, some time, when we two are alone together, we'll thresh it out, eh?"

Again Katherine shook her head. "No, I want never to talk about it again," she said tremulously.

"Why?" The old woman asked the question almost fiercely, bending forward to peer searchingly into her granddaughter's face.

For a moment it looked as if Katherine were in danger of being swept off her feet by the intensity of her hidden feeling. She opened her lips, then resolutely closed them again. Her grandmother did not seem to see, or, at all events, did not regard her effort at self-control.

"Have you no tongue in your head?"

"Say it isn't true—what you've just hinted, about my father and his. Say it isn't true, and I'll—*tell*——"

"Ho! Do you think I'm to be called to account by you, young miss?" Madam Crewe interrupted testily. "If Dr. Ballard is ready to marry you, in the face of the conditions I asked him to suppose, why, get down on your knees, and thank God for such a disinterested lover. But don't flatter yourself you can oblige me to do as you choose. I am sixty-eight years old and I will not be forced."

Dr. Ballard laughed out.

"Don't you see it's all nonsense, Katherine? The whole thing isn't worth a serious thought. If your grandmother likes to have her little joke, why, let us try to see the humor of it. Perhaps she doesn't want you to marry me. But now she sees it's inevitable, she'll——"

"No," said Katherine. "It's not inevitable. I can't marry you."

Dr. Ballard was silent, but Madam Crewe's words snapped out like sparks from a live wire.

"The day Norris was here, you said you would. You *insisted* you would. Does your refusal now mean you've reconsidered the conditions he suggested? You've thought better of your first decision?"

Katharine gave her a long look. It seemed to her, her humiliation was com-

plete. And still she managed to hold herself in check.

"You make it very hard for me—you force me to say things—I—— Very well, then listen! I *do* love Dr. Ballard and—I'd have married him if—I could!"

He was on his feet in a second, the chair he had sat in crashing backward with the violence of the sudden spring he made from it. But Katherine was quicker than he. She turned and had run from the room before he could prevent her.

Madam Crewe let her breath escape in a long sigh of fatigue.

"Dear me! What tiresome things the young are! As Slawson says, they're hard as nails. You'd better reconsider, and ask *me* to marry you instead of Katherine. I'm seasoned, if not mellowed. Yes, you'd much better marry me."

Dr. Ballard smiled grimly. "Where my handsomer grandfather failed, how could *I* hope to win?" he retorted, throwing her a glance of mock gallantry. But even as he looked, he saw her face blench, her figure sag together like a wilted plant. In a second he had her in his arms, carrying her to the couch, forgetting the personal in the professional, working over her with a will.

A familiar figure appeared in the open doorway.

Martha paused a moment, then came forward swiftly.

"Another——?" she inquired, her hands busying themselves at once in obedience to the doctor's silent orders.

He shook his head. "No."

Presently Martha felt a quiver of muscles beneath her fingers. Madam Crewe's eyelids lifted. She made an effort to raise herself.

"What's all this—to-do?" she taxed her strength to demand.

Dr. Ballard laid a restraining hand upon her shoulder.

"Nothing. That is, nothing serious. You'd been over-exerting. Nature stepped in and shut down the shop for a moment."

"Meaning—I lost consciousness? For how long? How came Slawson here? Did you send?"

Martha answered in the doctor's stead.

"No'm. I just happened along. My Sabina, she took it into her head this afternoon there was no place like home—an' she was glad of it. Her an' me disagreed on some triflin' matters, an' she threatened she'd leave if I didn't come to terms. I tol' her: 'I'm sorry you feel that way, but if you concluded you must go, why, I s'pose you must. We all enjoyed your s'ciety for the last five years, but the best o' friends must part, an' far be it from me to stand in your way, if you perfer to look for another situation, an' think you can better yourself. I'll do up your things for you, for luck!' So I did an' out she stepped, as bold as brass, with her clo'es done up in a bundle slung on the end of a old gulf-stick Mr. Ronald he give her brother Sammy, to carry over her shoulder. She ain't been gone above

three hours, but I thought while I was bringin' up the evenin's milk, I'd ask if, maybe, she'd blew in here?"

Madam Crewe compressed her lips. "No. Even your baby would know better than to come here for a happy home," she said with a caustic smile. "On your way back, you'd better look for *my* child, who, also, has probably run away. It seems to be the fashion nowadays for youngsters to defy their elders."

Dr. Ballard gave Martha a look.

"Well, I must be movin'. I took the liberty to bring you a form o' Spanish cream I made this afternoon. It's kind o' cool an' refreshin', when you ain't an appetite for substantialler things."

Passing Katherine's door she paused and lightly tapped on the panel. There was no answer. She dared not take it on herself to turn the knob, so went slowly downstairs, and, finally, out of the house and grounds.

Once in the road she saw, a short distance ahead of her, an easily recognizable figure.

"Oh—Miss Katherine!" she called softly.

For a moment the girl seemed undecided what to do. She walked on as if she had not heard the call, then suddenly wheeled about and stopped.

"I was afraid I'd missed you," Mrs. Slawson said casually. "All I wanted, was to tell you that if your gran'ma shouldn't be so well after her faintin'-spell, why, I'm ready to come an' help any time, be it night or day."

Katherine looked up, her face changing quickly.

"Fainting-spell?" She echoed the words vaguely.

"Yes. She come out o' this one all right, but if she had another you couldn't tell, at her age, poor ol' lady! Thanks be! it wasn't a stroke. Anyhow, I'd advise you keep Eunice Youngs overnight, to run an' carry, if need be."

The struggle was short and sharp. Martha pretended not to see. She pretended not to be aware that Miss Katherine had on her traveling hat, carried her coat over her arm, a bag in her hand.

"I'll go back!" the girl said at last, as if ending a debate.

"Be sure you send if you need me," Martha repeated.

They parted without another word, and Mrs. Slawson, resuming her homeward way, summed up the case to herself.

"Yes, she's gone back this time. But come another tug o' war between her an' the ol' lady, an' I wouldn't be so certain. I wonder now, how my young vagabone is doin', which her brothers an' sisters are all out on the still-hunt, searchin' for her this minute."

She had barely reached the house, and was busying herself with preliminary supper preparations, before starting out again to look for her stray lamb, when the screen-door was gently opened from without, and a small person, very

grimy as to outward visible signs, very chastened as to inward spiritual grace, entered the kitchen quietly.

Martha appeared totally unconscious of any other presence than her own, until Sabina's mind became vaguely troubled with doubts of her own substantiality. Her pilgrim's pack slipped from her shoulder, the "gulf-stick" fell clattering to the floor. Even then Mrs. Slawson made no sign.

The suspense was fast becoming unendurable. The child's under-lip thrust out, her chin began to quiver, but she controlled herself gallantly. Nixcomeraus, the cat, rose from where he had been lying curled up in a doze, humped a lazy back, stretched, yawned, and, with dignified mien, crossed the floor to rub against his little friend's familiar legs. That something, at least, recognized her, and knew she had come home, after her long, weary absence, almost upset Sabina's equilibrium. She bent down to stroke pussy's fur.

"I see," she essayed, with a superb effect of nonchalance, "I see you still have the same old cat!"

At the sound of her voice Martha turned.

"My, my!" she exclaimed, one hand clasping the other in surprise, "you don't mean to say this is Sabina! How glad I am to see you! Won't you sit down an' stay a little while? Cora an' Francie an' Saromy've gone out strollin', but they'll be back before long, an' they'd be disappointed if you'd 'a' went before they got home, so's they'd miss your call."

Sabina's eyes rolled. She gulped hard once, twice, three times. Then with a roar, her "austere control" gave way, she cast herself bodily upon her mother, clasping the maternal massive knees.

"I ain't goin' to stay *a lit-tle whi-ile*," she sobbed. "I'm goin' to stay *always*. I want C-Cora! 'n' I want F-Francie! 'n' I want S-Sammy! 'n' YOU!"

Martha bent to lift the giant-child so the stout little arms could clutch her neck.

"Now, what do you think o' that!" she ejaculated, holding the shaken traveler close.

Appeared Sammy in the doorway, troubled at first but brightening suddenly at sight of his recovered sister.

"Hey, Sabina's home!" he shouted ecstatically back to the others. Then all came trooping in with a rush, clinging about the youngest, hugging her, kissing her as if she had been gone a year.

"Why, it's just like the Prodigal's son, ain't it?" suggested Martha, in whose lap Sabina sat enthroned, refusing to leave it for even a moment.

"Who's he?" asked Sammy.

Mrs. Slawson cast a look of reproach at her son.

"Shame on you, to ask such a question, at your age! Don't you remember

the old prodigal gen'lman lived in the Bible, which his son had a rovin' disposition an' went off gallivantin' till his pervisions give out, an' he had to come home to get a square meal? When his father saw'm afar off, he got up, an' went out, an' called'm a fatted calf, an'—no I I'm wrong, he asked'm wouldn't he *like* some fatted calf, which, his son, bein' fond o' young veal, *did*, an' so they killed'm—I mean the calf. Now I'm wonderin' which one o' you three I better do it to for Sabina! There, there, Sabina! Don't holla so! O' course I don't mean I'd reely hurt your brothers an' sisters. Come, you're all tired out, or you wouldn't be so foolish! Cheer up, now! You're back home, after all your wanderin's, an' you won't be naughty any more—*if you can help it*, will you?"

CHAPTER XI

Whatever had been the cause of disagreement between Madam Crewe and her granddaughter, Martha noticed that a negative peace, at least, had been restored by the time she had occasion to go to Crewesmere again.

"And so you've been aiding and abetting a run-away girl, eh?" the old lady accosted her sharply.

Mrs. Slawson had almost forgotten the Ellen Hinckley episode, in the quick succession of events nearer home.

"You mean——" she pondered.

"You know perfectly well what I mean. The Hinckley girl. You assisted her to make her escape from that Buller brute. I hope you thought well, before you took the risk."

"Risk?" repeated Martha.

"Yes, *risk*. Evidently you don't know the difference between courage and recklessness."

"No'm, I don't. But I'll look'm up in the dickshunerry."

Madam Crewe brought her teeth together with a snap.

"Slawson, you're a strange specimen. I sometimes wonder if you're *plus* or *minus*. You certainly are not a simple equation, that's sure."

Martha smiled. "Speakin' o' the Hinckley girl—Ellen—I'd a letter from the uncle she went to, sayin' she landed there safe an' sound. So *she's* off'n my mind."

"And Buller?"

"He never was on it. *I* don't mind *him*. His name ought to been spelled

with a Y 'stead of the R. Them kind's never dangerous."

"Well, I hope not. All the same, I wish you'd kept your finger out of that pie for your own safety's sake."

Martha laughed. "I got two good fists of my own with me, that shoots out fine when required. Warranted to hit the bull's eye every time. I used to tell my husband, when we lived down in the city, I was afraid I might be arrested for carryin' unconcealed weapons."

Madam Crewe's stern little visage did not relax. "You'd need a more effective weapon than your two fists, if you had Buller to deal with," she said. "I've a mind to give you my son's revolver. Will you take it?"

Martha drew back quickly. "No'm, thank you, bein' much obliged, all the same. My husband an' me, we don't believe in settlin' disputes that way. Shootin', be it by one, or be it by many, is murder, an' nothin' else. I'd like to put a stop to it, if I could. I'm dead set against it. They talk about puttin' a stop to war, an' some says you couldn't do it. But you *could* do it. If every man who was 'listed, just crossed his arms, an' said respectful but firm: 'No, siree! Not on your life I won't shoot!' an' stuck to his word—where'd they get their armies? You can't *square* anythin' with *round* bullets. I wouldn't mind cuffin' Buller a good lick or two, but I wouldn't *shoot*'m. I've too much respec' for my own peace o' mind."

"Well, at least take the precaution to keep off these country roads after nightfall. Get yourself home now. And when you come here again, if it's at night like this, bring that dog of yours, that you talk so much about, along with you."

"Flicker? Goodness! Flicker's the peaceablest party of us all. He wouldn't be a mite o' perfection, even if we'd let'm out. Since we first took'm off'n the street, Flicker thinks everybody means well by'm. He'd never get over the shock if somebody treated'm low down. He just wouldn't *believe* it, that's all. But anyhow, Sam (my husband) he's been obliged to set some traps for the foxes that prowels 'round after Mr. Ronaldses hens an' ours, an' we're afraid Flicker might get caught in one, if we'd leave'm run free nights."

Acting on Madam Crewe's gentle hint, Martha proceeded to take herself off. She had not really thought of Buller with any apprehension, but as she walked along the dark, lonely road, the suggestion worked, and she fancied him lying in wait for her behind "any old ambush growin' by the way, ready to spring," as she told herself.

This did not prevent her from tramping on when, at last, she reached her own door, and realized she was out of yeast, and Cora had need of some for the night's "raisin'."

Mrs. Lentz "admired" to let her have the loan of a cake. Martha chatted a while, then started away, this time headed directly for home. She had gone but a short distance, the length of a city block perhaps, when, suddenly, she came to a

standstill.

"Who's there?" she demanded sternly. Her voice sounded unfamiliar, even to her own ears. She attempted to flash her lantern-light into the inky blackness of the thicket hedging the road-bank. "Who's there?" she repeated.

Silence.

For a second, she doubted her own instinct, and was on the point of passing sheepishly on, ashamed of her childishness, when a sinister rustle in the shadow brought her, as it were, up standing again, instantly alert, on the defensive.

"Who's there?" rang out for the third time. "If you don't speak or show this minute, I'll come an' fetch you."

The rustle increased. A blotch of shadow detached itself from its vague background, and a huddled shape inched forward, like a magnified beetle.

Martha held her lantern up as she took a step forward to meet the thing.

"MA!" she exploded. Then—— "Well, what do you think o' that!"

"O—oh, Martha!"

The next minute the magnified beetle was passionately clinging to "me son Sammy's wife," as if there were no other anchorage in all the world.

"But for the love o' Mike, Ma, how come you here? You're shakin' like an ash-pan. You're all done up. Never mind tellin' me now. When we're home is time enough."

Fairly carrying the poor, limp creature, heartening her, soothing her, Martha got her, at last, to the Lodge, set her in Sam's chair, with the comforting *pilla* to rest the *holla* in her back, brought her the reinforcing *cuppertee* which, in hot weather or cold, was Ma's greatest solace and, to crown all, sat down and listened, while she told of the dangers she had passed.

"It's a thrawn lot they are, down there," she began, sniffing vigorously. "You wouldn't believe the way they do be goin' on. I bided wit' Dennis an' Sarah for a bit, but there was no peace in the house at all. Every time I'd open me mouth, Sarah she'd be for jumpin' down me throat. There's no livin' wit' the likes of her, let alone himself, an' the childern. Nora-Andy told me they've the hearts of stone in their breast, the way they'd be never carin' how you'd get along. 'Twas two weeks I bided wit'm, an' then Sarah she brought me in the subway down to Hughey's. 'Twas the baby there had whoopin'-cough, an' Hughey says 'twould be very unlucky for one so old as me to be catchin' it off her. Liza says: 'It would that. I wouldn't have it on me conscience,' says she. I says, 'How would I be catchin' the whoopin'-cough, when I had it, itself, an' all the young 'uns here had it, long ago, an' me by, an' never a touch of it on me.' But they was that set on keepin' me safe from contagion, they wouldn't so much as let me stay the night under the roof. Sarah was as mad, as mad. Her an' Liza had it hot an' heavy between'm. They fairly had me killed wit' their sparrin'. 'Twas to Mary-

Ellen's they took me at last. An' when Sarah told Mary-Ellen of Liza's behavior, Mary-Ellen was fit to slay her. 'If it's to Liza Slawson my mother has to look for a home, her own daughters must be under the sod,' says she. I was wit' Mary-Ellen one week, come Tuesda', an' I would 'a' be contented to settle down there, only for Owen havin' a letter from his rich uncle, sayin' he'd come to visit'm for a bit. They couldn't be after offendin' him, explainin' they'd no room itself. So Mary-Ellen ast me would I shift over to Nellie's till she'd have the uncle in my bed. An' to Nellie's I went. But, you know as good as me, the sorta man is himself. You could search the world over, an' not find a contrarier. Me heart was sore for Nellie, but at the same time she'd no call to say I drew the temper out of her Michael, the like she never see equaled. 'He's never so gusty when we're alone,' says she. Well, well! Be this an' be that, I couldn't be sure I'd a roof to lay me head on, the night. Nora's new man has a tongue in'm, would scare you off, before you'd ever set foot in it, at all. Like a surly dog! An' all the while, the city as hot as hot! The heart of me did be oozin' out in sweat, every day. An' not one o' them to take me to the Park, or set foot in Coney Island, itself, let alone back home. The cravin' took holt o' me, till I could thole it no longer. I had the thrifle in me purse Sam give me when he left, for to spend, if I needed it. (God knows the rest never showed me so much as the face of a penny!) I packed me little bag, an', be meself, I wanda'ed to the railroad station—the cops tellin' me how to get there, itself. An' so I come back. Travelin' all the da', from airly dawn. I'd to wait at Burbank for the trolley to bring me here. Then I started for to walk afoot. But the dark come down, an' every sound I heard, it stopped the tickin' of me heart, like a clock. When I heard the steps of one along the road, I crep' into the bushes, to hide till they'd pass. Your voice, Martha, was never your own at all. 'Twas like a man's voice. The height of you showed like a tower itself, back o' the lantren. I'd never know 'twas a female. I'd no stren'th to resist a wild tramp. So, when you ast me, 'answer who it is,' the tongue in me head was dumb. But, 'tis glad I am to be home again, surely."

Sam went to the front door to shake out the ashes from his pipe. When he came back Martha was helping Ma up the stairs to her own room.

"Won't the childern be surprised an' pleased to see you back, in the mornin'," she was saying heartily.

Cora, bringing up the rear, remarked with importance, "Mother sent'm to bed sooner'n usual 'cause to-morrow morning we all got to get up early. We're going with Miss Claire, in the la'nch, across the lake, to see a blue herring, she's got there in a cove."

"A blue herring, is it? Well, well!" said Ma abstractedly.

Cora went on. "Mother said when Francie told her, firstoff, you'd gone away for good, an' wasn't coming back—Mother said, 'No matter how much I

feel my loss, I must try to be cheerful.' Mother said it was a shock, but you mustn't let the world see your suffering. The world's got troubles of its own."

Ma's dull eyes brightened. She gazed up searchingly into her daughter-in-law's face. "And, did you say that indeed, Martha?" she questioned.

Martha punched a pillow pugilistically. "Very likely," she answered holding the ticking with her teeth, while she pulled the clean slip over it. "Yes, I said it."

The old woman slowly, tremulously undressed.

After Cora had gone, and Ma was in bed, Martha lingered a moment, before turning out the light.

"I'm sorry you had such disappointment," she said. "But doncher care, Ma. Sometime us two'll go down to New York together, an' I'll give you the time o' your life."

For a moment Ma made no response. Then her quavering voice shook out the words, as if they had been stray atoms, falling from a sieve: "It ain't the disappointment I'm after mindin' so much," she lamented. "I could thole that, itself—but—(perhaps it's a silly old woman I am)! but the notion it's got into me head that—that—maybe the lot o' them—*didn't want me!*"

Martha extinguished the light with a jerk. "Oh, go to sleep, Ma, an' quit your foolishness. I'll say to you what I say to the childern. If you cry about nothin', look out lest the Lord'll be givin' you somethin' to cry *for*."

"Then you don't think——?"

"Oh, *go* to sleep, Ma," repeated Martha, as if the question were not debatable.

The sun was barely up when the children began to stir.

"Say, Sabina," Cora whispered, "I bet you don't know what's in Ma's room."

A quick sortie, and Sabina did know. Then Sammy knew, and Francie knew.

"Come, come!" cried Martha, appearing on the threshold, "get yourselves dressed, the whole of you. Don't use up all your joy at the first go-off. Leave some to spread over the rest of the time. Ma's goin' to stop, you know. Besides—we can't keep Miss Claire waitin'."

"In my da'," observed Ma thoughtfully, "it wouldn't 'a' been thought well of, for a lady like that to be la'nchin' out, just before——"

"It's not my picnic," Martha interrupted. "I said all I could to pervent it in the first place. But her heart's fixed, an' I couldn't say her no, 'specially when Lord Ronald said he saw no harm, an'd go along too."

"Well, if *he* sees no harm—and is goin' along too——" Ma murmured, as if her consent were to be gained on no other grounds.

"Certaintly," said Martha.

Everything was in readiness in and about the trim little *Moth*, when Claire Ronald appeared on the dock.

"Where's Mr. Frank?" Mrs. Slawson asked.

"He got a message late last night from Boston, about some stuff for the electric-plant. They've sent it on, and he had to go to Burbank to examine it, so, in case it wasn't right, it could be shipped straight back. He said it would save time and cartage, and he wants the work put through as soon as possible."

"Then, o' course we'll put off our trip!"

"Oh, no!"

"Did he say we could go, an' him not here to go along too?"

"No—but——"

"Then, I guess we'll call it off."

Claire's mouth set, in quite an uncharacteristic way.

"No, indeed! We'll *go*! We couldn't have a better morning."

"Well, I do' know, but I wisht I had my long-handled feather-duster here to brush away some o' them flims o' dust off'n the ceilin'."

"Why, those are darling little clouds!" Miss Claire exclaimed reproachfully. "When the sun gets high, it will draw them out of sight entirely, and the sky will be as clear as crystal."

"It's as you think, not as I do," Mrs. Slawson rejoined. "If you're shooted, I'm shot!"

"In with you, children. Steady now!" commanded Claire.

Martha being already at the wheel, her husband had only to stow Mrs. Ronald and the girls safely amidships, see Sammy stationed in the stern in charge of the rudder-ropes, release the boat from its moorings, and *The Moth* was ready for flight.

"Take care of yourselves!" he called after them.

"Sure!" Martha shouted back, and they were off.

Now she was fairly in the line of having her own way, Claire was radiant.

"The idea of finding fault with this day!" she taunted laughingly. "Why, I couldn't have made it better, myself!"

"Why don't those birds fly up in the sky, mother?" asked Francie. "What makes 'em fly so low down, right over the water?"

"They are gulls," Mrs. Ronald answered, as if that explained the mystery.

It was a tremendous surprise to find the blue heron a bird instead of "a delicatessen."

For a couple of hours after her first introduction to the new acquaintance Martha kept exclaiming at intervals. "Well, what do you think o' that!" as a sort of gentle indication of her amazement.

"Say, mother, the way the herring walks, it'd make you think o' folks goin' up the church-aisle to get married—steppin' as slow, as slow. Bridesmaids an' things."

Martha winked solemnly across at Claire.

"Nothin' interests Cora so much these days, as the loverin' business. She's got it on the brain."

"Dear me! But there are no lovers around here, I'm sure," Claire said, amused.

"Oh, yes, there are. There's you an' Lord Ronald, an' there's Dr. Ballard an' Miss Katherine—an'——"

"Say, young lady, you talk too much——"

"Well, mother, it's true. I know he likes her a lot, 'cause——"

"That's enough, Cora. You're too tonguey. Go along an' play with your little brothers an' sisters."

When they were alone Mrs. Ronald turned to Martha. "Is it really true, Martha? Is Dr. Ballard interested in Miss Crewe?"

Mrs. Slawson laughed. "Like that *advertisement* says the baby's *interested* in the soap: 'He won't be happy till he gets it!'"

"And does she——?"

"Certaintly. You couldn't help it. But the little ol' lady has her face set against it. *You* got such pretty, tackful ways with you—sometime, when you're with the little Madam you might kind o' work around to help the young folks some, if you'd be so good."

Cora came wandering back. The play of the younger children did not divert her. She watched the blue heron as it silently, delicately paced up and down the beach, picking its way among the submerged stones, suddenly darting its head beneath the surface of the water, bringing up a bull-head, perhaps, and swallowing it whole.

"Ain't he perfectly killin'?" she murmured. "The way he acts like he's too dainty to live? And see that yellow flower over there! We had loads and loads of it last fall, and I used to take it to the teacher till one of the girls laughed at me 'cause she said the woods's full o' them, an' besides it gave the teacher *hey?* fever. That's a joke. It means, it'd make her ask more questions than she does already. Ann Upton said that. Ann is awful smart. Once, when her composition was all marked up with red ink, 'cause the teacher had corrected it so much, Ann said 'she didn't care. It was the pink of perfection.'"

"That yellow weed is goldenrod," explained Miss Claire. "Do you remember the names of any of the other wild-flowers I taught you a year ago, Martha?"

"Well, not so's you'd notice it. Lemme see! P'raps I do. Wasn't there a sort o' purple flower you called Johnny-pie-plant?"

Mrs. Ronald laughed. "Joepyeweed, yes. You got the idea."

"An' then, there was wild buckwheat, an' Jewel-weed an'—now, what's the matter with me, for a farmer? Don't I know a thing or two about the country?"

"You certainly do."

"An' *I* know the name o' some too," asserted Cora. "Brides-lace, and Love-in-a-mist, and——"

"Sweet Sibyl of the Sweat-shop, or——"

"Mother, I think you're real mean!" Cora cried, anxious to prevent further betrayal.

"Say, ladies an' gen'lmen, I hate to break up this pleasant ent'tainment, but I guess you don't realize how long we been dreamin' the happy hours away, like Miss Frances Underwood used to sing, before she married Judge Granville—which they ain't so *happy* now, not on your life, poor dear! I think we better get a move on, or we'll get soaked good and plenty. It's my opinion we're goin' to have a shower."

Claire did not attempt to argue the point. It was too evident that something was really going to happen.

"Yes, let's hurry," was all she said. "It's later than I thought."

Martha summoned her straying flock, and they made for the boat.

The little clouds, no bigger than a man's hand, had turned gray. Francie's friends, the gulls, were darting excitedly to and fro, as if without direction, very close to the face of the water. Here and there the lake showed a white-cap.

Martha stood at the wheel, in the bow, and steered straight for the opposite shore.

For a while Mrs. Ronald kept up a careless chatter with the children, then, as if by common consent, there was silence.

A sharp wind had risen out of nowhere, apparently, and begun to lash the water into frothy fringes that tossed their beads of spray high over the side of the boat. Suddenly Francie screamed. This time it was not the spray, but the wave itself that the blast rushed before it to break full upon *The Moth*, drenching the child to the skin.

Martha glanced around to see what the trouble was.

"There's some tarpaulin under the seats," she shouted back over her shoulder, "wrap it about you an'—dry up!"

Again there was silence, while the clouds massed themselves into granite barricades, shutting out the light, and the gale gathered force and fury with every second. It was impossible, now, to see the farther shore. The little *Moth* seemed blindly fluttering in a dense mesh of gray mist impossible to penetrate.

"We're going every *which way*!" moaned Cora.

At the same instant—"The rudder-ropes, Sammy!" shouted Martha.

The boy slipped from his place, and, by sense of touch alone, found the cause of the obstruction, and freed the ropes.

The Moth gave a leap forward into the mist.

"I'm afraid!" roared Sabina in no uncertain voice.

"What you afraid of?" came back from the bow. "Don't you know, if there was any danger *I'd get out*!"

To the children, accustomed as they were to accept their mother's word without question, the statement carried instant reassurance. Sabina stopped roaring, and Francie only screamed when each new wave broke over her, threatening to swamp the boat.

"Hush, Francie!" called Miss Claire at length in a tense, strained voice. "You'll make your mother nervous."

Martha, hearing, answered back, "She don't make me nervous. There's nothing to be nervous about. Let her scream, if it makes her happy."

Francie stopped screaming.

All the while the throbbing of the little engine had been steady, incessant. But now Martha noticed that, at intervals, it missed a beat. She waited to see if it would right itself. A minute, and it had ceased altogether.

"Sammy!"

It only needed that to send the boy crawling, on his hands and knees, to start it up afresh, if he could—working, as his father had taught him to work.

The Moth spun around and around, in the trough of the waves.

Martha "knew what she knew," but her hands never left the wheel for an instant. What if the engine could not be made to go? What could she say to Mr. Frank if——? No, there was this comfort, if the worst came to the worst *she* would be the last to have a chance to say anything, to any of those waiting on the shore....

She heard the steady heart-beat start afresh.... The boy was back in his place. Martha, with new courage, strained her vision to pierce through the curtain of mist and rain, could see nothing, but clung to her wheel.

At length she realized she was steering toward something that she, alone of all the little group, could see—a faint adumbration, showing dark through the pall of enveloping gray.

But now the wind and the water were so high it was impossible to steer straight for the home-shore—she could only make it by slow degrees.

The storm had whipped her thick hair out of its customary coils. It blew about her face and shoulders in long, wet strands, buffeting her, blinding her. She never lifted a hand to save herself the stinging strokes.

Little by little the dark line widened, the way was made plain. Little by little Martha wheedled *The Moth* shoreward.

"I see somepn'," shouted Francie, at last. "I see our dock!" After an interval: "I see folks on our dock!" Later still: "I see father, 'n' Mr. Ronald, 'n' Ma, 'n'—oh! lots o' folks!"

The Moth fluttered forward. The waves beat her back. She seemed to submit with meekness, but a second later, seeing her chance, she dodged neatly, and sped on again, so, at last, gaining the quiet water of the little bay.

Mr. Ronald and Sam Slawson, in silence, made her fast to her moorings. In silence, Martha gave Claire into her husband's arms. He wrapped the shaking little figure about, in warm dry coverings, and carried her home, as he would a child.

The second they were out of sight and hearing, a babel of voices rose, Ma's shrill, high treble piping loud above the rest:

"When we saw the tempest gatherin', an' youse out in it, on the deep, an' not a boat could make to get to youse, the fear was in me heart, I didn't have a limb to move."

A burly form shoved her unceremoniously aside,

Joe Harding approached Martha, implanted a sounding kiss on her cheek.

"By gum, you're a cracker-jack, Mrs. Slawson, and no mistake!" he announced.

One by one the little knot of men and women followed suit, Fred Trenholm, Nancy Lentz, Mr. Peckett—all who, by the wireless telegraph that, in the country, flashes the news from house to house, had heard of *The Moth's* danger, and had come over to help if they could, and—couldn't.

Martha looked from one to the other in surprise.

"Well, what do you think o' that!" she managed to articulate through her chattering teeth, and then could say no more.

"Come along home, Martha," urged Sam gently.

CHAPTER XII

At first it seemed as if no one was to be any the worse for the morning's adventure.

As soon as she had attended to the children, had changed her own cold, drenched garments for dry, Martha hastened over to the big house.

Tyrrell, the butler, informed her that Mrs. Ronald was resting quietly enough now, but they had been uncommonly anxious about her at the start. The shock had unnerved her. When her husband carried her in, she was crying like a baby.

"Well, you know where to find me, if, when she wakes, she seems the least bit ailin'. All you have to do is ring me up, an' I'll be over in the shake of a lamb's tail."

But when the day passed, and there was no summons, when supper was over and the children, including Cora and Ma, in bed, Martha could stand it no longer.

"I just *got* to go over, an' see for myself how the land lays," she explained to Sam. "I know it's silly, but I just *got* to."

"All right. Come along," said Sam.

Martha shook her head. "No, you don't. Somebody's needed here in case, while I'm between this an' the big house, the telephone'd ring."

Patient Sam acquiesced at once. "Have it your own way. You've earned the right to have notions, and be fidgety if you want to. But no news is good news, an' what you'll make by running over there at this hour of night, when they said they'd 'phone if anything was needed, I don't know."

"I'll sleep better if I see for myself," was all the explanation Martha could give.

It was very dark, outside, once she got beyond the light from the Lodge windows. In her haste she had forgotten to bring the lantern with her, but she did not go back for it, because she felt she knew every inch of the ground, and, moreover, the impulse that drew her forth was so strong that she could not endure the idea of delay for a moment. She had discovered a short-cut across the grounds and meant to use it, though she knew Sam disapproved any trespassing on his adored lawns, hedges, and shrubberies, and, as a general rule, she respected his wishes. But now she made straight for the thicket of bushes walling in her kitchen-garden, meaning to push through it, at the point of least resistance, strike across the roadway and so slice off a good quarter of a mile, by bisecting the lawn sweeping up to the big house. Just within the thicket she stood as if at attention. For the life of her she could not have said what brought her to a standstill, but also, for the life of her, she could not go on until she knew what was on the other side of that wall of bushes.

Listening, she could hear nothing but the common-place night-sounds, now grown familiar to her ears. The stirrings of leaves, when the wind sighed through them, the surreptitious whirr of wings aloft, up over the tree-tops, the lowly meanderings of insects among the grass, the soft pad-pad of tiny, furry feet scampering to safety. But there was still another sound, an unusual, unfamiliar sound. It came to Martha in a flash what it was. A fox, caught in one of Sam's traps.

"Oh, you poor devil, you!" she heard herself exclaim.

The words were echoed by a human groan, so close at hand, she fairly

started.

"Who are you?" Her question rang out sharply.

"None of your damned business!" came back in instant answer. "But since you're here, curse you! come, and get me out of this —— —— trap."

A light flashed, by which Martha made out a man's figure crouching on the ground the other side of the hedge. His face was completely hidden, not alone by the drooping brim of his soft hat, but by a sort of black mask he wore. Without a moment's hesitation she forced her way through the hedge. Now she could see more plainly, she made out that the man was on his hands and knees. One hand was free—the other, caught in the fox-trap, was bleeding cruelly. On the ground, within easy reach lay a pistol, a bundle of fagots, and a bull's-eye electric torch. The man's uninjured left hand was clutching the torch.

"Doncher stir a muscle, Mr. Buller," Martha said imperatively, "till I make out how this thing works. I don't want to hurt you more than I got to, unspringin' the trap."

Buller swore violently as he bade her, "Go ahead then, and be quick about it!"

A moment, and the mangled hand was free. Instantly, its owner listed over on the grass in a dead faint, in total darkness.

Martha felt about in the darkness for the torch, set it glowing and, by aid of its light, found a flask in Buller's pocket, some of the contents of which she forced between his lips. When he was fully conscious, she bade him pick up his belongings, and come along home with her, where she could look after his hand, and, if necessary, telephone for the doctor.

Clutching at her shoulder, he staggered to his feet.

"Don't forget your gun," warned Martha drily.

"Damn the gun!" returned Buller.

Somehow they reached the Lodge. Sam, hearing footsteps, came to the door with an anxious face.

"Martha," he whispered, before he had made out she was not alone, "hurry back to the big house. Mr. Ronald's just called you up this minute. His wife wants you, and—I'm going for the doctor."

Martha pushed Buller forward into the entry.

"Look after'm, Sam. He was on his way to give us a call. With his pistol an' a bunch o' kindlin's to fire the house. He heard me comin', an' lay low for a minute, an' got caught in the trap you set for—the other fox. But take care of'm," she said, and vanished into the night.

Neither Sam nor Buller spoke for a moment. Then Sam opened the sitting-room door.

"Come in," he invited the other. "Let's take a look at your hand."

The tortured Buller thrust it forward where the lamplight could fall upon it. Sam shook his head.

"That's beyond me," he explained. "But I tell you what, I'm going for Dr. Driggs, anyhow. You get in the car and come along with me. Only, I better take that black dingus off your face, hadn't I?"

Buller made a clumsy effort to detach it himself, but his left hand alone could not manage it. Sam did it for him.

"Now, as soon as I get the car," he explained, "we can start."

While he was gone Buller paced the floor like a caged animal, writhing with pain, crying, cursing. Sam was gone but a few minutes. It seemed an eternity to the poor, waiting wretch. Then away they sped through the cool, calming darkness of the night.

In the extremity of his anguish, nothing really signified to Buller, yet again and again he found himself wondering if Slawson would "split" on him. As a matter of fact, Sam never opened his lips, beyond delivering his message to the doctor from Mr. Ronald, then turning Buller over to him for immediate attention.

The old physician scowled through his spectacles when he saw the wound.

"How did you manage *this* job?" he asked in his blunt, uncompromising way.

Buller winced. "Trap. Foxes after my hens. I set a trap to catch them."

"And got caught in it yourself! Huh! That's sometimes the way. Here, swallow this down. It'll dull the pain some. Now is the time you may wish you weren't a drinking man, Buller. I'll do the best I can for you, but you've given yourself a nasty hurt, and your blood's not in a state to help the healing along much. However, we'll see what we'll see. I'll give you these extra drops to take home with you. Use them if the pain comes back. Don't meddle with my bandage, d'you hear. Leave it alone. And, let me see you in the morning. Now, Mr. Slawson—— Ready!"

Again that swift, almost silent speeding through the night.

Since Buller's torture had ceased, the motion seemed for him part of a blissful dream, by which he was being gradually lulled to deeper and deeper peace. At first he started in to babble fatuously, but Dr. Driggs brusquely bade him, "Shut up! This is no time for merrymaking!" and he dropped back into himself, subdued but not suppressed.

At the big house Sam stopped his car.

"I'll take Buller home, and come back for you," he explained to Dr. Driggs.

"Better dump him out on the road," was the harsh, whispered rejoinder. "I know him from the ground up. He lied to me about his hand. He was up to deviltry of some kind, other than trapping foxes, depend upon it! Between you and me, that's a fierce hand he's got. I don't envy him his dance with it."

In the meantime, Martha had found Claire Ronald feverish and excited. It did not take her long to decide she would not leave the big house that night. When Sam returned to take him home, Dr. Driggs was not ready to go. Neither was Martha.

"But *you'd* better turn in, Slawson," advised Mr. Ronald. "No use in everybody's getting worn out. If I should need you, I'll call you up."

Early next morning the young kitchen-maid from the big house appeared at the Lodge door for certain necessaries Martha wanted and could not be spared long enough to come, herself, and fetch.

"Eh, now! You don't say so! Things must be pretty bad over there!" observed Ma.

The girl nodded dumbly. She adored Mrs. Ronald.

"If I was you, beggin' pardon for the liberty," Martha addressed Mr. Frank, "I'd get a-holt of those doctors an' nurses from the city you have engaged. They was comin' up in two weeks, anyhow. You never can tell. This might be a false alarm, but then again it mightn't. Either way, we don't want to take no risks."

"I'll telegraph," said Francis Ronald dully.

"What's the matter with the telefoam? Ain't you got a long-distance connection here?"

While Central was clearing the wire, Katherine Crewe was ushered in. She hesitated on the library threshold, then came forward rapidly, her face more lovely than Martha had ever seen it, in its softened expression of human sympathy.

"I'm so sorry—I've just heard—I came to see if I could do something—be of any help," she stammered shyly.

Frank Ronald had risen and was about to reply, when Dr. Driggs pushed through the doorway, interrupting gruffly.

"I'm not quite satisfied with the way things are going. Nothing to be uneasy about, you know, but, under the circumstances, I'd like another man to talk the case over with."

"I've just called up the New York specialist. He and the nurses——"

"Lord! I don't mean *that*! It'll take *them* a full day to get here. We can't wait that long. I want some one *now*."

"Now?" Frank Ronald echoed, without any appearance of understanding what the word meant.

"Now," repeated Dr. Driggs. "I'd like to call in——"

Tinkled the telephone-bell with irritating insistence.

Frank Ronald's cold hand gripped the thing as if he would choke it.

"Hello! Is this New York? Is this Dr. Webster? 'Morning, Dr. Webster! This is F. B. Ronald speaking. Yes—I've called you up, because my wife—— Can you

hear me *now*? Is this better?—My wife—I'm worried about my wife. I've called in Dr. Driggs of this village. He wants more advice.... Yes, by all means come on at once, and bring the nurses. But Driggs says he can't wait. Must have some one immediately.... Eh? ... *Who*, do you say? ... Boston? Yes, I get that ... Ballard of Boston? ... There's a young fellow here from Boston named Ballard, but he ... I don't believe he's the man. Wait a minute.... Please repeat that! ... You say he's the best skill in New England? National repute? ... I'm afraid.... Hello! Dr. Webster ... Driggs, here, says *'tis* the man you mean. He says he was just trying to tell me, when ... yes ... I'm sure we can get him. Yes, we *are* in luck! ... Very well ... Burbank Junction ... midnight.... Good-by!"

Francis Ronald's words and manner were painfully precise.

Thought Martha, "I've seen parties none too steady on their pins, just that kind o' mincin' about their steps. As if they'd dare you say they couldn't walk a chalk-line. Poor fella. He's so crazed with worry he can't see straight, but he's goin' to prove anybody thinks so, is another!"

When Katherine reached home she found Madam Crewe awaiting her.

"Well, and how are things going? You had your tramp for nothing, eh? Young Sammy's account of Mrs. Ronald's danger was hocus-pocus, of course!"

"No. Dr. Driggs is very anxious. He wants a consultation. While I was there Mr. Ronald called up Dr. Webster—*Elihu* Webster, from home. He's coming up with two nurses——"

"And Mrs. Ronald is going to *wait* for him? That's obliging of her, I'm sure!"

"Dr. Driggs had asked Mr. Ronald to let him have Dr. Ballard. He had asked, before they got Dr. Webster on the wire. Then, the first name Dr. Webster suggested was Dr. Ballard's. He called him 'the best skill in New England.' Said he was of 'national repute.'"

"You mean Driggs did. Well, what then? Driggs is getting old. He sometimes muddles. He's probably got this young sprig here confused with the great one."

"No, grandmother. Dr. Webster said it. Dr. Driggs only repeated what Dr. Webster said."

During the pause following Katherine's statement, Madam Crewe sat quite still, apparently absorbed in contemplation of her two, tiny hands, lying folded and motionless in her lap. When, at length, she looked up, a curious ghost of a smile curled the corners of her mouth.

"Really I am uncommonly gratified. You see, I can't help thinking, how barely I missed the honor of being this young man's grandmother. I'd have *liked* to have a grandchild of whom I could be proud."

Katherine winced. "I'm sorry I've disappointed you," she said bitterly.

"Don't mention it. It's not the first disappointment I've had in my life. It probably won't be the last. Moreover, now that you *know,* undoubtedly you'll think better of your decision to give him up. You'll marry him, after all, in spite of the loss of me and my money. So I'll have my *eminent* grandson, whether I want him or not."

"*Grandmother!*"

"Well, won't I? It seems to me, you have quite a keen eye for the main chance. At least, that's how I've made it out, judging from your behavior. At first, you were all for marrying him, when you thought you could do it on the sly, without sacrificing your interests with me. Then, on the impulse of the moment, for Norris's benefit, maybe, you played tragedy-queen and forswore your fortune for the sake of the man you love. All of which would have been very pretty and romantic—if you had stuck to it. But, when you had had time to calculate—presto! it's your lover you repudiate, to hang on to the money. Now you're fairly certain he's got all you'll need—doctors fleece one abominably, nowadays! Come and feel your pulse, and give you a soothing-syrup, and send in a bill for ten dollars, and *that's* no placebo, I tell you! Oh, there's no doubt you'll be rich, if you marry a *doctor*—— Where was I?"

"You were running down doctors, grandmother, and I don't see how you can, when you know what those you've had have done for you. I——"

"There, there! I don't need *you* to inform me, young miss. What I was saying is, nobody would doubt, for a minute, you'll take him now. *I* don't."

"Grandmother," the girl began, with the same kind of exaggerated punctilio Martha had observed in Mr. Ronald. "Grandmother, I want to be very respectful to you. I don't want to say one word that will excite you, or make you ill. But I think you take unfair advantage of me. You taunt me, and jeer at me because you know I can't hit back, without being an unutterable coward."

Madam Crewe made a clicking sound with her tongue.

"On the whole, I think I'd like it better if you *did* hit back, providing you hit back in the right way. No temper, you understand. No rage, no rumpus and that sort of vulgarity. But real dexterous thrusting and parrying. Now, for example, you missed an opportunity a few moments ago. When I said I'd have liked to have a grandchild I could be proud of, you might have retorted, 'I'm sorry I disappoint you, grandmother, but, perhaps, if *you* had been Dr. Ballard's grandmother, his distinction might not have been so great.' That would have been a silencer, because,—it would have been true. I'm afraid you're not very clever, my dear."

"If that sort of thing—slashing people with one's tongue, is clever, I'm glad I'm stupid."

"There! That's not so bad! Try again!" applauded the old woman.

Katherine turned away, with a gesture of discouragement.

"It never occurred to me before," Madam Crewe meditated, "but what you really need is a sense of humor. You're quite without humor. You've brains enough, but you have about as much dash and sparkle as one of your husband-that-is-to-be's mustard-plasters. Only the mustard-plaster has the advantage of you in sharpness."

The girl wheeled about abruptly. "He is not my husband that-is-to-be. I have told you that before."

"But the circumstances have changed. Now you know he is distinguished—probably well-to-do——"

"It only makes another barrier. Can't you see? Can't you understand?"

"Perhaps I might, if you'd have the goodness to explain. But you must remember, I'm an old woman. It's a great many years since I had heroics."

"Perhaps you never had them," Katherine retorted. "Perhaps you never were *young*—never cared for any one with all your heart. Perhaps you never had a heart."

"Perhaps," agreed Madam Crewe. "In which case, don't appeal to it. Appeal to my imagination. That, at least, I can vouch for."

"I took your word for it, that Dr. Ballard was a young struggling doctor, poor—with, at best, no more than a problematic future—that's what you said—a problematic future."

"Well?"

"When I began to suspect he cared for me, I was glad he hadn't a lot of advantages, to emphasize my want of them. It didn't seem to me, then, so impossible, that as poor as I should be, and as dull as you've always said I am, I might marry him some day, if he loved me. I never cared a rush about that nonsense connected with his grandfather. I wouldn't have cared, if it had been true. So when you threw mud at *my* grandfather and father, I didn't suppose *he'd* care—or believe it—either. And, he didn't and—doesn't. So far, we stood about equal. I could give him as true a love as he could give me. But——"

"Oho! So that's your idea. I see your point now. You've got the kind of love that weighs and balances, have you? You won't take more than you can give! Why, young miss, let me tell you, you may think that's high-flown and noble—it's no such thing! If you want to know what it is, it's your great-grandfather's arrogance turned inside out, that's all! If you refuse to marry the man you love, because you have nothing to offer him, you're as bad as I was when I refused because my lover had nothing to offer me. There's a pride of poverty that's as detestable as the pride of riches. You talk about love! You don't know what the word means. If you did, you'd see that the real thing is beyond such mean dickering. In love *fair exchange is low snobbery*."

The girl stared silently into her grandmother's face. Two bright spots were glowing in the withered cheeks, the old woman's eyes shot forth the fire of youth.

For the second time Katherine felt that the drawbridge was down. Impulsively, she took a step forward, grasping one of the little old hands, folding it tight in both her own.

"Grandmother, I want to tell you something—I see what you mean and—I know it's true. But—but—there's something else——"

Madam Crewe did not withdraw her hand. It almost seemed to Katherine as if its clasp tightened on hers.

"What else?"

"When he—when Dr. Ballard first spoke to me about his grandfather, he said, 'But after all, the only thing that really counts is character.' He said: 'One can afford to whistle at family-trees if one's own record is clean!' He said: 'After all, what's most important, is to be straight goods one's self. If I'd lied, or was a coward or had taken what belonged to some one else, or had any other dirty rag of memory trailing after me, I'd hesitate to ask any one to share my life with me, but——'"

"Well?"

"Grandmother—*I've* the kind of dirty rag of memory, he spoke about. I'm a coward—I've lied—I've taken what belonged to some one else."

CHAPTER XIII

Madam Crewe said nothing.

She gazed into Katherine's face blankly for a moment, then gradually withdrew her eyes to fix them on a bit of sky visible through the bowed shutters of the open window.

When the silence became unendurable, "Won't you speak to me, grandmother?" the girl pleaded. "Won't you let me feel you understand?"

There was a long pause before any answer came.

"Understand? No, I don't understand. How could one understand one's own flesh and blood being, doing—what you describe? That story would be perpetually new—perpetually incomprehensible. But perhaps you're vaporing. Using big words for insignificant things. A child's trick. Tell me the truth, and be quick about it."

There was something so formidable in the tiny old woman sitting there, coldly withdrawn into herself again, controlling any show of natural emotion with a fairly uncanny skill, that Katherine quailed before her.

In as few words as possible, she sketched the story of the recovered pocket.

Madam Crewe heard her through, in silence. In silence, received the object that had, at one time, been such a determining factor in her life. Katherine could not see that she betrayed, by so much as the quiver of an eyelash, the natural interest one might be conceived as feeling in so significant a link with the past.

"Be good enough to leave me," the old woman said at last. "And don't open this subject again, unless I bid you. If I need any one I'll ring for Eunice. Don't *you* come—for the present. Oh, before you go, see that you keep a close mouth about this thing, not alone to me, but to *every one*. Understand?"

Katherine nodded dumbly. She felt like a child dismissed in disgrace, or a prisoner returned to his cell. She did not know how long she remained in her room, but when Eunice came to announce luncheon, she sent her away, merely explaining that she was not hungry. And would Eunice kindly answer if Madam Crewe should ring?

Within her, a hundred impulses of revolt urged to some act of self-deliverance. She fought them down with appeals to her own better nature, her grandmother's need of her. It was to escape from herself, as much as from her environment, that, at last, in desperation, she caught up her hat and left the house.

She had been gone several hours, and it was twilight, when a low tap sounded on Madam Crewe's door.

Without waiting for permission to come in, Dr. Ballard did so. The old woman started up, as if his presence roused her from sleep, but he could see she had been fully awake.

"You look as if you had been through the wars," she observed dryly, examining his face with her searching eyes.

He dropped heavily into the chair she indicated.

"I have," he answered.

"You've saved two souls alive? Mother and child?"

He nodded. "But the war's not over. The fight's still on. I've done all *I* can. The rest lies with——"

The old woman took him up sharply. "Don't try to talk. Touch that bell."

Then, when Eunice, responding, stood on the threshold: "Bring me the leathern case you'll find standing beside the clothes-press in my dressing-room. Yes ... that's the one. Bring it here to me! Now, go downstairs and fetch a plateful of hard biscuits. Hurry! ... Stop! ... Before you go, hand me that glass from my table."

When the girl was gone, Madam Crewe unlocked the case before her, took

from it a flask, and with surprisingly steady hands, poured a share of its contents into the glass Eunice had placed on the wide arm of her chair.

"Wine?" asked Dr. Ballard doubtfully, hesitating to drink.

"No, not wine. Drink it down. Now, the biscuits. Don't talk."

She pretended to busy herself with the leathern case upon her knees—replacing the flask, turning the key in the lock, rather elaborately fingering the smooth surface, as if all her attention was concentrated on some imaginary fleck or flaw she had just discovered.

When, watching covertly, she saw the haggard lines slowly fade from her companion's face, the blood gradually mount to his cheeks, she drew an audible breath.

"That's great stuff!" Daniel Ballard observed appreciatively. "What do you call it?"

Madam Crewe raised her eyebrows. "I don't call it. It has no name, so far as I know. It's an old stimulant my father picked up somewhere in the far East. He treasured it like gold."

"It's certainly done the trick. I was all in, and now I feel quite fit. Mrs. Slawson and I have been *on the job* since morning. She's a wonder, that woman! No end of nerve and pluck. I could make a corking good nurse of her! She's back there now, watching. Firm as Gibraltar. I couldn't stand it any longer. I had to get away for a moment, to catch a breath of fresh air, and a glimpse of——"

"Me?" Madam Crewe caught him up.

He corrected her gravely. "No, the evening star."

"Katherine came home from the Ronalds' this morning much disturbed."

"Over the case?"

"Yes—that, and—the fact of your being what she hadn't supposed."

Dr. Ballard looked his question.

"She feels overawed, now she's aware *what a great man are you.* A bit sheepish, too, I fancy, because, if I remember right, she has twitted you, more than once, on being worn out waiting for patients."

"Well, what of it? Suppose she has? I can stand chaffing, I hope. And besides, she was right. I *am* worn out waiting for patients—waiting for patients to 'do the rest' after I've, so to speak, 'pressed the button.'"

"It's hard to believe you're the Daniel Ballard of Boston there's so much fuss about. Are you sure you're the man Elihu Webster meant? The man he called a celebrated specialist—the best skill in New England—and so forth and so forth?"

"I'm the only M.D. of my name in Boston," the young man said simply. "But I don't call myself a specialist, much less and-so-forth and-so-forth!"

"What do you call yourself, then?"

"A physician."

"I wish I had married your grandfather," Madam Crewe announced.

Daniel Ballard bent his head, acknowledging what was more than mere compliment, by a silence sincerer than words.

"I must go. Where's Katherine?" he asked, after a moment.

"I don't know. Not at home, I fancy. Will you do me a favor?"

"If I can."

"Don't try to see her for a while. Leave her alone."

He had risen to go, but her words checked him.

"I can't give you any such promise," he said. "It seems a strange request for you to make."

"You don't trust me?"

"No. Not in this."

"You may."

He hesitated. "Perhaps. Still—I give no promise. I'll think it over. When I have more time, you'll explain?"

"Perhaps," she echoed.

The next minute she was alone.

However she accomplished it, Madam Crewe had her way. Katherine did not see Dr. Ballard again before he left for Boston. He left a brief note explaining that Mr. Ronald refused to release him, even after Dr. Webster arrived with his brace of nurses.

Katherine read the letter with a bitter smile. Technically, she had nothing to complain of. She had definitely said she would never marry him. He had taken her at her word—and yet, his easy acquiescence hurt her cruelly. It did not *explain* anything, that Mr. Ronald himself confessed his dependence on Dr. Ballard.

The saving of his wife and baby (a miracle, Dr. Webster called it) made Frank Ronald feel that, whoever came or went, "Ballard" and Martha Slawson could not be spared from Claire's bedside, until the danger was over, recovery absolutely certain.

It was all perfectly plausible, and yet—

Then came an urgent recall to Boston, which "the best skill in New England" felt obliged to respond to in person.

"If you didn't have a family, Mrs. Slawson," he said to Martha, the last evening, as they sat in Claire's sitting-room, gratifying Frank Ronald's whim that they remain within call,—"If you didn't have a family I'd urge you to take up nursing. You have an excellent knack for it. I could make a capital nurse of you."

Martha nodded appreciatively. "Thank you, sir. But there's so many things I'm, as you might say, billed to be made over into first, I guess I'll have to cut out the trained nurse. Besides, I might fall down on a case I was a stranger to. It's

dead easy do for anybody you love, but to go an' pick'm up off'n the roadside——! Well, that's a differnt proposition. The dirt an' the smell o' some o' them! You wouldn't believe it!"

"Do you love that scamp Buller?"

"Not on your life! That is,—not so you'd notice it."

"Yet you stood by him like a soldier, when Driggs and I took his hand off, last night. How's that?"

Martha pondered a moment. "Well, you see, sir, to tell the truth, I feel kind o' responsible for Buller. 'Twas me made'm mad in the first place, an' then, when he wanted to get back at me, 'twas our trap give'm the nip. Poor fella! You couldn't help be sorry for'm, he'll miss that strong right hand o' his so, which it used to be a reg'lar pretidigiagitator with the licka—— 'Now you see it an' now you don't effec'.'"

Dr. Ballard laughed. "His left hand's in training already. Between the whiskey and the ether, last night, I was almost anesthetized myself. But joking aside, I'm going to leave Buller in your care. I'll show you about the bandaging, so when Driggs gets through with the patient, you can take him up. I wouldn't like to trust to Mrs. Buller. She's a slipshod creature, sure to neglect. Dr. Driggs tells me, Buller dreads *him* like the mischief, so he won't go there any longer than he has to. May I trust you to keep your eye on him, follow him up, and let me know if there's any hitch in the healing?"

"Certaintly you may," said Martha.

"Another thing," Dr. Ballard paused. "I'd be glad to feel you are keeping an eye on—a—Crewesmere."

Mrs. Slawson nodded. "Certaintly, again. But you don't think—that is, you ain't in doubt about the ol' lady, are you? I'd hate to think she might have somethin' I ain't used to. I kinda got accustomed to *strokes* now, so's if she'd have any more, I'd know just how to take a-holt, but if she set about gettin' up somethin' *new*, it'd sorta rattle me, maybe. You never can tell."

"No, that's it! You never can tell. *I* can't tell."

"It ain't as if she didn't have a sympton to show you," pleaded Martha, "so's you'd be workin' in the dark. When ladies is that way, the doctors says to'mselves: 'Her color's good, an' her pulse is strong, which proves she's far from a well woman. While I'm waitin' for somethin' to happen, I'll remove her appendicitis.' Folks has such funny furbelows inside'm nowadays, I don't wonder the doctors is puzzled. What's the use o' adenoids now, an' appendicitises, I should like to know, if it's only to go to the trouble an' expense of havin' 'm cut out?"

"Quite so," acquiesced Dr. Ballard gravely. "No, I'm not anxious about Madam Crewe's appendix. I'm anxious about her—granddaughter."

"Oh!" said Martha. "It's *her* you want to remove."

Dr. Ballard flushed. "Yes, Mrs. Slawson. That is—I wish to marry Miss Crewe. You already know of Madam's opposition. I don't mind that—any more. But something has happened—I don't know what—to change Miss Crewe, herself. I would never ask her to desert her grandmother. In fact, I would not respect her if she did desert her, leave her alone in her infirmity and old age. But I don't want her mind to be embittered. She is not happy. I wish you'd look after her—lend her a helping hand, once in a while. Lend her a helping *heart*."

"I'll do my best," promised Martha solemnly.

"I've grown attached to this place. I'd like to hear about—everybody, once in a while. I'd like, so to speak, to keep my finger on the pulse of the public."

Martha looked up perplexed. "The pulse o' the public? I don't know as I exackly *get* what you mean. But, if you want to feel the pulse o' the public, why—*you're* the doctor! Anyhow, I'll let you know how things is goin', if you'll excuse the liberty, and won't mind my spellin', which Sam says it's fierce."

"I'll deeply appreciate any line you may take the trouble to write me," Dr. Ballard assured her, with hearty sincerity.

It was September before Mrs. Slawson was actually settled at home again. The nurses, over at the big house, were altogether capable and trustworthy, but even after all need of her had passed, Mr. Ronald liked to feel Martha was within call. He fancied his wife felt more content when she was by, and, certainly, the baby slept better on her ample bosom than anywhere else.

It was a tiny creature, very delicate and fragile, a mere scrap of humanity that Martha could hold in the hollow of her hand.

In the privacy of their own sitting-room, the two trained nurses confided to Mrs. Slawson: "It's too bad the parents' hearts are so set on the child. They'll never raise it, *never*!"

"Now, what do you think o' that!" Martha said mournfully, and the two uniformed ones never knew that, in her heart, she despised them, "and their mizrable Bildadin' talk, which nobody could stand up against it, anyhow, much less a innocent little lamb that hasn't the stren'th to call'm liars to their faces."

"O' *course* we'll raise her," she assured Mr. Ronald confidently. "There's no doubt about it. Yes, I know she ain't very hefty, an' she ain't very robustic. But what do you expec'? You ain't give her a fair show yet. You can't take a baby, a few weeks old, 'specially if it had the tough time gettin' in on the game at all, that this one had, an' expec' her to be as big an' husky as my Sabina. It wouldn't be sensible. Besides, look at her mother! Miss Claire's no giantess, nor ever was, but she's as sound as a nut, an' so'll the baby be, when she gets her gait on, an'

knows it's up to her to keep in step with the percession. Don't you let nobody discourage you. Believin's half the battle. You can take it from me, that baby's goin' to live, an' thrive, like the little thorabred she is. *She* wouldn't give us all this trouble for nothin'."

Her invincible confidence was like a tonic to Francis Ronald. It reinforced his own more flickering faith, so he could meet Claire's hungrily questioning eyes with reassurance.

And, as the weeks went by, Martha's prediction seemed less and less preposterous.

"Didn't I *tell* you?" she exulted. "That baby's a winner! She's goin' to be standard weight, all right, all right, an' measure up to requirements too, give her time. But between you an' me, all this new-fangled business with scales, an' tape-measures, an' suchlike, is enough to discourage the best-intentioned infant. There's more notions, nowadays, than you can shake a stick at—an' I'd like to shake a stick at most of'm, believe *me*!"

At the time, she was thinking rather more of Miss Crewe, than of the nurses, whose "queer fandangoes" she never could become reconciled to.

She was frankly anxious about Katherine.

"If I could do with her, like I do with Buller, I wouldn't say a word," she ruminated. "I just keep a kinda gener'l line on him, an' when the time comes, I get a-holt of his collar-band, an' march'm up to the captain's office, as brave as a lion. He's got so the minute I tip'm the wink, he comes for his washin' an' ironin'—I should say, bandidgin', as meek as a lamb to the slaughterhouse. But you can take it from me, there's no gettin' a line on Miss Katherine. She's devotin' all her time an' attention to puttin' off flesh an' color. The trouble is, she's got nothin' to do, an' she does it so thora, she ain't got time for anything else. Dear me! I wisht I could sort o' set her an' Buller at each other. It might help'm both to forget their losses. He certaintly is a queer dick, an' no mistake!"

"In spite o' his sportin' a G.A.R. one, you can take it from *me*, Buller ain't got all his buttons!" she told Miss Katherine. "Do you know what he says? He says everybody's gone back on'm because he's in trouble. He says, nobody'll look at'm now he's mangled. They was his friends before, when he had all the limbs was comin' to'm, but—now he's shy a hand—they're too proud to notice'm. He says the world's a hard place for cripples."

A faint smile flitted across Katherine's face

"What a perverted point of view," she said, for the sake of saying something.

"Do you know what I think?" Mrs. Slawson continued. "I think now is the zoological moment to catch Buller, an' see what kind o' animal he is—*if* he's got the makin' of a man in'm. If he could be got to give up the drink, I do believe he might amount to somethin' yet. You can't know what a fella reely is, when he's

always steepin' in licka. It's like pickles. You wouldn't know if they're dill, or sweet or what they are, till you take'm out o' soak an' test'm."

"I should think *you* might influence him," suggested Miss Crewe impersonally. "You're so strong and wholesome and steady."

"Land, no! Buller wouldn't listen to me," said Martha. "How would *I* be reformin' anybody, when so many is reformin' me?"

"Mrs. Peckett, then?"

"Mrs. Peckett's way o' doin' things makes some folks nervous. It's like as if she said: 'I'm goin' to raise the tone o' this town, if I have to raise it by the scruff of its neck!' She's a good woman, Mrs. Peckett is, more power to her! Yes, she's as good as old gold, and—just as dull."

Katherine was amused. "Does Mr. Buller require people to be so very brilliant, then?"

"Land, no! *He* don't. But his *case* does. There's a differnce. The fella that gets the whip-hand of'm is the fella he's goin' to respec'. No others need apply. If there was anybody in this town could kinda give'm the fright of his life on the licka question, it'd be dead easy tame him to'm afterwords."

Miss Crewe's face lost its apathetic expression. A light of interest shone in her eyes.

"I wonder if an idea that has just occurred to me would be of any use? Last winter I attended a course of lectures at Columbia College, and one of the lectures was illustrated by lantern-slides, showing the effect of alcohol on the body and mind of habitual drunkards. They were enough to give one the horrors! If Buller could see those pictures——!"

Mrs. Slawson brought her hands down upon her knees with a sounding slap. "There, didn't I know you'd strike on just the right idea, quicker'n, sure'n anybody else? An' you've done it!"

"But it would cost a lot of money to get that lecturer here. We might not be able to get him at all, even if we could raise the money to pay——"

"Raise nothin'—beggin' your pardon!" Martha exclaimed. "Mr. Frank Ronald is always doin' things for everybody. Why couldn't you go to him, an' tell'm what you've just told me—that you're interested in savin' Buller's soul from destruction, not to speak o' the rest of'm, an' that you know a gen'lman down to Columbia with slidin' pictures, can do it, if he got the price of his ticket, an' somethin' to boot? I betcher Mr. Frank'd have'm up in no time, an' thank you for givin'm the chance."

Katherine shrank back. "Oh, no! I'd never dare," she said. "Mr. Ronald is dreadfully unapproachable, I think. His eyes are so stern, and he is so silent. He doesn't help you out at all—just seems always to be looking you through and through, and finding you very inferior."

"Have you see'm smile?"

"No."

"Well, you go down there, an' get'm to smile for you oncet. An' if you don't swear by'm ever after, my name ain't Martha Slawson. You can take it from me, Mr. Frank is true blue, like his eyes are. D'you think, if he wasn't, Miss Claire'd ever have married'm? Not on your life! She took'm for first choice, when she'd the refusal o' the pick o' the land, an' I know what I'm talkin' about."

By the time Martha was ready to go, Miss Crewe had decided that she really must see Mr. Ronald, and find if it were possible to interest him in her village-improvement plan.

If Mrs. Slawson would take her down to the big house, she could easily walk back before dinner-time, she said.

"Say, you make a chance, an' ask about Mrs. Ronald an' the baby. You'll get'm quickest, that way. An' even if you ain't used to infants, it won't be no lie to show you're dead stuck on this one, for she's a beauty on a small scale, an' no mistake," Martha dropped as they drove along.

Before Katherine was really aware, she found herself being escorted up-stairs to his wife's sitting-room by Francis Ronald himself.

Burning logs were glowing on the open hearth, the place was warm and bright, and fragrant with hothouse blooms. Claire Ronald, looking like a delicate flower, of a very human variety, rose from her low chair before the fire, to greet her guest, and from that moment Katherine's constraint was gone.

She told of her plan, and the Ronalds were interested from the first.

"I think it's a capital idea, don't you, Frank?" Claire cried, in her quick, impulsive way.

"There is something in it, no doubt," he admitted cautiously, smiling down at her with very different eyes from those Katherine had dreaded. "But I don't think much could be accomplished by one lecture. If these people are to get anything, they've got to get it in good doses, 'repeat when necessary.' You can't be sure you've made your point, until you've hammered it in, given it what the journalists call 'a punch.' This can only be done by repetition, emphasis. But a *course* of lectures—with lantern-slides—a course extending through the winter—that would be a great scheme, I think."

Katherine's face fell. "We could never hope to have a *course*," she mourned.

"Why not?"

"The expense. Think what the cost would be!"

"It would be cheaper, in proportion, than one."

"In proportion, yes. But I doubt if we could raise the money for one, much less the course."

Mr. Ronald's eyes scanned her quizzically. "You should drill under Martha

Slawson," he said with a touch of seriousness in his lighter manner. "She would never recognize the obstacle. She leaps it, or she mounts it, or she kicks it out of her way—but she never *admits* it,—and the consequence is,—it isn't there. Now, suppose you were not required to raise the price of the course. Suppose the price were guaranteed? Would you guarantee to raise the audience? Get enough people to pledge themselves to attend, so the lecturer would come up with the fair assurance that he'd face something beside empty benches?"

"I could try."

"How would you go about it?"

"There's a man named Buller——"

"Yes, I know him. A bad lot! Got his hand chewed up in a fox-trap, while he was on his way to my Lodge, to fire it, for the purpose of revenging himself on my superintendent's wife, Martha Slawson. Dr. Driggs told me about it. Gangrene set in, and the fellow'd have lost his arm, if not his life, if Dr. Ballard hadn't operated as promptly and skilfully as he did. Yes, I know Buller."

Katherine, considerably dashed, took up her theme again, notwithstanding.

"He's very ignorant, very debased, of course. Yet, I think, as Mrs. Slawson does, that he could be helped. He's very low in his mind just now, because he thinks his neighbors shun him on account of his accident."

For the first time she heard the hearty ring of Frank Ronald's laugh.

"Well, and this poor, abused soul is to aid you?—How?"

"He owns a horse and buckboard. It occurred to me he might be willing to help us, to the extent of taking me about from house to house, when I go to canvass. Incidentally, if the people see he's engaged in work we are interested in, it may re-establish him with them—with himself. He's lost all self-respect, all self-reliance. Mightn't it help him to get them back, if he felt he were concerned in some worthy enterprise, connected with reputable people?"

"It might."

The early autumn twilight had fallen before what Martha Slawson would have called their *conflab* ended.

While Mr. Ronald was giving orders for the motor to be brought around, his little wife displayed the wonderful baby, and Katherine, holding the tiny soft creature to her cheek, suddenly felt her heart melt toward that other tiny creature, not so soft, but almost as helpless, who was sitting solitary and alone in the chill

and dreariness of what she called, by courtesy, *home*.

CHAPTER XIV

Martha found an almost disorganized household when she got home.

"Say, this is never goin' to do in the world!" she exclaimed in astonishment. "I got to pull you all up with a round turn. The whole raft of you, from Ma down, needs a good whackin' into shape. Say, Ma, what you sittin' there whimperin' for? You look as if you'd lost your last enemy, an' had nobody left to take any comfort out of. I wouldn't put it before you to be yearnin' for the gayety o' little old New York again. That so?"

Ma drew in her lips plaintively. "No, it ain't so. I'm contented here, enough, only—— 'Tis not the same place at all when you're not in it. Never a one o' them to think o' drawin' me a cuppertee, nor set a match to the fire, when the wind is blowin' that chill, it's enough to rattle the teeth in your jaws. When I feel cold, I feel—*poor*!"

She began to cry.

"Now, Ma, you stop that, double-quick, or, you may take it from me, I'll give you something to cry *for*. I'm as cross as your grandmother's worsted-work. I could bite the head off a tenpenny nail. Keep out o' my way, everybody, till I get my house lookin' like a house again, an' my fam'ly in order, so's they'll have the appearance o' civilized human bein's, no matter what they reely are. Cora, you set the kettle on, while Sammy an' me goes down cellar to start a little fire in the furnace, to take the chill out o' the air an' the grouch out o' Ma. Francie, while you're restin' run down to the store an' get me a pound o' tea—I see there ain't a leaf left in the caddy. You can take Sabina along for comp'ny, only don't forget to bring her back. We might need her for somethin' sometime. You never can tell. For goodness' sake! Is that rack-a-bones Flicker Slawson? Well, what do you think o' that! I bet there ain't been one o' you ever thought to give'm, or Nix either, a sup or a bite, since I been gone! Such a measly-appearin' dog an' cat, *I* never see. I'm ashamed to look'm in the face."

As she talked, Martha passed from room to room, tidying up, straightening out, getting the household wheels back into their accustomed grooves and, all the while, unconsciously transforming the atmosphere of the place, and the persons in it, until they reflected her own wholesome, vital air of well-being, well-doing.

Ma, drinking her *cuppertee* from the saucer, reveled in the genial warmth her daughter-in-law had caused to come up out of the cold, dark, nether regions into which she, herself, never descended, and felt a sense of virtuous satisfaction in her own personal benevolence, as she rehearsed all the gossip she had been able to cull from without or within, since her son Sammy's wife had been gone. Ma did not call it gossip, she called it news.

"'Twas Mrs. Peckett was in an' out, as usual, an' told me what was goin' on, or I'd never have known no more than if we'd been livin' in the Sarah desert, itself. 'Twas her told me what a bloody rascal is Buller that he'd be after comin' here, in the dead o' night wit' his fagots, to burn us alive in our beds, to say nothin' o' the gun he was for shootin' us wit', into the bargain. An' you to be standin' by, an' holdin' his hand, when 'twas cut off on account of the gangerine! Mrs. Peckett says every one in the place is callin' you a good Sam Maritan."

"'In me eye,' says Biddy Martin," Martha sang out sceptically.

"Mrs. Peckett was sayin' 'twas the wife's dooty stand by her own man, an' not another woman's at all. Mrs. Peckett was after sayin' God knows she's as quick to do a kindness, as the next one, but the evil tongues some folks do be havin' nowadays, would make you look out for your repu*ta*tion."

"Say, Ma," said Martha, "did you ever notice how some people'll try to keep their own place clean by shakin' their dirty rags on other people's heads? *They* don't care where the smut lands, so long's they've shook it off'n their own skirts. The trouble is, they sometimes get come up with. They don't watch which way the wind's blowin', so they get all their own dirt, an' then some, blown back on'm, which they'd better never have stirred it up, in the first place."

Without in the least understanding her daughter-in-law's drift, Ma felt it desirable to change the subject. Did Martha know that the Fred Trenholms had "leegially" adopted the three Fresh Air children they had had with them all this summer and last?

"An' they do be as proud, as proud! The way you'd think they'd a fortune left them, instead of a ready-made fam'ly to eat'm out o' house an' home, itself."

"The Trenholms are *bricks*!"

Ma coughed nervously, then tried again.

"That old bachelor brother o' Mrs. Coleses, the one's been so long sick-a-bed wit' the doctor, he's been took down wit' the meazles."

Martha proceeded with her work.

"Well, that's the way it goes! When a fella's been cryin' wolf for years an' years, the chances are he'll attrac' some kinda thing his way, if it's only a meazly little skunk, which is more embarrassin' than dangerous. Meazles is a kinda come-down, for a party Hiram Parkinson's age an' ambitions. He's been walkin' around with, as you might say, one foot in the gravey,—poor soul! I bet it

makes'm sore to feel he's with both feet in the soup. Meazles! I guess I'll send'm a glass or two o' my slip-go-down jelly to cool his throat."

"I guess he didn't be expectin' *that*, whatever it was he did be expectin'," Ma dropped complacently.

"Well, you gener'ly get *sump'n*, if you expect it long enough. That's why it's up to us to be sure we like our order before it goes in, for in the end we'll have to chew it, anyhow."

Martha drew her chair to the center-table, seated herself, and taking paper, pen and a bottle of ink from the drawer, prepared to write.

"Goin' to write, Martha?" queried Ma, peering over at her curiously.

"Looks like it, don't it?"

"A letter?"

"Maybe, or else my last will an' prayer-book, as they say."

"I wonder——"

"I guess if you're goin' to wonder out loud, Ma, you'll have to do it later. I got to get this job off'n my hands right now, an' between you an' me an' the lamp-post, I ain't so flip with my pen an' ink, I can do much of anythin' fancy, *while you wait.* I got to take my time at it. It's the hardest stunt I know of. Firstoff, you got to have somethin' to write about, an' then, before you're fairly ready to put it down—what with delays, owin' to spellin', blots an' so forth—it's got away from you, an' you have to think up somethin' else in its place. While you're doin' that the next idea gets away, so you're left, whatever way you look at it. Now, 'silence in the court-house,' as Sammy says."

Ma would have given all she was worth to discover what it was that, for the next couple of hours or so, Martha was so painfully employed upon. She did her best to find out, but though she craned her neck, ducked her head, peeked and peered, it was no use. A substantial elbow curved around the paper, effectually shielding it from inquisitive eyes.

Dere doct. Ballad you will be supprised to here I am home again but that is wear I am for Miss Clare is well enough now to spair me and the baby is doing fine in spite of the nurses witch says she will live now witch I thank them kindly wen her two cheeks is getting as pink as roses and round besides so a blind man could see it and never a cry out of her the hole day long the lamb or night either except wen neccery. Mr. F. Ronald would not call the quean his cousin him and miss Kathrine is bizzy getting a party from the city to come and give a corse of leckchers to show the natives off of lantren slides what there bodies maid out of and how there jerms looks wen you see them on a sheet verry much unlarged. miss katrine hopes seeing what the licker does to his jerms will scair Buller off

the drink annyhow he ain't drunk much as ushal becaus he has bin driving her round in his backboard witch he is verry proud of besides he has not the time wen he is doing it. Wile i bean away Hireram parkinsin got meezils if this dont intrust you madam Crew is verry well but her and Miss Kathrin is still on the outs why i do not no Miss Kathrine was getting verry thin and wite when you left she got going to Mr. F. Ronaldses now she looks better do not think that is becaus ennything accepting the corse of leckchers. MEN is necherly jellys pardon the libberty but believe me miss Kathrin is trew blew like if she got found of any party once would not change to get found of any other party no matter how plutonic as a gent leman i once lived out with his wife Mr. Grandvil lately maid to a judg told me witch I just looked it up in the dickshunnery for the speling and it ain't what he told me it was a tall but relating to regions of fire insted of cool like you feel for your relations. Buller is heeling alrite so I no he is clean I told him his hole arm would go if he did not let up on the drink i will let you no if he lets up I will let you no if Madam crew and Miss Kathreen lets up all so enny more i think will intrust you I know what was in your hart wen you asked me so will rite as orphan as I can and no other soul will knew you can count on me. Love to all Yours

trewly Martha Slawson.

The writing of the letter in itself might not have excited any undue suspicion in Ma. Once in a long time Martha did actually "sit down to take her pen in hand" to write to one of the relations, though usually it was Cora who was offered up on the altar of family concord. But to-day "me son Sammy's wife's" conduct was exceptional. She wrote and rewrote, erased, tore up, until, Ma cogitated, "It's fairly a caution, an' out of all sensibleness, the way she does be destroyin' perfectly good paper."

Also,

"It'd surely be a stranger she'd be after wastin' all that time an' ink on, for not one of her own at all would ever be for gettin' the like of it." The next logical step in the shrewd deduction was—"Who is the stranger?"

Ma watched the little Mont Blanc at Martha's elbow grow, until finally it coasted, like a tiny avalanche to the floor. She watched her daughter-in-law stoop, abstractedly gather up the fragments and stuff them into her apron pocket.

When the great task was done, she saw the mysterious letter, artfully resisting, obliged at last to yield to main force, and go into its envelope whether it would or no. Saw it sealed, saw it stamped, saw it directed, saw it triumphantly carried, by Martha's own hand, to the R.F.D. mail-box, though Ma insisted "one

of the childern could go just as good, an' save you the steps, itself."

When Martha returned from her errand she found Mrs. Peckett in possession of Sam's chair by the table.

"And how's Mrs. Slawson after all her troubles? It's good to see you home again," the caller greeted her before she had fairly crossed the doorsill.

"Fine!" returned Martha, "only, I ain't had any troubles."

"That's what Martha always says," Ma observed half-complainingly, "Martha always says she wouldn't be for callin' what-she's-come-up-wit' *trouble*. She says, if you don't notice it, 'twill pass you by the quicker, but if you clap a name to it, 'twill come in an' live wit' chu, till you'd never get rid of it at all, like yourself this minute."

For a moment Martha felt as if she had taken a sudden dive in a clumsily-run elevator. Through the "sinkin' at the stummick" that followed, she saw Mrs. Peckett flush, bridle, and brace, as if making ready for fight. She flung herself into the breach, laughed, winked confidentially over Ma's head to their neighbor, and said calmly:

"Mrs. Peckett an' me'll have to grow your age, Ma, an' be the mother o' married sons, before we reely know what trouble is, won't we, Mrs. Peckett?"

Mrs. Peckett nodded.

"Though I will say, I never put much stock in all the talk that's going the rounds about mother-in-laws' suffering at the hands of the parties their sons married. Whenever I hear that kind of talk, I always point to Mr. P.'s mother who lived with us a year and a half after we went to housekeeping. The store she set by me! She was so afraid I'd do too much, or be worried, or the like of that, that, at the last, when she couldn't say much of anything, for the weakness, she'd tell the nurse, 'Don't let Beulah in!' When the nurse told me about it, after Mother Peckett was gone I was so affected I 'most cried. I said to the nurse, 'Did you ever!' and the nurse said to me, 'We reap what we sow!' Just like that—'We reap what we sow!' I wager she's told the story to many a family she's been out nursing since. Though, of course, one case don't prove the rule. But even if I am exceptional, I believe there's lots of daughter-in-laws better than they give them credit for being."

"Oh, I ain't *complainin'*," Ma maintained. "Martha, here, duz fairly well, an' I'll say this much for her, she's turned out better than I expected."

Martha bowed profoundly. "'Thank you, thank you, sir,' she sayed. 'Your kindness I never shall forget!'"

"Me son Sammy was me youngest, an' 'twas hard on me, part wit' him, to be married. All the time he was courtin' Martha, I was prayin' she'd turn'm down, or somethin'd happen to come between'm, the way they'd never go to the altar when the time come. I wanted Martha for to be takin' another fella was

sparkin' her along wit' Sammy, but she didn't. She tuk Sammy, like as if it was to spite me. It fairly broke me heart."

"Oho! So you had your love-affairs, like the rest of us, Mrs. Slawson. Do tell! Is the heart-broken lover still hanging on, or——"

"Heart-broken nothin'!" ejaculated Martha scornfully. "Gilroy's as chipper as a squirrel, an' don't you forget it!"

Ma wagged a sagacious head. "But he never married, Martha. You know that, as good as me. An' it's not for the lack of chances, itself. There's many a girl would give her eye-teeth for'm, wit' the riches he has, an' dressin' like a dood, the day."

Mrs. Peckett sighed. "Well, well, and I thought you to be such a sober, steady-going woman, Mrs. Slawson! But it seems *you've* had your romance, too! It's a surprise, but—live and learn! Live and learn!"

"That's just it!" Martha returned. "We don't. We live, but we don't learn, more's the pity. Have a cup o' tea. Ma relishes it, along about this time in the afternoon, an' it won't be a mite o' trouble. An' you must sample some cookies I made this mornin'. I'm quite stuck on my own cookies, if I do say it, as shouldn't."

After her guest had eaten, drunk, and departed, Martha observed with more than usual gravity,

"Say, Ma, you never want to mention anythin' to Mrs. Peckett you wouldn't just as lief was posted on a board-fence."

"Why, what call have you to say that to me, I should like to know, Martha Carrol?"

"Nothin' much, only—I kind, o' wish she hadn't got wind o' Gilroy."

"I do declare!" whimpered Ma, "Did you ever hear the like? If I so much as open me lips, I'm rebuked for't, the way I'd bring confusion on the fam'ly. Better for me, if I kep' to me own room entirely, an' never set foot here at all, to be accused o' settin' the neighbors gossipin' when 'twas never me, in the first place, but yourself alone, mentioned Gilroy's name."

Martha shrugged. "Come on, now, Ma, cheer up! I didn't mean to hurt your feelin's. It's just I nacherly distrust Mrs. Peckett. I used to think she was good, firstoff. But she's as shifty as dust! I wouldn't put it before her to take anything she got a-holt of—the innocentest thing, an' twist it into what'd scandalize your name, so you'd never get rid of the smutch of it, however you'd try. The worst things ever I heard of the folks in this place, Mrs. Peckett told me. It's took me over a year to find out most of'm's just mischeevious tattle. You can lock up against a thief, but you can't pertec' yourself from a liar."

Ma made no response, beyond blinking very fast for a second or so, but that was enough for Martha. Recognizing it as the sign of a coming deluge, she hastily changed the subject.

"What do you hear from the folks down home, these days?" she asked affably.

"No more than yourself. Sam got a letter from one o' them (Andy, I'm thinkin') this mornin'. Didn't he be after readin' it to youse before he went out?"

"No, he did not."

"I thought surely he would be tellin' you, that are his wife, even if he kep' his old mother in ignorance. That's the way it is wit' childern, these times."

"For the love o' Mike!" Martha murmured beneath her breath.

When Sam came in, shortly after, had silently eaten his supper, and was preparing to settle down for a bout with *The New England Farmer*, she proceeded to take him to task on his mother's behalf.

"Ma feels kind o' sore because you didn't show her the letter you got this mornin' from Andy."

Sam pulled off his shoes with a jerk. "How'd she know I got a letter from Andy?"

"I d'know. But you did, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, why didn't you read it to her? She's gettin' old, an' the older she gets, the crankier she gets. I guess it's up to us to humor her, for, one thing's certain, she won't humor *us*, an' there might as well be some fun in the house for some one."

Sam caught his lower lip between his teeth and held it there for a moment.

"There was nothing in Andy's letter would interest her. That is, there was no family news, or anything. 'Twas a business letter."

Martha proceeded with her work, dropping her questioning at once.

"Well, an' why wouldn't I be interested in me own son Andy's venturin', no matter if it *is* business, itself?" insisted the old woman querulously, when Martha repeated what Sam had said. "If that same Andy does be makin' a fortune, surely his own mother should be hearin' tell of it, first; leastwise, so she should in any God-fearin' fam'ly. But it's more like a heathen I'm treated now, than a Christian woman, that's raised a big crop o' childern till they'd be able fend for themselves. Andy is likeliest of the lot, an' now, when he's made his fortune, an' would be writin' his brother of his luck, his own mother would be told, 'It's only business!' the way she'll not take a natural joy in his triumphin', or, maybe, look to'm for a stray dollar, itself."

To all of which Martha made no reply.

But later, when Ma and the children were abed and asleep, she looked up from her mending to find Sam's eyes fixed on her in a stare of grim desperation.

"For a fella whose brother has just made his everlastin' fortune, you're the mournfullest party I ever struck," she quietly observed. "You're as glum-lookin'

as one o' them ball-bearer undertakers at a funer'l. Cheer up! It ain't your funer'l! An' if *you* ain't made the fortune, your brother has, so it's all in the fam'ly, anyhow."

"What do you mean?" Sam asked.

"Why, Ma says Andy's letter was to tell you he's made a fortune."

Sam groaned.

"Well, hasn't he?"

"No."

"What was his letter about, then? He ain't after money, to borrow it off'n you, is he?"

Sam shook his head.

"Because, if Andy wants to try any of his get-rich-quick games on us, he better guess again. He's got to take his chances with all the other fancy dancers, that's all there is to it. It's a poor pie won't grease its own tin."

"He don't want to borrow, Martha. He——"

"Well——?"

Sam swallowed hard, laid *The New England Farmer* on the table, and drew himself in his chair a step nearer his wife.

"When I was down in New York, Andy was fairly beset with the idea of going into a scheme with a man he knew, who'd offered him a chance, if he could raise the cash, or as-good-as. Andy could talk of nothing else. The same with Nora-Andy. They told me all about it, and I'm bound to say it did sound good to me. But I'd no money to give or lend, and I told them so. Ma'd been blabbing about our having a bit saved, and Nora-Andy reproached me with withholding it from my own brother, when it was only a loan he needed, with good interest for the one loaned it, to take the chance of a lifetime. I told them the money wasn't mine, but yours and the children's. You'd saved it, not I. And then Andy said, he'd never lay hand on it, if it was the last penny he'd ever hope to see. 'Twas not money he wanted of me at all, and he brought out a paper, that, if I would set my name to it, would help him out, as fine as money, and nobody hurt by the transaction a hair."

Martha dropped her sewing to her lap.

"You never signed it, Sam?" she entreated. "Of course, you never signed it. You know better'n me that it's wrong to set your name to any tool—(ol' lady Crewe's l'yer's very words)—wrong to set your name to any tool——"

"Instrument," suggested Sam drearily.

"Well, instrument, then. It's wrong to set your name to any instrument unless you know what you're up against."

"I know it," confessed Sam humbly.

"Well?" Martha plied him.

"I did it, mother. And now, the note's come due, and Andy can't meet it, and——"

"Well, what do you think o' that!" sighed Martha.

Sam had been leaning forward on his elbows, his palms propping his chin. Now his face dropped into his hands, as he hid his haggard eyes from her clear, searching ones.

"How much, Sam?"

"All we got. The whole two-hundred-and-fifty."

For a moment Martha was dumb. Then, straightening back in her chair, taking up her sewing again, she said, "Well, at least we *got* it. There's that to be thankful for. An' doncher break your heart, Sam, worryin' about your bein' such a fool as sign that tool—I should say instrument. I done the same thing myself, now I come to think of it. The pot can't call the kettle black. I set my name to a paper, ol' lady Crewe ast me to, an' God only knows how much I'll be stung for it, for *I* don't.—But wouldn't it kinda discourage you from puttin' by for a rainy day, when the money you scrimped an' scringed to save, has to go for a umbrella to keep some other fella dry, which all *you* get, is the drippin's—*right in the neck*!"

CHAPTER XV

After many days of serious pondering Martha decided that the only way to relieve her mind was to "march straight up to the captain's office," and ask Madam Crewe point-blank, precisely what the liabilities would be, in the event of the paper she had signed, falling due, and failing to be met by the old lady herself.

"But if she said 'twas her *will*?" argued Sam. "You're all right if it was her will. You couldn't lose out on that, you know. Unless you were the kind that'd be looking for yourself. And, of course, if you sign one as witness, you're sure you can't be left anything in it."

"I don't want to be left anything in it. But, by the same token, I don't want to be *left* other ways, either. That's to say, I wouldn't want to have to cough up a couple o' hunderd now, *just to oblige*. Especially when I ain't got'm. Besides, it wasn't *her* told me 'twas a will. 'Twas the l'yer—which is quite another pair o' shoes. Anyhow, I'm goin' up there to find out what I'm libel for in case she can't pay, like Andy."

Sam saw there was nothing to do but stand aside and let her go.

The moment she entered the room, Martha realized that a change had taken place in "ol' lady Crewe." It was not anything she could "put her finger on," as she would have expressed it, but it was there unmistakably, to be felt, to be—feared.

At the sound of her step upon the floor, the little Madam looked up quickly. A faint smile curled the corners of her mouth for a second, then vanished.

"Well, and what's brought you here, after all these weeks? I thought you had fallen into the well."

"I been stayin' with Miss Claire, I should say, Mrs. Ronald. An' since a week or ten days, when I went home, I been so took up with my house an' the fam'ly in gener'l, I ain't had a chance," Martha explained eagerly.

"Never mind apologizing. What's been the trouble with 'the house and the family in general'?"

"They got kind o' loose-jointed while I was away, so's I had to lick'm into shape again,—bring'm up to time. An' it kep' me hoppin'."

"You have *hopped* to some purpose, I hear. You and Dr. Ballard have been making a record for yourselves."

"Me?" repeated Martha, amazed. "I ain't done nothin'. But pshaw! I forgot! You're just tryin' to take a rise out o' me, as ushal."

"A *what?*"

"A rise. You know what I mean, ma'am. Tryin' to take my measure. That's what you're mostly up to—only folks ain't on to you."

Madam Crewe regarded her fixedly for a moment.

"Do you know, Slawson," she pronounced thoughtfully at length, "I've an idea I'd quite enjoy some of the things you say—*if you spoke English.* The trouble is, I don't understand your patois."

Martha smiled blandly. "Askin' your pardon, for the liberty, I often thought the same thing o' you. I don't understand *your* what-you-may-call-it, either. Nor most of us don't understand each other's, an' that's what's the trouble with us, I guess. I sometimes wonder how we get along as good as we do, with the gibberish we talk, makin' hash o' what we mean, an' sometimes, not meanin' anythin'."

"Right."

"An' the funny part is, the parties we're most likely to slip up on is them we love the most."

"Go on."

"I was thinkin' how, when my girl Cora was a baby in my arms, I had the best holt o' her I'll ever have, prob'ly. Her an' me understood each other then. But now, every oncet in a while, I might as good be a Dutchman, an' her a Figi Injun for all we make o' each other. I try to hold in my horses, an' hang on to all the patience I got at them times, an' I guess she does the same, an' somehow, we manage to rub along, but you may take it from me it's some of a scratch! The

same with the other childern, as they grow up. Even down to Sabina, who, young as she is, has a mind o' her own an' sever'l other parties to boot."

"And in the meantime, you and your husband are going without common comforts, necessities—for those very children, who would turn about and rend you at the first opportunity."

Martha laughed. "Not on your life they wouldn't rent us—or *sell* us either, when it come to the test. If we go without things, to give *them* a better start, we're not foolin' ourselves on it, believe *me*! We're makin' a A1 investment. We don't grumble at the taxes, or the 'sessments or all the rest o' the accidental expenses—so long as we know they're good. It's when you'd feel you got a bad bargain on your hands, like it'd be poor drainage, or hard as rocks, or leakin' and shifty—it'd be *then* you'd hold back, sendin' good money after bad. An' then you'd be wrong. For you can take it from me, there's no child so bad it ain't worth savin'. You read about'm in the papers, how they steal an' lie an' so forth, an' when all's said an' done, it's like pictures you'd get of yourself—they ain't as good as you are, bad as you are. No, you can't spoil a good child, an' you can help a bad one. So small credit to us, Sam an' I, if we do save. It's for the sake of our own, which, after all, we know the stuff they're made of. Same as you and Miss Katherine."

Madam Crewe was silent.

"No, it's not puttin' money in the childern, makes me sore," Martha continued, "it's when we scraped an' screwed a few dollars together for a nest-egg, an' then, in the turn o' a hand, it's gone—to pay for somethin' we never owed, nor no one got any good out of, but the wrong fella."

"You mean you've been doing something foolish? Speculating? Losing money?" demanded Madam Crewe abruptly.

"My husban' signed a paper for his brother, an' it let'm in for all we had put by. I was wonderin' if the paper I signed here early in the summer, I was wonderin' if *that* had a sting in it, too? An' if so, how much?"

"I don't understand."

"I mean, the paper I signed here the time Eunice Youngs an' me both set our names to it together."

"That paper was my will, woman. It had nothing to do with you."

"That's what Sam told me, but—I——"

"You could not be called upon to pay one copper because of what you did that day. On the contrary—— No! Never mind! What have you stood to lose through your husband's foo——"

"He wasn't any foolisher'n me," Martha anticipated her quickly.

"Your husband's misfortune," amended Madam Crewe.

"Two-hunderd-and-fifty dollars. All we had saved. But we'll set about right over again, an' if we have luck, we can put by some more. An' anyhow, I'm

thankful there won't be another such call on us. That was what I kinda had on my mind when I come."

"Well, you can shift it off your mind. I give you my word. You believe me, don't you?"

"Yes'm."

"And I believe you. So far we understand each other. Now, Slawson, I am going to prove that I trust you. I am going to ask you an honest question. I want an honest answer."

"Yes'm."

"You are the mother of four children. You have had experience in bringing them up right. I have had one child—one grandchild. I have brought them both up—*wrong*. What's the trouble?"

Martha did not reply at once.

Madam Crewe waited patiently, making no attempt to hurry her, and the room was as still as if it had been empty. At last Martha spoke.

"O' course I d'know what the trouble was, if there was any, with your boy. But it seems to me, I see where you kind o' slipped up on it with Miss Katherine."

"Well?"

"Firstoff, the way I look at it, childern is all selfish, which is only to say they're human, like the rest of us. They're selfish an' they're mischeevious, an' they're contrairy, for, when all's said an' done, they're—childern. What we want to do is, learn'm not to be selfish an' mischeevious an' contrairy. An' how can we learn'm not to be it, if we're that way ourselves? There's a lady I usedta work out for—(you know her—Mrs. Sherman, Mr. Frank Ronald's sister). She give her boy every bloomin' thing money could buy——. But she never give'm a square deal. You can take it from me, what a young 'un respec's is a square deal. He mayn't *like* it, but he respec's it. An' *you* for givin' it to'm.

"Now, beggin' pardon for the liberty, I don't think Miss Katherine's had a square deal, or a fair show. She ain't had what's her rights, an' she knows it. You kep' her too close on—well, lots o' things. Love an' a free foot an', oh, lots o' things. She's lived so long, as you might say, from hand to mouth, that now she don't know which is her hand an' which is her mouth. An' that makes her look kinda awkward to you. What I'd rather my childern'd feel about me than anythin' else is, that I see their side an' try to treat'm white. All the cuddlin' an' the coddlin' in creation won't help you, if your child knows it ain't havin' justice. An' all the strictness an' the punishin' won't keep it straight, if it ain't sure there's love along with the lickin's.

"Miss Katherine's a *good* child. You couldn't go far wrong, if you took it for granted she was goin' to do the right thing, like you are yourself. If I was you, excuse me for sayin' it—if I was you, I'd kinda open up to Miss Katherine. She's

young. With all she's so tall an' han'some-lookin', she ain't learned all the sense there is. She thinks, the same's the rest o' the kids, that the only reason she ain't got the world for the askin' is because her '*mean ol' fam'ly*' don't want her to have no fun. Give her a chance. Show her you believe in her. You got to believe folks believe in you, to do your best. Now, take you, for instance. Your talkin' up so quick an' sharp as you do, makes most parties feel you're kinda hard to get along with. But my, *I* get along with you first-rate, because I ain't fooled by your outsides. I know your insides is all right, an' that's enough for me. But a young lady, like Miss Katherine, she wouldn't know. She's got to be showed, like Sam says they do in Missouri. But, you can take it from me, you wouldn't have to show her but once. There! I've talked a blue streak, an' prob'ly tired you all out. Only, you see, when you get me on *childern*, you got me on a subjec's my speciality, as you might say. That is, I try to make it my speciality, like Sam does cows an' pigs an' farm-produc's gener'ly, now he's got to deal with'm. Before I go, can't I get you somethin', or, maybe, see you safe in bed?"

"Bed?" echoed Madam Crewe sharply. "Why do you suggest bed to me? Do I strike you as belonging there?"

"Oh, no'm!" lied Martha calmly. "I wasn't thinkin' o' your comfort, so much as mine. It kinda's got to be a habit with me to want to tuck the little ones up an' cover'm over, 'n' know they're fixed for a good, sound sleep, before I leave'm."

Madam Crewe set her lips.

"Well, Slawson, it won't be long before you can do that for me. But not to-night. Go your way now. It's growing late. But come again soon. Very soon, you understand?"

"Yes'm."

On her way out, Martha stopped at the kitchen door.

"Say, Eunice," she accosted that placid young woman whom she found cozily toasting her toes before the grateful warmth of the range, "where's Miss Katherine?"

"I d'know."

"Who's lookin' after the little Madam?"

"Nobody much, lately. Miss Katherine used to, and she does now, when she's home, but she's off, mostly, 'n' I have all I can do getting my work done up."

"Yes, I can see that," observed Martha dryly. "Well, I'm comin' to-morra again. You can tell Miss Katherine. But in the meantime, if you was plannin' to go home to-night, *doncher*. Just you stay right on deck here all of the time, from this on, do you understand?"

"Why?"

"Because I *tell* you, that's why. You might be needed on short notice. Now, are you goin' to do as I say or ain't you?"

"Yes."

"That's a good girl. An'—an' if I should be needed for anythin', any time, just you come for me, quick as you can put, be it day or night, an' I'll drop everythin' an' come."

Eunice followed her to the doorstep.

"Say, you give me the creeps, Mrs. Slawson."

Martha laughed. "Well, I'm glad if I got *some* kinda move on you, young lady. You certaintly need it."

But as she went her way home, Martha was in no laughing mood.

"I got the black dog on my shoulder, for fair," she muttered, hurrying her steps, spurred on by an unreasoning longing to be home, to see Sam, the children, even Ma.

Long before she reached the Lodge, she saw the light from the sitting-room lamp streaming out genially into the chill dusk of the early autumn evening. It had a reassuring welcome in it that fairly re-established her with the world on the old terms of good-cheer and common-sense optimism. The broad, benevolent smile for which Madam Crewe had so often derided her, was on her face as she turned the knob of the sitting-room door, pushed it open. A second, and the smile was there no longer.

"What's the matter?" Martha asked, looking from Ma to Mrs. Peckett, from Mrs. Peckett to Sam Slawson, in a puzzled, wondering way.

Nobody answered.

Ma sat cowering in her accustomed place. Mrs. Peckett, deeply flushed, was standing near the window, while Sam, towering over all, showed a livid, threatening face, the like of which Martha had never seen in all the years of their life together.

"What's the matter?" she repeated.

Again the question went unanswered, but after a moment, her husband, with a gesture, bade her close the entry-door.

"Now, what *is* the matter? For the love o' Mike, one of you say!" she demanded for the third time, after she had obeyed.

The sharp ring of insistence in her voice seemed to pluck an answer out of Ma.

"As Heaven's me witness, Martha, I meant no harm," she whimpered peevishly.

"Well?" probed Martha.

"But to see me own son castin' black looks at me, as if he'd slay me——"

"Tell me what *you've* done, never mind about Sam!"

"The day I first see you writin' one o' them letters, Martha——"

"What letters?"

Sam's fist came down on the table-top with the force of a sledge-hammer.

"Hold your tongue, Ma! By God! I won't have my wife's ears soiled with your dirty gossip. I've listened to you myself long enough, too long. I'd not have done it, even so, except for the need there is to stop your scandal-mongering—yours and this woman's here."

Martha laid a restraining hand upon his arm.

"Why, Sam! What ails you?" she asked in wonder. "I never seen you the like o' this before. Let Ma speak. She was sayin' about letters. What letters?"

The muscles in Sam's jaws twitched visibly beneath his tense skin. As Martha looked at him, she seemed scarcely to recognize him for the man who was her husband. Suddenly, from out of the dim recesses of her memory, emerged a line she had heard quoted in some far-off, vague time and association, when she had not consciously taken note of it. "Beware the fury of a patient man!" Now she understood what the words meant.

"If my wife must know this disgraceful thing, it's I will tell her," he spoke so low, his words were barely audible, but Ma would have felt easier if he had thundered. "Now listen, you two, to what I say. Never for one second have I doubted my woman. Never would I. When I tell you, Martha, what these have been saying, I don't do so for you to deny it. You're my wife. I believe in you—and would, against heaven and—*hell.* It seems, you've been writing letters to some one, lately, which God knows you've the right to do it. But these two here must needs spy on you, and sneak about, stealing the stray bits of scribbling you thought you'd destroyed and thrown away. They gathered them up, and, when your back was turned, pieced them together, to send to me with an anonymous letter—only I suspicioned something was afoot, and watched, and to-day I caught them at it. My God! There ought to be a separate fire in hell as punishment for such damned muck-raking!"

"Sam!" entreated Martha.

"Suppose you *have* written Gilroy, who, none knows better than I, how once he wanted to marry you, and how you turned him down for me. Suppose you have written to Peter Gilroy, and Peter Gilroy has written to you——"

"I have, Sam, an'—he has," Martha confessed slowly.

"Surely you'd the right to do it, and I'd be the last to question you."

Martha gave him a long look.

"Did you say Ma an' Mrs. Peckett got a-holt o' my letters to Gilroy?"

Sam nodded.

"Did they give you the letters?"

Sam thrust a clinched fist toward her. It was full of crumpled scraps.

With patient care Martha smoothed out the first tattered shred that came to hand. Laboriously she read it aloud.

"'I knew what was in your heart when you ast hie so will rite as orphan as I can and no other soul will no. Love. All yours—MARTHA."

She looked up to meet her husband's eyes.

"Yes, I wrote that, Sam," she said.

Mrs. Peckett's chin, gradually lifting, at last almost regained its habitual level.

"You see," she observed suavely, "I'm not a liar, Mr. Slawson. And I'm not the other things you have called me to your shame—not mine. But I bear you no malice, nor Mrs. Slawson either. I'm not that kind of person. I'm a Christian woman, trying to do my duty."

"Damn your duty!" exclaimed Sam hoarsely.

"The only thing is," Martha interposed, hastening to cover her husband's unaccustomed profanity. "The only thing is, these bits here, as I look'm over, ain't from letters I wrote to Peter Gilroy. They're from letters I wrote to—another man."

Still Sam did not flinch.

Martha took a deep breath.

"Won't you take a chair, Mrs. Peckett? An' I'll sit, too. An' so will you, Sam. So long's we got on this subjec', we better come to a clear understandin'. That's always the best way. As I said at the start, Sam, I have been writin' to Gilroy, an' he's been writin' to me."

She leaned from her chair to where her sewing-machine stood, pulled open the drawer of its table, and took therefrom a couple of thin envelopes tied about with a strand of black darning-cotton.

"P'raps I'd ought to have told you firstoff, Sam, but I didn't, because I thought your feelin's might be hurt, an'—what you don't know won't worry you. The day after you had the news of Andy's note comin' doo, I got a letter from Gilroy. I've it right here now. Also mine answerin' it. That's to say, a *copy* of mine answerin' it. The reason I kep' 'm is, Gilroy is with Judge Granville, an'—well—when you're dealin' with foxy parties, you got to be foxy to match'm. I won't read you the letters. If you like, *you* can read'm. They're here *for* you. Gilroy said 'twas him held your note for Andy. He'd took it over, an' he was writin' me to say that, for the sake o' the days gone by, he wanted to do me a kindness. He said he'd let you off the note. He said, well he knew what a poor provider you was, an' we'd prob'ly none too much, if we had anythin' a tall, an', as for him, he'd *plenty*, so he'd never miss it, bein' as he is a bachelder, an' right-hand-man to Judge Granville, an' prosperin' better an' better every day.

"I wrote'm back, post-haste, that I thanked'm kindly, but you'd already sent the money to Andy. Such bein' the case, I couldn't o' course take him at his word to let you off the note, but knowin' me so well as he'd used to, he'd know that I'd

like nothin' better than take money off'n a friend who meant so kindly by me *as his letter showed he did.* Bein' that kind of a friend, I said, I knew he'd like to hear you're doin' grand—you're right-hand-man to Mr. Ronald, an' we've all we need an' more, too, an' prosperin' better an' better every day.

"I took my letter to Miss Claire, before ever I sent it off, to make sure it was all right, an' Gilroy'd know what I meant. Miss Claire laughed when she was through readin' it. She said, it was surely all right, but what he'd read between the lines had illustrations, whatever that means. Anyhow, it stirred up Gilroy somethin' fierce, an'——" Martha paused, the blood surged up to her face in a tide. "He wrote to me again. A whole lot o' love-sick trash. I sent his letter back to'm (me keepin' a copy) with just a gentle hint o' warnin' to the effec' that if ever he done the like again, I'd tell you on'm, an' we'd both of us come down to New York by the first train, an' take a turn out of'm—first you, an' then me *on your leavin's.* Here's the whole co-respondence, Sam. I'm glad to get rid of it. It was clutterin' up my machine-drawer. But, p'raps, before you take it, to lock it away—Mrs. Peckett an' Ma would like to examine it."

Mrs. Peckett shook her head.

"Then you're satisfied I ain't a callyope?" Martha asked her.

"A *what?*" demanded Sam sharply.

"A callyope. One o' them things whistles on a boat, which, every oncet in a while we'd hear'm on the river, down home. Likewise, they mean coqwette."

"You mean *siren*?"

"Yes. Sure. They're called both ways. Madam Crewe says all women are sirens. Then you're satisfied I ain't a siren, Mrs. Peckett?"

Mrs. Peckett inclined her head, smiling with easy patronage.

Martha regarded her narrowly for a moment.

"I see you *ain't* satisfied!"

"I certainly am, so far as Mr. Gilroy is concerned, but——"

Sam got upon his feet in a manner to cause Mrs. Peckett to come to a sudden halt.

"I know what she means, Sam. Keep cool, an' let me handle this, which I'm the only one can, anyhow. You'd like to know the name o' the party I wrote them letters to, you an' Ma amused yourselves playin' puzzles with? Well, I'll tell you his name. It's Dr. Ballard, an' even *you* couldn't be so much of a looney as think *Dr. Ballard* would give a second thought to the likes o' me, that I'd be writin' love-letters to'm, much less him wastin' time to read'm, let alone write me back.

"Before he went away, Dr. Ballard told me, he'd a likin' for this place an' every mother's son in it, which, *I s'pose*, that means you, too, an' he ast would I write'm, to tell how things was goin' on, an' if Miss Claire an' the baby was gettin' on, an' how Buller was comin' along. I promised I would. An' I kep' my

promise, an' I'm goin' to keep on keepin' it. Any objection?"

Mrs. Peckett signified she had none.

"Then all that remains is to say good-by," said Martha gravely, rising and standing with quiet dignity beside her husband.

Mrs. Peckett took a step toward the door. Then abruptly she turned and extended her hand to Martha.

Sam Slawson shook his head. "No, you don't!" he forbade decidedly.

"I guess we better wait a while, an' see how we feel about each other later," Martha explained without animus. "My husban' says, 'No, you don't!' so' o' course that settles it for the present, anyhow. It's a kind o' pity things has come to this pass, for I don't like to be on the outs with anybody. But you certaintly took a risk, Mrs. Peckett. If my husban' had been like *some* men——! I don't see how you dared do it, knowin' you're a woman, yourself, with a man o' your own. P'raps 'twas because you'd set out to make me over, that you hold me so cheap. I always noticed folks is never so choice o' made-over things. They think the best wear's out of'm anyhow, an' it don't matter if they do use'm sort o' careless now. But it *is* matter, for it's *you'll* be blamed for not bein' clean, not the thing you've dirtied. Besides, sometimes a *made-over* will serve you better than new. I give you leave to remember that, Mrs. Peckett."

When their visitor was gone, Ma began to cry aloud.

"The fear is in me heart. I haven't a limb to move, the way I'd be dreadin' Sam's punishin' me!" she moaned, rocking backward and forward in her chair.

"He'll not punish you, Ma!" Martha promised.

Still Sam bent stormy brows upon his mother.

"I'll not punish you," he said, "but after what's happened, I guess we'll all feel happier if you make your home away from this."

"I'll die ere ever I'll go back to New York City to live wit' the likes o' them as don't want me!" sobbed the old woman explosively.

"A Home, then. I'll see you settled in a good Home."

Ma looked into his stern eyes, saw no relenting there, and turned to Martha. She held up her hands with the mute appeal of a child begging to be carried.

And Martha nodded. She would carry her.

"For," she explained to Sam, later, "Ma's only a child, after all. With no more sense, or as much as Sabina. Let her stay, Sam."

CHAPTER XVI

Martha had been gone but a quarter of an hour or so, when Katherine appeared at her grandmother's door.

It had become a purely perfunctory act, this pausing at the sitting-room threshold, and asking, "Can I do anything for you, grandmother?" To-night the answer was startlingly out of the ordinary.

"Yes. Come in. I want to speak to you."

The girl came forward, outwardly calm, inwardly, so shaken with a morbid dread of what might await her, that she dared not venture to speak, for fear her voice would betray her.

"Light the lamp."

Her uncertain fingers fumbled the first match, till it dropped to the floor. The second went out, before she could guide it to the wick. Only at the third attempt was she successful—and she knew her grandmother despised clumsy inefficiency.

"Where have you been?"

"To the Ronalds. We're getting up a course of lectures, don't you remember, for the natives—to run through the winter."

"The natives to run through the winter?"

Katherine shrank back hypersensitively from the foolish banter.

"I am doing the work. Mr. Ronald is giving the money."

"A very proper arrangement."

"It has kept me busy. I hope you haven't felt neglected."

"Not in the least. As usual, everything has been done for me that *had* to be done."

The little old woman was trying her best to act on Martha's advice, but her tongue, sharpened by years of skilful practice, could not sheathe its keen edge all at once. When next she spoke, it was with so studied a mildness that Katherine stared at her, wondering.

"You probably met Slawson as you came in? You must have passed her on the road."

"No, the Ronalds brought me home in their car. We drove out along the mountain-road, to see the foliage. We came back the other way."

"Well, get your things off now. And when you've had your dinner, come back to me. Or—no! I'll ring!"

It darted through Katherine's mind that her grandmother spoke with singular self-repression. Again she regarded her with puzzled eyes. Such moderation could only breed suspicion, in a mind grown abnormal in solitary confinement.

The girl ate no dinner.

It was late before she heard the silver tinkle that sounded, in her ears, like the crack of doom.

It was well her grandmother bade her, with a gesture, to sit down. Her quaking knees would hardly have borne her, standing.

"I'm a coward! A poor, weak coward!" she confessed to herself bitterly, resenting her weakness, yet apparently powerless to control it.

"I've been thinking over what you told me, and I have concluded to change my tactics with regard to you," the old woman plunged in, without preamble. "Perhaps I've made a mistake in the past, keeping from you things you should have known. All I can say is, I acted in good faith, for your best."

Katherine smiled faintly. "Isn't that what parents always say when they punish?"

Madam Crewe raised her chin in her old supercilious manner, then quickly lowered it.

"I don't know. I've had no experience. I never punished. Perhaps that is where I made my mistake."

Again Katherine's lips curled slightly in a wry smile.

"You need have no regrets there, grandmother. You have nothing to make up to me on that score."

"You mean I have punished you?"

"Oh—very thoroughly."

"Curious! I can't see myself doing it."

"I can't see you *not* doing it!"

Madam Crewe, in her turn, stared, surprised. Katherine was acting out of all character, in quite a new, unaccountable fashion.

"I suppose I must take your word for it," her grandmother admitted with an odd sigh. "Be kind enough not to interrupt. You know the story of the man I did not marry. Now you shall hear the story of the man I did marry.

"My father took me abroad after—after the Ballard fiasco. I did not care where I went, what I did. I was quite broken down. Quite, as Slawson would say, 'broken up.' Nothing made any difference to me. Everything was distasteful.

"One day, in London, my father brought a young man to me, introducing him as my future husband. That was all there was to it. I neither objected, nor approved. I had no mother. I did not understand.

"We were married almost immediately—my new lover was very eager. He urged haste. Almost immediately I discovered that my father had been duped by a cheap adventurer, a man without heart or conscience. A poor, weak wretch of profligate habits, a liar, a cheat. He had posed in society as a man of means, heir to a title. He was nothing of the sort. All those he had brought to stand sponsor for him, were hirelings paid to mislead us.

"For a long time I tried to hide the truth from my father. When, at last, he learned it, it killed him. He died in a fit of apoplexy, brought on by rage against

the man who had gulled him.

"My fortune was large. My husband squandered a considerable part, before I had sense to take steps to save it. He was a spendthrift. He forged my name on checks, he stole from my purse. I presume you wonder why I did not rid myself of him? In those days divorces were not the casual things they are now. A woman divorced, was a woman disgraced. Moreover, there was the boy. For his sake I bore, forbore. For his sake, I fought to save my fortune. He was my one hope. He was to make up, by his perfect rightness, for all that was wrong in my universe. I suppose I spoiled him. Slawson says you can't spoil a good child. If that is so, my boy must have been bad from the beginning. This I know, he was always his father's child. He had none of me in him. As a baby, he was full of soft, coaxing ways. It was torture to see them gradually becoming smooth, calculating, treacherous.

"Sit still! I know he was your father—but he was my son *first*. I used to pray, night after night, that he might not live to follow in his father's footsteps. Useless. The taint was too strong.

"He married your mother precisely as your grandfather had married me. I would have prevented it, if I had known. It was all so carefully, secretly arranged that I did not know. Your mother was sacrificed, as I had been. Her fortune was swept away. She died when you were hardly more than a baby. I was glad when she died. She was out of it.

"Your father brought you to me to be cared for. The sight of you, in your little black ribbons, was a constant reproach. I was afraid to look into your eyes, for fear I should see in them what had killed your mother.

"One thing I determined, that you were not to be spoiled. I would bring you up as well as I could. I had failed with your father. I would try a different method with you. I repeat, I acted in good faith. I did my best.

"Your father died suddenly—no matter how—enough that 'twas disgracefully. Within a twelve-month, I was a widow. Behind my crêpe I humbly thanked Almighty God.

"When I came to settle up my estate, I found myself practically impoverished. That is, everything had been so attached, encumbered, I could get no benefit from it. My income must be turned back to the estate, to save it. My only salvation—yours—was to cut myself off from all but a pittance, until every claim had been met, and I stood free and quit. That has been done. I owe no man anything. I have sacrificed much, but not my integrity, and not one acre, one security belonging to the property your great-grandfather left me, rescued from my husband. It is all intact. Your inheritance——"

Katherine was on her feet in an instant.

"Inheritance!" she blazed. "You have just told me what my inheritance is!

Fraud, lies, treachery—everything that is base. What does money matter to a creature like me? I can never get away from what I am. As you say, 'the taint is too strong!' Hush! *I* am speaking now. And I'm *going* to speak, and you've *got* to listen! For once in my life, I am going to have my say—I'm going to forget I am young and you are old, and I'm going to let you know what I have been feeling, thinking, *being* all these years, when you've thought I was a tame thing you could order about, and scold and ridicule, to the top of your bent.

"I know, now, why I was a lonely, unloved child. I've always wondered, before, for I *tried* to be good—even when I was too much of a baby to be anything else. I know, now, why you watched me out of the corners of your eyes, as if you were waiting for me to try to deceive you, in some way. You were waiting for my '*inheritance*' to crop out. How could I ever have been anything, but at my worst with you? How could I be clever, when you insisted I was dull? How could I be *myself*, when you condemned me, by your fears, to be my grandfather, and my father? What you waited for, came. Of course it would. I stole, I lied. I was a coward. 'The taint was too strong!'

"But let me tell you this, it needn't have been so. I could have been saved if, when I was a child—— Oh, I can't bear it! I can't bear it!"

She shrank together into a wretched heap on the floor, her head bowed on her knees.

Madam Crewe gazed at her, a strange shadow creeping over her face. As if to herself, she murmured, "That is what your grandfather used to plead—and your father. Whenever they were discomforted, they always said they couldn't bear it. So they didn't bear it. *I*—and others—had to bear it."

The sound of her voice, low as it was, brought Katherine to her feet. All the pent-in passion of her life, breaking loose now, beat mercilessly down upon the defenseless old woman before her. In some unaccountable way, the two seemed to have changed places. It was she who dominated, her grandmother who submitted.

The lamp burned low, sending out a rank odor that filled the room. The clock struck out three deep bell-notes.

Katherine, shuddering, sobbing, felt herself caught up in the whirlwind-strength of a new impulse. She turned her back on her grandmother. A moment, and the door of her own chamber shut her in.

Madam Crewe's head fell forward upon her breast.

* * * * *

The clock had just struck half-past five, when Martha groped her way downstairs.

She had her work "cut out for her," as she would have expressed it, and must start in promptly. She had just kindled a new fire in the kitchen-range, and was about to set out for the henhouse, and cow-barn, when a step on the porch brought her up standing.

In a second she had crossed the room, swung open the kitchen-door.

"Miss Katherine!" she exclaimed, in the breathless undertone of one brought face to face with a dread turned reality.

Katherine seemed to understand without need of explanation. She shook her head.

"No—grandmother's not sick. Grandmother is all right. But—I'm going away. I've left home. I'll never go back! Never! We had it out together last night, grandmother and I. *Last* night, and *all* night. I'll never cross that doorsill again, if I have to beg in the streets, or—starve."

Martha quietly closed the door, led Katherine to a chair, then set the water-kettle on the stove, without asking a question, saying a word.

"I've come straight to you, Mrs. Slawson," the girl continued breathlessly, "because you're my only friend in the place. The only one who knows anything about the kind of life I've led, and would understand."

"But, I *don't* understand," Martha corrected her. "I thought—that is to say, I somehow or other, got the idea the two of youse was goin' to get along better, after this. I can't think how things could 'a' got to this pass when, the last I heard, everything looked so promisin'."

Katherine took her up quickly. "I don't know what you mean by *promising*. The day Mrs. Ronald was taken sick, I told grandmother about—about—what I'd done. You know—the pocket—with the letters. And she treated me like a dog. Oh, she was cruel. Sent me away, out of her sight, as if I'd been something hateful to her—which I am. She hasn't spoken to me since, until last night, except to give some order. I don't know how you can say you thought things 'looked promising.'"

Martha measured out two heaping tablespoonfuls of freshly-ground coffee into the percolator, and set it on the stove.

"I saw your gran'ma yesterday, Miss Katherine," she explained. "Her an' me had a long talk, an', from what she dropped, I got the impression she meant to turn over a new leaf two-wards you, if you'd give her the chance."

"Did she say she meant to?"

"No, not eggsackly '*say*.' But——"

"Well, then, I guess you were mistaken. Or, perhaps she *meant* to try to do better by me, and, when the time came, she just couldn't, that's all. I'll give her the benefit of the doubt. But no matter what she *meant*, no matter what *I* did, the end of it was, we had a terrible time and—I've come away for—good."

After an interval, during which Martha had quietly relieved Katherine of the bag she clutched, she set before her a cup of steaming, fragrant coffee.

Katherine shook her head. "I couldn't touch it. I'm not hungry."

"Drink it down, hungry or not!" commanded Martha authoritatively.

Katherine obeyed.

"You must have been at the house late, yesterday afternoon," she said, between her absent sips. "For, I wasn't there, and I'd been at home all day except for an hour or so toward evening, when I went to the Ronalds'. When I came in grandmother called me, and, now I come to think of it, she did seem milder, kinder. She told me to take my dinner and then, after dinner, to come to her. It always scares me when grandmother summons me to appear before her—like a pensioner, or a criminal. It's always been that way, ever since I can remember. The sight of her, sitting there, cold and distant as a marble image, always freezes me to ice. I can't help it. I know I'm a coward, but I can't help it.

"I couldn't eat my dinner, for thinking what she had to say, so, by the time I went up to her, I was all of a tremble inside, though I probably didn't show it.

"Then she told me—told me—about her life. About my grandfather—my father. If you knew what I've sprung from, Mrs. Slawson, you'd turn me out of your house."

"Rot!" said Martha, "askin' pardon for the liberty."

Katherine went on—"Think of being watched, day after day—always under suspicion.—Think of having some one always being in fear and trembling because the time'll surely come when you'll show what you've sprung from. And, of course, it comes. I did the things my grandfather and my father had done before me. That was why, when I told her about the pocket, she sent me away from her. The thing she had dreaded, had happened."

"It always does," said Martha.

"So that's what I am," the girl went on shudderingly, "a coward, and a liar, and a thief. The child, and the grandchild, of cowards, thieves, liars. There's no hope for me! I can never be anything else."

Martha's hand upon her shoulder shook her, none too gently.

"Say, stop that nonsense, Miss Katherine. Stop it right now, before you say another word. There ain't any truth in it, to begin with, an' *I* say it's wicked to *think* such things. Just you answer me a couple o' questions, will you?"

Martha's unaccustomed severity startled Katherine out of her hysteria. She nodded acquiescence.

"Why did you tell me, firstoff, when you'd took the pocket?"

"Because I loathed myself so. I couldn't bear it alone."

"Why did you clap the name o' thief to yourself? Are you proud o' it?"

"It's the truth. I have to tell the truth!"

"Why have you?"

"Because it's *right* to."

"Then, on your own say-so, you ain't any o' those things you said. Don't you see you ain't? A thief don't hate what he does, so he's afraid to be alone with himself. A liar don't *have* to stick to the truth, does he? A coward won't stand up, an' face the music, 'cause it's *right* to—not so you'd notice it, he won't. All this hangin' on to your antsisters' shirt-tails an' apern-strings, for good, or for bad, makes me sick on my back. I'm tired seein' crooked sticks tryin' to pull glory down on themselves off'n what they call their Family-trees. Don't you fool yourself. It's every man for himself these days—*thank God*! It don't folla you're what your gran'pa is, any more'n your gran'ma. You got a mind o' your own, an' a conscience o' your own, an' if you did, in a way o' speakin', lose your grip on yourself, an' done what tempted you—to do it oncet, ain't to say you'll ever do it again. It's just the very reason why you *won't* ever do it again!"

Katherine shook her head. "That may be true. All I can say is, it doesn't seem true to me now. Anyway, I can't change my feeling about grandmother. I want never to see her again. She hates me and—I——"

"Now, easy! Go easy, Miss Katherine. What makes you think the ol' lady hates you?"

"Everything she has ever done. She's never kissed me in her life, that I can remember."

"Kissin' ain't all there is to lovin'. What did your gran'ma want to save her money for? What did she scrimp an' screw for, after bein' used to live in the lap o' lucksherry all her days——? I'm a ignorant woman, but it seems to me, she could 'a' paid up all was owin', and lived off'n her capital, an' said to herself: 'Hooray! A short life, an' a merry one! Let the grandchild I hate, look out for herself. What do *I* care?'"

"Perhaps she don't mind saving and denying herself, any more. She's got used to it," suggested Katherine. "Maybe she likes it."

"I wouldn't be too sure," Martha admonished, "Think it over."

"I have thought it over—and over and over. Nothing will change me. I'll not go back, Mrs. Slawson."

"Where are you goin'?"

"To Boston."

"What for, to Boston?"

"First, to tell Dr. Ballard just what and who I am. Grandmother thought it was *lying* for me to hold back that story, when I should have made a clean breast of it, at once. She acts as if she had to protect Dr. Ballard against me. She acts as if *he* is the one who's dear to her and I'm the stranger. Well, I'll show her! I'd never marry him now, if—if——"

"An', after you got through throwin' down Dr. Ballard?"

"I'll go somewhere else. To another town—and earn my living."

"Doin' what?"

"I don't know yet. But the way will open."

"You bet it will. Good an' big, the way'll open," Martha echoed her words with scoffing emphasis. "It'll make you dizzy lookin' at it gapin' at you!"

Katherine's pale cheeks flushed. "I'm not a fool, Mrs. Slawson. There are some things I can do, as it is. I can learn to do more."

"Certainly. There's lots o' lovely things you can do in this world—*if you don't charge anythin' for'm.*"

Katherine rose.

"I came to you, Mrs. Slawson, because I felt you were my friend."

"So I am."

"I came to you because I knew what you'd done for the Hinckley girl. I want you to do the same for me. There's a train leaves Burbank Junction for Boston at eleven-thirty-three. Will you take me over there in your motor?"

"No, ma'am!"

Katherine stared at her, out of astonished eyes.

"No, ma'am!" repeated Martha. "When I took Ellen Hinckley to Burbank, it was outa harm's way. If I took *you* it'd be into it. Ellen Hinckley was a poor, weak sister, which runnin' away was all there was *for* her. *You* are strong as they make'm, an' stayin' 's all there is for you. Ellen owed it to herself to leave her mother. You owe it to yourself to stand by yours."

"Then I'll go to Mr. Ronald. He'll take me—when I tell him."

"Don't you believe it. An' you won't tell'm either, Miss Katherine. You're too proud, an' he's too *fair*. It wouldn't take him a minute to tell you, 'Stay by the poor little ol' lady, till she's no need o' you no more, which it won't be long, now, anyhow.' It wouldn't take'm a minute to tell you that, Miss Katherine—not for Madam Crewe's sake—but for yours."

"I'll never go back," the girl reiterated determinedly. "Whatever I do, I'll never go back. If you won't take me to Burbank, I'll wait here at the station, for the trolley. There'll be another train out sometime. I'll get to Boston somehow."

"Miss Katherine," Martha pleaded, but the girl stopped her with an impatient gesture.

"It's no use, Mrs. Slawson. I feel as if there were nothing but ugliness and horror in all the world. It's come out—even in *you*!"

Martha turned her face away quickly, as if she had been struck.

"I've not gone back on you, Miss Katherine. Take my word for it, till you can see for yourself what I say's true. You think everything's ugly now. That's because you got knocked, same as if it was, flat on your back. You're just bowled

clean over. You're lookin' at things upside down. But let me tell you somethin'—there's been good in all the knocks ever I got in my life, if I had the sense to see."

"I don't believe it!" said Katherine passionately.

Martha smiled. "Certaintly you don't, at the present moment. But you will, in the course o' time. Why, the hardest knock a party'd land you, right between the eyes, you'd see *stars*."

Katherine turned quickly away, stooped to pick up her bag, and without another word, passed to the door.

"Say, Miss Katherine," called Martha, "I want to tell you somethin'. Now, listen! Dr. Ballard, he tol' me oncet——" she was talking to empty air.

Katherine had gone.

Martha followed at far as the doorstep, to look after the girlish figure marching so resolutely out into the cold gray of the early autumn morning. She stood watching it, until it passed out of sight, around the bend of the road that led to the village.

Then, with all her day's work still before her, Martha Slawson deliberately sat down to think.

"Between the two o' them, they've made a mess of it, for fair," she told herself. "But I'll give the ol' lady this credit, I do b'lieve she started in *wantin'* to do the right thing. The trouble with her is, she waited too long, an' in the meantime, Miss Katherine's been bottlin' in her steam, an' gettin' bitterer an' bitterer, till all it took was the first word from the little Madam, to bust her b'iler, an' send the pieces flyin'. Miss Katherine says they talked all night. I bet 'twas her done the talkin'. I can jus' see her takin' the bit between her teeth, an' lettin' rip, for all she was worth, same's Sam wipin' up the floor with Mrs. Peckett, which he'd never raised his hand to a soul in his life before, an' prob'ly never will again. Just for oncet the both of'm, him an' her, had their fling, more power to'm! In the meantime, the fat's in the fire. If I'd 'a' had the book-learnin' I'd oughta, an' not been the ignorant woman I am, I'd 'a' been able to speak the wise word to Miss Katherine, that would 'a' cooled her off, an' ca'med her down, till she'd have her reason back, an' could see the right an' wrong of it for herself. But I haven't, an' she ain't, an' while I'm sittin' here thinkin' about it, she's makin' tracks for Boston, an' Dr. Ballard. Bein' a man, he'll welcome her with open arms. Bein' a girl, she'll forget all about her good intentions to throw'm down, the minute she claps eyes on'm. An' then, when it's all over, an' Time has fanned the first flush off'n 'm, he'll get to thinkin' how she ain't the woman he thought her, because she left her gran'ma in the lurch, which he tol' me with his own lips he'd never ask her do it. In fac', he wouldn't respec' her if she did do it, an' the poor ol' lady so sick, 'n' old, 'n' lonesome. An', with one like Dr. Ballard, a girl'd want to think

twice before she'd risk lowerin' herself, to do what he couldn't respec'. No, Dr. Ballard mustn't know Miss Katherine's left her gran'ma alone. He mustn't know it, even if she *does* it! But how is he goin' not to know it, I should like to know?"

For a few moments Martha painfully pondered the problem, without any sign of untangling its knotted thread. Then suddenly she rose and, going to the foot of the stairway, called up to Sam:

"Say, Sam—come here a minute, will you? I wisht you'd wake up Cora, an' tell her get busy fixin' the breakfast. An' when you come down, set Sammy feedin' the hens, an' turnin' the cow out. I ain't able to do my chores, because I got suddently called away. I prob'ly won't be back till dinnertime, or maybe night. Don't wait for me, an' don't be uneasy. I'll tell you about it later."

She caught up her coat and hat, hanging on a hook on the entry closet door, and put them on while she was making her way across the grounds, in the direction of the big house.

She knew, before she crossed the kitchen doorsill, that Mr. Ronald would not be up at this hour of the morning; nevertheless, she got Tyrrell to take a message for her to his door.

"Tell'm I got somethin' very important I wanta say. Ask'm will he let me telefoam it up to'm."

Mr. Frank sent down word, "Certainly!"

"I got a favor to ask of you, sir," Martha told him without reserve.

"Let's hear it."

"Somethin' 's happened out to ol' lady Crewe's. Miss Katherine, she come to me just now, all upset an' wild-like. Las' night, when I see the little Madam, she showed as plain as could be, she's not long for this world, an' by now—what with the shock she's got—she's prob'ly goin' fast. Will you telefoam Dr. Ballard, an' ask'm to come to her right off? He told me, before he left, if any of you folks, here, or *her'd* reely need'm, I was to let'm know, an' he'd come, if it took a leg."

"But, Martha," objected Mr. Frank, "that's the point. If we *really need* him. Are you sure the case is so urgent? Recollect, Dr. Ballard is a busy man. His time is worth more than money. Much more. There isn't one chance in a thousand, that he could leave to come here, on the spur of the moment, even if I asked him."

"He'd come," said Martha confidently.

"And I don't want to ask him—I'd have no right to do it, unless the need is extreme. Is the need extreme? Are you sure of it?"

Martha hesitated but a moment. "Yes, sir. I'm sure," she answered.

"Then I understand you to say that I am to call up Dr. Ballard. I am to tell him that Madam Crewe is in a critical condition. I am to ask him to come on at once. It is a matter of life or death. That is the message, Martha?"

"Yes, sir."

"You're positive? Life or death?"

"Life—*an'* death," repeated Martha distinctly.

"Then call up Central, and ask for Long Distance. When you get it, give me the wire. Shall you wait for the answer?"

"No, sir. I'm goin' straight to the little ol' lady's now. She needs me, an'—I *know* the doctor'll come."

CHAPTER XVII

The "little ol' lady's" need of her was as distinct in Martha's consciousness, as if it had come to her in the form of a verbal message, through ordinary physical channels.

Its insistent reiteration, since the night before, had drowned out the impression of Mrs. Peckett's mischievous tongue, even Katherine's poignant reproaches. Everything else fell into the background before that one soundless cry of appeal.

For once in her life Martha hurried.

Eunice Youngs met her at the kitchen-porch, showing a scared face.

"Oh, Mrs. Slawson," she drawled, with something in her voice and manner almost resembling animation, "oh, Mrs. Slawson, if ever I was glad to see anybody!"

"What's the trouble?"

"I d'know. When I went up to Miss Katherine's room about an hour ago, with Madam's coffee, I knocked an' knocked, an' no one answered. Then, I went to Madam's door, an' knocked an' knocked, an' no one answered. But the sitting-room door was open, so I peeked in, an'——"

"Well?" Martha's impatience spurred her on.

"Madam was sitting up in her chair, just like always, only she—looked like she was dead."

Before the words were fairly out, Martha had brushed Eunice aside, and was halfway up the back stairs. In the moment it took her to cover the distance between them and the sitting-room, her thoughts ran riot, but one sentence kept repeating itself unconsciously:

"Poor Miss Katherine! Poor Miss Katherine!"

Automatically she tapped on the sitting-room door, pushed it open, and

entered.

Madam Crewe was sitting in her chair, as Eunice had described her, but as Martha came forward, the drooping head lifted ever so slightly, the heavy eyes gave out a faint spark.

Without a word Martha poured into a glass one of Dr. Ballard's stimulants, in the use of which she had been well instructed. She held the glass to Madam Crewe's lips, supporting her while she drank, then waiting until the lips showed a tinge of color.

"Good—morning! Why don't—you—ask—me, how I—slept?"

Martha caught the labored words with difficulty. She caught, what was even more difficult, the intention to preserve the old tone of caustic raillery.

"I never do," she answered imperturbably, playing up with gallant spirit, to the required pace. "I never do. Mornin's, when folks ask you how you slep', mostly it's just for the chance to let you know how *they didn't*."

"Kath—er—ine?"

"I see her before I come in here. She's kinda played out, this mornin'. I guess we better let her rest a while, hadn't we?"

Madam Crewe's eyes conveyed assent.

Chatting lightly on, ignoring any reason for not doing so, Martha undressed the rigid little body, and laid it tenderly in bed. Somehow, she managed to prepare a breakfast which the Madam patiently suffered herself to be fed, though Martha knew it was a hardship.

"It'd astonish you, how she's fightin'," Mrs. Slawson told Miss Claire, whom Mr. Ronald brought out in the course of the early forenoon to make inquiries. "It'd astonish you. She *won't* give in. She falls asleep, in spite of herself, but after a minute, there she is awake again, for all the world as if the spirit in her wouldn't let itself be downed. I never see anybody *livin'* as fierce as her. She's doin' it, for all she's worth. Every minute, full up, begrutchin' the time she has to lose for rest."

"You were right about Dr. Ballard, Martha," Francis Ronald admitted. "He is coming. I am going to Burbank to meet him and bring him back with me, directly I have taken my wife home."

Martha nodded. "I knew he'd do it. He's the kind you couldn't slip up on. Same's yourself, sir."

When Martha returned to her patient, Madam Crewe had to be told where she had been, had to be shown the flowers Mrs. Ronald had brought, informed of the messages she had left.

Then—"Where's Katherine?"

The question kept repeating itself, as if in spite of her.

"Comin' presently," Martha shied the point dexterously.

"I tried—last night ... 'square deal'—— Failed."

"Oh, no! you didn't fail. You mustn't be in too much of a hurry. Miss Katherine'll see what you meant, give her a chance to get the right squint at it. You got to be pationate with childern. Time goes slow for them. Miss Katherine's a *good* child!"

Madam Crewe raised her eyes, and fixed them full on Martha. "Slawson—you're a *good* woman."

* * * * *

It seemed to Katherine Crewe, trudging along the dreary stretch of road on her way to the station, that there was no use struggling any longer in a world where the combined forces were so obviously, so uncompromisingly against her. Her one hope had been Mrs. Slawson. Mrs. Slawson had failed her.

As she foresaw it, there was nothing in her meeting with Dr. Ballard to promise better things. She had told him, once and for all, she would never marry him. He had taken her at her word, and gone away. What she had to tell him now, would only constitute another reason for her to hold to her decision—another ground for him to accept it with easy resignation.

Filed past, in slow procession through her brain, all the haunting years, through which she had tried, and tried, and had had nothing but disappointment, frustration, for her pains.

Dr. Ballard had assured her one could overmaster conditions.

Not when the blood of weaklings ran in one's veins.

Everything he or Mrs. Slawson had told her, that had seemed convincing at the time, was negatived now, by her knowledge of what she was. Now she knew why she had never been able to compel life to give her what she demanded. It was because she was one of the "unfit," predestined, by two generations of degenerates, not to survive. She could see nothing but animus, as her grandmother's motive for telling her. The accumulated, smoldering resentment of years, gathering force through this crowning act of injustice, flamed up fiercely until it blinded her.

When, at last, she reached the station, it was only to find she had missed the car she should have taken. She must wait an hour for another.

She almost smiled. The little incident was so of a piece with the rest of her experience.

As she composed herself to sit out the hour, in the chill desolateness of the deserted waiting-room, her thoughts still harried her, but now she felt them less keenly. It was as if her wits were wrapped in cotton.

At a touch on her shoulder, she started up, trembling, dazed. She had not

seen the station-master, until he actually stood before her.

"Did you want to take the next trolley to Burbank?"

"Yes," she answered, wondering why her eyes were so heavy, her head so dull.

"Well, it'll be along in five minutes, now. I *thought* you wanted to take the last one, but you didn't stir, and come to find out, you were asleep. I hated to rouse you now, only I thought, maybe, I'd ought to."

She had slept two hours.

Speeding through the country, her head became clearer. Not for that were her thoughts less harassing. Another element had entered in, to make them more so,—indecision. Little by little, bit by bit, came back certain stray fragments of sentences she dimly recollected having heard Mrs. Slawson pronounce. Sentences that, at the time, in her benumbed state, had left her cold, making no conscious impression. She remembered Martha's face, when first she saw her at the porch door. What had she been afraid of? Martha Slawson, who was never afraid of anything? The answer that had sprung to her own lips, was given without deliberation. It had just naturally come in response to Mrs. Slawson's look of dread. She had replied that her grandmother was "all right." How had she known her grandmother was all right? She had not stopped to inform herself, before she left the house. She had gone without a word, without a look.

The last time she and her grandmother had come to grief, trying to "understand each other," the old woman had borne a brave front until the ordeal was over, then had quietly fainted away. What if she had done the same thing now?—when no one was there to come to the rescue.

* * * * *

—"By your own say-so you ain't any of those things.—You got a mind o' your own an' a conscience o' your own.... You're strong as they make'm.... This hangin' on your antsisters, for good or for bad, makes me sick.... Don't you fool yourself: It's every man for himself, these days, thank God! ... Somethin' beautiful in all your blows, if you only had sense to see. The hardest knock you ever got, you'd see *stars*...."

* * * * *

Once, when she was a child, Katherine had been given a toy which, more than all of her others, had filled her with delight and wonderment.

It was a large, circular box, set on a pedestal, revolving on a pin. Perpendicular slits were cut, at regular intervals, all around its lower wall, and within

were coiled long, colored picture-scrolls, facing outward. When the box, or drum, revolved, the scene depicted suddenly sprang into motion.

She could not have followed, had she tried, the subtle, involuted train of association that led her back to her experience with the long disremembered plaything. But, even as she thought of it, she saw herself, as she had so often sat, a disappointed, bewildered child, staring at the stupid, tiresome lengths of crude, static prints, which her inexperienced hand had not learned to adjust, so they would become significant, entertaining.

Like a sudden flash of light, came the suggestion that, up to this, she had sat just so, regarding life. Seeing it in the flat, finding it dull, stale, unprofitable. What if it were possible to learn the trick of adjustment! What if it were possible to discover the dynamic pivot, by which the great revolution would take place, the revolution that would make life interesting, give it meaning? Had any one ever found either?

Instantly, she thought of two persons—the two who, more than any others she had ever known, had got the most good pleasure out of life. Daniel Ballard—Martha Slawson. Two very different personalities, in widely different situations, yet with the same invincible courage, the same curious capacity for inspiring others with their own faith in all that is best. These two had the same wide vision, the same high purpose. They both had looked on life, and found it good.

Long before her car reached Burbank, Katherine had determined to go home.

She heard, with composure, the Junction "starter's" announcement, that her car had gone out three minutes before. She must wait an hour, if she wanted to take the next. In her present mood, she was glad of the opportunity to try her new-found strength. Out of her depths of depression she had leaped in one miraculous moment, to a height of exaltation such as she had never known before. She was ready to fight the world, in order to prove she could come out conqueror.

"No, ma'am, there ain't any other way of getting back, excepting the trolley, unless you take an automobile. But I tell you what! The Boston train'll be along presently. There'll be rigs here then, and motors come to meet it, and probably some of them'll be going back your way. They'd give you a lift, I dare say, if you're in a great hurry and asked them."

Katherine considered. To sit in the station, tamely waiting for things to come her way, was out of all line with her present impulse. She could not endure inaction. She had a flagellant's ecstatic eagerness to begin her own castigation. She would *walk*.

The starter did not confide to her his private opinion of her plan, when she indicated what she proposed to do by asking directions as to the way.

"There's a goodish stretch out of here, where the walking's easy. But you'd have to get beyond that, before you'd be likely to be come up with, by a rig, or a car, going your way. You see, the trolley-line and the motors both use the road. Foot passengers ain't allowed to, where there's so much traveling. It'd be dangerous. But once you get off the main beat, going in the direction of your town, all you have to do is stick to the road and you'll *get there*!"

Looking after her, as she started off gallantly enough, his skepticism found vent in a long, low whistle and a muttered—"You'll get there—*if* you have luck."

But Katherine felt no doubt of herself. It was only after she had covered "the goodish stretch," and come out on the road where the walking was "heavy," that her elation dropped a trifle, her bag began to prove itself subject to the law of gravitation. Still she plodded on resolutely.

She had no hope that she would be able to outstrip the trolley, but at least she was not meekly submitting to overmastering forces, as she had done in the past. And if nothing better offered, she would take the trolley, when it should come along, and so accomplish her purpose in the end.

She did not know how far she had walked, when her ears caught the sound of an approaching automobile.

The way, at that point, was narrow, and for a moment she hesitated. Would it be better to step up on the bank, or proceed, as she was doing, trusting to the chauffeur to guide and control his car so as not to run her down? She chose the first course, glad that she had done so, when, looking back the way she had come, she saw what an immense machine it was bearing down upon her. Then all at once, her heart gave a leap.

It was the Ronalds' car.

A minute, and the chauffeur had seen, recognized her. The car came to a halt.

The next thing she knew, Francis Ronald had sprung from the limousine, taken her bag, given it to his driver, handed her into the car, and, himself, taken his place beside his man. It was only then, that she realized he had closed the door upon her, and a companion. A man. She looked up. The car started into motion. She was in Daniel Ballard's arms, being held very close.

She tried to wrench herself away.

"No, no!" she panted. "You don't understand! You don't know!"

Recapturing the hand she had freed, he pressed it to his lips, smiling at her reassuringly.

"I know everything. It's all right. What do you think I care?"

"But you *don't* know," she insisted. "I was coming to tell you. I was on my way. And then I remembered how old she is, and weak and forlorn and—I am going back to her—to comfort her. But I had been on my way to you—to tell

you—tell you what I am—what I've done. I'm——"

"Hush!" commanded Dr. Ballard gently. "Be still, and you'll find it's all right. *She* made it right, before I left to go to Boston. She told me everything. What you had told her, what, I suppose, she has told you. Everything. She asked me to wait until you had found yourself. She said, you were an idealist—'Up in the clouds,' she put it. She feared you would draw a storm down on yourself and me, if you were trusted with your own life, at this juncture. She begged me not to press on you any more problems than you already had. She wanted you to profit by her mistakes, to have what she had missed—and to have it untarnished by regrets. It was for that she tested you. It was for that she denied herself necessaries, that, in the end, you might have plenty. She said, she must make sure you did not set money above love, as she, as—*others* had done before you. Talk about idealists! She managed it all very clumsily, but, at least, she tried to do right by you, according to her lights. I told her, 'twas wrong to tamper with human hearts. I told her, she had no right to try to direct human destinies. But I'd better have held my tongue. The mischief was already done. She had tampered. She had *tried*.... She was always hoping you would come to see she had acted in good faith. You see it now, don't you, sweetheart? You'll show her you do, when we get *home*, won't you—if it's not too late?"

"Too late?"

The syllables rang out with cruel sharpness.

"You don't know, then, that she is—dying?"

Katherine gave him a terrified look.

"Oh, let us go fast—*fast*! Dan—*darling*—don't let it be too late!"

It was nearing sunset when the car drove into Crewesmere.

Martha heard it, but the sound carried no comfort to her heart. At best, it could only mean that Dr. Ballard had arrived and—Dr. Ballard was not Katherine! Katherine for whom her grandmother had been vainly calling all through the day.

"She'll be here presently," Martha had answered. "She's gone out." "She'll come in pretty soon, now." "I expect her any minute."

Once, the little old woman had made a mighty effort, gathered her forces together, and brought out the question,

"Has she left me? Gone to Boston?"

Martha could not have escaped her searching eyes, if she had tried. She met them squarely, and told her untruth as convincingly as if it had been the truth. In the depths of her soul, she "had the faith to believe" it was the truth. "Only, I'm bound to confess, it don't look like it."

"Leave you? Gone to Boston? Not on your life. Miss Katherine's a *good* child. Even if she'd got kinda bewizzled-like, an' started off, meanin' to go, she wouldn't 'a' went. She'd turn back, an' come home. You can take it from me! I

know Miss Katherine."

But the hands of the clock had slipped around, and Katherine had not come home.

Dr. Driggs dropped in, like the rest of the neighbors, to "inquire." He did not venture inside the sick-room, but when Martha described the situation, Madam Crewe's hungry longing to keep up until she could see her grandchild, he left something to be administered that, he thought, "might help along, some, maybe."

It did.

After she had taken it, the wonderful little soul revived amazingly. She beckoned Martha to her with a look, whispering out the difficult syllables, as if on her last breath—

"If Katherine shouldn't come——"

"She will come, never fear," Martha reassured her.

"I've left you—a little keepsake. A thousand dollars.... It's down ... black-and-white ... in letter to Katherine. Promise ... take some, and go ... with your Sam ... to New York ... alone ... honeymoon."

"Certaintly," said Martha, humoring her soothingly, without the slightest suspicion she was listening to anything but the babbling of aged weakness.

"Certaintly, ma'am. An' thank you kindly for the thought. Sam an' me'll have the time of our lives."

"See ... you do!" ordered the little Madam.

The western sky was a blaze of glory when she spoke again.

"I'll meet you ... dearest Daniel ... when the sun goes down!"

"What, ma'am?" inquired Martha, instantly on the alert.

The lowered lids lifted. The lapsing mind leaped back to consciousness.

"Katherine!"

"She'll be here right off. She's on her way!"

An automobile drove up before the house.

"Dr. Ballard's come all the way from Boston to see you, ma'am," Martha said.

A moment, and the door opened. A girlish figure flew across the room.

"Grandmother! Dear, *dear* grandmother!"

Katherine knelt by the bedside, gathering up the little body in her loving arms.

Dr. Ballard bent to lift the tiny wrist.

There was a gentle sigh, a flicker of the eyelids. Madam Crewe looked up contentedly, over Katherine's bowed head, and her eyes fixed themselves full on Martha.

The look said, "Slawson, you're a good woman!"

THE END

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