



Old Loves for New *

by

Elizabeth York Miller

A full length book novel, printed complete in this issue

CHAPTER I

ANIMAL INSTINCT

THEY trotted briskly down Fifth Avenue together — Rose Warden, the woman who had sung her way from obscurity to fame through the opera-houses of Europe, and the Aberdeen terrier that she had brought back with her from England.

Almost a stranger in her own country, Rose's face was not as familiar to the women who passed her as was the cut of her clothes, which were as unmistakably Parisian as the way she wore them. The women had an envious eye for those clothes, for the exaggerated pot-hat sporting four smuggled egrets, and the long pony-skin coat, flaring of skirt and enriched by a wide sable collar and cuffs. Beyond a doubt, she was most elegantly and expensively turned out.

Her dog had some interest for the men

she passed, and they jeered or admired, according to their familiarity with his squat, long-bodied breed. Then, perhaps, if it was not too late, they saw Rose, not her fine raiment, and forgot all about poor little Jock.

The dog minded his business exceptionally well, for his ancestors were Scots, and he never meddled except for some good reason; but at the corner of Thirty-Fourth Street he got into a row through no fault of his own.

Another young woman not quite so expensively clad as Rose, with a dog less costly than Jock—hers was an Airedale terrier—came to a standstill beside them, to wait for the traffic; and then, without the slightest warning, and after the briefest exchange of compliments, there was a terrific battle.

Unquestionably the Airedale began it, but the Aberdeens are a sporting race and quick enough on the uptake. For the bet-

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ter part of a moment, pandemonium reigned in the immediate neighborhood. The women spectators shrieked and fled—all but the owners of the combatants, who with compressed lips and skirts held gingerly aside hovered on the edge of the ring, darting lightning-and-thunder glances at each other and at each other's dog.

Rose was a tall, fair woman with handsome, regular features and a cold, calculating blue eye. Plenty of people thought that she possessed a sweet disposition, but at the moment bad temper was more in evidence.

The other—younger than Rose—was pretty rather than handsome. She was small, dark, and helpless-looking; at least, helplessness seemed her chief characteristic just now, since her dog was getting the worst of it and she could do nothing.

To pause in the midst of a stimulating battle to note merely the mistresses of the valiant heroes may seem like neglecting a very good opportunity; but that is precisely what the man who finally spoiled all the fun did.

He stared at Rose's flushed, angry face, and from her to the soft, quivering features of the other, whose eyes were full of tears, and whose fine-spun dark hair was escaping her toque in the stress of the occasion. Then he smiled. After that, being a man of action, and realizing that the sport afoot was not only hurting the feelings of the two ladies concerned, but would in all certainty be stopped by the thick baton of a policeman who was rapidly approaching, he deftly hooked the crook of his walking-stick through Jock's collar and dragged the victor off.

The Airedale had had enough, and was perfectly content to abide by the decision. His mistress gathered him into her arms and fled across the avenue without so much as a backward glance. Released, Jock went placidly to heel, although his rough black coat was still bristling.

"That was very clever of you! Thanks, awfully," said Rose in her best English accent.

"Not at all! Merely lucky that I got him at the first dip. But aren't you going to say 'Howdy'? It's been a long time between drinks, Rose, I know, but—"

"Why, if it isn't Fraser Rhoades!"

The man beamed upon her cheerily. He was tall and thin and sandy-colored, with a quaint, good-humored face and mild blue

eyes. A pair of glasses strode his thin, high-bridged nose as if they grew there. He was not in the least a handsome man, but none the worse for that.

He stooped and patted Jock's head—without response, for no well-bred Aberdeen ever wags a tail at any but a very old friend.

"What do you call this hell-hound of yours? He looks about as pleasant as Monday morning!"

Rose laughed, her good-nature thoroughly restored.

"Oh, he's all right. You've got to know him, that's all. His name is Jock."

"Well, I shall call him 'the Premonition,'" said Rhoades.

Rose kept on laughing, her eyes sparkling to something like warmth, her color glowing richly.

"You were always so quaint, Fraser!"

"In the old days you used to say I was funny," he replied reproachfully.

"It's the same thing, only I'm afraid I'm rather Anglicized—"

"Not so that you'd notice it," Rhoades interrupted. "You look more like Paris to me. I got your note and meant to call on you this afternoon. If you're not too busy, come over to the Waldorf, and I'll treat you to some Anglicized tea."

"Sure! I know that word is right, because they use it in all the English plays when they want to introduce an American character."

"Now we're getting on. Did you have a good crossing?"

"Splendid! We beat the record again."

"You would. You beat all records, Rose. I'm puffed up with pride merely because I went to school with you. Now you're a great prima donna, and I'm—"

"A great lawyer; and we still find each other mutually helpful, although the seas have divided us for so long."

They got over to the other side of the street, Rhoades taking the dog under his arm and putting him in charge of a porter when the hotel was reached.

All the way, the quick give and take of talk possessed them. They were obviously old friends, genuinely delighted to see each other again. If in the past there had been any sentimental interest between them, it was nowhere in evidence now.

Rose settled herself comfortably and surveyed the animated scene in the palm-room with a contented sigh.

"It's certainly good to be back! Now tell me everything," she said.

"As your lawyer, it is I who should be told things," he replied. "In your note you said you were not going to sing any more—"

"Well, not for the present," she interrupted.

"And that you were going to verify the newspaper reports, marry Fred Garvice, and settle down to what you call domesticity."

Rose showed her pretty teeth in an almost too frank smile.

"Domesticity on a million a year!" she said. "It's good enough for me."

Rhoades studied the decorated ceiling for a few seconds. When he came back to earth, he seemed to have forgotten what they were talking about. He startled his guest by an apparently abrupt change of conversation.

"Is it possible you didn't recognize her?" he asked. In answer to her puzzled expression he added impatiently: "The pretty owner of the other dog. She knew you, all right. I'll bet my hat she's studied your photographs often enough."

Rose was obviously perplexed.

"Is it somebody I ought to know? I scarcely noticed her, and I've been abroad so long that—"

Rhoades made a wry face.

"Guess I've put my foot in it, but somehow I thought you knew. She was Mary Garvice—Fred's first wife."

CHAPTER II

RHOADES OVERHAULS HIS MEMORY

THERE was the slightest suggestion of a strained silence; then Rose said quietly:

"I have never seen Mrs. Garvice, or any photograph of her. Fred never speaks of her. Do you know her, Fraser?"

"Only by sight," Rhoades replied. "I'm sorry if I've annoyed you; but it seemed a sort of coincidence, you know, your dog and hers getting into that scrap right off the bat, as it were."

Rose commenced to fasten her furs. She has scarcely touched the tea and toast placed before her, and now she wanted to be going immediately. She told Rhoades that he must come to see her to-morrow at the Westphalia, where she had taken a suite of rooms for the present. There was

an accumulation of business to talk over, the most important thing of all being that Fred Garvice wished to settle a couple of million dollars on her immediately, and she thought it was a very good idea.

They were not to be married for a few months, as he was in mourning for his little boy. His son's illness had caused him to hurry back from Europe, and she had cut what Continental engagements she could so as to follow him quickly; but the child had died while he was on the high seas, and he was awfully upset about it.

"Fred has a foolish domestic streak in him, for all his money," she concluded artlessly.

"He hasn't had his money very long. Perhaps that accounts for it," Rhoades remarked.

The lawyer looked very closely at Rose as he put her and the dog into a taxi, but she was not aware of the scrutiny.

During the past seven years he had managed most of her legal business, and he was her friend as well as her attorney. He knew, for instance, that old Morris Bamberger, since dead, had paid for her musical education in Paris and made her an allowance, all on the score of his interest in art. When the old man died, there was an unpleasant scene with the Bamberger family because of a legacy of ten thousand dollars to Rose. The Bambergers said it was the principle of the thing, and not the paltry ten thousand, to which they took exception.

However, Rose got her legacy, and to Fraser Rhoades it seemed only natural, and quite in accord with Bamberger's reputation as a patron of music. The Rothschilds did that sort of thing constantly, on a much more munificent scale, and nobody ever turned a hair.

Rhoades, who had sauntered back to the tea-room, lit a cigarette and ordered a mild high-ball as an assistance to memory. He wanted to get Rose straight in his mind, somehow, and that was not an easy task.

After the death of Bamberger—what next? She was singing then at the opera-house in Wiesbaden, and nobody had helped her at all, influentially, unless the big check she had drawn to her old *maitre* in Paris had anything to do with it. There had been some trouble with him, afterward, in a threatened libel-suit, which Rose, acting upon her lawyer's written advice, had withdrawn.

Afterward, for several years, Rhoades had had little to do for her beyond watching gramophone-record copyrights and engaging an occasional press-agent. Then had come the big contracts, for each of which he was obliged to find her trustworthy people in Vienna, Munich, Berlin, and London. In Paris she looked out for herself.

So far her native land had not heard her sing. She was to have appeared in New York this season, and everything was all but settled when unexpected news came flying over the cables. She was going to throw over her career to marry Fred Garvice, Wall Street's most spectacular young millionaire.

And that reminded Rhoades of the grand duke. It seemed to his shrewdly simple mind that every foreigner he had ever heard of in connection with a great singer, dancer, or actress was a grand duke. He wished he had asked Rose about this one.

Just before Garvice appeared on the scene the New York newspapers had been humming with that delicious story. As it seemed unreal, it might have been true. Told briefly, it amounted to this—that the queen of song, a true American, refused to sit on the left hand of any man, however much she loved him, and whatever his titles and riches might be.

Fred Garvice, following hard upon the heels of what might have been, somehow lacked conviction more than the grand duke. The possibilities had been romantic, and certainly Garvice was not that.

Neither, when Rhoades came to think it over, was Rose Warden. But then he had known her since she was fifteen, and he was broad-minded enough to realize that he was no fair judge of her. He could always say that he "knew her when—" a damning statement at the best of times; but in truth, as a girl, Rose had impressed him more and with better qualities than she did as a woman, although he did not overlook her genius.

CHAPTER III

TIRESOME RELATIONS

THE Westphalia has its counterpart in a hundred small hotels in New York. Some of them are less exclusive, perhaps; none has a better cuisine and management.

Used to making herself at home here,

there, and everywhere, Rose Warden, like a soldier on the march, carried her pack and accouterments with her. These comprised twelve trunks, a French maid assisted by an English under maid, a Swiss man servant who had many accomplishments, and Jock. Looking after Jock was one of Gustave's many accomplishments, and the only one painfully acquired.

The suite was as elaborate as any successful prima donna betrothed to an American millionaire could achieve. It consisted of a bedroom, a dressing-room, a bath, a dining-room, and a salon. Including the accommodation of her servants—Eugénie and Phelps occupied a small chamber on the same floor, with their own sitting-room and bath—the whole, exclusive of meals, demanded a weekly check for slightly less than five hundred dollars.

No one thought of blinking an eyelash at this bill, although only three years ago Garvice, a very rich man now, paid no more than that for a year's rent of his comfortable house in a northern suburb; and Rose Warden, too, had only lately ceased counting her pennies.

Some are quicker to grasp their opportunities than others. These two people, each in his or her own way, had taken as naturally to luxury as a cat to cream.

The manager of the Westphalia would scarcely have known Rose's drawing-room for one of his own, could he have looked in over her shoulder as she entered it that autumn evening. The twelve trunks contained paraphernalia for a complete transformation. Black and gold draperies and cushion-covers replaced the more conventional old rose of the hired apartment.

The mantel had been swept of its stereotyped ornaments. It was now the familiar mantel of Rose's traveling home, with its clock in a tortoise-shell case, its many photographs, and its squat silver bowls of flowers. Flowers were everywhere—lilies, white roses, and violets, harmonizing well with the black-and-gold hangings.

The grand piano was littered with her music; the small tables held her books, all in delicate cream bindings. On one table stood a large photograph of a man, in a tortoise-shell frame decorated with intertwined initials in gold wire. This photograph had a bowl of violets all to itself.

Rose crossed the room and stretched out her hands to the grateful warmth of the log fire. Although she did not ring for

them, her two maids appeared as if by magic. The English girl took the dog away. It was time for his biscuit. The French-woman helped her mistress out of the elaborate fur coat.

"Any messages, Eugénie?" Rose asked.

She spoke in French, and was answered in the same tongue.

"Yes, *madame*—one only. *Monsieur* is calling at seven sharp, and hopes that you will dine in."

Rose shrugged her shoulders.

"Very well. In that case I shall make myself comfortable. Put out the white tea-gown—the one with the fur."

"Yes, *madame*."

The woman left the room burdened with Rose's outer garments.

Shorn of her wrappings, the famous prima donna stood revealed in black velvet and chiffon. The upper part of her frock was made like a loose coat, buttoned down the front and cut low at the neck, showing a dazzling column of white throat, against which lay a string of large pearls, fastened in front with a small Greek cross of emeralds and diamonds. Her only ring was an uncut emerald on the third finger of her left hand. The masses of her fair hair were arranged in German fashion, parted serenely over the low brow, and coiled on the top in heavy braids. Most of it was her own, and its color owed nothing to art.

There was something almost overpowering in her beauty. Occasionally a blond woman may be exotic, and Rose Warden was that. Slender enough now, there was a hint in her deep chest and closely confined hips that her battle in the years to come would be literally against the flesh.

There was the faintest suggestion of a frown in the cold blue eyes as she walked lazily to the mantel and chose a cigarette from the monogrammed box which formed part of her elaborate decorative scheme. Mechanically she put the cigarette between her lips and lighted it. Then, smiling, she shook a firm white fist at one of the many framed photographs on the mantel.

"Yes, *herr professor*, I may smoke as often as I please now, with no fear of interference from you!"

This *sotto-voce* remark was couched in German. It was evident that Rose had made good use of her years abroad.

A glance at the clock—it was nearly six—and then she went to the telephone.

"When Miss Warden comes, show her

up at once, please," she said, speaking to the office.

The answer came back that Miss Warden had already been waiting half an hour in the reception-room, no orders having been received about her beyond the universal one restricting visitors in general.

Presently up came Miss Warden, a small, slender girl very plainly dressed, with blue eyes like Rose's, only softer and warmer, and hair bronze-gold instead of eighteen-carat. She answered to the name of Cissie, and was affectionately greeted by Rose.

Cissie was plainly overcome by the luxurious surroundings in which she found herself; but after all Rose was her sister, and who ever stood in awe of her own sister?

"You certainly have changed!" said Cissie, seated on the edge of a gold and black chair, and looking askance at Rose's cigarette.

Rose laughed, taking the remark for a compliment.

"Everybody says that. But you have changed even more, Cissie. You had your hair down your back when I went abroad. Let me see, you must be—"

"I'm twenty-three," said Cissie, who really looked older.

"And to think that little Cissie is a worker like the rest of us, and earning her own living! What is it that you do? I forget."

Cissie blushed so painfully that for a moment it seemed as if she were ashamed of her occupation.

"That's what I wanted to speak to you about," she said in a hushed voice, "and I don't quite know how to. Mother feels rather badly about it; but we have to be so careful with money, on account of father's illness, and Lu can't spare a great deal. She's teaching, you know, out West, and has to keep herself—"

"What on earth is all this leading up to?" Rose demanded impatiently, her eyes taking on the fixed hardness of the rich when assailed for a contribution to charity. "I can't possibly let you have any more than I do. You don't seem to understand—"

Cissie's flush deepened, and for a moment it looked as if she were going to cry.

"Oh, indeed, that isn't what I meant! You're very kind, Rose, and most generous."

She might have added, with perfect truth, that both the kindness and the generosity

to which she alluded were of a purely spasmodic variety. They came when it was convenient—to Rose.

"What then?" her sister demanded.

Cissie made a bold effort to control her emotions.

"I earn twenty dollars a week," she said, "and you've no idea what would happen if I had to give it up."

"Really? So much as that, little Cissie? How clever of you! But why should you give it up?"

"Mother thinks I ought to—or that I ought to tell Mrs. Garvice that I—that I am your sister."

"Mrs. Garvice!"

"Yes. I work for her, you know."

"Work for her? Work for—"

"Mrs. Garvice—Mr. Garvice's wife—I mean his first wife. I've been with her for a year now. She decorates houses. I came to her as just a stenographer, but I've got on, and—and she's been so kind to me! And when her little boy died—oh, I can't quite tell you, Rose! You can see how perfectly rotten it is. Mother says it would be treachery not to tell her. You know what mother's like. She hasn't changed a bit. In fact, she's more like herself than ever. I guess you'd call it straight-laced; but you see, we live in a different world from you, and I don't suppose you can understand how we feel."

Rose threw her cigarette into the fire. The fair, low brow reflected sullen defiance; the sharp voice held a note of temper.

"I might have known my troubles would begin the minute I set foot in New York!" she said. "Really, Cissie, it does seem as if—however, I'll talk it over with Mr. Garvice, and see what he says. Now you'd better trot off, kid. I've got to dress, and—here, take this and give it to mother with my love. I'll manage to see her some time to-morrow."

"This" was a ten-dollar bill which she had slipped away from its brothers of higher denomination in her little gold hand-bag; but Cissie declined the gift without giving offense.

"We're awfully flush, Rose dear. Lu's monthly check came yesterday, and I won a prize of twenty-five last week for a nursery design in the *Home-Builder*."

Rose put the bill back into her purse.

"Really, Cissie, I should never have dreamed you were so clever," she said, patronage taking the place of the hardness

in her voice and eyes. "And I'll speak to Mr. Garvice. Your living mustn't be interfered with. I'm sure we can talk mother over. Good-by, darling!"

"Good-by," said Cissie, and took her leave with some abruptness.

Rose stood reflectively before the favored photograph a few seconds.

"So that's how your—how Mary Garvice makes both ends meet! And you never told me! I wonder if you know?"

Then the shapely shoulders expressed themselves in a truly Parisian shrug, and Rose went into her dressing-room to array herself like the Queen of Sheba, intent upon finding favor in the eyes of her Solomon.

CHAPTER IV

MR. VAN DECKER'S LITTLE JOKE

THERE was no mystery about Rose Warden's character. Her counterpart—except for her wonderful voice—may be found in droves in every large city in the world. She was of a type that civilization breeds rather than exterminates.

From the age of fifteen, when she was the soloist in the Methodist church in her home town, she had known pretty definitely what she wanted and had gone straight for it. No one had stopped her, because what she wanted seemed on the surface so wholly good.

Her family were just ordinary nice people whom Rose came to regard as "narrow and prejudiced" because they did not see eye to eye with her in every particular. She had neglected them shamefully after getting what money she could out of them—which was little enough, because they had little to spare. She followed their fortunes indifferently through her mother's letters.

They had been more or less battered about from pillar to post. They were living in a small flat in Newark; their home town was too far away for Cissie to go back and forth to her work. And as Cissie was the backbone of the little family, which had fallen upon hard times, there could be no argument about it, although Rose had attempted to give sympathetic advice from abroad.

It was true, as Cissie had said, that they lived in a different world from Rose's.

It had taken Rose twelve years, from the time when she was fifteen, to get every-

thing that she wanted. She might have employed a short cut through the favor of men like old Morris Bamberger, but one of his sort had been enough for her. It wasn't that she objected on moral scruples to giving any man the worth of his money. As far as morality went, she was a thorough pagan.. Neither God nor the devil had any terrors for her.

The demands of the flesh were easily gratified with a certain refinement of passion that warmed but never burned. She had been in love with so many men that not one of them really mattered. But her grand affairs had been little affairs, after all, and with good business instinct she had kept them apart from her main ambition, which was for a clear and logical independence based on personal achievement.

Then something very strange had happened. She met Fred Garvice; and she passionately guarded the secret, even from him, that she had fallen in love with him in a day.

To the world, and to Garvice, she kept up the pose that he was merely the one of her many conquests to whom she had decided to show supreme favor. Hence it would have been impossible for even the astute Fraser Rhoades to discover that a chance reference to Garvice's first wife had set every nerve in her body quivering.

In how many reconstructed and apparently happy homes is it true that the second wife has no peace on earth while the first refuses to slip respectably into her grave!

The feelings of the man in the case are not always quite clear. He may keep silent for many reasons. Generally he does keep very silent, and answers questions with such obvious distaste and reluctance that suspicion has something solid to build upon, while all the time the poor soul may loathe his first wife, and every memory evoked by her, just as cordially as does the second partner of his sorrows. But in his domestic relations a man cannot always be truthful without being a cad. No man ever responds cheerfully to the thorough, heart-searching process that every good wife, be she first, second, or third, feels it her indelicate duty to impose.

Rose was not yet Fred Garvice's bride, but their relationship had been so far established that for all practical purposes she could probe him with true wifely candor, not to say cruelty, or yet curiosity.

Things she felt she had a right to know had been hidden from her. It was her right to have it straight from his lips how thoroughly he despised and rejected the memory of the first Mrs. Garvice. He ought to do so, for it was he who had secured the divorce, and his grievance against her must be very real.

Rose was ready for him when he came to dine that evening. She wore white velvet edged with ermine, with cascades of old yellow lace advertising any richness left over from the fur. Her throat glistened with sapphires—the stone that became her best, because its hard brilliance was akin to her eyes. Her fair hair was a veritable crown of gold.

The mourning-band on his overcoat displeased her. It was the symbol of a grief connecting him with the other woman, and just now her teeth were on edge through too much tasting of Mary Garvice.

Garvice entered cheerful and unsuspecting. He was a tall man with a hard, fine face and engaging manners. His policy in life had been much the same as Rose's—to get what he wanted; but it had not taken him quite so long to do it.

Risen boldly from the ranks of mediocrity, he had sloughed his original skin in a remarkably short time. A mere glance at him gave the direct lie to the fiction of masculine inadaptability.

His clothes were just right; his jewelry so inconspicuous as to be practically nil. He, too, had learned what lessons England and the Continent had to teach.

She searched his face eagerly. There was always something in his dark eyes that she could not read—always something lacking in the warm, ready kiss he gave her. A subtler woman would have called it a tale half told, this strange reticence that never ceased to baffle her persistent inquiry at every touch and turn.

Yet he was really glad to see her and to be with her. He kissed her again and again, and held her strong, young body in his arms as if, perhaps, she were a refuge from thought—or could it be from conscience?

"Dinner?"

"Yes, darling. You didn't want to go out, Eugénie told me."

"So we're having it here. That's good! It will be better when we have a real home of our own. You can't guess what I've been doing all day."

Rose pouted a little.

"You said you had a lot of business to attend to."

"And so I had. Look at these pictures, old girl!"

He drew her down on the couch beside him and pulled a bunch of photographs out of his pocket.

"This lot is the Van Decker place. It's a corker! Old Van D. has come to the end of his rope, and can't keep it up."

"Oh, houses!" said Rose.

"Sure! We've got to have a house, haven't we? You don't want to go on living in hotels for the rest of your life, do you, sweetheart?"

"Of course not," she agreed, with genuine enthusiasm.

She examined the photographs excitedly. There were any amount of them, but in the end she always came back to the Van Decker place. It was on the Sound, not too far away from town. There were twenty bedrooms and bath-rooms; a ball-room that would put any ordinary city mansion to shame; a dining-room like a baronial hall. It had its private beach, with yacht landing; a garage built to hold ten cars, if necessary; twenty-five acres of ground, all artistically planned to get the best effects; and large and well-stocked conservatories.

"You're pretty rich, Fred, but I should think even a king would find that place expensive."

Perhaps she was thinking of the grand duke who had roused Fraser Rhoades's curiosity. Garvice laughed.

"Say, kid, not many kings have got anything on me. I arranged a loan of half a million for one of 'em only yesterday. Can the kings!"

This free and easy vernacular went oddly with his clothes and appearance. Europe had not cut very deep below the surface, after all.

Rose gave him a hug. Her eyes shone, and for a few moments she forgot fundamental worries.

"And we'll have wonderful house-parties—clever, interesting people. I can get them, all right, and Society with a big S will follow!"

They went in to dinner, and continued rhapsodies between the courses, passing the photographs back and forth as they noted some new beauty about this expensive mansion and its grounds.

"I'm so glad it's unfurnished," Rose said.

"I was afraid it would be full of things we might feel we ought to buy."

Garvice cleared his throat.

"Yes, so am I. Poor old Van Decker collapsed before he got that far."

"Then they've never lived in it?"

"No. It's just a—shell, as you might say. He gave it a gloomy name, too. We shall have to change that."

"The Owl's Nest? It seems rather quaint."

"My dear, look again. It's the Great Owl's Nest, and that's horrible!"

"Good gracious, Fred, why?"

"Don't you know your Bible, kid?"

Rose bridled at that, as she had every right to do.

"As well as you, I'll bet!"

Garvice laughed good-humoredly and refilled his wine-glass.

"You've got me there! I'll confess. It was the real-estate chap who pointed it out. It seems that old Van D. had a grudge against his wife, who made him stand for this grand enterprise that failed, and so he named it in honor of her—from something in Isaiah about a great owl making her nest and laying and hatching, and vultures gathering with their mates. It would make your blood run cold!"

"What a horrid revenge! Say, Fred, you've turned me against the place. I'm not exactly superstitious, but—"

"Bless you, kid, the Van Deckers are as happy as turtle-doves now. The old man salvaged enough to buy a farm in Jersey, and they've gone back to the land, where they belong. She's perfectly happy. It was a case of knowing enough to spit out what was too much to chew."

Rose allowed herself to be won over. After all, ambition was not dead in her merely because she had decided not to sing any more—"for the present," as she had told Fraser Rhoades. Her ambition had merely taken another turn. From being a queen of song she would become a queen of society, and the title was not in the least vague.

Society meant a following of riches after riches. The crudity of her conception was almost childish; but it certainly was not vague.

And Garvice? He was quite as eager as she. The kindergarten had graduated them both. There was no boredom in all this feverish planning.

"To-morrow we'll run out and have a

look over this great owl's nest. If all goes well, we'll turn it into a regular aviary in six months' time. We might call it the Canary's Perch—eh?"

"Or the Gilded Cage," Rose suggested. She was not without a superficial sense of humor. Then her face fell a little. "But I half promised to go out and visit mother to-morrow. And I must see Fraser Rhoades. I ran into him to-day on Fifth Avenue, by the way—"

She broke off suddenly. Fraser and Cissie brought it back to her—the unpleasant topic up her sleeve.

Garvice lit his cigar and regarded her complacently through the haze of its smoke. He had no idea what was passing in her mind.

"Oh, put 'em off! I'm simply keen as mustard on this, Rose. It seems as if I couldn't rest until it's settled."

"I'll put them off," Rose muttered.

They went back into the transformed salon. The lights were pleasantly shaded and the odor of the flowers gently stimulating to the mood they both were in. Gustave brought coffee and liqueurs in the special service which formed a part of Rose's traveling equipment. Garvice was not the first man to sip coffee *tête-à-tête* with her from that delicate Sèvres cup.

She lit herself a cigarette and stood looking down at him, one elbow on the mantel, her heavy, rich draperies hanging about her with the grace of sculptured marble. She really must speak to him about Cissie—and tell him of the dog-fight—and ask him those searching questions!

But he spoke first.

"We've got to hustle it through, kid," he said, his mind still on the Van Decker place. "You'd better give the Colonial Homestead people a call. I understand they're the best decorators in New York, although not as famous as Miss Brighton or Vanity's."

Rose nodded.

It seemed to her that the silence that fell suddenly between them was very heavy. Did Fred know that his first wife had joined the ranks of house-decorators? It was uncanny, his bringing up the subject like that!

He did not stay very long after dinner. He had to see a man about something or other at one of his clubs. She let him go without touching disagreeables. To change his gay mood would have caused her suffer-

ing which she was in no frame of mind to bear.

As soon as he had gone, however, she got the telephone-book and looked up the address of the Colonial Homestead Company, not exactly expecting to find confirmation of her fears. But the confirmation was there—

The Colonial Homestead Company (Mary Garvice), 12 West 36th Street.

He must have known! He had made the suggestion purposely!

CHAPTER V

HEART-BURNINGS AND HEART-SEARCHINGS

IN the morning Rose was ready for her man with hammer and tongs. The night before she had revealed a glimpse of the superwoman—a creature of feminine extraction who could hold her tongue. The sex, however, is generally true to itself in the long run.

Questions that had better been asked by candle-light had now the morning's searching and unromantic illumination to bring them out.

"I've looked up the Colonial Homestead Company, and I find that it is Mrs. Garvice," Rose said witheringly.

She had expected him to be surprised. There must have been some mistake. After all, he couldn't have done it in cold blood, and she was willing enough to accept his shocked apologies when they came. But it seemed, as she had thought at first, he really did it deliberately and of set purpose.

"Well?" he said.

"Do you mean to say that you knew?" It was she who was shocked now.

He cleared his throat. There was a shadow in the dark eyes. The something she had never quite defined came up between them again in full force.

"See here, kid, I've never said much to you about Mary—"

"You've never said anything, and it's about time you did!"

Biff! That was the hammer.

"Shall we talk it out now?"

"Better late than never. I'm about fed up with your delicate reserve!"

Bang went the tongs!

Garvice, properly subdued, avoided looking at her.

"Do you know why I divorced my wife?" he asked quietly.

"I couldn't guess in a million years. I dare say she didn't throw her cap over the windmill, or—"

"No, she didn't, and I wouldn't have believed it of her."

"Even if you caught her in the act, I suppose," Rose said sarcastically.

Garvice cleared his throat again. He spoke as if to an invisible audience.

"The money came between us. It was so sudden. Mary wasn't used to it; she hated it, I think. There were a lot of things. We didn't get on for nuts. She left me and took the boy with her. He was hers as much as mine, and he was so fond of her that I hadn't the heart—yes, he was fonder of her than he was of me. Still, I think—at least, she didn't try to turn him against me."

"See here, Fred, if you're going to stand there all day giving me ancient history, all I can say is that I'm fed up at the beginning."

Terror had caused Rose to forget that she had brought this down upon herself, but the avalanche was not to be stemmed.

"Guess you'll have to listen, kid."

"But I don't want to!"

She fairly shrilled the words. He turned his head, and she met his eyes squarely. Nothing was hidden in them now. The thing stood revealed in all its unpleasantness. After all, it was only a sort of morbid affliction of conscience from which he was suffering, and which he had striven so long to conceal. Get it out, like an aching tooth!

"Go on, if you wish to," she said, much more softly. "Poor old Fred! Where do I come in?"

He smiled at her gratefully—a hungry dog wagging his tail at the prospect of a bone.

"Thanks, dear; I thought you'd understand. Well, you see, I fell in love with you. When anybody divorces anybody, it generally means that the divorcing party wants to get married again. Mary wouldn't get rid of me, so I—well, that's where you come in, kid."

"But you'd been free nearly a year when I met you!" Rose exclaimed.

"Just so; but more than a year ago I heard you sing in Berlin. Before I could meet you there came a confounded cable, and I had to rush back here to look after

business. But I couldn't forget you, Rose. It was all finished between Mary and me."

"What if there was a chance of its not being finished?" she put in hurriedly.

"There was no chance. At least, I mean it is finished for me."

"She could have drawn you back by a thread," said Rose scornfully. "I think she might, even now!"

Garvice flushed. It was a painful process.

"You don't understand. The thing is over, done with. I love you. You are everything in the world to me. I divorced Mary simply that I might be free to marry you."

"But I thought American men—Abroad, of course, it is quite common; but the women suffer so over there, when they are divorced, that you might as well tie a stone around their necks at once and drop them into the river. I thought your reason was—rather better."

In spite of herself she was criticising him, although she loved Mary Garvice no more than before.

"My reason was you," he said quietly.

"I came to you as soon as I could."

"But how did you know that—"

"I was sure of you. I knew that I would win you—and I did."

This was surprising in a way; for what he had known, Rose had not so much as suspected. Indeed, it was only by the merest accident that she had allowed herself to be carried away.

"And now you see how it is. Mary won't take any money from me, and she's as mum as an oyster. When the boy was ill she sent a cablegram, but as you know—I got home too late. This business she's in—well, I don't know much about it, but you can lay your money on it, a hundred to one, that Mary can fix up a home—a hotel, or whatever it comes to—as well as Miss Brighton or Vanity's. It struck me that I might be able to help her in that way."

Rose's upper lip curled.

"Sweet of you, Fred; but I can see Mrs. Garvice giving such a commission the coldest, glassiest reception that ever strolled down from the arctic regions."

"She can't!" His voice rang with a triumph that was heart-breaking to his audience. "She's under contract to Van Decker, and the contract passes with the estate."

"Then we don't have to take that place,"

was Rose's retort. "It's simple enough, silly!"

"All right. You won't trouble to see it, I suppose?"

"Yes, I will. I'm not so prejudiced. Are you ready?"

"Sure. The car is outside. What jolly clothes you wear, Rose! Is that coat new, or have I seen it before?"

"About twenty times," she replied, with a laugh that touched only her lips and left but a faint impression there.

During the drive up the Sound she told him about Cissie. The family prejudices might be small things, but they were disquieting. Cissie's twenty dollars a week were in peril. Garvice had never met his future sister-in-law. He dismissed the case airily.

"Tell Cissie to throw over her job. I'll fix it up all right until she finds another."

No doubt he meant well, but he reckoned without Cissie and the quiet little forces behind her; and he reckoned, too, without Mary Garvice.

Those separated worlds! They can roll on very well without each other.

CHAPTER VI

MARY GARVICE'S BUSINESS

THE Colonial Homestead Decorating and Furnishing Company occupied one of those old-fashioned four-story houses with brown-stone fronts, which at a fairly recent period of our history were so typical of New York. As a symbol, the sky-scraper has eclipsed them in two senses of the word, but here and there they are still to be found, even long blocks of them, to prove that however hard and fast progress marches, some of the little things will get left behind.

The particular house which sheltered the Colonial Homestead Company may have been forgotten, or perhaps it was too small a bone of contention to upset the dignity of the vast dry-goods store which shouldered it on the one side and the tall apartment-house on the other. However that may be, there it stood, conscious that in its day it had been a fine mansion of no mean size.

When the Garvice family came to domestic grief, Mary Garvice's friends rallied and gave her the support she would not take from her husband. Among these friends was a certain well-to-do man named Terence Holbrook Heaton, and known

among his intimates as Terry. There were rumors that Terry Heaton had once wished to marry Mary; and when she chose Garvice instead, he dissolved from Mary's lover into a valued friend of the young couple, and gave Garvice the chance to exercise a talent for high finance.

If Garvice's tale was true, and it was money rather than the lack of it which estranged his wife from him, then Terry Heaton must have guessed badly, for it could not be said that in helping Garvice to make a fortune he had wished to bring him harm.

In these days of Garvice's great prosperity the two men met but seldom, and then with only the scantest courtesy. Perhaps Garvice resented the fact that he had been helped to attain riches, for gratitude is a characteristic of dogs rather than of men. It is more likely, however, that he remembered Terry's former admiration of Mary, and was annoyed at his coming out so boldly on her side when the nine days' scandal was in full swing. In business, however, they were still associated.

It was Terry Heaton who suggested to Mary a way by which she could earn her living, and it was he who lent her money and launched her in the adventure, which required a good deal of initiative. He also found her customers and gave her much advice. Not even Garvice suspected anything of a tender nature between them—a fact which to a great extent explains Mary Garvice.

Terry Heaton needed no explanation. He was just as much in love with Mary as he had always been, and would have sold his soul, or any other valuable commodity that he possessed, to give her a moment's happiness.

Mary accepted his help because she was so absolutely helpless; and after the great disillusion he was the one man she trusted. Her own family had turned against her for leaving her husband; and to the naked eye her excuse was pitifully inadequate. He had changed; his money had turned her world upside down. That was the most she had to say on the subject.

Few intelligent American wives would find fault with their husbands for an offense like Fred Garvice's. Indeed, as the sea-sick passenger replied when asked if he had breakfasted, on the contrary. But Mary had never been noted for her intelligence. When suffrage storms came sweeping over

the land, she took shelter in a worm-eaten, crumbling prejudice so feeble that her own mother could have pulled it down, and did so, leaving Mary cuddling uncomfortably in the ruins.

She had not even shown that her brain was capable of religious exaltation. Such new cults as Christian Science and New Thought merely shamed her with the consciousness of her own mental and moral shortcomings.

All about her agitations went on. Now it was the drink evil; now a Purity League was being formed; here a band of energetic sisters were intent upon village improvement; while another drew attention to the white-slave traffic. Mary had never come to close quarters with drink; if it was an evil, she was sorry, and wished it bad luck, but she was not prepared to lift up her voice against it. In her own soul purity was so innate that she believed well of the whole world; and as for village improvement, no fault had ever been found with the neat premises over which she herself had executed a vigilant care. The white-slave traffic was to her quite as much a fairy tale as "Bluebeard" or "The Forty Thieves."

Yet somewhere in her there must have been a revolutionary seed, something which had made her do what few other women of her gentle and almost stupid outlook on life would have dreamed of doing. The character of that seed could only be determined by the plant it put forth.

If you are earning your living, you haven't a great deal of time to devote to ideas apart from the work in hand. Mary Garvice had always earned her living. She had been a good daughter, and a wife and mother worthy of the name. When her occupation as a wife had vanished, she turned to making homes for other people, exercising in behalf of strangers the only real talent she possessed. She did it so well that her existence was justified in comfortable monetary returns.

On the top floor of the old-fashioned house where the business was carried on, she had her own home. There were a large sitting-room where she also took her meals; a bedroom, with bath; a minute kitchen, and a servant's bedroom. The little boy who had died had slept in a crib in her room. She had always kept him close to her, although, strictly speaking, he was not a baby when she lost him.

Passing down, one came to the "office floor." Here was the machinery of the Colonial Homestead Company, the modest force of stenographers, designers, and clerks. On the first floor several rooms had been thrown together to make one spacious showroom. The basement was shared between the janitor's family and reserve stock.

It was just the sort of commercial establishment that traveled and sophisticated New York loves—"a little place, my dear, where you simply can't go wrong," as one patroness told another. Yet Mary Garvice had been abroad only once in her life—a six weeks' honeymoon trip, during which she had paid scant attention to things a knowledge of which would have been more than useful to her now.

Terry Heaton had wanted her to begin on a scale that frightened her. He suggested a year or two in the old places of the earth, with systematic study and wholesale purchases from auction-rooms and antique-shops.

"I daren't, Terry," she had quavered. "I should be so alone, over there—and besides, I really know quite a lot. I mean that it's always been a hobby of mine. You couldn't possibly fool me on silver, for instance. I can tell almost by the feel if it's old Irish—the most valuable of all—Georgian, or Queen Anne. And as for furniture, that's an open book. Ninety per cent are fakes, pure and simple. I'll stick to the Colonial as much as I can. It's a straight, fair game, and I know it. Why play any other? I should like to specialize."

And specialize she did, to her own advantage as well as to the satisfaction of her customers. Now and again people came along who had been bitten with Empire or old Italian fevers, and Mary did her best by them, but her specialty was the colonial period of American history.

When Terry Heaton presented her with the Van Decker contract, she had been appalled. Such a large order was almost beyond the scope of her activities; yet she knew that if she was "to get on," she must shirk nothing. One either got on or went backward.

It was a relief to her, in a way, when the matter was held in abeyance by the failure of Van Decker, although she felt sorry for him personally. But her own contract still held. As Terry had explained

to her, whoever bought the Van Decker place would either have to buy her out at a round figure or let her fulfil her contract. These hard rulings puzzled her, although to Heaton they were only "business points."

She had been going on much as usual until a couple of mornings after the dog-fight on Fifth Avenue, when two things happened to set her in a tremulous flutter.

CHAPTER VII

A WOMAN'S BOND

"Good morning, Cissie!"

"Good morning, Mrs. Garvice!"

Mary Garvice turned to look at her pet assistant. Cissie Warden had a dragged appearance. She might have been out all night, and her greeting lacked conviction.

"Are you ill, Cissie?"

It is easy for a working girl to be ill without attracting her employer's attention. As a matter of fact, Cissie had been going from bad to worse in her appearance for several weeks.

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed.

"But, my dear—"

Cissie's hands flew to her face. The breaking-point had come.

Mrs. Garvice was glad that none of the other girls had arrived. She put a soft, dimpled hand on Cissie's shoulder.

"What's the matter, my dear?" she inquired, sincerely sympathetic. "If it's anything you don't want to tell me—"

"Mother said I must tell you to-day!" wailed poor Cissie.

"Is it something very awful?"

The voice had an encouragingly flippant note. Cissie dabbed her eyes.

"Mother thinks I ought to leave here."

Mary knitted her brows, but her lips kept on smiling.

"I was going to raise you, Cissie. After getting that prize, you know, you're worth a lot. Has somebody been offering you more money to desert?"

Cissie's tears flew now as from a gushing fountain.

"Oh, no!" she gasped out. "As if I would!"

"Then what's the trouble?"

"Mother says—"

Mary drew in a long breath. Manifestly, poor Cissie was unable to proceed. Why make her bear more than she could? The

childish shoulders were heaving; the bronze-gold hair looked dank and heavy; the peaked face was drawn and tear-stained. Poor little Cissie! She was only twenty-three, and she had been wickedly cheated of the flower of her girlhood. If she had said she was thirty, no one would have disputed it.

"See here, dear, I can guess what you don't like to tell me. It's about your sister and—and Mr. Garvice. I know all about that, Cissie. Why, you've forgotten how proud you were of your sister—I mean, you've forgotten telling me about her. Do you think I could forget? Rose Warden is a famous woman, and she is going to marry my—going to marry Mr. Garvice. As far as I am concerned, Cissie, it doesn't make any difference. I should hate to lose you."

Cissie's pale face emerged through her tears.

"Mrs. Garvice, I love you, and I'll work for you forever and ever. I don't want any raise; only mother said that I ought to tell you—that it wasn't fair to you."

It was out at last, the thing poor Cissie had been nerving herself up to saying.

"Now we understand each other. I don't want to lose you, Cissie, any more than you want to lose your job; so let's say no more about it."

Cissie nodded, and commenced vigorously to clean her machine, as the door opened to admit Miss Oates, the head clerk.

Mary Garvice went into her little partitioned-off sanctum. It was seldom that she cried outright. She had not wept very much when her boy slipped away from her. Now she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. Somehow she felt more sorry for pale-faced, worry-ridden Cissie than for herself.

The girl had a great capacity for faithfulness. She had foregone her youth, and life has no higher tragedy than that. Her girlhood was slipping by her while she toiled in ignorance of its passing. Conscience added its burden to her sacrifice. Yet no wrong of her own—nor of her sister's, as far as Mary Garvice knew—had impelled her poor confession; simply the etiquette of an entangled human fabric. When the thing had been woven ill, then people like Cissie Warden had to feel themselves to blame.

It was hard on Cissie, but Mary Garvice was glad to think that though she herself

was by no means a clever woman, she was broad-minded enough to realize that Cissie could not be held responsible for the Garvice matrimonial fiasco.

The atmosphere had cleared of the little storm when Mr. Terence Holbrook Heaton walked into the shop, shortly before one o'clock, and begged a word in private with Mary. Would she come out to lunch with him?

Mary said she would. While she ran upstairs to put on her wraps, Heaton, a big, broad-shouldered fellow with keen gray eyes and close-cropped gray mustache, chewed at the end of an unlighted cigar, which on the stage is a bit of business useful in denoting restlessness.

Cissie Warden passed him on the way out to her own lunch, and he spoke to her pleasantly. Cissie responded with a brilliant flush that must have drawn to her cheeks every drop of blood in her anemic little body.

"That girl's afraid of her shadow," Terry observed to himself. "She and Mary remind me of a team of rabbits trying to draw a fire-engine!"

Mary Garvice came down-stairs pulling on her gloves.

"What new scheme have you got up your sleeve?" she asked cheerfully, as they set out for the restaurant where they always lunched when they took the meal together.

"It's not a new scheme, but a very old one," Terry replied. He put his cigar away carefully for future consumption. "I'll tell you over the chops."

But before he told her anything he asked her something. In fact, he offered Mary Garvice the third proposal of marriage she had had from him; and Mary, for the third time, refused him gently but firmly.

"I'm sorry, Terry, but on this marrying business I feel differently from most people. 'For better or for worse,' I shall always think of Fred as my husband."

Terry did not look so very downcast. He had expected to be refused, but he thought her argument feeble, considering what she had done. Her actions, to him, spoke louder than her words.

"Then why in Heaven's name did you leave Fred? Really, the inconsistency of women makes me sick!"

"I'm not inconsistent," Mary maintained stoutly. "And why I left Fred is none of your business. I beg your pardon, Terry,

but if I'm rude it's your fault. So that's your old scheme, is it?"

"Mary, that's precisely where you get left! It isn't."

These friends were apt to be a little sharp with each other sometimes.

"Well, I suppose you'll tell me when you're good and ready," Mary said complacently, as she dug into her chop.

"I don't particularly want to tell you, but as you won't marry me, I shall have to. The Van Decker place has been sold."

"Oh! Well, I'm glad to hear it."

"Fred has bought it for that buxom young thrush he's caught."

Mary said "Oh!" again, but with a different intonation.

Terry leaned across the table, eagerly sympathetic.

"I was talking with Rhoades this morning about your contract. It seems that Miss Warden expects you to go on with it. The place is hers, lock, stock, and barrel—one of your husband's wedding-presents, I believe."

You never could tell when you were being cruel to Mary Garvice. She just sat and looked at you, expressionless as a sphinx.

"However you feel, Mary, there isn't much doubt that Fred doesn't share your opinions. He's divorced you, and he's going to marry this woman, and you've simply got to face the fact. I should advise you to stand by the contract. If you back out, and Rose Warden takes it into her head to sue you, there'll be a fine scandal, and you may lose several thousand dollars. On the other hand—"

"I haven't the slightest intention of backing out," Mary said warmly. "Nothing could induce me to break a contract. Shall I have to see Miss Warden?"

"Well, I'm stumped!" ejaculated Terry.

"Is there anything remarkable in keeping one's pledged word?"

"Only these rather remarkable circumstances."

"When people are in business, do they allow personal considerations to weigh with them?"

"Quite frequently," her friend replied. "Very likely he was thinking of the 'personal considerations' which had helped Fred Garvice to riches."

"Well, I don't," said Mary. "And anyhow, I think I'd like to have a hand in fixing up a home for Fred."

"A home! Good Heavens, Mary, you know well enough what that place is—a cross between a Moorish castle and an American summer hotel!"

"Nevertheless, Fred will think of it as his home. He must be tired of hotels by this time. Tell me, shall I have to see Miss Warden personally?"

"No. Rhoades will see you for her, and I suppose you can use the girl for a go-between."

"Cissie? Of course. I'd forgotten. Did you get any more gossip out of Mr. Rhoades?"

Terry's eyes twinkled.

"He told me about a dog-fight he spoiled the other afternoon, and two ladies who looked at each other as if they envied their dogs' privileges."

"Oh, Terry! I thought I recognized that young man. It was awful. Such a horrid little beast—he almost chewed Mike alive!"

"Who—Rhoades?"

"Don't be silly!"

"But Rhoades said Mike began it."

"I dare say he did. Mike never hunts far for an excuse. But was there nothing else? Did Mr. Rhoades say anything about Fred?"

There was a tremulous eagerness in the low voice now, and the soft, dark eyes were anxious and not so sphinxlike. Terry Heaton looked away and called to the waiter for something. That expression in Mary's eyes cut him to the quick.

"Oh, nothing very much," he answered presently. "He seems to be well and busy."

"Busy looking after *her*, I suppose."

"Given her a lot of money, the ass!"

"That leaves me cold. But I suppose he really is in love with her?"

"I'd have to be horribly in love with a woman before I'd make over half my fortune to her, and the marriage bond not signed yet," Terry said. "I wouldn't do it for you even. A great temptation for a woman to welsh!"

"Nonsense! Not if she cares for him—and she must care a great deal. Fred can make love like an angel."

"Like seven devils, if all I hear of him is true!" grumbled Terry.

Mary finished her meal in silence. She had a great many things to think of, among them being the possibility of running into her former husband during the business of

furnishing his nest. She understood, too, about Rose Warden, and even Terry did not realize what a wealth of instinctive bitterness covered all her soft words where this successful rival was concerned.

CHAPTER VIII

SEPARATED BY LAW

WHEN Heaton left Mary Garvice, instead of returning to his down-town office, he walked down Fifth Avenue to Madison Square and entered the huge building where Fred Garvice had recently taken a new suite of offices. He was acting upon sheer impulse, and had not the least intention of acting as a go-between for Mary and her former husband. Having discovered how she felt about Fred, in a manner of speaking, it was good business from the point of view of an interested friend to satisfy his curiosity as to the situation on the other side of the fence.

It was some time since he had seen Garvice. Though they still had business relations, they had not met since the latter became a millionaire; but he had heard enough about the man, and most of it bad—from Terry's point of view. However, a man who cares for a woman is not altogether the best judge of that other scoundrel for whom the woman has all but confessed that she cares.

The lift took the visitor up to a suite of all but gilded offices, one feature of which, however, was familiar. Over in one corner of the anteroom, pounding away at a clicking typewriter, sat Miss Blake, a veteran of many years' service. Heaton grinned to himself and wondered why, with his discriminating taste in the so-called gentle sex, Fred Garvice remained true to Miss Blake. The answer must be that she was a first-class stenographer. Heaton himself could vouch for that. He had made Garvice a present of her in the days when the rising young financier needed some one with brains to check his inaccuracies.

Well, it was good to see Miss Blake's ugly, wizened face again, and to note that her ringlets, instead of diminishing and growing grayer with the years, had taken on a new lease of life and the polished hue of rich old copper.

"Bless my soul, I hardly knew you!" exclaimed Heaton, as she came forward with her well-remembered mincing gait. "You

grow younger every time I see you, Miranda. The boss anywhere about?"

Miss Blake lowered her glance coquettishly. It cannot be said that her eyelashes swept her cheeks, but no doubt that was what she thought happened.

"You'll make me vain, Mr. Heaton, if you talk like that," she replied. "Yes, Mr. Garvice has just this moment come in. I'd better show you the way. I don't think you know our new offices."

"Fine outfit!" Heaton commented, inwardly making a nose at himself for his empty words. It was not the sort of palace he would have chosen in which to carry on a heavy day's work. There was too much brass about it, including Miss Blake's rejuvenated hair.

She opened a grotesquely carved white walnut door and revealed an interior that was a symphony in what used to be called "Alice blue," with bits—no, monsters—of furniture in the same white walnut and gargoyle carving as the door, which might have served as a warning of what was to come.

On the big, flat-topped desk were various things—an immaculate blotting-pad and accouterments in silver-gilt; a vase to correspond, holding strong-scented hyacinths of a shade of violet that did not jar with the Alice blue; a frame, also corresponding, that held somebody's photograph. There were many things in that room which the world would not have missed had they perished; but behind the flat-topped desk sat a rather weary-looking man, and almost every man is missed by some one when he chooses to perish, if it's only the washer-woman to whom he is indebted for his last clean shirt.

"Mr. Heaton," announced that hardy perennial, Miss Blake, and vanished, closing the rich door on its soundless hinges.

Garvice looked up. He had been marring the perfection of his silver-gilt-bound blotting-pad by drawing crude arabesques with a common lead-pencil.

"Hello, Terry! Bless me, I haven't seen you for an age!" he exclaimed, his handsome features relapsing from an expression of exquisite boredom to one of strained hospitality.

"Don't get up," said Heaton, who had perhaps forgotten how long ago it was since they had last met, and did not offer to shake hands. He dropped into one of the indescribable chairs, which looked as if it

had never been sat in before. The nap of its Alice-blue velvet cushions must have suffered under the strain of his huge frame. "I saw Fraser Rhoades. He told me all about your deal with Van Decker's creditors, and I've just come from having lunch with Mary."

He paused, and Garvice leaned forward slightly.

"Yes?"

"Mary would like to keep her contract, if it's perfectly feasible. That is, she sees no reason why she shouldn't keep it."

"Neither do I," Garvice broke in. "But does she really want to? That is—"

Heaton could not repress the sadness he felt in his heart when he smiled on the man who had cast Mary aside.

"I think she really wants to," he said.

"If I were sure—you understand, Terry, I wouldn't hurt Mary for worlds."

Heaton's eyes blazed.

"Don't worry about that! You can't do any more to her than you've done already. She doesn't hold any grudge. You see, Mary and I, in a manner of speaking, are pals. Every day seems to make us a bit chummier. On my word of honor, I can tell you that she doesn't hold any grudge; and in the course of time, Mary will find that her life isn't broken any more than yours is. You're not a dog in the manger, Garvice. You're going to marry a beautiful, talented woman. I dare say Miss Warden can throw hoops around Mary. At least, she must be a finer woman, from your point of view; but we don't all think alike, of course—and I've never met Miss Warden."

"You can go to the deuce!" said Garvice, with scanty politeness.

"Thanks," Heaton replied. "I only wanted to tell you that the Van Decker deal stands as written. No need to get hot about it." He shifted himself out of the gorgeous chair. "Don't forget that board-meeting on the 7th," he added. "No secretary proxies this time. It's important."

Garvice hunched his shoulders.

"I won't forget. Tell Mary—if you see her—that I'm much obliged. I wanted to do something. I wish to Heaven I could!—something better than just letting her pile furniture into a house—"

Heaton interrupted him curtly.

"Say, you've got a lot to learn about Mary. In the art of piling furniture she could teach you a thing or two—take a tip

from me—and she likes it. See you Monday week, I hope. Good afternoon!”

Terry had done his best in a fumbling way to achieve certain results of which he was not at all sure. In his heart of hearts he did not want to set Fred Garvice thinking about Mary sentimentally; but there was a drop of sporting blood in him. Perhaps, through long years of kneeling at the same unresponsive altar, his devotion to Mary had refined itself to a point where he would be glad to see the thing settled, even adversely to himself, so that he could enjoy a measure of freedom.

Almost before Heaton had departed, Miss Blake appeared with some letters to be signed. Then the telephone rang—the very private telephone that dare not ring without good reason.

It was Rose. Her clear, metallic voice floated over the wire in a demand for Fred’s immediate presence. Feldmann, the great impresario, was coming to tea. As a favor to him, Rose had promised to break her golden silence that afternoon and lapse into the silver of song.

On the spur of the moment, Garvice framed a rapid excuse. He thought of her surrounded by a gaping and complimentary audience. He knew the sort. He wished she would make up her mind definitely to drop the whole lot. Was it possible that some women were endowed too brilliantly for wifehood? Were gifts such as Rose possessed both unholy and unnatural?

He ordered his hat and coat and beat a hasty exit, merely to get away from the telephone.

At this hour of the day there was no place for a healthy man to go; yet he must go somewhere, to think things over. He chose the Waldorf—unknowingly the very table at which Rose and her lawyer had sat after the dog-fight. The waiter brought him the whisky high-ball he ordered. He did not want it particularly, but he had to order something. As a matter of fact, he scarcely tasted it, for on the other side of a fantastically decorated screen he heard a conversation that took him out of himself.

The voices were a man’s and a woman’s. Such a conversation must always be more or less interesting; but strangely enough, in this case, the woman had no grievance. She was gay and almost unnaturally pleasant. If they were married, or lovers, her love must be new, thought Garvice, with a grimace.

“Ah, well,” the man’s voice swelled out, “you can have a bet on nature if you like, but I know the bird!”

“You think you do,” chirped his companion. “Men always forget. I wouldn’t trust a man—”

“Give me one example.”

“Well, I’ll give you *one* with pleasure; but please don’t try to fix personalities. It happened only eighteen months ago—a year and a half. That isn’t long, is it?”

By this time Garvice had recognized the woman’s voice, and with horror. Once he had known her very well.

“Go on.”

“All right. Where was I?”

“You wouldn’t trust a man,” the basso profundo prompted sarcastically.

“No, certainly not. A man makes love regardless, when he has neither the spiritual right nor the moral intention. He knows well enough that he is clamped hard and fast to one woman, but he imagines not only that he can get away, but that he wants to get away. I don’t mean you, my dear—that is, not you alone. Take Garvice and Rose Warden, for instance.”

The eavesdropper jumped. This was coming too near home! That wretched woman, to whom he had made casual love eighteen months ago, had forgotten her warning against personalities.

“What about them?”

“Nothing very much—only everybody’ll be sorry by and by. Terence Heaton is madly in love with the first Mrs. Garvice, and of course they’ll marry; but I don’t think any of ’em will be happy. You simply can’t be, when you’re separated by *law*.”

“How do you know anything about that?” the man asked.

There was a brief pause. Then the woman’s voice, a little subdued, replied:

“I know because I’m—I’m one of ’em myself!”

“All right, I understand. I’m one of ’em, too. It’s a hateful kind of devilry. Can’t you make it up?”

“Sometimes I’ve thought I might try.”

“Same here. Let’s try—both of us. Shake—and good luck!”

There was a simultaneous scraping of chairs. Garvice saw the couple as they passed, but they did not see him. The woman was fairly young and not at all a bad sort, as he remembered her. The man was quite common.

This brief conversation had pointed a peculiar path to him. For the first time in his life, he loathed himself.

CHAPTER IX

CISSIE, THE GO-BETWEEN

ROSE had been won over to the Van Decker place by its obvious suitability to what she considered her requirements. The more she thought of the possibility of Garvice's first wife standing between her and the Great Owl's Nest, the more determined was she not to allow any such thing.

She felt sure that the contract could be broken; but on this point she had trouble—in fact, a sharp quarrel—with Garvice. Her lover was determined that the agreement should stand. He could not see that it amounted to allowing his first wife to have a hand in the home of his second.

His answer was monotonously the same. The Colonial Homestead Company was as capable of undertaking the work as any other firm. Of course, everything should be done as Rose wished. It was her privilege to suggest and approve or reject plans. In fact, the Colonial people—he never mentioned Mary's name in these heated discussions—were there to take their orders from Rose, and it was up to her to get busy and set the thing going.

Rose gave in, finally, because she really loved Garvice quite as much as she loved his money, and since coming back to New York she had been haunted with an unreasonable terror of losing him.

It seemed as if he took a diabolical interest in torturing her on this particular subject, for he was continually harping on the need "to get busy and set the thing going," as he put it. Rose wondered if he meant to make the new house an excuse for getting into communication with his first wife. The more she thought of Mary Garvice, the more bitterly she resented Mary's existence.

It had been impossible to oust Cissie from her job. She clung to it like a limpet, since everything was straight and aboveboard with her employer; and each time Rose saw her sister she became increasingly convinced that Cissie was a mean little thing. In vain did she try to throw an unfavorable light on her lover's first wife; Cissie was loyal to the point of exasperation. In fact, Cissie would have clothed Mary Garvice with the

robe and wings of an angel, if allowed her way.

Garvice met his future sister-in-law when the first batch of plans were being considered. Cissie had helped largely with those plans, and was proud of it. She impressed Garvice favorably, for all her diffident manner and her uneasy habit of looking up at him nervously from under her shaggy little bronze-gold bang, like a Skye terrier trembling uncertainly before a Newfoundland.

"Your sister's a wonder, kid!" he said to Rose, when Cissie had taken her departure. "You haven't absorbed all the genius in the family, by any means."

The next time Cissie came to the gilded apartment he saw her for a few moments alone, and embraced an opportunity for which he had been longing. After all, it was only natural that he should feel some interest in Mary. He could not escape the fact that she had played an important part in his past.

"Mrs. Garvice is very well," Cissie replied nervously to his questions. "Oh, yes, we have more business than we can see to properly at present. Yes, Mr. Heaton calls sometimes."

Garvice quite misunderstood Cissie's vivid blush when Terry's name came into the conversation. He said stiffly that he was glad Mrs. Garvice was well, and he hoped she didn't work too hard.

"I suppose she takes a little recreation now and again? I dare say Heaton motors her about?"

Cissie, still blushing violently, couldn't say as to that. She didn't think Mrs. Garvice went out much just now, because of her mourning. Then, remembering too late that it was Mr. Garvice's mourning also, she broke off in miserable confusion. There the subject ended for the time being, for Rose came in, radiant from a shopping tour, and they all fell to work on Cissie's new batch of designs.

A week passed before Garvice caught Cissie alone again. This time, by a skilful process of pumping, he extracted the information that Mrs. Garvice was in the habit of going up to Portchester on Mondays and Thursdays to direct the decorators and watch the progress of the work.

Unfortunately, Rose also had this information. The next day but one being a Monday, Garvice mentioned casually that as she was booked to take her mother to a

concert, he thought he'd run up and see how the house was shaping. Rose said nothing, but it was not at all difficult for her to get a substitute for herself as her mother's companion.

Her jealousy had taken active form by now, but she was as supremely intelligent as Mary Garvice was simple-minded, and she knew how to cloak it. She also knew how to cloak herself, and she spent the whole of Monday morning making such a toilet as only a woman with her natural beauty and resources of wardrobe could accomplish.

Her jealousy had grown insidiously, and she could not account for it herself. What a woman feels is ten times more real to her than what she actually sees or hears. Garvice's devotion left nothing to be desired. He was head over heels in love with her; yet she knew that his heart contained one locked chamber, and, unlike *Bluebeard* of old, he had not even trusted her with the key.

Strangely enough, he was not curious about the locked chambers in her own heart, and she could understand his delicacy as little as his absurd reticence.

She drove up to Porchester alone in her own car when the morning was half spent, thus giving Garvice time to get there ahead of her. Her sense of drama leaped to the situation on which she expected to stumble. She would pretend that her plans had been changed and a natural impulse had impelled her to seek out her lover where she knew him to be.

But things did not turn out just as she expected.

CHAPTER X

THREE KNIGHTS OF THE BRUSH

ALLOWING full rein to an imagination that was oriental in many respects, the ill-fated Mr. Van Decker had flung a Moorish castle on a rocky promontory of Long Island Sound and had given it a name taken from the Bible. One of Rose's first changes was to transform the Great Owl's Nest to Hispania. The new name had a lordly sound, and the mansion, with its irregular red roofs, gray stucco columns, quaint outside staircases, and long balconies, lived up to the picture, although there was no background of palms, and the green waters of the Sound had a chilly look not at all suggestive of the South.

Dark pine-trees etched themselves against the pallid sunshine reflected on the gray walls. A wide stone terrace, with steps leading down to a series of three fountains set in a formal garden of huge dimensions, reminded one of Versailles. There was also a Dutch garden, irregularly flagged, with a sunken pool; and at one side stretched a quarter-mile alley of Italian pergola with stone seats, broken columns, and marble bird-baths. The spacious lawns might have surrounded an English country house. Mr. Van Decker had missed nothing that seemed good to him, even at the risk of mixing metaphors.

The effect to an eye that loved opulence, and was not too critical as to harmony, was pleasing.

To clothe the interior of this mansion with some idea of coherence was a heavy task. A colonial scheme was out of the question. Mary fell back on stiff, heavy brocades for hangings; Moorish tapestries, when she could get them, and heavily gilded Spanish leather. Old Italian furniture was the most suitable, combined with Spanish brass and Chinese lacquer. The gilt and black, the painted panels, the pale reds and strong blues, were not easy to get. Many of the things she needed had to be ordered from abroad through expensive dealers.

When it came to pictures, Mary almost threw up her hands. There were few Italian primitives knocking about in the open market, and not enough good copies that she could secure to go half-way round Hispania. Besides, the choosing of pictures, as well as the hanging of them, ought to be a personal matter.

Carpets—the wonderful jewels of the old Persian and Moorish looms that Hispania demanded—were as rare as hen's teeth, and much more costly. Here and there one was to be found, and more were coming; but Mary felt that this was going to be a life task for her, and she did not care to spend all her remaining years in decorating a palace for her husband's second wife.

Once in the work, however, the personal side of it began to slip away from her. The very splendor of the place was difficult to associate with Fred Garvice as she had known him; for now her memory took a flying leap back into that portion of the past which was most dear. She skipped the ugly parts.

The man she had met and married in her early womanhood was not this man of princely fortune. This man and she had nothing more in common than a little boy's grave, and even that had served to separate them still further. Had the boy lived—well, no, not even he could have brought them together again while the money that had wrought their separation survived. So it was not the home of her husband that Mary Garvice was spending her strength of body and brain to make beautiful, but the mansion of a rather tasteless millionaire who had added to his more material triumphs the capture of a famous song-bird for his mate.

Mary was making money out of the enterprise, but every penny of it was honestly earned. On the particular Monday which held strange things in store for her, she had arrived early, looking workmanlike in her plain, black coat and skirt, her round black toque and modest furs. She had come by train, although Terry Heaton's car was always at her disposal, and had driven over from the station in a hired hack. With her she brought a despatch-case bursting with plans and notebooks.

There were caretakers on the premises, and a catering establishment had been set up in the garage for the small army of workmen. Mary's midday meal would be served in what was ultimately designed for the housekeeper's parlor.

When she arrived, she went first to the ballroom, where three clever copyists were engaged on allegorical panels. This room was originally meant to serve a double purpose. It should have been a picture-gallery, but there was no hope of its being that for a long time to come. Speeding up had been the catchword, and the only way to deal with those great blank walls in a hurry was to cover them with such works of art as satisfy the patrons of our best hotels.

The copyists, however, were doing very well. One cannot beckon to a Sargent at a moment's notice. These panels reflected Goya without Goya's stark and grim cruelty. The color of Spain was in them, even the dark ugliness of her people, as Goya saw them; but the figures postured to sunlight, not to shadow, and their smiles hid no gnawing pain.

The effect was as satisfactory as Mary had hoped for, although the work was really

just beginning. The decorators had planned out their panels, and two were already half finished, for the three men worked rapidly—almost as rapidly as the impatient Garvice could have wished. Two of them were young Americans who had done work of the same sort in Paris, and had found a way to make art support them quite as well as they supported her. The third was a melancholy Italian, a thin, starved-looking creature whose burning eyes and unpleasantly moist, red lips always gave Mary a creeping sensation.

There was nothing offensive in Peter Macchi's manner, however, and he was the best worker of them all, doing as much as both of his companions in the same time, and so much better that Mary feared for the unity of the whole. He slipped deftly down his ladder when she came into the ballroom, and gravely saluted her. The others kept on with their work, merely turning curiously for an instant and smiling at each other with knowing winks.

Whenever Mary appeared, Macchi made a point of standing at attention like a soldier, which his companions thought funny. He was always greedy for praise, and his employer generously gave him his due, although she could not say that she liked him. At the same time, she did not actually dislike the man, and there was a certain fascination in his burning eyes and thin hands that held her in spite of herself.

"*Madame* is pleased?" he asked in his musical, singsong English.

"Indeed, you have done wonders, Macchi! You ought to be painting great pictures some of these days."

One of the others, an irrepressible red-haired youth, commenced to sing half under his breath:

"Some of these days gwine miss yo', honey;
Some of these days gwine feel so lonely!"

Macchi turned and glared at the song-bird, who ceased abruptly; but Mary only smiled. The red-haired youth's antics always amused her.

"I paint great pictures now, *madame*. These are great pictures. And I paint them for you!"

Macchi indicated his panels with a sweeping gesture. The singer took up a new tune, painting hard all the time, as he sang in a sweet, full tenor:

"Hello, hello, who's your lady friend?

Who's the little lady by your side?

I've seen you with a girl or two,

Oh, oh, oh, I am surprised at you!

Hello, hello, stop your little games;

Don't you think your ways you ought to mend?

This isn't the girl I saw you with at Brighton;

Who, who, who's your lady friend?"

Mary was annoyed, but not with the impudent young man on the ladder. Macchi turned perfectly white with anger.

"Pay no attention to him, *madame*, I beg of you. He is always like that. May I have a private word with you, please? It is so noisy in here, and I have important matters to discuss."

Mary agreed reluctantly. As she turned to go out through the big double doors leading to the terrace, followed by the Italian, she heard the more modest of the other two copyists say to his friend:

"You better not be so free with your voice, Tommy. Mrs. Garvice 'll give you the boot, and serve you right. And old Macaroni will have his knife in you some of these days!"

CHAPTER XI

A CURIOUS STORY

OUT of doors, where the sweep of park was lightly brushed with fallen leaves, and the sparkle of autumnal air was warmed by sunlight, it was easier to bear with Peter Macchi. He stood before Mary in his stained blouse, with his dark hair waving in the breeze, and his glowing eyes intent on her face.

"*Madame*, I have a great regard for you. I am your friend," he began solemnly.

"I'm sure you are. But what is it, Macchi? What is this important matter you have to discuss with me?"

"*Madame* may think I presume—"

Mary tapped an impatient foot.

"Either speak out, or go back to your work. I have a lot to do this morning."

"Then I will speak out. There is something strange going on in this house behind you back, *madame*. It concerns the gentleman of the same name as yourself who owns the property. Whenever he comes here with his beautiful fiancée, something threatens him."

"What do you mean?" Mary cried.

Macchi was very much in earnest now. His eyes burned feverishly.

"It is true, *madame*, although no one but myself has perceived the danger—not even Mr. Garvice. I am certain that his life is in danger."

"You terrify me!" cried Mary, with white lips. "Why haven't you told Mr. Garvice? What is it you've noticed? Tell me at once."

"If *madame* will permit me, I'll begin at the beginning. A curse hangs over this house—of course you know that, *madame*."

"Don't be absurd! What danger is Mr. Garvice in? Or are you making all this up?"

Macchi drew himself into a dignified attitude.

"I respect you, *madame*, and I hope to earn your respect—"

"Oh, I'm sorry, but really you are annoying!"

Macchi shrugged his shoulders.

"It is not my fault if you will keep on interrupting." He was speaking as to an equal now. "I mentioned the curse. It is a very simple one, and needs no explaining. When they were building this mansion, *madame*, I was engaged to do the stenciling on the Moorish balconies—work far below the scope of my genius, as you may suppose, but one does these things sometimes for bread and butter. That was two years ago."

"Yes, yes!" Mary urged as he paused.

He drew in a long breath.

"I do not think there are any swallows about here; if so, they do not trouble the houses much. But some came—from the South, from Italy, perhaps, who knows? They are marvelous birds for flight. They nested there, *madame*, under the roof where it overhangs. It is the kind of roof they love, with tiles above to keep them snug and warm, and broad beams to insure the safety of their young."

He pointed upward with a long forefinger to one of the Moorish balconies.

"It was bad enough, their coming in the first place, for the swallow always brings ill luck; but it is twice as bad to drive them away once the nests are started. The house is accursed, *madame*, and events have proved it. Mr. Van Decker had the nests torn down, and in less than a month afterward his fortune was swept from him."

"But what on earth has all this to do with Mr. Garvice?" asked Mary.

The man's manner chilled her inexpressibly. He was an uncanny figure at the best

of times, but now he made her think of some croaking bird of ill omen infinitely more alarming than a whole colony of nest-building swallows whose domestic intentions had been blocked by Mr. Van Decker.

"It is this—the swallows came again, two weeks ago, and started to build once more in the selfsame spot."

"What arrant nonsense! Birds don't nest at this season."

"Ask Mr. Farley, the foreman. He had orders from Mr. Garvice to pull the nests down, and he wouldn't do it; so Mr. Garvice got a rake and ladder and pulled them down himself."

"It seems very odd," mused Mary; "but after all, I don't see how Mr. Garvice can be in any danger because he pulled down a few swallows' nests. For my part, I think I should have left them there."

Macchi's eyes lighted into a frenzy of adoration. It was not love; it was more like religious ecstasy.

"Ah, yes, but you are a sensible woman, *madame*. Since then several things have happened." He lowered his voice and came a step closer to her. "Three attempts have been made on Mr. Garvice's life during the past two weeks. The first occurred at the very time when he tore down the nests. Some tiles were loosened and came crashing down with them—nearly a bushel. He only just ducked in time. If you will look, *madame*, you will see where the roof has been repaired."

"But surely that was an accident," Mary objected.

"Perhaps," said Macchi. "I will not dispute about it. The second time it was dusk, and he had gone up to the terrace on the roof, where it is proposed to make a winter garden, as you know, *madame*. The lovely Miss Warden was with him. He telephoned down for me to come up—something about the frescoes—and what do you think I found at the head of the long flight of iron stairs leading to the roof, *madame*? I tripped over it myself, but as I was going up, and not down, I fell forward on the floor of the roof. It was a piece of stout cord stretched across, three inches from the top step. If they had fallen over that cord, *madame*, as they came down, they would both have broken their necks!"

"Good Heavens!" Mary gasped. "What did you do?"

"I cut the cord. I can show it to you, if you like, and the staples driven into the wall on either side."

"But you said nothing to Mr. Garvice?"

"No, *madame*. I didn't wish to alarm Miss Warden, and I thought I might be able to solve the mystery alone. It is probably one of the workmen who has a grudge against him."

"He must be told at once, of course. But there was a third attempt, you said?"

"Yes, that happened this morning, *madame*."

"This morning?"

"Yes, *madame*. Mr. Garvice was here this morning. He came about an hour ago, but a telegram arrived for him, and he only stayed a few minutes. In those few minutes he escaped death by an inch—one inch only, I assure you. It was the coming of the telegram which saved his life. Do you see that?"

Macchi whisked an object out of one of his pockets. It was a tiny silver hypodermic syringe, with a fine needle-point projecting from one end. Macchi had put it into a cigarette box.

"Don't touch it, *madame*!" he cried.

"Listen, and I will tell you. We were unrolling the bundle of tapestries which came yesterday. Mr. Garvice wished my advice about them. He had just asked at what time you were expected. I think he wanted to see you, *madame*. Then the telegram arrived, and he dropped the strip of tapestry he was holding to read it. I saw this point sticking out almost at the very spot he had been holding. I thought at first that it was a pin, and meant to pluck it out. Mr. Garvice turned away, saying he had to go back to New York at once; and as he left the room, this fell to the floor. I have seen them before, these little toys, and I was careful how I handled it. Mr. Farley keeps some guinea-pigs for his children, and I took leave to borrow one without permission. Poor fellow, he is no more! One prick, and he was dead."

By this time Mary's face was ashen.

"How could anybody know that Mr. Garvice would be interested in the tapestries?" she asked.

Macchi shook his head.

"How could anybody know he would pull down the swallows' nests? Or think to lay such a wicked trap on the roof at the precise moment? Mr. Farley was ordered to pull down the nests, and refused. I my-

self came near to touching the point of the needle."

Mary's brows drew together. Frankly, she was suspicious of Macchi. How did he happen to know so much about these things, if they had really happened? Why had he alone, of all the people employed on the place, stumbled upon so extraordinary a story?

She sent him back to his panel, with the assurance that she would communicate with Mr. Garvice at once, and went out with the intention of interviewing Farley on the subject of the swallows' nests and the cascade of tiles. She had only just started for the workmen's quarters, however, when a big motor-car came dashing up the drive as though driven by a fiend. A woman, white-faced with terror, sprang out.

And that was the manner in which the first Mrs. Garvice met the second Mrs. Garvice-to-be.

CHAPTER XII

FOUL PLAY OR ACCIDENT?

It will be remembered that Rose made ready to play a surprise visit to her new country house with every intention of interrupting a *tête-à-tête* between her lover and his first wife. It was an ambition deserving of better success; for had it come about that way, the story of the triple meeting might have made interesting reading. As it happened, here she was in the carefully planned toilet designed to put Mary in the shade, thinking nothing whatever about herself or her clothes and their effect on Mary.

She bounded out of the car before it had quite come to a standstill, and clutched Mary, who was the first person available. The chauffeur also got down, and came forward tentatively.

"Is Mr. Garvice here? Is he all right? Is he badly hurt?" Rose cried in a small avalanche of words.

Mary's nerves, already severely tried, deserted her. The fact that these two women loved Fred Garvice as perhaps he did not deserve to be loved would have been patent to the veriest dunce.

"Is he badly hurt?" Mary repeated in a shocked voice. "Has he been hurt? What has happened?"

"Then he isn't here? They didn't bring him back here?"

Rose fairly shook the first Mrs. Garvice in her frenzy.

"He isn't here. He left before I came, about an hour ago. What has happened to him? In pity's name, tell me!"

Rose relaxed her clutch and staggered back against the car, throwing a wildly helpless look at her chauffeur. By this time several people had collected, among them being Macchi and Pat Farley, the burly Irish foreman. Mary appealed desperately to the chauffeur, who looked frightened, but seemed to have his wits about him more than Rose.

The story was gleaned bit by bit. On the country road branching off from the Post Road, where one turned to reach Hispania, Rose's car had come upon the flaming ruins of the powerful two-seater that Garvice was in the habit of driving himself. There had undoubtedly been an explosion, for portions of the car were flung far and wide, including the license-plate, by which they were able to identify it. In a tangle of branches they had found Garvice's leather driving-coat, badly torn and stained with blood.

It was a lonely stretch of road with no houses near, and as Rose and her chauffeur were fearfully examining the neighborhood, and shouting to find if any one was near who knew anything about it, the only reply they got was a gunshot from the woods near by. Then the chauffeur had insisted upon his mistress getting back into her own car, and had driven her at top speed to Hispania.

"But I came over that road myself less than an hour ago," Mary quavered; "and the hackman must have gone back the same way; but Mr. Garvice left before I arrived."

"P'raps he was comin' back agin," Pat Farley suggested.

"We must make inquiries at once," Mary said, rousing herself. "Take a couple of your men, Farley, and go back in Miss Warden's car. Perhaps he was badly hurt, and somebody took him to one of the farm-houses."

Macchi stepped forward and made one of his ridiculous bows.

"May I be permitted to accompany Mr. Farley, *madame*?"

"Yes—I dare say it doesn't matter."

Never had his pale face and burning eyes been so distasteful to her. It was curious, to say the least of it, that his tale of intrigue

should be followed so quickly by the tragic sequel.

The red-haired painter was entrusted with the task of telephoning to Portchester, while ten of the humbler workmen set out on foot to find what they could. The under foreman took the crazy little car which was used for errands on the estate, and started for Portchester to bring back a doctor.

In the deserted ballroom with its ladders and canvases, the floor half covered with paint-stained tarpaulin, the two women most interested in Garvice found themselves alone at last, with nothing to do but to wait. In spite of their mutual anxiety, a certain self-conscious restraint made them uneasy in each other's presence. This was not the meeting that Rose had planned. Her carefully thought out toilet went by the board. Her extravagant hat and costly furs looked infinitely less impressive than Mary's simple mourning.

Mary had proved herself equal to the emergency, in so far as it could be met. It was she who had given the orders. Rose had lacked even the spirit to supplement or contradict them. Yet in the combat of their canine pets, where they had first caught a glimpse of each other, it was Rose who had stood firm, though angry, and Mary who had trembled.

There was a solitary chair in the ballroom, a high-backed affair of oak and leather which had been brought in for some purpose or other, and Rose appropriated it almost at once. Her knees were giving way. Had it not been there, she would have sunk to the floor.

Mary walked to the big double doors, which had been set open to mitigate the fumes of paint, and stood looking out over the smoky, golden landscape, so peaceful, yet holding its mysterious and perhaps tragic secrets. It seemed years since she had stood there on the terrace with Peter Macchi and listened to his fantastic tale of ill omen.

She had foolishly allowed Macchi to go with one of the search-parties; yet to keep him back might have been equally foolish. So long as he did not know that she doubted his integrity, he would be outwardly friendly, and would probably offer an addition to his absurd confidences. Some instinct told her that he would come back primed with proofs that a fourth attempt had been made on Garvice's life.

Common sense inclined her to the belief that the engine of her former husband's car had caught fire and exploded; that Garvice had been hurt, and had been taken by some good Samaritan to the nearest point of aid. If he had been killed outright, they would certainly have known of it by this time. Each moment that passed without definite news added to Mary's hope. As to the report of firearms in the woods, it was probably some boy hunting rabbits.

Her mind intent upon the problems which the morning had furnished too lavishly, Mary gradually forgot her self-consciousness where Rose Warden was concerned. It was Rose who recalled her.

"I should like a glass of water, please," said Rose faintly.

Mary turned with a start. The other woman was leaning back against the chair with half-closed eyes. The beautiful features looked sunken; the nostrils were sharply indented with shadows that might have been put in with a blue pencil.

"I believe she loves him more than—more than any man deserves!" was Mary's mental comment, as she hurried off to get the water.

When she came back, however, Rose had revived, and was standing at the door by the terrace. She took the glass with a perfunctory word of thanks, drank off the contents, and set it on the floor. After that she turned her back on Rose and stepped out upon the terrace.

Then, with the subtle perception of women, the first wife realized that it was not alone the fate of Fred Garvice which had overcome Rose, but her own presence. The singer could not live and breathe in the same atmosphere with her predecessor, and her predecessor was almost moved to smile. She had been conscious enough of jealousy herself, and even of a dim sort of hate, but her curiosity would never have led her to such lengths as Rose Warden's. And now all feeling about the woman was swept away by keen anxiety for Fred Garvice. There are times when even soldiers sheathe their swords or reverse arms.

The red-haired painter, no longer impudently flippant, came to whisper to Mary about his telephoning. The police in Portchester knew nothing of the accident until he had informed them. There was no news at all in Portchester. They were sending some people to make inquiries. Tommy, as his friend had called him, had also tele-

phoned to several of the big estates in the neighborhood, but could learn nothing.

Two hours passed before anything more definite than a burning motor-car flanked by its owner's stained leather coat came to light.

CHAPTER XIII

A MEETING OF OLD ACQUAINTANCES

MARY telephoned to Terry Heaton's office, only to be told that Heaton was out. Then, lo and behold, scarcely had she turned away from the instrument when Heaton himself appeared, very anxious and flustered.

It seemed that it was he who had sent the telegram to Garvice summoning the latter back to town, to an important business conference which could not take place without him. Garvice had evidently left with the intention of obeying the summons, and then, for some unknown reason, had turned back a mile or so out of Portchester.

Naturally Heaton, who had motored out full of fire and fury to fetch Garvice, had come upon the ruined motor-car, now surrounded by people, both official and otherwise. He had heard as much of the story as was known before he saw Mary. She was immensely relieved to see him. It seemed as if the greater part of her burden slipped comfortably to his broad shoulders; and for a few moments it was touch-and-go whether or not she would break down and weep. Then, remembering Rose, she decided not to do so.

"She is in there, Terry," she said, indicating the big mansion with a nod. "She followed him, I think. It seems that Cissie told him I was always here on Mondays, and I think he must have wanted to see me about something. Of course she also knew that I was here on Mondays. The days were fixed definitely for our mutual convenience."

"You mean Rose Warden?" Heaton asked, frowning. "What right has she—"

"Don't be stupid, Terry! It's her house."

"I dare say it is, but—"

"Well, she's here, so it's no use worrying," Mary sighed.

"What's she doing?"

"Sitting in the ballroom like a stone image, most of the time; but she revives when I leave her."

"Have you—have you been talking to each other?" Terry asked curiously.

"No, not after the first minute or two. That is, she asked me to get her a drink of water, and said 'Thank you' when I brought it."

Terry Heaton's clever face grew very thoughtful.

"I wonder if she knows what's at the bottom of this!" he muttered.

Mary glanced at him quickly.

"Come down here, Terry; I want to talk to you," she said. "A very strange thing happened earlier this morning."

She led him to the cold-looking Dutch garden, where she could still keep an eye on the driveway. They sat down on one of the benches, and then she told him Macchi's weird tale, word for word as she remembered it. She also described Macchi, his peculiar appearance, and the unpleasant effect he had on her.

Heaton heard her out in silence. He was one of those people—rare enough—who can listen without interrupting and ask their questions afterward. When she had finished, he said:

"H-m! Where is this dago paint-slinger?"

Mary told him that Macchi had gone with some of the others to find out what had become of Garvice, if they could.

Heaton agreed with her that the man's story, in the light of subsequent events, had a decidedly fishy flavor. He was certainly some prophet; almost too good to be true. It remained to be seen.

As they were talking, Rose Warden came down the steps leading from the terrace and turned to the right across the lawns to the drive, without seeing them. Her face was in profile, the features clearly distinguishable, for she was not very far away. Heaton started and gave a little laugh.

"Well, I'll be hanged if this isn't queer! I suppose that's she—Rose Warden?"

"Why, yes," Mary replied wonderingly. "Haven't you heard her sing? Or seen her photographs?"

"No, I've never heard her sing. She didn't get as far as her home town, although I understand she was on the way when Fred cut in and got permission to cage her. Of course, I've seen her photographs, but they don't do her justice, not by a—a long sight. She's some looker, isn't she?"

Mary's grave eyes betrayed no jealous pang, although it must be admitted that

she did feel a little unhappy at Terry Heaton's amazed and outspoken admiration. Men have no tact!

"I think I ought to speak to her," Terry said, after a moment's strained silence, during which he had stared stolidly at Rose's back.

She had stopped at the drive, and was straining her eyes in the direction of the lodge gates. Mary rose.

"Certainly you ought," she said. "I'll go in and keep in touch with the telephone. I'll be in the library if you want me."

There was a little bitterness in Mary's heart as she left him. Expressed as in the classics, her thought might have read:

"Et tu, Brute!"

She was not in love with Terry Heaton, and would have been honestly glad if he had found happiness with some other woman; but to have him stupefied with admiration for Rose Warden was a little too much. She might have saved herself these pessimistic reflections, however, for it was not altogether admiration which was impelling Heaton to step up to her rival with soft words of sympathy.

Heaton was in that enviable position, from the male point of view, which made it possible for him to pick and choose mere beauty with a discriminating eye. No woman owned him; yet, if he wished, he might have owned quite an unrespectable number of women. His tastes, however, lay in the direction of a placid life; and no one is so difficult and yet by the same token so easy to please as your confirmed man of the world.

No, Mary Garvice, who judged all men by the one specimen of the tribe she knew most intimately, had misjudged Heaton in supposing him to have been smitten at sight by a sable coat, a French hat, and a selfishly handsome profile. As far as he was concerned, wrongfully setting aside her undoubted claims to genius, Rose was an honorable member of the Clan of the Painted Lady. Perhaps she was only on outpost duty now, but there had been a time when—

On the calendar that was but four years back, yet to Heaton it might have been yesterday. He remembered her and the circumstances only too well. The latter were so shocking that although Rose's photographs had always given him a reminder of the woman he imagined her to resemble, he had never for a moment be-

lieved that that woman could possibly be the singer who came into her fame about a year later.

As he walked toward her, the story flew before his mental vision, like some incredibly swift cinema film. He saw Mentone; a plaster hotel set in a garden of flower scents; the Mediterranean, bluer than any picture post-card ever painted it; a beautiful woman, and a foreigner who was afterward known to be not her husband but her lover. The man was found dead in his bed one morning, in circumstances that pointed to that ugliest of all words, murder. The woman disappeared overnight. As far as Heaton knew, she had never been traced.

The couple had taken their meals in their own rooms, waited on by an ignorant Mentonese servant who would never be likely to follow the fortunes of a Rose Warden. When she appeared in public, she had always worn a veil; but Heaton had been more fortunate than the other visitors at the hotel, for he had seen her unveiled, and had spoken with her. The circumstances were not particularly interesting, but they may as well be told.

He had come upon her in the corridor early one morning, on her way to the bath. She had passed him haughtily, with averted face—the profile he recognized now so positively—and she had dropped a huge sponge, which he retrieved and returned to her, receiving her thanks, given hurriedly as she passed on. In that brief moment her face had been photographed on his brain. He remembered the vivid coloring, the cold blue eyes, and the masses of flaxen hair. Details of the tragedy had escaped him, however, and he did not remember the name under which the couple had passed.

Now, when he came up to Rose and addressed her, she turned to him without the slightest recognition.

"My name is Heaton. May I introduce myself, Miss Warden?"

She gave him her hand.

"I've heard Fred speak of you," she said. "Oh dear, Mr. Heaton, what do you suppose has happened to him?"

"I'm sure nothing really serious, or we should have heard by this time," Heaton replied, eying her narrowly. "I shouldn't worry too much, if I were you."

"That's more easily said than done. I'm sick with worry. I can't make it out at all."

She clenched her hands convulsively, and the muscles of her throat worked. Now that he was close to her, Terry Heaton was more than certain that she was the missing heroine of the Riviera tragedy.

"Try to occupy your mind with other things," he suggested. "This place of yours is lovely. Do you expect to get in soon? Let us talk about that."

"I can't talk about anything," she said rudely. "I'm too much upset."

"Then perhaps you would like to be alone? I apologize."

"Oh, Mr. Heaton, I didn't mean that!" She broke off, staring at him, as if a little puzzled. "Haven't we met before somewhere?" she added. "I seem to remember your face; but I meet so many people."

"Yes, we have," said Heaton, "but I didn't expect you to remember. It was at the Hôtel des Anglais in Mentone, four years ago in January."

CHAPTER XIV

PETER MACCHI AGAIN

If Heaton had expected Rose to be bowled over by his statement, he was mistaken. She looked at him very coolly for a few seconds, then shook her head.

"It couldn't have been there. I was never in Mentone in my life, strange to say. The nearest I ever got was Monte Carlo, for a flying two nights at the Casino, and that was last winter. We were booked for a week, but I had caught a dreadful cold in the train, and two performances of 'Butterfly' finished me. Try again, Mr. Heaton!"

The last sentence might read as if she were mocking him, but her voice was serious enough. Either she was as great an actress as she was a singer, or Heaton had made a terrible mistake.

He had no time at the moment to decide which way it was, for just then her motor came back, and everybody flew to meet it. The men jumped out, looking baffled and discouraged—all except Macchi, whom Heaton instantly recognized from Mary's description. The Italian wore an air of secret triumph, and seemed to be hiding some small object under his coat. A local policeman was with the party.

No further trace had been found of Garvice. As far as any one knew, he might have vanished in the explosion which

wrecked his car. Except for the leather coat and its sinister stains it was difficult to believe in the existence of his corporeal body, either dead or alive.

In their mutual anxiety the two women ignored each other's presence in a way that inclined Terry Heaton to an inward smile. He was not so anxious about Garvice as they were. It would not have broken his heart if Garvice remained lost for all time. Then he remembered the directors' meeting, and reflected that unless the missing man turned up by three o'clock at the latest, able to take his place in the deferred council, Garvice would pay for his accident in more than broken bones.

"I'll bet my hat he crawled out from the débris and took the first train he could catch to New York," Heaton growled to himself, in the midst of the chattering. Looking at his watch, he found that it was nearly half past one. "I must be moving," he said aloud. "Better let me drive you back, Mary."

Mary threw a wistful glance at the beautiful face of her successful rival. She did not want to go away, but Rose did not invite her to remain.

"Very well," she said.

Macchi was making signs to her, and she went toward him reluctantly. Heaton followed at once.

"*Madame*, the case is complete!" Macchi began in a voice of subdued triumph, but stopped when he saw Heaton measuring him.

"This is my friend, Mr. Heaton. I have told him your story, Macchi, and whatever you have to say please say before him."

Macchi bowed.

"As you please, *madame*. It is not my secret to keep any longer."

He glanced about quickly, but no one was paying any attention to them, Rose holding the center of the stage a little distance off. Then he unbuttoned his coat, having previously discarded his painting-blouse, and disclosed the object Heaton had noticed him hiding. It was the broken dial of a cheap nickel alarm-clock, and fastened to it were some bits of twisted wire, which Macchi invited them to smell. The odor was that of a burned-out cartridge.

"It is undoubtedly a bomb," he said.

"Where did you get it?" Heaton demanded.

"I found it in the brambles, sir, not far from where they picked up the coat."

"Why didn't you give it to the police? What right had you to touch it?"

Macchi looked crestfallen.

"I am very sorry, sir, if I did wrong—"

"You did very wrong. See here, young man, nobody has invited you to play detective. Take my advice. Go straight to the chief of police in Portchester and tell him everything you have told Mrs. Garvice. Do it at once, or you may be sorry."

Macchi licked his red lips apprehensively.

"I may get into trouble if I do, sir."

"And you can lay money on it that you'll get into trouble if you don't," Heaton interrupted sharply. Again he looked at his watch and gave a disgusted exclamation. "I've got to fly, Mary, and I don't intend to leave you here. There's nothing you can do. It's Miss Warden's affair, you know." Mary nodded, pale to the lips. Macchi watched her, his burning eyes full of devotion. "Now, young man!" Heaton said, turning upon him savagely.

"Yes, sir, I'll do as you say, but I know I'll get into trouble."

"He'll get into jail, if I don't miss my guess," Heaton said to Mary as they walked toward his car.

He had almost to lift her in, she was trembling so violently.

"Oh, Terry, do you think it can be true—what Macchi suggests?" she asked, as they bowed down the smooth driveway.

It was a limousine, and Terry, through the speaking-tube, was urging his chauffeur to forget the speed limit.

"Do I think what is true?" he asked crossly, when satisfied that his advice was being taken.

"That somebody has been planning to murder Fred?"

"Well, if they have, I believe that young Italian can say who it was. As soon as we get to New York I'll have some one telephone up here to the police. I'm afraid he'll cut and run, that's all; but we can't stop, now. Where did you get the fellow?"

"Through the Academy, with the other two."

Mary suddenly ducked and hid her eyes. They had slowed down to pass the spot where Garvice's car had been blown up. No longer could it be called a lonely country road, for fully half a hundred people and any amount of vehicles of varying descriptions were gathered round. Changing his mind, Heaton called a halt. He jumped out and had a few minutes' earnest

conversation with the sergeant who was superintending a thorough investigation of the surroundings.

"That's better," he said when he rejoined Mary. "Save telephoning. I told him about Macchi, and he'll see that the fellow's story is heard in the right quarter."

"Nothing further?"

"No. They've scoured the woods, made inquiries of every man, woman, and child within five miles, and telephoned to all the stations on the line, but there's nothing doing. The 'vanishing lady' isn't in it with poor old Fred."

"Oh, Terry, how can you be so callous? He may be dead or hideously hurt."

"My dear, the facts are all against it. I don't believe he's got a scratch."

"Don't be a fool, Terry! What about his poor coat?"

"Do you expect me to shed tears over the agony of his poor coat?"

"I expect you to be a little human," said Mary, with offended dignity.

She became silent, and little more was said during the remainder of the journey. Heaton left her at her place on Thirty-Sixth Street, and went on downtown to his office. A plan had formed in his astute mind for safeguarding Fred Garvice's interests.

Heaton bore Garvice no great love in these days, but he was a true sportsman. The other fellow was down in some mysterious fashion, and it seemed to Heaton that the only fair thing for one who knew the ins and outs of his business was to tide him over until he could give an account of himself.

There was just time for a hasty consultation with Garvice's chief business man before the conference of millionaires. At the meeting, Heaton took over Garvice's interests *en bloc*, at considerable inconvenience to himself. In fact, he did not know at the moment where he was going to find the necessary funds for such an enterprise. The early closing of the Stock Exchange made the thing barely possible.

The evening papers would be full of the mystery of Garvice's disappearance, and in the morning there would probably be a heavy fall in the big holdings he possessed. Unless some one stepped in and protected them, Garvice—if he survived—would be just about where he started a few years ago. It does not take long to unmake a fortune in Wall Street.

Heaton's work was cut out for him with a vengeance, and there was something heroic—on the surface, at least—in his attitude. The truth was that he preferred Fred Garvice rich to Fred Garvice poor. If he was a ruined man, Rose Warden might take it into her golden head to throw him over, and then he might come back to Mary. Terry liked to think that Fred and Mary had done with each other for good.

Leaving Heaton to the pursuance of his scheme, which promises to keep him so busy with dry details that he ceases to be interesting for the time being, let us return to the long-neglected Cissie Warden.

Cissie was at home in Newark when all this was going on. Sometimes, when there were plans and drawings to finish, she did the work in her "studio"—a hall-room in the flat where she lived with her parents. In one way it was very convenient, for, sitting by the window at her drawing-board, Cissie could reach out on one side to the book-shelf containing the works of reference she was using, and on the other to the table where were spread the various tools of her trade.

Also, because the room was so small, the little gas-heater was enough to warm it, although the fumes sometimes gave Cissie a headache.

The flat was one in a "three-family" house. On the first floor lived the noisy family of a drummer in the carpet trade—"very common people," as Cissie's mother remarked about twice a day. The Wardens were on the second floor, and over them were a young German couple and their first baby. The head of the family was a clerk in a local brewery.

The Wardens, sandwiched in between, paid little attention to their neighbors, and were, in turn, scorned for their supposed uppishness. In that suburb of a metropolitan suburb Rose Warden's was not a name with which to conjure awe, and Cissie's occupation was regarded with dim suspicion. It was against her that she looked pretty rather than clever. Consequently, as Cissie struggled with her water-colors to produce rich Moorish and Italian effects, she was rather surprised to be interrupted by young Mrs. Gleick, from the floor above.

The hall-room, it may be mentioned, was not contained in the flat proper, but was entered from the landing. It was intended for storage—hence the gas-stove.

Mrs. Gleick had knocked, and Cissie, supposing her visitor to be her mother, who always went through this ceremony as a prelude to interrupting work, said:

"Come in!"

Then she stared mutely at big, fair Mrs. Gleick, whom she knew only well enough to pass the time of day with her when they met on the stairs. The woman was agitated, and her round face was the color of putty.

"I wonder if you will do me a favor, Miss Warden!" she began hurriedly. "An accident has happened at the brewery—my husband is hurt, and they have sent for me. I must go at once, but I have no one to leave the baby with. Mrs. Williams is out, and I do not like to ask your mother. I must go at once. Oh, my poor Carl! I cannot say how badly he is hurt. You see, I have nobody to leave baby with, and I must go at once!"

She was beginning all over again when Cissie interrupted by getting up and saying that, of course, she would look after the baby.

Mrs. Gleick hurried Cissie up-stairs. In the intervals between putting on her wraps, she explained about the feeding-bottle and how to heat it. The baby would probably sleep for an hour, and by that time she might be back. She was very grateful to Cissie, and suggested that the latter might bring her things up and work, or make herself a cup of coffee, or do anything else that she liked. Then the distracted woman started off at a run.

Cissie had toiled hard that day, and was not loath to take a few hours' rest in the justifiable cause of humanity. She had never been in the Gleick's flat before, and it interested her to look about, amazed at the superlative specklessness of the modest home.

After a peep at the sleeping baby in his heavily frilled bassinet, she turned her attention to the decorative scheme of the parlor. There were a flowered carpet on the floor, flowered paper on the walls, red plush furniture, and a cottage organ. A canary's cage hung before one of the lace-curtained windows, and mantel-shelf and table were loaded with a fearsome array of bric-à-brac and framed photographs.

To while the time away, Cissie gingerly ventured to lift a book from its exact position on the marble-topped center table. Finding herself confronted by a tome of philosophic trend, equally solid for the mind

and heavy for the hands, she put it back again with care.

Then the baby woke up, and was fed according to directions. He was very amusing, and Cissie enjoyed herself immensely, rocking him in her arms, pretending that he was her own, bestowing kisses on his fat neck, and generally having the time of her rather dull young life.

She was not at all anxious for Mrs. Gleick to hurry back. The baby, who was too young to care whether she was his mother or not, occupied her thoughts to the complete exclusion of drawings for her sister's mansion on the Sound.

Then into the midst of this domestic enjoyment burst tragedy in the person of poor Mrs. Gleick, attended by her mother, two sisters, and a male relative. The "accident" had resulted in the death of Mr. Gleick.

The widow, sobbing, tore her child from Cissie's arms, and embraced it so fiercely that it lifted up its strong little voice with hers in lamentation for the father it would never know. Neighbors crowded in, sympathetic and whispering. Cissie learned that poor Mr. Gleick had been killed in a mysterious automobile accident.

The circumstances were these—the head of the brewery, in conference with one of the "big men" of the city, a banker named Morris, had called Gleick to do an important errand. He was to go to Morris's offices in Broad Street, to fetch some forgotten papers relating to a foreign loan in which both the small and the big capitalist were interested. Morris had told the young man to make use of his car, which was outside, to expedite the errand. Gleick had done as directed, and two minutes later, as he was being bowled along Market Street, the big limousine was blown asunder by a terrific explosion.

The explosion must have taken place somewhere in the body of the car, since the engine was found to be practically intact. The chauffeur was whirled twenty feet away, and landed with a cracked skull, two broken ribs, and a broken thigh. It was scarcely expected that he would live. A dozen people in the street had been injured, and a horse attached to a passing dray was instantly killed by a piece of flying metal. Many windows in the neighborhood had been broken, and quite a number of people had been thrown to the ground with the shock of the explosion.

But poor Mr. Gleick had suffered most terribly of all. He had been torn literally to ribbons. What was left of him had to be picked up and put into baskets.

The messenger who had been sent to Mrs. Gleick had confused her husband with the chauffeur. Hence she had gone to the hospital with a remnant of hope, only to learn the ghastly truth. It was a terrible thing for the poor woman, who seemed on the verge of losing her mind. The baby was taken from her for its own sake; and as soon as her relatives had the situation in hand as well as might be, Cissie retired, shuddering, to her family below, to recount the awful news.

She found her mother placidly mending stockings, with the Bible on a little stand beside her. Mrs. Warden's ambition had taken the old-fashioned form of memorizing whole books from the only volume which she regarded as possessing any value. She was now occupied with the "Gospel According to Saint John," and had got pretty well into it. Her lips moved softly as she darned the stockings.

She was a placid, pretty figure in her gray and black striped silk dress, with a bit of old lace fastened at her throat with a cameo brooch. Her hair was silvery-white, and she wore a cap. She looked almost too old to be Cissie's mother in these days of blond grandmothers; but the fact was that she had married, late in life, a man considerably younger than herself, and had unconsciously remained a wedded spinster of the old school. Her husband, an invalid, was out taking his daily sun-bath on a bench in the little park at the end of their street.

Cissie broke in upon her mother's peace and told of the tragedy up-stairs. Mrs. Warden took off her glasses, closed her Bible, and was properly, if gently, shocked.

"Dear, dear! Such things shouldn't be allowed. The poor man! His poor wife! As if there wasn't enough trouble in the world—"

These mild drippings were to be expected from Mrs. Warden, but there were times when Cissie found them irritating. She was glad when her father came in.

He was a tall, thin man with a Don Quixote beard and other characteristics—of temperament—which gave him a resemblance to that famous tilter at windmills. He carried a gold-headed cane and wore a starched white piqué waistcoat, winter and summer. In his way he was a

scholar, but not much of anything else. His liver was his fetish, and it stood him to very good purpose in gaining the subordination of his family. Without it, he would have been rather helpless; for in spite of her placid gentleness, the old maid he had married was a natural driver of men.

Cissie, however, had a great admiration for her father. He had given her the few good times she had had as a child, and was always on her side when it came to worldly amusements now that she might be called grown-up. He had encouraged her to a point where she was able to make a decent living for him, and they had a vice in common—both were passionately addicted to the “movies.”

So it was to be expected that Mr. Warden, in spite of his liver—which Cissie cheerfully accepted as a necessary subterfuge—should take a human interest in the Gleick tragedy. As a matter of fact, he did more than that. He was excited to such a degree that his fluttering old wife feared for his heart, and flew off to mix him a hot toddy—a delicate attention which he accepted with true appreciation of its rarity.

He had brought back an evening newspaper that told not only about Carl Gleick, but also of the mysterious disappearance of Fred Garvice. That was not the whole of the story either. At Albany, a Tammany politician had been blown up in *his* car and killed. In New York, a rich cotton-broker had met with a similar disaster, and although he was not yet dead, he was not expected to live the night. In Brooklyn, the owner of a big newspaper was nursing a broken jaw and several minor injuries, while his chauffeur had suffered the death penalty.

In each case the “accident” recorded was the same—an explosion in the body or engine of a motor-car in circumstances that suggested the foulest of foul play. And all had occurred in the late forenoon of that one day.

CHAPTER XV

A PRETTY KETTLE OF FISH

THE next morning the newspapers had scarcely anything to record but this wholesale attempt at the destruction of millionaires. It was plain that in the Newark case poor Carl Gleick was not the victim aimed at. In the Portchester case, the mys-

tery was complicated by the disappearance of Garvice. Nothing further had come to light there, except that it had been discovered that the stains on the leather coat were not blood, as had been thought at first, but were from a broken bottle of cough-mixture found in one of the breast-pockets.

Much was made of the arrest of Peter Macchi, against whom there was not the slightest evidence except that he had been too zealous in playing the detective. He was detained, however, on suspicion, for the matter was too far-reaching to risk anything.

Investigations went on briskly. In each of the five cases the method of destruction had been the same. A crudely made bomb, its-fuse regulated by a cheap nickel alarm-clock, had been placed in either the bonnet or the body of the car to be wrecked. The habits of the owners had been timed very accurately.

As a result, a commendable spirit of democracy asserted itself at once among the millionaires of the big cities. It is doubtful if ever before since the introduction of the motor so many rich men had gone afoot, or sought the more humble means of trolley or subway to carry them to their offices. Even comparatively poor men gave up the luxury of their cars for the time being, and in every garage throughout the length and breadth of the land there was a grand overhauling of men and machines.

Terence Holbrook Heaton, being a man of caution, employed two husky detectives to keep him company during his waking hours, and two others who watched near his bedside while he slept. Terry was brave enough, but bombs and bomb-throwers had the terror for him that they have for most people, and he was taking no risks.

Some brilliant mind—it may have been Heaton’s—unearthed the fact that each of the five men against whom the attacks had been planned was interested in loans to a minor but enterprising European state reported to be meditating a belligerent assault upon one of its neighbors. At the time of writing we know to what lengths a quarrel in the Balkans can go; but this is not a story of the Great War. It is not even a story of a little war.

Digging through stock reports, some one found that a month or so ago Frederic Garvice had actually made a personal loan of half a million dollars to the King of Hurpathia, on securities guaranteed by his

government. Morris, the Newark banker, was negotiating a Hurpathian contract for arms and ammunition. The cotton-broker, on the strength of certain tariff concessions, had sent a substantial contribution to the Hurpathian war-chest. Apparently George Best, the newspaper proprietor, had given Hurpathia nothing but the good-will of his columns, but perhaps his was the most important contribution of all. Daly, the Tammany boss, an uncannily clever man of business, was also understood to have had relations with Hurpathia.

After these coincidences came to light—which was promptly—men who had remotely thought of touching Hurpathian securities dropped the idea like a hot cake. Playing with bombs is not a sporting game. That morning, on the Exchange, anybody who pleased might have pretty nearly bought up the whole state for a song; but there were no singers.

The next day's sensation was the death of Martin Fenny, the rich cotton man, who had been lingering painfully throughout two days and nights. There was a mild panic in cotton, and, of course, stocks caught the infection. Heaton, heavily burdened with the responsibilities of the missing Garvice, saw himself going under unless he threw off some of his excess baggage.

When his fortune is at stake, your millionaire sweats tears of blood. Heaton wondered if it was worth while to make such a desperate fight for a woman who didn't seem to care for him anyway, and would scorn his motives had he taken the trouble to explain them to her.

He snatched an hour at dusk to call upon Mary. She was out; but Cissie Warden was there, just shutting up shop.

Heaton talked with Cissie while he waited for Mary. The girl had always been rather shy in his presence, but now she lost her self-consciousness in the thrilling topic of the day. Like Heaton, she had had personal experience of one of the tragedies, and she was moved to tell it with simple eloquence.

Heaton found himself mightily interested in the humble story of poor Mrs. Gleick, and of the Gleick baby, for whom Cissie had cared during his mother's unhappy errand. And then he became a little bit interested in Cissie herself. She made a pretty picture in her gray "art" overall, with her expressive blue eyes and her wealth of bronze-gold hair, against the background

of rich fabrics and old furniture distributed about the showroom. Her cheeks were flushed with excitement, and although she was almost painfully slender, Heaton—whose interest in any other woman but Mary was so rare as to be extraordinary—decided that with a few months of an easy life and a nourishing diet Cissie might become quite presentable.

Mary returned to find them chatting like old friends, while Heaton's watch-dogs defiled the atmosphere of her William-and-Mary anteroom with strong cigar-smoke and amused themselves with the evening papers. Heaton, too, was smoking, balancing his heavy frame on the arm of a Queen Anne chair as if it was so much rubbish; while Cissie, comfortably ensconced in a high-backed tapestry affair under the twinkling drop-lights of an old chandelier, swung her feet like a child and chattered like a parrot.

Owing him one for the cigar-smoke and another for treating her property in such a cavalier fashion, Mary's greeting of her visitor was cold and abrupt. Cissie immediately slipped down from her chair, and became unhappily self-conscious, making for the door with a murmured "Good night." She evidently thought that Mrs. Garvice was annoyed with her; and so did Heaton.

As Cissie fled the room, Terry remembered his troubles. It did not help matters much that Mary instantly took him to task for his bad manners, and for those of his keepers in the William-and-Mary anteroom.

"If they must smoke, let them go outside, Terry. And as for you, you ought to know better. I can't have my customers confronted with stale tobacco. This isn't a corner saloon, you know!"

Heaton immediately disposed of his cigar in the fireplace, and meekly went to lead his men to the door-step. When he came back, Mary was raising heavy windows, assisted by her temper.

"Now look here, Mary, there isn't any sense in your getting mad just because little Cissie and I were having a nice sociable time. You made the poor girl think she was dirt, and you'd like to make me think I was, but—"

Mary broke out laughing hysterically.

"You and Cissie! Did you imagine I was jealous?"

Heaton hoped so, but he said nothing, putting on an air of offended dignity.

"My dear Terry, I'm driven almost distracted, and your cigars were the last straw—you know what I mean. I'm so glad you came. You're the one person in the world who can help me."

She laid a soft, appealing hand on his arm, and Terry melted instantly.

"What is it, my dear?" he asked. "I'm in trouble, too, and it seemed as if you were the one person in the world who could help me. But tell me first."

Mary darted him a quick glance from her moist, dark eyes.

"It's Fred, of course." She sighed.

"I know, Mary, but—"

"I've heard from him," Mary said, too quietly for the thunderbolt she shot.

"Great Scott!" Heaton all but leaped. Then his face clouded, and he looked very cross. "I knew he was all right! I was sure—"

"Wait a moment. Let me show you. It's such a strange letter. But it's his handwriting, isn't it?"

She took a letter from her hand-bag and gave it to Heaton. The envelope was postmarked "Fordham, 10.30 A.M."

"I went down to your office as soon as it came," Mary said as he started to read, "but you had gone."

Heaton frowned heavily. What nonsense was this?

DEAR MARY:

I must see you at once, if you will be so kind as to come to me here. It is a boarding-house (2002 Bedford Park Boulevard) and I am calling myself Brown.

This is a fine mess, and has turned out very differently from what I expected, but I did it for you, Mary. Will explain when I see you and leave the judgment in your hands. Come before nine to-night, if you possibly can.

Always your loving husband,

FRED.

P. S.—Whatever you do, I beg of you not to communicate with Rose or the police until after I have seen you.

"Your loving husband!" sneered Terry. "What does he think he is—the Sultan of Turkey or Brigham Young? And what's his little game?"

Mary shook her head.

"Terry, I don't know, but I'm afraid. Do you suppose he's done anything—anything dreadful, I mean?"

"He's done enough dreadful things; but if you mean criminal, I shouldn't think so."

"Then why—what do you make of it?"

What did he do for me that has turned out differently than he expected? You see what it says. And why is he in a boarding-house in Fordham, calling himself Brown?"

Heaton turned the letter over and inspected it carefully. The note-paper was of cheap quality, but the writing was unmistakably Fred Garvice's. There are certain fists that simply cannot be imitated, and Garvice's was one of them.

"I don't think you ought to go," Heaton said presently. "Really, Mary, it's too risky. You'd better take no notice of that postscript. This is a matter for the police, not for you."

"I'm not afraid, if that's what you mean."

"I didn't say you were; but all the same, you've no proof that this isn't a trap."

"Fred wouldn't—"

"You don't know what's happened to him, or anything about this place he calls a boarding-house. It may be what he says it is, and it may not. You can't take his case independently from the others. Obviously he wasn't in his car when it blew up. Perhaps he knew what was going to happen. Perhaps he was kidnaped. We don't know, and a private investigation committee of one is rather useless. Don't you think so?"

Mary pressed her hands together, miserably conscious that she wanted to answer this mysterious appeal in the face of anything Terry Heaton might say. It is a curious trait in women that when it comes to a crisis, physical cowardice is not their weak point. Perhaps it is because they are buoyed up by an instinctive and pathetic trust in the strength and chivalry of men.

"I feel I ought to go, Terry."

"For Heaven's sake don't be so unreasonable!"

"Then will you go?"

Heaton rejected the suggestion with scorn.

"I haven't the least doubt in the world that, if it's a trap, it's meant to catch me. Everybody knows that although Fred and I are still associated in business, you and I are pretty close friends. No, thank you, I'm not caught on any bait of that sort in these uncertain times!"

"Terry, I believe you're a coward!"

"Believe what you like."

"Well, then, I shall have to go there by myself."

"I sha'n't let you."

"You can't stop me, Terry."

"The police can."

Mary's face went white.

"If you do a thing like that—if you betray him—I'll never speak to you again so long as I live!"

Heaton shrugged his shoulders. She had called his bluff, and he was not prepared to put her faith in him to any further test.

"You win, Mary. Come on. I'll even agree to risk my blessed neck in a taxi, if you'll let me hold your hand all the way out to Fordham."

Mary smiled gratefully.

"I knew I could depend on you! You may hold my hand as long as you like, if it amuses you."

"I'm hanged if it does that," Heaton muttered.

There are times when a woman takes your lifelong devotion too much as a matter of course.

CHAPTER XVI

SEVEN GABLES

FIRST they must have some dinner. Heaton was adamant on that point, since he had consumed nothing more substantial than a cocktail since breakfast, and it was an axiom with him that man's first duty is to his interior.

Mary suffered herself to be dragged around to their favorite little restaurant, and watched her friend put away a huge portion of beefsteak and relays of fried potatoes, while his two detectives at a nearby table refreshed themselves in a similar hearty fashion.

"You're crazy to go about with those men, Terry. People will begin to laugh at you," Mary said scornfully.

"Let them laugh!" Heaton replied.

"The world can spare me as ill as I can spare myself, and just now I'm not taking any chances."

Mary regarded him impatiently. Now that she had got her way, she wanted to get even more of it.

"You're not going to take them along with us?"

"What do you think? Not in our taxi, mind you, because they might interfere with me holdin' your hand, darlin' Mary," Heaton said, relapsing for a moment into the brogue of his ancestors. "But what do I hire 'em for?"

Mary pouted. She was very anxious to fulfil the exact directions given in Garvice's letter, and taking along two detectives was perilously like informing the police.

"Terry, I forbid you!"

"Forbid away, my dear."

"I think you're a beast! You never did like poor Fred, anyway."

"O-ho! So he's 'poor Fred' now!"

Mary flushed, and her eyes filled with tears.

"He's in trouble, and I feel sorry for anybody—"

"You've a soft heart, Mary. Couldn't you feel sorry for me, too? I'm in trouble myself."

He gulped down a lump of beefsteak and tackled another mouthful of potatoes. If he was not actually in trouble, he might be soon, for Terry's inner mechanism was not adjusted to the hurried bolting of meals. But Mary scorned him.

"You! What have you to worry about?"

She changed her attitude quickly when he told her. Her delicate features were filled with awe and her lips quivered.

"Do you mean to say that you've taken over Fred's affairs to save him from ruin? I don't understand business, and never shall; but how could you do it, Terry?"

"You don't understand business, my Lady of Beautiful Homes, so why trouble to explain?"

"But, Terry, that was awfully kind of you!"

"No," said Terry, "it was selfish. But even selfishness has its limits, and I'm not so sure I shall be able to hang on without going under myself. I may, unselfishly, be obliged to chuck Garvice's interests to the tender mercies of the Exchange. They won't do a thing to him either, if he keeps up this dodge much longer!"

Mary stared, thoroughly puzzled.

"You talk in such riddles," she said.

Heaton leaned toward her, elbows on the table.

"See here, Mary, it's up to you. You want Fred back, don't you?"

The direct question was like a blow in the face; yet she met it squarely.

"I never knew—I really wanted him until—"

"Until Rose Warden stepped in," Heaton finished up for her. "Anyway, you don't want me. It's up to you, Mary. Make up your mind if you prefer Fred as a millionaire or a pauper. It just happens

that I'm in a position to accommodate you either way."

Her eyes flashed with sudden intuition.

"You mean that if he were poor he'd come back to me?"

"If he were a pauper, I think Rose Warden would drop him, and other costly ladies would think twice before taking him up. That's what I think. It's a chance for a merciful revenge, Mary."

But the sparkle had gone out of Mary's eyes. She shook her head.

"I've got some pride. The test of Fred was not poverty, but wealth."

"I'm thinkin' it's the test of most of us," muttered Terry.

Then he pushed back his chair as a signal that, his appetite being satisfied, he was ready to go on this mad quest with her. She waited nervously in the lobby while a taxi was being sought and Heaton gave directions to his body-guard. They were to follow in another taxi and "hang about" when the end of the journey was reached. He told them no more than was necessary. He said simply that Mrs. Garvice had come upon a small piece of evidence that might or might not be important in solving the mystery of her former husband's disappearance.

It was half past eight when they left the crowded city behind them and came into the less densely populated neighborhood of the Bronx. Here there were stretches that had not been built upon at all; then the stark outlines of some tall new apartment-house, followed by a group of modest frame cottages that had seen very nearly the length of their days. Another open space, over which a couple of street-lamps cast uncertain shadows; then a mass of rocks crowned by dense foliage, behind which rose the outlines of a gabled frame house of goodly proportions.

"Guess this is the place, mister," said the driver. "Not far off, anyway—there's the Ursuline Convent, and I should rather reckon it was about here."

He struck a match to examine a number painted on the rocky face of the terrace.

"That's it, mister—2002, wasn't it?"

Heaton nodded and turned to Mary.

"Hadn't you better wait here?" he asked in a low voice. "You'll be perfectly safe."

But she shook her head and glanced eagerly toward the dimly lighted windows behind the mass of autumn foliage.

"No, I'm coming. He wants to see me."

Heaton had the satisfaction of seeing the other taxi draw up at the end of the block. He told his own man to wait, and Mary and he toiled up the flight of steps which had been cut into the rock. At the top a graveled path bordered with box and evergreens led around to the main entrance, which was at the side of the house. Somewhere at the back a dog set up a fearful commotion. Mary gave a gasp of fright, but was reassured by Heaton's assertion that the animal was undoubtedly tied up. Except for the dog, the place was unusually quiet.

Reaching out to feel his way, Heaton's hand came in contact with an iron rod, which he discovered to be part of a high, spiked fence, its ugliness hidden by the clever arrangement of shrubbery. He did not actually feel misgiving, but something that was near akin to it. So far there was no reason to suppose that the house was anything but what Garvice had described in his letter.

It was better when they emerged from the dark path and came upon a broad veranda, dimly lit from the inside through a fanlight. The house looked like a comfortable, old-fashioned dwelling. By daylight it must have been most attractive, as well as pleasantly situated on its rocky terrace high above the street. Down below they could hear the taxicab-driver whistling cheerfully, and the dog had ceased to bark. Beside the door was a brass plate bearing the name "Seven Gables," and below, in smaller letters, "Visitors' Bell."

"It looks all right," said Heaton, as he pulled the bell. "Cheer up, Mary!"

"I feel—nervous," Mary replied. "You'd better do the talking, Terry. I should probably break down or say something foolish."

The door was opened almost immediately, not by a servant, as might have been expected, but by a tall, severe-looking young woman in the uniform of a trained nurse. Behind her gleamed a vista of polished hardwood floor and white walls enlivened by old-fashioned woodcuts and steel engravings. Over her shoulder was wafted the unmistakable aroma of a hospital.

Heaton was so much surprised that for a moment he was bereft of the power of speech. The starched young person took advantage of his confusion to inform him and his shadowy companion in the back-

ground that the evening visiting-hour closed at six.

"Is this 2002 Bedford Park Boulevard?" Heaton asked, bewildered. "I'm awfully sorry. Perhaps we've made a mistake."

But they hadn't.

"Are you looking for Dr. Courtenay?" the young woman asked, thawing very slightly.

"No—that is—this isn't a boarding-house, is it?"

"This is Dr. Courtenay's sanatorium," was the reply.

"A hospital! Then he is ill!" faltered Mary, in the background.

The starched young person frowned at her.

"It is not a hospital. I said a sanatorium. We take only mental and nervous cases. If you will kindly tell me who—"

A gasp from Heaton.

"A private lunatic asylum!" he murmured.

After all, it did not seem such an unlikely place in which to find Fred Garvice.

"We came to see a Mr. Brown," Heaton explained hurriedly. "We are friends of his. He is expecting the lady with me; but we understood from his letter that it was a boarding-house."

The nurse quietly bade them enter. She glanced with impassive curiosity at Mary and then drew Heaton aside.

"Mr. Brown passed away very peacefully about two hours ago," she whispered. "If the lady is his wife, perhaps you would like to take her into the reception-room and tell her."

CHAPTER XVII

MR. BROWN'S DOUBLE LIFE

"It's all right, Mary. You go in there like a good girl and wait a minute. I want to have a word with this young lady."

Heaton pushed Mary toward the door that the nurse had indicated, and she obeyed, not understanding the nature of the news he had received, but too much awed by his decisive manner to rebel. He closed the door upon her and turned to the nurse.

"Do you mean to say that Mr.—Mr. Brown is dead?"

The starched young woman inclined her head.

"I told you so. May I ask who you are?"

"My name is Heaton—Terence Heaton."

A gleam of intelligence crossed her features. It seemed that she had heard of Terence Heaton.

"Dr. Courtenay is not in just now. He had to go out to see a patient, but if you care to wait—"

"Who is in charge here?" Heaton interrupted.

"I am. My name is Miss Hamilton. I am the head nurse."

Heaton coughed. He was more disturbed than he cared to show.

"Miss Hamilton, I wonder if you have any idea who your—your late patient was? You must have found him something of a mystery."

"Who? Mr. Brown?"

"Yes."

The young woman seemed surprised.

"Not at all. He has been coming here, off and on, for years. This is not exactly what you took it for, Mr. Heaton—not a lunatic asylum. We take nervous mental cases—and alcoholic. Do you understand? It is a sort of rest-cure."

"Under what class was Mr. Brown?" Heaton inquired, growing more and more puzzled.

If it hadn't been for his name, which Miss Hamilton evidently knew, it is doubtful if she would have allowed herself to be catechized in this fashion.

"Why, surely, if you were a friend of his, you know. Mr. Brown was a dipsomaniac."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Heaton.

The nurse smiled wanly.

"I believe he did his best to keep it from his friends and family, but I should never have thought he could succeed."

"Well, I am—hanged!" Heaton commented. "How did he die? It was sudden, wasn't it?"

"Oh, very. He only came in the day before yesterday. He always came voluntarily, you know, and by himself. He told us his wife was in Florida, and Dr. Courtenay telegraphed to the address he gave. We had no idea—" She lowered her voice and glanced toward the door behind which Mary was sitting. "It was *delirium tremens*. He had a wonderful constitution. Dr. Courtenay has known him well for years, and poor doctor never dreamed what was going to happen. Why, only this morning Mr. Brown and one of the male attendants went for a five-mile run around the park."

His heart was in a bad condition. We discovered it too late."

"Well, I am—blowed!" Heaton varied his comment this time. "Really, I don't know what to do," he went on. "I wish your Dr. Courtenay would come. See here, Miss Hamilton, I shall have to make a confidante of you to a certain extent. Would you be surprised to learn that Mr. Brown's name wasn't Brown?"

Again the faint, icy smile. Nothing surprised this young woman, apparently.

"Oh, I always thought it wasn't," she replied. "But still, it may have been."

"Just at this moment I can't tell you what it was; but it wasn't Brown. The lady in there is his divorced wife."

"Oh! Well, I always imagined that there was something between him and his wife, but I laid it to his unfortunate trouble."

"His—she had no idea, I think, that he was a dipsomaniac. I'm certain I hadn't, and I knew him very well."

"These secret drinkers are terrible," Miss Hamilton sympathized. "Mr. Brown was like that. He even fooled Dr. Courtenay when he'd pledged his word of honor. So Mrs. Brown hadn't gone South?"

"Oh, no. She received a letter from him, asking her to come here this evening. He wanted to see her about something."

The nurse did look surprised at last.

"That's strange! Why, all the time he's been coming here, off and on for several years, he's never had a single visitor."

"Yes, it is strange, and it gets stranger," Heaton observed.

"Would you like to see the body?" the nurse asked.

Heaton drew in a long breath.

"I may as well; but I don't mind telling you, right now—"

Whatever he meant to divulge was lost, for at that moment there was a sound of footsteps on the veranda outside, and the door-bell rang.

"Just excuse me one minute," said Miss Hamilton.

She moved swiftly to the door and opened it. Out of the darkness stepped Rose Warden, followed by a diffident, sandy-complexioned young man, whom Heaton recognized as Rose's friend and legal adviser, Fraser Rhoades. Rose was bareheaded, with a black, gold-embroidered cloak thrown over her evening dress. The bare column of her throat with its string of milky pearls

showed white and fair against a huge collar of black fox. She and Heaton stared at each other in blank amazement until Miss Hamilton drew attention to herself by inquiring politely:

"I beg your pardon—what can I do for you?"

Heaton answered for her.

"I believe this lady has come on the same errand as ourselves."

Rhoades, looking distressed and uncomfortable, gently cleared his throat and ventured to ask if they might see "Mr. Brown."

"But this must be a hospital!" exclaimed Rose. "Is he ill, Mr. Heaton? Did he send you a message, too?"

The nurse, impassive as a well-conducted sphinx, turned her clear gaze upon Heaton.

Mary Garvice chose that moment to come out of the reception-room. The murmur of voices in the hall and the ringing of the door-bell had aroused her curiosity. She gave a soft gasp when she saw Rose; and Rose's cheeks flamed with anger. Both women had been sorely tried, but this was a little too much.

"What are you doing here?" Rose demanded.

"Fred sent for me," Mary replied.

Heaton thrust his hands into his pockets. The two women were eying each other in a manner that could scarcely be called friendly. There was only one thing to do—to tell them that the cause of their mutual bitterness existed no longer. Unfortunately, no one yet has invented a soft way of breaking bad news.

"Come, girls, you've got to know some time. Poor old Fred is dead. He passed away peacefully a couple of hours ago."

Unconsciously Heaton used the nurse's mode of expression. To "pass away peacefully" takes a little of the sting from death.

They took his news very much alike. Neither spoke; neither stirred. Fraser Rhoades seemed moved the most.

"Well, that's—that's pretty awful!" he murmured. "It's the limit—that's what it is."

The nurse's eyes were asking Heaton to give her some explanation of these newcomers.

"This lady was to have married Mr. Brown," he said in a low voice, deferentially indicating Rose.

Her lips framed a silent "Oh!" and she glanced quickly from Rose to Mary.

"There is only one reception-room," she faltered.

Obviously it was impossible to put the two women together. Mary solved the problem by dropping down upon a seat in the hall.

"I'll wait here, if I may," she said.

The nurse indicated the reception-room to Rose.

"Will you step in there, madam?"

"No, thank you," Rose replied. "I'll wait here, too. What are you going to do, Mr. Heaton?"

Poor Terry had never felt more uncomfortable in his life.

"Well, I was just—nurse was just suggesting that I—should see the—the body, you know. As a matter of form—"

There was another chair ranged against the opposite wall, and Rose sank into that.

"I'll come with you," Rhoades said hastily.

Of two unpleasant tasks he chose the one that was least distasteful. For the life of him he couldn't have remained in the company of those two mute women.

Miss Hamilton led them off up the wide flight of polished stairs. She had rubber soles on her shoes, and walked like a fairy. Heaton and Rhoades were constrained to a creaking tiptoe.

Left alone, Mary and Rose riveted their gaze on the opposite wall, a few feet above each other's head. Then Mary commenced to weep; and presently her head went down, and she hid her face in her handkerchief. Bitterly self-reproachful, she was thinking of the past.

But Rose, who was made of sterner stuff, sat rigid, thinking of the future. She had never been one to cry over spilt milk, and, sincerely as she loved Fred Garvice, his death perhaps meant an enrichment of her own genius.

The house was very silent. One plainly heard the ticking of the grandfather clock at the far end of the hall.

Up-stairs a door closed softly. Then came sharp taps on the gravel outside; steps on the porch; a key was fitted into the lock, and a short, stout, rosy-faced man with a brown Vandyke beard and round, childish eyes let himself in. He glanced curiously at the two women, who, not aware that he was the proprietor of this uncanny establishment, allowed him to pass on without questioning. He went into a room on the other side of the hall, but emerged almost

immediately minus his hat and overcoat. This time he hesitated.

"Are you waiting to see me?" he asked.

Before either could reply, three figures came flying quickly down the stairs—Nurse Hamilton first, then Heaton, then Rhoades. All of them looked startled. Even the nurse had lost her sphinxlike expression.

"Oh, doctor," she exclaimed, with evident relief, "such a strange mistake! We can't make head nor tail of it."

Rose and Mary both jumped to their feet, their eyes glittering.

"A mistake?" Rose faltered.

Heaton answered her, including Mary in his statement.

"The man isn't Fred," he said quietly.

"I don't know who he is, but he isn't Fred."

The silence was broken by a little cry from Mary. It was a gentle warning that she was about to faint. Miss Hamilton, recognizing the symptoms before anybody else, caught her in time to prevent a heavy fall.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MYSTERY CLUB

At eleven o'clock that same night there was held a council of what might have been called the Mystery Club. It was an exclusive organization. Heaton gave out the invitations, and the members assembled at his house on upper Fifth Avenue at the hour appointed. It was just as soon as both he and Rhoades could safely pack off the two distressed women in their charge.

The membership of the club included Heaton himself, Fraser Rhoades, and round-eyed, pink-cheeked Dr. Courtenay. But first, perhaps, I should have mentioned Big Jim Lavery, otherwise James Lavery, former chief of police, the cleverest American detective that ever came out of Ireland, and the straightest.

Big Jim's autobiography has been written elsewhere. Some five years earlier he had resigned his office, and was now at the service of any one who could afford to hire him for public or private investigations. A tall, broad-shouldered fellow he was, with a brown mustache now plentifully streaked with gray, and the timid, gentle manners of a country parson. It was said that in some of the most desperate affairs he had brought off he had never carried a revolver; but that is probably

stretching hero-worship too far. Certainly Big Jim himself never made such a rash assertion, and no crook of his intimate acquaintance ever banked on the fairy tale.

The crooks knew Big Jim for what he was—a friend to be trusted when you behaved yourself; a foe to be feared when you didn't. He was a friend with a spare dollar in his pocket for thieves out of work; a foe with a hornet's nest up his sleeve for the lawbreaker.

It was this man whom Heaton, upon his own responsibility, had engaged to solve the mystery of Fred Garvice. Lavery had interviewed Macchi, under detention in Portchester. He had gone over the ground there thoroughly, and had placed some of his own men among the workmen at Hispania. He had investigated the Hurpathian theory, and had come to the conclusion that there was something in it. He had even found time to look through newspaper files and "obituary" pigeonholes for data concerning the interesting history of Rose Warden, as well as that of Garvice himself.

Heaton, however, had made no mention of the Mentone mystery, even in confidence. He was not so sure about that as when he first caught sight of Rose. These men foregathered at Heaton's at eleven o'clock. He had prepared for them with sandwiches, cigars, and liquid refreshments, and welcomed them in his spacious library, a leather-upholstered and book-furnished apartment where he spent most of his time when at home. Here they distributed themselves at ease.

Lavery read the two letters apparently written by Garvice, which had sent both Rose and Mary flying to Dr. Courtenay's sanatorium.

They had been posted at the same time, and were only slightly different in detail. The contents of Mary's are already known. Rose's read as follows:

MY DEAR ROSE:

You will be surprised to hear from me. I am alive and well, and anxious to see you; but things have turned out rather different from what I expected, and now I'm in a devil of a hole. Don't get frightened and hand this over to the police, or you will only make more trouble for me. Come to 2002 Bedford Park Boulevard to-morrow morning at ten o'clock, and ask to see Mr. Brown. This is a boarding-house, so be very careful what you say. Nobody has the least idea who I am. Will expect you to-morrow morning at ten.

Au revoir, my dear!

FRED.

Rhoades explained that upon receiving this letter Miss Warden was naturally upset, and did not feel that she could wait until the next morning. She had communicated with him, and had persuaded him to go with her at once to the address given.

Lavery examined the two letters closely. There was not the slightest doubt that both were written by the same hand, and all evidence went to prove that the hand was Garvice's. Mary, Rose, and Heaton were convinced of it. So was Lavery when he compared the letters with other specimens of Garvice's handwriting. He was an expert on such matters.

"There's only one man in the country who could have forged these," he said, as he laid them aside, "and he's doing a stretch of ten years in Sing Sing."

As far as Lavery was concerned, that point was settled. Garvice had written both letters, and Garvice was not the Mr. Brown who has just died of *delirium tremens* in Dr. Courtenay's sanatorium.

It was Dr. Courtenay's turn now, to shed what light he could on the subject. He was perfectly willing, and apparently had nothing to hide.

He had known his dead patient for many years, he said. The poor fellow's name was not Brown, but Timothy Bridges—a married man with several grown-up children. He had been a pronounced dipsomaniac with a pathetic, sneaking hope that some day he might be cured. Periodically, when he felt that he needed help, he would pack his family off somewhere and take a rest-cure. Apart from his one infirmity he was a cheerful, kindly soul—a man of some means, too, whose home was in one of the smaller cities of New York State.

No, Dr. Courtenay would not say that he had been eccentric. This in reply to a question of Lavery's. But he would say that he was untrustworthy, and his word was not to be relied on. That was a fault of his disease. He would make promises and fail to keep them with the regularity of a clock. He had to be watched very closely whenever he was under treatment, and no one could depend upon his bland assurances. But he had been a generous man, and every one had liked the poor fellow. All the attendants and nurses were devoted to him.

"What is your theory about the attack that brought on his death?" Lavery asked.

Dr. Courtenay's round eyes looked troubled, but this was no time for evasion.

"I think he got hold of some whisky, and drank about a quart of it," he replied with simple candor.

The detective lit one of the cigars that Heaton had provided for their comfort.

"And where do you suppose he got his whisky?" he asked.

Again the doctor looked troubled. His rosy face grew pinker.

"Dare say he bought it."

"When?"

"When he was out exercising this morning."

"But there was an attendant with him."

"Just so," said the doctor.

There was a slight pause.

Heaton and Rhoades were far from guessing the trend of this cross-questioning. Still, they were interested.

"Have you put any questions to the attendant?" Lavery went on.

"Of course I have."

"And what did he say?"

"He said he and Mr. Bridges did their five miles on the double around the park, and that Mr. Bridges was fatigued and went to bed, refusing to have any lunch. I was out of the house at the time. When I came in, I found my patient in an acute state of alcoholism, and there was not much time for speculating about anything before he died."

Lavery twisted his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other.

"Well, sir," he said, "I'll tell you what happened if you don't know it yourself. Your trusted attendant trusted your patient."

Dr. Courtenay nodded.

"I'm afraid he did," he agreed.

Lavery got up and thrust his big hands into his pockets. He had a peculiar trick of screwing up his eyes, which interested Fraser Rhoades very much. The young lawyer, as a matter of fact, seemed to be more interested in Big Jim than in the case he was developing.

"I don't want to butt into your business, doc," Lavery said presently, "but as a medical man your opinion is worth something. This here patient of yours must have been a pretty hefty gent for an invalid. You talk about his doing five miles on the double, and that's some stunt. Take it from me it's some stunt!"

Again Dr. Courtenay agreed to the main

fact, but demurred at the gently implied criticism of himself.

"Bridges had an iron constitution," he said, "and for a man of his age he was something of an athlete. He could do it easily, though, of course, his health was undermined. Violent exercise helped him to sleep. Insomnia is one of the things we have to fight, and in his case it was better to let him tire himself out in a normal way than to dose him with drugs."

"Quite so. I get you, doc," Lavery replied. "Now about this attendant—I want to see him right now, late as it is. Have you any objections?"

Dr. Courtenay said he hadn't, and a few minutes later the council broke up. Lavery went off with the doctor, and Rhoades, after a short chat with Heaton, also took his departure.

Heaton, with bed in his mind, was mixing himself a nightcap, when a servant brought in the card of a midnight visitor. The name on the card was Thomas McEvoy, and in the lower left-hand corner, in small script, appeared the words "Société des Beaux Arts."

Heaton's body-guard was on the premises, but in view of recent events the millionaire was in no mood to interview strangers at this hour.

"What's his business, Jenkins?" he asked suspiciously, fingering the bit of pasteboard.

"I couldn't say, sir, for certain, but the young gentleman called once before, earlier in the evening, and said you would want to see him particularly. He's a hartist, sir."

"An artist?"

"Yes, sir. Paints pictures. He said as you'd be most anxious to see him, as he's employed painting pictures for Mr. Garvice."

Curiosity overcame Heaton's not unnatural caution.

"Very well! Show him in," he said.

Mr. Thomas McEvoy of the Société des Beaux Arts may be recognized by Jenkins's sketchy description, and by his own red hair, as the musical painter who had so seriously annoyed Peter Macchi on an earlier morning. He looked harmless enough when he was shown into Heaton's library, and began with a fulsome apology both for calling at all and for the late hour of his visit.

Heaton cut him short.

"What is it you want?" he asked.

"It's this, Mr. Heaton—I didn't like to

go to the police about it, but I've been working at the Garvice place on some panels, with Macchi and another fellow, and to-day a girl comes along asking for Macchi. She didn't know they'd locked him up. She's a girl I saw him with once before, in a restaurant. My chum—the other fellow—didn't happen to be there when she came. She just walked into the ballroom from the terrace, as cool as a cucumber. I was on my ladder and turned when I heard her.

"'Hello!' I says. 'What do *you want?*'"

"She answers me in a kind of French—it wasn't a patois; more's if with an accent. Might have been a German or Italian accent. Said she wanted to see Mr. Macchi."

Heaton interrupted to motion his young visitor to a seat.

"Go on," he said. "This interests me very much. Did you tell her that Macchi was locked up?"

Tommy shook his head.

"I don't know why I didn't. Maybe I smelled a rat. He'd been swanking around to my chum and me how there was a plot to murder Mr. Garvice and how he'd unearthed it, and I thought I might unearth something, too. So I told the young lady that Mr. Macchi had a day off to have a tooth yanked out, and she was mightily concerned.

"'Will he be all right to-morrow?' says she, in that peculiar French of hers.

"'I doubt it,' says I. 'He's got to have another one out to-morrow.'"

"Even then she didn't tumble that I was kidding her. Then we got to talking—"

"What sort of a girl was she?" Heaton asked.

Tommy grinned confidentially.

"Say, a regular pippin! How she could fall for Pete Macchi I don't know. Great big eyes sharp as knives, and a smile with murder in it; hair a sort of purple black, and regular dago skin. Dressed fine, too. I made a date with her. She's going to let me buy her some eats to-morrow night at Baglioni's little place on Tenth Street. That's where I saw her once with Macchi."

"Oh, is she?" exclaimed Heaton. "It seems to me, Mr. McEvoy, that you are betraying this young woman's confidence in a rather mean way."

"Sure I am," returned Tommy bluntly. "That's why I didn't go to the police—see?"

Heaton laughed.

"You're all right, boy! Go on."

"Perhaps you'd rather I kept the rest of it to myself," said Tommy, rather huffy now.

"No need to get your back up. Have a cigar?"

"Thanks, I'll smoke one of my own cigarettes if I may. Well, as I was saying, we got to talking. She complimented me on my French, and I told her about my five years in Paris; and then, all of a sudden, I tumbled to an idea. I said to myself, she's neither Italian, German, nor French. All this talk about the Hurpathian loans put it into my head, I guess. So I said to her, speaking of languages:

"'I'll bet I know where you come from! You're a Threilese.'"

"A what?" demanded Heaton.

"A Threilese—from Threile, the capital of Hurpathia, you know.

"'A close guess,' says she. 'I was born in Elmude, which is just across the river from Threile.'"

"'That's very interesting,' says I. 'And is old Pete Macchi a Hurpathian, too?'"

"'No,' says she. 'Peter's a Mentonese.'"

"I asked her where she met him, but she only flashed her murder laugh at me and shook her head. Then I asked her what she'd come to America for, and she said she was one of the chorus brought over to sing in the opera. She's got a room on Tenth Street, not far from Baglioni's and her name is Lucia CarPELLI. Between you and me and old Queen Anne, Mr. Heaton, she doesn't know very much about Macchi—no more than any of the rest of us."

"Then what made her go all the way up to Portchester to find him?" Heaton asked quickly.

Tommy's bright face clouded.

"It ain't a nice thing to say of a girl, but I got the impression that she expected some money from him and needed it badly. He'd promised to meet her and hadn't—for reasons we know—and she just tried to root him out. She's got something up her sleeve, and I'll bet it's a knife, but I couldn't for the life of me make out who she's sharpened it for."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because all the time I was pumping her she was perfectly wise, and tried to pump me. She asked all sorts of questions about the house—who owned it, how long I had been working there, how many people were employed, and what Mr. Garvice's business was. The name seemed to mean nothing

to her. She doesn't know much English, and I suppose she hasn't read the newspapers. It seems she's only been here a month."

"That doesn't tally with your idea of the knife up her sleeve," Heaton put in.

"No, it doesn't, somehow," the red-haired youth replied lamely. "Well, I've told you all I can, Mr. Heaton. I had to tell somebody, and, as you so delicately hinted just now, it didn't seem quite fair to set the police after her. However, that's for you to decide."

Heaton nodded.

"Are you going to keep your engagement with her to-morrow night?" he asked.

"Sure!"

"What time?"

"Half past seven, unless she's late at rehearsal."

"Very well," said Heaton. "Perhaps I can manage to dine at Baglioni's myself, in which case you might introduce me to this interesting young woman."

"Sure!" said Tommy again, this time with a broad grin and a wink.

CHAPTER XIX

CISSIE'S AFTERNOON OUT

It can scarcely be said that the next morning brought clear vision to anybody.

Rose Warden, after a hasty glance at the newspapers, which told her nothing she did not already know, kept to her bed with a racking headache. It was the only way to evade the reporters.

Mary Garvice adopted similar tactics, except for the fact that she did not have or pretend to have a headache. She simply barricaded herself behind closed doors.

Cissie Warden, however, was not so lucky. She had been interviewed and snapshotted with heartless regularity from the first. Her duties took her out into the open, where such things could not very well be prevented.

The police had made several arrests in various quarters. A small bomb-factory was discovered in an Albany slum, and three Hurpathian anarchists had been taken into custody. In Newark they were hot on the trail of the alarm-clock, which proved to have been purchased in a local department-store by a foreigner less than a week before the outrage that resulted in the death of poor Gleick.

But the mystery of Fred Garvice was the only thing that really counted. It was a "good story," and every hour that delayed its solving was worth its weight in gold to the newspapers.

Heaton woke up to a pleasant medley of worries. He spent Saturday morning being mercilessly pounded on the Exchange, giving blow for blow with dogged determination to see the thing through just because nobody thought he would. At noon he returned to his offices in the American Building exhausted, but bearing the honors of war. His foes had nearly finished him, but not quite.

Big Jim Lavery was waiting for him, with what seemed very unimportant news. Lavery reported merely that his guess of the previous evening had been correct. The attendant who was supposed to have kept a close watch upon Dr. Courtenay's patient had been beguiled into a relaxation of vigilance. Lavery was now having the neighborhood searched for the saloon where the untrustworthy patient had purchased his poison. He seemed to think that that was a very important point.

Hard on the heels of the detective came poor Cissie Warden, on her way home, with a message from Mary. Cissie, whose trials had been many that morning, introduced herself with a flood of hysteria, and had to be comforted before she could utter a word. She had been harried by reporters to the very door of Heaton's office.

He was dismayed by her tears. She was such a pretty little thing, with her bronze-gold hair and childish face, and Heaton was so much older—old enough to be her father, he told himself—that, in fact, he ventured to kiss her.

True, the caress was lightly given, in conjunction with a friendly pat on the shoulder, and actually took place in the presence of the office-boy; but it awakened Cissie to a new sense of alarm. She dried her tears, and sat staring at him in dumb fascination while he gave orders to the boy about lunch for two, to be sent up from the millionaires' restaurant in the basement. He said she was tired out and must have time to rest and get her nerve back.

Cissie had been brought up to avoid such glittering temptations, but it was impossible to resist this one. She wondered whether Mr. Heaton would kiss her again, and, if he did, whether she would have the strength to deny him such liberties. But poor Cissie

might have spared herself the agony of apprehension. He had thought of her as a child, and the peck at her cheek had served the only purpose for which it was given—to stop her crying.

“Now, see here, Cissie”—he had somehow given up calling her Miss Warden—“you and I are going to have a nice little lunch all by ourselves, and then I’m going to send you home in my car. If any reporter gets fresh with you, have him arrested. That’s what you can do with ’em. You bet they aren’t bothering me!”

“Oh, I really couldn’t do that! I’d be afraid,” Cissie stammered.

Such heroic methods of dealing with her persecutors were not for her. She cheered up, however, when the lunch arrived, borne by two deft waiters who made magic work of setting it out and serving them. It was certainly an adventure for her to be eating a meal *tête-à-tête* with Terence Heaton in his private office, and she wondered whether she would have the courage to tell her mother and Mrs. Garvice.

Finally she decided that she would tell her father. About the tear-drying kiss she felt it was wiser to say nothing. Even her father might not approve of that, though by this time Cissie was convinced that Mr. Heaton’s motives were not ulterior.

She and Heaton enlivened each other immensely. They were both worn out with other people’s worries, and the little meal, ordered with Cissie’s gratification in mind, was relished quite as much by the host as by his guest. It had been a long time since Heaton had let himself go on such items as curried lobster and broiled mushrooms. Cissie went through it all with obvious and ravenous pleasure. Sweetbread patties followed the lobster, and then came asparagus with rich Hollandaise sauce, topped off with strawberry ice-cream and dozens of little cakes.

Heaton watched her in wonder. It did not seem possible that a thin girl—or any girl, for that matter—could eat so much, or such a medley, without disastrous effects; but apparently Cissie was all the better for her little debauch. The warm glow of the appreciated benefactor began to pervade Heaton’s veins, like sun after frost.

He had been so busy all his life making a door-mat of himself for Mary Garvice that Cissie’s simple, glowing admiration of him came as a pleasant surprise. There were plenty of women in the world who

would have allowed him the privilege of buying them as many meals as he liked, but they would have flattered him consciously, and the greed of his gold would have been easy to read in their eyes. At first, perhaps, there had been in Cissie’s eyes a greed of food, but it melted into the liquid adoration of the grateful dog that has been fed by the hand it loves.

He learned that Cissie’s usual midday meal consisted of a sandwich and a cup of cocoa, and that this was her first experience of lobster that did not come out of a tin can. And as he warmed to her through his own kindness, Heaton was reluctant to lose her too suddenly. He knew the damp chill that succeeds most pleasure-parties. An idea of making Cissie’s last as long as possible took possession of him.

He had an unholy notion that he could do with simple Cissie what he had never been able to do with Mary, and that was to induce her mood to fit his. He would be a regular devil, this afternoon—a tempter of the first water! Goethe’s *Mephistopheles* would have turned pea-green with bitter envy, could he have read the mind of his modern disciple. It was all the more fun because Heaton had a sneaking notion that Mary would coldly disapprove of what he meant to do, and that Cissie herself would be terrified.

After the first shock, however, Cissie bore up bravely. She heard him telephoning for the best orchestra-seats available—no, it must be a box, because there were positively no seats, good, bad or indifferent, left. It was a musical comedy of tuneful fame, and Cissie, who rarely had a dollar to spare for such things, fell with a dull, hard thud when he explained that her mission that afternoon was to help him put dull care on the run.

It is true she murmured some faint objection on the score of her clothes; but that was no excuse to Heaton, who had asked her just because she was so poor and almost shabby, and would never have given her a second thought had she been prosperous and smart.

So, instead of going home, Cissie drove up from the cavernous marts of trade to the sunshine of Fifth Avenue with Terence Holbrook Heaton. There were halts by the way—first at a florist’s, where Cissie’s dull raiment was glorified by a bunch of violets almost as big as her head; then, lest she still be hungry, another stop at Mail-

lard's, where a box of chocolates was dropped into her lap, all done up in pink ribbons and lace paper, so that it seemed almost a sin to eat them. But that day Cissie was sinning anyway.

Generally, when you are doing wrong, it makes you awfully unhappy. There was something vaguely wrong about this adventure. Cissie had suffered severe discipline at home, because it was believed that her sister Rose ought to stand as a warning. Their mother did not approve of Rose's gilded pedestal. And Heaton knew, if he stopped to think about it, that he ought not to give Cissie an appetite for things that must hereafter be denied her. But it cannot be said truthfully that either of them suffered any great pangs of conscience.

Cissie opened like a flower in the sun, remembered the comforting kiss because she tried so hard to forget it, and was both deliciously shy and surprisingly bold. Her conversation was mere prattle, but through it Heaton gleaned the satisfactory assurance that she was grateful for the honor and pleasure he had conferred upon her, and in his life he had seen too little of gratitude.

He rather expected to be bored by the show. Experience had taught him not to hope for much novelty in entertainments of that class, and he had seen them all. Under Cissie's bubbling delight, however, the comedian was really funny and the rest of it distinctly not bad. Heaton got most of his fun, as a matter of fact, out of watching her.

After it was over, she declined tea with a firmness that surprised him, considering how she could eat. A little shadow settled over her. Cinderella must fly home from the ball—alas, she must! The violets were hanging their heads a trifle; the pink-ribboned chocolate-box had a rifled look, and Cissie was conscious of a slight headache not to be improved by lectures to come.

"Good-by, and thank you ever so much!" she said wistfully, as he put her into his car, which was to take her home. "You can't imagine what a good time I've had!"

He gave her thin hand a friendly squeeze.

"So've I. You've done me a world of good. Not good-by, but *au revoir*, little Cissie!"

He watched the car glide away through the Broadway traffic, under the great white lights. The last glimpse he caught of Cissie, she was burying her nose in the big bunch of violets.

"Good kid!" he muttered.

Then, suddenly, he remembered that for a whole afternoon he had so far forgotten his alarm as to leave his protective body-guard to its own devices, and had even ridden in his own car. He walked through to Fifth Avenue to take the stage, and, like Cissie, was conscious of a state of shadowy gloom. It had been a very pleasant afternoon—one of those all too rare events that seem worth living over again, if one only could.

CHAPTER XX

MORE FOOD

CISSIE arrived at home to find that her sister Rose was paying a rare visit there. Rose had wearied of her headache and seclusion, and even her family was better than solitude.

Her coming had its usual strange effect on the household. Behind Rose's back, the old-maid mother and Don Quixote father grumbled about her a good deal; but when she appeared, they fluttered around with a sort of gratified pride. The grumbles were for Cissie now. She was late, and she had been badly needed to help prepare a supper that Rose would not scorn.

Mr. Warden entertained his eldest daughter in the shabby little parlor with a full list of his medical symptoms, while his wife, already tired with her Saturday cleaning, whipped up a mayonnaise with one hand and thrust a pan of biscuits into the oven with the other, with both ears alert for the first sound of Cissie. She did not recognize her daughter's approach in the soft purring of a motor, but a moment later Cissie came in. The returned prodigal had scarcely greeted her sister when her mother called to her to set the table, and hissed out something about the best napkins and finger-bowls.

Savory smells rose on the air, but failed to inspire Cissie, who—if Heaton could have known it—had had enough of food for one day. At any other time she would have been pleased at this promised variation from their simple diet. Instead of the Saturday night chops or stew, there

were fried chicken, creamy mashed potatoes, and a fruit salad that must have cost an alarming amount.

Suffering under this awful surfeit of food, all in one day, Cissie set the table with no enthusiasm. It was a little galling to have this work and fuss for Rose, who had dozens of servants to wait upon her, and who wouldn't give you a thank you for anything you did. Pleasure is wearying, too, and the great delight of it is to be able to sink back in gentle retrospection, living it all over again with no disturbing element between one and one's imagination. Instead of this, Cissie had to wriggle out of her coat and into the harness of a bib-apron.

There was some slight comfort to be extracted from the great bunch of violets, which she hoped would revive in a vase of water. They replaced the attenuated ferns which usually held the post of honor in the middle of the table, and were flanked by two glass dishes of Maillard's best chocolates, the sight of which made Cissie feel just a trifle faint at the moment. One can have too much of chocolates, even of the best.

Clattering of pans and fumes of cooking came from the kitchen; while from the parlor on the other side floated the drone and drawl of Mr. Warden's and Rose's conversation. Cissie, sandwiched between the two, suddenly conceived a hatred for her life. It was a new attitude, and not likely to last long; but for the moment she wished that she had a home of her own, with a servant or two to make things easier. Rose's talent had carried her out of this sort of thing, but you couldn't expect lightning to strike twice in the same family.

Finally everything was ready. The finger-bowls had been dusted and the best napkins folded in a truly astonishing fashion, difficult to understand unless one was in the secret of Cissie's recent experience. It was not ostentation which had impelled the artistic manipulation of the napkins—merely an effort to revive a pleasant memory.

Cissie took off her apron and smoothed her hair. Mrs. Warden brought in the fried chicken and its trimmings, and the conversationalists in the parlor were bidden to attend the feast. It was a strange thing that Rose seemed to be as pleased at the prospect of this home-cooked fare as Cissie

had been over her unexpected lunch with Heaton.

Usually grace was offered, but for some unknown reason Mr. Warden chose to omit it this evening, and his wife guiltily allowed the lapse. There was an uneasy feeling that Rose ought to be served with champagne instead of with coffee; not that she herself thought so, for in these rare visits to her people she usually wondered why she did not come oftener.

Mrs. Warden beamed upon the violets with gratified pride.

"I'm sure it was very thoughtful of you to bring me such lovely flowers, Rose," she said. "You, with all your worries and everything—"

But Rose had not brought them. Who, then? Cissie's crimson flush betrayed her. Cissie was only playing with the lower limb of fowl that had fallen to her portion, and no one but her father noticed this. A certain amount of resentful pride was centered in Rose, but Cissie was his favorite.

"Why, Cissie!" exclaimed her mother.

A rapid mental calculation overwhelmed Mrs. Warden. She did not know the precise cost of violets in the autumn, or at any other season, but she could hazard a shrewd guess. Had Cissie gone crazy?

For a wild moment Cissie thought of inventing an excuse. She might say that a crippled flower-vender in the street had enlisted her sympathies; that it was a rather withered bunch, as they could see, and cost only fifty cents. But the chocolates were staring her in the face, too, and there was something in Rose's cool, disparaging smile that raised a devil of pride in her.

Rose's gilded rooms were choked with flowers, or had been until recently. No doubt they were, still. She probably ordered them for herself; and Cissie was just a little weary of disparagement. Her flush subsided, and she grew so alarmingly pale that her father gave a start and forgot all about his liver for a few minutes.

"I didn't buy them," she said boldly. "They were given to me—and the candy, too. Have one, Rose? It's Maillard's."

Rose instantly thought of Mary Garvice. She had an increasing dislike for Cissie, merely on Mary's account. Cissie was flourishing gifts from that woman in her face!

"Thank you," she said, "but I never touch sweets."

"Who gave them to you?" asked Mrs. Warden.

"Oh, just a friend of mine—a man I know," said Cissie.

Rose glanced up with altered interest. Mr. Warden was able to hide the ghost of a smile behind his trim beard and mustache; but Cissie's mother had taken alarm.

"Was that what made you so late?" she demanded.

"Yes, it was. He took me to a *matinée*—'The Nymph of Nantucket'—oh, the bathing scene was so funny! I almost died. The fat man got into the wrong cabin and had to put on a girl's bathing-suit, and everybody thought he was—"

"*Cecilia!*"

It is impossible to convey the slightest idea of Mrs. Warden's pronunciation of her daughter's Christian name. It brought Cissie up with a sharp turn.

Rose giggled. Like Heaton, earlier in the day, she was finding Cissie an antidote for personal worry. Mr. Warden's eyes had an envious gleam, which he would not let his wife see for worlds. He was always having it thrown up to him that his children inherited their undesirable tendencies from him. It was no moment to prove, by sympathy, that they did.

"Well, mother—"

"Who was the man?" Mrs. Warden interrupted.

"Mr. Heaton," murmured Cissie.

Rose did not giggle now. Her cold blue eyes accused Cissie of being a liar.

"Which Mr. Heaton?" she asked.

"Why, Mr. Heaton—Terence Holbrook Heaton," Cissie explained.

There was a dead silence. If Cissie had said "The King of England" she could not have startled her audience more.

One might as well be killed for a sheep as for a lamb. Cissie cleared her throat nervously.

"Well! What is there so funny about it? Why shouldn't I go to a *matinée* with Mr. Heaton, if he asks me? He isn't married, and neither am I."

Rose gave a short, disagreeable laugh that set her sister's teeth on edge.

"And he's never been married, either," added Cissie, with unmistakable and vindictive meaning. Mr. Warden seemed on the point of saying something, but Cissie, warmed to confession, continued: "And what's more, I had lunch with him—so there!"

Then her father did speak.

"So that's why you're not hungry to-night, Cis! Well, mother, I don't see anything very terrible—"

Mrs. Warden interrupted him gently but firmly.

"You don't understand the world, Max. Young girls are so easily tempted, and a rich man like Mr. Heaton ought to know better than to show Cissie such attentions. They can only do her harm."

Mr. Warden smiled under his beard. Perhaps he did not know the world, but he thought he knew Cissie.

"Very likely he made you a proposal of marriage," suggested Rose sarcastically.

What a sad ending for so perfect and happy an afternoon! Cissie pressed her lips together to conceal their trembling, and got up to change the plates. Mrs. Warden's face had the resigned look of martyrdom which was so hard for her family to bear. It seemed to Cissie that ever since she had been born her mother was always suspecting her in one way or another. And there sat Rose, the talk of every newspaper in New York, sneering at her. It was too much!

Cissie served the fruit salad rather ungraciously, and then abruptly retired to her own bedroom. An hour later her father came in, sought her gropingly in the dark, and patted her wet face on the little sodden pillow.

"Say, Cis," he whispered, "you tell me all about it. I'll bet you had a bully time! I'd have liked to be there. Tell me about the fat man in the girl's bathing-suit, and what you had for lunch."

Cissie gulped heavily.

"Go on, kiddie. This is a dull hole, and your poor, sick old father would like to know a little more about the world—and its temptations."

Then Cissie found the heart to snicker tearfully. It was wrong of her father to poke fun at her mother, of course, but such things happen in the most united families.

CHAPTER XXI

LUCIA CARPELLI

WHILE Cissie's inquisition was being conducted, the cause of it had very nearly forgotten all about her.

Heaton remembered that the red-haired young artist, Tommy McEvoy, had a

"date" that evening at Baglioni's with a mysterious Hurpathian female, and that he himself meant to dine at that modest restaurant. It was neither necessary nor wise to change his clothes, for Baglioni's boasted a very democratic clientele, and Heaton had no wish to look conspicuous.

His nerves were steadier now, and he decided to embark upon this adventure without official protection. His features were not so well known outside of Wall Street that he need fear recognition, unless he ran up against a stray clerk with a taste for Bohemia. Even then, Baglioni's was a respectable place, and he had been told that the food was very good. It proved, as a matter of fact, to be extremely bad; but that is by the way.

He arrived a little late, and found two small rooms filled to suffocation. There was not a single unoccupied table. The air was blue with smoke, and the combined din of dishes, orchestra, and waiters shouting their orders, to say nothing of the buzz of conversation, was almost deafening. Saturday night at Baglioni's—a time and place to be avoided!

Heaton was on the point of retreating with a thankful sigh to his club when Tommy McEvoy, on the lookout, caught sight of him. Another instant, and Tommy was plucking at his sleeve and urging him toward a corner where a black-browed girl, her elbows on the table, a cigarette between her lips, sat eying him with suspicious interest.

"What a cool, quiet spot you've chosen!" Heaton commented, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. "I shall die in here!"

"Pretty bad, isn't it?" Tommy agreed cheerfully. He was young, and heat, din, and overcrowding mattered not to him. "There she is—that's her," he added under his breath.

Heaton had already observed her. He had a good memory for faces, and he felt certain that he had seen the girl before, but when or where he could not remember.

She sat staring rather sullenly as Tommy urged him over to the corner. Perhaps she was not pleased to have her *tête-à-tête* interrupted. She was a remarkable-looking girl, and apparently knew how to make the most of herself. Her dress was of a Futurist pattern, in red and green. Red combs confined her sleek, dark hair, upon which was perched a little black cap sport-

ing a peacock's feather. From the lobes of her ears hung gold hoops almost as big as half-dollars.

The murderous smile of which Tommy had spoken was a painted one, thin and straight and crimson as a wound. As for her age, she had been described as young, but that was scarcely true. Better to say that she was ageless—fair and youthful enough of face, slender and elastic of figure, but with eyes that seemed to have gazed upon all the sin in the world. It was impossible to imagine that she ever had been, or ever would be, different from that. She must have sprung into being fully primed with experience, and would probably die with her flesh still tender and her strong passions unsatisfied.

Just by looking at him, she caused a cool chill to creep down Heaton's spine. Where had he seen her before? Had he ever made the descent into Avernus, the question could be answered easily.

She was drinking red wine. As they approached the table she lifted her glass and took a long, greedy draft, still keeping her eyes fastened on Heaton. The effect was ghastly, somehow. It made him think of vampires.

Tommy's lightsome description of Miss Carpelli had scarcely prepared him for her as she was. It seemed as if the young artist was under the least bit of a spell. Already she was calling him "Tom-mee."

"This is my friend, Mr. Heaton—Miss Carpelli," said Tommy, introducing them.

Heaton said "Glad to meet you," and Miss Carpelli responded with an icy hand and the ghost of a smile. It seemed that she could speak English better than Tommy had thought on first acquaintance. Her speech was labored and quaint, but now and again showed an astonishing command of idiom and vocabulary.

"Hope I'm not *de trop*," said Heaton, as airily as he could manage.

Miss Carpelli was redolent of some Eastern scent which added to the already overpowering atmosphere.

"Notatall," she replied, all in one word.

"Do you speak French?" Tommy murmured anxiously.

"Notatall," said Heaton, moved to an unconscious imitation that embarrassed him deeply when he realized what he had done.

But Miss Carpelli threw back her head and laughed heartily, displaying the pink

roof of her mouth and two rows of perfect, white teeth.

"He is very 'andsome, your friend, Tom-mee—and very reech, yes?"

The painter and Heaton exchanged blank glances.

"I didn't tell her who you were," Tommy muttered.

She heard him.

"Ah, but I know *monsieur* very well—so well more than you, almos', Tom-mee."

Heaton attacked the thick soup that had been placed before him, but one spoonful was more than enough.

"You like eating in such places, *monsieur*?" Miss Carpelli asked, with the air of a curious child. "An' you so mos' particular about everything?"

"Now," said Heaton to himself, "she knows I've been brought here to meet her. That red-headed idiot!"

But he need not have blamed Tommy McEvoy.

"A change is very good, now and again—don't you think so?" he said aloud. "And how do you know that I am so particular? Let me see, when did I have the pleasure of seeing you last?"

Miss Carpelli regarded him with a far-away expression in her strange eyes. He saw her through a gray haze that was more than mere tobacco-smoke; saw her red mouth and great gold earrings and the peacock's feather tremulous above the black cap, all misted in gray. Then he shook himself into life, for the Eastern perfume had become overpowering.

The room was clearing now. Some one had thrown open a window, and to Heaton's amazement he found himself embarking on the fourth course in the menu, while the woman and Tommy McEvoy had apparently forgotten him, and were carrying on an animated personal conversation. Had he been staring at her all this time—or what? There were evidences that he had either eaten or refused two courses of the abominable food.

Then he remembered the point where their dialogue had ended. "Let me see, when did I have the pleasure of seeing you last?" he had asked. He gave himself another mental shake.

Yes, more than half the Bohemian crowd had vanished. Here and there a couple lingered over their coffee. The orchestra—two violins and a piano—were shutting up shop.

Then he saw that Tommy McEvoy was casting surreptitious, uneasy glances in his direction. He pushed away his plate.

"Bring me a cup of coffee, quick," he said to the hovering waiter, "and a cognac, if you've got a decent brand. Show me the bottle first."

Miss Carpelli clapped her hands softly.

"Ah, I told you *monsieur* was par-tic-ular!" she exclaimed.

"Are you ill, sir?" Tommy asked anxiously.

"Do I look ill?" Heaton demanded, with more spirit than the question seemed to warrant.

"No, but—"

"Well, I'm not. I believe I asked you something, Miss Carpelli, and either you didn't answer or you put me off."

"You slipped into dreamland, *monsieur*, and paid no attention to me. What was the question?"

He asked it again, this time keeping a firm hold on his traitorous senses.

"You seem to know such a lot about me, Miss Carpelli. Won't you tell me where we met, if we ever did?"

"It is no compliment that you do not remember, *monsieur*," she pouted. "It hur-rts my feelings. Ah, Tom-mee, he hur-rts my feelings!"

Tommy seemed to think that this wasn't quite right, and said so; but Heaton paid no attention to him. He knew now that this woman had some hypnotic gift, and had tried it on him with a show of success. No doubt, if it suited her to do so, she would try it on Tommy. The lad must be warned, but later.

"Please try to forgive me, Miss Carpelli," Heaton pleaded in speciously sweet tones. "It isn't quite fair."

If such eyes could be said to soften, hers did then.

"I will tell you. It was at Monte Carlo, four years ago. Now don't you remember? You put a louis on a number for me, and it came up twice in succession. I was reech that night. Afterward we had some champagne and sandwiches in the café of the Casino, and you complained, very cross, too, because the wine was sweet and the sandwiches not to your liking."

Tommy looked jealous. Peter Macchi, languishing in the Portchester jail, lost prestige with him as a rival.

Heaton did remember now, and it came to him with a shock. He had run over

from Mentone for the evening, following the popular custom of those who prefer to live away from Monte Carlo because it gets on their nerves at close quarters, but who, nevertheless, are not above a flutter now and again. And during the evening he had come upon this girl, the like of whom swarmed about the gaming-rooms. He had watched her shrug her shoulders when her last five-franc piece was raked in. Then he had said:

"Here's a louis—please tell me where to throw it."

Lucia Carpelli, without any hesitation, had replied:

"On twenty-four, *monsieur*. It *must* come up!"

And come up it did, twice in succession. The money was hers, of course, and they had celebrated, as she said.

He wondered, now, that he did not recall her instantly, because the next morning he had noted a curious little coincidence in connection with her number, twenty-four. It was the number of the room in which the Italian lover of the woman he had thought since to be Rose Warden was found dead.

He eyed the girl very closely. Four years ago she had made so little impression upon him that, except for the coincidence of the number, he would not have given her another thought. She must have developed her striking characteristics of feature and temperament since then. She had not always been this ageless creature of suggested evil.

To his surprise, she commenced to talk glibly of the very thing that was in his mind.

"Do you remember, *monsieur*, the death of the gentleman in the Hôtel des Anglais, where you were staying?"

He nodded.

"It was very sad—oh, so *mos'* sad!" she said. For an instant her eyes were liquid, but no tears fell. "Shall I tell you something, *monsieur*?"

"Please do," said Heaton.

He had lit a cigar, and the cognac made him feel better. Strange that she should mention that romantic tragedy! Strange that she should have known of it at all! There are so many tragedies in that neighborhood, and most of them are kept very quiet.

"I wonder, *monsieur*, you did not think of my name—Carpelli. That poor man

who died *mos'* suddenly was Carpelli, was he not? He was my husband."

This was all Greek to Tommy McEvoy, who instantly demanded to be enlightened, but Heaton bade him be quiet.

"Your husband?" he exclaimed, sorely puzzled and suspicious all at once. As a matter of fact, he had forgotten the name.

"Sur-re!" the girl replied, with the faintest little smile. "He 'ave run away from me with another, and I follow him. That is why I am in Monte Carlo that night when you so very kindly change my luck. Alas, he is daid, now. He was *mos'* very bad man. Ugh!"

This was getting close to home. Did she know or suspect the woman whom she called "another" to be Rose Warden? It was on the tip of his tongue to ask her if she had murdered her husband. It seemed not improbable.

Again it was as if she read his mind.

"You—you 'ave often wonder how Carpelli died. They discovered nothing, *monsieur*?" This was a question, not an assertion.

"I believe not," Heaton replied.

"And she—what became of her?"

Better not answer that question as truthfully as he thought he could!

"We never saw her again. She vanished that night," he said.

Miss Carpelli smiled scornfully.

"As well do I know that as you. But afterward?"

"Afterward?"

"Yes, *monsieur*! Ah, how slow-witted you are!"

"Afraid I am," Heaton muttered. "I don't follow you at all. If they had found her, she would have been arrested. It looked like murder, you know."

Miss Carpelli shook her head.

"It was not murder, *monsieur*. It was suicide. My husband, he keel 'imself with something out of a bottle. She is going to leave 'im, that woman. She 'as much better lover—reech man, very high up. Then he come to me, and it is that he wishes me to take 'im back. Me! I should say not! I say, 'Go keel yourself, fool! If you do not, I will!' Then I become one devil—one very beeg devil. She is gone, that woman with the yellow hair; she 'as forgotten Carpelli of the sweet tenor voice. She is very brave woman, her, and remembers no more. Do you believe in the old gods, *monsieur*?"

"Can't say that I do," Heaton replied uncomfortably.

Miss CarPELLI poured herself another glass of red wine, and drained it with that look of greed in her eyes which had so repelled him when he first caught sight of her. A few drops dribbled from the corners of her mouth, and she wiped them away daintily with her handkerchief.

"The old gods never forget," she said quietly. "They are watching that woman like the so many eyes of a spider—"

"Pleasant thought," put in Tommy McEvoy.

The girl paid no attention to him.

"Every hour their vengeance is that much nearer, and some day it will close in and cr-rush her!"

"So!" said Heaton. "Well, where are they going to find her?"

Miss CarPELLI gave him a straight look which, if it did not pierce his soul, at least shook his nerve a little.

"The gods always know," she replied. "And me—perhaps I know, too!"

CHAPTER XXII

THE MAN WHO COULD NOT REMEMBER

AN hour or so later, when Heaton was walking home for a breath of clean air, it seemed to him that the gods knew a great many things which bewildered him.

He had gone with Tommy McEvoy and the CarPELLI woman to a cabaret and had said good-by to them there. He was reluctant to leave Tommy with this creature who had "dangerous" marked all over her; but the painter was not exactly an infant, and there was no way to compel him to do something he obviously did not wish to do.

Heaton was badly confused. To him, more than to any one else in this drama, there had been given distorted bits and pictures which refused to make themselves into anything like an orderly plot. At every touch and turn he came up against a blind alley.

How, for instance, was one to trace any connection between the assassination of a Tammany politician in Albany, and a four-year-old Riviera romance? What had Dr. Courtenay's unfortunate patient to do with the cotton-broker who had likewise lost his life? Who gave Peter Macchi a hypodermic syringe filled with a deadly poison, and for what purpose? What had the

Hurpathian war loans to do with the strange conduct of Fred Garvice?

Heaton was very tired, and he was thoroughly sick of the whole business. Somebody was always saddling something on him, but this diabolical chain of disconnected events was the limit. He remembered the disgust and irritation he had once suffered at a jig-saw party. This was even a little worse.

When he got home, it was nearly midnight, and there was Big Jim Lavery waiting for him comfortably ensconced in the library with a fat cigar and a paper-covered novel.

Heaton glanced at the title as Lavery laid the book aside. It was called, "Her One Mistake." On the cover was a lurid picture of a lady with midnight hair placidly sticking a dagger into the immaculate shirt-front of a surprised gentleman.

"Great story, that!" said Lavery, noticing his host's smile. "I'll loan it to you when I'm finished, if you like."

"Thanks. What *was* her mistake?" Heaton asked, curiously.

"Don't know yet, for sure. Think it was getting married. So far that seems to have made her a deuce of a lot of trouble."

"It does so for most people," said Heaton. "That's why I'm single, I guess. Well, Jim, how goes it? Have you come to report progress? If so, you'll have to excuse me. I'd rather talk about the income-tax or the reason why I don't like truffles."

"Now, sir, you've just struck it!" Lavery exclaimed. "I've often wondered, myself, what makes people like truffles—"

"But I don't."

"Nor I," agreed the detective. "They give me indigestion."

"Pigs' food. They hunt 'em with pigs, you know."

"Say, are you kidding me? What are they—insects? I always thought they were a kind of potato."

Heaton laughed, and the big ex-police-man joined in.

"Guess we're both hedging for time," Lavery said. "Say, Mr. Heaton, I hate this job you've given me. There ain't no end to it, far's I can see!"

Heaton sighed and dropped down into a chair.

"I was just thinking that myself," he agreed. "I'm sick of it, too. I suppose you haven't found out a darned thing."

"Not much," Lavery replied. "Only—I've located Mr. Garvice."

Heaton jumped.

"Well, man alive, that's something!"

Lavery shook his head gloomily.

"No, it ain't."

"You mean you've lost him again?"

"No, I've got him right enough. He can't get away, and so he's shamming."

"Shamming what? For Heaven's sake, Jim, tell me about it!"

"Making believe he's lost his memory, sir, that's what he's doing. Bland and soft-spoken as a child. Doesn't know his own name, but willing to be convinced that he's who I say he is, and asks the prettiest questions."

"Well, I am hanged! How do you know he's shamming?"

Lavery winked and laid a finger to his nose.

"Oldest dodge in the profession, Mr. Heaton. You can't fool me."

"But when did you find him, and how?"

"Easy enough. Poked around the family hotels up there in the Bronx—otherwise the corner saloons. Raines Law, you know—covers a lot of things. Guess Mr. Garvice knew this fellow Brown, or Bridges, well enough to make him a go-between. But what's his game, I ask myself?"

"Are you quite sure he's shamming?"

Lavery drew at his fat cigar and crossed his legs.

"That's the only thing I *am* sure of."

"And where is he?"

The detective laughed.

"Where his letters said he was—in Doc Courtenay's boarding-house. Good a place as any, and I ain't got no warrant to lock him up."

"Well, that's a neat piece of work!" Heaton said. "Glad to see you're earning your princely salary, Jim. That is progress. Was he hurt in the explosion?"

Lavery snorted.

"He wasn't in it, you can take that from me. Not a scratch. Shaved off his mustache, too. Showed me his pockets full of money—had a cool five thousand in bills on him—pathetic as a baby as to how he got it. Hopes he isn't a thief—perfectly docile, but doesn't know himself from Adam, I *don't* think!"

Heaton was prepared for a further demand upon his energies. Tired as he was, he was willing to be prodded on a bit further.

"I suppose you want me to see him and try to jog his memory."

"To-morrow morning will do," Lavery said, to his infinite relief. "You and me better go up there to-morrow morning, early."

"Anybody know?" Heaton asked.

"One or two people. Chief Kelly. Had to tell him. Didn't say nothing about the shamming, though."

"Does—er—have you said anything to Mrs. Garvice or Miss Warden?"

Lavery shook his head vigorously.

"No, sir, and I'll be obliged if you don't until we get things sort of straightened out. Ladies always complicate a job like this. You may take it from me, Mr. Heaton, they sure do. And between you and me, it's the one thing that's itching him, and that will bring him out of his trance. He wants to know about one or the other of those two ladies—perhaps both; and while he's playing this game, he daren't ask. Do you get me?"

Heaton nodded thoughtfully.

"I do, in a way. What time in the morning?"

"Nine o'clock too early for you, sir?"

"No, not if I can get to bed some time soon."

Lavery took the hint, and was off; but although he was so tired, Heaton did not sleep very well. He dreamed all night of Cissie Warden. She was being married to the King of Hurpathia, and he—Terence Holbrook Heaton—had given her a bunch of violets and a box of chocolates for a wedding present. Somehow it seemed stingy, only nobody knew that because of Fred Garvice he was a bankrupt.

Lavery appeared promptly at nine o'clock the next morning, as specified, and he and Heaton motored up to the little sanatorium, which looked very cheerful by daylight, perched on the rocky terrace with its seven white gables.

Both Dr. Courtenay and his new patient were on the veranda. Yes, it was Fred Garvice right enough, very handsome without his mustache, and with a smile for Big Jim Lavery. For Heaton he had a look of studied curiosity.

"Good morning, Mr. Garvice. I've brought one of your old friends to see you. How are you this morning?" said Lavery.

"I'm very well," Garvice replied, gazing inquiringly at Heaton.

"Come now," the detective said persuasively. "Don't say you don't know Mr. Heaton. Memory still bad?"

"Awful!" Garvice replied with pathos. "Isn't it, doctor?"

"Seems to be," said Dr. Courtenay, whose rosy face had a worried look. "Well, I'll leave you gentlemen to talk things over. If you want me, I'll be in the office."

Garvice, who had on a big, soft dressing-gown, with his legs wrapped in a shawl, was swaying gently to and fro in a rocking-chair. He was provided with a pipe and the Sunday newspapers, and had been reading all about himself.

"So you're Mr. Heaton," he said. "Well, well! And you're an intimate friend of mine. It seems you've been trying to do me a service on the Stock Exchange. I'm surely much obliged to you, Mr. Heaton."

"Terry," Heaton suggested.

"Is that what I called you?" Garvice asked.

"It is," Heaton affirmed grimly. "And isn't it about time you let up on this nonsense, Fred? Lavery, here, knows you're shamming, and—"

"Oh, *does* he?" Garvice interrupted pettishly. "Let him prove it, then. Why should I do a silly thing like that? I'm not going to sit here and be insulted."

"You're the only one that can say why you're doing it," Lavery suggested. "We don't want to insult you, Mr. Garvice, but it's the other way about. You're insulting our intelligence. You've given yourself away a dozen different times."

"How, may I ask?"

"For one thing, you asked about those letters you'd given Mr. Brown to post. We've read both the letters, sir, and when you wrote them your memory was clear enough on some points."

The handsome man in his invalid get-up flushed with anger.

"They had no right—of course, I remember giving a man two letters to post. That's why I asked about them. My mind must have been clear until then."

Heaton thought it might be a good thing to humor him, and conveyed as much to Lavery with a quick glance. Unfortunately Garvice saw the look, too.

"Try to think, Fred. Who was this man—Brown, or Bridges? Was he a great friend of yours?"

Garvice shook his head.

"I don't know. I can scarcely remember him at all."

"Where were you when you realized that something was wrong?" Heaton persisted.

"In that place—Murdoch's Hotel—where this person found me."

"What did you think? Didn't you wonder who you were? Didn't you feel that you ought to see a doctor?"

These questions were confusing the mental patient. Also, they were making him angry. He raised his voice.

"I tell you, how did I know? I might have been anybody, with all that money on me, and no papers to give me a clue. If you really want to know how I felt, I was frightened."

"No papers?" Heaton asked in surprise.

"Not even a card," Garvice returned emphatically.

Lavery opened a small note-book that he carried, and studied it for a few seconds. Presently he commenced to speak monotonously, in his best professional voice.

"Now see here, Mr. Garvice, I put it to you, this is what happened—on Monday afternoon, about five o'clock, you appeared at this Murdoch's hotel clean-shaven, with a couple of new suit-cases filled with some things you'd bought at a gents' furnishing store in One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street. You called yourself Grant, and passed for a drummer from up State. You said you were expecting a friend by the name of Brown to call on you. Meanwhile, you sent Murdoch's boy out to buy a box of note-paper, and wrote two letters. Your manner was nervous and uneasy, and attracted considerable attention, but as yet no one thought of connecting you with Mr. Garvice, as your appearance was so altered."

"Now, sir, I put it to you, that on Tuesday morning you were sitting in the bar reading a newspaper, when a man came in dressed in a way that made him rather conspicuous."

"I know all that," Garvice interrupted crossly. "I can say it by heart—white sweater, blue trousers, canvas running-shoes, and bareheaded. I had a long talk with him, and gave him my two letters to mail. And his name was Brown, alias Bridges. Also, he was a dipsomaniac. You've told me that before."

"Yes, I have, but I was afraid you might have forgotten, sir, seeing as your memory's so treacherous."

Garvice disdained to reply to this in-

sinuation. He carefully relit his pipe and interrupted the detective with frank contempt.

"To go on," Lavery continued, "you and your friend had several drinks, and your friend, who was a patient of Dr. Courtenay's, bought a bottle of whisky, which he wrapped up in a rain-coat he was carrying. Before he left, he promised to call and see you the following morning—"

"And instead of coming," Garvice broke in, "the poor fellow died, and you came instead and told me who I am. I know all that."

"Quite so. The peculiar part of it is, Mr. Garvice, that from the time I met you your memory hasn't failed once, yet you only remember your friend and the letters 'through a haze,' as you say."

"That's it—through a haze," Garvice agreed cheerfully. "Now what do you propose to do about it, eh?"

That was just the point. Shamming Garvice undoubtedly was. If he stuck to this absurd attitude, nobody could get anything out of him, and certainly no charge could be brought against him. The money in his possession was his own, and there is no law against a man shaving off his mustache and registering at a hotel under a false name. It was unlikely that he had blown up his own car; and even if he had, there was no law against that, either, seeing that nobody had been endangered.

Heaton left the detective still arguing with the lost memory, and went in to see Dr. Courtenay, whom he found fidgeting uneasily in his office. The rosy little doctor was certainly perturbed.

"What do you make of it?" Heaton asked him. "Do you agree with Lavery?"

"You mean does Lavery agree with me," Dr. Courtenay snapped. "There is nothing whatever the matter with Mr. Garvice. I should be more than obliged if you would take him away. He has an upsetting effect on my other patients. They, at least, are ill, and he is not."

Heaton sighed. He did not care to be saddled with this new responsibility, and said so. Also he had a feeling that the moment Garvice possessed a measure of liberty, he would disappear again.

"As far as I'm concerned, he may disappear and welcome," Dr. Courtenay said. "He's made trouble enough for me, as it is. If it hadn't been for him, Bridges wouldn't have been tempted, and—"

"Oh, see here, that's hardly fair," Heaton

interrupted. "If anybody was to blame for that it was your own attendant."

The doctor conceded this, but stuck to his main point. He regarded Fred Garvice as a particularly unwelcome species of white elephant, and no amount of financial remuneration tempted him. The morale of his institution was threatened. He did not court publicity. His patients were few, men of wealth and good social position, and they counted upon quiet, inconspicuous surroundings while undergoing treatment. Money could not compensate for possible damage to the future of Seven Gables Sanatorium.

Heaton returned to the veranda, where he found the undesired patient deep in his pipe and newspaper, while Big Jim Lavery gloomily surveyed the scenery. Conversation between them had languished.

"Fred, the doctor says you're not a sick man, and he doesn't want you to stay here. It's unsettling to his other patients."

Garvice got up with cheerful alacrity and unwound the shawl from his knees.

"Only too happy to oblige," he murmured.

Lavery looked apprehensive. Was all his work to be undone?

"Will you come home with me, old chap?" Heaton asked with as much hospitality as he could summon.

"Haven't I got a home of my own?" Garvice asked plaintively.

Lavery snorted. He was sick of this pose.

"Of course you have—a very nice flat on Riverside Drive; but you'd better come back with me first, and we can talk things over. There are your business interests, you know, and to-morrow something definite must be settled."

Garvice consented, without the gratitude he ought to have expressed. He went in to collect his few possessions and settle with Dr. Courtenay for his brief entertainment.

"What are you going to do with him?" Lavery asked gloomily.

"Talk to him," Heaton replied. "See here, Lavery—let this 'lapse of memory' stand. As far as the press and public goes, it's good enough. I've an idea that's all he wants—to save his face."

"I've thought of that," Lavery assented, "and I don't mind his saving his face if he doesn't try to make a fool outen me. You must do as you think best, Mr. Heaton."

"Thanks. I'll do what I can with him, and let you know if anything important comes up. You'd better devote yourself to Macchi. Let him know that Mr. Garvice is safe, and see what he has to say about it."

Lavery nodded without enthusiasm. He had a methodical mind, and it was distinctly irritating to be obliged to leave this mute problem of the lost memory only half solved

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SINGER AND HER FRIENDS

IT was five o'clock in the afternoon of the same Sunday, and Rose Warden was holding court in the drawing-room of her suite at the Westphalia. Into the midst of it floundered Cissie, with the best intention in the world of cheering her sister's supposed loneliness.

The lovely salon, fragrant with flowers and aglow with soft lights, contained a motley assemblage. The Swiss man servant was bringing in relays of tea, which Rose's guests poured for themselves and one another, she having been coaxed to the piano by Signor Luini, the leading tenor of the Metropolitan forces. On the hearth-rug sat Fraser Rhoades, pulling the ears of the Aberdeen terrier, with whom he had by this time made friends.

The tubby man with the frowning eyes and mane of iron-gray hair was Feldmann, the impresario. The man with a bald head and pointed red-beard was Don Manuel Mandrigo, the famous composer, who was whispered to be morganatically connected with a Spanish princess, and about whose romance the little street boys of Madrid had a topical song beginning:

Sharper than the sword of royal hidalgo
Are the sweet songs of Manuel Mandrigo,
To pierce a lady's heart.

Next to Don Manuel on the black and gold couch sat Feldmann's wife, an unprepossessing *hausfrau* who was never seen without her knitting, and who was reputed to keep a close watch upon her talented husband. Little Antonio Busch, the first violin of the Metropolitan, was playing the difficult obbligato accompaniment to the duet which Rose and Luini were humming over. Rose herself played the piano accompaniment. She looked a regal, striking figure in dead black, her face paler than

usual below her wreathed crown of golden hair. A long string of black pearls was twisted several times about her throat.

Back in one corner sat a small man of advanced years, with scant gray hair, whose fine, eaglelike features consorted ill with his frail and shrunken body. In the lapel of his coat was a bit of yellow ribbon, an order of some sort.

Into this conclave was ushered Cissie, startled and timid. Rose gave her a nod and smile, interrupting the duet long enough to announce her as "my little sister." Rhoades, the only person present whom she knew, got to his feet and offered her a cup of tea.

She had not the least idea who all these other people were, but she guessed their importance. Here, apparently, was Rose picking up that old wonderful life of hers, while the fate of Fred Garvice hung by a thread.

Cissie had never heard Rose sing since the Methodist choir days. She was not impressed, now, by the soft, full-throated vocalization. Rose was not "letting herself out," as Cissie was sure she could. But every one else in the room seemed as pleased as if she had sung at the top of her lungs. The bald-headed man with the red beard clapped his hands and murmured something to Frau Feldmann about "marvelous technique." The black-browed impresario said it made him want to weep and curse in a breath to think that opera had lost her.

"But has it—forever? Surely Mme. Warden will come back!"

This from the eager-eyed little violinist. It made Cissie feel awfully queer to hear Rose called "Mme. Warden," when she was neither French nor married!

Rose swung around on the piano-stool, her pale face expressive of deep feeling.

"One never knows, my friends. It is so pleasant not to count upon the future!"

Luini, the tenor, had taken one of her hands, and was moving her pliant, white fingers in his brown ones in a way that shocked poor Cissie. With her free hand Rose wafted a kiss to the shrunken little man in the corner.

"And you, my dear Giorgio, do you regret my swan-song? If it is really destined to be my swan-song," she added as an afterthought.

The little man, who had been staring at her spellbound, roused himself.

"I regret nothing that is for your happiness, *Rosa mia*," he said.

Frau Feldmann looked up from her knitting.

"Your highness is more than kind," she said gruffly. "Mme. Warden thinks too much of her own happiness and too little of other people's."

Rose threw back her head and laughed, apparently not in the least offended at the spiteful remark.

Cissie, in the corner opposite the little man, gazed at him with ill-concealed awe. Rose had called him "Giorgio," but the German woman had said "your highness." It was almost too much for Cissie. She glanced in helpless bewilderment at Fraser Rhoades, who looked somewhat surprised himself.

It seemed strange to Cissie that she had not been introduced all around, but evidently Rhoades hadn't, either. She longed to slip away, but didn't see how it was to be managed without rendering herself unpleasantly conspicuous.

Feldmann got up and rifled the score of "Butterfly" until he came to what he wanted.

"Now, then!" he commanded, and hummed the opening bars.

This was an intimate afternoon between musicians. Fred Garvice was forgotten, or at least shelved for the moment. Rhoades from the hearth-rug, ventured a wink in Cissie's direction, meant to put her at her ease; but his amiable intention was negated by the shrunken little man in the opposite corner, who got up and half-wriggling, half-shuffling, made his way to Cissie's side. He was very lame, and propelled himself with the aid of a stout ebony stick. Panting a little from the exertion, he sat down beside Cissie.

"Are you really Mme. Warden's sister?" he asked in slightly accented English. His voice was low and sweet and, above all, friendly.

"Yes—your highness," Cissie replied. If she could, she would have denied the relationship as entailing too great a conversational burden.

"Please!" The little man spread his hands in a gesture of dissent. They were white and blue-veined, and as frail as a woman's. "To Rosa's sister I am Giorgio, and not 'your highness' nor even 'sir,' if you will be so kind. And what is your name, Rosa's little sister?"

The stilted, old-fashioned speech imbued Cissie with a corresponding sense of ceremony.

"My name is Cecilia," she whispered.

"That is a very pretty name. And are you, too, a singer?"

"No, I'm—I'm not at all like Rose," Cissie confessed.

"Of course not!" the little man agreed, with a reverent look in the direction of Rose's back. "Nobody is like her; but you are her sister, and, because you are her sister, I love you, Cecilia!"

Cissie blushed up to and including her ears. This was terrible! Not only to be approached by a highness, but to have him tell her, within two minutes, that he "loved" her!

Of course, she fully understood the nature of his professed affection, and she was democratic enough in theory not to be upset by such antiquated things as foreign titles; still, the combination gave her a bit of a shock.

"I'm sure it's very kind of you," she managed to murmur.

At that moment the door opened, and if anything was needed to increase Cissie's confusion it was Gustave's announcement of—

"Mr. Heaton!"

The only thing that consoled her, as she sat trembling on the edge of a chair beside the queer little man, was the fact that Heaton looked quite as much taken aback as she had felt when she came in herself.

Rose's hands fell lifelessly, producing a discordant bang; then she got up.

"How *do* you do? I've been expecting to hear from you all the afternoon—simply on tenter-hooks!"

The emphasis of her greeting seemed to set a signal to the rest of the room. Frau Feldmann stowed away her knitting in a black-satin bag. Luini looked at the clock, and Don Manuel at his watch. The violinist slipped his instrument into its case, and began to fold up his music. To Cissie it seemed a rude dismissal, but she was unused to the ways of prima donnas, even though this one was her sister.

In some subtle fashion they were all got rid of with the exception of Fraser Rhoades—either secretly bidden to remain or impervious to hints. The little lame man was the last to leave. Rose kissed his parchment cheek and delivered him

over to his own man servant, who was waiting to bear him away.

"Yes, Giorgio, I will look in and see you to-morrow. Mind you don't catch cold," were her parting words. "Don't go, Cissie. You're one of the family," she said, as Cissie would have followed in the footsteps of royalty. "I'm sure Mr. Heaton has disagreeable news for me."

She sank down again, exhausted, on the piano-stool. Somehow she looked more regal, more impressive, than in the rôle of an ordinary woman of fashion. The star of her genius sat upon her brow. It was perhaps the only ennobling quality that she possessed. It lighted up her whole personality like a lambent flame. So had Fred Garvice seen her for the first time and heard her clear, liquid voice in all its rich, youthful purity.

Those old friends who had come to condole had remained to revive the best that was in her. It was the artist quivering from top to toe that faced Terry Heaton.

"Well?" she demanded, a little impatiently.

Heaton's mouth drew down at the corners. He had never heard Rose Warden sing. This exalted mood made no impression upon him. His highness, of halting leg and yellow decoration, whom Rose had kissed in the face of all, had been but a parchment-skinned old *roué* to him. The others he knew merely as people with whom, when he wished to, he made acquaintance by means of a box or orchestra-chair at the opera. That was the only form of intercourse he desired with them. This point of view would have amazed simple-minded Cissie, had she understood it.

"Fred is at my house, and I have persuaded him to see you," Heaton said coldly.

"Persuaded him! At your house! But when—how?"

"He has"—there was the vestige of a smile lurking in the corners of the down-twisted mouth—"he has lost his memory. Lavery, the man I put on the case, located him in the Bronx. Would you care to come around?"

The exalted expression faded almost imperceptibly from Rose's face. Eagerness and irritation took its place.

"But, Mr. Heaton, I don't understand," she appealed to Rhoades. "What *is* he talking about, Fraser?"

Cissie's heart beat fast and hard. It was plain enough to her. This wonderful

Mr. Heaton had found Mr. Garvice. Cissie wondered what Mrs. Garvice was doing, and if she knew!

Heaton explained all over again, putting in a few more details. All day he had been wrestling with the reluctant memory, and the most he had accomplished was a grudging assent to an interview with Rose. It seemed that he had told the patient of a pledge to marry a certain young woman named Rose Warden. Playing unfairly upon the lost memory, he had not so much as mentioned Mary.

"And he wants to see me?" Rose murmured.

"He is—naturally—curious," Heaton replied.

"Is he very much changed?" she asked.

Heaton made cheerful answer:

"Oh, yes! He's shaved off his mustache."

Rhoades, scrambling up from the hearth-rug, gave an ill-timed laugh. Rose regarded him with absent-minded coldness.

"Of course, I will come at once," she said.

She went for her cloak. Heaton gave Cissie a friendly smile.

"You had better come along, too," he advised. "Between the two of them, I shall need consolation!"

CHAPTER XXIV

HEATON PLANS MORE PHILANTHROPY

NOTHING was more annoying to Cissie than the high-handed manner in which Rose appropriated Terry Heaton during the short drive up Fifth Avenue.

"You would think," Cissie commented bitterly to herself, "that he belonged to her!"

Nor was this all. Rose, who should have been concerned only with the adventures of Fred Garvice, made an opportunity to inflict deep humiliation upon Cissie by recounting in sprightly fashion the scene at home the evening before. Poor Cissie's withered violets and chocolates were mentioned, and their mother's horror at the half-told bathing-cabin story.

"You meant to be very kind to my little sister," Rose concluded, "but you only succeeded in getting her into trouble, Mr. Heaton. Poor Cissie! You cried your eyes out, didn't you, darling?"

This was the refinement of cruelty, and Cissie wished that the bottom of the car

would open and drop her. She was perilously near to crying again. If Heaton had spoken a single kind word to her, she would have opened her mouth and bawled like a baby. But all he said on that subject was:

"Stuff and nonsense!"

Then he proceeded to tell Rose more about Garvice, thus putting her in her proper place. It seemed to Cissie, vaguely comforted by this attitude of his, that he only just missed telling Rose to mind her own business.

Rose accepted the hint without resentment. As a matter of fact, she was herself on the verge of hysteria, and scarcely knew what she said or what was being said to her. Garvice had somehow lost his place in her life, and in her heart of hearts she was afraid of what might happen when he regained it. She knew the power his love had over her. It was a hateful thing to be seriously in love—more particularly hateful to a woman of her temperament, who had been heart-free and foot-loose most of her life.

She realized, perhaps, a certain shallowness of temperament in that respect. To be absolutely constant in the affections is not a universal trait. It is almost a gift in itself, and Rose, a genius in one respect, could not hope to be supreme in all things. Only the humble can love richly and well. Humility did not become her at all.

The wrought-iron doors of Heaton's marble mansion opened to receive them, and clanged to behind them with the effect of prison-bars to Rose.

"I am afraid! I am afraid!" she kept saying to herself.

She hoped that Heaton would not expect her to see Fred alone at their first meeting. She felt nervous and awkward, and clung to Cissie's hand as they walked through the vaulted marble corridor. And Cissie was saying to herself:

"This is where *he* lives. This is *his* house"—meaning Heaton, of course.

Heaton left them in a wonderful reception-room paneled with pale red and furnished with old Chinese lacquer. It bore no single sign of occupancy, and might have been one of Mrs. Garvice's show-rooms.

Everything in this house was on a massive scale, and money evidently had been spent like water to create its perfection. A little shudder crept over Cissie. Last night she had ached vaguely for some

of the good things of life, but now she felt oppressed by the burden that a very rich man must carry. Wealth, like poverty, is cumulative. You never can tell where it's going to end. No, Cissie did not desire to be rich. She thought with passionate affection of her own shabby, comfortable little home, and envied neither Rose or Garvice nor Terry Heaton.

Heaton came back presently. To Rose's infinite relief he said:

"We'll all go in together. Fred thinks it would be better."

"Oh, yes, it would!" she exclaimed.

So they went in nominally together, Cissie trailing uncomfortably a little in the rear.

Garvice was in the library—another massive room, but more human, somehow, to Cissie's thinking. It was the books, perhaps, and the faint commingled smell of Russia leather and tobacco.

The man who had given them so much trouble maintained a cheerful *sang-froid* in the face of this embarrassing and sentimental episode. He greeted Rose pleasantly and called Cissie by name, much to the surprise of Heaton, who thought that Garvice, in doing so, had made a bad slip. But not so—he had merely changed his tactics.

Now it came out that his memory was recovering slowly. He could remember everything up to the moment when he set out from Hispania in his car, and then, as he described it, "there came a great blank," until Lavery tapped him on the shoulder in Murdoch's Hotel.

He explained all this in easy, natural fashion, sitting on the arm of Rose's chair, with one hand laid affectionately on her shoulder. It was evidently a great relief to him to be able to remember something. It was also a great relief to Heaton, who hinted that very likely, in time, he would recall everything.

For a while they discussed his case, and the other accidents, and the story of Peter Macchi, and what Hurpathia might have to do with it all; also what voluntary news to give to the papers.

"And to-morrow morning," said Heaton, "after Chief Kelly has had a word with you, my friend, you'll come down to the Street and investigate your tangled affairs. I'm about fed up with 'em!"

Garvice agreed to this with what seemed pathetic willingness.

"Now, Cissie, I'm going to show you my house, if they can spare us," Heaton said, wishing to do the reunited lovers a good turn.

The ice was broken. Things were beginning to look normal again, and he sincerely hoped that Garvice would take his little hint and allow memory to come back in its entirety.

Cissie suffered herself to be led through the show-rooms of the great mansion. Her little feet awoke pattering echoes in the marble corridors. She felt as small and insignificant as an insect.

"And you live here all by yourself!" she heard herself exclaiming, as they shot up to the roof in the silk-padded and be-mirrored elevator.

"Oh, I don't live in all of it," Heaton replied. "Not all at once. Here we are! This is my roof-garden. When I give parties, all the romantic couples sneak away up here and leave the ballroom empty. You see, it's quite cozy, even in winter."

He pressed several electric switches and revealed fairy-land. Overhead, through the glass-domed superstructure, Cissie saw the evening sky faintly studded with stars. Little fountains splashed softly into basins where goldfish swam. There were masses of flowers and palms, and all the lights were cunningly contrived in artificial fruits and flowers so cleverly mingled with the real that except for the luminous radiance one could scarcely distinguish them. The floor was paved with Oriental tiles, and strewn with rugs that gleamed like jeweled fabrics. Chairs, tables, and wicker seats gave an air of comfort.

"Mrs. Garvice is copying my roof-garden for your sister's house," Heaton said. "It is very nice. In the summer all this glass can be made to disappear. What do you think of it?"

Cissie smiled faintly, looking up at him under her shaggy, bronze-gold bang.

"I think it is very nice," she replied.

"Is that all you think, little Cissie?"

It was odd that this child's matter-of-fact manner, when she was not overcome with embarrassment, should pique him.

"Oh, well, of course, you have to do something with your money," she conceded generously; "and it gives people like me employment. The more you spend, the merrier we are."

Heaton laughed a little discontentedly.

"And what do you do with the money you make out of us—people like you, I mean?"

"I?" Cissie seemed startled by the question. "Why, I—we give it to our mothers, generally, and they see that we have enough to eat, and get our shoes mended, and—and things like that."

"Nothing left over for good times?"

"Good times?" The term was a vague one to Cissie. "If you mean me, Mr. Heaton, I am very happy. I'm so busy, you know. One doesn't worry when one is busy."

He was longing to ask her more personal questions. Had she ever had a sweetheart, for instance? If the question had been asked and answered truthfully, Cissie could have told him that she had had several, and that her mother had put each in turn to rout. A good thing, too! They weren't any of them worth a cuckoo's call.

With regard to this funny little girl who had somehow wormed herself into his interest, Heaton had suddenly conceived an idea. Yesterday he began by giving her a taste of pleasure, and this afternoon her sister had warned him of his unwisdom. The warning only made him more keen.

"I think I shall give a ball, Cissie," he said slowly, "but only on one condition. They bore me to extinction, as a rule. Will you promise to come?"

Cissie made a quick mental review of the multitude of obstacles to be overcome. She also thought of the one creature in the world who could be counted on her side.

"Sure, I'll come," she said promptly, "if you'll ask my father, too. He wouldn't want me to have to go home so late by myself."

Heaton laughed.

"What about your mother?"

"Oh, mother doesn't care for such things—but father! Say, Mr. Heaton, I honestly believe it would cure his liver. And if you asked him—why, there wouldn't be any question about me. We'd simply run off and take ballyhoo afterward!"

Meanwhile, down in the library, Rose and Fred Garvice were discussing their own affairs. On the surface they were taking up life where it had temporarily stopped, but both were conscious of reservations. Rose, anxious to get at the bottom of the mystery, probed her lover with question after question, with scarcely more

success than either Heaton or Big Jim Lavery had achieved.

"You *must* remember leaving your car, Fred!" she implored. "It seems to me that you remember just what pleases you."

Although no one had told her anything about Garvice's defective memory being under suspicion, she was beginning to perceive for herself that he could tell more if he chose. Fred, however, maintained his position stoutly. Fortunately Rose had not seen the letter he had written to Mary. She questioned him about that, too, but he put her off, and talked instead of the advisability of a speedy marriage.

Then she told him something that Feldmann, the impresario, had said to her that afternoon.

"He thinks it is my duty to appear in New York before I abandon my career altogether. Would you mind very much, Fred? It isn't the money, of course; but I've never sung here, and you know the contracts were all but signed."

Garvice fidgeted.

"In the face of all this publicity, Rose? We ought to live very quietly now. I don't like to think of my wife—"

"Oh, nonsense!" she interrupted impatiently. "Who do you think has come over on purpose to hear me?"

"Can't guess."

Rose cleared her throat and looked away from him.

"Prince Giorgio of Threile. He called on me this afternoon."

Garvice's eyes narrowed.

"That's very strange, isn't it?" he asked.

"Why strange?" Rose demanded with a faint show of irritation.

"He's connected with the royal house of Hurpathia, isn't he?"

She shrugged her shoulders with a semblance of indifference.

"He's the king's cousin—about ten removes from the throne. Altogether an unimportant personage in his own country; but over here, of course, he is bound to make a sensation."

"What sort of a sensation? Are you going to let it leak out gently that this old man is the original of that grand duke story, and that you had almost made up your mind to marry him when I came along?"

Rose laid her hands on her lover's shoulders and smiled into his eyes.

"Now don't be silly, Fred! I believe you're jealous of the prince. I could have married him, and I chose you. Isn't that answer enough?"

"You could have married him if you were satisfied with that sort of a marriage," Garvice replied. "But I'm not going to have that story raked up again, particularly just now. You'll have all the reporters in New York tracing some connection between Giorgio of Threile and me and the Hurpathian loans. I won't stand for it, Rose!"

From his point of view there was nothing more to be said on that subject, and Rose had to be satisfied. What she had feared had happened; in his presence she came under the power of his love again more than ever. And now, between them, there was the mysterious barrier of his silence, as well as the reservation of something that his eyes had always withheld from her in connection with his first wife.

CHAPTER XXV

GARVICE CONFESSES

IN the course of a few days the police unearthed a tolerably extensive plot and rounded up seven conspirators. The plan of the five intended murders had been devised by a society of militant patriots from the minor European kingdom that was the hereditary enemy of Hurpathia, their object being, of course, to prevent an American war loan to the Hurpathian government. The success or non-success of their desperate mission does not actively concern this story.

There was no positive evidence against Peter Macchi, and he was allowed to go back to his panel-painting. The poisoned syringe which he claimed to have found in the roll of tapestries was still a mystery and an object of intense interest to the police. Lavery, under instructions from Heaton, was concentrating his energies on this aspect of the case. If Lavery was any good at all, Heaton submitted to himself, he could scarcely fail to find the Carpesli woman, supposing her to have anything more than an ethical connection with the business.

Meanwhile, Fred Garvice had explained himself to one person. He called upon Mary on the evening after his first public reappearance. Already Heaton had told

her over the telephone what she had the pleasure of reading in the Monday morning newspapers. She knew that Fred had been found, that he was safe and well, and that he was unable to give a full account of his adventures. The papers implied that he had been drugged and kidnaped—an ingenious theory which did not hold water very well.

At nine o'clock that evening Mary was in her office, busy over her accounts, when Katie, the devoted Irish servant who had been with her for many years, burst into the room shaking with excitement.

"It's Mr. Garvice, mum! He's downstairs this minute, mum, and would be afther seein' yez!"

Mary looked up from her desk, where the green-shaded light made a bright circular patch on the orderly heaps of papers. Her face was in shadow, and she laid down her pen with a steady hand. Somehow she had been expecting that Fred would come to her. It was three years since she had seen him last, and the manner of their parting had left a brutal scar on her heart.

"Well, Katie, let him come up," she said gently.

"Yes, mum. You're quite sure it won't be too much for yez?"

Katie understood quite a lot about these troubles.

"Oh, no," Mary replied with a faint smile. "There is a little business we have to discuss, and I must see him some time."

When she left him she had resolved never to set eyes upon him again as far as this world was concerned, if she could help it; but his letter had made her curious. Also she was curious about him personally. Would he be the stranger he was when she left him, or would another change have taken place? She rather hoped he would still be the stranger.

But when he came into the room her heart gave a great leap, and then lost a couple of beats. No one had told her that he would be minus his mustache, and she had missed any reference to it in the papers. Small as it was, the change rolled the years back with a vengeance. He looked exactly as he did in the days when he was courting her. She got up uncertainly, and found her hand being clasped.

"Thank you ever and ever so much for seeing me, Mary," he said huskily. "May I sit down for a few moments? I won't stay very long."

"Yes, do," she said. "Take that chair."

There was an awkward moment. He did not quite know what to do with his hat, which he had brought in with him. Finally he laid it on her desk, together with his gloves. He did not take off his overcoat, however.

"Katie looks much the same," he said after a short pause.

"Yes, she is just the same," Mary replied.

"And you—I think you've changed a little, Mary. I—that is, I wanted to see you about that letter I wrote you. You must have been surprised."

"Of course I was. You gave us—all your friends—a very bad time, Fred. Nobody understands anything about it—"

Garvice interrupted with an embarrassed laugh.

"It was a kid's game, Mary. Lucky for me, too, that I took it into my head to play it. I wasn't satisfied altogether, with—things in general. When I went up there that morning, I wanted to see you and find out if we—that is, if I couldn't persuade you to let me do something for you. Then came Heaton's confounded telegram, and I started off like a sheep to go to New York. Hadn't got far when it suddenly occurred to me that if I laid low for a couple of days, and didn't show up at the conference, something would bust. So I—"

Mary leaned forward eagerly.

"But, Fred, the papers said—Terry told me that you had lost your memory. I don't understand!"

Garvice's head hung down a little and his hands dropped lifelessly between his knees. He was the picture of dejection.

"That's what I did my best to make 'em think," he said. "I couldn't tell the truth. It wasn't any of their business, anyway—only Heaton made it his."

Light was beginning to dawn on her.

"You mean you meant to ruin yourself—to lose your money?"

Garvice made a pitiful effort to straighten his shoulders.

"Something like that. You know what the Bible says—'What shall it profit a man . . . ?' Well, I've been worried about my soul lately. Ever since the kid died—it seemed to bring me around to what a fool I'd made of myself. I thought this idea of mine might be a sort of test. There were other reasons, too. Rose was fixed up with plenty of money, so she couldn't kick. I've

spent about a million on that place up there, and what with other investments being tied up, I was short enough. But Heaton double-crossed me—he's pulled me through, and my fortune, what there is left of it, is safe enough."

Mary exclaimed softly, remembering what Heaton had said to her on that very subject.

"Go on, please," she said. "I understand as far as you've told me."

"Well," Fred continued, after a short pause, "I ran the car back a little way and left in there by the road, with my coat on the seat. There wasn't anything the matter with it then; the explosion must have happened later. I walked four miles to the next station, and had the luck to catch a train back to town. I was well provided with money, because I'd drawn out a lot the day before for the pay-roll, and hoping I might persuade you to accept a little present. On the train I ran into old Bridges, a man I'd known for some years. He was a good sort, and somehow I got to telling him my troubles. He had troubles, too, but I didn't know exactly what they were. He said that he was on his way to do a rest-cure at the house of a doctor in the Bronx who took paying guests. He also told me about Murdoch's, as a quiet place where I could hide away for a little while. Well, of course, I didn't expect there was going to be a general blow-up of automobiles all over the country, and that queered it.

"I sent around to old Bridges, and he agreed to see you and Rose, tell you that I was all right, and arrange something. You see, I expected to be a pauper by that time. So I wrote the letters in his name, with his permission, meaning to bring you up to the rest-cure place to see him. I knew the old fellow could hit it up with the booze pretty hard, but I didn't know he was so near his finish. I was waiting to hear from him again when Heaton's sleuth found me and told me he was dead. Then I did the only thing I could do not to look a perfect fool. I pretended I couldn't remember anything that had happened, but it didn't go down very well. That's all there is to that."

If Mary had possessed a very keen sense of humor, she must have laughed at the absurd predicament into which her former lord and master had got himself, but she did not appear to see anything funny in it.

The figure in the deep chair opposite her was too pitifully tragic.

She knew Fred Garvice. There had always been something childish in most of his actions. At one time she would have said "boyishly impulsive," but childish was the best word for it now. She remembered that he had only discovered his love for her when Terry Heaton came back to the little New England town which had bred them all three, and discovered that she was the prettiest and most desirable young woman on earth. It had given Garvice great satisfaction to prove himself a better man than Terry Heaton, who had made a fortune, but who could not win the love of the girl he wanted.

Over the days that followed, Mary would have drawn a veil if she could. With what gross effect had the money gone to Fred's head! He was like a selfish child left unchecked to ravage a candy-shop at his own sweet will.

With it all, he had never been clever enough to deceive her. Bills came in for jewels and gowns that Mary had never seen, and he left them lying about all over the place. Strange women rang him up on the telephone at all hours of the day and night. The climax was his purchase of a yacht, wherein a merry party was personally conducted by him to the Bermudas and an open scandal provoked.

Mary's own weakness had been that she cared so deeply for this reckless, selfish "child," whom she had married, that she denied him chastisement. And then a day came when it was too late. She had to choose between him and her own self-respect.

At first he had not wanted legal freedom. When he did want it, however, he grasped at it quite as impulsively as he had grasped at everything else. In fact, he was rather proud of this instinct of rashness. He conceived himself all through as a free man with liberty to follow the mood of the moment.

Now he had done yet another mad thing, and had come perilously near to making himself ridiculous. It was a wise choice on his part that elected to make Mary the sole confidante of this latest adventure. He told himself that she would not laugh, and he was right. She saw right down into the depths of his tragically uneasy soul. He was tired of the other woman before he had even married her.

"You said in your letter that you did it for me," she said quietly. "Perhaps you'd better explain what you meant by that."

Garvice raised his head and surveyed her gloomily.

"Oh, well, it all went flat, anyway. It was just an idea I had. I thought if I was bankrupt you might take pity on me, Mary."

"But have you ever needed my pity? And what did you propose to do about Miss Warden?"

He looked hurt, as if this were a rather cruel question.

"I dare say she would have thrown me over," he replied abruptly.

Remembering what she had seen of Rose, Mary was inclined to smile for the first time.

"Perhaps she can be—persuaded to do so," she said.

Garvice shook his head.

"No, it's all fallen flat, I tell you. That is, unless—"

"Unless what?" The question was crisp.

"Unless you'll take me back, Mary."

Mary's lips trembled. For an instant resentment surged so high in her heart that she could almost have summoned Heaton on the spot and reconsidered her refusal to marry him. She got up, and Garvice followed her example.

"It was good of you to come and tell me all about this," she said; "but I'm afraid I don't care to risk your proposal—if it is one. If there is ever to be a change in you—I mean the sort of change that could make either of us happy—it must come clean from within, and not be merely a surface scratch. Besides, you take too much for granted, Fred. I am not sitting here waiting for you to come back to me. A strange thing is this, that I know and you know, too—you will come back in a different way. You won't be able to help yourself; and then, perhaps, it may be too late. God alone can tell that!"

There was a sigh in her voice as she spoke the last sentence.

Garvice took his dismissal soberly. She rather expected one of those flares of temper which had usually met any effort to oppose him, but none came. To her great relief, he did not even offer to shake hands with her when he left. Katie showed him out.

Five minutes after he had gone, Mary

was absorbed in her accounts again. The interview had affected her less than she had thought possible.

CHAPTER XXVI

HEATON SOWS MORE DISCORD

HEATON had by no means forgotten Lucia Carpelli or his suspicions that Rose was the heroine of the romantic tragedy which had taken place at Mentone four years ago. With regard to all that, he chose to bide his time. He had a streak of romance in his own composition, and was anxious to see if Miss Carpelli herself would make a move to show her hand, if she held one.

Tommy McEvoy, who was busy painting panels with the liberated Macchi, informed him that Peter and the girl had quarreled, and that she was very busy at the opera, which was in full swing. Tommy didn't think that Macchi was mourning her. He seemed much the same—improved, if anything, and not quite so conceited.

Meanwhile Heaton had not laid aside his idea of giving a ball. He had an ulterior purpose in view. He was planning to create an opportunity for a rather daring stroke that he had in mind.

He knew a great many people, and the social strata at such a gathering were likely to be somewhat mixed, but that did not trouble him. If he sent out two hundred invitations, unless he was careful about cards, four hundred people would very likely find their way in. He had one of the best houses in New York for large entertainments; and while his parties had never been remarkable for "freak" surprises, there were several things his guests could count upon—the men upon perfect food and drink; the women upon a becoming background for their frocks and really worth-while cotillion favors.

His list would include many of the smart set and many who were not of it, but much is forgiven to a rich bachelor host, and it was well known that Heaton was not a social climber. For that reason society, in its fashionable and moneyed sense, was more than inclined to encourage him.

He had sent out his invitations three weeks in advance for New Year's eve, and in due course one came to the little flat in Newark, addressed to "Mr. and Mrs. Maximilian Warden and Miss Cecilia War-

den." Cissie was not at home when it arrived. She returned to find that her parents had quarreled violently over it, and that her father, entrenched behind his liver, had retreated to the couch in the parlor, sulking, but by no means routed. Her mother, upon whose brow sat a dubious kind of victory, was placidly mending, in the dining-room, while she awaited the enemy's reinforcements in the person of Cissie.

Cissie, who had almost forgotten Heaton's promise, burst cheerfully in upon this scene of domestic warfare with her arms full of little things she had been buying for Christmas. In a few moments she was regretting her generous extravagance; for she, like her father, meant to go to that ball, and she would need a new dress.

Her father revived at sight of her, while her mother immediately attacked her on the score of common sense. For a short time she was battered between the opposing forces, but she rallied soon enough and made her position clear. There was a futile effort on the part of the allies to buy off the enemy.

"Why shouldn't you come, too, mother?" Cissie suggested. "Mr. Heaton's house is grand, and there will be music. You always enjoy music, mother."

"I see myself!" Mrs. Warden replied in withering accents.

Her lace cap fairly trembled. Old Don Quixote's face looked longer than usual.

"Well, you needn't be a dog in the manger," he muttered.

His wife took off her horn-rimmed spectacles and surveyed him calmly.

"When I married you, Max, you were a God-fearing young man—"

"And now I'm a woman-fearing old one," he retorted rudely. "Just because I'm ill and—"

"It's because you're ill that I object most of all. And you needn't insult me, Max. I'm sure I do the best I can for you and Cissie on our limited means. There's the doctor's bill coming in next week, and goodness knows what it will be. I suppose you'd keep the poor doctor waiting for his money, and buy yourself a dress suit instead."

This is precisely what Mr. Warden would have done, had the matter been in his hands, but he lacked the pluck to say so.

"What's the matter with my old one?" he demanded. "I can get it pressed and

cleaned, and with a new waistcoat and a gardenia in my buttonhole I'll be all right."

Cissie flew to recover the clothes in question from their camphor-scented nest in the hall cupboard. They didn't look very grand. That was a fact which even the dauntless old gentleman was forced to confess when he had struggled into the coat and observed its sagging lines.

"Now you see!" said Mrs. Warden. "You can't have all the luxuries of life, and you *will* have the doctor, you know!"

Bitterly indeed, now, did Mr. Warden regret all those cozy, leisurely chats with his cheerful medical adviser. Cissie, silent, looked warily from one parent to the other. She had no money of her own, but she meant to go to that ball if she had to humble herself by borrowing a dress from Rose.

"And then," Mrs. Warden droned on, with the irritating self-satisfaction of the perfect killjoy, "I dare say you've overlooked the fact that Cissie will need a dress, to say nothing of other things. And how are you going to get there? Hire an automobile, no doubt!"

Don Quixote's face dropped another inch, but still he was not beaten.

"Why, mother, you can rig Cissie up a white muslin or something, and we can go on the train. She can carry her slippers in a bag—can't you, Cissie?"

"How are you going to get back?" Mrs. Warden put in, before Cissie could express an opinion on the suggestion. "At that time of night—or it will be morning, I suppose—how will you get a train?"

"We can wait in the station and come home with the milk," Cissie chirped hopefully.

"The milk will be going in the opposite direction," her mother said severely. "And you know very well that your father would catch his death, in his delicate state of health."

"I'll risk it!" said Mr. Warden with a sigh.

While she was in the kitchen, preparing supper, there was a surreptitious hunt for the head of the family's check-book; and when it was discovered that she had more than a hundred and fifty dollars to her credit, the indignation of the conspirators knew no bounds. Mr. Warden was for confronting her with the proof of her wealth, and demanding to know whether she could honestly say that the money belonged to her, because she had saved it,

or to Cissie, who had earned most of it. But Cissie counseled patience.

"Just leave her alone, father. Don't you worry. We're *going!*"

"Sure we're going; but I ought to see about my dress suit to-morrow, oughtn't I?"

"Leave it until the day after," said Cissie. "Don't you know what the real trouble is?"

Mr. Warden pulled thoughtfully at his neatly trimmed beard.

"I guess your mother don't want us to go," he said. "That's about the size of it."

"She's afraid Mr. Heaton will turn my head," said Cissie loftily.

Mr. Warden chuckled.

"Why, he's as old as I am, isn't he, Cis?"

"Not quite," Cissie replied. "But I hope I've got some sense!"

At supper a truce was called. Mrs. Warden grew more cheerful, and was full of suggestions for minor festivities. She said she wouldn't mind for once in her life going to a cinema, if it would give her family any pleasure; and wouldn't it be nice to have a Christmas tree and invite some impoverished young cousins who lived in Paterson? Father could dress up as Santa Claus.

It took all of Cissie's ingenuity to keep her father placid during the meal. At the idea of masquerading as Santa Claus he very nearly burst. As Cissie had foreseen, the invitation to the dance had upset his equilibrium. He could think of nothing else. It was burned on his brain.

After supper he sat down at the old walnut writing-bureau, and composed two missives. One was to his doctor, gently but firmly hinting that as his health was distinctly on the mend, further visits could be postponed for the present. The other, though more formal, was of a still happier nature. It informed Mr. Terence Holbrook Heaton that Mr. Maximilian Warden and Miss Cecilia Warden would be much pleased to accept his kind invitation for New Year's eve.

He wrote these two letters while Cissie and her mother were washing up the supper dishes, and slipped out and posted them at once. The next morning he realized his foolishness, for as the day waxed it became more and more plain that "mother" was inexorable.

He had taunted her with the existence of the hundred and fifty dollars; but far from being ashamed, she was proud to have an-

ticipated the demands of the new year so providently. The rent? He had forgotten that as well as the doctor, it seemed. Life insurance? Pew-rent? The monthly instalment on the piano that Cissie *would* have to replace the organ which had done them very well? Apparently nobody but herself had considered these things.

And then Mrs. Warden appealed to her husband's better nature. Didn't he, as the child's paternal parent, see what a danger Mr. Heaton was to Cissie? Did he want Cissie to be ruined for lack of proper guidance?

Mr. Warden evidently possessed no better nature. At all events, he struggled hopelessly at every touch and turn. He even told her that he had accepted the invitation, and she replied with the curt suggestion that a man in his weak physical state was quite likely to fall ill at the last moment. In fact, she was sure he would do so, if he followed his usual precedent in crises. This was a bitter accusation, and the house of Warden seemed on the point of plunging into civil war when the nominal head of it retorted that if he hadn't been kept in a moral strait-jacket all his life, he would probably be as well and fit as anybody ought to be at his age.

At six o'clock Cissie blew in with a radiant countenance. So many things had happened that when they had all been narrated Mr. Warden sank down, trembling and weak with victory. Reenforcements had come at the precise moment when he was ready to weep, if not actually to surrender.

To begin with, Mrs. Garvice, being told of the invitation, had of her own accord insisted upon being allowed to fit Cissie out from top to toe, a wonderful white lace gown of her own being the foundation, or *motif*, accompanied by a white velvet cloak with silver tassels. Then Rose, approached by telephone, had shown herself graciously disposed to provide father with his outfit. He was to come over to New York to-morrow, lunch with Rose, and go to the tailor's. And, as if that were not enough good luck, just as she was on the point of leaving, in had rushed Mr. Heaton and informed Cissie that, of course, he wanted her to know that he was sending a car for her and her family, and that it would also take them home again.

"So you see, mother!" Cissie finished triumphantly.

Mrs. Warden did see, and gave in with what grace she could, but nothing would persuade her to come over to the enemy in person. They could go, seeing that they meant to; but as for her, she had no desire at her age to go trapesing around to parties, and would be happier at home getting her proper sleep. A nice way to bring in the New Year!

CHAPTER XXVII

HEATON GETS HIS FORTUNE TOLD

AMONG Heaton's intimate friends much controversy raged with regard to his intended festivities. He invited them all with a bland lack of discrimination, perhaps relying upon a few refusals to smooth the path of his reckless diplomacy.

One difficulty was easily settled by Mary's declining to come. Not only was she in mourning for her little boy, but she was also very busy, and had neither heart nor mind to give to balls.

Rose, on the other hand, wanted to go very much, and had a sharp tussle with her lover before he would consent to accompany her. She reminded him that although he was in mourning, she was not, and something was due her to make up for the dull life she was leading. Heaton had asked her to sing during the evening, and this she was more than willing to do after securing an invitation for her old friend and admirer, Prince Giorgio of Threile, who was spending a few weeks in New York prior to visiting the Southern States.

Heaton did not know this minor royalty, failing to connect him with the little old man who had given Rose such an affectionate farewell that Sunday afternoon; but he had no objection to accommodating her. At her suggestion he also sent a card to Don Manuel Mandrigo.

But his preparations were still incomplete, and he was wavering in uncertainty as to the feasibility of carrying out one feature of his cherished plan. Could it be risked without dire results? The days slipped by and Heaton was unable to make up his mind.

Finally, on the day before that of the ball, fate played pleasantly into his hands in the person of the red-haired painter, Tommy McEvoy, whom he met dashing down the avenue at high speed, groomed like a horse-show favorite.

"Hello! Wait a minute!" said Heaton, buttonholing Tommy with condescending familiarity. "In a hurry?"

Tommy grinned.

"Somewhat. How are you this afternoon, Mr. Heaton?"

"Busy as a dog in flea-time," Heaton replied, a little inelegantly. "You're all dolled up to beat Gaby. Whither away, my friend, in those pink gloves and purple spats?"

Tommy regarded the articles in question with a spasm of indecision.

"Do you know, sir," he confided in a stricken whisper, "I believe you're right! In my business it'll be all up with me if I go color-blind. In the shop they were meant for heliotrope, and they looked like heliotrope to me. However, it can't be helped now."

The grin came back gradually as Tommy assured himself that the white carnation in his buttonhole had not suffered in the transition from electricity to cold, gray daylight.

"Say—want to come along?" he continued. "I'm on my way to a freak tea-fight—"

"Oh, thank you!" Heaton exclaimed sarcastically. "But I want to see you, McEvoy, about something most important. To-morrow night I'm giving a—"

"Oh, say, are you going to ask me at the eleventh hour? I've no pride. Just ask me!" Tommy burst in. "I don't mind waiting at table, or handing out dance programs, or any old thing."

Heaton smiled.

"Well, I was going to ask you, as a matter of fact; but we shall have to talk it over. I was thinking of having you bring some one, if you could keep her sort of in the background."

"Who?" asked Tommy, round-eyed with interest.

"Well—for reasons of my own—your friend Miss CarPELLi."

Tommy continued to stare at him.

"The girl's a lady," he said finally, "although I thought otherwise at first. But why do you want her?"

"Simply because I do," Heaton replied.

"Then you'd better come along with me," Tommy said. "The tea-fight's at Miss CarPELLi's place. You can drop it to her casually."

Heaton turned back with him when he heard this. Of course, Tommy was wrong.

The girl was not a lady, as that odious term is generally understood. Anything but that, thought Heaton, and his own audacity made him increasingly apprehensive.

"What about you and Miss CarPELLi?" he asked abruptly, as he strode down the avenue beside the young artist.

Tommy blushed—which, taken in conjunction with his red hair, was a painful sight.

"Oh, she just jollies me along," he replied.

"See here, I shouldn't get too much interested in her if I were you," the older man advised. "You don't know anything about her."

Tommy cast an uneasy glance at his mentor.

"Well, Mr. Heaton, if you'll forgive me speaking so plainly, aren't you a little bit gone on her yourself?"

Heaton laughed uproariously, and Tommy looked relieved.

"Anyway, she's always talking about you and that queer story she told us that night. You remember?"

"Yes, about her husband being the man who was found dead in the hotel at Mentone. What has she told you about that affair?"

"A lot that doesn't mean very much—all about her old gods and their vengeance. I told you I thought she had a knife up her sleeve for some one, and now I know who it is—it's for the woman who ran off with her husband. I believe that's what brought her to New York."

Heaton felt a cold chill run down his spine. Still, if Rose was that woman, and Lucia CarPELLi knew it, bringing them together under one roof could not do much additional harm.

By this time the two men had turned into Tenth Street, and Tommy led the way, as one who knew it well, to a respectable, old-fashioned house, the character of which was advertised by a placard announcing "Furnished Rooms." Miss CarPELLi's was the second-floor front, an apartment of good size where a skilful arrangement of couch-covers and screens at least partially disguised the fact that by night it could be turned into a bedroom.

Four people besides the hostess were sitting about, drinking pale Russian tea with slices of lemon and preserved fruit floating in it. Miss CarPELLi presided at a hissing samovar, and on the table were

plates of thin, hard little cakes and strange-looking sweetmeats.

The only place to know a woman is in her own home, humble though it may be. On the mantel stood a marvelously beautiful silver icon—proclaiming that Miss CarPELLi was probably, as she professed to be, of the Balkan peoples and a member of the Greek Church. Besides the icon and the samovar there were other touches. A weird musical instrument, a cross between a mandolin and a zither, yet with a character all its own, lay on the couch; a photograph of a group in national dress, framed in scented wood, stood near the icon; and on the other side was a metal marriage-crown set with enameled medallions of the saints of the Greek Church, such as is used in wedding ceremonies.

To Heaton's discomfort, a little charcoal brazier sent forth a thin blue stream of musky perfume; yet the air of the room was fresh enough, for two windows were partially open. That powerful scent, he reflected, would drench anybody who came within a mile of it, and he had visions of his valet's wonder when he changed his clothes that evening.

As to Miss CarPELLi, he had to admit that there might be something in Tommy's crude opinion. Certainly she was less objectionable than she had seemed that night at Baglioni's, although her eyes were just as wicked and her mouth just as crimson as ever.

She had on a long, loose robe cut with a Magyar effect, the material of dull silver patterned thickly with old blue flowers. A heavy silver cord held it in at the waist. From her ears hung long earrings of filigree silver, instead of the gold hoops. Her magnificent blue-black hair was drawn high severely from her forehead, and confined at the back with a comb that matched the earrings.

She greeted Heaton with naive pleasure and a prettily dignified hospitality. A cup of the oversweetened tea was pressed upon him, and he found it not at all bad. The other people, two men and two women, were friends of hers from the opera, she explained. They were all foreigners, and seemed as inoffensive as children and nearly as delightful.

One of the young men picked up the musical instrument—it was called a *bala-laika*, Tommy said—and played upon it charmingly. The others joined in and sang

a "Boat Song on the Volga" in an undertone. Thus encouraged, the musician tried his hand at Hurpathian folk-songs and dances.

While this was going on, Miss CarPELLi told the fortune of one of the girls with an ornately decorated pack of foreign cards. Heaton, being of Irish blood, could not help being interested, although he could not understand a word of what the fortune was. Miss CarPELLi must tell his fortune, he said, and was so eager about it that he all but hustled away her other visitors. Tommy, of course, remained behind and was privileged to listen. He helped to clear away the samovar and tea things, and at Heaton's request the brazier was put out.

"You do not like my incense?" Miss CarPELLi said with a laugh.

"I can't bear to think what I'll smell like afterward," Heaton replied. "No, I'm not strong on it, although I'm afraid I'll be strong with it. Now, fire away. What do I do? Cut the cards?"

Miss CarPELLi regarded him with dreamy eyes, and instantly he felt that he ought to be on his guard.

"You take them in your 'ands, so, sit quietly for a minute, and then lay them, so, in three piles, just as it may please you, *monsieur*. But first you—what you call it, Tom-mee?"

"Shuffle 'em," suggested Tommy.

"Ya-as, shuffle 'em."

Heaton did as bidden.

"Old fool that I am!" he murmured to himself.

Tommy lit a cigarette and sat down beside him. There was a pattering of cards as the woman laid them out in three circles with a single card in the middle of each. Her soft voice reached him as from a great distance away.

"This is the pas'—this of to-day, very great adventure—and this, the gods will give you."

She indicated the three piles in turn.

"You will see, *monsieur*, of whom you think much in the pas'—a lovely, dark woman. She does not love you, but you give many things to her. You become ver' reech—but you are never ver' 'appy. Once you think to marry another, but she is not jus' what you want. You cannot forget that lovely, dark one. Once you are ver' near death with illness, and doctor come and put something down your throat. There is steaming of kettles—"

"By Jove," exclaimed Heaton: "that's true, anyway! I nearly pegged out with diphtheria five years ago."

"But," the soft voice went on, "you are strong man, and the gods have work for you. It is not much, that pas'—it is stupid and lonely."

Heaton sighed. His Celtic temperament rose to the pathos of her simple description.

"To-day, *monsieur*, you are on the eve of important things, although you guess it not. Shall I tell you? I, myself, am ver' much in to-day. I see many people. There is dancing and much gaiety. Ah!" She broke off and laughed sharply. "No, it mus' be wrong, those cards."

"What's wrong?" Heaton demanded.

"It is my own dream. I would rather not tell any more," she replied.

"Oh, I say!"

But she had shuffled the cards all together, and her face was a mask of indifference.

"It is no good. I am ver' bad fortune-teller to-day. To-morrow, perhaps—or another time when I feel better. Tom-mee, please to give me a glass of water. You will find some over there behind that screen."

She leaned back as if exhausted, with a haunted, frightened look in her eyes that made them seem less wise with the knowledge of evil. The effect was to make Heaton wildly apprehensive, although he would have been the last person in the world to own to superstition.

"Before we go, what about to-morrow night?" asked Tommy, after bringing the water for Miss CarPELLi. "You haven't said anything to Lucia."

"Oh, yes," said Heaton, who felt almost as limp as a drowned kitten, and had almost decided to abandon his plan. "I've got a little show on at my place. Would you like to come?"

Miss CarPELLi languidly expressed her perfect willingness. She seemed glad to get rid of them at any price.

"What came over that girl, I can't guess," said Tommy, when they were out in the fresh air. "She went all of a heap, didn't she?"

"It was acting, pure and simple," Heaton replied. "But what's her object?"

Tommy was shocked and resentful.

"You don't know Lucia as I do, or you wouldn't say such things!" he protested indignantly.

"No, and I don't want to, either, Heaton said testily.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LADY OF THE ORDER

IN the late afternoon of the 31st of December there were important doings in a certain obscure little flat in Newark.

Cissie Warden had taken the day off, and in obedience to her mother's advice was devoting a goodly portion of it to repose. In another bedroom her father tossed as fitfully as she. Both emerged promptly on the stroke of six—the hour of their release—to be fed lightly with cocoa, sandwiches, and much good advice.

That they were headed wrong was a foregone conclusion; yet it was pleasant that the austere wife and mother finally unbent somewhat, and gave them a smile now and again. Cissie, for one, could not have departed in perfect peace without that dry, whimsical smile.

Old Don Quixote was with Cissie, body and soul. Already he had mastered the A B C of the "lame duck" and the "turkey trot"—lessons administered surreptitiously to a singularly apt pupil. His foot was light, whatever his liver, and all that he deplored in this modern school of Terpsichore was the abolition of the polka and the schottische.

After the makeshift meal, Cissie retired to her room to complete her preparations. The horn spectacles followed her father. The two ball-goers reappeared together, models of light and beauty. Cissie certainly looked very sweet, and almost as young as she actually was. The dress was a great success. In white lace, her thin arms veiled in tulle, a wreath of forget-me-nots circling her bronze-gold hair, and happiness enthroned in her blue eyes, she was a sight to be remembered. As for old Don Quixote, he was simply grand!

They admired each other tremendously, and the old-maid mother half grudgingly admired them both, until the busy hum of the motor-car outside announced the hour of their departure.

It was a curious sensation, slipping smoothly along through the Jersey flats in a miniature palace of luxury. The flowers in the slender vases; the electric heating arrangements; the soft velvet cushions and the springs which might also have been of

velvet—all contributed to an overpowering sense of ease irresistible to Cissie's father, for one.

He discovered a box of little cigars in the rack, which added materially to his pleasure. Cissie, in her white lace dress and velvet mantle, turned her face to the window and dreamed of the joys to come. It was all before them! To-morrow might prove a dull day, but to-night was powdered with diamond stars.

In the prow of the ferry-boat, where their car was temporarily stalled, they asked each other vivid questions. Yes, father had been to many balls in his youth, but to nothing so promising as this. Yes, Cissie believed that Rose would be there, too. No, Cissie was not wildly excited. She was *curious*, rather. What people did and what they said—Cissie could guess at that and trust to her instincts.

They bowled out into half-deserted West Street, through Twenty-Third Street, and then up the clean sweep of Fifth Avenue. As they neared their destination, the way was impeded for a couple of blocks, and further progress developed by inches.

Cissie's heart beat high and fast. It was wonderful to be edging along like this in a jam of motor-cars, none more perfectly appointed than their own; to see the faces of other cloaked and elaborately coiffured women gleaming under the little electric lights—women bored and indifferent for the most part, to Cissie's mystification, while some of their men-folk were even reading newspapers.

She and her father were not bored. They enjoyed everything, from the policeman regulating the traffic with a mighty hand to the little street-boys dodging in and out and the patient crowds drawn up on either side of the awning.

It was entrancing when their turn came, as it did in time, and Don Quixote offered an arm to his daughter with old-fashioned courtesy. There was a strip of carpet down to the curb, so that Cissie's new white slippers suffered no damage. They passed up to the great open door through a critical audience, who made personal remarks about Cissie's pretty face and her father's grand manner.

Inside it was a little confusing. Cissie's memory of this big marble house had been one of emptiness. Now it seemed full to overflowing, although they were fairly early. Flowers everywhere, and human

flowers as well—fair women in filmy gowns hung with jewels, displaying so much neck and arm that Cissie was very glad indeed that her mother had not yielded to persuasion and come. But nowhere in sight was there anybody that Cissie knew.

"I'll meet you here," her father whispered hurriedly, as he was being wafted away by a tall footman.

Cissie was sent in an opposite direction, and presently found herself in one of a series of dressing-rooms, where her cloak was taken by a trim maid and a check pressed into her hands, which it was wise to keep, seeing how thickly the walls were hung with wraps and furs.

She furtively inspected the women powdering their noses at dressing-tables, and envied them their perfect ease. She began to draw on the fresh pair of gloves she had saved for this moment, standing back in a corner and praying for Rose to come, or for courage to venture out alone into the marble corridor. No one, not even the maids, paid any attention to her, all being busy with their own concerns; but there was a faint rustle of attention when a newcomer entered.

Cissie drew in her breath in sheer amazement. Never, never, had she seen such an amazingly interesting woman. It was not her dress alone, although that was striking enough—of gold tissue veiled in old, yellow Spanish lace, with a golden rosebud on one shoulder. Her black hair was dressed high, with a huge tortoise-shell comb, and in her ears were golden hoops. On her corsage was pinned an order of some sort, fashioned of yellow and white diamonds hung from a strip of gold-colored ribbon.

She wore no other jewels, but the order was enough by itself. It awakened the other women to a lively curiosity, which was only increased by the cool, half-contemptuous smile on the newcomer's straight red lips. She remained in the room only long enough to shed her cloak, and then, with not so much as a glance toward a mirror, walked out again.

The other women exchanged looks and questioned the maids, but none of them knew who the lady of the order could be. Cissie, following timidly in her wake, was in time to see her take the arm of a red-headed young man and disappear up the marble stairway that lay like a carefully chiseled path through a young forest of palms and rose-trees.

Mr. Warden was waiting for his daughter, and had improved his time by getting into conversation with another man similarly employed. He knew that they had to go up-stairs, where Mr. Heaton was receiving his guests at the door of the ballroom. Dancing had already commenced, and they could hear the music growing more and more pronounced as they ascended.

To Cissie's great relief, her father did not show any trace of the self-consciousness that she felt so overwhelmingly. He was out to enjoy himself, and this new element seemed to suit him perfectly. He commented on the display of roses, naming several of the varieties, and thought it a pity that women no longer wore natural flowers to balls. He knew that the marble they were treading had come from Carrara, and that if the great altar-piece at the head of the stairway had not been painted under the direction of Botticelli himself, it was a good copy of his school's work. Indeed, old Don Quixote had turned quite suddenly into a polished man of the world.

Soon it was their turn in the little press at the ballroom door; and Cissie found herself shaking hands with Terry Heaton and introducing her father. The whole thing was merging into a dream for her. Details escaped her. Her little face under its bronze-gold bang was quite pale, as Heaton kept hold of her hand for a moment while he talked with them.

"I must find you some partners," he was saying, "just as soon as I am free. No, your sister hasn't come yet, or at least I haven't seen her. She is going to sing just before supper, you know. Really, Mr. Warden, you are to be congratulated upon having two such charming daughters!"

Suddenly he broke off, and, releasing Cissie's hand, beckoned with a backward nod of his head to the young man whom Cissie had noticed escorting the lady of the order, but who was alone now.

"I say, McEvoy, what have you done with her?"

Cissie stepped aside to give place to the red-headed youth, who looked rather uncomfortable. She heard his reply:

"She's smoking cigarettes in the library. Nobody else there."

Heaton laughed.

"Not a bad place for her! By the way, she looks stunning, doesn't she? What's that diamond thing she's got pinned on her?"

"I don't know," Tommy replied. "She told me to mind my business when I asked her. She's in a deuce of a temper, and I don't care how soon she goes home. I want to enjoy myself!"

"Well, begin now. Help this little friend of mine to have a good time. May I introduce Mr. McEvoy?—Miss Warden, and Mr. Warden."

So Cissie had a partner almost at once, and sailed away with him to the glad strains of a Boston. She was consumed with curiosity about the woman she had seen with Tommy McEvoy and the strange conversation she had overheard. Tommy, on his part, was a little curious about her. He had the courage of his curiosity, for he asked her if she was Miss Rose Warden's sister. Upon receiving an affirmative reply from Cissie, he relapsed into embarrassed silence.

He knew, of course, who she was now—the sister who was employed, as he was himself, by Mrs. Garvice. It was strange that they hadn't noticed each other before. He wondered what she would say the next time she saw him in his blouse, "sign-painting" as he called it, up at her sister's house. Probably both of them would laugh; for here they were obviously a little out of their element.

Then the dance ended, and Cissie was carefully handed over to her chaperon. After that she had other partners, including Heaton himself, and she was very, very happy.

Shortly before midnight Rose made a triumphant entry, attended by a small court. There was the little, distinguished man known to Cissie both as "your highness" and "Giorgio," leaning on his ivory-headed stick and clinging to Rose like a limpet. There was Don Manuel, with his fiery red beard and polished bald head. There was Busch, who was to accompany her; and, last and seemingly least of all, Fred Garvice, looking the picture of gloom. He and Heaton greeted each other in a very offhand manner.

Several important people gathered around Rose, who was as inaccessible to her family as a star. Cissie and her father stood on the fringe, listening to the plaudits of the prima donna's admirers. Then a way was made for her to the musicians' dais.

She had chosen the "Jewel Song" from "Faust" and an aria from "La Bohème." The latter, however, was never sung, for

before the first was finished something rather painful and dramatic happened.

CHAPTER XXIX

"GOOD-BY, MARY"

EVERYBODY had crowded into the ballroom. The little gilt chairs lining the walls were all filled, and standing groups gathered here and there. Those who had heard Rose sing abroad whispered their opinion of her to less well-informed acquaintances. The buzz of voices gradually ceased as she reached the dais and faced them.

Little Busch adjusted the piano-stool to his liking and dusted his hands with a silk handkerchief. Cissie saw Prince Giorgio's eyes light up as he enthusiastically joined in the polite applause which greeted the lovely young prima donna. Garvice continued to look gloomy. Nothing seemed to please him.

Cissie and her father were near the door, and Heaton was standing close beside them, when the first clear, liquid notes began. Cissie's eyes filled with tears. This was indeed a different sort of singing from the old Methodist choir days. No wonder Feldmann and Mandrigo had raved about her! How could she give it up just to get married, thought Cissie?

There was a slight rustle at the door as a few newcomers tried to push their way in. Somebody said, "S-sh!" But one of them slipped past and strolled straight out upon the ballroom floor, as if unaware of what was going on.

It was the black-haired woman who had so aroused Cissie's curiosity. She was breathing rather fast, and the diamond ornament on her breast rose and fell rhythmically. Heaton put out a hand to stop her, but she eluded him.

There she stood, conspicuous in her isolation, diverting attention from the diva. It was an atrocious exhibition of bad manners, but the woman stood at perfect ease. There was a smile on her thin, red lips, and she looked straight into Rose Warden's eyes with malignant intensity.

The song went on for a few bars, but obviously something was wrong with the singer. Her face became deathly pale, and then, without any further warning, she collapsed in a faint among the roses and lilies that made a low screen about the edge of the dais.

At the same moment, old Prince Giorgio staggered to his feet, staring in frozen horror—not at Rose, whom he seemed to have forgotten, but at the woman in gold and lace. She slipped back unnoticed through the crowd and vanished for the time being.

Heaton, naturally, was much concerned. He had interpreted Rose's collapse correctly to a certain extent. He was now convinced that she was the heroine of the Riviera romance, and that she had recognized Lucia CarPELLI as the woman whose husband she had stolen. And yet he was almost sorry now that he had made this scene possible by inviting the CarPELLI woman. To genius is owed some consideration.

Rose, still unconscious, was hurriedly carried away, and a well-known physician who was among the guests offered to attend her. Garvice, Cissie, and a couple of maid servants were allowed in the room to help. Meanwhile Heaton assured his guests that Miss Warden had merely been overcome by the superheated atmosphere, and would be all right again presently.

Supper was announced, and the distracted host had his hands full. He could not allow this unhappy incident to spoil the evening, and it was now close upon midnight, when the fun should wax fast and furious. All those silver trumpets had to be blown and the snapping bonbons with their costly gifts fought for; the New Year must be baptized royally with champagne, and feasted, too.

Heaton sent Tommy McEvoy to find Miss CarPELLI and take her home, if she could be induced to go, or to bring her some refreshments in a quiet corner. She could not be accused directly of having caused Rose's collapse, but while she remained she was a menace. But Tommy came back with a blanched cheek and a frightened eye, and drew Heaton aside from the table where he had been obliged to establish himself.

"Can't find her," he said abruptly. "But—"

"Have you been up to the roof? Did you get one of the servants to show you?"

"Sure I've been up to the roof, and that old Prince What's-His-Name who came with Miss Warden is there all by himself, kneeling on the floor and praying. It was a ghastly sight—tears rolling down his cheeks, and him trembling fit to shake the house!"

Heaton excused himself hastily and left the supper-party to get on without him. These people would be occupied for the better part of an hour, he was thankful to know.

"I suppose the old man is upset over Miss Warden's collapse," he said as he hurried off with Tommy.

"Don't believe he noticed her," Tommy replied. "He was moaning 'Lucia, Lucia!' It was horrible. Do you suppose he knows Miss CarPELLI? She's a Hurpathian, but so is your band. A girl like that—"

This was a new thought to Heaton. He remembered the flaming order on the girl's breast and the bit of yellow ribbon to which it was attached. Prince Giorgio of Threile wore a yellow ribbon in his buttonhole. It might be the same order.

At the head of the stairs they met Cissie coming down alone, and looking rather wistful, as if the evening was not proving up to her expectations.

"Mr. Garvice has taken Rose home," she said. "She is much better, but the heat made her feel faint, and they thought it was wiser to go. She asked me to apologize to you."

"That's all right, Cissie," Heaton replied. "I'm only too glad she's better. Look here, McEvoy, you take this little girl down and see that she has more than she can eat—and be sure you bag one of those crackers with the pink ballet-lady dolls for her. There's something really worth while inside."

Nothing loath, Tommy offered his escort to Cissie. He had been a little afraid that he was going to miss his own supper.

Heaton bethought himself of the lift at the second floor, and ascended in it to the roof-garden. The place was very still as he stepped out, having been deserted in favor of supper. It was full of rambling alleys with nooks and corners cleverly contrived for that palm-enclosed privacy so pleasant to lovers. The tinkle of the fountains, as the water dripped into the marble basins, had a silvery sound.

Heaton sniffed the air. Something was here that faintly overpowered the flowers. He knew that scent! It was strange that McEvoy hadn't noticed it, for it was almost as pungent as a menagerie, and, to Heaton's thinking, quite as unpleasant. The CarPELLI girl was here, somewhere.

Then, suddenly, almost at his elbow came the sound of voices. The woman's was

Miss Carpelli's, undoubtedly; the man's was thin and threadlike. They were speaking in a foreign tongue, and eavesdropping would not benefit Heaton.

He gave himself a mental shake, rounded the corner, and came upon a strange sight. Prince Giorgio of Threile was bending over the crouched figure of Lucia Carpelli, patting her head with his fine, white hands, and evidently trying to comfort her. She was sobbing softly, with little dry catches in her voice.

It was too late for Heaton to retreat. Lucia scrambled to her feet, and the old prince bowed.

"I fear we owe you an apology, sir. Certainly it is necessary to explain." Heaton glanced from one to the other in questioning silence. He was uncomfortable, but curiosity was his strongest feeling. "This is my daughter, Princess Lucia of Threile," the old man went on. "She has behaved unkindly to me, and is very sorry. For four years, sir, she has lived in comparative poverty and allowed me to think of her as one dead. It was a strange but happy meeting, sir. She had no idea that I was in New York."

What all this had to do with Rose Warden Heaton could not guess. With regard to the girl, nothing could really surprise him. Neither she nor her father was of his kind.

"Why, I suppose I ought to congratulate you," he said diffidently. "And you will be pleased to hear that Miss Warden is better. She has gone home."

Instantly both countenances darkened. Then the old man laid his hand on the girl's arm.

"You must forgive and—forget," he said gently.

"Never! She rob me of my husband—she is one ver' great traitor. Even you!" Her face was passionate with hate, and a slow, cruel smile touched her lips. "She, too—she think I am daid. To her I am one ghost—the ghost of a princess, and not that silly fool who run off and marry Carpelli. She see me as I am, and the music die in her throat. Ya-as, it is tragedy for her. The gods never forget!"

The old man sighed deeply, and made a faint sign to Heaton that all was not well with his daughter's mind.

"She is coming home with me, back to Hurpathia. We sail at once—to-morrow, perhaps, or next day. And now, sir, a

thousand thanks to you. With your permission we will make our adieus."

Heaton speeded them. To him it was a riddle still only half explained.

He returned to the supper-room, to find his party in full swing. No one had missed him very much. He sat down with Cissie and McEvoy, and drank a glass of champagne. His nod conveyed to Tommy that all was well.

Cissie, he was glad to see, was enjoying herself again. From one of her wrists dangled a little gold vanity-bag which had come out of the pink ballet-doll cracker. Around her plate were ranged other trophies—a scented bunch of exquisite artificial violets, a silver pencil, a chain bracelet of semiprecious stones, and one of the silver trumpets. Her cheeks were flushed with excitement, and she and Tommy seemed to be such excellent friends that Heaton experienced a sensation not unlike jealousy.

The first dance after supper was the cotillion, an old-fashioned arrangement to which Heaton clung. In this instance he was hoist by his own petard, for he had to dance in it with a fashionable young débutante for his partner.

Somewhere back in the line he caught occasional glimpses of Cissie and Tommy McEvoy. Also, had it interested him, he might have discerned Cissie's father partnered to a dashing matron, jumping through hoops with the agility of a schoolboy. But Heaton had not given the ball for Cissie's father, however much the latter might be enjoying it.

At last this semiofficial ordeal came to an end. He delicately damped his forehead with his handkerchief, led his girl graduate to her beaming chaperon, and felt himself free for a few moments. They would begin again presently with a tango or some such nonsense. The only thing that concerned him just now was the quick transference of Tommy McEvoy's interest from the Carpelli girl to Cissie Warden.

"You come along with me," he said to Cissie, who by this time was as thickly hung with presents as a Christmas tree.

Tommy surrendered her with a wicked grin. Perhaps he guessed. Cissie tripped in the wake of her host as joyful as a kitten.

"Enjoying yourself?" Heaton managed to ask without actually growling.

"Mr. Heaton, I don't know *how* to thank you! For a little while after Rose fainted I thought everything was going to be

spoiled; but Mr. McEvoy told me that singers often faint. They're very high-strung, he says, and—"

"Do you like McEvoy?" Heaton interrupted.

He had led her to the little elevator, and they were soaring upward.

"Do I like him? Why, he's made this party for me, Mr. Heaton! Hardly anybody else except you has danced with me. And he was so kind at supper!"

"Humph!" said Heaton.

They got out, Cissie following mechanically. The roof-garden was by no means deserted now. Some auction-bridgers had established themselves here, although plentiful accommodation was provided for them below. There were other couples, too. It took quite a hunt before Heaton was able to obtain a measure of privacy. But he had this advantage over his guests—he knew every nook and turning of the place.

"Now, Cissie," he said, and looked into her eyes.

"What?"

Plainly she was startled by his manner. With her the dream continued. The magic lights, the flower scents, the silver drip of the fountains, all fostered the illusions of this little Cinderella.

"Well, I guess you aren't wise, Cissie; and I feel sort of humbled."

"Oh, Mr. Heaton!" breathed Cissie in consternation. "What is it? What have I done?"

"You haven't done anything—that is, anything terrible, unless you say 'no'; but I'm almost afraid to ask it."

"To ask what?"

"For you to marry me, Cissie. But first I guess you've got to love me a lot. I couldn't do without that!"

Cissie's blue eyes brimmed to overflowing. She laid a thin hand trustingly in one of his, with amazing promptitude. Her soft, low laugh—half gurgle, half exclamation—might have come from the angels.

"Why, I've always loved you!" she said.

It was a revelation, for at that moment she knew that if he had not always loved her, too, he had pursued her gently from the time when they first made each other's acquaintance.

"Do you think you could marry me?" he asked, as bashfully as any schoolboy.

"Why, of course I could!"

"God bless you, Cissie! I'll do everything in my power to make you happy."

There was a little silence. Then he touched her lips for the first time. Their fragrant sweetness almost overpowered him.

Long afterward, when dawn was breaking, and the weary servants were ushering in the new year with broom, duster, and baskets piled high with the débris of festival, Heaton sat alone in his library and smoked a cigar.

If any one had told him this time yesterday that to-day he would be engaged to Cissie Warden, he would have called that man a liar. Yet here he was, engaged, and proud of it. The real wonder was what she could see in him. She not only loved him, but she adored him. It was flattering and very pleasant.

On the mantelpiece stood a framed photograph of Mary Garvice. Heaton got up and stood looking into the grave, pictured face.

"Good-by, Mary!" he said whimsically. "You never did belong to me, anyway, and perhaps it's just as well I didn't get you. But you will be very much surprised, my dear!"

CHAPTER XXX

CASTLES, SOME IN SPAIN

AT six o'clock in the morning, when you have been up all night, bed is the last thing that interests you.

Heaton went up to his private apartments, and found that his valet had anticipated his needs by turning on the steam in the Turkish bath. There he dozed comfortably for an hour, then had a cold shower, and was in his bath-gown before a breakfast-tray of eggs and deviled kidneys, when the tired valet burst in with a startling exclamation. It appeared that Mr. Garvice was down-stairs, raving like a maniac, and demanding to see Mr. Heaton at once.

"Let him come up," Heaton said, with mingled surprise and resignation.

Eight o'clock in the morning! Nice time to pay a New Year's call upon a man who has been up all night! Heaton yawned and poured himself another cup of coffee. What fresh trouble was this? Was it Rose, or Mary, or both?

As it happened, it was neither, and Heaton was almost as much startled as his valet when Garvice came into his dressing-room. His visitor justified the servant's

description. He wore a light rain-coat over his gala clothes of the previous evening, and from top to toe he was covered with soot and flecked with ashes. His hair was tossed like a mane; his red-rimmed eyes stared out of a countenance almost as black as a sweep's.

"Good Heavens, man!" Heaton gasped. "What has happened to you?"

Garvice sank into a chair with a groan.

"Hispania!" he muttered. "Burned to the ground—not a stick left standing!"

The tragedy thus simply told was none the less apparent. Garvice regarded his old friend with those shocking red-rimmed eyes.

"Can I trouble you for a wash and brush-up?" he asked wearily.

Heaton called his valet, ordered more breakfast, and helped his visitor out of the charred raincoat.

"Are you hurt?" he asked anxiously.

"Only singed here and there. Been up all night. Got a telephone-call directly I'd left Rose. It was blazing then. Jumped into my car, and was in time to see the best part of the fireworks. All gone—and the furniture wasn't insured yet. Pretty rotten!"

"I should think it was!" Heaton ejaculated.

Garvice looked less weird when he had sluiced off several layers of soot and brushed his hair. He declined breakfast, but gulped a steaming cupful of coffee.

"How on earth did it happen?" Heaton asked when they had settled down a bit, and Garvice had lit a cigarette with badly shaking fingers.

"Incendiary."

"But who?"

"Macchi. The fellow was burned alive. The last I saw of him, he was yelling from one of the balconies and throwing burning timbers down on his would-be rescuers. It was a horrid sight!"

"Good Heavens! He must have been crazy!" Heaton muttered.

"No doubt of that. He hid himself in the house after he was supposed to have left. Guess he had a delusion of some grudge against me or Rose. Kept screaming about her—something about revenge for her stealing another woman's husband. Awful! I can hear him laughing and shrieking yet. Poor Farley nearly lost his own life trying to get at the brute. He's got a broken arm, and two of the other workmen are badly burned, but thank good-

ness no lives lost except Macchi's. He was in with that Hurpathian gang, it seems."

Garvice drew in a long breath and sat in brooding silence for a moment.

"Does Rose know?" Heaton asked finally.

His visitor roused himself.

"Yes. I told my man to telephone her; but I haven't seen her."

"And Mary? Poor Mary—all her work gone up in smoke!"

"Yes, it's hard on Mary, too. The whole thing is rotten, and it needn't have happened. Farley is a careless fellow. The night-watchman had foregathered in his house to celebrate the new year. What do you think of that? I gave them beans, I can tell you. It took an hour to rout the firemen from Portchester out of their beds, and Macchi had taken care to put our own hose out of commission by cutting it in about a dozen places. He must have enjoyed himself!"

Heaton listened gravely. Although Garvice clearly misinterpreted the allusion the maniac had made to the theft of another woman's husband, Terry understood it correctly. This was very likely the work of the CarPELLI girl by proxy. It was not beyond reason to think that she had influenced Peter Macchi. She had a strange hypnotic power to which Heaton could testify personally.

With Macchi, perhaps, had perished the only possible means of ascertaining the whole truth.

After Garvice had gone home, Heaton was so exhausted that he lay down and slept heavily until the afternoon. When he awoke, he bethought himself of Cissie, to whom on this day of all days he owed some attention. Other people's castles in Spain might be razed to the ground, but the structure he hoped to build was something more solid.

Dear Cissie! He could not take her a ring to-day, because the shops were all closed, and he had nothing suitable about him for the unforeseen emergency. However, a bunch of roses was not difficult to come by, and after a belated lunch he set out for the home of his little sweetheart.

He was rather afraid of Cissie's mother, and searched his own past with scrupulous care to find something that might be difficult to confess. But it was very pleasant to reflect that he had been better than most men—what man is not?—and that his pec-

cadillos were too small to be worth telling to the most captious of parents.

True, he was nearly twenty years older than Cissie, and that might handicap him; but if she was satisfied, who else had a right to grumble? He was marrying Cissie, not her mother.

It was characteristic of Heaton's modesty that he did not see how eligible he was from almost every point of view. He forgot all about his money; had he thought of it, it would not have occurred to him that Cissie's "yes" was influenced by his wealth. He was a self-made man, as the saying is, and had never outgrown a certain simplicity of mind and tastes. Hence, when he presented himself at the little flat with his bunch of roses, it was with no critical attitude toward the humble environment of his sweetheart.

Cissie herself answered his ring. Her eyes danced with delight at sight of the flowers; a divine blush mantled her cheek when he kissed her. She was as adorable as a kitten.

"Mother—father! It's Mr. Heaton," she called out as she led him into the little parlor.

A groan came from the couch—meant, it is true, for an expression of welcome. There was stretched old Don Quixote, with his head tied up in a wet towel, and the remorse of the morning after written in every line of his long, lean face. His wife had been reading the Bible to him as she knitted on a woolen sock. Her expression had a secretly virtuous and triumphant air.

She got up now, and laid aside her horn-rimmed spectacles. Her husband, struggling to a sitting position, was advised to lie still. Heaton thought Cissie's mother the sweetest thing he had ever seen, next to Cissie herself. He loved her prim cap—not suspecting the bald spot it so artfully covered. Her thin, old-fashioned black and white striped silk dress, with its cameo brooch and fichu of thread lace, enchanted him. And in these days it was nice to see a woman unashamed of her years, reading the Bible and knitting at the same time.

"I am very pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Heaton," she said, measuring him with a not unfriendly eye. "Cissie tells me that you have done her the honor to ask her hand in marriage."

Heaton patted the hand in question.

"And Cissie has done me the great honor of saying yes," he replied.

Mr. Warden, from his couch, essayed a feeble smile.

"I'm right glad to see you, sir. It was certainly a surprise to her mother and me, and I guess to Cis, too, but—"

"Oh, father!" protested Cissie.

"You just lie down, Max," Mrs. Warden put in.

Old Don Quixote groaned.

"You find me poorly to-day, Mr. Heaton—very poorly indeed."

"My husband would go to your party," his wife explained; "and now he sees what that sort of thing does to a man of his age. I'm afraid he took a drop too much champagne."

"Oh, mother!" said Cissie, varying her protest.

Don Quixote also contested this point.

"Now, mother, you have no right to say that. I've told you over and over again it was the second helping of that game pie we had for supper."

"Well, well, we won't wrangle about it," Mrs. Warden said placidly, as one who held to her own opinions, nevertheless.

Heaton was invited to sit down; and while Cissie put her flowers into water, he told them the news about Hispania, which as yet they had not heard. Mr. Warden and Cissie were both much excited and affected by it; but Mrs. Warden, who had returned to her knitting, merely said it was the way of the world. When people set store by the things of the world, as Rose did—although Rose *was* her daughter—they met with disappointments. Then she gave Cissie a wise, sidelong glance, which seemed to say that this advice was meant for her, too.

Afterward they discussed the wedding. Heaton, sensing the anxiety of the old couple, who were too loyal to let their lack of superfluous money stand in the way of Cissie's happiness, had a rather delicate task to perform.

"As for me," he said, "I'd be obliged to Cissie if she'd cut out the wedding-bells, and come to the Little Church Around the Corner with me and be spliced as soon as ever was."

"I'd prefer it that way," said Cissie, "only—I'm afraid it can't be very soon!"

Heaton did not need to ask why the man on the couch and the knitting woman exchanged the briefest of pathetic glances. Mr. Warden made a jocular effort to face it down.

"Now, then, Cis, you're not to keep Mr. Heaton waiting too long."

Cissie looked rather pale and frightened.

"I was thinking that perhaps I shouldn't have—well, that I hadn't better tie us down, either of us, because as a matter of fact—"

She gulped painfully, and the tears sprang into her eyes.

"Dear me, what's the matter with you, child?" her mother exclaimed.

"I'll tell you what's the matter," Heaton answered for her. "Cissie has made up her mind not to leave her father and mother in the lurch; and a right good girl she is. I've thought of all that, and you can just leave it to me. Don't you suppose Cissie's husband knows the value of the treasure he's stealing from you?"

Mrs. Warden applied a handkerchief to her eyes, and then blew her nose gently.

"We're not selling Cissie," she said.

Mr. Warden, however, took a more sensible view of it.

"I guess with that big house to look after, and all those servants, Cissie will earn her board and keep," he said—grimly, because of his headache, and because he was going to lose his favorite daughter. "And she won't forget her poor old father—and mother." He added the last two words hastily. "Cissie's not like Rose!"

"It's the way of the world, and she must get married if she wants to," Mrs. Warden said with a sigh.

"Oh, come now, let's all cheer up," Heaton put in. "Perhaps you'll both come and live with us. Now that would be fine, wouldn't it?"

Cissie looked grateful, and old Don Quixote tore the towel off his forehead, suddenly galvanized into life. That *was* a good idea! He had visions of himself rolling in the lap of luxury; game pie and other things every night of his life; smoking those perfect cigars, and only to press a button to fetch anything from a shoe-string to a motor-car.

His headache was gone in a twinkling; but it returned with crushing force when his wife politely, but most firmly, vetoed this glorious plan. He saw at once that there was no getting by her.

Heaton saw it, too, and secretly admired her for the stand she took. His own mother had been like that, full of hard-headed common sense. He felt sorry for poor Don Quixote hopelessly checkmated, but the wet

towel was abundant proof that the old gentleman needed a certain amount of curbing. Left to himself, he would probably go merrily down the slide to perdition.

CHAPTER XXXI

NOT A PLEASANT TASK

THE destruction of Hispania made a profound impression upon Rose. Taken in conjunction with other things, it seemed to mark a turning-point in her life.

A few days later, Heaton called upon her late in the afternoon. He was to meet Cissie there, but Cissie had not yet arrived when he came, and Rose was alone in her drawing-room at the Westphalia. It was a rare opportunity, and he made the most of it. As Rose's future brother-in-law he had a few things to say to her. Like Mrs. Warden, he was old-fashioned.

"Look here," he began rather abruptly, "are you and Garvice going to get married, or are you not?"

Rose, clad in a frothy tea-gown, and supposed to be enjoying a state of semi-invalidism, regarded him superciliously.

"And what, my dear Terry, has that got to do with you?"

"Quite a lot."

Heaton bit into the end of a cigar with slightly vicious emphasis. She had given him permission to smoke.

"In the first place," he went on, "while I admire you as a great artist, I detest you as a woman."

These were surprising words, and Rose's face showed how she resented them.

"Thanks for your frank opinion. And what has that got to do with Fred? Or is it Cissie you're worrying about?"

"Oh—Cissie! Well, since you've brought her into it, I'll be a little more frank. When Cissie and I are married, she won't see any too much of you—no more than I can help, to be quite explicit."

Rose was thoroughly enraged now.

"How dare you? My own sister! What on earth do you mean? Explain yourself at once."

It was curious that Rose, who had snubbed and belittled her sister at every touch and turn, had suddenly conceived an overwhelming affection for the future Mrs. Terence Holbrook Heaton.

"Certainly I'll explain. I've got you dead to rights, Rose. You're no worse and

no better than your kind; but it isn't my kind, nor Fred's, when it comes to that, and it's very, very far from Cissie's. You've all the defects of genius. Now you take a little healthy advice from me. Shake Fred and go back to Europe, where you belong. You'll be happier there—and so will everybody else."

A surge of anger swept over Rose. She could not trust herself to speak. She just sat and listened, white with fury, impotent with rage.

Heaton paused to light his cigar.

"It won't do you a bit of good to sit there and glare at me. I've got you dead to rights, and as far as I'm concerned your number went up long ago. We'll begin with four years ago at Mentone—that's far enough back for a start. Or shall we begin in Paris, five years ago, when you met a young girl who was studying singing at the Conservatoire, and got very friendly with her—so friendly that she took you home one Christmas to stay with her people? This girl was a Hurpathian princess, and no doubt it flattered you—"

"Stop! How do you know all this?"

Rose had found her voice at last. She leaned forward, whiter than the drifting lace about her throat.

"Some of it I learned by chance; some I've only guessed; and a good deal of it was told to me," Heaton replied. "Now let's see how you repaid this girl for her kindness. In the end, I suspect you made a friend of her—"

"I refuse to listen. I—"

"You *will* listen! When you and Princess Lucia of Threile returned to Paris, you had already laid the foundations for an intrigue with her father, who readily succumbed to your undoubted charms. To get his daughter into his bad books, you encouraged her to contract a marriage with an Italian tenor, who had more looks than breeding or money. This fellow left her as soon as he discovered that her father meant to disinherit her. For some unknown freak you took him on. It was an adventure that ended badly. You remember when I asked you about Mentone, and you denied ever having been there? I really don't wonder that you denied it; but you were there with CarPELLI, and when you found that his wife had followed him you did a quick side-step by the first train. The man was heavily in debt; he had spent more than he possessed on you; his wife

had turned fiend, and—well, you know that he committed suicide.

"When you turned up in your old haunts again, a little fearful of consequences, I dare say, you heard a rumor that Lucia CarPELLI had also taken the easy road to oblivion. She wanted you to think that she was dead. When you saw her the other night, it was quite natural that you should be startled out of your senses. What had actually happened was that she was biding her time to do you a bad turn. She went into obscure opera companies, and devoted herself to the study of the occult as a pastime. She is clever, and mad, but you needn't worry. I don't think she'll trouble you any more. Her father has taken her home. He'll look after her, and for the moment she has enough satisfaction in having opened his eyes.

"She's been watching you closely for four years, following your success step by step, and waiting for the vengeance of those strange gods whom she professed to serve. Recently she got hold of a fellow named Macchi, who was employed on your unfortunate house. He became a little too much in her power—that is to say, where she had meant only poetic justice, this fellow, weak-minded fool, planned murder. He belonged to a hired gang of assassins, as well, so in him she had a ready weapon. Macchi conceived that it would be a fine thing to destroy Fred. His nerve failed him once, perhaps twice. He told Lucia what he had done, and she repudiated him, telling him to leave it to the gods. But Macchi had gone too far. He was a man with an obsession. The gods had turned his brain. So his career ended in smoke, as you know."

Heaton paused and cleared his throat.

"That's about all," he concluded. "I had a chat with your old Prince Giorgio before they sailed, and he told me all that I didn't know before. He's quite cured. And as I said before, your faults are the defects of your genius. You couldn't live a regular life if you tried. You're the blue-ribbon home-breaker. You'd break up your own home, if you ever had one, as cheerfully as anybody else's. Trouble clusters around you as eagerly as depositors around a busted bank. Now I guess I've finished. A word to the wise is usually inefficient, and you know your own business best—but there you are, as friend to friend!"

Rose got up, pale and cold as marble. Her rage was conquered.

"Now that you have finished—as friend to friend—you may go," she said.

"Thanks," he replied briefly.

In the elevator he met Cissie, wreathed in smiles and bursting with apologies because she was so late.

"Weren't you going to wait for me—Terry?" she asked, using his name with a timidity she had not yet overcome.

"Sure!" Heaton said breezily. "But your sister's busy, and I was going to wait down-stairs."

There was something grim in the set of his mouth, and Cissie was afraid that her tardiness had annoyed him. She could not guess, and was never to know, that he had just concluded the most unpleasant quarter-hour of his life. It was not a nice business, this striking at a woman; but when the woman herself played without the slightest regard to the rules of the game, she had to be told off properly.

And Heaton had told her off better than he realized.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE SPIRIT OF THE TWILIGHT

MARY GARVICE had been out choosing a wedding-present for Cissie. The task had proved difficult, for Cissie was marrying a man who could give her anything and everything, and poor Mary had racked the shops and her own brain to desperation before she hit upon what she wanted. In the end it was something almost commonplace—just a large photograph of herself framed in plain silver.

She came home with the frame feeling as triumphant as if she had unearthed the treasure of the Ephesians. Then she sat down and laughed at herself. All this trouble, and it had been so simple—the very thing that Cissie, who adored her, would really appreciate.

It was funny to think of Terry's being married, and to Cissie Warden of all people; but life was like that sometimes—terribly funny! Terry had been almost absurd when he tried to tell her about his engagement. She was glad that the confession had stirred in her no greater jealousy than a woman is permitted to feel for her brother.

Yes, the thought of losing Terry's dog-like devotion had been a little hard at first; but gradually she became reconciled and

even pleased. Neither Heaton nor Cissie had suspected that she had ever had any other feeling.

They were going to be very happy, Mary thought, because Cissie would give Terry the one thing he had never had—blind adoration. And he would be so grateful for warmth after all these years of trying to comfort himself in the neighborhood of an iceberg, that he would probably give Cissie more than she wanted.

They were to be married in a fortnight, and Cissie had already left her job for the busier one of getting together her modest wedding outfit. There was to be scarcely any celebration—just a simple ceremony at the romantic little church of Heaton's choice, followed by lunch at the Ritz-Carlton; after which the newly married pair would board the boat which was to take them to Bermuda.

Mary understood that Rose would not be present at her sister's wedding. There had been some rupture between her and the bridegroom which was not explained. Rose had declined to come, and had sent Cissie a most offensive message with her wedding-gift, to the effect that if Heaton objected there was no reason why it should not be returned. All this had bewildered the bride, but did not cause her any great amount of pain, it must be confessed, for Rose was so completely alien in sympathy and interests as to seem almost a stranger.

So Mary could come to the wedding and the lunch, and that was very pleasant. All told, there would not be more than eight people. The young school-teacher sister from the West was coming on; and besides Cissie's parents, and Mary, there would be a couple of Heaton's bachelor friends who had insisted that they must see him through the ordeal.

It was rather a nice way to get married, thought Mary, as she fitted her picture into the frame; so quiet and convenient, and then, if afterward things didn't work out satisfactorily, one needn't feel that there had been useless gaiety, to say nothing of expense and worry.

A little flush of shame dyed her cheeks as she thought of her own wedding. It had been more costly than her parents could afford, and she had spent six months, and no end of money, on her trousseau. The church and house had been packed, and gifts were showered upon them. Some of those gifts were about her now, and they

mocked her miserably. People had given them in good faith, but she and Fred had not kept the faith. It had ended in disappointment and that accursed thing—divorce!

Yes, there was no getting around it, divorce was accursed. Nobody in this reckless age understood life, or how to bear with it. Unless people were unusually wise, they made it into a merry-go-round or "grand change" affair. Were second marriages any happier than first ones, after the newly-assorted couples had shaken down a bit? If they didn't go in for a third experiment, and then a fourth, it was because sheer shame held them back.

There was something cynical in Mary's attitude of mind. Perhaps Terry's discovery that he could love some one besides her had cut deeper than she knew.

It was growing dark, and she switched on the lights, throwing the room into soft radiance. It was a pleasant room, with its old English chintses and polished mahogany, and the clusters of red roses which still came mechanically from Terry's hot-houses twice a week; but it was not a home. The spirit of a home had never really dwelt in it, even when the floor was littered with the little boy's toys, and his chatter had welcomed her as she climbed the stairs after her day's work.

Less still was it so now that the little boy was dead and everything belonging to him hidden away. Mary could not even bear the sight of his portrait. Yet he haunted the room, somehow. Because it was so quiet and lonely, he seemed to lurk in corners, smiling wistfully, as he had smiled when he lay ill and asking where his father was. That was why she had cabled to Fred. After all, he had been too late. Everything was always just a little late in this world.

Mary was no weeper, but the spicy smell of Terry's roses, and the thought of the unbearable loneliness which had come upon her suddenly, drew the tears from her eyes. One fell on the glass of Cissie's wedding-gift, and she dried it hastily—also her eyes. At her age a woman could not afford to weep. It meant at the very least a tiresome headache. But the ache in her throat was bad, too.

She had not heard the door-bell ring—her suite was too far up—nor had she heard the brief altercation between Katie and a twilight visitor; so when the door opened

softly, without a preliminary knock, she was caught in the act of dabbing her eyes.

"Fred!"

She clasped the arms of the chair and half rose; but something fell crouching at her feet. Only dimly did she recognize it for the body of the man who had once been her husband. Instead, it seemed the spirit of the twilight, heavy with memories that will not die; the melancholy spirit whose lament is plaintive with the past which he has lost, but which will not relax their hold on him.

"Oh, Mary, I am so miserable and so lonely!"

The "lonely" found an echo in her heart, and her hands touched his face softly. There is no loneliness like that of the once-married when they find themselves stranded.

"I can't bear to live unless you take me back. It's all dust and ashes. What a world!"

"Yes, what a world!" sighed Mary. "And *she*? You're not going to marry her?"

He buried his face on her knees. The confession was hard.

"She—she threw me over," he began, and waited a breathless second.

Would Mary resent or would she understand? The sad spirit was there at her elbow, blessing her with perfect understanding.

"You were glad, Fred?"

"Yes, I was very glad."

"Then you needn't say any more. We'll turn a fresh page. I'm lonely, too."

She was clasped in his arms and held tenderly.

"Not a fresh page, Mary," he whispered, his lips against her hair, "but the old one—where we began; only we'll go on differently—at least I will. That's a promise, Mary!"

"Can we?"

"My dear, nothing is so true and alive as the past. I have come through folly and suffering to know that. I'm too grateful to question my happiness, just now; too humble to ask forgiveness. I only know that something always held me to you, or to the thought of you, even when I was the craziest of fools. It was dragging at me all the time. *She* felt it, too. It was stronger than all the rest of the world put together."

"Memory, perhaps?" Mary suggested thoughtfully.

"No, I think it was hope," he replied;

"hope, and the knowledge that came to me that the love you and I started out with was really inexhaustible, although it might have many phases."

Mary pressed her wet cheek to his.

"I never stopped loving you," she said.

Crowned with wisdom, she added no reproaches.

At the same hour of twilight a swift steamer plowed its way through the rough, gray waves off Sandy Hook, bound for Plymouth.

A tall, fair woman muffled in furs sat in a deck-chair, holding a melancholy-looking Aberdeen terrier in her lap. The heavy mist from the sea had settled upon her face, giving it the gleaming appearance of wet marble. People getting up an appetite for dinner, or trying to fight down a reverse inclination, glanced at her curiously as they strolled past, and at the little court which already surrounded her. Some of them knew who she was, and hastened to tell the less well informed.

"That's Rose Warden. She's going to sing at Covent Garden they say. Wonder why they didn't get her for the Metropolitan!"

"Wasn't she going to marry somebody or other? That fellow Garvice, I heard—"

"Oh, you hear all sorts of things. Even a really successful prima donna has to keep in the limelight of the press. In these days it's as much advertising as art."

And Rose was saying to the head of her court, who happened to be a very great political personage in England:

"I'll sing at your sailors' orphans' concert on one condition, Lord Kendal."

"And that is?" The man bent over her, his eyes gleaming with something more than mere interest.

"That you'll help me to smuggle my precious Jock through your absurd customs."

There was a laugh at the political personage's expense. He had had something to do with that sensible quarantine act of Parliament.

"I couldn't do it, even on a wager," he said.

"Couldn't you do it for me?" pleaded Rose.

"Well, perhaps for you," he replied, close to her ear.

With an astonishing lack of gratitude, Jock growled at him.

THE END

NEXT MONTH'S NOVEL—The July number of **MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE** will contain a complete book-length novel by a writer who is perhaps the most widely popular of living novelists.

"THE HILLMAN"

BY E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Author of "The Double Traitor," "Mr. Grex of Monte Carlo," etc.

In his new novel this master story-teller has excelled himself in point of dramatic value, heart interest, and suspense. Always interesting, always original, and jealous of his fame for narrative, Oppenheim has poured his inexhaustible powers into "The Hillman" and achieved a splendid result.

John Strangewey, the man of the hill, is a gentleman of education and refinement. Family tradition and a desire for clean living in the open air have persuaded him to dwell in the mountains of Cumberland, remote from the life of the great modern cities.

Oppenheim opens his story as night is falling. A London actress, *Louise Maurel*, touring in a motor-car with her maid and chauffeur, has met with an accident. *John Strangewey*, who does not know the theatrical celebrity, offers them refuge, though his brother *Stephen*, suspicious of all women, protests that only evil can come from *John's* reception of the travelers.

Louise falls in love with the simple beauty of the place. She sees the difference between *John Strangewey's* life and her own, and a turmoil is set up in her heart. On the morrow she departs, leaving her benefactor in a state of mind that completely disorganizes his ideals and his life. Before long he follows *Louise* to London.

It is there that Oppenheim lets loose all his boundless capacity for complication, mystery, and romance. The hillman is swept into a mad maelstrom along with the woman. No other novelist could extricate the couple from the whirlpool into which they have been heaved; but all who follow Oppenheim's solution of the problem will admit that in this story he reaches the pinnacle of his art.