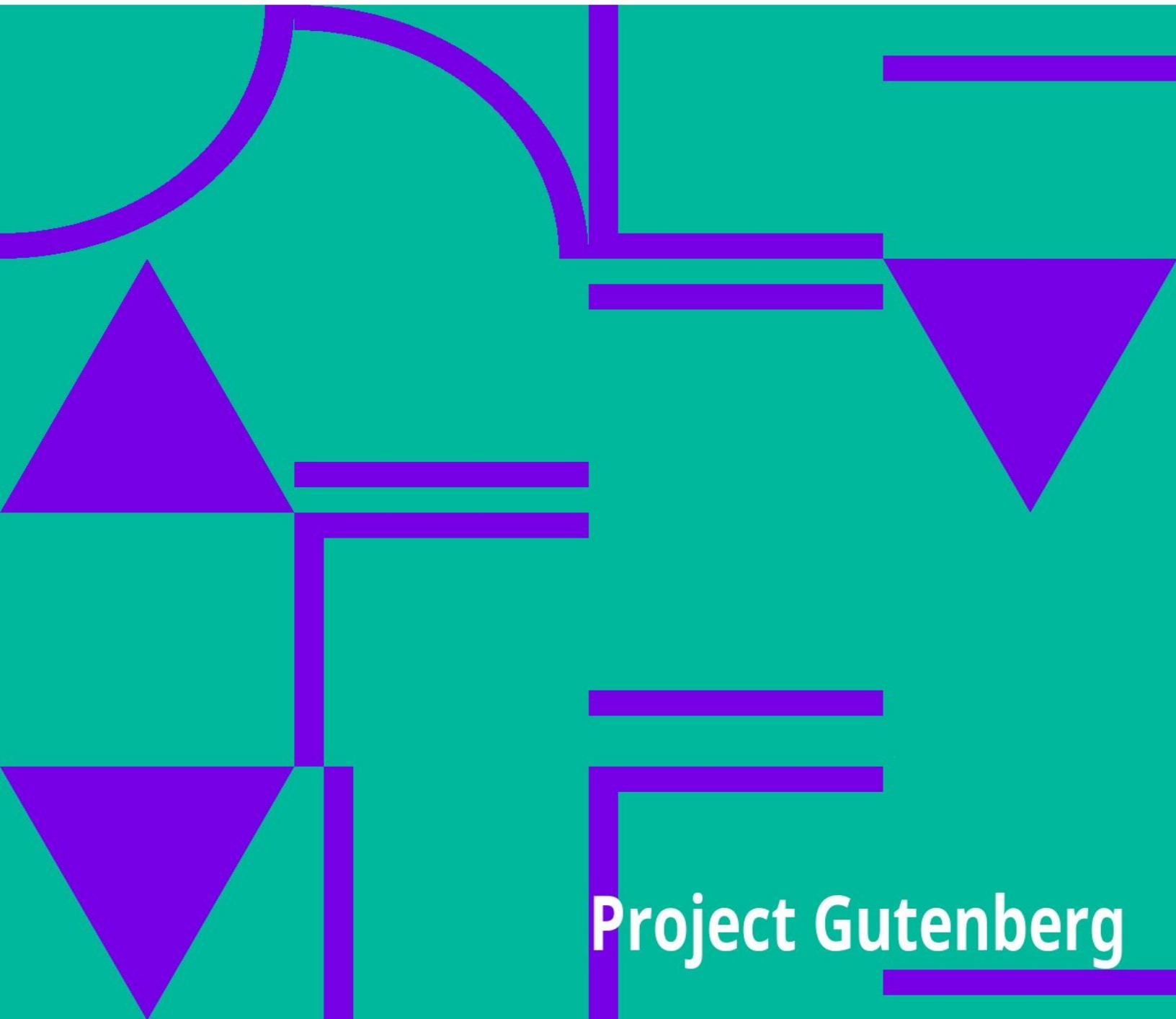


Kildares of Storm

Eleanor Mercein Kelly



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KILDARES OF STORM

BY ELEANOR MERCEIN KELLY
WITH FRONTISPIECE BY ALONZO KIMBALL

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TO AN UNFORGOTTEN MOTHER
Who moulded for others than her daughter
the standard of great womanhood

But for once Jacqueline of the eager lips turned her cheek, so that
her mother's kiss should not disturb the memory of certain others

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KILDARES OF STORM



CHAPTER I

Along a pleasant Kentucky road that followed nature rather than art in its curves and meanderings, straying beside a brook awhile before it decided to cross, lingering in cool, leafy hollows, climbing a sudden little hill to take a look out over the rolling countryside—along this road a single-footing mare went steadily, carrying a woman who rode cross-saddle, with a large china vase tucked under one arm.

People in an approaching automobile stopped talking to stare at her. She returned their gaze calmly, while the startled mare made some effort to climb a tree, thought better of it, and sidled by with a tremulous effort at self-control. A man in the machine lifted his hat with some eagerness. The woman inclined her head as a queen might acknowledge the plaudits of the multitude.

After they passed, comments were audible.

"What a stunner! Who is she, Jack?" The voice was masculine.

"Riding cross-saddle! Jack, do you know her?" The voice was feminine.

The answer was lower, but the woman on horseback heard it. "Of course I know her, or used to. It is the woman I was telling you about, the famous Mrs. Kildare of Storm."

Mrs. Kildare's color did not change as she rode on. Perhaps her lips tightened a little; otherwise the serenity of her face was unaltered. Serenity, like patience, is a thing that must be won, a habit of mind not easily to be broken. She reminded herself that since the invasion of automobiles she must expect often to encounter people who had known her before.

Her eyes, keen and gray and slightly narrowed, like all eyes that are accustomed to gaze across wide spaces, turned from side to side with quick, observant glances. Negroes, "worming" tobacco in a field, bent to their work as she passed with a sudden access of zeal.

"That's right, boys," she called, smiling. "The Madam sees you!"

The negroes guffawed sheepishly in answer.

A certain warmth was in her gaze as she looked about, her, something deeper than mere pride of possession. Her feeling for the land she owned was curiously maternal. "My dear fields," she sometimes said to herself. "My cattle, my trees"; and even, "my birds, my pretty, fleecy clouds up there."

When she came to a certain cornfield, acres of thrifty stalks standing their seven feet and more, green to the roots, plumes nodding proudly in the breeze, she faced her mare about and saluted, as an officer might salute his regiment.

A chuckle sounded from the other side of the road. On a bank almost level with her head a young man lay under a beech-tree, watching her with kindling eyes, as he had watched her ever since she rode into sight. "Miss Kate, Miss Kate, when are you going to grow up and give those girls of yours a chance?"

Her surprised blush took all the maturity out of her face. She might have been twenty. "Spying on me as usual, Philip! Well, why shouldn't I salute this corn of mine? It certainly serves me nobly."

He came down from the bank and stood beside her; a stalwart young man in shabby riding-boots and a clerical collar, with eyes surprisingly blue in a dark, aquiline, un-Anglo-Saxon face. They were filled just now with a look that made the lady blush again.

He was thinking (no new thought to Kentuckians) that of all the products of his great commonwealth, nothing equalled such women as this before him. Erect, deep-bosomed, with the warm brown flush of her cheeks, her level gaze, her tender mouth with the deep corners that mean humor—Kate Kildare, from girlhood to old age, would find in eyes that gazed on her the unconscious tribute that many women never know, and for that reason happily do not miss. But the vital quality of her beauty was not a matter of color, or form, or feature. It was a thing that had come to her since her first youth, a glow from within, the sort of spiritual fire at which a friend may warm himself. If happiness is a great beautifier, Philip Benoix believed he knew of one greater: sorrow.

"Well, well?" she demanded, laughing. "What are you staring at, boy? Why are you ogling me in that sentimental fashion? Have you mistaken me for—Jacqueline, perhaps?"

If she hoped to embarrass him in turn, she was disappointed. He shook his head. "If I were to ogle Jacqueline sentimentally, she'd slap me. Miss Kate," he added, "don't you know that saluting your corn was just your pagan way of thanking

God? Why not come to church and do it properly?"

"You may just as well give it up. I shall never go to church. I don't like church, so there! Stop talking shop, and come home to supper with me. What are you doing here, anyway, lolling about like a man of leisure, as if there were no souls to be saved?"

"I was lying in wait for yours. I knew you were out on a tour of inspection, and bound to pass this way."

"Did you want to see me especially?"

"I always do."

She flicked him with her riding-crop, "You're more Irish than French to-day! And where's your horse?"

"Well, old Tom seemed so comfortable and tired, munching away in his stall, that I hadn't the heart—"

"So you walked. Of course *you* weren't tired! Oh, Phil, Phil, you are your father's own son; too soft-hearted for this 'miserable and naughty world.' It won't be able to resist taking a whack at you."

A little silence fell between them. Both were thinking of a man who was no longer quite of this miserable and naughty world.

"Take my stirrup and trot along beside me, boy," she said. "We'll go faster that way. I wish you were still small enough to climb up behind me as you used to do—remember?"

His face suddenly quivered. "Are you asking me if I remember!—You have never let me tell you how well I remember, nor what your kindness meant to me, in those first days"—He spoke haltingly, yet with a sudden rush, as men speak whose hearts are full. "I was the loneliest little chap in the world, I think. Father and I had always been such friends. They tried to be kind, there at school; but they acted as if I were something strange; they watched me. I knew they were pitying me, remembering father, studying me for signs of inheritance. The son of a 'killer.' It was a dangerous time for a boy to be going through alone.... And then you came and brought me home with you; made me play with those babies of yours, took me with you wherever you went, read with me and discussed things with me as if I were an equal, talked to me about father, too. Do you think I don't

know all it meant to you? Do you think I did not realize, even then, what people were saying?"

"I have never been much afraid," said Kate Kildare quietly, "of what people were saying."

"No. And because of you, I dared not be afraid, either. Because of you I knew that I must stay and make my fight here, here where my father had failed. Oh, Kate Kildare, whatever manhood I may have I owe—"

"To your father," she said.

"Perhaps. But whatever good there is in me, you kept alive."

"Dear, dear! And that's why," she cried, with an attempt at lightness, "you feel it your duty to strike attitudes in your pulpit and keep the good alive in the rest of us?"

"That's why," he said, soberly, "But not you, Miss Kate. I do not preach to you. No man alive is good enough to preach to you."

"Good Heavens! When you have just been doing it!" Her laugh was rather tremulous. "What is this—a declaration? Are you making love to me, boy?"

He nodded without speaking.

The flush and the laughter died out of her face, leaving it very pale. "Look here," she said haltingly, "I'd like to accept your hero-worship, dear—it's sweet. But—If I've not been a very good woman, at least I've always been an honest one. You said even at that time you realized what people were saying. Did it never occur to you that what they said—might be true?"

He met her gaze unfalteringly. "I know you," he answered.

Her eyes went dim. Blindly she stooped and drew his head to her and kissed him.

At that moment a plaintive negro voice spoke close at hand. "Gawd sakes, Miss Kate, whar you gwine at wif my prize? Huccom you took'n hit away fum me?"

Unnoticed, an old, shambling negro had approached across the field, and was gazing in wide-eyed dismay at the china vase under her arm.

Mrs. Kildare welcomed the interruption. She did not often encourage her

emotions.

"Aha! Well met, Ezekiel," she said dramatically. "Search your heart, search your black heart, I say, and tell me whether a magnificent trophy like this deserves no better resting place than a cabin whose door-yard looks like a pig-sty."

"But ain't I done won it?" insisted the negro. "Ain't I done won it fa'r and squar'? Wan't my do'-yahd de purtiest in de whole Physick League?"

"It was, two weeks ago; and now what is it? A desert, a Sahara strewn with tomato-cans and ashes. No, no, Ezekiel. Winning a prize isn't enough for the Civic League—nor for God," she announced, sententiously. "You've got to keep it won."

She moved on, resistless, like Fate. The negro gazed after her, his mouth quivering childishly.

"She's a hard 'ooman, the Madam, a mighty hard 'ooman! Huccom she kissin' Mr. Philip Benoix dataway? Him a preacher, too!" Suddenly his eye gleamed with a forgotten memory. "De French doctor's boy—my Lawd! De French doctor's own chile!" He shook his fist after the retreating pair. "White 'ooman, white 'ooman, ain't you got no shame 't all?" he muttered—but very low, for the Madam had good ears.



CHAPTER II

As they jogged along, man and mare at the same easy foot-pace, Benoix said, "Are you sure that vase doesn't really belong to old Zeke, Miss Kate?"

"No, I'm not," she answered frankly. "I suppose it does belong to him, as a matter of fact. But the whole purpose of the Civic League I formed among the village negroes was to keep their quarters decent. If it fails of that—Well, the Madam giveth, and the Madam taketh away." She shot him a mischievous glance. "Evidently you don't approve of me, Philip?"

"Of you. Not of your ethics, perhaps. They 're rather—feminine."

She shrugged. "Oh, well—feminine ethics are enough for Storm village. They have to be," she said, succinctly.

Before them, outlined against the red round of the low sun, stood the rambling gray outlines of a house, topping a small hill. From one of its huge chimneys a pennant of smoke waved hospitably. The mare whinnied, and chafed a little against the bit.

"Clover smells her oats," said Mrs. Kildare, "and I smell Big Liza's ginger-bread. It makes me hungry. Let's go faster."

He did not seem to hear her. She glanced at his preoccupied face, wondering at this unusual indifference to Big Liza's ginger-bread. "What is it, Philip?"

"I have been thinking how to begin," he said slowly. "I've got to talk to you about something disagreeable."

"Surely you can talk to me about anything, without 'beginning'?"

"Well—I want to ask you to do something very unpleasant. To evict a tenant. Mag Henderson."

"That girl? But why?"

"Your agent says she's months behind in her rent."

"Smith talks too much. What if she is? I can afford to be patient with her. The

girl has had a hard time. Her father seems to have deserted her. Oh, I know they're a shiftless pair, but half the prejudice against them is that they are strangers. I know what that is," she added bitterly. "I've been a stranger myself in a rural community. You'll have to give me a better reason than that, Philip."

"I can," he said.

She lifted her eyebrows. "There's talk then? I suppose so. There's always talk, if a girl 's pretty enough and unprotected enough. The poor little foolish Mag Hendersons of the world! Oh," she cried, "I wonder that men *dare* to speak of them!"

"I dare," said Benoix, quietly. "I've my parish to think of. The girl's a plague-spot. Vice is as contagious as any other disease. Besides, it 's a question of her own safety. She's been threatened. That's why the father left."

"What?" cried Mrs. Kildare. "The 'Possum-Hunters'? You mean they are trying to run my affairs again?"

It was several years since men in masks had waged their anonymous warfare against certain tobacco planters whose plans did not accord with the sentiment of the community. The organization of Night Riders was supposed to be repressed. But power without penalty is too heady a draft to be relinquished easily, by men who have once known the taste of it.

Benoix nodded. "She has had warning."

Mrs. Kildare's lips set in a straight line. "Let them come! They'll try that sort of thing once too often."

"Yes—but it might be once too often for Mag, too. She—have you seen her lately?"

The other looked at him quickly. "Oh," she said, "oh! Well, she sha'n't suffer alone. Who's the man?"

"She will not tell."

"Loves him—poor thing!"

For a moment the priest showed in young Benoix' face. "Miss Kate! You speak as if that made a difference," he said sternly.

"And doesn't it, doesn't it? Good Lord, how young you are! You'd better pray that the years may teach you a little human weakness. I tell you, Mag sha'n't bear it all. Whoever's concerned in this thing shall suffer with her."

"I am afraid," said Benoix, reluctantly, "that would be—rather a large order."

"Oh! It isn't—love, then." For a moment Mrs. Kildare stared straight in front of her. Then she wheeled her horse, the pity in her face hardened into disgust. "Go on, will you? And tell the girls to save me some of that ginger-bread."

"Where are you going?"

"To evict Mag Henderson."

He protested. "But why to-night? Surely one night more! It will be very hard. Why not let Smith attend to it?"

She gave him a bleak little smile. "My dear boy, if I had left all the hard things to my manager to do, Storm to-day would be just where Basil Kildare left it."

She cantered back along the road and turned up a weed-grown lane, her face set and frowning. Despite her words to Benoix, at times like this she felt a very feminine need of a man, and scorned herself for the feeling.

Coming to a whitewashed log-cabin overgrown with morning-glories—the only crop the shiftless Hendersons had been able to raise—she pounded on the closed door with the butt of her crop. She heard a faint sound within, but nobody came to answer.

"I hear you in there. Don't keep me waiting, Mag."

Still no answer. But once again the faint sound came. It might have been the whining of an animal.

Mrs. Kildare jumped impatiently from her horse, and a few well-aimed blows of fist and knee sent the frail lock flying. The door was barricaded within by a bureau and a table and chairs—Mag's poor little defense, evidently, against the "Possum-Hunters."

"Where are you, my girl?" demanded Mrs. Kildare less impatiently, pushing her way to the back room. "It's not night-riders. It's the Madam."

A little slim creature, hardly more than a child, writhed on a cot in the corner, her

eyes bright and fixed like the eyes of a rabbit Kate had once seen caught in a trap, both fists stuffed into her mouth to stifle the groans that burst out in spite of them.

"Git out!" the girl panted fiercely. "Lemme be! I don' want none of ye 'round, not none of ye. You go way from here!"

The change in Mrs. Kildare's face was wonderful. "Why, child, what's the matter?" she said gently, even as she stripped off her gauntlets. For she knew very well what was the matter. In a widely separated rural community where doctors and nurses are scarce, the word "neighbor" becomes more than a mere honorary title.

In a few moments she had a fire going, water boiling, what few clean rags she could find sterilized. While she worked she talked, quietly and cheerfully, watching the girl with experienced eyes. She did not like her pulse nor her color. She saw that she was going to need help.

"I'll be back in ten minutes," she said presently. "I'm going to the nearest telephone to get the doctor. Keep up your courage, Mag. Only ten minutes!"

But the girl was clinging to her, by this time, moaning, begging, praying as if to God. "No, no—you cain't leave me, you cain't! I been alone so long. *Don'* leave me alone! I know I'm bad, but O Gawd, I'm skeert! *Don'* leave me to die all alone. You wouldn't leave a dawg die all alone!"

Mrs. Kildare soothed her with touch and word, wondering what was to be done. Through the open door she sent her strong voice ringing out across the twilight fields, again and again. There was nobody to hear. All the world had gone indoors to supper. Her waiting horse pawed the earth with a soft, reproachful nicker, to remind her that horses, too, have their time for supper. It gave her an idea.

"The children will be frightened, but I can't help that. I must have somebody here," she murmured, and slapped the mare sharply on the flank. "Home, Clover. Oats! Branmash! Hurry, pet!"

Obediently the startled creature broke into a trot, which presently, as she realized that she was riderless, became a panic-stricken gallop. Mrs. Kildare went back to her vigil.

It is a terrible experience to watch, helpless, the agony of a fellow creature. She

knelt beside the dirty pallet, her face as white as the girl's, beads of sweat on her brow, paralyzed by her utter inability to render aid—a new sensation to Mrs. Kildare. Maternity as she had known it was a thing of awe, of dread, a great brooding shadow that had for its reverse the most exquisite happiness God allows to the earth-born. But maternity as it came to Mag Henderson! None of the preparations here that women love to make, no little white-hung cradle, no piles of snowy flannel, none of the precious small garments sewn with dreams; only squalor, and shame, and fear unutterable.

Never a religious woman, Mrs. Kildare found herself presently engaged in one of her rare conversations with the Almighty, explaining to Him how young, how ignorant was this child to suffer so; how unfair that she should be suffering alone; how wicked it was to send souls into the world unwanted.

"You could do something about it, and You ought to," she urged, aloud. "Oh, God, what a pity You are not a woman!"

Even in her agony, it seemed a queer sort of prayer to Mag Henderson. But strong hands held hers close, a strong heart pounded courage into hers; and who shall say that the helpless tears on Kate Kildare's face were of no help to a girl who had known nothing in all her life of the sisterhood of women?

At last came the sound of thudding hoofs in the lane, and a clear voice, the echo of Kate's own, calling, "Mother! Where are you? *Mother!* Answer me. I'm coming—"

Mrs. Kildare made a trumpet of her hands and shouted, "Here, Jack. Here in Mag's cabin."

"Safe?"

"All safe."

"Phil, Phil!" called back the voice, breaking. "Come on. It's all right! We've found her! She's safe!"

In a moment a whirlwind of pink muslin burst in at the door, and enveloped Mrs. Kildare in an embrace which bade fair to suffocate, while anxious hands felt and prodded her to be sure nothing was broken.

"Oh, Mummy darling," crooned the beautiful voice, "*how* you frightened us! You're sure no bones are smashed—nothing sprained? Poor Clover had worked

herself into a perfect panic, galloping home all alone. And the servants screaming, and Jemima fearing the worst, as she always does. And we didn't even know where to hunt for you, till Philip came—Oh, *Mother!*"

"There, there, baby—it 's all right. No time for pettings now. There 's work to be done. Why didn't Jemima come? This is no place for a madcap like you."

Jacqueline chuckled and shivered. "The Apple Blossom"—she referred to her elder sister, Jemima—"was turning your room into a hospital-ward when I left, against the arrival of your mangled corpse. She had also ordered the wagon prepared like an ambulance, mattresses, chloroform, bandages—every gruesome detail complete. Our Jemima," she said, "is having the time of her life— isn't she, Reverend Flip?"

Mrs. Kildare smiled in spite of herself. The description of her eldest daughter was apt. But she said reprovingly, "Yon sound as if you were making fun of your sister, dear. And don't call Philip 'the Reverend Flip.' It is rude."

"Pooh! Rudeness is good for that elderly young man," murmured Jacqueline, with an engaging smile in his direction.

But the elderly young man, standing at the door, did not notice. He was gazing at Mrs. Kildare questioningly.

There had come a groan from the inner room.

"What's that?" cried Jacqueline. She ran to investigate. "Oh! The *poor* thing! What's the matter with her?"

Benoix would have stopped her, but Kate said shortly, "Nonsense, Phil. My girls were born women. You ride for the doctor."

At dawn a faint, fierce whisper came from the inner room.

"Whar's my babby? What you-all doin' with my babby? You ain't goin' to take her away from me? No, *no!* She's mine, I tell you!"

Jacqueline hurried in to her with the tiny, whimpering bundle. "Of course she's yours, and the sweetest, fattest darling. Oh, Mag, how I envy you!" She kissed the other's cheek.

There was a third girl in the room, a dainty, pink and white little person who well deserved her pet-name of the "Apple Blossom." She looked up in quick distaste

from the bandages her capable hands were preparing, and went out to her mother.

"Isn't it like Jacqueline? To sit outside all night with her fingers stuffed in her ears, because she couldn't stand the groaning, and then to—kiss the creature!"

Jemima was nineteen, a most sophisticated young woman.

Her mother smiled a little. "Yes," she admitted, "it is like Jacqueline, and that's why she's going to do poor Mag more good than either of us. The doctor says we shall be able to take Mag and the baby home presently."

"Home!" Philip Benoix looked at her in amaze. Like the others, his face was drawn and pale with that strange vigil. Death does not come so close without leaving its mark on the watchers. "Miss Kate, surely you're not going to take Mag Henderson into your own home?"

"Where else? You wanted me to evict her. I can't evict her into space."

"But, the responsibility!"

"Yes, there is a responsibility," said Kate Kildare, musing. "I don't know whether it's mine or God's, or whose—and I can't afford to take any chances."

"It will be easier to look after them at home," commented the practical Jemima.



CHAPTER III

On the rare occasions when the mistress of Storm sat idle in her eyrie, her household—children, negroes, even the motley assortment of dogs that claimed her for their own—had learned to go their ways softly. The morning after Mag's affair, three collies, a hound or so, and several curs waited in a respectful row, tentative tails astir, with eyes fixed patiently upon a certain great juniper-tree at the edge of Storm garden. On the other side of it sat a very weary woman, cradled between its hospitable roots, with her back turned on the workaday world and her face to the open country. This was her eyrie; and here, when another woman would have been shut into a darkened chamber courting sleep, came Kate Kildare on occasion to rest her soul.

To the left and right of her rose taller hills, of which Storm was the forerunner, the first small ripple of the Cumberlands as they broke upon the plain. At her feet stretched mile after rolling mile of summer green, and gold, and brown. There were dappled pastures of bluegrass, clover-fields, beech-woods, great golden reaches of corn; there was the rich black-green of tobacco—not much of that, for Kate Kildare loved her land too well to ruin it. Here and there the farm of some neighbor showed larger patches of the parasite that soon or late must sap Kentucky of its vigor, even while it fills her coffers with gold; but these were few. The greater part of the land in sight was Kildare land. Storms, like some feudal keep of the Old World, brooded its chickens under its wings, watchfully.

Far away, perhaps five miles or so, the roof of another mansion showed among the trees; a new house. Kate rarely looked in that direction. It made her feel crowded. It was not the only direction from which she kept her eyes averted. On the edge of the distant horizon rested always a low gray cloud, never lifting, nor shifting. It seemed to her an aureole of shadow crowning some evil thing, even as the saints in old paintings are crowned with light. It was the smoke of the little city of Frankfort, where there is a penitentiary.

The plateau at her feet was crossed by many a slender thread of road, to one of which her eyes came presently, as wandering feet stray naturally into a path they often use. It was rather a famous road, with a name of its own in history. Wild creatures had made it centuries ago, on their way from the hills to the river. The silent moccasins of Indians had widened it; later, pioneers, Kildares and their

hardy kindred, flintlock on shoulder, ear alert for the crackling of a twig in the primeval forest, seeking a place of safety for their women and children in the new world they had come to conquer. Now it was become a thoroughfare for prosperous loaded wains, for world-famed horses, for their supplanter, the automobile, which in ever-increasing numbers has come to enjoy and kill the peace of distant countrysides.

But to Kate Kildare the early history of that road meant nothing. It was for her the road that led back, a two days' journey, into her girlhood.

In the house Jacqueline was singing, her voice drowning the mellow tones of the old piano, ringing out singularly pure and clear, like a child's, lacking as yet the modulations to be learned of one teacher alone; life. It was a new song that Philip Benoix had brought for her to try:

"A little winding road
Goes over the hill to the plain—
A little road that crosses the plain
And comes to the hill again.
I sought for Love on that road—"

sang Jacqueline, cheerfully.

The eyes of the listener filled with sharp tears. She too had sought for Love on that road.

She saw herself riding down it into her great adventure, so young, so laughing and brave, Basil Kildare on his great horse beside her, all the world a misty golden green. She saw—even with closed eyes, she saw—the turn of the road where Jacques Benoix, Philip's father, had come to meet them on their wedding journey.

So far her memories often led her before she stopped them. But the experience of the night had left her oddly stirred and weakened, not quite herself. To-day the memories had their way with her.

She lived again through the whirlwind courtship that was still remembered in a community where sudden marriages are not unusual; saw again, as she had first seen it, the arresting, great figure of Basil Kildare framed in a ballroom door, with smoldering black eyes upon her, that spoke so much more eloquently than his tongue. Yet his tongue had done well enough, too, that night. Before their

first dance was over he had said to her: "I have been watching you grow up, Kate. Now I think you are old enough to marry me."

Two weeks later they went to her mother, hand in hand.

"But, my dearest!" fluttered the startled lady, "Mr. Kildare is a man of forty, and you only seventeen, only a child! Besides—"

"Mr. Kildare," answered the girl, with a proud glance at her lover, "will help me to become a woman, Mother dear."

What was she, newly widowed, who had depended in all things upon her husband, to oppose such a pair of wills? Rumors of the wild doings at Storm were not lacking in that gentler community, nor was the Kildare blood what she would have chosen to mix with her own. But there is among this type of women always the rather touching belief that it needs only matrimony to tame the wildest of eagles into a cooing dove. Kildare, moreover, was one of the great landowners of the State, a man of singular force and determination, and, when he chose to exert it, of a certain virile charm. When Mrs. Leigh realized that, ever since her daughter had been old enough to exhibit promise of the beauty she afterwards attained, this man had marked her for his own, a feeling of utter helplessness came over her.

They were a magnificent pair to look at, as they stood before her, tall, vivid, vital. Beside Basil Kildare the youths who had hitherto courted Kate, young as she was, seemed callow and insignificant, even to the mother. It would need a man to rule such a woman as Kate was to become, not an adoring boy; and Mrs. Leigh was of the type and generation that believed firmly in the mastery of husbands.

She could not make up her mind to consent to the marriage, but she did not forbid it. And it is probable that her forbidding would have had as much effect upon that pair of lovers as the sighing of the southwind. Perhaps less effect; for, in a Kentucky May, the sighing of the southwind is very persuasive.

Bridesmaids and their escorts rode part way on the wedding journey; a gay cavalcade, some of the youths a little white and quiet, all of the girls with envious, sentimental eyes upon Kate where she rode beside the handsomest of the wild Kildares, with the romantic, whispered reputation of his race upon him.

When these had turned back, the bridegroom, chafing a little under their

surveillance, swore a great oath of relief and spurred his horse close. In a sudden panic Kate bolted away from him, galloped up a lane, leaped a fence into a field, where he caught her and seized her, laughing aloud: "That's my girl! That's my pretty wild hawk! The spirit for a mother of Kildare men, by God!"

After that she met his kisses unafraid. Girl as she was, it seemed to her a beautiful saying—"a mother of Kildare men." Only three things she was bringing with her from the old home to the new—her piano, her father's books, and the oaken cradle that had come with the first Leigh from overseas, and followed other Leighs across the mountains along the old Wilderness Trail, into Kentucky.

Toward the end of their two days' journey through the May woods and meadows, a little barking dog sprung out at them, frightening Kate's thoroughbred until it almost threw her. Kildare struck furiously at the dog, and missed; struck again, leaped from his horse, and pursued it, striking and kicking, so that the terrified creature ran for its life, and Kate cried out, "Stop, Basil, stop. What are you doing? Stop, I say!"

He came back to her, cursing, an ugly line between his brows. "Got away, damn the luck! I almost—Why, Kate! Tears? Oh, good Lord," he laughed, still frowning. "You're as soft as Jacques Benoix!"

She mastered the tears; mastered, too, a strange little fear at her heart, thinking proudly, "He came when I called! He stopped when I called!"

Aloud she said, "It was the sun that made my eyes water. Who is Jacques Benoix?"

He told her about his neighbor, a stranger—"the only gentleman within ten miles of us, so you'll have to be friends with him"—a man so soft-hearted that he would not hunt foxes or rabbits; a man who broke his colts without the whip, and was trying to break a son the same way.

"More fool he, coming up here out of a city and trying to teach *us* to break colts!"

"Has he a wife?"

Kildare gave his great laugh. "You don't suppose a man as soft as that would have escaped? The woman's sickly—of course! That's why he married her, and that's why he has come up here. Gave up a big practice in New Orleans, they say,

because he thought it would be healthier here. So it is! Too damned healthy for him, I reckon! We don't need more than one doctor around Storm, and old Doc Jones has got a corner on the births and deaths already. Yes, Benoix is rather a fool. But he's got his uses. He'll play poker for twenty-four hours at a stretch, and drink—Lord!" said Kildare, admiringly. "I don't know where the little fellow puts it all!"

It was at the next crossroads that they found Benoix waiting; a slender, rather foreign-looking man, very carefully dressed, with a stiff little bouquet of geraniums in his hands. For the first time Kate's direct young gaze met the eyes whose blueness, in their dark setting, was a never-failing surprise to her. They held hers steadily for a moment; it seemed to her that they had already talked together before he spoke.

"I bring to Mrs. Kildare the first fruits from her kingdom," he said, offering the little bouquet.

"Flowers from Storm?" laughed Basil, incredulously. "Where'd you get them? You're a wizard, Jacques! I never saw any flowers at Storm."

"You were not looking for them, my friend. Now you will look!" Benoix' smile was a gleam of white teeth.

Kate tucked the flowers into her habit, and held out her hand to him. "I've been ordered to be friends with you. I do not think it will be hard," she said.

Kildare laughed again as the other bent formally over her hand. "Thank Heaven, I'm no Frenchman! A woman's hand, in a glove, must be about as thrilling to kiss as a mare's hoof. Try her lips, man! You'll find them better," he urged; and roared with laughter to see them both blushing.

Benoix rode with them the rest of the way, pointing out to the girl the beauties of her kingdom; mares nuzzling their new-born foals; the tender green of young crops; cloud shadows drifting over the rolling miles that darkled like ocean beneath a wind; a pair of mocking-birds at play, their gray wings flashing circles of white. For some time the hills had been marching toward them, and at last they reached the first. It was low, and covered with juniper-bushes. On the crest of it stood a house, grim and stanch as when the pioneer Kildare built it, facing undaunted through the years the brunt of every storm that swept the plateau. Its trees were bent and twisted by the giant grasp of many winds.

"You see why they call it 'Storm,'" said Benoix.

Kildare had left them, spurring forward with sudden eagerness, whistling. Crashing down through the underbrush came two enormous bloodhounds, baying like mad things. Kildare flung himself from his horse and met them with a shout, seizing them in his arms, romping and tumbling about with the great, frantic beasts until all three were covered with mud and slaver. It was a rather terrific spectacle. Kate thought of a bas-relief she had seen somewhere of a satyr playing with leopards.

"The only things in the world Basil loves!" murmured the Creole; adding quickly, "or did love. Do not be startled, Mrs. Kildare. Bloodhounds are greatly maligned. Jove and Juno, there, are as kind as kittens, despite their rough ways. Here you will find many rough ways," he spoke as if in warning. "It is a man's place. But you will change it!"

He was mistaken. After all her years there, Storm was still "a man's place." Kate had never found the time, nor the heart, to make a home of it.

Benoix left them, and Kate and Basil mounted to their house alone. Seen close at hand, it proved to be not without a certain charm, despite its weather-beaten grimness. No house can lack personality that has grown generation by generation with the race it shelters. The older part was of rough-hewn logs, whitewashed. To this had been added later a wing of boulders; later still, one of brick. Across the long front ran a brick-paved gallery, where a disused carriage had been drawn for shelter, and taken possession of by a flock of turkeys.

Negroes, big and little, came running from the quarters at the back. A huge, beaming black woman waddled out and lifted Kate bodily from the saddle, loudly praising God.

"My Lawdy, ain't she des' a *beauty*? Ain't Mr. Bas' done picked him a beauty-bright?"

In the open door waited another house-servant; a handsome young mulatto girl, who curtsied respectfully and stared at her new mistress with hostile, curious eyes.

Remembering, Kate shuddered, as she had shuddered then with the bewilderment, the sense of unreality, that took possession of her at that moment. It was all so unlike what she had expected, so appallingly unlike the gracious,

well-ordered life of the stately Bluegrass homes she had known.

Rank weeds grew to the very door-sill. Within she saw a huge, raftered hall hung with antlers and guns and saddles, pelts, fox-brushes. There was a stuffed bloodhound, the ancestor perhaps of Jove and Juno. A horse's head protruded from the wall, nostrils dilated, glassy eyes starting from the sockets, as if the poor creature were still running his last race with Death.

"Welcome home, wife!" cried Basil Kildare, kissing her lips with a loud smack.

The negroes guffawed in delight, the hounds bayed again till the hills echoed.

Then beside the house she saw a few squares and circles of fresh-turned earth, planted with limp coleas, and dusty-millers, and all the other unlovely specimens of horticulture favored by men when they go a-gardening. Her eyes filled with sudden tears.

"Why, Basil!" She slipped a hand into his. "You dear! How sweet of you to try to make me the little garden!"

"Eh? What garden?" His eyes followed hers. "Oh! That must be some of Benoix' doings. He's the only man 'round here who has time to fool with posies."



CHAPTER IV

There was never a stranger honeymoon than that of Kate and Basil Kildare. It began with a view-halloa. It ended ... how should happy hunting end except with the death of something?

That first year was not without its heady charm for a girl with the facile, the almost tragic, adaptability of seventeen years. True, it was not married life as she had dreamed it; but it was her husband's life. She made it hers.

Kildare's boon companions found to their relief that a young wife was no restraint upon their pleasures; was indeed an addition to them. No sport was too rough for her to share, no riding too hard, no gambling too heavy. Despite her town breeding, this was no hothouse plant, this daughter of a horse-racing, whisky-drinking, card-playing gentry. Kildare took a vast delight in her prowess, particularly at the card-table; swearing joyously when she won, paying her losses, which were considerable, with an amused indifference equal to her own. One quality, and one alone, had power to move him in man, woman, or beast. It was the quality he called Spirit.

In that Kate was not lacking. Rumors of the wild Kildares, always rife in a countryside they had made famous for generations with their amusements, did not abate after the coming of a new mistress to Storm. Of the society of her own sex, she had little or nothing. The few women of her class within driving distance were careful to call once—Kildare was not a man to antagonize. But they did not come again. Kate was not sorry. She found them less interesting than their men-folk. Their manners were provincial, their outlook narrow, and—they did not fall in love with her. In this they were unlike their husbands, their brothers, their sons, and fathers.

The guest-house was rarely empty. The bride and groom were never alone. Storm had long been a gathering place for sportsmen of every type, from the neighboring towns, from the city, from other States. Nor were their guests always gentlemen. Kate, indeed, grew to prefer certain of the rough and simple farmers who came there to the more polished visitors. Their admiration was humbler, less troublesome.

Gentlemen or not, Kate numbered her admirers among her husband's friends by

the score. She grew as adept in handling them as in handling colts; and her prowess in this, too, amused Basil Kildare enormously. He rallied her on each new victim with chuckles of delight. Too confident of himself for jealousy, he knew, if he thought of it at all, that his honor was safer in her hands than it had ever been in his own.

That the girl came to no harm in that wild year was owing to no watchfulness of her husband's. The Kildare motto was "Liberty For All." Nor was it owing to any love of her husband's, Kate soon knew this.

Her beauty was a matter of great pride to him. He flaunted it, his property, before other envious men; took her often upon his knee when any were about; pulled the pins out of her hair to reveal the full flowing splendor of it; hung her with jewels, sent away for velvets and silks and laces, so that she went about the rough place clad like a young queen at court. But despite various episodes in his career, Kildare was never a woman's man. He had married for one reason, and one alone. He made no concealment of it. "People say we Kildares are doomed, that the stock is dying out. We'll show 'em!" he often said. "Meanwhile, let the girl have her fling."

Nevertheless, there was watchfulness. No matter how far she went, no matter to what lengths her reckless gaiety led her, Kate was aware of the quiet, understanding scrutiny of Jacques Benoix. Their nearest neighbor, and by the strange attraction of opposites, Kildare's chosen intimate, it was inevitable that she should be thrown constantly into the company of the Creole. Despite his very evident admiration, he did not join the ranks of her more or less avowed lovers; a fact that in turn piqued and oddly comforted Kate. For at times this new life of hers seemed a strange dream, in which Benoix, with his gentleness, his punctilious courtesy, his rather formal friendliness of aspect, was the only fixed reality. She felt, vaguely, that she was safe with him; safer than with her husband. She thought of him more as a friend than as a man.

He reminded her somewhat of her father and his companions, courtly, scholarly gentlemen who belonged to that period of the South when men not only gambled and rode and drank, but found leisure to cultivate poetry, and Greek, and music, all the fine things of life. He talked to her about such matters as had interested them, large impersonal matters, taking for granted her intelligent understanding. This flattered the girl, though she had no ambition to be thought a scholar.

Often he borrowed books from her small store, to the impatient amusement of

Basil Kildare, who looked upon the reading of books as a pastime suitable for invalids and old women. Kate, too, found no room in her exciting, absorbing life for books, at that time. Still, there was an atmosphere about the Creole far less foreign to her than to her companions. It reminded her of a sheltered, exquisite, finely ordered childhood, of certain standards that she might otherwise have been in danger of forgetting. She never joined a group of her husband's boon companions, whether in the gaming-room or the hunting-field, without first making sure unconsciously that Benoix was there. And he was usually there.

At length Benoix, in his professional capacity, spoke to Kildare.

"What the devil, Jacques! Stop her riding and late hours, and all? What d'ye mean?"

The doctor told him.

The husband swore a pleased oath. "Good little girl! I told you we'd show 'em. But what of it? Child-bearing's no disease, man! Good Gad, the girl ain't goin' to turn out sickly, is she?" Kildare had a queer horror of "sickliness."

"Not if I can help it," said the other. He added, in the language Basil best understood, "You do not race a brood-mare, my friend. You turn her out to pasture."

Kildare admitted the point. Thereafter, though the usual life at Storm went on unchanged, Kate was no longer a part of it.

She was rather glad. It was restful to be turned out to pasture. She liked to hear them start off with the hounds in the cold dawn, knowing that she might turn over and sleep again. Sometimes she was awakened at night by swearing and quarrels and loud laughter from the guest-wing. Sometimes there was singing, one rich baritone leading the rest; and to this Kate listened eagerly. Dr. Benoix sang very beautifully when he was drunk.

One night she started up out of a dream to hear tipsy voices at her very door. It opened, and Basil Kildare stood on the threshold, holding a lamp above his head, saying over his shoulder: "Come on in, boys! That's all right—Kit's a good sport. Come and look at her, if you like. Prettiest thing in a nightgown you ever saw!"

An anger possessed Kate of which she had never dreamed herself capable. She knew then that there would never be any defender for her and her children except herself. She saw that what her inexperience had mistaken for strength in

her husband was only violence. She reached for the pistol at her bedside.

"Basil," she said quietly—too quietly—"if you bring those men into my room, I shall shoot."

Her voice sobered him; shocked him into an anger as hot as hers was cold. "Your room? *Your* room? By God, I do what I choose in this house! D'ye know who I am? By God—"

But her voice had sobered the others as well. They got him away by main force. Not one of them had glanced at her.

In the morning, for the first time in her life, Kate was ill, and Kildare in alarm sent for Benoix. Before her, he told the doctor what had occurred; ashamed, but brazening it out with a laugh. The doctor said nothing; merely looked at him. After a moment, the big man turned and went from the room.

Kate was oddly sorry for her husband. "He did not know what he was doing," she murmured. "But oh, Jacques, if *you* had been there, it would not have happened!"

"No. Hereafter, I shall be there."

"Please, please," whispered the girl, and she began to cry. She was quite unnerved. "Oh, I am afraid sometimes, Jacques! It's such a comfort to know you are near, to hear your voice—even when you are as drunk as the others!"

He went rather white about the lips. "Hereafter I shall be there," he repeated steadily. "And I shall not be as drunk as the others. I shall not be drunk at all."

After that night there was less company at Storm, and Kildare began to make frequent absences from home, lasting sometimes over several days. Kate was grateful, realizing that it was his way of showing her consideration. But she was also lonely. For the first time, she missed the companionship of women.

She made shy overtures to the tenants' wives, to the women in the village. But the barrier of caste was very evident, and there were other barriers. No virtue is so quick to take up arms as that of the middle classes. Kildare as a landlord was not popular. Beauty, charm, did not help her with them as it had with their husbands. There was the further barrier, which all aliens in a rural community reach soon or late: the well-nigh impassable barrier of strangeness. They would have none of her. They looked askance at her winning sweetness; they accepted

her bounty with stony, ungrateful thanks.

She thought of asking friends to visit her, only to be brought up sharply by the realization that hers was not a home to which such women as she had known would care to come. Once she spoke to her husband tentatively of sending for her mother.

"Oh, by all means, if you want her," he agreed, yawning a little. "But what will that genteel female do with herself at Storm? There isn't a tea-party nor an Episcopal Church within half a day's drive of us."

Kate knew that he spoke truly. Her mother would be both shocked and unhappy at Storm. Let her keep what illusions she had a while longer. The girl was young to be guarding other women's illusions.

And so she was thrown for company upon Jacques Benoix and his wife; the latter a personality so colorless, so fragile, that strain as she might she could not now recall a feature of her face, nor a tone of her voice. Yet when Kate's time came, this helpless invalid had herself carried up the hill to Storm, so that the girl might not be without a woman's hand to hold during the ordeal.

At this memory, the older Kate flushed a little. She wondered how much the invalid had seen with her dim and weary eyes, before she closed them.



CHAPTER V

The day came when Basil, summoned from the field to his wife's bedside, foundered his best hunter in his haste to see his son. The doctor met him at the door.

"It is over, and well over," he said, gravely smiling.

Mrs. Benoix added, "She never whimpered!"

"Of course not, ma'am!" said Kildare. "Neither does my dog, Juno."

He tiptoed to the bed, quietly for him, and stood gazing down at the little wrinkled head on Kate's breast, with a queer, sheepish pride on his face; somewhat the look of a schoolboy who receives a prize for good behavior.

Kate smiled tremulously up at him, "Isn't she sweet?"

His face fell. "Gad, a she-child, is it? Well, can't be helped. We'll name her for my rich Aunt Jemima. Better luck next time, Kit."

But there was not better luck next time; there was worse luck.

Less than a year later, Kildare inspected his second daughter. Kate was sleeping, the baby beside her covered to its chin. The nurse in attendance was the young mulatto woman who had looked so strangely at her new mistress when she came to Storm. Now her hostility to Kate seemed to have lost itself in devotion to Kate's child; the almost passionate devotion that makes of colored women such invaluable nurses.

As Kildare approached, he was aware of this girl's eyes fixed upon him. Stealthily her hand went out, and drew away the sheet that covered the new baby.

He ripped out a startled oath. "Good God! What's the matter with it, Mahaly? It's—it's damaged, ain't it?"

Kate awoke with a gasping cry, and put her hands out to hide the little twisted body from his gaze.

Fortunately the child died. "Fortunately," repeated the mother to herself now, without a quiver. To the end of her days she would carry in her heart the memory of its faint, unbabyish moaning. It opened to her the door of a new world, the world of suffering. She learned the agony of love that cannot help. The little Katherine lived long enough to make a woman of her; and strangely enough it reached the one soft spot in the heart of Basil Kildare. During its brief and piteous life, husband and wife came almost close to each other.

To the man with his passion for physical perfection, the breeder of thoroughbred horses and cattle and dogs, the fact that a child of his should have been born without this precious heritage was a thing incredible, a humiliation beyond words. Whenever he looked at the tiny, whimpering creature, he asked pardon of her with his eyes for so monstrous an injustice. He never tired of carrying her about in his powerful arms, of rubbing the poor twisted limbs in an effort to ease the pain away.

"The stock's sound enough," he would say again and again. "I'm all right, and you're all right, Kit. What's the matter with her?"

Once he whispered in sudden horror, "I've been a pretty bad lot, Kate. God! Do you suppose *I'm* to blame for this?"

She comforted him with her arms about his neck.

When the child died, Kildare himself made its grave, and carried the coffin in his arms across the fields to the little pasture burying-lot where lay all the Kildares of Storm. It was a queer funeral; none the less pitiful for its queerness. First Basil with the coffin, the two great hounds gamboling and baying around him in their delight at going for a walk with the family; then Kate, alone and quite tearless; then a dozen wailing, hysterical negroes. Benoix and a few others met them at the grave, but there was no clergyman. Kate herself spoke what she could of the burial service, till her memory and her voice failed her. Then Kildare picked his wife up in his arms, and carried her home as tenderly as he had carried his child's coffin.

But that night he was so drunk that Kate kept the woman Mahaly in her room for safety.

It was during this time, with maternity, and sorrow, and womanhood, that love came to her. She did not know it. She knew only that things could be borne so long as Benoix was there to help her, guarding, understanding; Benoix with his

steady eyes, and his gentle strength to share with her weakness.

They needed little excuse for their constant companionship; mere neighborliness; small Jemima's health; presents of flower-seeds and baby-patterns from his wife; books to be lent or borrowed, for Kate had turned to books at last. Kate's strength was slow in returning, and she spent much of the day sitting in the garden with her baby. It came to be Benoix' habit to stop there for a while coming or going from his house beyond. The baby knew the pit-a-patter of his racking horse, and had learned to clap her hands and crow when she heard it. The Creole had the same grave simplicity for children, as for his equals. It never failed to win them.

Often Kate drove with him on his rounds, the child on her knees, because she needed air and was not yet strong enough for riding; and in this way she saw a side of her friend which had hitherto been unknown to her. It was true, as Basil Kildare had said, that Dr. Jones "had a corner on the births and deaths in the neighborhood," but between the two extremes there were various physical disabilities which "the French doctor," as he was called, was allowed to treat, especially when there was no money for payment. With increasing frequency he was called in by the older physician to cases which proved baffling; and it became known that when the French doctor prescribed expensive medicines and nourishing luxuries, they were invariably forthcoming, whether they could be paid for or not.

With this the young mistress of Storm had much to do; and while this fact did not apparently lessen the neighborhood's attitude of critical animosity toward her, it gave the girl a keen pleasure to know that she was helping her friend. She began to understand the secret of the strong hold his profession has upon those who follow it truly—that warmly personal relation between the sufferer and his physician which is almost filial in its intensity. Jacques loved his patients, and they loved him. But it was not a lucrative practice.

She was witness to one little scene that came often to her memory in after days. He had stopped to visit a young farm laborer whom he had recently relieved of a stomach-trouble that was literally starving him to death. An old woman had followed him to the door of the cabin, her work-worn hands twisting together, her lips too tremulous for speech.

"But your troubles are over, Mrs. Higgs!" he smiled, lifting his hat with the punctilious courtesy he showed all women. "Live? Certainly he will live, and in

a few weeks we shall have him walking about, eating you out of house and home."

Still the old creature was unable to speak; but she seized the hand he held out to her, and carried it to her lips. When he withdrew it, in laughing embarrassment, there were tears upon it.

At last her voice came, hoarsely: "I don' know what it's goin' to cost, an' I don't, keer! It's wuth every cent, an' I'll wuk my fingers to the bone to pay ye. God bless ye, Doc!"

He looked down at the hard-wrung tears on his hand. "You have paid me already," he said; and Kate knew that he meant it.

Afterwards she questioned him a little about the case.

"It was a gastro-enterostomy, without complications," he explained. "A very simple thing, done every day."

He described the operation in some detail, Kate watching him in amaze.

"You can't tell me that a thing like that is done every day! Jacques, be honest— isn't it a very remarkable operation for a country doctor to perform?"

"Oh—for a country doctor, perhaps. For a surgeon who has had some experience, no."

"You are a surgeon, then, not a doctor?"

He smiled, that warm, flashing smile which always fell like a gleam of sunlight across her heart. "I am—whatever people need me to be."

It was true—physician, nurse, companion, guardian, friend—Jacques Benoix was always whatever people needed him to be.

In that moment, Kate realized that he had given up a great career to bring his sick wife into the country.

One of the closest bonds between them was a love for music. Kate's singing, untrained and faulty though it was, gave keen pleasure to his starved ears, and often he brought his little son to hear her; a boy of ten, rather grave and shy, but with his father's beautiful smile. Sometimes there were duets to be tried out together; Kildare, when he was at home, listening tolerantly and beating time out

of time to the pleasant sounds they made.

But he was not often at home in those days. He sought his pleasure elsewhere. The guest-house had been empty for months.

Kate and Benoix found his frequent absences rather a relief. They were freer to discuss the things that did not interest him, to read aloud to each other, to play games with the exacting Apple-Blossom, an executive from her cradle. It was at last the sort of domestic life of which every girl dreams in her secret heart; and Kate grew lovelier than her loveliest.

Meanwhile the countryside watched, and whispered, and waited. The countryside was wise in the ways of Nature, if these two were not.

Once Kildare asked (she missed the wistfulness of his voice), "Ain't it time you were riding again, Kit, and playing cards with the boys? They like to have you 'round. They're getting jealous of that kid of yours."

Kate smiled at him, absently. She was sitting on the floor, building a house of blocks under instruction from young Jemima. The amusements of men seemed to her futile things, just then, and childish.

"Benoix has given us the go-by, too. Won't touch a card or drink a drop nowadays. I don't know what's come over him. Good gad—" Kildare gave himself an impatient shake,— "sometimes I think the little Frenchman's a female in disguise!"

Kate smiled again. She knew very well what had come over Jacques. That much at least she had done in return for the precious thing his friendship was.

At last her eyes were opened. One day she saw her husband striding toward the house from the stables, pale, frowning, splashed with blood.

She cried out, and ran to him, "Basil! What's happened? Are you hurt?"

"Nonsense! I've just had to kill Juno, that's all."

"Kill Juno?" she gasped. "Good Heavens! Was she mad? Did she attack you?" She gathered up her child with an instinctive, fierce gesture of protection.

He grinned at her. "What an imagination! Bitches don't go mad, my dear. She littered yesterday, and her pups were all curs, that's all—every damned one of them. Beastly luck! So I've killed the lot of them—Juno, too."

She recoiled from him, repeating stupidly, "You *killed* them? Killed your own dog because her puppies were mongrels? Basil! I—I—don't think I understand."

"Time you learned something about breeding," he muttered impatiently. "Don't you know she might never have had another decent pup? Storm's got its reputation to sustain. I can't have the place overrun by a lot of curs."

He passed her, and went into the house.

She followed, stunned. All through supper, as she sat opposite her husband, listening, answering, serving his needs, the vision was before her of the great hound's eyes as they must have looked when, one by one, he took her puppies from her; when at last she felt the beloved hand at her own throat.

She looked at her husband furtively. It seemed to her that she had never really seen him before. The coarse, hairy hands, the face with its cruel lips, its low brow above which the hair waved up strongly like a black plume, its eyes, handsome and bright and shallow, like the eyes of certain animals of the cat-tribe—surely those eyes were growing too bright? People called this family "the wild Kildares," sometimes "the mad Kildares." *Were* they mad? Did that explain?

Slowly a great horror of the man seized her; a fear which never afterwards went away. He was her master, as he had been Juno's. She was at his mercy, his thing, his creature. If she displeased him, if her children displeased him....

He fell asleep presently in a chair, according to his wont, snoring like a well-fed animal. She sat and watched him for a while, shivering. Suddenly she gave a little choked cry, and ran out of the house. She stumbled down the hill, through the ravine below, along the road to where a lighted window shone through the darkness. It was the window of Jacques Benoix' study. She did not pause to realize why she was going. She wanted only to be near her friend.

He sat beside a lamp, reading to his wife, who lay on her couch beyond. Against his shoulder leaned his boy, rubbing a cheek upon the rough coat as if he loved to touch it. The light fell on the two dark heads so close together, the clustering boyish curls, the strong, curved lips, as sweet as any woman's. Kate pressed her white face against the window, drinking in the homely comfort of the scene. She had no wish to speak to him, no disloyal thought of betraying to her friend this new and terrible knowledge of her husband. It was enough to know that help was within reach; always within reach.

The invalid's cough sounded from the couch. Benoix laid his book aside and went to adjust her pillows. He bent over his wife and kissed her.

Then Kate knew. This stabbing shock in her heart—it was not friendship. It was jealousy; love.

She started away from the window. She must have made some slight sound, for

Jacques looked up suddenly, and after a moment came out into the darkness.

He almost stumbled over her in the ravine, face downward among dead leaves, shaken with dry sobbing. He went on his knees beside her, gripping his hands together behind him so that he should not touch her. But his voice was beyond his control. It broke into little sounds of tenderness and dismay.

"Kate—you! But what has happened? Tell me! What is wrong with you? What?"

His nearness, the trembling of his voice, filled her with an exquisite terror. If she could have risen and run away she would have done so, but she dared not trust her legs. Nor could she look at him, there in the starlight, with this new secret in her eyes. She clutched desperately at her self-command.

He bent closer. "Kate, tell me! You are hurt. *Dieu!* That man—" It was the first time she had heard a trace of accent in his speech. "What has he done to you?"

Still she could not trust herself to speak. In the silence she heard his breath come hard. When he said, in a crisp, queer staccato that was not his voice at all:

"If Basil Kildare has hurt you, I shall kill him."

"No, no," she gasped out. "It is not Basil. It is you!" She would have given years of her life to recall the words the instant they were spoken.

"I? *I* have hurt you, I, who would—But tell me! You must tell me!"

His will was stronger than hers. She told him.

"I saw you—kiss her."

"Kiss—"

"Your wife." She was close to hysteria now, all hope of self-command gone. She caught him by the arm. "Jacques, do you love her? I never knew, I never thought—Oh, but you *can't* love her! It is impossible, Jacques. Why don't you answer me?"

He was shivering as if with a chill. "That is a question you have no right to ask."

"I—no right?" She laughed aloud. "What do rights matter? Besides, I have every right, because it is me you love, me! I know it by your eyes, your voice. See, you are afraid to touch me. And yet you kiss her! Why? Why?"

She could barely hear the answer. "Because—it makes her a little happy."

She laughed again, brokenly. "You hypocrite!"

"No, not quite a hypocrite—" he got it out in jerks. "She cares for me. She needs me. She has given me our son. If one cannot have—the moon—at least there are stars."

She knelt facing him, with her hands out, whispering desperately, "But if you can have the moon, if you can—? Oh, my dear, my dear! Why don't you take me?"

He took her then, held her so close that his heart shook her body as if it were her own, kissed her eyes, her hair, her lips, until she was ashamed and put up her hands before her face so that he might kiss only them.

At last he put her from him, and went without a word back to his wife.



CHAPTER VI

The older Kate, looking from her eyrie at that other self of hers as at some stranger she had once known and pitied, saw a girl who wore her secret in her face, careless of who might read. Indeed she rather hoped the world would read; she had no shame of loving.

The negroes, sensitive as devoted dogs to the mood of their mistress, vied with each other in serving her, and whispered uneasily behind her back. Several times the mulatto nurse, Mahaly, more often with her than the others, seemed about to speak to her of something, but lost courage.

Kate did not notice. She noticed very little that went on around her in those days. Sometimes, indeed, she caught the hard, shallow gaze of her husband fixed upon her, curiously. But if he drew his own conclusions from her pallor, her starry eyes, her long fits of brooding, he at least did not trouble her with questions. Which perhaps was just as well. She would have answered them.

For a while she went about in a sort of daze, living over again what had passed in the ravine, wondering what she and Jacques would say to each other when he came to her. Then she began to wonder why he did not come to her. A week passed—two weeks. She grew troubled, frightened; for the first time a little ashamed. What if it were not love with him? The girl had learned in a hard school the difference between love and the thing that is called love.

She spent hours out under the juniper tree, listening for the pit-a-patter of a racking horse. She heard it often, but it did not stop. The baby playing near heard it, too; and when it passed she murmured with a tragic droop of the little mouth: "Aw—gone—by-by, Muddy! Aw—gone—by-by!"

Presently Kate lost all sense of shame; ordered out a saddle-horse in defiance of doctor's advice, and took to haunting the crossroads and the village on the chance of meeting him alone. This never happened. Fate, rather late in the day, seemed to have taken her good name into its keeping. They met, of course, but under the furtive, curious gaze of others. Usually, too, Jacques had his boy beside him. It was as if he were afraid to go alone.

So Kate had nothing to feed her heart upon but an occasional grave "Good

morning," or a meeting of eyes that were instantly wrenched apart. It was enough for her, however. This was no mere emotion she had stirred. The man's face was worn as by a long illness. The least touch of his eyes was a caress.

She grew to pity him more than herself. "Poor Jacques!" she thought tenderly. "Poor, miserable, foolish Jacques!—" and longed to comfort, to reassure him. She felt in herself the strength for two.

At last she wrote to him:

When are you coming, Jacques? I miss you so! Do not be afraid. Friends need be none the less friends because they love each other. Don't you trust me?

It was her custom to send her baby once or twice in the week to visit the invalid, Mrs. Benoix. She gave her note to the nurse to carry.

"It is to ask the doctor for a prescription," she explained. "If he is not there, it will not be necessary to leave the note. You understand?"

It was her first lie, and she told it badly, flushing and stammering. Mahaly understood only too well. The woman seemed oddly reluctant; tried once again to say what she had to say, and failed.

When she had gone, Kate felt in the reaction as if her heart had been released from some heavy weight. "Why haven't I written before?" she thought. "Shyness, pride between people who love—what a silly thing! He shall see how strong I am; how much better and truer a friend, now that we know."

To prove the purely friendly nature of her intentions, she donned her most becoming dress, in case he chose to bring his answer in person.

Mahaly brought the answer, however, written across a leaf of a prescription-pad:

I do not dare to come. It is myself I cannot trust. Forgive me!

It was her one love-letter from Jacques Benoix. She wore it out with reading.

Some days later the bomb fell. Her husband said casually, at the supper-table, "I bought the Benoix place to-day, Kate."

"Bought—the Benoix place?"

"Yes; not that I could afford it! God knows I'm land-poor enough as it is. But they needed the money, and I knew you would like me to help them, my dear.

They're such friends of yours."

Kate moistened her lips. "Of yours, too, Basil. But—why do they need money?"

He looked at her. "Oh, haven't you heard?" He spoke slowly, as if the words were pleasant to him. "Has Jacques not told you that they are going away to live, to the mountains? Mrs. Benoix' health; lungs, you know."

The room was whirling; around her. Clutching the tablecloth to steady herself, she was aware of Mahaly behind her master's chair, looking at her sharply, warningly. "Isn't it rather foolish of Jacques?" she heard herself asking, evenly, "to give up his practice a second time?"

Kildare laughed. "Not much practice to give up, my dear! Old Jones is good enough for us—he's not a d——d Frenchman, at least," he said with sudden savagery. "In fact," he added, smoothly again, "it was I who advised Jacques to try the mountains. He has worn out his welcome here."

At last Kate understood. Her husband had seen. He meant to guard what he did not value. He had forced Benoix to sell his home, and to give up his means of livelihood. He was driving him out of the neighborhood because he was her lover.

She rose, and walked steadily from the room. The girl Mahaly followed.

"Tek keer, tek keer!" she muttered, in a low voice. "He's watchin' you, Miss Kate!"

"He is always watching me," said Kate, dully.

"Yas 'm. I done tried to warn you. Hit were de letter. Ef you jes' hadn't 'a' sent de letter!"

"My husband saw that?"

"Yas 'm. I don gib it to him."

Kate recoiled, staring at her. "You! You gave it?" she whispered. "You whom I have trusted! My own servant!"

The mulatto woman's expression was a queer mixture of malice, and triumph, and pity.

"I was his servant first," said Mahaly.

Several months later, news came of the death of Mrs. Benoix in the mountains.

But it found Kate oddly indifferent. She was lingering, then, upon a certain dark threshold which she would have crossed very gladly but for voices that held her back; the prattle of a child, the thin, helpless whimper of a baby. She had just given birth to her third daughter.

Basil Kildare did not trouble himself to inspect his new property. Servants brought him word of its sex and its soundness.

"Good gad, another female?" he cried; and went off down the hill at a gallop.

Kate heard him go, and retreated a step from the dark threshold.

There was peace in the room.

Presently it seemed to her as if some one were near, a dear familiar presence she had learned to associate with that threshold; a strength to lean her weakness on; a hand gripping hers; eyes that held her with their tenderness, would not let her go.

By a great effort she raised her lids. The vision held. A voice said steadily: "Quiet, Kate. Remember your baby."

But she had no thought of excitement. It seemed too natural to have him there. "I knew—you would come—if you could—" she whispered.

He knelt beside her. She drew his head down to her breast, just above where the baby lay. So they stayed a while without speaking.

There was some sort of commotion downstairs; a cry, instantly hushed. The old doctor entered the room in haste, and paused, staring. After a moment he went out softly, clearing his throat. A mulatto-girl, curiously gray of face, was mounting fierce guard over the door, and would allow no others to enter.

Then came a sound of trampling feet in the road, as of men bearing some heavy burden.

Benoix began to speak, in a low and rapid whisper: "Whatever comes now, you will remember how I have loved you. From the very first, when I saw you riding

to me—There is for every man one woman, only we are fools and do not wait. Wherever I am, my love shall reach you. They cannot keep my love from going to you, and you will know. For me there is only you in the world. The other things are shadows. You will remember—whatever happens, you will remember?"

She smiled: there was no need to answer.

She asked, incuriously: "What are those feet in the hall? What are they carrying?"

He answered, "Basil Kildare."

"Basil? He is hurt?"

"He is dead," said Benoix.

After a moment she began to laugh—but very softly, so that the sleeping baby on her breast might not be disturbed: "Oh, thank God, thank God! God is good to us, Jacques!"

He stopped the terrible words on her lips with his own. There were feet on the stairs. He tried to speak to her once more from the door, but he could not. He closed the door behind him.



CHAPTER VII

The peace of that quiet time with her lover remained with Kate through the days that followed, even as he had intended it should, guarding her like an armor from the seething excitement of the world beyond her door. Wailing servants, friends arriving from far and near, people filling the house with lamentations (for the kindly magic of Death had transformed Kildare for the moment into the noblest of mortals)—all this stopped at the door of the quiet room where Mahaly mounted guard over the mistress she had betrayed.

None entered that room save the old doctor, and later Kate's mother, become suddenly an old woman, broken by the terrible rumors which had penetrated her peaceful Bluegrass home. She was shocked beyond words to find her newly widowed daughter serene as some Madonna out of a painting, wrapped in a rose-colored dressing-gown that would better have suited a bride.

"Whatever comes, you will remember how I love you," Benoix had said. Kate was remembering.

She lay dreaming of the future, thinking sometimes of her husband, not unkindly, but with pity, as one thinks of poor, blundering people who have gone through life unloving and unloved. Of his death she thought not at all. It was what he would have chosen, painless and quick, a fall from his horse within sight of his own house. So her mother found her, calm and very beautiful, placidly nursing her child.

Only once was the agitated lady able to prick her serenity. It was when she began to babble of Kildare's will. This stipulated that in case of re-marriage, Kate and her children were to be deprived of any interest in the estate save only that provided by law, in which event Storm was to become an endowed home for crippled children.

At this news, indeed, Kate winced. Her husband had managed to strike at her one last time from his grave, and in a vulnerable spot—her maternity. He was forcing her to rob her children.

But she regained her calm. Surely such a father as Jacques Benoix was a better gift to her children than houses and lands and cattle!

"I can't understand it," her bewildered mother moaned. "It's a cruel will, almost an insulting will, daughter! It is almost as if he—suspected you of something. What was Mr. Kildare thinking of? You are so young, you have a right to remarry! Surely he could have had no—reason?"

Kate told her mother the reason; partly out of justice to her husband, partly because her love was a thing she wished to confess.

The other rose to her feet, staggered, gasping: "Then they are true, those dreadful rumors! You with a lover—you a married woman! Ah, my little girl—my little girl! Such things do not happen in our family. They do not! A scandal—a murder? Thank Heaven your father died in time!"

It was Kate who comforted her mother. But in the midst of her soothing caresses, a sudden trembling seized her. The color fled out of her cheeks.

"Mother! What was that you said—A *murder*—?"

So at last the truth came, the truth which Mahaly and the few who loved Kate had tried to keep out of that peaceful chamber. Jacques Benoix had gone from her side to prison for the killing of her husband.

As soon as she was strong enough to travel—indeed before she was strong enough to travel—Kate went to her lover in prison; saw him for ten minutes alone.

She wasted not a moment in preliminaries; there had already developed in her that ability for affairs that was later to make her one of the foremost women of her State.

"I have engaged the best lawyers to be had for money," she said. "You will never go to the penitentiary, Jacques!"

He shook his head, his eyes roaming over her hungrily, imprinting every detail of her beauty on his memory to stay. "It is of no use, my dear one."

She blenched a little. "You mean—you did kill Basil? But no! I don't believe it. *You* kill a man?" she laughed. "Why, you could not kill a fox, a rabbit!"

"Nevertheless," he said, "I fear that I did kill Basil."

She caught at the doubt in his words. "You 'fear'—you do not *know*, Jacques?"

"I know only that I tried."

He told her the story then. Others had wished to tell her, but she would listen to nobody, saying proudly, "Jacques shall explain to me...."

He had been waiting at the foot of Storm hill, watching her window, desperate for news of how she did, when Kildare came galloping down the road. Before Benoix could speak, he had reined in his horse, crying out; "You, is it? I thought I'd catch you skulking around. You'll find a new brat at the house; female, of course. If it's yours, you're welcome to it—damn you!"

Benoix, blind with sudden fury, tried to drag him from his horse. Kildare struck with his whip, broke away, jeering back over his shoulder. Then Benoix found to his hand a jagged piece of rock, and flung it straight at the grinning face that mocked him. Kildare's horse reared, toppled...

A negro who had seen it all came trembling out of the hedge and found the French doctor striving to staunch a wound in Kildare's temple, from which blood and brains oozed together.

Benoix finished with Kate's face hidden on his breast "Oh, Jacques, Jacques!" she shuddered. "It was for me, then—you tried to defend me! But—perhaps the fall killed him, not your stone?"

"Perhaps," said her lover, soothing her.

In a moment she lifted her head. "Now," she cried, "we will face this thing together!" She proposed that he should marry her at once.

He knew nothing of Kildare's will; but he refused, would not listen, hid his eyes with his hand so that the pleading of her face would not weaken him.

"I've dragged you low enough without that, my Kate. Remember your children," he bade her, sternly, "Remember my boy. We have more than ourselves to consider."

She could not move him, neither with tears nor with kisses. The jailor came.

As they led him away, her voice followed him so that the grim place rang with it! "Your boy shall be mine till you come for us both. Jacques, I'll wait, I'll wait!"

Benoix was right. The best lawyers to be had could not keep him from the penitentiary. The judge, a just and troubled man who had known Kildare from

boyhood, laid what emphasis he could on the uncertainty of the case, the probability that Benoix had fought in self-defense. The jury would have none of it. Popular prejudice had transformed the master of Storm into a hero, a martyr to the unwritten law, who had given his life to defend the sanctity of his home. It did not help the accused that he was a stranger in the State, reputed to be an atheist, had not even a decent, pronounceable English name, was—of all things!—a Frenchman.

"A Creole American," corrected the accused, quietly. It was his one word in his own behalf.

Kate was in the courtroom when the jury brought in its verdict. She rose to receive it as if she were the accused, and more than one member of the jury, glancing at her, pursed virtuous lips.

The sentence was a life term in the penitentiary.

Mrs. Kildare, now famous and infamous throughout the country, made one more public appearance, this time in the church where she had been christened, confirmed, and married. She did not wear mourning, but her face was like marble against the bright color of her dress. The congregation began to whisper. She had brought her two children to be christened.

She was not quite alone. Two friends entered with her and stood at her side: her mother, and a young man named Thorpe, who had been the least among her girlhood adorers, and was the first to offer his support in her disgrace. It was he, as godfather, who spoke the children's names: "Jemima" for the elder, and for the younger, "Jacqueline Benoix."

At this there was a rustle throughout the church. Was it possible that she was actually naming her child for the condemned lover? The old minister's voice faltered, almost stopped, in his dismay. Afterwards, she had to brave the blank, frozen glances of people who had known her since her birth, and who now, it seemed, knew her no longer.

Not until that moment did Kate realize what interpretation the world might put upon her act of public loyalty to the man who had gone for her sake into a living death.

She had, indeed, her answer for the world; but it was an answer that must wait many years, until the baby Jacqueline was old enough to marry Benoix' son.

CHAPTER VIII

On the gallery at Storm stood two anxious girls with eyes fixed upon the big juniper-tree less patiently than the eyes of the waiting dogs. Their mother was invisible, but the presence of the dogs betrayed her.

"We'll have to do it, Jack," murmured the elder of the girls. "I hate to disturb her, but—there they come!"

She pointed to the road immediately below, along which an object that looked like a large black beetle was rattling and panting and honking its leisurely way toward Storm.

"The voice of the Ark will arouse her—just wait," advised Jacqueline. "It would arouse anything. Professor Jimsy must have bought the original trial machine made by the inventor, Blossom. How did he come to see mother before there were automobiles?"

"I don't remember—but you may be sure he came. Regularly every Friday night, and again Sunday, if encouraged. There! Mother must be stirring. Look at the dogs."

Mrs. Kildare appeared from the other side of the great tree, moving rather dazedly, as people move who have just awakened from sleep. The dogs leaped and gamboled around her, and she put them down with vague, kind gestures.

"There, Beauty! Never mind! No muddy feet, please, Jock! So, boys, so—"

"Mother, do hurry," called Jemima, with some impatience.

Mrs. Kildare hurried. It had long been her habit to obey her eldest child, who made her feel at times quite immature and thoughtless.

"What's up, girly?" she asked.

"Company," they said together.

"Oh, yes. Jim Thorpe's night for supper. But why so much excitement about it?"

"Only that the automobile is now at the foot of the hill, and your hair is coming

down, and he's going to catch you in an old, faded gingham. What *am* I going to do with such a mother?" sighed Jemima. "I don't believe you ever notice what you put on!"

"I don't," admitted her parent, humbly.

"And you think it's highmindedness, whereas it's just pure vanity. You know that no matter what you wear, you're more beautiful than everybody else!" The girl's voice was sternly accusing.

Kate laughed and kissed them both. "You spoil me, dears," she said; but Jemima's shrewdness made her wince, as it often did.

It was quite true that clothes existed for Kate Kildare only as more or less comfortable covering for her body; but of that body itself, the fine, satin skin, the hands, the lustrous hair, she took a care that she would have scorned to use in the days of her bellehood. She was aware of her comeliness, and she treasured it; not, however, for herself. She was a woman of one idea. Never for a moment, despite many failures, had she relinquished the hope of securing Jacques Benoix' release.

She asked meekly, "What dress am I to wear this evening, please, Blossom? Dear me! It seems to me you two have made yourselves rather gorgeous for a mere godfather. He'll be quite dazzled."

Both girls looked down consciously at their pretty frocks. They exchanged glances.

"It isn't exactly for Professor Jimsy," murmured Jacqueline. "He never looks at any one but you, anyway. It's—you tell her, Jemmy!"

"No, you!"

In the end, they told her together. "It's a party!"

Kate looked at them in surprise. Suddenly their eagerness, their excitement, struck her as being pathetic. What had they known of parties, of the gay, pleasure-seeking life usual to girls of their class?

The county of which Storm was the chief estate occupied toward its more aristocratic neighbor, the Bluegrass, the relative position of an unpretentious side-street toward the fashionable residence district of a city. It had a social life

of its own—what portion of the hospitable, gregarious, pleasure-loving State has not? There were many simple gaieties, dances, picnics, and the like, which took no account of distance or other obstacles to the natural coming together of young men and girls, and of older folk who have exchanged gallantry for gossip. In this life, the mistress of Storm held a certain place. No farmers' dinner, no fair, or barbecue, was complete without the presence of the county's one great landowner.

But her daughters were creatures apart, young princesses among admiring vassals. The country people looked with awe upon their tutors and dancing-masters and singing-teachers, their books, their clothes from the city. It had never occurred to them to include the little heiresses of Storm in their humble amusements; they belonged so palpably to a different world. The fact that this world was closed to them, because of the unforgotten scandal connected with their mother, left Jemima and Jacqueline singularly friendless; princesses, perhaps, but lonely princesses in their castle.

For the first time Kate realized this. Hitherto she had felt that they three were all sufficient unto themselves, with Philip Benoix, and James Thorpe, and one or two others who came regularly to Storm. Now she said to herself with a sharp pang, "My poor babies! My little hidden, lovely girls!"

Aloud she said, "A party?—that is splendid! Who are coming to the party? Some neighbor boys and girls?"

"Hardly," replied Jemima, with a superior smile. "The party is coming from Lexington."

Kate's face changed. She asked in quick dread, "Who are they?" It was not often that she met people from Lexington, except in the way of business, and then it was an ordeal to her.

"We don't know. Isn't it exciting? Professor Thorpe is bringing them."

Then Kate smiled. They would not be people who knew her. She could trust James Thorpe.

"I must make myself presentable," she murmured, moving toward the stairs.

The two girls heaved sighs of relief. It was evident that they had entertained doubts as to her reception of the party. Jacqueline walked beside her, rubbing a caressing cheek against her shoulder—a trick she had learned from the horses

among whom she spent much of her time.

"You see, Mummy, Blossom thought it was high time for us to be having some beaux."

"Good Heavens—not yet!" murmured Kate.

"At my age, you had several babies," Jemima reminded her, firmly; and Kate could not deny it.

"So we consulted our godfather," continued Jacqueline. "It seemed to us we had at last found a use for a godfather—besides candy, and birthday presents, and things like that, which don't really count. We asked him if he couldn't find us some nice young professors at the university—attractive, dancing ones, you know, not old fossils like him."

"Pleasant for James," murmured Kate. "He must be very little over forty!"

"But imagine him dancing," cried Jacqueline, and dismissed him from her world with a gesture. "So Jemima suggested to him that the surest way of having you alone, the next time he came, was to bring some young professors to amuse us. And," she finished dramatically, "here he comes, the Ark simply bursting with young professors!"

There was a loud honk at the door.

Mrs. Kildare fled up the stairs. Jemima, following her, said in a low voice, "You don't really mind, then—about the party?"

Something odd in the girl's voice arrested her. "Mind? Why should I mind, dear?"

"I don't know. I thought perhaps—you see you never do have any of your old friends here, and—and sometimes that seems to me queer. You must have had so many friends there, in Lexington, a woman like you. Or were they all beaux?"

Kate's heart beat hard. It was not the first time the girl's observant intelligence had frightened her, nor did the wistfulness of the query escape notice.

"Yes, I had many friends, and beaux, too—just as you will have, dear," she said steadily. "But you see I have been too busy with the farm and such things, since your father died, to keep up with people. That is all."

Jemima looked immeasurably relieved. "I knew you would give us friends some day, Mother, just as you have given us everything else. Only, I—I got a little tired of waiting."

"Did you, dear?" said her mother sadly. "I thought you were quite happy."

"We are, of course. But you see, we've *got* to get married some day, Jackie and I, and—there's no use waiting too long."

"I see."

Despite her dismay, Kate's lips twitched. It was so like this capable child of hers to be arranging the future, at nineteen, ready to be a mother to herself in case her natural mother failed her. But as she got quickly into the dress laid out for her, her hands shook a little. It is disconcerting to discover that one is no longer the parent of children, but of women grown.

She had the weary, bruised feeling of one who has traveled too far—and indeed it was a long journey she had made that day, from her own wistful and eager young womanhood to that of her daughters. She brushed her hands across her eyes to clear them of memories and dreams alike.

Introspection is always a difficult matter to direct and simple natures, such as Kate Kildare's, but she forced herself to it now. Had she in any way failed her children, as Jemima seemed to imply? Was it possible that in her absorption in a fixed idea she had neglected them, taken their welfare too much for granted? Was there anything she might have done for them that she had not done?

Conscience answered, No. It was for their sakes, far more than her own, that she had isolated herself with them, hidden them away from a world which she had found unkind. It was for their interests that she had worked harder than any man of her acquaintance, experimenting, studying, managing, until she was recognized as one of the greatest agriculturists of the State, and the unproductive property left by Basil Kildare had become a stock and dairy farm which netted her an income that ran well into five figures. More than wealth, she had given them education, bringing to Storm the best tutors and governesses to be had in the country. She had shared with them, too, her own practical knowledge and experience, the wisdom not to be found in books.

Every step of the way she had walked beside them. She who could not give them friends, had given them instead herself. Busy woman that she was, she was far

closer to them than mothers and daughters usually find themselves, sentiment to the contrary notwithstanding. Between them, she believed, were none of the unfortunate reticences usual in that relation, no questions that might not be asked, nor answers given. Kate would have said that she knew her daughters truly "by heart."

And yet already and without warning the time was upon her which she dreaded—the time when she might no longer walk beside them, watchfully, but only behind, and far behind. She knew—she had always known—that only the childhood of her girls could belong to her. Their womanhood, their future, they must face unaided.

It is a bitter moment for all mothers, but more especially for Kate Kildare, who knew better than most what pitfalls lie in wait for young and hurrying feet, and whose nightmare was inheritance.

Then a consoling thought came to her; came in the shape of Jacques Benoit's son, Philip, with the steady eyes, and the great, tender heart of his father. Inheritance is not always a nightmare. The future of little Jacqueline, at least, was secure. (Thus Kate to herself, with a characteristic self-confidence which took no account of chance or choice, or other obstacle to her intent.)

As for Jemima—once more her lips twitched. Jemima was certainly very capable.

Mrs. Kildare went down to meet her guests somewhat heartened.



CHAPTER IX

"This," murmured a voice into the ear of Professor Thorpe, "is the real thing at last! Everything so far has been a rather crude imitation of New York. I am disappointed in Lexington. But there's character here, distinction, local color. My dear uncle, why have you not brought me to this house before?"

"I did not bring you this time, as it happens," commented Professor Thorpe somewhat acidly. "You came."

"Thanks to a firm character and a discerning eye. What, miss a chance of seeing the Kildare on her native heath? Certainly not!"

The other turned and looked at him. "Suppose," he murmured, "that hereafter you speak of my friend and your hostess as 'Mrs. Kildare.'"

The younger man made a smiling gesture of apology. "What, ho! A *tendresse* here—I had forgotten," he said to himself; and added aloud, "Of course, you know, one does speak of famous women without adding handles to their names. The Duse, for instance, or Bernhardt—it would be ridiculous to call them 'Madame.'"

"Mrs. Kildare is not an actress," said the Professor, primly.

His nephew's smile grew broader. He sometimes found his uncle amusing. "I yearn to see the lady, by whatever name," he murmured. "Here she comes now. Jove, what a woman!"

His voice quite lost its drawling note. Percival Channing was a sincere admirer of beauty in all its forms, and he had without doubt a right to his claim of a discerning eye. There was something that set him apart from the other young men who had come with Professor Thorpe to Storm, aside from his English-cut clothes and a certain ease and finish which they lacked. It was an effect of keenness, of aliveness to the zest of the passing moment. He spoke of himself sometimes as a collector of impressions; and it was a true characterization. His slight, casual glance invariably took in more than the stare of other people; his nostrils quivered constantly, like those of a hound, as if they, too, were busy gathering impressions. It was a rather interesting face; a little vague in drawing

about the chin and lips, but mobile, sensitive, vivid; distinctly the face of an artist.

He gazed at Kate Kildare approaching down the long stairway with the appreciation of a connoisseur. Beside her moved a slender sprite of a girl, whose hair gleamed like spun gold above a dress of apple-green. But his glance for her was merely cursory, and returned at once to the older woman. Of this Jemima was quite aware. It had happened to her before. Her lips straightened, where another girl's would have drooped, but the sensation was the same. Jemima, not for the first time, was a little jealous of her mother.

Kate greeted her guests with a gracious courtesy that was almost regal in its simplicity. Channing in particular she welcomed warmly.

"What, Jim's nephew! And you have been with him for some time? Then why has he never brought you to us before?"

"Just what I have been asking him," murmured Channing, bending over her hand. His manner reminded her sharply of Jacques Benoit.

She asked, on an unconsidered impulse, "You have lived in France?"

"For many years. Have you?"

The group around them was silent, listening. Kate went rather pale. "No. But my greatest friend happens to be a Frenchman, a Creole," she said, steadily, and turned to the others.

Channing, who knew her story, guessed at once the identity of that "greatest friend." He gazed after her in renewed admiration. It was not often in his native land that he had come across a perfect type of the *grande amoureuse*.

He contrasted her with the setting in which he found her—a distinctly masculine setting. The hall was enormous, rough and simple; skins on the floor, rather wooden portraits of dead Kildares on the wall, together with antlers and fox-brushes, and the stuffed head of the horse running his race with Death. The huge fireplace of field-boulders might have roasted oxen in its time. There were some modern comforts; a piano, many books, a table heaped with periodicals; even that indispensable adjunct of American homes, the graphophone; but no curtains, nor cushions, nor draperies, none of the little touches that speak of feminine habitation. In twenty years, Kate had made few changes in the house; she regarded Basil Kildare's home as merely a temporary abode until Jacques came

to claim her and her children.

"I'm in luck!" thought the collector of impressions. "This is the setting for my new novel."

Here was the Kentucky, the America, he had hitherto sought in vain, with its suggestion of the backwoods of civilization, the pioneer, the primitive. And to emphasize and give the suggestion point, here was an example of the finest feminine beauty left to this degenerating world, beauty such as the Greeks knew, large-limbed, deep-bosomed, clear-eyed, product of a vigorous past, full of splendid augury for the future.

"What sons the woman must have!" he mused, stirred; and then remembered, with quite a sense of personal injury, that there were no sons.

He looked again with new interest at the daughter: but she disappointed him. She was too dainty, too petite, with a pink-and-white Dresden prettiness that was almost insignificant. (He missed, as people often did, the shrewd gray gleam behind those infantile lashes.) He hoped that the second daughter might prove truer to type.

Jacqueline, meanwhile, had made an unobtrusive appearance through a door just behind Professor Thorpe, and manifested her presence by a pinch on his arm.

He said "Ouch!" and dropped his eye-glass.

"Hush!" she admonished him, replacing it on his nose in motherly fashion. "I want to look them over and choose a victim before they see me. Why, you old duck of a godparent! Four of them—and all so young and beautiful. Two apiece. I hope they can dance?"

"Warranted to give perfect satisfaction in the ballroom, or money returned," he murmured. "But they aren't professors, my dear. None of ours seemed young and beautiful enough for your purposes."

She gave his arm an ecstatic squeeze. "I knew it! I simply knew the one in gray, with the haughty nose, couldn't be a professor."

"He's worse," warned Thorpe. "He's an author."

She gave a little squeal. "An author! But where did you get him, Goddy?" (Such was her rather irreverent abbreviation of "godfather," employed to signify

especial approbation.)

"I didn't. He got me. It is my famous nephew from Boston—'from Boston and Paris,' I believe he subscribes himself."

James Thorpe spoke with a certain fortitude which Jacqueline was quick to observe. He was a small, ugly man, with the scholar's stoop and the scholar's near-sighted, peering gaze—the sort of man who has never been really young and will never be old, looking at forty-five much as he looked at twenty, a little grayer, perhaps, a little more round-shouldered and ineffectual, but no more mature. His most marked characteristic was a certain shy amiability, which endeared him to his classes and his friends, even while it failed to command their respect. Beneath this surface manner, however, were certain qualities which Kate had had long occasion to test—dogged faithfulness, and an infinite capacity for devotion. He was a very welcome guest at Storm, their one connection with the outside world. Indeed, Kate's enemies were in the habit of referring to James Thorpe as the third man whom she had ruined. His learning and his abilities were wasted on the little college where he chose to remain in order to be near her.

It was Jacqueline's custom to treat the Professor as if he were a cross between a child and a pet dog,—a favorite pet dog. She murmured now, sympathetically, "Doesn't it like its famous nephew, then? I wonder why? He does look rather snippy. Is he so famous as all that? In the magazines and everything?"

"Pooh! He would scorn the magazines. Novels are his vehicle. Large novels, bound in purple Russia leather, my dear."

"But you've never sent us any of them."

"Heaven forbid!" murmured James Thorpe.

"Oho!" Jacqueline rounded her eyes. "They're that sort, are they? Asterisks in the critical spots?"

The Professor blushed. "Well, er—no. No asterisks whatever, anywhere. He belongs to what is called the er—decadent school."

Jacqueline gazed around him at the author with increased respect. "What's his name, Goddy?"

"James Percival Channing. 'James' is for me. Calls himself 'J. Percival,' however.

He would."

"What?—not *the* Channing? Why, Goddy, of course I've heard of him! I had no idea you had any one belonging to you like that."

"I don't often brag of it," he murmured.

"But what is he doing here?"

"Getting next to Nature, I believe. Collecting specimens, dialect, local color, animals in their habitat, you know. Take care, or he'll be collecting you."

Her eyes twinkled. "Wouldn't it be gorgeous to be in a book! Professor Jimsy, don't you think we ought to give him a little local color at once? Some native habits, for instance. Dare me to? Come, be a sport and dare me to! Then if Mother or Jemmy scolds me, I can blame it all on you."

She stroked his hand persuasively. There was no resisting Jacqueline's blandishments. He dared her to, albeit with misgivings. Ever since her infancy, when hearing his voice in the hall she had escaped from her nurse and her bath simultaneously and arrived, slippery with wet soap, to welcome him, Jacqueline had been the source of an uneasy fascination for her godfather. She represented, in his rather humdrum life, the element of the unexpected.

Some moments later the group gathered about Mrs. Kildare—and incidentally Jemima—were startled by the appearance of a vision in pink at the head of the stairs, who casually straddled the banister and arrived in their midst with the swoop of a rocket.

"Jacqueline!" gasped her sister.

Kate shook her head reprovably, and smiled. After all, one of her children was still a child. No need to trouble about the future yet!

Channing was the first of the guests to collect his wits, and he assisted the newcomer to alight from the newel-post with gallantry.

"What an effective entrance, Miss—ah, Jacqueline," he commented. "An idea for musical comedy, all the chorus sliding down on to the stage in a procession. I must suggest it to my friend Cohan."

The girl suddenly felt very small, but she concealed her embarrassment beneath an excessive nonchalance. "Why, in Boston don't people use their banisters? We

find them so convenient, so time-saving."

"Unfortunately, in Boston," he replied blandly, "very few women seem to have such decorative legs to exhibit."

There was a shocked pause. Thorpe and Mrs. Kildare had moved out of hearing. The three other young men rushed into the breach with small talk, casting furious looks at Channing, much to his amusement.

He made a mental note: "In rural Kentucky the leg may be seen but not heard."

Later Jacqueline whispered to her sister, "What was wrong with that compliment? Why did everybody look so queer?"

Their education had not included a course in the lesser feminine proprieties. But Jemima was not one to be caught napping. Conventions came to her by instinct.

"He should have said 'limbs,'" she answered promptly. "And he should not have seen them at all!"

Jacqueline inspected her slim ankles with approval. "I don't see how he could have helped it. They're very pretty. Blossom, what's wrong with legs anyway?"

But for once Jemima was unable to enlighten her.

The collector of impressions had several occasions to congratulate himself, during the course of that evening. He ceased to trust his memory, and commenced a series of surreptitious notes on his cuff, to the acute discomfort of his uncle. Among them appeared items such as the following: "7 vegetables and no soup." "Pancakes are called bread." "The butler has bare feet."

The butler was one of the stable-boys disguised for the occasion in a white coat and apron, who partially concealed himself behind the dining-room door and announced in a tremulous roar, "White folks, yo' supper's dished!"—stage-fright having conquered recent instructions.

Mrs. Kildare, who was usually served by an elderly housewoman, gazed at this innovation in frank astonishment; but it was only the first of her surprises. The table was frivolously alight with pink candles, and in the center stood a decoration consisting of a scalloped watermelon filled with flowers, leashed to a little fleet of flower-filled canteloupes, by pink ribbons.

Jacqueline could not dissemble her admiration of this effect. "Isn't it artistic?"

she demanded of the company at large. "Jemmy saw a table like this in the ladies' page of a magazine, and she copied it exactly."

"So helpful, those ladies' pages," murmured the author. "Once I got an idea out of them for turning a disused cook-stove into a dressing-table, with the aid of cretonne and a little white paint."

Jemima gave him a glance that was swift and sharp as the gleam of a knife, but she said nothing. She was too preoccupied at the moment to decide whether he was laughing at her or not. Temporarily, she gave him the benefit of the doubt. Weighty matters were on her mind that night. While Mrs. Kildare, as usual, sat at the head of her table, it was Jemima who ably and quite visibly conducted affairs.

From the pantry came suppressed guffaws, the shuffling of many feet, the steady fusillade of rattling china.

"It is a regiment preparing to charge!" thought Channing.

But when it charged, the author forgot his note-making and was content to eat. All day Jemima had been busy in the kitchen with Big Liza; both notable cooks in a country where cookery is justly regarded as one of the fine arts.

At one time Mrs. Kildare counted no less than five unaccustomed servitors, white-coated and barefooted, shuffling about the table, with fresh relays of waffles, biscuits, fried chicken. They ranged in size from the coachman's youngest to Big Liza herself, queen of the kitchen; a monumental figure whose apron-strings barely met about her blue-gingham waist, and whose giggles threatened momentarily to overcome her.

"Well, old woman, this *is* a surprise!" murmured her mistress. "What brings you into the dining-room?"

Big Liza shook like the aspic she was carrying. "Laws, Miss Kate, honey, I allus did have a eye fo' de gentlemen," she said coyly. "I des 'bleeged ter have a peep at de beaux. Mighty long time sense we-all's had a party at Sto'm!"

Jemima cast a reproachful glance at her mother; but the "beaux," accustomed from infancy to the ways of servants like Big Liza, responded cheerfully to the old woman's advances, bantering and teasing her till she retired to her kitchen in high delight, tossing her head.

Channing listened in sheer amaze. "Primitive? Why, it's patriarchal! Positively Biblical in its simplicity!" he thought.

Jemima was as pink as her decorations.

"Judging from the Apple Blossom's expression," murmured Thorpe to Mrs. Kildare, "you have committed a hopeless social error in conversing with your cook."

"I know! It was too bad of me. She takes her little party very seriously," said the other, remorsefully. "Don't you dare laugh at her, Jim! It is her first, and she's done it all by herself!"

"If she made this puff-paste herself, no man in the world will think of laughing at her," he said heartily. "But—their social instincts are awaking, Kate. They come by them very naturally. It is time for your girls to have their chance."

She winced. "What shall I do about it? How can I manage? I have no friends now. There is nobody I can count on to help them."

He leaned toward her, his lined face for the moment almost beautiful.

"There is always me, Kate. Hasn't the time come to let me help you, for their sakes? As Mrs. Thorpe—" he paused, and continued quietly, with a rather set look about his jaw, "As Mrs. Thorpe I think I can promise you a few friends, at least. And a—protector—though I may not look like one," he finished, wistfully.

She shook her head, not meeting his eyes. She always avoided, when she could, these offers of help, knowing that when he grew tired of making them she would miss him. But she had not the courage to send him away, to break with him entirely. She was not consciously selfish. If it had been suggested to her that she was interfering with her friend's career, she would have been shocked and grieved beyond measure. Thorpe's devotion was a thing so complete, so perfect in its unobtrusiveness, that it defeated its own purpose. She simply took it for granted.

He made no protest now; even smiled at her reassuringly, knowing that it troubled her to hurt him. Only the eagerness that had for the moment beautified his face died away, and Jacqueline, happening to glance across at him, thought, "Poor Goddy! How old and out of it all he looks!"

She drew him into the conversation. "I was just telling the author, Professor

Jimsy, that he inherits his patrician nose from you," she said (somewhat to the author's embarrassment). "And he says one doesn't inherit from uncles. That's nonsense! If property, why not noses? And character?" she added wickedly. "Oh, I see lots of resemblances between you!"

"Do you?" murmured the Professor, rather grimly.

"For instance, you both go in for psychology—only you don't publish yours in large purple novels."

"I do not," said the Professor.

Channing looked at her with surprise. Was it possible that this backwoods hoyden—Bouncing Bet of the Banister, he had named her to himself, with a taste for alliteration—was it possible that she had read any of his books? She was hardly more than a child. The hair hung down her back in a thick, gleaming rope, her merry gamin's face lacked as yet all those subtleties, those *nuances* of expression which fascinated him in such faces as her mother's. Channing was still young enough to prefer the finished product. But if she read his books....

Doubtless Mrs. Kildare was not a woman to be very particular about her young daughters' reading. The standards of a well-bred world would not prevail in this strange household. He thought suddenly of the girl's dangerous inheritance—the father, notorious even in a community that is not puritanical about the morals of its men; the mother, fought over like some hunted female of the lower creatures, yet faithful always to the lover who had done away with the husband.... Truly, the future career of young Jacqueline Kildare might be well worth watching. Despite her crude youth, there was a certain warm sweetness about her which, he noticed, drew and kept the attention of every man at the table—a caressing voice, hands that must always touch the thing that pleased her, above all a mouth of dewy scarlet, curving into deep dimples at the corner.

"Undoubtedly a mouth meant for kissing," mused Channing, the connoisseur.

He let his imagination go a little. It was a pampered imagination, that led him occasionally into indiscretions which he afterwards regretted—not too deeply, however, for after all, one owes something to one's art. "Psychological experiments," he named these indiscretions. He suspected that he was on the verge of one now, and tasted in advance some of the thrills of the pioneer.

And then, quite suddenly, he became aware of Jemima's cool, appraising, gray-

green gaze fastened upon his face; not quite meeting his eyes, but placed somewhere in the region of the mouth and chin, those features which Channing euphoniously spoke of to himself as "mobile." The author started. He resisted an impulse to put a hand up over his betraying mouth.

"What ho! The pink-and-white one's been making notes on her own account," he thought.

It was a privilege he usually reserved for himself.

After dinner the phonograph was promptly started, Jacqueline explaining that the young men were going to teach them to dance.

"Teach you?" exclaimed her mother. "Why, you both dance beautifully."

She had taught them herself from earliest childhood, lessons supplemented by the best dancing-masters that money could bring to Storm. Perhaps the prettiest memory the rough old hall held was that of two tiny girls hopping about together, yellow heads bobbing, short skirts a-flutter, their baby faces earnest with endeavor.

"Pooh, two-steps and waltzes, Mummy! They're as dead as the polka. Besides, you can't really dance with another girl."

"Can't you?" Kate sighed. She exchanged a rueful glance with Thorpe, "Jim, tell me, did *you* know the polka was dead?"

"I haven't danced since your wedding."

They settled themselves to look on, Kate murmuring, "I hope all this noise isn't keeping Mag Henderson awake. We've got a new baby upstairs, did you know it? A poor creature who had no one to look after her at home."

"So you brought her here—of course! Kate, Kate, isn't it enough that you take in every derelict dog in the county, without taking in the derelict infants and mothers as well?"

"I take in the dogs as a sort of atonement to poor old Juno and her mongrel pups," she said, soberly. "I feel as if Storm owed something to mongrels. As for this baby, it's a good experience for Jemima and Jacqueline. I want to teach them all I can, while I can."

"Humph! Where's the woman's husband!"

"There never was any."

"What? My *dear* Kate! And that's the type of woman you think will be a good experience for your young daughters?"

"Jim, you psychologists have a stupid way of dividing people into types. I regard them as individuals. My girls will do Mag Henderson more good than she can do them harm," she said, with a quiet dignity which ended discussion. "Good Heavens! What sort of dance is that?"

The dancing that is called "new" was just making its triumphal progress westward into the homes of the land.

"That, I believe, is a highly fashionable performance called the Turkey Trot."

"Looks it," she commented disapprovingly, even while her feet beat time to the infectious measure.

The voice of Jacqueline rang out, "But this isn't new at all! It's just ragging, like they do at the quarters, only not so limber. We've known how to rag for ever so long, haven't we, Blossom? Watch us!"

She caught her sister around the waist and went strutting down the long hall, hips and shoulders swinging, pretty feet prancing, laughing back over her shoulder with unconscious provocation, until a delighted old negro voice at the window cried, "Dat's de style, Miss Jack! Dat's de way to git 'em, honey!"

With the first note of the phonograph, the entire domestic force had transformed itself into an unseen audience.

When Philip Benoix came to the top of the Storm road, he jerked up his horse in sheer amaze. It was a scene such as he had never expected to find in that grim old fortress-home. Past the lighted windows couples stepped rapidly to the titivating strains of "Trop Moutarde"; while on the lawn outside the entire population of the quarters pranced and capered in much the same fashion, somewhat hampered by the excited dogs. Kate Kildare stood in the open doorway, gazing from the dancers within to the dancers without, and laughing until she held her sides.

Philip's grave face warmed with sympathy. "It is good to see her laugh like that. I won't tell her to-night," he thought; and would have turned away, but that the dogs suddenly became aware of him and gave tongue.

"Heah comes Pahson to jine de high jinks!" cried the erstwhile butler, running hospitably to take his horse. It was too late for retreat.



CHAPTER X

Kate stepped down into the porch with outstretched hands. "I am so glad it is you, Phil dear. You must have felt me wishing for you. Come, come in, boy! You don't have half enough of 'high jinks'!"

He shook his head silently.

She made a little grimace. "I forgot—the Cloth does not dance. But surely the Cloth may look on?"

"From afar off, perhaps, out of the way of temptation."

He spoke smilingly, but she reproached herself for thoughtlessness. Philip was very careful not to present himself anywhere that his presence might cause restraint or embarrassment, he never forgot, no matter if others forgot, that he was the son of a convict.

"Then I shall sit out here with you." As she drew closer to him, she saw his face clearly in the light that streamed from the open doorway. It was very pale. "Oh!" she cried. "What is the matter, Philip?"

"My father—"

Her hand went to her heart.

"Not bad news," he said quickly. "Good news. To-day I had a letter from the Governor."

The newly elected Governor of the State had been the presiding judge at Jacques Benoit's trial.

"The Governor! Well? Well?"

"He said—it was a personal letter, you understand, nothing official. He said that he had always entertained grave doubts as to the justice of father's sentence, and that if I could secure the signature of certain men in the State, he would be glad to consider a petition for pardon."



In the house, James Thorpe, waiting for Mrs. Kildare's return, after some time became aware that he was not the only person in the room not dancing. A girl in apple-green sat, with a rather fixed smile on her lips, watching three of the young men teaching Jacqueline a new step, while Percival Channing produced upon the piano a tune too recent for the resources of the graphophone. It occurred to him that Jemima's party might leave something to be desired on the part of its instigator. He crossed the room.

Jemima withdrew her eyes from the dancers with an effort. She had evidently forgotten his existence. "But what have you done with mother?" she demanded. "I thought you were having such a nice time with her all to yourself."

He explained.

"Oh, Philip, of course! Mother does spoil Philip dreadfully, poor fellow! She was a great friend of his mother's, you know, and his father is—but of course you know about his father. Phil simply worships mother, and I think she likes it. Any woman does," said Jemima, with the air of elderly wisdom which always amused Professor Thorpe. "Still, it's too bad of her to go off with him to-night, when I'd promised you a whole evening with her alone."

He winced. He was beginning to realize that evenings alone profited him no more than evenings in company.

"Since you've broken your promise," he said severely, "I think you will have to make me some reparation. This new dancing, now"—he mastered a certain trepidation—"it looks easy, if unbeautiful. Do you think you could teach it to me?"

She rose with alacrity. "Of course I could! I always learn things much quicker than Jacky. You see it's taking three of them to teach her—two to dance for her and one to dance with her—and I know the steps already. Professor Jim," she said irrelevantly, with a faint sigh, "do you think it pays to be clever?"

If Mrs. Kildare had noticed, she would have been more than a little astonished by the vision of shy and awkward James Thorpe, one of the leading psychologists of the country, capering nimbly in a lady's chamber under the guidance of her eldest child. But she did not notice.



"Do you know what this means?" she said, after a long silence. "It means that we have won, my dear. The very judge who tried him!"

Philip nodded, without speaking.

Her hand groped for his and clung to it. As the sisters of Lazarus must have felt when he who was dead came to them out of the tomb in his cere-cloths, so these two felt now. After seventeen years, the thing they had vainly hoped and striven for was about to be granted—not justice (it was too late for that), but mercy, freedom. And after seventeen years, what was a man to do with freedom?

"I am—frightened, a little," Philip said at last, turning to her. "What am I to do with father?"

"You are to bring him straight to me. No, I will go with you and bring him home myself."

"*Home?* To Basil Kildare's house?"

She lifted her head, "What matter whose house? We shall be married at once."

He said in a low voice, "Have you forgotten—the will?"

"Forgotten it?" she laughed. "Do you think that likely? Why do you suppose I have worked as I have, scheming, saving, paring corners—done my own selling and buying and overseeing, driven my men and myself to the limit of endurance, got for myself the reputation of a female Shylock? Because I like that sort of thing? Because I enjoy making money? No, my dear. When I rob my girls of their inheritance, as rob them I must, I shall be able to give them each a little fortune to take its place. I am a rich woman now, aside from the Storm property. Basil Kildare had the right, perhaps, to do as he chose with his property. Thank God he cannot lay a finger on mine!"

She stared out straight in the direction of the little cornfield graveyard, as if defying some ghostly presence there to do its worst.

Philip lifted the hand he held to his lips. When he spoke there was trouble in his voice. "Do you think that when my father hears the terms of Kildare's will, he will consent to such a sacrifice?"

She turned on him sharply. "He does not know about the will, and he must not, certainly until after we are married. Who would tell him—you, Philip?" Her eyes

met his. "Philip! What do you mean?"

"Suppose," he said very low, "it were a matter of my conscience?"

"Then I ask you not to listen to your conscience, but to me!" She put her hands on his shoulders. "If, as you say, you owe me anything—if you value my friendship—if you love me, Philip—promise that you will never tell your father!"

It was a great temptation through which he passed at that moment; a temptation all the more subtle in that he could tell himself truly it was for her sake he hesitated. One word to Jacques Benoix, and the thing he dreaded, the thing suddenly so near, would never come to pass.

"Don't you know it will hurt you to give up Storm?" His voice was hoarse. "It has been your life so long. You love the land, every stick and stone of it."

"And every twig and grass-blade. But," she said quietly, "I love Jacques more. Promise, dear."

He promised.

The silence fell again. Across Kate's face a moonbeam strayed and rested, and the young man sitting in the shadow a little behind her could not take his eyes away. He had the strange feeling that he was looking for the last time on the woman he loved, who belonged now irrevocably to his father. It was a glowing face, with eyes as lovely, and lips as tremulous, as those of a dreaming bride. Before Philip she made no attempt to conceal her thoughts. They had been confidantes too long.

It came to him that his father must be a remarkable man to have held through years of absence such a love as this.

"I wish I knew him better," he said, thinking aloud. "To me he is almost a stranger."

"A stranger!" She smiled incredulously. "I should think you would find it difficult to write those long weekly letters of yours to a 'stranger.'"

Philip had never found it difficult, because from the first the subject of those letters had been herself.

At the last meeting between Jacques and his son, the man in his extremity had

turned to the boy for aid, pleading with the terrified, bewildered little fellow as if with a man who understood. And Philip, already old beyond his years, born with the instinct of the priest and confessor, had understood.

"You will tell me of her?" Jacques had pleaded. "I have no friend but you, boy. You will take care of her? You will write me how she does?"

Philip had not failed his father. Every detail of Kate's life was known to the man in prison, her comings and goings, her daily habits, her work, her successes and failures, the very color of the gowns she wore. There had been from the first a sort of glamour about her, to the imagination of a lonely, dreaming boy. Even at fourteen he had been a little in love with Kate Kildare, as a page may be in love with a queen. With the passing years, more of Philip's self than he knew had crept into those weekly letters to his father; so that if Jacques Benoix was a stranger to him now, he was no stranger to his father.

"It is queer, though," he mused, still thinking aloud. "Often as I write to him, he rarely answers. Once a year, on my birthday, and again at Christmas. It is as if he wanted me to forget him!"

"I think he does," she said. "That is why he never writes to me at all. I have had only one letter, begging me never to come there, nor to allow you to come there. He even asked me not to write to him, and I have not written. But—forget Jacques!" She smiled proudly. "He does not know us, does he? Nor himself. Why, there is not a man or woman in the county who has forgotten him!"

Philip was staring at her in amaze. "You mean to say that *you* never hear from him, either, and that you have never seen him—?"

Her face paled. "Yes, I have seen him. Once. There were convicts working on one of the roads near Frankfort. I spoke to them as I passed—men in that dress always interest me now. One of them did not answer me, did not even lift his head to look at me. I looked more closely—"

"It was he?"

She nodded. "Working on the road like a common laborer, a negro! Oh, I went to the warden about it myself. I railed at him, asked him how he dared put such a man at that work, a gentleman. He heard me through patiently enough—after all, what business was it of mine? When I finished, he explained that he had put Jacques on the road at his own request, granted as a reward for help during an epidemic in the prison. Jacques had chosen it."

"Chosen it! Why?"

"Because it was out of doors, beyond the walls. Because he wanted to see the sky, and trees, and birds. He always loved birds...."

She felt Philip shaking, and with a gesture of infinite tenderness, drew his head down on her shoulder.

"He had changed so little, dear, so little. But it was years ago. Now he must seem older. Have you forgotten how he looks? You were such a child when he went. Glance into your mirror and you will see him again. The same eyes that flash blue in your dark face, the same smile, the same look of gentleness; strong gentleness. You are simply your father over again. That is why I love you so." She laid her cheek on his hair.

If the words brought a stab of pain that was almost unendurable, she did not guess it. From the moment her first child was laid in her arms, Kate, like many another woman, regarded herself as a mother to all mankind. For her, this was the boy Jacques had left in her care, the husband she had chosen for her own little girl; doubly, therefore, her son. That she was less than ten years his senior, the one beautiful woman in his world, the heroine of all a young man's idealism—of these things she was as unaware as of the fact that Jacques' boy had long ago left boyhood behind him.

He stayed where she lightly held him, his head rigid upon her shoulder, conscious in every fiber of his being of the cheek pressing his hair, the warmth and fragrance of her, the rise and fall of her soft bosom—praying with all the strength that was in him to become to this beloved woman only the son she thought him, nothing more, never anything more. The Benoix men came of a race of great lovers.

She released him presently and he rose, moving with a curious stiffness as of muscles consciously controlled.

"What, going so soon? I have so much more to say to you about him—but there! You look tired—you look not quite happy, Philip. What is it? Are you still wondering what to do with him? Don't! Leave that to me, dear. And now go straight to bed and get a good night's rest. To-morrow we shall begin on the petition—our last, thank God! I will see the men the Governor mentions myself."

When he was gone, she sat a while longer in the dark. She was not quite ready yet to face strangers, to face even her daughters. Jacques was coming back to her! She said the words over and over to herself, till they rang through her head like the refrain of a song. All the years between them, the long, lonely, weary years, filled with work and with the sort of happiness that comes from successful endeavor,—these were suddenly as naught, and she was a girl again, a wistful, dreaming girl with a baby in her arms, listening there in her garden for the pit-a-patter of her lover's horse.

She closed her eyes. Presently the voice of the graphophone broke in upon her dreams, and she became aware of the dancers that passed and repassed the lighted windows; among them a man in spectacles, guiding and being guided by a determined young person in apple-green, his face flushed and earnest, his grizzled hair somewhat awry. "Why—it's Jim Thorpe!" she thought, with a stab of remorse. "I'd forgotten him. But he's dancing, he's enjoying himself like a boy.

Bless that thoughtful girl of mine! She's made him look ten years younger. Dear, faithful old Jim!"

Her heart was open to all the world just then. She went to the window and smiled in at him tenderly.

Perhaps it was just as well that James Thorpe could not see that smile, and misunderstand it.



CHAPTER XI

Late summer in Kentucky; deep, umbrageous woodlands fragrant with fern, dreaming noons, shimmering in the heat, with the locust drowsily shrilling; warm and silver nights, made musical by the loves of many mocking-birds; the waste places green tangles of blossoming weed, the roads a-flutter with hovering yellow butterflies, over all the land a brooding hush, not the silence of idleness, of emptiness, but of life, intense and still as a spinning top is still. Beneath it those who listen are aware of a faint, constant stirring, a whisper of green and eager things pushing themselves up from the fecund soil.

More than ever before was Kate aware of the sympathy that bound her to these fields of hers, soon to be hers no longer. She could not keep away from them. Early and late the Madam and her racking mare were to be seen about the roads and lanes, inspecting dairies, stables, hog-pens, poultry-yards, watching the field-hands at their labor, hearing in person the requests and complaints of tenants. Much of her phenomenal success was due to personal supervision, as she knew; even, perhaps to personal charm, for field-hands and tenants are alike human. Now the executive habit stood her in good stead. None of the business of the great farm was neglected; but active as her mind was, through it all her heart was dreaming, not as a girl dreams, but as a woman may who knows well what she has missed of life. Spring had passed her by, with all its promise blighted. Now, like her fields, she had come to late summer, to the season of fulfilment.

There was much to be done in connection with Jacques Benoix' pardon; certain men to be interviewed, not always successfully, though the woman who had made Storm was heard with more respect than had been the desperate young heroine of a scandal; lawyers to be seen, land-agents, cattle-dealers, for in resigning her stewardship of the estate, a certain amount of liquidation was necessary. Optimist that she was, however, for years she had been preparing for this contingency. Her affairs were in such order that at any moment she could turn them over to others. Nothing that had any claim upon her was overlooked. The servants, the horses in her stable, the very mongrel dogs who by the instinct of their kind had discovered her weakness and spread the discovery broadcast,—all had their share in her planning for the future—their future, not hers.

Hers was to be put without question into the hands of Jacques Benoix. She

would go to him at the door of his prison-house and say, "Here I am, as you left me. What will you do with us, me and my children?"

She would trust the answer to his wisdom, ready, glad to follow wherever he should lead. Yet so much of herself, of her vital force, had gone into the building up of Storm that sometimes a realization of what was about to happen stabbed through her dreaming like a sharp pain. For twenty years this had been her world, and she was about to leave it. Often, as she passed among her young orchard trees, she laid a hand upon them yearningly, as a mother might touch children with whom she was about to part.

In all her planning, there was only one problem that baffled her, a new problem: Mag Henderson. It was difficult to arrange a future for Mag Henderson.

"I shall simply have to leave it to Jacques. He will know what to do with her," she decided, with a thrill at the thought of her coming dependence. It is only strength that realizes to the full the joy of leaning.

Mag and her child were both thriving under the care lavished upon them at Storm. They had been established in a room of the long-disused guest-wing, where young Jemima might keep a capable if impersonal eye upon their welfare. But Jacqueline, somewhat to her sister's surprise, had promptly relieved her of all responsibility with regard to the baby, and was doing her best to relieve the mother of responsibility also. From the first she regarded the child as her own personal possession, neglecting in its behalf the various colts and puppies which had hitherto occupied most of her waking moments.

The girl had a fund of maternal instinct that sat oddly upon her careless, madcap nature. It was a queer and rather a touching thing to Philip Benoix to see this young tomboy running about the place with an infant tucked casually under her arm or across her shoulder; and to Jemima, for some reason, it was rather a shocking thing.

"She's perfectly possessed by the child, always bathing it or dressing it or something, just as she used to do with dolls. You know we couldn't make her give up dolls till a year or two ago. She is actually persuading Mag to wean it, Philip," complained Jemima, who had no reserves with her friend, "so that she can keep it in her room at night. Did you ever hear of such a thing? A squalling infant that would much rather be with its mother! Isn't it—unseemly of her?"

But Philip did not find it unseemly. "She's growing up, that's all," he said,

looking at his young playmate and pupil with eyes newly observant.

Since his acceptance of the Storm parish, Philip had supplanted all other tutors to Kate's children, and was "finishing" their education with an attention to detail not possible in even the best of girls' finishing schools.

Mag had needed little persuasion to give over the care of her child to Jacqueline. She was not lacking in animal instinct, and those who advocated taking the child from her permanently would have found a fury to deal with. But she had also the ineradicable laziness of the "poor white," and it took effort to keep the baby up to the standard of Storm cleanliness. If one of the young ladies chose to take this effort off her hands, so much the better. Besides, it was Jacqueline who had kissed her.

Her temporary interest in the novel state of maternity was soon superseded by an interest still more novel and far more absorbing—the passion for dress.

Even in her abject poverty, there had been something noticeable about Mag Henderson, aside from mere prettiness. Her print frocks, while often ragged and rarely clean, fitted her figure very neatly, and she managed effects with a bit of ribbon and a cheap feather that might have roused the envy of many a professional milliner. Now that she had become the possessor of several cast-off dresses of Jemima's and Jacqueline's, her pleasure in them was a rather piteous thing to see. As her strength rapidly returned, under the influence of care and good feeding, she became absorbed in the task of altering these treasures to fit herself. For this she showed such aptitude and taste that Jemima spoke to her mother about it.

"I believe I've found what Mag is meant for—dressmaking."

Kate gave her daughter a delighted hug. "You clever Blossom! What should I do without you? We'll give Mag a profession. That solves the problem. Write to town at once for patterns and material, and set her to work. Teach her all you can, and whatever you do, now that she is getting strong, *keep her busy*."

Mrs. Kildare was a firm believer in the adage with regard to Satan and idle hands.

Jemima nodded responsibly. As it happened, this suggestion fitted in very well with certain schemes of her own. Like all good generals, she realized that equipment plays a vital part in war; and little as her mother realized it, the recent

"party" was the opening move in a well-thought-out campaign. Jemima had no idea of passing her entire life in the role of exiled princess; and since her mother evidently did not realize certain of the essential duties of motherhood, she intended to supply deficiencies herself.

So the voice of the sewing-machine began to hum through the old house like a cheerful bumble-bee, and Mag entered upon what was certainly the happiest period of her career. Laces, silks, fine muslins—these had the effect upon her developing soul that a virgin canvas has upon the painter. Her fingers wrought with them eagerly, deftly, achieving results which astonished Jemima, herself a dressmaker of parts. Her attitude toward Mag lost something of its cool patronage. She had always great respect for ability.

It was perhaps her absorption in Mag's efforts and the approaching campaign which blinded her keen young eyes to certain changes which had taken place in her mother. She did notice that she spent more time than usual in the juniper-tree eyrie; and one night when the three sat as usual in the great hall, busy with books and sewing, she suddenly realised that her mother had been reading for an hour without once turning her page.

"Mother's got something on her mind. I wonder why she doesn't consult me," she thought, characteristically; but at the moment she had too many weighty affairs on her own mind to give the matter her usual attention.

Occasionally Kate wandered into the sewing-room in the rather vague way that had come to her recently, quite unlike her usual brisk alertness.

"What are you up to, you and Mag?" she asked on one of these occasions. "You seem to be turning out garments by the wholesale." She fingered the dainty pile of fineries on the bed. "What a pretty petticoat! And a peignoir to match. How grand they are! And what's this—no sleeves in it, no waist to speak of—Why, it's a ball-dress! Where in the world have you ever seen a ball-dress, Jemmy girl?"

"In a magazine." Jemima spoke rather anxiously, with a mouth full of pins. "Does it look all right, Mother? Did you use to wear as—as little as that at a ball?"

"Well, not quite as little, perhaps," murmured Kate—the frock in her hand was of the Empire period. "Fashions change, however, and it looks very pretty. But what do you need with such a dress at Storm, dear?"

The girl said rather tensely, "Mother, do you expect Jacqueline and me to spend the rest of our lives at Storm?"

Kate's eyes dropped. "No," she answered in a low voice. She wondered whether the time had come to make the announcement she dreaded.

"Well, then!" said Jemima with a breath of relief. "You see I believe in being forehanded. Young ladies in society need lots of clothes, don't they?"

"You are not exactly young ladies in society."

"Not yet. But we mean to be," said Jemima, quietly.

Kate winced. She had not forgotten it, the thing her daughter called "society"; the little, cruel, careless, prurient world she had left far behind her and thought well lost. To Jemima it meant balls and beaux and gaiety. To her it meant the faces of women, life-long friends, turned upon her blank and frozen as she walked down a church aisle carrying the child she had named for her lover. Wider, kinder worlds were open to her children, surely, the world of books, of travel, of new acquaintance. But the thing Jemima craved, the simple, trivial, pleasure-filled neighborhood life that made her own girlhood bright to remember—of this she had deprived her children forever.

She caught the girl to her in a gesture of protection that was almost fierce. "What does it matter? Haven't you been happy with me, you and Jacqueline? Hasn't your mother been enough for you, my darling?"

Jemima submitted to the embrace with a certain distaste. "Of course. Don't be a goose, Mother dear! There'll never be any place I love as well as Storm—" (Kate winced again)—"or anybody I love as well as you. But we've our position in the world to think of, we Kildares," she ended, with the stateliness of a duchess.

"The world? Kentucky's a very small part of the world, dear."

"It happens to be the part we live in," said Jemima, unanswerably. "And ever since there was a Kentucky, there have been Kildares at the top of it. I do wish," she freed herself gently, "that you wouldn't always feel like embracing me when I've just done my hair! You're as bad as Jacky."

"Forgive me," said Kate humbly, releasing her. "So you can't be happy without 'society,' Jemmy? Parties don't always mean pleasure, my little girl."

"I know that—" Jemima spoke soberly. "I don't believe I'm going to have a very good time at parties. Jacqueline is. I don't know why—" her voice was quite impersonal. "I'm prettier than she is, really, and lots cleverer, but Jacky gets all the beaux. Even that author man, though you'd think.... Queer, isn't it?" She put her wistful question again: "Mother, do you think it pays to be clever?"

Kate, with a pang at the heart for this clear-eyed child of hers, answered as best she could this plaint of clever women since the world began. "Certainly it pays. Clever people usually get what they want."

"They get it, yes," mused the girl. "But it doesn't seem to come of its own accord. And things are nicer if they come of their own accord." She gave a faint sigh. "However, we must do what we can. And of course people don't go to parties, or give them, just to have a good time."

"No?" murmured Kate. "Why, then?"

"To make friends," explained the girl, patiently. "You see Jacky and I have to make our own friends."

Kate's eyes smote her suddenly with compunction, and she leaned her head against her mother's arm, quite impulsively for Jemima. "Not that I'm blaming you, Mummy. You've done the best you know how for us, and this is going to be my affair. It's all quite right for you to be a hermit, if you like. You're a widow, you've had your life. But Jacky and I aren't widows, and if we keep on this way, we'll never have a chance to be."

She was surprised by her mother's sudden chuckle. Jemima was never intentionally amusing.

"So," she finished, "Professor Jim is going to help us all he can."

"What! Jim Thorpe to the rescue again?" Kate could not accustom herself to the thought of this shy, awkward, scholarly man, the least considered of her girlhood adorers, in the rôle of social sponsor to her children.

"I asked him," explained Jemima, "whether he did not know all the worth while people in Lexington and thereabouts, and he said he did. So he is going to see that they invite us to their balls and things. Of course, we shall have to do our share, too. And then," she added with a hesitating glance, "I thought perhaps we might go to New York some day, and visit our father's aunt Jemima."

"That is an idea you may put out of your head at once," said Kate, quietly. "Your father's aunt and I are not on friendly terms."

"I know. I've often wondered why." She paused, but Kate's face did not encourage questioning. "She's very rich, and old, and has no children. Oughtn't we to make friends with her?"

"Jemima!" said her mother, sharply.

The girl looked at her in genuine surprise. "Have you never thought of that? Well, I think you should have, for our sakes. Even if you and she aren't good friends, need that make any difference with Jacky and me? You see, Mother dear, it is we who are really Kildares, not you."

Kate turned abruptly and left the room, more hurt than she cared to show. Sometimes the paternal inheritance showed so strongly in Jemima as to frighten her; the same fierce pride of race, the same hardness, the same almost brutal frankness of purpose. A terrifying question rose in her mind. When they heard the truth about her, as hear it they soon must, would her children be loyal to her? Would they understand, and believe in her? As the girl had said, they were Kildares, and she was not.

So far, despite the frequently urged advice of Philip, she had kept them in ignorance of the facts of their father's death. They knew that he had been killed by a fall from his horse. They knew, too, that Philip's father was in the penitentiary, a "killer" as the phrase goes in a hot-blooded country where many crimes are regarded as less forgivable than homicide. But to connect the two tragedies had never occurred to them, and the isolation of their life, passed almost entirely among inferiors and dependents, had made it possible to keep the truth from them. It would not be possible much longer.

But once more the mother postponed her moment of confession. It was the one cowardice of her life.



CHAPTER XII

The fact that, while the countryside had been astir for weeks with rumors of Jacques Benoix' impending release, her daughters were quite unaware of them was evidence of the Madam's complete sovereignty over her realm. It would have been a brave man or woman who dared to gossip of Mrs. Kildare's affairs with her children. They remained unconscious of the undercurrent of excitement and speculation in the atmosphere about them. In time, mention of the pardon and reference to the old-time scandal it revived, was made in the newspapers; but these papers failed to reach the reading-table at Storm, and the girls did not miss them. Kate had never encouraged the reading of newspapers in her household, finding the monthly reviews cleaner and more reliable; and indeed the doings of people in the far-off world were less real to Jemima and Jacqueline than episodes in such novels as their mother read aloud by the evening lamp, while one girl sewed and the other lost herself in those dreams of youth which are such "long, long dreams."

They wondered a little, it is true, over Kate's frequent absences from home, and over the defection of Philip.

"He hasn't been here for days, and he used to come every evening," complained Jacqueline, always his sworn ally and companion. "No time for riding, or music, or even lessons—not that I'm complaining of that! But he's never been too busy for us before."

The fact was that Philip dared not trust himself at Storm just yet, not until he had accustomed himself to the immediate thought of Kate Kildare as his mother.

"Philip looks a little queer, too—sort of hollow about the eyes," mused Jemima, the observant. "Still, he always was rather a solemn person."

"No such thing, Jemmy!" cried Jacqueline, who could bear no criticism of the thing or person she loved. "He's positively giddy sometimes when I have him alone. Anyway, wouldn't you be solemn yourself, if you had a father in the penitentiary?"

"He ought to be used to it by this time. No, I don't believe it is that. I believe it is mother."

"What do you mean—'mother'?"

"Oh, nothing. Only"—Jemima severely bit off a thread—"I do wish mother'd grow wrinkled or—or fat, or something, like other people's mothers."

"Why, Jemmy Kildare!" cried the other, shocked. "How can you say such a thing? Mother's the most beautiful person in the world!"

"Exactly. If I'm not mistaken, Philip thinks so too."

"Well, why shouldn't he? That's nothing to be solemn about."

The other smiled an enigmatical smile.

"Stop looking like that horrid Mona Lisa. You mean—" Jacqueline stared, then shouted with laughter. "Blossom, you're *too* silly! Of course mother's the most beautiful person in the world, but after all she is—mother! She's old."

"Remember Henry Esmond."

"Pooh! That's in a novel. Why, Philip might as well get up a romantic passion for—for the Sistine Madonna."

"Which would be exactly like him," commented Jemima; but Jacqueline dismissed the absurdity from her mind with another laugh.

From day to day now, Kate put off the breaking of her news. "Not yet," she pleaded with her better judgment. "I will wait till everything is settled."

She waited a day too long.

Jemima had driven down to the crossroads store for some pressing necessity of the sewing-room. Like many country stores, it combined the sale of groceries, fishing-tackle, hardware, dry-goods, and other commodities with the sale of wet-goods, the latter being confined to the rear portion of the establishment, opening upon a different road from the front portion.

The proprietor's wife, who usually managed the dry-goods and groceries' section, happened to be absent at the time, and the proprietor's unaccustomed efforts to find the buttons Jemima needed aroused her quick impatience.

"Never mind—let me find them myself, Mr. Tibbits," she urged. "I'll put them down in your book. There's a customer in the back store. Do go and attend to him."

Tibbits meekly obeyed, murmuring, "You might find them buttons on the shelf with the canned goods, or then agin they might be under the counter behind them bolts of mosquito-bar."

So it happened that Jemima was on her knees behind the counter, quite invisible, when two women in sunbonnets entered, deep in a congenial discussion of their betters, such as might have been heard in a dozen homes in the vicinity that day. They had failed to recognize the buggy at the door as a Storm equipage.

"What I want to know is how's she ever goin' to manage with the two of them at once. They do say the young parson's sort of took his father's place with her."

"Laws! I should think she'd be ashamed. Her old enough to be his mother!"

"No, she ain't, either. She wa'n't twenty, nothin' like, when Mr. Kildare brought her here, and the French doctor's boy must a-been about ten then. Ten years or less ain't such a heap of difference, not when you hold your looks the way she does. Anyway, they been seen kissin'."

"You don't say!"

The informer nodded, pursing her lips. "It come to me pretty straight. That old nigger Zeke, who does chores about, seen 'em with his own eyes, and tol' me about it next day when he was doin' some work in my patch. Said he caught 'em kissin' and just carryin' on, right in the public road."

"The idea! What for do you s'pose they want the father pardoned out, then? She got up the petition herself. Laws, what a mix-up! I shouldn't think she'd dare have anything to do with either of them. Don't look good, does it? Him killin' her husband and all."

It was here that the girl behind the counter, flushed and furious and just about to speak, suddenly lost her color.

"There was some that never believed he done it, Miz Sykes. If you'd ever known the French doctor—always so sort of soft and gentle in his ways, didn't believe in huntin' rabbits unless for food, used to doctor animals just as if they was folks. He didn't seem the sort of man to make a killer. But there! You never can tell with for'ners. And Kildare wa'n't the sort of man to let his wife go gallivantin' round the country with a lover, that's certain. We was s'prised he stood it long as he did. Oh, I ain't sayin' Dr. Benoix done his killin' in cold blood! He prob'ly

done it in self-defense. The gentlest critter'll fight if it's got to. But killin' it certainly was. No axdent about that!"

They went toward the back store, still talking, unaware of the white-lipped girl who slipped out from behind the counter and gained the refuge of her buggy with trembling knees.

Her knees might tremble, but her lips did not. They were set in a straight, grim line, and her brows met over eyes that had grown almost black. It would have been difficult to recognize in this stricken face the pink-and-white Dresden prettiness that had won her the sobriquet of "Apple Blossom."

An old man, fumbling at his cap as she passed, suddenly paused and stared after the buggy, aghast. He thought for the moment that he had seen the ghost of Basil Kildare.

She went straight to her mother's office, a small room opening off the great hall. She opened the door without knocking, and closed it after her.

"One moment, please, I am busy," murmured Kate, glancing up from her desk in surprise. She was not often interrupted so unceremoniously. But instantly she rose to her feet. She had no need to ask what had happened. The girl's face told her.

"Mother!" Jemima's voice was hoarse. "Is it true that—Philip's father—is coming out of the penitentiary?"

Kate inclined her head, paling.

"And that you are getting him out?"

"Philip and I together."

"Why?"

Kate did not answer. She was struggling to collect her wits for this sudden necessity.

Jemima came quite close, searching her face with curious grimness; and Kate saw the resemblance the old man had seen, and shivered.

"Mother, that was not the only news I heard at the store. I overheard some women talking. They said—"

"Surely we need not concern ourselves with village gossip, my child!" Kate was fighting for time.

But the appeal to the girl's pride went for once unheeded. "If they lied," she said tensely, "they must be punished for it. If they did not—Mother, what they said was that my father was not killed by accident. They said the man who killed him was Dr. Benoix. They said—why."

Kate moistened her lips. The time had come to speak, to explain what she could, to lie if necessary—anything to wipe out of her child's face that look of frozen horror.

But her tongue refused her bidding. She was hypnotized by the realization of her own utter folly. To have left such a discovery to chance! To have hoped that some impossible luck would keep her daughters in ignorance of her tragedy—and this in a rural community where nothing is ever forgotten, where every sordid detail of its one great scandal had been for years a household word!

The two stared at each other. Slowly the ruthless inquiry in the girl's eyes changed into fear, into a very piteous dismay. "Can't you deny—anything?" she whispered at last. "Mother! say it isn't so. I'll believe you."

She began to cry; not weakly with hidden face, but as a man cries, painful tears rolling unheeded down her cheeks, her shoulders heaving with hard sobs.

It came to Kate that never since her babyhood had she seen this child of hers in tears. She held out her arms, infinitely touched. "My dear, my baby!" she said. "Come here to Mother."

But the girl avoided her touch with a sort of shrinking. "All these years we've been trusting you, loving you, almost worshiping you—and you were *that sort*! Oh, Mother! Your husband's murderer—and his son coming and going about our house as if he were our brother. Those women said something about you and Philip, too,—but never mind that now. Will you tell me the truth, please? Before my father's death, you and—that man—loved each other?"

"Yes, Jemima, but—"

The girl silenced her. "And now that he is coming out of prison, you will go on—being lovers?"

Her mother answered quietly, "I shall marry him, dear, if that is what you mean."

Without another word, the girl turned and went out of the room. Kate hurried after her. "Wait, daughter, I haven't finished. There are some things I must tell you. Where are you going?"

"To tell Jacqueline."

Kate cried out, "No, not Jacqueline! She's too young. Wait, please—"

She followed up the stairs, commanding, pleading. "Wait! I prefer to tell her myself. Please, please! Jemima, do you hear me? I insist."

Jemima never paused. "My sister must know the truth. I owe that much to my father. Young or not, Jacqueline is a Kildare," she said stonily at the door of her room; and shut her mother out into the world of people who were not Kildares.

All that morning the Madam, greatly to the bewilderment of her household, wandered about the house in utter idleness, never stopping; saying to herself reasonably, "I must find something to do. Now is the time to be doing something;" wondering with that helpless, childlike egotism of people in great distress, how the sun happened to be shining so brightly out-of-doors, the birds singing quite as usual.

Invariably her footsteps came back to the door of the room that had been the nursery. It was there the two tiny cribs had stood, the rocking-horse, the doll's house, the little desks at which her babies had lisped their first lessons. It was there they murmured together now through the endless morning, discussing her fate, sitting in final judgment upon their mother.

She could not keep away from the door. Sometimes she pressed against it soundlessly, as if the passionate throbbing of her heart might send a wave through to reach them, to help them understand. How else could she help them to understand? Only by blackening now the memory of a father who was not there to defend himself, a father whom she herself had taught them to respect and to love.

It was an expedient that did not once occur to Kate Kildare.

"My little girls!" she whispered to herself. "My poor little frightened babies!"

If only she had been more with them, had taught them to know her better! In those hours she accused herself of neglecting her children, of leaving them too much to the care of others while she absented herself upon their business. She

begrudged, as mothers of dead children begrudge, every necessary moment she had spent away from them. What things were they saying in there, what things were they thinking of their mother?

At last she went upon her knees beside the door, her ear shamelessly at the keyhole. Jemima heard her there, and opened.

She said coldly, "You might have come in, if you wanted so much to hear what we were saying. The door was not locked. We have been deciding where we shall go."

Kate got with difficulty to her feet. "Where you shall go?" she repeated.

Then she thought she understood. Jemima had remembered the terms of her father's will, by which in case of her mother's re-marriage the property of Storm was forfeit.

"Oh, but daughter!"—the words tumbled over each other in their eagerness to be out. "You need not trouble about that! Losing Storm won't matter. You lose only what your father left, and I have doubled that—trebled it. Besides, there is the little property that came to me from my parents. I've always meant, when I married, to give you more than my marriage would cost you. That is why I have worked so hard, and saved. Perhaps you thought me miserly, grasping? I know people do. But that is why. The money is to be yours, all yours and Jacqueline's—at once, not after I die. We shall need very little, Jacques and I. Just a start somewhere—"

The girl stopped the hurrying words with a gesture of some dignity. "We have not thought about the money part yet, Mother. We were simply deciding where to live now."

"To live?" The words were puzzled.

"Yes. Surely you don't expect us to go on living with you and our father's murderer?"

Kate groped at the wall behind her for support. Here was a thing she had not thought of. She had known that she might lose her children's respect, perhaps, temporarily, their love; but she had counted unconsciously upon the force of daily habit, of companionship, of her own personal magnetism, to win back both, as she had won them from others. Deprived of their companionship, what chance had she? They were lost to her, utterly. Yet not even in that bitter moment did it

occur to her that she might fail the man who was coming back to her out of his living death.

She said tonelessly, "You are very young to leave your mother. Where could you go?"

The girl had her answer ready. "To my father's aunt Jemima. Now I understand why you and she have not been on good terms. I understand many things now. When she hears that we are leaving you, and why, I think she will be glad to offer us a home."

Kate bowed her head, "And Jacqueline? Is she, too, willing to leave me?"

At this there was a cry from inside the door, and a dishevelled, sobbing figure flung itself into Kate's arms and clung, desperately.

"No, no, *no*! Don't let her make me. I won't, I won't! She's been saying—oh, terrible things, Mummy! I tried not to listen. She said you didn't love us, you loved him. She said that when he comes—that man, Philip's father—you wouldn't want us around any more. But I know better. No matter who comes, you'll want *me*, you'll want your baby! Won't you, Mother? Dearest, darlingest Mother!"

"Jacky, don't be so weak," commanded her sister, sternly. "Remember what I told you. Remember our father."

"But I never knew our father. What do I care about him? It's Mummy I want. Whoever she loves, I love. I don't care *what* she's done! I wouldn't care if she'd killed Father herself—"

"Child, hush, hush!" whispered the trembling woman.

"I wouldn't! I'd just know he needed killing. There, there—" she had her mother's head on her breast now, fondling it, crooning over it as if it were Mag's baby. "Look—you've made her cry!" She stamped a furious foot at her sister. "What are you staring at with your cold, wicked eyes? You told me she was a bad woman—my *mother*! If she is, then I choose to be bad myself. I'd rather be bad and like her than good as—God. Now, then! Get out of here, you Jemmy Kildare!"

Jemima went. Sternly she closed her door upon the clinging pair, shutting both out together into the world of people who were not Kildares. But they were

together.



CHAPTER XIII

The night before Jacques Benoit's release found Kate Kildare lying sleepless within sight of a grim gray wall that blocked the end of the street upon which her window opened. A great fatigue was upon her, a fatigue more of the spirit than of the body. For years, it seemed to her, she had been fighting the world alone, unaided; and now that victory was within her grasp it tasted strangely like defeat.

She tried to realize that the gray wall no longer stood between her and happiness; was a menace that with the sun's rays would disappear out of her life like so much mist. But the effort was useless. The aura of shadow that hung always over that place wrapped her in its suffocating miasma, became part of the very air she breathed.

She had taken rooms in an old hostelry near the railroad station, wishing to avoid the curious recognition that would have been inevitable in the town's one good hotel. She was occupying what had been known in days of former prosperity as the bridal suite. This consisted of a dingy parlor, in which on the morrow Philip was to perform the ceremony that made her his father's wife, and of the room in which she lay, its walls dimly visible in the light of an arc-lamp just outside the window, gay with saffron cupids who disported themselves among roses of the same complexion. Over the mantel-piece of black iron hung an improbably colored lithograph of lovers embracing.

Kate found the effect of these decorations ironic, curiously depressing. She was not usually so responsive to environment.

Very near her now Jacques must be lying sleepless, too; watching for the dawn as she was watching—but with what eagerness, what trembling hope! Her depression shamed her. She tried in vain to conjure up a consoling vision of the man she had loved so long. The figure that came to her mind was more Philip than his father. She put it from her impatiently, angrily.

"I believe I'm developing nerves," she thought.

Her eyes, weary of the meaningless, leering antics of the cupids, presently came to rest on the ceiling above her bed, which appeared to be a-flutter with small pieces of pasteboard. She made them out to be business cards, evidently

momentoes of passing knights of the road who had amused themselves by sailing their credentials heavenward, each with a transfixing pin. Kate smiled a little, oddly cheered by these reminders of carefree, commonplace humanity which had lain sleepless also in that dreary bridal chamber. The knights of the road were better company for her thoughts than brides who might have dreamed there dreams to which she had forfeited her right; young, innocent brides who were not fighting their way to happiness over the happiness of their children.

Now and again a train came thundering past her window, till the old house shook to its foundation. For these she listened, tense and quivering. One of them would be bearing away from her forever the first-born of her children....

While she made ready for her journey, Jemima had also made ready for a journey, grimly; Jacqueline wandering between the two like a woebegone young specter, all her gaiety dissolved in tears. Mrs. Kildare herself had written to her husband's aunt, for the first time in years, explaining briefly her own intentions and Jemima's attitude with regard to them. The reply had come by telegraph, not to her, but to Jemima. Kate did not ask to see it. Without comment, she had observed the girl's preparations for immediate departure. She could not trust herself to speak.

It was known throughout the countryside by this time that the French doctor was indeed coming out of prison, and that the Madam intended to marry him. The news brought Professor Thorpe post-haste to Storm, pale, but ready as ever with his services.

"I never knew Dr. Benoix well, but now I shall make up for lost time," he said quietly. "What are your arrangements? Will you need a best man, or anything of that sort? Here I am."

Kate thanked him with tears in her eyes, declining.

"Jacques will prefer to see nobody, just at first, but Philip and me, I think. But if you *could* do something with Jemmy? She will listen to you, if to anybody. Make her understand, somehow—make her believe—" Her choking voice could not finish, and Thorpe silently patted her shoulder.

He had done his loyal best with the girl already, without success. He was handicapped by his promise not to say anything that would shake Jemima's passionate pride and faith in her father.

"I have nothing further to do with my mother's affairs," was her stony answer to all his arguments. "The day she brings that man into my father's house, I leave it, naturally; and I shall do my best to make Jacqueline leave it. That is all."

Her packing went on apace. On the last morning she found a check-book at her breakfast plate.

"Do you mean me to have this, Mother?" she asked in the coldly courteous voice she had used toward Kate since her discovery.

"Yes. There will be a deposit to your credit on the first day of each month until you come of age, when a third of my property will be turned over to you."

The girl flushed deeply, but said nothing except "Thank you." She would have liked to refuse all aid from her mother; but after all, was she not being deprived of her rightful inheritance? Let her mother make what reparation was possible.

To the last moment Kate hoped for some sign of relenting, struggled to find some explanation, some plea, that would draw the girl to her. But those who have formed the habit of ruling, suffer one disadvantage among their fellows: it is impossible for them to become suppliants.

"Good-by, Mother."

When she started for the train that was to take her to Frankfort, Jemima followed her to the door.

"You will be here when—we return, to-morrow?" Kate's steady voice hid very successfully her agonized suspense.

"No, Mother."

"Ah!... Then your aunt expects you? She knows what train to meet?"

"Yes, thank you. Professor Thorpe has made all the arrangements. He will put me on the train in Lexington."

Kate bent over her child. "Good-by, my daughter."

Even then the tremble of a lip, a tear on an eyelash, might have brought them into each other's arms. But neither was the sort of woman who weeps in a crisis. They kissed, their lips quite cool and firm.

It was Jacqueline who did the weeping for both of them, and insisted upon

sitting in her mother's lap all the way to the station, so that Kate had some difficulty in driving....

Such were the scenes and memories that flitted through Kate's brain all the night before her wedding; and the night was long.

Near morning she slept at last, and dreamed. Somebody stood beside her, smiling down—a stranger, she thought him, till she met his eyes.

"Jacques!" she cried, starting up with hands outstretched. "You, Jacques!"

The consoling vision for which she yearned had come at last; but not as she had seen it before, not in the prime of manhood, strong to bear her burdens. This was an elderly man, stooping, gray-haired, frail. Only the eyes were the same, blue as a child's in his wan face, warm as a caress. He spoke to her. He seemed to promise something.

She awoke with his name on her lips, and saw that it was morning. Peace had come to her with the vision. She faced a new day, a new life, serene and unafraid. What was it that he had promised? No matter. She would ask him when she saw him, soon now.

Smiling at her own credulity, she began with hasty hands to dress.

Out in the street she heard the crisp trot of horses, stopping beneath her window. Looking down, she saw one of her own vehicles, a light phaeton drawn by a pair of young blooded colts she had sent in to Frankfort some days earlier, that they might be rested and fresh for the day's drive back to Storm, which was to be their wedding journey. She looked them over critically.

"They are in excellent condition. We ought to make it in eight hours," she thought. "How he will love to drive those pretty fillies! He was always so fond of horses."

Philip knocked on her door. His voice said, "I am ready now."

It had been her idea to send him for Jacques alone, so that father and son might have a little time together before they came to her. She opened to him and stood, a white-clad vision, framed in the doorway of that dreary bridal suite.

"You see, I am ready too," she said, blushing a little. "Do you like my dress, Philip?"

He stared at her without speaking. His eyes were heavy and rimmed with shadow. For Philip, too, the night had been long.

She asked again rather anxiously, "Do I look nice, Philip? It doesn't seem too— young for me, this white?" She was in need of all her vanity just then. The mirror had shown her a face pale and luminous, not less beautiful—she knew that—but far older than the face whose memory Jacques carried with him into prison. She was obsessed by the fear that he would not recognize her.

But for once Philip's comforting admiration failed her. "I don't know how you look," he muttered, and turned abruptly away.

She stared after him in surprise. "Dear Phil—he must be very much upset to speak to me like that!" she thought.

She went into the parlor, and busied herself arranging flowers she had ordered to make the place less cheerless for the little wedding. The proprietress came in presently with more flowers, a box bearing the card of James Thorpe. The woman was in a flutter of excitement.

"They's two reporters in the office already, *Mrs. Kildare*," she said, emphasizing the name, "and more on the way, I reckon. If I'd 'a guessed who you were, I'd 'a had a weddin'-cake baked, I surely would. I've been on your side from the very first!"

"Thank you," said Kate, wearily.

"We've often had folks stayin' here to meet a friend who was comin' out,"—she jerked a significant thumb over her shoulder toward the penitentiary—"but never any one so famous, and never a weddin' right at the very gate, so to speak," she added unctuously.

Kate winced. She had registered under a false name, hoping thus to escape notoriety. Now she saw the folly of any such hope. From the first, no detail of her unfortunate romance had escaped notoriety.

"Let the reporters come up," she sighed. "Perhaps if I speak to them now they will let us alone afterwards."

She was speaking to them, when she heard in the street outside the familiar, crisp trot of the colts from Storm. Her voice broke off in the middle of a sentence, and the two reporters, exchanging glances, tactfully withdrew.

Kate was suddenly very weak in the knees. She stood by the window for a moment, clinging to the curtains, with closed eyes. "I must be prepared for changes," she said to herself. "It is many years, many years—"

She opened her eyes and looked down. Philip had alighted, throwing the lines to a porter. As he crossed the sidewalk, he glanced up at her window and she saw his face. No one followed him.

She met him at the head of the stairs. "Where is he, Philip?" Her voice was very quiet.

"Gone."

He led her into the room, closing the door in the faces of the eager reporters.

"Father caught a train that went through Frankfort just after dawn," he said tonelessly.

She cried out. "Just after dawn!" It was the hour of her vision. "He did not get our letters, then? He did not know that we were coming to take him home? There was some mistake!"

"There was no mistake. From the first he did not mean to see us. The warden said so."

"Where has he gone?"

"I do not know. The warden would not tell me."

Kate ran into her room, and returned with a hat and coat. "He will tell me," she said. "Come."

The warden received them in his private office, grave with sympathy.

"I understand what a blow this is to you," he said. "I argued with him to make him change his intention—Dr. Benoix was as nearly my personal friend as was possible under the circumstances. But from his first coming here he was determined never to be a burden upon his son—nor upon you, Mrs. Kildare. He felt, rightly or wrongly, that he had already darkened your life too much. It was for that reason he declined to write to you or to receive letters from you. He did not wish to keep alive a—a sentiment which would be better dead."

Kate gasped, "He said that?"

"Yes," said the warden, gently. "He asks that you forget him, if it is possible, or that you think of him as one who has died."

After a moment she said in her resolute voice, "You must tell us where he is."

The other shook his head. "I cannot, and I would not if I could. He has the right to make his life as he chooses. But you may be sure that wherever he has gone, there will be a place for him." The warden's voice changed, "He will be missed here. My business is not a sentimental one. It does not soften a man. We see a great deal of evil in this place, and very little that is good, and it is easy to—to question the ways of Providence, if there is any belief left in Providence. But when men like Benoix come to us, as occasionally they do come, the old-fashioned idea of a guardian Providence becomes—well, more tangible. There seems to be a reason back of such miscarriage of justice. I believe," he said rather haltingly, "that Benoix was sent here, not because he had any need of prison, but because prison had need of him."

He told them something of the doctor's prison life; of an epidemic that had raged through the wards, when he offered his services to the jail physician and for many days and nights had gone without sleep in his efforts to assuage suffering; of women in the surgical wards who mentioned his name beside that of God in their prayers; of men to whom he had given new hope and a new outlook on life by curing them of obscure disease from which they had not known they suffered.

"I would have recommended him for pardon or parole years ago, but he forbade me. He said he had more opportunity for research here than elsewhere." The warden smiled. "By 'research' he meant help, of course, he held the modern theory that crime is always a thing for the surgeon's knife, or the physician, or the teacher, to handle. We let him practise his theories wherever possible, because he was of great assistance to us. He could do more with the prisoners than we could, being one of them. Whenever we had trouble with an inmate, his first punishment was Benoix. He did not often need a second. It is many years since the whipping-post, or the standing-irons, or solitary confinement, have been used in this place, as perhaps you know. Many of our prison reforms may be traced to Benoix' influence, though he will never get the credit of them. He said once, 'What is the use of making men desperate? What you want is to make them ashamed. And that comes from inside.' Young man," he turned to Philip, "convict or not, you need never be ashamed of your father."

"I never have been," said Philip.

They went away, each with a letter Jacques had left for them. Kate's was very short:

I have known always that you would come, and that I must not let you. I am going while I have the strength to go. Fill up your busy, useful life without me, Kate. I thank God that you have your children and my boy, whom you have made a man. Once I left him to your care. Now I leave you to his, without fear. He is worthy.

Do not trouble your great heart for me. I shall find my work in a world that is so full of people—work and friends, too. We cannot be together, you and I, but remember always that I am not far from you wherever I may go, never so far that any need of yours will not reach me.

JACQUES.

She gave this letter, silently, to Philip, but he did not offer her his own. There were things his father had said to him in farewell not meant for other eyes to read; and for a long time they left him awed and silent.



CHAPTER XIV

Kate made the long drive back to Storm, which was to have been her wedding journey, with Philip beside her. They rarely spoke. Conversation was never necessary between them, and now both were busy with their thoughts. She drove, sitting erect as was her custom, her hands very light upon the lines, steadying the young horses now and then with a word, never urging or hurrying them; yet after a few coltish alarms and excursions they settled down to their work with a long, steady trot that ate up the miles like magic.—It was always a pleasure to Philip to see her drive. It was her great gift, he thought, settling men and horses alike to their stride.

They stopped for the nooning at a farmhouse where they were expected, and where their hostess met them eagerly at the gate. But when she saw who was Kate's companion, her face fell, and she hurried to her dining-room to remove from the table a large cake, decorated in candy roses. She asked no questions. There was that in the Madam's face which made questioning impossible.

After the meal and a brief rest for the horses, they drove on, still in silence, the colts trotting steadily now like old, sedate roadsters. Philip's thoughts were still too chaotic for speech. Disappointment, sorrow for his father, admiration, struggled with an unwilling relief, a secret gladness that made him sick with shame.

"Poor father! What am I thinking of!" he said to himself, angrily. "He may be ill, he may be without money. Why did I not ask more questions? Oh, I must find him somehow, I must! And yet—What a solution! She is here beside me. He will not take her from me. How did he know? I shall never have to call her 'mother.' He gives her to me. His whole life has been a sacrifice. What was it he wrote—'We must consider nothing now except her happiness, you and I, except her greatest good.' I wonder, I wonder—"

He dared not look at her often, but sat quite still through the long miles, thrilling to the touch of her skirts when they blew against his knees. The thoughts within him clamored so that sometimes he feared she must be aware of them.

But Kate had forgotten that he was there. Her eyes gazed straight before her down the white road, over which yellow August butterflies hovered like drifting

flowers; across the dappled, fragrant fields of the wide valley they crossed to the hills, whose vanguard, Storm, was already to be distinguished by the pennant of smoke flying from its tip. She longed for her home with a great longing, as children who have been hurt yearn for the comfort of their mother's arms.

Her mind was too bruised, too weary for consecutive thought. Sometimes the dream she had at dawn came back to her.—How broken he was, how frail! It did not seem to her that she had seen only a vision. It was Jacques himself. She understood now what promise he had made her. He was indeed never so far away that any need of hers could fail to reach him. He was giving her back her child, giving her back the land she loved, the work she loved; he was giving her what he could of happiness. But he was taking with him the hope that had kept her young.

Storm stood out clearly now against its background of hills, and a cloud of dust approached down the road, which presently revealed the galloping figure of Jacqueline, waving a large bouquet.

"Your wedding bouquet, Mummy," she cried from afar off, with rather tremulous gaiety. "Welcome home! Welcome home!"

Then, as her eyes made out the second figure in the phaeton, her expressive face changed. "Why—it's only you, Philip? Where is *he*?"

Philip said huskily, "We do not know."

"You don't know! You—you haven't *lost* him?"

Philip nodded. To his surprise he found that he was sobbing, crying as he had not cried since he was a boy.

"Oh—*oh*!" gasped Jacqueline. Then, "Stop, please, Mummy. I want to get in and comfort Phil."

She turned her horse loose with a slap on the flank, and clambered in between them.

Jacqueline knew a great deal about comforting people. It was a knowledge that had been given to her with her warm lips, and her crooning voice, and her clinging, caressing hands. She said nothing, because she could think of nothing to say; but for the rest of the way Philip was aware of a young arm wound tight about his shoulders, and more than once of lips fluttering against his cheek.

Jacqueline's kisses were like the dew from heaven, which falls alike upon the just and the unjust; none the less blessed, perhaps, for that.

Philip had more than his share of these attentions, because Kate did not seem to need them. She still drove silently, sitting upright, staring straight before her.

Once the girl leaned far out of the phaeton, and waved a handkerchief three times, as if she were signaling. There was an answering flutter from beneath the juniper-tree.

"Who is that in the eyrie?" It was the first time Kate had spoken for hours, and her voice seemed to come with a great effort.

"Why, it's the Blossom, Mother. She hasn't gone yet. She was waiting till the last possible moment, to be sure whether—whether Philip's father was with you. I promised to signal her yes or no."

Kate turned suddenly and looked at her. "Why did Jemima think he might not be with me?"

The girl answered very low, "Because—because she wrote to him."

The colts with a last gallant effort breasted the hill at a trot. At the door a wagon was waiting with a trunk in it, and Jemima stood beside it, dressed for traveling. But as they appeared, she dropped the satchel out of her hand and ran toward the phaeton.

"Bring brandy, Mag—be quick!" she called over her shoulder as she ran.

She had seen what the others had failed to notice: that her mother, still sitting upright with the lines in her hands, was quite unconscious.

CHAPTER XV

Years before, when gentle Mrs. Leigh turned her back forever upon the beloved Bluegrass town of her youth, and came to spend the remaining years of her life at Storm—for with all her ineffectiveness she was not the woman to leave her daughter alone in disgrace and sorrow—Kate had tried to make the strange country more homelike for her by building an Episcopal church. Meeting-houses of several denominations had been long established there; but to Mrs. Leigh, with Virginia and English antecedents, "church" meant candles on the altar, a vested choir, a rector in robes reading the familiar service of her childhood. She was willing to concede to Methodists, Baptists, Campbellites, other attendants of meeting-houses, a possible place in heaven; but hardly in the best society of heaven; and she was one of the people who cannot worship God comfortably except in the best society.

The church Kate built was small and plain—she had found her husband's estate heavily encumbered with debt. But it had its cross, its choir, and its rector, a scholarly old man who persuaded Philip into the ministry and who on his death was succeeded by him. And from the first it had its congregation. The farming people of that section of the State had come, or their immediate forebears had come, almost entirely from Virginia, so that the English service was as much a part of their traditions as of Mrs. Leigh's. The building of the first Episcopal church in that country did more to break down the enmity toward Basil Kildare's young widow than any of her patient efforts to win their friendship; and this despite the fact that she herself rarely entered it.

The little edifice stood in a grove of fine beeches between Storm and the crossroads village; a four-square structure of field boulders, with a modest steeple, and a gallery across the back for negroes, in the patriarchal Virginia fashion. The mistress of Storm saw to it that this gallery was well filled. The corner-stone bore an inscription that excited much comment in the community, as Kate intended it should:

**ERECTED IN MEMORY OF BASIL KILDARE
By His Two Children**

It was the first word of her answer to the world, and it had its weight.

"It says *his* two children. She wouldn't dare to tell a lie on stone!" was the current opinion.

Near the church was the rectory, one of those log-cabins boarded over and whitewashed, which are still quite common in Kentucky, sturdy mementoes of the sturdy pioneers whom they have outlived and will outlive for many a generation yet to come. Lilac, hollyhock, and hydrangea bloomed in season about this cabin, and it had a door-yard that made women linger enviously and men smile in scorn; for to these rough, hard-working, hard-living farmers it seemed that a young man might find better use for his leisure than the tending of flowers.

He had other weaknesses than flowers. The walls of his long living-room were lined with books, many of them "poetry-books," and the rector was reported to have read them all. Passers-by often heard him playing softly on his mother's old piano, and more than once he had been discovered in the kitchen, cooking his own dinner. The one servant he kept was an ancient negress addicted to the use of whisky and cocaine. To those who remonstrated with him for keeping the old woman, he explained that he got her very cheap because of her habits; but the community suspected other reasons, and despised him accordingly.

Their scorn of his "softness," however, failed to extend to the man himself. Different, they found him, reserved, a little cold, unless they happened to be in trouble; but never alien. For one thing, he had inherited from his father a gift that made "the French doctor" long remembered in that horse-raising community. It was an understanding of horses, indeed of all brute creatures, that amounted almost to wizardry. There was never a colt so unmanageable that he could not bring it to terms, without the aid of either whip or spur; never an equine ailment too subtle for him to discover and alleviate. At all hours of the day or night owners of sick beasts sent for the young rector as they had sent for his father, confident of willing assistance.

He had created his reputation by entering, against all protests, the stall of a crazed stallion which had just mangled its groom. "I want to look at his mouth," he explained. "Just as I thought! It's an ulcerated tooth. Give me my lancet. No wonder the poor beast was vicious!"

Philip had made the discovery among animals made by his father among men, that most wickedness may be traced to physical causes. He had also been heard

to say, not very originally, that horses needed more care than people, because people had speech and religion to help them and horses had neither; a saying which deeply endeared him to a community that ranks its thoroughbreds with its wives.

Two other qualities of his offset, in the eyes of the neighborhood, the matter of the flowers, the poetry-books, and the cooking. He had courage, and he had a temper, both proved. A few years previously, during the "tobacco-war" which upset the State, when the entire countryside was terrified by the outrages of the Night-Riders who had taken justice into their own hands, after the fashion of the moribund Ku-Klux Klan, young Benoix alone, of all the pastors in his neighborhood, did not hesitate to denounce from his pulpit Sunday after Sunday the men who resorted to masked terrorism as sneaks, cowards, and murderers. And this, despite the fact that the majority of his congregation were in sympathy with the Night-Riders for the best of reasons—kinship. Indeed, more than one man who listened to him with a stolid face had worn the mask and wielded the whip and torch himself. Benoix knew it; they knew that he did. They knew also that no possible circumstance could persuade him to give up one of the names he suspected to the law he was determined to uphold.

Anonymous letters came to him, warning, insulting, threatening his personal safety. More than one advised him to go armed. His board of vestrymen themselves remonstrated, counseling moderation for fear of alienating the congregation. His reply became famous throughout the State.

"Look here!" he cried, his blue eyes suddenly ablaze. "You want me to shut up, do you? Then behave yourselves, and see that your sons behave themselves. I'm talking to you, and you, and you—" he pointed direct at several of his vestrymen. "I want you to understand that I'm a disciple of peace. And, by God, I'm going to have peace in this parish if I have to fight for it with my fists!"

Such a man was Philip Benoix, priest, dreamer, idealist, son of a convicted murderer, lover of the woman who for seventeen years had been faithful to his father. He believed his great devotion a secret. Probably the only person within twenty miles who had not guessed it long ago was Kate Kildare herself....

Some Sundays after his father's release from prison, Philip, striding across the rectory garden in gown and cassock, was aware of a subdued stir among the men who lounged at the church door, waiting for service to begin. A light surrey was approaching which he knew well, drawn by the Madam's favorite bay colts. It

was the second Storm vehicle to arrive that morning. Jemima and Jacqueline were already within; Jemima at the organ, which she manipulated capably if unemotionally; Jacqueline marshaling her choir of farm boys and girls into a whispering, giggling semblance of order. In the gallery sat the usual quota of Storm servants, for Kate Kildare's household took its religion each week as faithfully as it took its tonics and calomel in due season.

With a throb of the heart, Philip realised that it must be his lady herself who drove those prancing bays. He thought over his sermon hastily.—Yes, it was good enough.

She drew the colts up on their haunches, flung the lines with a smile to the nearest bystander, and walked up the aisle with her free, swinging step, followed by a girl carrying a baby. The girl was Mag Henderson.

The sensation caused by this double appearance was immense. It was the first time many of the congregation had seen the Madam since the much-talked-of disappearance of Dr. Benoix, and they were eager to see how she took it. From all appearances she seemed to be taking it very calmly; a little paler than usual, perhaps; her eyes extraordinarily dark, but nothing to suggest the illness that had been rumored. Rather disappointed, they turned their eyes upon her companion; and then the whispering broke out like the buzzing of a swarm of angry bees.

Mrs. Kildare had brought Mag's baby to be baptized. Philip wondered why she had come without warning. He did not guess that only an impulse of sudden courage had brought her there at all. She remembered too keenly the last time she had come to church with a baby to be baptized.

That was why, perhaps, she so rarely honored with her presence the church she had built; but she could not explain this reluctance to Philip. "Church is too small for me," she said to him, airily. "My soul doesn't breathe between walls very well. I have to do my praying in the open."

It had long been her custom on Sunday mornings to ride among the deserted fields with her dogs, taking note of what had been accomplished during the week past, planning work for the week to come, visiting such of her tenants or laborers as were sick or incapacitated. Sometimes as she passed she heard Philip's voice in the pulpit, and stopped for a while to listen to him. It was no unusual thing for him to see her there, framed in the sunny square of the open doorway, sitting her restive horse, surrounded by dogs who leaped and gamboled eagerly, but in perfect silence, out of respect for the long whip she carried. At such moments his

congregation nudged each other in sympathetic amusement. Without turning to see, they knew by his flush and his halting speech who was outside.

But to-day there was no flushing or faltering of speech. Unprepared as he was, the priest in Philip woke to the necessity, and in his message the messenger forgot himself. Noting the women's curious, hostile glances, the buzzing whispers, the stiff-necked anger of the men, several of whom did not enter the church at all, he laid aside the text he had prepared and spoke to his people directly and very simply of that most dramatic episode in history, when Christ said to the crowd in the streets, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

While he spoke, he watched the girl sitting beside Mrs. Kildare, and at the first sign of shrinking, of embarrassment, he would have slipped at once into another theme. But there was no shrinking in that pretty, empty face. Indeed, after the first few moments of shyness before so large an audience, the girl looked about her openly, briding, pleased with the attention she was attracting in her new dress and with her new baby. If there was menace in those staring faces, the Madam was there to protect her. It was no new thing to the girl to be prayed over; this had come to be an attention she expected from preachers. Young as she was, there had been good reason for her leaving the town from which she came to Storm. But a whole sermon about herself, right out in church! It was a proud moment for Mag.

Benoix, his eyes on her face, sighed even as he spoke, realizing the probable hopelessness of Mrs. Kildare's effort.

The congregation was free to leave at the close of the regular service, without waiting for the christening. But it did not leave. For one thing, there was the Madam to be welcomed to church—excuse enough for those who needed excuse. To their shocked surprise the child was christened by the Madam's own name, "Katherine."

Afterwards, to each of the women who shook her hand, Kate said some such thing as this:

"You know Mag Henderson here, don't you? We've discovered that she is quite a wonderful dressmaker. Yes, she made the dress I have on, and those my girls are wearing. She is a stranger among us, too, so that of course we must find her plenty of work. That is only hospitable."

Kate knew her people when she appealed to their hospitality. Many a village

gossip, many a virtuous farmer's wife who had pursed her lips and kept her skirts from degrading contact with the notorious Mag Henderson, found herself pledged to employ the Madam's protégée for her next dressmaking.

"It does beat all," Mrs. Sykes was heard to murmur helplessly, "how that woman gets folks to do whatever she wants 'em to! 'Birds of a feather,' *I* say. But there! If she's willin' to give that misbegotten child her own Christian name, it won't do for the rest of us to be too toploftical. And them girls," she added, "certainly do dress stylish."

Philip usually took his Sunday dinner at Storm, and the congregation had the further privilege of watching their rector drive away in the same surrey with the Madam and Mag, apparently upon the most intimate and cordial relations with Mag's infant.

Mrs. Kildare, more sensitive of disapproving eyes for her friends than for herself, suggested that he come home with Jemima and Jacqueline instead.

"I'm a little uneasy about the mare Jacqueline is driving," she said, for an excuse.

"Pooh! Jacqueline can handle anything I can," Philip smiled. "Besides, I want to speak to you about something in particular."

"You usually do," murmured Kate, teasingly. She found his open partiality for her society rather amusing.

He was silent until they had passed the long line of homeward-bound vehicles, drawn respectfully out of the Madam's way. Then he said in a low voice, "Henderson is back in his cabin. Did you know it?"

Low as he spoke, the girl on the back seat heard him. "Not Pappy?" she cried. "Oh, oh, he's come for me agin! Please don't let me go back to him, *please* don't! I don't want to, I don't want to!"

"Why?" demanded Kate, sharply. "Was he cruel to you, Mag?"

"No'm, he wa'n't. He was always real kind, even if he was drunk; never kicked me, nor cussed me, nor nuthin'. But I don't want to go back to him. I'd ruther stay with you. Hit don't matter so much about me—I'm spiled anyway—but I don't never want Pappy to git my baby!"

Kate gave Philip a puzzled glance, which he met gravely. "Let her explain to

you," he said.

"Is it because you are more comfortable that you want to stay with me?" asked Mrs. Kildare. "Is it that?"

"That ain't all." The girl's hands were working together. "'Tain't safe for Pappy here, noways. Them Night Riders'll git him, shore. And he's so po'ly he couldn't stand a whippin'. It'd kill him. Oh, please, you make him go 'way, Miss Kate! Tell him I'll send him money soon as ever I git work, but make him go 'way. He shan't have my baby, he shan't!" She began to sob.

"There, there, Mag, don't be foolish. What would he want with your baby?"

"She's a gal."

Vaguely, understanding began to drift in to Kate. Her voice shook suddenly as she said, "What do you mean about the Night Riders getting your father? He is in no danger from them with you not there. It was you they threatened."

"No'm, 't were Pappy. That's how he come to run away. They got down on him fer makin' me do like I done."

"*Making* you—?" gasped Kate Kildare.

"Yes'm! It were him what found the men and brought 'em round. But it wa'n't no business of them Night Riders," said the girl resentfully. "I didn't mind. It were a easy way of makin' money, easier 'n workin'. Pappy's so po'ly, he ain't got the strength to work hisself. Only—" she began to cry again—"I know it ain't nice, and I don't want my baby should do that-a-way, not ever. I want she should grow up a lady, like you."

Kate was shivering uncontrollably. Over the brooding Sabbath stillness of her fields it seemed to her that a strange miasma was creeping, which shadowed the light of the sun. She had read of such horrors as this. She had thought of that strange traffic, the White Slave trade, as of some hideous, modern depravity that belonged to another and harsher world than her own. Yet here, almost within sight of the home that sheltered her children, here in the domain where her will was law, where she had believed herself cognizant of the doings of every man and woman and child—the thing had been going on unknown to her; the sacrifice of a little girl creature, not in the name of love (her tolerant mind found it difficult to condemn the sinning of stupid, healthy young human animals) but in the name of filial piety.—"Filial piety!" Always afterward the smug phrase

was hideous to her.

"Well," said Philip, rather hoarsely, "what are we to do with this—this man?"

"Let the Night Riders have him, and welcome!"

But Mag intervened once more in her father's behalf. "No, no, they'd kill him, shore! He's so sickly. Don't you let 'em git him, Miss Kate, don't you! He's always been real kind to me, even when he's drunk. Don't you let 'em git him!"

"Do you love him, Mag?" asked Kate, wonderingly.

"In co'se I do. He's my Pappy."

The others could not speak for a moment. Her unexpected loyalty to the father who had been "real kind" to her got them by the throat.

"What do you want me to do with him?" Mrs. Kildare asked at last.

"Jes' make him go away. Tell him he dassent come back no more. I reckon he thinks you'll take keer of him 'cause you're takin' keer of me. Ef he knows you ain't a-goin' to, he'll go away."

"Very well," said the other, gently, "he shall go away. And, Mag—" she reached back to grip the girl's hand strongly with hers—"he shall never have your baby. She shall grow up as nearly a 'lady' as I can make her. You have my word for that."

CHAPTER XVI

Kate, at this juncture, was filling her days to the brim with work, turning to it as to a tried friend, tested in many a crisis. Her recipe for avoiding thought was extreme physical fatigue; a good recipe, but one which was telling upon her physically. Philip's were not the only eyes which noticed the beginning of a change in Mrs. Kildare; a certain lack of buoyancy, an effect of effort in what she accomplished. Jemima, secretly alarmed, had insisted upon having in a doctor after her mother's fainting attack, but he made little of it. He was a bluff, cheerful, young countryman, shrewd but without subtlety, the son and the worthy successor of Jacques Benoix' successful rival, "Doc" Jones.

"She's as sound as a dollar," he pronounced admiringly. "Don't often see such a specimen of perfect health as the Madam. Nerves? Not likely. Probably over-fatigue—she does the work of ten men. Let me see, how old is she? Nearly forty—humph! Looks twenty-five. Make her take a rest. She'll be all right."

But rest, inactivity, was the one thing Kate would not allow herself. She dared not. She threw herself heart and soul into the business of her estate, and tried to feel the same interest, the same sense of large accomplishment, that had buoyed her up through so many years of loneliness.

On the Monday after Mag's child was christened, it happened that she was due to appear at a fair in an adjoining county, where she was exhibiting shorthorn cattle. But before she left, she did not forget to send a peremptory message to the man Henderson.

During her not infrequent absences from home, she had no uneasiness about her daughters, amply protected as they were by the numerous servants in the quarters back of the "great house," to say nothing of the small army of dogs which fattened upon her bounty. The housewoman who had been with her for years slept on such occasions on a pallet outside the girls' door, and Big Liza, the cook, also took up a position in the house, lying across the stairs in the great hall, whence her massive snores would have deterred the most reckless of marauders from entering.

But it chanced that this particular Monday was the occasion of the annual colored picnic in the village, held under the auspices of the Ladies of the

Evening Star, of which organization both the housewoman and Big Liza were officials. So from dusk until midnight the young ladies were to be left in the charge of no one but Lige, the stable-boy who had once figured as butler, to whose unhappy lot this honor had fallen because of his known slave-like devotion to Jacqueline. Every other member of the domestic force was off rejoicing with the Ladies of the Evening Star.

This youth was making the rounds of the house with one of the Madam's pistols in his belt, taking some comfort in the dramatization of his unlucky rôle, when breathless yells were heard approaching, and a small Ethiopian made his appearance over the back fence, yelling for help and the Madam in the same breath.

"The Madam's done gone away fum heah, an' lef me in charge," said Lige, grandly. "Whut kin I do fer you, young chile?"

A window opened in the house. "What's the matter, Lige? What's Cæsar Jackson yelling that way for?" demanded Jacqueline, who knew by name every creature, on two legs or four, in the county.

"Hit's de Riders!" gasped Cæsar Jackson. "De Riders is comin'!"

"Here? Nonsense! Why should Night Riders come to Storm? They wouldn't dare!" But she thought suddenly of Mag Henderson, and her jaw set.

"I yeared 'em, Miss Jacky! I hid behine a tree an' seed 'em pass with dey false-faces on!" The little negro shivered with that superstitious awe which had made the Ku-Klux Klan possible. "Dey 'lowed dey was a-gwine ter git old man Henderson."

Jacqueline gave a quick breath of relief. "Then they're too late. He has gone. Mother sent him word to leave the cabin last night. They won't find him."

"Yes'm, dey will, kase I seed 'im! I snuck erlong 'cross de fiel', an' dey was a light in de winder, an' I calls out, 'Run lak de debbil, kase de Riders is on dey way!' But he can't do it, run—he's too drunk. An' he say, 'Go an' git de Madam. Fo' God's sake git de Madam!' So I run, an' I run, an' I yells fit to bust myse'f—"

"You certainly did, Cæsar Jackson," said Jacqueline, patting his head. "You couldn't have yelled better if you had been a white boy. The Madam shall hear of this. She likes people who keep their wits about them.—What must we do, Jemmy?" The older girl had followed her out. "Do you suppose they mean

Henderson any real harm?"

There was a sobbing cry from Mag behind them. "They'll kill him, that's what they'll do! Oh, pore Pappy! They'll beat him up, an' it'll kill him, he's so puny. Oh, my Gawd! Cain't nobody stop 'em? They'll *kill* my Pappy!"

The two girls exchanged startled glances.

"What ef dey does? Nuffin but po' w'ite trash nohow," murmured Lige scornfully. He knew what he knew.

Jemima hushed him, sternly. "Poor white or not, we can't have tenants on our property murdered. I'll get help!" She started for the telephone.

"No time for that. They must be at the cabin already. We are the only neighbors, Jemmy. It's up to us. I wonder what mother would do if she were here?"

Even as she spoke she was running toward the stable. She knew that at least her mother would not be standing idle.

Mag cried after her, "Miss Jacky, whar you goin'? Don't you try it, honey, don't you! How could you stop 'em all by yourself? They might whip you, too, ef you was to make 'em mad."

"Whip me? *Whip me?*" Jacqueline threw up her head and laughed. Her purpose had not been clear in her mind, but Mag's plea settled it.

She jerked the pistol out of Lige's belt—an able, well-conditioned weapon it was, in whose use both girls were as proficient as their mother. Lige and the breathless pickaninny trotted faithfully beside her. Jemima's voice could be heard at the telephone, resolute and distinct, rousing the countryside to the rescue of Henderson. Number after number she called, gave her brief message, and rang again.

"But I bet we get there first!" murmured Jacqueline, with an excited giggle. "Three horses out, Lige. Don't stop to saddle. I suppose you can ride, Cæsar Jackson?" She laughed at her own question. Was there ever a country-born darky, or a city-born one, for that matter, unable to straddle a horse from the moment he left his cradle?

"Laws, Miss Jacky, what we-all up to dis time?" murmured Lige, apprehensively. It was not the first time he had followed his divinity into reckless adventure.

He led out the three horses, amid soft nickering from other stalls.

"They all want to come, the dears! What a pity there's nobody to ride them! We'd be quite a troop—Storm cavalry to the rescue!" Inspiration came to her. "Lige, it's awfully dark! Do you suppose it would be seen that they were riderless?"

"My golly!" chuckled Lige, grasping the situation.

"Fetch 'em all out!"

Herding the riderless horses before them, a feat in which both had had experience, they took a short cut across back fields to the road that ran behind Storm hill toward the Henderson cabin. The first of these fields was known as the hospital pasture, where grazed several mules recovering from stone-bruises, harness galls, and the like. Mrs. Kildare always kept invalided stock under her own eyes.

"Suppose," said Jacqueline, suddenly, "that we were to add a few mules to the regiment?"

Lige and the pickaninny Cæsar Jackson responded to this suggestion with a pleased alacrity. Eleven strong, they galloped into the lower pasture, where steers were being fattened for market.

"Lige," cried out Jacqueline, "can steers gallop?"

"Dey kin wid me behine 'em. *Whee-ow!*" yelled her faithful henchman.

Cæsar Jackson rushed ahead and opened the gate, and the cavalry from Storm swept out into the road.

The girl had planned her sortie with the lightning instinct of a born general, an inheritance, perhaps, from various Kildares who had played their parts in the wars of the world. The road behind Storm resembled the fateful sunken lane of Waterloo, hidden between higher land on either side, topped by fences which made scattering of forces impossible. Nothing was to be heard in the darkness except the dull thudding of hoofs, an occasional startled bellow, the choked laughter of the two lieutenants as they herded their forces along at a smart trot.

Where a side road branched toward the Henderson cabin, Jacqueline gave her final instructions. "Silence till I shoot off the pistol, then yell, yell for all you're worth! and drive 'em in at a gallop."

"My *golly*!" gasped Lige, in an ecstasy that almost lost him his seat.

Everything was propitious. An obliging moon came suddenly from the clouds and showed them a group of horses tethered about the cabin; showed them also men tying a struggling figure to a tree in the front yard. Then came a sound that drove the mirth out of the girl's face, and left it white and stern—the cry of a man in mortal terror.

"Brutes, beasts!" she muttered. "Now then, you boys—"

Off went the pistol. Out of three pairs of young and vigorous lungs burst such a rebel yell as might have startled Grant's army in its long sleep, let alone twelve or fourteen nervous and uneasy "Possum Hunters."

They did not stop to see what was upon them. They heard the yell, the shot, the soft thunder of many galloping feet, and they made for their horses. Some got away straddling the crupper, some embracing their steeds about the neck. After them galloped the regiment from Storm, bellowing and braying, with its rearguard of two boys and a girl quite helpless with laughter.

Where the lane debouched into the highroad the rout became sheer panic, for there pursued and pursuers ran full tilt into the glare of a large automobile, from which a voice called "Halt!"

"The Sheriff, the Sheriff!" cried somebody.

Night Riders were to be seen scattering in all directions, leaping into cornfields, scurrying into the woods. In a moment there was nothing left of the raid except a few sweating, quivering thoroughbreds, and many steers and mules that fell at once to cropping the wayside grass with the composure of true philosophy.

Then from the darkness behind (for the moon, her work done, had retired again) came guffaws, and gurgles, and wails of laughter. The three men in the automobile eyed each other inquiringly. The laughter drew nearer. They could distinguish, amid mirth unmistakably negroid, a beautiful contralto voice demanding. "*Did* you see 'em skedaddle, Lige? Oh, wasn't it glorious! Riding on their stomachs, their ears, any old way. Holding on with their toe-nails—Oh, Lord!"

One of the men jumped out of the machine. He had recognized that voice. "Jacqueline Kildare, you wild hoodlum! What have you been up to?"

Into the lamplight rode a disheveled figure straddling a horse bareback, her pink gingham skirts well up above her knees, hair flowing in a cascade of splendor about her shoulders.

"Oh, Reverend Flip, were you in time for the fun?" she asked, weakly. "'The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold.' Those bold, bad 'Possum Hunters' will never be able to hold up their heads in *this* county again! Routed by a girl with a troop of cattle!" (It may be added that she spoke no less than prophecy.)

"The 'Possum Hunters'! Do you mean to say *you've* been mixed up in this performance? My dear girl," said Philip, sternly, "what will your mother say."

"She'll kick herself to think of missing it!" cried Kate Kildare's daughter, and was off on another peal of laughter in which the three men joined with a will.

"I should have been sorry to miss it myself," said a voice which Jacqueline recognized, behind the headlight. "Better one night of Kentucky than a cycle of Cathay."

Jacqueline made ineffectual attempts upon her skirts, blushing, but she said demurely enough, "Why, if it isn't the author, just in time for some more local color! Where did you come from, Mr. Channing?"

"From Holiday Hill, where I am visiting my friend Farwell. Your sister telephoned for help, and we were on our way to the rescue. Farwell," continued Channing, "is now nudging me in the ribs and demanding to be properly introduced. Do you mind? Mr. Farwell, Miss Kildare."

Jacqueline's eyes were sparkling. "One ahead of Jemmy," she thought, triumphantly. The owner of the great new house five miles away which made Kate Kildare feel crowded, was an object of no small interest to her daughters.

"We've been so anxious to see you, Mr. Farwell! I wish it weren't dark," she said with her usual frankness. "We've been so afraid you would be old, or fat, or married, or something like that."

"What have I done," murmured a plaintive voice, "to deserve such unkind suspicions? Why old and fat?"

"Because rich. They usually go together—in books, at any rate. And it would be just our luck to have you married, when we're so dreadfully in need of beaux. *Are you married?*"

"Alas, yes! But does marriage bar one absolutely?"

Jacqueline considered. "Well, no, I don't suppose it does—except for marrying purposes. Not unless you're old and fat, too," she added, gravely.

"I do assure you!" Mr. Farwell leaped nimbly out of the car and struck an attitude in the full glare of the headlight, as one who would say, "Take a look at me. Gaze your fill."

Jacqueline did so with full and unqualified approval. Mr. Farwell was distinctly worth looking at.

"What a pity you are married!" she said sadly. "It will be a great blow to Jemima.—I must go home and break it to her. I suppose she's still at the telephone assembling the clans. Did she telephone you too, Philip, man of peace?"

"Naturally, sensible girl that she is, instead of charging about in the dark like an avenging fury in pink gingham."

She made a face at him. "Just the same, it was me and not Jemmy who saved Henderson a whipping!" she remarked, with more satisfaction than grammar.

"And where is Henderson now?"

Her face went blank. "Good gracious, I forgot all about him! He's tied to a tree in front of the cabin."

"I'm not surprised. Perhaps we'd better go and untie him," suggested Benoix. "Thanks for the lift, Mr. Farwell. It saved me a long walk. My old horse was too done to take out this evening. Are you ready, Jacqueline?"

He caught one of the grazing thoroughbreds and straddled it with an ease that filled the author's soul with envy. Channing was no horseman.

"Do you mean to say you are going to ride that prancing beast without either bit or bridle?" he murmured.

The clergyman smiled. "It doesn't take much riding to persuade a horse to go home. Besides, Mrs. Kildare's horses know me. Come, Jacqueline."

Farwell protested. "Why not let me run Miss Kildare home in the machine, while you go and liberate the late victim? She must be tired after such an experience."

Benoix answered for her, rather brusquely. "Jacqueline is too young to know

what it is to be tired. I'll go home with her, thanks. Good night."

He turned up the lane, and the girl followed, leaving her scattered cavalry to be herded home by the two negro boys. It would have been pleasant, she thought, to have appeared at Storm in an automobile, with not only the author in tow, but the interesting stranger as well, to the confounding of Jemima. Her voice came back through the darkness rather wistfully.

"Good-by. Wasn't it lucky you happened along in time?"

"It was indeed!" they replied with one voice.

"I hope," she called sweetly, "that you will think it necessary to come and inquire about my health. That would be only polite, don't you think?"

They agreed with her.

"There!" she said to Philip. "Didn't I do that nicely? Jemmy herself couldn't have been more young lady-like. Do tell me how you happened to know Mr. Farwell, and why you haven't introduced him to us? Didn't you know we were wild to see him?"

Benoix did not answer. His silence gave an effect of displeasure.

She put her horse closer to his, and laid a coaxing hand on his arm. "Why, Reverend Flip, I believe you are cross with me! What about—not because I came to Henderson's rescue, surely? I couldn't let those men get poor Mag's father! She said they would have killed him."

Philip murmured, "Not such a bad thing if they did."

"Philip! What did you say?"

"I said," he replied mendaciously, "that you have behaved foolishly and riskily, and with no dignity whatever. 'Young lady-like' indeed! Riding about the country bareback, with your hair down, and your skirts above your knees! What do you suppose those strange men thought of that?"

"I think they liked it," she said candidly. "They looked as if they did. You see neither of them is my spiritual pastor and master, so they don't have to be shocked by me." She gave him a demure, sidelong glance.

"I am not shocked either, you know that. Only—" said Philip.

"Only you wish I were more like Jemmy," she pouted. "Stiff, and proper, and prim—"

"I don't want you to be like any one but yourself," he said warmly, and paused. Suddenly he realized the change that was coming over this little playmate of his, half child and half woman as she was. The woman was beginning to predominate. He remembered her with Mag's baby, her almost passionate tenderness, her precocious knowledge of the child's needs. He remembered her manner with the two men they had just left, coquettish, innocently provocative. It had startled him. Evidently, Jacqueline was becoming aware of certain powers in herself which she was not averse to practising upon whatever victims came to hand; even upon her spiritual pastor and master.

"Jacqueline," he said gravely, "you are growing up. You must remember it. Why did you talk to a strange man like that?"

She chuckled. "Like what?"

"You know what I mean."

"Well—because I wanted him to come and see us. He's a neighbor, and we ought to be friends with him. And then—I'll tell you this, Philip, because you're my chum—I wanted that author man to notice me! He treated me like a silly child the last time. He won't again."

"I see,"—Philip smiled in spite of himself. "Nevertheless, you can't be too careful and dignified with strange men, dear."

She recognized the change in his voice; a change that usually came soon or late when people endeavored to scold Jacqueline.

"Now you're nice again," she said with satisfaction, slipping her hand into his. "You don't disapprove of me, anyway, half as much as you think you do. You might kiss me, just to show it."

He resisted gently. "No, my dear, you're getting too old for that."

"Too old for what?" she cried out.

"To kiss men. I told you you must be careful—"

She burst out laughing. "But you're not 'men,' you old goose!" Unexpectedly she jerked his head down to hers, and gave him a resounding smack on the cheek.

"There! I'm going to kiss people I love, men or women, till I'm as old as Methuselah—'specially if they're cross with me. You may as well get used to it. —Now kiss me back, nicely."

Philip succumbed to the inevitable with as good grace as possible. He wished, with a sigh, that this child of the woman he loved could remain as she was forever; innocent, frank, unspoiled by the encroachment of womanhood. Jacqueline was particularly dear to him, perhaps because of her resemblance to her mother....

They found the man Henderson in a whimpering heap at the foot of a tree, about which his arms were still tied. Vigorous rubbing restored the circulation to his wrists, and a few drops of whisky from Philip's pocket-flask completed the restoration.

"Now, then, you're able to walk. Go!" said Philip. "Get your things and march. You were told to get out last night."

Jacqueline looked at him in surprise. This sharp, cold voice was quite unlike Philip's usual gentleness with the unfortunate.

The man began to whimper and whine, "How kin I go? I ain't got no money, and I ain't got the stren'th to walk. I'm jes' a pore ole man what don't mean no harm to nobody. Take me along with you-all! I'm afeared the Riders'll git me ag'in. I come back to see my darter, the onliest chile I got in the worl'. I ain't got no other place to go at. The Madam won't let a pore ole man suffer. I wants to see my darter."

"Stop talking about your daughter!" interrupted Benoix, harshly, "I give you five minutes to get your things together and bring me your key."

"Why, Philip!" cried Jacqueline, hot with indignation. "Of course he's in no condition to go now, after the scare he's had. The poor thing! We'll take him home to Storm. Mother'll expect us to."

Henderson fawned upon her eagerly. "Bless yore purty sweet face! You won't let 'em git the ole man. That's right. Take me along with you to see my darter." He put a wheedling hand on her arm.

"You dare to touch that young lady—!" Philip spoke in a voice Jacqueline had never heard, shaken with rage. He had a stout switch in his hand. Suddenly, uncontrollably, he brought it down across the man's shoulders again and again.

Henderson cowered away from him. In less than the five minutes he had been given, he was shuffling down the lane, all his worldly goods slung over his shoulder in a handkerchief.

Then Jacqueline's shocked astonishment burst bounds.

"Why, Philip Benoix, you wicked, cruel man! To turn that poor old thing out of his home without even giving him a chance to see his daughter! And you struck him, too, struck him to hurt—you, a minister of the Gospel! Oh, oh, you 're as bad as those 'Possum Hunters,' kicking a dog when he's down. You, a man of peace!"

"It seems," said Philip, ruefully, "that I am also a man of wrath."

During the ride back to Storm both remained silent, Jacqueline nursing with some difficulty her displeasure against her friend. So this was Philip's famous temper, in which she had never quite believed! In truth, that sudden outburst of inexplicable rage on the part of the grave, quiet, young clergyman had appealed strongly to the love of brute force that is inborn in all women.

But it had frightened Philip himself. He realized for the first time that he was indeed the son of a man who had killed in anger. He touched more than once the little inconspicuous gold cross that hung at his belt, wondering whether he were fitted after all for the vocation he had chosen.



CHAPTER XVII

There stood, in the ravine which separated Storm hill from the property that had formerly belonged to Jacques Benoix, a roofless, tumbledown stone cabin which had been from childhood Jacqueline's own particular playground, as sacred to her as the eyrie to her mother. She called it, grandiloquently, the Ruin. The place had a sinister reputation, and was sedulously avoided by both negroes and whites of the neighborhood; which suited Jacqueline's purposes excellently. All dreamers feel the need of a hidden place where they may retire, free from the gaze of a not too sympathetic world; and the Ruin made a strong appeal to the imagination of Jacqueline.

If the place was haunted, as the neighborhood averred, it was perhaps not without reason. The cabin had once been a slave-house where an earlier Kildare kept certain human livestock to be fattened like hogs for the market, overcrowding and neglecting them, however, as he would not have dared to neglect and overcrowd hogs, so that the venture was not altogether successful. Recently, workmen laying drainage pipes through the ravine had uncovered a long trench filled with many bones, ghastly witness to the folly of neglecting livestock, human or otherwise. Cholera was the first ghost to haunt that spot, but it had left others which were heard about the cabin on windy nights, moaning and rattling chains and, because they were the ghosts of negroes, singing.

Jacqueline, unaware of this episode in the proud Kildare history, had nevertheless been faithfully warned by the negroes of "ha'nts" in the ravine, which added materially to her pleasure in the place. Not every budding genius has at her private disposal a haunted ruin; and at this period of her career Jacqueline was being a budding genius.

Their mother had recently taken both girls to a near-by city for their first taste of grand opera, completing the effect by the purchase of a graphophone and opera records. Since that time Jacqueline had nourished the more or less secret ambition of becoming the world's greatest *diva*. She had taken to singing in church with an impassioned ardor which startled, even while it titillated, the ear of the congregation. As Mrs. Sykes put it, "Folks hadn't ought to sing hymns as if they was love-songs, no matter how nice it sounds."

Jacqueline had not taken her family, even her adored mother, entirely into her confidence, having a shrewd conviction that her ambition would meet with slight encouragement from them. Of late, since the disturbance about Philip's father, both Jemima and her mother were too *distract*, too absorbed in their own affairs, to pay much attention to Jacqueline. Whatever confidences trembled on her lips, remained unsaid. She felt that they had more important things to think about. Once, indeed, she had ventured to join her voice to that of the Victrola in the mad scene from "Lucia," acting at the same time her conception of the part; and her family, staring in amazement, had suddenly roared with laughter, the first laughter heard in that house for many a day.

So Jacqueline and her hurt dignity sought refuge in the Ruin, there to rehearse her art hereafter untroubled by the jeers of an untemperamental world. Her faithful audience and inseparable companion was Mag's baby, who crowed and gurgled impartially over the woes of *La Tosca*, *Camille* or *Manon*, having inherited the easy-going placidity of her mother. Sometimes Kate, coming and going about her work, paused to listen, smiling at the arias soaring up out of the ravine, and thought, "It is a good thing that child has all outdoors at her disposal! Whatever should I do with her between four walls?"

Here, on the afternoon following her raid upon the raiders, Jacqueline posed and strutted happily, making the welkin ring with the piteousness of *Madame Butterfly*. From without came distant, languid, sounds of late summer, grass-mowers whirring in the hay-meadows, a stallion nickering in his stall for the freedom of the pasture, crickets and katydids shrilling their cheerful dirge for the summer that was passing. All of these sounds the girl knew and savored in the intervals between her singing. Now and then a bird hopped down from the branches that hung over the roofless cabin, and searched fearlessly for provender at her very feet. Mag's baby, on a bed of moss and leaves, crooned to herself, kicking fat legs toward heaven and clutching at stray sunbeams with futile hands.

Jacqueline broke off. "Oh, dear, I could sing so much better if somebody would listen!" she complained aloud to the birds and the baby and the world at large. "It takes two to make real music, a singer and a listener."

She began again. Suddenly, just outside, a very passable tenor took up the air just where a tenor should. Jacqueline was startled but not nonplussed; she had been hoping a miracle might occur that day. At seventeen, the age of miracles has not passed. She finished her share of the duet with a flourish, and on the last

note of his, Percival Channing appeared in the doorway.

"Weren't we splendid together?" she greeted him. "Just like the Victrola. Let's do it again!"

They did it again, and afterwards shook hands in mutual congratulation.

"What you said was quite true—music without some one to share it is only half music," he remarked. "But whom did you say it to?" He looked about him curiously.

"Oh, to my familiars!" She waved an airy hand. "This place is haunted, you know; but the ghosts run when they see a stranger.—You *do* make unexpected appearances, Mr. Channing!"

"Nothing compared with yours. The banister-rail, riding bareback 'out of the night,' as the romantics love to say—But unexpected? Come now, Miss Jacqueline—" he smiled quizzically—"surely you did expect me to inquire for your health?"

She dimpled. "Yes—but not quite so soon."

"You do yourself an injustice!" He added, with an air of formality, "I have come to make my dinner call. Is your mother at home?"

"You know very well that she's away, because you heard Philip say so last night! There's Jemima, though."

"Is your sister at home?" he asked politely.

"She's making pickle this afternoon, and she's always rather cross when she makes pickle. But I'm sure she'll see you, if you wish."

"I don't," said Channing.

"I thought not," murmured Jacqueline, and made a place for him to sit down beside her. "Look out—you'll squash the baby!"

Channing jumped. "A baby? Beg pardon, infant—" he poked a finger toward young Kitty, who promptly conveyed it to her mouth. "It's biting me," he said plaintively. "Call it off—What are you doing with a baby?"

"I'm winning it away from its mother so that she'll let me keep it for good," said Jacqueline in confidence.

"Humph! Rather a high-handed proceeding, that."

"Oh, no—I don't think Mag really wants a baby much, not like I do. She's fond of it in a way, just as cats are fond of their kittens; but they soon outgrow it, you know. Why, once we had a cat who ate her kittens!"

"Shocking of her," said Channing.

"I suppose it was because she didn't want to have them—any more than Mag did. She never had a husband, you see, and that makes it so awkward."

"Meaning the cat?" murmured Channing.

The author of erotic novels was rather pink about the gills. He wondered how much of the girl's naïveté was natural and how much pose. On the whole, judging from her antecedents and environment, he decided that it was largely pose, but thought none the less of her for that. The artificial always interested him more than the natural.

He looked at the baby again with a certain distaste. He had heard from Farwell the story of Mag's adoption into the Storm household, and it had rather shocked him. What was the woman thinking of to surround her young daughters with such influences? Naturally one would not expect prudery, conventionality, from the mistress of Storm, but in his experience quite *declassée* women guarded more carefully than this the morals of their young.

"I can't think why you want to keep the infant," he said.

Jacqueline looked at him in surprise. "Why, she's perfectly sweet! Look at her precious little curls, and her chubby feet, and all!" She gathered the small Kitty up in her arms protectively. "Didn't the bad old man admire her, then? Bless its heart! Just shows what a stupid he is—Why, Mr. Channing, everybody wants a baby!"

He murmured, "Yes? But in the natural course of events, surely—"

"I might have some of my own, you mean? I hope so—oh, I do hope so! Lots and lots of them. But I might not, you know. The natural course of events doesn't always happen. I might be an old maid. Or I might be wedded to my Art. 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.' Have you ever thought how perfectly *awful* it would be to go through life without any children at all?"

Mr. Channing admitted that he had not, and changed the subject. "What particular Art are you thinking of being wedded to?"

Jacqueline looked at him reproachfully, hurt. "I should think you'd know. Didn't you hear me practising?"

The author did not smile. Crude and untrained as it was, he had recognized in that young contralto a quality that made him start. He was always very quick to recognize talent.

"I was going to speak to you about that," he said seriously. "Do you know that you have quite a remarkable voice, Miss Jacqueline?"

"Of course I know it! But what's the use if nobody else does? A voice with nobody to listen to it is—is like being pretty with nobody to tell you so."

"Does nobody tell you *that*?" he murmured.

She dimpled again, flushing under his frank gaze. "They think I'm too young for compliments! As for my voice, it's getting so strong that Mummy and the Blossom are always saying to me, 'Not so loud.' If I let it out in the house, they put their fingers in their ears. If I let it out in church, Jemmy says I'm drowning the soprano—and so I am. What can I do?"

"Learn to use it," said Channing. "You must have lessons, of course."

"Oh, I've had them. The best singing-teacher in Lexington came here once a week all last winter."

"Lexington!" Channing smiled.

"You think I ought to have one from Louisville or Cincinnati?" she asked anxiously. "I didn't really seem to learn very much from the Lexington one."

Channing smiled again. "I'm afraid you won't get the sort of training you need this side of Europe. Your mother must send you to Germany, or at least to New York."

She made a gesture of despair. "Then there's no use talking about it. I'll never leave mother, never! I'll just have to go on practising out here as best I can, with nobody to listen to me."

"I'll listen to you," consoled Channing, "whenever you'll let me."

"But you'll be going away soon."

"Not very soon," he said. He did not add that he had decided on the moment to remain Farwell's guest until he had exhausted this new interest thoroughly. Channing was not the man to deny himself the luxury of any passing sensation.

He had found himself pleurably wakeful during the night, thinking of the picture the girl made as she rode into the glare of lamplight, skirts and hair in disarray, laughing like a young Bacchante, the spirit of youth and joy incarnate. Now he drew her out very skilfully, so that he might watch the changing expressions on her vivid face as she talked, or smiled, or bent broodingly over the child in her arms. Here, he thought, was temperament as well as talent. Properly handled, the girl had a career before her.

Nor was his curiosity about her entirely impersonal. Channing, as a rule, felt rather at a loss with girls. Occasionally in his work he found it necessary to introduce the young person, chiefly by way of contrast, and then he did extravagant justice to her rose-white flesh and her budding curves, and got her as speedily as possible into the arms of the villain; after which she became interesting. His natural taste in heroines was for the lady with a past, preferably several pasts. The blot on the woman's character was as piquant to him as the mole upon her shoulder. He had spent an impressionable youth in Paris.

But this Bouncing Bet of the Banister, as he had called her, this young wildwoods creature with all the instincts and none of the experience of his own class, gave an effect of warmth, of vitality, that thrilled him. His gaze kindled as he watched her. She promised to be even lovelier than she was, never as beautiful as the mother, perhaps, but quite beautiful enough to be disturbing, with her soft, thick-lashed eyes, her tender mouth, her slender, straight, finely molded body; no finished product this, but a bit of virgin soul-clay waiting to be modeled; an empty, exquisite vase waiting to be filled with life.

He thought suddenly of that matchless nude of Ingres', "La Source." Young Jacqueline Kildare might have posed for it.

Percival Channing; at thirty-four, had moments of regretting that he had not conserved his energies more carefully, been more truly "wedded to his Art," to use the girl's quaint phrase. He felt latterly a little stale, a little jaded and world-worn. It had occurred to him during the night that contact with so vital a personality might refresh him, might do for him what contact with the earth did for the giant Antæus. Indeed, to his imagination she suggested the earth, field

and pasture and wooded stream, nature in her abundance, promise. She was the very essence of this Kentucky, this half-tamed wilderness that he had come to study and to portray.

There is no more charming companion than your temperamentalist, when once the spark is struck. Jacqueline for the first time in her life enjoyed that most subtle flattery of being understood. Here was a person, a thoroughly "grown-up" person, who did not pet and humor her, and tease her as if she were a child; who on the other hand did not demand of her the impossible formalities of young ladyhood. Famous author as he was, he accepted her just as he found her, and liked her that way. She compared him with Philip, always suggesting some change, always trying to improve her; and after all Philip was nothing but a country clergyman!

When she had exhausted her own eager confidences, Mr. Channing paid her the compliment of talking about himself. He made confidences in return. She learned that he, like her, had suffered and was still suffering from a lack of sympathy on the part of his family. They failed completely to appreciate the necessities, the difficulties, of the artistic temperament. In fact, he had practically given up his family, and was a homeless wanderer upon the face of the earth, seeking his encouragement among strangers.

"But surely they must appreciate you now," cried Jacqueline. "Why, you are famous!"

He admitted it, rather sadly. "Famous—and lonely," he said.

She gave him an impulsive hand by way of sympathy. "I'd be willing to be lonely, if I could be famous. But I wouldn't be willing to have mother lonely," she added. "I never could make up my mind to leave her here alone."

"Alone? But there's your sister."

"No, there isn't. Not now. She's here, of course, but—" The girl's face shadowed, but she did not explain. The shock of that terrible scene between the two beings she loved best was a thing that did not bear thinking of, much less speaking of. Sometimes at night she woke trembling and sobbing with the memory of it, as from a nightmare. But by day she put it from her determinedly, and tried to pretend that everything was as it always had been in her home.

"Have you told your mother about this ambition of yours?" he asked curiously.

She shook her head. "No. I've hinted, but they—they laughed at me, and Jemmy said that it wouldn't be lady-like to go on the stage, even in grand opera."

Channing smiled. "The standards of the world, fortunately, vary somewhat from the standards of rural Kentucky. Some of the greatest 'ladies' I have known happened to be on the stage, and not always in grand opera."

He went on to speak of various singers and actors and painters and writers of his acquaintance, of studios and greenrooms, customs in European countries, famous friendships between royalty and artists; and she had her first glimpse of a world that made her own seem as barren and desolate as some desert isle.

Certain racial inheritances awoke in her and clamored. Her mother's family had been people of culture and travel and wide social affiliations. It had not occurred to her before that her life was singularly empty. She would have said that her friends were legion. The horses, the dogs, the negroes, the humbler country folk of the neighborhood, the tenants on her mother's property—all accepted the Madam's youngest daughter as one of themselves, and loved her accordingly. But of intercourse with her own kind, she had none. Her mother, Philip, Professor Thorpe, even Jemima—regarded Jacqueline as a playful, happy, charming tomboy, whose sole duty in life was to amuse herself and them. Philip, indeed, was beginning to observe the deeper instincts stirring in her; but Charming was the first of her equals to treat her quite as an equal, and the fact that she looked upon him as a dazzlingly superior order of being made his recognition of her as a kindred spirit a rather heady thing. Jacqueline was capable, as only seventeen may be, of a vast and uncritical hero-worship, that gave with both hands and never tired of giving.

"Oh!" she said at last, with a long sigh. "Listening to you is just like reading the most exciting book, all about crowned heads, and far countries, and society, and things like that. Jemmy ought to hear you. I wonder why Professor Jim has never sent us any of your novels? He is always giving us books."

"I told you," remarked Charming, "that my family did not appreciate me."

He was not quite sure whether it was a disappointment or a relief to realize that this wide-eyed girl had not, after all, read his books.

"Will you send me some?" she asked eagerly.

"I will not," he said decidedly. "But if you care for verse—" he hesitated.

"What? You write poetry, too?" Jacqueline clasped her hands. "Recite some for me at once!"

He chose one of his less erotic sonnets, and spoke it well and simply, with the diffidence which occasionally besets the most confident of authors with regard to their own performances.

Jacqueline listened dreamily. At last she said, "That's very musical. I'd like to sing it."

The comment pleased him exceedingly, musical phrases being his specialty. "You shall," he said. "I'll set it to music for you."

Her eyes opened wide. "You don't mean to say you're a composer as well as an author and a poet, Mr. Charming? That's *too* much! It isn't fair."

He blushed quite boyishly. It is a curious fact that people are often more avid of praise for the thing they cannot do, than for the thing they can. Channing, who had met with no small success as a novelist, secretly yearned to win impossible laurels as a composer of parlor music. "Talents usually go in pairs," he said modestly.

She commanded an instant performance, which he refused, explaining that his songs were never written for men's voices. "They have no thrill, no appeal. Who wants to hear a bull bellowing?"

"Or a cow lowing, for that matter?" she laughed.

"But that is very different. A cow lowing makes one think of twilight and the home pastures, of little stumbling, nosing calves, of the loveliest thing in life, maternity—"

She smiled, drawing the sleeping Kitty close. "You can say things like that, and yet you wonder why I want to keep this baby! You're a fraud, Mr. Channing!"

"A poet—The same thing," he murmured cynically. "We wear our sentiments on our sleeves for publishers to peck at." (he made a mental note of this epigram for future use.) "I've an idea! Suppose you run home with me now and try over some of my songs, will you? There's a lot of stuff that might interest you. I've got one of Farwell's machines down in the road."

"Go over to Holiday Hill in an automobile?" Her eyes sparkled. "But could I

take the baby?"

His face fell. "Why—er—won't it have to be fed or something? I'm afraid Farwell's bachelor establishment, complete as it is, offers no facilities for the feeding of infants."

"Oh, it's a bottle baby," she said casually. "But perhaps you're right—I'll take her up to the house.—No, if I do that, Jemmy'll want to know where I'm going, and stop me."

"Don't tell her."

"You don't know Jemmy!—I have it. Lige shall come and get the baby."

Cupping her hands about her mouth she let out a peculiar, clear yodel that promptly brought an answering call from the top of the ravine. In response to Jacqueline's peremptory, "Come here!" her faithful lieutenant descended with manifest reluctance.

Ten yards from the cabin he halted. "I dassent come no further, Miss Jacky, not for nobody," he pleaded.

"Don't be a coward! The ha'nts won't hurt you. I come here every day, and they never hurt me."

"No 'm, reck'n dey knows dere place—Dey's culled ha'nts," explained Lige, and stayed where he was.

But as Jacqueline put the child in his arms, he suddenly let out a frightened yell. "I sees smoke—oh, my Lawd! I sees smoke an' fire an' brimstone comin' out'n dat cabin!" he gasped, and fled, clutching the placid Kitty.

Jacqueline chuckled. "He saw the smoke from your cigarette," she explained to Channing. "Naturally he thought that it was a little manifestation from hell for his benefit. He's got religion, you see. So much the better. Now we'll never be disturbed here!"

The "we" amused Channing. It was evident that he was expected to call again at the Ruin.

CHAPTER XVIII

It was an epoch-making afternoon for Jacqueline, and not the least part of the enchantment was her first experience of automobiling. The wheezing, coughing little equipage known to Professor Thorpe's friends as the Ark had induced in her the belief that automobiles were a very poor substitute for horses, and she scorned to enter it. But this powerful, silent car of Farwell's, capable of such incredible speed and yet controlled by a lever or a button quite as easily as she herself could have handled a horse—it gave her the feeling that she was riding a tamed whirlwind.

"Nice car, isn't it? I like it best of all Farwell's machines. It is to be mine while I'm here," said Channing.

"Do you mean to say Mr. Farwell owns more than one of them?" asked Jacqueline, awed. "How in the world did he ever get to be so rich? He's an artist, isn't he? And I thought artists were never rich."

"It depends upon the kind of art. Farwell gives the people what they want, which always pays."

"He must sell a lot of pictures to buy a machine like this!"

"Pictures!" He turned and stared at her. "Why, I don't believe you know who he is!" He chuckled. "What a blow for Morty! I must tell him that there's actually a girl in America who doesn't recognise him on sight. He is *the* Farwell—Mortimer Farwell himself, my dear."

Jacqueline looked blank.

"What, never even heard of him? Mortimer Farwell is—or was—the most popular matinée idol on the stage. He's resting on his laurels at present, but I don't think he will rest long. Between you and me, he misses the footlights."

"On the stage! You mean he's an actor? And I'm going to his house! What *will* Jemmy say when she hears of this?" Jacqueline looked rather alarmed.

Channing said, much amused, "Actors don't bite, my dear child. Farwell's a gentleman. And I am here to protect you."

She still felt uneasy. Her experience of actors had been confined to the barnstormers who occasionally drifted into the nearest town and out again as speedily as possible. Though the theatres of Frankfort and Lexington were only a few hours away, they belonged to the life Mrs. Kildare shunned.

"At least he's married," murmured Jacqueline with some relief. "Is she on the stage, too? Will I like her?"

"His wife? Oh, Mrs. Farwell never comes here, you know. It's a bachelor place. That's why he calls it Holiday Hill."

"Dear me!" she said, puzzled. "Don't they like each other, then?"

"Very much, I believe. It's an extremely comfortable arrangement. She makes her engagements, he makes his; all very friendly and no questions asked. Quite the ideal match."

Jacqueline looked doubtful. "But what about the children?"

"Oh, there aren't any children, of course. Fancy May Farwell with children!"

"But if people are going to live that way, what is the use of getting married?"

"There is none," said Channing, earnestly. "Believe me, there is none. Many have made that discovery. I mean to profit by their example."

"You mean never to marry at all?" asked Jacqueline, and sighed a little; so far and fast does maiden fancy roam once it slips the leash.

Channing was not unaware of that sigh, and not displeased by it. But what he did fail to notice was the smile that immediately succeeded it; a demure and secret smile which said more plainly than words, "We shall see, Mr. Percival Channing! We shall see!"

The word "forbidden" had always upon young Jacqueline an opposite effect to that intended.

Hours passed as if on wings. Farwell, so they were informed by a correct manservant at the door, was away for the afternoon and evening, so that they had the house to themselves. Jacqueline went from room to beautiful room of the bachelor establishment, lost in admiration of the ivory-paneled walls, the charming pictures, the delicate French furniture and brocade hangings of the bedrooms, each with a marble bath attached that was luxurious enough for a

Roman emperor.

"To think of just a man having things like this!" she marveled.

It was her first glimpse of luxury, a thing unknown to the rough and simple comfort of Storm. Vaguely it oppressed her. She felt shy for the first time in her life, self-conscious. It seemed to her that her gestures were awkward, her voice too big and crude. Channing detected the chagrin in her expressive face, and had the tact to lure her into the music room, where she forgot herself entirely.

Music was far more of a passion with the girl than Kate Kildare was capable of realizing. She had done what she could to cultivate in both her daughters a taste that had been in her day part of the education of every lady. She herself enjoyed music, and she intended to supplement their singing and piano lessons with occasional visits to Cincinnati to hear grand opera. There was an excellent musical library at Storm, and the best records to be had for the graphophone were sent to her regularly. She felt that from a musical standpoint she was doing her full duty by her children.

Of the physical reaction that music produces in some finely strung temperaments, Kate knew nothing at all. Jacqueline's was a nature similar to hers, but far less balanced, and lacking as yet an outlet for its abounding energy. There were possibilities in her which would have startled the mother, had she guessed them.

Percival Channing, with his carefully developed flair for character study, guessed them from the first. Susceptibility to musical intoxication was a thing which he understood, a thing to which he himself was more or less subject. He knew the danger and the value of it. Without some such susceptibility, he believed, artistic accomplishment was not possible. He had been thrown much into the company of singers, players, painters, people whose profession was the charming of a capricious public, and he saw in the girl many of the requisites for success—not only the voice, so far unspoiled by bad training, but the sensitiveness, the beauty, even the splendid physical strength necessary to that most strenuous of all professions, operatic singing. It flattered his vanity to realize that he was the discoverer of a possible celebrity.

Song after song they tried together, Channing playing the accompaniments. He played well, and made the most of rather faulty music. Jacqueline thought the songs wonderful. It was her introduction to the sensuous, discordant harmonies of Strauss and de Bussy, of whom Channing was an ardent disciple. They

puzzled and stirred her oddly.

Now and then as she leaned over Channing's shoulder to interpret the difficult manuscript score, he glanced up to meet her eyes, no longer merry and mischievous as was their wont, but curiously somber, languid. He saw that she was giving herself to music as an opium eater surrenders to the drug he loves, indifferent to her surroundings, unaware of them, perhaps; but not unaware of him. It was to him she sang, however unconsciously. Jacqueline had found the audience she needed, and she was singing as she had never sung in her life before.

It was with some difficulty that Channing kept his attention on the score.

Unnoticed, the long August twilight had come into the room, and a servant shut it out unobtrusively with silken curtains. Later he returned and announced dinner. Jacqueline's eyes opened suddenly as if from sleep.

"What did he say?" she asked.

The servant cleared his throat and repeated, "Dinner is served."

"Dinner?" Jacqueline started. "You mean supper? Why, it's dark, and the candles are lighted! Mr. Channing, what time is it? Goodness, I must hurry! Mother'll be home by this time."

"Please, no," he protested. "I took the liberty of telling the servants you would dine with me to-night. Why not, Miss Jacqueline? Do take pity on my loneliness. Farwell does not return till to-morrow."

She hesitated, longingly. "It would be fun."

"Of course it would. And perfectly harmless. Farwell's servants are discreet. He has trained them. Nobody need know."

But it was not any doubts of propriety that made her hesitate. For Jacqueline, conventions did not exist. Moreover, the breaking of bread seemed too natural and simple a thing to take with any seriousness. It was her democratic custom to present herself for a meal at any table near which the meal hour happened to find her. Farmers, tenants, even negroes in the field, had on occasion proudly shared their bacon and corn-pone with the Madam's youngest daughter.

"It's Mother," she explained, "She has just come home, and I haven't seen her for

three days. If I am not there to pet her and make a fuss over her, she will miss me, and worry.—No," she corrected herself, "Mother never worries, but she'll wonder. I must go."

"There's to be a rum cake," murmured Channing, craftily. "And—do you like champagne?"

Jacqueline's eyes sparkled. "I've never tasted it, or rum cake either. I *would* like to—" her eyes wandered wistfully toward the dining-room. "Suppose I telephone and ask Mother whether she'd mind?"

"If you do that, she's sure to mind. Mothers always do. Besides, think of the firm sister. Do you suppose she'll consent to your dining in a strange actor's house? Never!"

Jacqueline tossed her head. "It's none of Jemmy's business. She's only two years older than I am.—Besides, I needn't tell her where I've been, need I?"

Channing had accomplished his purpose.

The girl's hunger for the things that were to him matters of everyday, touched him. She stood a moment in the door of the dining-room, gazing in delight at the long carven oak table, with Florentine candelabra at each end and a strip of filet across the center, at either side of which their plates were laid, separated by a vase of white alabaster, holding a few hothouse roses, crimson as blood. Untrained as her eyes were, they appreciated the æsthetic at sight.

"It is all so different," she said with a little sigh. "The very food is different, and beautiful."

"Farwell does himself very well at what he calls his little backwoods farmhouse. But why the sigh?"

"Because—" she looked away shyly, then looked at him again. "I was thinking that I don't belong in this sort of place, and—and you do."

"Nonsense!" He leaned across the table, and laid his hand on hers. "You belong wherever things are most beautiful, my dear. As for environment, you can make it what you choose," he said. "Don't you realize that? Whatever you choose, Jacqueline."

"Can I?" Her eyes met his in a long gaze. The languor of the music was still in

them, but he saw another expression growing there, a grave and womanly sweetness. "I wonder—" The hand under his turned so that the warm fingers clasped his.

At that moment the discreet servant entered with a small bottle wrapped in a napkin. Channing withdrew his hand abruptly.

"Of course you can!" he smiled and lifted a glass shaped like a lily, filled with sparkling gold. "To your future career!" he said, and drank.

She echoed the toast, "To my future career."

Perhaps the career she had in mind was not entirely an operatic one, however.

Very shortly afterwards, he took her home. She went rather reluctantly, glancing in at the music-room with a wistful sigh. But he was adamant. He had no idea of arousing maternal watchfulness.

"I wish we had time for a little more music," she said.

"We shall have a great deal more music before we are done with each other, little girl," he assured her.

She answered naïvely, "But it will never be quite like this again. The next time I come, Mr. Farwell will probably be here."

Channing laughed. "I can promise you he won't! Morty's an awfully good sort, and not keen on music. We shall have his music-room to ourselves whenever we like."

She nestled against him in the machine confidently, feeling the reaction of the day's excitement, and perhaps of the champagne, to which Basil Kildare's daughter had taken very kindly.

"I feel so tired all of a sudden," she murmured. "Do you mind if I put my head on your shoulder?"

Channing did not mind. "Make yourself comfortable!"

She lay there, gazing up happily at the stars that were beginning to show in the wide curve of the sky, and singing under her breath,

"When you come to the end of a perfect day—"

"I wish," she said presently, half to herself, "that this day could just have gone on forever."

Channing did not answer. He was beginning to congratulate himself on the self-control that kept his hands to the steering-wheel. Jacqueline, drowsy and sweet as a tired child, was rather hard to resist; but Channing had certain inconvenient ideas as to the duties of a host and a gentleman, ideas that were the sole remnant of a careful New England upbringing.

She lapsed into contented silence, and they did not speak again until they reached the foot of Storm hill. There Channing stopped his car.

"Wake up, and run along home now, little girl," he said, his voice more tender than he meant it to be.

She roused herself and smiled at him, a wonderful, wide smile. She was very grateful to this new friend of hers for his sympathy, his understanding, grateful for the glimpse he had given her of a world hitherto unguessed, grateful for the look in his eyes at that moment.

"I do wish," she said, holding out both hands, "that I knew how to—to thank you!"

Channing's admirable self-control slipped a cog. He took the hands. "I can show you how to thank me," he said, quite hoarsely for a mere collector of impressions.

She jerked her hands away, dimpling, and jumped out of the car. The imminent prospect of being kissed had not shocked her—in fact, she was rather surprised that she had not been kissed before. But she had her instincts of the sex that flees. So she turned and ran, neither very fast nor very far—

"Dear me!" she whispered presently against Channing's lips, "what would old Philip say to this? He told me I couldn't be too careful with strange men. I'm not being *very* careful, am I?"

"Damn Philip! Kiss me again," said the author.

Breathless and radiant, she ran her blithe way up the dark hill road. She had been hungry for other things than music and sympathy and friendship, this youngest of the wild Kildares of Storm.

Her mother was standing in the door, Philip Benoix beside her.

"There you are, Jacky girl! I was just about to send Philip out to find you, gadabout. Have you had any supper?"

"Oh, yes, Mummy darling, I took some with me." It was the first lie of Jacqueline's life, and the ease with which it came surprised her. She ran into her mother's arms and hugged her close. "Oh, Mummy, I am so happy, happy!"

"There, there," murmured Kate, moved. "Glad to have me home again, my precious? But you needn't crack my ribs in your belated ardor. Where have you been so late?"

"Oh, just roaming around," she said vaguely. "The twilight was so lovely."

"Little dreamer!" Sighing, she knew not why, Kate drew the glowing face to her own.

But for once Jacqueline of the eager lips turned her cheek, so that her mother's kiss should not disturb the memory of certain others.



CHAPTER XIX

If Mrs. Kildare's eyes had been of their usual observant keenness in those days, she could not have failed to notice the change in Jacqueline; a new loveliness, a sudden bursting into bloom of the womanhood that had lain hidden in the bud. Her eyes took on a starry softness quite different from their usual glint of mischief, the rich blood in her cheeks came and went with her thoughts, her very hair had a sort of sheen upon it like the luster on the wings of pigeons in the spring. Blossom time, that comes once in life to every woman, with its perilous short gift of the power that moves the world, had come in turn to Jacqueline. It is a moment when a girl most needs her mother; but Kate's thoughts were elsewhere.

People were saying among themselves, "The Madam's beginning to show her age." But they could not have said in just what way she showed it. There was no diminution of her tireless energy; she rode her spirited horses with the same supple ease; no pallor showed in her warm cheeks; no lines in the broad space between her brows; no gray in the glinting chestnut of her hair, as abundant and as splendidly vital as Jacqueline's own. The change was as subtle as the change in Jacqueline; yet many people spoke of it.

Sometimes on the road she passed acquaintances without seeing them; or in the midst of some important conversation, they became aware that she was listening only with her eyes. She spent much time under the juniper tree, sitting idle, her gaze fixed on the shadow over the distant penitentiary, which it had for years avoided. When that shadow hung over Jacques Benoix, her thoughts had at least known where to seek him, as the Moslem when he prays turns toward the east. Now her thoughts had no Mecca. They sought him homeless throughout the world.

Unused to introspection as she was, Kate had made a discovery about herself. Of the two types of strong-hearted women created, the mother-type and the lover-type, she would have said that she belonged indubitably to the former; that hers was a life led chiefly for and in her children. Now she knew that it was not so. Her work for them, her absorption in their welfare, their property and education and character—what were these but so much makeshift to fill the empty years until Jacques came to her?

She had been so sure, so passionately sure, that he would come to her. Vitality, beauty, youth, she had deliberately hoarded for him, like precious unguents to be poured out at his feet. What was she for but to atone to him for the bitterness that life had brought him, through her fault? Since he rejected her, of what use was she in the world?

A strange restlessness came over her, a feeling of waste, of unfulfilment. She was so intensely alive, so eager, so sentient—surely there must be some purpose for her yet in life; not as the mistress of Storm, not as the mother of Basil Kildare's daughters, but as herself, Kate, the woman. She tried to explain this restlessness to Philip, always her confidant, content for the present with any rôle that brought him in contact with her; faithfully, as his father had hidden him, biding his time.

"What am I for?" was her cry. "What is the use of me, Philip?"

For weeks she did not give up hope of Jacques' relenting, but it was a hope in which Philip did not encourage her. He recognized his father's decision as final, even as wise and just; though his heart was torn between pity and admiration for a man who was capable of such sacrifice. And he understood his dear lady better, far better, than she understood herself.

But if this new unrest of hers kindled certain hopes which he had never before dared to entertain, love taught him to offer her nothing now but comfort, the comfort of devoted friendship. It was a thing she sorely needed, for Kate had lost, and knew it, not only the man she loved, but her daughter Jemima.

The relations between them were evident to all observers: on the girl's part a scrupulous, cold courtesy; on the mother's, wistful and tentative efforts to please that would have touched any heart less youthfully hard than Jemima's. Kate's was a nature too great to harbor resentment. Grief had obliterated, almost as soon as it was born, her anger at the girl's treachery in writing to Benoix; if indeed anything so open and frank as Jemima's act could be called treachery.

The doctor had hardly left after Kate's unprecedented fainting attack, when the girl confessed: "Mother, I think you ought to know that I myself wrote to Dr. Benoix advising him not to come to this house. I told him that if he did so I should leave you."

"Is that all you told him?" asked Kate. "Did you tell him the terms of your father's will?"

The girl flushed. "Certainly not, Mother. That would not have been quite fair, when you had promised to make good any loss that came to Jacqueline and me through your marriage. I think," she said, "that you may always count upon me to be quite fair."

Kate nodded, wearily. It was true, Jemima was always fair.—She thought, "This was the baby Jacques loved"—who had clung to him as she never clung to her own father, who had listened as eagerly as she herself listened for the pit-a-patter of his racking horse, who had refused to be consoled when he passed without stopping. This was the baby, this stern, hard-eyed young girl, who had been their constant companion in the days of their unspoken love, equally dear to both of them, lavishing upon both her impartial ardors. Does memory only commence with thought, then? Do the loves through which we pass from cradle to grave disappear without leaving even a tenderness to show where they have been?

Jemima's throat contracted with hate at the very mention of Jacques' name. Had she learned so suddenly, perhaps, to hate her mother, too?

Nothing more was said of the girl's leaving home. She remained in her mother's house, but without capitulation. It was "her mother's house" now, no longer home. She was one of those proud, not ignoble natures whose affection is entirely dependent upon respect. Her mother had been the great figure in her rather narrow life, object of a silent, critical, undemonstrative affection which was the furthest possible remove from Jacqueline's or Kate's own idea of love, but which in its way amounted to hero-worship. When Kate with her own lips destroyed her daughter's faith in her, she had unwittingly destroyed an idol.

The moral lapse to which she admitted was as incomprehensible to this cool and level-headed observer of nineteen as actual sin. She realized that her mother had been unfaithful to her father—whether literally or spiritually did not matter—and that instead of repenting she was prepared to augment her unfaithfulness by putting in her husband's place the man who had killed him. These were the facts that stood out before her in all their naked horror, and it was impossible for her temperament to find either palliation or excuse.

The tragedy of the discovery left its mark upon young Jemima. Her lips retained permanently a certain cold fixity, that reminded more than one person who remembered him of Basil Kildare, and it was significant that she was never called again by her old pet-name of "the Apple-Blossom."

Kate made many efforts to break down the barrier between them, efforts which

Philip and even the unobservant Jacqueline found piteous. But they did not touch Jemima. She turned to the girl often for advice—a new and strange thing indeed for the Madam; discussed business matters with her, asked her opinion with a deference that would once have flattered Jemima immensely. Now she responded politely, with forced interest, as if she were a guest in her mother's house.

Kate asked once, "What about those parties you were going to have, dear? Surely you have not given up the social campaign?"

"No, Mother," answered the girl, "I don't often give things up, you know."

Kate did know. Neither had Basil Kildare often "given things up."

She went on with some effort, "I've been thinking lately over some of the good times we used to have when I was a girl. Those of us who lived outside of town, as you do, used to invite the others to house-parties—only we did not call them 'house-parties' in those days, or 'week-ends.' We called it 'staying all night.' Why shouldn't you and Jacky have young people out to stay all night? There's room enough for dozens of them at a time, and plenty of horses to ride. Boys and girls don't need much in the way of amusement except each other." She paused. "What do you say, daughter—shall I have a bathroom or two put into the guest-wing, and some fresh papers and curtains, and make it all ready for company again?"

"That would be very nice, Mother," said the girl, slowly, "only, you see, we don't know any young people to invite."

"I've thought of that, too!" Kate spoke with an eagerness more pathetic than tears. "Of course many of those boys and girls I used to know have boys and girls of their own now. It's many years since I've seen them, but—I think they won't all have forgotten me. If you like, I'll write and ask some of them to let their children visit us?"

If Jemima had any knowledge of the wincing courage this offer cost, she did not show it. "You're very kind to think of it," she said, "but I believe it will be better if Jacqueline and I make our own friends now, thank you."

Cut to the quick, Kate made no further effort to promote the social campaign. But it went on without her.

One evening Professor Thorpe, after his weekly supper at Storm, followed her

into her office with an air of mingled embarrassment and importance.

"Oh, dear!" she thought. "It's coming again."

But she was mistaken. He had a proposal of another sort to make; in fact an announcement.

"I am about to give an entertainment," he said, clearing his throat. "A party. A dancing party."

She looked at him in amazement. "You? A dancing party?"

"Why not? It is to be for your girls, and I shall expect you to chaperon it."

She threw back her head and laughed aloud. "Dear old Jim! I should be as much out of place in a ballroom now as—as a plow horse. But the girls will be overjoyed. How did you happen to evolve such an idea?"

"I didn't. It—er—was evolved for me. Jemima—"

Kate sobered. "I might have known it, Jim! I cannot have you so imposed upon. You must not undertake such a thing."

"But I wish to," he insisted stoutly. "I am very much obliged to Jemima for thinking of it. It is quite true, as she says, that I am under obligation to many people who have been most kind to me. It is true also that I have joined a country club, more by way of encouraging an infant—er—industry than with any idea of pleasure to myself. But, as Jemima says, when one joins a club one should patronize it. She tells me that it will be quite possible to make a dancing man of me with a few weeks' practice, and that in her opinion exercise and young society are what is needed to—er—to round out my individuality. Jemima is doubtless right—she usually is. So I shall issue invitations to a dancing party at the Country Club, preceded by dinner, as is customary."

Kate laughed again, but with dim eyes. The stanch devotion of this gentle, kindly scholar was a thing she found very touching. "Dear old Slow-poke!"—she used the name she and her livelier companions had given him in the days when he was the dull and quiet one among her followers. "So you are going to play sponsor to my children once more!"

Both fell silent, remembering the day when he had followed her down the aisle of the church that meant home to her, under the blank, icy stare of an entire

congregation. He lifted her hand to his lips.

"Jim, I am afraid," she said suddenly. "Women—you know how cruel they can be! Suppose they choose to punish my children for my sins?" With a fierce upwelling of the maternal instinct, she dreaded to let her young go out of her own protection, out of the safe obscurity she had made for them.

He reassured her as best he could, reminding her of the years that had passed, and of her daughters' charm. "Why, those girls would bring their own welcome anywhere! They are exquisite."

"You are prejudiced, Jim, dear."

He admitted it without shame. "But those young men I brought here to supper—they are not prejudiced, Kate, and I assure you they dog my footsteps begging to be brought again."

"Oh, men!—I am never afraid of men. It is the women I dread."

"Then we won't have any women," cried the Professor.

Kate smiled. "Oh, yes, you will! Jemima has read about chaperons in novels. She'll see to that."

"Wouldn't I be a sufficient chaperon?"

"You can't be a chaperon and a dancing man as well," she teased him. "Take your choice. Oh, I foresee a strenuous career ahead of you, my friend! Think of the invitations, and the decorations, and the favors, and the menu!"

"I had not thought of it in detail," admitted the Professor, rather nervously. "You—you alarm me. Still, I shall go through with it."

"You will indeed, with Jemima at the helm," she murmured. "You poor lamb! Perhaps the famous nephew will be of some assistance? I dare say he knows a good deal about balls, and things of that sort."

"Unfortunately, J. Percival is no longer my guest"—the Professor spoke a little stiffly. "At present he is visiting your neighbor Mr. Farwell, at Holiday Hill—an old acquaintance, I understand. You have seen nothing of him?"

She shook her head. "We do not know Mr. Farwell, and we are rather simple folk to appeal to the literary palate."

"Humph!" said the other dubiously. "I should not call Jemima, for instance, exactly a simple person. Look out for him, Kate!"

She raised her eyebrows. "You speak as if your famous nephew were a ravening wild wolf, Jim!"

"He's worse—He's a—temperamentalist," said the other, grimly. It was not the word he had started to use.



CHAPTER XX

The old hall of Storm, with its memories of many a wild festivity, had never served as background for a prettier sight than Jemima and Jacqueline Kildare, coming shyly down the steps in their first ball-dresses, followed by a girl in gingham, equally young and pretty, with an anxious proprietary eye upon the hang and set of their fineries.

"Don't you hug 'em, please, Miss Kate," warned this girl as they descended. "Tulle musses so easy."

There was a long "A-ah!" of delight from the foot of the stairs, where the entire household was assembled, to the youngest pickaninny from the quarters. Jemima, exquisite and fragile as a snow-spirit in her white tulle, descended with the queenly stateliness that seems possible only to very small women; but Jacqueline, pink as a rose, flushed and dewy as if she had just been plucked from the garden, took the final steps with a run and landed in her mother's arms, despite Mag's warning.

"Aren't we perfectly grand?" she demanded. "Did you ever see *anything* as beautiful as us? See my gloves—almost as long as my arms! And my neck doesn't look so awfully bony, does it? There's lots of it, anyway, and it's white." She inflated her chest to full capacity, and looked around the circle for approval. Philip was there, as well as Professor Thorpe, who had come to fetch them in the Ark. Each had boxes in their hands.

"O-oh!" cried Jacqueline in delight. "Presents! What have you brought us?"

Professor Thorpe's boxes proved to contain flowers, and Philip presented to each of them a charming antique fan.

"Why, Reverend! How did you know girls used such things? It must be your French blood cropping out."

"I found them among mother's things," he explained, "and I knew she would like you to have them."

The girl sobered, and stood on tiptoe to kiss his cheek. Jemima thanked him quietly, and laid her fan on a table. Philip and Kate exchanged a quick glance of

understanding. It was evident that she meant to accept nothing from a Benoix. Young Jemima Kildare was of the stuff that makes the Kentucky blood-feuds possible.

There was an awkward pause, broken by Professor Thorpe. "We ought to be starting, I think. The Ark, while willing, has its little weaknesses, and it would not do for my guests to arrive and find neither host nor guests of honor present."

"Wait a moment," said Kate. "I, too, have presentations to make."

She produced two white velvet boxes bearing the name of a famous New York jeweler.

"Oh, what pretty little pinky-white beads!" cried Jacqueline, clasping hers about her throat and prancing to a mirror to observe the effect.

Jemima examined hers, and then looked quickly at her mother.

"Are they pearls?" she asked.

"Yes," said Kate. "Small ones, but a good investment, I think. Some day when you're older, girlies, perhaps you'll like to remember that your mother earned the money that bought them." She spoke to both of them, but it was to Jemima that her unconscious plea was made.

The older girl hesitated. Then she murmured, "Thank you, Mother. They are beautiful," and fastened them about her throat.

Kate gave a little sigh of relief, echoed by James Thorpe. Both had feared for a moment that she would refuse her mother's gift as she had refused Philip's.

"Come, come," said Professor Thorpe, "we really must start. Two hours' drive before us!"

Jacqueline clung to her mother. "Oh, if you were only coming too, Mummy! If you only were! Just say the word, and I won't go. Why, you'll be here alone, Mummy, darling, alone all night! You'll miss us *dreadfully*. What do I care about beaux and balls. I'd rather be with you than with any one else in the world—*Almost* any one else," she added honestly, flushing.

Kate laughed, and pushed her away. "Mag is looking daggers at us. We mustn't crumple that finery any more, precious.—Remember not to talk at the top of your lungs.—Have you got a pocket-handkerchief?"

She followed them out to the waiting automobile, smiling; but Philip noticed that her lips moved now and then silently, and he suspected that she was praying. He was right. It was the first time in their lives that her children had gone out of her own protection.

Mag shrouded them in long dust garments, tucked the robes about them solicitously, having first wrapped each white-slipped foot in tissue paper. The passionate interest of the girl in the pleasures of these other girls, pleasures she could never hope to share, struck two at least of the onlookers as a rather piteous thing.

"Good-by, good-by!" Jacqueline leaned out to throw last kisses impartially. "How I wish you were coming too, Mag and Mummy and Phil, you dears! I'll remember everything to tell you, compliments, and all, and dresses especially, Mag. I'll bring home all the goodies I can stuff into my pockets, too—oh, dear, there aren't any pockets to a ball dress! Never mind—I'll put 'em in Goddy's pockets. Good-by! When next you see us, we'll be real young ladies."

Kate stood gazing after them as wistfully as Mag, both following with their thoughts two happy young adventurers into a happy world forever closed to themselves. "You'd like to be going to a ball yourself, wouldn't you?" said she, to the girl beside her.

"Would I? Oh, my Gawd! *Would I?*" gasped Mag, and ran into the house.

The repressed intensity of the reply startled Mrs. Kildare. She looked at Philip. "Did you hear that? I wonder if the girl isn't happy here."

The past few months had done a great deal for Mag Henderson's body, whatever they had accomplished for her soul. Maternity had developed her lissome figure into beautiful lines; health, the result of care and good feeding, colored her lips and her cheeks and her pretty, shallow eyes; she had learned not only the trick of dressing becomingly, but of keeping her hair, her hands, and her feet as neat as those of a lady. Even her voice had lost something of its uncouth drawl, and its lazy softness had a charm of its own. She was very imitative.

For some time Philip had been aware that his lady's protégée was developing into an attractive young woman.

"You say she seems devoted to the child?" he asked thoughtfully.

"I think so, yes. She is always making clothes for the baby, and playing with it,

and petting it—when Jacqueline will let her. But,"—Kate sighed faintly—"maternity isn't enough for all women, it seems."

It was such remarks as this that gave Philip his strong hope for the future.

But now he put himself aside to consider the problem of Mag Henderson. From the first he had foreseen that it was not a problem to be handled as simply as Kate thought to handle it. The psychological instinct of the priest was very strong in him—doubtless there had been many a good curé of souls among past generations of Benoixes, professing an older faith than his. In moments of clear vision that came to him he battled, as all thinkers must battle, with a great discouragement, a sense of helplessness that was almost terrifying. Of what use man's puny human endeavors against the forces of predestination arrayed against him—the forces of heredity, temperament, opportunity?

Mag Henderson cost him a wakeful night; and from her his thoughts kept straying oddly and unaccountably to Jacqueline, little Jacqueline, his playmate and pupil and chum, with her mischievous, daredevil impulses and her generous heart. He jerked his thoughts back angrily to poor Mag Henderson.

Why should he bracket the two together thus, the one a weed shooting up in a neglected fence corner, the other the loveliest and most lovingly tended blossom in a garden?—why, indeed, except that both were come, weed and flower alike, to the period of their blooming.



CHAPTER XXI

Kate's thoughts, too, were busy with her young adventurers into the world, throughout a wakeful night; only her anxieties did not concern themselves with Jacqueline. A nature so trusting, so unconscious, so bubbling over with friendliness toward all mankind, could not fail to make friends for itself among strangers, among even enemies. She had smiled to notice Jacqueline's success with the young men Thorpe had brought to supper. Her own girlhood had been a succession of just such triumphs. But belle as she was, many a ballroom had been spoiled for her by the sight of girls to whom it was not a scene of triumph, to whom it was no less than a battlefield, where the vanquished face defeat with the fixed and piteous smile of the hopeless wallflower.

Her heart yearned over her eldest daughter. Poor, clever, pretty Jemima, who knew so well what she wanted of life, and wanted it so determinedly! A world of which carefree gaiety is the essential element might be very cruel to Jemima. If Kate could have plucked out her own charm by the roots and given it to her child for a weapon, she would have done it thankfully.

She fell asleep at last over one of the prayers that had been unconsciously upon her lips that day: "Make people nice to them, God! You must see that my girls have partners, both of them, since I am not there to attend to it myself."

Kate's relations with her Creator, while informal, were remarkably confident, for a woman who believed herself non-religious....

It was a worn and leaden-eyed professor who returned the adventurers to Storm late the next day.

"Take me to a bed," he demanded wearily. "No, I shall not have supper, nor a julep, nor anything but a bed. I'd like to sleep without stirring for a week!"

Jacqueline embraced him with the arm that was not at the moment embracing her mother. "Poor old Goddy! Was it done to a frazzle, turkey-trotting with all the chaperons? You ought to have seen 'em, Mummy! Ladies as old as you are, yes, and older! hopping about like Dervishes. I'm glad you don't do such things. —But it was glorious! Crowds of beaux, and I tore all the lace off my petticoat, and we made the band play 'Home, Sweet Home,' five times. You know that is

what they play when the party is over."

"Still?" murmured Kate, smiling. She had a momentary recollection of times when she, too, had made the band repeat "Home, Sweet Home," she with Basil Kildare....

"As for Jemmy," went on the eager, excited voice. "You just ought to have seen her! My, my!"

"What about Jemmy?" asked the mother, quickly.

"Why, she gathered in the handsomest man in the room, simply annexed him. He broke in on every dance and took her to a corner to talk! All those snippy girls in the dressing-room were wild with jealousy. Don't ask me how she did it. *I* don't know! Tell mother how you did it, Jem."

"Oh, it was simple enough," said the other, shrugging. "I saw that I was not going to have a very good time unless I had somebody to fall back on, so I selected him. He wore his hair rather long and romantic. I told him he had the face of a poet. He spent the rest of the evening reciting original verses to me. That was all. But it looked well."

Kate gazed at her daughter with respect. Her anxiety for Jemima's future died on the spot.

"And Jacqueline?" she murmured. "Did she, too, manage to distinguish herself?"

"Oh, Jacky never needs to manage," said the older girl, with a pride in her little sister that was not lacking in nobility. "Whenever I wanted to find Jacky, I looked for the nearest crowd of men. They were like flies around a honey-pot."

Thorpe nodded smiling confirmation. "It was like old times. More than one person said to me, 'Kate Leigh is back again!'"

She flushed, incredulously. "They spoke of *me*?"

"Of course they did," cried Jacqueline, hugging her. "I was so proud. All the old men told me I looked like you, and most of them tried to kiss me when they got me alone."

"Great Heavens! I hope they didn't succeed?"

"Not all of them," said Jacqueline, demurely....

But her mother was not laughing when she followed Jemima into her room, and closed the door behind them.

"Now tell me everything that happened. What did Jacqueline mean by 'snippy' girls? Were any of those women rude to you?"

"Oh, no, Mother, not rude, of course." The lift of Jemima's chin said quite plainly, "I should not have permitted that."

"But they were not nice to you?"

The girl hesitated. Slowly the blood mounted up her delicate cheeks to the roots of her hair. Kate saw with dismay that her lips were trembling.

"My child!"—she took a step toward her.

But Jemima drew back, mastering herself. "Somebody ought to have told us, you or Professor Jim, or somebody," she said, quaveringly, "Perhaps you didn't know, but—Oh, Mother we made a dreadful mistake!"

"In going?" Kate clenched her hands. The look on her set face boded ill for people who had hurt her children.

"Those ball dresses!" Jemima brought it out with a despairing sob. "How was I to know? The magazines didn't say anything about it, and nobody told me. But all the other girls wore hats and high necks! Some of them even had on coat suits!"

Kate stared. "Is that all?" Suddenly she threw back her head, and laughed until she cried. She tried to stop, realizing that the thing was no less than a tragedy to ambitious Jemima. But the relief after what she had feared for them was too great.

"It seems to amuse you, Mother," said the girl, with dignity. "Perhaps you are above such things. Jacqueline and I are not. It was not pleasant to be thought country green-horns by all those strange, staring people. That author, Mr. Channing, was there, too,—and never came near me, though I think he did dance once or twice with Jacqueline.—There is nothing, nothing in this world," she said passionately, "as terrible as being different!"

Somewhere in Kate's reading she had come across a phrase that stuck, "The Herd-spirit, which shuns abnormality." She searched for the words to comfort

her child, and found them.

"My dear, since the world began people of unusual ability have found themselves 'different,' and have suffered because of it. It is not a matter of dress, or manner, or any outside thing, and assuredly it is not a difference to be ashamed of. People like us," she said quietly, "must learn to smile at the Herd-spirit."

Jemima's eyes met hers squarely. An answering gleam came into them; and for the moment the barrier between mother and daughter was down. They recognized each other.

The following week brought a pleasant surprise, and Jemima was comforted further. It was a letter from an old school friend of Mrs. Kildare's, Mrs. Lawrence, reminding her of their early intimacy, speaking of the pleasure it had been to meet her two lovely daughters, and inviting them to visit her in Lexington at a date named, that they might share with her own daughters some of the gaieties of town life.

Kate suspected Thorpe's hand in this invitation. For twenty years Mrs. Lawrence had lived within an hour's railroad journey of Storm, and this was the first reminder of their friendship. But far from resenting the belated kindness, she was deeply grateful for it; a fact which caused young Jemima's pride to wince for her mother. She herself, in such circumstances, would have returned the letter without comment.

Nevertheless, it was she who decided her mother to accept the invitation. Kate had hesitated, dreading to expose her children for the second time unprotected to the mercies of people who had ostracized her. But Jemima said with her usual decision, "We must go, of course, since you have no personal objection. It would be foolish to decline any opportunity that offers. That is what Professor Jim gave us the party for; to create opportunities."

"Is it?" asked Kate. "I thought it was to make friends."

"The same thing," explained Jemima. "One has to consider the future."

To the amaze of both, however, Jacqueline flatly declined to visit Mrs. Lawrence on any terms whatsoever.

"I'd rather stay here," was her calm response to all her sister's pleading.

"But, Jacky, we must get to know some girls!"

"Why must we? Silly, giggling, whispering creatures—you go and make the girl friends, Jemmy! I'd rather have beaux."

"And how are you to find any around here, I'd like to know?"

Jacqueline smiled demurely. "Perhaps they'll come and find me." Jemima could cheerfully have shaken her. "Anyway, I'd rather stay with mummy, and baby Kitty, and the colts, and all. You go and do the society act for both of us, sister," she coaxed. "You do it so beautifully. Think how you annexed that beautiful young man all those girls were smitten with! And you know how to be politely rude to people. I don't."

Occasionally her young sister's powers of observation surprised Jemima.

She heaved a sigh. "I suppose I shall have to go alone, then," she said. "Somebody will always do your share of the world's work, Jacky,"—but she kissed her sister even as she scolded her.

Kate was more than a little puzzled. With a return of her old shrewdness, she sought for possible reasons that might be keeping this joyous, pleasure-loving replica of her young self from the scene of further triumphs. Was it simply shyness? But Jacqueline had never been self-conscious enough to be shy. Had something occurred to rouse in her the fierce Kildare pride? Kate dismissed that fear promptly. Snubs and slights would fall harmless from such an armor of confidence in the world's friendly intentions toward her. Jacqueline would not recognize an insult if she saw it.

Her study of the girl made her aware for the first time of the change that had taken place in her. She saw, startled, that tender, radiant, exquisite young woman who had replaced her little daughter.

Instantly her thoughts went to Philip. Could it be Philip who was keeping her at home?

Kate's heart leaped in her breast. This marriage, planned in Jacqueline's infancy to clear her name and her children's from at least one stigma that rested upon it, had never been out of her mind. Now it was the one thing toward which her hopes, so lately torn from their rooted hold, were still straining. Jacques' son and her daughter—at least there should be that tie between herself and the man she loved. Some day perhaps her grandson would look at her with the eyes of

Jacques....

The girl, she had believed, must be still too young for any thought of marriage. But was she? Was she? The Leigh women matured early. She herself had been quite ready for marriage at seventeen. As for Philip, how was it with him?

From the day she had brought him home with her from his boarding-school, a sensitive, lonely lad of fourteen, he had been like a big brother to her children; at first their guardian playfellow, sharing with them his lore of field and wood and stream; later their tutor, during the months when he was not absent at the seminary which the old rector of the parish had persuaded him to enter; later still, their spiritual adviser and director, exercising over them a certain quiet authority which amused their mother but which was not resented in the least by either of the high-spirited girls. He and Jemima were excellent friends, or had been until her recent discovery about his father. It was to the older girl he turned for assistance in parish matters, and Kate realized that Jemima was far better fitted than her light-hearted sister for the manifold duties of a clergyman's wife. But from the first, little Jacqueline had been his especial pet and comrade—possibly because of her resemblance to her mother. They rode together, sang together, read together, even quarreled together, with a familiarity which shocked Jemima's inborn respect for "the Cloth".... Had there been always in this marked favoritism the germ of love? the mother wondered.

Of late Philip had been more at the house even than usual. He dropped in at all hours of the day with the excuse of books to be brought, new music to be tried, matters of many sorts to be discussed. It reminded Kate a little sadly of the days when his father had found just such excuses to spend his time at Storm. To be sure, he rarely found Jacqueline at home, and as Jemima systematically avoided him nowadays, he was thrown almost entirely upon her own companionship. But Kate easily persuaded herself that this was merely an accident, and one which she might in future control.

Now that she had thought of it, she had twice lately met Philip with Jacqueline, riding very slowly and in earnest conversation—those two, who usually took the roads and the fields at a flying gallop, daring each other on to further recklessness. Also, she recalled the last miles of that journey from Frankfort, when the girl sat between them, playing with hands, lips, and crooning voice her self-appointed rôle of comforter. It would be a stony-hearted celibate indeed who resisted little Jacqueline in the rôle of comforter.

Kate Kildare smiled to herself, content. At least one of her dreams was coming true. The old lying scandal would die in time and be forgotten. Fate, her enemy—what match was it for three such allies as propinquity, nature, and a wise mother?



CHAPTER XXII

The fact was that Philip, in his double capacity of priest and of bodyguard to the household of his liege lady, had been for some time aware of a thing that troubled him deeply. It was Philip who brought to the Madam's notice much that required her attention in her domain, but this he did not bring to her attention. His hands were tied.

Shortly after the episode of the Night Riders, he had happened to be driving in an adjoining county, when to his amazement a large automobile flashed by with Jacqueline at the wheel, speaking over her shoulder to a man who sat beside her. In the glimpse he had of them, Philip thought he recognized the man as Percival Channing. They were too absorbed in each other to notice him, hidden as he was in the depths of his buggy. Jacqueline's laugh floated back to him as they passed, a soft little laugh that brought a sudden frown to Philip's face. Her expert handling of the great car told its own story.

"That won't do at all!" muttered Philip aloud. Then he took himself up sharply—"Why won't it do?" The man was James Thorpe's nephew, a gentleman, a person of some distinction; certainly a fit companion for Kate's children. Why should he feel uneasy? That Jacqueline had not mentioned the further acquaintance with him might be merely an oversight. After all, the girl must marry some day, though the thought of losing his little playfellow gave Philip a pang.

"I see," he said casually at Storm that night, "that the author is still in our midst. I suppose he has called here, hasn't he?"

He spoke to Kate, not glancing in the direction of Jacqueline.

"Oh, yes. We found his cards one afternoon, with Mr. Farwell's," answered Kate. "I am sorry not to have seen him."

"He will probably come again," said Jemima, rather importantly. "In fact I asked him to, the other night at Professor Jim's party."

Jacqueline made a gleeful face at her sister's back, not unnoted by Philip.

"So-o!" he said to himself gravely. "I shall have to make friends with this

gentleman...."

He was on his way to Holiday Hill the next afternoon, when at the very gate he met Jacqueline coming out. She laughed; rather consciously for Jacqueline. "I've been returning that call," she said.

"So I see. Has Mrs. Farwell come, then?"

"Mrs. Farwell? Oh, no. She never comes. Mr. Farwell isn't here either, just now," she said innocently. "So I dropped in to—to keep Mr. Channing company." She began to flush, realizing that she had betrayed herself. "We were practising his songs together. We—we often do." She stammered a little.

"I see," he said again, lightly. It was not his policy to discourage confidences. "So Mr. Channing writes songs, as well as novels?"

"Oh, wonderful ones, Phil! You'd love them. I do wish you could hear them."

"I'd like to. Why not bring me the next time you come to practise?"

She looked down; then her eyes met his frankly. "I'd rather not, Phil. He wouldn't like it. Geniuses are peculiar. You see, we sing better when we're not disturbed. You know how that is, don't you?"

His heart contracted with sudden sympathy. He knew only too well "how it was." It seemed to him that lately his life was one long conspiracy against Fate to find Kate Kildare alone. Abroad, the eyes of the world seemed always turned upon them; at home she was surrounded by an impregnable barrier of daughters. On the rare occasions when he did manage to achieve the coveted *solitude à deux*, their talk was of farming, of the parish, of business, and in the end always of his father, his father. Her dependence upon him, her affection for him, was evident, but there was a curiously impersonal, almost absent-minded quality about it that sometimes chilled Philip and his budding hopes. When she spoke out her inmost thoughts, even when she took his hand or laid her arm across his shoulders with the impulsive, caressing gestures that were as common to her as to Jacqueline, he had the feeling that she was thinking of another man.

Philip was well fitted to understand Jacqueline just then. "My dear," he said quietly, "are you in love with Mr. Channing?"

The question took her by surprise. She paled, and then the lovely rose came over her face again in a hot flood. "Oh, yes, yes, Phil!" she cried eagerly. "Do come

and ride beside me, and let me tell you all about it. I've been wanting dreadfully to tell somebody who would understand. You're *such* a comfortable sort of person."

Philip's greatest gift was the art of listening. He employed it now, turning to her a glance steady and encouraging, concealing the anxiety that gnawed at his mind, why he could not say. The natural priest is as intuitive perhaps as the natural woman.

She took him into her confidence fully, concealing nothing. He learned about their daily meetings, either at the Ruin, or if Farwell happened to be absent, at Holiday Hill. She told him of their long automobile rides together, while she was supposed to be off exercising some of the horses; of the book he was beginning to write with her assistance; ("I inspire it," she explained gravely); of his belief in her own future career as a singer.

"He's going to help me, to introduce me to singers and teachers and—impresarios, I think they're called. He's going to make mother send me abroad to study, first. He says it's wicked to keep me shut up here away from life. All artists have got to see a great deal of life, you know, if they're to amount to anything. Oh, isn't it wonderful?" she broke off, "that such a man as that should ever have noticed me at all?"

Philip, glancing at the radiant young face, did not find it altogether wonderful.

"I suppose he makes love to you?" he asked.

She dimpled. "Of course! But in such a funny way, Phil. He doesn't seem to mean to, or to want to, exactly. We read a good deal, and talk about the world, and things like that, and sing—but all the time I know what he's thinking about, and—and I'm thinking about it, too! We don't read and sing and talk *all* the time—" She clasped her hands ecstatically, lines and all. "Oh, Phil darling, I wish you were in love, too! It's so perfect.—But you will be some day, and then I hope," she added quaintly, "that you'll have somebody as dear and comfortable as you are to confide in. A spiritual pastor and master is so safe, too. You may scold me, Reverend, and you may laugh at me—you're doing it now—but you can never tell on me."

"No," he admitted, "I never can. But why not tell on yourself, dear? Why so much mystery? Are you ashamed of being in love?"

He looked at her keenly. But though she hesitated, she met his eyes without embarrassment. "I think I am, a little. Not ashamed, exactly, but—shy. It's such a queer feeling, being in love. I never had it before. It makes you want not to eat, or sleep, or play with the baby, or do anything but just think of him; how he looked the last time you saw him, what he said, and—did. If people knew, they'd tease me, and watch me, and I couldn't bear that. I just couldn't bear it! Then there's Jemmy. She's so odd. She doesn't like to see me kissing the baby, even, or loving it. She thinks it isn't quite nice. If she knew about Mr. Channing—! Besides, she's so much cleverer than I am, so much more his sort, really. If he'd known her first he would probably have liked her best. I'd rather—just for a while, I'd rather—"

"Keep him out of Jemima's reach?" murmured Philip, amused.

She nodded. "You *do* understand things, don't you? Jemmy's so much cleverer than I am. Just until I'm sure of him, Philip—"

He asked quietly, "You're not sure of him, then?"

She gave him a demure glance under her infantile lashes. "Oh, yes, I am! But he's not quite sure of himself." She chuckled. "Mr. Channing *thinks* he doesn't want to marry any one, you see!"

It was what Philip had been waiting for from the first. His voice changed a little, and became the voice of the priest. "You need not tell your sister, Jacqueline; but your mother ought to know of this."

"I don't want her to know."

"Why not?"

"Oh, because," was the purely feminine answer. She added, troubled by his grave silence, "Mummy might not want me to see so much of him, if she knew. She can't realize that I'm grown up now. Old people forget how they felt when they were young." She was vaguely trying to express love's dread of being brought to earth, of being hampered by the fetters of a fixed relation.

"'Old people!' Your mother?" Philip spoke rather sharply.

"Oh, well, not *old*, of course. Still, she's too old to fall in love.—Anyway, there are some things a girl can't talk about with her mother; you ought to know there are." The glance she gave him was both embarrassed and appealing.

Alas for Kate's carefully fostered intimacy with her children, vanished at the first touch of a warmer breath!

Philip put his hand over hers on the bridle-rein. "My dear," he said earnestly, "there is nothing, absolutely nothing, you cannot talk about with your mother. She's that sort. Always remember it."

She jerked her hand away with a pettish gesture. "For goodness' sake, stop being so ancient and fatherly! And what right have you to tell me anything about mother? I don't mind your explaining about God to me, and Christian duty, and things like that. It's your business, and I suppose it bores you as much as anybody. But when you talk as if you had a special vested right in my own mother,—that's *too much*! As if you could possibly know her as well as I do!"

She spurred her horse and galloped ahead furiously. But at the next turn of the road she was waiting, remorseful.

"Forgive me for being a crosspatch, Flippy dear?" Her voice would have coaxed forgiveness from a stone. "I always am sort of—sort of foolish about mummy, you know."

"I have no fault to find with you for being foolish about your mother," said Philip.

"Then, that's all right!" She blew him a kiss, and prepared to leave him. "And of course I will tell her everything, soon. When she knows, she's going to be glad, gladder than anybody. I remember once,"—the girl's face grew very tender—"we were just little things, Jemmy and I, but she was talking to us, like she does. She said, 'When the right man comes along, my girlies, be sure he is the right man, and then *don't be afraid*. Love him with all your might and main, and be sure he knows it. There's nothing in the world so mean as a niggardly lover!' I—I am not a niggardly lover, Philip," she added shyly.

His throat contracted. Jacqueline's naïveté was singularly touching to him.

"Wait a moment," he said, detaining her. "Since I must keep the great secret, I want you to promise me one thing. Do not go to Mr. Farwell's house alone any more. You see," he explained to her widened eyes, "there aren't any women there. Girls do not call on men."

"I go to your house whenever I like!"

He smiled. "As you yourself said once, I'm 'not men.' But it isn't done, little girl. Take my word for that, please."

"Very well!" she chuckled. "You sound like Jemmy!—But I promise. I like the Ruin better anyway. More private."

She waved back at him, put her horse lightly over a fence, and was off across the fields at a full gallop.

He went his way thoughtfully. Philip was beginning to find his duties as guardian of Kate Kildare and her children somewhat onerous. He tried to reassure himself with the thought of Jacqueline's youth. Mature as she had become in body, in mind she was still a child. At that age, love could not be lasting.

But while it lasted, could it not devastate?

Often in this Kentucky valley he had known languorous Februaries when orchard and garden, deceived by a fierce-wooing sun, trustingly put forth their treasures, only to find them blackened and withered when the true spring came. Dear little Jacqueline, glowing, tremulous, instinct with the joy and passion of giving—for to Kate Kildare's child love meant always giving—was she to know so soon the blight of disillusionment?

"Not if I can help it," muttered Philip, squaring his jaws, and set his horse once more in the direction of Holiday Hill.

He intended to discover just how far and for what reason Percival Channing was averse to the state of matrimony.



CHAPTER XXIII

Jacqueline had presently another confidante, who came to her by chance; not Kate, still absorbed in her readjustment to life without Jacques Benoix, and not Jemima, even more absorbed in the preparation for her approaching visit. Jacqueline, indeed, was somewhat in disgrace with her sister. "Isn't it just like her," thought the older girl impatiently, "to go and make such a success of herself, and then sit back calmly and expect me to do the rest?"

Jemima had from her mother one gift of the born executive: the ability to recognize other people's abilities as well as their limitations. In a quite unenvious and impersonal way, she appreciated the superior charm of her sister, and intended to use it, backed by her own superior intelligence, for the benefit of both of them. Jacqueline's complete lack of interest in the social campaign was a serious blow to her plans, but she met it with stoic philosophy.

"I shall have to go ahead as best I can without charm," she told herself, soberly. "Brains always count, if you keep them hid."

To the casual observer the ambitions of young Jemima at this juncture might have seemed somewhat petty; but most beginnings are petty. There was in the girl's mind a determination that cannot be called unworthy, no matter how it manifested itself—nothing less than the reinstatement before the world of the family her mother had disgraced, the once-proud Kildares of Storm. She was going forth to do battle alone for the tarnished honor of her name, a gallant little knight-errant, tight-lipped and heavy-hearted, and far more afraid than she dared admit.

Something of this the mother sensed, and her heart yearned over her daughter. But Jemima rebuffed all overtures. She declined sympathy, and as far as possible she declined help from her mother. She had offered to return the check-book Kate gave her when she expected to go to New York, but her mother bade her keep it, saying, "It is time you learned how to handle your own money."

So Jemima did her planning and ordering without interference; and presently express boxes began to arrive from "the city," which caused much excitement in the household.

"Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as these," smiled Kate one day, looking in at the sewing-room where Mag was installed, adding deft final touches. "Where's Jacky, Jemima? Why isn't she here helping you two to run ribbons and whip on laces?"

"Oh, Jacky!" The other shrugged. "Where would she be? Galloping about the country, or playing games with herself down at her precious Ruin, I suppose. Occasionally she wanders into the sewing-room like a young cyclone, leaving havoc in her wake. I'd rather not have her assistance, thank you!"

"Miss Jacky ain't much of a hand with a needle," murmured the girl at the sewing-machine.

Kate smiled, as she always smiled when she thought of her youngest daughter. "Bless her heart! I wonder what she's about down there in the ravine. We haven't heard her singing lately. Do you suppose she has abandoned grand opera entirely? I think I must go and investigate."

Mag Henderson sat suddenly rigid. It was she who had become, inadvertently, Jacqueline's second confidante.

A few days before, she had made a discovery which she would have been torn limb from limb rather than betray; for the weakest natures are capable of one strong trait, and Mag's was loyalty. Just as she had tried to defend the father who had sold her into worse than slavery, so she would defend to the last ditch any member of the family who had rescued her—more particularly Jacqueline. For Jacqueline had done more than rescue her; she had kissed her.

She said with a sort of gasp, "Miss Jacky's awful busy, Miss Kate. She wouldn't like to be disturbed. She's—she's writin' a book."

Kate laughed. "Come now, Mag! not a *book*?"

"Yes'm, she is, 'cause I seen it."

"Well, well, what next?" cried Kate. "What sort of chicken have I hatched? There've been queer developments in the family, but never a genius that I know of. We must leave her alone, by all means. Maybe she will get over it."

Mag breathed more freely; and with the departure next day of Jemima, accompanied by two trunks and wearing an expression that said plainly, "I shall return with my shield or on it," Mag's fears for her beloved Miss Jacky were

further allayed. Of late the Storm household had begun to hold Jemima's seeing eye in even more respect than the Madam's.

Mag had stumbled upon Jacqueline's secret quite by accident. After her day's work was over she liked to walk the roads with her baby, dressed in her prettiest finery, with an eager, hopeful eye out for passing vehicles. On one of these rambles she happened into the lane which passed the haunted ravine, and there, concealed by the drooping branches of a willow beside the road, she had discovered a deserted automobile.

It aroused her curiosity. What could an automobile be doing in that unfrequented lane, and where was the owner of it? Fearfully she entered the ravine, and ventured a few steps toward the green tangle that hid the ruined cabin. When she came in sight of it, panic conquered curiosity, and she turned to run. It was very dark and hushed there in the underbrush.

But one of the young dogs, who had followed her, suddenly pricked up his ears and nosed his way to the cabin's threshold, where he paused with one foot lifted, making violent demonstrations with his tail. Mag followed him, reassured.

"A dog would have too much sense to wag hisself at ghosts," she thought....

No wonder it was still in the ravine. Birds passing overhead forbore to sing, out of sheer sympathy. The great trees stood tiptoe, guarding with finger on lip the love-dream of the little human creature who had played so long about their feet, and whose playing days were done. Mag and the young dog were silent, too, and would have gone softly away from the place where they were not wanted.

"Miss Jacky's got her a fella!" whispered Mag enviously to herself. "Ain't that grand?"

But the baby in her arms had as yet no conception that there might be places in the world where she was not wanted; poor little waif who had been unwanted anywhere! She recognized her usual companion wrapped in the arms of a strange man, and cooed inquiringly.

The lovers jumped apart.

"Oh!—It's only you, Mag!" gasped Jacqueline. "I thought Jemmy had caught us at last!..."

So it happened that Mag was elevated to the position of confidante; not a very

wise confidante, but a very proud and trustworthy one, eager to help her Miss Jacky to happiness, such as she conceived the term—a "fella" to love her and give her presents, which might or might not include a wedding-ring.

She was pressed into willing service, carrying notes, arranging meetings, mounting guard watchfully, thrilled with eager sympathy, and dreaming a little on her own account; sordid, pathetic dreams they were, in which, alas! the baby Kitty played no part at all. As Mrs. Kildare had guessed, maternity was not enough for Mag Henderson.

Percival Channing, in the midst of the prettiest idyl of his experience, was bringing to it far more enthusiasm than he would have thought possible for a mere collector of impressions. He was quite pleased with himself.

"Who said I was jaded and world-worn?" he thought amusedly. His critical faculty did not become atrophied when applied to himself, as is the way of smaller critical faculties.

From week to week he prolonged his visit at Holiday Hill, to the content of Farwell, who was finding the picturesque solitude he had created for himself rather wearing. Channing thought it necessary to explain that the country furnished him just the quiet environment he needed for his work.

"And eke the inspiration?" murmured Farwell.

"And eke the inspiration," admitted his guest.

Farwell puffed at a meditative pipe. He was a tolerant man, popular with his friends because of his chariness in proffering advice and comment; so that Channing was surprised when he continued the subject.

"I fancy the little girl is quite capable of taking care of herself—these Southern beauties are that way, from the cradle. But have a care of the old 'un, my boy! There's a glint in that fine gray eye I wouldn't care to rouse, myself. She's by way of being a queen around here, you know. I'm told the law asks her permission before it makes an arrest in this neighborhood. Her subjects neither marry, nor die, nor get themselves born without her permission—fact! As for her daughters, hands off! Approach them on your knees.

"I'll give you a bit of local color, if you like. Have you noticed that long-tailed whip she carries when she's got the dogs? Well, one day I saw a couple of negroes fighting in one of the fields; big, burly brutes, one with a knife, and both

full of cocaine, probably. The white man in charge danced around on the outskirts, afraid to interfere—I don't blame him! Suddenly there was a cry, 'Here comes the Madam!' And there she was, galloping into that field, hell-for-leather, unwrapping her long-tailed whip as she came. When the negroes had had enough of it and were whimpering for mercy, she turned her attention to the foreman. But she didn't whip him. She said, her voice as calm as a May morning, 'Go and get your time, Johnson. I've no room on the place for a timid man!'"

Farwell's eyes were lit with enthusiasm, but to Channing the story had been oddly distasteful. "Faugh! What a woman! And yet I'll swear she's a lady," he said, with an odd thought of introducing Mrs. Kildare to his rigid family circle in the rôle of mother-in-law.

"Of course she is! A great lady, of a type we're not familiar with, that's all. A relic of feudalism. I give you fair warning—don't monkey with the buzz-saw!"

"Nonsense!" Channing flushed. "Who's monkeying with buzz-saws? You're rather crude, you know."

"So is she. Don't you make any mistake about that! The Kildare is no parlor product. A woman who's led the life she has," drawled Farwell, "would be quite capable of protecting her children, even at the point of a pistol, I fancy."

The author gave a short, angry laugh. "You're incurably dramatic, Morty! You will carry your stage effects into real life. What do you think I'm up to, anyway? You don't suppose I mean that pretty child any harm?"

Farwell rolled protesting eyes toward heaven. "The very suggestion shocks me," he murmured. "But I have noticed that only the juice of the orange interests you, old man. The rest of it you leave on your plate, luxurious chap that you are!..."

His warning had its effect. There were no more stolen drives about the country in Farwell's automobiles, much to Jacqueline's disappointment; and once more Channing called in state at Storm, where he was received cordially by Mrs. Kildare, and took very little notice of demure Jacqueline in the background. So little, indeed, that Kate afterwards felt it necessary to apologize for him.

"You're too young for Mr. Channing, Jacky dear. What a pity Jemima was not here to talk to him! He's just the sort of man for her," she said.

Whereat Jacqueline's dimples became riotous, and she kept silence with difficulty.

Channing's new caution, however, did not carry him to the length of giving up his daily visits to the Ruin. He needed the girl too much. His belonged to the class of creative brain that works only under the stimulus of emotion. Channing was fond of saying that he took his material red-hot out of life itself, and his novels represented a series of personal experiences, psychological and otherwise, which perhaps accounted for their marked success with a certain public.

Channing was not without genius. He had to a great degree the poet's sensitiveness to all things exquisite, and added to that he had a gift of facile expression. Subtleties of style, that effort to find exactly the right phrase and shade of meaning which is the stumbling-block of so many conscientious writers, troubled him not at all. Given the sensation, words in which to clothe it came instinctively, faster often than he could write them down. But first he must needs experience the sensation. This type of brain suffers from one disadvantage. In time the receptive surface of it becomes dulled, calloused, and as the confirmed drug-user requires constantly increasing or varying doses to produce effect, so such an imagination requires constantly increasing or varying doses of emotion.

These young Jacqueline Kildare was supplying in full measure. To his sophisticated palate she was as refreshing as cool spring water. She roused, among impulses more familiar to his experience, certain others with which he had not credited himself, impulses of tenderness, of protection, of chivalry. He began to be aware of a pleasure that was entirely new to him in the sight of Jacqueline with Mag's baby, their very frequent companion.

"I *am* getting primitive!" he thought. "This is going back to nature with a vengeance."

For the first time in his life, the thought of marriage came to him occasionally and was put away with some regret. "I must not lose my head," he admonished himself. "It will not last, of course. It never does."

Channing knew himself very thoroughly.

But if he must not offer marriage to the girl, he could at least help her to a career. It flattered his *amour propre* to realize that the object of his present affections, crude young thing as she was, might be called in a certain sense his equal, a fellow artist, one of the world's chosen. He spoke very often of her career, and Jacqueline listened, dreamily.

Of late she had somewhat lost interest in careers. Or rather, she had another sort of career in view; that of the lady in the tower, to whom her knight brings all his trophies. It seemed to her that this might be the happiest career of all.

She knew very well what she was doing for Channing. In the morning hours, and often after he left her far into the night, the author wrote steadily, with the ease and smoothness of creation that is one of the most satisfying pleasures known to human experience. Daily, when he came to her for refreshment, he brought manuscript to read, incidents, character sketches, whole chapters in the novel he had started. All of which filled Jacqueline with a new and heady sense of power. If she was not "writing a book," as Mag reported, she was at least helping to write one.

And she gave more to her lover than inspiration. He found her criticism unexpectedly valuable. There had been no lack of brains in her family, and the library at Storm was large and excellent. Philip Benoit and James Thorpe had both supplemented the girls' reading with great wisdom, so that Jacqueline's taste was formed upon far better literature than that of the average woman of his acquaintance. She was not easily shocked—Kate boasted that she had never put her girls' brains into petticoats—but now and then, despite Channing's growing care, unconscious product of his new chivalry, matter crept into his pages which made her shake her head in quick distaste.

"People might *do* things like that," she said once, of a particularly unsavory episode, "but they'd never sit around and talk of it afterwards. They'd be ashamed!"

It was a comment on human nature the shrewdness of which he promptly appreciated. Jacqueline came to represent to him that invaluable portion of a writer's public, the average female mind. Under her proud guidance, Channing knew that he was writing the best and by far the cleanest of his novels.

It was at such moments that the thought of marriage came to him, and he reminded himself reluctantly that it would not do. "He travels fastest who travels alone...."

"I must speak to your mother about your voice," he said once. "She will have to let you study in Europe, or at least in New York. You're seventeen, aren't you? There's a long road to travel. No time to be lost."

"New York? But you live in Boston, don't you?"

"Heaven forbid! I was born in Boston, but one gets over it in time."

"I'm not sure now that it's worth while taking any more lessons," she said dreamily.

"You'll never be a singer without them."

"Well—sometimes I think I don't want to be a singer, Mr. Channing. Sometimes I think I'd rather be a—housekeeper, for instance."

"What! Give up fame and fortune for a hypothetical domestic career?"

"Not for a hypothetical one, no." She gave him a side-wise glance, dimpling. "But I *would* love to have a home of my own."

He humored her, for the sake of watching her rapt and eager face. "What would you do with a house of your own?"

"Oh, I'd have pink silk curtains at all the windows, and loads of books, and flowers, and a cook who could make things like Mr. Farwell's cook can—and—and a grand piano, and an automobile, and a stable full of thoroughbreds and puppies—" She paused for breath.

"Anything else?"

"Oh, yes. Babies! All ages and sizes of babies, small red wrinkled ones, and trot-about, and fat little boys in their first trousers—"

"Help, help!" murmured Channing. "Would there be any room in that house for a husband?"

"Yes," she said softly. "I used to think it was a nuisance, having to have a husband before you could have babies; but now—" she glanced at him shyly, and looked away again.

"But now?" he repeated, leaning toward her.

"I—I've changed my mind," she murmured, her heart beating very hard. Was he going to say anything?

The indications were that he was. His eyes had a look that she called to herself "beaming," and he put out his arms as if to take her into them. She swayed a little toward him, to make it easier.

But at the critical moment, discretion came once more to the rescue. He fumbled hastily in his pocket for a cigarette, and with that in his lips, felt safer.

"There is really no reason," he remarked, puffing, "that the operatic career may not be combined with the luxuries you mention, Jacqueline—pink silk curtains, infants, and all."

"Do singers marry?" she asked; and he could not but admire the nonchalance with which she covered her disappointment.

"Rather! Fast and frequently."

"But surely they don't have babies?"

"Why not? A friend of mine on the operatic stage"—he mentioned her name—"assures me that each baby improves her voice noticeably."

"I think it is very hard on her husband," declared Jacqueline. "You *know* he'd rather have her at home taking care of the children properly, and darning the stockings, and ready to greet him when he comes home tired at night!"

"Judging from the size of her income," murmured Channing, "I fancy that he would not."

Jacqueline jumped up, scarlet. The chagrin of her recent repulse, the nervous strain of the past few weeks, the reaction from too exalted a plane of emotion, all found vent in a burst of temper rare indeed to her sunny nature.

"That's a horrid thing to say," she flared out, "and sometimes I think you're a horrid man! Yes, I do! When you're cynical and—and worldly that way, I just can't bear you. So there! I'm going straight up to the house. Good-by! You needn't try to stop me."

She went, but very slowly, regretting already her foolish anger, waiting for him to call her back. Her feet lagged. She said to herself that these clever men could be very stupid....

But Channing did not call her back. He followed the ascending figure, so boyishly slender yet so instinct with feminine grace, with eyes that held regret, and pity, and something else. When it was out of sight among the upper trees, he heaved a sigh of relief.

"That was a narrow squeak, Percival, my boy," he admonished himself. "Another

instant, and it would have been all up with you. Time you were finding pressing business elsewhere!"

As has been said, Mr. Channing knew himself extremely well; a knowledge that was the result of expert study. He had learned that men pay a penalty for keeping their emotions highly sensitized. They react too readily to certain stimuli; they are not always under perfect control. There are times when the only safety lies in flight.

However, he was not quite ready to flee. He had his novel to finish. It is always a mistake, he had found, to change environment in the middle of a book.



CHAPTER XXIV

Philip, true to his promise to himself, deliberately set about the business of making friends with Jacqueline's lover. He found the matter less difficult than he had expected. Channing was an agreeable surprise to him. There was an atmosphere about him, man of the world that he was, as comforting to the young country cleric as an open fire to one unconsciously chilled. Philip recognized in the other a certain finish, a certain fine edge of culture and comprehension, that had set his own father apart from the people about them, kept him always a stranger in his environment, even to the perceptions of a young boy. With Channing he found many tastes in common, the love of books, of music, of art in every form; as well as a keen interest in the study of humanity, pursued by both from vastly different angles, but with equal ardor. Philip came to understand very well the man's fascination for Jacqueline; but the better he understood it, the more uneasy he became.

Channing's life seemed so rounded, so filled, so complete—what permanent place was there in it for a crude, untrained little country girl? He suspected that the author thought of her, as everybody else had thought of her, as a charming, impulsive, beautiful child, whose blandishments were almost impossible to resist; and he knew men well enough to guess that Channing had not tried very hard to resist them. Why should he? She was too young to be taken seriously, and she was very sweet. Philip himself, lover of another woman as he was, had more than once been quite uncomfortably stirred by the near sweetness of Jacqueline.... Neither as priest nor as man could he bring himself to condemn a thing he so well understood. The sense of responsibility deepened. What was he to do about it?

Percival Channing, on his part, always sensitive to environment, gave of his very best to Philip, reason enough for liking whoever brought it forth. But he had other reasons for liking the grave, simple, courteous young countryman—a sincere respect for his courage in choosing to live out his life in the very shadow of his father's disgrace, and also a very sincere if pagan admiration for the other's physical prowess—the admiration of the weakling for the man who is as nature meant men to be.

On the occasion of Philip's initial visit at Holiday Hill, Channing had stood on

the porch watching him ride away, his well-knit body moving in the perfect accord with his horse that means natural horsemanship, taking a gate at the foot of the road without troubling to open it, in one long, clean leap that brought an envious sigh from the watcher.

"What a man!" thought Channing. "I'll bet he doesn't know what a headache is, nor a furry tongue, nor a case of morning blues.—Heigho for the simple life!"

It was not Philip's last visit to Holiday Hill; and more than once on returning from his pastoral rounds, he found Channing in possession of the rectory, deep in one of his father's French books, practising rather futilely with the punching bag that decorated one corner of the living-room, or prowling about with an appreciative eye for old bindings and portraits, and what egg-shell china was left to remind Philip vaguely of the vague, fragile lady who had been his mother.

Farwell, too, came to the rectory; an adaptable, friendly soul, accustomed to fit himself comfortably into whatever surroundings offered themselves, but underneath his casual exterior extremely observant and critical of such things as seemed to him important. Philip, having dined in some elegance at Holiday Hill, had the courage to invite the two to one of his own simple suppers. And as his ancient negress selected that occasion, out of sheer excitement, to revert to her unfortunate habits, Philip himself cooked the meal, serving it without apology or explanation upon a cloth of fine yellowed damask, with his mother's egg-shell china, and certain spoons and forks that bore upon their attenuated tips the worn outlines of a crest. The table was drawn into a window, through which the scent of Philip's little garden floated in. There were flowers upon the table, too; garden roses in a low pewter bowl, and wax tapers in very beautiful bronze candelabra, at sight of which Farwell's eyes widened enviously.

The actor, an æsthete to his finger-tips, looked with satisfaction about the long, low room, wainscoted in vari-colored books, its great old-fashioned fireplace filled with fragrant pine-boughs, and overhung by a portrait in an oval frame of a dim gentleman in a stock; the mantel crowded with pipes, a punching-bag and dumb-bells in one end of the room, in the other an old square piano, open and inviting, showing evidence of constant use; shabby, comfortable chairs; a large desk with many pigeon-holes, very neat and business-like. Indeed, the whole room, despite its odd agglomeration of furnishings, was neat, meticulously neat, even to the spotless curtains, darned in many places by Jemima and the ladies of the Altar Guild.

Farwell spoke his thought aloud, "There's more character in this room of yours, Benoix, than in all that fine, self-conscious, art-y house of mine," he declared. "It could give pointers to any studio I know. It's the real thing!"

Philip flushed with surprise and pleasure. His unpretentious household gods were very dear to him, dear as they are sometimes to women. They meant more than furniture to the lonely young man; they meant home, and kindred, and all the gentler things that life had denied him.

Channing became lyrical over the salad, and was moved to propose a toast. He lifted his glass of beer—the best Philip's cellar afforded. "Here's to the greatest nation on earth, one drop of whose blood is worth more to Art than all the stolid corpuscles that clog the veins of lesser races. Without it what man can hope to write great prose, or paint great pictures, or mix a great salad? *Vive la France!*—Benoix, who taught you how to cook?"

"My father," said Philip, in a low voice. He had not often occasion to speak of his father, except to Mrs. Kildare.

"I knew it! There's nothing Anglo-Saxon or negroid about this cooking. Again I say, *Vive la France!*"

After they had gone, Philip did not go immediately to bed. He was too excited—as excited, he thought, smiling, as little Jemima had been with the success of her first party. He put out the lights, and sat by his window in the dark for a long time, going over in his mind the talk of that night. Good man-talk it had been, touching on all the big things that occupy the world's thought to-day, which hitherto Philip had got for himself only out of books and periodicals. He had listened eagerly to these young men, who were interested in larger matters than crops and stock-breeding and local politics. And they had listened to him—he knew that. More than once a remark of Channing recurred to him: "You're too big for this place, you know. Before long you'll be moving on."

It was a thought that he had often put deliberately out of his mind. His bishop had been the first to suggest it, some years before.

He looked now through the darkness toward Storm. "Moving on"? with his lady there, alone, deserted? He tried to picture Kate Kildare away from her environment of field and wood and open spaces, sharing with him that crowded intense life of cities toward which his mind yearned. But it was impossible. Once more he put ambition from him—if it was ambition that called. What right has a

priest with ambition?

No!—exile he might be, but exile he would remain, and gladly. What were they all but exiles—her daughters, his father in prison and out of prison, James Thorpe, who stayed because she might miss his friendship—all exiles from the world that called them, because of Kate Kildare?

"It's enough to be near her," he said to himself with a little sigh, looking once more through the darkness toward Storm.

With Farwell and Channing, too, on their way home, some glow of that good talk lingered.

"There's something about the chap—I don't know what it is," murmured Farwell, vaguely.

Channing nodded comprehension. "It's that you want him to like you, somehow. You want him to—respect you, I think."

Farwell looked around at him mockingly. "What a novel and virtuous sentiment! You'll be getting religion next." He added after a moment, "Can't say you're going about it exactly the right way, if you really want the dominie's respect, you know."

Channing flushed. "You mean the girl? It's not his girl, Morty—it's the mother he's after. If it were the girl—damned if I wouldn't get out of the way and give him a clear field!"

Farwell jeered. "Yes, you would! With the quarry in full view?"

"In full pursuit, you mean," said Channing, ruefully. "I wish I could make you understand that this affair isn't entirely of my own seeking, Farwell!"

His companion yawned. "Awkward to be so damned fascinating, isn't it? Look out—one of these days some of your fair friends are going to band themselves together, and catch you unawares, and marry you, my boy."

"One isn't a Mormon, worse luck," grunted the other.

CHAPTER XXV

It was a part of Channing's new policy of caution with regard to Jacqueline that took him occasionally to Storm in the rôle of casual caller, especially now that the older girl was not there to disconcert him with her oddly observant gaze. Here he frequently found other callers, young men who since Professor Thorpe's entertainment had discovered that the distance between Storm and their homes, by automobile and even by train, was a negligible trifle.

These young men Jacqueline referred to, with innocent triumph and evident justice, as "victims."

"I *told* Jemmy there was no need of going away from home to get beaux," she said complacently to Channing. "Here I've sat, just like a spider in a web, and—look at them all! To say nothing of you," she added, with a little gasp at her own daring.

Channing frowned slightly. He was not altogether pleased with the numbers and the frequency of the victims; a fact which added distinctly to Jacqueline's pride in them. But she never allowed her duties as hostess nor her instincts as coquette to interfere with any engagements at the Ruin.

It was Channing's custom, when he called at Storm, to bid her a nonchalant, not to say indifferent, farewell, and repair by devious ways to the ravine; where some moments later he welcomed a very different Jacqueline from the demure young person he had left—ardent, glowing, very eager to atone to him for the enforced restraint of the previous encounter. The coquette in Jacqueline was only skin deep.

One day, arriving at Storm at a belated lunch hour, the hospitable negress who opened to him led him back at once into the dining-room; and there he found a guest quite different from Jacqueline's victims. He was a singular-looking old man, clad in worn butternut jeans; an uncouth, uncombed, manifestly unwashed person at whose side on the floor rested a peddler's pack. He was doing some alarming trencher-work with his knife, and kept a supply of food convenient in his cheek while he greeted Channing with a courteous, "Howdy, stranger!"

"No, no, darter"—he continued without interruption his conversation with

Jacqueline. "'Tain't a mite of use puttin' that little washtub in my room no more, bekase you ain't a-goin' to toll me into it. I takes my bath when I gits home to Sally. She kinder expects it of me. Hit's a wife's privilege to cut her man's hair and pare his nails and scrub his ears an' all them little things, 'specially ef she ain't got no chillun to do hit fur, an' I'd feel mighty mean ef I disapp'inted her. I don't do much fer Sally, noways. No, darter, oncet or twicet a year's often enough fer a human critter to git wet all over, 'cep'n in a nateral way, by swimmin' in the crick. These here baths and perfumery-soaps an' all ain't nature. They're sinful snares to the flesh, that's what they be, not fitten' fer us workers in the Lord's vineyard."

"You think the Lord prefers you dirty?" murmured Jacqueline, with a side glance at the astonished Channing.

"I dunno, darter, but some of His chillun does, an' that's a fack. Ef I was too clean, I wouldn't seem to 'em like home-folks." He added, in all reverence, "I 'lows the Lord went dirty Hisself sometimes when He was among pore folks, jes' to show 'em He wa'n't no finer than what they be."

"I haven't a doubt of it," said Philip Benoix, beside him.

Channing suddenly realized who this peddler was. Jacqueline had spoken of him often—a protégé of her mother's whom she called the Apostle, half fanatic and half saint, who appeared at Storm occasionally on his way between the mountains of his birth and the city where he had taken unto himself a wife; bringing down to the "Settlements," for sale, certain crude handiwork of the mountain women, carrying back with him various products of civilization, such as needles, and shoe-strings, and stick-candy, and Bibles. It was his zeal in spreading what he called "the Word of God" along his route that had won the old peddler his title of "the Apostle."

Channing looked at him with new interest, the literary eye lighting even while he frowned at the sight of so uncouth a creature seated at lunch with ladies.

The Apostle suddenly turned to him with a gentle, quizzical smile, and Channing had the startled sensation of having spoken his thoughts unwittingly aloud.

"Stranger, I reckon you ain't never been up in them barren mountings, whar men has to wrastle with the yearth and the Devil fer every mouthful of food they puts into their bellies? When I comes down from thar, I always aims a bee line fer Sister Kildare's house, bekase I'm hongry. She don't never turn no hongry man

away. 'Tain't safe to turn a hongry man away. You cain't never tell," he added slowly and significantly, "who He might be."

There was a little pause, uncomfortable on Channing's part. Mysticism did not often come his way. He decided that the peddler was a trifle mad.

Then Mrs. Kildare said, "Tell this gentleman something about your own mountain, Brother Bates. He'd like to hear."

"I'm mighty discouraged about 'em up thar, an' that's a fack." He shook his head gloomily. "Folks on Misty is hongrier, and drunker, and meaner than ever—most as mean as they be in the cities. They're pison ign'rant. That's the trouble. The Word of God comes to 'em, but they're too ign'rant to onderstand. 'Tain't wrote in no language they knows, and ef it was, they couldn't read it. Take this here, now—'Love thy neighbor as thyself.' What does that mean to 'em? They ain't got no neighbors to speak of, and them they has, ef they ain't kin-folks, is enemies. Ef the Book was to say 'Git the drop on thy neighbor before he gits the drop on thee,' they'd understand. That's their language—but it ain't God's. I goes on totin' 'em the Word of God in my pack, and them that won't buy I gives it to. But there ain't nobody to explain it to 'em."

"What about you? Why can't you explain it to them?" asked Kate Kildare.

He shook his head again. "None of 'em wants to listen to old Brother Bates. They know I'm as ign'rant as what they be. I used to think ef I could manage someway to git book-l'arnin', I might be a preacher some day. But I dunno. Reckon I never could 'a' yelled and hollered loud enough, nor scared 'em up proper about hell-fire. I ain't so sure I got convictions about hell-fire," he admitted, apologetically. "Seems to me it ain't nateral. Seems to me ef there ever was such a thing, the Lord in His loving-kindness would 'a' put it out long ago.—And I couldn't ever have started the hymn for 'em—never could remember a tune in my born days. No, no! The best I can do for 'em is just to keep on totin' the Word of God around in my pack, hopin' they'll kind of absorb it in at the skin, like I done."

Philip said, "What about the Circuit Riders? Do none of them come to Misty?" He referred to a class of itinerant preachers who are entitled to as much honor for the work they have done among Cumberland mountaineers as any missionaries to the heathen of savage lands.

"Not no more, they don't. The last Circuit Rider that come was a young fellow who looked upon a woman to lust after her," explained the peddler with Biblical

simplicity, "and her man shot him up, and I reckon he was too skeert to come back again. Hit's mighty nigh a year sence there's bin a proper baptizin' or buryin' or marryin' on Misty, with young folks pairin' off and babies comin' along as fast as ever. They git tired of waitin' to be tied proper, you see. They've done backslid even from whar they was at."

"I had always understood," murmured the interested Channing, "that jumping over a broomstick was the accepted form of marriage in these mountains."

"Well, stranger, a broomstick's better than nothin', I reckon," replied the peddler tolerantly. "It kinder stands for law and order, anyway. I've knowed folks down around these parts, whar they's a-plenty of preachers, to take up with each other 'thout'n so much as a broomstick to make things bindin'-like."

Philip exchanged glances with the author. "*Touché!*" he murmured. He turned to Brother Bates. "If I can manage to get away for a week or two, will you pilot me up to Misty?" he asked. "I might make up a few arrears of weddings, funerals, and so forth."

"You, Philip? Good!" exclaimed Kate, heartily.

The Apostle for the first time allowed his gaze to rest on Philip. He chuckled, with the sly malice of a child that has played some trick upon an elder. "I 'lowed you'd be speakin' up purty soon," he said. "I bin talkin' at you all the time, son. Hit don't matter what kind of a preacher you be—Methody or Cam'elite, or what—jest so's you kin give 'em the Word strong."

"I'll give it to them as strong as I can," smiled Philip, "though I must confess that I share your doubts with regard to hell-fire."

"Can ye start a tune? That's what gits 'em every time."

"I can do better than that." He looked at Jacqueline.

Even as he spoke, inspiration had come to him. It was the answer to the problem of how to separate Jacqueline from Channing. "Will you come, too, and be my choir?" he asked her.

She clapped her hands. "What a lark! Mummy, may I? You know how I've always longed to go up into the mountains!"

Suddenly she paused, dismayed. She had remembered Channing.

But that gentleman rose to the occasion with promptitude, somewhat to the chagrin of Philip.

"How would you like to add a passable tenor to your choir, Benoix? If you will let me in on this missionary expedition, it would be awfully good of you. Just the opportunity I've been looking for."

The Apostle beamed on them all. "They's always room for workers in the Lord's vineyard," he said solemnly.

Philip could think of no reasonable objection to offer. He murmured something vague to Kate about the necessity of a chaperon.

She stared at him in frank amazement. "A chaperon for Jacqueline—with *you*? What an idea! You and Mr. Channing will take the best possible care of my little girl. Of course she shall go! I wish I could go myself."

"Why can't you?" he asked eagerly.

She shook her head. "At State Fair time? Impossible, with my head men away. It would demoralize the farm."

Jacqueline caught Philip's eye and winked, wickedly. "You'll just have to be that chaperon yourself, Reverend Flip," she murmured.



CHAPTER XXVI

Philip did his best, somewhat hampered by the fact that the girl regarded his enforced chaperonage as a joke, and flirted with Channing quite brazenly and openly under his very eye. Even the Apostle shortly became aware of how matters stood, and remarked to Philip benignly, at an early stage of their journey, "I like to see young folks sweet-heartin'. It's a nateral thing, like the Lord intended."

Philip could not agree with any heartiness; but presently the high spirits of the other two infected him, and he entered into the adventure with a growing zest. The clean September air was like wine, and they chattered and laughed like children starting off on a picnic.

Channing had spent the night before at Storm, to be in time for a sunrise start, and he appeared at breakfast in a costume which he and Farwell had evolved as suitable for mountaineering; an affair of riding-boots, pale corduroy breeches, flannel shirt, and a silk handkerchief knotted becomingly about the throat. He was disconcerted to discover that the suit-case of other appropriate garments he had brought with him must be left behind, his luggage being finally reduced to a package of handkerchiefs and a toothbrush.

"But we are to be gone at least a week!" he pleaded unhappily. "Surely a change of linen—"

"There'll be a creek handy," said Jacqueline, "and I'm taking a cake of soap in my bundle. We can't be bothered with luggage."

When he saw the mules that were to convey them from the mountain town at which the railroad left them, up to their final destination, he realized the undesirability of luggage. He also envied the other two their horsemanship.

But the mule proved easier riding than he had expected. They traveled at a slow, steady lope that ate up the miles imperceptibly, through wild and beautiful country, always climbing; passing at first occasional groups of unpainted pine houses which gave way, as they penetrated farther into the hills, to rough log cabins, growing fewer and farther apart. These had a bare, singularly unkempt look; and although many of them were so old as to be tumbledown, they did not

fit, somehow, into their surroundings. It was as if nature had never yet accepted man and his works, still tolerated him under protest, a blot upon her loveliness.

Channing commented upon this. "Why are there no vines and flowers about, nothing to make these pitiful places look as if people lived in them?"

"Folks is too busy wrestin' a livin' out of the bare yearth to pretty-up much," explained the Apostle.

"But why stay here at all? Why not go down into the valleys, where land is more fertile?"

The other answered quietly, "Folks that have lived on the mounting-top ain't never content to be cooped up in the valleys, son."

"If you think the outsides are pitiful," exclaimed Philip, "wait till you see the insides! I was only a child when we lived up here, but I have never forgotten. I ought to have come back long ago. Frankly, I have shirked it."

"When *you* lived up here? Why, Philip! When did you ever live in the mountains?" cried Jacqueline.

"Father and I brought my mother up here to get well. It was before you appeared on the scene, dear."

"I'd forgotten. And she didn't get well," said the girl, pityingly, reaching over to touch his hand. "Poor little boy Philip!"

Jacqueline could think of nothing more dreadful than a world without a mother in it. The pathos of that lonely little fellow who was so soon to lose his father, too, came over her in a wave.

"I *wish* I had been alive then to comfort you!" she said, quite passionately.

This new thing that had come to her lately had made her heart almost too big and tender. Since she had learned to love Channing, that always sensitive heart of hers ached and swelled with every grief or joy that passed, as a wind-harp thrills to the touch of passing airs.

She looked back at her lover suddenly, to remind herself of the blissful fact that he was there, and that presently, somehow, they would manage to be alone together.

The two had come to the stage where the world seems crowded with onlookers, and the silent solitude of the heights beyond lured them on as to a haven of refuge. Philip could not always be with them during the week ahead, nor Brother Bates. Meanwhile, the most assiduous of chaperons was powerless to deflect the precious current of consciousness that flowed between them, striking out sparks at every contact of touch or glance....

At noon they rested beside a little clear leaping stream, and investigated with satisfaction the lunch-basket Big Liza had packed for them at Storm. Afterwards, Jacqueline curled herself up in the leaves and went to sleep like a contented young kitten, while the three men smoked in silence, careful not to disturb her. Once, glancing at Channing, Philip surprised in his face, as he watched her, such a look of tenderness that his heart smote him.

"What a fool I am with my suspicions!" he thought. "Of course he wants her. Dear little thing! How could he help it?"

After that he was a more merciful chaperon, and rode ahead up the trail quite obviously, engaging Brother Bates in conversation.

It was sunset before they came to their destination, their high spirits fallen into rather weary silence, all of them glad of the sight of the cabin where the peddler had arranged for them to spend the night. He had sent word ahead to friends of his, and they were evidently expected. A man watching in the doorway called over his shoulder, "Here they be, Mehitabel," and came forward with the grave mountain greeting, "Howdy, strangers."

They were led in at once to supper, an appalling meal of soggy cornbread and molasses, with hog-meat swimming in grease. Their host and his two sons ate with them, waited on by his wife and daughter, all five staring at Jacqueline in unwinking silence, regarding her friendly efforts to draw them into conversation as frivolity beneath their notice.

The author glanced around him with a rather alarmed interest. It was evident that the room in which they were served not only as kitchen and living-room, but as bed-chamber also. It was the only room the cabin boasted, with the exception of a small lean-to, devoted, if he could trust his nostrils, to the family pig. Each end of the room was filled by a long bunk, and he came to the correct conclusion that one was for the women of the household, the other for the men. There were no windows, no means of ventilation whatever except the two doors opposite each other, and the rough chimney at which the woman Mehitabel performed her

extremely primitive feats of cooking.

Channing began to wish that he had been less avid for local color; but at that moment he caught Jacqueline's eye regarding him demurely, and was of a sudden reconciled to his surroundings.

While they ate, through the open door they saw a scattering stream of people pass along the trail below, all going in the same direction; on foot, on horseback, and mule-back, and ox-back. Many animals carried more than one rider. One old plow-horse came along, led by a sturdy patriarch, crowded from mane to crupper with children of assorted sizes.

"Why, how queer, when we never passed a single soul all day!" said Jacqueline. "Where do they all come from, Brother Bates, and where are they going?"

"To the meetin'-house down the trail a ways," he explained. "I sent word ahead that a preacher was comin', and all the folks is turnin' out."

Philip gave a faint groan. "What, to-night?" He had hoped for a few hours' rest after the day's journey.

"Why, in co'se! Hit's moonlight to-night, an' the teacher's done let out school a-purpose. I done sent word," said the Apostle. "'T ain't no time to waste. 'Watch and wait lest the Bridegroom cometh and find thee sleepin'."

"So there's a school even in these wilds? A lonely job for a school-ma'am, I should think. Is she pretty?" asked Channing, hopefully, with a thought of the accepted mountain school-teacher of current fiction.

"'T ain't no her. It's a him," remarked the host; his one contribution to the conversation.

"Reckon a her'd have right smart trouble keepin' school on Misty, wouldn't she, Anse?" chuckled Brother Bates.

"'Low she would," grunted the other, and relapsed into silence.

Afterwards, on their way to the meeting-house, Jacqueline inquired into his meaning. "Why would a woman have trouble teaching school here? Are the children so very bad?"

The Apostle explained, "'T ain't so much the chillun as the grown folks, specially the men folks. You see Teacher makes 'em all come on moonlight nights; the

paws and maws, and the gran'paws and gran'maws, too. He's got a whole lot of new-fangled notions, Teacher has. They don't allus take to 'em kindly—you know how old folks are about new-fangled ways. But he makes 'em come ef they wants to or not, and he larns 'em, too—not only spellin' and sums and such-like, but how to take keer of the babies, and the sick folks, and how to git the hens to lay, and how to cook, and all!"

"To cook! That is indeed a noble work," murmured Channing, devoutly, having recourse to his flask of soda-mints. "Would that our hostess might take advantage of the opportunity!"

"She have," said Brother Bates, proudly. "She done nussed the whole fambly through a fever-sickness a little while ago, doin' like Teacher told her, and nary one of 'em died. But she ain't got so fur as cookin' yet."

"I'd like to meet this teacher," said Philip, heartily. "Will he be at the meeting to-night?"

The Apostle sighed. "Reck'n he won't. Ain't it queer how a smart man like that don't take no stock in the Word of God? 'Lows he's scrambled along without it all his life, and allus will. But I dunno. I dunno. I expect the Lord's got a surprise up his sleeve for Teacher."

The door-yard of the rough cabin that was dignified by the name of meeting-house was quite crowded with men when they arrived. Philip went among them pleasantly, saying, "Good evening, my friends," shaking hands where he could find a hand to shake, greeted here and there by a gruff, "Howdy, Preacher," but for the most part welcomed in solemn, almost hostile silence.

"They're just kind o' bashful," murmured the peddler, in apology for his people.

"I know," smiled Philip, himself feeling a little shy, and like an intruder.

They filed in silently behind him, each depositing a gun in a rack beside the meeting-house door.

"I breathe more easily," murmured Channing in Jacqueline's ear. "For small mercies, let us be duly thankful. Lord, what a crew!"

The two followed Philip to the bare, uncarpeted platform that was to serve as altar. The girl saw to her dismay that there was no piano, not even a harmonium to assist her singing. Brother Bates acted as master of ceremonies. The peddler

was evidently a man of great importance in the community, its one traveler, acquainted with the ways of cities.

"Let marryin' couples set on the right-hand, front benches. Preacher will attend to 'em after meetin'," he announced.

Four or five couples obeyed these instructions with subdued tittering, the fact that several of the brides-to-be carried young infants in their arms not adding appreciably to their embarrassment.

"Have they licenses?" murmured Philip.

"I dunno," replied the Apostle, serenely. "Ef they ain't, they kin git 'em afterwards. The Lord knows how fur they be from law-places."

The little community of Misty Ridge was at that time one of the poorest and most uncivilized in the Cumberland Mountains; many hours' ride, over trails that were at times impassable, from the nearest railroad; entirely unknown to the world below save when one of its sons was sent, for good and sufficient reason, down to the penitentiary. It is a literary fashion of the day to laud the Kentucky mountaineer as an uncouth hero, a sort of nobleman in disguise, guarding intact in his wilderness an inheritance of great racial traits for the strengthening of future generations. Unfortunately, with his good old Saxon name and his good old Saxon customs, he also inherits occasionally something of the moral nature which caused his Saxon ancestor to be deported overseas. The mountains of Kentucky, and of Tennessee, were settled to some extent by convicts who had served their time in the English penal colonies along the sea-coast.

Such an origin, doubtless, might have been claimed by the sparse settlement on Misty, and time had done nothing to mitigate any curse of inheritance. The beautiful, barren hills, their hidden riches as yet undiscovered, yielding so meager a livelihood in return for such bitter labor, served as ramparts between their people and the world beyond. Little help at that time reached them from without. Solitude, ignorance, direst poverty, form a soil in which bodies flourish better than souls, and even bodies do not flourish exceedingly.

Channing, gazing about at the faces below him, one and all with eyes fixed upon the fresh loveliness of Jacqueline, had a moment of acute uneasiness. What right had Benoix, who knew the mountains, to bring the girl into contact with such bestiality? The odor of packed humanity that came to his fastidious nostrils was as sickening as the odor of a bear-pit. He recalled tales of their untamable

fierceness. He remembered the row of guns even now resting in a rack outside the door. His eye, going inadvertently to the sturdy figure of the clergyman, noticed a suspicious bulge in the hip-pocket of his riding-breeches. He started.

"Does Benoix carry a pistol?" he whispered to Jacqueline.

"Of course! I've got one, too," she answered cheerfully. "Where's yours?"

The author felt that he had lost his taste for mountaineering. He looked in vain for one of the beauteous mountain maids so satisfyingly frequent in the pages of current fiction. The women were all sallow, stolid, sullen, old beyond their years. Even the babies were sallow and stolid and old. Many of the men were muscular and well-grown, but with a lanky, stooping height that did not suggest health. Inflamed eyes were common in that congregation, hollow cheeks flushed with the sign there is no mistaking, faces vacuous and dull-eyed and foolishly a-grin.

"Ugh! Think of the germs," he said unhappily, under his breath. "Your friend the peddler is making signs at you."

Jacqueline, obedient to the signal, stopped to the edge of the platform and began to sing the first hymn that came to her mind. She found that she was singing alone. Channing did not know the air. She glanced imploringly at Philip, but he did not see her. He was studying his congregation. They sat in solemn silence, staring at Jacqueline.

At first her voice shook a little with self-consciousness, but she threw her head up gallantly, and went on, verse after verse. At the end she was singing as confidently as if Jemima and the little organ and the faithful choir of Storm church were behind her. Her voice died away in the final "Amen," and she went to her seat, still amid dead silence.

"Why didn't you help me out?" she whispered reproachfully to Philip.

"It wasn't necessary. Look at them!"

Then she saw that the stupidity, the grimness of all those watching faces was gone as if by magic. They had become bright, eager, almost tremulous with pleasure. The girl was touched. She understood why the peddler had so insisted upon Philip's ability to start a hymn. Music, such crude and simple music as came their way, meant to these starved natures all that they knew of beauty, of higher things, perhaps of religion.

In the hush that followed, Philip began: "The Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him."

It was a strange setting for the stately Episcopal service, simplified as Philip made it for the occasion; a bare, log-walled room, lit by smelling kerosene lamps, without altar, candles or cross, without religious symbol of any sort. Only Jacqueline followed the service, kneeling where the congregation should have knelt, making the responses in her clear young voice, joining him in the prayers. But Philip was aware of no incongruity. He gave them what he had to give, and felt none the less a priest because of his flannel shirt and his shabby riding-trousers. Cathedral or log-cabin, it was all one to him. He knew that with Jacqueline's singing, the Lord had indeed entered into His holy temple.

Presently he spoke to them as he would have spoken to his Sunday-school classes at home, earnestly and very simply, with none of the condescending blandness of the elder. Some of their homely phrases, their very accent, had crept unconsciously into his speech, a remnant of the impressionable days when he had lived for a while among mountain folk. Jacqueline realized that this unconscious adaptability was the secret of his hold on people, of their confiding trust in him. Whatever they might be, he was for the moment one of them, looking at their temptations, their failures, never from the outside but from their own point of view.

Brother Bates, a little worried at first by the mildness of his protégé's voice and manner, realized after a few moments the people were listening to him as they had never listened to the hell-fire-and-damnation preachers of their previous experience. Not a man in that room, including Percival Channing, escaped the somewhat uncomfortable feeling that the text, "Do unto others as ye would be done by," had been chosen particularly for his benefit—which is perhaps the secret of great preaching.

Jacqueline, gazing about with great pride in her friend, saw that not only was the room crowded with listeners, but that others were standing outside in the porch. One profile, outlined for a few moments against a window, attracted her attention by contrast with those about it; an elderly face, worn by evident illness or suffering, sensitive and intelligent and refined, despite the gray stubble of beard on his cheeks and the rough flannel collar about his throat. Jacqueline watched him curiously, until her gaze drew his and he suddenly disappeared.

"He looked almost like a gentleman," she thought. "I wonder why he did not

come inside?"

Her mind reverted to this man more than once.

When they were on their way back up the moonlit trail, she and Channing lingering behind the others, an explanation suddenly struck her.

"The non-believing school teacher, of course!" she exclaimed. "Ashamed to be caught listening to 'the Word of God.' Well, he may not be interested in the Word of God," she added musingly, "but he certainly was interested in the word of Philip. Never took his eye off Phil's face!"

Channing had taken her hand, which turned and clung to his with its usual nestling gesture. Now he put his arm around her, drawing her to him in the shadow of some trees. But close as they stood, he had an odd feeling that for the moment, the girl was far away from him.

"What are you thinking of? Tired, sweetheart?"

She leaned back against him, nodding. "Awfully. What a day! But wasn't it worth it, just to see those people listening to Philip? Do you know," she said, "I believe old Reverend Flip is going to be a bishop one of these days."

"Really?" he murmured, kissing her. It seemed an unlikely moment for the discussion of the clergyman, admirable as the fellow was.

But Jacqueline had no sense of the fitness of things. She said between one kiss and another, "Philip's so awfully *good*, you know."

Channing released her, "I daresay," he remarked with some dryness. "Being good is his profession, of course."

CHAPTER XXVII

It was a sore and weary author who at length, having postponed the inevitable as long as possible, crept into the bunk where his host and the two sons slept audibly, with Benoix beside them. The latter stirred a little, and greeted the newcomer.

"That you, Channing? This is the real thing in democracy, at last!" he murmured drowsily, and slept again as soundly as the others.

But Channing, though every aching muscle cried aloud for oblivion, could not sleep. He tossed and turned, listened to the heavy breathing of the men beside him, listened to lighter sounds from the far end of the cabin where Jacqueline was also tasting true democracy in company with the two mountain women. He had lingered outside the door until the three women came in from the lean-to where they had prepared for the night, Jacqueline a tall sprite between her squat, thick-bodied companions, a heavy rope of bronze hair over each shoulder, small feet showing bare and white beneath the severe robe of gray flannel which was the nearest approach to a negligée known to Mrs. Kildare's daughters. The atmosphere of Storm did not lend itself to the art of the negligée.

Moonlight shone full upon her, and Channing, watching with quickened heart-beat, saw her lips move as she gave a quick, shy glance toward the bunk where he was supposed to be already sleeping.

"She's telling me good night, the darling!" he thought, quite correctly, and blew her an unseen kiss.

There were times of late when the author almost forgot to analyze his own sensations. The Overmind that observed and registered for future reference had grown a trifle careless. Occasionally Channing felt, and acted, quite like an ordinary young man in love.

Now he lay quite still, that he might hear that low breathing across the room, trying to distinguish Jacqueline's from the rest. He had taken the precaution to open both doors of the cabin wide, after his hosts were safely asleep, letting in the moonlight and a little breeze that smelled keenly of pine woods. Now and then a faint bird-note broke the hush, or the mournful quaver of a screech-owl.

The situation was not without picturesque piquancy for a collector of impressions.

Beside him, Benoix and the other man slept with the abandon of tired animals, and the sound of their sleeping somewhat disturbed the poetry of the night. On the whole, however, he preferred them sleeping to waking. He sent his thoughts, on tiptoe, as it were, across the room. How exquisite she was, with her slim bare feet, and the hint of a chaste little ruffle showing at throat and wrist! Those drowsy, dewy eyes—the fluttering pulse in her soft throat—her clinging lips, which kissed as unconsciously as a child's until suddenly they were edged with fire....

Channing's thoughts became so insistent that perhaps they wakened her. There was a slight stirring in the bunk across the room, a slender gray shape appeared on the edge of it, feeling about on the floor for shoes. Still barefoot, with shoes in her hand, Jacqueline crept to the door.

Channing, all his fatigues forgotten, very carefully extricated himself from among the slumberers and followed. He congratulated himself upon the fact that his preparations for the night had been extremely sketchy, had in fact consisted merely in removing his coat and riding-boots. Once safe outside the cabin, he pulled on the boots, smoothed his hair with his fingers, knotted the handkerchief more becomingly about his throat, and went in pursuit of Jacqueline.

He had not far to go. She was sitting on the top rail of the nearest fence, her back toward him, framed in the center of the setting moon. She turned as he came upon her with a startled gasp:

"O-oh! You, Mr. Channing!"

One of the sweetest things about the girl to Channing was the queer little tender respect with which she always treated him. Even in their most intimate moments, he was still the great man, the superior order of being. She could not possibly have called him "Percival." Though he chided her for this attitude of respect, it did not displease him.

"I could not sleep in there," she explained, rather breathlessly, "so I came out to see the last of the moon. Of course I must go in again at once."

"Must you? Why, I wonder? I couldn't sleep either. Let's stay where we are!"

She asked, blushing: "But would that be quite proper?"

This first hint of conventionality in the girl surprised and rather touched him. He saw that she was quite painfully aware of the prim little wrapper, the unbound hair, the bare feet thrust into her shoes.

"Why, you little gray nun! Outdoors is quite as 'proper' as indoors—rather more so, in fact. It's the onlooker that makes things proper or improper, and here there are no onlookers.—This is all too wonderful to waste in sleeping!"

It was wonderful. The girl drew a breath of keen, cold ozone into her lungs.

"Isn't it queer," she said with a chuckle, "that mountains smell so sweet and mountaineers—don't? Ugh! fancy living in that stuffy cabin! All very well to sleep there once or twice for a lark, but to live there—!" She rubbed her bare ankles together unhappily. "Mr. Channing, do you suppose they were mosquitoes—?"

"Ssh!" he said. "I hold with the ancient belief that 'nothing exists until it is named.' There'll be several more nights of those bunks, you know.—If you find log-cabins open to suspicion, you ought to try the picturesque thatched-roof cots of Mother England! These mountaineers cling to the old traditions."

They laughed together, her slight barrier of shyness gone down in the intimacy of sharing a common peril.

"But were you ever so close to the moon, before?" she asked dreamily. "It is right face to face with us now. I believe we could step off into it."

"As if it were a great golden door, opening into—who knows where?—Suppose we try, Jacqueline? If we follow this ravine at our feet, it will lead us to the edge of the mountain, and so to the threshold of the moon, without a doubt. Only we must hurry if we are to get there before the door closes."

She shook her head. "Too late! Long before we reached the end of the ravine the moon would be gone, and then it would be dark as a pocket."

"Pooh! Who's afraid of the dark?" scoffed the city dweller in his ignorance.

"It wouldn't be safe," she said seriously. "We'd never be able to find our way back in the dark. Of course, if we had a lantern—" She dimpled up at him suddenly. "Do you know, there is a lantern hanging just inside the cabin door. I saw it."

Channing tiptoed back and secured the lantern, his heart thumping rather hard, not entirely for fear of discovery. They had come at last to the moment that had been in both their minds since the start of the journey, beneath all their gaiety and laughter—that final desired solitude of the heights.

They descended into the shallow ravine—a mere fissure it was in the surface of the mountain—crossing as they went an almost perpendicular cornfield of which Jacqueline made mental note as a landmark. They spoke in whispers, as if fearing to disturb the immemorial silence of the hills. Here and there a bird woke at their passing, and called a sleepy note of warning to its mate. Leaves rustled to the touch of the wind that is never still in high places. Near at hand sounded a sudden eerie cry, and Jacqueline drew close to Channing with a shudder.

"Suppose we meet a wildcat, or a bear, or something? What would we do?"

"Run," he said laconically; but he put a protective arm about her, which was perhaps what Jacqueline needed. It is usually in the presence of Man that Woman allows herself the luxury of timidity.

Soon they ceased to talk at all. He held her very close as they walked, and sometimes they stood for long moments without moving, embraced. No talk of Philip or other extraneous matters came between their kisses now. The young trees with which the ravine was filled hedged them in close and secret, a friendly guard; and Channing wished to abandon the expedition to the moon, being well content where he was. But Jacqueline, impelled by some blind instinct, urged him on toward the open, where a rim of gold, growing less and ever less, still showed between the interlacing branches.

Underbrush impeded them, tore at her skirts and her bare ankles, till Channing picked her up in his arms and carried her; not easily, for he was little taller than herself, but very willingly. So with his warm and fragrant burden, he emerged upon the edge of the mountain. At their feet was a sheer drop of many hundred feet into a cañon, where a stream whispered, with the reflection of tumbled stars in its bosom. All about lay a wide prospect of lesser hills, covered with a mantle of soft and feathery verdure that stirred very lightly, as if the mountains were breathing in sleep. As they gazed, the rim of the moon sank slowly, slowly, till there was nothing left but starlight.

Jacqueline murmured, "Isn't it lucky we brought the lantern? Let's light it now." Her voice was rather tremulous.

"Why, sweetest?" He seated himself in the fragrant pine-needles, and drew her down beside him. "Look, little girl, how high we are above earth; out of men's knowledge, all the world asleep. We might be gods on high Olympus. 'You and I alone in Heaven dancing'"—he finished softly that most beautiful passage out of "Marpessa."

But the Overmind chose that moment to return to duty. It suggested to Channing that he sounded a trifle histrionic, a trifle as though low music were about to be played by the orchestra. He caught himself murmuring inwardly, "What a setting! What a perfect setting!"

"For what?" inquired the Overmind, not at all in disapproval but with a sort of impersonal interest.

Just then the gifted Mr. Channing would have traded temperaments with the dullest lout that ever lost his head over a woman.

His self-consciousness reacted upon Jacqueline. All her earlier shyness returned. She drew the prim little wrapper down over her ankles, and sat quite stiffly erect, submitting to his embrace, but no longer returning it.

"I think we'd better be going back now," she said. "Suppose Philip were to wake up and miss us?"

Channing had an odd and perfectly irrelevant thought of that bulge in the clergyman's hip-pocket.

"Bother Philip! You'd suppose the man was a sort of watch-dog. I believe you're afraid of me to-night," he teased, turning her face to his.

Her lips trembled as he kissed them. "It is so dark," she whispered.

"Little goose! Why should the darkness make a difference to you and me?"

"I don't know—but it does." Suddenly she pushed him away, and jumped to her feet. "Give me the matches, Mr. Channing. I want to light the lantern and go back."

He obeyed with a shrug, wondering just where and how he had blundered. A sense of artistic incompleteness mingled with a keen personal sense of chagrin. Did the girl care less for him than he had thought? Or was it merely the instinct of self-preservation that had warned her?

Now that the blood ran more coolly in his veins, he blushed to realize that the instinct had been right.

They went back into the ravine, which, as Jacqueline had prophesied, had become as dark as a pocket. Without the lantern they could not have seen a foot ahead of them, and even with the lantern their way was not easy. They stumbled along, still hand-in-hand and silent; but it was no longer the delicious, thrilling silence of the earlier adventure. The glamour of it seemed to have departed with the moon.

Jacqueline, stiff with an embarrassment she did not understand (she thought it the fault of the negligée and the stockingless feet) was eager to get back to the shelter of the crowded cabin. Channing was by this time as eager as herself,

having discovered that riding-boots are not the most comfortable equipment for mountain tramping.

"There's our cornfield, at last!" said the girl, and both heaved sighs of relief.

They climbed laboriously toward the outline of corn stalks against the starlit sky, with a darker outline looming behind; but as they came into better sight of the cabin, she gave a cry of dismay.

"It's all lighted. Oh, Mr. Channing! They've missed us!"

"Damn!" said the author.

At that moment voices reached them: loud, drunken voices, mingled with laughter, and a snatch of song.

"Why—why!" muttered Channing, blankly. "That can't be our cabin!"

Nor was it. They had trusted to the wrong landmark.

They turned and hurried down into the ravine again. But Channing stumbled, and the sound reached the quick ears of the mountaineers above. There was a shout, in a voice suddenly sobered.

"Who's down thar?"

It was followed by the sharp ping of a bullet.

"Good gad, but they're shooting!" gasped Channing.

"They certainly are," said the girl, with a giggle. "It must be a still or something, and they think we're revenue officers!"

"Wh-what shall we do?"

"Run," she quoted him, laughing, and seizing his hand suited the action to the word. She seemed perfectly unafraid. "They won't get our range in the dark. Isn't this exciting?"

But the bullets followed them, too close for comfort.

"It's the lantern!" exclaimed Channing, and was about to drop it when the girl seized it out of his hand.

"Here—don't do that! We'd be wandering about in this ravine all night without

it."

She looked at her companion in sheer surprise. It was her first experience of the type of man who loses his head in the presence of danger. Her voice became all at once quite motherly and kind.

"It's all right. You go ahead and I'll carry the lantern. They're probably too drunk to follow us," she reassured him.

Channing, to the after mortification of his entire life, obeyed without demur.

"It's all right," she repeated. "But go as fast as you can."

Shots were flying thick and fast about the lantern she held at arm's length. More than one grazed her closely.

"You great cowards up there!" she cried out in sudden anger. "Do you know you're shooting at a girl?"

There was a sudden silence. Then the shouts began again with a new note. "A gal, be ye? Boys, hit's a female down thar. Come on up, gal! Let's see what ye look like."

But the shots ceased, and the shouts came no nearer.

"Just as I thought—they 're too drunk to follow us," she said triumphantly. "Better get out of this neighborhood, though. Hurry on, Mr. Channing!"

"I'm afraid I can't," he said faintly. "You go without me."

She turned the light of the lantern full upon him, and saw that he was holding to a tree, swaying where he stood. There was a dark stain on his breeches, just above the knee, which spread even as she looked.

Without a word, she turned and began to run up the hillside again.

"Where are you going?" he cried.

"To get help. You are hurt."

"Those drunken brutes? Never!"

"They'll help us. I'm a woman."

"All the more reason—" he conquered his growing weakness, and put what force

he could into his voice. "Jacqueline, I forbid you to go! Come here!"

She obeyed, wringing her hands. "But I don't know what to do for you!" she quavered.

"Listen! I must walk as far as I can, and when I'm done, you leave me, and run ahead for help. We can't be far from our own cabin now."

Channing had resumed his manhood, and it did not occur to the girl to argue with him. He was not a coward. He had merely been startled momentarily out of his self-control, unaccustomed as he was to physical danger. She realized this thankfully. The literary life does not prepare a man for the emergency of finding himself a target for bullets out of the dark.

Arm-in-arm they stumbled along the ravine. Soon he was obliged to lay an arm across her sturdy young shoulders, leaning upon her more heavily with each step. She felt the effort of his every motion, was aware of the labored breath with which he fought back his weakness. Still he struggled on. If she had loved him before, she adored him now.

"Oughtn't I to bandage it, or something?"

"No," he gasped. "It's not an artery, I think. Must get on. Almost done."

She was terrified. All the tenderness she had denied him that night rose in her, an overwhelming flood. As he faltered she urged him forward with crooning words, with caresses. "Just a little farther, that's my brave dear! We're almost there. It can't be far now, darling, beloved, my precious!"

He grew too faint to understand her words, but her will toward the last carried him on, step by step, she staring desperately at the skyline, looking for the cornfield that was to be her landmark.—Could they have passed it? Surely they had not come so long a way as this?

Suddenly the thought occurred to her that in starting back they might have entered the wrong ravine. There must be many such shallow fissures on the mountain-side. She heard near at hand the trickling of a spring, and stopped aghast. They had passed no spring on the way out. She was too thoroughly country-bred not to have taken note of running water instinctively, as animals do.

"Lost!" she whispered to herself; lost in wild country, between midnight and dawn, with a wounded man on her hands and—no stockings on! The choking

giggle she gave was more than half hysteria.

Then, without a word, Channing pitched forward on his face.

That steadied her. In a moment she had brought water in her cupped hands from that providential spring, had found his pocket-knife, ripped up his trousers-leg, and bandaged the wound as coolly as Jemima herself might have done it, though the sight of the blood nauseated her. She bathed his face with a wet handkerchief, but his eyelids merely fluttered once and were still again. In a panic she lifted his head to her bosom, trying to warm his cheeks; kissed him on the lips again and again, violently, begging him to wake and speak to her. It is a pity that the collector of impressions was unable to appreciate these man[oe]uvres.

"What shall I do? What *shall* I do?" she moaned.

He had bade her leave him and run for help—but did she dare? Even as she considered it, there was a rustling in the underbrush, and startlingly near at hand sounded the eerie cry that had frightened her earlier in the night. It did not frighten her now, oddly enough. She regretted the pistol she had left in the cabin. Her hand tightened on the pocket-knife, however, and she placed herself between Channing and the direction of the sound.

"Go away! Get out of this! Scat!" she said firmly, flourishing her lantern.

For a tense moment she waited; but the cry was not repeated. It had put out of the question, however, any thought of leaving Channing there defenseless. There were wild-cats in these mountains, she knew, rattlesnakes, too, possibly bears; and even the foxes that barked far away at intervals were not to be trusted with an unconscious human smelling of fresh blood.

There seemed nothing better to do than shout for help, on the chance of somebody hearing her in this wild and desolate place. Through the ravine rang the golden voice that might one day enthrall the world, pitched to fill a wider auditorium than it had ever filled before. From side to side it rolled and echoed in musical cadences: "Help! Come! Somebody please hear me! Help!"

Birds awoke with startled twittering, and various creatures of the underbrush, which had been attracted to the light of the lantern, fled away in terror. She sent her voice in the direction of the cabin they had mistaken for their own. Drunk or not, there were men there, and she needed them.

But after some time, an answer came from the other side of the ravine, a little way beyond. A bobbing light appeared on the edge, and a faint halloo reached her.

"What's wrong down there?"

Jacqueline shouted: "Man hurt! Bleeding! Awfully!"

The lantern bobbed rapidly downward. Presently a man came into sight, stoop-shouldered and spectacled, and roughly dressed. He knelt beside Channing and examined him.

"Nothing broken. Just loss of blood. That's not a bad bandage. It will last till we get him up the hill. No need to cry, young lady," he added; for at the first sound of that pleasant, crisp, gentleman's voice, Jacqueline had broken into sobs. She knew that her immediate troubles were over.



CHAPTER XXVIII

The newcomer asked no questions, then or afterwards, but busied himself with a little satchel he carried. "Drink this, please," he said to Jacqueline in a moment.

It was aromatic ammonia, and she spluttered over it and stopped crying. Then he forced some between Channing's lips; and presently the wounded man's eyes opened, to Jacqueline's almost sick relief.

"There! Now you will do nicely, though you will not feel like climbing my hill, perhaps," the stranger said to him. He eyed Jacqueline speculatively. "Are you a muscular young lady? I think so."

"Yes, indeed!" She doubled up her arm boyishly to exhibit the swelling biceps.

He nodded. "Excellent. Then we must make him a ladies' chair, you and I. Fortunately he is not a large man."

Channing, however, was heavier than he looked. He was only conscious enough to keep his arms over their shoulders, otherwise unable to help them at all. They made slow progress. Frequently they had to put him down and rest, more for the stranger's sake than for Jacqueline's.

"I fear my biceps are less creditable than yours," he smiled once, panting a little. "Or it is the breath, perhaps. One grows older, unfortunately."

As he spoke he coughed slightly, and Jacqueline looked with quick understanding at his thin face. She had heard such a cough before. The White Plague was one of the enemies which Mrs. Kildare fought untiringly and unceasingly in her domain.

"I am afraid this effort is not good for you," she murmured.

He shrugged deprecatingly, as if to say, "What does it matter?"

The gesture was oddly familiar to Jacqueline. She had seen Philip Benoix shrug in just that way. Indeed, there were other things about this man that seemed oddly familiar. She looked at him, puzzled. The lantern showed him dressed in coarse jeans, unkempt, unshaven. Yet his clear, well-modulated, slightly

accented speech proved him no genuine mountaineer. Perhaps the cough accounted for his presence in the mountains.—But his appearance of familiarity?

Suddenly Jacqueline placed him. It was the man she had seen outside the window of the meeting-house, listening so absorbedly to Philip's sermon.

"You're the school-teacher, aren't you?" she asked.

"At your service," he replied with a slight, courteous formality that again reminded her of Philip.

"I saw you at church to-night, and wondered why you did not come in."

"I am not a Christian," he explained.

"Oh, but that doesn't matter! That is just why Philip—Mr. Benoix, I mean—has come up here. To make Christians."

The other smiled faintly. "The few Christians of my acquaintance have been born, and not made.—Now, shall we start again?"

They came at last to the first of two small cabins, whose door the man kicked open. They deposited their now unconscious burden upon a bed, one of several that stood in a neat, white row, each with curtains about it.

"Why, it's a regular dormitory! Is yours a boarding-school?"

He shook his head. "My hospital extension. It is easier to take care of sick scholars here than at their homes, and I have often sick scholars. None at present, however. We have room here for several patients, as you see, and soon I hope to be able to build another house for women. Obstetrical cases," he explained, rather absently. While he spoke he was removing Channing's bandage. "Hum! The shot has fortunately missed the patella, but it must come out." He rose and began to build a fire in a small cook-stove at one end of the room. "When I have sterilized these instruments, young lady, we shall have a try for that bullet."

Jacqueline paled. "You mean you are going to—to cut him? Are you sure you know how?"

He smiled at her, "Quite sure. We mountain teachers have opportunity to learn many things."

"Including cooking," she said, with a wan attempt at raillery, remembering Brother Bates' gossip.

"Including cooking," he admitted gravely. "Wait until this coffee has boiled, and you shall see that I know one branch, at least, of my profession thoroughly."

He brought her a steaming cup in a moment, which she drained gratefully. "It's heavenly! May I have some more? Where did you learn to cook—from books?"

"From necessity. When I first came to the mountains, it seemed safer to cook than to be cooked for."

The girl was paying little attention. She watched Channing fearfully. He was still unconscious, livid; but the school-teacher appeared to feel no alarm. He went deftly and quite unhurried about his preparations, getting out a hypodermic syringe, a bottle of chloroform, placing certain instruments in the oven, others in boiling water.

Jacqueline shivered; but she went on with the conversation gallantly, striving to face the situation as her mother or Jemima would have faced it.

"I know one other man who can cook, but he's a minister, and they're always different, somehow. He learned in the mountains, too, by the way, because there was nobody but himself and his father to take care of his sick mother. He learned all sorts of things to help her ... how to sew on buttons, and mend clothes, and sweep—He can even darn stockings! And he's not a bit ashamed of it."

"I should think," murmured the other, "that he might be even proud of it. You find him unmanly, perhaps?"

"Unmanly! Philip?" The tone of her voice answered him. "Why, he's the manliest man I know!"

The teacher said nothing further; but she got the impression that he was listening, waiting for her to go on.

"Do you know," she said, "I feel as if I knew you, as if I might have known you all my life. Have I never seen you before?"

"I think not," he replied, in a low voice.—Who can tell how much is seen by little eyes newly opened upon the world? Perhaps vision is clearer then than afterwards, when speech and sound and crowding thoughts come to obscure it.

"Have you always lived in these mountains?"

He answered with a slight hesitation. "I came here seventeen years ago."

"And do you never go down to the lowlands?"

"No."

"Then I can't have known you before," she said disappointedly, "because I am only seventeen myself."

A shrewder observer—Jemima for instance—might have noted his hesitancy, might have realized that coming to a place does not imply remaining there continuously.

But Jacqueline was not shrewd. She took people literally, and understood just what they intended her to understand. The art of prevarication was unknown to her; though, as has been seen, she could lie upon occasion, with a large and primitive simplicity.

"Now then," said the teacher briskly. "If you are ready, young lady, we shall go after that bullet."

She shrank away, quivering, all her fine pretense at composure shattered. "O-oh, but you don't expect *me* to help you? I can't, I never can help with things like that! I'm not like mother and Jemmy. I couldn't bear it. He might groan! I can't stand it when they groan!"

The other frowned. "You are not a coward, I think, afraid of a little blood?"

"It's not the blood—though I don't like that a bit. It's the pain. It's when they groan. Please, please!—It's horrible enough when you don't care for them, but when you do—"

His face softened wonderfully. "Ah!—Yes. It is worse when you care, my dear; but all the more reason for helping. Come, I have no one else. You shall keep me from hurting him by holding this little cone over his face—see, how simple. He will certainly groan, and you will certainly bear it. Come, then!"

Jacqueline, sick and shivering, stuck to her post. "If Jemmy could only see me now!" was the thought with which she stiffened herself. She tried not to listen to the moaning voice—"They're killing me! Take it away. Oh, *don't* hurt me any more—"

"You said it wouldn't hurt him!" she muttered once, fiercely.

"And it does not—only his imagination. He has a vivid imagination, this chap."

"Of course he has!" She scented disrespect, and was quick to resent it. "He's a very famous author,—Mr. Percival Channing."

"So?" But the school-teacher did not appear to be greatly impressed. "A healthy-looking author, at least, which is in his favor. This should not give him any trouble.—Aha! Now we have it."

He held up the bullet for her to see.

"Now then," he added in a moment, "you shall go into my little guest-room there while I watch over our patient, and sleep like the heroine you are for many hours."

Jacqueline demurred indignantly. "Leave him? Indeed I won't! It's my place to nurse him, not yours. Go to sleep yourself!"

He did not venture to drive Woman out of her natural sphere.

"As you like. Just rest on one of these cots, then, while I attend to some further matters. I shall rouse you when I am ready to leave."

"You won't go far?"

"Oh, no. I shall be within call."

Jacqueline stretched herself luxuriously. The cot was very comfortable. "I shan't go to sleep, of course," she said....

Once during the night she stirred suddenly. "Philip will be worried," she murmured.

A quiet voice answered beside her, "No, I shall send word to him."

She lifted her heavy lids. "Oh, is that you, Phil?" she muttered contentedly, and dozed off again....

It was not such an odd mistake. The school-teacher, sitting there beside her, had taken off his spectacles, and the eyes she met when hers opened, were eyes she had known and trusted all her life; gleaming, kindly, quizzical eyes, astonishingly blue by contrast with a dark face.

He tried not to cough for fear of disturbing her. Until dawn and afterwards he sat there between the two beds, sometimes rising quietly to minister to Channing's needs, but for the most part gazing at the sleeping girl, hungrily, wistfully, often through a mist of tears; searching for resemblances, and finding them.

"Her child!" he whispered to himself. "Her little girl, the babe that was on her breast!—So like, and yet unlike. A hint of pliancy here, of weakness perhaps, that is not Kate. Wilfulness with Kate, never weakness—And already a woman, already come to the time of sacrifice. Her little girl!—"

He leaned over Channing, studying intently and anxiously the nervous, sensuous, intelligent face in its betraying relaxation of slumber. He shook his head presently, as if in doubt.

"But she will not see; perhaps she will never see. Yes, she is Kate's own child!" He sighed, and shrugged.

"At least there is Philip on guard," he said to himself, finally. "My sturdy, pious young Atlas, with the world so heavy on his shoulders!—"

The smile on the teacher's lips was mocking and sad, and very tender.



CHAPTER XXIX

It was broad daylight when Jacqueline was awakened by some one calling her by name, and shaking her none too gently.

"Come, come, Jacqueline, you must wake up, please! I have no time to waste."

She rubbed her eyes, yawning. "Let me alone, Phil! I'm half dead with sleep.—Heavens, where am I? Why are you so cross? Oh, Phil," she gasped, memory returning in a flood. "How is he? Is he conscious yet?"

"Who, Channing? Extremely conscious, I should say, and very much ashamed of himself. He is making an excellent breakfast in the next room."

His stern voice caused her to hang her head. "I suppose you're dreadfully mad at us, Reverend! Were you anxious?"

"Fortunately I didn't miss you till the school-teacher's messenger woke us with the news that you and Channing had been found lost in the woods somewhere. I've brought your clothes. It is a wonder you did not take pneumonia, wandering about half-dressed!"

She winced, and put out a wheedling hand, "My wrapper is just as warm as a dress, and—and it looks almost like one. See! it's—it's quite long, too, Phil!—I don't think he even noticed that my stockings weren't on."

"No?" He looked at her searchingly, and his face softened. The gaze that met his was deprecating and embarrassed, but frank as a child's.

"Still," she admitted, "it was a dreadful thing to do."

"It was a very silly thing to do, and as it turned out, very dangerous. These mountaineers are a wild lot, especially with a little moonshine in them. You might very well have been shot, instead of Channing."

"I wish I had been—oh, I *wish* I had been!" Her lip quivered. "You're so cross to me," she wailed, "and I've been through *such* a lot!"

He relented. "I don't mean to be cross, little girl. But you must see that I can't take the responsibility of such a madcap any longer. You will have to go back to

civilization."

Her face fell. "Oh, Phil! You don't mean that you are going to give up the missionary expedition because of what I've done?"

"I do not," he said crisply. "I came to accomplish certain things up here, and I shan't leave till they are done. But I shall have to manage without my choir. You are going back to Storm, you and Mr. Channing."

"When must we go?" she asked meekly.

"To-day. At once."

"Oh, but Philip, we can't! Mr. Channing couldn't be moved so soon. His poor leg —"

"I'm afraid he will have to risk that valuable member for the good of the common cause. He is going to need much attention, that is plain, and we can't impose on this school-teacher."

"Oh, *he* won't mind!" interposed Jacqueline, eagerly. "He's as good as a doctor, and a perfect dear."

"'Dear' or not, he is a busy man, and we have no claim on his time. Channing himself wants to go down to the neighborhood of genuine doctors, I fancy. He seems to be alarmed for fear of blood-poison developing." Despite himself, Philip's lip curled a little.

"I don't believe you're one bit sorry for Mr. Channing!"

"Now that you mention it," murmured Philip, "I don't believe I am. It serves him damned right!" He turned on his heel and left the room.

But later when she came out to him, dressed and abjectly penitent, he spoke more gently. "Jacky dear, I've got to interfere once more in something that is perhaps not my business. How do matters stand between you and our author friend? Has he decided yet whether he wants to marry you?"

The hot blood rushed into her cheeks. "Why—why, I don't know," she stammered, "He never—Philip Benoix, that certainly is *not* your business! The idea!"

"Whatever is your mother's business I make mine," he said quietly. "Jacqueline,

since you have tied my hands, I want you to promise me one thing. As soon as you get back, I want you to tell your mother everything about this affair with Channing."

Her head went up angrily. "I'll promise no such thing! What has mother to do with it? When Mr. Channing is ready," she said very stiffly, "I daresay he will speak to my mother himself, without any prompting from you."

It was her turn to walk away, outraged dignity in every motion.

Philip looked after her ruefully. "Of course she won't tell Kate, and I can't, and it would never occur to that dear woman to watch one of her own daughters.—I do wish," he muttered, "that Jemima were at home!"

It was an odd fact that many people who usually took young Jemima Kildare's existence very much for granted had a way of wishing for her suddenly when any emergency arose.

Jacqueline's dignity did not carry her far. She came back in a moment to ask humbly, "How am I ever to get Mr. Channing down to the railroad? He can't ride, and wheels are out of the question on that rough trail. Philip, really, he'll *have* to stay here till the wound is healed. It won't be any trouble for the teacher. I'll look after him myself."

"I think not," said Philip, grimly. "You will be safe at Storm by nightfall."

"You don't seem to realize that he is terribly wounded!"

"By no means 'terribly.' The school-teacher—who seems to be a capable person as well as a 'dear'—has made a very good job of removing the bullet, and there's no temperature. Believe me, your imaginative friend will manage to survive this affair. Everything is settled. Brother Bates will stay and see the school-teacher, and arrange with him about the mule-litter for Channing. He will go down with you himself, and see you safely into the train. Sorry I can't, but I'm expected on the other side of the mountain this morning for a 'buryin,' and as the deceased has been awaiting the occasion for several months—underground, I trust,—I don't like to postpone it any longer."

"Won't you even wait till we start?" she asked forlornly.

"I can't. Sorry not to see that school-teacher, too. He has gone off somewhere on an errand, the old woman in charge here says. Doesn't know when he will be

back. I must be off."

"Aren't you going to say good-by to Mr. Channing?"

"I have already said good-by, and other things, to Mr. Channing," said Philip, grimly. "*Au revoir*, little girl."

He rode up the trail at a lope, passing as he went a group of laurel bushes, behind which, had he looked more closely, he might have detected the crouching figure of a man, who watched him wistfully out of sight. The teacher's errand had not taken him far.

When Philip stopped at the schoolhouse again that evening on his return from the "buryin'," he found it deserted. There was a sign on the door. "School closed for a week. Gone fishing."

"A casual sort of school-teacher, this," said Philip, disappointed. "A regular gadabout! I'm afraid I shan't see him at all. What did you say his name was?"

The man Anse, who was his companion, eyed Philip impassively. "Dunno as I said. Dunno as I ever heerd tell. We calls him 'Teacher' hereabouts."

"Do you mean to say you've never *asked* his name?" demanded Philip.

"Folks hereabouts ain't much on axin' questions," remarked Anse. "'T ain't allus healthy, Preacher."

Philip felt oddly rebuked.



CHAPTER XXX

As if Philip's wish had materialized her, it was Jemima herself who met Jacqueline and Channing at the Storm station late that night; Jemima, fully equipped for the occasion, ambulance and all, brisk and important and even sympathetic in a professional sort of way.

Jacqueline hailed her with mingled feelings of relief and sisterly pleasure, complicated with certain misgivings as to her future freedom.

"Why, Jemmy! I thought you were going to stay with that Mrs. Lawton at least three weeks."

"Lucky I didn't," remarked her sister succinctly. "I had just got home when your telegram to mother came, telling about the accident, so of course I took charge of things. Mother wanted to come herself, but she seemed rather tired, so I made her stop at home. The doctor will be there to meet us."

Channing saw the improvised ambulance with thanksgiving. The journey back to civilization was a chapter in his experience which he had no wish to repeat....

It had started gaily enough, Channing quite comfortable in a sort of litter swung between two mules, led at a foot-pace by the versatile peddler and a silent young mountaineer, a son of their former host, Anse. The school-teacher rode with them to the foot of the mountain, to make sure of the bandages, and Jacqueline brought up the procession on her mule.

Before they started, Channing spoke a few appreciative if rather patronizing words to the school-master. "You've been awfully kind and clever about this. A surgeon could not have done better. You really ought to charge me a whopping big price, you know." He put his hand into his pocket, suggestively.

The other raised his eyebrows. "My services were not professional, Mr. Channing. I make no charge for them. It is all part of my day's work."

"Oh, but really—" insisted the author.

"Of course if you've plenty of money, you may pay what you like," added the teacher indifferently, and went back into the schoolhouse for something he had

forgotten.

Channing grinned. "Of course! I've never seen services yet, professional or otherwise, that could not be paid for. What do you think I ought to give him?"

It was to Jacqueline he spoke, but the Apostle answered: "You don't give him nothin', son. You puts what you kin in this here box for the Hospital."

He obligingly lifted down a box with a slit in it, that hung beside the schoolhouse door, bearing the inscription, "Hospital Fund." He rattled it as he did so. "It's gettin' real heavy," he commented with satisfaction. "Reck'n there must 'a' bin a lot of sick folks lately. Teacher must be pleased."

Channing lifted his eyebrows at Jacqueline. "Do you mean to say he leaves a box of money hanging outside his door at the mercy of any passing stranger?"

"Why not?" asked the teacher himself, reappearing.

"Very few strangers do pass, and though my neighbors have their failings, dishonesty is not one of them. Besides, it is their own money. They have given it."

"Rather an ambitious idea of yours, isn't it, a hospital in these wilds?"

"The name is more ambitious than the idea, Mr. Channing. What I hope to build is merely another small cabin for women, on the other side of my schoolhouse, and perhaps later an isolated building for contagious cases."

"And who is to care for your patients?"

"Oh, I have plenty of assistance. Some of the women have become excellent nurses, and one or two of the boys show a distinct aptitude for medicine. We shall make doctors of them yet." He broke off apologetically. "You will think that I have a partiality for hygienic matters, and perhaps I have. It is my theory that most crime is traceable to physical causes; to disease; and as most disease is the result of ignorance—" he shrugged. "You will see why I consider hygiene an important part of my school curriculum."

Channing was looking at him curiously. His manner had lost its patronage. "May I ask," he said, "whether the State finances this institution of yours?"

"No. The nearest school supplied by the State is miles away, over roads which for part of the year are almost impassable. That is why I happened to settle here."

"Then who does finance it? Yourself?"

The teacher smiled. "It is not 'financed' at all, nor does it need to be. My pupils supply me with food and fuel and free labor, in return for which I share with them what 'book-larnin' I happen to possess. And I wish there were more of it! What few books are needed I manage to provide. Mine is more a practical course than an academic one, you see."

Jacqueline had been listening with deep interest, her face a-glow. "And yet you think you are not a Christian!" she said softly. "Why, you are doing just such a thing as Christ might have done Himself."

"In a more up-to-date manner, I hope, young lady," shrugged the teacher. "We have gone far in 1900 years."

Jacqueline subsided, shocked. She wished Philip were there to put this irreverent person in his place.

"Have you never," questioned Channing, "considered asking for help from outside? Rich people go in for this sort of thing a great deal nowadays. It is quite a fashionable philanthropy."

"I have no acquaintance among rich people," said the other, "and I do not think my neighbors would care to accept philanthropy. They are proud."

Channing said, rather nicely, "If they are proud, they will understand that I prefer to pay for value received." He slipped into the box a bill whose denomination made the Apostle's eyes open wide.

"Fifty dollars!" he exclaimed in awe, "That's right, son—'Give up all thou hast and follow Me.' 'It is harder fer a rich man to enter into heaven than fer a camuel to go thoo the eye of a needle.' That's the way to git religion!—"

The teacher bowed, gravely. "The Woman's Ward is now an accomplished fact. Thank you, Mr. Channing."

For the first part of the journey down the mountain, the author had rather enjoyed the novel role of uncomplaining sufferer. The teacher's presence was both stimulating and reassuring. After he turned back, however, with a final look at the bandages, reaction set in. The sufferer's cheerfulness relapsed into a wincing silence, broken occasionally by faint groans, when a stumble on the part of his bearers set loose all the various aches that racked his body.

These aches were the result of exhaustion rather than of his wound; but he did not know this, nor did Jacqueline. The literary imagination pictured him in the last stages of blood-poison, and groans became more frequent. He could have found no surer way of appealing to Jacqueline's tenderness. She was one of the women to whom weakness is a thing irresistible. Her moment of ugly doubt when her lover showed panic under fire had passed instantly with a realization of his dependence upon her. To give is the instinct of such natures, maternal in their very essence. The fact that Channing seemed to need her had always been his chief hold on her fancy.

She walked beside him most of the way, leading her mule, so that she might hold his hand; yearning over him, suffering far more than he suffered, crooning tender words of encouragement.

"I wish," she said once, passionately, "that you were littler, that you were small enough to carry in my arms, so that *nothing* could hurt you!"—a sentiment which drew a glance of sympathy from even the stolid young mountaineer at the mule's head, and which set old Brother Bates to thinking wistfully of the long, long road that lay between him and the ministrations of his wife, Sally.

But the author was too far gone in anxiety and bone-weariness to care to linger just then in any primrose path of dalliance. He even wished heartily, if inaudibly, that the girl would be quiet and leave him alone.

Therefore, the final sight of Jemima and her business-like ambulance was a most welcome one.

He demurred politely when he heard where he was to be taken. "I ought not to impose on your mother's hospitality! Couldn't you get me to Farwell's house?"

"And who would take care of you there—men-servants? Nonsense!" said Jemima, briskly. "Mother wouldn't hear of it, and neither would I. Don't talk now. Just drink your coffee." (She had brought it hot in a thermos bottle.) "And thank your stars you weren't killed outright in those wild mountains. What an expedition!—feckless Jacky, that dreamer Philip, and a mad peddler! It never would have happened if I'd been at home.—Get up in front with the driver, Jack."

But this usurpation of her rights and privileges was more than the younger one could bear.

"Feckless I may be, Jemmy Kildare," she cried hotly, "but it was me who defended Mr. Channing from bears and things, me who helped with the operation, me who brought him home all by myself! And it's me he wants now—don't you, dear? Sit up in front yourself, smarty!"

Jemima obeyed, lifting astonished eyebrows. All the way to Storm her eyebrows fluttered up and down like flags in a gale of wind. She listened with straining ears to certain whisperings behind her; to certain silences more pregnant than whispering.

"So-o!" she thought. "*That's* what the child is up to! Calling him 'dear!' *That's* why she wouldn't go visiting.—Have mother and I been blind?"

CHAPTER XXXI

Channing began to be aware, despite the hospitality and comfort which were provided for him in overflowing measure, that he was seeing very little of Jacqueline under her mother's roof. In the ten days he had been there they had managed hardly more than as many minutes alone together. It was as if the entire household were entered into a coalition against them.

No sooner would Jacqueline slip into his room in the morning, bearing a dainty breakfast tray upon which she lavished all of her growing domestic artistry, than the series of interruptions began. First it would be the Madam herself, off on her rounds of inspection, but stopping long enough for a few minutes' chat with her guest. She would be followed by the elderly, apologetic housewoman, to put his things in order, answering Jacqueline's imperious demand for haste with an humble "Yais 'm, Miss Jacky, I's hurryin' fas' as a pusson kin go, but de Madam wouldn't like it a bit ef I skimped comp'ny's room."

Then would come, perhaps, Big Liza the cook, to enquire for "comp'ny's" health with elephantine coquetries; then Lige, erstwhile stable-boy and butler, now promoted to the proud role of valet, requesting orders for the day, and lingering with an appreciative ear for the conversation of his betters.

When these were out of the way, a firm tap at the door revealed Jemima, book in hand or with a basket of sewing, announcing quietly that she now had an hour or so at Mr. Channing's disposal; whereupon Jacqueline would give up in despair and flounce away, or resign herself to listen, seated behind her sister's back where she could make faces at it unseen except by the invalid.

The afternoons were quite as bad, the family solicitude being augmented by the presence of visitors, the most frequent of whom was Farwell; and in the evenings all sat together about the great fireplace in the hall—for the nights were growing chill—playing games, or listening to Jacqueline's music, or telling stories like children, until nine o'clock; at which hour Mrs. Kildare assembled her household, white and black, read a few prayers in a firm but inattentive manner, and sent everybody to bed.

The life had a simple charm which Channing savored with due appreciation; but it gave him very little of Jacqueline, and both thought longingly of the Ruin, at

present inaccessible. In one thing Jemima's inexperience played her false. To a man of Channing's temperament, occasional and tantalizing glimpses of the *inamorata* had an allure that unrestricted intercourse might soon have lessened. But considering her youth, Jemima was doing very well indeed.

Mag Henderson was the lovers' only ally. Notes still passed between them with a frequency which eluded Jemima's vigilance; and notes make very good fuel for a fire, if there is none better available.

One of these, extracted by Channing from his napkin under the very eye of the enemy, read:

Jemmy is certainly taking notice. Look out! We must put her off the track somehow. Couldn't you make love to her—a little? Not much, and, oh, please, *never* before me, because I just couldn't bear it!—This is a kiss. O

Channing appreciated this Machiavellian policy, and endeavored to put it into practice; but without success.

Nothing doing! (He wrote in answer). There's a look in that cool, greenish eye that sheds Cupid's darts like chain armor. If I must make love to any one but you, darling, it will have to be your mother. She's human. I tell you no man living would have the courage to breathe airy nothings into your sister's ear more than once.—Here's two kisses. O O

"Poor Jemmy!" thought Jacqueline, gently, when she read this.

"Poor Jemmy," indeed. Possibly she had made some such discovery for herself.

The time came when the author reluctantly admitted to himself that he had no further excuse to trespass upon Mrs. Kildare's hospitality. From the first he had been able to limp about the house, pale but courageous; now he found it difficult even to limp with any conviction. At last Farwell quite bluntly advised him that he would better be moving on.

"Your book is calling you, eh, what? If not, it ought to be. The old 'un is looking rather firm, if you ask me. Polite, of course, even cordial—it would not enter the creed of these people to be anything else, so long as one is under their roof. But firm, nevertheless."

Channing started. "You don't think she's on?"

Farwell shrugged—a gesture carefully done from the model of Philip Benoit.
"How did you explain your accident up there?"

"Told her we happened to be prowling about the hillside, and ran upon a moonshine still that didn't like us."

"Did you mention the hour of your innocent ramble?"

Channing flushed. "It was an innocent ramble, you know.—I did not mention the hour, however."

"What about Benoit? He and Mrs. Kildare are very thick."

Channing flushed again. The memory of his last conversation with the clergyman rankled. "Benoix's not the talking sort," he muttered. "Besides, he's still up in the mountains, arranging about a mission or something."

Farwell looked at him thoughtfully. "Not the talking sort—you're right, he's the acting sort. Typical Kentuckian and all that. His father's a convicted 'killer,' by the way."

"Oh, shut up!" said the author, inelegantly. "What if I have made love to Jacqueline? Does every girl who gets love made to her have to be led forthwith to the altar? The notorious Mrs. Kildare would hardly be a squeamish mama, I think. Why, she's got a common woman of the streets here in the house as a sort of maid-companion to her young daughters! What can you expect?"

"Nevertheless," demanded his friend, significantly, "how much have you seen of the girl since you have been here? You know, and I know, that the most squeamish of mamas are ladies who happen to be acquainted with the ropes themselves. *Verbum sap.*—Besides, there is your uncle. Might he have—er—conversed too freely, perhaps?"

Channing stirred uneasily. "He regards the recent episode, to which I suppose you refer, as somewhat of a blot upon the family escutcheon. It isn't likely he would mention it. But you're right—perhaps it behooves me to be moving before all is lost.—Damn it, Morty," he said savagely, "what an ass I have made of myself!"

He put his face in his hands, and groaned.

The actor regarded him curiously.

"Hard hit, eh? But you've been hard hit before, and got over it. Cheer up!"

"That's it," grunted Channing. "I will get over it, and—I don't want to, Morty! Every fellow's got a best time in his life. This is mine, and I know it. I want it to last. She's—she's sweet, I tell you! I could marry a girl like that...."

The other whistled. "Well, why not? She'd wait."

"She might—but what about me?" Channing spoke with a sort of desperation. "You know me! If I go away from her, I'm bound to get over it. If I don't go away from her—" he broke off, and walked restlessly around the room, limping occasionally from force of habit. "It's easy enough for a cold-blooded chap like

you to say 'wait.' But she doesn't help me, she doesn't help me! You phlegmatic people don't know how emotion, even the sight of emotion, goes to the head—or you'd never be actors. You wouldn't dare.—I am mad about her now, absolutely mad about her. Absurd, isn't it?" He gave a forlorn laugh. "In the words of the classic, 'I want what I want—when I want it.'"

Farwell was quite unconsciously and methodically making mental notes of his friend's gestures and expressions for future use. "The old boy's in earnest for once," he thought; and congratulated himself anew that he himself was no genius, merely a person with a knack for imitation, and a habit of keeping his finger on the pulse of the public. It puzzled him that a man who knew his own weaknesses so thoroughly should make no effort to deny or conquer them. Channing seemed to observe his ego as casually as if it belonged to a stranger; and with as little attempt to interfere with it. That, thought Farwell, must be one of the earmarks of genius. Mere men like himself, when they choose to fracture what rules have been laid down for them, do it as blindly as possible, with an ostrich-like hiding of their heads in the sand; but genius sees exactly what it is about, and does it just the same.—So ran the cogitations of Mr. Farwell.

"What would you do if you were I?" asked Channing, appealingly.

"Me? I'd go away from here while the going is good."

"Away from Storm, you mean?"

"Away from Kentucky."

Channing groaned. "Damn it all, I will, then! Though it's going to play hob with my book.—No time like the present. I'll go back with you to-day, Morty, and put my things together.—It 's been the best time of my life!" he sighed, already beginning to dramatize himself as the self-denying Spartan.

He sought out his hostess in her office an hour later, and confessed to her that he had no longer any excuse for remaining under her roof.

"We authors are such slaves," he murmured. "I must get back to my native habitat, like a bear to its cave." (he had almost said "wounded bear.")

"You are leaving Kentucky, then?"

"Yes, after a few days at Holiday Hill to get my things together."

"You are sure you are quite well and strong again?" she asked slowly.

"I fear I am. Better than I've ever been in my life, and fatter, alas! thanks to your excellent cook."

She did not give him an answering smile. "I am glad of that, because I should not like any guest, above all Jim Thorpe's nephew, to leave my house until he was quite ready to do so.—And I have been waiting," she added, very quietly, "until you were quite well and strong to speak to you about a certain matter."

His tongue went dry in his mouth; a sensation that reminded him of episodes in his schooldays, when circumstances led him not infrequently into the office of the headmaster.

Mrs. Kildare said quite suddenly, "I understand that you are courting my daughter Jacqueline, Mr. Channing."

For the moment a reply failed him. He had not expected quite such a lack of delicacy.

She went on. "Something my daughter Jemima noticed led us to that conclusion. Perhaps she was mistaken? You will understand, Mr. Channing, that I must be father as well as mother to my children."

She paused again; and still the usually fluent Channing had not found his voice.

"I thought it best," she went on, "to write to my friend Professor Thorpe, who introduced you to our house. Be kind enough to read his reply."

Channing took the letter, and made pretense of reading it, though he was only too well aware of its contents.

MY DEAR KATE:

Your letter overwhelms me. I had no idea that my nephew was on terms of any intimacy in your household. Jemima, in fact, assured me that the contrary was the case, and Jemima is not often mistaken.

I blame myself deeply for having introduced Percival at Storm without explanation. It is painful for me to have to inform you that my sister's son is at present under somewhat of a cloud. To be frank, he recently made a journey to Canada in company with a certain young person whom he had the hardihood to introduce at various hotels, clubs, etc., as his wife. When he wished to terminate

the arrangement, he found himself unable to do so because the woman entered claims upon him as what is termed a common-law wife.

The matter has with some difficulty been kept out of the public prints, and is now in the hands of lawyers for adjustment. My sister meanwhile claimed my hospitality for her son until such time as the scandal shall have blown over. I need not say that I regret having acceded to her request.

My nephew, being in no position to marry, was of course culpably wrong in offering attentions to any young girl. I can only hope that the peculiarities of his temperament prevented him from realizing what he was doing, and that he possibly regards Jacqueline merely as an extremely charming child, which she is. Surely the affair cannot go deeply with one so immature as Jacqueline.

On my return to Kentucky, I shall hasten to make apologies to you in person for myself and for my nephew. I do not trust myself to communicate with Percival at present, lest I forget what is due the undeniable ties of blood.

Your devoted servant,
THORPE.

Postscriptum: Percival is an egregious young ass.

J. T.

Channing finished the letter, adding to it a heartfelt if unspoken "Amen!"

"Well?" asked Mrs. Kildare. "What have you to say, please? Do you regard Jacqueline as merely a charming child?"

"No," he was impelled to answer. "Not—not now."

"Ah! Not now." Kate's lips set grimly, but she continued in a very quiet voice, "Have you anything to say, perhaps? I do not wish to be unfair."

Channing had a great deal to say, but he found some difficulty in saying it. He found some difficulty in meeting Mrs. Kildare's eyes. He felt more and more like a schoolboy who is about to receive a well-deserved whipping.—And then, quite suddenly, he recalled the past career of this outraged mother, with her righteous indignation; and fluency returned to him.

"My dear lady, it's all such a tempest in a tea-pot! My uncle's an old foggy. But

you're a woman of the world—you will understand.—I made a fool of myself in that affair, of course. Still, who would have supposed the woman wouldn't play the game? She's an old hand, an ex-chorus girl, and all that—Fay Lanham—any one can tell you about her. I don't know what got into her, except that I'm making a good deal of money nowadays, and I suppose she's ready to settle down. It was all quite understood, I assure you—"

Mrs. Kildare suddenly rose, and he saw for the first time how tall she was. "I am not and have never been a woman of the world, but I know men, if that is what you mean. And I know"—her voice cut like a whip—"that when these things occur among men of honor, at least the names of their victims are not mentioned."

He stared at her in genuine surprise. Chivalry in connection with Fay Lanham!—the combination was fantastic. "Oh, but—professionals!" he murmured. "I assure you she was no 'victim'—not as much a victim, perhaps, as myself."

"That does not interest me. What I wish to know is whether you are free to marry or not."

"Frankly, I don't know, Mrs. Kildare. The lawyers are to settle that."

"And not knowing, you have dared to court my daughter Jacqueline?"

The repetition of the old-fashioned phrase jarred his over-strung nerves. "My dear lady, if you mean by 'courting,' Have I proposed marriage to your daughter? I have not. If you mean, Have I made love to her? Yes. Naturally. Why not? I assure you, she has met me more than half way."

The instant the words were out, he would have given much to recall them. Why could he not have been simple and natural, told her that he loved Jacqueline, and that he was most heartily ashamed of himself?

Kate reached for the bell-rope and jerked it. When Lige came running—the service at Storm was not elegant, but it was prompt—she said, "Pack Mr. Channing's bag, and bring it down at once."

Then she spoke to Channing without looking at him. "My little girl is only seventeen. You are the nephew of my oldest and most trusted friend. It has never occurred to me to warn my daughters against gentlemen. I had forgotten it was necessary. I blame myself very deeply.—Now you will give me your word to make no effort to communicate with Jacqueline again in any way."

He protested. "Surely you will let me see her once, Mrs. Kildare! To explain?—to—to say good-by?"

"Certainly, in my presence. Your word of honor, please."

He gave it with as much dignity as he could muster.

She immediately opened the door and led him out into the hall, where Farwell and the two girls were amusing themselves with the graphophone.

"I know you will be sorry," she said from the threshold, "to hear that Mr. Channing is leaving us at once."

At the tone of her voice, Farwell gave a startled glance toward his friend, and Jemima suddenly put an arm around her sister, further rising to the occasion with polite murmurings of regret. But Jacqueline with one gesture brushed aside tact and subterfuge. She ran to Channing and caught his hand.

"Why, what's the matter?" she cried. "What has happened? Why is mother sending you away?"

"Jacqueline! Am I in the habit of sending guests away from my house?"

"You're doing it now, and I know why!" She threw back her head and laughed. "It's too late, Mummy dear! I suppose the fat's in the fire—but it was fun while it lasted! You didn't suspect your little girl was big enough to have a real sweetheart, did you?" A lovely blush spread over her face. She tugged at Channing's hand. "Come, why don't you tell her everything? Time to 'speak for yourself, John!'"

The silence puzzled her. She looked from one to the other. "Mummy, you're not really angry because we kept it a secret? Remember!—didn't you keep it a secret from your mother, too, just at first? It's a thing girls *have* to keep to themselves, just at first, till they're used to it—Jemmy," she cried, suddenly turning on her sister, "*why* are you looking so sympathetic at me?"

Channing lifted the little hand that was clutching his to his lips. "This is good-by," he said hoarsely. "I'm sorry—Your mother will explain.—I must go away."

"But you're coming back soon?"

He shook his head.

"Why, but—I'll see you again before you go, won't I?" Her voice was piteous.

"Mr. Channing has given me his word," said her mother, "to make no further attempt to communicate with you."

The girl took a long breath. Her chin lifted. "Oh! So you are still going to treat me as a little girl?" she said. "That's a mistake, Mother!"

Without any further effort to detain Channing, she walked to the stairs and up them, her chin still high.

Channing looked back once from the door. Mrs. Kildare, standing in the center of the hall, bowed to him gravely, as a queen might in dismissing an audience. Jemima, on guard at the foot of the staircase, also bowed in stately fashion.

But halfway up, Jacqueline paused and turned; and as his miserable gaze met hers, she distinctly winked at him.



CHAPTER XXXII

More and more, as the days passed, Kate congratulated herself on having taken Jacqueline's affairs in hand before any harm was done. Startled out of her own preoccupation by Jemima's discovery of how matters stood between Jacqueline and the author, she continued to watch the younger girl narrowly; but she saw no signs of secret grief, nor even of wounded pride. The girl had never been more radiant, her cheeks a-glow, her eyes so soft and lustrous that sometimes her mother's grew dim at sight of them. She remembered a time when her own mirror had shown her just such a look of brooding revery.

"Channing has done nothing more than wake her womanhood," thought the mother. "And now, now it is Philip's turn!"

Philip, since his return from the mountains, spent more time than ever at Storm. Kate noted with satisfaction the added gentleness of his manner with Jacqueline, and threw them together as much as possible. Jemima, too, seemed to have a great deal of time to give her younger sister in those days. Between them all, Jacqueline was rarely alone; but she had no longer any wish to be alone. She avoided the Ruin now, and took no more long rides about the country, except with Kate. She clung to her mother with the persistency of a child who is recovering from an illness.

Jemima had taken it upon herself to watch the mails, and reported that there were no letters for Jacqueline. Channing evidently intended to keep his word implicitly.

Jacqueline had received her mother's explanation of his conduct quite calmly.

"Let's not discuss it, Mummy," she begged, flushing a little. "Of course if Mr. Charming was already married, that way, he couldn't ask me to marry him. I understand." She attempted one little apology for him. "Geniuses aren't quite—quite like other men, and they ought to be judged differently, Mummy."

Her sister, who was present at the interview, came over to her here, and bestowed one of her rare kisses. Pride and dignity always had a strong appeal for Jemima....

When she had first gone to her mother with her suspicions, Kate was aghast. "In love with each other, child! Why, that's impossible. Where have they seen each other? He is an intellectual, sophisticated young man of the world,—and our Jacky—!"

"The attraction of opposites," Jemima reminded her.

For just one moment, the mother's thoughts were selfish. If Jacqueline after all did not marry Philip, what would become of her own vindication, that triumphant answer to the world for which she had so patiently waited? She put the old plan from her with a sigh.

"Of course Channing would be a good match for little Jacqueline. But I had hoped," she said, half to herself, "that my child might marry Philip."

Jemima gave her a queer, quick glance. "You think Philip wants that?"

Kate nodded. "Perhaps he does not know it yet, though."

The girl said haltingly, "I have always thought that Philip was rather fond of—you, Mother."

"Of me? So he is. Philip has loved me since he was a little boy," she answered, smiling tenderly. "All the more reason for him to love my Jacqueline. We are very much alike, only that she is prettier, and younger—which counts, of course.—But now you say she wants to marry this Channing."

"I do not say that he wants to marry her."

"Jemmy!"

"Well, why should he?" asked the girl, evenly. "It would not be a good match for Mr. Channing. His family are conservative Boston people. Can you imagine Jacky among conservative Boston people? Sliding down banisters, riding bareback, making eyes at all the men—"

"That is not what you mean," said her mother, rather white about the lips. "You mean the scandal about me. Yes, that would make a difference.—You think it is only a flirtation, then?"

"On his part, yes. On Jacqueline's—I don't know. But even flirtation is not very safe for Jacqueline. Remember her inheritance." Jemima met her mother's wincing eyes firmly.

"What do you mean?" gasped the older woman.

"I mean—that Jacqueline is oversexed." She had no intention of seeing her little sister come to grief for lack of frankness. "I know it, and you know it, and we both know that it is not her fault." She added after a moment, "I have reason to believe that Mr. Channing is not a marrying man. There was talk in Lexington—If I were you I should write to Professor Jim and ask him."

Kate promptly took her advice, with the results that have been seen; and her respect for the acumen of her elder child became somewhat akin to awe.

Nor was Jemima at the end of her surprises for her mother.

One morning she followed Kate rather aimlessly into her office; a thing almost unprecedented, for Mrs. Kildare was rarely disturbed in her sanctum except upon matters of business.

"You wish to see me about something, daughter?"

"Oh, no, I just wanted to talk."

Kate's heart thumped suddenly. It was a long time since the girl had sought her out for one of their old confidential chats about nothing in particular. She had been almost glad of the trouble about Jacqueline because for the moment it had brought her close again to her other child. The newly formed alliance was evidently to continue.

She said lightly, "Talk away, then!"

Jemima wandered about the room, examining this thing and that, without attention. "You've never asked me a question about the visit to Mrs. Lawton, nor why I came home sooner than I had expected to."

"I did not dare," admitted Kate, smiling a little. "I was afraid the great experiment had not proved a success."

"Oh, but it was. A great success!—That is not why I came home so soon."

"Why, then?"

Jemima gave a most unexpected answer. "Because I was homesick."

Tears of pure pleasure came into Kate's eyes.

"You see, I'd never been away from home before, and I had no idea how much I should miss you-all. But people were very kind to me; on Professor Jim's account, I think."

"Dear old Jim!" said Kate, softly. "He deserves loyal friends, because he knows so well how to be one.—I have missed him lately. When is he coming home again?"

"To-day. He will be out to-morrow for supper, as usual."

"Oh, yes, it is Friday, isn't it? What an odd idea, that lecture tour!—so unlike Jim. He has always been so shy and retiring. I wonder what made him undertake it?"

"I did," said Jemima.

"You?"

"Why, yes. Some of his lectures seemed to me most unusual, much too good to waste there in Lexington. So when the opportunity was offered to him to speak in several other places, I persuaded him to accept it. We went over the talks together and made them simpler; more popular, you know. Sometimes he forgets that every audience is not composed of scholars."

Kate stared at her child in amused respect. "Do you mean to say you have added literary censorship to your various other accomplishments?"

Jemima smiled deprecatingly. "I was glad to be able to help him a little, after all he has done for us.—Look here, Mother,"—she began to finger the papers on the desk—"do you care at all for Professor Jim?"

"Of course I do!"

"No—I don't mean that way. I mean—Are you ever going to marry him, do you think?"

Kate's speechless surprise was sufficient answer.

"Because if you're not,"—the girl cleared her voice—"don't you think it would be kinder to say so once and for all? You see, if he were sure you would not have him" (suddenly hot color surged over her face), "he might want to marry some one else."

"Old Jim marry! Jemima! What are you driving at? What can you mean?"

"I mean—me," gasped the girl, and suddenly turned and fled from the room.

It took Kate some moments to regain sufficient presence of mind to follow her. She found her level-headed daughter face downward among the pillows of her bed, sobbing most humanly.

Kate sat down beside her and pulled the golden head over into her arms, where she smoothed and caressed it as she had rarely done since the girl's babyhood.

"Now tell mother all about it. What put such a strange idea into your wise little old pate? Not Jim himself—I'm sure of that."

"Oh, no!—But it isn't a strange idea," protested the muffled voice from her lap. "I don't want to be an old maid—" (sniff, sniff). "He hasn't asked me yet, exactly—but he would if he were quite sure you didn't want him—" (sob). "And I'm twenty years old, now. I want to be married, like other women."

"Only twenty years old!" repeated her mother, gently.

"Oh, I know it sounds young, but it isn't always as young as it sounds" said the girl with unconscious pathos. "Look at me, Mother—I'm older than you, right now! I don't believe I ever was very young."

"But you may be yet," said Kate. "With your first lover, your first baby—Ah, child, child, you *must* not run the risk of marrying without love! You don't know what love can do to you."

"Yes, I do," whispered Jemima.

"What! You can't tell me you're in love with old Jim?"

The girl sat erect, and propounded certain decided views of hers on love and marriage as earnestly as if her little nose were not pink with embarrassed tears, and her eyes swimming with them like a troubled baby's.

"Being in love doesn't seem as important to me as it does to some people. Of course it's necessary, or the world would not go on. There has to be some sort of glamour to—to make things possible.—But I'm sure it's not a comfortable feeling to live with, any more than hunger would be.—Being in love does quite as much harm as good, anyway. Half the crimes in the world are the result of it, and all the unnecessary children. I don't want love, Mother! It hurts, and it makes

fools of otherwise intelligent persons. I shouldn't like, ever, to lose my self-control.—And the feeling doesn't last! Look at you, for instance. I suppose once you were in love with my father?"

Kate nodded.

"And then in a very little while you were in love with—some one else. Did it make you any happier, all that loving, or any better? I think not. Only unhappier, in the long run.—No, no, Mother! I don't want it. I don't want *any* emotions!"—She spoke with a queer distaste, the same fastidious shrinking with which she had often watched Jacqueline cuddling Mag's baby. "I only want to be safe."

"Marriage isn't always safe, my little girl."

"Mine will be. That's why I've chosen Professor Jim."

Kate made a helpless gesture with her hands. "Child, you don't know what you're giving up! You can't!"

Jemima swallowed hard. The confession she had to make was not easy. "Yes, I do. Because I tried love first, to be sure."

"My dear! You—tried love?"

"There was a young man—You remember, Jacqueline called him 'the most beautiful man in the room'? He was very handsome, and—nice to me. That's why I went to visit Mrs. Lawton, chiefly. I wanted to see more of him.—Whenever he touched my hand, or even my dress, little shivers ran up my back. I—I liked it. That's being in love, isn't it? Sometimes we went driving, in a buggy. Once it was moonlight, and I knew when we started that something was going to happen.—I meant it to. I flirted with him."

"Did you, dear!" murmured the mother, between tears and laughter. "I didn't suppose you knew how!"

"Oh, those things come, somehow. I've watched Jacky.—After a while, he kissed me. But do you know, Mother, that was the end of everything! I stopped having thrills the minute he did it. His mouth was so—so mushy, and his nose seemed to get in the way.—Still, I went on flirting. I wanted to give him every chance.—He didn't kiss me again, though. When we got home I asked him why that was. He said it was because he respected me too much."

She made a scornful gesture, "You see, it's just as I thought! Kisses and all that sort of thing have nothing to do with respect, with real liking. And if my own thrills couldn't outlast one moonlight buggy-ride, they would not do to marry on. It will be better for me to marry on respect."

"But poor Jim!" said Kate, unsteadily. "Must he, too, marry on respect?"

Jemima met her gaze candidly. "Why, no. Men are different, I think, even intellectual ones. He has thrills. I can feel him having them, when I dance with him. That's how I knew he wanted me. And I'm rather glad of it," she finished, her voice oddly kind.

Kate at the moment could think of nothing further to say. The thing was incomprehensible to her, appalling, yet strangely touching. This twenty-year-old girl, groping her way toward safety, that refuge of the middle-aged, as eagerly as other young things grasp at happiness, at romance!—She recalled phrases spoken by another startled mother to another girl quite as headstrong: "You are only a child! He is twice your age! You don't *know*!"

She did not give them utterance. What was the use? In this, if in nothing else, Jemima was her mother's daughter. She would always make her own decisions.

The girl went on presently to mention various advantages of the proposed marriage.

"Of course Professor Jim is quite rich—Oh, yes, didn't you know that? I asked him his income, and he told me. With that, and the money you have promised me, we can travel and see the world, and keep a good house to come back to. I could do a good deal for Jacqueline, of course. You will visit us, too, whenever you like. It may be my only chance of getting away from Storm, you see. I do not meet many young men, and I'm not the sort they are apt to marry, anyway."

"Are you so anxious to get away from Storm?" interrupted poor Kate. "You said you were homesick for us."

"And will be again, often. But that's a weakness one has to get over. And then, though I have been happy here, I've been unhappy, too. Lonely and a little—ashamed, lately." She forgot for the moment to whom she was speaking. Kate had ceased to be a person, was only "mother" to her, a warm, enfolding comprehension, such as perhaps children are aware of before they come to the hour of birth.—"Oh, it *will* be good to live among people who don't know, who

aren't always staring and whispering behind their hands about us Kildares!" she sighed.

Kate forced herself to say, impartially, "Lexington is not far away. I am afraid there will always be people there who know about us Kildares, dear."

"Lexington?" The girl's lip curled. "You don't suppose I shall let my husband spend the rest of his life in a little place like that! He has been wasted there too long already, he is a brilliant scholar, Mother, far more brilliant than people realize, too modest and simple to make the most of himself. You wait! I'll see to that."

Kate gave up. She lifted her daughter in her arms, and held her close for a long moment.

"You must do whatever you think best, my girl."

"Yes, Mother. I always do," said Jemima.

CHAPTER XXXIII

And so Mrs. Kildare had her second interview with a man who wanted, not herself, but one of her children. It made her feel very old, as if she were becoming a looker-on at life, almost an outsider.

Jemima had firmly led her choice to the door of the office and left him there, with reassuring whispers that were quite audible to the mother within. It was evident that she was bestowing counsel, and straightening his tie, and otherwise preparing him for conquest.

"Well, old Jim?" Kate looked up as he entered with a tremulous smile that drove from his mind irrevocably the fine speech he had prepared.

The professor was attired in new and dapper tweeds; the eye-glasses upon his aristocratic nose had dependent from them a rather broad black ribbon; and the shirtfront across which it dangled was of peppermint-striped silk, its dominant color repeated in silk socks appearing above patent-leather shoes. But dazzling raiment did not seem to produce in the inner man that careless courage which, as a psychologist, he had been led to expect.

"To think of coming to this house, to this room, and asking your permission to—to marry some one else! Kate," he blurted out, "I never felt such a fool in all my life!"

"And you never looked so handsome. Why, Jim, you're a boy again!" She rose and put her two hands on his shoulders, studying his sensitive, plain face, forcing his embarrassed eyes to meet hers. "My dear friend, my dear friend—So after all I am able to give you your happiness," she said softly, and kissed him for the first time in their acquaintance.

In such fashion was her consent to his marriage with Jemima asked and granted; and with it full forgiveness for his treachery to a devotion of over twenty years.

They turned their attention hastily away from sentiment to settlements. Thorpe was astonished by the amount of the dower Kate spoke of settling upon Jemima.

"Why, it is a small fortune! How did you make all this money?"

"Mules," she said. "Also hogs and dairy products, my three specialties. Mustn't the old horse-breeding Kildares turn over in their graves out there at the desecration? When I came into the property, I soon saw that racing stock was a luxury we could not afford, so I used the grass lands for mules instead. We have been lucky. Storm mules have the reputation now that Storm thoroughbreds used to have in Basil's day: and they sell at a far surer profit.

"Then I sent to an agricultural college for the best scientific farmer they had, and the best dairyman—a big expense, but they have paid. Also, we sell our products at city prices, since I persuaded the railroad to give us a spur here. We've cleared most of the land that Basil kept for cover, now, and are using every acre of it.—Oh, yes, I have made money, and I will make more. When I die the girls are going to be rich. The original Storm property will be divided between them then, according to Basil's will, you remember."

"I do remember it," said Thorpe, quietly. "There was another provision in that will.... The girls will never inherit Storm, my dear, because some day Benoit will come back to you."

She looked away out of the window. "I have given up hope, Jim. Months now, and no word from him. He has gone. Philip thinks so, too.—But you are right. If he does come, the girls will not inherit, because I shall marry him. Even if we are old people, I shall marry him."

She had lifted her head, and her voice rang out as it had rung through the prison when she cried to her lover that she would wait.

Thorpe kissed her hand. "And when that happens," he said gently, "I want you to know that Jemima will understand. I can promise that. I shall teach my wife to know her mother better."

She smiled at him, sadly. She suspected that he was promising a miracle he could not perform, counting upon an influencing factor that did not exist. "Was he fatuous enough to believe that Jemima loved him? Her fears for her child's happiness suddenly became fears for the happiness of this life-long friend. She felt that she must warn him.

"I wonder if you know just the sort of woman you are marrying, Jim? Jemima is very intelligent, and like many intelligent people she is a little—ruthless. Honorable, clear-sighted; but hard. She is more her father's child than mine. I do not always understand her, but—I do know that she is not sentimental, Jim dear."

He touched her hand reassuringly. "She has told me that she is not marrying me for love, if that is what you are trying to say. She has given me to understand, quite conscientiously, that she is merely accepting the opportunities I can offer her—I, a dull, middle-aged, dyspeptic don in a backwater college!" he chuckled. "But," he added—and the glow in his eyes was quite boyish—"I have had occasion to observe in Jemima certain symptoms—a proprietary interest in my belongings, for instance, my rooms, my welfare, my health, my—er—personal appearance—which lead me to believe that her regard for me is not entirely intellectual. In fact, I know rather more about Jemima's inner workings, so to speak, than she knows herself. One is not a psychologist for nothing! The—er—the tender passion manifests itself in various ways. Some women love with their emotions, as it were; some, God bless them! with their capable hands and brains."

Kate was deeply touched. "Perhaps you're right, Jim. I hope so, my dear. I do hope so!"

Jacqueline received the news of her sister's engagement with shouts of glee. "What a joke on you, Mummy! *What* a joke! Old Faithful carried off under your very nose, by your own child! And Jemmy, of all people! That's the way she did to that young man at Goddy's party. Good old Jemmy! When she warms up, I tell you she can trot a heat with the best."

"Jacky, hush!" Kate laughed despite herself. "You're getting too big to use that stable-talk. You would suppose Jemima had actually tried to entice him out of my clutches!"

"And didn't she, didn't she just? Why, you blessed innocent, she's had this up her sleeve for some time! I *thought* she was being mighty attentive to Goddy, teaching him to dance, and making him ties and all—only it never occurred to me she'd want—this!—Gracious!" she said, suddenly grave, "you don't suppose she kisses him, Mummy?"

"I hope so, dear. Why not? You've kissed him often enough yourself."

"And shall again, the funny old lamb! But not that way. Ugh!"

Mrs. Kildare winced to realize how far the education of her youngest had proceeded without her supervision.

Jacqueline's volatile thoughts had taken a new direction. "That means Jemmy is

going away to live. 'Way off to Lexington."

Kate sighed. "Farther than that, if I know Jemima."

"Then," said the girl, slowly, "when—if—I ever go away, you'd be here all alone, Mummy!"

"Mothers expect that, dear. Always we know that some day we shall be left alone. But we do not mind, we are even glad. We risk our lives to give life to our children, and we want them to have it all, life at its fullest. Otherwise we feel that we have been failures, somehow. Breath is such a small part of life!—So when your time comes, too, my girlie, you are not to hesitate because of me. Take your future in your two hands—just as all your many mothers have done before you.—Women have even less right to show cowardice than men" (it was a favorite theme with her), "because they have to be the mothers of men, and the maternal strain is nearly always the dominant—or so Jim Thorpe says—But I don't believe that you, at least, will ever go very far away from your mother!"

She was thinking, of course, of Philip.

Jacqueline was rather pale. Her eyes dropped. "I'm not so sure. I've been thinking lately—Mummy, could I possibly go to New York? I'm so tired of home!"

Kate was troubled. This restlessness was the first indication she had noticed that the affair with Channing might have left its effect. But she said, as if the girl's wish were very natural, "To New York? That's not impossible. It's a long time since I have been out of the State myself, and I've been thinking for some time of taking you and Jemmy for a trip. Suppose we go to New York, all three of us, and buy Jemmy's trousseau? And we'll take Philip, too—it's always pleasant to have a man about. We'll have a regular old orgy of theaters and shops and galleries, such as I used to have sometimes with my father and mother, years ago. Would that please you?"

"Oh, it would be wonderful! But—" the girl crimsoned, "that is not quite what I meant, Mummy darling. When I go to New York, I want to stay. For years."

"Years! But why?"

"To study music. To begin my career."

Kate sat down in the nearest chair. Since childhood Jacqueline had been talking

at intervals about this career of hers, an ambition varying in scope from journalism to, more latterly, the operatic stage. It was a favorite family joke, Jacqueline's career. And here it stared her suddenly in the face, no longer a joke. Jacqueline was in earnest.

She watched her mother's face anxiously. "I know it would be horribly expensive, lessons and all. But we can afford to be expensive, can't we?"

Kate's lips set. "We can, but we won't. Not in the matter of careers. What put this into your head, my girl?"

"It's always been there, I think. But you remember Mr. Channing spoke to you —"

"Ah, yes, Mr. Channing! I do remember; but that is hardly a recommendation that appeals to me," said Kate, drily.

"Mr. Channing has heard all the great singers of the world, and knows them, too." Jacqueline spoke with a firmness new to her. "And if he says I have a voice, I have. I ought to waste no more time, Mother."

"I also have a 'voice,' my dear, and I've found it extremely useful without having recourse to a career."

"How—useful!"

"Singing lullabies to my children, for one thing. It did not seem to me a waste of time—No, no, my girly, no stage women in this family! We've been conspicuous enough without that."

"Would you really mind so very much?" asked Jacqueline, wistfully.

"So much," answered her mother, smiling but grave, "that I should lock you into the cellar on a bread-and-water diet, at the first hint of such a thing! Understand me, I forbid it absolutely. You may put this nonsense out of your head."

Kate had rarely occasion to speak to her children in such a tone, and Jacqueline looked at her, rather frightened. But she said nothing.

"Why, Jacqueline, little daughter, why should you spend your youth and your loveliness on a public that will cast you aside like an old glove when it is worn out? No, no, there's a larger purpose for you in life than any mere career. Careers are for the women who miss the other things, and who use in default the best

they have. Fame, bah! It does not outlast a generation—or if it does, you will not know it. What you have to give will outlast many generations, will never die, will become part of the muscle and sinew and back-bone of your nation. Sons! Big, clean, lusty, well-born children!—Why, don't you suppose you and my clever Jemima—yes, and even my little crippled Katharine—were better gifts for me to bring the world than a mere passing pleasure in my voice?—Ah, Jacky, there's just one career open to women like you and me. You know very well what it is."

The girl was oddly stirred. When her mother spoke like this, she always thought, for some reason, of a statue she had never seen, a great bronze Liberty, with torch aloft, lighting into her safe harbor the ships of all the world.

But she said, after a moment, "You put me on a par with Mag Henderson, Mother. Has she fulfilled the purpose of her creation, then?"

Kate was startled anew. Jacqueline in the rôle of thinker was unexpected. But she answered, honestly as always, "I believe she has. Nature often makes use of unworthy vessels to accomplish her own ends—poor little vessels! Mag is waste, perhaps. Her child will not be waste.—I'll see to that. So the balance of economy is kept.—But you are no unworthy vessel, Jacqueline, thank God!"

The girl went to the window and stood looking out, over the garden that merged into a pasture, and so down gradually into the ravine where the ruined slave-house stood.

"Suppose," she asked in a muffled voice, "suppose I couldn't marry? What then?"

Kate believed she understood. The affair with Channing had left more of a hurt than she had realized. Jacqueline, at seventeen, doubtless considered herself a blighted being.—She controlled the smile that twitched at her lips, and said cheerfully, "Then you will just have to be a prop for my declining years. You won't begrudge me a prop, dear? Surely *you* don't want to go away from me?"

The unconscious emphasis on the pronoun went to Jacqueline's heart. She remembered the day Jemima had shut them out into the world of people who were not Kildares, she and her mother together...

She came back at a run, and plumped herself down on Kate's knees, great girl that she was, hiding her face in that sheltering breast, holding her mother tight,

tight, as if she could never let her go.

Kate returned the embrace with interest. She, too, remembered.

"It will be something bigger than a career that takes you away from your mother!" she whispered.

"Something bigger than a career," echoed Jacqueline, clinging closer.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Kate broached the subject of the New York trip at supper that night, but met with no encouragement whatever from her elder daughter, somewhat to her surprise.

"What is the use of buying an expensive trousseau? Mag sews quite well enough, and anyway I have more clothes now than I know what to do with," she argued practically. "If you think I haven't enough lingerie and all that, I can take some of Jacky's. It seems rather mean to desert a man just as soon as you get engaged to him. Besides, James and I shall be going to New York next month, on our wedding-trip."

"Next month?" cried Kate.

"Why, yes, Mother. There's no use putting it off, I think. James has been alone so many years; and he certainly needs some one to look after him. If you could see the pile of perfectly good socks in his closet that only need a little darning!" She spoke unsentimentally as ever; but there was a tone in her voice that made her mother give her hand a little squeeze.

"Very well, dear. You shall be married to-morrow, if you like."

"To-morrow is a little soon. Suppose we say three weeks from to-day?"

Kate gasped, but consented.

Preparations for the wedding went on apace at Storm, though it was to be a very quiet affair, not the fashionable ceremony, with bridesmaids and champagne, for which Jemima's heart privately yearned.

"I don't know any girls well enough to ask them to be bridesmaids," she explained wistfully to her fiance, who made a mental note to supply her with young women friends hereafter, if he had to hire them.

Nevertheless, it was something of a ceremony. The Madam did not have a daughter married every day. For days beforehand the negroes were busy indoors and out, cleaning, painting and whitewashing, exhibiting a tendency to burst into syncopated strains of Lohengrin whenever Jemima or the Professor came into view. The kitchen chimney belched forth smoke like a factory; for though no

invitations were sent out, it was inevitable that the countryside, white and black, would arrive to pay its respects to the newly wedded, and Big Liza, with an able corps of assistants, was preparing to welcome them in truly feudal fashion.

Gifts began to arrive, silver and glass and china from friends of the Professor and business connections of Mrs. Kildare. A magnificent service of plate came from Jemima's great-aunt, for whom she was named. ("We must make friends with Aunt Jemima, James," was the bride's thoughtful comment on the arrival of this present.) Philip could not afford to buy a handsome enough gift, and so parted with the bronze candelabra which Farwell had so covetously admired; a sacrifice which did much to break down the hauteur of the bride's recent manner with him. She knew how well he loved his few Lares and Penates.

There were other presentations of less conventional nature. These Professor Thorpe, whom the panting Ark conveyed nightly from the university to Storm and back again, eyed with a mixture of interest and dismay.

"This suckling pig, now," he murmured. "How are we to accommodate him in a city apartment, Jemima? And that highly decorative rooster—I fear we shall have some difficulty in persuading my janitor to accept him as an inmate. Do you suppose *all* your mother's tenants will feel called upon to supply us with livestock?"

"Oh, no, Goddy! Look at this crazy quilt," chuckled Jacqueline, busily unwrapping parcels, "It is made of the Sunday dresses of all Mrs. Sykes' friends and relations. She thought it might remind Jemmy of home. It will. Oh, it will! You've only to look at it and you'll see the entire congregation nodding over one of Phil's sermons!" She made a little face at the cleric, who responded by rumpling her hair. "Then the Housewives' League mother organized has crocheted enough perfectly hideous lace for all the sheets and things. Your bed-linen is going to bristle with it like a porcupine."

"It's very good of them," said Jemima, reprovingly. "As for the livestock, James, we can eat it.—Look at this barrel of potatoes, and these home-cured hams, and all the pickle. Stop laughing at my friends!"

Thorpe murmured meek apologies.

The evening before the wedding, Big Liza came striding into the hall where the family sat assembled, bearing aloft a large round object wrapped in newspaper.

"Huh! Look at what dat 'ooman Mahaly had the owdaciousity to bring fo' a bridal gif'!" she snorted, swelling with indignation. "Reck'n she 'lows dey ain't nary a cook at Sto'm good enough to make no bride-cake. Allus was a biggity, uppity piece, dat Mahaly!"

She placed it on a table, and waddled scornfully out again.

The professor undid the wrappings in a somewhat gingerly manner. There was an element of the unexpected about his wedding-gifts which intrigued curiosity. This time he gave a rather startled exclamation, blushed and backed away.

It was a mammoth white cake, which bore, besides certain garlands and other decorations of a distinctly Cubist tendency, the legend done in silver candies: FOR THE BABY.

"D-dear me!" murmured the professor, hastily shrouding it once more in its wrappings.

"That means Jemima," smiled Kate. "To Mahaly, Jemmy has always been 'The Baby.' She nursed her, you know."

"Nursed me—that mulatto woman who lives in the white people's neighborhood? I never knew that," said the girl. "How strange! She never comes here with the other old servants, even at Christmas time, and I've never gone to see her. Why was I not told?"

Kate did not answer.

"Did you have to dismiss her, Mother—was it that? Was she dishonest, or something of the sort?"

"No," said Kate, with an odd reluctance. "She was a very good servant in every way, and perfectly devoted to you and to little Katharine."

Jemima looked at her in surprise. It was very unlike the Madam to lose touch with any creature, human or otherwise, who had once faithfully served her. She waited for an explanation.

"Mahaly has never come to Storm," said Kate in a low voice, "since your father's death. She was his servant for many years before I came here."

"Oh!" said Jemima. The negress had evidently been one of her father's loyal supporters, resenting what she must have seen at Storm. "I see! In that case,

Mother, I should like to do something for her. People who are faithful to my father—"

There was an uncomfortable stir in the room.

"Mahaly has been given the cottage in which she lives, as a present from you and little Katharine," interrupted Kate.

"I am glad of that," said the girl with a certain stateliness. "I was going to say that people who are faithful to my father must never be forgotten by his children."

"Nor by his wife," said Kate, with quiet dignity....

Despite the preoccupation of the wedding, Kate did not make the mistake of neglecting Jacqueline's affairs. She had had her warning. Moreover, though she would have denied it even to herself, the younger girl had come to occupy a far larger share of her heart than had even been given to the self-reliant Jemima. She had felt, lately (and the thought frightened her) that in watching Jacqueline she was watching her own youth over again. What possibilities lay in the girl's nature for strength and weakness, for hot-headed folly, for sacrifice and passion and unselfish service, she knew as do those who have been the victims of such natures themselves. Jacqueline, if it were in human possibility to compass it, should profit by her mother's bitter mistakes.

She redoubled her vigilance on learning that Channing had after all not left the vicinity. Philip had passed him one day in one of Farwell's machines, and hastened to report the encounter at Storm.

"Perhaps he has come back for your wedding," she said thoughtfully to Thorpe.

The Professor's lips closed grimly. "He is not invited to my wedding. J. Percival and I have, so to speak, severed diplomatic relations. Look out for him, Kate!"

Philip, too, was not so certain as she that Channing was keeping to his promise with regard to Jacqueline.

But the girl was under her mother's eye all day long, excited as Jemima herself over the preparations, stitching with unwonted diligence on the bridal finery, running errands, seeing visitors, happy and busy and asking nothing better than to be with Kate or her sister whatever they were about. It was a little touching to both, as if the madcap girl had suddenly realized that the old companionship of

home was about to be broken up, and wanted to have as much of it as possible.

There was no hour in the full days when she might have seen Channing, even had she wished. And Jemima continued to watch her mail with a hawk's eye.

Channing's word of honor not to communicate with the girl would have seemed, in itself, an insufficient safeguard to Kate, had not her knowledge of men reassured her. She believed that her daughter was not the type to arouse more than a passing interest in such a man as Channing. Her beauty, her flattered response to his attentions, her fresh, unsophisticated charm of gaiety, might well appeal to him for a time, adding the fillip of the unaccustomed to a jaded palate. But it was an appeal that must be constantly renewed, that would not outlast any continued absence. She believed that Channing, while he would accept with eagerness whatever good thing came to his hand, was too indolent and too self-centered to overcome many obstacles in the pursuit of a fancy.

Jacqueline herself was reassuring, too. Her manner of receiving the news of Channing's perfidy had showed her no stranger to the Kildare pride. She seemed to regard the affair as a closed incident.

"Do you think," said Kate proudly to Philip, "that my daughter would care to have anything to do with the man, now that she knows his utter unworthiness?"

"It is just possible that she was attracted to Channing by other qualities than worthiness," commented Philip. "Weakness, for instance. Women have been attracted by weakness before this."

"Phil, Phil," Kate laughed, "you are an 'elderly young man,' as Jacky says! Almost as elderly and wise as our Jemima. Stop croaking and come and see the new wedding garments Mag is putting on my old chairs."

She flung an affectionate arm about him, and led him indoors, his heart beating too hard and suddenly to make further speech possible just then.—Yet there was much he wished to say, and not about Jacqueline. These wedding preparations stirred certain yearnings in his breast, certain eager hopes. It seemed to him that his lady was warmer lately, more approachable, more present, somehow. Was she, too, stirred by all this thought and talk of marriage? It was hard to wait patiently. Yet he was too good a horseman to rush his fences.

Mag on her knees, her mouth full of pins, was cleverly fitting slips of gay-flowered cretonne over the masculine chairs and sofas, assisted, or at least not

hindered, by Jacqueline.

"The old hall won't know itself, will it?" cried the latter, waving them a welcome. "All got up in ruffles and things, looking as frivolous as the lion in the circus with a bow on his tail!"

She ran after her disappearing mother with some question, and Philip, finding himself alone with Mag, was reminded of a certain duty he had to perform.

He stood a moment gazing down at her, she so intent upon her labors that she did not notice he was there. As always, the pathos of the girl moved him strongly; so young she was to be already one of life's failures, so helplessly a victim of early environment. Believed from care and hardship, well-fed and well-clothed and sheltered, she had grown sleek and soft and pretty as a petted kitten, and there should have been a look of content about her which he missed. Her mouth drooped a little, and now and then a visible shadow crossed her face.

He sighed. Rumor was once again busy with the name of Mag Henderson. Sometimes Philip wearied of his job as the neighborhood's spiritual policeman.

He asked gently: "Mag, you're not happy here at Storm?"

She looked up with a start. "Why—I didn't know no one was there! Why, yes, sir. They're real good to me and baby here."

"And you like your work, don't you?"

Again he noticed the shadow on her face. "I reckon so—as well as I'd like any work." People were always frank with Philip. "A gal gits kind o' tired of workin' all the time, though. I make dresses and trim hats for most of the ladies round about, now, and they pay me good, too. But...."

"But it's all work and no play, eh?"

"That's it," she said, grateful for his understanding. "I don't never have no fun. I ain't got no gen'leman friends, nor nothing. What's the use of havin' good clothes, and lookin' pretty and all, ef you don't get to go somewhere so that folks kin see you? I'm *tired* of bein' looked down on," she complained fretfully. "I ain't got a friend on this place 'cep'n Miss Jacky, and now she—"

Mag stopped short. Philip wondered what she had been about to say, but he was too good a confessor to force confidences.

"You've always got the Madam," he said.

"Yes, but she don't care nothing about *me*. She's kind enough, but so's she kind to any cur dog that comes along. What am I to her?"

"You've got your baby, Mag."

But the childish, fretful face did not soften. "Babies are more trouble than company to a person. Besides, she likes Miss Jacky now better'n her own mammy. She cries to go to her from me.—It's fun I want, like other gals. Everybody, it seems like, has fun but me, even the niggers. Parties, and picnics, and weddin's and all—Oh, my, but don't I *wisht* I was Miss Jemmy!"

Evidently the wedding preparations had stirred longings in more hearts than Philip's.

"Even if she is marryin' an old man an' a cast-off beau of her ma's, look at the ring he give her! A di'mon' big as my thumb-nail. She let me put it on my finger once, and it looked grand. Oh, my, I'd do 'most anything for a ring like that!"

"Would you, really, Mag?" he asked curiously, wondering at the fascination shining bits of stone possess for women far more civilized than this little savage. "Do you think a diamond ring would make you any happier?"

"In co'se it would," she said, impatiently.

"Why?"

"Oh, I dunno—it would make me look prettier, I expect."

He said, kindly: "You do not need to look any prettier. You are quite pretty enough, as it is."

Her whole expression changed. She gave him a conscious upward glance. "Am I? Why, Mr. Philip, I never thought a preacher'd notice how a gal looked!"

It told him all and more than he wanted to know. He continued to meet her gaze with grave eyes, and after a moment her own dropped.

"'T ain't much use bein' pretty round here," she muttered. "The city's the place for pretty gals."

"Who told you that? The drummer I saw you talking with behind the village store a few days ago?"

She tossed her head. "Well, what if it was? I got the right to pass the time o' day with a fellow, ain't I? You'd suppose I was in prison!"

Philip sought out his lady again with a troubled heart. "Sorry to croak any more at this busy time, but Mag will bear watching. She's been seen about with men once or twice lately."

Kate sighed with exasperation. "'Give a dog a bad name.' I shall have to acquire the hundred eyes of Argus to keep up with my household nowadays, it seems!"

It was not the first warning that had come to her about her protégée. Big Liza, for years her confidential friend and ally, had said to her one day: "Dat white gal ain't keerin' so much about de chile no mo', Miss Kate. She's allus a-leavin' her with me, ef Miss Jacky ain't got her. Gawd He knows I ain't complainin' about havin' a chile aroun', seein' as how I done raise nine of my own, right heah under ma kitchen stove, like so many little puppy-dawgs. But dey wuz cullud chillun, an' dat's diffunt. Is dishyer hot kitchen any place to raise up a w'ite chile in? Now I ax you! 'Pears to me like dat gal don' keer for nothin' no mo' but traipsin' down to de sto' an' gallivantin' roun' de roads wid her fine clo'es on. She ain't no better'n a yaller nigger gal!"

Kate asked reluctantly (she did not take kindly to spying), "Have you ever seen her with men, Liza?"

The black woman compressed her lips. "No'm, Miss Kate, I ain't nebber prezackly *seed* 'em—but laws, honey, dat kin' ob goin's-on don't aim to be seed!"

Now that she had a more definite rumor to go by, Kate said sorrowfully to Philip, "You told me it was a mistake to bring her here in the first place. It seems to me I make a great many mistakes!" She sighed again.

"At least," said he, "they are the sort of mistakes that will get you into heaven."

She laughed mirthlessly. "You always talk, you clergymen, as if you had special advices from heaven in your vest-pockets!"

But she was comforted, nevertheless. She would have found it hard to do without Philip's steady adulation.



CHAPTER XXXV

The night after the wedding proved to be for Kate Kildare one of the *nuits blanches* that were becoming common with her in the past few weeks. For many years the cultivated habit of serenity had carried her through whatever crises came into her life, following her days of unremitting labor with nights of blessed oblivion. But lately she found herself quite often waking just before daylight, with that feeling of oppression, that blank sense of apprehension, that is the peculiar property of "the darkest hour."

This night she occupied her brain as soothingly as possible with details of the wedding; smiling to remember the unaccustomed frivolity of the old hall, which the negroes had decorated with flowers and ribbons placed in all likely and unlikely places. Every antler sported its bow of white; the various guns which hung along the walls, as they had hung in the days of Basil's grandfather, each trailed a garland of blossoms; even the stuffed racehorse was not forgotten, so that he appeared to be running his final race with Death while incongruously munching roses.

Jacqueline as bridesmaid was, oddly enough, the only one of the wedding-party who seemed in the least upset. She was white as a sheet and trembling visibly, and when Philip greeted Jemima formally as "Mrs. Thorpe," she suddenly burst into tears, and refused to be comforted.

"He's so *old*!" she sobbed on her mother's shoulder. "Oh, poor Blossom! He's so *old*!"

Yet the bridegroom had looked to Kate's eyes amazingly young; and as he stood gazing down at the exquisite little white-clad figure beside him, there was such an expression of pride in his face, of incredulous, reverent happiness, that it was all his new mother-in-law could do to keep from kissing him before the ceremony was over.

Jemima herself was as calm as might have been expected; perhaps calmer. At the critical moment, when Philip's grave voice was beginning: "Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God"—the bride was heard to murmur to her attendant, "Jacky, pull my train out straight." Thereafter, she fixed her eye upon a certain flintlock rifle over the mantel-piece, which had won the first

Kentucky Kildare his way into the virgin wilderness, and went through the ceremony with the aplomb of a general directing his forces into battle. The mother wondered what the girl was thinking of, staring so fixedly at the old rifle. Perhaps she was vowing to be worthy of it in the new wilderness she was about to tread.

Afterwards for an hour or so Mr. and Mrs. Thorpe had graciously received the uninvited guests of both colors who had come "to see the bride off." Then the two sisters went upstairs together to change into the going-away dress; and Kate, presently following, found Jemima alone.

"I thought you would come, Mother. That's why I sent Jacky away."

Kate, a little tremulous herself, had counted upon the bride's composure to carry the day; but behold! it was suddenly a thing of the past. She ducked her head and ran into her mother's arms as if she were trying to hide from something, breathless, panic-stricken; and Kate soothed her silently with tender hands.

Presently Jemima whispered in a queer little voice, "Mother? Now that we are both married women, tell me—Was my father—was my father good to you?"

"My little girl! You need never worry about Jim's being good to you."

"Oh, Jim—of course!—I'm not thinking of him, I'm thinking of you. If—if my father was not good to you, I can understand—I see—"

Then Kate realized what she was trying to say. This cold, proud child of hers was willing to give up her pride in her father, if so be she might hold fast again to the old faith in her mother.

The temptation was great, but Kate put it from her. She could not rob dead Basil of his child's respect.

"You must never blame your father, dear, for any weakness of mine," she said, steadily.

But the girl still clung to her, whispering another strange thing. "Often, when I am half awake, I remember some one—Not you, Mother. Some one with a deep laugh, whose coat feels smooth on my cheek—who used to toss me up in the air, and play with me, and pet me if I was frightened. I always want to cry when he goes.—Is that my father, Mother?"

A pulse beat thickly in Kate's throat. She had some difficulty in answering. "Perhaps. Who knows? A baby's dreams, dear. But cling to them, cling to them —"

She knew very well it was not Jemima's father, but the man who should have been her father, Jacques Benoix. So, after all, the first loves of life are not forgotten, even by Jemimas....

Lying there, despite the depressing hour, content stole over her; a feeling that all was well with her elder child, at least.

She turned her thoughts to Jacqueline. There, too, things were going better. None of Philip's growing interest and tenderness for his little playmate had escaped her notice. Motherwise, she exaggerated these into symptoms of greater import. Blunderer that she was, she had at least managed to bring the child safe through the perils of a first passion, that rock upon which so many young lives wreck, even as hers had wrecked. In the rebound from the affair with Channing, the girl could not fail to appreciate the superior charm of Jacques' big and simple son, who was so much like Jacques himself. She was sure that Jacqueline already loved Philip without suspecting it. Women ere this have loved two men at once.

Then, as suddenly as pain that has been waiting for the first motion on the part of its victim to pounce, the apprehension she had been fighting came back upon her, twofold.—*Was* she so certain? And had she not in her blundering life been certain of too many things? That she would be a true wife to Basil Kildare, for instance; that she could justify Jacques before the world; that at least she might atone to him for all he had lost through her. And in each of these things she had been wrong. She, with all her boast of efficiency, she the successful Mrs. Kildare of Storm, what was she in the end but a failure—a wife whose husband had not trusted her, a woman who had ruined her lover's life, a mother whose daughter married without love, to get away from her?

She wondered, as at all such moments, what was the purpose for which she had been created; or whether there had indeed been a purpose. This humanity that takes itself so seriously, may it be after all only a superior sort of spider-egg, hatching out in due season, spinning busy webs for the world to brush away, laying other eggs, and so on, *ad infinitum*? Perhaps the God of simple people, such as her mother and Philip Benoix and Brother Bates, the God upon whom she herself called at times because of the force of early habit—perhaps He was only life-principle—the warmth of the sun, for instance—an impersonal,

intangible something which started the universe as one winds a clock, and left it to go on ticking till the mechanism runs down.... Good or bad, wise or foolish—what difference? Spin our webs no matter how carefully, they are only gossamer, visible for a moment with the dew or the frost upon them and then—vanished. Human and spider alike, unnoted, innumerable, self-perpetuating....

Poor Kate Kildare! When natures such as hers lose their self-reliance, life becomes as unsubstantial as an opium dream. If they cannot count upon themselves, what then may they count upon?

She jumped out of bed, and went to the window, where she stood for a while in the cold starlight, letting the wind blow in across her feverish face. She wrapped blankets around her, and sat listening to the sounds of the sleeping country; an owl mournfully hooting, a premature cock crowing lustily, the drowsy whickering of horses stirring in their stalls; for it was two o'clock, and the countryside was beginning to dream of day. She stayed for a long while brooding over the land she loved, as over a sleeping child. Always the great out-of-doors had its balm for her....

Suddenly she sat erect. In the shadows back of the stables something had moved. One of the dogs, perhaps? Then out into the starlight, crossing rapidly toward the house, flitted the slight figure of a girl, with several of the dogs leaping and gamboling about her in a silence that showed her to be no stranger. She was shrouded in a long hooded cape, and passed out of Kate's range too quickly to be recognizable.

"Now which of the wenches was that?" thought Kate, frowning. The amorous adventures of their black servants have come to be accepted by Southern housekeepers with unenquiring philosophy. "But why was she coming to the house at this hour?" she wondered further.

The negroes had their quarters well at the back, and no one slept in the "great house" with Kate and her daughters, except the housewoman, Ella, too elderly for midnight adventure, and Mag Henderson, who with her baby occupied a room in the guest-wing, under the Madam's immediate supervision.

She listened acutely. Her bedroom door rattled a little in the draught of another door which opened and closed. She heard an unmistakable creaking of the back stairs that led to a hall behind her room and the girls' rooms, and which also led to the guest-wing.

"It's Mag!" she thought.

In the morning, anxious and distressed, she hurried to consult Philip. He shrugged. "I'm not surprised, but I honestly don't know how to advise you, Miss Kate. I never wanted you to take her to Storm, but now that she's there, I suppose only the devil himself would get her away from you."

"It looks as if the devil were going to have a try at it," she commented, grimly.

"Are you perfectly sure it was Mag?"

"No, I'm not. It was too dark to see her face, and she was wrapped in a big cape. —Now that I come to think of it, it was the cape we always keep hanging by the side door for whoever happens to be going out. None of the negroes would dare to put that on. So it must have been Mag."

"At least we must be definitely sure before we say anything to her. It is a delicate matter. Sometimes a lack of trust at the wrong moment.—Be very sure, Miss Kate!"

"I'll watch to-night. Perhaps the poor little fool will try to slip off again."



Midnight found the Madam seated at her dark window, dressed and fully prepared for any emergency—except that she happened to be asleep. Black coffee had not been sufficient to offset the treacherously soothing effect of a rain-laden breeze full of soft earth-odors, that blew across her eyelids. She might have slept there placidly till morning, had not a clap of thunder awakened her with a start.

The night had become very tense and still. The trees seemed to hold themselves rigid, as if they listened for something. Now and then, lightning stabbed viciously through the dark. Beneath her the old house creaked, bracing itself once more to meet the onslaught of its life-long enemy, the wind. Far away across the plateau came a faint rushing sound, that grew in volume rapidly. Once again the thunder boomed.

Kate rose, yawning. "No amorous adventures for Mag to-night, that's certain! It's going to be the first big storm of the season. There's bite as well as bark in that sky."

But at the moment, a flash of lightning showed her a slight girl's figure running, not toward, but away from the house.

Kate was startled. "It's serious then, poor silly creature, if she goes out on a night like this!" For Mag had even more than the usual cowardice of her class. Thunder-storms reduced her to abject terror.

For a moment Kate thought of following, before she realized the folly of the idea. How could she hope to catch so fleet a pair of heels, already lost in the darkness? Then a faint cry came to her, the sound of a child wailing forlornly.

She slipped out into the passage, careful not to wake Jacqueline. Whatever was to be done with Mag, one duty lay plain before her—to comfort the deserted baby.

She opened Mag's door without knocking.—The baby was not deserted. Mag herself stood at the window in her nightdress, cringing from the lightning, and wringing her hands and weeping. The baby wept in sympathy.

When she saw who had entered, Mag ran forward with a terrified cry, and fell on her knees, clinging to Kate's skirts as a dog crouches against its master to escape a beating.

"'T ain't my fault, 't ain't my fault! I done begged her not to go to-night, I done prayed her, Miss Kate! Oh, oh, look at that lightnin'! She'll be kilt!"

"What are you talking about? Pull yourself together, Mag!" Even then the truth did not dawn on Kate. She thought she must have been the victim of some optical illusion. Mag had to tell her in so many words.

"Miss Jacky's gone to meet her fella again, and I *know* she's goin' to git kilt!"

Kate reeled against the wall. "Again?" she whispered.

"I done begged her not to, no more. I knowed he'd git her into trouble if she kep' it up.—Oh, I helped 'em, and toted notes for 'em, an' all, 'cause I liked to see her so happy—but I didn't never think it would come to this! I'd 'a' tol' you if I dared, Miss Kate, but I dassent, I dassent. She liked me—she kissed me once. Oh, oh, and now she's gone!"

Kate forced her stiff lips into speech. "This—has been going on for some time?"

"Yes'm, right smart. Ever since he was sick here. I took'n him a letter from her

the day he went away."

Even in that moment, Kate's whirling brain did Channing justice. He had kept his word, the letter of it, at least. He had not sought Jacqueline. It was she who had sought him.

She was getting back her breath. "Now," she said, "where shall I find them?"

Mag's wails broke forth anew. "I dunno! Reckon it's too late. Oh, my Lordy! I took'n her bag to the Ruin before supper, and he was to come for her there at midnight. Reckon it's past that now. They've done gone!"

"Gone?" The word was a gasping cry. "Gone—where?"

"I dunno. The city, I reckon, or wherever he lives at.—Oh, my Gawd, lissen at that!" The wind struck the house a great buffet, and the thunder was rattling steadily as artillery now.

Kate's knees refused to support her. She held herself upright by clinging to the bed.

The sight of the Madam thus stricken and speechless sobered Mag out of her own fears. She bethought herself suddenly of the letter Jacqueline had left for her mother.

"Here! Maybe it says in the letter where she's gone at. Don't look that way, Miss Kate! I wa'n't to give you the letter till mornin', but here it is. You kin have it now, see, Miss Kate!"

Only a few sentences of the long, incoherent screed in her hand penetrated to Kate's brain.

I can't bear to leave you, I just can't bear it; but I love him so, Mummy!—He needs me, and you don't. He can't finish his book without me.—We're going abroad, and I'll study my singing while he writes. Some day you'll be proud of your little girl—You said when the time came to take my life in my two hands, and it's come. You know it is not his fault that we can't be married right away—but what does all that matter? You'll be the first to understand, because I'm doing just what you would have done for Philip's father, if it hadn't been for us children. I know! I understand you so well, darling Mummy. I'm your own child.—We're not niggardly lovers, you and I! We're not afraid to give all we have—

Kate uttered a hoarse exclamation, and dropped the letter. Her moment of helplessness had passed. She ran down stairs, two steps at a time, Mag at her heels. She jerked open the side door, and was almost driven from her feet by a great gust of driving rain. It was Mag who wrapped around her the first cloak that came to hand, the big, hooded cape Jacqueline had worn the night before, Kate stopped for nothing except to seize the rawhide whip which hung on its accustomed nail beside the door.

"What you goin' to do with that?" gasped Mag.

"My pistols are upstairs," muttered the other.

Mag stood at the door as long as she could, catching glimpses as the lightning flashed of a shrouded, hooded figure running with the wind, fast, fast, like some wild witch abroad upon the elements.



CHAPTER XXXVI

It seemed to Kate presently, as she ran, that the wind was a friend, trying to help her. The driving rain on her face cleared her brain. Even the lightning was a friend, for without it she could not have seen a foot of her way ahead in the blackness.

Each time it flashed she stared about her, hoping to catch sight of Jacqueline. Suddenly she lifted up her voice and prayed aloud: "God, if You are up there, if there really is a You, now's Your chance to prove it! You hear me, God?" It was more a challenge than a prayer.

She knew that the girl had perhaps twenty minutes' start of her, but she might yet overtake her, and in this storm Channing might well be late. She slipped as she started down the ravine, and fell and rolled half way, bruising herself on tree roots and boulders, the wet grass soaking her to the skin.—No matter, it lost her no time. She fought her way through dripping, clinging underbrush to the ruins of the slave-house. The lightning showed it empty.—Could she have passed Jacqueline somehow in the darkness? She dared not wait to see, but ran on into the lane beyond. Nobody was in sight.

"I am too late!" she moaned, wringing her hands. "What shall I do now?"

She was convinced that Channing had already come for Jacqueline. She started running down the road, as if she might overtake the automobile on foot.

If she had waited at the cabin for a second lightning flash, she could not have failed to notice the traveling-bag left by Mag beside the door. Jacqueline, slipping into one of the stables to escape the first brunt of the storm, had lingered a moment to say good-by to her friends the horses; and it was at that moment that her mother passed. Kate had reached the Ruin first.

But she did not know it. When at the turn of the road she saw the glare of a headlight, she thought, "He's got her!" She was nearly exhausted by this time, too dazed to realize that the machine was approaching, not leaving, Storm. She gripped her rawhide whip and stepped directly into the path of the automobile.

It swerved violently, and came to a stand not a foot from her.

"Good God, Jacqueline! I almost ran you down," cried Channing. "Quick, jump in. You must be soaked to the bone, you plucky little darling!"

Quick as thought, Kate pulled open the door of the tonneau and slipped in behind. His mistake had stimulated her failing wits. Let him think her Jacqueline as long as possible! She choked back a laugh of rising excitement.

"You're wise—it's drier there than in front. Gad, what a storm! I was almost afraid it would scare you off. But I might have known better!"

Kate, listening acutely, detected a rather odd expression about the last words, and wondered suddenly whether Jacqueline's nonappearance might not have been something of a relief to Mr. Channing. Her eyes glittered, and she drew the shrouding hood closer about her face.

He had started the engine, and was turning the machine around. So far he had given her no opportunity to speak, and had to shout himself to be heard above the noise of the engine and the storm.

"We're going to have a run for it. I've arranged to have the 12:45 stop a second to take us on, and I'm late—This damned wind!"

The powerful car leaped forward. On two wheels it made the turn of the road, full into the teeth of the storm. Channing bent over his wheel. "Plenty of time to talk afterwards. Hold on tight!" His voice blew back to her, faint in the roar of the blast.

Kate settled back for the wild ride with a smile on her face, just such a grim, gay little smile as her daughter had worn when she led her cavalry charge against the Night Riders. She was secure from discovery for a few precious moments; while back there at the mouth of the ravine the real Jacqueline waited, bag in hand, anxious, crying a little perhaps, watching for a lover who would not appear.—Let her cry! She was safe there, safe with the friendly storm, the wind, the rain, and the lightning that do nothing worse than kill.

Far away across the wide plateau before them sounded the shrill whistle of a train. It shot into sight, a long, slim, glittering thing, flying a pennant of fiery smoke. Kate laughed exultingly. She never heard these trains shrieking their way through the darkness without a shuddering memory of her night of vigil in Frankfort, listening for the one which was to carry away her child, and which had taken instead the man she loved better than any child. She was a little

beyond herself now, a little *exaltée*, as the French say, with the excitement of the moment; and it seemed to her that the approaching train was an old enemy upon whom she was about to be avenged by robbing it of its prey.

"Hurry, hurry!" she cried, leaning forward, forgetting in her excitement that she must not speak.

Charming laughed back over his shoulder. "You joy-rider! We're doing the best we can now—but we'll make it."

They drew up at the platform just as the train paused, a grinning porter waiting on the step with his box.

"Got your bag? Run for it," cried Channing, and followed through the pelting rain with his own luggage.

The train started even as the chuckling porter helped her on.

"Stateroom fo' N'Yawk,—yessir, yessir! Right in dis way, miss. I done seed you-all comin'. You suttinly did tek yo' foot in yo' han' an' trabbel—yessir! yes, *suh*!"

"Lord, what a run!" Channing was saying behind her. "I left the engine going, too—old Morty will be furious when he finds her! You must be wet as an otter in spite of that great cape.—Well, little sweetheart, here we are! Let 's—"

He stopped short. Kate had turned, slipping the cape from her shoulders.—There they were, indeed. The train sped on, gathering speed with each mile.

She began to laugh, softly at first, then more and more heartily, till her whole body shook and the tears streamed down her face. The romance-loving porter, listening outside, chuckled in sympathy. Channing essayed a sickly smile.

She stopped as suddenly as she had begun, and a silence fell.

Channing broke it, of course. It was his misfortune in moments of emergency always to become chatty.

"You have taken me by surprise, really!—I—I didn't recognize you at first. That cape—Look here, this isn't entirely my fault. You must know that! I meant to keep my word, I tried to. But Jacqueline would insist upon seeing me to—to prove that she trusted me. I *told* her it wouldn't do. She said she had made no promise.—Oh, hang it all, how could I help myself, with the girl throwing herself at my head like that? I'm no anchorite."

"No?" murmured Kate.

"No, certainly not! That is.—Look here, it's not what you think at all! I've been meeting her at night—it was the only way we could manage. But I *am* a gentleman, you know."

"Yes?" murmured Kate.

He tried again, perspiring freely. "This looks bad, I know, but I assure you—Jacqueline understands that I mean to marry her as soon as things are definitely settled. She understands me absolutely, the only woman, perhaps, who ever has. She has temperament herself. Why, that's the reason I consented to take her away," he continued eagerly, gaining confidence from the other's silence. "She really ought to have her training for opera. You don't realize what a voice it is, Mrs. Kildare! I could offer her certain opportunities, lessons abroad, introductions, a career, in fact—"

"And meanwhile you were going to act as her protector?" broke in Kate.

"Why—why, yes. Exactly!"

The faintest smile just lifted her lip. "From yourself?" she murmured.

Channing's eyes dropped. He would have given years of his life to meet without flinching that little smile. "I repeat, I would have married Jacqueline as soon as it was possible." He spoke with an effort for quiet dignity that was not convincing, even to himself; perhaps because he noticed just then, for the first time, the dog-whip which Mrs. Kildare was twisting and untwisting in her strong fingers.

"I suppose that dream is over now," he added sadly—a little hastily.

"I think we may safely say," she admitted, "that that dream is over."

He could not lift his eyes from those slender, muscular fingers. Across his too-vivid imagination had flashed Farwell's picture of the Madam going to the rescue of her fighting negroes. A little shudder went down his back. He wondered what he should do if she suddenly attacked him. Could he lay his hands upon a woman? Should he call for help? Must he simply stand there and let her—whip him?...

At that moment a whistle sounded, and the train began to slow down for a station. To his almost sick relief, Mrs. Kildare drew her cape about her

shoulders. "I get off here," she said.

He rushed into speech. "Will you please tell Jacqueline how miserably sorry I am—how I regret—"

She cut him short. "I will tell Jacqueline nothing, and neither will you. All this"—she waved an inclusive hand about the stateroom—"it *never happened*."

"What! You mean—she is to believe I did not come for her?"

"Exactly. You have disappeared. And without any explanations to anybody."

"But, Mrs. Kildare! Good Lord! What will she think of me?"

"That you have simply broken your word again; which," said Kate, "is what I intend her to think. She shall not be further humiliated by the knowledge that there has been—an audience."

He began to understand. Kate knew her daughter. Pride was to be called to the rescue, and he himself would play a very sorry part hereafter in the memory of Jacqueline.

"But, Mrs. Kildare!" his vanity protested. "Really, I can't—"

His eyes dropped again, as if magnetized, to that twisting whip.

The author was not of the material out of which he created his heroes. He had a dread, an acute physical dislike, of what is called "a scene."—Very well! (he thought); if it helped poor, dear little Jacqueline to remember him as a cowardly wretch, as the sort of ungentlemanly villain of the piece who made engagements to elope with young women and then broke them—very well, let her so remember him.

Also, the thought occurred to him that if no explanations were to be made to any one, Philip Benoix would perhaps never hear of the thing he had tried and failed to do this night. For some odd reason, not entirely connected with the pistol he had seen in the clergyman's pocket, Channing wanted to be remembered as pleasantly as possible by Philip Benoix.

He sighed. "I see! You mean that Jacqueline shall learn to hate me.—As you wish, of course. I will make no explanations. I give you my word of honor never to write to her, or—"

"Your word of honor!" For one moment he met the full blast of the scorn in Kate's eyes, before his own fell again. "Never mind promises, sir. It will be to your advantage, Mr. Channing, to keep out of my way. Hereafter I take care of my own!"

For the first time her gaze followed his to the whip in her hands, and once more she burst out laughing; clear, ringing laughter that wakened half the car.

"Just a dog-whip," she explained from the door, reassuringly. Her voice was never sweeter. "I find after all that I shall not need it, you poor little prowling tomcat!—Good-by."



CHAPTER XXXVII

A rather watery sun was just showing over the tree-tops when Mrs. Kildare dismissed at her door the automobile she had commandeered, hoping to slip into the house unnoticed. But the dogs betrayed her. They were lingering hopefully about the kitchen door, with an eye on Big Liza, already up and about, for the Madam permitted no shiftless habits at Storm; and the sound of wheels brought them barking to the front of the house. Big Liza's curiosity was aroused, and she followed.

"My Lawdy, Miss Kate! whar you bin at?" she demanded, round-eyed. "You look lak a ghos', you sholy does!"

The Madam put her finger on her lip. "Business—I don't want it mentioned, Liza. You understand?"

The cook nodded importantly, pursing up her mouth. There is no safer confidante, as a rule, than a negro servant. The race is very amenable to the flattery of being trusted, and not too inquisitive about the doings of a superior order of beings. Kate had no fears with regard to Liza. It was Mag who bothered her.

The girl, who had not slept that night, met her at the foot of the stairs, looking terrified. "Oh, Miss Kate, whatever happened? Miss Jacky done come back an hour ago, and she's up in her room cryin' fit to break her heart. You—ain't *killed* him?" she whispered. It did not seem an unlikely question to ask of that white, set face with its burning eyes.

Kate drew her into the office and shut the door. "What have you told her?" she demanded.

"Who, Miss Jacky? I ain't told her nothin'. I didn't git a chance."

"Thank God!" murmured the mother.

All the way home her head had been spinning like a top with plans for keeping Jacqueline from knowing of her interference.

"She came in all wet and lookin' so queer!—No'm, she wa'n't cryin' then, but she

looked kind o' pinched and old-like. She didn't say nothin' to me, except ask for the letter she done left for you, and when I give it to her, she thanked me that pretty way she has, for bein' so good to her.—Me, *good* to her! when I'd gone and told, and everything!" Mag began to blubber.

"Telling," muttered Kate, "was the one good thing you did for her.—What then?"

"Why, she went in her room an' locked the door, and when I axed through the keyhole didn't she want somethin' hot to drink, 'cause she was so wet, she said no, just let her alone, and please not to wake her up for breakfas' 'cause she might have a headache."

Kate's face softened. "Poor child! If it's nothing worse than a headache!—Now, then, my girl, I want to tell you what your 'goodness' might have done for Jacqueline." Her voice became harder and sterner than Mag had ever heard it. "Should you like to see her such a creature as you were before I brought you here, hunted, looked down upon, ashamed to face people—the kind of woman that the Night Riders try to drive out of decent communities?"

The girl cowered away from her. "Miss Jacky like *me*? Oh, she couldn't be, not ever! She's a lady," she cried piteously. "Her fella would have married her—you'd 'a' made him!"

"He could not, as it happens. He would have turned her, perhaps, into just such an outcast as you were, and you helping him! This is the return you have made me for my charity, Mag Henderson!"

The girl crouched with her face hidden, as if she expected a beating. "I didn't know, I didn't know!" she moaned. "I just wanted her to be happy with her fella—What you goin' to do with me, Miss Kate?"

"God knows," said the other bitterly.

Mag caught at her skirts, lifting her face in abject pleading. "Whatever you does to me, don't send little Kitty away! Don't git a mad on the baby! Say you won't, Miss Kate, say you won't!"

"Nonsense!" Kate spoke more gently. "Nobody's going to 'do' anything to you, or to the baby, either. I suppose you cannot help your ignorance. That's our job.—But it is evident that you can't be trusted."

"Yes'm, I kin!" sobbed the girl, childishly. "Yes'm, I kin, too! Just you try me."

"Very well, I'll try you." Kate made a quick decision. "Listen to me, Mag! It was I who met Mr. Channing and—persuaded him to go away. But Jacqueline does not know this, and she must never know it. I will not have my girl shamed before her mother. She must think he went off of his own accord, because he was afraid to take her.—Do you understand?"

Mag nodded, sniffing.

"You are to say nothing of what has happened to-night, either to Jacqueline or to any one else. You have been sound asleep all night! Do you hear?"

"But supposin'," said Mag fearfully, "supposin' Miss Jacky axes me questions?"

"Then you must lie. You know how to do that, I suppose!" said Kate, with some impatience.

As it happened, that was one thing Mag Henderson did not know how to do, certainly not with the clear, candid eyes of Jacqueline upon her. But an alternative occurred to her, and she made her promise.

"I won't never tell, I won't never tell nobody, Miss Kate, cross my heart and hope to die!"

"Very well, then." Mrs. Kildare was rather touched by the girl's contrition, her eagerness to be trusted. She held out a forgiving hand. "Shake hands on it, and remember this is for Jacky's sake."

Mag, with a gulp, put her hand into the Madam's, and forgot for the moment that she had been a creature hunted, looked down upon, ashamed to face decent people. Whatever harm she had done, she intended to atone for, even with sacrifice.

Kate patted her on the shoulder. "Now then, run and bring a pot of black coffee to my room, and see that I am not disturbed for at least two hours."

When she emerged at the end of that time, a little hollow-eyed and stiff, but ready for the day's routine, she found upon inquiry that Jacqueline had kept to her room with the prophesied headache and did not wish to be disturbed; also, that Mag had gone down to the village on an errand. She paused uncertainly at Jacqueline's door, but decided finally to respect the girl's desire for privacy, glad herself of a little longer respite before their meeting. Duplicity was not her forte, and she knew it. Her heart ached with tenderness for her child, a tenderness that

she must not show.

All day long, as she rode upon her rounds, inspecting the damage wrought by last night's storm, she was rehearsing inwardly her first meeting with Jacqueline; planning to show her, without exciting suspicion, the depth of her love and her understanding. If only practical, unemotional Jemima were there, to act as buffer between them! She thought of consulting Philip, but decided that Jacqueline's secret was not hers to share.

One friend, however, she did consult, having so recently tested Him and found Him not wanting. Philip, happening into his always-open church early in the afternoon, was astounded to discover no less a person there than the Madam, on her knees, intent upon rendering unto God the things that are God's, as honestly as she rendered unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's.

He withdrew unnoticed; and thereafter, to his great delight, Kate Kildare was a regular frequenter of the church she had built, sitting with a rather bored expression through the service from first to last, while her horse and her dogs waited patiently at the door for their Sabbath exercise....

Kate shared the midday meal that day with workmen who were repairing damages to a favorite bit of beech-wood—frequently her custom when work was on hand that required her special attention. So it was not until dark that she rode wearily back to Storm, to discover her household seething with excitement.

Mag Henderson had never returned from her errand into the village. She had been gone since breakfast. A servant had just discovered, in Kate's room, a sealed letter addressed to the Madam, and pinned to her pillow.—Poor Mag had followed as closely as possible the example set by her beloved Miss Jacky.

Kate's face was very sad and discouraged as she read the little note:

I dassent stay cause if Miss Jacky was to ax me questions I'd be bound to tell and then you wuddent trust me no more but ef i go away I cain't answer no questions. You kin kepe Kitty. I luv her but I giv her to you cause I ain't got nothing else nice to give and you been awful kind to Me. plese let her be yore little Hands and feet, miss Kate, and kepe her always and fetch her up a lady like you not like me. plese mam dont you *never* let her do like me, and ef my Pappy ever comes to git her and says she's his'n for Gawds sake she aint no such thing she's yourn. There's a city fella a drummer been settin up to me right smart, and he says a purty gal is a fool to stay and not have no fun and just make close for other gals

to ware and in the city ennyway gals have more chanct So he wanted me to go along with him but I wuddent becos of Kitty but now I reckon yore glad to git shut of me so no more at present from yores truly

MAG.

Plese tell miss Jaky ef she brushes Kittys hare the wrong way evry day mebbe it will come curly.

Kate looked about her at the circle of black faces, all rather pleased and eager-looking over Mag's downfall, for the "poor white" is never popular with the better class of negroes, and Mag's position in the household had aroused some jealousy.

"I suppose it's too late to catch her," she said dully. "There have been a dozen trains to the city—we don't even know what city.—Oh, I've done this, I've done this!" She was speaking to herself, though she spoke aloud.

Big Liza took it upon herself to administer consolation. "No you ain't, honey, no, you ain't! She was jes' nachelly bo'n dat-a-way. In co'se it's natchel enough fo' a body to take up with a gemman friend, but to leave her own baby-chile behine her—why, dat gal's aimin' fer hell-fire jus' as fas' as she kin trabbel!"

Kate was reminded of poor Mag's parting gift, her "little hands and feet." She asked, sighing:

"Where is the baby?"

"Miss Jack's got her in her room."

She entered unheard, and found Jacqueline holding the little whimpering creature tight against her breast, rocking and crooning to it.

"There, there, precious! Did it miss its mama? Never mind, I know. They're tired of us, they've left us—I know. They just didn't want us any more. Never mind, pet! You've got me."

Kate slipped away again with dim eyes, leaving Jacqueline and the deserted baby to comfort each other.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Jacqueline had waited all that day for news from Channing, disappointed, more than a little humiliated, to think that he had failed where she had not, but making every allowance for him as a city-bred man not accustomed to storms such as that of the night before. Perhaps he had taken for granted that she would not venture out in it herself.

Then, as no word came from him, either by note or by telephone, she began to worry. The lightning had been very bad. After all, storms can be dangerous. Possibly he had met with an accident.

At last she could restrain herself no longer, and telephoned to Holiday Hill.

A noncommittal man-servant informed her that Mr. Farwell was still away (he had gone to Cincinnati on business for several days), and that the other gentleman had left unexpectedly the night before. He did not add that the household was all agog with the extreme unexpectedness of his leaving.

Jacqueline asked, rather tremulously, whether he would be returning soon. The servant thought not, as he had since telegraphed for all his luggage to be sent on to New York.

It was then that she began to realize what had happened to her. She still made excuses for him to herself. He had been thinking of her—he had decided that he could not accept her sacrifice. Perhaps he had been thinking a little of her mother, too, left alone there at Storm. Yes, she was sure he had been thinking a little of her mother, whom he so greatly admired, not understanding how eager Mrs. Kildare was for her children's happiness.—He would write, of course, and explain....

She dared not think of the blank and dreary future, but lived from hour to hour, watching for the mails. When the postman stopped on his daily round at the foot of Storm Hill, she was always waiting for him. Sometimes she met him down the road, in her eagerness. But there was never a letter for her, except now and then a line from the traveling Mrs. Thorpe.

Kate saw this eager watchfulness, and her heart smote her, and her secret lay

heavy on her breast. But she made no comment, even when she noticed that the girl was neglecting her food in a manner unprecedented, and heard her prowling about the house at night, when she should have been asleep, like an unhappy little ghost.

"I must give her time, poor girlie," she thought, and wished that she might consult Philip.

Philip, however, was doing some observing on his own account. He had come across a phrase in a book recently that recurred to him whenever he saw Jacqueline nowadays: "God gives us our eyes, our parents gives us our noses, but we make our own mouths."

It occurred to him that Jacqueline was "making her mouth" far too rapidly. Of a sudden the lips had lost all their childish softness and were settling into a firm, curved line of great beauty, but which had more than a hint of pathos. "She has no right to such a mouth at her age!" he thought.

The fact of Channing's final disappearance was known to him, though not the manner of it; and at first it had filled him with satisfaction. Now, however, he realized that to get Channing out of sight was by no means to get him out of mind. His thoughts went back over the constant and secret companionship of many weeks, reaching as a climax the night the two had lost themselves in the mountains. He was uneasy—far more uneasy than Kate, who had in view a consolation for Jacqueline which Philip did not as yet suspect.

One day he happened in at Storm, to find Farwell making one of his frequent visits there. Jacqueline was chatting and laughing with him with her usual gaiety, but Philip, even as he entered, sensed a certain air of distress about the girl. It was Farwell's first call since Channing's disappearance.

"Hello, dominie," the actor greeted him cheerfully, evidently relieved by his arrival. "We've just been discussing the mysterious Percival. You knew, of course, that he'd gone without so much as a by-your-leave to me? Not that only, but took my favorite car and left it running in the mud, simply shaking itself to pieces. A queer devil!—I had gone to Cincinnati for a day or two, and when I got back, not a sign of my guest, neither hair nor hide of him!"

"Rude enough," commented Benoix.

"Oh, rude! Channing and I are old pals, and dropped our manners long ago. But

unfriendly, that's what I call it! Leaving me in the lurch in that gloomy young barn of mine, without giving me a chance to get somebody in his place.—I tell you, this thing of being a country gentleman's the loneliest job I ever tackled! Do come and give me a cheering word now and then, Benoix.—And the only explanation the rotter made," he continued resentfully, "was a mere line saying he had been called to New York on urgent business. Urgent tommyrot! The only business he knows by sight is his own pleasure."

"His writing?" commented Jacqueline, quietly. "That isn't just pleasure."

"Oh, yes, it is, or you may be sure he wouldn't be doing it! I know Channing. He's selfish to the bone. Oh, I'm done with the chap!—The fact is," he added, very careful not to look at Jacqueline, "these geniuses aren't to be relied upon, either as friends or anything else, you see. They're just—geniuses."

"That's quite enough to be expected of them, isn't it?" remarked the girl, with a steady little smile.

Farwell changed the subject, having said what he had come to say; but inwardly he thought, "She's a brick! She's a loyal, plucky little brick, and Channing is a—skunk! Perhaps she chucked him, though," he reminded himself hopefully. "Serve him good and plenty if she did."

Thereafter the master of Holiday Hill spent as much time as he possibly could at Storm, Kate looking on at Jacqueline's friendly flirtation with him with something between a smile and a sigh.

The girl was doing a good deal in the way of flirtation just then, not only with Farwell, but with several of the earlier "victims" who continued to come out from Lexington occasionally, and were encouraged to come more often. Kate had been through just such a stage of unhappiness herself, the reckless, desperate, defiant stage, when trouble is to be kept at bay only by sheer bravado. And she had been watched safely through it by the understanding eyes of Jacques Benoix, even as Jacqueline would be watched through it by the understanding eyes of his son.

For it was only with Philip the girl dared to be quite herself just then, *distracte* and talkative by turns, subject to long silences, followed by bursts of wild gaiety. The change in his manner to her was very marked, he no longer teased and chaffed her as he had been wont to do, but treated her with a quiet affection, almost a deference; the *camaraderie* offered to a friend who has come abreast of

oneself on the hard path of life. Jacqueline in trouble, gallant and uncomplaining and piteously gay, was a Jacqueline who appealed to every instinct of chivalry in his fine nature.

If it had not been for Kate herself, the thing she so greatly desired might very well have come to pass just then. He might have fallen in love with Jacqueline. But unfortunately Kate was there, never lovelier than in her guarding, tender maternity; and for Philip other women, as women, did not exist.

Into this rather disturbed atmosphere of Storm arrived one day the new Mrs. Thorpe, quite unexpectedly and with something of a flourish.

Jacqueline, hearing outside the sound of a mellifluous horn which she did not recognize, ran to the window and reported company approaching, "But it isn't Mr. Farwell, Mummy, and it isn't victims. It's a lady all dressed up. Why, Mummy, it's—no, it can't be. Yes it is too! It's the bride and groom, in a new Ark!"

Jemima was herself engineering a smart blue-painted touring-car up the hill, somewhat cautiously but with her usual air of determination. She remarked tensely to the beaming gentleman beside her, "Wave to them, James, please. I can't spare a hand."

When the excited greetings were over, Jemima looked about her with a contented sigh. "New York was very grand and rich, but I'm glad to be back in this queer, shabby old house. Aunt Jemima asked all about everything, Mother—whether you had left the stuffed horse's head on the wall, whether the turkeys still tried to roost on the front porch, what you had done with father's old servants, especially Mahaly—she seemed to be particularly interested in Mahaly, for some reason or other. I told her everything was just as it had been always—and it is, thank goodness!" She spoke as if she had expected to find cataclysmic changes after an absence of three weeks. "Dogs overrunning the place, and Big Liza warbling at the top of her lungs in the kitchen, and you in your second-best riding skirt at this hour in the afternoon—naughty mother! Everything just the same as if—" Her roving eyes chanced to rest on her sister's face, and she stopped short.

"So you saw your Aunt Jemima?" asked Kate quickly, to change the subject.

"Oh, yes, of course, Mother. That's one reason we went to New York." She was full of the visit to her father's aunt, and forgot for the moment her shock at the

change in Jacqueline. "Such a wonderful place—a house as big as a hotel, and lawns that are evidently shaved and clipped and bathed as regularly as her pet poodle. But—think of it! She is seventy years old, and powdered and rouged like an actress!—Her manner was just a little—patronizing at first, but she soon got over that."

Thorpe chuckled. "My wife astonished her into a lamb-like meekness. She informed her that while she resembled the Kildare portraits to some slight degree, most of them were rather handsomer."

"Jemmy! Why, she was a famous beauty in her day!"

"Well, she isn't now; and I did not care for her manner," said the bride, calmly. "Besides, as it turned out, she liked rudeness. Some people do, you know. They think it's smart, and she's a very smart old person—likes a fast motor-car, and plays cards for money—hates to lose, too—and smokes, Mother! I kept thinking how surprised you would have been to see her."

"Pooh, that's nothing," said Jacqueline, moved to defend the honor of Storm. "Lots of women around here smoke. Why, you'll catch Big Liza with a pipe in her mouth at any time you go out in the kitchen!"

"Jacky, a pipe! The idea! Aunt Jemima has little gold-tipped cigarettes with her monogram on them. It's very much done."

"Blossom," cried Jacqueline accusingly, "did you smoke, yourself?"

The bride tossed her head, flushing. "Of course. One can't be too provincial." (The *a* in her "can't" had achieved a new and impressive breadth—which, considering that the honeymoon had been of only three weeks' duration, may serve to show something of the force and adaptability of Jemima's character.) "Still," she added, "I should not care to see mother smoking. I was rather—shocked by Aunt Jemima."

Kate smiled. She would not have been shocked. Her husband had too often spoken of his aunt as a true Kildare, and related with pride certain incidents in her career which had done their share toward creating the reputation of "the wild Kildares." It had always been a matter of astonishment to her that this wicked old woman, whose past might certainly have made for leniency in judgment, should have shown herself so hotly unforgiving toward the one episode she had selected to regard as the family scandal.

James Thorpe, the psychologist, could have told her that the recognized tolerance of innocence for vice has its complement in the approval with which unblemished reputations are regarded by those who have them not. Also, there was an unspoken tradition among her husband's people, as in many families, that while born Kildares, male or female, might exercise their Heaven-sent prerogative of behaving as they chose, it was for their mates to maintain the balance of discretion. Poor Kate had maintained no balance.

"Oh, speaking of New York," said the bride suddenly, "whom else do you suppose I saw there? Your friend the author, Jacky! Oh, not to speak to, of course ... James has broken with him entirely. Besides, he was with a person, a very blonde and pretty person, whom I did not care to meet." She smoothed down her skirts, the gesture of conscious rectitude the world over. "I should not be surprised if she were that woman—you know! Fay Something-or-other—"

Kate's warning glance reached her, and she bit her tongue.

Jacqueline had gone over to a window and stood looking out. "I miss the old Ark," she said after a moment. "What have you done with it?"

Jemima rushed into speech, her eyebrows flying distress signals at her mother. "Oh, that old thing? Why, when James bought the new car, I thought it would be nice to have the other painted and fixed up and give it to Philip for a present."

"Splendid!" said Kate. "It will be the greatest sort of help to him in his parochial visits—if you can persuade him to accept it. I've been trying for months to give him a decent horse to take the place of old Tom. What made you think of it?"

Jemima looked rather embarrassed. "Why, you see I have not been very—nice to Phil, lately. Not friendly, at least, as I used to be. But he's gone on just the same, as if nothing were the matter, just as dignified, and kindly; marrying us so beautifully, and sending us those rare candelabra, and all ... I like that way of acting, Mother, and I like Philip. So I thought it would be nice to give him the Ark as—as a sort of apology, you see."

Kate and James Thorpe exchanged a glance of mutual congratulation. Evidently the incipient feud was a thing of the past. Marriage was already rubbing off some of Jemima's edges.

"In that case," said Kate warmly, "I am sure Philip will accept the Ark, daughter. He would never refuse an apology.—Jacky, why don't you go and telephone him

that the Thorpes are here, and that he is expected for supper?"

Jacqueline slipped out of the room very gratefully. The tears had been welling up behind her eyes so fast that she was afraid some of them would spill over. She wanted desperately to be alone until she had accustomed herself to the thought of Channing with another woman. A blonde, pretty person, Jemima had said.— At least she did not sound like a person who could help him to write books!

CHAPTER XXXIX

As soon as they were alone, Jemima demanded explanations of her mother. "What has happened to Jacky? Why, she's all eyes! I never saw such a change! Her smile makes you want to cry, somehow.—Mother, it can't be—Channing?"

"I am afraid it is—" sighed Kate.

"Then she really cared for him? Why, but that's incredible! Such a man, Mother! James has told me a good deal about him. He's a sort of male vampire, always needing a woman to pet and admire him—any sort of woman. And our Jacqueline!" Her lips set. "Humph! If the child still cares for him, I'll see that she hears the whole truth about him. Jacky's not lacking in pride."

"I hope and pray it is only her pride that is suffering now," said Kate, and took Jemima fully into her confidence. It was a great relief to talk it over with somebody. She realized how she had missed this cool and level-headed child of hers.

But when she had finished, Jemima was by no means cool and level-headed. All her pretty married complacency had gone. She was more excited than her mother had ever seen her. She jumped up and began to walk around the room, muttering rather surprising things.

"Why did you let him go? The horrid beast! Oh, poor little Jacky, poor little Jacky! Why did you let him off, Mother? Why didn't you—shoot him?"

"Daughter!"

"Well, I don't care," muttered the girl, defiantly. "I can understand killing a man like that, I can!"

A queer little smile twitched at Kate's lips. "Can you, my dear?"

Jemima stopped short, and her eyes met her mother's, widening. She realized of what Kate was thinking. "Yes, I can," she repeated, breathlessly. "A man like that ... Mother! *Was my father—a—man like that?*"

But Kate spoke quickly, as if she had not heard. "Then you think I did right in

letting Jacqueline believe Channing had failed her?"

The girl thought it over. "No," she said at last, with her usual ruthlessness. "I don't. No good ever comes of deception, Mother. Look what it has done already! Poor Mag ran away because she was afraid of not keeping your secret."

Kate winced. "But I have Jacqueline!"

"And of course," conceded the other thoughtfully, "Mag would have gone to the bad anyway, soon or late.—Oh, yes, she would, Mother! No use blinking facts. As she used to say, she was 'spiled anyway.' On the whole," Jemima decided, "I think you have done the best thing possible. But I wish *I* had been here!—What are you going to do with Jacky now? Let her study singing?"

Kate realized the silence that had latterly fallen on Storm. The girl had not sung a note in weeks. Both piano and graphophone had been idle. She spoke of this.

"That's bad! Music has always meant so much to Jacky. She'll have to have an outlet of some sort. Better let her come home with me, Mother. I'll get her interested in something."

Kate shook her head. "Try, if you like, but she won't go. She's more 'mommerish' than ever just now, poor baby. She needs mothering, I think—and marrying!"

Jemima looked up quickly. "You mean Philip? Surely, Mother, you've given up the Philip idea, after *this*!"

"Why should I?"

"Why, Mother! Would it be fair to him? Don't you realize that poor little Jacky has been almost—wicked?"

"No, no, dear, never wicked! Only ignorant, and desperately in love. It seemed to her the honorable thing to do to go away openly with the man she loved, instead of concealing it.—Oh, can't you understand? Don't you see the difference between generous, blind sacrifice, and what you call 'wickedness'?"

"No," said Jemima, with pursed lips. "I must confess I can't. That happens to be my weakness.—But I can see, and have always seen, that Jacqueline is one of the sort of people who ought to be married as early in life as possible."

"Exactly! And who better for her than Philip?"

Jemima looked at her mother in utter exasperation. Was it possible that she was still blind to the thing that was the gossip of the countryside? Or—a new thought!—was it possible that she was going to take advantage of Philip's devotion to her, of his idealism and capacity for self-immolation, to persuade him into carrying out her long-laid plans? Jemima herself might have been capable of such a ruthless thing, but on consideration she did not believe it of her mother. There was a certain large innocence about Mrs. Kildare, an almost virginal shyness of mind, that made it difficult for her to conceive, even in the face of direct evidence, that a man younger than herself, a man whom she chose to regard as a son, could be regarding her in turn with eyes other than filial. Jemima did her the justice to recognize this.

She opened her lips to inform her mother of the truth, but somehow found herself saying instead, rather lamely, "She's not in love with Philip!"

Kate smiled. "This from *you*, my dear?"

The bride flushed. "When I spoke as I did about love not being necessary to marriage, I was thinking of myself, not of Jacqueline," she explained with dignity. "People have different requirements. Besides, I happened not to be in love with anybody else."

"That does make a difference, but I am counting on time," said the mother. "Time and propinquity. You are not old enough yet to realize the strength of those two factors, my dear. I am.—You said once that Jacqueline was oversexed. I think you are wrong. She simply matured very early, without our realising it. Certain instincts are very strong in her—the maternal instinct, for one—stronger than her judgment.—Just as it was with me. She is not the first poor little trusting dreamer to put up her altar to the Unknown God, and worship before the first who chooses to usurp it. But the altar remains, when the usurper has passed."

"For Philip to occupy? Poor Phil!" murmured Jemima under her breath.

Her mother wheeled round upon her. "Why do you say 'poor Phil'?" she demanded indignantly. "Do you suppose I would offer Jacques' son anything but the best I have to give? Don't you know that I am thinking of his happiness quite as much, perhaps more than of Jacqueline's? His is a bigger nature than yours, my daughter. He would never make the mistake of thinking the child capable of 'wickedness,' no matter what folly she might commit."

"And does he know of her latest 'folly,' Mother?"

"I do not know how much he may suspect, but that is not my affair. Jacqueline will tell him about it herself, doubtless ... after they are married," replied Kate, serenely.

Others entering the room just then put a stop to the conversation; but for the rest of the evening young Mrs. Thorpe was thoughtful. She knew the Madam's capacity for carrying out intentions. Watching Philip closely, his brotherly tenderness to Jacqueline contrasted with the silent, almost worshipful adoration her mother took so astonishingly for granted, she realized that it would be difficult for his lady to put any test to his devotion too difficult for him to perform. It seemed probable that Kate would succeed in covering one blunder with another blunder.

A great sympathy for Philip came over her—sympathy being a recently developed trait of Jemima's. She saw him suddenly as a piteous figure, even more piteous than her listless young sister, who would, after all, revive like a thirsty flower with the first draft of love that came to her reaching roots. Her mother had been right there.—But what was to atone to Philip for his lonely childhood, his lonely youth, always with the shadow resting upon it; his hopeless infatuation for a woman who would not see, his whole life devoted to that cold and thankless lot of service to others?

"We've taken too much from Philip as it is," she thought. "I must put a stop to this, somehow!"

She decided to drop a hint of warning to Jacqueline herself. Treachery it might be, but, as has been seen, Jemima was quite capable of treachery when it marched with expediency.

Drop a hint she accordingly did, one of her own especial brand of hints, as delicate and as subtle as a dynamite bomb.

It occurred at bedtime, when Jemima—the Thorpes were spending the night—slipped across into the room that had been the nursery to chat with her sister in the old-time intimacy of hair-brushing. Indeed, the room was still a nursery, for the crib that had been in turn Jemima's and Jacqueline's was drawn up close beside Jacqueline's bed, and contained the rosy, sleeping Kitty, with a favorite rattle tight clasped in one pink fist.

"Isn't she too precious, Jemmy?" whispered her foster-mother, who was leaning over the crib as her sister entered.

Jemima responded without particular enthusiasm—to her small Kitty would always represent in concrete form the doctrine of Original Sin. She said, "Come and let me show you how to fix your hair, dear, as they do it in New York. You're old enough now to wear it up."

"I try to, but it won't stay put, there's such a mop of it!" She submitted willingly to the other's deft ministrations. "Neither mother nor I look half as nice since you got married, Jemmy. Oh, I do love your smooth hands!" She held one affectionately to her cheek. "They're so nimble and sure of themselves, as if each finger had a little brain of its own that knew just exactly what it was about."

"I suppose, if one has a brain at all, it's everywhere, in the fingers as well as the head; just like God in the universe," said the other, rather absently. "Anyway, if I've got brains, you've got hair, and I don't know but what that's more important. You'll be a lovely creature like mother when I'm a weazened little old woman, as bald as a monkey—or with false things on, like Aunt Jemima. Intellectual hair is always so thin and brittle."

"Why, Blossom! Yours is just like curly sunlight!"

"Oh, yes, pretty while it lasts," said the other, dispassionately. "But not vital, like yours and mother's. You're both so splendidly vital. That's why—Look here, Jacky, Philip's more gone on mother than ever, isn't he? He just follows her around with his eyes, like that sentimental hound puppy who is always trying to crawl into her lap—"

"And spilling off," finished Jacqueline, with a chuckle. "I know! If she says 'good dog' to him, he wags steadily for an hour.—I used to think you were wrong about it," she added seriously, "and that Phil couldn't possibly be in love with any one so old as mother; not like men are with girls, you know. But lately—I'm not so sure."

Poor Jacqueline had learned a good deal lately about the possibilities of loving.

Jemima commented with satisfaction. "I'm glad *you* see it, anyway!"

"Of course he has not told me anything, but he—understands so well," sighed the other, without explaining what it was that he understood. "I wish he didn't, Jemmy. I *would* like to see dear old Phil happy! He's such a darling.—Do you

suppose we could possibly persuade mother ever to marry him?"

Jemima started and dropped her hair-brush. That was a solution which had not occurred to her.

"I think it would be such a good thing, don't you, Jemmy? They're both so wonderful."

"Nonsense!" said Jemima sharply, recovering from the shock. "What an idea! Mother wouldn't *dream* of such an unseemly thing, of course."

"I'm not so sure," said Jacqueline, with her new pathetic little wisdom. "She's awfully sweet to Phil, always wanting him round, and petting him, and making a fuss over him."

"Just as she does over that hound puppy! No, my dear, you may be sure that whatever she does, mother will never do anything so undignified as to marry Dr. Benoix' son. On the contrary, I happen to know that she is plotting to marry him to some one else."

"Jemmy! Our Philip? To whom?"

The hint dropped. "To you," said Jemima.

But it was not greeted with the shocked surprise, the incredulous dismay, which she had counted upon. Jacqueline considered the matter in silence for some moments. At length she said, musingly, "That might not be a bad idea. Philip really ought to get married—the Bishop told him so. It creates confidence, like with young doctors. And if you really think mother never will—Of course I could keep house for him, and hold the Mothers' Meetings and all, and make him more comfortable than that wretched Dilsey."

Jemima gasped.—"Do you mean to say you *would*?—So soon?" She bit her tongue, but Jacqueline did not seem to notice the unfortunate reference.

"Oh, me?" she said a little wearily. "What does it matter about me? I mean—I suppose a girl has to marry some time, and I'm used to Philip. I'm awfully fond of him, really. He'd make a wonderful father, wouldn't he?"

"Jacqueline Kildare!" cried the bride, blushing.

The girl met her startled eyes in the glass. For the moment she seemed the older of the two. "Why, didn't you think of that when you married Goddy? No, you

wouldn't have, I suppose. But it seems to me the most important thing of all, you know. It is something that will last, when—other things—don't. It seems to me people could stand a great deal of unhappiness," she said haltingly, "if they had babies. They wouldn't always be asking themselves, Why? Why? The answer would be there, right in their arms.—So if mother really wants me to marry Philip, and he doesn't mind ... I don't believe I shall mind, either."

Jemima made her last stand. "Suppose Philip does mind?"

"Then he won't ask me, of course, goosie!—Do show me how you made that perfectly beautiful puff."

Jemima returned to her lord and master somewhat subdued and crestfallen. She realized that for once she had overreached herself.



CHAPTER XL

Jemima's opposition had the effect, usual with determined natures, of crystallizing Mrs. Kildare's purpose, and she watched with impatience a situation that appeared rather slow in developing. Philip, touched to the heart by the change in Jacqueline, devoted much time and thought to her comforting, overtures which the girl met more than half way. The two were constantly together now, galloping over the frosty fields, driving about the country in the newly arrived Ark (which understanding Philip had accepted with a generosity that matched Jemima's), or reading aloud to each other in front of the roaring fire in Storm hall.

Kate, realizing however unconsciously that when she was about he had less attention for her daughter, kept out of their way as much as possible. It occurred to her that Philip was rather neglecting his parish in Jacqueline's behalf. She smiled to herself, and frequently commended Providence for its assistance.

But Providence moved a trifle slowly for a woman accustomed to prompt and decisive action. She yearned to advise Philip to strike while the iron was hot, to claim the girl for his own before her natural youth and high spirits reasserted themselves and made her less susceptible to tenderness. She wanted to see the two she loved happy together, as she had wanted nothing else since she put the thought of happiness out of her own life. Why were they wasting so much priceless time?

Suddenly, one afternoon, as she was riding home to Storm, the reason occurred to her. Philip's pride! the same pride that would permit him to accept no help from her even as a boy, when the small income his mother left him would have been insufficient to carry him through school and seminary if he had not managed to secure tutoring positions to eke out. He had accepted, perforce, the home she offered him during vacations, but nothing more, not even a horse for his personal use. He was a poor man, would perhaps always be a poor man, dependent upon the meager salary of a country clergyman; and he was the son of a convict to boot. Was it likely that he would ask in marriage the hand of one of the young heiresses of Storm? How stupid she had been!

"Bless the boy! I'll have to take this thing in hand myself," thought Kate Kildare,

glad of an excuse, and turned her horse's head toward the rectory.

Philip, absorbed in putting final touches to his next day's sermon, looked up from his desk to see her smiling in at the door of the room that was his study, his dining-room and his parlor combined.

He sprang to his feet. "You!" he cried, with a look in his eyes that might have told its own story to a woman less accustomed to appreciative male glances. "I—I was just thinking of you."

That was true enough. She would have found it difficult to come upon him at a time when he was not thinking of her, somewhere in the back of his mind. Lately, whenever he had been with Jacqueline, the girl reminded him so constantly, so almost poignantly, of her mother that sometimes he caught himself speaking to her in the very voice he used with his lady, a softer, deeper voice that was the unconscious expression of the inmost man. His congregation heard it sometimes, too, now that Mrs. Kildare had come to sit among them.—He had been writing out his sermon with unusual care because he had remembered that she would listen to it.

He ran to wheel his shabby wing-chair up to the fire, where a pot of coffee simmered on the hob, with a covered plate beside it.

"My supper," he explained, with a gesture of apology. "I often cook in here because it seems more cozy than the kitchen."

"Is Dilsey misbehaving again?"

He nodded ruefully. "I can't think where she gets the stuff, Miss Kate; the store won't sell it to her."

"Out of your emergency cupboard, I fancy. You give her all your keys, of course, for fear she will imagine you don't trust her? Oh, Phil, Phil," she laughed at his guilty face. "How you do need a wife to look after you!"

She settled herself comfortably in the comfortable chair, looking about the pleasant, twilight room with the sense of well-being that always came to her there. It was more homelike to her than the home where she had lived for twenty years, her big rough house that had taken on so irrevocably the look of the Kildares. Here faded brocade furniture, books, well-shaded lamps, a blue bowl filled with rosy apples, a jar of cedar-boughs that took the place of flowers now that the garden had gone to its winter rest—all these things spoke to her, as they spoke to

Philip, of other days, of his father, even of the shadowy lady with her slight, patient cough who had been his mother, and whom Kate always winced to remember. In this place she felt among friends. She was happy to think of her Jacqueline come at last into such a haven as Philip's home.

"Bring me some of your supper—especially the coffee, it smells so good!—and then come and sit beside me. Here—" she indicated a low hassock at her feet—"where I can tweak your ear if I want to; because I'm going to scold."

Philip obeyed in silence. He had fallen rather shy of her, now that he had her here as he had so often dreamed, sitting beside him in the twilight, sharing his supper, leaning her head against the cushions of his own chair, her slender arched feet, in their trim riding-boots, resting upon his fender. It was not often that the Madam found time or occasion to stop at the Rectory. What need, indeed, when Philip was so constantly at Storm? But the image of her sat more often than she guessed just as she was sitting now, with a worshiper at her feet.

His own thoughts, more than her presence, kept him silent. The phrase she had uttered so carelessly (he did not altogether know his lady there!) had set them clamoring—"How you do need a wife to look after you...."

Philip tried in vain to remember a time when he had not loved this woman. As a child, made older than his years by the shadow of his mother's invalidism, he had treasured his glimpses of the reckless, beautiful girl with her two babies, as other children might treasure glimpses into fairyland. As an older boy, with his world already in ruins about him, he had idealized his one friend into a sort of goddess, a super-human deity who could do no wrong, whose every word was magic and whose slightest wish law. At that period, if Kate had bade him rob a bank or commit a murder, he would have done it unquestioningly, happy only to be of service to her. Later, as he grew into a thoughtful young manhood, he came to understand that even deities may have their faults; but Kate's were dear faults, never of the heart. As she became less goddess she became more human, and so nearer to him, until at last she was woman to his man. But a very wonderful woman, to be approached, even in thought, with reverence. Philip's love had so grown with him, step by step, as to be part of the fabric of himself, large now as his very nature; and that was large indeed.

Yet never once in all the years had he imagined the sacrilege of making her his wife, until there came the farewell letter from his father in prison; that man used to reading the hearts of men, who saw the truth between the lines of his son's

letters, and deliberately gave the woman both loved into his son's keeping.

"She is still young," Jacques Benoix had written, "and you are young, and my time is over. You must be to her what I would have been. We must consider now nothing but her greatest happiness, you and I, her greatest good."

Since then Philip, if he had not thought of it before, thought of little else than of marrying Kate Kildare.

Not soon, of course; not until time should have brought its blessed balm of forgetfulness, when both the girls would be married and gone, perhaps, and she in her loneliness would turn to him. Meanwhile he must be at hand to take care of her, as his father had bidden him; to watch over her unobtrusively, helping her as he had with Jacqueline, sharing any trouble that came to her; making himself necessary in every way possible, so that more and more he should take with her the place of his father.

Kate was wrong in her ideas that his poverty had much influence upon Philip. Poverty and wealth mean little to the idealist; and his faith was very strong. He knew that if God gave this beloved woman into his keeping, He would provide very surely the means of keeping her.

He was patient, too; yet lately all the talk of love and of marriage, the companionship of wistful, lovelorn Jacqueline, perhaps, the sight of James Thorpe's almost fatuous happiness, had made patience newly difficult; had stirred a restlessness in him that sometimes he believed his lady noticed. When she was in the room with him, whether they spoke or not, he found it almost impossible to keep his eyes from her; and when at such times their glances met, it seemed to him there was a quick flash of response in hers, an understanding look, almost of expectancy, as if she were waiting for him to say something he did not say.

Philip was of course right. Nothing of the change in him had been lost on Kate; only she attributed it unfortunately to another cause—to Jacqueline.

She was chattering desultorily about many things, as they sat there in the deepening November dusk, by the fire; but he did not hear what she was saying. He began to look covetously out of the corner of his eye toward one of her hands that lay on the arm of the chair close beside him; a big, beautiful hand like Kate herself, capable as little Jemima's, but with the warmth, the healing in its touch, of Jacqueline's own. When he pictured her to himself, he always saw first her

eyes, clear and direct as a boy's; then her lovely, curved lips; then these sentient hands of hers. He wished that he had the courage to take the hand in his own, to hold it against his breast, his cheek. It had been his often enough to hold, and even to kiss; but always of her own volition. She was as generous of caresses as her youngest daughter; but it never occurred to Philip, nor had it perhaps occurred to other men who loved her, that they might venture to take what she did not offer. Kate was the giver, always.

Even now, as if aware of his thoughts, the hand lifted, strayed over to touch the hair on his temples lightly as a butterfly, and came to rest on his shoulder, drawing him a little closer. He sat very still, thrilling to its touch. She might as well at that moment have laid her hand on his bare heart. He wondered how many more seconds he could bear it before he flung himself on his knees beside her and buried his face in her lap....

"It's nice in here, so warm and dusky and comfy," she said. "Easier to talk here than in that bare, ugly office of mine. I'm glad I came.—Now the scolding is going to commence." The hand patted him affectionately. "Phil, dear, are you *quite* as frank with me as you used to be? Do you still tell me everything you think and do and are? Isn't there something you keep back nowadays?"

"Nothing," he answered in a rather choked voice, making one mental reservation.

"If I hadn't your full confidence, I should miss it more than I can say. You've spoiled me, dear. I want to be in everything that concerns you."

"You are," breathed poor Philip.

She leaned a little toward him. "No confidences, then? Nothing to ask me, boy? Because it would be yours without asking." She waited a moment. Silence—a very tense silence. "I don't know whether I've ever told you how much I love you, how much I admire you. Only it's more than that. You are the sort of man—my dear, if I could have had a son like you, I should have been the proudest woman in the world! It breaks my heart to think that Jacques does not know his great boy."

She felt him trembling under her touch, and went on with her encouragement. "Think of what you have to offer the woman you love! Most men come to us soiled, with fingerprints on them which the most forgiving wife can never seem to wash quite away. But you—you are as clean as your mother left you.—Look

at me, Philip! Yes, I knew it.—And what a home you will make for her! Money never made a home yet—it spoils more homes than it helps, I think, because it does away with the effort that makes anything worth while.—Oh, my dear boy, I think I shall be envious of the girl you marry!"

The voice speaking was the one she had kept, as she once told Jacqueline, to sing lullabies to her babies with—surely the most exquisite, tender, caressing voice in the world, thought Philip. He tried to listen to what she was saying, but heard only the voice. His senses were swimming in it. Suddenly he leant over and laid his cheek against her rough riding-skirt.

"Why, dearest boy!" The voice softened still more, and he felt her hands in his hair. "Did you think you could hide anything from *me*? What a goose! Don't you suppose I saw? I have been wondering for days why you didn't tell me. And then I knew. The money—is that, it? But how perfectly silly, dear! There's enough and more than enough for two, but if you prefer it, your bride shall come to you as poor as any churchmouse, glad and proud to do with whatever you are able to give her. We don't care much for—just *things*, we Kildares!"

He raised his face, incredulous, listening at last to her words; a dawning rapture in his eyes. She had seen. Was she offering herself to him, Philip, as a goddess might lean to a mortal? He could not speak....

"And then I've thought," she went on, "that perhaps the thing between your two fathers was holding you back. Don't let it, ah, don't let it! Before that all happened, they were friends, dear friends. Your father was the one man Basil loved. And some day when we are all together somewhere, afterwards—if there is an afterwards!—I believe they will be friends again. It was all a hideous mistake. Surely mistakes can't last through eternity? That is my idea of what Heaven is; a place where we shall understand each other's mistakes, and forgive them. But you and Jacqueline—oh, Philip! Philip! try not to make any mistakes, you two! I couldn't bear that."

Philip was himself now, hearing every word. He whispered haltingly, praying that he had misunderstood, "What—was it you thought I—wished to say to you?"

She laughed a little. "I thought—and think—you were trying to summon up courage to ask me for my Jacqueline!"

He had risen to take his blow standing. In the dusk that filled the room above the

fire-line, she could not see his face.

She went on after a moment, "And I can't, *can't* tell you how happy it made me, how secure.—For a while I was so troubled. Channing, you know—I thought I should have to give up my hopes.—But now he has gone, and you are here; dear, faithful fellow, so big and true! For years I've dreamed of this, ever since she was born. You and Jacqueline, his child and mine, finding together all that we have missed. And some day, your children—Ah, my dear, don't waste your moments! Years go so fast, and they do not come back."

He made a queer, hoarse sound in his throat. Kate peered up at him, for the first time suspecting something amiss. "Philip," she exclaimed, "why don't you say something? Aren't you glad that I am glad?"

Glad!—In the chaos that was his mind, only one thing stood out clear to him. His fingers unconsciously gripped the small gold cross that hung at his belt, and clung to it. He had dedicated his life to service, first of God and second of his fellow-men, chief of whom was the woman before him. All his life he had dreamed of serving her. In his boyish heroics he had defended her from lions, rescued her and her children from Indians, carried her on his back out of burning houses. Lonely youth and lonely man, dreams formed a greater part of his life than of most men's, and all of them centered about the great figure of his existence, Kate Kildare.

Now the opportunity was come. He was to serve her indeed, and sacrificially. He saw with a horrible clarity where his duty lay, and wondered that he had not seen it before. She needed him for Jacqueline as she would never need him for herself. Young Benoix was of the stuff of which martyrs are made; but as he stood there, gripping the little cross of his calling, he prayed wordlessly, desperately, that his cup might pass from him.

Kate had risen too, and stood dismayed by his silence, trying to read his face by the flickering light. "Philip, what is it? Have I made a mistake after all? Don't you love Jacqueline?" Her heart began to beat rather fast. Something of what was in the air she sensed, but without understanding.

What was it she was asking him? Oh, yes—whether he loved Jacqueline. Dear little clinging, pathetic child! of course he loved her. He must answer. He made a great effort and spoke, nodding his head.

"Yes. Oh, yes. I do love her."

Kate came closer, close enough to see the dumb pain in his eyes. She exclaimed aloud, "Philip! Is it Channing then, after all? You think he has come between you—irrevocably? No, but you are wrong! That is over, absolutely over. It is for you to take out the sting.—See, Philip, I am going to be quite frank with you, franker than women generally are, even with themselves. You don't know much about girls. I do—about my own girl, at least, for I was just such a girl once.—There comes a time to young women, as to all young animals, when we look about us for our mates. We may not seek, perhaps, but we look about. And the first that comes—is very welcome, Philip.—That is all. Nature's way. If Jacqueline still thinks of Channing—well, it is only blessed human instinct to put aside the thing that hurts. But you must help her—she can't do it, alone. Only a new love drives out the hurt of the old. Jacqueline needs you, dear."

He put out a protesting hand. She was asking him for help, his lady. He must not let her beg....

He said with stiff lips, "You think—she—would be willing—to marry me?"

Kate nodded. "I suspect she'd like to show Mr. Channing as soon as possible how little impression he has left behind him!—But it wouldn't be that, of course," she added, seriously. "Underneath the other affair, she's always been a little in love with you, Philip. Women are complex creatures, with a capacity for being attracted quite in proportion to their capacity for attracting.... And after you are once married—You know, there's really no mystery about mating, except what the poets make. Nature goes about it with a beautiful simplicity. Given two young creatures, handsome, clean, healthy, mutually sympathetic, throw them together a while without too many distractions—and there you are! It's as inevitable as that two and two make four. Don't think too much about it, dear—you're too watchful, too introspective. Just let go, and be natural. She's very sweet, my Jacqueline, very loving and tender. And you—well, you're not unattractive, you know! Don't worry.—Why, I give you my word as a mother, as a woman," she exclaimed, "that a month after you and Jacqueline are married, you will both have forgotten any ridiculous little obstacle that ever kept you apart!..."

She kissed him lightly on the cheek. "Come soon," she whispered. "It will comfort the child just now to know that she is wanted."

Philip had taken the kiss with closed eyes. When he opened them again, his room was empty. He ran to the window, and saw her, a shadow shape, swing into

her saddle with a shadowy wave of the hand for him. He stood there watching her out of sight, so soon out of sight; his lady, the woman he loved, so infinitely kind, and beautiful, and cruel, heedless as the gods are of homage they do not need.

He groped his way back to the chair where she had sat, leaned his cheek where hers had rested—the place was still warm—and said good-bye to her....

An hour later, before his courage had a chance to fail him, he rode to Storm and asked Jacqueline to marry him.

The girl put up her lips simply as a child. "I'd love to marry you, Phil, darling. How sweet of you to ask me! And now," she said eagerly, "let's go and tell Mummy. She'll be so pleased!"



CHAPTER XLI

So there was presently another wedding at Storm, or rather in the church at Storm; and Kate could have sung with the Psalmist: "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy ways, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

Jemima, who spent as much time as her husband would spare her at Storm, in the interval between the formal engagement and the wedding, tried conscientiously to summon up courage to end in some way a situation that seemed to her impossible. But her hints and innuendoes, broad as she dared make them, had no effect upon the radiant satisfaction of her mother, nor upon Philip himself, hedged around as he was with a sort of calm serenity, an uplifted, detached air, which she had not sufficient experience to recognize as the elation that goes with martyrdom.

She began to wonder if after all she had been mistaken in Philip's feeling for her mother. He seemed quite content, even happy. Nevertheless, there was something about him that awed Jemima a little, made her usual frankness with him quite impossible.

With Jacqueline, however, she had no such feeling of awe, and she watched her sister with amazed impatience. Her infatuation for Channing had been a thing inexplicable to the fastidious Jemima; even more inexplicable was the ease with which she appeared to forget him for another lover.

Much of the girl's gaiety had returned to her. She entered into the wedding preparations with the eagerness of a child playing with a new toy. She spoke of Philip constantly, was always watching for his arrival, greeted him when he came with the utmost enthusiasm, clinging to him, sitting on the arm of his chair, kissing him, regardless of onlookers. True, she was quite as demonstrative with her mother, with James Thorpe, even with Jemima, when permitted; but, as the older girl said to herself in distaste, she was not going to marry them!

One day, shortly before the wedding, when Jemima arrived at Storm she was met by her mother at the door with finger upon lip.

"Hush! Jacky is singing again," whispered Kate, delightedly.

It was the first time the girl had been to the piano for weeks.

The two stood and listened. She sang to herself very softly, unconscious of an audience, one of the Songs of the Hill:

"A little winding road
Goes over the hill to the plain—
A little road that crosses the plain
And comes to the hill again."

Kate realized the difference in Jacqueline's voice since she had heard it last in that Song of the Hill; clear and expressionless, then, as a boy's; so throbbing now, so poignant with understanding, that the mother's eyes filled with tears. Jemima's, too, were a little moist, and she blinked them hard, and steeled herself to say to Jacqueline that day what she had come to say.

The child must not slip further into an irrevocable mistake, if she could help it.

She made an opportunity as soon as possible to get her alone. "Jacky," she said abruptly, "are you quite sure you want to marry Philip,—and that he wants to marry you?"

The girl turned a startled face upon her—"Why, Jemmy, he asked me! Why would he ask me if he didn't want me?"

"I suspect Philip does many things he does not want to.—Didn't he know all about—Mr. Channing?" She looked mercifully away from the other's blanching face, "I wonder if that might have anything to do with his asking you?"

She waited nervously for a reply. Even the most confident of surgeons have their moments of suspense.

It came very low, "I never thought of that, Jemmy. Perhaps you are right.—Oh, if that is so, I just *can't* be loving enough to him to make up for his goodness, can I? Darling old Phil!—You see it was because he did know all about Mr. Channing" (the voice was almost inaudible now) "that I knew I could marry him. We understand each other, you see. I'd never expect to be first with him, to take mother's place with him, any more than he expects to take—And—and so—we could comfort each other." The voice failed utterly here, and Jacqueline ran blindly out of the room, up to the never-failing solace of Mag's baby; leaving Jemima with the miserable sensation of having been cruel where she meant to be

kind, and cruel to no purpose.

That night, when Philip came at his usual time, Jacqueline settled the matter once for all. She perched upon the arm of his chair, holding his head against her shoulder so that he could not look at her.

"Reverend Flip, dear," she began, "I want you to tell me something—truly, truly, truth now! Before it is too late. People shouldn't marry each other unless they're going to be quite honest with each other, should they?"

"No, dear," he answered. "Fire away."

"You're sure, quite sure, that you really want to marry me?" She abandoned her strangle-hold, and leaned down with her cheek on his hair, to make the telling of anything disagreeable more easy for him.

She felt him start, but he said, "Very sure, sweetheart."

"And you're not just being noble," she asked, wistfully, "like Jemmy thinks?"

Philip cried, "Jemima be darned!" and pulled her down into his arms quite roughly.

Her relief and gratitude pierced through the armor of his abstraction.

"Oh, Phil, you *are* sweet!" she whispered, holding him tight. "And I'll make up to you somehow for it. I will! I will!"

The wedding was more Jemima's idea of what such an affair should be than her own had been; with a bishop officiating, and a choir in surplices (rather weak-voiced and tearful, without their beloved leader) and a matron-of-honor in a very smart New York frock, and the little church crowded to its doors, and even spilling into the road beyond. Nor was the congregation entirely composed of country-folk, tenants and the like. There was quite a sprinkling of what Jemima called "worth-while people"; not only Jacqueline's victims, who came *en masse* and looking rather depressed, but Mrs. Lawton and her daughters and several other women whom Jemima had firmly brought to Storm (one could not be friends with young Mrs. Thorpe without being friends with her family as well) and who needed no urging to come a second time.

Well toward the front there sat another guest, whom the eye of the matron-of-honor encountered with some distaste; an unwashed-looking person with a

peddler's pack on the floor at his feet, whose beaming, innocent gaze missed no detail of the ceremony. Brother Bates was in the habit of carrying up to Misty other things besides his stock in trade and the Word of God. Very little that occurred at Storm was unknown to the man he called "Teacher."

Nobody who had any possible claim to be present missed that wedding. It was the nine days' wonder of the community. As Mrs. Sykes murmured to her chosen intimates: "To think of both them beautiful young gals bein' content to take their ma's cast-off leavin's!"—for the heart-affairs of the Madam were viewed by her realm with a certain proprietary, disapproving interest, not entirely unmixed with pride. And more than one noted that the bridegroom, waiting at the altar-steps with his best man, Farwell, was careful never to glance toward the pew where Mrs. Kildare sat, quite as beautiful and far more radiant than the young creature in white, who moved dreamily up the aisle as if her thoughts were far away. There was a certain amount of buzzing among the congregation.

Jacqueline was married in a sort of daze. She had remembered quite mechanically to keep five paces behind Jemima, to lift her skirts at the step so as not to stumble over them, even to smile at Philip because he smiled at her—a very tender, encouraging smile. As she spoke the words that made her his wife she thought triumphantly, "If Mr. Channing could only see me now!"

It was not until she was going down the aisle again on her husband's arm that the daze lifted suddenly. Her husband! She looked up at him with a little gasp, and Philip, feeling her tremble, pressed her hand, murmuring, "Steady, dear," as he would have spoken to a frightened colt.

Then she remembered that after all it was only old Philip, her friend....

Some hours later they drove back in the Ark from Storm to the rectory—their only wedding-journey—through a world white with the first snow, in honor of their nuptials. They went hand in hand through the little blanketed garden toward the welcome of the firelight that glowed through the cabin windows; and the door was eagerly opened to them by the elderly housewoman, Ella, and proud Lige, both of whom Mrs. Kildare had spared from Storm to replace the worthless Dilsey.

"We all's got two more presents!" announced Lige, a-grin from ear to ear with the joy of the occasion. "Come and look."

He led the way with a lantern toward Philip's modest stable, where they found a

pretty little Jersey cow with a placard tied to her crumpled horn, which read, "Compliments of the Possum Hunters."

It was the final activity of Night Riders in that community.

They found the second present on the dressing-table in the room which Philip had fitted up, without consulting anybody, as Jacqueline's boudoir; just such a room as the girl had dreamed of, with slender white furniture, and rosy curtains, and a little shelf of her favorite books, and a lovely photograph of her mother hanging beside her bed—which had once been Philip's photograph. She could hardly withdraw her attention from the delights of her room long enough to notice the present, a small pasteboard box addressed to "Mrs. Philip Benoix," which Philip finally opened for her.

He gave an exclamation. The box contained a ring of oddly wrought pale gold, set with a sapphire cut in a crest. It was a ring which his father had worn as far back as Philip could remember. The card enclosed said simply, "For my new little daughter, Jacqueline."

"Then the warden does know where he is!" cried Philip. He had written to his father about his approaching wedding, addressing the letter in care of the state penitentiary, on the chance of its reaching him. "But how did the box get here?"

Inquiry produced no results. Ella had found it on a table beside the door. In the excitement of that day, there had been a constant stream of people coming and going, the altar guild and the choir to decorate the house with evergreens, neighbors to inspect the preparations for the bride, negroes with offers of assistance, taking the delight of their race in anything that resembles an Occasion. Any one of these visitors might have left the ring unobserved.

Ella did not think to mention that among them had been the old mountain peddler, who had come to the door to ask whether there was a Bible in that house, and been routed by Ella with a scornful, "Go 'way f'um here. Don't you know Mr. Philip's a preacher?"

But busy as she was, Ella had found time to run and get him a glass of milk, remembering that he was a protégé of the Madam's, and that the Madam never permitted people to go from her door hungry.

CHAPTER XLII

The weeks that followed were the most contented of Kate Kildare's life, despite her loneliness in her great house, with no companion except the negro servants and Mag's baby. She felt like a captain who has carried his ship into port after a stormy passage. Her children were provided for; they were safe; life, which had treated her so harshly, was powerless to hurt them now. It was an attitude of mind that is apt to be rather tempting to the gods....

Jacqueline entered into her new rôle with touching eagerness. Somewhat to his surprise, Philip found her quite invaluable in his parochial work. She took much of the visiting off his hands, held Mothers' Meetings and Bible classes; taught Sunday-school; busied her unaccustomed needle quite happily with altar-cloths and vestments, and even more happily with socks and buttons. She discussed housekeeping matters very seriously with her mother and Jemima, more seriously than she practised them, perhaps, for Ella, trained by the Madam, had taken her two "young folks" into her protection with a capable thoroughness that is the acme of good African service, and proceeded to create such an atmosphere of comfort in the rectory as Philip had not thought possible.

He had always found his little home a pleasant place to come to; but now it was more than pleasant, with Jacqueline's eager face watching for him at the window, or her beautiful voice mingling in the twilight with the tinkling notes of his old piano. The punching-bag and other purely masculine paraphernalia had been banished to his own room, and the living-room, alas! had lost its aspect of meticulous neatness. But when Philip found a darning-basket spilled into his usual chair, or a riding-glove of Jacqueline's lying among the scattered sheets of his half-finished sermon, he did not frown. He told himself he would get used to it presently. In fact, he rather liked it. And he decidedly liked her funny little maternal airs with his clothes, and his health (which was excellent), and his finances (which were not).

Mrs. Kildare had insisted upon continuing Jacqueline's usual allowance until her coming of age; and Philip had felt it not quite fair to the girl herself to refuse; but Jacqueline knew better than to use the smallest part of that allowance toward expenses which Philip might consider his. So she consulted anxiously with her mother on the cost of food-supply, and was very firm with Ella in the matter of

flour and eggs; somewhat to the amusement of both older women.

Others besides Philip realized the charm of that picturesque cabin with its young and hospitable mistress. Farwell was a faithful visitor, and even some of the "victims" respectfully renewed their allegiance, to Jacqueline's frank pleasure. The Thorpes came out from town very often, with an automobile filled with friends; Jemima having come to appreciate more fully at a distance something of the unusual atmosphere of her former home. It was no rare thing for Philip to return from an afternoon gallop and find his house full of guests, drinking tea or toddies according to their sex, and unmistakably grouped around Jacqueline as the central figure. The party usually adjourned to Storm for supper, to the huge delight of Big Liza and the quiet pleasure of the Madam herself, who looked forward to these incursions of Jemima's with a combination of dread and eagerness.

Jacqueline, on these occasions, was surprised to note the ease with which Philip entered into the duties of host, making his guests comfortable with the sort of effortless charm that usually comes only with much experience of entertaining. She realized it was the same adaptability he had shown among the mountain folk, and among the simple people of his own parish; and she began to be very proud of her husband.

Invitations poured in on them from Lexington and Frankfort and the surrounding Bluegrass country. "Why don't we go to some of these parties!" he suggested one day. "Of course I'm not a dancing-man, but I could take you very easily, thanks to the Ark, and once there I daresay you will not lack for beaux, you staid old married woman!"

"Do you *want* to go to parties?" she asked, rather wistfully.

"I love to see you enjoy yourself."

"Oh, but I enjoy myself without parties," she said; adding quickly, "Would it be better for the parish if I went?"

He laughed and put an arm around her. "No, Mrs. Rector. It's not that kind of parish, thank goodness!"

"Then—" she nestled against him—"I'd rather stay home at night. Wouldn't you?"

Philip admitted that he would.

His suggestion had come as the result of much covert study of his little wife. Despite her pretty, matronly airs, her contented preoccupation with new duties, he was not altogether satisfied with the look of Jacqueline. He saw things her mother failed to notice—a faint shadow beneath her eyes which made them look oddly dark, a little hollowing of the cheeks, rosy as they were; above all a certain listlessness, a sort of abstraction that she covered by forced gaiety. She appeared to have lost interest in many of the things that used to be her joy; sang often, it is true, but without enthusiasm; rarely rode the fine saddle horse that had come from Storm stables to keep old Tom company, preferring to drive with Philip in the hitherto-despised Ark—preferring apparently above all things to sit at home in front of the fire, with a puppy and her sewing for company. Tomboy Jacqueline with a needle in her hands was a sight which somehow troubled Philip even more than it amused him. Often when he came upon her unexpectedly, he noted traces of tears about her eyes—a signal always for the sudden flow of high spirits which Philip found at times almost painful.

The girl was not happy. Channing had certainly left his mark.

"Damn the fellow!" said Philip to himself, most unclerically; and his anger did not cool with time.

He redoubled his tender care of Jacqueline; considerate of every mood, constantly praising and encouraging her, daily planning little surprises for her pleasure (the puppy had been one of them); doing everything possible, in fact, except make love to her. That would have been possible, too, for she was very sweet, a true daughter of Helen; and he a young and normal man, sorely in need of comforting. But guessing what he did of the girl's heart, he would not have offered her the indignity of unwelcome love-making.

"It is just like being married to a dear big brother," Jacqueline explained naïvely to her mother. "Philip is the best friend in the world!"

"I know. He would be, dear fellow," Kate replied, well content, remembering with a sudden shudder, despite the years which had passed, a husband who had never been a friend to her.

Kate was seeing very little of her new son-in-law in those days. Often as she came to the rectory—and she had formed the habit of dropping in once or twice a day on her way to and from her lonely house—she rarely found Philip at home.

"What does he find to do that keeps him so busy these winter days?" she

marveled.

"Oh, sick parishioners, and ailing cows, and things like that. He's always tearing about on horseback, or making long journeys somewhere in the Ark—I wish Jemmy had never given it to him! He manages to find duties that keep him out of doors just as long as there's any daylight to see by. And as if that weren't enough, he has fixed up the choir-room over at the church for a sort of study, because he says he can't write sermons with me about—I'm too distracting! Did you ever hear such nonsense? When I sit just as quiet as a mouse, and don't do a thing but watch him, or perhaps sit on a foot-stool beside him and hold the hand he isn't using. You don't need both hands to write a sermon!"

Kate laughed at the picture, looking at her daughter with a fond maternal eye. She could understand that the girl might be somewhat distracting, in her demure little house-dress turned in at the soft throat, and her hair done neatly on top of her head as became a matron, but escaping about her face in glinting chestnut tendrils.

"I suspect it *is* rather difficult to be a spiritual pastor and master and an attentive bridegroom at the same time," she commented.

She put the infrequency of Philip's appearances at Storm down to the same cause. "Young birds to their own nest," she thought, a little drearily. It is a rule that is rather hard on older birds.

But Jacqueline, her eyes already opened by Jemima, was more observant, and began to realize at last that Philip was trying to avoid her mother.

The thought troubled and frightened her. What had she done? They were her entire world now, Philip and her mother; and any world of Jacqueline's must necessarily be a world of much loving-kindness.

She consulted her sister, distressfully.

"Humph!" said Jemima, and would have liked to add, "I told you so!"—but did not dare.

Thoughts, however, have an annoying way of communicating themselves independent of words, and Jacqueline nodded sadly, as though she had spoken.

"I know. I oughtn't to have married Philip—you were right. I only wanted to make him happier, and I thought he could go on adoring mother just the same,

with me to comfort him in between whiles. But he won't let me,—he won't let me! And he's unhappier than ever.—Oh, Jemmy, what shall I do?"

Jemima for once was at a loss for advice to offer. She thought harsh things of her headstrong, single-minded mother, and yearned over this poor, ignorant, immolated young creature who seemed destined to waste her loveliness on those who could not value it.

"There's nothing to do," she sighed; adding with a cynicism of which she was not aware, "Except to wait for mother to grow old. It won't be long now. She *can't* go on looking like a girl forever!"

"Oh, Jemmy!" exclaimed Jacqueline, shocked and flushing. "Philip's not—that sort!"

"Every man's that sort," remarked the experienced Mrs. Thorpe.



CHAPTER XLIII

As the winter closed in—it was one of the open, keen, out-of-door winters which have done their share to make the dwellers on the great central plateau of Kentucky so sturdy a race of men—the Thorpe automobile was seen less frequently on the road to Storm. Kate smilingly accused Jemima of neglecting her for the furthering of her social campaign.

"A social campaign in *Lexington*? How absurd!" shrugged Jemima; to her mother's amusement.

It was difficult to keep pace with the development of Jemima.

"To tell the truth—I did not mean to speak of it until later—but we are finishing a book!"

"We'?" laughed Kate.

"Yes. James has been at work on it in a desultory way for a number of years, and I am very busy looking up references, and verifying quotations, and prodding. You know scholarly men are inclined to be—procrastinating."

(The word "lazy" was to Jemima's thinking too great an insult to be applied to any one for whom she cared.)

"Is it a novel, with you in it?" demanded Jacqueline, eagerly, with unconscious wistfulness. Once she herself had hoped to be the heroine of a novel; and she surreptitiously read all the book reviews she could lay hands upon to see whether Channing had been able to finish it without her.

"A novel—pooh! It is a treatise on the Psychology of the Feminist Movement; and I think," added Jemima complacently, "that it will be more salable than James' previous works."

"I have no doubt of it," murmured her mother. "But just what is this Feminist Movement I read so much about nowadays, dear? Votes, and strongmindedness in general?"

Jemima looked at her mother, thoughtfully. "If you but knew it, you yourself are

a leader in the Feminist Movement. It is seeing such women as you denied the ballot that has made most of us suffragists."

"Good Heavens! Are you *that*?" gasped her mother.

"All thinking women are 'that' nowadays," replied Jemima, reprovingly. "Besides, it's very smart."

Shortly after the book in question made its appearance, Jemima arrived at Storm one day quite pale with excitement. "It's come," she cried, "it's come at last! James has been offered the Presidency of ——" (she named a well-known Eastern university) "and he's already found a substitute for Lexington, and we're going on at once!"

"To live?" cried Jacqueline.

"Of course! Isn't it splendid? Oh, I've seen it coming ever since that lecture tour, and the book clinched matters."

Jacqueline embraced her sister in unselfish delight. "Think of it—'Mrs. President'! And all the young professors kowtowing, and the nice undergraduates to dance with—and what a wonderful place to live! Dear old Goddy! Oh, I *am* glad. That famous college! Why, it's perfectly amazing!"

"Nice, of course, but hardly amazing," corrected Jemima, herself once more. "James is a very brilliant man, you know. I always expected recognition for him. He should have had some such position long ago. But he had no knowledge of how to—take advantage of opportunities."

Kate found her voice at last. "I congratulate you, dear," she said quietly—a tribute which the other accepted with a simple nod, as becomes true greatness.

And then, suddenly and quite unexpectedly to herself, the face of the triumphant Mrs. Thorpe crumpled up into a queer little mask of distress, and she flung herself into her mother's arms and wept aloud.

The others tried to console her, weeping too. Mag's baby, dozing in front of the fire, sensed the general grief and lifted up her voice in sympathy. Big Liza, attracted by the commotion, learned the cause of it and added herself to the group with loud Ethiopian howls of dismay. The housemaid came running; and soon it was known throughout the quarters and at the stables that Miss Jemmy was going far away to live, and would never come back any more. There had not

been such excitement of gloom at Storm since Basil Kildare was brought into the house dead.

It was, characteristically, Jemima herself who quelled the tides of emotion she had started.

"We mustn't be f-foolish," she gulped, mopping her eyes impartially with her mother's sleeve and Liza's apron. "It isn't as if I was af-afraid to go and live among strangers—I'm used to it. B-but I can't help wondering how you all will manage to get along without me!" The tears flowed again.—"You're such a *helpless* person, Mother!"

This to the Madam, the famous Mrs. Kildare of Storm! Jacqueline gasped at the irreverence.

But for once Kate was not tempted to smile at the girl's egotism. She was already foretasting the dreariness of life without the critical, corrective, and withal stimulating presence of her elder child.

The Thorpes' going, after a last Christmas together at Storm, left Kate and Jacqueline more than ever dependent upon each other. If Philip had been more exacting as a husband, he might well have complained of his wife's constant attendance on her mother in those days. But he was so far from complaining that it was at his suggestion Jacqueline formed the habit of taking her midday meal at Storm.

It was the first real breaking of ties in Kate's little family, and he knew his lady well enough to realize that her cheerful, quiet exterior concealed a very lonely heart just then. So lonely, indeed, that Kate more than once considered the idea of asking Philip and Jacqueline to come and live with her at Storm, for she missed her old-time confidential talks with Philip almost as much as she missed Jemima.

But Philip was spared at least that test of devotion.

"Young birds to their own nest," she reminded herself, sighing.

Occasionally she sent for Philip as in the old days, for the purpose of discussing business or parish matters. He always came, schooling himself to the manner that might be expected of an affectionate son-in-law, but usually managing to bring Jacqueline with him. She was puzzled and a little hurt by his new intangible reserve. She could not quite understand the change in him, and

decided with some bitterness that he had lost interest in her now that she had given him what he wanted of her—namely, Jacqueline. That, she reminded herself, was the way of the world. She who knew men should not have been surprised.

And Jacqueline made up to her as best she could for Philip's defection. She had gone back lately to the ways of her little girlhood, loved to sit at Kate's feet in front of the grate fire, or even in her lap—no small accomplishment, for she was almost as tall a woman as her mother—listening while Kate read aloud, interrupting her frequently with caresses, making love to her as only Jacqueline could. Kate laughed at her for what she called her "mommerish" ways; but she found them very sweet, nevertheless. It was as if the girl were trying to be two daughters in one, and a faithless Philip to boot.

Kate, too, had gone back to old ways that winter, and occupied her hands with much sewing for Mag's baby. She had been, in the days before larger affairs took up so much of her time, a tireless needlewoman, and knew well the mental relaxation that comes to those who occasionally "sit on a cushion and sew a fine seam." She explained smilingly that she was preparing for old age, when nothing would be expected of her but to make clothes for her grandchildren; and meanwhile Mag's baby reaped the benefit.

Small Kitty had grown apace, a placid, dimpled little creature, who stayed with great docility wherever she was put, content to amuse herself with her ten fingers, or the new accomplishment of blowing bubbles out of her mouth. In all characteristics she was so different from what her own two strenuous, exacting babies had been that Kate marveled anew at the power of heredity.

"I *wish* you'd let me have her!" said Jacqueline one day, renewing an old complaint. "You don't love her half so much as I do, and anyway you've had three of your own."

Kate smiled to herself, and did not make the obvious answer. Instead she said, "It was to me Mag gave her, dear, to be made a 'lady' of."

"Poor Mag! Do you think you can ever do it?"

"I don't know," admitted Kate, rather helplessly. A year ago she would have said "Yes" with confidence; but the year had done much to shake her faith in her own ability. "At least I shall make a useful woman of her, which is more to the point."

Only once any sign had come out of the oblivion which had engulfed Mag Henderson. It was a little cheap string of gilt beads, addressed to Mrs. Kildare and accompanied by a scrap of paper which read:

For little Kitty, so she kin have somethin' purty to remember her mama by.

Kate had put the poor little gift away sadly, dreading to think how the girl must have earned even the trifling outlay it had cost. It seemed a pitifully suitable memento of that mother—a string of cheap gilt beads, already tarnished....

Jacqueline's handiwork on these occasions was a rather ambitious venture, a peppermint-striped silk shirt, reminiscent of Professor Thorpe's courting finery, which she was making as a surprise for Philip's birthday. Kate eyed this surprise with some misgivings, and hoped that she would not be asked for an opinion upon it. The sleeves of the thing looked rather odd, as if they were facing the wrong direction; also, the buttonholes might have been spaced more evenly.

In its beginning she ventured one remonstrance. "Isn't striped silk just a little giddy for the Cloth, dear?"

"Phil needs to be giddy, Mother. I mean that my husband shall be just as stylish as Jemmy's. Besides, it won't show under his clerical vest."

"But if it won't show, what's the use of all this grandeur?"

"Why, Mummy, what a vulgar thought! It will feel, of course!—You know how it is when there are ribbons and lace on our underthings—we feel sort of superior and extra lady-like."

"Do we?" laughed Kate. "I must try it and see."

"And then men admire silk tremendously," Jacqueline informed her, seriously. "Whenever I ask Phil what to put on, he chooses something silk, and I don't believe he's ever owned anything silk in all his life; unless perhaps a handkerchief. Oh, he's going to love this shirt, you'll see!"

"I am sure he is," said Kate tenderly, and thereafter held her peace.

Jacqueline was right, Philip's delight in his "surprise" was almost touching. It was perhaps the first thing that any woman had made for him with her own hands since the days when his mother prepared for his arrival in the world. He bragged about his shirt to all of his acquaintance, loyally concealing its weaknesses; and would have worn it with equal pride had it been as uncomfortable as the shirt of Nessus.

Jacqueline, highly elated, embarked upon a series of silken adventures. If firm

intention could have done it, she would have become in those days as accomplished a needlewoman as her mother and sister.



CHAPTER XLIV

Jacqueline had never quite thought out to herself the reason for Channing's unexplained disappearance. It was a subject upon which her mind dwelt constantly whenever she was alone; hence she managed to be alone as little as possible. The realization that he was a coward, as she had more than once suspected—afraid to face the consequences of his own act; afraid (the weakest cowardice of all!) of what people might say—had done much to help her pride through the humiliation of desertion, had done much, indeed, to banish him from her heart.

But she could not banish him from her mind. Again and again her thoughts went over all that had passed between them, trying piteously to discover what had happened to put them apart. He had been so madly in love, had wanted her so desperately—or was it she who had wanted him? Had she shown that too plainly?—Had she not shown him plainly enough?—Sometimes she reproached herself bitterly for her little instinctive coquetries with him. More often she asked herself in a terrified whisper whether he had ever really loved her at all, whether it was she herself who had done the seeking, the demanding?—she a shameless creature, blinded by her own feeling, to whom he had responded out of pity, perhaps (Jacqueline shivered), laughing at her all the while in his sleeve.

Poor Jacqueline! It was no wonder that her eyes were shadowed, her manner listless. Always, in these dreaded meditations, she came to a certain point where she dared think no further, but ran away from herself in a sort of panic, to the comfort of whoever happened to be nearer, Philip or her mother. And she saw to it that one of them was always near.

It was the frequency of these sudden, unexplained attacks of frantic affection that had driven Philip to the necessity of another study, where he might write sermons and attend to necessary matters free from the distraction of a wife who at any moment might fling herself into his arms demanding wordlessly to be comforted.

Not that he begrudged the little bruised soul any comfort he had to offer. He at least had gone into marriage with his eyes wide open. He understood Jacqueline far better than did her mother, who ascribed her varying moods to the whims and

megrims usual with young wives in the first difficult year or two of married life.

Frequently these panics occurred at night, when she suddenly found herself awake in the black loneliness, remembering Channing. Then she would jump out of bed and run into her husband's room, a distraught, white ghost of a figure, and climb in beside him to hide her head in the ready refuge of his shoulder.

"Nightmares again?" he would ask.

And she, nodding, buried her head deeper, while he held her close and silent until her shuddering ceased, and he knew by her light breathing that she was asleep there in his arms.

Perhaps it was a comforting that worked both ways, for Philip sometimes had nightmares of his own.

One day Jacqueline, after lunch with her mother, was glancing over the numerous magazines that littered the reading-table, when she came across something which riveted her attention. Kate, getting no answer to a twice-repeated question, looked over her shoulder to see what she was reading. On the front page she saw a picture of Percival Channing, with a notice of his new book, just published.

"He finished it without me after all, you see," said Jacqueline faintly. "He—he said he couldn't."

Kate made no comment. The mention of Channing always embarrassed her quite as much as it did Jacqueline. Her duplicity in the matter of his disappearance weighed heavily on her conscience, and she longed for the time to come when she could make full confession and be absolved. She wondered if the time had come already, since Jacqueline spoke of him of her own accord.

"I suppose I ought to be proud to have helped at all with such a book as that," went on the girl, haltingly. "It says here it is the greatest book he has ever written.—And I'm in it, Mother. It's a great honor, isn't it?"

"It's a great impertinence," exclaimed Kate.

Jacqueline flushed. "Mummy, dear, you've never been quite fair to Mr. Channing, and—it's not like you. If you realized how much I—I cared for him, you would be fairer.—Mother, I want to tell you something, now that it's all done and over."

Kate braced herself for what she knew was coming.

"I—I kept on seeing Mr. Channing, even after you told me not to—You never made *me* promise anything, you know."

"I trusted you."

"Yes, but it isn't fair to trust people when they don't want you to! If you had asked me any questions, I think I should have told you the truth—I *think* so. But you didn't ask me any questions.—It wasn't his fault, Mummy. I made him come. I used to meet him in the Ruin every night." She peered at her mother anxiously, and Kate got up abruptly and crossed the room so that her face should not be visible.

"That isn't all," went on the hurried voice, rather breathless now. "You see—it didn't seem very honorable, somehow, to go on meeting him like that, on your place, when you didn't know about it—"

"No," agreed Kate.

"So—so I thought I'd just better go away with him.—Oh, he didn't ask me to, he didn't really want me to—he said it was too much of a sacrifice to ask of me. But—you and I know, Mother, don't we? that there's no sacrifice too great to make when you love a man!"

"Oh, my little girl," groaned Kate, "how could you love him like that when you knew about—that woman, knew what sort of man he was?"

Jacqueline said eagerly, "But he explained all about that woman. He never really loved her at all, but he was lonely, and she was very beautiful and fascinating, as that sort of woman knows how to be. And artistic people are so susceptible. It was a sort of experiment—experience is an author's stock in trade, you know." (Kate could almost hear Channing saying it.) "It turned out wrong, of course. Why, Mother, she was *horrid*! The fact that a bad woman had got hold of him was all the more reason for a good woman to—to win him back. Oh, I suppose he was weak—I know he was—but weak people are the very ones who need us most, Mother, aren't they?"

Kate came behind her chair and laid her cheek on the girl's hair. "Don't say anything more, dear. I know, I understand. Surely nobody, neither God nor man, can condemn us women for our divine gift of pity."

But Jacqueline had dedicated herself to honesty that day. "It wasn't just pity, Mummy. I—I wanted him, too! I wanted him as much as he wanted me—more, I think, because after all he never came for me. Just went away without a word." Suddenly she hid her face in her hands. "Oh, Mummy, and I loved him so! I adored him!—I loved him as much as you loved Phil's father."

Kate opened her lips in quick protest, but did not speak. How could she explain the difference between this childish infatuation for a first lover and her own devotion to such a man as Jacques Benoix? Was there, after all, such a difference? It is not the recipient but the giver that makes love a holy thing.

She knelt beside the girl, and put both arms around her. "My dear!—Did it hurt very much when he did not come?"

Jacqueline leaned her head on the warm shoulder that had received so many of her griefs, and gave way freely to the relief of weeping.

"Oh, yes, it hurt," she said between sobs. "It still hurts."

"You don't mean that you still—care for him?"

The other raised tear-filled eyes in surprise. "Now that I am married to Philip? Why, of course not! How could I? My husband is the dearest thing in the world!"

Kate laughed in sheer relief.

But the girl's lips were still quivering, and she ducked her head down on the comfortable shoulder again. "I can't help feeling ashamed, though," she sobbed. "Ashamed be-because Mr. Channing proved to be such—such a coward, and because—he never could have loved me at all, or he would have come for me, or written, or something!—He must have been glad to get away from me, just as he was from that other woman."

"Listen, darling!" Kate realized that her own moment of confession had arrived. "He *did* come for you! It is my fault that he has never explained to you;"—and with the girl's widening, incredulous eyes fixed upon her, she told every detail of her experience that night of the storm.

When she finished, Jacqueline was on her feet, queerly white and still. "You knew," she whispered as if to herself, "and you let me think him—? You never told me—you let me suffer—Oh, *Mother!*—Why, it was deceit! It was a lie!"

Kate frowned. "What of it? Lying, deceit—what are they to me beside your happiness? I only wanted that—and thank God I've got it!"

Jacqueline gave her a strange look. "My happiness," she repeated.

The tone of her voice startled Kate. "You *are* happy?" she said, quickly, between a statement and a question. "You told me yourself that Philip was the dearest thing in the world to you!"

Jacqueline answered, "Mother, I love Philip now better than I ever dreamed it was possible to love any one. But—It does not make you exactly happy to feel that way about a man who—who doesn't know you're there, unless you remind him."

"Jacqueline! Philip does not love you—?"

"He tries his best to," said the girl with a hopeless little smile, "but he can't. Oh, it's quite true!"—she stopped her mother's protest by a gesture. "I knew it before I married him. Jemmy told me—Oh, do you think I would have done such a thing, do you dream I would have accepted such a sacrifice, if I had seen anything else to do? If I had guessed that Mr. Channing really wanted me?—I belonged to Mr. Channing, Mother.—Now do you see what you have done?"

Kate had risen, too, her hands shaking. A strange and appalling thought had forced itself into her head. She asked in a sort of whisper, "Daughter, *why did you marry Philip?*"

The answer came with a terrible simplicity, "Because I did not want to be like Mag Henderson. Because I thought—if a baby came—you never can tell—it would be better to have a father for it."

In the silence that followed, innumerable little familiar home-sounds came to Kate's ears; the crackling of a log in the fire, a negro voice out of doors calling "Soo-i, soo-i," to the pigs, Big Liza in the distant kitchen chanting a revival hymn while she washed the dishes. Her eyes in that one moment took in, as do the eyes of a drowning person, every detail of her surroundings; the sturdy masculine furniture covered incongruously with its wedding *crétonne*, the piano and books that had been a part of her childhood's home, her open office beyond, with its business-like array of maps and ledgers; and all these things seemed to accuse her of something, of being a traitor to some trust. Her eyes came to rest at last upon the old flintlock rifle over the mantel-shelf, beneath the wooden, grim-

faced Kildare who had carried it.

"And I did not kill him!" she muttered aloud, as if in apology to the rifle.

Jacqueline, who had been watching her fearfully, ran with a little cry and clung to her close.

"Mummy, don't look like that, don't stare so queerly! You frighten me," she wailed. "Didn't you guess—didn't you understand, when I told you how I adored him? I—I thought you would. How could I help it? I didn't know—I—Oh, Mummy!"

Kate with a gesture brushed aside her incoherences, brushed aside the thing she was confessing—a thing she saw to have been inevitable, taking into account the girl's nature, her inheritance ("From both sides," the mother reminded herself, grimly), and the man she had had to deal with. Kate told herself she was a fool not to have suspected it from the first; or rather to have allowed Channing to dull her suspicion of it with his halting statement that he was, after all, "a gentleman."

Even in that moment of sickening surprise, she faced and accepted and took upon herself the burden of her child's weakness. It was not that sin which roused in her a rapidly mounting tide of furious anger against Jacqueline. It was her sin against Philip Benoix.

"You accused me of deceit, of a lie. You!" Her voice was curiously thick, and she spoke with great effort. "Ah! There have been bad women in this family of yours, my girl, but never before, I think, a dishonorable one."

Jacqueline recoiled from her.

"Dishonorable! And my daughter! Stealing a good man's name to cover her own shame. How dared you, how *dared* you?" She began to stride up and down the room, the words pouring from her lips at white heat. Kate Kildare was one of the people whose quiet serenity covers a great power of anger, all the more forceful for being kept within bounds. Rarely indeed had she allowed it to force the flood-gates; and Jacqueline cowered away from her, staring, hardly believing it was herself to whom this cold fury of speech was addressed.

"Philip, left to my care by his father, Philip for whom I wanted everything good in life even more than for my own children! Oh, how dared you? So devoted to us, so grateful to me—how could he refuse? What chance had he? Even if he had known—" She turned on Jacqueline with a sudden gleam of hope. "*Did* he

know? Were you honest enough to tell him?"

The girl gasped. "How could I?" The blood came up over her face in a painful flood and her head drooped. "But—but I think he—understood. He—seemed to."

The other gave a short, hard laugh. "Not likely! Men, even such men as Philip, don't marry the—Magdalens, however much they pity them. Unless somebody makes them, as I made Philip.—Oh, my God! And I thought he was too modest to ask for you! I thought I was offering him the best I had!"

A faint voice interrupted her. "Did you—offer me to Philip?"

If Kate was aware of the cruelty of her words, she was beyond compunction just then. "Yes! Offered you?—Good Heavens, I insisted upon it! Oh, what a fool I have been, what a blind, blundering fool! Now I understand why he was so queer, so quiet.—Taking advantage of his devotion to shunt my disgrace onto him—Jacques' son!"

At last her anger exhausted her, and she sank into a chair, quite limp and silent. She did not know just when Jacqueline left the house, had been only vaguely aware of a horse galloping down the hill recklessly, as Jacqueline, like her father before her, was wont to gallop. In the reaction of emotion, she felt rather ill, and had to struggle with a physical weakness that threatened to overcome her.

Some time later a servant, entering to announce supper, found her there in the dark, and receiving no reply to her summons, ran back to the kitchen in some alarm.

Big Liza, with the wisdom of the simple, herself brought a tray of nourishing food, and stood over her mistress firmly while she ate, obediently enough, but tasting nothing of what she put into her mouth.

Presently, however, the food had its effect. Weakness passed; and Kate found that her anger had dissipated, leaving only a great, aching sorrow, not only for her daughter, but with her. Philip receded to the back of her mind. Channing was there only as one is aware of the presence of some crawling, hidden thing in the grass, whom one intends presently to crush with a heel. All her thoughts rested now upon Jacqueline.

She saw her as she had cowered away from that torrent of wrath, her tearless, strained eyes fixed incredulously upon the mother who was hurting her. She remembered all her little tender, clinging ways, her piteous loyalty to the man

who had deserted her, her gallant effort to bear gaily the load of fear that must for so long have been upon her heart. She remembered farther back than that—her fierce rage with the accusing Jemima, her arms wound tight about the mother whose weakness she had learned, her cry, "If she is bad, then I'll be bad, too! I'd rather be bad like her than good as—as God!"

Kate began to shiver. She, the defender of Mag Henderson, of all weak and helpless creatures, she had failed her own daughter!...

Her mind went still further back into the past, and recalled the scene between herself and Jacques Benoix, when she had offered herself to him, when only the fact that her lover was stronger than herself had kept her from far worse sinning than Jacqueline's—worse, because less ignorant. What right had she, Kate Leigh, reckless, headstrong, hot-hearted, to expect of her child either the sort of strength that resists temptation, or the sort that declines to shield itself at the expense of another?

Gradually she came to absolve Jacqueline from blame even in the matter of Philip. She had not sought Philip's help, she had only accepted what had been offered her—what her mother had prompted him to offer. Poor little victim, passive in the hands of stronger natures, in the hands of circumstance, heredity, character—that Fate which the ancient gods surely meant by their cryptic saying: "The fate of all men we have hung about their necks...."

If it had not been so late she would have gone to her daughter then, and begged for forgiveness. Instead she sat on before the dying fire, shivering without knowing it, sometimes unconsciously beating her breast with her hand, as Catholics beat their breasts during the mass, when they murmur, "*Mea culpa, mea culpa.*"

It was almost dawn when she realized that the fire was out, and went stiffly up to bed, careful not to wake Mag's baby, who slept beside her in the crib that had held in turn each of her own children.

CHAPTER XLV

It was so rarely that the Madam overslept herself that her servants had no precedent to follow in the matter. The housewoman, who finally entered on tiptoe to remove the placidly protesting Kitty, reported the Madam sleeping "like a daid pusson, and mighty peaked-lookin' in the face." So it was decided not to disturb her; and the morning was well advanced before Kate reached the Rectory, where her thoughts had been hovering since her first waking moment.

The counsels of the night had taught her a new humility. She came to Jacqueline as a suppliant, begging to be forgiven not only for her moment of cruel anger but for her stupid and bungling interference in her child's life. Nothing was very clear in her mind except that Philip must be told the truth, and that, whatever happened, she and her child would bear it together.

She was disappointed to find that both Jacqueline and Philip were out, Jacqueline having driven away soon after Philip left the house.

"Driven? She was not riding?" asked Kate in some surprise. Jacqueline, like her mother, rarely used a vehicle if a saddle-horse was at hand.

"She tooken de buggy, an' she tooken Lige, too," explained Ella. "No'm, I dunno whar she went at, kase I wa'n't here when dey lef', but I reckon she'll be gone a right smart while, 'cause she lef' me word jes what I was to feed dat puppy. As ef a pusson raised at Sto'm wouldn't know how to take keer of puppy-dawgs!" She exchanged with her former mistress a smile of indulgent amusement. "I 'lows she's goin' to tek her dinner with you-all like she ginally does, ain't she?"

Kate doubted it, after what had passed; but she went back to her house and waited, hopefully.

At about the dinner-hour she was called to the telephone, and for a moment failed to recognize Philip's voice over the wire. It sounded unnatural.

"Is Jacqueline there?"

"Why, no. Not yet. Is she coming?"

"I—I don't know. Look here!—don't worry, but she's been gone for some hours,

and she 's taken a trunk with her."

"A trunk?" cried Kate.

"Yes. Do you know anything about it? Has she spoken to you of making a visit, or anything?" He repeated his question, patiently; but Kate could not find her voice to answer. A premonition of disaster struck her dumb.

"You're not to worry," said Philip again. "Lige drove her over to the trolley-line, and he should be back soon. I'll telephone you what he has to say."

But Kate could not wait. She ran out to the stables and saddled a horse with her own hands, impatiently pushing aside the slower negroes.

Halfway to the rectory she met Philip, in the Ark. He held out to her an open letter.

"Lige brought it back to me. It's from Jacqueline. Read it," he said, dully.

Seated upon a restive horse that backed and filled nervously about the puffing engine, the paper fluttering in her fingers, Kate read aloud Jacqueline's farewell to her husband, only half grasping its meaning:

I didn't mean to be dishonorable, darling Philip; I didn't know I was being, till mother told me. I never thought. I only thought, suppose I have a baby, and it's a poor little thing without a father, like Mag's, that nobody wants except me, and that mother and Jemmy and everybody would be ashamed of? I couldn't bear it! —And I didn't know mother asked you to marry me—I thought you wanted to, because you were unhappy and wanted me for company—we're so used to each other. Truly, I thought that! And I thought you knew, Philip. It seemed to me that you knew, without my telling you.

Kate looked up here. "Did you know?" she asked.

He nodded, without speaking.

Kate's head drooped over the letter. "And her mother didn't," she thought.

But it's all been wrong, somehow, and the only way I know to make it right is to go away, as your father did. Please, please let that make it right! You don't believe in divorce, of course, but I know enough to know this marriage of ours is not a real marriage, and could be put aside if people knew what sort of girl I have been. The Bishop will help you, I am sure. So I have written him all about

it.

Kate gasped; but the courage of it brought up her drooping head again.

You must forgive me if you can, darling Philip, and thank you, thank you, thank you for being so sweet to me always! You must never worry about me, either. I am not going to die or anything like that. There is somebody who will help me, who always would have, only I didn't know it. I did him an injustice. Mother did not tell me. I can't forgive mother for that quite yet, but I will some day; and some day, perhaps, she will forgive me. You'll make her, won't you, Phil?

Oh, I do love you both so much! It nearly breaks my heart to go away from the precious little house, and the puppy, and Storm, and baby Kitty, and everything. I've never been away before.—You won't take off your winter flannels till the frost is out of the ground, will you? Promise me! And don't try to find me, because I *don't want to be found*. Only don't let mother fret about me. I shall think about you always, no matter where I am.

JACQUELINE.

The two stared at each other for a moment without a word. Then Philip said hoarsely, "She means Channing, of course!"

"No, no!" muttered the mother, shrinking, fighting against her own conviction. "She loves you too much for that. It is you she loves, now. She couldn't! She must have gone to Jemima. Oh, I am sure she has gone to Jemima! Come, we'll telegraph."

She started for the Rectory at a gallop, her thoughts as usual translating themselves into action. Over the telephone she dictated a long wire to Jemima, carefully worded so that the curiosity of a country telegraph operator should not be aroused. Her brain never worked better than in an emergency.

"Now," she said briskly, turning to the dazed and silent Philip, "come up and show me what you want in your bag."

"Where am I to go?" he asked vaguely.

"I'll tell you as soon as I hear from Jemima. But there is no time to waste."

He stood quite idle in the little rose and white bower he had prepared for his bride, watching Kate hurrying about his own room beyond, packing necessities

into his worn old leather satchel, somewhat hampered by the activities of Jacqueline's puppy, who made constant playful lunges at her feet.

He could not quite realize what had happened—that Jacqueline, his playmate, his little friend, his wife, had gone out of the safe haven of his home back to the man who had betrayed and deserted her. It seemed like a hideous dream from which he must soon awake. How had he failed her? What desperate unhappiness must have hidden itself in this pretty white room where he had hoped she might be happy!

At intervals during the night before, he had waked to hear her softly stirring about, and wondered why she did not come to him as usual, to be soothed into drowsiness. Once he had almost broken his custom and gone in to her, feeling that she had need of him. How he wished now that he had followed this impulse! Yes, and many another like it....

Looking about, he noticed that her glass lamp was quite empty of oil, and that her darning basket stood beside it, full to overflowing with neatly darned and rolled socks of his own. So that was how she had spent the night, doing her best to leave him comfortable! A great lump rose in his throat. He saw, too, that both his own photograph and that of her mother were gone. She had taken them with her.

His daze began to break. He remembered phrases in Jacqueline's letter: "I didn't mean to be dishonorable ... I didn't know mother *asked* you to marry me ... I did him an injustice."

He went in to Kate, and demanded abruptly to know how this thing had come about.

It was a question she had been dreading, but she answered it fully and frankly, sparing herself not at all. He listened with an oddly judicial air, new in her experience of him. When she described her share in Channing's disappearance, he interrupted her quickly.

"You deceived her?"

"Yes. I know now that it was wrong."

He made no comment; but when she came to her confession to Jacqueline that it was she who had suggested their marriage and not Philip, he interrupted her again.

"Kate," he said slowly and incredulously, "you have been cruel!"

At any other time he would have noticed how her never-idle hands were shaking, the paleness of her lips, the dark shadow of pain in her eyes. But just then he was not thinking of her. He was thinking of Jacqueline.

He turned away abruptly, and looked over the portmanteau she had been packing. On the top lay the peppermint-striped silk shirt his wife had made for him. He saw it through a sudden blur of tears.

"There's one thing you've forgotten to pack," he muttered, and slipped into the bag something which Kate removed as soon as his back was turned. It was a pistol.

She was startled by this. "Perhaps I'd better go after Jacqueline myself," she suggested.

"It is my right. I am her husband," was the stern answer.

In an incredibly short space of time, the telephone rang with Jemima's return message.

No word from Jack. P. C.'s address in New York is No. 5, Ardmore Apartments. James and I will meet her there. Don't worry.

"Thank Heaven for Jemima!" uttered her mother, turning from the telephone. "You'll have time to catch the evening train in Frankfort for New York, Philip. I'll meet you at the trolley station with money and all that."

He had not thought of money, would have started upon his quest with empty pockets. But it was characteristic of a new era that he accepted her financial help now quite simply, without demur, without thought, even, as he might have accepted it from his own mother.

The last thing he saw as the train pulled out of the station was Kate's face gazing up at him whitely from the platform, and he leaned far out of the window to promise, "I will not come back without her!"

But not then, nor until long afterwards, did he realize that for hours he had been with his dear lady at a time of great distress to her, without once realizing her presence; his thoughts yearning and his heart aching for another woman, for his wife, Jacqueline.

It was the moment of Kate's justification, of her triumph, had she but known it. But she did not know it.

She rode home slowly and yet more slowly through the twilight world, into which came presently a pale winter moon, serene and beautiful and mocking. There was no longer need of action, to stimulate her. She had reached the end of her strength.

The sensitive horse beneath her moved with increasing care, sedately and cautiously, as if he realized that he must be brains as well as feet for two. He was an experienced animal, and had known what it was to carry children on his back.

When he came to the front door of Storm, he paused of his own accord, and nickered anxiously.

So the servants found the Madam, and when they saw that she could not dismount, it was Big Liza who lifted her down in her strong old arms, as she had lifted her once before when she came, a bride, to Storm. She carried her in to a couch, moaning over her, "Oh, my lamb, my po' lamb; what is dey done to you now?"

The Madam could not answer.



Jemima Thorpe reached her mother's bedside two days later, greatly to the relief of the household, and of Dr. Jones.

"No, it does not seem to have been a stroke of any sort," explained that worthy and anxious man. "If Mrs. Kildare were an ordinary woman, I should call it hysteria, but she's not the neurotic type. It appears to be acute exhaustion, following, possibly, a shock of some kind." He looked at Jemima inquisitively, but without eliciting the information he sought. "At any rate, I am glad you have come, and I should suggest that Benoix and his wife be sent for. I hear they've gone off on a trip to New York?"

"To Europe," amended Jemima calmly. "They are now on the ocean, so they can't be sent for."

The doctor's eyes widened. Journeys to Europe were not usual among his patients. "Europe! Isn't that very sudden?"

"Very sudden," agreed Jemima. "Now shall we go in to mother?"

Perforce, he opened Mrs. Kildare's door, and announced with his cheeriest bedside manner, "Here's your girl home again."

The heavy eyes flew open. "Jacqueline!" she whispered.

But when she saw that it was not Jacqueline, the lids closed, and it seemed too much trouble to lift them again.

Jemima went on her knees, and laid a timid cheek on her mother's hand, that strong, beautiful hand lying so strangely limp now upon the counterpane. For the first time in her life she knew the feeling of utter helplessness. Her efficiency had failed her. In this emergency, she could not produce the thing her mother needed.

She wished with all her heart for her inefficient sister.



CHAPTER XLVI

Philip's pursuit of his wife came to have for him, before it was done, something of the strangeness of a nightmare, one of those endless dreams that come to fever patients, filled with confused, vague details of places and persons among whom he passed, leaving nothing clear to the memory afterwards except unhappiness.

And indeed the mental condition that urged him on was not unlike fever, compounded as it was of passionate pity for Jacqueline, and white-hot rage against the man who had taken his wife from him. He could not bear to think of the frightened misery that must have driven the girl to such a step, nor of the wretched disillusionment in store for her. Jacqueline ashamed; his gallant, loyal, high-hearted little playmate cowering under the whips of the world's scorn—it was a thought that drove all the youth out of Philip's face, and left it so grim and fierce that many a passing stranger stared at him covertly, wondering what tragedy lay behind such a mask of pain.

Only once did the effect of Jacqueline's shame upon his own life occur to Philip, and then he wrote a hasty line to the Bishop of his diocese, offering to resign at once from the ministry. No other alternative occurred to him. If Jacqueline had needed him when he married her, how infinitely greater was her need of him now! What came to either of them they would share together, he and his wife.

Nor was his decision entirely altruistic. Her going had already taught him one thing. "We are so used to each other," the piteous little letter had said. Yes, they were used to each other; so used that they would never again be able to do without each other.

His search did not end in New York. He found there only the news, gathered by James and Jemima Thorpe, that Channing had sailed a few hours before for Europe, and not alone. The steamship office had registered the name of a Mr. James Percival and wife, in whom it was not difficult to recognize the author.

Philip followed by the next boat, but found some difficulty, inexperienced traveler that he was, in coming upon traces of the pair, who doubled and twisted upon their tracks as if conscious of pursuit. It was some weeks before he ran his quarry to earth in Paris, having been directed to one of those "coquettish apartments" known to experts in the art of travel, who scorn the great, banal

caravansaries of the ordinary tourist.

Entering an unpretentious gate between an apothecary shop and a *pâtisserie*, he found himself in one of the hidden court-yards of the old city, where a placid, vine-covered mansion dozed in the sun, remote from the rattle of cobblestones and the vulgar gaze of the passing world. Doves preened themselves on the flagging, a cat occupied herself maternally with her young on the doorstep, birds were busy in the ivy. It was an ideal retreat for a honeymoon.

Philip, his jaw set and his heart pounding, jerked at the old-fashioned bell-handle, and the door was presently opened by a mustachioed lady in the dressing-sacque and heelless slippers which form the conventional morning-wear of the lower bourgeoisie. But, yes; she admitted in answer to his inquiry; the American Madame was *chez elle*. "Also Monsieur," she added, with smiling significance. "Ah, the devotion of *ces nouveaux mariés*!"

She added that if Monsieur would attend but one moment, she would mount to announce his arrival.

The clink of a coin arrested her. "If Madame will have the goodness to permit," suggested Philip, in French as fluent and far more correct than her own, "I prefer to announce my arrival in person."

She shrugged. "But perfectly! As Monsieur wishes. It is a little effect, perhaps? Monsieur is the brother, possibly; the cousin?" she asked, with the friendly curiosity of her kind.

"Monsieur is the husband," said Philip grimly, and passed.

The concierge gasped. "The husband! Name of a name!"

But seeing that he was already mounting the stairs, paying no attention whatever to her virtuous horror, the French-woman followed him on tiptoe, murmuring to herself, "*Mais comme c'est chic, ça!*" She had her racial taste for the spectacular.

At first she was somewhat disappointed. Applying alternately eye and ear to the keyhole, she detected none of the imprecations, the excited chatter, the nose-tweaking, the calling down of the just wrath of Heaven, which the occasion seemed to demand.

"Ah bah, these English!" she muttered scornfully, "If but my Henri were to discover me in such a situation—la, la!"

Philip, entering without knocking, had begun quietly and methodically to remove his coat before Channing was aware of his presence. The author looked up from his desk, surprised, and jumped to his feet, with an expression of pleasure in his face. Philip's brain registered that fact without attempting to explain it. Channing was undoubtedly glad to see him.

"Why, Benoix! Where have you dropped from? I did not hear you knock! What in the name of all that's pleasant brings you to Paris?"

He advanced with outstretched hand. Just at that moment, a woman entered from the room beyond.

Philip, bracing himself, turned to face his wife....

But it was not Jacqueline. It was a Titian-haired, lissome young woman upon whom he had never laid eyes before, and who returned his stare with self-possessed interest.

Philip gave a great gasp. "Channing! Who—who is this woman?"

"My wife," announced the author, with a laughing bow. "You seem surprised. Hadn't you heard? But of course not—it was all so sudden. And I'm glad to say the papers don't seem to have got hold of it yet, thanks to my forethought in booking passage under only half my name. Some time before I sailed, Fay and I decided to—to let matters rest as they were, and—she came with me." He was a trifle embarrassed, but carried off the introduction with an air. "Mrs. Channing—Mr. Benoix!"

Philip was utterly bewildered. "Do you mean to say you have not seen Jacqueline?"

"Jacqueline Kildare?" Channing's smiling ease left him. "Yes, I did see her in New York, the day I left. You didn't think—" An inkling of the other's errand dawned on him. He was suddenly alarmed, and, as usual in moments of emergency, burst into his unfortunate glibness of speech. "Why, she came to see me about studying for opera, something of that sort—that was all. I had promised her introductions. Unfortunately she came just as I was preparing to leave, and I had no time to do much for her. I gave her letters to several teachers, and got her the address of a good boarding-place...."

Philip muttered an exclamation.

"Oh, and I did more than that," said Channing quickly. "I talked to her like a Dutch uncle; advised her to go straight back to Kentucky, and not to do anything without her mother's permission—a great woman, Mrs. Kildare! I told her New York was no place for a young girl alone, and that she had been most indiscreet to come to me. I told her about my—er—my marriage, of course. I offered her money—"

"You did *what*?" asked Philip, suddenly.

"Why—er—yes!" Channing was taken aback by his tone. "Why not? You know what an impulsive, reckless child she is—she might very well have run off without any money in her pocket, and I should have been uncomfortable, quite miserable, to think—"

Philip's fist stopped the flow of words upon his lips.

"Wh-what did you do that for?" stammered the author, backing away.

"Put up your fists, if you've got any," was the answer.

Channing defended himself wildly, but without hope. He felt that his time had come. A certain conviction paralyzed his already sluggish muscles, "He knows!" he thought. "She's told him!"

Various things swam into his dizzy memory—the business-like punching-bag in the rectory at Storm, the pistol in Philip's riding-breeches, the fact that his father had been a convicted "killer" in the penitentiary. "He means to do for me!" thought Channing, and looked desperately around for help.

But there was no help. The woman he had acknowledged as his wife stood in a corner of the room, her skirts drawn fastidiously about her, looking on with unmistakable and fascinated interest. At the keyhole *Madame la concierge* also looked on, unobserved, breathing hard and thinking better thoughts of the Anglo-Saxon race.

Channing, his chin cut, his nose swollen to twice its natural size, undertook a series of masterly retreats. It was then that Madame, at the keyhole, began to fear for her furniture, and considered interference. Chairs were overturned, the table went crashing. At last a foot-stool completed what Philip's fists had begun. Channing tripped over it, fell heavily for the third time, and lay without moving.

His utter panic had saved him. Philip was tired of knocking him down, and

jerking him to his feet, and knocking him down again. He let him lie this time, turned him over with a contemptuous foot, and put on his coat.

"It was like punching a meal-bag!" he muttered, and strode out of the room without a glance for either the woman in the corner, or the one he surprised on the threshold.

Madame had been of two minds, as to whether to shriek for the *gendarmes*, now that all was safely over, or to fling herself upon the bosom of this gallant defender of his marital honor. But Philip was too quick for her. She did neither.

Presently Channing opened a puffy and wary eye. "Gone?" he asked faintly. "Then for God's sake why don't you get me something to stop this infernal nose-bleed?"

His wife brought him a towel and a basin of cold water, and presented them to him rather absently.

"Good Heavens, *what* an experience! Why, the brute might have killed me!—it runs in his family. Why didn't you go for help?"

"I was too interested," explained Mrs. Channing. "I've never seen a clergyman fight before." She added, with an impartiality unusual in a bride of several weeks, "You're not much of a man, are you, Percival dear?"

Out in the street Philip strode along buoyantly, his clerical collar somewhat awry, a black eye making itself rapidly apparent, indifferent to the curious glances of the people who passed. Now and then he stood still and laughed aloud, while Paris gazed at him indulgently, always sympathetic with madness.

To think that he had imagined Jacqueline capable of leaving him for a creature like Channing, flabby, wordy, feebly vicious! Somewhere at home she was waiting for him; lonely, perhaps, wondering why her husband did not come to her, but safe and unashamed. Possibly her mother and Jemima had already found her.

The thought reminded him of certain letters in his pocket, given him that morning at the American Express, and unopened in the excitement of at last running Channing to cover. He drew them out, hoping to find among them one from Storm.

The first was from his bishop, pooh-poohing his offer to resign from the

ministry, and suggesting a long vacation. It ended with a sentence that touched Philip deeply: "Assure your brave little wife of the lasting friendship of an old man who collects rare virtues (other people's virtues) as certain connoisseurs collect etchings, and who considers moral courage the rarest of the lot."

Philip turned to his other letter. At sight of the hand-writing he started, and looked quickly at the postmark. It was that of a little town in the Kentucky mountains.

Lately he had thought very often of his father, as he always thought in all the critical moments of his life. At such times the man whose face he had forgotten seemed very near to him. The feeling of nearness deepened as he opened his letter, the first from Jacques Benoix since he had left prison. It was almost as if his father stood there beside him, with a hand on his shoulder.

When he had finished reading, he turned blindly into a church he was passing (it happened to be the cathedral of Notre Dame) and knelt with hidden face before the statue of that coquettish, charming, typically Parisienne madonna, who is not unaccustomed to the sight of men praying with tears.



CHAPTER XLVII

A fleeting, illusory hint of spring appeared for the moment in that street known among all the world's great avenues—the Champs Elysées, the Nevsky Prospect, the Corso, Unter den Linden—as "The Avenue." Its pavements glistened with a slippery coating of mud that had yesterday been snow, its windows blossomed with hothouse daffodils and narcissi, also with flowery hats and airy garments that made the passer-by shiver by their contrast with the cutting March wind. In and out, among automobiles and pedestrians, darted that fearless optimist, the metropolitan sparrow, busy already with straws and twigs for his spring building.

A girl, moving alone and rather wearily among the chattering throng, caught this hint of changing seasons, and a wave of nostalgia passed over her that was like physical illness. A flower-vendor held out a tray of wilted jonquils. She bought a few of them—only a few, because she must needs be careful of her money—and held them to her face hungrily. They brought to her mind gardens where such flowers were already pushing their fat green buds up out of the fragrant earth—Storm garden, Philip's little patch of bloom—encouraged by a breeze that was full of sunlight. She saw the birds that flitted to and fro over those gardens upon their busy errands: sweet-whistling cardinals, bluebirds with rosy breasts, exquisite as butterflies; the flashing circles of white made by mocking-birds' wings as they soar and swoop. The noisy street faded from her eyes and ears, and she moved among the crowd as if she were walking a Kentucky lane, with the March wind in her hair.

So she was not at all surprised to meet a familiar face, and murmured absently, her thoughts on other matters, "That you, Mag?"

Then she came to herself with a start. The woman to whom she had spoken had passed quickly. Jacqueline wheeled in time to catch a glimpse of her in the crowd; a flashily dressed, too-stylish figure, mincing along on very high heels, and dangling in one hand a gilt-mesh bag. The paint that made a mask of her face, the heavy black rimming her eyes, the very perfume that left its trail behind her, told their own story. But the carriage of the head, the free, country-girl's swing of the shoulders, were unmistakable. It was Mag Henderson.

Jacqueline followed her, half running. She had so longed for the sight of a face

from home that the thought of losing her seemed unbearable. It did not matter to Kate Kildare's daughter that this was a woman of the streets, a hopeless derelict. She remembered only that she had once been her faithful, devoted ally.

But it mattered to Mag Henderson. Impossible that she had failed to recognize Jacqueline; impossible that she did not hear the clear, ringing voice crying after her, "Mag, wait for me, wait!"

Her cheeks were flushed with something besides rouge, the loose lips trembled. She, too, knew what it was to be hungry for the sight of a face from home.... Perhaps the recording angel put it down to Mag Henderson's account that she did not once hesitate, did not once look back, moving on so rapidly that at last Jacqueline, impeded by the staring throng, breathless, almost weeping in her disappointment, lost sight of her entirely, and gave up the pursuit.

She went her way, with hanging head. "Mother would have caught her," she thought, "or Jemmy. They'd have *made* her wait!"

For long afterwards she was haunted by that brief glimpse of the creature who a few months before had been as round and sleek and pretty as a petted kitten; the tragic eyes, old for all their feverish brilliance, the soft cheeks already hollow beneath their paint. However unjustly, Mag Henderson came to typify for Jacqueline the spirit of New York.

Her feet were dragging when she reached the respectable, shabby brownstone front that housed her and her ambitions, together with those of some thirty other more or less hopeful aspirants to fame and fortune, who might be heard as she entered amid much clattering of dishes in the basement dining-room.

The halls were faintly reminiscent of meals that had gone before, and Jacqueline, holding her jonquils to her face, decided against dinner. She made her way up two flights to her room, and sat down upon the bed, shivering, battling with a sense of discouragement that was almost panic.

The streets had lost their fleeting semblance of Spring long before she reached this place she called home, and were like bleak cañons through which the wind whistled hungrily. Jacqueline remembered a time not long since when she had found the wind bracing, stimulating, a playmate daring her to a game of romps. But that was a country wind, coming clean over wide spaces of hill and meadow; not this thing which filled her eyes and lungs with gritty dust, and whirled old newspapers and orange-peel and filthy rags along the gutters.

It was not the first time she had found herself lately battling with a sense of acute discouragement. Her singing-master, a fat and onion-smelling artist recommended very wisely by Channing, had been at first enthusiastic about the possibilities of her voice; but recently she had found it difficult to please him.

"Der organ is there, *ja wohl*, der organ. But Herr Gott im Himmel, is it mit der organ alone dot zinging makes himself? Put somesing *inside* der organ, meine gnädiges fraülein, I beg of you!"

That was just what Jacqueline seemed no longer able to do. What energy, what spirit she had, went into the mere business of living, and there was none left for song. A voice is, more than any other physical attribute, the essence of vitality; and nature had other uses just then for Jacqueline's vitality.

She did not understand, however, and sat there shivering uncontrollably, facing the grim fact of failure. Worse than failure—fear.

From where she sat, she could see her reflection in the mirror, and she looked at herself with frowning distaste. Jacqueline's beauty was oddly under eclipse just then. "I'm getting ugly—and whoever heard of an ugly prima donna?" she groaned in her innocence.

Then, suddenly, she saw what had been in her landlady's mind when, happening to pass her in the hall that morning, the woman had remarked casually, "You said you was *Miss Leigh*, didn't you? or was it *Mrs. Leigh*?"

Jacqueline had answered as casually; but now she understood the question. With a sharp intake of breath, she realized that the time had come for her to seek another home in this great, homeless wilderness of houses, that heeded her unhappy presence "as the sea's self should heed a pebble cast."

She unlocked a drawer, and proceeded to investigate her finances rather anxiously. She had come away with nothing but the money that happened to be in her purse, and her little string of pearls, her one jewel, upon which a pawnbroker, realizing her utter ignorance of values, had made her an infinitesimal advance. The lessons she was taking were expensive, and she knew that she must save for a time of need not far in the future. It was tantalizing to know that the generous allowance from her mother was accumulating untouched in a Frankfort bank, because she did not dare to draw upon it for fear of being traced.

"Though if mother really wanted to find me, she could have done it without that!" thought the girl, and suddenly buried her head in a pillow, sobbing for her mother.

She did not allow herself to cry long. "It is not good for me," she told herself soberly; and presently achieved a quivering smile at the thought of her mother's face when at last she should send for her and show what she had to show.

"There won't be any need of forgiveness then," she whispered. "Not for either of us!"

Of Philip she did not allow herself to think at all. The girl was gaining a strength of will in those days that exerted itself even over her thoughts, and her lips had become as firm as Mrs. Kildare's.... Philip was done with her, of course, since he did not come to her—just as she was done forever with Percival Channing.

In her first revulsion of feeling on learning that her lover had after all not deserted her of his own free will, she had turned to him, bruised and hurt as she was by that terrible hour with her mother, confident of his help in her need. No lesson of life was ever to make Jacqueline anything less than confident of the world's kindness.

But marriage with Philip had at least taught her a better judgment of men, and at her first sight of Percival Channing she knew that never again would there be anything he could offer her which she would care to accept. She realized at last the full depth and enormity of her mistake, but she set herself proudly to abide by the consequences, asking no quarter.

Art was still left to her, fame; and these she must win with no assistance except her own determination. Her career lay open before her. Perhaps some day her mother and Philip would cease to be ashamed of her; would even be a little proud of her....

Now, after all, was Art to fail her? Was she never to be famous after all?

Jacqueline hurriedly turned up the corners of her mouth, having read somewhere that it is impossible to despair so long as the lips are kept in that cheerful position. But the fear at her heart remained.

She did not know where to go. Landladies asked questions, and she was not a very good liar. Suppose they should be rude to her? In all her life, nobody had ever been rude to Jacqueline. She felt that it would be more than she could bear.

—And at the last to go to some strange hospital, to suffer, perhaps to die, among people whose names she did not know, she who had known by name every man, woman, child, and beast within twenty miles of Storm!... Was there none of all those friends who would befriend her now, who would take her in without question, and stand by her until her need was past? Surely somewhere, somewhere....

From long habit, she went on her knees to think her problem out; and the answer came, as it so often comes to people on their knees—came with a remembered fragrance of sun upon pine-branches, a steady sound among tree-tops of the wind that always blows above the world.

Some hours later Jacqueline took a train for Frankfort; and she passed Storm station at night, on her way to a town in the Kentucky mountains.



So it happened that there came to Philip, in Paris, the letter that told him he had found both his father and his wife.

Jacques Benoix, glancing out of his schoolhouse door at the unwonted sound of wheels in the trail below, had been startled to see a woman descending from a wagon, whom he at first mistook for Kate Kildare herself. She was helped by Bates the peddler, met by good chance in the town below.

"Here comes another worker for the Lord's vineyard!" beamed the peddler, as the school-teacher, recovering his breath, hurried to meet them.

"And a most welcome one! If I were a religious man, I should think you an answer to prayer, so great is our need of help."

"Help? Do you think *I* can be of any help?" asked Jacqueline, wistfully—a very changed Jacqueline she was, pale and drawn-looking, and with a new little dignity about her which the physician was quick to observe. "I'm not a capable person, you know, like mother and Jemmy. I do know a little about sewing, though, and cooking, and housekeeping, and—and—"

"Singing, I remember," smiled her host, "and making people comfortable, I think? The very things we need most, my dear. It is maddening in a place like this to be limited to one set of brains, and arms, and legs—and those masculine.

Ah, but I am glad that you have come!"

"So am I." Jacqueline breathed a grateful sigh. "But—" she swallowed hard, and looked him squarely in the face—"I want you to know that I am hiding away from everybody.—Must I tell you why?"

He took off his spectacles, so that she saw his eyes. Great kindliness dawned in them, a warm, understanding, tender gravity that had once before reminded her of somebody she trusted. He leaned toward her.

"I, too, am hiding away from those I love.—Must I tell you why, my daughter?"

She stared at him, her gaze widening. Suddenly she knew him, and with a little cry, her arms went about his neck.



CHAPTER XLVIII

It was some time before her mother began to do much credit to Jemima's reputation as a nurse. The nature of her illness, if illness it could be called, was baffling. She had neither pain nor temperature, her pulse was steady, though not strong, she ate and even slept as she was bidden, with a docility that was one of the most alarming symptoms of all in the Madam, hitherto impatient as a healthy man of restraint and control. She was content, to lie day after day in her room, she who had perhaps not spent more than a few weeks in bed during the whole course of her previous life, and then only when her children were born.

"I can't understand it," wrote young Mrs. Thorpe to her husband—a humiliating confession for Jemima. "She listens to me, and talks a little, seems rather glad that I am with her. But if I were not, I think it would not matter. She takes no interest in anything, seems hardly aware of anything, though she always makes the right answer when one speaks to her. Otherwise I might think.... Even Philip's letters leave her unmoved. She never opens them; simply hands them to me and says listlessly, 'See if he has found her.' And when I answer no, she does not seem to care particularly.... Sometimes I feel as if it weren't mother here beside me at all, as if she had gone away, and left just her body and her voice and her smile—and I wish she had taken the smile with her. It's hard to bear!... She was a little like this after Dr. Benoix disappeared, but not so bad.—Oh, James, you don't think, do you, that there can really be such a thing as a broken heart?"

The Professor comforted his wife with sensible and practical advice; but he was as uneasy as herself. Psychologist that he was, he knew that the strongest natures cannot bend and bend indefinitely, without in time reaching the breaking-point.

It was at his suggestion that a famous nerve-specialist was sent for from a distant city, much to the relief of honest and futile Dr. Jones.

The eminent gentleman made himself extremely comfortable at Storm, enjoyed the scenery and the Southern cooking, and occasionally conversed upon topics of the day with Mrs. Kildare, who exerted herself according to her traditions to put her guest at ease, even to the extent of sitting up in bed and allowing Jemima to dress her hair in the latest fashion.

"Mental trouble? Nonsense!" he pronounced, to Jemima's almost sick relief. "I wish my own mentality were as sound! For years she has been using up her nervous vitality without replacing it, that is all. This mental torpor is Nature's way of giving her a rest. Let her alone! That splendid body of hers will reassert itself presently. Rest is what she needs. And happiness," he added casually, with an insight which proved his right to the enormous fee he pocketed.

But it was a prescription rather difficult to fill.

Jemima tried conscientiously to catch her mother's attention with talk about farm matters, business affairs, the conduct of the dairy and stable; only to be put aside with a listless, "Better see Jenkins about that, dear. He's very efficient."

Jenkins was a young man trained by herself into efficiency, who had long been anxious to assume a more important part in the management of Storm, and was rising to his opportunity very creditably.

At last a letter came from Philip which Jemima believed would rouse Kate from her apathy. She read it—she opened all her mother's mail in those days—and rushed into her mother's room, almost tearful with her news.

"He's found Channing at last!" she cried; "and Jacqueline was not with him! Do you hear, Mother? Jacqueline was not with him at all! She never had been. It was another woman—some one he has married. Oh, Mother, *don't you understand?*"

Kate's eyes lifted very slowly to her face. "Then what," each word was an effort, "has he done with my Jacqueline?—Is she dead?"

Jemima caught her hands. "No, no, dear! Listen!"—she spoke very distinctly. "It was all a dreadful mistake—our mistake. She never went to Mr. Channing at all. She simply ran away to New York to study her singing, Philip says, and has been there all this time.—Oh, how can I ever make it up to poor little Jacky? Imagine thinking such a thing of her! I must have been crazy, jumping to such a *wicked* conclusion!" In her distress she wrung her hands. "And what must Jacqueline have been thinking of us, leaving her alone there so long? Oh, Mother!—" a happy idea had come to her. "Don't, let's leave her alone another day! Philip may not have reached her yet—this letter was mailed in Paris, just before he sailed. Let's go and find her ourselves, you and I!"

But the answering spark of eagerness she hoped for did not come.

"If Jacqueline wants me," said Kate, closing her eyes, "she will let me know."

The coldness of the reply chilled Jemima. It seemed so utterly unlike her impulsive, warm-hearted generous mother.

"Don't you realize how we have misunderstood her? Why, she hasn't been—been wicked at all! She simply saw she had made a mistake, and tried to undo it by going away—foolish, but so like Jacky, poor darling!—Mother! You don't mean to say you're not going to *forgive* her for running away?"

"*Forgive?*" repeated Kate wonderingly. Then she remembered that Jemima had never been a mother.

"It is Jacqueline who cannot forgive me," she explained, in her dull and lifeless voice.

Jemima gave up in despair. There was something about all this beyond her understanding.

In a few days a second letter came from Philip, postmarked New York, telling her that he had at last learned the where-abouts of his wife, and hoped soon to be going to her. He begged Kate to have patience, explaining that he was under promise not to reveal Jacqueline's hiding-place.

We must humor her now (he wrote). It is only because of the intervention of a friend she has found that she has consented to let me come to her presently. God knows what thoughts of us who love her and could not trust her have been in her head through these lonely weeks! We must give her time to get over them. She is not ready for us yet. You will understand, you who understand everything. Wait. And meanwhile comfort yourself as I do with the knowledge that she is safe, safe!

This letter puzzled Jemima almost unbearably, but she dared ask no question of her mother as to what had occurred. She was grateful to see that it at least roused the invalid to a show of interest. Kate took it into her languid hand and read it over twice, looking for some possible message for herself from Jacqueline, some little word of love that Jemima might have overlooked.

But finding nothing, she relapsed into the old listlessness.



CHAPTER XLIX

It was a very trivial and unimportant thing, to Jemima's thinking, which presently lifted Kate out of her languor into action once more. Big Liza, entering timidly one morning, as she did many times in the day, to gaze with miserable eyes at the figure on the bed, murmured to Jemima: "They's a message come fum that 'ooman Mahaly, down in the village, sayin' she's dyin', and wants to see the Madam. She 'lows she cain't die in peace 'thout'n she sees Miss Kate."

"Of course that's impossible," said Jemima in the same low tone. "Send word that we're very sorry. See that she has whatever she needs. If necessary, I'll go myself."

"Did you say she was dying?" asked an unexpected voice from the bed.

"Yais'm, Miss Kate! but don't you keer, honey. Tain't nothin but that mulatter 'ooman, Mahaly—You 'members about *her*!" she added scornfully.—Very little had passed among her "white folks" that was unknown to the sovereign of the kitchen.

To the amaze of both, Kate slipped without apparent effort out of the bed where she had lain for weeks. "Where are my clothes?" she demanded.

Jemima ran to her with a cry of protest. "Mother, be careful! What, you aren't thinking of going to see her? You can't—you're not strong enough!"

"Mahaly must not die before I speak with her."

"Then," said Jemima calmly, "I'll have her brought to you."

"A dying woman? Jemmy, don't be silly!" Kate spoke with an asperity that brought a wide grin to Big Liza's face, because it sounded as though the Madam were come back again.

Jemima, alarmed, continued to protest; at last ran to the telephone and called Dr. Jones to her assistance. Meanwhile Kate, scolded at, fussed over, but in the end helped by her cook, got into out-door clothes; and before Doctor Jones was on his way to Storm, she had taken the road for the village.

She sat erect in her surrey, pale, but scorning the proffered arm of Jemima, driven by a proud and anxious coachman behind the quietest pair of horses in the stable; and people as she passed stared at her with utter amaze—with more; with a delight that rose in some cases to the point of tears. For the first time, Kate realized that she had won something besides respect and dependence and fear from her realm. She had won love. The realization pierced through her apathy. A faint color came into her cheeks. More than once, as she paused to exchange greetings with some beaming and incoherent acquaintance, her own lips were tremulous.

"Why are they so glad to see me, Jemmy?" she asked once. "Did they think I was very ill?"

Her daughter nodded, not trusting her own voice. It seemed as if a miracle had occurred before her eyes.

"Well, I've fooled them," smiled Kate, drawing into her lungs a great breath of the keen, rain-swept air that was bringing new life into a world done with winter.

She asked one other question as they drove. "Jemmy, what does the neighborhood think about—Jacqueline?"

Jemima explained that she had allowed the impression to go abroad that Philip and Jacqueline had taken advantage of an opportunity to go to Europe on a belated honeymoon journey.

She did not say, because she did not know, that the countryside, always with an interested eye upon its betters, had connected the extreme suddenness of this journey with Philip's vanished father, picturing to itself touching death-bed scenes, and eleventh-hour repentances. Remembering the Madam's brief illness at the time of Dr. Benoix' disappearance, the neighborhood had connected her present illness also with its romantic imaginings; with the result that what was left of its disapproval had been swallowed up in a sudden and quite human wave of sympathy for that faithful woman and the man she loved.

When they reached a neat little cottage in the portion of the village devoted to white workingmen's homes, Kate allowed herself to be assisted to the door, where she dismissed her daughter, telling her to return in half an hour.

"I must see Mahaly alone," was her only answer to Jemima's uneasy protests.

She was ushered respectfully into a neat, clean room, hung with the enlarged

crayon portraits dear to the colored race, and boasting a parlor-organ draped in Battenberg lace. The window was open—a rare thing in a negro home, despite her efforts with the Civic League. The bed was stiffly starched and unoccupied, and the woman she had come to see sat upright in a chair, propped with pillows, panting with the effort of keeping breath in her lungs. She was dying of heart-disease.

She had been in her day rather a handsome creature, with the straight hair and high features that indicate a not unusual admixture of Indian blood. But though she must have been of about the same age as Mrs. Kildare, she looked by comparison withered and superannuated, with the grayish film across her eyes that one sees in those of aged animals.

These blurred eyes stared at Kate with a queer hostility, mixed with something else; as they had stared on the day she came a bride to Storm. She made a slight, futile attempt to rise.

"Nonsense, Mahaly! Don't move," said the Madam, kindly. "This is no time for manners."

She closed the door behind her, and would have closed the window had it not been for the woman's need of air and the inevitable faint odor that clings about negro habitations, no matter how cleanly they are kept. What she and her old servant had to say to each other must not be overheard. Fancying that she detected sounds as of some one moving on the porch outside, she called briefly: "Keep out of ear-shot, please." She was too accustomed to obedience to investigate results.

"You wanted to see me, Mahaly?" she said. "You wanted to explain something to me, perhaps?"

The woman struggled with her laboring breath. She was very near the end. Kate found it painful to look at her, and her gaze wandered away to the crayon portraits on the wall. The one over the bed, in the place of honor, was a portrait of her husband, Basil Kildare. Her face hardened. This was an impertinence! And yet....

Mahaly was speaking. "You-all ain't—found the French doctor yet—is you?"

"No. We will not discuss that, if you please.... Mahaly, we may never see each other again, you and I. Will you tell me now how you came—to hate me so

bitterly?"

Mahaly's eyes dropped. "I never! I tried to, but—I couldn't, Miss Kate. You was—so kin' to me."

"Yes, I was kind. I meant to be. I liked you, and trusted you. I gave you my children to nurse.—Mahaly, only once—no, twice—in my life have I trusted people, and had them fail me."

"The other time was Mr. Bas," whispered the woman. "I knows. It didn't—never do to trus'—Mr. Bas."

Her dying eyes followed Kate's to the picture, and dwelt upon it wistfully.

Once more the lady changed the subject. "Will you tell me why you tried to hate me, Mahaly?" She paused. "Was it because you were—jealous of me?"

The reply had a certain dignity. "It ain't fitten—for a yaller gal—to be jealous—of a w'ite pusson."

"Then, why?"

There was a silence. Gropingly the colored woman's hand went to a table at her side, and held out to Kate a tintype photograph in a faded pink paper cover. Kate looked at it. She saw Mahaly as she had been in the days of her youth, comely and graceful; in her arms a small, beady-eyed boy. The pride of motherhood was unmistakable.

"Your baby! Why, I never knew you had a baby." She looked closer, and her voice softened. "A cripple, like my little Katherine. Poor little fellow! Oh, Mahaly, did he die?"

There was a dull misery in the answer that went to her heart. "I dunno. I couldn't—never fin' out."

"*You don't know?*"

"Mr. Bas done sent him away—when you was comin'. He was real kin'—to him before, though he wa'n't never one—to have po'ly folks about, much. But when you—was comin'—he done sent him away, an' he wouldn't never tell me—whar to."

"Mahaly! *Why* did he send him away?"

Kate had risen, in her horror of what she knew was coming.

"Bekase he looked—too much—like his—paw," said Mahaly, and she spoke with pride....

Kate put her hands over her eyes. She remembered the sense of something sinister that had come to her when she first saw Storm; recalled the mystery which had hung about the mulatto girl, and which she had not quite dared to probe; the innuendoes of old Liza, from the first her ally and henchman; Mahaly's later passionate and hungry devotion to her own children. She remembered the fate, too, of Basil's hound Juno, and her mongrel pups.

"No wonder you hated me," she whispered, shuddering. "No wonder you hated me! To think that even he could have done such a thing!—Oh, but, Mahaly, how was I to know? How could you have blamed me?"

"I never. Only I 'lowed—that ef you was to git sent away—fum Sto'm—mebbe he would lemme have my baby—back agin." Mahaly's voice was getting very weak. She began fighting the air with her hands.

Kate dipped her handkerchief quickly into a glass of water and laid it on the woman's face. "No more talking now," she said, and would have gone for help; but the negress caught at her hand.

"Got—suthin' mo'—to say—fust—" she gasped painfully. "Miss Kate!—the French doctor didn't—kill him—"

"What?"

"I seed. I was—hidin' in de bushes—waitin' to speak to Mr. Bas" (only an iron effort of will made the words audible), "an' I riz up—out'n de bushes—when I yeard 'em quar'lin'—and dat skeert de hoss—an' he ra'ed up and threw—Mr. Bas off. De French doctor done flung—a rock, yes'm—but it ain't—never—teched him—"

"You know this? My God, Mahaly! You *know* this?"

"Yais'm, kase—it was me—de rock hit—" she turned her cheek, to show the scar it had left.

"Take that down in writing. Mother!" commanded a tense voice from the window, where Jemima was leaning in. "You must get it down in writing, before

witnesses! Here!" She jumped into the room, and opened the door, calling, "Some of you come here, quick! I want witnesses."

"She's dying," muttered Kate, dazed.

"No, she isn't! She sha'n't, before she says that again. Leave her to me! Now then, Mahaly"—she shook the gasping woman none too gently. "Come, come! You saw—Speak up! Oh, for God's sake, speak up!"

But Mahaly had said all that she had to say. For a terrible moment the sound of her losing battle filled the room. Then, of a sudden there was silence, peace; into which broke presently the mournful, savage note of negro wailing.

Jemima led her mother in silence out to the carriage. During the drive home she made only one remark, in a low whisper because of the coachman.

"Do you think the court will accept our word, Mother?"

Kate answered her meaning. "It would do no good. Jacques would say that the intention was there, whatever the fact. He meant to kill Basil. And it is too late now. He has paid the penalty."



That night, after Jemima was supposed to be in bed, Kate's door opened, and a slim little figure stole in, looking very childlike in its nightgown. But the voice that spoke was not childlike.

"Are you asleep, Mother?"

Kate held out her hand. She had expected Jemima. The girl clutched it fast.

"Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you tell me?" she whispered.

Kate wondered silently how much of Mahaly's confession she had heard.

The girl answered as if she had spoken. "I was there from the first. It was I you heard when you gave the order to go out of ear-shot."

"And you didn't go out of ear-shot? That wasn't quite honorable, daughter."

"No, but it was sensible. Do you think I'd have left you there alone to a trying death-bed scene, weak as you are? Honorable!—how do you expect me to be

honorable?" she burst out, bitterly, "when you know the sort of father I had? Sometimes of late I suspected, I began to think.... But you would not tell me, you were too fine to tell me. And you let me make a fool of myself, a perfect fool! Oh, I was so proud of being a Kildare, one of the Kildares of Storm; so ashamed of anything that did not quite come up to the standard of—of my father! Bah—*my father*! Not even man enough to take the consequences of his sin, to stand by them. My father," she cried fiercely, "was a coward! And I thought that everything that is good in me, pride and courage, and truthfulness, whatever manly virtues I may have, came from him, instead of—from you!"

"No, no—from yourself, dear," said Kate, quickly. "For everything that is best in you, you have yourself to thank."

Jemima lifted up her head, and made her confession of renewed faith, there in the dark. "But I'd rather thank you, Mother!"

It was Kate's first dose of the happiness the specialist had prescribed.

After a long pause, the voice spoke again out of the dark. "Mother—I want you to marry Dr. Benoix. Do you understand? We owe it to him—all of us. I *want* you to marry him."

"Ah!" whispered Kate. "If I only could!"

"You've not given up? Oh, but you mustn't give up! He shall be found! I'll find him myself, and bring him back to you, because it was I who sent him away." (Kate smiled faintly at the egotism, but she did not correct it.) "Oh, Mother, put your will into it!" urged the girl, leaning over her. "You know you've never failed in anything you've put your will into."

"I? Never failed?" repeated Kate, in bitter mockery.

"Now you're thinking of Jacqueline and Philip. That wasn't an error of will, but of judgment.—This time, *I'm* judging."

Boast that it was (Jemima was not the person to underrate her abilities), somehow it put new heart into Kate, made her realize that she had at hand a staff to lean upon, a counselor who, despite her youth, possessed a certain wisdom that her mother could never hope to gain.

"Oh, Jemmy," she sighed as one equal to another, "if you had been in my place, what would you have done about Jacqueline?"

Mrs. Thorpe took the matter into consideration. At length she pronounced gravely, "If I had been in your place, there never would have been a Jacqueline"; which ended the conversation for that night.



CHAPTER L

It was not long after this that Kate woke to a realization of the sacrifices her daughter was making to remain at Storm, and sent her back post-haste to her patient, neglected husband, and to the new worlds that remained to conquer.

"Of course I shall be lonely," she admitted in answer to Jemima's protest. "But I must get used to that. And I shall have my work, now that I am quite strong again."

Nor would she listen to Jemima's plea, seconded heartily by James Thorpe, that she leave Storm for a while and make them a visit.

"Suppose Jacqueline should come home, and not find me here?"

Jemima knew that it was not only Jacqueline of whom she thought.

But when Kate said that she had her work to return to, she had reckoned without her henchman Jenkins, a new broom that was sweeping very clean indeed. It is an axiom that while it requires creative genius to start an enterprise, once the momentum is gained any mediocre intelligence may keep it going. Kate learned this for herself.

During her illness, things had gone on much as usual. Her affairs were in excellent order. The spring planting had been arranged for; at the appointed season foals and calves and tottering new lambs made their appearance in their usual numbers among her pastures; the books showed no falling off in credits nor increase in debits; fences and roads were in excellent repair. Jenkins was manifestly eager and able to spare her all responsibility and trouble. She understood his ambition. There seemed no reason for her to resume the reins of authority from such capable hands.

She turned to her immediate household; but there, too, the efficiency which had been her fetish made interference unnecessary. Her well-trained servants chuckled among themselves at the Madam's sudden interest in housecleaning, in linen-closet and pantry, in cookery.

"Laws, Miss Kate, honey! Huccom you dirtyin' up yo' hands with niggers' work?" demanded Big Liza, reproachfully.

The village, too, seemed to be getting on surprisingly well without her. The Housewives' League she had organized had made amazing strides during her absence. It had elected a president and a secretary and was governing itself according to Roberts' Rules of Order quite as capably as it had been governed in the past by the Madam. It was even, thanks to Jemima's recent activities in the neighborhood, beginning to discuss in a shy and tentative manner the question of Votes for Women. Kate felt that she had created a Frankenstein.

Nor was the problem of the negro element any longer hers to struggle with alone. She had tried to meet it by starting among the colored people of the village a Civic League, quiescent during the winter, but coming to life each spring with garden-time, and progressing enthusiastically through the summer to the culmination of prize-giving, and a procession, with the prize-winners riding proudly at the front in decorated carriages. Now she found that Philip's successor, a city-bred young fellow trained in social service, had already taken the Civic League in hand and had converted the colored school into a Neighborhood House of the most approved pattern, where innocent entertainment might be had on two nights out of the week, winter and summer. The effect upon a gregarious, pleasure-loving race which, as John Wise has said, never outgrows mentally the age of seventeen, was already apparent. Kate wished humbly that she herself had thought of a Neighborhood House.

Gradually she came to the conclusion that she had outlived the community's need of her. She, Kate Kildare, not yet forty, with energy flowing back into her veins even as the sap was coming back into the trees after their winter's rest, could find no outlet for it.

There was nothing to fill the endless days. She tried to resume her long-neglected musical studies, but the piano was haunted for her now by the silent voice of Jacqueline, and she turned from it at last in despair. In this time of need, even books failed her. With her returning vigor full upon her, she could not find the patience to sit for hours poring over the thoughts of professional thinkers, or the imaginary deeds of people who had never lived—she who had lived so hard, and whose own thoughts came up aching out of her heart.

Mag's baby was her one occupation. Storm would have been indeed a dreary place just then without Mag's parting legacy to it. The small Kitty was somewhat young to begin her education, but begin it she did, nevertheless. She was as docile and anxious to please as her mother before her, and after days of patient training, managed to master the intricate syllables of what the doggie says and

what the pussy says. She also learned to navigate alone the distance from a chair-leg to Kate's knee; a fearful adventure, this, accomplished with much wild waving of arms and not a few tears, for Kitty was not of the intrepid, determined stuff to which Kate was accustomed in the way of infants.

However, she made a cuddlesome, drowsy armful to hold during the long Spring twilights; and often sitting so, alone in her great hall, Kate forgot what child it was she held, and went back to the days of her first motherhood, dreaming that the door would presently open and admit Jacques Benoix, come to sit for a while with his friend.

Few visitors troubled the monotony of Storm. During her illness the neighborhood had been assiduous with broths and jellies, but now that she was well again the old awe of the Madam returned, and it did not occur to the modest country folk that she would have been glad of their company. Holiday Hill was in charge of caretakers. Farwell, after months of the rôle of the Southern country gentleman, had suddenly yielded to the irresistible lure of the footlights, and was once more making his final appearance upon any stage. Philip's substitute occasionally paid a conscientious call, which Kate recognized, with some amusement, as a parochial visit. He was an earnest young man, with views, and it was evident that he regarded Mrs. Kildare's frank indifference to matters of dogma as a serious defect in her character.

Somewhat to her surprise, one day the Bishop of the diocese came out from Lexington to see her. She had met him before, as Philip's friend, and even entertained him at Storm on occasion; but their acquaintance was very slight, and she was at a loss to account for this visit.

He seemed to have come chiefly to talk about Philip. "I have been watching young Benoix since he first left the Seminary. We have many promising men in our clergy," he said, "many indefatigable workers, many beautiful spirits, many fine intellects. But a combination of all these qualities is rare in any profession. And besides these," he added quietly, "Benoix has the right sort of wife."

Kate's steady eyes met his without flinching. Though nothing was said about Jacqueline's letter to the Bishop, the thought of it had not for a moment been absent from their minds. "You think that?" she asked in a low voice.

"I know it! The right sort of wife is important to any man, but more to a clergyman than to others. Charm, tact, the kindness that comes from the heart itself, above all, understanding—these are the things your little Jacqueline has

brought to help her husband, and he will go far. Mark my words!—Presently I shall have to take those two young people away from you, into a wider field."

He watched her compressed, tremulous lips shrewdly and sympathetically. Jacqueline's confession and her voluntary atonement had touched his broad nature to the quick; and he had come to Storm of his own volition for the purpose of reconciling her with a presumably unforgiving mother. But his first glimpse of the mother's face showed him the needlessness of such an errand so far as she was concerned, and his sympathies turned into another channel.

He said lightly, "I suppose you hear often from the honeymooners?"

Kate shook her head.

"No? Young people are sometimes thoughtless in their happiness, forgetful of the rights of mothers.—My dear," he said suddenly, abandoning his pretense of ignorance, "why don't you go to them, take her by surprise? Things are so much better said face to face, and before any hurt has had time to rankle. Why don't you go to them?"

"I do not know where they are."

The Bishop looked thoughtful. "I can tell you," he said at last. "And I think I shall."

But Kate stopped him. The temptation had been great. She was weary of waiting for the word that never came, for the chance to hold her child in her arms again, and kiss away all the grief and pain and remorse that lay between them.

But she knew it was best for Jacqueline and Philip to come to their readjustment without her. Long meditation had taught her at last to understand that it was she herself who, unwittingly and unwillingly, had stood between them.

When the Bishop rose to go, he held her hand between his own for some moments. "When will you come to Lexington, my dear? I am an old and busy man, but I cannot afford to lose touch with such a woman as you. Will you come to see me occasionally?"

Kate replied quietly that she never went to Lexington. He understood. Though it had happened before his time, he had not failed to hear of the occasion when young Kate Leigh had brought her children home to be christened, and had been cut by an entire congregation.

He said gently, "The world's memory is short—shorter than you think. If you were to come to Lexington now, you would find that you have many friends there."

She gave no promise. The world's memory might be short, but she was not of the world, and hers was long.

"Then I must even come to you," said the Bishop; and was as good as his word thereafter....

As the long days lengthened into weeks, Kate gave up all pretense of activity, and resigned herself to waiting; waiting for she knew not what.

At first it had been Jacqueline; some word of her, or message from her. But, gradually, thoughts of her child merged somehow into thoughts of Jacques Benoix. She found herself dreaming of him as she had not allowed herself to dream since she first heard that he was coming out of the penitentiary, when their meeting seemed close, imminent, something to be prepared for constantly lest the shock of joy should be too great. She tried now to stop these dreams, in fear of the awakening; but could not.

Perhaps it was April in her blood, bringing to life the old habit of wanting her mate in the mating-season. Perhaps it was her talk with Jemima, and the girl's promise that Jacques Benoix should be found. Jemima rarely broke a promise.—Whatever the cause, the sense of his approach, his nearness, was sometimes so vivid that Kate felt she had but to turn her head to see him standing there behind her.

But if she turned it, there were only the dogs, eagerly waiting her pleasure, their tails astir; or perhaps a servant coming from the house with a wrap for her, because the breeze was damp.

She rarely rode abroad now. Pasture and field and meadow, Nature itself, had lost charm for her since she seemed to have no longer a share in bringing about their miracles. She was content to sit day after day in her eyrie, gazing out over the greening valley, watching the great flocks of martins, grackle, and robins that passed noisily overhead, going to meet the Spring farther north.

All about her sounded the murmur of bluebirds, which came each year to live in the old trees about Storm. She wondered why the bluebird should have been taken as a symbol of happiness. There is nothing more plaintive in nature than its

nesting-song, a cadence of little dropping minor notes, which Kate, grown fanciful in her idleness, translated for herself:

Love and loss, loss and love. Take them together, while there is time. Better together than not at all. Quick—for the Spring is passing by.—

Yet one who saw her sitting there, the breeze blowing tendrils of bright hair about her face, her strong, lithe hands clasped youthfully about her knees, her beautiful eyes darkling or brightening with the thoughts that passed, could not have connected her with the mere passivity of waiting, of remembering.

Sometimes the pale sunlight, growing daily in warmth, touched her cheek or her hand like a caress, and stirred her to a sudden restlessness.

"It can't be all over for me," she thought, then. "It can't!"

It seemed to her that she had been like the Lady of Shalott, doomed to see life only in a mirror, while her hands weaved eternally at a task of which she had grown weary; hoping always for one to pass, that she might turn and break the spell, and be done forever with the mirror....

At length a message came that put out of her mind both herself and the man she loved. It was a telegram from Philip, sent from the mountain town whence he and Jacqueline and Channing and Brother Bates had set forth on their missionary expedition.

The telegram read:

Jacqueline wants you. Will meet morning train. Please bring Mag's baby.

PHILIP.

CHAPTER LI

She was disappointed to find that Philip, despite his telegram, was not at the station to meet her, but had sent instead a wagon which, its driver explained, was to take her as far as wheels were feasible after the Spring rains, and then return.

"Reckon thar'll be a mule or somethin' to tote you the rest of the way," he added, indifferently.

He was unable to answer any of her questions, or to allay the fears which, despite the eager happiness in her heart, were beginning to make themselves felt. Jacqueline wanted her at last—but why?

Mile after mile they drove in utter silence, Kate's thoughts racing ahead of her; while small Kitty, on a pile of quilts in the bottom of the bouncing wagon, adapted herself to circumstances with the ease of a born traveler, and alternately dozed, or imbibed refreshment out of a bottle, or rehearsed her vocabulary aloud for the pleasure of the world at large. She would have preferred a more attentive audience, but she could do without it.

Where the road degenerated into a mere trail along the mountain-side, Kate found a mule awaiting her, in charge, not of Philip, as she had hoped, but of a mountaineer even more taciturn than the driver. Her fears became more acute.

"Can you tell me whether my daughter—young Mrs. Benoix—is ill?" she asked her new conductor, anxiously.

The man took so long to answer that she thought he had not heard her, and repeated the question.

He spat exhaustively—he was chewing tobacco—and finally replied, "The gal at Teacher's house? Dunno as I've heerd tell."

"Aren't you a neighbor of hers?"

He gave a brief nod of assent.

"Then," she persisted, "you surely would have heard if she were ill, wouldn't you?"

Another long pause. "Dunno as I would. We-all ain't much on talk."

"You certainly are not!" exclaimed Kate with some asperity.

It seemed to her anxious impatience that his taciturnity was deliberate, hostile. He was a rough, unkempt, savage-looking creature; yet the tenderness and skill with which he held little Kitty before him on his ungainly mount would have done credit to any woman.

Kate remarked presently, observing this, "You've had children of your own?"

"Thirteen on 'em."

"Thirteen? Splendid! All living?"

He spat again. "All daid. Died when they was babies."

"Good Heavens! This must be looked into!" exclaimed Kate, with a touch of the old authority; and then remembered that she was not in her own domain.

Presently, as they mounted, her attention was attracted to a woman planting in a steep and barren-looking field, swinging her arms with the fine free grace of a Millet figure.

"What's she trying to raise there—corn?" Kate inspected the soil with a professional eye. "She won't do it—not in that soil! It needs fertilizing."

Her companion remarked impartially, "Ben raisin' corn thar a right smart while."

"All the more reason to give it a rest! I suppose you've never heard of rotation of crops?"

"Yes, I hev," was the unexpected reply. "Fum Teacher." He spat with great success, and added, "We-all ain't much on new-fangled idees."

Kate attempted no more conversation. She began to feel the fatigue of the hurried journey, and to her secret fears was added a growing dread of the end of it, a sudden shyness about meeting not only Jacqueline, but Philip, after the conclusion to which her long meditations had led her. She had recalled again and again, and always with a sharp twinge of shame, the hurt bewilderment on Philip's face when she had offered him Jacqueline in marriage. What a blind and stubborn fool she had been not to understand! If he still had that look in his eyes, that patient acquiescence in her will, Kate felt that she could not bear it.... But

surely he had forgotten her, now that he was with Jacqueline? Surely the girl was lovely enough, and piteous enough in her great need of him, to drive any other woman out of his mind?

After many miles, the mountaineer volunteered a remark: "Thar's the school buildin's."

She saw on the rise beyond a group of log-cabins, the central one small and old, the two wings much larger and evidently of recent construction. In the doorway of one a man stood, looking out; and as he started down the slope toward them Kate recognized him. It was Philip.

"Mother!—At last!" he cried out. "I would have gone to meet you, but she could not spare me. She's been asking for you every moment.—Wait, let me help you!"

The tone of his voice laid to rest all her misgivings with regard to him. Even as he welcomed her, he was thinking of his wife.—As for Philip, if he remembered a time when to call this woman "mother" would have been like a knife-thrust in his breast, he thought only that the time was very long ago.

Kate sprang down unaided, her fatigue forgotten. "Jacqueline?" she demanded eagerly.

"A little stronger to-day. But—the baby—"

Kate gave a cry. Her unspoken fears had been true. "A baby?"

"Yes. It did not live.—That is why I asked you to bring little Kitty."

Kate put her hands before her eyes. "My poor little girl! Oh, my poor little girl! —Let me go to her."

At the door she was not surprised to find Jemima, in a neat nursing-dress, her eyes heavily lined with fatigue.

"I've been here several days. Jacky forgot to make them promise not to send for me. She never thought of me," she explained humbly.... "Oh Mother, it has been pretty bad! Jacky was so—so brave!" She broke down a little in Kate's arms.

"Steady, there," whispered Philip behind them. "She can't stand any excitement yet."

But the two had assumed charge of too many sickrooms together to need his

admonition.

Kate took off her hat, smoothed her hair, and went in to Jacqueline, as calmly as if they had parted yesterday.

The sight of the wan, thin face among the pillows, with eyes that looked by contrast enormous and black, shook her composure a little, and she gathered Jacqueline up against her breast without speaking. Jacqueline, too, was silent, clinging to her, touching her mother's hair and cheeks with feeble hands, as if to be sure it was really Kate.

"I knew you would come," she said at last, with a great sigh.

"Come! Oh, my darling, why didn't you send for me sooner?"

"Because I wanted to surprise you, Mummy. Because I knew when you saw baby, you'd forgive me, you wouldn't care, nothing would matter, except him.... But now there isn't any baby!" The weak voice suddenly rose to a wail. "There isn't any baby! Nothing has turned out as I had planned. Oh, Mummy! He was going to be so little, and sweet, and fat—nobody who saw him *could* have stayed angry with me!... And I never heard him cry, I never even felt his tiny hand clutching my finger!... It's because I was wicked," she moaned, tossing about so that Kate caught the waving hands and held them tight. "God wanted to get even with me. So He took the thing I wanted most in all the world. He took my baby. Oh, but that was cruel of Him, no matter how bad I'd been! Wasn't it? Wasn't it, Mummy?"

"Hush, child!" whispered Kate. "Hush! God isn't that sort!"

"Yes, He is, too! 'The Lord thy God is a *jealous* God'—ask Phil!—Oh, where is Phil?" She looked wildly around, her voice growing higher and higher. "He promised he wouldn't go away—he promised he wouldn't ever leave me again. I want him! Phil, Phil!—Oh, *there* you are!" The relief in her tone was pitiful. "Don't get where I can't see you again, Flippy darling. It frightens me so! Come here, I want to hold on to you.... Now, tell mother all about the baby. She didn't see him, you know, and I didn't see him either, very well. Oh, why did you let them make me stupid with chloroform, so I couldn't see him? Tell mother about his little ears, and his feet just exactly like mine—"

"Quiet, now," soothed Philip, striving to hush that painful, excited babble. "See, your mother is tired! Let's not talk about it now."

"But I want to talk! I want to, before I forget anything about him. It's the only baby I'll ever have. Mother wants to hear—don't you, Mummy? It was her grandson, you see."

"What nonsense!" interrupted Kate with tremulous cheerfulness. "The *only* baby? You're just eighteen—you shall have all the babies you want!"

"That shows how much you know about it!" cried Jacqueline with a sort of agonized triumph. "I can't have any more! The doctor said so. I heard him whispering to Jemmy, when he thought I was asleep, and I made her tell me. She didn't want to, but she thought I'd better know.... It isn't as if it would kill *me* to have them, Mother—that wouldn't matter! But it would kill them. It takes too long. Something is wrong about me."

Kate glanced at Philip in shocked questioning. He nodded slightly.

"So now you know the sort God is, Mother! Cruel, cruel! Just because I wasn't good.... Think of it, never any babies! No one to play with, and pet, and take care of.... No one that needs me, or wants me...."

Philip bent over her, "My darling, the world is full of babies!"

"But not mine. Not one that wants *me*.—Oh, how my breast aches, how my breast aches."

"This won't do," murmured Jemima, anxiously. "She's working herself up into a fever again. I'm going to call the doctor."

Philip whispered something in her ear, and she hurried to the door.

There was a sound outside that stopped the frantic words on Jacqueline's lips. "*What's that?*" she breathed. It came again; the fretful whimper of a sleepy child.

Jemima came into the room, carrying small Kitty, newly awakened from a nap on somebody's comfortable knees, and naturally resentful.

"O-oh!" gasped Jacqueline on a long-drawn breath. "*Give her to me!*"

Presently, held warm against that aching breast, Mag's baby slept again; and Jacqueline looked from one to the other of those about her with the first dawning of her old, wide, radiant smile.

Soon her own eyes drooped. The three tiptoed toward the door; but quiet as they

were the faint voice from the bed followed them: "Phil, Phil! where are you?"

"I can't leave her," he whispered apologetically. "You see how it is!" (Kate was glad indeed to see how it was.) "Will you go into the next room, and say good-bye to—our son?"



CHAPTER LII

Kate stood gazing down at the grandchild she had so longed for, Jacqueline's baby; an old, wrinkled, strangely wise little face, as befitted one who had solved with his first breath both the mysteries of Life and of Death. His tiny fists were clenched, his brow puckered, as if that momentary glimpse of knowledge had not been a happy one.

No woman who has not gazed so into the face of her own dead child can understand the hopelessness, the sense of bafflement, of the futility of all human endeavor, which surged through Kate Kildare at that moment. The waste of it! The utter, insensate waste of so much passion and hope and tenderness, of such desperate agony, of such courage to bear...! There is no spendthrift so prodigal as Nature. For one perfected product that pleases her, hundreds of precious guarded lives, such as this, thrown aside like so many pot-shards, useless, done for—and all to what purpose?... For the moment Kate visualised Nature as some incredible, insatiable goddess, a female Moloch, who must be propitiated always with mother's tears....

Then she had a thought of her husband; of his tenderness with their little suffering Katherine, his remorse-stricken grief over the child's death. Was that the purpose? For the moment, she forgot the other Basil whom she knew better, the one who had put aside his own flesh and blood as ruthlessly as Nature herself had put aside this little son of Jacqueline.

"Basil would be sorry for this," she whispered, half aloud. "Poor Basil!"

She did not know that she was weeping, or that she was not alone, till Jemima touched her hand; the girl's nearest approach to a caress.

"So this," said the latter, in a queer, small voice, "is the last of the Kildares of Storm!... Why do you cry, Mother? Aren't you *glad*?" She spoke fiercely. "Isn't it time we made way in the world for—better people?"

Kate tried haltingly to explain the sorrow that was upon her. "He wasn't all Kildare, this little fellow.... You never knew my father, or his father. They were gallant gentlemen, Jemima. All my life I have wanted sons like them, and like—the Benoix men. I have been proud of my health, my strength. I have lived

honorably, I have tried to keep myself a—a—"

"A gallant gentleman," said Jemima, nodding.

"Yes. So that the spark should remain alive, for my grandsons. It seemed to me —"

She broke off, finding it impossible to put into words what she felt; that her own indomitable vitality, her energy, her courage, the thing she had called "the spark," was something which had been put in her hands to guard for the long future, and that, instead, here in her hands it had gone out.

This meant death to Kate Kildare, far more than the separation of body and spirit would mean death.

Each woman was busy with her own thoughts for a while; widely different thoughts. Jemima murmured presently, "Philip said 'our son,' Mother! Oh, do you suppose that was—true? Or was he—"

She did not finish her own question; nor did Kate attempt to answer it.

"That would be like Philip," muttered the girl at last. "Anyway, it's his own affair."

She saw that her mother was sobbing.

"Don't!" she whispered in distress. "Don't! I—I never know what to do when people cry. Please!" Her voice altered suddenly. "Mother, you wait here a minute! You just wait here!"

Kate heard her leave the room, and then stooped to kiss her grandson good-by.

As she knelt there, tears raining fast on the tiny, unresponsive face in the coffin, she heard a step behind her. Thinking it was Jemima again, she did not look around.

It was some moments later that a memory came to her, so clear as to be almost a vision; the memory of her dream in Frankfort—a man standing near, with bent shoulders and gray hair, but eyes as blue as a child's, as tender as a woman's, gazing down at her, smiling down....

Behind her sounded a slight cough.

She lifted her head, suddenly trembling. "Who—who is there?" she whispered.

A voice answered, very low—"Kate!—Kate!"

Without another word, without a glance to make sure, she rose and went blindly into the arms that were ready for her.

It was like coming home.



AFTERWORD

The Madam made one final appearance at Storm, no longer as Mrs. Kildare but as Mrs. Benoix, remaining only long enough to put affairs in order for resigning her stewardship of the estate.

She had been married in the mountains to Dr. Benoix, over-ruling all his protests with a quiet, "Do you think I am going to run the risk of losing you again?"

And indeed his protests were not very heartfelt. He was unaware until too late of the clause in Basil Kildare's will by which Kate's re-marriage would lose Storm to herself and her children. His chief objection was on the score of his health, and to it Kate had replied simply, "That in itself would be a reason for our marriage, if there were no other. Oh, Jacques, if you could know how I *love* to be needed!"

He made his last weak protest. "But I cannot bear to think of you wasting your loveliness, your charm, here among these uncouth people, you who should shine in courts and palaces!"

She laughed softly. "I never have shone in any courts or palaces, goose! As for what you call my 'loveliness and charm'—they have been most valuable assets, I assure you, in dealing with my fellow-men." Her eyes danced with the daring that had made Kate Leigh's bellehood remembered beyond its time. "Why should beauty be wasted here more than elsewhere? There's less of it, and your mountaineers have eyes—though not very sound ones, poor dears!"

She went down to Storm alone, partly because of that little sinister cough of her husband's, which she made light of but never forgot; partly because she wished to spare him the publicity of the nine days' wonder that their marriage was.

But it was a publicity she need not have dreaded. Slowly enough, there had come about a great change in the feeling of the community toward Basil Kildare's widow; and when it was learned that she was at last relinquishing her great estate to marry the man for whom she had waited twenty years, the thing that had been scandal became suddenly romance. Kate woke one day to find herself a heroine.

There was a constant passage of vehicles Stormward in the fortnight she

remained there, ranging from humble farm-wagons to luxurious limousines; for not only her neighbors shared in the ovation, but people from her girlhood's home recalled the old-time friendship, and made haste to renew it. Something of the Bishop's influence might be felt here, perhaps; something, too, of the influence of young Mrs. Thorpe, whose brief stay among them had been by no means forgotten.

Kate accepted it all with a pleased surprise; received her guests, when she had time, in all friendliness, but with a certain reserve which was partly shyness. She found very little to say to people, especially women, of her own class, after all these years; and they went away to speak with some awe of one who seemed dedicated, set apart from life, like a nun who is about to take the veil. It was very different talk from that which had raged around the name of Kate Kildare twenty years before!

When at last she turned her back on Storm forever, her going was something in the nature of an Hegira. She took with her certain members of her household, notably Big Liza, who had grown too old in her service to adapt themselves to other ways; also a few favorite horses, and those of the dogs for whom she had not found suitable homes; to say nothing of cattle, hogs, and poultry, chosen for the purpose of showing Jacques' mountaineers how livestock ought to look.

This cavalcade was joined in the village, somewhat to Kate's dismay, by the Ladies of the Evening Star, in a body, also the Civic League, with a brass band, which accompanied her to the train, playing all the way as lustily as for a funeral. The final act of the performance was the presentation, rather fussily overseen by Philip's successor, of a mammoth bouquet of Spring blossoms, raised in the reclaimed dooryards of the Civic League.

Kate's last look, as the train pulled away, was for the old juniper-tree, her eyrie, lifting its hoary head, green now with tender leaves, across the wide valley where she had been for so long a prisoner.



The time came, when, as the Bishop had prophesied, Philip and Jacqueline were called away from the mountains into a wider field; to a crowded, dingy district in a city larger than any of Kentucky, where Jacqueline's mothering arms have never an excuse to be empty, and where, as her husband proudly confesses, more

people are attracted to his church by the quality of the music it provides than the quality of the sermons. But it is something else than music or sermons which attracts to these two all people who are in trouble, or in need; all derelicts of life. The hearts of Philip and his wife have not contracted about happiness of their own. They understand.

Mag's baby is with them, already learning, a docile, womanly little creature of six years, to pick up the stitches dropped by busy, careless, eager Jacqueline. It is a household Jacques Benoix loves to hear about, and Kate to visit.

But she never stays long. Cities bewilder her with their crowded indifference—men hurrying hither and thither like ants in an ant-hill, heedless of the wide sky above, heedless of each other, heedless of everything except each the small burden he carries on his back. Always she turns home to Jacques and the mountains with a sigh of relief.

Often, for she is not the woman to neglect a duty because it is painful, Kate goes down to Storm, a home now for crippled children, both white and black. It seems to her that the old house has grown less grim and forbidding under the influence of the little people who are happy there because of Basil Kildare's memory of his crippled daughter;—and also, perhaps, of another crippled child, his son.



Often, too, she makes one of her flying visits to James and Jemima Thorpe.

Once, some years since, she was called in haste to nurse Jemima through what her husband's telegram indicated as a "slight indisposition"; and upon hurrying to the sickroom was astounded to find Mrs. Thorpe propped up in bed, ministering very deftly to the needs of an infant son, so like his father that it was rather a shock to see him without eye-glasses.

It took Kate several days to recover her breath.

At last, happening one day to discover Jemima gazing down at her gourmand child with something more than tolerance in her expression, Kate blurted out:

"But I thought you did not believe in babies, Blossom!"

"Believe in them? Why, of course, Mother! Babies are quite indispensable to the scheme of things—but not to me."

"Then—why—?"

"Oh," said Jemima, practically, "it seemed rather a pity that there should be no one to inherit Aunt Jemima's money. And then—well, intelligences such as James' and mine really ought to be perpetuated, I suppose. As you once said—my baby isn't all Kildare!"

She gave her husband a quick, shy smile that was rather demonstrative for Jemima.

He leaned over and took her hand. "Why not tell your mother the truth, my dear?"

She flushed. "That is the truth, of course! Or—well, not perhaps *all* the truth.... You see, Mother, you were so upset about poor Jacky's baby.... Of course it's not quite the same, she is more like you than I am. But still ... And what you said about the 'spark.' ... So, you see—"

In her dread of sentiment, she was bungling the explanation so badly that James Thorpe took it out of her hands.

"Kate, you may regard the young person in question" (he grinned down at it fatuously) "as *our* child in only the technical sense of the word. It is, in fact, Jemima's gift to you. She came to the conclusion that she could offer you nothing you would prefer to a grandson."

"But," choked Kate, between laughter and tears, "suppose it had been a granddaughter?"

"Evidently you don't yet know our Jemima," remarked the husband.



Even Kate's grandson, however, does not keep her long away from the mountains and Jacques.

She knows that their time together, hers and her husband's, must be short. Neither misunderstands the significance of the little cough with which he has fought, for years, a losing battle. But they know, too, that it is given to few to taste the splendor of life as they have tasted it together; the joy of dreams realized, of service shared.

Kate was right in her belief that Jacques could take no advantage of the disclosure made by Mahaly. "The stone I threw was meant for Basil," he said. "Nevertheless—I am glad it failed to strike him. And I think that Basil, wherever he is, must be glad, too."

"*Wherever he is?*" repeated Kate, quickly. The subject of the hereafter was become of poignant interest to her, facing as she must what lay before them. "Oh, Jacques! Are you beginning to believe—to believe—?"

He interrupted her sadly. "I can believe only what I can understand. You must forgive me, my Kate. Only, sometimes there are dreams a man has, echoes perhaps out of his childhood—" he broke off with a shrug, "And one is envious when one sees a faith such as Philip's in his God, so strong, so sure.—Like his little-boy faith that his father was the best and greatest of men, all-wise, infallible."

Kate said, with her hand on his, "Sometimes a little boy is right, dear."



There have been great changes on Misty Ridge since Kate went to live in the mountains. The work Dr. Benoix started alone has grown beyond belief, and the influence of it extends now far beyond his immediate locality.

He has many other assistants than his wife, though none more able—a young oculist who specializes in trachoma, and makes no complaint of lack of practice; two trained teachers to help in the classrooms; even a clergyman fresh from his seminary to take the place left vacant by Philip, greatly to the satisfaction of Bates the peddler, and somewhat to the satisfaction of Dr. Benoix himself.

As he once explained to the visiting Bishop: "I will undertake to treat as best I can any ill of the human body or the human mind; but when it comes to the human soul—that calls for a bolder man than I am!"

The State is beginning to take notice of Misty Ridge, and offers of assistance come more rapidly than Kate can decline them. She does decline them; for the work there is Jacques Benoix' work, and she guards it for him jealously, to be his monument in the eyes of men when the great spirit that created it shall have passed into some other sphere of usefulness.

She herself, for all her share in the life of Jacques' people, their birth, their death, and the hard interval between, is nothing more to the dwellers on Misty Ridge than "Mrs. Teacher"—sometimes "Ole Mrs. Teacher," now that the glow of her hair is touched with gray, and beautiful lines are growing about her beautiful eyes.

But it is a name she loves above all other names—"Ole Mrs. Teacher." She wears it far more proudly than she ever wore her former title of "the Madam."

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