

BONDAGE

By Edna Kenton

IT was one rainy evening at Francesca Dwight's that Amy Crawford struck her little coterie of women friends almost dumb with her blunt statement that she was intending to marry the old lover, after all, and that within the month. It was Francesca's evening, and it happened somehow, that, of the five who dropped in, all were women. They were all women, too, who "did things." Francesca was a poster artist of ability and deserved fame. The slender woman who had been at the piano all evening, playing and singing as fancy bade her, had a grand-opera future dazzlingly near her. Isabel Blair was a newspaper woman of years' standing and experience. Beth Morris wrote, as did Elinor Darling, as did Amy. Up to the moment Amy made her brief announcement the evening had passed hilariously.

If some curious fancy had not led Germaine Taft, at the piano, to croon softly the melody of the Elsa bridal hymn, Amy would have doubtless, for that evening at least, kept to her firm resolve to be married before she announced any part of her affairs to any friends. But the rainy night, the bridal song, impulse, and the convenient presence of the five women who meant more to her than all her friends together, brought her to confession.

She smiled a little at the silence which met her. She was standing in the curve of Francesca's baby grand, her elbows planted squarely on its top, and her firm chin sunk deep in her hands. Somehow she found herself staring straight into Germaine's eyes

when she told them all. For a second Germaine's fingers lingered over some chords. Then she went on to the end of the crooned melody, as she had done all evening. Even with Amy's keen, dark eyes on her, there seemed no vital need for her to speak. She had hardly spoken all evening, save in song.

"I have met Evan Kilvert rather recently," observed Isabel Blair smoothly—she was the first to speak. "I consider him eminently qualified to make any reasonable woman happy."

Another pause fell, deeper after Miss Blair's words than after Amy's. Amy's eyes had left Germaine's, and she was now engaged in following the salient lines of a new Dwight poster, but she was not oblivious of the second silence. Her lips curved again in a tiny smile.

Elinor Darling spoke at last. She was a sharp-featured, black-eyed little morsel of a woman, with an appalling gift for saying terrifying things, and a faculty for making enemies that amounted to positive genius. "I'd do a good deal," she said bluntly, "but I declare, Amy, I'd stop short of such a piece of spite work!"

"Elinor!" murmured Francesca, shocked. This was Elinor Darling's star bit of daring.

Amy's rather fixed smile rippled into a careless laugh. "We all know what we all know," she said lightly. "Let Elinor alone. But I've tried everything else in the vain pursuit. Now I'm resolved on marriage." Her eyes went swiftly back to Germaine Taft.

"I wish," bravely ventured Beth, the poet, "that I could really believe, Amy, that you are one of the women who ever ought to be married."

Amy, watching Germaine, saw her eyes wander for one brief second from Francesca's beautiful Henner to Beth's anxious face, and then go quickly back to their evening-long contemplation of the wonderful shoulder lines and the tantalizing auburn hair.

"Amy," said the good Francesca gently, "is a woman to make home a delight—if she loves the man she marries, loves him to self-abnegation—not otherwise."

Amy Crawford laughed again. "All you girls mean well," she said mockingly. "Let the farce die now. I can see that in your minds success or failure will rest on my poor shoulders. I wonder—if anything happens—if you'll blame Evan, any of you?"

She sunk her chin even deeper into her hand, and turned her eyes once again upon Germaine Taft, who met her gaze at last. Amy's face paled suddenly. She dropped her hands and straightened her slight figure to its full height.

"I swear to you, I'd help it if I could, girls!" she said, her voice suddenly hoarsened. "I've got my doubts myself. But I'm driven, driven to it."

"If you only meant that the right way, Amy Crawford!" said Elinor Darling, with fierce energy. "The way I'll have to mean it, if I'm ever married—then I'd say Godspeed and marry him tomorrow. But you don't. You're a selfish pig, Amy. You take all the risks of ruining his life for a chance in a billion of drowning your own unhappiness. You'd have meant it once, the right way—with the wrong man. You may thank your stars you couldn't fling yourself away on Bertie Vawtry. But with Evan Kilvert—the downright good sort he is—pah! the blindness of these men! Does he imagine he's getting you on anything higher than a money basis; that if he were poor, you'd—?"

Amy had straightened slowly, as

Elinor's shrill, fierce voice rushed headlong. She listened, seemingly with deep interest and infinite curiosity, as to what the dark little woman might dare at last to say. Already her words had touched deep on hidden things. Yet the tiny smile had not left Amy's lips—until she turned suddenly toward the piano and the player.

"Gerry!" she whispered. "For God's sake, not that!"

Germaine's fingers stopped midway in their playing. By merest chance she was running through the throbbing viola melody of the Eighth Symphony. Her eyes rested for a scant two seconds on Amy's white face. Then she wheeled about at last and faced the room. She was a wonderfully beautiful woman, the sort of woman who fills a room with her presence, visible and invisible.

"I've got something to tell you, too, girls," she said quietly. "You'll be surprised. In three weeks I'm going to be confirmed, in Father Crowley's church."

Then stillness did settle upon the room and the women in it. It was Elinor Darling, of course, who first found voice to fling fierce protest.

"What has driven you to such madness and frumpery tricks?" she demanded. "Is the world going mad together?"

"I'll tell you," said Germaine Taft seriously. "I've merely got to do it. Perhaps you know the Church's attitude on divorce—that it doesn't grant it—doesn't recognize it. I was brought up in a convent, you know. Those Catholics know what they're about when they take their own and the Protestant young early. You can't ever get away from the feel of it, whatever sort of fool you tell yourself you are. Well, the point is this: if I don't fling myself into the Church I'll find myself married ten times over, and I can't afford to wreck my career that way. It wouldn't mean wreckage to a good many women, but I take things too seriously while they last—and I'm free once more, thank God!"

"Bob Taft was a brute!" agreed Elinor Darling genially. "And so this is your advanced—I should say medieval—method of escaping Frank Hawthorne."

"I've had enough of it," said Germaine Taft. "I don't want marriage. And yet— You see, I should never dare marry a man I couldn't escape if need arose, and if I go into the Church I know I'll have enough superstitious awe of any priest alive——"

"Oh, priests!" sneered Elinor Darling.

Mrs. Taft's eyes flashed just once. "Don't use that sort of tone, Elinor," she said. "It'll make me downright angry."

She turned back to the piano, her fingers gliding through some old Gregorian chords. There was a little pause; then Francesca spoke, gently enough, and in a few moments the room was left to Germaine and Amy, the others having drifted kitchenward.

Amy leaned suddenly far across the piano. "You're the only one of the old girls who's tried it, Gerry," she said swiftly; "tried that awful thing, marriage. Am I a fool?"

Mrs. Taft's eyes flashed straight into her friend's. "Amy, that depends," she said. The words were trivial, almost flippant, but the tone was clean cutting as a sword blade. Under its hidden thrust Amy Crawford winced.

She stood, fingering some loose sheets of music that lay on the piano. Her face paled and flushed by turns. She did not raise her eyes to her friend's again.

"Yes, that depends!" she said, almost harshly. Then she laughed a little, and strolled out to Francesca's tiny kitchen.

"I'm coming, girls," she called. "Drop your old-cat talk till later!"

II

For all of eleven years, ever since she was sixteen, Amy Crawford had lived the happy life of the born wanderer she was. Her father had been a

man with many gifts and little money, whose wife had died when Amy was twelve years old. He had cared for her as he had cared for the mother—that is to say, not at all. When she was sixteen he married again, and she never entered his house from the day her stepmother came into it. It was not because of passionate love and jealousy for her dead mother, or for her living father, that she showed such animosity toward the new wife. She merely resented this usurping of her rights as head of her father's erratically ordered house, and she was a firm believer in all the traditional saws of stepmotherhood. Without stopping to reason—she never reasoned till too late, then or ever—she simply announced her decision to leave her father's house the day the new wife entered it. There was a little money coming to her from her mother's slender estate, which her father made over to her then, and with it she made her moth-like flight to the city. It did not last her long, but it lasted long enough for her to gain a foothold, and later a native ability enabled her to keep it.

When she found herself settled in her first hall bedroom, not even its dinginess and chill damped her ardor. She was half-frightened and wholly charmed at the enticing necessity that confronted her, of earning her own living, of being independent. She tried newspaper work, space work at first, and later a regular position as general reporter, a place which horrified and delighted her by turns with its varied glimpses of life. By and bye she graduated from that work into a position as reader for a publishing house, and wrote, almost nothing which she signed by her own name, but which sold well, and brought her, all in all, a good deal of money. But she was a beggar always. When she had money she spent it like a prince, and her last dollar went more royally than her first. Her one method of economy was to do without things when she could not buy them. She made friends rapidly, and

most of them she kept. She had some beauty, but she had more charm. She was a small woman, yet she gave the impression of height because of her royal carriage. Her hair was warm chestnut and her eyes were brown, and her skin seemed to have caught some drops of their brown coloring, to add to its warm creaminess. And never were cheeks or lips redder with nature's color than were Amy Crawford's during those hard, happy first years. After several years of sifting and re-sifting, six women of them settled into a sort of clannish circle which was always more or less together, and to which other additions must subscribe *in toto*.

She was just eighteen when Evan Kilvert first came into her life. She had dazzled him from his first sight of her, self-contained young lawyer though he was. All one evening he watched her at a restaurant, as she dined with a man he knew. Her mass of warm brown hair fascinated him, the way it grew upward from her beautiful neck, and waved about her temples and her forehead. The warm lights of her brown eyes and the red of her cheeks and lips filled him with a mild and delicious fever. Others gathered about the two, and at last his friend caught sight of him as he dined at his solitary table, and motioned him over. Kilvert had obeyed the welcome gesture with but one thought, that he was to meet her.

The meeting came opportunely, for just then there happened to be no other special man—Amy had always and would always have her special man. Kilvert had filled in well just at first. Later he became interesting to her because of himself. Amy had consorted with many varied types during her two years of metropolitan life, but all of them could be grouped under the common heading of social vagabonds. Some of them had taught her good and some of them had not, but from all of them she had absorbed ideas, and, such as they were, ideals. Such a man as Kilvert was, conventional, accurately informed, aristocrat

in birth and breeding, and yet most truly democratic, in that much abused word's highest sense, a man who, not primarily because he cared for her, but because she was first and always a woman, gave her homage and courtesy and honor—such a man had never come into her life before. These social vagabonds she knew—they, too, gave her homage, but it was of different bouquet. For a time Kilvert, desperately earnest and desperately downright, swept her up part of the way to his level. She needed it, for her manner of life was deteriorating, and had so affected her in these two years. Finally, simply because she had drifted so far with him that she had lost her foothold, she allowed him to understand they were engaged.

It happened that just then she was doing her screaming specials for the Sunday edition of her paper. Kilvert detested that sort of work for her, and had succeeded in making her feel a part of its cheapness; but she seemed curiously averse to the hastening of their wedding day, which was always his solution of the vexed question. He was by no means of the Bluebeard type, however, and he was tolerant of the vagaries of the modern woman, even though he pronounced them vagaries and dreamings. He did not therefore definitely protest, until, one Sunday, he picked up the *Cry*, and read, in shrieking red letters, "My Seven Days and Nights in an Insane Asylum," signed by Polly Pry.

That morning Kilvert was angry. He remembered Amy's explanation by letter of an enforced absence of one week from town for her paper, a letter which was not candid, to put the most liberal construction upon it. She had not precisely lied, but she had by no means told him the truth. He detested her "Polly Pry" manoeuvres and the sensationalism attendant upon them. He loathed the thought of her, girl that she was, being spoken of by her editors as eligible because of her daring and nerve, for hanging assignments and interviews with murderers and the like. He had not seen her

for over a week, and she had not announced her return to him, either, but he went around to her tiny apartment that afternoon. He found it crowded, and she was fertile in expedients for warding off undesired solitudes; so Kilvert, annoyed and resentful, left at last when the revelry was at its height, leaving her annoyed and resentful also. Everyone there had praised her work, had called her a good fellow, had patted her on the back, metaphorically and literally, save Kilvert only.

That episode blew over, but the next discovery that Kilvert made roused him to deeper wrath. It was merely this, that Amy, for the sake of a good story, had joined a detective agency's working force, and was collecting material galore through her experience thereon. This time Kilvert made what Amy hotly called a scene, but he carried his point, and she dropped the work, a victory for him which rankled in her mind. Again he urged their immediate marriage, and again; and finally, in a moment of deepest irritation, Amy gave him in full her reasons for desiring to postpone it. Kilvert might have very excellent prospects; but she would not marry on prospects, unless, indeed, she were to carry on her newspaper work. This condition Kilvert would not listen to. He had stern, old-world ideas on the subject of wives working on salaries.

The end came at last, after almost a year of constant pulling and mutual irritation, over a small table in a tiny Italian restaurant where Amy had insisted on taking Kilvert, in preference to his own selection of a quiet, conventional, uptown place. Perhaps, if Amy had not insisted on carrying that one point; perhaps if Kilvert had not yielded it, the engagement would have stood for a time longer, at least. But Kilvert was sick of a cheap bohemianism which he did not enjoy, and Amy, still young and fresh to life, professed to loathe convention and its bonds. Kilvert could not eat the foreign dinner which was served them, while

Amy exclaimed in delight over every course. At last her forced and solitary delight changed to anger, and the end came even before Kilvert put her into a cab and gave the man her number. He sat beside her, indeed, during the drive, but his last word had been said, and he listened in silence to hers, fitting sentiments under the circumstances, but somewhat parrot-like in quality.

After that they did not meet for eight years. Residents of the same great city, where chance meetings come so oddly, they alone seemed not to run into each other. With Kilvert there had been no other woman. He had been grievously hurt in his affair with Amy, but the hurt had healed with the passing of time, and he would have vowed that not even the scar remained—until one afternoon, at a matinee, he looked across the crowded house, and saw her, sitting alone.

Their eyes met just before the curtain rose for the second act of the play, "Hedda Gabler." As the house darkened, Kilvert sat back, moved beyond his dreams. After eight years that it should happen so, in such wise! He had come that afternoon to see a great actress play a part that all the critics said was flawlessly suited to her. The play itself was highly repellent to him, but he granted its fine workmanship—granted the theme. Artistically, during the first act, he had been deeply impressed. During the second act he was humanly moved. He listened to the keen, incisive reading of lines that heretofore had been to him merely bright facets of dramatic dialogue, and he saw, for the first time, the soul in them.

When the curtain fell again, he found himself looking straight across the house at Amy Crawford. Conscience of his own graying head, he wondered at the eternal youth that seemed to be hers. She appeared to him quite as young at twenty-seven as at nineteen, and more beautiful. He crushed down the impulse to go over to her—a vacant chair stood be-

side her—but after that one meeting of eyes, she had not glanced his way. Yet he knew without egotism that she was perfectly conscious of his scrutiny.

He sat through the tragedy in profound silence. Often he had doubted that Hedda was anything but an exaggerated fancy of a dramatist's cunning brain. Never before had he thought of Amy Crawford beside that dramatic figure. Somehow the girl's character grew plain and luminous to him this afternoon, as it had never been before. Her unconventionalities became evidences of a great, liberty-loving spirit, rather than things born of pure freakishness as he had felt too many times in those old, impatient days. It seemed to him, as he sat there, and saw the working out of those same impulses repressed—love of liberty, love of action, infinite curiosity about life—that he was looking on Amy as she might have been, living Hedda's life in Hedda's country and environment, deprived of healthy outlets for her activities, outlets which she had deliberately made for herself. He shivered as he thought of such fate for Amy, and then he saw that he had granted her everything. If it were that through her activities she had found salvation, then he must rise up and call them blessed, every one. And, seen through Amy's mirror, even Hedda lost her antagonistic qualities for him, and became human and womanly and pitiable.

The words of Brack, that cynic of the play, rushed irresistibly to his lips a little later, as they met in the foyer and clasped hands as though they had parted yesterday.

"Do people do such things nowadays?" he asked her gravely. Even so near him she seemed hardly a day older—save perhaps her eyes, her mouth—the expressions that they wore.

"They might," she answered instantly. "How are you, Evan? It has been a long time."

"So long that a cup of tea somewhere, or even a very small dinner,

might prove an oddly pleasing diversion?" he suggested.

"It would be diverting, extremely so," she assented frankly. "Make it dinner somewhere. I only breakfasted at noon, and I'm ready, this early, for all the courses, Evan."

She glanced up at him as she spoke, keenly, fleetingly. To her he was not the same. The years had left their marks, not only on the graying hair, but they had lined the face, and deepened the gravity of the eyes, and made even sterner the already firm set of the jaw and mouth. And once again their eyes met in long, straight gaze.

He called a hansom outside and put her into it, and gave the man an order. When they reached their restaurant, Kilvert obtained a choice of tables, secluded and retired. He ordered cocktails first, something he would not have done for her eight years before, save under stiff protest, for he disliked to see women drink in public men's drinks. He remembered that she preferred a Martini to a Manhattan, and he ordered it with two olives. For the rest, from oysters to cheese, he chose every item with special reference to her tastes, remembered for almost a decade. Amy felt her pulse leap with the surprise of it, and then tears rushed to her eyes, for the comfort of it. Life had gone hard with her this past year.

They sat for four hours at their secluded table. They talked to each other as they had never talked before. They had never known each other as they learned to know each other then. Kilvert, as he sat and listened to her, saw the truth, disclosed to him at last for all time, that for him she had been the only woman, that for him there would never be another. He had had to see her again to realize it, had to see that weariness in her eyes which damped their glowing fire, and the almost hard line of her lips, and the smile that hid a quiver. He saw tonight for the first time that she was a woman born to unhappiness as the sparks fly upward; that her temperament was her torment rather than her fault; that, feminine thing as she was,

it was after all a great pity that she had not been born to that heritage of freedom the mere fact of manhood brings with it. He saw tonight, he told himself, that all her reckless words and deeds were mere outward evidences of the eternal duel going on within her soul; that he must always pity her rather than blame her; that whether he blamed or pitied her, he must always love her, and forever protect her, less from the world than from herself—most of all from herself. He seemed to understand her at last; to read her, to be able to reconcile the warring details that made up his knowledge of her.

As for Amy, she found herself yielding to irresistible impulse, telling him bits of her life that showed all too plainly how hopelessly it had lost its savor. She said at last that she was living now merely because she could not die naturally, and she was too great a coward bravely to end it all, even through one of the several painless methods. She told him frankly that she had changed for the worse since he had known her.

Suddenly, Kilvert laid his hand on hers, and hushed her. He began to talk quietly of himself, of his profession, his affairs, his home, his income; all practical matters, some of them things which no woman save a wife or one's betrothed should know. Kilvert would never have talked so to any other living woman—he would have looked on it as mutually degrading. He had every sympathy with any woman's most natural desire and indisputable right to know the truth about a man's affairs as truthfully and convincingly as he would tell her the state of his heart. But there were other ways of enlightening her, many ways. Yet with Amy this seemed the natural way. Lack of money had separated them, more than their undisciplined natures. He knew that, granted all things else, if his worldly affairs were other than they were, that same thing would separate them now. He could never fancy Amy marrying a poor man. He honestly did not believe that she would marry a man

purely for his wealth, but he unreservedly owned that she would never marry a man for his poverty. And, thank God, since he felt curiously certain that he was the one man who could take her and keep her with real understanding of her complex needs, he could offer her every comfort and some luxuries.

"I wanted you to know all this," he said simply, as he stood with her for a moment in the hall of her boarding-house, and saw its dinginess and mediocrity with an aching heart. "You know why, and we need discuss it all no further. But tomorrow I am coming to see you to talk about another matter. I have found you again, and I shall not easily let you go."

Amy went up to her room, her miserable little fourth-floor room, with its makeshift couch and its makeshift screen before the shabby dresser, and stared about it with the angry color leaping high and more fierce in her face. To such straits was she reduced, through her madness of a year and more ago, a madness which had possessed her, made her unfit for her work, which had caused her to draw heavily on her small principal till that, too, had almost failed her. She had been a fool to go to that play this afternoon, to see that woman, with her keen incisive perception of the truth absolute of Ibsen's characterization, play Hedda flawlessly. She, too, as well as the actress, had followed Ibsen through his intricacies, understood the character, sympathized with it, lived it—through all save that last breathless moment, when the pistol-shot rang out. Amy knew she would always fail there, else she long since would have done it, too. Just after it, she had looked into Kilvert's steady eyes, with her own raw soul looking through her own, and saw that he, too, had listened understandingly. At first that fact had been comfort; now, after it was all over and he was gone, it became pain, misery, degradation. Kilvert's comprehension and sympathy and pity stung her pride like white flames. She would have bartered all

that sympathy and understanding for one glance such as he used to give her, of simple respect and honor. Was this the forfeit she was to pay to these years which had intervened!

She cast away her clothes, and pulled out her makeshift couch into its real bed width, and flung herself upon it in angry despair. After eight years it had come to this, that his steadfast purposes had placed him high, and her dreamings had brought her low! All through the years, until of late, mirages of wealth had floated before her eyes to make her happy, even when money was scarcest. But the dreamings had gone now—nothing was left her—save a memory that ached like a raw, uncovered nerve, whose ache had stolen away her youth and her happiness and even her power to dream things vain, but pleasing.

She hardly thought of Kilvert, except to remind herself that under no circumstances was she to say anything but no, when he came the next afternoon. She could not say yes—not with that memory lying so close behind her; not while she shrank from it with agony, and yet could never flee from it; not while she still must lie, whole nights through, remembering! Alas, if Kilvert were but Vawtry, in spite of all, she could say nothing but yes, yes, yes a thousand times!

She did not sleep till the dawn crept in to make grayer her dun room, but not once again did she think of Kilvert. The evening with him was as if it had never been.

But the morning brought sanity and a certain humorous outlook. She found herself, while she was dressing, repeating certain figures which Kilvert had uttered the night before, and they slipped over her tongue as sweet morsels. The morning mail brought her two invitations, both of them delightfully complimentary, both of them requiring clothes. One gown would not answer. It must be two, and each must be perfect of its sort. She frowned as she read the letters over her boarding-house breakfast, and she

went back to her pseudo sitting-room to think it out. She could not refuse them, for the sake of ultimate good resulting, but she must have clothes. She dragged out a pastel-blue broad-cloth gown from its lair, three seasons old, in the mad hope that a princess dress was always in style. But this one was faded and mussed and irretrievably shabby. She took out a black evening frock which she hoped might do, and found that it would not. It would take all of two hundred dollars to make her barely presentable—and she might as well say two thousand for the good it did her. She wondered, as she surveyed the worn finery, if she could possibly induce her dressmaker, whom she had not patronized for many months now, but who owed to her much custom, to give her an extension of credit, for just this once.

But the noon mail brought her from that woman the seventeenth dun for a bill of eighteen months' standing. She was furious at the reminder of the woman's remembrance. No hope there—and that meant no hope anywhere.

An hour later Elinor Darling dropped in, with the cheerful news that at last she was getting forty dollars a week on her paper. Her black morsels of eyes snapped with delight as she told the news, and Amy exulted generously, considering that for a year she herself had not averaged forty dollars a month.

She sank into a fit of blue devils after Elinor had betaken herself and her hideously ugly tailor-made gown off. She knew she was a hundred times cleverer than Elinor Darling; that, lacking one thing, she excelled her in all others. But that one thing, perseverance, was the one essential. Amy could not persevere, could not concentrate. She wrote by moods, by fits and starts, and when inspiration refused to come she was lost. If it had not been for Bertie Vawtry and that whole affair she, too, might have been prosperous at the end of this year, she told herself. But that thing had

crushed her utterly, shamelessly. She had broken beneath the strain of it. Her youth had snapped. No joy in life remained.

Then, and not till then, the thought of Evan Kilvert came to her. She flushed and paled. She had decided the night before to tell him, with her refusal, something of the brutal, shameless truth; as much, at least, as she could tell him. She had a great desire to bare Bertie Vawtry to the eyes of one man, even though she laid bare her own soul in doing it. That, she knew, would end things with Evan, with any man.

She sat down suddenly. She had meant to tell him all the story. She asked herself now why she should—if she should—when she should. She sat with her hands clasped about her knees, wondering, questioning, at a loss. And in the midst of it, before she had found any particle of mind to make up, let alone its decision, Kilvert's card was brought up to her.

III

SHE married Evan Kilvert within the month. Francesca loaned her apartment, and all the girls were there; Francesca, tender as always, Isabel Blair serenely granting free will choice to all women, Beth ideal as ever, and Elinor even more blunt and dissatisfied. Gerry was there, too, whose confirmation the girls had witnessed only the Sunday before. Amy looked lovelier, perhaps, than she had ever looked in all her life in the wedding-gown which had taken her last cent to purchase.

After she and Kilvert were gone the girls sat down in the disordered, rose-scented place, and talked it all over for the hundredth time. Beth and Francesca were frankly hopeful; Amy's whole bearing seemed so serenely content. Isabel was always optimistic over other people's affairs, being an ardent disciple of the Doctrine of Desire which solves much for oneself, and for others, whether the

latter will or no. Even Elinor was less certainly sneering. Only Germaine had caught the glint of fear lurking far back in Amy's eyes as she glanced once at the man to whom she had just been married. Germaine, too, had looked at Kilvert with a sympathetic fear clutching her own heart. To her he seemed a calm, contained, cold man, eminently just, doubtfully merciful. And Amy—there would be times when all she would leave for a man to show her would be mercy. Unless each cared for the other to the uttermost there was too much of either of them to make their life together other than a hell. But all this Gerry kept loyally to herself. Only of herself she asked the question: "How long, how long?"

The wedding journey lasted just a month. Amy confided to the good Francesca three days after her return to town, when she dropped in from a shopping trip for luncheon, that if it had lasted another seven days she must have screamed and died.

"It's a dreadful thing," she remarked, over the delightful luncheon Francesca joyously set forth, "to be forced by custom to go away with a man you suddenly realize you don't know at all, are in fact a perfect stranger to him and he to you, and to be shut up with that man—alone, mind you—in a stateroom and car compartment and hotel suite, until one of you is brave enough to cry, 'Enough!' Frankly, I was contemplating the worries of divorce versus its delights, when a business telegram ended it, and saved me, and here I am."

It was an interesting fact, indicative of more or less, that Amy had not fallen into the marital habit of the intimate "we" during her month of honeymooning.

"And are you getting settled easily?" Francesca asked, delicately alive to the fact that Amy needed practical matters brought to her notice more than emotional ones.

"Oh, so-so!" said Amy lightly. "Evan has had this house, you know,

for the last five years, and the house-keeper and the butler—he could spare me better than them. Maggie used to be with the Kilverts before the family fortunes declined, and when Evvie's began to rise he imported her from her place of hiding, and she's been with him ever since. As for James—I have the most insane desire to call him 'Jim' some time, just to see him for once stirred out of his sepulchral calm. I told Evan that the night we came home—poor Evvie! It was George Eliot—some woman, anyway—who said more marriages made in heaven were sent to hell through differing senses of humor than for any other cause! I saw what the grounds for my suit would be by and bye. Good Francesca!"

Amy stopped to laugh at her friend's somewhat anxious face, and she thrust her hands recklessly through her hair.

"There!" she breathed. "A single, lone hair got pulled too tight this morning, and is responsible for all this crazy talk! Now I must get home, and see if James will let me inquire what we're to have for dinner. Where's Beth? And Isabel? All gone away? Well, I shall send for you for luncheon some day soon, and when the crowd gets back to town we'll celebrate. Gerry's gone, too? I'm glad—Gerry knows too much. You're much nicer. Good-bye!"

Yet it was six months from her wedding day before Amy Kilvert summoned the "old guard" to her home for dinner. To the girls she had explained elaborately. Evan had never really furnished more than a few rooms—the rest was makeshift. She was re-furnishing as she wished, and that was taking a delightful amount of time. Her Empire drawing-room, for instance, and her wonderfully English dining-room, with its incomparable accessory, James—she showed them through with voluble interest in her results. When the house was quite ready, then they were to come!

It did not quite convince any of them, for they all remembered too well the housewarmings Amy used to give periodically—she moved twice a

year—as soon as she herself was in the new rooms, whether her household goods had arrived or not. The less there was, the greater the success of the evening. Amy's housewarmings had been semi-annual frolics, with a landlady's warning the next morning.

Amy indeed did put off that piece of entertaining until she was ashamed and penitent. For two months after her return she plunged into the house-furnishing with great enthusiasm. She reveled in shopping, and tasted the first delights of the pleasures and the power of wealth. After that, through the late fall, there was a month or two of being entertained and entertaining, all of and by Kilvert's friends, who, after all, were few in number. It was when the first lull came that Amy went to the telephone one morning, and called them up, one by one, the five women, and five out of the host of men.

Wonderfully enough, they could all come—all the women, at least, and it was easy to substitute two names for the two men who could not get out. Then she went down into James's lair to inform him of dinner for twelve that night instead of for two. She made out a menu, with a discriminating taste in wines at which James remarked later downstairs. Then she went back, and, passing the telephone-room, bethought her of letting Kilvert know of this sudden large affair of hers. All her other dinners had been for six—ordinarily she disliked a larger number. She hesitated a moment, and then, feeling sudden inclination, went upstairs to her own room, and shut the door viciously upon an imaginary world.

They did not fit in that night, those friends of her bohemian days, with her Empire drawing-room, and her English dining-room, and James. The dinner was charming, and perfectly served. Whatever her surroundings, Amy might be counted on to pour charm broadcast over it all. Even her splendor had charm; it had even coziness. Perhaps if it had not been for James—and Kilvert at the head of Amy's table—the evening would have been a success.

But as it was, it was rank failure. Leonard Rhodes, who had never failed her before, was dumb as an oyster and uncomfortable as an impaled beetle. Harry Martin was perhaps the only man who rose to the occasion, and that was only because, Amy told herself, he and Kilvert discovered they were both subscribers to the same edition of Dumas's works. Kilvert could talk about books always, and, oddly enough, cared much for poetry and romance.

Harry Martin's brilliant achievement, however, began and closed the list for the evening. No one else felt moved to brilliancy. Perhaps it was because all of them were thinking of Amy's little fourth-floor flat, some two years back, with its blue walls and its white woodwork, with its tiny open fire, and its basket of real wood beside it, always blazing Sunday afternoons. It was a crazy place, with too many pictures about it, of course, and too many pillows—yet never enough pillows when all the crowd was gathered, sitting on the floor because the chairs always gave out with the third ring of the bell. But it had character and many memories. There was a small kitchen, much too confined for two, into which eight or nine crowded regularly for Sunday night tea-making. Leonard Rhodes always opened the beer bottles, and hunted up enough steins and mugs and glasses, the greatest task of all. How could Lennie look other than reminiscent as James punctiliously poured his fine wines? Harry Martin always made the rabbits, and Hastings Keats attended to the oysters, whatever their fashion of serving. Amy reminded him of that over the blue points, and he had failed to respond as spontaneously as he might have done. There had been one night when she had a bucket of them sent up for the evening tea, and Keats had opened them all evening, with a short white petticoat slipped about him for his apron and a towel about his head for his chef's cap. There had never been such an evening for uproarious

hilarity. Yet the mention of it to-night, which had never failed before to provoke reminiscent mirth, was like the solemn presenting of a grinning skull at a feast. They all left early, and gladly. Even Amy, at the last, because they had all failed her, failed them, and became mute.

"What was the matter?" she asked impetuously of Kilvert as the door closed upon the last one of them. She had banished James after the dreadful dinner, and was letting them out herself.

Kilvert looked at her gravely. "Was anything the matter?" he asked deliberately. "Surely James attended to all details."

"Oh—James!" Amy uttered softly. She had to speak it softly, or she should have screamed it. Was there ever such a stupid—stupid—stupid brute! She turned suddenly, and ran up the stairs, away from him, tearing her lace dress at every step. She reached her room and turned her key frantically in its lock. She tried the door even then to make sure it was fast. She went swiftly over to the door leading into Kilvert's room, and shut it softly, and she turned the key softly, terrified, and tried that door, too, and looked more frightened when she found it would not open. She stood against it, listening for the possible sound of Kilvert's steps. She wondered just what she should do if he tapped at the door she had just entered or if he tried the door she had just locked. But no steps came.

She crept at last to a window in her dressing-room, which commanded a view of Kilvert's library and peered through it. That room was already flooded with light. He was there. She could see his long shadow silhouetted against the curtain. She turned back, and, turning, caught her foot in a strip of the lace she had stepped on in her reckless rush upstairs. In a sudden access of fury she tore it from end to end across the bottom of her skirt, and then broke into hysterical sobs and smothered cries.

She was still sobbing when she heard

Kilvert enter his room at last. She drew herself together and waited. She was utterly undecided as to whether to pretend sleep or to refuse him admission. It was not until the fine thread of light beneath the separating door flashed into darkness and she heard the soft sound of the springs adjusting themselves to Kilvert's heavy body, that she realized what was an actual fact, that it was not every night now that Kilvert came in to say good night. She would have resented much his knock that night, but she resented more his unequivocal retiring. She had felt so sure he would try that door and that it would mean something to him, that it must mean something to him. She had never locked it before.

But yonder he lay, inert, probably sinking into instant slumber, totally unaware of any significances, any crises. When morning came he might knock, indeed, and try the door, and find it locked—but what would it mean to him then, in a world flooded with light and sunshine and with the smell of his morning coffee in the air?

She threw herself, dressed as she was, on the bed, and lay there for a few restless moments. At last, impelled by some power, she knew not what, she crept softly across to the dividing door and turned the key silently. Then she went over to her dressing-table and took a reckless dose of bromides. She flung herself again on the bed, this time divested of her evening frock and wrapped in a long, warm dressing-gown. And so, at last, she slept.

IV

It had come, the inevitable reaction against marriage. It seemed to Amy, as she opened her dull eyes upon the world the next morning, that she had been putting off that dinner all these months, trying to ward off thereby certain knowledge of what her instinct had told her long ago, that the old order had passed, giving way to a new dispensation which she loathed. She lay in her bed, battling fiercely with

the knowledge. She had tried to shut her eyes for weeks, almost months. She had tried her little tricks of charming with Kilvert, merely to move him and to amuse herself with what used to be potent entertainment, proof of her power over men. But when a man is one's husband such tricks lose their cunning. And they cost her eventually too much. For she invariably wearied before he did, and there was too much to explain or to endure. Besides, she had a curious fear of Kilvert's keen insight into her and she shrank from playing the courtesan in his eyes.

She confessed to herself this morning that, had she known a tithe of the oppressive, all-enveloping bondage of marriage, she would have been brave enough to stay in that hole where Kilvert found her and from where he had raised her—to this. She looked about her luxurious room and then shut her eyes against it. She hated it all. Why had not Gerry told her?—Gerry, who knew. Perhaps with Gerry it had not been the same, however. As Elinor had said, Bob Taft was a brute. Certainly life with a brute would be freer from deadly monotony than life with Evan Kilvert. There must have been heights and depths for Gerry, not dead level, such as her own marriage had always been. Never with Kilvert had she felt the supreme joy of self-surrender which comes with a love that cannot be measured. There had always been between them the eternal duel of the sexes. He had been blind to it, she told herself sneeringly; might, with a little finesse on her part, remain always blind to it. But her eyes were opened now, and she could not close them; and finesse grew suddenly a loathsome thing.

She shivered, and drew the eider-down coverlet closer about her. She was lying where she had thrown herself the night before, on the outside of her bed. During her restless sleep she had reached down for the light covering lying at its foot. She nestled into it shudderingly at the sound of a light tap on her door—Kilvert's tap.

Would he open the door, and should she be sleeping or just awakened?

But the knock was not repeated, nor did the door softly uncloze. Amy waited, tense and still, until she heard him go away, down to a solitary breakfast. She did not dream that her restless tossings had told him she was awake, nor that he knew her silence to be deliberate. There were many things she did not know nor understand about her husband.

During the fortnight following Amy sank deeper and deeper into her mire. Her revolt was bitter and heavy, and she felt no sort of impulse to conceal her misery. She took cowardly refuge in the unfailing headache and the ever-ready "nerves," and absented herself from breakfast always, and from dinner as often as she could compass it.

As for Kilvert, he realized that what he had anticipated had come to pass. He had not married Amy blindly. Neither had he married her analytically, so to speak. The vagaries of mental quibbling were not for him. The psychology of love had no labyrinths for him. To him the simplest thing in all the world was love. One either loved, or one did not.

He had married Amy, knowing that her feeling for him was far removed from what his was for her. He had known that even as early as on that afternoon when he had gone to tell her again that he loved her. He knew her tastes, her love of luxuries, and the sight of the dingy boarding-house hall the night before had filled him with a sort of horror at her present environment. He knew that the world had been treating her badly, and yet, even now, he could not believe that she had married him solely as a means of escape. He had honestly believed that she felt a clinging dependence on him, a real friendship for him, a frank and genuine liking. At all events, she was the one woman the world would ever hold for him and, while he might have desired her with a selfishness so inherent in all men as to be perhaps no fault, he also longed to give her his name so that, thereby,

he might give her those things he could not give her otherwise; servants, horses, dress, jewels, all the dear, lovely things she craved and helplessly worshiped and adored. Because of all these things, not for one reason only, nor yet two, he had urged her to speedy marriage, confident in the ultimate outcome. For he believed he knew her needs.

For these first six months matters had gone fairly well—not altogether smoothly, for he had soon discovered that the lack in her of the passion he felt was a greater thing to contend with than he had reckoned on. It made him ever so slightly self-conscious; very reticent of his love; doubtful, at last, of her reception of it; fearful of wearying her; fearful even of disgusting her with a display of feeling in which she did not share. He was slowly coming to realize that, while love may be a simple thing for a man, it is, for a woman, the most complex of all things. He was growing to feel baffled by the wall of reasonings and analyses and so-called logic of love which she was slowly rearing about her.

During this fortnight of silence and repression and unhappiness following Amy's unfortunate dinner to her bohemian friends, the strain of that dinner grew on him. He had merely felt at the time that it was a stupid thing, as it undoubtedly was, but he had not thought that any of the responsibility therefor lay on him. He had not liked Amy's silence over it in view of her seemingly elaborate preparations—it seemed too significant for so simple a thing, though he had never said so. He had sat at the head of his table, and had joined gravely in the conversation as it lagged about the board. One or two of the small crowd he liked—Francesca Dwight, for instance, and Germaine. The other three women he did not care for at all. Against Isabel Blair he held the old knowledge of her having been Amy's boon companion and abettor in all her yellow-journal escapades, the very memory of which made him set his

teeth hard. That Miss Blair had made of it all merely successive step-pings to a fine place in her profession he did not consider. As for Beth Morris and Elinor Darling, he disliked them both, and the men were even less to his taste. Evan Kilvert would never be a "mixer." His spirit was free enough, but his outer man was conventional to a degree, as were his tastes. He had old-fashioned ideas about women and their ways. He detested the sight of a woman smoking. He had disliked it when Amy had cigarettes passed with the coffee that night, and he had disliked it more when the women, to the last of them, refused what he knew they would have accepted had not he, Amy's husband, been sitting there, smoking his own cigarette in simulated peace.

So, during this fortnight, Kilvert endured his home atmosphere with what philosophy he might muster against a foreseen and expected contingency. But his acceptance of it as a necessary evil was marred by a vague sense of some fault of his which he could hardly place. Outwardly he had been hospitable enough to Amy's friends. He wondered if he might have improved the spirit of it. And first and last and all the time he pitied the woman he had made his wife, as she was beating her beautiful, strong wings against the cage he had given her; and sympathized with her; and left her free to work out her own salvation in her own devious way. But all this while, deep in his heart, so deeply buried that it lay all un-owned and unsuspected, nestled a tiny kernel of something far removed from pity and sympathy, and that absolute respect she craved from him.

V

FOR one long morning Amy moved about her house like a devastating wind. She had not seen Kilvert for two days. She had not breakfasted with him the day before, and he had

telephoned through his stenographer that he could not be home to dinner. She had not been asleep, but she had pretended sleep, when she heard him come that night—to no purpose, however, for he left her utterly to herself. When she came down to breakfast this morning, long after he left for downtown, she found a note beside her plate:

James told me last night your masseuse had just left, and I did not try to see you nor to waken you this morning. If this state of nerves and health is to continue had you not better see Dr. Jerrems, and get his opinion as to the best place for you to spend the next month or two? When I can be of service, command me always.

Since then she had trailed her skirts recklessly from drawing-room to kitchen and butler's pantry. She gave the servants orders and countermands until they almost smiled before her face, and would certainly laugh behind her back.

As noon approached, she dressed hurriedly, and drove downtown with no aim whatever. From her carriage window, during a crush and blockade of traffic, she caught sight of an odd necklace of copper and topaz in a goldsmith's shop, and she went into the shop immediately to begin negotiations for it. After the proper references, the man promised to send the bauble that afternoon. She lunched downtown, alone, but luxuriously. She might have telephoned Kilvert to come up from the office district. She knew he would come gladly—and the thought of his gladness was enough to make her withhold the message. Things had gone all ways of late. Not that all things had not moved with apparent smoothness. They had. Kilvert had let the days and nights move as on ball-bearings. She had simply been allowed to go to herself, and she was quite keen enough to see that Kilvert was deliberately giving her her head. She would have resented savage mastery much. Almost did she resent this coolly bestowed freedom more. For, after all, she was not free. It was this knowledge which galled and chafed her.

She came back at two o'clock, to meet James's reproachful face—she had told him she would lunch at home. She paused in the hall, hearing the ripple of her piano, and recognizing Germaine Taft's touch.

"Don't stop!" she cried impetuously, as she came quickly into the music-room. "I'll get out of these street things, and then we'll have an old-time rumpus. No, I've lunched."

She rapped out the last sentence at the impassive James, and with a last admonition to her friend to go on with her playing, went swiftly upstairs. She was hardly out of her outdoor things, however, before Gerry's old tap sounded.

"You beast!" Amy cried, her brown eyes sparkling with pleasure. "I told you to play! It's not the same, is it, in a big room conventionally set apart for it, to banging a piano in a scrooged-up nest of a hole that's used for everything, and a rented piano at that. Sit down, and whenever I find anything to put on, I'll send for tea, and then on with the dance!"

Mrs. Taft cast aside her furs and sank into a deep chair. She looked at her friend, standing before her dressing-table, pulling the pins from her shining hair, twisting it into a thing of comfort and beauty combined, moving restlessly all the time, and as she looked she read the signs of Amy's zodiac.

"Everything's everywhere," said Amy briefly. "I haven't let a soul in here for a week, and I don't know where a thing is. I throw them here and there and cover them up, and there you are!"

She was looking about her for the garment she wanted. Her restless eyes fell on the fire, and she came quickly across the room to replenish it. As she came, her high heel caught in her petticoat ruffle of pale green silk and much ribbon and lace, and a nerve-wrenching sound of parting silk was the aftermath. She bent with an impatient word, and examined the relentless result of haste and heel.

"It's quite hopeless!" she announced.

"Ah, these emotional clothes! The next trousseau I buy shall be black and white and gray—then I'll be eligible at once for bridehood, widowhood or divorcéehood."

She pinned up the torn place, as she went into her dressing-room, and she came back presently, slipping into an iris-embroidered kimono.

"Let's have tea sent up," she said, "kettle and all. It won't be much like old times—this part of it"—she waved her hand about her room—"but we used to make the tea. Do you remember the trash we used to have sitting round that was so precious—that old Beethoven head—we couldn't have had hats if it hadn't been for his old plaster crown to trim them on and get the 'set' right. Gerry, how far they're gone, those days!"

"And how much more beautiful it is to run into your private shop, and be trimmed instead of trimming!" said Mrs. Taft lightly. "It does very well when we're young and merry."

Amy sent for tea and sandwiches. Mrs. Taft watched her, her beautiful eyes darkening to blackness and her lips pressed hard together.

"How is Lennie Rhodes's new book coming out?" Amy asked as she came back. "He read me bits of it last winter—it seemed a howling good thing. But I haven't heard. I feel all out of the running. I haven't kept up."

"It is really going well," said Germaine. "It's a mild sort of a hit. I'm glad for Lennie. He really has solid ambitions, if he could only get far enough ahead to work the solid things up. But the froth sells. Where's 'Miriam Merriman,' Amy?"

Amy laughed oddly. "Mrs. Evan Kilvert's taken her place, Gerry dear," she said mockingly. "Ach, the explosion when Evan discovered the hideous and hidden truth!"

"You didn't tell him?" queried Mrs. Taft.

"Not I!" shrugged Amy. "He picked up *The Tatler* one night and discovered it for himself. He has always said I write of too intimately personal things—well, I had done it then. It

was a sort of devilish thing—I felt devilish when I wrote it. Remember it?—‘The Good Man’! It was based on a bit of argument we had one night which I saw would make good ‘copy,’ and in a sad moment I used it. I would have vowed that Evan never knew *The Tattler* existed—you know what they like, and I can do it for them to the queen’s taste. But, Evan! I told him no one knew who Miriam Merriman was, and then had to own up all the old crowd did, and any others they might care to tell. He said it showed a diseased mind to be able to put such sheer devilry into any story—he said lots of things. Some of them amused me, and a great lot of others I didn’t like. It ended by his making me vow never to send anything else to *The Tattler*. So, just to show him what it means when he stops my slender sources of income, I went downtown and ran up a bill—this is one of ‘em, Gerry.”

She dragged over a box, and opened it to display a beautiful black gown, loose falling transparency over its princess slip, after a style she so much affected. “The stays alone cost thirty-five dollars,” she said modestly. “I was going to take a twenty-five-dollar style, and then madame insisted on putting on these, for the sake of a line, and I was all in, Gerry.” She laughed and patted the daringly brocaded bits of silk lovingly. “They are simply exquisite!” she added solemnly.

Mrs. Taft shook her sane young head. She knew of old what Amy’s extravagances could be, even with a tiny matter of money to go on. She hardly dared think what she might do with an unlimited charge account.

“After all, Amy,” she said slowly, “that ‘Merriman’ stuff is rotten. It’s more than that—it’s salacious, lots of it. Of course it sells, because it takes a clever sort of trickery to write it, and it’s paid you well. But it’s on a low plane; clever, but low. While you were making your own way, it was the thing to make it—that’s what we say, at least. But I don’t blame Evan Kil-

vert for making you give it up—you provoke me, Amy. You are no child, not to know how men feel about such things. In a sense—a very limited sense—it doesn’t harm you; you are clean-minded enough, and you don’t take it seriously. But only one woman in a million could do that sort of thing and stay clean, and you’ll have to sift out a world of men to find one you could convince of that lone woman’s clean frankness of mind. But ‘The Good Man’ wasn’t clean—it was one-sided and sneering and regularly immoral! And it was based on a talk between you and Evan—Amy, how could you!”

“How couldn’t I?” said Amy. Her eyes were purely devilish. “Evan was too absurd that hateful time—I never thought him goody-goody before—it struck me funnily. I felt like writing it up, and I did. *The Tattler* took it—they always take all my stuff, and it was printed right away—rushed right in—then they sent me a copy, and Evan got hold of it—and then the deluge!”

As Amy rattled on, Mrs. Taft sat suddenly upright, and cast one horrified glance at her friend.

“Amy,” she said, “when was it that story came out?”

“About three weeks ago,” said Amy carelessly. “Just before I went mad and had you all up to dinner——”

“When did you send it in?” Germaine asked swiftly.

“The week before,” replied Amy. “I told you they rushed it. Wasn’t it a glorious dinner, Gerry? Didn’t everybody shine—like brass or pewter—glared or didn’t? It makes me sick to think of it—sick!”

Mrs. Taft sank back in her chair and closed her eyes. She herself looked sick and worn. Amy’s later outburst she had hardly heard.

Amy herself had dropped her firm chin into the cup of her fragile hand, and stared gloomily into the fire.

“What was the consensus of opinion?” she asked abruptly. “Of course you talked it and me over later, probably at Maman Taffi’s—I thought so

—it was there we always found ourselves when there was something to say that required gentle limbering of tongues before it would come. Well?”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Taft at length, in a curiously lifeless tone, “we talked it all pretty well over.”

Amy looked up as the silence grew. Her wonderfully expressive eyes narrowed and dilated.

“Just tell me what Elinor said,” she suggested wickedly.

The tea things had been brought, and she had been busying herself with them. She gave Gerry her cup just now, and Mrs. Taft smiled slightly as she took it.

“You are incorrigible, Amy,” she commented. “But all the same I am going to tell you.”

She lay back in her chair, sipping her tea. She did not speak until she had drained the cup. As Amy refilled it Mrs. Taft began to speak slowly.

“Of course it was a failure, Amy,” she said. “You told me that night that Evan knew nothing about it, who, more than any of us, should have been prepared. You see, he holds a deep though unowned grudge against all of us for our share in making you what you are. Yes, my dear, he loves you—much, but he would gladly see you different. What man would not? He hates, you see, the outer evidences of the inner bohemianism he doesn’t understand—and he bore a good deal of that sort of thing years ago—for you. One or two of us he likes for inscrutable reasons; but he doesn’t care much for the rest of us, and he hasn’t any longings after comprehension. He stood much of it nine years back, and he likes it less now than then.”

“To be sure,” said Amy crisply, “I might have telephoned him along with the rest of you, but—I didn’t. I——”

“You are going at all of this the wrong way,” said Gerry softly. “You must be honest with him, honest as he is with you. You lie a little, Amy, you know you do; not wickedly, but for expediency. Amy, I lived four

years with a liar. If he had told the truth about things I should have been enduring yet, for I cared as they cared when the world was young. But his lies were slow poison, and in the end they murdered the best love his life will ever know. Amy, you must be honest——”

Amy wrenched her shoulder free. “I hate discussions,” she said drily. “All my life I’ve done as I pleased. In the last six months I’ve asked more permissions to do inconsequential things than I ever allowed myself to ask in all my childhood.”

“Well, we said all these things,” said Mrs. Taft gently, “and some harder ones. And it was the general opinion of us all, Amy, since you insist on hearing it, that you yourself hold in your own hand the ending to it all, bitter or sweet. We all like Evan, even those of us whom he does not like, and others of whom he isn’t sure. Elinor, of course, thinks precisely as she did the night you told us of your engagement; which brings me to the last thing I have to say.”

She bent forward, and let her hand fall on her friend’s shining hair and linger there.

“I can see that you have just pierced the glamour and the newnesses, and that life just now seems empty indeed. What is certainly coming in the next few weeks will be anything but easy to endure, for you, or for that man you suffered to marry you. And I am sick at heart that I haven’t a conscience sufficiently elastic to gloss things over, and let a foolish vow go hang until a better season——”

“Ah-h!” Amy Kilvert breathed sharply. She threw off her friend’s tender hand and sprang to her feet. She went over to a window, where she stood for many minutes. At last she came back, and dropped on the rug beside Germaine, and leaned against her knee.

“You’re a good old girl, Gerry,” she said huskily. “There’s not another of the girls would have stuck it out, with me in this dare-devil mood—to keep her word in spite of it. Francesca

would have weakened, and no one would ever ask Beth to vow anything, and Isabel would have used her very excellent judgment, and Elinor is a Jesuit, anyway. You are just the straightest old girl, dear. You promised, and you told me. And now to bear it!"

She stopped to moisten her dry lips. Her head went down on her hands.

"When did he come back?" she asked faintly.

"A month ago, or more."

"And you heard of it——?"

"This morning."

"Good old Gerry!" Amy whispered.

Germaine Taft let the silence fall unheeded, while she frowned into the fire. She had married at twenty, foolishly, but with an abandon to love's call that evoked admiration and hushed pity, for a time, at least. She had endured for four years, as she had said, until she knew her love was dead, murdered as surely as Robert Taft might never murder any living thing. Since then she had worked as few women do, bound up at last in her voice and the future that lay bright before her.

So she could understand the quivering heart of this woman, crouching here, as most of the other girls could not; as Elinor Darling, despite her cleverness, could not—poor Elinor, to whom the heights as well as depths of love were all unexplored. And Germaine knew, beyond room for doubting, that the depths were worth enduring, if one had but reached the heights and gazed for a brief space from them. She knew Bertie Vawtry for all that he was, and she marveled that Amy had not known it long before, but the memory of her own wasted love kept her patient where the others were coldly unsympathetic; even though she knew all the story was born of passion rather than love, that each had played on the weakest points of the other, that the heights by either one had not been reached. For neither was other than selfish utterly. Neither had ever sunk self,

that happily it might be found again, ennobled.

Her pity went out to Kilvert. Her heart ached suddenly for him. She fancied, what was true enough, that he knew but little of women, and less of their vagaries, and she wondered what amount of patience he had to draw on, and what amount of mastery he would not be afraid to use. He had told Amy from the first that she was to be no slave, but free, and Germaine felt, wisely enough, that, while the sound of freedom tickled Amy's emancipated ear, masculine mastery was the one thing which could touch the real woman lying beneath all the emancipating processes of her years of liberty. And Kilvert knew but little of women, and had married this most complex one, fancying his eyes were open to her needs.

She bent at last and touched Amy's shoulder, bare where the kimono had slipped away.

"You'll not see him—ever, Amy?" she said gently.

"Heaven forbid!" said Amy Kilvert hoarsely. She sprang to her feet again, and stood, slight and shivering, staring down with purple-shadowed eyes on Germaine.

"It's pure obsession!" she said at last through pallid lips. "I'm a beast, I know. And I know he's a miserable little cad. But ah, Gerry, he's sweet and weak and lovable, and that's the combination we women can't resist, when such a man gets our hearts. He may wring them dry if he wants, and we'll bear the pain and smile in his face. It was that other woman, anyway—the woman I have still to reckon with." Her eyes grew black.

"Amy!" implored Germaine. "You haven't anyone to reckon with now—but Evan!"

Amy Kilvert turned away toward her haven, the blind window. When she came back once more, her twisting face was composed, her voice steadied from its breakings.

"You're a brick, Gerry," she said quietly. "I'll never forget this to

you, as long as I live. I could meet him anywhere now, and not an eyelash would quiver. It was the chance of running on him, not knowing he was in town, that must have made me go down under. I'll never forget it, Gerry, never, never!"

"On the strength of that," said Mrs. Taft, "I shall ask you an impudent question. Have you told Evan of that episode?"

"That is impudent," said Amy. Her lips smiled a little, but fear crept into her eyes. "Evan took me as I am," she said drily. "He really has some unique ideas about things. He really holds that one's past is one's own, whether that one be man or woman. He has never questioned me about a single—episode, you call them, Gerry."

"That isn't the point," said Germaine quietly. "It's a question of whether you've told him voluntarily or not. You see, Amy, it's very well for us advanced creatures to claim equalities. But when it comes to down-right actual living—it's all rot, all of it. There are certain fundamental laws of sex that I doubt can be eliminated in any so-called sexless heaven. Amy, Amy, we are miserable sinners, all of us!"

"Don't go!" begged Amy. "Must you, really? Well, go in peace. I shall make myself irresistible tonight, for the first time in two weeks—three, I might say, and go down to play the model wife. But, oh, Gerry"—she smiled with her lips, while her eyes held rebellion only—"this fearful mental bond that the very fact of marriage brings! This never being able to get away from the memory that I, of my own will, deliberately gave myself to any man, deliberately vowed those dreadful vows! Why wasn't I born twenty centuries hence, when this barbarous system of marriage is wiped out, and something—anything—is in its place!"

She leaned over the stair railing and called down another series of good-byes. The sound of them, or something else, brought Mrs. Taft back to

her, even from the foot of the stairs. She took Amy's hands eagerly, almost desperately.

"Promise me," she said quickly, "promise me, Amy, that under no circumstance will you send any more work of any sort to *The Tattler*. Promise me, dear, forever!"

Amy stared, amazed. "Very well," she said coolly. "I fancy Evvie will have his eye out for that, too, regardless of my vow to him. I couldn't go through another scene!"

"Never, Amy," said Mrs. Taft doubtfully. She kissed Amy's cold lips again, and went away.

Amy stared after her wonderingly. That was not like Gerry—nothing of that last bit of talk. What sort of domestic crisis did she think sending work to *The Tattler* might precipitate! She found she could not answer the question, and in a moment it was gone from her mind. She stood, bent over the railing, staring vacantly down into the hall. The sound of the opening outer door aroused her, and with a frightened glance downward she went swiftly away to her room. She had shrunk from going back to it. Now it seemed like some sweet house of refuge.

"Ah-h!" she breathed again as she shut the door behind her, and leaned heavily against the wall. In a moment she gathered herself together and went over to her dressing-table, and sat down before it, and pulled out a tiny secret drawer. Evan objected to rouge, but he had been known inconsistently to admire some of its subtler results. Rouge it must be tonight—she was shocked at her yellowish pallor. With all her imaginings she had not thought she would be moved like this. A physical sickness that was akin to nausea almost overcame her. She let her head fall forward on her arms. The sound of Kilvert's steps brought her upright. She stared at her door like some live thing caught in a trap. The steps paused a second, and then went on.

Amy suddenly remembered that note of his, that morning. She knew now why she would not telephone him

to come up to luncheon that noon. It would have been too great and too instant concession. But it was quite evident that he was thinking it was high time for a change of tactics. If she began to play tonight, he would lay it all to that clever note of his—well, let him; let him think what he would, what he could!

She smiled coldly. Then she picked up some cold cream and began to rub a little of it into her skin.

"I've got to begin to act now," she said to herself grimly. "I might as well begin tonight. There may be some amusement in it, even with him!"

VI

SHE swept into the dining-room a few moments late, deliberately so. She came with a jangling of jet and a perfumed swishing of skirts, with her beautiful hair exquisitely dressed, and a delicate flush on her charming face. Her eyes, skilfully treated, shone like oddly colored jewels. She wore the frock in which she had indulged herself when Kilvert called a halt on her literary output—it had given her a malicious satisfaction to wear it on this night.

Kilvert looked up in surprise as she entered. He was already seated at the table. She had protested fretfully one night recently at his waiting for her, and since then he had gone in when the dinner-hour came. He rose immediately, leaving his soup untasted, and came to draw back her chair for her himself.

"I didn't know you were dressing, Amy," he said quietly; "otherwise I should have waited."

He went back to his place, and laid aside the evening paper with which he had been solacing his solitude. While he waited for her to be served he glanced at her quizzically.

"What is it tonight?" he asked. His eyes spoke his approval, and no woman resents that, even from her husband.

Amy met his eyes. "I've been mop-

ing like a sick tigress," she said frankly. "This dress came home—I didn't tell you I was getting it—and inspired me to action. At any rate, I got into it. You don't object to my getting it? I didn't need it at all."

"I only object that you didn't get it sooner," remarked Kilvert, "if this is the effect."

"And another bill hasn't come in yet—I only got this today." She put one hand to her lovely, slim throat. "This darling necklace. I didn't need this, either, Evvie. I suppose I ought to be whipped?"

Kilvert smiled in spite of himself at her upward inflection. After six months of marriage it had come to pass that, for the first time since wealth had really come to him, he opened the monthly bills with a feeling that was curiosity at least; a curiosity that, with every month, found ample and more ample reward.

"One necklace more or less—so long as it isn't always a solid bank of diamonds—oughtn't to matter," he said. "You'd better try these mushrooms tonight, Amy. Here, they're delicious."

The dinner-hour turned out to be a delightful one. Kilvert met her halfway at every turn, and Amy herself felt equal to anything. The spirit of the game had taken possession of her. She looked at Kilvert at last as he sat across from her, eating his grapes as delicately as a woman, tall and broad-shouldered, with his fine head more than frosted, with his firm lips and firmer chin and still firmer jaw, with his gray eyes that matched his hair enticingly, and lashes which, despite his premature grayness, were still dark. Ah, he was a splendid thing to see, and he was good, good, good beyond compare—at all events he had rescued her from that frightful fourth-story room, and had given her this, all this.

Kilvert pushed his chair back suddenly and came over to her. "Bring the coffee to the library," he said to James. He laid his strong, steady fingers on her shaking hands, and when the man left the room he bent down to her.

"Brace up," he said quietly. "That's a good girl. Come, we'll shut the servants away, and then you can pull yourself together, dear, or let go. I know you've been in hell."

Amy, following him to the library, honestly tried to pull herself together. It might have been better if she had broken down and gone through the tempest. But she knew that Kilvert loathed tears almost more than any man she had ever known, and she refrained therefore, hardly out of consideration for him so much as for the sake of preserving intact his cordial feeling for her. Just now she required approval, quite as much as her lungs needed oxygen.

The coffee-tray was brought in almost immediately, and she sat down beside the low table on which it and the liqueurs were placed. She poured the coffee into its gilded cup, and, reaching for the decanter of cognac, measured off a liqueur-glass and poured it into the coffee. Kilvert stood waiting, deliberating. He was wishing, for the first time, that Amy had not been, for him, the one woman; not because he did not desire her now more than ever, but because, if he had known others, many others, in the years in which he might have cultivated them, he would know what to do now, instead of feeling inward doubt as to whether to accept conditions placidly, or to crush her to him in a passion of mastery and ardor. He was still deliberating as he took the cup she handed him. When he had finished it, Amy was drinking her coffee, and he knew this much, that no mere brute of man can afford, even in a lover's heaven, to run the risk of ruining a new gown. And, by the time Amy's coffee, with its double allowance of cognac, was sipped, she was almost herself again; so much herself that, as Kilvert took out his cigarettes, she leaned forward.

"Just one or two tonight, Evvie," she said coaxingly. "I need them. They'll steady me when nothing else will. That's a good boy. You're so foolish to care."

Kilvert held out the box to her and gave her a light. "I don't precisely care," he protested, "in just the sense you mean. I confess I don't see the need of a woman's acquiring the habit, but as long as you smoke all day, you might as well smoke with me."

Amy laughed and shrugged her shoulders. "Your knowledge is omniscient," she said.

Kilvert lifted her right hand and pointed to a small brown stain on the middle finger. "The source of your nerves," he remarked. "That's what I really mind. It hurts you."

Again a proof of that terrible intimacy of knowledge! She resented it in every fiber, and it was resentment which prompted her next speech.

"Physically?" she asked, through the blue rings of her cigarette-smoke. "As my high society tales hurt me morally?"

Kilvert was standing against the fireplace, one arm upon the mantel. He looked at her steadily, and she felt herself shrink beneath his gaze, as she had shrunk many times since he had grown to look on her with new understanding. She grew even more defiant.

"Oh, Good Man!" she sneered. "Be my physician, of the body and the mind!"

Kilvert's face went darkly crimson. Amy caught her lip hard as she saw the flush come, born, not of mortification at her sneer, but of anger, just and mighty. She felt the bad taste of the scene, her unpardonable rudeness, her complete defenselessness against his scorn—it might well be his disgust. She rose quickly. Words rushed from her lips.

"I was talking with Gerry today," she said, "about that 'Miriam Merri-man' stuff. She said one thing—let me say it to you, Evan—'Only one woman in a million could do that sort of work and stay clean, and you'd have to sift a world of men to find the one you could convince of that lone woman's clean frankness of mind!'"

He caught her plea instantly, and stopped her with a gesture. Things

he had said in that stormy talk of theirs had wounded him in retrospect far more than they had wounded her.

"It's the people who read it, and the people who know you write it," he said briefly. "You—God in heaven, Amy!—have I known you so long to know you so little? Dear, it is so cheap—lower than the back-door gossip they print. When you could do wonderful things, with work and concentration! You've skimmed so long, done the surface things because they brought the quick returns. Thank God, you've no cause ever to think of that part of it again. That idea you were telling me about weeks ago—you haven't done anything with it yet?"

Again, even in her gratitude at his understanding of her pleading, she felt annoyance at his knowledge of that thing, her brilliant idea, with a solution clever beyond compare. She had had it in mind for some years, though it was no more than outlined yet. She had always longed to write a book, and was always sure she never would, merely because it would take so long. Her stories and skits and bits of criticism she was able to dash off at a sitting, and her very versatility and speed in writing had seemed, through long indulgence in surface things, to unfit her for sustained work of any sort.

She turned away from Kilvert and lighted another cigarette.

"No," she said brusquely, "I haven't touched it."

"Then get at it tomorrow," urged Kilvert. "Get down to work and make it come. Do it first of all for your own sake, and then for me, because I believe in it, and in you."

"There's a knotty point," objected Amy. "I've never quite worked it out. The sudden change in the character of the woman—it has to be or the story falls. But I don't believe in sudden changes in real life, Evan. People stay what they are born."

Kilvert looked at her as she stood before him, one lovely hand on a lovelier hip, the other carelessly holding her cigarette. Did people change?

He had hoped for her, not change, perhaps, but certainly development. He shut his cigarette-case and slipped it into his pocket.

"It's a simple psychological question," he said. "You can work it out." He glanced at the clock. "It's a little late," he suggested, "but I can telephone. Should you like a play?"

Amy hesitated doubtfully. "I don't know," she said. "What is here?"

Kilvert named over a few musical comedies, with the natural first choice of a man whose day hours bring heavy problems and whose nights cry out for relaxation.

"There are 'Sherlock Holmes' and Mrs. Campbell's 'Magda,'" he added.

"I've seen 'Holmes' four times," said Amy, "and the thrill is about gone. See what you can get for 'Magda,' Evan."

Kilvert called to her in a few moments. "The seats are good. The curtain goes up in seven minutes, but we may get down before Magda's entrance."

He stifled a sigh as he turned from the telephone. He had hoped it might be something foolish and rollicking, not for his sake but for hers. He rather shied at problem plays these days. He had problems of his own which no tradition-ridden stagecraft might adequately express, and he was fearful of putting any more into Amy's overcrowded brain. As he recalled "Magda," however, it held no problem which could cause a household upheaval.

They sat through the play almost silently. Amy's lips went white when von Keller came on the scene—she had forgotten that old lover, and the part he played in Magda's life. When the play was over and they were waiting for their carriage, she turned upon Kilvert.

"People don't change," she said fiercely. "Magda was always the same, always!"

"But she had grown past von Keller, at least," said Kilvert quietly. He looked down at her suddenly. He felt the frightfully unstrung shaking

of her arm along his own. He hurried her into their carriage, at last fortunately ready. He was afraid of her nerves these vital days. Once within it he put a steady arm about her and drew her close.

"Dear," he said, "can't we try to talk it out? I am sometimes at a loss before your words, but ten thousand times more so in the face of your silences."

Amy caught her breath in a quick, hard sob, but she did not speak. Kilvert waited a moment, and then went quietly on:

"You must not think that I have not seen much and felt much in these last few weeks. I've known this very thing would come, and the pity is that I can't help you. You must fight it out yourself in brave battle. Dear, if only we had been married years ago, and gone through with this readjusting period when we both were younger and more adaptable!"

Amy caught swiftly at the shred of self-justification. "We couldn't have been," she said. "We couldn't have been now if you hadn't had this." Her hand went vaguely out about the carriage with a gesture quite sufficiently expressive. "Oh, I am a mercenary wretch and a fool!" she cried hysterically. "But I always said, and always held to it, that marriage without money was unendurable—you know it would have been—you know what it is, even with money to smooth it over. Evvie, Evvie, I'm a selfish thing, but I was honest with you—"

Her voice broke over the word. Honest! When her marriage was founded on a lie, a tacit lie! When she had allowed him to infer that there had never been another man whom she could have married! She felt a mad impulse rush upon her, to confession. She opened her lips. It was full upon her, that intoxicating allurements which self-abasement has at times for every human soul.

"Yes," came Kilvert's quiet voice. "We've been honest with each other, Amy, almost brutally so. I knew it

was the money partly, dear, that gave you to me. That was right enough. But something else gave you to me, too. Without it you could not have come. That other thing made the first thing right enough. I've never asked more of you, dear, than you could give and I couldn't have asked for you again if I had not the blessed wealth to give you. I told you I would have infinite patience. We entered into it with open eyes."

Amy sank back within his arms, white and frightened. Thank God, she had not spoken! Never in her life had she seen Kilvert openly angry, and she had a curious fear of it that amounted to terror. He must believe the lie—that she cared for him partially at least. Her nerveless relief at her narrow escape made her relax through all her body, and she lay at last, almost a dead weight in Kilvert's arms. Suddenly she began to sob, great, tearing sobs, that shook her from head to foot.

"Dear, dear girl!" Kilvert whispered softly. "What torment you have been in! There, there! We'll get home quickly, to light and warmth, and scatter all these horrors. I've left you to yourself to fight it out alone. It's too hard for you—we must face things together now, Amy, together!"

She lay in his arms, sobbing and shivering, all through the drive. When they reached home, he lifted her in his arms, slender thing that she was, and all but carried her up the steps. Once within the hall, she leaned shuddering against the newel post, while Kilvert bolted the outer doors. She weakly tried to make the ascent, but Kilvert spoke quickly, with authority.

"Wait, Amy," he said briefly.

He shot the last bolt into place. Then he came over to her and put his arm about her shaking body, and, for the first time in weeks, they went upstairs together.

VII

For an entire week the play went on, stumblingly at times, feverishly al-

ways; but on the whole, as Amy reviewed the days, she felt some interest and a certain chastened pride in her success. She was onlooker and leading lady at one and the same time. This acting helped to pass the days. There came to be a certain pleasure in getting the farcical masque adjusted, not a hair's slender breadth awry.

But every day her mistake grew more shockingly apparent to her, and she feared the outcome with a great terror. For she knew that Kilvert did not hold his name lightly, nor her share in it.

One day she found herself in the library, beside a case of law books. She took one out, and discovered that she was turning, with reckless instinct, to its section on Divorce. She dropped it, indeed, when the word smote her eyes, but she went back to it, and pored over it for two hours. She sighed wearily as she shut it at last and slipped it carefully back. Oh, to be free again, free—it was the only boon she asked, simple liberty—and during this afternoon, the noose had only tightened about her throat. There were no grounds, none!

As she left the library she glanced back in nervous fear lest she might have left that book, after all, lying openly about, and the beauty of the room caught her weary eyes and held them as never before. Rich and dark and restful, all that a library should be, all that she had longed for—and now that she had it, she was using it for this! Her lip curled in self-disgust. What was the matter with her? Why could she not make herself care horribly for the man she had married, as horribly much as he cared for her—and how much that was, it seemed she had never known until this past fearful week! She had honestly determined to make herself care, and now all she cried out for was freedom, the old fourth-story room, if need be, with the old dresses, and the old, eternal wonder over the next week's income; all things uncertain, but all things free, as she spelled Liberty.

She went through the rich, dark hall—it, too, precisely her idea of what

a hall should be—and on upstairs, to a small room which held her old desk and her old typewriter. She sat down before it as a matter of habit. Battered and old as the machine was, she had refused to change it. She was used to its peculiar personality, and she did not like the thought of making friends with a new one. She had a sort of fancy that she would never write again, if this old friend were allowed to go from her, and every now and then she had ambitions, great ones, to write that really good thing, to do something really worth while. Sometimes she had risen from her bed, and crept across the hall, filled with some idea that, in the darkness, seemed good. But her ideas never bore the glare of light; in it they shriveled up and faded. Only last night she had done that very thing, creeping softly, so as not to waken Kilvert, and the flight had ended in a fit of hysteria from which he patiently rescued her, and for which she was paying all this day with aching eyes and head.

She remembered this afternoon Kilvert's urging of a week ago to get down to solid work and make the big thing come. She wanted to do that. Beyond all things, even her longings for freedom, did she desire to prove herself to Evan Kilvert in work of which he unreservedly approved. But she doubted more and more that she could ever concentrate. She had worked well in the years past, but always under driving compulsion. She never got her newspaper stories in a moment before they had to be in, and time and again, for some big story, the presses had been held back for her. When there was need, she had always, somehow, risen to the occasion; but now there was no need, except indeed to prove herself to Kilvert, who professed such infinite faith in her and her possibilities.

She found it at last, at the bottom of a trunk in the trunk-room. Then she dressed rapidly, twisting her hair into her old way of wearing it, slipping into a plain shirt waist with a loose, dashing tie, instead of the stiff effects

she had worn of late. She hurried breathlessly, though the night had scarcely fallen, and the hour was very early. It seemed to her that she could not wait, could not breathe the soft, rich air of this Avenue home any longer. The city called to her, the great, living, throbbing city, of which she had been a part so long. A thousand beckoning hands plead mutely with her, extended from all directions, north, east, and west, and south. In any direction she might go and find familiar haven. Maman Taffi's, for instance—some of the old crowd would surely be there. But no, she would not dine tonight with any of the old crowd in the flesh. Her revel was to be with Memory, her last revel, she said with quivering lips, before she settled down to final goodness and dulness.

She pinned on a small, dark hat, and reached from habit for her rich furs. She hesitated; then she went down to the bottom of that trunk again, and brought out a modest bit of mink which she fastened about her throat. She tied a heavy veil about her face, and went downstairs. In the shadow of the half-opened door she spoke to the butler.

"I am going out to dinner, James," she said briefly.

"Mr. Kilvert has the horses, ma'am," said James. One might fancy his tone was reproving. "Shall I call a cab, ma'am?"

"No," said Amy, briefly still. "It is only a few blocks. I want the walk."

She went quickly down the steps, and down the Avenue. When she reached the first cross street below, she took it, and walked rapidly along it. She felt that strange fear of the dark to which she had become more and more a prey since her marriage—she, who for years had been accustomed to the city at all hours of the day or night, attended or alone. She quickened her steps from fear and eagerness. Just beyond her was the street-car line which would take her to her Mecca, the tiny French café that, after two empty years, called her insistently to its doors once more.

She sat in a car which was all but empty, watching the frantic crush uptown. How often she had struggled in that maelstrom! She caught herself viewing it almost as a novelty, and that after ten years of its fierce buffetings, so quickly had wealth and its comforts become accustomed things.

She alighted at last, near a small square, and walked across its windy spaces. Just beyond it lay her goal, the small, unostentatious café, its entrance unlettered, with no sign to indicate its presence, yet known to the favored few. She found her heart beating, and her pulses throbbing. The buffeting wind played about her, and she did not feel it. Instead she felt a wonderful exhilaration pouring through her.

The room was well filled when she entered it. She glanced about it—how strange was Fate sometimes! She walked straight across to a small corner table at the rear of the room, set for two. She took that seat which enabled her to command a view of the entire dining-hall if she wished, or, if she pleased, to turn aside and sit unseen. When a waiter approached her through a haze of cigar-smoke, she feed him quickly, and pointed to the chair across from her. He immediately turned it down.

"You needn't serve me just now," she said. "I'll wait."

The man nodded, the reserved chair explaining her words to him, and he went away, her silver jingling comfortably in his pocket.

She sat there a long time, her head resting on her hand, and so shielded from any staring diners. No one paid any attention to her, however, unless one might except two or three men, dining alone in different parts of the room, whose eyes were drawn to her as bits of steel to the magnet. But her attitude was forbidding, and she was unmistakably blind to any admiring or ogling glances.

For even before the waiter left her to peace and solitude, she had begun her mad revel with Memory, her guest who was to sit across from her in that

turned-down chair. If Kilvert had been right a week back when he told her that she had been walking in hell, she knew tonight that she had skirted only the edges of that baneful place. For, since that day, when Gerry had come to keep her vow of telling, she had penetrated its most secret depths.

Months before she had pledged Gerry to that act of friendship, to tell her when Bertie Vawtry should come back at last to town. After his marriage he had gone abroad—he was afraid—afraid—Amy told herself, to run a risk of meeting her, with the story that was theirs.

She turned her back sharply upon the room, seeking that merciful solitude of blank wall with which she had provided herself. That story of hers and Bertie's, which, in all its bitterness, only Germaine knew!

She rose and walked restlessly about the small room. He skirt caught on a drawer half opened, and its contents attracted her eye—a mass of papers and clippings and the like, which she had always intended to go through, and never had. She drew up a low chair, and began the task forthwith. It might occupy her until time to dress for dinner.

In less than an hour she had accomplished the greater part of it, merely by casting most of the material into a waste-basket. In lifting a last pile of papers, her hand slipped along a smooth surface, and she caught her breath sharply, as she recognized it for her Red Letter Day book, stretching faithfully enough over a decade, kept up conscientiously enough for months at a time, and let lapse for months, but on the whole a faithful history of those years. She thought grimly of her marriage certificate for the last entry. "The End"!

She turned the pages hurriedly. Once or twice she stopped to smile at some memory evoked from the dimmed years. She lingered over half-forgotten stories of hers, pasted in, living proofs of her yellow-journal

days. There were programs, too, of plays, dances, concerts. She came upon a full-page entry, made by Lennie Rhodes. She read it musingly, with smiling lips, and turned the page, still smiling at Lennie's drolleries. Two blank pages struck her eye, the right-hand one pinned securely to the page succeeding, its reverse side lying hidden so from curious eyes.

She shut the book with a little moan. Bertie Vawtry had written that hidden entry, the page full, the most wonderful love-lyric he would ever write, dashed off one night on such a night, for her alone! There was no other copy of it. It lay there now, all of two years old, and all her—

The day closed about her, the twilight fell as she sat there, the book held in her lap, open at those two pages, pinned jealously together. She started at last, and her teeth chattered, as a step sounded close beside her, and a hand pressed her shoulder masterfully.

"I knocked, Amy, and you didn't hear," said Kilvert's strong, easy voice.

"No," muttered Amy, her voice shaking. "I—was asleep, I think. The room is cold."

Kilvert turned on the lights. Then he came back and bent over her chair. "What is it?" he asked.

She shut the book quickly, and glanced up at him. He was already in evening dress, although the clock told only five.

"Nothing," she said. "Just a book of foolish things a girl keeps and is ashamed of. What brings you home so early, Evan?"

"An unforeseen banquet, gotten up on the spur of the moment," he answered. He raised himself from her chair, feeling vaguely repulsed, and leaned against the door, one of the few men whom evening dress distinguishes. He surveyed his hands critically, and lightly polished a nail while he talked.

"Judge Gibbons is in town from Washington, and the fact just leaked out. McKendry and Hopkins took the matter up, and a dinner takes place this evening at seven o'clock. I must

see three men before then, however, so I came home early to dress. I've been trying to find you ever since I came, and just thought of this bare little den of yours."

"So you won't be here for dinner?" said Amy lifelessly. She was staring at him, thinking him to be the handsomest man she had ever known, and dully conscious of her own tumbled hair and a negligée dress and dilapidation of mind and body. She was not born to immaculateness, as Kilvert was, and his absolute rectitude in the matter of dress often stirred the ready springs of resentment.

"No," said Kilvert regretfully. "That leaves you alone, of course. I had wondered if you'd like to have Mrs. Taft come down, or Francesca, or—any of them. I'll telephone for you."

"No," said Amy sharply. "Please don't. My head is splitting. It has been all day. I should send anyone home in a tearing rage."

"Let me make some sort of arrangement for you tonight," insisted Kilvert. "Francesca wouldn't annoy you in the least, and you wouldn't be alone. I shall be very late, you see."

Amy hesitated a moment. "No," she said again. "I shall be better by myself. That's good of you, Evan. Good night, then. Don't hurry home. I shall be asleep before many hours."

She let him kiss her, and watched him go away. Moved by sudden impulse, she went to her own room, and watched him step into his carriage. She turned irresolutely back. After all, it might be pleasanter to have Gerry come down. Even Francesca—but Gerry first of all, because Gerry understood so many unspeakable things. She went halfway downstairs to the telephone—she hated telephones, and there was but one in the house, downstairs.

Midway she stopped, her hands pressed against her eyes. Her lips went white. A sudden thought had come to her, a mighty impulse, which shook her as she stood in indecision.

When she let her hands drop she went quickly back, upstairs, to her own

room, pulling off her dressing-jacket as she went, snatching the confining pins from her hair. It fell in shining glory about her as she hunted desperately through her things. Where might that walking-suit be which she had brought with her, from the old home to the new one, almost the only dress she had that belonged to those old, free days! She had never had it on since her marriage, but it was the only possible thing to wear tonight.

Three years before she had known Bertie Vawtry as editor of a new magazine, started on what proved to be a meteoric career. She was twenty-five then, as was he. He had been attracted by her "Miriam Merriman" work, and had addressed a letter to her, in care of *The Tattler*, soliciting some of her manuscripts for his magazine. She chanced to have a number of ideas then which she fondly hoped might be available, and she decided to call upon him personally and talk some of them over. She had been delighted with the boy, and he with her. Before she left his office that afternoon he had naively confided to her most of the secrets of his venture, and the next night found him at her apartment. It had been that four-room one, with the blue walls and the tiny kitchen, and all the delights.

He was not the sort of man she had ever had her affairs with before, because he was, first of all, a boy, and Amy, from her earliest teens, had chosen her friends among men, and always men of the world. She called him indeed a boy of the world, from the first. Later it became Boy of the World, and at last and finally, Boy of All the World. It was a state of mind and heart that few men and most women will understand, that led Amy to worship Bertie Vawtry as she had never worshiped any man. He was weak, but he was so lovable. He was petulant, but he was so sweet. He was careless of obligations and far too easy-going, but he was so unutterably charming in his virtues, and most charming of all when he was at

fault. Never was there such a lover, she told him often; and, indeed, he made love as flawlessly as men of his type invariably do.

None of Amy's best friends quite approved the mad episode, although Vawtry was a favorite with all of them because of his wonderful versatility. He could play and act and sing. He could improvise, and compose, and write plays. Among the various evenings of the various women of the little coterie he shone with a great light. He was enjoying to the full his new-found right to enter into such charmed circles, which his new position as editor gave him. He found everything and everybody interesting. Francesca he honestly respected and liked; liked her better than she liked him, which spoke much for the power of her personality. Gerry he delighted in. Isabel Blair he found invaluable for her ready knowledge of people and events, and for her prodigality of ideas, which she gave out to him with regal generosity. Elinor Darling and he always sparred, always argued, never by any chance agreed.

It was Elinor indeed who came to Amy at last with a hateful tale of another woman, whose name was appearing with some regularity in Vawtry's magazine. She herself had noted the name, and Vawtry had already told her, with apparent freedom, about the woman. He had described her as old, quite thirty-five years of age, indeed, and had made clearer to Amy than her vision afterward disclosed it, a most peculiar cast which the lady unfortunately possessed in her left eye. One night, merely because Amy had insisted upon it, he brought her down to Gerry's "night in." None of them had particularly cared for Miss Eugenia Darth, and it was evident that she was stricken with no violent fancy for any of them. She gazed at them, separately and precisely, through her lorgnette, as if each was some peculiar variety of the genus genius, and she departed with Vawtry, whom she openly assumed to own, with an air

of shaking all bohemian dust from her disdainful feet.

Yet Elinor's tale was backed with much evidence. Vawtry had been seen here and there, and here again, always with Miss Darth. It was granted that his magazine was doomed from the start, because he persisted, without experience in either line, in trying to manage it both editorially and financially. The wonder had been how it had run so long. Elinor had her explanation. Miss Darth was wealthy, with a passion heretofore ungratified, for beholding her name in print. The rest followed easily, to one who knew Bertie Vawtry's easy conscience, easy morals, easy way of taking life, even if one did not know what was patent to all, that Miss Darth, while indulging her passion for literature, had developed a passion for Bertie Vawtry, to be equaled in its insanity, so Elinor frankly averred, only by Amy's wild fancy for him, small, inconsequential parasite that he was.

Amy did not confess to Elinor that she had had her scenes with Bertie over his mad taking about of Eugenia Darth. But the scene she had with him after Elinor's well-meant disclosures had never before been equaled in all their stormy story. Vawtry had made it all plain at last, however, that it was purely a question of money, and of playing on and up to the vanity of an egregiously vain woman, whose pleasure was sufficiently compassed by a little personal attention and much public printing of her name. It meant the success of the magazine, he told her, which meant marriage or postponement thereof for him and Amy, the best and dearest and most sane and generous of girls.

She turned suddenly. The waiter had come back, and was bowing inquiringly. She waved him impatiently away. What did she want of food this night! She turned back, even more decidedly, to the eyeless wall. The room was becoming noisier. Everything was louder, the talk and

the laughter and the music. The string orchestra ceased abruptly, and the room seemed to become suddenly boorish. She sighed in relief when the music began again—it might drown some of the common sounds. But presently she shrank back as if she had been struck.

"Ah-h!" she breathed. Her face twisted with her torture of mind, and she dropped her veil hastily. It had been a favorite melody two years ago with the little body of musicians, an odd arrangement whose background was the throbbing viola melody from the Eighth Symphony. They had played it that last night she and Bertie had dined together, that last night here.

Time and again that night she had asked him what the matter was. She had put forth every charm and wile, and his depression had only deepened. Once, indeed, there had come a moment when he had leaned across the tiny table, if not across this very table, at least in this very corner, and had almost told her—she would swear to that—he had almost told her. Ah, if only he had, what might she not have worked for woe to that vain woman! He had almost told her! But she, senseless, suspicionless thing, had laughed at those words of his so openly caught back, and had dismissed his mood as a slight thing! All but his kisses that night as he told her good-bye. Never to her dying day would she forget them, precursors that they were of that telegram which reached her just twenty-four hours later. She had received many telegrams since, but never one without hysteric emotion, so branded was the content of that yellow envelope on her mind and soul.

"Forgive me," it ran. "I married Eugenia Darth tonight. I should have told you. Forgive me."

His letter came the next day, wild, incoherent, breathing undying love for her, and a passion the more furious because it was balked. His fate had overtaken him, and his despair was frantic. Eugenia Darth had advanced

much money. He found himself at last too greatly in her debt to escape—this had been her solution.

Amy Kilvert pressed her hands hard against her face. Would that music never stop? Would those strings forever throb? That they should be playing that piece of all things tonight! Someone had called for it again—fool!—and they were beginning the odd little arrangement from the first.

She turned swiftly back and faced the room. Anything was better than that blank wall, anything which might distract her mind from its torment, if it were but a menu card. She felt blindly about the table for one. And then she stopped her gropings, her hands lying where her great amazement froze them, her face turning whiter and whiter and then colder and more cold. Someone, a man, had come quickly over to her, and was already taking the seat across from her. He had knocked, almost needlessly, it seemed to her blurred eyes, into another man who was also coming in her direction. The room swirled before her eyes. She put out a nerveless hand.

"Bertie Vawtry—you!" she whispered, her voice a frozen sound.

She felt her hand caught in a hand which she would have known out of a world of phantom hands and ghost-like claspings. She dimly saw him, with his other hand, lay hold of a fleeing waiter by a flying coattail.

"Bring a hot Scotch, and be quick about it," he said. "And two Martinis, quick! Move!"

VIII

"WELL!" said Vawtry at last. His hand still held Amy's. He had not released it, even when the waiter brought the drinks, nor while Amy was drinking the steaming fluid which was to make her blood run warm again.

She had been sitting before him,

blinded, her head swimming, powerless to move or to speak. She knew that if she opened her lips a scream would ring from her throat, and she shut them tight against it. The waiter, moved by Vawtry's stern command, was back almost instantly, but it seemed a thousand years to Amy before Vawtry pushed a glass toward her. She lifted it, and drained it eagerly. It was as she put it from her that Vawtry spoke.

Before that word of his she had been a woman almost at the stage of absolute collapse. The sound of his voice acted like a whip on her stunned senses.

"How did you do it?" she whispered gaspingly. "Have the courage to come to me—here—and speak to me—"

"Because you were here," said Vawtry savagely, brutally.

Amy flushed darkly, flushed for the first time, it seemed to her, in years. The more she tried to beat back the flood of shame, the more furious were its waves. It was true; she was here, at this very table, listening to the same music.

She threw up her head with the old, reckless toss Bertie Vawtry remembered as he remembered few things. The color still lingered on her face, so white before. What mattered! She had not meant to come here tonight, had not planned it. She had been driven here. If she had dreamed that Vawtry was to be here, too, she would have gone away from this place as far and as fast as she could, gone north on the wings of the wind. But she was here, hopelessly entangled from the start, hopelessly enmeshed. Her whole life was a series of blunders, she told herself, and this one—she could see the grinnings of the gods at her helplessness. For here she had come, to keep her last mad revel with Memory, and yonder it sat, across from her, embodied in Bertie Vawtry's flesh!

"Yes," she said deliberately. "That would give you courage, naturally—at last!"

It was Vawtry's turn to flush under the scorn in her eyes. She did not wait for him to speak, but she laughed a laugh which matched her eyes, and beckoned to a waiter.

"Oh, I have engaged his services long since," she said in reply to Vawtry's protest. "No, you will dine with me tonight, my dear Bertie, or you will get quietly up and go away and leave me to myself. I shall tell you I had really planned a dinner alone tonight."

A glance at Vawtry's face told her there was no doubt of his staying, whatever the conditions she imposed. So Amy Kilvert ordered, choosing, with deliberate malice against the man and herself, dishes which had potent memories lurking in their savory depths, and she pointed their significances delicately to him, with each definite charge to the waiter. In visible need for self-defense, Vawtry lighted a cigarette, and, while he smoked it silently, surveyed her; shining hair, dark eyes, slender figure and undulating grace—all as it had been two years before. It was like a figment of a dream.

She dismissed the man at last, and turned to Vawtry. She reached out her slender hand for one of the cocktail glasses, and she began to play with the olive in it. Her eyes were full of malice.

"Well!" she said, in mocking repetition of his gambit. "How goes the play, Bertie? And the candle—is it burning brightly, or does it flicker at times?"

Vawtry leaned back, and blew tiny rings rapidly upward toward the dingy ceiling. Truly this bohemian spot was physically unclean. Amy had felt it when she first entered the place tonight. She followed Vawtry's eyes, and she wondered if he was feeling it now, the dirt, the blackened walls, the lack of the old-time charm. While his eyes were following the tiny blue rings in their leisurely flight she let her eyes rest for a scant moment on him. He was tall and slender as he had always been, with his beautiful

Greek head whose contour she had worshiped—God help her!

He looked at her at last, long after her eyes had been averted. "Have you an idea of how long you sat here, with this chair tipped down?" he asked her. "One hour, from the time you entered. I was here already. You were attracting notice. I might have come over here at last, I grant you, but I shouldn't have come so soon, if a hulking brute of a beast hadn't lurched over just ahead of me."

Amy remembered the slight scuffle near her, which had immediately preceded Vawtry's appearance. Her heart leaped within her. She was independent, yes, and able to take care of herself; but she loved to be taken care of, and her gratitude to Vawtry now was quite out of proportion to the service rendered. It softened her—dangerously—and Vawtry saw it.

"I should have come to you at last, certainly," he added.

Amy did not reply. She was twirling her empty glass. Speech had left her, and again her lips looked frozen.

"Because," Vawtry added deliberately, "you have always been the one woman I have ever loved, always—you always will be."

Amy smiled, with those frozen lips. "You should tell that to the woman you married," she said with what she knew was unpardonably bad taste. But the whole thing was bad taste, and she could think of nothing else to say, and say something she must. She must not let him do all the talking, with his wonderful voice, and his terrible power of influencing her. So her words rushed headlong to meet a reward they merited.

"The woman I married is dead," said Bertie Vawtry.

She stared at him helplessly. What a horrible thing for her to have said, and at what disadvantage she was again placed! Eugenia Darth dead—that tall, solidly built, aggressively strong woman! That left him, Vawtry, free, free! She found that thought uppermost.

"She died six months ago," Vawtry

continued after a moment's silence. "Suddenly a strange fever took her and she went under without a single spurt of resistance. Yes, it was shocking, I dare say. Not so shocking as it might have been had she not had all her papers ready for filing her suit for divorce as soon as we should return. I found them, all her correspondence with her New York lawyer. That naturally stilled any too excessive grief of mine at her untimely taking off."

"The charge?" Amy asked, with curling lips.

"Merely non-support," Vawtry answered lightly. "There had been unpleasantnesses from the first. But I really allowed myself to be caught napping; I confess to distinct surprise over that post-mortem discovery. That suit was to be a master stroke, a master surprise. And then the grim reaper stepped sardonically along and turned the edge of the joke with his scythe!"

"You cad!" said Amy Kilvert. She half rose from her chair, just as the waiter came with the oysters. At the man's look of surprise, she sat weakly down again. If he had not come just then she felt she should have walked from the place without a backward glance. But he was there, sent by the jesting gods, to thrust her back into her seat.

She even laughed a little as she lifted an oyster from its shell. She had always had a sense of humor, had Amy, however tinged with bitterness it might be. Such "copy" as this evening might make! She leaned back and laughed again. Vawtry flinched under her laugh as he had not flinched under "cad."

"Come," she said decisively. "We'll have no more walking of ghosts from any part of the past. We'll eat and drink together a last good dinner, and then you shall put me in a cab and say good night, and I shall go—" She stopped dead short.

Vawtry glanced over at her. His dark eyes narrowed. They were flaming, and his lips were set. "I had heard of it," he said. He pushed his untasted oysters from him. "So you

are married, Amy! I heard it just before I was to have sailed for home, six months ago. The bit of news changed my plans. I toured a bit, instead—Greece, the islands thereabouts, some of those bits of opal sea we were to have cruised upon together, Amy, if the cursed money had only come in time. It's come at last, but it's come too late!"

Amy laughed again. She could hardly scream, could hardly spring at him and tear madly at his beautiful face. So she laughed instead—and sneered.

"On the devoted Eugenia's money!" she said. "How dreadful you didn't cable me as soon as there was hope, Bertie! It might have reached me on my wedding morning."

"It would have reached you on your wedding morning," said Vawtry grimly.

Amy caught her breath, aghast. What if it had! Vawtry read her thought in her terror-filled eyes.

"Of course, the bad taste of such a cablegram was too palpable to be overlooked!" he said. "Indeed, I must do myself the common justice and decency of asserting that I really did not think of such a thing until I began to make my grim discoveries. When they were complete I confess that the total aspect of my sense of duty to old bonds was changed, but I decided not to cable you, but to come to you—and found myself to be too late, even to redeem my passage. I calculated it out once, and it is really true that, if I had cabled you the morning that she died the news would have come as a unique wedding congratulation."

Amy smiled again and felt her lips twist suddenly beneath the smile. Her voice came huskily, tearing at her throat in its passage.

"Oh, let us stop this horrible, horrible talk! Anything is better than it."

Vawtry touched her shaking hand again with his slender, white, magnetic one.

"It is horrible," he said grimly. "But the entire situation is horrible. Well, what shall we talk about?"

"Anything!" said Amy.

Vawtry lifted his hand slowly from hers. She began to speak hastily of Gerry, of Elinor, of Lennie Rhodes and his new book. Vawtry fell into her piteous humor for impersonal topics, with that flexible adaptability of his which was always more a feminine than a masculine quality, and throughout the dinner they held firmly to gossip of people they knew.

But, despite Amy's best endeavors, silences began to fall, tiny ones at first, and then long ones. The ices came, and then the cheese and coffee, and words between the two had almost ceased. Amy's eyes were lowered. Her slender fingers were nervously crumbling bits of cracker to powder fine as the fabled product of the mills of fate. Vawtry folded his arms at last upon the table and stared broodingly at her face.

"It's cursedly impudent of me," he said harshly. "I've forfeited any right to know, but I've got to know it, all the same. Are you reasonably happy, Amy? Don't hurl yourself at me that way. You're not—you're not! I'll spare you the verbal answer, Amy! You see, I read 'The Good Man,' Amy! I accepted it, in fact."

Amy's burst of incoherent fury vanished before her blank amazement.

"You took it!" she stammered.

"Precisely!" said Vawtry moodily. "I'm editor and owner of *The Tattler* now. It was going under, and I had the chance. It's the only sort of thing I was ever interested in—that first venture went up in smoke as soon as we were out of the country; she refused point-blank to sink any more of her money in the hole she said it was. Well—" Vawtry's jaw snapped together. In a moment he went on: "I hadn't been in charge a week before your story came in—it was the first one I accepted; the forms had been closed, but I had them torn apart and 'The Good Man' put up. The manuscript gave me your address. I walked up there that evening and stared at the outside of your prison. Since then I've waited for other stories, but they've never come. I wrote

once for some—last week—had Ross write.”

He pushed a box of cigarettes toward her, and Amy took one up and lighted it fiercely. The old recklessness had come back; she knew herself to be under a curious spell, a wild and varying one; but where lay the use of anything! She had pride, somewhere, but it was beaten down. Vawtry had found her—here! He had a right to think from that what he would. Vawtry had read that dreadful story, had taken it, even, for publication. She sat upright and stared blankly ahead of her. That was what Gerry knew, what Gerry meant, that day when she had questioned her so closely about the time when ‘The Good Man’ had come out, had been sent in; when she had extracted that solemn promise that no more stories should go to *The Tatler* office! But the harm was done! Vawtry would think but one thing from that story, and he had a right to his conclusions. Everything she did was wrong, now and always. She had made a yeasty mess of her whole life; it sickened her—sickened her!

She took one puff at her cigarette, and then she held it off and stared at it, her eyes narrowing.

“It’s forbidden, Bertie,” she said lightly. “‘Miriam Merriman’—and these!”

He watched her hand as it filiped the box of cigarettes half across the table, the hand that wore Kilvert’s wedding-ring.

“God!” he said briefly. “He *is* good.”

Amy flinched, and was surprised thereat. It restored her to sanity, however; showed her her last serious blunder in daring to criticize Kilvert before this man. She lifted her cigarette to her lips again and smoked it swiftly. What had she been going to do?—tell him—this man—of her troubles, her unhappinesses with cause and without; this man, who, two years before, had jilted her as cruelly as ever woman was thrown aside? Her self-contempt rose steadily. She

could not flay Vawtry for sneering when she had so definitely pointed the way.

She tossed her cigarette lightly from her and picked up her gloves. She beckoned to the waiter and he came with the bill. It had been a long time since she had noticed him about, even though Vawtry, since their dinner, had ordered several drinks. For the first time since Vawtry had joined her she glanced about the room. It was filled yet, but with a totally different crowd, not of diners, but of roysterers.

As the bill was laid before her Vawtry bent quickly forward, but Amy slipped it swiftly from beneath his hand. She gave the waiter a bill and waved away idea of change accruing. As he moved off she called him back. “Get me a hansom,” she said.

Vawtry looked determined. “I am going to see you safely home.”

Amy smiled slightly. “In five minutes we will say good-bye, Bertie,” she said. “I came here tonight for a last revel with the old, free days, thinking this place would be a haven—and I find it dirty and unclean and the food cheap and bad and the music full of discords—all these faults in what I once delighted in. And you, Bertie, have pointed the final moral.”

“I?” said Vawtry.

Amy smiled in sudden glee at the surprise in his tone. “You!” she said. “Even you. That the past belongs to the past; that much of the old life was like this place, unclean and cheap and bad and none of us knew it, because we had the spirit of youth and its blindness——”

She stopped suddenly. She rose to her feet and stood, looking down at Vawtry’s bent head. Her pride had come back to save her.

“You have pointed the moral to all of it,” she said, “the uncleanness and the cheapness and the badness. You had no right ever to speak to me again; and yet, finding me here tonight, you will say it gave you the right—I wonder if a woman could have taken it—of coming to me. And so we have dined together——”

"At your expense," interpolated Vawtry.

"It has all been at my expense," said Amy Kilvert swiftly. "That is what I have learned tonight. No, I'll not take your hand. Why should I? In token that I forgive? Pah! Forgiveness could never cover the case. It would take the maddest love, the wildest passion, the sort of thing I shall never feel again in all the world. Ah, good night!—"

Vawtry had risen to his feet, too, and stood watching her as she swept through the room. He could not believe it, that the meeting had come and gone! And he could not understand, as she disappeared at last from his sight, why he had allowed her to go alone, why even now he could not follow her! But to find her in this mixture of minds and moods—it had left him totally ignorant of where he stood with her. She had shown him that she despised him, and he winced. And then he wondered, wondered if it might be that she loved him yet—and the thrill of pure delight that ran through him showed him beyond shadow of doubt where he stood. He sat down and began to smoke, cigarette after cigarette, rapidly, excitedly. His brain was full of wild dreamings, wilder plannings, nebulous purposes.

Amy, meantime, went swiftly down the short flight of steps, and threw herself into the cab. She gave the man her address, and then she sank back against the cushions, and covered her face with her hands, hiding even from the blackness of the night, and drew long, shuddering breaths. Such results as this mad freak of hers had brought!

She writhed with shame as she saw with sudden clearness how small an amount of anger she had shown to Bertie Vawtry, for the wanton deed he had done her. She felt as if some impish hands had taken up her brain and wrung it into odd, fantastic shapes, so hard was it for her to see clearly. All these two years she had

burned with wild resentment against Vawtry. She had married Evan Kilvert in resentment against Vawtry. She had fled down here tonight in resentment against Vawtry—and, finding him here also, her anger had died down; at best, had flamed but fitfully. Even now she drew a quivering breath as she remembered that beautiful face of his, the look in his eyes, the magnetic touch of his magnetic hands, those hands whose touch she had recognized before she had believed that it could be he. She knew that she ought to be furiously angry, but she found no anger left in her, only weariness and heart-sickness. She told herself, in extenuation of her crime against herself, that it was because she knew him so well, and knowing him, must excuse him much.

Suddenly she started, almost to her feet. She sat upright, tense and keyed up again. She called to the driver, bade him hurry, hurry! She had remembered a fact all but forgotten, that she was going home to Kilvert. She was in no mood for lies tonight, and she doubted if she could tell them, were he to have reached home before her. She realized that she had absolutely no idea what time it was—ten or twelve or two—it might be any or no one of the hours! Panic seized her, and anger thereat. She was afraid of Kilvert, afraid of meeting him, of facing his keen, steady, unswerving eyes.

When the man stopped she thrust a bill into his hands far in excess of the fare, and waved him away. She had no time to wait for change. She ran up the steps and inserted her latch-key with shaking fingers. Before she turned it once, the door opened, and Kilvert, standing there, took her by the wrist, and drew her into the hall.

IX

KILVERT undid the fur about her throat and threw it to the floor. She glanced at him once, and her eyes

dropped before his. How she hated them—steady, unswerving, keen, unwinking! Already her golden second for speech had passed; silence was now the only thing left her, and it was neither silver nor golden. If only she had been prudent enough to have had her lie thought up! But she had not—she did not even know what time it was.

Kilvert at last stepped back. Not a full moment had passed, but the tenseness of the seconds broke her, and she went quite to pieces. She spoke quickly, senselessly:

"I suppose it's late, or you wouldn't be up. Gerry and I had a lot to talk about——"

Kilvert raised his hand. "Spare yourself and me this sort of thing, Amy."

Amy's brain had raced along—of course, he would telephone there first—or to Francesca—he had spoken of those two.

"I mean Elinor," she said, with a last mad throw. "I——"

She broke again, for Kilvert's cool hand was again upon her wrist.

"Stop!" he said. The word rang out, stern, compelling. He caught his underlip for a brief space. When he spoke again his voice was as level as usual.

"It is after two o'clock," he said. "Naturally I became alarmed some time ago. There seemed nothing to do but wait, however——"

"You didn't telephone!" Amy gasped.

Kilvert looked at her coldly. He relinquished her wrist, and moved away a few steps.

"I did not telephone," he said briefly. "I have no desire to have it a matter of remark that I seek my wife by telephone after midnight. I had hoped you were at Mrs. Taft's."

Amy raised her head, but again those steady eyes confronted her. For want of something better to do, she curled her lips and laughed a little.

"You might have had Maggie call for you," she suggested. "Maggie's voice sounds quite ladylike through a telephone."

"Nor do I take my servants into my confidence," said Kilvert. "James is in bed this long while now."

He stood, waiting, as Amy knew. If only she had not begun to lie without having an idea of what her lie should be. She felt no confidence in her powers to deceive this man. She felt unstrung, broken, and suddenly an insanely furious rage against Kilvert seized her. She had come home heart-sick and mourning, to this taking to task, this calling to account. She laughed again.

"I should have telephoned you from Elinor's," she said carelessly, "but she's so far up, and the telephone's on the ground floor. No gentleman could ask that of a lady, could he, Evan? So I didn't. Good night; I'm tired to death——"

She slipped past him, furtively, desperately. Halfway up the stairs she paused to glance back. Kilvert was standing against the staircasing, following with his eyes her fleeing figure. She stumbled against a step and almost fell, but she caught herself, and rushed on. A sort of terror that belongs distinctively to childhood seized her, terror of what might be following after her. She kept her head turned, so as to have Kilvert within sight, until she reached her own room, and was inside it.

She leaned against the wall, her hands pressed against her face. Was it all worth it? What if she should go down those stairs now, straight down, and up to him, and say, "Two years ago a man threw me over for a woman who could bring him money, and later, loving him still, I married you, because you came offering to take me and clothe me, on the one condition that I cared for you at least as much as I cared for any other man. I let you believe that, and that I cared for you more than for anyone else, because I never dreamed of the torment that lie would bring me. And now he has come back—free, and I am bound——"

She caught herself up, and hurled herself more fiercely against the sheltering wall. If it meant death to refuse,

she could not go down to her husband and say those words to him. She feared him more tonight than she had ever feared anyone in all her fearless life.

She felt chilled and trembling. Her hands shook as she drew off her gloves. Two or three stray hairs had been swaying across her face all evening, and she grew suddenly weary of futile replacings, and pulled them out and cast them from her. She looked toward her bed, already turned down and waiting for her, piled with its rose-colored blankets, to warm her chilled, bloodless body. She moved toward it helplessly.

Halfway across the room she stopped short. There was no sleep for her—yet. That lie she had told him and had persisted in, even in the face of his virtual charge that she was lying—how easy it would be for him to disprove it!

She stood still, trying to think. She wondered if it would be like a man to do such a thing, to call up Elinor Darling the next day, and incidentally find out if she had had callers the night before, and their names. There were a thousand ways in which he might do it, without rousing suspicion even in Elinor Darling's shrewd brain. Almost had she decided that it would not be like a man to do such a thing—and, ah, she was so cold and weary—at least no man of Kilvert's type, when her clock chimed the hour, half-past two. Half-past two! Late enough in all truth for a wife's return after unexplained absence, and ample cause for an aggrieved husband to act!

Panic seized her again. She opened her door cautiously and peered out. Kilvert was still standing in the hall below. Even as she looked, she saw him rouse himself, and move away toward his library. She waited till she heard the click of the library door as it closed. That must mean an hour at least before he would come upstairs. At all events, it was her chance. If he should take it into his head to telephone Elinor, there was no telling at what time he might do it, and when she was once asleep through the aid of those

bromides nestling in a hidden drawer, she did not know when she would waken.

She took off her street shoes, and slipped her feet into soft Turkish slippers. She unfastened her belt, preparatory to getting into a soft kimono, but nervous desire to make haste held her back. She slipped carefully from her room, and across the hall to the stairway and down it. The telephone was in a small apartment off the dining-room. There were plenty of doors between it and the library. It would not be possible for Kilvert to hear her. Yet cold fear shook her as she crept along.

She found herself safely at last within the tiny room. She had managed it without light and without noise. She bent her slender body low over the shining instrument.

"Hello!" she called softly, her lips close to the mouthpiece, and her hand clasped about it, to muffle her tones. "Hello! Give me Madison 2222—2222. Yes. . . . Ring them again. You must, Central. Ring them again!"

She waited, every nerve alert at last, and every muscle tense. There was no sound anywhere save the blur of the ringing bell two miles away. Suddenly she bent close again.

"Yes? Hello! Is this the Caledonia? Call Miss Darling for me right away. Miss Elinor Darling. Yes, Elinor Darling——"

A shaft of yellow light fell on her through the quickly opened door behind her, and then a heavy shadow. Amy turned and screamed, and dropped the receiver. Kilvert picked it up as it swung against the table. He reached out his other hand, and laid it once again on Amy's wrist, as he called:

"Hello! The Caledonia? Don't call Miss Darling; it is a mistake."

Kilvert hung up the receiver carefully, and then he turned to his wife, shrinking, like a hunted thing, against the wall.

"It is a mistake," he repeated. "I will have no vulgar intriguings of this sort."

Amy's head went fiercely up. "Intriguings!" she said.

"Of this sort," Kilvert repeated steadily. He led her through the dining-room, his hand still resting lightly on hers. When they reached the door of the library, which stood wide, Kilvert stopped, and checked Amy in her wild steps forward.

"May we talk a little together, absurd as the hour is?" he asked.

But his tone was not a question, and Amy went through no empty form of giving permission. Instead, she entered the room as if it were a jail, and her jailer just behind her.

X

KILVERT pushed forward a chair for her, and she sank nervelessly into it. He did not sit down, but stood in front of her, with his hands clasped behind him, resting hard against a table.

"I think I should have said nothing more to you about this night's escape," he began slowly. "It is a question of delicate balance, with much to be argued and more to be decided either way. But I hardly think I should have said anything more to you about something you are so evidently averse to discussing, had you not tried this really low bit of trickery which I happened to overhear, and which I am glad to know I was able to cut short. I confess myself angry at this. I have always thought you played a square game, Amy. I should never have dreamed you capable of resorting to such palpable make-up. But with this latest development tonight, there remains a word or two to say."

He paused a moment, looking down at her pale face, sharpened by her struggles of weeks.

"When I married you," he began slowly, "I did it with my eyes open. Even with the half-love I believed you had for me, and the entire devotion I offered you, I knew that for both of us there would come bad hours and days—months, perhaps, before the sharing of our two lives could become a perfected

thing. I knew that you would never have married me unless I could offer you such things as this." His hand went out about the room. "I never believed that you could marry me, merely because I came, offering wealth; although I confess to realizing, with a keenness mercifully given to few men, I dare hope, the entire selfishness of what I called your love for me. Long ago I had to own that you held no love for me in your heart, to help you through. Knowing this, what was there of aid I could offer, save my silence, and solitude, when you began to chafe and fret and strain against the bond that binds you to me! I have held aloof, waiting for you to see what is true, that my love for you is the stanchest thing that has ever come into your life. It has lived against great odds. It will continue to live, doubtless against greater ones. However——"

He paused after the last sharp-flung word, and straightened himself.

"Of this night's work there remains this for me to say. I swore from the first that I would never compel you to anything against your will, that you should remain the free thing you were born. I never realized, until marriage put its bonds upon me, too, that in your sense of the word, freedom in marriage is an impossible thing. Marriage is merciless in its intimacies—we are both finding that out. No man has ever known you as I have come to know you—the curious workings of your fevered brain, the curious code of philosophy and morals you have evolved from life. And no woman has ever known me so thoroughly to judge me so mercilessly as you. I have a great love, to be hurt indeed, but to aid me—you have nothing. And so, for weeks, you have been hiding from me, deceiving me in countless ways, feigning illness, feigning sleep. Tonight, when I told you I was going away for the entire evening, do you think I did not see the flash of light leap to your eyes? Why——"

Amy looked up. "Evan!" she cried hoarsely.

He stopped her. "When I came back and found you gone, I saw that I had expected just such a thing—in fact, I have grown to expect anything from you that you do. Now, where you happened to go tonight matters to me nothing—nothing! What matters is your pitiful deception about it, and your outrageous attempt to drag an outsider into my affairs and yours. I know as well as you that you went to none of those friends' houses tonight—let the matter rest there."

He stopped again. When he went on, his voice was slightly lowered, but cold and stern.

"I shall ask you, however, to remember this for the future, and to forget it never—that you share my name, that my name is yours, and that there must be no playing with it. The unconventional things you did before you were married to me must, many of them, go by the boards from now on. Innocent enough, then, they lose their innocence and become mere bravado when you do them now. The spirit which made them clean then is not yours to have now, for you no longer belong to yourself solely, but to me; and although I shall never press that claim in such wise as to embarrass you seriously in private or in public, yet there are certain things which you must guard, and one of them is the name you deliberately chose to take."

He had reached the end at last. Amy sat, stabbing her hat fiercely through and through with its long pins. After a moment of silence Kilvert bent down and held out his hand.

"It is past three," he said quietly. "Your nerves are in a wretched state. Will you go up now and try to get some natural sleep? Let the bromides go, however, even if you don't sleep at all. You can't afford to let that habit grow, Amy."

Still she sat, ignoring his hand, pulling the pins slowly from her hat. She began to speak at last, rapidly, gaspingly.

"I meant to get in before you came; there wasn't any harm in what I meant to do—to go to a little place—I used—

to go to and have one last fling all by myself before I settled down to begin it all over again. When I got there I—got to thinking; I hurried home—I hadn't an idea of the time—" Her voice trailed into sickening silence.

Kilvert's jaw was rigid as he stared down at her. He felt perfectly sure of much of the real state of affairs. He had told Amy tonight he knew she did not love him. He had held back his damning conviction that she loved another man, a conviction which he had smothered for many weeks, and which tonight seemed to spring alive and mighty from his brain. As he listened to her now he felt absolutely sure that she had seen the man, whoever he might be, this night. Of more than that he refused to think. Even her hour of home-coming did not shake his faith in her clean-mindedness and honesty. And yet these lies, these lies!

He reached out his hand again and drew her to her feet.

"You are very tired and worn," he said. "I shouldn't try to talk any more tonight, if I were you. And, Amy, never try to talk of this again until we can sit down together, man and woman, and talk soul to soul. You are not willing to tell me the whole truth about this thing; then let the matter rest in silence. Never try to tell me half-truths or worse."

She turned from him abruptly and moved toward the door. She felt suddenly and miserably conscious of her shabby appearance, her old street suit and her knockabout hat and her absurd slippers, compared to his immaculate evening dress. As she reached the door she turned sharply on him.

"Evan, you don't think—?" she stammered.

Kilvert came close to her and opened the door for her. "I think—nothing," he said, "except that such a thing as this must never occur again—never, Amy."

He watched the door slam fiercely behind her. He stood without stirring until its vibrations had died. Then he went slowly back to the table, where lay a worn, cheap copy of a play, an

acting edition. He picked it up absently. He knew it practically by heart, "Hedda Gabler."

"Am I like that weak fool, Tesman?" he asked of himself. "Because I give her her head, let her come and go, allow her to shut me from her when she wishes and admit me when she can endure me? Is it strength or weakness that makes me let her go her gait, that makes me love her yet, a woman who married me because she was sick and tired of making her own way for herself and as a safe haven from—God knows what, or who!"

He stared moodily down at the book; then he tossed it into a private drawer and went up to his room, past Amy's door, shut and bolted fast. Through the door that stood between them, shut and locked, he knew, he heard her sobs and smothered moans at intervals all the long night through. For, though the night was almost gone, the dawn brought no cheering light, only purple cloud and beating rain; and the slow, wakeful minutes stretched to hours for them both.

XI

DURING the next week Amy paid the penalty of that night's nerve-dissipation with an illness that was not feigned. Indeed, after the first day she had a nurse, because her nights were sleepless and her nerves would not admit of sleeping-drugs. Night after night she begged for bromides, chloral, anything to make her forget she was living; and for sole answer she received soothing rubbings which, after a time, worked their good results.

During that week she saw Kilvert twice, and those two occasions came early in the week. On all the other days he sent up messages which called for responses if he were to follow them in person, and Amy turned on her pillow in shame and could not send them. Nothing could ever move smoothly again, she thought wearily, until she confessed the whole story of that night, and less and less was she able to speak

Bertie Vawtry's name to Kilvert. She told herself it was not as if Kilvert knew anything of the man, as if she might tell him things of Lennie Rhodes or Harry Martin or the countless others of whom he knew at least something. For Vawtry's name would ring strangely on his ears; she could not compass the preliminaries, let alone the story itself.

She began to move about the house at last, weak and nerveless, but restless as a flame. Her face looked sharpened and more pale, as if some inward fire were indeed consuming her. She went to see Germaine once and cut her visit short. She had thought she might find relief there, but there was none anywhere. Gerry had warned her faithfully of Vawtry's presence in town, and the warning had done her no good; she had only rushed all the more headlong into the most insidious of meetings. She could not tell Gerry of it, any more than she could tell Kilvert, and the constraint of that visit was too heavy to endure.

One day she went down to luncheon, weary and depressed. She picked up a morning paper as she went into the dining-room and turned to its lists of amusements. It just occurred to her it was matinee afternoon. She found nothing there which irresistibly caught her fancy. "Carmen" was on at the Metropolitan, however, and she decided idly to call up Germaine, who never got enough of songs and singers, and ask her to go to hear Calvé.

She felt a shudder creep through her disordered nerves as she stepped into the telephone-room. She had not entered the place since that night two weeks ago when she had looked up from her whispered call to see Kilvert standing in the doorway. She called her number hastily and turned away disappointed. It was Gerry's competent little maid who answered. Mrs. Taft was away for the day.

Amy walked through the hall, hesitating. She disliked to go alone. She disliked the thought of going with anybody else. Most of all she disliked to stay in that afternoon. She went up-

stairs still hesitating and dressed hesitatingly. She decided at last to wear her brown velvet gown with its striking coat and lace bodice. She felt a faint interest as she settled her hat into exact line. Elaine always knew what suited her customers best, even though she had had Mrs. Kilvert's custom for but two brief seasons.

She was still hesitating between grand opera and musical comedy as she put her foot upon the step of her victoria. She found herself saying, "The Metropolitan," without having really reached a conclusion. She laughed a little as she settled back against the cushions. The only reason she had said "The Metropolitan" was because she could not, for the life of her, recall the name of the play-house where the comedy in question was running. She tried to recall it all through the drive, but with no success.

She sent Thomas in to see about her ticket, and when he brought it out to her she scanned it critically. She almost wished to find some fault with it which might make it possible for her to send him back with her haughty complaint that he had been imposed upon. Her brief fancy for "Carmen" and Calvé had died the death. But there was no fault to find. She had designated from the sixth to the eighth rows and an aisle seat, and she held a seventh-row seat on the centre aisle. She ordered the victoria for the precise moment of dismissal and went her slightly disgusted way.

She was rather early—the curtain would not rise for fifteen minutes. The ushers increased their pace rapidly. The aisles became one continuous stream of women. She was more than ever sorry that she had come. She did not care for matinee performances, her argument being that the lack of men to play to made the playing both of the men and women on the stage less virile and less conscientious.

She had to rise several times while her row was filling up. The last party was made up of three; enough, she thought, to fill the remaining vacant seats. It annoyed her to see the one

seat next her still unoccupied. The girl just beyond it was dainty and lovely—and small. Amy had a horror of large people who overflowed the narrow bounds of their opera chairs onto her. How unfortunate that this pretty girl was not to sit next to her!

"I beg your pardon," said a voice beside her. "The usher tells me the next seat is——"

She looked up into Vawtry's face. Her face was deathly white. She sat quite still.

"I do not believe you," she said between her teeth. "It is a trick."

Vawtry held out his seat check. "I bought it ten minutes ago," he said. "Two seats had just been returned, the man said, and the aisle seat had just been resold."

Still Amy did not move. She looked at him insolently as he stood above her.

"If it had been Tannhäuser," she said, with consummate daring, "I could not doubt it is all your trick. That poor opera quite goes with this sort of thing—the Venus motifs and all that."

"Some of this is quite as devilish as Tannhäuser can hope to be," said Vawtry smoothly. "Can you listen unmoved—or do you command me to seek other accommodations?"

Amy Kilvert rose with studied insolence, and took the inside seat. "Stay, by all means," she said icily.

Vawtry murmured soft thanks as she gave up her seat to him. He sat down, quite conscious that he should have spared her and himself, as he might have easily done, although the coincidence was genuine. But he did not care to spare either himself or her. His veins were running molten fire at this unexpected sight of her. He had always loved her. His marriage—and hers most of all—had but piled the fuel higher. He did not even try to go away, but it is a fact that he could not have gone, even with all his will exerted.

Before the curtain went up, neither of them spoke. There was a pause quite as long after the curtain went down. Vawtry finally turned to her.

"You are making this very hard for me, Amy," he said.

It was a superbly artistic bit of speech. Amy groped vainly after a seam in its polished surfaces. Turn it as she might she could not find a flaw. Hard for him, when it was he who was making it hellish for her! But could she tell him that? For her pride's sake she could not cast back reproach. She found the springs of ready retort dried within her, her sense of values blunted, her only refuge silence, and that a thin and paltry one.

After a moment Vawtry went swiftly on: "I can never forgive myself for letting you go home alone that night. If I had dreamed what time it was, wild horses could not have taken you from me—alone. It must have been after two when you reached home." He paused; then he laid his hand softly over hers. "Tell me, Amy, you did not suffer for it?"

"I did not suffer for it," said Amy, in bitter obedience.

Vawtry was silent a moment. When he spoke his voice was full of pain.

"I can never forgive myself for the whole of it," he said. "I should have protected you from—everything that night, not from the night alone. I should have known what the hour was, should have sent you from me in good season—it was terrible for you to reach that home of yours at such an hour—my poor girl!"

"I did not suffer from your lack of care," said Amy once again, with painful precision.

Again Vawtry allowed the heavy silence to fall between them. His dark eyes scanned her white face keenly, longingly, with fierce desire. What a mad fool he had been, to have run any risks of losing this slender, glowing bit of womanhood, flame to him, and ice, he knew, to the man she had madly married! It was impossible not to see how greatly moved she was. Even if it were hate she felt for him, it were ten thousand times better than indifference.

"How strange our fate has been!" he murmured at length. "It has been

without seeking, Amy, that we have met on these two occasions so intimately, so horribly apart from the chattering crowds that have been about us. Do you dare say there is nothing in it?"

Dare—when she knew the bare chances of this meeting as he could not! How well he knew that strain of fatalism in her! How often they had talked over this very thing in the old days! How many of their lover's meetings had been made up of just such curious coincidences! Chance had never figured so potently in any other part of her life. How could she but believe in it, in spite of herself! Yet she answered him harshly.

"Coincidences are common things, almost getting to be those things which do not happen."

The curtain signal came just then, and she thanked heaven that she had had the last word, however poor a thing it must be reckoned.

Throughout the entire second act Vawtry sat well forward, his eyes deliberately out of range of Amy. Yet he knew that through all the act her eyes did not waver from starved sight of him, his head so wonderfully Greek, his face, delicate, artistic, beautiful. She leaned far back, watching him. Always his beauty had fascinated her, warmed her, charmed her. She could not explain it; she had never been able to explain it, and she had tried.

With the second intermission he turned suddenly to her, and caught the swift flaming of her startled blood, and the shamed drooping of her eyes. But for all he said or looked that flush and telltale start might not have been. He began to talk of impersonal things, delightfully, enthrallingly. There seemed no more need for Amy to fight fierce battle for the right word to say—it leaped now swiftly to her tongue. No responsibility was hers any longer—hers it was merely to enjoy. Vawtry suddenly shouldered all the burden of this meeting. He suggested promising once, but she hastily demurred. Both she and Vawtry knew too many

people who might be here this afternoon. So they sat and talked.

When the opera was ended, Vawtry helped her lingeringly with her outdoor things, and his eyes told what they also said his tongue was afraid to utter. He was like a woman about woman's clothes. She knew that he knew the significance of the name within her velvet coat, the touches on her hat that bespoke its origin, the quality of her exquisite furs. At least she had these things to sweeten the bitterness of her self-betrayal into the hands of her enemy. If he had wealth now, she, too, had its luxuries; she hated herself for her ignoble triumphing, but the feeling stayed with her.

They went out slowly. She had given him her carriage-check, and had regretted it immediately. If his audacity should lead him to ask her for a seat in her victoria, what would she say? When he came back to her she saw, with a thrill of actual relief, that he was accompanied by a tall, beautiful, strikingly dressed woman, whom he introduced as Mrs. Styles. With that multiple knowledge of things which her life had given her, Amy knew the woman for the wife of one F. Marshall Styles, whose ability for making money was equaled only by his wife's ability to climb. She perceived that Mrs. Styles looked upon Vawtry as an acquisition, and was glad to show favor to his friends, and that her confidence in his judgment, already large, was greatly strengthened by the result of her rapid inventory of Amy's dress.

"Mrs. Styles is in great distress of mind," Vawtry said to Amy lightly. "Her carriage is hopelessly blockaded and her footman has just arrived, breathless, to beg her patience."

Amy responded with amused sympathy and the three chatted until Vawtry slipped away, leaving the two women together.

"Your carriage is ready," he said to Amy when he returned. Then he turned to Mrs. Styles. "I have further questioned your man," he said. "I find he is really hopeless of getting

here before it is quite dark. Shall I try to find some sort of a vehicle for you? Even that will take time, in this frightful matinee crush."

He glanced casually at Amy as he spoke. She responded instantly, without volition. It was not till she was home, waiting for Kilvert and their dreaded dinner together that she realized she must have done precisely what Vawtry had willed her to do when he brought into such juxtaposition the facts of her victoria's readiness and Mrs. Styles's predicament. For she had turned to that lady quickly. "Let me take you in," she had said. "We may live near each other. Even if we do not, I have all the time in the world."

But it was not until she was sitting across from Kilvert, trying to make some sort of talk to save them in their servants' eyes, that it occurred to her to wonder if Mrs. Styles had not done the thing which Vawtry desired in asking her carriage hostess to come to tea the following Tuesday, both of them having, during their drive, professed the utmost weariness of those conventions which the world in general literally observes. She decided, while she questioned Kilvert absently about his day, that, even though she had promised to come, her acceptance after all would depend on whether Mrs. Styles chose to observe those conventions which they both had derided.

She followed Kilvert into the library when they rose from the dinner-table and tossed over some new magazine lying on the table. It seemed to her almost time to take up a part of the burden again, that acting which she had begun not a month before, and which had ended so disastrously with her breakdown of a fortnight back. She dropped into a great, leather-covered chair and watched Kilvert as he untied a package of books which were lying on a side-table. He brought them over to her.

"I brought up Rhodes's new book tonight," he said. "You may like to read it. The critics are warmer than usual."

Amy took the book and turned

its pages. Kilvert's thoughtfulness touched her, and yet maddened her. If only she might feel that for some space of time she were out of his mind as if she never had been in it! Yet she thanked him and read him bits here and there of bright dialogue or breezy comment. Kilvert dropped into a chair across from her while she read and scanned her face thoughtfully.

"You are so pale," he said abruptly. "You should be getting out more, Amy. I dare say you have been cooped up all day today, as usual."

Amy closed the book and laid it aside. "I went out this afternoon," she said quickly. What if she should tell him now, of this afternoon and of that sickening night! She felt again that strange impulse to confession, not for anyone's sake but hers, anyone's comfort but her own. Then she cast the impulse from her in terror and rose to her feet. She was afraid of that warm, rich room, of herself, and, most of all, of those keen eyes which, when last she had seen them, were bent on her. She glanced at Kilvert now and found he was looking at her yet. No, she could never tell him, never. She was a coward, perhaps, but she could never tell him. The coincidences were too oddly coincident with the story.

"I went to 'Carmen,'" she added hastily. "I tried to catch Gerry, for company, and she wasn't at home, so I went alone. It has tired me more than I thought, so I think I shall go upstairs. Yes, I'll try to get out a little more now, Evan. Good night."

She went away from him, calling herself a weak and feeble thing, to be so enthralled by Vawtry's eyes, so filled with fear by Kilvert's. She sneered at herself as she remembered how she had obeyed the undoubted desire that Vawtry's eyes held that afternoon, had done the thing he willed her to do. This woman, Mrs. Styles, was not her sort of woman at all. She had been a fool to promise to go to that tea, especially when a child would know Vawtry would be there. Well, she would have reason enough for not keeping that foolish promise—convention was worth

all it cost, sometimes. Mrs. Styles had no right to ask her.

She was away from home the next afternoon. A single card awaited her on her return. It bore the engraved name of Mrs. F. Marshall Styles. She read it with a faint smile, and tossed it from her.

"Kismet!" she said wearily.

XII

VAWTRY stood upon the sidewalk until Amy's victoria had disappeared in the crush of carriages. Then he lighted a cigar, because he felt the need of its soothing effect, and glanced up and down. He finally decided on his uptown apartment, and on a walk thereto.

He was in very truth entirely innocent of any conniving at that meeting of the afternoon. He was still acutely conscious that he might have prevented more than passing greetings and farewells, but his gladness was keen that the meeting had been precisely what it was. Although Amy had not by word or intentional glance given him any ground for hope that she still loved him, much less that she was at all ready to listen to any tale of love from him, nevertheless he, who knew her so well, had beheld her moved almost beyond her powers of self-control. And whether it were hate or love that stirred her so deeply, he did not care, just now. It was enough that he provoked so deep an emotion, whatever its extreme.

He walked swiftly along the Avenue, his pulses tingling and his eyes alight. He ascended the porticoed entrance to the bachelors' apartment building where he had his suite of rooms, and he let himself quickly in. His man came to take his outdoor things, and he flung them off and motioned him away. The walk had not calmed him, he discovered.

He went into his dimly lighted, beautifully furnished sitting-room, and flung himself along a broad couch that filled one wall space. As he swept his

eyes about the room, a bitter smile came to his lips. For memory rose before him of his two small rooms of two years back, when he loved Amy, and she loved him, and they both were free as birds of the air. If he had had all this then, how different their stories now.

He did not often think of his dead wife, and never with tenderness; but tonight he remembered her with scorn and detestation. He had been her money debtor to the extent of thousands of dollars before she had deliberately forced the issue. As he had told Amy in his letter after his marriage, there had really been nothing else for him to do—since the lady was ready with her solution—unless, indeed, he cared to look ruin bravely in the face, a thing which no one would suspect Bertie Vawtry of doing.

For Vawtry was a pure and perfect cross-section of dilettantism. He knew the faddish artists of his day, and his Omar Khayyam. He sang well, and he could play all the Wagner motifs. He had the argot and the patois of all the studios. He had taken hold of that wild venture of his, that ephemeral magazine which had proved his life's undoing, with ardent delight. He had always longed for the life artistic, and he himself did too many things by halves to do anything well. Editing an artistic and literary periodical seemed to his fancy just the sort of thing he was made for by the gods of this world.

Amy Crawford had come into his life just as that iridescent dream was well under way, and their first meeting had been electrical. And later, when the dream of his mad venture was losing its glowing colors and becoming a dun and sordid thing, this other woman, this dead Eugenia, swept across his orbit, with her plain figure and plainer face, and her vanities and sillinesses, and her astounding wealth.

Vawtry shivered in the warm room. Thank God, it was ended, the hideous deceits and more hideous revealings that came at times when his endurance failed him, and her vanity and jealous

fears flamed into open fury. Her too evident ten years' seniority, his ardent youth, and the natural wonder and smiles of chance strangers, together with his own irresistible impulses to snatch sips of honey for his solace when he might, all this was too much for the preserving of the infatuated woman's uncertain temper. And yet, even with almost two years of hell and its torments, he might still have missed all this luxury—if she had not died when she did.

Vawtry's lips curved into an irrepressible smile as he glanced about the rich room. His sense of humor was keen, and he had never forgotten his emotions, when, almost immediately following the hour of his wife's death, he discovered that the checkmate she had planned for him was defeated by Death itself. To be sure, with her estate left intestate, he had come in for only his legal share, but that share was ample for a life of luxury. He had soothed the first few months of his widowhood by picking up all through the Orient rugs and curios, in contemplation of just such an apartment as this—and behold the net result of his first magazine venture! It was not so bad, and the two wasted years out of his twenties would be forgotten when he reached his forties.

He pulled himself up from his couch, and went over to the library-table, a wonderful piece of carved teakwood. A paper was lying there, a *Tattler* of several weeks back. He picked it up musingly. It contained Amy's story. If Amy had not sent him that story, one of his several holds on her would be wanting now. "The Good Man!"

He thought seriously of another potential hold on her he had put in operation that afternoon. He could not always rely on Fate, kind as the jade had been this last fortnight. There must be some common stamping-ground—he had been thinking of that all through the opera, and in the foyer he had run on Mrs. Styles, eager, opulent, a climber of sorts, who would do all things for him in return for what *The Tattler* might do, if it willed, for

her. She was a clever woman, this dashing creature, and one word had been sufficient. It only remained now, for him to lie in waiting, to be patient. Even now he was deliberately planning nothing definite—but he was mad with love of her—Amy, the only woman he had ever loved with a love that lasted a scant six months. That she was out of his reach now only made her the more desirable, the more desired.

He rang for his man. "Dinner in half an hour, Reynolds," he said, "with a trial of the champagne that came today. That last consignment must go back."

He settled into his lounging-chair, and picked up the back number of his paper again. That story of Amy's which he had printed and paid her for at double rates fascinated him. He had wondered at the time if it were a message to him, and he had waited, after his manner, for further enlightenment before he moved in her direction. The night at that French café had settled that question beyond a doubt. She had sent it innocently enough, which fact only added to the interest it held for him. With every re-reading he found new confessions lurking in lines and between lines.

He read it through once again. Then he laid it aside, and lighted a cigarette, and laughed.

"'The Good Man!'" he murmured.

The smile still lingered on his lips when Reynolds stepped into the room, half an hour later, announcing dinner.

XIII

WHILE she waited she wondered, almost impersonally, how it had come about that she was here, ready for her journey, half an hour ahead of time. What other event had she not delayed by at least so much time! Even for her wedding she had been exactly one hour late. Something had been utterly wrong with the lacing of her stays, and that frightful fact had not been discovered until her princess

wedding dress was all but laced together.

She shrugged her shoulders a little impatiently. She hardly knew why she was thinking now of all that delay unless it was that, all day long, she had been running across odd reminders of the day when she took Evan Kilvert's name, the name he was so insistent on her guarding as a treasure of great price. She wondered with a smile what he would say tonight when he came home and found her note.

She had gone over the house that morning, after a small steamer-trunk had been hastily packed and sent away, from room to room, lightly, almost casually; feeling like a disembodied spirit looking upon the scenes of past revels and conflicts. From pantry to attic she had gone, avoiding the servants when she could, meeting their curious eyes with cool blankness when she could not. It was seldom now that she made the grand tour of her house. She did not blame them for their curiosity.

She had heard the clock strike the noon hour as she came down from the third story. It occurred to her then, with really interesting impersonality, that two o'clock was the hour. It hardly seemed that she herself had any part in the small matter of departure set for them.

She had gone, however, directly into her bedroom, and she looked about it, until its rosy colors danced before her eyes. She had gone up to a drawing hanging against a wall, a self-caricature of a famous caricaturist, whom she had known long years before his name and fame came to him. She had always liked that bit of work, and had always taken it with her everywhere. She had forgotten that she was leaving it behind. She put up her hands to lift it down, and then she had remembered that Evan liked it, too, that Evan could stand before it and chuckle by the half-hour. Well, if he liked it, let him have it! She wished now that the thought of his pleasure in it had preceded instead of followed her cool reflection that she had really

no place for it, since her steamer-trunk was gone.

She had turned from the picture and had gone over to her wardrobe closet. She knew what was hanging there, for she had had to make rigid selection only that morning. After having had so much, it was hard to select the few needful things which must go within the narrow confines of a steamer-trunk. She looked regretfully at a black lace dress and a rosy chiffon one; how unfortunate that she could not possibly take them with her!

And so, after many wanderings, she found herself in Kilvert's bedroom. She had unlocked the communicating door; it had been locked for many, many weeks. She found herself wondering what he would say when he came home and read that letter. But why should she worry about his caring? What sort of man would let a wife drift so far away—if he cared? The answer had come sharply; she had winced under it, as she was wincing now, that it was not because he could not, but because he would not master her. At first his withdrawal had been the consideration born of a love too mighty for her to reach up to. Of late she had felt it to be the calm ignoring born of deep disgust.

She had looked about the room curiously, almost as if she had never seen it before. She had straightened a brush here, a chair there. For one brief minute she stood beside his bed. She wondered how he was to pass the coming night, whether he would sleep—or care!

Then, because she had felt that oddly impersonal standpoint breaking up within her she had gone hurriedly from the room, and, without noticing the time, had slipped into her outdoor things and had snatched up her gloves and handbag and umbrella and had gone downstairs. In the hall she hesitated for a second. She had intended to call a cab. But she found sudden fear enveloping her, a curious fear, the same fear that had sent her stumbling up the stairs that dreadful night, now three months back, looking fearfully

over her shoulder, in dread of some hideous thing seizing on her from behind. She would have to go to that dreadful telephone-room, and she would certainly see Kilvert standing again in the doorway, as he had stood and looked at her that night. Even now he might be coming, might see her with this telltale bag; and if he should come on her she would have no lie ready for him. She had tried to say to herself with bravado that he might come and welcome, that she would gladly give him the truth; but even at the time she had known that she was lying to herself. She could not tell some truths to that man; it was easier to lie to him, and to lie to him was the hardest task she had ever set herself.

And so it was that she had come here so far ahead of time, because she had fled in terror, driven out by a formless fear that Kilvert might come home and find her there.

She looked about the station. There was the usual crowd of restless humanity, fretful women and crying children and inconsiderate men. She had withdrawn from them all as far as she could, because she hated crowds and jostlings. Already she had, too, a curious feeling that she was indeed a thing apart from them—the women about her, girls and matrons and mothers alike.

Rather near her a woman was sitting, one of the type to whom the fact of maternity is a leveler of all castes and creeds and conventions. She was, doubtless, under normal conditions, a modest woman. Amy watched her as she brightly and unblushingly raised her baby to her bared breast. Amy's lips curled in a sneer of sheer disgust, and a moment later, watching the same woman bend adoringly over the red, ugly child she was nursing, her eyes filled with hot, unreasoning tears. She had never cared for motherhood. She had always felt honest pity for those women whose best years had to be wasted in the care of their young. She was intensely glad today that she was free from any such responsibility. But she suddenly realized, as she had never realized before, the

anchor that two groping baby hands might be.

Her mind went back to Kilvert. All the time she had been watching that mother and her child she had been thinking of him. How intensely he cared for children! She thought his fondness for them foolish and odd, but it was of a quality at which she could never even pretend to sneer. In fact, the fineness of its quality shamed her, who had none of it. She remembered now a talk of theirs before their marriage, when some such simple scene as this one had crossed their sight. She had seen then, for the first time, that almost maternal love of his for children, and the sight had made her fretful and dissatisfied and uncertain.

"I am not like that," she had said at last. "I was never intended by nature to be a mother. I am honestly afraid of children, in all ways."

She seemed to feel again the cool, fleeting touch of his hand on hers.

"You have never found out what you were intended for, Amy," he had said gently. "Nature has wonderful ways of teaching when she is allowed to work unthwarted."

It was all he had ever said to her, but she had never forgotten it. In spite of herself she wondered how it would be with her today if, instead of leaving Evan Kilvert's home, she were nested within it, guarded as tenderly as if she were the one woman in the world to whom annunciation had ever come. How he longed for fatherhood!

Well, thank God, there was no child! She had given marriage a fair trial, and it had proved the worst one of her many mistakes. Now she was to make her last throw, snatch once again after a happiness snatched away two years and more before. She could not doubt Vawtry's reckless devotion for her, nor hers for him. For three endless months, ever since their first meeting after separation, she had tried to be good and had had to lie and lie about it all, and be virtually called a liar for all her pains. She could not think yet of that telephone-room scene with Kilvert without purple

flushes of shame and anger and torment.

She had not meant to see Vawtry ever again after that first meeting. And the first time she ventured out, after two weeks, he and she had been thrown together at the opera. It had been fate which had decided her life always—fate which had thrown her into Kilvert's arms and fate which was casting her now into Vawtry's.

She had struggled hard to break the spell Vawtry had cast over her. She had not been eager for Mrs. Styles's friendship, whose home had been Vawtry's skilfully manipulated battlefield. She had left the continuance of that thing to chance, and something—fate again—had inspired Mrs. Styles to leave that conventional calling-card. And since her first acceptance of that opulent lady's generous hospitality she had felt the subtle flattery of warm admiration and liking on Mrs. Styles's part.

For two months she had been meeting Vawtry constantly at the Styleses' home. They were flashy people. She felt instant and innate superiority to them, but they were kindly and generous and liberal in their views to the point of having no views. With finished tact Vawtry stayed in the far background until a certain intimacy was firmly established. That once settled he steadily advanced himself through the middle to the foreground, and, after a night or two of struggle and doubt, it became clear to her that, if she stopped going to the Styleses' home now there would be gossip and association of her name with Vawtry's as the cause thereof, which would be far worse than the enduring of his company when he thrust it upon her. Sometimes a woman is given the reasonings of Satan and all the devils.

She hardly knew how she had come at last to the far-reaching decision on which she was acting today, yet it had all come naturally enough. For a week the vital question had hung heavy in the air; Vawtry was pressing hard for his answer before he asked it. Only the afternoon before, in Mrs. Styles's

music-room, he had put it into words. Long before the week began Amy would have been unable to put him from her. His waiting but made victory surer.

Both he and she had reasoned that their love made all things right. The divorce that Kilvert would obtain later would put things conventionally right, Vawtry told her. Amy stopped him there.

"I shall never be married again," she had told him. "I should hate you within three days if I bore your name legally."

Vawtry had let it pass without argument. After all, that phase of the question mattered little. What mattered was that he should gain immediate possession of this woman he loved. He pressed other questions on her. They would go West for their belated honeymoon. When they returned they would have an apartment which would be a hospitable refuge for people of broad culture and broader morals; there would be nothing unpleasant for her to face from anyone, ever. Even after the divorce, if she did not choose to have the legal ceremony read, her courtesy title of Mrs. Vawtry would do for everyone. He had arranged all things.

Yet today she wondered how she had come, after all, to consent. Certainly there had been no domestic crisis to precipitate such decision. She and Kilvert, indeed, had passed an unusually pleasant evening together only the night before. One of his friends who had dramatic ambitions had handed Kilvert a copy of a play for his judgment. Kilvert brought it home with him, and at dinner gave it to her. She had begun to read it immediately, and she caught a particularly clever thing on the fifth page and passed it over to Kilvert. It had ended in her reading the play aloud to him that night and in a long series of joint criticisms, which Kilvert jotted down in his fine, precise hand for the young playwright's benefit. She was glad to think of that peaceful an ending to it all; it was so much better, so much

more inevitable in its very seeming than if her departure had come swift upon some sharp scene. This thing spelled Finality.

Shrill crying near her roused her at last. She looked up, almost bewildered. The woman with her nursing baby was gone. A fat Irishwoman, with twins, had taken her place. They were lap babies still, and both of them were crying. Amy watched with interest this woman's astonishing manoeuvres, which made her two arms do the full work of six. She became lost in the sleight-of-hand which the nursing of twins involved. The woman seemed altogether just and impartial, too, and the babies were openly ugly, and her love for them was a strange but patent thing.

Amy moved her slender limbs restlessly. She swept the waiting-room with her eye. She seemed to meet answering gazes from many. She knew her dress was as unobtrusive as a simple brown tailored suit could be, but she had been there a long time—she had forgotten all about time. She glanced up at a clock. Surely it was high time for Bertie to have come.

For a few scant seconds she stood upright, brought to her feet through sheer bewilderment. She sat down again and stared straight ahead of her. Their train left at two o'clock, and it was now ten minutes past the hour. The train had gone—without them. Gone! She looked about her once in sudden terror. Had she mistaken the meeting-place? How foolish of her; there was no mistake of that sort possible. Bertie Vawtry simply had not come.

She looked about her again. Thank heaven, she met no curious eyes now! She closed hers against the hideous room, against the shame which rose and beat and buffeted her. What should she do—what should she do! For the time being she took no reckoning of unavoidable delays. Bertie Vawtry simply had not come.

In dreams one may live through a lifetime in seconds. In those three minutes through which Amy Kilvert

lay against her straight-back seat with closed eyes, and a face over which the crimson blood poured in surges, it was given to her to see the scrolls of three souls unroll before her; not hers alone, but Evan Kilvert's and Bertie Vawtry's. She saw and read the record of each one. She looked upon her own infinitely lower than one, somewhat higher—thank heaven—than the other!

When she rose again to her feet she caught at the back of her seat to steady herself. She glanced again shudderingly at the clock. It was thirteen minutes past two—the lifetime she had lived in those three minutes just added to Time Past! She looked furtively about her, in terror lest she should catch sight of Vawtry hastening toward her from some part of the room. At first she had not thought of anything except that he had not come, deliberately had not come. Now she remembered with a rush the countless things that might have held him, all legitimate delays, and she was terrified at the thought that he might even then be rushing across the street to her. The memory of all those countless things bewildered her. She did not know what she thought the explanation was—unavoidable detention or inexcusable carelessness or deliberate failure to come. It might be any or all of these things—she did not care. All that she knew was that she could never go away with him, so long as she lived, for she had just seen his hidden soul, and it was small and black and hideous, and he loved it and it alone—as she loved hers and hers only.

She decided to go out by a small, not generally used door. She found herself at last on the street, still cold with fear lest she should meet him. When she came to a drug-store she went into it, and bought some paper and envelopes, and wrote a letter. As she wrote, she felt a strong temptation to be honest, nakedly honest, for the sake of that shrunken spirit of hers which she had just beheld; and then the temptation to do one really good act—which, in this instance, discounted hon-

esty and lay far apart from it—overcame her, and she wrote a few keen, sneering lines to Vawtry, refusing to go away with him; such notice appearing to be her final touch to a deep, dark plot dating from some two years and three months back. She called a messenger and sent it to his rooms. Then she rose, decided on her next step.

So far as outward matters went, she could easily go back to Kilvert's home. In spite of that foolish fear which made her flee so hurriedly two brief hours before, there was not one chance in ten thousand that he had come home in the middle of the day. She could guard against running into any such ten thousandth chance by telephoning James, and then, when he told her, as he would, that certainly Mr. Kilvert had not come home, she could order him to withhold that note. Half an hour later she could hold it in her hand. There was really not a chance against her chance to sit that night at Evan Kilvert's table, his wife.

But she set her lips tight as all this thronged her mind. She could never get away from those three revealing moments. She could never go back to him without confession—and such confession—that she had not run away with another man because for the second time he had failed her, had not come! She had not done the deed, but she had willed it as she had never willed anything in all her life. To all intent she had sinned the sin. What man would take her back, especially when he knew, as Kilvert would know, the sordid impulses which alone would bring her! Since she could not go without confession, she could not go back.

She was planning to go to a hotel for the night, to send for her trunk from the station, and to look for a boarding-place the next day. She decided to go far downtown, and she hailed a passing car. She found herself scanning its occupants with that same fear of meeting Vawtry which had held her ever since she went swiftly away from the station. She sat down near the door, holding her handbag, the beautiful one she had

bought before her marriage and paid for after it, from Kilvert's pocket. He had never known of that instance, nor of the many, many bills she had settled so. In this moment she perceived that his ignorance or knowledge mattered not a whit. She had done the deeds. Her sordid, sordid, sordid soul!

She heard the conductor call a cross street, and the sound brought back a flood of odd memory. Five years before she had lived for a few months on this street—the picture of that old-fashioned room she had slept in came back to her. It had spelled peace to her then—she could not remember why she had ever left the place.

At the next street she got off and walked back. She had a sudden fancy to try for it at least, that same quaint room. She was sick of people. She would drop out of their lives. She would begin again to live her own—she would have to. Her money would not hold out long.

She found the same old lady in the same old house, with the same old room at her disposal. She hesitated a second in giving her name when she sent for her trunk. She had decided impulsively on her mother's maiden name as her own now, and the old lady, knowing her once as Amy Crawford, was calling her Mrs. Garland. She wondered if Vawtry—granted he had come at last—would think of tracing her by her trunk, and then she laughed. If the gods willed it, let him trace her down just once again, if he were so minded.

But the next two hours were dreadful things. At any moment in them she was safe in going back to Kilvert's luxurious home, back to her rose-pink room, back to wealth and ease and careless plenty. Terror of the future swept her time and again. She hardly knew what she would do for money after the few hundreds she had with her were gone. It would be so easy to walk serenely into that home, pick up that damning letter lying on the hall table waiting for Kilvert and tear it into bits, even burn those bits to

make assurance doubly sure. There was no need for Kilvert to know—he had never heard Vawtry's name—he would think her a madwoman were she to try to confess to him about an unknown man. Even if she could not go back without confession then—how curiously she clung to that feeling!—then why not confess? Men liked confessions, grovelings—Kilvert himself had been waiting for them for months—he would get all and more than he had ever bargained for. She wavered time and again. Even after her trunk came, at seven o'clock, she looked at it in miserable indecision. Sometimes he could not come home to dinner—she knew he had a heavy case on now—even now she might go home and find all things easy for her.

But she did not go, she did not go. Temptation in its subtlest guises assailed her time and again. She was shown how she might make even her confessions alluring to her husband—the very thought of making them to him became alluring to her. But she did not go.

She undressed early, and went to bed, too worn and weary to sit or stand any longer. Once she felt a sort of stupor creeping over her, and she resigned herself to it longingly. How long it held her she did not know. But she roused from it at last, to find herself sitting upright in her bed. What awful terrors had shaken her? She lighted her gas with shaking fingers, and opened her pocket-book desperately. She counted its contents, and gasped with fear. She had something over twenty dollars there, which, it seemed, left as it was from her regular allowance, she might use. But the five one-hundred-dollar bills which Kilvert had given her only two days before to pay an excess dressmaker's bill, and which, without once thinking of ethics, she had brought with her when she left his house, these, it seemed, from this vision—dream—nightmare—which had just shaken and wakened her, she must not use. She knew it with the same moral clearness with which

she had seen that afternoon that, without confession, she could not go back. There was no reason to her, she told herself, trying to reason things out to her advantage. But, if she was not to use that sum, there remained then but one thing for her to do—it was hardly more than ten o'clock, she discovered—she could at least dress and go down somewhere to telephone James—even yet there was the chance that Kilvert was not home—there was still that chance for her.

She was hastily twisting up her hair, when she stopped, shocked into stillness. She had forgotten. She was forever too late. *She could not go back.* For she must confess—reason or no reason, she was powerless against that settled thing—she must confess. And confession would not save her. He would know so well that it was not love which brought her back, but merely coarse, material longings for those material things she had too hastily thrown up. What man would ever let her pass beyond his outer hall, knowing that?

She lay down upon her bed again, wide-eyed and sleepless, but quiet and still. The struggle was ended, but she waited. Not until she heard the midnight hour strike through the silent house did she turn restlessly upon her narrow bed, suddenly relaxed and nerveless.

"Even if he did not come home to dinner tonight," she whispered wearily, "he has read it now. He was never later than twelve o'clock."

She did not know then or ever that Vawtry, angry and flurried, reached the station just ten minutes after she left it. His tardiness was a combination of carelessness and inevitable circumstance. He did not find her, and some instinct drove him directly to his rooms, where he found her note awaiting him. The paper was not her usual monogrammed variety, and its time of arrival was late indeed; but Vawtry, raging and baffled, did not stop to think of trifles. He felt absolutely certain that, with this ridicu-

lous ending to a grave matter, he had lost her forever. The realization maddened him to such excess of pain and fury as would perhaps have comforted her could she but have looked upon it.

At six o'clock he left, alone, on one of his two tickets, for the West. In spite of his extravagances there was always about Vawtry a certain admirable thrift.

XIV

It was close on midnight indeed when Kilvert came home that night. He had telephoned word of his detention for the evening, and had learned of James that Mrs. Kilvert was not in. He found the man waiting for him when he came at last, and he took the note James handed to him, recognizing, with a curious foreboding, Amy's bold, beautiful script.

"Mrs. Kilvert has not come in yet, sir," remarked James incidentally.

"This is all, James," said Kilvert quietly. "You may go to bed."

He waited till he heard the door at the rear of the hall close. Then he went into the library and tore open the envelope with a hand that shook.

He read the letter slowly. Then he let it fall upon the table and sat staring at it. His face had gone white and his jaw was rigid. Otherwise he seemed unmoved.

An hour went by before he picked it up again and read it slowly over. It was during that hour that Amy, worn and beaten, had sunk to deadened slumber. Sentences flashed up at him, some of them as if they had been written in red ink.

I am going to leave you. There is no use in trying to make it go any longer. Besides, the Other Man has come back. I meant never to see him again, but we met by purest accident that night three months ago, when I came home at two. I hated him that night. But I met him again without meaning to—we had seats together at an opera matinee—I swear it was not planned. I've lied to you before, but every word I write down here is truth. I met a friend of his that afternoon, Mrs. F. Marshall Styles. I've been there often since. At first he didn't come there so much, and then he was there all the time. Yesterday

afternoon we decided it. He married another woman for the same reason that I married you. Now she is dead and he has her money. I always loved him and I never loved you, although I don't mind telling you this, that I shall never honor him, and I shall never cease to honor you—in spite of myself. If I were worth anything at all I would spare your honor and your name. But I am driven to it. Forget me when you can. Divorce me when you will. Divorce will make no difference to me, for I shall never have a marriage service read over me again; but for your sake, put me from you as soon as you can. Go to Gerry; she knows all the past story—mine and his—that I haven't time to write out. He is Bertie Vawtry; he is editor of *The Tatler*, Evan. He accepted "The Good Man!" I didn't know he was in America when I sent it in. It is fate, I tell you—fate! I would never have sent it to him, never have had it printed anywhere, if I had known he was here. But he knew it all from reading that—all the unhappiness of my marriage. I might have made my pride win out, if that defense had not been down. But he knew too much from that. We are going West at two o'clock, for weeks. I am everything you think me. Good-bye.

Vawtry—Vawtry! Kilvert rose in sudden fury. That odd, distinctive name! The very name his woman client of a year back bore, who wrote him from abroad of the divorce she wanted from her husband—non-support, that was her charge. This cad—he had his minutest history from the woman who knew him best, given with all the detail of a vain and jealous wife some years her husband's senior. Kilvert recalled now that one of the first letters he opened after he and Amy came back from their wedding trip was a letter from Vienna announcing her death and presenting, through her husband's lawyers, his claims on her intestate estate. The grim humor of it had struck him at the time. He even remembered that he had told Amy of it, though he recalled that he had mentioned no names. He was invariably cautious in such wise. He had had nothing more to do with the matter after that, and the final adjustment had passed into the hands of another member of the firm.

But he knew the man. He had no need to go to Gerry. He knew the man. All the letters of that dead woman—he had them all—foolish con-

fidences poured out incoherently to her lawyer as she might have put them before her favorite physician. She had gone into every detail in every direction; she had a mania for minutiae, this dead Eugenia Vawtry. He knew the man! And with such a man Amy had deliberately chosen to go away!

Then it was that the iron struck his soul and entered it; she was with him, had been with him for almost twelve hours; she was with him tonight, regardless of honor, of self-respect. She had fled deliberately from her husband's home, had written in cold blood this morning of her intention; had known of it last night, even while they sat together here, she in that dark leather chair across yonder, slender and exquisite and glowing in her flame-like dress, reading that play of Cosburn's to him; they had not had such an evening together in weeks. He had even bent, as she went away from him, and had kissed her warmly on the lips; it was the last time he had seen her, touched her.

Kilvert dropped into his chair with a groan. Anger rose and tore him; his pride rended him; his insulted love choked and strangled him. But against his will he pitied her, for her mad reachings after happiness and for the apples of Sodom which she had clutched instead.

When morning came, and he heard the servants stirring, he went upstairs unseen, and took his morning bath. When he came down to breakfast he spoke to Maggie gravely:

"Mrs. Kilvert will not be back for some time, Maggie."

"There was a steamer-trunk went yesterday morning, sir, to the Grand Central Station," said Maggie the faithful one, trouble writ large across her brow. "But seeing as Mrs. Kilvert said nothing to any of the household, sir, I didn't know."

"Yes," said Kilvert. He turned back to her as he went into the dining-room.

"Mrs. Kilvert has a good many effects, Maggie, which she will not wish disturbed. I shall lock her

rooms myself, and no one need enter them till her return."

"Yes, sir," said Maggie, the trouble in her eyes not dying. Kilvert's servants were old family treasures, and adored him. Amy had her admirers too, belowstairs, mingled though they were with her detractors, but Kilvert's praises were one continuous pæan.

Before going downtown, Kilvert went back upstairs. He went first to Amy's den, where her old desk and typewriter stood, battered remnants of her busy days. He glanced about the small room, and then shut the door and locked it, and took the key with him. He crossed the hall then to her room, and stood for a second outside the door before he opened it. Stinging memories came to him of the many times, when, with her within, he had paused here, only to pass by. Had he been the one primarily at fault in this thing, in that he had failed to exercise the mastery a woman in spite of herself demands of a man! He opened the door and stepped inside—the beautiful room which she had so adorned, so made alive! He went over to a window which was slightly raised, and closed it. Then he glanced about him. Through the half-opened door of her wardrobe closet he saw many of her dresses hanging. The flaming color of the gown she had worn when last he saw her seemed to flash out at him, and strike him across the eyes. He went swiftly over and shut the door. Her dressing-gown lay across the foot of her bed. Her dressing-table was strewn with many silver trifles—surely she had not taken much with her—one steamer-trunk, Maggie had said. That would not hold much.

He set his teeth at the thought of Maggie—his half-lie to her. He would have to meet constantly now the need for equivocations or stubborn silences. He would say nothing, but by and bye the truth would creep about, through the servants first, and then from servant to master here and there until his little world would know the shameful, naked truth. When the questions

about her return stopped then he would know, and not till then, that the truth was circulating busily. The shame of it—the shameful shame, for him and her! He wished one thing passionately as he stood there—that she was a girl of tender years, still in her teens, young enough to be held not altogether responsible for her act. For an erring child-wife there was full excuse to beat the tempter with whips, to slay him, even. But to add that item to this history, with Amy the woman she was, who had made her successful way alone for many years—the world would laugh at him for a fool, and rightly. Worst of all, he would laugh at himself. This was a case where a woman deliberately chose her path, even when it led straight to dishonor. There were many, knowing her and the outlines of her history, who would say the temptress had been she, the victim Vawtry.

Kilvert found himself cursing aloud. The bitter, eating shame of it! The bitter shame! He went from the empty room without a glance behind him, and shut and locked the door that led into his room—locked it upon all traces of her living presence, her laden dressing-table, the crimson dressing-gown lying across her bed, holding still the curves of that slender body which for a day and a night had belonged of her free will to another man. He put the three keys into his bedroom safe. It was months before he stepped within those rooms again, to find the dust lying heavy over everything, and all the silver trinkets tarnished and black from long exposure and lack of care.

He went downtown that day and the next day and the next. He came home that night and the next night and the next. All day he worked. All evening he sat in his library, battling with his anger, his pride, his love, his aching pity. He went to bed sleepless, and he woke from troubled slumber unrefreshed. So the first week passed, and the first month, and the second and the third.

It was at the beginning of the fourth

month of his desertion and loneliness that his boy brought him, one afternoon, a lady's card. Kilvert took it carelessly, and read its inscription. It was Germaine Taft's.

He hesitated a moment. No one of Amy's old friends had written him or seen him to inquire about her absence. He had indeed been mercifully spared embarrassment. The servants had told callers that Mrs. Kilvert was out of town, and no other explanations had been insisted on. Once or twice he had wondered over the silence of all those women friends of her girlhood, and had explained it with the bitter reasoning that she had doubtless been pleased to make formal recognition of this second change in her life quite as punctiliously as when she sent out announcement cards of the Kilvert-Crawford nuptials. But of it all he really knew nothing. He did not know whether Vawtry—and Amy—were in or out of town; whether he still owned *The Tattler*, which still appeared regularly on Saturday, or whether he had given up its management. He knew nothing—had made no attempt to find out anything. This card—he wondered what it boded. He did not wish to see Mrs. Taft, and yet he felt it was impossible to avoid it. He spoke at last curtly:

"Show the lady in."

He was standing by his desk when Germaine Taft came into his office. He caught her eyes first, and they held him. They were wide and deeply shadowed, and showed traces of recent tears. He felt her hand tremble greatly as he took it. Yet he did not feel afraid of hysteria in her. He had assurance that this woman, though she doubtless traveled at times the usual feminine roads to nerve relief, indulged in tears in secret and alone.

He drew a chair forward for her wordlessly. He saw she was trembling with eagerness.

"Mr. Kilvert," she said impetuously. "I have come to you this afternoon because I had to come—because I have just come from"—she hesitated a moment, and then went courageously

on—"from Bertie Vawtry. Ah!" she urged, as Kilvert turned from her with a repellent gesture, "let me tell you what he said—you must. She is not with him—she has left him—he told me so—he does not know where she is, and he has been back a month—a month. She left him after two months—he told me so himself—and he has not heard from her since. Ah! I knew she could not stay with him, could not endure him nor the shame of it."

She paused, hoping for response. Kilvert sat down beside his desk. He was turned half from her. All that she could see of his face was the stern set of his mouth and chin. She remembered the glint of fear in Amy's eyes on her wedding day, and she herself, who had never feared any man, understood at last how even she might fear Evan Kilvert.

"She wrote to me," she went quickly on—she did not dare let that pause lengthen, "the barest sort of a note, the morning she went away with him, telling me I should not see her again unless I sought her out, that she was giving up all things along with you. She had a horror of coming on this man unawares, and three months before she went away I went to her to tell her he was back in town. She promised me then not to meet him—I know she meant to keep that promise then—I can never think she sought him out deliberately. I did not know she had seen him at all. I cannot tell you how that note sickened me, sickened me."

"She did not seek him!" Kilvert's voice rang hoarsely out after a second's pause. "She met him accidentally, on her part at least. I am sure that is the truth."

He stopped. When he began to speak again his voice was his usual one, cool, courteous, deliberate.

"I am sure you mean all good things in coming to me with this thing. But I do assure you that the news you bring matters nothing. I happen to know much of the—man in question, enough to make me certain the liaison could not

endure. I knew too much of them both to hope it might. If it could have meant her real happiness, I could have wished it might last. The quick ending has not surprised me, and does not change the situation."

He stopped again. His fingers slipped along a ruler's shining edge.

"If she were a mere girl," he continued slowly, "there would be room for a certain sort of action. I have seen too much of the curious workings of the human heart not to feel my knowledge thereof almost a guilty one. There come temporary madnesses which no man, and certainly no woman, can ever explain, and which should not be laid too heavily at the doors of the obsessed ones. But she was a woman of twenty-eight, ripe and experienced years. What man, with the slight hold a few months of marriage could give him on such a woman, would have the right to say to her, 'You were not responsible. You are not capable of choosing. You do not know your own mind!' She *was* responsible. She *was* capable of deciding. She must have known her mind, so far as leaving her home went. That she found another mind to make up later in view of later conditions does not change the force of her first decision. That decision holds for her and for me. Neither of us could possibly wish it should not."

"But," cried Germaine Taft pitifully, "where is she? Where is she? His heartlessness broke me utterly this afternoon—I had just heard he was back, and went to him—I—and bore his devilish sneers long enough to get at what he could tell me—where is she?"

Kilvert's face changed slightly, but only momentarily. It settled into coldness again.

"I have no idea," he said. "And I can take no steps to find out."

Once again he stopped. He continued with visible effort.

"I was wrong, somewhat, in saying that the news you bring has not changed the situation. I am willing to tell you this: that, after her flight, I

discovered, oddly enough, that she had not drawn her full amount on deposit at her bank. Neither has she drawn on it since, but beginning with this month, I shall place, monthly, a sum to her credit there, which will insure her against need, with instructions to the bank to forward the same to her as soon as they are in possession of her address. If you wish me to add this instruction, that they notify you when they are in a position to forward letters to her, I shall be glad to do so. I hope this will be of comfort to you. You have been a good friend to her—to us both."

Germaine's lips trembled as she listened. She had come, expecting a stone, and she had received for Amy bread, literally, as soon as she wrote to draw on that account!

"You are too good," she said, rising quickly, because she felt her composure going. "I can never thank you enough—it is all anyone could ever ask of you—and more than any other man I know would grant, with conditions as they are. Please add that last—I must hear."

Her voice broke entirely, and she added no other word. She merely held out her slender, trembling hand, and Kilvert held it hard.

"I thank you many times for coming," he said quietly.

He went with her to the outer door. Then he went back to his private office, giving the boy a curt order to admit no one for an hour. He wrote out a cheque immediately, and inclosed it in a letter to Amy's bank. He laid it on a pile of letters ready for late mailing. Then he crossed his arms on his desk, and stared moodily ahead of him.

So she had left the cad—already. And he was in town again, with a back better fitted for a horsewhip's stinging lashes than any man in town. Why, why, could he not go down to *The Tatler* office and artistically lattice that cowardly cur until his whip hung in satisfying ribbons? Why could he not? The answer came too quickly. He held Amy too greatly

responsible. He could cheerfully horsewhip any man for seducing a child, but he would be a mirth-provoking fool to go after the man in this case. It was the woman who had dealt him the injury. He could not satisfy his honor here by flaying or by slaying Vawtry.

In an hour he lifted his embargo on his inner office, and until five o'clock saw persons of consequence and inconsequence. At six, in the warm light of a summer evening, he went home to meet James's comfortable impassivity, to a solitary dinner which palled in spite of the fact that it was a tiny gem of perfect ray, to a lonely library, and a lonelier evening, to a night of restless tossing and revival of pain. She was not with Vawtry—there was comfort in that. But comfort changed to stabbing pain when the thought came that Vawtry even did not know her whereabouts, that no one of those who had loved her knew where she was wandering, under what manner of roof she might be sleeping tonight.

The months went by, and as regularly as they passed Kilvert added to that bank account which was steadily growing, and was never drawn upon. The fear came to him at last that she was dead. Later a colder fear struck him, that he would never know that she lived or had died, and he found uncertainty to be the greatest grief of all.

XV

THE outer door of a house in a miserable side street opened late one afternoon, and Amy Kilvert came slowly down its shabby steps. Her name on the rusty mail-box read "Amy Garland." Her resolve to drop out of her old life had held firm.

Her own appearance matched that of the street and of the house from which she emerged. It was not the house to which she had gone that day she fled from Kilvert and from Vawtry. It had been many months since

she could afford those prices, ridiculously cheap as they had sounded in her ears that afternoon. For six months she had been living here primarily because the room rental was nearer what she could pay, but more and more because she was safe here from chance recognition by anyone she had ever known. She was wearing the same brown cloth suit in which she had taken her double flight. The contents of that steamer-trunk had rendered service such as she had never dreamed so limited a wardrobe could be made to do. But its limit was almost reached now—as was her own.

Her vicissitudes had been many during this twelvemonth just passing and her distinct successes none. She had hardly counted, after all, on the hardships that lay before her, when she took her mother's maiden name and sunk her own known self into a new Unknown.

Because of her unshakable resolve to cut away all the old life, any old standby, a newspaper position, for instance, was out of the question. Isabel Blair and Elinor Darling were too familiar with the ins and outs of all the offices in town for her to think of being able to preserve her incognita even if her own acquaintance were not so wide and scattered. She felt sincerely that she would rather starve than meet any of them.

Her twenty dollars had melted like snow in June. The rest, the five hundred dollars, her Egyptian spoil from her house of bondage, she had thought to send back to Kilvert. She had it all sealed, in fact, when a terrible thought rushed over her, the memory of a Potter's Field to which she had once gone for her paper—another of her yellow-journal escapades. She had never been able to forget its grim horrors. She might die—it was altogether possible she might die—the thought of such an end after death turned her faint and sick. Then, even though she had decided to send the money back, she had shrunk before from reminding Kilvert that she was living. She would far

rather he should believe she had taken the money with her, as he must believe, when that unpaid bill came in again. She was past caring for the good or bad opinions of others now—all that mattered was what she could or could not do. In the end she went to a small savings bank devoted to storing up the pennies of the East Side poor, and deposited her hundreds with an absolutely firm and simple resolve to leave them there until she died.

She clung to her writing, preserving her incognita. She sold enough to keep her alive for a year, writing always against fearful odds. Sometimes the burden of her typewriter rental was almost more than she could compass—that dreadful three dollars a month. She longed for her old one with a longing greater than she longed for anything from her old life. That three dollars seemed so merciless a tribute to drop into the maw of a great corporation.

But she had never got ahead. Most of her work had to go to magazines and papers which paid on publication, and the small amounts were mortgaged long before they were received. Lately it had become almost difficult to manage the stamps for the number of things she was sending out, and which for a long month had been so relentlessly returned.

The pity of it was that, if she could only make herself consent to be recognized, there were a dozen editors who would take her work on the strength of her former reputation—this same work she was sending out so resolutely, and which was coming back so constantly. She had sold one story two weeks before which would bring her perhaps twenty-five dollars, a feature story for an entire Sunday page. But it had not appeared the day before, and that meant at least a dreary week of waiting and another week before the payment would be made. Its printing might easily be delayed for a month. And she was three weeks in arrears for her room rent, and she had left tonight a single unbroken dollar,

with eight stamps to buy on the bare chance of two stories being accepted quickly and paid for speedily.

She shivered as her feet touched the sloppy pavement. It was a chilly March day, raw and bleak. Her shoes were cheap things and had worn out quickly.

She went into a small shop where stamps were sold and bought the eight she needed. She dropped her envelopes into a mail-box and walked on aimlessly. She had been trying to work all day, but she had accomplished nothing save wanton waste of her low stock of paper. The thought of that useless waste weighed upon her heavily, so pressing had her necessities become. She thought faintly of the eighty-four cents she had in her pocket-book, all the money she had in the world; she had really grown accustomed to forgetting that five hundred dollars lying in the penny savings bank, with the accrued year's interest.

As she walked along she wondered if she dared write the Sunday editor who had accepted her feature story with a faint cordiality, to tell him she must have some of the money to keep her from starving. She had made some tea that noon and she had some biscuit in her room. She had thought she must manage dinner of some sort tonight, but the sight of the scanty change which the girl pushed across the counter terrified her and drove away the hunger she had felt. She must save every penny of that which she could save, until she knew whether she dared brave that editor's wrath by infringing against well-known editorial rules made for the young and guileless. The maddening thing was that she had infringed many times in the past unscathed with this same editor, and he had advanced her the money she demanded without a murmur. But that was when she was Amy Crawford, and known. She doubted much that Amy Garland, unknown, would receive such treatment.

She walked slowly along the dingy street until she emerged, almost without knowing it, upon one of the lesser

avenues. Daylight was holding longer these latter March days. She had almost two hours of freedom yet from that close, hateful room; two hours before she would be afraid to traverse those close-built, narrow streets which led back to it. She could not understand the fear she had of streets at night, when she used to be so unconcerned in sunshine, moonshine or midnight blackness. But fear she had, and of a terrible sort.

She came to a small park at last, blocks distant from her lodging-place, and she sat down gratefully. Her strength was small since those days began of insufficient nourishment and crushing anxiety. Already she realized that she had come too far, and that she must gather strength here, enough to carry her back.

She sank down upon a small park bench, her head thrown back against a tree behind her. Her breath came quick and fast. Part of the time her eyes were closed. More than one woman, passing hurriedly, cast a frightened glance at the pallid-faced woman, whose pallor was made more shockingly white by the long, dark lashes resting against her thin cheeks. Now and then, at some step alarmingly close, or at some children's shouts and cries, she would open her eyes. Her apathy began at last to alarm her, and she sat upright.

A vagrant paper blew suddenly against her skirts, wet and muddy from its scurry along the sloppy walks in the teeth of the March wind. She bent to pick it up and was frightened at the sudden rush of blood to her head and the dizziness resulting. She opened it quickly and began to read, not because she cared if all Europe were engulfed in a cataclysmic earthquake sweeping rapidly toward the Americas, but because she must do something to crush down this rising sickness and giddiness.

She read the headlines apathetically. A woman had been killed on one of the Elevated roads, and the guards were held by the police. A young girl of alleged social prominence had eloped

with her father's latest hired footman, and pictorial journalism rejoiced thereat. A persistent and brave individual had won his case against a powerful corporation—a name in the first paragraph of the story caught her eye—it preceded by five lines the name of the victorious party to the suit—Evan Kilvert's name, the lawyer who had wrung victory from almost certain defeat.

Time and again during this year she had found Evan Kilvert's name figuring in different ways in the papers, and always, as now, it had leaped at her from the page, striking her eyes like red-hot needles. Always it had told success for him. She read through this story. Kilvert had won his case, and with it thirty thousand dollars.

She dropped the paper, and watched the wind take it up and send it flying down the walk. She said it over to herself—thirty thousand dollars! She tried to think how much money it really was. She sat, conjuring all sorts of foolish things, merely to get the magnitude of it before her. But she could not compass it. It suddenly seemed to her that twenty dollars out of it might be a little fortune, enough to content anyone for a time.

She watched the paper, still flying and tumbling down the street outside. She remembered, when it was out of reach, that today she had forgotten, for the first time in all this year, to turn first of all to that page which held the divorce lists, to scan it hurriedly, shrinkingly, with dread. Every day she expected to see it—Kilvert *vs.* Kilvert! Why not? He had every cause.

She shivered as the wind came keener from the east. She was cold here, but she did not see how she could possibly begin that long walk back. If only she might ride—but she could not spare the fare, simply could not. She thought of what she might write the next day to that Sunday editor—he had been star reporter once with her on her first paper. She was sorely afraid he might return the story instead of sending her the money for it. Well, suppose he

did! She might as well have the story now as the money in two weeks, when she was dead.

Her mind went back to the thought of Kilvert—her thoughts had not really left him since she had read that wind-blown sheet. She could see how he would come home tonight, with his step alert and firm, and a little more rapid than usual. His head would be high, and his nostrils would be slightly dilated. It would be his eyes, however, which would hold the story of his victory; those keen, steady, kindly eyes, that never swerved from any other eyes on earth, because there was no need, ever, with his clean hands and his clean heart. She used to tell herself she hated them, keen, steady, unswerving as they were. She wondered today if she ever had—if it had not been herself, her smallness of soul, that she had despised and loathed, the soul he had seen, in all its dwarfish littleness.

She did not often let her mind linger on those days of her brief married life. She had found such brooding not conducive to even semblance of peace. But this afternoon she had no will left to guard against the rush of memories. How they came crowding, the oddest things in all the world to remember; a look, a touch, a kiss, a simple word, lifted bodily from its context of day or night, or hour, and remembered when other important things had fled her curious brain forever! How good he was, how good! Simple and direct of thought and life as he was, how he had borne with her senseless analyses and her exasperating quibblings! He had promised her he would have infinite patience always.

She remembered that drive home from the play that night, "Magda," when he had repeated that promise of infinite patience. The whole scene flashed back on her, and first of all, the warmth of it all, the warm carriage, her fur-lined coat, his strong arms about her—the night of the day she had first heard that Vawtry had come back! How she had rebelled at the pressure of his arms about her, through the drive and through the night; and yet,

even then she had known them for safe haven! But she would not yield then to that inward whisper.

XVI

SHE never knew whether she fainted or merely dropped asleep. At all events, she came back to consciousness by herself. No passer-by had disturbed her. No policeman had come along to shake her roughly by the shoulder, because of her shabby garments, and tell her gruffly to "Get along!" She thought first, with thankfulness, of that last thing, that she had not been warned to move on. She had seen so much of that sort of thing during this last year. Her next thought was that it was all but dark.

She sprang to her feet, convulsed with terror. She was far from home, and already she was desperately afraid. This terrible fear of the dark which she used to mock at in others had grown upon her till it had become frantic and incapable of being reasoned with. Her limbs were shaking, and she was quivering through her whole body with the sudden start to life after her long unconsciousness.

She did not wait a moment. She began to run through the twilight, out of the little park. Her terror kept pace with her speed. She seemed to hear steps behind her, pursuing, although when she turned her head she could see no one. Her failing breath made her stop at last. She withdrew to the edge of the sidewalk, close to the flight of steps leading up to an old-fashioned house, whose parlors were brilliantly lighted, and through whose unshaded windows she could see numbers of people. She began to realize that she must not run; that she must walk, and that slowly, if she could hope to get home without aid.

She waited there, getting back her failing breath, and trying to reason herself out of her terror. Once again she debated getting dinner of some sort—perhaps it was food she needed to dissipate her light-headedness. But

she really felt no hunger, and she decided on making tea when she reached her room. It would be hot, and she might get to sleep immediately.

She rested for five minutes, perhaps, and then she started again, with studied slowness, down the street. She almost measured her steps, and she walked with grimly resolute deliberation, though her heart beat high with dread. She managed to control herself so, for perhaps three short blocks, at fearful nerve wear. Suddenly panic caught her again, and she began to run a few steps at a time, and then catch herself back into a walk. She felt tears coming to her eyes, and sobs beginning to choke her. She knew at last that she was sobbing, short, quick sobs, as she alternately ran and walked. A woman turned to look after her. Two men stopped and stared. Her wild terror grew till it held her and shook her.

Suddenly she felt herself rush headlong into some moving body, and then hurled back. Blinded by her tears, in rushing away from those two staring, commenting men, she had run directly into another man, whose approach she had not seen. She reeled backward, quivering with new terror. She heard him murmur some sort of an apology, and then she knew that he was holding her arm, steadying her. She was grateful for the support, yet wilder fear caught her heart. She broke fiercely into his words.

"Please let me go—please let me go!" she said. "Please let me——"

She heard her name spoken quickly, hoarsely, with great amazement. She put her hands to her eyes and pressed them hard against her eyeballs. Then she opened them and stared into Kilvert's face. Tears were rolling down her face, those selfsame tears which had blinded her and made her run into him—of all men in the great city, him! His hand was still on her arm, holding it closer.

"Please let me go!" she repeated in a stunned whisper.

"I hurt you," said Kilvert dully.

He was looking at her, her shabby

dress, her shabby hat, her shabby gloves, even her shoes. His eyes rested at last, as at first, on her face, white and drawn and haggard.

"I hurt you," he repeated, "and you are ill."

"No," she said weakly. "No—I am tired. I—walked too far. Please let me go. I—was only hurrying away from the dark."

The memory of that fear of hers came back to him, the fear which had grown steadily through their marriage. He let his hold on her arm relax, but he turned with her. "If you are far from your home, it will be quite dark before you reach it," he said briefly. "You must let me come with you, Amy."

"No!" she said. She stared at him, her eyes widening with horror. Thirty thousand dollars—coming in Evan Kilvert's person to the place he had just called her home! Ah, perhaps he thought—of course he thought—that she was still with Vawtry—he was offering to go with her to Vawtry's house, to save her from her fear of darkness. She staggered slightly, and she felt his arm steady her again.

"Don't try to go on for a moment," she heard his even voice saying, the voice that always quieted and calmed her. "Wait till you are better, Amy."

She pressed her hands against her eyes again. After her stern resolve not to allow Kilvert, under any circumstances, to find that terrible spot in the city where she existed, there remained just one thought in her fevered brain—she *must* tell him that, after all, she had not actually sinned against him, whatever her intent had been; that she had not gone away with Bertie Vawtry. She felt that if he were a woman he would know that she had not—would see that her poverty spoke her virtue, for her beauty was still great enough to bring her largess.

She felt herself stagger again, and she still kept her hands pressed against her eyes, to hide sickening sight of a tossing world. And more than all else she felt the steady pressure of his arm. It was about her now—she knew that he was holding her up bodily

against him, and she wondered how long she could stand; how long before she must sink through that encircling arm, and drop prone upon the pavement. She must find her voice quickly and send him away quickly—then nothing would matter, not the wet pavement for her shivering body to lie upon, nor the terrifying dark, nor even death.

"You must go away," she managed to say at last. She knew that her voice was pitched very high because her throat was contracting so horribly. "You must go away—I can get home—you must not go with me—even though it isn't his home—I ran away from him—I went away—I wouldn't stay—I want to tell you this—please let me go—"

"Don't!" said Kilvert sharply. His voice came beating on her ears as if from a great distance, and yet she knew he was close beside her. "I know all about it—I know you are not with him."

"I'm—glad!"

Her voice died. Another second and Kilvert was holding her dead weight against him. He looked up and down the street. There was no cab in sight, nothing in sight, save a small boy, hopping homeward on the stone flaggings, jumping cracks with earnestness and skill.

"Here," said Kilvert sternly. "Drop that. Run for a cab, to the nearest stand. Here's fifty cents, and a dollar to come, if you're back in five minutes."

He was back in two minutes, having hailed a passing hansom with shrill command. Kilvert lifted Amy's frail figure as if she were a child, and put her gently in. It was not until the cabman had turned down a side street toward the Avenue that it came to him with strange significance that he had not thought of giving any number save his own, save "Home."

XVII

SHE roused once during the drive, but Kilvert hushed her quietly, and

she lapsed almost immediately into inert unconsciousness. Once again he spoke to her before they reached the house, and she only moved slightly in answer.

But when they reached his door she was again unconscious. Kilvert lifted her out, and carried her up the steps, seeing for the first time the complications which would begin with James's opening of the door upon them. At least one of those complications, however, he might avert. He called to the cabman to bring him the carriage rugs, and he wrapped them, clumsily enough, about Amy's pathetic figure.

"Mrs. Kilvert is home again, James," he said briefly to that patently astounded man. "She is very ill. Call Dr. Jerrems and then come up for these rugs. No, not Maggie, yet."

That was enough—let them gossip now as they would. At least James's keen eyes had seen only the shrouded figure, and Maggie would not have seen even that. That much he could spare this woman, his wife.

In the dim light of the upper hall he cast the rugs from her, and carried her into his bedroom, and shut the door upon them. He laid her down upon the bed, and then, for the first time since she left his house a year ago, he took from his safe one of those three keys, and opened the door that led into her empty room. He turned on the lights, and saw, with a shiver, the gray film of dust that lay over everything. He opened drawer after drawer until he found at last what he was seeking, one of her beautiful, sheer nightgowns, ready threaded with its fresh ribbons, lying ready all these months which had become a year.

He went back to find her staring about her, dazed, uncertain. The wild gleam in her eyes died as she saw him, and he lifted her quietly.

"Try to sit up, Amy," he said gently. "That chair yonder will be better—here!"

He took her in his arms again, and carried her over to a low, deep chair. He had brought back with him from her room one of her loose robes,

sheltered all this time in that closed closet, and he wrapped her in it. Then he knelt down and began to unbutton her shoes.

"You must be undressed, you know," he said quietly. "Don't try to help yourself too much, only what you can manage easily."

Her hands seemed to have lost their cunning, and she could do but little. She watched him with wide eyes as he quickly loosened her clothes for her.

"There was something else I meant to tell you," she said suddenly. "The number of that place I lived—and I forget it. I can't think. If you go to *The Cry*, and ask the Sunday editor about Amy Garland, he can tell you where it is, but don't tell him it's really me, for I didn't let him know—I didn't let anybody know. The address doesn't matter except that—I think I am going to die—and there's a letter there, Evan. I wrote it to you the day after I went away, about some money I took with me—that five hundred dollars that wasn't mine. I ought to have sent it back, but I was a coward when I thought of that dreadful Potter's Field story I wrote once—you didn't like to have me do it—years ago. It came up to haunt me, but I put it all in the bank and never touched a cent—"

"Amy, Amy!" cried Kilvert. "Don't! Stop thinking of things to tell me. Stop thinking of this awful year!"

"I wanted you to know about the letter," she said dully. "Nobody else ought to read it, and if somebody doesn't take my things away from there—but wait till I'm dead, Evan, to read it. While I'm living there's no need."

Her voice slipped away from her, and for a moment Kilvert thought she had fainted again. He made quick work of his task, and in a few moments lifted her back into the bed. He drew up the coverings carefully about her thin body and wasted face. The tears almost came to his eyes when he saw her press her white cheek rapturously against the cool linen of

the pillow, and feel with pitiful eagerness the fineness of the nainsook gown, and the freshness of its ribbons. He tossed the shabby clothing he had taken from her into a closet, and then he unlocked the door, and rang for Maggie. She came instantly, with eagerness.

"There must be a nurse, Maggie," he said. He let his hand rest for a moment on her faithful arm. "Have James tell Dr. Jerrems that before he starts, if possible. Here is the hall-door key to Mrs. Kilvert's bedroom. She must be moved in there tomorrow."

"Yes, sir," said Maggie. She looked at Amy, once more sunk into semi-unconsciousness. "Lord love us, sir, but she is sick! I'm thinking it will be a bad fever."

"Get her room ready tonight," said Kilvert. "Have the dust and deadness out by morning."

"Yes, sir," said Maggie again, and went away, her head full of shrewd surmisings, but her lips closed to all the world.

The next day Amy was taken from Kilvert's room into her own, and for a month she lay there, too weak to move, held there in complete collapse. Kilvert usually went in to see her once a day. The sight of him might cause her worry, but he reasoned that his absence might cause her far more distress of mind, with her shrinking from his bounty what it was. For the first two weeks it was merely a word or two that they exchanged each day, for power of speech had almost left her. Not once, even when his daily visits lengthened slightly, and their brief conversations lengthened, too, did she refer by word of mouth to her presence there, and he was glad because of her silence. She was too pitifully weak—it hurt him beyond expression to think of what she had suffered of the rigors of poverty during that unspeakable year. He had found her address, had gone to that squalid place where she had lived—he could not endure the thought of it, nor of the pitiful belongings he found there.

He went in to see her one evening, after his return from downtown, prepared to follow a suggestion of her nurse's. He found her dressed and sitting up. For a week past now he had found her so when he came in at six o'clock.

"Don't you think you are well enough to come down to dinner to-night?" he asked her casually, after he had gone through their habitual form of greeting and mutual inquiry.

She glanced quickly up at him, and the blood rolled over her face. She had not been downstairs once since her return.

"I—don't think so," she stammered painfully. "I—am better off up here, for a long time yet; that is, as long as—" Her voice died.

Kilvert checked a sharp sigh. How terrible the situation between them was! It was veneered now, with the silences that illness imposes; but when health came back at last to her what sort of speech awaited them, and what outcome to their lives' tangle!

"Now, you know," he said deliberately, "I came home early tonight, planning for this, because the nurse telephoned me that you had been up all day. It may tire you a bit, but it will be a sort of healthful tire. I shall come back, at all events, before I go down."

He did come back in half an hour and took her downstairs with him. He soon perceived that James's dignified presence irritated her, and he dismissed him for the rest of the dinner. The hour went well, and he was glad for her that monotony of her day was slightly broken, and that her first venture downstairs was an accomplished fact.

"Are you feeling well enough for another hour away from your room?" he asked her as they paused near the library door. "Or would you rather go up now?"

She flushed again and looked away from him. "I'd better go up," she said. Yet she lingered. She spoke at last, her eyes upon her nervous fingers.

"Gerry," she stammered, "or any of them—anybody—you haven't told anybody that I am——?"

"Only Mrs. Taft," said Kilvert gently. "And her only because I promised her long ago that I would. No one else. And she will not come until you send for her."

"Don't send for her," begged Amy shrinkingly. "Nor tell anyone, because——"

She stopped again and stared blankly in front of her. Then she moved toward the stairs.

"Don't come up with me," she said huskily. "No, I can go up by myself—Evan, you will kill me."

Kilvert fell back. He watched her slender figure climb slowly, and with many pauses, the flight of stairs. He watched her sink, exhausted, on the top step, but he made no sign. When her door closed on her at last he went into the library and stood staring moodily from its windows upon the side street.

"Damnation!" he breathed at last. "If I could but shoot him down like the cur he is! But he walks the earth and the woman has paid again!"

XVIII

By another fortnight's end Amy was practically well. She was still weak, still very nervous, still subject to varying moods. But her color was beginning to come back and her figure began to show some of its old, alluring roundness. Since that first dinner downstairs she had been down almost every evening. She had waited at first for Kilvert to suggest it, and at last, on the fourth night, he held her back a moment at the foot of the stairs before she began her slow ascent, which she made resolutely alone.

"You don't mind coming down to dinner?" he asked her directly.

She glanced at him fleetingly. "No," she said briefly.

"Then please come every night," Kilvert said. "It is doing you good to get away from that room, and a

solitary dinner would seem lonely indeed to me now."

Again she stared blankly away from him. "If you want me," she said at last.

"Indeed I do," Kilvert replied earnestly. "Please go up slowly. Good night."

But she steadily refused his invariable request that she spend part of the evening downstairs.

One evening—it was quite two full months since he had brought her home—he came home to find her already downstairs. For the first time she was dressed in something other than tea-gowns and invalid *négligées*. She wore a thin dress of her favorite pink, which deepened the pale bloom on her cheeks and gave lustre to her eyes. She looked more her old self than she had looked since her illness. She came to meet him from the music-room, where she had been playing. A faint smile was on her lips, yet her eyes were grave.

"Yes," she said, in reply to his cheerful query. "I am really well once more."

Kilvert glanced back at her as he went upstairs to dress. Her tone rang in his ears while he busied himself with his toilet. He sighed once, sharply. The time for silences was passing quickly, and God alone knew what open speech would bring forth.

That dinner was different from any of their others since she had come back. Constraint hung heavy over it. Kilvert almost omitted the familiar "Do come in tonight" as they reached the library door. When she entered with him, for the first time since her return, his pulse gave one mad leap and stopped. The hour had struck for them then, as he had feared.

He took out his after-dinner cigarettes, and offered them to her. She thrust them away with one thin hand. "I haven't smoked them for a year," she said swiftly. "I was too poor. Sometimes I thought I should go mad for lack of them. I shall never touch one again."

She stood before him, watching him

curiously as he shut the box and laid it aside.

"I liked to think that was a part of the penance," she added curtly. "I think that, of all things, it was the very hardest. I shall never sneer at a drunkard's weak will again."

Silence settled over the room. Kilvert leaned moodily against the fireplace, playing with a small bronze figure. Amy's hand caught at the tall back of a chair.

"You will let me talk to you tonight," she said, "because I cannot stay here much longer."

"All this house is yours," said Kilvert hoarsely.

She raised one blue-veined hand. "That is all too good of you," she said. "But it is impossible. I do not know that you will understand me at all, but it was only when I lost my self-respect that I found it. I can't lose it again—merely for the good of your bounty—kind as you are to offer it, and freely as you offer it."

"At least," said Kilvert, "spare us both this a while longer. You are not strong enough."

"I should have to go from this house tonight if I did not speak," said Amy proudly. "You must let me speak tonight. Don't stop me—don't hush me—let me speak."

She looked sorrowfully at him as he turned away. Yet it was easier than when he faced her.

"I have thought and thought and thought over some speech about—that man," she said, with a catch in her throat. "It seems too horrible to speak his name in this, your house, but I never told you anything about him, even when I went away, and there can be no speech between us if I do not speak his name, because he is the head and front of my offending."

Kilvert wheeled about and came over to her. "Will it help you any," he asked her, his voice dangerously low, "if I tell you that I was Eugenia Vawtry's lawyer, and handled all her letters relating to her intended suit for divorce—that I have those letters now, describing with all the pettiness of a

jealous, spiteful woman, every detail of the life, person and moral conduct of the man she married—and I never knew, Amy, until the night I came home to find you gone, that the man was even known to you, much less loved by you.”

Amy dropped like a shot thing into the chair against which she had been leaning. Her eyes stared at him from her white face. “I don’t believe you!” she said, with eloquent faith. “Then you held in your hand at the time the bit of knowledge that would have stopped our marriage as truly as there is a heaven above us. I was mad with love of him—mad! I had struggled for a year or more, after he threw me over to marry that woman—I was sick of torment—I needed money desperately—and I let you marry me—loving that other man, that man!”

“I had hoped there was something of all this which you might spare yourself and me,” said Kilvert. “I know all of this, most of it, all the essential part.”

“It is all essential,” said Amy. “Even the two invitations that came the morning after I met you again, which cried out for new clothes when I had not a penny to spend for them—and my dressmaker’s dun, killing all hope of credit there—and Elinor Darling’s raise to forty dollars a week, when I had not made so much all that month. And so, when you came that afternoon, I went down and said I would marry you—and the first thing I did after you left was to fly to Madame Marabout’s and order the two dresses—on prospective credit, Evan, do you understand? If she didn’t give me those she was going to have trouble with her overdue bill, and she would never have the chance of Mrs. Kilvert’s custom. I paid for those two dresses later, out of your pocket—that was what I married you for!”

“I know practically all this,” said Kilvert, though his lips had whitened.

He was standing on the opposite side of the table from her, looking at her steadily. Her head went down suddenly upon her arms, outspread along the oaken table. The light from the

shaded lamp fell full upon her burnished hair, her beautiful neck and lovely shoulders.

“And then,” she murmured painfully, “I began to find out what hell marriage can be for two people when one loves and the other does not. I believed many times that I hated you, but never in all the world so much as I hated and loathed myself.”

“I know all this,” said Kilvert patiently. “Amy, you will be back where you were—”

She shook off his detaining hand, stretched out to her across the table. “If I were to talk all night I should never make you understand how everything you did and did not do enraged me. I was angry when you compelled me, and angry when you gave me my head. I was angry at your patience and angry at your wrath.”

“I know all this,” said Kilvert.

“And finally”—her voice dropped to a whisper—“I met—him. Everything I wrote you in that last note was true. That night when I was away till two—I had no idea of meeting him there—I should never have dared go to that little café if I had known—only the week before Gerry had told me he was back, and even then neither she nor I knew that the woman he had married was dead. When I looked up and saw him standing across from me—Evan, I tried to be angry—and I could not be. I saw so well why he had married her, and how—all his reasons were no worse than mine for marrying you. We both wanted money. How could I blame him, then? He found me there, in our old corner—and he had read ‘The Good Man,’ and what defense had I against him, when I had battered all of them down myself?”

“Amy!” said Kilvert pleadingly.

“And so, at last, we decided to go away together—I was sick for happiness. I believed he held it for me.” Her voice had dropped till Kilvert could scarcely hear it. “I was to meet him at the station at two o’clock—I was in a panic of fear lest you should come home that day of all days and make me miss my appointment—I hur-

ried away early so that I got there at half-past one. There were queer people there—women with babies, one woman with two. I couldn't see a woman anywhere without one. I was glad, glad that—because I could not have gone away and left it—and I was glad to go. And then I got to thinking—and thinking—and thinking, and finally I looked up, Evan, and it was ten minutes past the hour, and the train was gone, and he had not come. I shut my eyes for three minutes, and I saw straight into souls—and I got up and went away in terror for fear he should be coming, and I sent him a note throwing him over, just as I had written you a note that morning casting you aside, and whether he ever came, or weakened and did not come—I never knew.”

She raised her head at last, which had been bowed so low, and looked with frightened eyes into Kilvert's face. He was leaning across the table, gripping her shoulder fiercely.

“What do you mean?” he said savagely. “Is it possible you are saying you did not go away with him, and live with him for two months——?”

He watched her eyes widen in fear and amazement.

“I told you—I told you,” she muttered. “That night you found me—that I ran away from him—that I didn't stay—Evan!”

Her voice rang through the quiet room. She threw off his hand and rose to her feet.

“Do you mean to tell me,” she said, “that you brought me back here, to the home I left, honestly believing that I had gone away with him, even for a brief space, and gave me food and shelter and care? Evan, Evan!”

She read his answer in his face, and she turned away from him, toward the wall, and laid her face against her up-flung arms.

“God help me!” said Kilvert huskily. “What else could I believe! I knew indeed that you had left him after two months. I thought that was what you were trying to tell me.”

She turned. “You knew I had left

him after two months!” she repeated dazedly.

But it was Kilvert now who turned away. He felt the glad, murderous light leap into his eyes. Not until he found himself repeating to Amy Germaine Taft's well-meant words of comfort did the whole devilish revenge of the man neither of them cared to name lie open before him. The cad had lied, deliberately lied to Amy's friend and to God knew who else. At last he, Kilvert, had his handle for action, and might he be damned forever if he did not make masterly use of it!

He turned back at last to Amy, who was standing close against the crimson wall.

“We must not talk any more tonight, Amy,” he said swiftly. “You are worn to death. Let the rest go till tomorrow. Yes, we will finish it all up then. Let it all rest tonight!”

She moved toward him as he began to speak, and then she paused, repulsed and wounded through and through. Kilvert had turned away from her again. He was making quick calculation of time and opportunity. Tonight or tomorrow—should he wait till tomorrow! Tonight, tonight, tonight—every atom in his blood danced and quivered. He felt a hand fall lightly on his arm. Amy was standing close beside him.

“You shall not let this thing go till tomorrow,” she said proudly. “In intent I sinned against you, and in the eyes of one man at least trailed your name and honor in the dust. But not in deed, Evan, not in deed. There is proof which even you must grant—that woman I took lodgings of that afternoon, even the man who brought my trunk that night——”

He faced her in keenest self-reproach. “How brutal you must think me!” he said. “But I had not even thought of doubt. You could not lie to me now, ever! You could never have lied to me on this sort of thing. Never give me a shred of proof—I have your word.”

He took her hands and drew her to the door. “Try to get some rest,” he said simply. “Let everything else go till tomorrow.”

He took her further, even to the door of her room. When he left her he went directly to his own. He glanced at his watch. It told ten o'clock. There was ample time. He chose to put on riding things. When he went downstairs, he went first to the gunroom, and took down a whip hanging there, which he knew to be tried and keen and true. Then he looked up the apartment address of one Bertie Vawtry, and then—he let himself softly out of the house.

XIX

SHE stood, weak and shaking, on the spot where Kilvert had left her. She listened to him as he moved quietly about his room, listened till she heard the soft closing of the outer door behind him. He was going—where? The question pulsed and throbbed through her, a steady undercurrent to all her other thoughts.

When she knew that he had really left the house she broke utterly. She covered her face with her hands and walked wildly about her room, shaken with sobs, swayed and torn by her tempest of shame and sorrow and everlasting regret. What sort of god was this man, her husband, who had taken her back to his home, had fed her, clothed her, cared for her, ministered to her, believing her all the time to have been that other man's mistress, cast off or self-discarded—it did not alter the fact as he believed it. And, believing it, he had taken her back, had given her every courtesy, every consideration—it was not human. Never before could she have been convinced that such a man ever lived to bear himself as Kilvert had done. With her old, fatal impulses to self-analysis she tried to think it out, how he could have done the thing, why he should have done it. She stopped herself in the midst of her questionings. Oh, never to question again—if only she might let the subtler issues go forever! For her ceaseless meddlings with motives had brought her at last to this, that she

could not see a deed that was all divine without trying to put some hideously human motive into it.

She caught sight of her face in a mirror, flushed and swollen with her weeping, and she went over and turned off all the lights till the room was dark, save for the soft moonlight streaming through her windows. Her sobbings had ceased, but she was still breathing in quick, shuddering gasps.

In the dark she took off her thin dinner-dress and coiled her hair into a looser knot. She felt about till she found a dressing-gown, long and warm and soft, and she wrapped herself in it with nervous shivers. Then she went over to a window and sat down in a low chair and laid her hot cheek against the cooling window-pane.

He had believed her! She knew that. He must have seen into her soul as directly as she had once, that dreadful day, seen into his. And he had seen Truth there at last. She knew he did not doubt her, that he would never seek out the proof of her story. She wondered if she could ever believe any man or woman so directly, in the face of such damning evidence, and she knew she could not, that doubts would come in spite of her. To simply believe—that, too, was divine, divine as his taking of her back in the face of his belief in her sin.

And all the while that throbbing question, which she was afraid to stop to answer, pulsed through her—where had he gone—for what?

She had gone down to him tonight, resolved to leave his house very shortly. She knew that he pitied her infinitely, but she could not stay merely because he pitied her. She had never tried to make herself believe that he could have a particle of love left for her. His name—he had told her that she must guard that, and she had thrown it back in his teeth, soiled and draggled. He could never forgive that thing, she had honestly believed.

But this blinding discovery of tonight had cast her into a sea of doubts. If he had indeed taken her back as he had, what would this double discovery

mean for him, for her, for them both. The thought of love for him had hardly entered into her thoughts about him ever; not even in these last two months. He had been Haven, Refuge, Sanctuary, and she had been afraid to cling too close because of her pitiful need thereof. But with this crowning knowledge of him, this royal overlooking and all but forgetting, with the revelation of that, the floodgates were down and she could not put them back.

At last she broke again, not into sobs and tears, but into soft murmurings, incoherent words. Her whole body trembled and quivered.

"It is worship," she whispered over and over. "Neither love nor adoration, but worship. There is nothing I would not do for him, nothing. And I cannot offer it, and he may not ask anything of me ever again. There is nothing I would not do for him, nothing. I would give him myself as I could never give myself to any other man. I would give him——"

Her throat contracted; a purple wave of quickening blood poured slowly over her, from her feet to her head. She buried her quivering face in her arms.

"There is nothing under heaven that I would not give him, if he would but take it of me," she said at last, and then she lay quiet and still.

Yet her pulses beat and throbbed with the driving of that ceaseless questioning—where had he gone? And her fear grew as the minutes passed, and then the hours, and he did not come.

It was one o'clock when Kilvert came back. As he entered he flung a sickeningly limp bundle of strings and leather into a corner of the hall. He looked serene and satisfied and happy. He went softly upstairs, past Amy's darkened room and into his own. He turned on the lights, repressing with difficulty a cheerful whistle of a cheerful little air.

And then he looked up, amazed. The dividing door between their rooms had swung wide, and Amy stood in the doorway.

"I had to come," she said quickly.

"Forgive me, I had to know you are safe. You must tell me what you have done—I have been imagining horrible things!"

Kilvert went over to her, and drew her into the room.

"For weeks after you left me," he said, "I tried to make it right to kill that cur, at some convenient season, but I could not make the responsibility enough his—forgive me, forgive me, Amy—I am telling you the truth you asked for. I told you tonight that I knew you had not been with him after two months—he himself told Germaine Taft that thing for his devilish revenge, and she came to tell me that, for my soul's good."

He put his arms about her as she swayed in horror. "Be still," he said as she began to speak. "I know he is a liar and a devil. That was why I cut all things short tonight—to make sure of catching him at home. I had to wait an hour for him. I intended that he should be out of town tonight, but—I forgot. He is not able to leave tonight, but he will go tomorrow, Amy, and he will never return. I have the glad power to make him an exile from this place to the day of my death. He will not come back."

She grew more and more unyielding within his arms. She pulled herself away at last. Kilvert glanced at her, almost distrustfully, and spoke sharply.

"What is it?" he asked. "Are you sorry I marred that devilish beauty of his, and made bloody that lying mouth? Tell me if you are. At least, I have done it."

She shrank at his tone. "I wish you had killed him," she said briefly. "That is how much I care for the little you have done."

Kilvert laughed suddenly. "It is not so little," he said. "Be at rest there."

She was drawing away from him, step by step, her eyes anywhere but on him. Kilvert stepped quickly over to her.

"I said we would let the rest go till tomorrow," he said. "But I am afraid to let you go without saying it all tonight. I am afraid of your analyses

and your subtleties and your woman's logic. I know all that you will say that, even though you did not go, you willed to go. But you said something else tonight that discounts all that, the truest thing that you will ever say—you lost your self-respect to find it. You could not do the things ever again that you have confessed to tonight. The same motives could never sway you. You would not send even for that tiny balance at your bank—not touch that pitiful sum you took away."

"But I almost spent it," she broke in fiercely. "Almost—I went there one day, to take some of it out—I was hungry," she whispered.

She felt a hot tear splash on her cheek and she looked up in wonder into Kilverts working face. He held her close.

"You know I love you," he said. His voice was breaking as she had never dreamed it could break and quiver. "You know I love you, love you beyond shadow of doubting you?"

"Yes," she said. She looked into his eyes still. She could not look away.

"It is worship I give you at last," she told him. "Neither love nor adoration, but worship." She put her arms about his neck, and hid her face from him.

"There is nothing under heaven that I will not do for you," she murmured.



THE BOHEMIAN

ONCE upon a time there lived an artist. He had lofty ideals in his brain and yellow stains on his finger-nails. Besides, he lived on his relations. He went through three universities, and thence post-graduated to Paris, whither he traveled to absorb some atmosphere.

He returned a finished artist. He must have been good, for, when he entered a museum, he could tell at a glance where Raphael fell down, how bad Velasquez really was, where Murillo was weak, and why Rubens turned out so much poor stuff. It was he who discovered that the Brabizon School—he called it that himself—is not what it is said to be, and that Sir Joshua Reynolds—he hailed him as Josh—was poor on brushwork.

Meanwhile he lived in a hall-room and wore flowing neckties. His shoes were of varying patterns and his clothes were stylish—in 1863. He slept most of the day and walked around all night. When one inquired wherefore, he announced proudly, "I am a bohemian."

He ate sausages cooked over a candle in a plug hat, and slept under the carpet near the floor. He enounced that all marriage contracts should contain a two weeks' clause, and that all property should be divided among everybody. He borrowed three dollars from anybody who would lend it to him; failing three, he borrowed two, or even—from a stingy friend—ten cents. He paid no one and never incurred a laundry bill. When one would inquire wherefore, he announced proudly, "I am a bohemian."

One day the artist "arrived."

An editor saw promise in his work and gave him a three years' contract at sixty dollars per week.

The next month he married and settled down. Before his contract expired he had two children, a savings-bank account, and three life-insurance policies. He goes to bed each night at nine, and his clothes are of the latest fashion. His meals are served to the minute and he stickles abjectly for the influence of the Home.

MORAL: Bohemianism is only an excuse.

S. F. STERN.