

HER LAST APPEARANCE.

I.

THE weight of dullness oppressing the groups of passengers gathered on the deck of a great ocean steamer suddenly lifted. A whisper ran round that, for the first time on the voyage, Miss Vivienne was about to issue from her *cabine de luxe*. A file of deck-stewards appeared; the first bringing a reclining-chair; the second, rugs and cushions; the third, a low table, a bag, and a pile of books. Next came a correct-looking English maid, with foot-warmer, vinaigrette, and a beautiful little Skye terrier. Lastly, a tall, slender woman took all eyes: she wore a loose-fitting garment of sealskin; on her head was a sealskin cap, while over her face was a veil of brown tissue which crossed behind her neck and knotted under the chin.

Little comments were buzzed about as Miss Vivienne nestled into her chair. There was a dramatic effectiveness in the way she permitted herself to be propped with cushions and covered with rugs. One woman remarked that she wished she possessed the actress's secret of preserving her figure; another said it was her inborn natural stateliness which gave distinction to all she did; a third declared that almost any woman could show elegance and distinction in such a sealskin redingote, which must have cost at least five hundred dollars, while as for that rug of Russian sable and silver fox fur, conjecture lost itself in trying to fix a price; then still another murmured, "No, it is the business of these actresses to be diabolically effective."

She was their spectacle, and curiosity, observation, criticism, carried to almost any limit, were legitimate. Miss Vivienne, whether by chance or by intention, had established herself, not side by side with the other passengers, but at a suffi-

cient distance to create the illusion of the line of footlights. The lookers-on saw study, pose, even in the way she turned and faced the sea, as if enjoying the keen air, the fresh scent, the joyous dappled expanse where whitecaps were dancing over dazzling stretches of blue and green. Society, besides applauding and patronizing Miss Vivienne, had recognized her all her life, since she had forced it to respect her and accept her profession for her sake. Still, at this moment it was the impulse of no one among the group of women to cross that line of demarcation. The men were chiefly gathered in the smoking-room, discussing the probabilities of the day's run. One man, however, who had been leaning against the rail, now went slowly up to Miss Vivienne.

"Who is that?" the women questioned one another.

"His name is Dwight. I was curious about him and asked the purser. His name is not in the passenger-list."

Mr. Dwight continued to stand quietly by the recumbent figure, until the Skye terrier, peeping jealously from between the rugs, snapped and growled. At this sound Miss Vivienne turned, and looked at the middle-aged man, whose well-set, capable head was gray, whose eyes were gray, whose mustache and also his suit of tweed were gray, — at first with languid indifference; then, recognizing him, she started up and caught his hand between both of hers.

"What, *you*, Owen?" she murmured, with intense surprise.

"It is I," he said, smiling, — "most surely I."

"*You* coming back from Europe? I did not know that you had ever crossed the ocean in your life."

"I never did until a fortnight ago. I happened to see in the paper, on the

morning of September 20, that you were very ill at Geneva of Roman fever. I sailed that afternoon at three o'clock."

She uttered a slight exclamation; then after a moment's pause said, "Luckily it was not Roman fever. Do you mean that you went to Geneva to find me?"

"I reached Geneva the 29th. You had left for Clarens several days before."

"Yes, I reached Clarens the 24th. I was there just five days."

"When I got to Clarens I found that you were sailing from Bremen that very morning. I set off, and caught the steamer at Southampton."

She had lifted her veil. A clearly cut, fine, rather worn face with dark heavy-lidded eyes was disclosed.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "if I had had any idea that a friend was looking for me, was thinking of me! Of course there was my manager cabling message after message, but I knew he was chiefly anxious about the play he had set for the beginning of the season. If you had only written" —

"I ought to have sent a dispatch from New York that I was on the point of sailing; but," he laughed, "I did not have the presumption to feel sure you would be glad to see me. All I felt was that I must reach you, must know what was happening to you."

"I first felt feverish and ill on the way from Milan," Miss Vivienne now said, with evident relief in having a friend to confide in. "I was with the Cheney's, — not people to endure anybody who is sick or out of spirits. I had no idea that it was more than a bad headache, but I decided to stop in Geneva for two days, and then join them in Paris. I was to sail with them September 12th. The headache was only the beginning. I doubt if I was ever dangerously ill, but from the first, the doctor, the landlord, the servants, even my maid, seemed to have given me over, and to be ready to have me dead and buried without loss of time. If I had not had such a horror of dying

alone, I might have died out of pure good nature, in order to oblige them. As it was, presently there came a day when I made them carry me on board the steamboat, and the air of the lake gave me new life on the instant. By the time I reached Montreux I was better, and my forces soon regathered. But I had never calculated on dying before I was a very old woman, and the experience gave me a feeling of earthquake. Not even yet does anything seem solid."

"How are you now?"

"Only needing strength and spirits. This is the first time I have ventured out of my stateroom. The weather was dreadful, and besides I had such a sense of nothingness. Why did you not let me know you were on board?"

He shook his head, smiling.

"It must have been horribly inconvenient," she said under her breath.

"What?"

"Crossing in such haste."

"I had no choice. I wanted news of you."

She burst out again: "It is such a relief to see a familiar face. I experienced a great void." She met his vivid look, and turned away with a little gesture. "Madeline, my maid, is an excellent woman," she pursued, with a low laugh, "but I could read her every thought, and I knew that she was trying to decide whether to stay and claim my effects, or to run away and shirk all responsibility. I was never actually delirious, but I was sleepless, and the new part I had been studying ran in my head; I had the nightmarish feeling that I must get up and be dressed, for Mr. Benson insisted I should act that very night, although I told him I had not even learned the lines. All sorts of such terrors took hold of me. I have not yet recovered my balance. I dread the going back. I say to myself fifty times a day that I hate the stage and everything belonging to it."

He looked at her with a curious in-

tensity of glance. "The reality falls below your idea of it? The life does not satisfy you?"

"There is no reality; it is always like Sisyphus trying to roll up the stone, — what you have done to-day with all your strength has to be done over again to-morrow."

"Why go back to such a bondage?" he asked, with strong feeling in his face.

"I may say I want to give it up," she now confessed, laughing, "but I could n't. Ask a drunkard" —

She broke off. The steward, making his rounds with cups of bouillon, offered one to Miss Vivienne. Her maid approached, and Owen Dwight, remarking that he feared he had tired her, raised his cap and was withdrawing, when she cried eagerly, "You will keep in sight, cousin Owen?"

He nodded.

For the remainder of the voyage Miss Vivienne was absolutely dependent upon Dwight. He waited for her at her stateroom door; she leaned upon his arm as she paced the deck. She discoursed to him, and to him alone, in spite of the palpable envy of the men who would have been glad to take his place. There was a secret intoxication for Dwight in the mere situation. Kate (for she was his cousin by three removes, and her name was Katharine Vivienne Marey) had been ill; she had become disenchanted with the stage, and for once in his life he had not missed his opportunity. He told her about himself. His business had prospered. He owned a place in the country, and spent but a few hours each day at his office in town. He was fond of gardening, had an orchid-house, and prided himself on his chrysanthemums. He confessed to some extravagance in pictures, but his joy was in his library. He could not help feeling that such a rounded and complete existence as he described must be acceptable to every instinct of a woman who realized her loneliness, who dreaded the renewed

struggle of her profession, and confessed that even its victories brought disillusion and disappointment.

But on the last day of the voyage came a change. Miss Vivienne did not leave her stateroom until towards evening, and when she met him she was in a new mood, eager and absorbed. She had been hard at work, she said; and how delightful it was, after this listless, idealess existence, to set to work!

"Work is the only tonic," she declared. "The springs of activity it gives the mind are necessary to the body as well. The moment I actually set to work, I feel braced; I am now just my usual self."

Her words stabbed him with the sharpest irony. "Do you mean that you have been studying your new part?"

"Yes, and I am ready to say I never liked any part so well. It is so fresh, so full of life. At first it eluded me. I dreaded lest I had altogether lost the old *élan*; I could not throw myself into it. The whole play is intensely modern; it touches everything, it invades everything; not a chord of human nature escapes. The modern school of acting refuses to recognize anything save the making a vivid and personal representation; and to be individual and vivid you must be charming, or the result is caricature. I am always dreading lest I should lose my flexibility, my pliancy, — lest I should grow old. There is a great deal one can do without much work which has its own charm, grace, and logic; but that juvenile audacity expends itself; and when it is expended, one has, to take its place, experience, hard study, experiment, with endless touchings and retouchings. And all this conscientious work is tedious; it is all thrown away unless one is bewitching. Now, to-day I have for the first time approached my conception of the part of Corisande." She laughed and looked into his face. "You see, Owen, I do not mind confessing to you that I have no genius."

"That means you have a great deal of talent."

"But talent does sometimes seem such a negative thing. Genius goes straight to the mark. Genius pierces right through theatricality and convention, — grasps the core of the matter; says and does what is most absolutely familiar, even trite, in a way which makes you feel it was never done before. There is a young actor in our company" —

"Paul Devine?" he asked quickly.

"You have seen him, then?"

"Seen him? Of course I have seen him. Whoever sees you sees him. He's always your lover or your husband. I hate the fellow."

She laughed mischievously. "Confess that he has genius."

"Genius? Not a bit, except that he knows how to make love without appearing like a fool. I grant that he is natural and unaffected, — does not pose, — which is a relief." Then, with a note of indignation in his voice, he added, "I have heard that the women call him handsome."

She laughed again, but went on with eagerness: "I made him all he is. Cavendish, who used to take those parts, had grown unbearable. We were no longer on speaking terms. One day at rehearsal I stopped short and said to the manager, 'That may be Mr. Cavendish's notion of a lover, but to me it suggests a tiger.' He had to go. Benson gave him a company and sent him on the road. It was then that I brought Paul forward. There was a certain integrity about his acting; he had taken the most ordinary parts without any pretension, but I liked the way he looked, stood, and spoke. His father and mother had been on the stage; they had tried to keep him away from it, but he came back from pure love of the art. And heredity counts for a great deal. The art of the great actors is lost, but it is something to have even the tradition of it. A modern actor who has received in childhood the least hint of their method —

the clear-cut speech, the sharp incisive emphasis, the search after strong effects — never slurs over passages as the new slipshod people do. The secret of the old acting — of all good acting — is to give color, character, human feeling, to the most indifferent passage. Nowadays, being unable to express emotion, actors and actresses rely on slow music, electric lights, the most obvious and trivial effects. I taught Paul first how to feel, then to express his feeling with insight into real emotion. He is one of the most poignantly realistic actors at times. There are at least two scenes in the new play where we shall be great." She said this with the quiet assurance of one who has studied one's self, for whom flattery does not exist. "You have seen me sometimes?" she now asked.

"I always buy a ticket for your first night in any part," Dwight answered.

"One is not quite at home, not quite at one's best, on a first night. One is thinking too much of the house, — one listens longing for the echo. I never see the audience until I have played a part at least half a dozen times. I wonder, however, that I never saw *you*?" A slight emphasis dwelt on the pronoun, and she looked at him with a smile that flattered. "I want you to see me in my new part," she went on. "I am rather a charming woman in it. It oppressed me for a time, but little by little I assimilated it, and now I have mastered it. I hope to make it superb."

He uttered an exclamation.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I am not glad to hear that you like your part. I should prefer to have you go back to the mood you were in that first day you came on deck. It was the greatest pleasure I have had for years to hear you say that you hated the stage, that you wished you need not go back to it."

"What do you want me to do?" she inquired, with some archness.

"Marry me, and come and live in the country."

She shook her head. "Go and live in the country," she repeated. "I always associate the phrase with the story that a dog bit the Duke of Buckingham, who anathematized the animal by bidding him go and live in the country."

"People like Buckingham" —

"Yes, people like Buckingham and like me do not long for the country. They need to be carried along by the full current of life in order to feel themselves alive."

"But, Kate, you have had your day, and a long, brilliant day it has been. It cannot last forever."

"It is still at its zenith," she declared.

"Call this the zenith, but from the moment it reaches the zenith it must decline."

"The moment the least hint reaches me that my powers are declining," retorted Miss Vivienne with spirit, "I will give up my place. 'Superfluous lags the veteran on the stage' shall never be said of me. The most sensitive barometer of any change in the weather is in the tone of the manager, and you should have seen Benson's distracted messages. Everything is hanging on my return. Paul Devine's part waits to be created. If I had not known that I was needed to set everything going, I should have stayed ten days longer in Switzerland. But they are all at my mercy."

"I have not a particle of doubt," observed Dwight, "that some pretty actress is longing to step into your shoes, and is not too well pleased that you have recovered so speedily."

She turned upon him; then saw the quizzical smile on his face, and contented herself with saying, "How furious I should be with you for making that speech, if I did n't like you so much!"

"If you like me, listen to me, Kate. Abdicate at this moment, when your powers are most felt and your presence will be most missed. You asked if I had gone to see you act. I told you I had

seen you in every part you had played. What I did not tell you was that always there mingled with my admiration a feeling of its being a profanation that you were on the stage at all. But you longed for the life, and I have rejoiced that you have had the very flower of it. Still, I have said to myself that finally the time must come; that you could not be content to grow old in that career; that you would long for a private life, for some one to turn to, some one to love, — at least somebody who loves you; and the only man who loves a woman of forty is the one who has loved her in her youth."

A cry escaped her. "Horrible!" she exclaimed, with a shudder. "People don't say such things."

"I'm not people. I'm Owen. I'm the man who has worshiped you all your life, — who has gone on all these years making a home fit for you."

"Nevertheless," she murmured, with a little smile at the corners of her lips, "this man who has loved me all his life married."

"Yes, I married. Circumstances made it a duty; and had she lived, had the child lived, even," — he drew in a deep breath, — "I — I should n't perhaps have felt free to rush across the ocean after you. But both are dead, fifteen — sixteen years ago. I am a wifeless, childless, lonely man except for you. I have no other duty anywhere, I have no other inclination anywhere. I am under the bondage of a feeling that has never set me free, — that never will set me free. Kate, old, gray, dull, commonplace as I am, if you will marry me, I will make you a happy woman."

He had spoken well. She was grateful to him, — indeed, he had moved her; for this old unalterable love of his, dating back to her girlhood, had meanings for her beyond the power of any present speech. She could recall how, when as a willful girl, without father or mother, brother or sister, she had declared her

intention of going on the stage, he had given her up with an agony of renunciation, saying that he felt as if it were a crime to let her go; that it was like watching a little boat pushing out into deep seas where it must founder. She realized now how all these years he had watched her course. She had a vision, too, of the sort of fate which awaited her if she became his wife, — a happy woman — yes — perhaps. . . . Then she recalled the sweet insistence of another man's eyes and smile, the charm of his presence, his grateful, ardent words. A quick leap of the heart towards emotion, excitement, success, sent her thoughts traveling back to her profession.

"So long as I was ill," she said, "any temptation you could offer would have been powerful. But I am absolutely wedded to the stage. I have always said nothing could induce me to marry and give up my career. If I were to marry" — She broke off; then added, without finishing her sentence, "What you said just now about my age" —

"I was only quoting. I know that you are years and years younger than I am."

"I was going to say that it is only on the stage that age makes no difference to a woman. It does not matter whether I am forty so long as I look twenty."

"Is there then no magic in the idea of youth?"

"Those elegant young creatures who seem to have been transferred from a fashion-plate cannot act," said Miss Vivienne with disdain. "They have studied how to keep their trains in correct sweep; they can faint to admiration, and can coil their bodies like peacocks, so that you can behold the full spread of the tail while the face is turned toward you. But they move nobody; they are limited by their lack of feeling, by the commonness of mind that does not permit them to efface their vanity, and they remain cold, artificial, ill accepted. You remember the French saying, 'If youth

knew, if old age could.' Now I flatter myself that I am at the age when I know, and yet have not lost my efficacy."

He stood looking at her, wondering at her.

"Perhaps ten years hence!" he cried abruptly out of his inner thought; then said, with a different note in his voice, "Of course I ought not to have spoken; but that first day when you seemed so ill, when you confessed yourself so tired" —

"It was pity, then?" she interrupted, smiling.

"Call it pity, if you like. Certainly I had but one longing, and that was to offer you all I possessed. I have offered it. Possibly ten years hence you may be glad to accept me as a refuge."

She had her hand inside his arm, and she pressed it slightly. "Owen," she murmured, "I'm horribly ungrateful. You are too good to be taken as a refuge, even as a foretaste of divine rest."

"I don't care so much how you take me. I only want you to take me," said Dwight.

II.

Miss Vivienne slept in her own luxurious little suite at the Vandyck on the following night. On Monday morning, she awoke with a sense of comfort in her familiar surroundings; in the feeling that work, successful work to the full measure of her strength, awaited her. She had said once to Owen Dwight that the worst of the stage was that publicity was the very breath of its nostrils, that everything was an advertisement, and that she hated the necessity of being advertised which her profession imposed. To-day, nevertheless, she was flushed with a sense of victory, for the ovation of yesterday had made it the most triumphant experience of her life, all the more that it had the charm of the unexpected. Mr. Benson and Paul Devine had come down in a steamer to meet her in the bay,

with a party of friends. She had found her rooms full of flowers ; on a basket of exquisite roses was Paul's card with the lines, —

"For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,
And, thou away, the very birds are mute."

Then, at eight o'clock, Mr. Benson had given her a dinner, an elegant, sumptuous affair, with many artistic and literary guests, herself and Paul Devine the only actors.

While she ate her breakfast she was glancing at the morning papers, each of which devoted at least a column to an account of her reception. One reporter described her sitting between her manager and her favorite *jeune premier*, Paul Devine, wearing a gown of steel-gray cloth, the perfect fit of which was revealed as she carelessly threw back a superb Russian mantle lined with fox and edged with sable. He went on to speak of the symmetrical impression the actress always produced ; her quiet, non-chalant bearing, her dress, her whole movement and tone pervaded by that individual distinction which gave her charm and finesse as a woman. She had renewed her youth, he declared ; no sign of age was apparent on that ever beautiful face.

Another recounted the dialogue he had enjoyed with the leading lady of the New Century Theatre. The actress had kindled into animation at the mention of the new play, *Corisande*, observing that she had never liked any part so well as the title rôle. Some parts had to be carried through by sheer force of will ; this seized, stimulated, lent wings to the artist.

A third said there had been rumors that Miss Vivienne was out of health, and was about to relinquish the stage, and let her mantle fall on some younger member of the profession. Miss Vivienne had, however, put to flight such reports, declaring that never had she been in better health or more eager for the season to begin.

One writer eked out his plain statement of facts by a résumé of Miss Vivienne's long-established successes, the result of a method rounded to a perfect style ; a genius which owed nothing to its spontaneity, everything to study, to a delight in the grasp of technical details. Hers was no restless spirit on the lookout for novelties ; she pushed nothing to extremes, plucked no feathers from birds whose wings could essay higher flights than her own, but rested satisfied with her own traditions, and in the intense premeditation of her art was always to be commended and admired.

Miss Vivienne more than once knitted her brows while reading this.

"That is Louis Dupont," she said to herself. "He likes what he calls spontaneity and freedom ; that is, he likes an actress who, whatever she does, seems always longing to dance the cancan."

Another reporter had asked the actress if the coming play demanded handsome gowns ; and she had told him she had six, each a masterpiece, a creation of the best men-milliners in Paris. It needed but this statement, which was not even exaggeration, but pure fiction, to show the impressionistic tricks of the reporter's trade. It was nevertheless true that six new gowns were at this moment being ranged round the room by the painstaking Madeline, who declared that the customs people had creased them. It had just occurred to Miss Vivienne that it was perhaps her maid who had thus enlightened the paragraphist, and she was turning to put the question, when the woman, answering a knock at the door of the apartment, returned with a card on a salver. Miss Vivienne, bending to read the name, exclaimed in surprise, "Mr. Benson ?"

"No, ma'am, a young lady."

Looking again, Miss Vivienne saw penciled above the manager's name, "Introducing Miss Lucy Angell."

"Who is Miss Lucy Angell ?" she said to herself ; then asked aloud, "A

young lady, you say? What sort of a young lady?"

"Quite the lady, ma'am."

Miss Vivienne rose. "Have them take these things away," she said, making a gesture towards the breakfast service. "Then tell the young lady I am but just off the steamer, that I am very busy, and that if she does not object to coming to me here" —

She sat down at her desk, began to open a pile of letters and notes, and became absorbed in their contents. Presently permitting herself to be aware that some one had entered the room, she turned. A girl with a slight, elegant figure, dressed in dark serge, with a cravat of pale blue knotted at the throat under a turn-down collar, stood at a little distance looking wistfully at her. The face was charming; the hair was brown, the complexion fair and pure as a child's; only to meet the eyes, which were of some dark indefinable tint, and to notice the expression of the lips, was to feel the eloquence of a moving, unusual sort of beauty. Conjectures shot through Miss Vivienne's mind. Why had her manager sent this girl to her?

"You will forgive me for receiving you here? I am still giddy from my voyage." She took up the card again. "Can I do anything for you, Miss Angell?"

"You don't seem to remember me," the girl said tremulously.

Miss Vivienne gazed at the soft child's face, — a face with a curious courage and pride in its steadfast look.

"Have I ever met you before?" she inquired.

Miss Angell laughed slightly. "I've been your understudy for three years, Miss Vivienne," she answered.

"Probably, then, you know me better than I know you, Miss Angell," Miss Vivienne observed, with the slightest possible change of tone. "Pray sit down. Take that seat."

Miss Angell advanced a step, and put

her hand on the back of the chair indicated. Perhaps she preferred to stand. She burst out impulsively: "I know every change in your face; I know every inflection in your voice, your every gesture and movement. I have moulded myself upon you, Miss Vivienne. People who have heard me go through your parts say that if they had closed their eyes they would have supposed it could be no one but yourself."

"Imitation is the sincerest flattery, they say," Miss Vivienne replied blandly. "Still, it seems a pity not to be more original."

"Oh, I'm original, I'm always original, — that's my strong point," Miss Angell insisted. "That's what makes me succeed."

"Ah, you succeed." Miss Vivienne, as she spoke, looked at the girl with a slight narrowing of the eyelids. "As until lately I was never ill, and have never lost a day of my engagement, I feared I had been so disobliging as to give you no chance to try your powers."

"I'm what they call 'Corisande up to date,'" explained Miss Angell. "I've been rehearsing the part for a month."

Miss Vivienne could not have told why the effect of this announcement was a sudden sense of eclipse. Was it because envy, jealousy, plucked at her heart with the reminder that Paul Devine had been acting up to this girl's Corisande, looking into these violet eyes, watching the play of expression on these red dewy lips? But what folly! Until he has entire freedom in a new part, an actor is all the time working like a slave at it; and, under the eye of a martinet like Benson, — who while early rehearsals were in progress was absolutely merciless, sitting down in the middle of the stage, ready to pounce upon the unhappy culprit who diverged a hair's breadth from the stringent rules, to breathe forth fire, almost slaughter, at the least sign of pre-occupation, — there could be no opportunity for a whisper, hardly for a glance.

No; Miss Vivienne reviled herself for the suggestion. Had not Paul told her yesterday that he was still as tired as a dog because the taskmaster, after four hours' rehearsal on Saturday, when they were all dropping with fatigue and starvation, had insisted on going through the last two acts again?

"Mr. Benson says he has hopes of the play," said Miss Vivienne, after this momentary reflection. "My absence has given you a very nice chance."

"I have been waiting for three years for something to happen," Miss Angell answered, with a sigh. "Twice I went traveling with the other company, but nothing worth having turned up. You see, Miss Vivienne, the stage is so crowded with leading ladies, there is very little demand for a girl with nothing but" — She broke off without finishing her sentence.

"Her face?" Miss Vivienne suggested. "My face is my fortune, sir, she said!"

"Oh, I'm no beauty," said Miss Angell, smiling and dimpling, "and Mr. Benson says I don't make up worth a button. I never in my life had a dress fit to wear on the stage. But I do believe I can act."

Again that premonitory shiver passed through Miss Vivienne. The moment she spoke with feeling the girl was electrical.

"Why, the other day," Miss Angell resumed after an instant's pause, "when I was saying the lines at the beginning of the third act, the company all stopped and applauded." She looked at Miss Vivienne a moment in silence, and although something in the actress's face froze the question, she faltered humbly, "Will you let me recite them to you?"

"I cannot spare the time," replied Miss Vivienne quietly. "More than that, I cannot afford to sacrifice my own individual study of the part. I have promised to be at the rehearsal to-morrow. Then, if you are present, you can hear me in it."

Miss Angell had listened, the smile

going off her lips, the expression changing in her eyes. Now she drew a long breath, as if summoning up her resolution.

"Can't you guess what I came to ask you to do for me?" she asked softly.

"No."

"I came to ask if, considering that you are not strong, you would not let me act *Corisande* for a week, — for two nights, — even for one night?"

"Act before the public?"

"Before the public."

"Your name on the bills?"

"My name on the bills."

Miss Vivienne was a mature woman, also an accomplished actress, but the torment of this moment tried her acutely. Her face flushed, her brain whirled. Her hands, as they lay clasped in her lap, turned cold and clammy.

"I know," faltered Miss Angell, with a sound in her voice not unlike a sob, "I know it's horrible presumption, but it's my one chance. It will make a difference with my whole life. If you had not got well" —

"You mean that if I had died, you would have taken my place?"

But irony and innuendo were quite thrown away on the girl, whose whole face, her dark eyes and their darker lashes, her fitful color, the dimples about the sad little mouth that was made for joy, all showed that she was terribly in earnest.

"I only meant if you had not been able to come back before the opening of the season," she went on. "You see, I feel the part so much — if you would only be willing to wait a little — to let me have this one chance."

Miss Vivienne laughed. "What becomes of me while you are enjoying your triumph?"

Miss Angell again drew a deep breath. "You have had a thousand triumphs," she rejoined. "You do not need this. You have nothing to look forward to. All the prizes of the profession were

yours years and years ago. You are rich, you are famous; while I—I am only twenty-one, and I am so poor."

"I am very sorry for you," Miss Vivienne now said kindly. "I will help you in some way. But in this you seem not to know what you are asking. You are like a child reaching out for the moon."

"I told you I knew I was presumptuous," the girl proceeded, "but it's my whole life that weighs in the scale. I know that I am selfish, but just put yourself in my place. I am sure that I have talent. I am sure that I can act. Just think, with this sense of power pent up, with this longing to put it into speech and action,—think, I say, how hard it is to be put by, passed over. Acting is different from the other arts. It cannot exist without opportunity. One may make a statue, one may paint a picture, one may write a book, to show what is in one. But to act"—She broke off; then asked abruptly, "Don't you see what you are depriving me of?"

Miss Vivienne could not understand why she was so wrought upon by the girl's indignant look and speech that she could not seem to keep her hold of her place, but felt herself slipping down the incline. She tried her wits at the riddle.

"Did Mr. Benson send you to me?" she inquired.

"He knew that I was coming."

"And for what?"

"Yes."

"Did he give his sanction to your request that I should step aside in your behalf?"

"No: he only laughed; he told me he should like to know what you would say to me."

"You see what he thought of it."

"But he has praised me to the skies."

"How praised you?"

"He says I light up the play,—that I have youth on my side. Then once he burst out, 'Ah, Miss Angell, *you* dare to be spontaneous!'"

"He said that!" cried Miss Vivienne as if pierced.

"Then again he exclaimed, 'We shall begin the season with a thunderclap!'"

"Ah," said Miss Vivienne with disdain, "that is a phrase of Mr. Benson's. He used it twice over to me yesterday. One has one's own vocabulary." She was silent for a moment, averting her glance from the girl, whose eyes were full of anguished expectancy, then asked in a studiously quiet manner, "How about Paul Devine? Did he advise you to come?"

"No: he was angry with me for proposing it. He declared the thing was absurd, quite out of the question."

An exclamation burst from Miss Vivienne irresistibly. Her face lighted up as if what she had just heard had been what she had waited for, longed for.

The girl had flushed deeply as she spoke. Her eyes filled. "But he believes in me!" she cried. "He says that"—She broke off, her lips quivering.

"He says what?"

"That—he—should—like—to—act—Romeo—to—my—Juliet."

Miss Vivienne smiled. She had risen. Her whole manner had changed from luke-warm to blood-warm kindness. "My dear little girl," she said gently, "I am sorry to clip your glorious impulse. Of course you and Paul Devine could act Romeo and Juliet very prettily. You have youth on your side, and youth is a power in itself. But youth is not everything. You seem to consider that the advantages I have gained are something to keep or to hand over, as the case may be. I doubt if you begin to know what study and hard work are. Your wishes color everything for you. And if I had died, it seems as if you might have slipped easily into the rôle of Corisande." She made a little gesture. "As it is, I recovered. I expect to make a great success of Corisande."

It was clear that Miss Angell had hoped everything, and now saw that she had

lost everything. There was no stoicism in her demeanor, — nothing but visible acute disappointment.

"I know," she said, speaking only by a great effort, "that it is like asking a queen to come down from her throne."

"Do queens ever come down from their thrones until they are obliged to come?"

The girl looked at the older woman as if she would have liked to exchange irony for irony.

"But your day may come," Miss Vivienne continued kindly.

"I want it now. Unless it comes now I shall miss all that I care about having."

"That is what it is to be young," Miss Vivienne said lightly. "You will find out a little later that it is better to have missed what seems at twenty - one the most splendid thing in life." Then, for a feminine diversion, she pointed to the toilettes laid out on the lounge and chairs. "Have you any curiosity to look at the gowns I am to wear in the play?" she asked.

"I saw them when I first came in. I have seen them all the time we have been talking, and what they have made me feel is that I should like to play Corisande in this old serge and make a success of it. I am certain that I could."

"I have played often enough in gowns I have made myself," Miss Vivienne retorted; "and fearfully and wonderfully made they were, too. But, unluckily, nowadays the public are educated up to a certain standard of taste, and like perfection, harmony, and symmetry."

In spite of her disavowal, curiosity, jealousy, or the mere feminine instinct for chiffons had made Miss Angell walk a few steps nearer the dresses, and now, lifting one, she uttered an exclamation of delight.

"Should you like to try it on?" Miss Vivienne asked indulgently.

"Not unless you will let me recite the first scene in the third act."

"Do you think, my dear, you are quite generous?" Miss Vivienne asked.

Miss Angell looked first blank, then puzzled, then stricken. But presently, as if she had argued the case anew in her own mind, she burst out, "I have no right to ask anything; only, you see, Miss Vivienne, I have nothing, and you—you have everything. I simply hold out my hand to you like a beggar. It does seem to me that you might give me just this one little chance. It ought to touch you as a woman. You were young once."

"I am a woman. I was young once, — I was young once, and now I suppose I am old," Miss Vivienne said, with a slight bitterness of tone; "but I have always had a scruple against insisting on receiving what I had not won by my own powers. I cannot afford to diminish my well-earned privileges."

"You could increase them if you did me this favor."

"How?"

"You would make me love you, — love you forever and forever."

"Ah!"

III.

Five minutes later Miss Vivienne was still standing staring straight before her, although the door had closed on her visitor. The interview had ended abruptly, for at her skeptical, half-ironical "Ah!" the girl had faltered, in breathless incoherence, "They all wish it — they all hoped for it. You are cruel — cruel — cruel!" then had rushed away. Left in possession of the field, Miss Vivienne still felt her rival like a living presence; still seemed to hear her say, "You were young once," "I hold out my hand to you like a beggar," "This is my one chance," "You are cruel — cruel — cruel!"

She suffered in remembering that such speeches had been hurled at her. They disturbed her sense of fairness. They were not only unjust, they were absurd. Now that it was too late she could think

of a hundred cogent things to have answered. She ought, in a vein of good-natured sarcasm, to have remonstrated ; to have pointed out to the girl, with a touch of humor, that she could hardly have supposed *this*, was it possible she had forgotten *that* ? to have summoned logic and reason, and demanded some fair play in their behalf. Miss Vivienne was far from satisfied with the part she had played in the interview. It was incredible how little she had maintained her dignity, how easily she had been depressed by the girl's infatuated belief in her own talent. It seemed as if some hidden efficacy in the appeal had disarmed her ordinary good judgment.

"But one does not give up what is one's own !" she now exclaimed in passionate self-justification. "Except for her own statement, I do not even know that the girl can act."

The manager had said nothing of the "Corisande up to date." Instead, he was jubilant over his chief actress's return. "We shall begin the season with a thunderclap !" he had exclaimed ; he had confided to her his belief that Corisande would be the most successful play he had ever put on the stage.

Paul Devine had alluded to the play but once, and then only to explain his fatigue and dullness by the prolonged rehearsal. His manner, always quiet and self-contained, had been touched with more than usual delicacy and tenderness when they had met the day before. The moment he had approached her, Owen Dwight, with his grimmest smile, had yielded up his place beside Miss Vivienne to the newcomer, and had gone to collect her luggage. She and Paul had said little that was personal or direct. She had talked chiefly, and he had listened, with sympathizing comment, to her accounts of her illness, the bad weather in the early part of the voyage, the sulks and despair of Toby, the terrier, her own joy in being at home again.

Of course one inward thought had ab-

sorbed her as it must have absorbed him. She had avoided his direct glance, for his eyes had looked the question he had had no chance to utter aloud. When, four months before, she and the young actor had parted, she had promised to tell him, when they met again, whether she would consent to become his wife. They had acted together for the season. He owed everything to her, although his own abilities, his good looks, his energy, his tenacity of purpose, had helped him. It was easily within her power to help him further yet in his profession ; and when, with passionate gratitude, he had told her he wished to marry her, she could justify the quick leap of her heart towards this belated bloom of passion by the thought that he needed her money, her experience ; that without her he would be condemned to a long, arduous struggle, with no sure rewards. However, she had not yielded at once. She had said to herself she must impose some test. She had, indeed, held him at arm's length, derided him, told him that she was years too old for him. He said he wanted her to be his inspiration, his enthroned queen ; that she could never grow old, never become less than adorable. She had listened readily enough. She had ascribed to herself something above and beyond mere beauty, and it had always been her own belief that she was not one of the women whose charm is a mere morning-glory freshness.

Now, with the clear vision in her mind of that absolutely fresh thing of the dawn which had just left her, — that girl with her translucent skin, dewy lips, eyes like a gazelle's, a whole aspect made up, as it were, of fire and dew, — Miss Vivienne moved to the mirror and looked at the image of the woman who had repulsed her.

She was startled to find herself old, gray, furrowed. She had let her vexation and annoyance show themselves only too palpably. Her well-chiseled features, her flexible lips, her fine clear eyes, the

way her hair grew off her forehead and temples, — these points, which she had considered the unalterable part of her beauty, could not redeem her. Her glance was cold, her lips were angry, her whole face was haggard. With the instinct of an actress, she set a smile going on her lips and lighted up the fire in her eyes. There was again the familiar reflection full of charm and finesse, but she had had a bad moment. With a sharp pang she realized that she had lost her youth.

But fact is always depressing to a woman after she is twenty-five. She must correct it by the persistence of an ideal which dowers her with the lost radiance of her early youth. Thus, after pulling herself together, as it were, Miss Vivienne regained her usual attitude of mind. What is success in life but the understanding how to win against odds? One must struggle in order to conquer. That human being who permits himself to be supplanted deserves to be supplanted. What she experienced at this moment was indignation, contempt, a wish to crush whatever impeded her free action. Reason and logic showed her that she dominated the situation. Why, then, irrationally, did she demand more than reason and logic? Why did the solid earth seem to shake under her feet? Why should she so long to be reassured, reinstated? Why was it that only one person in the world could reassure and reinstate her?

She did not try to analyze or answer this question. Instead, she darted to her desk, wrote a few words, tore the leaf from a tablet, inclosed it in an envelope, directed it to Paul Devine, New Century Theatre, rang the bell, and gave orders that the note should be sent by special messenger and the answer brought back; for it was not worth while to try to live at the mercy of these doubts, suspicions, apprehensions. The sting which had touched her at a single point multiplied into a thousand, and each dart was dipped

in venom. Who was it the girl had meant when she said "they all wished" her, the Corisande up to date, to have the part? Of course it was not Paul; yet she must know, and at once. Everything precious hung on Paul's caring for no woman but herself; she must be loved by Paul absolutely. If he had looked at this girl; if, feature by feature, smile by smile, glance by glance, he had weighed her against the older woman, and found the balance in her favor —

What then? Until this instant she had hardly known how she had learned to look to Paul for all the charm, the flavor, the compensation of her life. Until he had come into the company she had gone on acting just as she had gone on eating and sleeping. Almost without knowing it, she had grown very tired of the stage; its triumphs had been necessary, but she realized their emptiness. She knew that the world behind the scenes bristled with strife, competitions, bitterness, but she had walked along her course blind to them. She did not like the members of her profession in general. She had little of the *laissez-aller*, the Bohemian point of view, the easy give and take, which insure popularity. She had contented herself with work, which had been in danger of becoming mere conscientious touching and retouching, polishing and repolishing. Then Paul had begun to act with her. He had brought back the passion, the illusion, of her art. Why did she now look forward so ardently to the part of Corisande? Was it not simply and wholly because he was the man who loved Corisande, and whom Corisande at last loved?

While she was walking to and fro, chafing restlessly under these thoughts, she heard a voice in the next room, and, believing that Paul had come, she opened the door and darted forward to meet him; then perceived that it was not he, but Owen Dwight.

"Oh, it is you!" she exclaimed, stopping short.

"Were you expecting some one else?"

"Not quite yet. It is a relief to see you. I am so glad you came."

But he had only dropped in for a moment, he said, to tell her that the custom-house people were at last through with the box they had detained. All was right, all was arranged, and he had brought the key. Then observing the signs of spent emotion on her face, he added, "I expected to find you radiant."

"Radiant? Radiant about what?"

"When I read the morning papers, I said to myself, 'Well, Owen Dwight, this is the goddess you were inviting to sit opposite you at table the rest of your life, to pour out your coffee at breakfast and watch your slumbers before the fire in the evening.' I called myself a fool."

"One calls one's self such names sometimes, even if one does not quite believe in the truth of them. Yet there are disillusiones the memory of which stings eternally."

"Kate, what has happened?"

"A mere trifle, yet it has spoiled my peace of mind."

"After the tribute you received yesterday, after such a perfect ovation, certainly no trifle ought to disturb you. However, I suppose what seems a triumphant success to us insignificant beings, whose comings and goings make no difference to anybody but ourselves, is mere everyday experience to you."

"Possibly you read what the reporter in the Prism said, — that my genius owed nothing to spontaneity, that it showed too much premeditation."

"Surely such nonsense could n't wreck your peace of mind. He only meant that you did good work, had a style of your own, respected your art, and did not juggle and experiment with it."

"It is not Louis Dupont's criticism that upset me, but something quite different." Her whole face showed that she was deeply in earnest.

"Tell me, Kate." He laid his hand on hers. She felt the cordiality of his

look, the strength of his sustaining clasp.

"I want to know what has happened."

"Just fancy! A girl who calls herself Miss Angell — the girl who says she is my understudy, who has been reading my part while the company have been rehearsing *Corisande* — came here!"

"Well, what did she want?"

"Wanted me to give up the part to her!"

"Give up the part for good and all?"

"For a night, she said, — two nights, — a whole week!"

"What was her justification for such an extraordinary request?"

"She declared that the happiness of her whole future depended on her having this chance."

"The happiness of her whole future? What sort of a person is she?"

"Charming, young, a light graceful figure, a rose-leaf skin, eyes like — but I have not the words at hand to describe her. I assure you, her beauty made the whole thing superb. Her challenge left me breathless. 'The part of *Corisande* or your life,' she seemed to say."

"What did you tell her?"

"If I did not surrender on the instant, it was not that I did not feel myself dwindle to the vanishing-point. 'You are old, I am young,' she said, with a little more circumlocution, and I felt actually apologetic for spoiling her sunshine."

"The girl must be a presumptuous fool," Dwight said, his whole manner showing sympathy and concern. "Surely she had no backing?"

"Mr. Benson had lent her his card to introduce her. But she expressly said he laughed at her for coming. That is his way. He would tell me cynically, if I asked him what he meant, that he was sure her audacity would amuse me, — that I might get a hint from the situation."

"She has been rehearsing your part?"

"She says that the whole company stopped and applauded her. Benson told her she had youth on her side."

"The insolence of youth, the insolence of life!"

"She had the grace to say that she knew it was like asking a queen to come down from her throne."

"Exactly. What did the queen say?"

"What do you suppose?" Miss Vivienne looked into Dwight's face, her own full of pride and determination. "What should you have wished me to say?"

"Of course my wish is that you should give up the whole thing," he responded in a perfectly matter-of-fact manner. "But what she asked was absurd."

"It was more than absurd; it was incredible, impossible! If I were to give up for a night, I should give up for all time. Humpty Dumpty could not have a greater fall."

Dwight not only saw that she suffered, but he suffered with her and for her. At the same time he saw beyond the present moment, and he realized that neither his sympathy nor her resolution could avert a result which was working itself out irresistibly. He was not a man to dogmatize on any subject, nor was it possible for him to insist on his own wishes, his own wants. But even while, with more and more soreness of feeling, she went on recalling the various aspects of her grievance, discussing it anew from every point of view, he could feel that she was every moment coming nearer and nearer to him, re-establishing the old intimacy, the old habit of absolute frankness.

"The sting of it lies in the fact that she *is* younger, that she is more beautiful," she said, always returning by a different argument to the same climax.

"There is always a younger, there is always a fairer," Dwight said. "You are young for me, Kate; you will always be young for me. You are beautiful for me; you will always be beautiful for me." He had no time to say more. The words were hardly uttered when another man entered the room, — the man who had displaced him yesterday; a far

younger man, slim, tall, rather delicate of aspect, but with deep-set blue eyes of peculiar brilliancy, and all his features, his whole bearing, showing character and capacity.

He went straight to Miss Vivienne. "You sent for me," he said.

"Yes." The look she bent on the newcomer was at once intimate, inquisitive, commanding. Dwight saw that this was no idle visit, and made haste to get away.

Left alone with Paul, Miss Vivienne stood passive. He studied her face. It seemed to accuse him.

"I know what it is!" he burst out, perhaps taking refuge in irritability from some conflict of feeling. "But I told her not to come."

"Are you alluding to Miss Lucy Angell?"

"Yes. I see from your face that, since yesterday, something has displeased you. I know of nothing else."

She did not speak, only continued to look at him. He advanced a step.

"Tell me what is troubling you, Kate," he said caressingly.

"Troubling me?" She evaded the hand reached out to take hers. She sat down in an armchair, and motioned that he should take the one opposite. "I simply wish to be sure where I stand. You know how it is with Benson, — he never really answers a question. I feel sure that you will be direct and candid. You evidently know that a very pretty young girl, calling herself Miss Angell, came here before I had finished my breakfast. She informed me that she had been rehearsing *Corisande*, that my part suited her, and that she wished me to give it up to her for a week, or at least for a night or two."

It was clear that as she spoke he followed her account with some anxiety. When she paused, he kept his eyes fixed on her as if expecting to hear more. Seeing that he waited, she continued, "I wanted to ask if she plays my part well?"

At this question his lips showed a slight quivering. He answered, however, in a quiet, even tone. "She has a good deal of talent. She has wonderful naturalness; whatever she says or does seems to go straight to the mark. Of course she has certain little awkwardnesses."

"With such a face and figure, she could not do anything very awkward. Beauty covers a multitude of sins."

He sat silent, staring at her; then said under his breath, "She does very well; all her work has life in it."

• "Then you advise me to give up my part to her?"

"I do not advise it. I told her she was too ambitious."

"She described how you all broke into applause in the opening scene of the third act. She said that when it was believed I could not get well" —

"Did she dare speak of such a thing?"

"Mr. Benson told her the season would open with a thunderclap."

Paul uttered an exclamation.

Miss Vivienne went on: "She flung her youth in my face."

"Shame on her, — shame on her!" cried Paul, his features working, his voice hoarse. "But she did not mean it, she is not so brutal. It is only that she has worked herself up into an intense longing for this chance. It means so much to her. She has been trying so hard to get a paying engagement. This part suits her, and she feels as if the opportunity would be everything to her."

"So she told me. She wants her share of the good things of the world. She wants my share."

He threw up his arms as if something cramped and fettered him. "She had no right to come," he said again. "I told her the idea was monstrous; it's intolerable. Only" —

"Only what?"

"She knew that I owed everything to you — she believed that you might be willing" —

"Might be willing to do everything for her?"

"Yes," he said with dejection.

"She thought me so benevolent?"

"She was sure of it. You have everything, she has nothing."

"It was not her poverty which she thrust in my face; rather it was her youth, her talent, her beauty." Miss Vivienne flung this taunt; then when she saw that he was somehow gathering his forces to answer it, her mood seemed suddenly to change. "Paul," she said in a different tone, "it is a little strange that we should begin at once to talk about this girl. When we parted last May" —

He made a spring towards her, caught her hand and bent above her. "Yes," he said resolutely. "I know. That is the real question. What have you decided?" There was manliness, chivalry, devotion, in his manner, everything except what she longed for, — the passionate craving of a lover. Her eyes, raised to his, rested on his face. "Tell me, Kate," he said.

"What am I to tell you?"

"You were to come back and tell me whether you could find it in your heart to marry me."

"Tell me something first," said Miss Vivienne.

He drew a long breath. "Anything."

"Do you still wish me to marry you?"

"I expect it. I count on it. I have planned for it." But he spoke hoarsely and with an effort.

"Last spring you said you loved me."

"Surely, Kate, you have no doubt of me?"

"But tell me, do you still love me?"

"I love you devotedly." His eyes met hers; his whole face was intensely serious.

"You have heard," she now said gently, "that I was very ill. For three days it seemed possible that I might die."

His clasp tightened. "Thank God that you are here."

"I had made my will. It was in my letter-case, but it was not signed. I asked the landlord to send for a notary, and it was signed before witnesses. I left everything to you, Paul."

"I do not deserve such goodness," he said in a broken voice.

"If you love me, why not? I have no near relatives. Who ought to profit by my death but the man I had made up my mind to marry?"

"Thank you," he said simply and breathlessly. For a moment he seemed lost to realities; then when he met her clear, unfaltering look, he said with decision, "When shall it be?" His look, as he asked this, was the look which had always pleased her. She had loved him for his youth, his grace, his expressive eyes and smile, but also for the capacity for kindling into high emotion which his whole face now showed.

"When shall what be?" she asked, smiling and coloring.

"When shall we be married?"

"Oh, not until the season is over!"

"The season has not begun."

"After it has begun and ended."

"No, now!" he cried, no longer merely trying to be fervent, but alive with feeling and driven by impatience.

"But why such haste?" she demanded archly.

"Can you ask?"

As he spoke, he bent over her with a caress which thrilled her. Why did she not let herself be moved to tenderness, — why not shut her eyes, her ears, permit herself to be borne along by the current of his ardor? His ardor? Was it that, in spite of his words, his manner, his readiness, his apparent desire to go beyond the mark rather than not to reach it, she felt his coldness, — that it made her cold as well? But she had always said that she had never had time or thought for love. In almost making up her mind to marry Paul, what she had felt had been that they were linked together by circumstance; not only their interests,

but their tastes and aspirations were in common. He loved, admired, and believed in her, and she held the golden key which could open a future before him as an actor-manager. There was a secret intoxication in the idea of saying, "Yes, let us be married now;" in feeling that after a decisive step, a step which could not be retraced, doubts, hesitations, scruples, would settle themselves. Why should she yearn for warmth, for tenderness?

"You do love me, Paul, — love me with all your heart?" she demanded.

His brow furrowed. He bit his lip; he turned away and stamped his foot. "Why do you doubt me? Has somebody been telling you tales against me?"

"I have seen no one who has mentioned your name except Miss Angell."

They had drawn far apart.

"What can I say more than that I love you?" he asked, with a dignity that almost surprised her. "What can I do more than ask you to marry me, and at once? Surely, when I act in this way you cannot suspect me of being false to you!"

"False! I had not thought of calling you false, Paul. I sent for you, — I hardly know why, but I was disturbed, upset; everything was vague. That girl had threatened me. I saw how young she was, how pretty she was, — too lovely to be looked at, and" — Without finishing her sentence, she waited — fixing her eyes on his face — for him to speak. He had averted his glance.

"Yes," he said in a stiff tone, "she is young, she is pretty."

"Too young, too pretty, to be looked at coldly."

"Yes."

"And she acts well."

"She acts charmingly."

"And you fell in love with her."

"Yes," he returned in the same heavy, stiff tone, "I fell in love with her."

Her actual belief, her actual hope, had

been in suspense until this moment. Now something in her heart or brain seemed to turn to lead, and with a sombre and speechless load oppress her senses. She did not try to answer this confession, and when she remained silent he turned and looked at her.

"I see," he said in a hopeless voice, "you despise me."

"No, I only despise myself for believing in you."

"You don't realize that a man may suddenly fall in love, and yet hold another woman sacred in his heart all the time" —

"That he suddenly catches love like a cold, and gets over it?"

"That a passion drags his heart and body at its heels, but that with his mind and soul" — He broke off. There was a pause; he glanced at her, and saw that her face was dark, her hands clenched in her lap. "It was the accident of our playing together," he faltered. "The words would have stirred me, no matter to whom I had to speak them, but when she" —

It seemed to him that she was suffering physically. Her whole body swayed.

"You have spoken to her — of love — outside of the play?" she asked.

"Once."

"Are you engaged to her?"

"No."

"The point of honor kept you true to me?"

"She knew that it was an impulse regretted as soon as yielded to."

"Did you tell her you were bound to me?"

"No."

"What then?"

"I have told her nothing. I have let her believe that I drew back because it was all rash, imprudent, foolish, — because she was poor, had no position. That is the reason she is so anxious to take the part of Corisande, — to be more nearly equal to me. She little realizes the horrible perfidy" —

"Horrible perfidy," — she repeated the words, still sitting in her chair as if stunned. Then suddenly flinging herself into the question, as if her vitality had been repressed until she saw this outlet for her emotion, she rose, crying out, "You say you love me!"

"I am yours. I have every feeling towards you a woman needs to ask of the man she consents to marry."

"Gratitude, admiration, loyalty!" — she enumerated these with feverish eagerness.

"Yes."

"You ask me to marry you at once."

"To-day."

"Not to-day; to-morrow, perhaps, — say next day."

"I thank you."

"I shall tell Mr. Benson that Miss Angell must be dismissed."

"She shall be dismissed."

Having thus established a basis, she began to analyze her position, to reduce it to its rational requirements, to justify her antagonism to what she had rejected. A woman has some rights. Surely, after her long struggle she deserved some compensation. Her whole life, her whole heart, her whole world, were in her art. Although she had had her successes, they had not come to her wholly unspoiled; they left her asking something more.

"You and I could do wonderful things together, Paul," she said with enthusiasm.

"Yes."

"And you do love me a little?" she faltered pitifully.

He said in a low, deliberate voice that he loved her, — he would be true to her, he would be good to her. At the same moment that he spoke he drew out his watch. "I have to go!" he exclaimed. "It is time for rehearsal."

"Rehearsal!"

"Yes, at one o'clock to-day."

She looked at him eagerly. She came nearer to him, with entreaty in her eyes.

"I have to go," he repeated, as if answering her unuttered question.

"She will be there?"

"Of course," he returned sharply.

"Why did I tell Benson I could not rehearse to-day?" she cried. "I can, — I must. I will not sit down tamely and let that girl rob me of everything I had looked forward to and cared about. Call a carriage, Paul. Madeline can get me ready in five minutes."

Her mood was so restless that her words carried no weight with him.

"You would be flurried, Kate," he said compassionately. "You would not do your best." He paused a moment. "As — for — Miss — Angell," he then went on, "if it will be any comfort to you, I promise on my word and honor not to say a word to her outside of my part, — not even to look at her." As he spoke his tone indicated intense strength of will and purpose.

"I must go," he said again. He glanced at her, hesitated, then took a few steps towards the door.

"Kiss me good-by, Paul," she murmured in a trembling voice. But as he approached, panic and confusion beset her, — a sense of unfeminine presumption. "No, no, no!" she exclaimed, with a poignant note in her voice. "I did not mean it. Go, Paul, — go to rehearsal."

He stood irresolute for a moment; his lips moved, but no words came; perhaps none offered themselves. Once more he glanced at his watch, then with an ejaculation hurried away.

IV.

The theatre was dark, the obscurity of the great empty space of the auditorium traversed only here and there by a dusty sunbeam. The stage too was dark; for although at the sides an occasional jet of gas flared, it illumined nothing, — rather rendered the twilight more dull and

gloomy. It was Tuesday morning. The rehearsal of *Corisande* was in progress. The first two acts were over; the third was about to begin. The roll-call had been gone through two hours before, when Mr. Benson had dryly explained that the chief part would once more be read by Miss Angell. This announcement not only roused surprise among the actors, but Mr. Benson's manner, as he made it, showed that something had happened to ruffle his temper. There was an ominous pucker between his brows, as he sat down in the middle of the stage, just in front of the footlights, and studied the *mise en scène*, resting his elbow on the arm of his chair and rubbing his clean-shaven chin with his hand. In spite of this attitude of repose, his whole figure had an active earnestness as if he longed for action. Every other moment, after an angry glance round the stage, he bounced out of his seat to re-chalk the position of a piece of furniture, calling on heaven, calling on the universe; when they did not respond, summoning the stage-manager, the property-man, the scene-shifter, — demanding, entreating, objurgating, all in a breath.

"Where is that tabouret? Send me that property-man. Where, I ask, sir, is that tabouret? Not ready, and I gave you twenty-four hours? Heavens and earth!" infusing into this apostrophe all the solemnity it was capable of expressing, "is the rehearsal to stop because the essential properties are not forthcoming? A low table, — a table exactly twenty-eight inches high, this instant. If not a table, a packing-case; if not a packing-case, a chair. The play cannot be obstructed by such imbecile inefficiency. *It must go on.*"

Then, when something to supply the place of the missing tabouret was tremblingly produced and set down, there came a snarl: "Not there! Not there!" The unhappy supernumerary lifted the substitute, staring about him helplessly.

"That was an inch, a whole inch, outside the mark. Here — here, I say! Where is the armchair? I said the armchair. Put that armchair by the side of the tabouret. At the right hand, I say. Do you know your right hand from your left? Are you aware of the fact that on the stage the right hand is fixed, immutable? Heavens and earth! the right, I say, — to the right!"

This ominous mood had communicated itself to the whole company. Everybody was nervous. All through the first act the manager was merciless. Nothing suited him. The actors, conscious that a good six hours of agony and struggle were before them this day, looked at one another with a silent shrug of the shoulders. At the least deviation from position, at the faintest sign of hesitation in the lines or in the prescribed movement, there would come a despairing cry.

"Six inches to the left centre, — six inches, I say, madam." It was the heavy lady, a capital actress, but unwieldy and inert except in real action, and the manager's special abhorrence at rehearsal. "We must have a wheel-chair, — a wheel-chair at once I would have, if that devil of a property-man ever brought anything I wanted." In default of the wheel-chair the manager himself flew towards the actress, who, having seated herself in the nearest chair, seemed to refuse to budge.

"Sir," he demanded presently of another, "is that a bag of potatoes you are carrying? Good God, have I got the leisure to bother with your legs and elbows?"

Even Paul Devine, usually a first favorite, was declared to mumble his part to such a degree of extinction of voice that nobody heard his cues.

"You seem to be under a mistake, Mr. Devine: you think you are a mute at a funeral. You are not a mute at a funeral; we do not want a mute at a funeral; there is no one cast for a mute at a funeral in the entire play. What we want

is a lively young fellow, a divine creature on two legs, — something between a man and an angel."

But this exordium failed to put spirit into Paul. It was clear that he liked neither objections nor suggestions; that he was nervous, rather irritable, acting feverishly by fits and starts. Even the scenes where he and Miss Angell had hitherto lighted up the dullness, and for a few kindling moments banished the terrors of rehearsal, passed off coldly.

The third act, as we have said before, was about to begin. Again there had been a conference between the manager and the various stage-setters, comparing lists, making notes, discussing positions. The actors, chafing restlessly, were gathered in groups, talking in low voices, all but Paul Devine, who was walking up and down alone behind the scenes. Miss Angell was standing at the corner of the stage with a walking-lady who was complaining in a whisper, when it seemed to the former that two figures had entered the opposite proscenium. There had been a momentary gleam of light as the door opened; then nothing but a deeper trail of shadow across the broad bars of darkness.

"Did you see?" the young actress said to her companion, with sudden excitement. "There are two people in that box."

"I thought something moved. But every door is locked, — Benson insists on that. Not a soul is to be let into the house. It must be somebody connected with the theatre."

Perhaps Miss Angell had seen what she longed for; at least no one else on the stage had had the vision revealed to her.

But still it is something to see even in mirage what one has longed for, and when she told herself that it might be Katharine Vivienne who had come to hear her in the third act, the wild conjecture brought inspiration. She had nothing to lose; she had everything to gain.

She had the passionate will which made her believe in herself, in her own faculty, in her own right.

The first words she uttered, as she came forward at the signal, thrilled even the most sluggish actor. The scene-shifter, the carpenter, peeped from behind the wings. More than once a cry came from the manager.

"Good, excellent, my child. Just a little more pause, — stop and count ten." "A little farther away." "Crescendo — crescendo — not too much at the beginning — leave a little for the thunder-bolt." "There, there, gently." "I only point out the defects; the beauties will take care of themselves. But heavens and earth! I want to ask, where did you get your style? It takes other people years and years!"

These interjections, thrown in as if irrepressibly as the play proceeded, were suddenly accented by a soft clapping of hands from the right-hand proscenium box.

"Who is that?" demanded Mr. Benson irascibly. "There is some one there. Who has been admitted against my express order? Who has had the audacity to give any permission?"

"Mr. Benson, — Mr. Benson, I say."

But Miss Vivienne — for it was she — had by this time reached the stage. She was followed by Owen Dwight, who, as if not in the least surprised at the novel rôle imposed upon him, played it with an ease, a quiet radiance of demeanor, which showed that he had no hesitations and no doubts.

"I have come," said Miss Vivienne, addressing the manager, "to explain

why I broke my promise to attend rehearsals. I have come to tell you I am forced to break my engagement, — to give up my position. I have also come, Mr. Benson, to congratulate you on the acquisition of a *Corisande* who will make the play a brilliant success. I might use twenty adjectives, but I will content myself with one: Miss Angell is charming."

Mr. Benson, crimson, embarrassed, perplexed, doubtful whether he was to take Miss Vivienne seriously or consider it one of the actress's caprices, began to splutter: "But — but — but what is the matter? I don't understand this. What has gone wrong? Why, let me hear what reasons" —

Miss Vivienne, however, had gone up to Miss Angell. She put a hand on each of the girl's shoulders, leaned forward and kissed first one cheek and then the other.

"My dear," she said, "you see that, after all, I did hear you in the third act. You do it beautifully. I have studied the part for three months. I know the difficulties. I understand how fully you have overcome them. I shall insist on sending you the gown you liked, to play in." Then she let her eyes travel over the group of actors until they rested on Paul Devine's face. The expression it wore was full of pain, — startled and incredulous. "For this is my last appearance on the stage," she went on, with a peculiar inflection in her voice. "I am going to be married." She turned towards Dwight and rested her hand on his arm. "We are going to be married to-morrow."

Ellen Olney Kirk.

A NOOK IN THE ALLEGHANIES.

II.

MY spring campaign in Virginia was planned in the spirit of the old war-time bulletin, "All quiet on the Potomac;" happiness was to be its end, and idleness its means; and so far, at least, as my stay at Pulaski was concerned, this peaceful design was well carried out. There was nothing there to induce excessive activity: no glorious mountain summit whose daily beckoning must sooner or later be heeded; no long forest roads of the kind that will not let a man's imagination alone till he has seen the end of them. The town itself is small and compact, so that it was no great jaunt, even in sunny weather, to get away from it in any direction, — an unusual piece of good fortune, highly appreciated by a walking naturalist in our Southern country, — and such woods as especially invited exploration lay close at hand. In short, it was a place where, even to the walking naturalist aforesaid, it was easy to go slowly, and to spend a due share of every day in sitting still, which latter occupation, so it be engaged in neither upon a piazza nor on a lawn, is one of the best uses of those fullest parts of a busy man's life, his so-called vacations.

The measure of my indolence may be estimated from the fact that the one really picturesque road in the neighborhood was left undiscovered till nearly the last day of my sojourn. It takes its departure from the village¹ within a quarter of a mile of the hotel, and the friendly manager of the house, who seemed himself to have some idea of such pleasures as I was in quest of,

¹ Pulaski, or Pulaski City (the place goes by both names, — the second a reminiscence of its "booming" days, I should suppose), is so intermediate in size and appearance that I find

commended its charms to me very shortly after my arrival. So I recollected afterward, but for the time I somehow allowed the significance of his words to escape me, else I should, no doubt, have traveled the road again and again. As things were, I spent but a single forenoon upon it, and went only as far as the "height of land."

The mountain road, as the townspeople call it, runs over the long ridge which fills the horizon east of Pulaski, and down into the valley on the other side. It has its beginning, at least, in a gap similar in all respects to the one, some half a mile to the northward, into which I had so many times followed a footpath, as already fully set forth. The traveler has first to pass half a dozen or more of cabins, where, if he is a stranger, he will probably find himself watched out of sight with flattering unanimity by the curious inmates. In my time, at all events, a solitary foot-passenger seemed to be regarded as nothing short of a phenomenon. What was more agreeable, I met here a little procession of happy-looking black children returning to the town loaded with big branches of flowering apple-trees; a sight which for some reason put me in mind of a child, a tiny thing, — a veritable pickaninny, — whom I had passed, some years before, near Tallahassee, and who pleased me by exclaiming to a companion, as a dove cooed in the distance, "Listen dat mourn-in' dove!" I wondered whether such children, living nearer to nature than some of us, might not be peculiarly susceptible to natural sights and sounds.

Before one of the last cabins stood three white children, and as they gazed

myself speaking of it by turns as village, town, and city, with no thought of inconsistency or special inappropriateness.