

The Gay Rebellion

Robert W. Chambers



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"She looked at him almost insolently. . . . 'Presently,' she said."
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The

GAY REBELLION

By **ROBERT W. CHAMBERS**

Untitled illustration

ILLUSTRATED BY

EDMUND FREDERICK

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TO

SUZANNE CARROLL

*Though J. H. jeer
And "Smith" incline to frown,
I do not fear
To write these verses down
And publish them in town.
The solemn world knows well that I'm no poet;
So what care I if two gay scoffers know it?*

*Buck up, my Muse!
Wing high thy skyward way,
And don't refuse
To let me say my say
As bravely as I may.
To praise a lady fair I father verses,
Which Admiration cradles, Homage nurses.*

*For you, Suzanne,
Long since have won my heart;*

*You break it, too,
And leave the same to smart full sore
Whenever you depart for Baltimore.
You're charming;—and in metre I endeavour
To say you are as winsome as you're clever.*

*Winsome and wise,
Subtle in maiden's lore,
With wondrous eyes—
Alas for Baltimore,
That grows this rose no more!
As for Manhattan, that benign old vulture
Wins one more prize in fancy horticulture.*

*So now to you
I dedicate this tale;
It's neither new
Nor altogether stale,—
Nor can completely fail,
For your bright name as sponsor for my story
Assures the author of reflected glory.
R. W. C.*

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PREFACE

THESE stories, mademoiselle, as your intuition tells you, are for old-fashioned young people only; and should be read in the Golden Future, some snowy evening by the fire after a home dinner à deux. Your predestined husband, mademoiselle, is to extend his god-like figure upon a sofa, with an ash-tray convenient. You are to do the reading, curled up in the big velvet wing-chair, with the lamp at your left elbow and the fender under your pretty feet. As for me, I shall venture to smile at you now and then from the printed page—but with discretion, mademoiselle, not inconveniencing your party à deux. For, to be rid of me, you have merely to close this book.

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FOREWORD

The attention of the civilized world is, at present, concentrated upon The Science of Eugenics. The author sincerely trusts that this important contribution to the data now being so earnestly nosed out and gathered, may aid his fellow students, scientifically, politically and anthropologically.

Miris modis Di ludos faciunt hominibus!

R. W. C.

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"Facta canam; sed erunt qui me finxisse loquantur."—OVID.

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I

THE year had been, as everybody knows, a momentous and sinister year for the masculine sex; marriages and births in the United States alone had fallen off nearly eighty per cent.; the establishment of Suffragette Unions in every city, town, and village of the country, their obedience to the dictation of the Central National Female Franchise Federation; the financial distress of the florists, caterers, milliners and modistes incident to the almost total suspension of social functions throughout the great cities of the land, threatened eventually to paralyse the nation's business.

Clergymen were in a pitiable condition for lack of fees and teas; the marriage license bureau was open only Mondays and Saturdays; the social columns of the newspapers were abolished. All over the Union young men were finding time hanging heavy on their hands after business hours because there was little to do now that every town had its Franchise Clubs magnificently fitted with every requisite that a rapidly advancing sex could possibly demand.

The pressure upon the men of the Republic was becoming tremendous; but, as everybody knows, they held out with a courage worthy, perhaps, of a better cause, and women were still denied the franchise in the face of impending national disaster.

But the Central Federation of Amalgamated Females was to deliver a more deadly blow at man than any yet attempted, a blow that for cruelty and audacity remains unparalleled in the annals of that restless sex.

As everybody now knows, this terrible policy was to be inaugurated in secret; a trial was to be made of the idea in New York State; neither the state nor federal governments had the faintest suspicion of what impended; not a single newspaper had any inkling.

Even Augustus Melnor, owner and editor of that greatest of New York daily newspapers, the *Morning Star*, continued to pay overwhelming attention to his personal appearance, confident that the great feminine revolt was on its

last shapely legs, and that once more womankind would be kind to any kind of mankind, and flirt and frivol and marry, and provide progeny, and rock the cradle as in the good old days of yore.

So it happened one raw, windy day in May, Mr. Melnor entered his private office in the huge *Morning Star* building, in an unusually cheerful frame of mind and sent for the city editor, Mr. Trinkle.

"An exceedingly pretty girl smiled at me on my way down town, Trinkle," he said exultantly. "That begins to look as though the backbone of this suffragette strike was broken. What?"

"You've got a dent in your derby; it may have been that," said Mr. Trinkle.

Mr. Melnor hastily removed his hat and punched out the dent.

"I'm not so sure it was that," he said, flushing up.

Mr. Trinkle gazed gloomily out of the window.

For an hour they talked business; then Mr. Melnor was ready to go.

"How are my nephews getting on?" he asked.

"Something rotten," replied Mr. Trinkle truthfully.

"What's the matter with 'em?"

"Everything—except a talent for business."

"You mean to say they exhibit no aptitude?"

"Not the slightest."

Mr. Melnor seized his overcoat from the hook.

Mr. Trinkle offered to hold it for him. The offer irritated the wealthy owner of the *Star*, who suspected that the city editor meant to intimate that he, Mr. Melnor, was too old to get into his own overcoat without assistance.

"Never mind!" he said ungratefully. He fussed at the carnation in his buttonhole, picked up his doggy walking stick, glanced over his carefully

pressed trousers and light coloured spats, strolled across to the mirror, and leisurely drew on his new gloves.

"Mr. Trinkle," he began more complacently, "what I want you to always bear in mind is that my pup nephews require a thorough grilling! I want you to bully 'em! Suppress 'em! Squelch, nag, worry, sit on 'em!"

"I have," said the city editor with satisfaction. "They loathe me."

"Do it some more, then! I won't permit any nepotism in this office! If you don't keep after 'em they'll turn into little beastly journalists instead of into decent, self-respecting newspaper men! Have either of my nephews attempted to write any more poetry for the Saturday supplement?"

"Young Sayre got away with some verses."

"Wha' d'ye do with 'em?" growled Mr. Melnor.

"Printed 'em."

"*Printed* them! Are—you—craz-y?"

"Don't worry. Sayre got no signature out of me."

"But *why* did you print?"

"Because those verses were too devilish good to lose. You must have read them. It was that poem *Amourette*."

"Did *he* do *that*?"

"Yes; and the entire sentimental press of the country is now copying it without credit."

"My nephew wrote *Amourette*?" repeated Mr. Melnor with mingled emotions.

"He sure did. That poem seemed to deal a direct blow at this suffragette strike. Several women subscribers sent in mash notes. I had a mind to take advantage of one or two myself."

Pride and duty contended in the breast of Augustus Melnor; duty won.

"That's what I told you!" he snapped; "those pups will begin to write for the magazines if you don't look out!"

"Well *I* tell *you* that they've no nose for news—no real instinct—and they might as well write for the backs of the magazines."

"They've got to acquire news instinct! Bang it into 'em, Trinkle! Rub their noses in it! I'll have those pups understand that if ever they expect to see any inheritance from me they'll have to prepare themselves to step into my shoes! They'll have to know the whole business—from window-washer to desk!—and they've got to like it, too—every bit of it! You keep 'em at it if it kills 'em, Trinkle. Understand?"

"It'll kill more than those gifted young literary gentlemen," said Trinkle darkly.

"What do you mean by that?"

"It will kill a few dozen good stories. We're going to murder a big one now. But it's your funeral."

"That Adirondack story?"

"Exactly. It's as good as dead."

"Trinkle! Listen to me. How are we going to make men of those pups if we don't rouse their pride? I tell you a man grows to meet the opportunity. The bigger the opportunity the bigger he grows—or he blows up! Put those boys up against the biggest job of the year and it's worth five years' liberal education to them. That's my policy. Isn't it a good one?"

Mr. Trinkle said: "It's your paper. *I* don't give a damn."

Mr. Melnor glared at him.

"You do what I tell you," he growled. "You start in and slam 'em around the way they say Belasco slammed Leslie Carter! I'll have no nepotism here!"

He went out by a private entrance, walking with the jaunty energy that characterised him. Mr. Trinkle looked after him. "Talk of nepotism!" he muttered, then struck the desk savagely.

To the overzealous young man who came in with an exuberant step he snarled:

"Showemin! And don't you go volplaning around this office or I'll destroy you!"

A moment afterward the youthful nephews of the great Mr. Melnor appeared. They closed and locked the door behind them as they were tersely bidden, then stood in a row, politely and attentively receptive—well-bred, pleasant-faced, expensive-looking young fellows, typical of the metropolis. Mr. Trinkle eyed them with disfavour.

"So at last you're ready to start, eh?" he rasped out. "I thought perhaps you'd gone to Newport for the summer to think it over. You are ready, are you not?"

"Yes, sir, we hope to——"

"Well, dammit! 'yes' is enough! Cut out the 'we hope to'! And try not to look at me patiently, Mr. Sayre. I don't want anybody to be patient with me. I dislike it. I prefer to incite impatience in people. Impatience is a form of energy. I like energy! Energy is important in this business. The main thing is to get a move on; and then, first you know, you'll begin to hustle. Try it for a change."

He continued to inspect them gloomily for a few moments; then:

"To successfully cover this story," he continued, "you both *ought* to be expert woodsmen, thoroughly inured to hardship, conversant with woodcraft and nature. Are you?"

"We've been reading up," began Langdon confidently; "we have a dozen pocket volumes to take into the woods with us."

"Haven't I already warned you that every ounce of superfluous luggage will weigh a ton in the woods?" interrupted the city editor scornfully. "Are you two youthful guys under the impression that you can stroll through the wilderness loaded down with a five-foot shelf of assorted junk?"

"Sayre arranged that," said Langdon. "He has invented a wonderful system, Mr. Trinkle. You know that thin, white stuff, which resembles sheets of

paper, that they give goldfish to eat. Well, Sayre and I tasted it; and it wasn't very bad; so we had them make up twelve thousand sheets of it, flavoured with vanilla, and then we got Dribble & Co., the publishers, to print one set of their Nature Library on the sheets and bind 'em up in edible cassava covers. As soon as we thoroughly master a volume we can masticate it, pages, binding, everything. William, show Mr. Trinkle your note-book," he added, turning to Sayre, who hastily produced a pad and displayed it with pardonable pride.

"Made entirely of fish food, sugar, pemmican, and cassava," he said modestly. "Takes pencil, ink, stylograph, indelible pencil, crayon, chalk—"

The city editor regarded the two young men and then the edible pad in amazement.

"What?" he barked. "Say it again!"

"It's made of perfectly good fish-wafer, Mr. Trinkle. We had it analysed by Professor Smawl, and he says it is mildly nutritious. So we added other ingredients——"

"You mean to say that this pad is fit to eat?"

"Certainly," said Langdon. "Bite into it, William, and show him."

Sayre bit out a page from the pad and began to masticate it. The city editor regarded him with intense hostility.

"Oh, very well," he said. "I haven't any further suggestions to offer. Your uncle has picked you for the job. But it's my private opinion that here is where you make good or hunt another outlet for your genius—even if your uncle does own the *Star*."

Then he rose and laid his hands on their shoulders:

"It's a wild and desolate region," he said, with an irony they did not immediately perceive; "nothing but woods and rocks and air and earth and mountains and madly rushing torrents and weird, silent lakes—nothing but trails, macadam roads, and sign-posts and hotels and camps and tourists, and telephones. If you find yourself in any very terrible solitudes, abandon

everything and make for the nearest fashionable five-dollar-a-day igloo. It may be almost a mile away, but try to reach it, and God bless you."

As the dawning suspicion that they were being trifled with became an embarrassed certainty, the city editor's grim visage cracked into a grimmer grin.

"I don't think that you young gentlemen are cut out for a newspaper career, but *you* do, and others higher up say to let you try it. So you're going in to find at least one of those four men, dead or alive. The police haven't been able to find them, but you will, of course. The game-wardens, fire-wardens, guides, constables, farmers, lumbermen, sheriffs, can't discover hair or hide of them; but no doubt you can. The wild and dismal state forest is now full of detectives, amateur and professional; it's full of hotel keepers, trout fishermen, and private camps which are provided with elevators, electric light, squash courts, modern plumbing, and footmen in knee-breeches; and all of these dinky ginks are hunting for four young and wealthy men who have, at regular intervals of one week each, suddenly and completely disappeared from the face of nature and the awful solitudes of the Adirondacks. I take it for granted that you have the necessary data concerning their several and respective vanishings?"

"Yes, sir," said Langdon, who was becoming redder and redder under the bland flow of the Desk's irony.

"Suppose you run over the main points before you dash recklessly out into the woods via Broadway."

"William," said Langdon with boyish dignity, "would you be kind enough to run over your notes for Mr. Trinkle?"

"It will afford me much pleasure to do so," replied Sayre, also very red and dignified.

Out of his pocket he drew what appeared to be an attenuated ham sandwich. Opening it with a slight smile of triumph, as Mr. Trinkle's eyes protruded, he turned a page of fish-wafer paper and read aloud the pencilled memoranda:

"May 1st, 1910.

"Reginald Willett, a wealthy amateur, author of *Rough Life Photography, Snapshots at Trees, Hunting the Wild Bat with the Camera*, etc., etc., left his summer camp on the Gilded Dome, taking with him his kodak for the purpose of securing photographs of the wilder flowers of the wilderness.

"He never returned. His butler and second man discovered his camera in the trail.

"No other trace of him has yet been discovered. He was young, well built, handsome, and in excellent physical condition."

Sayre turned the page outward so that Mr. Trinkle could see it.

"Here's his photograph," he said, "and his dimensions."

Mr. Trinkle nodded: "Go on," he said; and Sayre resumed, turning the page:

"May 8th: James Carrick, a minor poet, young, well built, handsome, and in excellent physical condition, disappeared from a boat on Dingman's Pond. The boat was found. It contained a note-book in which was neatly written the following graceful poem:

"While gliding o'er thy fair expanse
And gazing at the shore beyond,
What simple joys the soul entrance
Evoked by rowing on Dingman's Pond.
The joy I here have found shall be
Dear to my heart till life forsake,
And often shall I think of thee,
Thou mildly beauteous Dingman's Lake."

"Stop!" said Mr. Trinkle, infuriated. Sayre looked up.

"The poem gets the hook!" he snarled. "Go on!"

"The next," continued young Sayre, referring to his edible note-book, "is the case of De Lancy Smith. On May 16th he left his camp, taking with him his rod with the intention of trying for some of the larger, wilder, and more

dangerous trout which it is feared still infest the remoter streams of the State forest.

"His luncheon, consisting of truffled patés and champagne, was found by a searching party, but De Lancy Smith has never again been seen or heard of. He was young, well built, handsome, and——"

"In excellent physical condition!" snapped Mr. Trinkle. "That's the third Adonis you've described. Quit it!"

"But that is the exact description of those three young men——"

"Every one of 'em?"

"Every one. They all seem to have been exceptionally handsome and healthy."

"Well, does that suggest any clue to you? Think! Use your mind. Do you see any clue?"

"In what?"

"In the probably similar fate of so much masculine beauty?"

The young men looked at him, perplexed, silent.

Mr. Trinkle waved his hands in desperation.

"Wake up!" he shouted. "Doesn't it strike you as odd that every one of them so far has been Gibsonian perfection itself? Doesn't that seem funny? Doesn't it suggest some connection with the present Franchise strike?"

"It *is* odd," said Langdon, thoughtfully.

"You notice," bellowed Mr. Trinkle, "that no young man disappears who isn't a physical Adonis, do you? No thin-shanked, stoop-shouldered, scant-haired highbrow has yet vanished. You notice that, don't you, Sayre? Open your mouth and speak! Say anything! Say pip! if you like—only say *something*!"

The young man nodded, bewildered, and his mouth remained open.

"All right, all right—as long as you *do* notice it," yelled the city editor, "it looks safe for you; I guess *you* both will come back, all right—in case any of these suffragettes have become desperate and have started kidnapping operations."

Langdon was rather thin; he glanced sideways at Sayre, who wore glasses and whose locks were prematurely scant.

"Go on, William," he said, with a crisp precision of diction which betrayed irritation and Harvard.

Sayre examined his notes, and presently read from them:

"The fourth and last victim of the Adirondack wilderness disappeared very recently—May 24th. His name was Alphonso W. Green, a wealthy amateur artist. When last seen he was followed by his valet, who carried a white umbrella, a folding stool, a box of colours, and several canvases. After luncheon the valet went back to the Gilded Dome Hotel to fetch some cigarettes. When he returned to where he had left his master painting a picture of something, which he thinks was a tree, but which may have been cows in bathing, Mr. Green had vanished. . . . Hum—hum!—ahem! He was young, well built, handsome, and——"

"Kill it!" thundered the city editor, purple with passion.

"But it's the official descrip——"

"I don't believe it! I won't! I can't! How the devil can a whole bunch of perfect Apollos disappear that way? There are not four such men in this State, anyway—outside of fiction and the stage——"

"I'm only reading you the official——"

Mr. Trinkle gulped; the chewing muscles worked in his cheeks, then calmness came, and his low and anxiously lined brow cleared.

"All right," he said. "Show me, that's all I ask. Go ahead and find just one of these disappearing Apollos. That's all I ask."

He shook an inky finger at them impressively, timing its wagging to his parting admonition:

"We want two things, do you understand? We want a story, and we want to print it before any other paper. Never mind reporting progress and the natural scenery; never mind telegraphing the condition of the local colour or the dialect of northern New York, or your adventures with nature, or how you went up against big game, or any other kind of game. I don't want to hear from you until you've got something to say. All you're to do is to prowl and mouse and slink and lurk and hunt and snoop and explore those woods until you find one or more of these Adonises; and then get the story to us by chain-lightning, if," he added indifferently, "it breaks both your silly necks to do it."

They passed out with calm dignity, saying "Good-bye, sir," in haughtily modulated voices.

As they closed the door they heard him grunt a parting injury.

"What an animal!" observed Sayre. "If it wasn't for the glory of being on the *N. Y. Star*——"

"Sure," said Langdon, "it's a great paper; besides, we've got to—if we want to remain next to Uncle Augustus."

It *was* a great newspaper; for ethical authority its editorials might be compared only to the *Herald's*; for disinterested principle the *Sun* alone could compare with it; it had all the lively enterprise and virile, restless energy of the *Tribune*; all the gay, inconsequent, and frothy sparkle of the *Evening Post*; all the risky popularity of the *Outlook*. It was a very, very great New York daily. What on earth has become of it!

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

II

LANGDON, very greasy with fly ointment, very sleepy from a mosquitoful night, squatted cross-legged by the camp fire, nodding drowsily. Sayre fought off mosquitoes with one grimy hand; with the other he turned flapjacks on the blade of his hunting-knife. All around them lay the desolate Adirondack wilderness. The wire fence of a game preserve obstructed their advance. It was almost three-quarters of a mile to the nearest hotel. Here and there in the forest immense boulders reared their prehistoric bulk. Many bore the inscription: "Votes for Women!"

"I tell you I *did* see her," repeated Sayre, setting the coffee-pot on the ashes and inspecting the frying pork.

"The chances are," yawned Langdon, rousing himself and feebly sucking at his empty pipe, "that you fell asleep waiting for a bite—as I did just now. Now I've got my bite and I'm awake. It was a horse-fly. Aren't those flapjacks ready?"

"If you're so hungry, help yourself to a ream of fish-wafer," snapped Sayre. "I'm not a Hindoo god, so I can't cook everything at once."

Langdon waked up still more.

"I want to tell you," he said fiercely, "that I'd rather gnaw circles in a daisy field than eat any more of your accursed fish-wafer. Do you realise that I've already consumed six entire pads, one ledger, and two note-books?"

Sayre struck frantically at a mosquito.

"I wonder," he said, "whether it might help matters to fry it?"

"That mosquito?"

"No, you idiot! A fish-wafer."

"You'd better get busy and fry a few trout."

"Where are they?"

"In some of these devilish brooks. It's up to you to catch a few."

"Didn't I try?" demanded Sayre; "didn't I fish all the afternoon?"

"All I know about it is that you came back here last night with a farthest north story and no fish. You're an explorer, all right."

"Look here, Curtis! Don't you believe I saw her?"

"Sure. When I fall asleep I sometimes see the same kind—all winners, too."

"I was *not* asleep!"

"You said yourself that you were dead tired of waiting for a trout to become peevish and bite."

"I was. But I didn't fall asleep. I did see that girl. I watched her for several minutes. . . . Breakfast's ready."

Langdon looked mournfully at the flapjacks. He picked up one which was only half scorched, buttered it, poured himself a cup of sickly coffee, and began to eat with an effort.

"You say," he began, "that you first noticed her when you were talking out loud to yourself to keep yourself awake?"

"While waiting for a trout to bite," said Sayre, swallowing a lump of food violently. "I was amusing myself by repeating aloud my poem, *Amourette*:

"Where is the girl of yesterday?
The kind that snuggled up?
In vain I walk along Broadway—
Where is the girl of yesterday,
Whose pretty——"

"All right! Go on with the facts!"

"Well, that's what I was repeating," said Sayre, tartly, "and it's as good verse as you can do!"

Langdon bit into another flapjack with resignation. Sayre swallowed a cup of coffee, dodging an immersed June-beetle.

"I was just repeating that poem aloud," he said, shuddering. "The woods were very still—except for the flies and mosquitoes; sunlight lay warm and golden on the mossy tree-trunks——"

"Cut it. You're not on space rates."

"I was trying to give you a picture of the scene——"

"You did; the local colour about the mosquitoes convinced me. Go on about the girl."

An obstinate expression hardened Sayre's face; the breeze stirred a lock on his handsome but prematurely bald forehead; he gazed menacingly at his companion through his gold pince-nez.

"I'll blue-pencil my own stuff," he said. "If you want to hear how it happened you'll listen to the literary part, too."

"Go on, then," said Langdon, sullenly.

"I will. . . . The sunlight fell softly upon the trees of the ancient wood; bosky depths cast velvety shadows——"

"What is a bosky depth? What *is* boskiness? By heaven, I've waited years to ask; and now's my chance? You tell me what 'bosky' is, or——"

"Do you want to hear about that girl?"

"Yes, but——"

"Then you fill your face full of flapjack and shut up."

Langdon bit rabidly at a flapjack and beat the earth with his heels.

"The stream," continued Sayre, "purled." He coldly watched the literary effect upon Langdon, then went on:

"Now, there's enough descriptive colour to give you a proper mental picture. If you had left me alone I'd have finished it ten minutes ago. The rest moves with accelerated rhythm. It begins with the cracking of a stick in the forest. Hark! A sharp crack is——"

"Every bum novel begins that way."

"Well, the real thing did, too! And it startled me. How did I know what it might have been? It might have been a bear——"

"Or a cow."

"You talk," said Sayre angrily, "like William Dean Howells! Haven't you *any* romance in you?"

"Not what *you* call romance. Pass the flapjacks."

Sayre passed them.

"My attention," he said, "instantly became riveted upon the bushes. I strove to pierce them with a piercing glance. Suddenly——"

"Sure! 'Suddenly' always comes next."

"Suddenly the thicket stirred; the leaves were stealthily parted; and——"

"A naked savage in full war paint——"

"Naked nothing! A young girl in full war paint and a perfectly fitting gown stepped noiselessly out."

"Out of what? you gink!"

"The bushes, dammit! She held in her hand a curious contrivance which I could not absolutely identify. It might have been a hammock; it might have been a fish-net."

"Perhaps it was a combination," suggested Langdon cheerfully. "Good idea; she to help you catch a trout; you to help her sit in the hammock; afterward ——"

Sayre, absorbed in retrospection, squatted beside the fire, a burnt flapjack suspended below his lips, which were slightly touched with a tenderly reminiscent smile.

"What are you smirking about *now*?" demanded Langdon.

"She was *such* a pretty girl," mused Sayre, dreamily.

"Did you sit in the hammock with her?"

"No, I didn't. I'm not sure it was a hammock. I don't know what it was. She remained in sight only a moment."

"Didn't you speak to her?"

"No. . . . We just looked. She looked at me; I gazed at her. She was so unusually pretty, Curtis; and her grave, grey eyes seemed to meet mine and melt deep into me. Somehow——"

"In plainer terms," suggested Langdon, "she gave you the eye. What?"

"That's a peculiarly coarse observation."

"Then tell it your own way."

"I will. The sunlight fell softly upon the trees of the ancient wood——"

"Woodn't that bark you!" shouted Langdon, furious. "Go on with the dolly dialogue or I'll punch your head, you third-rate best seller!"

"But there was no dialogue, Curt. It began and ended in a duet of silence," he added sentimentally.

"Didn't you say anything? Didn't you try to make a date? Aren't you going to see her again?"

"I don't know. I am not sure what sweet occult telepathy might have passed between us, Curtis. . . . Somehow I believe that all is not yet ended. . . . Pass the pork! . . . I like to think that somehow, some day, somewhere——"

"Stop that! You're ending it the way women end short stories in the thirty-five-centers. What I want to know is, why you think that your encounter

with this girl has anything to do with our finding Reginald Willett."

There was a basin of warm water simmering on the ashes; Sayre used it as a finger-bowl, dried his hands on his shirt, lighted his pipe, and then slowly drew from his hip pocket a flat leather pocket-book. "Curt," he said, "I'm not selfish. I'm perfectly willing to share glory with you. You know that, don't you?"

"Sure," muttered Langdon. "You're a bum cook, but otherwise moral enough."

Sayre opened the pocket-book and produced a photograph.

"Everybody who is searching for Willett," he said, "examined the few clues he left. Like hundreds of others, you and I, when we first entered these woods, went to his camp on Gilded Dome, prowled all over it, and examined the camera which had been picked up in the trail, didn't we?"

"We did. It was a sad scene—his distracted old father——"

"H'm! Did you see his distracted old father, Curt?"

"I? No, of course not. Like everybody else, I respected the grief of that aged and stricken gentleman——"

"I didn't."

"Hey? Why, you yellow dingo——"

"Curt, as I was snooping about the Italian Garden I happened to glance up at the mansion—I mean the camp—and I saw by the window a rather jolly old buck with a waxed moustache and a monocle, smoking a good cigar and perusing his after-breakfast newspaper. A gardener told me that this tranquil old bird was Willett Senior, who had arrived the evening before from Europe via New York. So I went straight into that house and I disregarded the butler, second man, valet, and seven assorted servants; and Mr. Willett Senior heard the noise and came to the dining-room door. 'Well, what the devil's the matter?' he said. I said: 'I only want to ask you one question, sir. Why are you not in a state of terrible mental agitation over the tragic disappearance of your son?'

"'Because,' he replied, coolly, 'I know my son, Reginald. If the newspapers and the public will let him alone he'll come back when he gets ready.'

"'Are you not alarmed?'

"'Not in the least.'

"'Then why did you return from Europe and hasten up here?'

"'Too many newspaper men hanging around.' He glanced insultingly at the silver.

"'I let that go. 'Mr. Willett,' I said, 'they found your son's camera on the trail. Your butler exhibits it to the police and reporters and tells them a glib story. He told it to me, also. But what I want to know is, why nobody has thought of developing the films.'

"'My butler,' said Mr. Willett, eyeing me, 'did develop the films.'

"'Was there anything on them?'

"'Some trees.'

"'May I see them?'

"He scrutinised me.

"'After you've seen them will you take your friend and go away and remain?' he asked wearily.

"'Yes,' I said.

"He walked into the breakfast room, opened a silver box, and returned with half a dozen photographs. The first five presented as many views of foliage; I used a jeweller's glass on them, but discovered nothing else."

"Was there anything to jar you on the sixth photograph?" inquired Langdon, interested.

Sayre made an impressive gesture; he was a trifle inclined toward the picturesque and histrionic.

"Curt, on the ground under a tree in the sixth photograph lay something which, until last evening, did not seem to me important." He paused dramatically.

"Well, what was it? A bandersnatch?" asked Langdon irritably.

"Examine it!"

Langdon took the photograph. "It looks like a—a hammock."

"What that girl held in her hand last night resembled a hammock."

"Hey?"

Sayre leaned over his shoulder and laid the stem of his pipe on the extreme edge of the photograph.

"If you look long enough and hard enough," he said, "you will just be able to make out the vague outline of a slender human hand among the leaves, holding the end of the hammock. See it?"

Langdon looked long and steadily. Presently he fished out a jeweller's glass, screwed it into his eye, and looked again.

"Do you think that's a human hand?"

"I do."

"It's a slim one—a child's, or a young girl's."

"It is. *She* had be-u-tiful hands."

"Who?"

"That girl I saw last evening."

Langdon slowly turned and looked at Sayre.

"Well, what do you make of it?"

"Nothing yet—except a million different little romances."

"Of course, you'd do that anyway. But what scientific inference do you draw? Here's a thing that looks like a hammock lying on the ground. One end seems to be lifted; perhaps that *is* a hand. Well, what about it?"

"I'm going to find out."

"How?"

"By—fishing," said Sayre quietly, rising and picking up his rod.

"You're going back there in hopes of——"

"In hopes."

After a silence Langdon said: "You say she was unusually pretty?"

"Unusually."

"Shall I—go with you, William?"

"No," said Sayre coldly.

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

III

SAYRE had been fishing for some time with the usual result when the slightest rustle of foliage caught his ear. He looked up. She was standing directly behind him.

He got to his feet immediately and pulled off his cap. That was too bad; he was better looking with it on his head.

"I wondered whether you'd come again," he said, so simply and naturally that the girl, whose grey eyes had become intent on his scanty hair with a surprised and pained expression, looked directly into his smiling and agreeable face.

"Did you come to fish this pool?" he asked. "You are very welcome to. *I* can't catch anything."

"Why do you think that I am out fishing?" she asked in a curiously clear, still voice—very sweet and young—but a voice that seemed to grow out of the silence instead of to interrupt it.

"You are fishing, are you not? or at least you came here to fish last evening?" he said.

"Why do you think so?"

"You had a net."

He expected her to say that it was a hammock which she was trailing through the woods in search of two convenient saplings on which to hang it.

She said: "Yes, it was a net."

"Did my being here drive you away from your favourite pool?"

She looked at him candidly. "You are not a sportsman, are you?"

"N—no," he admitted, turning red. "Why?"

"People who take trout in nets are fined and imprisoned."

"Oh! But you *said* you had a net."

"It wasn't a fish net."

He waited. She offered no further explanation. Sometimes she looked at him, rather gravely, he thought; sometimes she looked at the stream. There was not the slightest hint of embarrassment in her manner as she stood there—a straight, tall, young thing, grey-eyed, red-lipped, slim, with that fresh slender smoothness of youth; clad in grey wool, hatless, thick burnished hair rippling into a heavy knot at the nape of the whitest neck he had ever seen.

The stiller she stood, apparently wrapped in serious inward contemplation, the stiller he remained, as though the spell of her serene self-absorption consigned him to silence. Once he ventured, stealthily, to smack a mosquito, but at the echoing whack there was, in her slowly turned face, the calm surprise of a disturbed goddess; and he felt like saying "excuse me."

"Do they bite you?" she asked, lifting her divine eyebrows a trifle.

"Bite me! Good heavens, don't they bite you? But I don't suppose they dare _____"

"What?"

"I didn't mean 'dare' exactly," he tried to explain, feeling his ears turning a fiery red, and wondering why on earth he should have made such a foolish remark.

"What *did* you mean?"

"N—nothing. I don't know. I say things and—and sometimes," he added in a burst of confidence, "they don't seem to *mean* anything at all." To himself he groaned through ground teeth: "What an ass I am. What on earth is the matter with me?"

She considered him in silence, candidly; and redder and redder grew his ears as he saw that she was quietly inspecting him from head to foot with an interest perfectly unembarrassed, innocently intent upon her inspection.

Then, having finished him down to his feet, she lifted her eyes, caught his, looked a moment straight into them, then sighed a little.

"Do you know," she said, "I ought not to have come here again."

"Why?" he asked, astonished.

"There's no use in my telling you. There was no use in my coming. Oh, I realise that perfectly well now. And I think I'd better go——"

She lingered a moment, glanced at the stream running gold in the afternoon light, then turned away, bidding him good-bye in a low voice.

"Are you g-going?" he blurted out, not knowing exactly what he was saying.

She moved on in silence. He looked after her. A perfectly illogical feeling of despair overwhelmed him.

"For Heaven's sake, don't go away!" he said.

She moved on a pace, another, more slowly, hesitated, halted, leisurely looked back over her shoulder.

"What did you say?" she asked.

"I said—I said—I said——" but he began to stammer fearfully and could get no farther.

Perhaps she thought he was threatened with some kind of seizure; anyway, something about him apparently interested her enough to slowly retrace her steps.

"What is the matter, Mr. Sayre?" she asked.

"Why, *that's* funny!" he said; "you know my name?"

"Yes, I know your name."

"Could—would—should—might——" he could get no farther.

"What?"

"M-might I—would it be—could you——"

"Are you trying to ask me what is *my* name?"

"Yes," he said; "did you think I was reciting a lesson in grammar?"

Suddenly the rare smile played delicately along the edges of her upcurled mouth.

"No," she said, "I knew you were embarrassed. It wasn't nice of me. But," and her face grew grave, "there is no use in my telling you my name."

"Why?"

"Because we shall not meet again."

"Won't you ever let me—give me a chance—because—you know, somehow—seeing you yesterday—and to-day—this way——"

"Yes, I know what you mean."

"Do you?"

"Yes. *I* came back, too," she said seriously.

A strange, inexplicable tingling pervaded him.

"You came—came——"

"Yes. I should not have done it, because I saw you perfectly plainly yesterday. But—somehow I hoped—somehow——"

"What!"

"That there had been a mistake."

"You thought you knew me?"

"Oh, no. I knew perfectly well I had never before seen you. That made no difference. It wasn't that. But I thought—hoped—I had made a mistake. In fact," she said, with a slight effort, "I was dishonest with myself. I knew all the time that it was useless. And as soon as I saw you with your cap off——"

"W-what!" he faltered.

A slight blush, perfectly distinct in her creamy skin, grew, then waned.

"I am sorry," she said. "Of course, you do not understand what I am saying; and I can not explain. . . . And I think I had—better—go."

"Please don't."

"That is an added reason for my going."

"What is?"

"Your saying 'please don't.'"

He looked at her, bewildered, and slowly passed his hand across his eyes.

"Somehow," he said, "this is all like magic to me. Here in the wilderness I hear a stick crack——"

"I meant you to hear it. I could have moved without a sound."

"And, looking up, I see the most beautif—I see—you. Then I dream of you."

"*Did* you?"

"Every moment—between mosquitoes! And then to-day I returned, hoping."

She lost a trifle of her colour.

"Hoping—what?"

"T-t-to s-s-see you," he stammered.

"I *must* go," she said under her breath, almost hurriedly; "this must stop *now*!"

"Won't you—can't you—couldn't I——"

"No. No—no—no—Mr. Sayre."

He said: "I've simply got to see you again. I know what I'm asking—saying—hoping—wishing—isn't usual—conventional—advisable, b-b-but I can't help it."

Standing there facing him she slowly shook her head.

"There is no use," she said. "It is perfectly horrid of me to have come back. I somehow was afraid—from the expression of your face yesterday——"

"Afraid of what?"

She hesitated; then, lifting her grey eyes, fearlessly:

"Afraid that you might wish to see me again. . . . Because I felt the same way."

"Do you mean," he cried, "that I—that you—that we—Oh, Lord! I'm not eloquent, but every faltering, stuttering, stammering, fool of a word I *do* say means a million things——"

"Oh, I know it, Mr. Sayre. I know it. I have no business here; I *must* not remain——"

"If you go, you know I'll do some absurd thing—like poking my head under water and holding it there, or walking backward off that ledge. Do you know—if you should suddenly go away now, and if that ended it——"

"Ended—what?"

"You know," he said.

She may have known, for she stood very still, with head lowered and downcast eyes. As for Sayre, what common sense he possessed had gone. The thrilling unreality of it all—the exquisite irrational, illogical intoxication of the moment—her beauty—the mystery of her—and of the still, sunlit woods, had made of them both, and the forest world around them, an enchanted dream which he was living, every breath a rapture, every heart-beat an excited summons from the occult.

"Mr. Sayre," she said, with an effort, "I shall not tell you my name; but if you ever again should happen to think of me, think of my name as the name

of the girl in that poem which I heard you reciting yesterday."

"Amourette?"

"Yes. That was the name of the poem and of the girl. You may call me Amourette—when you are thinking of me alone by yourself."

"Did you like that poem?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because—I wrote it."

"You!" She lost a little of her colour.

"Yes," he said, "I wrote it—Amourette."

"Then—then I had better go away as fast as I can," she murmured.

With an enraptured smile verging perilously upon the infatuated, if not fatuous, he repeated her name aloud; and she looked at him out of soft grey eyes that seemed at once fascinated and distressed.

"Please let me go," she said.

He was not detaining her.

"Won't you?" she asked, pitifully.

"No, I won't," said William Sayre, suddenly invaded by an instinct that he possessed authority in the matter. "We must talk this thing over."

"Oh, but there isn't any use—really, truly there isn't! Won't you believe me?"

"No," he said as honestly as he could through the humming exaltation that sang in him until, to himself, he sounded like a beehive.

There was a fallen log all over moss behind her.

"We ought to be seated to properly consider this matter," he said.

"I must not think of it! I must go instantly."

When they were seated, and he had nearly twisted his head off trying to meet her downcast eyes, he resumed a normal and less parrot-like posture, and folded his arms portentously.

"To begin," he said, "I came here fishing. I heard a stick crack——"

She looked up.

"*That* was my fault. It was all my fault. I don't know how I ever came to do it. I never did such a thing in my life. We merely heard that you and Mr. Langdon were in the woods——"

"*Who* heard?"

"We. Never mind the others. I'll say that *I* heard you were here. And—and I took my—my net and came to—to——"

"To what?"

"To—investigate."

"Investigate what? *Me*?"

"Y-yes. I can't explain. But I came, honestly, naturally, unsuspiciously. And as soon as I saw you I was quite sure that you were not what—what certain people wanted, even if you were the author of *Amourette*——"

"To begin," he said, "I came here fishing."

"*I* was not what *you* wanted?" he repeated, bewildered.

"I mean that—that you were not what—what *they* required——"

"They? Who are *they*? And what, in Heaven's name, did 'they' require?"

"I don't want to tell you, Mr. Sayre. All I shall say is that I knew immediately that they didn't want *you*, because you are not up to the University standard. And you won't understand that. I ought to have gone quietly away. . . . I don't know why I didn't. I was so interested in listening to you recite, and in looking at you. I loved your poem, *Amourette*. . . . And two hours slipped by——"

"You stood there in the bushes looking at *me* for two hours, *and* listening to my poem—and *liking* it?"

"Yes, I did. . . . I don't know why. . . . And then, somehow, without any apparent reason, I wanted you to see *me* . . . without any apparent reason . . . and so I stepped on a dry stick. . . . And to-day I came back . . . without any apparent reason. . . . I don't know what on earth has happened to make me—make me—forget——"

"Forget what?"

"Everything—except——"

"Except what?"

She looked up at him with clear grey eyes, a trifle daunted.

"Forget everything except that I—like you, Mr. Sayre."

He said: "That is the sweetest and most fearless thing a woman ever said. I am absurdly happy over it."

She waited, looking down at her linked fingers.

"And," he said, "for the first time in all my life I have cared more for what a woman has said to me than I care for anything on earth."

There was a good deal of the poet in William Sayre.

"Do you mean it?" she asked, tremulously.

"I mean more."

"I—I think you had better not say—more."

"Why?"

"Because of what I told you. There is no use in your—your finding me—interesting."

"Are you married?" he asked, so guilelessly that she blushed and denied it with haste.

His head was spinning in a sea of pink clouds. Harps were playing somewhere; it may have been the breeze in the pines.

"Amourette," he repeated in a sort of divine daze.

"I am—going," she said, in a low voice.

"Do you desire to render me miserable for life?" he asked so seriously that at first she scarcely realised what he had said. Then blush and pallor came and went; she caught her breath, looked up at him, beseechingly.

"Everything is wrong," she said in the ghost of a voice. "Things are hurrying me—trying to drive me headlong. I must go. Let me go, now."

And she sat very still, and closed her eyes. A second later she opened them.

"Why did you come?" she asked almost fiercely. "There was no use in it! Why did you come into these woods for that foolish newspaper? By this time the Associated Press, the police, and the families of the men you are looking for have received letters from every one of the four missing young men, saying that they are perfectly well and happy and expect to return—after their honeymoons."

Flushed, excited, beautiful in her animation, she faced the astounded young man who stared at her wildly through his eye-glasses.

After a while he managed to ask whether she wished him to believe that these four young men had each eloped with their soul mates.

She bit her lip. "To be accurate," she said in a low voice, "somebody eloped with each one of them."

"How? I don't understand!"

"I don't wish you to. . . . Good-bye."

"You mean," he demanded, incredulously, "that four girls ran away with these four big, hulking young men?"

"Practically."

"That's ridiculous! Besides, it's impossible! Besides—women don't run men off like cattle rustlers. Man is the active agent in elopements, woman the passive agent."

She did not answer.

"Isn't she?"

She made no reply.

He said: "Amourette, shall I illustrate what I mean—with you as the passive agent?"

The girl bent over a little, then with a sudden movement she dropped her head in her hands. A moment later he saw a single tear fall between her fingers.

He looked east, west, north, south, and finally up into the sky. Seeing nobody, the silly expression left his otherwise interesting face; a graver, gentler light grew in his eyes. And he put one arm around her supple waist.

"Something is dreadfully wrong," he said; "all this must be explained—our strange encounter, our speaking, our talking at cross purposes, our candid interest in each other—the sudden, swift, unfeigned friendship that was born the instant that our eyes encountered——"

"I know it. It *was* born. Oh, I know it. I *know* it, and I could not help it—somehow—somehow——"

"It—it was almost like—like—love at first sight," he whispered.

"It was—something like it—I am afraid——"

"Do you think it *was* love?"

"I don't know. . . . Do you?"

"I don't know. . . . You mustn't cry. Put your head down—here. You mustn't be distressed."

"I am, dreadfully."

"You mustn't be."

"I can't help it—now."

"Could you help it if you—loved me?"

"Oh, no! Oh, no! It would distress me beyond measure to—to love you. Oh, it must not be—it must not happen to me——"

"It is already happening to *me*."

"Don't let it! Don't let it happen to either of us! Please—please——"

"But—it *is* happening all the while, Amourette."

She drew a swift, startled sigh.

"Is *that* what it is that is happening to me, too, Mr. Sayre?"

"Yes. I think so."

"Oh, oh, *oh*!" she sobbed, hiding her face closer to his shoulder.

"Amourette! Darling! Dea——"

"L-listen. Because now I've got to tell you all about the disappearance of those perfectly horrid young specimens of physical perfection. And after that you will abhor me!"

"Abhor *you*! Dearest—dearest and most divine of women!"

"Wait!" she sobbed. "I've got myself and you into the most awful scrape you ever dreamed of by falling in love with you at first sight!"

And she turned her face closer to his shoulder and slipped one desperate little hand into his.

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

IV

ABOUT two o'clock that afternoon Sayre rushed into camp with his scanty hair on end.

Langdon, who had been attempting to boil a blank-book for dinner, gazed at him in consternation.

"What is it? Bears, William?" he asked fearfully. "D-d-don't be f-f-frightened; I'll stand by you."

"It isn't bears, you simp! I've just unearthed the most colossal conspiracy of the century! Curtis, things are happening in these woods that are incredible, abominable, horrible——"

"*What* is happening?" faltered Langdon, turning paler. "Murder?"

"Worse! They've got Willett and the others! She admitted it to me——"

"Hey?"

"Willett and Carrick and the others!" shouted Sayre, gesticulating. "They've caught 'em all! She said so! I——"

"They? She? Who's caught what? Who's 'they'? What it is? Who's 'she'? What are you talking about, anyway?"

"Amourette told me——"

"Amourette? Who the deuce is Amourette?"

"I don't know. Shut up! My head's spinning like a gyroscope. All I know is that I want to marry her and she won't let me—and I believe she would if I had a reliable hair-restorer and wasn't near-sighted—but she ran away and got inside the fence and locked the gate."

"Are you drunk?" demanded Langdon, "or merely frolicsome?"

"I don't know. I guess I am. I'm about everything else. What do I know about anything anyway? Nothing!"

He began to run around in circles; Langdon, having seen similar symptoms in demented cats, regarded him with growing alarm.

"I tell you it's an outrageous social condition which tolerates such doings!" shouted Sayre. "It's a perfectly monstrous state of things! Nine handsome men out of ten are fatheads! I told her so! I tried to point out to her—but she wouldn't listen—she wouldn't listen!"

Langdon stared at him, jaw agape. Then:

"Quit that ghost-dancing and talk sense," he ventured.

"Do you think that men are going to stand for it?" yelled Sayre, waving his hands, "ordinary, decent, God-fearing, everyday young men like you and me? If this cataclysmic cult gains ground among American women—if these exasperating suffragettes really intend to carry out any such programme, everybody on earth will resemble everybody else—like those wax figures marked 'neat,' 'imported,' and 'nobby'! And I told Amourette that, too; but she wouldn't listen—she wouldn't lis—My God! *Why* am I bald?"

He swung his arms like a pair of flails and advanced distractedly upon Langdon, who immediately retreated.

"Come back here," he said. "I want to picture to you the horrors that are going on in your native land! You ought to know. You've got to know!"

"Certainly, old man," quavered Langdon, keeping a tree between them. "But don't come any closer or I'll scream."

"Do you think I'm nutty?"

"Oh, not at all—not *at* all," said Langdon soothingly. "Probably the wafers disagreed with you."

"Curtis, wouldn't it rock any man's equilibrium to fall head over heels in love with a girl inside of ten minutes? I merely ask you, man to man."

"It sure would, dear friend——"

"And then to see that divine girl almost ready to love you in return—see it perfectly, plainly? And have her tell you that she could learn to care for you if your hair wasn't so thin and you didn't wear eye-glasses? By Jinks! That was *too* much! I'll leave it to you—*wasn't* it?"

Langdon swallowed hard and watched his friend fixedly.

"And then," continued Sayre, grinding his teeth, "*then* she told me about Willett!"

"Hey?"

"Oh, the whole thing is knocked in the head from a newspaper standpoint. They've all written home. They're married—or on the point of it——"

"What!"

"But that isn't what bothers me. What do I care about this job, or any other job, since I've seen the only girl on earth that I could ever stay home nights for! And to think that she ran away from me and I'm never to see her again because I'm near-sighted and partly bald!"

He waved his arms distractedly.

"But, by the gods and demons!" he cried, "I'm not going to stand for her going hunting with that man-net! If she catches any insufferable pup in it I'll go insane!"

Langdon's eyes rolled and he breathed heavily.

"Old man," he ventured, kindly, "don't you think you'd better lie down and try to take a nice little nap——"

Sayre instantly chased him around the tree and caught him.

"Curt," he said savagely, "get over the idea that there's anything the matter with me mentally except love and righteous indignation. I *am* in love; and it hurts. I'm indignant, because those people are treating my sex with an outrageous and high-handed effrontery that would bring the blush of impotent rage to any masculine cheek!"

"What people?" said the other warily. "You needn't answer till you get your wits back."

"They're back, Curt; that twelve-foot fence of heavy elephant-proof wire which we noticed in the forest day before yesterday isn't the fencing to a game park. It encloses a thousand acres belonging to the New Race University. Did you know that?"

"What's The New Race University?" asked Langdon, astonished.

"You won't believe it—but, Curtis, it's a reservation for the—the p-p-propagation of a new and s-s-symmetrically p-p-proportioned race of g-g-god-like human beings! It's a deliberate attempt at cold-blooded scientific selection—an insult to every bald-headed, near-sighted, thin-shanked young man in the United States!"

"William," said the other, coaxingly, "you had better lie down and let me make some wafer soup for you."

"You listen to me. I'm getting calmer now. I want to tell you about these New Race women and their University and Amourette and Reginald Willett and the whole devilish business."

"Is there—is there really such a thing, William? You would not tell me a bind like that just to make a goat of me, would you?"

"No, I wouldn't. There *is* such a thing."

"Did you see it?"

"No, I——"

"How do you know?"

"Amourette told me—shamelessly, defiantly, adorably! It was organised in secret out of the most advanced and determined as well as the most healthy, vigorous, and physically beautiful of all the suffragettes in North America. One of their number happened to own a thousand acres here before the State took the rest for its park. And here they have come, dozens and dozens of them—to attend the first summer session of the New Race University."

"Is—is there actually a University in these woods?"

"There is."

"Buildings?" demanded Langdon, amazed.

"No, burrows. Isn't that the limit? Curt, believe me, they live in caves. It's their idea of being vigorous and simple and primitive. Their cult is the cave woman. They have classes; they study and recite and exercise and cook and play auction bridge. Their object is to hasten not only political enfranchisement, but the era of a physical and intellectual equality which will permit them to mate as they choose and people this republic with perfect progeny. Every girl there is pledged to mate only with the very pick of physical masculine perfection. Their pledge is to build up a new, god-like race on earth, which ultimately will dominate, crush out, survive, and replace all humanity which has become degenerate. Nothing mentally or physically or politically imperfect is permitted inside that wire fence. My eye-glasses bar me out; your shanks exclude you—also your politics, because you're a democrat."

"That's monstrous!" exclaimed Langdon, indignantly.

"More monstrous still, these disciples of the New Race movement are militant! Their audacity is unbelievable! Certain ones among them, adepts in woodcraft, have now begun to range this forest with nets. What do you think of that! And when they encounter a young fellow who agrees with the remorseless standard of perfection set up by the University, they stalk him and net him! They've got four so far. And now it's Amourette's turn to go out!"

Langdon's teeth chattered.

"W-w-what are they g-going to do with their captures?"

"Marry them!"

"Willett? And Carrick and——"

"Yes. Isn't it awful, Curt?"

"Was she the girl with the net in the photo? I mean, was that her hand?"

"No; that was a friend of her's who bagged Willett. Amourette started out yesterday for the first time after—well, I suppose you'd call it 'big game.' She saw me, stalked me, got near enough to see my glasses, and let me go. And to-day, thinking that she might have been mistaken and that perhaps I only wore sun-glasses, she came back. But I was ass enough to take off my cap to her, and she saw my hair—saw where it wasn't—and that settled it."

"What a mortifying thing to happen to you, William."

"I should think so. There's nothing unusual the matter with me. Cæsar was bald. It's idiotic to bar a man out because he has fewer hairs than the next man. And the exasperating part of it is that I believe I could win her if I had half a chance."

"Of course you could. If she's any good as a sport, she'd rather have you, hairless myopiac that you are, than a tailor's dummy."

Sayre said: "Isn't it a terrible thing, Curtis, to think of that sweet, lovely young girl pledged to a scientific life like that? P-pledged to p-p-propagate p-p-perfection?"

"What a mean-spirited creature that fellow Willett must be," observed Langdon in disgust; "and the other three—Ugh!"

"Why?"

"To tamely submit to being kidnapped and woo'd and wed that way—endure the degradation of a captivity among all those young girls——"

Sayre said: "Would *you* call for help if kidnapped?"

Langdon gazed into space: "I wonder," he murmured.

Sayre looked at him searchingly.

"I don't believe you'd make the welkin ring with your yelps. It's probably the same with those four men."

"Probably."

"I don't suppose those suffragettes of the New Race University really require any fence there to keep those men in."

"No; only to keep the rest of us out."

"The chances are that Willett and that poet Carrick and De Lancy Smith and Alphonso W. Green couldn't be chased out of that University."

"Those *are* the chances. How I hate those four men. It's curious, William, that no man can ever tolerate the idea of any other man ever getting solid with any looker. I always did dislike to see another man with a pretty girl. . . . William?"

"What?"

"Think of the concentrated beauty in that University! Think of that rich round-up of creamy dreams! Consider that mellifluous marmalade! And—we can't have any—because *you* are slightly bald and near-sighted and *I* am thin and scholarly!" He ran at the camp-kettle and kicked it.

After a painful silence Sayre said timidly: "Don't laugh, but *is* there any known substance which will bring in hair?"

"You mean bring it out?"

"Well, dammit, grow it! Is there?"

"There are too many bald monarchs and millionaires to prove the contrary. Nor is there anything that can make my thin shanks fatter."

"—I'd be willing to go about without glasses," said Sayre humbly. "I told her so."

"Couldn't you deceive her with a wig? It wouldn't matter afterward. After you're once married let her shriek."

"Amourette *saw* my head." And he hung it in bitter dejection.

"Come on," said Langdon cheerily. "Let's peek through their fence and see what happens. Much has been done with a merry eye in this world of haughty ladies."

As they turned away into the woods Sayre clenched his fists.

"I'd like to knock the collective blocks off those four young men inside that fence. And—to think—to *think* of Amourette going out again to-morrow, man hunting, with her net! I can't endure it, Curt—I simply can't."

Langdon looked at his friend in deep commiseration.

"I wish I could help you, William—but I don't see—I—don't—exactly—see——" He hesitated. "Of course I *could* go to Utica and pay a wig-maker and costumer to make me up into the kind of Charlie-Gussie they're looking for at that University. . . . And when your best girl goes out hunting, she'll see me and net me, and you can be in hiding near by, and rush out and net her."

In their excitement they seized each other and danced.

"Why not?" exclaimed Langdon. "Shall I try? Trust me to come back a specimen of sickening symmetry—the kind of man women write about and draw pictures of—pink and white and silky-whiskered! Shall I? And I'll bring you a net to catch her in! Is it a go, William?"

Sayre broke down and began to cry.

"Heaven bless you, friend," he sobbed. "And if ever I get that girl inside a net she'll learn something about natural selection that they p-p-probably forgot to teach in their accursed New Race University!"

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

V

ONE week later Curtis Langdon sat on the banks of a trout stream fishing, apparently deeply absorbed in his business; but he was listening so hard that his ears hurt him.

A few yards away, ambushed behind a rock on which was painted "Votes for Women," lurked William Sayre. A net lay on the ground beside him, fashioned with ring and detachable handle like a gigantic butterfly net.

He, too, tremendously excited, was listening and watching the human bait—Langdon being cast for the bait.

Perfect and nauseating beauty now marked that young gentleman. Features and figure were symmetrical; his eyebrows had been pencilled into exact arcs, his mouth was a Cupid's bow, his cheeks were softly rosy, and a silky and sickly moustache shadowed his rosy lips. Under his fashionable outing shirt he wore a rubber chest improver; his cunningly padded shoulders recalled the exquisite sartorial creations of Mart, Haffner, and Sharx; his patent puttees gave him a calf to which his personal shanks had never aspired; thick, golden-brown hair, false as a woman's vows, was tossed carelessly from a brow, snowy with pearl powder. And he wore a lilac-edged handkerchief in his left cuff.

Both young men truly felt that if any undergraduate of the New Race University was out stalking she'd have at least one try at such a bait. Nothing feminine and earnest could resist that glutinous agglomeration of charms.

But they had now been there since before dawn; nothing had broken the sun-lit quiet of forest and water, not even a trout; and they listened in vain for the snapping of the classical twig.

Lunch time came; they ate a pad apiece. Neither dared to smoke, Sayre because it might reveal his hiding place, Langdon because smoking might be considered an imperfection in the University.

Sunlight fell warm on the banks of the stream, the leaves rustled, big white clouds floated in the blue above. Nothing came near Langdon except a few mosquitoes, who couldn't bite through the make-up; and a small and inquisitive bird that inspected him with disdain and said, "cheep—che-ep!" so many times that Langdon took it as a personal comment and almost blushed.

He thought to himself: "If it wasn't that William is actually becoming ill over his unhappy love affair I'm damned if I'd let even a dicky-bird see me in this rig. Ugh! What a head of hair! The average girl's ideal is what every healthy man wants to kick. I wouldn't blame any decent fellow for booting me into the brook on sight."

He bit into his pad and sat chewing reflectively and dabbling his line in the water.

"Poor old William," he mused. "This business is likely to end us both. If we stay here we lose our jobs; if we go back William is likely to increase the nut crop. I never supposed men took love as seriously as that. I've heard that it sometimes occurred—what is it Shakespeare says: 'How Love doth make nuts of us all!'"

He chewed his pad and swung his feet, philosophically.

"Why the devil doesn't some girl come and try to steal a kiss?" he muttered. "It might perhaps be well to call their attention to my helpless presence and unguarded condition."

So he sang for a while, swinging his legs: "Somebody's watching and waiting for me!" munching his luncheon between verses; and, as nobody came, he bawled louder and louder the refrain: "Somebody's darling, darling, dah-ling!" until a hoarse voice from behind the rock silenced him:

"Shut up that hurdy-gurdy voice of yours! A defect like that will count ten points against you! Can it!"

"Oh, very well," said Langdon, offended; "but everybody doesn't feel the way you do about music."

Silence resumed her classical occupation in the forest; the stream continued to sparkle and make its own kind of music; the trout, having become accustomed to the queer thing on the bank and the baited hook among the pebbles, gathered in the ripples stemming the current with winnowing fins.

A very young rabbit sat up in a fern patch and examined Langdon with dark, moist eyes. He sat there for several minutes, and might have remained for several more if a sound, unheard by Langdon and by Sayre, had not set the bunch of whiskers on his restless nose twitching, and sent him scurrying off over the moss.

The sound was no sound to human ears; Langdon heard it not; Sayre, drowsy in the scented heat, dozed behind his rock.

A shadow fell across the moss; then another; two slim shapes moved stealthily among the trees across the brook.

For ten minutes the foremost figure stood looking at Langdon. Occasionally she used an opera glass, which, from time to time, she passed back over her shoulder to her companion.

"Ethra," she whispered at last, "he seems to be practically perfect."

"I'm wondering about those puttees, dear—shanks in puttees are deceptive."

"Those are exquisite calves," said Amourette sadly. "I'm sure they'll measure up to regulation. And his chest seems up to proof."

"What beautiful eyebrows," murmured Ethra.

But Amourette found no pleasure in them, nor in the golden-brown hair, nor the bloom of youth and perfect health pervading their unconscious quarry. Perhaps she was thinking of a certain near-sighted, thin-haired young man—and how she had slammed the gate of the wire fence in his face—*after* their first kiss.

She drew a deep, painful breath and lifted her head resolutely.

"I suppose I'd better begin to stalk him, Ethra," she said.

"Yes; he's a very good specimen. Be careful, dear. Strike a circle and come up behind him. When you're ready, mew like a cat-bird and I'll let him catch a glimpse of me. And as soon as he begins to—to rubber," she said, with a haughty glance at the unconscious angler, "steal up and net him, and I'll come across and help tie him up."

Amourette sighed, standing there irresolute. Then she straightened her drooping shoulders, seized her net very firmly, and, with infinite caution, began to stalk her quarry.

Once the stalking had fairly begun, the girl became absorbed in the game. All memory of Sayre, if there indeed had been any to make her falter in her purpose, now departed. She was a huntress pure and simple, silent, furtive, adroit, intent upon her quarry. There came a kind of fierceness into her concentration; the joy of the chase thrilled her as she crept noiselessly through the woods, describing a circle, crossing the stream far above the sleepy fisherman, gliding, stealing nearer, nearer, until at length she stood in the thicket behind him.

For a moment she waited silently, freeing her net and gathering it in her right hand ready for a deadly cast. Then, pursing up her red lips, she mewed like a cat-bird, three times.

Instantly, across the stream, she saw Ethra step out of the willows into plain view; saw Langdon wake up, stare, get up, and regard the beautiful vision across the stream with concentrated and delighted attention.

Then Amourette stole swiftly forward over the moss, swinging the heavy silken net in her right hand, closer, closer. Suddenly the net whistled in the air, glistened, lengthened, and fell, enmeshing Langdon; and, at the same instant something behind her whistled and fell slap; and she found herself struggling in the folds of an enormous butterfly net.

"Ethra! Help!" she cried, terrified, trying to keep her balance in the web which enveloped her, striving to tear a way free through the meshes; but she was only wrapped up the tighter; two brutal masculine arms lifted her, held her cradled and entangled, freed the handle from the net, and bore her swiftly away.

"Darling," whispered William Sayre, "d-don't kick."

"*You!*" she gasped, struggling frantically.

"The real thing, dearest of women! The old-fashioned, original cave man. Will you come quietly? There's a license bureau in the next village. Or shall I be obliged to keep right on carrying you?"

"Oh, oh, *oh!*" she sobbed; "what disgrace! what humiliation; what shame! Oh, Ethra! Ethra! What in the world am I to do?"

"That's where the mistake arose," said William gently; "*you* don't have to do anything—except put both arms around my neck and—be careful not to knock off my glasses."

"*Glasses!* Ethra! Ethra! Where are you? Don't you see what is becoming of me? You—you had b-better hurry, too," she added with a sob, "because the man who is carrying me off is the man I told you about. *Ethra!* Where are you?"

A convenient echo replied in similar terms. Meanwhile Sayre was walking faster and faster through the woods.

For a while she lay motionless and silent, cradled in his arms. And after a long, long time she tried feebly to adjust the disordered undulations on her hair.

Then a very small, still voice said:

"Mr. Sayre?"

"Darling!"

She seemed to recognise this as her name.

"Mr. Sayre, w-what are you going to do with me?"

"Marry you."

"B-b-by f-f-force?"

"That is up to you, darling."

"Against my will?"

"That also is up to you."

"And—and my inclination?"

"No, not against that, Amourette."

"Do you dare believe I love you?"

"I should worry."

"Do you know you are hurting me, physically, spiritually, mentally?"

"I suppose I am."

"Do you realise that you are a brute?"

"I sure do. We're all of us a little in that line, Amourette."

After a long silence she turned her face so that it rested against his shoulder—nestled closer, and lay very still.

Untitled illustration

VI

ALL over the United States conditions were becoming terrible, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of militant women, wives, widows, matrons, maidens, and stenographers had gone on strike. Non-intercourse with man was to be the punishment for any longer withholding the franchise; husbands, fathers, uncles, fiancés, bachelors, and authors held frantic mass meetings to determine what course to pursue in the imminence of rapidly impending industrial, political, and social disaster.

But, although men's sufferings threatened to be frightful; although for months now nobody of the gentler sex had condescended to pay them the slightest attention; although their wives replied to them only with monosyllables and scornful smiles, and their sweethearts were never at home to them, let it be remembered to their eternal credit that not one thought of surrender ever entered their limited minds.

And so it was with young Langdon, who was left in a condition neither dignified nor picturesque—a martyr to friendship and a victim to his own rather frivolous idea of practical humour.

Hopelessly entangled in the net which enveloped him from head to foot, he flopped about among the dead leaves on the bank of the stream, struggling and kicking like a fly in a cobweb. This he considered humorous.

The lithe figure across the brook continued to view his gyrations with mingled emotions.

She was a boyish young thing with a full-lipped, sensitive mouth, eyes like bluish-black velvet, and clipped hair of a dull gold colour that curled thickly all over a small and beautifully shaped head in little burnished *boucles d'or*—which description ought to hold the reader for a while.

She wore gray wool kilts, riding breeches laced in about the knee, suede puttees and tan shoes; and she carried a Russian game pouch beautifully embroidered across her right shoulder.

For a minute or two she watched the entangled young man, eyes still wide with the excitement of the chase, full delicate lips softly parted; and her intent and earnest face reflected modest triumph charmingly modified by an involuntary sympathy—the natural tribute of a generous sportswoman to the quarry successfully stalked and bagged.

Cautiously, now, but without hesitation she advanced to the edge of the stream, picked her way cleverly across it on the stones, and, leaping lightly to the bank, stood looking down at Langdon, who had ceased his contortions and now lay flat on his back, gazing skyward, a grin on his otherwise attractive countenance.

He smiled up at her through the meshes of the net when he encountered her curious eyes, expecting immediate release.

There was no answering smile from her as she coolly examined his symmetrical features and perfect physical proportions through the folds of the net.

No, there could be no longer any doubt in her mind that this young man was what the New Race University required for breeding purposes.

No such specimen as this could hope to escape instant marriage. Here were features so mathematically flawless that they became practically featureless; here was bodily balance so ideal that the ultimate standards of Greek perfection seemed lop-sided in comparison. No, there could be no doubt about it; this young man was certainly required for the purpose of scientific propagation; willy-nilly he was destined to be one of the ancestors of that future and god-like race which must, one day, people the earth to replace the bigoted and degenerate population which at present encumbered it.

She regarded him without the slightest personal interest now. His symmetry wearied her profoundly.

"When are you going to let me out?" he asked cheerfully.

She looked at him almost insolently under slightly lifted brows.

"Presently," she said; and began to fumble in her satchel. In a few moments she produced two bottles, a roll of antiseptic cotton, and a hypodermic needle.

"Will you come with me voluntarily?" she inquired, stepping nearer and looking down at him, "or must I use force?"

He might have been humorously willing to go; he really desired to see this amusing adventure to the finish. But man resents coercion.

"Force?" he repeated.

"Exactly," she replied, displaying her pocket pharmacy.

"What are those things you have in your hand?" he asked, trying to see.

"Chloroform and a hypodermic needle. If you do not wish to come with me voluntarily you may take your choice."

He laughed long and loud and derisively.

"That's ridiculous," he said. "Be kind enough to undo this net. I might have been willing to go with you and look 'em over—your friends, you know; but I don't care for your idea of humour."

"Your reply is typically man-like and tyrannical. For centuries man has enjoyed and abused the option of doing what he pleased. Now men are going to do what *we* please, whether or not it suits them."

"So I've understood," he said, laughing; "but this revolt has been on for a year and I haven't noticed any men doing what they did not wish to do."

"We have four who are doing it. They are in training for their honeymoons. You are to be the fifth to begin training," she said coolly.

He laughed again derisively, and lay watching her. She walked up close beside him and seated herself on the rock marked "Votes for Women."

"I suppose," she said, tauntingly, "that you were rather astonished to wake up from your fishing nap, and find yourself——" she considered the effect of her words, gazing at him insolently from under slightly lowered lashes —"find yourself all balled up in a fish net."

He only grinned at her.

"What are you laughing at?" she demanded, unsmiling.

"Lying here flat on my back, I am smiling at Woman! at every individual woman on earth! at this ridiculous feminine uprising, this suffragette revolution—at your National Female Federation Committee; the thousands of local unions; this strike of your entire sex; this general boycott of my sex! What has it accomplished?" He tried to wave his hand.

"You parade and make speeches in the streets, throw bricks, slap the faces of a few State Congressmen, and finally proclaim a general strike and boycott.

"And what's the result? All social functions and ceremonies are suspended; caterers, florists, confectioners, cabmen, ruined; theatres, restaurants, department stores, novelists, milliners, in financial throes; a falling off of over eighty per cent. in marriages and births—and you are no nearer a vote than you were before the great strike paralysed the business of this Republic."

The young lady had been growing pinker and pinker.

"Oh! . . . And is that why you are laughing?" she asked.

"Yes. It's the funniest strike that ever happened to a serious-minded sex. Because you know your sex, as a sex, is a trifle destitute of a sense of humour——"

"That expression," she cut in with bitter satisfaction, "definitely determines *your* intellectual and social limits, Mr. Langdon. You are what you appear to be—one of those dreary bothers whose stock phrase is 'a sense of humour'—the kind of young man who has acquired a florid imitation of cultivation, a sort of near-polish; the type of person who uses the word 'brainy' for 'capable,' and 'mentality' for 'intelligence'; the dreadful kind of person who speaks of a subject as 'meaty' instead of properly employing the words 'substance' or 'material'; the sort of——"

Langdon, red and wrathful, sat up on the ground, peering at her through the enveloping net.

"Never in my life," he said, "have I been spoken to in such terms of feminine contempt. Stop it! Can't you appreciate a joke?"

"Mr. Langdon, the day is past when women will either countenance or take part in any disrespectful witticisms, slurs, or jests at the expense of their own sex. Once—and that not very long ago—they did it. Comic papers made my sex the subject of cartoons and witticisms; the stage dared to spread the contemptible misinformation; women either smiled or remained indifferent. The impression became general and fixed that women were gallinaceous, that a hen-like philosophy characterised the sex; that they were, at best, second-rate humans, tagging rather gratefully at the heels of the Lords of Creation, unconcerned with the greater and vital questions of the world.

"Now your sex has discovered its mistake. After countless centuries of intellectual and physical bondage Woman has calmly risen to assert herself—not as the peer of man, *but as his superior!*"

"What!" exclaimed Langdon, angrily.

"Certainly. Since prehistoric times man has attempted to govern and shape the destinies of all things living on this earth. He has made of his reign a miserable fizzle. It is our turn now to try our hands.

"And so, at last, woman steps forward, tipping the symbols of despotic power—sceptre and crown—from the nerveless hand and dishonoured brow of her recent lord and master! And down he goes under her feet—where he belongs."

Langdon, unable to endure such language, attempted to sit up, but the net interfered and he lay clawing at the meshes while the girl calmly continued:

"The human race, as it is at present, is a disgrace to the world it inhabits. We women have now decided to repeople the earth scientifically with a race as wholesome in body as our instruction shall render it in mind. Those among us women who are adjudged physically and mentally perfect for this great and sacred work have pledged ourselves to the sacrifice—*pro bono publico*.

"We shall pick out, from your degenerate sex, such physically perfect individuals as chance to remain; we shall regard our marriages with them as purely scientific and cold-blooded affairs; we have begun, for the purposes of re-populating the world by capturing four symmetrical young men. You are the fifth. The Regents of the New Race University will select for you several girls who, theoretically, are best qualified to become the mothers of your——"

"Stop!" shouted Langdon, tearing violently at the net. "I don't want you to talk that way to me!"

"What way?"

"You know perfectly well," he retorted, blushing vividly. "I won't stand it!"

"What a slave to prudery and smug convention you are," she observed with amused contempt. "Nobody in the University is going to shock your modesty."

"Well, what *are* they going to do?"

"Turn you loose in the preserve after the Regents have inspected you."

"And then?"

"Oh, I suppose two or three girls will be selected."

"To do w-what?"

"To pay you marked attention."

"M-m-marked *what*?"

"Attention. Two or three girls will begin to court you."

"How?"

"Oh, the usual way—by sending you flowers and books and bon-bons, and asking permission to call on you in your cave," she said carelessly.

There was an embarrassed pause, then:

"Will *you* be one of those—those aspirants to my hand?" he inquired.

She said indifferently: "I hope not. I'm sure I don't desire to be the mother of——"

"Stop! I tell you to stop conversing on such topics!" he yelled, struggling and squirming and finally rolling over, all fours in the air.

"I want to get up!" he shouted. "My position is undignified! Anybody'd think I was a prize animal. I don't like this poultry talk! I'm a *man*! I'm no bench-winner. And if ever I marry and p-p-produce p-p-progeny, it will be somebody *I* select, not somebody who selects *me*!"

The girl looked at him sternly.

"No," she said. "For centuries man has mated from sentiment and filled the earth with mental and physical degeneracy. Now woman steps in. It is her turn. And she flings aside precedent, prejudice, and sentiment—for the good of the human race! and joining hands with Science marches forward inexorably toward the millennium!"

The girl was so earnest, so naïve, so emotionally stirred by the picture evoked that she enacted in pretty gestures the allegory of womanhood trampling upon sentimental emotion and turning toward Science with arms outstretched.

Langdon, who had managed to sit up, regarded her with terrified interest.

"Would you be amiable enough to remove this net?" he asked, shivering.

"I shall take you before the Board of Regents of the New Race University. They will assign you a cave."

"This joke has gone far enough," he said. "Please take off this net."

"No. I am going to show the Regents what I caught."

"*Me*?"

"Certainly."

"But, my poor child," he said, "I am not what I seem. The joke is entirely on woman—poor, derided, deluded, down-trodden, humourless woman! Why,

all this symmetry of mine—all these endearing young charms, are—are
——"

He hesitated, looked at her, reflected, wavered. She was *so* pretty—somehow he didn't want to tell her. He felt furtively of his rubber chest improver, his flexible pneumatic calves, his golden brown wig, his pencilled brows, silky moustache, and carefully fashioned rosebud mouth. . . . A sudden and curious distaste for confessing to her that all the beauties were unreal came over him.

Meanwhile, paying him no further attention for the moment, she was trying hard to uncork the bottle of chloroform.

When she succeeded, she soaked the roll of antiseptic cotton, folded it in a handkerchief, and re-corked the bottle. Then, eyeing him coldly, holding the saturated handkerchief with one hand, her pretty nose with the other, she said with nasal difficulty:

"Dow, Bister Lagdod, bake up your bind dot to struggle——"

"Are you actually going to do it?" he asked, incredulously.

"I ab!" she replied firmly.

"Nonsense! *You* are not accustomed to give chloroform!"

"Do; but I've read up od the subject——"

"What!" he exclaimed, horrified. "Look out what you're doing, child! Don't you dare try that on me!"

"I've got to," she insisted. "Please dod bake be dervous or we bay have ad accidend——"

"Take that stuff away!" he yelled. "You'll give me too much and then I won't wake up at all!"

"I'll be as careful as I cad," she promised him. "Dow be still——"

"But this is monstrous!" he retorted, flopping about in the leaves like a stranded fish and frantically endeavouring to dodge the wet and reeking handkerchief.

"Let go of my nose! Help! He—he—hah—h—um! bz-z-z-z——" and he suddenly relaxed and fell back a limp, loose-limbed mass among the leaves.

Pale and resolute the girl knelt beside him, freed him from the net, and, bending nearer, gazed earnestly into his unconscious features. Still gazing, she drew a postman's whistle from her satchel, set it to her lips, and was about to summon the student on duty at the distant gate to help bring in the quarry, when something about the features of the recumbent young man arrested her attention.

The postman's whistle fell from her pretty lips; her startled eyes widened as she bent closer to examine the perfections which had captivated her from a scientific standpoint.

At that instant consciousness began to return; he gave a sudden spasmodic and comprehensive flop; there was a report like a pistol. His chest improver had exploded.

Terrified, trembling, she dropped on her knees beside him; never before had she heard of a young man being blown to pieces by chloroform. Then, almost hysterical, she ran to the stream, filled her leather satchel with water, and, running back again, emptied it upon his upturned countenance.

Horror on horror! His golden brown hair—his very scalp seemed to be parting from his forehead—eyebrows, silky moustache, lips—his entire face seemed to be coming off; and, as she shrieked and tottered to her feet, he began to sputter and kick so violently that both pneumatic calves blew up like the reports of a double-barreled shotgun.

And Ethra reeled back against a tree and cowered there, covering her shocked eyes with shaking fingers.

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

VII

It is a surprising and trying moment for a girl who throws water upon a young man's face to see that face begin to dissolve and come off, feature by feature, in polychromatic splendour.

She did not faint; her intellect reeled for a moment; then she dropped her hands from her eyes and saw him sitting up on the ground, blinking at her gravely from a streaked and gaudy countenance. His wig was tilted over one eye; rouge and pearl powder made his cheeks and chin very gay; and his handsome, silky moustache hung by one corner from his upper lip. It was too much. She sat down limply on a mossy log and wept.

His senses returned gradually; after a while he got up and walked down to the edge of the brook with all the dignity that unsteady legs permitted.

Fascinated, she watched him at his ablutions where he squatted by the water's edge, scrubbing away as industriously as a washer-racoon. It did not occur to her to flee; curiosity dominated—an overpowering desire to see what he really resembled in *puris naturalibus*.

After a while he stood up, hurled the damp wig into the woods, wiped his hands on his knickerbockers and his face on his sleeve, and, bending over, examined his collapsed calves.

And all the while, as the fumes of the chloroform disappeared and he began to realise what had been done to him, he was becoming madder and madder.

She recognised the wrath in his face as he swung on his heel and came toward her.

"It is your own fault!" she said, resolutely, "for playing a silly trick like ——" But she observed his advance very dubiously, straightening up to her full slender height to confront him, but not rising to her feet. Her knees were still very shaky.

He halted close in front of her. Something in the interrogative yet fearless beauty of her upward gaze checked the torrent of indignant eloquence under which he was labouring, and, presently, left him even mentally mute, his lips parted stupidly.

She said: "According to the old order of things a well-bred man would ask my pardon. But a decently-bred man, in the first place, wouldn't have done such a thing to me. So your apology would only be a paradox——"

"What!" he exclaimed, stung into protest. "Am I to understand that after netting me and chloroforming me and nearly drowning me——"

"My mistake was perfectly natural. Do you suppose that I would even dream of trailing *you* as you really are?"

He gazed at her bewildered; passed his unsteady hand over his countenance, then sat down abruptly beside her on the mossy log and buried his head in his hands.

She looked at him haughtily, sitting up very straight; he continued beside her in silence, face in his hands as though overwhelmed. Nothing was said for several minutes—until the clear disdain of her gaze changed, imperceptibly; and the rigidity of her spinal column relaxed.

"I am very sorry this has happened," she said. There was, however, no sympathy in her tone. He made no movement to speak.

"I am sorry," she repeated after a moment. "It is hard to suffer humiliation."

"Yes," he said, "it is."

"But you deserved it."

"How? I didn't fashion my face and figure."

She mistook him: "*Somebody* did."

"Yes; my parents."

"What!"

"Oh, I don't mean that silly make-up," he said, raising his head.

"What *do* you mean?"

"I mean my own face and figure. What you did to me—your netting me, doping me, and all that wasn't a patch on what you said afterward."

"What do you mean? What did I say?"

"You asked me if I supposed that you would dream of netting a man with a face and f-figure like——"

"Mr. Langdon!"

"Didn't you?"

"I—you—we——"

"You did! And can any man suffer any humiliation to compare with words like those? I merely ask you."

With eyes dilated, breath coming quickly, she stared at him, scarcely yet comprehending the blow which her words had dealt to one of the lords of creation.

"Mr. Langdon," she said, "do you suppose that I am the sort of girl to deliberately criticise either your features or your figure?"

"But you did."

"I merely meant that you should infer——"

"I inferred it all right," he said bitterly.

Perplexed, not knowing how to encounter such an unexpected reproach, vaguely distressed by it, she instinctively attempted to clear herself.

"Please listen. I hadn't any idea of mortifying you by explaining that you are not qualified by nature to interest the modern woman in——"

He turned a bright red.

"Do you suppose such a condemnation—such a total ostracism—is agreeable to a man? . . . Is there anything worse you can say about a man

than to inform him that no woman could possibly take the slightest interest in him?"

"I didn't say that. I said the modern woman——"

"You're all modern."

"It is reported that there are still a few women sufficiently old-fashioned to ——"

"They don't interest me." He looked up at her. "What *you've* said has—simply—and completely—spoiled—my life," he said slowly.

"What *I* said?"

"Yes."

"What have—what could—what I—how—where—who is——" and she checked herself, eyes on his.

"Yes," he repeated with a curious sort of satisfaction, "you have spoiled my entire life for me."

"What an utterly—what a wildly absurd and impossible——"

"And you *know* it!" he insisted, with gloomy triumph.

"Know what?"

"That you've spoiled——"

"Stop! Will you explain to me how——"

"Is it necessary?"

"Necessary? Of course it is! You have made a most grave and serious and—
and heartless charge against a woman——"

"Yes, a heartless one—against you!"

"I? *Heartless*?"

"Cold, deliberate, cruel, unfeeling, merciless, remorseless——"

"Mr. Langdon!"

"Didn't you practically tell me that no woman could endure the sight of a face and figure like mine?"

"No, I did not. What a—a cruel accusation!"

"What *did* you mean, then?"

"That—that you are not exactly—qualified to—to become an ancestor of the physically perfect race which——"

"What *is* wrong with me, then?"

She looked at him helplessly. "What do you mean?"

"I mean where am I below proof? Where am I lacking? What points count me out?"

Her sensitive underlip began to tremble.

"I—I don't want to criticise you——" she faltered.

"Please do. I beg of you. There are beauty doctors in town," he added earnestly. "They can fix up a fellow—and I can go to a gymnasium, and take up deep-breathing and——"

"But, Mr. Langdon, do *you* want to—to be—captured——"

He looked into her bright and melting eyes.

"Yes," he said. "I'd like to give you another chance at me."

"Me? After what I did to you?"

"Will you?"

"Why, what a perfectly astonishing——"

"Not very. Look me over and tell me what points count against me. I know I'm not good-looking, but I'd like to go into training for the bench—I mean ——"

"Mr. Langdon," she said slowly, "surely *you* would not care to develop the featureless symmetry and the—the monotonous perfection necessary to _____"

"Yes, I would. I wish to become superficially monotonous. I'm too varied; I realise that. I want to resemble that make-up I wore——"

"That! Goodness! What a horrid idea——"

"Horrid? Didn't you like it well enough to net me?"

"I—there was nothing expressive of my personal taste in my capturing you—I mean the kind of a man you appeared to be. It was my duty—a purely scientific matter——"

"I don't care what it was. You went after me. You wouldn't go after me as I now appear. I want you to tell me what is lacking in me which would prevent you going after me again—from a purely scientific standpoint."

She sat breathing irregularly, rather rapidly, pretty head bent, apparently considering her hands, which lay idly in her lap. Then she lifted her blue eyes and inspected him. And it was curious, too, that, now when she came to examine him, she did not seem to discover any faults.

"My nose doesn't suit you, does it?" he asked candidly.

"Why, yes," she said innocently, "it suits me."

"That's funny," he reflected. "How about my ears?"

"They seem to be all right," she admitted.

"Do you think so?"

"They seem to me to be perfectly good ears."

"That's odd. What *is* there queer about my face?"

She looked in vain for imperfections.

"Why, do you know, Mr. Langdon, I don't seem to notice anything that is not entirely and agreeably classical."

"But—my legs are thin."

"Not very."

"Aren't they too thin?"

"Not *too* thin. . . . Perhaps you might ride a bicycle for a few days——"

"I will!" he exclaimed with a boyish enthusiasm which lighted up his face so attractively that she found it fascinating to watch.

"Do you know," she said slowly, "the chances are that I would have netted you anyway. It just occurred to me."

"Without my make-up?" he asked, in delighted surprise.

"I think so. Why not?" she replied, looking at him with growing interest. "I don't see anything the matter with you."

"My chest improver exploded," he ventured, being naturally honest.

"*I* don't think you require it."

"Don't you? That is the nicest thing you ever said to me."

"It's only the truth," she said, flushing a trifle in her intense interest. "And, as far as your legs are concerned, I really do not believe you need a bicycle or anything else. . . . In fact—in fact—*I* don't see why you shouldn't go with me to the University if—if you—care to——"

"You darling!"

"Mr. Langdon! Wh-what a perfectly odd thing to s-say to me!"

"I didn't mean it," he said with enthusiasm; "I really didn't mean it. What I meant was—you know—don't you?"

She did not reply. She was absorbed in contemplating one small thumb.

"I'm all ready to go," he ventured.

She said nothing.

"Shall we?"

She looked up, looked into his youthful eyes. After a moment she rose, a trifle pale. And he followed beside her through the sun-lit woods.

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

VIII

At the gate of the New Race University and Masculine Beauty Preserve the pretty gate-keeper on duty looked at Langdon, then at his fair captor, in unfeigned astonishment.

"Why, Ethra!" she said, "is *that* all you've brought home?"

"Did you think I was going to net a dozen?" asked Ethra Leslie, warmly. "Please unlock the gate. Mr. Langdon is tired and hungry, and I want the Regents to finish with him quickly so that he can have some luncheon."

The gate-keeper, a distractingly pretty red-haired girl, regarded Langdon with dubious hazel eyes.

"He'll never pass the examination," she whispered to Ethra. "What on earth are you thinking of?"

"What are *you* thinking of, Marcella? You must be perfectly blind not to see that he complies with every possible requisite! The Regents' inspection is bound to be only a brief formality. Be good enough to unbar the gates."

Marcella slowly drew the massive bolts; hostile criticism was in the gaze with which she swept Langdon.

"Well, of all the insignificant looking young men," she murmured to herself as Ethra and her acquisition walked away along the path, side by side.

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

IX

THE collective and individual charms of the Board of Regents so utterly over-powered Langdon that he scarcely realised what was happening to him.

First, at their request, he sat cross-legged on the ground; and they walked round and round him, inspecting him. Under such conditions no man could be at his best; there was a silly expression on his otherwise attractive face, which, as their attitude toward him seemed to waver between indifference and disapproval, became unconsciously appealing.

"Kindly rise, Mr. Langdon," said Miss Challis, chairman of the board.

Langdon got up, and his ears turned red with a sudden and burning self-consciousness.

"Please walk past us two or three times, varying your speed."

He walked in the various styles to which he had been accustomed, changing speed at intervals and running the entire gamut between a graceful boulevard saunter and a lost-dog sprint.

"Now," said the beautiful chairman, "be good enough to run past us several times."

He complied and they studied his kangaroo-like action. Miss Vining even bent over and felt of his ankles doubtfully, and to his vivid confusion Miss Darrell strolled up, made him sit down on a log, placed one soft, white finger on his mouth, and, opening it coolly, examined the interior. Then they drew together, consulting in whispers, then Miss Challis came with a stethoscope and listened to his pneumatic machinery, while Miss Vining carelessly pinched his biceps and tried his reflexes. After which Miss Darrell pushed a thermometer into his mouth, measured his pulses and blood pressure, tested his sight and hearing and his sense of smell. The latter was intensely keen, as he was very hungry.

Then Miss Challis came and stood behind him and examined, phrenologically, the bumps on his head, while Miss Vining, seated at his feet, read his palm, and Miss Darrell produced a dream book and a pack of cards, and carefully cast his horoscope. But, except that it transpired that he was going to take a journey, that somebody was going to leave him money, and that a dark lady was coming over the sea to trouble him, nothing particularly exciting was discovered concerning him.

Miss Challis, relinquishing his head, produced a crystal and gazed into it. She did not say what she saw there. Miss Vining tried to hypnotise him and came near hypnotising herself. Which scared and irritated her; and she let him very carefully alone after that.

And all the while Ethra sat on a tree stump, hands tightly clasped in her lap, looking on with pathetic eagerness and timidly searching the pretty faces of the Board of Regents for any hopeful signs.

Presently the Board retired to a neighbouring cave to confer; and Langdon drew a deep breath of relief.

"Well," he said, smiling at Ethra, "what do you think?"

"It will be horrid of them if they don't award you a blue ribbon," she said.

"Good heavens!" he faltered, "do they give ribbons?"

"Certainly, first, second, third, and honourable mention. It is the scientific and proper method of classification."

Fury empurpled his visage.

"That's the limit!" he shouted, but she silenced him with a gesture, nodding her head toward the surrounding woods; and among the trees he caught sight of scores and scores of pretty girls furtively observing the proceedings.

"Don't let them see you display any temper or you'll lose their good will, Mr. Langdon. Please recollect that there is no sentiment in this proceeding; it is a scientific matter to be scientifically recorded—purely a matter of eugenics."

Langdon gazed around him at the distant and charming faces peeping at him from behind trees and bushes. Everywhere bright eyes met his mischievously, gaily. An immense sense of happiness began to invade him. The enraptured and fatuous smile on his features now became almost idiotic as here and there, among the trees, he caught glimpses of still more young girls strolling about, arms interlacing one another's waists. The prospect dazzled him; his wits spun like a humming top.

"Are—are many ladies likely to come and—and court me?" he asked timidly of Ethra.

A quick little pang shot through her; but she said with a forced smile: "Why do you ask? Are you a coquette, Mr. Langdon?"

"Oh, no! But, for example, I wouldn't mind being rushed by that willowy blonde over there. I'd also like to meet the svelte one with store puffs and sorrel hair. She *is* a looker, isn't she?"

"She is certainly very pretty," said Ethra, biting her lips with unfeigned vexation.

He gazed entranced at the distant throng for a while.

"And that little grey-eyed romp—the very young and slim one," he continued enthusiastically. "Me for a hammock with her in the goosy-goosy moonlight. . . . And I hope I'm going to meet a lot more—every one of 'em. . . . *What* on earth is *that*?" he exclaimed, changing countenance and leaning forward. "By Jinks, it's a *man*!"

"Certainly. There are four men here. You knew that."

"I forgot," he said, glowering at the unwelcome sight of his own sex.

Ethra said: "Oh, yes, there are those first four men we caught—Mr. Willett, Mr. Carrick, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Green." She added carelessly: "I have been paying rather marked attention to Alphonso W. Green."

"To whom?" he asked, with a disagreeable sensation drenching out the sparks of joy in his bosom.

"To Alphonso W. Green. . . . And I've jollied De Lancy Smith with bonbons a bit, too. They are having a lot of attention paid them—and they're rather spoiled. But, of course, any girl can marry any one of them if she really wants to."

Langdon gazed miserably at her; she seemed to be pleasantly immersed in her own reflections and paid no further heed to him. Then he cast a scowling glance in the direction of the young man who was gathering wild flowers and arranging them in a little basket.

"Ethra," he began—and stopped short under the sudden and unexpected unfriendliness of her glance. "Miss Leslie," he resumed, reddening, "I wouldn't have come here unless I thought—hoped—believed—that you would pay *me* m-m-marked——"

"*Mr. Langdon!*"

"What?"

"Men do not assume the initiative here. They make no advances; they wait until a girl pays them attentions so unmistakable that——"

"Well, I *did* come here because of you!" he blurted out angrily.

"That is an exceedingly indelicate avowal!" she retorted. "If the Regents hear you talk that way you won't be permitted to receive any girl unchaperoned."

He gazed at her, bewildered; she stood a moment frowning and looking in the direction of the cave whither the Board of Regents had retired.

"They're calling me," she exclaimed as a figure appeared at the cave entrance and beckoned her.

"I won't be long, Mr. Langdon. I am perfectly confident that you have passed the inspection!" And she walked swiftly across to the edge of the thicket where the three Regents stood outside their cave.

As she came up one of them put her arm around her.

"My poor child," she said, "that man will never do."

"W-what!" faltered the girl, turning pale.

"Why, no. How in the world could you make such a mistake?"

Ethra looked piteously from one to another.

"What is the matter with him?" she asked. "I can't see anything the matter with him. If his legs are a trifle—refined in contour—a bicycle will help _____"

"But, Ethra, this is not a hospital, dear. This is not a sanitarium. We don't want any imperfect living creature inside this preserve."

"W-w-what is your decision?" asked the girl; and her underlip began to quiver, but she controlled it.

"The first vote," said Miss Challis, "was for his instant eviction, Miss Vining dissenting. The second vote was for his expulsion with the privilege of taking another examination in three months—Miss Darrell dissenting _____"

"I think he's the limit," said Miss Darrell.

"Why, Jessica!" exclaimed Ethra, swallowing a sob.

"The next vote," continued Betty Challis, "was whether he might not remain here a day or two for closer observation. Jessica hasn't voted yet, but Phyllis Vining and I are willing——"

"Oh, Jessica!" pleaded Ethra, catching her hands and pressing them to her own breast, "I—I beg you will let him remain—if only for a few days! Please, please, dear. I *know* his calves will grow if scientifically massaged; and if he is hygienically fed he will improve——"

Miss Darrell looked curiously at her; under her hands the girl's heart was beating wildly.

"Well, then, Betty," she said to Miss Challis, "I vote we keep him under observation for a day or two. Give him the yellow ribbon." And, bending, she kissed Ethra lightly on the lips, whispering:

"I'm afraid we won't be able to keep him, dear. But if you'd like to have a little fun with him and jolly him along, why—why, I was a flirt myself in the old days of the old regime."

"That is all I want," said Ethra, dimpling with delight. "I want to see how far I can go with him just for the fun of it."

Miss Darrell smiled tenderly at the girl and strolled off to join the other Regents; and Ethra, her thoughtful eyes fixed on Langdon, came slowly back, the yellow ribbon trailing in her hand.

Langdon leaped to his feet to meet her, gazing delightedly at the yellow ribbon.

"I qualified, of course!" he said joyously. "When is it customary to begin the courting?"

"You haven't qualified," said the girl, watching the effect of her words on the young man. "This is merely the probation ribbon."

An immense astonishment silenced him. She drew the big orange-coloured ribbon through his button-hole, tied it into a bow, patted it out into flamboyant smartness, and, stepping back, gazed at him without any particular expression in her dark blue eyes.

"Then, then I may be chased away at any moment?" he asked unsteadily.

"I am afraid so."

Thunderstruck, he stared at her: "What on earth are we to do?" he groaned.

"*We?*"

"You and I?"

"How does it concern *me*?" asked the girl coldly.

"Doesn't it?"

She looked him calmly in the eye and shook her head.

"No, Mr. Langdon. However, as you are to remain here for a day or two under observation, no doubt you will receive *some* attention."

"Ethra! Isn't it possible that you might learn to care——"

"Hush! That is no way to talk!"

"Well——well, I can't wait for you to——"

"You *must* wait! You have nothing to say about such things until some girl asks you. And that isn't very likely. Those four perfectly handsome young men have been here for weeks now, and, although they have received lots of attention, not one girl has yet made any of them an actual declaration. The girls here are having too good a time to do anything more serious than a little fussing——just enough to frisk a kiss now and then and keep the men amused——"

"*That* is monstrous!" said Langdon, very red. "When a man's really in love ——"

"Nonsense! Men are flirts——every one of them!"

She laughed, made him a little gesture of adieu, refused to let him follow her, and coolly sauntered off among the trees, heedless of his remonstrances at being left to himself.

He watched her until she disappeared, then, with misgivings, walked toward a tennis court, where the four men were playing a rather dawdling and indifferent game and keeping a lively eye out for the advent of some girl.

They appeared to be rather good-looking fellows, not in any way extraordinary, remarkable neither for symmetry of feature nor of limb.

Langdon stood at the edge of the court looking at them and secretly comparing their beauty with such charms as he was shyly inclined to attribute to himself. There could be no doubt that he compared favourably with them. If he was some, they were not so much.

One, a tall young fellow with blond, closely clipped hair, nodded pleasantly to him, and presently came over to speak to him.

"I suppose you are a new recruit. Glad to see you. We're all anxious to have enough men captured to get up two ball nines. My name is Reginald Willett."

"Mine is Curtis Langdon."

"Come over and meet the others," said Willett pleasantly.

Langdon followed him, and was presently on excellent terms with James Carrick, De Lancy Smith, and Alphonso W. Green, amiable, clean cut, everyday young fellows.

To them he related the circumstances of his capture, and they all laughed heartily. Then he told them that he was here merely on probation for a day or two, naïvely displaying the yellow ribbon.

Willett laughed. "Oh, that's all right. They usually say that. We all came in on probation; the Regents couldn't agree, and some girl always swings the deciding vote as a special favour to herself."

"You don't think they'll kick me out?"

"Not much!" laughed Willett. "First of all, your captor would object—not necessarily for sentimental reasons, but because she caught you; you are hers, her game; she says to herself: 'A poor thing, but mine own!' and hangs to you like grim death. Besides, no woman ever lets any man loose voluntarily. And women haven't changed radically, Mr. Langdon. Don't worry; you can stay, all right."

"Here comes Betty Challis," said Carrick, glancing at Alphonso W. Green. "It's you for a stroll, I guess."

Mr. Green looked conscious; more conscious still when the pretty Miss Challis strolled up, presented him with a bouquet, and stood for a few moments conversing with everybody, perfectly at her ease. Other girls came up and engaged the young men in lively conversation. Presently Miss Challis made a play for hers:

"Would you care to canoe, Mr. Green?" she asked casually, turning to him with a slight blush which she could not control.

Green blushed, too, and consented in a low voice.

As they were departing, Miss Vining rode up on horseback, leading another horse, which De Lancy Smith, at her request, nimbly mounted; and away they galloped down a cool forest road, everybody looking after them.

Miss Darrell cut out and roped Willett presently and took him to walk in the direction of a pretty cascade.

A charming girl, a Miss Trenor, arrived with a hammock, book, and bon-bons, and led Carrick away somewhere by virtue of a previous agreement, and the remaining girls pretended not to care, and strolled serenely off in pretty bunches, leaving Langdon standing, first on one foot, then on the other, waiting to be spoken to.

Abandoned, he wandered about the tennis court, kicking the balls moodily. Tiring of this, he sat down under a tree and twirled his thumbs.

Once or twice some slender figure passed, glancing brightly at him, and he looked as shyly receptive as he could, but to no purpose. Gloom settled over him; hunger tormented him; he gazed disconsolately at the yellow ribbon in his button-hole, and twiddled his thumbs.

And all the while, from the shadow of a distant cave, Ethra was watching him with great content. She knew he was hungry; she let him remain so. By absent treatment she was reducing him to a proper frame of mind.

The word had been passed that he was Ethra's quarry; mischievous bright eyes glanced at him, but no lips unclosed to speak to him; little feet strolled near him, even lingered a moment, but trotted on.

His sentiments varied from apathy to pathos, from self-pity to mortification, from hungry despair to an indignation no longer endurable.

He had enough of it—plenty. Anger overwhelmed him; hunger smothered sentiment; he rose in wrath and stalked off toward a girl who was strolling along, reading a treatise on eugenics.

"Will you be good enough to tell me how to get out?" he asked.

"Out?" she repeated. "Have you a pass to go out?"

"No, I haven't. Where do I obtain one?"

"Only the girl who captured you can give you a pass," she said, amused.

"Very well; where can I find her?"

"Who was it netted you?"

"A Miss Leslie," he snapped.

"Oh! Ethra Leslie's cave is over in those rocks," said the girl, "among those leafy ledges."

"Thanks," he said briefly, and marched off, scowling.

Ethra saw him coming, and his stride and expression scared her. Not knowing exactly what to do, and not anticipating such a frame of mind in him, she turned over in her hammock and pretended to be asleep, as his figure loomed up in the mouth of the cave.

"Miss Leslie!" His voice was stentorian.

She awoke languidly, and did it very well, making a charming picture as she sat up in her hammock, a trifle confused, sweet blue eyes scarcely yet unclosed.

"Mr. Langdon!" she exclaimed in soft surprise.

He looked her squarely, menacingly, in the eyes.

"I suppose," he said, "that all this is a grim parody on the past when women did the waiting until it was men's pleasure to make the next move. I suppose that my recent appraisal parallels the social inspection of a debutante—that my present hunger is paying for the wistful intellectual starvation to which men once doomed your sex; that my isolation represents the isolation from all that was vital in the times when women's opportunities were few and restricted; that my probation among you symbolises the toleration of my sex for whatever specimen of your sex they captured and set their mark on as belonging to them, and on view to the world during good behaviour."

He stared at her flushed face, thoughtfully.

"The allegory is all right," he said, "but you've cast the wrong man for the goat. I'm going."

"Y-you can't go," she stammered, colouring painfully, "unless I give you a pass."

"I see; it resembles divorce. My sex had to give yours a cause for escape, or you couldn't escape. And in here you must give me a pass to freedom, or I remain here and starve. Is that it?"

She crimsoned to her hair, but said nothing.

"Give me that pass," he said.

"If I do every girl here will gossip——"

"I don't care what they say. I'm going."

She sat very still in the hammock, eyes vacant, chin on hand, considering. It was not turning out as she had planned. She had starved him too long.

"Mr. Langdon," she said in a low voice, "if it is only because you are hungry——"

"I'm not; I'm past mere hunger. You disciplined me because I took a human and natural interest in the pretty inhabitants of this new world. And I *told* you that I never would have entered it except for you. But you made me pay for a perfectly harmless and happy curiosity. Well, I've starved and paid. Now I want to go. . . . Either I go or there'll be something doing—because I won't remain here and go hungry much longer."

"S-something—doing?" she faltered.

"Exactly. With the first——"

"You can go if you wish," she said, flushing scarlet and springing out of the hammock.

He waited, jaws set, while she seated herself at a table and wrote out the pass.

"Thank you," he said, in such a rage that he could scarcely control his voice.

She may not have heard him; she sat rigid at the table, looking very hard into space—sat motionless as he took a curt leave of her, never turning her head—listened to his tread as he strode off through the ferns, then laid her brow between snowy hands which matched the face that trembled in them.

As for him, he swung away along the path by which he had come, unstrung by turns, by turns violently desiring her unhappiness, and again anticipating approaching freedom with reckless satisfaction.

Then a strange buoyancy came over him as he arrived in sight of the gate, where the red-haired girl sat on a camp stool, yawning and knitting a silk necktie—for eventualities, perhaps; perhaps for herself, Lord knows. She lifted her grey eyes as he came swinging up—deep, clear, grey eyes that met his and presently seemed ready to answer his. So his eyes asked; and, after a long interval, came the reply, as though she had unconsciously been waiting a long, long while for the question.

"I suppose you will wish to keep this," he said in a low voice, offering her the pass. "You will probably desire to preserve it under lock and key."

She rose to her slender height, took it in her childish hands, hesitated, then, looking up at him, slowly tore the pass to fragments and loosed them from her palm into the current of the south wind blowing.

"That does not matter," she said, "if you are going to love me."

There was a moment's silence, then she held out her left hand. He took it; with her right hand, standing on tiptoe, she reached up and unbarred the gates. And they passed out together into the infernal splendour of the sunset forest.

X

THE riots in London culminated in an episode so cataclysmic that it sobered the civilised world. Young Lord Marque, replying to a question in the House of Lords, said: "As long as the British peerage can summon muscular vigour sufficient to keep a monocle in its eye and extract satisfaction from a cigarette, no human woman in the British Empire shall ever cast a bally ballot for any bally purpose whatever. What!"

And the House of Lords rose to its wavering legs and cheered him with an enthusiasm almost loud enough to be heard above ordinary conversation.

But that unwise and youthful and masculine defiance was the young man's swan-song. A male suffragette rushed with the news to Miss Pondora Bottomly; Lord Marque was followed as he left the house; and that very afternoon he was observed fleeing in a series of startled and graceful bounds through Regent Park, closely pursued by several ladies of birth, maturity, and fashion carrying solid silver hair-brushes.

The Queen, chronicling the somewhat intimate and exclusive affair a week later, mentioned that: "Among those present was the lovely Lady Diana Guernsey wearing tweeds, leather spats, and waving a Directoire Banner embroidered with the popular device, 'Votes for Women,' in bright yellow and bottle green on an old rose ground;" and that she had far outdistanced the aged Marchioness of Dingledeell, Lady Spatterdash, the Hon. Miss Mousely, the Duchess of Rolinstone, Baroness Mosscroppe, and others; and that, when last seen, she and the Earl of Marque were headed westward. A week later no news of either pursuer or pursued having been received, considerable uneasiness was manifested in court and suffragette circles, and it was freely rumoured that Lady Guernsey had made a rather rash but thoroughly characteristic vow that she would never relinquish the trail until she had forced Lord Marque to eat his own words, written in frosting upon a plum cake of her own manufacture.

Marque may have heard of this vow, and perhaps entertained lively doubts concerning Lady Diana's abilities as a pastry cook. At any rate, he kept

straight on westward in a series of kangaroo-like leaps until darkness mercifully blotted out the picture.

Remaining in hiding under a hedge long enough to realise that London was extremely unsafe for him, he decided to continue west as far as the United States, consoling himself with the certainty that his creditors would have forced his emigration anyway before very long, and that he might as well take the present opportunity to pick out his dollar princess while in exile.

But circumstances altered his views; the great popular feminine upheaval in America was now in full swing; the eugenic principle had been declared; all human infirmity and degenerate imperfections were to be abolished through marriages based no longer upon sentiment and personal inclination, but upon the scientific selection of mates for the purpose of establishing the ideally flawless human race.

This was a pretty bad business for Lord Marque. The day after his arrival he was a witness of the suffragette riots when the Mayor, the Governor, and every symmetrical city, county, and State official was captured and led blushing to the marriage license bureau. He had seen the terrible panic in Long Acre, where thousands of handsome young men were being chased in every direction by beautiful and swift-footed suffragettes. From his window in the Hotel Astor he had gazed with horror upon this bachelors' St. Bartholomew, and, distracted, had retired under his bed for the balance of the evening, almost losing consciousness when a bell-hop knocked at his door with a supply of towels.

Only one thought comforted him; the ocean rolled majestically between the Lady Diana, her pastry, and the last of the house of Marque.

Never should that terrible and athletic young woman discover his whereabouts if he had to remain away from London forever; never, never would he eat that pastry!

As he lay under his bed, stroking his short moustache and occasionally sneezing, he remembered with a shudder his flight from those solid silver hair-brushes through Regent's Park; he recalled how, behind him, long after the heavier feminine aristocracy had given up the chase, one youthful, fleet,

supple, and fearsome girl had hung to his trail—a tall, lithe, incarnation of her goddess namesake.

She had been too far away for him to distinguish her features; only in Liverpool, where one dark night he ventured out to buy a copy of the *Queen* and eagerly read the details of the function, did he learn the name of his closest pursuer.

Later, furtively haunting the smoking room on the *Caramania*, he learned from the gossip there of Lady Diana's vow that she would never rest until Lord Marque had eaten her plum cake with its frosted inscription—this inscription consisting of the flippant words of his own rash speech delivered in the upper house of Parliament.

Now, lying on his back under the bed, while outside in Long Acre the dreadful work was going on, he lighted a cigarette and pondered the situation. He didn't believe that Lady Diana would attempt to trail him to America. That was one comfort. But, in view of the suffragette disturbances going on outside his windows, he saw little prospect of a dollar princess for the present. Meanwhile, how was he to exist?

The vague and British convictions concerning the rapid accumulation of wealth on a "ranch" of any kind comforted Marque. He also believed them.

And three months later he had managed to survive a personal acquaintance with the following episodes:

First, one large revolver bullet through hat with request to answer affably when addressed by white men.

Second, one infuriated cow.

Third, one indigestion incubated by cumulative series of pie and complicated by attentions from one large centipede.

Fourth, one contusion from a Montana boot with suggestion concerning monocle.

Fifth, one 45-70 Winchester projectile severing string of monocle, accompanied by laughter and Navajo blanket.

Sixth, comprehensive corporal casualties incident upon international altercation concerning relative importance of Guy Fawkes and July 4th.

Seventh, physical debility due to excessive local popularity following personal encounter with one rustler.

Eighth, complete prostration in consequence of frequent attempts to render thanks for toasts offered him at banquet in celebration of his impending departure for the East.

Ninth, general collapse following bump of coal and forcible ejection from freight train near Albany, New York.

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

XI

THE duties of young Lord Marque, the new man on the Willett estate at Caranay, left him at leisure only after six o'clock, his day being almost entirely occupied in driving a large lawn mower.

Life, for John Marque—as he now called himself—had become exquisitely simple; eating, sleeping, driving a lawn mower—these three manly sports so entirely occupied the twenty-four hours that he had scarcely time to do much weeding—and no time at all to sympathise with himself because he was too busy by day and too sleepy at night.

Sundays he might have taken off for the purpose of condoling with himself, had it not been for the new telephone operator.

She was a recent incumbent at the railroad station—a tall, clear-skinned, yellow-haired girl of twenty-five who sat at her desk all day saying in a low, prettily modulated voice, "hello—hello—hello—hello" to unseen creatures of whom John Marque wotted not.

Three things concerning her he had noticed: She wore pink gingham; she never seemed to see him when he came down to the little sunburnt platform and seated himself on the edge, feet dangling over the rails; he had never seen her except when she was seated at the pine table which was ornamented by her instrument and switchboard. She had a bed-room and kitchen in the rear. But he never saw her go into them or emerge; never saw her except seated at her switchboard, either reading or sewing, or, with the silvery and Greek-like band encircling her hair and supporting the receiver close to her small ears, repeating in her low, modulated voice: hello—hello—hello—hello.

He wondered how tall she might be. He had never seen her standing or walking. He wondered what her direct gaze might be like. Only her profile had he yet beheld—a sweet, youthful, profile nobly outlined under the gold of her hair; but under the partly lowered lashes as she sat sewing or reading or summoning centrals from the vast expanses of North America, he

divined eyes of a soft lilac-blue. And he chewed his pipe-stem and kicked his feet and thought about them.

Few trains stopped at Caranay except for water; the station, an old-time farm house of small dimensions, overlooking the track and Willow Brook, contained ticket office, telephone, and telegraph in one—all presided over by the telephone operator. Sometimes as many as two people in a week bought railroad tickets; sometimes a month would pass without anybody either sending or receiving a telegram. Telephone calls were a little more frequent.

So the girl had little to do there at her sunny open window, where mignonette and heliotrope and nasturtiums bloomed in pots, and the big bumble bees came buzzing and plundering the little window garden. And, except on Sundays, Marque had little leisure to observe her, although in the long late June evenings it was still light at eight o'clock, and he had, without understanding how or why, formed the habit of coming down to the deserted station platform to smoke his pipe and sometimes to fish in the shallow waters of Willow Brook, and watch the ripples turn from gold to purple, and listen to a certain bird that sat singing every day at sunset on the tip of a fir-balsam across the stream—a black and white bird with a rosy pink chest.

So lovely the evening song of this bird that Marque, often watching the girl askance, wondered that the surprising beauty of the melody never caused her to lift her head from book or sewing, or even rise from the table and come out to the doorway to listen.

But she never did; and whether or not the bird's singing appealed to her, he could not determine.

Nobody in the little gossiping hamlet of Caranay seemed to know more than her name; he himself knew only a few people—men who, like himself, worked on the Willett place with hoe and rake and spraying cart and barrow—comrades of roller and mower and weed-fork and mole-trap—dull-witted cullers of dandelion and rose-beetle. And mostly their names were Hiram.

These had their own kind in the female line to "go with"—Caranay being far from the metropolis, and as yet untroubled by the spreading feminine

revolution. Only stray echoes of the doings had as yet penetrated to Caranay daisy fields; no untoward consequences had as yet ensued except that old Si Dinglebat's wife, after reading the remains of a New York paper found on the railroad track, had suddenly, and apparently in a fit of mental aberration, attacked Si with a mop, accompanying the onslaught with the reiterated inquiry: "Air wimmen to hev their rights?"

That was the only manifestation of the welt-weh in Caranay—that and the other welt on Si's dome-like and knobby forehead.

He encountered Marque that evening after supper as that young man, in clean blue jeans, carrying a fish-pole and smoking his pipe, was wandering in circles preparatory to a drift in the general direction of the railroad station.

"Evenin', neighbour!" he said.

"Good evening," said the young man.

"Goin' sparkin'?" inquired Si, overflowing with natural curiosity and tobacco.

"What?"

"Be you goin' a-sparkin'?"

"Nonsense!" said Marque, reddening. "I don't know any girls in Caranay."

"Waal, I cal'late you know that gal down to the depot, don't ye?"

"No, I don't."

"Hey? I'm a leetle deaf."

"No!" shouted Marque, "I don't."

"Don't what?"

"Don't know her, dammit!"

"Aw, quit yer cussin'," said Si, with a gummy wink. "Folks has been talkin' ever since the fustest time you set onto that there platform and that Eden gal

fooled ye with her lookin' glass."

"What are you talking about?" said Marque impatiently.

"Issy Eden and her pretendin' not to see nobody—an' her a lookin' into the leetle glass behind her table and a seein' of ye all the time! I know she kin see because she ketched Hi Orville's boy a-hookin' apples outen the bar'l that—"

"You mean she is able to see *anybody* on the platform," said Marque, confused and astounded.

"You bet she kin. I know because I peeked in the winder an' I seen her a-lookin' at you when you was fishin'——"

But the young fellow had recovered himself: "All right," he interrupted; "that isn't your business or mine. Who gave you that crack on the lid?"

"By gum," he said, "Hetty done it. I was that took! Forty year, and she ain't never throwed s'much as a dish pan at me. I wa'n't lookin' for no sech thing at my time o' life, young man. So when I come in to wash up for supper, I sez to my woman, 'Hello, Het,' sez I, an' she up an' screeched an' fetched me a clip.

"'Lord a'mighty!' sez I. 'Look out what ye doin',' sez I. 'Air wimmen to hev their rights?' sez she, makin' for me some more. 'Is wimmen to be free?' she sez.

"'Yew bet,' sez I, grabbin' onto her. 'I'll make free with ye,' sez I. An' I up an' tuk an' spanked Hetty—the first time in forty year, young man! An' it done her good, I guess, for she ain't never cooked like she cooked supper to-night. God a'mighty, what biscuits them was!"

Marque listened indifferently, scarcely following the details of the domestic episode because his mind was full of the girl at the station and the amazing discovery that all these days she could have seen him perfectly well at any moment if she had chosen to take the trouble, without moving more than her dark, silky lashes. Had she ever taken that trouble? He did not know, of course. He would like to have known.

He nodded absently to the hero of the welt-weh clash, and, pipe in one hand, pole in the other, walked slowly down the road, crossed the track, and seated himself on the platform's edge.

She was at her desk, reading. And the young man felt himself turning red as he realised that, if she had chosen, she could have seen him sitting here every evening with his eyes fixed—yes, sentimentally fixed upon the back of her head and her pretty white neck and the lovely contour of her delicately curved cheek.

All by himself he sat there and blushed, head lowered, apparently fussing with his line and hook and trying to keep his eyes off her, without much success.

His angling methods were simple; he crossed the grass-grown track, set his pole in position, and returned to seat himself on the platform's edge, where he could see his floating cork and—her. Then, as usual, he relapsed into meditation.

If only just once she had ever betrayed the slightest knowledge of his presence in her vicinity he might, little by little, cautiously, and by degrees, have ventured to speak to her.

But she never had evinced the slightest shadow of interest in anything as far as he had noticed.

Now, as he sat there, the burnt out pipe between his teeth, watching alternately his rod and his divinity, the rose-breasted grosbeak began to sing in the pink light of sunset. Clear, pure, sweet, the song rang joyously from the tip of the balsam's silver-green spire. He rested his head on one hand and listened.

The song of this bird, the odour of heliotrope, the ruddy sunlight netting the ripples—these, for him, must forever suggest her.

He had curious fancies about her and himself. He knew that, if she ever did turn and look at him out of those lilac-tinted eyes, he must fall in love with her, irrevocably. He admitted to himself that already he was in love with all he could see of her—the white neck and dull gold hair, the fair cheek's

curve, the glimpse of her hand as she deliberately turned a page in the book she was reading.

But that evening passed as had the others; night came; she lowered her curtain; a faint tracery of lamplight glimmered around the edges; and, as always, he lighted his pipe and took his fish, and shouldered his pole and went home to die the little death we call sleep until the sun of toil should glitter above the eastern hills once more.

A few days later he decided to make an ass of himself, having been sent with a wagon to Moss Centre, a neighbouring metropolis.

First he sent a telegram to himself at Caranay, signing it William Smith. Then he went to the drug store telephone, and called up Caranay.

"Hello! What number, please?" came a far, sweet voice; and Marque trembled: "No number. I want to speak to Mr. Marque—Mr. John Marque."

"He isn't here."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly. I saw him driving one of Mr. Willett's wagons across the track this morning."

"Oh, that's too bad. Could I—might I—ask a little information of you?"

"Certainly."

"What sort of a fellow is this John Marque? He doesn't amount to much I understand."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I might want to employ him, but I don't believe he is the sort of man to trust——"

"You are mistaken!" she said crisply.

"You mean he is all right?"

"Absolutely."

"Honest?"

"Of course."

"Capable?"

"Certainly."

"Sober?"

"Perfectly."

"M-moral?"

"Unquestionably!" she said indignantly.

"Are you sure?"

"I am."

"How do you know?"

"I have means of information which I am not at liberty to disclose. Who is this speaking?"

"William Smith of Minnow Hollow."

"Are you going to take Mr. Marque to Minnow Hollow?"

"I may."

"You can't. Mr. Willett employs him."

"Suppose I offer him better wages——"

"He is perfectly satisfied here."

"But I——"

"No! Mr. Marque does not care to leave Caranay."

"But——"

"I am sorry. It is useless to even suggest it to him. Good-bye!"

With cheeks flushed and a slightly worried expression she resumed her sewing through the golden stillness of the afternoon. Now and then the clank of wagon wheels crossing the metals caused her to glance swiftly into her mirror to see what was going on behind her. And at last she saw Marque drive up, cross the track, then, giving the reins to the boy who sat beside him, turn and walk directly toward the station. And her heart gave a bound.

For the first time he came directly to her window; she saw and heard him, knew he was waiting behind the mignonette and heliotrope, and went on serenely sewing.

"Miss Eden?"

She waited another moment—time enough to place her sewing leisurely on the table. Then, very slowly she turned in her chair and looked at him out of her dark lilac-hued eyes.

He heard himself saying, as in a dream:

"Is there a telegram for me?"

And, as her delicate lifted brows questioned him:

"I am John Marque," he said.

She picked up the telegram which lay on her table and handed it to him.

"Thank you," he said. After he had gone she realised that she had not spoken.

Untitled illustration

XII

WHENEVER he went to Moss Centre with the wagon he telephoned and telegraphed to himself, and about a month after he had begun this idiot performance he ventured to speak to her.

It occurred late in July, just before sunset. He had placed his rod, lighted his pipe, and seated himself on the platform's edge, when, all of a sudden, and without any apparent reason, a dizzy sort of recklessness seized him, and he got up and walked over to her window.

"Good evening," he said.

She looked around leisurely.

"Good evening," she said in a low voice.

"I was wondering," he went on, scared almost to death, "whether you would mind if I spoke to you?"

After a few seconds she said:

"Well? Have you decided?"

Badly frightened, he managed to find voice enough to express his continued uncertainty.

"Why did you care to speak to me?" she asked.

"I—we—you——" and he stuck fast.

"Had you anything to say to me?" she asked in a lower—and he thought a gentler—voice.

"I've a lot to say to you," he said, finding his voice again.

"Really? What about?"

He looked at her so appealingly, so miserably, that the faintest possible smile touched her lips.

"Can I do anything for you, Mr. Marque?"

"If—if you'd only let me speak to you——"

"But I am letting you."

"I mean—to-morrow, too——"

"To-morrow? To-morrow is a very, very long way off. It is somewhere beyond those eastern hills—but a very, very long way off!—as far as the East is from the West. No; I know nothing about to-morrow, so how can I promise anything to anybody?"

"Will your promise cover to-day?"

"Yes. . . . The sun has nearly set, Mr. Marque."

"Then perhaps when to-morrow is to-day you will be able to promise——"

"Perhaps. Have you caught any fish?"

After a moment he said: "How did you know I was fishing? You didn't turn to look."

She said coolly: "How did you know I didn't?"

"You never do."

She said nothing.

At her window, elbows on the sill, the blossoms in her window-box brushing his sunburnt face, he stood, legs crossed, pipe in hand, the sunset wind stirring the curly hair at his temples.

"Did you hear the bird this evening?" he asked.

"Yes. Isn't he a perfect darling!"

Her sudden unbending was so gracious, so sweet that, bewildered, he remained silent for a while, recovering his breath. And finally:

"I never knew whether or not you noticed his singing," he said.

"How could you suppose any woman indifferent to such music?" she asked indignantly. She was beginning to realise how her silence had starved her all these months, and the sheer happiness of speech was exciting her. Into her face came a faint glow like a reflection from the pink clouds above the West.

"That little bird," she said, "sings me awake every morning. I can hear his happy, delicious song above the rushing chorus of dawn from every thicket. He dominates the cheery confusion by the clear, crystalline purity of his voice."

It scarcely surprised him to find himself conversing with a cultivated woman—scarcely found it unexpected that, in her, speech matched beauty, making for him a charming and slightly bewildering harmony.

Her slim hands lay in her lap sometimes; sometimes, restless, they touched her bright hair or caressed the polished instruments on the table before her. But, happy miracle! her face and body remained turned toward him where he stood leaning on her window-sill.

"There is a fish nibbling your hook, I think," she said.

He regarded his bobbing cork vaguely, then went across the track and secured the plump perch. At intervals during their conversation he caught three more.

"Now," she said, "I think I had better say good-night."

"Would you let me give you my fish?"

She replied, hesitating: "I will let you give me two if you really wish to."

"Will you bring a pan?"

"No," she said hastily; "just leave them under my window when you go."

Neither spoke again for a few moments, until he said with an effort:

"I have wanted to talk to you ever since I first saw you. Do you mind my saying so?"

She shook her head uncertainly.

He lingered a moment longer, then took his leave. Far away into the dusk she watched him until the trees across the bridge hid him. Then the faint smile died on her lips and in her eyes; her mouth drooped a little; she rested one hand on the table, rose with a slight effort, and lowered the shade. Listening intently, and hearing no sound, she bent over and groped on the floor for something. Then she straightened herself to her full height and, leaning on her rubber-tipped cane, walked to the door.

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

XIII

HE came every day; and every day, at sundown, she sat sewing by the window behind her heliotrope and mignonette waiting.

Sometimes he caught perch and dace and chub, and she accepted half, never more. Sometimes he caught nothing; and then her clear, humorous eyes bantered him, and sometimes she even rallied him. For it had come to pass in these sunset moments that she was learning to permit herself a friendliness and a confidence for him which was very pleasant to her while it lasted, but, after he had gone, left her with soft lips drooping and gaze remote.

Because matters with her, with them both, she feared, were not tending in the right direction. It was not well for her to see him every day—well enough for him, perhaps, but not for her.

Some day—some sunset evening, with the West flecked gold and the zenith stained with pink, and the pink-throated bird singing of Paradise, and the brook talking in golden tones to its pebbles—some such moment at the end of day she would end all of their days for them both—all of their days for all time.

But not just yet; she had been silent so long, waiting, hoping, trusting, biding her time, that to her his voice and her own at eventide was a happiness yet too new to destroy.

That evening, as he stood at her window, the barrier of mignonette fragrant between them, he said rather abruptly:

"Are you ill?"

"No," she said startled.

"Oh, I am relieved."

"Why did you ask?"

"Because every Tuesday I have seen the doctor from Moss Centre come in here."

In flushed silence she turned to her table and, folding her hands, gazed steadily at nothing.

Marque looked at her, then looked away. The big, handsome young physician from Moss Centre had been worrying him for a long while now, but he repeated, half to himself: "I am very much relieved. I was becoming a little anxious—he came so regularly."

"He is a friend," she said, not looking at him.

He forced a smile. "Well, then, there is no reason for me to worry about you."

"There never was any reason—was there?"

"No, no reason."

"You don't say it cheerfully, Mr. Marque. You speak as though it might have been a pleasure for you to worry over my general health and welfare."

"I think of little else," he said.

There was a silence. Between them, along the barrier of heliotrope and mignonette, the little dusk moths came hovering on misty wings; the sun had set, but the zenith was bright crimson. Perhaps it was the reflection from that high radiance that seemed to tint her face with a softer carmine.

She looked out into the West across the stream, thinking now that for them both the end of things was drawing very near. And, to meet fate half way with serenity—nay, to greet destiny while still far off, with a smile, she unconsciously straightened in her chair and lifted her proud little head.

"Lord Marque," she said quietly, "why do you not go back to England?"

For a moment what she had said held no meaning for him. Then comprehension smote him like lightning; and, thunderstruck, he remained as he was without moving a muscle, still resting against her window-sill, his lean, sun-browned face illuminated under the zenith's fiery glory.

"Who are you?" he said, under his breath.

"Only an English girl who happened to have seen you in London."

"When?"

She turned deliberately and, resting one arm across the back of her chair, looked him steadily in the eyes.

"I am twenty-five. Since I was twenty your face has been familiar to me."

They exchanged a long and intent gaze.

"I never before saw you," he said.

"Perhaps."

"Have I?"

"Who can know what a fashionable young man really looks at—through a monocle."

"I don't wear it any more. I lost it out West," he said, reddening.

"You lost your top hat once, too," she said.

He grew red as fire.

"So you've heard of that, too?"

"I saw it."

"You! Saw me attacked?" he demanded angrily, while the shame burnt hotter on his cheeks.

"Yes. You ran like the devil."

For a moment he remained mute and furious; then shrugged: "What was I to do?"

"Run," she admitted. "It was the only way."

He managed to smile. "And you were a witness to that?"

She nodded, eyes remote, her teeth nipping at the velvet of her underlip. He, too, remained lost in gloomy retrospection for a while, but finally looked up with a more genuine smile.

"I wonder whatever became of that fleet-footed girl who hung to my heels long after the more solidly constructed aristocracy gave up?"

"Lady Diana Guernsey?"

"That's the one. What became of her?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because she gave me the run of my life. She was a good sport, that girl. I couldn't shake her off; I took to a taxi and she after me in another; my taxi broke down in the suburbs and I started across country, she after me. And the last I saw of her was just after I leaped a hedge and she was coming over it after me—a wonderful athletic young figure in midair silhouetted against the sky line. . . . That was the last I saw of her. I fancy she must have pulled up dead beat—or perhaps she came a cropper."

"She did," said the girl in a low voice.

"Is that so?" he said, interested. "Hope it didn't damage her."

"She broke her thigh."

"Oh, that's too bad!" he exclaimed. "If I'd guessed any such thing I'd have come back. . . . The poor little thing! I mean that, though she was nearly six feet, I seem to think of her as little—and, of course, I'm six—two and a half. . . . Good little sport, that Diana girl! She got over it all right, I hope."

"It lamed her for life, Lord Marque."

Shocked, for a moment he could find no words to characterise his feelings. Then:

"Oh, dammitall! I say, it's a rotten shame, isn't it? And all on account of me—that superb young thing taking hedges like a hunter! Oh, come now, you know I—it hurts me all the way through. I wish I'd let her catch me! What would she have done to me? I wouldn't mind being pulled about a bit—or

anything—if it would have prevented her injury. By gad, you know, I'd even have eaten her plum cake, frosting and all, to have saved her such a fate."

The girl's eyes searched his. "That was not the most tragic part of it, Lord Marque."

"God bless us! Was there anything more?"

"Yes. . . . She was in love with you."

"With—with *me*?" he repeated, bewildered.

"Yes. As a young, romantic girl she fell in love with you. She was a curious child—like all the Guernseys, a strange mixture of impulse and constancy, of romance and determination. If she had fallen in love with Satan she would have remained constant. But she only fell in love with young Marque. . . . And she loves him to this day."

"That—that's utterly impossible!" he stammered. "Didn't she become a suffragette and carry a banner and chase me and vow to make me eat my own words frosted on a terrible plum cake?"

"Yes. And all the while she went on loving you."

"How do you know?" he demanded, incredulously.

"She confided in me."

"In *you*!"

"I knew her well, Lord Marque. . . . Not as well as I thought I did, perhaps; yet, perhaps better than—many—perhaps better than anybody. . . . We were brought up together."

"You were her governess?"

"I—attempted to act in a similar capacity. . . . She was difficult to teach—very, very difficult to govern. . . . I am afraid I did not do my best with her."

"Why did you leave her to come here?" he asked.

She made no reply.

"Where is she now?"

She looked out into the cinders of the West, making no answer.

He gazed at her in silence for a long time; then:

"Is she really lame?"

"Yes."

"Very?"

"It is hip disease."

"But—but that can be cured!" he exclaimed. "It is now perfectly curable. Why doesn't she go to Vienna or to New York——"

"She is going."

"She ought to lose no time!"

"She is going. She only learned the nature of her trouble very recently."

"You mean she has been lame all this time and didn't know what threatened her?"

"She was—too busy to ask. Finally, because she did not get well, she called in a physician. But she is a very determined girl; she refused to believe what the physician told her—until—very recently——"

"See here," he said, "are you in constant communication with her?"

"Constant."

"Then tell her you know me. Tell her how terribly sorry I am. Tell—tell her that I'll do anything to—to—tell her," he burst out excitedly, "that I'll eat her plum cake if that will do her any good—or amuse her—or anything! Tell her to bake it and frost it and fill it full of glue, for all I care—and express it to you; and I'll eat every crumb of that silly speech I made——"

"Wait!" she exclaimed. "Do you realise what you're saying? Do you realise what you're offering to do for a girl—a lame girl—who is already in love with you?"

His youthful face fell.

"By gad," he said, "do you think I ought to marry her? How on earth can I when I'm—I'm dead in love with—somebody myself?"

"You—in love?" she said faintly.

He gazed across the brook at the darkening foliage.

"Oh, yes," he said with a pleasant sort of hopelessness, "but I fancy she cares for another man."

"W-why do you think so?"

"He comes to see her."

"Is that a reason?"

"She won't talk about him."

"When a woman won't talk about a man is it always because she cares for him in *that* way?"

"Isn't it?"

"No."

They had lifted their heads now, facing each other in the violet dusk. Between them the scent of heliotrope grew sweeter. He said:

"I've been all kinds of a fool. For all I know women have as many rights on earth as men have. All I wish is that the plucky girl who took that hedge, banner in hand, were well and happy and married to a really decent fellow."

"But—she loves you."

"And I"—he looked up, encountering her blue eyes—"am already hopelessly in love. What shall I do?"

She said under her breath: "God knows. . . . I can not blame you for not wishing to marry a lame girl——"

"It isn't that!"

"But you wouldn't anyhow——"

"I would if I loved her!"

"You *couldn't*—love a—a cripple! It would not be love; it would be pity——"

He said slowly: "I wish that *you* were that lame girl. Then you'd understand me."

For a while she sat bolt upright, clasped hands tightening in her lap. Then, turning slowly toward him, she said:

"I am going to say good-night. . . . And thank you—for Diana's sake. . . . And I am going to say more—I am going to say good-bye."

"Good-bye! Where are you going?"

"To New York."

"When?"

"Before I see you again."

"There is no train until——"

"I shall drive to Moss Centre."

"Where that—that doctor lives——"

"Yes. I am going to New York with him, Lord Marque."

He stood as though stunned for a moment; then set his teeth, clenched his hands, and pulled himself together.

"I think I understand," he said quietly. "And—I wish you—happiness."

She stretched out her hand to him above the heliotrope.

"I—wish it—to you——" suddenly her voice broke; again her teeth caught at her underlip like a child who struggles with emotion. "You—*don't* understand," she said. "Wait a little while before you—come to any—unhappy—conclusions."

After a moment she made a slight effort to disengage her hand—another—then turned in her chair and dropped her head on the table, her right hand still remaining in his. Presently he released it; and she placed both hands on the edge of the table and her forehead upon them.

"I am coming in," he said.

She straightened up swiftly at his words.

"Please don't!" she said in a startled voice, still tremulous.

But he was gone from the dark window, and, frightened, she bent over, caught up her walking stick, and took one impulsive step toward the door. And stood stock still in the middle of the floor as he entered.

His eyes met hers, fell on the supporting cane; and she covered her face with her left arm, standing there motionless.

"Good God!" he breathed. "*You!*"

She began to cry like a child.

"I didn't want you to know," she wailed. "Oh, I didn't want you to know. I thought there was no use—no hope—until yesterday. . . . I—wanted to go to New York with the doctor and be made all sound and well again b-before—before I let you love me——"

"Oh, Diana—Diana!" he whispered, with his arms around her. "Oh, Diana—Diana—my little girl Diana!"

Which was silly enough, she being six feet—almost as tall as he.

"Turn your back," she whispered. "I want to go to my desk—and I can't bear to have you see me walk."

"You darling——"

"No, no, no! Please let them cure me first. . . . Turn your back."

He kissed her hands, held her at arm's length a second, then turned on his heel and stood motionless.

He heard her move almost noiselessly away; heard a desk open and close; heard the chair by the window move as she seated herself.

"Come here," she said in a curious, choked voice.

He turned, went swiftly to her side.

"Great heavens!" he said. "When did you bake that cake?"

"Y-yesterday."

"Why?"

"B-because I was going away to New York and would never perhaps see you again unless I was entirely cured. And I meant to leave this for you—so you would know that I had followed you even here—so you would know I had made a plucky try at you—through all these months—"

"You—you corker!"

"D-do you really mean it?"

"Mean it! I tell you, Diana, you women put it all over the lords of creation—or any lord ever created! Mean it! You bet I do, sweetness! I'll take back everything I ever said about women. They're *the* real thing in the world! And the best thing for the world is to let them run it!"

"But—dear——" she faltered, lifting her beautiful eyes to him, "if men are going to feel *that* way about it, we won't want to run anything at all. . . . It was only because you wouldn't let us that we wanted to."

He said in impassioned tones:

"Let the bally world run itself, Diana. What do we care—you and I?"

"No," she said, "we don't care now."

Then that rash and infatuated young man, losing his head entirely, drew from his jeans a large jack-knife, and, before she could prevent him, he had sliced off an enormous hunk of plum cake heavily frosted with his own words.

"Don't, dear!" she begged him. "I couldn't ask *that* of you——"

"I will!" he said, and bit into it.

"Don't!" she begged him; "please don't! I haven't had much experience with pastry. It may give you dreadful dreams!"

"Let it!" he said. "What do I care for dreams while you remain real! Diana—Diana—huntress of bigger game than ever fled through the age of fable!"

And he bolted a section of frosting and began to chew vigorously upon another, while she slipped both hands into his, regarding him with tender solicitude.

"Have no fears for me, dearest," he said indistinctly; "fortified by months of pie I dread no food ever prepared by youth and beauty. Even the secret dishes of the Medici——"

"John!"

"W-what, darling?"

"After all—I don't cook so badly."

So, in the gloaming, he swallowed the last crumb and gathered her into his strong young arms, and drew her golden head down close to his.

"Take it from me," he whispered, relapsing into the noble idioms of his adopted country, "you're all to the mustard, Diana; your eats were bully and I liked 'em fine!"

XIV

THE situation in Great Britain was becoming deplorable; the Home Secretary had been chased into the Serpentine; the Prime Minister and a dozen members of Parliament had taken permanent refuge in the vaults of the Bank of England; a vast army of suffragettes was parading the streets of London, singing, cheering, and eating bon-bons. Statues, monuments, palaces were defaced with the words "Votes for Women," and it was not an uncommon sight to see some handsome young man rushing distractedly through Piccadilly pursued by scores of fleet-footed suffragettes of the eugenic wing of their party, intent on his capture for the purposes of scientific propagation.

No young man who conformed to the standard of masculine beauty set by the eugenic suffragettes was safe any longer. Scientific marriage between perfectly healthy people was now a firmly established principle of the suffragette propaganda; they began to chase attractive young men on sight with the avowed determination of marrying them to physically qualified individuals of their own sex and party, irrespective of social or educational suitability.

This had already entailed much hardship; the young Marquis of Putney was chased through Cadogan Place, caught, taken away in a taxi, and married willy-nilly to a big, handsome, strapping girl who sold dumb-bells in the new American department store. No matter who the man might be professionally and socially, if he was young and well-built and athletic he was chased on sight and, if captured, married to some wholesome and athletic young suffragette in spite of his piteous protests.

"We will found," cried Mrs. Blinkerly Dank-some-Hankly triumphantly, "a perfect human race and teach it the immortal principles of woman's rights. So, if we can't persuade Parliament to come out for us, we'll take Parliament by the slack of its degraded trousers, some day, and throw it out!"

This terrible menace delivered in Trafalgar Square was cabled to the *Outlook*, which instantly issued its first extra; and New York, already in the

preliminary throes of a feminine revolution, went wild.

That day the handsome young Governor of New York, attended by his ornamental young Military Secretary in full uniform, had arrived at the Waldorf-Astoria to confer with the attractive young Mayor of the metropolis concerning a bill to be introduced into the legislature, permitting the franchise to women under certain conditions. And on the same day a monster suffragette parade was scheduled.

Some provisions of the proposed measure, somehow or other, had become known to the National Federation of Women; and as the Governor, his Military Secretary, and the Mayor sat in earnest conference in a private room at the Waldorf, the most terrible riot that New York ever saw began on Fifth Avenue just as the head of the parade, led by the suffragette band of 100 pieces, arrived at the hotel.

The Governor, Mayor, and Secretary rushed to the windows; acres of banners waved wildly below; cheer after cheer rent the raw March atmosphere; in every direction handsome young men were fleeing, pursued by eugenists. Under their very windows the shocked politicians beheld an exceedingly good-looking youth seized by several vigorous and beautiful suffragettes, dragged into a taxi, and hurried away toward a scientific marriage, kicking and struggling. This was nothing new, alas. More than one attractive young man had already been followed and spoken to in Manhattan.

Mr. Dill, president of the Board of Aldermen, and the handsomest incumbent of the office that the city ever beheld, had been courted so persistently that, fearful of being picked up, he remained in hiding disguised as a Broadway fortune teller, where the Mayor came at intervals to consult him on pretense of having his palms read.

But now the suffragettes threw off all restraint; men, frightened and confused, were being not only spoken to on Fifth Avenue, but were being seized and forcibly conducted in taxicabs toward the marriage license bureau.

It was a very St. Bartholomew for bachelors.

"John," said the Governor to his capable young Military Secretary, "take off that uniform. I'm going to flee in disguise."

"What does your excellency expect me to flee in—dishabille?" stammered the Military Secretary.

"I don't care what you flee in," said the Governor bluntly; "but I will not have it said that the Governor of the great State of New York was seized by a dozen buxom eugenists and hurried away to become the founder of a physically and politically perfect race of politicians. Get out of those gold-laced jeans!"

"I'll flee disguised as a chambermaid," muttered the handsome, rosy-cheeked young Mayor. And he rang for one.

While the Governor and his Secretary were exchanging clothes they heard the Mayor in the hallway arguing with a large German chambermaid in an earnest and fatherly manner, punctuated by coy screams from the maid.

By and by he came back to the room, perspiring.

"I bought her clothes," he said; "she'll throw them over the transom."

The clothing arrived presently by way of the transom; the Governor and the Secretary tried to aid the Mayor to get into the various sections of clothing, but as they all were bachelors and young they naturally were not aware of the functions of the various objects scattered over the floor.

The Governor picked up a bunch of curls attached to a cup-shaped turban swirl.

"Good heavens!" he said. "The girl has scalped herself for your sake, John!"

"I bought that, too," said the Mayor, sullenly. "Do you know which way it goes on, George?"

They fixed it so that two curls fell down and dangled on either side of his Honour's nose.

Meanwhile the unfortunate Military Secretary had dressed in the top hat and cutaway of the Governor.

He said huskily, "If I can't outrun them they'll catch me and try to start raising statesmen."

"It's your duty to defend me," observed the Governor.

"Yes, with my life, but not with my p-progeny—"

"Then you'd better run faster than you've ever run in all your life," said the Governor coldly.

At that moment there came a telephone call.

"Lady at the desk to speak to the Governor," came a voice.

"Hello, who is it?" asked his excellency coyly.

"Professor Elizabeth Challis!" came a very sweet but determined voice.

At the terrible name of the new President of the National Federation of American Women the Governor jumped with nervousness. Anonymous letters had warned him that she was after him for eugenic purposes.

"What do you want?" he asked tremulously.

"In the name of the Federation I demand that you instantly destroy the draft of that infamous bill which you are preparing to rush through at Albany."

"I won't," said the Governor.

"If you don't," she said, "the committee on eugenics will seize you."

"Let 'em catch me first," he replied, boldly; and rang off.

"Now, John," he said briskly, "as soon as they catch sight of you in my top hat and cutaway they'll start for you. And I advise you to leg it if you want to remain single."

The unfortunate Military Secretary gulped with fright, buttoned his cutaway coat, crammed his top hat over his ears, and gazed fearfully out of the window, where in the avenue below the riot was still in lively progress. Terrified young men fled in every direction, pursued by vigorous and

youthful beauty, while the suffragette band played and thousands of suffragettes cheered wildly.

"Isn't it awful!" groaned the Mayor, arranging the lace cap on his turban-swirl and shaking out his skirts. "The police are no use. The suffragettes kidnap the good-looking ones. Are you ready for the sortie, Governor?"

The Governor in the handsome uniform of his Military Secretary adjusted his sword and put on the gold-laced cap. Then, thrusting the draft of the obnoxious bill into the bosom of his tunic, he strode from the room, followed by his Secretary and the unfortunate Mayor, who attempted in vain to avoid treading on his own trailing skirts.

"George," said the Mayor, spitting out a curl that kept persistently getting into his mouth every time he opened it, "I'll be in a pickle unless I can reach Dill's rooms. . . . Wait! There's a pin sticking into me——"

"Too late," said the Governor; "it will spur you to run all the faster. . . . Where is Dill's?"

The Mayor whispered the directions, spitting out his curl at intervals when it incommoded him; the Governor walked faster to escape.

Down in the elevator they went, gazed at by terror-stricken bell-hops and scared porters.

As the cheering and band playing grew louder and more distinct the Secretary quailed, but the Governor admonished him:

"You've simply *got* to save me," he said. "*Pro bono publico!* Come on now. Make a dash for a taxi and the single life! One—two—three!"

The next moment the Secretary's top hat was carried away by a brick; the Mayor's turban-swirl went the same way, amid showers of confetti and a yell of fury from a thousand suffragettes who saw in his piteous attempt to disguise himself, by aid of a turban-swirl, an insult to womanhood the world over.

A perfect blizzard of missiles rained on the terrified politicians; the Secretary and the Mayor burst into a frantic canter up Thirty-fourth Street, pursued by a thousand strikingly handsome women. The Governor ran west.

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

XV

THE Governor of the great State of New York was now running up Broadway with his borrowed sword between his legs and his borrowed uniform covered with confetti—footing it as earnestly as though he were running behind his ticket with New York County yet to hear from.

After him sped bricks, vegetables, spot-eggs, and several exceedingly fashionable suffragettes, their perfectly gloved hands full of horsewhips, banners, and farm produce.

But his excellency was now running strongly; one by one his eager and beautiful pursuers gave up the chase and fell out, panting and flushed from the exciting and exhilarating sport, until, at Forty-second Street, only one fleet-footed young girl remained at his heels.

The order of precedence then shifted as follows: First, the young and handsome Governor running like a lost dog at a fair and clutching the draft of the obnoxious bill to his gold-laced bosom; second, one distractingly lovely young girl, big, wholesome-looking, athletic, and pink of cheeks, swinging a *ci-devant* cat by the tail as menacingly as David balanced the loaded sling; third, several agitated policemen whistling and rapping for assistance; fourth, the *hoi polloi* of the *Via Blanca*; fifth, a small polychromatic dog; sixth, the idle wind toying carelessly with the dust and refuse and hats and skirts of all Broadway.

"Only one fleet-footed young girl remained at his heels."

This municipal dust storm, mingling with the brooding metropolitan gasoline fog, produced a sirocco of which no Libyan desert needed to be ashamed; and it alternately blotted out and revealed the interesting Marathonian procession, until one capricious and suffocating flurry, full of whirling newspapers and derbies, completely blotted out the Governor and the young lady at his heels.

And when, a moment later, the miniature tornado had subsided into a series of playful sidewalk eddys, only the policemen, the hoi polloi, and the dog were still going; the Governor and the beautiful suffragette had completely disappeared.

They had, it is true, chosen a very good time and place for such an occult performance; Long Acre at its busiest.

Several mounted policemen had now joined in the frantic festivities. They galloped hurriedly in every direction. The crowd cheered and pursued the police, the small dog barked in eddying circles till he resembled an expiring pinwheel.

Meanwhile a curious thing had occurred; the youthful Governor was now chasing the suffragette. It occurred abruptly, and in the following manner:

No sooner had the dust cloud spread a momentary fog around the radiant young man—like a hurricane eclipse of the sun—than he darted into the narrow and dark hallway of an old-fashioned office building devoted to theatrical agencies, all-night lawyers, and "astrologists," and started up the stairs. But his unaccustomed sword tripped him up, and as he fell flat with a startling outcrash of accoutrements, there came a flurry of delicately perfumed skirts, the type-written papers were snatched from his gloved hands, and the perfumed skirts went scurrying away through the dusky corridor which ought to have opened on the next cross street. And didn't.

After her ran the Governor, now goaded to courage by the loss of his papers, and she, finding herself in a cul-de-sac, turned at bay, launched the cat at his head, and attempted to spring past him. But he caught the whirling feline in one white-gloved hand and barred her way with the other; and she turned once more in desperation to seek an egress which did not exist.

A flight of precipitate and rickety stairs led upward into an obscurity rendered deeper by a single gas jet burning low on the landing above.

Up this she sprang, two at a time, the young man at her heels; up, up, passing floor after floor, until a dirty skylight overhead warned her that the race was ending.

On the top corridor there was a door ajar; she sprang for it, opened it, tried to slam and lock it behind her, then, exhausted, she shrank backward into the room and sank into a red velvet chair, holding the bunch of papers tightly to her heaving breast.

There was another chair—a gilt one. Into it fell his excellency, gasping, speechless, his spurred and booted legs trailing, his borrowed uniform all over confetti and dust from his tumble on the stairs.

Minute after minute elapsed as they lay there, fighting for breath, watching each other.

She was the first to stir; and instantly he dragged himself to his feet, staggered over to the door, locked it, dropped the key into his pocket, returned to his chair, and collapsed once more.

After a few moments he glanced down at the cat which he was still clutching. A slight shiver passed over him, then, as he inspected it more closely, over his features crept an ironical smile.

For the cat was not even a *ci-devant* cat; it had never been a cat; it was only an imitation of a defunct one made out of floss and chenille, like a teddy-bear; and he smiled at her scornfully and dangled it by its black and white tail.

"Pooh," he panted; "I suppose even your bricks and vegetables and eggs were cotillion favours full of confetti."

"They were," she admitted defiantly. "Which did not prevent their serving their purposes."

"As what?"

"As symbols!"

"Symbols?" he retorted in derision.

"Yes, symbols! The three most ancient symbols of an insulted people's fury—the egg, the turnip, and the cat."

"*Mala gallina, malum ovum*," he laughed, adjusting his sword and picking several streamers of confetti from his tunic. "Did they hurl spot-eggs in ancient Rome, fair maid?"

"They did; and cats—*ex necessitate rei*," she observed with composure.

"*Ex nihilo felis fit*—a cat-fit for nothing," he retorted, flippantly.

Half disdainfully she straightened out the slight disorder of her own apparel, still breathing fast, and keeping tight hold of the bundle of papers.

"How soon are you going to let me have them?" he asked good-humouredly.

"Never."

"I can't permit you to leave this room until you hand them to me."

"Then I shall never leave this room."

"You certainly shall not leave it until I have those papers."

"Then I'll remain here all my life!" she said defiantly.

"What do you expect to do when the people who live here return?"

She shrugged her pretty shoulders, and presently cast an involuntary and uneasy glance around the room.

It was not a place to reassure any girl; gilt stars were pasted all over walls and ceilings, where also a tinsel sun and moon appeared. The constellations were interspersed with bats.

The remaining decorations consisted of a cozy corner, some pasteboard trophies, red cotton velvet hangings, several plaster casts of human hands, and a frieze of half-burnt cigarettes along the mantel-edge.

"Are you going to give me those papers?" he repeated, secretly amused.

"No."

"What do you expect to do with them?"

"Deliver them to Professor Elizabeth Challis, President of the National Federation of Independent Women of America."

"Is this a private enterprise of yours," he asked curiously, "or just a—a playful impulse, or the militant fruition of a vast and feminine conspiracy?"

She smiled slightly.

"I suppose you mean to be impertinent, but I shall not evade answering you, Captain Jones. I am acting under orders."

"Betty's?" he inquired, flippantly.

"The orders of Professor Elizabeth Challis," she said, with heightened colour.

"Exactly. It *is* a conspiracy, then, complicated by riot, assault, disorderly conduct, and highway robbery— isn't it?"

"You may call it what you choose."

"Oh, I'll leave that to the courts."

She said disdainfully: "We recognize no laws in the making of which we have had no part."

"There's no use in discussing that," said the Governor blandly; "but I'd like to know what you suffragettes find so distasteful in that proposed bill which the Mayor and—and the Governor of New York have had drafted."

"It is reactionary—a miserable subterfuge—a treacherous attempt to return to the old order of things! A conspiracy to re-shackle, re-enslave American womanhood with the sordid chains of domestic cares! To drive her back into the kitchen, the laundry, the nursery—back into the dark ages of dependence and acquiescence and non-resistance—back into the degraded epochs of sentimental relations with the tyrant man!"

She leaned forward in her excitement and her sable boa slid back as she made a gesture with her expensive muff.

"Once," she said, "woman was so ignorant that she married for love! Now the national revolt has come. Neither sentiment nor impulse nor emotion

shall ever again play any part in our relations with man!"

He said, trying to speak ironically: "That's a gay outlook, isn't it?"

"The outlook, Captain Jones, is straight into a glorious millennium. Marriage, in the future, is to mean the regeneration of the human race through cold-blooded selection in mating. Only the physically and mentally perfect will hereafter be selected as specimens for scientific propagation. All others must remain unmated—*pro bono publico*—and so ultimately human imperfection shall utterly disappear from this world!"

Her pretty enthusiasm, her earnestness, the delicious colour in her cheeks, began to fascinate him. Then uneasiness returned.

"Do you know," he said cautiously, "that the Governor of New York has received anonymous letters informing him that Professor Elizabeth Challis considers him a proper specimen for the—the t-t-terrible purposes of s-s-scientific p-p-propagation?"

"Some traitor in our camp," she said, "wrote those letters."

"It—it isn't true, then, is it?"

"What isn't true?"

"That the Governor of the great State of New York is in any danger of being seized for any such purpose?"

She looked at him with a curious veiled expression in her pretty eyes, as though she were near-sighted.

"I think," she said, "Professor Challis means to seize him."

The Governor gazed at her, horrified for a moment, then his political craft came to his aid, and he laughed.

"What does she look like?" he inquired. "Is she rather a tough old lady?"

"No; she's young and—athletic."

"Barrel-shaped?"

"Oh, she's as tall as the Governor is—about six feet, I believe."

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed, paling.

"Six feet," she repeated carelessly; "rowed stroke at Vassar; carried off the standing long jump, pole vault, and ten-mile swimming——"

"This—this is terrible," murmured the young man, passing one gloved hand over his dampening brow. Then, with a desperate attempt at a smile, he leaned forward and said confidentially:

"As a matter of fact, just between you and me, the Governor is an invalid."

"Impossible!" she retorted, her clear blue eyes on his.

"Alas! It is only too true. He's got a very, very rare disease," said the young man sadly. "Promise you won't tell?"

"Y-yes," said the girl. Her face had lost some of its colour.

"Then I will confide in you," said the young man impressively. "The Governor is threatened with a serious cardiac affection, known as Lamour's disease."

She looked down, remained silent for a moment, then lifted her pure gaze to him.

"Is that true—Captain Jones?"

"As true as that I am his Military Secretary."

Her features remained expressionless, but the colour came back as though the worst of the shock were over.

"I see," she said seriously. "Professor Challis ought to know of this sad condition of affairs. I have heard of Lamour's disease."

"Indeed, she ought to be told at once," he said, delighted. "You'll inform her, won't you?"

"If you wish."

"Thank you! *Thank* you!" he said fervently. "You are certainly the most charmingly reasonable of your delightful sex. The Governor will be tremendously obliged to you——"

"Is the Governor—are his—his affections—to use an obsolete expression—fixed upon any particular——"

"Oh, no!" he said, smiling; "the Governor isn't in love—except—er—generally. He's a gay bird. The Governor never, in all his career, saw a single specimen of your sex which—well, which interested him as much—well, for example," he added in a burst of confidence, "as much even as you interest me!"

"Which, of course, is not at all," she said, laughing.

"Oh, no—no, not at all——" he hesitated, biting his moustache and looking at her.

"I'll tell you one thing," he said; "if the Governor ever did get entirely well—er—recovered—you know what I mean?"

"Cured of his cardiac trouble?—this disease known as Lamour's disease?"

"Exactly. If he ever did recover, he—I'm quite sure he would be——" and here he hesitated, gazing at her in silence. As for her, she had turned her head and was gazing out of the window.

"I wonder what your name is?" he said, so naïvely that the colour tinted even the tip of the small ear turned toward him.

"My name," she said, "is Mary Smith. Like you, I am Militant Secretary to Professor Elizabeth Challis, President of the Federation of American Women."

"I hope we will remain on pleasant terms," he ventured.

"I hope so, Captain Jones."

"Non-combatants?"

"I trust so."

"Even f-friends?"

She bent her distractingly pretty head in acquiescence.

"Then you'll give me back the papers?"

"I'm sorry."

"Sorry for taking them?"

"No, sorry for keeping them."

"You don't mean to say that you are going to keep them, Miss Smith?"

"I'm afraid I must. My duty forces me to deliver them to Professor Challis."

"But why does this terrible and strapping young lady desire to swipe the draft of this bill?"

"Because it contains the evidence of a wicked conspiracy between the Governor of New York, the Mayor of this city, and an abandoned legislature. The women of America ought to know what threatens them before this bill is perfected and introduced. And before they will permit it to be debated and passed they are determined to march on Albany, half a million strong, as did the heroines of Versailles!"

She stretched out her white gloved hand with an excited but graceful gesture; he eyed her moodily, swinging the chenille cat by its fluffy tail.

"What do they suspect is in that bill?" he said at last.

"We are not yet perfectly sure. We believe it is an insidious attempt to sow dissension in the ranks of our sex—a bill cunningly devised to create jealousy and unworthy distrust among us—an ingenious and inhuman conspiracy to disorganize the National Federation of Free and Independent Women."

"Nonsense," he said. "The bill, when perfected, is designed to give you what you want."

"What!"

"Certainly; votes for women."

"On what terms?" she asked, incredulously.

"Terms? Oh, no particular terms. I wouldn't call them 'terms,'" he said craftily; "that sounds like masculine dictation."

"It certainly does."

"Of course. There are no terms in it. It's a—a sort of a civil service idea—a kind of a qualification for the franchise——"

"Oh!"

"Yes," he continued pleasantly, "it a—er—suggests that a vote be accorded to any woman who, in competition with others of that election district, passes the examinations——"

"*What* examinations?"

He twirled the cat carelessly.

"Oh, the examination papers are on various subjects. One is chemistry."

"Chemistry?"

"Yes—that part of organic chemistry which includes the scientific preparation of—er—food."

Her eyes flashed; he twirled the cat absently.

"Yes," he said, "chemistry is one of the subjects. Physics is another—physical phenomena."

"What kind?"

"Oh, the—the proposition that nature abhors a vacuum. You're to prove it—you're given a certain area—say a bed-room full of dust. Then you apply to it——"

"I see," she said; "you mean we apply to it a vacuum cleaner, don't you?"

"Or," he admitted courteously, "you may solve it through the science of dynamics——"

"Of course—using a broom." Her eyes were beautiful but frosty.

"Do you know," he said, as pleasantly as he dared, "that you, for instance, would be sure to pass."

"Because I'm intelligent enough to comprehend the subtleties of this—bill?"

"Exactly." He swung the cat in a circle.

"Thank you. And what else do these examination papers contain?"

"Physics mostly—the properties of solid bodies. For example, you choose a button—any ordinary button," he explained frankly, as though taking her into his confidence; "say, for instance, the plain bone button of commerce ——"

"And sew it onto some masculine shirt," she nodded as he sank back apparently overcome with admiration at her intelligence. "And that," she added, "no doubt is intended to illustrate the phenomenon of adhesion."

"You are perfectly correct," he said with enthusiasm.

"What else is there?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing—nothing very much. A few experiments in bacteriology——"

"Sterilizing nursing bottles?"

"How on earth did you ever guess?" he cried, overwhelmed, but perfectly alert to the kindling anger in her blue eyes. "Why, of course that is it. It is included in the science of embryotics——"

"What science?"

"Embryotics. For instance, you take an embryo of any kind—say a—a baby. Then you show exactly how to dress, undress, wash, feed, and finally bring that baby to triumphant maturity. It's interesting, isn't it, Miss Smith?"

She said nothing. He twirled the cat furiously until its tail gave way and it flew into a corner.

"Captain Jones," she said, "as I understand it, this bill is a codified conspiracy to turn every woman of this State into a—a washer of clothes, a cleaner of floors, a bearer of children—and a Haus-frau!"

"I—I would not put it *that* way," he protested.

"And her reward," she went on, not noticing his interruption, "is permission to vote—to use the inalienable liberty with which already Heaven has endowed her."

Tears flashed in her eyes; she held her small head proudly and not one fell.

"Captain Jones," she said, "do you realize what centuries of suppression are doing to my sex? Do you understand that woman is degenerating into an immobility—an inertia—a molluskular condition of receptive passivity which is rendering us, year by year, more unfitted to either think or act for ourselves? Even in the matter of marriage we are not permitted by custom to assume the initiative. We may only shake our heads until the man we are inclined toward asks us, when he is entirely ready to ask. Then, like a row of Chinese dolls, we nod our heads. I tell you," she said, tremulously, "we are becoming like that horrid, degenerate, wingless moth which is born, mates, and dies in one spot—a living mechanical incubator—a poor, deformed, senseless thing that has through generations lost not only the use, but even the rudiments of the wings which she once possessed. But the male moth flies more strongly and frivolously than ever. There is nothing the matter with the development of *his* wings, Captain Jones."

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

XVI

It was now growing rather dark in the room.

"I'm terribly sorry you feel this way," he said.

She had averted her eyes and was now seated, chin in hand, looking out of the window.

"Do you know," he said, "this is a rotten condition of affairs."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"This attitude of women."

"Is it more odious than the attitude of men?"

"After all," he said, "man is born with the biceps. He was made to do the fighting."

"Not all of the intellectual fighting."

"No, of course not. But—you don't want him to rock the cradle, do you?"

"Cradles are no longer rocked, Captain Jones. I don't think *you* would be qualified to pass this examination with which you menace us."

He began to be interested. She turned from the window, saw he was interested, hesitated, then:

"I wish I could talk to you—to such a man as you seem to be—sensibly, without rancour, without personal enmity or prejudice——"

"Can't you?"

"Why, yes. *I* can. But—I am not sure what *your* attitude——"

"It is friendly," he said, looking at her. "I am perfectly hap—I mean willing to listen to you. Only, sooner or later, you must return to me those papers."

"Why?"

"The Governor entrusted them to me officially——"

She said smiling: "But you—your Governor I mean—can frame another similar bill."

"I'm a soldier in uniform," he said dramatically. "My duty is to guard those papers with my life!"

"I am a soldier, too," she said proudly, "in the Army of Human Progress."

"Very well," he said, "if you regard it that way."

"I do. Only brute violence can deprive me of these papers."

"That," he said, "is out of the question."

"It is no more shameful than the mental violence to which you have subjected us through centuries. Anyway, you're not strong enough to get them from me."

"Do you expect me to seize you and twist your arm until you drop those papers?"

"You can never have them otherwise. Try it!"

He sat silent for a while, alternately twisting his moustache and the cat's tail. Presently he flung the latter away, rose, inspected the stars on the wall, and then began to pace to and fro, his gloved hands behind his back, spurs and sword clanking.

"It's getting late," he said as he passed her. Continuing his promenade he added as he passed her again. "I've had no luncheon. Have you?"

He poked around the room, examining the fantastic furnishings in all their magnificence of cotton velvet and red cheesecloth.

"If this is Dill's room it's a horrible place," he thought to himself, sitting down by a table and shuffling a pack of cards.

"Shall I cast your horoscope?" he asked amiably. "Here's a chart."

"No, thank you."

Presently he said: "It's getting beastly cold in this room."

"Really!" she murmured.

He came back and sat down in the gilded chair. It was now so dusky in the room that he couldn't see her very plainly.

So he folded his arms and abandoned himself to gloomy patience until the room became very dark. Then he got up, struck a match, and lighted the gas.

"By Jupiter!" he muttered, "I'm hungry."

For nearly five minutes she let the remark go apparently unnoticed. But the complaint he had made is the one general and comprehensive appeal that no woman ever born can altogether ignore. In the depths of her something always responds, however faintly. And in the soul of this young girl it was answering now—the subtle, occult response of woman to the eternal and endless need of man—hunger of one kind or another.

"I'm sorry," she said, so sincerely that the sweetness in her voice startled him.

"Why—why, do you know I believe you really are!" he said in grateful surprise.

"I am a great many things that you have no idea I am," she said, smiling.

"What is one of them?"

"I'm afraid I'm a—a fool."

She came forward and stood looking at him.

"I've been thinking," she said, "that I can do you no kinder service than to destroy those papers and let you go home."

For a moment he thought she was joking, then something in her expression changed his opinion and he took a step forward, eyes fixed on her face.

"Yes," he said, "it would be the kindest thing you can do for me. Shall I tell you why? It's because I'm hopelessly near-sighted. I wear glasses when I'm alone in my study, where nobody can see me."

"What in the world has *that* to do with my leaving you?" she asked, colouring up.

"Suffragettes would never marry a near-sighted man, would they?"

"They ought not to."

"*You* wouldn't, would you?"

"Why do you ask—such a thing?"

"I want to know."

"But how does your myopia concern *me*?" she said faintly.

"*Couldn't* it—ever?" he asked, reddening.

"No," she said, turning pale.

"Then we'd better not stay here; and I'm going to be as generous as you are," he said, advancing toward her. "I'm going to let you go home."

She backed away, thrusting the papers behind her; his arm slipped around her, after them, strove to grasp them, to hold and restrain her, but there was a strength in her tall, firm young body which matched his own; she resisted, turned, twisted, confronted him with high colour, and lips compressed, and they came to a deadlock, breathing fast and irregularly.

Again, coolly, dexterously, he pitted his adroitness, then his sheer strength against hers; and it came again to a deadlock.

Suddenly she crook'd one smooth knee inside of his; her arms slid around him like lightning; he felt himself rising into the air, descending—there came a crash, a magnificent display of ocular fireworks, and nothing further concerned him until he discovered himself lying flat on the floor and heard somebody sobbing incoherencies beside him.

He was mean enough to keep his eyes shut while she, on her knees beside him, slopped water on his forehead and begged him to speak to her, and told him her heart was broken and she desired to die and repose in mortuary simplicity beside him forever.

Certain terms she employed in addressing what she feared were only his mortal remains caused him to prick up his ears. He certainly was one of the meanest of men.

"Dear," she sobbed, "I—I have l-loved you ever since your lithographs were displayed during the election! Only speak to me! Only open those beloved eyes! I don't care whether they are near-sighted! Oh, please, please wake up!" she cried brokenly. "I'll give you back your papers. What do I care about that old bill? I'm p-perfectly willing to do all those things! Oh, oh, oh! How conscience does make Haus-fraus of us all!"

His meanness now became contemptible; he felt her trembling hands on his brow; the fragrant, tearful face nearer, nearer, until her hot, flushed cheeks and quivering lips touched his. And yet, incredible as it seems, and to the everlasting shame of all his sex, he kept eyes and mouth shut until a lively knocking on the door brought him bolt upright.

She uttered a little cry and shrank away from him on her knees, the tears glimmering in her startled and wide open eyes.

"Good heavens, darling!" he said seriously; "how on earth are we going to explain this?"

They scrambled hastily to their feet and gazed at each other while kicks and blows began to rain on the door.

"I believe it's Dill," he whispered; "and I seem to hear the Mayor's voice, too."

"Help! Help! For heaven's sake!" screamed the Mayor, "let us in, George! There's a mob of suffragettes coming up the stairs!"

The Governor unlocked the door and jerked it open, just as several unusually beautiful girls seized Mr. Dill and the Military Secretary.

The Mayor, however, rushed blindly into the room, his turban-swirl was over one eye, his skirt was missing, his apron hung by one pin.

He ran headlong for a sofa and tried to scramble under it, but lovely and vigorous arms seized his shins and drew him triumphantly forth.

"Hurrah!" they cried delightedly, "we have carried the entire ticket!"

"Hurrah!" echoed a sweet but tremulous voice, and a firm young arm was slipped through the Governor's.

He turned to meet her beautiful, level gaze.

"Check!" she said.

"Make it check-mate," he said steadily.

"Mate *you*?"

"Will you?"

She bent her superb head a moment, then lifted her splendid eyes to his.

"Of course I will," she said, as steadily as her quickening heart permitted. "Why do you suppose I ran after you?"

"Why?" whispered that infatuated man.

"Because," she said, naïvely, "I was afraid some other girl would get you. . . . A girl never can be sure what another girl might do to a man. . . . And I wanted you for myself."

"Thank God," he said, "that six-foot Professor Challis will never get me, anyway."

She bent her adorable face close to his.

"Your excellency," she murmured, "*I* am Professor Challis!"

At that instant a pretty and excited suffragette dashed up the stairs and saluted.

"Professor," she cried, "all over the city desirable young men are being pursued and married by the thousands! We have swept the State, with Brooklyn and West Point yet to hear from!" Her glance fell upon the Governor; she laughed glee-fully.

"Shall I call a taxi, Professor?" she asked.

An exquisite and modest pride transformed the features of Professor Betty Challis to a beauty almost celestial.

"Let George do it," she said tenderly.

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

XVII

A FEW minutes later, amid a hideous scene of riot, where young men were fleeing distractedly in every direction, where excited young girls were dragging them, struggling and screaming, into cabs, where even the police were rushing hither and thither in desperate search for a place to hide in, the Governor of New York and Professor Elizabeth Challis might have been seen whirling downtown in a taxicab toward the marriage license bureau.

Her golden head lay close to his; his moustache rested against her delicately flushed cheek. A moment later she sat up straight in dire consternation.

"Oh, those papers! The draft of the bill!" she exclaimed. "Where is it?"

"Did you want it, Betty?" he asked, surprised.

"Why—why, no. Didn't you want it, George?"

"I? Not at all."

"Then why on earth did you keep me imprisoned in that room so long if you didn't want those papers?"

He said slowly: "Why didn't you give them up to me if *you* didn't really want them, Betty?"

She shook her pretty head. "I don't know. . . . But I'm afraid it was only partly obstinacy."

"It was only partly that with me," he said.

They smiled.

"I just wanted to detain you, I suppose," he admitted.

"George, you wouldn't expect me to match that horrid confession—would you?"

"No, I wouldn't ask it of you."

He laid his cheek against hers and whispered: "Darling, do you think our great love justifies our concealing my myopia?"

"George," she murmured, "I think it does. . . . Besides, I'm dreadfully near-sighted myself."

"You!"

"Dear, every one of us has got *something* the matter with her. Miss Vining, who caught the Mayor, wears a rat herself. . . . Do you mean to say that men believe there ever was a perfect woman?"

He kissed her slowly. "*I* believe it," he said.

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

XVIII

As the extremes of fashionable feminine costume appear first on Fifth Avenue in late November, and in early December are imitated in Harlem, and finally in January pervade the metropolitan purlieus, so all the great cities of the Union, writhing in the throes of a fashionable suffragette revolution, presently inoculated the towns; and the towns infected the villages, and the villages the hamlets, and the hamlets passed the contagion along into the open country, where isolated farms and dicky-birds alone remained uninfected and receptive.

It was even asserted by enthusiastic suffragettes that flocks of feminine dicky-birds had begun to assault masculine birds of the same variety; and that the American landscape was full of agitated male birds, lacking rear plumage, flying distractedly in every direction or squatting disconsolately in lonely trees, counting their tail feathers.

Mr. Borroughs and our late great President were excitedly inclined to believe it, but the most famous and calm of explorers, who had recently returned from exile to his camp on top of Mt. McKinley, warned the scientific world on a type-writer not to credit anything that anybody said until he had corroborated it in the magazines. And he left that week for another trip to the pole to find out what the attitude of the polecats might be concerning the matter in question.

Meanwhile the cities were full of trouble and forcibly selected bridegrooms. From 60,000 marriages recorded in New York City for the twelve months of the previous year, in the few months of the eugenic revolution the number of weddings had reached the enormous figures of 180,000, not including Flatbush.

Thousands and thousands of marriageable young men were hiding in their clubs or in the shrubbery of Central Park, waiting for a chance to make their escape to the country and remain incognito in hay lofts until the eugenic revolution had ended itself in a dazzling display of divorce.

Westchester, the Catskills, and even the country farther north were full of young business men and professional men fleeing headlong from their jobs in Wall Street, Broadway, and Fifth Avenue, and hiring out to farmers and boarding house keepers under assumed names. One could jump a young man out of almost any likely thicket north of the Bronx; they were as plentiful and as shy as deer in the Catskills; corn field, scrub, marsh, and almost any patch of woods in the State, if carefully beaten up, would have yielded at least one or two flocks of skulking young men.

Now, as there was no close season, and marriageable youths in New York City became scarcer, those militant suffragettes devoted to eugenic principles began to make excursions into the suburbs in search of bebies and singles—which had escaped the exciting days of the great Long Acre drive and the bachelors' St. Bartholomew. And, as the April days turned into May days, and the May days into June days, parties of pretty, laughing, athletic girls penetrated farther and farther into the country, joyously rummaging the woods and routing out and scattering into flight the lurking denizens. For every den had its denizen, and Diana roamed the earth once more.

There was excellent sport to be had along the Hudson. Some young ladies went in automobiles; some in yachts; some by train, to points north, where the landscape looked more promising and wilder—but probably not as wild as the startled masculine countenances peering furtively from hillside thickets as some gay camping party of distractingly pretty girls appeared, carrying as excess baggage one clergywoman and a bundle of marriage licenses, with the bridegroom's name represented only by a question mark.

It was on an unusually beautiful day in early June that two briar-mangled and weather-beaten young men, bearing every evidence of Wall Street and excessive fright, might have been seen sitting up like a brace of startled rabbits in a patch of ferns which grew along the edges of a brook at the foot of a charmingly wooded slope among the Westchester hills. In every direction stretched hills, woods, and Italians. The calm remote sky was blue and unvexed by anything except factory smoke; not a sound was visible, not a noise was to be seen.

Bacon was frying unctuously in a pan on the coals beside them; their suit-cases lay near. They sat up in the fern patch, coffee cups suspended, eyes wild, listening intently.

"Brown," whispered Vance, "did you hear anything except the hum of automobiles?"

"I sure did," nodded Brown, craning his neck like a turkey in a briar-patch and glaring around.

"If—if they've got dogs," said Vance, "they'll flush us before—hark! Great guns! *Look* at that bench show!"

Brown's hair rose on end. "They *have* got dogs," he whispered, "a toy bull, a Mexican, a Chow, two Pomms—and, by Jupiter! they've got a marmoset! Look at 'em! Hark! You can hear those unnatural girls laughing! Me for a quick getaway. Come on!"

"They—they may come from some college," faltered Vance; "they may run us down. Shall we trust to our protective colouring and squat close?"

"Do you want to stay here until that miserable Chow comes poking his orange-coloured head into the ferns and laughs at us with his blue tongue?"

Vance wrung his hands, hurling coffee all over Brown in his agonised indecision.

"Good heavens!" he moaned. "I don't *want* to be married! I can't afford it! Do you think those girls can outrun us?"

"If they can," said Brown, "they'll want me more than I want my liberty. Look out! There's their bat-eared bull! See him sniff! The wretched mutt has winded the bacon! We've got to make a break for it now! Come on! Beat it, son!"

Up out of the covert crashed the two young fellows, and went prancing away through the woods, suit-cases in hand. A chorus of excited yelps and barks greeted the racket they made in their flight; a shrill whistle rang out, then a pretty and excited voice:

"Mark! Quick, Gladys! There are two of them! Mark left!"

"Are they any good?" cried Gladys. "Oh, where are they, dear?"

"I only caught a glimpse of them. They looked like fine ones, in splendid condition. Millicent! Quick, where are you?"

"Here!" came a third voice. "Oh, Constance! one is too perfectly splendid for anything! Chow-Chow is at his heels! Look out! Mark right!"

"Run!" panted Constance, leaping a fallen log.

The lovely June woodland was now echoing with the happy cries of the chase, the ki-yi of excited lap-dogs, the breathless voices of the young girls, the heavy crashing racket of stampeding young men rushing headlong through bramble and thicket with a noise like a hurricane amid dead leaves.

Vance's legs, terror weakened, wobbled as he fled; and after ten minutes he took to a tree with a despairing scream.

Brown, looking back from the edge of a mountain pasture, saw the dogs leaping frantically at his friend's legs as he shinned rapidly up the trunk, and disappeared into the clustering foliage; saw three flushed young girls come running up with cries of innocent delight; saw one of them release a slender, black, furry, spidery thing which immediately ran up the tree; heard distracted yells from Vance:

"For heaven's sake, take away that marmoset! I can't bear 'em—I hate 'em, ladies! Ouch! He's all over me! He's trying to get into my pocket! Take him away, for the love of Mike, and I'll come down!"

But Brown waited to hear no more. Horror now lent him her infernal wings; he fairly fluttered across the mountain side, sailed down the farther slope, and into a lonely country road. Along this he cantered, observed only by surprised cattle, until, exhausted, he slackened his pace to a walk.

Rickety fences and the remains of old stone walls flanked him on either hand; the clearings were few, the cultivated patches fewer. He encountered no houses. On a distant hillside stood a weather-beaten barn, the sky shining blue through its roof rafters.

Beyond this the road forked; one branch narrowed to a grassy cattle path and presently ended at a pair of bars. Inside the bars was a stone barn;

beside the barn a house of the century before last—a low, square stone house, half stripped of its ancient stucco skin, a high-roofed one-story affair, with sagging dormers peering from the slates and little oblong loop-holes under the eaves, from which the straw of birds' nests fluttered in the breeze.

Surely this ancient place, even if inhabited—as he saw it was—must be sufficiently remote from the outer world to insure his safety. For here the mountain road ended at the barn-yard bars; here the low wooded hills walled in this little world of house, barn, and orchard, making a silent, sunny place under the blue sky, sweet with late lilac bloom and the hum of bees. No factory smoke was visible, no Italians.

He looked at the aged house. A black cat sat on the porch thoughtfully polishing her countenance with the back of one paw. Three diminutive parti-coloured kittens frisked and rolled and toddled around her; and occasionally she seized one and washed it energetically against the grain.

Brown looked at the door with its iron knocker, at the delicately spread fan-light over it, at the side-lights, at the half-pillars with their Ionic capitals, at the ancient clumps of lilacs flanking the stone step—great, heavy-stemmed and gnarled old bushes now all hung with perfumed clusters of palest lavender bloom.

Leaning there on the picket fence he inhaled their freshness, gazing up into the sunny foliage of the ancient trees, elms, maples, and one oak so aged and so magnificent that, awed, his eyes turned uneasily again toward the house to reassure himself that it was still inhabited.

Cat and kittens were comfortable evidence, also a hen or two loitering near, and the pleasant sound from a dozen bee-hives, and a wild rose in a china bowl, dimly visible on an inner window-sill.

There were two characters he might assume; he might go to the back door and request a job; he might bang on the front door with that iron knocker, shaped like a mermaid, and ask for country board.

Of one thing, somehow or other, he was convincing himself; this crumbling house and its occupants knew as much about the recent high-jinks in New York as did the man who built it in the days when loop-holes were an

essential part of local architecture, and the painted Sagamore passed like a spectre through the flanking forests.

So Brown, carrying his suit-case, opened the gate, walked up the path, seized the knocker, and announced himself with resolution.

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

XIX

WHILE he waited the cat looked up at him, curiously but pleasantly. "Hello, old lady," he said; and she arched her back and rubbed lightly against his nigh leg while the kittens tumbled over his shoes and played frantically with the frayed bottoms of his trousers.

This preliminary welcome seemed to comfort him out of all proportion to its significance; he gazed complacently about at the trees and flowers, drew in deep breaths of the lilac's fragrance, and waited, listening contentedly for the coming foot-fall.

He had not heard it when the door opened and a young girl appeared on the threshold, standing with one hand resting on the inner knob; the other touching the pocket of her apron, in which was a ball of yarn stuck through with two needles.

She was slim and red-haired and slightly freckled, and her mouth was perhaps a shade large, and it curled slightly at the corners; and her eyes were quite perfectly made, except that one was hazel-brown and the other hazel-grey.

Hat in hand, Brown bowed; and then she did a thing which interested him; she lifted the edges of her apron between slender white thumbs and forefingers and dropped him the prettiest courtesy he had ever seen off the stage.

"I came to inquire," he said, "whether you ever take summer boarders."

"What are boarders?" she asked. "I never heard of them except in naval battles."

"Thank heaven," he thought; "this is remote, all right; and I have discovered pristine innocence in the nest."

"Modern boarders," he explained politely, "are unpleasant people who come from the city to enjoy the country, and who, having no real homes, pay

farmers to lodge and feed them for a few days of vacation and dyspepsia."

"You mean is this a tavern?" she asked, unsmiling.

"No, I don't. I mean, will you let me live here a little while as though I were a guest, and then permit me to settle my reckoning in accordance with your own views upon the subject?"

She hesitated as though perplexed.

"Suppose you ask your father or mother," he suggested.

"They are absent."

"Will they return this morning?"

"I don't know exactly when they expect to return."

"Well, couldn't you assume the responsibility?" he asked, smiling.

She looked at him for a few moments, and it seemed to him as though, in the fearless gravity of her regard, somehow, somewhere, perhaps in the curled corners of her lips, perhaps in her pretty and unusual eyes, there lurked a little demon of laughter. Yet it could not be so; there were only serenity and a child's direct sweetness in the gaze.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"John Brown 4th."

"Mine is Elizabeth Tennant. Where do you live?"

"In—New York," he admitted, watching her furtively.

"I was there once—at a ball—many years ago," she observed.

"Not *very* many years ago, I imagine," he said, smiling at her youthful reminiscence.

"Many, many years ago," she said thoughtfully. "I shall go again some day."

"Of course," he murmured politely, "it's a thing to do and get done—like going abroad."

She looked up at him quickly.

"Years ago I knew a boy—with your easy humour and your trick of speech. He resembled you otherwise; and he wore your name becomingly."

He tried to recall knowing her in his extreme youth, but made no definite connection.

"You wouldn't remember," she said gravely; "but I think I know you now. Who is your father?"

"My father?" he repeated, surprised and smiling. "My father is John Brown 3rd."

"And his father?"

"My grandfather?" he asked, very much amused. "Oh, he was John Brown 2nd. And *his* father was Captain John Brown of Westchester; but I don't want to talk D. A. R. talk to you about my great grandfather——"

"He fought at Pound Ridge," said the girl, slowly.

"Yes," said Brown, astonished.

"Tarleton's cavalry—the brutal hussars of the legion—killed him on the Stamford Road," she said; "and he lay there in the field all day with one dead arm over his face and his broken pistol in his hand, and the terrible galloping fight drove past down the stony New Canaan road—and the smoke from the meeting house afire rolled blacker and blacker and redder and redder——"

With a quickly drawn breath she covered her face with both hands and stood a moment silent; and Brown stared at her, astonished, doubting his eyes and ears.

The next moment she dropped her hands and looked at him with a tremulous smile.

"What in the world can you be thinking of me?" she said. "Alone in this old house, here among the remoter hills of Westchester. I live so vividly in the past that these almost forgotten tragedies seem very real to me and touch

me closely. To me the present is only a shadow; the past is life itself. Can you understand?"

"I see," he said, intensely relieved concerning her mental stability; "you are a Daughter of the American Revolution or a Society of Colonial Wars or—er—something equally—er—interesting and desirable——"

"I am a Daughter of the American Revolution," she said proudly.

"Exactly," he smiled with an inward shudder. "A—a very interesting—er—and—exceedingly—and—all that sort of thing," he nodded amiably. "Don't take much interest in it myself—being a broker and rather busy——"

"I am sorry."

He looked up quickly and met her strange eyes, one hazel-grey, one hazel-brown.

"I—I'll be delighted to take an interest in anything you—in—er—this Revolutionary business if you—if you don't mind telling me about it," he stammered. "Evenings, now, if you have time to spare——"

She smiled, opened the door wider, and looked humorously down at him where he stood fidgeting on the step.

"Will you come in?" she asked serenely.

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

XX

HE went, first depositing his suit-case on the step outside by the cats, and followed her into a large, comfortable sitting room.

"By jove," he said, "you know this is really mighty pretty! What a corking collection of old furniture! Where in the world did you find—or perhaps this is the original furniture of the place?"

She said, looking around the room as though slightly perplexed: "This furniture was made to order for me in Boston."

"Then it isn't genuine," he said, disappointed. "But it's a very clever imitation of antique colonial. It is really a wonderful copy."

"I don't think it is a copy."

"It certainly doesn't look like it; but it must be if it was made in Boston for you. They're ingenious fellows, these modern makers of colonial furniture. Every antique shop in New York is loaded up with excellent copies of this sort—only not nearly as well done."

She assented, apparently with no very clear understanding of what he meant.

"What a charming setting this old house makes for such things," he said.

She nodded, looking doubtfully at the rag carpet.

"The Manor House was much finer," she observed. "Come to the window and I'll show you where it stood. They were fine folk, the Lockwoods, Hunts, and Fanchers."

They rose and she laid one pretty hand on his sleeve and guided him into a corner of the window, where he could see.

"Hello," he said uneasily, "there is a main travelled road! I thought that here we were at the very ends of civilisation!"

"That is the Bedford road," she said. "Over there, beyond those chestnuts, is the Stamford road. Can you see those tall old poplars? Beyond the elms I mean—there—where the crows are flying?"

"Yes. Eight tall poplars."

"The Manor House stood there. Tarleton burnt it—set it afire with all its beautiful furniture and silver and linen! His hussars ran through it, setting it afire and shooting at the mirrors and slashing the silks and pictures! And when the Major's young wife entered the smoking doorway to try to save a pitiful little trinket or two, an officer—never mind who, for his descendants may be living to-day in England—struck her with the flat of his sword and cut her and struck her to her knees! That is the truth!"

He said politely: "You are intensely interested in—er—colonial and revolutionary history."

"Yes. What else have I to think of—here?"

"I suppose many interesting memories of those times cluster around this old place," he said, violently stifling a yawn. He had risen early and run far. Hunger and slumber contended for his mastery.

"Many," she said simply. "Just by the gate yonder they captured young Alsop Hunt and sent him away to the Provost Prison in New York. In the road below John Buckhout, one of our dragoons, was trying to get away from one of Tarleton's dragoons of the 17th Regiment; and the British trooper shouted, 'Surrender, you damned rebel, or I'll blow your brains out!' and the next moment he fired a bullet through Buckhout's helmet. 'There,' said the dragoon, 'you damned rebel, a little more and I should have blown your brains out!' 'Yes, damn you,' replied John, 'and a little more and you wouldn't have touched me!'"

Brown looked at her amused and astonished to hear such free words slip so eagerly from a mouth which, as he looked at it, seemed to him the sweet mouth of a child.

"Where did *you* ever hear such details?" he asked.

"People told me. Besides, the house is full of New York newspapers. You may read them if you wish. I often do. Many details of the fight are there."

"Reading such things out of old newspapers published at the time certainly must bring those events very vividly before you."

"Yes. . . . It is painful, too. The surprise and rout of Sheldon's 2nd dragoons—the loss of their standard; the capture, wounding, and death of more than two score—and—oh! that young death there in the wheat! the boy lying in the sun with one arm across his face and the broken pistol in his hand! and his wife—the wife of a month—dragging him back to this house—with the sunset light on his dead face!"

"To *this* house?"

She dropped her hand lightly on his shoulder and pointed.

"Tarleton's troopers came stamping and cursing in by that very door after they had burned Judge Lockwood's and the meeting house—but they left her alone with her dead, here on the floor where you and I are standing. . . . She was only seventeen; she died a few months later in child-birth. God dealt very gently with her."

He looked around him in the pleasant light of the room, striving to comprehend that such things had happened in such a sleepy, peaceful place. Sunlight fell through the curtains, casting the wild roses' shadow across the sill; the scent of lilacs filled the silence.

"It's curious—and sad," he said in a low voice. "How odd that I should come here to the very spot where that old ancestor of mine died——"

"He was only twenty when he died," she interrupted.

"I know. But somehow a fellow seems to think of any ancestor as a snuffy old codger——"

"He was very handsome," she said, flushing up.

There was a silence; then she looked around at him with a glint of humour in her pretty eyes—one hazel-brown, one hazel tinged with grey; and the delicious mouth no longer drooped.

"Can't you imagine him as young as you are? gay, humorous, full of mischievous life, and the love of life? something of a dandy in his uniform—and his queue tied smartly à la Française!—gallant—oh, gallant and brave in the dragoon's helmet and jack-boots of Sheldon's Horse! Why, he used to come jingling and clattering into this room and catch his young wife and plague and banter and caress her till she fled for refuge, and he after her, like a pair of school children released—through the bed-rooms, out by the kitchen, and into the garden, till he caught her again in the orchard yonder and held her tight and made her press her palms together and recite:

*I love thee
I love thee
Through all the week and Sunday*

—until for laughing and folly—I—they——"

To his amazement her voice broke; into her strange eyes sprang tears, and she turned swiftly away and went and stood by the curtained window.

"Well, by gad!" he thought, "of all morbid little things! affected to tears by what happened to somebody else a hundred and thirty odd years ago! Women are sure the limit!"

And in more suitable terms he asked her why she should make herself unhappy.

She said: "I *am* happy. It is only when I am here that I am lonely and the dead past lives again among these wooded hills."

"Are you not—usually—here?" he asked, surprised. "I thought you lived here."

"No. I live elsewhere, usually. I am too unhappy here. I never remain very long."

"Then why do you ever come here?" he asked, amused.

"I don't know. I am very happy elsewhere. But—I come. Women do such things."

"I don't exactly understand why."

"A woman's thoughts return eternally to one place and one person. *One* memory is her ruling passion."

"What is that memory?"

"*The Place and the Man.*"

"I don't know what you mean."

"I mean that a woman, in spirit, journeys eternally to the old, old rendezvous with love; makes, with her soul, the eternal pilgrimage back to the spot where Love and she were first acquainted. And, moreover, a woman may even leave the man with whom she is happy to go all alone for a while back to the spot where first she knew happiness because of him. . . . You don't understand, do you?"

Brown was a broker. He did *not* understand.

She looked at him, smiling, sighing a little—and, in spite of her fresh and slender youth—and she was certainly not yet twenty—he felt curiously young and crude under the gentle mockery of her unmatched eyes—one hazel-brown, one hazel tinged with grey.

Then, still smiling wisely, intimately to herself, she went away into an inner room; and through the doorway he saw her slim young figure moving hither and thither, busy at shelf and cupboard. Presently she came back carrying an old silver tray on which stood a decanter and a plate of curious little cakes. He took it from her and placed it on a tip-table. Then she seated herself on the ancient sofa, and summoned him to a place beside her.

"Currant wine," she said laughingly; "and old-fashioned cake. Will you accept—under this roof of mine?"

He was dreadfully hungry; the wine was mild and delicious, the crisp cakes heavenly, and he ate and ate in a kind of ecstasy, not perfectly certain what

was thrilling him most deeply, the wine or the cakes or this slender maid's fresh young beauty.

On one rounded cheek a bar of sunlight lay, gilding the delicate skin and turning the curling strands of hair to coils of fire.

He thought to himself, with his mouth a trifle fuller than convention expects, that he would not wish to resist falling in love with a girl like this. *She* would never have to chase him very far. . . . In fact, he was perfectly ready to be captured and led blushing to the altar.

Once, as he munched away, he remembered the miserable fate of his late companion Vance, and shuddered; but, looking around at the young girl beside him, his fascinated eyes became happily enthralled, and matrimony no longer resembled doom.

"What are these strange happenings in New York of which I hear vague rumours?" she enquired, folding her hands in her lap and looking innocently at him.

His jaw fell.

"Have *you* heard about—what is going on in town?" he asked. "I thought you didn't know."

"They say that the women there are ambitious to govern the country and are even resolved to choose their own husbands."

"Something of that sort," he muttered uneasily.

"That is a very strange condition of affairs," she murmured, brooding eyes remote.

"It's a darned sight worse than strange!" he blurted out—then asked pardon for his inelegant vehemence; but she only smiled dreamily and sipped her currant wine in the sunshine.

"Shall we talk of something pleasanter?" he said, still uneasy, "—er—about those jolly old colonial days. . . . That's rather an odd gown you wear—er—pretty you know—but—*is* it not in the style of—er—those days of—of yore—and all that?"

"It was made then."

"A genuine antique!" he exclaimed. "I suppose you found it in the garret. There must be a lot of interesting things up there behind those flat loop-holes."

"Chests full," she nodded. "We save everything."

He said: "You look wonderfully charming in the costume of those days. It suits you so perfectly that—as a matter of fact, I didn't even notice your dress when I first saw you—but it's a *wonder*!"

"Men seldom notice women's clothes, do they?"

"That is true. Still, it's curious I didn't notice such a gown as that."

"Is it *very* gay and fine?" she asked, colouring deliciously. "I love these clothes."

"They are the garments of perfection—robing it!"

"Oh, what a gallant thing to say to me. . . . Do you truly find me so—so agreeable?"

"Agreeable! You—I don't think I'd better say it——"

"Oh, I beg you!"

"May I?"

"Pray, observe my unmatched eyes."

Her cheeks and lips were brilliant, her eyes sparkling; she leaned a trifle toward him, frail glass in hand.

"May not a pretty woman listen without offense if a gallant man praises her beauty?"

"You *are* exactly that—a beauty!" he said excitedly. "The most bewitching, exquisite, matchless——"

"Oh, I beg of you, be moderate," she laughed—and picked up a fan from somewhere and spread it, laughing at him over its painted edge.

"Pray, observe my unmatched eyes before you speak again of me as matchless."

"Your eyes *are* matchlessly beautiful!—more wonderfully beautiful than any others in all the world!" he cried.

Yet the currant wine was very, very mild.

"Such eyes," he continued excitedly, "are the most strangely lovely eyes I ever saw or ever shall see. Nobody in all the world, except you, has such eyes. I—I am going quite mad about them—about you—about everything. . . I—the plain fact is that I love—such eyes—and—and every harmonious and lovely feature that—that b-b-belongs to them—and to—to *you*!"

She closed her painted fan slowly, slowly left her seat, took from the blue bowl on the window-sill the wild rose blooming there, turned and looked back at him, half smiling, waiting.

He sprang to his feet, scarcely knowing now what he was about; she waited, tall, slender, and fresh as the lovely flower she held.

Then, as he came close to her, she drew the wild rose through the lapel of his coat, and he bent his head and touched his lips to the blossom.

"When she and you—and Love—shall meet at last, you will first know her by her eyes," she began; and the next instant the smile froze on her face and she caught his arm in both hands and clung there, white to the lips.

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

XXI

"LISTEN!" she whispered; "did you hear that?"

"What?" he asked, dazed.

"On the Bedford road! do you hear the horses? Do you hear them running?"

"W-what horses?"

"Tarleton's!" she gasped, pressing her white face between her hands. "Can't you hear their iron scabbards rattle? Can't you hear their bugle horn? Where is Jack? *Where* is Jack?"

A flurry of mellow music burst out among the trees, followed by a loud report.

"Oh, God!" she whispered, "the British!"

Brown stared at her.

"Why, that's only an automobile horn—and their tire just blew out," he began, astonished.

But she sprang past him, calling, "Jack! Jack! Where are you?" and he heard the door fly open and her childish cry of terror outside in the sunshine.

The next second he followed her, running through the hall and out through the door to the porch; and at the same moment a big red touring car came to a standstill before the house; the chauffeur descended to put on a new tire, and a young girl in motor duster and hood sprang lightly from the tonneau to the tangled grass. As she turned to look at the house she caught sight of him.

Brown took an uncertain step forward; and she came straight toward him.

Neither spoke as they met face to face. He looked at her, passed his hand over his eyes, bewildered, and looked again.

She was slim and red-haired and slightly freckled, and her mouth was perhaps a shade large, and it curled slightly at the corners, and her eyes were quite perfectly made except that one was hazel-brown and the other a hazel-grey.

She looked at him, and it seemed to him as though, in the fearless gravity of her regard, somewhere, somehow—perhaps in the curled corners of her lips, perhaps in her pretty and unusual eyes—there lurked a little demon of laughter. Yet it could not be so—there were only serenity and a child's direct sweetness in her gaze.

"I suppose you have come to look at this old-time place?" she said. "People often come. You are perfectly welcome."

And, as he made no answer:

"If you care to see the inside of the house I will be very glad to show it to you," she added pleasantly.

"Is—is it *yours*?" he managed to say, "or—or your sister's?"

She smiled. "You mistake me for somebody else. I have no sister. This is the old Brown place—a very, very old house. It belonged to my great grandmother. If you are interested I will be glad to show you the interior. I brought the key with me."

"But people—relatives of yours—are living there now," he stammered.

"Oh, no," she said, smiling, "the house is empty. We are thinking of putting it in shape again. If you care to come in I can show you the quaint old fireplaces and wainscoting—if you don't mind dust."

She mounted the step lightly and, fitting the key and unlocking the door—which he thought he had left open—entered.

"Come in," she called to him in a friendly manner.

He crossed the threshold to her side and halted, stunned. An empty house, silent, shadowy, desolate, confronted him.

The girl beside him shook out her skirts and glanced at her dusty gloves.

"A vacuum cleaner is what this place requires," she said. "But *isn't* it a quaint old house?"

He pressed his shaking hands to his closed eyes, then forced them to open upon the terrible desolation where *she* had stood a moment since—and saw bare boards under foot, bare walls, cobwebs, dust.

The girl was tiptoeing around the four walls examining the condition of the woodwork.

"It only needs electric lights and a furnace in the cellar and some kalsomine and pretty wall paper——"

She turned to glance back at him, and stood so, regarding him with amused curiosity—for he had dropped on his knees in the dust, groping in an odd blind way for a flower that had just fallen from his coat.

"There are millions of them by the roadside," she said as he stumbled to his feet and drew the frail blossom through his buttonhole with unsteady fingers.

"Yes," he said, "there are other roses in the world." Then he drew a deep, quiet breath and smiled at her.

She smiled, too.

"This was her room," she explained, "the room where she first met her husband, the room into which she came a bride, the room where she died, poor thing. Oh, I forgot that you don't know who *she* was!"

"Elizabeth Tennant," he answered calmly.

"Why—how did *you* know?"

"God knows," he said; and bent his head, touching the petals of the wild rose with his lips. Then he looked up straight into her eyes—one was hazel-brown, one hazel tinged with grey.

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

XXII

As they left the house an hour later, walking down the path slowly, shoulder to shoulder, she said:

"Mr. Brown, I *want* you to like that house."

A sudden and subtly hideous idea glided into his brain.

"*You* don't believe in suffragettes, do you?" he said, forcing a hollow laugh.

"Why, I *am* one. Didn't you know it?"

"*You!*"

"Certainly. Goodness! how you did run! But," she added with innocent satisfaction, "I think I have secured every bit as good a one as the one Gladys chased out of a tree with her horrid marmoset."

Untitled illustration

XXIII

THE Eugenic Revolution might fairly be said to have begun with the ignominious weddings of Messrs. Reginald Willett, James Carrick, De Lancy Smith, and Alphonso W. Green.

Its crisis culminated in the Long Acre riots. But the great suffragette revolution was now coming to its abrupt and predestined end; the reaction, already long overdue, gathered force with incredible rapidity and exploded from Yonkers to Coney Island, in a furious counter-revolution. The revolt of the Unfit was on at last.

Mobs of maddened spinsters paraded the streets of the five boroughs demanding spouses. Maidens of uncertain age and attractions who, in the hysterical enthusiasm of the eugenic revolution, had offered themselves the pleasures of martyrdom by vowing celibacy and by standing aside while physically perfect sister suffragettes pounced upon and married all flawless specimens of the opposite sex, now began to demand for themselves the leavings among the mature, thin-shanked, and bald-headed.

In vain their beautiful comrades attempted to explain the eugenistic principles—to point out that the very essence of the entire cult lay in non-reproduction by the physically unfit, and in the ultimate extinction of the thin, bald, and meagre among the human race.

But thousands and thousands of the love-maddened rose up and denounced the Beauty Trust, demanded a return to the former conditions of fair competition in the open shop of matrimony.

They were timidly encouraged by thousands of middle-aged gentlemen who denied that either excessive meagreness or baldness was hereditary; they even dared to assert that the suffragette revolution had been a mistake, and pointed out that only an average of one in every hundred women had taken the trouble to exercise her privilege at the polls in the recent election, and that ninety per cent. of those who voted marked their ballots wrong or

forgot to mark them at all, or else invalidated them by writing suggestions to the candidates on the backs of the ballots.

A week of terrible confusion ensued, and, in the very midst of it, news came from London that Miss Pondora Bottomly, who, after throwing bricks all day through the back windows of Windsor Castle, had been arrested by a very thin Scotch policeman, had suddenly seized the policeman and married him in spite of his terrified cries.

A shout of protest arose from every human man in the civilised world; a groan of dismay burst from every human woman. It was the beginning of the end; the old order of things was already in sight; men, long hidden, reappeared in public places; wives shyly began to respond to the cautious "good-mornings" of their long ignored husbands, the wealthy and socially desirable but otherwise unattractive plucked up spirits; florists, caterers, modistes, ministers came out of seclusion and began to prowl around the débris of their ruined professions with a view to starting out again in business; and here and there the forgotten art of flirting was furtively resurrected and resumed in the awaking metropolis.

"Perfection," said America's greatest orator on the floor of the Senate, "is endurable only because unattainable. The only things on earth that make this world interesting are its sporting chances, its misfortunes, and its mutts!"

And within a month after the delivery of this classic the American nation had resumed its normal, haphazard aspect. The revolution, the riots on Fifth Avenue and Long Acre, the bachelors' St. Bartholomew were all forgotten; Tammany Hall and the Republican State Organization yawned, stretched, rubbed their eyes, awoke, and sat up licking their hungry chops; the gentlemen in charge of the Bureau of Special Privileges opened the long-locked drawers of that piece of furniture, and looked over the ledgers; trusts, monopolies, systems came out of their cyclone cellars; turf associations dredged the dump-docks for charters, whither a feminine municipal administration had consigned them; all-night cafés, dance-halls, gambling houses reopened, and the electric lights sparkled once more on painted cheeks and tinted lips.

The good old days of yore were returning fast on the heels of the retreat of woman; capital shook hands with privilege; the prices of staples soared; joints, dives, and hospitals were fast filling up; jails and prisons and asylums looked forward to full houses. It was the same old world again—the same dear old interesting, exciting, grafting, murdering, diseased planet, spinning along through space—just as far as usual from other worlds and probably so arranged in order that other worlds might not suffer from its aroma.

And over it its special, man-designed god was expected to keep watch and deal out hell or paradise as the man-made regulations which governed the deity and his abode required.

So once again the golden days of yore began; congregations worshipped in Fifth Avenue churches and children starved on Avenue A; splendid hospitals were erected, palatial villas were built in the country; and department stores paid Mamie and Maud seven dollars a week—but competed in vain, sometimes, with smiling and considerate individuals who offered them more, including enough to eat.

The world's god was back in his heaven; the world would, therefore, go very well; and woman, at last, was returning to her own sphere to mind her own business—and a gifted husband, especially created as her physical and mental lord and master by a deity universally regarded as masculine in sex.

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

LEFT OVER

XXIV

SHE knew so little about the metropolis that, on her first visit, a year before, she had asked the driver of the taxicab to recommend a respectable hotel for a lady travelling alone; and he had driven her to the Hotel Aurora Borealis—that great, gay palace of Indiana limestone and plate glass towering above the maelstrom of Long Acre.

When, her business transacted, she returned to the Westchester farm, still timid, perplexed, and partly stunned by the glitter and noise of her recent metropolitan abode, she determined never again to stop at that hotel.

But when the time came for her to go again the long list of hotels confused her. She did not know one from the other; she shrank from experimenting; and, at least, she knew something about the Aurora Borealis and she would not feel like an utter stranger there.

That was the only reason she went back there *that* time. And the next time she came to town that was the principal reason she returned to the Aurora Borealis. But the next time, she made up her mind to go elsewhere; and in the roaring street she turned coward, and went to the only place she knew. And the time after that she fought a fierce little combat with herself all the way down in the train; and, with flushed cheeks, hating herself, ordered the cabman to take her to the Hotel Aurora Borealis.

But it was not until several trips after that one—on a rainy morning in May—that she found courage to say to the maid at the cloak-room door:

"Who *is* that young man? I always see him in the lobby when I come here."

The maid cast an intelligent glance toward a tall, well-built young fellow who stood pulling on his gloves near the desk.

"Huh!" she sniffed; "he ain't much."

"What do you mean?" asked the girl.

"Why, he's a capper, mem."

"A—a what?"

"A capper—a gambler."

The girl flushed scarlet. The maid handed her a check for her rain-coat and said: "They hang around swell hotels, they do, and pick up acquaintance with likely looking and lonely boobs. Then the first thing the lonely boob knows he's had a good dinner with a new acquaintance and is strolling into a quiet but elegant looking house in the West Forties or Fifties." And the maid laughed, continuing her deft offices in the dressing-room, and the girl looked into the glass at her own crimson cheeks and sickened eyes.

At luncheon he sat at a little table by a window, alone, indolently preoccupied with a newspaper and a fruit salad. She, across the room, kept her troubled eyes away. Yet it was as though she saw him—perhaps the mental embodiment of him was the more vivid for her resolutely averted head.

Every detail of his appearance was painfully familiar to her—his dark eyes, his smooth face which always seemed a trifle sun-tanned, the fastidious and perfect taste of his dress in harmony with his boyish charm and quiet distinction—and the youth of him—the wholesome and self-possessed youth—that seemed to her the most dreadful thing about him in the new light of her knowledge. For he could scarcely be twenty-five.

Every movement he made had long since fascinated her; his unconscious grace had been, to her, the unstudied assurance of a man of the world bred to a social environment about which she knew only through reading.

Never had she seen him but straightway she began to wonder who and what exalted person in the unknown metropolitan social circle he might be.

She had often wondered, speculated; sometimes dreamily she had endowed him with name and position—with qualities, too—ideal qualities suggested by his air of personal distinction—delightful qualities suggested by his

dark, pleasant eyes, and by the slight suspicion of humour lurking so often on the edges of his smoothly shaven lips.

He was so clean-looking, so nice—and he had the shoulders and the hands and the features of good breeding! And, after all—after all, he was a gambler!—a derelict whose sinister living was gained by his wits; a trailer and haunter and bleeder of men! Worse—a decoy sent out by others!

She had little appetite for luncheon; he seemed to have less. But she remembered that she had never seen him eat very much—and never drink anything stronger than tea.

"At least," she thought with a mental quiver, "he has that to his credit."

The quiver surprised her; she was scarcely prepared for any emotion concerning him except the natural shock of disillusion and the natural pity of a young girl for anything ignoble and hopelessly unworthy.

Hopelessly? She wondered. Was it possible that God could ever find the means of grace for such a man? It *could* be done, of course; it were a sin for her to doubt it. Yet she could not see how.

Still, he was young enough to have parents living somewhere; unmarred enough to invite confidence if he cared to. . . . And suddenly it struck her that to invite confidence was part of his business; his charm part of his terrible equipment.

She sat there breathing faster, thinking.

His charm was part of his equipment—an infernal weapon! She understood it now. Long since, innocently speculating, she had from the very beginning and without even thinking, conceded to him her confidence in his worthiness. And—the man was a gambler!

For a few moments she hated him hotly. After a while there was more sorrow than heat in her hatred, more contempt for his profession than for him. . . . And *somebody* had led him astray; that was certain, because no man of his age—and appearance—could have deliberately and of his own initiative gone so dreadfully and cruelly wrong in the world.

Would God pity him? Would some means be found for his salvation? Would salvation come? It must; she could not doubt it—after she had lifted her eyes once more and looked at him where he sat immersed in his newspaper, a pleasant smile on his lips.

A bar of sunlight fell across his head, striping his shoulder; the scarlet flowers on the table were becoming to him. And, oh! he seemed so harmless—so delightfully decent; there where the sunlight fell across his shoulder and spread in a golden net across the white cloth under his elbows.

She rose, curiously weary; a lassitude lay upon her as she left the room and went out into the city about her business—which was to see her lawyer concerning the few remaining details of her inheritance.

The inheritance was the big, prosperous Westchester farm where she lived—had always lived with her grandfather since her parents' death. It was turning out to be very valuable because of the mania of the wealthy for Westchester acreage and a revival in a hundred villages of the magnificence of the old Patroons.

Outside of her own house and farm she had land to sell to the landed and republican gentry; and she sold it and they bought it with an avidity that placed her financial independence beyond doubt.

All the morning she transacted business downtown with the lawyer. In the afternoon she went to a matinée all by herself, and would have had a most blissful day had it not been for the unquiet memory of a young man who, she had learned that morning, was fairly certain of eternal damnation.

That evening she went back to Westchester absent-minded and depressed.

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

XXV

It was in early June when she arrived in town again. He was in the lobby as usual; he lunched at the table by the window as usual. There seemed to be nothing changed about him except that he was a handsomer man than she had supposed him.

She ate very little luncheon. As usual, he glanced at her once—a perfectly pleasant and inoffensive glance—and resumed his luncheon and his newspaper. He was always quiet, always alone. There seemed to be a curious sort of stillness which radiated from him, laying a spell upon his environment for a few paces on every side of him. She had felt this; she felt it now.

Downtown her business was finally transacted; she went to a matinée all by herself, and found herself staring beyond the painted curtain and the mummers—beyond the bedizened scenery—out into the world somewhere and into two dark, boyish eyes that looked so pleasantly back at her. And suddenly her own eyes filled; she bent her head and touched them with her handkerchief.

No, she must never again come to the Hotel Aurora Borealis. There were reasons. Besides, it was no longer necessary for her to come to town at all. She *must* not come any more. . . . And yet, if she could only know what became of him—whether salvation ever found him——

The curtain fell; she rose and pinned on her hat, gathered her trifles, and moved out with the others into the afternoon sunshine of Broadway.

That evening she dined in her room. She had brought no luggage. About ten o'clock the cab was announced.

As she walked through the nearly deserted lobby she looked around for him. He stood near the door, talking to the hotel detective.

Halting a moment to button her gloves, she heard the detective say:

"Never mind the whys and whats! You fade away! Understand?"

"By what authority do you forbid me entrance to this hotel?" asked the young man coolly.

"Well, it's good enough for you that I tell you to keep out!"

"I can not comply with your suggestion. I have an appointment here in half an hour."

"Now you go along quietly," said the detective. "We've had our eyes on you. We know all about you. And when the hotel gets wise to a guy like you we tip him off and he beats it!"

"We can discuss that to-morrow; I tell you I have an appointment——"

"G'wan out o' here!" growled the detective.

The young man quietly fell into step beside him, but on the sidewalk he turned on him, white and desperate.

"I tell you I've *got* to keep that appointment." He stood aside as the girl passed him, head lowered, and halted to wait for her cab. "I tell you I've got to go back——"

"Here, you!" The detective seized his arm as he attempted to pass; the young man wheeled and flung him aside, and the next instant reeled back as the detective struck him again with his billy, knocking him halfway into the street.

"You damned dead-beat!" he panted, "I'll show you!"

The young man stood swaying, his hands against his head; porters, cabmen, and the detective saw him stagger and fall heavily. And the next moment the girl was kneeling beside him.

"Let him alone, lady," said somebody. "That bum isn't hurt."

The "bum," in fact, was getting to his feet, groping for some support; and the girl's arm was offered and he leaned on it a moment, clearing his eyes with a gloved hand. Suddenly he made a movement so quick that she never understood how she wrenched the short, dull-blue weapon from his hand.

"Pick up your hat!" she gasped. "Do what I tell you!"

He looked at her, dazed, then the blood blotted his dark eyes again. She stooped swiftly, caught up his hat, and, holding tightly to his arm, opened the other door of the taxicab.

"They'll kill you here," she whispered. "Come with me. I've got to talk to you!"

"Lady—are you crazy?" demanded the tall head-porter, aghast.

But she had got him into the cab. "Drive on," she said through clenched teeth. And the chauffeur laughed and started east.

In the swaying cab the man beside her sat bent over, his face in his hands, blood striping the fingers of his gloves. With a shudder she placed the automatic weapon on the cushion beside her and shrank back, staring at him.

But his senses seemed to be returning, for presently he sat up, found his handkerchief, staunched the rather insignificant abrasion, and settled back into his corner. Without looking at her he said:

"Would you mind if I thank you? You have been very kind."

She could not utter a word.

Presently he turned; and as he looked at her for the first time a faint flicker of humour seemed to touch his eyes.

"Where are we going—if you don't mind?" he said pleasantly.

Then the breathless words came, haltingly.

"I've got to tell you something; I've *got* to! I can't stand aside—I *can't* pass by on the other side!"

"Thank you," he said, smiling, "but Lazarus is all right now."

"I mean—something else!" Her voice fell to a whisper. "I *must* speak!"

He looked pleasantly perplexed, smiling.

"Is there anything—except a broken head—that could possibly permit me the opportunity of listening to you?"

"I—have seen you before."

"And I you."

She leaned against her window, head resting on her hand, her heart a chaos.

"Where are you going when—when I leave you?" she said.

He did not answer.

"Where?" She turned to look at him. "Are you going back to that hotel?" And, as he made no reply: "Do you wish to become a murderer, too?" she said tremulously. "I have your pistol. I ask you not to go back there."

After a moment he said: "No, I won't go back. . . . Where is the pistol?"

"You shall not have it."

"I think perhaps it would be safer with me."

"No!"

"Very well."

"And—I—I ask you to keep away from that man!" She grew unconsciously dramatic. "I ask you—if you have any memory which you hold sacred—to promise me on that memory not to—to——"

"I won't shoot him," he said, watching her curiously. "Is that what you mean?"

"Y-yes."

"Then I promise—on my most sacred memory—the memory of a young girl who saved me from committing—what I meant to do. . . . And I thank her very deeply."

She said: "I *did* save you from—*that!*"

"You did—God knows." He himself was trembling a little; his face had turned very white.

"Then—then——" she forced her courage—lifted her frightened eyes, braving mockery and misconstruction—"then—is there a chance of my—helping you—further?"

For a moment her flushed face and timid question perplexed him; then the quick blood reddened his face, and he stared at her in silence.

"I—I can't help it," she faltered. "I believe in you—and in—salvation. . . . Please don't say anything to—hurt me."

"No," he said, still staring, "no, of course not. And—and thank you. You are very kind. . . . You are *very* kind. . . . I suppose you heard somebody say—what I am."

"Yes. . . . But that was long ago."

"Oh, you knew—you have known—for some time?"

"Yes."

He sat thinking for a while.

Presently they both noticed that the cab had stopped—had probably been standing for some time in front of the station; and that several red-capped porters were watching them.

"My name is Lily Hollis," she said, "and I live at Whitebrook Farm, Westchester. . . . I am not coming to New York again—and never again to that hotel. . . . But I would like to talk to you—a little."

He thought a moment.

"Do you want a gambler to call on you, Miss Hollis?"

"Yes," she said.

"Then he will do it. When?"

"To-morrow."

He passed his hand over his marred young face.

"Yes," he said quietly, "to-morrow."

He looked up and met her eyes, smiled, opened the door, and stepped to the sidewalk. Then he went with her to her train. She turned at the gates and held out her hand to him; and, hat in hand, he bent his battered head and touched her gloves with twitching lips.

"To-morrow?"

"Certainly."

She said, wistfully: "May I trust in you?"

"Yes. Tell me that you trust me."

"I trust you," she said; and laid the pistol in his hands.

His face altered subtly. "I did not mean in that way," he said.

"How could I trust you more?"

"With—yourself."

"That is a—lesser trust," she said faintly. "It is for you that I have been afraid."

He saw the colour deepen in her cheeks, looked, bit his lip in silence.

"To-morrow?" she said under her breath.

"Yes."

"Good-bye till then."

"Good-bye."

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

XXVI

THE next day he didn't appear, but a letter did.

"I merely lied to you," he wrote. "All gamblers are liars. You should have passed by on the other side."

Yes, that is what she should have done; she realised it now alone there in the sunny parlour with his letter.

There was no chance for him; or, if there was, she had not been chosen as the instrument of his salvation.

Slowly she turned her head and looked around her at her preparations—the pitiful little preparations for him—the childish stage setting for the scene of his salvation.

The spotless parlour had been re-dusted, cleaned, rubbed to its old-time polish. Bible and prayer-book on the mahogany centre-table had been arranged and re-arranged so many times that she no longer knew whether or not her art concealed art, and was innocently fearful that he might suspect the *mise-en-scène* and fight shy of her preparations for his regeneration.

Again and again she had re-arranged the flowers and books and rumbled the un-read morning newspaper to give to the scene a careless and casual every-day allure; again and again she had straightened the rugs, then tried them in less symmetrical fashion. She let the kitten in to give a more home-like air to the room, but it squalled to go out, and she had to release it.

Also, from the best spare room she had brought Holman Hunt's "Shadow of the Cross"—and it had taxed her slender strength to hang it in place of the old French mezzotint of Bacchus and Ariadne.

But the most difficult task was to disseminate among the stiff pieces of furniture and the four duplicate sofa cushions an atmosphere of pleasant and casual disorder—as though guests had left them where they were—as though the rigid chairs were accustomed to much and intimate usage.

But the effect troubled her; every formal bit of furniture seemed to be arranged as for an ambuscade; the cushions on the carved sofa sat in a row, like dwarfs waiting; the secretary watched, every diamond pane a glittering eye. And on the wall the four portraits of her parents and grand-parents were behaving strangely, for she seemed never to be out of range of their unwinking painted eyes.

From other rooms she had brought in ornaments, books, little odds and ends—and the unaccustomed concentration of household gods caused her much doubt and uncertainty, so fearful was she that his wise dark eyes might smilingly detect her effort.

There had been much to do in the short time pending his arrival—the gravel path to be raked, the lawn to be rolled and cut, the carefully weeded flower beds to be searched for the tiniest spear of green which did not belong there, the veranda to be swept again, and all the potted plants to be re-arranged and the dead leaves and blossoms to be removed.

Then there were great sheafs of iris to gather; and that, and the cutting of peonies and June roses, were matters to go about with thought and discretion, so that no unsightly spaces in bloom and foliage should be apparent to those dark, wise eyes of his that had looked on so many things in life—so many, many things of which she knew nothing.

Also she was to offer him tea; and the baking of old-fashioned biscuits and sweets was a matter for prayerful consideration. And Hetty, the hired girl, had spent all the morning on her grand-mother's silver, and William Pillsbury, executor of chores, had washed the doorstep and polished the windows and swept the maple-pods and poplar silk from the roof-gutters, and was now down on his knees with shears, trimming the grass under the picket-fence.

And *he* was not coming after all. He was never coming.

For a little while she failed to realise it; there was a numb sensation in her breast, a dull confusion in her mind. She sat alone in the parlour, in her pretty new gown, looking straight ahead of her, seeing nothing—not even his letter in her hand.

And she sat there for a long while; the numbness became painful; the tension a dull endurance. Fatigue came, too; she rested her head wearily on the back of the chair and closed her eyes. But the tall clocks ticking slowly became unendurable—and the odour of the roses hurt her.

Suddenly, through and through her shot a pang of fright; she had just remembered that she had given him back his pistol.

On her feet now, startled as though listening, she stood, lips slightly parted, and the soft colour gone from them. Then she went to the window and looked down the road; and came back to stand by the centre-table, her clasped hands resting on the Bible.

For a while fear had its way with her; the silent shock of it whitened her face and left her with fair head bowed above her clasped hands.

Once or twice she opened the Bible and tried to understand, choosing what she cared for most—reading of Lazarus, too. And she read about miracles—those symbolic superfluities attributed to a life which in itself was the greatest of all miracles.

And ever through the word of God glittered the memory of the pistol till fear made her faint, and she rose, her hands against her breast, and walked unsteadily out under the trees.

A bird or two had begun its sunset carol; the tree-trunks were stained with the level crimson light. Far away her gaze rested on the blue hills. Beyond them lay the accursed city.

The dull reiteration in her brain throbbed on unceasingly; she had given him his pistol; he had lied to her; she had trusted him; he had lied; and the accursed city lay beyond those hills—and he was there—with his pistol; and he had lied to her—lied! lied! God help them both!

Across her clover fields the ruddy sunlight lay in broad undulating bands, gilding blossom and curling trefoil. On every side of her the farm stretched away over a rolling country set with woods; sweet came the freshening air from the hills; she heard her collie barking at the cattle along the pasture brook; a robin carolled loudly from the orchard; orioles answered; gusts of twittering martins swept and soared and circled the chimneys.

Erect, anguished hands clenched, she stood there, wide eyes seeing nothing, and in her shrinking ears only the terrible reiteration of her growing fears.

Then the level sun struck her body with a bar of light; all the world around her smouldered rose and crimson. But after a little the shadows fell through the fading light; and she turned her head, shivering, and went back to the house—back to the room she had prepared for him, and sat there watching the shapes of dusk invade it; the vague grey ghosts that came crawling from corners and alcoves to gather at her feet and wait and wait there with her for him who would never come into her life again.

Untitled illustration

Untitled illustration

XXVII

"MISS LILY?"

She lifted her head from the sofa cushion in the dark, dazzled by the sudden lamp-light.

"What is it?" she asked, averting her face.

"There's a gentleman says he'd like to see you——"

The girl turned, still dully confused; then, rigid, sat bolt upright.

"*Who?*"

"A gentleman—said you don't know his name. Shall I show him in?"

She managed to nod; her heart was beating so violently that she pressed her hand over it.

He saw her sitting that way when he entered.

She did not rise; pain and happiness, mingled, confusing her for a moment; and he was already seated near her, looking at her with an intentness almost expressionless.

"You see," he said, "what the honour of a gambler is worth. I have lied to you twice already."

His words brought her to her senses. She rose with an effort and, as he stood up, she gave him her hand.

"Don't think me rude," she said. "I was resting—not expecting you—and the lamp and—your coming—confused me."

"You were not expecting me," he said, retaining her hand an instant. Then she withdrew it; they seated themselves.

"I don't know," she said, "perhaps I was expecting you—and didn't realise it."

"Had you thought—much about it?"

"Yes," she said.

Then it seemed as though something sealed her lips, and that nothing could ever again unseal them. All that she had to say to him vanished from her mind; she could not recall a single phrase she had prepared to lead up to all she must somehow say to him.

He talked quietly to her for a while about nothing in particular. Once she saw him turn and look around the room; and a moment afterward he spoke of the old-time charm of the place and the pretty setting such a room made for the old-fashioned flowers.

He spoke about gardens as though he had known many; he spoke of trees and of land and of stock; and, as he spoke in his pleasant, grave young voice, he noticed the portraits on the wall; and he spoke of pictures as though he had known many, and he spoke of foreign cities, and of old-world scenes. And she listened in silence and in such content that the happiness of it seemed to invade her utterly and leave her physically numb.

From time to time his dark eyes wandered from her to the objects in the room; they rested for a moment on the centre-table with its Book, lingered, passed on. For a little while he did not look at her—as though first it were necessary to come to a conclusion. Whatever the conclusion might have been, it seemed to make his eyes and mouth alternately grave and amused—but only very faintly amused—as though the subject he was considering held him closely attentive.

And at last he looked up at her, gently, not all the curiosity yet quenched.

"You are kind enough to wish to know about me; and too well bred to ask—now that the time is come. Shall I speak of myself?"

Her voiceless lips found a word.

"Then—*It* began in college—after my uncle died and left nothing for me to go on with. . . . I worked my way through—by my wits. . . . Up to that time

it was only luck and card-sense—and luck again—the ability to hold the best cards at the best time—hold them honestly, I mean. It happens—I don't know why or what laws govern it. Some men hold them—always hold them—with intervals of bad fortune—but only intervals."

He gazed thoughtfully at the rag carpet, passed a well-shaped hand over his forehead.

"Yes, it is the truth. . . . And so, Fortune linked arms with me . . . and I drifted into it—gradually—not all at once . . . lower—always a little lower—until—what *you* saw occurred."

She would not meet his eyes, perhaps with an idea of sparing him.

He said: "You know nothing of such things, of course. . . . I am—on a commission basis for doing what—they threw me out of that hotel for doing. . . . Of course, a man can fall lower—but not much lower. . . . The business from which I receive commissions is not honest—a square game, as they say. Some games may be square for a while; no games are perfectly square all the time. . . . I have heard of honest gamblers; I never saw one. . . . There may be some; but I'm afraid they're like good Indians. . . . And that is the way in which Life and I are situated."

After a while she managed to look at him.

"Could you tell me—are you—your circumstances——"

"I am not in want," he said gently.

"Then it is not—not necessity——"

"No. It is easier and more interesting than for me to earn a decent living."

"Is that the only reason?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Have you no—regrets?"

"Sometimes. . . . I am not immune to shame. . . . I wonder whether you know what it cost me to come here."

A dull flush mounted to his forehead, but he faced her steadily enough.

"You saw me kicked out of a hotel by an Irish servant because I was not fit to be tolerated among reputable people. . . . And you did not pass by on the other side. . . . Under your clear eyes my spirit died a thousand shameful deaths while I went with you to your destination. . . . The contempt of the whole world burnt me; and your compassion drove every flame into me——" He checked himself, swallowed, forced a smile, and went on in his low, pleasant voice: "I am afraid I have been dramatic. . . . All I meant to say is that my humiliation, witnessed by you, is a heavier price to pay—a more painful reckoning with Fate, than I had really ever looked for."

"I—I had no contempt for you," she faltered.

"You could not escape it; but it is kind of you to say that."

"You don't understand. I had no contempt. I was—it—the dread of harm to you—frightened me. . . . And afterward I was only so sorry for you—and wanted to—to help——"

He nodded. "The larger charity," he said. "You may read all about it there in that Bible, but—the world takes it out in reading about it. . . . I do not mean to speak bitterly. . . . There is nothing wrong with me as far as the world goes—I mean *my* world. . . . Only—in the other and real world there is—you. . . . You, who did not pass by on the other side; and to whom the Scriptures there are merely the manual which you practice—for the sake of Christ."

"You think me better—far better than I am."

"I know what you are. I know what it cost you to even let me lean on you, there in the glare of the electric light—there where men stood leering and sneering and misjudging you!—and my blood on your pretty gown——"

"Oh—I did not think—care about that—or the men——"

"You cared about them. It is a growing torture to you. Even in the generous flush of mercy you thought of it; you said you would never go back to that hotel. I knew why you said it. I knew what, even then, you suffered—what of fear and shame and outraged modesty. I know what you stood for, there

in the street with a half-senseless crook hanging to your arm—tugging for a weapon which would have sent two more mongrels to hell——"

"You shall not say that!" she cried, white and trembling. "You did not know what you were doing——"

He interrupted: "'For they know not what they do.' . . . You are right. . . . We don't really know, any of us. But few, except such as you, believe it—few except such as you—and the Master who taught you. . . . And that is all, I think. . . . I can't thank you; I can't even try. . . . It is too close to melodrama now—not on your side, dear little lady!"

He rose.

"Are you—going?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

He turned unconsciously and looked through the windows into the southern darkness.

"I—want you to stay," she said.

He turned and bent toward her with his youthful and engaging manner.

"It is sweet and good of you; but you know it is best that I go."

"Why?"

"Because—it might be that some of your friends would know me. . . . It is for your sake I am going."

"I wish you to stay."

"I know it. It makes me wonderfully happy."

"*Won't* you?"

"I must not."

"What are you going to do in the city?"

There was a silence; then: "The *same*?" she faltered.

"I am afraid so."

"Why?"

"What else is there?"

"Everything. . . . And I—ask it of you."

He looked at her with troubled eyes.

"I'm afraid you don't know what you are asking——"

"I do know! I ask—your soul of God!"

For a long while he stood there as though turned to stone. Then, as though rousing from a dream, he walked slowly to the window, looked long into the south. At last he turned.

She sat on the edge of the sofa, her face in her hands, deathly silent, waiting.

"Tell me," she whispered, not looking up as he bent over her.

"About that matter of a stray soul?" he said pleasantly. "It's all right—if you care to—bother with it. . . ."

Her hands dropped, and when she looked up he saw the tears standing in her grey eyes.

"Do you mean it?" she asked, trembling.

"God knows what I mean," he said unsteadily; "and I shall never know unless you tell me."

And he sat down beside her, resting his elbows on his knees and his head between his hands, wondering what he could do with life and with the young soul already in his dark keeping. And, after a while, the anxiety of responsibility, being totally new, wearied him; perplexed, he lifted his head, seeking her eyes; and saw the compassion in her face and the slow smile

trembling on her lips. And suddenly he understood which of them was better fitted for a keeper of souls.

"Will you be patient?" he said.

"Can you ask?"

He shook his head, looking vacantly at the lamp-light.

"Because I've gone all wrong somehow . . . since I was a boy. . . . You *will* be patient with me—won't you?"

"Yes," she said.

Untitled illustration

ENVOI

*In all Romances
And poet's fancies
Where Cupid prances,
 Embowered in flowers,
The tale advances
'Mid circumstances
That check love's chances
 Through tragic hours.*

*The reader's doleful now,
The lover's soulful now,
At least a bowlful now
 Of tears are poured.
The villain makes a hit,
The reader throws a fit,
The author grins a bit
 And draws his sword!*

*Strikes down Fate's lances,
Avoids mischances,
And deftly cans his
 Loquacious lore
'Mid ardent glances
And lover's trances
And wedding dances
 Forevermore.*

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