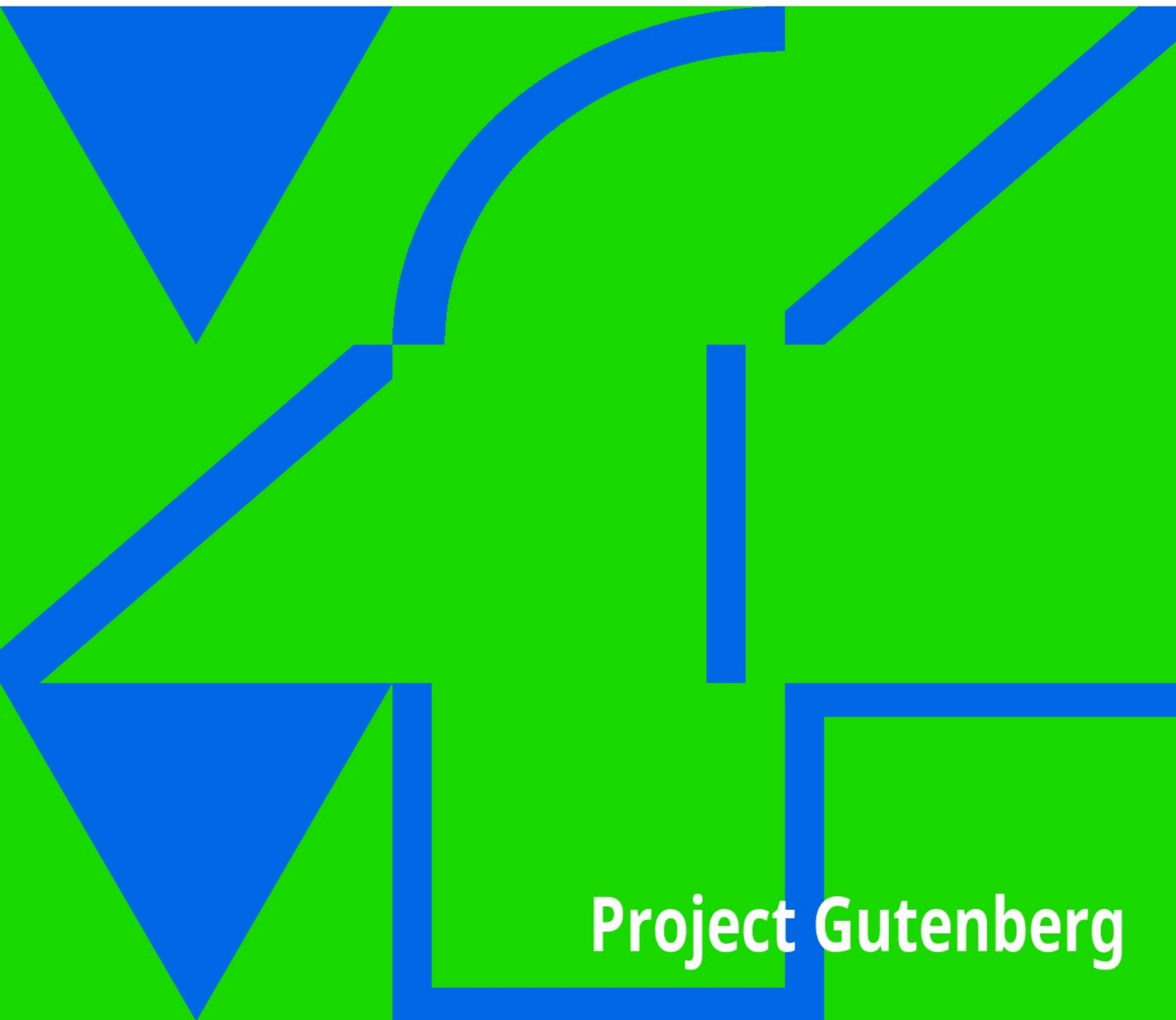


Sunny Slopes

Ethel Hueston

An abstract geometric design featuring a vibrant green background. Overlaid on this are several blue shapes: two large triangles pointing downwards on the left side, a thick curved line in the upper center, a diagonal line segment on the right, and a vertical line segment in the center. At the bottom, there are blue rectangular outlines forming a frame-like structure.

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***START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SUNNY
SLOPES***

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"A minister's wife! You look more like a little girl's baby doll."

**[Frontispiece: "A minister's wife! You look more like a little girl's baby
doll."]**

SUNNY SLOPES

BY

ETHEL HUESTON

**AUTHOR OF
PRUDENCE OF THE PARSONAGE,
PRUDENCE SAYS SO, ETC.**

**ILLUSTRATED BY
ARTHUR WILLIAM BROWN**

**GROSSET & DUNLAP
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This Book

*Is Written in Memory of My Husband
Eager in Service, Patient in Illness
Unfaltering in Death, and
Is Dedicated to
The St. Louis Presbytery
To Which I Owe a Debt of Interest
Of Sympathy and of Unfailing Friendship
I Can Ever Hope to Pay*

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ILLUSTRATIONS

"A minister's wife! You look more
like a little girl's baby doll." *Frontispiece*

"Silly old goose," she murmured.

Carol, with an inarticulate sob,
gathered her baby in her arms.

"I beg your pardon," she said, sweetly,
unsmilingly, "I did not mean to be rude."

SUNNY SLOPES

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNING

Back and forth, back and forth, over the net, spun the little white ball, driven by the quick, sure strokes of the players. There was no sound save the bounding of the ball against the racquets, and the thud of rubber soles on the hard ground. Then—a sudden twirl of a supple wrist, and—

"Deuce!" cried the girl, triumphantly brandishing her racquet in the air.

The man on the other side of the net laughed as he gathered up the balls for a new serve.

Back and forth, back and forth, once more,—close to the net, away back to the line, now to the right, now to the left,—and then—

"Ad out, I am beating you, David," warned the girl, leaping lightly into the air to catch the ball he tossed her.

"Here is a beauty," she said, as the ball spun away from her racquet.

The two, white-clad, nimble figures flashed from side to side of the court. He sprang into the air to meet her ball, and drove it into the farthest corner, but she caught it with a backward gesture. Still he was ready for it, cutting it low across the net,—yes, she was there, she got it,—but the stroke was hard,—and the ball was light.

"Was it good?" she gasped, clasping the racquet in both hands and tilting dangerously forward on tiptoe to look.

"Good enough,—and your game."

With one accord they ran forward to the net, pausing a second to glance about enquiringly, and then, one impulse guiding, kissed each other ecstatically.

"The very first time I have beaten you, David," exulted the girl. "Isn't everything glorious?" she demanded, with all of youth's enthusiasm.

"Just glorious," came the ready answer, with all of mature manhood's response to girlish youth. Claspings the slender hands more tightly, he added, laughing, "And I kiss the fingers that defeated me."

"Oh, David," the buoyant voice dropped to a reverent whisper. "I love you,—I love you,—I—I am just crazy about you."

"Careful, Carol, remember the manse," he cautioned gaily.

"But this is honeymooning, and the manse hasn't gloomed on my horizon yet. I'll be careful when I get installed. I am really a Methodist yet, and Methodists are expected to shout and be enthusiastic. When we move into our manse, and the honeymoon is ended, I'll just say, 'I am very fond of you, Mr. Duke.'" The voice lengthened into prim and prosy solemnity.

"But our honeymoon isn't to end. Didn't we promise that it should last forever?"

"Of course it will." She dimpled up at him, snuggling herself in the arm that still encircled her shoulders. "Of course it will." She balanced her racquet on the top of his head as he bent adoringly over her. "Of course it will,—unless your grim old Presbyterians manse all the life out of me."

"If it ever begins, tell me," he begged, "and we'll join the Salvation Army. There's life enough even for you."

"I beat you," she teased, irrelevantly. "I am surprised,—a great big man like you."

"And to-morrow we'll be in St. Louis."

"Yes," she assented, weakening swiftly. "And the mansers will have me in their deadly clutch."

"The only manser who will clutch you is myself." He drew her closer in his arm as he spoke. "And you like it."

"Yes, I love it. And I like the mansers already. I hope they like me. I am improving, you know. I am getting more dignified every day. Maybe they will think I am a born Presbyterian if you don't give me away. Have you noticed how serious I am getting?" She pinched thoughtfully at his chin. "David Duke, we have been married two whole weeks, and it is the most delicious, and breathless, and amazing thing in the world. It is life—real life—all there is to life, really, isn't it?"

"Yes, life is love, they say, so this is life. All the future must be like this."

"I never particularly yearned to be dead," she said, wrinkling her brows thoughtfully, "but I never even dreamed that I could be so happy. I am awfully glad I didn't die before I found it out."

"You are happy, aren't you, sweetheart?"

She turned herself slowly in his arm and lifted puckering lips to his.

"Hey, wake up, are you playing tennis, or staging Shakespeare? We want the court if you don't need it."

Mr. and Mrs. Duke, honeymooners, gazed speechlessly at the group of young men standing motionless forty feet away, then Carol wheeled about and ran swiftly across the velvety grass, over the hill and out of sight, her husband in close pursuit.

Once she paused.

"If the mansers could have seen us then!" she ejaculated, with awe in her voice.

CHAPTER II

MANSERS

The introduction of Mrs. David Arnold Duke, née Methodist, to the members of her husband's Presbyterian flock, was, for the most part, consummated with grace and dignity. Only one untoward incident lingered in her memory to cloud her lovely face with annoyance.

In honor of his very first honeymoon, hence his first opportunity to escort a beautiful and blushing bride to the cozy little manse he had so painstakingly prepared for her reception, the Reverend David indulged in the unwonted luxury of a taxicab. And happy in the consciousness of being absolutely correct as to detail, they were driven slowly down the beautifully shaded avenues of the Heights, one of the many charming suburbs of St. Louis,—aware of the scrutiny of interested eyes from the sheltering curtains of many windows.

Being born and bred in the ministry, Carol acquitted herself properly before the public eye. But once inside the guarding doors of the darling manse, secure from the condemning witness of even the least of the fold, she danced and sang and exulted as the very young, and very glad, must do to find expression.

Their first dinner in the manse was more of a social triumph than a culinary success. The coffee was nectar, though a trifle overboiled. The gravy was sweet as honey, but rather inclined to be lumpy. And the steak tasted like fried chicken, though Carol had peppered it twice and salted it not at all. It wasn't her fault, however, for the salt and pepper shakers in her "perfectly irresistible" kitchen cabinet were exactly alike,—and how was she to know she was getting the same one twice?

Anyhow, although they started very properly with plates on opposite sides of the round table, by the time they reached dessert their chairs were just half way round from where they began the meal, and the salad dishes were so close together that half the time they ate from one and half the time from the other. And when it was all over, they pushed the dishes back and clasped their hands promiscuously together and talked with youthful passion of what they were going to do, and how wonderful their opportunity for service was, and what revolutions they were going to work in the lives of the nice, but no doubt prosy mansers, and how desperately they loved each other. And it was going to last forever and ever and ever.

So far they were just Everybride and Everygroom. Their hearts sang and the manse was more gorgeous than any mansion on earth, and all the world was good and sweet, and they couldn't possibly ever make any kind of a mistake or blunder, for love was guiding them,—and could pure love lead astray?

David at last looked at his watch and said, rather hurriedly:

"By the way, I imagine a few of our young people will drop in to-night for a first smile from the manse lady."

Carol leaped from her chair, jerked off the big kitchen apron, and flew up the stairs with never a word. When David followed more slowly, he found her already painstakingly dusting her matchless skin with velvety powder.

"I got a brand new box of powder, David, the very last thing I did," she began, as he entered the room. "When this is gone, I'll resort to cheaper kinds. You see, father's had such a lot of experience with girls and complexions that he just naturally expects them to be expensive—and would very likely be confused and hurt if things were changed. But I can imagine what a shock it would be to you right at the start."

David assured her that any powder which added to the wonder of that most wonderful complexion was well worth any price. But Carol shook her head sagely.

"It's a dollar a box, my dear, and very tiny boxes at that. Now don't talk any more for I must fix my hair and dress, and—I want to look perfectly darling or they won't like me, and then they will not put anything in the collections and the heathens and we will starve together. Oh, will you buckle my slippers? Thanks. Here's half a kiss for your kindness. Oh, David, dear, do run along and don't bother me, for suppose some one should get here before I am all fixed, and— Shall I wear this little gray thing? It makes me look very, very sensible, you know, and—er—well, pretty, too. One can be pretty as well as sensible, and I think it's a Christian duty to do it. David, I shall never be ready. I can not be talked to, and make myself beautiful all at once. Dear, please go and say your prayers, and ask God to make them love me, will you? For it is very important, and— If I act old, and dignified, they will think I am appropriate at least, won't they? Oh, this horrible dress, I never can reach the hooks. Will you try, David, there's my nice old boy. Oh, are you going down? Well, I suppose one of us

ought to be ready for them,—run along,—it's lonesome without you,—but I have to powder my face, and— Oh, that was just the preliminary. The conclusion is always the same. Bye, dearest." Then, solemnly, to her mirror, she said, "Isn't he the blesseddest old thing that ever was? My, I am glad Prudence got married so long ago, or he might have wanted her instead of me. I don't suppose the mangers could possibly object to a complexion like mine. I can get a certificate from father to prove it is genuine, if they don't believe it."

Then she gave her full attention to tucking up tiny, straying curls with invisible hair pins, and was quite startled when David called suddenly:

"Hurry up, Carol, I am waiting for you."

"Oh, bless its heart, I forgot all about it. I am coming."

Gaily she ran down the stairs, parted the curtains into the living-room and said:

"Why are you sitting in the dark, David? Headache, or just plain sentimental? Where are you?"

"Over here," he said, in a curious, quiet voice.

She groped her way into the center of the room and clutched his arms. "David," she said, laughing a little nervously, "here goes the last gasp of my dear old Methodist fervor."

"Why, Carol—" he interrupted.

"Just a minute, honey. After this I am going to be settled and solemn and when I feel perfectly glorious I'll just say, 'Very good, thank you,' and—"

"But, Carol—"

"Yes, dear, just a second. This is my final gasp, my last explosion, my dying outburst. Rah, rah, rah, David. Three cheers and a tiger. Amen! Hallelujah! Hurrah! Down with the traitor, up with the stars! Now it's all over. I am a Presbyterian."

David's burst of laughter was echoed on every side of the room and the lights

were switched on, and with a sickening weakness Carol faced the young people of her husband's church.

"More Presbyterians, dear, a whole houseful of them. They wanted to surprise you, but you have turned the tables on them. This is my wife, Mrs. Duke."

Slowly Carol rallied. She smiled the irresistible smile.

"I am so glad to meet you," she said, softly, "I know we are going to like each other. Aren't you glad you got here in time to see me become Presbyterian? David, why didn't you warn me that surprise parties were still stylish? I thought they had gone out."

Carol watched very, very closely all that evening, and she could not see one particle of difference between these mansers and the young folks in the Methodist Church in Mount Mark, Iowa. They told funny stories, and laughed immoderately at them. The young men gave the latest demonstrations of vaudeville trickery, and the girls applauded as warmly as if they had not seen the same bits performed in the original. They asked David if they might dance in the kitchen, and David smilingly begged them to spare his manse the disgrace, and to dance themselves home if they couldn't be more restrained. The young men put in an application for Mrs. Duke as teacher of the Young Men's Bible Class, and David sternly vetoed the measure. The young ladies asked Carol what kind of powder she used, and however she got her hair up in that most marvelous manner.

And Carol decided it was not going to be such a burden after all, and thought perhaps she might make a regular pillar in time.

When, as she later met the elder ones of the church, and was invariably greeted with a smiling, "How is our little Methodist to-day," she bitterly swallowed her grief and answered with a brightness all assumed:

"Turned Presbyterian, thank you."

But to David she said:

"I did seriously and religiously ask the Lord to let me get introduced to the mansers without disgracing myself, and I am just a teeny bit disappointed because He went back on me in such a crisis."

But David, wise minister and able exponent of his faith, said quickly:

"He didn't go back on you, Carol. It was the best kind of an introduction, and He stood by you right through. They were more afraid of you than you were of them. You might have been stiff and reserved, and they would have been cold and self-conscious, and it would have been ghastly for every one. But your break broke the ice right off. You were perfectly natural."

"Hum,—yes—natural enough, I suppose. But it wasn't dignified, and why do you suppose I have been practising dignity these last ten years?"

CHAPTER III

A BABY IN BUSINESS

"Centerville, Iowa.

"Dear Carol and David—

"Please do not call me the baby of the family any more. I am in business, and babies have no business in business. Very good, wasn't it? I am practising verbosity for the book I am going to write some day. Verbosity is what I want to say, isn't it? I am never sure whether it is that or obesity. But you know what I mean.

"To begin at the beginning, then, you would be surprised how sensible father is turning out. I can hardly understand it. You remember when I insisted on studying stenography, Aunt Grace and Prue, yes, and all the rest of you, were properly shocked and horrified, and thought I ought to teach school because it is more ministerial. But I knew I should need the stenography in my writing, and father looked at me, and thought a while, and came right out on my side. And that settled it.

"Of course, when I wanted to cut college after my second year so I could get to work, father talked me out of it. But I am really convinced he was right that

time, even though he wasn't on my side. But after I finished college, when they offered me the English Department in the High School in Mount Mark at seventy-five per, and when I insisted on coming down here to Centerville to take this stenographic job with Messrs. Nesbitt and Orchard, at eight a week, well, the serene atmosphere of our quiet home was decidedly murky for a while. I said I needed the experience, both stenographic and literary, and this was my opportunity.

"Aunt Grace was speechless. Prudence wept over me. Fairy laughed at me. Lark said she just wished you were home to take charge of me and teach me a few things. But father looked at me again, and thought very seriously for a while, and said he believed I was right.

"Consequently, I am at Centerville.

"Isn't it dear of father? And so surprising. The girls think he needs medical attention, and honestly I am a little worried over him myself. It was so unexpected. Really, I half thought he would 'put his foot down,' as the Ladies Aiders used to want Prudence to do with us. He was always resigned, father was, about giving the girls up in marriage, but every one always said he would draw the line there. He is developing, I guess.

"Do you remember Nesbitt and Orchard? Mr. Nesbitt was a member of the church when we lived here, but it was before I was born, so I don't feel especially well acquainted on that account. But he calls me Connie and acts very fatherly.

"He is still a member of the church, and they say around town that he is not a bit slicker outside the church than he was when father was his pastor. He hurt me spiritually at first. So I wrote to father about it. Father wrote back that I must be charitable—must remember that belonging to church couldn't possibly do Mr. Nesbitt any harm, and for all we knew to the contrary, might be keeping him out of the electric chair every day of his life. And Mr. Nesbitt couldn't do the Christians any harm—the Lord is looking after them. And those outside who point to the hypocrites inside for excuses would have to think up something new and original if we eliminated the hypocrites on their account,—'so be generous, Connie,' wrote father, 'and don't begrudge Mr. Nesbitt the third seat to the left for he may never get any nearer Paradise than that.'

"Father is just splendid, Carol. I keep feeling that the rest of you don't realize it as hard as I do, but you will laugh at that.

"Mr. Nesbitt likes me, but he has—well, he has what a minister should call a 'bad disposition.' I'll tell you more about it in German when I meet you. German is the only language I know that can do him justice.

"I have been in trouble of one kind or another ever since I got here. Mr. Nesbitt owns a lot of houses around town, and we have charge of their rental. One day he gave me the address of one of his most tumble down shacks, and promised me a bonus of five dollars if I rented it for fifteen dollars a month on a year's lease. About ten days later, sure enough I rented it, family to take possession immediately. Mr. Nesbitt was out of town, so I took the rent in advance, turned over the keys, and proceeded to spend the five dollars. I learned that system of frenzied finance from you twins in the old days in the parsonage.

"Next morning, full of pride, I told Mr. Nesbitt about it.

""Rented 800 Stout,' he roared. 'Why, I rented it myself,—a three years' lease at eighteen a month,—move in next Monday.'

""Mercy,' says I. 'My family paid a month in advance.'

""So did mine.'

""My family is already in,' says I. That was a clincher.

"He raved and he roared, and said I got them in and I could get them out. But when he grew rational and raised my bonus to ten dollars, I said I would do my best. He agreed to refund the month's rent, to pay the moving expenses both in and out, to take over their five dollar deposit for electric lights, and to pay the electric and gas bill outstanding, which wouldn't be much for two or three days.

"So off marches the business baby to the conflict.

"They didn't like it a bit, and talked very crossly indeed, and said perfectly horrible, but quite true, things about Messrs. Nesbitt and Orchard. But finally they said they would move out, only they must have until Friday to find a new house. They would move out on Saturday, and leave the keys at the office.

"Mr. Nesbitt was much pleased, and said I had done nicely, gave me the ten dollars and a box of chocolates and we were as happy as cooing doves the rest of the day.

"But my family must have been more indignant than I realized. On Saturday, at one o'clock, Mr. Nesbitt told me to go around by the house on my way home to make sure the front door was locked. It was locked all right, but I noticed that the electric lights were burning. Mr. Nesbitt had not sent the key with me, as it was an automatic lock, and it really was none of my business if folks moved out and left the lights on. Still it seemed irregular, and when I got home I tried to get Mr. Nesbitt on the phone. But he and Mr. Orchard had left the office and gone out into the country for the afternoon. Business,—they never go to the country for pleasure. So I comfortably forgot all about the electric lights.

"But Monday afternoon, Mr. Nesbitt happened to remark that his family would not move in until Wednesday. Then I remembered.

"I said, 'What is the idea in having the electric lights burning down there?'

"'What?' he shouted. He always shouts unless he has a particular reason for whispering.

"'Why, the electric lights were burning in the house when I went by Saturday.'

"'All of them?'

"'Looked it from the outside.'

"'Did you turn them off?'

"'I should say not. I hadn't the key. Besides I didn't turn them on. I didn't know who did, nor why. I just left them alone.'

"That meant a neat little electric bill of about six dollars, and Mr. Nesbitt talked to me in a very un-neutral way, and I got my hat and walked off home. He called me up after a while and tried to make peace, but I said I was ill from the nervous shock and couldn't work any more that day. So he sent me a box of candy to restore my shattered nerves, and the next day they were all right.

"One day I got rather belligerent myself. It was just a week after I came. One

of his new tenants phoned in that Nesbitt must get the rubbish out of the alley back of his house or he would move out. Mr. Nesbitt tried to evade a promise, but the man was curt. 'You get that rubbish out to-day, or I get out to-morrow.'

"Mr. Nesbitt was just going to court, so he told me to call up a garbage man and get the rubbish removed.

"I didn't know the garbage men from the ministers, and they weren't classified in the directory. So I went to Mr. Orchard, a youngish sort of man, very pleasant, but slicker than Nesbitt himself.

"I said, not too amiably, 'Who are the garbage haulers in this town?'

"He said: 'Search me,' and went on writing.

"I dropped the directory on his desk, and said, "'Well, if Mr. Nesbitt loses a good tenant, I should worry.'

"Then he looked up and said: 'Oh, let's see. There's Jim Green, and Softy Meadows, and—and—Tully Scott—and—that's enough.'

"So I called them up. Jim Green was in jail for petty larceny. Softy Meadows was in bed with a broken leg. Tully Scott would do it for three fifty. So I gave him the number and told him to do it that afternoon without fail.

"Pretty soon Mr. Nesbitt came home. 'How about that rubbish?'

"I got Tully Scott to do it for three fifty.'

"He fairly tore his hair. 'Three fifty! Tully Scott is the biggest highway robber in town, and everybody knows it! Why didn't you get the mayor and be done with it? Three fifty! Great Scott! Three fifty! You call his lordship Tully Scott up and ask him if he'll haul that rubbish for a dollar and a half, and if he won't you can call off the deal.'

"I called him up, quietly, but inwardly raging.

"Will you haul that rubbish for a dollar and a half?'

"No,' he drawled through his nose, 'I won't haul no rubbish for no dollar and

a half, and you can tell old Skinflint I said so.'

"He hung up. So did I.

""What did he say?"

"I thought the nasal inflection made it more forceful, so I said, 'No, I won't haul no rubbish for no dollar and a half, and you can tell old Skinflint I said so.'

"Mr. Orchard laughed, and Mr. Nesbitt got red.

""Call up Ben Moore and see if he can do it.'

"I looked him straight in the eye. 'Nothing doing,' I said, with dignity. 'If you want any more garbage haulers, you can get them.'

"I sat down to the typewriter. Mr. Orchard nearly shut himself up in a big law book in his effort to keep from meeting anybody's eye. But Nesbitt went to the phone and called Ben Moore. Ben Moore had a four days' job on his hands. Then he called Jim Green, and Softy Meadows, and finally in despair called the only one left. John Knox,—nice orthodox name, my dear. John Knox would do it for the modest sum of five dollars, and not a—well, I'll spare you the details, but he wouldn't do it for a cent less. Nesbitt raved, and Nesbitt swore, but John Knox, while he may not be a pillar in the church, certainly stood like a rock. Nesbitt could pay it or lose his tenant. He paid.

"Mr. Orchard got up and put on his hat. 'Miss Connie wants some flowers and some candy and an ice-cream soda, my boy, and I want some cigars, and a coca cola. It's on you. Will you come along and pay the bill, or will you give us the money?'

""I guess it will be cheaper to come along,' said Nesbitt, looking bashfully at me, for I was very haughty. But I put on my hat, and it cost him just one dollar and ninety cents to square himself.

"But they both like me. In fact, Mr. Orchard suggested that I marry him so old Nesbitt would have to stop roaring at me, but I tell him honestly that of the two evils I prefer the roaring.

"No, Carol, I am not counting on marriage in my scheme of life. Not yet.

Sometimes I think perhaps I do not believe in it. It doesn't work out right. There is always something wrong somewhere. Look at Prudence and Jerry,—devoted to each other as ever, but Jerry's business takes him out among men and women, into the life of the city. And Prudence's business keeps her at home with the children. He's out, and she's in, and the only time they have to love each other is in the evening,—and then Jerry has clubs and meetings, and Prudence is always sleepy. Look at Fairy and Gene. He is always at the drug store, and Fairy has nothing but parties and clubs and silly things like that to think about,—a big, grand girl like Fairy. And she is always looking covetously at other women's babies and visiting orphans' homes to see if she can find one she wants to adopt, because she hasn't one of her own. Always that sorrow behind the twinkle in her eyes! If she hadn't married, she wouldn't want a baby. Take Larkie and Jim. Always Larkie was healthy at home, strong, and full of life. But since little Violet came, Lark is pale and weak, and has no strength at all. Aunt Grace is staying with her now. Why, I can't look at dear old Larkie without half crying.

"Take even you, my precious Carol, perfectly happy, oh, of course, but all your originality, your uniqueness, the very you-ness of you, will be absorbed in a round of missionary meetings, and prayer-meetings, and choir practises, and Sunday-school classes. The hard routine, my dear, will take the sparkle from you, and give you a sweet, but un-Carol-like precision and method. Oh, yes, you are happy, but thank you, dear, I think I'll keep my Self and do my work, and—be an old maid.

"Mr. Orchard offers himself as an alternative to the roars every now and then, and I expound this philosophy of mine in answer. He shouts with laughter at it. He says it is so, so like a baby in business. He reminds me of the time when gray hairs and crow's-feet will mar my serenity, and when solitary old age will take the lightness from my step. But I've never noticed that husbands have a way of banishing gray hairs and crow's-feet and feeble knees, have you? Babies are nice, of course, but I think I'll baby myself a little.

"I do get so homesick for the good old parsonage days, and all the bunch, and — Still, it is nice to be a baby in business, and think how wonderful it will be when I graduate from my baby-hood, and have brains enough to write books, big books, good books, for all the world to read.

"Lovingly as always,

"Baby Con."

When Carol read that letter she cried, and rubbed her face against her husband's shoulder,—regardless of the dollar powder on his black coat.

"A teeny bit for father," she explained, "for all his girls are gone. And a little bit for Fairy, but she has Gene. And quite a lot for Larkie, but she has Jim and Violet." And then, clasping her arm about his shoulders, which, despite her teasing remonstrance, he allowed to droop a little, she cried exultantly: "But not one bit for me, for I have you, and Connie is a poor, poverty-stricken, wretched little waif, with nothing in the world worth having, only she doesn't know it yet."

CHAPTER IV

A WOMAN IN THE CHURCH

And there was a woman in the church.

There always is,—one who stands apart, distinct, different,—in the community but not with it, in the church but not of it.

The woman in David's church was of a languorous, sumptuous type, built on generous proportions, with a mass of dark hair waving low on her forehead, with dark, straight-gazing, deep-searching eyes, the kind that impel and hold all truanting glances. She was slow in movement, suggesting a beautiful and commendable laziness. In public she talked very little, laughing never, but often smiling,—a curious smile that curved one corner of her lip and drew down the tip of one eye. She had been married, but no one knew anything about her husband. She was a member of the church, attended with most scrupulous regularity, assisted generously in a financial way, was on good terms with every one, and had not one friend in the congregation. The women were afraid of her. So were the men. But for different reasons.

Those who would ask questions of her, ran directly against the concrete wall of the crooked smile, and turned away abashed, unsatisfied.

Carol was very shy with her. She was not used to the type. There had been women in her father's churches, but they had been of different kinds. Mrs. Waldemar's straight-staring eyes embarrassed her. She listened silently when the other women talked of her, half admiringly, half sneeringly, and she grew more timid. She watched her fascinated in church, on the street, whenever they were thrown together. But one deep look from the dark eyes set her a-flush and rendered her tongue-tied.

Mrs. Waldemar had paid scant attention to David before the advent of Carol, except to follow his movements with her eyes in a way of which he could not remain unconscious. But when Carol came, entered the demon of mischief. Carol was young, Mrs. Waldemar was forty. Carol was lovely, Mrs. Waldemar was only unusual. Carol was frank as the sunshine, Mrs. Waldemar was mysterious. What woman on earth but might wonder if the devoted groom were immune to luring eyes, and if that lovely bride were jealous?

So she talked to him after church. She called him on the telephone for directions in the Bible study she was taking up. She lounged in her hammock as he returned home from pastoral calls, and stopped him for little chats. David was her pastor, she was one of his flock.

But Carol screwed up her face before the mirror and frowned.

"David," she said to herself, when a glance from her window revealed David leaning over Mrs. Waldemar's hammock half a block away, doubtless in the scriptural act of explaining an intricate passage of Revelation to the dark-eyed sheep,—"David is as good as an angel, and as innocent as a baby. Two very good traits of course, but dangerous, tre-men-dous-ly dangerous. Goodness and innocence make men wax in women's hands." Carol, for all her youth, had acquired considerable shrewdness in her life-time acquaintance with the intricacies of parsonage life.

She looked from her window again. "There's the—the—the dark-eyed Jezebel." She glanced fearfully about, to see if David might be near enough to hear the word. What on earth would he think of the manse lady calling one of his sheep a Jezebel? "Well, David," she said to herself decidedly, "God gave you a

wife for some purpose, and I'm slick if I haven't much brains." And she shook a slender fist at her image in the mirror and went back to setting the table.

David was talkative that evening. "You haven't seen much of Mrs. Waldemar, have you, dear? People here don't think much Of her. She is very advanced,—too advanced, of course. But she is very broad, and kind. She is well educated, too, and for one who has had no training, she grasps Bible truths in a most remarkable way. She has never had the proper guidance, that's the worst of it. With a little wise direction she will be a great addition to our church and a big help in many ways."

Carol lowered her lashes reflectively. She was wondering how much of this "wise direction" was going to fall to her precious David?

"I imagine our women are a little jealous of her, and that blinds them to her many fine qualities."

Carol agreed, with a certain lack of enthusiasm, and David continued with evident relish.

"Some of her ideas are dangerous, but when she is shown the weakness of her position she will change. She is not one of that narrow school who holds to a fallacy just because she accepted it in the beginning. The elders objected to her teaching a class in Sunday-school because they claimed her opinions would prove menacing to the young and uninformed. And it is true. She is dangerous company for the young right now. But she is starting out along better lines and I think will be a different woman."

"Dangerous for the young." The words repeated themselves in Carol's mind. "Dangerous for the young." Carol was young herself. "Dangerous for the young."

The next afternoon, Carol arrayed herself in her most girlishly charming gown, and with a smile on her lips, and trepidation in her heart, she marched off to call on her Jezebel. The Jezebel was surprised, no doubt of that. And she was pleased. Every one liked Carol,—even Jezebels. And Mrs. Waldemar was very much alone. However much a woman may revel in the admiration of men, there are times when she craves the confidence of at least one woman. Mrs. Waldemar led Carol up-stairs to a most seductively attractive little sitting-room, and Carol sat at her feet, as it were, for two full hours.

Then she tripped away home, more than ever aware of the wonderful charm of Mrs. Waldemar, but thanking God she was young.

When David came in to dinner, a radiant Carol awaited him. In the ruffly white dress, with its baby blue ribbons, and with a wide band of the same color in her hair, and tiny curls clustering about her pink ears, she was a very infant of a minister's wife.

David took her in his arms appreciatively. "You little baby," he said adoringly, "you look younger every day. Will you ever grow up? A minister's wife! You look more like a little girl's baby doll."

Carol giggled, and rumbled up his hair; When she took her place at the table she artfully snuggled low in her chair, peeping roguishly at him from behind the wedding-present coffee urn.

"David," she began, as soon as he finished the blessing, "I've been thinking all day of what you said about Mrs. Waldemar, and I've been ashamed of myself. I really have avoided her. She is so old, and clever, and I am such a goose, and people said things about her, and—but after last night I was ashamed. So to-day I went to see her, all alone by myself, without a gun or anything to protect me."

David laughed, nodding at her approvingly. "Good for you, Carol," he cried in approbation. "That was fine. How did you get along?"

"Just grand. And isn't she interesting? And so kind. I believe she likes me. She kept me a long time and made me a cup of tea, and begged me to come again. She nearly hypnotized me, I am really infatuated with her. Oh, we had a lovely time. She is different from us, but it does us good to mix with other kinds, don't you think so? I believe she did me good. I feel very emancipated to-night."

Carol tossed her blue-ribboned, curly head, and the warm approval in David's eyes cooled a little.

"What did she have to say?" he asked curiously.

"Oh, she talked a lot about being broad, and generous, and not allowing environment to dwarf one. She thinks it is a shame for a—a—girl of my—well, she called it my 'divine sparkle,' and she said it was a compliment,—anyhow, she said it was a shame I should be confined to a little half-souled bunch of

Presbyterians in the Heights. She has a lot of friends down-town, advanced thinkers, she calls them,—a poet, and some authors, and artists, and musicians,—folks like that. They have informal meetings every week or so, and she is going to take me. She says I will enjoy them and that they will adore me."

Carol's voice swelled with triumph, and David's approval turned to ice.

"She must have liked me or she wouldn't have been so friendly. She laughed at the Heights,—she called it a 'little, money-saving, heart-squeezing, church-bound neighborhood.' She said I must study new thoughts and read the new poetry, and run out with her to grip souls with real people now and then, to keep my star from tarnishing. I didn't understand all she said, but it sounded irresistible. Oh, she was lovely to me."

"She shouldn't have talked to you like that," protested David quickly. "She is not fair to our people. She can not understand them because they live sweet, simple lives where home and church are throned. New thought is not necessary to them because they are full of the old, old thought of training their babies, and keeping their homes, and worshiping God. And I know the kind of people she meets down-town,—a sort of high-class Bohemia where everybody flirts with everybody else in the name of art. You wouldn't care for it."

Carol adroitly changed the subject, and David said no more.

The next day, quite accidentally, she met Mrs. Waldemar on the corner and they had a soda together at the drug store. That night after prayer-meeting David had to tarry for a deacons' meeting, and Carol and Mrs. Waldemar sauntered off alone, arm in arm, and waited in Mrs. Waldemar's hammock until David appeared.

And David did not see anything wonderful in the dark, deep eyes at all,—they looked downright wicked to him. He took Carol away hurriedly, and questioned her feverishly to find out if Mrs. Waldemar had put any fresh nonsense into her pretty little head.

Day after day passed by and David began going around the block to avoid Mrs. Waldemar's hammock. Her advanced thoughts, expressed to him, old and settled and quite mature, were only amusing. But when she poured the vials of her emancipation on little, innocent, trusting Carol,—it was—well, David called it "pure down meanness." She was trying to make his wife dissatisfied with her

environment, with her life, with her very husband. David's kindly heart swelled with unaccustomed fury.

Carol always assured him that she didn't believe the things Mrs. Waldemar said,—it was interesting, that was all, and curious, and gave her new things to think about. And minister's families must be broad enough to make Christian allowance for all.

But, curiously enough, she grew genuinely fond of Mrs. Waldemar. And Mrs. Waldemar, in gratitude for the girlish affection of the little manse lady, left David alone. But one day she took Carol's dimpled chin in her hand, and turned the face up that she might look directly into the young blue eyes.

"Carol," she said, smiling, "you are a girlie, girlie wife, with dimples and curls and all the baby tricks, but you're a pretty clever little lady at that. You were not going to let your darling old David get into trouble, were you? And quite right, my dear, quite right. And between you and me, I like you far, far better than your husband." She smiled the crooked smile and pinched Carol's crimson cheek. "The only way to keep hubby out of danger is to tackle it yourself, isn't it? Oh, don't blush,—I like you all the better for your little trick."

CHAPTER V

A MINISTER'S SON

"Centerville, Iowa.

"Dear Carol and David:

"I am getting very, exceptionally wise. I am really appalled at myself. It seems so unnecessary in one so young. You will remember, Carol, that I used to say it was unfair that ministers' children should be denied so much of the worldly experience that other ordinary humans fall heir to by the natural sequence of things. I resented the deprivation. I coveted one taste of every species of sweet, satanic or otherwise.

"I have changed my mind. I have been convinced that ordinaries may dabble in forbidden fires, and a little cold ointment will banish every trace of the flame, but ministers' children stay scarred and charred forever. I have decided to keep far from the worldly blazes and let others supply the fanning breezes. For you know, Carol, that the wickedest fires in the world would die out if there were not some willing hands to fan them.

"There is the effect. The cause—Kirke Connor.

"Carol, has David ever explained to you what fatal fascination a semi-satanic man has for nice, white women? I have been at father many times on the subject, and he says, 'Connie, be reasonable, what do I know about semi-satanics?' Then he goes down-town. See if you can get anything out of David on the subject and let me know.

"Kirke is a semi-satanic. Also a minister's son. He has been in trouble of one kind or another ever since I first met him, when he was fourteen years old. He fairly seethed his way through college. Mr. Connor has resigned from the active ministry now and lives in Mount Mark, and Kirke bought a partnership in Mr. Ives' furniture store and goes his troubled, riotous way as heretofore. That is, he did until recently.

"A few weeks ago I missed my railway connections and had to lay over for three hours in Fairfield. I checked my suit-case and started out to look up some of my friends. As I went out one door, I glimpsed the vanishing point of a man's coat exiting in the opposite direction. I started to cut across the corner, but a backward glance revealed a man's hat and one eye peering around the corner of the station. Was I being detected? I stopped in my tracks, my literary instinct on the alert. The hat slowly pivoted a head into view. It was Kirke Connor. He shuffled toward me, glancing back and forth in a curious, furtive way. His face was harrowed, his eyes blood-shot. He clutched my hand breathlessly and clung to me as to the proverbial straw.

"Have you seen Matters?' he asked.

"Matters?"

"You know Matters,—the sheriff at Mount Mark."

"I looked at him in a way which I trust became the daughter of a district

superintendent of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

"He mopped his fevered brow.

"'He has been on my trail for two days.' Then he twinkled, more like himself. 'It has been a hot trail, too, if I do say it who shouldn't. If he has had a full breath for the last forty-eight hours, I am ashamed of myself.'

"'But what in the world—'

"'Let's duck into the station a minute. I know the freight agent and he will hide me in a trunk if need be. I will tell you about it. It is enough to make your blood run cold.'

"Honestly, it was running cold already. Here was literature for the asking. Kirke's wild appearance, his furtive manner, the searching sheriff—a plot made to order. So I tried to forget the M. E. Universal, and we slipped into the station and seated ourselves comfortably on some egg boxes in a shadowy corner where he told his sad, sad tale.

"'Connie, you keep a wary eye on the world, the flesh and the devil. I know whereof I speak. Other earth-born creatures may flirt with sin and escape unscathed. But the Lord is after the minister's son.'

"'I thought it was the sheriff after you?' I interrupted.

"'Well, so it is, technically. And the devil is after the sheriff, but I think the Lord is touching them both up a little to get even with me. Anyhow, between the Lord and the devil, with the sheriff thrown in, this world is no place for a minister's son. And the rule works on daughters, too.

"'You know, Connie, I have received the world with open hands, a loving heart, a receptive soul. And I got gloriously filled up, too, let me tell you. Connie, shun the little gay-backed cards that bear diamonds and hearts and spades. Connie, flee from the ice-cold bottles that bubble to meet your lips. Connie, turn a cold shoulder to the gilded youths who sing when the night is old.'

"'For goodness' sake, Kirke, tell me the story before the sheriff gets you.'

"'Well, it is a story of bottles on ice.'

"'Mount Mark is dry.'

"'Yes, like other towns, Mount Mark is dry for those who want it dry, but it is wet enough to drown any misguided soul who loves the damp. I loved it,—but, with the raven, nevermore. Connie, there is one thing even more fatal to a minister's son than bottles of beer. That thing is politics. If I had taken my beer straight I might have escaped. But I tried to dilute it with politics, and behold the result. My father walking the floor in anguish, my mother in tears, my future blasted, my hopes shattered.'

"'Kirke, tell me the story.'

"'Matters is running for reelection. I do not approve of Matters. He is a booze fighter and a card shark and a lot of other unscriptural things. As a Methodist and a minister's son I felt called to battle his return to office. So I went out electioneering for my friend and ally, Joe Smithson. You know, Connie, that in spite of my wandering ways, I have friends in the county and I am a born talker. I took my faithful steed and I spent many hours, which should have been devoted to selling furniture, decrying the vices of Matters, extolling the virtues of Smithson. Matters got his eye on me.

"'He had the other eye on that office. He saw he must make a strong bid for county favor. The easiest way to do that in Mount Mark is to get after a boot-legger. There was Snippy Brown, a poor old harmless nigger, trying to earn an honest living by selling a surreptitious bottle from a hole in the ground to a thirsting neighbor in the dead of night. Plainly Snippy Brown was fairly crying to be raided. Matters raided him. And he got a couple of hundred of bottles on ice.'

"'Served him right,' I said, in a Sabbatical voice.

"'To be sure it did. And Matters put him in jail and made a great fuss getting ready for his trial. I had a friend at court and he tipped me off that Matters was going to disgrace the Methodist Church in general and the Connors in particular by calling me in as a witness, making me tell where I bought sundry bottles known to have been in my possession. Picture it to yourself, sweet Connie,—my white-haired mother, my sad-eyed father, the condemning deacons, the sneering Sunday-school teachers, the prim-lipped Epworth Leaguers,—it could not be. I left town. Matters left also,—coming my way. For two days we have been at it,

hot foot, cold foot. We have covered most of southeastern Iowa in forty-eight hours. He has the papers to serve on me, but he's got to go some yet.'

"Kirke stood up and peered about among the trunks. All serene.

"'I am nearly starved,' he said plaintively. 'Do you suppose we could sneak into some quiet joint and grab a ham sandwich and a cup of coffee?'

"I was willing to risk it, so we sashayed across the Street, I swirling my skirts as much as possible to help conceal unlucky Kirke.

"But alas! Kirke had taken just one ravenous gulp at his sandwich when he stopped abruptly, leaning forward, his coffee cup upraised. I followed his wide-eyed stare. There outside the window stood Matters, grinning diabolically. He pushed open the door, Kirke leaped across the counter and vaulted through the side window, crashing the screen. Matters dashed around the house in hot pursuit, and I—well, consider that I was a reporter, seeking a scoop. They did not beat me by six inches. Only I wish I had dropped the sandwich. I must have looked funny.

"Kirke flashed behind a shed, Matters after him, I after Matters. Kirke zigzagged across a lawn dodging from tree to tree,—Matters and I. Kirke turned into an alley,—Matters and I. Woe to the erring son of a minister! It was a blind alley. It ended in a garage and the garage was locked.

"Matters pulled out a revolver and yelled, 'Now stop, you fool; stop, Kirke!' Kirke looked back; I think he was just ready to shin up the lightning rod but he saw the revolver and stopped. Matters walked up, laughing, and handed him a paper. Kirke shoved it in his pocket. I clasped my sandwich in both hands and looked at them tragically,—sob element. Then Matters turned away and said, 'See you later, Kirke. I congratulate the county on securing your services. Just the kind of witness we like, nice, respectable, good family, and all. Makes it size up big, you know. Be sure and invite your friends.'

"For a second I thought Kirke would strike him. I shook the sandwich at him warningly and he answered with a wave of his own,—yes, he had his sandwich, too. Then he said in a low voice, 'All right, Matters. But you call me in that trial and I'll get you.'

"'Oh, oh, Sonny, you must not threaten an officer of the law,' said Matters, in

a hateful, chiding voice. He turned and sauntered away. Kirke and I watched him silently until he was out of sight. Then we turned to each other sympathetically.

"Let's go back after that coffee,' said Kirke bravely.

"He took a bite of his sandwich thoughtfully, and I did of mine, trying to eat the lump in my throat with it. An hour later we went our separate ways.

"I heard nothing further for two weeks, then Mr. Nesbitt was called East on business and said I might go home if I liked. Imagine my ecstasy. I found the family, as well as all Methodists in general, quite uplifted over the strange case of Kirke Connor. From a semi-satanic, he had suddenly evolved into a regular pillar, as became the son of his saintly mother and his orthodox father. He attended church, he sang in the choir, he went to Sunday-school, he was prominent at prayer-meeting. Every one was full of pious satisfaction and called him 'dear old Kirke,' and gave him the glad hand and invited him to help at ice-cream socials. No one could explain it, they thought he was a Mount Mark edition of Twice Born Men in the flesh.

"So the first afternoon when he drove around with his speedy little brown horse and his rubber tired buggy and asked me to go for a drive, father smiled, and Aunt Grace demurred not. Maybe I could give him a little more light. I watched him pretty closely the first mile or so. He had nothing to say until we were a mile out of town. He is a good-looking fellow, Carol,—you remember, of course, because you never forget the boys, especially the good-looking ones. His eyes were clear and slightly humorous, as if he knew a host of funny things if he only chose to tell. Finally in answer to my reproachful gaze, he said:

"Well, I didn't have anything to say about it, did I? I did not ask to be born a minister's son. It was foreordained, and now I've got to live up to it in self-defense. There may be forgiveness for other erring ones, but I tell you our crowd is spotted.'

"I had nothing to say.

"Well, you might at least say, 'Good for you, my boy. Here's luck?'" he complained.

"I was still silent.

"'It is good business, too,' he continued belligerently. 'I am selling lots of furniture. I have burned the black and white cards. I have broken the ice-cold bottles. I have shunned the gilded youths with mellow voices. I go to church. I sell furniture. I sleuth Matters.'

"'You what?'

"'I am trailing Matters. Turn about. Where he goeth, I goeth. Where he lodgeth, I lodgeth. His knowledge is my knowledge, and his tricks, my salvation.'

"'You make me sick, Kirke. Why don't you talk sense?'

"'He is crooked, Connie, and everybody knows it. But it is no cinch catching him at it. Smithson is going to be elected and Matters knows it. But the only way I can keep out of that trial is to get something on Matters. So whenever he is out, I am out on the same road. He is going toward New London this afternoon and so are we. I have got just five more days and you must be a good little scout and go driving with me, so he won't catch on that I am sleuthing him. He will think I am just beaung you around in the approved Mount Mark style.'

"'Sure enough after a while we came across Matters talking to a couple of farmers on the cross roads, and Kirke and I stopped a quarter of a mile farther down and ate sandwiches and told stories, and when Matters passed us a little later he could have sworn we were there just for our joy in each other's company. But we did not learn anything.

"'The next day we were out again, with no better luck. But the third day about four in the afternoon, Kirke called me on the telephone. There was subtle excitement in his voice.

"'Come for a drive, Connie?' he asked; common words, but there was a world of hidden invitation, of secret lure, in his voice for me.

"'Yes, gladly,' I said. Father did not nod approvingly and Aunt Grace did not smile this time. Three days in succession was a little too warm even for a newly made pillar, but they said nothing and Kirke and I set out.

"'He raided Jack Mott's last night and has about three hundred bottles to smash this afternoon. The old fellow is pretty fond of the ice-cold bottles himself

and it is common report that he raids just often enough to keep himself supplied. So I think I'll keep an eye on him to-day. He started half an hour ago, south road, and he has Gus Waldron with him,—his boon companion, and the most notoriously ardent devotee of the bottles in all dear dry Mount Mark. Lovely day for a drive, isn't it?"

"'Yes, lovely.' I was very happy. I felt like a princess of old, riding off into danger, and I felt very warm and friendly toward Kirke. Remember that he is very good-looking and just bad enough in spite of his new pillar-hood, to be spell-binding, and—it was lots of fun. Kirke grabbed my hand and squeezed it chummily, and I smiled at him.

"'You are a glorious girl,' he said.

"I suppose I should have reminded him and myself that he was a semi-satanic, but I did not. I laughed and rubbed the back of his hand softly with the tips of my nice pink finger nails, and laughed again.

"Then here came a light wagon,—Matters and Waldron,—going home, and we realized we had been loitering on the job. Kirke shook his head impatiently.

"'You distracted me,' he said. 'I forgot my reputation's salvation in the smile of your eye.'

"But we drove on to look the field over. Less than half a mile down the road we came to a low creek with rocky rugged banks. The banks were splashed and splattered with bits of glass, and over the glass and over the rocks ran thin trickling streams of a pale brown liquid that had a perfectly sickening odor. I sniffed disgustedly as we walked over to reconnoiter.

"'I guess he made good all right,' said Kirke in a disappointed voice, inspecting the glass-splattered banks of the creek. Then he leaped across and walked lightly up the bank on the opposite side. Stooping down, he lifted an unbroken bottle and waved it at me, laughing.

"'They missed one. Never a crack in it and still cold.' He looked at it curiously, affectionately, then with resignation. 'I am a minister's son,' he reminded himself sternly. He lifted the bottle above his head, and with his eye selected a nice rough rock half way down the bank. 'Watch the bubbles,' he called to me.

"'Hay, mister,' interposed a voice, 'gimme half a dollar an' I'll show you a whole pile of 'em that ain't broke.'

"Slowly we rallied from our stupefaction as we gazed at the slim, brown, barefooted lad of the farm who was proudly brandishing a forbidden cigarette of corn-silks.

"'A whole pile of 'em. On the square?' asked Kirke with glittering eyes.

"'Yes, sir. A couple o' fellows come out in a light wagon a while ago an' had a lot of bottles in boxes. First they throwed one on the rocks, an' then they throwed one up in the tall grass, one up an' one down. There's a whole pile of 'em that ain't broke at all. An' the little dark fellow says, 'A good job, Gus. We'll be Johnny-on-the-spot as soon as it gets dark.'"

"Kirke was standing over him, his eyes bright, his hands clenched. 'On the level?' he whispered.

"'Sure, but gimme the half first.' Kirke passed out a silver dollar without a word and the boy snatched it from him, giggling to himself with rapture.

"'Right up there, mister, in that pile of weeds.'

"Kirke took my hand and we scrambled up the bank, pulling back the tall grass,—no need to stoop and look. Bottle after bottle, bottle after bottle, lay there snugly and securely, waiting for the sheriff and his friend to rescue them after dark.

"The lad had already disappeared, smoking his corn-silks rapturously, his dollar snug in the palm of his hand. And Kirke and I, without a word, began patiently carrying the bottles to the buggy. Again and again we returned to the clump of weeds, counting the bottles as we carried them out,—a hundred and fifty of them, even.

"Then we got into the buggy, feet outside, for the bed of the buggy was filled and piled high, covered with the robe to discourage prying eyes, and turned the little brown mare toward town.

"'Connie, would you seriously object to kissing me just once? I feel the need of it this minute,—moral stimulus, you know.'

"'Ministers' daughters have to be very, very careful,' I told him in an even voice.

"We were both silent then as we drove into town. When he pulled up in front of the house he looked me straight in the face, and he uses his eyes effectively.

"'You are a darling,' he said.

"I said 'Thanks,' and went into the house.

"He told me next morning what happened that evening. Of course he was there to witness Matters' discomfiture. He did not put in appearance until the sheriff and his friend were climbing anxiously and sadly into the light wagon to return home empty-handed. Then he sauntered from behind a hedge and lifted his hat in his usual debonair manner.

"'By the way, Mr. Sheriff,' he began in a quiet, ingratiating voice, 'I hope I am not to be called as a witness in that boot-legging case.'

"Matters snarled at him. 'Pooh,' he said angrily, 'you can't blackmail me like that. You can't prove anything on me. I reckon the people around here will take the word of the sheriff of their county against the booze fightin' son of a Methodist preacher.'

"Kirke waved his hand airily. 'Far be it from me to enter into any defense of my father's son. But a hundred and fifty bottles are pretty good evidence. And speaking of witnesses, I have a hunch that the people of this county will fall pretty hard for anything that comes from the lips of the baby daughter of the district superintendent of the Methodist Church.'

"Matters hunched forward in his seat. 'Connie Starr,' he said, in a hollow voice.

"Kirke swished the weeds with his cane,—he has all those graceful affectations.

"Matters swallowed a few times. 'Old man Starr is too smart a man to get his family mixed up in politics,' he finally brought out.

"'Baby Con is of age, I think,' said Kirke lightly. 'And she is very advanced,

you know, something of a reformer, has all kinds of emancipated notions.'

"Matters whipped up and disappeared, and Kirke went to prayer-meeting. Aunt Grace saw him; I wasn't there.

"The next day, I met Matters on the street. Rather, he met me.

"'Miss Connie,' he said in a friendly, inviting voice, 'you know there are a lot of things in politics that girls can't get to the bottom of. You know my record, I've been a good Methodist since before you were born. Sure you wouldn't go on the witness stand on circumstantial evidence to make trouble for a good Methodist, would you?'

"I looked at him with wide and childish eyes. 'Of course not, Mr. Matters,' I said quickly. He brightened visibly. 'But if I am called on a witness stand I have to tell what I have seen and heard, haven't I, whatever it is?' I asked this very innocently, as one seeking information only.

"Your father wouldn't let a young girl like you get mixed up in any dirty county scandal,' he protested.

"If I was—what do you call it—subpoenaed—is that the word?' He forgot that I was working in a lawyer's office. 'If I was subpoenaed as a witness, could father help himself?'

"Mr. Matters went forlornly on his way and that night Kirke came around to say that the sheriff had informed him casually that he thought his services would not be needed on that boot-legging case,—they had plenty of other witnesses,—and out of regard for the family, etc., etc.

"Kirke smiled at him. 'Thank you very much. And, Matters, I have a hundred and fifty nice cold bottles in the basement,—if you get too warm some summer evening come around and I'll help you cool off.'

"Matters thanked him incoherently and went away.

"That day Kirke and I had a confidential conversation. 'Connie Starr, I believe I am half a preacher right now. You marry me, and I will study for the ministry.'

"Kirke Connor,' I said, 'if any fraction of you is a minister, it isn't on speaking terms with the rest of you. That's certain. And I wouldn't marry you if you were a whole Conference. And I don't want to marry a preacher of all people. And anyhow I am not going to get married at all.'

"At breakfast the next morning father said, 'I believe Kirke Connor is headed straight, for good and all. Now if some nice girl could just marry him he would be safe enough.'

"Aunt Grace looked at him warningly. 'But of course no nice girl could do it, yet,' she interposed quickly. 'It wouldn't be safe. He can't marry until he is sure of himself.'

"Oh, I don't know,' I said thoughtfully. 'Provided the girl were clever as well as nice, she could handle Kirke easily. Now I may not be the nicest girl in the world, but no one can deny that I am clever.'

"Father swallowed helplessly. Then he rallied. 'By the way, Connie, won't

you come down to Burlington with me for a couple of days? I have a lot of work to do there, and we can have a nice little honeymoon all by ourselves. What do you say?"

"Oh, thank you, father, that is lovely. Let's go on the noon train, shall we? I can be ready."

"All right, just fine." He flashed a triumphant glance at Aunt Grace and she dimpled her approval.

"Now don't tell any one we are going, father," I cautioned him. "I want to surprise Kirke Connor. He is going to Burlington on that train himself, and it will be such a joke on him to find us there ready to be entertained. He is to be there several days, so he can amuse me while you are busy. Isn't it lovely? He really needs a little boosting now, and it is our duty, and—will you press my suit, Auntie? I must fly or I won't be ready."

"Aunt Grace looked reproachfully at father, and father looked despairingly at Aunt Grace. But we had a splendid time in Burlington, the three of us, for father never did one second's work all the time, he was so deathly afraid to leave me alone with Kirke.

"Isn't it lots of fun to be alive, Carol? So many thrilling and interesting and happy things come up every day,—I love to dig in and work hard, and how I love to drop my work at five thirty and run home and doll up, and play, and flirt—just nice, harmless flirting,—and sing, and talk,—really, it is a darling little old world, isn't it?"

"Oh, and by the way, Carol, when you want a divorce just write me about it. Mr. Nesbitt and I specialize on divorces, and I can do the whole thing myself and save you lots of trouble. Just tell me when, and I will furnish your motive.

"Lovingly as always,

"Connie."

CHAPTER VI

THE HEAVY YOKE

The burden of ministering rested very lightly on Carol's slender shoulders. The endless procession of missionary meetings, aid societies, guilds and boards, afforded her a childish delight and did not sap her enthusiasm to the slightest degree. She went out of her little manse each new day, laughing, and returned, wearily perhaps, but still laughing. She sang light-heartedly with the youth of the church, because she was young and happy with them. She sympathized passionately with the old and sorry ones, because the richness of her own content, and the blessed perfection of her own life, made her heart tender.

Into her new life she had carried three matchless assets for a minister's wife, —a supreme confidence in the exaltation of the ministry, a boundless adoration for her husband, and a natural liking for people that made people naturally like her. Thus equipped, she faced the years of aids and missions with profound serenity.

She was sorry they hadn't more time for the honeymoon business, she and David. Honeymooning was such tremendously good fun. But they were so almost unbelievably busy all the time. On Monday David was down-town all day, attending minister's meeting and Presbytery in the morning, and looking up new books in the afternoon. Carol always joined him for lunch and they counted that noon-time hour a little oasis in a week of work. In the evening there were deacons' meetings, or trustees' meetings, or the men's Bible class. On Tuesday evening they had a Bible study class. On Wednesday evening was prayer-meeting. Thursday night, they, with several of their devoted workers, walked a mile and a half across country to Happy Hollow where they conducted mad little mission meetings. Friday night Carol met with the young women's club, and on Saturday night was a mission study class.

Carol used to sigh over the impossibility of having a beau night. She said that she had often heard that husbands couldn't be sweethearts, but she had never believed it before. Pinned down to facts, however, she admitted she preferred the husband.

Mornings Carol was busy with housework, talking to herself without intermission as she worked. And David spent long hours in his study, poring

over enormous books that Carol insisted made her head ache from the outside and would probably give her infantile paralysis if she dared to peep between the covers. Afternoons were the aid societies, missionary societies, and all the rest of them, and then the endless calls,—calls on the sick, calls on the healthy, calls on the pillars, calls on the backsliders, calls on the very sad, calls on the very happy,—every varying phase of life in a church community merits a call from the minister and his wife.

The heavy yoke,—the yoke of dead routine,—dogs the footsteps of every minister, and even more, of every minister's wife. But Carol thought of the folks that fitted into the cogs of the routine to drive it round and round,—the teachers, the doctors' wives, the free-thinkers, the mothers, the professional women, the cynics, the pillars of the church,—and thinking of the folks, she forgot the routine. And so to her, routine could never prove a clog, stagnation. Every meeting brought her a fresh revelation, they amused her, those people, they puzzled her, sometimes they made her sad and frightened her, as they taught her facts of life they had gleaned from wide experience and often in bitter tears. Still, they were folks, and Carol had always had a passion for people.

David worked too hard. It was positively wicked for any human being to work as he did, and she scolded him roundly, and even went so far as to shake him, and then kissed him a dozen times to prove how very angry she was at him for abusing himself so shamefully.

David did work hard, as hard as every young minister must work to get things going right, to make his labor count. His face, always thin, was leaner, more intense than ever. His eyes were clear, far-seeing. The whiteness of his skin, amounting almost to pallor, gave him that suggestion of spirituality not infrequently seen in men of passionate consecration to a high ideal. The few graying hairs at his temples, and even the half-droop of his shoulders, added to his scholarly appearance, and Carol was firmly convinced that he was the finest-looking man in all St. Louis, and every place else for that matter.

The mad little mission, so-called because of the riotous nature of the meetings held there, was in a most flourishing condition. Everything was going beautifully for the little church in the Heights, and in their gratitude, and their happiness, Carol and David worked harder than ever,—and mutually scolded each other for the folly of it.

"I tell you this, David Arnold Duke," Carol told him sternly, "if you don't do something to that cold so you can preach without coughing, I shall do the preaching myself, and then where would you be?"

"Without a job, of course," he answered. "But you wouldn't do it. The wind has chafed your darling complexion, and you wouldn't go into the pulpit with a rough face. Your devotion to your beauty saves me."

"All very well, but maybe you think a cold-sermon is effective." Carol stood up and lifted her hand impressively. "My dear brothers and sisters,—hem-ah-hem-h-hh-em,—let us unite in reading the—ah-huh-huh-huh. Let us sing—h-h-h-h-hem—well, let us unite in prayer then—ah-chooo! ah-choooooo!"

"Where did you put those cough-drops?" he demanded. "But even at that it is better than you would do. 'Just as soon as I powder my face we will unite in singing hymn one hundred thirty-six. Oh, excuse me a minute,—I believe I feel a cold-sore coming,—I have a mirror right here, and it won't take a minute. Now, I am ready. Let us arise and sing,—but since I can not sing I will just polish my nails while the rest of you do it. Ready, go!'"

Carol laughed at the picture, but marched off for the bottle of cough medicine and the powder box, and while he carefully measured out a teaspoonful of the one for himself, she applied the other with gay devotion.

"But I truly think you should not go to Happy Hollow to-night," she said. "Mr. Baldwin will go with me, bless his faithful old pillary heart. And you ought to stay in. It is very stormy, and that long walk—"

"Oh, nonsense, a little cough like this! You are dead tired yourself; you stay at home to-night, and Baldwin and I will go. You really ought to, Carol, you are on the jump every minute. Won't you?"

"Most certainly not. I haven't a cold, have I? Maybe you want to keep me away so you can flirt with some of the Hollowers while I am out of sight. Absolutely vetoed. I go."

"Please, Carol,—won't you? Because I ask it?"

She snuggled up to him at that and said: "It's too lonesome, Davie, and I have to go to remind you of your rubbers, and to muffle up your throat. But—"

The ring of the telephone disturbed them, and she ran to answer.

"Mr. Baldwin?—Yes—Oh, that is nice of you. I've been trying to coax him to stay home myself. David, Mr. Baldwin thinks you should not go out to-night, with such a cold, and he will take the meeting, and—oh, please, honey."

David took the receiver from her hand.

"Thanks very much, Mr. Baldwin, that is mighty kind of you, but I feel fine to-night.—Oh, sure, just a little cold. Yes, of course. Come and go with us, won't you? Yes, be here about seven. Better make it a quarter earlier, it's bad walking to-night."

"David, please," coaxed Carol.

"Goosie! Who but a wife would make an invalid of a man because he sneezes?" David laughed, and Carol said no more.

But a few minutes later, as she was carefully arranging a soft fur hat over her hair and David stood patiently holding her coat, there came a light tap at the door.

"It is Mr. Daniels," said Carol. "I know his knock. Come in, Father Daniels. I knew it was you."

The old elder from next door, his gray hair standing in every direction from the wind he had encountered bareheaded, his little gray eyes twinkling bright, opened the door.

"You crazy kids aren't going down to that Hollow a night like this," he protested.

They nodded, laughing.

"Well, David can't go," he said decidedly. "That's a bad cold he's got, and it's been hanging on too long. I can't go myself for I can't walk, but I'll call up my son-in-law and make him go. So take off your hat, Parson, and— No you come over and read the Bible to me while the young folks go gadding. I need some ministerial attention myself,—I'm wavering in my faith."

"You, wavering?" demanded David. "If no one ever wavered any harder than you do, Daniels, there wouldn't be much of a job for the preachers. And you say for me to let Carol go with Dick? What are you thinking of? I tell you when any one goes gadding with Carol, I am the man." Then he added seriously: "But really, I've got to go to-night. We're just getting hold of the folks down there and we can't let go. Otherwise, I should make Carol stay in. But the boys in her class are so fond of her that I know she is needed as much as I am."

"But that cough—"

"Oh, that cough is all right. It will go when spring comes. I just haven't had a chance to rest my throat. I feel fine to-night. Come on in, Baldwin. Yes, we are ready. Still snowing? Well, a little snow— Here, Carol, you must wear your gaiters. I'll buckle them."

A little later they set out, the three of them, heads lowered against the driving snow. There were no cars running across country, and indeed not even sidewalks, since it was an unfrequented part of the town with no residences for many blocks until one reached the little, tumbledown section in the Hollow. Here and there were heavy drifts, and now and then an unexpected ditch in the path gave Carol a tumble into the snow, but, laughing and breathless, she was pulled out again and they plodded heavily on.

In spite of the inclement weather, the tiny house—called a mission by grace of speech—was well and noisily filled. Over sixty people were crowded into the two small rooms, most of them boys between the ages of twelve and sixteen, laughing, coughing, dragging their feet, shoving the heavy benches, dropping song-books. They greeted the snow-covered trio with a royal roar, and a few minutes later were singing, "Yes, we'll gather at the river," at the tops of their discordant voices. Carol sat at the wheezy organ, painfully pounding out the rhythmic notes,—no musician she, but willing to do anything in a pinch. And although at the pretty little church up in the Heights she never attempted to lift her voice in song, down at the mission she felt herself right in her element and sang with gay good-will, happy in the knowledge that she came as near holding to the tune as half the others.

Most of the evening was spent in song, David standing in the narrow doorway between the two rooms, nodding this way, nodding that, in a futile effort to keep a semblance of time among the boisterous worshipers. A short

reading from the Bible, a very brief prayer, a short, conversational story-talk from David, and the meeting broke up in wild clamor.

Then back through the driving snow they made their way, considering the evening well worth all the exertion it had required.

Once inside the cozy manse, David and Carol hastily changed into warm dressing-gowns and slippers and lounged lazily before the big fireplace, sipping hot coffee, and talking, always talking of the work,—what must be done tomorrow, what could be arranged for Sunday, the young people's meeting, the primary department, the mission study class.

And Carol brought out the big bottle and administered the designated teaspoonful.

"For you must quit coughing, David," she said. "You ruined two good points last Sunday by clearing your throat in the middle of a phrase. And it isn't so easy making points as that."

"Aren't you tired of hearing me preach, Carol? We've been married a whole year now. Aren't you finding my sermons monotonous?"

"David," she said earnestly, resting her head against his shoulder, partly for weariness, partly for the pleasure of feeling the rise and fall of his breast,—"when you go up into the pulpit you look so white and good, like an apostle or a good angel, it almost frightens me. I think, 'Oh, no, he isn't my husband, not really,—he is just a good angel God sent to keep me out of mischief.' And while you are preaching I never think, 'He is mine.' I always think, 'He is God's.'"

Tears came into her eyes as she spoke, and David drew her close in his arms.

"Do you, sweetheart? It seems a terrible thing to stand up there before a houseful, of people, most of them good, and clean, and full of faith, and try to direct their steps in the broader road. I sometimes feel that men are not fit for it. There ought to be angels from Heaven."

"But there are angels from Heaven watching over them, David, guiding them, showing them how. I believe good white angels are guiding every true minister,—not the bad ones— Oh, I know a lot about ministers, honey,—proud, ambitious, selfish, vainglorious, hypocritical, even amorous, a lot of them,—but

there are others, true ones,—you, David, and some more. They just have to grow together until harvest, and then the false ones will be dug up and dumped in the garbage."

For a while they were silent.

Finally he asked, smiling a little, "Are you getting cramped, Carol? Are you getting narrow, and settling down to a rut? Have you lost your enthusiasm and your sparkle?"

Carol laughed at him. "David, do you remember the first night we were married, when we knelt down together to say our prayers and you put your arm around my shoulder, and we prayed there, side by side? Dearest, that one little fifteen minutes of confidence and humility and heart-gratitude was worth all the sparkle and fire in the world. But have I lost it? Seems to me I am as much a shouting Methodist as ever."

David laughed, coughing a little, and Carol hustled him off to bed, sure he was catching a brand new cold, and berating herself roundly for allowing this foolish angel of hers to get a chill right on her very hands.

CHAPTER VII

THE FIRST STEP

It was Sunday night in mid-winter. After church, David remained for a trustees' meeting, and Carol walked home with some of the younger ones of the congregation. When they asked if she wished them to wait with her for David she shook her head, smiling gratefully but with weariness.

"No, thank you. I am going right straight to bed. I am tired."

Into the little manse she crept, sinking into the first easy chair that presented itself. With slow listless fingers she removed her wraps, dropping them on the floor beside her,—laboriously unbuttoned and removed her shoes, and in the

same lifeless manner loosened her dress and took the pins from her hair. Then, holding her garments about her, she went in search of night dress, slippers and negligee. A few seconds later she returned and curled herself up with some cushions on the floor before the fireplace.

"Ought to make some coffee,—David's so hungry after church,—too—dead—tired—Ummmmm." Her voice trailed off into a murmur and she closed her eyes.

David found her so, soundly sleeping, her hair curling about her face. He knelt down and kissed her. She opened one eye.

"Coffee?" she queried automatically.

"I should say not. Go to bed." He sprawled full length on the floor, his head against her arm.

"Worn out, aren't you, David?"

"Well, I'm ready for bed; Such a day! Did you have time for Mrs. Garder before Endeavor?"

"Yes, she knew me too. I am glad I went. She had been waiting for me. They say it is only a few days now. The way of a minister's wife is hard sometimes. She wanted me to sing *Lead Kindly Light*, and was so puzzled and confused when I insisted I couldn't sing. She thought ministers' wives always sang. I know she is disappointed in me now. If the Lord foreknew that I was going to marry a minister, why didn't He foreordain that I should sing?"

David laughed, but attempted no explanation.

"Did you get along all right at the Old Ladies' Home?"

"Oh, fine. The girls sang beautifully, and I read the Bible lesson without mispronouncing a single word. Did the boys miss me at the Hollow?"

"Yes, they said they needed you worse than the old ladies. Maybe they were right. We must save your Sunday afternoons for them after this. They do need you."

"Did you have supper with the Baldwins?"

"Yes. You stayed with Mrs. Norris, didn't you?"

"Yes. Um, I am sleepy."

David coughed slightly.

"Get up off this floor, David Duke," scolded Carol. "Don't you know that floors are always drafty? I am surprised at you. I wish Prudence was here to make you soak your feet in hot water and drink peppermint tea."

"You work too hard, Carol. You are busy every minute."

"Yes. I have to be, to keep in hailing distance of you. You usually do about three things at once."

"It's been a good year, Carol. You've enjoyed it, spite of everything, haven't you?"

"It's been the most wonderful year one could dream of. Even Connie's literary imagination could not conjure up a sweeter one."

"Always something to do, something to think of, some one to see,—always on the alert, to-day crowded full, to-morrow to look forward to."

"And best of all, David, always with you, working with you, taking care of you,—always— Oh, I am tired, but it is not so bad being tired out when you've done your level best."

"Carol, it is fine, labor is, it is life. I can't imagine an existence without it. Going to bed, worn out with the day, rising in the morning ready to plunge in over one's ears. It is the only real life there is. How do people endure a drifting through the days, with never anything to do and never worn enough to sleep?"

"I don't know," said Carol promptly. "They aren't alive, that's sure. But let's go to bed. David, please get off that floor and stop coughing."

David obediently got up, lightly dusting his trousers as he did so. Then he lifted his arms high and breathed deeply. "Anyhow it is better to be tired than

lazy, isn't it?"

CHAPTER VIII

REACTION

"Will you have this woman?"

David's clear, low voice sounded over the little church, and the bride lifted confident, trusting eyes to his face. The people in the pews leaned forward. They had glanced approvingly at the slender, dark-eyed girl in her bridal white, but now every eye was centered on the minister. The hand in which he held the Book was white, blue veined, the fingers long and thin. His eyes were nervously bright, with faint circles beneath them.

David looked sick.

So the glowing, sweet faced bride was neglected and the groom received scant attention. The minister cleared his throat slightly, and the service went smoothly on to the end.

But the sigh of relief that went up at its conclusion betokened not so much satisfaction that another young couple were setting forth on the troubled, tempting waters of matrimony, as that David had finished another service and all might yet be well.

Carol, half way back in the church, had heard not one word of the service.

"David is an angel, but I do wish he were a little less heavenly," she thought passionately. "He—makes me nervous."

The carriage was at the door to take the minister and his wife to the Daniels home for the bridal reception, but David said, "Tell him to take us to the manse first, Carol. I've got to rest a minute. I'm tired to-night."

In the living-room of the manse he carefully removed the handsome black

coat in which he had been graduated from the Seminary in Chicago, and in which a little later he had been ordained for the ministry and installed in his church in the Heights. Still later he had worn it at his marriage. David hung it over the back of a chair, saying as he did so:

"Wearing pretty well, isn't it? It may be called upon to officiate in other crises for me, so it behooves me to husband it well."

Then he dropped heavily on the davenport before the fireplace, with Carol crouching on a cushion beside him, stroking his hand.

"Let's not go to the reception," she said. "We've congratulated them a dozen times already."

"Oh, we've got to go," he answered. "They would be disappointed. We'll only stay a few minutes. Just as soon as I rest—I am played out to-night—it is only a step."

They slipped among the guests at the reception quietly and unobtrusively, but were instantly surrounded.

"A good service, David," said Mr. Daniels, eying him keenly. "You make such a pretty job of it I'd like to try it over myself."

"Now, Dan," expostulated his anxious little wife. "Don't you pay any attention to him, Mrs. Duke, he's always talking."

"I know it," said Carol appreciatively. "I never pay attention."

"You need a vacation, Mr. Duke," broke in a voice impulsively.

"I know it," assented David. "We'll take one in the spring,—and you can help pay the expenses."

"You'd better take it now," suggested Mrs. Baldwin. "The church can get along without you, you know."

But the laugh that went up was not genuine. Many of them, in their devotion to David, wondered if the church really could get along without him.

David gaily waved aside the enormous plate of refreshments that was passed to him. "I had my dinner, you know," he explained. "Carol isn't neglecting me."

"He had it, but he didn't eat it,—and it was fried chicken," said Carol sadly.

A few minutes later they were at home again, and before Carol had finished the solemn task of rubbing cold cream into her pretty skin, David was sleeping heavily, his face flushed, his hands twitching nervously at times.

Carol stood above him, gazing adoringly down upon him for a while. Then shutting her eyes, she said fervently:

"Oh, God, do make David less like an angel, and more like other men."

Early the next morning she was up and had steaming hot coffee ready for David almost before his eyes were open.

"To crowd out that mean little cough that spoils your breakfast," she said. "I shall keep you in bed to-day."

All morning David lounged around the house, hugging the fireplace, and complained of feeling cold though it was a warm bright day late in April, and although the fire was blazing. In the afternoon he took off his jacket and loosened his collar.

"It certainly is hot enough now," he declared. "Open the windows, Carol,—I am roasting."

"That is fever," she announced ominously. "Do you feel very badly?"

"Well, nothing extra," he assented grudgingly.

"David, if you love me, let's call a doctor. You are going to have the grippe, or pneumonia, or something awful, and—if you love me, David."

The pleading voice arrested his refusal and he gave the desired consent, still laughing at the silly notion.

So Carol sped next door to the home of Mr. Daniels, the fatherly elder.

"Mr. Daniels," she cried, brightly happy because David had consented to a doctor, and a doctor meant health and strength and the end of that hateful little cough. "We are going to have a doctor see David. What is the name of that man down-town—the one you think is so wonderful?"

Mr. Daniels gladly gave her the name, warmly approving the move, but he shook his head a little over David. "I am no pessimist," he said, "but David is not just exactly right."

"The doctor will fix him up," cried Carol joyously. "I am so relieved and comfortable now. Don't try to worry me."

David looked nervous when Carol gave him the name of the physician she had called.

"He is a Catholic,—and some of the members think—"

"Of course they do, but I am the head of this house," declared Carol, standing on tiptoe and assuming her most lordly air. "And Doctor O'Hara is the best in town, and he is coming."

"Oh, all right, if you feel like that about it. I don't suppose he would give me strychnine just because I am a Presbyterian minister."

"Oh, mercy!" ejaculated Carol. "I never thought of that. Do you suppose he would?"

But David only laughed at her, as he so often did.

When Carol met the doctor at the door, she found instant reassurance in the strong, kind, clever face.

"It's a cold," she explained, "but it hangs on too long, and he keeps running down-hill."

The doctor looked very searchingly into David's pale bright face. And Carol and David did not know that the extra joke and the extravagant cheeriness of his voice indicated that things looked badly. They took great satisfaction in his easy manner, and when, after a brief examination, he said:

"Now, into bed you go, Mr. Duke, and there you stay a while. Get a substitute for Sunday. You've got to make a baby of a bad cold and pet it a little."

David and Carol laughed, and when the doctor went away, and David was safely in bed, Carol perched up beside him and they had a stirring game of parcheesi. But David soon tired, and lay very quietly all evening, eating no dinner, and talking very little. Telephone messages from "the members" came thick and fast, with offers of all kinds of tempting viands, and callers came streaming to the door. But Father Daniels next door turned them every one away.

"He can't talk any more," he said in his abrupt, yet kindly way. "He's just worn out talking to this bunch,—that's all that ails him."

Next day the doctor came again, gave another examination, and said there was some little congestion in the lungs.

"Just do as I have told you,—keep the windows up, drink a lot of fresh milk, and eat all the raw eggs you can choke down."

"He won't eat anything," said Carol.

"Let him fast then, and he'll soon be begging for raw eggs. I'll see you again to-morrow."

When he returned next day there was a little shadow in the kind eyes. David lay on the cot, smiling, and Carol stood beside him.

"How do you feel to-day?"

"Oh, just fine," came the ready answer.

But the shadow in the doctor's eyes deepened.

"The meanest part of a doctor's work is handing out death blows to hope," he said. "But you two are big enough to take a hard knock without flinching, and I won't need to beat around the bush. Mr. Duke, you have tuberculosis."

David winched a little and Carol clutched his hand spasmodically, yet they smiled quickly, comfortingly into each other's eyes.

"That does not mean that your life is fanning out, by any means," continued the doctor in his easy voice. "We've got a grip on the disease now. You are getting it right at the start and you stand a splendid chance. Your clean life will help. Your laughing wife will help. Your confidence in a Divine Doctor will help. Everything is on your side. If you can, I think I should go out west somewhere,—to New Mexico, or Arizona. It is low here, and damp,—lots of people chase the cure here, and find it, but it is easier out there where the air is light and fine and the temperature is even, and where doctors specialize on lungs."

"Yes, yes, indeed, we shall go right away," declared Carol feverishly. "Yes, indeed."

"Keep on with my treatment while you are here. And get out as soon as you can. Stay in bed all the time, and don't bother with many visitors. I don't need to tell you the minor precautions. You both have brains. Be sure you use them. Now, don't get blue. You've still got plenty to laugh at, Mrs. Duke. And I give you fair warning, when you quit laughing there's the end of the fight. You haven't any other weapon strong enough to beat the germs."

It was hard indeed for Carol to see anything to laugh at just that moment, but she smiled, rather wanly, at the doctor when he went away.

There was silence between them for a moment.

At last, she leaned over him and whispered breathlessly, "Maybe it is really a good thing, David. You did need a vacation, and now you are bound to get it."

David smiled at her persistent philosophy of optimism.

Again there was silence. Finally, with an effort he spoke. "Carol, I—I could have thanked God for letting us know this two years ago. Then you would have escaped."

"David, don't say that. Just this minute I was thanking Him in my heart because we didn't know until we belonged to each other."

She lifted her lips to him, as she always did when deeply moved, and instinctively he lowered his to meet them. But before he touched her he stopped, stricken by a bitter thought, and pushed her face away almost roughly.

"Oh, Carol," he cried, "I can't. I can never kiss you again. I have loved to touch you, always. I have loved your cool, sweet, powdery skin, and your lips,—I have always thought of your lips as a crimson bow in a pale pink cloud,—I—I have loved to touch you. I have always adored your face, the look of it as well as the feel of it. I have *loved* to kiss you."

Carol slipped an arm beneath his head and strove to pull his hand away from his face.

"Go on and do it," she whispered passionately. "I am not afraid. You kissed me yesterday and it didn't hurt me. Kiss me, David,—I don't care if I do get it."

He laughed at her then, uncertainly, brokenly, but he laughed. "Oh, no you don't, my lady," he said. "You've got to keep strong and well to take care of me. You want to get sick so you'll get half the petting."

Like a flash came the revelation of what her future was to be. "Oh, of course," she cried, in a changed voice. "Of course we must be careful,—I forgot. I'll have to keep very strong and rugged, won't I? Indeed, I will be careful."

Then they sat silent again.

"Out west," he said at last dreamily. "Out west. I've always wanted to go west. Not just this way, but—maybe it is our chance, Carol."

"Of course it is. We'll just rest and play a couple of months, and then come back better than ever. No, let's get a church out there and stay forever. That will be Safety First. Isn't it grand we have that money in the bank, David? Think how solemn it would be now if we were clear broke, as we were before we decided to economize and start a bank-account."

David nodded, smiling, but the smile was grave. The little bank-account was very fine, but to David, lying there with the wreck of his life about him, the outlook was solemn in spite of it.

CHAPTER IX

UPHEAVAL

"Forty-eight, forty-nine, fifty, fifty-one, fifty-two, fifty-three,—for goodness' sake!—fifty-four, fifty-five." Carol looked helplessly at her dusty hands and mopped her face desperately with her forearm.

David, watching her from the bed in the adjoining room, gave way to silent laughter, and she resumed her solemn count.

"Forty-six, forty—"

"Fifty-six," he called. "Don't try any trickery on me."

"Fifty-six, fifty-seven, fifty-eight, fifty-nine, sixty." She sighed audibly. "Sixty-one, sixty-two, sixty-three, sixty-four—sixty-four perfectly fresh eggs," she announced, turning to the doorway and frowning at her husband, who still laughed. "Sixty-four perfectly fresh eggs, all laid yesterday."

"Now, I give you fair warning, my dear, I am no cold storage plant, and you can't make me absorb any sixty-four egg-nogs daily just to even up the demand with the supply. I drank seven yesterday, but this is too much. You must seek another warehouse."

"You are very clever and facetious, Davie, really quite entertaining. But what am I to do with sixty-four fresh eggs?"

"And I may as well confess frankly that I consider a minister's wife distinctly out of her sphere when she tries to corner the fresh egg market, particularly at the present price of existence. It isn't scriptural. It isn't orthodox. I am surprised at you, Carol. It must be some more Methodism cropping out. I never knew a Presbyterian to do it."

"And as for milk—"

"There you go again,—milk. Worse and worse. Yesterday I had milk toast, and milk custard, and fresh milk, and buttermilk. And here you come at me again first thing to-day. Milk!"

"Seven whole quarts have arrived this morning,—bless their darling old hearts."

"The cows?"

"The parishioners," Carol explained patiently. "Ever since the doctor said fresh milk and eggs, we've been flooded with milk and—"

"Pelted with eggs. But you can't pelt any sixty-four eggs down me."

"David," she said reproachfully, "I must confess that you don't sound very sick. The doctor says, 'Take him west,' and I am taking you if I ever get rid of these eggs. But I do think it would be more appropriate to take you to a vaudeville show where you might coin some of this extravagant humor. There's a market for it, you know."

"Here comes Mrs. Sater, with a covered basket," announced David, glancing from the window. "I just wonder if the dear kind woman is bringing me a few fresh eggs. You know the doctor advised me to eat fresh eggs, and—"

Carol clutched her curly head in despair. "Cock-a-doodle-doo," she crowed.

"You mean, 'Cut-cut-cut-ca-duck-et,'" reproved David.

Mrs. Sater paused outside the manse door in blank astonishment. Dear, precious David so terribly ill, and poor little Carol getting ready to take him away to a strange and awful country, and the world full of sadness and weeping and gnashing of teeth, and yet—from the open windows of the manse came the clear ring of Carol's laughter, followed closely by David's deeper voice. What in the world was there to laugh at, since tuberculosis had rapped at the manse door?

They were young, of course, and they were still in love,—that helped. And they had the deathless courage of the young and loving. But Mrs. Sater bet a dollar she wouldn't waste any time laughing if tuberculosis were stalking through her home.

"Come in," said Carol, in answer to her second ring. "We saw you from the window, but I was laughing so I was ashamed to open the door. David's so silly, Mrs. Sater. Since he isn't obliged to strain his mental capacity by thinking up sermons, he has developed quite a funny streak. Oh, did you bring us some nice fresh eggs? How dear of you. Yes, the doctor said he must eat lots of them."

"They were just laid yesterday," said Mrs. Sater complacently. "And I said to

myself, 'Nice fresh eggs like these are too good for anybody less than a preacher.' So I brought them. There's just half a dozen,—he ought to eat that many in one day."

"Oh, yes, easily. He is very fond of egg-nog."

David sputtered feebly among the pillows. "Oh, easily," he echoed helplessly.

"I knew a woman that ate eighteen eggs every day," said Mrs. Sater encouragingly. "She got well and weighed two hundred and thirty pounds, and then she had apoplexy and died."

David turned on Carol reproachfully. "There you see! That's what comes of eating raw eggs." Then he added suspiciously, "Maybe you knew it before and have been enticing me to raw eggs on purpose."

Both Carol and David seized this silly pretext to relieve their feelings, and laughed so heartily that good Mrs. Sater was quite concerned for them. She had heard it sometimes affected folks like that,—a great nervous or mental shock. She looked at them very anxiously indeed.

"Are you selling your furniture pretty well?" she asked nervously.

"Oh, just fine. Mr. Barker at the drug store has promised to fumigate everything after we are gone, so we won't scatter any germs in our wake." Carol spoke hurriedly, her heart swelling with pity as she saw the sudden convulsive clutching of David's hands beneath the covers. "Mr. Daniels has a list of 'who bought what,' and will see that everything is delivered in good shape. Only, we take the money ourselves in advance. Now look at this chair, Mrs. Sater,—a lovely chair," she rattled, thinking wretchedly of that contraction of David's hands and the darkening of his eyes. "A splendid chair. It isn't sold yet. It cost us eight seventy-five one year ago, and we are selling it for the mere pittance of five dollars even,—we make it even because we haven't any change. A most beautiful chair, an article to grace any home, a constant reminder of us, a chair in which great men have sat,—Mr. Daniels, and Mr. Baldwin, and the horrible gas collector who has made life wretched for every one in the Heights, and—all for five dollars, Mrs. Sater. Can you resist it?"

Carol's voice took on a new ring as she saw the shadow leave David's eyes, and his lips curve into laughter again.

"Well, I swan, Mrs. Duke, if you don't beat all. Yes, I'll take that chair. It may not be worth five dollars, but you are."

Carol ostentatiously collected the five dollars, doubled it carefully into a tiny bit, and tied it in the corner of her handkerchief.

"My money, Mr. David Arnold Duke, and I shall buy candy and talcum with it."

Then she ran into the adjoining room to answer the telephone.

Mrs. Sater looked about her hesitatingly and leaned forward.

"David," she said in a low voice, "Carol ought to go home to her father. It's dangerous for her to stay with you. Everybody says so. Make her go home until you are well. She may get it too if she goes along. They'll take good care of you at the Presbyterian hospital out there, you a minister and all."

The laughter, the light, left David's face at the first word.

"I know it," he said in a heavy voice. "I have told her to go home. But she won't even talk it over. She gets angry if I mention it. Every one tells me it is dangerous,—but Carol won't listen."

"Just until you get well, you know."

"I shall never get well unless she is with me. But I am trying to send her away. What can I do? I can't drive her off." His hands closed and then relaxed, lying helplessly on the covers.

When Carol returned she looked suspiciously from the stern white face on the pillow to the disturbed one of her caller.

"David is tired, Mrs. Sater," she said gently. "Let's go out in the other room and visit. I have made him laugh too much to-day, and he is weak. Come along and maybe I can sell you some more furniture." Then to David, brightly, "It was Mrs. Adams, David, she wanted to know if we needed any nice fresh eggs." She flashed a smile at him and his lips answered, but his eyes were mute. Carol looked back at him from the doorway, questioning, but finally followed Mrs. Sater into the next room.

"Mrs. Sater, you will excuse me now, won't you?" she said. "But I have a feeling that David needs me. He looks so tired. You will come in again, and—"

"Certainly, my dear, David first by all means. Run right along. And if you need any more fresh eggs, just let me know."

"Yes, thank you, yes."

"Carol," whispered the kindly woman earnestly, "why don't you go home and stay with your father until David is better? They will take such good care of him at the hospital, and he will need you when he is well, and it isn't safe, Carol, it positively is not safe. Why won't you do as he tells you?"

Carol stood up, very straight and very tall. "Mrs. Sater," she said, "you know I am an old-fashioned Methodist. And I believe that God wanted David to have me in his illness, when he is idle. If He hadn't, the illness would have come before our marriage. But I think God foresaw it coming and thought maybe I could do David good when he was laid aside. I know I am a silly little goose, but David loves me, and is happy when I am with him, and enjoys me more than anything else in the world. I am going with him. I know God expects me to do my part."

And Mrs. Sater went away, after kissing Carol's cheek, which already was paling a little with anxiety.

Carol ran back to David and sat on the floor beside him, pulling his hand from beneath the cover and kissing the white, blue-veined fingers. She crooned and gurgled over him as a mother over a little child, but did not speak until at last he turned to her and said abruptly:

"Carol, won't you go home until I get well? Please dear, for my sake."

Carol kissed the thumb once more and frowned at him. "You want to flirt with the nurses when you get out there, and are trying to get me out of the road. Every one says nurses are dangerous."

"Carol, please."

"Mrs. Sater has been talking to you. Oh, I knew it. She is a nice, kind, Christian woman, and loves us both, but, David, why doesn't God teach some

people to mind their own business? She is a good Christian, I know, dear, but I do believe there is still a little work of grace to be done in her."

David smiled a little, sadly.

"Carol, it would break my heart if you got this from me."

"I won't get it. They will teach us how to be careful and sanitary, and take proper precautions, and things like that. I am going to be very, very careful. Why, honey, I won't get it. But, David, I would rather get it than go away and leave you. I couldn't do that. I should never be happy again if I left you when you were needing me."

David turned his face to the wall. "Maybe, dear," he said very gently, "maybe it would be better if you did go home,—better for me. I need perfect rest you know, and we talk and laugh so much and have such good times together. I don't know, possibly I might get well faster—alone."

For a long moment Carol gazed at him in horror. "David," she gasped. "Don't say that. Dear, I will go home if it makes you worse to have me. I will do anything. I only want to help you. But I will be very nice and quiet, like a mouse, and never say a word, and not laugh once, if you take me with you. David, do I make you feel sicker? Does my chatter weary you? I thought I was helping to amuse you."

"Carol, I can't lie like that even to send you away from me. Maybe I ought to, but I can't. Why, sweetheart, you are the only thing left in the world. You are the world to me now. Dear, I said it for your sake, not for mine, Carol, never for mine."

Slowly the smiles struggled through the anguish in her face, and she resumed her kissing of his fingers.

"Silly old goose," she murmured; "big old silly goose. Just because he's a preacher he wants to boss all the time. Can't boss me. I won't be bossed. I like to boss myself. I won't let my beautiful old David go off out there to flirt with the nurses and Indian girls and whoever else is out there. I should say not. I'll stick right along, and whenever a woman turns our way, I'll shout, 'Married! He is mine!'"

"Silly old goose," she murmured.

[Illustration: "Silly old goose," she murmured.]

David laughed at her passionate discussion to herself.

"Besides, I have been learning a lot of things. I've been talking to the doctor privately when you couldn't hear."

"Indeed!"

"Oh, yes, and we are great friends. He says if we just live clean, white, sanitary lives, I am safe. I must keep strong and fat, and the germs can't get a start. And he has been telling me lots of nice things to do. David, I know I can help you. The doctor said so. He says I must be happy and gay, and be positively sure you will be well again in time, and I can do you more good than a tonic. Yes, he said that very thing, Doctor O'Hara did. Now please beg my pardon, and maybe I'll forgive you."

David promptly did, and peace was restored.

A committee of brotherly ministers was sent out from the Presbytery to find how things were going in the little manse in the Heights. Very gently, very tenderly they made their inquiries of Carol, and Carol answered frankly.

"With the furniture money we have six hundred dollars," she told them, rather proudly.

"That's just fine. It will take you to Albuquerque and keep you straight for a few months, and by that time we'll have things in hand back here. You know, Mrs. Duke, you and David belong to us and we are going to see you through. And then when it is all over we'll get him a church out there,—why, everything is going splendidly. Now remember, it may be a few months, or it may be ten years, but we are back of you and we are going to see you through. Don't ever wonder where next month's board is to come from. It will come. It isn't charity, Mrs. Duke. It is just the big brotherhood of the church, that's all. We are going to be your brothers, and fathers, and—mothers, too, if you will have us."

The devoted mansers rallied around them, weeping over them, giving them

good advice along with other more material, but not more helpful, assistance and declaring they always knew David was too good to live. And when Carol resentfully assured them that David was still very much alive, and maybe wasn't as good as they thought, they retaliated by suggesting that her life was in no danger on that score.

On the occasion of Doctor O'Hara's last visit, Carol followed him out to the porch.

"You haven't presented your bill," she reminded him. "And it's a good thing for you we are preachers or we might have slipped away in the night."

"I haven't any bill against you," he said, smiling kindly down at her.

Carol flushed. "Doctor," she protested. "We expected to pay you. We have the money. We don't want you to think we can't afford it. We knew you were an expensive doctor, but we wanted you anyhow."

He smiled again. "I know you have the money, but, my dear little girl, you are going to need every cent of it and more too before you get rid of this specter. But I couldn't charge David anything if he were a millionaire. Don't you understand,—this is the only way we doctors have of showing what we think of the big work these preachers are doing here and there around the country?"

"But, doctor," said Carol confusedly, "we are—Presbyterians, you know—we are Protestants."

The doctor laughed. "And I am a Catholic. But what is your point? David is doing good work, not my kind perhaps, and not my way, but I hope, my dear, we are big enough and broad enough to take off our hats to a good worker whether he does things just our way or not."

Carol looked abashed. She caught her under lip between her teeth and kept her eyes upon the floor for a moment. Finally she faced him bravely.

"I wasn't big or broad,—not even a little teensy bit," she said honestly. "I was a little, shut-in, self-centered goose. But I believe I am learning things now. You are grand," she said, holding out her slender hand.

The doctor took it in his. "Carol, don't forget to laugh when you get to

Albuquerque. You will be sick, and sorry, and there will be sobs in your heart, and your soul will cry aloud, but—keep laughing, for David is going to need it."

Carol went directly to her husband.

"David, I am learning lots of perfectly wonderful things. If I live to be a thousand years old,—oh, David, I believe by that time I can love everybody on earth, and have sympathy for all and condemnation for none; and I will really know that nearly every one in the world is *very good*, and those that are not are *pretty good*."

David burst into laughter at her words. "Poorly expressed, but finely meant," he cried. "Are you trying to become the preacher in our family?"

"All packed up and ready to start," she said thoughtfully, "and to-morrow night we leave our darling little manse, and our precious old mansers and turn cowboy. Aren't you glad you didn't send me home?"

CHAPTER X

WHERE HEALTH BEGINS

In a little white cottage tent, at the end of a long row of minutely similar, little white cottage tents, sat David and Carol in the early evening of a day in May, looking wistfully out at the wide sweep of gray mesa land, reaching miles away to the mountains, blue and solemn in the distance.

"Do—do you feel better yet, David?" Carol asked at last, desperately determined to break the menacing silence.

David drew his breath. "I can't seem to notice any difference yet," he replied honestly. "It doesn't look much like Missouri, does it?"

"It is pretty,—very pretty," she said resolutely.

"Carol, be a good Presbyterian and tell the truth. Do you wish you had gone

home, to green and grassy Iowa?"

"David Duke, I am at home, and here is where I want to be and no place else in the world. It is big and bleak and bare, but— You are going to get well, aren't you, David?"

"Of course I am, but give me time. Even Miracle Land can't transform weakness to health in two hours."

"I must go over to the office. Mrs. Hartley said she wanted to give me some instructions."

Carol rose quickly and stepped outside the cottage.

Crossing the mesa she met three men who stopped her with a gesture. They were of sadly similar appearance, tall, thin, shoulders stooped, hair dull and lusterless, eyes dry and bright. Carol thought at first they were brothers, and so they were,—brothers in the grip of the great white plague.

"Are you a lunger?" ejaculated one of them in astonishment, noting the light in her eyes and the flush in her cheeks.

"A—lunger?"

"Yes,—have you got the bugs?"

"The bugs!"

"Say, are you chasing the cure?"

"Of course not," interrupted the oldest of the three impatiently. "There's nothing the matter with her, except that she's a lunger's wife. Your husband is the minister from St. Louis, isn't he?"

"Yes,—I am Mrs. Duke."

"I am Thompson. I used to be a medical missionary in the Ozarks. How is your husband?"

"Oh, he is doing nicely," she said brightly,—the brightness assumed to hide

the fear in her heart that some day David might look like that.

Thompson laughed disagreeably. "Sure, they always do nicely at first. But when the bugs get 'em, they're gone. They think they're better, they say they are getting well,—God!"

Carol looked at him with questioning reproach in the shadowed eyes. "It does not hurt us to hope, at least," she said gently. "It does no harm, and it makes us happier."

"Oh, yes," came the bitter answer. "Sure it does. But wait a few years. Bugs eat hope and happiness as well as lungs."

Carol quivered. "You make me afraid," she said.

"Thompson is an old croak," interrupted one of the younger men, smiling encouragement. "Don't waste your time on him,—talk to me. He is such a grouch that he gives the bugs a regular bed to sleep in. He'd have been well years ago if he hadn't been such a chronic kicker. Cheer up, Mrs. Duke. Of course your husband will get along. Got it right at the start, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes, right at the very start."

"That's good. Most people fool around too long and then it's too late, and all their own fault. Sure, your husband is all right. It's too bad Thompson can't die, isn't it? He's got too mean a disposition to keep on living with white folks."

"Oh, I shouldn't say that," disclaimed Carol quickly. "He—he is just not quite like the people I have known. I didn't know how to take him. He was only joking of course." She smiled forgivingly at him, and Thompson had the grace to flush a little.

"I am Jimmy Jones," said the second man. "I was a bartender in little old Chi. Far cry from a missionary to a bartender, but I'll take my chances on Paradise with Thompson any day."

"A—a bartender." Carol rubbed her slender fingers in bewilderment.

"I am Arnold Barrows, formerly a Latin professor. *Amo, mas, mat,*" said the third man suddenly. "I am looking for my Paradise right here on earth, and I am

sorry you are married. My idea of Paradise is a girl like you and a man like me, and everything else go hang."

Carol drew herself up as though poised for flight, a startled bird taking wing.

Thompson and Jones laughed at her horrified face, but the professor maintained his solemn gravity.

"He is just a fool," said the bartender encouragingly. "Don't bother about him. It is not you in particular, he is nuts on all the girls. Cheer up. We're not so bad as we sound. I have a cottage near you. Tell the parson I'll be in to-morrow to give him the latest light on the bonfires in perdition. I know all about them. Tell him we'll organize a combination prayer-meeting; he can lead the prayer and I'll give advanced lessons in bunny-hugs and fancy-fizzes."

"Good night,—good night,—good night," gasped Carol.

Forgetting her errand to the office, she rushed back to David, to safety, to the sheltering folds of the little white cottage tent.

He questioned her curiously about her experience, and although she tried to evade the harsher points, he drew every word from her reluctant lips.

"Lunger,—and bugs,—and chasers,—it doesn't sound nice, David."

"But maybe it is the best thing after all. We are not used to it yet, but I suppose it is better for them to take it lightly and laugh and be funny about it. They have to spend a lifetime with the specter, you know,—maybe the joking takes away some of the grimness."

Carol shivered a little.

"Aren't you going to the office?"

"No, I am not. If Mrs. Hartley wants to see me, she can come here. I am scared, honestly. Let's do something. Let's go to bed, David."

It was a two-roomed cottage, a thin canvas wall separating the rooms. There were window-flaps on every side, and conscientiously Carol left them every one upraised, although she had goose-flesh every time she glanced into the black

wall of darkness outside the circle of their lights, a wall only punctuated by the yellow rays of light here and there, where the more riotous guests of the institution were dissipating up to the wicked hour of nine o'clock.

"Good night, David,—you will call me if you want anything, won't you?" And Carol leaped into bed, desperately afraid a lizard, or a scorpion or a centipede might lie beneath in wait for unwary pink toes once the guarding lights were out.

This was the land where health began,—the land of pure light air, of clear and penetrating sunshine, the land of ruddy cheeks and bounding blood. This was the land which would bring color back to the pale face of David, would restore the vigor to his step, the ring to his voice. It was the land where health began.

She must love it, she would love it, she did love it. It was a rich, beautiful, gracious land,—gray, sandy, barren, but green with promise to Carol and to David, as it had been to thousands of others who came that way with a burden of weakness buoyed by hope.

A shrill shriek sounded outside the tent,—a dangerous rustling in the sand, a crinkling of dead leaves in the corners of the steps, a ring, a roar, a wild tumult. Something whirled to the floor in David's room, papers rattled, curtains flapped, and there was a metallic patter on the uncarpeted floor of the tent. Carol gave an indistinct murmur of fear and burrowed beneath the covers.

It was David who threw back the blankets and turned on the lights. Just a sand-storm, that was all,—a common sand-storm, without which New Mexico might be almost any other place on earth. David's Bible had been whirled from the window-ledge, and fine sand was piling in through the screens.

Carol withdrew from the covers most courageously when she heard the comforting click of the electric switch, and the reassuring squeak of David's feet on the floor of the room.

"Everything's all right," he called to her. "Don't get scared. Will you help me put these flaps down?"

Carol leaped from her bed at that, and ran to lower the windows. Then she sat by David's side while the storm raged outside, roaring and piling sand against the little tent.

After that, to bed once more, still determinedly in love with the land of health, and praying fervently for morning.

Soon David's heavy breathing proclaimed him sound asleep. But sleep would not come to Carol. She gazed as one hypnotized into the starry brightness of the black sky as she could see it through the window beside her. How ominously dark it was. Softly she slipped out of bed and lowered the flaps of the window. She did not like that darkness. After the storm, David had insisted the windows must be opened again,—that was the first law of lungers and chasers.

She was cold when she got back into bed, for the chill of the mountain nights was new to her. And an hour later, when she was almost dozing, footsteps prowled about the tent, loitering in the leaves outside her western window. David was sleeping, she must not interfere with a moment of his restoring rest. She clasped her hands beneath the covers, and moistened her feverish lips. If it were an Indian lurking there, his deadly tomahawk upraised, she prayed he might strike the fatal blow at once. But the steps passed, and she climbed on her knees and lowered the flaps on the side where the steps sounded.

Later, the sudden tinkle of a bell across the grounds startled her into sitting posture. No, it wasn't David, after all,—somebody else,—some other woman's David, likely, ringing for the nurse. Carol sighed. How could David get well and strong out here, with all these other sick ones to wring his heart with pity? Were the doctors surely right,—was this the land of health?

Again footsteps approached the tent, stirring up the dry sand, and again Carol held her breath until they had passed. Then she grimly closed the windows on the third side of her room, and smiled to herself as she thought, "I'll get them up again before David is awake."

But she crept into bed and slept at last.

Early, very early, she was awakened by the sunlight pouring upon the flaps at the windows. It was five o'clock, and very cold. Carol wrapped a blanket about her and peeked in upon her husband.

"Good morning," she greeted him brightly. "Isn't it lovely and bright? How is my nice old boy? Nearly well?"

"Just fine. How did you sleep?"

"Like a top," she declared.

"Were you afraid?"

"Um, not exactly," she denied, glancing at him with sudden suspicion.

"Did the wind blow all your flaps down?"

"How did you know?"

"Oh, I was up long ago looking in on you. We'll get a room over in the Main Building to-day. It costs more, but the accommodations are so much better. We are directly on the path from the street, so we hear every passing footstep."

Carol blushed. "I am not afraid," she insisted.

"We'll get a room just the same. It will be easier for you all the way around."

Carol flung open the door and gazed out upon the land of health. The long desolate mesa land stretched far away to the mountains, now showing pink and rosy in the early sunshine. The little white tents about them were as suggestively pitiful as before. There were no trees, no flowers, no carpeting grass, to brighten the desolation.

Bare, bleak, sandy slopes reached to the mountains on every side. David sat up in bed and looked out with her.

"Just a long bare slope of sand, isn't it?" she whispered. "Sand and cactus,—no roses blooming here upon the sandy slopes."

"Yes, just sandy slopes to the mountains,—but Carol, they are sunny,—bare and bleak, but still they are sunny for us. Let's not lose sight of that."

CHAPTER XI

THE OLD TEACHER

"Chicago, Illinois.

"Dear Carol and David—

"It is most remarkable that you two can keep on laughing away out there by yourselves. It makes me think perhaps there is something fine in this being married business that sort of makes up for the rest of it. I think it must take an exceptionally good eyesight to discern sunshine on the slopes of sickness. If I were traveling that route, I am convinced I should find it led me through dark valleys and over stony pathways with storm clouds and thunders and lightnings smashing all around my head.

"You admonished me to talk about myself and leave you alone. Well, I suppose you know more about yourselves than I could possibly tell you, and since it is your own little baby sister, I am sure you are more than willing to turn your telescope away from the sunny slopes a while for a glimpse of my business dabbles.

"This is Chicago.

"Aunt Grace was rendered more speechless than ever when I announced my intention of coming, and Prudence was shocked. But father and I talked it over, and he looked at me in that funny searching way he has and then said:

"'Good for you, Connie, you have the right idea. Chicago isn't big enough to swallow you, but it won't take you long to eat Chicago bodily. Of course you ought to go.'

"I know it is not safe to praise men too highly, they are so easily convinced of their astounding virtues, but that time I couldn't resist shaking hands with father and I said, and meant it:

"'Father, you are the only one in the world. I don't believe even the Lord could make your duplicate.'

"'Mr. Nesbitt was very angry because I left them'. He said that after he took me, a stupid little country ignoramus, and made something out of me, my desertion was nothing short of rank ingratitude and religious hypocrisy and treason to the land of my birth. One might have inferred that he picked me out of the gutter, brushed the dirt off, smoothed my ragged looks, and seated me royally

in his stenographic chair, and made a business lady out of me. But it didn't work.

"I came.

"Mr. Baker, the minister there, is back of it. He met me on the street one day.

"I hear you are literary,' he said.

"Well, I think I can write,' I answered modestly.

"Then he said he had a third-half-nephew by marriage, to whom, ground under the heel of financial incompetency, he had once loaned the startling sum of fifty dollars,—I say startling, because it startled me to know a preacher ever had that much ready cash ahead of his grocery bill. Anyhow, the third-half-nephew, with the fifty dollars as a nucleus,—I think Providence must have multiplied it a little, for our fifty dollars never accomplished miracles like that,—but with that fifty dollars as a starter he did a little plunging for himself, and is now owner and editor of a great publishing house in Chicago.

"And Mr. Baker, the old minister, kept him going and coming, you might say, by sending him at frequent intervals, bright and budding lights with which to illuminate his publications. It seems the third-half-nephew by marriage, in gratitude for the fifty dollars, never refused a position to any satellite his uncle chose to recommend. And Mr. Baker glowed with delight that he had been able, from the unliterary center of Centerville to send so many candles to shine in the chandelier of Chicago.

"All I had to do was to come.

"As I said before, I came.

"I went out to Mrs. Holly's on Prairie Avenue and the next morning set out for the Carver Publishing Company, and found it, with the assistance of most of the policemen and street-car conductors as well as a large number of ordinary pedestrians encountered between Prairie on the South Side, and Wilson Avenue on the North. I asked for Mr. Carver, and handed him Mr. Baker's letter. He shook hands with me in a melancholy way and said:

"When do you want to begin? Where do you live?"

"To-morrow. I have a room out on the south side, but I will move over here to be nearer the office.'

"Hum,—you'd better wait a while.'

"Isn't it a permanent position?' I asked suspiciously.

"Oh, yes, the position is permanent, but you may not be.'

"Mr. Baker assured me—'

"Oh, sure, he's right. You've got the job. But so far, he has only sent me nineteen, and the best of them lasted just fourteen days.'

"Then you are already counting on firing me before the end of two weeks,' I said indignantly.

"No. I am not counting on it, but I am prepared for the worst.'

"What is the job? What am I supposed to do?'

"You must study our publications and do a little stenographic work, and read manuscripts and reject the bum ones,—which is an endless task,—and accept the fairly decent ones,—which takes about five minutes a week,—and read exchanges and clip shorts for filling, and write squibs of a spicy nature, and do various and sundry other things and you haven't the slightest idea how to start.'

"No, I haven't, but you get me started, and I'll keep going all right.'

"The next morning he asked how long it took me to get to the office from Prairie, and I said:

"I moved last night, I have a room down on Diversey Boulevard now.'

"He looked me over thoughtfully. Then he said: 'You ought to be a poet.'

"Why? I haven't any poetic ability that I know of.'

"Probably not, but you can get along without that. What a poet needs first of all is nerve.'

"I didn't think of anything apt to say in return so I got to work. Day after day he tried me out on something new and watched me when he thought I didn't notice, and went over my work very carefully. One morning he asked me to write five hundred words on 'The First Job in a Big City,' bringing out a country aspirant's sensations on the occasion of his first interview with a prospective employer.

"I still felt so strongly about his insolent assurance that I couldn't hold down his little old job, that I had no trouble at all with the assignment. He read it slowly and made no comment, but he gave it a place in the current issue. And then came a blessed day when he said, 'Well, you are on for good, Miss Starr. I now believe in the scriptural injunction about seventy times seven, and a kind Providence cut the margin down for me. I forgive Uncle Baker for the nineteen atrocities at last.'

"I was very happy about it, for I do love the work and the others in the office are splendid, so keen and clever, and Mr. Carver is really wonderful. We are not a large concern, and we have to lend a hand wherever hands are needed. So I am getting five times my fifteen dollars a week in experience, and I am singing inside every minute I feel so good about everything. The workers are all efficient and enthusiastic, and we are great friends. We gossip affectionately about whoever is absent, and hold a jubilee at the restaurant down-stairs when any one gets ahead with an extra story. No other publishers have come rapping at my door in a mad attempt to steal me away from Mr. Carver. I have no bulky mail soliciting stories from my facile pen. But I am making good with Mr. Carver, and that's the thing right now.

"Have I fallen in love yet? Carol, dear, I always understood that when folks get married they lose their sentimentality. Are you the proving exception? My acquaintance with Chicago masculinity is confined to the office, the Methodist Church, and the boarding-house. The office force is all married but the office boy. The Methodist congregation is composed of women, callow youths and bald heads of families. Women are counted out, of necessity. I am beyond callow youths, and not advanced to heads of families. Why, I haven't a chance to fall in love,—worse luck, too, for I need the experience in my business.

"At the boarding-house I do have a little excitement now and then. The second night after my installation a man walked into my room without knocking,—that is, he opened the door.

"Gee, the old lady wasn't bluffing,' he said, in a tone of surprise.

"It was early in the evening and he was properly dressed and looked harmless, so I wasn't frightened.

"Good evening,' I said in my reserved way.

"Gave you my room, did she?' he asked.

"She gave me this one,—for a consideration.'

"Yes, it is mine,' he said sadly. 'She has threatened to do it, lo, these many years, but I never believed she would. Faith in fickle human nature,—ah, how futile.'

"Yes?'

"Yes. You see now and then I go off with the boys, and spend my money instead of paying my board, and when I come back I expect my room to be awaiting me. It always has been. The old lady said she would rent it the next time, but she had said it so many times! Well, well, well. Broke, too. It is a sad world, isn't it? Did you ever pray for death?'

"No, I did not. And if you will excuse me, I think perhaps you had better fight it out with the landlady. I have paid a month's rent in advance.'

"A month's rent!' He advanced and shook hands with me warmly before I knew what he was doing. 'A month in advance. It is an honor to touch your hand. Alas, how many moons have waned since I came in personal contact with one who could pay a month in advance.'

"The landlady—'

"Oh, I am going. No room is big enough for two. Lots of fellows room together to save money, but it is too multum in too parvum; I think I prefer to spend the money. I have never resorted to it, even in my brokest days. I didn't leave my pipe here, did I?'

"I haven't seen it,' I said very coldly.

"Well, all right. Don't get cross about it. Out into the dark and cold, out into the wintry night, without a cent to have and hold, but landladies are always right.'

"He smiled appealingly but I frowned at him with my most ministerial air.

"I am a poet,' he said apologetically. 'I can't help going off like that. It isn't a mental aberration. I do it for a living.'

"I had nothing to say.

"My card.' He handed it to me with a flourish, a neatly engraved one, with the word 'advertisement' in the corner. I should have haughtily spurned it, but I was too curious to know his name. It was William Canfield Brewer.

"Well, good night. May your sleep be undisturbed by my ghost stalking solitary through your slumbers. May no fumes from my pipe interfere with the violet de parme you represent. If you want any advertising done, just call on me, William Canfield Brewer. I write poetry, draw pictures, make up stories, and prove to the absolute satisfaction of the most skeptical public that any article is even better than you say it is. I command a princely salary,—but I can't command it long enough. Adieu, I go, my lady, fare thee well.'

"Good night.'

"I could hardly wait for breakfast, I was so anxious to ask about him. I gleaned the following facts. The landlady had packed his belongings in an old closet and rented me the room in his absence, as he surmised. He is a darling old idiot who would rather buy the chauffeur a cigar than pay for his board. He says it is less grubby. He is too good a fellow to make both ends meet. He is too devoted to his friends to neglect them for business. He can write the best ads in Chicago and get the most money for it, but he can't afford the time. Mrs. Gaylord is a stingy old cat, she always gets her money if she waits long enough, and he pays three times as much as anything is worth when he does pay. Mrs. Gaylord's niece is infatuated with him, without reciprocation, and Mrs. Gaylord wanted her, the niece, to stick to the grocer's son; she says there is more money in being advertised than advertising others. Wouldn't Prudence faint if she could hear this gossip? Don't tell her,—and I wouldn't repeat it for the world.

"I hoped he would come back for another room,—there is lots of experience

in him, I am sure, but he sent for his things. So that is over. I found his pipe. And I am keeping it so if he gets smokey and comes back he may have it.

"Oh, I tell you, Carol, Experience may teach in a very expensive school, but she makes the lessons so interesting, it is really worth the price.

"Lots of love to you both,

"From

"CONNIE."

CHAPTER XII

THE LAND O' LUNGERS

"Is Mrs. Duke in?"

David looked up quickly as the door opened. He saw a fair petulant face, with pouting lips, with discontent in the dark eyes. He did not know that face. Yet this girl had not the studied cheerfulness of manner that marks church callers at sanatoriums. She did not look sick, only cross. Oh, it was the new girl, of course. Carol had said she was coming. And she was not really sick, just threatened.

"Mrs. Duke is over at the Main Building, but will be back very soon. Will you come in and wait?"

She came in without speaking, pulled a chair from the corner of the porch, and flounced down among the cushions. David could not restrain a smile. She looked so babyishly young, and so furiously cross. To David, youth and crossness were incongruous.

"I am Nancy Tucker," said the girl at last.

"And I am Mr. Duke, as you probably surmise from seeing me on Mrs. Duke's porch. She will be back directly. I hope you are not in a hurry."

"Hurry! What's the use of hurrying? I am twenty years old. I've got a whole lifetime to do nothing in, haven't I?"

"You've got a lifetime ahead of you all right, but whether you are going to do nothing or not depends largely on you."

"It doesn't depend on me at all. It depends on God, and He said, 'Nothing doing. Just get out and rust the rest of your life. We don't need you.'"

"That does not sound like God," said David quietly.

"Well, He gave me the bugs, didn't He?"

"Oh, the bugs,—you've got them, have you? You don't look like it. I didn't know it was your health. I thought maybe it was just your disposition."

David smiled winningly as he spoke, and the smile took the sting from the words.

"The bugs are worse on the disposition than they are on the lungs, aren't they?"

"Well, it depends. Carol says they haven't hit mine yet." He lifted his head with boyish pride. "She ought to know. So I don't argue with her. I am willing to take her word for it."

Nancy smiled a little, a transforming smile that swept the discontent from her face and made her nearly beautiful. But it only lasted a moment.

"Oh, go on and smile. It did me good. You can't imagine how much better I felt directly."

"There's nothing to make me smile," cried Nancy hotly.

"You may smile at me," cried Carol gaily, as she ran in. "How do you do? You are Miss Tucker, aren't you? They were telling me about you at the office."

"Yes, I am Miss Tucker. Are you Mrs. Duke? You look too young for a minister's wife."

"Yes, I am Mrs. Duke, and I am not a bit too young."

"I asked them if I should call a doctor, and they said that could wait a while. First of all, they said, I must come to Room Six and meet the Dukes."

Carol looked puzzled. "They didn't tell me that. What did they want us to do to you?"

"I don't know. I just said, 'Well, I guess I'd better get a doctor to come and kill me off,' and they said, 'You go over to Number Six and meet the Dukes.'"

"They said lovely things about you," Carol told her, smiling. "And they say you will be well in a few months,—that you haven't T. B.'s at all yet, just premonitions."

The good news brought no answering light to the girl's face.

"They are nurses. You can't believe a word they say. It is their business to build up false hopes."

"When any one tells me David is worse, I think, 'That is a wicked story'; but when any one says, 'He is better,' I am ready to fall on my knees and salute them as messengers from Heaven," said Carol.

One of the sudden dark clouds passed quickly overhead, obscuring the glare of the sunshine, darkening the yellow sand.

"I hate this country," said Nancy Tucker. "I hate that yellow hot sand, and the yellow hot sun, and the lights and shadows on the mountains. I hate the mountains most of all. They look so abominably cock-sure, so crowy, standing off there and glaring down on us as if they were laughing at our silly little fight for health."

Carol was speechless, but David spoke up quickly.

"That is strange; Carol and I think it is a beautiful country,—the broad stretch of the mesa, the blue cloud on the mountains, the shadow in the canyons, and most of all, the sunshine on the slopes. We think the fight against T. B.'s is like walking through the dark shade in the canyons, and then suddenly stepping out on to the sunny slopes."

"I know you are a preacher. I suppose it is your business to talk like that." Then when Carol and David only smiled excusingly, she said, "Excuse me, I didn't mean to be rude. But it is hideous, and—I love to be happy, and laugh,—"

"Go on and do it," urged David. "We've just been waiting to hear you laugh."

"You should have been at the office with me," said Carol. "We laughed until we were nearly helpless. It is that silly Mr. Gooding again, David. He isn't very sick, Miss Tucker,—he just has red rales. I don't know what red rales are, but when the nurses say that, it means you aren't very sick and will soon be well. But Gooding is what he calls 'hipped on himself.' He is always scared to death. He admits it. Well, last night they had lobster salad, a silly thing to have in a sanatorium. And Gooding ordered two extra helpings. The waiter didn't want to give it to him, but Gooding is allowed anything he wants so the waiter gave in. In the night he had a pain and got scared. He rang for the nurses, and was sure he was going to die. They had to sit up with him all night and rub him, and he groaned, and told them what to tell his mother and said he knew all along he could never pull through. But the nurse gave him some castor oil, and made him take it, and finally he went to sleep. And every one is having a grand time with him this morning."

Nancy joined, rather grudgingly, in their laughter.

"Oh, I suppose funny things happen. I know that. But what's the use of laughing when we are all half dead?"

"I'm not. Not within a mile of it. You brag about yourself if you like, but count me out."

"Hello, Preacher! How are you making it to-day?"

They all turned to the window, greeting warmly the man who stood outside, leaning heavily on two canes.

"Miss Tucker, won't you meet Mr. Nevius?"

In response to the repeated inquiry, David said, "Just fine this morning. How are you?"

"Oh, I am more of an acquisition than ever. I think I have a bug in my heart."

He turned to Miss Tucker cheerfully. "I am really the pride of the institution. I've got 'em in the lungs and the throat and the digestive apparatus, and the bones, and the blood, and one doctor includes the brain. But I flatter myself that I've developed them in a brand-new place, and I'm trying to get the rest of the chasers to take up a collection and have me stuffed for a parlor ornament."

"How does a bug in the heart feel?"

"Oh, just about like love. I really can't tell any difference myself. It may be one, it may be the other. But whichever it is I think I deserve to be stuffed. Hey, Barrows!" he called suddenly, balancing himself on one cane and waving a summons with the other. "Come across! New lunger is here, young, good-looking. I saw her first! Hands off!"

Barrows rushed up as rapidly as circumstances permitted, and looked eagerly inside.

"It is my turn," he said reproachfully. "You are not playing fair. I say we submit this to arbitration. You had first shot at Miss Landbury, didn't you?"

"I am not a nigger baby at a county fair, three shots for ten cents," interrupted Nancy resentfully. But when the others laughed at her ready sally, she joined in good-naturedly.

"You don't look like a lunger," said Barrows, eying her critically.

"Mr. Duke thinks I came out for the benefit of my disposition."

"Good idea." Nevius jerked a note-book from his pocket and made a hurried notation.

"Taking notes for a sermon?" asked Carol.

"No, for a sickness. That's where I'll get 'em next. I hadn't thought of the disposition. Thank you, thank you very much. I'll have it to-morrow. Bugs in the disposition,—sounds medical, doesn't it?"

"Oh, don't, Mr. Nevius," entreated Carol. "Don't get anything the matter with your disposition. We don't care where else you collect them, as long as you keep on making us laugh. But, woodman, spare that disposition."

Nevius pulled out the note-book and crossed off the notation. "There it goes again," he muttered. "Women always were a blot on the escutcheon of scientific progress. Just to oblige you, I've got to forego the pleasure of making a medical curiosity of myself. Well, well. Women are all right for domestic purposes, but they sure are a check on science."

"They are a check on your bank-book, too, let me tell you," said Barrows quickly. "I never cared how much my wife checked me up on science, but when she checked me out of three bank-accounts I drew the line."

"Speaking of death," began Nevius suddenly.

"Nobody spoke of it, and nobody wants to," said Carol.

"Miss Tucker suggests it by the forlornity of her attitude. And since she has started the subject, I must needs continue. I want to tell you something funny. You weren't here when Reddy Waters croaked, were you, Duke? He had the cottage next to mine. I was in bed at the time with—well, I don't remember where I was breaking out at the time, but I was in bed. You may have noticed that I have what might be called a classic pallor, and a general resemblance to a corpse."

Nancy shivered a little and Carol frowned, but Nevius continued imperturbably. "The undertaker down-town is a lunger, and a nervous wreck to boot. But he is a good undertaker. He works hard. Maybe he is practising up so he can do a really artistic job on himself when the time comes. Anyhow, Reddy died. They always come after them when the rest of us are in at dinner. It interferes with the appetite to see the long basket going out. So when the rest were eating, old Bennett comes driving up after Reddy. It was just about dark, that dusky, spooky time when the shadows come down from the mountains and cover up the sunny slopes you preachers rave about. So up comes Bennett, and he got into the wrong cottage. First thing I knew, some one softly pushed open the door, and in walked Bennett at the front end of the long basket, the assistant trailing him in the rear. I felt kind of weak, so I just laid there until Bennett got beside me. Then I slowly rose up and put out one cold clammy hand and touched his. Bennett choked and the assistant yelled, and they dropped the basket and fled. I rang the bell and told the nurse to make that crazy undertaker come and get the right corpse that was patiently waiting for him, and she called him on the telephone. Nothing doing. A corpse that didn't have any better judgment than

that could stay in bed until doomsday for all of him. So they had to get another undertaker. But Bennett told her to get the basket and he would send the assistant after it. But I held it for ransom, and Bennett had to pay me two dollars for it."

His auditors wiped their eyes, half ashamed of their laughter.

"It is funny," said Nancy Tucker, "but it seems awful to laugh at such things."

"Awful! Not a bit of it," declared Barrows. "It's religious. Doesn't it say in the Bible, 'Laugh and the world laughs with you, Die and the world laughs on'?"

"I laugh,—but I am ashamed of myself," confessed Carol.

"What do women want to spoil a good story for?" protested Nevius. "That's a funny story, and it is true. It is supposed to be laughed at. And Reddy is better off. He had so many bugs you couldn't tell which was bugs and which was Reddy. He was an ugly guy, too, and he was stuck on a girl and she turned him down. She said Reddy was all right, but no one could raise a eugenical family with a father as ugly as Reddy. He didn't care if he died. Every night he used to flip up a coin to see if he would live till morning. He said if he got off ahead of us he was coming back to haunt us. But I told him he'd better fly while the flying was good, for I sure would show him a lively race up to the rosy clouds if I ever caught up. I knew if he got there first he'd pick out the best harp and leave me a wheezy mouth organ. He always wanted the best of everything."

Just then the nurse opened the door.

"Barrows and Nevius," she said sternly. "This is the rest hour, and you are both under orders. Please go home at once and go to bed, or I shall report to Mrs. Hartley." When they had gone, she looked searchingly into the face of the brand-new chaser. "How are you feeling now?" she asked.

"Oh, pretty well." And then she added honestly, "It really isn't as bad as I had expected. I think I can stand it a while."

"Have you caught a glimpse of the sunny slopes yet?"

Instinctively they turned their eyes to the distant mountains, with the white crown of snow at the top, and beneath, long radiating lines of alternating light and shadow, stretching down to the mesa.

"The shadows look pretty dark," she said, "but the sunny slopes are there all right. But I was happy at home; I had hopes and plans—"

"Yes, we all did," interrupted David quickly. "We were all happy, and had hopes and plans, and— But since we are here and have to stay, isn't it God's blessing that there is sunshine for us on the slopes?"

CHAPTER XIII

OLD HOPES AND NEW

Along toward the middle of the summer Carol began eating her meals on the porch with David, and they fixed up a small table with doilies and flowers, and said they were keeping house all over again. Sometimes, when David was sleeping, Carol slipped noiselessly into the room to turn over with loving fingers the soft woolen petticoats, and bandages, and bonnets, and daintily embroidered dresses,—gifts of the women of their church back in the Heights in St. Louis.

About David the doctors had been frank with Carol.

"He may live a long time and be comfortable, and enjoy himself. But he will never be able to do a man's work again."

"Are you sure?" Carol had taken the blow without flinching.

"Oh, yes. There is no doubt about that."

"What shall I do?"

"Just be happy that he is here, and not suffering. Love him, and amuse him, and enjoy him as much as you can. That is all you can do."

"Let's not tell him," she suggested. "It would make him so sorry."

"That is a good idea. Keep him in the dark. It is lots easier to be happy when hope goes with it."

But long before this, David had looked his future in the face. "I have been set aside for good," he thought. "I know it, I feel it. But Carol is so sure I will be well again! She shall never know the truth from me."

When Carol intensely told him he was stronger, he agreed promptly, and said he thought so, himself.

"Oh, blessed old David, I'm so glad you don't know about it," thought Carol.

"My sweet little Carol, I hope you never find out until it is over," thought David.

Sometimes Carol stood at the window when David was sleeping, and looked out over the long mesa to the mountains. Her gaze rested on the dark heavy shadows of the canyons. To her, those dark valleys in the mountains represented a buried vision,—the vision of David strong and sturdy again, springing lightly across a tennis court, walking briskly through mud and snow to conduct a little mission in the Hollow, standing tall and straight and sunburned in the pulpit swaying the people with his fervor. It was a buried hope, a shadowy canyon. Then she looked up to the sunny slopes, stretching bright and golden above the shadows up to the snowy crest of the mountain peaks. Sunny slopes,—a new hope rising out of the old and towering above it. And then she always went back to the chest in the corner of the room and fingered the tiny garments, waiting there for service, with tender fingers.

And once in a while, not very often, David would say, smiling, "Who knows, Carol, but you two may some day do the things we two had hoped to do?"

A few weeks later Aunt Grace came out from Mount Mark, and in her usual soft, gentle way drifted into the life of the chasers in the sanatorium. She told of the home, of William's work and tireless zeal, of Lark and Jim, of Fairy and Babbie, of Prudence and Jerry. She talked most of all of Connie.

"That Connie! She is a whole family all by herself. She is entirely different from the rest of you. She is unique. She doesn't really live at all, she just looks on. She watches life with the cool critical eyes of a philosopher and a stoic and an epicure all rolled into one. She comes, she sees, she draws conclusions. William and I hold our breath. She may set the world on fire with her talent, or she may become a demure little old maid crocheting jabots and feeding kittens. No one can foretell Connie."

And Carol, in a beautiful, heavenly relief at having this blessed outlet for her pent-up feelings, reclined in a big rocker on the porch, and smiled at Aunt Grace, and glowed at David, and declared the sunny slopes were so brilliant they dazzled her eyes.

There came a day when she packed a suitcase, and petted David a little and gave him very strict instructions as to how he was to conduct himself in her absence, and went away over to the other building, and settled down in a pleasant up-stairs room with Aunt Grace in charge. For several days she lounged there quietly content, gazing for hours out upon the marvelous mesa land, answering with a cheery wave the gay greetings shouted up to her from chasers loitering beneath her windows.

But one morning, she watched with weary throbbing eyes as Aunt Grace and a nurse and a chamber maid carefully wrapped up a tiny pink flannel roll for a visit to Room Number Six in the McCormick Building.

"Tell him I am just fine, and it is a lucky thing that he likes girls better than boys, and we think she is going to look like me. And be particularly sure to tell him she is very, very pretty, the doctor and the nurse both say she is,—David might overlook it if his attention were not especially called to it."

Three weeks later, the suit-case was packed once more, and Carol was moved back across the grounds to Number Six and David, where already little Julia was in full control.

"Aren't you glad she is pretty, David?" demanded Carol promptly. "I was so relieved. Most of them are so red and frowsy, you know. I've seen lots of new ones in my day, but this is my first experience with a pretty one."

The doctor and the nurse had the temerity to laugh at that, even with Julia, pink and dimply, right before them. "Oh, that old, old story," said the doctor. "I'm looking for a woman who can class her baby with the others. I intend to use my fortune erecting a monument to her if I find her,—but the fortune is safe. Every woman's baby is the only pretty one she ever saw in her life."

Carol and David were a little indignant at first, but finally they decided to make allowances for the doctor,—he was old, and of course he must be tired of babies, he had ushered in so many. They would try and apply their Christian charity to him, though it was a great strain on their religion.

But what should be done with Julia? David was so ill, Carol so weak, the baby so tender. Was it safe to keep her there? But could they let that little rosebud go?

"Why, I will just take her home with me," said Aunt Grace gently. "And we'll keep her until you are ready. Oh, it won't be a bit of trouble. We want her."

That settled it. The baby was to go.

"For once in my life I have made a sacrifice," said Carol grimly. "I think I must be improving. I have allowed myself to be hurt, and crushed, and torn to shreds, for the good of some one else. I certainly must be improving."

Later she thought, "She will know all her aunties before she knows me. She will love them better. When I go home, she will not know me, and will cry for Aunt Grace. She will be afraid of me. Really, some things are very hard." But to David she said that of course the doctors were right, and she and David were so old and sensible that it would be quite easy to do as they were bid. And they were so used to having just themselves that things would go on as they always had.

But more nights than one she cried herself to sleep, craving the touch of the little rosebud baby learning of motherhood from some one else.

CHAPTER XIV

NEPTUNE'S SECOND DAUGHTER

"Chicago, Illinois.

"Dearest Carol and David—

"Carol, dear, an awful thing has happened. Do you remember the millionaire's son who discovered me up the cherry tree years ago when I was an infant? He comes to see me now and then. He is very nice and attentive, and all of my

friends have selected the color schemes for their boudoirs in my forthcoming palatial home. One night he telephoned and said his mother was in town with him, and they should like to come right up if I did not mind. I did not know he was in town, I hardly knew he had a mother, and I was in the act of shampooing my hair. Phyllis was making candy, and Gladys was reading aloud to us both. Imagine the mother of a millionaire's son coming right up, and I in a shampoo.

"'Oh,' I wailed, 'I haven't anything to wear, and I am not used to millionaires' sons' mothers, and I won't know what to say to her.'

"'Leave it to us, Connie!' cried my friends valiantly.

"Gladys whirled the magazine under the bed, and Phyllis turned out the electricity under the chafing-dish and put the candy in the window to finish at a later date.

"Did I tell you about our housekeeping venture? Gladys is a private secretary to something down-town and gets an enormous salary, thirty a week. Phyllis is an artist and has a studio somewhere, and we are great friends. So we took a cunning little apartment for three months, and we all live together and cook our meals in the baby kitchenette when we feel domestic, and dine out like princesses when we feel lordly. We have the kitchenette, and a bathroom with two kinds of showers, and a bedroom apiece, though mine is really a closet, and two sitting-rooms, so two of us can have beaux the same night. If we feel the need of an extra sitting-room—that is, three beaux a night—we draw cuts to see who has to resort to the park, or a movie, or the ice-cream parlor, or the kitchenette. Our time is up next week and we shall return modestly to our boarding-houses. It is great fun, but it is expensive, and we are so busy.

"We have lovely times. The girls are—not like me. They are really society buds, and wear startling evening gowns and go places in taxis, and are quite the height of fashion. It is a wonder they put up with me at all. Still every establishment must have at least one Cinderella. But let me admit honestly and Methodistically that I do less Cinderelling than either of them. Gladys darns my stockings, and Phyllis makes my bed fully half the time.

"Anyhow, when Andrew Hedges, millionaire's son, telephoned that his mother was coming up, they fell upon me, and one rubbed and one fanned, and they both talked at once, and in the end I agreed to leave myself in their hands.

They knew all about millionaires' sons' mothers, it seemed, and would fix me up just exactly O. K. right. Gladys and I are the same size, and she has an exquisite semi-evening gown of Nile green and honest-to-goodness lace which I have long admired humbly from my corner among the ashes. Just the thing. I should wear it, and make the millionaire's son's mother look like twenty cents.

"Wickedly and wilfully I agreed. So when the hair was dry enough to manage, they marched me into Gladys' room—the only one of the three capable of accommodating three of us—and turned the mirrors to the wall. I protested at that. I wanted to see my progress under their skilful fingers.

"'No,' said Phyllis sagely. 'It looks horrible while it is going on. You must wait until you are finished, and then burst upon your own enraptured vision. You will enchant yourself.'

"Gladys seconded her and I assented weakly. I know I am not naturally weak, Carol, but the thought of a millionaire's son's mother affected me very strangely. It took all the starch out of my knees, and the spine out of my backbone.

"By this time I was established in Gladys' green slippers with rhinestone buckles, and Gladys was putting all of her own and Phyllis' rings on my fingers, and Phyllis was using a crimping iron on my curls. I was too curly already, but Phyllis said natural curliness was not the thing any more. Then Gladys began dabbing funny sticky stuff all over my fingers, and scratching my eyebrows, and powdering about twenty layers on my face and throat. After that, she rubbed my finger nails until I could almost see what they were doing to me. I never thought I had much hair, but when Phyllis got through with me I could hardly carry it. The ladies in Hawaii who carry bushel baskets on their heads will tell you how I felt. And whenever I moved it wobbled. But they both clapped their hands and said I looked like a dream, and of course I would have acquired another bushel had they advised it.

"I trusted them because they look so wonderful when they are finished,—just right,—never too much so.

"Our bell rang then, and Phyllis answered and said, 'Tell them Miss Starr will be in in a moment.'

"There is a general apartment maid, and when we wish to be very perfectly fine, we borrow her,—for a quarter.

"When I knew they had arrived, I leaped up, panic-stricken, and dived head first into that pile of Nile green silk and real lace. They rescued me tenderly, and pushed me in, and hooked me here, and buttoned me there, both panting and gasping, I madly hurrying them on, because I can't get over that silly old parsonage notion that it isn't good form to keep folks waiting.

"'There you are,' cried Gladys.

"'Fly,' shouted Phyllis.

"Out I dashed, recollected myself in the bathroom, and—yes, I did that foolish thing, Carol. Your vanity would have saved you such a blunder. But I tore myself from their blood-stained hands, and went in to meet a millionaire's son's mother without looking myself over in the mirror.

"When I parted the curtains, Andy leaped to his feet with his usual quick eagerness, but he stopped abruptly and his lips as well as his eyes widened.

"'How do you do?' I said, moistening my lips which already felt too wet, only I didn't know what was the matter with them. I held out my hand, unwontedly white, and he took it flabbily, instead of briskly and warmly as he usually did.

"'Mother,' he said, 'I want you to meet Miss Starr.'

"She wasn't at all the kind of millionaire's son's mother we have read about. She had no lorgnette, and she did not look me over superciliously. But she had turned my way as though confident of being pleased, and her soft eyes clouded a little, though she smiled sweetly. Her hair was silver white and curled over her forehead and around her ears. She had dimples, and she stuck her chin up like a girl when she laughed. She wore the softest, sweetest kind of a wistaria colored silk. I was charmed with her. It could not have been mutual.

"She held out her hand, smiling so gently, still with the cloud in her eyes, and we all sat down. She did not look me over, though she must have yearned to do so. But Andy looked me over thoroughly, questioningly, from the rhinestone pin at the top of the swaying hair, to the tips of my Nile green shoes. I tried to talk, but my hair wobbled so, and little invisible hair pins kept visibleing themselves and sliding into my lap and down my neck, and my lips felt so moist and sticky, and my skin didn't fit like skin, and—still I was determined to live up to my part, and I talked on and on, and—then, quite suddenly, I happened to glance into a

mirror beside me. There was some one else in the room. Some one in a marvelous dress, with a white-washed throat, with lips too red, and cheeks too pink, and brows too black, some one with an unbelievable quantity of curls on top of her, and—I turned around to see whom it might be. Nobody there. I looked back to the mirror. I was not dreaming,—of course there was some one in the room. No, the room was empty save we three. I turned suspiciously to Mrs. Hedges. She was still in her place, a smiling study in wistaria and silver gray. I looked at Andy, immaculate in black and white. Then—sickening realization.

"I stood up abruptly. The atrocity in the mirror rose also.

"That isn't I,' I cried imploringly.

"Mrs. Hedges looked startled, but Andy came to my side at once.

"No, it certainly isn't,' he said heartily. 'What on earth have you been doing to yourself, Connie?'

"I went close to the mirror, inspecting myself, grimly, piteously. I do not understand it to this day. The girls do the same things to themselves and they look wonderful,—never like that.

"I rubbed my lips with my fingers, and understood the moisture. I examined my brows, and knew what the scratching meant. I shook the pile of hair, and a shower of invisible hair pins rewarded me. I brushed my fingers across my throat, and a cloud of powder wafted outward.

"What does it say in the Bible about the way of the unrighteous? Well, I know just as much about the subject as the Bible does, I think. For a time I was speechless. I did not wish to blame my friends. But I could not bear to think that any one should carry away such a vision of one of father's daughters.

"Take a good look at me please,' I said, laughing, at last, 'for you will never see me again. I am Neptune's second daughter. I stepped full-grown into the world to-night from the hands of my faithless friends. Another step into my own room, and the lovely lady is gone forever.'

"Andy understands me, and he laughed. But his mother still smiled the clouded smile.

"I hurled myself into the depths of self-abasement. I spared no harsh details. I told of the shampoo, and the candy on the window-ledge, the magazine under the bed. Religiously I itemized every article on my person, giving every one her proper due. Then I excused myself and went up-stairs. I sneaked into my own room, removed the dream of Nile green and lace and jumped up and down on it a few times, in stocking feet, so the girls would not hear,—and relieved my feelings somewhat. I think I had to resort to gold dust to resurrect my own complexion,—not the best in the world perhaps, but mine, and I am for it. I combed my hair. I donned my simple blue dress,—cost four-fifty and Aunt Grace made it.' I wore my white kid slippers and stockings. My re-debut—ever hear the word?—was worth the exertion. Andy's face shone as he came to meet me. His mother did not know me.

"'I am Miss Starr,' I said. 'The one and only.'

"'Why, you sweet little thing,' she said, smiling, without the cloud.

"We went for a long drive, and had supper down-town at eleven o'clock, and she kept me with her at the hotel all night. It was Saturday. I slept with her and used all of her night things and toilet articles. I told her about the magnificent stories I am going to write sometime, and she told me what a darling Andy was when he was a baby, and between you and me, I doubt if they have a million dollars to their name. Honestly, Carol, they are just as nice as we are.

"They stayed in Chicago three days, and she admitted she came on purpose to get acquainted with me. She made me promise to spend a week with them in Cleveland when I can get away, and she gave me the dearest little pearl ring to remember her by. But I wonder—I wonder— Anyhow I can't tell him until he asks me, can I? And he has never said a word. You know yourself, Carol, you can't blurt things out at a man until he gives you a chance. So my conscience is quite free. And she certainly is adorable. Think of a mother-in-law like that, pink and gray, with dimples. Yes, she is my ideal of a mother-in-law. I haven't met 'father' yet, but he doesn't need to be very nice. A man can hide a hundred faults in one fold of a pocketbook the size of his.

"Lots of love to you both,—and you write to Larkie oftener than you do to me, which isn't fair, for she has a husband and a baby and is within reaching distance of father, and I am an orphan, and a widow, and a stranger in a strange land.

"But I love you anyhow.

"Connie."

CHAPTER XV

THE SECOND STEP

They sat on canvas chairs on the sand outside the porch of the sanatorium, warmly wrapped in rugs, for the summer evenings in New Mexico are cold, and watched the shadows of evening tarnish the gold of the mesa. Like children, they held hands under the protecting shelter of the rug. They talked of little Julia off in Mount Mark, how she was growing, the color of her eyes, the shape of her fingers. They talked of her possible talents, and how they could best be developed, judging as well as they could in advance by the assembled qualities of all her relatives. David suggested that they might be prejudiced in her favor a little, for as far as they could determine there was no avenue of ability closed to her, but Carol stanchly refused to admit the impeachment. They talked of the schools best qualified to train her, of the teachers she must have, of the ministers they must demand for her spiritual guidance. They talked of the thousand bad habits of other little girls, and planned how Julia should be led surely, sweetly by them.

Then they were silent, thinking of the little pink rosebud baby as she had left them.

The darkness swept down from the mountains almost as sand-storms come, and Carol leaned her head against David's shoulder. She was happy. David was so much better. The horrible temperature was below ninety-nine at last, and David was allowed to walk about the mesa, and his appetite was ravenous. Maybe the doctors were wrong after all. He was certainly on the high-road to health now. She was so glad David had not known how near the dark valley he had passed.

David was rejoicing that he had never told Carol how really ill he had been.

She would have been so frightened and sorry. He pictured Carol with the light dying out in her eyes, with pallor eating the roses in her cheeks, with languor in her step, and dullness in her voice,—the Carol she would surely have been had she known that David was walking under the shadow of death. David was very happy. He was so much better, of course he would soon be himself. Things looked very bright. Somehow to-night he did not yearn so much for work. It was Carol that counted most, Carol and the little Julia who was theirs, and would some day be with them. The big thing now was getting Julia ready for the life that was to come to her.

He was richly satisfied.

"Carol, this is the most wonderful thing in the world, companionship like this, being together, thinking in harmony, hoping the same hopes, sharing the same worries, planning the same future. Companionship is life to me now. There is nothing like it in all the world."

Carol snuggled against his shoulder happily.

"Love is wonderful," he went on, "but companionship is broader, for it is love, and more beyond. It is the development of love. It is the full blossom of the seed that has been planted in the heart. Service is splendid, too. But after all, it takes companionship to perfect service. One can not work alone. You are the completion of my desire to work, and you are the inspiration of my ability to work. Yes, companionship is life,—bigger than love and bigger than service, for companionship includes them both."

CHAPTER XVI

DEPARTED SPIRITS

As the evenings grew colder, the camp chairs on the mesa were deserted, and the chattering "chasers" gathered indoors, sometimes in one or another of the airy tent cottages, sometimes before the cheerful blaze of the logs in the fireplace of the parlors, but oftenest of all they flocked into Number Six of McCormick Building, where David was confined to his cot. Always there was laughter in Number Six, merry jesting, ready repartee. So it became the mecca of those, who, even more assiduously than they chased the cure, sought after laughter and joy. In the parlors the guests played cards, but in Number Six, deferring silently to David's calling, they pulled out checkers and parcheesi, and fought desperate battles over the boards. But sometimes they fingered the dice and the checkers idly, leaning back in their chairs, and talked of temperatures, and hypodermics, and doctors, and war, and ghosts.

"I know this happened," said the big Canadian one night. "It was in my own home and I was there. So I can swear to every word of it. We came out from Scotland, and took up a big homestead in Saskatchewan. We threw up a log house and began living in it before it was half done. Evenings, the men came in from the ranches around, and we sat by the fire in the kitchen and smoked and told stories. Joined on to the kitchen there was a shed, which was intended for a summer kitchen. But just then we had half a dozen cots in it, and the hands slept there. One night one of the boys said he had a headache, and to escape the smoke in the kitchen which was too thick to breathe, he went into the shed and lay down on a cot. It was still unfinished, the shed was, and there were three or four wide boards laid across the rafters at the top to keep them from warping in the damp. Baldy lay on his back and stared up at the roof. Suddenly he leaped off the bed,—we all saw him; there was no door between the rooms. He leaped off and dashed through the kitchen.

"'What's the matter?' we asked him.

"'Let me alone, I want to get out of here,' he said, and shot through the door.

"We caught just one glimpse of his face. It was ashen. We went on smoking. 'He's a crazy Frenchman,' we said, and let it go. But my brother was out in the

barn and he corralled him going by.

"'I am going to die, Don,' he said. 'I was lying on the bed, looking up at the rafters, and I saw the men come in and take the big white board and make it into a coffin for me. I am going home, I want to be with my folks.'

"Don came in scared stiff, and told us, and we said 'Pooh, pooh,' and went on smoking. But about eleven o'clock a couple of fellows from another ranch came over and said their boss had died that afternoon and they could not find the right sized boards for the coffin. They wanted a good straight one about six feet six by fourteen inches. We looked in the barns and the sheds, and could not find what they wanted. Then we went into the lean-to, where there were some loose boards in the corner, but they wouldn't do.

"'Say,' said one of them, 'how about that white board up there in the rafters? About right, huh?'

"We pulled it down, and it was just the size. They were tickled to get it, for they hated to drive twelve miles to town through snowdrifts over their heads.

"'That's the big white board that Baldy saw,' said Don suddenly. Yes, by George! We sent for Baldy that night to make sure, and it was just what he had seen, and the very men that came for the board. Baldy was mighty glad he wasn't the corpse."

"Mercy," said Carol, twitching her shoulders. "Are you sure it is true?"

"Gospel truth. I was right there. I took down the board."

"I know one that beats that," said the Scotchman promptly. "They have a sayin' over in my country, that if you have a dream, or a vision, of men comin' toward you carryin' a coffin, you will be in a coffin inside of three days. One night a neighbor of mine, next farm, was comin' home late, piped as usual, and as he came zigzaggin' down a dark lane, he looked up suddenly and saw four men marchin' solemnly toward him, carryin' a coffin. McDougall clutched his head. 'God help me,' he cried. 'It is the vision.' Then he turned in his tracks and shot over a hedge and up the bank, screamin' like mad. The spirits carryin' the coffin yelled at him and, droppin' the coffin, started up the hill after him. But McDougall only yelled louder and ran faster, and finally they lost him in the hills. So they went back. They were not spirits at all, and it was a real coffin. A

woman had died, and they were takin' her in to town ready for the funeral next day. But the next day we found McDougall lyin' face down on the grass ten miles away, stone dead."

The girls shivered, and Carol shuffled her chair closer to David's bed.

"Ran himself to death?" suggested David.

"Well, he died," said the Scotchman.

"Is it true?" asked Carol, glancing fearfully through the screen of the porch into the black shadows on the mesa.

"Absolutely true," declared the Scotchman. "I was in the searchin' party that found him."

"I—I don't believe in spirits,—I mean haunting spirits," said Carol, stiffening her courage and her backbone by a strong effort.

"How about the ghosts that drove the men out into the graveyards in the Bible and made them cut up all kinds of funny capers, and finally haunted the pigs and drove 'em into the lake?" said Barrows slyly.

"They were not ghosts," protested Carol quickly. "Just evil spirits. They got drowned, you know,—ghosts don't drown."

"It does not say they got drowned," contradicted Barrows. "My Bible does not say it. The pigs got drowned. And that is what ghosts are,—evil spirits, very evil. They were too slick to get drowned themselves; they just chased the pigs in and then went off haunting somebody else."

Carol turned to David for proof, and David smiled a little.

"Well," he said thoughtfully, "perhaps it does not particularly say the ghosts were drowned. It says they went into the pigs, and the pigs were drowned. It does not say anything about the spirits coming out in advance, though."

Carol and Barrows mutually triumphed over each other, claiming personal vindication.

"Do you believe in ghosts, Mr. Duke?" asked Miss Tucker in a soft respectful voice, as if resolved not to antagonize any chance spirits that might be prowling near.

"Call them psychic phenomena, and I may say that I do," said David.

"How do you explain it, then?" she persisted.

"I explain it by saying it is a phenomenon which can not be explained," he evaded cleverly.

"But that doesn't get us anywhere, does it?" she protested vaguely. "Does it—does it explain anything?"

"It does not get us anywhere," he agreed; "but it gets me out of the difficulty very nicely."

"I know a good ghost story myself," said Nevius. "It is a dandy. It will make your blood run cold. Once there was a—"

"I do not believe in telling ghost stories," said Miss Landbury. "There may not be any such thing, and I do not believe there is, but if there should happen to be any, it must annoy them to be talked about."

"You shouldn't say you don't believe in them," said Miss Tucker. "At least not on such a dark night. Some self-respecting ghost may resent it and try to get even with you."

Miss Landbury swallowed convulsively, and put her arm around Carol's waist. The sudden wail of a pack of coyotes wafted in to them, and the girls crouched close together.

"Once there was a man—"

"It is your play, Mr. Barrows," said Miss Landbury. "Let's finish the game. I am ahead, you remember."

"Wait till I finish my story," said Nevius, grinning wickedly. "It is too good to miss, about curdling blood, and clammy hands, and—"

"Mr. Duke, do you think it is religious to talk about ghosts? Doesn't it say something in the Bible about avoiding such things, and fighting shy of spirits and soothsayers and things like that?"

"Yes, it does," agreed Nevius, before David could speak. "That's why I want to tell this story. I think it is my Christian duty. You will sure fight shy of ghosts after you hear this. You won't even have nerve enough to dream about 'em. Once there was a man—"

Carol deliberately removed Miss Landbury's arm from her waist, and climbed up on the bed beside David. Miss Landbury shuffled as close to the bed as propriety would at all admit, and clutched the blanket with desperate fingers. Miss Tucker got a firm grip on one of Carol's hands, and after a hesitating pause, ensconced her elbow snugly against David's Bible lying on the table. Gooding said he felt a draft, and sat on the foot of the cot.

"Once there was a man, and he was in love with two women—oh, yes, Mrs. Duke, it can be done all right. I have done it myself—yes, two at the same time. Ask any man; they can all do it. Oh, women can't. They aren't broad-minded enough. It takes a man,—his heart can hold them all." The girls sniffed, but Nevius would not be side-tracked from his story. "Well, this man loved them both, and they were both worth loving—young, and fair, and wealthy. He loved them distractedly. He loved one because she was soft and sweet and adorable, and he called her Precious. He loved the other because she was talented and brilliant, a queen among women, the center of every throng, and he called her Glory. He loved to kiss the one, and he loved to be proud of the other. They did not know about each other, they lived in different towns. One night the queenly one was giving a toast at a banquet, and the revelers were leaning toward her, drinking in every word of her rich musical voice, marveling at her brilliancy, when suddenly she saw a tiny figure perch on the table in front of her fiancé,—yes, he was fiancéing them both. The little figure on the table had a sweet, round, dimply face, and wooing lips, and loving eyes. The fiancé took her in his arms, and stroked the round pink cheek, and kissed the curls on her forehead. Glory faltered, and tried to brush the mist from before her eyes. She was dreaming,—there was no tiny figure on the table. There could not be. Lover—they both called him Lover; he had a fancy for the name—Lover was gazing up at her with eyes full of pride and admiration. She finished hurriedly and sat down, wiping the moisture from her white brow. 'Such a strange thing, Lover,' she whispered. 'I saw a tiny figure come tripping up to you, and she caressed and

kissed you, and ran her fingers over your lips so childishly and—so adoringly, and—' Lover looked startled. 'What!' he ejaculated. For little Precious had tricks like that. 'Yes, and she had one tiny curl over her left ear, and you kissed it.' 'You saw that?' 'Yes, just now.' She looked at him; he was pale and disturbed. 'Have you ever been married, Lover?' she asked. 'Never,' he denied quickly. But he was strangely silent the rest of the evening. The next morning Glory was ill. When he called, they took him up to her room, and he sat beside her and held her hand. 'Another strange thing happened,' she said. 'The little beauty who kissed you at the banquet came up to my bed, and put her arms around me and caressed and fondled me and said she loved me because I was so beautiful, and her little white arms seemed to choke me, and I struggled for breath and floundered out of bed, and she kissed me and said I was a darling and tripped away, and—I fainted.'"

"Mr. Nevius, that isn't nice," protested Miss Landbury.

"Lover said urgent business called him out of town. He would go to Precious. Glory was getting freakish, queer. Precious never had visions. She was not notionate. She just loved him and was content. So he went to her. She dimpled at him adoringly, and led him out to her bower of roses, and sat on his knee and stroked his eyes with her pink finger tips, and he kissed the little curl over her left ear and thought she was worth a dozen tempestuous Glories. But suddenly she caught her breath and leaned forward. He spoke to her, but she did not hear. Her face was colorless and her white lips were parted fearfully. For she saw a lovely, radiant, queenly woman, magnificently gowned, the center of a throng of people, and Lover was beside her, his face flushed with pride, his eyes shining with admiration. Her fine voice, like music, held every one spellbound. Precious clasped her tiny hands over her rose-bud ears and shivered. She shut her eyes hard and opened them and—what nonsense! There was no queenly lady, there was no loud, clear, ringing voice. But her ears were tingling. She turned to Lover, trembling.

"'How—how—how funny,' she said. 'I saw a radiant woman talking, and she fascinated all the world, and you were with her, adoring her. Her voice was like music, but so loud, too loud; it crashed in my ears, it deafened me.'

"Lover's brows puckered thoughtfully. 'How did she look?' he asked.

"'Tall and white, with crimson lips, and black hair massed high on her head. And her voice was just like music.'

"The next morning Precious was ill. When Lover went to her she clung to him and cried. 'The lovely lady,' she said, 'she came when I was alone, and she said I was a beautiful little doll and she would give me music, music, a world full of music. And her voice was like a bell, and it grew louder and louder, and I thought the world was crashing into the stars, and I screamed and fell on the floor, and when I awoke the music was gone, and—I was so weak and sick.'

"Lover decided to go back to Glory until Precious got over this silly whim. But he had no peace. Glory was constantly tormented by the loving Precious. And when he returned to Precious, the splendor of Glory's voice was with her day and night. He lost his appetite. He could not sleep. So he went off into the woods alone, to fish and hunt a while. But one night as he sat in his tent, he heard a faint, far-off whisper of music,—Glory's voice. It came nearer and nearer, grew louder and louder, until it crashed in his ears like the clamor of worlds banging into stars, as Precious had said. And then he felt a tender caressing finger on his eyes, and soft warm arms encircled his neck, and soft red lips pressed upon his. Closer drew the encircling arms, more breathlessly the red lips pressed his. He struggled for breath, and fought to tear away the dimpled arms. The music of Glory's voice rose into unspeakable tumult, the warm pressure of Precious' arms rendered him powerless. He fell insensible, and two days later they found him,—dead."

There was a brief eloquent silence when Nevius finished his story. The girls shivered.

"A true story?" queried David, smiling.

"A true story," said Nevius decidedly.

"Um-hum. Lover was alone in the woods, wasn't he? How did his friends find out about those midnight spirits that came and killed him?"

The girls brightened. "Yes, of course," chirped Carol. "How did folks find out?"

"Say, be reasonable," begged Nevius. "Spoiling another good story. I say it is a true tale, and I ought to know. I," he shouted triumphantly, "I was Lover."

Hooting laughter greeted him.

"But just the same," contended Barrows, "regardless of the feeble fabrications of senile minds, there are ghosts none the less. The night before we got word of my father's death, my sister woke up in the night and saw a white shadow in her window,—and a voice,—father's voice,—said, 'Stay with me, Flossie; I don't want to be alone.' She told about it at breakfast, and said it was just five minutes to two o'clock. And an hour later we got a message that father had died at two that night, a thousand miles away."

"Honestly?"

"Yes, honestly."

"I knew a woman in Chicago," said Miss Landbury, "and she said the night before her mother died she lay down on the cot to rest, and a white shadow came and hovered over the bed, and she saw in it, like a dream, all the details of her mother's death just as it happened the very next day. She swore it was true."

"Don't talk any more about white shadows," said Carol. "They make me nervous."

"Wouldn't it be ghastly to wake up alone in a little wind-blown canvas tent in the dead of night, and find it shut off from the world by a white shadow, and hear a low voice whisper, 'Come,' and feel yourself drawn slowly into the shadow by invisible clammy fingers—"

"Don't," cried Miss Landbury.

"That's not nice," said Carol.

"Don't scare the girls, Barrows. Carol will sleep under the bed to-night."

"I am with the girls myself," said Gooding. "There isn't any sense getting yourself all worked up talking about spirits and ghosts and things that never happened in the world."

"Oh, they didn't, didn't they? Just the same, when you reach out for a cough-drop and get hold of a bunch of clinging fingers that aren't yours, and are not connected with anybody that belongs there,—well, I for one don't take any chances with ghosts."

A sudden brisk tap on the door drew a startled movement from the men and a frightened cry from the girls. The door opened and the head nurse stood before them.

"Ten-fifteen," she said curtly. "Please go to your cottages at once. Mr. Duke, why don't you send your company home at ten o'clock?"

"Bad manners. Ministers need hospitality more than religion nowadays, they tell us."

"Oh, Miss David," cried Miss Tucker, "won't you go out to my tent with me? I feel so nervous to-night."

"What is the matter?" asked the nurse suspiciously, looking from one to another of the flushed faces and noting the restless hands and the fearful eyes.

"Nothing, nothing at all, but my head aches and I feel lonesome."

The nurse contracted her lips curiously. "Of course I will go," she said.

"Let me come too," said Miss Landbury, rising with alacrity. "I have a headache myself."

Huddled together in an anxious group they set forth, and the nurse, like a good shepherd, led her little flock to shelter. But as she walked back to her room, her brows were knitted curiously.

"What in the world were the silly things talking about?" she wondered.

"David Duke," Carol was informing her husband, as she stood over him, in negligee ready to "hop in," "I shall let the light burn all night, or I shall sleep in the cot with you. I won't run any risk of white shadows sitting on me in the dark."

"Why, Carol—"

"Take your pick, my boy," she interrupted briskly. "The light burns, or I sleep with you."

"This cot is hardly big enough for one," he argued. "And neither of us can

sleep with that bright light burning."

"David," she wailed, "I have looked under the bed three times already, but I know something will get me between the electric switch and the bed."

David laughed at her, but said obligingly, "Well, jump in and cover up your head with a pillow, and get yourself settled, and I will turn off the lights myself."

"It is a sin and a shame and I am a selfish little coward," Carol condemned herself, but just the same she was glad to avail herself of the privilege.

A little later the white colony on the mesa was in darkness. But Carol could not sleep. The blankets over her head lent a semblance of protection, but most distracting visions came to her wide and burning eyes.

"Are you asleep, David?" she would call at frequent intervals, and David's "Yes, sound asleep," gave her momentary comfort.

But finally he was awakened from a light sleep by a soft pressure against his foot. Even David started nervously, and "Ghosts" flashed into his logical and well-ordered brain. But no, it was only the soft and shivering form of his wife, curling herself noiselessly into a ball on the foot of his cot. David watched her, shaking with silent laughter. Surreptitiously she slipped an arm beneath his feet, and circled them in a deadly grip. If the ghosts got her, they would get David's feet, and in her girlish mind ran a half acknowledged belief that the Lord wouldn't let the ghosts get as good a man as David.

Wretchedly uncomfortable as to position, but blissfully assured in her mind, she fell into a doze, from which she was brought violently by a low whisper in the room:

"Mrs. Duke."

"Ooooooooo," moaned Carol, diving deep beneath the covers.

David sat up quickly.

"Who is there?"

"It is I, Miss Landbury," came a frightened whisper. "Can't I stay with you a

while? I can't go to sleep to save me,—and honestly, I am scared to death."

This brought Carol forth, and with warm and sympathetic hospitality she turned back the covers at the foot of the bed and said:

"Yes, come right in."

David nudged her remindingly with his foot. "Since there are two of you to protect each other," he said, laughing, "suppose you go in to Carol's bed, and leave me my cot in peace."

This Carol flatly refused to do. If Miss Landbury was willing to share the foot of David's cot, she was more than welcome. But if she meant to stand on ceremony and go into that awful big black room without a minister, she could go by herself, that was all. Carol lay down decidedly, and considered the subject closed.

"I don't want to sleep," said Miss Landbury unhappily. "I am not sleepy. I just want a place to sit, where I—I won't keep seeing things."

"Turn on the light, Carol," said David. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, both of you."

"That's all right," defended Carol. "You are a preacher, and ghosts don't bother—"

"Don't say ghosts," chattered Miss Landbury.

"Well, what is the plan of procedure?" inquired David patiently. "Are you going to turn my cot into a boarding-house? You girls stay here, and I will go in to Carol's bed. Give me my bath robe, honey, and—"

"Oh, please," gasped Miss Landbury.

"And leave us on this porch with nothing but screen around us?" exclaimed Carol. "I am surprised at you, David."

David turned his face to the wall. "Well, make yourselves comfortable. Good night, girls."

The girls stared at each other in the darkness, helplessly, resignedly. Wasn't that just like a man?

"I tell you what," said Carol hopefully, "let's bring the mattress and the blankets from my bed and put them on the floor here beside David, and we can all sleep nicely right together."

"Oh, that's lovely," cried Miss Landbury. "You are the dearest thing, Mrs. Duke."

Hurriedly, and with bated breath, they raided Carol's bed, tugging the heavy mattress between them, quietly ignoring the shaking of David's cot which spoke so loudly of amusement.

"I'll crawl right in then," said Miss Landbury comfortably.

"I sleep next to David, if you please," said Carol with quiet dignity.

Miss Landbury obediently rolled over, and Carol scrambled in beside her.

"Turn off the light," suggested David.

"Oh, yes, Miss Landbury, turn it off, will you?" said Carol pleasantly.

"Who, me?" came the startled voice. "Indeed I won't."

"David, dearest," pleaded Carol weakly.

"Go on parade in my pajamas, dear?" he questioned promptly.

"Let's both go then," compromised Carol, and she and Miss Landbury, hand in hand, marched like Trojans to the switch in the other room, Carol clicked the button, and then came a wild and inglorious rush back to the mattress on the floor.

"Good night, girls."

"Good night, David."

"Good night, Mr. Duke."

"Good night, Miss Landbury."

"Good night, Mrs. Duke."

Then sweet and blessed silence, which lasted for at least five minutes before there sounded a distinct, persistent rapping on their door.

Carol and Miss Landbury rushed to the protection of each other's arms, and before David had time to call, the door opened, the switch clicked once more, and Gooding, his hair sticking out in every possible direction, his bath robe flapping ungracefully about his knees, confronted them.

"This is a shame," he began ingratiatingly. "I know it. But I've got to have some one to talk to. I can't go to sleep and— Heavens, what's that on the floor?"

"It is I and my friend, Miss Landbury," said Carol quietly. "We are having a slumber party."

"Yes, all party and no slumber," muttered David.

"Well, I am glad I happened in. I was lonesome off there by myself. You know you do get sick of being alone all the time. Shove over, old man, and I'll join the party."

David looked at him in astonishment.

"Nothing doing," he said. "This cot isn't big enough for two. Go in and use Carol's bed if you like."

"It's too far off," objected Gooding. "Be sociable, Duke."

"There isn't any mattress there anyhow," said Carol.

They looked at one another in a quandary.

"Go on back to bed, Gooding," said David, at last. "This is no time for conversation."

Gooding would not hear of it. "Here I am and here I stay," he said with finality. "I've been seeing white shadows and feeling clammy fingers all night."

"Well, what are you going to do? We've got a full house, you can see that."

"Go and get your own mattress and blankets and use them on my bed," urged Carol.

Miss Landbury turned on her side and closed her eyes. She was taken care of, she should worry over Mr. Gooding!

"I don't want to stay in there by myself," said Gooding again. "Isn't there room out here?"

"Do you see any?"

"Well, I'll move in the room with you," volunteered David.

Miss Landbury sat up abruptly.

"We won't stay here without you, David," said Carol.

"I tell you what," said Gooding brightly, "we'll get my mattress and put it in the room for me, and we'll move David's mattress on Carol's bed for David, and then we'll move the girls' mattress in on the floor for them."

No one offered objections to this arrangement. "Hurry up, then, and get your mattress," begged Carol. "I am so sleepy."

"I can't carry them alone through those long dark halls," Gooding insisted. Miss Landbury would not accompany him without a third party, Carol flatly refused to leave dear sick David alone in that porch, and at last in despair David donned his bath robe and the four of them crossed the wide parlor, traversed the dark hall to Gooding's room and returned with mattress, pillows and blankets. After a great deal of panting and pulling, the little party was settled for sleep.

It must have been an hour later when they were startled into sitting posture, their hearts in their throats, by piercing screams which rang out over the mesa, one after another in quick succession.

"David, David, David," gasped Carol.

"I'm right here, Carol; we're all right," he assured her quickly.

Miss Landbury swayed dizzily and fell back, half-conscious, upon the pillows. Gooding, with one bound, landed on David's bed, nearly crushing the breath out of that feeble hero of the darkness.

Lights flashed quickly from tent to tent on the mesa, frightened voices called for nurses, doors slammed, bells rang, and nurses and porters rushed to the rescue.

"Who was it?" "Where was it?" "What is it?"

"Over here, I think," shouted a man. "Miss Tucker. I called to her and she did not answer."

A low indistinct sound, half groan, half sobbing, came from the open windows of the little tent. And as they drew near, their feet rattling the dry sand, there came a warning call.

"A light, a light, a light," begged Miss Tucker. The nurses hesitated, half frightened, and as they paused they heard a low drip, drip, inside the tent, each drop emphasized by Miss Tucker's sobs.

The porter flashed a pocket-light, and they opened the door. Miss Tucker lay in a huddled heap on her bed, her hands over her face, her shoulders rising and falling. The nurses shook her sternly.

"What is the matter with you?" they demanded.

Finally, she was persuaded to lift her face and mumble an explanation. "I was asleep, and I heard my name called, and I looked up. There was a white shadow on the door. I seized my pillow and threw it with all my might, and there was a loud crash and a roar, and then began that drip, drip, drip,—oh-h-h!"

"You silly thing," said Miss Alien. "Of course there was a crash. You knocked the chimney off your lamp,—that made a crash all right. And the lamp upset, and it is the kerosene drip, dripping from the table to the floor. Girls who must have kerosene lamps to heat their curlers must look for trouble."

"The white shadow—" protested the girl.

"Moonshine, of course. Look." Miss Alien pulled the girl to her feet. "The

whole mesa is in white shadow. Run around to the tents, girls," she said to her assistants, "and tell them Miss Tucker had a bad dream,—nothing wrong. We will have a dozen bed patients from this night's foolishness."

Miss Tucker refused to be left alone and a nurse was detailed to spend the night with her.

When the nurses on their rounds reached Miss Landbury's room in the McCormick Building, they had another fright. The room was empty. The bed was cold,—had not been occupied for hours, likely. They rushed to the head nurse, and a wild search was instituted.

The Dukes' room, Number Six, McCormick, was wrapped in darkness.

"Don't go near them," Miss Alien said. "Perhaps they did not hear the noise, and Mr. Duke should not be disturbed."

So the wild search went on.

But after a time, a Mexican porter, with a lantern, seeking every nook and corner, plodded stealthily around a corner of the McCormick.

He heard a gasp beside him, and turning his lantern he looked directly into the window, where four white, tense faces peered at him with staring eyes. He returned their stare, speechlessly. Then he saw Miss Landbury.

"Ain't you lost?" he ejaculated.

Miss Landbury, frightened out of her senses, and not recognizing the porter in the darkness, shot into her bed on the floor, and David answered the man's questions. A moment later an outraged matron, flanked by two nurses, marched in upon them.

"What is the meaning of this?" they demanded.

"Search me," said David pleasantly. "Our friends and neighbors got lonesome in the night and refused to sleep alone and let us rest in contentment. So they moved in, and here we are."

Both Gooding and Miss Landbury positively declined to go home alone, and

other nurses were appointed to guard them during the brief remaining hours of the night. At four o'clock came sleep and silence and serenity, with Carol on the floor, clutching David's hand, which even in sleep she did not resign.

The next morning a huge notice was posted on the bulletin board.

"Any one who tells a ghost story, or discusses departed spirits, in this institution or on the grounds thereof, shall have all privileges suspended for a period of six weeks.

"By order of the Superintendent."

CHAPTER XVII

RUBBING ELBOWS

"Chicago, Illinois.

"Dearly Beloveds:

"Nearly I am converted to matrimony as a life career. Almost I feel it is worth the sacrifice of independence, the death of originality, the banishment of special friendship, and the monotonous bondage of rigid routine.

"I have just come back from Mount Mark, where I had my second visit with little Julia. She is worth the giving up of anything, and the enduring of everything. She is marvelous.

"When I first saw her, just after Aunt Grace brought her home,—I think I told you that I went without a new pair of lovely gray shoes at ten dollars a pair in order to go to Mount Mark to meet her,—she was very sweet, and all that, but when they are so rosily new they are more like scientific curiosities than literary inspirations. But I have met her again, and I am everlastingly converted to the domestic enslavement of women. One little Julia is worth it. So as soon as I find the husband, I am going to cultivate my eleven children. You remember that was

the career I picked out in the days of my tender youth.

"Her face is big and round and white, and her eyes are bluer than any summer sky the poets could rave about. Her lips are the original Cupid's bow,—in fact, Julia's lips have about convinced me that Cupid must have been a woman, certainly he could ask no more deadly weapon for shattering the hearts of men. Her hair is comical. It is yellow gold, but it sticks straight out in every direction. It is the most aggravatingly, irresistibly defiant hair you ever saw in your life. It makes you kiss it, and brush it, and soak it in water, and shake Julia for having it, and then fall in love with her all over again.

"She is just beginning to talk. When I arrived the whole family was assembled to do me honor, Prudence and Fairy, Lark and all the babies. Julia seemed to resent her temporary eclipse in the limelight. She crowed in a compelling way, and when I advanced to bow reverently before her, she pointed a fat, accusing finger at me, and said, 'Who is 'at?' Her very first word,—and no presidential message ever provoked half the storm of approval her little phrase called forth. We laughed, and kissed each other, and begged her to say it again, and Prudence said 'Oh, if Carol could have heard that,' and then we all rushed off and cried and scolded each other for being so silly, and Julia screamed. Oh, it was a formal afternoon reception all right.

"And I am putting a little three-line ad in the morning *Tribune*. 'Young, accomplished, attractive lady without means, of strong domestic tendencies, desires a husband, eugenic, rich, good looking. Object matrimony.'

"Of course I know that I repeat myself. But if you don't say 'Object matrimony,' some men wouldn't catch the point.

"And so you are out of the San and keeping house again. A brand-new honeymoon, of course, and cooing doves, and chiming bells, and all the rest of it. When the rest of us back here write to each other, we say at the end, 'Carol is well and David is better.' It conveys the idea of a Thanksgiving service and a hallelujah chorus. It means Good night, God bless you, and Merry Christmas, all in one.

"By the way, do you remember William Canfield Brewer, the original advertiser who got moved out when I moved in? Well, between you and me, almost for a while I did begin to see some charms in matrimony. He came again,

and was properly introduced. And took me for a drive,—it seems he had just collected his salary,—and he came again, and we went to the park, and he came again. And that was when I began to see the halo around the wedding bells. One night he was telling me his experiences in saving money,—uproariously funny, my dear, for he never could save more than five dollars a month, and ran in debt fifteen dollars to encompass it. He said:

"My wife used to say it was harder work for me to carry my salary home from the office than to earn it right at the start."

"I laughed,—I thought of course it was a joke. I guess the laugh was revealing, for he turned around suddenly and said:

"You knew I was married, didn't you, Connie?" First time he ever called me Connie.

"Well, the halo vanished like a flash and hasn't got back yet.

"I said, 'No, I didn't know it.'

"Why, everybody knows it,' he expostulated.

"I did not."

"We are devoted to each other,' he said, laughing lightly, 'but we find our devotion wears better at long distance. So she lives wherever I do not, and we get along like birdies in their little nest. I haven't seen her for two years.'

"Then he went on with his financial experiences, evidently calling the subject closed.

"When he started home, he said, 'Well, what shall we do Sunday?'

"Nothing, together. You are married."

"Well, I don't get any fun out of it, do I?'

"No, maybe not. But I have a hunch I won't get much fun out of it, either."

"I forgot about the parsonage.' He considered a moment. 'All right, I'll hunt

her up and have her get a divorce,' he volunteered cheerfully.

"He was very puzzled and perplexed when I vetoed that. He says I can't have the true artistic temperament, I am so ghastly religious. At any rate, I have not seen him since, and have not answered his notes. Now, don't weep over me, Carol, and think my young affections were trifled with. They weren't—because they didn't have time. But I am not taking any chances.

"Henceforth I get my sentiment second hand.

"The girl at our table, Emily Jarvis, who is a spherist, attributes all the good fortune that has come to you and David to the fact that at heart you are in harmony with the spheres. You don't know what a spherist is, and neither do I. But it includes a lot of musical terms, and metaphors, and is something like Christian Science and New Thought, only more so. Spherists believe in a life of harmony, and somehow or other they get the spheres back of it, and believe in immaterial matter, and that all physical manifestations are negative, and the only positive, or affirmative, is 'harmony.'

"Emily is very, very pretty, and that sort of excuses her for digging into the intricacies of spheral harmonies. Even such unmitigated nonsense as sphere control, spirit harmony, and mental submission, assumes a semblance of dignity when expounded by her cherry-red lips. She speaks vacuously of being under world-dominance, and has absolutely no physical consciousness. She says so herself. If she ignores her tempting curves and matchless softness, she is the only one in the house who does. In fact, it is only the attraction of her very physical being, which she denies, that lends a species of sense to her harmonious converse. She and I are great friends. She says I am a harmonizer on the inside.

"She is engaged to a man across the hall, Rodney Carter. She has the room next to mine. His voice is deep and carrying, hers is clear and ringing, and the walls are thin. So I have benefited by most of their courtship. But the course of true love, you know. She has tried spiritually and harmoniously to convert him to immaterialism, but Rodney is very conscious of his physical, muscular, material being, and he hoots at her derisively, but tenderly.

"'Oh, cut it out, Emily,' he said, one evening. 'We can only afford one spirit in the family. One of us has got to earn a living. Spirits, it seems, require plenty of steak and potatoes to keep them in harmony. I could not conscientiously lead you

to the altar, even a spheral altar, if I were not prepared to pay house rent and coal bills. One's enough, you can be our luxury.'

"'But, Rod, if you are in harmony you can earn our living so much more easily. You must get above this notion of material necessities. There are no such things.'

"'I don't believe it,' he interrupted coldly. 'There are material necessities. You are one of them. The most necessary in the world. You may be harmonious, but you are material, too. That is why I love you. I couldn't be crazy about a melodious breath of air ghosting around the back yard. And I am not strong for disembodied minds, either. They make me nervous. They sound like skulls and cross-bones, and whitening skeletons to me. I love you, your arms, your face, all of you. It may not be proper to talk about it, but I love it. Can you imagine our minds embracing each other, thrilling at the contact,—oh, it's tommyrot. A fool —'

"'It may be tommyrot to you, Rod,' said Emily haughtily. 'But the inspiration of the matchless minds of the mystic men of the Orient—'

"'Inspiration of idiocy. What do mystic men of the Orient know about warm-blooded Americans, dead in love? I might kiss the air until I was blue in the face, —nothing to it,—but let me kiss you, and we are both aquiver, and—'

"'Rodney Carter, don't you dare say such things,' she cried furiously. 'It is insulting. Besides it has nothing to do with it. It isn't so anyhow. And what is more—'

"'There's nothing mysterious about us. Let the old Chinesers pad around in their bare feet and naked souls if they want to. We are children of light, we are, creatures of earth, earthly. We're—'

"'Oh, I can't argue with you, Rod,' she began confusedly.

"'I don't want you to. Kiss me. One kiss, Emily mine, will confound the whole united order of Maudlin Mystics. I am willing to risk all the anathemas contained in an inharmonious sphere for one touch of your lips. Go ahead with your sacred doctrine of universal and spiritual imbecility, but soften its harshness with worldly, physical, sin-suggesting kisses, and I am in tune with the infinite.'

"Then Emily broke the engagement, and Rodney, after relieving himself of more heretical opinions of spiritual simplicity and mystic madness, stalked unmelodiously away, slamming her door, and his own after it.

"What I didn't hear of it myself, Emily told me afterward, for we are very confidential.

"The whole house was intensely interested in the dénouement. Rodney sat stolidly at his table, crunching his food, gazing reproachfully and adoringly at Emily's proudly lifted head. Emily, for all her unconsciousness of physical necessity, lost her appetite, and grew pale. The mental and physical may have nothing in harmony, as she says, but certainly her mental upheaval resulting from the lack of Rodney's demonstrations of love, affected her physical appetite as well as her complexion.

"When Rodney met Emily in the halls, he made her life miserable.

"'Good morning, Long Sin Coo.' 'Hello, Ghostie.' 'Hey, Spirit, may I borrow a nip of brandy to make an ethereal cocktail for my imaginary nightcap?'

"And he opened his transom and took to talking to himself out loud. So Emily decided to close her transom. It stuck. She asked my assistance, and we balanced a chair on a box and I held it steady while she got up to oil the transom. But first she would lose her balance, then she would drop the oil can, then the box would slip. She couldn't reach the joints, or whatever you call them, and when she stood on tiptoe she lost her balance. Then she got her finger in the joint and pinched it, emitting a most material squeal as she did so. Happening to glance through the transom, she saw Rodney standing below in the hall, grinning at her with inharmonious, unspiritual, unsentimental glee, and she tugged viciously at the transom, banging herself off the box, upsetting the chair, and squirting oil all over me as she fell.

"Rodney rushed to the rescue, but Emily was already scrambling into sitting posture, scared, bruised and furious. She had torn her dress, twisted her ankle, bumped her head and scratched her face. And Rodney had seen it.

"Ignoring me, Rodney sat down on the box and looked her over with cold professional eyes.

"'My little seeker after truth,' he said, 'you are a mystic combination of spirit

and mind. You are in tune with the infinite spheres. You are a breath in a universal breeze. Therefore you feel no inconvenience. Get up, my child, and waltz an Oriental hesitation down the hall and convince yourself everlastingly that you are in truth only a mysterious unit in a universe of harmonic chords.'

"Emily dropped her head on the oil can, lifted up her voice and wept. And Rodney, with an exclamation that a minister's daughter can not repeat, took the unhappy mystic into his arms.

"'Sweetheart, forgive me. I am a brute, I know. Knock me on the head with the oil can, won't you? Don't cry, sweetheart,—Emily, don't.'

"Finally Emily spoke. 'You are as mean and hateful as you can be, Rodney Carter,' she said, burrowing more deeply into his shoulder. 'And I despise you. And I am going to marry you, too, just to get even with you. Give me back my engagement ring.' Rodney ecstatically did. The touch of her lovely, material body must have thrilled him, for he kissed her all over the top of the head, her face being hidden.

"I stood my ground. I was looking for literary material since I never have a chance to make romance for myself. Emily spoke again.

"'I know now that the Vast Infinite intends us for each other. I have been dwelling in Perfect Harmony the last four days, trusting the All Perfection to bring us together again. So I know that our union was decreed from the foundation by the Universal sphere. I tell you, Rod, you can't get ahead of the Infinite.'

"Then I went to my own room, and they never knew when I left,—they didn't even remember I had been there. But as I came back from answering the phone at eleven o'clock, I met Rod in the hall. He had some books in his hand. He ducked them behind him when he saw me. I reached for them sternly, and he pulled them out rather sheepishly. I read the titles, 'Spheral Mentality,' 'Infinite Spheres,' 'Spheral Harmony.'

"'Made me promise to read 'em, too,' he confided in a whisper. 'And by George, she is worth it.'

"Oh, I tell you, Carol, these boarding-houses are chuck full of literary material. Really, I am developing. I know it. I feel it every day. I rub elbows with

every one I meet, and I like it. I don't care if they aren't 'My Kind' at all. I am learning to reach down to the same old human nature back of all the different kinds. Isn't that growth?

"You asked about the millionaire's son. He still comes to see me every once in a while. He says he can't promise to let me spend all of his millions for missions if I marry him,—says he has too much fun spending them on himself,—but he insists that I may do whatever I like with him. Isn't it too bad I can't feel called upon to take him in hand?

"Anyhow, if I had a million dollars do you know what I would do? Buy an orphans' home, and dump 'em all in a big ship and go sailing, sailing over the bounding main. I'd kidnap Julia and take her along.

"He was here last week, and sent his love to you, and best wishes to David. He told me to ask particularly how your complexion gets along out in the sunny mesa land.

"I want to see you. I am saving up my pennies religiously, and when they have multiplied sufficiently I am coming. Thanks for the invitation.

"Lovingly as always,

"Connie."

CHAPTER XVIII

QUIESCENT

Long but not dreary weeks followed one after the other. In the little 'dobe cottage, situated far up the hill on the mesa, Carol and David lived a life of passionless routine. Carol was busy, hence she had the easier part. David's breakfast on a tray at seven, nourishment at nine, luncheon at twelve, nourishment at three, dinner at six, nourishment at nine,—with medicines to be administered, temperatures to be taken, alcohol rubs to be given at frequent

intervals,—this was Carol's day. And at odd hours the house must be kept clean and sanitary, dishes washed, letters written. And whenever the moment came, David was waiting for her to come and read aloud to him.

When a man of action, of energy, of boundless enthusiasm is tossed aside, strapped with iron bands to a little white cot on a screened porch with a view of a sunburned mesa reaching off to the mountains, unless he is of the biggest, and finest, his personality can not survive. David's did. Months of helplessness lay behind him, a life of inaction lay before him. He could walk a half block or so, he could go driving with kind neighbors who invited him, but every avenue of service was closed, every form of expression denied him. He had hoped to live a full, good, glowing life. And there he lay.

It is not work which tells the caliber of man, but idleness.

Month followed month, now there were bitter winds and blinding snows, now the hot sun scorched the yellow sand of the mesa, now the mountains were high white clouds of snow, now the fields of green alfalfa showed on a few distant foothills, and the canyons were green with pines. Otherwise there was no change.

But the summers in New Mexico were crushingly, killingly hot, and so the sturdy-hearted health chasers left the 'dobe cottage, packed their few possessions and moved up into Colorado. And while David waited patiently in the hotel, Carol set forth alone and found a small cottage with sleeping porch, cleanly and nicely furnished, rent reasonable, no objections to health seekers. And she and David moved into their new home.

And the old life of Albuquerque began again, meals, nourishments and medicines alternating through the days.

In the summer of the third year, Carol wrote to Connie:

"Haven't you been saving up long enough? We do so want to see you, and Colorado is beautiful. We haven't the long mesa stretching up to the sunny slopes as it was in New Mexico, but from our tiny cottage we can look right over the city to the mountains on the other side, and the sunny slopes are there. So please count your pennies. They give summer rates you know."

Connie went down to Mount Mark the night she received that letter, spending half the night in the train, and talked it over with the family. Without a dissenting voice, they said she ought to go. Ten days later, Carol and David were exulting over Connie's letter.

"Yes, thank you, I am coming. In fact, I was only waiting for the word from you. So I shall start on Monday next, C., B. & Q., reaching Denver Tuesday afternoon at 2:30. Be sure and meet me.

"I nearly lost my job, too. I went to Mr. Carver and said I wanted a vacation. He said 'All right, when and how long?' I said, 'Beginning next Monday.' He nodded. 'To continue six weeks.' He nearly died. He asked what kind of an institution for the feeble-minded I thought this was. I said I hadn't solved it yet. He reminded me that I have already had one week's vacation, and three days on two different occasions. He said he hired people to work, not to visit their relatives at his expense. He said I had one week of vacation coming. And I interrupted to say I didn't expect any salary during that time, I just wanted him to hold my position for me. He said he was astonished I didn't ask him to discontinue publication during my absence. Finally he said I might have one week on full pay, and one week without pay, and that was enough for a senator.

"So I went to my machine and wrote out a very literary resignation which I handed to him. I know the business now, and I have met a lot of publishers, so I was safe in resigning. I knew I could get another position in three days. He tore the resignation up, and said he wished I could outgrow my childishness.

"Before luncheon, he said he had a good idea. We were away behind in clippings for filling and he suggested that I take a big bundle of exchanges with me, and clip while I vacated. Also I could doubtless find the time to write a thousand or so words a week and send it in, and then I might go on full pay for six weeks. Figuratively I fell upon his neck and kissed him,—purely figuratively, for his wife has a most annoying way of dropping in at unexpected hours,—and I am getting the most charming new clothes made up, so David will think I am prettier than you. Now don't withdraw the invitation, for I shall come anyhow."

Carol considered herself well schooled in the art of emotional restraint, but when she finished reading those blessed words—which to her ears, so hungry for the voices of home, sounded like an extract from the beatitudes—she put her head on the back of David's hand and gulped audibly. And she admitted that she must certainly have cried, save for the restraining influence of the knowledge that crying made her nose red.

In the meantime, back in Iowa, the Starrs in their separate households, were running riot. Never was there to be such a wonderful visit for anybody in the world. Jerry and Prudence bundled up their family, and got into a Harmer Six and drove down to Mount Mark, where they ensconced themselves in the family home and announced their intention of staying until Connie had gone. As soon as Fairy heard that, she hastened home too, full of the glad tidings that she had found a boy she wanted to adopt at last. Lark and Jim neglected the farm shamefully, and all the women of the neighborhood were busy making endless little odds and ends of dainty clothing for Carol, who had lived ready-made during the three years of their domicile in the shadowland of sunshine.

A hurried letter was despatched to David's doctor, asking endless questions, pledging him to secrecy, and urging him to wire an answer C. O. D. Little Julia was instructed as to her mother's charms and her father's virtues far beyond the point of her comprehension. And Jerry spent long hours with Connie in the car, explaining its mechanism, and making her a really proficient driver, although she had been very skilful behind the wheel before. Also, he wrote long letters to his dealer in Denver, giving him such a host of minute instructions that the bewildered agent thought the "old gent in Des Moines had gone daft."

Carol wrote every day, pitifully, jubilantly, begging Connie to hurry and get started, admonishing her to take a complete line of snapshots of every separate Starr, to count each additional gray hair in darling father's head, and to locate every separate dimple in Julia's fat little body. And every letter was answered by every one of the family, who interrupted themselves to urge everybody else not to give anything away, and to be careful what they said. And they all cried over Julia, and over Carol's letters, and even cried over the beautiful assortment of clothes they had accumulated for Carol, using Lark as a sewing model.

Twenty minutes after the train left Mount Mark, came a telegram from Carol: "Did she get off all right? Did anything happen? Wire immediately." And the whole family rushed off to separate rooms to weep all over again.

But Aunt Grace walked slowly about the house, gathering up blocks, and headless dolls, and tailless dogs, and laying them carefully away in a drawer until little Julia should return to visit the family in Mount Mark.

For the doctor had said it was all right to restore the baby to her heart-hungering parents in the mountain land. Carol was fairly strong, David was fairly well. The baby being healthy, and the parents being sanitary, the danger to its tiny lungs was minimized,—and by all means send them the baby.

So Julia was arrayed in matchless garments destined to charm the eyes of the parents, who, in their happiness, would never realize it had any clothes on at all, and Connie set out upon her journey with the little girl in her charge.

On Tuesday morning, Carol was a mental wreck. She forgot to salt David's eggs, and gave him codeine for his cough instead of tonic tablets for his appetite. She put no soda in the hot cakes, and made his egg-nog of buttermilk. She laughed out loud when David was asking the blessing, and when he wondered how tall Julia was she burst out crying, and then broke two glasses in her energetic haste to cover up the emotional outbreak. Altogether it was a most trying morning. She was ready to meet the train exactly two hours and a half before it was due, and she combed David's hair three times, and whenever she couldn't sit still another minute she got up and dusted the railing around the porch, brushed off his lounging jacket, and rearranged the roses in the vase on his table.

"David, I honestly believe I was homesick. I didn't know it before. I got along all right before I knew she was coming, but now I want to jump up and down and shout. Why on earth didn't she take an earlier train and save me this agony?"

At last, in self-defense, David insisted that she should start, and, too impatient to wait for cars and to endure their stopping at every corner, she walked the two miles to the station, arriving breathless, perspiring and flushed. Even then she was thirty minutes ahead of time, but finally the announcer called the train, and Carol stationed herself at the exit close to the gate to watch the long line of travelers coming up from the subway. No one noticed the slender woman standing so motionless in the front of the waiting line, but the angels in Heaven must have marked the tumult throbbing in her heart, and the happiness stinging in her bright eyes.

Then—she leaned forward. That was Connie of course,—she caught her breath, and tears started to her eyes. Yes, that was Connie, that tall slim girl with the shining face,—and oh, kind and merciful Providence, that must be her own little Julia trudging along beside her, the fat white face turning eagerly from side to side, confident she was going to know that mother on sight, just because they had told her a mother was what most belonged to her.

Carol twisted her hands together, wringing her gloves into a shred. She moistened her dry lips, and blinked desperately to crowd away those tears. Yes, it was Connie, the little baby sister she used to tease so mercilessly, and Julia, the little rosebud baby she had wanted so many nights. She could not bear to let those ugly tears dim her sight for one minute, she dare not miss one second of that feast to her hungering eyes.

The two sisters who had not seen each other for nearly four years, looked into each other's faces, Carol's so pleadingly hungry for the vision of one of her own, Connie's so strongly sweet and reassuring. Instinctively the others drew away, and the little group, the red-capped attendant trailing in the rear, stood alone.

"Julia, this is your mama," said Connie, and the wide blue eyes were lifted wonderingly into those other wide blue eyes so like them,—the mother eyes that little Julia had never known. Carol, with an inarticulate sob dropped on her knees and gathered her baby into her arms.

Carol, with an inarticulate sob, gathered her baby in her arms.

[Illustration: Carol, with an inarticulate sob, gathered her baby in her arms.]

Julia, who had been told it was to be a time of laughter, or rejoicing, of utter gaiety, marveled at the pain in the face of this mother and patted away the tears with chubby hands, laughing with excitement. By the time Carol could be drawn from her wild caressing of the rosebud baby, she was practically helpless. It was Connie who marshaled them outside, tipped the red-capped attendant, waved a hand to the driver waiting across the street, directed him about the baggage, and saw to getting Carol inside and seated.

Only once Carol came back to earth, "Mercy, Connie, taxis cost a fortune out here."

"This isn't a taxi," said Connie, "it is just a car."

But Carol did not even hear her answer, for Julia, enchanted at being so lavishly enthroned in the attention of any one, lifted her lips for another noisy kiss, and Carol was deaf to the rest of the world.

Her one idea now was to get this precious, wonderful, matchless creature home to David as quickly as possible.

"Hurry, hurry," she begged. "Make him go faster, Connie."

"He can't," said Connie, laughing. "Do you want to get us pinched for speeding the first thing?"

And Julia, catching the word, immediately pinched both her auntie and her mama, to show them she knew what they were talking about. And Carol was stricken dumb at the wonderful, unbelievable cleverness of this remarkable infant.

When the car stopped before her cottage, she forgot her manners as hostess, she forgot the baggage, and the driver, and even sister Connie. She just grabbed Julia in her arms and rushed into the cottage, back through the kitchen to the sleeping porch in the rear, and stood gloating over her husband.

"Look, look, look," she chanted. "It is Julia, she is ours, she is here." David sat up in bed, his breath coming quickly.

Carol, like a goddess of plenty dispensing royal favors, dumped the smiling child on the bed and David promptly seized her.

By this time Connie had made her arrangements with the driver, and escorted herself calmly into the house, trailing the family to the porch, gently readjusting Julia who was nearly turned upside down by the fervor of her papa and mama, and informed David that she wanted to shake hands. Thus recalled, David did shake hands, and looked pleased when she commented on how well he was looking. But in her heart, Connie, the young, untouched by sorrow, alive with the passion for work, was crying out in resentment. Big, buoyant, active David reduced to this. Carol, radiant, glowing, gleaming Carol,—this subdued gentle woman with the thin face and dark circles beneath her eyes. "Oh, it is wrong," thought Connie,—though she still smiled, for hearts are marvelous creations, holding such sorrow, and hiding it well.

When their wraps were removed, Julia sat on David's table, with David's hand squeezing her knees, and Carol clutching her feet, and with Connie, big and bright, sitting back and watching quietly, and telling them startling and imaginary tales of the horrors she had encountered on the train. David was entranced, and Carol was enchanted. This was their baby, this brilliant, talented, beautiful little fairy,—and Carol alternately nudged David's arm and tapped his shoulder to remind him of the dignity of his fatherhood.

But in one little hour, she remembered that after all, David was her job, and even crows, charming little Julia must not crowd him aside, and she hastened to prepare the endless egg-nog. Then from the kitchen window she saw the auto, still standing before their door.

"Oh, my gracious!" she gasped. "We forgot that driver."

She got her purse and hurried outside, but the driver was gone, and only the car remained. Carol was too ignorant of motor-cars to observe that it was a Harmer Six, she only wondered how on earth he could go off and forget his car. She carried the puzzle to David, and he could not solve it.

"Are you able to walk at all, David?" asked Connie.

"Yes, indeed," he said, sitting up proudly, "I can walk half a block if there are no steps to climb."

"Come out in front and we'll investigate," she suggested.

When they reached the car, and it took time for David walked but slowly, he promptly looked at the name plate.

"Harmer Six," he read. "Why this is Jerry's kind of car."

"Yes, it is his kind," explained Connie. "He and Prudence sent this one out for you and Carol and Julia. They have just established an agency here, and he has made arrangements with the dealer to take entire care of it for you, sending it up when you want it, calling for it when you are through, keeping it in repair, and providing gas and oil,—and the bill goes to Jerry in Des Moines."

One would have thought enough happiness had come to the health seekers for one day. Carol would have sworn she could not possibly be one little bit gladder than she had been before, with David sick, of course. And now came this! How David would love it. She looked at her husband, happily pottering around the engine, turning bolts and buttons as men will do, and she looked at Julia, proudly viewing her own physical beauties in the shining body of the car, and she looked at Connie with the charm and glory of the parsonage life clinging about her like a halo. Then she turned and walked into the house without a word. Understandingly, David and Connie allowed her to pass inside without comment.

"Connie," said David when they were alone, "I believe God will give you a whole chest of stars for your crown for the sweetness that brought you out here. Carol was sick for something of home. I wanted her to go back for a visit but she would not leave me. But she was sick. She needed some outside life. I can give her nothing, I take my life from her. And she needed fresh inspiration, and you have brought it." David was silent a moment. "Connie, whenever things do get shadowy for us, the clouds are pulled back so we may see the sun shining on the slopes more brilliantly than ever."

Turning quickly she followed his gaze, and a softness came into her eyes as she looked. Truly the darkness of the canyons seemed only to emphasize the brightness of the ridges above them.

She laid her hand on David's arm, that strong, shapely, capable hand, and

whispered, "David, if I might have what you and Carol have, if I could be happy in the way that you are, I think I should be willing to lose the sunshine on the slopes and dwell entirely in the darkness of the canyons. But I haven't got it, I don't know how to get it." Then she added slowly, "But I suppose, having what you two have, one could not lose the sunshine on the slopes."

CHAPTER XIX

RE-CREATION

Were you ever wakened in the early morning by the clear whistle of a meadow-lark over your head, with the rich scent of the mountain pines coming to you on the pure light air of a new day, with the sun wrapping the earth in misty blue, and staining the mountains with rose? To David, lying on his cot in the open air, every dawning morning was a new creation, a brand new promise of hope. To be sure, the enchantment was like to be broken in a moment, still the call of the morning had fired his blood, and given him a new impetus,—impetus, not for work, not for ambition, not for activity, just an impetus to lie quietly on his cot and be happy.

The birds were shortly rivaled by the sweeter, dearer, not less heavenly voice of little Julia, calling an imaginary dog, counting her mother's eyes, or singing to herself an original improvise upon the exalted subject of two brown bugs. And a moment later, came the sound of rapturous kissing, and Carol was awake. And before the smile of content left his face, she stood in the doorway, her face flushed with sleep, her hair tumbling about her face, a warm bath robe drawn about her. Always her greeting was the same.

"Good morning, David. Another glorious day, isn't it?"

Then Julia came splashing out in Aunt Connie's new rose-colored boudoir slippers, with Connie in hot barefooted pursuit. And the new day had begun, the riotous, delirious day, with Julia at the helm.

Connie had amusing merry tales to tell of her work, and her friends, and the

family back home. And time had to be crowded a little to make room for long drives in the Harmer Six. Carol promptly learned to drive it herself, and David, tentatively at first, talked of trying his own hand on it. And finally he did, and took a boyish satisfaction in his ability to manipulate the gears. Oh, perhaps it made him a little more short of breath, and he found that his nerves were more highly keyed than in the old time days,—anyhow he came home tired, hungry, ready to sleep.

Even the occasional windy or cloudy days, when the Harmer Six was left wickedly wasting in the garage, had their attractions. How the girls did talk! Sometimes, when they had finished the dishes, Carol, intent on Connie's story, stood patiently rubbing the dish pan a hundred, a thousand times, until David would call pleadingly, "Girls, come out here and talk." Then, recalled in a flash, they rushed out to him, afraid the endless chatter would tire him, but happy that he liked to hear it.

"Speaking of lovers," Connie would begin brightly,—for like so many of the very charming girls who see no charm in matrimony, most of Connie's conversation dealt with that very subject. And it was what her auditors liked best of all to hear. Why, sometimes Carol would interrupt right in the middle of some account of her success on the papers, to ask if a certain man was married, or young, or good looking. After all, getting married was the thing. And Connie was not sufficiently enthusiastic about that. Writing stories was very well, and poems and books had their place no doubt, but Shakespeare himself never turned out a masterpiece to compare with Julia sitting plump and happy in the puddle of mud to the left of the kitchen door, her round pink face streaked and stained and grimy.

"I really did decide to get married once," Connie began confidentially, when they were comfortably settled on the porch by David's cot. "It was when I was in Mount Mark one time. Julia was so sweet I thought I could not possibly wait another minute. I kept thinking over the men in my mind, and finally I decided to apply my business training to the problem. Do you remember Dan Brooks?"

Carol nodded instantly. She remembered all the family beaux from the very beginning. "A doctor now, isn't he? Lives next door to the folks in Mount Mark. I used to think you would marry him, Connie. He is well off, and nice, too. And a doctor is very dignified."

Connie agreed warmly, and David laughed. All the Starrs had been so sensible in discussing the proper qualifications for lovers, and all had impulsively married whenever the heart dictated.

"Yes, that's Dan. Did you ever notice that cluster of lilac bushes outside our dining-room window? Maybe you used it in your own beau days. It is a lovely place to sit, very effective, for Dan's study overlooks it from the up-stairs, and their dining-room from down-stairs. So whenever I want to lure Dan I sit under the lilacs. He can't miss me.

"One day I planted myself out there with a little red note-book and the telephone directory. Dan and his mother were eating luncheon. I was absorbed in my work, but just the same I had a wary eye on Dan. He shoved back his chair, and got up. Then he kissed his mother lightly and came out the side door, whistling. I looked up, closed the directory, snapped the lock on my note-book, and took the pencil out of my mouth. I said, 'Hello, Danny.' Then I shoved the books behind me.

"Hello, Connie.—No, I wouldn't invite Fred Arnold if I were you. It would just encourage him to try, try again, and it would mean an additional wound in the heart for him. Leave him out.'

"I frowned at him. 'I am not doing a party,' I said coldly.

"No? Then why the directory? You are not reading it for amusement, are you? You are not—'

"Never mind, Dan. It is my directory, and if I wish to look up my friends—'

"Look up your friends!' Dan was plainly puzzled. 'None of my business, of course, but it is a queer notion. And why the tablet? Are you taking notes?' He reached for the notebook with the easy familiarity that people use when they have known you all your life. I shoved it away and flushed a little. I can flush at a second's notice, Carol. It is very effective in a crisis. I'll teach you, if you like. It only requires a little imagination."

Carol hugged her knees and beamed at Connie. "Go on," she begged. "How did it turn out?"

"Well,' he said, 'you must be writing a book. Are you looking up heroes?"

Mount Mark isn't tremendously rich in hero material. But here am I, tall, handsome, courageous.'

"I sniffed, then I smiled, then I giggled. 'Yes,' I agreed, 'I was looking up heroes, but not for a book.'

""What for then?'

""For me.'

""For you?'

""Yes, for me. I want a hero of my own. Dan,' I said in an earnest impressive manner, 'you may think this is very queer, and not very modest, but I need a confidant, and Aunt Grace would think I am crazy. Cross your heart you'll never tell?'

"Dan obediently crossed, and I drew out the books.

""I am going to get married.'

"Dan pulled his long members together with a jerk and sat up. He was speechless.

"I nodded affirmatively. 'Yes. Does it surprise you?'

""Who to?' he demanded furiously and ungrammatically.

""I haven't just decided,' I vouchsafed reluctantly.

""You haven't—great Scott, are they coming around in droves like that?' He glanced down the street as if he expected to see a galaxy of admirers heaving into view. 'I knew there were a few hanging around, but there aren't many fellows in Mount Mark.'

""No, not many, and they aren't coming in droves. I am going after them.'

"Having known me almost since my toothless days, Dan knew he could only wait.

""I am getting pretty old, you know.'

"He looked at me critically and gave my age a smile.

"I am very much in favor of marriage, and families, and such things. I want one myself. And if I don't hurry up, I'll have to adopt it. There's an age limit, you know."

"Age limit,' he exploded.

"I think I shall have a winter wedding, a white one, along in January. Not in December, it might interfere with my Christmas presents.'

"Connie—'

"I am going to be very systematic about it. In this note-book I am making a list of all the nice Mount Markers. I couldn't think of any myself right offhand, so I had to resort to the directory. Now I shall go through the list and grade them. Some are black-marked right at the start. Those that sound reasonable, I shall try out. The one that makes good, I shall marry. I've got to hurry, too. My vacation only lasts a week, and I have to work on my trousseau a little. It's lots of fun. I am perfectly fascinated with it.'

"Dan had nothing to say. He looked at me with that blankness of incomprehension that must be maddening in a man after you are married to him."

Carol squeezed David's hand and gurgled rapturously. This was her great delight, to get Connie talking, so cleverly, of her variegated and cosmopolitan love-affairs.

"I suppose you are surprised,' I said kindly, 'and naturally you think it rather queer. You mustn't let any one know. Mount Mark could never comprehend such modernity. I feel very advanced, myself. I want to spring up and shout, "Votes for Women" or "Up with the Red Flag," or "Villa Forever," or something else outspoken and bloody."

Carol and David shook with laughter, silently, not to interrupt the story.

"How about love, Connie?" suggested Dan, meekly.

"I believe in love, absolutely. That is my strongest point. As soon as I find a

champion, I am going to concentrate all my energy and all my talent on falling dead in love with him.'

"Have you found any eligibles yet?'

"Yes, Harvey Grath, and Robert Ingersoll, and Cal Keith, and Doctor Meredith.'

"Where do I come in?'

"Oh, we know each other too well,' I said with discouraging promptness. 'The real fascination in getting married is the novelty of it. There wouldn't be any novelty in marrying you. I know as much about you as your mother does. Eggs fried over, meat well done, no gravy, breakfast in bed Sunday morning, sporting pages first,—it would be like marrying father. Now I must get to work, Danny, so you'd better trot along and not bother me. And you must keep away evenings unless you have a date in advance. You might interrupt something if you bob in unannounced.'

"May I have a date this evening?' he asked with high hauteur.

"So sorry, Danny, I have a date with Cal Keith.' I consulted the note-book. 'To-morrow night Doctor Meredith. Thursday night, Buddy Johnson.'

"Friday then?'

"Yes, Friday.'

"The next time he saw me, he said first thing, which proved he had been thinking seriously, 'I suppose it will be the end of my hanging around here if you get married.'

"Evidently he thought I would contradict him. But I didn't.

"I am afraid so,' I admitted. 'My husband will be so fearfully jealous! He will be so crazy about me that he won't allow another man to come within a mile of me.'

"Dan snorted. 'You don't know how crazy he'll be about you.'

"Oh, yes, I do, for when I pick him out, I'll see to that part of it. That will be easy. It is picking him out that is hard.'

"You know how Dan is, Carol. He is very fond of the girls, especially me, and he makes love in a sort of semi-fashion, but he never really wanted to get married. He liked to be a bachelor. He noticed how other men ran down after marriage, and he didn't want to run down. He saw how so many girls went to seed after marriage, and he didn't want them to belong to him. 'Let well enough alone, you fool,' was his philosophy. I knew it. He had told me about it often, and I always said it was sound good sense.

"The second afternoon I told him I was going to wear white lace to be married in, and had picked out my bridesmaids. I asked him where would be a nice place to go for a honeymoon, and he flung himself home in a huff, and said it was none of his business where I went but he suggested New London or Danville. I showed no annoyance when he left so abruptly. I was too busy. I drew my feet up under me and went on making notes in my red book. He looked out from behind the windows of the dining-room, carefully concealed of course, but I saw him. I could hear him nearly having apoplexy when he saw me utterly and blissfully absorbed in my book."

Carol chuckled in ecstasy. She foresaw that Connie was practically engaged to Dan, a prince of a fellow, and she was so glad. That little scamp of a Connie, to keep it secret so long.

"Oh," she cried, "I always thought you loved each other."

"So?" asked Connie coolly. "Dan admitted he was surprised that my plans worked so easily. Before that he had been my escort on every occasion, and the town accepted it blandly. Now I had a regular series of attendants, and Dan was relegated to a few spare moments under the lilacs now and then. He couldn't see how I got hold of the fellows. He said they were perfect miffs to be nosed around like that. Why didn't they show some manhood? Boneless, brainless jelly fishes, jumping head first because a little snip of a girl said jump.

"The third day I called him on the phone.

"Dan, come over quick. I have the loveliest thing to show you.'

"He did not wait for a hat. He dashed out and over the hedge, and I had the

door open for him.

"'Oh, look,' I gurgled. I am not a very good gurgler, but sometimes you just have to do it.

"Dan looked. 'Nothing but silverware, is it?'

"I was hurt. 'Nothing but silverware? Why, it is my silverware, for my own little house. It cost a terribly, criminally lot, but I couldn't resist it. I really feel much more settled since I bought it. There is something very final about silverware. See these pretty doilies I am making. Aunt Grace is crocheting a bedspread for me, too. Those are guest towels,—they were given to me.'

"Dan's lips curled scornfully. He turned the lovely linens roughly, and wiped his hands on a dainty guest towel.

"'Connie, this is downright immodest. Furnishing your house before you have a lover!'

"'Do you think so?' I kissed a circular hand-embroidered table-cloth. 'If I had known it was such fun furnishing my house, I'd have had the lover years ago and don't you forgit it.'

"'I am disappointed in you.'

"'I am sorry,' I said lightly. 'But I am so excited over getting married, that I can't bother much about what mere friends think any more. My husband's opinions—'

"'Mere friends,' he shouted. 'Mere friends! I am no mere friend, Connie Starr. I'M—I'M—'

"'Yes, what are you?'

"Well, I am your pal, your chum, your old schoolmate, your best friend,—'

"'Oh, that was before I was engaged.'

"'Engaged?' Dan was staggered. 'Are you really engaged then? Have you found the right one?'

"'Being engaged alters the situation. You must see that.'

"'Who is it?'

"'Oh, don't be so silly. I haven't found the right one yet. But the principle is just the same. With marriage just ahead of me, all the rest of the world must stand back to give place to my fiancé.'

"Dan sneered. 'Yeh, look at the world standing back and gazing with envy on this moonbeam fiancé. Look!'

"'Oh, Dan it is the most fascinating thing in the world. In four months I may be standing at the altar, dressed in filmy white,—I bought the veil yesterday,—promising to love, honor and obey,—with reservations,—for the rest of my life. A little home of my own, a husband to pet, and chum with,—I am awfully happy, Dan, honestly I am.'

"And Carol I did enjoy it. It was fun. I was simply hypnotized with the idea of having a house and a husband and a lot of little Julias. Dan glared at me in disgust. Then he went home, snarling about my mushiness. But he thought it was becoming to me. He said I got prettier every day. I would not even let him touch my hand any more. You know Dan and I were pretty good pals for a long time, and he was allowed little privileges like that. Now it was all off. Dan might rave and Dan might storm, but I stood firm. He could not touch my hands! I was consecrated to my future husband.

"'It may not be wicked, Dan, I do not say it is. But it makes me shiver to think what would happen if my husband caught you doing it. He might kill you on the spot.'

"'You haven't got a husband,' Dan would snap.

"'The principle is just the same.' Then I would dimple up at him. I am not the dimply type of girl, I know, but there are times when one has simply got to dimple at a man, and by wrinkling my face properly I can give the dimple effect. I have practised it weary hours before the mirror. I have often prayed for a dimpled skin like yours, Carol, but I guess the Lord could not figure out how to manage it since my skin was practically finished before I began to pray. 'I keep wondering what he will like for breakfast,' I said to Dan. 'Isn't that silly? I hope he does not want fried potatoes. It seems so horrible to have potatoes for

breakfast.' Then I added loyally, 'But he will probably be a very strong character, original, and unique, and men like that always have a few idiosyncrasies, so if he wants fried potatoes for breakfast he shall have them.'

"Dan sniffed again. He was becoming a chronic sniffer in these days of my engagement.

"Yeh, he'll want fried potatoes all right, and postum, and left-over pumpkin pie. I have a picture of the big mutt in my mind now. "Constance," he'll say, "for pity's sake put more lard in the potatoes when you fry them. They are too dry. Take them back and cook them over." He will want his potatoes swimming in grease, he is bound to, that's just the kind of man he is. He will want everything greasy. Oh, you're going to have a sweet time with that big stiff.'

"I shook my fist at him. 'He will not!' I cried. 'Don't you dare make fun of my husband. He—he—' Then I stopped and laughed. 'Isn't it funny how women always rush to defend their husbands when outsiders speak against them? We may get cross at them ourselves, but no one else shall ridicule them.'

"Yes, you are one loving little wife all right. You sure are. You won't let any one say a mean word against your sweet little snookie-ookums. Oh, no. Wait till you get to darning his socks, you won't be so crazy about him then.'

"I do get a little cross when I darn his socks,' I confessed. 'I don't mind embroidering monograms on his silk shirts, but I can't say that so far I really enjoy darning his socks. Still, since they are his, it is not quite so bad. I wouldn't darn anybody else's, not even my own.'

"Are you doing it already?' Dan gasped. He found it very hard to keep me and my husband straight in his mind.

"I am just pretending. I practise on father's. I want to be a very efficient darner, so my patches won't make his poor dear feet sore.'

"Lord help us,' cried Dan, springing to his feet and flinging himself through the hedge and slamming the door until it shook the house. He went away angry every time. He simply couldn't be rational. One day he said he guessed he would have to be the goat and marry me himself just to keep me out of trouble. Then he blushed, and went home and forgot his hat.

"Came down to the last day. 'It has simmered down to Harvey Grath and Buddy Johnson,' I told him. 'Harvey Grath,—Buddy Johnson,—Harvey Grath,—Buddy Johnson. Do run away, Danny, and don't be a nuisance. Harvey Grath,—Buddy Johnson.'

"Dan neglected his patients until it is a wonder they did not all die,—or get well, or something. He sat up-stairs in his study watching an endless procession of Harvey Graths and Buddy Johnsons, coming, lingering, going.

"That night, regardless of the illuminating moon, I took Buddy Johnson to the lilac corner. Dan was up-stairs smoking in front of his window. Buddy didn't know about that window, but I did. He took my hand, and I let him. I leaned my head against his shoulder,—not truly against, just near enough so Dan could not tell the difference. Buddy tried to kiss me, and nearly did it. I wasn't expecting it just at that minute. Dan sprang from his chair before the conclusion, so he did not know if the kiss was a fact, or not. Then I moved two feet away. Dan came out and marched across to the lilacs.

"'Connie,' he said, 'I am sorry to interrupt, but I need to talk to you a few minutes. It is a matter of business.' To Buddy he said, 'You know Connie always helps me out when I get stuck. Can you give me a minute, Connie?'

"I said, 'Of course I can. You'll excuse me won't you, Buddy? It is getting late anyhow.'

"So Buddy went away and Dan marched we up on the porch where it was dark and shady.

"'Are you engaged to Buddy Johnson?'

"'No.'

"'Thank Heaven.'

"Dan kissed me, regardless of the accusing eyes of my husband in the background."

Carol breathed loudly in her relief. He kissed her. Connie did not care. They were engaged.

"Dan breathlessly took back everything he ever said about getting married, and being a bachelor, and so forth. He said he was crazy to be married, always had been, but didn't find it out before. He said he had always adored me. And I drew out my note-book, and showed him the first page,—Doctor Daniel Brooks, O. K. And every other name in the book was checked off.

"Dan was jubilant." Connie's voice trailed away slowly, and her earnest fine eyes were cloudy.

"An engagement," cried Carol, springing up.

"No," said Connie slowly, "a blunder."

"A blunder," faltered Carol, falling back. "You did it on purpose to make him propose, didn't you?"

"Yes, and he proposed, and we were engaged. But it was just a blunder. It was not Dan I wanted. Carol, every woman feels like that at times. She is full of that great magnificent ideal of home, and husband, and little children. It seems the finest thing in the world, the only flawless life. She can't resist it, for the time being. She feels that work is silly, that success is tawdry, that ambition is wicked. It is dangerous, Carol, for if she gets the opportunity, or if she can make the opportunity, she is pretty sure to seize it. I believe that is why so many marriages are unhappy,—girls mistake that natural woman-wish for love, and they get married, and then—shipwreck."

Carol sat silent.

"Yes," said David sympathetically, "I think you are right. You were lucky to escape."

"I knew that evening, that one little evening of our engagement, that having a home and a husband, and even a little child like Julia, would never be enough. Something else had to come first. And it had not come. I went to bed and cried all night, so sorry for Dan for I knew he loved me,—but not sorry enough to make me do him such a cruel injustice. The next morning I told him, and that afternoon I returned to Chicago.

"I have thought a whole lot more of my job since then."

"But why couldn't you love him?" asked Carol impatiently. "It seems unreasonable, Connie. He is nice enough for anybody, and you were just ripe and ready for it."

Connie shrugged her shoulders. "Why didn't you love somebody else besides David?" she asked, and laughed at the quick resentment that flashed to Carol's eyes.

"Well," concluded Connie, "God certainly wanted a few old maids to leaven the earth, and I think I have the making for a good leavener. So I write stories, and let other women wash the little Julias' faces," she added, laughing, as Julia, unrecognizably dirty, entered with a soup can full of medicine she had painstakingly concocted to make her daddy well.

CHAPTER XX

LITERARY MATERIAL

Connie wanted to see something out of the ordinary. What was the use of coming to the wild and woolly if one never saw anything wilder than a movie of New York society life, or woollier than miles of properly garbed motorists driving under the guidance of blue-coated policemen as safely and sanely as could be done in Chicago.

It was Julia who came to the rescue. She discovered, on a neighbor's porch, and with admirable socialistic tendencies appropriated, a glaring poster, with slim-legged horses balancing themselves in the air, not at all inconveniencing their sunburned riders in varicolored silk shirts.

"Look at the horses jump over the moon," she exulted, kissing a scarlet shirt in rapture.

Upon investigation it turned out to be an irresistible advertisement of the annual Frontier Days, at Fort Morgan. Carol explained the pictures to Julia, while Connie looked over her shoulder.

"Do they do all it says?" she asked.

Carol did not know. She had never attended any Frontier Days, but she imagined they were even more wonderful than the quite impossible poster. Carol's early determination to adore the Westland had become fixed habit at last. It was capable of any miracles, to her.

"How far is it up there?" pursued Connie, for Connie had a very inartistic way of sticking to her subject.

"I do not know. About a hundred miles, I believe."

"A nice drive for the Harmer," said Connie thoughtfully. "How are the roads?"

"I do not know, but I think all the roads are good in Colorado. Certainly no road is impassable for a Harmer Six with you at the wheel."

"I have a notion to drive up and see them," said Connie. "Literary material, you know."

"I want to see the horsies fly, too," cried Julia quickly.

Carol thought it might do David good, and David was sure Carol needed a vacation. They would think it over.

Connie immediately went down-town and returned with a road guide, and her arm full of literature about frontier days in general. Then it was practically settled. A little distance of a hundred miles, a splendid car, a driver like Connie! It was nothing. And Carol was so excited getting ready for their first outing in the years of David's illness, that she forgot his medicine three times in succession, and David maliciously refused to remind her.

They all talked at once, and agreed that it was very silly and dangerous and unwise, but insisted it was the most alluring, appealing madness in the world. David, for over three years limited to the orderly, methodical, unstimulating confines of a screened porch, felt quite the old-time throbbing of his pulse and quickening of his blood. Even the doctor waxed enthusiastic. He looked into David's tired face and said:

"I think it will do him good. It can not do him harm."

In the excitement of getting ready for something unusual, he developed an unnatural strength and simply could not be kept in bed at all. He slept soundly, ate heartily, and looked forward to the trip in the car so anxiously that to the girls it was really pitiful.

Then came a glorious day in September when the Harmer Six stood early at their door, the lunch basket, and suit-cases were carefully arranged, and they were off,—off in the beautiful Harmer,—off to the country,—to the mountains and canyons,—to climb one of the sunny slopes that had beckoned to them so enticingly. Almost they held their breath at first, afraid the first creak of the car would waken them from the unbelievable dream.

Always as they climbed a long hill, Carol reminded them that they were climbing a sunny slope that would lead to a city of gold at the top, a city where everything was happy and bright, and there was no sickness, no sorrow, no want. And looking ahead to the spires of a little village, nestling cloudy and blue on the plains, she vowed it was a golden city, and they leaned forward to catch the first sparkle of the diamond-studded streets. And when they reached the city itself, little, ugly, sordid,—a city of gold, perhaps, to those who had made a fortune there, but not by any means a golden city of dreams to the Arcady travelers,—Carol shook herself and said it was a mistake, she meant the next one.

Rooms had been engaged in advance at the Bijou, on the ground floor, for the sake of David's softened muscles, and they reached the town ahead of the regular Frontier Day crowds, allowing themselves plenty of time to get rested and to see the whole thing start.

Julia frolicked on the wide velvety lawn with all the dogs and cats and children that could be drawn from the surrounding neighborhood. David sat on the porch in a big chair, enjoying the soft breezes sweeping down over the plains, looking through half closed lids out upon the quiet shaded street. Carol crouched excitedly in another chair beside him, squeezing his hand to call attention to every sunburned picturesque son of the plains that galloped down that way. But Connie, with the lustful eyes of a fortune-hunter walked up and down the corridors, peering here and peeking there, listening avidly to every unaccustomed word that was spoken,—getting material.

Quickly the hotels were filled to capacity, and overflowed to cots in the hall, rugs on the porches, and piles of straw in the stables. The street so quietly peaceful on Sunday, by Wednesday was a throbbing thoroughfare, with autos, wagons and horses whirling by in clouds of dust. The main street, a block away, was a noisy, active, flourishing, carnival city, with fortune-tellers, two-headed dogs, snake-charmers, minstrels and all the other street-fair habitues in full possession. A dance platform was erected on a prominent corner, and bands were brought in from all the neighboring towns on the plains.

Connie was convinced she could get enough material to last a lifetime. No detective was hotter on the scent of a trail than she. Never two cowboys met in a secluded corner in the lobby to divide their hardly earned coins, but Connie sauntered slowly by, catching every word, noting the size of every coin that changed possession. No gaily garbed horseman could signal to a girl of his admiration, but Connie caught the motion first, and was taking mental notes for future coinage. They were not people to her, just material. She loved them, she reveled in them, she dreamed of them, just as a collector of curios gloats over the treasures he amasses. She classified them in a literary note-book for her own use, and kept them on file for instant reference.

When they went to the fair-grounds, early, in order to secure a comfortable seat for David where he should not miss one twist of a rider's supple body, they were as delighted as children truanting from school. It was the most exhilarating thing in the world,—this clever little trick on the sleeping porch and the white cot, on egg-nogs and beef juice and buttermilk. No wonder their faces tingled with excitement and their eyes sparkled with delight.

Connie was surprised that the girls were pretty, really pretty, with pink and white skin and polished finger nails, those girls in the silk blouses and khaki shirts, those girls with the wide sombrero and the iron muscles, who rode the bucking horses, and raced around the track, and did a thousand other appalling things that pink-skinned, shiny-nailed girls were not wont to do back home. They stayed at the Bijou, a whole crowd of them, and Connie never let them out of her sight until they closed their bedroom doors for the night. They talked in brief broken sentences, rather curtly, but their voices were quiet and low, and they weren't half as slangy as cowgirls, by every literary precedent, ought to be. They were not like Connie, of course, tall and slim, with the fine exalted face, with soft pink palms and soft round arms. And their striking saddle costumes were not half as curious to Fort Morgan as Connie's lacy waists, and her tailored

skirts, and her frilly little silk gowns. But they were more curious to Connie.

She tried to picture herself in a sombrero like that, with gauntlets on her hands, and with a fringed leather skirt that reached to her knees, and with a scarlet silk blouse and a yellow silk belt,—and even her distinctly literary imagination could not compass such a miracle. But she was sure if she ever could rig herself up like that, she would look like a dream, and she really envied the cowgirls, who leaped head first from the saddle but always landed right side up.

People of another world, well, yes. But there are ways of getting together.

Connie talked very little that first afternoon. She watched the people around her, and listened as they discussed the points of the horses, the cowgirls and the jockeys with equal impartiality. She heard their bets, their guttural grunts of disapproval with the judges' decisions, their roars of satisfaction when the right horse won. She watched the cowgirls, walking unconcernedly about the ring, flapping their riding-whips against their leather boots. She watched the lithe-limbed cowboys slouching not ungracefully around the nervous ponies, waving their hats in greeting to their friends, calling loud jests to their fellows in the cowboy band. How strange they were, how startlingly human, and yet how thousand-miles removed.

Connie rebelled against it. They were folks. And so was Connie. The thousand miles was a barrier, an injustice. In order to handle literary material, she must get within touching distance of it. All those notes she had collected so painstakingly were cold, inanimate. In order to write of folks she must touch them, feel them, must know they lived and breathed as she did. Why couldn't she get at them,—folks, plain folks, and so was she. A slow fury rose up in her, and she watched the great events Of the afternoon with resentful eyes. Even when a man not entered for racing, swung over the railing into the center field, and scrambled upon the bare back of King Devil, the wild horse of the plains which had never yielded to man's bridling hand, and was tossed and dragged and jerked and twisted, until it seemed there could be no life left in him, yet who finally pulled the horse almost by brute force into submission, while the spectators went wild, and Julia screamed, and Carol sank breathless and white into her seat, and David stood on the bench and yelled until Carol pulled him down,—even then Connie could not get the feeling. She wanted to write these people, to put them on paper, and she couldn't, because they were not people to her, they were just

"Good points."

Afterward, when they slowly made their way to the car, and drove home to the Bijou again, Connie was still silent. She saw David comfortably settled in the big chair on the sunny corner of the porch, with Carol beside him and Julia romping on the lawn. Then she walked up and down in front of the hotel. Finally she came back to the corner of the porch.

"David," she said impetuously, "I've got to speak to one of them myself." She waved a hand vaguely in the direction of the fair-grounds.

"One of them?" echoed David.

"Yes, one of those riders. I want to see if they can make me feel anything. I want to find out if they are anything like other folks."

David looked up suddenly, and a smile came to his eyes. Connie turned quickly, and there, not two feet from her, stood "One of them," the man who had ridden King Devil. His sombrero was pushed back on his head, and his hair clung damply to his brown forehead. His lean face was cynical, sneering. He carried a whip and spurs in one hand, the other rested on the bulging hip of his khaki riding trousers.

Connie stared, fascinated, into the thin, brown, sneering face.

"How do you do?" he said mockingly. "Isn't it charming weather?"

Connie still looked directly into his eyes. Somehow she felt that back of the sneer, back of the resentment, there lay a little hurt that she should have spoken so, classed him with fine horses and cattle, him and his kind. Connie would make amends, a daughter of the parsonage might not do ungracious things like that.

"I beg your pardon," she said, sweetly, unsmilingly, "I did not mean to be rude. But the riders did fascinate me. I am spellbound. I only wished to see if the charm would hold. I have not been in the West before this." She held out her hand, slender, white, appealing.

"I beg your pardon," she said, sweetly, unsmilingly, "I did not mean to be rude."

**[Illustration: "I beg your pardon," she said, sweetly, unsmilingly,
"I did not mean to be rude."]**

The man looked at her curiously in turn, then he jerked off his sombrero and took her hand in his. There was the contact, soft white skin of the city, hard brown hand of the mountain plains, and human blood is swift to leap in response to an unwonted touch.

Connie drew her hand away quickly, but his eyes still held hers.

"Let me beg your pardon instead," he said. "Of course you did not mean it the way it sounded. None of my business, anyhow."

"Come on, Prince," called a man from the road, curbing his impatient horse. But "Prince" waved him away without turning.

This was a wonderful girl.

"I—I write stories," Connie explained hurriedly, to get away from that searching clasp of glances. "I wanted some literary material, and I seemed so far away from everything. I thought I needed the personal touch, you know."

"Anything I can tell you?" he offered feverishly. "I know all about range and ranch life. I can tell you anything you want to know."

"Really? And will you do it? You know writers have just got to get material. It is absolutely necessary. And I am running very short of ideas, I have been loafing."

He waited patiently. He was more than willing to tell her everything he knew, or could make up to please her, but he had not the slightest idea what she wanted. Whatever it was, he certainly intended to make the effort of his life to give her.

"I am Constance Starr," said Connie, still more abashed by the unfaltering presence of this curious creature, who, she fully realized at last, was quite human enough for any literary purpose. "And this is my brother-in-law, Mr. Duke, and my sister, Mrs. Duke."

"My name is Prince Ingram."

David shook hands with him cordially, with smiling eyes, and asked him to sit down so Connie might ask her questions in comfort. They all took chairs, and Prince waited. Connie racked her brain. Five minutes ago there had been ten thousand things she yearned to know about this strange existence. Now, unfairly, she could not think of one. It seemed to her she knew all there was to know about them. They looked into each other's eyes, men and women, as men and women do in Chicago. They touched hands, and the blood quickened, the old Chicago style. They talked plain English, they liked pretty clothes, they worshiped good horses, they lived on the boundless plains. What on earth was there to ask? Quite suddenly, Connie understood them perfectly.

But Prince realized that he was not making good. His one claim to admission in her presence was his ability to tell her what she wanted to know. He had got to tell her things,—but what things? My stars, what did she want to know? How old he was, where he was born, if he was married,—oh, by George, she didn't think he was married, did she?

"I am not married," he said abruptly. David looked around at him in surprise, and Carol's eyes opened widely. But Connie, with what must have been literary intuition, understood. She nodded at him and smiled as she asked, "Have you always lived out here?"

"No." He straightened his shoulders and drew a deep breath. Here was a starter, it would be his own fault if he could not keep talking the rest of the night. "No, I came out from Columbus when I was eighteen. Came for my health." He squared his shoulders again, and laughed a big deep laugh which made Connie marvel that there should be such big deep laughs in the world.

"My father was a doctor. He sent me out, and I got a job punching time in the mines at Cripple Creek. I met some stock men, and one of them offered me a job, and I came out and got in with them. Then I got hold of a bit of land and began gathering up stock for myself. I stayed with the Sparker outfit six years, and then my father died. I took the money and got my start, and—why, that is all." He stopped in astonishment. He had been sure his story would last several hours. He had begun at the very start, his illness at eighteen, and here he was right up to the present, and—he rubbed his knee despairingly. There must be something else. There had to be something else. What under the sun had he been doing all these fourteen years in the ranges?

"Don't you ever wish to go back?" Connie prompted kindly.

"Back to Columbus? I went twice to see my father. He had a private sanatorium. My booming voice gave his nervous patients prostrations, and father thought my clothes were not sanitary because they could not be sterilized. Are you going to stay here for good?"

It was very risky to ask, he knew, but he had to find out.

"I am visiting my sister in Denver. We just came here for the Frontier Days," said Connie primly.

"There is another Frontier Week at Sterling," he said eagerly. "A fine one, better than this. It isn't far over there. You would get more material at Sterling, I think. Can't you go on up?"

"I have been away from Chicago four weeks now," said Connie. "In exactly two weeks I must be at my desk again."

"Chicago is not a healthy town," he said, in a voice that would have done credit to his father, the medical man. "Very unhealthy. It is not literary either. Out west is the place for literature. All the great writers come west. Western stories are the big sellers. There's Ralph Connor, and Rex Beach, and Jack London and—and—"

"But I am not a great writer," Connie interrupted modestly. "I am just a common little filler-in in the ranks of a publishing house. I'm only a beginner."

"That is because you stick to Chicago," he said eloquently. "You come out here, out in the open, where things are wide and free, and you can see a thousand miles at one stretch. You come out here, and you'll be as great as any of 'em,—greater!"

The loud clamor of the dinner bell interrupted his impassioned outburst and he relapsed into stricken silence.

"Well, we must go to dinner before the supply runs out," said David, rising slowly. "Come along, Julia. We are glad to have met you, Mr. Ingram." He held out his thin, blue-veined hand. "We'll see you again."

Prince looked hopelessly at Connie's back, for her face was already turned toward the dining-room. How cold and infinitely distant that tall, straight, tailored back appeared.

"Ask him to eat with us," Connie hissed, out of one corner of her lip, in David's direction.

David hesitated, looking at her doubtfully. Connie nudged him with emphasis.

Well, what could David do? He might wash his hands of the whole irregular business, and he did. Connie was a writer, she must have material, but in his opinion Connie was too young to be literary. She should have been older, or uglier, or married. Literature is not safe for the young and charming. Connie nudged him again. Plainly if he did not do as she said, she was going to do it herself.

David turned to the brown-faced, sad-eyed son of the mountain ranges, and said:

"Come along and have dinner with us, won't you?"

Carol pursed up her lips warningly, but Prince Ingram, in his eagerness, nearly picked David up bodily in his hurry to get the little party settled before some one spoiled it all.

He wanted to handle Connie's chair for her, he knew just how it was done. But suppose he pushed her clear under the table, or jerked it entirely from under her, or did something worse than either? A girl like Connie ought to have those things done for her. Well, he would let it go this time. So he looked after Julia, and settled her so comfortably, and was so assiduously attentive to her that he quite won her heart, and before the meal was over she said he might come and live with them and be her grandpa, if he wanted.

"Grandpa," he said facetiously. "Do I look as old as that? Can't I be something better than a grandpa?"

"Well, only one papa's the style," said Julia doubtfully. "And you are too big to be a baby, and—"

"Can't I be your uncle?" Then, glancing at Connie with a sudden realization of the only possible way the uncle-ship could be accomplished, he blushed.

"Yes, an uncle is better," said Connie imperturbably. "You must remember, Julia dear, that men are very, very sensitive about their ages, and you must always give them credit for youth."

"I see," said Julia. And Prince wondered how old Connie thought he was, his hair was a little thin, not from age—always had been that way—and he was as brown as a Zulu, but it was only sunburn. He'd figure out a way of letting her know he was only thirty-two before the evening was over.

"Are you going over to the street to-night?" he asked of David, but not caring half a cent what David did.

"I am afraid I can't. I am not very good on my feet any more. I am sorry, the girls would enjoy it."

"Carol and I might go alone," suggested Connie bravely. "Every one does out here. We wouldn't mind it."

"I will not go to a street carnival and leave David," protested Carol.

"It would be rather interesting." Connie looked tentatively from the window.

Prince swallowed in anguish. She ought to go, he told them; she really needs to go. The evenings are so much fuller of literary material than day-times. And the dancing—

"I do not dance," said Connie. "My father is a minister."

"You do not dance! Why, that's funny. I don't either. That is, not exactly,—Oh, once in a while just to fill in." Then the latter part of her remark reached his inner consciousness. "A minister. By George!"

"My husband is one, too," said Carol.

Prince looked helplessly about him. Then he said faintly, "I—I am not. But my father wanted me to be a preacher. He sent me to Princeton, and I stuck it out nearly ten weeks. That is why they call me Prince, short for Princeton. I am the

only real college man on the range, they say."

"The street fair must be interesting," Connie went back to the main idea.

"Yes indeed, the crowds, the side-shows—I mean the exhibits, and the lotteries, and—I am sure you never saw so much literary material crowded into two blocks in your life."

"Oh, well, I don't mind. Maybe some other night we can go." Connie was sweetly resigned.

"I should be very glad,—if you don't mind,—I haven't anything else to do,—and I can take good care of you."

"Oh, that is just lovely. And maybe you will give me some more stories. Isn't that fine, David? It is so kind of you, Mr. Ingram. I am sure I shall find lots of material."

David kicked Carol warningly beneath the table. "You must go too, Carol. You have never seen such a thing, and it will do you good. I am not the selfish brute you try to make me. You girls go along with Mr. Ingram and I will put Julia to bed and wait for you on the porch."

Well, of course, Mrs. Duke was very nice, and anyhow it was better to take them both than lose them both, and that preacher had a very set face in spite of his pallor. So Prince recovered his equanimity and devoted himself to enjoying the tumultuous evening on the street. He bought candy and canes and pennants until the girls sternly refused to carry another bit of rubbish. He bought David a crimson and gold silk handkerchief, and an Indian bracelet for Julia, and took the girls to ride on the merry-go-round, and was beside himself with joy.

Suppose his friends of the range did draw back as he passed, and gaze after him in awe and envy. Suppose the more reckless ones did snicker like fools, nudging each other, lifting their hats with exaggerated courtesy,—he should worry. He had lived on the range for fourteen years and had never had such a chance before. Now he had it, he would hang on to it if it cost him every sheep he had on the mountains. Wasn't Connie the smartest girl you ever saw, always saying funny, bright things, and—the way she stepped along like a goddess, and the way she smiled! Prince Ingram had forgotten that girls grew like that.

They returned to the hotel early and found David waiting on the porch as he had promised. He was plainly tired, and Carol said he must go to bed at once. They all rose and walked to the door, and then, very surprisingly, Connie thought she would like to sit a while on the quiet porch, from which every other one had gone to the carnival, and collect her thoughts. Carol frowned, and David smiled, but what could they do? They had said they were tired and now they must go to bed perforce. Prince looked after her, and looked at the door that had closed behind David and Carol, and rubbed his fingers thoughtfully under his collar,—and followed Connie back to the porch.

"Will it bother you if I sit here a while? I won't talk if you want to think."

"It won't bother me a bit," she assured him warmly. "It is nice of you to keep me company. And I would rather talk than think."

So he put her chair at the proper angle where the street lamp revealed her clear white features, and he sat as close beside her as he dared. She did not know it, but his elbow was really on the arm of her chair instead of his own. He almost held his breath for fear a slight move would betray him. Wasn't she a wonderful girl? She turned sidewise in the chair, her head resting against the high back, and smiled at him.

"Now talk," she said. "Let us get acquainted. See if you can make me love the mountain ranges better than Chicago."

He told her of the clean sweep of the wind around his little cottage among the pines on the side of the mountain, of the wild animals that sometimes prowled his way, of the shouting of the boys on the range in the dark night, the swaying of distant lanterns, the tinkle of sheep bells. He told her of his father, of the things that he himself had once planned to be and do. He told her of his friends: of Lily, his pal, so-called because he used a safety razor every morning of his life; of Whisker, the finest dog in Colorado; of Ruby, the ruddy brown horse that would follow him miles through the mountains and always find the master at the end of the trail. And he told her it was a lonely life. And it was. Prince Ingram had lived here fourteen years, with no more consciousness of being alone than the eagle perched solitary on the mountain crags, but quite suddenly he discovered that it was lonely, and somehow the discovery took the wonder from that free glad life, and made him long for the city's bright lights, where there were others,—not just cowboys, but regular men and women.

"Yes," assented Connie rather abruptly, "I suppose it would be nice to be in a crowd of women, laughing and dancing and singing. I suppose you do miss it."

"That was not what I meant," said Prince slowly. "I don't care for a crowd of them. Not many. One is enough." He was appalled at his own audacity, and despised himself for his cowardice, for why didn't he look this white fine girl of the city in the eyes and say:

"Yes, one,—and you are it."

CHAPTER XXI

ADVENTURING

If Connie truly was in pursuit of literary material, she was indefatigable in the quest. But sometimes Carol doubted if it was altogether literary material she was after. And David was very much concerned,—what would dignified Father Starr, District Superintendent, say to his youngest daughter, Connie the literary, Connie the proud, Connie the high, the fine, the perfect, delving so assiduously into the mysteries of range life as typified in big, brown, rugged Prince Ingram? To be sure, Prince had risen beyond the cowboy stage and was now a "stock man," a power on the ranges, a man of money, of influence. But David felt responsible.

Yet no one could be responsible for Connie. Father Starr himself could not. If she looked at one serenely and said, "I need to do this," the rankest foolishness assumed the proportions of dire necessity. So what could David, sick and weak, do in the face of the manifestly impossible?

Carol scolded her. And Connie laughed. David offered brotherly suggestions. And Connie laughed again. Julia said Prince was a darling big grandpa, and Connie kissed her.

The Frontier Days passed on to their uproarious conclusion. Connie saw everything, heard everything and took copious notes. She was going to start her book. She had made the acquaintance of some of the cowgirls, and she studied

them with a passionate eagerness that English literature in the abstract had never aroused in her gentle breast.

Then she became argumentative. She contended that the beautiful lawn at the Bijou was productive of strength for David, rest for Carol, amusement for Julia, and literary material for her. Therefore, why not linger after the noisy crowd had gone,—just idling on the long porches, strolling under the great trees? And because Connie had a convincing way about her, it was unanimously agreed that the Bijou lawn could do everything she claimed for it, and by all means they ought to tarry a week.

It was all settled before David and Carol learned that Prince Ingram was tired of Frontier Days and had decided not to go on to Sterling, but thought he too should linger, gathering up something worth while in Fort Morgan. Carol looked at Connie reproachfully, but the little baby sister was as imperturbable as ever.

Prince himself was all right. Carol liked him. David liked him, too. And Julia was frankly enchanted with him and with his horse. But Connie and Prince,—that was the puzzle of it,—Connie, fine white, immaculate in manner, in person and in thought,—Prince, rugged and brown, born of the plains and the mountains. Carol knew of course that Prince could move into the city, buy a fine home, join good clubs, dress like common men and be thoroughly respectable. But to Carol he would always be a brown streak of perfect horsemanship. Whatever could that awful Connie be thinking of?

The days passed sweetly and restfully on the Bijou lawn, but one day, most unaccountably to Connie, Prince had an appointment with his business partner down at Brush. He would ride Ruby down and be back in time for dinner at night if it killed him. Connie was cross about that. She thought he should have asked her to drive him down in the car but since he did not she couldn't very well offer her services. What did he suppose she was hanging around that ugly little dead burg for? Take out the literary material, Fort Morgan had nothing for Connie. And since the literary material saw fit to absent itself, it was so many hours gone for nothing.

After he had gone, Connie decided to play a good trick on him. He would kill himself to get back to dinner with her, would he? Let him. He could eat it with David and Carol, and the little Julia he so adored. Connie would take a long drive in the car all by herself, and would not be home until bedtime. She would

teach that refractory Material a lesson.

It was a bright cloudless day, the air cold and penetrating. Connie said it was just the day for her to collect her thought, and she could do it best of all in the car. So if they would excuse her,—and they did, of course. Just as she was getting into the car she said that if she had a very exceptionally nice time, she might not come back until after dinner. They were not to worry. She knew the car, she was sure of herself, she would come home when she got ready.

So off she went, taking a naughty satisfaction in the good trick she was playing on that poor boy killing himself to get back for dinner with her. An hour in the open banished her pettishness, and she drove rapidly along the narrow, twisting, unfamiliar road, finding a wild pleasure in her reckless speed. She loved this, she loved it, she loved it. She clapped on a little more gas to show how very dearly she did love it.

After a long time, she found herself far out in a long stretch of gray prairie where no houses broke the bare line of the plains for many miles. It had grown bitterly cold, too, and a sudden daub of gray splashed rapidly across the whole bright sky. Connie drew a rug about her and laughed at the wind that cut her face. It was glorious,—but—she glanced at the speedometer. She had come a long way. She would just run on to the next village and have some luncheon,—mercy, it was three o'clock. Well, as soon as she had something to eat, she would hurry home and perhaps if Prince showed himself properly penitent she would not go right straight to bed.

She pressed down on the accelerator and the car sped forward. Presently she looked around, sniffing the air suspiciously. The sky looked very threatening. She stopped the car and got out. The wind sweeping down from the mountains was a little too suggestive of snow flakes, and the broad stretch of the plains was brown, bare and forbidding. She was not hungry anyhow. She would go home without any luncheon. So she turned the car and started back.

Here and there at frequent intervals intersecting roads crossed the one she was following. She must keep to the main road, the heaviest track, she was sure of that. But sometimes it was hard to recognize the heaviest track. Once or twice, in the sudden darkening of the ground, she had to leap hurriedly out and examine the tracks closely. Even then she could not always tell surely.

Then came the snow, stinging bits of glass leaping gaily on the shoulders of the wind that bore them. Connie set her teeth hard. A little flurry that was all, she was in no danger, whoever heard of a snow-storm the first week in October?

But—ah, this was not the main track after all,—no, it was dwindling away. She must go back. The road was soft here, with deep treacherous ruts lying under the surface. She turned the car carefully, her eyes intent on the road before her, leaning over the wheel to watch. Yes, this was right,—she should have turned to the left. How stupid of her. Here was the track,—she must go faster, it was getting dark. But was this the track after all,—it seemed to be fading out as the other had done? She put on the gas and bumped heavily into a hidden rut. Quickly she threw the clutch into low, and—more gas— What was that? The wheel did not grip, the engine would not pull,—the matchless Harmer Six was helpless. Again and again Connie tried to extricate herself, but it was useless. She got out and took her bearings. It was early evening, but darkness was coming fast. The snow was drifting down from the mountains, and the roads were nearly obliterated.

Connie was stuck, Connie was lost, for once she was unequal to the emergency. In spite of her imperturbability, her serene confidence in herself, and in circumstances, and in the final triumph of everything she wanted and believed, Connie sat down on the step and cried, bitterly, passionately, like any other young women lost in a snow-storm on the plains. It did her good, though it was far beneath her dignity. Presently she wiped her eyes.

She must turn on the lights, every one of them, so if any travelers happened to come her way the signal would summon them to her aid. Then she must get warm, one might freeze on a night like this. She put up the curtains on the car and wrapped herself as best she could in rugs and rain coats. Even then she doubted her ability to withstand the penetrating chill.

"Well," she said grimly, "if I freeze I am going to do it with a pleasant smile on my lips, so they will be sorry when they find me." Tears of sympathy for herself came into her eyes. She hoped Prince would be quite heart-broken, and serve him right, too. But it was terrible that poor dear Carol should have this added sorrow, after all her years of trial. And it was all Connie's own fault. Would women ever have sense enough to learn that men must think of business now and then, and that even the dearest women in the world are nuisances at times?

Well, anyhow, she was paying dearly for her folly, and perhaps other women could profit by it. And all that literary material wasted. "But it is a good thing I am not leaving eleven children motherless," she concluded philosophically.

If men must think of business, and they say they must, there are times when it is sheer necessity that drives and not at all desire. Prince Ingram hated Brush that day with a mortal hatred. Only two days more of Connie, and a few thousand silly sheep were taking him away. Well, he had paid five hundred dollars for Ruby and he would find out if she was worth it. He used his spurs so sharply that the high-spirited mare snorted angrily, and plunged away at her most furious pace. It was not an unpleasant ride. His time had been so fully occupied with the most wonderful girl, that he had not had one moment to think how really wonderful she was. This was his chance and he utilized it fully.

His business partner in Brush was shocked at Prince's lack of interest in a matter of ten thousand dollars. He wondered if perhaps King Devil had not bounced him up more than people realized. But Prince was pliant, far more so than usual, accepted his partner's suggestions without dissent, and grew really enthusiastic when he said finally:

"Well, I guess that is all."

Prince shook hands with him then, seeming almost on the point of kissing him, and Ruby was whirling down the road in a chariot of dust before the bewildered partner had time to explain that his wife was expecting Prince home with them for dinner.

Prince fell from the saddle in front of the Bijou and looked expectantly at the porch. He was sentimental enough to think it must be splendid to have a girl waiting on the porch when one got home from any place. Connie was not there. Well, it was a good thing, he was grimy with dust and perspiration, and Connie was so alarmingly clean. But Carol called him before he had time to escape.

"Is it going to storm?" she asked anxiously.

Prince wheeled toward her sharply. "Is Connie out in the car?"

"Yes," said Carol, staring off down the road in a vain hope of catching sight of the naughty little runaway in the gray car.

"When did she go?" he asked.

"About eleven. She wasn't coming home until after dinner."

"How far was she going?"

"A long way, she said. She went that direction," Carol pointed out to the right.

"Is it going to storm?" asked David, coming up.

"Yes, it is. But don't you worry, Mrs. Duke. I'll get her all right. If it turns bad, I will take her to some little village or farm-house where she can stay till morning. We'll be all right, and don't you worry."

There was something very assuring in the hearty voice, something consoling in his clear eyes and broad shoulders. Carol followed him out to his horse.

"Prince," she said, smiling up at him, "you will get her, won't you?"

"Of course I will. You aren't worrying, are you?"

"Not since you got home," said Carol. "I know you will get her. I like you, Prince."

"Do you?" He was boyishly pleased. "Does—does David?"

Carol laughed. "Yes, and so does Julia," she teased.

Prince laughed, too, shamefacedly, but he dared not ask, "Does Connie?"

He turned his horse quickly and paused to say, "You'd better get your husband inside. He will chill in spite of the rugs. It is winter, to-night. Good-by."

"He will get her," said Carol confidently, when she returned to David. "He is nice, don't you think so? Maybe he would be perfectly all right—in the city. Connie could straighten him out."

"Yes, brush off the dust, and give him an opera hat and a dinner coat and he would not be half bad."

"He is not half bad now, only—not exactly our kind."

"Women are funny," said David slowly. "I believe Connie likes his kind, just as he is, and would not have him changed for anything."

At first, Prince had no difficulty in following the wide roll of Connie's wheels, for no other cars had gone that way. But once or twice he had to drop from the saddle and examine the tracks closely to make sure of her. Then came the snow, and the tracks were blurred out. Prince was in despair.

"Three roads here," he thought rapidly. "If she took that one she will come to Marker's ranch, and be all right. If she took the middle road she will make Benton. But this one, it winds and twists, and never gets any place."

So on the road to the left, that led to no place at all, Prince carefully guided his weary horse, already beginning to stumble. He sympathized with every aching step, yet he urged her gently to her best speed. Then she slipped, struggled to regain her footing, struck a treacherous bit of ice, and fell, Prince swinging nimbly from the saddle. Plainly she was unable to carry him farther, so he helped her to her feet and turned her loose, pushing on as fast as he could on foot.

Anxiously he peered into the gathering darkness, longing for the long flash of yellow light which meant Connie and the matchless Harmer.

Suddenly he stopped. From away over the hills to his right, mingling with the call of the coyotes, came the unmistakable honk of a siren. He held his breath to listen. It came again, a long continued wail, in perfect tune with the whining of the coyotes. He turned to the right and started over the hills in the wake of the call.

Over a steep incline he plunged, and paused.

"Thank God," he cried aloud, for there he saw a little round yellow glow in the cloudy white mist,—the Harmer Six, and Connie.

He shouted as he ran, that she might not be left in suspense a moment longer than need be. And Connie with numbed fingers tugged the curtains loose and leaned out in the yellow mist to watch him as he came.

We talk of the mountain peaks of life. And poets sing of the snowy crest of life crises, where we look like angels and speak like gods, where we live on the summit of ages. This moment should have been a summit, yet when Prince ran down the hill, breathless, exultant, and nearly exhausted, Connie, her face showing peaked and white in the yellow glare, cried, "Hello, Prince, I knew you'd make it."

She held out a half-frozen hand and he took it in his.

"Car's busted," she said laconically. "Won't budge. I drained the water out of

the radiator."

"All right, we'll have to hoof it," he said cheerfully.

He relieved her of the heavier wraps, and they set out silently through the snow, Prince still holding her hand.

"I am awfully glad to see you," she said once, in a polite little voice.

He smiled down upon her. "I am kind o' glad to see you, too, Connie."

After a while she said slowly, "I need wings. My feet are numb." And a moment later, "I can not walk any farther."

"It is ten miles to a house," he told her gravely. "I couldn't carry you so far. I'll take you a mile or so, and you will get rested."

"I am not tired, I am cold. And if you carry me I will be colder. You just run along and tell Carol I am all right—"

"Run along! Why, you would freeze."

"Yes, that is what I mean."

"There is a railroad track half a mile over there. Can you make that?"

Connie looked at him pitifully. "I can not even lift my feet. I am utterly stuck. I kept stepping along," she mumbled indistinctly, "and saying, one more,—just one more,—one more,—but the foot would not come up,—and I knew I was stuck."

Her voice trailed away, and she bundled against him and closed her eyes.

Prince gritted his teeth and took her in his arms. Connie was five feet seven, and very solid. And Prince himself was nearly exhausted with the day's exertion. Sometimes he staggered and fell to his knees, sometimes he hardly knew if he was dragging Connie or pushing her, or if they were both blown along by the wind. Always there was the choke in his throat, the blur in his eyes, and that almost unbearable drag in every muscle. A freight train passed—only a few rods away. He thought he could never climb that bank. "One more—one—more—one

more," mumbled Connie in his ear.

He shook himself angrily. Of course he could make that bank,—if he could only rest a minute,—he was not cold,—just a minute's rest to get his breath again—a moment would be enough. God, what was he thinking of? It was not weariness, it was the chill of the night that demanded a moment's rest. He strained Connie closer in his arms and struggled up the bank.

At the top, he dropped her beside the track, and fell with her. For a moment the fatal languor possessed him.

A freight train rounded the curve and came puffing toward them. Prince, roused by springing hope, clambered to his feet, pulling the little pocket flash from his pocket. He waved it imploringly at the train, but it thundered by them.

Resolutely bestirring himself, he carried Connie to a sheltered place where the wind could not strike her, and wrapped her as best he could in his coat and sweater. Then, lowering his head against the driving wind, he plunged down the track in the face of the storm.

CHAPTER XXII

HARBORAGE

Less than a mile down the track, Prince came to the tiny signal house for which he had been looking. The door was locked, and so numb and clumsy were his fingers that he found it hard to force it open. Once on the inside, he felt that the struggle was nearly over. This was the end. Using the railway's private phone, he astonished the telegraph operator in Fort Morgan by cutting in on him and asking him to run across to the nearest garage with a call for a service car.

For a long moment the operator was speechless. Did you ever hear of insolence like that? He told Prince to get off that wire and keep his hands away from railway property or he would land in the pen. Then he went back to his work. But Prince cut in on him again. Finally the operator referred him to the

station master and gave him the connection. But the station master refused to meddle with any such irregular business. This was against the law, and station masters are strong for law and order. But Prince was persistent. At last, in despair, they connected him with the district superintendent.

"Who in thunder are you, and what do you want?" asked the superintendent in no gentle voice.

"I want some of those sap-heads of yours in Fort Morgan to take a message to the garage, and they won't do it," yelled Prince.

"Say, what do you think this is? A philanthropic messenger service?" ejaculated the superintendent.

"I haven't got time to talk," cried Prince. "I've got to get at a garage, and quickly."

"Well, we don't run a garage."

"Shut up a minute and listen, will you? There is a woman out here on the track, half frozen. We are twenty miles from a house. Will you send that message or not? The woman can't live two hours."

"Well, why didn't you tell what was the matter? I will connect you with the operator at Fort Morgan and tell him to do whatever you say. You stay on the wire until he reports they have a car started."

So Prince was flung back to the operator at Fort Morgan, and that high-souled scion of the railway was sent out like a common delivery boy to take a message. Prince waited in an agony of suspense for the report from the garage. It was not favorable. No man in town would go out on a wild goose chase into the plains on a night like that. Awfully sorry, nothing doing.

"Take a gun and make them come," said Prince, between set teeth.

"I'm not looking for trouble. Your woman would freeze before they got there anyhow."

"Send the sheriff," begged Prince.

"He couldn't get out there a night like this in time to do you any good."

This was literally true. For a second Prince was silent.

"Anything else?" asked the operator. "Want me to run out and get you a cigar, or a bottle of perfume, or anything?"

"Then there is just one thing to do," said Prince abruptly. "I'll have to flag the first train and get her aboard."

"What! You can't do it. You don't dare do it. It is against the law to flag a train on private business."

"I know it. So I am asking you to make it the railroad's business. I am warning you in advance. Where are the fuses?"

The operator helplessly called up the superintendent once more.

"What the dickens do you want now?"

"It's that nut on the line," explained the operator. "He wants something else."

"Yes, I want to know where the fuses are so I can flag the first train that comes. Or I will just set the tool house afire; that will stop them."

"The fuses are in the lock box under the phone. Break the lock, or pick it. Let us know if you get in all right. How the dickens did you get a woman out there a night like this?"

But Prince had no time to explain. "Thanks, old man, you're pretty white," he said, and clasped the receiver on to the hook. A little later, with the precious fuses in his pocket, he was fighting his way through the snow back to Connie, lying unconscious in the white blankets which no longer chilled her.

The waiting seemed endlessly weary. Prince dared not sit down, but must needs keep staggering up and down the track, praying as he had never prayed in all his life, that God would send a train before Connie should freeze to death. Stooping over her, he chafed her hands and ankles, shaking her roughly, but never succeeding in restoring her to consciousness though doubtless he did much toward keeping the blood in feeble circulation.

Then, thank God! No heavenly star ever shone half so gloriously bright as that wide sweep of light that circled around the ragged rocks. Prince hastily fired the fuse, and a few minutes later a lumbering freight train pulled up beside him, anxious voices calling inquiry.

With rough but willing hands they pulled the girl on board, and piled heavy coats on a bench beside the fire where she might lie, and brought out some hot coffee which Prince swallowed in deep gulps. They even forced a few drops of it down Connie's throat. Prince was soon himself again, and sat silently beside Connie as she slept the heavy sleep.

A long lumbering ride it was, the cars creaking and rocking, reeling from side to side as if they too were drunk with weariness and cold.

At last Connie moved a little and lifted her lashes. She lay very still a while, looking with puzzled eyes at her strange surroundings, enjoying the huge fire, wondering at that curious rocking. Then, glancing at the big brown head beside her, where Prince sat on an overturned bucket with her hand in his, she closed her eyes again, still puzzled, but content.

Long minutes afterward she spoke.

"Are you cold, Prince?"

He tightened his clasp on her hand.

"No."

"How did you ever make it?"

"The train came along and we got on. Now we are thawing out," he explained, smiling reassurance.

"I do not remember it. I only remember that I was stuck in the snow, and that you did not leave me."

"Here comes some more coffee, lady," said the brakeman, coming up. Connie drank it gratefully and sat up.

"Where are we going?"

"To Fort Morgan."

"Want any more blankets or anything?" asked the brakeman kindly. "Are you getting warm?"

"Too warm, I will have to move a little."

Prince helped her gently farther from the roaring flames, and again pulled his bucket close to her side. He placed his hand in her lap and Connie wriggled her fingers into his.

Suddenly she leaned forward and looked into his face, noting the steady steely eyes, the square strong chin, the boyish mouth. Not a handsome face, like Jerry's, not fine and pure, like David's,—but strong and kind, a face that somehow spoke wistfully of deep needs and secret longings. Suddenly Connie felt that she was very happy, and in the same instant discovered that her eyes were wet. She smiled.

"Connie," whispered the big brown man, "are we going to get married, sometime?"

"Yes," she whispered promptly, "sometime. If you want me."

His hands closed convulsively over hers.

"Make it soon," he begged. "It is terribly lonesome."

"Two years," she suggested, wrinkling her brows. "But if it is too lonesome, we will make it one."

"You won't go away." Prince was aghast at the thought.

"I have to," she told him, caressing his hand with her fingers. "You know I believe I have a talent, and it says in the Bible if you do not use what is given you, all the other nice things you have may be taken away. So if I don't use that talent, I may lose it and you into the bargain."

Prince did not understand that, but it sounded reasonable. Whatever Connie said, of course. She had a talent, all right, a dozen,—a hundred of them. He thought she had a monopoly on talents.

"I will go back a while and study and work and get ready to use the talent. I have to finish getting ready first. Then I will come and live with you and you can help me use it. You won't mind, will you?"

"I want you to use it," he said. "I'm proud of it. I will take you wherever you wish to go, I will do whatever you want. I'll get a home in Denver, and just manage the business from the outside. I can live the way you like to live and do the things you like to have done; Connie, I know I can."

Connie reached slowly for her hand-bag. From it she took a tiny note-book and tossed it in the fire.

"Literary material," she explained, smiting at him. "I can not write what I have learned in Fort Morgan. I can only live it."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SUNNY SLOPE

After Connie's visit, when she had returned to Chicago to finish learning how to write her knowledge, David and Carol with little Julia settled down in the cottage among the pines, and the winter came and the mountains were huge white monuments over the last summer that had died. Later in the winter a nurse came in to take charge of the little family, and although Carol was afraid of her, she obeyed with childish confidence whenever the nurse gave directions.

"I feel fine to-day," David said to her one morning. "I think when spring comes I shall be stronger again. It is a good thing to be alive."

He glanced through the window and looked at Carol, buttoning Julia's gaiters for the fifth time that morning.

"It is a pretty nice world to most of us," said the nurse.

"We each have a world of our own, I guess. Mine is Carol and Julia now. I

have no grouch at life, and I register no complaint against circumstances, but I should be glad to live in my little world a long, long time."

One morning when spring had come, when the white monuments melted and drifted away with the clouds, and when the shadowy canyons and the yellow rocky peaks stood out bare and bright, David called her to him.

"Look," he said, "the same old sunny slope. We have been climbing it four years now, a long climb, sometimes pretty rough and rugged for you."

"It was not, David,—never," she protested quickly. "It was always a clear bright path. And we've been finding things to laugh at all the way."

He pulled her into his arm beside him on the bed. "We are going to the top of the sunny slope together. Look at the mountain there. We are going up one of those sunny ridges, and sometime, after a while, we will stand at the top, right on the summit, with the sky above and the valleys below."

She nodded her head, smiling at him bravely.

"I think it is probably very near to Heaven," he said slowly, in a dreamy voice. "I think it must be. It is so intensely bright,—see how it cuts into the blue. Yes, it must be right at the gates of Heaven. We will stand right there together, won't we?"

"David," she whispered.

"This is what I want to say. After that, there will be another way for you to go, on the other side. Look at the mountains, dear. See, there are other peaks beyond, with alternating slopes of sunshine and canyons of shadow. It is much easier to stick to the sunny slopes when there are two together. It is very easy to stagger off into the shadows, when one has to travel alone. But, Carol, don't you go into the shadows. I want to think always that you are staying in the sunshine, on the slopes, where it is bright, where Julia can laugh and play, where you can sing and listen to the birds. Stick to the sunny slopes, dear, even when you are climbing alone."

Carol nodded her head in affirmation, though her face was hidden.

"I will, David. I will run right out of the shadows and find the sunny slopes."

"And do not try to live by, 'what would David like?' Be happy, dear. Follow the sunshine. I think it guides us truly, for a pure kind heart can not mistake fleeting gaiety for lasting joys like you and I have had. So wherever your journey of joy may take you, follow it and be assured that I am smiling at you in the sunshine."

Carol stayed with him after that, sitting very quietly, speaking softly, in the subdued way that had developed from her youthful buoyance, always quick to smile reassuringly and adoringly when he looked at her, always ready to look hopefully to the sunny slopes when his finger pointed.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE END

In a low hammock beneath the maples Carol lay, pale and slender, dressed in a soft gown of creamy white, with a pink rose at her belt. Through an open window she could see her father at his desk up-stairs. Often he came to the window, waving a friendly greeting that told how glad he was to have her in the family home again. And she could see Aunt Grace in the kitchen, energetically whipping cream for the apple pie for dinner—"Carol always did love apple pie with whipped cream." Julia was digging a canal through the flower bed a dozen steps away. And close at her side sat Lark, the sweet, old, precious twin, who could not attend to the farm a single minute now that Carol was at home once more.

Carol's hands were clasped under her head, and she was staring up through the trees at the clear blue sky, flecked like a sea with bits of foam.

"Mother," cried Julia, running to the hammock and sweeping wildly at the sky with a knife she was using for a spade, "I looked right up into Heaven and I saw my daddy, and he did not cough a bit. He smiled at me and said, 'Hello, little sweetheart. Take good care of Mother.'"

Carol kissed her, softly, regardless of the streaks of earth upon her chubby

face.

"Mother," puzzled Julia, "what is it to be died? I can't think it. And I lie down and I can't do it. What is it to be died?"

"Death, Julia, you mean death. I think, dear, it is life,—life that is all made straight; life where one can work and never be laid aside for illness; life where one can love, and fear no separation; life where one can do the big things he yearned to do, and be the big man he yearned to be with no hindrance of little petty things. I think that death is life, the happy life."

Julia, satisfied, returned to her canal, and Lark, with throbbing pity, patted Carol's arm.

"Do you know, Larkie, I think that death is life on the top of a sunny slope, clear up on the peak where it touches the sky. Such a big sunny slope that the canyons of shadow are miles and miles away, out of sight entirely. I believe that David is living right along on the top of a sunny slope."

Her father stepped to the window and tapped on the pane, waving down to them. "I can't keep away from this window," he called. "Whenever you twins get together I think I have to watch you just as I used to when you were mobbing the parsonage."

The twins laughed, and when he went back to his desk they turned to each other with eyes that plainly said, "Isn't he the grandest father that ever lived?"

Then Carol folded her hands behind her head again and looked dreamily up through the leafy maples, seeing the broad mesa stretching off miles away to the mountains, where the dark canyons underlined the sunny slopes.

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