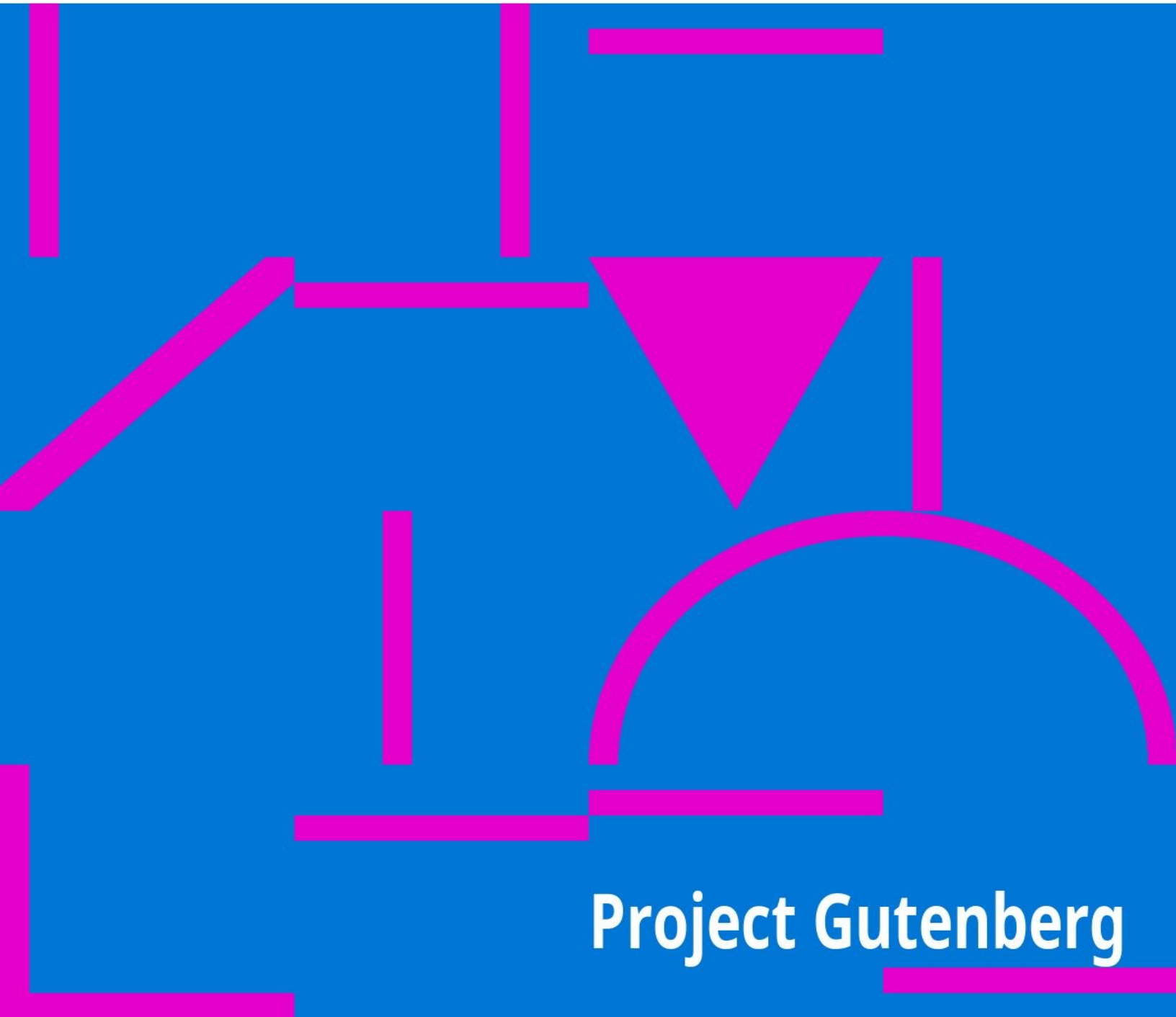


The Nest Builder

A Novel

Beatrice Forbes-Robertson Hale



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THE NEST-BUILDER

A NOVEL

By Beatrice Forbes-Robertson Hale

Author Of “What Women Want”

With A Frontispiece By J. Henry



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PART I
MATE-SONG



I

Outbound from Liverpool, the Lusitania bucked down the Irish Sea against a September gale. Aft in her second-class quarters each shouldering from the waves brought a sickening vibration as one or another of the ship's great propellers raced out of water. The gong had sounded for the second sitting, and trails of hungry and weary travelers, trooping down the companionway, met files of still more uneasy diners emerging from the saloon. The grinding jar of the vessel, the heavy smell of food, and the pound of ragtime combined to produce an effect as of some sordid and demoniac orgy—an effect derided by the smug respectability of the saloon's furnishings.

Stefan Byrd, taking in the scene as he balanced a precarious way to his seat, felt every hypercritical sense rising in revolt. Even the prosaic but admirably efficient table utensils repelled him. “They are so useful, so abominably enduring,” he thought. The mahogany trimmings of doors and columns seemed to announce from every overpolished surface a pompous self-sufficiency. Each table proclaimed the aesthetic level of the second class through the lifeless leaves of a rubber plant and two imitation cut-glass dishes of tough fruit. The stewards, casually hovering, lacked the democracy which might have humanized the steerage as much as the civility which would have oiled the workings of the first cabin. Byrd resented their ministrations as he did the heavy English dishes of the bill of fare. There were no Continental passengers near him. He had left the dear French tongue behind, and his ears, homesick already, shrank equally from the see-saw Lancashire of the stewards and the monotonous rasp of returning Americans.

Byrd's left hand neighbor, a clergyman of uncertain denomination, had tried vainly for several minutes to attract his attention by clearing his throat, passing the salt, and making measured requests for water, bread, and the like.

“I presume, sir,” he at last inquired loudly, “that you are an American, and as glad as I am to be returning to our country?”

“No, sir,” retorted Byrd, favoring his questioner with a withering stare, “I am a Bohemian, and damnably sorry that I ever have to see America again.”

The man of God turned away, pale to the temples with offense—a high-bosomed matron opposite emitted a shocked “Oh!”—the faces of the surrounding listeners assumed expressions either dismayed or deprecating.

Budding conversationalists were temporarily frost-bitten, and the watery helpings of fish were eaten in a constrained silence. But with the inevitable roast beef a Scot of unshakeable manner, decorated with a yellow forehead-lock as erect as a striking cobra, turned to follow up what he apparently conceived to be an opportunity for discussion.

“I'm not so strongly partial to the States mysel', ye ken, but I'll confess it's a grand place to mak' money. Ye would be going there, perhaps, to improve your fortunes?”

Byrd was silent.

“Also,” continued the Scot, quite unrebuffed, “it would be interesting to know what exactly ye mean when ye call yoursel' a Bohemian. Would ye be referring to your tastes, now, or to your nationality?”

His hand trembling with nervous temper, Byrd laid down his napkin, and rose with an attempt at dignity somewhat marred by the viselike clutch of the swivel chair upon his emerging legs.

“My mother was a Bohemian, my father an American. Neither, happily, was Scotch,” said he, almost stammering in his attempt to control his extreme distaste of his surroundings—and hurried out of the saloon, leaving a table of dropped jaws behind him.

“The young man is nairvous,” contentedly boomed the Scot. “I'm thinking he'll be feeling the sea already. What kind of a place would Bohemia, be, d'ye think, to have a mother from?” turning to the clergyman.

“A place of evil life, seemingly,” answered that worthy in his high-pitched, carrying voice. “I shall certainly ask to have my seat changed. I cannot subject myself for the voyage to the neighborhood of a man of profane speech.”

The table nodded approval.

“A traitor to his country, too,” said a pursy little man opposite, snapping his jaws shut like a turtle.

A bony New England spinster turned deprecating eyes to him. “My,” she whispered shrilly, “he was just terrible, wasn't he? But so handsome! I can't help but think it was more seasickness with him than an evil nature.”

Meanwhile the subject of discussion, who would have writhed far more at the spinster's palliation of his offense than at the men's disdain, lay in his tiny cabin, a prey to an attack of that nervous misery which overtakes an artist out of his element as surely and speedily as air suffocates a fish.

Stefan Byrd's table companions were guilty in his eyes of the one unforgivable

sin—they were ugly. Ugly alike in feature, dress, and bearing, they had for him absolutely no excuse for existence. He felt no bond of common humanity with them. In his lexicon what was not beautiful was not human, and he recognized no more obligation of good fellowship toward them than he would have done toward a company of ground-hogs. He lay back, one fine and nervous hand across his eyes, trying to obliterate the image of the saloon and all its inmates by conjuring up a vision of the world he had left, the winsome young cosmopolitan Paris of the art student. The streets, the cafés, the studios; his few men, his many women, friends—Adolph Jensen, the kindly Swede who loved him; Louise, Nanette, the little Polish Yanina, who had said they loved him; the slanting-glanced Turkish students, the grave Syrians, the democratic un-British Londoners—the smell, the glamour of Paris, returned to him with the nostalgia of despair.

These he had left. To what did he go?



II

In his shivering, creaking little cabin, suspended, as it were, by the uncertain waters between two lives, Byrd forced himself to remember the America he had known before his Paris days. He recalled his birthplace—a village in upper Michigan—and his mental eyes bored across the pictures that came with the running speed of a cinematograph to his memory.

The place was a village, but it called itself a city. The last he had seen of it was the “depot,” a wooden shed surrounded by a waste of rutted snow, and backed by grimy coal yards. He could see the broken shades of the town's one hotel, which faced the tracks, drooping across their dirty windows, and the lopsided sign which proclaimed from the porch roof in faded gilt on black the name of “C. E. Trench, Prop.” He could see the swing-doors of the bar, and hear the click of balls from the poolroom advertising the second of the town's distractions. He could smell the composite odor of varnish, stale air, and boots, which made the overheated station waiting-room hideous. Heavy farmers in ear-mitts, peaked caps, and fur collars spat upon the hissing stove round which their great hide boots sprawled. They were his last memory of his fellow citizens.

Looking farther back Stefan saw the town in summer. There were trees in the street where he lived, but they were all upon the sidewalk-public property. In their yards (the word garden, he recalled, was never used) the neighbors kept, with unanimity, in the back, washing, and in the front, a porch. Over these porches parched vines crept—the town's enthusiasm for horticulture went as far as that—and upon them concentrated the feminine social life of the place. Of this intercourse the high tones seemed to be giggles, and the bass the wooden thuds of rockers. Street after street he could recall, from the square about the “depot” to the outskirts, and through them all the dusty heat, the rockers, gigglers, the rustle of a shirt-sleeved father's newspaper, and the shrill coo-ees of the younger children. Finally, the piano—for he looked back farther than the all-conquering phonograph. He heard “Nita, Juanita;” he heard “Sweet Genevieve.”

Beyond the village lay the open country, level, blindingly hot, half-cultivated, with the scorched foliage of young trees showing in the ruins of what had been forest land. Across it the roads ran straight as rulers. In the winter wolves were not unknown there; in the summer there were tramps of many strange nationalities, farm hands and men bound for the copper mines. For the most part

they walked the railroad ties, or rode the freight cars; winter or summer, the roads were never wholly safe, and children played only in the town.

There, on the outskirts, was a shallow, stony river, but deep enough at one point for gingerly swimming. Stefan seemed never to have been cool through the summer except when he was squatting or paddling in this hole. He remembered only indistinctly the boys with whom he bathed; he had no friends among them. But there had been a little girl with starched white skirts, huge blue bows over blue eyes, and yellow hair, whom he had admired to adoration. She wanted desperately to bathe in the hole, and he demanded of her mother that this be permitted. Stefan smiled grimly as he recalled the horror of that lady, who had boxed his ears for trying to lead her girl into ungodliness, and to scandalize the neighbors. The friendship had been kept up surreptitiously after this, with interchange of pencils and candy, until the little girl—he had forgotten her name—put her tongue out at him over a matter of chewing-gum which he had insisted she should not use. Revolted, he played alone again.

The Presbyterian Church Stefan remembered as a whitewashed praying box, resounding to his father's high-pitched voice. It was filled with heat and flies from without in summer, and heat and steam from within in winter. The school, whitewashed again, he recalled as a succession of banging desks, flying paper pellets, and the drone of undigested lessons. Here the water bucket loomed as the alleviation in summer, or the red hot oblong of the open stove in winter time. Through all these scenes, by an egotistical trick of the brain, he saw himself moving, a small brown-haired boy, with olive skin and queer, greenish eyes, entirely alien, absolutely lonely, completely critical. He saw himself in too large, ill-chosen clothes, the butt of his playfellows. He saw the sidelong, interested glances of little girls change to curled lips and tossed heads at the grinning nudge of their boy companions. He saw the harassed eyes of an anaemic teacher stare uncomprehendingly at him over the pages of an exercise book filled with colored drawings of George III and the British flag, instead of a description of the battle of Bunker Hill. He remembered the hatred he had felt even then for the narrowness of the local patriotism which had prompted him to this revenge. As a result, he saw himself backed against the schoolhouse wall, facing with contempt a yelling, jumping tangle of boys who, from a safe distance, called upon the "traitor" and the "Dago" to come and be licked. He felt the rage mount in his head like a burning wave, saw a change in the eyes and faces of his foes, felt himself spring with a catlike leap, his lips tight above his teeth and his arms moving like clawed wheels, saw boys run yelling and himself darting between them down the road, to fall at last, a trembling, sobbing bundle of reaction, into

the grassy ditch.

In memory Stefan followed himself home. The word was used to denote the house in which he and his father lived. A portrait of his mother hung over the parlor stove. It was a chalk drawing from a photograph, crudely done, but beautiful by reason of the subject. The face was young and very round, the forehead beautifully low and broad under black waves of hair. The nose was short and proud, the chin small but square, the mouth gaily curving around little, even teeth. But the eyes were deep and somber; there was passion in them, and romance. Stefan had not seen that face for years, he barely remembered the original, but he could have drawn it now in every detail. If the house in which it hung could be called home at all, it was by virtue of that picture, the only thing of beauty in it.

Behind the portrait lay a few memories of joy and heartache, and one final one of horror. Stefan probed them, still with his nervous hand across his eyes. He listened while his mother sang gay or mournful little songs with haunting tunes in a tongue only a word or two of which he understood. He watched while she drew from her bureau drawer a box of paints and some paper. She painted for long hours, day after day through the winter, while he played beside her with longing eyes on her brushes. She painted always one thing—flowers—using no pencil, drawing their shapes with the brush. Her flowers were of many kinds, nearly all strange to him, but most were roses—pink, yellow, crimson, almost black. Sometimes their petals flared like wings; sometimes they were close-furled. Of these paintings he remembered much, but of her speech little, for she was silent as she worked.

One day his mother put a brush into his hand. The rapture of it was as sharp and near as to-day's misery. He sat beside her after that for many days and painted. First he tried to paint a rose, but he had never seen such roses as her brush drew, and he tired quickly. Then he drew a bird. His mother nodded and smiled—it was good. After that his memory showed him the two sitting side by side for weeks, or was it months?—while the snow lay piled beyond the window—she with her flowers, he with his birds.

First he drew birds singly, hopping on a branch, or simply standing, claws and beaks defined. Then he began to make them fly, alone, and again in groups. Their wings spread across the paper, wider and more sweepingly. They pointed upward sharply, or lay flat across the page. Flights of tiny birds careened from corner to corner. They were blue, gold, scarlet, and white. He left off drawing birds on branches and drew them only in flight, smudging in a blue background for the sky.

One day by accident he made a dark smudge in the lower left-hand corner of his page.

“What is that?” asked his mother.

The little boy looked at it doubtfully for a moment, unwilling to admit it a blot. Then he laughed.

“Mother, Mother, that is America.” (Stefan heard himself.) “Look!” And rapidly he drew a bird flying high above the blot, with its head pointed to the right, away from it.

His mother laughed and hugged him quickly. “Yes, eastward,” she said.

After that all his birds flew one way, and in the left-hand lower corner there was usually a blob of dark brown or black. Once it was a square, red, white, and blue.

On her table his mother had a little globe which revolved above a brass base. Because of this he knew the relative position of two places—America and Bohemia. Of this country he thought his mother was unwilling to speak, but its name fell from her lips with sighs, with—as it now seemed to him—a wild longing. Knowing nothing of it, he had pictured it a paradise, a land of roses. He seemed to have no knowledge of why she had left it; but years later his father spoke of finding her in Boston in the days when he preached there, penniless, searching for work as a teacher of singing. How she became jettisoned in that—to her—cold and inhospitable port, Stefan did not know, nor how soon after their marriage the two moved to the still more alien peninsula of Michigan.

Into his memories of the room where they painted a shadow constantly intruded, chilling them, such a shadow, deep and cold, as is cast by an iceberg. The door would open, and his father's face, high and white with ice-blue eyes, would hang above them. Instantly, the man remembered, the boy would cower like a fledgling beneath the sparrow-hawk, but with as much distaste as fear in his cringing. The words that followed always seemed the same—he could reconstruct the scene clearly, but whether it had occurred once or many times he could not tell. His father's voice would snap across the silence like a high, tight-drawn string—

“Still wasting time? Have you nothing better to do? Where is your sewing? And the boy—why is he not outside playing?”

“This helps me, Henry,” his mother answered, hesitating and low. “Surely it does no harm. I cannot sew all the time.”

“It is a childish and vain occupation, however, and I disapprove of the boy

being encouraged in it. This of course you know perfectly well. Under ordinary circumstances I should absolutely forbid it; as it is, I condemn it.”

“Henry,” his mother's voice trembled, “don't ask me to give up his companionship. It is too cold for me to be outdoors, and perhaps after the spring I might not be with him.”

This sentence terrified Stefan, who did not know the meaning of it. He was glad, for once, of his father's ridicule.

“That is perfectly absurd, the shallow excuse women always make their husbands for self-indulgence,” said the man, turning to go. “You are a healthy woman, and would be more so but for idleness.”

His wife called him back, pleadingly. “Please don't be angry with me, I'm doing the best I can, Henry—the very best I can.” There was a sweet foreign blur in her speech, Stefan remembered.

His father paused at the door. “I have shown you your duty, my dear. I am a minister, and you cannot expect me to condone in my wife habits of frivolity and idleness which I should be the first to reprimand in my flock. I expect you to set an example.”

“Oh,” the woman wailed, “when you married me you loved me as I was—”

With a look of controlled annoyance her husband closed the door. Whether the memory of his father's words was exact or not, Stefan knew their effect by heart. The door shut, his mother would begin to cry, quietly at first, then with deep, catching sobs that seemed to stifle her, so that she rose and paced the room breathlessly. Then she would hold the boy to her breast, and slowly the storm would change again to gentle tears. That day there would be no more painting.

These, his earliest memories, culminated in tragedy. A spring day of driving rain witnessed the arrival of a gray, plain-faced woman, who mounted to his mother's room. The house seemed full of mysterious bustle. Presently he heard moans, and rushed upstairs thinking his mother was crying and needed him. The gray-haired woman thrust him from the bedroom door, but he returned again and again, calling his mother, until his father emerged from the study downstairs, and, seizing him in his cold grip, pushed him into the sanctum and turned the key upon him.

Much later, a man whom Stefan knew as their doctor entered the room with his father. A strange new word passed between them, and, in his high-strung state, impressed the boy's memory. It was “chloroform.” The doctor used the word several times, and his father shook his head.

“No, doctor,” he heard him saying, “we neither of us approve of it. It is contrary to the intention of God. Besides, you say the case is normal.”

The doctor seemed to be repeating something about nerves and hysteria. “Exactly,” his father replied, “and for that, self-control is needed, and not a drug that reverses the dispensation of the Almighty.”

Both men left the room. Presently the boy heard shrieks. Lying, a grown man, in his berth, Stefan trembled at the memory of them. He fled in spirit as he had fled then—out of the window, down the roaring, swimming street, where he knew not, pursued by a writhing horror. Hours later, as it seemed, he returned. The shades were pulled down across the windows of his house. His mother was dead.

Looking back, the man hardly knew how the conviction had come to the child that his father had killed his mother. A vague comprehension perhaps of the doctor's urgings and his father's denials—a head-shaking mutter from the nurse—the memory of all his mother's tears. He was hardly more than a baby, but he had always feared and disliked his father—now he hated him, blindly and intensely. He saw him as the cause not only of his mother's tears and death, but of all the ugliness in the life about him. “Bohemia,” he thought, would have been theirs but for this man. He even blamed him, in a sullen way, for the presence in their house of a tiny little red and wizened object, singularly ugly, which the gray-haired woman referred to as his “brother.” Obviously, the thing was not a brother, and his father must be at the bottom of a conspiracy to deceive him. The creature made a great deal of noise, and when, by and by, it went away, and they told him his brother too was dead, he felt nothing but relief.

So darkened the one bright room in his childhood's mansion. Obscured, it left the other chambers dingier than before, and filled with the ache of loss. Slowly he forgot his mother's companionship, but not her beauty, nor her roses, nor “Bohemia,” nor his hatred of the “America” which was his father's. To get away from his native town, to leave America, became the steadfast purpose of his otherwise unstable nature.

The man watched himself through high school. He saw himself still hating his surroundings and ignoring his schoolfellows—save for an occasional girl whose face or hair showed beauty. At this time the first step in his plan of escape shaped itself—he must work hard enough to get to college, to Ann Arbor, where he had heard there was an art course. For the boy painted now, in all his spare time, not merely birds, but dogs and horses, boys and girls, all creatures that had speed, that he could draw in action, leaping, flying, or running against the wind. Even now Stefan could warm to the triumph he felt the day he discovered the old

barn where he could summon these shapes undetected. His triumph was over the arch-enemy, his father—who had forbidden him paint and brushes and confiscated the poor little fragments of his mother's work that he had hoarded. His father destined him for a “fitting” profession—the man smiled to remember it—and with an impressive air of generosity gave him the choice of three—the Church, the Law, or Medicine. Hate had given him too keen a comprehension of his father to permit him the mistake of argument. He temporized. Let him be sent to college, and there he would discover where his aptitude lay.

So at last it was decided. A trunk was found, a moth-eaten bag. His cheap, ill-cut clothes were packed. On a day of late summer he stepped for the first time upon a train—beautiful to him because it moved—and was borne southward.

At Ann Arbor he found many new things, rules, and people, but he brushed them aside like flies, hardly perceiving them; for there, for the first time, he saw photographs and casts of the world's great art. The first sight, even in a poor copy, of the two Discoboli—Diana with her swinging knee-high tunic—the winged Victory of Samothrace—to see them first at seventeen, without warning, without a glimmering knowledge of their existence! And the pictures! Portfolios of Angelo, of the voluptuous Titian, of the swaying forms of Botticelli's maidens—trite enough now—but then!

How long he could have deceived his father as to the real nature of his interests he did not know. Already there had been complaints of cut lectures, reprimands, and letters from home. Evading mathematics, science, and divinity, he read only the English and classic subjects—because they contained beauty—and drew, copying and creating, in every odd moment. The storm began to threaten, but it never broke; for in his second year in college the unbelievable, the miracle, happened—his father died. They said he had died of pneumonia, contracted while visiting the sick in the winter blizzards, and they praised him; but Stefan hardly listened.

One fact alone stood out amid the ugly affairs of death, so that he regarded and remembered nothing else. He was free—and he had wings! His father left insurance, and a couple of savings-bank accounts, but through some fissure of vanity or carelessness in the granite of his propriety, he left no will. The sums, amounting in all to something over three thousand dollars, came to Stefan without conditions, guardians, or other hindrances. The rapture of that discovery, he thought, almost wiped out his father's debt to him.

He knew now that not Bohemia, but Paris, was his El Dorado. In wild haste he made ready for his journey, leaving the rigid trappings of his home to be sold after him. But his dead father was to give him one more pang—the scales were

to swing uneven at the last. For when he would have packed the only possession, other than a few necessities, he planned to carry with him, he found his mother's picture gone. Dying, his father, it appeared, had wandered from his bed, detached the portrait, and with his own hands burnt it in the stove. The motive of the act Stefan could not comprehend. He only knew that this man had robbed him of his mother twice. All that remained of her was her wedding ring, which, drawn from his father's cash-box, he wore on his little finger. With bitterness amid his joy he took the train once more, and saw the lights of the town's shabby inn blink good-bye behind its frazzled shades.



III

Byrd had lived for seven years in Paris, wandering on foot in summer through much of France and Italy. His little patrimony, stretched to the last sou, and supplemented in later years by the occasional sale of his work to small dealers, had sufficed him so long. His headquarters were in a high windowed attic facing north along the rue des Quatre Ermites. His work had been much admired in the ateliers, but his personal unpopularity with, the majority of the students had prevented their admiration changing to a friendship whose demands would have drained his small resources. "Ninety-nine per cent of the Quarter dislikes Stefan Byrd," an Englishman had said, "but one per cent adores him." Repeated to Byrd, this utterance was accepted by him with much complacency, for, even more than the average man, he prided himself upon his faults of character. His adoration of Paris had not prevented him from criticizing its denizens; the habits of mental withdrawal and reservation developed in his boyhood did not desert him in the city of friendship, but he became more deeply aware of the loneliness which they involved. He searched eagerly for the few whose qualities of mind or person lifted them beyond reach of his demon of disparagement, and he found them, especially among women.

To a minority of that sex he was unusually attractive, and he became a lover of women, but as subjects for enthusiasm rather than desire. In passion he was curious but capricious, seldom rapidly roused, nor long held. In his relations with women emotion came second to mental stimulation, so that he never sought one whose mere sex was her main attraction. This saved him from much—he was experienced, but not degraded. Of love, however, in the fused sense of body, mind, and spirit, he knew nothing. Perhaps his work claimed too much from him; at any rate he was too egotistical, too critical and self-sufficient to give easily. Whether he had received such love he did not ask himself—it is probable that he had, without knowing it, or understanding that he had not himself given full measure in return. The heart of France is practical; with all her ardor Paris had given Byrd desire and friendship, but not romance.

In his last year, with only a few francs of his inheritance remaining, Stefan had three pictures in the Beaux Arts. One of these was sold, but the other two importuned vainly from their hanging places. Enormous numbers of pictures had been exhibited that year. Every gallery, public and private, was crowded; Paris

was glutted with works of art. Stefan faced the prospect of speedy starvation if he could not dispose of another canvas. He had enough for a summer in Brittany, after which, if the dealers could do nothing for him, he was stranded. Nevertheless, he enjoyed his holiday light-heartedly, confident that his two large pictures could not long fail to be appreciated. Returning to Paris in September, however, he was dismayed to find his favorite dealers uninterested in his canvases, and disinclined to harbor them longer. Portraits and landscapes, they told him, were in much demand, but fantasies, no. His sweeping groups of running, flying figures against stormy skies, or shoals of mermaids hurrying down lanes of the deep sea, did not appeal to the fashionable taste of the year. Something more languorous, more subdued, or, on the other hand, more “chic,” was demanded.

In a high rage of disgust, Stefan hired a fiacre, and bore his children defiantly home to their birthplace. Sitting in his studio like a ruffled bird upon a spoiled hatching, he reviewed the fact that he had 325 francs in the world, that the rent of his attic was overdue, and that his pictures had never been so unmarketable as now.

At this point his one intimate man friend, Adolph Jensen, a Swede, appeared as the *deus ex machine*. He had, he declared, an elder brother in New York, an art dealer. This brother had just written him, describing the millionaires who bought his pictures and bric-a-brac. His shop was crowded with them. Adolph's brother was shrewd and hard to please, but let his cher Stefan go himself to New York with his canvases, impress the brother with his brilliance and the beauty of his work, and, undoubtedly, his fortune would at once be made. The season in New York was in the winter. Let Stefan go at once, by the fastest boat, and be first in the field—he, Adolph, who had a little laid by, would lend him the necessary money, and would write his brother in advance of the great opportunity he was sending him.

Ultimately, with a very ill grace on Stefan's part—who could hardly be persuaded that even a temporary return to America was preferable to starvation—it was so arranged. The second-class passage money was 250 francs; for this and incidentals, he had enough, and Adolph lent him another 250 to tide him over his arrival. He felt unable to afford adequate crating, so his canvases were unstretched and made into a roll which he determined should never leave his hands. His clothing was packed in two bags, one contributed by Adolph. Armed with his roll, and followed by his enthusiastic friend carrying the bags, Stefan departed from the Gare Saint-Lazare for Dieppe, Liverpool, and the *Lusitania*.

Reacting to his friend's optimism, Stefan had felt confident enough on leaving

Paris, but the discomforts of the journey had soon flattened his spirits, and now, limp in his berth, he saw the whole adventure mistaken, unreal, and menacing. In leaving the country of his adoption for that of his birth, he now felt that he had put himself again in the clutches of a chimera which had power to wither with its breath all that was rare and beautiful in his life. Nursing a grievance against himself and fate, he at last fell asleep, clothed as he was, and forgot himself for a time in such uneasy slumber as the storm allowed.



IV

The second-class deck was rapidly filling. Chairs, running in a double row about the deck-house were receiving bundles of women, rugs, and babies. Energetic youths, in surprising ulsters and sweaters, tramped in broken file between these chairs and the bulwarks. Older men, in woolen waistcoats and checked caps, or in the aging black of the small clergy and professional class, obstructed, with a rooted constancy, the few clear corners of the deck. Elderly women, with the parchment skin and dun tailored suit of the "personally conducted" tourist, tied their heads in veils and ventured into sheltered corners. On the boat-deck a game of shuffleboard was in progress. Above the main companion-way the ship's bands condescended to a little dance music on behalf of the second class. The Scotchman, clad in inch-thick heather mixture, was already discussing with all whom he could buttonhole the possibilities of a ship's concert. In a word, it was the third day out, the storm was over, and the passengers were cognizant of life, and of each other.

The Scot had gravitated to a group of men near the smoking-room door, and having received from his turtle-jawed neighbor of the dinner table, who was among them, the gift of a cigar, interrogated him as to musical gifts. "I shall recite mesel'," he explained complacently, sucking in his smoke. "Might we hope for a song, now, from you? I've asked yon artist chap, but he says he doesna' sing."

His neighbor also disclaimed talents. "Sorry I can't oblige you. Who wants to hear a man sing, anyway? Where are your girls?"

"There seems to be a singular absence of bonny girrls on board," replied the Scot, twisting his erect forelock reflectively.

"Have you asked the English girl?" suggested a tall, rawboned New Englander.

"Which English girrl?" demanded the Scot.

"Listen to him—which! Why, that one over there, you owl."

The Scotchman's eyes followed the gesture toward a group of children surrounding a tall girl who stood by the rail on the leeward side. She was facing into the wind toward the smoking-room door.

"Eh, mon," said the Scot, "till now I'd only seen the back of yon young

woman,” and he promptly strode down the deck to ask, and receive, the promise of a song.

Stefan Byrd, after a silent breakfast eaten late to avoid his table companions, had just come on deck. It had been misty earlier, but now the sun was beginning to break through in sudden glints of brightness. The deck was still damp, however, and the whole prospect seemed to the emerging Stefan cheerless in the extreme. His eyes swept the gray, huddled shapes upon the chairs, the knots of gossiping men, the clumsy, tramping youths, with the same loathing that the whole voyage had hitherto inspired in him. The forelocked Scot, tweed cap in hand, was crossing the deck. “There goes the brute, busy with his infernal concert,” he thought, watching balefully. Then he actually seemed to point, like a dog, limbs fixed, eyes set, his face, with its salient nose, thrust forward.

The Scot was speaking to a tall, bareheaded girl, about whom half a dozen nondescript children crowded. She was holding herself against the wind, and from her long, clean limbs her woolen dress was whipped, rippling. The sun had gleamed suddenly, and under the shaft of brightness her hair shone back a golden answer. Her eyes, hardly raised to those of the tall Scotchman, were wide, gray, and level—the eyes of Pallas Athene; her features, too, were goddess-like. One hand upon the bulwarks, she seemed, even as she listened, to be poised for flight, balancing to the sway of the ship.

Stefan exhaled a great breath of joy. There was something beautiful upon the ship, after all. He found and lit a cigarette, and squaring his shoulders to the deckhouse wall, leaned back the more comfortably to indulge what he took to be his chief mission—the art of perceiving beauty.

The girl listened in silence till the Scotchman had finished speaking, and replied briefly and quietly, inclining her head. The Scot, jotting something in a pocket notebook, left her with an air of elation, and she turned again to the children. One, a toddler, was picking at her skirt. She bent toward him a smile which gave Stefan almost a stab of satisfaction, it was so gravely sweet, so fitted to her person. She stooped lower to speak to the baby, and the artist saw the free, rhythmic motion which meant developed, and untrammelled muscles. Presently the children, wriggling with joy, squatted in a circle, and the girl sank to the deck in their midst with one quick and easy movement, curling her feet under her. There proceeded an absurd game, involving a slipper and much squealing, whose intricacies she directed with unruffled ease.

Suddenly the wind puffed the hat of one of the small boys from his head, carrying it high above their reach. In an instant the girl was up, springing to her feet unaided by hand or knee. Reaching out, she caught the hat as it descended

slantingly over the bulwarks, and was down again before the child's clutching hands had left his head.

A mother, none other than the prominently busted lady of Stefan's table, blew forward with admiring cries of gratitude. Other matrons, vocative, surrounded the circle, momentarily cutting off his view. He changed his position to the bulwarks beside the group. There, a yard or two from the gleaming head, he perched on the rail, feet laced into its supports, and continued his concentrated observation.

"See yon chap," remarked the Scot from the smoking-room door to which his talent-seeking round of the deck had again brought him. "He's fair staring the eyes oot o'his head!"

"Exceedingly annoying to the young lady, I should imagine," returned his table neighbor, the prim minister, who had joined the group.

"Hoots, she willna' mind the likes of him," scoffed the other, with his booming laugh.

And indeed she did not. Oblivious equally of Byrd and of her more distant watchers, the English girl passed from "Hunt the Slipper" to "A Cold and Frosty Morning," and from that to story-telling, as absorbed as her small companions, or as her watcher-in-chief.

Gradually the sun broke out, the water danced, huddled shapes began to rise in their chairs, disclosing unexpected spots of color—a bright tie or a patterned blouse—animation increased on all sides, and the ring about the storyteller became three deep.

After a time a couple of perky young stewards appeared with huge iron trays, containing thick white cups half full of chicken broth, and piles of biscuits. Upon this, the pouter-pigeon lady bore off her small son to be fed, other mothers did the same, and the remaining children, at the lure of food, sidled off of their own accord, or sped wildly, whooping out promises to return. For the moment, the story-teller was alone. Stefan, seeing the Scot bearing down upon her with two cups of broth in his hand and purpose in his eye, wakened to the danger just in time. Throwing his cigarette overboard, he sprang lightly between her and the approaching menace.

"Won't you be perfectly kind, and come for a walk?" he asked, stooping to where she sat. The girl looked up into a pair of green-gold eyes set in a brown, eager face. The face was lighted with a smile of dazzling friendliness, and surmounted by an uncovered head of thick, brown-black hair. Slowly her own eyes showed an answering smile.

“Thank you, I should love to,” she said, and rising, swung off beside him, just in time—as Stefan maneuvered it—to avoid seeing the Scot and his carefully balanced offering. Discomfited, that individual consoled himself with both cups of broth, and bided his time.

“My name is Stefan Byrd. I am a painter, going to America to sell some pictures. I'm twenty-six. What is your name?” said Stefan, who never wasted time in preliminaries and abhorred small talk—turning his brilliant happy smile upon her.

“To answer by the book,” she replied, smiling too, “my name is Mary Elliston. I'm twenty-five. I do odd jobs, and am going to America to try to find one to live on.”

“What fun!” cried Stefan, with a faunlike skip of pleasure, as they turned onto the emptier windward deck. “Then we're both seeking our fortunes.”

“Living, rather than fortune, in my case, I'm afraid.”

“Well, of course you don't need a fortune, you carry so much gold with you,” and he glanced at her shining hair.

“Not negotiable, unluckily,” she replied, taking his compliment as he had paid it, without a trace of self-consciousness.

“Like the sunlight,” he answered. “In fact,”—confidentially—“I'm afraid you're a thief; you've imprisoned a piece of the sun, which should belong to us all. However, I'm not going to complain to the authorities, I like the result too much. You don't mind my saying that, do you?” he continued, sure that she did not. “You see, I'm a painter. Color means everything to me—that and form.”

“One never minds hearing nice things, I think,” she replied, with a frank smile. They were swinging up and down the windward deck, and as he talked he was acutely aware of her free movements beside him, and of the blow of her skirts to leeward. Her hair, too closely pinned to fly loose, yet seemed to spring from her forehead with the urge of pinioned wings. Life radiated from her, he thought, with a steady, upward flame—not fitfully, as with most people.

“And one doesn't mind questions, does one—from real people?” he continued. “I'm going to ask you lots more, and you may ask me as many as you like. I never talk to people unless they are worth talking to, and then I talk hard. Will you begin, or shall I? I have at least two hundred things to ask.”

“It is my turn, though, I think.” She accepted him on his own ground, with an open and natural friendliness.

“I have only one at the moment, which is, 'Why haven't we talked before?'”

and she glanced with a quiet humorousness at the few unpromising samples of the second cabin who obstructed the windward deck.

“Oh, good for you!” he applauded, “aren't they loathly!”

“Oh, no, all right, only not stimulating—”

“And we are,” he finished for her, “so that, obviously, your question has only one answer. We haven't talked before because I haven't seen you before, and I haven't seen you because I have been growling in my cabin—voilà tout!”

“Oh, never growl—it's such a waste of time,” she answered. “You'll see, the second cabin isn't bad.”

“It certainly isn't, *now*,” rejoiced Stefan. “My turn for a question. Have you relatives, or are you, like myself, alone in the world?”

“Quite alone,” said Mary, “except for a married sister, who hardly counts, as she's years older than I, and fearfully preoccupied with husband, houses, and things.” She paused, then added, “She hasn't any babies, or I might have stayed to look after them, but she has lots of money and 'position to keep up,' and so forth.”

“I see her,” said Stefan. “Obviously, she takes after the *other* parent. You are alone then. Next question—”

“Oh, isn't it my turn again?” Mary interposed, smilingly.

“It is, but I ask you to waive it. You see, questions about *me* are so comparatively trivial. What sort of work do you do?”

“Well, I write a little,” she replied, “and I've been a governess and a companion. But I'm really a victim of the English method of educating girls. That's my chief profession—being a monument to its inefficiency,” and she laughed, low and bell-like.

“Tell me about that—I've never lived in England,” he questioned, with eager interest. (“And oh, Pan and Apollo, her voice!” he thought.)

“Well,” she continued, “they bring us up so nicely that we can't do anything—except *be* nice. I was brought up in a cathedral town, right in the Close, and my dear old Dad, who was a doctor, attended the Bishop, the Dean, and all the Chapter. Mother would not let us go to boarding-school, for fear of 'influences'—so we had governesses at home, who taught us nothing we didn't choose to learn. My sister Isobel married 'well,' as they say, while I was still in the schoolroom. Her husband belongs to the county—”

“What's that?” interrupted Stefan.

“Don't you know what the county is? How delightful! The 'county' is the

county families—landed gentry—very ancient and swagger and all that—much more so than the titled people often. It was very great promotion for the daughter of one of the town to marry into the county—or would have been except that Mother was county also.” She spoke with mock solemnity.

“How delightfully picturesque and medieval!” exclaimed Stefan. “The Guelphs and Ghibellines, eh?”

“Yes,” Mary replied, “only there is no feud, and it doesn't seem so romantic when you're in it. The man my sister married I thought was frightfully boring except for his family place, and being in the army, which is rather decent. He talks,” she smiled, “like a phonograph with only one set of records.”

“Wondrous Being—Winged Goddess—” chanted Stefan, stopping before her and apostrophizing the sky or the boat-deck—“a goddess with a sense of humor!” And he positively glowed upon her.

“About the first point I know nothing,” she laughed, walking on again beside him, “but for the second,” and her face became a little grave, “you have to have some humor if you are a girl in Lindum, or you go under.”

“Tell me, tell me all about it,” he urged. “I've never met an English girl before, *nor* a goddess, and I'm so interested!”

They rested for a time against the bulwarks. The wind was dropping, and the spume seethed against the black side of the ship without force from the waves to throw it up to them in spray. They looked down into deep blue and green water glassing a sky warm now, and friendly, in which high white cumuli sailed slowly, like full-rigged ships all but becalmed.

“It is a very commonplace story with us,” Mary began. “Mother died a little time after Isobel married, and Dad kept my governess on. I begged to go to Girton, or any other college he liked, but he wouldn't hear of it. Said he wanted a womanly daughter.” She smiled rather ruefully. “Dad was doing well with his practice, for a small-town doctor, and had a good deal saved, and a little of mother's money. He wanted to have more, so he put it all into rubber. You've heard about rubber, haven't you?” she asked, turning to Stefan.

“Not a thing,” he smiled.

“Well, every one in England was putting money into rubber last year, and lots of people did well, but lots—didn't. Poor old Dad didn't—he lost everything. It wouldn't have really mattered—he had his profession—but the shock killed him, I think; that and being lonely without Mother.” She paused a moment, looking into the water. “Anyhow, he died, and there was nothing for me to do except to begin earning my living without any of the necessary equipment.”

“What about the brother-in-law?” asked Stefan.

“Oh, yes, I could have gone to them—I wasn't in danger of starvation. But,” she shook her head emphatically, “a poor relation! I couldn't have stood that.”

“Well,” he turned squarely toward her, his elbow on the rail, “I can't help asking this, you know; where were the bachelors of Lindum?”

She smiled, still in her friendly, unembarrassed way.

“I know what you mean, of course. The older men say it quite openly in England.—‘Why don't a nice gel like you get married?’—It's rather a long story.” (“Has she been in love?” Stefan wondered.) “First of all, there are very few young men of one's own sort in Lindum; most of them are in the Colonies. Those there are—one or two lawyers, doctors, and squires' sons—are frightfully sought after.” She made a wry face. “Too much competition for them, altogether, and —” she seemed to take a plunge before adding—“I've never been successful at bargain counters.”

He turned that over for a moment. “I see,” he said. “At least I should do, if it weren't for it being you. Look here, Miss Elliston, honestly now, fair and square —” he smiled confidingly at her—“you're not asking me to believe that the competition in your ease didn't appear in the other sex?”

“Mr. Byrd,” she answered straightly, “in my world girls have to have more than a good appearance.” She shrugged her shoulders rather disdainfully. “I had no money, and I had opinions.”

(“She's been in love—slightly,” he decided.) “Opinions,” he echoed, “what kind? Mustn't one have any in Lindum?”

“Young girls mustn't—only those they are taught,” she replied. “I read a good deal, I sympathized with the Liberals. I was even—” her voice dropped to mock horror—“a Suffragist!”

“I've heard about that,” he interposed eagerly, “though the French women don't seem to care much. You wanted to vote? Well, why ever not?”

She gave him the brightest smile he had yet received.

“Oh, how nice of you!” she cried. “You really mean that?”

“Couldn't see it any other way. I've always liked and believed in women more than men. I learnt that in childhood,” he added, frowning.

“Splendid! I'm so glad,” she responded. “You see, with our men it's usually the other way round. My ideas were a great handicap at home.”

“So you decided to leave?”

“Yes; I went to London and got a job teaching some children sums and history—two hours every morning. In the afternoons I worked at stories for the magazines, and placed a few, but they pay an unknown writer horribly badly. I lived with an old lady as companion for two months, but that was being a poor relation minus the relationship—I couldn't stand it. I joined the Suffragists in London—not the Militants—I don't quite see their point of view—and marched in a parade. Brother-in-law heard of it, and wrote me I could not expect anything from them unless I stopped it.” She laughed quietly.

Stefan flushed. He pronounced something—conclusively—in French. Then—“Don't ask me to apologize, Miss Elliston.”

“I won't,” reassuringly. “I felt rather like that, too. I wrote that I didn't expect anything as it was. Then I sat down and thought about the whole question of women in England and their chances. I had a hundred pounds and a few ornaments of Mother's. I love children, but I didn't want to be a governess. I wanted to stand alone in some place where my head wouldn't be pushed down every time I tried to raise it. I believed in America people wouldn't say so often, 'Why doesn't a nice girl like you get married?' so I came, and here I am. That's the whole story—a very humdrum one.”

“Yes, here you are, thank God!” proclaimed Stefan devoutly. “What magnificent pluck, and how divine of you to tell me it all! You've saved me from suicide, almost. These people immolate me.”

“How delightfully he exaggerates!” she thought.

“What thousands of things we can talk about,” he went on in a burst of enthusiasm. “What a perfectly splendid time we are going to have!” He all but warbled.

“I hope so,” she answered, smilingly, “but there goes the gong, and I'm ravenous.”

“Dinner!” he cried scornfully; “suet pudding, all those horrible people—you want to leave this—?” He swept his arm over the glittering water.

“I don't, but I want my dinner,” she maintained.

This checked his spirits for a moment; then enlightenment seemed to burst upon him.

“Glorious creature!” he apostrophized her. “She must be fed, or she would not glow with such divine health! That gong was for the first table, and I'm not in the least hungry. Nevertheless, we will eat, here and now.”

She demurred, but he would have his way, demanding it in celebration of their

meeting. He found the deck steward, tipped him, and exacted the immediate production of two dinners. He ensconced Miss Elliston in some one else's chair, conveniently placed, settled her with some one else's cushions, which he chose from the whole deck for their color—a clean blue—and covered her feet with the best rug he could find. She accepted his booty with only slight remonstrance, being too frankly engaged by his spirits to attempt the role of extinguisher. He settled himself beside her, and they lunched delightedly, like children, on chops and a rice pudding.



V

It is not too easy to appropriate a pretty girl on board ship. There are always young men who expect the voyage to offer a flirtation, and who spend much ingenuity in heading each other off from the companionship of the most attractive damsels. But the "English girl" was not in the "pretty" class. She was a beauty, of the grave and pure type which implies character. All the children knew her; all the women and men watched her; but few of the latter had ventured to speak to her, even before Stefan claimed her as his monopoly. For this he did, from the moment of their first encounter. To him nobody on the ship existed but her, and he assumed the right to show it.

He had trouble from only two people. One was the Scotchman, McEwan, whose hide seemed impervious to rebuffs, and who would charge into a conversation with the weight of a battering ram, planting himself implacably in a chair beside Miss Elliston, and occasionally reducing even Stefan to silence. The other was Miss Elliston herself. She was kind, she was friendly, she was boyishly frank. But occasionally she would withdraw into herself, and sometimes would disappear altogether into her cabin, to be found again, after long search, telling stories to some of the children. On such occasions Stefan roamed the decks and saloons very like a hungry wolf, snapping with intolerable rudeness at any one who spoke to him. This, however, few troubled to do, for he was cordially disliked, both for his own sake and because of his success with Miss Elliston. That success the ship could not doubt. Though she was invariably polite to every one, she walked and talked only with him or the children. She was, of course, above the social level of the second-class; but this the English did not resent, because they understood it, nor the Americans, because they were unaware of it. On the other hand, English and Americans alike resented Byrd, whom they could neither place nor understand. These two became the most conspicuous people in the cabin, and their every movement was eagerly watched and discussed, though both remained entirely oblivious to it. Stefan was absorbed in the girl, that was clear; but how far she might be in him the cabin could not be sure. She brightened when he appeared. She liked him, smiled at him, and listened to him. She allowed him to monopolize her. But she never sought him out, never snubbed McEwan for his intrusions into their tête-à-têtes, seemed not to be "managing" the affair in any way. Used to more obvious methods, most of the company were puzzled. They did not understand that they

were watching the romance of a woman who added perfect breeding to her racial self-control. Mary Elliston would never wear her feelings nakedly, nor allow them to ride her out of hand.

Not so Stefan, who was, as yet unknowingly, experiencing romantic love for the first time. This girl was the most glorious creature he had ever known, and the most womanly. Her sex was the very essence of her; she had no need to wear it like a furbelow. She was utterly different from the feminine, adroit women he had known; there was something cool and deep about her like a pool, and withal winged, like the birds that fly over it. She was marvelous—marvelous! he thought. What a find!

His spirit flung itself, kneeling, to drink at the pool—his imagination reached out to touch the wings. For the first time in his life he was too deeply enthralled to question himself or her. He gloried in her openly, conspicuously.

On the morning of the fifth day they had their first dispute. They were sitting on the boat deck, aft, watching the wake of the ship as it twisted like an uncertain white serpent. Stefan was sketching her, as he had done already several times when he could get her apart from hovering children—he could not endure being overlooked as he worked. “They chew gum in my ear, and breathe down my neck,” he would explain.

He had almost completed an impression of her head against the sky, with a flying veil lifting above it, when a shadow fell across the canvas, and the voice of McEwan blared out a pleased greeting.

“Weel, here ye are!” exclaimed that mountain of tweed, lowering himself onto a huge iron cleat between which and the bulwarks the two were sitting cross-legged. “I was speerin’ where ye’d both be.”

“Good Lord, McEwan, can’t you speak English?” exclaimed Byrd, with quick exasperation.

“I hae to speak the New York lingo when I get back there, ye ken,” replied the Scot with imperturbable good humor, “so I like to use a wee bit o’ the guid Scotch while I hae the chance.”

“A wee bit!” snorted Stefan, and “Good morning, Mr. McEwan, isn’t it beautiful up here?” interposed Miss Elliston, pleasantly.

“It’s grand,” replied the Scotchman, “and ye look bonnie i’ the sun,” he added simply.

“So Mr. Byrd thinks. You see he has just been painting me,” she answered smilingly, indicating, with a touch of mischief, the drawing that Stefan had

hastily slipped between them.

The Scotchman stooped, and, before Stefan could stop him, had the sketch in his hand.

“It's a guid likeness,” he pronounced, “though I dinna care mesel' for yon new-fangled way o' slappin' on the color. I'll mak'ye a suggestion—” But he got no further, for Stefan, incoherent with irritation, snatched the sketch from his hands and broke out at him in a stammering torrent of French of the Quarter, which neither of his listeners, he was aware, could understand. Having safely consigned all the McEwans of the universe to pig-sties and perdition, he walked off to cool himself, the sketch under his arm, leaving both his hearers incontinently dumb.

McEwan recovered first. “The puir young mon suffers wi' his temper, there's nae dooting,” said he, addressing himself to the task of entertaining his rather absent-minded companion.

His advantage lasted but a few moments, however. Byrd, repenting his strategic error, returned, and in despair of other methods succeeded in summoning a candid smile.

“Look here, McEwan,” said he, with the charm of manner he knew so well how to assume, “don't mind my irritability; I'm always like that when I'm painting and any one interrupts—it sends me crazy. The light's just right, and it won't be for long. I can't possibly paint with anybody round. Won't you, like a good fellow, get out and let me finish?”

His frankness was wonderfully disarming, but in any case, the Scot was always good nature's self.

“Aye, I ken your nairves trouble ye,” he replied, lumbering to his feet, “and I'll no disobleeg ye, if the leddy will excuse me?” turning to her.

Miss Elliston, who had not looked at Stefan since his outburst, murmured her consent, and the Scot departed.

Stefan exploded into a sigh of relief. “Thank heaven! Isn't he maddening?” he exclaimed, reassembling his brushes. “Isn't he the most fatuous idiot that ever escaped from his native menagerie? Did you hear him commence to criticize my work? The oaf! I'm afraid—” glancing at her face—“that I swore at him, but he deserved it for butting in like that, and he couldn't understand what I said.” His tone was slightly, very slightly, apologetic.

“I don't think that's the point, is it?” asked the girl, in a very cool voice. She was experiencing her first shock of disappointment in him, and felt unhappy; but

she only appeared critical.

“What do you mean?” he asked, dashed.

“Whether he understood or not.” She was still looking away from him. “It was so unkind and unnecessary to break out at the poor man like that—and,” her voice dropped, “so horribly rude.”

“Well,” Stefan answered uncomfortably, “I can't be polite to people like that. I don't even try.”

“No, I know you don't. That's what I don't like,” Mary replied, even more coldly. She meant that it hurt her, obscured the ideal she was constructing of him, but she could not have expressed that.

He painted for a few minutes in a silence that grew more and more constrained. Then he threw down his brush. “Well, I can't paint,” he exclaimed in an aggrieved tone, “I'm absolutely out of tune. You'll have to realize I'm made like that. I can't change, can't hide my real self.” As she still did not speak, he added, with an edge to his voice, “I may as well go away; there's nothing I can do here.” He stood up.

“Perhaps you had better,” she replied, very quietly. Her throat was aching with hurt, so that she could hardly speak, but to him she appeared indifferent.

“Good-bye,” he exclaimed shortly, and strode off.

For some time she remained where he had left her, motionless. She felt very tired, without knowing why. Presently she went to her cabin and lay down.

Mary did not see Stefan again until after the midday meal, though by the time she appeared on deck he had been waiting and searching for her for an hour. When he found her it was in an alcove of the lounge, screened from the observation of the greater part of the room. She was reading, but as he came toward her she looked up and closed her book. Before he spoke both knew that their relation to each other had subtly changed. They were self-conscious; the hearts of both beat. In a word, their quarrel had taught them their need of each other.

He took her hand and spoke rather breathlessly.

“I've been looking for you for hours. Thank God you're here. I was abominable to you this morning. Can you possibly forgive me? I'm so horribly lonely without you.” He was extraordinarily handsome as he stood before her, looking distressed, but with his eyes shining.

“Of course I can,” she murmured, while a weight seemed to roll off her heart—and she blushed, a wonderful pink, up to the eyes.

He sat beside her, still holding her hand. "I must say it. You are the most beautiful thing in the world. The—most—beautiful!" They looked at each other.

"Oh!" he exclaimed with a long breath, jumping up again and half pulling her after him in a revulsion of relief, "come on deck and let's walk—and talk—or," he laughed excitedly, "I don't know what I shall do next!"

She obeyed, and they almost sped round the deck, he looking spiritually intoxicated, and she, calm by contrast, but with an inward glow as though behind her face a rose was on fire. The deck watched them and nodded its head. There was no doubt about it now, every one agreed. Bets began to circulate on the engagement. A fat salesman offered two to one it was declared before they picked up the Nantucket light. The pousy little passenger snapped an acceptance. "I'll take you. Here's a dollar says the lady is too particular." The high-bosomed matron confided her fears for the happiness of the girl, "who has been real kind to Johnnie," to the spinster who had admired Stefan the first day out. Gossip was universal, but through it all the two moved radiant and oblivious.



VI

McEwan had succeeded in his fell design of getting up a concert, and the event was to take place that night. Miss Elliston, who had promised to sing, went below a little earlier than usual to dress for dinner. Byrd had tried to dissuade her from taking part, but she was firm.

"It's a frightful bother," she said, "but I can't get out of it. I promised Mr. McEwan, you know."

"I won't say any further what I think of McEwan," replied Stefan, laughing. "Instead, I'll heap coals of fire on him by not trying any longer to persuade you to turn him down."

As she left, Stefan waved her a gay "Grand succès!" but he was already prey to an agony of nervousness. Suppose she didn't make a success, or—worse still—suppose she *did* make a success—by singing bad music! Suppose she lacked art in what she did! *She* was perfection; he was terrified lest her singing should not be. His fastidious brain tortured him, for it told him he would love her less completely if she failed.

Like most artists, Stefan adored music, and, more than most, understood it. Suppose—just suppose—she were to sing Tosti's "Good-bye!" He shuddered. Yet, if she did not sing something of that sort, it would fall flat, and she would be disappointed. So he tortured himself all through dinner, at which he did not see her, for he had been unable to get his place changed to the first sitting with hers. He longed to keep away from the concert, yet knew that he could not. At last, leaving his dessert untouched, he sought refuge in his cabin.

The interval that must be dragged through while the stewards cleared the saloon Stefan occupied in routing from Adolph's huge old Gladstone his one evening suit. He had not at first dreamed of dressing, but many of the other men had done so, and he determined that for her sake he must play the game at least to that extent. Byrd added the scorn of the artist to the constitutional dislike of the average American for conventional evening dress. His, however, was as little conventional as possible, and while he nervously adjusted it he could not help recognizing that it was exceedingly becoming. He tore a tie and destroyed two collars, however, before the result satisfied him, and his nerves were at leaping pitch when staccato chords upon the piano announced that the concert had begun. He found a seat in the farthest corner of the saloon, and waited, penciling

feverish circles upon the green-topped table to keep his hands steady.

Mary Elliston's name was fourth on the program, and came immediately after McEwan's, who was down for a "recitation." Stefan managed to sit through the piano-solo and a song by a seedy little English baritone about "the rolling deep." But when the Scot began to blare out, with tremendous vehemence, what purported to be a poem by Sir Walter Scott, Stefan, his forehead and hands damp with horror, could endure no more, and fled, pushing his way through the crowd at the door. He climbed to the deck and waited there, listening apprehensively. When the scattered applause warned him that the time for Mary's song had come, he found himself utterly unable to face the saloon again. Fortunately the main companionway gave on a well opening directly over the saloon; and it was from the railing of this well that Stefan saw Mary, just as the piano sounded the opening bars.

She stood full under the brilliant lights in a gown of white chiffon, low in the neck, which drooped and swayed about her in flowing lines of grace. Her hair gleamed; her arms showed slim, white, but strong. And "Oh, my golden girl!" his heart cried to her, leaping. Her lips parted, and quite easily, in full, clear tones that struck the very center of the notes, she began to sing. "Good girl, *good girl!*" he thought. For what she sang was neither sophisticated nor obvious—was indeed the only thing that could at once have satisfied him and pleased her audience. "Under the greenwood tree—" the notes came gay and sweet. Then, "Fear no more the heat o' the sun—" and the tones darkened. Again, "Oh, mistress mine—" they pulsed with happy love. Three times Mary sang—the immortal ballads of Shakespeare—simply, but with sure art and feeling. As the last notes ceased, "Love's a stuff will not endure," and the applause broke out, absolute peace flooded Stefan's heart.

In a dream he waited for her at the saloon door, held her coat, and mounted beside her to the boat deck. Not until they stood side by side at the rail, and she turned questioningly toward him, did he speak.

"You were perfect, without flaw. I can't tell you—" he broke off, wordless.

"I'm so glad—glad that you were pleased," she whispered.

They leant side by side over the bulwarks. They were quite alone, and the moon was rising. There are always liberating moments at sea when the spirit seems to grow—to expand to the limits of sky and water, to become one with them. Such a moment was theirs, the perfect hour of moonrise on a calm and empty sea. The horizon was undefined. They seemed suspended in limitless ether, which the riding moon pierced with a swale of living brightness, like

quicksilver. They heard nothing save the hidden throb and creak of the ship, mysterious yet familiar, as the night itself. It was the perfect time. Stefan turned to her. Her face and hair shone silver, glorified. They looked at each other, their eyes strange in the moonlight. They seemed to melt together. His arms were round her, and they kissed.

A little later he began to talk, and it was of his young mother, dead years ago in Michigan, that he spoke. "You are the only woman who has ever reminded me of her, Mary. The only one whose beauty has been so divinely kind. All my life has been lonely between losing her and finding you."

This thrilled her with an ache of mother-pity. She saw him misunderstood, unhappy, and instantly her heart wrapped him about with protection. In that moment his faults were all condoned—she saw them only as the fruits of his loneliness.

Later, "Mary," he said, "yours is the most beautiful of all names. Poets and painters have glorified it in every age, but none as I shall do"; and he kissed her adoringly.

Again, he held his cheek to hers. "Beloved," he whispered, "when we are married" (even as he spoke he marveled at himself that the word should come so naturally) "I want to paint you as you really are—a goddess of beauty and love."

She thrilled in response to him, half fearful, yet exalted. She was his, utterly.

As they clung together he saw her winged, a white flame of love, a goddess elusive even in yielding. He aspired, and saw her, Cytheria-like, shining above yet toward him. But her vision, leaning on his heart, was of those two still and close together, nestling beneath Love's protecting wings, while between their hands she felt the fingers of a little child.



VII

That night Mary and Stefan spoke only of love, but the morning brought plans. Before breakfast they were together, pacing the sun-swept deck.

Mary took it for granted that their engagement would continue till Stefan's pictures were sold, till they had found work, till their future was in some way arranged. Stefan, who was enormously under her influence, and a trifle, in spite of his rapture, in awe of her sweet reasonableness, listened at first without demur. After breakfast, however, which they ate together, he occupying the place of a late comer at her table after negotiation with the steward, his impatient temperament asserted itself in a burst.

"Dearest one," he cried, when they were comfortably settled in their favorite corner of the boat deck, "listen! I'm sure we're all wrong. I know we are. Why should you and I—" and he took her hand—"wait and plan and sour ourselves as little people do? We've both got to live, haven't we? And we are going to live; you don't expect we shall starve, do you?"

She shook her head, smiling.

"Well, then," triumphantly, "why shouldn't we live together? Why, it would be absurd not to, even from the base and practical point of view. Think of the saving! One rent instead of two—one everything instead of two!" His arm gave her a quick pressure.

"Yes, but—" she demurred.

He turned on her suddenly. "You don't want to wait for trimmings—clothes, orange blossoms, all that stuff—do you?" he expostulated.

"No, of course not, foolish one," she laughed.

"Well, then, where's the difficulty?" exultingly.

She could not answer—could hardly formulate the answer to herself. Deep in her being she seemed to feel an urge toward waiting, toward preparation, toward the collection of she knew not what small household gods. It was as if she wished to make fair a place to receive her sacrament of love. But this she could not express, could not speak to him of the vision of the tiny hand.

"You're brave, Mary. Your courage was one of the things I most loved in you. Let's be brave together!" His smile was irresistibly happy.

She could not bear that he should doubt her courage, and she wanted

passionately not to take that smile from his face. She began to weaken.

“Mary,” he cried, fired by the instinct to make the courage of their mating artistically perfect. “I’ve told you about my pictures. I know they are good—I know I can sell them in New York. But let’s not wait for that. Let’s bind ourselves together before we put our fortunes to the touch! Then we shall be one, whatever happens. We shall have that.” He kissed her, seeing her half won.

“You’ve got five hundred dollars, I’ve only got fifty, but the pictures are worth thousands,” he went on rapidly. “We can have a wonderful week in the country somewhere, and have plenty left to live on while I’m negotiating the sale. Even at the worst,” he exulted, “I’m strong. I can work at anything—with you! I don’t mind asking you to spend your money, sweetheart, because I *know* my things are worth it five times over.”

She was rather breathless by this time. He pressed his advantage, holding her close.

“Beloved, I’ve found you. Suppose I lost you! Suppose, when you were somewhere in the city without me, you got run over or something.” Even as she was, strained to him, she saw the horror that the thought conjured in his eyes, and touched his cheek with her hand, protectingly.

“No,” he pleaded, “don’t let us run any risks with our wonderful happiness, don’t let us ever leave each other!” He looked imploringly at her.

She saw that for Stefan what he urged was right. Her love drew her to him, and upon its altar she laid her own retarding instinct in happy sacrifice. She drew his head to hers, and holding his face in the cup of her hands, kissed him with an almost solemn tenderness. This was her surrender. She took upon herself the burden of his happiness, even as she yielded to her own. It was a sacrament. He saw it only as a response.

Later in the day Stefan sought out the New England spinster, Miss Mason, who sat opposite to him at table. He had entirely ignored her hitherto, but he remembered hearing her talk familiarly about New York, and his male instinct told him that in her he would find a ready confidante. Such she proved, and a most flattered and delighted one. Moreover she proffered all the information and assistance he desired. She had moved from Boston five years ago, she said, and shared a flat with a widowed sister uptown. If they docked that night Miss Elliston could spend it with them. The best and cheapest places to go to near the city, she assured him, were on Long Island. She mentioned one where she had spent a month, a tiny village of summer bungalows on the Sound, with one small but comfortable inn. Questioned further, she was sure this inn would be nearly

empty, but not closed, now in mid-September. She was evidently practical, and pathetically eager to help.

Unwilling to stay his plans, however, on such a feeble prop, Byrd hunted up the minister, whom he took to be a trifle less plebeian than most of the men, and obtained from him an endorsement of Miss Mason's views. The man of God, though stiff, was too conscientious to be unforgiving, and on receiving Stefan's explanation congratulated him sincerely, if with restraint. He did not know Shadeham personally, he explained, but he knew similar places, and doubted if Byrd could do better.

Mary, all enthusiasm now that her mind was made up, was enchanted at the prospect of a tiny seaside village for their honeymoon. In gratitude she made herself charming to Miss Mason until Stefan, impatient every moment that he was not with her, bore her away.

They docked at eight o'clock that night. Stefan saw Mary and Miss Mason to the door of their flat, and would have lingered with them, but they were both tired with the long process of customs inspection. Moreover, Mary said that she wanted to sleep well so as to look "very nice" for him to-morrow.

"Imperturbable divinity!" admired Stefan, in mock amazement. "I shall not sleep at all. I am far too happy; but to you, what is a mere marriage?"

The jest hurt her a little, and seeing it, he was quick with loverlike recompense. They parted on a note of deep tenderness. He lay sleepless, as he had prophesied, at the nearest cheap hotel, companioned by visions at once eagerly masculine and poetically exalted. Mary slept fitfully, but sweetly.

The next morning they were married. Stefan's first idea had been the City Hall, as offering the most expeditious method, but Mary had been firm for a church. A sight of the municipal authorities from whom they obtained their license made of Stefan an enthusiastic convert to her view. "All the ugliness and none of the dignity of democracy," he snorted as they left the building. They found a not unlovely church, half stifled between tall buildings, and were married by a curate whose reading of the service was sufficiently reverent. For a wedding ring Mary had that of Stefan's mother, drawn from his little finger.

By late afternoon they were in Shadeham, ensconced in a small wooden hotel facing a silent beach and low cliffs shaded with scrub-oak. The house was clean, and empty of other guests, and they were given a pleasant room overlooking the water. From its windows they watched the moon rise over the sea as they had watched her two nights before on deck. She was the silver witness to their nuptials.



PART II

MATED



I

Mary found Stefan an ideal lover. Their marriage, entered into with such, headlong adventurousness, seemed to unfold daily into more perfect bloom. The difficulties of his temperament, which had been thrown into sharp relief by the crowded life of shipboard, smoothed themselves away at the touch of happiness and peace. No woman, Mary realized, could wish for a fuller cup of joy than Stefan offered her in these first days of their mating. She was amazed at herself, at the suddenness with which love had transmuted her, at the ease with which she adjusted herself to this new world. She found it difficult to remember what kind of life she had led before her marriage—hardly could she believe that she had ever lived at all.

As for Stefan, he wasted no moments in backward glances. He neither remembered the past nor questioned the future, but immersed himself utterly in his present joy with an abandonment he had never experienced save in painting. Questioned, he would have scoffed at the idea that life for him could ever hold more than his work, and Mary.

Thus absorbed, Stefan would have allowed the days to slip into weeks uncounted. But on the ninth day Mary, incapable of a wholly carefree attitude, reminded him that they had planned only a week of holiday.

“Let's stay a month,” he replied promptly.

But Mary had been questioning her landlord about New York.

“It appears,” she explained, “that every one moves on the first of October, and that if one hasn't found a studio by then, it is almost impossible to get one. He says he has heard all the artists live round about Washington Square, but that even there rents are fearfully high. It's at the foot of Fifth Avenue, he says, which sounds very fashionable to me, but he explains it is too far 'down town.'”

“Yes, Fifth Avenue is the great street, I understand,” said Stefan, “and my dealer's address is on Fourth, so he's in a very good neighborhood. I don't know that I should like Washington Square—it sounds so patriotic.”

“Fanatic!” laughed Mary. “Well, whether we go there or not, it's evident we must get back before October the first, and it's now September the twenty-fourth.”

“Angel, don't let's be mathematical,” he replied, pinching the lobe of her ear,

which he had proclaimed to be entrancingly pretty. "I can't add; tell me the day we have to leave, and on that day we will go."

"Three days from now, then," and she sighed.

"Oh, no! Not only three more days of heaven, Mary?"

"It will hurt dreadfully to leave," she agreed, "but," and she nestled to him, "it won't be any less heaven there, will it, dearest?"

This spurred him to reassurance. "Of course not," he responded, quickly summoning new possibilities of delight. "Imagine it, you haven't even seen my pictures yet." They had left them, rolled, at Miss Mason's. "And I want to paint you—really paint you—not just silly little sketches and heads, but a big thing that I can only do in a studio. Oh, darling, think of a studio with you to sit to me! How I shall work!" His imagination was fired; instantly he was ready to pack and leave.

But they had their three days more, in the golden light of the Indian summer. Three more swims, in which Stefan could barely join for joy of watching her long lines cutting the water in her close English bathing dress. Three more evening walks along the shimmering sands. Three more nights in their moon-haunted room within sound of the slow splash of the waves. And, poignant with the sadness of a nearing change, these days were to Mary the most exquisite of all.

Their journey to the city, on the little, gritty, perpetually stopping train was made jocund by the lively anticipations of Stefan, who was in a mood of high confidence.

They had decided from the first to try their fortunes in New York that winter; not to return to Paris till they had established a sure market for Stefan's work. He had halcyon plans. Masterpieces were to be painted under the inspiration of Mary's presence. His success in the Beaux Arts would be an Open Sesame to the dealers, and they would at once become prosperous,—for he had the exaggerated continental idea of American prices. In the spring they would return to Paris, so that Mary should see it first at its most beautiful. There they would have a studio, making it their center, but they would also travel.

"Spain, Italy, Greece, Mary—we will see all the world's masterpieces together," he jubilated. "You shall be my wander-bride." And he sang her little snatches of gay song, in French and Italian, thrumming an imaginary guitar or making castanets of his fingers.

"I will paint you on the Acropolis, Mary, a new Pallas to guard the Parthenon." His imagination leapt from vista to vista of the future, each opening

to new delights. Mary's followed, lured, dazzled, a little hesitant. Her own visions, unformulated though they were, seemed of somewhat different stuff, but she saw he could not conceive them other than his, and yielded her doubts happily.

At the Pennsylvania Station they took a taxicab, telling the driver they wanted a hotel near Washington Square. The amount registered on the meter gave Mary an apprehensive chill, but Stefan paid it carelessly. A moment later he was in raptures, for, quite unexpectedly, they found themselves in a French hotel.

“What wonderful luck—what a good omen!” he cried. “Mary, it's almost like Paris!” and he broke into rapid gesticulating talk with the desk clerk. Soon they were installed in a bright little room with French prints on the walls, a gay old-fashioned wall paper and patterned curtains. Stefan assured her it was extraordinarily cheap for New York. While she freshened her face and hair he dashed downstairs, ignoring the elevator—which seemed to exist there only as an American afterthought—in search of a packet of French cigarettes. Finding them, he was completely in his element, and leant over the desk puffing luxuriously, to engage the clerk in further talk. From him he obtained advice as to the possibilities of the neighborhood in respect of studios, and armed with this, bounded up the stairs again to Mary. Presently, fortified by a pot of tea and delicious French rolls, they sallied out on their quest.

That afternoon they discovered two vacant studios. One was on a top floor on Washington Square South, a big room with bathroom and kitchenette attached and a small bedroom opening into it. The other was an attic just off the Square. It had water, but no bathroom, was heated only by an open fire, and consisted of one large room with sufficient light, and a large closet in which was a single pane of glass high up. The studio contained an abandoned model throne, the closet a gas ring and a sink. The rent of the first apartment was sixty dollars a month; of the second, twenty-five. Both were approached by a dark staircase, but in one case there was a carpet, in the other the stairs were bare, dirty, and creaking, while from depths below was wafted an unmistakable odor of onions and cats.

Mary, whose father's rambling sunny house in Lindum with its Elizabethan paneling and carvings had been considered dear at ninety pounds a year, was staggered at the price of these mean garrets, the better of which she felt to be quite beyond their reach. Even Stefan was a little dashed, but was confident that after his interview with Adolph's brother sixty dollars would appear less formidable.

“You should have seen my attic in Paris, Mary—absolutely falling to pieces—

but then I didn't mind, not having a goddess to house," and he pressed her arm. "For you there should be something spacious and bright enough to be a fitting background." He glanced up a little ruefully at the squalid house they had just left.

But she was quick to reassure him, her courage mounting to sustain his. "We could manage perfectly well in the smaller place for a time, dearest, and how lucky we don't have to take a lease, as we should in England." Her mind jumped to perceive any practical advantage. Already, mentally, she was arranging furniture in the cheaper place, planning for a screen, a tin tub, painting the dingy woodwork. They asked for the refusal of both studios till the next day, and for that evening left matters suspended.

In the morning, Stefan, retrieving his canvases from Miss Mason's flat, sought out the dealer, Jensen. Walking from Fifth Avenue, he was surprised at the cheap appearance of the houses on Fourth, only one block away. He had expected to find Adolph's brother in such a great stone building as those he had just passed, with their show windows empty save for one piece of tapestry or sculpture, or a fine painting brilliant against its background of dull velvet. Instead, the number on Fourth Avenue proved a tumbledown house of two stories, with tattered awnings flapping above its shop-window, which was almost too grimy to disclose the wares within. These were a jumble of bric-a-brac, old furniture of doubtful value, stained prints, and one or two blackened oil paintings in tarnished frames. With ominous misgivings, Stefan entered the half-opened door. The place was a confused medley of the flotsam and jetsam of dwelling houses, and appeared to him much more like a pawnbroker's than the business place of an art dealer. From its dusty shadows a stooped figure emerged, gray-haired and spectacled, which waited for Stefan to speak with an air of patient humbleness.

"This isn't Mr. Jensen's, is it?" Stefan asked, feeling he had mistaken the number.

"My name is Jensen. What can I do for you?" replied the man in a toneless voice.

"You are Adolph's brother?" incredulously.

At the name the gray face flushed pathetically. Jensen came forward, pressing his hands together, and peered into Stefan's face.

"Yes, I am," he answered, "and you are Mr. Byrd that he wrote to me about. I'd hoped you weren't coming, after all. Well," and he waved his hand, "you see how it is."

Stefan was completely dismayed. "Why," he stammered, "I thought you were

so successful—”

“I’m sorry.” Jensen dropped his eyes, picking nervously at his coat. “You see, I am the eldest brother; a man does not like to admit failure. I may be sold up any time now. I wanted Adolph not to guess, so I—wrote—him—differently.” He flushed painfully again. Stefan was silent, too taken aback for speech.

“I tell you, Mr. Byrd,” Jensen stammered on, striking his hands together impotently, “for all its wealth, this is a city of dead hopes. It’s been a long fight, but it’s over now.... Yes, you are Adolph’s friend, and I can’t so much as buy a sketch from you. It’s quite, quite over.” And suddenly he sank his head in his hands, while Stefan stood, infinitely embarrassed, clutching his roll of canvases. After a moment Jensen, mastering himself, lifted his head. His lined, prematurely old face showed an expression at once pleading and dignified.

“I didn’t dream what I wrote would do any harm, Mr. Byrd, but now of course you will have to explain to Adolph—?”

Stefan, moved to sympathy, held out his hand.

“Look here, Jensen, you’ve put me in an awful hole, worse than you know. But why should I say anything? Let Adolph think we’re both millionaires,” and he grinned ruefully.

Jensen straightened and took the proffered hand in one that trembled. “Thank you,” he said, and his eyes glistened. “I’m grateful. If there were only something I could do—”

“Well, give me the names of some dealers,” said Stefan, to whom scenes were exquisitely embarrassing, anxious to be gone.

Jensen wrote several names on a smudged half sheet of paper. “These are the best. Try them. My introduction wouldn’t help, I’m afraid,” bitterly.

On that Stefan left him, hurrying with relief from the musty atmosphere of failure into the busy street. Though half dazed by the sudden subsidence of his plans, unable to face as yet the possible consequences, he had his pictures, and the names of the real dealers; confidence still buoyed him.



II

Three hours later Mary, anxiously waiting, heard Stefan's step approach their bedroom door. Instantly her heart dropped like lead. She did not need his voice to tell her what those dragging feet announced. She sprang to the door and had her arms round his neck before he could speak. She took the heavy roll of canvases from him and half pushed him into the room's one comfortable arm-chair. Kneeling beside him, she pressed her cheek to his, stroking back his heat-damped hair. "Darling," she said, "you are tired to death. Don't tell me about your day till you've rested a little."

He closed his eyes, leaning back. He looked exhausted; every line of his face drooped. In spite of his tan, it was pale, with hollows under the eyes. It was extraordinary that a few hours should make such a change, she thought, and held him close, comfortingly.

He did not speak for a long time, but at last, "Mary," he said, in a flat voice, "I've had a complete failure. Nobody wants my things. This is what I've let you in for." His tone had the indifferent quality of extreme fatigue, but Mary was not deceived. She knew that his whole being craved reassurance, rehabilitation in its own eyes.

"Why, you old foolish darling, you're too tired to know what you're talking about," she cried, kissing him. "Wait till you've had something to eat." She rang the bell—four times for the waiter, as the card over it instructed her. "Failure indeed!" she went on, clearing a small table, "there's no such word! One doesn't grow rich in a day, you know." She moved silently and quickly about, hung up his hat, stood the canvases in a corner, ordered coffee, rolls and eggs, and finally unlaced Stefan's shoes in spite of his rather horrified if feeble protest.

Not until she had watched him drink two cups of coffee and devour the food—she guessed he had had no lunch—did she allow him to talk, first lighting his cigarette and finding a place for herself on the arm of his chair. By this time Stefan's extreme lassitude, and with it his despair, had vanished. He brightened perceptibly. "You wonder," he exclaimed, catching her hand and kissing it, "now I can tell you about it." With his arm about her he described all his experiences, the fiasco of the Jensen affair and his subsequent interviews with Fifth Avenue dealers. "They are all Jews, Mary. Some are decent enough fellows, I suppose, though I hate the Israelites!" ("Silly boy!" she interposed.) "Others are horrors.

None of them want the work of an American. Old masters, or well known foreigners, they say. I explained my success at the Beaux Arts. Two of them had seen my name in the Paris papers, but said it would mean nothing to their clients. Hopeless Philistines, all of them! I do believe I should have had a better chance if I'd called myself Austrian, instead of American, and I only revived my American citizenship because I thought it would be an asset!" He laughed, ironically. "They advised me to have a one-man show, late in the winter, so as to get publicity."

"So we will then," interposed Mary confidently.

"Good Lord, child," he exclaimed, half irritably, "you don't suppose I could have a gallery for nothing, do you? God knows what it would cost. Besides, I haven't enough pictures—and think of the frames!" He sat up, fretfully.

She saw his nerves were on edge, and quickly offered a diversion. "Stefan," she cried, jumping to her feet and throwing her arms back with a gesture the grace of which did not escape him even in his impatient mood, "I haven't even seen the pictures yet, you know, and can't wait any longer. Let me look at them now, and then I'll tell you just how idiotic those dealers were!" and she gave her bell-like laugh. "I'll undo them." Her fingers were busy at the knots.

"I hate the sight of that roll," said Stefan, frowning. "Still—" and he jumped up, "I do immensely want you to see them. I know *you'll* understand them." Suddenly he was all eagerness again. He took the canvases from her, undid them and, casting aside the smaller ones, spread the two largest against the wall, propping their corners adroitly with chairs, an umbrella, and a walking stick. "Don't look yet," he called meanwhile. "Close your eyes." He moved with agile speed, instinctively finding the best light and thrusting back the furniture to secure a clearer view. "There!" he cried. "Wait a minute—stand here. Now look!" triumphantly.

Mary opened her eyes. "Why, Stefan, they're wonderful!" she exclaimed. But even as she spoke, and amidst her sincere admiration, her heart, very slightly, sank. She knew enough of painting to see that here was genius. The two fantasies, one representing the spirits of a wind-storm, the other a mermaid fleeing a merman's grasp, were brilliant in color, line and conception. They were things of beauty, but it was a beauty strange, menacing, subhuman. The figures that tore through the clouds urged on the storm with a wicked and abandoned glee. The face of the merman almost frightened her; it was repellent in its likeness at once to a fish and a man. The mermaid's face was less inhuman, but it was stricken with a horrid terror. She was swimming straight out of the picture as if to fling herself, shrieking, into the safety of the spectator's arms. The

pictures were imaginative, powerful, arresting, but they were not pleasing. Few people, she felt, would care to live with them. After a long scrutiny she turned to her husband, at once glorying in the strength of his talent and troubled by its quality.

“You are a genius, Stefan,” she said.

“You really like them?” he asked eagerly.

“I think they are wonderful!” He was satisfied, for it was her heart, not her voice, that held a reservation.

Stefan showed her the smaller canvases, some unfinished. Most were of nymphs and winged elves, but there were three landscapes. One of these, a stream reflecting a high spring sky between banks of young meadow grass, showed a little faun skipping merrily in the distance. The atmosphere was indescribably light-hearted. Mary smiled as she looked at it. The other two were empty of figures; they were delicately graceful and alluring, but there was something lacking in them—what, she could not tell. She liked best a sketch of a baby boy, lost amid trees, behind which wood-nymphs and fauns peeped at him, roguish and inquisitive. The boy was seated on the ground, fat and solemn, with round, tear-wet eyes. He was so lonely that Mary wanted to hug him; instead, she kissed Stefan.

“What a duck of a baby, dearest!” she exclaimed.

“Yes, he was a nice kid—belonged to my concierge,” he answered carelessly. “The picture is sentimental, though. This is better,” and he pointed to another mermaid study.

“Yes, it's splendid,” she answered, instinctively suppressing a sigh. She began to realize a little what a strange being she had married. With an impulsive need of protection she held him close, hiding her face in his neck. The reality of his arms reassured her.

That day they decided, at Mary's urging, to take the smaller studio at once, abandoning the extravagance of hotel life. In practical manners she was already assuming a leadership which he was glad to follow. She suggested that in the morning he should take his smaller canvases, and try some of the less important dealers, while she made an expedition in search of necessary furniture. To this he eagerly agreed.

“It seems horrible to let you do it alone, but it would be sacrilegious to discuss the price of saucepans with a goddess,” he explained. “Are you sure you can face the tedium?”

“Why, I shall love it!” she cried, astonished at such an expression.

He regarded her whimsically. “Genius of efficiency, then I shall leave it to you. Such things appal me. In Paris, my garret was furnished only with pictures. I inherited the bed from the last occupant, and I think Adolph insisted on finding a pillow and a frying-pan. He used to come up and cook for us both sometimes, when he thought I had been eating too often at restaurants. He approved of economy, did Adolph.” Stefan was lounging on the bed, with his perpetual cigarette.

“He must be a dear,” said Mary. She had begun to make a shopping list. “Tell me, absurd creature, what you really need in the studio. There is a model throne, you will remember.”

“Oh, I’ll get my own easel and stool,” he replied quickly. “There’s nothing else, except of course a table for my paints. A good solid one,” he added with emphasis. “I’ll tell you what,” and he sat up. “I go out early to-morrow on my dealer hunt. I force myself to stay out until late afternoon. When I return, behold! The goddess has waved her hand, and invisible minions—” he circled the air with his cigarette—“have transported her temple across the square. There she sits enthroned, waiting for her acolyte. How will that do?” He turned his radiant smile on her.

“Splendid,” she answered, amused. “I only hope the goddess won’t get chipped in the passage.”

She thought of the dusty studio, of brooms and scrubbing brushes, but she was already wise enough in wife-lore not to mention them. Mary came of a race whose women had always served their men. It did not seem strange to her, as it might have to an American, that the whole labor of their installation should devolve on her.

With her back turned to him, she counted over their resources, calculating what would be available when their hotel bill was paid. Except for a dollar or two, Stefan had turned his small hoard over to her. “It’s all yours anyway, dearest,” he had said, “and I don’t want to spend a cent till I have made something.” They had spent very little so far; she was relieved to realize that the five hundred dollars remained almost intact. While Stefan continued to smoke luxuriously on the bed, she jotted down figures, apportioning one hundred and fifty dollars for six months’ rent, and trying to calculate a weekly basis for their living expenses. She knew that they were both equally ignorant of prices in New York, and determined to call in the assistance of Miss Mason.

“Stefan,” she said, taking up the telephone, “I’m going to summon a minion.”

She explained to Miss Mason over the wire. "We are starting housekeeping to-morrow, and I know absolutely nothing about where to shop, or what things ought to cost. Would it be making too great demands on your kindness if I asked you to meet me here to-morrow morning and join me in a shopping expedition?"

The request, delivered in her civil English voice, enchanted Miss Mason, who had to obtain all her romance vicariously. "I should just love to!" she exclaimed, and it was arranged.

Mary then telephoned that they would take the studio—a technicality which she knew Stefan had entirely forgotten—and notified the hotel office that their room would be given up next morning.

"O thou above rubies and precious pearls!" chanted Stefan from the bed.

After dinner they sat in Washington Square. Their marriage moon was waning, but still shone high and bright. Under her the trees appeared etherealized, and her light mingled in magic contest with the white beams of the arc lamps near the arch. Above each of these, a myriad tiny moths fluttered their desirous wings. Under the trees Italian couples wandered, the men with dark amorous glances, the girls laughing, their necks gay with colored shawls. Brightly ribboned children, black-haired, played about the benches where their mothers gossiped. There was enchantment in the tired but cooling air.

Stefan was enthusiastic. "Look at the types, Mary! The whole place is utterly foreign, full of ardor and color. I have cursed America without cause—here I can feel at home." To her it was all alien, but her heart responded to his happiness.

On the bench next them sat a group of Italian women. From this a tiny boy detached himself, plump and serious, and, urged by curiosity, gradually approached Mary, his velvet eyes fixed on her face. She lifted him, resistless, to her knee, and he sat there contentedly, sucking a colored stick of candy.

"Look, Stefan!" she cried; "isn't he a lamb?"

Stefan cast a critical glance at the baby. "He's paintable, but horribly sticky," he said. "Let's move on before he begins to yell. I want to see the effect from the roadway of these shifting groups under the trees. It might be worth doing, don't you think?" and he stood up.

His manner slightly rebuffed Mary, who would gladly have nursed the little boy longer. However, she gently lowered him and, rising, moved off in silence with Stefan, who was ignorant of any offense. The rest of their outing passed sweetly enough, as they wandered, arm in arm, about the square.

III

The next morning Stefan started immediately after his premier déjeuner of rolls and coffee in quest of the less important dealers, taking with him only his smaller canvases. "I'll stay away till five o'clock, not a minute longer," he admonished. Mary, still seated in the dining-room over her English bacon and eggs—she had smilingly declined to adopt his French method of breakfasting—glowed acquiescence, and offered him a parting suggestion.

"Be sure to show them the baby in the wood."

"Why that one?" he questioned. "You admit it isn't the best."

"Perhaps, but neither are they the best connoisseurs. You'll see." She nodded wisely at him.

"The oracle has spoken—I will obey," he called from the door, kissing his fingers to her. She ventured an answering gesture, knowing the room empty save for waiters. She was almost as unselfconscious as he, but had her nation's shrinking from any public expression of emotion.

Hardly had he gone when the faithful Miss Mason arrived, her mild eyes almost youthful with enthusiasm. From a black satin reticule of dimensions beyond all proportion to her meager self she drew a list of names on which she discoursed volubly while Mary finished her breakfast.

"You'll get most everything at this first place," she said. "It's pretty near the biggest department store in the city, and only two blocks from here—ain't that convenient? You can deal there right along for everything in the way of dry goods."

Mary had no conception of what either a department store or dry goods might be, but determined not to confound her mentor by a display of such ignorance.

"Seemed to me, though, you might get some things second hand, so I got a list of likely places from my sister, who's lived in New York longer'n I have. I thought mebbe—" her tone was tactful—"you didn't want to waste your money any?"

Mary was impressed again, as she had been before her wedding, by the natural good manners of this simple and half educated woman. "Why is it," she wondered to herself, "that one would not dream of knowing people of her class at home, but rather likes them here?" She did not realize as yet that for Miss

Mason no classes existed, and that consequently she was as much at ease with Mary, whose mother had been “county,” as she would be with her own colored “help.”

“You guessed quite rightly, Miss Mason,” Mary smiled. “I want to spend as little as possible, and shall depend on you to prevent my making mistakes.”

“I reckon I know all there is t' know 'bout economy,” nodded Miss Mason, and, as if by way of illustration, drew from her bag a pair of cotton gloves, for which she exchanged her kid ones, rolling these carefully away. “They get real mussed shopping,” she explained.

Within half an hour, Mary realized that she would have been lost indeed without her guide. First they inspected the studio. Mary had had a vague idea of cleaning it herself, but Miss Mason demanded to see the janitress, and ascended, after a ten minutes' emersion in the noisome gloom of the basement, in high satisfaction. “She's a dago,” she reported, “but not so dirty as some, and looks a husky worker. It's her business to clean the flats for new tenants, but I promised her fifty cents to get the place done by noon, windows and all. She seemed real pleased. She says her husband will carry your coal up from the cellar for a quarter a week; I guess it will be worth it to you. You don't want to give the money to him though,” she admonished, “the woman runs everything. I shouldn't calc'late,” she sniffed, “he does more'n a couple of real days' work a month. They mostly don't.”

So the first problem was solved, and it was the same with all the rest. Many dollars did Miss Mason save the Byrds that day. Mary would have bought a bedstead and screened it, but her companion pointed out the extravagance and inconvenience of such a course, and initiated her forthwith into the main secret of New York's apartment life.

“You'll want your divan new,” she said, and led her in the great department store to a hideous object of gilded iron which opened into a double bed, and closed into a divan. At first Mary rejected this Janus-faced machine unequivocally, but became a convert when Miss Mason showed her how cretonne (she pronounced it “*creeton*”) or rugs would soften its nakedness to dignity, and how bed-clothes and pillows were swallowed in its maw by day to be released when the studio became a sleeping room at night.

These trappings they purchased at first hand, and obliging salesmen promised Miss Mason with their lips, but Mary with their eyes, that they should go out on the noon delivery. For other things, however, the two searched the second-hand stores which stand in that district like logs in a stream, staying abandoned

particles of the city's ever moving current. Here they bought a high, roomy chest of drawers of painted pine, a Morris chair, three single chairs, and a sturdy folding table in cherry, quite old, which Mary felt to be a "find," and which she destined for Stefan's paints. Miss Mason recommended a "rocker," and Mary, who had had visions of stuffed English easy chairs, acquiesced on finding in the rocker and Morris types the only available combinations of cheapness and comfort. A second smaller table of good design, two brass candlesticks, and a little looking-glass in faded greenish gilt, rejoiced Mary's heart, without unreasonably lightening her pocket. During these purchases Miss Mason's authority paled, but she reasserted herself on the question of iceboxes. One dealer's showroom was half full of them, and Miss Mason pounced on a small one, little used, marked six dollars. "That's real cheap—you couldn't do better—it's a good make, too." Mary had never seen an ice-box in her life, and said so, striking Miss Mason almost dumb.

"I'm sure we shouldn't need such a thing," she demurred.

Recovering speech, Miss Mason launched into the creed of the ice-box—its ubiquity, values and economies. Mary understood she was receiving her second initiation into flat life, and mentally bracketed this new cult with that of the divan.

"All right, Miss Mason. In Rome, et cetera," she capitulated, and paid for the ice-box.

Thanks to her friend, their shopping had been so expeditious that the day was still young. Mary was fired by the determination to have some sort of nest for her tired and probably disheartened husband to return to that evening, and Miss Mason entered whole-heartedly into the scheme. The transportation of their scattered purchases was the main difficulty, but it yielded to the little spinster's inspiration. A list of their performances between noon and five o'clock would read like the description of a Presidential candidate's day. They dashed back to the studio and reassured themselves as to the labors of the janitress. Miss Mason unearthed the lurking husband, and demanded of him a friend and a hand-cart. These she galvanized him into producing on the spot, and sent the pair off armed with a list of goods to be retrieved. In the midst of this maneuver the department store's great van faithfully disgorged their bed and bedding. Hardly waiting to see these deposited, the two hurried out in quest of sandwiches and milk.

"I guess we're the lightning home-makers, all right," was Miss Mason's comment as they lunched.

Returning to the department store they bought and brought away with them a

kettle, a china teapot ("Fifteen cents in the basement," Miss Mason instructed), three cups and saucers, six plates, a tin of floor-polish and a few knives, forks, and spoons. Meanwhile they had telephoned the hotel to send over the baggage. When the street car dropped them near the studio they found the two Italians seated on the steps, the furniture and baggage in the room, and Mrs. Corriani wiping her last window pane. "I shall want your husband again for this floor," commanded the indefatigable Miss Mason, opening her tin of polish, "and his friend for errands." They fell upon their task.

An hour later the spinster dropped into the rocking chair. "Well, we've done it," she said, "and I don't mind telling you I'm tuckered out."

Mary's voice answered from the sink, where she was sluicing her face and arms.

"You've been a marvel—the whole thing has been Napoleonic—and I simply don't know how to thank you." She appeared at the door of the closet, which was to serve as kitchenette and bathroom, drying her hands.

"My, your face is like a rose! *You* don't look tired any!" exclaimed the spinster. "As for thanks, why, it's been a treat to me. I've felt like I was a girl again. But we're through now, and I've got to go." She rose. "I guess I'll enjoy my sleep to-night."

"Oh, don't go, Miss Mason, stay for tea and let my husband thank you too."

But the little New Englander again showed her simple tact. "No, no, my dear, it's time I went, and you and Mr. Byrd will want to be alone together your first evening," and she pulled on her cotton gloves.

At the door Mary impulsively put her arms round Miss Mason and kissed her.

"You have been good to me—I shall never forget it," she whispered, almost loath to let this first woman friend of her new life go.

Alone, Mary turned to survey the room.

The floor, of wide uneven planks, was bare, but it carried a dark stain, and this had been waxed until it shone. The walls, painted gray, had yielded a clean surface to the mop. The grate was blackened. On either side of it stood the two large chairs, and Mary had thrown a strip of bright stuff over the cushions of the Morris. Beside this chair stood the smaller table, polished, and upon it blue and white tea things. Near the large window stood the other table, with Stefan's palette, paint tubes, and brushes in orderly array, and a plain chair beside it, while centered at that end was the model-throne. Opposite the fireplace the divan fronted the wall, obscured by Mary's steamer rug and green deck cushion. At the

end of the room the heavy chest of drawers, with its dark walnut paint, faced the window, bearing the gilded mirror and a strip of embroidery. On the mantelpiece stood Mary's traveling clock and the two brass candlesticks, and above it Stefan's pastoral of the stream and the dancing faun was tacked upon the wall. She could hear the kettle singing from the closet, through the open door of which a shaft of sunlight fell from the tiny window to the floor.

Suddenly Mary opened her arms. "Home," she whispered, "home." Tears started to her eyes. With a caressing movement she leant her face against the wall, as to the cheek of her lover.

But emotion lay deep in Mary—she was ashamed that it should rise to facile tears. "Silly girl," she thought, and drying her eyes proceeded more calmly to her final task, which was to change her dress for one fitted to honor Stefan's homecoming.

Hardly was she ready when she heard his feet upon the stair. Her heart leapt with a double joy, for he was springing up two steps at a time, triumph in every bound. The door burst open; she was enveloped in a whirlwind embrace. "Mary," he gasped between kisses, "I've sold the boy—sold him for a hundred! At the very last place—just as I'd given up. You beloved oracle!"

Then he held her away from him, devouring with his eyes her glowing face, her hair, and her soft blue dress. "Oh, you beauty! The day has been a thousand years long without you!" He caught her to him again.

Mary's heart was almost bursting with happiness as she clung to him. Here, in the home she had prepared, he had brought her his success, and their love glorified both. Her emotion left her wordless. Another moment, and his eyes swept the room.

"Why, Mary!" It was a shout of joy. "You magician, you miracle-worker! It's beautiful! Don't tell me how you did it—" hastily—"I couldn't understand. It's enough that you waved your hand and beauty sprang up! Look at my little faun dancing—we must dance too!" He lilted a swaying air, and whirled her round the room with gipsy glee. His face looked like the faun's, elfin, mischievous, happy as the springtime.

At last he dropped into a chair. Then Mary fetched her teakettle. They quenched their thirst, she shared his cigarette, they prattled like children. It was late before they remembered to go out in search of dinner, hours later before they dropped asleep upon the gilded Janus-faced couch that had become for Mary the altar of a sacrament.

IV

Mary's original furnishings had cost her less than a hundred dollars. In the first days of their housekeeping she made several additions, and Stefan contributed a large second-hand easel, a stool, and a piece of strangely colored drapery for the divan. This he discovered during a walk with Mary, in the window of an old furniture dealer, and instantly fell a victim to. He was so delighted with it that Mary had not the heart to veto its purchase, though it was a sad extravagance, costing them more than a week's living expenses. The stuff was of oriental silk, shot with a changing sheen, of colors like a fire burning over water, which made it seem a living thing in their hands. The night they took it home Stefan lit six candles in its honor.

In spite of these expenses Mary banked four hundred dollars, leaving herself enough in hand for a fortnight to come, for she found that they could live on twenty-five dollars a week. She calculated that they must make, as an absolute minimum, to be safe, one hundred dollars a month, for she was determined, if possible, not to draw further upon their hoard. This was destined for a future use, the hope of which trembled constantly in her heart. All her plans centered about this hope, but she still forebore to speak of it to Stefan, even as she had done before their marriage. Perhaps she instinctively feared a possible lack of response in him. Meanwhile, she must safeguard her nest.

In spite of Stefan's initial success, Mary wondered if his art would at first yield the necessary monthly income, and cast about for some means by which she could increase his earnings. She had come to America to attain independence, and there was nothing in her code to make dependence a necessary element of marriage.

"Stefan," she said one morning, as she sat covering a cushion, while he worked at one of the unfinished pastorals, "you know I sold several short stories for children when I was in London. I think I ought to try my luck here, don't you?"

"You don't need to, sweetheart," he replied. "Wait till I've finished this little thing. You see if the man I sold the boy to won't jump at it for another hundred." And he whistled cheerily.

"I'm sure he will," she smiled. "Still, I should like to help."

"Do it if you want to, Beautiful, only I can't associate you with pens and

typewriters. I'm sure if you were just to open your mouth, and sing, out there in the square—" he waved a brush—"people would come running from all over the city and throw yellow and green bills at you like leaves, till you had to be dug out with long shovels by those funny street-cleaners who go about looking dirty in white clothes. You would be a nymph in a shower of gold—only the gold would be paper! How like America!" He whistled again absently, touching the canvas with delicate strokes.

"You are quite the most ridiculous person in the world," she laughed at him. "You know perfectly well that my voice is much too small to be of practical value."

"But I'm not being practical, and you mustn't be literal, darling—goddesses never should."

"Be practical just for a moment then," she urged, "and think about my chances of selling stories."

"I couldn't," he said absently, holding his brush suspended. "Wait a minute, I've got an idea! That about the shower of gold—I know—Danaë!" he shouted suddenly, throwing down his palette. "That's how I'll paint you. I've been puzzling over it for days. Darling, it will be my chef d'oeuvre!" He seized her hands. "Think of it! You standing under a great shaft of sun, nude, exalted, your hands and eyes lifted. About you gold, pouring down in cataracts, indistinguishable from the sunlight—a background of prismatic fire—and your hair lifting into it like wings!" He was irradiated.

She had blushed to the eyes. "You want me to sit to you—like that!" Her voice trembled.

He gazed at her in frank amazement. "Should you mind?" he asked, amazed. "Why, you rose, you're blushing. I believe you're shy!" He put his arms around her, smiling into her face. "You wouldn't mind, darling, for me!" he urged, his cheek to hers. "You are so glorious. I've always wanted to paint your glory since the first day I saw you. You *can't* mind!"

He saw she still hesitated, and his tone became not only surprised but hurt. He could not conceive of shame in connection with beauty. Seeing this she mastered her shrinking. He was right, she felt—she had given him her beauty, and a denial of it in the service of his art would rebuff the God in him—the creator. She yielded, but she could not express the deeper reason for her emotion. As he was so oblivious, she could not bring herself to tell him why in particular she shrank from sitting as Danaë. He had not thought of the meaning of the myth in connection with her all-absorbing hope.

“Promise me one thing,” she pleaded. “Don't make the face too like me—just a little different, dearest, please!”

This a trifle fretted him.

“I don't really see why; your face is just the right type,” he puzzled. “I shan't sell the picture, you know. It will be for us—our marriage present to each other.”

“Nevertheless, I ask it, dearest.” With that he had to be content.

Stefan obtained that afternoon a full-length canvas, and the sittings began next morning. He was at his most inspiring, laughed away Mary's stage fright, posed her with a delight which, inspired her, too, so that she stood readily as he suggested, and made half a dozen lightning sketches to determine the most perfect position, exclaiming enthusiastically meanwhile.

When absorbed, Stefan was a sure and rapid worker. Mary posed for him every morning, and at the end of a week the picture had advanced to a thing of wonderful promise and beauty. Mary would stand before it almost awed. Was this she, she pondered, this aspiring woman of flame? It troubled her a little that his ideal of her should rise to such splendor; this apotheosis left no place for the pitying tenderness of love, only for its glory. The color of this picture was like the sound of silver trumpets; the heart-throb of the strings was missing. Mary was neither morbid nor introspective, but at this time her whole being was keyed to more than normal comprehension. Watching the picture, seeing that it was a portrayal not of her but of his love for her, she wondered if any woman could long endure the arduousness of such deification, or if a man who had visioned a goddess could long content himself with a mortal.

The face, too, vaguely troubled her. True to his promise, Stefan had not made it a portrait, but its unlikeness lay rather in the meaning and expression than in the features. These differed only in detail from her own. A slight lengthening of the corners of the eyes, a fuller and wider mouth were the only changes. But the expression amidst its exaltation held a quality she did not understand. Translated into music, it was the call of the wood-wind, something wild and unhuman flowing across the silver triumph of the horns.

Of these half questionings, however, Mary said nothing, telling Stefan only what she was sure of, that the picture would be a masterpiece.

The days were shortening. Stefan found the light poor in the afternoons, and had to take part of the mornings for work on his pastoral. This he would have neglected in his enthusiasm for the Danaë, but for Mary's urgings. He obeyed her mandates on practical issues with the unquestioning acceptance of a child. His attitude suggested that he was willing to be worldly from time to time if his

Mary—not too often—told him to.

The weather had turned cool, and Mr. Corriani brought them up their first scuttle of coal. They were glad to drink their morning coffee and eat their lunch before the fire, and Mary's little sable neck-piece, relic of former opulence, appeared in the evenings when they sought their dinner. This they took in restaurants near by—quaint basements, or back parlors of once fine houses, where they were served nutritious meals on bare boards, in china half an inch thick. Autumn, New York's most beautiful season, was in the air with its heart-lightening tang; energy seemed to flow into them as they breathed. They took long walks in the afternoons to the Park, which Stefan voted hopelessly banal; to the Metropolitan Museum, where they paid homage to the Sorollas and the Rodins; to the Battery, the docks, and the whole downtown district. This they found oppressive at first, till they saw it after dark from a ferry boat, when Stefan became fired by the towerlike skyscrapers sketched in patterns of light against the void.

Immediately he developed a cult for these buildings. "America's one creation," he called them, "monstrous, rooted repellently in the earth's bowels, growing rank like weeds, but art for all that." He made several sketches of them, in which the buildings seemed to sway in a drunken abandonment of power. "Wicked things," he named them, and saw them menacing but fascinating, titanic engines that would overwhelm their makers. He and Mary had quite an argument about this, for she thought the skyscrapers beautiful.

"They reach sunward, Stefan, they do not menace, they aspire," she objected.

"The aspiration is yours, Goddess. They are only fit symbols of a super-materialism. Their strength is evil, but it lures."

He was delighted with his drawings. Mary, who was beginning to develop civic pride, told him they were goblinessque.

"Clever girl, that's why I like them," he replied.

Late in October Stefan sold his pastoral, though only for seventy-five dollars. This disappointed him greatly. He was anxious to repay his debt to Adolph, but would not accept the loan of it from his wife. Mary renewed her determination to be helpful, and sent one of her old stories to a magazine, but without success. She had no one to advise her as to likely markets, and posted her manuscript to two more unsuitable publications, receiving it back with a printed rejection slip.

Her fourth attempt, however, was rewarded by a note from the editor which gave her much encouragement. Children's stories, he explained, were outside the scope of his magazine, but he thought highly of Mrs. Byrd's manuscript, and

advised her to submit it to one of the women's papers—he named several—where it might be acceptable. Mary was delighted by this note, and read it to Stefan.

“Splendid!” he cried, “I had no idea you had brought any stories over with you. Guarded oracle!” he added, teasingly.

“Oracles don't tell secrets unless they are asked,” she rejoined.

“True. And now I do ask. Give me the whole secret—read me the story,” he exclaimed, promptly putting away his brushes, lighting a cigarette, and throwing himself, eagerly attentive, into the Morris chair.

Mary prepared to comply, gladly, if a little nervously. She had been somewhat hurt at his complete lack of interest in her writing; now she was anxious for his approbation. Seated in the rocking chair she read aloud the little story in her clear low voice. When she had finished she found Stefan regarding her with an expression affectionate but somewhat quizzical.

“Mary, you have almost a maternal air, sitting there reading so lovingly about a baby. It's a new aspect—the rocker helps. I've never quite liked that chair—it reminds me of Michigan.”

Mary had flushed painfully, but he did not notice it in the half light of the fire. It had grown dark as she read.

“But the story, Stefan?” she asked, her tone obviously hurt. He jumped up and kissed her, all contrition.

“Darling, it sounded beautiful in your voice, and I'm sure it is. In fact I know it is. But I simply don't understand that type of fiction; I have no key to it. So my mind wandered a little. I listened to the lovely sounds your voice made, and watched the firelight on your hair. You were like a Dutch interior—quite a new aspect, as I said—and I got interested in that.”

Mary was abashed and disappointed. For the first time she questioned Stefan's generosity, contrasting his indifference with her own absorbed interest in his work. She knew her muse trivial by comparison with his, but she loved it, and ached for the stimulus his praise would bring.

Beneath the wound to her craftsmanship lay another, in which the knife was turning, but she would not face its implication. Nevertheless it oppressed her throughout the evening, so that Stefan commented on her silence. That night as she lay awake listening to his easy breathing, for the first time since her marriage her pillow was dampened by tears.

V

In the next morning's sun Mary's premonitions appeared absurd. Stefan waked in high spirits, and planned a morning's work on his drawings of the city, while Mary, off duty as a model, decided to take her story in person to the office of one of the women's papers. As she crossed the Square and walked up lower Fifth Avenue she had never felt more buoyant. The sun was brilliant, and a cool breeze whipped color into her cheeks.

The office to which she was bound was on the north side of Union Square. Crossing Broadway, she was held up half way over by the traffic. As she waited for an opening her attention was attracted by the singular antics of a large man, who seemed to be performing some kind of a ponderous fling upon the curbstone opposite. A moment more and she grasped that the dance was a signal to her, and that the man was none other than McEwan, sprucely tailored and trimmed in the American fashion, but unmistakable for all that. She crossed the street and shook hands with him warmly, delighted to see any one connected with the romantic days of her voyage. McEwan's smile seemed to buttress his whole face with teeth, but to her amazement he greeted her without a trace of Scotch accent.

"Well," said he, pumping both her hands up and down in his enormous fist, "here's Mrs. Byrd! That's simply great. I've been wondering where I could locate you both. Ought to have nosed you out before now, but my job keeps me busy. I'm with a magazine house, you know—advertising manager."

"I didn't know," answered Mary, whose head was whirling.

"Ah," he grinned at her, "you're surprised at my metamorphosis. I allow myself a month every year of my native heath, heather-mixture, and burr—I like to do the thing up brown. The rest of the time I'm a Gothamite, of necessity. Some time, when I've made my pile, I shall revert for keeps, and settle down into a kilt and a castle."

Much amused by this unsuspected histrionic gift, Mary walked on beside McEwan. He was full of interest in her affairs, and she soon confided to him the object of her expedition.

"You're just the man to advise me, being on a paper," she said, and added laughing, "I should have been terrified of you if I'd known that on the ship."

“Then I'm glad I kept it dark. You say your stuff is for children? Where were you going to?”

She told him.

“A woman's the boss of that shop. She's O.K. and so's her paper, but her prices aren't high.” He considered. “Better come to our shop. We run two monthlies and a weekly, one critical, one household, one entirely for children. The boss is a great pal of mine. Name of Farraday—an American. Come on!” And he wheeled her abruptly back the way they had come. She followed unresistingly, intensely amused at his quick, jerky sentences and crisp manner—the very antithesis of his former Scottish heaviness.

“Mr. McEwan, what an actor you would have made!”

She smiled up at him as she hurried at his side. He looked about with pretended caution, then stooped to her ear.

“Hoots, lassie!” he whispered, with a solemn wink.

“Stefan will never believe this!” she said, bubbling with laughter.

At the door of a building close to the corner where they had met he stopped, and for a moment his manner, though not his voice, assumed its erstwhile weightiness.

“Never mind!” he held up an admonishing forefinger. “I do the talking. What do you know about business? Nothing!” His hand swept away possible objections. “I know your work.” She gasped, but the finger was up again, solemnly wagging. “And I say it's good. How many words?” he half snapped.

“Three thousand five hundred,” she answered.

“Then I say, two hundred dollars—not a cent less—and what I say *goes*, see?” The finger shot out at her, menacing.

“I leave it to you, Mr. McEwan,” she answered meekly, and followed him to the lift, dazed. “This,” she said to herself, “simply is not happening!” She felt like Alice in Wonderland.

They shot up many stories, and emerged into a large office furnished with a switch-board, benches, tables, desks, pictures, and office boys. A ceaseless stenographic click resounded from behind an eight-foot partition; the telephone girl seemed to be engaged conjointly on a novel and a dozen plugs; the office boys were diligent with their chewing gum; all was activity. Mary felt at a loss, but the great McEwan, towering over the switchboard like a Juggernaut, instantly compelled the operator's eyes from their multiple distractions. “Good morning, Mr. McEwan—Spring one-O-two-four,” she greeted him.

“Morning. T'see Mr. Farraday,” he economized.

“M'st Farraday—M'st McEwan an' lady t'see you. Yes. M'st Farraday'll see you right away. 'Sthis three-one hundred? Hold th' line, please,” said the operator in one breath, connecting two calls and waving McEwan forward simultaneously. Mary followed him down a long corridor of doors to one which he opened, throwing back a second door within it.

They entered a sunny room, quiet, and with an air of spacious order. Facing them was a large mahogany table, almost bare, save for a vase which held yellow roses. Flowers grew in a window box and another vase of white roses stood on a book shelf. Mary's eyes flew to the flowers even before she observed the man who rose to greet them from beyond the table. He was very tall, with the lean New England build. His long, bony face was unhandsome save for the eyes and mouth, which held an expression of great sweetness. He shook hands with a kindly smile, and Mary took an instant liking to him, feeling in his presence the ease that comes of class-fellowship. He looked, she thought, something under forty years old.

“I am fortunate. You find me in a breathing spell,” he was saying.

“He's the busiest man in New York, but he always has time,” McEwan explained, and, indeed, nothing could have been more unhurried than the whole atmosphere of both man and room. Mary said so.

“Yes, I must have quiet or I can't work,” Farraday replied. “My windows face the back, you see, and my walls are double; I doubt if there's a quieter office in New York.”

“Nor a more charming, I should think,” added Mary, looking about at the restful tones of the room, with its landscapes, its beautifully chosen old furniture, and its flowers.

“The owner thanks you,” he acknowledged, with his kindly smile.

“Business, business,” interjected McEwan, who, Mary was amused to observe, approximated much more to the popular idea of an American than did his friend. “I've brought you a find, Farraday. This lady writes for children—she's printed stuff in England. I haven't read it, but I know it's good because I've seen her telling stories to the kids by the hour aboard ship, and you couldn't budge them. You can see,” he waved his hand at her, “that her copy would be out of the ordinary run.”

This absurdity would have embarrassed Mary but that Mr. Farraday turned on her a smile which seemed to make them allies in their joint comprehension of McEwan's advocacy.

"She's got a story with her for you to see," went on that enthusiast. "I've told her if it's good enough for our magazine it's two hundred dollars good enough. There's the script." He took it from her, and flattened it out on Farraday's table. "Look it over and write her."

"What's your address?" he shot at Mary. She produced it.

"I'll remember that," McEwan nodded; "coming round to see you. There you are, James. We won't keep you. You have no time and I have less. Come on, Mrs. Byrd." He made for the door, but Farraday lifted his hand.

"Too fast, Mac," he smiled. "I haven't had a chance yet. A mere American can't keep pace with the dynamic energy you store in Scotland. Where does it come from? Do you do nothing but sleep there?"

"Much more than that. He practises the art of being a Scotchman," laughed Mary.

"He has no need to practise. You should have heard him when he first came over," said Farraday.

"Well, if you two are going to discuss me, I'll leave you at it; I'm not a highbrow editor; I'm the poor ad man—my time means money to me." McEwan opened the door, and Mary rose to accompany him.

"Won't you sit down again, Mrs. Byrd? I'd like to ask you a few questions," interposed Farraday, who had been turning the pages of Mary's manuscript. "Mac, you be off. I can't focus my mind in the presence of a human gyroscope."

"I've got to beat it," agreed the other, shaking hands warmly with Mary. "But don't you be taken in by him; he likes to pretend he's slow, but he's really as quick as a buzz-saw. See you soon," and with a final wave of the hand he was gone.

"Now tell me a little about your work," said Farraday, turning on Mary his kind but penetrating glance. She told him she had published three or four stories, and in what magazines.

"I only began to write fiction a year ago," she explained. "Before that I'd done nothing except scribble a little verse at home."

"What kind of verse?"

"Oh, just silly little children's rhymes."

"Have you sold any of them?"

"No, I never tried."

"I should like to see them," he said, to her surprise. "I could use them perhaps

if they were good. As for this story," he turned the pages, "I see you have an original idea. A child bird-tamer, dumb, whose power no one can explain. Before they talk babies can understand the birds, but as soon as they learn to speak they forget bird language. This child is dumb, so he remembers, but can't tell any one. Very pretty."

Mary gasped at his accurate summary of her idea. He seemed to have photographed the pages in his mind at a glance.

"I had tried to make it a little mysterious," she said rather ruefully. His smile reassured her.

"You have," he nodded, "but we editors learn to get impressions quickly. Yes," he was reading as he spoke, "I think it likely I can use this. The style is good, and individual." He touched a bell, and handed the manuscript to an answering office boy. "Ask Miss Haviland to read this, and report to me to-day," he ordered.

"I rarely have time to read manuscripts myself," he went on, "but Miss Haviland is my assistant for our children's magazine. If her judgment confirms mine, as I feel sure it will, we will mail you a cheque to-night, Mrs. Byrd—according to our friend McEwan's instructions—" and he smiled.

Mary blushed with pleasure, and again rose to go, with an attempt at thanks. The telephone bell had twice, with a mere thread of sound, announced a summons. The editor took up the receiver. "Yes, in five minutes," he answered, hanging up and turning again to Mary.

"Don't go yet, Mrs. Byrd; allow me the luxury of postponing other business for a moment. We do not meet a new contributor and a new citizen every day." He leant back with an air of complete leisure, turning to her his kindly, open smile. She felt wonderfully at her ease, as though this man and she were old acquaintances. He asked more about her work and that of her husband.

"We like to have some personal knowledge of our authors; it helps us in criticism and suggestion," he explained.

Mary described Stefan's success in Paris, and mentioned his sketches of downtown New York. Farraday looked interested.

"I should like to see those," he said. "We have an illustrated review in which we sometimes use such things. If you are bringing me your verses, your husband might care to come too, and show me the drawings."

Again the insistent telephone purred, and this time he let Mary go, shaking her hand and holding the door for her.

“Bring the verses whenever you like, Mrs. Byrd,” was his farewell.

When she had gone, James Farraday returned to his desk, lit a cigar, and smoked absently for a few moments, staring out of the window. Then he pulled his chair forward, and unhooked the receiver.



VI

Mary hurried home vibrant with happiness, and ran into the studio to find Stefan disconsolately gazing out of the window. He whirled at her approach, and caught her in his arms.

“Wicked one! I thought, like Persephone, you had been carried off by Dis and his wagon,” he chided. “I could not work when I realized you had been gone so long. Where have you been?” He looked quite woebegone.

“Ah, I’m so glad you missed me,” she cried from his arms. Then, unable to contain her delight, she danced to the center of the room, and, throwing back her head, burst into song. “Praise God from whom all blessings flow,” chanted Mary full-throated, her chest expanded, pouring out her gratitude as whole-heartedly as a lark.

“Mary, I can see your wings,” interrupted Stefan excitedly. “You’re soaring!” He seized a stick of charcoal and dashed for paper, only to throw down his tools again in mock despair. “Pouf, you’re beyond sketching at this moment—you need a cathedral organ to express you. What has happened? Have you been sojourning with the immortals?”

But Mary had stopped singing, and dropped on the divan as if suddenly tired. She held out her arms to Stefan, and he sat beside her, lover-like.

“Oh, dearest,” she said, her voice vibrating with tenderness, “I’ve wanted so to help, and now I think I’ve sold a story, and I’ve found a chance for your New York drawings. I’m so happy.”

“Why, you mysterious creature, your eyes have tears in them—and all because you’ve helped me! I’ve never seen your tears, Mary; they make your eyes like stars lost in a pool.” He kissed her passionately, and she responded, but waited eagerly to hear him praise her success. After a moment, however, he got up and wandered to his drawing board.

“You say you found a chance for these,” indicating the sketches. “How splendid of you! Tell me all about it.” He was eagerly attentive, but she might never have mentioned her story. Apparently, that part of her report simply had not registered in his brain.

Mary’s spirits suddenly dropped. She had come from an interview in which she was treated as a serious artist, and her husband could not even hear the

account of her success. She rose and began to prepare their luncheon, recounting her adventures meanwhile in a rather flat voice. Stefan listened to her description of McEwan's metamorphosis only half credulously.

"Don't tell me," he commented, "that the cloven hoof will not out. Do you mean to say it's to him that you owe this chance?"

She nodded.

"I don't see how we can take favors from that brute," he said, running his hands moodily into his pockets.

Mary looked at him in frank astonishment.

"I don't understand you, Stefan," she said. "Mr. McEwan was kindness itself, and I am grateful to him, but there can be no question of receiving favors on your part. He introduced me to Mr. Farraday as a writer, and it was only through me that your work was mentioned at all." She was hurt by his narrow intolerance, and he saw it.

"Very well, goddess, don't flash your lightnings at me." He laughed gaily, and sat down to his luncheon. Throughout it Mary listened to a detailed account of his morning's work.

Next day she received by the first post a cheque for two hundred dollars, with a formal typewritten note from Farraday, expressing pleasure, and a hope that the Household Publishing Company might receive other manuscripts from her for its consideration. Stefan was setting his palette for a morning's work on the Danaë. She called to him rather constrainedly from the door where she had opened the letter.

"Stefan, I've received a cheque for two hundred dollars for my story."

"That's splendid," he answered cheerfully. "If I sell these sketches we shall be quite rich. We must move from this absurd place to a proper studio flat. Mary shall have a white bathroom, and a beautiful blue and gold bed. Also minions to set food before her. Tra-la-la," and he hummed gaily. "I'm ready to begin, beloved," he added.

As Mary prepared for her sitting she could not subdue a slight feeling of irritation. Apparently she might never, even for a moment, enjoy the luxury of being a human being with ambitions like Stefan's own, but must remain ever pedestaled as his inspiration. She was irked, too, by his hopelessly unpractical attitude toward affairs. She would have enjoyed the friendly status of a partner as a wholesome complement to the ardors of marriage. She knew that her husband differed from the legendary bohemian in having a strictly upright code in money

matters, but she wished it could be less visionary. He mentally oscillated between pauperism and riches. Let him fail to sell a picture and he offered to pawn his coat; but the picture sold, he aspired to hire a mansion. In a word, she began to see that he was incapable either of foresight or moderation. Could she alone, she wondered, supply the deficiency?

That evening when they returned from dinner, which as a rare treat they had eaten in the café of their old hotel, they found McEwan waiting their arrival from a seat on the stairs.

“Here you are,” his hearty voice called to them as they labored up the last flight. “I was determined not to miss you. I wanted to pay my respects to the couple, and see how the paint-slinging was getting on.”

Mary, knowing now that the Scotchman was not the slow-witted blunderer he had appeared on board ship, looked at him with sudden suspicion. Was she deceived, or did there lurk a teasing gleam in those blue eyes? Had McEwan used the outrageous phrase “paint-slinging” with malice aforethought? She could not be sure. But if his object was to get a rise from Stefan, he was only partly successful. True, her husband snorted with disgust, but, at a touch from her and a whispered “Be nice to him,” restrained himself sufficiently to invite McEwan in with a frigid show of politeness. But once inside, and the candles lighted, Stefan leant glumly against the mantelpiece with his hands in his pockets, evidently determined to leave their visitor entirely on Mary's hands.

McEwan was nothing loath. He helped himself to a cigarette, and proceeded to survey the walls of the room with interest.

“Nifty work, Mrs. Byrd. You must be proud of him,” and again Mary seemed to catch a glint in his eye. “These sketches now,” he approached the table on which lay the skyscraper studies. “Very harsh—cruel, you might say—but clever, yes, *sir*, mighty clever.” Mary saw Stefan writhe with irritation at the other's air of connoisseur. She shot him a glance at once amused and pleading, but he ignored it with a shrug, as if to indicate that Mary was responsible for this intrusion, and must expect no aid from him.

McEwan now faced the easel which held the great Danaë, shrouded by a cloth.

“Is this the latest masterpiece—can it be seen?” he asked, turning to his host, his hand half stretched to the cover.

Mary made an exclamation of denial, and started forward to intercept the hand. But even as she moved, dismay visible on her face, the perverse devil which had been mounting in Stefan's brain attained the mastery. She had asked

him to be nice to this jackass—very well, he would.

“Yes, that's the best thing I've done, McEwan. As you're a friend of both of us, you ought to see it,” he exclaimed, and before Mary could utter a protest had wheeled the easel round to the light and thrown back the drapery. He massed the candles on the mantelpiece. “Here,” he called, “stand here where you can see properly. Mythological, you see, Danaë. What do you think of it?” There were mischief and triumph in his tone, and a shadow of spite.

Mary had blushed crimson and stood, incapable of speech, in the darkest corner of the room. McEwan had not noticed her protest, it had all happened so instantaneously. He followed Stefan's direction, and faced the canvas expectantly. There was a long silence. Mary, watching, saw the spruce veneer of metropolitanism fall from their guest like a discarded mask—the grave, steady Highlander emerged. Stefan's moment of malice had flashed and died—he stood biting his nails, already too ashamed to glance in Mary's direction. At last McEwan turned. There was homage in his eyes, and gravity.

“Mr. Byrd,” he said, and his deep voice carried somewhat of its old Scottish burr, “I owe ye an apology. I took ye for a tricky young mon, clever, but better pleased with yersel' than ye had a right to be. I see ye are a great artist, and as such, ye hae the right even to the love of that lady. Now I will congratulate her.” He strode over to Mary's corner and took her hand. “Dear leddy,” he said, his native speech still more apparent, “I confess I didna think the young mon worthy, and in me blunderin' way, I would hae kept the two o' ye apart could I hae done it. But I was wrong. Ye've married a genius, and ye can be proud o' the way ye're helping him. Now I'll bid ye good night, and I hope ye'll baith count me yer friend in all things.” He offered his hand to Stefan, who took it, touched. Gravely he picked up his hat, and opened the door, turning for a half bow before closing it behind him.

Stefan knew that he had behaved unpardonably, that he had been betrayed into a piece of caddishness, but McEwan had given him the cue for his defense. He hastened to Mary and seized her hand.

“Darling, forgive me. I knew you didn't want the picture shown, but it's got to be done some day, hasn't it? It seemed a shame for McEwan not to see what you have inspired. I ought not to have shown it without asking you, but his appreciation justified me, don't you think?” His tone coaxed.

Mary was choking back her tears. Explanations, excuses, were to her trivial, nor was she capable of them. Wounded, she was always dumb, and to discuss a hurt seemed to her to aggravate it.

“Don't let's talk about it, Stefan,” she murmured. “It seemed to me you showed the picture because I did not wish it—that's what I don't understand.” She spoke lifelessly.

“No, no, you mustn't think that,” he urged. “I was irritated, and I'm horribly sorry, but I do think it should be shown.”

But Mary was not deceived. If only for a moment, he had been disloyal to her. The urge of her love made it easy to forgive him, but she knew she could not so readily forget.

Though she put a good face on the incident, though Stefan was his most charming self throughout the evening, even though she refused to recognize the loss, one veil of illusion had been stripped from her heart's image of him.

In his contrite mood, determined to please her, Stefan recalled the matter of her stories, and for the first time spoke of her success with enthusiasm. He asked her about the editor, and offered to go with her the next morning to show Mr. Farraday his sketches.

“Have you anything else to take him?” he asked.

“Yes,” replied Mary. “I am to show him some verses I wrote at home in Lindum. Just little songs for children.”

“Verses,” he exclaimed; “how wonderful! I knew you were a goddess and a song-bird, but not that you were a poet, too.”

“Nor am I; they are the most trifling things.”

“I expect they are delicious, like your singing. Read them to me, beloved,” he begged.

But Mary would not. He pressed her several times during the evening, but for the first time since their marriage he found he could not move her to compliance.

“Please don't bother about them, Stefan. They are for children; they would not interest you.”

He felt himself not wholly forgiven.



VII

A day or two later the Byrds went together to the office of the Household Publishing Company and sent in their names to Mr. Farraday. This time they had to wait their turn for admittance for over half an hour, sharing the benches of the outer office with several men and women of types ranging from the extreme of aestheticism to the obviously commercial. The office was hung with original drawings of the covers of the firm's three publications—The Household Review, The Household Magazine, and The Child at Home. Stefan prowled around the room mentally demolishing the drawings, while Mary glanced through the copies of the magazines that covered the large central table. She was impressed by the high level of makeup and illustration in all three periodicals, contrasting them with the obvious and often inane contents of similar English publications. At a glance the sheets appeared wholesome, but not narrow; dignified, but not dull. She wondered how much of their general tone they owed to Mr. Farraday, and determined to ask McEwan more about his friend when next she saw him. Her speculations were interrupted by Stefan, who somewhat excitedly pulled her sleeve, pointing to a colored drawing of a woman's head on the wall behind her.

“Look, Mary!” he ejaculated. “Rotten bourgeois art, but an interesting face, eh? I wonder if it's a good portrait. It says in the corner, 'Study of Miss Felicity Berber.' An actress, I expect. Look at the eyes; subtle, aren't they? And the heavy little mouth. I've never seen a face quite like it.” He was visibly intrigued.

Mary thought the face provocative, but somewhat unpleasant.

“It's certainly interesting—the predatory type, I should think,” she replied. “I'll bet it's true to life—the artist is too much of a fool to have created that expression,” Stefan went on. “Jove, I should like to meet her, shouldn't you?” he asked naïvely.

“Not particularly,” said Mary, smiling at him. “She'll have to be your friend; she's too feline for me.”

“The very word, observant one,” he agreed.

At this point their summons came. Mary was very anxious that her husband should make a good impression. “I hope you'll like him, dearest,” she whispered as for the second time the editor's door opened to her.

Farraday shook hands with them pleasantly, but turned his level glance rather

fixedly on her husband, Mary thought, before breaking into his kindly smile. Stefan returned the smile with interest, plainly delighted at the evidences of taste that surrounded him.

"I'm sorry you should have had to wait so long," said Farraday. "I'm rarely so fortunately unoccupied as on your first visit, Mrs. Byrd. You've brought the verses to show me? Good! And Mr. Byrd has his drawings?" He turned to Stefan. "America owes you a debt for the new citizen you have given her, Mr. Byrd. May I offer my congratulations?"

"Thanks," beamed Stefan, "but you couldn't, adequately, you know."

"Obviously not," assented the other with a glance at Mary. "Our mutual friend, McEwan, was here again yesterday, with a most glowing account of your work, Mr. Byrd; he seems to have adopted the rôle of press agent for the family."

"He's the soul of kindness," said Mary.

"Yes, a thoroughly good sort," Stefan conceded. "Here are the New York sketches," he went on, opening his portfolio on Farraday's desk. "Half a dozen of them."

"Thank you, just a moment," interposed the editor, who had opened Mary's manuscript. "Your wife's work takes precedence. She is an established contributor, you see," he smiled, running his eyes over the pages.

Stefan sat down. "Of course," he said, rather absently.

Farraday gave an exclamation of pleasure.

"Mrs. Byrd, these are good; unusually so. They have the Stevenson flavor without being imitations. A little condensation, perhaps—I'll pencil a few suggestions—but I must have them all. I would not let another magazine get them for the world! Let me see, how many are there! Eight. We might bring them out in a series, illustrated. What if I were to offer the illustrating to Mr. Byrd, eh?" He put down the sheets and glanced from wife to husband, evidently charmed with his idea. "What do you think, Mr. Byrd? Is your style suited to her work?" he asked.

Stefan looked thoroughly taken aback. He laughed shortly. "I'm a painter, Mr. Farraday, not an illustrator. I haven't time to undertake that kind of thing. Even these drawings," he indicated the portfolio, "were done in spare moments as an amusement. My wife suggested placing them with you—I shouldn't have thought of it."

To Mary his tone sounded needlessly ungracious, but the editor appeared not to notice it.

"I beg your pardon," he replied suavely. "Of course, if you don't illustrate—I'm sorry. The collaboration of husband and wife would have been an attraction, even though the names were unknown here. I'll get Ledward to do them."

Stefan sat up. "You don't mean Metcalf Ledward, the painter, do you?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," replied Farraday quietly; "he often does things for us—our policy is to popularize the best American artists."

Stefan was nonplused. Ledward illustrating Mary's rhymes! He felt uncomfortable.

"Don't you think he would get the right atmosphere better perhaps than anyone?" queried Farraday, who seemed courteously anxious to elicit Stefan's opinion. Mary interposed hastily.

"Mr. Farraday, he can't answer you. I'm afraid I've been stupid, but I was so pessimistic about these verses that I wouldn't show them to him. I thought I would get an outside criticism first, just to save my face," she hurried on, anxious in reality to save her husband's.

"I pleaded, but she was obdurate," contributed Stefan, looking at her with reproach.

Farraday smiled enlightenment. "I see. Well, I shall hope you will change your mind about the illustrations when you have read the poems—that is, if your style would adapt itself. Now may I see the sketches?" and he held out his hand for them.

Stefan rose with relief. Much as he adored Mary, he could not comprehend the seriousness with which this man was taking the rhymes which she herself had described as "just little songs for children." He was the more baffled as he could not dismiss Farraday's critical pretensions with contempt, the editor being too obviously a man of cultivation. Now, however, that attention had been turned to his own work, Stefan was at his ease. Here, he felt, was no room for doubts.

"They are small chalk and charcoal studies of the spirit of the city—mere impressions," he explained, putting the drawings in Farraday's hands with a gesture which belied the carelessness of his words.

Farraday glanced at them, looked again, rose, and carried them to the window, where he examined them carefully, one by one. Mary watched him breathlessly, Stefan with unconcealed triumph. Presently he turned again and placed them in a row on the bare expanse of his desk. He stood looking silently at them for a moment more before he spoke.

“Mr. Byrd,” he said at last, “this is very remarkable work.” Mary exhaled an audible breath of relief, and turned a glowing face to Stefan. “It is the most remarkable work,” went on the editor, “that has come into this office for some time past. Frankly, however, I can't use it.”

Mary caught her breath—Stefan stared. The other went on without looking at them:

“This company publishes strictly for the household. Our policy is to send into the average American home the best that America produces, but it must be a best that the home can comprehend. These drawings interpret New York as you see it, but they do not interpret the New York in which our readers live, or one which they would be willing to admit existed.”

“They interpret the real New York, though,” interposed Stefan.

“Obviously so, to you,” replied the editor, looking at him for the first time. “For me, they do not. These drawings are an arraignment, Mr. Byrd, and—if you will pardon my saying so—a rather bitter and inhuman one. You are not very patriotic, are you?” His keen eyes probed the artist.

“Emphatically no,” Stefan rejoined. “I'm only half American by birth, and wholly French by adoption.”

“That explains it,” nodded Farraday gravely. “Well, Mr. Byrd, there are undoubtedly publications in which these drawings could find a place, and I am only sorry that mine are not amongst them. May I, however, venture to offer you a suggestion?”

Stefan was beginning to look bored, but Mary interposed with a quick “Oh, please do!” Farraday turned to her.

“Mrs. Byrd, you will bear me out in this, I think. Your husband has genius—that is beyond question—but he is unknown here as yet. Would it not be a pity for him to be introduced to the American public through these rather sinister drawings? We are not fond of the too frank critic here, you know,” he smiled, whimsically. “You may think me a Philistine, Mr. Byrd,” he continued, “but I have your welfare in mind. Win your public first with smiles, and later they may perhaps accept chastisement from you. If you have any drawings in a different vein I shall feel honored in publishing them”—his tone was courteous—“if not, I should suggest that you seek your first opening through the galleries rather than the press. Whichever way you decide, if I can assist you at all by furnishing introductions, I do hope you will call on me. Both for your wife's sake and for your own, it would be a pleasure. And now”—gathering up the drawings—“I must ask you both to excuse me, as I have a long string of appointments. Mrs.

Byrd, I will write you our offer for the verses. I don't know about the illustrations; you must consult your husband." They found themselves at the door bidding him goodbye: Mary with a sense of disappointment mingled with comprehension; Stefan not knowing whether the more to deplore what he considered Farraday's Philistinism, or to admire his critical acumen.

"His papers and his policy are piffling," he summed up at last, as they walked down the Avenue, "but I must say I like the man himself—he is the first person of distinction I have seen since I left France."

"Oh! Oh! The first?" queried Mary.

"Darling," he seized her hand and pressed it, "I said the first person, not the first immortal!" He had a way of bestowing little endearments in public, which Mary found very attractive, even while her training obliged her to class them as solecisms.

"I felt sure you would like him. He seems to me charming," she said, withdrawing the hand with a smile.

"Grundy!" he teased at this. "Yes, the man is all right, but if that is a sample of their attitude toward original work over here we have a pretty prospect of success. 'Genius, get thee behind me!' would sum it up. Imbeciles!" He strode on, his face mutinous.

Mary was thinking. She knew that Farraday's criticism of her husband's work was just. The word "sinister" had struck home to her. It could be applied, she felt, with equal truth to all his large paintings but one—the Danaë.

"Stefan," she asked, "what did you think of his advice to win the public first by smiles?"

"Tennysonian!" pronounced Stefan, using what she knew to be his final adjective of condemnation.

"A little Victorian, perhaps," she admitted, smiling at this succinct repudiation. "Nevertheless, I'm inclined to think he was right. There is a sort of Pan-inspired terror in your work, you know."

He appeared struck. "Mary, I believe you've hit it!" he exclaimed, suddenly standing still. "I've never thought of it like that before—the thing that makes my work unique, I mean. Like the music of Pan, it's outside humanity, because I am."

"Don't say that, dear," she interrupted, shocked.

"Yes, I am. I hate my kind—all except a handful. I love beauty. It is not my fault that humanity is ugly."

Mary was deeply disturbed. Led on by a chance phrase of hers, he was actually boasting of just that lack which was becoming her secret fear for him. She touched his arm, pleadingly.

“Stefan, don't speak like that; it hurts me dreadfully. It is awful for any one to build up a barrier between himself and the world. It means much unhappiness, both for himself and others.”

He laughed affectionately at her. “Why, sweet, what do we care? I love you enough to make the balance true. You are on my side of the barrier, shutting me in with beauty.”

“Is that your only reason for loving me?” she asked, still distressed.

“I love you because you have a beautiful body and a beautiful mind—because you are like a winged goddess of inspiration. Could there be a more perfect reason?”

Mary was silent. Again the burden of his ideal oppressed her. There was no comfort in it. It might be above humanity, she felt, but it was not of it. Again her mind returned to the pictures and Farraday's criticism. “Sinister!” So he would have summed up all the others, except the Danaë. To that at least the word could not apply. Her heart lifted at the realization of how truly she had helped Stefan. In his tribute to her there was only beauty. She knew now that her gift must be without reservation.

Home again, she stood long before the picture, searching its strange face. Was she wrong, or did there linger even here the sinister, half-human note?

“Stefan,” she said, calling him to her, “I was wrong to ask you not to make the face like me. It was stupid—'Tennysonian,' I'm afraid.” She smiled bravely. “It is me—your ideal of me, at least—and I want you to make the face, too, express me as I seem to you.” She leant against him. “Then I want you to exhibit it. I want you to be known first by our gift to each other, this—which is our love's triumph.” She was trembling; her face quivered—he had never seen her so moved. She fired him.

“How glorious of you, darling!” he exclaimed, “and oh, how beautiful you look! You have never been so wonderful. If I could paint that rapt face! Quick, I believe I can get it. Stand there, on the throne.” He seized his palette and brushes and worked furiously while Mary stood, still flaming with her renunciation. In a few minutes it was done. He ran to her and covered her face with kisses. “Come and look!” he cried exultingly, holding her before the canvas.

The strange face with its too-wide eyes and exotic mouth was gone. Instead, she saw her own purely cut features, but fired by such exultant adoration as

lifted them to the likeness of a deity. The picture now was incredibly pure and passionate—the very flaming essence of love. Tears started to her eyes and dropped unheeded. She turned to him worshiping.

“Beloved,” she cried, “you are great, great. I adore you,” and she kissed him passionately.

He had painted love's apotheosis, and his genius had raised her love to its level. At that moment Mary's actually was the soul of flame he had depicted it.

That day, illumined by the inspiration each had given each, was destined to mark a turning point in their common life. The next morning the understanding which Mary had for long instinctively feared, and against which she had raised a barrier of silence, came at last.

She was standing for some final work on the Danaë, but she had awakened feeling rather unwell, and her pose was listless. Stefan noticed it, and she braced herself by an effort, only to droop again. To his surprise, she had to ask for her rest much sooner than usual; he had hitherto found her tireless. But hardly had she again taken the pose than she felt herself turning giddy. She tottered, and sat down limply on the throne. He ran to her, all concern.

“Why, darling, what's the matter, aren't you well?” She shook her head. “What can be wrong?” She looked at him speechless.

“What is it, dearest, has anything upset you?” he went on with—it seemed to her—incredible blindness.

“I can't stand in that pose any longer, Stefan; this must be the last time,” she said at length, slowly.

He looked at her as she sat, pale-faced, drooping on the edge of the throne. Suddenly, in a flash, realization came to him. He strode across the room, looked again, and came back to her.

“Why, Mary, are you going to have a baby?” he asked, quite baldly, with a surprised and almost rueful expression.

Mary flushed crimson, tears of emotion in her eyes. “Oh, Stefan, yes. I've known it for weeks; haven't you guessed?” Her arms reached to him blindly.

He stood rooted for a minute, looking as dumfounded as if an earthquake had rolled under him. Then with a quick turn he picked up her wrap, folded it round her, and took her into his arms. But it was a moment too late. He had hesitated, had not been there at the instant of her greatest need. Her midnight fears were fulfilled, just as her instinct had foretold. He was not glad. There in his arms her heart turned cold.

He soon rallied; kissed her, comforted her, told her what a fool he had been; but all he said only confirmed her knowledge. "He is not glad. He is not glad," her heart beat out over and over, as he talked.

"Why did you not tell me sooner, darling? Why did you let me tire you like this?" he asked.

Impossible to reply. "Why didn't you know?" her heart cried out, and, "I wasn't tired until to-day," her lips answered.

"But why didn't you tell me?" he urged. "I never even guessed. It was idiotic of me, but I was so absorbed in our love and my work that this never came to my mind."

"But at first, Stefan?" she questioned, probing for the answer she already knew, but still clinging to the hope of being wrong. "I never talked about it because you didn't seem to care. But in the beginning, when you proposed to me—the day we were married—at Shadeham—did you never think of it then?" Her tone craved reassurance.

"Why, no," he half laughed. "You'll think me childish, but I never did. I suppose I vaguely faced the possibility, but I put it from me. We had each other and our love—that seemed enough."

She raised her head and gazed at him in wide-eyed pain. "But, Stefan, what's marriage *for*?" she exclaimed.

He puckered his brows, puzzled. "Why, my dear, it's for love—companionship—inspiration. Nothing more so far as I am concerned." They stared nakedly at each other. For the first time the veils were stripped away. They had felt themselves one, and behold! here was a barrier, impenetrable as marble, dividing each from the comprehension of the other. To Stefan it was inconceivable that a marriage should be based on anything but mutual desire. To Mary the thought of marriage apart from children was an impossibility. They had come to their first spiritual deadlock.



VIII

Love, feeling its fusion threatened, ever makes a supreme effort for reunity. In the days that followed, Stefan enthusiastically sought to rebuild his image of Mary round the central fact of her maternity. He became inspired with the idea of painting her as a Madonna, and recalled all the famous artists of the past who had so glorified their hearts' mistresses.

"You are named for the greatest of all mothers, dearest, and my picture shall be worthy of the name," he would cry. Or he would call her Aphrodite, the mother of Love. "How beautiful our son will be—another Eros," he exclaimed.

Mary rejoiced in his new enthusiasm, and persuaded herself that his indifference to children was merely the result of his lonely bachelorhood, and would disappear forever at the sight of his own child. Now that her great secret was shared she became happier, and openly commenced those preparations which she had long been cherishing in thought. Miss Mason was sent for, and the great news confided to her. They undertook several shopping expeditions, as a result of which Mary would sit with a pile of sewing on her knee while Stefan worked to complete his picture. Miss Mason took to dropping in occasionally with a pattern or some trifle of wool or silk. Mary was always glad to see her, and even Stefan found himself laughing sometimes at her shrewd New England wit. For the most part, however, he ignored her, while he painted away in silence behind the great canvas.

Mary had received twelve dollars for each of her verses—ninety-six dollars in all. Before Christmas Stefan sold his pastoral of the dancing faun for one hundred and twenty-five, and Mary felt that financially they were in smooth water, and ventured to discuss the possibility of larger quarters. For these they were both eager, having begun to feel the confinement of their single room; but Mary urged that they postpone moving until spring.

"We are warm and snug here for the winter, and by spring we shall have saved something substantial, and really be able to spread out," she argued.

"Very well, wise one, we will hold in our wings a little longer," he agreed, "but when we do fly, it must be high." His brush soared in illustration.

She had discussed with him the matter of the illustrations for her verses as soon as she received her cheque from Farraday. They had agreed that it would be a pity for him to take time for them from his masterpiece.

“Besides, sweetheart,” he had said, “I honestly think Ledward will do them better. His stuff is very graceful, without being sentimental, and he understands children, which I'm afraid I don't.” He shrugged regretfully. “Didn't you paint that adorable lost baby?” she reminded him. “I've always grieved that we had to sell it.”

“I'll buy it back for you, or paint you another better one,” he offered promptly.

So the verses went to Ledward, and the first three appeared in the Christmas number of *The Child at Home*, illustrated—as even Stefan had to admit—with great beauty.

Mary would have given infinitely much for his collaboration, but she had not urged it, feeling he was right in his refusal.

As Christmas approached they began to make acquaintances among the polyglot population of the neighborhood. Their old hotel, the culinary aristocrat of the district, possessed a cafe in which, with true French hospitality, patrons were permitted to occupy tables indefinitely on the strength of the slenderest orders. Here for the sake of the French atmosphere Stefan would have dined nightly had Mary's frugality permitted. As it was, they began to eat there two or three nights a week, and dropped in after dinner on many other nights. They would sit at a bare round table smoking their cigarettes, Mary with a cup of coffee, Stefan with the liqueur he could never induce her to share, and watching the groups that dotted the other tables. Or they would linger at the cheapest of their restaurants and listen to the conversation of the young people, aggressively revolutionary, who formed its clientele. These last were always noisy, and assumed as a pose manners even worse than those they naturally possessed. Every one talked to every one else, regardless of introductions, and Stefan had to summon his most crushing manner to prevent Mary from being monopolized by various very youthful and visionary men who openly admired her. He was inclined to abandon the place, but Mary was amused by it for a time, bohemianism being a completely unknown quantity to her.

“Don't think this is the real thing,” he explained; “I've had seven years of that in Paris. This is merely a very crass imitation.”

“Imitation or not, it's most delightfully absurd and amusing,” said she, watching the group nearest her. This consisted of a very short and rotund man with hair à la Paderewski and a frilled evening shirt, a thin man of incredible stature and lank black locks, and a pretty young girl in a tunic, a tam o' shanter, enormous green hairpins, and tiny patent-leather shoes decorated with three inch heels. To her the lank man, who wore a red velvet shirt and a khaki-colored suit

reminiscent of Mr. Bernard Shaw, was explaining the difference between syndicalism and trade-unionism in the same conversational tone which men in Lindum had used in describing to Mary the varying excellences of the two local hunts. "I.W.W." and "A.F. of L." fell from his lips as "M.F.H." and "J.P." used to from theirs. The contrast between the two worlds entertained her not a little. She thought all these young people looked clever, though singularly vulgar, and that her old friends would have appeared by comparison refreshingly clean and cultivated, but quite stupid.

"Why, Stefan, are dull, correct people always so clean, and clever and original ones usually so unwashed?" she wondered.

"Oh, the unwashed stage is like the measles," he replied; "you are bound to catch it in early life."

"I suppose that's true. I know even at Oxford the Freshmen go through an utterly ragged and disreputable phase, in which they like to pretend they have no laundry bill."

"Yes, it advertises their emancipation. I went through it in Paris, but mine was a light case."

"And brief, I should think," smiled Mary, to whom Stefan's feline perfection of neatness was one of his charms.

At the hotel, on the other hand, the groups, though equally individual, lacked this harum-scarum quality, and, if occasionally noisy, were clean and orderly.

"Is it because they can afford to dress better?" Mary asked on their next evening there, noting the contrast.

"No," said Stefan. "That velvet shirt cost as much probably as half a dozen cotton ones. These people have more, certainly, or they wouldn't be here—but the real reason is that they are a little older. The other crowd is raw with youth. These have begun to find themselves; they don't need to advertise their opinions on their persons." He was looking about him with quite a friendly eye.

"You don't seem to hate humanity this evening, Stefan," Mary commented.

"No," he grinned. "I confess these people are less objectionable than most." He spoke in rapid French to the waiter, ordering another drink.

"And the language," he continued. "If you knew what it means to me to hear French!"

Mary nodded rather ruefully. Her French was of the British school-girl variety, grammatically precise, but with a hopeless, insular accent. After a few attempts Stefan had ceased trying to speak it with her. "Darling," he had begged, "don't

let us—it is the only ugly sound you make.”

One by one they came to know the habitués of these places. In the restaurant Stefan was detested, but tolerated for the sake of his wife. “Beauty and the Beast” they were dubbed. But in the hotel café he made himself more agreeable, and was liked for his charming appearance, his fluent French, and his quick mentality. The “Villagers,” as these people called themselves, owing to their proximity to New York's old Greenwich Village, admired Mary with ardor, and liked her, but for a time were baffled by her innate English reserve. Mentally they stood round her like a litter of yearling pups about a stranger, sniffing and wagging friendly but uncertain tails, doubtful whether to advance with affectionate fawnings or to withdraw to safety. This was particularly true of the men—the women, finding Mary a stanch Feminist, and feeling for her the sympathy a bride always commands from her sex, took to her at once. The revolutionary group on the other hand would have broken through her pleasant aloofness with the force—and twice the speed—of a McEwan, had Stefan not, with them, adopted the role of snarling watchdog.

One of Mary's first after dinner friendships was made at the hotel with a certain Mrs. Elliott, who turned out to be the President of the local Suffrage Club. Scouting a new recruit, this lady early engaged the Byrds in conversation and, finding Mary a believer, at once enveloped her in the camaraderie which has been this cause's gift to women all the world over. They exchanged calls, and soon became firm friends.

Mrs. Elliot was an attractive woman in middle life, of slim, graceful figure and vivacious manner. She had one son out in the world, and one in college, and lived in a charming house just off the Avenue, with an adored but generally invisible husband, who was engaged in business downtown. As a girl Constance Elliot had been on the stage, and had played smaller Shakespearean parts in the old Daly Company, but, bowing to the code of her generation, had abandoned her profession at marriage. Now, in middle life, too old to take up her calling again with any hope of success, yet with her mental activity unimpaired, she found in the Suffrage movement her one serious vocation.

“I am nearly fifty, Mrs. Byrd,” she said to Mary, “and have twenty good years before me. I like my friends, and am interested in philanthropy, but I am not a Jack-of-all-trades by temperament. I need work—a real job such as I had when the boys were little, or when I was a girl. We are all working hard enough to win the vote, but what we shall fill the hole in our time with when we have it, I don't know. It will be easy for the younger ones—but I suppose women like myself will simply have to pay the price of having been born of our generation. Some

will find solace as grandmothers—I hope I shall. But my elder son, who married a pretty society girl, is childless, and my younger such a light-hearted young rascal that I doubt if he marries for years to come.”

Mary was much interested in this problem, which seemed more salient here than in her own class in England, in which social life was a vocation for both sexes.

At Mrs. Elliot's house she met many of the neighborhood's more conventional women, and began to have a great liking for these gently bred but broad-minded and democratic Americans. She also met a mixed collection of artists, actresses, writers, reformers and followers of various “isms”; for as president of a suffrage club it was Mrs. Elliot's policy to make her drawing rooms a center for the whole neighborhood. She was a charming hostess, combining discrimination with breadth of view; her Fridays were rallying days for the followers of many more cults than she would ever embrace, but for none toward which she could not feel tolerance.

At first Stefan, who, man-like, professed contempt for social functions, refused to accompany Mary to these at-homes. But after Mrs. Elliot's visit to the studio he conceived a great liking for her, and to Mary's delight volunteered to accompany her on the following Friday. Few misanthropes are proof against an atmosphere of adulation, and in this Mrs. Elliot enveloped Stefan from the moment of first seeing his Danaë. She introduced him as a genius—America's coming great painter, and he frankly enjoyed the novel sensation of being lionized by a group of clever and attractive women.

Mrs. Elliot affected house gowns of unusual texture and design, which flowed in adroitly veiling lines about her too slim form. These immediately attracted the attention of Stefan, who coveted something equally original for Mary. He remarked on them to his hostess on his second visit.

“Yes,” she said, “I love them. I am eclipsed by fashionable clothing. Felicity Berber designs all my things. She's ruinous,” with a sigh, “but I have to have her. I am a fool at dressing myself, but I have intelligence enough to know it,” she added, laughing.

“Felicity Berber,” questioned Stefan. “Is that a creature with Mongolian eyes and an O-shaped mouth?”

“What a good description! Yes—have you met her?”

“I haven't, but you will arrange it, won't you?” he asked cajolingly. “I saw a drawing of her—she's tremendously paintable. Do tell me about her. Wait a minute. I'll get my wife!”

He jumped up, pounced on Mary, who was in a group by the tea-table, and bore her off regardless of her interrupted conversation.

“Mary,” he explained, all excitement, “you remember that picture at the magazine office? Yes, you do, a girl with slanting black eyes—Felicity Berber. Well, she isn't an actress after all. Sit down here. Mrs. Elliot is going to tell us about her.” Mary complied, sharing their hostess' sofa, while Stefan wrapped himself round a stool. “Now begin at the beginning,” he demanded, beaming; “I'm thrilled about her.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Elliot, dropping a string of jade beads through her fingers, “so are most people. She's unique in her way. She came here from the Pacific coast, I believe, quite unknown, and trailing an impossible husband. That was five years ago—she couldn't have been more than twenty-three. She danced in the Duncan manner, but was too lazy to keep it up. Then she went into the movies, and her face became the rage; it was on all the picture postcards. She got royalties on every photograph sold, and made quite a lot of money, I believe. But she hates active work, and soon gave the movies up. About that time the appalling husband disappeared. I don't know if she divorced him or not, but he ceased to be, as it were. His name was Noaks.” She paused, “Does this bore you?” she asked Mary.

“On the contrary,” smiled she, “it's most amusing—like the penny novelettes they sell in England.”

“Olympian superiority!” teased Stefan. “Please go on, Mrs. Elliot. Did she attach another husband?”

“No, she says she hates the bother of them,” laughed their hostess. “Men are always falling in love with her, but—openly at least—she seems uninterested in them.”

“Hasn't found the right one, I suppose,” Stefan interjected.

“Perhaps that's it. At any rate her young men are always confiding their woes to me. My status as a potential grandmother makes me a suitable repository for such secrets.”

“Ridiculous,” Stefan commented.

“But true, alas!” she laughed. “Well, Felicity had always designed the gowns for her dancing and acting, and after the elimination of Mr. Noaks she set up a dressmaking establishment for artistic and individual gowns. She opened it with a *thé dansant*, at which she discoursed on the art of dress. Her showroom is like a sublimated hotel lobby—tea is served there for visitors every afternoon. Her prices are high, and she has made a huge success. She's wonderfully clever,

directs everything herself. Felicity detests exertion, but she has the art of making others work for her.”

“That sounds as if she would get fat,” said Stefan, with a shudder.

“Doesn't it?” agreed Mrs. Elliot. “But she's as slim as a panther, and intensely alive nervously, for all her physical laziness.”

“Do you like her?” Mary asked.

“Yes, I really do, though she's terribly rude, and I tell her I'm convinced she's a dangerous person. She gives me a feeling that gunpowder is secreted somewhere in the room with her. I will get her here to meet you both—you would be interested. She's never free in the afternoon; we'll make it an evening.” With a confirming nod, Mrs. Elliot rose to greet some newcomers.

“Mary,” Stefan whispered, “we'll go and order you a dress from this person. Wouldn't that be fun?”

“How sweet of you, dearest, but we can't afford it,” replied Mary, surreptitiously patting his hand.

“Nonsense, of course we can. Aren't we going to be rich?” scoffed he.

“Look who's coming!” exclaimed Mary suddenly.

Farraday was shaking hands with their hostess, his tall frame looking more than ever distinguished in its correct cutaway. Almost instantly he caught sight of Mary and crossed the room to her with an expression of keen pleasure.

“How delightful,” he greeted them both. “So you have found the presiding genius of the district! Why did I not have the inspiration of introducing you myself?” He turned to Mrs. Elliot, who had rejoined them. “Two more lions for you, eh, Constance?” he said, with a twinkle which betokened old friendship.

“Yes, indeed,” she smiled, “they have no rivals for my Art and Beauty cages.”

“And what about the literary circus? I suppose you have been making Mrs. Byrd roar overtime?”

Their hostess looked puzzled.

“Don't tell me that you are in ignorance of her status as the Household Company's latest find?” he ejaculated in mock dismay.

Mrs. Elliot turned reproachful eyes on Mary. “She never told me, the unfriendly woman!”

“Just retribution, Constance, for poring over your propagandist sheets instead of reading our wholesome literature,” Farraday retorted. “Had you done your duty by the Household magazines you would have needed no telling.”

“A hit, a palpable hit,” she answered, laughing. “Which reminds me that I want another article from you, James, for our Woman Citizen.”

“Mrs. Byrd,” said Farraday, “behold in me a driven slave. Won't you come to my rescue and write something for this insatiable suffragist?”

Mary shook her head. “No, no, Mr. Farraday, I can't argue, either personally or on paper. You should hear me trying to make a speech! Pathetic.”

Stefan, who had ceased to follow the conversation, and was restlessly examining prints on the wall, turned at this. “Don't do it, dearest. Argument is so unbeautiful, and I couldn't stand your doing anything badly.” He drifted away to a group of women who were discussing the Italian Futurists.

“Tell me about this lion, James,” said Constance, settling herself on the sofa. “I believe she is too modest to tell me herself.” She looked at Mary affectionately.

“She has written a second 'Child's Garden,' almost rivaling the first, and we have a child's story of hers which will be as popular as some of Frances Hodgson Burnett's,” summed up Farraday.

Mary blushed with pleasure at this praise, but was about to deprecate it when Stefan signaled her away. “Mary,” he called, “I want you to hear this I am saying about the Cubists!” She left them with a little smile of excuse, and they watched her tall figure join her husband.

“James,” said Mrs. Elliot irrelevantly, “why in the world don't you marry?”

“Because, Constance,” he smiled, “all the women I most admire in the world are already married.”

“À propos, have you seen Mr. Byrd's work?” she asked.

“Only some drawings, from which I suspect him of genius. But she is as gifted in her way as he, only it's a smaller way.”

“Don't place him till you've seen his big picture, painted from her. It's tremendous. We've got to have it exhibited at Constantine's. I want you to help me arrange it for them. She's inexperienced, and he's helplessly unpractical. Oh!” she grasped his arm; “a splendid idea! Why shouldn't I have a private exhibition here first, for the benefit of the Cause?”

Farraday threw up his hands. “You are indefatigable, Constance. We'd better all leave it to you. The Byrds and Suffrage will benefit equally, I am sure.”

“I will arrange it,” she nodded smiling, her eyes narrowing, her slim hands dropping the jade beads from one to the other.

Farraday, knowing her for the moment lost to everything save her latest piece

of stage management, left her, and joined the Byrds. He engaged himself to visit their studio the following week.



IX

Miss Mason was folding her knitting, and Mary sat in the firelight sewing diligently. Stefan was out in search of paints.

"I tell you what 'tis, Mary Elliston Byrd," said Miss Mason. "It's 'bout time you saw a doctor. My mother was a physician-homeopath, one of the first that ever graduated. Take my advice, and have a woman."

"I'd much rather," said Mary.

"I should say!" agreed the other. "I never was one to be against the men, but oh, my—" she threw up her bony little hands—"if there's one thing I never could abide it's a man doctor for woman's work. I s'pose I got started that way by what my mother told me of the medical students in her day. Anyway, it hardly seems Christian to me for a woman to go to a man doctor."

Mary laughed. "I wish my dear old Dad could have heard you. I remember he once refused to meet a woman doctor in consultation. She had to leave Lindum—no one would employ her. I was a child at the time, but even then it seemed all wrong to me."

"My dear, you thank the Lord you live under the Stars and Stripes," rejoined Miss Mason, who conceived of England as a place beyond the reach of liberty for either women or men.

"I shall live under the Tricolor if Stefan has his way," smiled Mary.

"Child," said her visitor, putting on her hat, "don't say it. Your husband's an elegant man—I admire him—but don't you ever let me hear he doesn't love his country."

"I'm certainly learning to love it myself," Mary discreetly evaded.

"You're too fine a woman not to," retorted the other. "Now I tell you. I've been treated for my chest at the Women's and Children's Hospital. There's one little doctor there's cute's she can be. I'm goin' to get you her address. You've got to treat yourself right. Good-bye," nodded the little woman; and was gone in her usual brisk fashion.

It was the day of Mr. Farraday's expected call, and Miss Mason had hardly departed when the bell rang. Mary hastily put away her sewing and pressed the electric button which opened the downstairs door to visitors. She wished Stefan were back again to help her entertain the editor, and greeted him with apologies

for her husband's absence. She was anxious that this man, whom she instinctively liked and trusted, should see her husband at his best. Seating Farraday in the Morris chair, she got him some tea, while he looked about with interest.

The two big pictures, "Tempest," and "Pursuit," now hung stretched but unframed, on either side of the room. Farraday's gaze kept returning to them.

"Those are his Beaux Arts pictures; extraordinary, aren't they?" said Mary, following his eyes.

"They certainly are. Remarkably powerful. I understand there is another, though, that he has only just finished?"

"Yes, it's on the easel, covered, you see," she answered. "Stefan must have the honor of showing you that himself."

"I wish you would tell me, Mrs. Byrd," said Farraday, changing the subject, "how you happened to write those verses? Had you been brought up with children, younger brothers and sisters, for instance?"

Mary shook her head. "No, I'm the younger of two. But I've always loved children more than anything in the world." She blushed, and Farraday, watching her, realized for the first time what a certain heightened radiance in her face betokened. He smiled very sweetly at her. She in her turn saw that he knew, and was glad. His manner seemed to enfold her in a mantle of comfort and understanding.

As they finished their tea, Stefan arrived. He entered gaily, greeted Farraday, and fell upon the tea, consuming two cups and several slices of bread and butter with the rapid concentration he gave to all his acts.

That finished, he leaped up and made for the easel.

"Now, Farraday," he cried, "you are going to see one of the finest modern paintings in the world. Why should I be modest about it? I'm not. It's a masterpiece—Mary's and mine!"

Mary wished he had not included her. Though determined to overcome the feeling, she still shrank from having the picture shown in her presence. Farraday placed himself in position, and Stefan threw back the cloth, watching the other's face with eagerness. The effect surpassed his expectation. The editor flushed, then gradually became quite pale. After a minute he turned rather abruptly from the canvas and faced Stefan.

"You are right, Mr. Byrd," he said, in an obviously controlled voice, "it is a masterpiece. It will make your name and probably your fortune. It is one of the

most magnificent modern paintings I have ever seen.”

Mary beamed.

“Your praise honors me,” said Stefan, genuinely delighted.

“I’m sorry I have to run away now,” Farraday continued almost hurriedly. “You know what a busy man I am.” He shook hands with Stefan. “A thousand congratulations,” he said. “Good-bye, Mrs. Byrd; I enjoyed my cup of tea with you immensely.” The hand he offered her was cold; he hardly looked up. “You will let me have some more stories, won’t you? I shall count on them. Good-bye again—my warmest congratulations to you both,” and he took his departure with a suddenness only saved from precipitation by the deliberate poise of his whole personality.

“I’m sorry he had to go so soon,” said Mary, a little blankly.

“What got into the man?” Stefan wondered, thrusting his hands into his pockets. “He was leisurely enough till he had seen the picture. I tell you what!” he exclaimed. “Did you notice his expression when he looked at it? I believe the chap is in love with you!” He turned his most impish and mischievous face to her.

Mary blushed with annoyance. “How perfectly ridiculous, Stefan! Please don’t say such things.”

“But he is!” He danced about the room, hugely entertained by his idea. “Don’t you see, that is why he is so eager about your verses, and why he was so bouleversé by the Danaë! Poor chap, I feel quite sorry for him. You must be nice to him.”

Mary was thoroughly annoyed. “Please don’t talk like that,” she reiterated. “You don’t know how it hurts when you are so flippant. If you suggest such a reason for his acceptance of my work, of course I can’t send in any more.” Tears of vexation were in her eyes.

“Darling, don’t be absurd,” he responded, teasingly. “Why shouldn’t he be in love with you? I expect everybody to be so. As for your verses, of course he wouldn’t take them if they weren’t good; I didn’t mean that.”

“Then why did you say it?” she asked, unplacated.

“Dearest!” and he kissed her. “Don’t be dignified; be Aphrodite again, not Pallas. I never mean anything I say, except when I say I love you!”

“Love isn’t the only thing, Stefan,” she replied.

“Isn’t it? What else is there? I don’t know,” and he jumped on the table and sat smiling there with his head on one side, like a naughty little boy facing his

schoolmaster.

She wanted to answer “comprehension,” but was silent, feeling the uselessness of further words. How expect understanding of a common human hurt from this being, who alternately appeared in the guise of a god and a gamin? She remembered the old tale of the maiden wedded to the beautiful and strange elf-king. Was the legend symbolic of that mysterious thread—call it genius or what you will—that runs its erratic course through humanity's woof, marring yet illuminating the staid design, never straightened with its fellow-threads, never tied, and never to be followed to its source? With the feeling of having for an instant held in her hand the key to the riddle of his nature, Mary went to Stefan and ran her fingers gently through his hair.

“Child,” she said, smiling at him rather sadly; and “Beautiful,” he responded, with a prompt kiss.



X

The next morning brought Constance Elliot, primed with a complete scheme for the future of the Danaë. She found Mary busy with her sewing and Stefan rather restlessly cleaning his palette and brushes. The great picture was propped against the wall, a smaller empty canvas being screwed on the easel. Stefan greeted her enthusiastically.

"Come in!" he cried, forestalling Mary. "You find us betwixt and between. She's finished," indicating the Danaë, "and I'm thinking of doing an interior, with Mary seated. I don't know," he went on thoughtfully; "it's quite out of my usual line, but we're too domestic here just now for anything else." His tone was slightly grumbling. From the rocking chair Constance smiled importantly on them both. She had the happy faculty of never appearing to hear what should not have been expressed.

"Children," she said, "your immediate future is arranged. I have a plan for the proper presentation of the masterpiece to a waiting world, and I haven't been responsible for two suffrage matinees and a mile of the Parade for nothing. I understand publicity. Now listen."

She outlined her scheme to them. The reporters were to be sent for and informed that the great new American painter, sensation of this year's Salon, had kindly consented to a private exhibition of his masterpiece at her house for the benefit of the Cause. Tickets, one dollar each, to be limited to two hundred.

"Then a bit about your both being Suffragists, and about Mary's writing, you know," she threw in. "Note the value of the limited sale—at once it becomes a privilege to be there." Tickets, she went on to explain, would be sent to the art critics of the newspapers, and Mr. Farraday would arrange to get Constantine himself and one or two of the big private connoisseurs. She personally knew the curator of the Metropolitan, and would get him. The press notices would be followed by special letters and articles by some of these men. Then Constantine would announce a two weeks' exhibition at his gallery, the public would flock, and the picture would be bought by one of the big millionaires, or a gallery. "I've arranged it all," she concluded triumphantly, looking from one to the other with her dark alert glance.

Stefan was grinning delightedly, his attention for the moment completely captured. Mary's sewing had dropped to her lap; she was round-eyed.

“But the sale itself, Mrs. Elliot, you can hardly have arranged that?” she laughed.

Constance waved her hand. “That arranges itself. It is enough to set the machinery in motion.”

“Do you mean to say,” went on Mary, half incredulous, “that you can simply send for the reporters and get them to write what you want?”

“Within reason, certainly,” answered the other. “Why not?”

“In England,” Mary laughed, “if a woman were to do that, unless she were a duchess, a Pankhurst, or a great actress, they wouldn't even come.”

Constance dismissed this with a shrug. “Ah, well, my dear, luckily we're not in England! I'm going to begin to-day. I only came over to get your permission. Let me see—this is the sixteenth—too near Christmas. I'll have the tickets printed and the press announcement prepared, and we'll let them go in the dead week after Christmas, when the papers are thankful for copy. We'll exhibit the first Saturday in the New Year. For a week we'll have follow-up articles, and then Constantine will take it. You blessed people,” and she rose to go, “don't have any anxiety. Suffragists always put things through, and I shall concentrate on this for the next three weeks. I consider the picture sold.”

Mary tried to express her gratitude, but the other waved it aside. “I just love you both,” she cried in her impulsive way, “and want to see you where you ought to be—at the top!” She shook hands with Stefan effusively. “Mind you get on with your next picture!” she cried in parting; “every one will be clamoring for your work!”

“Oh, Stefan, isn't it awfully good of her?” exclaimed Mary, linking her arm through his. He was staring at his empty canvas. “Yes, splendid,” he responded carelessly, “but of course she'll have the kudos, and her organization will benefit, too.”

“Stefan!” Mary dropped his arm, dumfounded. It was not possible he should be so ungenerous. She would have remonstrated, but saw he was oblivious of her.

“Yes,” he went on absently, looking from the room to the canvas, “it's fine for every one all round—just as it should be. Now, Mary, if you will sit over there by the fire and take your sewing, I think I'll try and block in that Dutch interior effect I noticed some time back. The light is all wrong, but I can get the thing composed.”

He was lost in his new idea. Mary told herself she had in part misjudged him.

His comment on their friend's assistance was not dictated by lack of appreciation so much as by indifference. No sooner was the picture's future settled than he had ceased to be interested in it. The practical results of its sale would have little real meaning for him, she knew. She began to see that all he asked of humanity was that it should leave him untrammelled to do his work, while yielding him full measure of the beauty and acclamation that were his food. "Well," she thought, "I'm the wife of a genius. It's a great privilege, but it is strange, for I always supposed if I married it would simply be some good, kind man. He would have been very dull," she smiled to herself, mentally contrasting the imagined with the real.

A few days before Christmas Mary noticed that one of the six skyscraper studies was gone from the studio. She spoke of it, fearing the possibility of a theft, but Stefan murmured rather vaguely that it was all right—he was having it framed. Also, on three consecutive mornings she awakened to find him busily painting at a small easel close under the window, which he would hastily cover on hearing her move. As he evidently did not wish her to see it, she wisely restrained her curiosity. She was herself busy with various little secrets—there was some knitting to be done whenever his back was turned, and she had made several shopping expeditions. On Christmas Eve Stefan was gone the whole afternoon, and returned radiant, full of absurd jokes and quivers of suppressed glee. He was evidently highly pleased with himself, but cherished with touching faith, she thought, the illusion that his manner betrayed nothing.

That night, when she was supposed to be asleep, she felt him creep carefully out of bed, heard him fumbling for his dressing gown, and saw a shaft of light as the studio door was cautiously opened. A moment later a rustling sounded through the transom, followed by the shrill whisper of Madame Corriani. Listening, she fell asleep.

She was wakened by Stefan's arms round her.

"A happy Christmas, darling! So wonderful—the first Christmas I ever remember celebrating."

There was a ruddy glow of firelight in the room, but to her opening eyes it seemed unusually dark, and in a moment she saw that the great piece of Chinese silk they used for their couch cover was stretched across the room on cords, shutting off the window end. She jumped up hastily.

"Oh, Stefan, how thrilling!" she exclaimed, girlishly excited. As for him, he was standing before her dressed, and obviously tingling with impatience. She slipped into a dressing gown of white silk, and caught her hair loosely up.

Simultaneously Stefan emerged from the kitchenette with two steaming cups of coffee, which he placed on a table before the fire.

“Clever boy!” she exclaimed delighted, for he had never made the coffee before. In a moment he produced rolls and butter.

“Déjeuner first,” he proclaimed gleefully, “and then the surprise!” They ate their meal as excitedly as two children. In the midst of it Mary rose and, fetching from the bureau two little ribbon-tied parcels, placed them in his hands.

“For me? More excitements!” he warbled. “But I shan't open them till the curtain comes down. There, we've finished.” He jumped up. “Beautiful, allow me to present to you the Byrds' Christmas tree.” With a dramatic gesture he unhooked a cord. The curtain fell. There in the full morning light stood a tree, different from any Mary had ever seen. There were no candles on it, but from top to bottom it was all one glittering white. There were no garish tinsel ornaments, but from every branch hung a white bird, wings outstretched, and under each bird lay, on the branch below, something white. At the foot of the tree stood a little painting framed in pale silver. It was of a nude baby boy, sitting wonderingly upon a hilltop at early dawn. His eyes were lifted to the sky, his hands groped. Mary, with an exclamation of delight, stepped nearer. Then she saw what the white things were under the spreading wings of the birds. Each was the appurtenance of a baby. One was a tiny cap, one a cloak, others were dresses, little jackets, vests. There were some tiny white socks, and, at the very top of the tree, a rattle of white coral and silver.

“Oh, Stefan, my dearest—'the little white bird'!” she cried.

“Do you like it, darling?” he asked delightedly, his arms about her. “Mrs. Elliot told me about Barrie's white bird—I hadn't known the story. But I wanted to show you I was glad about ours,” he held her close, “and directly she spoke of the bird, I thought of this. She went with me to get those little things—” he waved at the tree—“some of them are from her. But the picture was quite my own idea. It's right, isn't it? What you would feel, I mean? I tried to get inside your heart.”

She nodded, her eyes shining with tears. She could find no words to tell him how deeply she was touched. Her half-formed doubts were swept away—he was her own dear man, kind and comprehending. She took the little painting and sat with it on her knee, poring over it, Stefan standing by delighted at his success. Then he remembered his own parcels. The larger he opened first, and instantly donned one of the two knitted ties it held, proclaiming its golden brown vastly becoming. The smaller parcel contained a tiny jeweler's box, and in it Stefan

found an old and heavy seal ring of pure design, set with a transparent greenish stone, which bore the intaglio of a winged head. He was enchanted.

“Mary, you wonder,” he cried. “You must have created this—you couldn't just have found it. It symbolizes what you have given me—sums up all that you are!” and he kissed her rapturously.

“Oh, Stefan,” she answered, “it is all perfect, for your gift symbolizes what you have brought to me!”

“Yes, darling, but not all I am to you, I hope,” he replied, rubbing his cheek against hers.

“Foolish one,” she smiled back at him.

They spent a completely happy day, rejoicing in the successful attempt of each to penetrate the other's mind. They had never, even on their honeymoon, felt more at one. Later, Mary asked him about the missing sketch.

“Yes, I sold it for the bird's trappings,” he answered gleefully; “wasn't it clever of me? But don't ask me for the horrid details, and don't tell me a word about my wonderful ring. I prefer to consider that you fetched it from Olympus.”

And Mary, whose practical conscience had given her sharp twinges over her extravagance, was glad to let it rest at that.

During the morning a great sheaf of roses came for Mary with the card of James Farraday, and on its heels a bush of white heather inscribed to them both from McEwan. The postman contributed several cards, and a tiny string of pink coral from Miss Mason. “How kind every one is!” Mary cried happily.

In the afternoon the Corrianis were summoned. Mary had small presents for them and a glass of wine, which Stefan poured to the accompaniment of a song in his best Italian. This melted the somewhat sulky Corriani to smiles, and his wife to tears. The day closed with dinner at their beloved French hotel, and a bottle of Burgundy shared with Stefan's favorite waiters.



XI

During Christmas week Stefan worked hard at his interior, but about the fifth day began to show signs of restlessness. The following morning, after only half an hour's painting, he threw down his brush.

"It's no use, Mary," he announced, "I don't think I shall ever be able to do this kind of work; it simply doesn't inspire me."

She looked up from her sewing. "Why, I thought it promised charmingly."

"That's just it." He ruffled his hair irritably. "It does. Can you imagine my doing anything 'charming'? No, the only hope for this interior is for me to get depth into it, and depth won't come—it's facile." And he stared disgustedly at the canvas.

"I think I know what you mean," Mary answered absently. She was thinking that his work had power and height, but that depth she had never seen in it.

Stefan shook himself. "Oh, come along, Mary, let's get out of this. We've been mewed up in this domestic atmosphere for days. I shall explode soon. Let's go somewhere."

"Very well," she agreed, folding up her work.

"You feel all right, don't you?" he checked himself to ask.

"Rather, don't I look it?"

"You certainly do," he replied, but without his usual praise of her. "I have it, let's take a look at Miss Felicity Berber! I shall probably get some new ideas from her. Happy thought! Come on, Mary, hat, coat, let's hurry." He was all impatience to be gone.

They started to walk up the Avenue, stopping at the hotel to find in the telephone book the number of the Berber establishment. It was entered, "Berber, Felicity, Creator of Raiment."

"How affected!" laughed Mary.

"Yes," said Stefan, "amusing people usually are."

Though he appeared moody the crisp, sunny air of the Avenue gradually brightened him, and Mary, who was beginning to feel her confined mornings, breathed it in joyfully.

The house was in the thirties, a large building of white marble. A lift carried

them to the top floor, and left them facing a black door with “Felicity Berber” painted on it in vermilion letters. Opening this, they found themselves in a huge windowless room roofed with opaque glass. The floor was inlaid in a mosaic of uneven tiles which appeared to be of different shades of black. The walls, from roof to floor, were hung with shimmering green silk of the shade of a parrot's wing. There were no show-cases or other evidences of commercialism, but about the room were set couches of black japanned wood, upon which rested flat mattresses covered in the same green as the walls. On these silk cushions in black and vermilion were piled. The only other furniture consisted of low tables in black lacquer, one beside every couch. On each of these rested a lacquered bowl of Chinese red, obviously for the receipt of cigarette ashes. A similar but larger bowl on a table near the door was filled with green orchids. One large green silk rug—innocent of pattern—invited the entering visitor deeper into the room; otherwise the floor was bare. There were no pictures, no decorations, merely this green and black background, relieved by occasional splashes of vermilion, and leading up to a great lacquered screen of the same hue which obscured a door at the further end of the room.

From the corner nearest the entrance a young woman advanced to meet them. She was clad in flowing lines of opalescent green, and her black hair was banded low across the forehead with a narrow line of emerald.

“You wish to see raiment?” was her greeting.

Mary felt rather at a loss amidst these ultra-aestheticisms, but Stefan promptly asked to see Miss Berber.

“Madame rarely sees new clients in the morning.” The green damsel was pessimistic. Mary felt secretly amused at the ostentatious phraseology.

“Tell her we are friends of Mrs. Theodore Elliot's,” replied Stefan, with his most brilliant and ingratiating smile.

The damsel brightened somewhat. “If I may have your name I will see what can be done,” she offered, extending a small vermilion tray. Stefan produced a card and the damsel floated with it toward the distant exit. Her footsteps were silent on the dead tiling, and there was no sound from the door beyond the screen.

“Isn't this a lark? Let's sit down,” Stefan exclaimed, leading the way to a couch.

“It's rather absurd, don't you think?” smiled Mary.

“No doubt, but amusing enough for mere mortals,” he shrugged, a scarcely perceptible snub in his tone. Mary was silent. They waited for several minutes.

At last instinct rather than hearing made them turn to see a figure advancing down the room.

Both instantly recognized the celebrated Miss Berber. A small, slim woman, obviously light-boned and supple, she seemed to move forward like a ripple. Her naturally pale face, with its curved scarlet lips and slanting eyes, was set on a long neck, and round her small head a heavy swathe of black hair was held by huge scarlet pins. Her dress, cut in a narrow V at the neck, was all of semi-transparent reds, the brilliant happy reds of the Chinese. In fact, but for her head, she would have been only half visible as she advanced against the background of the screen. Mary's impression of her was blurred, but Stefan, whose artist's eye observed everything, noticed that her narrow feet were encased in heelless satin shoes which followed the natural shape of the feet like gloves.

"Mr. and Mrs. Byrd! How do you do?" she murmured, and her voice was light-breathed, a mere memory of sound. It suggested that she customarily mislaid it, and recaptured only an echo.

"Pull that other couch a little nearer, please," she waved to Stefan, appropriating the one from which they had just risen. Upon this she stretched her full length, propping the cushions comfortably under her shoulders.

"Do you smoke?" she breathed, and stretching an arm produced from a hidden drawer in the table at her elbow cigarettes in a box of black lacquer, and matches in one of red. Mary declined, but Stefan immediately lighted a cigarette for himself and held a match for Miss Berber. Mary and he settled themselves on the couch which he drew up, and which slipped readily over the tiles.

"Now we can talk," exhaled their hostess on a spiral of smoke. "I never see strangers in the morning, not even friends of dear Connie's, but there was something in the name—" She seemed to be fingering a small knob protruding from the lacquer of her couch. It must have been a bell, for in a moment the green maiden appeared.

"Chloris, has that picture come for the sylvan fitting room?" she murmured. "Yes? Bring it, please." Her gesture seemed to waft the damsel over the floor. During this interlude the Byrds were silent, Stefan hugely entertained, Mary beginning to feel a slight antagonism toward this super-casual dressmaker.

A moment and the attendant nymph reappeared, bearing a large canvas framed in glistening green wood.

"Against the table—toward Mr. Byrd." Miss Berber supplemented the murmur with an indicative gesture. "You know that?" dropped from her lips as the nymph glided away.

It was Stefan's pastoral of the dancing faun. He nodded gaily, but Mary felt herself blushing. Her husband's work destined for a fitting room!

"I thought so," Miss Berber enunciated through a breath of smoke. "I picked it up the other day. Quite lovely. My sylvan fitting room required just that note. I use it for country raiment only. Atmosphere, Mr. Byrd. I want my clients to feel young when they are preparing for the country. I am glad to see you here."

Stefan reciprocated. So far, Miss Berber had ignored Mary.

"I might consult you about my next color scheme—original artists are so rare. I change this room every year." Her eyelids drooped.

At this point Mary ventured to draw attention to herself.

"Why is it, Miss Berber," she asked in her clear English voice, "that you have only couches here?"

Felicity's lids trembled; she half looked up. "How seldom one hears a beautiful voice," she uttered. "Chairs, Mrs. Byrd, destroy women's beauty. Why sit, when one can recline? My clients may not wear corsets; reclining encourages them to feel at ease without."

Mary found Miss Berber's affectations absurd, but this explanation heightened her respect for her intelligence. "Method in her madness," she quoted to herself.

"Miss Berber, I want you to create a gown for my wife. I am sure when you look at her you will be interested in the idea." Stefan expected every one to pay tribute to Mary's beauty.

Again Miss Berber's fingers strayed. The nymph appeared. "How long have I, Chloris? ... Half an hour? Then send me Daphne. You notice the silence, Mr. Byrd? It rests my clients, brings health to their nerves. Without it, I could not do my work."

Mary smiled as she mentally contrasted these surroundings with Farraday's office, where she had last heard that expression. Was quiet so rare a privilege in America, she wondered?

A moment, and a second damsel emerged, brown-haired, clad in a paler green, and carrying paper and pencil. Not until this ministrant had seated herself at the foot of Miss Berber's couch did that lady refer to Stefan's request. Then, propping herself on her elbow, she at last looked full at Mary. What she saw evidently pleased her, for she allowed herself a slight smile. "Ah," she breathed, "an evening, or a house gown?"

"Evening," interposed Stefan. Then to Mary, "You look your best décolletée, you know."

“Englishwomen always do,” murmured Miss Berber.

“Will you kindly take off your hat and coat, and stand up, Mrs. Byrd?” Mary complied, feeling uncomfortably like a cloak model.

“Classic, pure classic. How seldom one sees it!” Miss Berber's voice became quite audible. “Gold, of course, classic lines, gold sandals. A fillet, but no ornaments. You wish to wear this raiment during the ensuing months, Mrs. Byrd?” Mary nodded. “Then write Demeter type,” the designer interpolated to her satellite, who was taking notes. “Otherwise it would of course be Artemis—or Aphrodite even?” turning for agreement to Stefan. “Would you say Aphrodite?”

“I always do,” beamed he, delighted.

At this point the first nymph, Chloris, again appeared, and at a motion of Miss Berber's hand rapidly and silently measured Mary, the paler hued nymph assisting her as scribe.

“Mr. Byrd,” pronounced the autocrat of the establishment, when at the conclusion of these rites the attendants had faded from the room. “I never design for less than two hundred dollars. Such a garment as I have in mind for your wife, queenly and abundant—” her hands waved in illustration—“would cost three hundred. But—” her look checked Mary in an exclamation of refusal—“we belong to the same world, the world of art, not of finance. Yes?” She smiled. “Your painting, Mr. Byrd, is worth three times what I gave for it, and Mrs. Byrd will wear my raiment as few clients can. It will give me pleasure”—her lids drooped to illustrate finality—“to make this garment for the value of the material, which will be—” her lips smiled amusement at the bagatelle—“between seventy and eighty-five dollars—no more.” She ceased.

Mary felt uncomfortable. Why should she accept such a favor at the hands of this poseuse? Stefan, however, saved her the necessity of decision. He leapt to his feet, all smiles.

“Miss Berber,” he cried, “you honor us, and Mary will glorify your design. It is probable,” he beamed, “that we cannot afford a dress at all, but I disregard that utterly.” He shrugged, and snapped a finger. “You have given me an inspiration. As soon as the dress arrives, I shall paint Mary as Demeter. Mille remerciements!” Bending, he kissed Miss Berber's hand in the continental manner. Mary, watching, felt a tiny prick of jealousy. “He never kissed my hand,” she thought, and instantly scorned herself for the idea.

The designer smiled languidly up at Stefan. “I am happy,” she murmured. “No fittings, Mrs. Byrd. We rarely fit, except the model gowns. You will have the

garment in a week. Au revoir.” Her eyes closed. They turned to find a high-busted woman entering the room, accompanied by two young girls. As they departed a breath-like echo floated after them, “Oh, really, Mrs. Van Sittart—still those corsets? I can do nothing for you, you know.” Tones of shrill excuse penetrated to the lift door. At the curb below stood a dyspeptically stuffed limousine, guarded by two men in puce liveries.

The Byrds swung southward in silence, but suddenly Stefan heaved a great breath. “Nom d'un nom d'un nom d'un vieux bonhomme!” he exploded, voicing in that cumulative expletive his extreme satisfaction with the morning.



XII

Constance Elliot had not boasted her stage-management in vain. On the first Saturday in January all proceeded according to schedule. The Danaë, beautifully framed, stood at the farther end of Constance's double drawing-room, from which all other mural impedimenta, together with most of the furniture, had been removed. Expertly lighted, the picture glowed in the otherwise obscure room like a thing of flame.

Two hundred ticket holders came, saw, and were conquered. Farraday, in his most correct cutaway, personally conducted a tour of three eminent critics to the Village. Sir Micah, the English curator of the Metropolitan, reflectively tapping an eye-glass upon an uplifted finger tip, pronounced the painting a turning-point in American art. Four reporters—whose presence in his immediate vicinity Constance had insured—transferred this utterance to their note books. Artists gazed, and well-dressed women did not forbear to gush. Tea, punch, and yellow suffrage cakes were consumed in the dining room. There was much noise and excessive heat. In short, the occasion was a success.

Toward the end, when few people remained except the genial Sir Micah, whom Constance was judiciously holding with tea, smiles, and a good cigar, the all-important Constantine arrived. Prompted, Sir Micah was induced to repeat his verdict. But the picture spoke for itself, and the famous dealer was visibly impressed. Constance was able to eat her dinner at last with a comfortable sense of accomplishment. She was only sorry that the Byrds had not been there to appreciate her strategy. Stefan, indeed, did appear for half an hour, but Mary's courage had failed her entirely. She had succumbed to an attack of stage fright and shut herself up at home.

As for Stefan, he had developed one of his most contrary moods. Refusing conventional attire, he clad himself in the baggy trousers and flowing tie of his student days, under the illusion that he was thus defying the prejudices of Philistia. He was unaware that the Philistines, as represented by the gentlemen of the press, considered his costume quintessentially correct for an artist just returned from Paris, and would have been grieved had he appeared otherwise. Unconsciously playing to the gallery, Stefan on arrival squared himself against a doorway and eyed the crowds with a frown of disapprobation. He had not forgotten his early snubs from the dealers, and saw in every innocent male

visitor one of the fraternity.

Constance, in her bid for publicity, had sold most of her tickets to the socially prominent, so that Stefan was soon surrounded by voluble ladies unduly furred, corseted, and jeweled. He found these unbeautiful, and his misanthropy, which had been quiescent of late, rose rampant.

Presently he was introduced to a stout matron, whose costume centered in an enormous costal cascade of gray pearls.

"Mr. Byrd," she gushed, "I dote on art. I've made a study of it, and I can say that your picture is a triumph."

"Madam," he fairly scowled, "it is as easy for the rich to enter the kingdom of Art as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle." Leaving her pink with offense, he turned his back and, shaking off other would-be admirers, sought his hostess.

"My God, I can't stand any more of this—I'm off," he confided to her. Constance was beginning to know her man. She gave him a quick scrutiny. "Yes, I think you'd better be," she agreed, "before you spoil any of my good work. An absent lion is better than a snarling one. Run home to Mary." She dismissed him laughingly, and Stefan catapulted himself out of the house, thereby missing the attractive Miss Berber by a few minutes. Dashing home across the Square, he flung himself on the divan with every appearance of exhaustion. "Sing to me, Mary," he implored.

"Why, Stefan," she asked, startled, "wasn't it a success? What's the matter?"

"Success!" he scoffed. "Oh, yes. They all gushed and gurgled and squeaked and squalled. Horrible! Sing, dearest; I must hear something beautiful."

Failing to extract more from him, she complied.

The next day brought a full account of his success from Constance, and glowing tributes from the papers. The head-lines ranged from "Suffragettes Unearth New Genius" to "Distinguished Exhibit at Home of Theodore M. Elliot." The verdict was unanimous. A new star had risen in the artistic firmament. One look at the headings, and Stefan dropped the papers in disgust, but Mary pored over them all, and found him quite willing to listen while she read eulogistic extracts aloud.

Thus started, the fuse of publicity burnt brightly. Constance's carefully planned follow-up articles appeared, and reporters besieged the Byrds' studio. Unfortunately for Mary, these gentry soon discovered that she was the Danaë's original, which fact created a mild succès de scandale. Personal paragraphs

appeared about her and her writing, and, greatly embarrassed, she disconnected the door-bell for over a week. But the picture was all the more talked about. In a week Constantine had it on exhibition; in three, he had sold it for five thousand dollars to a tobacco millionaire.

“Mary,” groaned Stefan when he heard the news, “we have given in to Mammon. We are capitalists.”

“Oh, dear, think of our beautiful picture going to some odious nouveau riche!” Mary sighed. But she was immeasurably relieved that Stefan's name was made, and that they were permanently lifted from the ranks of the needy.

That very day, as if to illustrate their change of status, Mrs. Corriani puffed up the stairs with the news that the flat immediately below them had been abandoned over night. The tenants, a dark couple of questionable habits and nationality, had omitted the formality of paying their rent—the flat was on the market. The outcome was that Stefan and Mary, keeping their studio as a workshop, overflowed into the flat beneath, and found themselves in possession of a bed and bathroom, a kitchen and maid's room, and a sitting room. These they determined to furnish gradually, and Mary looked forward to blissful mornings at antique stores and auctions. She had been brought up amidst the Chippendale, old oak, and brasses of a cathedral close, and new furniture was anathema to her. A telephone and a colored maid-servant were installed. Their picnicking days were over.



XIII

True to her word, Constance arranged a reception in the Byrds' honor, at which they were to meet Felicity Berber. The promise of this encounter reconciled Stefan to the affair, and he was moreover enthusiastically looking forward to Mary's appearance in her new gown. This had arrived, and lay swathed in tissue paper in its box. In view of their change of fortune they had, in paying the account of seventy-five dollars, concocted a little note to Miss Berber, hoping she would now reconsider her offer, and render them a bill for her design. This note, written and signed by Mary in her upright English hand, brought forth a characteristic reply. On black paper and in vermilion ink arrived two lines of what Mary at first took to be Egyptian hieroglyphics. Studied from different angles, these yielded at last a single sentence: "A gift is a gift, and repays itself." This was followed by a signature traveling perpendicularly down the page in Chinese fashion. It was outlined in an oblong of red ink, but was itself written in green, the capitals being supplied with tap-roots extending to the base of each name. Mary tossed the letter over to Stefan with a smile. He looked at it judicially.

"There's draughtsmanship in that," he said; "she might have made an etcher. It's drawing, but it's certainly not handwriting."

On the evening of the party Stefan insisted on helping Mary to dress. Together they opened the great green box and spread its contents on the bed. The Creator of Raiment had not done things by halves. In addition to the gown, she had supplied a wreath of pale white and gold metals, representing two ears of wheat arranged to meet in a point over the brow, and a pair of gilded shoes made on the sandal plan, with silver-white buckles. Pinned to the gown was a printed green slip, reading "No corsets, petticoats or jewelry may be worn with this garb."

The dress was of heavy gold tissue, magnificently draped in generous classic folds. It left the arms bare, the drapery being fastened on either shoulder with great brooches of white metal, reproduced, as Stefan at once recognized, from Greek models. Along all the edges of the drapery ran a border of ears of wheat, embroidered in deep gold and pale silver. Mary, who had hitherto only peeped at the gown, felt quite excited when she saw it flung across the bed.

"Oh, Stefan, I do think it will be becoming," she cried, her cheeks bright pink. She had never dreamed of owning such a dress.

He was enchanted. "It's a work of art. Very few women could wear it, but on you—! Well, it's worthy of you, Beautiful."

During the dressing he made her quite nervous by his exact attention to every detail. The arrangement of her hair and the precise position of the wreath had to be tried and tried again, but the result justified him.

"Olympian Deity," he cried, "I must kneel to you!" And so he did, gaily adoring, with a kiss for the hem of her robe. They started in the highest spirits, Stefan correct this time in an immaculate evening suit which Mary had persuaded him to order. As they prepared to enter the drawing room he whispered, "You'll be a sensation. I'm dying to see their faces."

"Don't make me nervous," she whispered back.

By nature entirely without self-consciousness, she had become very sensitive since the Danaë publicity. But her nervousness only heightened her color, and as with her beautiful walk she advanced into the room there was an audible gasp from every side. Constance pounced upon her.

"You perfectly superb creature! You ought to have clouds rolling under your feet. There, I can't express myself. Come and receive homage. Mr. Byrd, you're the luckiest man on earth—I hope you deserve it all—but then of course no man could. Mary, here are two friends of yours—Mr. Byrd, come and be presented to Felicity."

Farraday and McEwan had advanced toward them and immediately formed the nucleus of a group which gathered about Mary. Stefan followed his hostess across the room to a green sofa, on which, cigarette in hand, reclined Miss Berber, surrounded by a knot of interested admirers.

"Yes, Connie," that lady murmured, with the ghost of a smile, "I've met Mr. Byrd. He brought his wife to the Studio." She extended a languid hand to Stefan, who bowed over it.

"Ah! I might have known you had a hand in that effect," Constance exclaimed, looking across the room toward Mary.

"Of course you might," the other sighed, following her friend's eyes. "It's perfect, I think; don't you agree, Mr. Byrd?" and she actually rose from the sofa to obtain a better view.

"Absolutely," answered Stefan, riveted in his turn upon her.

Miss Berber was clad in black tulle, so transparent as barely to obscure her form. Sleeves she had none. A trifle of gauze traveled over one shoulder, leaving the other bare save for a supporting strap of tiny scarlet beads. Her triple skirt

was serrated like the petals of a black carnation, and outlined with the same minute beads. Her bodice could scarcely be said to exist, so deep was its V. From her ears long ornaments of jet depended, and a comb in scarlet bead-work ran wholly across one side of her head. A flower of the same hue and workmanship trembled from the point of her corsage. She wore no rings, but her nails were reddened, and her sleek black hair and scarlet lips completed the chromatic harmony. The whole effect was seductive, but so crisp as to escape vulgarity.

"I must paint you, Miss Berber," was Stefan's comment.

"All the artists say that." She waved a faint expostulation.

Her hands, he thought, had the whiteness and consistency of a camelia.

"All the artists are not I, however," he answered with a smiling shrug.

"Greek meets Greek," thought Constance, amused, turning away to other guests.

"I admit that." Miss Berber lit another cigarette. "I have seen your Danaë. The people who have painted me have been fools. Obvious—treating me like an advertisement for cold cream."

She breathed a sigh, and sank again to the sofa. Her lids drooped as if in weariness of such banalities. Stefan sat beside her, the manner of both eliminating the surrounding group.

"One must have subtlety, must one not?" she murmured.

How subtle she was, he thought; how mysterious, in spite of her obvious posing! He could not even tell whether she was interested in him.

"I shall paint you, Miss Berber," he said, watching her, "as a Nixie. Water creatures, you know, without souls."

"No soul?" she reflected, lingering on a puff of smoke. "How chic!"

Stefan was delighted. Hopefully, he broke into French. She replied with fluent ease, but with a strange, though charming, accent. The exotic French fitted her whole personality, he felt, as English could not do. He was pricked by curiosity as to her origin, and did not hesitate to ask it, but she gave her shadow of a smile, and waved her cigarette vaguely. "Quién sabe?" she shrugged.

"Do you know Spanish?" he asked in French, seeking a clue.

"Only what one picks up in California." He was no nearer a solution.

"Were you out there long?"

She looked at him vaguely. "I should like some coffee, please."

Defeated, he was obliged to fetch a cup. When he returned, it was to find her

talking monosyllabic English to a group of men.

Farraday and McEwan had temporarily resigned Mary to a stream of newcomers, and stood watching the scene from the inner drawing room.

“James,” said McEwan, “get on to the makeup of the crowd round our lady, and compare it with the specimens rubbering the little Berber.”

Farraday smiled in his grave, slow way.

“You're right, Mac, the substance and the shadow.”

Many of the women seated about the room were covertly staring at Felicity, but so far none had joined her group. This consisted, besides Stefan, of two callow and obviously enthralled youths, a heavy semi-bald man with paunched eyes and a gluttonous mouth, and a tall languid person wearing tufts of hair on unexpected parts of his face, and showing the hands of a musician.

Round Mary stood half a dozen women, their host, the kindly and practical Mr. Elliot, a white-haired man of distinguished bearing, and a gigantic young viking with tawny hair and beard and powerful hands.

“That's Gunther, an A1 sculptor,” said McEwan, indicating the viking, who was looking at Mary as his ancestors might have looked at a vision of Freia.

“They're well matched, eh, James?”

“As well as she could be,” the other answered gravely. McEwan looked at his friend. “Mon,” he said, relapsing to his native speech, “come and hae a drop o' the guid Scotch.”

Constance had determined that Felicity should dance, in spite of her well-known laziness. At this point she crossed the room to attack her, expecting a difficult task, but, to her surprise, Felicity hardly demurred. After a moment of sphinx-like communing, she dropped her cigarette and rose.

“Mr. Byrd is going to paint me as something without a soul—I think I will dance,” she cryptically vouchsafed.

“Shall I play?” offered Constance, delighted.

Miss Berber turned to the languid musician.

“Have you your ocarina, Marchmont?” she breathed.

“I always carry it, Felicity,” he replied, with a reproachful look, drawing from his pocket what appeared to be a somewhat contorted meerschaum pipe.

“Then no piano to-night, Connie. A little banal, the piano, perhaps.” Her hands waved vaguely.

A space was cleared; chairs were arranged.

Miss Berber vanished behind a portiere. The languid Marchmont draped himself in a corner, and put the fat little meerschaum to his lips. A clear, jocund sound, a mere thread of music, as from the pipe of some hidden faun, penetrated the room. The notes trembled, paused, and fell to the minor. Felicity, feet bare, toes touched with scarlet, wafted into the room. Her dancing was incredibly light; she looked like some exotic poppy swaying to an imperceptible breeze. The dance was languorously sad, palely gay, a thing half asleep, veiled. It seemed always about to break into fierce life, yet did not. The scent of mandragora hung over it—it was as if the dancer, drugged, were dreaming of the sunlight.

When, waving a negligent hand to the applause, Felicity passed Stefan at the end of her dance, he caught a murmured phrase from her.

“Not soulless, perhaps, but sleeping.” Whether she meant this as an explanation of her dance or of herself he was not sure.

Mary watched the dance with admiration, and wished to compare her impressions of it with her husband's. She tried to catch his eye across the room at the end, but he had drifted away toward the dining room. Momentarily disappointed, she turned to find Farraday at her elbow, and gladly let him lead her, also, in search of refreshments. There was a general movement in that direction, and the drawing room was almost empty as McEwan, purpose in his eye, strode across it to Constance. He spoke to her in an undertone.

“Sing? Does she? I had no idea! She never tells one such things,” his hostess replied. “Do you think she would? But she has no music. You could play for her? How splendid, Mr. McEwan. How perfectly lovely of you. I'll arrange it.” She hurried out, leaving McEwan smiling at nothing in visible contentment. In a few minutes she returned with Mary.

“Of course I will if you wish it,” the latter was saying, “but I've no music, and only know foolish little ballads.”

“Mr. McEwan says he can vamp them all, and it will be too delightful to have something from each of my women stars,” Constance urged. “Now I'll leave you two to arrange it, and in a few minutes I'll get every one back from the dining room,” she nodded, slipping away again.

“Cruel man, you've given me away,” Mary smiled.

“I always brag about my friends,” grinned McEwan. They went over to the piano.

“What price the Bard! Do you know this?” His fingers ran into the old air for “Sigh No More, Ladies.” She nodded.

“Yes, I like that.”

“And for a second,” he spun round on his stool, “what do you say to a duet?” His candid blue eyes twinkled at her.

“A duet!” she exclaimed in genuine surprise. “Do you sing, Mr. McEwan?”

“Once in a while,” and, soft pedal down, he played a few bars of Marzials’ “My True Love Hath My Heart,” humming the words in an easy barytone.

“Oh, what fun!” exclaimed Mary. “I love that.” They tried it over, below their breaths.

The room was filling again. People began to settle down expectantly; McEwan struck his opening chords.

Just as Mary’s first note sounded, Stefan and Felicity entered the room. He started in surprise; then Mary saw him smile delightedly, and they both settled themselves well in front.

“Men were deceivers ever,” sang Mary, with simple ease, and “Hey nonny, nonny.” The notes fell gaily; her lips and eyes smiled.

There was generous applause at the end of the little song. Then McEwan struck the first chords of the duet.

“My true love hath my heart,” Mary sang clearly, head up, eyes shining. “My true love hath my heart,” replied McEwan, in his cheery barytone.

“—And I have his,” Mary’s bell tones announced.

“—And I have his,” trolled McEwan.

“There never was a better bargain driven,” the notes came, confident and glad, from the golden figure with its clear-eyed, glowing face. They ended in a burst of almost defiant optimism.

Applause was hearty and prolonged. McEwan slipped from his stool and sought a cigarette in the adjoining room. There was a general congratulatory movement toward Mary, in which both Stefan and Felicity joined. Then people again began to break into groups. Felicity found her sofa, Mary a chair. McEwan discovered Farraday under the arch between the two drawing-rooms, and stood beside him to watch the crowd. Stefan had moved with Felicity toward her sofa, and, as she disposed herself, she seemed to be talking to him in French. McEwan and Farraday continued their survey. Mary was surrounded by people, but her eyes strayed across the room. Felicity appeared almost animated, but Stefan seemed inattentive; he fidgeted, and looked vague.

A moment more, and quite abruptly he crossed the room, and planted himself down beside Mary.

“Ah,” sighed McEwan, apparently à propos of nothing, and with a trace of Scotch, “James, I’ll now hae another whusky.”



PART III
THE NESTLING

I

Stefan's initial and astonishing success was not to be repeated that winter. The great Constantine, anxious to benefit by the flood tide of his client's popularity, had indeed called at the studio in search of more material, but after a careful survey, had decided against exhibiting "Tempest" and "Pursuit." Before these pictures he had stood wrapped in speculation for some time, pursing his lips and fingering the over-heavy seals of his fob. Mary had watched him eagerly, deeply curious as to the effect of the paintings. But Stefan had been careless to the point of rudeness; he had long since lost interest in his old work. When at last the swarthy little dealer, who was a Greek Jew, and had the keen, perceptions of both races, had shaken his head, Mary was not surprised, was indeed almost glad.

"Mr. Byrd," Constantine had pronounced, in his heavy, imperfect English, "I think we would make a bad mistake to exhibit these paintings now. Technically they are clever, oh, very clever indeed, but they would be unpopular; and this once," he smiled shrewdly, "the public would be right about it. Your Danaë was a big conception as well as fine painting; it had inspiration—feeling—" his thick but supple hands circled in emphasis—"we don't want to go back simply to cleverness. When you paint me something as big again as that one I exhibit it; otherwise," with a shrug, "I think we spoil our market."

After this visit Stefan, quite unperturbed, had turned the two fantasies to the wall.

"I dare say Constantine is right about them," he said; "they are rather crazy things, and anyhow, I'm sick of them."

Mary was quite relieved to have them hidden. The merman in particular had got upon her nerves of late.

As the winter advanced, the Byrds' circle of acquaintances grew, and many visitors dropped into the studio for tea. These showed much interest in Stefan's new picture, a large study of Mary in the guise of Demeter, for which she was posing seated, robed in her Berber gown. Miss Mason in particular was delighted with the painting, which she dubbed a "companion piece" to the Danaë. The story of Constantine's decision against the two salon canvases got about and, amusingly enough, heightened the Byrds' popularity. The Anglo-Saxon public is both to take its art neat, preferring it coated with a little sentiment. It now

became accepted that Stefan's genius was due to his wife, whose love had lighted the torch of inspiration.

“Ah, Mr. Byrd,” Miss Mason had summed up the popular view, in one of her rare romantic moments, “the love of a good woman—!” Stefan had looked completely vague at this remark, and Mary had burst out laughing.

“Why, Sparrow,” for so, to Miss Mason's delight, she had named her, “don't be Tennysonian, as Stefan would say. It was Stefan's power to feel love, and not mine to call it out, that painted the Danaë,” and she looked at him with proud tenderness.

But the Sparrow was unconvinced. “You can't tell me. If 'twas all in him, why didn't some other girl over in Paris call it out long ago?”

“Lots tried,” grinned Stefan, with his cheeky-boy expression.

“Ain't he terrible,” Miss Mason sighed, smiling. She adored Mary's husband, but consistently disapproved of him.

Try as she would, Mary failed to shake her friends' estimate of her share in the family success. It became the fashion to regard her as a muse, and she, who had felt oppressed by Stefan's lover-like deification, now found her friends, too, conspiring to place her on a pedestal. Essentially simple and modest, she suffered real discomfort from the cult of adoration that surrounded her. Coming from a British community which she felt had underestimated her, she now found herself made too much of. A smaller woman would have grown vain amid so much admiration; Mary only became inwardly more humble, while outwardly carrying her honors with laughing deprecation.

For some time after the night of Constance's reception, Stefan had shown every evidence of contentment, but as the winter dragged into a cold and slushy March he began to have recurrent moods of his restless irritability. By this time Mary was moving heavily; she could no longer keep brisk pace with him in his tramps up the Avenue, but walked more slowly and for shorter distances. She no longer sprang swiftly from her chair or ran to fetch him a needed tool; her every movement was matronly. But she was so well, so entirely normal, as practically to be unconscious of a change to which her husband was increasingly alive.

Another source of Stefan's dissatisfaction lay in the progress of his Demeter. This picture showed the Goddess enthroned under the shade of a tree, beyond which spread harvest fields in brilliant sunlight. At her feet a naked boy, brown from the sun, played with a pile of red and golden fruits. In the distance maids and youths were dancing. The Goddess sat back drowsily, her eyelids drooping, her hands and arms relaxed over her chair. She had called all this richness into

being, and now in the heat of the day she rested, brooding over the fecund earth. So far, the composition was masterly, but the tones lacked the necessary depth; they were vivid where they should have been warm, and he felt the deficiency without yet having been able to remedy it.

“Oh, damn!” said Stefan one morning, throwing down his brush. “This picture is architectural, absolutely. What possessed me to try such a conception? I can only do movement. I can't be static. Earth! I don't understand it—everything good I've done has been made of air and fire, or water.” He turned an irritable face to Mary.

“Why did you encourage me in this?”

She looked up in frank astonishment, about to reply, but he forestalled her.

“Oh, yes, I know I was pleased with the idea—it isn't your fault, of course, and yet—Oh, what's the use!” He slapped down his palette and made for the door. “I'm off to get some air,” he called.

Mary felt hurt and uneasy. The nameless doubts of the autumn again assailed her. What would be the end, she wondered, of her great adventure? The distant prospect vaguely troubled her, but she turned easily from it to the immediate future, which held a blaze of joy sufficient to obliterate all else.

The thought of her baby was to Mary like the opening of the gates of paradise to Christian the Pilgrim. Her heart shook with joy of it. She passed through her days now only half conscious of the world about her. She had, together with her joy, an extraordinary sense of physical well-being, of the actual value of the body. For the first time she became actively interested in her beauty. Even on her honeymoon she had never dressed to please her husband with the care she now gave to the donning of her loose pink and white negligées and the little boudoir caps she had bought to wear with them. That Stefan paid her fewer compliments, that he often failed to notice small additions to her wardrobe, affected her not at all. “Afterwards he will be pleased; afterwards he will love me more than ever,” she thought, but, even so, knew that it was not for him she was now fair, but for that other. She did not love Stefan less, but her love was to be made flesh, and it was that incarnation she now adored. If she had been given to self-analysis she might have asked what it boded that she had never—save for that one moment's adoration of his genius the day he completed the Danaë—felt for Stefan the abandonment of love she felt for his coming child. She might have wondered, but she did not, for she felt too intensely in these days to have much need of thought. She loved her husband—he was a great man—they were to have a child. The sense of those three facts made up her cosmos.

Farraday had asked her in vain on more than one occasion for another manuscript. The last time she shook her head, with one of her rare attempts at explanation, made less rarely to him than to her other friends.

“No, Mr. Farraday, I can't think about imaginary children just now. There's a spell over me—all the world waits, and I'm holding my breath. Do you see?”

He took her hand between both his.

“Yes, my dear child, I do,” he answered, his mouth twisting into its sad and gentle smile. He had come bringing a sheaf of spring flowers, narcissus, and golden daffodils, which she was holding in her lap. He thought as he said goodbye that she looked much more like Persephone than the Demeter of Stefan's picture.

In spite of her deep-seated emotion, Mary was gay and practical enough in these late winter days, with her small household tasks, her occasional shopping, and her sewing. This last had begun vaguely to irritate Stefan, so incessant was it.

“Mary, do put down that sewing,” he would exclaim; or “Don't sing the song of the shirt any more to-day;” and she would laughingly fold her work, only to take it up instinctively again a few minutes later.

One evening he came upon her bending over a table in their sitting room, tracing a fine design on cambric with a pencil. Something in her pose and figure opened a forgotten door of memory; he watched her puzzled for a moment, then with a sudden exclamation ran upstairs, and returned with a pad of paper and a box of water-color paints. He was visibly excited. “Here, Mary,” he said, thrusting a brush into her hand and clearing a place on the table. “Do something for me. Make a drawing on this pad, anything you like, whatever first comes into your head.” His tone was eagerly importunate. She looked up in surprise, “Why, you funny boy! What shall I draw?”

“That's just it—I don't know. Please draw whatever you want to—it doesn't matter how badly—just draw something.”

Mystified, but acquiescent, Mary considered for a moment, looking from paper to brush, while Stefan watched eagerly.

“Can't I use a pencil?” she asked.

“No, a brush, please, I'll explain afterwards.”

“Very well.” She attacked the brown paint, then the red, then mixed some green. In a few minutes the paper showed a wobbly little house with a red roof and a smudged foreground of green grass with the suggestion of a shade-giving

tree.

“There,” she laughed, handing him the pad, “I’m afraid I shall never be an artist,” and she looked up.

His face had dropped. He was staring at the drawing with an expression of almost comic disappointment.

“Why, Stefan,” she laughed, rather uncomfortably, “you didn’t think I could draw, did you?”

“No, no, it isn’t that, Mary. It’s just—the house. I thought you might—perhaps draw birds—or flowers.”

“Birds?—or flowers?” She was at a loss.

“It doesn’t matter; just an idea.”

He crumpled up the little house, and closed the paintbox. “I’m going out for awhile; good-bye, dearest”; and, with a kiss, he left the room.

Mary sat still, too surprised for remonstrance, and in a moment heard the bang of the flat door.

“Birds, or flowers?” Suddenly she remembered something Stefan had told her, on the night of their engagement, about his mother. So that was it. Tears came to her eyes. Rather lonely, she went to bed.

Meanwhile Stefan, his head bare in the cold wind, was speeding up the Avenue on the top of an omnibus.

“Houses are cages,” he said to himself. For some reason, he felt hideously depressed.



“I called on Miss Berber last evening,” Stefan announced casually at breakfast the next morning.

“Did you?” replied Mary, surprised, putting down her cup. “Well, did you have a nice time?”

“It was mildly amusing,” he said, opening the newspaper. The subject dropped.



II

Mary, who had lived all her life in a small town within sight of the open fields, was beginning to feel the confinement of city life. Even during her year in London she had joined other girls in weekend bicycling excursions out of town, or tubed to Golder's Green or Shepherd's Bush in search of country walks. Now that the late snows of March had cleared away, she began eagerly to watch for swelling buds in the Square, and was dismayed when Stefan told her that the spring, in this part of America, was barely perceptible before May.

"That's the first objection I've found to your country, Stefan," she said.

He was scowling moodily out of the window. "The first? I see nothing but objections."

"Oh, come!" she smiled at him; "it hasn't been so bad, has it?"

"Better than I had expected," he conceded. "But it will soon be April, and I remember the leaves in the Luxembourg for so many Aprils back."

She came and put her arm through his. "Do you want to go, dear?"

"Oh, hang it all, Mary, you don't suppose I want to leave you?" he answered brusquely, releasing his arm. "I want my own place, that's all."

She had, in her quieter way, become just as homesick for England, though sharing none of his dislike of her adopted land.

"Well, shall we both go?" she suggested.

He laughed shortly. "Don't be absurd, dearest—what would your doctor say to such a notion? No, we've got to stick it out," and he ruffled his hair impatiently.

With a suppressed sigh Mary changed the subject. "By the by, I want you to meet Dr. Hillyard; I have asked her to tea this afternoon."

"Do you honestly mean it when you say she is not an elderly iron-sided with spectacles?"

"I honestly assure you she is young and pretty. Moreover, I forbid you to talk like an anti-suffragist," she laughed.

"Very well, then, I will be at home," with an answering grin.

And so he was, and on his best behavior, when the little doctor arrived an hour later. She had been found by the omniscient Miss Mason, and after several visits Mary had more than endorsed the Sparrow's enthusiastic praise.

When the slight, well-tailored little figure entered the room Stefan found it hard to believe that this fresh-faced girl was the physician, already a specialist in her line, to whom Mary's fate had been entrusted. For the first time he wondered if he should not have shared with Mary some responsibility for her arrangements. But as, with an unwonted sense of duty, he questioned the little doctor, his doubts vanished. Without a trace of the much hated professional manner she gave him glimpses of wide experience, and at one point mentioned an operation she had just performed—which he knew by hearsay as one of grave difficulty—with the same enthusiastic pleasure another young woman might have shown in the description of a successful bargain-hunt. She was to Stefan a new type, and he was delighted with her. Mary, watching him, thought with affectionate irony that had the little surgeon been reported plain of face he would have denied himself in advance both the duty and the pleasure of meeting her.

Over their tea, Dr. Hillyard made a suggestion.

“Where are you planning to spend the summer?” she asked.

Stefan looked surprised. “We thought we ought to be here, near you,” he answered.

“Oh, no,” the doctor shook her head; “young couples are always martyrizing themselves for these events. By May it will be warm, and Mrs. Byrd isn't acclimatized to our American summers. Find a nice place not too far from the city—say on Long Island—and I can run out whenever necessary. You both like the country, I imagine?”

Stefan was overjoyed. He jumped up.

“Dr. Hillyard, you've saved us. We thought we had to be prisoners, and I've been eating my heart out for France. The country will be a compromise.”

“Yes,” said the doctor, smiling a little, “Mrs. Byrd has been longing for England for a month or more.”

“I never said so!” and “She never told me!” exclaimed Mary and Stefan simultaneously.

“No, you didn't,” the little doctor nodded wisely at her patient, “but I know.”

Stefan immediately began to plan an expedition in search of the ideal spot, as unspoiled if possible as Shadeham, but much nearer town. All through dinner he discussed it, his spirits hugely improved, and immediately after rang up Constance Elliot for advice.

“Hold the line,” the lady's voice replied, “while I consult.” In a minute or two she returned.

“Mr. Farraday is dining with us, and I've asked him. He lives at Crab's Bay, you know.”

“No, I don't,” objected Stefan.

“Well, he does,” her voice laughed back. “He was born there. He says if you like he will come over and talk to you about it, and I, like a self-sacrificing hostess, am willing to let him.”

“Splendid idea,” said Stefan, “ask him to come right over. Mary,” he called, hanging up the receiver, “Constance is sending Farraday across to advise us.”

“Oh, dear,” said she; “sometimes I feel almost overwhelmed by all the favors we receive from our friends.”

“Fiddlesticks! They are paid by the pleasure of our society. You don't seem to realize that we are unusually interesting and attractive people,” laughed he with a flourish.

“Vain boy!”

“So I am, and vain of being vain. I believe in being as conceited as possible, conceited enough to make one's conceit good.”

She smiled indulgently, knowing that, as he was talking nonsense, he felt happy.

Farraday appeared in a few minutes, and they settled in a group round the fire with coffee and cigarettes. Stefan offered Mary one. She shook her head.

“I'm not smoking now, you know.”

“Did Dr. Hillyard say so?” he asked quickly.

“No, but—”

“Then don't be poky, dearest.” He lit the cigarette and held it out to her, but she waved it back.

“Don't tease, dear,” she murmured, noticing that Farraday was watching them. Stefan with a shrug retained the cigarette in his left hand, and smoked it ostentatiously for some minutes, alternately with his own. Mary, hoping he was not going to be naughty, embarked on the Long Island topic.

“We want to be within an hour of the city,” she explained, “but in pretty country. We want to keep house, but not to pay too much. We should like to be near the sea. Does that sound wildly impossible?”

Farraday fingered his cigarette reflectively.

“I rather think,” he said at last, “that my neighborhood most nearly meets the requirements. I have several hundred acres at Crab's Bay, which belonged to my

father, running from the shore halfway to the railroad station. The village itself is growing suburban, but the properties beyond mine are all large, and keep the country open. We are only an hour from the city—hardly more, by automobile.”

“Are there many tin cans?” enquired Stefan, flippantly. “In Michigan I remember them as the chief suburban decoration.”

“Yes?” said Farraday, in his invariably courteous tone, “I’ve never been there. It is a long way from New York.”

“Touché,” cried Stefan, grinning. “But you would think pessimism justified if you’d ever had my experience of rural life.”

“Was your father really American?” enquired his guest with apparent irrelevance.

“Yes, and a minister.”

“Oh, a minister. I see,” the other replied, quietly.

“Explains it, does it?” beamed Stefan, who was nothing if not quick. They all laughed, and the little duel was ended. Mary took up the broken discussion.

“Is there the slightest chance of our finding anything reasonably cheap in such a neighborhood?” she asked.

“I was just coming to that,” said Farraday. “You would not care to be in the village, and any houses that might be for rent there would be expensive, I’m afraid. But it so happens there is a cottage on the edge of my property where my father’s old farmer used to live. After his death I put a little furniture in the place, and have occasionally used it. But it is entirely unnecessary to me, and you are welcome to it for the summer if it would suit you. The rent would be nominal. I don’t regard it commercially, it’s too near my own place.”

Mary flushed. “It’s most awfully good of you,” she said, “but I don’t know if we ought to accept. I’m afraid you may be making it convenient out of kindness.”

“Mary, how British!” Stefan interrupted. He had taken lately so to labeling her small conventionalities. “Why accuse Mr. Farraday of altruistic insincerity? I think his description sounds delightful. Let’s go tomorrow and see the cottage.”

“If you will wait till Sunday,” Farraday smiled, “I shall be delighted to drive you out. It might be easier for Mrs. Byrd.”

Mary again demurred on the score of giving unnecessary trouble, but Stefan overrode her, and Farraday was obviously pleased with the plan. It was arranged that he should call for them in his car the following Sunday, and that they should lunch with him and his mother. When he had left Stefan performed a little pas

seul around the room.

“Tra-la-la!” he sang; “birds, Mary, trees, water. No more chimney pots, no more walking up and down that tunnel of an avenue. See what it is to have admiring friends.”

Mary flushed again. “Why will you spoil everything by putting it like that?”

He stopped and patted her cheek teasingly.

“It's me they admire, Mary, the great artist, creator of the famous Danaë,” and he skipped again, impishly.

Mary was obliged to laugh. “You exasperating creature!” she said, and went to bed, while he ran up to the studio to pull out the folding easel and sketching-box of his old Brittany days.



III

When on the following Sunday morning Farraday drove up to the house, Mary was delighted to find Constance Elliot in the tonneau.

"Theodore has begun golfing again, now that the snow has gone," she greeted her, "so that I am a grass widow on holidays as well as all the week."

"Why don't you learn to play, too?" Mary asked, as they settled themselves, Stefan sitting in front with Farraday, who was driving.

"Oh, for your English feet, my dear!" sighed Constance. "They are bigger than mine—I dare say so, as I wear fours—but you can walk on them. I was brought up to be vain of my extremities, and have worn two-inch heels too long to be good for more than a mile. The links would kill me. Besides," she sighed again prettily, "dear Theodore is so much happier without me."

"How can you, Constance!" objected Mary.

"Yes, my dear," went on the other, her beautiful little hands, which she seldom gloved, playing with the inevitable string of jade, "the result of modern specialization. Theodore is a darling, and in theory a Suffragist, but he has practised the matrimonial division of labor so long that he does not know what to do with the woman out of the home."

"This is Queensborough Bridge," she pointed out in a few minutes, as they sped up a huge iron-braced incline. "It looks like eight pepper-castors on a grid, surmounted by bayonets, but it is very convenient."

Mary laughed. Constance's flow of small talk always put her in good spirits. She looked about her with interest as the car emerged from the bridge into a strange waste land of automobile factories, new stone-faced business buildings, and tumbledown wooden cottages. The houses, in their disarray, lay as if cast like seeds from some titanic hand, to fall, wither or sprout as they listed, regardless of plan. The bridge seemed to divide a settled civilization from pioneer country, and as they left the factories behind and emerged into fields dotted with advertisements and wooden shacks Mary was reminded of stories she had read of the far West, or of Australia. Stefan leant back from the front seat, and waved at the view.

"Behold the tin can," he cried, "emblem of American civilization!" She saw that he was right; the fields on either side were dotted with tins, bottles, and

other husks of dinners past and gone. Gradually, however, this stage was left behind: they began to pass through villages of pleasant wooden houses painted white or cream, with green shutters, or groups of red-tiled stucco dwellings surrounded by gardens in the English manner. Soon these, too, were left, and real country appeared, prettily wooded, in which low-roofed homesteads clung timidly to the roadside as if in search of company.

“What dear little houses!” Mary exclaimed.

“Yes,” said Constance, “that is the Long Island farmhouse type, as good architecturally as anything America has produced, but abandoned in favor of Oriental bungalows, Italian palaces and French châteaux.”

“I should adore a little house like one of those.”

“Wait till you see Mr. Farraday's cottage; it's a lamb, and his home like it, only bigger. What can one call an augmented lamb? I can only think of sheep, which doesn't sound well.”

“I'm afraid we should say it was 'twee' in England,” Mary smiled, “which sounds worse.”

“Yes, I'd rather my house were a sheep than a 'twee,' because I do at least know that a sheep is useful, and I'm sure a 'twee' can't be.”

“It's not a noun, Constance, but an adjective, meaning sweet,” translated Mary, laughing. She loved Constance's nonsense because it was never more than that. Stefan's absurdities were always personal and, often, not without a hidden sting.

“Well,” Constance went on, “you must be particularly 'twee' then, to James' mother, who is a Quaker from Philadelphia, and an American gentlewoman of the old school. His father was a New Englander, and took his pleasures sadly, as I tell James he does; but his mother is as warm as a dear little toast, and as pleasant—well—as the dinner bell.”

“What culinary similes, Constance!”

“My dear, from sheep to mutton is only a step, and I'm so hungry I can think only in terms of a menu. And that,” she prattled on, “reminds me of Mr. McEwan, whose face is the shape of a mutton chop. He is sure to be there, for he spends half his time with James. Do you like him?”

“Yes, I do,” said Mary; “increasingly.”

“He's one of the best of souls. Have you heard his story?”

“No, has he one?”

“Indeed, yes,” replied Constance. “The poor creature, who, by the way, adores you, is a victim of Quixotism. When he first came to New York he married a

young girl who lived in his boarding-house and was in trouble by another man. Mac found her trying to commit suicide, and, as the other man had disappeared, married her to keep her from it. She was pretty, I believe, and I think he was fond of her because of her terrible helplessness. The first baby died, luckily, but when his own was born a year or two later the poor girl was desperately ill, and lost most of what little mind she possessed. She developed two manias—the common spendthrift one, and the conviction that he was trying to divorce her. That was ten years ago. He has to keep her at sanitariums with a companion to check her extravagance, and he pays her weekly visits to reassure her as to the divorce. She costs him nearly all he makes, in doctors' bills and so forth—he never spends a penny on himself, except for a cheap trip to Scotland once a year. Yet, with it all, he is one of the most cheerful souls alive.”

“Poor fellow!” said Mary. “What about the child?”

“He's alive, but she takes very little notice of him. He spends most of his time with Mrs. Farraday, who is a saint. James, poor man, adores children, and is glad to have him.”

“Why hasn't Mr. Farraday married, I wonder?” Mary murmured under the covering purr of the car.

“Oh, what a waste,” groaned Constance. “An ideal husband thrown away! Nobody knows, my dear. I think he was hit very hard years ago, and never got over it. He won't say, but I tell him if I weren't ten years older, and Theodore in evidence, I should marry him myself out of hand.”

“I like him tremendously, but I don't think I should ever have felt attracted in that way,” said Mary, who was much too natural a woman not to be interested in matrimonial speculations.

“That's because you are two of a kind, simple and serious,” nodded Constance. “I could have adored him.”

They had been speeding along a country lane between tall oaks, and, breasting a hill, suddenly came upon the sea, half landlocked by curving bays and little promontories. Beyond these, on the horizon, the coast of Connecticut was softly visible. Mary breathed in great draughts of salt-tanged air.

“Oh, how good!” she exclaimed.

“Here we are,” cried Constance, as the machine swung past white posts into a wooded drive, which curved and curved again, losing and finding glimpses of the sea. No buds were out, but each twig bulged with nobbins of new life; and the ground, brown still, had the swept and garnished look which the March winds leave behind for the tempting of Spring. Persephone had not risen, but the

earth listened for her step, and the air held the high purified quality that presages her coming.

“Lovely, lovely,” breathed Mary, her eyes and cheeks glowing.

The car stopped under a porte cochère, before a long brown house of heavy clapboards, with shingled roof and green blinds. Farraday jumped down and helped Mary out, and the front door opened to reveal the shining grin of McEwan, poised above the gray head of a little lady who advanced with outstretched hand to greet them.

“My mother—Mrs. Byrd,” Farraday introduced.

“I am very pleased to meet thee. My son has told me so much about thee and thy husband. Thee must make thyself at home here,” beamed the little lady, with one of the most engaging smiles Mary had ever beheld.

Stefan was introduced in his turn, and made his best continental bow. He liked old ladies, who almost invariably adored him. McEwan greeted him with a “Hello,” and shook hands warmly with the two women. They all moved into the hall, Mary under the wing of Mrs. Farraday, who presently took her upstairs to a bedroom.

“Thee must rest here before dinner,” said she, smoothing with a tiny hand the crocheted bedspread. “Ring this bell if there is anything thee wants. Shall I send Mr. Byrd up to thee?”

“Indeed, I'm not a bit tired,” said Mary, who had never felt better.

“All the same I would rest a little if I were thee,” Mrs. Farraday nodded wisely. Mary was fascinated by her grammar, never having met a Quaker before. The little lady, who barely reached her guest's shoulder, had such an air of mingled sweetness and dignity as to make Mary feel she must instinctively yield to her slightest wish. Obediently she lay down, and Mrs. Farraday covered her feet.

Mary noticed her fine white skin, soft as a baby's, the thousand tiny lines round her gentle eyes, her simple dress of brown silk with a cameo at the neck, her little, blue-veined hands. No wonder the son of such a woman impressed one with his extraordinary kindness.

The little lady slipped away, and Mary, feeling unexpected pleasure in the quiet room and the soft bed, closed her eyes gratefully.

At luncheon, or rather dinner, for it was obvious that Mrs. Farraday kept to the old custom of Sunday meals, a silent, shock-headed boy of about ten appeared, whom McEwan with touching pride introduced as his son. He was dressed in a

kilt and small deerskin sporran, with the regulation heavy stockings, tweed jacket and Eton collar.

“For Sundays only—we have to be Yankees on school days, eh, Jamie?” explained his father. The boy grinned in speechless assent, instantly looking a duplicate of McEwan.

Mary's heart warmed to him at once, he was so shy and clumsy; but Stefan, who detested the mere suspicion of loutishness, favored him with an absent-minded stare. Mary, who sat on Farraday's right, had the boy next her, with his father beyond, Stefan being between Mrs. Farraday and Constance. The meal was served by a gray-haired negro, of manners so perfect as to suggest the ideal southern servant, already familiar to Mary in American fiction. As if in answer to a cue, Mrs. Farraday explained across the table that Moses and his wife had come from Philadelphia with her on her marriage, and had been born in the South before the war. Mary's literary sense of fitness was completely satisfied by this remark, which was received by Moses with a smile of gentle pride.

“James,” said Constance, “I never get tired of your mother's house; it is so wonderful to have not one thing out of key.”

Farraday smiled. “Bless you, she wouldn't change a footstool. It is all just as when she married, and much of it, at that, belonged to her mother.”

This explained what, with Mary's keen eye for interiors, had puzzled her when they first arrived. She had expected to see more of the perfect taste and knowledge displayed in Farraday's office, instead of which the house, though dignified and hospitable, lacked all traces of the connoisseur. She noticed in particular the complete absence of any color sense. All the woodwork was varnished brown, the hangings were of dull brown velvet or dark tapestry, the carpets toneless. Her bedroom had been hung with white dimity, edged with crochet-work, but the furniture was of somber cherry, and the chintz of the couch-cover brown with yellow flowers. The library, into which she looked from where she sat, was furnished with high glass-doored bookcases, turned walnut tables, and stuffed chairs and couches with carved walnut rims. Down each window the shade was lowered half way, and the light was further obscured by lace curtains and heavy draperies of plain velvet. The pictures were mostly family portraits, with a few landscapes of doubtful merit. There were no flowers anywhere, except one small vase of daffodils upon the dinner table. According to all modern canons the house should have been hideous; but it was not. It held garnered with loving faith the memories of another day, as a bowl of potpourri still holds the sun of long dead summers. It fitted absolutely the quiet kindness, the faded face and soft brown dress of its mistress. It was keyed to her, as

Constance had understood, to the last detail.

“Yes,” said Farraday, smiling down the table at his mother, “she could hardly bring herself to let me build my picture gallery on the end of the house—nothing but Christian charity enabled her to yield.”

The old lady smiled back at her tall son almost like a sweetheart. “He humors me,” she said; “he knows I’m a foolish old woman who love, my nest as it was first prepared for me.”

“Oh, I can so well understand that,” said Mary.

“Do you mean to say, Mrs. Farraday,” interposed Stefan, “that you have lived in this one house, without changing it, all your married life?”

She turned to him in simple surprise. “Why, of course; my husband chose it for me.”

“Marvelous!” said Stefan, who felt that one week of those brown hangings would drive him to suicide.

“Nix on the home-sweet-home business for yours, eh, Byrd?” threw in McEwan with his glint of a twinkle.

“Boy,” interposed their little hostess, “why will thee always use such shocking slang? How can I teach Jamie English with his father’s example before him?” She shook a tiny finger at the offender.

“Ma’am, if I didn’t sling the lingo, begging your pardon, in my office, they would think I was a highbrow, and then—good night Mac!”

“Don’t believe him, Mother,” said Farraday. “It isn’t policy, but affection. He loves the magazine crowd, and likes to do as it does. Besides,” he smiled, “he’s a linguistic specialist.”

“You think slang is an indication of local patriotism?” asked Mary.

“Certainly,” said Farraday. “If we love a place we adopt its customs.”

“That’s quite true,” Stefan agreed. “In Paris I used the worst argot of the quarter, but I’ve always spoken straightforward English because the only slang I knew in my own tongue reminded me of a place I loathed.”

“Stefan used to be dreadfully unpatriotic, Mrs. Farraday,” explained Mary, “but he is outgrowing it.”

“Am I?” Stefan asked rather pointedly.

“Art,” said McEwan grandly, “is international; Byrd belongs to the world.” He raised his glass of lemonade, and ostentatiously drank Stefan’s health. The others laughed at him, and the conversation veered. Mary absorbed herself in trying to

draw out the bashful Jamie, and Stefan listened while his hostess talked on her favorite theme, that of her son, James Farraday.

They had coffee in the picture gallery, a beautiful room which Farraday had extended beyond the drawing-room, and furnished with perfect examples of the best Colonial period. It was hung almost entirely with the work of Americans, in particular landscapes by Inness, Homer Martin, and George Munn, while over the fireplace was a fine mother and child by Mary Cassatt. For the first time since their arrival Stefan showed real interest, and leaving the others, wandered round the room critically absorbing each painting.

“Well, Farraday,” he said at the end of his tour, “I must say you have the best of judgment. I should have been mighty glad to paint one or two of those myself.” His tone indicated that more could not be said.

Meanwhile, Mary could hardly wait for the real object of their expedition, the little house. When at last the car was announced, Mrs. Farraday's bonnet and cloak brought by a maid, and everybody, Jamie included, fitted into the machine, Mary felt her heart beating with excitement. Were they going to have a real little house for their baby? Was it to be born out here by the sea, instead of in the dusty, overcrowded city? She strained her eyes down the road. “It's only half a mile,” called Farraday from the wheel, “and a mile and a half from the station.” They swung down a hill, up again, round a bend, and there was a grassy plateau overlooking the water, backed by a tree-clad slope. Nestling under the trees, but facing the bay, was just such a little house as Mary had admired along the road, low and snug, shingled on walls and roof, painted white, with green shutters and a little columned porch at the front door. A small barn stood near; a little hedge divided house from lane; evidences of a flower garden showed under the windows. “Oh, what a duck!” Mary exclaimed. “Oh, Stefan!” She could almost have wept.

Farraday helped her down.

“Mrs. Byrd,” said he with his most kindly smile, “here is the key. Would you like to unlock the door yourself?”

She blushed with pleasure. “Oh, yes!” she cried, and turned instinctively to look for Stefan. He was standing at the plateau's edge, scrutinizing the view. She called, but he did not hear. Then she took the key and, hurrying up the little walk, entered the house alone.

A moment later Stefan, hailed stentoriously by McEwan, followed her.

She was standing in a long sitting-room, low-ceilinged and white-walled, with window-seats, geraniums on the sills, brass andirons on the hearth, an eight-day

clock, a small old fashioned piano, an oak desk, a chintz-covered grandmother's chair, a gate-legged table, and a braided rag hearth-rug. Her hands were clasped, her eyes shining.

"Oh, Stefan!" she exclaimed as she heard his step. "Isn't it a darling? Wouldn't it be simply ideal for us?"

"It seems just right, and the view is splendid. There's a good deal that's paintable here."

"Is there? I'm so glad. That makes it perfect. Look at the furniture, Stefan, every bit right."

"And the moldings," he added. "All handcut, do you see? The whole place is actually old. What a lark!" He appeared almost as pleased as she.

"Here come the others. Let's go upstairs, dearest," she whispered.

There were four bedrooms, and a bathroom. The main room had a four-post bed, and opening out of it was a smaller room, almost empty. In this Mary stood for some minutes, measuring with her eye the height of the window from the floor, mentally placing certain small furnishings. "It would be ideal, simply ideal," she repeated to herself. Stefan was looking out of the window, again absorbed in the view. She would have liked so well to share with him her tenderness over the little room, but he was all unmindful of its meaning to her, and, as always, his heedlessness made expression hard for her. She was still communing with the future when he turned from the window.

"Come along, Mary, let's go downstairs again."

They found the others waiting in the sitting-room, and Farraday detached Stefan to show him a couple of old prints, while Mrs. Farraday led Constance and Mary to an exploration of the kitchen. Chancing to look back from the hall, Mary saw that McEwan had seated himself in the grandmother's chair, and was holding the heavy shy Jamie at his knee, one arm thrown round him. The boy's eyes were fixed in dumb devotion on his father's face.

"The two poor lonely things," she thought.

The little kitchen was spotless, tiled shoulder-high, and painted blue above. Against one wall a row of copper saucepans grinned their fat content, echoed by the pale shine of an opposing row of aluminum. Snowy larder shelves showed through one little door; through another, laundry tubs were visible. There was a modern coal stove, with a boiler. The quarters were small, but perfect to the last detail. Mrs. Farraday's little face fairly beamed with pride as they looked about them.

“He did it all, bought every pot and pan, arranged each detail. There were no modern conveniences until old Cotter died—he would not let James put them in. My boy loves this cottage; he sometimes spends several days here all alone, when he is very tired. He doesn't even like me to send Moses down, but of course I won't hear of that.” She shook her head with smiling finality. There were some things, her manner suggested, that little boys could not be allowed.

“But, Mrs. Farraday,” Mary exclaimed, “how can we possibly take the house from him if he uses it?”

“My dear,” the little lady's hand lighted on Mary's arm, “when thee knows my James better, thee will know that his happiness lies in helping his friends find theirs. He would be deeply disappointed if thee did not take it,” and her hand squeezed Mary's reassuringly.

“We are too wonderfully lucky—I don't know how to express my gratitude,” Mary answered.

“I think the good Lord sends us what we deserve, my dear, whether of good or ill,” the little lady replied, smiling wisely.

Constance sighed contentedly. “Oh, Mrs. Farraday, you are so good for us all. I'm a modern backslider, and hardly ever go to church, but you always make me feel as if I had just been.”

“Backslider, Constance? 'Thy own works praise thee, and thy children rise up and call thee blessed—thy husband also,’” quoted their hostess.

“Well, I don't know if my boys and Theodore call me blessed, but I hope the Suffragists will one day. Goodness knows I work hard enough for them.”

“I've believed in suffrage all my life, like all Friends,” Mrs. Farraday answered, “but where thee has worked I have only prayed for it.”

“If prayers are heard, I am sure yours should count more than my work, dear lady,” said Constance, affectionately pressing the other's hand.

The little Quaker's eyes were bright as she looked at her friend.

“Ah, my dear, thee is too generous to an old woman.”

Mary loved this little dialogue, “What dears all my new friends are,” she thought; “how truly good.” All the world seemed full of love to her in these days; her heart blossomed out to these kind people; she folded them in the arms of her spirit. All about, in nature and in human kind, she felt the spring burgeoning, and within herself she felt it most of all. But of this Mary could express nothing, save through her face—she had never looked more beautiful.

Coming into the dining room she found Farraday watching her. He seemed

tired. She put out her hand.

“May we really have it? You are sure?”

“You like it?” he smiled, holding the hand.

She flushed with the effort to express herself. “I adore it. I can't thank you.”

“Please don't,” he answered. “You don't know what pleasure this gives me. Come as soon as you can; everything is ready for you.”

“And about the rent?” she asked, hating to speak of money, but knowing Stefan would forget.

“Dear Mrs. Byrd, I had so much rather lend it, but I know you wouldn't like that. Pay me what you paid for your first home in New York.”

“Oh, but that would be absurd,” she demurred.

“Make that concession to my pride in our friendship,” he smiled back.

She saw that she could not refuse without ungraciousness. Stefan had disappeared, but now came quickly in from the kitchen door.

“Farraday,” he called, “I've been looking at the barn; you don't use it, I see. If we come, should you mind my having a north light cut in it? With that it would make an ideal workshop.”

“I should be delighted,” the other answered; “it's a good idea and will make the place more valuable. I had the barn cleaned out thinking some one might like it for a garage.”

“We shan't run to such an extravagance yet awhile,” laughed Mary.

“A bicycle for me and the station hack for Mary,” Stefan summed up. “I suppose there is such a thing at Crab's Bay?”

“She won't have to walk,” Farraday answered.

Started on practical issues, Mary's mind had flown to the need of a telephone to link them to her doctor. “May we install a 'phone?” she asked. “I never lived with one till two months ago, but already it is a confirmed vice with me.”

“Mayn't I have it put in for you—there should be one here,” said he.

“Oh, no, please!”

“At least let me arrange for it,” he urged.

“Now, son, thee must not keep Mrs. Byrd out too late. Get her home before sundown,” Mrs. Farraday's voice admonished. Obediently, every one moved toward the hall. At a word from McEwan, the mute Jamie ran to open the tonneau door. Farraday stopped to lock the kitchen entrance and found McEwan on the little porch as he emerged, while the others were busy settling themselves

in the car. As Farraday turned the heavy front door lock, his friend's hand fell on his shoulder.

“Ought ye to do it, James?” McEwan asked quietly.

Farraday raised his eyes, and looked steadily at the other, with his slow smile.

“Yes, Mac, it's a good thing to do. In any case, I shouldn't have been likely to marry, you know.” The two friends took their places in the car.



IV

After much consideration from Mary, the Byrds decided to give up their recently acquired flat, but to keep the old studio. She felt they should not attempt to carry three rents through the summer, but, on the other hand, Stefan was still working at his Demeter, using an Italian model for the boy's figure, and could not finish it conveniently elsewhere. Then, too, he expressed a wish for a pied-à-terre in the city, and as Mary had very tender associations with the little studio she was glad to think of keeping it.

Stefan was working fitfully at this time. He would have spurts of energy followed by fits of depression and disgust with his work, during which he would leave the house and take long rides uptown on the tops of omnibuses. Mary could not see that these excursions in search of air calmed his nervousness, and she concluded that the spring fever was in his blood and that he needed a change of scene at least as much as she did.

About this time he sold his five remaining drawings of New York to the Pan-American Magazine, a progressive monthly. They gained considerable attention from the art world, and were seized upon by certain groups of radicals as a sermon on the capitalistic system. On the strength of them, Stefan was hailed as that rarest of all beings, a politically minded artist, and became popular in quarters from which his intolerance had hitherto barred him.

It entertained him hugely to be proclaimed as a champion of democracy, for he had made the drawings in impish hatred not of a class but of American civilization as a whole.

Their bank account, in spite of much heightened living expenses, remained substantial by reason of this new sale, but Stefan was as indifferent as ever to its control, and Mary's sense of caution was little diminished. Her growing comprehension of him warned her that their position was still insecure; he remained, for all his success, an unknown quantity as a producer. She wanted him to assume some interest in their affairs, and suggested separate bank accounts, but he begged off.

"Let me have a signature at the bank, so that I can cash checks for personal expenses, but don't ask me to keep accounts, or know how much we have," he said. "If you find I am spending too much at any time, just tell me, and I will stop."

Further than this she could not get him to discuss the matter, and saw that she must think out alone some method of bookkeeping which would be fair to them both, and would establish a record for future use. Ultimately she transferred her own money, less her private expenditures during the winter, to a separate account, to be used for all her personal expenses. The old account she put in both their names, and made out a monthly schedule for the household, beyond which she determined never to draw. Anything she could save from this amount she destined for a savings bank, but over and above it she felt that her husband's earnings were his, and that she could not in honor interfere with them. Mary was almost painfully conscientious, and this plan cost her many heart-searchings before it was complete.

After her baby was born she intended to continue her writing; she did not wish ever to draw on Stefan for her private purse. So far at least, she would live up to feminist principles.

There was much to be done before they could leave the city, and Mary had practically no assistance from Stefan in her arrangements. She would ask his advice about the packing or disposal of a piece of furniture, and he would make some suggestion, often impracticable; but on any further questioning he would run his hands through his hair, or thrust them into his pockets, looking either vague or nervous. "Why fuss about such things, dear?" or "Do just as you like," or "I'm sure I haven't a notion," were his most frequent answers. He developed a habit of leaving his work and following Mary restlessly from room to room as she packed or sorted, which she found rather wearing.

On one such occasion—it was the day before they were to leave—she was carrying a large pile of baby's clothes from her bedroom to a trunk in the sitting-room, while Stefan stood humped before the fireplace, smoking. As she passed him he frowned nervously.

"How heavily you tread, Mary," he jerked out. She stood stock-still and flushed painfully.

"I think, Stefan," she said, with the tears of feeling which came over-readily in these days welling to her eyes, "instead of saying that you might come and help me to carry these things."

He looked completely contrite. "I'm sorry, dearest, it was a silly thing to say. Forgive me," and he kissed her apologetically, taking the bundle from her. He offered to help several times that afternoon, but as he never knew where anything was to go, and fidgeted from foot to foot while he hung about her, she was obliged at last to plead release from his efforts.

“Stefan dear,” she said, giving him rather a harassed smile, “you evidently find this kind of thing a bore. Why don't you run out and leave me to get on quietly with it?”

“I know I've been rotten to you, and I thought you wanted me to help,” he explained, in a self-exculpatory tone.

She stroked his cheek maternally. “Run along, dearest. I can get on perfectly well alone.”

“You're a brick, Mary. I think I'll go. This kind of thing—” he flung his arm toward the disordered room—“is too utterly unharmonious.” And kissing her mechanically he hastened out.

That night for the first time in their marriage he did not return for dinner, but telephoned that he was spending the evening with friends. Mary, tired out with her packing, ate her meal alone and went to bed immediately afterwards. His absence produced in her a dull heartache, but she was too weary to ponder over his whereabouts.

Early next morning Mary telephoned Miss Mason. Stefan, who had come home late, was still asleep when the Sparrow arrived, and by the time he had had his breakfast the whole flat was in its final stage of disruption. A few pieces of furniture were to be sent to the cottage, a few more stored, and the studio was to be returned to its original omnibus status. Mrs. Corriani, priestess of family emergencies, had been summoned from the depths; the Sparrow had donned an apron, Mary a smock; Lily, the colored maid, was packing china into a barrel, surrounded by writhing seas of excelsior. For Stefan, the flat might as well have been given over to the Furies. He fetched his hat.

“Mary,” he said, “I'm not painting again until we have moved. Djinns, Afrits and Goddesses should be allowed to perform their spiritings unseen of mortals. I shall go and sit in the Metropolitan and contemplate Rodin's Penseur—he is so spacious.”

“Very well, dearest,” said Mary brightly. She had slept away her low spirits. “Don't forget Mr. Farraday is sending his car in for us at three o'clock.”

He looked nonplused. “You don't mean to say we are moving to-day?”

“Yes, you goose,” she laughed, “don't you remember?”

“I'm frightfully sorry, Mary, but I made an engagement for this evening, to go to the theatre. I knew you would not want to come,” he added.

Mary looked blank. “But, Stefan,” she exclaimed, “everything is arranged! We are dining with the Farradays. I told you several times we were moving on the

fourth. You make it so difficult, dear, by not taking any interest.” Her voice trembled. She had worked and planned for their flitting for a week past, was all eagerness to be gone, and now he, who had been equally keen, seemed utterly indifferent.

He fidgeted uncomfortably, looking contrite yet rebellious. Mary was at a loss. The Sparrow, however, promptly raised her crest and exhibited a claw.

“Land sakes, Mr. Byrd,” she piped, “you are a mighty fine artist, but that don't prevent your being a husband first these days! Men are all alike—” she turned to Mary—“always ready to skedaddle off when there's work to be done. Now, young man—” she pointed a mandatory finger—“you run and telephone your friends to call the party off.” Her voice shrilled, her beady eyes snapped; she looked exactly like one of her namesakes, ruffled and quarreling at the edge of its nest.

Stefan burst out laughing. “All right, Miss Sparrow, smooth your feathers. Mary, I'm a mud-headed idiot—I forgot the whole thing. Pay no attention to my vagaries, dearest, I'll be at the door at three.” He kissed her warmly, and went out humming, banging the door behind him.

“My father was the same, and my brothers,” the Sparrow philosophized. “Spring-cleaning and moving took every ounce of sense out of them.” Mary sighed. Her zest for the preparations had departed.

Presently, seeing her languor, Miss Mason insisted Mary should lie down and leave the remaining work to her. The only resting place left was the old studio, where their divan had been replaced. Thither Mary mounted, and lying amidst its dusty disarray, traced in memory the months she had spent there. It had been their first home. Here they had had their first quarrel and their first success, and here had come to her her annunciation. Though they were keeping the room, it would never hold the same meaning for her again, and though she already loved their new home, it hurt her at the last to bid their first good-bye. Perhaps it was a trick of fatigue, but as she lay there the conviction came to her that with to-day's change some part of the early glamour of marriage was to go, that not even the coming of her child could bring to life the memories this room contained. She longed for her husband, for his voice calling her the old, dear, foolish names. She felt alone, and fearful of the future.

“My grief,” exclaimed Miss Mason from the door an hour later. “I told you to go to sleep 'n here you are wide awake and crying!”

Mary smiled shamefacedly.

“I'm just tired, Sparrow, that's all, and have been indulging in the 'vapors.’”

She squeezed her friend's hand. "Let's have some lunch."

"It's all ready, and Lily with her hat 'n coat on. Come right downstairs—it's most two o'clock."

Mary jumped up, amazed at the time she had wasted. Her spell of depression was over, and she was her usual cheerful self when, at three o'clock, she heard Stefan's feet bounding up the stairs for the last time.

"Tra-la, Mary, the car is here!" he called. "Thank God we are getting out of this city! Good-by, Miss Sparrow, don't peck me, and come and see us at Crab's Bay. March, Lily. A riverderci, Signora Corriani. Come, dearest." He hustled them all out, seized two suitcases in one hand and Mary's elbow in the other, chattered his few words of Italian to the janitress, chaffed Miss Mason, and had them all laughing by the time they reached the street. He seemed in the highest spirits, his moods of the last weeks forgotten.

As the car started he kissed his fingers repeatedly to Miss Mason and waved his hat to the inevitable assemblage of small boys.

"The country, darling!" he cried, pressing Mary's hand under the rug. "Farewell to ugliness and squalor! How happy we are going to be!"

Mary's hand pressed his in reply.



V

It was late April. The wooded slopes behind "The Byrdsnest," as Mary had christened the cottage, were peppered with a pale film of green. The lawn before the house shone with new grass. Upon it, in the early morning, Mary watched beautiful birds of types unknown to her, searching for nest-making material. She admired the large, handsome robins, so serious and stately after the merry pertness of the English sort, but her favorites were the bluebirds, and another kind that looked like greenish canaries, of which she did not know the name. None of them, she thought, had such melodious song as at home in England, but their brilliant plumage was a constant delight to her.

Daffodils were springing up in the garden, crocuses were out, and the blue scylla. On the downward slope toward the bay the brown furry heads of ferns had begun to push stoutly from the earth. The spring was awake.

Stefan seemed thoroughly contented again. He had his north light in the barn, but seldom worked there, being absorbed in outdoor sketching. He was making many small studies of the trees still bare against the gleam of water, with a dust of green upon them. He could get a number of valuable notes here, he told Mary.

During their first two weeks in the country his restlessness had often recurred. He had gone back and forth to the city for work on his Demeter, and had even slept there on several occasions. But one morning he wakened Mary by coming in from an early ramble full of joy in the spring, and announcing that the big picture was now as good as he could make it, and that he was done with the town. He threw back the blinds and called to her to look at the day.

"It's vibrant, Mary; life is waking all about us." He turned to the bed.

"You look like a beautiful white rose, cool with the dew."

She blushed—he had forgotten lately his old habit of pretty speech-making. He came and sat on the bed's edge, holding her hand.

"I've had my restless devil with me of late, sweetheart," he said. "But now I feel renewed, and happy. I shan't want to leave you any more." He kissed her with a gravity at which she might have wondered had she been more thoroughly awake. His tone was that of a man who makes a promise to himself.

Since that morning he had been consistently cheerful and carefree, more attentive to Mary than for some time past, and pleased with all his surroundings.

She was overjoyed at the change, and for her own part never tired of working in the house and garden, striving to make more perfect the atmosphere of simple homeliness which Farraday had first imparted to them. Lily was fascinated by her kitchen and little white bedroom.

“This surely is a cute little house, yes, *ma'am*,” she would exclaim emphatically, with a grin.

Lily was a small, chocolate-colored negress, with a neat figure, and the ever ready smile which is God's own gift to the race. Mary, who hardly remembered having seen a negro till she came to America, had none of the color-prejudice which grows up in biracial communities. She found Lily civil, cheerful, and intelligent, and felt a sincere liking for her which the other reciprocated with a growing devotion.

Often in these days a passerby—had there been any—could have heard a threefold chorus rising about the cottage, a spring-song as unconscious as the birds'. From the kitchen Lily's voice rose in the endless refrain of a hymn; Mary's clear tones traveled down from the little room beside her own, where she was preparing a place for the expected one; and Stefan's whistle, or his snatches of French song, resounded from woods or barn. Youth and hope were in the house, youth was in the air and earth.

Farraday's gardens were the pride of the neighborhood, these and the library expressing him as the house did his mother. Several times he sent down an armful of flowers to the Byrdsnest, and, one Sunday morning, Mary had just finished arranging such a bunch in her vases when she heard the chug of an automobile in the lane. She looked out to see Constance, a veiled figure beside her, stopping a runabout at the gate. Delighted, she hastened to the door. Constance hailed her.

“Mary, behold the charioteer! Theodore has given me this machine for suffrage propaganda during the summer, and I achieved my driver's license yesterday. I'm so vain I'm going to make Felicity design me a gown with a peacock's tail that I can spread. I've brought her with me to show off too, and because she needed air. How are you, bless you? May we come in?”

Not waiting for an answer, she jumped down and hugged Mary, Miss Berber following in more leisurely fashion. Mary could not help wishing Constance had come alone, as she now felt a little self-conscious before strangers. However, she shook hands with Miss Berber, and led them both into the sitting-room.

“Simply delicious!” exclaimed Constance, glancing eagerly about her, “and how divinely healthy you look—like a transcendental dairy-maid! This place

was made for you, and how you've improved it. Look, Felicity, at her chintz, and her flowers, and her *cunning* pair of china shepherdesses!" She ran from one thing to another, ecstatically appreciative.

Mary had had no chance to speak yet, and, as Felicity was absorbed in the languid removal of a satin coat and incredible yards of apple green veiling, Constance held the floor.

"Look at her pair of love-birds sidling along the curtain pole, as tame as humans! Where did you find that wooden cage? And that white cotton dress? You smell of lavender and an ironing-board! Oh, dear," she began again, "driving is very wearing, and I should like a cocktail, but I must have milk. Milk, my dear Mary, is the only conceivable beverage in this house. Have you a cow? You ought to have a cow—a brindled cow—also a lamb; 'Mary had,' et cetera. My dear, stop me. Enthusiasm converts me into an 'agreeable rattle,' as they used to call our great-grandmothers."

"Subdue yourself with this," laughed Mary, holding out the desired glass of milk. "Miss Berber, can I get anything for you?"

Felicity by this time was unwrapped, and had disposed herself upon a window-seat, her back to the light.

"Wine or water, Mrs. Byrd; I do not drink milk," she breathed, lighting a cigarette.

"We have some Chianti; nothing else, I'm afraid," said Mary, and a glass of this the designer deigned to accept, together with a little yellow cake set with currants, and served upon a pewter plate.

"I see, Mrs. Byrd," Felicity murmured, as Constance in momentary silence sipped her milk, "that you comprehend the first law of decoration for woman—that her accessories must be a frame for her type. I—how should I appear in a room like this?" She gave a faint shrug. "At best, a false tone in a chromatic harmony. You are entirely in key."

Her eyelids drooped; she exhaled a long breath of smoke. "Very well thought out—unusually clever—for a layman," she uttered, and was still, with the suggestion of a sibyl whose oracle has ceased to speak.

Mary tried not to find her manner irritating, but could not wholly dispel the impression that Miss Berber habitually patronized her.

She laughed pleasantly.

"I'm afraid I can't claim to have been guided by any subtle theories—I have merely collected together the kind of things I am fond of."

“Mary decorates with her heart, Felicity, you with your head,” said Constance, setting down her empty tumbler.

“I’m afraid I should find the heart too erratic a guide to art. Knowledge, Mrs. Byrd, knowledge must supplement feeling,” said Felicity, with a gesture of finality.

“Really!” answered Mary, falling back upon her most correct English manner. There was nothing else to say. “She is either cheeky, or a bromide,” she thought.

“Felicity,” exclaimed Constance, “don’t adopt your professional manner; you can’t take us in. You know you are an outrageous humbug.”

“Dear Connie,” replied the other with the ghost of a smile, “you are always so amusing, and so much more wide awake in the morning than I am.”

Conversation languished for a minute, Constance having embarked on a cake. For some reason which she could not analyze, Mary felt in no great hurry to call Stefan from the barn, should he be there.

Felicity rose. “May we not see your garden, Mrs. Byrd?”

“Certainly,” said Mary, and led the way to the door. Felicity slipped out first, and wandered with her delicate step a little down the path.

“Isn’t it darling!” exclaimed Constance from the porch, surveying the flower-strewn grass, the feathery trees, and the pale gleam of the water. Mary began to show her some recent plantings, in particular a rose-bed which was her last addition to the garden.

“I see you have a barn,” said Felicity, flitting back to them with a hint of animation. “Is it picturesque inside? Would it lend itself to treatment?” She wandered toward it, and there was nothing for the others to do but follow.

“Oh, yes,” explained Mary, “my husband has converted it into a studio. He may be working there now—I had been meaning to call him.”

She felt a trifle uncomfortable, almost as if she had put herself in the wrong.

“Coo-oo, Stefan,” she called as they neared the barn, Felicity still flitting ahead. The door swung open, and there stood Stefan, palette in hand, screwing up his eyes in the sun.

As they lit on his approaching visitor an expression first of astonishment, and then of something very like displeasure, crossed his face. At sight of it, Mary’s spirits subconsciously responded by a distinct upward lift. Stefan waved his brush without shaking hands, and then, seeing Constance, broke into a smile.

“How delightful, Mrs. Elliot! How did you come? By auto? And you drove Miss Berber? We are honored. You are our first visitors except the Farradays.

Come and see my studio.”

They trooped into the quaint little barn, which appeared to wear its big north light rather primly, as a girl her first low-necked gown. It was unfurnished, save for a table and easel, several canvases, and an old arm-chair. Felicity glanced at the sketches.

“In pastoral mood again,” she commented, with what might have been the faintest note of sarcasm. Stefan's eyebrows twitched nervously.

“There's nothing to see in here-these are the merest sketches,” he said abruptly. “Come along, Mrs. Elliot, I've been working since before breakfast; let's say good-morning to the flowers.” And with his arm linked through hers he piloted Constance back toward the lawn.

“Mr. Byrd ought never to wear tweed, do you think? It makes him look heavy,” remarked Felicity.

Again Mary had to suppress a feeling of irritation. “I rather like it,” she said. “It's so comfy and English.”

“Yes?” breathed Felicity vaguely, walking on.

Suddenly she appeared to have a return of animation.

She floated forward quickly for a few steps, turned with a swaying movement, and waited for Mary with hands and feet poised.

“The grass under one's feet, Mrs. Byrd, it makes them glad. One could almost dance!”

Again she fluttered ahead, this time overtaking Constance and Stefan, who had halted in the middle of the lawn. She swayed before them on tiptoe.

“Connie,” she was saying as Mary came up, “why does one not more often dance in the open?”

Though her lids still drooped she was half smiling as she swayed.

“It may be the spring; or perhaps I have caught the pastoral mood of Mr. Byrd's work; but I should like to dance a little. Music,” her palms were lifted in repudiation, “is unnecessary. One has the birds.”

“Good for you, Felicity! That *will* be fun,” Constance exclaimed delightedly. “You don't dance half often enough, bad girl. Come along, people, let's sit on the porch steps.”

They arranged themselves to watch, Constance and Mary on the upper step, Stefan on the lower, his shoulders against his wife's knees, while Felicity dexterously slipped off her sandals and stockings.

Her dress, modeled probably on that of the central figure in Botticelli's Spring, was of white chiffon, embroidered with occasional formal sprigs of green leaves and hyacinth-blue flowers, and kilted up at bust and thigh. Her loosely draped sleeves hung barely to the elbow. A line of green crossed from the shoulders under each breast, and her hair, tightly bound, was decorated with another narrow band of green. She looked younger than in the city—almost virginal. Stooping low, she gathered a handful of blue scylla from the grass, Mary barely checking an exclamation at this ravishing of her beloved bulbs. Then Felicity lay down upon the grass; her eyes closed; she seemed asleep. They waited silently for some minutes. Stefan began to fidget.

Suddenly a robin called. Felicity's eyes opened. They looked calm and dewy, like a child's. She raised her head—the robin called again. Felicity looked about her, at the flowers in her hand, the trees, the sky. Her face broke into smiles, she rose tall, taller, feet on tiptoe, hands reaching skyward. It was the waking of spring. Then she began to dance.

Gone was the old languor, the dreamy, hushed steps of her former method. Now she appeared to dart about the lawn like a swallow, following the calls of the birds. She would stand poised to listen, her ear would catch a twitter, and she was gone; flitting, skimming, seeming not to touch the earth. She danced to the flowers in her hand, to the trees, the sky, her face aglint with changing smiles, her skirts rippling like water.

At last the blue flowers seemed to claim her solely. She held them sunward, held them close, always swaying to the silent melody of the spring. She kissed them, pressed them to her heart; she sank downward, like a bird with folding wings, above a clump of scylla; her arms encircled them, her head bent to her knees—she was still.

Constance broke the spell with prolonged applause; Mary was breathless with admiration; Stefan rose, and after prowling restlessly for a moment, hurried to the dancer and stooped to lift her.

As if only then conscious of her audience, Felicity looked up, and both the other women noticed the expression that flashed across her face before she took the proffered hand. It seemed compounded of triumph, challenge, and something else. Mary again felt uncomfortable, and Constance's quick brain signaled a warning.

“Surely not getting into mischief, are you, Felicity?” she mentally questioned, and instantly began to east about for two and two to put together.

“Wonderful!” Stefan was saying. “You surely must have wings—great,

butterfly ones—only we are too dull to see them. You were exactly like one of my pictures come to life.” He was visibly excited.

“Husband disposed of, available lovers unattractive, asks me to drive her out here; that's one half,” Constance's mind raced. “Wife on the shelf, variable temperament, studio in town; and that's the other. I've found two and two; I hope to goodness they won't make four,” she sighed to herself anxiously.

Mary meanwhile was thanking Miss Berber. She noticed that the dancer was perfectly cool—not a hair ruffled by her efforts. She looked as smooth as a bird that draws in its feathers after flight. Stefan was probably observing this, too, she thought; at any rate he was hovering about, staring at Felicity, and running his hands through his hair. Mary could not be sure of his expression; he seemed uneasy, as if discomfort mingled with his pleasure.

They had had a rare and lovely entertainment, and yet no one appeared wholly pleased except the dancer herself. It was very odd.

Constance looked at her watch. “Now, Felicity, this has all been ideal, but we must be getting on. I 'phoned James, you know, and we are lunching there. I was sure Mrs. Byrd wouldn't want to be bothered with us.”

Mary demurred, with a word as to Lily's capacities, but Constance was firm.

“No, my dear, it's all arranged. Besides, you need peace and quiet. Felicity, where are your things? Thank you, Mr. Byrd, in the sitting-room. Mary, you dear, I adore you and your house—I shall come again soon. Where are my gloves?” She was all energy, helping Felicity with her veil, settling her own hat, kissing Mary, and cranking the runabout—an operation she would not allow Stefan to attempt for her—with her usual effervescent efficiency. “I'd no idea it was so late!” she exclaimed.

As Felicity was handed by Stefan into the car, she murmured something in French, Constance noticed, to which he shook his head with a nervous frown. As the machine started, he was left staring moodily after it down the lane.

“Thee is earlier than I expected,” little Mrs. Farraday said to Constance, when they arrived at the house. “I am afraid we shall have to keep thee waiting for thy lunch for half an hour or more.”

“How glad I shall be—” Stefan turned to Mary, half irritably—“when this baby is born, and you can be active again.”

He ate his lunch in silence, and left the table abruptly at the end. Nor did she see him again until dinner time, when he came in tired out, his boots whitened with road dust.

“Where have you been, dearest?” she asked. “I’ve been quite anxious about you.”

“Just walking,” he answered shortly, and went up to his room. The tears came to her eyes, but she blinked them away resolutely. She must not mind, must not show him that she even dreamed of any connection between his moodiness and the events of the morning.

“My love must be stronger than that, now of all times,” thought Mary. “Afterwards—afterwards it will be all right.” She smiled confidently to herself.



VI

It was the end of June. Mary's rosebushes were in full bloom and the little garden was languid with the scent of them. The nesting birds had all hatched their broods—every morning now Mary watched from her bedroom window the careful parents carrying worms and insects into the trees. She always looked for them the moment she got up. She would have loved to hang far out of the window as she used to do in her old home in England, and call good-morning to her little friends—but she was hemmed in by the bronze wire of the windowscreens. These affected her almost like prison bars; but Long Island's summer scourge had come, and after a few experiences of nights sung sleepless by the persistent horn of the enemy and made agonizing by his sting, she welcomed the screens as deliverers. The mosquitoes apart, Mary had adored the long, warm days—not too hot as yet on the Byrdsnest's shady eminence—and the perpetually smiling skies, so different from the sulky heavens of England. But she began to feel very heavy, and found it increasingly difficult to keep cool, so that she counted the days till her deliverance. She felt no fear of what was coming. Dr. Hillyard had assured her that she was normal in every respect—"as completely normal a woman as I have ever seen," she put it—and should have no complications. Moreover, Mary had obtained from her doctor a detailed description of what lay before her, and had read one or two hand-books on the subject, so that she was spared the fearful imaginings and reliance on old wives' tales which are the results of the ancient policy of surrounding normal functions with mystery.

Now the nurse was here, a tall, grave-eyed Canadian girl, quiet of speech, silent in every movement. Mary had wondered if she ought to go into Dr. Hillyard's hospital, and was infinitely relieved to have her assurance that it was unnecessary. She wanted her baby to be born here in the country, in the sweet place she had prepared for it, surrounded by those she loved. Everything here was perfect for the advent—she could ask for nothing more. True, she was seeking comparatively little of Stefan, but she knew he was busily painting, and he was uniformly kind and affectionate when they were together. He had not been to town for over two months.

Mrs. Farraday was a frequent caller, and Mary had grown sincerely to love the sweet-faced old lady, who would drive up in a low pony chaise, bringing

offerings of fruit and vegetables, or quaint preserves from recipes unknown to Mary, which had been put up under her own direction.

Then, too, McEwan would appear at week-ends or in the evening, tramping down the lane to hail the house in absurd varieties of the latest New York slang, which, never failed to amuse Mary. The shy Jamie was often with her; they were now the most intimate of friends. He would show her primitive tools and mechanical contrivances of his own making, and she would tell him stories of Scotland, of Prince Charlie and Flora, of Bruce and Wallace, of Bannockburn, or of James, the poet king. Of these she had a store, having been brought up, as many English girls happily are, on the history and legends of the island, rather than on less robust feminine fare.

Farraday, too, sometimes dropped in in the evening, to sit on the porch with Stefan and Mary and talk quietly of books and the like. Occasionally he came with McEwan or Jamie; he never came alone—though this she had not noticed—at hours when Stefan was unlikely to be with her.

At the suggestion of Mrs. Farraday, whose word was the social law of the district, the most charming women in the neighborhood had called on Mary, so that her circle of acquaintances was now quite wide. She had had in addition several visits from Constance, and the Sparrow had spent a week-end with them, chirping admiration of the place and encomiums of her friend's housekeeping. But Mary liked best to be with Stefan, or to dream alone through the hushed, sunlit hours amid her small tasks of house and garden. Now that the nurse was here, occupying the little bedroom opening from Mary's room, the final preparations had been made; there was nothing left to do but wait.

Miss McCulloch had been with them three days, and Stefan had become used to her quiet presence, when late one evening certain small symptoms told her that Mary's time had come. Stefan, entering the hall, found her at the telephone. "Dr. Hillyard will be here in about an hour and a quarter," she said quietly, hanging up the receiver. "Do you know if she has driven out before? If not, it might be well for you, Mr. Byrd, to walk to the foot of the lane soon, and be ready to signal the turning to her." Miss McCulloch always distrusted the nerves of husbands on these occasions, and planned adroitly to get them out of the way.

Stefan stared at her as flabbergasted as if this emergency had not been hourly expected. "Do you mean," he gasped, "that Mary is ill?"

"She is not ill, Mr. Byrd, but the baby will probably be born before morning."

"My God!" said Stefan, suddenly blanching. He had not faced this moment, had not thought about it, had indeed hardly thought about Mary's motherhood at

all except to deplore its toll upon her bodily beauty. He had tried for her sake, harder than she knew, to appear sympathetic, but in his heart the whole thing presented itself as nature's grotesque price for the early rapture of their love. That the price might be tragic as well as grotesque had only now come home to him. He dropped on a chair, his memory flying back to the one other such event in which he had had part. He saw himself thrust from his mother's door—he heard her shrieks—felt himself fly again into the rain. His forehead was wet; cold tingles ran to his fingertips.

The nurse's voice sounded, calm and pleasant, above him. A whiff of brandy met his nostrils. “You'd better drink this, Mr. Byrd, and then in a minute you might go and see Mrs. Byrd. You will feel better after that, I think.”

He drank, then looked up, haggard.

“They'll give her plenty of chloroform, won't they?” he whispered, catching the nurse's hand. She smiled reassuringly. “Don't worry, Mr. Byrd, your wife is in splendid condition, and ether will certainly be given when it becomes advisable.”

The brandy was working now and his nerves had steadied, but he found the nurse's manner maddeningly calm. “I'll go to Mary,” he muttered, and, brushing past her, sprang up the stairs.

What he expected to see he did not know, but his heart pounded as he opened the bedroom door. The room was bright with lamplight, and in spotless order. At her small writing-table sat Mary, in a loose white dressing gown, her hair in smooth braids around her head, writing. What was she doing? Was she leaving some last message for him, in case—? He felt himself grow cold again. “Mary!” he exclaimed hoarsely.

She looked round, and called joyfully to him.

“Oh, darling, there you are. I'm getting everything ready. It's coming, Stefan dearest. I'm so happy!” Her face was excited, radiant.

He ran to her with a groan of relief, and, kneeling, caught her face to his. “Oh, Beautiful, you're all right then? She told me—I was afraid—” he stumbled, inarticulate.

She stroked his cheek comfortingly. “Dearest, isn't it wonderful—just think—by to-morrow our baby will be here.” She kissed him, between happy tears and laughter.

“You are not in pain, darling? You're all right? What were you writing when I came in?” he stammered, anxiously.

"I'm putting all the accounts straight, and paying all the bills to date, so that Lily won't have any trouble while I'm laid up," she beamed.

Stefan stared uncomprehendingly for a moment, then burst into half-hysterical laughter.

"Oh, you marvel," he gasped, "goddess of efficiency, unshakable Olympian! Bills! And I thought you were writing me a farewell message."

"Silly boy," she replied. "The bills have got to be paid; a nice muddle you would be in if you had them to do yourself. But, dearest—" her face grew suddenly grave and she took his hand—"listen. I *have* written you something—it's there—" her fingers touched an elastic bound pile of papers. "I'm perfectly well, but if anything *should* happen, I want my sister to have the baby. Because I think, dear—" she stroked his hand with a look of compassionate understanding—"that without me you would not want it very much. Miss Mason would take it to England for you, and you could make my sister an allowance. I've left you her address, and all that I can think of to suggest."

He gazed at her dumbly. Her face glowed with life and beauty, her voice was sweet and steady. There she sat, utterly mistress of herself, in the shadow of life and death. Was it that her imagination was transcendent, or that she had none? He did not know, he did not understand her, but in that moment he could have said his prayers at her feet.

The nurse entered. "Now, Mr. Byrd, I think if you could go to the end of the lane and be looking out for the doctor? Mrs. Byrd ought to have her bath."

Stefan departed. In a dream he walked to the lane's end and waited there. He was thinking of Mary, perhaps for the first time, not as a beautiful object of love and inspiration, nor as his companion, but as a woman. What was this calm strength, this certitude of hers? Why did her every word and act seem to move straight forward, while his wheeled and circled? What was it that Mary had that he had not? Of what was her inmost fiber made? It came to him that for all their loving passages his wife was a stranger to him, and a stranger whom he had never sought to know. He felt ashamed.

It was about eleven o'clock when the distance was pricked by two points of light, which, gradually expanding, proved to be the head-lamps of the doctor's car. She stopped at his hail and he climbed beside her.

"I'm glad you came, though I think I know the turning," said Dr. Hillyard cheerfully.

"How long will it be, doctor?" he asked nervously.

“Feeling jumpy?” she replied. “Better let me give you a bromide, and try for a little sleep. Don't you worry—unless we have complications it will be over before morning.”

“Before *morning*!” he groaned. “Doctor, you won't let her suffer—you will give her something?”

He was again reassured. “Certainly. But she has a magnificent physique, with muscles which have never been allowed to soften through tight clothing or lack of exercise. I expect an easy case. Here we are, I think.” The swift little car stopped accurately at the gate, and the doctor, shutting off her power, was out in a moment, bag in hand. The nurse met them in the hall.

“Getting on nicely—an easy first stage,” she reported. The two women disappeared upstairs, and Stefan was left alone to live through as best he could the most difficult hours that fall to the lot of civilized man. Presently Miss McCulloch came down to him with a powder, and advice from the doctor anent bed, but he would take neither the one nor the other. “What a sot I should be,” he thought, picturing himself lying drugged to slumber while Mary suffered.

By and by he ventured upstairs. Clouds of steam rose from the bathroom, brilliant light was everywhere, two white-swathed figures, scarcely recognizable, seemed to move with incredible speed amid a perfectly ordered chaos. All Mary's pretty paraphernalia were gone; white oil cloth covered every table, and was in its turn covered by innumerable objects sealed in stiff paper. Amid these alien surroundings Mary sat in her nightgown on the edge of the bed, her knees drawn up.

“Hello, dearest,” she called rather excitedly, “we're getting awfully busy.” Then her face contracted. “Here comes another,” she said cheerily, and gasped a little. On that Stefan fled, with a muttered “Call me if she wants me,” to the nurse.

He wandered to the kitchen. There was a roaring fire, but the room was empty—even Lily had found work upstairs. For an hour more Stefan prowled—then he rang up the Farraday's house. After an interval James' voice answered him.

“It's Byrd, Farraday,” said Stefan. “No—” quickly—“everything's perfectly all right, perfectly, but it's going on. Could you come over?”

In fifteen minutes Farraday had dressed and was at the door, his great car gliding up silently beside the doctor's. As he walked in Stefan saw that his face was quite white.

“It was awfully good of you to come,” he said.

“I'm so glad you asked me. My car is a sixty horsepower, if anything were needed.” Farraday sat down, and lighted a pipe. Stefan delivered knowledge of the waiting machine upstairs, and then recommenced his prow. Back and forth through the two living rooms he walked, lighting, smoking, or throwing away endless cigarettes. Farraday sat drawing at his pipe. Neither spoke. One o'clock struck, and two.

Presently they heard a loud growling sound, quite un-human, but with no quality of agony. It was merely as if some animal were making a supreme physical effort. In about two minutes this was repeated. Farraday's pipe dropped on the hearth, Stefan tore upstairs. “What is it?” he asked at the open door. Something large and white moved powerfully on the bed. At the foot bent the little doctor, her hands hidden, and at the head stood the nurse holding a small can. A heavy, sweet odor filled the room.

“It's all right,” the doctor said rapidly. “Expulsive stage. She isn't suffering.”

“Hello, Stefan dear,” said a small, rather high voice, which made him jump violently. Then he saw a face on the pillow, its eyes closed, and its nose and mouth covered with a wire cone. In a moment there came a gasp, the sheathed form drew tense, the nurse spilled a few drops from her can upon the cone, the growling recommenced and heightened to a crescendo. Stefan had an impression of tremendous physical life, but the human tone of the “Hello, Stefan,” was quite gone again.

He was backing shakily out when the doctor called to him.

“It will be born quite soon, now, Mr. Byrd,” her cheery voice promised.

Trembling with relief, he stumbled downstairs. Farraday was standing rigid before the fireplace, his face quite expressionless.

“She's having ether—I don't think she's suffering. The doctor says quite soon, now,” Stefan jerked out.

“I'm thankful,” said Farraday, quietly.

He stooped and picked up his fallen pipe, but it took him a long time to refill it—particles of tobacco kept showering to the rug from his fingers. Stefan, with a new cigarette, resumed his prow.

Midsummer dawn was breaking. The lamplight began to pale before the glimmer of the windows. A sleepy bird chirped, the room became mysterious.

There had been rapid steps overhead for some moments, and now the two men became aware that the tiger-like sounds had quite ceased. The steps overhead quieted. Farraday put out the lamp, and the blue light flooded the room.

A bird called loudly, and another answered it, high, repeatedly. The notes were right over their heads; they rose higher, insistent. They were not the notes of a bird. The nurse appeared at the door and looked at Stefan.

“Your son is born,” she said.

Instantly to both men it was as if eerie bonds, drawn over-taut, had snapped, releasing them again to the physical world about them. The high mystery was over; life was human and kindly once again. Farraday dropped into his chair and held a hand across his eyes. Stefan threw both arms round Miss McCulloch's shoulders and hugged her like a child.

“Oh, hurrah!” he cried, almost sobbing with relief. “Bless you, nurse. Is she all right?”

“She's perfect—I've never seen finer condition. You can come up in a few minutes, the doctor says, and see her before she goes to sleep.”

“There's nothing needed, nurse?” asked Farraday, rising.

“Nothing at all, thank you.”

“Then I'll be getting home, Byrd,” he said, offering his hand to Stefan. “My warmest congratulations. Let me know if there's anything I can do.”

Stefan shook the proffered hand with a deeper liking than he had yet felt for this silent man.

“I'm everlastingly grateful to you, Farraday, for helping me out, and Mary will be, too. I don't know how I could have stood it alone.”

Stefan mounted the stairs tremblingly, to pause in amazement at the door of Mary's room. A second transformation had, as if by magic, taken place. The lights were out. The dawn smiled at the windows, through which a gentle breeze ruffled the curtains. Gone were all evidences of the night's tense drama; tables and chairs were empty; the room looked calm and spacious.

On the bed Mary lay quiet, her form hardly outlined under the smooth coverlet. Half fearfully he let his eyes travel to the pillow, dreading he knew not what change. Instantly, relief overwhelmed him. Her face was radiant, her cheeks pink—she seemed to glow with a sublimated happiness. Only in her eyes lay any traces of the night—they were still heavy from the anaesthetic, but they shone lovingly on him, as though deep lights were behind them.

“Darling,” she whispered, “we've got a little boy. Did you worry? It wasn't anything—only the most thrilling adventure that's ever happened to me.”

He looked at her almost with awe—then, stooping, pressed his face to the pillow beside hers.

“Were they merciful to you, Beautiful?” he whispered back. Weakly, her hand found his head.

“Yes, darling, they were wonderful. I was never quite unconscious, yet it wasn't a bit bad—only as if I were in the hands of some prodigious force. They showed me the baby, too—just for a minute. I want to see him again now—with you.”

Stefan looked up. Dr. Hillyard was in the doorway of the little room. She nodded, and in a moment reappeared, carrying a small white bundle.

“Here he is,” she said; “he weighs eight and a half pounds. You can both look at him for a moment, and then Mrs. Byrd must go to sleep.” She put the bundle gently down beside Mary, whose head turned toward it.

Almost hidden in folds of flannel Stefan saw a tiny red face, its eyes closed, two microscopic fists doubled under its chin. It conveyed nothing to him except a sense of amazement.

“He's asleep,” whispered Mary, “but I saw his eyes—they are blue. Isn't he pretty?” Her own eyes, soft with adoration, turned from her son to Stefan. Then they drooped, drowsily.

“She's falling off,” said the doctor under her breath, recovering the baby. “They'll both sleep for several hours now. Lily is getting us some breakfast—wouldn't you like some, too, Mr. Byrd?”

Stefan felt grateful for her normal, cheery manner, and for Mary's sudden drowsiness; they seemed to cover what he felt to be a failure in himself. He had been unable to find one word to say about the baby.

At breakfast, served by the sleepy but beaming Lily, Stefan was dazed by the bearing of doctor and nurse. These two women, after a night spent in work of an intensity and scope beyond his powers to gage, appeared as fresh and normal as if they had just risen from sleep, while he, unshaved and rumped, could barely control his racked nerves and heavy head, across which doctor and nurse discussed their case with animation.

“We are all going to bed, Mr. Byrd,” said the doctor at last, noting his exhausted aspect. “I shall get two or, three hours' nap on the sofa before going back to town, and I hope you will take a thorough rest.”

Stefan rose rather dizzily from his unfinished meal.

“Please take my room,” he said, “I couldn't stay in the house—I'm going out.” He found the atmosphere of alert efficiency created by these women utterly insupportable. The house stifled him with its teeming feminine life. In it he felt

superfluous, futile. Hurrying out, he stumbled down the slope and, stripping, dived into the water. Its cold touch robbed him of thought; he became at once merely one of Nature's straying children returned again to her arms.

Swimming back, he drew on his clothes, and mounting to the garden, threw himself face down upon the grass, and fell asleep under the morning sun.

He dreamed that a drum was calling him. Its beat, muffled and irregular, yet urged him forward. A flag waved dazzlingly before his eyes; its folds stifled him. He tried to move, yet could not—the drum called ever more urgently. He started awake, to find himself on his back, the sun beating into his face, and the doctor's machine chugging down the lane.



VII

The little June baby at the Byrdsnest was very popular with the neighborhood. During the summer it seemed to Stefan that the house was never free of visitors who came to admire the child, guess his weight, and exclaim at his mother's health.

As a convalescent, Mary was, according to Constance Elliot, a complete fraud. Except for her hair, which had temporarily lost some of its elasticity, she had never looked so radiant. She was out of bed on the ninth day, and walking in the garden on the twelfth. The behavior of the baby—who was a stranger to artificial food—was exemplary; he never fretted, and cried only when he was hungry. But as his appetite troubled him every three hours during the day, and every four at night, he appeared to Stefan to cry incessantly, and his strenuous wail would drive his father from house to barn, and from barn to woods. Lured from one of these retreats by an interval of silence, Stefan was as likely as not to find an auto at the gate and hear exclamatory voices proceeding from the nursery, when he would fade into the woods again like a wild thing fearful of the trap.

His old dislike of his kind reasserted itself. It is one thing to be surrounded by pretty women proclaiming you the greatest artist of your day, and quite another to listen while they exclaim on the perfections of your offspring and the health of your wife. For the first type of conversation Stefan had still an appetite; with the second he was quickly surfeited.

Nor were women his only tormentors. The baby spent much of its time in the garden, and every Sunday Stefan would find McEwan planted on the lawn, prodding the infant with a huge forefinger, and exploding into fatuous mirth whenever he deluded himself into believing he had made it smile. Of late Stefan had begun to tolerate this man, but after three such exhibitions decided to blacklist him permanently as an insufferable idiot. Even Farraday lost ground in his esteem, for, though guilty of no banalities, he had a way of silently hovering over the baby-carriage which Stefan found mysteriously irritating. Jamie alone of their masculine friends seemed to adopt a comprehensible attitude, for he backed away in hasty alarm whenever the infant, in arms or carriage, bore down upon him. On several occasions when the Farraday household invaded the Byrdsnest Stefan and Jamie together sneaked away in search of an environment

more seemly for their sex.

“You are the only creature I know just now, Jamie,” Stefan said, “with any sense of proportion;” and these two outcasts from notice would tramp moodily through the woods, the boy faithfully imitating Stefan's slouch and his despondent way of carrying his hands thrust in his pockets.

There were no more tales of Scotland for Jamie in these days, and as for Stefan he hardly saw his wife. True, she always brightened when he came in and mutely evinced her desire that he should remain, but she was never his. While he talked her eye would wander to the cradle, or if they were in another room her ear would be constantly strained to catch a cry. In the midst of a pleasant interlude she would jump to her feet with a murmured “Dinner time,” or “He must have some water now,” and be gone.

Stefan did not sleep with her—as he could not endure being disturbed at night—and she took a long nap every afternoon, so that at best the hours available for him were few. Any visitor, he thought morosely, won more attention from her than he did, and this was in a sense true, for the visitors openly admired the baby—the heart of Mary's life—and he did not.

He did not know how intensely she longed for this, how she ached to see Stefan jab his finger at the baby as McEwan did, or watch it with the tender smile of Farraday. She tried a thousand simple wiles to bring to life the father in him. About to nurse the baby, she would call Stefan to see his eager search for the comfort of her breast, looking up in proud joy as the tiny mouth was satisfied.

At the very first, when the baby was newborn, Stefan had watched this rite with some interest, but now he only fidgeted, exclaiming, “You are looking wonderfully fit, Mary,” or “Greedy little beggar, isn't he?” He never spoke of his old idea of painting her as a Madonna. If she drew his attention to the baby's tiny hands or feet, he would glance carelessly at them, with a “They're all right,” or “I'll like them better when they're bigger.”

Once, as they were going to bed, she showed Stefan the baby lying on his chest, one fist balled on either side of the pillow, the downy back of his head shining in the candle-light. She stooped and kissed it.

“His head is too deliciously soft and warm, Stefan; do kiss it good-night.”

His face contracted into an expression of distaste. “No,” he said, “I can't kiss babies,” and left the room.

She felt terribly, unnecessarily hurt. It was so difficult for her to make advances, so fatally easy for him to rebuff them.

After that, she did not draw the baby to his attention again.

Perhaps, had the child been a girl, Stefan would have felt more sentiment about it. A girl baby, lying like a pink bud among the roses of the garden, might have appealed to that elfin imagination which largely took the place in him of romance—but a boy! A boy was merely in his eyes another male, and Stefan considered the world far too full of men already.

He sealed his attitude when the question of the child's name came up. Mary had fallen into a habit of calling it “Little Stefan,” or “Steve” for short, and one morning, as the older Stefan crossed the lawn to his studio her voice floated down from the nursery in an improvised song to her “Stefan Baby.” He bounded upstairs to her.

“Mary,” he called, “you are surely not going to call that infant by my name?”

Mary, her lap enveloped in aprons and towels, looked up from the bath in which her son was practising tentative kicks.

“Why, yes, dear, I thought we'd christen him after you, as he's the eldest. Don't you think that would be nice?” She looked puzzled.

“No, I do not!” Stefan snorted emphatically. “For heaven's sake give the child a name of his own, and let me keep mine. My God, one Stefan Byrd is enough in the world, I should think!”

“Well, dear, what shall we call him, then?” she asked, lowering her head over the baby to hide her hurt.

“Give him your own name if you want to. After all, he's your child. Elliston Byrd wouldn't sound at all bad.”

“Very well,” said Mary slowly. “I think the Dad would have been pleased by that.” In spite of herself, her voice trembled.

“Good Lord, Mary, I haven't hurt you, have I?” He looked exasperated.

She shook her head, still bending over the baby.

“It's all right, dear,” she whispered.

“You're so soft nowadays, one hardly dare speak,” he muttered. “Sorry, dear,” and with a penitent kiss for the back of her neck he hastened downstairs again.

The christening was held two weeks later, in the small Episcopal church of Crab's Bay. Stefan could see no reason for it, as neither he nor Mary was orthodox, but when he suggested omitting the ceremony she looked at him wide-eyed.

“Not christen him, Stefan? Oh, I don't think that would be fair,” she said. Her

manner was simple, but there was finality in her tone—it made him feel that wherever her child was concerned she would be adamant.

The baby's godmother was, of course, Constance, and his godfathers, equally obviously, Farraday and McEwan. Mary made the ceremony the occasion of a small at-home, inviting the numerous friends from whom she had received congratulations or gifts for the baby.

Miss Mason had insisted on herself baking the christening cake; Farraday as usual supplied a sheaf of flowers. In the drawing room the little Elliston's presents were displayed, a beautiful old cup from Farraday, a christening robe, and a spoon, “pusher,” and fork from Constance, a silver bowl “For Elliston's porridge from his friend Wallace McEwan,” and a Bible in stout leather binding from Mrs. Farraday, inscribed in her delicate, slanting hand. There was even a napkin ring from the baby's aunt in England, who was much relieved that her too-independent sister had married a successful artist and done her duty by the family so promptly.

Mary was naively delighted with these offerings.

“He has got everything I should have liked him to have!” she exclaimed as she arranged them.

Stefan, led to the font, showed all the nervousness he had omitted at the altar, but looked very handsome in a suit of linen crash, while Mary, in white muslin, was at her glowing best.

Constance was inevitably late, for, like most American women, she did not carry her undeniable efficiency to the point of punctuality. At the last moment, however, she dashed up to the church with the élan of a triumphant general, bearing her husband captive in the tonneau, and no less a person than Gunther, the distinguished sculptor, on the seat beside her.

“I know you did not ask him, but he's so handsome I thought he ought to be here,” she whispered inconsequentially to Mary after the ceremony.

Of their many acquaintances few were unrepresented except Miss Berber, to whom Mary had felt disinclined to send an invitation. She had sounded Stefan on the subject, but had been answered by a “Certainly not!” so emphatic as to surprise her.

At the house Gunther, with his great height and magnificent viking head, was unquestionably the hit of the afternoon. Holding the baby, which lay confidently in his powerful hands, he examined its head, arms and legs with professional interest, while every woman in the room watched him admiringly.

“This baby, Mrs. Byrd, is the finest for his age I have ever seen, and I have modeled many of them,” he pronounced, handing it back to Mary, who blushed to her forehead with pleasure. “Not that I am surprised,” he went on, staring frankly at her, “when I look at his mother. I am doing some groups for the Pan-American exhibition next year in San Francisco. If you could give me any time, I should very much like to use your head and the baby’s. I shall try and arrange it with you,” and he nodded as if that settled the matter.

“Oh,” gasped Constance, “you have all the luck. Mary! Mr. Gunther has known me for years, but have *I* had a chance to sit for him? I feel myself turning green, and as my gown is yellow it will be most unbecoming!” And seizing Farraday as if for consolation, she bore him to the dining room to find a drink.

Stefan, who was interested in Gunther, tried to get him to the barn to see his pictures; but the sculptor would not move his eyes from Mary, and Stefan, considerably bored, was obliged to content himself with showing the studio to some of his prettiest neighbors.

Nor did his spirits improve when the party came to an end.

“Bon Dieu!” he cried, flinging himself fretfully into a chair. “Is our house never to be free of chattering women? The only person here to-day who speaks my language was Gunther, and you never gave me a chance at him.”

Mary gasped, too astonished at this accusation to refute it.

“Ever since we came down here,” he went on irritably, “the place has seethed with people, and overflowed with domesticity. I never hear one word spoken except on the subject of furniture, gardening and babies! I can’t work in such an environment; it stifles all imagination. As for you, Mary—”

He looked up at her. She was standing, stricken motionless, in the center of the room. Her hair, straighter than of old, seemed to droop over her ears; her form under its loose muslin dress showed soft and blurred, its clean-cut lines gone, while her face, almost as white as the gown, was woe-begone, the eyes dark with tears. She stood there like a hurt child, all her courageous gallantry eclipsed by this unkind ending to her happy day. Stefan rose to his feet and faced her, searching for some phrase that could express his sense of deprivation. He had the instinct to stab her into a full realization of what she was losing in his eyes.

“Mary,” he cried almost wildly, “your wings are gone!” and rushed out of the room.

PART IV

WINGS



I

One evening early in October Mary telephoned Farraday to ask if she could consult him with reference to the Byrdsnest. He walked over after dinner, to find her alone in the sitting room, companioned by a wood fire and the two sleeping lovebirds.

James had been very busy at the office for some time, and it was two or three weeks since he had seen Mary. Now, as he sat opposite her, it seemed to him that the leaping firelight showed unaccustomed shadows in her cheeks and under her eyes, and that her color was less bright than formerly. Was it merely the result of her care of her baby, he wondered, or was there something more?

"I fear we've already outstayed our time here, Mr. Farraday," Mary was saying, "and yet I am going to ask you for an extension."

Farraday lit a cigarette.

"My dear Mrs. Byrd, stay as long as you like."

"But you don't know the measure of my demands," she went on, with a hesitating smile. "They are so extensive that I'm ashamed. I love this little place, Mr. Farraday; it's the first real home I've ever had of my own. And Baby does so splendidly here—I can't bear the thought of taking him to the city. How long might I really hope to stay without inconveniencing you? I mean, of course, at a proper rent."

"As far as I am concerned," he smiled back at her, "I shall be overjoyed to have you stay as long as the place attracts you. If you like, I will give you a lease—a year, two, or three, as you will, so that you could feel settled, or an option to renew after the first year."

"But, Mr. Farraday, your mother told me that you used to use the place, and in the face of that I don't know how I have the selfishness to ask you for any time at all, to say nothing of a lease!"

"Mrs. Byrd." Farraday threw his cigarette into the fire, and, leaning forward, stared at the flames, his hands clasped between his knees. "Let me tell you a sentimental little story, which no one else knows except our friend Mac." He smiled whimsically.

"When I was a young man I was very much in love, and looked forward to having a home of my own, and children. But I was unfortunate—I did not

succeed in winning the woman I loved, and as I am slow to change, I made up my mind that my dream home would never come true. But I was very fond of my 'cottage in the air,' and some years later, when this little house became empty, I arranged it to look as nearly as I could as that other might have done. I used to sit here sometimes and pretend that my shadows were real. You will laugh at me, but I even have in my desk plans for an addition, an ell, containing a play room and nurseries."

Mary gave a little pitiful exclamation, and touched his clasped hands. Meeting her eyes, he saw them dewy with sympathy.

"You are very gracious to a sentimental old bachelor," he said, with his winning smile. "But these ghosts were bad for me. I was in danger of becoming absurdly self-centered, almost morbidly introspective. Mac, whose heart is the biggest I know, and who laughs away more troubles than I ever dreamed of, rallied me about it, and showed me that I ought to turn my disappointment to some use. This was about ten years ago, when his own life fell to pieces. I had been associated with magazines for some time, and knew how little that was really good found its way into the plainer people's homes. At Mac's suggestion I bought an insolvent monthly, and began to remodel it. 'You've got the home-and-children bug; well, do something for other people's'—was the way Mac put it to me. Later we started the two other magazines, always keeping before us our aim of giving the average home the best there is. To-day, though I have no children of my own, I like to think I'm a sort of uncle to thousands."

He leant back, still staring into the fire. There was silence for a minute; a log fell with a crash and a flight of sparks—Farraday replaced it.

"Well, Mrs. Byrd," he went on, "all this time the little ghost-house stood empty. No one used it but myself. It was made for a woman and for children, yet in my selfishness I locked its door against those who should rightfully have enjoyed it. Mac urged me to use it as a holiday house for poor mothers from the city, but, somehow, I could not bring myself to evict its dream-mistress."

"Oh, I feel more than ever a trespasser!" exclaimed Mary.

He shook his head. "No, you have redeemed the place from futility—you are its justification." He paused again, and continued in a lower tone, "Mrs. Byrd, you won't mind my saying this—you are so like that lady of long ago that the house seems yours by natural right. I think I was only waiting for someone who would love and understand it—some golden-haired young mother, like yourself, to give the key to. I can't tell you how happy it makes me that the little house should at last fulfil itself. Please keep it for as long as you need it—it will always

need you.”

Mary was much moved: “I can't thank you, Mr. Farraday, but I feel deeply honored. Perhaps my best thanks lie just in loving the house, and I do that, with all my heart. You don't mind my foolish little name for it?”

“The Byrdsnest? I think it perfect.”

“And you don't mind either the alterations I have made?”

“My dear friend, while you keep this house I want it to be yours. Should you wish to take a long lease, and enlarge it, I shall be happy. In fact, I will sell it to you, if in the future you would care to buy. My only stipulation would be an option to repurchase should you decide to give it up.” He took her hand. “The Byrdsnest belongs to Elliston's mother; let us both understand that.”

Her lips trembled. “You are good to me.”

“No, it is you who are good to the dreams of a sentimentalist. And now—” he sat back smilingly—“that is settled. Tell me the news. How is my godson, how is Mr. Byrd, how fares the sable Lily?”

“Baby weighs fourteen and a half pounds,” she said proudly; “he is simply perfect. Lily is an angel.” She paused, and seemed to continue almost with an effort. “Stefan is very busy. He does not care to paint autumn landscapes, so he has begun work again in the city. He's doing a fantastic study of Miss Berber, and is very much pleased with it.”

“That's good,” said Farraday, evenly.

“But I've got more news for you,” she went on, brightening. “I've had a good deal more time lately, Stefan being so much in town, and Baby's habits so regular. Here's the result.”

She fetched from the desk a pile of manuscript, neatly penned, and laid it on her guest's knee.

“This is the second thing I wanted to consult you about. It's a book-length story for children, called 'The House in the Wood.' I've written the first third, and outlined the rest. Here's the list of chapters. It is supposed to be for children between eight and fourteen, and was first suggested to me by this house. There is a family of four children, and a regulation father and mother, nurse, governess, and grandmother. They live in the country, and the children find a little deserted cottage which they adopt to play in. The book is full of their adventures in it. My idea is—” she sat beside him, her eyes brightening with interest—“to suggest all kinds of games to the children who read the story, which seem thrilling, but are really educational. It's quite a moral little book, I'm afraid,” she laughed, “but I

think story books should describe adventures which may be within the scope of the ordinary child's life, don't you? I'm afraid it isn't a work of art, but I hope—if I can work out the scheme—it may give some practical ideas to mothers who don't know how to amuse their children.... There, Mr. Editor, what is your verdict?"

Farraday was turning the pages in his rapid, absorbed way. He nodded and smiled as he looked.

"I think it's a good idea, Mrs. Byrd; just the sort of thing we are always on the lookout for. The subject might be trite enough, but I suspect you of having lent it charm and freshness. Of course the family is English, which is a disadvantage, but I see you've mixed in a small American visitor, and that he's beginning to teach the others a thing or two! Where did you learn such serpent wisdom, young lady?"

She laughed, amazed as she had been a year ago at his lightning-like apprehension.

"It isn't humbug. I do think an American child could teach ours at home a lot about inventiveness, independence, and democracy—just as I think ours might teach him something about manners," she added, smiling.

"Admitted," said he, laying down the manuscript, "and thank you for letting me see this. I claim the first refusal. Finish it, have it typed, and send it in, and if I can run it as a serial in *The Child at Home*, I shall be tremendously pleased to do so. If it goes, it ought to come out in book form, illustrated."

"You really think the idea has something in it?"

"I certainly do, and you know how much I believe in your work."

"Oh, I'm so glad," she exclaimed, looking far more cheerful than he had seen her that evening.

He rose to go, and held her hand a moment in his friendly grasp.

"Good night, dear Mrs. Byrd; give my love to Elliston, and remember that in him and your work you have two priceless treasures which, even alone, will give you happiness."

"Oh, I know," she said, her eyes shining; "good night, and thank you for the house."

"Good night, and in the house's name, thank you," he answered from the door.

As she closed it, the brightness slowly faded from Mary's face. She looked at the clock—it was past ten.

"Not to-night, either," she said to herself. Her hand wandered to the telephone

in the hall, but she drew it back. “No, better not,” she thought, and, putting out the lights, walked resolutely upstairs. As, candle in hand, she passed the door of Stefan's room, she looked in. His bed was smooth; a few trifles lay in orderly array upon his dressing table; boots, from which the country dust had been wiped days ago, stood with toes turned meekly to the wall. They looked lonely, she thought.

With a sigh, she entered her own room, and passed through it to the nursery. There lay her baby, soundly sleeping, his cheek on the pillow, his little fists folded under his chin. How beautiful he looked, she thought; how sweet his little room, how fresh and peaceful all the house! It was the home of love—love lay all about her, in the kind protection of the trees, in the nests of the squirrels, in the voices and faces of her friends, and in her heart. Love was all about her, and the sweetness of young life—and she was utterly lonely. One short year ago she thought she would never know loneliness again—only a year ago.

The candle wavered in her hand; a drop of wax fell on the baby's spotless coverlet. Stooping, she blew upon it till it was cold, and carefully broke it off. She sat down in a low rocking chair, and lifting the baby, gave him his good-night nursing. He barely opened his sleep-laden eyes. She kissed him, made him tidy for the night, and laid him down, waiting while he cuddled luxuriously back to sleep.

“Little Stefan, little Stefan,” she whispered.

Then, leaving the nursery door ajar, she undressed noiselessly, and lay down on the cool, empty bed.



II

The following afternoon about teatime Stefan bicycled up from the station. Mary, who was in the sitting room, heard him calling from the gate, but did not go to meet him. He hurried into the room and kissed her half-turned cheek effusively.

"Well, dear, aren't you glad to see me?" he asked rather nervously.

"Do you know that you've been away six days, Stefan, and have only troubled to telephone me twice?" she answered, in a voice carefully controlled.

"You don't mean it!" he exclaimed. "I had no idea it was so long."

"Hadn't you?"

He fidgeted. "Well, dear, you know I'm frightfully keen on this new picture, and the journeys back and forth waste so much time. But as for the telephoning, I'm awfully sorry. I've been so absorbed I simply didn't remember. Why didn't you ring me up?"

"I didn't wish to interrupt a sitting. I rang twice in the evenings, but you were out."

"Yes; I've been trying to amuse myself a little." He was rocking from one foot to the other like a detected schoolboy.

"Hang it all, Mary," he burst out, "don't be so judicial. One must have some pleasure—I can't sit about this cottage all the time."

"I don't think I've asked you to do that."

"You haven't, but you seem to be implying the request now."

She was chilled to silence, having no heart to reason him out of so unreasonable a defense.

"Well, anyway," he said, flinging himself on the sofa, "here I am, so let's make the best of it. Tea ready?"

"It's just coming."

"That's good. When are you coming up to see the picture? It's going to be the best I've done. I shall get Constantine to exhibit it and that stick of a Demeter together, and then the real people and the fools will both have something to admire."

"You say this will be your best?" asked Mary, whom the phrase had stabbed.

“Well,” he said reflectively, lighting a cigarette, “perhaps not better than the Danaë in one sense—it hasn't as much feeling, but has more originality. Miss Berber is such an unusual type—she's quite an inspiration.”

“And I'm not, any more,” Mary could not help adding in a muffled voice.

“Don't be so literal, my dear; of course you are, but not for this sort of picture.” The assurance sounded perfunctory.

“Thank goodness, here comes the tea,” he exclaimed as Lily entered with the tray. “Hullo, Lily; how goes it?”

“Fine, Mr. Byrd, but we've sorely missed you,” she answered, with something less than her usual wholehearted smile.

“Well, you must rejoice, now that the prodigal has returned,” he grinned. “Mary, you haven't answered my question yet—when are you coming in to see the picture? Why not to-morrow? I'm dying to show it to you.”

She flushed. “I can't come, Stefan; it's impossible to leave Baby so long.”

“Well, bring him with you.”

“That wouldn't be possible, either; it would disturb his sleep, and upset him.”

“There you are!” he exclaimed, ruffling his hair. “I can't work down here, and you can't come to town—how can I help seeming to neglect you? Look here”—he had drunk his tea at a gulp, and now held out his cup for more—“if you're lonely, why not move back to the city—then you could keep your eye on me!” and he grinned again.

For some time Mary had feared this suggestion—she had not yet discussed with Stefan her desire to stay in the country. She pressed her hands together nervously.

“Stefan, do you really want me to move back?”

“I want you to do whatever will make you happier,” he temporized.

“If you really needed me there I would come. But you are always so absorbed when you're working, and I am so busy with Baby, that I don't believe we should have much more time together than now.”

“Neither do I,” he agreed, in a tone suspiciously like relief, which she was quick to catch.

“On the other hand,” she went on, “this place is far better for Baby, and I am devoted to it. We couldn't afford anything half as comfortable in the city, and you like it, too, in the summer.”

“Of course I do,” he answered cheerfully. “I should hate to give it up, and I'm

sure it's much more economical, and all that. Still, if you stay here through the winter you mustn't be angry if I am in town part of the time—my work has got to come first, you know.”

“Yes, of course, dear,” said Mary, wistfully, “and I think it would be a mistake for me to come unless you really wanted me.”

“Of course I want you, Beautiful.”

He spoke easily, but she was not deceived. She knew he was glad of the arrangement, not for her sake, but for his own. She had watched him fretting for weeks past, like a caged bird, and she had the wisdom to see that her only hope of making him desire the nest again lay in giving him freedom from it. Her pride fortified this perception. As she had said long ago, Mary was no bargainer.

In spite of her comprehension, however, she warmed toward him. It was so good to see him lounging on the sofa again, his green-gold eyes bright, his brown face with its elfish smile radiant now that his point was won. She knew he had been unkind to her both in word and act, but it was impossible not to forgive him, now that she enjoyed again the comfort of his presence.

Smiling, she poured out his third cup of tea, and was just passing it when there was a knock, and McEwan entered the hall.

“Hello, Byrd,” he called, his broad shoulders blocking the sitting room door as he came in; “down among the Rubes again? Madam Mary, I accept in advance your offer of tea. Well, how goes the counterfeit presentment of our friend Twinkle-Toes?”

Stefan's eyebrows went up. “Do you mean Miss Berber?”

“Yes,” said McEwan, with an aggravating smile, as he devoured a slice of cake. “We're all expecting another ten-strike. Are you depicting her as a toe-shaker or a sartorial artist?”

“Really, Wallace,” protested Mary, who had grown quite intimate with McEwan, “you are utterly incorrigible in your Yankee vein—you respect no one.”

“I respect the President of these United States,” said he solemnly, raising an imaginary hat.

“That's more than I do,” snorted Stefan; “a pompous Puritan!”

“For goodness' sake, don't start him on politics, Wallace,” said Mary; “he has a contempt for every public man in America except Roosevelt and Bill Heywood.”

“So I have,” replied Stefan; “they are the only two with a spark of the

picturesque, or one iota of originality.”

“You ought to paint their pictures arm in arm, with Taft floating on a cloud crowning them with a sombrero and a sandbag, Bryan pouring grape-juice libations, and Wilson watchfully waiting in the background. Label it 'Morituri salutamus'—I bet it would sell,” said McEwan hopefully.

Mary laughed heartily, but Stefan did not conceal his boredom. “Why don't you go into vaudeville, McEwan?” he frowned.

“Solely out of consideration for the existing stars,” McEwan sighed, putting down his cup and rising. “Well, chin music hath charms, but I must toddle to the house, or I shall get in bad with Jamie. My love to Elliston, Mary. Byrd, I warn you that my well-known critical faculty needs stimulation; I mean to drop in at the studio ere long to slam the latest masterpiece. So long,” and he grinned himself out before Stefan's rising irritation had a chance to explode.

“Why do you let that great tomfool call you by your first name, Mary?” he demanded, almost before the front door was shut.

“Wallace is one of the kindest men alive, and I'm quite devoted to him. I admit, though, that he seems to enjoy teasing you.”

“Teasing me!” Stefan scoffed; “it's like an elephant teasing a fly. He obliterates me.”

“Well, don't be an old crosspatch,” she smiled, determined now they were alone again to make the most of him.

“You are a good sort, Mary,” he said, smiling in reply; “it's restful to be with you. Sing to me, won't you?” He stretched luxuriously on the sofa.

She obeyed, glad enough of the now rare opportunity of pleasing him. Farraday had brought her some Norse ballads not long before; their sad elfin cadences had charmed her. She sang these now, touching the piano lightly for fear of waking the sleeping baby overhead. Turning to Stefan at the end, she found him sound asleep, one arm drooping over the sofa, the nervous lines of his face smoothed like a tired child's. For some reason she felt strangely pitiful toward him. “He must be very tired, poor boy,” she thought.

Crossing to the kitchen, she warned Lily not to enter the sitting room, and herself slipped upstairs to the baby. Stefan slept till dinner time, and for the rest of the evening was unusually kind and quiet.

As they went up to bed Mary turned wistfully to him.

“Wouldn't you like to look at Elliston? You haven't seen him for a long time.”

“Bless me, I suppose I haven't—let's take a peep at him.”

Together they bent over the cradle. "Why, he's looking quite human. I think he must have grown!" his father whispered, apparently surprised. "Does he make much noise at night nowadays, Mary?"

"No, hardly any. He just whimpers at about two o'clock, and I get up and nurse him. Then he sleeps till after six."

"If you don't mind, then," said Stefan, "I think I will sleep with you to-night. I feel as if it would rest me."

"Of course, dearest." She felt herself blushing. Was she really going to be loved again? She smiled happily at him.

When they were in bed Stefan curled up childishly, and putting one arm about her, fell asleep almost instantly, his head upon her shoulder. Mary lay, too happy for sleep, listening to his quiet breathing, until her shoulder ached and throbbed under his head. She would not move for fear of waking him, and remained wide-eyed and motionless until her baby's voice called to her.

Then, with infinite care, she slipped away, her arm and shoulder numb, but her heart lighter than it had been for many weeks.

She had forgotten to put out her dressing gown, and would not open the closet door, because it creaked. Little Elliston was leisurely over his repast, and she was stiff with cold when at last she stole back into bed. Stefan lay upon his side. She crept close, and in her turn put an arm about him. He was here again, her man, and her child was close at hand, warm and comforted from her breast. Love was all about her, and to-night she was not mocked. Warm again from his touch, she, too, fell at last, with all the dreaming house, asleep.



III

Stefan stayed at home for several days, sleeping long hours, and seemingly unusually subdued. He would lie reading on the sofa while Mary wrote, and often she turned from her manuscript to find him dozing. They took a few walks together, during which he rarely spoke, but seemed glad of her silent company. Once he called with her on Mrs. Farraday, and actually held an enormous skein of wool for the old lady while she, busily winding, told them anecdotes of her son James, and of her long dead husband. He made no effort to talk, seeming content to sit receptive under the soothing flow of her reminiscences.

"Thee is a good boy," said the little lady, patting his hand kindly as the last shred of wool was wound.

"I'm afraid not, ma'am," said he, dropping quaintly into the address of his childhood. "I'm just a rudderless boat staggering under topheavy sails."

"Thee has a sure harbor, son," she answered, turning her gentle eyes on Mary.

He seemed about to say more, but checked himself. Instead he rose and kissed the little lady's hand.

"You are one of those who never lose their harbor, Mrs. Farraday. We're all glad to lower sail in yours."

On the way home Mary linked her arm in his.

"You were so sweet to her, dear," she said.

"You're wondering why I can't always be like that, eh, Mary!"

She laughed and nodded, pressing his arm.

"Well, I can't, worse luck," he answered, frowning.

That evening, while they sat in the dining room over their dessert, the telephone bell rang. Stefan jumped hastily to answer it, as if he felt sure it was for him, and he proved right.

"Yes, this is I," he replied, after his first "hello," in what seemed to Mary an artificial voice.

There was a pause; then she heard him say, "You can?" delightedly, followed by "To-morrow morning at ten? Hurrah! No more wasted time; we shall really get on now." Another pause, then, "Oh, what does it matter about the store?" impatiently—and at last "Well, to-morrow, anyway. Yes. Good-bye." The

receiver clicked into place, and Stefan came skipping back into the room radiant, his languor of the last few days completely gone.

Mary's heart sank like a stone. It was too obvious that he had stayed at home, not to be with her, but merely because his sitter was unobtainable.

"Cheers, Mary; back to work to-morrow," he exclaimed, attacking his dessert with vigor. "I've been slacking shamefully, but Felicity is so wrapped up in that store of hers I can't get her half the time. Now she's contrite, and is going to sit to-morrow."

Mary, remembering his remark about McEwan, longed to say, "Why do you call that little vulgarian by her first name?" but retaliatory methods were impossible to her. She contented herself with asking if he would be home the next evening.

"Why, yes, I expect so," he answered, looking vague, "but don't absolutely count on me, Mary. I've been very good this week."

She saw that he was gone again. His return had been more in the body than the spirit, after all. If that had been wooed a little back to her it had winged away again at the first sound of the telephone. She told herself that it was only his work calling him, that he would have been equally eager over any other sitter. But she was not sure.

"Brace up, Mary," he called across at her, "you're not being deserted. Good heavens, I must work!" His impatient frown was gathering. She collected herself, smiled cheerfully, and rose, telling Lily they would have coffee in the sitting room.

He spent the evening before the fire, smoking, and making thumbnail sketches on a piece of notepaper. She sang for some time, but without eliciting any comment from him. When they went up to bed he stopped at his own door.

"I think I'll sleep alone to-night, dear. I want to be fresh to-morrow. Good night," and he kissed her cheek.

When she came down in the morning he had already gone. Lying on the sitting room table, where it had been placed by the careful Lily, lay the scrap of notepaper he had been scribbling on the night before. It was covered with tiny heads, and figures of mermaids, dancing nymphs, and dryads. All in face or figure suggested Felicity Berber.

She laid it back on the table, dropping a heavy book over it. A little later, while she was giving Elliston his bath, it suddenly occurred to Mary that her husband had never once during his stay alluded to her manuscript, and never

looked at the baby except when she had asked him to. She excused him to herself with the plea of his temperament, and his absorption in his art, but nevertheless her heart was sore.

For the next few weeks Stefan came and went fitfully, announcing at one point that Miss Berber had ceased to pose for his fantastic study of her, called "The Nixie," but had consented to sit for a portrait.

"She's slippery—comes and goes, keeps me waiting interminably," he complained. "I can never be sure of her, but she's a wonderful model."

"What do you do while you're waiting for her?" asked Mary, who could not imagine Stefan enduring with equanimity such a tax upon his patience.

"Oh, there's tremendous work to be done on the Nixie still," he answered. "It's only her part in it that is finished."

One evening he came home with a grievance.

"That fool McEwan came to the studio to-day," he complained. "It was all I could do not to shut the door in his face. Of all the chuckleheads! What do you think he called the Nixie? 'A tricky piece of work!' Tricky!" Stefan kicked the fire disgustedly. "And it's the best thing I've done!"

"As for the portrait, he said it was 'fine and dandy,' the idiot. And the maddening thing was," he went on, turning to Mary, and uncovering the real source of his offense, "that Felicity positively encouraged him! Why, the man must have sat there talking with her for an hour. I could not paint a stroke, and he didn't go till I had said so three times!" completed Stefan, looking positively ferocious. "What in the fiend's name, Mary, did she do it for?" He collapsed on the sofa beside her, like a child bereft of a toy. Mary could not help laughing at his tragic air.

"I suppose she did it to annoy, because she knew it teased," she suggested.

"How I loathe fooling and play-acting!" he exclaimed disgustedly. "Thank God, Mary, you are sincere. One knows where one is with you!"

He seemed thoroughly upset. Miss Berber's pin-prick must have been severe, Mary thought, if it resulted in a compliment for her.

The next evening, Mary being alone, Wallace dropped in. For some time they talked of Jamie and Elliston, and of Mary's book.

He was Scotch to-night, as he usually was now when they were alone together. Cheerful as ever, his cheer was yet slow and solid—the comedian was not in evidence.

"Hae ye been up yet to see the new pictures?" he asked presently. She shook

her head.

“Ye should go, bairn, they're a fine key. Clever as the devil, but naething true about them. After the Danaë-piff!” and he snapped his fingers. “Ye hae no call to worry, you're the hub, Mary—let the wheel spin a wee while!”

She blushed. “Wallace, I believe you're a wizard—or a detective.”

“The Scottish Sherlock, eh?” he grinned. “Weel, it's as I tell ye—tak my word for't. Hae ye seen Mrs. Elliot lately?”

“No, Constance went up to their place in Vermont in June, you know. She came down purposely for Elliston's christening, the dear. She writes me she'll be back in a few days now, but says she's sick of New York, and would stay where she is if it weren't for suffrage.”

“But she would na',” said McEwan emphatically.

“No, I don't think so, either. But she sees more of Theodore while she stays away, because he feels it his duty to run up every few days and protect her against savage New England, whereas when she's in town she could drive her car into the subway excavations and he'd never know it. I'm quoting verbatim,” Mary laughed.

McEwan nodded appreciatively. “She's a grand card.”

“She pretends to be flippant about husbands,” Mary went on, “but as a matter of fact she cares much more for hers than for her sons, or anything in the world, except perhaps the Cause.”

“That's as it should be,” the other nodded.

“I don't know.” There was a puzzled note in Mary's voice. “I can't understand the son's taking such a distinctly second place.”

McEwan's face expanded into one of his huge smiles. “It's true, ye could not. That's the way God made ye, and I'll tell ye about that, too, some day,” he said, rising to go.

“Good-bye, Mr. Holmes,” she smiled, as she saw him out.

Before going to bed that night Mary examined her conscience. Why had she not been to town to see Stefan's work? She knew that the baby—whose feeding times now came less frequently—was no longer an adequate excuse. She had blamed Stefan in her heart for his indifference to her work—was she not becoming guilty of the same neglect? Was she not in danger of a worse fault, the mean and vulgar fault of jealousy? She felt herself flushing at the thought.

Two days later Mary put on her last year's suit, now a little shabby, kissed the baby, importuned the beaming Lily to be careful of him, and drove to the train in

one of the village livery stable's inconceivably decrepit coupes.

It was about twelve o'clock when she arrived at the studio, and, ringing the bell, mounted the well-known stairs with a heart which, in spite of herself, beat anxiously. Stefan opened the door irritably, but his frown changed to a look of astonishment, followed by an exuberant smile, as he saw who it was.

"Here comes Demeter," he cried, calling into the room behind him. "Why, Mary, I'm honored. Has Elliston actually released his prisoner at last?" He drew her into the studio, and kissed her almost with ostentation.

"Let's suspend the sitting, Felicity," he cried, "and show our work."

Mary looked about her. Her old home was almost unchanged. There was the painted bureau, the divan, the big easel, the model throne where she had posed as Danaë. It was unchanged, yet how different. From the throne stepped down a small svelt figure—it rippled toward her, its gown shimmering like a fire seen through water. It was Felicity, and her dress was made from the great piece of oriental silk Stefan had bought when they were first married, and which they had used as a cover for their couch.

Mary recognized it instantly—there could be no mistake. She stared stupidly, unable to find speech, while Miss Berber's tones were wafted to her like an echo from cooing doves.

"Ah, Mrs. Byrd," she was saying, "how lovely you look as a matron. We are having a short sitting in my luncheon hour. This studio calms me after the banal cackling of my clients. I almost think of ceasing to create raiment, I weary so of the stupidities of New York's four hundred. Corsets, heels"—her hands fluttered in repudiation. She sank full length upon the divan, lighting a cigarette from a case of mother-of-pearl. "Your husband is the only artist, Mrs. Byrd, who has succeeded in painting me as an individual instead of a beauty. It's relieving"—her voice fainted—"very"—it failed—her lids drooped, she was still.

Stefan looked bored. "Why, Felicity, what's the matter? I haven't seen you so completely lethargic for a long time. I thought you kept that manner for the store."

Mary could not help feeling pleased by this remark, which drew no response from Felicity save a shadowy but somewhat forced smile.

"Turn round, Mary," went on Stefan; "the Nixie is behind you."

Mary faced the canvas, another of his favorite underwater pictures. The Nixie sat on a rock, in the green light of a river-bed. Green river-weed swayed and clung about her, and her hair, green too, streamed out to mingle with it. In the

ooze at her feet lay a drowned girl, holding a tiny baby to her breast. This part of the picture was unfinished, but the Nixie stood out clearly, looking down at the dead woman with an expression compounded of wonder and sly scorn. "Lord, what fools these mortals be," she might have been saying.

The face was not a portrait—it was Felicity only in its potentialities, but it was she, unmistakably. The picture was brilliant, fantastic, and unpleasant. Mary said so.

"Of course it is unpleasant," he answered, "and so is life. Isn't it unpleasant that girls should kill themselves because of some fool man? And wouldn't sub-humans have a right to ribald laughter at a system which fosters such things!"

"He has painted me as a sub-human, Mrs. Byrd," drawled Felicity through her smoke, "but when I hear his opinion of humans I feel complimented."

"It seems to me," said Mary, "that she's not laughing at humans in general, but at this particular girl, for having cared. That's what makes it unpleasant to me."

"I dare say she is," said Stefan carelessly. "In any case, I'm glad you find it unpleasant—in popular criticism the word is only a synonym for true."

To Mary the picture was theatrical rather than true, but she did not care to argue the point. She turned to the portrait, a clever study in lights keyed to the opalescent tones of the silk dress, and showing Felicity poised for the first step of a dance. The face was still in charcoal—Stefan always blocked in his whole color scheme before beginning a head—but even so, it was alluring.

Mary said with truth that it would be a fine portrait.

"Yes, I like it. Full of movement. Nothing architectural about that," he said, glancing by way of contrast at the great Demeter drowsing from the furthest wall. "The silk is interesting, isn't it?"

Mary's throat ached painfully. He was utterly unconscious of any hurt to her in the transfer of this first extravagance of theirs. If he had done it consciously, with intent to wound, she thought it might have hurt her less.

"It's very pretty," she said conventionally.

"Bare, perhaps, rather than pretty," murmured Miss Berber behind her veil of smoke.

Mary flushed. This woman had a trick of always making her appear gauche. She looked at her watch, not sorry to see that it was already time to leave.

"I must go, Stefan, I have to catch the one o'clock," she said, holding out her hand.

"What a shame. Can't you even stay to lunch?" he asked dutifully. She shook

her head, the ache in her throat making speech difficult. She seemed very stiff and matter-of-fact, he thought, and her clothes were uninteresting. He kissed her, however, and held the door while she shook hands with Felicity, who half rose. The transom was open, and through it Mary, who had paused on the landing to button her glove, overheard Miss Berber's valedictory pronouncement.

“The English are a remarkable race—remarkable. Character in them is fixed—in us, fluid.”

Mary sped down the first flight, in terror of hearing Stefan's reply.

All that evening she held the baby in her arms—she could hardly bring herself to put him down when it was time to go to bed.



IV

On November the 1st Mary received their joint bank book. The figures appalled her. She had drawn nothing except for the household bills, but Stefan had apparently been drawing cash, in sums of fifty or twenty-five dollars, every few days for weeks past. Save for his meals and a little new clothing she did not know on what he could have spent it; but as they had made nothing since the sale of his drawings in the spring, their once stout balance had dwindled alarmingly. One check, even while she felt its extravagance, touched her to sympathy. It was drawn to Henrik Jensen for two hundred dollars. Stefan must have been helping Adolph's brother to his feet again; perhaps that was where more of the money had gone.

Stefan came home that afternoon, and Mary very unwillingly tackled the subject. He looked surprised.

"I'd no idea I'd been drawing so much! Why didn't you tell me sooner?" he exclaimed. "Yes, I've given poor old Henrik a bit from time to time; I thought I'd mentioned it to you."

"You did in the summer, now I come to think of it, but I thought you meant a few dollars, ten or twenty."

"Much good that would have done him. The poor old chap was stranded. He's all right now, has a new business. I've been meaning to tell you about it. He supplies furniture on order to go with Felicity's gowns—backgrounds for personalities, and all that stuff. I put it up to her to help find him a job, and she thought of this right off." He grinned appreciatively. "Smart, eh? We both gave him a hand to start it."

"You might have told me, I should have been so interested," said Mary, trying not to sound hurt.

"I meant to, but it's only just been arranged, and I've had no chance to talk to you for ages."

"Not my doing, Stefan," she said softly.

"Oh, yes, the baby and all that." He waved his arm vaguely, and began to fidget. She steered away from the rocks.

"Anyhow, I'm glad you've helped him," she said sincerely.

"I knew you would be. Look here, Mary, can we go on at the present rate—

barring Jensen—till I finish the Nixie? I don't want Constantine to have the Demeter alone, it isn't good enough.”

“I think it is as good as the Nixie,” she said, on a sudden impulse. He swung round, staring at her almost insolently.

“My dear girl, what do you know about it?” His voice was cold.

The blood rushed to her heart. He had never spoken to her in that tone before. As always, her hurt silenced her.

He prowled for a minute, then repeated his question about their expenses.

“I don't want to have to think in cents again unless I must,” he added.

Mary considered, remembering the now almost finished manuscript in her desk.

“Yes, I think we can manage, dear.”

“That's a blessing; then we won't talk about it any more,” he exclaimed, pinching her ear in token of satisfaction.

The next day Mary sent her manuscript to be typed. In a week it had gone to Farraday at his office, complete all but three chapters, of which she enclosed an outline. With it she sent a purely formal note, asking, in the event of the book being accepted, what terms the Company could offer her, and whether she could be paid partly in advance. She put the request tentatively, knowing nothing of the method of paying for serials. In another week she had a typewritten reply from Farraday, saying that the serial had been most favorably reported, that the Company would buy it for fifteen hundred dollars, with a guarantee to begin serialization within the year, on receipt of the final chapters, that they enclosed a contract, and were hers faithfully, etc. With this was a personal note from her friend, congratulating her, and explaining that his estimate of her book had been more than borne out by his readers.

“I don't want you to think others less appreciative than I,” was his tactful way of intimating that her work had been accepted on its merits alone.

The letters took Mary's breath away. She had no idea that her work could fetch such a price. This stroke of fortune completely lifted her financial anxieties, but her spirits did not rise correspondingly. Six months ago she would have been girlishly triumphant at such a success, but now she felt at most a dull satisfaction. She hastened, however, to write the final chapters, and deposited the check when it came in her own bank, drawing the next month's housekeeping money half from that and half from Stefan's rapidly dwindling account. That she was able to do this gave her a feeling of relief, no more.

Mary had now nursed her baby for over four months, and began to feel a nervous lassitude which she attributed—quite wrongly—to this fact. As Elliston still gained weight steadily, however, she gave her own condition no thought. But the last leaves had fallen from the trees, sea and woods looked friendless, and the evenings were long and lonely. The neighbors had nearly all gone back to the city. Farraday only came down at week-ends, Jamie was busy with his lessons, and Constance still lingered in Vermont. As for Stefan, he came home late and left early; often he did not come at all. She began to question seriously if she had been right to remain in the cottage. Her heart told her no, but her pride said yes, and her pride was strong; also, it was backed by reason. Her steady brain, which was capable of quite impersonal thinking, told her that Stefan would be actively discontented just now in company with his family, and that this discontent would eat into his remaining love for her.

But her heart repudiated this mental cautioning, crying out to her to go to him, to pour out her love and need, to capture him safely in her arms. More than once she nerved herself for such an effort, only to become incapable of the least expression at his approach. Emotionally inarticulate even in happiness, Mary was quite dumb in grief. Her conversation became trite, her sore heart drew a mantle of the commonplace over its wound; Stefan found her more than ever “English.”

So lonely was she at this time that she would have asked little Miss Mason to stay with her, but for the lack of a spare bedroom. Of all her friends, only Mrs. Farraday remained at hand. Mary spent many hours at the old lady's house, and rejoiced each time the pony chaise brought her to the Byrdsnest. Mrs. Farraday loved to drive up in the morning and watch the small Elliston in his bath, comparing his feats with her memories of her own baby. She liked, too, to call at the cottage for mother and child, and take them for long rambling drives behind her ruminant pony.

But the little Quakeress usually had her house full of guests—quaint, elderly folk from Delaware or from the Quaker regions of Pennsylvania—and could not give more than occasional time to these excursions. She had become devoted to Mary, whom she secretly regarded as her ideal of the woman her James should marry. That her son had not yet met such a woman was, after the loss of her husband, the little lady's greatest grief.

In the midst of this dead period of graying days, Constance Elliot burst one morning—a God from the Machine—tearing down the lane in her diminutive car with the great figure of Gunther, like some Norse divinity, beside her. She fell out of her auto, and into an explanation, in one breath, embracing Mary warmly

between sentences.

“You lovely creature, here I am at last! Theodore hadn't been up for a week, so I came down, to find Mr. Gunther thundering like Odin because I had promised to help him arrange sittings with you, and had forgotten it. I had to bring him at once. He says his group is all done but the two heads, and he must have yours and the baby's. But he'll tell you all about it. Where is he? Elliston, I mean. I've brought him some short frocks. Where are they, Mr. Gunther? If he's put them in his pockets, he'll never find them—they are feet long—the pockets, I mean. Bless you, Mary Byrd, how good it is to see you! Come into the house, every one, and let me rest.”

Mary was bubbling with laughter.

“Constance, you human dynamo, we'll go in by all means, and hold our breaths listening to your 'resting'!”

“Don't sass your elders, naughty girl. Oh, my heavens, I've been five months in New England, and have behaved like a perfect gentlewoman all the time! Now I'm due for an attack of New Yorkitis!” Constance rushed into the sitting room, pulled off her hat and patted her hair into shape, ran to the kitchen door to say hello to Lily, and was back in her chair by the time the others had found theirs. Her quick glance traveled from one to the other.

“Now I shall listen,” she said. “Mary, tell your news. Mr. Gunther, explain your ideas.”

Mary laughed again. “Visitors first,” she nodded to the Norwegian who, as always, was staring at her with a perfectly civil fixity.

He placed a great hand on either knee and prepared to state his case. With his red-gold beard and piercing eyes, he was, Mary thought, quite the handsomest, and, after Stefan, the most attractive man she had ever seen.

“Mrs. Byrd,” he began, “I am doing, among other things, a large group called 'Pioneers' for the Frisco exhibition. It is finished in the clay—as Mrs. Elliot said—all but two heads, and is already roughly blocked in marble. I want your head, with your son's—I must have them. Six sittings will be enough. If you cannot, as I imagine, come to the city, I will bring my clay here, and we will work in your husband's studio. These figures, of whom the man is modeled from myself, do not represent pioneers in the ordinary sense. They embody my idea of those who will lead the race to future greatness. That is why I feel it essential to have you as a model.”

He spoke quite simply, without a trace of flattery, as if he were merely putting into words a self-evident truth. A compliment of such staggering dimensions,

however, left Mary abashed.

“You may wonder,” he went on, seeing her silent, “why I so regard you. It is not merely your beauty, Mrs. Byrd, of which as an artist I can speak without offense, it is because to my mind you combine strong mentality and morale with simplicity of temperament. You are an Apollonian, rather than a Dionysian. Of such, in my judgment, will the super-race be made.” Gunther folded his arms and leaned back.

He was sufficiently distinguished to be able to carry off a pronouncement which in a lesser man would have been an impertinence, and he knew it.

Constance threw up her hands. “There, Mary, your niche is carved. I don't quite know what Mr. Gunther means, but he sounds right.”

Mary found her voice. “Mr. Gunther honors me very much, and, although of course I do not deserve his praise, I shall certainly not refuse his request.”

Gunther bowed gravely from the hips in the Continental manner, without rising.

“When may I come,” he asked; “to-morrow? Good! I will bring the clay out by auto.”

“You lucky woman,” exclaimed Constance. “To think of being immortalized by two great artists in one year!”

“Her type is very rare,” said Gunther in explanation. “When does one see the classic face with expression added? Almost always, it is dull.”

“Now, Mary, produce the infant!” Constance did not intend the whole morning to be devoted to the Olympian discourse of the sculptor.

The baby was brought down, and the rest of the visit pivoted about him. Mary glowed at the praises he received; she looked immeasurably brighter, Constance thought, than when they arrived.

On the way home Gunther unbosomed himself of a final pronouncement. “She does not look too happy, but her beauty is richer and its meaning deeper than before. She is what the mothers of men should be. I am sorry,” he concluded simply, “that I did not meet her more than a year ago.”

Constance almost gasped. What an advantage, she thought, great physical gifts bring. Even without this man's distinction in his art, it was obvious that he had some right to assume his ability to mate with whomever he might choose.

Early the next morning the sculptor drove up to the barn, his tonneau loaded with impedimenta. Mary was ready for him, and watched with interest while he lifted out first a great wooden box of clay, then a small model throne, then two

turntables, and finally, two tin buckets. These baffled her, till, having installed the clay-box, which she doubted if an ordinary man could lift, he made for the garden pump and watered his clay with the contents of the buckets.

He set up his three-legged turntables, each of which bore an angle-iron supporting a twisted length of lead pipe, stood a bucket of water beneath one, and explained that in a few minutes he would be ready to begin. Donning a linen blouse, he attacked the mass of damp clay powerfully, throwing great pieces onto the skeleton lead-pipe, which he explained had been bent to the exact angle of the head in his group.

“The woman's figure I modeled from ideal proportions, Mrs. Byrd, and this head will be set upon its shoulders. My statue will then be a living thing instead of a mere symbol.”

When Mary was posed she became absorbed in watching Gunther's work grow. He modeled with extraordinary speed, yet his movements had none of the lightning swoops and darts of Stefan's method. Each motion of his powerful hands might have been preordained; they seemed to move with a deliberate and effortless precision, so that she would hardly have realized their speed had the head and face not leaped under them into being. He was a silent worker, yet she felt companioned; the man's presence seemed to fill the little building.

“After to-day I shall ask you to hold the child, for as long as it will not disturb him. I shall then have the expression on your face which I desire, and I will work at a study of the boy's head at those moments when he is awake.”

Mary sincerely enjoyed her sittings, which came as a welcome change in her even days. Gunther usually stayed to lunch, Constance joining them on one occasion, and Mrs. Farraday on another. Both these came to watch the work, Gunther, unlike Stefan, being oblivious of an audience; and once McEwan came, his sturdy form appearing insignificant beside the giant Norseman. Wallace hung about smoking a pipe for half an hour or more. He was at his most Scotch, appeared well pleased, and ejaculated “Aye, aye,” several times, nodding a ponderous head.

“Wallace, what are you so solemnly aye-ayeing about? Why so mysterious?” enquired Mary.

“I'm haeing a few thochts,” responded the Scot, his expression divided between an irritating smile and a kindly twinkle.

“Well, don't be annoying, and stay to lunch,” said Mary, dispensing even justice to both expressions.

Stefan, returning home one afternoon half way through the sittings, expressed

a mild interest in the news of them, and, going out to the barn, unwrapped the wet cloths from the head.

“He's an artist,” said he; “this has power and beauty. Never sit to a second-rater, Mary, you've had the best now.” And he covered the head again with a craftsman's thoroughness.

Mary was sorry when the sittings came to an end. On the last day the sculptor brought two men with him, who made the return journey in the tonneau, each guarding a carefully swathed bust against the inequalities of the road. Gunther bowed low over her hand with a word of thanks at parting, and she watched his car out of sight regretfully.



V

The week's interlude over, Mary's days reverted to their monotonous tenor. As November drew to a close, she began to think of Christmas, remembering how happy her last had been, and wondering if she could summon enough courage for an attempt to engage Stefan's interest in some kind of celebration. She now admitted to herself that she was actively worried about her relations with him. He was quite agreeable to her when in the house, but she felt this was only because she made no demands on him. Let her reach out ever so little for his love, and he instantly became vague or restless. Their intercourse was friendly, but he appeared absolutely indifferent to her as a woman; she might have been a well-liked sister. Under the grueling strain of self-repression Mary was growing nervous, and the baby began to feel the effects. His weekly gains were smaller, and he had his first symptoms of indigestion.

She redoubled the care of her diet, and lengthened her daily walks, but he became fretful, and at last, early in December, she found on weighing him that he had made no gain for a week. Terrified, she telephoned for Dr. Hillyard, and received her at the door with a white face. It was a Sunday morning, and McEwan had just dropped in with some chrysanthemums from the Farradays' greenhouse. Finding Mary disturbed he had not remained, and was leaving the house as the doctor drove up.

Dr. Hillyard's first words were reassuring. There was absolutely nothing to fear in a week's failure to gain, she explained. "It always happens at some stage or other, and many babies don't gain for weeks."

Still, the outcome of her visit was that Mary, with an aching heart, added a daily bottle to Elliston's régime. In a week the doctor came again, gave Mary a food tonic, and advised the introduction of a second bottle. Elliston immediately responded, palpably preferring his bottle feedings to the others. His fretfulness after these continued, he turned with increased eagerness to his bottle, and with tears of disappointment Mary yielded to his loudly voiced demands. By Christmas time he was weaned. His mother felt she could never forgive herself for failing him so soon, and a tinge of real resentment colored for the first time her attitude toward Stefan, whom she knew to be the indirect cause of her failure.

The somewhat abrupt deterioration of Mary's magnificent nervous system

would have been unaccountable to Dr. Hillyard had it not been for a chance encounter with McEwan after her first visit. The Scotchman had hailed her in the lane, asking for a lift to a house beyond the village, where he had some small errand. During a flow of discursive remarks he elicited from the doctor, without her knowledge, her opinion that Mary was nervously run down, after which he rambled at some length about the value of art, allowing the doctor to pass his destination by a mile or more.

With profuse thanks for her kindness in turning back, he continued his ramblings, and she gathered the impression that he was a dull, inconsequential talker, that he considered young couples “kittle cattle,” that artists were always absorbed in their work, that females had a habit of needless worrying, and that commuting in winter was distracting to a man's labors. She only half listened to him, and dropped him with relief, wondering if he was an anti-suffragist. Some memory of his remarks must, however, have remained with her, for after her next visit to Mary she found herself thinking that Mr. McEwan was probably neither an anti-suffragist, nor dull.

A little before Christmas McEwan called on Constance, and found her immersed in preparations for a Suffrage bazaar and fête.

“I can't talk to any one,” she announced, receiving him in a chaos of boxes, banners, paper flowers, and stenographers, in the midst of which she appeared to be working with two voices and six hands. “Didn't the maid warn you off the premises?”

“She did, but I sang 'Take back the lime that thou gavest' in such honey tones that she complied,” said Mac.

“Just for that, you can give the fête a two-inch free ad in The Household Magazine,” Constance implacably replied.

He grinned. “I raise the ante. Three inches, at the risk of losing my job, for five minutes alone with you.”

“You lose your job!” scoffed Constance, leading the way into an empty room, and seating herself at attention, one eye on her watch. “Proceed—I am yours.”

Mac sat opposite her, and shot out an emphatic forefinger.

“The Berber girl's middle name is Mischief,” he began, plunging in medias res; “Byrd's is Variability; for the last five months the Mary lady's has been Mother. Am I right?”

Constance's bright eyes looked squarely at him.

“Wallace McEwan, you are,” she said.

His finger continued poised. "Very well, we are 'on,' and *our* middle name is Efficiency, eh?"

"Yes," Constance nodded doubtfully, "but—"

McEwan's hand slapped his knee. "Here's the scheme," he went on rapidly. "Variable folk must have variety, either in place or people. If we don't want it to be people, we make it place, see? Is your country house closed yet?"

"No, I fancied I might go there to relax for a week after the fête."

"A1 luck. You won't relax, you'll have a week's house-party, sleighing, skating, coasting, all that truck. The Byrds, Farraday (I'll persuade him he can leave the office), a couple of pretty skirts with no brains—me if you like. Get me?"

Constance gasped, her mind racing. "But Mary's baby?" she exclaimed, clutching at the central difficulty.

"You're the goods," replied McEwan admiringly. "She couldn't shine as Queen of the Slide if she was tied to the offspring—granted. Now then." He leant forward. "She's had to wean him—you didn't know that. Your dope is to talk up the house-party, tell her she owes it to herself to get a change, and make her leave the boy with a trained nurse. The Mary lady's no fool, she'll be on."

Constance's eyes narrowed to slits, she fingered her beads, and nodded once, twice.

"More trouble," she said, "but it's a go. Second week in January."

He grasped her hand. "Votes for Women," he beamed.

She looked at her watch. "Five minutes exactly. Three inches, Mr. McEwan!"

"Three inches!" he called from the door.



VI

Christmas was a blank period for Mary that year. Stefan came home on Christmas eve in a mood of somewhat forced conviviality, but Mary had had no heart for festive preparations. Stefan had failed her and she had failed her baby—these two ever present facts shadowed her world. She had bought presents for Lily and the baby, a pair of links for Stefan, books for Mrs. Farraday and Jamie, and trifles for Constance and Miss Mason, but the holly and mistletoe, the tree, the new frock and the Christmas fare which normally she would have planned with so much joy, were missing. Stefan's gift to her—a fur-lined coat—was so extravagant that she could derive no pleasure from it, and she had the impression that he had chosen it hurriedly, without much thought of what would best please her. From Constance she received a white sweater of very beautiful heavy silk, with a cap and scarf to match, but she thought bitterly that pretty things to wear were of little use to her now.

It was obvious that Stefan's conscience pricked him. He spent the morning hanging about her, and even played a little with his son, who now sat up, bounced, crowed with laughter, clutched every article within reach, and had two teeth. Mary's heart reached out aching to Stefan, but he seemed to her a strange man. The contrast between this and their last Christmas smote her intolerably.

In the afternoon they walked over to the Farradays', where there was a tree for Jamie and a few friends, including the chauffeur's and gardener's children. Here Stefan prowled into the picture gallery, while Mary, surrounded by children, was in her element. Returning to the drawing room, Stefan watched her playing with them as he had watched her on the *Lusitania* fifteen months before. She was less radiant now, and her figure was fuller, but as she smiled and laughed with the children, her cheeks pink and her hair all a-glitter under the lights, she looked very lovely, he thought. Why did the sight of her no longer thrill him? Why did he enjoy more the society of Felicity Berber, whom he knew to be affected and egotistic, and suspected of being insincere, than that of this beautiful, golden woman of whose truth he could never conceive a doubt?

A feeling of deep sadness, of unutterable regret, swept through him. Better never to have married than to have outlived so soon the magic of romance. Which of them had lost the key? When Mary had furled her wings to brood over her nest he had thought it was she; now he was not so sure.

Walking home through the dark woods he stopped suddenly, and drew her to him.

“Mary, my Beautiful, I'm drifting, hold me close,” he whispered. Her breath caught, she clung to him, he felt her face wet with tears. No more words were spoken, but they walked on comforted, groping their way under the damp fingers of the trees. Stefan felt no passion, but his tenderness for his wife had reawakened. For her part, tears had thawed her bitterness, without washing it away.

The next morning Constance drove over.

“Children,” she said, hurrying in from the cold air, “what a delicious scene! I invite myself to lunch.”

Mary was playing with Elliston on a blanket by the fire, Stefan sketching them, the room full of sun and firelight. The two greeted her delightedly.

“Now,” she said, settling herself on the couch, “let me tell you why I came,” and she proceeded to unfold her plans for a house-party at Burlington. “You've never seen our winter sports, Mary, they're glorious, and you need a change from so much domesticity. As for you, Mr. Byrd, it will give you a chance to learn that America can be attractive even outside New York.”

Both the Byrds were looking interested, Stefan unreservedly, Mary with a pucker of doubt.

“Now, don't begin about Elliston,” exclaimed Constance, forestalling objections. “We've heaps of room, but it would spoil your fun to bring him. I want you to get a trained nurse for the week—finest thing in the world to take a holiday from maternity once in a while.” She turned to Stefan as a sure ally. “Don't you agree, Mr. Byrd?”

“Emphatically,” beamed he, seizing her hand and kissing it. “A glorious idea! Away with domesticity! A real breath of freedom, eh, Mary?”

Constance again forestalled difficulties.

“We are all going to travel up by night, ten of us, and Theodore is engaging a compartment car with rooms for every one, so there won't be any expense about that part of it, Mary, my dear. Does it seem too extravagant to ask you to get a trained nurse? I've set my heart on having you free to be the life of the party. All your admirers are coming, that gorgeous Gunther, my beloved James, and Wallace McEwan. I baited my hooks with you, so you simply *can't* disappoint me!” she concluded triumphantly.

Stefan pricked up his ears. Here was Mary in a new guise; he had not thought

of her for some time as having “admirers.” Yet he had always known Farraday for one; and certainly Gunther, who modeled her, and McEwan, who dogged her footsteps, could admire her no less than the editor. The thought that his wife was sought after, that he was probably envied by other men, warmed Stefan's heart pleasantly, just as Constance intended it should.

“It sounds fascinating, and I certainly think we must come,” Mary was saying, “though I don't know how I shall bring myself to part with Elliston,” and she hugged the baby close.

“You born Mother!” said Constance. “I adored my boys, but I was always enchanted to escape from them.” She laughed like a girl. “Now you grasp the inwardness of my Christmas present—it is a coasting outfit. Won't she look lovely in it, Mr. Byrd?”

“Glorious!” said Stefan, boyishly aglow; and “I don't believe two and two do make four, after all,” thought Constance.

All through luncheon they discussed the plan with animation, Constance enlisting Mary's help at the Suffrage Fête the first week in January in advance payment, as she said, for the house-party. “Why not get your nurse a few days earlier to break her in, and be free to give me as much time as possible?” she urged.

“Good idea, Mary,” Stefan chimed in. “I'll stay in town that week and lunch with you at the bazaar, and you could sleep a night or two at the studio.”

“We'll see,” said Mary, a little non-committal. She knew she should enjoy the Fête immensely, but somehow, she did not feel she could bring herself to sleep in the little studio, with Felicity the Nixie sneering down at her from one wall, and Felicity the Dancer challenging from the other.

But it was a much cheered couple that Constance left behind, and Stefan came home every afternoon during the week that remained till the opening of the bazaar.

Being in the city for this event, Mary, in addition to engaging a nurse, indulged in some rather extravagant shopping. She had made up her mind to look her best at Burlington, and though Mary was slow to move, when she did take action her methods were thorough. She realized with gratitude that Constance, whom she suspected of knowing more than she indicated, had given her a wonderful opportunity of renewing her appeal to her husband, and she was determined to use it to the full. Incapable—as are all women of her type—of coquetry, Mary yet knew the value of her beauty, and was too intelligent not to see that both it and she had been at a grave disadvantage of late. She understood

dimly that she was confronted by one of the fundamental problems of marriage, the difficulty of making an equal success of love and motherhood. She could not put her husband permanently before her child, as Constance had done, and as she knew most Englishwomen did, but she meant to do it completely for this one week of holiday, at least.

Meanwhile, amidst the color and music of the great drill-hall where the suffragists held their yearly Fête, Mary, dispensing tea and cakes in a flower-garlanded tent, enjoyed herself with simple whole-heartedness. All Constance's waitresses were dressed as daffodils, and the high cap, representing the inverted cup of the flower, with the tight-sheathed yellow and green of the gown, was particularly becoming to Mary. She knew again the pleasure, which no one is too modest to enjoy, of being a center of admiration. Stefan dropped in once or twice, and waxed enthusiastic over Constance's arrangements and Mary's looks.

On one of these occasions Miss Berber suddenly appeared in the tent, dressed wonderfully in white panne, with a barbaric mottle of black and white civet-skins flung over one shoulder, and a tight-drawn cap of the fur, apparently held in place by the great claws of some feline mounted in heavy gold. She wore circles of fretted gold in her ears, and carried a tall ebony stick with a gold handle, Louis Quatorze fashion. From her huge civet muff a gold purse dangled. She looked at once more conventional and more dynamic than Mary had seen her, and her rich dress made the simple effects of the tent seem amateurish.

Neither Mary nor she attempted more than a formal salutation, but she discoursed languidly with Constance for some minutes. Stefan, who had been eating ice cream like a schoolboy with two pretty girls at the other side of the tent, came forward on seeing the new arrival, and after a good deal of undecided fidgeting, and a "See you later" to Mary, wandered off with Miss Berber and disappeared for the rest of the afternoon. In spite of her best efforts, Mary's spirits were completely dashed by this episode, but they rose again when Stefan met her at the Pennsylvania Station and traveled home with her. As they emerged from the speech-deadening roar of the tunnel he said casually, "Felicity Berber is an amusing creature, but she's a good deal of a bore at times." Mary took his hand under the folds of their newspaper.



VII

On the evening of their departure Mary parted from her baby with a pang, but she knew him to be in the best of hands, and felt no anxiety as to his welfare. The nurse she had obtained was a friend of Miss McCullock's, and a most efficient and kindly young woman.

Their journey up to town reminded Mary of their first journey from Shadeham, so full of spirits and enthusiasm was Stefan. The whole party met at the Grand Central, and boarded the train amid laughter, introductions, and much gay talk. Constance scintillated. The solid Mr. Elliot was quite shaken out of his sobriety, McEwan's grin was at its broadest, Farraday's smile its pleasantest, and the three young women whom Constance had collected bubbled and shrilled merrily.

Only Gunther appeared untouched by the holiday atmosphere. He towered over the rest of the party calm and direct, disposing of porters and hand-baggage with an unruffled perfection of address. Mary, watching him, pulled Stefan's sleeve.

"Look," she said, pointing to two long ribbons of narrow wood lashed to some other impedimenta of Gunther's. "Skis, Stefan, how thrilling! I've never seen them used."

Stefan nodded. "I'd like to get a drawing of that chap in action. His lines are magnificent," Mary had never been in a sleeping car before, and was fascinated to see the sloping ceilings of the state-rooms change like pantomime trick into beds under the deft handling of the porter. She liked the white coat of this autocrat of the road, and the smart, muslin trimmings of the colored maid. She and Stefan had the compartment next their host's; Farraday and McEwan shared one beyond; Gunther and his skis and Walter, the Elliot's younger son, completely filled the next; Mrs. Thayer, a cheerful young widow, and Miss Baxter and Miss Van Sittart, the two girls of the party, occupied the remaining three. The drawing room had been left empty to serve as a general overflow. To this high-balls, coffee, milk and sandwiches were borne by white-draped waiters from the buffet, and set upon a magically installed table. Mrs. Thayer, Constance, and the men fell upon the stronger beverages, while Mary and the girls divided the milk.

Under cover of the general chatter McEwan raised his glass to Constance.

“I take off my hat to you, Mrs. Elliot, for a stage manager,” he whispered, glancing at the other women. “A black-haired soubrette, a brown pony, and a redheaded slip; no rivals to the leading lady in this show!”

Their train reached Burlington in a flurry of snow, and they were bundled into big, two-seated sleighs for the drive out of the city.

Mary, wrapped in her fur-lined coat and covered with a huge bearskin, watched with interest the tidy, dignified little town speed by. Even Stefan was willing to admit it had some claims to the picturesque, but a little way beyond, when they came to the open country, he gave almost a whoop of satisfaction. Before them stretched tumbled hills, converging on an icebound lake. Their snowy sides glittered pink in the sun and purple in the shadows; they reared their frosted crests as if in welcome of the morning; behind them the sky gleamed opalescent. Stefan leant forward in the speeding sleigh as if to urge it with the sway of his body, the frosty air stung his nostrils, the breath of the horses trailed like smoke, the road seemed leading up to the threshold of the world. The speed of their cold flight was in tune with the frozen dance of the hills—Stefan whooped again, intoxicated, the others laughed back at him and cheered, Mary's face glowed with delight, they were like children in their joy.

The Elliot house lay in a high fold of the hills, overlooking the lake, and almost out of sight of other buildings. Within, all was spacious warmth and the crackle of great wood fires; on every side the icy view, seen through wide windows, contrasted with the glowing colors of the rooms. A steaming breakfast waited to fortify the hastily drunk coffee of the train. After it, when the Byrds found themselves in their cozy bedroom with its old New England furniture and blue-tiled bathroom, Stefan, waltzing round the room, fairly hugged Mary in excited glee.

“What fun, Beautiful, what a lovely place, what air, what snow!” She laughed with him, her own heart bounding with unwonted excitement.

The six-day party was a marked success throughout. Even the two young girls were satisfied, for Constance contrived the appearance of several stalwart youths of the neighborhood to help her son leaven the group of older men. Mrs. Thayer flirted pleasantly and wittily with whoever chanced to be at hand, Mr. Elliot hobnobbed with Farraday and made touchingly laborious efforts to be frivolous, and McEwan kept the household laughing at his gambols, heavy as those of a St. Bernard pup.

Constance darted from group to group like a purposeful humming-bird, but did not lack the supreme gift of a hostess—that of leaving her guests reasonably

alone. All the women were inclined to hover about Byrd, who, with Gunther, represented the most attractive male element. As the women were sufficiently pretty and intelligent, Stefan enjoyed their notice, but Gunther stalked away from them like a great hound surrounded by lap-dogs. He was invariably courteous to his hostess, but had eyes only for Mary. Never seeming to follow her, and rarely talking to her alone, he was yet always to be found within a few yards of the spot she happened to occupy. Farraday would watch her from another room, or talk with her in his slow, kind way, and Wallace always drew her into his absurd games or his sessions at the piano. But Gunther neither watched nor chattered, he simply *was*, seeming to draw a silent and complete satisfaction from her nearness. Of the men he took only cursory notice, talking sometimes with Stefan on art, or with Farraday on life, but never seeking their society.

Indoors Gunther seemed negative, outdoors he became godlike. The Elliots possessed a little Norwegian sleigh they had brought from Europe. It was swan-shaped, stood on low wooden runners, and was brightly painted in the Norse manner. This Gunther found in the stable, and, promptly harnessing to it the fastest horse, drove round to the house. Striding into the hall, where the party was discussing plans for the day, he planted himself before Mary, and invited her to drive. The others, looking out of the window, exclaimed with pleasure at the pretty little sleigh, and Mary gladly threw on her cap and coat. Gunther tucked her in and started without a word. They were a mile from the house before he broke silence.

“This sleigh comes from my country, Mrs. Byrd; I wish I could drive you there in it.”

He did not speak again, and Mary was glad to enjoy the exhilarating air in silence. By several roads they had gradually climbed a hillside. Now from below they could see the house at some distance to their right, and another road running in one long slope almost straight to it from where they sat. Gunther suddenly stood up in the sleigh, braced his feet, and wrapped a rein round each arm.

“Now we will drive,” said he. They started, they gathered speed, they flew, the horse threw himself into a stretching gallop, the sleigh rocked, it leapt like a dashing wave. Gunther half crouched, swaying with it. The horse raced, his flanks stretched to the snow. Mary clung to her seat breathless and tense with excitement—she looked up at the driver. His blue eyes blazed, his lips smiled above a tight-set jaw, he looked down, and meeting her eyes laughed triumphantly. Expanding his great chest he uttered a wild, exultant cry—they seemed to be rushing off the world's rim. She could see nothing but the blinding

fume of the upflung snow. She, too, wanted to cry aloud. Then their pace slackened, she could see the road, black trees, a wall, a house. They drove into the courtyard and stopped.

The hall door was flung open. They were met by a group of faces excited and alarmed. Gunther, his eyes still blazing, helped her down and, throwing the reins to a waiting stable-boy, strode silently past the guests and up to his room.

“Good heavens! you might have been killed,” fussed Mr. Elliot. Farraday looked pale, the women laughed excitedly.

“Mary,” cried Stefan, his face flashing with eagerness, “you weren't frightened, were you?”

She shook her head, still breathless.

“It was glorious, you were like storm gods. I've never seen anything so inspiring.” And he embraced her before them all.

After this episode Gunther resumed his impassive manner, nor did any other of their outdoor sports draw from him the strange, exultant look he had given Mary in the sleigh. But his feats on the toboggan slide and with his skis were sufficiently daring to supply the party with liberal thrills. His obvious skill gained him the captaincy of the toboggan, but after his exhibition of driving, most of the women hesitated at first to form one of his crew. Mary, however, who was quite fearless and fascinated by this new sport, dashed down with him and the other men again and again, and was, with her white wraps and brilliant pink cheeks, as McEwan had prophesied, “the queen of the slide.”

Stefan was intoxicated by the tobogganing, and though he was only less new to it than Mary he soon became expert. But on his skis the great Norwegian was alone, the whole party turning out to watch whenever he strapped them to his feet. His daring leaps were, Stefan said, the nearest thing to flying he had ever seen. “For I don't count aeroplanes—they are mere machinery.”

“Ah, if the lake were frozen enough for ice-boating,” replied Gunther, “I could show you something nearer still. But they tell me there is little chance till February for more than in-shore skating.”

Only in this last named sport had Gunther a rival, Stefan making up in grace what he lacked in practice. Beside his, the Norwegian's skating was powerful, but too unbending.

Mary, owing to the open English winters, had had less experience than any one there, but she was so much more graceful and athletic than the other women that she soon outstripped them. She skated almost entirely with Stefan, only once

with Gunther, who, since his strange look in the sleigh, a little troubled her. On that one occasion he tore round the clear ice at breakneck speed, halting her dramatically, by sheer weight, a few inches from the bank, where she arrived breathless and thrilled.

Seeing her thus at her best, happy and admired, and full of vigorous life, Stefan found himself almost as much in love as in the early weeks of their marriage.

“You are more beautiful than ever, Mary,” he exclaimed; “there is an added life and strength in you; you are triumphant.”

It was a joy again to feel her in his arms, to know that they were each other's. After his troubled flights he came back to her love with a feeling of deep spiritual peace. The night, when he could be alone with her, became the happy climax of the day.

The amusements of the week ended in an impromptu dance which Constance arranged by a morning at the telephone. For this, Mary donned her main extravagance, a dress of rainbow colored silk gauze, cut short to the ankle, and worn with pale pink slippers. She had found it “marked down” at a Fifth Avenue house, and had been told it was a model dubbed “Aurora.” With it she wore her mother's pearl ornaments. Stefan was entranced by the result, and Constance almost wept with satisfaction.

“Oh, Mary Byrd,” she cried, hugging her daintily to avoid crushing the frock; “you are the best thing that has happened in my family since my mother-in-law quit living with me.”

That night Stefan was at his best. Delighted with all his surroundings, he let his faunlike spirits have full play, and his keen, brown face and green-gold eyes flashed apparently simultaneously from every corner of the room. Gunther did not dance; Farraday's method was correct but quiet, and none of the men could rival Stefan in light-footed grace. Both he and Mary were ignorant of any of the new dances, but Constance had given Mary a lesson earlier in the day, and Stefan grasped the general scheme with his usual lightning rapidity. Then he began to embroider, inventing steps of his own which, in turn, Mary was quick to catch. No couple on the floor compared with them in distinction and grace, and they danced, to the chagrin of the other men and girls, almost entirely together.

Whatever disappointment this caused, however, was not shared by their hostess and McEwan. After enduring several rounds of Mac's punishing dancing, Constance was thankful to sit out with him and watch the others. She was glad to

be silent after her strenuous efforts as a hostess, and McEwan was apparently too filled with satisfaction to have room left for speech. His red face beamed, his big teeth glistened, pleasure radiated from him.

“Aye, aye,” he chuckled, nodding his ponderous head, and again “Aye, aye,” in tones of fat content, as the two Byrds swung lightly by.

“Aye, aye, Mr. McEwan,” smiled Constance, tapping his knee with her fan. “All this was your idea, and you are a good fellow. From this moment, I intend to call you by your first name.”

“Aye, aye,” beamed McEwan, more broadly than before, extending a huge hand; “that’ll be grand.”

The dance was the climax of the week. The next day was their last, leave-takings were in the air, and toward afternoon a bustle of packing. Stefan was in a mood of slight reaction from his excitement of the night before. While Mary packed for them both he prowled uncertainly about the house, and, finding the men in the library, whiled away the time in an utterly impossible attempt to quarrel with McEwan on some theory of art.

They all left for the train with lamentations, and arrived in New York the next morning in a cheerless storm of wet snow.

But by this time Mary's regret at the ending of their holiday was lost in joy at the prospect of seeing her baby. She urged the stiff and tired Stefan to speed, and, by cutting short their farewells and jumping for a street car, managed to make the next train out for Crab's Bay. She could hardly sit still in the decrepit cab, and it had barely stopped at their gate before she was out and tearing up the stairs.

Stefan paid the cab, carried in their suitcase, and wandered, cold and lonely, to the sitting room. For him their home-coming offered no alleviating thrill. Already, he felt, Mary's bright wings were folding again above her nest.



VIII

Refreshed, in spite of his natural reaction of spirits, by the week's holiday, Stefan turned to his work with greater content in it than he had felt for some time. His content was, to his own surprise, rather increased than lessened by the discovery that Felicity Berber had left New York for the South. Arriving at his studio the day after their return from Vermont, he found one of her characteristic notes, in crimson ink this time, upon snowy paper.

"Stefan," it read, "the winter has found his strength at last in storms. But our friendship dallies with the various moods of spring. It leaves me restless. The snow chills without calming me. My designing is beauty wasted on the blindness of the city's overfed. A need of warmth and stillness is upon me—the south claims me. The time of my return is unrevealed as yet. Felicity."

Stefan read this epistle twice, the first time with irritation, the second with relief. "Affected creature," he said to himself, "it's a good job she's gone. I've frittered away too much time with her as it is."

At home that evening he told Mary. His devotion during their holiday had already obscured her memory of the autumn's unhappiness, and his carefree manner of imparting his tidings laid any ghost of doubt that still remained with her. Secure once more in his love, she was as uncloudedly happy as she had ever been.

In his newly acquired mood of sanity, Stefan faced the fact that he had less work to show for the last nine months than in any similar period of his career, and that he was still living on his last winter's success. What had these months brought him? An expensive and inconclusive flirtation at the cost of his wife's happiness, a few disturbing memories, and two unfinished pictures. Out of patience with himself, he plunged into his work. In two weeks of concentrated effort he had finished the Nixie, and had arranged with Constantine to exhibit it and the Demeter immediately. This last the dealer appeared to admire, pronouncing it a fine canvas, though inferior to the Danaë. About the Nixie he seemed in two minds.

"We shall have a newspaper story with that one, Mr. Byrd, the lady being so well known, and the subject so dramatic, but if you ask me will it sell—" he shrugged his fat shoulders—"that's another thing."

Stefan stared at him. "I could sell that picture in France five times over."

Constantine waved his pudgy fingers.

“Ah, France! V'là c' qui est autre chose, 's pas? But if we fail in New York for this one I think we try Chicago.”

The reception of the pictures proved Constantine a shrewd prophet. The academic Demeter was applauded by the average critic as a piece of decorative work in the grand manner, and a fit rebuke to all Cubists, Futurists, and other anarchists. It was bought by a committee from a western agricultural college, which had come east with a check from the state's leading politician to purchase suitable mural enrichments for the college's new building. Constantine persuaded these worthies that one suitable painting by a distinguished artist would enrich their institution more than the half dozen canvases “to fit the auditorium” which they had been inclined to order. Moreover, he mulcted them of two thousand dollars for Demeter, which, in his private estimation, was more than she was worth. He achieved the sale more readily because of the newspaper controversy aroused by the Nixie. Was this picture a satire on life, or on the celebrated Miss Berber? Was it great art, or merely melodrama? Were Byrd's effects of river-light obtained in the old impressionist manner, or by a subtler method of his own? Was he a master or a poseur?

These and other questions brought his name into fresh prominence, but failed to sell their object. Just, however, as Constantine was considering a journey for the Nixie to Chicago, a purchaser appeared in the shape of a certain Mr. Einsbacher. Stefan happened to be in the gallery when this gentleman, piloted by Constantine himself, came in, and recognized him as the elderly satyr of the pouched eyes who had been so attentive to Felicity on the night of Constance's reception. When, later, the dealer informed him that this individual had bought the Nixie for three thousand, Stefan made no attempt to conceal his disgust.

“Thousand devils, Constantine, I don't paint for swine of that type,” said he, scowling.

The dealer's hands wagged. “His check is good,” he replied, “and who knows, he may die soon and leave the picture to the Metropolitan.”

But Stefan was not to be mollified, and went home that afternoon in a state of high rebellion against all commercialism. Mary tried to console him by pointing out that even with the dealer's commission deducted, he had made more than a year's income from the two sales, and could now work again free from all anxiety.

“What's the good,” he exclaimed, “of producing beauty for sheep to bleat and monkeys to leer at! What's the good of producing it in America at all? Who

wants, or understands it!”

“Oh, Stefan, heaps of people. Doesn't Mr. Farraday understand art, for instance?”

“Farraday,” he snorted, “yes!—landscapes and women with children. What does he know of the radiance of beauty, its mystery, the hot soul of it? Oh, Mary,” he flung himself down beside her, and clutched her hand eagerly, “don't be wise; don't be sensible, darling. It's March, spring is beginning in Europe. It's a year and a half since I became an exile. Let's go, beloved. You say yourself we have plenty of money; let's take ship for the land where beauty is understood, where it is put first, above all things. Let's go back to France, Mary!”

His face was fired with eagerness; he almost trembled with the passion to be gone. Mary flushed, and then grew pale with apprehension. “Do you mean break up our home, Stefan, for good?”

“Yes, darling. You know I've counted the days of bondage. We couldn't travel last spring, and since then we've been too poor. What have these last months brought us? Only disharmony. We are free now, there is nothing to hold us back. We can leave Elliston in Paris, and follow the spring south to the vineyards. A progress a-foot through France, each day finding colors richer, the sun nearer—think of it, Beautiful!” He kissed her joyously.

Her hands were quite cold now, “But, Stefan,” she temporized, “our little house, our friends, my work, the—the *place* we've been making?”

“Dearest, all these we can find far better there.”

She shook her head. “I can't. I don't speak French properly, I don't understand French people. I couldn't sell my stories there or—or anything,” she finished weakly.

He jumped up, his eyes blank, hands thrust in his pockets.

“I don't get you, Mary. You don't mean—you surely can't mean, that you don't want to go to France *at all*? That you want to *live* here?”

She floundered. “I don't know, Stefan. Of course you've always talked about France, and I should love to go there and see it, and so on, but somehow I've come to think of the Byrdsnest as home—we've been so happy here—”

“Happy?” he interrupted her. “You say we've been happy?” His tone was utterly confounded.

“Yes, dear, except—except when you were so—so busy last autumn—”

He dropped down by the table, squaring himself as if to get to the bottom of a riddle.

“What is your idea of happiness, Mary, of *life* in fact?” he asked, in an unusually quiet voice. She felt glad that he seemed so willing to talk things over, and to concede her a point of view of her own.

“Well,” she began, feeling for her words, “my idea of life is to have a person and work that you love, and then to build—both of you—a place, a position; to have friends—be part of the community—so that your children—the immortal part of you—may grow up in a more and more enriching atmosphere.” She paused, while he watched her, motionless. “I can’t imagine,” she went on, “greater happiness for two people than to see their children growing up strong and useful—tall sons and daughters to be proud of, such as all the generations before us have had. Something to hand our life on to—as it was in the beginning—you know, Stefan—” She flushed with the effort to express.

“Then,”—his voice was quieter still; she did not see that his hands were clenched under the flap of the table—“in this scheme of life of yours, how many children—how many servants, rooms, all that sort of thing—should you consider necessary?”

She smiled. “As for houses, servants and things, that just depends on one’s income. I hate ostentation, but I do like a beautifully run house, and I adore horses and dogs and things. But the children—” she flushed again—“why, dearest, I think any couple ought to be simply too thankful for all the children they can have. Unless, perhaps,” she added naïvely, “they’re frightfully poor.”

“Where should people live to be happy in this way?” he asked, still in those carefully quiet tones.

She was looking out of the window, trying to formulate her thoughts. “I don’t think it matters very much *where* one lives,” she said in her soft, clear tones, “as long as one has friends, and is not too much in the city. But to own one’s house, and the ground under one, to be able to leave it to one’s son, to think of *his* son being born in it—that I think would add enormously to one’s happiness. To belong to the place one lives in, whether it’s an old country, or one of the colonies, or anywhere.”

“I see,” said Stefan slowly, in a voice low and almost harsh. Startled, she looked at him. His face was knotted in a white mask; it was like the face of some creature upon which an iron door has been shut. “Stefan,” she exclaimed, “what —?”

“Wait a minute,” he said, still slowly. “I suppose it’s time we talked this thing out. I’ve been a fool, and judged, like a fool, by myself. It’s time we knew each other, Mary. All that you have said is horrible to me—it’s like a trap.” She gave

an exclamation. "Wait, let me do something I've never done, let me *think* about it." He was silent, his face still a hard, knotted mask. Mary waited, her heart trembling.

"You, Mary, told me something about families in England who live as you describe—you said your mother belonged to one of them. I remember that now." He nodded shortly, as if conceding her a point. "My father was a New Englander. He was narrow and self-righteous, and I hated him, but he came of people who had faced a hundred forms of death to live primitively, in a strange land."

"I'm willing to live in a strange country, Stefan," she almost cried to him.

"Don't, Mary—I'm still trying to understand. I'm not my father's son, I'm my mother's. I don't know what she was, but she was beautiful and passionate—she came of a mixed race, she may have had gipsy blood—I don't know—but I do know she had genius. She loved only color and movement. Mary—" he looked straight at her for the first time, his eyes were tortured—"I loved you because you were beautiful and free. When your child bound you, and you began to collect so many things and people about you, I loved you less. I met some one else who had the beauty of color and movement, and I almost loved her. She told me the name Berber wasn't her own, that she had taken it because it belonged to a tribe of wanderers—Arabs. I almost loved her for that alone. But, Mary, you still held me. I was faithful to you because of your beauty and the love that had been between us. Then you rose from your petty little surroundings"—he cast a look of contempt at the pretty furnishings of the room—"I saw you like a storm-spirit, I saw you moving among other women like a goddess, adored of men. I felt your beautiful body yield to me in the joy of wild movement, in the rhythm of the dance. You were my bride, alive, gloriously free—once more, you were the Desired. I loved you, Mary." He rose and put his hands on her shoulders. Her face was as white as his now. His hands dropped, he almost leapt away from her, the muscles of his face writhed. "My God, Mary, I've never wanted to *think* about you, only to feel and see you! Now I must think. This—this existence that you have described! Is that all you ask of life? Are you sure?"

"What more could one ask!" she uttered, dazed.

"What *more*?" he cried out, throwing up his arms. "What *more*, Mary! Why, it isn't life at all, this deadly, petty intricate day by day, surrounded by things, and more things. The hopeless, unalterable tameness of it!" He began to pace the room.

"But, my dear, I don't understand you. We have love, and work, and if some part of our life is petty, why, every one's always has been, hasn't it?"

She was deeply moved by his distress, afraid again for their happiness, longing to comfort him. Yet, under and apart from all these emotions, some cool little faculty of criticism wondered if he was not making rather a theatrical scene. "Daily life must be a little monotonous, mustn't it?" she urged again, trying to help him.

"No!" he almost shouted, with a gesture of fierce repudiation. "Was Angelo's life petty? Was da Vinci's? Did Columbus live monotonously, did Scott or Peary? Does any explorer or traveler? Did Thoreau surround himself with *things*—to hamper—did George Borrow, or Whitman, or Stevenson? Do you suppose Rodin, or de Musset, or Rousseau, or Millet, or any one else who has ever *lived*, cared whether they had a position, a house, horses, old furniture? All the world's wanderers, from Ulysses down to the last tramp who knocked at this door, have known more of life than all your generations of staid conventional county families! Oh, Mary"—he leant across the table toward her, and his voice pleaded—"think of what life *should* be. Think of the peasants in France treading out the wine. Think of ships, and rivers, and all the beauty of the forests. Think of dancing, of music, of that old viking who first found America. Think of those tribes who wander with their tents over the desert and pitch them under stars as big as lamps—all the things we've never seen, Mary, the songs we've never heard. The colors, the scents, and the cruel tang of life! All these I want to see and feel, and translate into pictures. I want you with me, Mary—beautiful and free—I want us to drink life eagerly together, as if it were heady wine." He took her hand across the table. "You'll come, Beloved, you'll give all the little things up, and come?"

She rose, her face pitifully white. They stood with hands clasped, the table between them.

"The boy, Stefan?"

He laughed, thinking he had won her. "Bring him, too, as the Arab women carry theirs, in a shawl. We'll leave him here and there, and have him with us whenever we stay long in one place."

She pulled her hand away, her eyes filled with tears. "I love you, Stefan, but I can't bring my child up like a gipsy. I'll live in France, or anywhere you say, but I must have a home—I can't be a wanderer."

"You shall have a home, sweetheart, to keep coming back to." His face was brightening to eagerness.

"Oh, you don't understand. I can't leave my child; I can't be with him only sometimes. I want him always. And it isn't only him. Oh, Stefan, dear"—her

voice in its turn was pleading—"I don't believe I can come to France just now. I think, I'm almost sure, we're going to have another baby."

He straightened, they faced each other in silence. After a moment she spoke again, looking down, her hands tremblingly picking at her handkerchief.

"I was so happy about it. It was the sign of your renewed love. I thought we could build a little wing on the cottage, and have a nurse." Her voice fell to a whisper. "I thought it might be a little girl, and that you would love her better than the boy. I'll come later, dear, if you say so, but I can't come now." She sank into her chair, her head drooping. He, too, sat down, too dazed by this new development to find his way for a minute through its implications.

"I'm sorry, Mary," he said at last, dully. "I don't want a little girl. If she could be put away somewhere till she were grown, I should not mind. But to live like this all through one's youth, with a house, and servants, and people calling, and the place cluttered up with babies—I don't think I can do that, possibly."

She was frankly crying now. "But, dear one, can't we compromise? After this baby is born, I'll give up the house. We'll live in France—I'll travel with you a little. That will help, won't it?"

He sighed. "I suppose so. We shall have to think out some scheme. But the ghastly part is that we shall both have to be content with half measures. You want one thing of life, Mary, I another. No amount of self-sacrifice on either side alters that fact. We married, strangers, and it's taken us a year and a half to find it out. My fault, of course. I wanted love and beauty, and I got it—I didn't think of the cost, and I didn't think of *you*. I was just a damned egotistical male, I suppose." He laughed bitterly. "My father wanted a wife, and he got the burning heart of a rose. I—I never wanted a wife, I see that now, I wanted to snare the very spirit of life and make it my own—you looked a vessel fit to carry it. But you were just a woman like the rest. We've failed each other, that's all."

"Oh, Stefan," she cried through her tears, "I've tried so hard. But I was always the same—just a woman. Only—" her tears broke out afresh—"when you married me, I thought you loved me as I was."

He looked at her, transfixed. "My God," he whispered, "that's what I heard my mother say more than twenty years ago. What a mockery—each generation a scorn and plaything for the high Gods! Well, we'll do the best we can, Mary. I'm utterly a pagan, so I'm not quite the inhuman granite my Christian father was. Don't cry, dear." He stooped and kissed her, and she heard his light, wild steps pass through the room and out into the night. She sat silent, amid the ruins of her nest.



IX

For a month Stefan brooded. He hung about the house, dabbled at a little work, and returned, all without signs of life or interest. He was kind to Mary, more considerate than he used to be, but she would have given all his inanimate, painstaking politeness for an hour of his old, gay thoughtlessness. They had reached the stage of marriage in which, all being explained and understood, there seems nothing to hope for. Alone together they were silent, for there was nothing to say. Each condoned but could not comfort the other. Stefan felt that his marriage had been a mistake, that he, a living thing, had tied about his neck a dead mass of institutions, customs and obligations which would slowly crush his life out. "I am twenty-seven," he said to himself, "and my life is over." He did not blame Mary, but himself.

She, on the other hand, felt she had married a man outside the pale of ordinary humanity, and that though she still loved him, she could no longer expect happiness through him. "I am twenty-five," she thought, "and my personal life is over. I can be happy now only in my children." As those were assured her, she never thought of regretting her marriage, but only deplored the loss of her dream. Nor did she judge Stefan. She understood the wild risk she had run in marrying a man of whom she knew nothing. "He is as he is," she thought; "neither of us is to blame." Lonely and grieved, she turned for companionship to her writing, and began a series of fairy tales which she had long planned for very young children. The first instalment of her serial was out, charmingly illustrated; she had felt rather proud on seeing her name, for the first time, on the cover of a magazine. She engaged a young girl from the village to take Elliston for his daily outings, and settled down to a routine of work, small social relaxations, and morning and evening care of the baby. The daily facts of life were pleasant to Mary; if some hurt or disappointed, her balanced nature swung readily to assuage itself with others. She honestly believed she felt more deeply than her husband, and perhaps she did, but she was not of the kind whom life can break. Stefan might dash himself to exhaustion against a rock round which Mary would find a smooth channel.

While her work progressed, Stefan's remained at a standstill. Disillusioned with his marriage and with his whole way of life he fretted himself from his old sure confidence to a mood of despair. Their friends bored him, his studio like his

house became a cage. New York appeared in her old guise of mammoth materialist, but now he had no heart to satirize her dishonor. He wanted only to be gone, but told himself that in common decency he must remain with Mary till her child was born. He longed for even the superficial thrill of Felicity's presence, but she still lingered in the South. So fretting, he tossed himself against the bars through the long snows of an unusually severe March, until April broke the frost, and the road to the Byrdsnest became a morass of running mud.

In the last two weeks Stefan had begun a portrait of Constance, but without enthusiasm. She was a fidgety sitter, and was moreover so busy with her suffrage work that she could never be relied on for more than an hour at a time. After a few of these fragmentary sittings his ragged nerves gave out completely.

"It's utterly useless, Constance!" he exclaimed, throwing down his palette and brushes, as the telephone interrupted them for the third time in less than an hour. "I can't paint in a suffrage office. This is a studio, not the Club's headquarters. If you can't shut these people off and sit rationally, please don't trouble to come again."

"I know, my dear boy, it's abominable, but what can I do? Our bill has passed the Legislature; until it is submitted next year I can't be my own or Theodore's, much less yours. As for you, you look a rag. This winter has about made me hate my country. I don't wonder you long for France."

Her eyes narrowed at him, she dangled her beads reflectively, and perched on the throne again without attempting to resume her pose. "My dear boy," she said suddenly, "why stay here and be eaten by devils—why not fly from them?"

"I wish to God I could," he groaned.

"You can. Mary was in to see our shop yesterday; she looked dragged. You are both nervous. Do what I have always done—take a holiday from each other. There's nothing like it as a tonic for love."

"Do you really think she wouldn't mind?" he exclaimed eagerly. "You know she—she isn't very well."

"Chtt," shrugged Constance, "*that's* only being more than usually well. You don't think Mary needs coddling, do you? She's worried because you are bored. If you aren't there, she won't worry. I shall take your advice—I shan't come here again—" and she settled her hat briskly—"and you take mine. Go away—" Constance threw on her coat—"go anywhere you like, my dear Stefan—" she was at the door—"except south," she added with a mischievous twinkle, closing it.

Stefan, grinning appreciatively at this parting shot, unscrewed his sketch of

Constance from the easel, set it face to the wall in a corner, cleaned his brushes, with the meticulous care he always gave to his tools, and ran for the elevated, just in time to catch the next train for Crab's Bay. At the station he jumped into a hack, and, splashing home as quickly as the liquid road bed would allow, burst into the house to find Mary still lingering over her lunch.

"What has happened, Stefan?" she exclaimed, startled at his excited face.

"Nothing. I've got an idea, that's all. Let me have something to eat and I'll tell you about it."

She rang for Lily, and he made a hasty meal, asking her unwonted questions meantime about her work, her amusements, whether many of the neighbors were down yet, and if she felt lonely.

"No, I'm not lonely, dear. There are only a few people here, but they are awfully decent to me, and I'm very busy at home."

"You are sure you are not lonely?" he asked anxiously, drinking his coffee, and lighting a cigarette.

"Yes, quite sure. I'm not exactly gay—" and she smiled a little sadly—"but I'm really never lonely."

"Then," he asked nervously, "what would you say if I suggested going off by myself for two or three months, to Paris." He watched her intently, fearful of the effect of his words. To his unbounded relief, she appeared neither surprised nor hurt, but, after twisting her coffee cup thoughtfully for a minute, looked up with a frank smile.

"I think it would be an awfully good thing, Stefan dear. I've been thinking so for a month, but I didn't like to say anything in case you might feel—after our talk—" her voice faltered for a moment—"that I was trying to—that I didn't care for you so much. It isn't that, dear—" she looked honestly at him—"but I know you're not happy, and it doesn't help me to feel I am holding you back from something you want. I think we shall be happier afterwards if you go now."

"I do, too," said he, "but I was so afraid it would seem cruel in me to suggest it. I don't want to grow callous like my father." He shuddered. "I want to do the decent thing, Mary." His eyes were pleading.

"I know, dearest, you've been very kind. But for both our sakes, it will be far better if you go for a time." She rose, and, coming round the table, kissed his rough hair. He caught her hand, and pressed it gratefully. "You are good to me, Mary."

The matter settled, Stefan's spirit soared. He rang up the French Line and

secured one of the few remaining berths for their next sailing, which was in three days. He telephoned an ecstatic cable to Adolph. Then, hurrying to the attic, he brought down his friend's old Gladstone, and his own suitcase, and began to sort out his clothes. Mary, anxious to quell her heartache by action, came up to help him, and vetoed his idea of taking only the barest necessities.

"I know," she said, "you want to get back to your old Bohemia. But remember you are a well-known artist now—the celebrated Stefan Byrd," and she courtesied to him. "Suppose you were to meet some charming people whom you wanted to see something of? Do take a dinner-jacket at least."

He grinned at her. "I shall live in a blouse and sleep in my old attic with Adolph. That's the only thing I could possibly want to do. But I won't be fractious, Mary. If it will please you to have me take dress clothes I'll do it—only you must pack them yourself!"

She nodded smilingly. "All right, I shall love to." She had failed to make her husband happy in their home, she thought; at least she would succeed in her manner of speeding him from it. It was her tragedy that he should want to go. That once faced, she would not make a second tragedy of his going.

She spent the next morning, while he went to town to buy his ticket, in a thorough overhauling of his clothes. She found linen bags to hold his shoes and a linen folder for his shirts. She pressed his ties and brushed his coats, packed lavender bags in his underwear, and slipped a framed snapshot of herself and Elliston into the bottom of the Gladstone. With it, in a box, she put the ring she had given him, with the winged head, which he had ceased to wear of late. She found some new poems and a novel he had not read, and packed those. She gave him her own soapbox and toothbrush case. She cleaned his two bags with shoe polish. Everything she could think of was done to show that she sent him away willingly, and she worked so hard that she forgot to notice how her heart ached. In the afternoon she met him in town and they had dinner together. He suggested their old hotel, but she shook her head. "No dear, not there," she said, smiling a little tremulously. They went to a theatre, and got home so late that she was too tired to be wakeful.

"By the by," she said next morning at breakfast, "don't worry about my being alone after you've gone. I thought it might be triste for the first few days, so I've rung up the Sparrow, and she's coming to occupy your room for a couple of weeks. She's off for her yearly trip abroad at the end of the month. Says she can't abide the Dutch, but means to see what there is to their old Rhine, and come back by way of Tuscany and France." Mary gurgled. "Can't you see her in Paris, poor dear, 'doing' the Louvre, with her nose in a guidebook. Why! Perhaps you

may!”

“The gods forbid,” said Stefan devoutly.

He had brought his paints and brushes home the night before, and after breakfast Mary helped him stow them away in the Gladstone, showing him smilingly how well she had done his packing. While he admired, she remembered to ask him if he had obtained a letter of credit. He burst out laughing.

“Mary, you wonder! I have about fifty dollars in my pocket, and should have entirely forgotten to take more if you hadn't spoken of it. What a bore! Can't I get it to-morrow?”

“You might not have time before sailing. I think you'd better go up to-day, and then you could call on Constance to say good-bye.”

“I don't like to leave you on our last day,” he said uneasily,

“Oh, that will be all right, dear,” she smiled, patting his hand. “I have oceans to do, and I think you ought to see Constance. Get your letter of credit for a thousand dollars, then you'll be sure to have enough.”

“A thousand! Great Scott, Adolph would think I'd robbed a bank if I had all that.”

“You don't need to spend it, silly, but you ought to have it behind you. You never know what might happen.”

“Would there be plenty left for you?”

“Bless me, yes,” she laughed; “we're quite rich.”

While he was gone Mary arranged an impromptu farewell party for him, so that instead of spending a rather depressing evening alone with her, as he had expected, he found himself surrounded by cheerful friends—McEwan, the Farradays, their next neighbors, the Havens, and one or two others. McEwan was the last to leave, at nearly midnight, and pleading fatigue, Mary kissed Stefan good night at the door of her room. She dared not linger with him lest the stifled pain at her heart should clamor for expression too urgently to be denied. But by this time he himself began to feel the impending separation. Ready for bed, he slipped into her room and found her lying wide-eyed in a swathe of moonlight. Without a word he lay down beside her and drew her close. Like children lost in the dark, they slept all night in each other's arms.

Next day Mary saw him off. New York ended at the gangway. Across it, they were in France. French decorations, French faces, French gaiety, the beloved French tongue, were everywhere.

“Listen to it, Mary,” he cried exultingly, and she smiled a cheerful response.

When the warning bell sounded he suddenly became grave.

“Say good-bye again to Elliston for me, dear,” he said, holding her hand close. “I hope he grows up like you.”

Her eyes were swimming now, in spite of herself. “Mary,” he went on, “this separation makes or mars us. I hope, dear, I believe, it will make us. God bless you.” He kissed her, pressed her to him. Suddenly they were both trembling.

“Why are we parting?” he cried, in a revulsion of feeling.

She smiled at him, wiping away her tears. “It's better, dearest,” she whispered; “let me go now.” They kissed again; she turned hurriedly away. He watched her cross the gangway—she waved to him from the dock—then the crowd swallowed her.

For a moment he felt bitterly bereaved. “How ironic life is,” he thought. Then a snatch of French chatter and a gay laugh reached him. The gangway lifted, water widened between the bulwarks and the dock. As the ship swung out he caught the sea breeze—a flight of gulls swept by—he was outbound!

With a deep breath Stefan turned a brilliant smile upon the deck ... Freedom!

Mary, hurrying home with aching heart and throat, let the slow tears run unheeded down her cheeks. From the train she watched the city's outskirts stream by, formless and ugly. She was very desolate. But when, tired out, she entered her house, peace enfolded her. Here were her child, the things she loved, her birds, her pleasant, smiling servant. Here were white walls and gracious calm. Her mate had flown, but the nest remained. Her heart ached still, but it was no longer torn.



X

The day after Stefan sailed Felicity Berber returned from Louisiana. The South had bored her, without curing her weariness of New York. She drove from the Pennsylvania Station to her studio, looked through the books, overhauled the stock, and realized with indifference that her business had suffered heavily through her absence. She listened lazily while her lieutenants, emphasizing this fact, implored her to take up the work again.

“What does it matter,” she murmured through her smoke. “The place still pays. Your salaries are all secure, and I have plenty of money. I may come back, I may not. In any event, I am bored.” She rippled out to her landaulette, and drove home. At her apartment, her Chinese maid was already unpacking her trunks.

“Don't unpack any more, Yo San. I may decide to go away again—abroad perhaps. I am still very bored—give me a white kirtle and telephone Mr. Marchmont to call in an hour.”

With her maid's help she undressed, pinned her hair high, and slipped on a knee-high tunic of heavy chiffon. Barefooted, she entered a large room, walled in white and dull silver—the end opposite the windows filled by a single mirror. Between the windows stood a great tank of gold and silver fish swimming among water lilies.

Two enormous vases of dull glass, stacked with lilies against her homecoming, stood on marble pedestals. The floor was covered with a carpeting of dead black. A divan draped in yellow silk, a single ebony chair inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and a low table in teakwood were the sole furniture. Here, quite alone, Felicity danced away the stiffness of her journey, danced away the drumming of the train from her ears, and its dust from her lungs. Then she bathed, and Yo San dressed her in a loose robe of silver mesh, and fastened her hair with an ivory comb carved and tinted to the model of a water lily. These rites complete, Felicity slowly partook of fruit, coffee and toast. Only then did she re-enter the dance room, where, on his ebony chair, the dangling Marchmont had been uncomfortably waiting for half an hour.

She gave him her hand dreamily, and sank full length on the divan.

“You are more marvelous than ever, Felicity,” said he, with an adoring sigh.

She waved her hand. "For all that I am not in the mood. Tell me the news, my dear Marchmont—plays, pictures, scandals, which of my clients are richer, which are bankrupt, who has gone abroad, and all about my friends."

Marchmont leant forward, and prepared to light a cigarette, his thin mouth twisted to an eager smile, his loose hair wagging.

"Wait," she breathed, "I weary of smoke. Give me a lily, Marchmont." He fetched one of the great Easter lilies from its vase. Placing this on her bosom, she folded her supple hands over it, closed her eyes, and lay still, looking like a Bakst version of the Maid of Astolat. Felicity's hints were usually sufficient for her slaves. Marchmont put away his cigarette, and proceeded with relish to recount the gossip with which, to his long finger-tips, he was charged.

"Well," said he, after an hour's general survey of New York as they both knew it, "I think that about covers the ground. There is, as I said, no question that Einsbacher is still devoted. My own opinion is he will present you with the Nixie. I suppose you received the clippings I sent about the picture? Constance Elliot has only ordered two gowns from the studio since you left—but you will have seen that by the books. She says she is saving her money for the Cause." He snickered. "The fact is, she grows dowdy as she grows older. Gunther has gone to Frisco with his group. Polly Thayer tells me his adoration of the beautiful Byrd is pathetic. So much in love he nearly broke her neck showing off his driving for her benefit." Marchmont snickered again. "As for your friend Mr. Byrd—" he smiled with a touch of sly pleasure—"you won't see him, he sailed for France yesterday, alone. His name is in this morning's list of departures." And he drew a folded and marked newspaper from his pocket.

A shade of displeasure had crept over the immobile features of Miss Berber. She opened her eyes and regarded the lank Marchmont with distaste. Her finger pressed a button on the divan. Slowly she raised herself to her elbow, while he watched, his pale eyes fixed on her with the expression of a ratting dog waiting its master's thanks after a catch.

"All that you have told me," said Felicity at last, a slight edge to her zephyr-like voice, "is interesting, but I wish you would remember that while you are free to ridicule my clients, you are not free as regards my friends. Your comment on Connie was in poor taste. I am not in the mood for more conversation this morning. I am fatigued. Good-day, Marchmont." She sank to her pillows again—her eyes closed.

"Oh, I say, Felicity, is that all the thanks I get?" whined her visitor.

"Good-day, Marchmont," she breathed again. The door opened, disclosing Yo

San. Marchmont's aesthetic veneer cracked.

"Oh, shucks," he said, "how mean of you!" and trailed out, his cutaway seeming to hang limp like the dejected tail of a dog.

The door closed, Felicity bounded up and, running across the room, invoked her own loveliness in the mirror.

"Alone," she whispered to herself, "alone." She danced a few steps, swayingly. "You've never lived, lovely creature, you've never lived yet," she apostrophized the dancing vision in the glass.

Still swaying and posturing to some inward melody, she fluttered down the passage to her bedroom. "Yo San," she called, her voice almost full, "we shall go to Europe." The stolid little maid nodded acquiescence.

For the next three days Felicity Berber, creator of raiment, shut in her pastoral fitting room and surrounded by her chief acolytes, sat at a table opposite Stefan's dancing faun, and designed spring gowns. Felicity the idle, the somnolent, the alluring, gave place to Felicity the inventor, and again to Felicity the woman of business. Scissors clipped, typewriters clicked, colored chalks covered dozens of sheets with drawings.

The staff became first relieved, then enthusiastic. What a spring display they were to have! On the third day hundreds of primrose-yellow envelopes, inscribed in green ink to the studio's clients, poured into the letter-chute. Within them an announcement printed in flowing green script read, under Felicity's letterhead, "I offer twenty-one original designs for spring raiment, created by me under the inspiration of a sojourn in the South. Each will be modified to the wearer's personality, and none will be duplicated. I am about to travel in Europe, there to gain atmosphere for my fall creations." After her signature, was stamped, by way of seal, a tiny woodcut of Stefan's faun.

The last design was complete by Friday, and on Saturday Felicity sailed on the Mauretania, her suite of three rooms a wilderness of flowers. Marchmont, calling at the apartment to escort her to the boat, found the dance-room swathed in sheeting, its heavy carpet rolled into a corner. Evidently, this was to be no brief "sojourn." The heavy Einsbacher was at the dock to see her off, together with a small pack of nondescript young men. Constance was not there, and Marchmont guessed that she had not been told of her friend's departure.

Einsbacher had the last word with Felicity. "I hope you will like the vlowers," he whispered gutturally. "Let me know if I may make you a present of the Nixie," and he gave a thick smile.

"You know my rule," she murmured, her lids heavy, a bored droop at the

corners of her mouth. “Nothing worth more than five dollars, except flowers. Why should I break it—” her voice hovered—“for you?”—it sank. She turned away, melting into the crowd. Marchmont, with malicious pleasure, watched Einsbacher's discomfited retreat.

In her cabin Felicity collected all the donors' cards from her flowers and, stepping outside, with a faint smile dropped them into the sea.



XI

It was the end of April, and Paris rustled gaily in her spring dress. Stefan and Adolph, clad in disreputable baggy trousers topped in one case by a painter's blouse and in the other by an infinitely aged alpaca jacket, strolled homeward in the early evening from their favorite café.

Adolph was in the highest spirits, as he had been ever since Stefan's arrival three weeks before, but the other's face wore a rather moody frown. He had begun to weary a little of his good friend's ecstatic pleasure in their reunion.

He was in Paris again, in his old attic; it was spring, and his beloved city as beautiful as ever. He had expected a return of his old-time gaiety, but somehow the charm lacked potency. He wanted to paint, but his ideas were turgid and fragmentary. He wanted excitement, but the city only seemed to offer memories. The lapse of a short eighteen months had scattered his friends surprisingly. Adolph remained, but Nanette was married. Louise had left Paris, and Giddens, the English painter, had gone back to London. Perhaps it was the spring, perhaps it was merely the law which decrees that the past can never be recaptured—whatever the cause, Stefan's flight had not wholly assuaged his restlessness. Of adventures in the hackneyed sense he had not thought. He was too fastidious for the vulgar sort, and had hitherto met no women who stirred his imagination. Moreover, he harbored the delusion that the failure of his great romance had killed his capacity for love. "I am done with women," he said to himself.

Mary seemed very distant. He thought of her with gratitude for her generosity, with regret, but without longing.

"Never marry," he said to Adolph for the twentieth time, as they turned into the rue des Trois Ermites; "the wings of an artist must remain unbound."

"Ah, Stefan," Adolph replied, sighing over his friend's disillusionment, "I am not like you. I should be grateful for a home, and children. I am only a cricket scraping out my little music, not an eagle."

Stefan snorted. "You are a great violinist, but you won't realize it. Look here, Adolph, chuck your job, and go on a walking tour with me. Let's travel through France and along the Riviera to Italy. I'm sick of cities. There's lots of money for us both, and if we run short, why, bring your fiddle along and play it—why not?"

At their door the concierge handed Adolph some letters.

“My friend,” said he, holding up a couple of bills, “one cannot slip away from life so easily. How should I pay my way when we returned?”

“Hang it,” said Stefan impatiently, “don't you begin to talk obligations. I came to France to get away from all that. Have a little imagination, Adolph. It would be the best thing that could happen to you to get shaken out of that groove at the Opera—be the making of you.”

They had reached the attic, and Adolph lit a lamp.

“We'll talk of it to-morrow, my infant, now I must dress—see, here is a letter for you.”

He handed Stefan a tinted envelope, and began leisurely to don his conventional black. Holding the note under the lamp, Stefan saw with a start that it was from Felicity, and had been left by hand. Excited, he tore it open. It was written in ordinary ink, upon pale pink paper, agreeably scented.

"My dear friend," he read in French, "I am in Paris, and chancing to remember your old address—"I swear I never told her the number," he thought)—send this in search of you. How pleasant it would be to see you, and to have a little converse in the sweet French tongue. You did not know that it was my own, did you? But yes, I have French-Creole blood. One is happy here among one's own kind. This evening I shall be alone. Felicity."

So, she was a Creole—of the race of Josephine! His pulses beat. Cramming the note into his pocket he whirled excitedly upon his friend.

"Adolph," he cried, "I'm going out—where are my clothes?" and began hastily to rummage for his Gladstone amidst a pile of their joint belongings. Throwing it open, he dragged out his dress suit—folded still as Mary had packed it—and strewed a table with collars, ties, shirts, and other accessories.

"Hot water, Adolph! Throw some sticks into the stove—I must shave," he called, and Adolph, amazed at this sudden transformation, hastily obeyed.

"Where do you go?" he asked, as he filled the kettle.

"I'm going to see a very attractive young woman," Stefan grinned. "Wow, what a mercy I brought some decent clothes, eh?" He was already stripped, and shaking out a handful of silk socks. Something clicked to the floor, but he did not notice it. The dressing proceeded in a whirl, Adolph much impressed by the splendors of his friend's toilet. A fine shirt of tucked linen, immaculate pumps, links of dull gold—his comrade in Bohemia had completely vanished.

"O là, là!" cried he, beaming, "now I see it is true about all your riches!"

"I'm going to take a taxi," Stefan announced as he slipped into his coat; "can I drop you?"

He stood ready, having overtaken Adolph's sketchy but leisured dressing.

"What speed, my child! One moment!" Adolph shook on his coat, found his glasses, and was crossing to put out the lamp when his foot struck a small object.

"What is this, something of yours?" He stooped and picked up a framed snapshot of a girl playing with a baby. "How beautiful!" he exclaimed, holding it under the lamp.

"Oh, yes," said Stefan with a slight frown, "that's Mary. I didn't know I had it with me. Come on, Adolph," and he tossed the picture back into the open Gladstone.

While Adolph found a taxi, Stefan paused a moment to question the concierge. Yes, monsieur's note had been left that afternoon, Madame remembered, by une petite Chinoise, bien chic, who had asked if Monsieur lived here. Madame's aged eyes snapped with Gallic appreciation of a possible

intrigue.

Stefan was glad when he had dropped Adolph. He stretched at ease along the cushions of his open taxi, breathing in the warm, audacious air of spring, and watched the faces of the crowds as they emerged under the lights to be lost again mysteriously in the dusk.

Paris, her day's work done, was turning lightly, with her entrancing smile, to the pursuit of friendship, adventure, and love. All through the scented streets eyes sought eyes, voices rose in happy laughter or drooped to soft allurements. Stefan thrilled to the magic in the air. He, too, was seeking his adventure.

The taxi drew up in the courtyard of an apartment house. Giving his name, Stefan entered a lift and was carried up one floor. A white door opened, and the small Yo San, with a salutation, took his hat, and lifted a curtain. He was in a long, low room, yellow with candlelight. Facing him, open French windows giving upon a balcony showed the purpling dusk above the river and the black shapes of trees. Lights trickled their reflection in the water, the first stars shone, the scent of flowers was heavy in the air.

All this he saw; then a curtain moved, and a slim form appeared from the balcony as silently as a moth fluttering to the light.

"Ah, Stefan, welcome," a voice murmured.

The setting was perfect. As Felicity moved toward him—her gown fluttering and swaying in folds of golden pink as delicately tinted as the petals of a rose—Stefan realized he had never seen her so alluring. Her strange eyes shone, her lips curved soft and inviting, her cheeks and throat were like warm, white velvet.

He took her outstretched hand—of the texture of a camelia—and it pulsed as if a heart beat in it.

"Felicity," he half whispered, holding her hand, "how wonderful you are!"

"Am I?" she breathed, sighingly. "I have been asleep so long, Stefan. perhaps I am awake a little now."

Her eyes, wide and gleaming as he had never seen them, held him. A mysterious perfume, subtle and poignant, hung about her. Her gauzy dress fluttered as she breathed; she seemed barely poised on her slim feet. He put out his arm as if to stay her from mothlike flight, and it fell about her waist. He pressed her to him. Her lips met his—they were incredibly soft and warm—they seemed to blossom under his kisses.



Adolph, returning from the opera at midnight, donned his old jacket and a pair of slippers and, lighting his pipe, settled himself with a paper to await Stefan's coming. Presently first the paper, then the burnt-out pipe, fell from his hands—he dozed, started awake, and dozed again.

At last he roused himself and stretched stiffly. The lamp was burning low—he looked at his watch—it was four o'clock. Stefan's Gladstone bag still yawned on a chair beside the table. In it, the dull glow of the lamp was reflected from a small silver object lying among a litter of ties and socks. Adolph picked it up, and looked for some moments at the face of Mary, smiling above her little son. He shook his head.

“Tch, tch! Quel dommage-what a pity!” he sighed, and putting down the picture undressed slowly, blew out the lamp, and went to bed.



XII

On a Saturday morning at the end of June, Mary stood by the gate of the Byrdsnest, looking down the lane. McEwan, who was taking a whole holiday from the office, had offered to fetch her mail from the village. Any moment he might be back. It was quite likely, she told herself, that there would be a letter from France this morning—a steamer had docked on Thursday, another yesterday. Surely this time there would be something for her. Mary's eyes, as they strained down the lane, had lost some of their radiant youth. A stranger might have guessed her older than the twenty-six years she had just completed—she seemed grave and matronly—her face had a bleak look. Mary's last letter from France had come more than a month ago, and a face can change much in a month of waiting. She knew that last letter—a mere scrap—by heart.

"Thank you for your sweet letters, dear," it read. "I am well, and having a wonderful time. Not much painting yet; that is to come. Adolph admires your picture prodigiously. I have found some old friends in Paris, very agreeably. I may move about a bit, so don't expect many letters. Take care of yourself. Stefan."

No word of love, nothing about Elliston, or the child to come; just a hasty word or two dashed off in answer to the long letters which she had tried so hard to make amusing. Even this note had come after a two weeks' silence. "Don't expect many letters—" she had not, but a month was a long time.

There came Wallace! He had turned the corner—he had waved to her—but it was a quiet wave. Somehow, if there had been a letter from France, Mary thought he would have waved his hat round his head. She had never spoken of her month-long wait, but Wallace always knew things without being told. No, she was sure there was no letter. "It's too hot here in the sun," she thought, and walked slowly into the house.

"Here we are," called McEwan cheerily as he entered the sitting room. "It's a light mail to-day. Nothing but 'Kindly remit' for me, and one letter for you—looks like the fist of a Yankee schoolma'am."

He handed her the letter, holding it with a big thumb over the right-hand corner, so that she recognized Miss Mason's hand before she saw the French stamp.

"Mind if I hang round on the stoop and smoke a pipe?" queried McEwan, pulling a newspaper from his pocket.

“Do,” said Mary, opening her letter. It was a long, newsy sheet written from Paris and filled with the Sparrow's opinions on continental hotels, manners, and morals. She read it listlessly, but at the fourth page suddenly sat upright.

“I thought as long as I was here I'd better see what there is to see,” Miss Mason's pen chatted; “so I've been doing a play or the opera every night, and I can say that not understanding the language don't make the plays seem any less immoral. However, that's what people go abroad to get, so I guess we can't complain. The night before last who was sitting in the orchestra but your husband with that queer Miss Berber? I saw them as plain as daylight, but they couldn't see me away up in the circle. When I was looking for a bus at the end I saw them getting into an elegant electric. I must say she looked cute, all in old rose color with a pearl comb in her hair. I think your husband looked real well too—I suppose they were going to some party together. It's about time that young man was home again with you, it seems to me, and so I should have told him if I could have got anywhere near him in the crowd. All I can say is, I've had enough of Europe. I'm thinking of going through to London for a week, and then sailing.”

At the end of the letter Mary turned the last page back, and slowly read this paragraph again. There was a dull drumming in her ears—a hand seemed to be remorselessly pressing the blood from her heart. She sat staring straight before her, afraid to think lest she should think too much. At last she went to the window.

“Wallace,” she called. He jumped in, paper in hand, and saw her standing dead white by her chair.

“Ye've no had ill news, Mary?” he asked with a burr.

She shook her head. “No, Wallace; no, of course not. But I feel rather rotten this morning. Talk to me a little, will you?”

Obediently he sat down, and shook out the paper. “Hae ye been watching the European news much lately, Mary?” he began.

“I always try to, but it's difficult to find much in the American papers.”

“It's there, if ye know where to look. What would ye think o' this assassination o' the Grand Duke now?” He cocked his head on one side, as if eagerly waiting for her opinion. She began to rally.

“Why, it's awful, of course, but somehow I can't feel much sympathy for the Austrians since they took Bosnia and Herzegovina.”

“What would ye think might come of it?”

“I don't know, Wallace—what would you!”

“Weel,” he said gravely, “I think something's brewing down yonder—there'll be trouble yet.”

“Those poor Balkans, always fighting,” she sighed.

“I’m feered it’ll be more than the Balkans this time. Watch the papers, Mary—I dinna’ like the looks o’ it mesel’.”

They talked on, he expounding his views on the menace of Austria’s near-east aspirations as opposed to Russia’s friendship for the Slavic races. Mary tried to listen intelligently—the effort brought a little color to her face.

“Wallace,” she said presently, “do you happen to know where Miss Berber is this summer?”

“I do not,” he said, his blue eyes steadily watching her. “But Mrs. Elliot would ken maybe—ye might ask her.”

“Oh, it doesn’t matter,” said Mary. “I just wondered.”

When McEwan had gone Mary read Miss Mason’s letter for the third time, and again the cold touch of fear assailed her. She took a camp stool and sat by the edge of the bluff for a long time, watching the water. Then she went indoors again to her desk.

“Dear Stefan,” she wrote, “I have only had one note from you in six weeks, and am naturally anxious to know how you are getting on. I am very well, and expect our baby about the tenth of October. Elliston is beautiful; imagine, he is a year old now! I think he will have your eyes. I am sorry you are not getting on well with your work, but perhaps that has changed by now. Dear, I had a letter from Miss Mason this morning, and she writes of having seen you and Miss Berber together at the opera. You didn’t tell me she was in Paris, and I can’t help feeling it strange that you should not have done so, and should leave me without news for so long. I trust you, dear Stefan, and believe in our love in spite of the difficulties we have had. And I think you did rightly to take a holiday abroad. But you have been gone three months, and I have heard so little. Am I wrong still to believe in our love? Only six months ago we were so happy together. Do you wish our marriage to come to an end? Please write me, dear, and tell me what you really think, for, Stefan, I don’t know how I shall bear the suspense much longer. I’m trying to be brave, dear—and I *do* believe still.

“Your

“Mary.”

Her hand was trembling as she finished writing. She longed to cry out, “For God’s sake, come back to me, Stefan”—she longed to write of the wild ache at her heart—but she could not. She could not plead with him. If he did not feel the pain in her halting sentences it would be true that he no longer loved her. She sealed and stamped the letter. “I must still believe,” she kept repeating to herself. There was nothing to do but wait.

In the weeks that followed it seemed to Mary that her friends were more than

ever kind to her. Not only did James Farraday continually send his car to take her driving, and Mrs. Farraday appear in the pony carriage, but not a day passed without McEwan, Jamie, the Havens, or other neighbors dropping in for a chat, or planning a walk, a luncheon, or a sail. Constance, too, immersed in work though she was, ran out several times in her car and spent the night. Mary was grateful—it made her waiting so much less hard—while her friends were with her the constant ache at her heart was drugged asleep. Knowing Wallace, she suspected his hand in this widespread activity, nor was she mistaken.

The day after the arrival of Miss Mason's letter McEwan had dropped in upon Constance in the evening, when he knew she would be resting after her strenuous day's work at headquarters. By way of a compliment on her gown he led the conversation round to Felicity Berber, and elicited the information that she was abroad.

"In Paris, perhaps?" he suggested.

"Now you mention it, I think they did say Paris when I was last in the shop."

"Byrd is in Paris, you know," said McEwan, meeting her eyes.

"Ah!" said Constance, and she stared at him, her lids narrowing. "I hadn't thought of that possibility." She fingered her jade beads.

"I wonder if you ever write her?" he asked.

"I never write any one, my dear man, and, besides, what could I say?"

"Well," said he, "I had a hunch you might need a new rig for the summer Votes campaign, or something. I thought maybe you'd want the very latest Berber styles, and would ask her to send a tip over. Then I thought you'd string her the local gossip, how Mrs. Byrd's baby will be born in October, and you don't think her looking as fit as she might. You want a cute rattle for it from Paris, or something. Get the idea?"

"You think she doesn't know?"

"I think the kid's about as harmless as a short-circuited wire, but I think she's a sport at bottom. My dope is, *if* there's anything to this proposition, then she doesn't know." He rose to go.

"Wallace, you are certainly a bright boy," said Constance, holding out her hand. "The missive shall be despatched."

"Moreover," said Mac, turning at the door, "Mary's worried—a little cheering up won't hurt her any."

"I'll come out," said Constance'. "What a shame it is—I'm so fond of them both."

“Yes, it's a mean world—but we have to keep right on smiling. Good night,” said he.

“Good night,” called Constance. “You dear, good soul,” she added to herself.



XIII

Adolph was practising some new Futurist music of Ravel's. Its dissonances fatigued and irritated him, but he was lured by its horrible fascination, and grated away with an enraged persistence. Paris was hot, the attic hotter, for it was July. Adolph wondered as he played how long it would be before he could get away to the sea. He was out of love with the city, and thought longingly of a possible trip to Sweden. His reflections were interrupted by Stefan, who pushed the door open listlessly, and instantly implored him to stop making a din.

"What awful stuff—it's like the Cubist horrors," said he, petulantly.

"Yes, my friend, yet I play the one, and you go to see the other," said Adolph, laying down his fiddle and mopping his head and hands.

"Not I," contradicted Stefan, wandering over to his easel. On it was an unfinished sketch of Felicity dancing—several other impressions of her stood about the room.

"Rotten work," he said, surveying them moodily. "All I have to show for over three months here. Adolph," he flung himself into a chair, and rumped his hair angrily, "I'm sick of my way of life. My marriage was a mistake, but it was better than this. I did better work with Mary than I do with Felicity, and I didn't hate myself."

"Well, my infant," said Adolph, with a relieved sigh, "I'm glad to hear you say it. You've told me nothing, but I am sure your marriage was a better thing than you think. As for this little lady—" he shrugged his shoulders—"I make nothing of this affair."

Stefan's frown was moodier still.

"Felicity is the most alluring woman I have ever known, and I believe she is fond of me. But she is affected, capricious, and a perfect mass of egotism."

"For egotism you are not the man to blame her," smiled his friend.

"I know that," shrugged Stefan. "I've always believed in egotism, but I confess Felicity is a little extreme."

"Where is she?"

"Oh, she's gone to Biarritz for a week with a party of Americans. I wouldn't go. I loathe mobs of dressed-up spendthrifts. We had planned to go to Brittany, but she said she needed a change of companionship—that her soul must change

the color of its raiment, or some such piffle.” He laughed shortly. “Here I am hanging about in the heat, most of my money gone, and not able to do a stroke of work. It’s hell, Adolph.”

“My boy,” said his friend, “why don’t you go home?”

“I haven’t the face, and that’s a fact. Besides, hang it, I still want Felicity. Oh, what a mess!” he growled, sinking lower into his chair. Suddenly Adolph jumped up.

“I had forgotten; there is a letter for you,” and he tossed one into his lap. “It’s from America.”

Stefan flushed, and Adolph watched him as he opened the letter. The flush increased—he gave an exclamation, and, jumping up, began walking feverishly about the room.

“My God, Adolph, she’s heard about Felicity!” Adolph exclaimed in his turn. “She asks me about it—what am I to do?”

“What does she say; can you tell me?” enquired the Swede, distressed.

“Tiens, I’ll read it to you,” and Stefan opened the letter and hastily translated it aloud. “She’s so generous, poor dear,” he groaned as he finished. Adolph’s face had assumed a deeply shocked expression. He was red to the roots of his blonde hair.

“Is your wife then enceinte, Stefan!”

“Yes, of course she is—she cares for nothing but having children.”

“*But*, Stefan!” Adolph’s hands waved helplessly—he stammered. “It cannot be—it is impossible, *impossible* that you desert a beautiful and good wife who expects your child. I cannot believe it.”

“I *haven’t* deserted her,” Stefan retorted angrily. “I only came away for a holiday, and the rest just happened. I should have been home by now if I hadn’t met Felicity. Oh, you don’t understand,” he groaned, watching his friend’s grieved, embarrassed face. “I’m fond of Mary—devoted to her—but you don’t know what the monotony of marriage does to a man of my sort.”

“No, I don’t understand,” echoed his friend. “But now, Stefan,” and he brought his fist down on the table, “now you will go home, will you not, and try to make her happy?”

“I don’t think she will forgive this,” muttered Stefan.

“This!” Adolph almost shouted. “This you will explain away, deny, so that it troubles her no more!”

“Oh, rot, Adolph, I can't lie to Mary,” and Stefan began to pace the room once more.

“For her sake, it seems to me you must,” his friend urged.

“Stop talking, Adolph; I want to think!” Stefan exclaimed. He walked in silence for a minute.

“No,” he said at last, “if my marriage is to go on, it must be on a basis of truth. I can't go back to Mary and act and live a lie. If she will have me back, she must know I've made some sacrifice to come, I'll go, if she says so, because I care for her, but I *can't* go as a faithful, loving husband—it would be too grotesque.”

“Consider her health, my friend,” implored Adolph, still with his bewildered, shocked air; “it might kill her!”

“Can't! She's as strong as a horse—she can face the truth like a man.”

“Then think of the other woman; you must protect her.”

“Pshaw! she doesn't need protection! You don't know Felicity; she'd be just as likely as not to tell Mary herself.”

“I always thought you so honorable, so generous,” Adolph murmured, dejectedly.

“Oh, cut it, Adolph. I'm being as honorable and generous as I know how. I'll write to Mary now, and offer to come back if she says the word, and never see Felicity again. I can't do more.”

He flung himself down at the desk, and snatched a pen.

“My dearest girl:” he wrote rapidly, “your brave letter has come to me, and I can answer it only with the truth. All that you feared when you heard of F.'s being with me is true. I found her here two months ago, and we have been together most of the time since. It was not planned, Mary; it came to me wholly unexpectedly, when I thought myself cured of love. I care for you, my dear, I believe you the noblest and most beautiful of women, but from F. I have had something which a woman of your kind could never give, and in spite of the pain I feel for your grief, I cannot say with truth that I regret it. There are things—in life and love of which you, my beautiful and clear-eyed Goddess, can know nothing—there is a wild grape, the juice of which you will never drink, but which once tasted, must ever be desired. Because this draught is so different from your own milk and honey, because it leaves my tenderness for you all untouched, because drinking it has assuaged a thirst of which you can have no knowledge, I ask you not to judge it with high Olympian judgment. I ask you to forgive me, Mary, for I love you still—better now than when I left you—and I hold you above all women. The cup is still at my lips, but if you will grant me forgiveness I will drink no more. I agonize over your grief—if you will let me I will return and try to assuage it. Write me, Mary, and if the word is forgive, for your sake I will bid my friend farewell now and forever. I am still your husband if you will have me—there

is no woman I would serve but you.

"Stefan."

He signed his name in a dashing scrawl, blotted and folded the letter without rereading it, addressed and stamped it, and sprang hatless down the stairs to post it.

An enormous weight seemed lifted from him. He had shifted his dilemma to the shoulders of his wife, and had no conception that in so doing he was guilty of an act of moral cowardice. Returning to the studio, he pulled out a clean canvas and began a vigorous drawing of two fauns chasing each other round a tree. Presently, as he drew, he began to hum.



XIV

It was the fourth of August.

Stefan and Felicity sat at premier déjeuner on the balcony of her apartment. About them flowers grew in boxes, a green awning hung over them, their meal of purple fruit, coffee, and hot brioches was served from fantastic green china over which blue dragons sprawled. Felicity's negligée was of the clear green of a wave's concavity—a butterfly of blue enamel pinned her hair. A breeze, cool from the river, fluttered under the awning.

It was an attractive scene, but Felicity's face drooped listlessly, and Stefan, hands deep in the pockets of his white trousers, lay back in his wicker chair with an expression of nervous irritability. It was early, for the night had been too hot for late sleeping, and Yo San had not yet brought in the newspapers and letters. Paris was tense. Germany and Russia had declared war. France was mobilizing. Perhaps already the axe had fallen.

Held by the universal anxiety, Stefan and Felicity had lingered on in Paris after her return from Biarritz, instead of traveling to Brittany as they had planned.

Stefan had another reason for remaining, which he had not imparted to Felicity. He was waiting for Mary's letter. It was already overdue, and now that any hour might bring it he was wretchedly nervous as to the result. He did not yet wish to break with Felicity, but still less did he wish to lose Mary. Without having analyzed it to himself, he would have liked to keep the Byrdsnest and all that it contained as a warm and safe haven to return to after his stormy flights. He neither wished to be anchored nor free; he desired both advantages, and the knowledge that he would be called upon to forego one frayed his nerves. Life was various—why sacrifice its fluid beauty to frozen forms?

“Stefan,” murmured Felicity, from behind her drooping mask, “we have had three golden months, but I think they are now over.”

“What do you mean?” he asked crossly.

“Disharmony”—she waved a white hand—“is in the air. Beauty—the arts—are to give place to barbarity. In a world of war, how can we taste life delicately? We cannot. Already, my friend, the blight has fallen upon you. Your nerves are harsh and jangled. I think”—she folded her hands and sank back on her green

cushions—"I shall make a pilgrimage to China."

"All of which," said Stefan with a short laugh, "is an elaborate way of saying you are tired of me."

Her eyebrows raised themselves a fraction.

"You are wonderfully attractive, Stefan; you fascinate me as a panther fascinates by its lithe grace, and your mind has the light and shade of running brooks."

Stefan looked pleased.

"But," she went on, her lids still drooping, "I must have harmony. In an atmosphere of discords I cannot live. Of your present discordant mood, my friend, I *am* tired, and I could not permit myself to continue to feel bored. When I am bored, I change my milieu."

"You are no more bored than I am, I assure you," he snapped rudely.

"It is such remarks as those," breathed Felicity, "which make love impossible." Her eyes closed.

He pushed back his chair. "Oh, my dear girl, do have some sense of humor," he said, fumbling for a cigarette.

Yo San entered with a folded newspaper, and a plate of letters for Felicity. She handed one to Stefan. "Monsieur Adolph leave this," she said.

Disregarding the paper, Felicity glanced through her mail, and abstracted a thick envelope addressed in Constance's sprightly hand. Stefan's letter was from Mary; he moved to the end of the balcony and tore it open. A banker's draft fell from it.

"Good-bye, Stefan," he read, "I can't forgive you. What you have done shames me to the earth. You have broken our marriage. It was a sacred thing to me—now it is profaned. I ask nothing from you, and enclose you the balance of your own money. I can make my living and care for the children, whom you never wanted."

The last three words scrawled slantingly down the page; they were in large and heavier writing—they looked like a cry. The letter was unsigned, and smudged. It might have been written by a dying person. The sight of it struck him with unbearable pain. He stood, staring at it stupidly.

Felicity called him three times before he noticed her—the last time she had to raise her voice quite loudly. He turned then, and saw her sitting with unwonted straightness at the table. Her eyes were wide open, and fixed.

"I have a letter from Connie." She spoke almost crisply. "Why did you not tell me that your wife was enceinte?"

“Why should I tell you?” he asked, staring at her with indifference.

“Had I known it I should not have lived with you. I thought she had let you come here alone through phlegmatic British coldness. If she lost you, it was her affair. This is different. You have not played fair with us.”

“Mary was never cold,” said Stefan dully, ignoring her accusation.

“That makes it worse.” She sat like a ramrod; her face might have been ivory; her hands lay folded across the open letter.

“What do you know—or care—about Mary?” he said heavily; “you never even liked her.”

“Your wife bored me, but I admired her. Women nearly always bore me, but I believe in them far more than men, and wish to uphold them.”

“You chose a funny way of doing so this time,” he said, dropping into his chair with a hopeless sigh.

She looked at him with distaste. “True, I mistook the situation. Conventions are nothing to me. But I have a spiritual code to which I adhere. This affair no longer harmonizes with it. I trust—” Felicity relaxed into her cushions—“you will return to your wife immediately.”

“Thanks,” he said ironically. “But you're too late. Mary knows, and has thrown me over.”

There was silence for several minutes. Then Stefan rose, picked up the draft from the floor, looked at it idly, refolded it into Mary's letter, and put both carefully away in his inside pocket. His face was very pale.

“Adieu, Felicity,” he said quietly. “You are quite right about it.” And he held out his hand.

“Adieu, Stefan,” she answered, waving her hand toward his, but not touching it. “I am sorry about your wife.”

Turning, he went in through the French window.

Felicity waited until she heard the thud of the apartment door, then struck her hands together. Yo San appeared.

“A kirtle, Yo San. I must dance away a wound. Afterwards I will think. Be prepared for packing. We may leave Paris. It is time again for work.”

Stefan, walking listlessly toward his studio, found the streets filled with crowds. Newsboys shrieked; men stood in groups gesticulating; there were cries of “Vive la France!” and “A bas l'Allemagne!” Everywhere was seething but suppressed excitement. As he passed a great hotel he found the street, early as it

was, blocked with departing cabs piled high with baggage.

“War is declared,” he thought, but the knowledge conveyed nothing to his senses. He crossed the Seine, and found himself in his own quarter. At the corner of the rue des Trois Ermites a hand-organ, surrounded by a cosmopolitan crowd of students, was shrilly grinding out the Marseillaise. The students sang to it, cheering wildly.

“Who fights for France?” a voice yelled hoarsely, and among cheers a score of hands went up.

“Who fights for France?” Stefan stood stock still, then hurried past the crowd, and up the stairs to his attic.

There, in the midst of gaping drawers and fast emptying shelves, stood Adolph in his shirt sleeves, methodically packing his possessions into a hair trunk. He looked up as his friend entered; his mild face was alight; tears of excitement stood in his eyes.

“Ah, my infant,” he exclaimed, “it has arrived! The Germans are across the frontier. I go to fight for France.”

“Adolph!” cried Stefan, seizing and wringing his friend's hand. “Thank God there's something great to be done in the world after all! I go with you.”

“But your wife, Stefan?”

Stefan drew out Mary's letter. For the first time his eyes were wet.

“Listen,” he said, and translated the brief words.

Hearing them, the good Adolph sat down on his trunk, and quite frankly cried. “Ah, quel dommage! quel dommage!” he exclaimed, over and over.

“So you see, mon cher, we go together,” said Stefan, and lifted his Gladstone bag to a chair. As he fumbled among its forgotten contents, a tiny box met his hand. He drew out the signet ring Mary had given him, with the winged head.

“Ah, Mary,” he whispered with a half sob, “after all, you gave me wings!” and he put the ring on. He was only twenty-seven.



Later in the day Stefan went to the bank and had Mary's draft endorsed back to New York. He enclosed it in a letter to James Farraday, in which he asked him to give it to his wife, with his love and blessing, and to tell her that he was

enlisting with Adolph Jensen in the Foreign Legion.

That night they both went to a vaudeville theatre. It was packed to the doors—an opera star was to sing the Marseillaise. Stefan and Adolph stood at the back. No one regarded the performance at all till the singer appeared, clad in white, the French liberty cap upon her head, a great tricolor draped in her arms. Then the house rose in a storm of applause; every one in the vast audience was on his feet.

“*Allons, enfants de la patrie,*” began the singer in a magnificent contralto, her eyes flashing. The house hung breathless.

“*Aux armes, citoyens!*” Her hands swept the audience. “*Marchons! Marchons!*” She pointed at the crowd. Each man felt her fiery glance pierce to him—France called—she was holding out her arms to her sons to die for her—

“*Qu'un sang impur abreuve nos sillons!*”

The singer gathered the great flag to her heart. The tears rolled down her cheeks; she kissed it with the passion of a mistress. The house broke into wild cheers. Men fell upon each other's shoulders; women sobbed. The singer was dumb, but the drums rolled on—they were calling, calling. The folds of the flag dazzled Stefan's eyes. He burst into tears.



The next morning Stefan Byrd and Adolph Jensen were enrolled in the Foreign Legion of France.



PART V

THE BUILDER



I

It was spring once more. In the garden of the Byrdsnest flowering shrubs were in bloom; the beds were studded with daffodils; the scent of lilac filled the air. Birds flashed and sang, for it was May, high May, and the nests were built. Mary, warm-cheeked in the sun, and wearing a broad-brimmed hat and a pair of gardening gloves, was thinning out a clump of cornflowers. At one corner of the lawn, shaded by a flowering dog-wood, was a small sand-pit, and in this a yellow-haired two-year-old boy diligently poured sand through a wire sieve. In a white perambulator lay a pink, brown-haired, baby girl, soundly sleeping, a tiny thumb held comfortably in her mouth. Now and then Mary straightened from her task and tiptoed over to the baby, to see that she was still in the shade, or that no flies disturbed her.

Mary's face was not that of a happy woman, but it was the face of one who has found peace. It was graver than of old, but lightened whenever she looked at her children with an expression of proud tenderness. She was dressed in the simplest of white cotton gowns, beneath which the lines of her figure showed a little fuller, but strong and graceful as ever. She looked very womanly, very desirable, as she bent over the baby's carriage.

Lily emerged from the front door, and set a tea-tray upon the low porch table. She lingered for a moment, glancing with pride at the verandah with its green rocking chairs, hammock, and white creeping-rug.

"My, Mrs. Byrd, don't our new porch look nice, now it's all done?" she exclaimed, beaming.

"Yes," said Mary, dropping into a rocking-chair to drink her tea, and throwing off her hat to loosen the warm waves of hair about her forehead, "isn't it awfully pretty? I don't know how we should have managed without it on damp mornings, now that Baby wants to crawl all the time. Ah, here is Miss Mason!" she exclaimed, smiling as that spinster, in white shirtwaist and alpaca skirt, dismounted from a smart bicycle at the gate.

"Any letters, Sparrow?"

Miss Mason, extracting several parcels from her carrier, flopped gratefully into a rocker, and drew off her gloves.

"One or two," she said. "Here, Lily; here's your marmalade, and here's the

soap, and a letter for you. There are a few bills, Mary, and a couple of notes—” she passed them across—“and here’s an afternoon paper one of the Haven youngsters handed me as I passed him on the road. He called out something about another atrocity. I haven’t looked at it. I hate to open the things these days.”

“I know,” nodded Mary, busy with her letters, “so do I. This is from Mr. Gunther, from California. He’s been there all the winter, you know. Oh, how nice; he’s coming back! Says we are to expect a visit from him soon,” Mary exclaimed, with a pleased smile. “Here’s a line from Constance,” she went on. “Everything is doing splendidly in her garden, she says. She wants us all to go up in June, before she begins her auto speaking trip. Don’t you think it would be nice!”

“Perfectly elegant,” said the Sparrow. “I’m glad she’s taking a little rest. I thought she looked real tired this spring.”

“She works so frightfully hard.”

“Land sakes, work agrees with *you*, Mary! You look simply great. If your new book does as well as the old one I suppose porches won’t satisfy you—you’ll be wanting to build an ell on the house?”

“That’s just what I do want,” said Mary, smiling. “I want to have a spare room, and proper place for the babies. We’re awfully crowded. Did I tell you Mr. Farraday had some lovely plans that he had made years ago, for a wing?”

“You don’t say!”

“Yes, but I’m afraid we’ll have to wait another year for that, till I can increase my short story output.”

“My, it seems to me you write them like a streak.”

Mary shook her head. “No, after Baby is weaned I expect to work faster, and ever so much better.”

“Well, if you do any better than you are doing, Frances Hodgson Burnett won’t be in it; that’s all I can say.”

“Oh, Sparrow!” smiled Mary, “she writes real grown-up novels, too, and I can only do silly little children’s things.”

“They’re not silly, Mary Byrd, I can tell you that,” sniffed Miss Mason, shaking out her paper.

“My gracious!” She turned a shocked face to Mary. “What do you suppose those Germans have done now? Sunk the Lusitania!”

“The Lusitania?” exclaimed Mary, incredulously.

“Yes, my dear; torpedoed her without warning. My, ain't that terrible? It says they hope most of the passengers are saved—but they don't know yet.”

“Let me see!” Mary bent over her shoulder. “The Lusitania gone!” she whispered, awed.

“No, no!” exclaimed the Sparrow suddenly, hurrying off the porch. “Ellie not pour sand over his head! No, naughty!”

Mary sank into her chair with the paper. There was the staring black headline, but she could hardly believe it. The Lusitania gone? The great ship she knew so well, on which she and Stefan had met, gone! Lying in the ooze, with fish darting above the decks where she had walked with Stefan. Those hundreds of cabins a labyrinth for fish to lose their way in—all rotting in the black sea currents. The possible loss of life had not yet come home to her. It was inconceivable that there would not have been ample time for every one to escape. But the ship, the great English ship! So swift—so proud!

Dropping the paper, she walked slowly across the garden and the lane, and found her way to a little seat she had made on the side of the bluff overlooking the water. Here, her back to a tree trunk, she sat immobile, trying to still the turmoil of memories that rose within her.

The Lusitania gone!

It seemed like the breaking of the last link that bound her to the past. All the belief, all the wonder of that time were already gone, and now the ship, her loveship, was gone, too, lost forever to the sight of men.

She saw again its crowded decks, saw the lithe, picturesque figure of the young artist with the eager face bending over her—

“Won't you be perfectly kind, and come for a walk?”

She saw the saloon on her engagement night when she sang at the ship's concert. What were the last words she had sung?

"Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty—
Love's a stuff will not endure."

Alas, how unconsciously prophetic she had been. Nothing had endured, neither love, nor faith, nor the great ship of their pilgrimage herself.

Other memories crowded. Their honeymoon at Shadeham, the sweet early days of their studio life, her glorious pride in his great painting of love exalted.... The night of Constance's party, when, after her singing, her husband had left his place by Miss Berber and crossed the room so eagerly to her side. Their first weeks at the Byrdsnest—how happy they had been then, and how worshipfully he had looked at her the morning their son was born. All gone. She had another baby now, but he had never seen it—never would see it, she supposed. Her memory traveled on, flitting over the dark places and lingering at every sunny peak of their marriage journey. Their week in Vermont! How they had skated and danced together; how much he seemed to love her then! Even the day he sailed for France he seemed to care for her. "Why are we parting?" he had cried, kissing her. Yes, even then their marriage, for all the clouds upon it, had seemed real—she had never doubted in her inmost heart that they were each other's.

With a stab of the old agony, Mary remembered the day she got his letter admitting his relations with Felicity. The unbelievable breakdown of her whole life! His easy, lightly made excuses. He, in whose arms she had lain a hundred times, with whom she had first learnt the sacrament of love, had given himself to another woman, had given all that most close and sacred intimacy of love, and had written, "I cannot say with truth that I regret it." How she had lived through the reading of those words she did not know. Grief does not kill, or surely she would have died that hour. Her own strength, and the miracle of life within her, alone stayed her longing for death. It was ten months ago; she had lived down much since then, had schooled herself daily to forgetfulness; yet now again the unutterable pang swept over her—the desolation of loss, and the incapacity to believe that such loss could be.

She rebelled against the needlessness of it all now, as she had done then, in those bitter days before her little Rosamond came to half-assuage her pain.

Well, he had redeemed himself in a way. The day James Farraday came to tell her that Stefan had enlisted, some part of her load was eased. The father of her children was not all ignoble.

Mary mused on. How would it end? Would Stefan live? Should she—could she—ever see him again? She thanked God he was there, serving the country he loved. "The only thing he ever really loved, perhaps," she thought. She supposed he would be killed—all that genius lost like so much more of value that the

world was scrapping to-day—and then it would all be quite gone—

Through the trees dropped the insistent sound of a baby's cry to its mother. She rose; the heavy clouds of memory fell away. The past was gone; she lived for the future, and the future was in her children.

The next morning Mary had just bathed the baby, and was settling her in her carriage, when the Sparrow, who, seated on the porch with Elliston, was engaged in cutting war maps from the papers and pasting them in an enormous scrapbook, gave a warning cough.

“Here comes Mr. McEwan,” she whispered, in the hushed voice reserved by her simple type for allusions to the afflicted.

“Oh, poor dear,” said Mary, hurrying across the lawn to meet him. She felt more than ever sympathetic toward him, for Mac's wife had died in a New Hampshire sanitarium only a few weeks before, and all his hopes of mending her poor broken spirit were at an end. Reaching the gate, she gave an involuntary cry.

McEwan was stumbling toward her almost like a drunken man. His face was red, his eyes bloodshot; a morning paper trailed loosely from his hand.

“Mary,” he cried, “I came back from the station to see ye—hae ye heard, my girl?”

“Wallace!” she exclaimed, frightened, “what is it? What has happened?” She led him to a seat on the porch; he sank into it unresisting. Miss Mason pushed away her scrapbook, white-faced.

“The Lusitania! They were na' saved, Mary. There's o'er a thousand gone. O'er a hundred Americans—hundreds of women and little bairns, Mary—like yours—Canadian mithers and bairns going to be near their brave lads—babies, Mary.” And the big fellow dropped his rough head on his arms and sobbed like a child.

“Oh, Wallace; oh, Wallace!” whispered Mary, fairly wringing her hands; “it can't be! Over a thousand lost?”

“Aye,” he cried suddenly, bringing his heavy fist down with a crash on the wicker table, “they drooned them like rats—God damn their bloody souls.”

His face, crimson with rage and pity, worked uncontrollably. Mary covered

her eyes with her hands. The Sparrow sat petrified. The little Elliston, terrified by their strange aspects, burst into loud wails.

“There, darling; there, mother's boy,” crooned Mary soothingly, pressing her wet cheek to his.

“Little bairns like that, Mary,” McEwan repeated brokenly. Mary gathered the child close into her arms. They sat in stunned horror.

“Weel,” said McEwan at last, more quietly. “I'll be going o'er to enlist. I would ha' gone long sine, but that me poor girl would ha' thocht I'd desairted her. She doesna' need me now, and there's eno' left for the lad. Aye, this is me call. I was ay a slow man to wrath, Mary, but now if I can but kill one German before I die —” His great fist clenched again on the table.

“Oh, don't, dear man, don't,” whispered Mary, with trembling lips, laying her cool hand over his. “You're right; you must go. But don't feel so terribly.”

His grip relaxed; his big hand lay under hers quietly.

“I could envy you, Wallace, being able to go. It's hard for us who have to stay here, just waiting. My poor sister has lost her husband already, and I don't know whether mine is alive or dead. And now you're going! Elliston's pet uncle!” She smiled at him affectionately through her tears.

“I'll write you if I hear aught about the Foreign Legion, Mary,” he said, under his breath.

She pressed his hand in gratitude. “When shall you go?” she asked.

“By the next boat.”

“Go by the American Line.”

His jaw set grimly. “Aye, I will. They shall no torpedo me till I've had ae shot at them!”

Mary rose. “Now, Wallace, you are to stay and lunch with us. You must let us make much of the latest family hero while we have him. Eh, Sparrow?”

“Yes,” nodded Miss Mason emphatically, “I've hated the British ever since the Revolution—I and my parents and my grandparents—but I guess I'm with them, and those that fight for them, from now on.”



II

On the Monday following the sinking of the Lusitania, James Farraday received a letter from the American Hospital in Paris, written in French in a shaky hand, and signed Adolph Jensen.

New York was still strained and breathless from Saturday's horror. Men sat idle in their offices reading edition after edition of the papers, rage mounting in their hearts. Flags were at half mast. Little work was being done anywhere save at the newspaper offices, which were keyed to the highest pitch. Farraday's office was hushed. Those members of his staff who were responsible for *The Child at Home*—largely women, all picked for their knowledge of child life—were the worst demoralized. How think of children's play-time stories when those little bodies were being brought into Queenstown harbor? Farraday himself, the efficient, the concentrated, sat absent-mindedly reading the papers, or drumming a slow, ceaseless tap with his fingers upon the desk. The general gloom was enhanced by their knowledge that Mac, their dear absurd Mac, was going. But they were all proud of him.

By two o'clock Farraday had read all the news twice over, and Adolph's letter three times.

Telephoning for his car to meet him, he left the office and caught an early afternoon train home. He drove straight to the Byrdsnest and found Mary alone in the sitting room.

She rose swiftly and pressed his hand:

"Oh, my dear friend," she murmured, "isn't it terrible?"

He nodded. "Sit down, Mary, my dear girl." He spoke very quietly, unconsciously calling her by name for the first time. "I have something to tell you."

She turned white.

"No," he said quickly, "he isn't dead."

She sat down, trembling.

"I have a letter from Adolph Jensen. They are both wounded, and in the American Hospital in Paris. The Foreign Legion has suffered heavily. Jensen is convalescent, and returns to the front. He was beside your husband in the trench. It was a shell. Byrd was hit in the back. My dear child—" he stopped for a

moment. “Mary—”

“Go on,” she whispered through stiff lips.

“He is paralyzed, my dear, from the hips down.”

She stared at him.

“Oh, no, James—oh, no, James—oh, no!” she whispered, over and over.

“Yes, my poor child. He is quite convalescent, and going about the wards in a wheeled chair. But he will never be able to walk again.”

“Why,” said Mary, wonderingly, “he never used to be still—he always ran, and skipped, like a child.” Her breast heaved. “He always ran, James—” she began to cry—the tears rolled down her cheeks—she ran quickly out of the room, sobbing.

James waited in silence, smoking a pipe, his face set in lines of inexpressible sadness. In half an hour she returned. Her eyes were swollen, but she was calm again.

“I’m sorry to have kept you waiting so long,” she said, with a pitiful attempt at a smile. “Please read me the letter, will you?”

James read the French text. Stefan had been so brave in the trenches, always kept up a good heart. He used to sing to the others. A shell had struck the trench; they were nearly all killed or wounded. Stefan knew he would walk no more, but he was still so brave, with a smile for every one. He was drawing, too, wonderful pencil drawings of the front. Adolph thought they were much more wonderful than anything he had ever done. All the nurses and wounded asked for them. Adolph would be going back in a month. He ventured to ask Mr. Farraday to lay the affair before Mrs. Byrd. Stefan had no money, and no one to take care of him when he left the hospital. He, Adolph, would do all that was possible, but he was sure that his friend should go home. Stefan often, very often, spoke of his wife to Adolph. He wore a ring of hers. Would Mr. Farraday use his good offices?

James folded the letter and looked at Mary.

“I must go and fetch him,” she said simply.

“Mrs. Byrd—Mary—I want you to let me go. Mac has offered to do it before enlisting, but I don’t think your husband cared for Mac, and he always liked me. It wouldn’t be fair to the baby for you to go, and it would be very painful for you. But it will give me real happiness—the first thing I’ve been able to do in this awful business.”

“Oh, no, James, I couldn’t let you. Your work—it is too much altogether.”

“The office can manage without me for three weeks. I want you to let me do

this for you both—it's such a small thing.”

“I feel I ought to go, James,” she reiterated, “I ought to be there.”

“You can't take the baby—and she mustn't suffer,” he urged. “There will be any amount of red tape. You really must let me go.”

They discussed it for some time, and at last she agreed, for the sake of the small Rosamond. She began to see, too, that there would be much for her to do at this end. With her racial habit of being coolest in an emergency, Mary found herself mentally reorganizing the régime of the Byrdsnest, and rapidly reviewing one possible means after another of ensuring Stefan's comfort. She talked over her plans with James, and before he left that afternoon their arrangements were made. On one point he was obliged to give way. Stefan's money, which he had returned to Mary before enlisting, was still intact, and she insisted it should be used for the expenses of the double journey. Enough would be left to carry out her plans at this end, and Stefan would know that he was in no sense an object of charity.

James, anxious as he was to help his friends in all ways, had to admit that she was right. He was infinitely relieved that the necessity for practical action had so completely steadied her. He knew now that she would be almost too busy in the intervening weeks for distress.

The next day James engaged his passage, sent a long cable to Adolph, and performed prodigies of work at the office. By means of some wire-pulling he and Mac succeeded in securing a cabin together on the next American liner out.

Meanwhile, Mary began her campaign. At breakfast she expounded her plans to Miss Mason, who had received the news overnight.

“You see, Sparrow,” she said, “we don't know how much quiet he will need, but we couldn't give him *any* in this little cottage, with the babies. So I shall fit up the studio—a big room for him, a small one for the nurse, and a bath. The nurse will be the hardest part, for I'm sure he would rather have a man. The terrible helplessness”—her voice faltered for a second—“would humiliate him before a woman. But it must be the right man, Sparrow, some one he can like—who won't jar him—and some one we can afford to keep permanently. I've been thinking about it all night and, do you know, I have an idea. Do you remember my telling you about Adolph Jensen's brother?”

“The old one, who failed over here?”

“Yes. Stefan helped him, you know, and I'm sure he was awfully grateful. When the Berber shop changed hands in January, I wondered what would become of him; I believe Miss Berber was only using him out of kindness. It

seems to me he might be just the person, if we could find him.”

“You’re a smart girl, Mary, and as plucky as they make ‘em,” nodded the spinster.

“Oh, Sparrow, when I think of his helplessness! He, who always wanted wings!” Mary half choked.

“Now,” said Miss Mason, rising briskly, “we’ve got to act, not think. Come along, child, and let’s go over to the barn.” Gratefully Mary followed her.

Enquiries at the now cheapened and popularized Berber studio elicited Jensen’s old address, and Mary drove there in a taxi, only to find that he had moved to an even poorer quarter of the city. She discovered his lodgings at last, in a slum on the lower east side. He was out, looking for a job, the landlady thought, but Mary left a note for him, with a bill inside it, asking him to come out to Crab’s Bay the next morning. She hurried back to Rosamond, and found that the excellent Sparrow had already held lively conferences with the village builders and plumbers.

“I told ‘em they’d get a bonus for finishing the job in three weeks, and I guess I got the whole outfit on the jump,” said she with satisfaction. “Though the dear Lord knows,” she added, “if the plumbers get through on schedule it’ll be the first time in history.”

When Henrik Jensen arrived next day Mary took an instant liking to him. He was shabbier and more hopeless than ever, but his eyes were kind, his mouth gentle, and when she spoke of Stefan his face lighted up.

She told him the story of the two friends, of his brother’s wound and Stefan’s crippling, and saw that his eyes filled with tears.

“He was wonderful to me, Mrs. Byrd, he gave me a chance. I was making good, too, till Miss Berber left and the whole scheme fell to pieces. I’m glad Adolph is with him; it was very gracious of you to let me hear about it.”

“Are you very busy now, Mr. Jensen?”

He smiled hopelessly.

“Yes, very busy—looking for work. I’m down and out, Mrs. Byrd.”

She unfolded her scheme to him. Stefan would need some one near him night and day. He would be miserable with a servant; he would—she knew—feel his helplessness more keenly in the presence of a woman. She herself could help, but she had her work, and the children. Mr. Jensen would be one of the family. She could offer him a home, and a salary which she hoped would be sufficient for his needs—

“I have no needs, Mrs. Byrd,” he interrupted at this point, his eyes shining with eagerness. “Enough clothes for decency, that's all. If I could be of some use to your husband, to my friend and Adolph's, I should ask no more of life. I'm a hopeless failure, ma'am, and getting old—you don't know what it is like to feel utterly useless.”

Mary listened to his gentle voice and watched his fine hands—hands used to appraising delicate, beautiful things. The longer they talked, the more certain she felt that here was the ideal person, one bound to her husband by ties of gratitude, and whose ministrations could not possibly offend him.

She rang up Mrs. Farraday, put the case to her, and obtained her offer of a room to house Mr. Jensen while the repairs were making. She arranged with him to return next day with his belongings, and advanced a part of his salary for immediate expenses. Mary wanted him to come to her at once, both out of sympathy for his wretched circumstances, and because she wished thoroughly to know him before Stefan's return.

Luckily, the Sparrow took to Jensen at once, so there was nothing to fear on that score. For the Sparrow was now a permanent part of Mary's life. She had a small independent income, but no home—her widowed sister having gone west to live with a daughter—and she looked upon herself as the appointed guardian of the Byrdsnest. Not only did she relieve Mary of the housekeeping, and help Lily with the household tasks, which she adored, but she had practically taken the place of nurse to the children, leaving Mary hours of freedom for her work which would otherwise have been unattainable.

The competency of the two friends achieved the impossible in the next few weeks, as it had done on the memorable first day of Mary's housekeeping. Mr. Jensen, with his trained taste, was invaluable for shopping expeditions, going back and forth to the city with catalogues, samples, and orders.

In a little over three weeks Stefan's old studio had been transformed into a bed-sitting-room, with every comfort that an invalid could desire, and the further end of it had been partitioned into a bathroom and a small bedroom for Mr. Jensen, with a separate outside entrance.

“Oh, if only I had the new wing,” sighed Mary.

“This will be even quieter for him, Mrs. Byrd, and the chair can be wheeled so quickly to the house,” replied Mr. Jensen.

The back window of Mary's sitting room had been enlarged to glass doors, and from these a concrete path ran to the studio entrance. Mary planned to make it a covered way after the summer.

The day the wheeled chair arrived it was hard for her to keep back the tears. It was a beautifully made thing of springs, cushions, and rubber tires. It could be pushed, or hand-propelled by the occupant. It could be lowered, heightened, or tilted. It was all that a chair could be—but how to picture Stefan in it, he of the lithe steps and quick, agile movements, the sudden turns, and the swift, almost running walk? Her heart trembled with pity at the thought.

They had already received an “all well” cable from Paris, and three weeks after he had sailed, James telegraphed that they were starting. He had waited for the American line—he would have been gone a month.

As the day of landing approached, Mary became intensely nervous. She decided not to meet the boat, and sent James a wireless to that effect. She could not see Stefan first among all those crowds; her instinct told her that he, too, would not wish it.

The ship docked on Saturday. The day before, the last touches had been put to Stefan's quarters. They were as perfect as care and taste could make them. Early on Saturday morning Mr. Jensen started for the city, carrying a big bunch of roses—Mary's welcome to her husband. While the Sparrow flew about the house gilding the lily of cleanliness, Mary, with Elliston at her skirts, picked the flowers destined for Stefan's room. These she arranged in every available vase—the studio sang with them. Every now and then she would think of some trifle to beautify it further—a drawing from her sitting room—her oldest pewter plate for another ashtray—a pine pillow from her bedroom. Elliston's fat legs became so tired with ceaselessly trotting back and forth behind her that he began to cry with fatigue, and was put to bed for his nap. Rosamond waked, demanding dinner and amusement.

The endless morning began to pass, and all this while Mary had not thought!

At lunch time James telephoned. They would be out by three o'clock. Stefan had stood the journey well, was delighted with the roses, and to see Jensen. He was wonderfully brave and cheerful.

Mary was trembling as she hung up the receiver. He was here, he was on the way; and still, she had not thought!

Both children asleep, the last conceivable preparation made, Mary settled herself on the porch at last, to face what was coming.

The Sparrow peeped out at her.

“I guess you'd as soon be left alone, my dear,” she said, tactfully.

“Yes, please, Sparrow,” Mary replied, with a nervous smile. The little spinster

slipped away.

What did she feel for Stefan? Mary wondered. Pity, deep pity? Yes. But that she would feel for any wounded soldier. Admiration for his courage? That, too, any one of the war's million heroes could call forth. Determination to do her full duty by this stricken member of her family? Of course, she would have done that for any relative. Love? No. Mary felt no love for Stefan. That had died, nearly a year ago, died in agony and humiliation. She could not feel that her lover, her husband, was returning to her. She waited only for a wounded man to whom she owed the duty of all kindness.

Suddenly, her heart shook with fear. What if she were unable to show him more than pity, more than kindness? What if he, stricken, helpless, should feel her lack of warmth, and tenderness, should feel himself a stranger here in this his only refuge? Oh, no, no! She must do better than that. She must act a part. He must feel himself cared for, wanted. Surely he, who had lost everything, could ask so much for old love's sake? ... But if she could not give it? Terror assailed her, the terror of giving pain; for she knew that of all women she was least capable of insincerity. "I don't know how to act," she cried to herself, pitifully.

A car honked in the lane. They were here. She jumped up and ran to the gate, wheeling the waiting chair outside it. Farraday's big car rounded the bend—three men sat in the tonneau. Seeing them, Mary ran suddenly back inside the gate; her eyes fell, she dared not look.

The car had stopped. Through half-raised lids she saw James alight. The chauffeur ran to the chair. Jensen stood up in the car, and some one was lifted from it. The chair wheeled about and came toward her. It was through the gate—it was only a yard away.

"Mary," said a voice. She looked up.

There was the well-known face, strangely young, the eyes large and shadowed. There was his smile, eager, and very anxious now. There were his hands, those finely nervous hands. They lay on a rug, beneath which were the once swift limbs that could never move again. He was all hers now. His wings were broken, and, broken, he was returning to the nest.

"Mary!"

She made one step forward. Stooping, she gathered his head to her breast, that breast where, loverlike, it had lain a hundred times. Her arms held him close, her tears ran down upon his hair.

"My boy!" she cried.

Here was no lover, no husband to be forgiven. Cradled upon her heart there lay only her first, her most wayward, and her best loved child.



III

Mary never told Stefan of those nightmare moments before his arrival. From the instant that her deepest passion, the maternal, had answered to his need, she knew neither doubt nor unhappiness.

She settled down to the task of creating by her labor and love a home where her three dependents and her three faithful helpmates could find the maximum of happiness and peace.

The life of the Byrdsnest centered about Stefan; every one thought first of him and his needs. Next in order of consideration came Ellie and little Rosamond. Then Lily had to be remembered. She must not be overworked; she must take enough time off. Henrik, too, must not be over-conscientious. He must allow Mary to relieve him often enough. As for the Sparrow, she must not wear herself out flying in three directions at once. She must not tire her eyes learning typewriting. But at this point Mary's commands were apt to be met with contempt.

"Now, Mary Byrd," the Sparrow would chirp truculently, "you 'tend to your business, and let me 'tend to mine. Anybody would think that we were all to save ourselves in this house but you. As for my typing, it's funny if I can't save you something on those miserable stenographers' bills."

Mary was wonderfully happy in these days—happier in a sense than she had ever been, for she had found, beyond all question, the full work for hands to do. And to her love for her children there was added not merely her maternal tenderness for Stefan, but a deep and growing admiration.

For Stefan was changed not only in the body, but in the spirit. Everybody remarked it. The fierce fires of war seemed to have burnt away his old confident egotism. In giving himself to France he had found more than he had lost; for, by a strange paradox, in the midst of death he had found belief in life.

"Mary, my beautiful," he said to her one day in September, as he worked at an adjustable drawing board which swung across his knees, "did you ever wonder why all my old pictures used to be of rapid movement, nearly all of running or flying?"

"Yes, dearest, I used to try often to think out the significance of it."

They were in the studio. Mary had just dropped her pencil after a couple of

hours' work on a new serial she was writing. She often worked now in Stefan's room. He was busy with a series of drawings of the war. He had tried different media—pastel, ink, pencils, and chalks—to see which were the easiest for sedentary work.

“It's good-bye to oils,” he had said, “I couldn't paint a foot from the canvas.”

Now he was using a mixture of chalk and charcoal, and was in the act of finishing the sixth drawing of his series. The big doors of the barn were opened wide to the sunny lawn, gay with a riot of multicolored dahlias.

“It's odd,” said Stefan, pushing away his board and turning the wheels of his chair so that he faced the brilliant stillness of the garden, “but I seem never to have understood my work till now. I used always to paint flight partly because it was beautiful in itself but also, I think, with some hazy notion that swift creatures could always escape from the ugliness of life.”

Mary came and sat by him, taking his hand.

“It seems to me,” he went on, “that I spent my life flying from what I thought was ugly. I always refused to face realities, Mary, unless they were pleasant. I fled even from the great reality of our marriage because it meant responsibilities and monotony, and they seemed ugly things to me. And now, Mary,” he smiled, “now that I can never shoulder responsibilities again, and am condemned to lifelong monotony”—she pressed his hand—“neither seems ugly any more. The truth is, I thought I fled to get away from things, and it was really to get away from myself. Now that I've seen such horrors, such awful suffering, and such unbelievable sacrifice, I have something to think about so much more real than my vain, egotistical self. I know what my work is now, something much better than just creating beauty. I gave my body to France—that was nothing. But now I have to give her my soul—I have to try and make it a voice to tell the world a little of what she has done. Am I too vain, dearest, in thinking that these really say something big?”

He nodded toward his first five drawings, which hung in a row on the wall.

“Oh, Stefan, you know what I think of them,” she said, her eyes shining.

“Would you mind pinning up the new one, Mary, so that we can see them all together?”

She rose and, unfastening the drawing from its board, pinned it beside the others. Then she turned his chair to face them, and they both looked silently at the pictures.

They were drawings of the French lines, and the peasant life behind them.

Dead soldiers, old women by a grave, young mothers following the plow—men tense, just before action. The subjects were already familiar enough through the work of war correspondents and photographers, but the treatment was that of a great artist. The soul of a nation was there—which is always so much greater than the soul of an individual. The drawings were not of men and women, but of one of the world's greatest races at the moment of its transfiguration.

For the twentieth time Mary's eyes moistened as she looked at them.

The shadows began to lengthen. Shouts came from the slope, and presently Ellie's sturdy form appeared through the trees, followed by the somewhat disheveled Sparrow carrying Rosamond, who was smiting her shoulder and crowing loudly.

"I'll come and help you in a few minutes, Sparrow," Mary called, as the procession crossed the lawn, her face beaming love upon it.

"Can you spare the few minutes, dear?" Stefan asked, watching her.

"Yes, indeed, they won't need me yet."

The light was quite golden now; the dahlias seemed on fire under it.

"Mary," said Stefan, "I've been thinking a lot about you lately."

"Have you, dear?"

"Yes, I never tried to understand you in the old days. I had never met your sort of woman before, and didn't trouble to think about you except as a beautiful being to love. I was too busy thinking about myself," he smiled. "I wondered, without understanding it, where you got your strength, why everything you touched seemed to turn to order and helpfulness under your hands. I think now it is because you are always so true to life—to the things life really means. Every one always approves and upholds you, because in you the race itself is expressed, not merely one of its sports, as with me."

She looked a little puzzled. "Do you mean, dearest, because I have children?"

"No, Beautiful, any one can do that. I mean because you have in perfect balance and control all the qualities that should be passed on to children, if the race is to be happy. You are so divinely normal, Mary, that's what it is, and yet you are not dull."

"Oh, I'm afraid I am," smiled Mary, "rather a bromide, in fact."

He shook his head, with his old brilliant smile.

"No, dearest, nobody as beautiful and as vital as you can be dull to any one who is not out of tune with life. I used to be that, so I'm afraid I thought you so, now and then."

“I know you did,” she laughed, “and I thought you fearfully erratic.”

He laughed back. They had both passed the stage in which the truth has power to hurt.

“I remember Mr. Gunther talking to me a little as you have been doing,” she recalled, “when he came to model me. I don't quite understand either of you. I think you're just foolishly prejudiced in my favor because you admire me.”

“What about the Farradays, and Constance, and the Sparrow and Lily and Henrik and McEwan and the Havens and Madame Corriani and—”

“Oh, stop!” she laughed, covering his mouth with her hand.

“And even in Paris,” he concluded, holding the hand, “Adolph, and—yes, and Felicity Berber. Are they all 'prejudiced in your favor'?”

“Why do you include the last named?” she asked, rather low. It was the first time Felicity had been spoken of between them.

“She threw me over, Mary, the hour she discovered how it was with you,” he said quietly.

“That was rather decent of her. I'm glad you told me that,” she answered after a pause.

“All this brings me to what I really want to say,” he continued, still holding her hand in his. “You are so alive, you *are* life; and yet you're chained to a half-dead man.”

“Oh, don't, dearest,” she whispered, deeply distressed.

“Yes, let me finish. I shan't last very long, my dear—two or three years, perhaps—long enough to say what I must about France. I want you to go on living to the full. I want you to marry again, Mary, and have more beautiful, strong children.”

“Oh, darling, don't! Don't speak of such things,” she begged, her lips trembling.

“I've finished, Beautiful. That's all I wanted to say. Just for you to remember,” he smiled.

Her arms went round him. “You're bad,” she whispered, “I shan't remember.”

“Here comes Henrik,” he replied. “Run in to your babies.”

He watched her swinging steps as, after a farewell kiss, she sped down the little path.



IV

Stefan's moods were not always calm. He had his hours of fierce rebellion, when he felt he could not endure another moment with his deadened carcass; when, without life, it seemed so much better to die. He had days of passionate longing for the world, for love, for everything he had lost. Mary fell into the habit of borrowing the Farradays' car when she saw such a mood approaching, and sending Stefan for long drives alone. The rushing flight seldom failed to carry him beyond the reach of his black mood. Returning, he would plunge into work, and the next day would find him calm and smiling once again. He suffered much pain from his back, but this he bore with admirable patience.

"It's nothing," he would say, "compared to the black devils."

Stefan's courage was enormously fortified by the success of his drawings, which created little less than a sensation. Reproductions of them appeared for some weeks in *The Household Review*, and were recopied everywhere. The originals were exhibited by Constantine in November.

"Here," wrote one of the most distinguished critics in New York, himself a painter of repute, "we have work which outranks even Mr. Byrd's celebrated Danaë, and in my judgment far surpasses any of the artist's other achievements. I have watched the development of this young American genius with the keenest interest. I placed him in the first rank as a technician, but his work—with the exception of the Danaë—appeared to me to lack substance and insight. It was brilliant, but too spectacular. Even his Danaë, though on a surprising inspirational plane, had a quality high rather than profound, I doubted if Mr. Byrd had the stuff of which great art is made, but after seeing his war drawings, I confess myself mistaken. If I were to sum up my impression of them I should say that on the battlefield Mr. Byrd has discovered the one thing his work lacked—soul."

Stefan read this eulogy with a humorous grin.

"I expect the fellow's right," he said. "I don't think my soul was as strong on wings in the old days as my brush was. Without joking, though," he went on, suddenly grave, "I don't know if there is such a thing as a soul, but if there is, such splendid ones were being spilled out there that I think, perhaps, Mary, I may have picked a bit of one up."

"Dearest," said Mary, with a kiss of comprehension, "I'm so proud of you. You are great, a great artist, and a great spirit." And she kissed him again, her eyes shining.

If the Byrdsnest was proud in November of its distinguished head, it positively bristled with importance in December, when Constantine telephoned that the trustees of the Metropolitan were negotiating for Stefan's whole series. This possibility had already been spoken of in the press, though the family had not dared hope too much from the suggestion.

The Museum bought the drawings, and Stefan took his place as one of America's great artists.

"Mary, I'm so glad I can be useful again, as well as ornamental," he grinned, presenting to her with a flourish a delightfully substantial cheque.

His courage, and his happiness in his success, were an increasing joy to Mary. She blossomed in her pride of him, and the old glowing look came back to her face.

Only one thing—besides her anxiety for his health—troubled her. With all his tenderness to her, and his renewed love, he still remained a stranger to his children. He seemed proud of their healthy beauty, and glad of Mary's happiness in them; but their nearness bored and tired him, and they, quick to perceive this, became hopelessly unresponsive in his presence. Ellie would back solemnly away from the approaching chair, and Rosamond would hang mute upon her mother's shoulder. "It's strange," Mary said to the Sparrow, who was quick to notice any failure to appreciate her adored charges; "they're his own, and yet he hasn't the key to them. I suppose it's because he's a genius, and too far apart from ordinary people to understand just little human babies."

The thought stirred faintly the memory of her old wound.



V

That Christmas, for the first time in its history, the Byrdsnest held high festival. House and studio were decorated, and in the afternoon there was a Christmas-tree party for all the old friends and their children.

The dining-room had been closed since the night before in order to facilitate Santa Clans' midnight spiritings.

When all the guests had arrived, and Stefan had been wheeled in from the studio, the mysterious door was at last thrown open, revealing the tree in all its glory, rooted in a floor of glittering snow, with its topmost star scraping the ceiling.

With shouts the older children surrounded it; Ellie followed more slowly, awed by such splendor; and Rosamond crept after, drawn irresistibly by a hundred glittering lures.

Crawling from guest to guest, her tiny hands clutching toys as big as herself, her dark eyes brilliant, her small red mouth emitting coos of rapture, she enchanted the men, and drew positive tears of delight from Constance.

"Oh, Walter!" she cried, shaking her son with viciousness, "how could you have been so monotonous as to be born a boy?"

After a time Mary noticed that Stefan was being tired by the hubbub, and signaled an adjournment to the studio for tea and calm. The elders trooped out; the children fell upon the viands; and Miss Mason caught Rosamond by the petticoat as she endeavored to creep out after Gunther, whose great size seemed to fascinate her.

The sculptor had given Mary a bronze miniature of his now famous "Pioneers" group. It was a beautiful thing, and Constance and James were anxious to know if other copies were to be obtained.

"No," Gunther answered them laconically, "I have only had three cast. One the President wished to have, the second is for myself, and Mrs. Byrd, as the original of the woman, naturally has the third."

"Couldn't you cast one or two more?" Constance pleaded.

"No," he replied, "I should not care to do so."

Stefan examined the bronze with interest, his keen eyes traveling from the man's figure to the woman's.

"It's very good of you both," he said, looking from Gunther to Mary, with a trace of his old teasing smile. Mary blushed slightly. For some reason which she did not analyze she was a trifle embarrassed at seeing herself perpetuated in bronze as the companion of the sculptor.

When the guests began to leave, Mary urged the Farradays to remain a little longer. "It's only five o'clock," she reminded them.

Mrs. Farraday settled herself comfortably, and drew out her khaki-colored knitting. James lit his pipe, and Stefan wheeled forward to the glow of the fire, fitting a cigarette into his new amber holder.

"I have a letter from Wallace," said James, "that I've been waiting to read you. Shall I do so now?"

"Oh, do!" exclaimed Mary, "we shall love to hear it. Wait a moment, though, while I fetch Rosamond—the Sparrow can't attend to them both at once *and* help Lily."

She returned in a moment with the sleepy baby.

"I'll have to put her to bed soon," she said, settling into a low rocking chair, "but it isn't quite time yet. I suppose Jamie has heard his father's letter?"

"Oh, yes," said James, "and has dozens of his own, too."

"He's such a dear boy," Mary continued, "he's playing like an angel with Ellie in there, while the Sparrow flits."

James unfolded Mac's closely written sheets, and read his latest accounts of the officers' training corps with which he had been for the last six months, the gossip that filtered to them from the front, and his expectation of being soon gazetted to a Highland Regiment.

"The waiting is hard, but when once I get with our own lads in the trenches I'll be the happiest man alive," wrote Mac. "Meanwhile, I think a lot of all you dear people. I'm more than happy in what you tell me of Byrd's success and of the bairns' and Mary's well being. Give them all my love and congratulations."

James turned the last page, and paused. "I think that's about all," he said.

But it was not all. While the others sat silent for a minute, their thoughts on the great struggle, Farraday's eyes ran again down that last page.

"Poor Byrd," Mac wrote, "so you say he'll not last many years. Well, life would have broken him anyway, and it's grand he's found himself before the end. He's not the lasting kind, there's too much in him, and too little. She wins, after all, James; life won't cheat her as it has him. She is here just to be true to her instincts—to choose the finest mate for her nest-building. She'll marry again, though the dear woman doesn't know it, and would be horrified at the thought. But she will, and it won't be either of us—we are too much her kind. It will be some other brilliant egoist who will thrill her, grind her heart, and give her wonderful children. She is an instrument. As I think I once heard poor Byrd say, she is not merely an expression of life, she is life."

James folded the letter and slipped it into his pocket.

"Come, son, we must be going," murmured Mrs. Farraday, putting up her knitting.

"Rosamond is almost asleep," smiled Mary.

"Don't rise, my dear," said the little lady, "we'll find our own way."

"Good-bye, Farraday," said Stefan, "and thank you for everything."

Mary held out her hand to them both, and they slipped quietly out.

"What a good day it has been, dearest. I hope you aren't too tired," she said, as she rocked the drowsy baby.

"No, Beautiful, only a little."

He dropped his burnt-out cigarette into the ash-tray at his side. The rocker creaked rhythmically.

"Mary, I want to draw Rosamond," said Stefan thoughtfully.

"Oh, do you, dearest? That *will* be nice!" she exclaimed, her face breaking into a smile of pleasure.

"Yes. Do you know, I was watching the little thing this afternoon, when Gunther and all the others were playing with her. It's very strange—I never noticed it before—but it came to me quite suddenly. She's exactly like my mother."

"Is she really?" Mary murmured, touched.

“Yes, it's very wonderful. I felt suddenly, watching her eyes and smile, that my mother is not dead after all. Will you—” he seemed a little embarrassed—“could you, do you think, without disturbing her, let me hold the baby for a little while?”

THE END

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