ROBERT KIMBERLY

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ROBERT KIMBERLY

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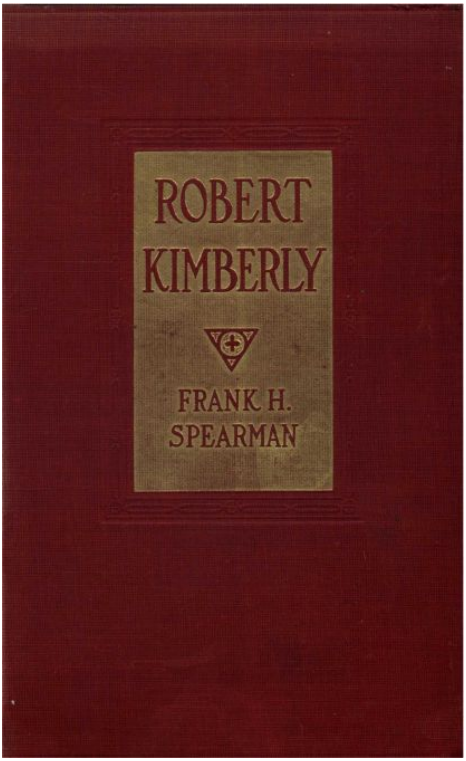

Cover

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"I despise your threats," she said, choking with her own words. "I despise you"

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Published February, 1911

TO MY WIFE

ILLUSTRATIONS

I despise your threats," she said choking with her own words. "I despise you." . . . . . *Frontispiece*

Kimberly placed it without hesitation on her shoulders

She sang for him "Caro Mio Ben"

An acolyte, entering in the gray of the early morning, saw on the last of the kneeling benches a man resting with bowed head

Robert Kimberly

CHAPTER I

The dancing pavilion, separated from the Casino itself by an arched passageway and affording another pretty view of the lake in the moonlight, was filled with young people when Alice entered.

"It will be cool here, I think," suggested Dolly De Castro, leading the way for her guest. "The Hickories is by no means a gay place," she continued, seating herself beside Alice where they could see the dancers moving in and out of the long room. "And it isn't a club. There is just this Casino and the fields for golf and polo. It is a neighborhood affair–and really the quietest place of the kind in the Lake country. Too bad you could not have been here three weeks ago for the Kermess."

"So Miss Venable said. They are great fun."

"We revive one occasionally to preserve the Dutch traditions of the family," continued Dolly. "Mrs. Charles Kimberly–Imogene–gave it this year. Last year I gave it. You would have seen everybody, especially the Sea Ridge people. Fritzie, dear?" Dolly paused to stay a slender young woman who was passing. "Miss Venable," she explained, still speaking to Alice, "is our favorite cousin and will make you acquainted with every one."

Fritzie Venable whose lively, brown eyes escaped beauty only through a certain keenness of expression, stopped with a smile and waited on Dolly's word.

"I want Mrs. MacBirney to go over to the Nelsons' after a while. This dance is really a young people's affair," Dolly went on, turning to Alice. "These are friends of Grace's and Larrie's and I don't know half of them. Take care of Mrs. MacBirney a moment, Fritzie, will you, while I find Arthur?" asked Dolly, rising and leaving the two together.

Alice looked after Dolly as she walked away. Dolly had the Kimberly height and preserved it with a care that gave dignity to her carriage. Her dignity, indeed, showed in her words as well as in her manner; but in both it battled with a mental intensity that fought for immediate expression. Dolly persuaded and dictated unblushingly, though it could not be said, unpleasingly.

"I know you are enjoying Mrs. De Castro and her lovely home," said Fritzie to Alice. "Of course," she added as Alice assented, "The Towers is on a much grander scale. But I think Black Rock is the 'homiest' place on Second Lake. I suppose since I saw you yesterday you have been all around?"

"Not quite; but I've met many lovely people."

"You can't help liking Second Lake people. They are a kind-hearted, generous set–notably so for people of means."

"Aren't such people usually generous?"

Fritzie looked doubtful: "People of large means, perhaps, yes. Indeed, the only trouble here is, there are too many of that sort. Everybody is prosperous and everybody, with, I think, two exceptions, contented. I," laughed Fritzie, "am one of the exceptions. There being no possibility of preëminence in the line of means, I believe I have in my rôle of discontent a certain distinction; and as far as I can see, as much fun as anybody. In fact, I've often thought the only place where I

should care to be rich would be among the poor. Where every one overflows with luxury distinctions are necessarily lost–and I like distinctions. Isn't this pretty for dancing?"

"Everything over here is pretty," said Alice.

"The place takes its name, 'The Hickories,' from the grove back of it. You see there was nothing about the Lake itself to serve the purpose of a country club–no golf course, no polo field. All this stretch of the eastern shore is a part of The Towers estate, but Mr. Kimberly was good enough to set it apart for the rest of us–you have met Mr. Robert Kimberly?"

"Neither of the Mr. Kimberlys as yet."

"There is Charles now." Fritzie indicated a smooth-faced, youthful-looking man coming in through one of the veranda openings. "That is he speaking to Dolly. They call him the handsome Kimberly."

Alice smiled: "For a man that's rather a severe handicap, isn't it?"

"To be called handsome?"

"It suggests in a way that good looks are exceptional in the family, and they are not, for their sister, Mrs. De Castro is very handsome, I think. Which brother is this?"

"The married brother; the other is Robert. They call him the homely Kimberly. He isn't really homely, but his face in repose *is* heavy. He is the bachelor."

"Mr. MacBirney tells me he is completely wrapped up in business."

"Rather–yes; of late years."

"That, I presume, is why he has never married."

"Perhaps," assented Fritzie with a prudent pause. "Some men," she went on somewhat vaguely, "get interested, when they are young, in women in general. And afterward never settle down to any one woman, you know."

"I should think that kind of a man would be tiresome."

Fritzie looked at young Mrs. MacBirney somewhat in surprise, but there was nothing in Alice's frank eyes to provoke criticism. They met Fritzie's with an assurance of good-nature that forestalled hostility. Then, too, Fritzie remembered that Mrs. MacBirney was from the West where people speak freely. "Robert is deliberate but not a bit tiresome," was all Fritzie said in answer. "Indeed, he is not communicative."

"I didn't mean in that way," explained Alice. "I should only be afraid a man like that would take himself so seriously."

Fritzie laughed: "He wouldn't know what that meant. You had music at your dinner to-night."

"Lovely music: the Hawaiian singers."

"I was sorry I couldn't be there. They always come out to sing for Robert when they are in the States, and they are always in dreadful financial straits when

they get as far from home as this, and he is always making up their deficits. They used to sing at The Towers, from barges on the lake. But The Towers is hardly ever opened nowadays for a function. The music over the water with the house illuminated was simply superb. And the evening winding up with fireworks!" sighed Fritzie in pleasing retrospect.

"There is Robert now," she continued.. "Do you see him? With Mrs. Charles Kimberly. They are devoted. Isn't she a slip? And the daintiest little thing. Robert calls her his little Quakeress–her people were Quakers. She seems lost among the Kimberlys–though Robert isn't quite so tall as his brother, only more muscular and slower."

Robert Kimberly with Imogene on his arm entered from the opposite side of the room and walked across the floor to take her to her husband. His face was darker than that of Charles and heavier eyebrows rendered his expression less alert. Fritzie waved a hand at Imogene, who answered with her fan and greeted Alice.

"And there comes Mrs. Nelson–the pale brunette. Heroic woman, I call her. She has been fighting her advancing weight for ten years. Isn't she trim? Heavens, she ought to be. She lives in Paris half the time and does nothing but dress and flirt."

"And who is it with her?"

"The stately creature with her is Dora Morgan. She is a divorcée. She likewise lives in Paris and is quite a singer. I haven't heard her lately but she used to sing a little off the key; she dresses a little off the key yet, to say nothing of the way she acts sometimes. They are going to dance."

A small orchestra of stringed instruments with a French horn, hidden somewhere in a balcony, began the faint strains of a German waltz. The night was warm. Young people in white strolling through dim veranda openings into the softly lighted room moved at once out upon the floor to the rhythm of the music. Others, following, paused within the doorways to spin out ends of small talk or persist in negligible disputes. The dancers wore the pretty Hawaiian leis in honor of the Island singers.

"There were some interesting men at the dinner to-night," said Alice.

"You mean the German refiners? Yes, they are Charles Kimberly's guests," remarked Fritzie as the floor filled. "There they are now, in that group in the archway with Mr. Nelson."

"But the smaller man was not at the dinner."

"No, that is Guyot, the French representative of the Kimberlys. He and George Doane, the bald, good-looking man next to him, have the party in charge. You met the immense man, Herr Gustav Baumann, at dinner. He is a great refiner and a Hawaiian planter. They are on their way to Honolulu now and leave

within an hour or two in Robert Kimberly's car for San Francisco. The Baumanns have known the Kimberlys for generations. Should you ever think Herr Baumann could dance? He is as light as a cat on his feet, but he waltzes in the dreadful European round-and-round way. The black-haired man with the big nose is Lambert, a friend of his, a promoter and a particularly famous chemist whom Robert Kimberly, by the way, hates–he is a Belgian. I can't bear him, either–and, Heavens, Guyot is bringing him over here now to ask me to dance!"

Fritzie's fear proved true. However, she accepted graciously as Lambert was brought forward and bowed in making his request. But she did not fail to observe that though he bowed low, Lambert's bold eyes were glued on Alice even while he was begging Fritzie for the dance. Something in Alice's slender face, the white hardly touched enough with pink, except under animation, held Lambert's glance. Alice, already prejudiced, directed her eyes as far away as possible under the inspection and was glad that Fritzie rose at once.

Robert Kimberly joined Baumann and Edward Nelson. "You have not told me yet, Robert," Baumann began, "how you put in your time here in the country."

"I have a good secretary and do a great deal of my work here, Gustav."

"But one does not always work. What else? I remember," he continued, turning to Nelson, "the stories my father used to tell about the Kimberlys–your father, Robert, and especially your Uncle John." Baumann radiated interest in everything American. "Those men were busy men. Not alone sugar-refining, but horses, steamboats, opera-houses, women–always, always some excitement."

"Other times, other manners, Baumann," suggested Nelson. "In those days a fine horse had a national interest; to-day, everybody's horse does his mile in two minutes. The railroads long ago killed the steamboats; newsboys build the opera-houses now; sugar refines itself. Mere money-making, Baumann, has become so absorbing that a Kimberly of this generation doesn't have time to look at a woman."

"Nelson!" protested the good-natured and perspiring German, "no time to look at a woman? That, at least, cannot be true, can it, Robert?"

"Not quite. But I imagine the interest has waned," said Kimberly. "When a man took his life in his hand on such a venture the excitement gave it a double zest–the reflection that you were an outlaw but prepared, if necessary, to pay the price with your life. Nowadays, the husband has fallen lower than the libertine. If you break up his home–he sues you. There is nothing hair-raising in that. Will you dance, Gustav?"

"I want very much to dance. Your women dance better than ours."

"Why, your women dance beautifully. Nelson will find you a partner," suggested Kimberly. "I must hunt up Mrs. Nelson. I have a dance with her, myself."

Alice sat for a moment alone. Among the dancers, Robert Kimberly moved

past her with Lottie Nelson on his arm. Alice noticed how handsome and well poised Lottie was on her feet; Kimberly she thought too cold to be an attractive partner.

Within a moment Dolly came back. "I can't find Arthur anywhere."

"He isn't on the floor, Mrs. De Castro."

"No matter, I will let him find me. Isn't it a pretty company? I do love these fresh faces," remarked Dolly, sitting down. "The young people complain of our being exclusive. That is absurd. We have to keep quiet, otherwise why live in the country? Besides, what would be gained by opening the doors?"

Dolly had a pleasing way of appealing in difficulties, or what seemed such, even to a stranger. "We don't want ambitious people," she went on; "they are killing, you know–and we certainly don't want any more like ourselves. As Arthur says," Dolly laughed a little rippling laugh, "'we have social liabilities enough of our own.'"

Arthur De Castro came up just in time to hear his name: "What's that Arthur says, Dolly?"

"Oh, here you are!" exclaimed his wife. "No matter, dear, what it was."

"It is certain Arthur never said anything of the kind, Mrs. MacBirney," interposed De Castro. "If any one said it, it must have been you, Dolly."

Alice laughed at the two. "No matter who said it," remarked Dolly, dismissing the controversy, "somebody said it. It really sounds more like Robert than anybody else."

"You will be aware very soon, Mrs. MacBirney," continued De Castro, "that the Kimberlys say all manner of absurd things–and they are not always considerate enough to father them on some one else, either."

Alice turned to her hostess with amused interest: "You, of course, are included because you are a Kimberly."

"She is more Kimberly *than* the Kimberlys," asserted her husband. "I am not a Kimberly." Arthur De Castro in apologizing bowed with so real a deprecation that both women laughed.

"Of course, the young people rebel," persisted Dolly, pursuing her topic, and her dark hair touched with gray somehow gave an authority to her pronouncements, "young people always want a circle enlarged, but a circle *never* should be. What is it you want, Arthur?"

"I am merely listening."

"Don't pretend that you leave the men just to listen to me. You want Mrs. MacBirney to dance."

"She is always like that," declared De Castro to Alice, whom he found pleasing because her graciousness seemed to invite its like. "Just such bursts of divination. At times they are overwhelming. I remember how stunned I was when

she cried–quite before I could get my breath: 'You want to marry me!'"

"Was she right?" laughed Alice, looking from one to the other.

"Absolutely."

"Is she right now?"

"Dolly is always right."

"Then I suppose I must dance."

"Not, of course, unless you want to."

Alice appealed to Dolly: "What did you do?"

"I said I wouldn't marry him."

"But you did," objected her companion.

"He was so persistent!"

Alice laughingly rose: "Then it would be better to consent at once."

Dolly rose with her. Two of the dancers stopped before them: a tall, slender girl and a ruddy-faced, boyish young man.

"Grace," said Dolly to the blue-eyed girl, "I want you to meet Mrs. MacBirney. This is my niece, Grace De Castro."

The young girl looked with pretty expectancy into Alice's face, and frankly held out her hand.

"Oh, what a bloom!" exclaimed Alice, looking at the delicate features and transparent skin. Grace laughed happily. Alice kept her hand a moment: "You are like a bit of morning come to life, Grace."

"And this is my cousin, Mrs. MacBirney–Mr. Morgan," said Grace shyly.

Larrie Morgan, a bit self-conscious, stood for an instant aloof. Alice said nothing, but her eyes in the interval worked their spell. He suddenly smiled.

"I'm mightily pleased to meet you, Mrs. MacBirney," he exclaimed with heartiness. "We've all heard about you. Is Mr. MacBirney here?" he continued, tendering the biggest compliment he could think of.

"He is somewhere about, I think."

"We shall lose our waltz, Mrs. MacBirney," urged Arthur De Castro.

"Oh, we mustn't do that. Let's run," whispered Alice, taking his arm.

"Who is Mrs. MacBirney?" asked Grace of Larrie with an appealing look as Alice moved away.

"Why, don't you know? Her husband owns some beet plants."

"What lovely manners she has." Grace spoke under her breath. "And so quiet. Where are their refineries, Larrie?"

"In the West."

"Where in the West?"

"Somewhere out toward the Rocky Mountains," hazarded Larrie.

"Denver?" suggested Grace doubtfully.

"I fancy that's it. Anyway," explained Larrie coldly, "we are buying them."

"Are you?" asked Grace, lifting her soft eyes timidly.

To her, Larrie was the entire Kimberly sugar interest; and at the moment of making the MacBirney purchase he looked, to Grace, the part.

CHAPTER II

Edward Nelson, the counsel, in some measure the political adviser and, as to the public, the buffer of the Kimberly sugar interests, was fond of entertaining. Being naturally an amiable gourmet, his interests suited his tastes. Moreover, his wife, Lottie Nelson, pleasing of face, with a figure well proportioned and with distinction in her bright, indolent eyes, loved to entertain. And she loved to entertain without working hard to do so. Morningside, her country home at Second Lake, though both attractive and spacious, and designed with a view to entertaining, was already being replaced with a new home more attractive and more spacious, and meant to be filled with still more guests.

Observation and experience had convinced Lottie that the easiest way to keep people in hand is to feed them well. And she quite understood that a vital part of the feeding in such a philosophy is the drinking. There were difficulties, it is true, but which of us has not difficulties?

People–provided, they were people of consequence–diverted Lottie. She had no children–children had no place in her view of life–nor was she vitally interested in her husband. The companionship of those whom she called her friends thus became a necessity; the annoyance being that not always would the particular friends whom she wanted–men chiefly–gather to her.

On the evening of the De Castro dinner and dance, Lottie was in better than her usual spirits. She had brought home Charles Kimberly–who as a yachtsman bore the title of Commodore–and his wife, Imogene. Imogene, the little Quakeress, did not like her, as Lottie was aware, but Charles Kimberly was always in sorts and always tractable–different in that respect from Robert. Charles and his wife took MacBirney and Fritzie Venable to the Nelsons' with them and Alice was to follow with the De Castros.

When Lottie reached home, Dora Morgan had already come over with George Doane, one of the Kimberly stock brokers. These two assured the evening. In the dining-room only a few–of the right sort–were needed for good company.

But more was in prospect for this evening–Robert Kimberly was expected. Nelson came down from the library with MacBirney and left him with Imogene while he followed Charles to a smoking-room. Fritzie and Mrs. Nelson joined Doane and Dora Morgan in the music-room. Cards were proposed, but no one had the energy to get at them.

A servant passed in the hall to answer the door and Lottie Nelson at once left the room. When she reached the vestibule the footman was taking Robert Kimberly's coat. She walked well up to Robert before she spoke: "At last!"

"I went back to The Towers for a moment," said Kimberly in explanation. "Are Charles and Nelson here?"

"And is that all after a month–'Are Charles and Nelson here?'!" echoed Lottie patiently and with a touch of intimate reproach.

"We have a conference to-night, you know, Lottie. How are you?"

She put back her abundant hair: "Why didn't you call up last week when you were home to find out?"

"I was home only overnight. And I came late and left before you were awake. You know I have been at the new refinery for a week. We began melting yesterday."

"At the big one?"

"At the big one."

She took hold of the lei that he had worn over from the dance and in a leisurely way made a pretence of braiding the stem of a loose rose back into it. "This is the prettiest I've seen," said Lottie. "Who gave it to you?"

"Grace. What is the matter with it?" he asked looking down at her white fingers.

"You are losing your decoration," she murmured with leisurely good-nature. "Nobody to do anything for you."

Kimberly looked at the parting lei with some annoyance, but if he entertained doubts as to its needing attention he expressed none. "These things are a nuisance anyway," he declared at length, lifting the lei impatiently over his head and depositing it without more ado on a console. "We will leave it there."

"Where else have you been all this time?" demanded Lottie with an indolent interest.

"All over the country–even across the Rockies."

"Across the Rockies! And a whole big car to yourself! You must love solitude. And now you are buying a lot of refineries."

"Not I–the companies are."

"Oh, it's all the same."

"Not precisely; this MacBirney purchase is not by my advice or with my approval."

"He is in there now, Imogene is talking with him."

"The trip was extremely tedious," said Kimberly, casting his eyes slowly around for means of escape.

"How could it be anything else with no friends along?"

"With McCrea and two secretaries and a stenographer, I hadn't time to take any friends."

"What is time for?"

"I should say in the West it is valuable for getting home with."

"And when you do get home?"

"To build more; borrow more; control more; sell more; spend more. I'm speaking for all the rest of you, not for myself. I'm just the centrifugal to throw the money out."

"Never by any chance to live more, I suppose?"

"You mean to eat and drink more? How could we?"

"I *don't* mean to eat and drink more. I mean just what I say, to live more!"

They were at the threshold of the music room. He laughed good-naturedly, but Lottie declined to be appeased.

"Lord, but I'm sick of it all!" she exclaimed petulantly.

Kimberly used care not to offend, yet he always interposed a screen between himself and her, and however delicate the barrier, Lottie Nelson had never been able to penetrate it.

"No sicker of it than I am," he returned. "But I'm a part of the machine; I can't get out. I suppose you are, and you can't get out. But you are too young to talk like that; wait till the new home is finished. Then you will shine."

She uttered a contemptuous exclamation, not quite loud enough for the others to hear, as she reëntered the room. The others, in fact, scarcely would have heard. Fritzie, Doane, and Dora Morgan were laughing immoderately. Imogene at the piano was playing softly. Kimberly stopped to speak to her.

"I forgot, by the way, to ask you when you sail, Imogene," he said.

She answered with one hand running over the keys: "That depends on you, doesn't it, Robert? I do hope you'll get through soon."

"Anxious to get away, are you?"

"You know I always am."

"Where are you going this time?"

"To the Mediterranean, I suppose."

"You are fond of the Mediterranean."

"Every place else seems so savage after it."

"Lottie says you have been talking with MacBirney."

"Just a few minutes."

"How do you like him?" asked her brother-in-law.

Imogene laughed a little: "He is very intelligent. He confuses me a little, though; he is so brisk."

"Is he entertaining?"

Imogene shrugged her shoulders: "Yes. Only, he rather makes you feel as if he were selling you something, don't you know. I suppose it's hardly fair to judge of one from the first interview. His views are broad," smiled Imogene in retrospect. "'I can't understand,' he said 'why our American men should so unceasingly pursue money. What can more than a million or two possibly be good for–unless to give away?'" Imogene looked with a droll smile into Kimberly's stolid face. "When he said, 'a million or two,' I thought of my wretched brother-in-law struggling along with thirty or forty that he hasn't yet managed to get rid of!"

"You don't think, then, he would accept a few of them?" suggested Kimberly.

"Suppose you try him some time," smiled Imogene as she walked with Kimberly to the card-table where Fritzie and Dora Morgan sat with Doane.

"Travelling agrees with you, Robert," observed Doane.

"The country agrees with you," returned Kimberly. "Good company, I suppose, George, is the secret."

"How is the consolidation getting along?"

"There isn't any consolidation."

"Combination, then?"

"Slowly. How is the market?"

"Our end of it is waiting on you. When shall you have some news for us?"

"You don't need news to make a market," returned Kimberly indifferently, as he sat down. He looked at those around the table. "What are you doing?"

"Tell your story again, Dora," suggested Doane.

Dora Morgan looked at Kimberly defiantly. "No," she said briefly.

"Pshaw, tell it," urged Doane. "It's about the Virgin Mary, Robert."

Dora was firm: "It's not a bachelor's story," she insisted.

"Most of your stories are bachelors' stories, Dora," said Kimberly.

Dora threw away her cigarette. "Listen to that! Didn't I tell you?" she asked appealing to Doane. "Robert is getting to be a real nice man."

In an effort to appease both sides, Doane laughed, but somewhat carefully.

"I got into trouble only the other day in telling that story," continued Dora, with the same undercurrent of defiance.

Effectively dressed, though with a tendency to color, and with dark, regular features, flushed a little at night, Dora Morgan had a promise of manner that contrasted peculiarly with her freedom of tongue.

"Tell us about it, Dora?" said Lottie Nelson.

"It was over at The Towers. I was telling the story to Uncle John. His blood is red, yet," she added without looking at Robert Kimberly to emphasize her implication.

"Uncle John!" echoed Fritzie, at fault. "Did Uncle John object?"

"Oh, no, you misunderstand. It wasn't Uncle John." Every one but Kimberly laughed. "I was telling Uncle John the story, and his nurse–your protégé, what's his name? I never can remember–Lazarus? the queer little Italian," she said, appealing to Kimberly.

"Brother Francis," he answered.

"He's not so awfully little," interposed Fritzie.

"Well, he was in the room," continued Dora, "and he got perfectly furious the moment he heard it."

"Furious, Dora? Why, how funny!" exclaimed Lottie Nelson, languidly.

"He turned on me like a thunder-cloud. Poor Uncle John was still laughing–he laughs on one side of his face since his stroke, and looks so fiendish, you know–when Lazarus began to glower at me. He was really insulting in his manner. 'Oh, I didn't know you were here,' I said to hush him up. 'What difference should that make?' he asked, and his eyes were flashing, I can tell you."

"'The Virgin Mary is no relation of yours, is she?' I demanded frigidly. You ought to have seen the man. You know how sallow he is; he flushed to the roots of his hair and his lips snapped like a trap. Then he became ashamed of himself, I dare say, and his eyes fell; he put his hand on his breast and bowed to me as if I had been a queen–they certainly have the prettiest manners, these poor Italians–haven't they, Imogene?"

"But what did he say?" asked Fritzie.

"'Madame,' he exclaimed, as if I had stabbed him to the heart, 'the Blessed Virgin is my mother.' You really would have thought I had insulted his own mother. They have such queer ideas, these foreigners. My, but he was mad! Then, what do you think? The next day I passed him walking up from the lake and he came over with such apologies! He prayed I would overlook his anger–he professed to have been so shocked that he had forgotten himself–no doubt he was afraid he would lose his job."

"George, you look sleepy," Lottie Nelson complained, looking at Doane. "You need something to wake you up. Suppose we adjourn to the dining-room?"

Imogene returned to the piano. Kimberly walked to the door of the dining-room with the others. "I will go upstairs," he said to Lottie Nelson.

"Don't stay all night," she returned peremptorily. "And come have something before you go up."

"Perhaps when I come down."

Fritzie caught his arm, and walked with him into the hall. They talked for a

moment. "You must meet her," declared Fritzie at length, "she is perfectly lovely and will be over after a while with Dolly." Then she looked at him suddenly: "I declare, I don't believe you've heard a word of what I've been saying."

"I'm afraid not, Fritzie, but no matter, listen to what I say. Don't go in there and drink with that bunch."

"I won't."

"Whiskey makes a fool of you."

Fritzie put up her hand: "Now don't scold."

Upstairs, Nelson and Charles Kimberly, facing each other, were seated at a big table on which lay a number of type-written sheets, beautifully clear and distinct. These they were examining.

"What are you going over?" asked Robert, taking the chair Nelson drew up for him.

"The Colorado plants."

"Our own or the MacBirney?"

"Both."

Charles Kimberly with one hand in his pocket, and supporting his head with the other as his elbow rested on the table, turned to Robert with a question.

"You've seen the MacBirney figures. What do you think of them?"

"They are high. But I expected that."

"Do you really need the MacBirney plants to control the Western market?" asked Charles Kimberly. With eyes half closed behind his glasses he studied his brother's face, quite as occupied with his thoughts as with his words.

Robert did not answer at once. "I should hate to say so, personally," he remarked at length.

"McCrea," continued Charles, "contends that we do need them to forestall competition. That is, he thinks with the MacBirney crowd out of the field we can have peace for ten years out there."

Nelson asked a question. "What kind of factories have they got?"

"Old-fashioned," answered Robert Kimberly.

"What kind of influence?"

"In public affairs, I don't know. In trade they are not dangerous, though MacBirney is ambitious and full of energy. The father-in-law was a fine old fellow. But he died just before the reorganization. I don't know how much money they've got now."

"They haven't much," remarked Nelson.

"We bother them a good deal from San Francisco," continued Robert Kimberly, reflecting, "but that is expensive. Ultimately we must own more factories in Colorado. Of course, as far as that goes, I would rather build new plants than remodel rat-hospitals."

Charles Kimberly straightened up and turned himself in his chair. "Ten years of peace is worth a good deal to us. And if MacBirney can insure that, we ought to have it. All of this," he appealed to Robert, as he spoke, "is supposing that you are willing to assent."

"I do not assent, chiefly because I distrust MacBirney. If the rest of you are satisfied to take him in, go ahead."

"The others seem to be, Robert."

"Then there is nothing more to be said. Let's get at the depreciation charges and the estimates for next year's betterments, so we can go over the new capitalization."

While the conference went on, the muffled hum of gathering motor-cars came through the open windows.

Robert Kimberly leaving the two men, walked downstairs again. The rooms were filling with the overflow from the dance. They who had come were chiefly of the married set, though boys and girls were among them.

After the manner of those quite at home, the dancers, still wearing their flower leis, were scattered in familiar fashion about small tables where refreshment was being served.

At one end of the music room a group applauded a clever young man, who, with his coat cuffs rolled back, was entertaining with amateur sleight-of-hand.

At the other end of the room, surrounded by a second group, Fritzie Venable played smashing rag-time. About the tables pretty, overfed married women, of the plump, childless type, with little feet, fattening hands, and rounding shoulders, carried on a running chatter with men younger than their husbands.

A young girl, attended at her table by married men, was trying to tell a story, and to overcome unobserved, her physical repugnance to the whiskey she was drinking.

In the dining-room Lottie Nelson was the centre of a lively company, and her familiar pallor, which indulgence seemed to leave untouched, contrasted with the heightened color in Dora Morgan's face.

Robert Kimberly had paused to speak to some one, when Fritzie Venable came up to ask a question. At that moment Arthur and Dolly De Castro, with Alice on Dolly's left, entered from the other end of the room. Kimberly saw again the attractive face of a woman he had noticed dancing with Arthur at the Casino. The three passed on and into the hall. Kimberly, listening to Fritzie's question, looked after them.

"Fritzie, who is that with Dolly?" he asked suddenly.

"That is Mrs. MacBirney."

"Mrs. MacBirney?" he echoed. "Who is Mrs. MacBirney?"

"Why, Mr. MacBirney's wife, of course. How stupid of you! I told you all

about her before you went upstairs. He has brought his wife on with him. Dolly knew her mother and has been entertaining Alice for a week."

"Alice! Oh, yes. I've been away, you know. MacBirney's wife? Of course. I was thinking of something else. Well–I suppose I ought to meet her. Come, Fritzie."

CHAPTER III

They found Alice with the De Castros in the hall. Dolly looked pleased as her brother came forward. Alice collected herself. She felt a momentary trepidation at meeting this man, from whom, she was already aware, much of what she had seen and most of the people whom she had met at Second Lake in some degree derived.

She had heard for years, since girlhood, indeed, of the house of Kimberly. Her own father's struggle through life had been in the line of their business, and the name of the Kimberlys could not but be haloed wherever refiners discussed their affairs. Moreover, at the moment her own husband was seeking, and with prospects of success, an alliance with them.

Yet in a moment she found it all very easy. Kimberly's manner as he met her was simplicity itself. His words were few and did not confuse her, yet they were sufficient to relieve the necessity of any effort on her part to avoid embarrassing pauses. She only noticed that the others rather waited for Kimberly to speak; giving him a chance to say without interruption whatever he pleased to say. Beyond this, that the conversation was now reserved for herself and Kimberly, she was at ease and wondered why she had been a little afraid of him. The surprise was that he was younger than she had supposed. She began to wonder that his name should at times command so much of the public interest. Nor could any but those who knew him have realized that under his restraint Alice was experiencing his most gracious manner.

But those who did know him saw instantly how interested he was in her youth and inexperience. Her cheeks were already flooded with pink, as if she realized she must do her best to please and was conscious that she was not wholly failing. Timidity reflected itself in her answers, yet this was no more than an involuntary compliment, pleasing in itself. And whenever possible, Alice took refuge from the brother's more direct questions by appealing to his sister Dolly.

Kimberly was diverted to see her seek escape in this fashion from his directness.

She expressed presently her admiration for the decorations at the Casino and the talk turned upon the Hawaiian singers; from them to Hawaii and Honolulu. Word at that moment came from the music room that the singing was beginning. Kimberly without any sign of giving up Alice, followed Dolly and her husband down the hall to where the guests were gathering.

The group paused near the foot of the stairs. Alice asked an explanation of the chant that they had heard at the Casino and Kimberly interpreted the rhythm for her. "But I should have thought," he added, "you would be familiar with it."

"Why so?"

"Because you have been at the Islands."

"Pray, how did you know that?"

"By your pronunciations."

"Ah, I see. But I was there only once, when I was quite young, with my father."

"And yet you have no lei to-night? That is hardly loyal, is it?"

"We came late and they had all been given out, I suppose."

"I have one in reserve. You must show your good-will to the musicians. Permit me." He turned with dignity to the console where he had so unceremoniously discarded his own lei and picked the garland up to lay it upon Alice's shoulders.

"But Robert," Fritzie cried, "you mustn't! That is a rose lei."

"What is the difference?" asked Kimberly.

"There's a superstition, you know, about a rose lei."

"Mercy, what is it?" demanded Alice, pink and smiling.

"If a man gives you a rose lei you must marry him or you will die."

"Fortunately," remarked Kimberly, lifting the decoration quickly above Alice's head and placing it without hesitation on her shoulders, "neither Mrs. MacBirney nor I are superstitious. And the roses harmonize perfectly with your gown, Mrs. MacBirney. Don't you love the Islands?"

"I've always wanted to go back to them to stay. I don't think if I had my choice I should ever leave them."

"Neither should I. We must get up a party and have a yacht meet us in San Francisco for the trip. This fall would be a good time to get away."

His decisive manner was almost startling; the trip seemed already under way. And his mannerisms were interesting. A certain halting confidence asserted itself under the affected indifference of his utterance. Whatever he proposed seemed as easy as if done. He carried his chin somewhat low and it gave a dogmatism to his words. While he seemed to avoid using them obtrusively, his eyes, penetrating and set under the straight heavy brows which contracted

easily, were a barometer from which it was possible to read his intent.

"You have been frequently at the Islands?" returned Alice.

"Years ago I knew them very well."

"Father and I," Alice went on, "spent a month at Honolulu." And again the softness of her long vowels fell agreeably on Kimberly's ear. Her voice, he thought, certainly was pretty. "It is like a paradise. But they have their sorrows, do they not? I remember one evening," Alice turned toward Fritzie to recount the incident, "just at the sunset of a rarely perfect day. We were walking along the street, when we heard the most piercing cries from a little weeping company of women and children who were coming down the esplanade. In front of them walked a man all alone–he was a leper. They were taking him away from his family to be sent to Molokai. It was the most distressing thing I ever saw." She turned to Kimberly. "You have never been at Molokai?"

"I have cruised more or less around it. Do you remember the windward cliffs just above the leper settlement? They are superb from the sea. We put in once at Kalawao for a night and I called on the priest in charge of the mission."

"It must have been very, very dreadful."

"Though like all dreadful places, disappointing at first; nothing, apparently, to inspire horror. But after we had breakfasted with the priest in the morning, we went around with him to see his people." Kimberly's chin sank and his eyes closed an instant as he moved his head. "I remember," he added slowly, "a freezing up around the heart before we had gone very far." Then he dismissed the recollection. "The attendant at home who takes care of my uncle–Francis–" he continued, "had a brother in the leper missions. He died at Molokai. Francis has always wanted to go there."

The conversation waited a few moments on the singing. "Miss Venable tells me," said Alice, presently, "these singers always come out to sing for you when they visit this country."

"I have met most of them at one time or another in Hawaii. You know they are the gentlest, most grateful people in the world. Sha'n't we have some refreshment, Mrs. MacBirney?"

CHAPTER IV

"I am hoping it will all be settled satisfactorily soon," said Dolly De Castro to Alice

Kimberly placed it without hesitation on her shoulders

Kimberly placed it without hesitation on her shoulders

one afternoon a few weeks afterward. She had invited Alice out from town for a fortnight at Black Rock while MacBirney, with McCrea and the active partners of the Kimberly interests were working on the negotiations for the purchase of the MacBirney factories.

"And when it is settled, I can congratulate you, I think, my dear, most sincerely on any issue that associates your husband and his interests with those of my brothers."

"Indeed, I realize that it would be a matter for congratulation, Mrs. De Castro. I hope if they do come to terms, your brothers will find Mr. MacBirney's Western acquaintance and experience of some value. I am sorry you haven't seen more of my husband—-"

"I understand perfectly how engaged he has been."

"He is an unceasing worker. I told him yesterday, when he was leaving home, that Mrs. De Castro would think I had no husband."

"Then," continued Dolly, pursuing her topic, "if you can secure the little Cedar Lodge estate on the west shore–and I think it can be arranged–you will be very comfortable."

Dolly had suggested a drive around the lake, and as she made an admirable guide Alice looked forward with interest to the trip. If it should be objected that Dolly was not a good conversationalist, it could be maintained that she was a fascinating talker.

It is true that people who talk well must, as a penalty, say things. They can have no continued mental reserves, they must unburden their inner selves. They let you at once into the heart of affairs about them–it is the price that the brilliant talker must pay. Such a one gives you for the moment her plenary confidence, and before Alice had known Dolly a month, she felt as if she had known her for years.

On their drive the orders were to follow the private roads, and as the villas around the entire lake connected with one another, they were obliged to use the high-roads but little. Each of the places had a story, and none of these lost anything in Dolly's dramatic rendering.

From the lower end of the lake they drove to Sunbury, the village–commonplace, but Colonial, Dolly explained–and through it. Taking the ridge road back of the hills, they approached another group of the country places. The houses of these estates belonged to an older day than those of the lake itself. Their type indicated the descent from the earlier simplicity of the Colonial, and afforded a melancholy reminder of the architectural experiments following the period of the Civil War.

"Our families have been coming out here for a hundred years," observed Dolly. "These dreadful French roofs we have been passing, give you the latest

dates on this side of the ridge." As she spoke they approached a house of brown sandstone set in an ellipse of heavy spruces.

"This was the Roger Morgan place. Mrs. Morgan, Bertha, was our half-sister, dear, the only child of my father's first marriage–she died seven years ago. This villa belongs to Fritzie Venable. She was Roger Morgan's niece. But she hasn't opened it for years–she just keeps a caretaker here and makes her home with Imogene. To me, spruces are depressing."

"And what is that?" asked Alice, indicating an ivy-covered pile of stone in the midst of a cluster of elms at some distance to the left of the house and on a hill above it. "How odd and pretty!"

"That is the Morgan chapel."

"Oh, may we see it?"

"Of course," assented Dolly, less enthusiastically. "Do you really want to see it?"

It was Alice's turn to be interested: "Why, yes, if we may. How quaint-looking," she pursued, scrutinizing the façade.

"It is, in fact, a mediæval style," said Dolly.

The car was turned into the driveway leading up to the chapel. When the two women had alighted and walked up the steps to the porch, Alice found the building larger than it had appeared from below the Morgan house.

Dolly led the way within. "It really is a beautiful thing," she sighed as they entered. "A reproduction in part–this interior–of a little church in Rome, that Mrs. Morgan was crazy about, Santa Maria in–dear me, I never can remember, Santa Maria in something or other. But I want you to look at this balustrade, and to walk up into one of these ambones. Can't you see some dark-faced Savonarola preaching from one on the sins of society?" Dolly ascended the steps of one ambone as she spoke, while Alice walked up into the other.

"You look as if you might do very well there yourself on that topic," suggested Alice.

"But I don't have to get into an ambone to preach. I do well anywhere, as long as I have an audience," continued Dolly as she swept the modest nave with a confident glance.

They walked back toward the door: "Here's a perfect light on the chancel window," said Dolly pausing. "Superb coloring, I think."

Alice, held by the soft rich flame of the glass, halted a moment, and saw in a niche removed from casual sight the bronze figure of a knight standing above a pavement tomb. "Is this a memorial?"

"Poor Bertha," continued Dolly; "ordered most of these windows herself."

"But this bronze, Mrs. De Castro, what is it?"

"A memorial of a son of Bertha's, dear."

The shield of the belted figure bore the Morgan arms. An inscription set in the tomb at his feet took Alice's attention, and Dolly without joining her waited upon her interest.

"And in whose memory do you say this is?" persisted Alice.

"In memory of one of Bertha's sons, dear."

"Is he buried here?"

"No, he lies in Kimberly Acre, the family burial-ground on The Towers estate–where we shall all with our troubles one day lie. This poor boy committed suicide."

"How dreadful!"

"It is too sad a story to tell."

"Of course."

"And I am morbidly sensitive about suicide."

"These Morgans then were relatives of the Mrs. Morgan I met last night?"

"Relatives, yes. But in this instance, that signifies nothing. These, as I told you, were Fritzie's people and are *very* different."

They reëntered the car and drove rapidly down the ridge. In the distance, to the south and east, the red gables of a cluster of buildings showed far away among green, wooded hills.

"That is a school, is it?" asked Alice.

"No, it is a Catholic institution. It is a school, in a way, too, but not of the kind you mean–something of a charitable and training school. The Catholic church of the village stands just beyond there. There are a number of Catholics over toward the seashore–delightful people. We have none in our set."

The ridge road led them far into the country and they drove rapidly along ribboned highways until a great hill confronted them and they began to wind around its base toward the lake and home. Half-way up they left the main road, turned into an open gateway, and passing a lodge entered the heavy woods of The Towers villa.

"The Towers is really our only show-place," explained Dolly, "though Robert, I think, neglects it. Of course, it is a place that stands hard treatment. But think of the opportunities on these beautiful slopes for landscape gardening."

"It is very large."

"About two thousand acres. Robert, I fancy, cares for the trees more than anything else."

"And he lives here alone?"

"With Uncle John Kimberly. Uncle John is all alone in the world, and a paralytic."

"How unfortunate!"

"Yes. It is unfortunate in some ways; in others not so much so. Don't be shocked. Ours is so big a family we have many kinds. Uncle John! mercy! he led his poor Lydia a life. And she was a saint if ever a wife was one. I hope she has gone to her reward. She never saw through all the weary years, never knew, *outwardly*, anything of his wickedness."

Dolly looked ahead. "There is the house. See, up through the trees? We shall get a fine view in a minute. I don't know why it has to be, but each generation of our family has had a brainy Kimberly and a wicked Kimberly. The legend is, that when they meet in one, the Kimberlys will end."

CHAPTER V

To afford Alice the effect of the main approach to The Towers itself, Dolly ordered a roundabout drive which gave her guest an idea of the beauties of the villa grounds.

They passed glades of unusual size, bordered by natural forests. They drove among pleasing successions of hills, followed up valleys with occasional brooks, and emerged at length on wide, open stretches of a plateau commanding the lake.

A further drive along the bluffs that rose high above the water showed the bolder features of an American landscape unspoiled by overtreatment. The car finally brought them to the lower end of a long, formal avenue of elms that made a setting for the ample house of gray stone, placed on an elevation that commanded the whole of Second Lake and the southern country for many miles.

Its advantage of position was obvious and the castellated effect, from which its name derived, implied a strength of uncompromising pride commonly associated with the Kimberlys themselves.

At Dolly's suggestion they walked around through the south garden which lay toward the lake. At the garden entrance stood a sun-dial and Alice paused to read the inscription:

Per ogni ora che passa, im ricordo.
Per ogni ora che batte, una felicità.
Per ogni ora che viene, una speranza.

"It is a duplicate of a dial that Robert fancied in the garden of the Kimberly

villa on Lago Maggiore," Dolly explained. "Come this way, I want you to see the lake and the terrace."

From the terrace they looked back again at the house. Well-placed windows and ample verandas afforded views in every direction of the surrounding country. Retracing their way to the main entrance, they ascended a broad flight of stone steps and entered the house itself.

Following Dolly into the hall, Alice saw a chamber almost severe in spaciousness and still somewhat untamed in its oak ruggedness. But glimpses into the apartments opening off it were delightfully satisfying.

They peeped into the dining-room as they passed. It was an old-day room, heavily beamed in gloomy oak, with a massive round table and high chairs. The room filled the whole southern exposure of its wing and at one end Alice saw a fireplace above which hung a great Dutch mirror framed in heavy seventeenth-century style. Dolly pointed to it: "It is our sole heirloom, and Robert won't change it from the fireplace. The Kimberly mirror, we call it–from Holland with our first Kimberly. The oak in this room is good."

Taken as a whole, however, Dolly frankly considered The Towers too evidently suggestive of the old-fashioned. This she satisfactorily accounted for by the fact that the house lacked the magic of a woman's presence.

Alice, walking with her, slowly and critically, found nowhere any discordant notes. The carpets offered the delicate restraints of Eastern fancy, and the wall pictures, seen in passing, invited more leisurely inspection.

There was here something in marble, something there Oriental, but nowhere were effects confused, and they had been subdued until consciousness of their art was not aroused.

Alice, sensitive to indefinable impressions, had never seen anything comparable to what she now saw, and an interior so restful should have put her at ease.

Yet the first pleasing breath in this atmosphere brought with it something, she could not have told what, of uneasiness, and it was of this that she was vaguely conscious, as Dolly questioned the servant that met them.

"Is Mr. De Castro here yet?" she asked.

"Yes, Mrs. De Castro. He is with Mr. Kimberly. I think they are in the garden."

"Tell them we are here. We will go up and speak to Uncle John."

They were at the foot of the stairs: "Sha'n't I wait for you?" suggested Alice.

"By no means. Come with me. He is really the head of the family, you know," Dolly added in an undertone, "and mustn't be slighted."

Alice, amused at the importance placed upon the situation, smiled at Dolly's earnestness. As she ascended the stairs with her hostess, a little wave

of self-consciousness swept over her.

On the second floor was a long gallery opening at the farther end upon a western belvedere, lighted just then by the sun. The effect of the room, confusing at first in its arrangement, was, in fact, that of a wide and irregular reception hall for the apartments opening on the second floor. At the moment the two women reached the archway, a man walked in at the farther end from the terrace.

"There is Robert, now!" Dolly exclaimed. He was opening the door of a room near at hand when he saw his sister with Alice, and came forward to meet them. As he did so, a door mid-way down the hall opened and a man clad in a black habit crossed between Kimberly and Alice.

"That is Francis, who takes care of Uncle John," said Dolly. Francis, walked toward the balcony without seeing the visitors, but his ear caught the tones of Dolly's voice and she waved a hand at him as he turned his head. He paused to bow and continued his way through a balcony door.

As Kimberly came forward his face was so nearly without a smile that Alice for a moment was chilled.

"I brought Mrs. MacBirney in to see Uncle John a moment, Robert. How are you?" Dolly asked.

"Thank you, very well. And it is a pleasure to see Mrs. MacBirney, Dolly."

He looked into Alice's eyes as he spoke. She thanked him, simply. Dolly made a remark but Alice did not catch it. In some confusion of thought she was absurdly conscious that Kimberly was looking at her and that his eyes were gray, that he wore a suit of gray and that she now, exchanging compliments with him, was clad in lavender. The three talked together for some moments. Yet something formal remained in Kimberly's manner and Alice was already the least bit on the defensive.

She was, at any rate, glad to feel that her motoring rig would bear inspection, for it seemed as if his eyes, without offensively appearing to do so, took in the slightest detail of her appearance. His words were of a piece with his manner. They were agreeable, but either what he said lacked enthusiasm or preoccupation clouded his efforts to be cordial.

"They told us," said Dolly, at length, "you were in the garden."

"Arthur is down there somewhere," returned Kimberly. "We will go this way for Uncle John," he added. "Francis is giving him an airing."

They walked out to the belvedere. Facing the sunset, Alice saw in an invalid chair an old man with a wrinkled white face. Dolly, hastening forward, greeted him in elevated tones. Kimberly turned to Alice with a suggestion of humor as they waited a little way from Dolly's hand. "My sister, curiously enough," said he, "always forgets that Uncle John is *not* deaf. And he doesn't like it a bit."

"Many people instinctively speak louder to invalids," said Alice. Uncle

John's eyes turned slowly toward Alice as he heard her voice. Dolly, evidently, was referring to her, and beckoned her to come nearer. Alice saw the old man looking at her with the slow care of the paralytic–of one who has learned to distrust his physical faculties. Alice disliked his eyes. He tried to rise, but Dolly frowned on his attempt: it looked like a failure, anyway, and he greeted Alice from his chair.

"You are getting altogether too spry, Uncle John," cried Dolly.

His eyes turned slowly from Alice's face to Dolly's and he looked at his talkative niece quizzically: "Am I?" Then, with the mildly suspicious smile on his face, his eyes returned to Alice. Kimberly watched his uncle.

"They say you want to ride horseback," continued Dolly, jocularly. He looked at her again: "Do they?" Then he looked back at Alice.

Kimberly, his hands half-way in the pockets of his sack-coat, turned in protest: "I think you two go through this every time you come over, Dolly." Dolly waved her hand with a laugh. Uncle John this time did not even take the trouble to look around. He continued to smile at Alice even while he returned to Robert his non-committal: "Do we?"

Alice felt desirous of edging away from Uncle John's kind of Kimberly eyes. "You ought to get better here very fast, Mr. Kimberly," she said to him briskly. "This lovely prospect!" she exclaimed, looking about her. "And in every direction."

"It is pretty toward the lake," Robert volunteered, knowing that Uncle John would merely look at Alice without response.

He led the way as he spoke toward the mirrored sheet of water and, as Alice came to his side, pointed out the features of the landscape. Dolly sat a moment with Uncle John and joined Kimberly and Alice as they walked on.

They encountered the attendant, Brother Francis, who had retreated as far as he could from the visitors. Dolly, greeting him warmly, turned to Alice. "Mrs. MacBirney, this is Brother Francis who takes care–and such excellent care!–of Uncle John."

Brother Francis's features were spare. His slender nose emphasized the strength of his face. But if his expression at the moment was sober, and his dark eyes looked as if his thoughts might be away, they were kindly. His eyes, too, fell almost at the instant Dolly spoke and he only bowed his greeting to Alice. But with Francis a bow was everything. Whether he welcomed, tolerated, or disapproved, his bow clearly and sufficiently signified.

His greeting of Alice expressed deference and sincerity. But there was even more in it–something of the sensible attitude of a gentleman who, in meeting a lady in passing, and being himself an attendant, desires to be so considered and seeks with his greeting to dismiss himself from the situation. To this end,

however, Francis's efforts were unsuccessful.

"He is the most modest man in the world," murmured Dolly, in concluding a eulogium, delivered to Alice almost in the poor Brother's face.

"Then why not spare his feelings?" suggested Kimberly.

"Because I don't believe in hiding a light under a bushel," returned Dolly, vigorously. "There is so little modesty left nowadays—-"

"That you want to be rid of what there is," suggested Kimberly.

"That when I find it I think it a duty to recognize it," Dolly persisted.

Brother Francis maintained his composure as well as he could. Indeed, self-consciousness seemed quite lacking in him. "Surely," he smiled, bowing again, "Madame De Castro has a good heart. That," he added to Alice, italicizing his words with an expressive forefinger, "is the real secret. But I see danger even if one *should* possess a gift so precious as modesty," he continued, raising his finger this time in mild admonition; "when you–how do you say in English–'trot out' the modesty and set it up to look at"–Francis's large eyes grew luminous in pantomime–"the first thing you know, pff! Where is it? You search." Brother Francis beat the skirt of his black gown with his hands, and shook it as if to dislodge the missing virtue. Then holding his empty palms upward and outward, and adding the dismay of his shoulders to the fancied situation, he asked: "Where is it? It is gone!"

"Which means we shouldn't tempt Brother Francis's modesty," interposed Alice.

Francis looked at Alice inquiringly. "You are a Catholic?" he said, "your husband not."

Alice laughed: "How did you know?"

Francis waved his hand toward his informant: "Mr. Kimberly."

The answer surprised Alice. She looked at Kimberly.

There was an instant of embarrassment. "Francis feels our pagan atmosphere so keenly," Kimberly said slowly, "that I gave him the news about you as a bracer–just to let him know we had a friend at court even if we were shut out ourselves."

"He told me," continued Francis, with humor, "that a Catholic lady was coming this afternoon, and to put on my new habit."

"Which, of course, you did not do," interposed Kimberly, regaining the situation.

Brother Francis looked deprecatingly at his shiny serge.

Dolly and Alice laughed. "Mr. Kimberly didn't understand that you kept on your old one out of humility," said Alice. "But how did you know anything about my religion?" she asked, turning to Kimberly.

Francis took this chance to slip away to his charge.

"Arthur De Castro is the culprit," answered Kimberly. "He told me some time ago."

"You have a good memory."

"For some things. Won't you pour tea for Mrs. MacBirney, Dolly? Let us go downstairs, anyway."

He walked with Alice into the house, talking as they went.

Dolly bent over Uncle John's chair. "Isn't she nice?" she whispered, nodding toward Alice as Alice disappeared with Kimberly. "You know Madame De Castro went to school in Paris with her mother, who was a De Gallon, and her father–Alice's grandfather–was the last man in Louisville to wear a queue."

Uncle John seemed not greatly moved at this information, but did look reminiscent. "What was her father's name?"

"Alice's father was named Marshall. He and her mother both are dead. She has no near relatives."

"I remember Marshall–he was a refiner."

"Precisely; he met with reverses a few years ago."

Uncle John looked after Alice with his feeble, questioning grin. "Fine looking," he muttered, still looking after her much as the toothless giant looked after Christian as he passed his cave. "Fine looking."

Dolly was annoyed: "Oh, you're always thinking about fine looks! She is nice."

Uncle John smiled undismayed. "Is she?"

CHAPTER VI

Alice had been married five years–it seemed a long time. The first five years of married life are likely to be long enough to chart pretty accurately the currents of the future, however insufficient to predict just where those currents will carry one.

Much disillusioning comes in the first five years; when they have passed we know less of ourselves and more of our consort. Undoubtedly the complement of this is true, and our consort knows more of us; but this thought, not always reassuring, comes only when we reflect concerning ourselves, which fortunately, perhaps, is not often. Married people, if we may judge from what they say, tend to reflect more concerning their mates.

Alice, it is certain, knew less of herself. Much of the confidence of five years earlier she had parted with, some of it cruelly. Yet coming at twenty-five into the Kimberly circle, and with the probability of remaining in it, of its being to her a new picture of life, Alice gradually renewed her youth. Some current flowing from this joy of living seemed to revive in her the illusions of girlhood. All that she now questioned was whether it really was for her.

Her husband enjoyed her promise of success in their new surroundings without realizing in the least how clearly those about them discriminated between his wife and himself. She brought one quality that was priceless among those with whom she now mingled–freshness.

Among such people her wares of mental aptness, intelligence, amiability, not to discuss a charm of person that gave her a place among women, were rated higher than they could have been elsewhere. She breathed in her new atmosphere with a renewed confidence, for nothing is more gratifying than to be judged by what we believe to be the best in us; and nothing more reassuring after being neglected by stupid people than to find ourselves approved by the best.

Walter MacBirney, her husband, representing himself and his Western associates, and now looked on by them as a man who had forced recognition from the Kimberly interests, made on his side, too, a favorable impression among the men with whom his affairs brought him for the first time in contact.

If there was an exception to such an impression it was with Robert Kimberly, but even with him MacBirney maintained easily the reputation accorded to Western men for general capacity and a certain driving ability for putting things through.

He was described as self-made; and examined with the quiet curiosity of those less fortunate Eastern men who were unwilling or unable to ascribe their authorship to themselves, he made a satisfactory showing.

In the Kimberly coterie of men, which consisted in truth more of the staff associates in the Kimberly activities than of the Kimberlys themselves, the appearance of MacBirney on the scene at Second Lake was a matter of interest to every one of the fledgling magnates, who, under the larger wing of the Kimberlys, directed the commercial end of their interests.

McCrea, known as Robert Kimberly's right-hand man; Cready Hamilton, one of the Kimberly bankers, and brother of Doctor Hamilton, Robert's closest friend; Nelson, the Kimberly counsel–all took a hand in going over MacBirney, so to say, and grading him up. They found for one thing that he could talk without saying anything; which in conducting negotiations was an excellent trait. And if not always a successful story-teller, he was a shrewd listener. In everything his native energy gave him a show of interest which, even when factitious, told in his favor.

Soon after the call on Uncle John, Dolly arranged a dinner for the MacBirneys, at which Charles Kimberly and his wife and Robert Kimberly were to be the guests. It followed a second evening spent at the Nelsons', whence Robert Kimberly had come home with the De Castros and MacBirneys. Alice had sung for them. After accepting for the De Castro dinner, Robert at the last moment sent excuses. Dolly masked her feelings. Imogene and Charles complained a little, but Arthur De Castro was so good a host that he alone would have made a dinner go.

MacBirney, after he and Alice had gone to their rooms for the night, spoke of Robert's absence. "I don't quite understand that man," he mused. "What do you make of him, Alice?"

Alice was braiding her hair. She turned from her table. "I've met him very little, you know–when we called at his house, and twice at the Nelsons'. And I saw very little of him last night. He was with that drinking set most of the evening."

MacBirney started. "Don't say 'that drinking set.'"

"Really, that describes them, Walter. I don't see that they excel in anything else. I hate drinking women."

"When you're in Rome, do as the Romans do," suggested MacBirney, curtly.

Alice's tone hardened a trifle. "Or at least let the Romans do as they please, without comment."

"Exactly," snapped her husband. "I don't know just what to make of Kimberly," he went on.

"Charles, or the brother?"

"Robert, Robert. He's the one they all play to here." MacBirney, sitting in a lounging-chair, emphasized the last words, as he could do when impatient, and shut his teeth and lips as he did when perplexed. "I wonder why he didn't come to-night?"

Alice had no explanation to offer. "Charles," she suggested, tying her hair-ribbon, "is very nice."

"Why, yes–you and Charles are chummy already. I wish we could get better acquainted with Robert," he continued, knitting his brows. "I thought you were a little short with him last night, Alice."

"Short? Oh, Walter! We didn't exchange a dozen words."

"That's just the way it struck me."

"But we had no chance to. I am sure I didn't mean to be short. I sang, didn't I? And more on his account, from what Dolly had said to me, than anybody else's. He didn't like my singing, but I couldn't help that. He didn't say a single word."

"Why, he did say something!"

"Just some stiff remark when he thanked me."

Alice, rising, left her table. MacBirney laughed.

"Oh, I see. That's what's the matter. Well, you're quite mistaken, my dear." Catching Alice in his arms as she passed, in a way he did when he wished to seem affectionate, MacBirney drew his wife to him. "He *did* like it. He remarked to me just as he said good-night, that you had a fine voice."

"That does not sound like him–possibly he was ironical."

"And when I thanked him," continued MacBirney, "he took the trouble to repeat: 'That song was beautifully sung.' Those were his exact words."

In spite of painful experiences it rarely occurred to Alice that her husband might be deceiving her, nor did she learn till long afterward that he had lied to her that night. With her feelings in some degree appeased she only made an incredulous little exclamation: "He didn't ask me to sing again," she added quietly.

MacBirney shrugged his shoulders. "He is peculiar."

"I try, Walter," she went on, lifting her eyes to his with an effort, "to be as pleasant as I can to all of these people, for your sake."

"I know it, Alice." He kissed her. "I know it. Let us see now what we can do to cultivate Robert Kimberly. He is the third rail in this combination, and he is the only one on the board of directors who voted finally against taking us in."

"Is that true?"

"So Doane told Lambert, in confidence, and Lambert told me."

"Oh, Lambert! That detestable fellow. I wouldn't believe anything he said anyway."

MacBirney bared his teeth pleasantly. "Pshaw! You hate him because he makes fun of your Church."

"No. I despise him, because he is a Catholic and ridicules his own."

Her husband knew controversy was not the way to get a favor. "I guess you're right about that, Allie. Anyway, try being pleasant to Kimberly. The way you know how to be, Allie–the way you caught me, eh?" He drew her to him with breezy enthusiasm. Alice showed some distress.

"Don't say such things, please."

"That was only a joke."

"I hate such jokes."

"Very well, I mean, just be natural," persisted MacBirney amiably, "you are fascinating enough any old way."

Alice manifested little spirit. "Does it make so much difference to you, Walter, whether we pay attention to *him*?"

MacBirney raised his eyebrows with a laughing start. "What an innocent you are," he cried in a subdued tone. And his ways of speech, if ever attractive, were now too familiar. "Difference!" he exclaimed cheerily. "When they buy he

will name the figure."

"But I thought they had decided to buy."

"The executive committee has authorized the purchase. But he, as president, has been given the power to fix the price. Don't you see? We can afford to smile a little, eh?"

"It would kill me to smile if I had to do it for money."

"Oh, you are a baby in arms, Allie," exclaimed her husband impatiently, "just like your father! You'd starve to death if it weren't for me."

"No doubt."

MacBirney was still laughing at the idea when he left his wife's room, and entering his own, closed the door.

Alice, in her room, lay in the darkness for a long time with open eyes.

CHAPTER VII

The test of Alice's willingness to smile came within a brief fortnight, when with the De Castros, she was the guest of Imogene Kimberly at The Cliffs, Imogene's home.

"This is all most informal," said Imogene, as she went downstairs arm-in-arm with Alice; "as you see, only one-half the house is open."

"The open half is so lovely," returned Alice, "that I'm glad to take the other half on faith."

"It was my only chance–this week, and as Dolly says, I 'jumped at it'! I am sorry your husband has disappointed us."

"He was called to town quite unexpectedly."

"But Providence has provided a substitute. Robert Kimberly is coming." Alice almost caught her breath. "He is another of those men," continued Imogene, "whom you never can get when you want them. Fortunately he telephoned a moment ago saying he *must* see Charles. I answered that the only possible way to see him was to come over now, for he is going fishing and leaves at midnight. The guides wired this morning that the ice is out. And when the ice goes out," Imogene raised her hands, "neither fire nor earthquake can stop Charles. Here is Robert now. Oh, and he has Doctor Hamilton with him. All the better. If we can get both we shall have no lack of men."

Robert Kimberly and Doctor Hamilton were coming down the hall. "How

delightful!" cried Imogene, advancing, "and I am so glad *you*'ve come, doctor."

Kimberly paused. He saw Alice lingering behind her hostess and the De Castros with Fritzie Venable coming downstairs.

"You have a dinner on," he said to Imogene.

"Only a small one."

"But you didn't tell me—-"

"Just to give you a chance to show your indifference to surprises, Robert."

She introduced Doctor Hamilton to Alice. "These two are always together," she explained to Alice, lifting her fan toward the doctor and her brother-in-law. "But any hostess is fortunate to capture them like this, just the right moment."

Hamilton, greeting Alice, turned to Imogene: "What is this about your husband's going to Labrador to-morrow?"

"He is going to-night. The salmon are doing something or other."

"Deserted Gaspé, has he?"

"Temporarily," said Imogene, pausing to give an order to a butler. Robert waited a moment for her attention. "I brought the doctor," he explained, "because I couldn't leave him to dine alone. And now—-"

"And now," echoed Imogene, "you see how beautifully it turns out. The Nelsons declined, Mr. MacBirney disappoints me, Charles goes fishing, and can't get home to-night in time to dine. But there are still seven of us–what could be better? Mrs. De Castro will claim the doctor. Arthur won't desert me, and, Robert, you may give an arm to Fritzie and one to Mrs. MacBirney."

There was now no escape from a smile, and Alice resolved to be loyal to her hostess. The party moved into the drawing-room.

Fritzie Venable tried to engage Kimberly in answering her questions about a saddle-horse that one of his grooms had recommended. Kimberly professed to know nothing about it. When it became apparent that he really did know nothing of the horse, Fritzie insisted on explaining.

Her spirited talk, whether concerning her own troubles or those of other people, was not uninteresting. Soon she talked more especially to Alice. Kimberly listened not inattentively but somewhat perfunctorily, and the manner, noticeable at their second meeting, again impressed Alice.

Whether it was a constraint or an unpleasing reserve was not clear; and it might have been the abstraction of a busied man, one of that type familiar in American life who are inherently interesting, but whose business affairs never wholly release their thought.

Whatever the cause, Fritzie was sufficiently interested in her own stories to ignore it and in a degree to overcome the effect of it. She was sure of her ground because she knew her distinguished connection had a considerate spot in his heart for her. She finally attacked him directly, and at first he did not go

to the trouble of a defence. When she at length accused him, rather sharply, of letting business swallow him up, Kimberly, with Alice listening, showed a trace of impatience.

"The old sugar business!" Fritzie exclaimed reproachfully, "it is taking the spirituality completely out of the Kimberly family."

Robert looked at her in genuine surprise and burst into a laugh. "What's that?" he demanded, bending incredulously forward.

Fritzie tossed her head. "I don't care!"

"Spirituality?" echoed Kimberly, with a quiet malice. His laugh annoyed Fritzie, but she stuck to her guns: "Spirits, then; or gayety, or life!" she cried. "I don't care what you call it. Anything besides everlastingly piling up money. Oh, these almighty dollars!"

"You tire of them so quickly, is it, Fritzie? Or is it that they don't feel on familiar terms enough to stay long with you?" he asked, while Alice was smiling at the encounter.

Fritzie summoned her dignity and pointed every word with a nod. "I simply don't want to see *all* of my friends–ossify! Should you?" she demanded, turning to Alice for approval.

"Certainly not," responded Alice.

"Bone black is very useful in our business," observed Kimberly.

Fritzie's eyes snapped. "Then buy it! Don't attempt to supply the demand out of your own bones!"

It would have been churlish to refuse her her laugh. Kimberly and Alice for the first time laughed together and found it pleasant.

Fritzie, following up her advantage, asked Doctor Hamilton whether he had heard Dora Morgan's latest joke. "She had a dispute," continued Fritzie, "with George Doane last night about Unitarians and Universalists—-"

"Heavens, have those two got to talking religion?" demanded Kimberly, wearily.

"George happened to say to Cready Hamilton that Unitarians and Universalists believed just about the same doctrine. When Dora insisted it was not so, George told her she couldn't name a difference. 'Why, nonsense, George,' said Dora, 'Unitarians deny the divinity of Christ, but Universalists don't believe in a damned thing.' And the funny part of it was, George got furious at her," concluded Fritzie with merriment.

"I suppose you, too, fish," ventured Alice to Kimberly as the party started for the dining-room.

"My fishing is something of a bluff," he confessed. "That is, I fish, but I don't get anything. My brother really does get the fish," he said as he seated her. "He campaigns for them–one has to nowadays, even for fish. I can't scrape up interest

enough in it for that. I whip one pool after another and drag myself wearily over portages and chase about in boats, and my guides fable wisely but I get next to nothing."

Alice laughed. Even though he assumed incompetence it seemed assumed. And in saying that he got no fish one felt that he did get them.

Arthur was talking of Uncle John's nurse–whom the circle had nicknamed "Lazarus." He referred to the sacrifices made sometimes by men.

"It won't do to say," De Castro maintained, "that these men are mere clods, that they have no nerves, no sensitiveness. The first one you meet may be such a one; the next, educated or of gentle blood."

"'Lazarus,'" he continued, "is by no means a common man. He is a gentleman, the product of centuries of culture–this is evident from five minutes' talk with him. Yet he has abandoned everything–family, surroundings, luxuries–for a work that none of us would dream of undertaking."

"And what about women, my dear?" demanded Dolly. "I don't say, take a class of women–take any woman. A woman's life is nothing but sacrifice. The trouble is that women bear their burdens uncomplainingly. That is where all women make a mistake. My life has been a whole series of sacrifices, and I propose people shall know it."

"No matter, Dolly," suggested Imogene, "your wrongs shall be righted in the next world."

"I should just like the chance to tell my story up there," continued Dolly, fervently.

Kimberly turned to Alice: "All that Dolly fears," said he, in an aside, "is that heaven will prove a disappointment. But to change the subject from heaven abruptly–you are from the West, Mrs. MacBirney."

"Do you find the change so abrupt? and must I confess again to the West?"

"Not if you feel it incriminates you."

"But I don't," protested Alice with spirit.

"Has your home always been there?"

"Yes, in St. Louis; and it is a very dear old place. Some of my early married life was spent much farther West."

"How much farther?"

"So much that I can hardly make anybody comprehend it–Colorado."

"How so?"

"They ask me such wild questions about buffalos and Indians. I have found one woman since coming here who has been as far West as Chicago, once."

"In what part of Colorado were you?"

"South of Denver."

"You had beautiful surroundings."

"Oh, do you know that country?"

"Not nearly as well as I should like to. It is beautiful."

Alice laughed repentantly as she answered: "More beautiful to me now, I'm afraid, than it was then."

"Any town is quiet for a city girl, of course. Was it a small town?"

"Quite small. And odd in many ways."

"I see; where the people have 'best clothes'—-"

"Don't make fun."

"And wear them on Sunday. And there is usually one three-story building in the town–I was marooned over Sunday once in a little Western town, with an uncle. I saw a sign on a big building: 'Odd Fellows' Hall.' Who are the Odd Fellows, uncle?' I asked. He was a crusty old fellow: 'Optimists, my son, optimists,' he growled, 'They build three-story buildings in two-story towns.' What was your town, by the way?"

"Piedmont."

"Piedmont?" Kimberly paused a moment. "I ought to know something of that town."

Alice looked surprised. "You?"

"The uncle I spoke of built a railroad through there to the Gulf. Isn't there a town below Piedmont named Kimberly?"

"To be sure there is. How stupid! I never thought it was named after your uncle."

"No, that uncle was a Morgan,", interposed Imogene, listening, "the town was named after your next neighbor."

"How interesting! And how could you make such fun of me–having me tell you of a country you knew all about! And a whole town named after you!"

"That is a modest distinction," remarked Kimberly. "As a boy I was out there with an engineering party and hunted a little. My uncle gave me the town as a Christmas present."

"A town for a Christmas present!"

"I suspected after I began paying taxes on my present that my uncle had got tired of it. They used to sit up nights out there to figure out new taxes. In the matter of devising taxes it is the most industrious, progressive, tireless community I have ever known. And their pleas were so ingenious; they made you feel that if you opposed them you were an enemy to mankind."

"Then they beguiled Robert every once in a while," interposed Fritzie, "into a town hall or public library or a park or electric lighting plant. Once they asked him for a drinking fountain." Fritzie laughed immoderately at the recollection. "He put in the fountain and afterward learned there was no water within fifteen miles; they then urged him to put in a water-works system to get water to it."

"I suggested a brewery to supply the fountain," said Arthur, looking over, "and that he might work out even by selling the surplus beer. There were difficulties, of course; if he supplied the fountain with beer, nobody would buy it in bottles. Then it was proposed to sell the surplus beer to the neighboring towns. But with the fountain playing in Kimberly, these would pretty certainly be depopulated. Per contra, it was figured that this might operate to raise the price of his Kimberly lots. But while we were working the thing out for him, what do you think happened?"

"I haven't an idea," laughed Alice.

"The town voted for prohibition."

"Fancy," murmured Imogene, "and named Kimberly!"

"And what became of the fountain?"

"Oh, it is running; he put in the water-works."

"Generous man!"

"Generous!" echoed Hamilton. "Don't be deceived, Mrs. MacBirney. You should see what he charges them for water. I should think it would be on his conscience, if he has one. He is Jupiter with the frogs. Whatever they ask, he gives them. But when they get it–how they do get it!"

"Don't believe Doctor Hamilton, Mrs. MacBirney," said Robert Kimberly. "I stand better with my Western friends than I do with these cynical Easterners. And if my town will only drink up the maintenance charges, I am satisfied."

"The percentage of lime in the water he supplies is something fierce," persisted the doctor. "It is enough to kill off the population every ten years. I suggested a hospital."

"But didn't Mr. MacBirney tell me they have a sugar factory there?" asked Alice.

"They have," said De Castro. "One of Robert's chemists was out there once trying to analyze the taxes. Incidentally, he brought back some of the soil, thinking there might be something in it to account for the tax mania. And behold, he found it to be fine for sugar beets! Irrigation ditches and a factory were put in. You should see how swell they are out there now."

"Robert has had all kinds of resolutions from the town," said Fritzie.

Kimberly turned to Alice to supplement the remark. "Quite true, I *have* had all kinds–they are strong on resolutions. But lately these have been less sulphurous."

"Well, isn't it odd? My father's ranch once extended nearly all the way from Piedmont to the very town you are speaking of!" exclaimed Alice.

Kimberly looked at her with interest. "Was that really yours–the big ranch north of Kimberly?"

"I spent almost every summer there until I was fifteen."

"That must have been until very lately."

Alice returned his look with the utmost simplicity. "No, indeed, it is ten years ago."

Kimberly threw back his head and it fell forward a little on his chest. "How curious," he said reflectively; "I knew the ranch very well."

When they were saying good-night, Imogene whispered to Alice: "I congratulate you."

Alice, flushed with the pleasure of the evening, stood in her wraps. She raised her brows in pleased surprise. "Pray what for?"

"Your success. The evening, you know, was in your honor; and you were decidedly the feature of it."

"I really didn't suspect it."

"And you made a perfect success with your unexpected neighbor."

"But I didn't do anything at all!"

"It isn't every woman that succeeds without trying. We have been working for a long time to pull Robert out of the dumps." Imogene laughed softly. "I noticed to-night while you were talking to him that he tossed back his head once or twice. When he does that, he is waking up! Here is your car, Dolly," she added, as the De Castros came into the vestibule.

"Arthur is going to take Doctor Hamilton and Fritzie in our car, Imogene," explained Dolly. "Robert has asked Mrs. MacBirney and me to drive home around the south shore with him."

CHAPTER VIII

Charles Kimberly was at The Towers the morning after the return from his fishing trip, to confer with Uncle John and his brother upon the negotiations for the MacBirney properties. In the consideration of any question each of the three Kimberlys began with a view-point quite distinct from those of the others.

John Kimberly, even in old age and stricken physically to an appalling degree, swerved not a hair's-breadth from his constant philosophy of life. He believed first and last in force, and that feeble remnant of vitality which disease, or what Dolly would have termed, "God's vengeance," had left him, was set on the use of force.

To the extent that fraud is an element of force, he employed fraud; but

it was only because fraud is a part of force, and whoever sets store by the one will not always shrink from the other. Any disposition of a question that lacked something of this complexion seemed to Uncle John a dangerous one.

Charles had so long seen bludgeoning succeed that it had become an accepted part of his business philosophy. But in the day he now faced, new forces had arisen. Public sentiment had become a factor in industrial problems; John was blind to its dangerous power; Charles was quite alive to it.

New views of the problem of competition had been advanced, and in advocating them, one of the Kimberlys, Robert, was known to be a leader. This school sought to draw the sting of competitive loss through understandings, coöperation, and peace, instead of suspicion, random effort, and war.

Charles saw this tendency with satisfaction; Uncle John saw it sceptically. But Charles, influenced by the mastery of his uncle, became unsettled in his conclusions and stood liable to veer in his judgment to one side or the other of the question, as he might be swayed by apprehensions concerning the new conditions or rested in confidence in the policies of the old.

Between these two Kimberly make-ups, the one great in attack, the other in compromise, stood Robert. "Say what you please," Nelson often repeated to McCrea, "John may be all right, but his day is past. Charlie forgets every day more than the opposition know, all told. But I call Robert the devil of the family. How does he know when to be bold? Can you tell? How does he know when to be prudent? I know men, if I do anything, McCrea–but I never can measure that fellow."

Whatever Robert liked at least enlisted all of his activities and his temperament turned these into steam cylinders. John Kimberly influenced Robert in no way at all and after some years of profanity and rage perceived that he never should. This discovery was so astounding that after a certain great family crisis he silently and secretly handed the sceptre of family infallibility over to his nephew.

Left thus to himself, Robert continued to think for himself. The same faculties that had served John a generation earlier now served Robert. John had forgotten that when a young man he had never let anybody think for him, and the energy that had once made John, also made his younger nephew.

The shrewdness that had once overcome competition by war now united with competitors to overcome the public by peace. The real object of industrial endeavor being to make money, a white-winged and benevolent peace, as Nelson termed it, should be the policy of all interests concerned. And after many hard words, peace with eighty per cent. of the business was usually achieved by the united Kimberlys.

It had cost something to reach this situation; and now that the West had

come into the sugar world it became a Kimberly problem to determine how the new interests should be taken care of.

On the morning that Charles called he found Uncle John in his chair. They sent for Robert, and pending his appearance opened the conference. At the end of a quarter of an hour Robert had not appeared. Charles looked impatiently at his watch and despatched a second servant to summon his brother. After twenty-five minutes a third call was sent.

During this time, in the sunniest corner of the south garden, sheltered by a high stone wall crested with English ivy and overgrown with climbing roses, sat Robert Kimberly indolently watching Brother Francis and a diminutive Skye terrier named Sugar.

Sugar was one of Kimberly's dogs, but Francis had nursed Sugar through an attack after the kennel keepers had given him up. And the little dog although very sick and frowsy had finally pulled through. The intimacy thus established between Sugar and Francis was never afterward broken but by death.

In this sunny corner, Kimberly, in a loose, brown suit of tweed, his eyes shaded by a straw hat, sat in a hickory chair near a table. It was the corner of the garden in which Francis when off duty could oftenest be found. A sheltered walk led to the pergola along which he paced for exercise. Near the corner of the wall stood an oak. And a bench, some chairs and a table made the spot attractive. Sugar loved the bench, and, curled up on it, usually kept watch while Francis walked. On cold days the dog lay with one hair-curtained eye on the coming and going black habit. On warm days, cocking one ear for the measured step, he dozed.

Francis, when Sugar had got quite well, expressed himself as scandalized that the poor dog had never been taught anything. He possessed, his new master declared, neither manners nor accomplishments, and Francis amid other duties had undertaken, in his own words, to make a man of the little fellow.

Robert, sitting lazily by, instead of attending the conference call, and apparently thinking of nothing–though no one could divine just what might be going on under his black-banded hat–was watching Francis put Sugar through some of the hard paces he had laid out for him.

"That dog is naturally stupid, Francis–all my dogs are. They continually cheat me on dogs," said Kimberly presently. "You don't think so? Very well, I will bet you this bank-note," he took one from his waistcoat as he spoke, "that you cannot stop him this time on 'two'."

"I have no money to bet you, Robert."

"I will give you odds."

"You well know I do not bet–is it not so?"

"You are always wanting money; now I will bet you the bank-note against

one dollar, Francis, that you cannot stop him on 'two'."

Francis threw an eye at the money in Kimberly's hand. "How much is the bank-note, Robert?"

"One hundred dollars."

Francis put the temptation behind him. "You would lose your money. Sugar knows how to stop. In any case, I have no dollar."

"I will bet the money against ten cents."

"I have not even ten cents."

"I am sorry, Francis, to see a man receiving as large a salary as you do, waste it in dissipation and luxury. However, if you have no money, I will bet against your habit."

"If I should lose my habit, what would I do?"

"You could wear a shawl," argued Kimberly.

"All would laugh at me. In any case, to bet the clothes off my back would be a sin."

"I am so sure I am right, I will bet the money against your snuff-box, Francis," persisted Kimberly.

"My snuff-box I cannot bet, since Cardinal Santopaolo gave it to me."

"Francis, think of what you could do for your good-for-nothing boys with one hundred dollars."

Francis lifted his dark eyes and shook his head.

"I will bet this," continued the tempter, "against the snuff in your box, that you can't stop him this time on 'two'."

"Sugar will stop on 'two'," declared Francis, now wrought up.

"Dare you bet?"

"Enough! I bet! It is the snuff against the money. May my poor boys win!"

The sunny corner became active. Kimberly straightened up, and Francis began to talk to Sugar.

"Now tell me again," said Kimberly, "what this verse is."

"I say to him," explained Francis, "that the good soldier goes to war—-"

"I understand; then you say, 'One, two, three!'"

"Exactly."

"When you say 'three,' he gets the lump?"

"Yes."

"But the first time you say the verse you stop at 'two.' Then you repeat the verse. If the dog takes the lump before you reach the end the second time and say 'three'—-"

"You get the snuff!" Francis laid the box on the table beside Kimberly's bank-note.

"Sugar! Guarda!" The Skye terrier sat upright on his haunches and lifted

his paws. Francis gave him a preliminary admonition, took from a mysterious pocket a lump of sugar, laid it on the tip of the dog's nose, and holding up his finger, began in a slow and clearly measured tone:

"Buon soldato
Va alia guerra,
Mangia male,
Dorme in terra.
Uno, due–
Buon soldato
Va–"

But here Sugar, to Francis's horror, snapped the lump into his mouth and swallowed it.

"You lose," announced Kimberly.

Francis threw up his hands. "My poor boys!"

"This is the time, Francis, your poor boys don't get my money. I get your snuff."

"Ah, Sugar, Sugar! You ruin us." The little Skye sitting fast, looked innocently and affectionately up at his distressed master. "Why," demanded the crestfallen Francis, "could you not wait for the lump one little instant?"

"Sugar is like me," suggested Kimberly lazily, "he wants what he wants when he wants it."

Alice, this morning, had been deeply in his thoughts. From the moment he woke he had been toying indolently with her image–setting it up before his imagination as a picture, then putting it away, then tempting his lethargy again with the pleasure of recalling it.

He drew a cigar-case from his pocket and carefully emptied the snuff out of the box into it. "When do you get more snuff, Francis?"

"On Saturday."

"This is Tuesday. The box is nearly full. It looks like good stuff." He paused between each sentence. "But you would bet."

Francis without looking busied himself with his little pupil.

"I have emptied the box," announced Kimberly. There was no answer. "Do you want any of it back?"

Francis waved the offer aside.

"A few pinches, Francis?"

"Nothing."

"That dog," continued Kimberly, rapping the box to get every grain out and

perceiving the impossibility of harrying Francis in any other way, "is good for nothing anyway. He wasn't worth saving."

"That dog," returned Francis earnestly, "is a marvel of intelligence and patience. He has so sweet a temper, and he is so quick, Robert, to comprehend."

"I fail to see it."

"You will see it. The fault is in me."

"I don't see that either."

Francis looked at Kimberly appealingly and pointed benevolently at Sugar. "I ask too much of that little dog. He will learn. 'Patience, Francis,' he says to me, 'patience; I will learn.'"

Summoning his philosophy to bridge over the disappointment, Francis, as he stood up, absent-mindedly felt in his deep pocket for his snuff-box. It was in difficulties such as this that recourse to a frugal pinch steadied him. He recollected instantly that the snuff was gone, and with some haste and stepping about, he drew out his handkerchief instead–glancing toward Kimberly as he rubbed his nose vigorously to see if his slip had been detected.

Needless to say it had been–less than that would not have escaped Kimberly, and he was already enjoying the momentary discomfiture. Sugar at that moment saw a squirrel running down the walk and tore after him.

Francis with simple dignity took the empty snuff-box from the table and put it back in his pocket. His composure was restored and the incident to him was closed.

Kimberly understood him so well that it was not hard to turn the talk to a congenial subject. "I drove past the college the other day. I see your people are doing some building."

Francis shrugged his shoulders. "A laundry, Robert."

"Not a big building, is it?"

"We must go slow."

"It is over toward where you said the academy ought to go."

"My poor academy! They do not think it will ever come."

"You have more buildings now than you have students. What do you want with more buildings?"

"No, no. We have three hundred students–three hundred now." Francis looked at his questioner with eyes fiercely eager. "That is the college, Robert. The academy is something else–for what I told you."

"What did you tell me?" Kimberly lighted a cigar and Francis began again to explain.

"This is it: Our Sisters in the city take now sixteen hundred boys from seven to eight years old. These boys they pick up from the orphan courts, from the streets, from the poor parents. When these boys are twelve the Sisters cannot

keep them longer, they must let them go and take in others.

"Here we have our college and these boys are ready for it when they are sixteen. But, between are four fatal years–from twelve to sixteen. If we had a school for *such* boys, think what we could do. They would be always in hand; now, they drift away. They must go to work in the city filth and wickedness. Ah, they need the protection we could give them in those terrible four years, Robert. They need the training in those years to make of them mechanics and artisans–to give them a chance, to help them to do more than drift without compass or rudder–do you not see?

"Those boys that are bright, that we find ready to go further, they are ready at sixteen for our college; we keep and educate them. But the others–the greater part–at sixteen would leave us, but trained to earn. And strengthened during those four critical years against evil. Ah!"

Francis paused. He spoke fast and with an intensity that absorbed him.

Kimberly, leaning comfortably back, sat with one foot resting on his knee. He knocked the ash of his cigar upon the heel of his shoe as he listened–sometimes hearing Francis's words, sometimes not. He had heard all of them before at one time or another; the plea was not new to him, but he liked the fervor of it.

"Ah! It is not for myself that I beg." Brother Francis's hands fell resignedly on his knees. "It is for those poor boys, to keep them, Robert, from going to hell–from hell in this world and in the next. To think of it makes me always sorrowful–it makes a beggar of me–a willing beggar."

Kimberly moved his cigar between his lips.

"But where shall I get so much money?" exclaimed Francis, helplessly. "It will take a million dollars to do what we ought to do. You are a great man, Robert; tell me, how shall I find it?"

"I can't tell you how to find it; I can tell you how to make it."

"How?"

"Go into the sugar business."

"Then I must leave God's business."

"Francis, if you will pardon me, I think for a clever man you are in some respects a great fool. I am not joking. What I have often said about your going into the sugar business, I repeat. You would be worth ten thousand dollars a year to me, and I will pay you that much any day."

Francis looked at Kimberly as if he were a madman, but contented himself with moving his head slowly from side to side in protest. "I cannot leave God's business, Robert. I must work for him and pray to him for the money. Sometime it will come."

"Then tell Uncle John to raise your wages," suggested Kimberly, relapsing

into indifference.

"Robert, will you not sometime give me a letter to introduce me to the great banker who comes here, Hamilton?"

"He will not give you anything."

"He has so much money; how can he possibly need it all?"

"You forget, Francis, that nobody needs money so much as those that have it."

"Ah!"

"Hamilton may have no more money than I have, and you don't ask me for a million dollars."

"It is not necessary to ask you. You know I need it. If you could give it to me, you would."

"If I gave you a million dollars how should I ever get it back?"

Francis spoke with all seriousness. "God will pay you back."

"Yes, but when? That is a good deal of money to lend to God."

"It is a good deal."

"When do I get it back, and how?"

"He will surely pay you, Robert; God pays over there."

"That won't do–over there. It isn't honest."

Francis started. "Not honest?"

"You are offering deferred dividends, Francis. What would my stockholders say if I tried that kind of business? Gad, they would drag me into court."

"Ah, yes! But, Robert; you pay for to-day: he pays for eternity."

Kimberly smoked a moment. "In a proposition of that kind, Francis, it seems to me the question of guarantees is exceedingly important. You good men are safe enough; but where would the bad men come in on your eternal dividends?"

"You are not with the bad men, Robert. Your heart is not bad. You are, perhaps, cruel—-"

"*What?*"

"But generous. Sometime God will give you a chance."

"You mean, sometime I will give God a chance."

"No, Robert, what I say I mean–sometime, God will give you a chance."

Charles Kimberly's impatient voice was heard from the pergola.

"Robert! We've been waiting thirty minutes," he stormed.

"I am just coming."

CHAPTER IX

That afternoon MacBirney played golf with Charles Kimberly. Toward five o'clock, Alice in one of the De Castro cars drove around to The Hickories after him. When he came in, she was sitting on the porch with a group of women, among them Fritzie Venable and Lottie Nelson.

"I must be very displeasing to Mrs. Nelson," Alice said to her husband as they drove away. "It upsets me completely to meet that woman."

"Why, what's the matter with *her*?" asked MacBirney, in a tone which professing friendly surprise really implied that the grievance might after all be one of imagination.

"I haven't an idea," declared Alice a little resentfully. "I am not conscious of having done a thing to offend her."

"You are oversensitive."

"But, Walter, I can tell when people mean to be rude."

"What did Mrs. Nelson do that was rude?" asked her husband in his customary vein of scepticism.

"She never does anything beyond ignoring me," returned Alice. "It must be, I think, that she and I instinctively detest each other. They were talking about a dinner and musicale Thursday night that Mr. Robert Kimberly is giving at The Towers. Miss Venable said she supposed we were going, and I had to say I really didn't know. We haven't been asked, have we?"

"Not that I know of."

"Mrs. Nelson looked at me when Fritzie spoke; I think it is the first time that she ever has looked at me, except when she had to say 'good-morning' or 'good-evening.' I was confused a little when I answered, I suppose; at any rate, she enjoyed it. Mr. Kimberly would not leave us out, would he?"

"I don't think so. He was playing golf this afternoon with Cready Hamilton, and he stopped to offer me his yacht for the week of the cup races."

"Why, how delightful! How came he ever to do that?"

"And I think he has made up his mind what he is going to do about placing me on the board," continued MacBirney, resuming his hard, thin manner and his eager tone of business. "I wish I knew just what is coming."

Alice had scarcely reached her room when she found the dinner invitation. She felt a little thrill of triumph as she read it. Her maid explained that the note had been laid in the morning with Mrs. De Castro's letters.

Late in the evening Kimberly came over with his sister-in-law, Imogene. The De Castros were at the seashore overnight and the visitors' cards were sent up to the MacBirneys. It was warm and the party sat on the south veranda. Kimberly talked with Alice and she told him they hoped to be present at his dinner.

"You are sure to be, aren't you?" he asked. "The evening is given for you."

"For us?"

"No, not for 'us,' but for you," he said distinctly. "Mr. MacBirney has said he is fond of the water–you like music; and I am trying something for each of you. I should have asked you about your engagements before the cards went out. If there is any conflict the date can easily be recalled."

"Oh, no. That would be a pity."

"Not at all. I change my arrangements when necessary every ten minutes."

"But there isn't any conflict, and I shall be delighted to come. Pray, how do you know I like music?"

"I heard you say so once to Arthur De Castro. Tell me what you are amused about?"

"Have I betrayed any amusement?"

"For just about the hundredth part of a second, in your eyes."

They were looking at each other and his gaze though within restraint was undeniably alive. Alice knew not whether she could quite ignore it or whether her eyes would drop in an annoying admission of self-consciousness. She avoided the latter by confessing. "I am sure I don't know at all what you are talking about—-"

"I am sure you do, but you are privileged not to tell if you don't want to."

"Then–our dinner card was mislaid and until to-night we didn't know whether—-"

"There was going to be any dinner."

"Oh, I knew that. I was at the Casino this afternoon—-"

"I saw you."

"And when I was asked whether I was going to the dinner at The Towers I couldn't, of course, say."

"Who asked you, Mrs. Nelson?"

"No, indeed. What made you think it was she?"

"Because she asked me if you were to be there. When I said you were, she laughed in such a way I grew suspicious. I thought, perhaps, for some reason you could not come, and now *I* am confessing–I ran over to-night expressly to

find out."

"How ridiculous!"

"Rather ridiculous of me not to know before-hand."

"I don't mean that–just queer little complications."

"A mislaid dinner-card might be answerable for more than that."

"It was Miss Venable who asked, quite innocently. And had I known all I know now, I could have taken a chance, perhaps, and said yes."

"You would have been taking no chance where my hospitality is concerned."

"Thank you, Mr. Kimberly, for my husband and myself."

"And you might have added in this instance that if you did not go there would be no dinner."

Alice concealed an embarrassment under a little laugh. "My husband told me of your kindness in placing your yacht at our disposal for the races."

"At his disposal."

"Oh, wasn't I included in that?"

"Certainly, if you would like to be. But tastes differ, and you and Mr. MacBirney being two—-"

"Oh, no, Mr. Kimberly; my husband and I are one."

"–and possibly of different tastes," continued Kimberly, "I thought only of him. I hope it wasn't ungracious, but some women, you know, hate the water. And I had no means of knowing whether you liked it. If you do—-"

"And you are not going to the races, yourself?"

"If you do, I shall know better the next time how to arrange."

"And you are not going to the races?"

"Probably not. Do you like the water?"

"To be quite frank, I don't know."

"How so?"

"I like the ocean immensely, but I don't know how good a sailor I should be on a yacht."

Imogene was ready to go home. Kimberly rose. "I understand," he said, in the frank and reassuring manner that was convincing because quite natural. "We will try you some time, up the coast," he suggested, extending his hand. "Good-night, Mrs. MacBirney."

"I believe Kimberly is coming to our side," declared MacBirney after he had gone upstairs with Alice.

Annie had been dismissed and Alice was braiding her hair. "I hope so; I begin to feel like a conspirator."

MacBirney was in high spirits. "You don't look like one. You look just now like Marguerite." He put his hands around her shoulders, and bending over her

chair, kissed her. The caress left her cold.

"Poor Marguerite," she said softly.

"When is the dinner to be?"

"A week from Thursday. Mr. Kimberly says the yacht is for you, but the dinner is for me," continued Alice as she lifted her eyes toward her husband.

"Good for you."

"He is the oddest combination," she mused with a smile, and lingering for an instant on the adjective. "Blunt, and seemingly kind-hearted—-"

"Not kind-hearted," MacBirney echoed, incredulously. "Why, even Nelson, and he's supposed to think the world and all of him, calls him as cold as the grave when he *wants* anything."

Alice stuck to her verdict. "I can't help what Nelson says; and I don't pretend to know how Mr. Kimberly would act when he wants anything. A kind-hearted man is kind to those he likes, and a cold-blooded man is just the same to those he likes and those he doesn't like. There is always something that stands between a cold-blooded man and real consideration for those he likes–and that something is himself."

Alice was quite willing her husband should apply her words as he pleased. She thought he had given her ample reason for her reflection on the subject.

But MacBirney was too self-satisfied to perceive what her words meant and too pleased with the situation to argue. "Whatever he is," he responded, "he is the wheel-horse in this combination–everybody agrees on that–and the friendship of these people is an asset the world over. If we can get it and keep it, we are the gainers."

"Whatever we do," returned Alice, "don't let us trade on it. I shrink from the very thought of being a gainer by his or any other friendship. If we are to be friends, do let us be so through mutual likes and interests. Mr. Kimberly would know instantly if we designed it in any other way, I am sure. I never saw such penetrating eyes. Really, he takes thoughts right out of my head."

MacBirney laughed in a hard way. "He might take them out of a woman's head. I don't think he would take many out of a man's."

"He wouldn't need to, dear. A man's thought's, you know, are clearly written on the end of his nose. I wish I knew what to wear to Mr. Kimberly's dinner."

CHAPTER X

One morning shortly after the MacBirneys had been entertained at The Towers John Kimberly was wheeled into his library where Charles and Robert were waiting for him. Charles leaned against the mantel and his brother stood at a window looking across the lake toward Cedar Point. As Francis left the room Uncle John's eyes followed him. Presently they wandered back with cheerful suspicion toward his nephews, and he laid his good arm on the table as they took chairs near him.

"Well?" he said lifting his eyebrows and looking blandly from one to the other.

"Well?" echoed Charles good-naturedly, looking from Uncle John to Robert.

"Well?" repeated Robert with mildly assumed idiocy, looking from Charles back again to Uncle John.

But Uncle John was not to be committed by any resort to his own tactics, and he came back at Charles on the flank. "Get any fish?" he asked, as if assured that Charles would make an effort to deceive him in answering.

"We sat around for a while without doing a thing, Uncle John. Then they began to strike and I had eight days of the best sport I ever saw on the river,"

Uncle John buried his disappointment under a smile. "Good fishing, eh?"

"Excellent."

There was evidently no opening on this subject, and Uncle John tried another tender spot. "Yacht go any better?"

"McAdams has done wonders with it, Uncle John. She never steamed so well since she was launched."

"Cost a pretty penny, eh, Charlie?"

"That is what pretty pennies are for, isn't it?"

Unable to disturb his nephew's peace of mind, Uncle John launched straight into business. "What are you going to do with those fellows?"

"You mean the MacBirney syndicate? Robert tells me he has concluded to be liberal with them."

"He is giving too much, Charlie."

"He knows better what the stuff is worth than we do."

Uncle John smiled sceptically. "He will give them more than they are worth, I am afraid."

Robert said nothing.

"Perhaps there is a reason for that," suggested Charles.

They waited for Robert to speak. He shifted in his chair presently and spoke with some decision. His intonation might have been unpleasant but that the depth and fulness of his voice redeemed it. The best note in his utterance was its open frankness.

"Uncle John understands this matter just as well as I do," he began, some-

what in protest.

"We have been over the ground often. These people have been an annoyance to us; this is undeniable. McCrea has complained of them for two years. Through a shift in the cards–this money squeeze–we have them to-day in our hands—-"

Uncle John's eyes shone and he clasped the fingers of one hand tightly in the other. "That is what I say; trim them!" he whispered eagerly.

Robert went on, unmoved: "Let us look at that, too. He wants me to trim them. I have steadily opposed buying them at all. But the rest of you have overruled me. Very good. They know now that they are in our power. They are, one and all, bushwhackers and guerillas. To my mind there isn't a trustworthy man in the crowd–not even MacBirney.

"They have made selling agreements with McCrea again and again and left him to hold the sack. We can't do business in that way. When we give our word it must be good. They give their word to break it. Whenever we make a selling agreement with such people we get beaten, invariably. They have cut into us on the Missouri River, at St. Paul, even at Chicago–from their Kansas plants. They make poor sugar, but it sells, and even when it won't sell, it demoralizes the trade. Now they are on their knees. They want us to buy to save what they've got invested. At a receiver's sale they would get nothing. But on the other hand Lambert might get the plants. If we tried to bid them in there would be a howl from the Legislature, perhaps."

Uncle John was growing moody, for the prey was slipping through his fingers. "It might be better to stand pat," he muttered.

Robert paid no attention. "What I propose, and God knows I have explained it before, is this: These people can be trimmed, or they can be satisfied. I say give them eleven millions–six millions cash–three millions preferred and two millions in our common for fifty per cent of their stock instead of sixteen millions for all of their stock."

Uncle John looked horror stricken. "It is nothing to us," exclaimed Robert, impatiently. "I can make the whole capital back in twelve months with McCrea to help MacBirney reorganize and run the plants. It is a fortune for them, and we keep MacBirney and the rest of them, for ten years at least, from scheming to start new plants. Nelson says there are legal difficulties about buying more than half their stock. But the voting control of all of it can be safely trusteed."

Uncle John could barely articulate: "Too much, it is too much."

"Bosh. This is a case where generosity is 'plainly indicated,' as Hamilton says."

"Too much."

"Robert is right," asserted Charles curtly.

Uncle John threw his hand up as if to say: "If you are resolved to ruin us, go on!"

"You will be surprised at the success of it," concluded Robert. "MacBirney wants to come here to live, though Chicago would be the better place for him. Let him be responsible for the Western territory. With such an arrangement we ought to have peace out there for ten years. If we can, it means just one hundred millions more in our pockets than we can make in the face of this continual price cutting."

Charles rose. "Then it is settled."

Uncle John ventured a last appeal. "Make the cash five and a half millions."

"Very good," assented Robert, who to meet precisely this objection had raised the figure well above what he intended to pay. "As you like, Uncle John," he said graciously. "Charles, make the cash five and a half millions."

And Uncle John went back to his loneliness, treasuring in his heart the half million he had saved, and encouraged by his frail triumph in the conference over his never-quite-wholly-understood nephew.

At a luncheon next day, the decision was laid by Charles and Robert before the Kimberly partners, by whom it was discussed and approved.

In the evening Charles, with Robert listening, laid the proposal before MacBirney, who had been sent for and whose astonishment at the unexpected liberality overwhelmed him.

He was promptly whirled away from The Towers in a De Castro car. And from a simple after-dinner conference, in which he had sat down at ten o'clock a promoter, he had risen at midnight with his brain reeling, a millionaire.

Alice excused herself when her husband appeared at Black Rock, and followed him upstairs. She saw how he was wrought up. In their room, with eyes burning with the fires of success, he told her of the stupendous change in their fortunes. With an affection that surprised and moved Alice, who had long believed that never again could anything from him move her, he caught her closely in his arms.

Tears filled her eyes. He wiped them away and forced a laugh. "Too good to be true, dearie, isn't it?"

She faltered an instant. "If it will only bring us happiness, Walter."

"Alice, I'm afraid I have been harsh, at times." Her memory swept over bitter months and wasted years, but her heart was touched. "It is all because I worry too much over business. There will be no more worries now–they are past and gone. And I want you to forget everything, Allie." He embraced her fervently. "I have had a good deal of anxiety first and last. It is over now. Great God! This is so easy here. Everything is so easy for these people."

The telephone bell tinkled. Through a mist of tears Alice felt her husband's

kiss. She rose to answer the bell. Dolly was calling from downstairs. "Come down both of you," she said. "Charles and Imogene are here with Fritzie and Robert."

With Charles and Imogene had come a famous doctor from the city, Hamilton's friend, Doctor Bryson. Alice protested she could not come down. Dolly told her she "simply must." The controversy upset Alice but she had at last to give way. She bathed her face in cold water and her husband deceived her with assurances that her eyes showed no traces of tears.

Very uncertain about them, she followed MacBirney down, taking refuge at once in a corner with Imogene.

While the two were talking, Grace De Castro and Larrie Morgan came in, bringing some young friends. "Aren't they the nicest couple?" exclaimed Alice as they crossed the room.

"It is a blessing they are," said Imogene. "You see, Grace will probably succeed to the De Castro fortune, and Larrie is likely sometime to have the Kimberly burdens. It crushes me to think that Charles and I have no children."

"Are you so fond of children?" Alice asked wistfully.

"Why, of course, dear; aren't you?"

"Indeed I am, too fond of them. I lost my only child, a baby girl—-"

"And you never have had another?"

"No."

"If Robert would marry, we should have a family hope there," continued Imogene. "But I am afraid he never will. How did you enjoy your evening at The Towers?"

"We had a delightful time."

"Isn't Robert a good host? I love to see him preside. And he hasn't given a dinner before for years."

"Why is that?"

Imogene laid her hand gently on Alice's. "It is a long story, dear, a tragedy came into his life–into all our lives, in fact. It changed him greatly."

Soon after the MacBirneys came down, the Nelsons arrived on the scene and the company moved to a south room to get the breeze. Imogene talked with Alice and MacBirney, but Kimberly joined them and listened, taking part at intervals in the conversation.

When Imogene's attention was taken by MacBirney, Robert, asking Alice if she got the air from the cooling windows, moved her chair to where the breeze could be felt more perceptibly. "I hope you haven't had bad news to-night," he said, taking a seat on a divan near her.

She understood instantly that her eyes had not escaped his scrutiny, but concealed her annoyance as best she could. "No, indeed. But I had some exciting

news to-night."

"What was it?"

"Oh, I mayn't tell, may I? I am not supposed to know anything, am I?"

Her little uncertainty and appeal made her charmingly pretty, he thought, as he watched her. The traces in her eyes of tears attracted him more than anything he had seen before. Her first little air of annoyed defiance and her effort to throw him off the track, all interested him, and her appeal now, made in a manner that plainly said she was aware the secret of the news was his own, pleased him.

He was in the mood of one who had made his plans, put them through generously, and was ready for the enjoyment that might follow. "Certainly, you are supposed to know," said he graciously. "Why not? And you may tell if you like. At any rate, I absolve you as far as *I'm* concerned. I couldn't conceive you guilty of a very serious indiscretion."

"Then I suppose you know that we are very happy, and why–don't you?"

"Perhaps; but that should be mere excitement. How about the tears?"

She frowned an impatient protest and rose. "Oh, I haven't said anything about tears. They are going out on the porch–shall we join them?" He got up reluctantly and followed her.

Arthur De Castro and Charles Kimberly offered chairs to Alice. They were under a cluster of electric lamps, where she did not wish to sit for inspection. As she hesitated Robert Kimberly spoke behind her. "Possibly it will be pleasanter over here, Mrs. MacBirney."

He was in the shadow and had drawn a chair for her near Nelson outside the circle of light, from which she was glad to escape. He took the seat under the light himself. When an ice was served, the small tables were drawn together. Alice, occupied with Nelson, who inspired by his vis-à-vis had summoned something of his grand air, lost the conversation of the circle until she heard Doctor Bryson, and turned with Nelson to listen. He was thanking Mrs. De Castro for a compliment.

"I am always glad to hear anything kind of my profession." He spoke simply and his manner Alice thought engaging. "It *is* a high calling–and I know of but one higher. We hear the complaint that nowadays medicine is a savagely mercenary profession. If a measure of truth lies in the charge I think it is due to the fact that doctors are victims of the mercenary spirit about them. It's a part of the very air they breathe. They can't escape it. The doctor, to begin with, must spend one small fortune to get his degree. He must spend another to equip himself for his work. Ten of the best years of his life go practically to getting ready. His expense for instruments, appliances, and new and increasingly elaborate appointments is continuous."

"But doctor," Fritzie Venable leaned forward with a grave and lengthened face, "think of the fees!"

The doctor enjoyed the laugh. "Quite true. When you find an ambitious doctor, unless his energy is restrained by a sense of his high responsibility, he may be possessed of greed. If a surgeon be set too fast on fame he will affect the spectacular and cut too much and too freely. I admit all of this. My plea is for the conscientious doctor, and believe me, there are many such. Nor must you forget that, at the best, half our lives we are too young to please and half our lives too old."

"Hamilton said the other night," observed Robert Kimberly, filling in the pause, "that a good doctor must spend his time in killing, not his own patients, but his own business."

"No other professional man is called on to do that," observed Bryson. "Indeed, the saddest of all possible proofs of the difficulties of our calling is found in the fact that the suicide rate among doctors is the highest in the learned professions."

MacBirney expressed surprise. "I had no idea of such a thing. Had you, Mr. Kimberly?" he asked with his sudden energy.

"I have known it, but perhaps only because I have been interested in questions of that kind."

Dolly's attention was arrested at once by the mention of suicide. "Oh, dear," she exclaimed, "Don't let us talk about suicide."

But Robert Kimberly could not always be shut off and this subject he pursued with a certain firmness. Some of the family were disturbed but no one presumed to interfere. "Suicide," he went on, "has a painful interest for many people. Has your study of it, doctor, ever led you to believe that it presupposes insanity?" he asked of Bryson.

"By no means."

"You conclude then that sane men and women do commit suicide?"

"Frequently, Mr. Kimberly."

Kimberly drew back in his chair. "I am glad to be supported in my own conviction. The fact is," he went on in a humorous tone, "I am forced either to hold in this way or conclude that I am sprung from a race of lunatics."

"Robert," protested Dolly, "can't we talk about something else?"

Kimberly, however, persisted, and he now had, for some reason not clear to Alice, a circle of painfully acute listeners. "The insanity theory is in many cases a comfortable one. But I don't find it so, and I must stick to the other and regard suicide as the worst possible solution of any possible difficulty."

Doctor Bryson nodded assent. Kimberly spoke on with a certain intensity. "If every act of a man's life had been a brave one," he continued, "his suicide

would be all the more the act of a coward. I don't believe that kind of a man can commit suicide. Understand, I am considering the act of a man–not that of a youth or of one immature."

"Well, I don't care what you are *considering*, Robert," declared Dolly with unmistakable emphasis, "we will *talk* about something else."

CHAPTER XI

The conversation split up. Kimberly, unruffled, turned to Alice and went on in an undertone: "I am going to tell you Francis's views on the subject anyway. He has the most intense way of expressing himself and the pantomime is so contributing. 'Suicide, Mr. Kimberly,' he said to me one day, 'is no good. What would a man look like going back to God, carrying his head in his hand? "Well, I am back, and here are the brains you gave me." "What did you do with them?" "I blew them out with a bullet!" That is a poor showing I think, Mr. Kimberly, for business. Suicide is *no* good.'"

"But who is this Brother Francis," asked Alice, "whom I hear so much of? Tell me about him."

"He is one of the fixtures at The Towers. A religious phenomenon whom I personally think a great deal of; an attendant and a nurse. He is an Italian with the courtesy of a gentleman worn under a black gown so shabby that it would be absurd to offer it to a second-hand man."

"Does the combination seem so odd?"

"To me he *is* an extraordinary combination."

"How did you happen to get him?"

"That also is curious. The Kimberlys are cantankerous enough when well; when ill they are likely to be insupportable. Not only that, but kindness and faithfulness are some of the things that money cannot buy; they give themselves but never sell themselves. When my uncle fell ill, after a great mental strain, we hired nurses for him until we were distracted–men and women, one worse than another. We tried all colors and conditions of human kind without finding one that would suit Uncle John. I began to think of throwing him into the lake–and told him so. He cried like a child the day I had the set-to with him. To say the truth, the old gentleman hasn't many friends left anywhere, but early impressions are a great deal to us, you know, and I remember him when he was a figure in

the councils of the sugar world.

"I recall," continued Kimberly, "a certain Black Friday in our own little affairs when the wolves got after us. The banks were throwing over our securities by the wagon-load, and this old man who sits and swears and shakes there, alone, upstairs, was all that remained between us and destruction. He stood in our down-town office with fifty men fighting to get at him–struggling, yelling, screaming, and cursing, and some who couldn't even scream or curse, livid and pawing the air.

"He stood behind his desk all day like a field-marshal, counselling, advising, ordering, buying, steadying, reassuring, juggling millions in his two hands like conjuror's balls. I could never forget that. I am not answering your question—-"

"But do go on!" There were no longer tears in Alice's eyes. They were alive with interest. "That," she exclaimed, "was splendid!"

"He won out, and then he set himself on vengeance. That was the end of our dependence on other people's banks. Most people learn sooner or later that a banking connection is an expensive luxury. He finally drove off the street the two institutions that tried to save themselves at our expense. The father of Cready and Frank Hamilton, Richard Hamilton, a rank outsider, helped Uncle John in that crisis and Uncle John made Richard Hamilton to pillow his head on tens of millions. Since that day we have been our own bankers; that is, we own our own banks. And I this is curious, never from that day to this has Uncle John completely trusted any man–not even me–except this very man we are talking about."

"Brother Francis?"

"Brother Francis. You asked how I got him; it is not uninteresting; a sort of sermon on good deeds. Just before this big school in the valley was started, the order to which he belongs had been expelled from France–it was years ago; the reformers over there needed their property. Half a dozen of the Brothers landed down here in the village with hardly a coat to their backs. But they went to work and in a few years had a little school. The industry of these people is astonishing."

"One day they came to The Towers for aid. Old Brother Adrian, the head Brother, came himself–as he long afterward told me–with a heavy heart, indeed, with fear and trembling. The iron gates and the Krupp eagles frightened him, he said, when he entered the grounds. And when he asked for the mistress of the house, he could hardly find voice to speak. My mother was away, so Aunt Lydia appeared–you have seen her portrait, haven't you?"

"No."

"You must; it is not unlike you. Aunt Lydia and my mother were two of the loveliest women I have ever known. When she came down that day, Brother Adrian supposing it was my mother begged a slight aid for the work they had

undertaken in the valley. Aunt Lydia heard him in silence, and without saying a word went upstairs, wrote out a cheque and brought it down. He glanced at the figures on it–fifty–thanked her, gave it to the young Brother with him, and with some little compliment to the beauty of The Towers, rose to go.

"While they were moving toward the door the young Brother, studying the cheque grew pale, halted, looked at it again and handed it to his superior. Brother Adrian looked at the paper and at the young Brother and stood speechless. The two stared a moment at each other. Aunt Lydia enjoyed the situation. Brother Adrian had thought the gift had been fifty dollars–it was fifty thousand.

"He fainted. Servants were hurried in. Even when he recovered, he was dazed–he really for a year had not had enough to eat. Aunt Lydia always delighted in telling how the young Brother helped him down the avenue after he could walk. This is a tediously long story."

"Do go on."

"When he again reached the big iron gates he turned toward the house and with many strange words and gestures called down the mercies of Heaven on that roof and all that should ever sleep under it—-"

"How beautiful!"

"He blessed us right and left, up and down, fore and aft–he was a fine old fellow, Adrian. When my mother heard the story she was naturally embarrassed. It looked something like obtaining blessings under false pretences. The only thing she could do to ease her conscience was to send over a second cheque."

"Princely!"

"It came near killing Brother Adrian. It seems odd, too, compared with the cut-and-dried way in which we solemnly endow institutions nowadays, doesn't it? They all three are dead, but we have always stood, in a way, with Adrian's people.

"The young man that made the exciting call with him is now the superior over there, Brother Edmund. After the trouble we had with Uncle John, in finding some one he could stand and who could stand him, I went one day in despair to Brother Edmund. I allowed him to commit himself properly on what they owed to Aunt Lydia's goodness and the rest, and then began to abuse him and told him he ought to supply a nurse for my uncle. He told me theirs was a teaching order and not a nursing order. I redoubled my harshness. 'It is all very well when *you* need anything,' I said, 'when *we* need anything it is different. Did those women,' I thundered, 'ask what you were, when you were starving here?'

"It wasn't precisely logical, but abuse should be vigorous rather than logical, anyway, and I tried to be vigorous. They got very busy, I can tell you. They held a conclave of some sort and decided that Uncle John must be taken care of. If he were a common pauper, they argued, they would not refuse to take care

of him; should they refuse because he was a pauper of means? They concluded that it was a debt they owed to Aunt Lydia and by Heaven, next morning over came this sallow-faced, dark-eyed Brother Francis, and there he is still with Uncle John."

CHAPTER XII

MacBirney's personal efforts in effecting the combination with the Kimberly interests were adjudged worthy of a substantial recognition at the hands of the company and he was given charge of the Western territory together with a place on the big directorate of all the companies and made one of the three voting trustees of the syndicate stock. The two other trustees were, as a "matter of form," Kimberly men–McCrea and Cready Hamilton. This meant for MacBirney a settled Eastern residence and one befitting a gentleman called to an honor so unusual. He was made to feel that his new circumstances entailed new backgrounds socially as well as those that had been accorded him in a monetary way, and through the Kimberlys, negotiations were speedily concluded for his acquiring of the Cedar Lodge villa some miles across the lake from The Towers.

At the end of a trying two months, the MacBirneys were in their new home and Alice had begun receiving from her intimates congratulations over the telephone. Another month, and a busy one, went to finishing touches. At the end of that period there was apparently more than ever to be done. It seemed that a beginning had hardly been made, but the new servants were at home in their duties, and Alice thought she could set a date for an evening. Her head, night and day, was in more or less of a whirl.

The excitement of new fortunes had come very suddenly upon her and with her husband she walked every day as if borne on the air of waking dreams. Dolly declared that Alice was working too hard, and that her weary conferences with decorators and furnishers were too continual. Occasionally, Dolly took matters into her own hands and was frequently in consultation on domestic perplexities; sometimes she dragged Alice abruptly from them.

Even before it had been generally seen, the new home, once thrown open, secured Alice's reputation among her friends. What was within it reflected her taste and discrimination. And her appointments were not only good, they were distinctive. To be able to drape the vestments of a house so as to make of it almost

at once a home was not a feat to pass unnoticed among people who studied effects though they did not invariably secure them.

Robert Kimberly declared that Alice, under many disadvantages, had achieved an air of stability and permanence in her home. Dolly told Lottie Nelson that nothing around the lake among the newer homes compared with it. Lottie Nelson naturally hated Alice more cordially than ever for her success. She ventured, when the new house was being discussed at a dinner, to say that Mr. MacBirney seemed to have excellent taste; whereupon Charles Kimberly over a salad bluntly replied that the time MacBirney had shown his taste was when he chose a wife. "But," added Charles, reflectively, "perhaps a man doesn't prove his taste so much in getting a wife as in keeping one.

"Any man," he continued, "may be lucky enough to get a wife; we see that every day. But who, save a man of feeling, could keep, well, say Imogene or Dolly, for instance?"

Robert agreed that if the MacBirney home showed anything it showed the touch of an agreeable woman. "Any one," he declared, paraphrasing his brother, "can buy pretty things, but it takes a clever woman to combine them."

One result of the situation was a new cordiality from Lottie Nelson to the MacBirneys. And since it had become necessary to pay court to them, Lottie resolved to pay hers to Mr. MacBirney. She was resourceful rather than deep, and hoped by this to annoy Alice and possibly to stir Robert Kimberly out of his exasperating indifference. The indifference of a Kimberly could assume in its proportions the repose of a monument.

Lottie, too, was a mover in many of the diversions arranged to keep the lake set amused. But as her efforts did not always tend to make things easy for Alice, Dolly became active herself in suggesting things.

One Saturday morning a message came from her, directing Alice to forbid her husband's going to town, drop everything, provide a lunch and join a motoring party for the seashore. MacBirney following the lines of Robert Kimberly's experience with cars had secured at his suggestion, among others, a foreign car from which things might reasonably be expected.

Imogene Kimberly and Charles took Alice with them and Dolly rode with MacBirney, who had Robert Kimberly with him in the new car to see how it behaved. Kimberly's own chauffeur drove for them. Doane took Arthur De Castro and Fritzie Venable. The servants and the lunch followed with a De Castro chauffeur.

As the party climbed toward Sea Ridge a shower drove them into the grounds of a country club. While it rained, the women, their long veils thrown back, walked through the club house, and the men paced about, smoking.

Alice, seated at a table on the veranda, was looking at an illustrated paper

when Robert Kimberly joined her. He told her what extravagant stories he had heard from Dolly about the success of her new home. She laughed over his sister's enthusiasm, admitted her own, and confessed at length how the effort to get satisfactory effects had tired her. He in turn described to her what he had once been through in starting a new refinery and how during the strain of six weeks the hair upon his temples had perceptibly whitened, turning brown again when the mental pressure was relieved.

"I never heard of such a thing," exclaimed Alice.

"I don't know how unusual it is, but it has happened more than once in our family. I remember my mother's hair once turned in that way. But my mother had much sadness in her life."

"Mrs. De Castro often speaks of your mother."

"She was a brave woman. You have never seen her portrait? Sometime at The Towers you must. And you can see on her temples just what I speak of. But your home-making will have just the opposite effect on you. If care makes the hair white, happiness ought to make it browner than ever."

"I suppose happiness is wholly a matter of illusion."

"I don't see that it makes much difference how we define it; the thing is to be happy. However, if what you say is so, you should cling to your illusions. Get all you can–I should–and keep all you can get."

"You don't mean to say you practise that?"

"Of course I do. And I think for a man I've kept my illusions very well."

"For a *man*!" Alice threw her head back. "That is very comfortable assurance."

He looked at her with composure. "What is it you object to in it?"

"To begin with," demanded Alice, "how can a man have any illusions? He knows everything from the very beginning."

"Oh, by no means. Far from it, I assure you."

"He has every chance to. It is only the poor women who are constantly disillusionized in life."

"You mustn't be disillusionized, Mrs. MacBirney. Hope unceasingly."

She resented the personal application. "I am not speaking of myself."

"Nor am I speaking of you, only speaking through you to womankind. You 'poor women' should not be discouraged." He raised his head as if he were very confident. "If we can hope, you can hope. I hope every day. I hope in a woman."

She bore his gaze as she had already borne it once or twice before, steadily, but as one might bear the gaze of a dangerous creature, if strengthened by the certainty of iron bars before its impassive eyes. Kimberly was both too considerate and possessed too much sense of fitness to overdo the moment. With his hand he indicated a woman walking along a covered way in front of them. "There, for

instance, goes a woman," he continued, following up his point. "Look at her. Isn't she pretty? I like her walk. And a woman's walk! It is impossible to say how much depends on the walk. And all women that walk well have good feet; their heels set right and there is a pleasure in watching each sure foot-fall. Notice, for instance, that woman's feet; her walk is perfect."

"How closely observant!"

"She is well gowned–but everybody is well gowned. And her figure is good. Let us say, I hope in her, hope she will be all she looks. I follow the dream. In a breath, an instant, a twinkling, the illusion has vanished! She has spoken, or she has looked my way and I have seen her face. But even then the face is only the dial of the watch; it may be very fair. Sometime I see her mind–and everything is gone!"

"Would it be impertinent to ask who has put women up in this way to be inspected and criticised?" retorted Alice.

"Not in the least. I am speaking only in illustration and if you are annoyed with me I shall miss making my point. Do I give up merely because I have lost an illusion? Not at all. Another springs up at once, and I welcome it. Let us live in our illusions; every time we part with one and find none to take its place we are poorer, Mrs. MacBirney, believe me."

"Just the same, I think you are horridly critical of women."

"Then you should advise me to cultivate my illusions in their direction."

"I should if I thought it were necessary. As I have a very high opinion of women, I don't think any illusions concerning them are necessary."

"Loftily said. And I sha'n't allow you to think my own opinion any less high. When I was a boy, women were all angels to me; they are not quite that, we know."

"In spite of illusions."

"But I don't want to put them very much lower than the angels–and I don't. I keep them up because I like to."

Her comment was still keen. "Not because they deserve it."

"I won't quarrel with you–because, then, they do deserve it. It is pleasant to be set right."

The shower had passed and the party was making ready to start. Alice rose. "You haven't said what you think of your own kind, as you call them–menkind."

Kimberly held her coat for her to slip into. "Of course, I try not to think of them."

When they reached the summit dividing the lake country from the sea the sun was shining. To the east, the sound lay at their feet. In the west stretched the heavy forests and the long chain of lakes. They followed the road to the sea and after their shore luncheon relaxed for an hour at the yacht club. Driving back by

the river road they put the new car through some paces, and halting at intervals to interchange passengers, they proceeded homeward.

Going through Sunbury at five o'clock the cars separated. MacBirney, with whom Robert Kimberly was again riding, had taken in Fritzie Venable and Alice. Leaving the village they chose the hill road around the lake. Brice, Kimberly's chauffeur, took advantage of the long, straight highway leading to it to let the car out a little. They were running very fast when he noticed the sparker was binding and stopped for a moment. It was just below the Roger Morgan place and Kimberly, who could never for a moment abide idleness, suggested that they alight while Brice worked. He stood at the door of the tonneau and gave his hand to Alice as she stepped from the car. In getting out, her foot slipped and she turned her ankle. She would have fallen but that Kimberly caught her. Alice recovered herself immediately, yet not without an instant's dependence on him that she would rather have escaped.

Brice was slow in correcting the mechanical difficulty, and finding it at last in the magneto announced it would make a delay of twenty minutes. Fritzie suggested that they walk through her park and meet the car at the lower end. MacBirney started up one of the hill paths with Alice, Kimberly and Fritzie following. They passed Morgan house and higher in the hills they reached the chapel. Alice took her husband in to see the beauty of the interior. She told him Dolly's story of the building and when Fritzie and Kimberly joined them, Alice was regretting that Dolly had failed to recollect the name of the church in Rome it was modelled after. Kimberly came to her aid. "Santa Maria in Cosmedin, I think."

"Oh, do you remember? Thank you," exclaimed Alice. "Isn't it all beautiful, Walter? And those old pulpits–I'm in love with them!"

MacBirney pronounced everything admirable and prepared to move on. He walked toward the door with Fritzie.

Alice, with Kimberly, stood before the chancel looking at the balustrade. She stopped near the north ambone, and turning saw in the soft light of the aisle the face of the boy dreaming in the silence of the bronze.

Below it, measured words of Keats were dimly visible. Alice repeated them half aloud. "What a strange inscription," she murmured almost to herself.

Kimberly stood at her elbow. "It is strange."

She was silent for a moment. "I think it is the most beautiful head of a boy I have ever seen."

"Have you seen it before?"

"I was here once with Mrs. De Castro."

"She told you the story?"

"No, we remained only a moment." Alice read aloud the words raised in the

bronze: "'Robert Ten Broeck Morgan: ætat: 20.'"

"Should you like to hear it?"

"Very much."

"His father married my half-sister–Bertha; Charles and I are sons of my father's second marriage. 'Tennie' was Bertha's son–strangely shy and sensitive from his childhood, even morbidly sensitive. I do not mean unbalanced in any way—-"

"I understand."

"A sister of his, Marie, became engaged to a young man of a Southern family who came here after the war. They were married and their wedding was made the occasion of a great family affair for the Morgans, and Alices and Legares and Kimberlys. Tennie was chosen for groomsman. The house that you have seen below was filled with wedding guests. The hour came."

"And such a place for a wedding!" exclaimed Alice.

"But instead of the bridal procession that the guests were looking for, a clergyman came down the stairs with a white face. When he could speak, he announced as well as he could that the wedding would not take place that night; that a terrible accident had occurred, and that Tennie Morgan was lying upstairs dead."

Alice could not recall, even afterward, that Kimberly appeared under a strain; but she noticed as she listened that he spoke with a care not quite natural.

"You may imagine the scene," he continued. "But the worst was to come—-"

"Oh, you were there?"

"When you hear the rest you will think, if there is a God, I should have been, for I might have saved him. I was in Honolulu. I did not even hear of it for ten days. They found him in his bathroom where he had dressed, thrown himself on a couch, and shot himself."

"How terrible!"

"In his bedroom they found a letter. It had been sent to him within the hour by a party of blackmailers, pressing a charge–of which he was quite innocent–on the part of a designing woman, and threatening that unless he complied with some impossible demands, his exposure and news of an action for damages should follow in the papers containing the account of his sister's wedding. They found with this his own letter to his mother. He assured her the charge was utterly false, but being a Kimberly he knew he should not be believed because of the reputation of his uncles, one of whom he named, and after whom he himself was named, and to whom he had always been closest. This, he feared, would condemn him no matter how innocent he might be; he felt he should be unable to lift from his name a disgrace that would always be recalled with his sister's

wedding; and that if he gave up his life he knew the charges would be dropped because he was absolutely innocent. And so he died."

For a moment Alice stood in silence. "Poor, poor boy!" she said softly. "How I pity him!"

"Do you so? Then well may I. For I am the uncle whom he named in his letter."

Unable or unwilling to speak she pointed to the tablet as if to say: "You said the uncle he was named after."

He understood. "Yes," he answered slowly, "my name is Robert Ten Broeck Kimberly."

Her eyes fell to the tessellated pavement. "It is frightfully sad," she said haltingly. Then as if she must add something: "I am very sorry you felt compelled to recall so painful a story."

"It isn't exactly that I felt compelled; yet perhaps that expresses it, too. I have expected sometime to tell it to you."

CHAPTER XIII

The showers returned in the night. They kept Alice company during several sleepless hours. In the morning the sun was out. It was Sunday and when Annie brought her mistress her rolls and chocolate Alice asked the maid if she had been to church.

"Kate and I went to early church," said Annie.

"And what time is late church, Annie?"

"Ten thirty, Mrs. MacBirney."

"I am going myself this morning."

"And what will you wear?"

"Anything that is cool."

Alice was thinking less of what she should wear than of how she should tell her husband that she had resolved upon going to church. Painful experience had taught her what ridicule and resource of conjugal meanness to expect whenever she found courage to say she meant to go to church. Yet hope, consoling phantom, always suggested that her husband the next time might prove more amenable to reason.

When at last she managed casually to mention her momentous resolve,

MacBirney showed that he had lost none of his alertness on the subject. He made use first of surprise to express his annoyance. "To church?" Then he gave vent to a contemptuous exclamation uttered with a semblance of good-natured indifference. "I thought you had got that notion pretty well out of your head, Alice."

"You have got it pretty well out for me, Walter. Sometimes it comes back. It came this morning–after a wakeful night. I haven't been for a long time."

"What church do you want to go to?"

His disingenuousness did not stir her. "To my own, of course. There is a little church in the village, you know."

"Oh, that frame affair, yes. Awfully cheap looking, isn't it? And it threatens rain again. Don't mind getting wet?"

"Oh, no, I'll take the victoria."

"You can't; Peters is going to drive me over to The Towers."

"Then give me one of the cars."

"I understand they are both out of order."

"Oh, Walter! Can't you have Peters drive you to The Towers after he takes me to Sunbury?"

"I have an engagement with Robert Kimberly at eleven o'clock."

"Could you change it a little, do you think, Walter?"

"An engagement with Robert Kimberly!"

"Or be just a little late for it?"

MacBirney used his opportunity to advantage. "Keep *him* waiting! Alice, when you get an idea into your head about going to church you lose your common-sense."

She turned to the window to look at the sky. "I can't walk," she said hopelessly. Her husband made no comment. As her eyes turned toward the distant Towers she remembered that Robert Kimberly the evening before had asked–and so insistently that it had been one of the causes of her wakefulness–for permission to bring over in the morning some grapes from his hot-houses. He had wanted to come at eleven o'clock and she had assured him she should not be at home–this because, during some uneasy moments when they were close together in the car, she had resolved that the next morning she should seek if only for an hour an influence long neglected but quite removed from his. It was clear to her as she now stood at the window, that Kimberly had sought every chance to be at her personal service at eleven o'clock, even though her husband professed an engagement with him.

"Couldn't Peters," she asked, turning again to MacBirney, "drive me down half an hour earlier–before you go? I can wait at the church till he comes back after me?"

MacBirney was reading the stock-market reports in the morning paper. "All right," he said curtly.

She was contained this time. There had been occasions when scenes such as this had brought hot tears, but five years of steady battering had fairly subdued Alice.

At high mass, an hour later, villagers saw a fine lady–a Second Lake lady, they shrewdly fancied from the carriage that brought her–kneeling among them in a pew close to the altar, and quite oblivious of those about her, kneeling, too, at times when they stood or sat; kneeling often with her face–which they thought pretty–hidden in her hands as if it somehow had offended; kneeling from the credo until the stragglers in the vestibule and about the church door began to slip away from the last gospel. There was an unusual stir about the church because it was a confirmation Sunday and an archbishop, a white-haired man who had once been in charge of the little Sunbury parish himself, was present.

Alice followed the last of the congregation out of the door and into the village sunshine. She looked up and down the country road for her horses but none were in sight. Below the church where the farmers' rigs stood, a big motor-car watched by village boys was waiting. They knew that the car, with its black and olive trimmings, was from The Towers because they were familiar with the livery of the villa grooms.

Their curiosity was rewarded when they saw the fine lady come out of the church. The instant she appeared a great gentleman stepped from the black tonneau and, lifting his hat very high, hastened across the muddy road to greet her–certainly she made a picture as she stood on the church steps in her tan pongee gown with her brown hair curling under a rose-wreathed Leghorn hat.

Her heart gave a frightened jump when she saw who was coming. But when the gentleman spoke, his voice was so quiet that even those loitering near could not hear his words. There was some discussion between the two. His slight gestures as they talked, seemed to indicate something of explanation and something of defence. Then a suggestion of urgency appeared in his manner. The fine lady resisted.

From under her pongee parasol she looked longingly up the road and down for her horses, but for a while no horses came. At last a carriage looking like her own did come down the lake road and she hoped for a moment. Then as the carriage drove rapidly past her face fell.

The great gentleman indicated his annoyance at the insolent mud that spattered from the carriage wheel by a look, but he kept quite near to the fine lady and his eyes fell very kindly on her pink cheeks. Her carriage did not come even after they had gone to his car and seated themselves in the tonneau to await it. He was too clever to hurry her. He allowed her to wait until she saw her case

was quite hopeless, then she told him he might drive her home.

"I came," he explained, answering an annoyed note in a second question that she asked, "because I understood you were going to church—-"

"But I did not say I was."

"I must have dreamed it."

Brice, sitting at the wheel in front of them, smiled–but only within his heart–when this came to his ears; because it was Brice who had been asked during the morning where Mrs. MacBirney was and Brice who had reported. He was senior to Peters, senior to all the Second Lake coachmen and chauffeurs, and usually found out whatever he wanted to find out.

"At any rate," Kimberly laughed good-naturedly, "I have been waiting here half an hour for you."

Brice knew that this was true to the minute, for in that half-hour there had been many glances at two good watches and a hamper of hot-house grapes. Brice himself, since a certain missed train, involving language that lingered yet in his ears, carried a good watch.

But to-day not even amiable profanity, which Brice recalled as normal during extended waits, had accompanied the unusual detention. No messenger had been despatched to sound the young village priest with a view of expediting the mass and the fine lady had been in nowise interrupted during her lengthened devotions. Kimberly, in this instance, had truthfully been a model of patience.

"These are the grapes," Brice heard behind him, as he let the machine out a bit and fancied the top of the hamper being raised. "Aren't they exceptional? I found the vines in Algeria. There are lilies on this side."

An expression of involuntary admiration came from the tonneau. "Assumption lilies! For your sister?"

"No, for you. They are to celebrate the feast."

"The feast? Why, of course!" Then came a categorical question, animated but delivered with keenness: "How did you know that to-day is the feast of the Assumption?"

A bland evasion followed. "I supposed that every one knew the fifteenth of August is the feast of the Assumption. Taste this grape."

"I am very sure *you* didn't know."

"But I *did*. Taste the grape."

"Who told you?"

"Whence have you the faculties of the Inquisition? Why do you rack me with questions?"

"I begin to suspect, Mr. Kimberly, that you belong on the rack."

"No doubt. At least I have spent most of my life there."

"Come, please! Who told you?"

”Francis, of course; now will you taste this grape?”

CHAPTER XIV

When MacBirney reached home with the victoria Alice had not yet taken off her hat, and a maid was bringing vases for the lilies. He had been driving toward Sea Ridge and taken the wrong road and was sorry for his delay in getting to the church. Alice accepted his excuses in good part. He tried to explain his misunderstanding about the engagement with Kimberly. She relieved his endeavors by making everything easy, telling him finally how Kimberly had brought her home and had left the grapes and lilies. When the two sat down at luncheon, MacBirney noticed Alice’s preoccupation; she admitted she had a slight headache. She was glad, however, to have him ask her to go for a long motor drive in the afternoon, thinking the air would do her good, and they spent three hours together.

When they got home it was dusk. The dinner served on the porch was satisfying and the day which had opened with so little of promise seemed to do better at the close. Indeed, Alice all day had sought quiet because she had something to say which she was resolved to say this day. After dinner she remained with her husband in the moonlight. He was talking, over his cigar, of an idea for adding a strip of woodland to the lower end of their new estate, when she interrupted him.

”Should you be greatly shocked, Walter, if I said I wish we could go away from here?” She was leaning toward him on the arm of her chair when she spoke and her hands were clasped.

His astonishment was genuine. ”What do you mean?”

”I don’t know. Yet I feel as if we ought to go, Walter.”

”What for?”

She was looking earnestly at him, but in the shadow he could not see, though he felt, her eyes.

”It is hard to explain.” She paused a moment. ”These people are delightful; you know I like them as much as you do.”

MacBirney took his cigar from his mouth to express his surprise. ”I thought you were crazy about the place and the people and everything else,” he exclaimed. ”I thought this was just what you were looking for! You’ve said so much about refined luxury and lovely manners—-”

"I am thinking of all that." There was enough in her tone of an intention to be heard to cause him to forget his favorite expedient of drowning the subject in a flood of words. "But with all this, or to enjoy it all, one needs peace of mind, and my peace of mind is becoming disturbed."

Quite misunderstanding her, MacBirney thought she referred to the question of church-going, and that subject offered so much delicate ground that Alice continued without molestation.

"It is very hard to say what I meant to say, without saying too little or too much. You know, Walter, you were worried at one time about how Mr. Robert Kimberly would look at your proposals, and you told me you wanted me to be agreeable to him. And without treating him differently from any one else here, I have tried to pay particular regard to what he had to say and everything of that kind. It is awfully hard to specify," she hesitated in perplexity. "I am sure I haven't discriminated him in any way from his brother, or Mr. De Castro, for instance. But I have always shown an interest in things he had to point out, and he seemed to enjoy–perhaps more than the others–pointing things out. And—-"

"Well?"

"It seems to me now as if he has begun to take an interest in everything *I* do—-"

Her husband became jocular. "Oh, has he?"

Alice's words came at last bluntly. "And it completely upsets me, Walter."

MacBirney laughed again. "Why so?"

She took refuge in a shade of annoyance. "Because I don't like to think about it."

"Think about what?"

"About any man's–if I must say it–paying attention to me, except my husband."

"Now you are hitting me, aren't you, Alice? You are pretty clever, after all," declared MacBirney still laughing.

She threw herself back in her chair. "Oh, Walter, you don't understand at all! Nothing could be further from what I am thinking. I ought not to say he has been attentive enough to speak of. It is not that I dislike Mr. Kimberly. But he does somehow make me uncomfortable. Perhaps I don't understand their way here."

"Why, that is all there is to it, Alice. It's merely their way. Give it no thought. He is simply being agreeable. Don't imagine that every man that sends you flowers is interested in you. Is that all, Allie?"

"Yes." Her acuteness divined about what he would reply. "And," she added, "I think, however foolish it may sound, it is enough."

"Don't worry about bridges you will never have to cross. That's the motto

I've followed."

"Yes, I know, but—-"

"Just a moment. All you have to do is to treat everybody alike."

"But, Walter—-"

"You would have to do that anywhere–shouldn't you? Of course. Suppose we should go somewhere else and find a man that threatened to become an admirer—-"

"Don't use such a word!"

"Call it what you please–we can't keep moving away from that kind of a possibility, can we?"

"Still, Walter, I feel as if we might get away from here. I have merely told you exactly what I thought."

"We can't get away. This is where everything is done in the sugar business. This is the little world where the big moves are decided upon. If you are not here, you are not in it. We are in the swim now; it took long enough to get in it, God knows. Now let us stay. You can take care of yourself, can't you?"

"How can you ask me!"

He pursued her with a touch of harshness. "How can I ask you? Aren't you talking about running away from a situation? *I* don't run away from situations. I call the man or woman that runs away from a situation, a coward. Face it down, work it out–don't dodge it."

MacBirney finished without interruption.

In the living room the telephone bell rang. He went in to answer it and his wife heard him a moment in conversation. Then on the garage wire he called up the chauffeur and ordered a car. Coming out again on the porch he explained: "Lottie wants us to come over."

"Lottie?" There was a shade of resentment, almost of contempt, in Alice's echo and inquiry.

"Lottie Nelson."

"Don't call her Lottie, Walter."

"She calls me Walter."

"She has no business to. What did you tell her? Don't let us go out to-night."

"It is a little celebration of some kind and I told her we would come."

"My head has ached all day."

"It will do your head good. Come on. I told her we were coming."

CHAPTER XV

They found a lively party at the Nelsons'. Guyot was there, with Lambert, thick-lipped and voluble. Dora Morgan with Doane and Cready Hamilton had come, worn and bedraggled, from a New England motoring trip. Dora, still quite hoarse, was singing a music-hall song when the MacBirneys entered the room.

She stopped. "My ears are crazy to-night–I can't sing," she complained, responding to Alice's greeting. "I feel as if there were a motor in my head. Tired? Oh, no, not a bit. But the dust!" Her smile died and her brows rose till her pretty eyes shone full. She threw her expiring energy into two husky words: "*Something* fierce!"

Dolly and her husband with Imogene and Charles had responded to Lottie's invitation, and Robert Kimberly came later with Fritzie Venable. Dolly greeted Alice with apologies. "I am here," she admitted with untroubled contempt, "but not present. I wanted to see what Lambert looks like. We hear so much about his discoveries. Robert doesn't think much of them."

Mrs. Nelson, languidly composed, led MacBirney to the men who were in an alcove off the music room. Near them sat Robert Kimberly talking to Imogene. Dora could not be coaxed to sing again. But the hostess meant to force the fighting for a good time. Dora joined the men and Guyot, under Nelson's wing, came over to meet Alice, who had taken refuge with Dolly. At a time when the groups were changing, Nelson brought Lambert over. But neither Alice nor Dolly made objection when his host took him away again.

Kimberly came after a while with Fritzie to Alice's divan and, standing behind it, tried by conversation and such attraction of manner as he could offer, to interest Alice. He failed to waken any response. She quite understood a woman's refuge from what she wishes to avoid and persevered in being indifferent to every effort.

Kimberly, not slow to perceive, left presently for the party in the dining-room. But even as he walked away, Alice's attitude toward him called to her mind a saying of Fritzie's, that it is not pleasant to be unpleasant to pleasant people, even if it is unpleasant to be pleasant to unpleasant people.

"Were you tired after yesterday's ride?" asked Dolly of Alice.

"Not too tired."

"Robert told you about Tennie Morgan's death."

Alice looked at her inquiringly. "How did you know?"

"You were in the Morgan chapel together. And you looked upset when you came back. I had promised to tell you the story sometime myself. I know how easy it is to get a false impression concerning family skeletons. So I asked Robert about it the minute you left the car, and I was annoyed beyond everything when he said he had told you the whole story."

"But dear Mrs. De Castro! Why should you be annoyed?"

Dolly answered with decision: "Robert has no business ever to speak of the affair." Alice could not dispute her and Dolly went on: "I know just how he would talk about it. Not that I know what he said to you. But it would be like him to take very much more of the blame on himself than belongs to him. Men, my dear, look at these things differently from women, and usually make less of them than women do. In this case it is exactly the reverse. Robert has always had an exaggerated idea of his responsibility in the tragedy–that is why it annoys me ever to have him speak about it. I know my brother better, I think, than anybody alive knows him, and I am perfectly familiar with all the circumstances. I know what I am talking about."

Very much in earnest Dolly settled back. "To begin with, Tennie was an abnormal boy. He was as delicate in his mental texture as cobweb lace. His sensitiveness was something incredible and twenty things might have happened to upset his mental balance. No one, my dear, likes to talk state secrets."

"Pray do not, then. It really is not necessary," pleaded Alice.

"Oh, it is," said Dolly decidedly, "I want you to understand. Suicide has been a spectre to the Kimberlys for ages. Two generations ago Schuyler Kimberly committed suicide at sixty-six–think of it! Oh! I could tell you stories. There has been no suicide in this generation. But the shadow," Dolly's tones were calm but inflected with a burden of what cannot be helped may as well be admitted, "seems only to have passed it to fall upon the next in poor Tennie. Two years afterward they found his mother dead one morning in bed. I don't know what the trouble was–it was in Florence. Nobody knows–there was just a little white froth on her lips. The doctors said heart disease. She was a strange woman, Bertha, strong-willed and self-indulgent–like all the rest of us."

"Don't say that of yourself. You are not self-indulgent, you are generous."

"I am both, dear. But I know the Kimberlys, men and women, first and last, and that is why I do not want you to get wrong impressions of them. My brother Robert isn't a saint, neither is Charles. But compare them with the average men of their own family; compare them with the average men in their own situation in life; compare them with the Nelsons and the Doanes; compare them with that

old man that Robert is so patient with! Compare them, my dear, to the men everywhere in the world they move in–I don't think the Kimberly men of this generation need apologize particularly.

"Robert was so completely stunned by Tennie's death that for years I did not know what would happen. Then a great industrial crisis came in our affairs, though afterward it seemed, in a way, providential. Poor old Uncle John got it into his head he could make sugar out of corn and ended by nearly ruining us all. If things had gone on we should all have been living in apartments within another year. When we were so deep in the thing that the end was in sight we went to Robert on our knees, and begged him to take hold of the business and save the family–oh, it had come quite to that. He had been doing absolutely nothing for a year and I feared all sorts of things about him. But he listened and *did* take hold and made the business so big–well, dear heart, you have some idea what it is now when they can take over a lot of factories, such as those of your husband and his associates, on one year's profits. I suppose, of course, these are state secrets–you mustn't repeat them—-"

"Certainly not."

"And for years they have been the largest lenders of ready money in the Street. So you can't wonder that we think a great deal of Robert. And he likes you–I can see that. He has been more natural since you came here than for years."

"Surely your brothers never can say they have not a devoted sister."

"I can't account for it," persisted Dolly, continuing. "It is just that your influence is a good one on him; no one can explain those things. I thought for years he would never be influenced by any woman again. You've seen how this one," Dolly tossed her head in disgust as she indicated Lottie Nelson, then passing, "throws herself at him." With the last words Dolly rose to say she was going home. Imogene was ready to join her, and Lottie's protests were of no avail. Charles was upstairs conferring with Nelson and Imogene went up to get him.

Alice walked to the dining-room. Her husband, in an uncommonly good-humor, was drinking with their hostess. In the centre of the room, Hamilton, Guyot, Lambert, and Dora Morgan sat at the large table. Guyot offered Alice a chair. She sat down and found him entertaining. He took her after a time into the reception room where Lottie had hung a Degas that Guyot had brought over for her. Alice admired the fascinating swiftness and sureness of touch but did not agree with Guyot that the charm was due to the merit of color over line. When the two returned to the dining-room, Kimberly stood at a cellaret with Fritzie.

Lottie and MacBirney sat with the group at the big table. "Oh, Robert," Lottie called to Kimberly as Alice appeared in the doorway, "mix me a cocktail."

Turning, Kimberly saw Alice: "I am out of practice, Lottie," he said.

"Give me some plain whiskey then."

Kimberly's shortness of manner indicated his annoyance. "You have that at your hand," he said sitting down.

"How rude, Robert," retorted Lottie, with assumed impatience. She glanced loftily around. "Walter," she exclaimed, looking across the table at Alice's husband and taking Alice's breath away with the appeal, "give me some whiskey."

"Certainly, Mrs. Nelson."

"No, stop; mix me a cocktail."

"Is your husband an expert, Mrs. MacBirney?" asked Guyot as MacBirney rose.

"Not to my knowledge," answered Alice frankly. "I hope," she added, with a touch of asperity as her husband stepped to a sideboard, "that Mrs. Nelson is not fastidious."

"It is disgusting the way my friends are behaving," complained Lottie turning to Lambert. "This is my birthday—-"

"Your birthday!"

"That is why you are all here. And whoever refuses now to drink my health I cast off forever."

"Is this a regular birthday or are you springing an extra on us?" demanded Fritzie.

"Go on, MacBirney, with your mixture," exclaimed Lambert, "I'll serve at the table. You are going to join us, of course, Mrs. MacBirney?"

Alice answered in trepidation: "It must be something very light for me."

"Try whiskey, Mrs. MacBirney," suggested Dora Morgan benevolently, "it is really the easiest of all."

Alice grew nervous. Kimberly, without speaking, pushed a half-filled glass toward her. She looked at him in distress. "That will not hurt you," he said curtly.

The men were talking Belgian politics. Lambert was explaining the antiquated customs of the reactionaries and the battle of the liberals for the laicizing of education. He dwelt on the stubbornness of the clericals and the difficulties met with in modernizing their following.

Kimberly either through natural dislike for Lambert or mere stubbornness objected to the specific instances of mediævalism adduced and soon had the energetic chemist nettled. "What do you know about the subject?" demanded Lambert at length. "Are you a Catholic?"

"I am not a Catholic," returned Kimberly amiably. "I am as far as possible, I suppose, from being one. The doors of the church are wide, but if we can believe even a small part of what is printed of us they would have to be broadened materially to take in American refiners."

"If you are not a Catholic, what are you?" persisted Lambert with heat.

"I have one serious religious conviction; that is, that there are just two

perfectly managed human institutions; one, the Standard Oil Company, the other the Catholic Church."

There was now a chance to drop the controversy and the women together tried to effect a diversion. But Lambert's lips parted over his white teeth in a smile. "I have noticed sometimes that what we know least about we talk best about." Kimberly stirred languidly. "I was born of Catholic parents," continued Lambert, "baptized in the Catholic Church, educated in it. I should know something about it, shouldn't I? You, Mr. Kimberly, must admit you know nothing about it." Kimberly snorted a little. "All the same, I take priests' fables for what they are worth," added Lambert; "such, for example, as the Resurrection of Christ." Lambert laughed heartily. Fritzie looked uneasily at Alice as the words fell. Her cheeks were crimsoned.

"Can a central fact of Christianity such as the Resurrection fairly be called a priests' fable?" asked Kimberly.

"Why not?" demanded Lambert with contemptuous brevity. "None but fossilized Catholics believe such nonsense!"

"There are still some Protestants left," suggested Kimberly mildly.

"No priest dictates to me," continued the chemist, aroused. "No superstition for me. I want Catholics educated, enlightened, made free. I should know something about the church, should I not? You admit you know nothing—-"

"No, I did not admit that," returned Kimberly. "You admitted it for me. And you asked me a moment ago what I was. Lambert, what are you?"

"I am a Catholic–not a clerical!" Lambert emphasized the words by looking from one to another in the circle. Kimberly spread one of his strong hands on the table. Fritzie watching him shrank back a little.

"You a Catholic?" Kimberly echoed slowly. "Oh, no; this is a mistake." His hand closed. "You say you were born a Catholic. And you ridicule the very corner-stone of your faith. The last time I met you, you were talking the same sort of stuff. I wonder if you have any idea what it has cost humanity to give you the faith you sneer at, Lambert? To give you Catholic parents, men nineteen hundred years ago allowed themselves to be nailed to crosses and torn by dogs. Boys hardly seven years old withstood starvation and scourging and boys of fifteen were burned in pagan amphitheatres that you might be born a Christian; female slaves were thrown into boiling oil to give you the privilege of faith; delicate women died in shameful agonies and Roman maidens suffered their bodies to be torn to pieces with red-hot irons to give you a Christian mother–and you sit here to-night and ridicule the Resurrection of Christ! Call yourself liberal, Lambert; call yourself enlightened; call yourself Modern; but for God's sake don't call yourself a Catholic."

"Stop a moment!" cried Lambert at white heat.

Lottie put out her arm. "Don't let's be cross," she said with deliberate but unmistakable authority. "I hate a row." She turned her languid eyes on MacBirney. "Walter, what are these people drinking that makes them act in this way? Do give Mr. Kimberly something else; he began it."

Kimberly made no effort to soothe any one's feelings. And when Fritzie and Alice found an excuse to leave the room he rose and walked leisurely into the hall after them.

The three talked a few moments. A sound of hilarity came from the music room. Alice looked uneasily down the hall.

"I never knew your husband could sing," said Fritzie.

CHAPTER XVI

It dawned only gradually on Alice that her husband was developing a surprising tendency. He walked into the life that went on at the Nelson home as if he had been born to it. From an existence absorbed in the pursuit of business he gave himself for the moment to one absorbed in pursuit of the frivolous. Alice wondered how he could find anything in Lottie Nelson and her following to interest him; but her husband had offered two or three unpleasant, even distressing, surprises within as few years and she took this new one with less consternation than if it had been the first.

Yet it was impossible not to feel annoyance. Lottie Nelson, in what she would have termed an innocent way, for she cared nothing for MacBirney, in effect appropriated him, and Alice began to imagine herself almost third in the situation.

Tact served to carry the humiliated wife over some of the more flagrant breaches of manners that Mrs. Nelson did not hesitate at, if they served her caprice. MacBirney became "Walter" to her everywhere. She would call him from the city in the morning or from his bed at night; no hour was too early to summon him and none too late. The invitations to the Nelsons' evenings were extended at first both to Alice and to him. Alice accepted them in the beginning with a hopeless sort of protest, knowing that her husband would go anyway and persuading herself that it was better to go with him. If she went, she could not enjoy herself. Drinking was an essential feature of these occasions and Alice's efforts to avoid it made her the object of a ridicule on Lottie's part that she took

no pains to conceal.

It was at these gatherings that Alice began to look with a degree of hope for a presence she would otherwise rather have avoided. Kimberly when he came, which was not often, brought to her a sense of relief because experience had shown that he would seek to shield her from embarrassment rather than to expose her to it.

Lottie liked on every occasion to assume to manage Kimberly together with the other men of her acquaintance. But from being, at first, complaisant, or at least not unruly, Kimberly developed mulish tendencies. He would not, in fact, be managed. When Lottie attempted to force him there were outbreaks. One came about over Alice, she being a subject on which both were sensitive.

Alice, seeking once at the De Castros' to escape both the burden of excusing herself and of drinking with the company, appealed directly to Kimberly. "Mix me something mild, will you, please, Mr. Kimberly?"

Kimberly made ready. Lottie flushed with irritation. "Oh, Robert!" She leaned backward in her chair and spoke softly over her fan. "Mix me something mild, too, won't you?"

He ignored Lottie's first request but she was foolish enough to repeat it. Kimberly checked the seltzer he was pouring long enough to reply to her: "What do you mean, Lottie? 'Mix you something mild!' You were drinking raw whiskey at dinner to-night. Can you never understand that all women haven't the palates of ostriches?" He pushed a glass toward Alice. "I don't know how it will taste."

Lottie turned angrily away.

"Now I have made trouble," said Alice.

"No," answered Kimberly imperturbably, "Mrs. Nelson made trouble for herself. I'm sorry to be rude, but she seems lately to enjoy baiting me."

Kimberly appeared less and less at the Nelsons' and the coolness between him and Lottie increased.

She was too keen not to notice that he never came to her house unless Alice came and that served to increase her pique. Such revenge as she could take in making a follower of MacBirney she took.

Alice chafed under the situation and made every effort to ignore it. When matters got to a point where they became intolerable she uttered a protest and what she dreaded followed–an unpleasant scene with her husband. While she feared that succeeding quarrels of this kind would end in something terrible, they ended, in matter of fact, very much alike. People quarrel, as they rejoice or grieve, temperamentally, and a wife placed as Alice was placed must needs in the end submit or do worse. MacBirney ridiculed a little, bullied a little, consoled a little, promised a little, and urged his wife to give up silly, old-fashioned ideas and "broaden out."

He told her she must look at manners and customs as other people looked at them. When Alice protested against Lottie Nelson's calling him early and late on the telephone and receiving him in her room in the morning–MacBirney had once indiscreetly admitted that she sometimes did this–he declared these were no incidents for grievance. If any one were to complain, Nelson, surely, should be the one. Alice maintained that it was indecent. Her husband retorted that it was merely her way, that Lottie often received Robert Kimberly in this way–though this, so far as Robert was concerned, was a fiction–and that nobody looked at the custom as Alice did. However, he promised to amend–anything, he pleaded, but an everlasting row.

Alice had already begun to hate herself in these futile scenes; to hate the emotion they cost; to hate her heartaches and helplessness. She learned to endure more and more before engaging in them, to care less and less for what her husband said in them, less for what he did after them, less for trying to come to any sort of an understanding with him.

In spite of all, however, she was not minded to surrender her husband willingly to another woman. She even convinced herself that as his wife she was not lively enough and resolved if he wanted gayety he should have it at home. The moment she conceived the notion she threw the gage at Lottie's aggressive head. Dolly De Castro, who saw and understood, warmly approved. "Consideration and peaceable methods are wasted on that kind of a woman. Humiliate her, my dear, and she will fawn at your feet," said Dolly unreservedly.

Alice was no novice in the art of entertaining; it remained only for her to turn her capabilities to account. She made herself mistress now of the telephone appointment, of the motoring lunch, of the dining-room gayety. Nelson himself complimented her on the success with which she had stocked her liquor cabinets.

She conceived an ambition for a wine cellar really worth while and abandoned it only when Robert Kimberly intimated that in this something more essential than ample means and the desire to achieve were necessary. But while gently discouraging her own idea as being impractical, he begged her at the same time to make use of The Towers' cellars, which he complained had fallen wholly into disuse; and was deterred only with the utmost difficulty from sending over with his baskets of flowers from the gardens of The Towers, baskets of wines that Nelson and Doane with their trained palates would have stared at if served by Alice. But MacBirney without these aids was put at the very front of dinner hosts and his table was given a presage that surprised him more than any one else. As a consequence, Cedar Lodge invitations were not declined, unless perhaps at times by Robert Kimberly.

He became less and less frequently a guest at Alice's entertainments, and not to be able to count on him as one in her new activities came after a time as

a realization not altogether welcome. His declining, which at first relieved her fears of seeing him too often, became more of a vexation than she liked to admit.

Steadily refusing herself, whenever possible, to go to the Nelsons' she could hear only through her husband of those who frequented Lottie's suppers, and of the names MacBirney mentioned none came oftener than that of Robert Kimberly. Every time she heard it she resented his preferring another woman's hospitalities, especially those of a woman he professed not to like.

Mortifying some of her own pride she even consented to go at times to the Nelsons' with her husband to meet Kimberly there and rebuke him. Then, too, she resolved to humiliate herself enough to the hateful woman who so vexed her to observe just how she made things attractive for her guests; reasoning that Kimberly found some entertainment at Lottie's which he missed at Cedar Lodge.

Being in the fight, one must win and Alice meant to make Lottie Nelson weary of her warfare. But somehow she could not meet Robert Kimberly at the Nelsons'. When she went he was never there. Moreover, at those infrequent intervals in which he came to her own house he seemed ill entertained. At times she caught his eye when she was in high humor herself–telling a story or following her guests in their own lively vein–regarding her in a curious or critical way; and when in this fashion things were going at their best, Kimberly seemed never quite to enter into the mirth.

His indifference annoyed her so that as a guest she would have given him up. Yet this would involve a social loss not pleasant to face. Her invitations continued, and his regrets were frequent. Alice concluded she had in some way displeased him.

CHAPTER XVII

One morning she called up The Towers to ask Kimberly for a dinner. He answered the telephone himself and wanted to know if he might not be excused from the dinner and come over, if it were possible, in the evening.

Alice had almost expected the refusal. "I wish you would tell me," she said, laughing low and pleasantly, "what I have done."

He paused. "What you have done?"

"What I have done that you avoid coming to Cedar Lodge any more?"

"I don't, do I?" He waited for an answer but Alice remained silent. His tone

was amiable and his words simple, yet her heart was beating like a hammer. "You know I haven't gone about much lately," he went on, "but whenever you really want me for a dinner you have need only to say so."

"I never ask a guest for dinner without wanting him."

It was his turn to laugh. "Do you really manage that, Mrs. MacBirney? I can't; and yet I think myself fairly independent."

"Oh, of course, we are all tied more or less, I suppose, but–you know what I mean."

"Then you do want me to appear?"

Alice suddenly found her tongue. "We should never ask any one to whom Mr. MacBirney and I are under so many obligations as we are to Mr. Kimberly without 'wanting him,' as you express it. And we really want you very much to-morrow night."

He laughed, this time with amusement. "You are rather strong now on third persons and plurals. But I think I understand that you really do want me to come."

"Haven't I just said so?" she asked with good-humored vexation.

"Not quite, but I shall arrive just the same."

Alice put up the receiver, agreeably stirred by the little tilt. It was a lift out of the ruck of uncomfortable thought that went to make up her daily portion, and the elation remained with her all day.

She decided that some vague and unwillingly defined apprehensions concerning Kimberly's feeling toward her were after all foolish. Why make herself miserable with scruples when she was beset with actual perplexities at home? Walter himself was now more of what she wanted him to be. He perceived his wife's success in her active hospitality and applauded it, and Alice began to feel she could, after all, be safe in a nearer acquaintance with Kimberly and thus lessen a little Lottie Nelson's pretensions.

It is pleasant to a woman to dress with the assurance that anticipates success. Alice went to her toilet the following afternoon with an animation that she had not felt for weeks. Every step in it pleased her and Annie's approbation as she progressed was very gratifying to her mistress.

The trifles in finishing were given twice their time, and when Alice walked into her husband's room he kissed her and held her out at arm's length in admiration. She hastened away to look at the table and the stairs rose to meet her feet as she tripped down the padded treads.

Passing the drawing-room the rustle of her steps caused a man within it to turn from a picture he was studying, and Alice to her surprise saw Kimberly standing before a sanguine of herself. She gave a little exclamation.

"I asked not to be announced," he explained. "I am early and did not want

to hurry you." He extended his hand. "How are you?"

"I couldn't imagine who it was, when I looked in," exclaimed Alice cordially. "I am glad to see you."

He held out his hand and waited till she gave him hers. "You look simply stunning," he answered quietly. "There is something," he added without giving her a chance to speak and turning from the eyes of the portrait back again to her own, "in your eyes very like and yet unlike this. I find now something in them more movingly beautiful; perhaps twenty-five years against eighteen–I don't know–perhaps a trace of tears."

"Oh, Mr. Kimberly, spare your extravagances. I hear you have been away."

"At least, I have never seen you quite so beautiful as you are this moment."

"I am not beautiful at all, and I am quite aware of it, Mr. Kimberly."

"I would not wish you to think anything else. There the beauty of your character begins."

Her repugnance was evident but she bore his eyes without flinching. "You humiliate me exceedingly," was all she attempted to say.

"The truth should not humiliate you. I—-"

"Must I run away?"

"Not, I hope, because I tell you you are beautiful, for I shall continue to tell you so every time I see you."

"Surely you will not take advantage of your hostess, Mr. Kimberly?"

"In what way?" he asked.

"By saying things most unpleasant for her to hear."

"I say things awkwardly, perhaps unpleasantly, but always sincerely."

Alice looked down at her fan, but spoke with even more firmness. "If we are to be good friends, you must excuse me even from sincerity on topics of this kind."

"Don't cut me from your friendship. We must be the best of friends. I cannot conceive of you as being other than kind, even patient with me."

"Then do not say things I cannot listen to."

"I will never say anything you may not listen to. But concede me the privilege–for it is one–of paying honest tribute to your loveliness when I can't help it."

Without raising her eyes she spoke with decision. "I positively will not listen." With the word she caught up her gown and started away. He walked with her. "I am afraid," he said regretfully, "you are sorry you sent for me."

She turned with burning eyes. "You should be the last to make me so, Mr. Kimberly."

"I wish to be the last. Yet I hate to sacrifice sincerity."

"There is something I put far above sincerity."

He looked mildly surprised. "What can it be?"

"Consideration for the feelings of another–particularly if she be somewhat helpless."

"Just a moment." They were entering the hall and he stopped her. "In what way are you helpless?"

"Through consideration on my part for my guest to-night, for my husband's friend, for a friend to whom we both owe much—-"

"You owe that friend nothing. If you really think so, disabuse your mind. And I have never professed the slightest friendship for Mr. MacBirney. Whatever we do, let us keep the facts clear. If we speak of consideration, what about my feelings? And about helplessness–I am up against a stone wall all the time in trying to say anything."

"You have no right to say anything!" exclaimed Alice energetically and starting on as she spoke.

"Perhaps that is true. One that can't say things better than I do shouldn't attempt them. If one of us must be humiliated let it be me. Where are you taking me?"

She stopped. "Nowhere at all, Mr. Kimberly. Won't you—-"

"Where are you going?"

"To look at my table. Mr. MacBirney will be right down. Won't you wait for him in the library?"

"No."

"I should be most grateful."

"I want to see the table myself."

Alice tossed her head. "This way then."

At the threshold of the dining-room, Kimberly paused. The table was dressed in yellow with the lowest tones in the fruits of the centrepiece. The pears were russet, the grapes purple, and pomegranates, apples, and golden plums supplied the tints of autumn. The handles of the old silver basket were tied with knots of broad, yellow ribbon. Alice, touching the covers here and there, passed behind the chairs.

"You get your effects very simply," observed Kimberly. "Only people with a sure touch can do that."

"I thought there were to be no more compliments."

He looked at the sconces. "Just one for the lighting. Even Dolly and Imogene sin in that way. They overdo it or underdo it, and Mrs. Nelson is impossible. Where have you put me?"

She pointed with her fan. "Next to Mrs. Nelson."

"Next to Mrs. Nelson?" he echoed in surprise.

"Why not?"

"Did you say humiliation? Do I deserve so much?"

"At dinner one tries, of course, to group congenial people," suggested Alice coldly.

"But we are not congenial."

"I supposed you were Mrs. Nelson's most frequent guest."

"I have not been at Mrs. Nelson's since the evening Guyot and Lambert were there," said Kimberly. "You, yourself, were there that night."

Alice betrayed no confusion but she was shocked a little to realize that she believed him instantly. Kimberly, at least as to truthfulness, had won her confidence. Her own husband had forfeited it. The difficulty now, she felt, would be ever to believe him at all.

"I remember," she assented with returning cordiality. "I was very proud to listen that night."

Kimberly stood with his hand on the back of a chair. "Lambert is a brilliant fellow."

"Possibly; my sympathies were not with his views.

"So I sit here?" continued Kimberly patiently. "Who sits next to you?"

"Your brother."

Kimberly spoke with resignation. "Charles always had the luck of the family."

A door opened and a butler entered the room. On seeing Kimberly he attempted to withdraw.

"Come in, Bell," said Alice. "What is it?"

"The juggler, Mrs. MacBirney; his assistant has telephoned they've missed their train."

"Oh, Bell!" exclaimed his mistress in indignant protest. "Don't tell me that."

"And it's the last out, till ten-thirty o'clock."

Alice's face fell. "That ends my evening. Isn't it *too* exasperating. Stupid jugglers!"

Kimberly intervened. "What train did he miss, Bell?"

"The seven-ten, sir, from town."

"Why don't you call up the division superintendent and ask his office to stop the eight-ten?"

Bell looked at his mistress. "I might do that, sir."

"Oh, can you?" cried Alice.

"You ought to have done it without being told, Bell," observed Kimberly. "You've done such things before."

"Might I use your name, sir?"

"Use whatever is necessary to get him. And ask them to hunt up the juggler in the waiting-room and put him aboard. Who is he?"

"A China boy, sir, I understand."

"In that case, they could not miss him."

The butler left the room. "Do you think they will do it?" asked Alice anxiously.

"Don't give it further thought. We could get him out on a special if necessary."

Voices came from the front room. Alice started forward. "There are guests."

"By-the-way," added Kimberly, pointing to the card on his cover and that on his brother's, "you don't mind my correcting this mistake, do you?"

Alice looked very frankly at him, for the success of the dinner was keenly on her mind. "You will be of more assistance, Mr. Kimberly, if you will not make any change. Mrs. Nelson and Mrs. Morgan are my difficulties and I hoped you would solve them for me."

"By all means."

Dolly's voice was heard in the hall. "Where are you, Alice? Here are the McCreas, from town, and Doctor Hamilton."

They sat down fourteen at the table–the Kimberlys, De Castros, Nelsons, McCreas, Hamilton, Miss Venable, and Dora Morgan.

Alice was playing to the enemy and meant to demonstrate to the Nelson coterie that she needed no assistance from them to establish herself as a hostess at Second Lake. If she wished, on this occasion, for a great success it was hers. The dinner was good, and the moment that Nelson had assured himself of this he began good-naturedly to help things on.

A remark from some one about the gulf between law and justice gave him a chance. "Why associate the two at all?" he asked lazily. "Law is strictly a game of the wits. It is played under the convention of an appeal to justice, but justice is invoked merely to satisfy the imagination. If people understood this there would be no complaint about a gulf between the two. We imagine justice; we get law. Similarly, we imagine heaven; we get–what we deserve. If the imagination be satisfied, man will endure the sweat of Sisyphus; most of us suffer it in this world, anyway. Law and justice are like chemical incompatibles and there must be a gulf between them. And law is no better and no worse than other conventions of society. Who that studies human government in any form has ever been able to regard it otherwise than with contempt?"

"Certainly," interposed Fritzie Venable, with formal irony. "No one that takes care of the Kimberly interests at Washington."

"The Kimberly interests at Washington," returned Nelson with complaisance, "are so well behaved that they take care of themselves."

"Then I don't see what contempt you should have for this government," retorted Fritzie vigorously.

"Only that it affords him no adequate exercise for his ingenuity," suggested Arthur De Castro.

"I don't care," protested Fritzie; "I am an American and I won't have our government abused. I believe in sticking to your own."

"Well, if *we* haven't stuck to our own, I should like to know who has?" observed Charles Kimberly benevolently. "We've stuck for fifty years to our tariff builders, as Mustard would to a stot. MacBirney's farmers are doing the work for us now," he continued. "Our beet growers guard the sugar schedule at Washington. These wonderful Western States; lowest in illiteracy, highest in political sagacity! It is really a shame to take the money."

"I don't see how *you* conscientiously can take it," declared Hamilton, appealing to Robert Kimberly.

"I do it by educating my conscience, Doctor," responded Robert Kimberly. "Every one that takes the trouble to inquire knows I am a free trader. I abstain from the Reform Club, but that is out of deference to my partners. I contribute to both campaign funds; to the one for our shareholders, to the other for my conscience; for as I say, personally I am a free trader."

"And a tariff beneficiary," added Arthur De Castro.

"Why not, Arthur? Wasn't it Disraeli who said sensible men are all of one religion? He might better have said, sensible men are all of one politics. It is true, we are tariff beneficiaries, but this country is doing business under a protective theory. We are engaged, as we were long before there was a tariff, in what is now a protected industry. We can't change our business because the government changes its economic policy.

"And if anybody *is* to have protection here, Arthur, why shouldn't we? Who has a better right to it? Our warrants of occupation were extorted from the Iroquois. We fought the Indian, we fought the French, we fought the English—-"

"Was there anybody you didn't fight?"

"We put up our credit in Paris and Amsterdam for the colonies and for the Federal Government when the colonies and the Federal Government had none. Then along comes a little coterie of steel men in our own day," Kimberly tossed his head with disdainful impatience, "who make the toil of a hundred years look like a farce–out-Herod Herod in protection and pile up hundreds of millions while we are up to our armpits in molasses trying to grind out a mere living. Protection! We don't get half enough. Who has any better sanction for exercising that airy, invisible pressure of a tariff tax?" he demanded, lifting a glass of wine to the light.

"Picturesque old pirate," murmured Hamilton.

"And he needs the money," commented De Castro. "Why quarrel with him?"

"I am sure you will all pledge the sugar business," continued Kimberly, rais-

ing a refilled glass blandly, "and join me in welcoming anybody that wants to go into it. This is a free country, gentlemen."

"What do you use on competitors, the rack and dungeon?"

"Nothing that savors of them."

"But you take care of competition," persisted Hamilton.

Kimberly laughed.

"Certainly we do," interposed McCrea, quickly and frankly. "But without unnecessary cruelty, as Mr. Robert Kimberly puts it. No man that ever fought the company and had horse-sense has ever starved to death. We can use such a man's talents better than he can, and very often he comes into camp and becomes our teacher; that has happened. Our system of combination has brought comforts and luxuries into thousands of homes that never would have known them under the waste of competition. Hundreds and thousands of men have profited by uniting their efforts with ours. And no man that wasn't a business lunatic has ever been the worse for anything we've done."

"Your husband talks well, Mrs. McCrea," said Robert Kimberly, to a quiet little woman near him.

"He has had able teachers," laughed Mrs. McCrea.

"No, it is because he believes in himself. It's a great thing to be able to believe in yourself."

"Don't you?"

"Far from it."

"You've made a good many others believe in you."

"Not always for their own best interests, I'm afraid."

"Yes, I know," Dolly was saying to those of the women who were listening to her, "the weight of authority is against me. But I have always held, and hold yet, that a simple thing, such as lapis-lazuli, is best set in gold–much better than in silver. Talk with Castellani about it sometime, or Viola."

"Yes, and they'll tell you silver, every time," interrupted Fritzie vigorously.

Dolly waved her hand as if to dismiss controversy.

"Gold is so common," objected Lottie Nelson.

"Not more so than lapis," retorted Dolly.

"But isn't that the glory of gold," suggested Robert, "that it is common? It has the seal of approval of mankind; what higher sanction do you want? You are always safe in resting with that approval. I believe in common things–pearls for example and rubies. I am just common enough to like them."

Bell, passing behind his mistress, spoke in her ear. Alice's face lighted and she caught Kimberly's eye. "He is here," she nodded laughingly across the table.

The juggler had come and as the dessert was being served he followed a butler into the room in his native robes and assumed his place as one of Bell's

assistants. The Chinaman was handsome and of great size and strength. Alice only hinted to her guests what awkwardness might be looked for from the new footman, and the juggler smiling in Oriental silence began to cajole the senses of his spectators.

After he had amused them with trifles he floated a gossamer veil of yellow silk over a huge glass bowl filled with fruit from a serving table. With this in his hands he hastened to the fireplace at the end of the room and turning heaved the bowl swiftly toward the ceiling, catching it in his arms as it descended filled with quivering goldfish swimming in water of crystal clearness.

He took oranges from the side tables and, splitting them, released songbirds into the air. The guests tossed fruit at him, and from apples and pomegranates he cut favors for them–jewelled stick-pins, belt agraffes and Florentine bonbonières. When the evening was over Alice thanked her guests for their compliments. Lottie Nelson's words in particular left a flush of triumph in Alice's cheeks and she looked so happy that Kimberly paused before he spoke.

"Well?" said Alice questioningly. And then: "If you have had a good time, don't be afraid to say so."

He looked at her as if pleased at her fervor. "Are you a little bit sorry?" he asked quizzically.

Her brows rose with a pretty assumption of ignorance. "I have nothing to be sorry for."

"Then I suppose I must have."

She dropped her eyes for a moment to her sandalwood fan. "Of course, you will decide that."

"I presume," he continued, taking the fan without apology from her hands, "I may come over when you are not at home and look at your portrait?"

"I am sure you don't realize how silly that sounds. I hear you have a new picture," she added, looking up.

"It is to be hung next week. MacBirney is to bring you over to see it. Are you sorry I came?"

"Oh, is *that* what you meant? Why, such a question! You saved my evening."

"But are you sorry?"

"I shouldn't say so if I were, should I?"

"No, but answer, anyway."

Her expression of vexation was pleasing. "How obstinate! No, then. And you saved my evening besides."

"You must take me as I am."

"You cannot, I know, be less than you should be."

"How about you?"

She drew herself up the least bit. "I hope no friend of mine would wish me anything less."

"We are both then to be all we should be."

"Don't you think I am very patient?" she demanded impatiently.

"You are. We are both to be, aren't we?"

She did not conceal her annoyance. "I sincerely trust so," she said coldly. "But there is a limit to all things."

He held out his hand. "Thank you for a delightful evening."

CHAPTER XVIII

The new picture at The Towers made a topic of interest among Kimberly's friends, but Alice found excuses for not going to see it until MacBirney would brook no further delays. They drove over one afternoon and found Doctor Hamilton and Imogene in the library. Robert Kimberly came downstairs with Charles and greeted the MacBirneys. Tea was brought presently and Kimberly asked Alice to pour it.

"I haven't seen you since your dinner," said he, sitting down after a time by Alice. "You were indisposed the day I called. Imogene tells me you intend spending the winter in town."

"Mr. MacBirney wants to."

"I hoped you would winter in the country."

"I like the country, but Mr. MacBirney likes the town. I shall enjoy it, too. You know we are really country folk and haven't had as much town life as you have."

The others started for the east room. "Come," said Dolly, beckoning Alice, "you want to see the Rubens."

The new picture was hung as a panel between a smaller Rubens and an unknown head of the Virgin, in the manner of Botticelli. Kimberly seated Alice apart from the others and stood behind her.

"You have been in this room before?" he said questioningly.

"Once before. It is very much richer now." She indicated the new picture as she spoke, a large canvas of the Crucifixion. "There are two titles for it," explained Kimberly, "a Latin and a Dutch. I like the Dutch best: 'The Ninth Hour.' This picture doesn't appeal so much to my friends as it has appealed to me. But see what

this master magician has chosen here; the supreme moment of the Crucifixion."

Those with them were chatting apart. Alice sat in silence while Kimberly spoke and when he had done they were silent together. "I hope you are going to like it," he said after a pause.

MacBirney asked a question, and Kimberly walked to where he was seated. When he came back he seemed unable to wait longer for Alice's comment. "What is the verdict?"

"Nothing I have ever seen of Rubens's leaves me unmoved," she answered. "This is almost overwhelming, terrible."

"Mrs. MacBirney likes my 'Crucifixion,' Dolly," observed Kimberly after another silence.

"Oh, you needn't quote Alice," exclaimed Dolly from a window seat. "So do I like it. All I said was, that it is a sin to pay so much for a picture."

"No price is too great for a great inspiration. See," he pointed for Alice to the face of a Roman soldier cowering in the foreground of the canvas. "There is one man's face. Hamilton has studied a good many pictures and watched unnumbered faces in every expression of suffering. He has told me that, so far as he knows pictures, the emotion of fear has never been depicted on the human countenance except in that face. As a great surgeon, of a very wide experience, he may be said to know what fear pictured on a human face should be. And there it is before us. Conceive what a triumph for that man to have achieved this, so far from us in the dead centuries, and yet so near to us in this magic of his skill. Observe what a background he has chosen to depict it from–Jerusalem, bathed in the uncanny, terrifying light that accompanies a convulsion of nature. The earth rent, the dead issuing from their graves, nature prostrate, and everywhere–brooding over everything, but stamped most of all on this one guilty face–fear. How it all builds up the agony of that death sweat on the cross! By Heaven, it is tremendous! And Dolly says it is a sin to spend so much money for it. Brother Francis doesn't agree with her; I found him in here early one morning saying his prayers to it."

"Before it," said Alice instantly.

"I thought that no mean tribute. Frankly, do you think me extravagant?"

"Did you really pay the price named in the newspapers?"

"Even then?"

"It does take one's breath away–at least, it took mine."

"I have wanted this picture for years. Hamilton made one trip over with me to look at it–he told me of it first. Then I had to wait all these years for the opportunity to acquire it."

"What patience!"

His eyes were fixed on the picture. "It must have taken patience to paint it.

But patience gives us everything in this life." Alice was silent. "You don't agree with me?"

"How do you know that?"

"I feel it; the air is thick with your dissent. But, Alice, I am right and you are wrong."

Her name coming so suddenly and for the first time from his lips astonished her. Her heart sent its blood in protest to her very ears. In a room with other people nothing could be said. But she rose and turning from Kimberly called to her husband, asking if he were ready.

"Before you go I have a favor to ask," said Kimberly, intervening, and Kimberly's petitions had always something of the color of command. "I told you," he said, speaking to Alice, "of my mother's portrait. It is upstairs; will you come see it?"

"I should like very much to see it. Come, Walter," she held out her hand for her husband. "Mr. Kimberly wants us to see his mother's portrait."

Kimberly made no comment, but the manner with which he paused, waiting for MacBirney to join them, sufficiently indicated that he was conscious of waiting. When MacBirney noticed his attitude he moved from those he was with much more quickly than he would have done at his wife's behest. Dolly came with MacBirney and the four walked upstairs. Kimberly's rooms opened to the south. There were five in the apartment and while Kimberly excused himself to take MacBirney in for a moment to speak to his uncle, Dolly took Alice through Kimberly's suite.

"These rooms are charming!" exclaimed Alice, when the men came in to them. "You must see them, Walter. The breakfast room is dear."

They were standing in the library, which served as a writing room and a conference room. It was finished in oak and on the east the breakfast room opened, in white and green.

Alice took her husband's arm. "See, Walter," she said passing through the open door; "isn't this darling? These tones must be restful to wake to!"

"I had lunch here once," announced MacBirney in his choppy way. "With you and your brother and McCrea," he added, turning to Kimberly.

"You never said a word to me about seeing such a pretty place," remarked his wife.

"You've been in the west room?" asked Kimberly.

"Yes, Alice sang for me while you were with Uncle John," responded Dolly.

"I thought I heard music," remarked Kimberly, looking at Alice. "What did you sing?"

"I only hummed an old air."

Kimberly tried to get her to go back to the piano but could not. "I miss

music keenly," he said, "I wish I could make a contract with you to sing here every day."

Alice laughed.

"You would be in very good company," interposed Dolly. "Some famous artistes have sung at that piano. Robert," she added, as the two women walked toward his dressing-room, "has everything here but what he ought to have–a wife. When mother lived, The Towers was more than a habitation–it was a home."

In his bedroom, Kimberly indicated a portrait above the fireplace. "This is my mother," he said to Alice. "Sit down for just a moment–I want you to like her."

"I like her very much, already," returned Alice. "But I should like to sit a moment to enjoy the portrait. I wish I could have known your mother."

"This room I fancy best of them all," Dolly was saying to MacBirney as they walked on. "All of this wall panelling and ceiling was made from one mahogany log brought up from Santo Domingo many years ago with a cargo of sugar."

Kimberly, sitting with Alice before his mother's picture, showed a self-consciousness he did not often betray, a solicitude, seemingly, that Alice should agree with his own estimate of his mother. "She was the most tender, kindly woman in the world," he said after a moment.

"Such a mother ought to be an inspiration to you for everything high and good, Mr. Kimberly."

"Yet I have never reached anything high and good."

"Sometime you will."

He looked at her curiously. "Do you really think that?"

"Yes, I do. And thank you for letting me see your mother."

"If you only could have met her!" There was an intensity of regret in his words. "It was a tragedy for such a woman to die young. I have long wanted you to see her portrait; you constantly make me think of her, Alice."

She turned calmly and frankly. "It is most kind of you to say that, Mr. Kimberly. So kind that I am going to be bold enough to ask a favor."

"I know what you are going to ask, but I wish you wouldn't. I want very much to do what you are about to ask me not to do—-"

"It is almost nothing–only not to call me Alice."

"There is no use my asking a favor, is there?" He turned with almost a boyish humor in his manner. His mother's eyes seemed to look at her in his eyes as he spoke.

"Not, Mr. Kimberly, this time. I want you to oblige me."

"You are afraid of me." There was no resentment in the words; nothing beyond a regret.

Her answer was low but neither weak nor confused. "Is it quite generous, Mr. Kimberly–here?"

"No," he answered in the same even voice, "it is not. Unhappily, there are times when generosity is weakness. I've been trying ever since I have known you to think of you just as I think of myself. I believe I have tried to give you a little the best of it–yet a selfish man can't always be sure of doing that."

"I trust you think of me," she responded, "only as one of the least important among your friends."

"You are afraid of me. And yet I want your confidence above everything in this world–and I must in some way deserve and win it."

"I do wish you would not say these things. I have to try very hard not to dislike you exceedingly when you speak in this way."

"You do dislike me exceedingly when I speak in this way. I know it perfectly."

If her voice trembled the least bit it was with indignation. "I sometimes ask myself whether I should suffer it even for my husband's sake. You will force me to do something unpleasant, I fear."

"I never will force you to do anything. I do want to call you Alice. But don't hate me for that."

She heard with relief Dolly talking to her husband in the doorway. "It was almost three years before Imogene saw Charles again," Alice heard Dolly say, "and, would you believe it, he began exactly where he left off. After that Imogene decided it was of no use. So, she is Mrs. Kimberly!"

"By Jove! He had patience," laughed MacBirney.

Dolly laughed a little, too. "That is the only exasperating thing about the Kimberly men–their patience."

CHAPTER XIX

MacBirney's decision to spend the winter in town became very welcome to Alice; the atmosphere within a wide radius of The Towers seemed too charged with electricity for mental peace. And her husband, having tasted for the first time the excitement of the stock markets, desired to be near his brokers.

Fritzie, who was an authority in town affairs, made it easy for Alice to find acceptable quarters. In general the Second Lake people cared less and less for opening their town houses. Robert Kimberly's house, while nominally open, never saw its master. Charles and Imogene Kimberly for several years had spent

their winters cruising and now made ready to take Grace De Castro to the eastern Mediterranean. Arthur and Dolly were to winter at Biarritz and join Charles and Imogene in Sicily on their return from the Levant. Fritzie accepted Alice's invitation to spend the season in town with her. Dora Morgan had already gone to Paris for an indefinite stay and the Nelsons, Congress being in session, were starting for Washington.

MacBirney came over to The Towers just before leaving with Alice for town to see Robert Kimberly. When Kimberly asked him what was on his mind, "I would like to know," MacBirney answered frankly, "what I can make some money in this winter." It was the second time he had brought the subject up and Kimberly who had once evaded his inquiries saw that nothing was to be gained by further effort in that direction.

Kimberly regarded him gravely. "Buy standard railway shares," he suggested, "on a four-and-a-half-per-cent average."

"But I want to do better than four-and-a-half-per-cent. It costs something to live."

"I mean, you would have your profit in the advances. But your present income ought to cover a very liberal scale of living," said Kimberly.

MacBirney squirmed in his chair. Kimberly would have preferred he should sit still. "That is true," assented MacBirney, with smiling candor, "but a poor man doesn't want to spend all his money. Isn't there a chance," he asked, coming to the point in his mind, "to make some money in our own stock? I have heard a rumor there would be, but I can't run it down."

"There are always chances if you are closely enough in touch with general conditions. Charles keeps better track of those things than I do; suppose you talk with him."

"Charles sends me to you," protested MacBirney good naturedly.

"Our shares seem just now to be one of the speculative favorites," returned Kimberly. "That means, as you know, violent fluctuations."

MacBirney was impatient of hazards. "Put me next on any one of your own plans, Mr. Kimberly, that you might feel like trusting me with," said MacBirney, jocularly.

"I don't often have any speculative schemes of my own," returned Kimberly. "However," he hesitated a moment; MacBirney leaned forward. "Doane," continued Kimberly abruptly, "has a strong party interested now in putting up the common. They profess to think that on its earnings it should sell higher. In fact, they have sounded me about an extra dividend. I am opposed to that–until Congress adjourns, at any rate. But the company is making a great deal of money. I can't uncover Doane's deal, but I can say this to you: I have agreed to help them as much as I safely can. By that, I mean, that their speculative interests

must always come second to the investment interests of our shareholders."

"By Jove, I wish I could get in on a movement like that, Mr. Kimberly. With you behind it—-"

"I am not behind it–only not opposed to it. For my part, I never advise any one to speculate in our securities. I can't do it. I do business with speculators, but I never speculate myself. You don't credit that, do you? What I mean is this: I never take chances. If it is necessary, for cogent reasons, to move our securities up or down, I am in a position to do so without taking any extreme chances. That is natural, isn't it?"

MacBirney laughed and swayed in his chair. "I'd like to be fixed that way for just one year of my life!" he exclaimed.

"If you were you would find plenty of other things to engage your attention."

"Well, can you do anything for me on this present deal?"

Kimberly reflected a moment. "Yes," he said finally, "if you will operate through the brokers I name and do exactly as I say, and run the risk of losing half the money you put up–I don't see how you could lose more than that. But if you don't do exactly as I tell you, without question, you might lose a great deal more. I am not supposing, of course, that you would risk more than you could afford to lose."

"Not at all. I want to play safe."

"Place your orders to-day and to-morrow then for what common you can carry. Hamilton will let you have what money you need–or he will get it for you. Then forget all about your investment until I tell you to sell. Don't question the advice, but get out promptly at that moment no matter what you hear or what the market looks like. Can you do that? And keep your own counsel?"

"Trust me."

"Good luck then. And if it should come bad, try not to feel incensed at me," concluded Kimberly, rising.

"Surely not!" exclaimed MacBirney.

Kimberly smiled. "But you will, just the same. At least, that is my experience."

"What about the winter, Mr. Kimberly–are you going in town?"

"I haven't decided."

But although Kimberly had made no decision he had made vague promises to every one. With Charles he talked about putting his own yacht into commission, taking Larrie from the refineries for a breathing spell and meeting Charlie's party in February at Taormina. He discussed with Dolly a shorter vacation, one of taking passage to Cherbourg, motoring with Arthur and herself across France and meeting Charles at Nice, whence all could come home together.

The Nelsons left the lake last. Lottie gave Kimberly a parting thrust as she said good-by, delivering it in such a way that she hoped to upset him. "So you are in love with Alice MacBirney?" she said smilingly.

Kimberly looked frankly into her clear, sensuous eyes. "What put that into your head, Lottie?"

She laughed unsympathetically. "I'm glad you've got some one this time that will make you do the walking–not one like the rest of us poor creatures."

"Why do you talk about 'this time,' and 'us poor creatures'? Let me tell you something."

"Do, so I can tell it to Alice."

"You may at any time tell Mrs. MacBirney anything I say. It is this: if I should ever find a woman to love, I expect to do the walking. Tell her that, will you? I respect Mrs. MacBirney very highly and admire her very much–is that clear? But that is far from outraging her feelings by coupling her name with mine or mine with hers. Don't do that. I will never forgive it." She had never seen him so angry.

He realized more than once during the long winter that the slighted woman had told him only the truth. But from her it was an impertinent truth. And it galled him to be forced to admit to the loose-thinking members of his own set what he felt toward Alice.

Meantime, he spent the whole winter at The Towers with Uncle John, the tireless Francis, and his own unruly thoughts. His time went to conferences with his city associates, infrequent inspections of the refineries, horseback rides over the winter landscape, and to winter sunsets watched alone from the great western windows.

In town Alice found Fritzie an admirable guide.

"I try," said Fritzie calmly, answering one of Alice's jests at her wide acquaintance, "to move with the best. I suppose in heaven we shall encounter all sorts. And if we don't cultivate the elect here we may never have another chance to."

"You are far-sighted, Fritzie dear," smiled Alice. "What I can't understand is, why you don't marry."

"I have too many rich relations. I couldn't marry anybody in their class. I should have to pick up with some wretched millionaire and be reduced to misery. The Lord deliver us from people that watch their incomes–they are the limit. And it must, I have always thought, be terrible, Alice, to live with a man that has made a million honestly. He would be so mean. Of course, we are mean, too; but happily a good part of our meannesses are underground–buried with our ancestors."

Fritzie's light words struck home with an unsuspected force. Alice knew

Fritzie had no thought of painting MacBirney; it was only Alice herself who recognized her husband's portrait.

Fritzie certainly had, as she admitted, an appetite for the luxurious and even MacBirney liked her novel extravagances. In their few resting hours the two women talked of Second Lake. "Fritzie," said Alice one night when they were together before the fire, "the first time I met you, you said every one at Second Lake was contented, with two exceptions. You were one; who was the other?"

"Robert, dear. He is the most discontented mortal alive. Isn't it all a strange world?"

Alice, too, had thoughts that winter, but they were confused thoughts and not always to be tolerated. She, likewise, was beginning to think it a strange world.

MacBirney, guided by McCrea, followed the pool operations with sleepless vigilance. They reached their height when Congress adjourned early without disturbing the tariff. The street saw enormous gains ahead for the crowd operating in the Kimberly stocks and with public buying underway the upward movement in the shares took on renewed strength.

It was just at this moment of the adjournment of Congress that Kimberly sent McCrea to MacBirney with directions to sell, and explicitly as to how and through whom to sell. MacBirney, to McCrea's surprise, demurred at the advice and argued that if he dropped out now he should lose the best profits of the venture.

McCrea consented to talk to Kimberly again. Doane, the Hamilton banking interests and their associates were still ostensibly buying and were talking even higher prices. It did not look right to MacBirney to sell under such circumstances but McCrea came back the very next day with one word: "Sell." No reasons, no explanations were given, nothing vouchsafed but a curt command.

MacBirney, doubtful and excited, consulted Alice, to whom indeed, in serious perplexity, he often turned. Knowing nothing about the situation, she advised him to do precisely as Kimberly directed and to do so without loss of time. He was still stubborn. No one but himself knew that he was carrying twice the load of stock he had any right to assume, and battling thus between greed and prudence he reluctantly placed the selling orders.

Just as he had gotten fairly out of it, the market, to his mortification, advanced. A few days later it ran quite away. Huge blocks of stock thrown into it made hardly any impression. The market, as MacBirney had predicted, continued strong. At the end of the week he felt sure that Kimberly had tricked him, and in spite of winning more money than he had ever made in his life he was in bad humor. Kimberly himself deigned no word of enlightenment. McCrea tried to explain to MacBirney that the public had run away with the market–as

it sometimes did. But MacBirney nursed resentment.

The Nelsons came over from Washington that week–it was Holy Week–for the opera and the week-end, and MacBirney asked his wife to entertain them, together with Lambert, at dinner on Friday night.

Alice fought the proposal, but MacBirney could not be moved. She endeavored to have the date changed to Easter Sunday; MacBirney was relentless. He knew it was Good Friday and that his wife was trying to avoid entertaining during the evening. But he thought it an opportunity to discipline her. Alice sent out her invitations and they were accepted. No such luck, she knew, as a declination would be hers.

Lottie, amusing herself for the winter with Lambert, was in excellent humor. But Alice was nervous and everything went wrong. They rose from the table to go to the opera, where Nelson had the Robert Kimberly box. Alice seeking the retirement of an easy-chair gave her attention to the stage and to her own thoughts. In neither did she find anything satisfying. Mrs. Nelson, too talkative with the men, was a mild irritation to her, and of all nights in the year this was the last on which Alice would have wished to be at the opera. It was only one more link in the long chain of sacrifices she wore for domestic peace, but to-night her gyves lay heavy on her wrists. She realized that she was hardly amiable. This box she was enjoying the seclusion of, brought Kimberly close to her. The difference there would be within it if he himself were present, suggested itself indolently to her in her depression. How loath, she reflected, Kimberly would have been to drag her out when she wished to be at home. It was not the first time that she had compared him with her husband, but this was the first time she was conscious of having done so. All they were enjoying was his; yet she knew he would have been indifferent to everything except what she preferred.

And it was not alone what he had indicated in deferring to her wishes; it was what he often did in deferring in indifferent things to the wishes of others that had impressed itself upon her more than any trait in his character. How much happier she should be if her own husband were to show a mere trace of such a disposition, she felt past even the possibility of telling him; it seemed too useless. He could not be made to understand.

For supper the party went with Nelson. The gayety of the others left Alice cold. Nelson, with the art of the practised entertainer, urged the eating and drinking, and when the party left the buzzing café some of them were heated and unrestrained. At two o'clock, Alice with her husband and Fritzie reached their apartment, and Alice, very tired, went directly to her own rooms. MacBirney came in, somewhat out of humor. "What's the matter with you to-night?" he demanded. Alice had dismissed Annie and her husband sat down beside her table.

"With me? Nothing, Walter; why?"

"You acted so cattish all the evening," he complained, with an irritating little oath.

Alice was in no mood to help him along. "How so?" she asked tying her hair as she turned to look at him.

An inelegant exclamation annoyed her further. "You know what I mean just as well as I do," he went on curtly. "You never opened your mouth the whole evening. Lottie asked me what the matter was with you—-"

Alice repeated but one word of the complaining sentence. "Lottie!" she echoed. Her husband's anger grew. "If Lottie would talk less," continued Alice quietly, "and drink less, I should be less ashamed to be seen with her. And perhaps I could talk more myself."

"You never did like anybody that liked me. So it is Lottie you're jealous of?"

"No, not 'jealous of,' only ashamed of. Even at the dinner she was scandalous, I thought."

Her husband regarded her with stubborn contempt, and it hurt. "You are very high and mighty to-night. I wonder," he said with a scarcely concealed sneer, "whether prosperity has turned your head."

"You need not look at me in that way, Walter, and you need not taunt me."

"You have been abusing Lottie Nelson a good deal lately. I wish you would stop it." He rose and stood with one hand on the table. Alice was slipping her rings into the cup in front of her and she dropped in the last with some spirit.

"I will stop it. And I hope you will never speak of her again. I certainly never will entertain her again under any circumstances," she exclaimed.

"You will entertain her the next time I tell you to."

Alice turned quite white. "Have you anything else to say to me?"

Her very restraint enraged him. "Only that if you try to ride your high horse with me," he replied, "I will send you back to St. Louis some fine day."

"Is that all?"

"That is all. And if you think I don't mean what I say, try it sometime." As he spoke he pushed the chair in which he had been sitting roughly aside.

Alice rose to her feet. "I despise your threats," she said, choking with her own words. "I despise you. I can't tell you how I despise you." Her heart beat rebelliously and she shook in every limb; expressions that she would not have known for her own fell stinging from her lips. "You have bullied me for the last time. I have stood your abuse for five years. It will stop now. You will do the cringing and creeping from now on. That woman never shall sit down at a table with me again, not if you beg it of me on your knees. You are a cowardly wretch; I know you perfectly; you never were anything else. I have paid dearly for ever

believing you a man." Her contempt burned the words she uttered. "Now drive me one step further," she sobbed wildly, "if you dare!"

She snapped out the light above her head with an angry twist. Another light shone through the open door of her sleeping-room and through this door she swiftly passed, slamming it shut and locking it sharply behind her.

MacBirney had never seen his wife in such a state. He was surprised; but there could be no mistake. Her blood was certainly up.

CHAPTER XX

If Alice or her husband apprehended a stormy sequel to the unpleasant scene in her dressing room both were relieved that none followed. Not a word came up between them as a result of the breach. There was the usual silence that follows a tempestuous outbreak and the usual indirect, almost accidental, resumption of speaking relations after the acute suspicion of renewed hostilities had worn itself out.

MacBirney had the best of reasons for ignoring what had passed. He had, in fact, experienced the most surprising moments of his life and caution advised against the stirring up of any further altercation. Heretofore he had always known just what his wife, when bullied, would do; but he no longer knew and the uncertainty gave him pause.

He found matter for surprise, indeed for a series of surprises, in the manner in which Alice stood newly revealed to him. Dependence and timidity seemed suddenly to have left her. She walked a new path; not one of complete indifference to her husband, but of decision complete in itself. Forced to cast aside his judgment and fall back on her own, Alice accepted the alternative openly. Her new attitude made itself felt in unnumbered ways–sometimes in no more than arranging for a day down-town with Fritzie, sometimes in discussing when Cedar Lodge should be opened and how. MacBirney found himself no longer consulted; Alice told him what she intended to do. If he gave arbitrary or unreasonable orders they were ignored. If he followed the subject further his inquiries were ignored.

Alice realized it was not right to live in a home in this way, but MacBirney himself had taught her so many ways of wrong living that compunction had grown dull. His pupil, long unwilling to accept his debasing standards of married

life, long suffering the cruelty of finding them enforced upon her, had at last become all that he had made her and something unpleasantly more–she made herself now complete mistress of her own affairs.

Nor was Alice less surprised at the abject surrender of her husband. She knew him in the end better than he knew himself, and cowardly though he was, she felt the new situation would not endure forever–that worse must surely follow. But those who learn to sleep on dumb reproach and still for years the cry of waking apprehension, learn also not to look with foreboding ahead.

There were, it is true, times in which Alice asked herself if in her new attitude she were not walking in a dream; slumbers in which the old shrinking fear returned; moments in which she could hardly realize her own determination. But the fear that had so long subdued her now served to support her courage. Go back she would not; the present she had made her own, the future must account for itself.

Moreover, as the acuteness of the crisis passed everything looked better. The present tends always to justify itself. And prosperous skies opening on MacBirney's speculative ventures consoled him for such loss of prestige as he suffered in his own home.

He was again, curiously enough, Alice thought, in cordial touch with Robert Kimberly. She never asked a question and did not know for a long time what could account for this change, since he had been abusing Kimberly vigorously during the life of the market pool. Kimberly had never called at the town apartment and Alice heard of him only through Fritzie, who visited The Towers on monetary errands and always spoke interestingly of Robert's affairs.

And now spring airs came even to town, and Alice, breathing them, with the sudden sunshine and the morning song of birds, longed for her country home. She kept the telephone wire busy summoning her gardener to conferences and laid out elaborate plans with him for making Cedar Lodge more beautiful for the summer. A number of things conspired to keep her from getting out to Second Lake early. But the servants had been installed and the lodge put in readiness for her coming.

One night in May–a summer night, warm, lighted by the moon and still–an impulse seized Alice to break away from everything for the country. Morning found her with Fritzie, and accompanied only by their maids, in a big motor-car speeding over the ribbon roads toward Second Lake. A curious play of emotions possessed Alice as they whirled through the dust of the village and swung into the hills toward The Towers. She had given no instructions to her chauffeur as to which road he should take and he had chosen the southern road because the grades were better.

It was months since Alice had seen Kimberly. But not until now did she

realize with some apprehension how much he had been in her mind all winter. The near prospect of meeting him disturbed her and she felt an uneasiness at the thought. It was too late to change the route. She felt she had been wrong not to give orders for the north road in time. Then the notion came that she must meet him sometime, anyway, and whenever they met he must be kept within bounds she had set many times since their last hour together. She could see in the distance The Towers gates and the lodge, sentinel-like, away up the road. The mere sight of the familiar entrance brought Kimberly up sharply. The chauffeur checked the car to ask whether he should drive through the grounds. Fritzie said, "Yes."

Alice corrected her, "No, no."

"Why, my dear," exclaimed Fritzie, "not stop to speak to Robert!"

"It will delay us, and I am crazy to get home."

"But it will cut off two miles!"

"And keep us an hour."

"It won't keep us five minutes and the grounds are beautiful."

"We will see them to-morrow. Drive straight ahead, Peters."

Fritzie protested as they flew past the lodge. "I feel like a heathen going by The Towers in this way. I hope Robert won't hear of it."

"I will take all the blame," returned Alice, with a bravado she did not feel. Then she laid her hand on Fritzie's arm. "You may come back right after luncheon."

When they reached the hill beyond Black Rock they saw Cedar Point lying below in the sunshine of the lake. Alice cried out at the beauty of it. Her spirits rose with an emotion that surprised her. For an instant she could not speak. Her eyes moistened and the load that had oppressed her a moment earlier took wings. Before she had quite recovered, the car was down the hill and speeding through the green gates, up the winding avenue of maples, and swinging in an alarming ellipse around to the front of the house.

She ran in through the open doors as if she had left it all but yesterday. Flowers were everywhere. She passed from room to room with the bubbling spirits of a child and dropped at last into her own little chair at her toilet table. Annie, infected with the happiness of her mistress, was wreathed in smiles as she took her hat, while Fritzie, sitting in dusty veil and gloves, telephone in hand, was calling The Towers and in the same breath begging her maid to prepare her bath. No response to Fritzie's telephone message came until late in the afternoon. About four o'clock Robert Kimberly called her up.

"I hear you have arrived," he said.

"This is a pretty time for you to be answering, Robert. Where have you been all day?"

"Driving with Francis. He hasn't been very well lately. I took him over to the Sound. How is Mrs. MacBirney, Fritzie?"

"Come over and see."

"Call her to the telephone."

Alice took the receiver. "How do you do, Mr. Kimberly?"

"Glad to hear your voice. Fritzie has been telling me stories about you all winter."

Alice controlled the pleasant excitement that came with the familiar sound of his own voice. "You mustn't believe the stories you hear," she laughed. "How are you all?"

"One story to-day sounded pretty straight."

"Sometimes those are the least reliable. How is your uncle?"

"Still I shall have to have it out with you–passing us by this morning."

"But you weren't at home."

"Worse and worse–you didn't know that."

She laughed again happily. "You may scold as much as you like, I'm so happy to get home I'm walking on air."

"How do you manage that? I never can get up any excitement over getting home. I wish I might come and see how it affects you."

"Do come."

"Unfortunately I am leaving to-night for the Southwest."

"For the Southwest?" she echoed in surprise. "But we heard of you just back from the West."

"Yes, and with some stories for you. This time it is New Orleans and a terminal project."

"So busy a man! I hope we shall see you when you return."

"I certainly hope so. If I didn't, I shouldn't go. By-the-way," he added humorously, "I seem to have dropped something."

"What can it be?"

"The string you held out a minute ago."

Alice's eyes danced but only the telephone receiver saw them. "What string?"

"About letting me come over. A car was set in this afternoon at Sunbury but the train doesn't pick me up till eleven o'clock to-night. I might run over to see you on my way down—-"

"Oh, by all means, do, Mr. Kimberly."

"–just to see how you look when you are happy."

"Do come; but I am always happy."

He hesitated a moment. "If I were sure of that I might not come."

"You *may* be 'sure,' I assure you. And why, pray, shouldn't you come?"

He retreated easily. "Because in that case I could see your happiness, without intruding on you when you are tired–as you must be now. However, I will run in for a few moments after dinner."

Kimberly appeared shortly before nine o'clock. Fritzie greeted him. "Oh, aren't you youthful to-night?" she exclaimed. He was in a travelling suit and his face was tanned from his Western trip. "You should never wear anything but gray, Robert."

"Has she been as agreeable as this all winter?" asked Kimberly turning to greet Alice.

"All winter," declared Fritzie, answering for herself, "except once when Lottie Nelson's dog chewed up a lace hat for me, and Robert, I have spent this whole winter saying good things about you–haven't I Alice? Even when we saw they were trying to put you in jail."

"Many worthy people seemed to sympathize with that effort," responded Kimberly dryly. "I trust you didn't?" he added turning to Alice.

"I? Not in the least. If they had succeeded, I should have brought you flowers."

The three sat down. Kimberly looked at Alice. "What have you been doing all winter?"

"Nothing."

"Listen to that!" exclaimed Fritzie. "Why, we've been as busy as ants all winter."

"Fritzie would never allow you to do nothing," said Kimberly. "You met a lot of people she tells me."

"I said 'nothing,' because the time went so fast I found no time to do anything I had intended to."

Fritzie objected again: "You kept at your singing all winter, didn't you?"

Kimberly showed interest at once. "Good! Let us hear now how your voice sounds in the country air."

"I haven't any songs."

"You threw some into the wicker trunk," interposed Fritzie.

"Find them, Fritzie, do," said Kimberly. "And what else did you do?" he asked of Alice as Fritzie ran upstairs.

"Everything that country people do," responded Alice. "And you've been West? Tell me all about it."

Kimberly looked very comfortable in a Roman chair as he bent his eyes upon her. "Hardly a spot in Colorado escaped me this time. And I went to Piedmont—-"

"To Piedmont?" cried Alice. "Oh, to see the little factory."

"To see the house you lived in when you were there."

"What possible interest could that poor cottage have for any one? You must have realized that we began housekeeping very modestly."

He brushed her suggestion away with a gesture.

"I wanted to see it merely because you had lived in it." He waited a moment. "Can't you understand that?"

"Frankly, I cannot."

"St. Louis was very interesting," he went on.

"Oh, I love St. Louis!" Alice exclaimed.

"So do I," assented Kimberly. "And in St. Louis I went to see the house you were born in. It was worth looking at; your father's house was a house of character and dignity—-"

"Why, thank you!"

"–Like many of the older houses I ran across in searching it out—-"

Alice seemed unable to rise quite above her embarrassment. "I can hardly believe you are not making fun of me. What ridiculous quests in St. Louis and in Piedmont! Surely there must have been incidents of more importance than these in a three-weeks' trip."

He ignored her comment. "I stood a long time staring at your father's house, and wishing I might have been born in that little old cottage just across the street from where that rich little girl of sixteen lived. I would rather have known you then than lived all I have lived since you were born there."

Alice returned his look with control of every feature. "I did not live there till I was sixteen, if you mean the old home. And if you had been born just across the street you would have had no absurd idea about that little girl in your head. Little girls are not usually interested in little boys across the street. Little boys born thousands of miles away have better chances, I think, of knowing them. And it is better so–for *they*, at least, don't know what absurd, selfish little things girls across the street are."

"That is all wrong—-"

"It is not," declared Alice pointedly.

But the force of everything she said was swept away by his manner. "Only give me the same street and the meanest house in it!" His intensity would not be answered. "*I* would have taken the chances of winning."

"What confidence!"

"And I'd have done it or torn the house down."

Fritzie came back. "I can't find the music anywhere."

Kimberly rose to go to the music room. "No matter," he persisted, "sing anything you can remember, Mrs. MacBirney–just sing."

It seemed easier, as it always seemed when Kimberly persisted, to consent than to decline. Alice sang an English ballad. Then a scrap–all she could

remember–of a Moskowski song; then an Italian ballad. Kimberly leaned on the piano.

"Do you like any of those?" asked Alice with her hands running over the keys.

"All of them. But what was the last?"

"An Italian air."

"Yes, I remember it–in Italy. Sing it again, will you?"

"Tell me about that song," he said when she had repeated it. "It is lovely."

"I don't know much. It is a very old song."

"Have I ever told you about a villa on Lago Maggiore?"

"Fritzie has told me. She says it is a dream."

"I should like to hear you sing that song there sometime."

The moon was rising when Kimberly left for the train. Fritzie objected to his going. "Give up your trip. Stay over to-night. What's the difference?"

"I can't, Fritzie. I'm going like a minstrel show, billed for one-night stands. I have engagements ahead of me all the way and if I miss a day I upset the whole schedule."

"What's it all about?"

"A railroad terminal and reorganization. And I've just time to get around and back for Charles's return."

"And the country dance!" said Fritzie.

"Dolly's country dance," explained Alice.

"Good. I don't want to miss that."

Fritzie caught his sleeve. "You disappointed us last year."

"You may count on me," promised Kimberly.

Fritzie pouted. "I know what that means, 'don't count on me!'"

"This time," returned Kimberly as the door of his motor-car was opened for him, "it isn't going to mean that, Fritzie."

CHAPTER XXI

MacBirney followed his household to the country after two weeks. The De Castros were then back and Dolly enlisted Alice and Fritzie to make ready for the dance at Black Rock barn which regularly signalized at Second Lake what Nelson termed the "opening of navigation."

Alice, with Fritzie to help, was charged with the decorations for the event, and two days before it, the available men about the place, under their direction, were emptying the green-houses and laying the woods under tribute.

The lighting scheme Alice pronounced ineffective. For years no one had given the subject any attention. At the last moment electricians were brought out from town to work early and late and lights were installed from which operators in elevated cages could throw sheets of color on the dancers.

When Imogene and Charles got home–and they were late, arriving only the evening before the party–Dolly, who met them at the train, drove them directly to Black Rock, where Alice with her husband, Fritzie, and Arthur De Castro was conducting a rehearsal of the electrical effects. The kisses and embraces of the committee and the arrivals took place under the rays of the new spot lights.

"Now if Robert were here," cried Fritzie impatiently, "everything would be complete. No one knows where he is. Suppose he doesn't come?"

"He is in town and will be out to-morrow." Imogene as she made the announcement put her arm around Alice. "Sweetheart, you must be dead."

Alice was sustained by the excitement. "Nothing of the sort. I haven't done anything but suggest," she said gayly. "Fritzie has done all the work. In the morning we will bring in the apple blossoms and we are through."

But when she had received all the enthusiasm and compliments she went home tired. MacBirney came to her room to talk, but he had no word for the successful decorations and Alice pleading fatigue went directly to bed.

She woke with the sun streaming through the east windows. It was late and though still tired she rose at once. The morning was superb, and, while dressing, Alice surprised Annie by singing to herself.

Fritzie drove over with her to Black Rock. Alice running in to speak to Dolly found her in bed. Dolly kissed her. "You look so fresh, dear." Alice drew herself up with a laugh. "It's the morning, Dolly."

"By-the-way, Robert is here. He came late and he and Arthur talked so long he stayed all night. He is just across the hall in the blue room."

"Then every one is accounted for. I must be off, Dolly."

"Where are you going?"

"To the woods with Fritzie to get the blossoms."

An old coaching brake had been sent up from the stables and Arthur De Castro was waiting for the two women. "I am going to drive you down the field before I take my ride," he explained.

"You do need exercise. You look sleepy, Arthur," remarked Fritzie, critically.

"Robert kept me up all night." Arthur turned to Alice. "You knew he was back?"

"Dolly told me."

"The lazy fellow isn't up yet," said Fritzie.

Arthur corrected her. "He is up and gone home. But he will be over again this morning."

The horses were fresh and took Arthur's attention across the field and the big wagon lurched as the team danced along. In the woods they found Grace De Castro with the men who were to work. Arthur's saddle-horse was in waiting. The men began loading the brake with elder blossoms, brier roses, and branches from the forest trees. Arthur had meant to take his groom with him, but found there would be nobody to drive the brake back to the barn.

"No matter, Mr. De Castro," said Alice. "Take him. I will drive back." Arthur demurred, but Alice insisted. "I would rather drive the team than not. I drive our horses all the time."

Arthur and the groom rode away. Fritzie and Grace looked at Alice in astonishment when the wagon had been loaded and Alice took the driver's high seat, pulled her glove gauntlets back taut and a gardener handed her the reins.

"Aren't you afraid?" cried Grace.

"Not in the least," Alice answered, slipping her hands into the driving loops and putting her foot on the wheel-brake.

"Really," declared Grace, "you have quite an air."

Fritzie was apprehensive. "For Heaven's sake, don't let them run away, Allie."

The men at the bridles stood aside, Alice spoke and the team leaped swiftly ahead. She gave them leeway for a few moments, but kept them under control and her manner was so confident that Fritzie's fears were allayed before the brake had crossed the first hill. As Alice made the turn in the road and looked laughingly back the two girls waved approval at her. They saw the brim of her broad hat rising and falling like a bird's wings as she nodded to them; then she threw on the wheel-brake and started down the hill.

For a moment the difficulty of holding the pair in check increased and by the time the barn was in sight the struggle had stirred her blood. It colored two little circles in her cheeks and had lighted fires of animation in her gray eyes. She saw the rising entrance to the barn and only took heed that the doors were wide open. Then she gave all her strength to guiding the rushing horses up the long incline. Just as their heads shot under the doorway the off horse shied. The front wheels of the brake bounced over the threshold and Alice saw, standing within, Robert Kimberly.

She gave an exclamation of surprise as she threw on the wheel-brake, pulled with all her strength on the reins and brought her horses to a halt. Kimberly with one hand on the casement stood perfectly still until she looked around. Then he came forward laughing. "You certainly are a capital whip."

"You frightened me nearly to death!" exclaimed Alice with a long breath. "Where, pray, did you come from?" she demanded, looking down from her eminence.

"From almost everywhere. And you?"

"From the woods."

He laid a hand on the foot-board. "Really, I wonder whether there is anything you can't do."

"I am afraid there is one thing now. I don't see how I am going to get down. Aren't there any men around to take the horses?"

"The horses will stand. Just hook your lines and jump from the wheel."

Alice looked at the distance in dismay. "That is easy to say."

"Not hard to do," returned Kimberly. "I'll break your flight."

"I'm a wretched jumper."

"Nonsense. You can't tell me you're a wretched anything after that drive."

"Step away then and I'll jump. Only, I don't see just how I am going to stop after I start."

"What do you want to stop for? Come ahead."

She put her foot cautiously on the wheel; it was a very pretty foot. Then she steadied herself and with her hand swept little ringlets of hair from her eyes.

She knew he was waiting to receive her and, meaning to elude him, turned at the last instant and jumped away from where he stood. Kimberly, in spite of her precaution, caught her as her feet struck the floor, and leaned an instant over her. "Beautifully done!" he exclaimed, and drawing her suddenly into his arms he kissed her.

She pushed him back with all her strength. He met her consternation with good humor. "I couldn't help it."

Alice, burning with angry blushes, retreated. He hoped it would end there and ignored the outraged spirit in her eyes as she took her handkerchief from her waist.

He tried to laugh again. "Don't be angry." But Alice put both hands to her face and walked quickly away.

CHAPTER XXII

Kimberly followed her through the open door. "Where are you going?" he asked.

Her answer came in her quickened step. He repeated his words without eliciting any response. Then he stepped directly in front of her in the path. "Stop for one moment. Alice, you can't go any farther while you are as angry at me as you are now."

"I am Alice to no one but my husband," she exclaimed controlling herself as well as she could. "You shall not stop me, you have no right to."

"Where are you going?"

"I am going home."

"Listen; you are Alice to me–now, and forever; remember that."

Her knees trembled as she strove to escape him. She tried to pass through the shrubbery and could not. She felt faint and dizzy. The very world had changed with a kiss. Everything in life seemed upset, every safeguard gone.

He took her arm. "Come back to the path, Alice. We must walk it together."

She paused an instant for breath and made an effort to speak as she put his hand angrily away. "I insist," she cried, "that you do not continue to insult me."

"If you wait for me to insult you, Alice, you will wait a long time. I should be as likely to insult my own mother."

"I have done nothing to deserve this," she sobbed, frantic with confusion.

"You deserve more a thousand times than my devotion ever can bring you. But all it can ever bring, from the moment I kissed you, is yours."

Her eyes blazed through her tears. In her helpless wrath she stamped her foot. "You are shameless. I detest your conduct. If you are going to the house I will stay here. If you are not, let me go."

He met her denunciation with steadiness. "Nothing you can say will anger me."

"You mean you have no respect for me." She spoke so fast she could scarcely frame the words. "Why don't you say so? Are you too cowardly?"

The imputation stung him. He seemed to explode inwardly. "I have nothing *but* respect for you, Alice," he insisted with terrifying energy, "but this thing must be fought out—-"

She attempted to speak. His words drowned her. "I want to say nothing that will wound or offend you. You make it very hard for me to speak at all—-"

"You have no right to speak—-"

"But, Alice," he exclaimed, throwing all his force into the words, "you don't love that man. That is why I speak. If you *did* love him, if even he loved you, I could be silent."

"I love my husband as a wife should," she cried, struggling vainly to escape his accusation.

"You do not. You cannot!"

They spoke at white heat, she fighting vainly to control her trembling limbs

and Kimberly pausing at times to deal better his sledge-hammer blows at her pitiful strength.

"You do not love that man. If I believed you did," he spoke with a bitterness she had never heard before, "I should never want to see another sun rise. I respect you above all women that breathe; but in that I am right, I can't be wrong. I have suppressed and stifled and smothered as long as I can and it will come out!"

"I will not hear you!"

"Sometime, somewhere, you will hear me. Don't speak!" he exclaimed vehemently. The veins knotted upon his forehead. "I forgot myself for a moment. If you knew what it costs me to remember! But, Alice, for me it is you–or nothing in this world. Remember! You or nothing!"

She searched his face for pity. "I am sinking with shame. What further, what more humiliation do you want? We are in plain view of the house. I am utterly helpless. Will you not have the decency to leave me?"

"I wish I could have said this better; I do nothing well. If I have hurt you, I am very, very sorry." He strode away toward the garden.

Trying to compose herself, Alice walked to the house. Providentially, Dolly had already started for the field. Summoning a servant, Alice ordered her car and with her head whirling started for home. As she was hurried over the country road her mind gradually righted itself, and strange thoughts ran like lightning flashes through her brain. Reaching home, she hastened upstairs and locked her door.

What startled her most painfully in her reflections was the unwelcome conviction that there was nothing new, nothing surprising in her situation. Nothing, at least, except this violent outburst which she now realized she ought long ago to have foreseen. She was suddenly conscious that she had long known Kimberly loved her, and that one day he would call her to account–for the crime of being loved in spite of herself, she reflected bitterly.

She threw herself on her couch and held her hands upon her burning temples. He had caught her in his arms and forced a kiss upon her. The blood suffused her face at the recollection. Again and again, though she turned from the picture, imagination brought it back. She saw his eyes as he bent over her; the thought of the moment was too much to support. Her very forehead crimsoned as the scene presented itself. And worse, was the realizing that something of fascination lingered in the horror of that instant of amazement and fear and mad repulsion of his embrace. She hid her face in her pillow.

After a time she grew calmer, and with her racing pulse quieted, her emotion wore itself somewhat out. Saner thoughts asserted themselves. She felt that she could fight it out. She searched her heart and found no wantonness within it. Strongly assailed, and not, she felt, through her own fault, she would fight and

resist. He had challenged her when he had said it should be fought out. She, too, resolved it should be.

She bathed her forehead, and when she felt sure of herself, rang for Annie. Lunch was served in her room, but she could eat nothing. At moments she felt the comforting conviction of having settled her mind. Unhappily, her mind would not stay settled. Nothing would stay settled. No mood that brought relief would remain. The blood came unbidden to her cheeks even while Annie was serving her and her breath would catch at the opening of a door.

When she heard the hum of a motor-car on the open highway her heart jumped. She opened the porch doors and went out to where she could look on the lake. Her eyes fell upon the distant Towers and her anger against Kimberly rose. She resolved he should realize how he had outraged her self-respect. She picked from the troubled current of her thought cutting things that she ought to have said. She despised herself for not having more angrily resented his conduct, and determined, if he dared further persist, to expose him relentlessly to the circle of their friends, even if they were his own relations. There should be no guilty secret between them; this, at least, she could insure.

When the telephone bell rang, Annie answered it. Dolly was calling for Alice and went into a state when told that Alice had come home affected by the heat, and had given up and gone to bed; she hoped yet, Annie said, to be all right for the evening. Fritzie took the wire at Black Rock to ask what she could do, and Annie assured her there was nothing her mistress needed but quiet and rest.

When the receiver had been hung up the first bridge was crossed, for Alice was resolved above all things not to be seen that night at the dance. When Fritzie came back to Cedar Lodge to dress, Alice was still in bed. Her room was darkened and Annie thought she might be sleeping. At dinner-time, MacBirney, who had been in town all day, came in to see how she was. She told her husband that he would have to go to Dolly's with Fritzie.

MacBirney bent over his wife and kissed her, greatly to her mental discomfort. An unwelcome kiss from him seemed to bring back more confusingly the recollection of Kimberly's kiss, and to increase her perplexities. She detested her husband's caresses; they meant no real affection and she did not intend he should think she believed they did. But she never could decide where to draw the line with him, and was divided between a desire to keep him always at a distance and a wish not to seem always unamiable.

Fritzie, after she was dressed, tiptoed in. The room was lighted to show Alice the new gown. It was one of their spring achievements, and Alice raised herself on her pillow to give a complete approval of the effect. "It is a stunning thing; simply stunning. If you would only stop running yourself to death, Fritzie, and put on ten pounds, you would be absolute perfection."

"If I stopped running myself to death what would there be to live for?" demanded Fritzie, refastening the last pin in her Dresden girdle. "We all have to live for something."

Alice put her hand to her head. "I wonder what I have to live for?"

Fritzie turned sharply. "You? Why nothing but to spend your money and have a good time. Too bad about you, isn't it? You'll soon have a million a year for pin-money."

Alice shook her head. "A dozen millions a year would not interest me, Fritzie."

Fritzie laughed. "Don't be too sure, my dear; not too sure. Well," Fritzie's hands ran carefully over her hair for the last time, "there are a lot of men coming over from the Sound to-night. I may meet my fate!"

"I wish you may with all my heart, Fritzie. Why is it fates always come to people that don't want them?"

"Don't you believe it," cried Fritzie, "they do want them."

"They don't–not always."

"Don't you ever believe it–they only say they don't or think they don't!" she exclaimed, with accustomed vehemence.

Alice moved upon her pillow in impatient disapproval. "I hope you'll have a good time to-night."

MacBirney was ready and Fritzie joined him. The house grew quiet after they left. Annie brought up a tray and Alice took a cup of broth. She did not long resist the drowsiness that followed. She thought vaguely for a moment of a prayer for safety. But her married life had long excluded prayer. What good could come of praying to be kept unharmed while living in a state that had in itself driven her from prayer? That, at least, would be too absurd, and with a dull fear gnawing and dying alternately at her heart she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXIII

At noon next day MacBirney, seeking his wife, found her in her dressing-room. She had come from the garden and stood before a table filled with flowers, which she was arranging in vases.

"I've been looking for you." MacBirney threw himself into a convenient chair as he spoke. "Robert Kimberly is downstairs."

"Mr. Kimberly? To see you, I suppose."

"No, to see you."

"To see *me*?" Alice with flowers in her hand, paused. Then she carried a vase to the mantel-piece. "At this time of day?"

"Well–to see us, he says."

She returned to the table. "What in the world does he want to see us about?"

MacBirney laughed. "He says he has something to say to both of us. I told him I would bring you down."

A breath would have toppled Alice over. "I can't dress to go down now," she managed to say. "It may be something from Dolly. Ask him to give you any message he has."

Walking hurriedly to the mantel with another jar of roses, she found her fear extreme. Could it be possible Kimberly would dream of saying to her husband what he had said to her yesterday? She smothered at the thought, yet she knew his appalling candor and felt unpleasantly convinced that he was capable of repeating every word of it. The idea threw her into a panic. She resolved not to face him under such circumstances; she was in no position to do so. "Tell him," she said abruptly, "that as much as I should like to hear what he has to say, he will have to excuse me this morning."

"He offered to come this evening if you preferred."

"We have other guests to-night," returned Alice coldly. "And I can't be bothered now."

"Bothered?" echoed MacBirney with sarcasm. "Perhaps I had better tell him that."

"By all means, if you want to," she retorted in desperation. "Tell him anything you like."

Her husband rose. "You are amiable this morning."

"No, I am not, I'm sorry to say. I am not quite well–that is the real truth and must be my excuse. Make it for me or not as you like."

MacBirney walked downstairs. After an interminable time, Alice, breathing more freely, heard Kimberly's car moving from the door. When she went down herself she watched narrowly the expression of her husband's face. But he was plainly interested in nothing more serious than Fritzie's account of the country dance. When Alice ventured to ask directly what Kimberly's messages were, he answered that Kimberly had given none. With Fritzie, Alice took a drive after luncheon somewhat easier in mind. Yet she reflected that scarcely twenty-four hours had passed and she already found herself in an atmosphere of suspense and apprehension from which there seemed no escape.

While she was dressing that night, flowers from The Towers' gardens were brought to Cedar Lodge in boxfuls, just as they had regularly been sent the year

before–roses for the tables, violets for Alice's rooms, orchids for herself. If she only dared send them back! Not, she knew, that it would make any difference with the sender, but it would at least express her indignation. She still speculated as to whether Kimberly would dare to tell her husband and upon what would happen if he should tell him.

And her little dream of publicity as an antidote! What had become of it already? So far as Kimberly was concerned, she now firmly believed he was ready to publish his attitude toward her to the world. And she shrank with every instinct from the prospective shame and humiliation.

The water about her seemed very deep as she reflected, and she felt singularly helpless. She had never heard of a situation just such as this, never imagined one exactly like it. This man seemed different from every other she had ever conceived of; more frankly brutal than other brutes and more to be dreaded than other men.

A week passed before Kimberly and Alice met. It was at Charles Kimberly's. Doctor Bryson, the Nelsons, and Fritzie were there.

As Alice and her husband came down, Charles Kimberly and Robert walked out of the library. Robert bowed to MacBirney and to Alice–who scarcely allowed her eyes to answer his greeting.

"Are you always glad to get back to your own country, Mrs. Kimberly?" asked MacBirney greeting his hostess.

Imogene smiled. "Dutifully glad."

"Is that all?"

"At least, I come back with the same feeling of relief that I am getting back to democracy."

"That is," suggested Lottie Nelson, "getting back to where you are the aristocracy."

Dolly, who with her husband joined them in time to hear the remark, tossed her head. "I always thank Heaven, Lottie, that we have no aristocracy here."

"But you are wrong, Dolly, we have," objected Robert Kimberly as the party went into the drawing-room. "Democracy is nothing but an aristocracy of ability. What else can happen when you give everybody a chance? We began in this country by ridding ourselves of an aristocracy of heredity and privilege; and we have only succeeded in substituting for it the coldest, cruelest aristocracy known to man–the aristocracy of brains. This is the aristocracy that controls our manufacturing, our transportation, our public service and our finance; it makes our laws and apportions our taxation. And from this fell cause done our present griefs arise."

"But you must rid yourself of the grossly material conception of an aristocracy, Mr. Kimberly," said Nelson. "Our real aristocracy, I take it, is not our

material one, as Robert Kimberly insists. The true aristocrat, I hold, is the real but mere gentleman."

"Exactly right," assented De Castro. "The gentleman and nothing else is the thing."

"There is nothing more interesting than the gentleman," returned Robert Kimberly, "except the gentleman plus the brute. But the exception is enormous, for it supplies our material aristocrat."

"You must remember, though, that ideas of superiority and inferiority are very tricky," commented Imogene. "And they persist for centuries. To the Naples beggar, even to-day, the Germans are 'barbarians.' And whenever I encounter the two I never can decide which *is* the aristocrat, the traveller or the beggar."

"I read your speech at the New England dinner last night," said Imogene, turning to Nelson, "and I saw all the nice things that were said about it this morning."

"If credit were due anywhere it would be to the occasion," returned Nelson. "There is always something now in such gatherings to suggest the discomforting reflection that our best native stock is dying out."

Dolly looked distressed. "Oh, dear, are those unfortunate people still dying out? I've been worrying over their situation for years. Can't any one do anything?"

"Don't let it disturb you, Mrs. De Castro," said Bryson.

"But I am afraid it is getting on my nerves."

"Nothing dies out that doesn't deserve to die out," continued Bryson. "As to the people Nelson speaks of, I incline to think they ought to die out. Their whole philosophy of life has been bad. Nature ought to be ashamed, of course, to pass them by and turn to inferior races for her recruits. But since all races are inferior to them, what can she do but take refuge with the despised foreigner? The men and women that take life on the light-housekeeping plan may do so if they will–for one generation. What may safely be counted on is that nature will find its workers in the human hive even if it has to turn to the savage tribes."

"But the poor savages, doctor–they also are on the verge of extinction, are they not?" demanded Dolly.

"Then nature will provide its workers from one unfailing source–from those we have always with us, the poor and the despised. And it can be depended on with equal certainty to cast the satisfied, cultivated, and intellectual drones into outer darkness."

"My dear, but the doctor is savage, isn't he?" Lottie Nelson made the appeal indolently to Imogene. "We shall soon be asking, doctor," she concluded languidly, "which tribe you belong to."

"He would answer, the medical tribe," suggested Fritzie.

"Speaking of savages," interposed Arthur De Castro, "Charles and I were making a portage once on the York River. On the trail I met two superb little Canadian lads–straight, swarthy, handsome fellows. They couldn't speak English. 'You must be French,' I suggested, addressing the elder by way of compliment in that tongue. Imagine my surprise when he answered with perfect composure, 'Non, monsieur. Nous sommes des sauvages!'"

"For my part," said Imogene, "I am always glad to hear Doctor Bryson defend families and motherhood. I don't care how savage he gets."

"I defend motherhood because to me it is the highest state of womanhood. Merely as an instinct, its mysteries are a never-ending marvel."

Lottie Nelson looked patiently bored. "Oh, tell us about them, do, doctor."

"I will tell you of one," returned Bryson undismayed. "Take the young mother that brings her first child into the world; from the day of its birth until the day of that mother's death, her child is never wholly out of her thought. The child may die, may be forgotten by every one else on earth, may be to all other conscious existence in this world as a thing that never was. But in its mother's heart it never dies. I call that a mystery."

The doctor's glance as he finished fell on Alice's face. He was sorry at once that he had spoken at all. Her eyes were fixed on him with a look of acute pain.

Alice hardly knew Doctor Bryson, but what he saw in the sadness of her face he quite understood. And though they had never met, other than in a formal way, he never afterward felt that they were wholly strangers.

CHAPTER XXIV

"By the way, Nelson," said De Castro, "what is there in this story in the afternoon papers about Doane and Dora Morgan?"

"It is substantially true, I fancy. They have eloped."

"From whom could they possibly be eloping?" asked Lottie.

"Why, you must know Doane has a wife and two little girls," exclaimed Dolly indignantly.

"I supposed his wife was divorced," returned Lottie helplessly. "Why wasn't she?"

"Perhaps," suggested Fritzie, "there wasn't time."

"I don't care; Dora's life has been a very unhappy one," persisted Lottie,

"and frankly I am sorry for her."

"Even though she has run away with another woman's husband," said Imogene.

"Don't *you* think she deserves a great deal of sympathy, Robert?" asked Lottie, appealing to Kimberly.

"I can't say that I do," he answered slowly. "What moves one in any consideration of a situation of that kind is, in the first place, the standards of those that fall into it. Who, for instance, can scrape up any interest in the affairs of the abandoned? Or of those who look on irregular relations pretty much as they do on regular? People to enlist sympathy in their troubles must respect themselves."

The conversation drifted and Alice, within range of both tables, caught snatches of the talk at each. She presently heard Lottie Nelson speaking petulantly, and as if repeating a question to Kimberly. "What *do* men most like, Robert?" Alice could not see Kimberly's face, but she understood its expression so well that she could imagine the brows either luminously raised if Kimberly were interested, or patiently flat if he were not.

"You ought to know," she heard Kimberly answer. "You have been very successful in pleasing them."

"And failed where I have most wanted to succeed. Oh, no. I am asking you. What *do* they like?"

The answer halted. "I can't tell you. To me, of course, few men seem worth pleasing."

"What should you do to please a man, if you were a woman?"

"Nonsense."

"I'm asking purely out of curiosity," persisted Lottie. "I have failed. I realize it and I shall never try again. But at the end–I'd like to know."

"You probably would not agree with me," answered Kimberly after a silence, "most women would not. Perhaps it would fail with most men–but as I say, most men wouldn't interest me, anyway. If I had it to try, I would appeal to a man's highest nature."

"What is his highest nature?"

"Whatever his best instincts are,"

"And then?"

"That's all."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"No, it isn't nonsense. Only I am not good at analyzing. If I once caught a man in that way I should know I had him fast forever. There is absolutely no use in flinging your mere temptations at him. Keep those quietly in the background. He will go after them fast enough when you have made sure of him on the higher plane. If you are compelled to display your temptations at the start, the case is

hopeless. You have surrendered your advantage of the high appeal. Trust him to think about the other side of it, Lottie. You can't suggest to him anything he doesn't know, and perhaps–I'm not sure–he prefers to turn to that side when he thinks you are not looking. The difficulty is," he concluded, speaking slowly, "even if you get him from the lower side, he won't stay hooked. You know how a salmon strikes at a fly? All human experience shows that a man hooked from the side of his lower instincts, will sooner or later shake the bait."

"It must be something even to have him on the hook for a while, Robert."

"But you don't agree with me."

"No."

"No doubt, I'm wrong. And it isn't, I suppose, of much consequence whether the men stay caught or not. I look at it, probably, with a business instinct. When I do anything, I want it to stay done forever. When I make a deal or fasten a point I want it to stay fastened for all time. That is my nature. Now, that may not be a woman's nature. You shouldn't have asked me, don't you see, because we 'begin' differently."

"I fancy that's it, Robert. We 'begin' differently."

"Try another seer–there is De Castro. Here is Mrs. MacBirney. Mrs. MacBirney," Kimberly moved so he could command Alice's attention, "Mrs. Nelson is trying to find out what a man likes in a woman. I haven't been able to tell her—-"

"It isn't that at all," smiled Lottie, wearily. "Mr. Kimberly can tell. He won't."

Kimberly appealed to Alice. "It is a great mistake not to trust your oracle when he is doing his best–don't you think so, Mrs. MacBirney?"

"I suppose an oracle is consulted on his reputation–and it is on his reputation that his clients should rely," suggested Alice.

"Anyway," declared Lottie, rising, "I am going to try another."

Kimberly turned his chair as she walked away so that he could speak to Alice. "Giving advice is not my forte. Whenever I attempt it I disappoint somebody; and this time I had a difficult subject. Mrs. Nelson wants to know what men like in women. A much more interesting subject would be, what women like in men. I should suppose, in my blundering way, that sincerity would come before everything else, Mrs. MacBirney. What do you think?"

"Sincerity ought to be of value."

"But there is a great deal else, you imply."

"Necessarily, I should think."

"As, for instance?"

"Unselfishness among other things," said Alice.

He objected frankly to her suggestion. "I don't know about unselfishness.

I have my doubts about unselfishness. Are you sure?"

"Most ideals include it, I believe."

"I don't know that I have any ideals–abstract ideals, that is. Though I once took quite an interest in the Catholic Church."

"An academic interest."

"No, no; a real and concrete interest. I admire it greatly. I tried once to look into its claims. What in part discouraged me was the unpleasant things Catholics themselves told me about their church."

"They must have been bad Catholics."

"I don't know enough about them to discriminate between the good and the bad. What, by the way," he asked bluntly, "are you–a good Catholic or a bad one?"

She was taken for an instant aback; then she regarded him with an expression he did not often see in her eyes. "I am a bad one, I am ashamed to say."

"Then these I speak of must have been good ones," he remarked at once, "because they were not in the least like you."

If he thought he had perplexed her he was soon undeceived. "There are varying degrees even of badness," she returned steadily. "I hope I shall never fall low enough to speak slightingly of my faith."

"I don't understand," he persisted, musing, "why you should fall at all. Now, if I were a Catholic I should be a good one."

"Suppose you become one."

He disregarded her irony. "I may sometime. To be perfectly frank, what I found most lacking when I looked into the question was some sufficient inducement. Of what use? I asked myself. If by following Christianity and its precepts a man could make himself anything more than he is–prolong his years, or recall his youth. If he could achieve the Titanic, raise himself to the power of a demigod!" Kimberly's eyes shone wide at the thought, then they closed to a contrasting torpor. "Will religion do this for any one? I think not. But fancy what that would mean; never to grow old, never to fall ill, never to long for without possessing!" A disdainful pride was manifest in every word of his utterance, but he spoke with the easy-mannered good-nature that was his characteristic.

"A man that follows the dreams of religion," he resumed but with lessening assurance, for Alice maintained a silence almost contemptuous and he began to feel it, "is he not subject to the same failures, the same pains, the same misfortunes that we are subject to? Even as the rest of us, he must grow old and fail and die."

"Some men, of course," she suggested with scant patience, "should have a different dispensation from the average mortal."

Kimberly squirmed dissentingly. "I don't like that phrase, 'the average mortal.' It has a villainously hackneyed sound, don't you think? No, for my part

I should be willing to let everybody in on the greater, the splendid dispensation."

"You might be sorry if you did."

"You mean, there are men that should die–some that should die early?"

"There are many reasons why it might not work."

He stopped. "That is true–it might not work, if universally applied. It would do better restricted to a few of us. But no matter; since we can't have it at all, we must do the best we can. And the way to beat the game as it must be played in this world at present," he continued with contained energy, "is to fight for what we want and defend it when won, against all comers. Won't you wish me success in such an effort, Alice?"

"I have asked you not to call me Alice."

"But wish me the success, won't you? It's awfully up-hill work fighting alone. Two together can do so much better. With two the power is raised almost to the infinite. Together we could be gods–or at least make the gods envy us."

She looked at him an instant without a word, and rising, walked to an anteroom whither MacBirney, Lottie Nelson, De Castro, and Fritzie had gone to play at cards.

CHAPTER XXV

When the season was fairly open the Kimberlys made Alice the recipient of every attention. A solidarity had always seemed, in an unusual degree, to animate the family. They were happy in their common interests and their efforts united happily now to make Alice a favored one in their activities.

In everything proposed by Dolly or Imogene, Alice was consulted. When functions were arranged, guests lists were submitted to her. Entertainment was decided upon after Alice had been called in. The result was a gay season even for Second Lake. And Dolly said it was the influx of Alice's new blood into the attenuated strain at the lake that accounted for the successful summer. Alice herself grew light-hearted. In social affairs the battalions inclined to her side. Even Lottie Nelson could not stand out and was fain to make such peace as she could.

In all of this Alice found consolation for the neglect of her husband. She had begun to realize that this neglect was not so much a slight, personal to her, as a subordination of everything to the passion for money-getting. It is impossible

to remain always angry and Alice's anger subsided in the end into indifference as to what her husband said or did.

She had, moreover–if it were a stimulus–the continual stimulus of Kimberly's attitude. Without insincerity or indifference he accommodated his interest in her to satisfactory restraint. This gave Alice the pleasure of realizing that her firmness had in nowise estranged him and that without being turbulent he was always very fond of her. She knew he could look to many other women for whatever he chose to ask of favor, yet apparently he looked to her alone for his pleasure in womankind; and in a hundred delicate ways he allowed her to feel this.

A handsome young Harvard man came to her at the lake seeking an opening in the refineries. His people were former Colorado acquaintances whom Alice was extremely desirous of obliging. She entertained her visitor and tried vainly to interest her husband in him. MacBirney promised but did nothing, and one day Dolly calling at Cedar Lodge found Alice writing a note to the college boy, still waiting in town on MacBirney's empty promises, telling him of the failure of her efforts and advising him not to wait longer.

"But why worry?" asked Dolly, when Alice told her. "Speak to Robert about it. He will place him within twenty-four hours."

"I can't very well ask a favor of that kind from Mr. Kimberly, Dolly."

"What nonsense! Why not?"

Alice could not say precisely why. "After my own husband hasn't found a way to place him!" she exclaimed.

Dolly did not hesitate. "I will attend to it. Give me his address. Football, did you say? Very good."

Within a week the young man wrote Alice–from the Orange River refineries, where he was, he picturesquely said, knee-deep in sugar–that he had actually been before the sugar magnate, Robert Kimberly himself, adding with the impetuous spelling of a football man, that the interview had been so gracious and lasted so long he had grown nervous about the time Mr. Kimberly was giving him.

Kimberly never referred to the matter nor did Alice ever mention it to him. It was merely pleasant to think of. And in such evidences as the frequent letters from her protégé she read her influence over the man who, even the chronicle of the day could have told her, had she needed the confirmation, extorted the interest of the world in which he moved; and over whom, apparently, no woman other than herself could claim influence.

She came tacitly to accept this position toward Kimberly. Its nature did not compromise her conscience and it seemed in this way possible both to have and not have. She grew to lean upon the thought of him as one of the consoling sup-

ports in her whirling life–the life in which reflection never reached conclusion, action never looked forward to result, and denial had neither time nor place.

The pursuit of pleasure, sweetened by that philanthropy and the munificent almsgiving which was so esteemed by those about her, made up her life. Alice concluded that those of her circle severely criticised by many who did not know them, did much good. Their failings, naturally, would not condemn them with critics who, like herself, came in contact with them at their best.

Some time after the placing of the young college man, Alice, running in one morning on Dolly found her in tears. She had never before seen Dolly even worried and was at once all solicitude. For one of the very few times in her life, it appeared, Dolly had clashed with her brother Robert. Nor could Alice get clearly from her what the difference had been about. All that was evident to Alice was that Dolly was very much grieved and mortified over something Kimberly had said or done, or refused to say or do, concerning a distinguished actress who upon finishing an American tour was to be entertained by Dolly.

Alice in the afternoon was over at Imogene's. Robert Kimberly was there with his brother. Afterward he joined Imogene and Alice under the elms and asked them to drive. While Imogene went in to make ready Alice poured a cup of tea for Kimberly. "I suppose you know you have made Dolly feel very bad," she said with a color of reproach.

Kimberly responded with the family prudence. "Have I?" Alice handed him the tea and he asked another question. "What, pray, do you know about it?"

"Nothing at all except that she is hurt, and that I am sorry."

"She didn't tell you what the difference was?"

"Except that it concerned her coming guest."

"I offered Dolly my yacht for her week. She wanted me to go with the party. Because I declined, she became greatly incensed."

"She thought, naturally, you ought to have obliged her."

"I pleaded I could not spare the time. She has the Nelsons and enough others, anyway."

"Her answer, of course, is that your time is your own."

"But the fact is, her guest made the request. Dolly without consulting me promised I would go, and now that I will not she is angry."

"I should think a week at sea would be a diversion for you."

"To tag around a week in heavy seas with wraps after a person of distinction? And pace the deck with her on damp nights?"

"That is unamiable. She is a very great actress."

Kimberly continued to object. "Suppose she should be seasick. I once went out with her and she professed to be ill every morning. I had to sit in her cabin–it was a stuffy yacht of De Castro's–and hold her hand."

"But you are so patient. You would not mind that."

"Oh, no; I am not in the least patient. The Kimberlys are described as patient when they are merely persistent. If I am even amiable, amiability is something quite other than patience. Patience is almost mysterious to me. Francis is the only patient man I ever have known."

"In this case you are not even amiable. We all have to do things we don't want to do, to oblige others. And Dolly ought to be obliged."

"Very well. If you will go, I will. What do you say?"

"You need not drag me in. I shall have guests of my own next week. If Dolly made a mistake about your inclination in the affair it would be only generous to help her out."

"Very well, I will go."

"Now you are amiable."

"They can put in at Bar Point and I will join them for the last two days. I will urge McEntee, the captain, to see that they are all sick, if possible, before I come aboard. Then they will not need very much entertaining."

"How malicious!"

"Not a bit. Dolly is a good sailor. Her guest cares nothing for me. It is only to have an American at her heels."

"They say that no one can resist her charm. You may not escape it this time."

A fortnight passed before any news came to Alice from the yachting party. Then Fritzie came home from Nelsons' one day with an interesting account of the trip. Until the story was all told, Alice felt gratified at having smoothed over Dolly's difficulty.

"They were gone longer than they expected," said Fritzie. "Robert was having such a good time. Lottie Nelson tells me Dolly's guest made the greatest sort of a hit with Robert. He didn't like her at first. Then she sang a song that attracted him, and he kept her singing that song all the time. He sat in a big chair near the piano and wouldn't move. The funny thing was, she was awfully bored the way he acted. By the way, you must not miss the golf to-morrow. Everybody will be out."

Alice hardly heard the last words. She was thinking about Kimberly's entertaining the celebrity. Every other incident of the voyage had been lost upon her. When she found herself alone her disappointment and resentment were keen. Some unaccountable dread annoyed her. He was then, she reflected, like all other men, filled with mere professions of devotion.

Something more disturbed her. The incident revealed to her that he had grown to be more in her thoughts than she realized. Racks and thumb-screws could not have dragged from her the admission that she was interested in him.

It was enough that he professed to be devoted to her and had been led away by the first nod of another woman.

CHAPTER XXVI

The golf course and the casino were crowded next day when Alice arrived. Yet among the throng of men and women, her interest lay only in the meeting of one, as in turn his interest in all the summer company lay only in seeking Alice. She had hardly joined Imogene and the lake coterie when Kimberly appeared.

The players had driven off and the favorites, of whom there were many, could already be trailed across the hills by their following. When the "out" score had been posted, De Castro suggested that the party go down to the tenth hole to follow the leaders in.

A sea-breeze tempered the sunshine and the long, low lines of the club-house were gayly decorated. Pavilions, spread here and there among the trees, gave the landscape a festival air.

On the course, the bright coloring of groups of men and women moving across the fields made a spectacle changing every moment in brilliancy.

Kimberly greeted Alice with a gracious expectancy. He was met with a lack of response nothing less than chilling. Surprised, though fairly seasoned to rebuffs, and accepting the unexpected merely as a difficulty, Kimberly set out to be entertaining.

His resource in this regard was not scanty but to-day Alice succeeded in taxing his reserves. In his half-mile tramp with her in the "gallery," punctuated by occasional halts, he managed but once to separate her from the others. The sun annoyed him. Alice was aware of his lifting his straw hat frequently to press his handkerchief to beads of perspiration that gathered on his swarthy forehead, but she extended no sympathy.

In spite of his discomfort, however, his eyes flashed with their accustomed spirit and his dogged perseverance in the face of her coldness began to plead for itself. When the moving "gallery" had at last left them for an instant behind, Kimberly dropped on a bench under the friendly shade of a thorn apple tree.

"Sit down a moment, do," he begged, "until I get a breath."

"Do you find it warm?"

"Not at all," he responded with negligible irony. "It is in some respects

uncommonly chilly." He spoke without the slightest petulance. "For Heaven's sake, tell me what I have done!"

"I don't know what you mean."

"I mean, you are not kind in your manner toward me. I left you–I hoped you would remember–to do a favor for you—-"

"For me?" Her tone was not in the least reassuring.

"At least, I conceived it to be for you," he replied.

"That is a mistake."

"Very good. Let us call it mistake number one. I spent five days with Dolly and her guests—-"

"Guests," repeated Alice, lingering slightly on the word, as she poked the turf slowly with her sunshade, "or guest?"

"Guest!" he echoed, "Ah!" He paused. "Who has put me wrong in so simple a matter? What I did was no more than to be agreeable to Dolly's guests. I spent much time with the guest of honor at Dolly's repeated requests. She happened to sing a song that pleased me very much, for one particular reason; it was your lovely little Italian air; I am not ashamed to say it brought back pleasant moments. Since she could do nothing else that was so pleasing," he continued, "I kept her singing the song. She became bored and naturally ceased to be good-natured. Then, Dolly asked me to run around by Nantucket, which we could have done in two days. Not to be churlish, I consented. Then the coal gave out, which took another day."

"What a mishap! Well, I am glad to hear the trip went pleasantly."

"If you are, something has gone wrong with you—-"

"Nothing whatever, I can assure you."

"You are offended with me."

"I assure you I am not."

"I assure you, you are." He took the sunshade from her hand. "You remember the fable about the man that tried to oblige everybody? He wasn't a refiner–he was a mere miller. At the start I really did my best for three days to entertain Dolly's lovely vampire and at the end of that time she made a face at me–and wound up by telling Dolly my head was full of another woman. Then–to be quite shamefully frank–I had to dodge Lottie Nelson's apologies for her unpleasant temper on an evening that you remember; altogether my lot was not a happy one. My head was full of another woman. You remember you said nobody could resist her charm? I thought of it. What is charm? I often asked myself. I saw nothing of charm in that charming woman. Who can define it? But penetration! She could read you like a printed book. We talked one night of American women. I dared to say they were the loveliest in the world. She grew incensed. 'They know absolutely nothing!' she exclaimed. 'That is why we like them' I

answered. 'They are innocent; you are as corrupt as I am.' Then she would call me a hypocrite." He stopped suddenly and Alice felt his eyes keenly upon her. "Is it possible you do not believe what I am saying?"

"Innocent women believe whatever they are told."

"I don't deserve sarcasm. I am telling the simple truth. For once I am wholly at fault, Alice. I don't know what the matter is. *What* has happened?"

"Nothing has happened; only to-day I seem especially stupid."

"Are you as frank with me as I am with you?"

She made no answer. He drew back as if momentarily discouraged. "If you no longer believe me–what can I do?"

"It isn't at all that I do not believe you–what difference should it make whether or no I believe you? Suppose I were frank enough to admit that something I heard of you had disappointed me a little. What credit should I have for commenting on what in no way concerns me?"

"Anything heard to my discredit should be carefully received. Believe the best of me as long as you can. It will never be necessary, Alice, for any one to tell you I am unworthy; when that day comes you will know it first from me. And if I ever am unworthy, it will not be because I willed to be–only because through my baseness I never could know what it means to be worthy of a woman far above me."

She reached out her hand for her sunshade but he refused to give it back. She tried to rise; he laid his hand on her arm. "A moment! It was about me, was it?" he continued. "Did you receive it cautiously? Put me in your position. How do you think one would fare who came to me with anything to your discredit? Think of it, Alice–how do you think one would fare–look at me."

She looked up only for an instant and as if in protest. But in spite of herself something in her own eyes of confidence in him, some tribute to his honesty, stood revealed, and inspired him with a new courage.

"You say what you hear of me does not concern you. Anything you hear of me does concern you vitally." His intensity frightened her, and thinking to escape him, she still sat motionless.

"Everything I do, important or trivial, has its relation to you. Do you believe me? Alice, you must believe me. You do believe me. How can you say that anything you hear of me does not concern you? It concerns you above every living person. It concerns your happiness—-"

"Such wildness–such extravagance!" she exclaimed trying to control her fear.

"I tell you I am neither wild nor extravagant. Our happiness, our very lives are bound up together. It isn't that I say to you, you are mine–I am yours."

The furious beating of her heart would not be stilled. "How can you say

such things!"

"I say them because I can't escape your influence in my life. I only want to come up to where you are–not to drag you down to where I am–to where I have been condemned to be from the cradle. If what you hear of me conflicts with what I say to you, believe nothing of what you hear." His words fell like blows. "If I could show you my very heart I could not be more open. It is you who are everything to me–you alone."

Breathless and rigid she looked away. Hardly breathing himself, Kimberly watched her. Her lip quivered. "Oh, my heart!" he murmured. But in the words she heard an incredible tenderness. It moved her where intensity had failed. It stilled the final pangs of revolt at his words. She drifted for an instant in a dream. New and trembling thoughts woke in a reluctant dawn and glowed in her heart like faint, far streamers of a new day.

"Oh, my heart!" The words came again, as if out of another world. She felt her hand taken by a strong, warm hand. "Do you tremble for me? Is my touch so heavy? How shall I ever safeguard the flower of your delicacy to my clumsiness?"

She neither breathed nor moved. "No matter. You will teach me how, Alice. Learning how you can be happiest, I shall be happiest. I feel beggared when I lay my plea before you. What are all my words unless you breathe life upon them? A few things–not many–I have succeeded in. And I succeeded," the energy of success echoed in his confession, "only because I let nothing of effort stand between me and the goal. You have never been happy. Let me try to succeed with your happiness."

A silence followed, golden as the moment. Neither felt burdened. About them was quiet and the stillness seemed to flow from the hush of their thoughts.

"It is easy for you to speak," she faltered at last, "too easy for me to listen. I am unhappy–so are many women; many would be strong enough never to listen to what you have said. I myself should be if I were what you picture me. And that is where all the trouble lies. You mistake me; you picture to yourself an Alice that doesn't exist. If I could return your interest I should disappoint you. I am not depreciating myself to extort compliments–you would supply them easily, I know. Only–I know myself better than you know me."

"What you say," he responded, "might have point if I were a boy–it would have keen point. While to me your beauty–do not shake your head despairingly–your beauty is the delicacy of girlhood, you yourself are a woman. You have known life, and sorrow. I cannot lead you as a fairy once led you from girlhood into womanhood–would that I could have done it! He should be a very tender guide who does that for a woman.

"But I can lead you, I think, Alice, to everything in this world that consoles a woman for what she gives to it. Do not say I do not know you–that is saying I

do not know myself, men, women, life–it is saying I know nothing. Modest as I am," he smiled lightly, "I am not yet ready to confess to that. I do know; as men that have lived and tasted and turned away and longed and waited, know–so I know you. And I knew from the moment I saw you that all my happiness in this world must come from you."

"Oh, I am ashamed to hear you say that. I am ashamed to hear you say anything. What base creature am I, that I have invited you to speak!" She turned and looked quickly at him, but with fear and resolve in her eyes. "This you must know, here and now, that I can never be, not if you kill me, another Dora Morgan."

He met her look with simple frankness. "The world is filled with Dora Morgans. If you could be, Alice, how could I say to you what I never have said, or thought of saying, to any Dora Morgan?"

"To be a creature would kill me. Do not be deceived–I know."

"Or do worse than kill you. No, you are like me. There is no half-way for you and me. Everything–or nothing!"

She rose to her feet. He saw that she supported herself for a moment with one hand still on the bench rail. He took her other hand within his own and drew her arm through his arm.

It was the close of the day. The sun, setting, touched the hills with evening, and below the distant Towers great copses of oak lay like islands on the mirrored landscape. They walked from the bench slowly together. "Just a little help for the start," he murmured playfully as he kept her at his side. "The path is a new one. I shall make it very easy for your feet."

CHAPTER XXVII

"I hope you rested well after your excitement," said Kimberly to Alice, laughing reassuringly as he asked. It was the day following their parting at the golf grounds. He had driven over to Cedar Lodge and found Alice in the garden waiting for Dolly. The two crossed the terrace to a sheltered corner of the garden overlooking the bay where they could be alone. After Alice had seated herself Kimberly repeated his question.

She regarded him long and thoughtfully as she answered, and with a sadness that was unexpected: "I did not rest at all. I do not even yet understand–perhaps I never shall–why I let you talk to me in that wild, wild way. But if I

did not rest last night, I thought. I am to blame–I know that–as much as you are. Don't tell me. I am as much to blame as you are. But this cannot go on."

His eyes were upon her hands as they lay across flowers in her lap. He took a spray from her while she spoke and bent his look upon it. She was all in white and he loved to see her in white. In it she fulfilled to him a dream of womanhood. "I ought to ask you what you mean when you say and think these fearful things," she went on, waiting for him to lift his eyes. "I ought to ask you; but you do not care what it means, at least as far as you are concerned. And you never ask yourself what it means as far as I am concerned."

He replied with no hesitation. "I began asking myself that question almost the first time I ever saw you. I have asked myself nothing else ever since. It means for both of us exactly the same thing; for you, everything you can ask that I can give you; for me, everything I can give you that you can ask."

"If there were no gulf between us–but there is. And even if what you say were true, you can see how impossible it would be for me to say those words back to you."

He looked at the spray. "Quite true; you cannot. But I shall ask so little–less of you than of any woman in the world. And you will give only what you can, and when you can. And you alone are to be the judge of what you can give and when, until our difficulties are worked out.

"I shall only show you now that I *can* be patient. I never have been–I have confessed to that. Now I am going to the test. Meantime, you don't realize, Alice, quite, how young you are, do you? Nor how much in earnest I am. Let us turn to that for a while."

From a shrub at his side he plucked sprigs of rosemary and crushed them with the spray. "Even love never begins but once. So, for every hour that passes, a memory; for every hour that tarries, a happiness; for every hour that comes, a hope. Do you remember?"

"I read it on your sun-dial."

"Every one may read it there. Where I want you to read it is in my heart."

"I wonder whether it is most what you say, or the way in which you say it, that gets people into trouble?"

"On the contrary; my life has been spent in getting people out of trouble, and in waiting to say things to you."

"You are improving your opportunity in that respect. And you are losing a still more delightful opportunity, for you don't know how much relief you can give me by leaving most of them unsaid."

"It is impossible, of course, to embrace all of our opportunities–often impossible to embrace the cause of them."

"Don't pick me up in that way, please."

He held his hands over hers and dropped the crushed rosemary on them. "Would that I could in any way. Since I cannot, let me annoy you."

Dolly appeared at a distance, and they walked down the terrace to meet her. She kissed Alice. "What makes you look so girlish to-day? And what is all this color around your eyes? Never wear anything but white. I never should myself," sighed Dolly. "You know Alice and I are off for the seashore," she added, turning to her brother.

"So I hear."

"Come along."

"Who is going?"

"Everybody, I suppose. They all know about the trip."

"Where do you dine?"

"On the shore near the light-house. Arthur is bringing some English friends out from town; we are going to dance."

That night by the sea Kimberly and Alice danced together. He held her like a child, and his strength, which for a moment startled her, was a new charm when she glided across the long, half-lighted floor within his arm. Her grace responded perfectly to the ease with which he led, and they, stopped only when both were breathing fast, to stroll out on the dark pier and drink in the refreshment of the night wind from the ocean.

They remained out of doors a long time, talking sometimes, laughing sometimes, walking sometimes, sometimes sitting down for a moment or kneeling upon the stone parapet benches to listen to the surf pounding below them. When they went in, he begged her again to dance. Not answering in words she only lifted her arm with a smile. Making their way among those about them they glided, he in long, undulating steps, she retreating in swift, answering rhythm, touching the floor as lightly as if she trod on air.

"This plume in your hat," he said as they moved on and on to the low, sensuous strains of the music, "it nods so lightly. Where do you carry your wings?"

The very effort of speaking was exhilarating. "It is you," she answered, "who are supplying the wings."

The gayety of the others drew them more closely together. Little confidences of thought and feeling–in themselves nothing, in their unforbidden exchange everything–mutual confessions of early impressions each of the other, compliments more eagerly ventured and ignored now rather than resented. Surprise read in each other's eyes, dissent not ungracious and denial that only laughingly denied–all went to feed a secret happiness growing fearfully by leaps and bounds into ties that never could be broken.

The dance with its exhilaration, the plunging of her pulse and her quick, deep breathing, shone in Alice's cheeks and in her eyes. The two laughed at

everything; everything colored their happiness because everything was colored by it.

The party drove home after a very late supper, Alice heavily wrapped and beside Dolly in Kimberly's car. Entertainments for the English party followed for a week and were wound up by Kimberly with an elaborate evening for them at The Towers. For the first time in years the big house was dressed *en fête* and the illuminations made a picture that could be seen as far as the village.

Twenty-four sat at The Towers round table that night. Alice herself helped Dolly to pair the guests and philosophically assigned her husband to Lottie Nelson. Kimberly complimented her upon her arrangement.

"Why not?" she asked simply, though not without a certain bitterness with which she always spoke of her husband. "People with tastes in common seem to drift together whether you pair them or not."

They were standing in an arbor and Kimberly was plucking grapes for her.

"He is less than nothing to me," she continued, "as you too well know–or I should not be here now eating your grapes."

"Your grapes, Alice. Everything here is yours. I haven't spoken much about our difficulties–'our' difficulties! The sweetness of the one word blots out the annoyance of the other. But you must know I shall never rest until you are installed here with all due splendor as mistress, not alone of the grapes, but of all you survey, for this is to be wholly and simply yours. And if I dare ask you now and here, Alice–you whose every breath is more to me than the thought of all other women–I want you to be my wife."

Her lips tightened. "And I am the wife of another man–it is horrible."

He heard the tremor in her tone. "Look at me."

"I cannot look at you."

"When you are free—-"

"Free!" Her voice rising in despair, fell again into despair. "I shall never be free."

"You shall, and that speedily, Alice!" She could imagine the blood surging into Kimberly's neck and face as he spoke. "I am growing fearful that I cannot longer stand the thought of his being under the same roof with you."

"He cannot even speak to me except before Annie."

Kimberly paused. "I do not like it. I want it changed."

"How can I change it?"

"We shall find a way, and that very soon, to arrange your divorce from him."

"It is the one word, the one thought that crushes me." She turned toward him as if with a hard and quick resolve. "You know I am a Catholic, and you know I am ashamed to say it."

"Ashamed?"

"I have disgraced my faith."

"Nonsense, you are an ornament to any faith."

"Do not say that!" She spoke with despairing vehemence. "You don't realize how grotesque it sounds. If what you say were true I should not be here."

He drew himself up. There was a resentful note in his tone. "I did not suppose myself such a moral leper that it would be unsafe for any one to talk to me. Other Catholics–and good ones–talk to me, and apparently without contamination."

"It is only that *I* have no right to. Now you are going to be angry with me."

He saw her eyes quiver. "God forbid! I misunderstood. And you are sensitive, dearest."

"I am sensitive," she said reluctantly. "More than ever, perhaps, since I have ceased practising my religion."

"But why have you ceased?"

Her words came unwillingly. "I could not help it."

"Why could you not help it?"

"You ask terribly hard questions."

"You must have wanted to give it up."

"I did not want to. I was forced to."

"Who could force you?"

He saw what an effort it cost her to answer. The words were dragged from her. "I could not live with my husband and practise it."

"So much the more reason for quitting him, isn't it?"

"Oh, I want to. I want to be free. If I only could."

"Alice, you speak like one in despair. There is nothing to be so stirred about. You want to be free, I want you to be, you shall be. Don't get excited over the matter of a divorce. Your eyes are like saucers at the thought. Why?"

"Only because for me it is the final disgrace–not to be separated from him–but to marry again with him alive! It means the last step for me. And the public scandal! What will they say of me, who knew me at home?"

"Alice, this is the wildest supersensitiveness. The whole world lives in divorced marriages. Public scandal? No one will ever hear of your divorce. The courts that grant your plea will attend to suppressing everything."

"Not everything!"

"Why not? We abase them every day to so many worse things that their delicate gorges will not rise at a little favor like that."

She looked at him gravely. "What does the world say of you for doing such things?"

"I never ask. You know, of course, I never pay any attention to what the world says of anything I do. Why should I? It would be difficult for the world to

despise me as much as I despise it. You don't understand the world. All you need is my strength. I felt that from the very first–that if I could give you my strength the combination would be perfect. That is why I am so helplessly in love with you–my strength must be yours. I want to put you on a throne. Then I stand by, see?–and guard your majesty with a great club. And I can do it."

They laughed together, for he spoke guardedly, as to being heard of others, but with ominous energy. "I believe you could," murmured Alice.

"Don't worry over your religion. I will make you practise it. I will make a devotee of you."

"Robert! Robert!"

He stooped for her hand and in spite of a little struggle would not release it until he had kissed it. "Do you know it is the first time my name has ever passed your lips?" he murmured.

She was silent and he went on with another thought. "Alice, I don't believe you are as bad a Catholic as you think. I'll tell you why. I have known Catholic women, and men, too, that have given up their religion. Understand, I know nothing about your religion, but I do know something about men and women. And when they begin elaborate explanations they think they deceive me. In matter of fact, they deceive only themselves. When they begin to talk about progress, freedom of thought, decay of dogmas, individual liberty and all that twaddle, and assume a distinctly high, intellectual attitude, even though I don't know what they have given up, I know what they are assuming; I get their measure instantly. I've sometimes thought that when God calls us up to speak on judgment day He will say in the most amiable manner: 'Just tell your own story in your own way.' And that our own stories, told in our own way, will be all the data He will need to go ahead on. Indeed, He would not always need divine prescience to see through them; in most cases mere human insight would be enough. Just listen to the ordinary story of the ordinary man and notice how out of his own mouth he condemns himself. I see that sort of posturing every day in weak-kneed men and women who want to enlist large sums of money to float magnificent schemes. Now you are honest with yourself and honest with me, and I see in this a vital difference."

They walked back through the garden and encountered Brother Francis who was taking the air. Kimberly stopped him. Nelson and Imogene joined the group. "Ah, Francis!" exclaimed Imogene, "have they caught you saying your beads?"

"Not this time, Mrs. Kimberly."

"Come now, confess. What were you doing?"

Brother Francis demurred and protested but there was no escape. He pointed to The Towers. "I came out to see the beautiful illumination. It is very

beautiful, is it not?"

"But that isn't all, for when we came along you were looking at the sky."

"Ah, the night is so clear–the stars are so strong to-night—-"

"Go on."

"I was thinking of Italy."

CHAPTER XXVIII

"I never can catch Brother Francis, thinking of anything but Italy," remarked Kimberly.

"Who can blame him?" exclaimed Imogene.

"Or the hereafter," added Kimberly.

Nelson grunted. "I'm afraid he doesn't find much sympathy here on that subject," he observed, looking from one to another.

"Don't be mistaken, Nelson," said Kimberly, "*I* think about it, and Francis will tell you so. I have already made tentative arrangements with him on that score. Francis is to play Lazarus to my Dives. When I am in hell I am to have my cup of cold water from him. And remember, Francis, if you love me, the conditions. Don't forget the conditions; they are the essence of the contract. I am to have the water one drop at a time. Don't forget that; one drop at a time. Eternity is a long, long while."

Francis, ill at ease, took a pinch of snuff to compose himself.

"Your rôle doesn't seem altogether to your liking, Francis," suggested Imogene.

"His rôle! Why, it's paradise itself compared to mine," urged Kimberly.

Brother Francis drew his handkerchief and wiped his nose very simply. "I pray, Robert," he said, "that you may never be in hell."

"But keep me in your eye, Francis. Don't relax your efforts. A sugar man is liable to stumble and fall in while your back is turned."

"We must get started for the lake," announced Imogene. "Brother Francis, we are all going down to see The Towers from the water. Will you come?"

Francis excused himself, and his companions joined the other guests who were gathering at the water. Oarsmen were waiting with barges and fires burned from the pillars of the esplanade. As the boats left the shore, music came across the water. Alice, with Kimberly, caught a glimpse of her husband in a passing

boat. "Having a good time?" he cried. For answer she waved her hand.

"Are you really having a good time?" Kimberly asked. "I mean, do you care at all for this kind of thing?"

"Of course, I care for it. Who could help it? It is lovely. Where are we going?"

"Down the lake a mile or two; then the boats will return for the fireworks."

"You don't seem very lively yourself to-night. Are you bored?"

"No; only wondering whether you will go driving with me to-morrow."

"I said I would not."

"I hoped, of course, you might reconsider."

He did not again press the subject of the drive, but when they were walking up the hill after the rockets and showers of gold falling down the dark sky, she told him he might come for her the next day. "I don't know how it is," she murmured, "but you always have your own way. You wind me right around your finger."

He laughed. "If I do, it is only because I don't try to."

"I realize it; that is what puzzles me."

"The real secret is, not that I wind you around my finger, but that you don't want to hurt my feelings. I find something to wonder at, too. When I am with you–even when you are anywhere near me, I am totally different. Alone, I am capable of withdrawing wholly within myself. I am self-absorbed and concentrated. With you I am never wholly within myself. I am, seemingly, partly in your consciousness."

Alice shook her head. "It is true," he persisted. "It is one of the consequences of love; to be drawn out of one's self. I have it." He turned to her, questioningly, "Can you understand it?"

"I think so."

"But do you ever feel it?"

"Sometimes."

"Never, of course, for me?"

"Sometimes."

CHAPTER XXIX

"This is a courtship without any spring," said Dolly one night to her husband. They were discussing her brother and Alice. "At first it was all winter, now it is

all summer."

She thought they showed themselves together too much in public, and their careless intimacy was, in fact, outwardly unrestrained.

Not that Dolly was censorious. Her philosophy found refuge in fatalism. And since what is to be must be–especially where the Kimberlys were concerned–why worry over the complications? Seemliness, however, Dolly held, was to be regarded, and concerning this she felt she ought to be consulted. The way to be consulted she had long ago learned was to find fault.

But if she herself reproved Kimberly and Alice, Dolly allowed no one else to make their affairs a subject of comment. Lottie Nelson, who could never be wholly suppressed, was silenced when occasion offered. One afternoon at The Hickories, Alice's name being mentioned, Lottie asked whether Robert was still chasing her.

"Chasing her?" echoed Dolly contemptuously and ringing the changes on the objectionable word, "Of course; why shouldn't he chase her? Who else is there to chase? He loves the excitement of the hunt; and who else around here is there to hunt? The other women hunt him. No man wants anything that comes tumbling after him. What we want is what we can't get; or at least what we're not sure of getting."

Kimberly and Alice if not quite unconscious of comment were at least oblivious of it. They motored a great deal, always at their own will, and they accounted to no one for their excursions.

"They are just a pair of bad children," said Imogene to Dolly. "And they act like children."

One of their diversions in their rambling drives was to stop children and talk with them or ask questions of them. One day near Sunbury they encountered a puny, skeleton-faced boy, a highway acquaintance, wheeling himself along in an invalid chair.

They had never hitherto talked with this boy and they now stopped their car and backed up. Alice usually asked the questions. "I thought you lived away at the other end of the village, laddie?"

"Yes'm, I do."

"You haven't wheeled yourself all this way?"

"Yes'm."

"What's the matter with you that you can't walk, Tommie?" demanded Kimberly.

"My back is broken."

Alice made a sympathetic exclamation. "My dear little fellow–I'm very sorry for you!"

The boy smiled. "Oh, don't be sorry for me."

"Not sorry for you?"

"I have a pretty good time; it's my mother–I'm sorry for her."

"Ah, indeed, your mother!" echoed Alice, struck by his words. "I am sorry for both of you then. And how did you break your back?"

"In our yard–climbing, ma'am."

"Poor devil, he's not the first one that has broken his back climbing," muttered Kimberly, taking a note from his waistcoat. "Give him something, Alice."

"As much as this?" cried Alice under her breath, looking at the note and at Kimberly.

"Why not? It's of no possible use to us, and it will be a nine-months' wonder in that little household."

Alice folded the note up and stretched her white-gloved hand toward the boy. "Take this home to your mother."

"Thank you. I can make little baskets," he added shyly.

"Can you?" echoed Alice, pleased. "Would you make one for me?"

"I will bring one up to your house if you want me to."

"That would be too far! And you don't know where I live."

The boy looked at the green and black car as if he could not be mistaken. "Up at The Towers, ma'am."

Brice, who took more than a mild interest in the situation, grinned inwardly.

Kimberly and Alice laughed together. "Very well; bring it to The Towers," directed Kimberly, "I'll see that she gets it."

"Yes, sir."

"And see here; don't lose that note, Tommie. By Heavens, he handles money more carelessly than I do. No matter, wait till his mother sees it."

While they were talking to the boy, Dolly drove up in her car and stopped a moment to chat and scold. They laughed at her and she drove away as if they were hopeless.

"Your sister is the dearest woman," remarked Alice as Dolly's car disappeared. "I am so fond of her, I believe I am growing like her."

"Don't grow too like her."

"Why not?"

"Dolly has too much heart. It gets her into trouble."

"She says you have too much, yourself."

"I've paid for it, too; I've been in trouble."

"And I shall be, if you don't take me home pretty soon."

"Don't let us go home as long as we can go anywhere else," pleaded Kimberly. "When we go home we are separated."

He often attempted to talk with Alice of her husband. "Does he persecute

you in any way?" demanded Kimberly, trying vainly to get to details.

Alice's answer was always the same. "Not now."

"But he used to?" Kimberly would persist.

"Don't ask me about that."

"If he ever should lay a hand on you, Alice—-"

"Pray, pray," she cried, "don't look like that. And don't get excited; he is not going to lay a hand on me."

They did not reach Cedar Lodge until sundown and when they drove up to the house MacBirney, out from town, was seated on the big porch alone. They called a greeting to him as they slowed up and he answered in kind. Kimberly, without any embarrassment, got out to assist Alice from the car. The courtesy of his manner toward her seemed emphasized in MacBirney's presence.

On this night, it was, perhaps, the picture of Kimberly standing at the door of his own car giving his hand to MacBirney's wife to alight, that angered the husband more than anything that had gone before. Kimberly's consideration for Alice was so pronounced as completely to ignore MacBirney himself.

The small talk between the two when Alice alighted, the laughing exchanges, the amiable familiarity, all seemed to leave no place in the situation for MacBirney, and were undoubtedly meant so to be understood. Kimberly goodhumoredly proffered his attentions to that end and Alice could now accept them with the utmost composure.

Fritzie had already come over to Cedar Lodge from Imogene's for dinner and Kimberly returned afterward from The Towers, talking till late in the evening with MacBirney on business affairs. He then drove Fritzie back to The Cliffs.

MacBirney, smarting with the stings of jealousy, found no outlet for his feeling until he was left alone with his wife. It was after eleven o'clock when Alice, reading in her sitting-room, heard her husband try the door connecting from his apartments. Finding it bolted, as usual, MacBirney walked out on the loggia and came into her room through the east door which she had left open for the sea-breeze. He was smoking and he sat down on a divan. Alice laid her book on her knee.

It was a moment before he spoke. "You seem to be making Kimberly a pretty intimate member of the family," he began.

"Oh, do you think so? Charles or Robert?"

"You know very well who I mean."

"If you mean Robert, he is a familiar in every family circle around the lake. It is his way, isn't it? I don't suppose he is more intimate here than at Lottie's, is he? Or at Dolly's or Imogene's?"

"They are his sisters," returned MacBirney, curtly.

"Lottie isn't. And I thought you wanted me rather to cultivate Robert, didn't

you, Walter?" asked Alice indifferently.

He was annoyed to be reminded of the fact but made no reply.

"Robert is a delightfully interesting man," continued Alice recklessly, "don't you think so?"

MacBirney returned to the quarrel from another quarter. "Do you know how much money you have spent here at Cedar Lodge in the last four months?"

Alice maintained her composure. "I haven't an idea."

He paused. "I will tell you how much, since you're so very superior to the subject. Just twice as much as we spent the first five years we were married."

"Quite a difference, isn't it?"

"It is–quite a difference. And the difference is reckless extravagance. You seem to have lost your head."

"Suppose it is reckless extravagance! What do you mean to say–that I spent all the money? This establishment is of your choosing, isn't it? And have you spent nothing? How do you expect to move in a circle of people such as live around this lake without reckless extravagance?"

"By using a little common-sense in your expenditures."

For some moments they wrangled over various details of the ménage. Alice at length cut the purposeless recrimination short. "You spoke of the first five years we were married. You know I spent literally nothing the first five years of our married life. You continually said you were trying 'to build up.' That was your cry from morning till night, and like a dutiful wife, I wore my own old clothes for the first two years. Then the next three years I wore made-over hats and hunted up ready-made suits to enable you to 'build up.'"

"Yes," he muttered, "and we were a good deal happier then than we are now."

She made an impatient gesture. "Do speak for yourself, Walter. You were happier, no doubt. I can't remember that you ever gave me any chance to be happy."

"Too bad about you. You look like a poor, unhappy thing–half-fed and half-clothed."

"Now that you have 'built up,'" continued Alice, "and brought me into a circle not in the least of my choosing, and instructed me again and again to 'keep our end up,' you complain of 'reckless extravagance.'"

"Well, for a woman that I took with a travelling suit from a bankrupt father, and put at the head of this establishment, you certainly can hold your 'end up,'" laughed MacBirney harshly.

"Just a moment," returned Alice, with angry eyes. "You need not taunt me about my father. When you were measuring every day the sugar and coffee we were to use during the first five years of our married life, you should have

foreseen you couldn't move as a millionaire among multimillionaires without spending a lot of money."

MacBirney turned white. "Thank you for reminding me," he retorted, with shining teeth, "of the thrift of which you have since had the advantages."

"Oh dear, no, Walter. The advantages of that kind of thrift are purely imaginary. The least spark of loving-kindness during those years would have been more to me than all the petty meannesses necessary to build up a fortune. But it is too late to discuss all this."

MacBirney could hardly believe his ears. He rose hastily and threw himself into another chair. "You've changed your tune mightily since 'the first five years of our married life,'" he said.

Alice tossed her head.

"But I want you to understand, *I* haven't."

"I believe that!"

"And I've brought you to time before now, with all of your high airs, and I'll do it again."

"Oh, no; not again."

"I'll teach you who is master under this roof."

"How like the sweet first five years that sounds!"

He threw his cigar angrily away. "I know exactly what's the matter with you. You have run around with this lordly Kimberly till he has turned your head. Now you are going to stop it, now and here!"

"Am I?"

"You are."

"Hadn't you better tell Mr. Kimberly that?"

"I will tell *you*, you are getting yourself talked about, and it is going to stop. Everybody is talking about you."

Alice threw back her head. "So? Where did you hear that?"

"Lambert told me yesterday."

"I hope you were manly enough to defend your wife. Where did you see Lambert?"

"I saw him in town."

"I shouldn't listen to silly gossip from Lambert, and I shouldn't see Lambert again."

"How long have you been adviser as to whom I had better or better not see?" asked MacBirney contemptuously.

"You will find me a good adviser on some points in your affairs, and that is one."

"If you value your advice highly, you should part with it sparingly."

"I know what *you* value highly; and if Robert Kimberly finds out you are

consorting with Lambert it will end your usefulness in *his* combinations very suddenly."

The thrust, severe in any event, was made keener by the fact that it frightened him into rage. "Since you come from a family that has made such a brilliant financial showing–" he began.

"Oh, I know," she returned wearily, "but you had better take care." He looked at his wife astounded. "You have insulted me enough," she added calmly, "about the troubles of my father. The 'first five years' are at an end. I have spoiled you, Walter, by taking your abuse so long without striking back and I won't do it any more."

"What do you mean?" he cried, springing from his chair. "Do you think you are to keep your doors bolted against me for six months at a time and then browbeat and abuse me when I come into your room to talk to you? Who paid for these clothes you wear?" he demanded, pointing in a fury.

"I try never to think of that, Walter," replied Alice, rising to her feet but controlling herself more than she could have believed possible. "I try never to think of the price I have paid for anything I have; if I did, I should go mad and strip these rags from my shoulders."

She stood her ground with flashing eyes. "*I, not you*," she cried, "have paid for what I have and the clothes I wear. *I* paid for them–not you–with my youth and health and hopes and happiness. I paid for them with the life of my little girl; with all that a wretched woman can sacrifice to a brute. Paid for them! God help me! How haven't I paid for them?"

She stopped for sheer breath, but before he could find words she spoke again. "Now, I am done with you forever. I am out of your power forever. Thank God, some one will protect me from your brutality for the rest of my life—-"

MacBirney clutched the back of a chair. "So you have picked up a lover, have you? This sounds very edifying from my dear, dutiful, religious wife." Hardly able to form the words between his trembling lips, he smiled horribly.

She turned on him like a tigress. "No," she panted, "no! I am no longer your religious wife. It wasn't enough that I should go shabby and hungry to make you rich. Because I still had something left in my miserable life to help me bear your cruelty and meanness you must take that away too. What harm did my religion do you that you should ridicule it and sneer at it and threaten and abuse me for it? You grudged the few hours I took from your household drudgery to get to church. You promised before you married me that our children should be baptized in my faith, and then refused baptism to my dying baby."

Her words rained on him in a torrent. "You robbed me of my religion. You made me live in continual sin. When I pleaded for children, you swore you would have no children. When I told you I was a mother you cursed and villified me."

"Stop!" he screamed, running at her with an oath.

The hatred and suffering of years were compressed into her moment of revolt. They flamed in her cheeks and burned in her eyes as she cried out her choking words. "Stop me if you dare!" she sobbed, watching him clench his fist. "If you raise your hand I will disgrace you publicly, now, to-night!"

He struck her. She disdained even to protect herself and crying loudly for Annie fell backward. Her head caught the edge of the table from which she had risen.

Annie ran from the bedroom at the sound of her mistress's voice. But when she opened the boudoir door, Alice was lying alone and unconscious on the floor.

CHAPTER XXX

She revived only after long and anxious ministrations on Annie's part. But with the return of her senses the blood surged again in her veins in defiance of her husband. Her first thought was one of passionate hatred of him, and the throbbing pain in her head from her fall against the table served to sharpen her resentment.

MacBirney, possessed of enough craft to slip away from an unpleasant situation, returned early to town, only hoping the affair would blow over, and still somewhat dazed by the amazing rebellion of an enduring wife.

He realized that a storm might break now at any moment over his head. Always heavily committed in the speculative markets, he well understood that if Kimberly should be roused to vengeance by any word from Alice the consequences to his own fortune might be appalling.

It chanced that Kimberly was away the following day and Alice had twenty-four hours to let her wrath cool. Two days of reflection were enough. The sense of her shame and her degradation as a woman at the hands of a man so base as her husband were alone enough to suggest moderation in speaking to Kimberly of the quarrel.

But more than this was to be considered. What would Kimberly do if she told him everything? A scandalous encounter, even a more serious issue between the two men was too much to think of. She felt that Kimberly was capable in anger of doing anything immoderate and it was better by far, her calmer judgment told her, to bury her humiliation in her own heart than to risk something worse. She was now, she well knew, with this secret, a terror to her cowardly

husband, just as he had been, through a nightmare of wretched years, her own terror.

For the first time, on the afternoon of the second day, she found herself awaiting with burning impatience some word from The Towers. She had resolved what to say to Kimberly and wanted now to say it quickly. When the telephone bell rang promptly at four o'clock her heart dilated with happiness; she knew the call came from one who never would fail her. Alice answered the bell herself and her tones were never so maddening in Kimberly's ears as when she told him, not only that he might come, but that she was weary with waiting. She stood at the window when his car drove up and tripped rapidly downstairs. When she greeted him he bent down to kiss her hand.

She did not resist his eagerness. She even drew a deep breath as she returned his look, and having made ready for him with a woman's lovely cunning, enjoyed its reward.

"I've been crazy to see you," he cried. "It is two days, Alice. How can I tell you how lovely you are?"

Her eyes, cast down, were lifted to his when she made her confession. "Do you really like this rig? It is the first toilet I ever made with the thought of nobody but you in my head. So I told Annie" she murmured, letting her hand rest on his coat sleeve, "to be sure I was exactly right."

He caught her hands.

"Let's go into the garden," she said as he held them. "I have something to say to you."

They sat down together. "Something has happened since I saw you," she began.

"Has the break come?" demanded Kimberly instantly.

"We had a very painful scene night before last," said Alice. "The break has come. He has gone to town–he went yesterday morning. I have asked myself many questions since then. My father and mother are dead. I have no home to go to, and I will not live even under the same roof with him any longer. I feel so strange. I feel turned out, though there was nothing of that in what he said–indeed, I am afraid I did most of the talking."

"I wish to God I had heard you!"

"It is better not. Every heart knoweth its own bitterness—-"

"Let me help bear yours."

"I feel homeless, I feel so alone, so ashamed–I don't know what I don't feel. You will never know what humiliation, what pain I have been through for two days. Robert–" her voice faltered for an instant. Then she spoke on, "I never can tell you of the sickness and shame I have long felt of even pretending to live with some one I could not respect."

”Close the book of its recollection. I came into your life for just such a moment, to be everything you need. I am home, husband, and protection–everything.”

”If I could only make my senses believe my ears.” She paused. ”It seems as if I am in a dream and shall wake with a horror.”

”No, this is a dream come true. I foresaw this time and I have provided for it. Only delicacy has kept me from asking you before about your very personal affairs and your private purse, Alice. Understand at once,” he took her hands vehemently, ”everything I have is yours without the least reserve. Do you understand? Money is the last thing to make any one happy, I well know that, but in addition to the word of my heart to your heart–the transfers to you, Alice, have long been made and at this moment you have, merely waiting for you to draw upon them, more funds than you could make use of in ten lifetimes. Everything is provided for. There are tears in your eyes. Sit still for a moment and let me speak.”

”No, I must speak. I am in a horrible position. I cannot at such a juncture receive anything from you. But there are matters to be faced. Shall I stay here? If I do, he must go. Shall I go? And if I do go, where?”

”Let me answer with a suggestion. My family are all devoted to us. Dolly and Imogene are good counsellors. I will lay the matter before them. After a family council we shall know just what to do and how. I have my own idea; we shall see what the others say. Dolly, you know, has taken you under her wing from the first, and Dolly you will find is a powerful protector. If I tell you what I did to-day you will gasp with astonishment. I cabled for a whole new set of photographs of the Maggiore villa. I want our first year together, Alice, to be in Italy.”

CHAPTER XXXI

Accompanied by Imogene, Dolly hastened over to Cedar Lodge in the morning. Alice met them in the hall. ”My dear,” cried Dolly, folding her impulsively in her arms, ”you are charged with fate!”

Then she drew back, laid her hands on Alice’s shoulders and, bringing her face tenderly forward, kissed her. ”How can I blame Robert for falling in love with you? And yet!” She turned to Imogene. ”If we had been told that first night

that *this* was the woman of our destiny! How do you bear your new honors, dearie? What! Tears! Nonsense, my child. You are freighted with the Kimberly hopes now. You are one of us. Tears are at an end. I, too, cried when I first knew of it. Come, sit down. Imogene will tell you everything." And having announced this much, Dolly proceeded with the telling herself.

"When you first knew of it?" echoed Alice. "Pray, when was that?"

"Oh, long, long ago–before ever you did, my dear. But no matter now. We talked last night, Arthur, Charles, Imogene, and Robert and I until midnight. And this is what we said: 'The dignity of your personal position is, before everything else, to be rigidly maintained.' Mr. MacBirney will be required to do this. He will be counselled on this point–made to understand that the obligation to maintain the dignity of his wife's position is primary. Robert, of course, objected to this. He was for allowing no one but himself to do anything—-"

"I hope you clearly understand, Dolly, I should allow Mr. Kimberly to do nothing whatever at this juncture," interposed Alice quickly.

"I understand perfectly, dear. But there are others of us, you know, friends of your own dear mother, remember. Only, aside from all of that, we considered that the situation admitted of but one arrangement. Charles will tell Nelson exactly what MacBirney is to do, and Nelson will see that it is done. The proper bankers will advise you of your credits from your husband, for the present–and they are to be very generous ones, my dear," added Dolly significantly. "So all that is taken care of and Mr. MacBirney will further be counselled not to come near Cedar Lodge or Second Lake until further orders. Do you understand?"

"Why, yes, Dolly," assented Alice perplexed, "but Mr. MacBirney's acquiescence in all this is very necessary it seems to me. And he may agree to none of it."

"My dear, it isn't at all a question of *his* agreeing. He will do as he is advised to do. Do you imagine he can afford breaking with the Kimberlys? A man that pursues money, dear heart, is no longer a free agent. His interests confront him at every turn. Fledgling millionaires are in no way new to us. Mercy, they pass in and out of our lives every day! A millionaire, dear, is nothing but a million meannesses and they all do exactly as they are told. Really, I am sorry for some of them. Of all unfortunates they are nowadays the worst. They are simply ground to powder between the multi-millionaires and the laboring classes. In this case, happily, it is only a matter of making one do what he ought to do, so give it no thought."

Dolly proved a good prophet concerning MacBirney's course in the circumstances. MacBirney, desirous of playing at once to the lake public in the affair of his domestic difficulties, made unexceptional allowances for his wife's maintenance. Yet at every dollar that came to her from his abundance she felt

humiliated. She knew now why she had endured so much at his hands for so long; it was because she had realized her utter dependence on him and that her dreams of self-support were likely, if she had ever acted on them, to end in very bitter realities.

At the first sign of hot weather, Charles and Imogene put to sea with a party for a coasting cruise; Dolly sailed for the continent to bring Grace back with her. Robert Kimberly unwilling to leave for any extended period would not let Alice desert him; accordingly, Fritzie was sent for and came over to stay with her. The lake country made a delightful roaming place and Alice was shown by Kimberly's confidences how close she was to him.

He confided to her the journal of the day, whatever it might be. Nothing was held back. His successes, failures, and worries all came to her at night. He often asked her for advice upon his affairs and her wonder grew as the inwardness of the monetary world in which he moved stood revealed to her. She spoke of it one day.

"To be sought after as you are–to have so many men running out here to find you; to be consulted by so many—-"

Kimberly interrupted her. "Do you know why they seek me? Because I make money for them, Alice. They would run after anybody that could make them money. But they are wolves and if I lost for them they would try to tear me to pieces. No man is so alone as the man the public follows for a day even while it hates or fears him. And the man the bankers like is the man that can make money for them; their friendship is as cold and thin as autumn ice."

"But even then, to have the ability for making money and doing magnificent things; to be able to succeed where so many men fail–it seems so wonderful to me."

"Don't cherish any illusions about it. Everyone that makes money must be guilty of a thousand cold-blooded things, a thousand sharp turns, a thousand cruelties; it's a game of cruelties. Fortunately, I'm not a brilliant success in that line, anyway; people merely think I am. The ideal money-maker always is and always will be a man without a temper, without a heart, and with an infusion, in our day, of hypocrisy. He takes refuge in hypocrisy because the public hates him and he is forced to do it to keep from hating himself. When public opinion gets too strong for him he plays to it. When it isn't too strong, he plays to himself. I can't do that; I have too much vanity to play to anybody. And the recollection of a single defeat rankles above the memory of a thousand victories. This is all wrong–far, far from the ideal of money getting; in fact, I'm not a professional in the game at all–merely an amateur. A very successful man should never be trusted anyway."

"Why not?"

"Because success comes first with him. It comes before friendship and he will sacrifice you to success without a pang."

She looked at him with laughing interest. "What is it?" he asked changing his tone.

"I was thinking of how I am impressed sometimes by the most unexpected things. You could never imagine what most put me in awe of you before I met you."

"There must have been a severe revulsion of feeling when you did meet me," suggested Kimberly.

"We were going up the river in your yacht and Mr. McCrea was showing us the refineries. All that I then knew of you was what I had read in newspapers about calculating and cold-blooded trust magnates. Mr. McCrea was pointing out the different plants as we went along."

"The river is very pretty at the Narrows."

"First, we passed the independent houses. They kept getting bigger and bigger until I couldn't imagine anything to overshadow them and I began to get frightened and wonder what your refineries would be like. Then, just as we turned at the island, Mr. McCrea pointed out a perfectly huge cluster of buildings and said those were the Kimberly plants. Really, they took my breath away. And in the midst of them rose that enormous oblong chimney-stack. A soft, lazy column of smoke hovered over it–such as hovers over Vesuvius." She smiled at the remembrance. "But the repose and size of that chimney seemed to me like the strength of the pyramids. When we steamed nearer I could read, near the top, the great terra-cotta plaque: KIMBERLYS AND COMPANY. Then I thought: Oh, what a tremendous personage Mr. Robert Kimberly must be!"

"The chimney is yours."

"Oh, no, keep it, pray–but it really did put me wondering just what you were like."

"It must have been an inspiration that made me build that chimney. The directors thought I would embarrass the company before we got the foundations in. I didn't know then whom I was building it for, but I know now; and if you got a single thrill out of it the expenditure is justified. And I think mention of the thrill should go into the directors' minutes on the page where they objected to the bill–we will see about that. But you never expected at that moment to own the chimney, did you? You shall. I will have the trustees release it from the general mortgage and convey it to you."

"And speaking of Vesuvius, you never dreamed of a volcano lying in wait for you beneath the lazy smoke of that chimney, did you? And that before very long you would not alone own the chimney but would be carrying the volcano

around in your vanity bag?"

CHAPTER XXXII

One afternoon in the early autumn Kimberly came to Cedar Lodge a little later than usual and asked Alice, as he often did, to walk to the lake. He started down the path with something more than his ordinary decision and inclined for a time to reticence. They stopped at a bench near an elm overlooking the water. "You have been in town to-day," said Alice.

"Yes; a conference this morning on the market. Something extraordinary happened."

"In the market?"

"Market conditions are bad enough, but this was something personal."

"Tell me about it."

"MacBirney was present at the conference. After the meeting he came to the head of the table where I was talking with McCrea–and sat down. When McCrea joined the others in the lunchroom, MacBirney said he wanted to speak to me a moment. I told him to go ahead.

"He began at once about his differences with you. His talk puzzled me. I was on the defensive, naturally. But as far as I could see, he designed no attack on me; and of you he could utter nothing but praise–it was rather trying to listen to. I could not fathom his purpose in bringing the matter before me in this singular way, but he ended with an appeal—-"

"An appeal!"

"He asked me to bring a message to you. I told him I would deliver any message entrusted to me. He wants you to know that he is very sorry for what has taken place. He admits that he has been in the wrong—-"

"It is too late!" Alice in her emotion rose to her feet.

"And he asks you, through me," Kimberly spoke under a strain he did not wholly conceal, "if he may come back and let the past bury itself."

"It is too late."

"He said," Kimberly rose and faced Alice, "there had been differences about religion—-"

"Ask him," she returned evenly, "whether I ever sought to interfere with his religious views or practices."

"These, he promises, shall not come between you again."

"Wretched man! His words are not the slightest guarantee of his conduct."

Kimberly took his hat from his head and wiped his forehead. "This was the message, Alice; is he to come back to you?"

"Whatever becomes of me, I never will live again with him."

"That is irrevocable?"

"Yes."

"I have kept my word–that you should have his message as straight as I could carry it."

"I believe you have. He certainly could not, whatever his intentions, have paid you a higher tribute than to entrust you with one for me."

"Then he does not and never can stand between you and me, Alice?"

"He never can."

The expression of his eyes would have frightened her at a moment less intense. Slightly paler than she had been a year earlier and showing in her manner rather than in her face only indefinable traces of the trouble she had been through, Alice brought each day to Kimberly an attraction that renewed itself unfailingly.

He looked now upon her eyes–he was always asking whether they were blue or gray–and upon her brown hair, as it framed her white forehead. He looked with tender fondness on the delicate cheeks that made not alone a setting for her frank eyes but for him added to the appeal of her lips. He sat down again, catching her hand to bring her close.

"Come," he urged, relaxing from his intensity, "sit down. By Heaven, I have suffered to-day! But who wouldn't suffer for you? Who but for the love of woman would bear the cares and burdens of this world?"

Alice smiled oddly. "We have to bear them, you know, for the love of man." She sat down on the bench beside him. "Tell me, how have you suffered to-day?"

"Do you want to know?"

"Of course, I want to know. Don't you always want to know how I have suffered? Though I used to think," she added, as if moved by unpleasant recollections, "that nobody cares when a woman suffers."

"The man that loves her cares. It is one of love's attributes. It makes a woman's sorrow and pain his, just as her joy and happiness are his. Pleasure and pain are twins, anyway, and you cannot separate them. Alice!" He looked suddenly at her. "You love me, don't you?"

Her face crimsoned, for she realized he was bent on making her answer.

"Let us talk about something else, Robert."

He repeated his question.

"Don't make me put it into words yet, Robert," she said at last. "You have so

long known the answer–and know that I still speak as his wife. Do I love you?" She covered her face with her hands.

"Alice!" His appeal drew her eyes back to his. They looked speechless at each other. The moment was too much. Instinctively she sprang in fear to her feet, but only to find herself caught within his arm and to feel his burning lips on her lips. She fought his embrace in half-delirious reproach. Then her eyes submitted to his pleading and their lips met with her soft, plunging pulse beating swiftly upon his heart.

It was only for an instant. She pushed him away. "I have answered you. You must spare me now or I shall sink with shame."

"But you are mine," he persisted, "all mine."

She led him up the path toward the house.

"Sometimes I am afraid I shall swallow you up, as the sea swallows up the ship, in a storm of passion."

"Oh no, you will not."

"Why not?"

"Because I am helpless. Was there more to your story?"

"You know then I haven't told it all."

"Tell me the rest."

"When he had finished, I told him I, too, had something to say. 'I shall deliver your message to Alice,' I said. 'But it is only fair to say to you I mean to make her my wife if she will accept me, and her choice will lie between you and me, MacBirney.'

"You should have seen his amazement. Then he collected himself for a stab–and I tried not to let him see that it went deep. 'Whatever the outcome,' he said, 'she will never marry you.'

"'You must recollect you have not been in her confidence for some time,' I retorted. He seemed in no way disconcerted and ended by disconcerting me. 'Remember what I tell you, Mr. Kimberly,' he repeated, 'you will find me a good prophet. She is a Catholic and will never marry you or any other man while I live.'

"'You may be right,' I replied. 'But if Alice marries me she will never live to regret it for one moment on account of her religion. I have no religion myself, except her. She is my religion, she alone and her happiness. You seem to invoke her religion against me. What right have you to do this? Have you helped her in its practice? Have you kept the promises you made when you married a Catholic wife? Or have you made her life a hell on earth because she tried to practise her religion, as you promised she should be free to do? Is she a better Catholic because she believed in you, or a worse because to live in peace with you she was forced to abandon the practice of her religion? These are questions for you

to think over, MacBirney. I will give her your message—-'

"'Give her my message,' he sneered. 'You would be likely to!'

"'Stop!' I said. 'My word, MacBirney, is good. Friend and foe of mine will tell you that. Even my enemies accept my word. But if I could bring myself to deceive those that trust me I would choose enemies to prey upon before I chose friends. I could deceive my own partners. I could play false to my own brother–all this I could do and more. But if I could practise deceits a thousand times viler than these, I could not, so help me God, lie to a trusting girl that I had asked to be my wife and the mother of my children! Whatever else of baseness I stooped to, *that* word should be forever good!'

"Alice, I struck the table a blow that made the inkstands jump. My eyeglasses went with a crash. Nelson and McCrea came running in; MacBirney turned white. He tried to stretch his lips in a smile; it was ghastly. Everybody was looking at me. I got up without a word to any one and left the room."

Alice caught his sleeve. "Robert, I am proud of you! How much better you struck than you knew! Oh," she cried, "how could I help loving you?"

"Do you love me?"

"I would give my life for you."

"Don't give it for me; keep it for me. You will marry me; won't you? What did the cur mean by saying what he did, Alice?"

"He meant to taunt me; to remind me of how long I tried to live in some measure up to the religion that he used every means to drive me from–and did drive me from."

"We will restore all that."

"He meant I must come to you without its blessing."

He looked suddenly and keenly at her. "Should you be happier with its blessing?"

"Ah, Robert."

"But should you?"

She gazed away. "It is a happiness I have lost."

"Then you shall have it again."

"I will trust to God for *some* escape from my difficulties. What else can I do? My husband!" she exclaimed bitterly–"generous man to remind me of religion!"

Kimberly spoke with a quick resolve. "I am going to look into this matter of where you stand as a wife. I am going to know why you can't have a chance to live your life with me. If I give you back what he has robbed you of, our happiness

will be doubled."

CHAPTER XXXIII

When Kimberly reached The Towers it was dusk. Brother Francis was walking on the terrace. Kimberly joined him. "How is Uncle John to-day, Francis?"

"Always the same. It is an astonishing vitality in your family, Robert."

"They need all they have."

"But all that need strength do not have it. How is your market to-day?"

"Bad," muttered Kimberly absently.

"I am sorry that you are worried."

"More than the market worries me, Francis. But the market is getting worse and worse. We met again to-day and reduced prices. The outsiders are cutting. We retaliate to protect our customers. When *we* cut, the cut is universal. Their warfare is guerilla. They are here to-day, there to-morrow."

"I have thought of what you said last night. Cutting you say, has failed. Try something else. To-morrow advance all of your standard brands one quarter. Be bold; cut with your own outside refineries. The profit from the one hand pays the cost of the war on the other."

Kimberly stopped. "How childish of you to waste your life in a shabby black gown, nursing people! Absolutely childish! If you will go into the sugar business, I tell you again, Francis, I will pay you twenty thousand dollars a year for ten years and set aside as much more preferred stock for you."

"Nonsense, Robert."

"You are a merchant. You could make a name for yourself. The world would respect you. There are enough to do the nursing, and too few brains in the sugar business. To-night I will give the orders and the advance shall be made when the market opens."

"But your directors?"

"We will direct the directors. They have had two months to figure how to fight the scalpers; you show me in twenty-four hours. Some monks were in to see me this morning; I was too busy. They told my secretary they were building an asylum for old men. I told him to say, not a dollar for old men; to come to me when they were building an asylum for old women. What do you say to my offer, Francis?"

"What do I say? Ah, Robert, although you are a very big paymaster, I am working for a Paymaster much bigger than you. What do I say? I say to you, give up this sugar business and come with me to the nursing. I will give you rags in place of riches, fasting in place of fine dinners, toil in place of repose, but my Paymaster–He will reward you there for all you endure here."

"Always deferred dividends. Besides, I should make a poor nurse, Francis, and you would make a good sugar man. And you seem to imply I am a bad man in the sugar business. I am not; I am a very excellent man, but you don't seem to know it."

"I hope so; I hope you are. God has given you splendid talents–he has given you more reason, more heart, more judgment than he has given to these men around you. If you waste, you are in danger of the greater punishment."

"But I don't waste. I build up. What can a man do in this world without power? He must have the sinews of empire to make himself felt. Francis, what would Cromwell, Frederick, Napoleon have been without power?"

"Ah! These are your heroes; they are not mine. I give glory to no man that overcomes by force, violence, and worse–fraud, broken faith, misrule, falsehood. What is more detestable than the triumph of mere brains? Your heroes, do they not tax, extort, pillage, slaughter, and burn for their own glory? Do they not ride over law, morality, and justice, your world's heroes? They are not my heroes. When men shrink at nothing to gain their success–what shall we say of them? But to hold law, morality, and justice inviolable; to conquer strength but only by weakness, to vanquish with pity, to crush with mercy–that alone is moving greatness."

"Where do you find it?" demanded Kimberly sharply.

"Never where you look for your heroes; often where I look for mine–among the saints of God. Not in men of bronze but in men of clay. It is only Christ who puts the souls of heroes into hearts of flesh and blood."

"But you have, along with your saints, some very foolish rules in your church, Francis. Take the case of Mrs. MacBirney. There is a woman who has done evil to no one and good to every one. She finds herself married to a man who thenceforth devotes himself to but one object in life–the piling up of money. She is forgotten and neglected. That is not the worst; he, with no religion of his own, makes it his business to harass and worry her in the practice of hers. He is filled with insane jealousies, and moved by equally insane hatreds of whatever she desires. I come into their lives. I see this proud and unhappy woman struggling to keep her trials hidden. I break down the barriers of her reserve–not easily, not without being repulsed and humiliated as I never before have been by a woman–and at last make her, unwillingly, tell me the truth. Meantime her husband, after a scene–of which I have never yet learned the real facts–has left her.

I say such a woman has the right to free herself from a brute such as this; your church says 'no.'"

"Robert, I see what you are coming to. But do not make the case harder than it is. She may free herself from him if she cannot live in peace with him; she may leave him under intolerable conditions. But not marry again."

"Precisely. And I offer her my devotion and a home and only ask to make her truly my wife and restore to her the religion he has robbed her of. And this very religion that he has trampled on and throttled, what does it say? 'No.'"

"You state a hard case. Your reasoning is very plausible; you plead for the individual. There is no law, human or divine, against which the individual might not show a case of hardship. The law that you find a hardship protects society. But to-day, society is nothing, the individual everything. And while society perishes we praise the tolerant anarchism that destroys it."

"Francis, you invoke cruelty. What do I care for society? What has society done for me?"

"No, I invoke responsibility, which none of us can forever escape. You seek remarriage. Your care is for the body; but there is also the soul."

"Your law is intolerant."

"Yours is fatal. How often have you said to me–for you have seen it, as all thoughtful men see it–that woman is sinking every day from the high estate to which marriage once lifted her. And the law that safeguards this marriage and against which you protest is the law of God. I cannot apologize for it if I would; I would not if I could. Think what you do when you break down the barrier that He has placed about a woman. It is not alone that the Giver of this law died a shameful death for the souls of men. You do not believe that Christ was God, and Calvary means nothing to you.

"But, Robert, to place woman in that high position, millions of men like you and me, men with the same instincts, the same appetites, the same passions as yours and mine, have crucified their desires, curbed their appetites, and mastered their passions–and this sacrifice has been going on for nineteen hundred years and goes on about us every day. Who realizes it?

"Faith is ridiculed, fasting is despised, the very idea of self-denial is as absurd to pagan to-day as it was nineteen hundred years ago to pagan Rome. And with its frivolous marriages and easy divorces the world again drags woman back to the couch of the concubine from which Christianity with so much blood and tears lifted her up nineteen hundred years ago."

"Francis, you are a dreamer. Society is gone; you can't restore it. I see only a lovely woman its victim. I am not responsible for the condition that made her one and I certainly shall not stand by and see her suffer because the world is rotten–nor would you–don't protest, I know you, too. So I am going to raise her

as high as man can raise a woman. She deserves it. She deserves infinitely more. I am only sorry I can't raise her higher. I am going to make her my wife; and you, Francis, shall dance at the wedding. Oh, you needn't throw up your hands–you are going to dance at the wedding."

"Non posso, non posso. I cannot dance, Robert."

"You don't mean, Francis," demanded Kimberly severely suspicious, "to tell me you would like me the less–that you would be other than you have been to me–if you saw me happily married?"

"How could I ever be different to you from what I have been? Every day, Robert, I pray for you."

Kimberly's brows contracted. "Don't do it."

Francis's face fell. "Not?"

"For the present let me alone. I'm doing very well. The situation is delicate."

Francis's distress was apparent, and Kimberly continued good-naturedly to explain. "Don't stir God up, Francis; don't you see? Don't attract his attention to me. I'm doing very well. All I want is to be let alone."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"By the way, how does it seem to be quite a free woman?" said Kimberly one evening to Alice.

"What do you mean?"

"Your decree was granted to-day."

She steeled herself with an exclamation. "*That* nightmare! Is it really over?"

He nodded. "Now, pray forget it. You see, you were called to the city but once. You spent only ten minutes in the judge's chambers, and answered hardly half a dozen questions. You have suffered over it because you are too sensitive–you are as delicate as Dresden. And this is why I try to stand between you and everything unpleasant."

"But sha'n't you be tired of always standing between me and everything unpleasant?"

He gazed into her eyes and they returned his searching look with the simplicity of faith. In their expression he felt the measure of his happiness. "No," he answered, "I like it. It is my part of the job. And when I look upon you, when I am near you, even when I breathe the fragrance of your belongings–of a glove,

a fan, a handkerchief–I have my reward. Every trifle of yours takes your charm upon itself."

He laid a bulky package in her lap. "Here are the maps and photographs."

"Oh, this is the villa." Alice's eye ran with delight over the views as she spread them before her. "Tell me everything about it."

"I have not seen it since I was a boy. But above Stresa a pebbled Roman highway winds into the northern hills. It is flanked with low walls of rotten stone and shaded with plane trees. Half an hour above the town an ilex grove marks a villa entrance."

He handed her a photograph. "This is the grove, these are the gates–they are by Krupp, and you will like them. Above them are the Dutch Kimberly arms–to which we have no right whatever that I can discover. But wasn't it delightfully American for Dolly to appropriate them?

"The roadway grows narrower as it climbs. Again and again it sinks into the red hill-side, leaving a wall tapestried with ivy. Indeed, it winds about with hardly any regard for a fixed destination, but the air is so bland and the skies at every turn are so soft, that pretty soon you don't care whether you ever get anywhere or not. The hills are studded with olives and oranges.

"When you have forgotten that you have a destination the road opens on a lovely *pineto*. You cross it to a casino on the eastern edge and there is the lake, two hundred feet below and stretching away into the Alps.

"Above the casino you lose yourself among cedars, chestnuts, magnolias, and there are little gorges with clumps of wild laurel. Figs and pomegranates begin beyond the gorge. The arbors are hidden by oleander trees and terraces of camellias rise to the belvedere–the tree you see just beside it there is a magnolia.

"Back of this lies the garden, laid out in the old Italian style, and crowning a point far above the lake stands the house. The view is a promise of paradise–you have the lake, the mountains, the lowlands, the walnut groves, yellow campaniles, buff villas, and Alpine sunsets."

"You paint a lovely picture."

"But incomplete; to-night you are free to tell me when I can take you. Make it an early day, Alice. The moment we are married, we start. We will land at any little port along the Riviera that strikes your fancy, have a car to meet us, and drive thence by easy stages to the lake. From the moment we touch at Gibraltar you will fall in love with everything anew; there is only one Mediterranean–one Italy, cara mia ben. Let us go in. I want you to sing my song."

They walked into the house and to the dimly lighted music room. There they sat down together on the piano bench and she sang for him, "Caro Mio Ben."

She sang for him "Caro Mio Ben"

She sang for him "Caro Mio Ben"

CHAPTER XXXV

Not every day brought unalloyed happiness. Moments of depression asserted themselves with Alice and, if tolerated, led to periods of despondency. She found herself seeking a happiness that seemed to elude her.

Even her depression, banished by recreation, left behind something of a painful subconsciousness like the uneasy subsidence of a physical pain. Activity thus became a part of her daily routine and she gained a reputation for lively spirits.

Kimberly, whose perception was not often at fault, puzzled over the strain of gayety that seemed to disclose a new phase in Alice's nature. Once, after a gay day at Sea Ridge, he surprised her at home in the evening and found her too depressed to dissemble.

"Now," he said, taking both her hands, "you are going to tell me what the matter is."

"Robert, nothing is the matter."

"Something is the matter," he persisted. "Tell me what it is."

"It is less than nothing. Just a miserable spectre that haunts me sometimes. And when I feel in that way, I think I am still his wife. Now you are vexed with me."

"Not for an instant, darling; only perplexed. Your worries are mine and we must work out some relief for them, that is all. And when things worry me you will help me do away with my spectres, won't you?"

He soothed and quieted her, not by ridicule and harshness but by sympathy and understanding, and her love for him, which had found a timid foothold in the frailest response of her womanly reserve, now sent its roots deep into her nature.

It was nothing to her that he was great in the world's eyes; that in itself would have repelled her–she knew what the world would say of her ambition in marrying him. But he grew in her eyes because he grew in her heart as she came to realize more and more his solicitude for her happiness–the only happiness, he told her, in which he ever should find his own.

"I know how it will end, Robert." They were parting after a moment the most intense they had ever allowed themselves together. She was putting away his unwilling arms, as she looked in the darkness of the garden up into his face.

"How will it end?" he asked.

"In my loving you as much as you love me."

Winter passed and the spring was again upon them before they realized

it. In the entertaining around the lake they had been fêted until it was a relief to run away from it all, as they often did. To escape the park-like regularity of their own domains, they sought for their riding or driving the neglected country below the village. Sometimes on their horses they would explore the backwoods roads and attempt swampy lanes where frogs and cowslips disputed their entry and boggy pools menaced escape.

Alice, hatless and flushed with laughter and the wind, would lead the way into abandoned wood-paths and sometimes they found one that led through a forest waste to a hidden pond where the sun, unseen of men, mirrored itself in glassy waters and dogwood reddened the margin where their horses drank.

In the woods, if she offered a race, Kimberly could never catch Alice no matter what his mount. She loved to thread a reckless way among sapling trees, heedless of branches that caught her neck and kissed her cheeks as she hurried on–riding gave them delightful hours.

They were coming into the village one May morning after a long cross-country run when they encountered a procession of young girls moving across the road from the parish school to the church and singing as they went. The church itself was *en fête.* Country folk gathered along the road-side and clustered about the church door where a priest in surplice waited the coming procession.

Kimberly and Alice, breathing their horses, halted. Dressed in white, like child brides, the little maidens advanced in the sunshine, their eyes cast down in recollection and moving together in awkward, measured step. From their wrists hung rosaries. In their clasped hands they carried prayer-books and white flowers, and white veils hung from the rose wreaths on their foreheads.

"How pretty!" exclaimed Kimberly as the children came nearer.

"Robert," asked Alice suddenly, "what day is this?"

"Thursday, isn't it?"

"It is Ascension Thursday."

The church-bells began to ring clamorously and the little girls, walking slowly, ceased their song. The lovers waited. Childhood, hushed with expectancy and moving in the unconscious appeal of its own innocence, was passing them.

The line met by the young priest reached the open door. Kimberly noted the wistful look in Alice's eyes as the little band entered the church. She watched until the last child disappeared and when she spoke to her horse her eyes were wet. Her companion was too tactful to venture a question. They rode until his silence told her he was aware of her agitation and she turned to him.

"Do you know," she said, slowly searching his eyes, "that you are awfully good?"

"If I am," he responded, "it is a discovery. And the honor, I fear, is wholly yours."

"It is something," she smiled, her voice very sweet, "to have lived to give that news to the world."

They rode again in silence. She felt it would be easier if he were to question her, but it was only after some time that he said: "Tell me what the little procession was about."

"I am ashamed to have acted in this way. But this was the day of my First Communion, Ascension Thursday. It was only a coincidence that I should see a First Communion class this morning."

"What is First Communion?"

"Oh, don't you know?" There was a sadness in the tone. "You don't, of course, you dear pagan. It is *you* who should have been the Christian and I a pagan. You would never have fallen away."

"You only think you have fallen away, Alice. You haven't. Sometimes you seem to act as if you had fallen from some high estate. You have not; don't think it. You are good enough to be a saint–do you give me credit for no insight? I tell you, you haven't fallen away from your religion. If you had, you would be quite at ease, and you are very ill at ease over it. Alice," he turned about in his saddle, "you would be happier if our marriage could be approved by your church."

"It never can be."

"I have led a number of forlorn hopes in my day. I am going to try this one. I have made up my mind to see your archbishop–I have spoken with Francis about it. I am going to find out, if nothing more, exactly where we stand."

CHAPTER XXXVI

In response to a request from Kimberly, Hamilton came out to spend the night at The Towers. Dolly was leaving just as the doctor arrived. She beckoned him to her car.

"You are to save the sixteenth for us, doctor; don't forget to tell Mrs. Hamilton," she said. "We have persuaded Robert to give a lawn fête for Grace and Larrie and we want you. Then, too–but this is a secret–Robert's own wedding occurs two weeks later. That will be private, of course, so the affair on the sixteenth will include all of our friends, and we want you to be sure to be here."

When the doctor sat down with Kimberly in the library after dinner, the latter spoke of his coming marriage. "You know," he said briefly, as the doctor

took a book from the table, "I am going to make Mrs. MacBirney my wife."

"I do. I rejoice in it. You know what I think of her."

"She has at last set the date and we are to be married on the thirtieth of June. It will be very quiet, of course. And, by the way, save the sixteenth of June for us, doctor."

"Mrs. De Castro has told me. We shall be glad to come out."

"You, I know, do not approve of marriages made through divorce," continued Kimberly, bluntly.

"No, nor do you," returned the doctor. "Not as a general proposition. In this case, frankly, I look on it as the most fortunate thing that has happened in the Kimberly family since your own mother married into it."

"She was a Whitney," muttered Kimberly, leaning back and lifting his chest as he often did when talking. "Arthur De Castro has a strain of that blood. He has all her refinement. The Kimberlys are brutes.

"MacBirney," he went on abruptly, "complained to McCrea yesterday–among other things that he wants to quarrel about–that I had broken up his home. I have not; I think you know that."

"A man came to me the other day"–the doctor laid aside his book–"to say he was going to stand on his 'rights' and sue for alienation a man who had run off with his wife. He asked me what I thought of it. 'I suppose you want my honest opinion,' I replied. 'Yet I am afraid it won't comfort you much. What "rights" have you established in your marriage that anybody is bound to respect?' He looked at me astonished. 'The rights of a husband,' he answered. 'Doesn't the law, doesn't society give them to me?' 'A man that asks equity from society,' said I, 'ought to come into court with clean hands.' I should like to know whose hands are cleaner than mine,' he replied, 'I married, made a home for my wife and supported her.'"

Kimberly leaning further back let his chin sink on his breast, but his eyes shining under his black brows showed that he followed the story.

"'But where are the fruits of your marriage?' I asked," continued the doctor, narrating. "'Don't stare at me–where are the children? How have you lived with your wife? As nature and law and society intended you should–or as a mere paramour? Children would have protected your wife as a woman; the care of children would have filled her life and turned her mind from the distraction of listening to another man. Why didn't you make a wife and mother of the woman you married instead of a creature? In that case you might have pleaded "rights." But you thought you could beat the game; and the game has beaten you. You thought you could take the indulgence of marriage without its responsibilities. Either you debased your wife to your level or allowed her to debase you to hers. Don't talk about "rights," you haven't any.'"

Hamilton ceased.

"What did the fellow say?" asked Kimberly.

"What could he say?" demanded Hamilton.

They sat a moment in silence.

Kimberly broke it. "It is a humiliating fact, Hamilton–I often think of it," he said moodily–"that the only way in which we can determine our own moral standing is by measuring the standards of our vicious classes. I mean by our vicious classes the social driftwood who figure in the divorce courts and the scandal of the day and should be placed in a social penitentiary.

"What is really alarming to-day is that our standards of what constitutes vice have fallen so low. We speak of husbands; has there ever been a period in the history of our race when husbands have fallen so low? There was a time when the man that spoke the English tongue would defend his home with his life—-"

"In those days they had homes to defend."

"–when it meant death to the man that crossed the threshold of his honor—-"

"They had honor, too."

"But consider the baseness the American husband has reached. When he suspects his wife's infidelity, instead of hiding his possible disgrace, he employs detectives to make public the humiliating proofs of it. He advertises himself in the bill he files in the courts. He calls on all men to witness his abasement. He proclaims his shame from the housetops and wears his stripes as a robe of honor. And instead of killing the interloper he brands the woman that bears his name, perhaps the mother of his children, as a public creature–isn't it curiously infamous? And this is what our humane, enlightened, and progressive social views have brought us to–we have fallen too low to shoot!

"However," concluded Kimberly, shaking himself free from the subject, "my own situation presents quite other difficulties. And, by the way, Francis is still ailing. He asked the superior yesterday for a substitute and went home ill. You have seen Uncle John?"

"A moment, before dinner."

"Is he failing, Hamilton?"

"Mentally, no; physically, he loses ground lately."

"We die hard," said Kimberly, reflecting, "we can't help it. The old gentleman certainly brightened up after he heard of my coming marriage. Not that I told him–Dolly did so. It pleased him marvellously. I couldn't understand exactly why, but Dolly suggested it was one of the natural instincts of Uncle John coming out. His eyes sparkle when the subject is mentioned," continued Kimberly dryly. "I really think it is the covetous instinct in him that is gratified. He has always disliked MacBirney and always itched to see him 'trimmed.' This seems

to satisfy, heroically, Uncle John's idea of 'trimming' him. He is as elated as if he were doing the 'trimming' himself."

Kimberly explained to Hamilton why he had sent for him and asked him for a letter of introduction to the archbishop, whom he desired to meet.

"You are on one or two executive boards with him, I think," suggested Kimberly. "Do you know him well enough to oblige me?"

"I know him very well," returned Hamilton. "And you, too, ought to know him."

The surgeon wrote the note at once.

"MOST REVEREND AND DEAR ARCHBISHOP:

CHAPTER XXXVII

Kimberly was lunching next day at the city office when MacBirney's name came in with a request for an interview. He was admitted without delay and while a valet removed the trays and the table, Kimberly greeted his visitor and, indicating a chair, asked him to sit down. He saw at a glance the suppressed feeling in MacBirney's manner; the latter, in fact, carried himself as a man fully resolved to carry out a course yet fearful of the results.

"I have come to give notice of my withdrawal from the June pool in common," began MacBirney without preface.

"I am not the one to give notice to," returned Kimberly civilly, "inasmuch as I am not in the June pool and not in touch with its operations."

"Well, I've sold–I am selling," MacBirney corrected himself hastily, "my allotment, no matter who is at interest."

"McCrea and my brother are the organizers—-"

"I understand," interjected MacBirney, "that you made a good deal of talk about my action in the December pool a year ago–I give you no chance to say I haven't served ample notice this time."

"On the contrary, I quieted a great deal of talk about your action a year ago. It was so grossly unfair to your associates that I ascribed your unloading of your stock without notifying them to rank ignorance, and was disposed to overlook it on that ground."

MacBirney smiled with some sarcasm. "Though you were careful enough to say publicly that you would never be caught in another pool with me."

"I never have been, have I? And I did not 'say publicly'; I said so to McCrea, who had my permission to tell you. It cost me six hundred thousand dollars at that time to support the market against you for three days. And while I like to see my associates make money, I object to their making it out of me."

"You didn't say so to poison my wife against me?"

"I have never, MacBirney, spoken of that or of any other of your business affairs to your wife. I never have spoken even your name to your wife, in praise or in blame, until you left her–except twice to ask her if she loved you. Even that she treated as an insult."

"You must have made some progress since then."

Kimberly's head began to move slowly from side to side. "I am told," added MacBirney, in a thin, hard voice, "you are getting ready to marry her."

"Quite true, I am."

MacBirney's rage forced him to his feet. "I am beginning to understand now, Kimberly," he framed the words slowly and carefully, "the way you have plotted against me from the start. I was warned before I ever saw you that you had no respect for the law of God or man where a woman was concerned. I was warned that no woman was safe near you."

Kimberly eyed his enraged associate calmly. "You are travelling far in a few words, MacBirney. I hope you understand, once for all, that certain limits cover a situation even such as this. I don't like your last phrase. It might be made to apply unpleasantly to a woman now very dear to me. I am used to angry men, and what you say about me—-"

"What I say about—-"

"What you say about me is allowable, no matter what I think of it. But understand this, if you say one word about her–here or elsewhere, now or hereafter–I will stop you, if I have to choke you with my own hands."

"You can't scare me, Kimberly."

"I don't want to; I don't want to choke you; but if you wish to see me try it, pass that limit just once. Now go on, MacBirney."

"I could have nothing to say against Alice."

Kimberly nodded heartily in approval.

"But I have something to say about a man who pretended to be my friend—-"

"I never pretended to be your friend."

"–And played traitor to me as you have done. But it's of a piece with your whole record. First you got me down here—-"

"I never got you down here."

"–Then you began to lay your plans to ruin my home."

"What were you doing all this time? Trying to circumvent me by making your home happy or trying to help me by neglecting it?"

MacBirney shook his finger at Kimberly in rage. "You can't escape with smooth phrases. You broke up my home!"

Kimberly had regained his coolness. "No, you broke it up. Long before I ever saw you, you broke up your home. It was broken up and only waiting for some one to save your wife from the wreck. MacBirney, you have made a success of your business; one one-hundredth of the effort you have given to your business would have saved your home. Yet you thought you could treat your wife like a servant, humiliate and abuse her and still hold her forth a figurehead for your 'home'!" muttered Kimberly with scorn.

"You, yourself, put her up to the divorce. Deny that, will you?"

"No, I will not deny it," retorted Kimberly relapsing into indifference. "After I came into her life she followed my advice. I believe I have advised her for the best."

"I see your finger trailing through every turn of my trouble now. I saw it too late. But I'm not done with you. And I'm not the only man that understands your trickery. Lambert will have you on your knees in the sugar business before you are very much older. Now, I have come to you with a straight proposition. I want the escrow control of the Western refineries. If you are ready to give it to me we will make a working agreement and have peace. If you are not, I will back Lambert in a string of modern plants that will drive you out of the Western field. We are ready; the question for you to consider is whether you want to compromise."

At this threat Kimberly, so far as the words could be used of him, went to pieces. To be outfaced in his own headquarters by one whom he would have termed a hare-brained upstart in the refining world was too much for his poise. The only outward indication of his surprise and disgust was a smile; but it was a dangerous smile. "I am afraid I am not enough of a business man to compromise, MacBirney," he responded in low tones. "You can't have the escrow control of the Western refineries."

"Very good. That decision suits me. I am now practically out of your stock; we shall see what we shall see."

"One moment, MacBirney," said Kimberly, moved by some sudden impulse of mercy following his rage, as if MacBirney were really too small fry to pit himself against. "You have brought a personal affair and a business affair before me. The business affair, as you are still my associate, I may say a word on. Don't put any money you can't afford to lose behind Lambert, for it will all go. I myself have not got resources enough to give that man a free hand. He has a genius in

one direction–that of talking men out of their money.

"Moreover, in this case there is a personal friction of long standing between him and me, and I will never let him lift his head in the sugar business in this country while I am at the head of these companies, not if I have to work twenty-four hours a day to clean him out. But that would not be necessary–for he will not only attend to ruining himself but to ruining every man that goes with him. If you want to quit us, do so. Build as many refineries as you like and we will try to get on peaceably with you–though I myself would not put a dollar into new refineries to-day. You are rich; you had eight hundred thousand dollars when I paid you for your junk, and you made two million dollars in the December pool alone–a good part of it out of me. You will take from these offices eight million dollars in less than three years."

MacBirney's alarm at Kimberly's intimate knowledge of his resources showed in his face. "In railroads you might make it forty millions in the next ten years, with even average prudence," continued Kimberly calmly. "Sugar will be a load, anyway you go into it; but sugar and Lambert will beat you to a frazzle."

Charles Kimberly walked into the room as his brother concluded. "Talk a few moments with Charles about this," suggested Kimberly, coolly, ringing for his office secretary.

"MacBirney," explained Robert Kimberly to his brother, "has sold out his common and has a lot of money loose. I am telling him to go in for railroads."

The secretary entered. Robert Kimberly after giving him some directions, got into his car and was driven up-town to the residence of the archbishop. He alighted before a large, remodelled city house not far from the cathedral. A messenger had already delivered Hamilton's letter of introduction and Kimberly was presenting himself by appointment.

At the door a man-servant took his card and he was met in the reception room by a young clergyman, who conducted him to the second floor. As Kimberly entered the large room into which he was ushered he saw the prelate rising from his table. He was a grave man and somewhat spare in his height, slightly stooped with the passing of seventy years, and bearing in the weariness of his face an expression of kindliness and intelligence.

"This is a pleasure, Mr. Kimberly," he said, extending his hand.

"It is a pleasure for me, your grace."

"Come this way," continued the archbishop, indicating a divan in one corner of the room.

"I brought no letter of introduction other than that from Doctor Hamilton, which I sent you," Kimberly began as the archbishop seated himself.

"Surely, you did not consider even Doctor Hamilton's note necessary," returned the archbishop, while his secretary withdrew. "Your name and that of

your family have been familiar to me for many years. And I fear those of my people who venture in upon you with their petitions do not always bring letters."

"You have occupied this see for many years," suggested Kimberly in compliment.

"As priest and bishop I have lived in this diocese more than forty years. It seems a long time. Yet the name of Kimberly was very old here when I came, and without ever meeting one of your family, I have heard much of you all since. So if there were no other reason, I should welcome your call as an opportunity to tell you how grateful I am, and the charities of the archdiocese are, for your repeated generosities. You know we are not blessed among our own people with many benefactors of large means. And the calls come upon us with surprising frequency."

"My father," responded Kimberly, "who was more of a philosopher than a merchant, impressed me very early with the truth that your church was a bulwark of social order–one which to that extent laid all thoughtful men under a debt to it."

"You are a man of wide interests, Mr. Kimberly."

"The country grows too fast, your grace. There seems no escape from expansion."

"Yet you find time for all of your work?"

Kimberly made a deprecatory gesture. "My chief affair is to find men to do my work for me. Personally, I am fairly free."

"From all save responsibility, perhaps. I know how hard it is to delegate that. And you give all of your energy to business. You have no family?"

"No, and this brings me to the object of my visit." Kimberly paused a moment. "I shall soon enter into marriage."

"Ah, I see!"

"And the subject is a difficult one to lay before your grace."

The archbishop saw an indefinable embarrassment in his visitor's manner and raised his thin hand. "Then it has every claim to sympathetic consideration. Forget for a moment that I am almost a stranger–I am certainly no stranger to difficulties. And do no longer address me formally. I said a moment ago that I was glad to meet you if only to thank you for your responses to our numerous needs. But there is another reason.

"When I was a young man, first ordained, my charge was the little village of Sunbury up in the lake country. You may imagine how familiar the Kimberly estates became to me in my daily rounds of exercise. I heard much of your people. Some of their households were of my congregation. Your mother I never met. I used to hear of her as exceedingly frail in health. Once, at least, I recall seeing

her driving. But her servants at The Towers were always instructed not alone to offer me flowers for the altar but diligently to see that the altar was generously provided from her gardens and hot-houses.

"I once learned," the archbishop's head drooped slightly in the reminiscence and his eyes rested full upon his visitor, "that she was passing through a dreaded ordeal, concerning which many feared for her. It was on a Sunday before mass that the word came to me. And at the mass I told my little flock that the patroness to whom we owed our constant offering of altar flowers was passing that morning through the valley of the shadow of death, and I asked them to pray for her with me. You were born on a Sunday, Mr. Kimberly." Kimberly did not break the silence and the archbishop spoke on. "You see I am quite old enough myself to be your father. I remember reading an account of your baptism."

Kimberly looked keenly into the clear, gray eyes. Not a shade of thought in the mind of the man before him was lost upon his penetration. "Any recollection of my mother," he said slowly, "touches me deeply. To think that you recall her so beautifully is very grateful to me–as you may well imagine. And that was my birthday! Then if my mother was, or I have ever been, able to help you I am sure we are repaid in being so remembered all these years. I lost my father and my mother many years ago—-"

He paused. "It is very pleasant to be remembered," he repeated uncertainly, as if collecting himself. "I shall never forget what you have just told me. And I thank you now for the prayers you said for my mother when she brought me into the world. Your grace," he added abruptly, "I am greatly perplexed."

"Tell me frankly, how and why."

"I came here with some confidence of getting what I should ask for. I am naturally a confident man. Yet my assurance deserts me. It seems, suddenly, that my mission here is vain, that my hopes have deluded me–I even ask myself why I have come. I could almost say I am sorry that I have come."

The archbishop lifted his hand to speak. "Believe me, it is not other than for good that you have come," he said.

Kimberly looked at him questioningly. "I cannot tell for what good," added the archbishop as if to say he could not answer the unspoken question. "But believe me, you have done right and not wrong in coming–of that I am sure. Tell me, first, what you came to tell me, what it is in your heart that has brought you

here."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

"I must tell you," began Kimberly, "that while seemingly in a wide authority in directing the business with which I am connected I am not always able to do just as I please. Either voluntarily or involuntarily, I yield at times to the views of those associated with me. If my authority *is* final, I prefer not to let the fact obtrude itself. Again, circumstances are at times too strong for any business man to set his mere personal views against. Yielding some years ago to the representations of my associates I took into our companies a group of Western factories controlled by a man whom I distrusted.

"To protect our interests it was necessary to move, in the premises, in one of two ways. I favored the alternative or driving him out of the business then and there. There were difficulties in either direction. If we ruined him we should be accused of 'trust methods,' of crushing a competitor, and should thus incur added public enmity. On the other hand, I contended if the man were untrustworthy he would grow more dangerous with power. I need hardly explain to an intelligent man, regardless of his views on trusts, that any man of integrity, no matter how threatening or violent a competitor he may be in the beginning, is a man we welcome as an associate into our business. We need him just as he needs us–but that is aside. We took the man in—-"

"Against your judgment?"

"Against my judgment. I never met him until he came East. My estimates of him were made wholly on his record, and I knew what is known to but few–that he had ruined his own father-in-law, who died a bankrupt directly through this man's machinations, and without ever suspecting him. This seemed to me so unspeakable, so cannibalistic, that I never needed to know anything further of the man. Yet I took him in, determined only to add a new care in watching him and still to keep him in my power so that I could crush him if he ever played false.

"He came to us–and brought his wife. I knew the man thoroughly the instant I set eyes on him. His appearance confirmed my impression. But I met his wife, and found in her a woman to engage respect, homage, and devotion, one with a charm of manner and person to me unequalled; with a modesty coupled

with spirit and humor that confounded my ideas of women–a woman, in a word, like my own mother. I am keeping nothing from you—-"

"Your confidence is safely bestowed."

"I was moved the moment I saw her. But unhappy experiences had checked and changed me somewhat. I did not disclose my feelings though I already knew how she affected me. If I had misjudged her husband I would make amends–on her account. Then as I watched them the question came to me–how is he treating her? I will make, for her sake, a new judgment of him, I said. But I saw him as indifferent to her as if she did not exist. I saw him neglect her and go out of his way to humiliate her with attentions to women of our circle that were not fit to be her servants. I asked myself whether she could be happy–and I saw that as far as affection was concerned she sat at a hearthstone of ashes.

"Even her religion–she was a Catholic–with petty and contemptible persecutions he had robbed her of. She was wretched and I knew it before I let even her suspect my interest. After that I vacillated, not knowing what I should do. I advanced and retreated in a way I never did before. But one day–it was an accident–her ankle turned as she stepped out of her car and as she fell forward I caught her on my arm. She repelled me in an instant. But from that moment I determined to win her for my wife."

The archbishop regarded him in silence.

"I am telling you the exact truth. It would profit me nothing to deceive you, nor have I ever deceived myself or her. She fought my persistence with all her strength. I tried to make her see that I was right and she was wrong, and my best aid came from her own husband. I knew it would be said I was to blame. But this man never had made a home in any sense for his wife. And if it could be urged that he ever did do so, it was he, long before I ever saw him, who wrecked it–not his wife–not I."

"You say she was a Catholic. Has this poor child lost her faith?"

Kimberly paused. "I do not know. I should say that whatever her faith was, he robbed her of it."

"Do not say exactly that. You have said we must not deceive ourselves and you are right–this is of first importance. And for this reason alone I say, no one can deprive me of my faith without my consent; if I part with it, I do so voluntarily."

"I understand, quite. Whatever I myself might profess, I feel I should have no difficulty in practising. But here is a delicate woman in the power of a brute. There is an element of coercion which should not be lost sight of and it might worry such a woman out of the possession of her principles. However, whatever the case may be, she does not go to church. She says she never can. But some keen unhappiness lies underneath the reason–if I could explain it I should not be

here."

"Has she left her husband?"

"No. He, after one of his periodical fits of abuse, and I suspect violence, left her, and not until he knew he had lost her did he make any effort to claim her again. But he had imperilled her health–it is this that is my chief anxiety–wrecked her happiness, and made himself intolerable by his conduct. She divorced him and is free forever from his brutality.

"So I have come to you. I am to make her my wife–after I had thought never to make any woman my wife–and for me it is a very great happiness. It is a happiness to my brother and my sister. Through it, the home and the family which we believed was fated to die with this generation–my brother is, unhappily, childless–may yet live. Can you understand all this?"

"I understand all."

"Help me in some way to reconcile her religious difficulties, to remove if possible, this source of her unhappiness. Is it asking too much?"

The archbishop clasped his hands. His eyes fixed slowly upon Kimberly. "You know, do you not, that the Catholic Church cannot countenance the remarriage of a wife while the husband lives."

"I know this. I have a profound respect for the principles that restrain the abuses of divorce. But I am a business man and I know that nothing is impossible of arrangement when it is right that it should be arranged. This, I cannot say too strongly, is the exceptional case and therefore I believe there is a way. If you were to come to me with a difficult problem within the province of my affairs as I come to you bringing one within yours, I should find a means to arrange it–if the case had merit."

"Unhappily, you bring before me a question in which neither the least nor the greatest of the church–neither bishop nor pope–has the slightest discretionary power. The indissolubility of marriage is not a matter of church discipline; it is a law of divine institution. Christ's own words bear no other meaning. 'What God hath joined together let not man put asunder.' He declared that in restoring the indissolubility of marriage he only reëstablished what was from the beginning, though Moses because of Jewish hardness of heart had tolerated a temporary departure. No consent that I could give, Mr. Kimberly, to a marriage such as you purpose, would in the least alter its status. I am helpless to relieve either of you in contracting it.

"It is true that the church in guarding sacredly the marriage bond is jealous that it shall be a marriage bond that she undertakes to guard. If there should have been an impediment in this first marriage–but I hardly dare think of it, for the chances are very slender. A prohibited degree of kindred would nullify a marriage. There is nothing of this, I take it. If consent had clearly been lacking–

we cannot hope for that. If her husband never had been baptized—-"

"What difference would that make?"

"A Christian could not contract marriage with a pagan–such a union would be null."

"Would a good Catholic enter into such a union?"

"No."

Kimberly shook his head. "Then she would not. If she had been a disgrace to her religion she might have done it. If she had been a woman of less character, less intelligence it might be. If she had been a worse Catholic," he concluded with a tinge of bitterness, "she might stand better now."

"Better perhaps, as to present difficulties; worse as to that character which you have just paid tribute to; which makes, in part, her charm as a woman–the charm of any good woman to a good man. You cannot have and not have. When you surrender character a great deal goes with it."

The archbishop's words sounded a knell to Kimberly's hopes, and his manner as he spoke reflected the passing of his momentary encouragement. "There is nothing then that you can do."

"If there be no defect–if this first marriage was a valid marriage–I am powerless in the circumstances. I can do nothing to allow her to remarry while her husband lives."

Kimberly arose. "We cannot, of course, *kill* him," he said quietly. "And I am sorry," he added, as if to close the interview, "not to be able to relieve her mind. I have made an effort to lay before you the truth and the merit of the case as far as she is concerned. I had hoped by being absolutely unreserved to invoke successfully something of that generosity which you find edifying in others; to find something of that mercy and tolerance which are always so commendable when your church is not called on to exercise them."

The archbishop, too, had risen. The two men faced each other. If the elder felt resentment, none was revealed in his manner or in his answer. "You said a few moments ago that you could not always do as you pleased," he began; "I, too, am one under authority." His fingers closed over the cross on his breast. "All generosity, all mercy, all tolerance that lie within His law, nothing could prevent my granting to you, and to less than you–to the least of those that could ask it. I know too much of the misery, the unhappiness of a woman's life and of the love she gives to man, to withhold anything within my power to alleviate her suffering.

"I have wounded you, and you rebuke me with harsh words. But do not carry harshness against me in your heart. Let us be sure that these words mean the same thing to both of us. If generosity and tolerance are to override a law given by God, of what use am I? Why am I here to be appealed to? On the other

hand, if by generosity or tolerance you mean patience toward those who do not recognize the law that binds me, if you mean hesitancy in judging those whose views and practices differ from my own, then I have the right to ask you to grant these qualities to me.

"But if you appeal to the laws and principles of Catholic truth, they *are* intolerant, because truth cannot compromise. My church, which you rebuke with this intolerance, is the bearer of a message from God to mankind. If men already possessed this message there would be little reason for the existence of such a church. The very reason of her being is to convince men of the truth of which they are not yet convinced.

"Either she is the divinely commissioned messenger of God or she is not–and if not, her pretensions are the most arrogant the world has ever seen and her authority is the cruelest mockery. And so you view the church, so the world views it–this I well know. It is painful sometimes, it is at this moment, to insist upon a law that I have no power to set aside–but to do less would be simply a betrayal of my trust. And if this were the price of what you term 'tolerance,' I must rest with my church under the stigmas you put upon us."

Kimberly's anger rose rather than abated with the archbishop's words. "Of course," he retorted without trying to conceal his anger, "it makes a difference who seeks relief. Your church can find no relief for a helpless woman. As I remember, you accommodated Napoleon quickly enough."

"Certain unworthy ecclesiastics of my church, constituting an ecclesiastical court, pretended to find his marriage with Josephine invalid; the church never confirmed their verdict. Thirteen of its cardinals suffered Napoleon's penalties because of their protest against his remarriage. Let us parallel the case. Suppose I could offer to join with you in a conspiracy. Suppose we should assure this suffering soul that she is free to remarry. Assume that I could make myself a party to deceiving her–would you be party with me, to it? Do I mistake, if I believe you could not conspire in such a baseness?"

"I do not deal in deceptions."

"Do you admire Napoleon's methods?"

"Not all of them."

"Let us, then, Mr. Kimberly, bear our burdens without invoking his duplicity."

"We can do that, your grace," answered Kimberly coldly. "But we shall also be obliged to bear them without relief from where we had the most right to look for it. It was not for myself that I came to you. I sought to restore to your church one who has been driven from it by a wretch. I should have been better advised; I was too hopeful. Your policy is, as it always has been, hopelessly fixed and arbitrary. You encourage those who heap upon you the greatest abuse

and contempt and drive from your doors those disposed to meet you upon any reasonable composition of a difficulty. I should only wound you if I attempted to answer your last rebuke."

"You are going—-"

"Yes."

"And you go with bitterness. Believe me, it is not pleasant to be without the approbation of the well-disposed who think and believe differently from ourselves. But if as Catholics we regard it a privilege to possess the truth we must be prepared to pay the price it exacts. The world will always think us wrong, a peculiar people and with principles beyond its comprehension. We cannot help it. It has always been so, it always must be so. Good-by."

"Good-by."

"If dividing a burden lightens it, remember you have three now to bear yours instead of two. I shall not forget either of you in my prayers, certainly not this dear soul of whom you have told me. This is my poor offering to you and to her for all you have done for those that come to you in my name."

CHAPTER XXXIX

Following the visit to the archbishop, McCrea, who had been on nettles to get hold of Kimberly for a trip of inspection, whisked him away for two days among the seaboard refineries.

Instead, however, of the two days planned by McCrea, the inspection kept Kimberly, much to his annoyance, for three days. The date set for Grace's fête found him still inspecting, but growing hourly more unmanageable, and before breakfast was over on the third morning McCrea began to feel the violence of Kimberly's protests.

By the most ingenious activity on the part of the alert McCrea and his powerful railroad friends the day's programme for the party was hastened to completion and the indignant magnate was returned by train to Second Lake in time for dinner.

He drove home by way of Cedar Point, and Alice, who had been constantly in touch with him on the telephone, felt the elation of his presence when she saw him alight from his car and walk across the terrace to where she and Fritzie, dressed for the evening, were feeding the goldfish.

Kimberly took her hands as she ran forward to meet him. "I thought you were never coming!" she exclaimed.

"For a while I thought so myself."

"And you saw the archbishop?" she murmured eagerly. "He could do nothing?"

He regarded her with affection. "I had set my heart on bringing back good news."

"I knew there was no chance," said Alice as if to anticipate a failure. "But it was like you to try. You are always doing unpleasant things for me."

He saw the disappointment under her cheerfulness. "And though I did fail–you love me just the same?"

She looked into his searching eyes simply. "Always."

"And we marry two weeks from to-night?"

"Two weeks from to-night," she answered, smiling still, but with a tremor in her steady voice. Then she clasped her hands.

"What is it?" he asked.

Standing in the sunset before him–and he always remembered her as she stood then–Kimberly saw in her eyes the fires of the devotion he had lighted. "I hope," she whispered, "I can make you happy."

"You would make a stone happy," he murmured, breathing the fragrance of her being as she looked up at him.

It was evening when he saw her again and he stood with Dolly and Imogene who were receiving.

The night was warm and the guests sought the lawns, the garden, and the groves. When a horn blown across the terrace announced dancing, slight and graceful women, whose draperies revealed mere delicate outlines of breathing creatures, came like fairies out of the night. The ballroom, in candle-light, was cool, and only the ceiling frescoes, artfully heightened by lights diffused under ropes of roses, were brighter than the rest of the room.

As the last guests arrived from town–Cready Hamilton and his wife with Doctor Hamilton and the Brysons–Kimberly walked into the ballroom. He caught Alice's eye and made his way toward her.

She smiled as he asked for a dance. "Do you realize," said he as she rose, "that this is your first–and your last–dance at The Towers as a guest? Next time you will be hostess–won't you?"

A sound of breaking glass crashing above the music of the violins took Alice's answer from her lips. Every one started. Women looked questioningly at the men. Alice shrank to Kimberly's side. "Merciful Heaven!" she whispered, "what was that?"

He answered lightly. "Something has smashed. Whatever it is, it is of no

consequence."

The music continuing without interruption reassured the timid. There was no sequence to the alarming sound, the flow of conversation reasserted itself and in a moment the incident was forgotten.

But Kimberly perceived by Alice's pallor that she was upset. "Come out into the air," he said, "for a moment."

"But don't you want to see what it was?"

"Some one else will do that; come."

She clung to his arm as they passed through an open door. "You don't seem just well, dearie," he said, taking her hand within his own. "Let us sit down."

He gave her a chair. She sank into it, supporting her head on her other hand. "I haven't been quite well for a day or two, Robert. I feel very strange."

Kimberly with his handkerchief wiped the dampness from her forehead. Her distress increased and he realized that she was ill. "Alice, let me take you upstairs a moment. Perhaps you need a restorative."

The expression on her face alarmed him. They rose just as Dolly hastened past. "Oh, you are here!" she cried, seeing Kimberly. "Why, what is the matter with Alice?"

Alice herself answered. "A faintness, dear," she said with an effort. "I think that awful crash startled me. What was it?"

Dolly leaned forward with a suppressed whisper. "Don't mention it! Robert, the Dutch mirror in the dining-room has fallen. It smashed a whole tableful of glass. The servants are frightened to death."

"No one was hurt?" said Kimberly.

"Fortunately no one. I must find Imogene."

She hurried on. Alice asked Kimberly to take her back to the ballroom. He urged her to go upstairs and lie down for a moment.

The music for the dance was still coming from within and against Kimberly's protest Alice insisted on going back. He gave way and led her out upon the floor. For a few measures, with a determined effort, she followed him. Then she glided mechanically on, supported only by Kimberly and leaning with increasing weakness upon his arm.

When he spoke to her, her answers were vague, her words almost incoherent. "Take me away, Robert," she whispered, "I am faint."

He led her quietly from the floor and assisted her up a flight of stairs to his mother's apartment. There he helped her to lie down on a couch. Annie was hurriedly summoned. A second maid was sent in haste for Doctor Hamilton and Dolly.

Alice could no longer answer Kimberly's questions as he knelt. She lay still with her eyes closed. Her respiration was hardly perceptible and her hands had

grown cold. It was only when Kimberly anxiously kissed her that a faint smile overspread her tired face. In another moment she was unconscious.

CHAPTER XL

When Hamilton hastily entered the room, Annie, frightened and helpless, knelt beside her mistress, chafing her hands. On the opposite side of the couch Kimberly, greatly disturbed, looked up with relief.

Taking a chair at her side, the doctor lifted Alice's arm, took her pulse and sat for some time in silence watching her faint and irregular respiration.

He turned after a moment to Kimberly to learn the slight details of the attack, and listening, retracted the lids of Alice's eyes and examined the pupils. Reflecting again in silence, he turned her head gently from side to side and afterward lifted her arms one after the other to let them fall back beside her on the couch.

Even these slight efforts to obtain some knowledge of Alice's condition seemed to Kimberly disquieting and filled him with apprehension. The doctor turned to Annie. "Has your mistress ever had an experience like this before, Annie?"

"No, doctor, never. She has never been in this way before."

Imogene came hurrying upstairs with Dolly to learn of Alice's condition. They looked upon her unconsciousness with fear and asked whispered questions that intensified Kimberly's uneasiness.

"Do you think we could take her home, doctor?" asked Annie, timidly.

The doctor paused. "I don't think we will try it to-night, Annie. It is quite possible for her to remain here, isn't it?" he asked, looking at Dolly and Kimberly.

"Certainly," returned Dolly. "I will stay. Alice can have these rooms and I will take the blue rooms connecting."

"Then put your mistress to bed at once," said Hamilton to Annie.

"And telephone home, Annie," suggested Dolly, "for whatever you need. I will see the housekeeper right away about the linen."

Kimberly listened to the concise directions of the doctor for immediate measures of relief and followed him mechanically into the hall. Only one thought came out of the strange confusion–Alice was at least under his roof and in his mother's room.

When he returned with the doctor the lights were low and Alice lay with her head pillowed on her loosened hair. The maid and Dolly had hastened away to complete their arrangements for the emergency and for a few moments the two men were alone with their charge.

"Doctor, what do you make of this?" demanded Kimberly.

Hamilton, without taking his eyes from the sick woman, answered thoughtfully: "I can hardly tell until I get at something of the underlying cause. Bryson will be here in a moment. We will hear what he has to say."

Doctor Bryson appeared almost on the word. Hamilton made way for him at Alice's side and the two conferred in an undertone.

Bryson asked many questions of Hamilton and calling for a candle retracted Alice's eyelids to examine the pupils for reaction to the light. The two doctors lost not an unnecessary moment in deliberation. Consulting rapidly together, powerful restoratives were at once prepared and administered through the circulation.

Reduced to external efforts to strengthen the vital functions the two medical men worked as nurses and left nothing undone to overcome the alarming situation. Then for an hour they watched together, closely, the character and frequency of Alice's pulse and breathing.

To Kimberly the conferences of the two men seemed unending. Sometimes they left the room and were gone a long time. He walked to a window to relieve his suspense. Through the open sash came the suppressed hum of motors as the cars, parked below the stables, moved up the hill to receive departing guests and made their way down the long, dark avenue to the highway.

On the eastern horizon a dull gray streak crossed a mirror that lay in the darkness below. Kimberly had to look twice to convince himself that the summer night was already waning.

Annie came into the room and, he was vaguely conscious, was aiding the doctors in a painstaking examination of their patient. Through delicacy Kimberly withdrew, as they persistently questioned the maid in the hope of obtaining the much-needed information concerning her mistress's previous condition; for what Annie could not supply of this they knew they must work without.

Plunged in the gloom of his apprehensions, he saw the doctors coming down the hall toward him and stopped them. "Speak before me," he said with an appeal that was a command. "You both know what I have at stake."

The three retired to the library and Kimberly listened attentively to every phase of the discussion between the two master clinicians as they laid their observations before him. The coma was undisguisedly a serious matter. It seemed to them already ingravescent and, taken in connection with the other symptoms, was even ominous. The two men, without a satisfactory history, and without

a hope of obtaining one from the only available source–the suffering woman herself–discussed the case from every side, only to return unwillingly to the conclusion to which everything pointed–that a cerebral lesion underlay the attack.

Their words sent a chill to Kimberly's heart. But the lines of defence were mapped out with speed and precision; a third eminent man, an authority on the brain, was to be sent for at once. Nurses, equal almost in themselves to good practitioners, were to be called in, and finally Hamilton and Bryson arranged that either one or the other should be at the sick-bed every instant to catch a possible moment of consciousness.

Hamilton himself returned to his patient. Bryson at the telephone took up the matter of summoning aid from town, and when he had done threw himself down for a few hours' sleep. Kimberly followed Hamilton and returned to Alice's side. He saw as he bent over her how the expression of her face had changed. It was drawn with a profound suffering. Kimberly sitting noiselessly down took her hand, waiting to be the first to greet her when she should open her eyes.

All Second Lake knew within a day or two of Alice's critical illness. The third doctor had come in the morning and he remained for several days.

Hamilton questioned Annie repeatedly during the period of consultations. "Try to think, Annie," he said once, "has your mistress never at any time complained of her head?"

"Indeed, sir, I cannot remember. She never complained about herself at all. Stop, sir, she did last summer, too–what am I thinking of? I am so confused. She had a fall one night, sir. I found her in her dressing-room unconscious. Oh, she was very sick that night. She told me that she had fallen and her head had struck the table–the back of her head. For days she suffered terribly. Could it have been that, do you think?"

"Put your hand to the place on your head where she complained the pain was."

"How did she happen," Hamilton continued, when Annie had indicated the region, "to fall backward in her own room, Annie?"

"She never told me, doctor. I asked her but I can't remember what she said. It was the night before Mr. MacBirney left Cedar Lodge."

The doctors spent fruitless days in their efforts to overcome the unconsciousness. There was no longer any uncertainty as to the seat of the trouble. It lay in the brain itself and defied every attempt to relieve it. Even a momentary interval of reason was denied to the dumb sufferer.

Kimberly, on the evening of the third day, had summoned his medical advisers to his own room and asked the result of their consultation. The frail and

eminent man whom Hamilton and Bryson had brought from town told Kimberly the story. He could grasp only the salient points of what the specialist said: That in a coma such as they faced it was the diagnosis of the underlying conditions that was always important. That this was often difficult; sometimes, as now, impossible. That at times they encountered, as now, a case so obscure as to defy the resources of clinical medicine. Kimberly asked them their judgment as to the issue; the prognosis, they could only tell him, was doubtful, depending wholly upon the gravity of the apoplectic injury.

The Kimberly family rose to the emergency. Aware of the crisis that had come, through Alice, into Robert's life, Imogene and Dolly, on hand day and night, were mother and sister to him and to her. Nowhere in the situation was there any failure or weakening of support.

Hamilton, undismayed in the face of the physical catastrophe he had been called upon so unexpectedly to retrieve, and painfully aware of what the issue meant to his near and dear friend, never for an instant relaxed his efforts.

Seconded by his nurses, reinforced by his counsel and strengthened by Bryson's close co-operation, Hamilton faced the discouragement steadily, knowing only too well that the responsibility must rest, in the end, on him alone.

Absorbed, vigilant, tireless–pouring the reserve energy of years into the sustained struggle of the sleepless days and nights–he strove with every resource of his skill and watched unremittingly for an instant's abatement of the deadly lethargy that was crushing the vitality of the delicate woman before him.

Kimberly, following the slightest details of the sick-room hours, spent the day and the night at the bedside or in pacing the long hall. If he slept it was for an hour and after leaving orders to summon him instantly if Alice woke. They who cared for her knew what he meant by "waking." They knew how long and mutely, sometimes in the day, sometimes in the silence of the night, he watched her face for one returning instant of reason.

They knew how when hope burned low in every other eye it shone always steadily in his. The rising of the sun and its setting meant to him only another day of hope, another night of hope for her; every concern had passed from him except that which was centered in the fight for her life.

Considerate as he was to those about him they feared him, and his instinctive authority made itself felt more keenly in his silence than in his words. The heavy features, the stubborn brow, the slow, steady look became intensified in the long, taciturn vigil. Every day Dolly walked with him and talked with him. She made a bond between him and the world; but she saw how little the world meant when danger came between him and the woman he loved.

One evening the nurses told him that Alice was better. They hoped for a return of consciousness and he sat all night waiting for the precious instant. The

next day while he slept, wearied and heartsick, Alice sank. For ten minutes those about her endured a breathless, ageing suspense that sapped their energy and strength, until it was known that the doctor had won the fight and the weary heart had returned to its faint and labored beat. They told Kimberly nothing of it. When he awoke he still thought she was better.

When he came into the room he was so hopeful that he bent over her and fondly called her name. To his consternation and delight her eyes opened at the sound of his voice; it seemed as if she were about to speak. Then her eyes closed again and she lay still. The incident electrified him and he spoke hopefully of it for hours. At midnight he sent Hamilton away, saying he himself was fresh and would be on duty with the nurse until daylight.

The air was sultry. Toward morning a thunder-storm broke violently. Kimberly walked out into the hall to throw the belvedere doors open to the fresh air. As he turned to go back, his heart stopped beating. In the gloom of the darkened gallery a slender, white figure came from the open door of the sick-room and Kimberly saw Alice, with outstretched hands, walking uncertainly toward him. He stood quite still and taking her hands gently as they touched his own he murmured her name.

"Alice! What is it, darling?" She opened her eyes. Their vacancy pierced his heart.

"Baby is crying," she faltered; "I hear my baby. Walter." Her hands groped pitifully within his own. "Walter! Let me go to her!"

She tried to go on but Kimberly restrained and held her for a moment trembling in his arms. "Come with me," he said, leading her slowly back to her pillow. "Let us go to her together."

CHAPTER XLI

When the sun burst upon The Towers in the freshness of the morning, Kimberly's eyes wore another expression. The pleading of her words still rang in his ears. The tears in her voice had cost him his courage. Before another night fell they told him but a slender hope remained. He seemed already to have realized it.

After the doctors had spoken and all knew, Annie crept into Kimberly's room. His head was bowed on the table between his arms. With her little wet

handkerchief and her worn beads crushed in her hands, she ventured to his side. Her sobs aroused him. "What is it, Annie?"

"Oh, Mr. Kimberly; she is so sick!"

"Yes, Annie."

"Don't you think you should call a priest for her?"

"A priest?" He opened his eyes as if to collect his thoughts.

"Oh, yes, a priest, Mr. Kimberly."

"Go yourself for him, Annie."

Tears were streaming down the maid's cheeks. She held out an ivory crucifix. "If her eyes should open, dear Mr. Kimberly, won't you give this to her? It is her own." Kimberly took the crucifix in silence and as Annie hurried away he buried his head again in his arms.

The timid young clergyman from the village responded within half an hour. Hamilton spoke kindly to him and explained to him Alice's condition; for unless consciousness should return Hamilton knew that nothing could be done.

After trying in vain to speak to her the priest asked leave to wait in an adjoining room. His youthfulness and timidity proved no detriment to his constancy, for he sat hour after hour relieved only by Annie's messages and declining to give up. In the early morning finding there had been no change he left, asking that he be sent for if consciousness should return.

With a strength that the doctors marvelled at, Alice rallied after the bad night. She so held her improvement during the day that Hamilton at nightfall felt she still might live.

While the doctors and the family were at dinner Kimberly was kneeling upstairs beside Alice. She lay with her eyes closed, as she had lain the night she was stricken, but breathing more quietly. The racking pain no longer drew her face. Kimberly softly spoke her name and bent over her. He kissed her parched lips tenderly and her tired eyes opened. A convulsion shook him. It seemed as if she must know him, but his pleading brought no response.

Then as he looked, the light in her eyes began to fade. With a sudden fear he took her in his arms and called to Annie on the other side of the bed. The nurse ran for Hamilton. Annie with a sob that seemed to pierce Alice's stupor held up the ivory crucifix and the eyes of her dying mistress fixed upon it.

Reason for an instant seemed to assert itself. Alice, her eyes bent upon the crucifix, and trying to rise, stretched out her hands. Kimberly, transfixed, supported her in his arms. Annie held the pleading symbol nearer and Alice

with a heart-rending little cry clutched it convulsively and sank slowly back.

CHAPTER XLII

She died in his arms. In the stillness they heard her name again and again softly spoken, as if he still would summon her from the apathy of death. They saw him, in their sobbing, wait undiscouraged for his answer from the lips that never would answer again.

If he had claimed her in her life he claimed her doubly in her death; now, at least, she was altogether his. He laid her tenderly upon the pillow and covering her hands, still clasping the crucifix, in his own hands he knelt with his face buried in the counterpane.

Day was breaking when he kissed her and rose to his feet. When Dolly went to him in the morning to learn his wishes she found him in his room. Alice was to lie, he said, with the Kimberlys on the hill, in the plot reserved for him. His sister assented tearfully. As to the funeral, he asked Dolly to confer with the village priest. He directed that only Annie and her own women should make Alice ready for the burial and forbade that any stranger's hand should touch his dead.

She lay in the sunshine, on her pillow, after Annie had dressed her hair, as if breathing. Kimberly went in when Annie came for him. He saw how the touch of the maid's loving hands had made for her dead mistress a counterfeit of sleep; how the calm of the great sleep had already come upon her, and how death, remembering the suffering of her womanhood, had restored to her face its girlish beauty. Hamilton, who was with him, followed him into the room. Kimberly broke the silence.

"What *is* First Communion, Hamilton?" he asked.

Hamilton shook his head.

"I think," Kimberly said, pausing, "it must be the expression upon her face now."

During the day he hardly spoke. Much of the time he walked in the hall or upon the belvedere and his silence was respected. Those of his household asked one another in turn to talk with him. But even his kindness repelled communication.

In the early morning when the white couch had been placed to receive her

for the grave he returned to the room with Dolly and they stood beside Alice together.

"This is my wedding day, Dolly. Did you remember it?"

"Robert!"

"I tried for once to do better; to treat Alice as a woman should be treated. This is my reward–my wedding day."

He lifted her in his arms like a child and as he laid her in her coffin looked at her stonily. "My bride! My Alice!"

Dolly burst into tears. The harshness of his despair gave way as he bent over her for the last time and when he spoke again the tenderness of his voice came back. "My darling! With you I bury every earthly hope; for I take God to witness, in you I have had all my earthly joy!" He walked away and never saw her face again.

The unintelligible service in the church did not rouse him from his torpor and he was only after a long time aware of a strange presence on the altar. Just at the last he looked up into the sanctuary. Little clouds of incense rising from a swinging thurible framed for an instant the face of a priest and Kimberly saw it was the archbishop.

The prelate stood before the tabernacle facing the little church filled with people. But his eyes were fixed on the catafalque and his lips were moving in prayer. Kimberly watched with a strange interest the slender, white hand rise in a benediction over the dead. He knew it was the last blessing of her whom he had loved.

Dolly had dreaded the scene at the grave but there was no scene. Nor could Kimberly ever recollect more than the mournful trees, the green turf, and the slow sinking of a flowered pall into the earth. And at the end he heard only the words of the archbishop, begging that they who remained might, with her, be one day received from the emptiness of this life into one that is both better and lasting.

CHAPTER XLIII

In the evening of the day on which they had buried Alice, and the family were all at The Towers, Dolly, after dinner, asked Doctor Hamilton to walk with her. Robert Kimberly had dined upstairs and Hamilton upon leaving Dolly went up to Kimberly's rooms.

The library door was closed. Hamilton, picking up a book in an adjoining room, made a place under the lamp and sat down to read. It was late when Kimberly opened the closed door. "Do you want to see me, doctor?" he asked abruptly.

"Not particularly. I am not sleepy."

Kimberly sat down in the corner of a davenport. "Nor am I, doctor. Nor am I talkative–you understand, I know."

"I have been reading this pretty little French story." Hamilton had the book in his hand. "Mrs. MacBirney gave it to you. I have been thinking how like her it seems–the story itself–elevated, delicate, refined—-"

"It happens to be the only book she ever gave me."

Hamilton looked again at the inscription on the fly-leaf, and read in Alice's rapid, nervous hand:

"From Alice, To Robert."

"What slight chances," the doctor went on, "contribute sometimes to our treasures. You will always prize this. And to have known and loved such a woman–to have been loved by her–so much does not come into every man's life."

Kimberly was silent. But Hamilton had come to talk, and disregarding the steady eyes bent suspectingly upon him he pursued his thought. "To my mind, to have known the love of one woman is the highest possible privilege that can come to a man. And this is the thought I find in this book. It is that which pleases me. What surprises me in it is the light, cynical view that the man takes of the responsibility of life itself."

"All sensualists are cynical."

"But how can a man that has loved, or treasures, as this man professes to treasure, the memory of a gifted woman remain a sensualist?"

Kimberly shrugged his shoulders. "Men are born sensualists. No one need apologize for being a sensualist; a man should apologize for being anything else."

"But no matter what you and I are born, we die something other."

"You mean, we progress. Perhaps so. But that we progress to any more of respect for man or for life, I have yet to learn. We progress from a moment of innocence to an hour of vanity, and from an hour of vanity to an eternity of ashes."

"You are quoting from the book."

"It is true."

"She did not believe it true. She died clinging to a crucifix."

Kimberly shrank under the surgeon's blade.

"A memory is not vanity," persisted Hamilton. "And the day some time comes when it embodies all the claim that life has upon us; but it is none the less

a valid claim. In this case," the surgeon held up the book, "Italy and work proved such a claim."

"My work would be merely more money-getting. I am sickened of all money-getting. And my Italy lies to-night–up there." His eyes rolled toward the distant hill. "I wish I were there with her."

"But between the wishing and the reality, Robert–you surely would not hasten the moment yourself."

Kimberly made no answer.

"You must think of Alice–what would she wish you to do? Promise me," Hamilton, rising, laid his hand on Kimberly's shoulder, "that to-night you will not think of yourself alone. Suicide is the supreme selfishness–remember your own words. There was nothing of selfishness in her. Tell me, that for to-night, you will think of her."

"That will not be hard to do. You are very kind. Good-night."

In the morning Kimberly sent for Nelson and later for Charles. It was to discuss details concerning their business, which Robert, conferring with his brother, told him frankly he must now prepare to take up more actively. Charles, uneasy, waited until they had conferred some time and then bluntly asked the reason for it.

Kimberly gave no explanation beyond what he had already given to Nelson, that he meant to take a little rest. The two worked until Charles, though Robert was quite fresh, was used up. He rose and going to an open window looked out on the lake, saying that he did not want to work any longer.

The brothers were so nearly of an age that there seemed no difference in years between them. Robert had always done the work; he liked to do it and always had done it. To feel that he was now putting it off, appalled Charles, and he hid his own depression only because he saw the mental strain reflected in Robert's drawn features.

Charles, although resolutely leaving the table and every paper on it, looked loyally back after a moment to his brother. "It's mighty good of you, Bob," he said slowly, "to explain these things all over again to me. I ought to know them–I'm ashamed that I don't. But, somehow, you always took the load and I like a brute always let you take it. Then you are a lot brainier than I am."

Robert cut him off. "That simply is not true, Charlie. In matter of fact, that man has the most brains who achieves happiness. And you have been supremely happy."

"While you have done the work!"

"Why not? What else have I been good for? If I could let you live–if even one of us could live–why shouldn't I?"

The elder brother turned impulsively. "Why? Because you have the right

to live, too. Because sunshine and bright skies are as much for you as they are for me."

They were standing at the window together. Robert heard the feeling in the words.

"Yes," he answered, "I know the world is full of sunshine, and flowers are always fresh and life is always young and new hands are always caressing. This I well know, and I do not complain. The bride and the future are always new. But Charlie," he laid his hand on his brother's shoulder, "we can't all play the game of life with the same counters; some play white but some must play black. It's the white for you, the black for me. The sun for you, the shadow for me. Don't speak; I know, I have chosen it; I know it is my fault. I know the opportunities wasted. I might have had success, I asked for failure. But it all comes back to the same thing–some play the white, some the black."

CHAPTER XLIV

A second shock within a week at The Towers found Kimberly still dazed. In the confusion of the household Uncle John failed one morning to answer Francis's greeting. No word of complaint had came from him. He lay as he had gone to sleep.

Hamilton stood in the room a moment with Kimberly beside his dead uncle.

"He was an extraordinary man, Robert," said the surgeon, breaking the silence at last. "A great man."

"He asked no compromise with the inevitable," responded Kimberly, looking at the stern forehead and the cruel mouth. "I don't know"–he added, turning mechanically away, "perhaps, there is none."

After the funeral Dolly urged Robert to take Hamilton to sea and the two men spent a week together on the yacht. Between them there existed a community of mental interest and material achievement as well as a temperamental attraction. Hamilton was never the echo of any expression of thought that he disagreed with. Yet he was acute enough to realize that Kimberly's mind worked more deeply than his own and was by this strongly drawn to him.

Moreover, to his attractive independence Hamilton united a tenderness and tact developed by long work among the suffering–and the suffering, like children, know their friends. Kimberly, while his wound was still bleeding, could talk to

Hamilton more freely than to any one else.

The day after their return to The Towers the two men were riding together in the deep woods over toward the Sound when Kimberly spoke for the first time freely of Alice. "You know," he said to Hamilton, "something of the craving of a boy's imagination. When we are young we dream of angels–and we wake to clay. The imagination of childhood sets no bounds to its demands, and poor reality, forced to deliver, is left bankrupt. From my earliest consciousness my dreams were of a little girl and I loved and hungered for her. She was last in my sleeping and first in my waking thoughts.

"It grew in me, and with me, this pictured companion of my life. It was my childish happiness. Then the time came when she left me and I could not call her back. An old teacher rebuked me once. 'You think,' said he, 'that innocence is nothing; wait till you have lost it.'

"I believed at last, as year after year slipped away, that I had created a being of fancy too lovely to be real. I never found her–in all the women I have ever known I never found her until one night I saw Alice MacBirney. Dolly asked me that night if I had seen a ghost. She was my dream come true. Think of what it means to live to a reality that can surpass the imagination–Alice was that to me.

"To be possessed of perfect grace; that alone means so much–and grace was but one of her natural charms. I thought I knew how to love such a woman. It was all so new to her–our life here; she was like a child. I thought my love would lift me up to her. I know, too late, it dragged her down to me."

"You are too harsh. You did what you believed right."

"Right?" echoed Kimberly scornfully. "What *is* right? Who knows or cares? We do what we please–who does *right*?"

They turned their horses into a bridle-path toward the village and Kimberly continued to speak. "Sometimes I have thought, what possibilities would lie in moulding a child to your own ideas of womanhood. It must be pleasing to contemplate a girl budding into such a flower as you have trained her to be.

"But if this be pleasing, think what it is to find such a girl already in the flower of her womanhood; to find in her eyes the light that moves everything best within you; to read in them the answer to every question that springs from your heart. This is to realize the most powerful of all emotions–the love of man for woman."

The horses stopped on the divide overlooking the lakes and the sea. To the left, the village lay at their feet, and beyond, the red roofs of the Institute clustered among clumps of green trees. The sight of the Institute brought to Kimberly's mind Brother Francis, who, released from his charge at The Towers, had returned to it.

He had for a time wholly forgotten him. He reflected now that after Hamil-

ton's departure the companionship of Francis might help to relieve his insupportable loneliness. The men rode together past the village and parted when they reached the lake, Hamilton returning to The Towers and Kimberly riding south to the Institute to take, if possible, Brother Francis home with him. He expected some objection, but was prepared to overcome it as he dismounted at the door of the infirmary and rang. A tall, shock-haired brother answered.

"I have come to see Brother Francis."

"You mean Brother Francis, who was at The Towers? He has gone, I am sorry to say."

"Where has he gone?"

"Brother Francis has gone to the leper mission at Molokai."

Kimberly stared at the man: "Molokai! Francis gone to Molokai? What do you mean?"

A wave of amazement darkening Kimberly's features startled the red-haired brother. "Who sent him?" demanded Kimberly angrily. "Why was I not notified? What kind of management is this? Where is your Superior?"

"Brother Ambrose is ill. I, Mr. Kimberly, am Brother Edgar. No one sent Brother Francis. Surely you must know, for years he has wished to go to the Molokai Mission? When he was once more free he renewed his petition. The day after it was granted he left to catch the steamer. He went to The Towers to find you to say good-by. They told him you had gone to sea."

Kimberly rode slowly home. He was unwilling to admit even to himself how hateful what he had now heard was to him and how angrily and inexplicably he resented it.

He had purposed on the day that he made Alice his wife to give Brother Francis as a foundation for those higher schools that were the poor Italian's dream, a sum of money much larger than Francis had ever conceived of. It was to have been one of those gifts the Kimberlys delighted in–of royal munificence, without ceremony and without the slightest previous intimation; one of those overwhelming surprises that gratified the Kimberly pride.

Because it was to have been in ready money even the securities had previously been converted, and the tons of gold lay with those other useless tons that were to have been Alice's on the same day–in the bank vaults. And of the two who were to have been made happy by them, one lay in her grave and the other with his own hand had opened the door of his living tomb.

Kimberly in the weariness of living returned to the empty Towers. Dolly and her husband had gone home and Hamilton now returning to town was to dine with Charles Kimberly. Robert, welcoming isolation, went upstairs alone.

His dinner was brought to his room and was sent down again untasted. He locked his doors and sat down to think. The sounds about the house which at best

barely penetrated the heavy walls of his apartment died gradually away. A clock within the room chiming the hour annoyed him and he stopped it. His thoughts ran over his affairs and the affairs of his brother and his sister and partners and turned to those in various measure dependent upon his bounty.

His sense of justice, never wholly obscured, because rooted in his exorbitant pride, was keenly alive in this hour of silent reckoning. No injustice, however slight, must be left that could be urged against his memory, and none, he believed, could now thus be urged. If there were a shock on the exchanges at the news of his death, if the stocks of his companies should be raided, no harm could come to the companies themselves. The antidote to all uneasiness lay in the unnecessarily large cash balances, rooted likewise in the Kimberly pride, that he kept always in hand for the unexpected.

His servants, to the least, had been remembered and he was going over his thought of them when, with a pang, he reflected that he had completely forgotten the maid, Annie. It was a humiliation to think that of all minor things this could happen–that the faithful girl who had been closer than all others to her who was dearest to him could have been neglected. However, this could be trusted to a letter to his brother, and going to a table he wrote a memorandum of the provisions he wished made for Annie.

Brother Francis and his years of servitude came to his mind. Was there any injustice to this man in leaving undone what he had fully intended to do in providing for the new school? He thought the subject over long and loosely. What would Francis say when he heard? Could he, stricken sometime with a revolting disease, ever think of Kimberly as unjust?

The old fancy of Francis in heaven and Dives begging for a drop of water returned. But the thought of lying for an eternity in hell without a drop of water was more tolerable than the thought of this faithful Lazarus' accusing finger pointing to a tortured Dives who had been in the least matter unjust. If there were a hereafter, pride had something at stake in this, too.

And thus the thought he most hated obtruded itself unbidden–was there a hereafter?

Alice rose before him. He hid his face in his hands. Could this woman, the very thought of whom he revered and loved more than life itself–could she now be mere dissolving clay–or did she live? Was it but breathing clay that once had called into life every good impulse in his nature?

He rose and found himself before his mother's picture. How completely he had forgotten his mother, whose agony had given him life! He looked long and tenderly into her eyes. When he turned away, dawn was beating at the drawn shades. The night was gone. Without even asking what had swayed him he put

his design away.

CHAPTER XLV

Kimberly took up the matters of the new day heavy with thought. But he sent none the less immovably for Nelson and the troublesome codicil for the school was put under immediate way. He should feel better for it, he assured himself, even in hell. And whether, he reflected, it should produce any relief there or not, it would silence criticism. With his accustomed reticence he withheld from Nelson the name of the beneficiaries until the final draught should be ready, and in the afternoon rode out alone.

McCrea and Cready Hamilton came out later with the treasurer. They had brought a messenger who carried balance sheets, reports, and estimates to be laid before Kimberly. He kept his partners for dinner and talked with them afterward of the affairs most on their minds. He told them he would go over the estimates that night alone and consult with them in the morning. The type-written sheets were spread with some necessary explanations on his table in the library upstairs and after his usual directions for their comfort for the night he excused his associates.

He closed his door when they had gone. The table lamp was burning and its heavy shade shrouded the beamed ceiling and the distant corners of the sombre room. But the darkness suited Kimberly's mood. He seated himself in a lounging chair to be alone with his thoughts and sat motionless for an hour before he moved to the table and the papers. The impressive totals of figures before him failed to evoke any possible interest; yet the results were sufficient to justify enthusiasm or, at least, to excite a glow of satisfaction. He pushed the reports back and as he stared into the gloom Alice's deathbed rose before him. He heard her sharp little cry, the only cry during that fortnight of torture. He saw her grasp the crucifix from Annie's hand and heard Annie's answering cry, "Christ, Son of God, have mercy!"

Christ, Son of God! Suppose it were true? The thought urged itself. He walked to a window and threw it open. The lake, the copses and fields lay flooded with moonlight, but his eyes were set far beyond them. What if it were true? He forced himself back to the lamp and doggedly took up the figures.

Mechanically he went over and over them. One result lost its meaning the

moment he passed to the next and the question that had come upon him would not down. It kept knocking disagreeably and he knew it would not be put away until the answer was wrung from him.

The night air swept in cool from the lake and little chills crept over him. He shook them off and leaned forward on the table supporting his head with his hands. "It is not true," he cried stubbornly. There was a savage comfort in the words. "It is not true," he muttered. His hands tightened and he sat motionless.

His head sank to the table, and supporting it on his forearm, with the huge typewritten sheets crumpled in his hands, he gave way to the exhaustion that overcame him. "It is not true," he whispered. "I never will believe it. He is not the Son of God. There is no God."

Yet he knew even as he lost consciousness that the answer had not yet come.

CHAPTER XLVI

When Charles came over in the morning, Robert made a pretence of discussing the budget with his associates. It was hardly more than a pretence. Figures had palled upon him and he dragged himself each day to his work by force of will.

The city offices he ceased to visit. Every matter in which his judgment was asked or upon which his decision was needed was brought to The Towers. His horses were left to fret in the stables and he walked, usually alone, among the villa hills.

Hamilton, even when he felt he could not penetrate the loneliness of Kimberly's moods, came out regularly and Kimberly made him to know he was welcome. "It isn't that I want to be alone," he said one night in apology to the surgeon. "The only subjects that interest me condemn me to loneliness. Charles asked me to meet a Chicago friend of his last night–and he talked books to me and pictures! How can I talk pictures and books? McCrea brought out one of our Western directors the other day," as Kimberly continued his chin went down to where it sank when matters seemed hopeless, "and he talked railroads!"

"Go back to your books," urged Hamilton.

"Books are only the sham battles of life."

"Will you forego the recreation of the intellect?"

"Ah! The intellect. We train it to bring us everything the heart can wish.

And when our fairy responds with its gifts the appetite to enjoy them is gone. Hamilton, I am facing an insupportable question–what shall I do with myself? Shall I stop or go on? And if I go on, how? This is why I am always alone."

"You overlook the simplest solution. Take up life again; your difficulties will disappear."

"What life? The one behind me? I have been over that ground. I should start out very well–with commendable resolutions to let a memory guide me. And I should end–in the old way. I tell you I will never do it. There is a short cut to the end of that road–one I would rather take at the beginning. I loathe the thought of what lies behind me; I know the bitterness of the flesh." His hands were stretched upon the table and he clenched them slowly as he drew them up with his words, "I never will embrace or endure it again."

"Yet, for the average man," he went on, "only two roads lie open–Christianity or sensuality–and I am just the average man. I cannot calmly turn back to what I was before I knew her. She changed me. I am different. Christians, you know," his voice dropped as if he were musing, "have a curious notion that baptism fixes an indelible mark on the soul. If that is so, Alice was my baptism."

"Then your choice is already made, Robert."

"Why do you say that? When I choose I shall no longer be here. What I resent is being forced to choose. I hate to bow to law. My life has been one long contempt for it. I have set myself outside every law that ever interfered with my desires or ambitions. I have scorned law and ignored it–and I am punished. What can a man do against death?"

"Even so, there is nothing appalling in Christianity. Merely choose the form best adapted to your individual needs."

"What would you have me do? Fill myself with sounding words and echoing phrases? I am doing better than that where I am. There is only one essential form of Christianity–you know what it is. I tell you I never will bow to a law that is not made for every man, rich or poor, cultured or crude, ignorant or learned. I never will take up the husks of a 'law adapted to individual needs.' That is merely making my own law over again, and I am leaving that. I am sick of exploiting myself. I despise a law that exploits the individual. I despise men in religious thought that exploit themselves and their own doctrines. I need wholly another discipline and I shall never bring myself to embrace it."

"You are closer to it than you think. Yet, for my part, I hate to see you lose your individuality–to let some one else do your thinking for you."

"A part of my individuality I should be gainer for losing. A part of it I wish to God some one had robbed me of long ago. But I hate to see you, Hamilton, deceive yourself with phrases. 'Let some one else do your thinking for you,'" Kimberly echoed, looking contemptuously away. "If empty words like that were

all!"

"You are going a good way, Robert," said the surgeon, dryly.

"I wish I might go far."

"Parting company with a good many serious minds–not to say brilliant ones."

"What has their brilliancy ever done for me? I am tired of this rubbish of writing and words. Francis was worth libraries. I esteem what he did with his life more than I do the written words of ten thousand. He fought the real battle."

"Did he win?"

Kimberly's hand shot out. "If I knew! If I knew," he repeated doggedly. And then more slowly. "If I knew–I would follow him."

CHAPTER XLVII

Kimberly no longer concealed from his family the trend of his thinking nor that which was to them its serious import. Dolly came to him in consternation. "My dear brother!" she wept, sitting down beside him.

His arm encircled her. "Dolly, there is absolutely nothing to cry about."

"Oh, there is; there is everything. How can you do it, Robert? You are turning your back on all modern thought."

"But 'modern thought,' Dolly, has nothing sacred about it. It is merely present-day thought and, as such, no better than any other day thought. Every preposterous thought ever expressed was modern when it first reached expression. The difficulty is that all such 'modern' thought delights in reversing itself. It was one thing yesterday and is wholly another to-day; all that can with certainty be predicated of it is, that to-morrow it will be something quite else. Present day modern thought holds that what a man believes is of no moment–what he does is everything. Four hundred years ago 'modern' thought announced that what a man did was of no moment, what he believed was everything. Which was right?"

"Well, which was right?" demanded Dolly, petulantly. "You seem to be doing the sermonizing."

"If you ask me, I should say neither. I should say that what a man believes is vital and what he does is vital as well. I know–if my experience has taught me anything–that what men do will be to a material degree modified by what they believe. It is not I who am sermonizing, Dolly. Francis often expressed these

thoughts. I have only weighed them–now they weigh me."

"I don't care what you call it. Arthur says it is pure mediævalism."

"Tell Arthur, 'mediævalism' is precisely what I am leaving. I am casting off the tatters of mediæval 'modern' thought. I am discarding the rags of paganism to which the modern thought of the sixteenth century has reduced my generation and am returning to the most primitive of all religious precepts–authority. I am leaving the stony deserts of agnosticism which 'modern' thought four hundred years ago pointed out as the promised land and I am returning to the path trodden by St. Augustine. Surely, Dolly, in this there is nothing appalling for any one unless it is for the man that has it to do."

Yet Kimberly deferred a step against which every inclination in his nature fought. It was only a persistent impulse, one that refused to be wholly smothered, that held him to it. He knew that the step must be taken or he must do worse, and the alternative, long pondered, was a repellent one.

Indeed, the alternative of ignoring a deepening conviction meant, he realized, that he must part with his self-respect. He went so far as seriously to ask himself whether he could not face putting this away; whether it was not, after all, a fanciful thing that he might do better without. He considered that many men manage to get on very well in this world without the scruple of self-respect.

But honesty with himself had been too long the code of his life to allow him to evade an unanswered question and he forced himself gradually to the point of returning to the archbishop. One night he stood again, by appointment, in his presence.

"I am at fault in not having written you," Kimberly said simply. "It was kind of you to remember me in my sorrow last summer. Through some indecision I failed to write."

"I understand perfectly. Indeed, you had no need to write," returned the archbishop. "Somehow I have felt I should see you again."

"The knot was cruelly cut."

The archbishop paused. "I have thought of it all very often since that day on the hill," he said. "'Suppose,' I have asked myself, 'he had been taken instead. It would have been easier for him. But could he really wish it? Could he, knowing what she once had suffered, wish that she be left without him to the mercies of this world?'" The archbishop shook his head. "I think not. I think if one were to be taken, you could not wish it had been you. That would have been not better, but worse."

"But she would not have been responsible for my death. I am for hers."

"Of that you cannot be certain. What went before your coming into her life may have been much more responsible."

"I am responsible for another death–my own nephew, you know, commit-

ted suicide. And I would, before this, have ended my mistakes and failures," his voice rose in spite of his suppression "–put myself beyond the possibility of more–but that she believed what you believe, that Christ is the Son of God."

The words seemed wrung from him. "It is this that has driven me to you. I am sickened of strife and success–the life of the senses. It is Dead Sea fruit and I have tasted its bitterness. If I can do nothing to repair what I have already done, then I am better done with life."

"And do not you, too, believe that Christ is the Son of God?"

"I do not know what I believe–I believe nothing. Convince me that He was the Son of God and I will kneel to him in the dust."

"My dear son! It is not I, nor is it another, that can convince you. God, alone, extends the grace of faith. Have you ever asked for it?"

Kimberly started from his apathy. "I?" He relapsed again into moodiness. "No." The thought moved him to a protest. "How can I reach a far-off thing like faith?" he demanded with angry energy—"a shadowy, impalpable, evasive, ghostly thing? How can I reach, how can I grasp, what I cannot see, what I cannot understand?"

"You can reach it and you can grasp it. Such questions spring from the anger of despair; despair has no part in faith. Faith is the death of despair. From faith springs hope. It is despair that pictures faith to you as a far-off thing."

"Whatever it may be, it is not for me. I have no hope."

"What brought you to-night? Can you not see His grace in forcing you to come against your own inclination? His hope has sustained you when you least suspected it. It has stayed your hand from the promptings of despair. Faith a far-off thing? It is at your side, trembling and invisible. It is within your reach at every moment. You have but to put forth your hand to touch it."

Kimberly shook his bowed head.

"Will you stretch forth your hand–will you touch the hem of His garment?"

Kimberly sat immovable. "I cannot even stretch forth a hand."

"Will you let me stretch forth mine?" His silence left the archbishop to continue. "You have come to me like another Nicodemus, and with his question, unasked, upon your lips. You have done wrong–it is you who accuse yourself, not I. Your own words tell me this and they can spring only from an instinct that has accused you in your own heart.

"Christianity will teach you your atonement–nothing else can or will. You seem to picture this Christianity as something distant, something of an unreal, shadowy time and place. It is not. It is concrete, clear, distinct, alive, all about you every day, answering the very questions you have asked in your loneliness. It is hidden in the heart of the servant that waits at your call, locked in the breast of the man that passes you in the street. It is everywhere, unseen, unapprehended

about you. I am going to put it before you. Stay with me to-night. In that room, my own little chapel," the archbishop rose as he indicated the door, "spend the time until you are ready to sleep. You have given many years to the gratification of yourself. Give one hour to-night to the contemplation of God. May I tell you my simple faith? The night before He suffered, He took bread and blessed and broke it, and gave it to His disciples. And He said, in substance, 'Take and eat of this, for this is my body, broken for your sins. And as often as ye shall do this, do it in commemoration of me.' And on these words I ground my faith in this mystery of His presence; this is why I believe He is here to-night, and why I leave you with Him in this tabernacle before you. If you feel that you have done wrong, that you want to atone for it, ask Him to teach you how."

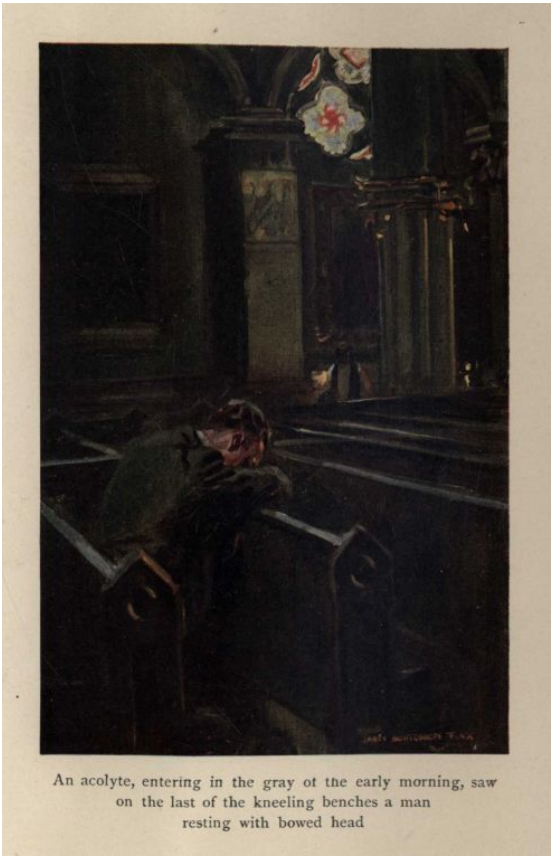
The archbishop opened the chapel door. In the darkness of the cool room, the red sanctuary lamp gleamed above the altar. The archbishop knelt for a moment beside his questioner; then he withdrew, closing the door behind him, and the silence of the night remained unbroken.

An acolyte, entering in the gray of the early morning, saw on the last of the kneeling benches a man resting with bowed head. In the adjoining room the archbishop himself had slept, within call, in his chair. He entered the chapel and an assistant robed him to say his mass before his single auditor. The service over, he made his thanksgiving, walked to where the man knelt and, touching him on the shoulder, the two left the room together.

CHAPTER XLVIII

The apprehension that had long waited upon Robert Kimberly's intentions weighed upon his circle. It was not enough for those about him to assure themselves that their affairs of business or of pleasure must move on whether Robert should determine to move on with them or not. His aloofness carried with it an uncertainty that was depressing.

If he were wholly gone it would be one thing; but to be not gone and not of them was quite another. When Nelson brought the codicil providing for the school, satisfactorily framed, Kimberly had changed his intention and resolved, instead of incorporating the foundation in his will, to make immediate provision for an endowment. When the details were worked out, Nelson left to bring his wife home from Paris. Lottie's first visit was to Dolly's home, and there she found



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Imogene and Fritzie. She tiptoed in on the surprised group with a laugh.

They rose in astonishment, but Lottie looked so trim and charming in her French rig that she disarmed criticism. For a moment every one spoke at once. Then Dolly's kind heart gave way as she mentally pronounced Lottie faultless.

"You never looked so well in your life," she exclaimed with sincerity. "I declare, Lottie, you are back to the sprightliness of girlhood. Paris certainly agrees with you."

Lottie smiled. "I have had two great rejuvenators this year–Paris and a good conscience."

Fritzie could not resist. "Do they go together, Lottie?" she asked.

Lottie responded with perfect ease: "Only when one is still young, dear. I shouldn't dare recommend them to mature persons."

"You felt no risk in the matter yourself?" suggested Fritzie.

"Not in the least," laughed Lottie, pushing down her slender girdle. But she was too happy to quarrel and had returned resolved to have only friends. "You must tell me all about poor Robert." She turned, as she spoke to Dolly, with a sudden sympathy in her tender eyes. "I have thought so much about his troubles. And I am just crazy to see the poor fellow. What is he doing?"

"He is in town for a few days, just now. But he has been away for two months–with the yacht."

"Where?"

"No one knows. Somewhere along the coast, I suppose."

"With whom?"

"Alone."

Lottie threw her eyes upward. "*What* does he *mean*? What do *you* all mean by letting him get into such a rut? Such isolation; such loneliness! He needs to be cheered up, poor fellow. Dolly, I should think *you* would be frightened to death—-"

"What could I possibly do that I haven't done?" demanded Dolly. "No one can do a thing with Robert when he is set. I have simply *had* to give up."

"You *mustn't* give up," protested Lottie courageously. "It is just the giving up that ruins everything. Personally, *I* am convinced that no one can long remain insensible to genuine and sincere sympathy. And certainly no one could accuse poor Robert of being unresponsive."

"Certainly not–if you couldn't," retorted Fritzie.

Lottie turned with amiability. "Now, Fritzie dear, you are *not* going to be unkind to me. I put myself entirely out of the case. It is something we ought all to work for together. It is our duty, I think."

She spoke very gently but paused to give the necessary force to her words. "Truly, it would be depressing to *any* one to come back to a gay circle and find

it broken up in the way ours is. We can't help the past. Its sorrows belong to it alone. We must let the dead bury the dead and all work together to restore the old spirit when everybody was happy–don't you feel so, Arthur?" she asked, making that sudden kind of an appeal to Arthur De Castro to which it is difficult to refuse assent.

"Certainly we should. And I hope you will be successful, Lottie, in pulling things together."

"Robert is at home now, isn't he?"

"He has been at home a fortnight," returned Arthur, "but shut up with the new board of directors all the time. MacBirney walked the plank, you know, last fall when Nelson went on the board."

"I think it was very nice of Robert to confer such an honor on Nelson," observed Lottie simply, "and I intend to tell him so. He is always doing something for somebody," she continued, rising to go. "And I want to see what the constant kindness he extends to others will do if extended to him."

"She also wants to see," suggested Fritzie to Imogene, as Dolly and Arthur walked with Lottie to the door, "what Paris and a good conscience, and a more slender figure, will do for him."

"Now, Fritzie!"

"If Robert Kimberly," blurted Fritzie hotly, "ever takes up again with Lottie Nelson, I'll never speak to him as long as I live."

"Again? When did he ever take up with her?"

"I don't care. You never can tell what a man will do."

Imogene, less easily moved, only smiled. "Dolly entertains the Nelsons to-morrow evening, and Robert will be asked very particularly to come."

Kimberly did not return home, as was expected, that night. At The Towers they had no definite word as to whether he would be out on the following day. Dolly called up the city office but could only leave a message for him. As a last resort she sent a note to The Towers, asking Robert to join them for the evening in welcoming Lottie. Her failure to receive an answer before the party sat down to dinner rather led Dolly to conclude that they should not see him and she felt no surprise when a note was handed her while the coffee was being served. She tore it open and read:

"DEAR DOLLY:

"I am just home and have your note. I am sorry not to be with you to-night to join in welcoming the Nelsons. I send all good wishes to the little company, but what I have now to tell you will explain my absence.

"I had already made an appointment before I learned of your arrangements

for the evening. Father Pauly, the village clergyman, sleeps to-night at The Towers and I am expecting him as I write. He does not know of my intention, but before he leaves I shall ask him to receive me into the Roman Catholic Church.
"ROBERT."

Dolly handed the note to Arthur. He asked if he should read it aloud. She nodded assent.

Fritzie, next morning, crossing the lake with flowers for Alice, was kneeling at her grave when Kimberly came up. She rose hastily but could not control herself and burst into tears. Kimberly took her hands as she came to him. "Dear Fritzie," he murmured, "*you* haven't forgotten."

"I loved you both, Robert."

They walked down the hill together. Fritzie asked questions and Kimberly met her difficulties one after another. "What great difference does it make, Fritzie, whether I work here or elsewhere? I want a year, possibly longer, of seclusion–and no one will bother me at the Islands. Meantime, in a year I shall be quite forgotten."

Charles Kimberly was waiting at The Towers for a conference. The brothers lunched together and spent the afternoon in the library. Dolly came over as they were parting. "Is it true, Robert," she asked piteously, "that you are going to Molokai?"

"Not for weeks yet, Dolly. Much remains to be arranged here."

"To the lepers?"

"Only for a year or two." He saw the suffering in her face and bent over her with affectionate humor. "I must go somewhere for a while, Dolly. You understand, don't you?"

She shook the tears from her long lashes. "You need not tell me. Robert, you will never come back."

He laughed tenderly. "My heart is divided, Dolly. Part of it is here with you who love me; part of it, you know, is with her. If I come back, I shall find you here. If I do not come back, I shall find her THERE."

In a distant ocean and amid the vastness of a solitude of waters the winter sun shines warm upon a windward cliff. From the face of this gigantic shape, rising half a mile into the air, springs a tapestry of living green, prodigal with blossoms and overhanging at intervals a field of flowers.

On the heights of the crumbling peak the wild goat browses in cool and leafy groves. In its grassy chimneys rabbits crouch with listening ears, and on

the sheer face of the precipice a squirrel halts upon a dizzy vine. Above its crest a seabird poises in a majesty of flight, and in the blue distance a ship sails into a cloudless sky. This is Molokai.

At the foot of the mountain the morning sun strikes upon a lowland, thrust like a tongue of fire into the cooling sea, and where the lava meets the wave, breakers beat restlessly.

On one shore of this lowland spit, and under the brow of the cliff, a handful of white cottages cluster. On the opposite shore lies a whitewashed hamlet brightened by tropical gardens and shaded with luxuriant trees; it is the leper port. Near the sea stands a chapel surmounted by a cross. Beyond it a larger and solitary cross marks a second village–the village of the leper dead.

An island steamer whistled one summer evening for the port, and a landing boat put out from the pier. It was the thirtieth of June. Three passengers made ready to disembark, two of them women, Sisters of St. Francis, who had offered themselves for the leper mission, and the third a man, a stranger, who followed them over the steamer's side and, rearranging their luggage, made a place for the two women in the stern of the weather-beaten craft.

It was the close of the day and the sun flowed in a glory of gold over the sea. On one edge of the far horizon a rain cloud drifted. In the east the moon was rising full and into a clear sky. A heavy swell lifted the boat from the steamer's side. The three passengers steadied themselves as they rose on its crest, and the brown oarsmen, catching the sweep of the sea, headed for the long line of foam that crawled upon the blackened rocks.

On the distant beach a black-robed figure outlined against the evening sky watched with straining eyes the sweep of the dripping oars and with arm uplifted seemed to wait with beating heart upon their stroke for him who was coming. Along the shore, cripples hastening from the village crowded the sandy paths toward the pier. In the west, the steamer was putting out again upon its course, and between the two the little boat, a speck upon the waves, made its way stoutly through the heaving sea.

THE END

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