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THE ISLE OF DREAMS

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Myra Kelly

Author of
"LITTLE CITIZENS"



D. APPLETON & CO.

New York

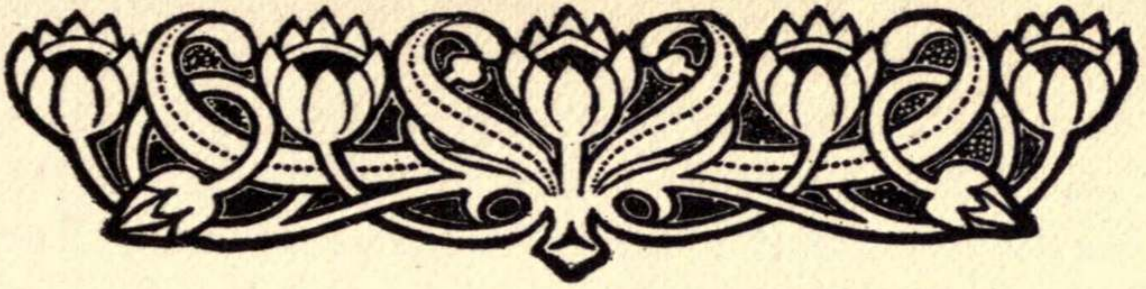
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To My husband



THE ISLE OF DREAMS

I

IT was an imposing house—wide and dignified and cool, though one could hardly have called it handsome. Built in the days before the New York architect had been forced up into the air to find space, it stood upon a piece of land ample enough to allow of a strip of green and a few magnolias before its windows, and, at the back, a larger patch of green inclosing a fountain, a flower bed or so, a tree or two, an arbor, and some garden chairs. The brass trappings about its hospitable door were polished to a dazzling brilliance, its windows were bright, its curtains immaculate, and its grass plots carefully trimmed.

Wide and dignified and cool was Mrs.

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Denis also, as she stood upon the steps in the early May sunshine and surveyed the little park across the street. Spotless was her gown, immaculate her apron, and bright her smile.

“Laylocks!” she murmured, and sniffed the air. “Laylocks, God bless ’em!”

Around the corner from the avenue came the postman, and Mrs. Denis watched him quizzically as he made his erratic and interrupted way toward her. Up some steps he went; down others he vanished; but always he came back to the sunshine again, and always he came nearer to the calm old house and to Mrs. Denis. The sheaf of letters and papers which he delivered to her was befittingly large and important, and she sat down upon the clean-swept top step to sort them into piles upon her lap.

“One for Miss Merrill,” she counted. “Two for Miss Merrill. One for Mr. Drummond. Three for Mr. Drummond. Four for Miss Merrill. And, oh, deary, deary, me! here’s one for Miss Merrill in the bold, free, striking writing of a man. They mostly uses

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typewriters and young females to write their letters for 'em nowadays, and when you see the bold, free, striking writing of a man 'tis a very dangerous looking sign. Five for Mr. Drummond. Two for Mrs. Drummond. One for Mrs. Denis—that's the milk bill—and a very fair collection altogether I call it, except for that bold, free, striking one for my lamb. They'll take her away from me some day, I suppose; but that's life and nature, as Denis used to say. Oh, deary me!"

Suddenly the park, the sky, and the sunshine vanished—shut out by two tiny hands.

"Glory be!" cried Mrs. Denis, making no effort to free herself. "I wonder *who*, now, would be up to such contrary tricks."

"Guess!" commanded a shrill little voice.

"It's Mr. Drummond," announced the victim, "and fie for shame, sir, fie for shame."

"It ain't Mr. Drummond. Don't you 'member he went away yesterday?"

"Now, Miss Katharine, dear, sure I ought to have knowed your sweet voice. It is yourself, avick."

"No, it ain't Miss Merrill."

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“Then of course it’s Mrs. Drummond, for there’s no one else for it to be outside the children, and they’d never go for to blind a poor old body on such a lovely morning. I’m surprised at you, Mrs. Drummond, ma’am, I am indeed.”

“It ain’t Mrs. Drummond!” shrieked the voice in high glee. “She’s went with Mr. Drummond and left them babies for us to take care of. It’s me.”

And the hands slipped from eyes to neck as a pair of thin little arms clutched Mrs. Denis and a thin little body tumbled over her shoulder and settled itself among the letters on her lap.

“It’s me,” announced the shrill voice; “it’s your own little girl, Doris Gwendolin Patricia Denis, and you never knowed me. You never do seem able to guess it’s me.”

“Well, maybe I’d remember next time,” Mrs. Denis promised. “And now you must take the letters up. Miss Merrill will be waiting above for you.”

Doris Gwendolin Patricia allowed herself to be stroked into presentable trim—a bow

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encouraged, a stocking smoothed, a ribbon adjusted—and set out to execute her mission.

The interior of the house was even more calm and pleasant than its exterior. The spacious hall, the wide shallow-stepped stairs with curving balustrade and windows of colored glass, the pictures, statues, palms, tapestries, and rugs were sources of constant joy to the happy people who lived among them, and of constant envy to those who did not. And it would have been difficult to find a group as contented and as busy as that over which Mrs. Denis reigned and watched with an affection which nothing could alter.

The house had been the property of old Anthony Merrill, had been by him bequeathed to his son, and by him to his daughter when, at the early age of thirty, he had followed his wife to a happier world and had left Katharine, then six years old, nominally to the care of several maiden aunts and bachelor uncles, but really to the devotion of Mrs. Denis, who had been maid, nurse, friend, and comfort to his ill-starred little family.

Followed a childhood harried by aunts and

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harassed by uncles. Followed a girlhood of boarding schools. Followed womanhood, talent, work, travel. And always Mrs. Denis took care of the big empty house and kept it ready for her darling's brief returns. Followed hard times of work and struggle. Followed sweet times of success. Followed a meeting with Carrie Sommerville, a friend of Paris study time, married now to a most indulgent husband, and the proud mother of two charming babies. Followed an arrangement whereby the two households became one, and Katharine by this coöperation was enabled to live becomingly in the home of her fathers. Followed then all the beatitudes for Mrs. Denis and for Doris Gwendolin Patricia, a waif whom she had adopted in the years of her loneliness and had named after the several heroines of several novels with which the circulating library had helped to cheer her through many an empty hour. The child adored Katharine as fondly as the old lady did. It was her most blessed privilege to carry Miss Merrill's letters to the big studio which had been old Anthony's library, and

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whose windows overlooked the fountain, the grass, the trees, the flower beds, and the garden chairs.

On this bright spring morning these windows were open and the young Chatelaine was leaning out of one and watching the Misses Drummond in the garden below. Doris Gwendolin Patricia placed the letters on the abandoned breakfast table and approached to worship her divinity. The rites were simple and soon performed, but they turned Miss Merrill's attention to her devotee. And with her attention she turned her face, her clever, alert face with its baffling expression, half whimsical, half surprised, which the little devotee had been taught to consider the most wonderful face in the world. "Though her mother, God rest her soul," Mrs. Denis had always maintained, "was more of a beauty at her age. But she hadn't Miss Katharine's smile, my dear."

Doris Gwendolin Patricia regarded the elder Drummonds apathetically, the younger Drummonds superciliously, but Katharine with an idolatry which included in its list of

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deities Miss Merrill's voice and eyes and rooms and gowns—all the dainty ways and belongings which made her so troublesome and so dear. But it sternly excluded her friends. While Mrs. Denis viewed with suspicion the bold, free, striking writing of a man, this more ardent spirit warred against everyone, whether man or woman, who seemed to entertain designs upon the leisure or affection of her idol. She detested all of Miss Merrill's customary visitors and regarded newcomers with aversion. And later on that bright May morning she was sent up to announce the advent of a visitor, among all visitors the one whom she most detested. It was nearly eleven o'clock when she crept in to whisper:

“Miss Emerton is in the 'ception room. Gran'ma can't make her go away. Will you see her?”

“Of course she will,” a voice from the stairs interrupted, and Miss Emerton thrust herself and her spring millinery upon the scene.

“Katharine, dear, this queer little mite

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would hardly let me come up. But I knew you would never refuse to see me.”

If Miss Merrill's eyes were the mirror of her thoughts, then Miss Emerton was nearer to hearing that refusal than she seemed to guess. But she was not of the hypersensitive type, so she established herself comfortably in a deep chair, waved her guide away, and commenced in a high-pitched monologue to announce the object of her visit. Katharine listened thoughtfully with her telltale eyes upon her work until the nature of Gladys's proposition caught and held her interest.





II

BUT you would never do it," Miss Emerton reiterated with a fretful glance round the luxurious studio when, her address ended, a silence had ensued. "You are too fond of your name and your fame and your glory."

"Nonsense," retorted Katharine. "I can't see that they have anything to do with the case." And she crossed to the cushion-heaped couch and propped herself comfortably upon it. "I should love to do all those things. Is there anything else?"

"Nothing else," replied Miss Emerton, still stiffly but with a slightly softened expression, for Katharine looked small and fragile in her blue painting apron among the cushions, and Miss Emerton was fond of her in a patronizing, elder-sisterly, disapproving way. She rather enjoyed the sensation of lecturing,

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sometimes even hectoring, this friend of whom nearly everyone else stood in such unreasonable awe, and she would have been greatly surprised if anyone had hinted that Katharine's forbearance and gentleness were caused, not by a becoming wonder at Gladys's superior mentality, not by envy of her social advantages, but by a wasted pity and an unmerited admiration.

For Gladys Emerton and Katharine Merrill had entered the classes of a great Parisian teacher at the same time. Both wanted to paint. The great man took a week to make his decision. To Katharine he had said: "Work and you will go far." And she had straightway consecrated her whole life to the work. Gladys's easel had been beside Katharine's and the master turned to survey the canvas upon it, and the self-confident young woman before it with inscrutable eyes. Miss Emerton, in the boastfulness of her new French with her old accent, made some remark intended to imply that she, too, had only to work in order to achieve, and the old man had answered: "Assuredly, Mademoiselle

must work—the world cannot spare her—but, might one suggest?—at something else.”

Katharine had never forgotten the sinister old face, the circle of inquisitive students, the flush and the shrug with which Gladys had heard her sentence. To Gladys it only meant that she was not appreciated by one silly old man in a dirty coat. To Katharine it would have meant the death of all hope forever. And when her return to New York had brought about a renewal of this old acquaintance, she had marveled at the courage of the rejected claimant for the gift which had been granted her. Gladys never complained nor whimpered. She even sometimes referred, with a calm courage which brought tears to Katharine's eyes, to the days when they had studied and tried together, but any hint at the difference in their positions left Katharine powerless in the clutches of her friend. She stretched a hand to Gladys now and patted that ruffled young woman upon the tailor-made shoulder.

“Then, of course, I'll do it. Of course, old girl,” she promised.

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“I wonder if you will. You are so fond of dropping into attitudes in the center of the stage and of appropriating all the admiration for miles around.”

“Base ingratitude!” cried Katharine. “I have just made up my mind to renounce all these things for your sake, to go with you to stay with these friends of yours; to leave all my best pretties at home, to be sulky, disheveled, and disagreeable; to sit in corners and glower and suck my thumb. But go on with the letter. You’ve read me only the first sentence. It promises well, you say?”

“I thought so when it came this morning, but now I’m not so sure. If you are going to scintillate according to your custom, I’d rather stay at home or go alone. Do you think,” in happy inspiration, “that I might? Say you are too busy to leave town, or something like that?”

“You must read me the letter,” said Katharine. “I can’t tell you until I hear it.”

Gladys prepared to obey, but there was a pucker of insubordination in her lower lip and a glance of something like jealousy in her eye.

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“‘My dear Miss Emerton,’” she began. “‘My brother tells me that you know the Miss Katharine Merrill whose wonderful paintings are daily coming to be more widely and highly appreciated.’”

“You may skip all that part,” interjected the young person among the pillows. “Go on with the rest.”

“‘Could you not persuade her to accompany you on a week-end visit to the Island? The place is, perhaps, at its best during this month, and the apple blossoms are due next Saturday. My mother——’

“She presides over his household, you know,” interpolated Gladys.

“‘——is writing to you both, but begs that you will forego the formality of an interchange of visits, since she is already established with me for the summer. Yours very sincerely, Robert Ford.’”

“I call it a charming letter,” was Katharine’s verdict. “And it comes most opportunely for me. Carrie Drummond and I have lent our studios—those big doors open, you know, and make such a jolly room out of the

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two—to a lunatic of a cousin of hers with a mania for entertaining and no place to do it in. I shall like being away from the orgy. They dragged me to the last, but I'll never be taken alive at another. It's different with Carrie; the creature is a cousin of hers, and some one must maintain decorum. So she's coming back from Maryland to do it. But I shall be glad to escape it all."

"No, no," Gladys urged with a careful disingenuousness. "You mustn't make any sacrifice on my account. I can accept the invitation and say that you have another engagement."

"Hardly, I think, after that letter. I'm afraid it's a case of united we go or divided we stay."

"And you will really promise——"

"Not to outshine you? Readily, since I couldn't if I tried. You don't appreciate what a guidebook would call your great natural attractiveness. If only I had your height and eyes and hair! Do you know, oh foolish virgin, that with the addition of three celery curls and a flowered bedquilt, you'd be a typi-

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cal Aubrey Beardsley woman? You throw us all into the background."

"But will you stay there?" Gladys persisted.

"Of course I shall. I shall *be* the background. I can see the picture now," and she regarded her friend through narrowed eyelids with abstracted gaze. "Listen! I'll describe it to you. The Central Female Figure gracefully coiled *on* a rock *under* a parasol and a shady tree. Beside her the Central Male Figure, merely sketched in at present but already showing interesting elements. The Background repeating motif of Foreground, shows the friend of C. F. F. and the brother of C. M. F.—both very small and hazy—under a smaller parasol and a blighted tree."

Gladys showed little interest in the portrait group. Her unsteady attention had already fallen upon another aspect.

"And you really think that we ought to go?" she asked. "That they really want us?"

"Most likely not," laughed Katharine. "Hospitality may be an insanity with him, as

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it is with Carrie's awful cousin. O Gladys, Gladys dear," she went on earnestly, "the world is a much kinder place than you think, and the people in it are kinder, too. Of course Mr. Ford wants us—you at least—because his brother does. But why drag *me* in?"

"I can't imagine," Gladys mused with a startling frankness, crossing to the open window and looking fretfully down upon the garden. The surety of her self-conceit was growing less than sure. She had always ignored any charms which were not exemplified in her own aristocratic if somewhat acidulated appearance, but it was being borne in upon her now that there was a winsomeness, a cheeriness, and an unaffected trustfulness about Katharine Merrill which combined dangerously with her admittedly great talent and her very evident youth. And Gladys had no intention of being outshone.

"But you can't help being yourself," she went on crossly. "And people have such a way of taking to you when they meet you first. Of course it is because you are supposed to be a romantic figure—young and

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alone in the world and all that sort of thing. But I must say I don't see what you have to complain of. Everyone in this house is devoted to you, you are popular, free as air, and your pictures——”

“Yes, yes, I know,” Katharine cried, following her to the window, all compunction now, though Gladys in this particular mood was particularly hard to bear. “I know everyone is dear to me. See how good *you* are! I was just wondering how I could escape the hospitable cousin, and you came in with this delightful plan.”

“Oh, it wouldn't be delightful for you! The Fords are greatly prejudiced against the public woman.”

“All the better for Backgrounds, my dear. Think how they will regard a sulky public woman!”

“Could you,” suggested Miss Emerton, turning to her hostess, “could you, perhaps, manage a cigarette?”

“I might if you would like to spend the rest of the time in smoothing my fevered pillow and shaking out my restless brow. One

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infers that they disapprove of cigarettes. I'll sacrifice my vanity to your love, but not, sweet maid, my health. And now, is it decided?"

"Yes, if you will be——"

"Stupid?"

"Yes, and——"

"Disagreeable?"

"Yes, and——"

"If I'll sit in dark corners with the host person while you disport with the brother?"

"But he is very nice. Quite as nice as the brother. Nicer, perhaps. Of course Jack is my friend, but I don't want to slight the other. He is the host, as you say, and rather charming. In fact—well, to put it plainly—you see——"

"I see that you don't know your own mind," laughed Katharine. "In which case you don't care much for either. Just give me a hint when you feel up to it. And now for details. Where do they live? Where is this island?"

"Off the Connecticut shore. Robert Ford owns it all and lives there in the dearest of rambling houses crammed with all sorts of

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things he gathered in 'furrin parts.' He's been twice round the world. There's a sea wall in front and quaint gardens behind. I spent a Sunday afternoon there last winter, and it was all delightful, even in the snow."

"It surely sounds alluring. Are there any boats? May I take my yachting things?"

"Are they old?"

"As time."

"Then take them. There may be boats, and *I* might take the frock I got this year for Nassau."

"And the people? In the words of the intelligence office, how many in family?"

"Three. The mother and the two sons."

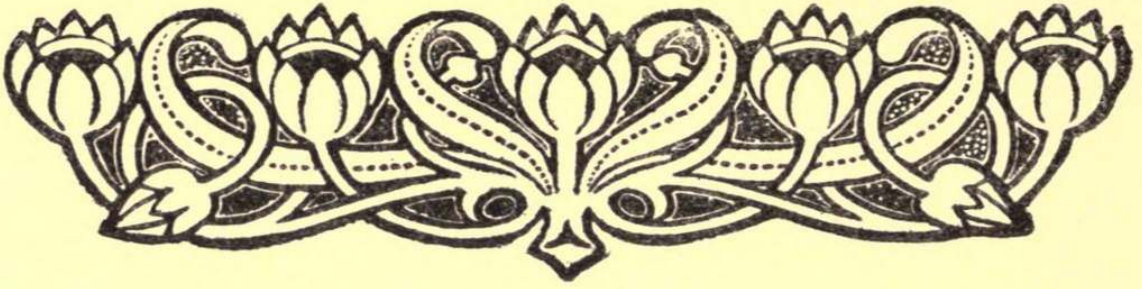
"None of whom will approve of me," commented Katharine ruefully. "Well, the lime-light there won't blind me. But we'll go. It will be a healthy experience for me. And in the country one can keep away from people so easily. I might even take my paints and things and do a little sketching."

"Then I won't go. That would be the worst thing you could possibly do. To paint!—to be a genius there before their very eyes!"

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“All right,” said the patient Katharine, “I won’t. I’ll suck my thumb until you seal one brother with your favor. Then I shall try to be a comfort to the other. One could almost make a poem out of that. Other and brother, you know.”





III

OFF the southern shore of Connecticut there are several small islands, well wooded, fertile, and picturesquely separated from one another and from the mainland by bays and coves of Long Island Sound. Some are used by the Government as lighthouse stations, some are too wild or too small to warrant cultivation, some support small but thrifty native communities, and some are appointed as luxurious country homes by people who prefer retirement, natural beauty, and "a life on the ocean wave" to crowded summer resorts.

Robert Ford's island was one of the latter. It comprised some two hundred acres and lay at a distance of about a mile from the shore. The house was a low, white structure, with a tower at one end, built according to no defi-

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nite school or period, but it was spacious, many-windowed, and perfectly adapted to its owner's ideal of country life, which was to gather together as many congenial people as possible and then, after placing all sorts of devices for amusement at their command, to go placidly about his own employments and enjoyments. If these could be shared with any or all of his guests, then so much the better. If not, then not so very much worse.

And it would be a holiday maker of a very unusual turn who could not find some outlet for his energies. In the house there were books and billiards, a music room, a smoking room, and the well-equipped observatory in the tower. Out of doors there were wooded walks and bordered gardens, greenhouses and orchards, the tennis lawn and the terraces where one could lounge for hours in a deck chair and watch the wide expanse of sea and land and sky, always beautiful and ever changing. A sea wall separated the lawn from the water, and at one end of it there was a boathouse presided over by a very salty salt and boasting small craft of several varieties

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of sail and motor, besides the seventy-foot steam yacht which was the object of intense pride and solicitude on the part of the salty salt.

If all these resources failed there was still the mainland where, besides the private landing stage a short distance from the railroad station, the discontented one or two could find the garage and a despondent native of sunny France who had been in Ford's employment for nearly two years and who had never, in that time, been known to volunteer a remark or to allow himself any pleasure save that of quarreling violently with Captain Jameson on the details and management of motor boats. Since each disputant confined himself to his native tongue, and since the discussion necessarily bristled with technicalities and profanity, there was no danger that any understanding would arise between them to deprive the exile of his only relaxation. Captain Jameson spoke of his colleague officially and nautically as "Pier"; but unofficially and in the circle of his family, which consisted of a widowed sister who lived with him in the

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upper part of the boathouse, he designated him as "That Dago." And he always transhipped a passenger from boat to auto with a chastened sense of having looked his last upon a fellow creature. Pierre, meanwhile, felt that it was but a pitiful postponement of the inevitable to steer his charges through the perils of city traffic or suburban dog and trolley, only to deliver them to Captain Jameson and a watery grave. These henchmen, like all the other servants of the household, were absolutely at the command of the guests upon the island, and took orders with a well-trained alacrity from anyone who gave them.

The Island bountifully fulfilled Robert Ford's promise and his guests' anticipation on Friday afternoon, at which time Miss Emerton and her friend were expected. Pierre and the car were at the station, Captain Jameson and the motor boat were at the dock, and Robert Ford was on the platform when the train drew in.

A slim young woman, faultlessly but unobtrusively gowned, was the first to alight, and Ford was conscious of a moment of rebellion

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as he told himself that he had not come in search of anything so normal and bright-eyed as she. He had known too many artists to expect a really famous one to wear a costume of bright brown with hair and eyes to match and a dash of pink in cheeks and hat. "Now, this," he realized, "is more my sort of thing," as a much-dressed figure was assisted to the platform by an obsequious guard. Amidst clouds of chiffon veil and billows of feather boa he recognized Miss Emerton and hurried to greet her.

"It was so kind of you to come," he assured her. "But Miss Merrill? Did she change her mind?"

"No, indeed," gushed Gladys. "Let me present you to her," and Robert wheeled in obedience to her gesture and found himself smiling into the brown eyes.

A moment afterwards and he had possessed himself of their baggage checks, secured their belongings, and bestowed them all in the automobile. Pierre conveyed the party to the dock and recommended their bodies to Captain Jameson and their souls to God.

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And Katharine's spirits, which during the short journey down from town had sunk to a low loneliness, began to recover their usual cheer. She had found ample time and cause, even in that short space, to regret having forfeited the care of Mrs. Denis and the companionship of the returning Drummonds for the very uncertain joy of spending some days in a strange place and with strangers. A brief reflection and a few moments of Miss Emerton's conversation had made it clear to Katharine that she need not expect much of that young lady's society or attention. But the beauty of the woods and fields through which the train had passed consoled her somewhat, and her first surprised impression of Ford further reassured her. She had evolved a portrait of her host as unlike the reality as she was unlike his ideal artist. She had not been prepared for a well-knit, athletic figure, a face grave and almost stern, but capable of a smile of such kindness, wisdom, and enjoyment as made her feel that Gladys had been understating the case when she described the host as "nearly as charming as his brother."

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Once on the water, she was further comforted and repaid a thousandfold. The Island, growing every moment clearer as they approached it, seemed the very embodiment of the spring which was making such pitiful pleas for a hearing in the crowded city. Here it was riotous yet gentle—enthroned yet shrinking. The transparent green of grass, the pink of apple trees, the warm brown of new-plowed earth, the shining blue of sky and sea filled Katharine's eyes with delight and pride. For here were the powers she served—nature and color and light! And straightway she forgot the reason of her being there. She forgot her companions, her rôle, her very self, and only remembered that she was a servant greatly blessed and that there was still work for her to do in the beautiful kingdom of her rulers.

The very wind summoned her. Sweet of flower and earth and wave, it blew across her face, loosening little tendrils of her sunny hair and bearing her memory back to Brittany and three springs ago. How hard she had worked—and how happily!

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The same wind was flapping and snapping through Miss Emerton's flying jib and top-sails, and she was so preoccupied with her unruly rigging that Ford thought it kinder to desist even from the very desultory conversation with which they had beguiled thus much of the way. An unusually vicious onslaught drove Gladys to the cabin and a looking glass, and Ford turned to his other guest.

"It is nearly over now," he began; "you can see the house. That long white one on the hill."

"I can see no other," she said, and Ford liked the clear-cut enunciation with which she said it, and recognized the influence of French sojourn in the precision of her consonants. "Are you an Alexander Selkirk, monarch of all you survey? The feeling must be intoxicating."

"It should not be. Two hundred acres are really not overwhelming. Though I grant you that having it all in one tight little island is a great advantage."

"It is the heart of the whole thing," cried

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Katharine. "It is almost like the very Good Place we are told about, where 'moths do not break in nor steal, nor thieves grow rusty.'"

"But as to being monarch of it all, I'm not so sure," he laughed, as a white figure appeared upon the terrace and commenced to descend the path leading to the boathouse. "I may be that in name, but there's the present regent, my mother."

She was waiting for them when they disembarked, and Katharine found no violent display of disapprobation in her greeting nor in that of the other son who stood beside her, and who took such evident pride and pleasure in her dainty and surprising youthfulness. The Ford trio, in fact, seemed frankly delighted with one another. Katharine, as the whole group made its leisurely way to the house, saw the lady slip her hand into that of her elder son quite as a matter of course and habit.

Tea ensued. The guests were shown to their rooms, and could hardly make up their minds to leave those bowers of mahogany and

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chintz, where every window framed a picture, where flowers abounded, and a bright-faced maid ministered unto them.

Down in the wide living room the Fords were waiting and beguiling the time with conversation.

“I give you my word,” Robert repeated, “that I never was more surprised in my life. Why, she’s just like any other of the nicest girls we know. The sort of girl one’s friends have for sisters. There are numbers of people we might have had to meet her if I had only known. What do you think of her, mother?”

“That she has designs upon us, of course,” laughed Jack. “Doesn’t she always think that of every female between six and sixty.”

“Jack,” his mother admonished, “don’t be ungrateful. You two boys would have been unhappily married over and over again if I hadn’t warned and protected you.” And, as Jack collapsed under this charge of averted bigamy, she turned to Robert.

“Seriously, dear,” she was beginning wist-

fully, when he established himself before her resolutely, and:

“Seriously, dearest,” he interrupted, “you must listen first to me. That poor child——”

“Child!” repeated Mrs. Ford. “She’s at least twenty-eight.”

“Twenty-five,” Jack emerged from his conscience to amend. “Miss Emerton told me. Same age herself.”

“Just as I surmised,” his mother placidly smiled. “*Thirty* if they are a day.”

“Her age has nothing to do with it. Jack’s thirty and I’m forty, yet you know the dangers you shield us from. Well, to go back. That poor child is in six times as perilous a position as we are. Really, you ought to do something about it. “It’s ‘a subject made to your hand.’ She’s an orphan with a comfortable income, a house in town, and a very great talent. You grant the talent, I hope.”

“Oh, yes,” his mother admitted, “no one can deny that.”

“And I chance to know about the house and income. She can earn more money in a

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year than many of the men whom one meets, and she is—well, you see what she is.”

“If you’ve forgotten, you’ll have another chance. I hear them on the stairs,” warned Jack.





IV

DURING the first few hours of that afternoon Katharine was puzzled. In outward seeming there was little to choose between the brothers. Jack was sufficiently like his brother and sufficiently unlike, and they were both sufficiently brave in controlling their dislike for the public woman. Gladys treated them both with the same jealously careful indifference, and they reflected the indifference without the jealousy. The insistence with which Robert proposed that he and Miss Merrill should stroll through the garden and round the island, while Jack should take Miss Emerton out in the canoe, was only equaled by the *empressement* with which Jack proposed that Miss Merrill should accompany him in his canoe what time Robert should show the gardens and the island to Miss Emerton.

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Finding neither guidance nor suggestion in the face of the Central Female Figure, the Background accepted both invitations, and endeavored to determine from the resulting conversations which Ford had succumbed to the elongated charms of Gladys. But the brothers were noncommittal.

Robert, when he led her out into the quiet garden, seemed quite content to bear the heavier burden of the conversation. He told her of how, when a boy with his first sailboat, he had landed upon the island one day to build a fire and eat his lunch. Of how the old fisherman who then owned it had showed him its beauties and its advantages, its trees and brooks, and its gently sloping hill. Of how he had made many further visits to the island during that same summer, of his first sailboat: "A cat, Miss Merrill, so overloaded with canvas that I always had to sit on the windward rail before I hoisted sail. I often wonder why I was not drowned. Reserved, perhaps, for the other fate. Well, and so I went to college, then to Europe, then to the four corners of the earth, and for years I

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rarely thought of the island and of my old friend.”

“I know, I understand,” said Katharine, as he paused. “One hates to grant any truth to a proverb, but absence does make the heart grow fonder—of somebody else. I spent three consecutive years in France, and I nearly forgot Denis.”

Ford started slightly, and the silence lasted for yet a little while before he spoke again, and with something less than his earlier concentration.

“I had been at home for a season or two when I chanced to sail in these waters with some friends of mine. I learned that the old man was dead and the place for sale. So I bought it. I had never seen, in all my travels, a piece of land I so much desired. I’ve devoted five years to it, and I’ve found it as responsive, as grateful, and as sympathetic as many a man. More so than any woman.”

“Did you ever devote five years to a woman?”

“Never could—yet, though I’ve often tried to. But you can’t get tired of a thing which

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is always waiting for you, always makes you comfortable, never asks for anything and makes the most amazing best of what you give it."

"It certainly sounds unfeminine," Katharine agreed. "But it hardly strikes one as being masculine either."

"No," he acquiesced, "it is altogether more than human. I heard Jack arranging to show you about, but I want to claim that privilege. I really can do it better than he, you know."

"But Miss Emerton—" Katharine was beginning.

"Of course," said the host. "I had nearly forgotten her. Jack shall be her guide. He was very keen about having her out. They are old friends, you know. I've met her only once before. Jack brought out a number of his friends one Sunday afternoon." And Katharine inferred that her post in the background would be shared and enlivened by the companionship of her host.

It was certainly enlivened. Everything—from the gray carved lions on the terrace to

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the queer old books in the library—had its own story, and he told them well. The trim garden was “after” one he had looked out on for a month from some delightful lodgings in a quaint Welsh village where he had gone to fish and had stayed to shoot. The ivy on the sundial was from St. Helena; the sundial itself from a little Italian town. The queerly wrought lamp in the hall, the group of silver cups in the smoking room, the mounted heads of moose and tiger and lion in the hall, the ivories and tapestries in the music room—all represented a risk run, a bargain driven, a train or a meal missed.

Katharine had visited many of the places he spoke of, and they compared memories and impressions and laughed over discomforts which had been hardships when they were endured, but were pleasures in retrospect.

From time to time they drifted into the orbit of Mrs. Ford, who would join them for some space, whimsically indulgent of her son's enthusiasm, but courteously thoughtful of their guest.

“Don't tire Miss Merrill,” she warned him.

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“You’ve been dragging her about for an unconscionable time and at an unconscionable pace. Let her come with me to the music room now. Miss Emerton and Jack are there.”

They were. There was a stiffness about the one and a lassitude about the other which gave Katharine some uneasiness. Had she, she wondered, blundered after all? Was the host destined to bask in the high lights while she and the brother hovered in semidarkness?

She was soon granted an opportunity of judging whether such an arrangement would serve to fill the hours agreeably.

“Ahoy and aho and, oh, who’s for the ferry,
The brier’s in bud and the sun’s going down,”

chanted Jack as he emerged from a deep chair and pointed to the reddening west. “Miss Merrill, has Robert left you any strength at all? Are you too tired to come and look at the island’s coral strand?”

Ensnconced in the bow of the canoe Katharine set herself to the question which was growing hourly more perplexing and more

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insistent. The athletic young gentleman who faced her from the stern did not look like the hero of an obscure attachment. Also he seemed quite free from yearning thoughts of the two left in the twilight of the big music room. With little apparent effort he drove his craft through the long shadows and pale sunlight close to the shore.

“It’s the jolliest place in the world, Miss Merrill,” he informed her, with a vigor of which jealousy should have made him incapable. “Just the jolliest place in the world.”

“Surely it is very charming,” she acquiesced warmly.

“And Robert is the jolliest chap in the world.”

Her acquiescence was less warm, and he went on:

“Don’t believe any of the cynical things he says. He doesn’t mean a word of ’em. He says shocking things about, for instance, women. Now, that’s all pose. He has lots of friends among ’em, and he’s a regular old Sir Galahad about ’em. Do anything, you

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know, to serve 'em. Why, that man is godfather to as many babies and Boston terriers as the President is!"

"Some have greatness and godchildren thrust upon them," quoted Katharine. She was beginning to enjoy these people and to see some reason for their devotion to whatever—whether relative or real estate—chanced to belong to them.

"And to hear him talk," Jack went on, "you'd think he'd hate it. But he doesn't. He sends all the babies a Christmas present—all alike—gets 'em by the dozen every year—and all the mothers flowers. He's so popular that if he didn't live out here he'd die of dyspepsia in a year. Even now the lunches are awfully hard on him. Poor fellow!"

Katharine spent a silent moment in contemplation of this pitiful condition and then:

"Miss Emerton—" she began and halted.

"That puzzles me," Jack admitted. "He *would* invite her, and now he wants me to entertain her. And there are limits to what a fellow can be expected to do even for the dearest old chap in the world."

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“It was he, I may remark, who invited me. Am I also to be inflicted upon you?”

Jack's manners were good. He said what the occasion demanded, and was still saying it when they sauntered back to the terrace.

Katharine rather dreaded the dressing hour which would summon her to a *tête-a-tête* upstairs, for the brow of Miss Emerton boded ill. But she was hardly prepared for the asperity with which, as soon as they were in the solitude of their apartments, she was met with the question:

“What do you mean by behaving as you do, after promising as you did?”

A soft answer did not in the least turn away wrath.

“I'm doing as well as I can,” Katharine explained. “You won't tell me which of the two you prefer, so I've been trying to discover which prefers you.”

“And did you?”

“No,” Katharine truthfully admitted, “I did not. Why can't you be sensible and tell me?”

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“Because you know perfectly well,” said Gladys.

There was a connecting door between the rooms assigned to them. She marched through it now and closed it with a bang.

Peace was restored by a refractory fastening of Miss Emerton's newest and most becoming gown. One can forgive much to a rival whose attire has seen its best days, and who is amiably assisting at one's toilet; doing wondrously with flattened tulle and distorted trimmings. So far did Gladys unbend that Katharine ventured once more upon the question:

“Which?”

But the Central Female Figure drew herself stiffly up to her full height of outraged friendship and pink chiffon and repeated:

“You know perfectly well. If you can't keep away from him, if you must talk to him, I wish you'd try to discover what he thinks of me.”

“Or when,” Katharine added—mentally.

“But I'd rather you'd leave him alone and stay with his brother.”

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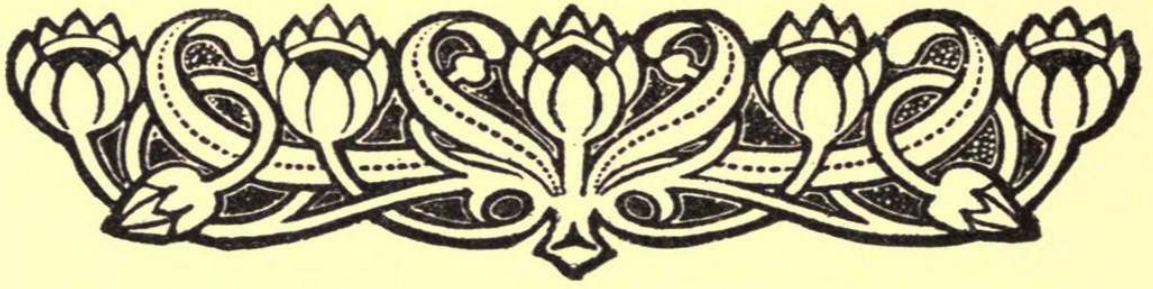
“Which brother?” asked Katharine, with unabated interest, and could find no answer then nor at any time during the most uncomfortable evening which the spoiled and petted Miss Merrill had ever endured. The pleasant, lingering dinner passed off very well. Gladys, conscious of her frock—and of Katharine’s—sparkled and bubbled and was happy. The host was courteous, the brother charming, the mother affable, the Background repressed. But, after coffee on the terrace, a repetition of the afternoon’s episodes and upbraidings menaced the unfortunate Background when Mrs. Ford retired to magazines and the library and Katharine was too tired, after the unaccustomed exertions of the afternoon, to do more than cling to Gladys with a tenacity which earned for her the disapprobation of the general. Of Gladys, who wished to monopolize the brother of her choice, of Robert who thought that Jack wished to monopolize Gladys, of Jack who was beginning to think that Gladys wished to be monopolized by Robert.

So a quartet sat stiffly among the coffee cups.

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A quartet wandered, uncommunicative, out into the moonlit garden. A quartet paced tediously on the wide sea-wall where lawn met shore. And a quartet parted so unregretfully in the spacious hall as to give some show of reason for the surprise with which the painted ladies and gentlemen on the walls regarded them. But these were old-fashioned people of the long ago before the time of electric light, when "good nights" were ceremonious affairs accompanied by cordiality and candlesticks.





V

VERY early on the next morning Miss Merrill was sitting with dangling feet upon the sea wall. The weariness of the preceding night had gone, and she was blissfully contemplating the beauty all about her and the happy hours before her. For there seemed little danger of boredom while Robert Ford was host. Yes, she decided, as she thought of the people in the quiet house behind her, yes, she liked them. If leisure meant many friends and holidays like these, then Gladys was more fortunate than it had been Katharine's habit to consider her. She liked Mrs. Ford. Only to look at her was a pleasure. And her manner was so charming and so sincere! For Mrs. Ford had fulfilled the more happy of Miss Emerton's predictions, and had "taken to"

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Miss Merrill. She had graciously consented to overlook the element of publicity in her situation, and had showed her portraits of her two sons made in their youth and innocence.

Miss Merrill liked Jack. She liked the cheerful independence with which he maintained his own individuality under the handicap of an older brother, his admiration for this brother, the reverence in which he held his mother, and his partisanship of all things relating to his Alma Mater. The best crew, the best teams, the best campus, and the best fellows all belonged to the university which had made him an excellent specimen of physical development and a lawyer of ability and promise.

She *thought* she liked the elder brother, she told herself uneasily. But she did not quite understand his manner. Considered as abstract manner it was faultless. He was courteous, thoughtful, and cordial. That was it. He was too cordial. He seemed to feel that Katharine and he were friends of long and intimate acquaintanceship. And she, under

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the influence of his cordiality and sincerity, found herself allowing him to take for granted a comradeship and a unity of interest which nothing had occurred to establish. The accident of their having visited the same foreign towns and countries did not explain it. He had been frankly in quest of pleasure. Her travels had all had some bearing on her work, and he seemed no more interested in pictures than in a dozen other pursuits. He had not mentioned her profession, and yet he knew of it. His letter had told her that. If she had found one of her canvases in his house she might have understood his attitude, for she knew that there was something of herself in everything she painted, and it seemed reasonable to suppose that, having constantly before him the expression of a thought or a mood of hers, he would acquire some faint reflection of her nature, and she had always felt that a community of interest should bind the owner of a picture to the author of it. But on her way through the awakening house she had searched in vain for any stroke of her brush. His walls showed discretion, taste, and well-

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used opportunity, but no trace of Katharine Merrill.

Was this bearing habitual to him, she wondered. She must watch him with Gladys and with such other strangers as might be expected. She was hoping that these strangers would not be too numerous as her host came gently up and dropped at her side.

"I saw you from my window," said he, "and as there is something I very much wanted to say to you, I hurried out. Isn't it a perfect morning? And how jolly it was of you to wear those yachting things!"

"So you came out to discuss clothes and the weather? And before breakfast!"

"No. There is really something I want to tell you. Something more than that you bear the clear light of day rather triumphantly, and that we're going for a sail after breakfast."

"Not really. I *am* glad. There is nothing I love as I do sailing. No place where I am happier than on the sea."

"Then you shall be skipper. I shall be your mate—nautical interpretation always understood—and we'll take Captain Jameson for

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the entertainment and propitiation of Mrs. Grundy. I'll show you places as beautiful as Katharine Merrill's pictures. By the way, I don't in the least believe that you are Katharine Merrill. She is a personage. You are——"

"A person?" she suggested. "And you got up at this goodly but ungodly hour to accuse me of obtaining board and lodging—and great pleasure—under false pretenses."

"You are, perhaps, the Katharine Merrill of reality," he admitted, "but not the Katharine Merrill of my dreams. She was a genius who looked like a genius. Could your most ardent admirer describe you thus?"

"He had better not try," said Miss Merrill darkly.

"I won't," said this calm young man, and Katharine was dismayed to find that she was blushing.

"But what came you out to say?" she asked in hasty change of subject, and then wondered whether she had been more hasty than wise. There was a deliberateness about him which rather alarmed her.

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“I came out,” said he, “to talk about Miss Emerton. How well do you know her?”

And Katharine was reassured. She tried to persuade herself that she was also relieved. Here was the explanation of the confidential attitude which had puzzled her. What more natural than that he should feel an interest in one as near the rose as she? He had not been sure of her sympathy yesterday, but now he had come—as dozens of other men and women had come—to disclose his true state of heart. She was preparing as sincere a panegyric of Miss Emerton as she could evolve upon such sudden notice when he repeated his question.

“As well,” she answered, “as one may know another when one is rather busy and sees the other rather seldom. I’ve known her for a long time, and I like her immensely, though she sometimes disapproves of me. But I could tell you of ever so many brave and kind things she’s done——”

“Presently, presently,” he interrupted. “I came out here to tell you of something she has done which you don’t seem to have discovered. She has fallen in love with my brother.

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Of course it's his own fault, but there it is," and he turned a ruefully amused face to her, seeming to expect that she, too, would be amused. But affairs of the heart—of other's hearts—were always rather serious to Katharine. Her own admirers she treated with a gay unconcern, but to the loves and trials of her friends she brought a very unsophisticated tenderness and reverence. She was not sufficiently *du monde* to laugh at sentiment, and the contemplation of the Drummonds' never-ending courtship made her ready to believe that love had, after all, a great deal to do with making the world go round.

"I'm very glad," she replied, quite seriously, and she resumed her panegyric with a new vigor. "A little softening is really the only improvement she required, and of course that will come now."

But Ford had seen the throning and dethroning of too many divinities in his brother's regard to accept one as definitive. He tried to convey something of this to his companion.

"I was discussing only *her* emotional state,"

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he suggested. "Jack's is another matter." And Katharine, remembering her talk with Jack on the preceding evening, sorrowfully agreed with him. "Of course," the elder brother went on, "I asked her out here on his account and because I hoped to reach you through her. For some time I have had my mind made up to meet you. But to go back to Jack. The dear old chap can't help it, you understand, but he has an atrocious habit of flitting like the bee from flower to flower. And no one is more surprised and concerned than he when he finds that the charmer of last month has turned into the bore of this."

"But Gladys—" Katharine was beginning, when he broke in:

"May be all that you say, though to me she seems a bit intense. But perhaps her very intensity is the force requisite to overcome this single fault of Jack's. Mutual improvement, you will observe, since you expect him to benefit her. And how could we better further these hopes of ours than by removing all distracting elements from their way? It might be well," with happy inspiration, "to ask for

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a luncheon basket, and to stay away all day. For you must, in the sacred cause of love and friendship, make up your mind to one thing: it will be your duty to spend all the spare hours of your visit in my society. If it were later in the season we might persuade my mother to accompany us, but she hates to go on the water in anything smaller than that brute of a steam yacht, and in any colder months than July and August. So for to-day you must allow Captain Jameson to under-study her."

"You are sure," Katharine temporized, "that Gladys won't think it strange, won't object to being deserted by both host and friend?"

"May I remind you, at the risk of exhibiting pride of race and family, that she has Jack?"

"Yes, she has Jack."

"And may I assure you, at the risk of repeating my true but artless words, that she and Jack are sufficient unto each other? They are old friends; calls, flowers, letters, opera, and that sort of thing. I'm off now to interview

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Captain Jameson. The *Katrinka* must be especially shipshape when the new captain takes the wheel. You'll bring your painting things, of course."

"Alas! and woe is me! I have none. Not so much as a pencil."

"I might be able to manage a pencil," he reassured her. "And now my duty to you, sir," and he jerked his heel and an imaginary forelock in a comic-opera salute. "I'll be back in a brace of shakes."

She was watching the gay assumption of a nautical roll in his retreating figure, when Jack Ford came gently up. Katharine noticed that he, like his brother, was in irreproachable yachting costume. The Island seemed in danger of being depopulated on that pleasant day in May.

"I thought he'd never go away," Jack began confidentially, when the proper greetings had been exchanged. "There is something I very much wanted to say to you, so I hurried out when I saw you on the wall."

"Where I don't intend to stay," she supplemented. "I'm going to build castles in that

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sand down there," and she indicated the narrow strip just below them not yet covered by the tide. "I haven't built castles in the sand since I was quite a little girl."

As he helped her down the rough face of the wall, Jack reflected that she did not look very mature even now, in her blue skirt and blouse with a dark collar emphasizing the whiteness of her neck and a breastknot reflecting the brightness of her cheeks and lips. But he refrained from expressing this opinion, and only remarked:

"I'm ever so glad you put on your yachting things. We're going for a sail after breakfast."

"Are you?" she asked abstractedly. She had found a suitable piece of driftwood and was laying out an elaborate floor plan. Then, still idly, she added: "So are we."

"We?" he echoed. "Who?"

"Your brother, Captain Jameson, and I."

"Now that's really too bad of Bobbie," said this virtuous young man. "Don't you think he ought to consult us all before he makes a plan which will separate us? What will Miss

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Emerton say? And, by the way, that brings me to what I came out to talk about. How well do you know Miss Emerton?"

Katharine straightened from her task and looked at him closely. This was no trick of new sunlight. He was certainly the brother, not the host. His fairer hair and his greater breadth differentiated him. But here was the question she had already answered. As she stared, he repeated it.

"Just how well, Miss Merrill, do you know Miss Emerton?"

"As well," said Katharine, in dazed repetition, "as well as one may know a friend whom one has known for a long time but never very intimately. Why do you ask?"

"Because I think I can tell you something you don't know about her. Did you know that she's in love with my brother?"

"That's impossible," cried Katharine sharply. "It's impossible, I tell you."

"And I'll tell him you said so," grinned Jack. "It will do him good to hear a frank opinion of himself."

The tide crept into the courtyard of Kath-

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arine's castle and began to undermine its foundations, but she only watched it dully, with the piece of driftwood idle in her hand.

"Are you sure?" she asked when the last wall had fallen. "Are you quite, quite sure?"

"She as good as said so," he assured her, "yesterday afternoon. Don't pretend you're surprised. Weren't you prepared for something of the kind when she accepted Bobbie's invitation? He showed it to me, and I just leave it to you now. *Did* it sound like the sort of thing she'd care for? Does she look like the sort of girl who would leave town and her dressmaker to see an apple tree in blossom? I said so to him then. But he only laughed and said he knew more than I did about what he was appealing to. Now if you've known her as long as you say, you know better than that. She never came here to look at the scenery. Not much."

"The Island has more attractions than your brother and the orchards," Katharine rallied to remind him. "You are too modest."

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“Oh, as for me!” he exclaimed ruefully, and ruffled his yellow hair. “She’s tired of me. She and I met one another a lot last winter, and we used to pull rather well together at first. But I bore her now. She’s after Bob. Girls always give me up when they meet Bob. They all get tired of me in a couple of months. So, if you have any heart or sympathy under that very correct whistle lanyard, you’ll come out to sail with me. They don’t want us around, you know. Now do they?”

And suddenly Katharine began to laugh, as the completeness of this proof of Robert’s insight into the nature of his brother grew clear. She threw her improvised shovel at an incoming whitecap, and set her foot on the ruins of the house of sand. And still she laughed in a queer relieved manner which left her companion quite unamused. She climbed back to her place upon the wall and dangled her feet again. But she ceased from laughing when she remembered that Gladys was probably at that moment lost in the details of the Nassau frock, and might be expected at almost

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any time to see and misunderstand the tableau on the wall.

“I shall do nothing of the kind,” she replied to Jack’s invitation. “Your brother fortunately warned me that the only flaw in your nature is inconstancy. You don’t appreciate Gladys. You don’t deserve this opportunity of getting to know her well.”

“You’re right,” he agreed. “I don’t. You oughtn’t to let me have it. I feel that I’m not worthy to spend a whole day in the clear air she lives in. But Bob! Now Bob’s just the sort of man to thrive on it.”

“He is coming,” remarked Katharine. “You can tell him so.”

“All right aboard, sir,” reported the mate with a repetition of his wonderful salute. “The crew’s below and sober, sir—or very nearly.”

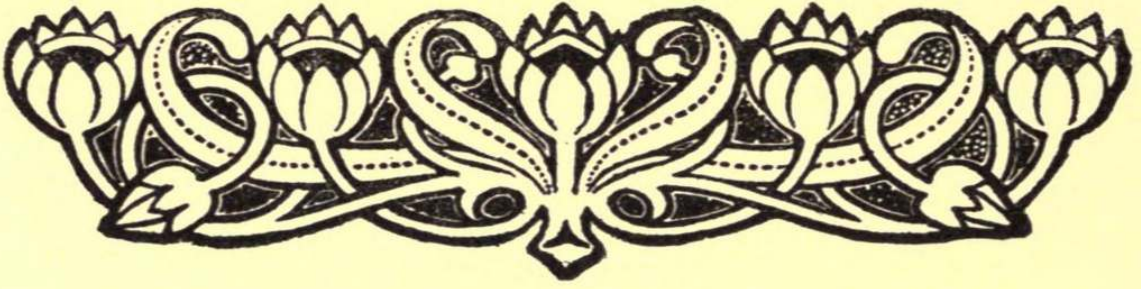
“Bob,” remonstrated Jack, “what will Miss Emerton think of our manners? You can’t seriously mean to deprive her—to deprive us—of Miss Merrill’s society for a whole day!”

“Oh, thank you!” said Katharine demurely.

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“Gammon,” remarked his brother, “pure gammon. We shall start immediately after breakfast—the which, I judge from the agitation of Bertha in the middle distance, is even now ready.”





VI

ROBERT FORD combined a blandly cheerful manner with a knack of doing precisely as he pleased exactly when he wished, and the officers of the good ship *Katrinka* were off on the tossing sea before the others of the house party had reached a second cup of coffee.

It was a heavenly morning and a glorious one. And long before it was time to do justice to Bertha's inexhaustible basket, Miss Merrill and Mr. Ford had traveled farther upon the way of friendship than they might have done in months of drawing-room intercourse.

Ford had learned how Miss Merrill had been, for as long as her memory served, the very perplexing ward of two maiden aunts, who had promptly made use of her art aspira-

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tions as an excuse for surrendering a responsibility which had always been irksome to them and which threatened to destroy every custom and tenet of their very customary and tenacious lives.

“And now,” continued Katharine, “I am that most pathetic spectacle—a female orphan of tender years cast off by her heartless, artless relations, and having a glorious time.”

“Still, you know,” Ford was beginning, when she interrupted:

“I’ve adopted a family all of my own. They share my old house with me. They are devoted to one another, have two delicious babies, and are wonderfully good to me. Then there is Denis, my maid—she used to be my nurse——”

“Oh,” said Ford, “I wondered who Denis was.”

“And hundreds upon hundreds of other friends, nearer or farther——”

“Will you put my name on the waiting list?” he interjected. “Am I eligible?” But Katharine received this with a merest glance of bright eyes, and went serenely on:

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“Who are good to me and spoil me, and take me to their country places in the summer, or come to stay with me in the winter. Now it’s your turn to autobiographize. Begin!”

“Aye, aye, sir,” answered Ford. “But my story, as the mate always says when the men gather in the foc’sle to smoke their long pipes through the dog watches, ‘my story passes belief.’ I grew up, went to school, broke several bones for the glory of my college, traveled, came home, inherited my father’s responsibilities, worked a little, traveled again, bought the Island, built the house and waited—for yesterday afternoon.”

“I’m glad,” laughed Katharine, “that you granted the incredibility of your tale. I hate to choose between seeming rude or idiotic. And I’m not like the immortal White Queen who used to believe as many as ten impossible things before breakfast.”

“Try again,” the mate urged, “the prescription ran. Shut your eyes and take a long breath. *Now*, do you believe me when I repeat: ‘and waited for yesterday afternoon’?”

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“I’m sorry,” said the captain, opening a pair of eyes which did not look so. “Dreadfully sorry, but I seem to be like Alice: I can’t believe impossible things.”

“I’ll try again to-morrow before breakfast,” said the mate. “And on the sea wall if you will be so kind.”

“Perhaps,” she replied.

It was midafternoon when the mate turned to the captain.

“Go forward, if you please, sir,” said he, “and keep a sharp lookout ahead. When we make that next point you’ll see the place which reminds me always of your ‘Isle of Dreams.’”

“Do you remember that?” cried Katharine wonderingly.

“Yes, I remember it. And now, watch!”

The *Katrinka* rounded a little neck of land and glided into a harbor of Fairyland.

“Oh!” cried Katharine, and steadied herself with an arm about the mast. “Oh, wonderful! Oh, beautiful!”

“Dreamland,” supplemented Ford. “The Isle of Dreams.”

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“Oh!” cried Katharine again. “I’d give my soul for my painting kit. Mr. Ford, *did* you remember the pencil?”

“Aye, aye, sir,” answered Ford, with another excerpt from the sailor’s hornpipe (he had been executing it piecemeal all day, to the surprise of Captain Jameson and the uneasiness of his guest, who expected him to disappear over the rail at almost any moment). “Pencils in the fo’c’s’le, sir. Better go below and choose one.”

Katharine craned her sunny head through the hatch, and then scrambled down with little quick cries of pleasure. “It’s all a dream,” she protested. “Where did you get them? How did you manage it?”

“They belong to a dabbling friend of mine. His pictures are shocking, but his kit seemed decent enough. I feared you might leave your own things at home; so I borrowed these as soon as you allowed us to expect you. You’ll paint me a little picture, will you not?”

“But surely—may we anchor?”

“You are captain. You need only say: ‘I’m going to toss off a masterpiece! Lower away

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the anchor, box the mainmast, and make the scuppers tight."

"Will you, please?" pleaded the captain of Captain Jameson.

"Lowered it is, sir."

"And now, Mr. Ford, if this *should* chance to be a masterpiece, you may keep it until I am great—being dead—and then sell it for much gold."

"When it is sold I shall have all the gold I care for in my crown and in my harp," said he. "What shall we call it—this other 'Isle of Dreams'?"

"You're fond of that picture. Was it, perhaps, the only one of mine you chanced to see?"

"No. I've seen others."

"But you liked that best?"

He nodded.

"Clever person. So do I. It was the first I ever sold, and I can keep myself from vanity at any time by remembering that I never again did anything so good."

"Wholesome reflection. Wrong, no doubt, but wholesome."

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“I miss it to this day,” she went on abstractedly. “Some of its touches and details elude me now. I can’t quite remember whether the seagulls are two or three. I can’t quite remember the shade of violet in the face of the little cliff. I’ve not seen it for five years. I don’t even know where it is. I haven’t a single finished thing of my own in the house. That is what one pays for what the world calls genius, and what one knows to be colossal luck. For if one kept all one’s pictures in one basket, how could one be a celebrity? They must go out into the world so that one’s name may be great in the land—and on cheques. When I get too humble about that other thought I spoke of, I cheer myself again by thinking of all the rooms which are just a bit prettier because of me and of all the people who are grateful to Katharine Merrill when she reminds them of places they have loved.”

“And what does a celebrity do with the price of her own bare walls?”

Katharine watched a seagull out of sight before she answered:

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“All sorts of things,” and then stopped.

“Go on,” he urged. “What sorts of things. I have a reason for asking.”

“Well,” said she, and nearly lost the dabbling friend’s palette over the side as the *Katrinka* rocked with the land swell, “if you will condescend to consider me as a type of the genius I could tell you. Sometimes she does extravagant things, sometimes foolish. Sometimes she buys old furniture and new books. Then she tries to buy immunity from the hard times which, nevertheless, she always expects. In one of those moods she undertook the maintenance of a cot in a babies’ hospital. And again she buys things like this yachting affair of which you and Captain Jameson so kindly approve.”

“Not really. You’re joking.”

“Yes, really. With the very first money I earned I fitted out *The Genius* as you see her. She has oilskins, too, and a sou’wester.”

“You buy clothes? I never thought of that.”

“In the present artificial condition of society,” she reminded him, “it has come to be

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expected of one. And an admiring Public is a pleasant—even generous—provider. You should see the dream of a dinner dress which is the latest form taken by my ‘Study in Gentle Greens.’ That white lace affair I wore last night began as ‘Moonlight on Still Waters.’ All my things, all my pretties, are furnished by a dotting populace.”

“A clever and discerning populace.”

“No. I’m sorry to contradict, but dotting is the proper word. Of course I love my Public dearly, but not all its kindness, not all its praise, can hide from my loving eyes the melancholy fact that the poor old dear is as mad as any hatter.”

“What?” he cried, and fell limply back upon Captain Jameson, who was watching with superstitious awe the translation of the scene before him into terms of paint and paper.

“As mad,” she serenely continued, intent upon her work and calmly oblivious to the effect of her last remark, “as the proverbial March hare. How otherwise can you explain its habits? I spread some paint more

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or less evenly over a larger or smaller surface, and that Public rises up to call me talented, and to give me largely of its riches. Of course it is mad."

"Once upon a time when the world was young," Robert Ford began, with the detached air of one whose love was loved in those halcyon days, "there was a virtue known as Gratitude. It was very beautiful, but like many beautiful things, like white flowers and clouds and women, it was very fragile, too, and very sensitive. So that when the world grew old, busy, and hard, Gratitude faded like the woman, drooped like the flower, wept itself away like the cloud."

Katharine laid down her brushes and turned to him. All the mockery and *insouciance* had left her.

"Once upon a time when a woman was young—very young," she began, "the world, which is neither old nor hard nor always busy, gave her a gift. She had never hoped for it. But she had tried for it. She had persistently tried for it—living her life, seeing the beauties of the maligned world and trying to show

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them to others. For she loved the world. And the world was grateful to the woman—for Gratitude is not dead—and gave the woman fame.”

“By George!” said Ford. “By George! you make a man ashamed of being an unbeliever. You seem to have found some of the lost virtue. But you are always finding beauty. And now go on. Did the woman enjoy the gift of the world?”

“No; she was too anxious. It was such a baby fame that the woman carried always in her heart a great fear lest he should die. But he lived. He was not a wonderful baby, but he was the woman’s very own, and she loved him. Now he is nearly five years old, and she is more than ever anxious. For a boy of five can’t be held always in a woman’s arms. He must run about and play. What if he should run away?”

“Not a bit of him,” Robert Ford protested. “He isn’t blind nor deaf nor an idiot. I’ll wager he’s a sturdy little fellow—sturdy of heart and legs—whom no designing stranger, armed with a bag of candy and a rubber dog,

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could lure from his own gate and his own mother."

"Thank you," said Katharine huskily; "you really seem to understand," which was more than could be said for Captain Jameson. Never was an old salt more helplessly at sea. His single and feeble attempt at adjustment was to substitute a bewildered "ma'am" for the "miss" which had adorned his previous remarks. He was puzzled—densely puzzled.





VII

WHEN the good ship *Katrinka*, Katharine Merrill master, sailed home out of the golden sunset, Mrs. Ford and Jack were waiting on the little pier.

“Miss Emerton had a headache,” Jack reported, without much enthusiasm. “I’ve seen nothing of her since luncheon time.”

“I’ll go to her at once,” said the conscience-stricken Katharine. “I should never have left her, I suppose.”

“She was better alone,” Mrs. Ford said reassuringly. “I sat with her for an hour, but she hardly spoke.”

Gladys Emerton with the willowy length, the discontented expression, the celery curls, and the flowery bedquilt, was lying in the deep bay of the window when Katharine entered timidly and took her hand. She took it, but she did not keep it long.

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“Go away,” commanded the sufferer.

“What happened? Have you two quarreled? Was he less charming than you thought? They so often are.”

“You know best. Was he charming? You’ve been with him for the last eight hours. I wish you’d go away.”

“Robert!” Katharine gasped. “Robert!”

“You progress rapidly,” sneered Gladys. “What does he call you—Kittie?”

“Get up and behave like a sensible woman,” cried Katharine indignantly. “If you had done it sooner, nothing of this would have happened. Don’t you see how you’ve bungled everything? Get up and dress in your very best, and prepare for an endless *tête-à-tête* with Robert. I’ll take Jack. I could quite as well have taken him to sail if you had been rational. He, too, asked me.”

“Oh, did he, indeed?” asked Gladys, but the tidings did not seem to soothe.

Now a maid may determine to engage all the attention and the leisure of a younger brother, but if the younger brother will have none of her—having mutely set her down as

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an unconscionable flirt—the charming is like to fail. She may also resolve to slight, snub, and otherwise antagonize a host, but if the host will meet rebuffs with a debonair unconcern, her lack of manner is likely to fall flatly short of its purpose. Katharine could do nothing to redistribute this exceedingly “mixed foursome,” and found herself toward the end of the evening supinely submitting to detachment from her duty.

“Miss Merrill,” began Robert Ford, “do you remember our discussion upon insanity to-day? If you will come with me, I shall show you the thing about which I am madder than a hatter, as mad as the proverbial March hare. Would you care to see it?”

“How perfectly lovely!” cried Gladys, who had been included in neither invitation nor glance nor yet pronoun. “I had no idea——”

“Then I fear that it would alarm you,” countered Robert with the most caressing of smiles. “You observe that I have prepared Miss Merrill for the disclosure. Perhaps tomorrow you will allow me to explain it to you. In the meantime may I suggest that the grass

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is dry and the orchard, in full blossom, at your service, as well as Jack in the extreme of restlessness? Miss Merrill, will you honor me?"

And what could Katharine do? As she turned at the door to bend a propitiatory glance upon the Central Female Figure, she noted that two neglected parts of her rôle were being enacted for her—Gladys was glowering and Jack frankly sulky.

"If that's affectation," said Robert, "they are fools. If it's not, then the sooner they come to their senses the better. Shouldn't you think that moonlight through apple blossoms would straighten them out?"

"Yes, if anything could," faltered Katharine.

At the end of the hall the host unlocked a door and ushered Katharine into a room lighted only by a fire of driftwood in the wide fireplace. He led her to the hearth, and as he kicked the logs into a brighter glow, Katharine caught here and there the outline of a picture frame against the dull green wall.

"This room has been my hobby for the last

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two or three years," he told her. "The pictures are all the work of an artist of whom, before then, I had never heard."

"A modern?"

"Very modern. To me they are exquisite. I loved them, everyone of them, at first sight, and I find new beauties in them from day to day. In this a picture differs from a woman. A picture grows without changing. A woman changes without growing. A woman, in my experience——"

"*The* woman in your experience?"

"Is yet to be experienced. But, as I was telling you, I bought this artist's pictures whenever I could find them, and made this room into a miniature gallery, with hangings and lights so that I can illuminate the frames one at a time. I want to ask your opinion of the arrangement. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you my very first love."

He busied himself with a switchboard, and a vision of summer sea and sky and land sprang into life upon the wall. For an instant Katharine stood at gaze and then swept across the room.

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“The ‘Isle of Dreams,’” she breathed.
“My ‘Isle of Dreams.’”

“In which you will observe that the sea-gulls are three, and the violet on the little cliff is—oh, quite beyond words. In it you will also see a most becoming yachting suit, with oilskins and a sou’wester complete. And this”—he touched the board again—“is to the uninitiated ‘A Study in Gentle Greens,’ but to those who know, it is ‘A Dream of a Dinner Dress.’ Here is a white lace gown. The others I can’t identify, but they were, no doubt, becoming.”

He touched button after button, and Katharine, silent now, absolutely silent, wheeled from square to square of light.

“May I trouble you,” she said at last, and there was a queer catch in her voice—“may I trouble you to light them all at once? It is so difficult to count.”

He flooded the room with light, and stood face to face with a woman who shrank away at his approach and began madly to count the pictures on the walls.

“You’re surprised,” said he with a laugh.

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“But you mustn’t let it affect you so much. You will find that people all up and down this broad land are collecting your things just as I have done. You told me, you know, that the boy Fame was beginning to run about and to talk to strangers. Did any of these, by the way, endow that crib in the hospital?”

She had finished her counting, and now stood with her back to the pictures and to him. Her arms rested upon the mantelshelf, and her forehead upon her arms.

“No,” she answered dully—“no, thank God, you can’t claim that.”

“Your hospitality is overwhelming. But the crib is safe. Even if I should claim it I shouldn’t fit into it. But what did you call the picture which made it possible?”

“‘Silver Sails Come Out of the West,’ from ‘Sweet and Low,’ you remember.”

“Then I have it. I keep it in my room, because only to look at it is to rest tired eyes. Was there ever such luck? I have everything you’ve mentioned.”

Her face was still hidden, but there was a

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droop in her shoulders and hips which made her seem smaller and slighter than ever. He, however, was too absorbed in the scene to which he had been leading up ever since the morning to notice the change in his companion. Even her voice failed to warn him as she replied:

“Or painted. At least you have everything I ever sold.”

“Then,” he announced jubilantly, “I have the felicity of combining in my humble person your admiring Public, your March hare, and your Hatter.”

“How dared you?” she demanded then, turning upon him in hot and sudden rage. “How *dared* you make me your plaything, your hobby, your fad?”

“My dear Miss Merrill,” Robert, maddeningly unexcited, replied, “I can assure you that I had no idea that my man—I’ve given a standing order to a dealer in town—had succeeded in laying hands on more than a few of your things.”

“You may rescind your order. There are—and will be—no more. I trust you enjoyed

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this afternoon? That I was sufficiently amusing?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Ford stoutly. "Amusing? How?"

"Surely it was diverting that I should describe myself to you as celebrity, a genius! Talk to you fulsomely of the Fame the world had given me—*Me*, whose whole audience is the chance visitor you bring here—to *you*, who has made me—what I am!" And Ford began to understand that the scene was not going at all as he had planned it.

"Now listen to me," said he, possessing himself of one of Katharine's trembling hands and holding it in both of his. "You are talking nonsense. You must let me explain——"

"Katharine!—oh, Katharine, dear!" cried Gladys from the hall.

"Confound it!" muttered Robert.

"Quick; not so much light!" implored Katharine. And a moment later Miss Emerton was regarding the placid tableau of her friend and her host seated one on either side of the hearth in the pleasant firelit room.

When Jack revealed the art treasures to

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Gladys her consternation was louder than Katharine's had been.

"Why—why," she stammered, "they are all of them Katharine's!"

"All of Katharine's," echoed Miss Merrill, on her stealthy way to the door. Robert bore down upon her and caught her just in time.

"I must have a few words with you," he insisted softly in the semisafety of the hall. "You are laboring under the gravest misapprehension which you *must*, in common justice, let me clear away."

"Not now," she pleaded. "I want to be alone. Give me an hour. Excuse me, somehow, to the others and keep Gladys away from me for so long. Then she may come up. But just at first—it is so new an idea to me—I was rude—forgive me. And good night."

"Good night, Sweet Genius," replied Ford gently. "You are torturing yourself without reason—or rather I have tortured you. Believe me, this matter is only at its beginning. We shall find a solution in the morning. You remember we have an appointment on the sea wall."

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She placed her cold little fingers in his hand and smiled unsteadily up at him:

“It is the first time,” she pleaded in further extenuation of her outbreak, “the very first time that fate was really unkind to me. I’m not accustomed to being hurt. Again, forgive me. And again, good night.”

Ford was doing battle with a wild desire to gather her close to him and soothe her as one may soothe a tired and unhappy child. But while he debated on the probable result of this procedure, she withdrew her hand with a pre-occupation which told him that hers was no wound for such easy comfort, and that arguments would be wasted until she had her hour or even her night of solitude.

And so, for that hour, Gladys had her will. The stage was hers. Robert’s attention, or as much of it as she could detach from the figure he had seen toiling up the stairs, was hers. Jack drifted back to the drawing-room and to Mrs. Ford, who was still, with her calm stateliness and gentle wit, the woman he most admired.

When the allotted hour was over, Mrs. Ford

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and Gladys went upstairs, and the brothers retired to the terrace for a last cigar.

“Your Miss Merrill took the gallery badly,” commented Jack. “Why did she bolt?”

“My boy,” said Robert, “that gallery was a piece of fiendish torture, and I, fool that I am, expected her to enjoy it. I’ll explain it to you if you’re not too sleepy. But your Miss Emerton—why was she so disturbed?”

“*My Miss Emerton!*” cried Jack. “Mine! Well, I must say! Mine! What do you think she talked about as long as she stayed up to-day? You. Who did she come out here to see? You. And who asked her to come and then threw her on my hands? You. Always you.”

A window opened, and the voice of Miss Emerton rang softly out: “Katharine!—oh, Katharine, dear, are you out there?”

“Good Lord!” said Robert Ford. “What next? Isn’t she there?”

Bertha with Gladys and Mrs. Ford in decorous dishabille were soon in the hall. The complications were evidently rather bewildering to the mother who was unaccustomed to

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guests—female and young—who vanished alone into the night. Gladys seemed to consider the whole affair as a last attempt upon the center of interest. Bertha was alert and unsurprised.

“Miss Merrill’s gone to town. She left on the 10:20 train. I was to tell you, madam, that she had not time to say good-by.”

“But why did she go?” asked Robert.

“She seemed in deep distress, sir. First she had me call up Captain Jameson, and she talked to him a minute on the east porch. Then she had me help her to dress. She said she had to go home at once. ‘No one dead, miss?’ said I. ‘Yes, Bertha,’ said she; ‘he’s dead. But then, you know, he never lived.’ She seemed excited like that, and she was bound to get home. She wouldn’t let me call anyone—not even Miss Emerton. And when I suggested calling you, sir, she got terribly upset. So I went with her down to the dock, there is a moon, you know, sir, and the captain took her across to the 10:20. He told me he’d go up to the station with her, and see that she started safe. He said this afternoon

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when he came up with the rugs and cushions that he had never seen a lady with such a knack for knots. I was to pack her things and send them to her in the morning!"

"You will leave Miss Merrill's things in her room, if you please," commanded Robert quietly.

"My son," began Mrs. Ford, "Miss Merrill is a genius and a great artist," and she wondered why he stooped and kissed her. "You cannot expect her to behave as an ordinary person would. Let her wishes be carried out. What else can you do?"

"I can find her," said Robert Ford.





VIII

REALLY, you know, it might be worse," remarked Tom Drummond consolingly. "I distinctly remember the last time that your cousin honored us. It was certainly worse."

"You need not look forward to a next time," remarked his wife as she rescued Miss Drummond, aged five, from the avalanche of pillows which had buried her inquiring person, "because there never will be a next time. I have borne all I intend to bear. And when Kate comes home and sees her studio, I don't know what she will say."

"By the way, where is our rich and gifted neighbor? Why isn't she here?"

"Because she's off somewhere for the week-end. She left a note with Denis. Gone to do her duty by Society, I suppose."

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Well, why shouldn't she? Society certainly does more than its duty by her. Did you know that she got some ridiculous price for that last misty meadows thing? She's a fad. Her pictures never hang about until people are sick of them."

"She's a fortunate and a gifted young person, that Kate of yours," said her husband. "Very fortunate and very gifted."

"And very dear."

"Very dear. I know only one dearer, and she is looking more than common fair to-night." And he surveyed his brisk little wife with the air of satisfied approbation which had done so much to spoil her and had somehow failed quite to do so. "But how comes it, in the absence of our chatelaine, that the dividing doors are open?"

"Oh, she lent her rooms to Leonie without a murmur. She said she would do anything but come to the 'swarry,' as Sam Weller used to call an evening gathering. But I don't think we shall be regaled with anything so nourishing as his boiled leg of mutton. Leonie is providing the refreshments this time."

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“ Shall we let the kidlets stay up? ” asked their indulgent father. “ They were very good the other evening when those nice young fellows came to see Katharine. ”

“ Oh, I'd much rather not! I feel as though I could not see them with the people whom Leonie is sure to have here. I should want to boil them afterwards to kill the germs. Denis will take care of them. They are always good with her. ”

“ I suppose you're right, but we'll give them some of the 'swarry,' ” Mr. Drummond stipulated. “ And now I must dress for the mad revel. We must be ready when Genius knocks. ”

The sounds of revelry were at their languid highest when a latchkey clicked unobserved in Miss Merrill's door, and a tired, bewildered figure stood in the opening and looked upon the extraordinary scene before her. In the center of her dear, familiar room—the quiet harbor to which she had been hurrying through the past three hours of nightmare—a solitary candle stood upon a tabouret and shed barely sufficient light to indicate that

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the place was full of people. Katharine's blank bewilderment gave place to an even more blank enlightenment. She had forgotten Carrie's cousin's party! And before she could effect her escape she was pulled forward into the darkness by Carrie's eager hand.

"You darling," Mrs. Drummond gurgled. "I'll never forget this of you! You knew they would kill me and you came back to receive my parting breath."

"I forgot," gasped Katharine. "Oh, Carrie, come away with me! Come up to my room."

"The ladies' dressing room," Carrie announced. "They keep running up and down dabbing powder on their awful noses."

"Then the library."

"The smoking room," wailed Carrie.

"Your room."

"The green room. Several of them are making up there for some kind of a play. There is somebody everywhere, and Mrs. Pettigrew's baby is asleep in the middle drawer of your bureau. Don't jump! The drawer is open."

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“ Oh, I must get away ! ” wailed Katharine. “ And, oh, Carrie, I have so much to tell you ! Where are the babies ? ”

“ With Denis. This is the last, the very last time that I will lend my studio to that lunatic. Look at her ! Does she look related to me ? I believe poor old Uncle Robert found her on the doorstep and adopted her. Now watch her—she’s steering this way.”

“ But what happened to the electricity,” demanded Miss Merrill ; “ why are they in the dark ? And where ”—for she was rapidly adjusting herself to the situation—“ where are the chairs ? ”

“ The lights were in perfect order, but she calls them crude. She brought that candle in her suit case. I forget her precise objection to the chairs, but she banished them and borrowed—in our names, yours and mine—every pillow and cushion on the block. Now smile and smile and be a villain ! Here she comes ! ”

An indistinct yellow mass loomed out of the darkness ; a pudgy hand—also yellow—detached itself, and a drawling voice was heard to soliloquize rather than to remark :

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“Miss Merrill, too! Kind!”

“Not at all,” Katharine murmured.

“Some of my friends,” the voice mumbled on, “have come especially to meet Miss Merrill. Bobby,” and she turned to her attending satellite, a youth of not more than sixteen blighted summers, “Bobby, tell Smithson to come to me.”

Bobby vanished into the darkness of the room beyond where Katharine’s eyes, becoming accustomed to the feeble light, could distinguish faint outlines of guests and cushions in irregular heaps upon the floor. The yellow hostess meanwhile delivered herself of several remarks, distinguished more by candor than by tact, touching upon the need of “true feeling” in the treatment of rooms and furniture.

“You hardly recognize your little place, Miss Merrill, I suppose. Just a touch from a hand with real feeling was all it needed. You remember how you left it. Look at it now.”

“She can’t—in the dark,” Carrie was beginning, when the obedient Bobby returned accompanied by an oblong patch of shirt front.

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Mr. Smithson was of so brunette a complexion that the shadows refused to reveal anything more of him save the occasional and very fleeting flash of cuff.

“Smithson,” the yellow bulk of hostess announced, “this is Katharine Merrill. Katharine Merrill, this is Smithson. Know one another!”

A clammy hand took Katharine’s, and a leaden voice murmured conventionalities. Then the hostess, seeing other duties, moved away, and left Katharine in the uninterrupted rays of the pale candle.

Then did Smithson smack his clammy hand upon his marshy brow and raise his hollow voice:

“Nay, it cannot be,” he wailed. “It is too young a face.”

A memory of the morning, the bright, normal, happy morning, shut down over Katharine. She was on the sea wall again; she was hearing again the mutinous and debonair mate: “I don’t in the least believe that you are Katharine Merrill.” And it was fortunate that Smithson expected no reply to his tribute,

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for none was forthcoming. Not in the least deterred, he continued:

“Too young a face, I say, to have loved and suffered and worked.”

“It is only in stories,” said Carrie, the unregenerate, seeing that a remark was due and that Katharine would not make it; “it is only in stories and molehills that faces work.” But the stranger would have none of her.

“You are cruel,” the wan voice wailed, and Katharine felt that a pair of slushy eyes were studying her. “You have the cruel eyes of Art. They pierce my soul.”

Again Katharine made no answer, and Carrie was too accustomed to deference to go on with a conversation without its support. So Smithson tried again:

“When,” he broke out, “when did you first find that you had this pow-wow-er? When did you first discover that you were among our Great?”

No question could have been more nicely adjusted to overwhelm Katharine Merrill, and Smithson was delighted with its effect. He

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was evolving other psychic subtleties when Carrie interrupted him:

“Who’s the woman in the portière?” she demanded. “And how does she keep it on?”

“That is Miss Jones,” Smithson replied, “one of the freest, bravest spirits left among us. She overcomes all restraint. She chafes against all bonds. She is wonderful!”

“She is,” said Carrie. “At least her *tut-and-simple* is. I happened to be near her and the candle simultaneously, and I saw that she is kept from absolute freedom by one hairpin on her head and one brooch on her left shoulder. I hope she won’t overcome any more restraints to-night.”

“She’s coming this way, now,” warned Katharine. “Tell us, Mr. Smithson, what does she do? What must one talk to her about?”

“Do!” echoed the scandalized Mr. Smithson. “She does nothing. She simply lives her life as she has conceived it. It is a lesson to us all.”

And then the portière trailed up to the little group. It was draped, *à la Greque*, upon the

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most bony and withered of anatomies, and it was held in place, as Katharine's observation corroborated, by a single cameo brooch of a workmanship as antique as its wearer.

"Oh, Smithson, you here!" the portière remarked. "Horrid rabble, horrid hole!"

Smithson had once been a gentleman, and he still remembered some of the laws of that estate. Freedom of opinion was one thing, but this was quite another. Katharine detected his embarrassment.

"Pray don't mind us," she urged, and then, to the portière: "We regret that you are not more comfortable. These rooms are ours. I am Miss Merrill. This is Mrs. Drummond."

"Caroline Drummond!" the portière exclaimed. "The illustrator?"

"The same," said Carrie.

"Then I am repaid for coming. Your pictures always fascinate me. I often say to Jimmie that if I could write some stuff and have you for the drawings I should be quite content. Jimmie laughs at me; but he always pretends to laugh when he really understands me best. But those dear lovable children you

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draw! So sweet and fat and real. I always feel that I could undress them—like a doll, you know. I love dolls. I have six of them at home. But Jimmie laughs at them, too. And now I *must* have you for my friend. I must, indeed. Let me stay and talk to you.”

Katharine was poised for flight, but Carrie laid a detaining hand upon her knee. They had retreated to a high-backed settle too heavy to be removed even by “the hand with true feeling,” and Carrie made place for the portière by her side. But the emancipated one would seem to have spurned all furniture. She walked round about herself three or four times until her trailing draperies were massed to her satisfaction. She then collapsed in studied stages, and, adjusting her hairpin, her brooch, and her pensive expression, she dug a sharp elbow into Carrie’s knee, and breathed hard. When she had thus signified the overwhelming nature of her emotions, she gurgled and thrilled inarticulately for some space before she broke into the startling announcement:

“I knew that you and I should meet. I

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knew our souls would merge and flow and that we should be friends." Here her overworked hairpin resigned and was restored by Katharine, who, in her gratitude for the boon of being ignored, would have done almost anything.

"Yes, oh, yes," the Turkish corner pursued. "Let our souls mingle and weep."

"I don't have much time for that kind of thing," said Carrie. "My family——"

"Your family!" shrieked the talented Miss Jones so shrilly that several other depressed revelers turned gloomy eyes upon her. "Do you live with your family?"

"I do," said Carrie. "Don't you?"

"I couldn't. They never understood me. No one ever understood me—except Jimmie—until I found you." Carrie turned to Katharine, and even in the darkness it was impossible not to observe that one of her eyes closed itself in a long and deliberate wink.

"Yes, I think I understand you," she responded. "Tell me more."

"Mine own people," the misunderstood one pursued, while she forced her hair into a

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ragged knot and transfixed it with the sulky hairpin, "never made any allowance for my moods of high exaltation or deep despondency, and I had a sister who was learning to sing. Their callousness toward the bright, delicate soul which was growing up in their midst——"

"Or in yours," murmured Carrie.

"——was incredible. They actually expected me to join them at meal time!"

"Tyranny!" cried Carrie.

"And I love freedom! I cannot live without it. I am a spirit. A bird——"

"You are, you are," Mrs. Drummond agreed with enthusiasm.

"So I flew away. I found a kindred spirit. I leaned upon it and was comforted. And at peace."

"Bully for you!" cried Carrie blithely.
"Bully for you!"

Then to Katharine in rapid quotation:
"That's all very well for Mary Ann, but what must it be for Abraham?"

"His wife," the free soul continued, "could not understand it."

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"I can see, even in this dim light, that she might have been puzzled," Carrie agreed.

"She was so conventional! So limited! Only last week she refused again to dine with us. She has a green soul and yet she *dared* to marry Jimmie. Didn't she know that harmony between them was impossible when their soul-tones were antagonistic? Why, even her voice was green. And yet she dared to marry Jimmie with his great big royal purple soul and voice! Mine are only violet—pale violet—but they harmonize with his."

"And then you know," Carrie suggested, "your soul is growing darker all the time. That must be a comfort to you."

"It is," the portière cried, "my only one. How you understand! Darker every, every moment! Beautiful thought!"

Mrs. Drummond was preparing herself to bestow other comfort when Bobby, the blighted, came out of the night. "Refreshments," he announced in a tone suited to the heralding of a condemned murderer's last breakfast. "What may I bring you, ladies?"

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“What is there?” demanded the spirit with materialistic interest.

“Turkish and Egyptian, Scotch and Rye,” chanted Bobby.

“Scotch and Egyptian, please,” ordered the Bird, while Carrie set out in angry haste to remonstrate with her yellow cousin, and Katharine escaped to the more congenial atmosphere of Mrs. Denis’s apartments, there to be right royally welcomed by the two Miss Drummonds, a scandalized old lady, and Doris Gwendolin Patricia.

Denis’s sense of outraged hospitality was clamoring for an audience, and found it in Katharine. Indignation had undone the long training of the public library, and she was Celt, pure Celt, as she demanded:

“Is it mad entirely they are this night?” in accents of scorn and Kerry. “There’s about eighty of thim in it, an’ not a cake nor a pail of cream has passed the door. An’ the screeches of thim! Not laughs, mind ye, but screeches fit to wake the dead. An’ it’s all in the dark they are, like a Protestant bishop, as the sayin’ is. But sit you down, my poor tired

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lamb. There's plenty of chairs here for you to choose from. Children an' chairs stays with me this night. It'll soon be over now, please God, an' we'll be able to go to bed. For the sand man went by a long time ago, and some of us are sleepy."

So Katharine held one drowsy child in her arms until the last cab had rattled off and the last heel had clicked away into the young May night which, even in New York, held a sense of spring. Then when the children had been tucked up for the few remaining hours, and when Mrs. Drummond's concern and curiosity had grown beyond bearing point, Katharine Merrill sank into one of the heaps of cushions in her transformed studio and told the story of her visit. Carrie perched upon the tabouret when she had thrown the remaining inches of the candle out through the garden window and snapped on all the electric lights. Mr. Drummond rescued an uncomplaining chair from the lower hall and stretched his long, cramped legs.

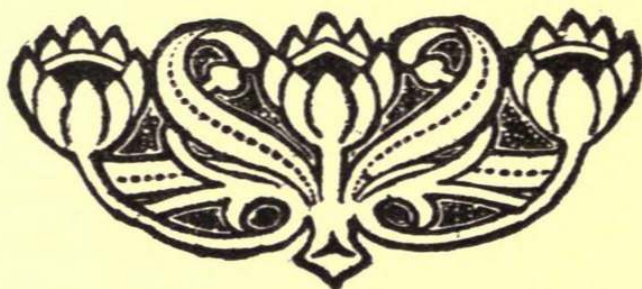
"You're sure you want to tell us?" Carrie asked in noble disinterestedness when she had

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seen her friend's face in brilliant light. "Sure you wouldn't rather wait until the morning? Of course I shall have died long before then, but don't let that influence you."

"No, no, I must talk it out now. Unless"—hesitatingly—"it is too late. I don't know what time it is or what day it is. Am I keeping you two up?"

"Nonsense!" cried Carrie. "Begin."





IX

DOU know Gladys Emerton?" queried Katharine.

"Horrid prig," was Mrs. Drummond's comment. "Doris Gwendolin Patricia suspected that she was responsible for your vanishing. D. G. P. has conceived a healthy hatred for that unbearable friend of yours. Well, and what did Miss Emerton do to you?"

"I went with her on Friday, before you people came home, to stay with some friends of hers down in Connecticut."

"Name and full description of friends," commanded Mrs. Drummond as she fluttered off the tabouret, adjusted a cushion to Katharine's head, and fluttered back again.

"Ford was the name. A Mrs. Ford and her two sons."

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“Ages of same?”

“Oh, indefinite! Thirty or forty, perhaps.”

“Names?”

“They call one Jack. I suppose his name is John.”

“Name of other son is suppressed because more interesting to witness,” Carrie remarked to her husband.

“Nonsense, I take no interest in either of them. The older brother’s name is Robert.”

“A charming fellow, Robert Ford. I know him slightly,” Drummond interrupted. “You and he ought to get on capitally together. He’s picture mad. I see him at all the exhibitions.”

“One of us, Kate?” asked Carrie. “I don’t recognize the name.”

“It may seem stupid, but really, I don’t know what he is.” And Carrie drew her own conclusions, knowing that when a man’s profession or occupation ceases to be a matter of interest to a maid, it is what Mrs. Denis calls “a dangerous looking sign” indeed.

“He is,” said Drummond, “what the pa-

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pers describe as a 'capable young financier.' There is a rumor, supported by an office in our building and a staff of clerks, that he works, but I've never heard of his doing anything more strenuous than being bored at trustees' meetings and by executors' accounts."

"And what," asked Mrs. Drummond, "could your rich young picture-fancying trustee-executor have done to drive our Kate out into the night and back to the stuffy city?"

"He had a picture gallery," Katharine began stiffly, and a dull flush dyed all her face—even her ears and her neck were crimson. "He showed it to me; described it to me—to me—as a fad of his; and then, of course, I came home."

Mrs. Drummond arose and gathered Katharine into her arms. "The brute!" she cried, and then to her puzzled husband: "Your charming Robert Ford must have charming taste in pictures. Look at poor old Kate. It's shameful that any kind of girl interested in any kind of art should be supposed— But

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never mind, dear. He's not worth bothering about—the brute!”

“You are quite wrong,” Katharine interposed, freeing herself from her friend's embrace, and then impulsively returning it. “His collection was almost entirely of landscapes, and painted—think of it, Carrie—by me.”

“How delightful!” cried Mrs. Drummond, who certainly had Matthew Arnold's “openness of mind and flexibility of intelligence.” “How romantic! How perfectly fine for you!”

“Gently, old girl, gently now,” Drummond warned her, as he saw that Katharine was on the verge of hysterical tears, and that the touch of Carrie's arms and lips would precipitate the crisis. “Quietly, take it quietly, Katharine. Go on.” But his warning was too late, and with a wail of “He has every single thing I ever painted shut up there in a room where no one ever goes,” the Genius collapsed, sobbing, into Carrie's arms.

“It isn't true,” cried Carrie, vehemently. “It can't be true.”

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“But it is,” wailed Katharine. “I saw them. He has every one of them. And, Carrie, do you know what that makes of me?”

“It isn’t true,” repeated Carrie more vehemently, but with less conviction, and then added, as if in defiance of a thought which no one had expressed, “And even if he has them, you are just what you always were.”

“But I never knew it until to-night,” and Katharine looked desolately round her desolated room. “Think what a fool I’ve been! Think how I’ve imposed on everyone—myself, you two, everyone! Oh, Carrie, Carrie, did such a thing ever happen to anyone? If you read it in a story you’d think it was impossible.”

“I think so now,” said Carrie, stoutly, but her eyes were wide with hurt and surprise. She herself was an illustrator of children’s books, so successful and so busy as to have no time for more serious and permanent work. But all her pride and ideals centered in Kate. Kate so gifted, so calmly aspiring, so far above the shifts and compromises to which less fortunate workers are forced to stoop. All the

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pride which she might have lavished upon the fulfillment of her own dreams she made over to the gems which her friend wrought so earnestly and happily in the big studio where the elder Miss Drummond and Doris Gwendolin Patricia played intricate "make believes," sometimes helped but generally hindered, by the younger Miss Drummond, while the mother sketched them happily from her nest in the window seat.

So Katharine's fame had grown as dear to her friend as it was to herself, and so Mrs. Drummond, when she grasped the full import of the announcement, only strengthened her earlier verdict.

"The brute," she repeated. "The heartless, sneaking brute."

"Of course," Katharine continued, and her voice was nearly steady now, "of course this changes everything. I'm not what we all thought. I'm a one man's fad, and he is neither clever enough nor important enough to make the position less than an insult. Now, what is one to do?"

"Kill him," suggested Carrie, who was

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about five feet high and very fair. "Death is too good for him."

"There are more lawful ways of meeting the situation," her pacific husband suggested. He was too familiar with the flights of these inseparables to attempt to follow them into the high places of their emotion, and always waited, calmly secure, for their return to his more practical level. "One would be to buy the pictures from him and to sell them broadcast—even at a loss—among the dealers and fanciers. Carrie was saying only this evening that there was never any difficulty about selling your things."

"No, because Mr. Ford's agent bought them all. No one else ever bought—or wanted—one of them. And besides, I haven't the money to buy them from him. I've spent thousands of dollars of his which I never shall be able to repay. I've dressed and played and lived upon his bounty and his ignorance of art. I have been simply one of his extravagances."

"No, no," Carrie protested. "Don't talk like that. He was right about the value of the pictures. But, oh, I wish he were dead!"

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“That would make it worse,” Drummond reminded her, “and it’s deplorable enough as it is.”

“Poor old Kate,” murmured Carrie. “What would you most like to do?”

“I thought it all out on the train to-night. I shall go to a little place in Brittany. I used to sketch there years ago, and I know the dearest old woman in the dearest old cottage who will take me in and be good to me. And I shall paint—how I shall paint! You see, I shall be beginning all over to make a name and a fame. But I shall miss you all so! And Denis!”

“Oh, the brute!” ejaculated Carrie again with more vigor than variety. “The stupid, unappreciative, interfering brute. But why do you let him influence you, Kate? Just stay here with us—the babies would be lost without you—and show him how little you care. You needn’t fly off to old women in Brittany because one young man in New York buys too many of your pictures. Stay here and paint some more.”

“No,” said Drummond, “Katharine is

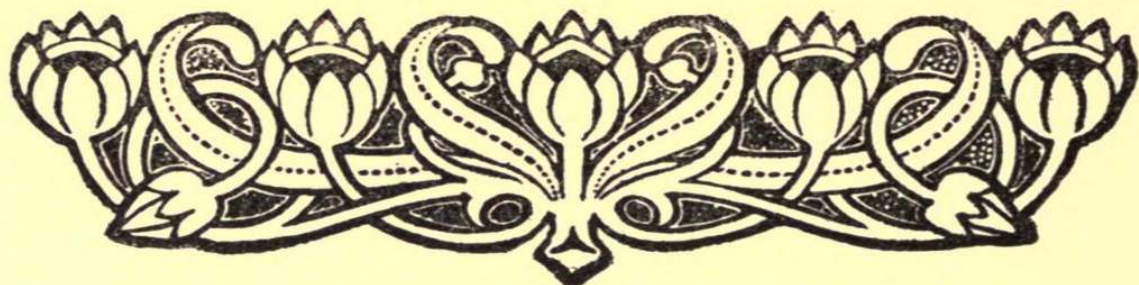
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right. She couldn't do good work here until this matter is arranged. Let her begin again, without any handicap, in a new place. The foreign *salons* and exhibitions are her straightest road to all Ford has kept from her."

"I wish," said Mrs. Drummond darkly, "that I might have a few moments of uninterrupted conversation with that young man."

"Or monologue?" suggested her husband. "You are so wonderful in monologue."





X

ON the ensuing morning the remnants of the week-end party found themselves marooned upon the Island. The weather had retreated six weeks into the past and a sullen March sea scowled at a sullen March sky, while the flowers of yesterday shook dolefully in a rough wind which dashed clouds of spray and rain against the windows. A mile of impassable water separated the Island from the shore and called forth the maledictions of Robert Ford and the gratitude of his remaining guest.

During several wakeful periods of the night, Gladys Emerton had pondered on the course she should pursue, and had been unable to formulate any plausible reason for neglecting a very inconvenient duty. Even her limited power of sympathy told her that

Katharine must be suffering acutely and that she, in her rôle of intimate friend, could not do less than follow and condole. It was not until nearly morning that a satisfactory plan occurred to her. A committee of two should hasten to the sufferer. Robert had announced a determination to find Katharine. What could be more natural than that Gladys, too, should fly—with him—to the side of her afflicted one. She could imagine and arrange many little incidents and tableaux in such a mission calculated to arouse his slow admiration. Katharine in tears could not bear comparison with her friend's tender but undisfigured pity, and Gladys rather fancied that her long "svelte" figure would adapt itself gracefully to the support of Katharine's disheveled and woe-begone person.

But the weather had managed an even more desirable condition of things, and Gladys, as she donned a charming morning gown and a no less becoming air of resigned concern, recognized, as she thought, the working of a special Providence in her behalf, and prepared for a whole day of uninterrupted opportunity.

“And a great deal can be done in twenty-four hours,” she reflected. “Katharine never met him until the day before yesterday, and he was perfectly ridiculous about her last night. And she was even more ridiculous dashing off in that melodramatic way. I suppose these Fords will think that I have very peculiar friends.”

Jack’s opinion on this point, as upon all others, was unexpressed, as that young gentleman elected to remain *perdu* and to consume a meal—which was either breakfast or luncheon, according as one chose to judge it by time or by constituents—in the privacy of his apartments. Neither the half-amused exposition of his mother nor the all-indignant strictures of his brother could move him, and he was still chuckling under his blankets when the other two went down to breakfast and their guest.

For Robert it was a cheerless repast, although Miss Emerton, a brisk little fire, and a bowl of daffodils did what they could to enliven it, and Mrs. Ford seconded their efforts with a sedate philosophy which re-

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mained unshaken while guests and sunshine vanished.

“Dear Katharine is so impulsive,” Gladys gushed. “She’s always flying off at tangents and then coming back again. But until she is ready to come back it is always best to let her fight things out alone. I always said that her hypersensitiveness would get her into trouble, and now it has. There she is back in that dreary town alone, while I am here with you,” and she presented her hostess with a beautifully made smile.

“Alone?” queried Ford. “She spoke of friends sharing her house.”

“The Drummonds,” rejoined Gladys. “Such queer people! It is altogether the queerest household, but dear Katharine is so loyal and so dependent on the opinion of others that she would not part with them even when I wanted her to share an apartment in a really modern part of town with me. I couldn’t make her see it. She insisted that she could not leave the old house because it had been her grandfather’s; because Denis—a queer old woman who used to be her nurse

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—wouldn't bear transplanting; because she loved the garden; and because she couldn't do without the children."

"The children are Mrs. Drummond's?" Mrs. Ford inferred. "I remember Bertha's telling us last night that your friend was troubled about a little boy."

"That must have been a mistake," Gladys answered, and she wondered at her host's agitation. "The children are three little girls. Two belong to the Drummonds and Mrs. Denis adopted the other, through a queer craving for something to take care of, while Katharine was studying in Europe. She is the strangest little creature you ever saw. And the affection of this hodgepodge of a family is the only argument she brings to bear against my suggestion of the apartment with electric lights, steam heat, an elevator, the subway station a block away, and a trolley passing the door."

"I know a man called Drummond," remarked Ford. "I wonder if by any chance Miss Merrill's friend could be his wife. She is some sort of an artist, I believe."

“She illustrates children’s books,” Gladys admitted, conscious of having made an injudicious move, and not knowing quite how to unmake it. “You have met her?” she asked. “Personally she is perfectly all right, but I don’t like her influence for Katharine.”

“For my part I should be inclined to choose the garden and the children,” said Mrs. Ford. “But it seems unusual in one of you new women. I thought you considered such things antiquated.”

“Katharine doesn’t. But then you could hardly call her advanced. She and Carrie Drummond play with those little girls until, I assure you, their mentality is becoming affected and they have no true sense of values. You see yourself what a childish thing dear Kate did last night. There isn’t a scrap of harm in her, and there are several wonderfully good points about her, but she is certainly immature for a girl who has been thrown upon her own resources for so long.”

Yes, that was it, Robert told himself when he was safe in the smoking room. She was strangely like a child. She had played

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about the *Katrinka* like a humming bird—bright, alert, and quivering with life. He remembered her as she challenged Captain Jameson to a tournament of complicated knots, and taught him one which she had learned from a Breton fisherman, and again as she held herself erect against the wind with barely a touch of her fingers against the mast, while her whole lithe body bent and straightened to the rise and fall of the boat. And her gayety, her frank pride, her almost boyish enjoyment of life and sun and wind and water and motion. He comforted his impatience by reflecting that the very intensity of her grief, the blind unthinking impulse to get away from the hurt and back to the people she loved, argued that the grief would be short-lived. He would go to her as soon as he and Captain Jameson could fight a passage to the mainland, and he would find her ready to treat the accident of his having absorbed all her work as the grewsome joke it really was. On one point at least he could reassure her. The market value of “*Katharine Merrills*” was in the ascendant. Some of the earlier canvases had

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been inexpensive enough, but lately his agent had found it increasingly difficult to persuade owners—whether dealers or private collectors—to part with even a sketch. And this was not, as he could prove to her, because he was known to be on the lookout for her work, but because its excellence and originality were making themselves felt. He had really and unconsciously done her a service by keeping her work within her reach until she had established her position. If he could but persuade her to take this view of the matter it would be comparatively simple to find some method of turning this extraordinary accident to good account.

But she, meanwhile, was suffering torments of self-scorn and self-doubt, while he was shut in on this silly island by a spiteful freak of weather and forced to endure the inanities of a girl Jack had grown tired of.

It was strange friendship, he reflected, which existed between these two girls. One so artificial, so selfish, and withal so pathetic in her satisfied conventionality. The other such a strange product of a strange child-

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hood. Such a child she was. Such a woman she might be made. Subjected, as he surmised, to the most disillusioning of influences and keeping her illusions! Going unsmirched through student experiences in foreign cities! Believing that mankind was still adorned by all the virtues after who could guess how many disappointments and betrayals! Venerating truth and love and honor when they were all out of fashion, and expecting from all mankind the warm and cordial kindness with which she regarded it! To hear her discourse of the gratitude and generosity of the world was to believe that the millennium had set in. Ford wondered restlessly how long this faith could be preserved, and how much he, who would have so gladly kept the glamor close and bright around her, had done to destroy it.

A half hour's conversation with Captain Jameson in the tobacco and paint scented warmth of the boathouse did nothing to relieve his impatience. The captain had conceived an ardent and outspoken admiration for his yesterday's commander, but was

greatly puzzled by the course of events on the preceding evening.

“But I leave it to you, sir,” he argued. “What can a man do when a little lady, young enough to be his daughter an’ smart enough to do what I yesterday see that one do, asks a favor off him. An’ Bertha will tell you how pitiful she kept sayin’: ‘Captain, dear captain’—she called me ‘dear captain’ just like that—‘take me to the shore an’ let me go home. I can’t stay here no more.’”

“I wish I had known of it,” said Robert. “I might have persuaded her to stay.”

“Just what I says to her; and Bertha says similar. ‘Speak to Mr. Ford before you goes,’ we says. And she says: ‘Captain,’ she says, drawing herself up a little, ‘don’t you know as I am commandin’ of the *Katrinka* for this day,’ and she sort of smiles a smile as make my neck swell up here,” and the captain indicated a stubble grown tract in the region of his collar. “‘You sure are, ma’am,’ says I, for a more beguilin’ young female I never seen than her in that whitey evenin’ rig o’ hers. ‘Well,’ she says, ‘an’ didn’t you hear

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Mr. Ford say as how you an' Pier was at my orders an' I had only to ask to have?' 'Them is orders, ma'am,' I says, and Bertha, she says: 'Them is always Mr. Ford's orders for his guests.' An' then that young lady turns to me an' she says agin: 'Dear Captain Jameson, this ain't orderin' at all. It's askin'. I'm askin' you to take me ashore. Will you do it?' 'Ashore it is, ma'am,' I says, an' does it as soon as Bertha has her fixed. I takes her to the train an' puts her aboard. Pier, he wants to start up steam an' take her that way, but I ain't trustin' her to nobody but myself. An' as we was waitin' for the train to come in she says, kinder shaky, an' I see by the lamps her eyes was wet: 'Captain,' she says, 'be careful of the *Katrinka*.' 'Captain, to you, ma'am,' I says, 'I will until you take the helm again.' 'Never no more,' she says, 'but here's something I want you to keep to remember me by,' an' she puts a little bundle in my hand. An' then the train took her, an' here's what I had," and the captain, after unbuttoning many layers of coat and knitted waistcoat, disclosed the pocket of a blue flan-

nel shirt. From this depository he drew out a long silken cord with a gold whistle attached to it. "You seen it round that little white neck o' hers," he reminded Ford, who stood in need of no reminding, "an' she'd took time to tie it in that French knot I was so took by. An' now, sir," he went on when he had restored it to its place and had risen to his sturdy legs, "I've knowed you a long time an' I've served you true. But I says an' I means, that when you took an' made that little lady feel—or let anybody else make her feel—like she couldn't stay no more in your house, you done a bad day's work, Mr. Ford, a bad day's work."

"It was indeed a bad day's work," Ford acquiesced. "But I never knew that I was doing it until the thing was done. And now I am tied up here for no one knows how long."

"This gale looks good for all day," the captain gloomily agreed, as he consulted his barometer and took careful survey of conditions outside the warm little boathouse. "It's quite a blow, sir."

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Ford joined him at the window and looked dejectedly out. The captain studied the stern-lipped, troubled-eyed face beside him as sharply as he had studied the other barometer or the sky, and something he saw there gave him cause for thought, and thought led him to deliberate speech.

“Females,” he remarked, with a beautiful generality, “is like boats. The best of ’em is the hardest to handle. Take a racer. Look at the build of her an’ the rig of her. An’ give her her head and what does she do. There ain’t nobody on earth can tell you, sir. An’ that little lady sure is racer built. We comes home all hands happy and willin’ at five o’clock, an’ at nine she says she can’t stay no more.”

“I’ll tell you what happened,” Ford volunteered, glad to find some one to whom he could talk rationally and freely. “Then you’ll see what I mean by saying that I didn’t know what I was doing until it was too late to stop.”

The captain listened attentively with his wise old eyes on the bowl of his pipe and a judicial twist in all his features. Ford knew

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him too well to attempt explanation or amplification, and the captain's comprehension was as instant as it was concerned.

"Mebbe it was too late to do anything yesterday," he admitted, when he had heard all the complications of pride, surprise, humiliation, and flight, "but it strikes me it's about time to do something now. She'll be workin' herself up into a spell of sickness if you don't go an' straighten her mind out on these here points as you have explained to me."

"How can I?" queried Ford impatiently. "Look at that sea. Listen to that confounded wind."

"Sho!" ejaculated Captain Jameson. "Be you goin' to let a little breeze o' wind come betwixt you an' a thing like that what's got to be done? You go git your shore clothes on while the Boy an' me gits the old dory out. Ain't no sea what this little bit o' blow kin kick up as is too much for a Cape Cod dory. What's the time?"

"Noon."

"You want to hurry. Tide turns about one."

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“I’ll go in these things. Change and get lunch at the club. I’ll speak to Mrs. Ford and be with you in ten minutes.”

“Good, sir,” responded Jameson, and departed into the storm, stentoriously calling upon the invisible Boy.

The pose of graceful expectancy in which Miss Emerton had draped herself against the balustrades when she detected the approach of her host was wasted upon his preoccupation and shattered by his first question:

“May I take any message from you to Miss Merrill?”

“Take—to Miss Merrill?” she repeated. “On such a day? In such a storm?” and then she trailed her dull-blue draperies down to a closer remonstrance. “You can’t be serious. Your brother has just appeared—the storm kept him awake all night—and has read the most alarming things in the instruments in the observatory. I was going to ask you to explain the barometer to me before luncheon.”

“I’m awfully sorry,” he assured her, cap in hand, and she noticed from her position

just above him that the rain was trickling down his neck and that his hair was close and fine. These things had no direct bearing upon anything in particular, yet they made her fiercely eager to keep him with her—and away from Katharine—at any cost. But his will was adamant.

Her plan of the night watches occurred to her, and she insisted upon it with a charming eloquence of love and duty and braving wrath of weather for a friend's sake. But he dismissed it with a half regretful, half amused manner.

“It would be delightful. But what could you wear? And now if you will pardon this desertion of a guest—but I know you will when you remember that I may be so fortunate as to reassure Miss Merrill on the matter which is making her unhappy—I will report to my mother, consign you to her and to Jack for the afternoon, and say good morning. There is a question of tide which cannot be evaded.”

And Miss Emerton was left in the wide hall and to the realization that she had failed, mis-

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erably failed, because of that clinging femininity which she had so long cultivated as her greatest charm and asset. The elaborate gowns in which she had put so much trust had proved her undoing, and she stood in one of the most costly of them all and loathed it.

Mrs. Ford accepted the announcement of her son's departure with her accustomed serenity. She had learned that Robert and Captain Jameson were a match for any phase of weather of which Long Island Sound was capable.

"Very well, dear, you know best," she said placidly. "But I think you ought to stay in town unless the storm subsides."

"I'm going, too," Jack announced, suddenly emerging from the depths of a chair and the paper of the preceding evening. "I'm not going to be left here alone."

"Of course not," Robert replied pacifically. "You will have mother and Miss Emerton."

"I won't stay," Jack protested hotly. "I'm no entertainment committee. What do you go and ask girls here for if you're going to

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vacate as soon as they come? I have lots of things to do in town."

"To-morrow," his brother amended. "You simply can't desert Miss Emerton—to-day."

"I can as well as you. I'll go and comfort the other. 'I'll gaze in her orbits of blue,'" he quoted, "or is it brown? 'And her hand I will tenderly squeeze'——"

"Boys, boys," their mother admonished them as though they were little children, "don't quarrel. Jack, stop teasing your brother. Robert——" but here Miss Emerton floated into the room, and Jack subsided, though not without one last attempt at liberty:

"If you want me to go with you, Bob, old chap," he volunteered with a fearful joviality, "say the word."

"No, no," protested Robert, disregarding the pleading eyes fixed upon him. "You are in active charge here. Take care of mother. Make Miss Emerton happy. Take her to the observatory and explain the internal workings of such seafaring instruments as you find there. Try to persuade her—as is indeed most true"——and he turned with gentle cour-

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tesy to Gladys, "that we are very happy to have her with us and that we apologize for—everything."

So Jack and Gladys in the tower trained field glasses and telescope upon the dory, and watched its staggering progress toward the shore, while the exile from sunny France, visibly dejected even at that distance, ran the mackintoshed automobile out on the dock and busied himself with cranks and gauges.

The little boat lurched against the pier and shot past. But now there were only two black figures in it. The other was running toward the automobile, which was contributing clouds of vapor to the general disturbance.

"'Off again, on again,'" quoted Jack, and laid down the glasses.

"'Gone again,'" sighed Gladys, and turned from the telescope. And no one observed the masterly seamanship with which Captain Jameson and the Boy beat and tacked and buffeted their way back to the Island.



XI

OH, no, sir, I'm afraid not, sir," said Mrs. Denis lugubriously. "She denies herself to all, this day."

"Perhaps she will make an exception in my case," Ford responded. "You will at least take up my card."

"Oh, no, sir, I really can't," Mrs. Denis maintained. "Miss Merrill isn't well and I can't disturb her."

"But, Mrs. Denis," Robert began, with a smile which went straight to her soft old heart and won it, "I know your name, you see. Miss Merrill told me all about you."

"Then, sir, will you step into the reception room for a moment. She won't see you, that I know, but come in out of the rain, an' I'll tell you what I can."

Ford followed his portly guide into the

house which Katharine had declined to exchange for the elevated apartment and Miss Emerton's constant society. He understood her disinclination when he saw the air of repose and dignity with which even the casual and impersonal reception room greeted the stranger, and he knew that he had found that *rara avis* among New York dwellings, a house sacred to one family and uncontaminated by the occasional and careless lessee

Mrs. Denis, too, was a *rara avis* among retainers. Her gray hair was smoothly brushed and surmounted by a lace cap, while her gown and apron were of rustling silk. Not since he had visited friends in England had he seen anything like her. And he was unaccountably relieved and reassured, though he reflected that much of the impracticability of his vanished guest was the result of this unusual environment.

"If she told you my name, sir, it's likely she told you more," Mrs. Denis, with sad dignity began, lifting a corner of her apron to dry an unstarted tear. But discovering the apron to be of silk, she substituted a tightly folded

handkerchief and continued: "She's told you, maybe, how long I've watched over her young footsteps and the growin' flowers of her mind, but did she, by word or by deed, give you to know that I was to be shut out—*locked* out in the hall while Mrs. Drummond held Ody Colone to her nose an' was the comforter of her affliction?"

"Haven't you seen her to-day?" questioned Ford anxiously.

"No, sir; not her, sir. But when I carried up her breakfast I seen her Wreck," and Mrs. Denis blew her nose with infinite care and paused to enjoy the result of this announcement before she went on: "Pray be seated, sir. I'll tell you all," and Robert obeyed the suggestion.

"Friday, but two short suns ago, I packed her for a visit to go—as she said to me in her happy way—out to meet the Spring. I misdoubted something was wrong when she said she was going with *that* Miss Emerton. I has my eyes, sir, an' I uses 'em, an' I see as that young lady never comes here without wanting something."

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“But tell me about Miss Merrill?” Ford urged. “When did she come back?”

“She went away on Friday afternoon,” Mrs. Denis responded, refusing to skip one throb of her narrative, “as happy an’ as beautiful as the dawn—you consider her beautiful, of course, sir?”

“Of course,” he acquiesced. “Everyone must.”

“Her mother was a beautiful woman,” she leisurely proceeded. “An’ she was no older than Miss Katharine when she went the way of all and left that lamb in my care. An’ now it’s shut out in the hall I am while another holds the Ody Colone to her nostril!” and she dissolved again into moist self-pity.

Robert had not braved the perils of wind and wave nor risked the lives of Captain Jameson and of Pierre to call upon a garrulous old woman. Yet he accepted the situation with a grace which did as much credit to his cleverness as to his kindness. Such an ally as this would be of infinite value to his cause, and meanwhile he was at least in Katharine’s house and talking to the person who had known her

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longest and who loved her most. Encouraged by his attention Mrs. Denis grew biographical of her charge and instructed Ford in the intricacies and treatment of measles and boasted of her sure cure for chickenpox. He learned that to appreciate true and angelic patience he should have beheld Miss Katharine languishing under these and other disorders, but "brought out of them, praise be to God, with not so much as a pound off her, nor a mark to show she had 'em." The memory of these happy days made her present ignominious position, "shut out, sir, while another holds her head and the Ody Colone," all the harder to bear. She had, still with the keenest enjoyment of her woes and wrongs, reduced the handkerchief to a limp uselessness long before her remarks grew modern enough to refer again to the events of the last few days.

"In the flower of her youth and beauty, sir, she left us on Friday, an' last night she come back a Wreck. And to me, pressing for some explanation, she only says, an' weeps in the sayin': 'Denis, you'd never understand. You

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couldn't understand.' But I understand enough to know, sir, that she's an angel from above, and that them as injures her is fiends an' will reap the rewards of such."

Here were Captain Jameson's sentiments in another form, Robert reflected, and knew that this time he could offer no explanation. Katharine had been right, and Mrs. Denis would not understand. He felt a great deal less than frank as he rose to take his leave.

"Will you say to Miss Merrill that I called, that I deeply regret her indisposition, and that I trust she will be so kind as to see me at eleven o'clock in the morning."

"At eleven o'clock, sir," she repeated carefully.

"Thank you," said he. "Good afternoon, and thank you."

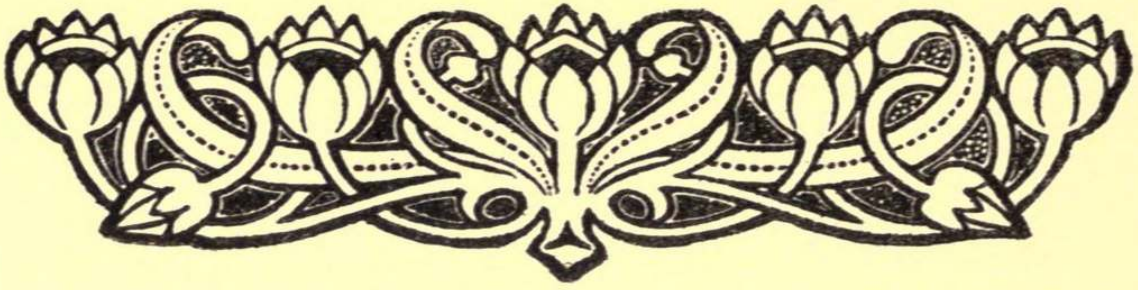
Mrs. Denis, with a grand air, accompanied him to the door, and ushered him out to the still vindictive weather and his waiting hansom. When he had quite disappeared she turned back into the house with a new contentment.

"To-morrow at eleven," she communed,

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“is a sweet hour for a tryst. I suppose she’ll see him in the studio. I must get a flower or two in the morning.” And she fell to planning all sorts of aids and accessories to this important interview as happily as though she had never dreaded “the bold, free, striking writing of a man,” and all the ills it might portend.





XII

A MOST beautiful gentleman, Miss Katharine, dear," Mrs. Denis reported, when she had at last obtained audience with her nursling, "and with a beautiful smile and the most beautiful clothes upon him. His heart was in his eyes as he says: 'To-morrow at eleven.' Here's his card with the tryst wrote upon it in his own hand. The shakes is caused by feelings."

"Thank you, Denis, dear," replied Katharine wearily. She took the card and read it with no visible emotion, and then quite calmly tore it in two and threw its fragments into the fire.

"At eleven, you say he will be here? I'm glad to know that."

"Strong in hopes," added the shocked Mrs.

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Denis, "as you will be well enough to see him."

"I expect to be entirely well long before then. In fact, there's not much wrong with me now," protested Kate, and with the ungrateful intention of getting rid of Denis's solicitude and her panegyrics upon the beautiful young gentleman she feigned an interest in the day's menu. It was an unfailing method of banishing Denis, and one to which Katharine and the Drummonds unblushingly resorted. Mrs. Denis was convinced that without the inspiration of her constant presence and watchfulness "that young gurrl," as she described each succeeding servant of whatever age and duty, would lay ignorant hands upon the commissariat and "poison us all with noxious viands."

So Denis trotted off to the kitchen and Katharine summoned Carrie to hear of how the enemy had stormed the citadel, carried the outworks, and made an unprotesting prisoner of the garrison of one.

And Denis did not see her "lamb" again until the succeeding Wednesday morning,

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when she was hurried into a cab and driven to the White Star dock. There Katharine, with many remorseful speeches and embraces, informed her old nurse that she was going away, but tempered the surprise by assurances of a swift return.

“And you will take care of everything for me, won't you Denis, dear?” she charged her. “And be good to the Drummonds, and don't let the babies forget me. Let everything go on as it has. I'll send you a cheque at the first of every month. If you want to write to me use the old address of the Paris bank. But almost before you have time to miss me, I shall be back again. And, oh, I'm going to miss you all so! For I love you, Denis, dear. I love you.”

The emotional Denis was swamped in tears, astonishment, sorrow, and reproachfulness, and did not reach the surface of articulate speech until she was back in the deserted house and the *Celtic* was far beyond the Statue of Liberty. Only Mrs. Drummond remained to listen to her bewailings and to her perplexity as to what she could say to “the

beautiful gentleman" who had called thrice within three days.

"If you mean Mr. Ford," said Carrie darkly, "I will see him, if you like, and explain things to him. I'd really rather like it, I think."

"Oh, will you, ma'am!" cried Denis. "He was here on Sunday, an' the sufferin' dear wouldn't see him. I give her his card with a few words written on it in a shakin' hand. There in that very chair she set an' wep, and she tears up the card an' throws it in the fire."

Later in the afternoon as Carrie was sitting in the big, disordered studio, Mrs. Denis announced Ford's arrival.

"He's below, ma'am, dear," she whispered, though two doors, a flight of stairs, and several corridors lay between her and detection. "Mr. Ford, strong in his young hopes, is below."

"Bring him up," laughed Carrie mischievously. "I'll see him."

"Do, ma'am, and ease his mind. Yesterday he was terrible put out——"

"Then it would be only kind to let him in

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to-day," Mrs. Drummond suggested. "Ask him to come to Miss Merrill's studio."

"Where is Miss Merrill?" Ford demanded after the curtest of greetings had been exchanged.

"I really can't tell you," said Carrie, very small and indignant in her Savonarola chair. "Ever since her very enlightening visit to your Island, we have been packing. She left to-day."

"Where did she go?" asked Ford, consulting his watch.

"I don't know," Carrie admitted weakly, but added vindictively, "and if I did I should hardly tell you. Your interference has done quite enough of harm. You've broken her pride and her spirit; you've broken everything but her ambition."

"We will discuss that later. At present I want to ask you some questions which your—energy—leads me to think you can answer. Will you tell me whether Miss Merrill's peculiar manner toward myself is caused by genius or by pique?"

"And I refuse to answer so rude and heart-

less a question. By what right do you ask it? Haven't you done her enough injury?"

"There seems to be a sort of consolidated misunderstanding on this point," said Ford calmly, "and with your permission—or even without any cordial expression of it—I shall explain the matter to you. I am fond of pictures. I am not an artist, but I have traveled widely, have haunted every picture gallery of interest in Europe, and know something of Oriental art as well. I trust I don't bore you."

"Oh, no," Mrs. Drummond murmured politely, and in truth he did not, for she was absorbed in the details, not of his biography, but of his costume. How, she wondered, did he manage to be so utterly correct without being aggravating.

"It is now some years since I found and bought a picture called 'The Isle of Dreams,' by Katharine Merrill. You know it, of course?"

"I never chanced to see it, but she often spoke of it and wondered where it was. She used to talk of the way in which her things dropped out of sight. She could sometimes

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trace them through two or three changes in ownership, but after that she always lost them. Of course, we know the reason now, and she might have guessed it earlier if she had not been so busy and proud and happy. She owes you a great deal—both ways.”

“Well, I fell in love with ‘The Isle of Dreams’ and set out to collect more of the artist’s work. There is such an air of authority and maturity in everything I found that I took it for granted that she was a woman of middle age, and thought the few canvases my dealer succeeded in securing for me to be but a very insignificant part of her entire work. On Saturday night I learned the truth under circumstances which I can never sufficiently deplore. I was a brute.”

“Oh, no, how could you know?” urged Carrie, making strange use of her coveted few uninterrupted moments with Robert Ford.

“I failed then to make her understand my position, and I have since failed three times to find her when I called. I intend to see her. Can I persuade you now to tell me where she is?”

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“Off Fire Island,” answered Mrs. Drummond forlornly. “Gone away and no one knows where she is. I am to send letters to her bankers in Paris, and none of her other friends know even so much. She’s going to some far-away village to sketch and paint and work until she gets a medal or so, a picture in the *Salon*, and some of the fame you’ve imprisoned in that gallery of yours.”

Robert took a meditative stroll through the room, and Carrie, watching him with careful and appraising eyes, found herself suddenly sorry for him, though there was no bid for sympathy in his expression or in his carriage. Neither did his next remark sound helpless.

“There is no immediate need for communicating with her either by letter or in person, though both could, of course, be managed. When we have made some progress in the arrangement of her affairs we will report to her. May I ask you to reproduce as nearly as possible her mental condition when she left? You and she, of course, discussed the part I had taken in her affairs. In what way have I injured her?”

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“ Well, in several ways. But most of all I should say you have destroyed her self-confidence. She considered herself—we all considered her—an artist of established reputation, well known and appreciated; almost, in a limited field, famous. You understand how the delusion arose and how it grew.”

“ Perfectly,” he answered gravely. “ And my further injury? ”

“ Was to her self-respect. We are all proud to make the big impersonal Public our banker. We take its money proudly and we spend it gayly. No income inherited from dead relatives or shared by living ones ever seems so absolutely and irresponsibly our own as the Public’s payment for the Public’s pleasure. Actors and painters and singers and writers will all tell you this. Well, Katharine has learned that she lived and dressed, and played and learned, not by the generosity of this open-handed, un-exacting Public, but by the generosity of Robert Ford. She has thought out the situation in all sorts of bearings, and she has decided first to make her name known in the picture world *via* the Paris *Salon* and the English

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and American exhibitions, and then to repay you what she can."

"In what length of time does she intend to accomplish this?"

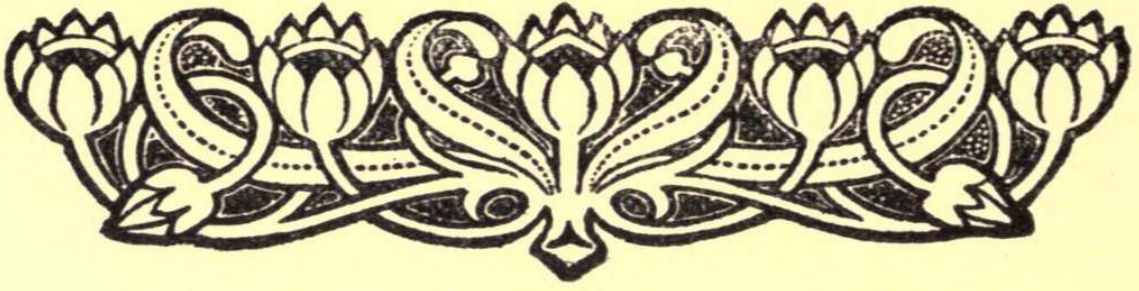
"It will take a long, long time. Just her foreign work will take at least a year."

"And during this year what is my rôle to be? Were you so good as to settle that for me?" he asked with a smile.

"You will please do nothing," Carrie commanded. "There is, in fact, nothing for you to do."

"And I have never," said Robert Ford, "been in the habit of doing nothing by the year."





XIII

RATHARINE MERRILL was suffering meanwhile in the hard-won solitude of her cabin as she had not before found time to do. The few days which intervened between her enlightenment on the Island and the sailing of the *Celtic* had afforded no leisure for dejection and tears, even if such weakness had not been impossible in the brave and championing society of Carrie Drummond.

But when she had bestowed her well-worn traveling necessaries in their proper places, when she had interviewed the deck steward and chartered a chair, when she had studied the passenger list and rejoiced to find no familiar name upon it, when she had wandered through the floral display in the saloon and had restored three lost and howling young-

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sters to their lost and helpless nurses—then she realized that even the physical preoccupations of sea sickness may be preferable to the psychical preoccupations of self-pity and self-reviling, and abandoned herself to misery of a lonely, introspective sort. There was nothing but thinking to do, and no one to protect her from the conclusion to which that thinking led.

She was a failure. All her years of effort and of work, all her years of unchanging devotion and proud sacrifice culminated in this. She had decorated an obscure room on an uncharted island belonging to an unknown man.

Hour after hour she lay in her stateroom and marveled at her past stupidity. Why had she never followed the adventures of her pictures after their first purchase? Many of her friends kept careful record of their work, entered its vicissitudes and changes of ownership in little books devoted to that use, knew the cities, houses, galleries, and museums which held their pictures. But she, blind fool, had never done this. She had preferred her

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“Big Impersonal Public” to a cold list of individuals or institutions. “A fool,” she fretted, as she buried her hot cheek in the cooler side of her pillow and waved away the ministrations of the stewardess, “a motley, conceited fool!”

The stewardess persisted. The day was fine. The young lady had not left her room for nearly two days. “An’ the hair, miss, hon the deck will do you good ’owever hill you feel. Let me dress you, do now, and steward shall ’elp you hup.”

The woman was kindly, and her suggestion sensible. Katharine adopted it, though she declined the proffered “’elp,” and Mrs. Denis, at home in the house which was always empty to her when her nursling was not in it, would have been torn between pride and sorrow if she could have known how dreadfully that nursling missed the touch of her loving old hands and the refuge of her faithful admiration. For dressing is but a thankless and uninteresting work when there is no one to assist at the process or care for the result.

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The glare and cheer of the deck were even more trying when Katharine at last reached that sunny pandemonium of quoits, flirtations, babies, books, pedestrians, bean bags, *mal-demer*, and shuffleboard. Her rugs were consigned to the deck steward under whose admiring care she had often traveled but who ventured now to suggest "a very dry broiled chop and a glass of dry champagne, miss," and who shook his head in sympathetic incredulity when Katharine explained that she was only tired, not ill.

"Oh, no, miss; of course not, miss," he respectfully agreed as he established her in her chair. "But, if you'll allow me to suggest it, you'll eat much better up here in the air than if you went down to the stuffy saloon. Shall I order that little snack I described to you, miss, for your luncheon?"

"If you will," said Miss Merrill listlessly. "Thank you, yes. I should rather not go down."

So she lay among her wrappings long hour after hour and, once the gayest of holiday makers, watched the gayety all about her with

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lack-luster eyes. Occasionally one of the ship's officers, recognizing her, stopped and spoke. Her neighbors to right and left proffered a remark and a magazine, but she was left, save for these fleeting interruptions, to a depression which grew steadily more unbearable.

For here were sky and sea and sunshine, empty day after empty day. Here were sunsets, too, and all things nautical. Here were even light-hearted men and maids in yachting array, just as there had been on her last day among her dreams. Not a word or incident of that day escaped her, and there was hardly one to which she could look back without humiliation and regret. Beginning with the duplicating conversations on the sea wall, she had gone merrily through blunder after blunder, stupidity after stupidity until she had ended in tears, vituperation, and flight, "just like an hysterical schoolgirl or the leading lady in a melodrama," she jeered. "And you let him know and pity you! What good can his pity do you, you coward; you spiritless, prideless Thing!" and Mrs. Denis

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might have scented "a dangerous looking sign" in the use of the pronoun without its antecedent.

The happier portions of that day made no more pleasant memory. All the gay badinage which had enlivened the hours spent in the *Katrinka* took on a horrible significance in the light of the evening's discovery. The part of all her wholly inexcusable conduct which seemed most inexcusable and inexplicable was that gayly enough and thoughtlessly—but accurately withal—she had furnished Ford with the essentials of her biography. Her early life, her loneliness, Denis, her work, her ambition, her pride, and her success. He knew about them all and what each had meant to her. Even little incidents and habits of her daily life she had described to him, and the joy with which she lived it! Her very clothes had not escaped, and she had let him know that she had dressed and played and lived upon his largesse. She had told him about the bed in the Babies' Hospital! a thing which no one—not even Carrie Drummond—had known. There must have been some witchery in the

day or in the air. She had never talked to anyone as she had to that slow-smiling, quick-seeing Robert Ford. And what must he have thought of her outbreak about Fame! Of course it was bathos, pure bathos, and he had encouraged—even abetted—her in it. How he must have laughed about it afterwards!

But even in her sore resentment she knew this to be unjust. She remembered his concern when she had told him—as she would have given worlds not to have told him—that all her pictures were also his. Of course he might have regarded them simply from a commercial standpoint and have been dismayed to find them practically worthless. But he had shown no trace of such consideration in the short few moments in the hall on that nightmare night, nor had his persistent attempts to find her at her own home, as sentimentally reported by Denis, indicated that he regarded her as in any way responsible for the fiasco or even that he considered the circumstances in that lamentable light.

If only she had been warned or prepared, ever so indefinitely, she might have held her-

self in better control: might have carried the situation so differently; might have suffered chagrin, disappointment, injury, and humiliation silently and proudly; might have spared herself the paralyzing consciousness that he was sorry for her. In all the lesser trials of her life she had asked and accepted pity from no one, and now she knew herself to be the object of pity to the man to whom she owed her comfort, her home, her very income.

And his enlightenment in no way helped in her design. It would have been better to have left him in the placid enjoyment of the erroneous value he set upon his property until she had done all that could be done to make his valuation the true one. It would have been the work of years, even under the most favorable stars, but it would still have been possible. Only she had known the exact number of her canvases; only she could have betrayed their worthlessness, and only she had done it. She could imagine the avidity with which the studio tea tables and club lunch rooms would fall upon the tidings that Katharine Merrill, the aloof, the haughty, the domestically in-

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clined, was that worst of pretenders in the court of Art, a one man's fad. From the studios the news would spread to the papers, from them to the dealers, from them to "the Great Impersonal Public," which she had for so long held in grateful regard, but which would then be hearing her name for the first time.

She could do nothing to avert the catastrophe. She was completely in Robert Ford's power, and Carrie Drummond was not there to suggest that she had so been any time during the past four or five years, and had prospered and been happy in it, and to recommend that he be trusted to guard what was his only the more carefully for knowing that it was all his.

The steward, much concerned, brought and administered his panacea twice a day throughout the remaining space of the voyage. The stewardess carried out a treatment of her own devising at breakfast time. The officers were cordial, introductions inevitable, and Katharine young and neither ill favored nor ill mannered. But not all these antidotes to

melancholy could keep her from returning, time after time, to the darkest shadow in the Valley of Humiliation—her doubt of her own talent. Had she the power, she asked herself, to force recognition from the world? Could she rely upon the verdict of the prejudiced Drummonds, the uncritical Ford, or the casual writer of art reviews and notices? Fellow students, fellow exhibitors, teachers, and fellow artists had been kind. But these were poor substitutes for the growing mass of public appreciation upon which she had so mistakenly rested. And to all other torments of spirit these reflections added fear.

Shaken in self-esteem and lonely beyond tears she at last reached the little fishing town which was to be the scene of a struggle which only high hope, indomitable courage, and secure self-confidence could carry to success. And Fate and Ford had beggared her.

She was greeted vociferously by her old friend and landlady, and courteously by the blushing fisherman son of the house whom she remembered as a tow-headed urchin much given to the shy commencements of conversa-

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tion but always overcome at his own temerity after the two first remarks. She climbed to the little room which had been hers and was amazed to find it quite unchanged by all the changing years. Even the view from the little window was the same, and she caught her breath sharply as she turned to it. And straightway all her hope and courage and strength came surging back to her. For out beyond the squat shipping and blunt docks of the harbor, out under the perfect sky, violet cliffed, soft wooded, and beautiful beyond all remembering, the original Island of Dreams lay on its placid waters waiting to welcome her.





XIV.

DESPITE Ford's energetic protestation against a year's idleness he seemed, as the months went by, to be blessed with unlimited leisure. He found time to lay siege to the sympathy and friendship of the elder Drummond, and the Misses Drummond adored him from the first. Doris Gwendolin Patricia accepted him with enthusiasm, and Denis regarded him as a being sent straight from heaven or the nearest public library.

It was she who instituted and maintained the rule that he should be ushered straight to Miss Merrill's studio, and that the Drummonds should be notified of his presence only when he so desired. And he spent many an afternoon hour alone or with only Doris Gwendolin Patricia to bear him company in the big,

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dim room in which he had never seen Katharine Merrill, but in which, nevertheless, he could always see her clearly.

Mrs. Denis watched over him with a devotion only less than that with which she yearned for her nursling, and she always reported these solitary vigils to Mrs. Drummond.

“The beautiful gentleman was here to-day, ma’am,” she would impart in bronchial whisperings. “His offerings to the empty shrine was roses, sweet flowers of love; and last month it was daffydills. His heart gets warmer, ma’am, with the weather. So it ever was with Denis, as the seasons rolled.” And Carrie, sitting often in the empty shrine, would wonder and dream and sigh. But at the last she always smiled.

On the days when foreign mails might be expected Robert Ford might be expected also. Then would he and the ladies of the Drummond family—with sometimes the much-starched addition of Doris Gwendolin Patricia—have tea in the studio; and he would then, sitting gravely in the Savonarola chair and protecting his scarf pin from the onslaughts of

the younger of the Misses Drummond, whose devotion to him was only equaled by his passion for them, listen to the excerpts from Miss Merrill's correspondence with which Mrs. Drummond, with shockingly little compunction, entertained him.

"And listen to this," she superfluously entreated on a day when every faculty of his was concentrated upon the letter in her hand, "just listen to this":

"'It occurs to me that, since Tom knows him, you may meet Robert Ford. Don't let my experience prejudice you against him, and don't quite take him at Denis's valuation. I remember that, before I saw his pictures, I thought him more than usually bearable; but she has deified him. Be careful not to mention me to him nor to tell him anything about my plans.'"

"How does that affect you?" asked Mrs. Drummond.

"I feel like a Nihilist," he answered with a slight catch in his voice, due perhaps to emotion, perhaps to the sudden planting in the midst of his faultless waistcoat of the fat

pink slippers of the younger Miss Drummond.

“‘There is something,’” she read on, “‘wrong about the men one meets away from home. They are never quite and entirely as one feels they ought to be. Is it that men, when they are charming, don’t travel? Or is it that men, when they are traveling, aren’t charming?’”

“Now, O confessed globe trotter,” Carrie asked, “how does that make you feel?”

“Much worse, thank you,” he blandly lied. He was quite content to be mentioned or remembered at all in a life as busy as that out of which Katharine sent these letters.

She was working desperately, she wrote, but she felt that she was accomplishing much. A picture for the Paris *Salon* was well under way, and another for the London *Academy* was beginning to take form. There were always messages to Denis and to Mr. Drummond, and always prayers and entreaties that the babies should not be allowed to forget their absent but devoted Aunt Katharine.

As time passed and her confidence grew,

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she trusted herself to send a message to Ford. "Get Tom to tell him," it ran, "not to sell those pictures unless he has already done so. If these plans of mine should carry they may, after all, be worth something. Tom needn't go into details of course, but simply advise him to wait before disposing of them."

But Ford did not profit by this sage advice. Rather it seemed to worry him when Carrie imparted it. They were all on the Island. It was late August, and Captain Jameson, closely followed by Doris Gwendolin Patricia, had arrived with the letters just as Bertha and tea appeared. The Misses Drummond fluttered white among the roses and butterflies, and Mrs. Ford was discoursing softly at the piano in the cool dimness of the music room.

"Does she say anything of the date of her return?" asked Ford. "I trust she has not changed her plan of staying at least a year."

"You don't want her to come home!" exclaimed Carrie with an indignation which nearly precipitated her from her deck chair to the stones of the terrace. "You don't want to see her! I'm surprised at you!"

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“Not for a year at least. I’m not carrying out your instructions about doing nothing, you see, and I’m very busy about this name and fame of hers.”

“Tom,” cried his dutiful wife. “Do you hear? Wake up, dear, and conspire.”

“I’m not asleep,” Drummond retorted, and showed his still lighted cigar in corroboration. “I am preparing an obituary for you to present to Denis when you have allowed Doris Gwendolin Patricia to be drowned. She is never out of the boats.”

“Nor away from Captain Jameson,” Carrie supplemented, “and Mrs. Denis would be the last to object. She is very romantic on the subject of the captain, and looks forward to his visits as events. ‘Seafaring gentlemen,’ she told me the other day, ‘improves the manners and broadens the minds of us all.’ He surely improves the manners of D. G. P. She is as good as gold with him, and her conversation is growing quite nautical.”

“He’s as changed as she,” said Jack. “He’s downright garrulous and babbling when that child’s with him. And she tells me

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that he sings—think of that old chap singing—when he calls on Mrs. Denis.”

“I heard him,” babbled Carrie. “Or rather I felt him. It was like a gentle earthquake. And then Denis allowed herself to be persuaded to step a few steps of a jig. The three infants were unmanageable for days afterwards.”

“And a change has come over Denis’s repertoire of songs for housewifely lubrication,” Drummond observed. “When I came home from the office the other day she was shelling peas in the garden to the tune of ‘Nancy Lee,’ and she tried to put the infants to sleep on ‘My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean.’ Isn’t that what she would herself describe as a ‘dangerous looking sign’ if she detected it in our fair Chatelaine?”

“Whom Mr. Ford would consign to alien lands forever,” remarked Carrie. “I wonder what Denis and the captain would think if they heard him hoping she would never come back.”

“I said,” Ford repeated, “and I maintain, that I hope Miss Merrill will stay away for at least a year. During that time I intend to

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set all things straight between us, so that I can meet her frankly on equal ground, and I want both of you to help me. But most of all I want you to write her no reports of what we are doing or any notices which may appear in the newspapers."

"Newspaper notices!" marveled Carrie. "Why and when?"

"It's part of the game, a part of the fame," he answered. "She can't be much in the public eye without being in the public print."

"Do you think she'll like it?" she queried.

"Do you think she'll know it?" he parried.

"You are right; how should she?" Carrie sighed. "She lets no one write to her save me, and my poor brain reels under the strain of sending her a weekly budget of news and leaving out all the interesting happenings. I can never tell her when we have been here nor about the sailing we have nor any of the fun. Luckily there are always the children to write about. She is as insane as ever about them, begging me not to let them forget her and all that kind of thing. As though I could change the course of nature and make the days stand

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still. But I do my best. Come here, children," she called, as the young ladies plunged into view through a hedge of sweet peas. "Come here and listen to your overworked parent. Do you remember Aunt Katharine?"

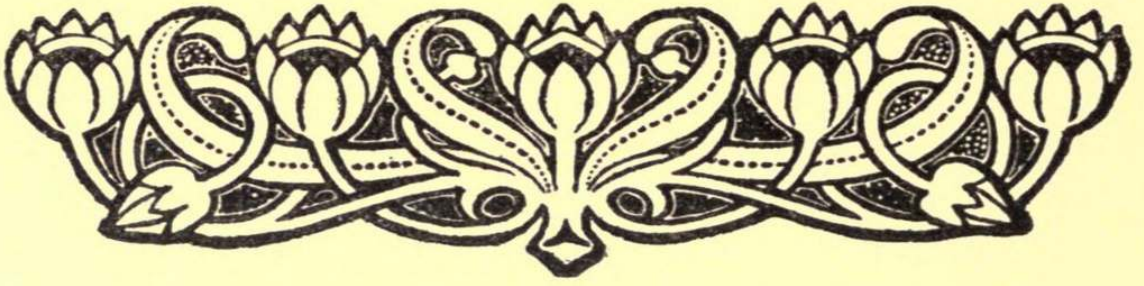
"Yes, mother," answered the elder Miss Drummond; the younger Miss Drummond sucked her thumb.

"Then don't forget her," their mother charged them. "But, if you feel it coming on, apply to Mr. Ford. He remembers her."

"My Aunt Katharine gives me candy," the younger Miss Drummond was understood to remark as she swarmed up Mr. Ford's white-ducked person to clasp him round the neck. "No one gives me candy now," she stated plaintively. "Wisht she'd come in now with candy."

"Go and tell my mother that we and tea are waiting for her," Robert advised. "Perhaps she'll give you some cake if you promise to be very good."

"I *am* good," the younger Miss Drummond assured him. "But cake and candy makes me better."



XV

DO you know," Carrie Drummond idly observed in the ensuing pause, "that boat out there seems to be in trouble."

Ford turned lazily in the direction of her pointing finger. Jack and Drummond were already watching the erratic course of a small sloop which seemed bent upon committing suicide among Captain Jameson's flotilla.

"Girl at the wheel," was Jack's diagnosis, and Carrie handed him the field glasses. He broke into an amazed chuckle and, lying carefully down again, began to wriggle, prostrate, toward the house. Instantly and gladly the elder Miss Drummond prepared to follow suit, but was parentally restrained.

"Crawl while yet there's time," Jack warned his brother, "or, if you'd rather, stay and be

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taken alive. I'm off to my mother's apron strings."

Robert possessed himself of the glasses, through which the puzzled Carrie could only distinguish an innocent seeming tender into which a white-ducked man and two blue-jerseyed sailors were assisting a yachting costume, a parasol, and a pair of high-heeled feet.

"By Jove, Jack, she's caught you," said Robert sympathetically preparing to retreat toward the house. "Just tell her how deeply I am sure to regret having missed her."

"I'd love to, but I've *such* a cold," wheezed Jack from the shelter of the rosebushes. "Let Mrs. Drummond tell her."

"Tell whom?" demanded that mystified matron. "What has happened to both of you?"

"We're frightened; we want our mother," the hidden Ford explained, and Miss Drummond, scenting a new game, crowed rapturously and threw herself upon him.

The strangers meanwhile sped over the short interspace of blue water and approached the landing stage, where "the Boy," Captain

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Jameson, and his constant shadow, Doris Gwendolin Patricia, "stood by" with a beautiful precision. The lady in the nautical costume waved a hand, raised a veil, tilted a parasol, and Doris Gwendolin Patricia bolted toward the group upon the terrace. Her thin legs twinkled over the grass, and her thinner voice preceded her:

"It's that Miss Emerton," she panted, as she fell upon Mrs. Drummond. "What's she coming for? We didn't want her."

"True, sage infant," Carrie answered, as she glanced from Ford to Ford and did some rapid memory work, "but perhaps she wants some of us."

"I want my mother," Jack insisted. "I only want my mother."

"And what can she do for you?" asked Mrs. Ford, appearing at one of the long windows.

"Save me!" he begged. "Let her have Robert. I'm too young to be taken from my mother."

"It's Miss Emerton," Robert explained. "She has returned to claim her own."

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“Or to exhibit him,” supplemented Carrie, watching the embarkation with shrewd eyes. “From the bend of his back and the set of his chin, I should judge that spotless youth to consider himself on exhibition in a hostile, jealous land.”

“He is,” said Jack. “I ought to warn him that Robert——”

“Go and bid him welcome, boys,” their mother enjoined them.

“And stifle your true feelings,” added Carrie. “Remember that a man may smile and smile and be a villain.”

The brothers rose in obedient concert, and, each attended and circumnavigated by a circling Miss Drummond, set out to do the necessary violence to truth.

The stranger proved to be a suspicious but harmless combination of large feet and hands, with a small head and a jerky manner. Jack remembered having encountered him at some winter festivity, and welcomed him with all possible cordiality, while he met Miss Emerton with a just perceptible tinge of reproachfulness which gratified that young lady and

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flattered the small-headed young man into the pride of feeling that he was succeeding where another had failed—as Jack intended that he should feel.

Robert was presented and commiserated under the same happy misconception, and then Gladys turned incredulous eyes upon the plump but uncordial faces of the Misses Drummond.

“Why, babies!” was the only remark which her usually copious vocabulary yielded, nor was her amazement decreased when Doris Gwendolin Patricia passed on her quick, flitting way to rejoin the captain. Another surprise was waiting for her in a cushion-filled lounging chair beside the tea table—Carrie Drummond—and she found still another in the air of perfect and accustomed ease with which this young matron presided over the *samovar* and chatted with Mrs. Ford, while Drummond devoted his lazy energies to the disinfecting of a favorite rosebush with clouds of tobacco smoke. More introductions ensued through which Gladys’s large-handed admirer was sustained by being appointed guardian of

the white parasol. He stood in need of some such support, for Miss Emerton was encountering even more difficulty in steering her conversational bark through the shoals and rapids of this gathering than she had met on her approach to the Island. Whenever a collision seemed inevitable she threw the unsuspecting Mr. G. Percival Carsons over the rail and used him to avert the crash of actual impact. But nothing could check Mrs. Ford's innocent desire for speech and information, and it was she who introduced the topic which everyone else—except always the custodian of the parasol—had been avoiding.

“What do you hear from our friend Miss Merrill?” she asked when everyone was comfortably established.

“Nothing at all,” responded Miss Emerton, and she threw Mr. Carsons into aquatic service again by asking him:

“You remember my friend, the Miss Merrill who painted, do you not?”

“Remember her perfectly,” he agreed. “Brown eyes, hadn't she? Awfully neat girl. Awfully neat.”

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He had already so characterized the Drummond babies, the wide prospect of summer sea, several of Miss Emerton's remarks, and the proportions of tea, cream, and sugar with which Carrie had regaled him. He felt that he was blossoming into eloquence and doing honor to his theme, and the silence which greeted his last remarks urged him to yet more complicated flights.

"Saw a picture of hers once in a shop. Really a neat little thing you know, with some water and trees and things of that kind in it. Haven't seen her lately. Where is she, Miss Gladys?"

"Ask Mr. Ford," Gladys acidly advised him, but before he had found time to do so, Carrie was answering him and earning the admiration of Jack Ford and the grateful friendship of Robert. What the recording angels may have thought of her performance seemed to trouble her not at all.

"Miss Merrill is in Europe," she told Mr. Carsons, with so confidential a smile that he felt quite definitely informed. "She got several commissions which meant a great deal to

her, and she went over to execute them. Haven't you heard from her?" she added sweetly to Gladys.

"Never," said that young person, but she said it to Robert. Questions and answers seemed to run at cross-purposes, and the carefully trained Misses Drummond marveled at the manners of these elders of theirs. "Never once," Miss Emerton repeated, "since a day or two after she ran away so queerly from me. She telephoned me then that she was going to sail almost immediately, but I did not bother to go to see her off. I have never quite forgiven her for her treatment of my friends."

"Didn't you tell me something about that visit?" the small-headed Mr. Carsons broke loose to inquire. "I remember your being dreadfully fagged one night when I met you at Mrs. Courtney's. You said you'd been at some poky place in the country with a girl who behaved like the Wandering Jew. I'm remembering it perfectly now. There was music there and a chap who made a fool of himself in Southern dialect. An awfully neat affair altogether. And now your Wandering

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Jew is in Europe! That's rather turning the tide isn't it? They generally wander in this direction, don't they?"

Some occult signal flashed from Carrie to Drummond, and that gentleman abandoned his rosebush and caught this conversational gauntlet. Other psychic commands followed, and he caught the conversational Mr. Carsons and led him away to the safety of the billiard room. After a decent interval Jack followed them, and was presently heard calling loudly for his brother.

"What is it?" demanded Robert as he sauntered up the steps, but Jack waited until they were within whispering distance before he suggested.

"Let's give true love a helping hand. Come down and envy him. You sigh like a furnace and I'll be actively rude—Drummond will help. I've tipped him off."

Drummond was already at work. He and Carsons were moistly sentimental on the loneliness of bachelorhood. The windows of the billiard room stood open and the brothers were just outside.

“You see these young fellows here,” they heard Drummond say in a throaty quaver. “You see the luxury which surrounds them! They are devoted to one another and to their mother; they have, as you see, plenty of society, and yet they are not happy!”

“Poor chaps!” commiserated the fortunate G. Percival. “I suppose they do get lonely. But they certainly are neatly fixed here. Awfully neatly fixed.”

“Now I,” pursued Drummond, “I have no such pomps in my humble rooms——”

“He lives like a Sybarite!” chuckled Robert, while Jack leaned helplessly against the wall. “Did you ever know he had it in him?” he demanded. “Isn’t he the star of pure effulgent ray!”

“But happiness,” Drummond went on, “happiness has nothing to do with comfort. When you’re most happy you’re often most uncomfortable. You and I know that. These Ford men might have discovered it if each had not thought only of the other, but now it is too late for both of them. And perhaps

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they could not have made her happy. She's a wonderful creature."

"She is! She is!" G. Percival Carsons acquiesced warmly. He was by this time very warm indeed, what with the sun and tea and embarrassment. "But look here," he went on when the purport of Drummond's earlier remark filtered through his cranium. "Perhaps we oughtn't to have come here to-day. I wouldn't have come a step if I'd known. It would be low, you know. I wouldn't have come a step," he repeated earnestly, for G. Percival Carsons had his code of ethics, and it forbade open gloating over crushed rivals. "But Miss Emerton wanted to show me the Island. She thinks I ought to buy something like it, and, by Jove, I think I will. It's so awfully neat, you know. Still, if she had told me about these poor chaps I'd never have come, you know. Two of them! Dear, dear!"

"Oh, she didn't know! You see each was waiting for the other to speak. And she never guesses the impression she is creating. She is," and Drummond watched his victim steadily, "so absolutely unaffected and natural."

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“She is indeed. How well you seem to know her. And to think of their never telling her! And knowing her for nearly a year! Why, I’ve told her forty times already, and I met her only three months and twenty-five days ago. Poor chaps. She doesn’t even guess.”

“Of course not, and you mustn’t let her. I had no real right to tell you all this, but I felt that you ought to know. If she found it out she might make herself miserable by refusing to accept the man she loves—” and Drummond possessed himself of the stranger’s right hand and shook it—“because by doing so she would make two other good men miserable. *You* know what a heart she has!”

“It would never do at all,” Carsons agreed. “It makes me feel like a sweep to think of it, but, to tell you the truth, I’m the happiest man alive. She’s to give me a final answer on the way home this evening. And of course her coming here with me and all that sort of thing, you know, makes me hope for the best, you know.”

“Surely, surely,” Drummond encouraged

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him. "And you mustn't mind these Fords too much. 'It's an ill wind' you know, and 'all's fair in love and war.' They missed their chance and a braver man wins; that's all."

And yet if that were all why did he, immediately upon the appearance of the brothers, set out in search of one of his daughters, whom he set out in turn in search of his wife? And when they were together in the dim privacy of the library, why did he further impart to that capable young matron the exact condition of affairs between Miss Emerton and her admirer.

"By the way," she asked casually, "did he tell you who he is?"

"G. Percival Carsons."

"The millionaire proprietor of 'Silver Maple,'" she announced. "You remember the advertisements: 'Sure and quick relief for pain or strain in man or beast. May be taken internally or externally; best if taken eternally.'"

"Carsons the Eternal!" exclaimed Drummond. "I've heard of him often enough. So that's he! And that girl——"

“Is going to marry him if she can't get Robert Ford. She has been telling us about his horses and his temper and his money. I never did like that girl! She came here to-day just to see what her chances were with Robert. How much do you think she really knows about Kate and her pictures and all?”

“Not much, I should judge. She was not quite clever enough to grasp the situation on the night of the catastrophe, and she has heard nothing since.”

“Well, she's made up her mind to find out what she can, but Mrs. Ford is a match for her. She has been fishing all the last half hour, and has only discovered that Miss Merrill was here one day in the early summer shortly before she sailed on the *Celtic*.”

“That must have surprised her,” laughed Drummond. “She's not succeeding brilliantly in her quest, is she?”

“But she's making up her mind on the matrimonial project,” said Carrie. “Isn't it awful, Tom, to be able to 'make up one's mind' about being married. When it came to that point with me I hadn't any mind at all.”

“Thank you, dear,” said her husband. “That’s very flattering.”

“Oh, you know what I mean!” she exclaimed, enfolding as much of him as her arms could encompass in a quick and remorseful embrace. “You *know* I didn’t think things out as she is doing. She has come here deliberately to see if she has any chance to secure Robert and the Island before she makes a more brilliant but less pleasant arrangement with Carsons.”

“Exactly,” he acquiesced. “And you are to show her that she hasn’t.”

“But how?”

“Far be it from me to dictate,” said he. “‘*Verbum sap,*’ my dear. I must go back to the victor and the vanquished. But remember, she is to give him her answer this very evening.”

“She will,” promised Carrie. “She’ll do it before they leave this island.”

And she did. Drummond had always found his wife’s machinations diverting, but that afternoon she threw herself into a combination of plots and counterplots which made the

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one enlightened member of her audience wonder what his life would be if she should turn her arts and her audacity to mischievous purpose. From time to time she acted Chorus to her own drama and vouchsafed him a word of explanation, but for the most part he was content to watch her manipulations of the *dramatis personæ* with a calm assurance that in the last act Gladys's much-coiffed head would be resting on the shoulder of Carsons, the Eternal.

Groups and pairs coalesced and parted, strolled or sat, re-formed and broke again, under Carrie's unsuspected generalship, and only once did Drummond find cause for misgiving. He was seeking solitude, or his daughters, in the orchard, and discerned Miss Emerton's long gracefulness disposed to admirable advantage against the trunk of an apple tree. And she was in animated and evidently sentimental conversation with Robert Ford! Drummond hurried off to report this discovery to Carrie, but she reassured him.

"Of course, I know, I sent him to do it."

"To flirt in the orchard?"

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“To congratulate her upon her engagement. I screwed it out of her and then everything was simple. Jack finished first. He’s doing erratic things with ice and limes and things in the butler’s pantry, and G. Percival is being cheered and petted by Mrs. Ford in the library. Oh, I’m so hot!”

“Poor little woman,” he sympathized, “you’ve been at it pretty steadily for two hours. But it’s good practice. You’ll be glad you’ve had it when you come to settle your daughters and their suitors.”

“Don’t talk like that, Tom,” she begged. “You talk as if I were a matchmaker. And you know——”

“I do, indeed,” he interrupted. “What are you doing to Captain Jameson and to Denis? What are you doing to Robert Ford and preparing to do to the Chatelaine when you lay hands on her? Marry them! every one of them, you dear old Mormon.”

“But this was your idea,” she urged. “And now, your punishment has found you. Here comes the bride elect and it’s your turn to be congratulatory.”



XVI

ARADUALLY Katharine Merrill's name emerged from obscurity. At judicious intervals a canvas or two of hers appeared in the showrooms of the dealers. They were always marked "Sold," but they provoked comment and occasional offers of repurchase. Loan exhibitions had a new name on their catalogue; a new beauty on their walls. Sunday supplements published reproductions—before which Carrie cringed—of the work of the new American artist. A magazine of authority devoted several pages to an article of critical appreciation. Slowly and very carefully she grew in the esteem and the knowledge of the big impersonal Public until Mrs. Denis neglected the circulating library and devoted her leisure and surplus capital to periodic literature.

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The Drummonds were Ford's constant advisers in what he described as the Publicity Department of his project. His experience of candid and commercial advertising was of little assistance to him here. But Drummond knew which publications were authoritative on matters of art. Carrie knew a girl who could "do some good stuff and place it, too." Drummond knew which exhibitions were worth while, and a reporter who could give a chosen picture due prominence in the next day's "Art Notes."

Ford was surprised that a campaign of restitution could be such an absorbing thing, and he derived endless information and amusement from its details. But its greatest contribution to his pleasure was the friendship of the Drummonds, which led to a merging and coalescing of the two households until the Misses Drummond were as much at home upon the Island as they were in the little park opposite their city home, and Ford was as familiar to Mrs. Denis's admiring regard as he was to the doorman of his favorite club. Even Pierre and the Captain were involved in

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this era of good feeling, and the Gallic gloom of the former melted away under the spell of the younger Miss Drummond, who adored him. She would so blithely risk her life in hanging over the side of the car by one arm or leg. She would insert her fat little fingers into forbidden intricacies, and withdraw them in such disillusionment when they were hurt. She would find and take unto herself such unsuspected smudges of black grease or other lurking uncleanness. She would call down upon her unrepentant head so many parental reprimands. It was impossible to approve of her traveling manners, and much more impossible to leave her at home when an excursion was in prospect. So her mother had adopted the expedient of putting her in Pierre's charge, and to him in times of stress of misbehavior she would turn with a faith in his prowess and a confidence in his kindness which were irresistible to the chivalry of France.

This intercourse between the families added largely to Ford's knowledge of the absent Chatelaine. He wandered through her rooms,

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heard her mentioned hourly and intimately, handled the books she had loved, drank from the cups and ate from the plates she had chosen. He was urged to "try another piece of this cake, it is Katharine's favorite of all Mrs. Denis's repertoire," and warned that "a great big spiky-haired goblin lives in that closet where Aunt Katharine keeps her paints and brushes. He'd bite anyone but her, an' make your skin all painty where his teef went in."

And daily he added to the sum total of his impressions the quiet dignity and well-ordered discipline of her home. The air of refinement and repose which permeated it, never lost its charm for him, and he felt a very real but subconscious pride in them. It would not have been safe to suggest to him that he was at all influenced by the fact that, while the taste and labor were hers, he had furnished the sinews of war. He and she had all unconsciously coöperated in the result. And, as his own possessions had always seemed a shade more desirable than those of other people, he came to consider this by-product

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of his picture gallery as far and away the most pleasant place in all the not inhospitable city.

He never ceased from marveling that so much had been done with so little. He had spent less upon his pictures than upon, for instance, his yacht, and she had turned that little to such marvelous advantage. Drummond had long been Katharine's man of business, and he had held it no treason to put Robert Ford in possession of the facts relating to the financial standing of the absent Chatelaine. Carrie had indeed insisted upon this explanation, knowing that her friend, in the dismay of finding the length and breadth of her indebtedness to Ford, had quite ignored her earlier indebtedness to her grandfather, to whom she owed the house, its essential furnishings, and a balance at the bank which made penury and luxury alike impossible.

What restraint she showed, what discernment, and what maturity of taste! Was it possible that his memory played him false? Was this, indeed, the normal setting of the

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blue-clad, bright-haired figure which had flitted about the *Katrinka* and had chattered to Captain Jameson and himself?

And then he asked himself again the question which had baffled him: Was she after all more child or woman? He told himself impatiently that the answer to it had nothing to do with the fact that he owed her a reputation and a fame.

Many and serious were the consultations held by him and the Drummonds upon the details of that climax of all their efforts—the exhibition and sale. After long deliberation they fixed upon the middle of March as the most auspicious season. The sale was extravagantly advertised and extravagantly managed, and it proved an extravagant success. The works of Katharine Merrill were scattered as far as even she could desire, and only the “Isle of Dreams” remained, hung now with much quiet pomp of frame and circumstance upon her studio wall.

Her letters at about that time were full of the small trials and successes which marked

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the history of her own pictures, and Carrie suffered agonies of repression as she turned from the reading of enthusiastic comment or sympathetic criticism to the writing of platitudes of domesticity.

The pictures gone, a new problem arose. After much careful bookkeeping the conspirators found themselves possessed of a sum which quite overwhelmed Carrie until Ford informed her that, with her assistance, he intended to spend it all in Katharine Merrill's name, and in ways which she might have chosen, and this before she could return and disclaim it.

"For it's hers, of course," he explained. "And you know as well as I do that she would never have anything to do with it. So we'll spend it for her, if you don't mind."

Then Carrie consigned the babies to the care of Denis and delivered herself up to an orgie of extravagance. She and Robert investigated charities and attended board meetings. They held long consultations with Jack Ford in his legal and professional capacity. With Drummond she attended art auctions and pur-

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chased tangible Beauty. They visited shops which could find no adequate English for their wares, but described them in foreign tongues and held them at outlandish values. A substantial annuity was settled upon Mrs. Denis. The precarious future of Doris Gwendolin Patricia was made as safe as a steady but modest income could make it. Various protégées of Katharine's were provided for in her name by the untiring Carrie, who discovered and reported to her amused coadjutors that it might be more blessed, but it was certainly more difficult, to give than to receive. "Especially," she added, "to the poor. You know, Tom, that sick girl whom Kate discovered in the square one night and kept in the spare room until she and Denis had coddled her back into as much health as she had ever known——"

"And I remember that you took a hand in the coddling, and that gowns and other comforts went with her," Drummond amplified. "What has she done?"

"First she refused to leave town unless her crippled sister could go with her. Then she

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refused to go unless she were allowed to regard their fare and board and other expenses in the light of a loan 'to be repaid,'” quoted Carrie with frank tears in her eyes, “‘with interest, just as soon as we get well,’” and Carrie, still frankly, blew her nose and abandoned herself to tears in the shelter of Drummond’s arm. But she was soon sufficiently restored to go on with her report on ambitions aided, obstacles removed, comforts provided, and pleasures arranged. “And to think that Kate is missing it all!” she wailed. “These are the things in all the world which she would most enjoy doing. I think I’ve remembered everyone in whom she was interested, and I hope I’ve helped them as she would wish to have them helped.”

But Ford knew of two serious omissions from her list, and to these he had himself attended before securing her coöperation. He had insured a moderate degree of prosperity to the Misses Drummond, and the bed in the Children’s Hospital had become a little ward where six small sufferers might find

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health. Over its door it bore the name of Katharine Merrill, and on its wall, at a height to which even tired eyes could lift themselves, there hung a vision of sea and sunset called "Silver Sails Come Out of the West."





XVII

WHEN Katharine Merrill came home. She had accomplished all upon which she had set her heart. She had found her talent and proved it before the world. It was May again, and morning as she passed between Fort Wadsworth and Fort Hamilton. She saw that fruit trees were in blossom and that all the world was young.

She was met by the elder Drummonds, and thought that she detected a new constraint in Carrie's manner, even in the enthusiasm of first greetings. When Drummond had at last obtained their freedom and had bestowed them in a waiting hansom, he bent over his wife:

"Tell her as soon as you can," he advised. "You don't know when he'll turn up, and you promised to prepare her mind. George, but she's handsome!"

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"You tell her," pleaded Carrie.

"I'll follow you in half an hour," Drummond said to Katharine, ignoring his wife's pleading hand and eyes. "I'll just go to the office to look after my mail," and the cab rattled out into the bright sunshine, which even at the city's bedraggled hem was gay and springlike.

"And how well you look!" they cried then in coincidental chorus as they turned to survey one another. "How very well you look!"

"I *am* well," Katharine answered. "And I've got those medals and things I went out to seek. And I sold the *Salon* picture."

"Oh, you lucky, lucky girl!" Carrie interrupted, seeing safe and foreign conversational ground. "Tell me all about it."

"There isn't much to tell. I got what I wanted, and somehow, quite suddenly, I found that I did not want it at all. No one was glad. No one really cared except those who were jealous. Altogether it was rather lonely and disappointing. 'Vanity of vanities,' you know."

"I do *not* know," her vehement friend re-

torted. "I think it was perfectly splendid of you to go over there all alone and to work all alone and to win all alone. Instead of crying *vanitas, vanitas*, you ought to shout *veni, vide, vici*. I'd give anything for your honors."

"Tom and the infants, for instance?" Katharine suggested. "Would you sell them for money or fame?" And Carrie, thinking of a coming interview, smiled and took heart of grace. But she shirked her duty.

Mrs. Denis threatened to precipitate the explanation. When she held her darling once more in her arms and had assured herself that Katharine was well and unchanged, she broke into such a storm of welcome and of gratitude as aroused the wonder which the transformed studio finished. For the place was a very bower of beauty and of apple blossoms, and, above it all, serene, violet cliffed, enchanting, "The Isle of Dreams" lay on its placid waters, waiting.

"What does it mean?" Katharine demanded for the hundredth time. "What's the matter with Denis, and why is that picture here?"

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“You’ve not seen the infants,” Carrie evaded. “Wait a moment. They are dearer than ever.”

So the Misses Drummond stood on plump, white-stockinged legs between their parent and explanation. The manner of the elder Miss Drummond was perfect. She threw herself upon her restored aunt and shrieked aloud. But the younger Miss Drummond stood and gazed.

“Come and speak to Aunt Katharine,” she was admonished. She only sucked her thumb.

“You remember Aunt Katharine,” her mother charged her.

“Remember Aunt Katharine,” repeated the infant obligingly but vaguely.

“Who do you love best?” Mrs. Drummond prompted in an agony. “Who gives you candy?”

“I love my Uncle Robert best,” the younger Miss Drummond answered with a horrible distinctness. “Wisht he’d come in now with candy.”

“Your Uncle Robert,” Katharine repeated

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blankly, and turned to Carrie. "Who is her Uncle Robert?"

"I'm done for," moaned Carrie, but Drummond's entrance saved her.

"Haven't you done it yet?" he whispered to his wife. "Good Heavens, haven't you done it yet?"

"No," Carrie answered. "I left it to you. After all, you know, he was your friend."

"Viper," was his commentary upon this remark. "But it's got to be done. He may be here at any time."

And they did it. It took tact and time and courage, but in the end it was done. Katharine heard the story with scrupulous attention, but she spoke hardly at all.

"He comes usually at this hour. Shall I stay with you?" asked the meek Carrie when the ordeal was over.

"I should prefer not," said Katharine. "I have some thinking and readjusting to do. Somehow he is always demanding readjustments of one."

"Might I suggest," laughed Carrie, who, having confessed and being forgiven, was in

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a radiant state of self-righteousness, "that you begin with your hair and frock. You must be looking your best just to show him how weak his memory was."

Katharine banished her with scorn and contumely, but when, half an hour later, Mrs. Denis ushered Ford into her darling's presence, even she was surprised at the fairness of the girl who stood at the window with Doris Gwendolin Patricia clinging to her hand. She was clad in pale and shimmering green, and a spray of apple blossoms rose and fell with her quick breathing.

"Miss Katharine, dear," began Mrs. Denis, "here's the Beautiful Gentleman come to see you," and in the laughter following upon this announcement much of the embarrassment natural to the meeting was lost.

Denis detached Doris Gwendolin Patricia and left Katharine and Robert face to face upon that equal ground which both had worked so hard to reach. He was the first to speak.

"A year ago I asked you to listen to an explanation—you were to have met me on the

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sea wall in the morning. Can you spare me a few moments now?"

"But I am no longer in need of explanation," she replied gently. "Believe me, Mr. Ford, Carrie and Tom have just been telling me of the extent of my new indebtedness to you."

"It was entirely a matter of business and honesty—though the combination of terms seems unusual—and there is no question of obligation at all. If there were," he laughed as she made a little gesture of dissent, "it would have been all upon my side. I've had what Jack would call 'the time of my life' hustling the art world. But I hope I brought your Fame Boy through it, quite unscathed."

"You are very good," said Katharine. "We have both been rather busy undoing the work of that little gallery of yours. While you were making me famous, I've been trying to make those pictures something like as valuable as you thought them."

"And I've parted with them!"

"And I," she supplemented ruefully, "I've ceased to care for fame. In Paris they gave

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me a medal. That meant fame. And I could find no one to rejoice with me, no one even to dine with me that night. And I dined alone in a restaurant, and realized—many things.”

“I think,” said Robert Ford, “that I could undertake to rejoice with you, and I should be most happy, if you will allow it, to arrange that you are not again obliged to dine alone.”

“You are very kind,” Katharine laughed.

“No, really,” Ford reiterated, “I assure you I shall be most happy.”





XVIII

IT was Friday afternoon again, and all the west was gold when Katharine and Robert Ford left the train at the little station and found Pierre waiting for them.

The *Katrinka* was at the dock with Captain Jameson in beaming attendance. She was outlined in an array of pennants which seemed to comprise every possible signal in the code of happiness, and, as Katharine stepped aboard, the commodore's flag flew aloft and snapped triumphantly in the breeze. In an ecstasy of pride Captain Jameson fired a salute with a small cannon before trusting himself to speak. Then he bared his shaggy head and addressed his passenger in the following carefully comprehensive speech:

“ You are hearty welcome back, miss. I've

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took the best of care of this here craft, sir, and you'll excuse me passing the remark that you're as lovely as ever, ma'am."

"Oh, thank you, captain!" She smiled at him, and then turned to Ford—she had developed a habit of turning to Ford—while the captain went forward with a boat hook.

"Robert," said Katharine, but she had not yet learned to say it without a blush, nor had he learned to hear it without a sudden widening of the eyes and lifting of the head. Captain Jameson, looking back, caught these changes in transit, and tried to hide his two hundred blue-clad pounds behind the mast. "Ain't no hurry about casting off," he informed the universe at large. "There's lots of daylight left."

"Robert," began Katharine again, with an air of custom which her eyes still belied, "did you plan all this? Was it your idea?"

"No, really, my sweet Kate," he protested, "Jameson thought of it. I only sent him a wire from Albany that we should be coming home to-day. He did all the rest."

"With the help, ma'am," Captain Jameson

supplemented, "of Mrs. Jameson, who wished me to present her compliments an' say she is ready—if not prevented by Bertha—to wait upon you at any time."

"She is very kind," said Katharine politely. She had never, she reflected, heard that the captain was married; had bestowed no thought upon his domestic arrangements. The vagueness of her manner drew him to hold further communion with the universe. "She don't guess it," he pointed out to the encircling horizon; "the very idee ain't crossed her blessed mind," and then reported in a stentorian bellow, "she's cast off, ma'am. Hard a starboard, if you please."

But Katharine still turned to Robert. "You must take the wheel," she urged. "You are in command."

"Then you must set the course. Whither away. Let me hear you say the word."

"Home, dear," she said obediently, but it was Captain Jameson who steered into the sunset, while his passengers kept up a desultory conversation in which silence was as eloquent as speech.

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“And I was to further say, ma’am,” said Captain Jameson, when he considered it again his turn to engage Katharine’s attention, “as how Mrs. Jameson and me hopes it don’t look to you as something of a liberty: our going through the ceremony the same day and only an hour after yourselves. But, as she says to me often an’ often before ever you come home, ma’am, ‘I’ll never taste happiness until my Lamb is happy, too.’”

“You don’t mean,” cried Katharine with kindling eyes, “you *can’t* mean——”

“Besides which,” the captain pursued, “she was busy, very busy, as you may remember, ma’am, what with one thing an’ another. But she was perticular sot that I should tell you with her love as how she was always ready, as her life’s habit was, to wait upon your little wants. She feels that Bertha’s experience with Ody Colone, hairdressing and etcetera cannot equal—nor ain’t expected to equal—her own. There was words on this subject between them two females when I was leaving the Island to-day. I don’t know, for sure, how they come out, but me an’ Mrs. Jameson

has been married five weeks now, an' I have a idee she may git her way."

"Have you married my Denis?" demanded Katharine; and then to Robert: "Did you let him take my Denis away from me?"

"He has only brought her home for you," Ford reminded her. "Would you have left her alone in that house? You know it would have been empty for her."

"Oh, no, not to say took her away from you, ma'am," the captain corroborated. "She can be with you as much as you asks. Me an' Mrs. Jameson an' the little tad——"

"Your other adorer, Doris Gwendolin Patricia," Robert explained.

"—will always take commands as honors," the captain ended in a burst of pride, and returned to his official preoccupations.

"Denis married you without a word to me," Katharine marveled; "what possible reason can she have had for not telling me? I grant you I kept her busy, but that was because I didn't know."

"She wouldn't have you know beforehand, ma'am," Jameson explained, "nor you

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neither, sir. She says—she has a wonderful way with words, Mrs. Jameson has—‘*being* married is all right for people of our age, Silas, my dear. It’s all right an’ natural when it’s done an’ over with. But *gittin’* married is for young things like Miss Katharine an’ Mr. Robert. We’d be two old fools to tell we was goin’ to do it. But we’d be a whole lunatic asylum not to do it.’ So, when we two saw you two drive away from the church so happy an’ so handsome, if you’ll excuse my passing the remark, we went back an’ was married, as I have the honor to report, right after an’ by the same sky pilot. An’ I hope you’ll agree with me that the second bride warn’t bad to look at.”

“Why, she was lovely,” cried Katharine, “and Mrs. Drummond planned her dress as carefully as she did mine. And she never told me! I remember that I was surprised when she did not cry. However, I was glad she didn’t; but I remember rather expecting it, and being happily disappointed. But of course she couldn’t cry on her wedding day. How I wish I had known! Some one

should have warned me that she was as busy as I."

And her memory traveled back to the two months between her return from France and her marriage. Eight weeks of sheer breathless happiness and hurry—for herself and for all her household. How the quiet square had echoed to the snorting of Pierre's motor car, the arriving and departing of delivery wagons, the constant closing of the bright-featured front door! How Carrie Drummond's diminutive person had disappeared in billows of diaphanous summer shopping, as she devoted her tireless energy and her faultless taste to the superintendence of the trousseau. How the Misses Drummond and Doris Gwendolin Patricia had spurned the fountain, the grass plots, and the garden benches in favor of the hall—that thoroughfare for mysterious packages and hurrying servants. How with each succeeding day the thermometer mounted and the excitement followed it until the quiet old house was changed to a seething furnace. But every day brought its quiet hour when Robert came, and restored peace and sanity while his visit

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endured. Then would the younger Miss Drummond have her little moment of importance. She would patter down to the waiting car and—followed and admired, but never emulated by the elder Miss Drummond and Doris Gwendolin Patricia—she would proceed to beguile the leisure or to cheer the occupations of the waiting Pierre. Then would the feet of the maids cease from destroying the carpet upon the stairs. Then would parcels be allowed to accumulate unchallenged in the darkened reception room. Then would Carrie Drummond bestow an errant thought upon her own much-neglected career, and all things fall into their accustomed ways until the gentle splashing of the fountain was heard again in the house.

And through all the turmoil and clash of these eight weeks, Mrs. Denis had moved, serene, dignified, and bland. This placidity was so unexpected in one of her nurse's race and romanticism that Katharine had wondered if it were not a pose assumed and retained at the cost of herculean repression, and leading straight to hysterical collapse.

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Another alteration appeared in Mrs. Denis's psychic attitude at the same time. She developed a positive craving for "dangerous look-in' signs," and would point out to Robert the rare occasions upon which she considered that he had not done his full duty as an ardent lover should.

"Leaving so soon, sir!" she would remonstrate when some detail of his lady's pleasure or his own business caused him to curtail his visit. "Twenty-seven minutes is but a short time to spend in a maiden's bower when decorated especial for your coming. And I should like you to know, sir," she would add when occasion demanded, "that the violets laid this morning at her feet was not as fresh as might be desired to express the thoughts of love. And there was a day last week when your daily letter was not in the first mail. It come in the second, but a hour's wait is trying to the feelings."

"I telephoned," Ford would explain in smiling extenuation, and even the exacting Mrs. Denis had admitted that his speech, his manner, and his habits had bristled with

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alarming symptoms. So she had gone placidly and consequentially through all vicissitudes of joy, of shopping, of merrymaking, and packing, upheld by the different but no less constant manifestations of Captain Jameson's regard. His letters were in the abbreviated form of a ship's log, and the blossoms of his affection took the more enduring form of sea shells or the full-rigged models of historic vessels.

"Dear old Denis, too," mused Katharine. "I think, Robert, that you are a very wonderful man. You think of everybody—make everybody happy."

"Myself most of all, sweet Kate," he answered; "always myself most of all."

The *Katrinka* was approaching the Island, and the house showed very white and cool among its trees and gardens when Katharine spoke again.

"It is very beautiful," she breathed, "more beautiful even than I remembered it. It looks hardly real in all that shining light."

"It is real, my fair Kate," her husband as-

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sured her. "Long ago you showed me the wonders of 'The Isle of Dreams,' and now I'm taking you to the Island where the dreams come true."

(1)

THE END



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