Friendship Village

by Zona Gale

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FRIENDSHIP VILLAGE

BY ZONA GALE

AUTHOR OF "THE LOVES OF PELLEAS AND ETTARRE"

NEW YORK THE MACMILLAN COMPANY 1908

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To EDITH, HARRIET, AND MUSA AND THE TWO FOR WHOM IT COMES TOO LATE GEORGIA AND HELEN THIS BOOK IS LOVINGLY INSCRIBED

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Friendship Village is not known to me, nor are any of its people, save in the comradeship which I offer here. But I commend for occupancy a sweeter place. For us here the long Caledonia hills, the four rhythmic spans of the bridge, the nearer river, the island where the first birds build—these teach our windows the quiet and the opportunity of the "home town," among the "home people." To those who have such a bond to cherish I commend the little real home towns, their kindly, brooding companionship, their doors to an efficiency as intimate as that of fairy fingers. If there were shrines to these things, we would seek them. The urgency is to recognize shrines.

Portage, Wisconsin,

September, 1908.

Certain of the following chapters have appeared in The Outlook, The Broadway Magazine, The Delineator, Everybody's, and Harper's Monthly Magazine. Thanks are due to the editors for their courteous permission to reprint these chapters.

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Friendship Village

I

THE SIDE DOOR

It is as if Friendship Village were to say:—

"There is no help for it. A telephone line, antique oak chairs, kitchen cabinets, a new doctor, and the like are upon us. But we shall be mediæval directly—we and our improvements. Really, we are so now, if you know how to look."

And are we not so? We are one long street, rambling from sun to sun, inheriting traits of the parent country roads which we unite. And we are cross streets, members of the same family, properly imitative, proving our ancestorship in a primeval genius for trees, or bursting out in inexplicable weaknesses of Court-House, Engine-House, Town Hall, and Telephone Office. Ultimately our stock dwindles out in a slaughter-yard and a few detached houses of milkmen. The cemetery is delicately put behind us, under a hill. There is nothing mediæval in all this, one would say. But then see how we wear our rue:—

When one of us telephones, she will scrupulously ask for the number, not the name, for it says so at the top of every page. "Give me one-one," she will put it, with an

impersonality as fine as if she were calling for four figures. And Central will answer:—

"Well, I just saw Mis' Holcomb go 'crost the street. I'll call you, if you want, when she comes back."

Or, "I don't think you better ring the Helmans' just now. They were awake 'most all night with one o' Mis' Helman's attacks."

Or, "Doctor June's invited to Mis' Sykes's for tea. Shall I give him to you there?"

The telephone is modern enough. But in our use of it is there not a flavour as of an Elder Time, to be caught by Them of Many Years from Now? And already we may catch this flavour, as our Britain great-great-lady grandmothers, and more, may have been conscious of the old fashion of sitting in bowers. If only they were conscious like that! To be sure of it would be to touch their hands in the margins of the ballad books.

Or we telephone to the Livery Barn and Boarding Stable for the little blacks, celebrated for their self-control in encounters with the Proudfits' motor-car. The stable-boy answers that the little blacks are at "the funeral." And after he has gone off to ask his employer what is in then, the employer, who in his unofficial moments is our neighbour, our church choir bass, our landlord even, comes and tells us that, after all, we may have the little blacks, and he himself brings them round at once,—the same little blacks that we meant all along. And when, quite naturally, we wonder at the boy's version, we learn: "Oh, why, the blacks was standin' just acrost the street, waitin' at the church door, hitched to the hearse. I took 'em out an' put in the bays. I says to myself: 'The corp won't care.'" Someway the Proudfits' car and the stable telephone must themselves have slipped from modernity to old fashion before that incident shall quite come into its own.

So it is with certain of our domestic ways. For example, Mis' Postmaster Sykes—in Friendship Village every woman assumes for given name the employment of her

husband—has some fine modern china and much solid silver in extremely good taste, so much, indeed, that she is wont to confess to having cleaned forty, or sixty, or seventy-five pieces—"seventy-five pieces of solid silver have I cleaned this morning. You can say what you want to, nice things are a rill care." Yet—surely this is the proper conjunction—Mis' Sykes is currently reported to rise in the night preceding the days of her house cleaning, and to take her carpets out in the back yard, and there softly to sweep and sweep them so that, at their official cleaning next day, the neighbours may witness how little dirt is whipped out on the line. Ought she not to have old-fashioned silver and egg-shell china and drop-leaf mahogany to fit the practice? Instead of daisy and wild-rose patterns in "solid," and art curtains, and mission chairs, and a white-enamelled refrigerator, and a gas range.

We have the latest funeral equipment,—black broadcloth-covered supports, a coffin carriage for up-and-down the aisles, natural palms to order, and the pulleys to "let them down slow"; and yet our individual funeral capacity has been such that we can tell what every woman who has died in Friendship for years has "done without": Mis' Grocer Stew, her of all folks, had done without new-style flat-irons; Mis' Worth had used the bread pan to wash dishes in; Mis' Jeweller Sprague—the first Mis' Sprague—had had only six bread and butter knives, her that could get wholesale too.... And we have little maid-servants who answer our bells in caps and trays, so to say; but this savour of jestership is authentic, for any one of them is likely to do as of late did Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss's maid,—answer, at dinner-with-guests, that there were no more mashed potatoes, "or else, there won't be any left to warm up for your breakfasts." ... And though we have our daily newspaper, receiving Associated Press service, yet, as Mis' Amanda Toplady observed, it is "only very lately that they have mentioned in the Daily the birth of a child, or anything that had anything of a tang to it."

We put new wine in old bottles, but also we use new bottles to hold our old wine. For, consider the name of our main street: is this Main or Clark or Cook or Grand

Street, according to the register of the main streets of towns? Instead, for its half-mile of village life, the Plank Road, macadamized and arc-lighted, is called Daphne Street. Daphne Street! I love to wonder why. Did our dear Doctor June's father name it when he set the five hundred elms and oaks which glorify us? Or did Daphne herself take this way on the day of her flight, so that when they came to draught the town, they recognized that it was Daphne Street, and so were spared the trouble of naming it? Or did the Future anonymously toss us back the suggestion, thrifty of some day of her own when she might remember us and say, "Daphne Street!" Already some of us smile with a secret nod at something when we direct a stranger, "You will find the Telegraph and Cable Office two blocks down, on Daphne Street." "The Commercial Travellers' House, the Abigail Arnold Home Bakery, the Post-office and Armoury are in the same block on Daphne Street." Or, "The Electric Light Office is at the corner of Dunn and Daphne." It is not wonderful that Daphne herself, foreseeing these things, did not stay, but lifted her laurels somewhat nearer Tempe,—although there are those of us who like to fancy that she is here all the time in our Daphne-street magic: the fire bell, the tulip beds, and the twilight bonfires. For how else, in all reason, has the name persisted?

Of late a new doctor has appeared—one may say, has abounded: a surgeon who, such is his zeal, will almost perform an operation over the telephone and, we have come somewhat cynically to believe, would prefer doing so to not operating at all. As Calliope Marsh puts it:—

"He is great on operations, that little doctor. Let him go into any house, an' some o' the family, seems though, has to be operated on, usually inside o' twelve hours. It'll get so that as soon as he strikes the front porch, they'll commence sterilizin' water. I donno but some'll go an' put on the tea-kettle if they even see him drive past."

Why within twelve hours, we wonder when we hear the edict? Why never fourteen hours, or six? How does it happen that no matter at what stage of the malady the

new doctor is called, the patient always has to be operated on within twelve hours? Is it that everybody has a bunch and goes about not knowing it until he appears? Or is he a kind of basanite for bunches, and do they come out on us at the sight of him? There are those of us who almost hesitate to take his hand, fearing that he will fix us with his eye, point somewhere about, and tell us, "Within twelve hours, if you want your life your own." But in spite of his skill and his modernity, in our midst there persist those who, in a scientific night, would die rather than risk our advantages.

Thus the New shoulders the Old, and our transition is still swift enough to be a spectacle, as was its earlier phase which gave over our Middle West to cabins and plough horses, with a tendency away from wigwams and bob-whites. And in this local warfare between Old and New a chief figure is Calliope Marsh—who just said that about the new doctor. She is a little rosy wrinkled creature officially—though no other than officially—pertaining to sixty years; mender of lace, seller of extracts, and music teacher, but of the three she thinks of the last as her true vocation. ("I come honestly by that," she says. "You know my father before me was rill musical. I was babtized Calliope because a circus with one come through the town the day't I was born.") And with her, too, the grafting of to-morrow upon yesterday is unconscious; or only momentarily conscious, as when she phrased it:—

"Land, land, I like New as well as anybody. But I want it should be put in the Old kind o' gentle, like an i-dee in your mind, an' not sudden, like a bullet in your brain."

In her acceptance of innovations Calliope symbolizes the fine Friendship tendency to scientific procedure, to the penetration of the unknown through the known, the explication of mystery by natural law. And when to the bright-figured paper and pictures of her little sitting room she had added a print of the Mona Lisa, she observed:—

"She sort o' lifts me up, like somethin' I've thought of, myself. But I don't see any sense in raisin' a question about what her smile means. I told the agent so.

'Whenever I set for my photograph,' I says to him, 'I always have that same silly smile on my face.'"

With us all the Friendship idea prevails: we accept what Progress sends, but we regard it in our own fashion. Our improvements, like our entertainments, our funerals, our holidays, and our very loves, are but Friendship Village exponents of the modern spirit. Perhaps, in a tenderer significance than she meant, Calliope characterized us when she said:—

"This town is more like a back door than a front—or, givin' it full credit, anyhow, it's no more'n a side door, with no vines."

For indeed, we are a kind of middle door to experience, minus the fuss of official arriving and, too, without the old odours of the kitchen savoury beds; but having, instead, a serene side-door existence, partaking of both electric bells and of neighbours with shawls pinned over their heads.

Only at one point Calliope was wrong. There are vines, with tendrils and flowers and many birds.

II

THE DÉBUT

Mrs. Ricker, "washens, scrubben, work by the day or Our," as the sign of her own lettering announced, had come into a little fortune by the death of her first husband, Al Kitton, early divorced and late repentant. Just before my arrival in Friendship she had bought a respectable frame house in the heart of the village,—for a village will have a heart instead of having a boulevard,—and with her daughter Emerel she had set up a modest establishment with Ingrain carpets and parlour pieces, and a bit of grass in front. Thus Emerel Kitton—we, in our simple, penultimate way, called it Kitten—became a kind of heiress. She had been christened Emma Ella, but her

mother, of her love of order, had tidied the name to Emerel, and Friendship had adopted the form, perhaps as having about it something pleasing and jewel-like. Though Emerel was in the thirties at the time of her inheritance, she was still pretty, shy, conformable; and yet there was no disguising that she was nearly a spinster when, as soon as the white house was settled, Mrs. Ricker issued invitations to her daughter's coming-out party.

You aRe Invite to A Comen Out Recep Next wenesday Night at eigt At Her Home Emma Ella Kitton Mrs. Ricker and Kitton Pa

the invitations said, and the "Pa" was divined to imply "Please answer."

"It's Kitton's money an' it's his daughter. I hed to hev him in it somehow," Mrs. Ricker explained her double signature. "You see," she added, "up till now I ain't never been situate' so's Emerel could come out. I've always wanted to give her things, too, but 't seems like when I've tried, everything's shook its fist at me. It ain't too late. Emerel looks just like she did fifteen years ago, don't she?"

It was at once observed that if Emerel shared her mother's enthusiasm for the project, she did not betray it. But then no one knew much about Emerel save that she was engaged, and had been so for some years, to big Abe Daniel, the Methodist tenor, a circumstance wholly unconsidered in the scheme of her début.

Quite simply and with happy pride, Mrs. Ricker and Kitton issued her invitations to every one in the village who had ever employed her. And the village was divided against itself.

"How can we?" Mis' Postmaster Sykes demanded, "I ask you. There's things to omit an' there's things to observe. We should be The Laughing Stock."

"The Laughing Stock," variously echoed her followers.

On the other hand:—

"Land, o' course we'll all go," Mis' Amanda Toplady comfortably settled it, "an' take

Emerel a deboo present, civilized. The dear child."

And to that many of us gladly assented, Timothy, big Amanda's little husband, going so far as to add:

"I do vum, the Sykeses feels the post-office like it was that much oats."

A day later Timothy's opinion seemed, he thought, to be verified. Mis' Postmaster Sykes issued "written invites to an evening party, hot supper and like that," as Friendship communicated it, to be given on the very night of Emerel's début.

Friendship was shaken. Never in the history of the village had two social affairs been set for the same hour. Indeed, more than one hostess had postponed an impending tea-party or thimble party or "afternoon coffee" or "five o'clock supper" on hearing that another was planned for the same day. And now, when there were those of us anxious to "do something nice" for hard-working little Mrs. Ricker, the Sykeses had deliberately sought the forbidden ground. And Society dare not deny Mis' Sykes, for besides "being who she was" ("She's the leader in Friendship if they is a leader," we said, emphatically implying that there was none), she kept two maids,—little young thing and a rill hired girl,—entertained "above the most," put out her sewing and wore, we kept in the back of our minds, a bar pin, solid, with "four solitaires" in it. And, "Oh, you know," Calliope Marsh admitted to me later, "Mis' Sykes is rilly a great society woman. They isn't anybody's funeral that she don't get to ride to the cemet'ry."

Mrs. Ricker and Kitton accepted the situation with fine philosophy.

"Of course," she said, "the whole town can dance to the Sykeses' fiddlin' if they want. But it's a pretty pass if they do let anybody step in before me that's washed for 'em an' cleaned their houses years on end."

My own course was pleasantly simple. Mrs. Ricker and Kitton had included me on her list, accredited, no doubt, because a few weeks earlier she had helped me to settle my belongings in Oldmoxon house, and since then had twice swept for me,

and was to come in a day or two to do so again. As I had instantly accepted her invitation, I had no choice when Mis' Sykes's "written invite" came, even though when it arrived Mis' Sykes herself was calling on me.

"Well said," she observed, when she saw a neighbour's little girl, her temporary servitor, coming up my walk with the invitations in a paper bag to be kept clean, "I meant to get my call made on you before your invite got here. I hope you'll overlook taking us both together. I've meant to call on you before, but I declare it looked like a mountain to me to get started out. Don't you find your calls a rill chore?"

But Mis' Sykes's visit was, she confessed, "Errand as well as Call."

"The Friendship Married Ladies' Cemetery Improvement Sodality," she told me, as she rose to go, "is to our wits' end to get up a new entertainment. We want to give something, and we want it should be rill new and spicey, but of course it has to be pretty quiet, owing to the Cause—the Dead, so. It bars us from home-talent evenings or festivals or like that. And the minute I saw the inside o' your house it come to me: of course you know your house is differ'nt from Friendship. If I'd been shot out of a gun into it, I wouldn't 'a' sensed I was in Friendship at all. You've got nice things, all carved an' hard to dust. The Oldmoxons use' to do a lot o' entertainin', an' everybody remembers it, an' the house has been shut quite some time. Well, now, you've been ask' to join the Sodality. An' if you was to announce an Evening Benefit for it, here in your home, the whole town'd come out to it hot-foot. We're owin' Zittelhof on Eph Cadoza's coffin yet, an' I shouldn't wonder an' that one evening would pay him all off and, same time, get you rill well acquainted. Don't you think it's a nice i-dea?"

As I had come to Friendship chiefly to get away from everywhere, I thought that I had never heard such a bad plan. But inasmuch as I was obliged to refuse outright one invitation of my visitor's, about the other I weakly temporized and promised to let her know. And she went away, deploring my hasty acceptance of Mrs. Ricker and Kitton, although, "How could you tell?" she strove to excuse me. "A person

coming to a strange town so, of course they accept all their invitations good faith. And then her signing her name that way might mislead you. It gives a rill sensation of a hyphen. But still, the spelling—after all you'd ought—"

She looked at me with tardy suspicion.

"Some geniuses can't spell very well, you know," I defended my discrimination.

"That's so," she admitted brightly; "I see you're literary."

The next morning the other principal, Mrs. Ricker and Kitton, arrived to keep her engagement with me. She was a little woman, suggesting wire, which gave and sprang when she moved, and paper, which crackled when she laughed. Her speech was all independence, confidence, self-possession; but in her silences I have seldom seen so wistful a face as hers.

In response to my question:—

"Oh," Mrs. Ricker and Kitton said brightly, "everything's goin' fine. I s'pose the town's still decidin' between us, but up to now I ain't had but one regrets that can't come—that's Mis' Stew. She wrote it was on account o' domestic affliction, an' I hadn't heard what, so I went right down. 'Seems nobody had died—she ain't much of any family, anyway. But she'd wrote her letter out of a letter book, an' the only one she could find regrettin' an invite give domestic affliction for the reason. She said she didn't know a letter like that hed to be true, an' I don't know as it does, either."

She stood silent for a moment, searching my face.

"Look-a-here," she said; "they's somethin' I thought of. Mebbe you've heard of it bein' done in the City somewheres. Do you s'pose folks'd be willin' to send Emerel's an' my funeral flowers to the comin' out party instead?"

"Funeral...?" I doubted.

"Grave flowers," she explained. "You know, they're a perfect waste so far's the General Dead is concerned. An' land knows, the fam'ly don't sense 'em much more.

Anyway, Emerel an' I ain't got any fam'ly. An' if folks'd be willin' to send us what flowers they would send us if we died now, then they'd do us some good. We'll never want 'em more'n we do now, dead or alive. 'Least, I won't. Emerel, she don't seem to care. But do you think it'd be all right if I was to mention it out around?"

My desire to have this happen I did my best not to confuse with a disinterested opinion. But indeed Mrs. Ricker and Kitton was seldom in need of an opinion, as was proved that night by the appearance of this notice in the Friendship Daily:—

All that would give flowers when dead please send same anyhow and not expected to send same if we do die afterwards.

Mrs. Ricker and Kitton.

All of Friendship society which intended to accept Mis' Sykes's invitation hastened with relieved eagerness to follow with flowers its regrets to the "comen out recep." For every one was genuinely attached to the little laundress and interested in her welfare—up to the point of sacrificing social interests in the eyes of the Sykeses. Friendship gardens were rich with Autumn, cosmos and salvia and opulent asters, and on the morning of the two parties this store of sweetness was rifled for the débutante. By noon Mrs. Ricker and Kitton was saying in awe, "Nobody in Friendship ever had this many flowers, dead, or alive, or rich." And although some of us grieved that Mis' Postmaster Sykes had shown what she named her good-will by ordering from the town a pillow of white carnations (but with no "wording"), Mrs. Ricker and Kitton received even this suggestive token with simple-hearted delight.

"It'll look lovely on the lamp shelf," she observed. "I've often planned how nice my parlour'd trim up for a funeral."

In the preparation for the two events, the one unconcerned and unconsulted appeared to be the débutante herself. We never said "Emerel's party"; we all said "Mis' Ricker's party." We knew that Mrs. Ricker and Kitton was putting painstaking care

on Emerel's coming-out dress, which was to be a surprise, but otherwise Emerel was seldom even mentioned in connection with her début. And whenever we saw her, it was as Friendship had seen her for two years,—walking quietly with Abe Daniel, her betrothed.

"It's doin' things kind o' backwards," Calliope Marsh said, "engaged first an' comin' out in society afterwards. But I donno as it's any more backwards than ridin' to the cemet'ry feet first. What's what all depends on what you agree on for What. If it ain't your soul you mean about," she added cryptically.

The Topladys and others of us who united to uphold Emerel, and especially to uphold Emerel's mother, could not but realize that the majority of Friendship society had regretted to decline the début party, and had been pleased to accept the hospitality of the Postmaster Sykeses. I dare say that this may have been partly why, in the usual self-indulgence of challenge, I put on my prettiest frock for the party and prepared to set out somewhat early, hoping for the amusement of sharing in the finishing touches. But as I was leaving my house Calliope Marsh arrived, buttoned tightly in her best gray henrietta, her cheeks hot with some intense excitement.

"Well," she said without preface, "they've done it. Emerel Kitton's married. She's just married Abe at the parsonage to get out o' bein' debooed. They've gone to take the train now."

No one could fail to see what this would mean to Mrs. Ricker and Kitton, and, rather than the newly married Emerel, it was she who absorbed our speculation.

"Mis' Ricker just slimpsed," Calliope told me. "I says to her: 'Look here, Mis' Ricker, don't you go givin' in. Your kitchen's a sight with the good things o' your hand—think o' that,' I told her; 'think how you mortgaged your very funeral for to-night, an' brace yourself up,' An' she says, awful pitiful: 'I can't, Calliope,' she says. "T seems like this slips the pins right out. They ain't nothin' to deboo with now, anyway,' she told me. 'How can I?'"

"Oh, poor Mrs. Ricker!" I exclaimed.

Calliope looked at me intently.

"Well," she said, "that's what I run in about. You're a stranger just fresh come here. You ain't met folks much yet. An' Mis' Sykes, she's just crazy to get a-hold o' you an' your house for the Sodality. An' the only thing I could think of for Mis' Ricker—well, would you stand up with Mis' Ricker to-night an' shake all their hands? An' sort o' leave her deboo for you, you might say?"

I think that I loved Calliope for this even before she understood my assent. But she added something which puzzled me.

"If I was you," she observed, "I'd do somethin' else to-night, too. You could do it—or I could do it for you. You don't expect to let Mis' Sykes hev the Sodality here, do you?"

"I might have had it here," I said impulsively, "if she had not done this to poor little Mrs. Ricker."

"Would—would you give me the lief to say that?" Calliope asked demurely.

I had no objection in the world to any one knowing my opinion of Mis' Postmaster Sykes's proceeding,—"one of her preposterousnesses," Calliope called it,—and I said so, and set off for Mrs. Ricker's, while Calliope herself flew somewhere else on some last mission. And, "Mis' Sykes'd ought to be showed," she called to me over-shoulder. "That woman's got a sinful pride. She'd wear fur in August to prove she could afford to hev moths!"

The Ricker parlour was a garden which sloped gently, as a garden should, for the house was old and the parlour floor sagged toward the entrance so that the front of the organ was propped on wooden blocks. The room was bedizened with flowers, in dishes, tins, and gallon jars, so that it seemed some way an alien thing, like a prune horse. On the lamp shelf was the huge white carnation pillow, across which the hostess had inscribed "welcom," in stems.

Within ten minutes of the appointed hour all those who had been pleased to accept were in the rooms, and Mrs. Ricker and Kitton and I, standing among the funeral flowers, received the guests while Calliope, hovering at the door, gave the key with: "Ain't you heard? Emerel's a bride instead of a debbytant. Ain't it a rill joke? Married to-night an' we're here to celebrate. Throw off your things." Then she hopelessly involved them in a presentation to me, and between us we contrived to elide Mrs. Ricker and Kitton from all save her perfunctory office, until her voice and lips ceased their trembling. Poor little hostess, in her starched lawn which had seemed to her adequate for her unpretentious rôle of mother! All her humour and independence and self-possession had left her, and in their stead, on what was to have been her great night, had settled only the immemorial wistfulness.

Although I did not then foresee it, the guests that evening were destined to point me to many meanings, like sketches in the note-book of a patient Pen. I am fond of remembering them as I saw them first: the Topladys, that great Mis' Amanda, ponderous, majestic, and suggesting black grosgrain, her beaming way of whole-hearted approval not quite masking the critical, house-wife glances which she continually cast; and little Timothy, her husband, who, in company, went quite out of his head and could think of nothing to say save "Blisterin' Benson, what I think is this: ain't everything movin' off nice?" Dear Doctor June, pastor emeritus of Friendship, since he was so identified with all the village interests that not many could tell from what church he had retired. (At each of the three Friendship churches he rented a pew, and contributed impartially to their beneficences; and, "seems to me the Lord would of," he sometimes apologized for this.) Photographer Jimmy Sturgis, who stood about with one eye shut, and who drove the 'bus, took charge of the mail-bags, conducted a photograph gallery, and painted portraits. ("The Dead From Photos a specialty," was tacked on the risers of the stairs leading to his studio.) And Mis' Photographer Sturgis, who was an invalid and "very, very seldom got out." (Not, I was to learn, an invalid because of ill health, but by nature. She was an

invalid as other people are blond or brunette, and no more to be said about it.) Miss Liddy Ember, the village seamstress, and her beautiful sister Ellen, who was "not quite right," and whom Miss Liddy took about and treated like a child until the times when Ellen "come herself again," and then she quite overshadowed in personality little busy Miss Liddy. Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, and Eppleby Holcomb, and the "Other" Holcombs; Mis' Doctor Helman, the Gekerjecks, who "kept the drug store," and scented the world with musk and essences. ("Musk on one handkerchief and some kind o' flower scent on your other one," Mis' Gekerjeck was wont to say, "then you can suit everybody, say who who will.")—These and the others Mrs. Ricker and Kitton and I received, standing before the white carnation pillow. And I, who had come to Friendship to get away from everywhere, found myself the one to whom they did honour, as they were to have honoured Emerel.

When the hour for supper came, Mrs. Ricker and Kitton excused herself because she must "see to gettin' it on to the plates," and Mis' Toplady, Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, Calliope, and I "handed." We had all lent silver and dishes—indeed, save at Mis' Sykes's (and of course at the Proudfits' of Proudfit estate), there is rarely a Friendship party at which the pantries of the guests are not represented, an arrangement seeming almost to hold in anticipation certain social and political ideals. (If the telephone yields us an invitation from those whom we know best, we always answer: "Thank you. I will. What do you want me to send over?" Is there such a matter-of-course federation on any boulevard?) And after the guests had been served and the talk had been resumed, we four who had "handed" sat down, with Mrs. Ricker and Kitton, at meat, at a corner of the kitchen table.

"Everything tastes like so much chips to me when I hev company, anyhow," the hostess said sadly, "but to-night it's got the regular salt-pork taste. When I'm nervous or got delegates or comin' down with anything, I always taste salt pork."

"Well, everything's all of a whirl to me," Calliope confessed, "an' I should think your

brains, Mis' Ricker, 'd be fair rarin' 'round in your head."

"Who didn't eat what?" Mrs. Ricker and Kitton asked listlessly. "I meant to keep track when the plates come out, but I didn't. Did they all take a-hold rill good?"

"They wa'n't any mincin' 't I see," Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss assured her. "Everything you had was lovely, an' everybody made 'way with all they got."

We might have kept indefinitely on at these fascinating comparisons, but some unaccountable stir and bustle and rise of talk in the other rooms persuaded our attention. ("Can they be goin' home?" cried that great Mis' Amanda Toplady. "If they are, I'll go bail Timothy Toplady started it." And, "I bet they've broke the finger bowl," Mrs. Ricker and Kitton prophesied darkly.) And then we all went in to see what had happened, but it was what none of us could possibly have forecast: Crowding in the parlour, overflowing into the sitting room, still entering from the porch, were Postmaster and Mis' Postmaster Sykes and all their guests.

It was quite as if Wishes had gathered head and spirited them there. I remember the white little face of Mrs. Ricker and Kitton, luminously gratified to the point of triumph; and Mis' Sykes's brisk and cordial "No reason why we shouldn't go to two receptions in an evening, like they do in the City, Mis' Ricker, is they?" And the aplomb of the hostess's self-respecting, corrective "An' Kitton. 'Count of Al bein' so thoughtful in death." And then to my amazement Mis' Postmaster Sykes turned to me and held out both hands.

"I am so glad," she said, almost in the rhythm of certain exhausts, "that you've decided to hev Sodality at your house. You must just let me take a-hold of it for you and run it. And I'm going to propose your name the very next meeting we hev, can't I?"

I walked home with Calliope when we had left Mrs. Ricker and Kitton, tired but triumphant. ("Land," the hostess said, "now it's turned out so nice, I donno but I'm rill pleased Emerel's married. I'd hate to think o' borrowin' all them things over again

for a weddin'.") And in the dark street Calliope said to me:—

"You see what I done, I guess. I told you Mis' Sykes was reg'lar up-in-arms about usin' your house—though I think the rill reason is she wants to get upstairs in it. You know how some are. So I marched myself up there before the party, an' I told her you wasn't goin' to hev Sodality sole because you thought she'd been so mean to Mis' Ricker. An' I give her to understand sharp off 't she'd better do what she did do if she wanted you in the Sodality at all. 'An',' s'I, 'I donno what she'll think o' you anyway, not knowin' enough to go to two companies in one evenin', like the City, even if one is your own.' She see reason. You know, Mis' Sykes an' I are kind o' connections, but you can make even your relations see sense if you go at 'em right. I donno," Calliope ended doubtfully, "but I done wrong. An' yet I feel good friends with my backbone too, like I'd done right!"

And it was so that having come to Friendship Village to get away from everywhere, I yet found myself abruptly launched in its society, committed to its Sodality, and, best of all, friends with Calliope Marsh.

III

NOBODY SICK, NOBODY POOR

Two days before Thanksgiving the air was already filled with white turkey feathers, and I stood at a window and watched until the loneliness of my still house seemed like something pointing a mocking finger at me. When I could bear it no longer I went out in the snow, and through the soft drifts I fought my way up the Plank Road toward the village.

I had almost passed the little bundled figure before I recognized Calliope. She was walking in the middle of the road, as in Friendship we all walk in winter; and neither of us had umbrellas. I think that I distrust people who put up umbrellas on a country

road in a fall of friendly flakes.

Instead of inquiring perfunctorily how I did, she greeted me with a fragment of what she had been thinking—which is always as if one were to open a door of his mind to you instead of signing you greeting from a closed window.

"I just been tellin' myself," she looked up to say without preface, "that if I could see one more good old-fashion' Thanksgivin', life'd sort o' smooth out. An' land knows, it needs some smoothin' out for me."

With this I remember that it was as if my own loneliness spoke for me. At my reply Calliope looked at me quickly—as if I, too, had opened a door.

"Sometimes Thanksgivin' is some like seein' the sun shine when you're feelin' rill rainy yourself," she said thoughtfully.

She held out her blue-mittened hand and let the flakes fall on it in stars and coronets.

"I wonder," she asked evenly, "if you'd help me get up a Thanksgivin' dinner for a few poor sick folks here in Friendship?"

In order to keep my self-respect, I recall that I was as ungracious as possible. I think I said that the day meant so little to me that I was willing to do anything to avoid spending it alone. A statement which seems to me now not to bristle with logic.

"That's nice of you," Calliope replied genially. Then she hesitated, looking down Daphne Street, which the Plank Road had become, toward certain white houses. There were the homes of Mis' Mayor Uppers, Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, and the Liberty sisters,—all substantial dignified houses, typical of the simple prosperity of the countryside.

"The only trouble," she added simply, "is that in Friendship I don't know of a soul rill sick, nor a soul what you might call poor."

At this I laughed, unwillingly enough. Dear Calliope! Here indeed was a drawback to her project.

"Honestly," she said reflectively, "Friendship can't seem to do anything like any other town. When the new minister come here, he give out he was goin' to do settlement work. An' his second week in the place he come to me with a reg'lar hang-dog look. 'What kind of a town is this?' he says to me, disgusted. 'They ain't nobody sick in it an' they ain't nobody poor!' I guess he could 'a' got along without the poor—most of us can. But we mostly like to hev a few sick to carry the flowers off our house plants to, an' now an' then a tumbler o' jell. An' yet I've known weeks at a time when they wasn't a soul rill flat down sick in Friendship. It's so now. An' that's hard, when you're young an' enthusiastic, like the minister."

"But where are you going to find your guests then, Calliope?" I asked curiously.

"Well," she said brightly, "I was just plannin' as you come up with me. An' I says to myself: 'God give me to live in a little bit of a place where we've all got enough to get along on, an' Thanksgivin' finds us all in health. It looks like He'd afflicted us by lettin' us hev nobody to do for.' An' then it come to me that if we was to get up the dinner,—with all the misery an' hunger they is in the world,—God in His goodness would let some of it come our way to be fed. 'In the wilderness a cedar,' you know—as Liddy Ember an' I was always tellin' each other when we kep' shop together. An' so to-day I said to myself I'd go to work an' get up the dinner an' trust there'd be eaters for it."

"Why, Calliope," I said, "Calliope!"

"I ain't got much to do with, myself," she added apologetically; "the most I've got in my sullar, I guess, is a gallon jar o' watermelon pickles. I could give that. You don't think it sounds irreverent—connectin' God with a big dinner, so?" she asked anxiously.

And, at my reply:—

"Well, then," she said briskly, "let's step in an' see a few folks that might be able to tell us of somebody to do for. Let's ask Mis' Mayor Uppers an' Mis'

Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, an' the Liberty girls."

Because I was lonely and idle, and because I dreaded inexpressibly going back to my still house, I went with her. Her ways were a kind of entertainment, and I remember that I believed my leisure to be infinite.

We turned first toward the big shuttered house of Mis' Mayor Uppers, to whom, although her husband had been a year ago removed from office, discredited, and had not since been seen in Friendship, we yet gave her old proud title, as if she had been Former Lady Mayoress. For the present mayor, Authority Hubblethwaite, was, as Calliope said, "unconnect'."

I watched Mis' Uppers in some curiosity while Calliope explained that she was planning a dinner for the poor and sick,—"the lame and the sick that's comfortable enough off to eat,"—and could she suggest some poor and sick to ask? Mis' Uppers was like a vinegar cruet of mine, slim and tall, with a little grotesquely puckered face for a stopper, as if the whole known world were sour.

"I'm sure," she said humbly, "it's a nice i-dea. But I declare, I'm put to it to suggest. We ain't got nobody sick nor nobody poor in Friendship, you know."

"Don't you know of anybody kind o' hard up? Or somebody that, if they ain't down sick, feels sort o' spindlin'?" Calliope asked anxiously.

Mis' Uppers thought, rocking a little and running a pin in and out of a fold of her skirt.

"No," she said at length, "I don't know a soul. I think the church'd give a good deal if a real poor family'd come here to do for. Since the Cadozas went, we ain't known which way to look for poor. Mis' Ricker gettin' her fortune so puts her beyond the wolf. An' Peleg Bemus, you can't get him to take anything. No, I don't know of anybody real decently poor."

"An' nobody sick?" Calliope pressed her wistfully.

"Well, there's Mis' Crawford," admitted Mis' Uppers; "she had a spell o' lumbago two weeks ago, but I see her pass the house to-day. Mis' Brady was laid up with toothache, too, but the Daily last night said she'd had it out. An' Mis' Doctor Helman did have one o' her stomach attacks this week, an' Elzabella got out her dyin' dishes an' her dyin' linen from the still-room—you know how Mis' Doctor always brings out her nice things when she's sick, so't if she should die an' the neighbours come in, it'd all be shipshape. But she got better this time an' helped put 'em back. I declare it's hard to get up anything in the charity line here."

Calliope sat smiling a little, and I knew that it was because of her secret certainty that "some o' the hunger" would come her way, to be fed.

"I can't help thinkin'," she said quietly, "that we'll find somebody. An' I tell you what: if we do, can I count on you to help some?"

Mis' Mayor Uppers flushed with quick pleasure.

"Me, Calliope?" she said. And I remembered that they had told me how the Friendship Married Ladies' Cemetery Improvement Sodality had been unable to tempt Mis' Uppers to a single meeting since the mayor ran away. "Oh, but I couldn't though," she said wistfully.

"No need to go to the table if you don't want," Calliope told her. "Just bake up somethin' for us an' bring it over. Make a couple o' your cherry pies—did you get hold of any cherries to put up this year? Well, a couple o' your cherry pies an' a batch o' your nice drop sponge cakes," she directed. "Could you?"

Mis' Mayor Uppers looked up with a kind of light in her eyes.

"Why, yes," she said, "I could, I guess. I'll bake 'em Thanksgivin' mornin'. I—I was wonderin' how I'd put in the day."

When we stepped out in the snow again, Calliope's face was shining. Sometimes now, when my faith is weak in any good thing, I remember her look that November morning. But all that I thought then was how I was being entertained that lonely day.

The dear Liberty sisters were next, Lucy and Viny and Libbie Liberty. We went to the side door,—there were houses in Friendship whose front doors we tacitly understood that we were never expected to use,—and we found the sisters down cellar, with shawls over their heads, feeding their hens through the cellar window, opening on the glassed-in coop under the porch.

In Friendship it is a point of etiquette for a morning caller never to interrupt the employment of a hostess. So we obeyed the summons of the Liberty sisters to "come right down"; and we sat on a firkin and an inverted tub while Calliope told her plan and the hens fought for delectable morsels.

"My grief!" said Libbie Liberty, tartly, "where you goin' to get your sick an' poor?"

Mis' Viny, balancing on the window ledge to reach for eggs, looked back at us.

"Friendship's so comfortable that way," she said, "I don't see how you can get up much of anything."

And little Miss Lucy, kneeling on the floor of the cellar to measure more feed, said without looking up:—

"You know, since mother died we ain't never done anything for holidays. No—we can't seem to want to think about Thanksgiving or Christmas or like that."

They all turned their grave lined faces toward us.

"We want to let the holidays just slip by without noticin'," Miss Viny told us. "Seems like it hurts less that way."

Libbie Liberty smiled wanly.

"Don't you know," she said, "when you hold your hand still in hot water, you don't feel how hot the water really is? But when you move around in it some, it begins to burn you. Well, when we let Thanksgiving an' Christmas alone, it ain't so bad. But when we start to move around in 'em—"

Her voice faltered and stopped.

"We miss mother terrible," Miss Lucy said simply.

Calliope put her blue mitten to her mouth, but her eyes she might not hide, and they were soft with sympathy.

"I know—I know," she said. "I remember the first Christmas after my mother died—I ached like the toothache all over me, an' I couldn't bear to open my presents. Nor the next year I couldn't either—I couldn't open my presents with any heart. But—" Calliope hesitated, "that second year," she said, "I found somethin' I could do. I saw I could fix up little things for other folks an' take some comfort in it. Like mother would of."

She was silent for a moment, looking thoughtfully at the three lonely figures in the dark cellar of their house.

"Your mother," she said abruptly, "stuffed the turkey for a year ago the last harvest home."

"Yes," they said.

"Look here," said Calliope; "if I can get some poor folks together,—or even one poor folk, or hungry,—will you three come over to my house an' stuff the turkey? The way—I can't help thinkin' the way your mother would of, if she'd been here. An' then," Calliope went on briskly, "could you bring some fresh eggs an' make a pan o' custard over to my house? An' mebbe one o' you'd stir up a sunshine cake. You must know how to make your mother's sunshine cake?"

There was another silence in the cellar when Calliope had done, and for a minute I wondered if, after all, she had not failed, and if the bleeding of the three hearts might be so stanched. It was not self-reliant Libbie Liberty who spoke first; it was gentle Miss Lucy.

"I guess," she said, "I could, if we all do it. I know mother would of."

"Yes," Miss Viny nodded, "mother would of."

Libbie Liberty stood for a moment with compressed lips.

"It seems like not payin' respect to mother," she began; and then shook her head. "It ain't that," she said; "it's only missin' her when we begin to step around the kitchen, bakin' up for a holiday."

"I know—I know," Calliope said again. "That's why I said for you to come over in my kitchen. You come over there an' stir up the sunshine cake, too, an' bake it in my oven, so's we can hev it et hot. Will you do that?"

And after a little time they consented. If Calliope found any sick or poor, they would do that.

"We ain't gettin' many i-dees for guests," Calliope said, as we reached the street, "but we're gettin' helpers, anyway. An' some dinner, too."

Then we went to the house of Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss—called so, of course, to distinguish her from the "Other" Holcombs.

"Don't you be shocked at her," Calliope warned me, as we closed Mis' Holcomb's gate behind us; "she's dreadful diff'r'nt an' bitter since Abigail was married last month. She's got hold o' some kind of a Persian book, in a decorated cover, from the City; an' now she says your soul is like when you look in a lookin'-glass—that there ain't really nothin' there. An' that the world's some wind an' the rest water, an' they ain't no God only your own breath—oh, poor Mis' Holcomb!" said Calliope. "I guess she ain't rill balanced. But we ought to go to see her. We always consult Mis' Holcomb about everything."

Poor Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss! I can see her now in her comfortable dining room, where she sat cleaning her old silver, her thin, veined hands as fragile as her grandmother's spoons.

"Of course, you don't know," she said, when Calliope had unfolded her plans, "how useless it all seems to me. What's the use—I keep sayin' to myself now'-days; what's the use? You put so much pains on somethin', an' then it goes off an' leaves you.

Mebbe it dies, an' everything's all wasted. There ain't anything to tie to. It's like lookin' in a glass all the while. It's seemin', it ain't bein'. We ain't certain o' nothin' but our breath, an' when that goes, what hev you got? What's the use o' plannin' Thanksgivin' for anybody?"

"Well, if you're hungry, it's kind o' nice to get fed up," said Calliope, crisply. "Don't you know a soul that's hungry, Mame Bliss?"

She shook her head.

"No," she said, "I don't. Nor nobody sick in body."

"Nobody sick in body," Calliope repeated absently.

"Soul-sick an' soul-hungry you can't feed up," Mis' Holcomb added.

"I donno," said Calliope, thoughtfully, "I donno but you can."

"No," Mis' Holcomb went on; "your soul's like yourself in the glass: they ain't anything there."

"I donno," Calliope said again; "some mornin's when I wake up with the sun shinin' in, I can feel my soul in me just as plain as plain."

Mis' Holcomb sighed.

"Life looks dreadful footless to me," she said.

"Well," said Calliope, "sometimes life is some like hearin' firecrackers go off when you don't feel up to shootin' 'em yourself. When I'm like that, I always think if I'd go out an' buy a bunch or two, an' get somebody to give me a match, I could see more sense to things. Look here, Mame Bliss; if I get hold o' any folks to give the dinner for, will you help me some?"

"Yes," Mis' Holcomb assented half-heartedly, "I'll help you. I ain't nobody much in family, now Abigail's done what she has. They's only Eppleby, an' he won't be home Thanksg'vin this year. So I ain't nothin' else to do."

"That's the i-dee," said Calliope, heartily; "if everything's foolish, it's just as foolish

doin' nothin' as doin' somethin'. Will you bring over a kettleful o' boiled potatoes to my house Thanksgivin' noon? An' mash 'em an' whip 'em in my kitchen? I'll hev the milk to put in. You—you don't cook as much as some, do you, Mame?"

Did Calliope ask her that purposely? I am almost sure that she did. Mis' Holcomb's neck stiffened a little.

"I guess I can cook a thing or two beside mash' potatoes," she said, and thought for a minute. "How'd you like a pan o' 'scalloped oysters an' some baked macaroni with plenty o' cheese?" she demanded.

"Sounds like it'd go down awful easy," admitted Calliope, smiling. "It's just what we need to carry the dinner off full sail," she added earnestly.

"Well, I ain't nothin' else to do an' I'll make 'em," Mis' Holcomb promised. "Only it beats me who you can find to do for. If you don't get anybody, let me know before I order the oysters."

Calliope stood up, her little wrinkled face aglow; and I wondered at her confidence.

"You just go ahead an' order your oysters," she said. "That dinner's goin' to come off Thanksgivin' noon at twelve o'clock. An' you be there to help feed the hungry, Mame."

When we were on the street again, Calliope looked at me with her way of shy eagerness.

"Could you hev the dinner up to your house," she asked me, "if I do every bit o' the work?"

"Why, Calliope," I said, amazed at her persistence, "have it there, of course. But you haven't any guests yet."

She nodded at me through the falling flakes.

"You say you ain't got much to be thankful for," she said, "so I thought mebbe you'd put in the time that way. Don't you worry about folks to eat the dinner. I'll tell Mis'

Holcomb an' the others to come to your house—an I'll get the food an' the folks. Don't you worry! An' I'll bring my watermelon pickles an' a bowl o' cream for Mis' Holcomb's potatoes, an' I'll furnish the turkey—a big one. The rest of us'll get the dinner in your kitchen Thanksgivin' mornin'. My!" she said, "seems though life's smoothin' out fer me a'ready. Good-by—it's 'most noon."

She hurried up Daphne Street in the snow, and I turned toward my lonely house. But I remember that I was planning how I would make my table pretty, and how I would add a delicacy or two from the City for this strange holiday feast. And I found myself hurrying to look over certain long-disused linen and silver, and to see whether my Cloth-o'-Gold rose might be counted on to bloom by Thursday noon.

IV

COVERS FOR SEVEN

"We'll set the table for seven folks," said Calliope, at my house on Thanksgiving morning.

"Seven!" I echoed. "But where in the world did you ever find seven, Calliope?"

"I found 'em," she answered. "I knew I could find hungry folks to do for if I tried, an' I found 'em. You'll see. I sha'n't say another word. They'll be here by twelve, sharp. Did the turkey come?"

Yes, the turkey had come, and almost as she spoke the dear Liberty sisters arrived to dress and stuff it, and to make ready the pan of custard, and to "stir up" the sunshine cake. I could guess how the pleasant bustle in my kitchen would hurt them by its holiday air, and I carried them off to see my Cloth-o'-Gold rose which had opened in the night, to the very crimson heart of it. And I told them of the seven guests whom, after all, Calliope had actually contrived to marshal to her dinner. And in the midst of our almost gay speculation on this, they went at their share of the task.

The three moved about their offices gravely at first, Libbie Liberty keeping her back to us as she worked, Miss Viny scrupulously intent on the delicate clatter of the egg-beater, Miss Lucy with eyes downcast on the sage she rolled. I noted how Calliope made little excuses to pass near each of them, with now a touch of the hand and now a pat on a shoulder, and all the while she talked briskly of ways and means and recipes, and should there be onions in the dressing or should there not be? We took a vote on this and were about to chop the onions in when Mis' Holcomb's little maid arrived at my kitchen door with a bowl of oysters which Mis' Holcomb had had left from the 'scallop, an' wouldn't we like 'em in the stuffin'? Roast turkey stuffed with oysters! I saw Libbie Liberty's eyes brighten so delightedly that I brought out a jar of seedless raisins and another of preserved cherries to add to the custard, and then a bag of sweet almonds to be blanched and split for the cake o' sunshine. Surely, one of us said, the seven guests could be preparing for their Thanksgiving dinner with no more zest than we were putting into that dinner for their sakes.

"Seven guests!" we said over and again. "Calliope, how did you do it? When everybody says there's nobody in Friendship that's either sick or poor?"

"Nobody sick, nobody poor!" Calliope exclaimed, piling a dish with watermelon pickles. "Land, you might think that was the town motto. Well, the town don't know everything. Don't you ask me so many questions."

Before eleven o'clock Mis' Mayor Uppers tapped at my back door, with two deep-dish cherry pies in a basket, and a row of her delicate, feathery sponge cakes and a jar of pineapple and pie-plant preserves "to chink in." She drew a deep breath and stood looking about the kitchen.

"Throw off your things an' help, Mis' Uppers," Calliope admonished her, one hand on the cellar door. "I'm just goin' down for some sweet potatoes Mis' Holcomb sent over this morning, an' you might get 'em ready, if you will. We ain't goin' to let you

off now, spite of what you've done for us."

So Mis' Mayor Uppers hung up her shawl and washed the sweet potatoes. And my kitchen was fragrant with spices and flavourings and an odorous oven, and there was no end of savoury business to be at. I found myself glad of the interest of these others in the day and glad of the stirring in my lonely house. Even if their bustle could not lessen my own loneliness, it was pleasant, I said to myself, to see them quicken with interest; and the whole affair entertained my infinite leisure. After all, I was not required to be thankful. I merely loaned my house, cosey in its glittering drifts of turkey feathers, and the day was no more and no less to me than before, though I own that I did feel more than an amused interest in Calliope's guests. Whom, in Friendship, had she found "to do for," I detected myself speculating with real interest as in the dining room, with one and another to help me, I made ready my table. My prettiest dishes and silver, the Cloth-o'-Gold rose, and my yellow-shaded candles made little auxiliary welcomes. Whoever Calliope's guests were, we would do them honour and give them the best we had. And in the midst of all came from the City the box with my gift of hothouse fruit and a rosebud for every plate.

"Calliope!" I cried, as I went back to the kitchen, "Calliope, it's nearly twelve now. Tell us who the guests are, or we won't finish dinner!"

Calliope laughed and shook her head and opened the door for Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, who entered, followed by her little maid, both laden with good things.

"I prepared for seven," Mis' Holcomb said. "That was the word you sent me—but where you got your seven sick an' poor in Friendship beats me. I'll stay an' help for a while—but to me it all seems like so much monkey work."

We worked with a will that last half-hour, and the spirit of the kitchen came upon them all. I watched them, amused and pleased at Mis' Mayor Uppers's flushed

anxiety over the sweet potatoes, at Libbie Liberty furiously basting the turkey, and at Miss Lucy exclaiming with delight as she unwrapped the rosebuds from their moss. But I think that Mis' Holcomb pleased me most, for with the utensils of housewifery in her hands she seemed utterly to have forgotten that there is no use in anything at all. This was not wonderful in the presence of such a feathery cream of mashed potatoes and such aromatic coffee as she made. There was something to tie to. Those were real, at any rate, and beyond all seeming.

Just before twelve Calliope caught off her apron and pulled down her sleeves.

"Now," she said, "I'm going to welcome the guests. I can—can't I?" she begged me. "Everything's all ready but putting on. I won't need to come out here again; when I ring the bell on the sideboard, dish it up an' bring it in, all together—turkey ahead an' vegetables followin'. Mis' Holcomb, you help 'em, won't you? An' then you can leave if you want. Talk about an old-fashion' Thanksgivin'. My!"

"Who has she got?" Libbie Liberty burst out, basting the turkey. "I declare, I'm nervous as a witch, I'm so curious!"

And then the clock struck twelve, and a minute after we heard Calliope tinkle a silvery summons on the call-bell.

I remember that it was Mis' Holcomb herself—to whom nothing mattered—who rather lost her head as we served our feast, and who was about putting in dishes both her oysters and her macaroni instead of carrying in the fair, brown, smoking bake pans. But at last we were ready—Mis' Holcomb at our head with the turkey, the others following with both hands filled, and I with the coffee-pot. As they gave the signal to start, something—it may have been the mystery before us, or the good things about us, or the mere look of the Thanksgiving snow on the window-sills—seemed to catch at the hearts of them all, and they laughed a little, almost joyously, those five for whom joy had seemed done, and I found myself laughing too.

So we six filed into the dining room to serve whomever Calliope had found "to do for." I wonder that I had not guessed before. There stood Calliope at the foot of the table, with its lighted candles and its Cloth-o'-Gold rose, and the other six chairs were quite vacant.

"Sit down!" Calliope cried to us, with tears and laughter in her voice. "Sit down, all six of you. Don't you see? Didn't you know? Ain't we soul-sick an' soul-hungry, all of us? An' I tell you, this is goin' to do our souls good—an' our stomachs too!"

Nobody dropped anything, even in the flood of our amazement. We managed to get our savoury burden on the table, and some way we found ourselves in the chairs—I at the head of my table where Calliope led me. And we all talked at once, exclaiming and questioning, with sudden thanksgiving in our hearts that in the world such things may be.

"I was hungry an' sick," Calliope was telling, "for an old-fashion' Thanksgivin'—or anything that'd smooth life out some. But I says to myself, 'It looks like God had afflicted us by not givin' us anybody to do for.' An' then I started out to find some poor an' some sick—an' each one o' you knows what I found. An' I ask' myself before I got home that day, 'Why not them an' me?' There's lots o' kinds o' things to do on Thanksgivin' Day. Are you ever goin' to forgive me?"

I think that we all answered at once. But what we all meant was what Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss said, as she sat flushed and smiling behind the coffee-cups:—

"I declare, I feel something like I ain't felt since I don't know when!"

And Calliope nodded at her.

"I guess that's your soul, Mame Bliss," she said. "You can always feel it if you go to work an' act as if you got one. I'll take my coffee clear."

V

THE SHADOW OF GOOD THINGS TO COME

The Friendship accommodation reaches the village from the City at six o'clock at night, and we call the train the Dick Dasher, because Dick Dasher is its engineer. We "come out on the Dick Dasher" and we "go in on the Through"; but the Through is a kind of institution, like marriage, while the Dick Dasher is a thing more intimate, like one's wedding. It was one winter night on the latter that I hardly heeded what I overheard.

"The Lord will provide, Delia," Doctor June was saying.

"I ain't sure," came a piping answer, "as they is any Lord. An' don't you tell anybody 'bout seein' me on this train. I'm goin' on through—west."

"Thy footfall is a silver thing, West——west!"

I said over to the beat of the wheels, but the words that I said over were more insistent than the words that I heard. I was watching the eyes of a motor-car carrying threads of streaming light, moving near the track, swifter than the train. It belonged, as I divined, to the Proudfits of Friendship, and it was carrying Madame Proudfit and her daughter Clementina, after a day of shopping and visiting in the town. And when I saw them returning home in this airy fashion,—as if they were the soul and I in the stuffy Dick Dasher were the body,—I renewed a certain distaste for them, since in their lives these Proudfits seemed goblin-like, with no interest in any save their own picturesque flittings. But while I shrugged at myself for judging them and held firmly to my own opinion, as one will do, I was conscious all the time of the gray minister in the aisle of the rocking coach, holding clasped in both hands his big carpet-bag without handles. Over it I saw him looking down in grieved consternation at the little woman huddled in the rush seat.

"No Lord!" he said, "no Lord! Why, Delia More! You might as well say there ain't no life in your own bones."

"So they isn't," she answered him grimly. "They keep on a-goin' just to spite me."

"Delia More—De-lia More," the wheels beat out, and it was as if I had heard the name often. Already I had noticed the woman. She had a kind of youth, like that of Calliope, who had journeyed in town on the Through that morning and who had somewhat mysteriously asked me not to say that she had gone away. But Calliope's persistent youthfulness gives her a claim upon one, while on this woman whom Doctor June perplexedly regarded, her stifled youth imposed a forlorn aloofness, made the more pathetic by her prettiness.

No one but the doctor himself was preparing to leave the train at Friendship. He balanced in the aisle alone, while the few occupants of the car sat without speaking—men dozing, children padding on the panes, a woman twisting her thin hair tight and high. Doctor June looked at those nearest to be sure of their tired self-absorption, but as for me, who sat very near, I think he had long ago decided that I kept my own thoughts and no others, since sometimes I had forgotten to give him back a greeting. So it was in a fancied security which I was loath to be violating, that he opened his great carpet-bag and took out a book to lay on the girl's knee.

"Open it," he commanded her.

I saw the contour of her face tightened by her swiftly set lips as she complied.

"Point your finger," he went on peremptorily. She must have obeyed, for in a kind of unwilling eagerness she bent over the page, and the doctor stooped, and together in the blurring light of the kerosene lamp in the roof of the coach they made out something.

"... the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things ..." I unwillingly caught, and yet not wholly unwillingly either. And though I watched, as if much depended upon it, the great motor-car of the Proudfits vanishing before us into the dark, I could not forbear to glance at the doctor, who was nodding, his kind face quickening. But the girl lifted her eyes and laughed with deliberate

scepticism.

"I don't take any stock," she said, and within me it was as if something answered to her bitterness.

"No—no. Mebbe not," Doctor June commented with perfect cheerfulness. "Some folks take fresh air, and some folks like to stay shut up tight. But—'the shadow of good things to come.' I'd take that much stock if I was you, Delia."

As he laid the book back in his bag, the train was jolting across the switches beside the gas house, and the lights of Friendship were all about the track.

"Why don't you get off?" he reiterated, in his tone a descending scale of simple hospitality. "Come to our house and stop a spell. Come for tea," he added; "I happen to know we're goin' to hev hot griddle-cakes an' sausage gravy."

She shook her head sharply and in silence.

Doctor June stood for a moment meditatively looking down at her.

"There's a friend of yours at our house to-day, for all day," he observed.

"I ain't any friends," replied the girl, obstinately, "without you mean use' to be. An' I don't know if I had then, either."

"Yes. Yes, you have, Delia," said Doctor June, kindly. "He was asking about you last time he was here—kind of indirect."

"Who?" she demanded, but it was as if something within her wrung the question from her against her will.

"Abel Halsey," Doctor June told her, "Abel Halsey. Remember him?"

Instead of answering she looked out the window at the Friendship Depot platform, and:—

"Ain't he a big minister in the City?" I barely heard her ask.

"No," said Doctor June; "dear me, no. Abel's still gypsyin' it off in the hills. I expect he's out there by the depot with the busses now, come to meet me in his buggy.

Better let him take us all home to griddle-cakes, Delia?" he pressed her wistfully.

"I couldn't," she said briefly. And, as he put out his hand silently, "Don't you let anybody know't you saw me!" she charged him again.

When he was gone, and the train was slackening in the station, she moved close to the window. If I had been lonely.... I must have caught a certain cheer in the look of the station and in the magnificent, cosmic leisure of the idlers: in Photographer Jimmy Sturgis, in his leather coat, with one eye shut, stamping a foot and waiting for the mail-bag; in old Tillie, known up and down the world for her waffles, and perpetually peering out between shelves of plants and wax fruit set across the window of the "eating-house"; in Peleg Bemus, wood-cutter, stumping about the platform on his wooden leg, wearing modestly the prestige he had won by his flute-playing and by his advantage of New York experience—"a janitor in the far east, he was," Timothy Toplady had once told me; in Timothy Toplady himself, who always meets the trains, but for no reason unless to say an amazed and reproachful—"Blisterin' Benson! not a soul wants off here"; and in Abel Halsey, that itinerant preacher, of whom Doctor June had spoken. Abel was a man of grace, Bible-taught, passioning for service, but within him his gentle soul burned to travel, and his white horse, Major Mary, and his road wagon and his route to the door of many a country church were the sole satisfactions of his wanderlust; and next to these was his delight to be at a railway station when any train arrived, savouring the moment of some silent familiarity with distance. I delighted in them all, and that night, as I looked, I wondered how it would seem to me if I were returning to it after many years; and I could imagine how my heart would ache.

As the train moved on, the girl whom Doctor June had called Delia More turned her head, manifestly to follow for a little way each vanishing light and figure; and as the conductor came through the car and she spoke to him, I saw that she was in a tingle of excitement.

"You sure," she asked, "that you stop to the canal draw?"

"Uh?" said the conductor, and when he comprehended, "Every time," he said, "every time. You be ready when she whistles." He hesitated, manifestly in some curiosity. "They ain't a house in a mile f'om there, though," he told her.

"I know that," she gave back crisply.

When I heard her speaking of the canal draw, I found myself wondering; for a woman is not above wonder. There, where the trains stopped just perceptibly I myself was wont to leave them for the sake of the mile walk on the quiet highroad to my house. That, too, though it chanced to be night, for I am not afraid. But I wondered the more because other women do fear, and also because mine was the only house between the canal draw and Friendship Village; and manifestly the shortest way to reach the village would have been to alight at the station. But I held my peace, for the affairs of others should be to those others an efficient disguise; and moreover, the greater part of one's wonder is wont to come to naught.

Yet, as I seemed to follow this woman out upon the snow and the train kept impersonally on across the meadows, I could not but see that her bags were many and looked heavy, and twice she set them down to rearrange. I think a ghost of the road could have done no less than ask to help her. And I did this with an abruptness of which I am unwilling master, though indeed I had no need to assume impatience, for I saw that my quiet walk was spoiled.

When I spoke to her, she started and shrank away; but there was an austerity in the lonely white road and in the country silence which must have chilled a woman like her; and her bags were many and seemed heavy.

"Much obliged to you," she said indistinctly. "I'd just as li've you should take the basket, if you want."

So I lifted the basket and trudged beside her, hoping very much that she would not talk. For though for my own comfort I would walk far to avoid treading on a nest, or

a worm, or a magenta flower (and I loathe magenta), yet I am often blameful enough to wound through the sheerest bungling those who talk to me when I would rather be silent.

The night was one clinging to the way of Autumn, and as yet with no Winter hinting. The air was mild and dry, and the sky was starry. I am not ashamed that on a quiet highroad on a starry night I love to be silent, and even to forget concerns of my own which seem pressing in the publicity of the sun; but I am ashamed, I own, to have been called to myself that night by a little choking breath of haste.

"I can't go—so fast," my companion said humbly; "you might jest—set the basket down anywheres. I can—"

But I think that she can hardly have heard my apology, for she stood where she had halted, staring away from me. We were opposite the cemetery lying in its fence of field stone and whitewashed rails.

"O my soul, my soul!" I heard her say. "I'd forgot the graveyard, or I couldn't never 'a' come this way."

At that she went on, her feet quickening, as I thought, without her will; and she kept her face turned to me, so that it should be away from that whitewashed fence. And now because of the wound she had shown me, I walked a little apart in the middle of the road for my attempt at sympathy. So we came to the summit of the hill, and there the dark suddenly yielded up the distance. The lamps of the village began to signal, lights dotted the fields and gathered in a cosey blur in the valley, and half a mile to westward the headlight that marked the big Toplady barn and the little Toplady house shone out as if some one over there were saying something.

"You live here in Friendship?" the girl demanded abruptly.

I could show her my house a little way before us.

"Ever go inside the graveyard?" she asked.

Sometimes I do go there, and at that answer she walked nearer to me and spoke eagerly.

"Air all the tombstones standin' up straight, do you know?" she said. "Hev any o' their headstones fell down on 'em?"

This I could answer too, definitely enough; for Friendship Cemetery, by the vigilance of the Married Ladies' Cemetery Improvement Sodality, is kept in no less scrupulous order than the Friendship parlours.

"Well, that's a relief," she said; "I couldn't get it out o' my head." Then, because she seemed of those on whom silence lays a certain imaginary demand, "My mother an' father an' sister's buried there," she explained. "They're in there. They all died when I was gone. An' I got the notion that their headstones had tipped over on to 'em. Or Aunt Cornie More's, maybe."

Aunt Cornie More. I knew that name, for they had told me about her in Friendship, so that her name, and that of the Oldmoxons, in whose former house I lived, and many others were like folk whom one passes often and remembers. I had been told how Aunt Cornie More had made her own shroud from her crocheted parlour curtains, lest these fall to a later wife of her octogenarian husband; and how as she lay in her coffin the curtain's shell-stitch parrot "come right acrost her chest." This woman beside me had called her "Aunt" Cornie More. And then I remembered the name which Doctor June had spoken on the train and the wheels had measured.

"Delia More!" I said, involuntarily, and regretted it as soon as I had spoken. But, indeed, it was as if some legend woman of the place walked suddenly beside me, like the quick.

Who in Friendship had not heard the name, and who, save one who keeps her own thoughts and forgets to give back greeting, would not on the instant have remembered it? Delia More's stepsister, Jennie Crapwell, had been betrothed to a carpenter of Friendship, and he was at work on their house when, a month before the

wedding-day, Delia and that young carpenter had "run away." Who in Friendship could not tell that story? But before I had made an end of murmuring something—

"I might 'a' known they hadn't done talkin' yet," Delia More said bitterly. "They say it was like that when Calliope Marsh's beau run off with somebody else,—for ten years the town et it for cake. Well, they ain't any of 'em goin' to get a look at me. I don't give anybody the chance to show me the cold shoulder. You can tell 'em I was here if you want. They can scare the children with it."

"I won't tell," I said.

She looked at me.

"Well, I can't help it if you do," she returned. "I'm glad enough to speak to somebody, gettin' back so. It's fourteen year. An' I was fair body-sick to see the place again."

At this she asked about Friendship folk, and I answered as best I might, though of what she inquired I knew little, and what I did know was footless enough for human comfort. As to the Topladys, for example, I had no knowledge of that one who had earned his money in bricks and had later married a "foreigner"; but I knew Mis' Amanda, that she had hands dimpled like a baby giant's, and that she carried a blue parasol all winter to keep the sun from her eyes. I could not tell whether Liddy Ember had been able to afford skilled treatment for her poor, queer, pretty little sister, but I knew that Ellen Ember, with her crown of bright hair, went about Friendship streets singing aloud, and leaping up to catch at the low branches of the curb elms, and that she was as picturesque as a beautiful grotesque on a page of sober text. I had not learned where the Oldmoxons had moved, but I knew of them that they had left me a huge fireplace in every room of my house. I could have repeated little about Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, save that her black week-day cloak was lined with wine broadcloth, and that she wore it wrong side outward for "best." And of whether Abigail Arnold's children had turned out well or

ill, I was profoundly ignorant; but I remembered that she had caused a loaf of bread to be carved on the monument of her husband, the home baker. And so on. But these were not matters of which I could talk to the hungry woman beside me.

Then, to my amazement, when I mentioned the Proudfits,—those great and rich Proudfits whose motor had raced by our train,—Delia More would have none of them.

"I do' want to hear about 'em," she said. "I know about 'em. I use' to play with Miss Clementina an' Miss Linda when we were little things. I use' to live with the Proudfits then, an' go to school. They were good to me—time an' time again they've told me their home was mine, too. But now—it wouldn't be the same. I know 'em. They always were cruel proud an' cruel pious. Mis' Proudfit, she use' to set up goodness an' worship it like a little god."

This judgment startled me, and yet to its import I secretly assented. For though I barely had their acquaintance, Madame Proudfit and her daughter Clementina were thorns to me too, so that I had had no pleasure in giving them back their greetings. Perhaps it was that they alone in Friendship sounded for me a note of other days—but whatever it was, they were thorns to me; and I remember how, once more, something within me seemed to answer to this woman's bitterness.

None the less, since of the Proudfits I could give her some fragment of account, I did so, to forge for Delia More what link I might between her present and her past. And it was knowledge which all Friendship shared.

"You knew," I said, "that Miss Linda does not come here now, because she married against the wish of her family."

Delia More looked up at me. But though I saw that now she softened somewhat, I had no relish for giving to her anything of the sad romance of beautiful Linda Proudfit (as they said) and the poor young clerk of nobody knew where, who, a dozen years before, had fled away together "into the storm."

"Then there is Calliope Marsh," I ventured, to turn my thought not less than hers. But Delia More did not answer, and at this I was puzzled, for I think that Calliope has lived in Friendship since the beginning, when she and Liddy Ember were partners in their little "modiste" shop. "You will recall Calliope?" I pressed the matter.

And at that, "Yes. Oh, yes," she said, and would say no more. And because Calliope had forbidden me, I did not mention that I had seen her on the train that morning, and that she was absent from Friendship, but it grieved me that this stranger should be indifferent to anything about her.

I would have passed my own gate, because the basket was heavy and because I knew that the girl was crying. But she remembered how I had shown her my house, and there she detained me and caught at her basket, in haste to be gone. So I, who feel upon me a weak necessity to do a bidding, watched her go down the still road; yet I could not let her go away quite like that, and before I had meant to do so I called to her.

"Delia More!" I said—as familiarly as if she had been some other expression of myself.

I saw her stop, but I did not go forward. I lifted my voice a little, for by the distance between us I was less ill at ease than I am in the usual personalities of comfort.

"I heard that on the train," I said then awkwardly,—and I was the more awkward that I was not persuaded of any reason in my words,—"that about 'the shadow of good things to come.' Maybe it meant something."

Delia More's thin, high-pitched voice came back to me, expressing all my unvoiced doubt.

"Tisn't like," she said. "I never take any stock."

Then I looked at my dark house in a kind of consternation lest it had heard me trying to give comfort, for within those walls I had sometimes spoken almost as this

woman spoke. But it occurred to me that even the drowned should throw immaterial ropes to any who struggle in dark waters.

It will not be necessary, I hope, to say that I followed Delia More that night from no faintest wish to know what might happen to her. For I have a weak desire for peace of mind, and I would rather have forgotten her story. I followed because the quiet highroad was so profoundly lonely, and the country silence is ambiguous, and I cannot bear to think of a woman abroad alone in the dark. I cannot bear to think of myself abroad alone in the dark, though I go quite without fear; but certain other women have fear, and this one was crying. I kept well behind her, and as soon as she reached the village, I meant to lose sight of her and return, for a village is guardian enough. But when we had passed the bleak meadow of the slaughter-house and the wide, wet-smelling wood yard and had reached the first cottage on Daphne Street, I was startled to see her unlatch that cottage gate and enter the yard. And I was suddenly sadly apprehensive, for the cottage was the home of Calliope, who that morning had left the village and had asked me to say nothing about it. What if this poor creature had fled to Calliope for sanctuary, only to find locked doors? So I waited in the shadow of a warehouse like a bandit; and I raged at the thought of having possibly to harbour this stranger among the books of my quiet home.

Then suddenly I saw a light shining brightly in Calliope Marsh's cottage, and some one wearing a hat came swiftly and drew down a shade. On the instant the matter was clear to me, who have a genius for certain ways of a busybody. Calliope must have known that this poor girl was coming; Calliope's warning to me to keep silence must have been a way of protection to her. And here to Calliope's cottage Delia More had come creeping, whom all Friendship would hold in righteous distaste. But I alone of all Friendship knew that she was here, "fair body-sick to see the place again."

I turned back to the highroad, pretending great wrath that I should be so keen over

the doings of any, and that my walk should have been spoiled because of her. But there are times when wrath is difficult. And do what I would, there came some singing in my blood, and like a busybody, I found myself standing still in the road fashioning a plan.

VI

STOCK

It was as if Time and the Hour were my allies, for at once I was aware of a cutter driven smartly from the village, and I recognized the Topladys' sorrel. At my signal the cutter drew up beside me, and it held Timothy Toplady on his way home from the station. I asked him what o'clock it was, and when he had found a match to light his huge silver watch—

"Blisterin' Benson!" he said ruefully, "it's ha'-past six, an' me late with the chores again. I'm hauled an' sawed if it hain't always ha' past six. They don't seem to be no times in between."

"Mr. Toplady," I said boldly, "let us get up a surprise party on Calliope Marsh—you and Mrs. Toplady and me."

I had learned that he was loath to oppose a suggestion and that he always preferred to agree, but I had not hoped for enthusiasm.

"That's the i-dea," said Timothy, heartily. "I do admire a surprise. But what I think is this," he added, "when'll we hev it?"

"To-night," I proposed boldly.

"Whew!" Timothy whistled. "Sudden for General—eh? Suits me—suits me. Better drive out home with me an' break it to Amanda," he cried.

I smiled as I sat beside him, noting that his enthusiasm was very like relief. For if any one was present, he well knew that his masterful Amanda would say nothing of

his tardiness. And so it was, for as we entered the kitchen she entirely overlooked her husband in her amazement at seeing me.

"Forevermore!" that great Amanda said, turning from her stove of savoury skillets; "ain't you the stranger? Timothy says only to-day, speakin' o' you, 'She ain't ben here for a week,' s'e. 'Week!' s'I; 'it's goin' on two.' I'm a great hand to keep track. Throw off your things."

At that I began to feel her influence. Mis' Toplady is so huge and capable that her mere presence will modify my judgments; and instantly I fell wondering if I was not, after all, come on a fool's errand. She is like Athena. For I can think about Athena well enough, but if I were really to stand before her, I am certain that the project in which I implored her help would be sunk in my sudden sense of Olympus.

Not the less, I made my somewhat remarkable proposal with some show of assurance, and I should have counted on Mis' Toplady's sympathy, which ripens at less than a sigh. In Friendship you but mention a possible charity, visit, or new church carpet, and the enthusiasm will react on the possibility, and the thing be done. It is the spirit of the West, the pioneer blood in the veins of her children, expressing itself (since there are of late no forests to conquer) in terms of love of any initiative. We love a project as an older world would approve the civilizing reasons for that project. Mis' Amanda plunged into the processes of the party much as she would have felled a tree. It warmed my heart to hear her.

"We'd ought to hev a hot supper—what victuals'll we take?" she said. "Land, yes, oysters, o' course, an' we'll all chip in an' take plenty-enough crackers. We might as well carry dishes from here, so's to be sure an' hev what we want to use. At Mis' Doctor Helman's su'prise we run 'way short o' spoons, an' Elder Woodruff finally went out in the hall an' drank his broth, an' hid his bowl in the entry. Mis' Helman found it, an' knew it by the nick. That reminds me—who'll we ask?"

"Mrs. Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss," said I, promptly, "and Abigail Arnold, and

Doctor June, and Abel Halsey."

"An' the Proudfits," Mis' Amanda went on.

"Suppose," said I, with high courage, "that we do not ask the Proudfits at all?"

Mis' Amanda threw up her giant hands.

"Not ask the Proudfits?" she said. "Why, my land a' livin', the minister hardly has church in the church without the Proudfits get an invite."

"Calliope mends their fine lace for them," I reminded her, feeling guilty. "They wouldn't care to come, Mrs. Amanda, would they?"

But of course I was remembering Delia More's "But now—I know 'em. They worship goodness like a little god." And that night I was not minded to have them about, for it might befall that it would be necessary to understand other things as well.

"Miss Linda would 'a' cared to," said Mis' Amanda, thoughtfully, "but I donno, myself, about Mis' Proudfit an' Miss Clementina—for sure."

So bold an innovation as the Proudfits' omission, however, moved Timothy Toplady to doubt.

"They might not come," he said, frowning and looking sidewise, "but what I think is this, will they like bein' left out?"

His masterful Amanda instantly took the other side.

"Land, Timothy!" she said, "you be one!"

I have heard her say that to him again and again, and always in a tone so skilfully admiring that he looked almost gratified. And we mentioned the Proudfits no more.

So Calliope Marsh's surprise party came about. When supper was over, the table was "left setting," while pickles and cookies and "conserve" were packed in baskets; and presently the Topladys and I were stealing about the village inviting to festivity. I love to remember how swiftly Daphne Street took on an air of the untoward.

Kitchens were left dark, unaccustomed lights flashed in upper chambers, some went scurrying for oysters before the post-office store should be closed, and some spread the news, eager to share in the holiday importance. I love to remember our certainty, so reasonably established, that they would all join us as infallibly as children will join in jollity. No one refused, no one hesitated; and when, at eight o'clock, the Toplady's and I reached the rendezvous in the Engine-House entry, every one was there before us—save only, of course, the Proudfits.

"Where's the Proudfits? Ain't we goin' to wait for the Proudfits?" asked more than one; and some one had seen the Proudfit motor come flashing through the town from the Plank Road, empty. At all of which I kept a guilty silence; and I had by then not a little guilt to bear, since I was becoming every moment more doubtful of my undertaking. For at heart these people are the kindly of earth, and yet they are prone, as Delia More had said of the Proudfits, "to worship goodness like a little god," nor do they commonly broaden their allegiance without distinguished precedent. And how were we to secure this?

Every one was there—the little gray Doctor June, flitting about as quietly as a moth, and all those of whom Delia More had asked me: Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, wearing her cloak wine broadcloth side out to honour the occasion; Abigail Arnold, with a huge basket of gingerbread and jumbles from her home bakery; Photographer Jimmy Sturgis, and even Mis' Sturgis, in a faint aroma of caraway which she nibbled incessantly; Liddy Ember, and poor Ellen, wearing her magnificent hair like a coronet, and standing wistfully about, with her hand, palm outward, persistently covering her mouth; and Abel Halsey, who was to leave at midnight for a lonely cross-country ride into the hills. And as they stood, gossiping and eager, the women bird-observant of one another's toilettes, I own myself to have felt like an alien among them, remembering how I alone knew that Calliope Marsh was not even in the village.

Very softly we lifted the latch of Calliope's gate and trooped in her little dark yard.

"Blisterin' Benson!" Timothy Toplady whispered, "ef the house hain't pocket-dark, front and back. What ef she's went in the country?"

"Sh—h!" whispered his great Amanda, masterfully. "It's the shades down. I'm nervous as a witch. My land! if the front door ain't open a foot!"

Though there are no locked doors in Friendship, I had feared that Calliope's cottage door would now be barred, and that Delia More would answer no formal summons. At sight of the unguarded entrance I had a sick fear that she had in some way heard of our coming and fled away, leaving the door ajar in her haste. But when we had footed softly across the porch and peered in the dark passage, we saw at its farther end a crack of light.

"Might as well step ri' down to the dinin' room—that's where she sets," Mis' Amanda said in her whisper, which is gigantic too.

The passage smelled of the oilcloth on the floor and of a rubber waterproof which I brushed. And I shrank back beside the waterproof and let the others go on. For, after all, to that woman within I was a stranger, and these were her friends of old time. So it was Mis' Amanda who opened the dining-room door.

I could see that the room was cheery with a red-shaded hanging-lamp, and shelves of plants, and a glowing fire in the great range. A table was covered with red cotton and laid with dishes. Also, there was the fragrance of toast, so that one wished to enter. And in a rocking-chair sat Delia More. She stared up in a kind of terror at the open door, and then turned shrinkingly to some one who sat beside her. But at that one beside her I looked and looked again, for her rich fur cloak had fallen where she had let it fall; and there, sitting with Delia More's hand in hers, was that great Madame Proudfit of the Proudfit estate.

"For the land!" Mis' Amanda said. "For the land...."

But she was not looking at Madame Proudfit. And hardly seeing her, as I could

guess, that great Mis' Amanda went forward, holding out her arms.

"Delia More!" she cried, "Delia More!"

I saw Abel Halsey's pale, luminous face as he pushed past Timothy and strode within and crossed to her; and I remember Abigail Arnold and Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, and how they followed Abel with little sharp cries which must have been a kind of music. And with them went Ellen Ember, as if, secretly, she were wiser than we knew. And while the others blocked the passage or crowded into the room, according to the nature which was theirs, some one came from the cellarway and paused, smiling, on the threshold. And it was Miss Clementina Proudfit, with eggs in her hands.

"Wait!" I heard Delia's sharp, piping voice then; "wait!"

She rose, one thin little hand pressed tensely along her cheek. But the other hand Madame Proudfit held in both her own as she, too, rose beside her. And with them Abel stood, facing the rest.

"O, Abel Halsey—Abel Halsey ..." Delia said, "an' Mame Bliss—nor you, Abigail, don't you, any of you, come in yet. I got somethin' to tell you."

"But shake hands first, Delia," cried Abel Halsey, and Delia looked up at him, in her face a sudden, incredulous thankfulness which flushed it, brow and cheek, and won it to a way of beauty. But she did not give him her hand. And before she could speak again Miss Clementina put down the eggs, and, with some little stir of silk, she took a step or two steps toward us.

"Ah," she said, "let us not wait for anything—it has been so long since we have met! Delia has just told mother and me all about these years—and you don't know how splendid we think she has been and how brave in great trouble. Come in, everybody, and let's make her welcome home!"

Madame Proudfit said nothing, but she nodded and smiled at Delia More, and it seemed to me that in the Proudfits' way with Delia, their beautiful Linda had won a

kind of presence with them after all. And in the moment's hush the toast, propped on a fork before the coals in the range, suddenly blazed up in blue flame at the crust.

"Somebody save the toast!" cried Clementina and smiled very brightly.

They needed no more. Timothy Toplady sprang at the toast, and already Abel Halsey and Doctor June were shaking Delia's hand; and Mis' Amanda, throwing her shawl back over her shoulders from its pin at her throat, enveloped Delia in her giant arms. And the others came pushing forward, on their faces the smiles which, however they had faltered in the passage seeking a precedent, I make bold to guess bodied forth the gentle, hesitant spirit which informed them.

As for me, I waited without, even after the others had entered. And as I lingered, the outer door was pushed open to admit some late comer who whisked down the passage and stood in the dining-room doorway. It was Calliope.

"Delia More!" she cried; "didn't I tell you how it'd be if you'd only let 'em know? An' Mis' Proudfit, you here? I been worried to death on account o' forgettin' to take home your cream lace waist I mended."

Madame Proudfit's voice lowered the high key of the others talking in chorus.

"We drove over to get it, Calliope," she said. "And here we found our Delia More."

At eleven o'clock that night, as I sat writing a letter in which the spirit of what had come to pass must have breathed—as a spirit will breathe—Calliope Marsh tapped at my door; and she had a little basket.

"Here," she said, "I brought you this. It's some o' everything we hed. An'—I'm obliged for my s'prise," she added, squeezing my hand in the darkness. "I surmised first thing, most, when Delia described you. No; land, no!—Delia don't suspicion you got it up. She don't think of it bein' anybody but just God—an' I donno's 'twas. An' that's what Abel thinks—wa'n't Abel splendid? You know 'bout Abel—an' Delia? You know he use' to—he wanted to—that is, he was in—oh, well, no. Of course you wouldn't know. Well, Delia don't suspicion you—but she said I should

tell you something. 'You tell her,' she says to me, 'you tell her I say I guess I take stock now,' she says; 'tell her that: I guess I take stock now.'"

At this my heart leaped up so that I hardly know what I said in answer.

"Delia's out here now," Calliope called from the dark steps. "The Proudfits brought us. Delia's goin' home with 'em—to stay."

Thus I saw the eyes of the Proudfits' motor, with the threads of streaming light, about to go skimming from my gate. And in that kindly security was Delia More.

"Calliope," I cried after her because I could not help it, "tell Delia More I take stock, too!"

VII

THE BIG WIND

Of Abel Halsey, that young itinerant preacher, I learned more on a December day when Autumn seemed to have come back to find whether she had left anything. Calliope and I were resting from a racing walk up the hillside, where the squat brick Leading Church of Friendship overlooks the valley pastures and the village. Calliope walks like a girl, and with our haste and the keen air, her wrinkled cheeks were as rosy as youth.

"Don't it seem like some days don't belong to any month, but just whim along, doin' as they please?" Calliope said. "Months that might be snowin' an' blowin' the expression off our face hev days when they sort o' show summer hid inside, secret an' holy. That's the way with lots o' things, ain't it? That's the way," she added thoughtfully, "Abel feels about the Lord, I guess. Abel Halsey,—you know."

They had told me how Abel, long ordained a minister of God, had steadfastly refused to be installed a pastor of any church. He was a devout man, but the love of far places was upon him, and he lived what Friendship called "a-gypsyin'" off in the

hills, now to visit a sick man, now to preach in a country schoolhouse, now to marry, or bury, or help with the threshing. These lonely rides among the hills and his custom of watching a train come in or rush by out of the distance were his ways of voyaging. Perhaps, too, his little skill at the organ gave him, now and then, an hour resembling a journey. But in his first youth he had meant to go away in earnest—far away, to the City or some other city. Also, though Calliope did not speak of it again, and I think that the others kept a loyal silence because of my strangerhood, I had known, since the home coming of Delia More, that Abel Halsey had once had another dream.

"You wasn't here when the new church was built," Calliope said, looking up at the building proudly. "That was the time I mean about Abel. You know, before it was built we'd hed church in the hall over the Gekerjeck's drug store; an' because it was his hall, Hiram Gekerjeck, he just about run the church,—picked out the wall paper, left the stair door open Sundays so's he could get the church heat, till the whole service smelt o' ether, an' finally hed church announcements printed as a gift, but with a line about a patent medicine o' his set fine along at the bottom. He said that was no differ'nt than advertisin' the printin'-offices that way, like they do. But it was that move made Abel Halsey—him an' Timothy Toplady and Eppleby Holcomb an' Postmaster Sykes, the three elders, set to to build a church. An' they done it too. An' to them four I declare it seemed like the buildin' was a body waitin' for its soul to be born. From the minute the sod was scraped off they watched every stick that went into it. An' by November it was all done an' plastered an' waitin' its pews—an' it was a-goin' to be dedicated with special doin's—music from off, an' strange ministers, an' Reverend Arthur Bliss from the City. I guess Abel an' the elders hed tacked printed invites to half the barns in the county.

"I rec'lect it was o' Wednesday, the one next before the dedication, an' windy-cold an' wintry. I'd been havin' a walk that day, an' 'long about five o'clock, right about where we are, I'd stood watchin' the sunset over the Pump pasture there, till I was

chilled through. The smoke was rollin' out o' the church chimney because they was dryin' the plaster, an' I run in there to get my hands warm an' see how the plaster was doin'. An' inside was the three elders, walkin' 'round, layin' a finger on a sash or a post—the kind o' odd, knowledgeable way men has with new buildin's. The Ladies' Aid had got the floor broom-clean, an' the lamp-chandelier filled an' ready; an' the foreign pipe-organ that the Proudfits had sent from Europe was in an' in workin' order, little lookin'-glass over the keyboard an' all. It seemed rill home-like, with the two big stoves a-goin', an' the floor back of 'em piled up with the chunks Peleg Bemus had sawed for nothin'. Everything was all redded up, waitin' for the pews.

"Timothy Toplady was puttin' out his middle finger stiff here an' there on the plaster.

"'It's dry as a bone,' he says, 'but what I say is this, le's us leave a fire burn here all night, so's to be sure. I'd hate like death to hev the whole congregation catchin' cold an' takin' Hiram Gekerjeck's medicine.'

"I rec'lect Eppleby Holcomb looked up sort o' dreamy—Eppleby always goes round like he'd swallowed his last night's sleep.

"'The house o' God,' he says over; 'ain't that curious? Nothin' about it to indicate it's the house o' God but the shape—no more'n's if 'twas a buildin' where the Holy Spirit never come near. An' yet right here in this place we'll mebbe feel the big wind an' speak with Pentecostal tongues.'

""T seems like,' says Postmaster Sykes, thoughtful, "t seems like we'd ought to hev a little meetin' o' thanks here o' Sat'day night—little informal praise meetin' or somethin.'

"Timothy shakes his head decided.

"'Silas Sykes, what you talkin'?' he says. 'Why, the church ain't dedicated yet. A house o' God,' s'e, 'can't be used for no purpose whatsoever without it's been dedicated.'

"'So it can't—so it can't,' says the postmaster, apologetic, knowin' he was in politics

an' that the brethren was watchin' him, cat to mouse, for slips.

"'I s'pose that's so,' says Eppleby, doubtful. But he's one o' them that sort o' ducks under situations to see if they're alike on both sides, an' if they ain't, he up an' questions 'em. Timothy, though, he was differ'nt. Timothy was always goin' on about constituted authority, an' to him the thing was the thing, even if it was another thing.

"'That's right,' he insists, his lips disappearin' with certainty. 'I s'pose we hadn't reely ought even to come in here an' stan' 'round, like we are.'

"He looks sidlin' over towards me, warmin' my hands rill secular by the church stove. An' I felt like I'd been spoke up for when somebody says from the door:—

"'You better just bar out the carpenters o' this world, friends, an' done with it!'

"It was Abel Halsey, standin' in the entry, lookin' as handsome as the law allows. An' I see he happened to be there because the Through was about due,—that's the one that don't stop here,—an' you can always get a good view of it from this slope. You know Abel never misses watchin' a fast train go 'long, if he can help himself.

"'What's the i-dea?' Abel says. 'How can you pray at all in closets an' places that ain't been dedicated? I shouldn't think they'd be holy enough, 's'e.'

"'That,' says the postmaster, sure o' support, 'ain't the question.'

"'I thought it couldn't be,' says Abel, amiable. 'Well, what is the question? Whether prayer is prayer, no matter where you're prayin'?'

"'Oh, no,' says Eppleby Holcomb, soothin', 'it ain't that.'

"'I thought it couldn't be that,' says Abel. 'Is it whether the Lord is in dedicated spots an' nowheres else?'

"'Abel Halsey,' Timothy tarts up, 'you needn't to be sacrilegious.'

"'But,' says Abel, 'the question is, whether you're sacrilegious to deny a prayer-meetin' or any other good use to the church or to any other place, dedicated

or not. Well, Timothy, I think you are.'

"Timothy clears his throat an' dabs at the palm of his hand with his other front finger. But before he could lay down eternal law, we sort o' heard, almost before we knew we heard, folks hurryin' past out here on the frozen ground. An' they was shoutin', like questions, an' a-shoutin' further off. We looked out, an' I can remember how the whole slope up from the village there was black with folks.

"We run outside, an' I know I kep' close by Abel Halsey. An' I got hold o' what had happened when somebody yelled an answer to his askin'. You probably heard all about that part. It was the day the Through Express went off the track down there in the cut beyond the Pump pasture.

"We run with the rest of 'em, me keepin' close to Abel, I guess because he's got a way with him that makes you think he'd know what to do no matter what. But when he was two-thirds o' the way acrost the pasture, he stops short an' grabs at my sleeve.

"'Look here,' he says, 'you can't go down there. You mustn't do it. We donno what'll be. You stay here,' he says; 'you set there under the cottonwood.'

"You kind o' haf to mind Abel. It's sort o' grained in that man to hev folks disciple after him. I made him promise he'd motion from the fence if he see I could help any, an' then I se' down under that big tree down there. I was tremblin' some, I know. It always seems like wrecks are somethin' that happen in other states an' in the dark. But when one's on ground that you know like a book an' was brought up on,—when it's in the daylight, right by a pasture you've been acrost always an' where you've walked the ties,—well, I s'pose it's the same feelin' as when a man you know cuts up a state's prison caper; seem's like he can't of, because you knew him.

"Half the men o' Friendship run by me, seems though. The whole town'd been rousted up while we was in the church talkin' heresy. An' up on the high place on the road there I see Zittelhof's undertaking wagon, with the sunset showin' on its nickel rails. But not a woman run past me. Ain't it funny how it's men that go to danger of

rail an' fire an' water—but when it's nothin' but birth an' dyin' natural, then it's for women to be there.

"When I'd got about ready to fly away, waitin' so, I see Abel at the fence. An' he didn't motion to me, but he swung over the top an' come acrost the stubble, an' I see he hed somethin' in his arms. I run to meet him, an' he run too, crooked, his feet turnin' over with him some in the hard ground. The sky made his face sort o' bright; an' I see he'd got a child in his arms.

"He didn't give her to me. He stood her down side o' me—a little thing of five years old, or six, with thick, straight hair an' big scairt eyes.

"'Is she hurt, Abel?' I says.

"'No, she ain't hurt none,' he answers me, 'an' they's about seventeen more of 'em, her age, an' they ain't hurt, either. Their coach was standin' up on its legs all right. But the man they was with, he's stone dead. Hit on the head, somehow. An',' Abel says, 'I'm goin' to throw 'em all over the fence to you.'

"The little girl jus' kep' still. An' when we took her by each hand, an' run back toward the fence with her, her feet hardly touchin' the ground, she kep' up without a word, like all to once she'd found out this is a world where the upside-down is consider'ble in use. An' I waited with her, over there this side the cut, hearin' 'em farther down rippin' off fence rails so's to let through what they hed to carry.

"Time after time Abel come scramblin' up the sand-bank, bringin' 'em two 't once—little girls they was, all about the age o' the first one, none of 'em with hats or cloaks on; an' I took 'em in my arms an' set 'em down, an' took 'em in my arms an' set 'em down, till I was fair movin' in a dream. They belonged, I see by their dress, to some kind of a home for the homeless, an' I judged the man was takin' 'em somewheres, him that Abel said'd been killed. Some'd reach out their arms to me over the fence—an' some was afraid an' hung back, but some'd just cling to me an' not want to be set down. I can remember them the best.

"Abel, when he come with the last ones, he off with his coat like I with my ulster, an' as well as we could we wrapped four or five of 'em up—one that was sickly, an' one little delicate blonde, an' a little lame girl, an' the one—the others called her Mitsy—that'd come over the fence first. An' by then half of 'em was beginnin' to cry some. An' the wind was like so many knives.

"'Where shall we take 'em to, Abel?' I says, beside myself.

"'Take 'em?' he says. 'Take 'em into the church! Quick as you can. This wind is like death. Stay with 'em till I come.'

"Somehow or other I got 'em acrost that pasture. When I look at the Pump pasture now, in afternoon like this, or in Spring with vi'lets, or when a circus show's there, it don't seem to me it could 'a' been the same place. I kep' 'em together the best I could—some of 'em beggin' for 'Mr. Middie—Mr. Middie,' the man, I judged, that was dead. An' finally we got up here in the road, an' it was like the end o' pain to be able to fling open the church door an' marshal 'em through the entry into that great, big, warm room, with the two fires roarin'.

"I got 'em 'round the nearest stove an' rubbed their little hands an' tried not to scare 'em to death with wantin' to love 'em; an' all the while, bad as I felt for 'em, I was glad an' glad that it was me that could be there with 'em. They was twenty,—when I come to count 'em so's to keep track,—twenty little girls with short, thick hair, or soft, short curls, an' every one with something baby-like left to 'em. An' when we set on the floor round the stove, the coals shone through the big open draft into their faces, an' they looked over their shoulders to the dark creepin' up the room, an' they come closer 'round me—an' the closest-up ones snuggled.

"Well, o' course that was at first, when they was some dazed. But as fast as their blue little hands was warm an' pink again, one or two of 'em begun to whimper, natural an' human, an' up with their arm to their face, an' then begun to cry right out, an' some more joined in, an' the rest pipes up, askin' for Mr. Middie. An' I thought,

'Sp'osin' they all cried an' what if Abel Halsey stayed away hours.' I donno. I done my best too. Mebbe it's because I'm use' to children with my heart an' not with my ways. Anyhow, most of 'em was cryin' prime when Abel finally got there.

"When he come in, I see Abel's face was white an' dusty, an' he had his other coat off an' gone too, an' his shirt-sleeves was some tore. But he comes runnin' up to them cryin' children an' I wish't you could 'a' seen his smile—Abel's smile was always kind o' like his soul growin' out of his face, rill thrifty.

"'Why, you little kiddies!' s'e, 'cryin' when you're all nice an' warm! Le's see now,' he says grave. 'Anybody here know how to play Drop-the-handkerchief? If you do,' he tells 'em, 'stand up quick!'

"They scrambled 'round like they was beetles an' you'd took up the stone. They was all up in a minute, an' stopped cryin', too. With that he catches my handkerchief out o' my hand an' flutters it over his head an' runs to the middle o' the room.

"'Come on!' he says. 'Hold o' hands—every one o' you hold o' hands. I'm goin' to drop the handkerchief, an' you'd better hurry up.'

"That was talk they knew. They was after him in a secunt an' tears forgot,—them poor little things,—laughin' an' hold o' hands, an' dancin' in a chain, an' standin' in a ring. An' when he hed 'em like that, an' still, Abel begun runnin' 'round to drop the handkerchief; an' then he turns to me.

"'Only two killed, thank God,' he says as he run; 'the conductor an' M-i-d-d-l-e-t-o-n,' he spells it, an' motions to the children with the handkerchief so's I'd know who Middleton was. 'An' not a scrap o' paper on him,' he goes on, 'to tell what home he brought the children from or where he's goin' with 'em. Their mileage was punched to the City—but we don't know where they belong there, an' the conductor bein' gone too. The poor fellow that had 'em in charge never knew what hurt him. Hit from overhead, he was, an' his skull crushed....'

"It was so dark in the church by then we could hardly see, but the children could

keep track o' the white handkerchief. He let it fall behind the little girl he'd brought me first,—Mitsy,—an' she catches it up an' sort o' squeaks with the fun an' runs after him. An' while he doubles an' turns,—

"'They've telegraphed ahead,' he says, 'to two or three places in the City. But even if we hear right off, we can't get 'em out o' Friendship to-night. They'll hev to stay here. The Commercial Travellers' Hotel an' the Depot House has both got all they can do for—some of 'em hurt pretty bad. They couldn't either hotel take 'em in....'

"Then he lets Mitsy catch him an' he ups with her on his shoulder an' run with her on his back, his face lookin' out o' her blue, striped skirts.

"'We'll hev to house 'em right here in the church,' he says.

"'Here?' says I; 'here in the church?'

"'You know Friendship,' he says, hoppin' along. 'Not half a dozen houses could take in more'n two extry, even if we hed the time to canvass. An' we ain't the time. They want their s-u-p-p-e-r right now,' he spells it out, an' lit out nimble when Mitsy dropped the handkerchief back o' the little blond girl. Then he let the little blond girl catch them, and he took her on his shoulders too, an' they was both shoutin' so 't he hed to make little circles out to get where I could hear him.

"'I've seen Zittelhof,' he told me. 'He was down there with his wagon. He'll bring up enough little canvas cots from the store. An' I thought mebbe you'd go down to the village an' pick up some stuff they'll need—bedding an' things. An' get the women here with some supper. Come on now,' he calls out to 'em; 'everybody in a procession an' sing!'

"He led 'em off with

"'King William was King James's son,'

an' he sings back to me, for the secunt line,

"'Go now, go quick, I bet they're starved!'

"So I got into my coat, tryin' to think where I should go to be sure o' not wastin' time talkin'. Lots o' folks in this world is willin', but mighty few can be quick.

"I knew right off, though, where I'd find somebody to help. The Friendship Married Ladies' Cemetery Improvement Sodality was meetin' that afternoon with Mis' Toplady, an' I could cut acrost their pasture—" Calliope nodded toward the little Toplady house and the big Toplady barn—"an' that's what I done. An' when I got near enough to the house to tell, I see by the light in the parlour that they was still there. An' I know when I got into the room, full as I was o' news o' them little children an' the wreck an' the two killed an' all them that was hurt—there was the Sodality settlin' whether the lamb's wool comforter for the bazaar should be tied with pink for daintiness or brown for durability.

"'Dainty!' says I, when I got my breath. 'They's sides to life makes me want to pinch that word right out o' the dictionary same as I would a bug,' I says.

"That was funny, too,"—Calliope added thoughtfully, "because I like that word, speakin' o' food an' ways to do things. But some folks get to livin' the word same's if it was the law.

"I guess they thought I was crazy," she went on, "but I wasn't long makin' 'em understand. An' I tell you, the way they took it made me love 'em all. If you want to love folks, just you get in some kind o' respectable trouble in Friendship, an' you'll see so much lovableness that the trouble'll kind o' spindle out an' leave nothin' but the love doin' business. My land, the Sodality went at the situation head first, like it was somethin' to get acrost before dark. An' so it was.

"I remember Mis' Photographer Sturgis: 'There!' she says, 'most cryin'. 'If ever I take only a pint o' milk, I'm sure as sure to want more before the day's out. None of us is on good terms with each other's milkman. Where we goin' to get the milk,' she says, 'for them poor little things?'

"'Where?' says Mis' Toplady—you know how big an' comfortable an' settled she

is—'Where? Well, you needn't to think o' where. I expect the Jersey won't be milked till I go an' milk her,' she says, 'but she gives six quarts, nights, right along now, an' sometimes seven. Now about the bread.'

"Mis' Postmaster Sykes use' to set sponge twice a week, an' she offered five loaves out o' her six baked that day. Mis' Holcomb had two loaves o' brown bread an' a crock o' sour cream cookies. An' Libbie Liberty bursts out that they'd got up their courage an' killed an' boiled two o' their chickens the day before an' none o' the girls'd been able to touch a mouthful, bein' they'd raised the hens from egg to axe. Libbie said she'd bring the whole kettle along, an' it could be het on the church stove an' made soup of. So it went on, down to even Liddy Ember, that was my partner an' silly poor, an' in about four minutes everything was provided for, beddin' an' all.

"Mis' Toplady had flew upstairs, gettin' out the linen, an' she was comin' down the front stairs with her arms full o' sheets an' pillow slips when through the front door walks Timothy Toplady, come in all excited an' lookin' every which way. Seems he'd barked his elbow in the rescue work an' laid off for liniment.

"'Oh, Timothy,' says his wife, 'them poor little children. We've been plannin' it all out.'

"'Who's goin' to take 'em in?' says Timothy, tryin' to roll up his overcoat sleeve for fear the Sodality'd be put to the blush if he got to his elbow any other way.

"'They're all warm in the church,' Mis' Toplady says; 'we're goin' to leave 'em there. Zittelhof's goin' to take up canvas cots. We're gettin' the bedding together,' she told him.

"Timothy looked up, sort o' wild an' glazed.

"'Canvas cots,' s'e, 'in the house o' the Lord?'

"'Why, Timothy,' says his wife, helpless, 'it's all warm there now, an' we don't know what else. We thought we'd carry up their supper to 'em—'

"'Supper,' says Timothy, 'in the house o' the Lord?'

"Then Mis' Toplady spunks up some.

"'Why, yes,' she says; 'I'm goin' to milk the Jersey an' take up the two pails.'

"Timothy waves his barked arm in the air.

"'Never!' s'e. 'Never. We elders'll never consent to that, not in this world!'

"At that we all stood around sort o' pinned to the air. This hadn't occurred to nobody. But his wife was back at him, rill crispy.

"'Timothy Toplady,' s'she, 'they use churches for horspitals an' refuges,' she says.

"'They do,' says Timothy, solemn, 'they do, in necessity, an' war, an' siege. But here's the whole o' Friendship Village to take these children in, an' it's sacrilege to use the house o' God for any purpose whatever while it's waitin' its dedication. It's stealin', he says, 'from the Lord Most High.'

"I never see anybody more het up. We all tried to tell him. Nobody in Friendship has a warm spare room in winter, without it's the Proudfits, an' they was in Europe an' their house locked. Mebbe six of us, we counted up afterwards, could 'a' took in two children to sleep in a cold room, or one child to sleep with some one o' the family. But as Abel said, where was the time to canvass round? An' what could we do with the other little things? But Timothy wouldn't listen to nothin'.

"'Amanda,' s'e in a married voice, 'what I say is this, I forbid you to carry a drop o' Jersey milk or any other kind o' milk up to that church.'

"With that he was out the front door an' liniment forgot.

"Mis' Sykes spatted her hands.

"'He'll find Silas Sykes an' Eppleby,' she says to Mis' Holcomb. 'Quick. Le's us get our hands on my bread an' your cookies. Them poor little things—'way past their supper hour.'

"'An' none of 'em got mothers,' says Mis' Sturgis, 'just left 'round with lockets on, I

sp'ose, an' wrecked an' hungry....'

"'An' one o' 'em lame,' Mame Holcomb puts in, down on her knees tryin' to sort out her overshoes. The Sodality never could tell its own overshoes.

"Well, they scattered so quick it made you think o' mulberry leaves, some years, in the first frost—an' I was left alone with Mis' Toplady.

"'Here,' she says to me then, all squintin' with firmness, 'you take along all the linen an' comfortables you can lug. Timothy didn't mention them. An' leave the rest to me.'

"I went over that in my mind while I stumbled along back to the church, loaded down. But I couldn't make much out of it. I knew Timothy Toplady: that he was meek till he turned an' then it was look out. An' I knew, too, that Timothy could run Silas Sykes, the postmaster's political strength, like you've noticed, makin' him kind o' wobbled in his own judgment of other things. I didn't know how Eppleby Holcomb'd be—it might turn out to be one o' the things he'd up an' question, civilized, but I wa'n't sure. Anyhow, the cream cookies an' the two loaves wasn't so vital as them five loaves o' bread.

"When I got back to the church, here it was all lit up. Abel had lit the chandelier on a secular scene! Bless 'em, it surely was secular, though, accordin' to my lights, it was some sacred too. Six or seven of the little things was buildin' a palace out o' the split wood, with the little lame girl for queen. The little blonde an' the one that was rill delicate lookin' had gone to sleep by the stove on Abel's overcoat. Mitsy, she run from somewheres an' grabbed my hand. An' Abel had the rest over by the other stove tellin' 'em stories. I heard him say dragon, an' blue velvet, an' golden hair.

"I hadn't more'n got inside the door before Zittelhof's wagon come with the cots. An' Mis' Zittelhof was with him, her arms full o' bedclothes she'd gathered up around from folks. I never said a word to Abel about the trouble with Timothy. I donno if Abel rilly heard us come in, he was so excited about his dragon. An' Mis' Zittelhof

an' I began makin' up the cots. On the first one I laid the two babies that was asleep on the floor. They never woke up. Their little cheeks was warm an' pink, an' one of 'em had some tears on it. When I see that, I clear forgot the church wasn't dedicated, an' I thanked God they was there, safe an' by a good fire, with somebody 'tendin' to 'em.

"The bed-makin' an' the story-tellin' an' the palace-buildin' went on, an' I kep' gettin' exciteder every minute. When the door opened, I couldn't tell which was in my mouth, my heart or my tongue. But it was only Libbie Liberty with the big iron kettle o' chicken broth an' a basket o' cups an' spoons. She se' down the kettle on the stove an' stirred up the fire under it, an' it was no time before the whole church begun to smell savoury as a kitchen. An' then in walks Mis' Holcomb with her brown bread an' cream cookies. An' we fair jumped up an' down when Mis' Sykes come breathin' in the door with them five loaves o' wheat bread safe, an' butter to match.

"Still, we was without milk. There wasn't a sign o' Mis' Toplady. An' any minute Timothy might get there with Silas in tow. Mis' Sykes was nervous as a witch over it, an' it was her proposed we set the children up on the cots an' begin' feedin' 'em right away. I run down the room to tell Abel, an' then I hed to tell him why we'd best hurry.

"Abel laughs a little when he heard about it.

"'Dear old Timothy,' he says, 'servin' his God accordin' to the dictates of his own notions. Wait a minute till I release the princess.'

"When he said that, I was afraid he must be telling a worldly story with royalty in. An' I begun to get troubled myself. But I heard him end it: 'So the Princess found her kingdom because she learnt to love every living thing. She saved the lives of the hare an' the goldfinch. An' don't you ever let any living thing suffer one minute and maybe you'll find out some of the things the Princess knew.' An', royalty or not, I

felt all right about Abel's story-telling after that.

"Then we all brisked round an' begun settin' the children up on the cots—two or three to a cot, with one of us to wait on 'em. An' both the little sleepy ones woke up, too. An' when we sliced an' spread the bread an' dished the hot chicken broth an' see how hungry they all seemed, I declare if one of us could feel wicked. The little things'd begun to talk some by then, an' they chatted soft an' looked up at us, an' that little Mitsy—she'd got so she'd kiss me every time I'd ask her. An' I was perfectly shameless. I donno's the poor little thing got enough to eat. But sometimes when things go blue—I like to think about that. I guess we was all the same. Our principal feelin' was how dear they was, an' to hurry up before Timothy Toplady got there, an' how we wish't we hed more milk.

"Then all of a sudden while we was flyin' round, I happened to go past the front door, an' I heard a noise in the entry. I thought o' Timothy an' Silas, comin' with sheriffs an' firearms an' I didn't know what—Silas havin' politics back of him, so; an' I rec'lect I planned, wild an' contradictory, first about callin' an instantaneous congregational meetin' to decide which was right, an' then about telegraphin' to the City for constituted authority to do as we was doin', an' then about Abel fightin' Timothy an' Silas both, if it come rilly necessary.

"I got hold o' Mis' Sykes an' Mame Holcomb, an' told 'em quiet. 'Somethin's the matter outside there,' I says to 'em, kind o' warnin', 'an' I thought you two'd ought to know it.' An' we all three come 'round by the entry door, careless, an listened. An' the noise kep' up, kind o' soft an' obstinate, an' we couldn't make it out.

"'We'd best go out there an' see,' says Mis' Sykes, low; 'the dear land knows what men will do.'

"So we watched our chance an' slipped out—an' I guess, for all our high ways, we was all three wonderin' inside, was we rilly doin' right. You know your doubts come thick when there's a noise in the entry. But Mis' Sykes acted as brave as two, an' it

was her shut the door to behind us.

"An' there, right by that stone just outside the entry o' the church, set Mis' Timothy Toplady, milkin' her Jersey cow.

"We could just see her, dim, by the light o' the transom. She was on the secunt pail, an' that was two-thirds full. She hed her back toward us, an' she didn't hear us. She set all wrapped up in a shawl, a basket o' cups side of her, an' the Jersey standin' there, quiet an' demure. An' beyond, in the cut an' movin' acrost the Pump pasture, it was thick with lanterns.

"But before we three'd hed time to burst out like we wanted to, we sort o' scrooched back again. Because on the other side o' the cow we heard Timothy Toplady's voice. He'd just got there, some breathless, an' with him, we see, was Eppleby.

"'Amanda,' says Timothy, 'what in the Dominion o' Canady air you doin'?'

"'I shouldn't think you would know,' says Mis' Toplady, short. 'You don't do enough of it.'

"She hed him there. Timothy always will go down to the Dick Dasher an' shirk the chores.

"'Amanda,' says Timothy, 'you've disobeyed me flat-footed.'

"'No such thing,' s'she, milkin' away like mad for fear he'd use force; 'I ain't carried a drop o' milk here. I've drove it,' she says.

"Timothy groaned.

"'Milkin' in the church,' he says.

"'No, sir,' says Amanda, back at him; 'I'm outside on the sod, an' you know it.'

"An' then my hopes sort o' riz, because I thought I heard Eppleby Holcomb laugh soft—sort of a half-an'-half chuckle. Like he'd looked under the situation an' see it wasn't alike on both sides. An' 't the same time Mis' Toplady, she changed her way, an',—

"'Timothy,' s'she, 'you hungry?'

"'I'm nigh starved,' says Timothy. 'It must be eight o'clock,' s'e, 'but I ain't the heart to think o' that.'

"'No,' s'she, 'so you ain't. Not with them poor babies in there hungrier'n you be an' nowheres to go.'

"With that she got done milkin' an' stood up an' picked up her two pails—we could smell the sweet, warm milk from where we was.

"'Timothy,' s'she, 'the worst sacrilege that's done in this world is when folks turns their backs on any little bit of a chance that the Lord gives 'em to do good in, like He told 'em. Who was it, I'd like to know, said, "Suffer little children"? Who was it said, "Feed my lambs"? No "when" or "where" about that. Just do it. An' no occasion to hem an' haw about it, either. The least you can do for your share in this, as I see it, is to keep your silence and drive the cow back home. The oven's full o' bake' sweet potatoes an' they must be just nearin' done.'

"I see Timothy start to wave his arms an' I donno what he would 'a' said if it hadn't been settled for 'im. For then, like it was right out o' the sky, the church organ begun to play soft. For a minute we all looked up, like the Shepherds must of when the voices of the night told 'em the spirit o' God was in the world, born in a little child. It was Abel,—I knew right away it was Abel,—an' he was just gentlin' round soft on the keys, kind o' like he was askin' a blessin' an' rockin' a cradle an' doin' all the little nice things music can. An' with that Mis' Sykes, she throws open the church door.

"I'll never forget how it looked inside—all warm an' lamp-lit an' with them little things bein' fed an' chatterin' soft. An' up in the loft set Abel, playin' away on the foreign organ before it'd been dedicated. An' then he begun singin' low—an' there's somethin' about Abel 't you just haf to listen, whatever he says or does. Even Timothy hed to listen—though I think he was some struck dumb, too, an' that kep' him controlled for a minute—like it will. An' Abel sung:—

"'The Lord is my Shepherd—I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me—He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul....'

"An' at the first line, before we'd rilly sensed what it was he said, every one o' them little children in the midst o' their supper slips off the edge o' the cots an' kneeled down there on the bare floor, just like they'd been told to. Oh, wasn't it wonderful? An' yet it wasn't—it wasn't. We found out, when folks come for 'em the next mornin', it was the children's prayer that they sung every day o' their lives at their Good Shepherd's Orphans' Home—soft an' out o' tune an' with all their little hearts, just as they went ahead an' sung it with Abel, clear to the end. I guess they didn't know everybody don't kneel down all over the world when they hear the Twenty-third Psalm.

"Abel seen 'em in the little lookin'-glass over the keyboard. An' when he'd got done he set there perfectly still with his head down. An' Mis' Sykes an' Mis' Holcomb an' Eppleby an' I bowed our heads too, out there in the entry. An' so, after a minute, did Timothy. I couldn't help peekin' to see.

"An' then, when the children was all a-rustlin' up, Mis' Toplady she jus' hands her two pails o' milk over to Timothy.

"'You take 'em in,' she says to him, her eyes swimmin'. 'I've come off without my handkerchief.'

"Timothy looks round him, kind o' helpless, but Eppleby stood there an' pats him on the arm.

"'Go in—go in, brother,' Eppleby says gentle. 'I guess the church's been dedicated. I feel like we'd heard the big wind—an' I guess, mebbe, the Pentecostal tongues.'

"An' Timothy—he's an awful tender-hearted man in spite o' bein' so notional—Timothy just went on in with the milk, without sayin' anything. An' Eppleby side of him. An' we 'most shut the door on Silas Sykes, comin' tearin' up on

account o' Timothy leavin' him urgent word to come, without explainin' why. An' when Silas see the inside o' the church, all lit up an' chicken supper for the children an' the other two elders there with the milk, he just rubs his hands an' beams like he see his secunt term. I donno's it'd ever enter Silas Sykes's head't there was anything wrong with anything, providin' somebody wasn't snappin' him up for it. I guess it's like that in politics.

"We took the milk around an', bake' sweet potatoes forgot, Timothy stood up by the stove, between Eppleby an' Silas, an' watched us—an' the Jersey must 'a' picked her way home alone. An' Abel, he just set there to the organ, gentlin' 'round soft on the keys so it made me think o' God movin' on the face o' the waters. An' movin' on the face of everything else too, dedicated or not. It was like we'd felt the big wind, same as Eppleby said. An' somethin' in it kind o' hid, secret an' holy."

VIII

THE GRANDMA LADIES

Two weeks before Christmas Friendship was thrown into a state of holiday delight. Mrs. Proudfit and her daughter, Miss Clementina, issued invitations to a reception to be given on Christmas Eve at Proudfit House, on Friendship Hill. The Proudfits, who had rarely entertained since Miss Linda went away, lived in Europe and New York and spent little time in the village, but, for all that, they remained citizens in absence, and Friendship always wrote out invitations for them whenever it gave "companies." The invitations the postmaster duly forwarded to some Manhattan bank, though I think the village had a secret conviction that these were never received—"sent out wild to a bank in the City, so." However, now that old courtesies were to be so magnificently returned, every one believed and felt a greater respect for the whole financial world.

The invitations enclosed the card of Mrs. Nita Ordway, and the name sounded for me a note of other days when, before my coming to Friendship Village, we two had, in the town, belonged to one happy circle of friends.

"I thought at first mebbe the card'd got shoved in the envelope by mistake," said Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss. "I know once I got a Christmas book from a cousin o' mine in the City, an' a strange man's card fell out o' the leaves. I sent the card right straight back to her, an' Cousin Jane seemed rill cut up, so I made up my mind I'd lay low about this card. But I hear everybody's got 'em. I s'pose it's a sign that it's some Mis' Ordway's party too—only not enough hers to get her name on the invite. Mebbe she chipped in on the expenses. Give a third, like enough."

However that was, Friendship looked on the Christmas party as on some unexpected door about to open in its path, and it woke in the morning conscious of expectation before it could remember what to expect. Proudfit House! A Christmas party! It touched every one as might some giant Santa Claus, for grown-ups, with a pack of heart's-ease on his back.

When Mrs. Ordway arrived in the village, the excitement mounted. Mrs. Nita Ordway was the first exquisitely beautiful woman of the great world whom Friendship had ever seen—"beautiful like in the pictures of when noted folks was young," the village breathlessly summed her up. To be sure, when she and her little daughter, Viola, rode out in the Proudfits' motor, nobody in the street appeared to look at them. But Friendship knew when they rode, and when they walked, and what they wore, and when they returned.

It was a happiness to me to see Mrs. Ordway again, and I sat often with her in the music room at Proudfit House and listened to her glorious voice in just the songs that I love. Sometimes she would send for her little Viola, so that I might sit with the child in my arms, for she was one of those rare children who will let you love them.

"I like be made some 'tention to," Viola sometimes said shyly. She was not afraid,

and she would stay with me hour-long, as if she loved to be loved. She was like a little come-a-purpose spirit, to let one pretend.

A day or two after the invitations had been received, I was in my guest room going over my Christmas list. Just before Christmas I delight in the look of a guest room, for then the bed is spread with a brave array of pretty things, and when one arranges and wraps them, the stitches of rose and blue on flowered fabrics, the flutter of crisp ribbons, and the breath of sachets make one glad. I was lingering at my task when I heard some one below, and I recognized her voice.

"Calliope!" I called gladly from the stairs, and bade her come up to me.

Calliope is one of the women in whose presence one can wrap one's Christmas gifts. She came into the room, bringing a breath of Winter, and she laid aside her tan ulster and her round straw hat, and straightway sat down on the rug by the open fire.

"Well said!" she cried contentedly, "a grate fire upstairs! It's one of the things that never seems real to me, like a tower on a house. I'd as soon think o' havin' a grate fire up a tree an' settin' there, as in my chamber. Anyway, when it comes Winter, upstairs in Friendship is just a place where you go after something in the bureau draw' an' come down again as quick as you can. I s'pose you got an invite to the party?"

"Yes," I said, "and you will go, Calliope?"

But instead of answering me:—

"My land!" she said, "think of it! A party like that, an' not a low-necked waist in town, nor a swallow-tail! An' only two weeks to do anything in, an' only Liddy Ember for dressmaker, an' it takes her two weeks to make a dress. I guess Mis' Postmaster Sykes has got her. They say she read her invite in the post-office with one hand an' snapped up that tobacco-brown net in the post-office store window with the other, an' out an' up to Liddy's an' hired her before she was up from the breakfast table. So she gets the town new dress. Mis' Sykes is terrible quick-moved."

"What will you wear, Calliope?" I asked.

"Me—I never wear anything but henriettas," she said. "I think the plainer-faced you are, the simpler you'd ought to be dressed. I use' to fix up terrible ruffled, but when I see I was reg'lar plain-faced I stuck to henriettas, mostly gray—"

"Calliope," I said resolutely, "you don't mean you're not going to the Proudfit party?"

She clasped her hands and held them, palms outward, over her mouth, and her eyes twinkled above them.

"No, sir," she said, "I can't go. You'll laugh at me!" she defended. "Don't you tell!" she warned. And finally she told me.

"Day before yesterday," she said, "I went into the City. An' I come out on the trolley. An' I donno what possessed me,—I ain't done it for months,—but when we crossed the start of the Plank Road, I got off an' went up an' visited the Old Ladies' Home. You know I've always thought," she broke off, "—well, you know I ain't a rill lot to do with, an' I always had an i-dee that mebbe sometime, when I got older, I might—"

I nodded, and she went on.

"Well, I walked around among 'em up there—canary birds an' plants an' footstools—an' the whole thing fixed up so cheerful that it's pitiful. Red wall-paper an' flowered curtains an' such, all fair yellin' at you, 'We're cheerful—cheerful—cheerful!' till I like to run. An' it come over me, bein' so near Christmas an' all, what would they do on Christmas? So I asked a woman in a navy-blue dress, seein' she flipped around like she was the flag o' the place.

"'The south corridor,' she answers,—them's the highest payin"—Calliope threw in, "'chipped in an' got up a tree, an' there's gifts for all,' s'she. 'The west corridor'—them's the local city ones—'all has friends to take 'em away for the day. The east corridor'—they're from farther away an' middlin' well-to-do—'all has boxes

comin' to 'em from off. But the north corridor,' s'she, scowlin' some, 'is rather a trial to us.'

"An' I was waitin' for that. The north corridor is all charity old ladies, paid for out o' the fund; an' the president o' the home has just died, an' the secretary's in the old country on a pleasure trip, an' the board's in a row over the policy o' the home, an' the navy-blue matron dassent act, an' altogether it looked like the north corridor was goin' to get a regular mid-week Wednesday instead of a Christmas. An' I up an' ast' her to take me down to see 'em."

It was easy to see what Calliope had done, I thought: she had promised to spend Christmas Eve over there in the north corridor, reading aloud.

"They was nine of 'em," she went on, "nice old grandma ladies, with hands that looked like they'd ought to 'a' been tyin' little aprons an' cuttin' out cookies an' squeezin' somebody else's hand. There they set, with the wall-paper doin' its cheerfulest, loud as an insult,—one of 'em with lots o' white hair, one of 'em singin' a little, some of 'em tryin' to sew or knit some. My land!" said Calliope, "when we think of 'em sittin' up an' down the world—with their arms all empty—an' Christmas comin' on—ain't it a wonder—Well, I stayed 'round an' talked to 'em," she went on, "while the navy-blue lady whisked her starched skirts some. She seemed too busy 'tendin' to 'em to give 'em much attention. An' they looked rill pleased when I talked to 'em about their patchwork an' knittin', an' did they get the sun all day, an' didn't the canary sort o' shave somethin' off'n the human ear-drum, on his tiptop notes? An' when I said that, Grandma Holly—her with lots o' white hair—says:—

"'I donno but it does,' she says, 'but I don't mind; I'm so thankful to see somethin' around that's little an' young.'

"That sort o' landed in my heart. It's just what I'd been thinkin' about 'em.

"'Little, young things,' s'I, sort o' careless, 'make a lot o' racket, you know.'

"At that old Mis' Burney pipes up—her that brought up her daughter's children an'

her son-in-law married again an' turned her out:—

"'I use' to think so,' she says quiet; 'the noise o' the children use' to bother me terrible. When they reely got to goin' I use' to think I couldn't stand it, my head hurt me so. But now,' s'she, 'I get to thinkin' sometimes I wouldn't mind a horse-fiddle if some of 'em played it.'

"'They're lots o' company, the little things,' says old Mis' Norris—she'd kep' mislayin' her teeth an' the navy-blue lady had took 'em away from her that day for to teach her, so I couldn't hardly understand what she said. 'Mine was named Ellen an' Nancy,' I made out.

"'Some o' you remember my Sam,'—Mis' Ailing speaks up then, an' she begun windin' up her yarn an' never noticed she was ravellin' out her mitten,—'he was an alderman,' she was goin' on, but old Mis' Winslow cuts in on her:—

"'It don't matter what he was when he was man-grown,' s'she. 'Man-grown can get along themselves. It's when they're little bits o' ones,' she says.

"'Little!' says Grandma Holly. 'Is it little you mean? Well, my Amy's two little feet use' to be swallowed up in my hand—so,' she says, shuttin' her hand over to show us.

"Well, so they went on. I give you my word I stood there sort o' grippin' up on my elbows. I'd always known it was so—like you do know things are so. But somehow when you come to feel they're so, that's another thing. And I was feelin' this in my throat 'bout as big as an orange. I'd thought their hands looked like they'd ought to be tyin' up little aprons, but I never thought o' the hands bein' rill lonesome to do the tyin', an' thinkin' about it, too. An' now I understood 'em like I see 'em for the first time, rill face to face. Somehow, we ain't any too apt to look at people that way," said Calliope. "You see how I mean it.

"Then comes the navy-blue woman an' says it's time for their hot milk, an' they all looked up, kind o' hopeful. An' I see that the navy-blue one had got 'em trained into

the i-dee that hot milk was an event. She didn't like to hev 'em talk much about the past, she told me, when she see what we was speakin' of, because it gener'lly made some of 'em cry, an' the i-dee was to keep the spirit of the home bright an' cheerful. 'So I see,' s'I, dry. An' there was Christmas comin' on, an' nothin' to break the general cheerfulness but hot milk. "Well," Calliope said, "I s'pose you'll think I'm terrible foolish, but I couldn't help what I done—"

"I don't wonder at it," said I, warmly; "you promised to spend Christmas Eve with them and read aloud to them, didn't you, Calliope?"

"No!" Calliope cried; "I didn't do that. I should think they'd be sick to death o' bein' read aloud to. I should think they'd be sick to death bein' cheered up by their surroundin's. No—I invited the whole nine of 'em to come over an' spend Christmas Eve with me."

"Calliope!" I cried, "but how—"

"I know it," she exclaimed, "I know it. But they're all well an' hardy. The charity corridor ain't expected in the infirmary much. An' Jimmy Sturgis is goin' to bring 'em over free in the closed 'bus—I'll fill it with hot bricks an' hot flat-irons an' bed-quilts. An' my land! you'd ought to see 'em when I ask' 'em. I don't s'pose they'd had an invite out in years. The navy-blue lady looked like I'd nipped a mountain off'n her shoulders, too. An' now," said Calliope, "what on top o' this earth will I do with 'em when I get 'em here?"

What indeed? I left my task and sat by her on the rug before the fire, and we talked it over. But all the while we talked, I could see that she was keeping something back—some plan of which she was doubtful.

"I ain't no money to spend, you know," she said, "an' I won't let anybody else spend any for me, for this. Folks has plans enough o' their own without mine. But I kep' sayin' to myself, all the way home when my knees give down at the i-dee of what I was goin' to do: 'Calliope, the Lord says, "Give." An' He meant you to give, same's

those that hev got. He didn't say, "Everybody give but Calliope, an' she ain't got much, so she'd ought to be let off." He said, "Give."' An' He didn't mention all nice things, same's I'd like to give, an' most everybody does give—" she nodded toward my bed, brave with its Christmas array. "He didn't mention givin' things at all. An' so," said Calliope, "I thought o' somethin' else."

She sat with brooding eyes on the fire, her hands clasped about her knees.

"The Lord Christ," said Calliope, "didn't hev nothin' of His own. An' yet He just give an' give an' give. An' somehow I got the i-dee," she finished, glancing up at me shyly, "that mebbe Christmas ain't really all in your stocking foot, after all. I ain't much to spend, and mebbe that sounds some like sour grapes. But it seems like a good many beautiful things is free to all, an' that they's ways to do. Well, I've thought of a way—"

"Calliope," I said, "tell me what you have really planned for the old-lady party. You have planned?"

"Well, yes," she said, "I hev. But mebbe you'll think it ain't anything. First I thought o' tea, an' thin bread-an'-butter sandwiches—it seems some like a party when you get your bread thin. An' I've got apples in the house we could roast, an' corn to pop over the kitchen fire. But then I come to a stop. For I ain't nothin' else, an' I've spent every cent I can spend a'ready. But yet I did want to show 'em somethin' lovely—an' differ'nt from what they see, so's it'd seem as if somebody cared, an' as if they'd been in Christmas, too. An' all of a sudden it come to me, why not invite in a few little children o' somebody's here in Friendship? So's them old grandma ladies—"

She shook her head and turned away.

"I expec'," she said, "you think I'm terrible foolish. But wouldn't that be givin', don't you think? Would that be anything?"

I have planned, as will fall to us all, many happy ways of keeping festival; but I think that never, even in days when I myself was happiest, have I so delighted in any

event as in this of Calliope's proposing. And when at last she had gone, and the dusk had fallen and I lighted candles and went back to my pleasant task, some way the stitches of pink and blue on flowered fabrics, the flutter of crisp ribbons, and the breath of the sachets were not greatly in my thoughts; and that which made me glad was a certain shining in the room, but this was not of candle-light, or firelight, or winter starlight.

With the days the plans for the Proudfit party—or rather the plans of the Proudfit guests—went merrily forward. It was, they said, like "in the Oldmoxon days," when the house in which I was now living had been the Friendship fairyland. Some take their parties solemnly, some joyously, some feverishly; but Friendship takes them vitally, as it takes a project or the breath of being. Like the rest of the world, the village sank Christmas in festivity. It could not see Christmas for the Christmas plans.

Speculation was the delight of meetings, and every one conspired in terms of toilettes.

"Likely," said Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, "Mis' Banker Mason'll wear her black-an'-white foulard. Them foulards are wonderful durable—you can't muss 'em. She got hers when Gramma Mason first hurt her back, so's if anything happened she'd be part mournin', an' if anything didn't, she'd have a nice dress to wear out places. Ain't it real convenient,—white standin' for both companies an' the tomb, so?"

And "Mis' Photographer Sturgis has the best of it, bein' an invalid, till a party comes up," said Libbie Liberty. "She gets plenty enough food sent in, an' flowers, an' such things, an' she's got nails hung full o' what I call sympathy clo'es, to wear durin' sympathy calls. But when it comes to a real what you might say dress-up dress, I guess she'll hev to be took worse with her side an' stay in the house."

Abigail Arnold contributed:—

"Seems Mis' Doctor Helman had a whole wine silk dress put away with her dyin' things. She always thought it sounded terrible fine to hear about the dead havin' dress-pattern after dress-pattern laid away that hadn't never been made up. So she'd got together the one, but now she an' Elzabella are goin' to work an' make it up. I guess Mis' Helman thinks her stomach is so much better 't mebbe she'll be spared till after the holidays when the sales begin."

Even Liddy Ember had promised to go and to take Ellen, and Ellen went up and down the winter streets singing sane little songs about the party, save on days when she "come herself again," and then she planned, as wildly as anybody, what she meant to wear. And Liddy, whose dream had always been to do "reg'lar city dress-makin', with helpers an' plates an' furnish the findin's at the shop," and whose lot instead had been to cut and fit "just the durable kind," was blithely at work night and day on Mis' Postmaster Sykes's tobacco-brown net. We understood that there were to be brown velvet butterflies stitched down the skirt, and if her Lady Washington geranium flowered in time,—Mis' Sykes was said to lay bread and milk nightly about the roots to encourage it,—she was to wear the blossom in her hair. ("She'll be gettin' herself talked about, wearin' a wreath o' flowers on her head, so," said some.) But then, Mis' Sykes was recognized to be "one that picks her own steps."

"Mis' Sykes always dresses for company accordin' to the way she gets her invite," Calliope observed. "A telephone invite, she goes in somethin' she'd wear home afternoons. Word o' mouth at the front door, she wears what she wears on Sundays. Written invites, she rags out in her rill best dress, for parties. But engraved," Calliope mounted to her climax, "a bran' new dress an' a wreath in her hair is the least she'll stop at."

But I think that, in the wish to do honour to so distinguished an occasion, the temper of Mis' Sykes, and perhaps of Ellen Ember too, was the secret temper of all the

village.

IX

"NOT AS THE WORLD GIVETH"

I daresay that excitement followed excitement when news of Calliope's party got abroad. But of this I knew little, for I spent those next days at the Proudfits' with Nita Ordway and little Viola, and though I thought often of Calliope, I chanced not to see her again until the holidays were almost upon us. In the late afternoon, two days before Christmas, I dropped in at her cottage to learn how pleasantly the plans for her party matured.

To my amazement I found her all dejection.

"Why, Calliope," I said, "can't the grandma ladies come, after all?"

Yes, they could come; they were coming.

"You are never sorry you asked them?" I pressed her.

No. Oh, no; she was glad she had asked them.

"Something is wrong, though," I said sadly—thinking what a blessed thing it is to be so joyous a spirit that one's dejections are bound to be taken seriously.

"Well," said Calliope, then, "it's the children. No it ain't, it's Friendship. The town's about as broad as a broom straw an' most as deep. Anything differ'nt scares 'em like something wore out'd ought to. Friendship's got an i-dee that Christmas begins in a stocking an' ends off in a candle. It thinks the rest o' the days are reg'lar, self-respecting days, but it looks on Christmas like an extry thing, thrown in to please 'em. It acts as if the rest o' the year was plain cake an' the holidays was the frostin' to be et, an' everybody grab the best themselves, give or take."

"Calliope!" I cried—for this was as if the moon had objected to the heavens.

"Oh, I know I'd ought not to," she said sadly; "but don't folks act as if time was give to 'em to run around wild with, as best suits 'em? Three hundred an' 'leven days a year to use for themselves, an' Sundays an' Christmas an' Thanksgivin' to give away looks to me a rill fair division. But, no. Some folks act like Sundays an' holidays was not only the frostin', but the nuts an' candy an' ice-cream o' things—their ice-cream, to eat an' pass to their own, an' scrape the freezer."

And then came the heart of the matter.

"'T seems," said Calliope, "there's that children's Christmas tree at the new minister's on Christmas Eve. But that ain't till ha'-past seven, an' I done my best to hev some o' the children stop in here on their way, for my little party. An' with one set o' lungs their mas says no, they'd get mussed for the tree if they do. I offered to hev 'em bring their white dresses pinned in papers, an' we'd dress 'em here—I think the grandma ladies'd like that. But their mas says no, pinned in papers'd take the starch out an' their hair'd get all over their heads. An' some o' the mothers says indignant: 'Old ladies from the poorhouse end o' the home—well, I should think not! Children is very easy to take things. If you'd hed young o' your own, you'd think more, Calliope,' they says witherin'."

Her little wrinkled hands were trembling at the enormity.

"I donno," she added, "but I was foolish to try it. But I did want to get a-hold o' somethin' beautiful for them old ladies to see. An', my mind, they ain't much so rilly lovely as little young children, together in a room."

"But, Calliope," I said in distress, "isn't there even one child you can get?"

"No, sir," she said. "Not a one. I been everywhere. You know they ain't any poor in Friendship. We're all comfortable enough off to be overparticular."

"But wouldn't you think," I said, "at Christmas time—"

"Yes, you would," Calliope said, "you would. You'd think Christmas'd make everything kind o' softened up an' differ'nt. Every time I look at the holly myself, I

feel like I'd just shook hands with somebody cordial."

None the less—for Calliope had drunk deep of the wine of doing and she never gave up any project—at four o'clock on the day before Christmas I saw the closed 'bus driven by Jimmy Sturgis fare briskly past my house on its way to the "start of the Plank Road," to the Old Ladies' Home. Within, I knew, were quilts and hot stones of Calliope's providing; and Jimmy had hung the 'bus windows with cedar, and two little flags fluttered from the door. It all had a merry, holiday air as Jimmy shook the lines and drew on swiftly through the snow to those wistful nine guests, who at last were to be "in Christmas," too.

"If they can't do nothin' else," Calliope had said, "they can talk over old times, without hot milk interferin'. But I wish, an' I wish—seem's though there'd ought always to be a child around on Star o' Bethlehem night, don't it?"

I dined alone that Star of Bethlehem night, and to dine alone under Christmas candles is never a cheerful business. The Proudfit car was to come for me soon after eight, and at eight I stood waiting at the window of my little living room, saying to myself that if I were to drop from the air to a deserted country road, I should be certain that it was Christmas Eve. You can tell Christmas Eve anywhere, like a sugar-plum, with your eyes shut. It is not the lighted houses, or the close-curtained windows behind which Christmas trees are fruiting; nor yet, in Friendship, will it be the post-office store or the home bakery windows, gay with Christmas trappings. But there is in the world a subdued note of joyful preparation, as if some spirit whom one never may see face to face had on this night a gift of perceptible life. And in spite of my loneliness, my heart upleaped to the note of a distant sleigh-bell jingling an air of "Home, going Home, Christmas Eve and going Home."

Then, when the big Proudfit car came flashing to my door, I had a sweet surprise. For from it, through the snowy dark, came running a little fairy thing, and Viola Ordway danced to my door with her mother, muffled in furs.

"We've been close in the house all day," Mrs. Ordway cried, "and now we've run away to get you. Come!"

As for me, I took Viola in my arms and lifted her to my hall table and caught off her cloak and hood. I can never resist doing this to a child. I love to see the little warm, plump body in its fine white linen emerge rose-wise, from the calyx cloak; and I love that shy first gesture, whatever it may be, of a child so emerging. The turning about, the freeing of soft hair from the neck, the smoothing down of the frock, the half-abashed upward look. Viola did more. She laid one hand on my cheek and held it so, looking at me quite gravely, as if that were some secret sign of brotherhood in the unknown, which she remembered and I, alas! had forgotten. But I perfectly remembered how to kiss her. If only, I thought, all the empty arms could know a Viola. If only all the empty arms, up and down the world, could know a Viola even just at Christmas time. If only—

Over the top of Viola's head I looked across at Nita Ordway, and a sudden joyous purpose lighted all the air about me—as a joyous purpose will. Oh, if only—And then I heard myself pouring out a marvellous jumble of sound and senselessness.

"Nita!" I cried, "you are not a Friendship Village mother! You are not afraid. Viola is not going to the new minister's Christmas tree. Oh, don't you see? It's still early—surely we have time! The grandma ladies must see Viola!"

I remember how Nita Ordway laughed, and her answer made me love her the more—as is the way of some answers.

"I don't catch it—I don't," she said, "but it sounds delicious. All courage, and old ladies, and ample time for everything! If I said, 'Of course,' would that do?"

Already I was tying Viola's hood, and next to taking off a child's hood I love putting one on—surely every one will have noticed how their mouths bud up for kissing. While we sped along the Plank Road toward Calliope's cottage, I poured out the story of who were at her house that night, and why, and all that had befallen. In a

moment the great car, devouring its own path of light, set us down at Calliope's gate, and Calliope herself, trim in her gray henrietta, her wrinkled face flushed and shining, came at our summons. And I pushed Viola in before us—little fairy thing in a fluff of white wraps and white furs.

"Look, Calliope!" I cried.

Calliope looked down at her, and I think she can hardly have seen Mrs. Ordway and me at all. She smote her hands softly together.

"Oh," she said, "if it isn't! Oh—a child for Star o' Bethlehem night, after all!"

She dropped to her knees before Viola, touching the little girl's hand almost shyly. There was in Calliope's face when she looked at any child a kind of nakedness of the woman's soul; and she, who was so deft, was curiously awkward in such a presence.

"They're out there in the dinin' room," she whispered, "settin' round the cook stove. I saw they felt some better out there. Le's us leave her go out alone by herself, just the way she is."

And that was what we did. We said something to Viola softly about "the poor grandma ladies, with no little girl to love," and then Calliope opened the door and let her through.

We peeped for a moment at the lamp-lit crack. The dining room was warm and bright, its table covered with red cotton and set with tea-cups, shelves of plants blooming across the windows, cedar green on the walls. The odour of pop-corn was in the air, and above an open griddle hole apples bobbed on strings tied to the stove-pipe wing. And there about the cooking range, with its cheery opened hearth, Calliope's Christmas guests were gathered.

They were exquisitely neat and trim, in black and brown cloth dresses, with a brooch, or a white apron, or a geranium from a window plant worn for festival. I recognized Grandma Holly, with her soft white hair, and I thought I could tell which were Mis' Ailing and Mis' Burney and Mis' Norris. And the faces of them all, the

gentle, the grief-marked, even the querulous, were grown kindly with the knowledge that somebody had cared about their Christmas.

The child went toward them as simply as if they had been friends. They looked at her with some murmuring of surprise, and at one another questioningly. Viola went straight to the knee of Grandma Holly, who was nearest.

"'At lady tied my hood too tight," she referred unflatteringly to me, "p'eas do it off."

Grandma Holly looked down over her spectacles, and up at the other grandma ladies, and back to Viola. The others gathered nearer, hitching forward rocking-chairs, rising to peer over shoulders—breathlessly, with a manner of fearing to touch her. But because of the little uplifted face, waiting, Grandma Holly must needs untie the white hood and reveal all the shining of the child's hair.

"Nen do my toat off," Viola gravely directed.

At that Grandma Holly crooned some single indistinguishable syllable in her throat, and then off came the cloak. The little warm, plump body in its fine linen emerged, rose-wise, and Viola smoothed down her frock, and freed her hair from her neck, and glanced up shyly. By the stir and flutter among them I understood that they were feeling just as I feel when a little hood and cloak come off.

Viola stood still for a minute.

"I like be made some 'tention to," she suggested gently.

Ah—and they understood. How they understood! Grandma Holly swept the little girl in her arms, and I know how the others closed about them with smiles and vague unimportant words. Viola sat quietly and happily, like a little come-a-purpose spirit to let them pretend. And it was with them all as if something long pent up went free.

Calliope left the door and turned toward us.

"Seems like my throat couldn't stand it," she said, ... and it seemed to me, as we three sat together in the dim little parlor, that Nita Ordway must cherish Viola for us

all—for the grandma ladies and Calliope and me.

Half an hour later we three went out to the dining room. Viola ran to her mother when she entered. Nita took her in her arms and sat beside the stove, her cloak slipping from her shoulders, the soft peach tints of her gown shot through with shining lines and the light caught in her collar of gems. "I did want to get a-hold o' somethin' beautiful for them old ladies to see," Calliope had said.

"Oh," said Grandma Holly, and she laid her brown hand on Viola's hand, "ain't she dear an' little an' young?"

"I wish't she'd talk some," begged old Mis' Norris.

"Ain't she good, though, the little thing?" Mis' Ailing said. "Look at how still she sets. Not wigglin' 'round same as some. It was just that way with Sam when he was small—he'd set by the hour an' leave me hold him—"

A little bent creature, whose name I never learned, sat patting Viola's skirt.

"Seems like I'd gone back years," we heard her say.

Grandma Holly held up one half-closed hand.

"Like that," she told them, "my Amy's feet was so little I could hold 'em like that, an' I see hers is the same way. She's wonderful like Amy was, her age."

I cannot recall half the sweet, trivial things that they said. But I remember how they told us stories of their own babies, and we laughed with them over treasured sayings of long-ago lips, or grieved with them over silences, or rejoiced at glad things that had been. Regardless of the Proudfit party, we let them talk as they would, and remember. Then of her own accord Nita Ordway hummed some haunting air, and sang one of the songs that we all loved—the grandma ladies and Calliope and I. It was a sleepy song, whose words I have forgotten, but it was in a kind of universal tongue which I think that no one can possibly mistake. And out of the lullaby came all the little spirits, freed in babyhood or "man-grown," and stood at the knees of the

grandma ladies, so that I was afraid that they could not bear it.

When the song was done, Viola suddenly sat up very straight.

"I got a litty box," she announced, "an' I had a parasol. An' once a boy div me a new nail. An' once I didn' feel berry well, but now I am. An' once—"

Their laughter was like a caress. Before it was done, we heard a stamping without, and there was Jimmy Sturgis, with a spray of holly in his old felt hat and the closed 'bus at the door.

We helped Calliope to get their wraps and to fill the 'bus with hot stones from the oven and with many quilts, and we made ready a basket of pop-corn and apples and of the cedar hung around the little room. They stood about us to say good-by, or to tell us some last bit of the news of their long-past youth—dear, wrinkled faces framed in broad lines of bonnet or hood, and smiling, every one.

"This gray shawl I got on me is the very one I used to wrap Amy in to carry her through the cold hall," said Grandma Holly. "My land-a-livin'! seems's if I'd been with her to-night, over again!"

Their way of thanks lay among stumbling words and vague repetitions, but there was a kind of glory in their grateful faces, and one always remembers that.

"Merry Prismas, gramma ladies!" Viola cried shrilly at the 'bus door, and within they laughed like mothers as they answered. And Jimmy Sturgis cracked his whip, and the sleigh-bells jingled.

Nita Ordway and Viola and I stood for a moment with Calliope at her gate.

"Come!" we begged her, "now go with us. We are all late together. There is no reason why you should not go with us to the Christmas party."

But Calliope shook her head.

"I'm ever so much obliged to you," she said, "but oh, I couldn't. I've hed too rilly a Christmas to come down to a party anywheres."

When Nita and Viola and I reached Proudfit House, the guests were all assembled, but we knew that Mrs. Proudfit and Miss Clementina would be the first to forgive us when they understood.

The big colonial home was bright with scarlet-shaded candles and holly-hung walls; there was mistletoe on the sconces, and in the great hall there were tuneful strings. On the landing of the stairs stood Mrs. Proudfit and Miss Clementina, charmingly pretty in their delicate frocks, and wholly gay and gracious. ("They seem lively like in pictures where folks don't make a loud sound a-talkin'," said Friendship. "I s'pose it's somethin' you learn in the City.") And Friendship wore its loyalty like a mantle. Twelve years had passed, and yet one and another said under breath and sighed, "If only Miss Linda could 'a' been here, too."

All Friendship Village was there, save Abel Halsey, who was at the Good Shepherd's Home Christmas tree in the City, and, perhaps one would say, Delia More, who had begged to be allowed to help in the kitchen "an' be there that way." Even Peleg Bemus was in his place in the orchestra, sitting with closed eyes, playing his flute, and keeping audible time with his wooden leg,—quite as he did when he played his flute at night, on Friendship streets. And there was Mis' Postmaster Sykes, in the tobacco-brown net, with butterflies stitched down the skirt and the Lady Washington geranium in her hair—and forever near her went little Miss Liddy Ember with an almost passionate creative pride in the gown of her hand, so that she would murmur her patron an occasional warning: "Mis' Sykes, throw back your shoulders, you hev to, to bring out the real set o' the basque;" or, "Don't forget you want to give a little hitch to the back when you stand up, Mis' Sykes." And to one and another Liddy said proudly, "I declare if I didn't get that skirt with the butterflies just like a magazine cover." And there, too, was Ellen Ember, wearing a white book muslin and a rosy "nubia" that had been her mother's; and Ellen's face was uplifted, and of pale distinction under the bronze glory of her hair, but all that evening she smiled and sang and wondered, in utter absence of the spirit. ("Oh," poor Miss Liddy

said, "I do so want Ellen to come herself before supper. She won't remember a thing she eats, an' she don't have much that's tasty an' good. It'll be just like she missed the whole thing, in spite of all the chore o' comin'.") And there were Mis' Doctor Helman in her new wine silk; Mis' Banker Mason in the black-and-white foulard designed to grace a festival or to respect a tomb; Mis' Sturgis, in a put-away dress that was a surprise to every one; Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, and Eppleby, and the "Other" Holcombs; Abigail Arnold, the Gekerjecks, Mis' Toplady and Timothy, even Mis' Mayor Uppers—no one was forgotten. And—save poor Ellen—every one was aglow with the sweet satisfaction of having sent abroad a brave array of pretty things, with stitches of rose and blue on flowered fabrics, with the flutter of ribbons, and the breath of sachets, and with many a gift of substance to those less generously endowed. To them all the delight of the season was in the gifts of their hands and in the night's merry-making, and in the joy of keeping holiday. Here, as Calliope had said, Christmas, begun in a stocking, was ending in a candle.

And yet it was Star of Bethlehem night, the night of Him who "didn't mention givin' things at all."

X

LONESOME.—I

Calliope and I were talking over the Proudfit party, as I had grown to like to talk over most things with her, when I said something of two of the guests whom I did not remember before to have seen: a little man of shy gravity and an extremely pretty girl who, if she looked at any one but him, did so quite undetected.

"That's Eb Goodnight," Calliope replied, "him of the new-born spine. Wasn't it like the Proudfits to ask them?"

And, at my question:

"Some folks," Calliope said, "has got spines and some folks hasn't. But what I say is, nobody can tell which is which. Because now and then the soft-spine' kind just hardens up all in a minute same as steel. So when I meet a stranger that sort o' sops along through life, limp and floppy, I never judge him. I just say, 'You look some like a loose shutter, but mebbe you can fair bang the house down, if you rilly get to blowin'.' It was that way with Eb Goodnight.

"I donno how it is other places. But I've noticed with us here in Friendship—an' I've grown to the town from short dresses to bein'-careful-what-I-eat—I've often noticed't when folks seems not to have any backbone to speak of, or even when they go 'round sort o' crazy—they's usually some other reason, like enough. Sensitive or sick or lonesome, or like that. It was so with Eb—an' it was so with Elspie. Elspie, though, was interestin' on account o' bein' not only a little crazy, but rill pretty besides. But Eb, he was the kind that a sign-board is more interestin' than. An' yet—"

With that she paused, looking down some way of her own thought. I knew Calliope's "an' yet." It splendidly conceded the entire converse of her argument.

"Eb come here to Friendship," she went on, "less public than Elspie did. Elspie come official, as an inmate o' the county house. Eb, he sort o' crep' in town, like he crep' everywhere else. He introduced himself to me through sellin' needles. He walked in on me an' a two-weeks ironin' one mornin' with, 'Lemme present myself as Ebenezer Goodnight, sewin' needles, knittin' needles, crochet hooks an' shuttles an' anything o' that,' an' down he set an' never opened his mouth about his needles again. Eb was real delicate, for an agent. He just talked all the time about Friendship an' himself. 'The whol' blame' town's kin,' s'e; 'I never see such a place. Everybody's kin, only just me. Air you,' he ask' me wistful, 'cousin' of 'em all, too?'

"'Mis' Sprague that's dead was connected up with me by marriage an' Mis' Sykes is my mother's secunt cousin,' I owned up.'

"'That's it again,' s'e, sighin'. 'I'm the odd number, dum it,' he says sorrowful.

"Well, an' he hed sort of an odd-number way about him, too. He went along the street like he didn't belong. I donno if you know what I mean, but he was always takin' in the tops o' buildin's an' lookin' at the roads an' behavin' like he noticed—the way you don't when you live in a town. Yes, Ebenezer Goodnight went around like he see things for the first time. An' somehow he never could join in. When he walked up to a flock o' men, he stood side of 'em, an' not with 'em. An' he shook hands sort o' loose an' temporary like he meant somethin' else. An' he just couldn't bear not to agree with you. If he let out't the sky was blue an' you said, No, pink, he'd work around till he'd dyed his sky pink, too. That man would agree to things he never heard of. Let Peleg Bemus be tellin' one o' his eastern janitor adventures, an' Eb'd set an' agree with him, past noddin' an' up to words, all about elevators an' Ferris boats an' Eyetalians an' things he'd never laid look to. He seemed to hev a spine made mostly o' molasses. An' sometimes I think your spine's your soul.

"Eb hed been lonelyin' 'round the village a month or so when Sum Merriman, that run the big rival business to the post-office store, an' was fire chief besides, took him an' his peddler's pack into the dry goods end—an' Eb was tickled. He went down first mornin' in his best clo'es, a-wearin' both collar an' cuffs. But when somebody remarked on the clo'es, he didn't hev backbone enough to keep on wearin' 'em—he slimpsed right back to his peddler duds an' done his best to please. An' he did please—he made a rill first-rate merchant clear up till June o' the year. An' then Sum Merriman, his employer, he went to work an' died.

"Sum died a Tuesday, an', bein' it never rains but it pours, an' piles peelin's on ashes, or whatever it is they say, it was the Tuesday that the poorhouse burnt down—just like it knew the fire chief was gone. The poorhouse use' to be across the track, beyond the cemetery an' quite near my house. An' the night it burnt I was settin' on the side stoop without anything over my head, just smellin' in the air, when I see a

little pinky look on the sky beyond the track. It wasn't moon-time, an' they wa'n't nothin' to bonfire that time o' year, an' I set still, pretendin' it was rose-bushes makin' a ladder an' buildin' a way of escape by night. It was such a nice evenin' you couldn't imagine anything rilly happenin' bad. But all at once I heard the fire-engine bell poundin' away like all possessed—an' then runnin' feet, like when they's an accident. I got to the gate just as somebody come rushin' past, an' I piped up what was the matter. 'Poorhouse's afire,' s'e. 'Poorhouse,' s'I. 'My land!' An' I out the gate an' run alongside of him, an' he sort o' slowed down for me, courteous.

"Then I noticed it was Eb Goodnight—lonelier'n ever now that his employer hed died that day. I'd never see Eb hustle that much before, an' the thought went through my head, kind o' wonderin', that he was runnin' as if the fire was a real relation o' his an' he was sent for. 'Know anything else about it?' I ask' him, keepin' up. 'Not much,' s'e, 'but I guess it's got such a head-start the whol' thing'll go like a shell.' An' when we got to the top o' the bank on the other side o' the track, we see it was that way—the poorhouse'd got such a head-start burnin' that nothin' could save it, though Timothy Toplady, that was town marshal an' chairman o' the county board, an' Silas Sykes an' Eppleby Holcomb, that was managers o' the poorhouse, an' some more, went puffin' past us, yellin', 'Put it out—run fer water—why don't you do suthin'?'—an' like that, most beside theirselves.

"'Them poor critturs,' says I, 'oh, my, them poor critturs in the home'—for there must 'a' ben twenty o' the county charges all quartered in the buildin'. An' when we come to the foot o' the poorhouse hill, land, land, I never see such Bedlam.

"The fire had started so soon after dusk that the inmates was all up yet. An' they was half of 'em huddled in a bunch by the side-yard stile an' half of 'em runnin' 'round wild as anything. The whol' place looked like when you hev a bad dream. It made me weak in my knees, an' I was winded anyway with runnin', an' I stopped an' leant up against a tree, an' Eb, he stopped too, takin' bearin's. An' there I was, plump

against Elspie, standin' holdin' her arms 'round the tree trunk an' shiverin' some.

"'Elspie,' s'I, 'why, you poor child.'

"'No need to rub that in,' s'she, tart. It's the one word the county charges gets sensitive about—an' Eb, he seemed to sense that, an' he ask' her, hasty, how the fire started. He called her 'Miss,' too, an' I judged that 'Miss' was one o' them poultice words to her.

"'I donno,' s'she, 'but don't it look cheerful? The yard's all lit up nice, like fer comp'ny,' she says, rill pleased.

"It sort o' uncovered my nerves to hear her so unconcerned. I never hed understood her—none of us hed. She was from outside the state, but her uncle, Job Ore, was on our county board an' he got her into our poorhouse—like you can when you're in politics. Then he up an' died an' went home to be buried, an' there she was on our hands. She wa'n't rill crazy—we understood't she hadn't ben crazy at all up to the time her mother died. Then she hadn't no one to go to an' she got queer, an' the poorhouse uncle stepped in; an' when he died, he died in debt, so his death wa'n't no use to her. She was thirty odd, but awful little an' slim an' scairt-lookin', an' quite pretty, I allus thought; an' I never see a thing wrong with her till she was so unconcerned about the fire.

"'Elspie,' s'I, stern, 'ain't you no feelin',' s'I, 'for the loss o' the only home you've got to your back?'

"'Oh, I donno,' s'she, an' I could see her smilin' in that bright light, 'oh, I donno. It'll be some place to come to, afterwards. When I go out walkin',' s'she, 'I ain't no place to head for. I sort o' circle 'round an' come back. I ain't even a grave to visit,' s'she, 'an' it'll be kind o' cosey to come up here on the hill an' set down by the ashes—like they belonged.'

"I know I heard Eb Goodnight laugh, kind o' cracked an' enjoyable, an' I took some shame to him for makin' fun o' the poor girl.

"'She's goin' clear out o' her head,' thinks I, 'an' you'd better get her home with you, short off.' So I put my arm around her, persuadish, an' I says: 'Elspie,' I says, 'you come on to my house now for a spell,' I says. But Eb, he steps in, prompter'n I ever knew him—I'd never heard him do a thing decisive an' sudden excep' sneeze, an' them he always done his best to swallow. 'I'll take her to your house,' he says to me; 'you go on up there to them women. I won't be no use up there,' he says. An' that was reasonable enough, on account o' Eb not bein' the decisive kind, for fires an' such.

"So Eb he went off, takin' Elspie to my house, an' I went on up the hill, where Timothy Toplady and Silas Sykes an' Eppleby was rushin' round, wild an' sudden, herdin' the inmates here an' there, vague an' energetic. I didn't do much better, an' I done worse too, because I burned my left wrist, long an' deep. When I got home with it, Eb was settin' on the front stoop with Elspie, an' when he heard about the wrist, he come in an' done the lightin' up. An' Elspie, she fair su'prised me.

"'Where do you keep your rags?' s'she, brisk.

"'In that flour chest I don't use,' I says, 'in the shed.'

"My land! she was back in a minute with a soft piece o' linen an' the black oil off the clock shelf that I hadn't told her where it was, an' she bound up my wrist like she'd created that burn an' understood it up an' down.

"'Now you get into the bed,' she says, 'without workin' the rag off. I'm all right,' s'she. 'I can lock up. I like hevin' it to do,' she told me.

"But Eb puts in, kind o' eager:—

"'Lemme lock up the shed—it's dark as a hat out there an' you might sprain over your ankle,' he says awkward. An' so he done the lockin' up, an' it come over me he liked hevin' that little householdy thing to do. An' then he went off home—that is, to where he stopped an' hated it so.

"Well, the poorhouse burnt clear to the ground, an' the inmates hed to be quartered 'round in Friendship anyhow that night, an' nex' day I never see Friendship so upset.

I never see the village roust itself so sudden, either. Timothy an' the managers was up an' doin' before breakfast next mornin', an' no wonder. Timothy Toplady, he had three old women to his farm. Silas Sykes, he'd took in Foolish Henzie an' another old man for his. An' Eppleby Holcomb, in his frenzy he'd took in five, an' Mame was near a lunatic with havin' 'em to do for. An' all three men bein' at the head o' the burned buildin', they danced 'round lively makin' provision, an' they sent telegrams, wild an' reckless, without countin' the words. An' before noon it was settled't the poorhouse in Alice County, nearest us, should take in the inmates temporary. We was eatin' dinner when Timothy an' Silas come in to tell Elspie. I wished Eppleby had come to tell her. Eppleby does everything like he was company, an' not like he owned it.

"Eb was hevin' dinner with us too. He'd been scallopin' in an' out o' the house all the forenoon, an' I'd ask' him to set down an' hev a bite. But when he done even that, he done it kind of alien. Peleg Bemus, playin' his flute walkin' along the streets nights, like he does, seems more a rill citizen than Eb use' to, eatin' his dinner. Elspie, she'd got the whol' dinner—she was a rill good cook, an' that su'prised me as much as her dressin' my wrist the night before. She'd pampered me shameful all that mornin' too, an' I'd let her—when you've lived alone so long, it's kind o' nice to hev a person fussin' here an' there, an' Elspie seemed to love takin' care o' somebody. I declare, it seemed as if she done some things for me just for the sake o' doin' 'em—she was that kind. Timothy an' Silas wouldn't hev any dinner,—it was a boiled piece, too,—bein' as dinners o' their own was gettin' cold. But they set up against the edge o' the room so's we could be eatin' on.

"'Elspie,' says Timothy, 'you must be ready to go sharp seven o'clock Friday mornin'.'

"'Go where?' says Elspie. She hed on a black-an'-white stripe o' mine, an' her cheeks were some pink from standin' over the cook stove, an' she looked rill pretty.

"Timothy, he hesitated. But,—

"'To the Alice County poorhouse,' says Silas, blunt. Silas Sykes is a man that always says 'bloody' an' 'devil' an' 'coffin' right out instead o' 'bandaged' an' 'the Evil One,' an' 'casket.'

"'Oh!' says Elspie. 'Oh, ...' an' sort o' sunk down an' covered her mouth with her wrist an' looked at us over it.

"'The twenty o' you'll take the Dick Dasher,' says Timothy, then, 'an' it'll be a nice train ride for ye,' he says, some like an undertaker makin' small talk. But he see how Elspie took it, an' so he slid off the subjec' an' turned to Eb.

"'Little too early to know who's goin' to take the Merriman store, ain't it?' s'he, cheerful. Timothy ain't so everlastin' cheerful, either, but he always hearties himself all over when he talks, like he was a bell or a whistle an' he hed it to do.

"Eb, he dropped his knife on the floor.

"'Yes, yes,' he says flurried, 'yes, it is—' like he was rushin' to cover an' a 'yes' to agree was his best protection.

"'Oh, well, it ain't so early either,' Silas cuts in, noddin' crafty.

"'No, no,' Eb agrees immediate, 'I donno's 'tis so very early, after all.'

"'I'm thinkin' o' takin' the store over myself,' says Silas Sykes, tippin' his head back an' rubbin' thoughtful under his whiskers. 'It'd be a good idee to buy it in, an' no mistake,'

"'Yes,' says Eb, noddin', 'yes. Yes, so't would be.'

"'I donno's I'd do it, Silas, if I was you,' says Timothy, frownin' judicial. 'Ain't you gettin' some stiff to take up with a new business?' But Timothy is one o' them little pink men, an' you can't take his frowns much to heart.

"'No,' says Eb, shakin' his head. 'No. No, I donno's I would take it either, Mr. Sykes.'

"I was goin' to say somethin' about the wind blowin' now east, now west, an' the

human spine makin' a bad weathercock, but I held on, an' pretty soon Timothy an' Silas went out.

"'Seven o'clock Friday A.M., now!' says Silas, playful, over his shoulder to Elspie. But Elspie didn't answer. She was just sittin' there, still an' quiet, an' she didn't eat another thing.

"That afternoon she slipped out o' the house somewheres. She didn't hev a hat—what few things she did hev hed been burnt. She went off without any hat an' stayed most all the afternoon. I didn't worry, though, because I thought I knew where she'd gone. But I wouldn't 'a' asked her,—I'd as soon slap anybody as quiz 'em,—an' besides I knew't somebody'd tell me if I kep' still. Friendship'll tell you everything you want to know, if you lay low long enough. An' sure as the world, 'bout five o'clock in come Mis' Postmaster Sykes, lookin' troubled. Folks always looks that way when they come to interfere. Seems't she'd just walked past the poorhouse ruins, an' she'd see Elspie settin' there side of 'em, all alone—

"'—singin',' says Mis' Sykes, impressive,—like the evil was in the music,—'sittin' there singin', like she was all possessed. An' I come up behind her an' plumped out at her to know what she was a-doin'. An' she says: "I'm makin' a call,"—just like that; "I'm makin' a call," s'she, smilin', an' not another word to be got out of her. 'An',' says Mis' Sykes, 'let me tell you, I scud down that hill, one goose pimple.'

"'Let her alone,' says I, philosophic. 'Leave her be.'

"But inside I ached like the toothache for the poor thing—for Elspie. An' I says to her, when she come home:—

"'Elspie,' I says, 'why don't you go out 'round some an' see folks here in the village? The minister's wife'd be rill glad to hev you come,' I says.

"'Oh, I hate to hev 'em sit thinkin' about me in behind their eyes,' s'she, ready.

"'What?' says I, blank.

"'It comes out through their eyes,' she says. 'They keep thinkin': Poor, poor, poor Elspie. If they was somebody dead't I could go to see,' she told me, smilin', 'I'd do that. A grave can't poor you,' she told me, 'an' everybody that's company to you does.'

"'Well!' says I, an' couldn't, in logic, say no more.

"That evenin' Eb come in an' set down on the edge of a chair, experimental, like he was testin' the cane.

"'Miss Cally,' s'e, when Elspie was out o' the room, 'you goin' t' let her go with them folks to the Alice County poorhouse?'

"I guess I dissembulated some under my eyelids—bein' I see t' Eb's mind was givin' itself little lurches.

"'Well,' s'I, 'I don't see what that's wise I can do besides.'

"He mulled that rill thorough, seein' to the back o' one hand with the other.

"'Would you take her to board an' me pay for her board?' s'e, like he'd sneezed the i-dea an' couldn't help it comin'.

"'Goodness!' s'I, neutral.

"Eb sighed, like he'd got my refusal—Eb was one o' the kind that always thinks, if it clouds up, 't the sun is down on 'em personally.

"'Oh,' s'I, bold an' swift, 'you great big ridiculous man!'

"An' I'm blest if he didn't agree to that.

"'I know I'm ridiculous,' s'he, noddin', sad. 'I know I'm that, Miss Cally.'

"'Well, I didn't mean it that way,' s'I, reticent—an' said no more, with the exception of what I'd rilly meant.

"'Why under the canopy,' I ask' him, for a hint, 'don't you take the Sum Merriman store, an' run it, an' live on your feet? I ain't any patience with a man,' s'I, 'that lives on his toes. Stomp some, why don't you, an' buy that store?'

"An' his answer su'prised me.

"'I did ask Mis' Fire Chief fer the refusal of it,' he said. 'I ask' her when I took my flowers to Sum, to-day—they was wild flowers I'd picked myself,' he threw in, so's I wouldn't think spendthrift of him. 'An' I'm to let her know this week, for sure.'

"'Glory, glory, glory,' s'I, under my breath—like I'd seen a rill live soul, standin' far off on a hill somewheres, drawin' cuts to see whether it should come an' belong to Eb, or whether it shouldn't.

XI

LONESOME.—II

"All that evenin' Eb an' Elspie an' I set by the cook stove, talkin', an' they seemed to be plenty to talk about, an' the air in the room was easy to get through with what you hed to say—it was that kind of an evenin'. Eb was pretty quiet, though, excep' when he piped up to agree. 'Gettin' little too hot here, ain't it?' I know I said once; an' Eb see right off he was roasted an' he spried 'round the draughts like mad. An' a little bit afterwards I says, with malice the fourth thought: 'I can feel my shoulders some chilly,' I says—an' he acted fair chatterin'-toothed himself, an' went off headfirst for the woodpile. I noticed that, an' laughed to myself, kind o' pityin'. But Elspie, she never noticed. An' when it come time to lock up, I 'tended to my wrist an' let them two do the lockin'. They seemed to like to—I could tell that. An' Elspie, she let Eb out the front door herself, like they was rill folks.

"Nex' day I was gettin' ready for Sum Merriman's funeral,—it was to be at one o'clock,—when Elspie come in my room, sort o' shyin' up to me gentle.

"'Miss Cally,' 's'she, 'do you think the mourners'd take it wrong if I's to go to the funeral?'

"'Why, no, Elspie,' I says, su'prised; 'only what do you want to go for?' I ask' her.

"'Oh, I donno,' s'she. 'I'd like to go an' I'd like to ride to the graveyard. I've watched the funerals through the poorhouse fence. An' I'd kind o' like to be one o' the followers, for once—all lookin' friendly an' together so, in a line.'

"'Go with me then, child,' I says. An' she done so.

"Bein' summer, the funeral flowers was perfectly beautiful. They was a rill hothouse box from the Proudfits; an' a anchor an' two crosses an' a red geranium lantern; an' a fruit piece made o' straw flowers from the other merchants; an' seven pillows, good-sized, an' with all different wordin', an' so on. The mound at the side o' the grave was piled knee-high, an' Mis' Fire Chief Merriman, I heard, said it seemed like Sum was less dead than almost anybody 't'd died in Friendship, bein' the grave kind o' spoke up, friendly, when you see the flowers. She went home rill cheerful from the funeral an' was able to help get the supper for the out-o'-town relations, a thing no widow ever thinks of, anyway till the next day—though Sum was her second husband, so it was a little different than most.

"Well, a few of us waited 'round the cemetery afterwards to fix the flowers on the top o' the sod, an' Elspie, she waited with me—fussin' quiet with one thing an' another. Eb, he waited too, standin' 'round. An' when it come time for us women to lay the set pieces on, I see Elspie an' Eb walkin' off toward the top o' the cemetery hill. It's a pretty view from there, lookin' down the slope toward the Old Part, where nobody remembered much who was buried, an' it's a rill popular walk. I liked seein' 'em go 'long together—some way, lookin' at 'em, Elspie so pretty an' Eb so kind o' gentle, you could 'a' thought they was rill folks, her sane an' him with a spine. I slipped off an' left 'em, the cemetery bein' so near my house, an' Eb walked home with her. 'Poor things,' I thought, 'if he does go back to peddlin' an' she has to go to the Alice County poorhouse, I'll give 'em this funeral afternoon for a bright spot, anyhow.'

"But I'd just about decided that Elspie wa'n't to go to Alice County. I hadn't looked

the i-dee in the face an' thought about it, very financial. But I ain't sure you get your best lights when you do that. I'd just sort o' decided on it out o' pure shame for the shabby trick o' not doin' so. I hadn't said anything about it to Timothy or Silas or any o' the rest, because I didn't hev the strength to go through the arguin' agony. When the Dick Dasher had pulled out without her, final, I judged they'd be easier to manage. An' that evenin' I told Elspie—just to sort o' clamp myself to myself; an' I fair never see anybody so happy as she was. It made me ashamed o' myself for not doin' different everything I done.

"I was up early that Friday mornin', because I judged't when Elspie wasn't to the train some o' them in charge'd come tearin' to my house to find out why. I hadn't called Elspie, an' I s'posed she was asleep in the other bedroom. I was washin' up my breakfast dishes quiet, so's not to disturb her, when I heard somebody come on to the front stoop like they'd been sent for.

"'There,' thinks I, 'just as I expected. It's one o' the managers.'

"But it wa'n't a manager. When I'd got to the front door, lo an' the hold! there standin' on the steps, wild an' white, was the widow o' the day before's funeral—Mis' Fire Chief Merriman, lookin' like the grave hed spoke up. She'd got up early to go alone to the cemetery, an', my house bein' the nearest, she'd come rushin' back to me with her news.

"'Cally!' s'she, from almost before she laid eyes on me, 'Cally! Somebody's stole every last one o' the flowers off'n Sum's grave. An' the ribbins.'

"She was fair beside herself, bein' as the loss hed piled up on a long sickness o' Sum's, an' a big doctor's bill consequent, an' she nervous anyhow, an' a good deal o' the ribbin tyin' the stems was silk, both sides.

"'I'll hev out the marshal,' s'she, wild. 'I'll send for Timothy. They can't hev got far with 'em. I'll know,' s'she, defiant, 'whether they's anything to the law or whether they ain't.'

"I hed her take some strong coffee from breakfast, an' I got her, after some more fumin's an' fustin's, to walk back to the cemetery with me, till we give a look around. I do as many quick-moved things as some, but I allus try, first, to give a look around.

"'An' another thing,' s'I to her, as we set out, 'are you sure, Mis' Fire Chief, that you got to the right grave? The first visit, so,' I says, 'an' not bein' accustomed to bein' a widow, lately, an' all, you might 'a' got mixed in the lots.'

"While she was disclaimin' this I looked up an' see, hangin' round the road, was Eb. He seemed some sheepish when he see me, an' he said, hasty, that he'd just got there, an' it come over me like a flash't he'd come to see Elspie off. An' I marched a-past him without hardly a word.

"We wasn't mor'n out o' the house when we heard a shout, an' there come Silas an' Timothy, tearin' along full tilt in the store delivery wagon, wavin' their arms.

"'It's Elspie—Elspie!' they yelled, when they was in hearin'. 'She ain't to the depot. She'll be left. Where is she?'

"I hadn't counted on their comin' before the train left, but I thought I see my way clear. An' when they come up to us, I spoke to 'em, quiet.

"'She's in the house, asleep,' s'I, 'an' what's more, in that house she's goin' to stay as long as she wants. But,' s'I, without waitin' for 'em to bu'st out, 'there's more important business than that afoot for the marshal;' an' then I told 'em about Sum Merriman's flowers. 'An',' s'I, 'you'd better come an' see about that now—an' let Eppleby an' the others take down the inmates, an' you go after 'em on the 8.05. It ain't often,' s'I, crafty, 'that we get a thief in Friendship.'

"I hed Timothy Toplady there, an' he knew it. He's rill sensitive about the small number o' arrests he's made in the village in his term. He excited up about it in a minute.

"'Blisterin' Benson!' he says, 'ain't this what they call vandalism? Look at it right

here in our midst like a city!' says he, fierce—an' showin' through some gleeful.

"'Why, sir,' says Silas Sykes, 'mebbe it's them human goals. Mebbe they've dug Sum up,' he says, 'an mebbe—' But I hushed him up. Silas Sykes always grabs on to his thoughts an' throws 'em out, dressed or undressed. He ain't a bit o' reserve. Not a thought of his head that he don't part with. If he had hands on his forehead, you could tell what time he is—I think you could, anyway.

"Well, it was rill easy to manage 'em, they bein' men an' susceptible to fascinations o' lawin' it over somethin'. An' we all got into the delivery wagon, an' Eb, he come too, sittin' in back, listenin' an' noddin', his feet hangin' over the box informal.

"I allus remember how the cemetery looked that mornin'. It was the tag end o' June—an' in June cemeteries seems like somewheres else. The Sodality hed been tryin' to get a new iron fence, but they hadn't made out then, an' they ain't made out now—an' the old whitewashed fence an' the field stone wall was fair pink with wild roses, an' the mulberry tree was alive with birds, an' the grass layin' down with dew, an' the white gravestones set around, placid an' quiet, like other kind o' folks that we don't know about. Mis' Fire Chief Merriman, she went right through the wet grass, cross lots an' round graves, holdin' up her mournin' an' showin' blue beneath—kind o' secular, like her thinkin' about the all-silk ribbin at such a time. Sure enough, she knew her way to the lot all right. An' there was the new grave, all sodered green, an' not a sprig nor a stitch to honour it.

"'Now!' says Mis' Merriman, rill triumphant.

"'Land, land!' s'I, seein' how it rilly was.

"Timothy an' Silas, they both pitched in an' talked at once an' bent down, technical, lookin' for tracks. But Eb, he just begun seemin' peculiar—an' then he slipped off somewheres, though we never missed him, till, in a minute, he come runnin' back.

"'Come here!' he says. 'Come on over here a little ways,' he told us, an' not knowin' anything better to do we turned an' went after him, wonderin' what on the earth was

the matter with him an' ready to believe 'most anything.

"Eb led us past the vault where Obe Toplady, Timothy's father, lays in a stone box you can see through the grating tiptoe; an' round by the sample cement coffin that sets where the drives meet for advertisin' purposes, an' you go by wonderin' whose it'll be, an' so on over toward the Old Part o' the cemetery, down the slope of the hill where everybody's forgot who's who or where they rest, an' no names, so. But it's always blue with violets in May—like Somebody remembered, anyhow.

"When we got to the top o' the hill, we all looked down the slope, shinin' with dew an' sunniness, an' little flowers runnin' in the grass, thick as thick, till at the foot o' the hill they fair made a garden,—a garden about the size of a grave, knee-deep with flowers. From where we stood we could see 'em—hothouse roses an' straw flowers, an' set pieces, an' a lot o' pillows, an' ribbins layin' out on the grass. An' there, side of 'em, broodin' over 'em lovin', set Elspie, that I'd thought was in my house asleep.

"Mis' Fire Chief, she wasn't one to hesitate. She was over the hill in a minute, the blue edge o' petticoat bannerin' behind.

"'Up-un my word,' s'she, like a cut, 'if this ain't a pretty note. What under the sun are you doin' sittin' there, Elspie, with my flowers?'

"Elspie looked up an' see her, an' see us streamin' toward her over the hill.

"'They ain't your flowers, are they?' s'she, quiet. 'They're the dead's. I was a-goin' to take 'em back in a minute or two, anyway, an' I'll take 'em back now.'

"She got up, simple an' natural, an' picked up the fruit piece an' one o' the pillows, an' started up the hill.

"'Well, I nev-er,' says Mis' Merriman; 'the very bare brazenness. Ain't you goin' to tell me what you're doin' here with the flowers you say is the dead's, an' I'm sure what was Sum's is mine an' the dead's the same—'

"She begun to cry a little, an' with that Elspie looks up at her, troubled.

"'I didn't mean to make you cry,' she says. 'I didn't mean you should know anything about it. I come early to do it—I thought you wouldn't know.'

"'Do what?' says Mis' Merriman, rill snappish.

"Elspie looks around at us then as if she first rilly took us in. An' when she sees Eb an' me standin' together, she give us a little smile—an' she sort o' answered to us two.

"'Why,' she says, 'I ain't got anybody, anywheres here, dead or alive, that belongs. The dead is all other folks's dead, an' the livin' is all other folks's folks. An' when I see all the graves down here that they don't nobody know who's they are, I thought mebbe one of 'em wouldn't care—if I kind of—adopted it.'

"At that she sort o' searched into Mis' Merriman's face, an' then Elspie's head went down, like she hed to excuse herself.

"'I thought,' she said, 'they must be so dead—an' no names on 'em an' all—an' their live folks all dead too by now—nobody'd care much. I thought of it yesterday when we was walkin' down here,' she said, 'an' I picked out the grave—it's the littlest one here. An' then when we come back past where the funeral was, an' I see them flowers—seemed like I hed to see how 'twould be to put 'em on my grave, that I'd took over. So I come early an' done it. But I was goin' to lay 'em right back where they belong—I truly was.'

"I guess none of us hed the least i-dea what to say. We just stood there plain tuckered in the part of us that senses things. All, that is, but one of us. An' that one was Eb Goodnight.

"I can see Eb now, how he just walked out o' the line of us standin' there, starin', an' he goes right up to Elspie an' he looks her in the face.

"'You're lonesome,' s'he, kind o' wonderin'. 'You're lonesome. Like—other folks.'

"An' all to once Eb took a-hold o' her elbow—not loose an' temporary like he shook

hands, but firm an' four-cornered; an' when he spoke it was like his voice hed been starched an' ironed.

"'Mis' Fire Chief,' s'he, lookin' round at her, 'I's to let you know this week whether I'd take over the store. Well, yes,' he says, 'if you'll give me the time on it we mentioned, I'll take it over. An' if Elspie'll marry me an' let me belong to her, an' her to me.'

"'Marry you?' says Elspie, understandin' how he'd rilly spoke to her. 'Me?'

"Eb straightened himself up, an' his eyes was bright an' keen as the edge o' somethin'.

"'Yes, you,' he says gentle. 'An' me.'

"An' then she looked at him like he was lookin' at her. An' it come to me how it'd been with them two since the night they'd locked up my house together. An' I felt all hushed up, like the weddin' was beginnin'.

"But Timothy an' Silas, they wa'n't feelin' so hushed.

'Look a-here!' says Timothy Toplady, all pent up. 'She ain't discharged from the county house yet.'

"'I don't care a dum,' says Eb, an' I must say I respected him for the 'dum'—that once.

"'Look a-here,' says Silas, without a bit o' delicacy. 'She ain't responsible. She ain't—'

"'She is too,' Eb cut him short. 'She's just as responsible as anybody can be when they're lonesome enough to die. I ought 'a' know that. Shut up, Silas Sykes,' says Eb, all het up. 'You've just et a hot breakfast your wife hed ready for you. You don't know what you're talkin' about.'

"An' then Eb sort o' swep' us all up in the dust-pan.

"'No more words about it,' s'he, 'an' I don't care what any one o' you says—Mis'

Cally nor none o' you. So you might just as well say less. Tell 'em, Elspie!'

"She looked up at him, smilin' a little, an' he turned toward her, like we wasn't there. An' I nudged Mis' Merriman an' made a move, an' she turns right away, like she'd fair forgot the funeral flowers. An' Timothy an' Silas actually followed us, but talkin' away a good deal—like men will.

"None of us looked back from the top o' the hill, though I will own I would 'a' loved to. An' about up there I heard Silas say:—

"'Oh, well. I am gettin' kind o' old an' some stiff to take a new business on myself.'

"An' Timothy, he adds absent: 'I don't s'pose, when you come right down to it, as Alice County'll rilly care a whoop.'

"An' Mis' Fire Chief Merriman, she wipes up her eyes, an', 'It does seem like courtin' with Sum's flowers,' she says, sighin', 'but I'm rill glad for Eb.'

"An' Eb not bein' there to agree with her, I says to myself, lookin' at the mornin' sun on the cemetery an' thinkin' o' them two back there among the baskets an' set pieces—I says, low to myself:—

"'Oh, glory, glory, glory.'

"For I tell you, when you see a livin' soul born in somebody's eyes, it makes you feel pretty sure you can hev one o' your own, if you try."

XII

OF THE SKY AND SOME ROSEMARY

When the Friendship Married Ladies' Cemetery Improvement Sodality had its Evening Benefit at my house, Delia More came to help in the kitchen. She steadfastly refused to be a guest. "I'd love bein' 'round there," she said, "over the stove, or that way. But I can't—can't be company—yet. When I think of it, it's like a

high swing."

So she stayed in the kitchen, and it was characteristic of Friendship that when its women learned that she was there, they all went—either deliberately or for a drink of water—to speak with her. And they all did learn that she was there. "Who you got in the kitchen?" was a part of the small talk from guest to hostess. The men stayed "in the other part of the house," Doctor June and Eppleby Holcomb sending by me some cordial word to Delia. I think that they cannot do these things anywhere else with such beautiful delicacy.

When my other guests had taken leave, Calliope stayed to help in the search for Mis' Postmaster Sykes's pickle fork and two of Mis' Helman's napkins (the latter marked with L because the store had been out of papier-maché H's, and it didn't matter what letter so long as you knew it meant you) and all the other borrowed articles whose mislaying made any Sodality gathering a kind of panic. Moreover, Calliope had been helping and we, and Delia, had been far too busy to taste supper.

We would have said that the true life of the evening was done instead of just beginning. But when we entered the kitchen, we found Delia More serving the supper on an end of the baking table, while warming his hands at the range stood Abel Halsey.

"I came in across the track, from the hills," Abel explained to me. "I didn't know you had doings till I tied and blanketed—an' I came on in anyhow, back way. I'm in luck too. I haven't had supper."

We four sat down in that homely cheer, and before us was the Sodality's exquisite cookery. It was good to have Abel there. Since my coming to Friendship I had seen him often, and my wonder at him had deepened. He was alive to the finger-tips and by nature equipped to conquer through sheer mentality, but he seemed deliberately to have fore-gone the prizes for the tasks of the lower places. Not only so, but he who understood all fine things seemed to regard his tastes as naïveté, and to have

won away from them, as if he had set "above all wisdom and subtlety" the unquenchable spirit which he knew. And withal he was so merry, so human, so big, and so good-looking. "Handsome as Calvert Oldmoxon," the older ones in Friendship were accustomed to say,—save Calliope, whom I had never heard say that,—but I myself, if I had not had my simile already selected, would have said "as Abel Halsey." If a god were human, I think that Abel would have been very like a god. And to this opinion his experiences were continually bearing witness.

That night, for example, he was in the merriest humour, and told us a tale of how, that day, the sky had fallen. There had been down on the Pump pasture, deep fog, white and thick and folded in, and above him blue sky, when he had emerged on the Hill Road and driven on with his eyes shut. ("When I need an adventure," he said, "I just trot old Major Mary with my eyes shut. Courting death isn't half as costly as they think it is.") And when he had opened his eyes, the sky was gone, and everything was white and thick and folded in and fabulous. Obviously, as he convinced us, the sky had fallen. But he had driven on through it and in it, and had found it, as I recall his account, to be made of inextinguishable dreams. These, Abel ran on, are on the other side of the sky for anybody who claims them, and our sandwiches were, above all sandwiches, delicious. He was so merry that Calliope and I, by a nod or a smile of understanding, played our rôle of merely, so to say, proving that the films were right—for you may have an inspired conversational photographer, but unless you are properly prepared chemically he can get no pictures. As Calliope had said of her evening with Eb and Elspie, "the air in the room was easy to get through with what you had to say—it was that kind of evening." Sometimes I wonder if an hour like that is real time; or is it, instead, a kind of chronometrical fairy, having no real existence on the dial, but only in essence.

As I think of it now the hour, if it was an hour, was simply a background for Delia More. For it was not only Calliope and I who responded to Abel's light-hearted talk,

but, little by little, it was Delia too. Perhaps it was that faint spark in her—fanned to life on the night of her coming home, so that she "took stock"—which we now divined faintly quickening to Abel's humour, his wisdom, even his fancies. Save in her bitterness, on that first night, I had not heard her laugh; and it was as if something were set free. I could not help looking at her, but that did not matter, for she did not see me. She was listening to Abel with an almost childish delight in her face; and in her eyes was the look of one in a place before unvisited.

Some while after we had moved away from the table and sat together about the cooking range, we heard the questioning horn of a motor. We knew that it would belong to the Proudfits, since for us in Friendship there exists no other motor, and moreover this one was standing at my gate. Abel went out there and came back to tell us that the car had been in town to fetch the Proudfits' lawyer, and that Madame Proudfit had kindly sent it for Delia "and spoilt everything," he added frankly. As he said that, Abel looked at her, and I saw that a dream may persist through personality itself. As I have said, if a god were human, Abel would have been like a god; and in nothing more so than in this understanding of the immortalities.

Calliope stood up and caught, and held, my eyes in passing.

"Let's you and Abel and I take Delia home in the automobile," she said; "there ain't anything so good for folks as fresh air."

I brought a warm wrap for Delia, a crimson cloak of mine which, so to say, drew a line about her, defining her prettiness; and in the starlight we set off along the snowless Plank Road, Delia and Abel and I in the tonneau of the machine, and I silent. It had befallen strangely that over this road Delia More and I should be faring in the Proudfits' car, and beside her Abel Halsey as if, for such as he and she, a dream may, just possibly, come back.

"See," she said to Abel, "the sky has gone back up again."

"Yes," Abel assented, "one of the things even the sky can't do is to change the way

things are."

"Oh, I know, I know ..." said Delia More.

"I want you to feel that," said Abel, gently. "Things are the way things are, and no use trying to leave them out of it. Besides, you need them. They're foundation. Then you build, and build better. That's all there is to it, Delia."

She was silent, and Abel sat looking up at the stars.

"All there is to it except what I said about the other side of the sky," he said. "And then me. I'll help."

From my thought of these two I remember that I drifted on to some consideration of myself, for their presence opened old paths where were in durance things that did their best to escape, and were disquieting. I thought also of Calliope, of whose story I had heard a little from one and another. And it seemed to me that possibly Delia More's laughter and her wistfulness summed us all up.

When we drew up at the entrance to Proudfit House we all alighted, Calliope and Abel and I to walk home. But while we were saying good night to Delia, the door opened and Clementina Proudfit stood against the light. The car was to wait, she said, to take Mr. Baring, the lawyer, to the midnight train. And then, as she saw her:—

"Calliope!" she cried, "I never wanted anybody so much. Come in and make Mr. Baring a cup of your good coffee—you will, Calliope? Mother and I will be with him for half an hour yet. Come, all of you, and help her."

We went in, lingering for a moment by the drawing-room fire while Miss Clementina went below stairs; and I noted how, in that room colourful and of fair proportion, Abel Halsey in his shabby clothes moved as simply as if the splendour were not there. He stood looking down at Delia, in her white dress, the crimson cloak catching the firelight; while Calliope and I, before a length of Beauvais tapestry, talked with spirit about both tapestry and coffee-making. ("My

grandmother use' to crochet faces an' figgers in her afaghans, too," Calliope commented, "an' when I looked at 'em they use' to make me feel kind o' mad. But with these, I don't care at all.") And when Miss Clementina returned,—

"Now," Calliope said to me, "you come with me an' help about the coffee, will you? An' Delia, you an' Abel stay here. Nothin' will put me out o' my head so quick—nothin'—as too many flyin' 'round the kitchen when I'm tryin' to do work."

We went downstairs, and Miss Clementina rejoined her mother and the lawyer in the library, and Delia and Abel were left alone together in the firelight. If I had been a dream, and had been intending to come back at all, I think that I must have come then.

"Pray, why don't you?" said Calliope to me almost savagely on the kitchen stairs.

The coffee-making was a slow process and a silent one. Calliope and I were both absorbed in what had so wonderfully come about: That Delia More, who was dead, was alive again; or rather, that her spirit, patient within her through all the years of its loneliness, was coming forth at the sound of Abel's voice. We were alone in the kitchen, and when the coffee was over the flame, we stood at the window looking out on the black kitchen gardens. There lay the yellow reflection of the room, with that unreality of all window-mirrored rooms, so that if one might walk within them one would almost certainly wear one's self with a difference.

"Ain't it like somethin' bright was in the inside o' the garden," Calliope put it, "just the way I told you Abel feels about everything? That they's something inside, hid, kind of secret an' holy—like the dreams he said was in the sky. I guess mebbe he's believed that about Delia all these years. An' now he's bringin' it out. Oh," she said, "the kitchen is where you can tell about things best. Seems to me you'd ought to know somethin' about Delia an' Abel."

And I wanted to hear.

"Abel see Delia first," Calliope told me then, "to the Rummage Sale that the

Cemetery Auxiliary, that the Sodality use' to be, give. That is to say, they didn't give it, as it turned out—they just had it, you might say. Abel was twenty-five or so, an' he'd just come here fresh ordained a minister. We found he wa'n't the kind to stop short on, Be good yourself an' then a crown. No, but he just went after the folks that was livin' along, moral an' step-pickin', an' he says to us, 'What you sittin' down here for, enjoyin' yourselves bein' moral? Get out an' help the rest o' the world,' he says. But everybody liked him in spite o' that, an' he was goin' to be installed minister in our church.

"Then the Rummage Sale come on an' he met Delia. Delia was eighteen an' just back from visitin' in the City, with her veil a new way, an' I never see prettier. She was goin' to take charge o' the odd waists table, an' Abel was runnin' 'round helpin'—Abel wa'n't the white-cuff kind, like some, but he always pitched in an' stirred up whatever was a-stewin'. He come bringin' in an armful o' old shoes somebody'd fetched down, an' just as she was beginnin' on the odd waists, sortin' 'em over, he met Delia. I remember she looks up at him from under that veil an' from over a red basque she'd picked off the pile, an', 'Mr. Halsey,' she says, 'I've a notion to buy this myself an' be savin'.' That took Abel—Delia was so pretty an' fluffy that hearin' her talk savin' was about like seein' a butterfly washin' out its own wings. 'Do,' says he, 'the red is beautiful on you,' s'e, shovin' the blame off on to the red. An' when he got done with the shoes he come over to help on the waists too—I was lookin' over the child sizes, next table, an' I see the whole business.

"I will say their talk was wonderful pretty. It run on sort o' easy, slippin' along over little laughs an' no hard work to keep it goin'. Abel had a nice way o' cuttin' his words out sharp—like they was made o' somethin' with sizin' on the back an' stayed where he put 'em. An' his laugh would sort o' clamp down soft on a joke an' make it double funny. An' Delia, she was right back at him, give for take, an' though she was rill genial, she was shy. An' come to think of it, Abel was just as full o' his fancyin's then as he is now.

"'Old clothes,' he says to her, 'always seems to me sort o' haunted.'

"'Haunted?' I know she asks him, wonderin'.

"'All steeped in what folks have been when they've wore 'em,' s'e, 'an' givin' it out again.'

"'Oh ...' Delia says, 'I never thought o' that before.'

"An' she see what he meant, too. Delia wa'n't one to get up little wavy notions like that, but she could see 'em when told. An' neither was she one to do one way instead of another by just her own willin' it, but if somebody pointed things out to her, then she'd see how, an' do the right. An' I think Abel understood that about her—that her soul was sort o' packed down in her an' would hev to be loosened gentle, before it could speak. Like Peleg Bemus says about his flute," Calliope said, smiling, "that they's something packed deep down in it that can't say things it knows."

"'Clothes folks wear, rooms they live in, things they use—they all get like the folks that use 'em,' Abel says, layin' black with black an' white with white, on to the waist table. 'It makes us want to step careful, don't it?' s'e. 'I think,' s'e, simple, 'your dresses—an' ribbins—an' your veil—must go about doin' pleasant things without you.'

"'Oh, no,' says Delia, demure, 'I ain't near good enough, Mr. Halsey; you mustn't think that,' she says—an' right while he was lookin' gentle an' clerical an' ready to help her, she dimples out all over her face. 'Besides,' she says, 'I ain't enough dresses to spare away from me for that. I ain't but about two!' s'she. An' when a girl is all rose pink and sky blue and dainty neat, a man loves to hear her brag how few dresses she's got, an' Abel wa'n't the exception.

"'Same as a lily,' says he; 'they only have one dress. Now, what else shall I do?'

"Well, at sharp nine the Cemetery Auxiliary come to order, Mis' Sykes presidin', like she always does when it's time for a hush. The doors was to open to the general public at ten o'clock, an' the i-dee was to hev the Auxiliary get the pick o' the goods

first, payin' the reg'lar, set, marked price. An' just as they was ready to begin pickin', up arrove the Proudfit pony cart with a great big box o' stuff, sent to the sale. Land, land, Mis' Sykes from the chair an' the others the same, they just makes one swoop—an' begun selectin'; an' in less than a jiffy if they hadn't selected up every one o' the Proudfit articles themselves. It was natural enough. The things was worth havin'—pretty curtains, an' trimmin's not much wore, an' some millinery an' dresses with the new hardly off. An' the Auxiliary paid the price they would 'a' asked anybody else. They was anxious, but they was square.

"That just seemed to get their hand in. Next, they fell to on the other tables an' begun buyin' from them. They was lots o' things that most anybody would 'a' been glad to hev that the owners had sent down sheer through bein' sick o' seein' 'em around—like you will—an' couldn't be thrown away 'count o' conscience, but could be give to a cause an' conscience not notice. We had quite fun buyin', too—knowin' they was each other's, an' no hard feelin'—only good spirits an' pleased with each other's taste. Everybody knew who'd sent what, an' everybody hed bought it for some not so high-minded use as it hed hed before, an' kep' their dignity that way. Front-stair carpet was bought to go down on back stairs, sittin' room lamp for chamber lamp, kitchen stove-pipe for wash room stove-pipe, an' so on, an' the clothes to make rag rugs—so they give out. The things kep' on an' on bein' snapped up hot-cake quick, an' the crowd beginnin' to gather outside, waitin' to get in, made 'em sort o' lose their heads an' begin buyin' sole because things was cheap—bird-cages, a machine cover, odd table-leaves, an' like that. The Society was rill large then, an' what happened might 'a' been expected. When ten o'clock come an' it was time to open the door, the Rummage Sale was over, an' the Auxiliary hed bought the whole thing themselves.

"We never thought folks might be anyways mad about it—but I tell you, they was. They hed been seein' us through the glass, like they was caged in front o' bargain day. An' when Mis' Toplady, fair beamin', unlocks the door an' tells 'em the sale was

through with an' a rill success, they acted some het up. But Mis' Toplady, she bristles back at 'em. 'I'm sure,' s'she, 'nobody wants you to die an' be buried in a nice, neat, up-to-date, kep'-up cemet'ry if you don't want to.' An' o' course she hed 'em there.

"Well, it was that performance o' the Auxiliary's that rilly brought Delia an' Abel together. It seemed to strike Abel awful funny, an' Delia, lookin' at it with him, she see the funny too. They laughed a good deal, an' they seemed to sort o' understand each other through laughin', like you will. Delia bought the red waist, an' Abel walked home with her—an' by that time Abel, with his half-scriptural, half-boy, half-lover way that he couldn't help, was just on the craggy edge o' fallin' in love with her. But I b'lieve it wa'n't love, just ordinary. It was more like Abel, in his zeal for reddin' up the world, see that he could do for Delia what nobody else could do—an' her for him. An' that both of 'em workin' together could do more through knowin' each other was near. That's the way,' Calliope said shyly, 'lovin' always ought to be, my notion. An' when it ain't, things is likely to get all wrong. Sometime—sometime,' she said, 'you'll hear about me—an' how things with me went all wrong. An' I want you to remember, no matter how much it don't seem my fault—that that's why they did go wrong—an' no other. I was too crude selfish to sense what love is. I didn't know—I didn't know. An' so with lots o' folks.

"I've often thought that Delia an' Abel meetin' at a Rummage Sale was like all the rest of it. There was just a lot o' rubbish lumberin' up the whole situation. Things wasn't happy for Delia to home—her mother, Mis' Crapwell, had married again to a man that kep' throwin' out about hevin' to be support to Delia; an' her stepsister, Jennie Crapwell, was sickly an' self-seekin' an' engaged all to once. An' the young carpenter that Jennie was goin' to marry, he was the black-eyed, hither-an'-yon kind, an' crazier over Delia from the first than he ever was over Jennie. Delia, she was shy about not havin' much education—Mis' Proudfit hed wanted to send her off to school, an' Mis' Crapwell wouldn't hear to it—an' Abel kep' talkin' that he was goin'

to hev a big church in the City some day, an' I guess that scairt Delia some, an' Jennie kep' frettin' an' houndin' her, one way an' another, an' a-callin' her 'parson's wife'—ain't it awful the power them pin-pricky things has if we let 'em? An' Delia wa'n't the kind to know how to do right by her own willin'. An' so all to once we woke up one mornin', an' she'd done what she'd done, an' no help for it.

"It was only a month after Delia an' Abel had met that Delia went away, an' Abel hadn't been installed yet. An' when Delia done that, Abel just settled into bein' somebody else. He seemed to want to go off in the hills an' be by himself, an' most o' the time he done so. But there was grace for him even in that: Abel see the hill folks, how they didn't hev any churches nor not anything else much, an' he just set to work on 'em, quiet an' still. He'd wanted to go away an' travel, but the chance never come. An' it seemed, then on, he didn't want even to hear o' the City, an' when his chances there come, he never took 'em. An' Abel's been 'round here with the hill folks the fourteen years since, an' never pastor of any church—but he got the blessedness, after all, an' I guess the chance to do better service than any other way. You can see how he's broad an' gentle an' tender an' strong, but you don't know what he does for folks—an' that's the best. An' yet—his soul must be sort o' packed away too, to what it would 'a' been if things had 'a' gone differ'nt ... packed away an' tryin' to say somethin'. An' now Delia's come back I b'lieve Abel knows that, an' I b'lieve he sees the soul in her needin' him too, just like it did all that time—waitin' to be loosened, gentle, before it can speak; an' meanin' things it can't say, like Peleg's flute. Oh, don't it seem like the dreams Abel said he found up in the sky had ought to be let come true?"

It did seem as if, for the two up there in the drawing-room, this dream might, just possibly, come back.

"But then you never can tell for sure about the sky, can you?" said Calliope, sighing.

Coffee was served in the library where Madame Proudfit and Miss Clementina had

been in consultation with their lawyer. We were all rather silent as Madame Proudfit sat at the urn and the lawyer handed our cups down some long avenue of his abstraction. And now everything seemed to me a kind of setting for Delia and Abel, and Calliope kept looking at them as if, before her eyes, things might come right. So, I own, did I, though in the Proudfit library it was usually difficult to fix my attention on what passed; for it was in that room that Linda Proudfit's portrait hung, and the beautiful eyes seemed always trying to tell one what the weary absence meant. But I thought again that this daughter of the house had won a kind of presence there, because of Madame Proudfit's tender mother-care of Delia More.

Yet it was to this care that Calliope and I owed a present defeat; for when we were leave-taking,—

"We shall sail, then, the moment we can get passage," Madame Proudfit observed to her lawyer, "providing that Clementina can arrange. Delia," she added, "Clementina and I find to-night that we must sail immediately for Europe, for six months or so. And we want to carry you off with us."

Madame Proudfit and Miss Clementina and Delia were standing with us outside the threshold, where the outdoors had met us like something that had been waiting. There, with the light from the hall falling but dimly, I saw in Abel's face only the glow of his simple joy that this good thing had come to Delia—though, indeed, that very joy told much besides. And it was in his face when he bade Delia good night and, since he was expected somewhere among the hills for days to come, gave her God-speed. But we four fell momentarily silent, as if we meant things which we might not speak. It was almost a relief to hear tapping on the sidewalk the wooden leg of Peleg Bemus, while a familiar, thin little stream of melody from his flute made its way about.

"Doesn't it seem as if Peleg were trying to tell one something?" said Madame Proudfit, lightly, as we went away.

And down on the gravel of the drive Calliope demanded passionately of Abel and me:—

"Oh, don't some things make you want to pull the sky down an' wrap up in it!"

But at this Abel laughed a little.

"It's easier to pull down just the dreams," he said.

XIII

TOP FLOOR BACK

One morning a few weeks after the Proudfits had left, I was sitting beside Calliope's cooking range, watching her at her baking, when the wooden leg of Peleg Bemus thumped across the threshold, and without ceremony he came in from the shed and stood by the fire, warming his axe handle. But Peleg's intrusions were never imputed to him. As I have said, his gifts and experiences had given him a certain authority. Perhaps, too, he reflected a kind of institutional dignity from his sign, which read:—

P. Bemus: Retail Saw Miller

At the moment of his entrance Calliope was talking of Emerel Kitton, now Mrs. Abe Daniel:

"There's them two," she said, "seems to hev married because they both use a good deal o' salt—'t least they ain't much else they're alike in. An' Emerel is just one-half workin' her head off for him. Little nervous thing she is—when I heard she was down with nervous prostration two years ago, I says, 'Land, land,' I says, 'but ain't she always had it?' They's a strain o' good blood in that girl,—Al Kitton was New England,—but they don't none of it flow up through her head. She's great on sacrificin', but she don't sacrifice judicious. If folks is goin' to sacrifice, I think they'd ought to do it conscientious, the kind in the Bible, same as Abraham an' like that."

Peleg Bemus rubbed one hand up and down his axe handle.

"I reckon you can't always tell, Miss Marsh," he said meditatively. "I once knowed a man that done some sacrificin' that ain't called by that name when it gets into the newspapers." He turned to me, with a manner of pointing at me with his head, "You been in New York," he said; "ain't you ever heard o' Mr. Loneway—Mr. John Loneway?"

I was sorry that I could not answer "yes." He was so expectant that I had the sensation of having failed him.

"Him an' I lived in the same building in East Fourteenth Street there," he said. "That is to say, he lived top floor back and I was janitor. That was a good many years ago, but whenever I get an introduction to anybody that's been in New York, I allus take an interest. I'd like to know whatever become of him."

He scrupulously waited for our question, and then sat down beside the oven door and laid his axe across his knees.

"It was that hard winter," he told us, "about a dozen years ago. I'd hev to figger out just what year, but most anybody on the East Side can tell you. Coal was clear up an' soarin', an' vittles was too—everybody howlin' hard times, an' the Winter just commenced. Make things worse, some philanthropist had put up two model tenements in the block we was in, an' property alongside had shot up in value accordin' an' lugged rents with it. Everybody in my buildin' 'most was rowin' about it.

"But John Loneway, he wasn't rowin'. I met him on the stairs one mornin' early an' I says, 'Beg pardon, sir,' I says, 'but you ain't meanin' to make no change?' I ask him. He looks at me kind o' dazed—he was a wonderful clean-muscled little chap, with a crisscross o' veins on each temple an' big brown eyes back in his head. 'No,' he says. 'Change? I can't move. My wife's sick,' he says. That was news to me. I'd met her a couple o' times in the hall—pale little mite, hardly big as a baby, but

pleasant-spoken, an' with a way o' dressin' herself in shabby clo'es that made the other women in the house look like bundles tied up careless. But she didn't go out much—they had only been in the house a couple o' weeks or so. 'Sick, is she?' I says. 'Too bad,' I says. 'Anything I can do?' I ask him. He stopped on the nex' step an' looked back at me. 'Got a wife?' he says. 'No,' says I, 'I ain't, sir. But they ain't never challenged my vote on 'count o' that, sir—no offence,' I says to him respectful. 'All right,' he says, noddin' at me. 'I just thought mebbe she'd look in now and then. I'm gone all day,' he added, an' went off like he'd forgot me.

"I thought about the little thing all that mornin'—layin' all alone up there in that room that wa'n't no bigger'n a coal-bin. It's bad enough to be sick anywheres, but it's like havin' both legs in a trap to be sick in New York. Towards noon I went into one o' the flats—first floor front it was—with the kindlin' barrel, an' I give the woman to understand they was somebody sick in the house. She was a great big creatur' that I'd never see excep' in red calico, an' I always thought she looked some like a tomato ketchup bottle, with her apron for the label. She says, when I told her, 'You see if she wants anything,' she says. 'I can't climb all them stairs,' she answers me.

"Well, that afternoon I went down an' hunted up a rusty sleigh-bell I'd seen in the basement, an' I rubbed it up an' tied a string to it, an' 'long in the evenin' I went upstairs an' rapped at Mr. Loneway's door.

"'I called,' I says, 'to ask after your wife, if I might.'

"'If you might,' he says after me. 'I thank the Lord you're somebody that will. Come in,' he told me.

"They had two rooms. In one he was cookin' somethin' on a smelly oil-stove. In the other was his wife; but that room was all neat an' nice—curtains looped back, carpet an' all that. She was half up on pillows, an' she had a black waist on, an' her hair pushed straight back, an' she was burnin' up with the fever.

"'Set down an' talk to her,' he says to me, 'while I get the dinner, will you? I've got to

go out for the milk.'

"I did set down, feelin' some like a sawhorse in church. If she hadn't been so durn little, seems though I could 'a' talked with her, but I ketched sight of her hand on the quilt, an'—law! it wa'n't no bigger'n a butternut. She done the best thing she could do an' set me to work.

"'Mr. Bemus,' she says, first off—everybody else called me Peleg—'Mr. Bemus,' she says, 'I wonder if you'd mind takin' an old newspaper—there's one somewheres around—an' stuffin' in the cracks of this window an' stop its rattlin'?'

"I laid my sleigh-bell down an' done as she says; an' while I fussed with the window, that seems though all Printin' House Square couldn't stuff up, she talked on, chipper as a squirrel, all about the buildin', an' who lived where, an' how many kids they was, an' wouldn't it be nice if they had an elevator like the model tenement we was payin' rent for, an' so on. I'd never 'a' dreamt she was sick if I hadn't looked 'round a time or two at her poor, burnin'-up face. Then bime-by he brought the supper in, an' when he went to lift her up, she just naturally laid back an' fainted. But she was all right again in a minute, brave as two, an' she was like a child when she see what he'd brought her—a big platter for a tray, with milk-toast an' an apple an' five cents' worth o' dates. She done her best to eat, too, and praised him up, an' the poor soul hung over her, watchin' every mouthful, feedin' her, coaxin' her, lookin' like nothin' more'n a boy himself. When I couldn't stand it no longer, I took an' jingled the sleigh-bell.

"'I'm a-goin',' I says, 'to hang this outside the door here, an' run this nice long string through the transom. An' to-morrow,' I says, 'when you want anything, just you pull the string a time or two, an' I'll be somewheres around.'

"She clapped her hands, her eyes shinin'.

"'Oh, goodey!' she says. 'Now I won't be alone. Ain't it nice,' she says, 'that there ain't no glass in the transom? If we lived in the model tenement, we couldn't do that,'

she says, laughin' some.

"An' that young fellow, he followed me to the door an' just naturally shook hands with me, same's though I'd been his kind. Then he followed me on out into the hall.

"'We had a little boy,' he says to me low, 'an' it died four months ago yesterday, when it was six days old. She ain't ever been well since,' he says, kind of as if he wanted to tell somebody. But I didn't know what to say, an' so I found fault with the kerosene lamp in the hall, an' went on down.

"Nex' day I knew the doctor come again. An' 'way 'long in the afternoon I was a-tinkerin' with the stair rail when I heard the sleigh-bell ring. I run up, an' she was settin' up, in the black waist—but I thought her eyes was shiney with somethin' that wasn't the fever—sort of a scared excitement.

"'Mr. Bemus,' she says, 'I want you to do somethin' for me,' she says, 'an' not tell anybody. Will you?'

"'Why, yes,' I says, 'I will, Mis' Loneway,' I says. 'What is it?' I ask' her.

"'There's a baby somewheres downstairs,' she says. 'I hear it cryin' sometimes. An' I want you to get it an' bring it up here.'

"That was a queer thing to ask, because kids isn't soothin' to the sick. But I went off downstairs to the first floor front. The kid she meant belonged to the Tomato Ketchup woman. I knew they had one because it howled different times an', I judge, pounded its head on the floor some when it was maddest. It was the only real little one in the buildin'—the others was all the tonguey age. I told what I wanted.

"'For the land!' says Tomato Ketchup, 'I never see such nerve. Take my baby into a sick room? Not if I know it. I s'pose you just come out o' there? Well, don't you stay here, bringin' diseases. A hospital's the true place fer the sick,' she says.

"I went back to Mis' Loneway, an' I guess I lied some. I said the kid was sick—had the croup, I thought, an' she'd hev to wait. Her face fell, but she said 'all right an'

please not to say nothin',' an' then I went out an' done my best to borrow a kid for her. I ask' all over the neighbourhood, an' not a woman but looked on me for a cradle snatcher—thought I wanted to abduct her child away from her. Bime-by I even told one woman what I wanted it for.

"'My!' she says, 'if she ain't got one, she's got one less mouth to feed. Tell her to thank her stars.'

"After that I used to look into Mis' Loneway's frequent. The women on the same floor was quite decent to her, but they worked all day, an' mostly didn't get home till after her husband did. I found out somethin' about him, too. He was clerk in a big commission house 'way down-town, an' his salary, as near as I could make out, was about what mine was, an' they wa'n't no estimatin' that by the cord at all. But I never heard a word out'n him about their not havin' much. He kep' on makin' milk toast an' bringin' in one piece o' fruit at a time an' once in a while a little meat. An' all the time anybody could see she wa'n't gettin' no better. I knew she wa'n't gettin' enough to eat, an' I knew he knew it, too. An' one night the doctor he outs with the truth.

"Mr. Loneway an' I was sittin' in the kitchen while the doctor was in the other room with her. I went there evenin's all the time by then—the young fellow seemed to like to hev me. We was keepin' warm over the oil-stove because the real stove was in her room, an' the doctor come in an' stood over him.

"'My lad,' he says gentle, 'there ain't half as much use o' my comin' here as there is o' her gettin' strengthenin' food. She's got to hev beef broth—cer'als—fresh this an' fresh that'—he went on to tell him, 'an' plenty of it,' he says. 'An' if we can make her strength hold out, I think,' he wound up, 'that we can save her. But she's gettin' weaker every day for lack o' food. Can you do anything more?' he ask' him.

"I expected to see young Mr. Loneway go all to pieces at this, because I knew as it was he didn't ride in the street-car, he was pinchin' so to pay the doctor. But he sorter set up sudden an' squared his shoulders, an' he looked up an' says:—

"'Yes!' he says. 'I've been thinkin' that to-night,' he says. 'An' I've hed a way to some good luck, you might call it—an' now I guess she can hev everything she wants,' he told him; an' he laughed some when he said it.

"That sort o' amazed me. I hadn't heard him sayin' anything about any excruciatin' luck, an' his face hadn't been the face of a man on the brink of a bonanza. I wondered why he hadn't told her about this luck o' his, but I kep' quiet an' watched to see if he was bluffin'.

"I was cleanin' the walk off when he come home nex' night. Sure enough, there was his arms laid full o' bundles. An' his face—it done me good to see it.

"'Come on up an' help get dinner,' he yelled out, like a kid, an' I thought I actually seen him smilin'.

"Soon's I could I went upstairs, an' they wa'n't nothin' that man hadn't brought. They was everything the doctor had said, an' green things, an' a whol' basket o' fruit an' two bottles o' port, an' more things besides. They was lots o' fixin's, too, that there wa'n't a mite o' nourishment in—for he wa'n't no more practical nor medicinal'n a wood-tick. But I knew how he felt.

"'Don't tell her,' he says. 'Don't tell her,' he says to me, hoppin' 'round the kitchen like a buzz-saw. 'I want to surprise her.'

"You can bet he did, too—if you'll overlook the liberty. When he was all ready, he made me go in ahead.

"'To-ot!' says I, genial-like—they treated me jus' like one of 'em. 'To-ot! Lookey-at!'

"He set the big white platter down on the bed, an' when she see all the stuff,—white grapes, mind you, an' fresh tomatoes, an' a glass for the wine,—she just grabs his hand an' holds it up to her throat, an' says:—

"'Jack! Oh, Jack!' she says,—she called him that when she was pleased,—'how did you? How did you?'

"'Never you mind,' he says, kissin' her an' lookin' as though he was goin' to bu'st out himself, 'never you ask. It's time I had some luck, ain't it? Like other men?'

"She was touchin' things here an' there, liftin' up the grapes an' lookin' at 'em—poor little soul had lived on milk toast an' dates an' a apple now an' then for two weeks to my knowledge. But when he said that, she stopped an' looked at him, scared.

"'John!' she says, 'you ain't—'

"He laughed at that.

"'Gamblin'?' he says. 'No—never you fear.' I had thought o' that myself, only I didn't quite see when he'd had the chance since night before when the doctor told him. 'It's all owin' to the office,' he says to her, 'an' now you eat—lemme see you eat, Linda,' he says, an' that seemed to be food enough for him. He didn't half touch a thing. 'Eat all you want,' he says, 'an', Peleg, poke up the fire. There's half a ton o' coal comin' to-morrow. An' we're goin' to have this every day,' he told her.

"Land o' love! how happy she was! She made me eat some grapes, an' she sent a bunch to the woman on the same floor, because she'd brought her an orange six weeks before; an' then she begs Mr. Loneway to get an extry candle out of the top dresser draw'. An' when that was lit up she whispers to him, and he goes out an' fetches from somewheres a guitar with more'n half the strings left on; an' she set up an' picked away on 'em, an' we all three sung, though I can't carry a tune no more'n what I can carry a white oak tree trunk.

"'Oh,' she says, 'I'm a-goin' to get well now. Oh,' she says, 'ain't it heaven to be rich again?'

"No—you can say she'd ought to 'a' made him tell her where he got the money. But she trusted him, an' she'd been a-livin' on milk toast an' dates for so long that I can pretty well see how she took it all as what's-his-name took the wild honey, without askin' the Lord whose make it was. Besides, she was sick. An' milk toast an' dates'd reconcile me to 'most any change for the better.

"It got so then that I went upstairs every noon an' fixed up her lunch for her, an' one day she done what I'd been dreadin'. 'Mr. Bemus,' she says, 'that baby must be over the croup now. Won't you—won't you take it down this orange an' see if you can't bring it up here awhile?'

"I went down, but, law!—where was the use? The Ketchup woman grabs up her kid an' fair threw the orange at me. 'You don't know what disease you're bringin' in here,' she says—she had a voice like them gasoline wood-cutters. I see she'd took to heart some o' the model-tenement social-evenin' lectures on bugs an' worms in diseases. I carried the orange out and give it to a kid in the ar'y, so's Mis' Loneway'd be makin' somebody some pleasure, anyhow. An' then I went back upstairs an' told her the kid was worse. Seems the croup had turned into cholery infantum.

"'Why,' she says, 'I mus' send it down somethin' nice an' hot to-night,' an' so she did, and I slips it back in the Loneway kitchen unbeknownst. She wa'n't so very medicinal, either, bless her heart!

"'Tell me about that baby,' she says to me one noon. 'What's its name? Does it like to hev its mother love it?' she ask me.

"I knew the truth to be that it didn't let anybody do anything day or night within sight or sound of it, an' it looked to me like an imp o' the dark. But I fixed up a tol'able description, an' left out the freckles an' the temper, an' told her it was fat an' well an' a boy. That seemed to satisfy her. Its name, though, sort o' stumped me. The Tomato Ketchup called it mostly 'you-come-back-here-you-little-ape.' I heard that every day. So I said, just to piece out my information, that I thought its name might be April. That seemed to take her fancy, an' after that she was always askin' me how little April was—but not when Mr. Loneway was in hearin'. I see well enough she didn't want he should know that she was grievin' none.

"All the time kep' comin', every night, another armful o' good things. Land! that man he bought everything. Seems though he couldn't buy enough. Every night the big

platter was heaped up an' runnin' over with everything under the sun, an' she was like another girl. I s'pose the things give her strength, but I reck'n the cheer helped most. She had the surprise to look forward to all day, an' there was plenty o' light, evenin's; an' the stove, that was drove red-hot. The doctor kep' sayin' she was better, too, an' everything seemed lookin' right up.

"Seems queer I didn't suspect from the first something was wrong. Seems though I ought to 'a' known money didn't grow out o' green wood the way he was pretendin'. It wasn't two weeks before he takes me down to the basement one night when he comes home, an' he owns up.

"'Peleg,' he says, 'I've got to tell somebody, an' God knows maybe it'll be you that'll hev to tell her. I've stole fifty-four dollars out o' the tray in the retail department,' says he, 'an' to-day they found me out. They wasn't no fuss made. Lovett, the assistant cashier, is the only one that knows. He took me aside quiet,' Mr. Loneway says, 'an' I made a clean breast. I said what I took it for. He's a married man himself, an' he told me if I'd make it up in three days, he'd fix it so's nobody should know. The cashier's off for a week. In three days he's comin' back. But they might as well ask me to make up fifty-four hundred. I've got enough to keep on these three days so's she won't know,' he says, 'an' after that—'

"He hunched out his arms, an' I'll never forget his face.

"I says, 'Mr. Loneway, sir,' I says, 'chuck it. Tell her the whole thing an' give 'em back what you got left, an' do your best.'

"He turned on me like a crazy man.

"'Don't talk to me like that,' he says fierce. 'You don't know what you're sayin',' he says. 'No man does till he has this happen to him. The judge on the bench that'll send me to jail for it, he won't know what he's judgin'. My God—my God!' he says, leanin' up against the door o' the furnace room, 'to see her sick like this—an' needin' things—when she give herself to me to take care of!'

"Course there wa'n't no talkin' to him. An' the nex' night an' the nex' he come home bringin' her truck just the same. Once he even hed her a bunch o' pinks. Seems though he was doin' the worst he could.

"The pinks come at the end of the second day of the three days the assistant cashier had give him to pay the money back in. An' two things happened that night. I was in the kitchen helpin' him wash up the dishes while the doctor was in the room with Mis' Loneway. An' when the doctor come out o' there into the kitchen, he shuts the door. I see right off somethin' was the matter. He took Mr. Loneway off to the back window, an' I rattled 'round with the dishes an' took on not to notice. Up until when the doctor goes out—an' then I felt Mr. Loneway's grip on my arm. I looked at him, an' I knew. She wasn't goin' to get well. He just lopped down on the chair like so much sawdust, an' put his face down in his arm, the way a schoolboy does—an' I swan he wa'n't much more'n a schoolboy, either. I s'pose if ever hell is in a man's heart,—an' we mostly all see it there sometime, even if we don't feel it,—why, there was hell in his then.

"All of a sudden there was a rap on the hall door. He never moved, an' so I went. I whistled, I rec'lect, so's she shouldn't suspect nothin' from our not goin' in where she was right off. An' a messenger-boy was out there in the passage with a letter for Mr. Loneway.

"I took it in to him. He turned himself around an' opened it, though I don't believe he knew half what he was doin'. An' what do you guess come tumblin' out o' that envelope? Fifty-four dollars in bills. Not a word with 'em.

"Then he broke down. 'It's Lovett,' he says, 'it's Lovett's done this—the assistant cashier. Maybe he's told some o' the other fellows at the desks next, an' they helped. They knew about her bein' sick. An' they can't none of 'em afford it,' he says, an' that seemed to cut him up worst of all. 'I'll give it back to him,' he says resolute. 'I can't take it from 'em, Peleg.'

"I says, 'Hush up, Mr. Loneway, sir,' I says. 'You got to think o' her. Take it,' I told him, 'an' thank God it ain't as bad as it was. Who knows,' I ask' him, 'but what the doctor might turn out wrong?'

"Pretty soon I got him to pull himself together some, an' I shoved him into the other room, an' I went with him, an' talked on like an idiot so nobody'd suspect—I didn't hev no idea what.

"She was settin' up in the same black waist, with a newspaper hung acrost the head o' the iron bed to keep the draught out. All of a sudden,—

"'John!' says she.

"He went close by the bed.

"'Is everything goin' on good?' she ask' him.

"'Everything,' he told her right off.

"'Splendid, John?' she ask' him, pullin' his hand up by her cheek.

"'Splendid, Linda,' he says after her.

"'We got a little money ahead?' she goes on.

"'Bless me, if he didn't do just what I had time to be afraid of. He hauls out them fifty-four dollars an' showed her.

"She claps her hands like a child.

"'Oh, goodey!' she says; 'I'm so glad. I'm so glad. Now I can tell you,' she says to him.

"He took her in his arms an' kneeled down by the bed, an' I tried to slip out, but she called me back. So I stayed, like an' axe in the parlour.

"'John,' she says to him, 'do you know what Aunt Nita told me before I was married? "You must always look the prettiest you know how," Aunt Nita says,' she tells him, "'for your husband. Because you must always be prettier for him than anybody else is." An', oh, dearest,' she says, 'you know I'd 'a' looked my best for you if I

could—but I never had—an' it wasn't your fault!' she cries out, 'but things didn't go right. It wasn't anybody's fault. Only—I wanted to look nice for you. An' since I've been sick,' she says, 'it's made me wretched, wretched to think I didn't hev nothin' to put on but this black waist—this homely old black waist. You never liked me to wear black,' I rec'lect she says to him, 'an' it killed me to think—if anything should happen—you'd be rememberin' me like this. You think you'd remember me the way I was when I was well—but you wouldn't,' she says earnest; 'people never, never do. You'd remember me here like I look now. Oh—an' so I thought—if there was ever so little money we could spare—won't you get me somethin'—somethin' so's you could remember me better? Somethin' to wear these few days,' she says.

"He breaks down then an' cries, with his face in her pillow.

"'Don't—why, don't!' she says to him; 'if there wasn't any money, you might cry—only then I wouldn't never hev told you. But now—to-morrow—you can go an' buy me a little dressing-sacque—the kind they have in the windows on Broadway. Oh, Jack!' she says, 'is it wicked an' foolish for me to want you to remember me as nice as you can? It ain't—it ain't!' she says.

"Then I give out. I felt like a handful o' wet sawdust that's been squeezed. I slid out an' downstairs, an' I guess I chopped wood near all night. The Tomato Ketchup's husband he pounded the floor for me to shut up, an' I told him—though I never was what you might call a impudent janitor—that if he thought he could chop it up any more soft, he'd better engage in it. But then the kid woke up, too, an' yelled some, an' I's afraid she'd hear it an' remember, an' so I quit.

"Nex' mornin' I laid for Mr. Loneway in the hall.

"'Sir,' I says to him when he come down to go out, 'you won't do nothin' foolish?' I ask' him.

"'Mind your business,' he says, his face like a patch o' poplar ashes.

"I was in an' out o' their flat all day, an' I could see't Mis' Loneway she's happy as a

lark. But I knew pretty well what was comin'. Mind you, this was the third day.

"That night I hed things goin' in the kitchen an' the kettle on, an' I's hesitatin' whether to put two eggs in the omelet or three, when he comes home. He laid a eternal lot o' stuff on the kitchen table, without one word, an' went in where she was. I heard paper rustlin', an' then I heard her voice—an' it wasn't no cryin', lemme say. An' so I says to myself, 'Well,' I says, 'she might as well hev a four-egg omelet, because it'll be the last.' I knew if they's to arrest him she wouldn't never live the day out. So I goes on with the omelet, an' when he come out where I was, I just told him if he'd cut open the grapefruit I hed ever'thing else ready. An' then he quit lookin' defiant, an' he calmed down some; an' pretty soon we took in the dinner.

"She was sittin' up in front of her two pillows, pretty as a picture. An' she was in one o' the things I ain't ever see outside a store window. Lord! it was all the colour o' roses, with craped-up stuff like the bark on a tree, an' rows an' rows o' lace, an' long, flappy ribbon. She was allus pretty, but she looked like an angel in that. An' I says to myself then, I says: 'If a woman knows she looks like that in them things, an' if she loves somebody an', livin' or dead, wants to look like that for him, I want to know who's to blame her? I ain't—Peleg Bemus, he ain't.' Mis' Loneway was as pretty as I ever see, not barrin' the stage. An' she was laughin', an' her cheeks was pink-like, an' she says,—

"'Oh, Mr. Bemus,' she says, 'I feel like a queen,' she says, 'an' you must stay for dinner.'

"I never seen Mr. Loneway gayer. He was full o' fun an' funny sayin's, an' his face had even lost its chalky look an' he'd got some colour, an' he laughed with her an' he made love to her—durned if it wasn't enough to keep a woman out o' the grave to be worshipped the way that man worshipped her. An' when she ask' for the guitar, I carried out the platter, an' I stayed an' straightened things some in the kitchen. An' all the while I could hear 'em singin' soft an' laughin' together ... an' all the while I knew

what was double sure to come.

"Well, in about an hour it did come. I was waitin' for it. Fact, I had filled up the coffee-pot expectin' it. An' when I heard the men comin' up the stairs I takes the coffee an' what rolls there was left an' I meets 'em in the hall, on the landing. They was two of 'em—constables, or somethin'—with a warrant for his arrest.

"'Gentlemen,' says I, openin' the coffee-pot careless so's the smell could get out an' circ'late—'gentlemen, he's up there in that room. There's only these one stairs, an' the only manhole's right here over your heads, so's you can watch that. You rec'lect that there ain't a roof on that side o' the house. Now, I'm a lonely beggar, an' I wish't you'd let me invite you to a cup o' hot coffee an' a hot buttered roll or two, right over there in that hall window. You can keep your eye peeled towards that door all the while,' I reminds 'em.

"Well, it was a bitter night, an' them two was flesh an' blood. They 'lowed that if he hadn't been there they'd 'a' had to wait for him, anyway, so they finally set down. An' I doled 'em out the coffee. I 'lowed I could keep 'em an hour if I knew myself. Nobody could 'a' done any different, with her an' him settin' up there singin' an' no manner o' doubt but what it was for the last time.

"I'd be'n 'round consid'able in my time an' I knew quite a batch o' stories. I let 'em have 'em all, an' poured the coffee down 'em. They was willin' enough—it wa'n't cold in the halls to what it was outside, an' the coffee was boilin' hot. An' if anybody wants to blame me, they'd hev to see her first, all fluffed up same as a kitten in that pink jacket-thing, afore I'd give 'em a word o' hearin'.

"In the midst of it all I heard the Tomato Ketchup's kid yell. I remembered that this'd be my last chanst fer her to see the kid when she could get any happiness out of it. I didn't think twice—I just filled up the cups o' them two, an' then I sails downstairs, two at a time, an' opened the door o' first floor front without rappin'. The kid was there in its little nightgown, howlin' fer fair because it had be'n left alone with its

boy brother. The Tomato Ketchup an' her husband was to a wake. I picked up the kid, rolled it in a blanket, grabbed brother by the arm, an' started up the stairs.

"'Is the house on f-f-fire?' says the boy brother.

"'Yes,' says I, 'it is. An' we're goin' upstairs to hunt up a fire-escape,' I told him.

"At the top o' the stairs I sets him down on the floor an' promises him an orange, an' then I opens the door, with the kid on my arm. It had stopped yellin' by then, an' it was settin' up straight, with its eyes all round an' its cheeks all pinked-up with havin' just woke up, an' it looked awful cute, in spite of its mother. Mis' Loneway was leanin' back, laughin', an' tellin' him what they was goin' to do the minute she got well; but when she see the baby she drops her husband's hand and sorter screams out, weak, an' holds out her arms. Mr. Loneway, he hardly heard me go in, I reckon—leastwise, he looks at me clean through me without seein' I was there. An' she hugs the kiddie up in her arms an' looks at me over the top of its head as much as to say she understood an' thanked me.

"'Its ma is went off,' I told 'em apologetic, 'an' I thought maybe you'd look after it awhile,' I told 'em.

"Then I went out an' put oranges all around the boy brother on the hall floor, an' I hustled back downstairs.

"'Gentlemen,' says I, brisk, 'I've got two dollars too much,' says I—an' I reck'n the cracks in them walls must 'a' winked at the notion. 'What do you say to a game o' dice on the bread-plate?' I ask' 'em.

"Well, one way an' another I kep' them two there for two hours. An' then, when the game was out, I knew I couldn't do nothin' else. So I stood up an' told 'em I'd go up an' let Mr. Loneway know they was there—along o' his wife bein' sick an' hadn't ought to be scared.

"I started up the stairs, feelin' like lead. Little more'n halfway up I heard a little noise. I looked up, an' I see the boy brother a-comin', leakin' orange-peel, with the

kid slung over his shoulder, sleepin'. I looked on past him, an' the door o' Mr. Loneway's sittin' room was open, an' I see Mr. Loneway standin' in the middle o' the floor. I must 'a' stopped still, because something stumbled up against me from the back, an' the two constables was there, comin' close behind me. I could hear one of 'em breathin'.

"Then I went on up, an' somehow I knew there wasn't nothin' more to wait for. When we got to the top I see inside the room, an' she was layin' back on her pillow, all still an' quiet. An' the little new pink jacket never moved nor stirred, for there wa'n't no breath.

"Mr. Loneway, he come acrost the floor towards us.

"'Come in,' he says. 'Come right in,' he told us—an' I see him smilin' some."

XIV

AN EPILOGUE

When Peleg had gone back to the woodshed, Calliope slipped away too. I sat beside the fire, listening to the fine, measured fall of Peleg's axe—so much more vital with the spirit of music than his flute; looking at Calliope's brown earthen baking dishes—so much purer in line than the village bric-a-brac; thinking of Peleg's story and of the life that beat within it as life does not beat in the unaided letter of the law. But chiefly I thought of Linda Loneway. Linda Loneway. I made a picture of her name.

So, Calliope having come from above stairs where I had heard her moving about as if in some search, I think that I recognized, even before I lifted my eyes to it, the photograph which she gave me. It was as if the name had heard me, and had come.

"It's Linda," Calliope said. "It's Linda Proudfit. An' I'm certain, certain sure it's the Linda that Peleg knew."

"Surely not, Calliope," I said—obedient to some law.

Calliope nodded, with closed eyes, in simple certainty.

"I know it was her that Peleg meant about," she said. "I thought of it first when he said about her looks—an' her husband a clerk—an' he said he called her Linda. An' then when he got to where she mentioned Aunt Nita—that's what her an' Clementina always calls Mis' Ordway, though she ain't by rights—oh, it is—it is...."

Calliope sat down on the floor before me, cherishing the picture. And all natural doubts of the possibility, all apparent denial in the real name of Linda Proudfit's poor young husband were for us both presently overborne by something which seemed viewlessly witnessing to the truth.

"But little Linda," Calliope said, "to think o' her. To think o' her—like Peleg said. Why, I hardly ever see her excep' in all silk, or imported kinds. None of us did. I hardly ever 'see her walk—it was horses and carriages and dance in a ballroom till I wonder she remembered how to walk at all. Everything with her was cut good, an' kid, an' handwork, an' like that—the same way the Proudfits is now. But yet she wasn't a bit like Mis' Proudfit an' Clementina. They're both sweet an' rule-lovin' an' ladies born, but—" Calliope hesitated, "they's somethin' they ain't. An' Linda was."

Calliope looked about the room, seeking a way to tell me. And her eyes fell on the flame on her cooking-stove hearth.

"Linda had a little somethin' in her that lit her up," she said. "She didn't say much of anything that other folks don't say, but somehow she meant the words farther in. In where the light was, an' words mean differ'nt an' better. I use' to think I didn't believe that what she saw or heard or read was exactly like what her mother an' Clementina an' most folks see an' hear an' read. Somehow, she got the inside out o' things, an' drew it in like breathin', an' lit it up, an' lived it more. I donno's you know what I'm talkin' about. But Mis' Proudfit an' Clementina don't do that way. They're dear an' good an' generous, an' lots gentler than they was before Linda left 'em—an' yet they

just wear things' an' invite folks in an' see Europe an' keep up their French an' serve God, an' never get any of it rill lit up. But Linda, she knew. An' she use' to be lonesome. I know she did—I know she did.

"I use' to look at her an' wish an' wish I wa'n't who I am, so's I could a' let her know I knew too. I use' to go to mend her lace an' sell orris root to her—an' Madame Proudfit an' Clementina would be there, buyin' an' livin' on the outside, judicious an' refined an' rill right about everything; but when Linda come in, she sort o' reached somewheres, deep, or up, or out, or like that, an' got somethin' that meant it all instead o' gnawin' its way through words. It was like other folks was the recipe an' Linda was the rill dish. They was the way to be, but she was the one that was.

"Well, then one year, when she come home from off to school, this young clerk followed her. I only see 'em together once—he only stayed a day an' had his terrible time with Jason Proudfit an' everybody knew it—but even with seein' 'em that once, I knew about him. I don't care who he was or what he was worth—he was lit up, too. I donno why he was a clerk nor anything of him—excep' that the lit kind ain't always the money-makers—but he could talk to her her way. An' when I see the four of 'em drive up in front of the post-office the day he come, Mis' Proudfit an' Clementina talkin' all soft an' interested an' regular about the foreign postage stamps they was buyin', an' Linda an' him sittin' there with foreign lands fair livin' in their eyes—I knew how it would be. An' so it was. They went off, Linda with only the clothes she was wearin' an' none of her stone rings or like that with her. An' see what it all done—see what it done. Jason Proudfit, he wouldn't forgive 'em nor wouldn't hear a word from 'em, though they say Mis' Linda wrote, at first, an' more than once. An' then when he died two years or so afterwards, an' Mis' Proudfit tried everywhere—they wa'n't no trace. An' no wonder, with a differ'nt name so's nobody should find out how poor they was—an' death—an' like enough prison...."

Calliope stood up, and in the pause Peleg's axe went rhythmically on.

"I'm goin' to be sure," she said. "I hate to—but o' course I've got to be rill certain, in words."

She went out to the shed, taking with her the photograph, and closed the door. Peleg's axe ceased. And when she came back, she said nothing at all for a little, and the axe did not go on.

"We mustn't tell Mis' Proudfit—yet," she put it, presently, "not till we can think. I donno's we ever can tell her. The dyin'—an' the disgrace—an' the other name—an' the hurt about Linda's needin' things ... Peleg thinks not tell her, too."

"At least," I said, "we can wait, for a little. Until they come home."

I listened while, her task long disregarded, Calliope fitted together the dates and the meagre facts she knew, and made the sad tally complete. Then she laid the picture by and stood staring at the cooking-range flame.

"It ain't enough," she said, "bein'—lit up—ain't enough for folks, is it? Not without they're some made out o' iron, too, to hold it—like stoves. An' yet—"

She looked at me with one of her infrequent, passionate doubtings in her eyes.

"—if Mis' Proudfit an' Clementina had just of been lit too," she said, "mebbe—"

She got no farther, though I think it was not the opening of the door by Peleg Bemus that interrupted her. Peleg did not come in. He said something of the snow on his shoes, and spoke through the door's opening.

"I'm a-goin to quit work for to-day, Mis' Marsh," he told her. "Seems like I'm too dead tired to chop."

XV

THE TEA PARTY

As spring came on, and I found myself fairly identified with the life of

Friendship,—or, at any rate, "more one of us," as they said,—I suggested to Calliope something which had been for some time pleasantly in my mind: might I, I asked one day, give a tea for her?

"A tea!" she repeated. "For me? You know they give me a benefit once in the basement of the Court House. But a private tea, for me?"

And when she understood that this was what I meant,

"Oh," she said earnestly, "I'd be so glad to come. An' you an' I can know the tea is for me—if you rilly mean it—but it won't do to say it so'd it'd get out around. Oh, no, it won't. Not one o' the rest'll come near if you give it for me—nor if you give it for anybody. Mis' Proudfit, now, she tried to give a noon lunch on St. Patrick's day for Mis' Postmaster Sykes, an' the folks she ask' to it got together an' sent in their regrets. 'We're just as good as Mis' Postmaster Sykes,' they give out to everybody, 'an' we don't bow down to her like that.' So Mis' Proudfit she calls it a Shamrock Party an' give it a day later. An' every one of 'em went. It won't do to say it's for me."

So I contented myself with planning to seat Calliope at the foot of my table, and I found a kind of happiness in her child-like content, though only we two knew that the occasion would do her honour. If Delia had been available we would have told her, but Delia was still in Europe, and would not return until June.

Calliope was quite radiant when, on the afternoon of the tea, she arrived in advance of the others. She was wearing her best gray henrietta, and I noted that she had changed her cameo ring from her first to her third finger. ("First-finger rings seem to me more everyday," she had once said to me, "but third-finger I always think looks real dressy.") She was carrying a small parcel.

"You didn't ask to borrow anything," she said shyly; "I didn't know how you'd feel about that, a stranger so. An' we all got together—your company, you know—an' found out you hadn't borrowed anything from any of us, an' we thought maybe you hesitated. So we made up I should bring my spoons. They was mother's, an' they're

thin as weddin' rings—an' solid. Any time you want to give a company you're welcome to 'em."

When I had laid the delicate old silver in its place, I found Calliope standing in the middle of my living-room, looking frankly about on my simple furnishings, her eyes lingering here and there almost lovingly.

"Bein' in your house," she said, "is like bein' somewheres else. I don't know if you know what I mean? Most o' the time I'm where I belong—just common. But now an' then—like a holiday when we're dressed up an' sittin' 'round—I feel differ'nt an' special. It was the way I felt when they give the William Shakespeare supper in the library an' had it lit up in the evenin' so differ'nt—like bein' somewheres else. It'll be that way on Market Square next month when the Carnival comes. I guess that's why I'm a extract agent," she added, laughing a little. "When I set an' smell the spices I could think it wasn't me I feel so special. An' I feel that way now—I do' know if you know what I mean—"

She looked at me, measuring my ability to comprehend, and brightening at my nod.

"Well, most o' Friendship wouldn't understand," she said. "To them vanilla smells like corn-starch pudding an' no more. An' that reminds me," she added slowly, "you know Friendship well enough by this time, don't you, to find we're apt to say things here this afternoon?"

"Say things?" I repeated, puzzling.

"We won't mean to," she hastened loyally to add; "I ain't talkin' about us, you know," she explained anxiously, "I just want to warn you so's you won't be hurt. I guess I notice such things more'n most. We won't mean to offend you—but I thought you'd ought to know ahead. An' bein' as it's part my tea, I thought it was kind o' my place to tell you."

She was touching the matter delicately, almost tenderly, and not more, as I saw, with a wish to spare me than with a wish to apologize in advance for the others, to

explain away some real or fancied weakness.

"You know," she said, "we ain't never had anybody to, what you might say, tell us what we can an' what we can't say. So we just naturally say whatever comes into our heads. An' then when we get it said, we see often that it ain't what we meant—an' that it's apt to hurt folks or put us in a bad light, or somethin'. But some don't even see that—some go right ahead sayin' the hurt things an' never know it is a hurt. I don't know if you've noticed what I mean," Calliope said, "but you will to-night. An' I didn't want you should be hurt or should think hard of them that says 'em."

But how, I wondered, as my guests assembled, could one "think hard" of any one in Friendship, and especially of the little circle to which I belonged: My dear Mis' Amanda Toplady, Mis' Photographer Sturgis, Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, who, since our Thanksgiving, seemed, as Calliope put it, to have "got good with the universe again"; the Liberty sisters, for that day once more persuaded from their seclusion, and Mis' Postmaster Sykes, with, we sometimes said, "some right to hev her peculiarities if ever anybody hed it." Of them all the Friendship phrase of approval had frequently been spoken: That this one, or that, was "at heart, one o' the most all-round capable women we've got."

I had hoped to have one more guest—Mrs. Merriman, wife of the late chief of the Friendship fire department. But I had promptly received her regrets, "owing to affliction in the family," though the fire chief had died two years and more before.

"But it's her black," Calliope had explained to me sympathetically; "she can't afford to throw away her best dress, made mournin' style, with crape ornaments. As long as that lasts good, she'll hev to stay home from places. I see she's just had new crape cuffs put on, an' that means another six months at the least. An' she won't go to parties wearin' widow weeds. Mis' Fire Chief Merriman is very delicate."

My guests, save Calliope, all arrived together and greeted me, I observed, with a manner of marked surprise. Afterward, when I wondered, Calliope explained simply

that it was not usual for a hostess to meet her guests at the door. "Of course, they're usually right in the midst o' gettin' the supper when the company comes," she said.

My prettiest dishes and silver were to do honour to those whom I had bidden; and boughs of my Flowering-currant filled my little hall and curved above the line of sight at table, where the candle shades lent deeper yellows. I delighted in the manner of formality with which they took their places, as if some forgotten ceremonial of ancient courts were still in their veins, when a banquet was not a thing to be entered upon lightly.

Quite in ignorance of the Japanese custom of sipping tea while the first course is arriving, it is our habit in Friendship to inaugurate "supper" by seeing the tea poured. In deference to this ceremony a hush fell immediately we were seated, and this was in courtesy to me, who must inquire how each would take her tea. I think that this conversation never greatly varied, as:—

"Mrs. Toplady?" I said at once, the rest being understood.

"Cream and sugar, if you please," said that great Amanda heartily, "or milk if it's milk. I take the tea for the trimmin's."

Then a little stir of laughter and a straying comment or two about, say, the length of days at that time of year, and:—

"Mrs. Sykes?"

"Just milk, please. I always say I don't think tea would hurt anybody if they'd leave the sugar alone. But then, I've got a very peculiar stomach."

"Mrs. Holcomb?"

"I want mine plain tea, thank you. My husband takes milk and the boys like sugar, but I like the taste of the tea."

At which, from Libbie Liberty: "Oh, Mis' Holcomb just says that to make out she's strong-minded. Plain tea an' plain coffee's regular woman's rights fare, Mis'

Holcomb!" And then, after more laughter and Mis' Holcomb's blushes, they awaited:—

"Mrs. Sturgis?"

"Not any at all, thank you. No, I like the tea, but the tea don't like me. My mother was the same way. She never could drink it. No, not any for me, though I must say I should dearly love a cup."

"Miss 'Viny?"

"Just a little tea and the rest hot water. Dear me, I shouldn't go to sleep till to-morrow night if I was to drink a cup as strong as that. No—a little more water, please. I s'pose I can send it back for more if it's still too strong?"

"Miss Libbie?"

"Laviny just wants the canister pointed in her direction, an' she thinks she's had her tea. Lucy don't dare take any. Three lumps for me, please. I like mine surup."

"Calliope?"

"Oh," said Calliope, "milk if there's any left in the pitcher. An' if there ain't, send it down clear. I like it most any way. Ain't it queer about the differ'nce in folks' tastes in their tea and coffee?"

That was the signal for the talk to begin with anecdotes of how various relatives, quick and passed, had loved to take their tea. No one ever broached a real topic until this introduction had had its way. To do so would have been an indelicacy, like familiar speech among those in the ceremony of a first meeting.

Thus I began to see that in spite of Calliope's distress at the ways of us in Friendship, a matchless delicacy was among its people a dominant note. Not the delicacy born of convention, not that sometimes bred in the crudest by urban standards, but a finer courtesy that will spare the conscious stab which convention allows. It was, if I may say so, a savoir faire of the heart instead of the head. But we had hardly entered

upon the hour before the ground for Calliope's warning was demonstrated.

"There!" she herself bridged a pause with her ready little laugh, "I knew somebody'd pass me somethin' while I was saltin' my potato. My brother, older, always said that at home. 'I never salt my potato,' he use' to say, 'without somebody passes me somethin'."

Next instant her eyes flew to my face in a kind of horror, for:—

"We've noticed that at our house, too," Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss observed, vigorously using a salt-shaker, "but then I always believe, myself, in havin' everything properly seasoned in the kitchen before it comes on to the table."

"See!" Calliope signalled me fleetly.

But no one else, and certainly not Mis' Holcomb herself, perceived the surface of things vexed by a ripple.

"Well, now," said that great Mis' Amanda Toplady heartily, "that is so about saltin' your potato. I know it now, but I never thought of it right out before. Lots o' things are true that you don't think of right out. Now I come to put my mind on it, I know at our house if I cut up a big plate o' bread we don't eat up half of it; but just as sure as I don't, I hev to get up from the table an' go get more bread."

"I know—we often speak of that!" and "So my husband says," chimed Mis' Holcomb and Mis' Sturgis.

"Seems as if I'd noticed that, too," Calliope said brightly.

Whereupon: "My part," Miss Lucy Liberty contributed shyly, "I always like to see a great big plate of good, big slices o' bread come on to the table. Looks like the crock was full," she added, laughing heartily to cover her really pretty shyness, "an' like you wouldn't run out."

Calliope's glance at me was still more distressed, for my table showed no bread at all, and my maid was at that moment handing rolls the size of a walnut. But for the

others the moment passed undisturbed.

"I've never noticed in particular about the bread," observed Mis' Sykes,—she had great magnetism, for when she spoke an instant hush fell,—"but what I have noticed"—Mis' Sykes was very original and usually disregarded the experiences of others,—"is that if I don't make a list of my washing when it goes, something is pretty sure to get lost. But let me make a list, an' even the dust-cloths'll come back home."

Everybody had noticed that. Even Libbie Liberty assented, and exchanged with her sister a smile of domestic memories.

"An' every single piece has got my initial in the corner, too," Mis' Sykes added; "I wouldn't hev a piece o' linen in the house without my initial on. It don't seem to me rill refined not to."

Calliope's look was almost one of anguish. My hemstitched damask napkins bear no saving initial in a corner. But no one else would, I was certain, connect that circumstance, even if it was observed, with what Mis' Sykes had said.

"It's too bad Mis' Fire Chief Merriman wouldn't come to-day," Calliope hastily turned the topic. "She can't seem to get used to things again, since Sum died."

"She didn't do this way for her first husband that died in the city, I heard," volunteered Mis' Sturgis. "Why, I heard she went out there, right after the first year."

"That's easy explained," said Mis' Sykes, positively.

"Wasn't she fond of him?" asked Mis' Holcomb. "She seems real clingin', like she would be fond o' most any one."

"Oh, yes, she was fond of him," declared Mis' Sykes. "Why, he was a professional man, you know. But then he died ten years ago, durin' tight skirts. Naturally, being a widow then wasn't what it is now. She couldn't cut her skirt over to any advantage—a bell skirt is a bell skirt. An' they went out the very next year. When

she got new cloth for the flare skirts, she got colours. But the Fire Chief died right at the height o' the full skirts. She's kep' cuttin' over an' cuttin' over, an' by the looks o' the Spring plates she can keep right on at it. She really can't afford to go out o' mournin'. I don't blame her a bit."

"She told me the other day," remarked Libbie Liberty, "that she was real homesick for some company food. She said she'd been ask' in to eat with this family an' that, most hospitable but very plain. An' seems though she couldn't wait for a company lay-out."

"She won't go anywheres in her crape," Mis' Sykes turned to me, supplementing Calliope's former information. "She's a very superior woman,—she graduated in Oils in the city,—an' she's fitted for any society, say where who will. We always say about her that nobody's so delicate as Mis' Fire Chief Merriman."

"She don't take strangers in very ready, anyway," Mis' Holcomb explained to me. "She belongs to what you might call the old school. She's very sensitive to everything."

The moment came when I had unintentionally produced a hush by serving a salad unknown in Friendship. When almost at once I perceived what I had done, I confess that I looked at Calliope in a kind of dread lest this too were a faux pas, and I took refuge in some question about the coming Carnival. But my attention was challenged by my maid, who was in the doorway announcing a visitor.

"Company, ma'am," she said.

And when I had bidden her to ask that I be excused for a little:—

"Please, ma'am," she said, "she says she has to see you now."

And when I suggested the lady's card:—

"Oh, it's Mis' Fire Chief Merriman," the maid imparted easily.

"Mis' Fire Chief Merriman!" exclaimed every one at table. "Well forevermore!

Speakin' of angels! She must 'a' forgot the tea was bein'."

In my living-room, in her smartly freshened spring toilet of mourning, Mis' Fire Chief Merriman rose to greet me. She was very tall and slight, and her face was curiously like an oblong yellow brooch which fastened her gown at the throat.

"My dear friend," she said, "I felt, after your kind invitation, that I must pay my respects during your tea. Afterwards wouldn't be the same. It's a tea, and there couldn't be lanterns an' bunting or anything o' the sort. So I felt I could come in."

"You are very good," I murmured, and in some perplexity, as she resumed her seat, I sat down also. Mis' Merriman sought in the pocket of her petticoat for a black-bordered handkerchief.

"When you're in mourning so," she observed, "folks forget you. They don't really forget you, either. But they get used to missing you places, an' they don't always remember to miss you. I did appreciate your inviting me to-day so. Because I'm just as fond of meeting my friends as I was before the chief died."

And when I had made an end of murmuring something:—

"Really," she went on placidly, "it ought to be the custom to go out in society when you're in mourning if you never did any other time. You need distraction then if you ever needed it in your life. An' the chief would 'a' been the first to feel that too. He was very partial to going out in company."

And when I had made an end of murmuring something else:—

"You were very thoughtful to give me an invitation for this afternoon," she said. "An' I felt that I must stop in an' tell you so, even if I couldn't attend."

Serenely she spread her black crape fan and swayed it. In the dining-room my guests proceeded with their lonely salad toward a probable lonely dessert. At thought of that dessert and of that salad, a suggestion, partly impulsive and partly flavoured with some faint reminiscence, at once besieged me, and in it I divined a solution of

the moment.

"Mrs. Merriman," I said eagerly, "may I send you in a cup of strawberry ice? I've some early strawberries from the city."

She turned on me her great dark eyes, with their flat curve of shadow accenting her sadness.

"I'm sure you are very kind," she said simply. "An' I should be pleased, I'm sure."

I rose, hesitating, longing to say what I had in mind.

"I'd really like your opinion," I said, "on rather a new salad I'm trying. Now would you not—"

"A salad?" Mis' Merriman repeated. "The chief," she said reflectively, "was very partial to all green salads. I don't think men usually care for them the way he did."

"Dear Mrs. Merriman," said I at this, "a cup of bouillon and a bit of chicken breast and a drop of creamed cauliflower—"

"Oh," she murmured, "really, I couldn't think—"

And when I had made my cordial insistence she looked up at me for a moment solemnly, over her crape fan. I thought that her eyes with that flat, underlying curve of shadow were as if tears were native to them. Her grief and the usages of grief had made of her some one other than her first self, some one circumscribed, wary of living.

"Oh," she said wistfully, "I ain't had anything like that since I went into mourning. If you don't think it would be disrespectful to him—?"

"I am certain that it would not be so," I assured her, and construed her doubting silence as capitulation.

So I filled a tray with all the dainties of our little feast, and my maid carried it to her where she sat, and then to us at table served dessert. And my strange party went forward with seven guests in my dining-room and one mourner at supper in my

living-room.

"How very, very delicate!" said Mis' Postmaster Sykes, in an emphatic whisper. "Mis' Fire Chief Merriman is a very superior woman, an' she always does the delicate thing."

And now as I met Calliope's eyes I saw that the dear little woman was looking at me with a manner of unmistakable pride. In spite of her warning to me and what she thought had been its justification during the supper, here was an occasion to reveal to me a delicacy unequalled.

Thereafter, in deference to my mourning guest in the next room, we all dropped our voices and talked virtually in whispers. And when at last we rose from the table, complete silence had come upon us.

Then, the tray not having yet been brought from that other room, I confess to having found myself somewhat uncertain how to treat a situation so out of my experience. But the kind heart of my dear Mis' Amanda Toplady was the dictator.

"Now," she whispered, tip-toeing, "we must all go in an' speak to her. Poor woman—she don't call anywheres, an' she stays in mournin' so long folks have kind o' dropped off goin' to see her. Let's walk in an' be rill nice to her."

Mis' Fire Chief Merriman sat as I had left her, and the tray was before her on my writing-table. She looked up gravely and greeted them all, one by one, without rising. We sat about her in a circle and spoke to her gently on subjects decently allied to her grief: on the coming meeting of the Cemetery Improvement Sodality; on the new styles in mourning; on the deaths in Friendship during the winter; and on two cases of typhoid fever recently developed in the town. (The Fire Chief had died of "walking typo.") And Mis' Merriman, gravely partaking of strawberry ice and cake and bonbons, listened and replied and, with the last morsel, rose to take her leave.

It was then that my unlucky star shone effulgent. For, as she was shaking hands all

round:—

"Oh, Mrs. Merriman," I said, with the gentlest intent, "would you care to come out to see my dining-room? My Flowering-currant was very early this year—"

To my horrified amazement Mis' Fire Chief Merriman lifted her black-bordered handkerchief to her face and broke into subdued sobbing. Suddenly I understood that all the others were looking at me in a kind of reproachful astonishment. My bewilderment, mounting for an instant, was precipitately overthrown by the sobbing woman's words.

"Oh," Mis' Merriman said indistinctly, "I'm much obliged to you, I'm sure. But how can you think I would? I haven't looked at lanterns an' bunting an' such things since the Fire Chief died. I don't know how I'm ever going to stand the Carnival!"

In deep distress I apologized, and found myself adrift upon a sea of uncharted classifications. Here were niceties of distinction which escaped my ruder vision, trained to the mere interchange of signals in smooth sailing or straight tempest, on open water. But I knew with grief that I had given her pain—that was clear enough; and in my confusion and wish to make amends, I caught up from their jar on the hall table my Flowering-currant boughs and thrust them in her hands.

"Ah," I begged breathlessly, "at all events, take these!"

On which she drew away from me and shook her head and fairly fled down the path, her floating crape brushing the mother bushes of my offending offering. And I was helplessly aware that sympathetic silence had fallen on the others and that the sympathy was not for me.

"But what on earth was the matter?" I entreated my guests.

It was that great Mis' Amanda Toplady who slipped her arm about me and explained.

"When we've got any dead belongin' to us," she said, "we always carry all the

flowers we get to the grave—an', of course, we don't feel we can carry them that's been used for a company. It's the same with Mis' Fire Chief. An' she can't bear even to see flowers an' things that's fixed for a company, either. Of course, that's her privilege."

Mis' Sykes took my hands.

"You come here so lately," she said, "you naturally wouldn't know what's what in these things, here in Friendship. An' then, of course, Mis' Fire Chief Merriman is very, very delicate."

Calliope linked her arm in mine.

"Don't you mind," she whispered; "we're all liable to our mistakes."

Half an hour after tea my guests took leave.

"I enjoyed myself so much," said Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss; "you look tired out. I hope it ain't been too much for you."

"Entertainin' is a real job," said Mis' Sturgis, "but you do it almost as if you liked it. I enjoyed myself so much."

"I'll give bail you're glad it's over," said Libbie Liberty, sympathetically, "even if it did go off nice. I enjoyed myself ever so much."

"Ever so much," murmured Miss Lucy, laughing heartily.

"Good night. Everything was lovely. I enjoyed myself very much," Mis' Postmaster Sykes told me. "And," she said, "you'll hear from me very, very soon in return for this."

"Now don't you overdo, reddin' up to-night," advised my dear Mis' Amanda Toplady. "Just pick up the silver an' rense it off, an' let the dishes set till mornin', I say. I did enjoy myself so much."

"Good-by," Calliope whispered in the hall. "Oh, it was beautiful. I never felt so special. Thank you—thank you. An'—you won't mind those things we said at the

supper table?"

"Oh, Calliope," I murmured miserably, "I've forgotten all about them."

I went out to the veranda with her. At the foot of the steps the others had paused in consultation. Hesitating, they looked up at me, and Mis' Sykes became their spokesman.

"If I was you," she said gently, "I wouldn't feel too cut up over that slip o' yours to Mis' Merriman. She'd ought not to see blunders where they wasn't any meant. It'd ought to be the heart that counts, I say. Good-by. We enjoyed ourselves very, very much!"

They went down the path between blossoming bushes, in the late afternoon sun. And as Calliope followed,—

"That's so about the heart, ain't it?" she said brightly.

XVI

WHAT IS THAT IN THINE HAND?

"Busy, busy, busy, busy all the day. Busy, busy, busy. And busy ..."

"There goes Ellen Ember, crazy again," we said, when we heard that cry of hers, not unmelodious nor loud, echoing along Friendship streets.

Then we usually ran to the windows and peered at her. Sometimes her long hair would be unbound on her shoulders, sometimes her little figure would be leaping lightly up as she caught at the lowest boughs of the curb elms, and sometimes her hand would be moving swiftly back and forth above her heart.

"If your heart is broken," she had explained to many, "you can lace it together with 'Busy, busy, busy ...' Sing it and see! Or mebbe your heart is all of a piece?"

Once, when I had gone to Miss Liddy's house, I had found Ellen in a skirt fashioned

of an old plaid shawl of her father's, her bare shoulders wound in the rosy "nubia" that had been her mother's, and she was dancing in the dining-room, with surprising grace, as Pierrette might have danced in Carnival, and singing, in a sweet, piping voice, an incongruous little song:—

O Day of wind and laughter, A goddess born are you, Whose eyes are in the morning Blue—blue!

"I made that up," she had explained, "or I guess mebbe I remembered it from deep in my skull. I like the feel of it in my mouth when I speak the words."

I used to think that Miss Liddy was really a less useful citizen than Ellen. For though Miss Liddy worked painstakingly at her dressmaking, and even dreamed over it little partial dreams, Ellen, mad or sane, made a garden, and threw little nosegays over our fences, and exercised a certain presence, latent in the rest of us, which made us momentarily gentle and in awe of our own sanity.

When, one spring morning, a week before the Friendship Carnival, she passed down Daphne Street with her plaintive, musical "Busy, busy, busy ..." Doctor June and the young Reverend Arthur Bliss sat on Doctor June's screened-in porch discussing a deficit in the Good Shepherd's Orphans' Home fund for the fiscal year. Ever since the wreck of the Through, Friendship had contributed to the support of the Home,—having first understood then that the Home was its patient pensioner,—and now it was almost like a compliment that we had been appealed to for help.

Doctor June listened with serene patience to what his visitor would say.

"Tension," said the Reverend Arthur Bliss, squaring his splendid young shoulders, "tension. Warfare. We, as a church, are enormously equipped. We have—shall we say?—the helmets of our intelligence and the swords of our wills. Why, the joy of the fight ought to be to us like that of a strong man ready to do battle, oughtn't it—oughtn't it?"

Doctor June, his straight white hair outlining his plump pink face, nodded; but one

would have said that it was rather less at the Reverend Arthur than at his Van Houtii spiræa, which nodded back at him.

"My young friend," said Doctor June, "will you forgive me for saying that it is fairly amazing to me how the church of God continues to use the terms of barbarism? We talk of the peace that passeth understanding, and yet we keep on employing metaphors of blood-red war. What does the modern church want of a helmet and a sword, if I may ask? Even rhetorically?"

"The Christian life is an eternal warfare against the forces of sin, is it not?" asked the Reverend Arthur Bliss in surprise.

"Let me suggest," said Doctor June, "that all good life is an eternal surrender to the forces of good. There's a difference."

The visitor from the city smiled very reverently.

"I see, sir," he said, "that you are one of those wonderful non-combatants. You are by nature sanctified—and that I can well believe."

"I am by nature a miserable old sinner," rejoined the doctor, warmly. "Often—often I would enjoy a fine round Elizabethan oath—note how that single adjective condones my poor taste. But I hold that good is inflowing and that it possesses whom it may possess. If a man is too busy fighting, it may pass him by."

"But surely, sir," said the young clergyman, "you agree with me that a man wins his way into the kingdom of light by both a staff and a sword?"

"You will perhaps forgive me for agreeing with nothing of the sort," said the doctor, mildly; "I hold that a man takes his way to the light by grasping whatever the Lord puts in his hand—a hammer, a rope, a pen—and grasping it hard."

"But the ungifted—what of the ungifted?" cried the Reverend Arthur Bliss.

"In this sense, there are none," said Doctor June, briefly.

"Busy, busy, busy all the day. Busy, busy, busy ..." sounded suddenly from the street

in Ellen's thin soprano. Doctor June looked down at her, his expression scarcely changing, because it was always serenely soft. But the young clergyman saw with amazement the strange little figure with her unbound hair and her arms high and swaying, and as she took some steps of her dance before the gate, he questioned his host with uplifted brows.

"A little mad," the doctor said, nodding, "like us all. She sings in the streets of a glad morning, and dances now and then. We take ours out in tangential opinions. It is nearly the same thing."

The young clergyman's face lighted responsively at this, and then he deferentially clinched his argument.

"There is a case in point," said he. "That poor creature there—what has the Lord put in her hand?"

Doctor June looked thoughtful.

"Nothing," he declared, "for any fight. But I'm not sure that she isn't made to be a leaven. The kingdom of God works like a leaven, you know, my dear young friend. Not like a dum-dum bullet."

"But—that poor creature. A leaven?" doubted the Reverend Arthur Bliss.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Doctor June, "I shouldn't wonder. I'm not so sure as I used to be that I can recognize leaven at first sight."

"Ah, that's it!" cried his guest. "But a soldier, now, is a soldier!"

Then they smiled their lack of acquiescence, and went back to the figures for the fiscal year.

An hour later Doctor June stood alone on his garden walk, aimlessly poking about among his slips. He had done what he always did, following close on the heels of his well-established resolution never to do it again. He had pledged himself to try to raise one hundred dollars in Friendship for a pet philanthropy.

"It's a kind of dissipation with me," he said, helplessly, and wandered down to his gate. "If I read an article about the Congo Free State or Women in India, it acts on me like brandy. I go off my head and give away my substance, and involve innocent people. But then, of course, this is different. It is always different."

Then he heard Ellen's little song again. "Busy, busy, busy ..." she sang, and came round the corner from the town, catching at the lowest branches of the curb elms and laughing a little. At Doctor June's gate she halted and shook some lilacs at him.

"Here," she said, "put some on your coat for a patch on your heart so's the break won't show. Ain't the Lord made the sun shine down this morning? Did you know there's a Carnival comin' to town?"

"Like enough, Ellen," said Doctor June. "Like enough."

"Is one," she persisted. "They said about it in the Post-Office—I heard 'em. Dancin', an' parrots, an' jumpin' dogs."

He stood looking at her thoughtfully as she arranged her flowers, singing under breath.

"Ellen," he said, "will you tell Miss Liddy a few of us are going to meet here in my yard to-morrow afternoon, to talk over some money-raising? And ask her to come?"

"I will," Ellen sang it, "I will an' I will. Did you mean me to come, too?" she broke off wistfully.

"My stars, yes!" said Doctor June. "You're going to come early and help me, aren't you? I took that for granted."

"Here's your lilacs," said Ellen, tossing him a nosegay. "I'll tell Liddy while she's eatin'. Liddy don't like me to talk much when she's workin'. But when she eats I can talk, an' I'll tell her then."

She went on, singing, and Doctor June shook his head.

"I don't know but Mr. Bliss is right," he said, "though I hope I can keep my doubts to

myself and not brag about 'em, just to be the style. But it does look as if poor Ellen Ember came into the world empty-handed. As if the Lord didn't give her much of anything to work with."

Summons to a meeting to talk over money-raising is, in Friendship, like the call to festivity in a different life. The cause never greatly matters. Interests appear eclectically to range from ice to coral. For let the news get about that there is to be a bazaar for China, a home bakery sale for the missionary station at Trebizond, or a Japanese tea for the Friendship cemetery fund, and we all sew or bake or lend dishes or sell tickets with the same infinity of zeal. The enterprise in hand absorbs our sense of the ultimate object; as when, after three days of hand-to-hand battle to wrest money for the freedmen from the patrons of a Kirmess at the old roller-skating rink, dear Mis' Amanda, secretary and door-tender, handed over our $64.85 with the wondering question:—

"What do they mean by Freegman, anyway? What country is it they live in?"

It was no marvel that Doctor June's garden was filled, that yellow afternoon, with many eager for action. Some of us knew that there was an Orphans' Home fund deficit; but more of us knew only that we were to "talk over some money-raising." I remember how, from the garden seat against the spiræa, the doctor faced us, all scattered about the antlered walk and its triangle of green, erect on golden oak and bright velvet chairs from within doors. And when he had told us of the shortage to which we were party, instantly the talk emptied into channels of possible pop-corn social, chicken-pie supper, rummage sale, art and loan exhibit, Old Settlers' Entertainment, and so on. After which Doctor June rose, and stood touching thoughtfully at the leaves which grew nearest, while he essayed to turn our minds from chicken-pot-pie-part-veal, and bib-aprons, to the eternal verities.

"My friends," he said, "isn't there a better way? Let us, this time, give of our hearts' love to the little children of God, instead of buying pies and freezing ice cream in

His name."

There was, of course, an instant's hush in the garden. We were not used to paradoxes, and we felt as concave images must feel when they first look upon the world. It was as amazing as if we had been told that God grieves with us instead of afflicting us, as we held.

"None of us has much money to give," Doctor June went on; "let us take the way that lies nearest our hand, and make a little money. God never permitted any normal human creature to come into His world unprovided with some means of making it better. Only, let us get outside our bazaar and chicken-pie faculties. Now what can we each do?"

We sat still for a little, tentatively murmuring; and then Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss stood up by the sweet-alyssum urn.

"Speakin' of what we can do," she said, "doin' ain't easy. Not when you're well along in years. Your ways seem to stiffen up some. When I was a girl, I could 'a' been quite an elocutionist if I could 'a' had lessons. I had a reg'lar born sense o' givin' gestures. But I never took. An' now I declare I don't know of anything I could do. It's the same way, I guess, with quite a number of us."

Mis' Postmaster Sykes was in the arm-chair, and she sat still, queenly.

"I could do some o' my embroidery," she observed, "but it's quite expensive stuff, an' I don't know whether it would sell rill well here in Friendship. I'd be 'most afraid to risk. An' I don't do enough cookin', myself, to what-you-might-say know how, any more."

"Same with my sewing," observed Mis' Doctor Helman; "I put it all out now. I don't know as I could sew up a seam. That's the trouble, hiring everything done so."

Those who did not hire everything done preserved a respectful silence. And Doctor June looked up in the elm trees.

"The Lord," he said, "spoke to Moses out of the burning bush. The Lord said unto Moses, 'What is that in thine hand?' Moses had, you remember, nothing but a rod in his hand. But it was enough to let the people know that God had been with him—that the Lord had appeared unto him. Suppose the glory of the Lord, here in the garden, should ask us now, as it does ask, 'What is that in thine hand?' What have we got?"

There was silence again, and we looked at one another doubtfully.

"Land, Doctor!" said Libbie Liberty then, "I been tryin' for two years to earn a new parlour carpet, an' I ain't had nothin' in my hand to earn with. So I keep on sayin' I like an old Brussels carpet—they're so easy to sweep."

"My!" said Abigail Arnold, "I declare, I'd be real put to it to try to make extry money. 'Bout the only thing the Lord seems to 'a' put in my hand is time. I've got oodles o' that, layin' 'round loose."

Mis' Photographer Sturgis was in the big garden chair, wrapped in a shawl, her feet on an inverted flower-pot.

"I'm tryin' to think," she said, looking sidewise at the ground. "I donno's I know how I could earn a cent, convenient. It ain't real easy for women to earn. I think mebbe the Lord meant the men to be the Moseses."

Mis' Amanda Toplady's voice rolled out, deep and comfortable, like a complaisant giant's.

"Well said!" she remarked. "I'm drove to death all day. If anybody's to ask me what I got in my hand, I declare I guess I'd say, rill reverent: Dear Lord, I've got my hands full, an' that's about all I have got."

So we went on, saying much or little as was our nature, but we were all agreed that we were virtually helpless—for Calliope was out of town that week, and not present to shame us.

"What's in my hands?" said grim Miss Liddy Ember, finally, in her thin falsetto. "Well, I ain't got any rill, what-you-might-call hands. I just got kind o' cat's paws for my three meals a day an' my rent."

Then, by her sister's side, Ellen Ember stood up. We had hardly noticed her, sitting there quietly playing with some of the doctor's flowers. But now we saw that she had hurriedly twisted her splendid hair about her head, and by this we understood that she was herself again. We had seen her come to herself like this on the street, and then she would go hurrying home, the tears running down her face in shame for her unbound hair and her singing and dancing. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were shining as she rose now, and she looked appealingly pretty, one hand, palm outward, half hiding her trembling mouth. By her soft eyes, too, we knew that she was herself again.

"You all know," she began, and dare not trust herself. "You all know ..." she said once more, and we understood what she would say. "What can I do?" she cried to us. "What is there I can do? I ain't got anything but my craziness! Oh, it seems like I ain't much, an' so I'd ought to do all the more."

To soothe her, we took our woman's way of all talking at once. And then Doctor June called out cheerily that he felt the way Ellen did, that he wasn't a real Moses, for what had he—Doctor June—in his hand, and didn't we all know there was no money in pills? And then he told us how the Reverend Arthur Bliss was to be in town again on Wednesday of the next week, and would we not all think the matter over quietly, and meet with them on that evening, for cakes and tea?

"As many of you as can," he said, "come with a plan to earn a dollar, and tell how you mean to do it. Ellen, you and I'll preside at the meeting, and hear what the rest say, and keep real still ourselves, like proper officers."

But Ellen Ember would not be comforted. She stood with that one hand, palm outward, pressed against her lips, looking at us with big, brimming eyes.

"I ain't got nothin' but my craziness, you know," she said over. And then, as she was going through the gateway, she turned to Doctor June.

"Why, Wednesday's the first night o' the Carnival!" she cried. "You set the dollar meetin' on the first night o' the Carnival!"

"My stars!" cried Doctor June, gravely. "And I might have been selling pills on the grounds!"

All Friendship Village loves a Carnival. Once the word meant to me a Florentine fiesta day, with a feast of colour, and of many little fine things, "real, like laughter." Now when I say "carnival" I mean the painted eruption by night from the market square of some town like Friendship, when lines broaden and waver grotesquely, when the mirth is in great silhouettes and Colour goes unmasked.

I always make my way to such a place, for it holds for me the wonder of the untoward; as will a strolling Italian plodding past my house at night with his big, silent bear; or the spectacle of the huge, faded red ice-wagon, with powerful horses and rattling chains and tongs, and giants in blue denim atop the crystal; or the strange, copper world that dissolves in the fluid of certain sunsets. And that Wednesday night, a week later, on my way to the "dollar meeting" at Doctor June's, I turned toward the Friendship Carnival with some vestige of my youth clinging to the hem of things.

I gave my attention to them all: The pop-corn wagon, an aristocratic affair that looked like a hearse; the little painted canaries and love-birds, so out of place and patient that I thought they must have souls to form as well as we; the sad little live monkey, incessantly dodging white balls thrown at him by certain immortals (who, when they hit him, got pipes); and the giant who flung "Look! Look! Look! Look!" through a megaphone, while a good little dog toiled up a ladder and then stood at the ladder's top in a silence that was all nice reticence and dignity. Also, the huge Saxon fellow who, at the portal of the Arabian Court of Art and Regular Café Restaurant,

sang a love-song through a megaphone—"Tenderly, dearest, I breathe thy sweet name," he hallooed, with his free hand beckoning the crowd to the Court of Art.

And then I saw the Lyric Dance Arcade and Indian Palace of Asiatic Mystery. And I found myself close to the platform, listening to the cry of a man in gilt knickerbockers.

"Ladies! Gentlemen! All!" he summoned. "Never in the history of the show business has there been anything resemblin' this. Come here—here—here—here! See Zorah, queen of the West and princess of the East, who is about to begin one of her most sublimely sensational dances. See her, see her, you may never again see her! Graceful, glittering, genteel. Graceful, glittering, gen-te-e-e-l. I am telling you about Zorah, queen of the West and princess of the East, in her ancient Asiatic dance, the most up-to-date little act in the entire show business to-day. Here she is, waiting for you—you—you. Everybody that's got the dime!"

Until he ceased, I had hardly noticed Zorah herself, standing in the canvas portico. The woman had, I then observed, a kind of appealing prettiness and a genuineness of pose. She was looking out on the crowd with the usual manner of simulated shyness, but to the shyness was given conviction by an uplifted hand, palm outward, hiding her mouth. I noted her small, stained face, her splendid unbound hair—and then a certain resemblance caught at my heart. And I saw that she was wearing a skirt made of a man's plaid shawl, and about her shoulders was a rosy, old-fashioned nubia. Her face and throat were stained, and so were her thin little arms—but I knew her.

The performance, as the man had said, was about to begin, and already he was giving Zorah her signal to go within. Somehow I bought a ticket and hurried into the tent. The seats were sparingly occupied, and I saw, as I would have guessed, no one whom I knew in the eager, stamping little audience. In their midst I lost the slim figure that had preceded me, until she mounted the platform and swept before the footlights a stately courtesy.

And there, in the smoky little tent, Ellen Ember began to dance, with her quite surprising grace—as Pierrette might have danced in Carnival. It was the charming, faery measure which she had danced for me in Miss Liddy's dining-room; and as she had sung to me then, so now, in a sweet piping voice, she sang her incongruous little song:—

O Day of wind and laughter, A goddess born are you, Whose eyes are in the morning Blue—blue! The slumbrous noon your body is, Your feet are the shadow's flight, But the immortal soul of you Is Night.

It seemed to me that I sat for hours in that hot little place, cut off from the world, watching. Again and again, to the brass blare of some hoiden tune, she set the words of the lyric that "she liked the feel of," and she danced on and on. And when at last the music shattered off, and she ceased, and ran behind a screening canvas, somehow I made my way forward through the crowd that was clapping hands and calling her back, and I gained the place where she stood.

When I asked her to come with me, she nodded and smiled, with unseeing eyes, and assented quite simply, and then suddenly sat down before the lifted tent flap.

"But I must wait for my money," she said. "That's what I came for—my money. They thought I'd never earn my dollar, but I have."

At this I understood. And now I marvel how I talked at all to the man in gilt knickerbockers who arrived and haggled over the whole matter.

Zorah, he explained, the sure-enough Zorah, had took down sick in the last place they made, an' they'd had to leave her behind. An' when he told about it down town that morning, this little piece here had up an' offered. Somethin' had to be done—he left it to me if they didn't. He felt his duty to the amusement park public, him. So he had closed with her for a dollar for three fifteen-minute turns—he give two shillings a turn, on the usual, but she'd hung out stout for the even money. An' she'd danced her three, odd but satisfactory. You could hand 'em queer things in the show

business, if you only dressed the part. Yes, sure, here was the dollar. Be on hand to-morrow night? No? Sufferin' snakes, but was we goin' to leave him shipwrecked?

Finally I got her away, and skirted the market-place with her dancing at my side, shaking her silver dollar in her shut palms and singing:—

"Busy, busy, busy all the day. An' then I earned my dollar, my dollar—they never thought I'd earn my dollar ..."

I remember, as we struck into the unlighted block where Miss Liddy's house stood, that I was struggling hard for my own serenity, so that for a moment I did not observe that Ellen stopped beside me. But I knew that she fell silent, and when I turned I saw her there on the dark walk hurriedly twisting her splendid hair about her head. And by that and by her silence I understood that she was suddenly herself, and of her own mind, as we say.

On this, "Ellen!" said I quickly, "how fine of you to have earned your Orphans' Home dollar so soon. But you have beaten us all!"

She had contrived to fasten her hair, and I saw her touching tentatively the folds of her strange dress. And so I made her know what she had done, as gently as I might, and with all praise I stilled her dismay and shame. And last I led her, as I was determined that I would do, past Miss Liddy's dark little house and on to the home of Doctor June.

I think that I would not have dared take Ellen, just as she was, in her plaid skirt and her rosy nubia, into that black and brown henrietta-cloth assembly, if I had remembered that there was to be a stranger present. But this, in the events of the hour, I had quite forgotten. I remembered as I entered the room and came face to face with the Reverend Arthur Bliss, talking of the figures for the fiscal year.

"—and the deficit," he was saying, "ought to be made up by us who are so well equipped to do it. With Paul, let us fight the good fight—of every day. This is to-day's fight. Now let us talk over our various weapons."

Doctor June looked thoughtfully at his young guest, and in the older face was a brooding tenderness, like the tenderness of the father who longs to hold the child in quiet, in his arms.

"Yes," said Doctor June, "'fighting' is one name for it. I am tempted to say that 'drudgery' is another name. Errantry, ministry, service, or whatever. It all comes to the same thing: 'What is that in thine hand?' Well, now, who of us is first?"

"I think," said I then, "that Ellen Ember is first."

She would have shrunk back from the doorway to the passage, but I put my arm about her, and then I told them. And when I had done, I remember how she threw up that pathetic hand of hers, palm outward, and this time it was over her eyes.

"I'm a disgrace to all of you!" she said, sobbing, "an' to the whole Good Shepherd's Home. But I guess anyhow it's all the way I had. Seems like I ain't got nothin' in the world but my craziness!"

There was silence for a moment, that rich silence which flowers in the heart. And then great Mis' Amanda Toplady spoke out, in her deep voice which now she some way contrived to keep firm.

"Well said!" she cried. "I come here to say I'd give a dollar outright to get red o' the whole thing, rather'n to fuss. But now I ain't goin' to stop at a dollar. Seems like a dollar for me wouldn't be moral. I'm goin' to sell some strawberry plants—why, we got hundreds of 'em to spare. I can do it by turnin' my hand over. An' I expec' the Lord meant you should turn your hand over to find out what's in it, anyway."

I think that then we tried our woman's way of all talking at once, but I remember how the shrill voice of Abigail Arnold, of the home bakery, rose above the others:—

"Cream puffs!" she cried. "I got a rush demand for my cream puffs every Sat'day, an' I ain't been makin' 'em sole-because I hate to run after the milk an' set it. An' I was goin' to get out o' this by givin' fifty cents out o' the bakery till. An' me with my hands full o' cream puffs...."

"Hens—hens is what mine is," Libbie Liberty was saying. "My grief, I got both hands full o' hens. I wouldn't sell 'em because I can't bear to hev any of 'em killed—they're tame as a bag o' feathers, all of 'em. I guess I ben settin' the hens o' my hand over against the heathen an' the orphans. An' now I'm goin' to sell spring chickens...."

Mis' Sturgis in the rocking-chair was waving a corner of her shawl.

"C-canaries!" she cried. "I can rise canary-birds an' sell 'em a dollar apiece in the city. I m-meant to slide out account o' my health, but it was just because I hate to muss 'round b-boilin' eggs for the little ones. I'll raise a couple or two—mebbe more."

"My good land!" came Miss Liddy Ember's piping falsetto; "to think o' my sittin' up, hesitatin', when new dresses just falls off the ends o' my fingers. An' me in my right mind, too."

Dear Doctor June stood up among us, his face shining.

"Bless us," he said. "Didn't I have some spiræa in my hand right while I stood talking to you the other afternoon in my garden? And haven't I got some tricolored Barbary varieties of chrysanthemums, and some hardy roses and one thing and another to make men marvel? And can't I sell 'em in the city at a pretty profit? What I've got in my hand is seeds and slips—I see that plain enough. And my stars, out they go!"

Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, Mis' Mayor Uppers, even Mis' Postmaster Sykes—ah, they all knew what to do, knew it as if somebody had been saying it over and over, and as if they now first listened.

But Ellen Ember sat crying, her face buried in her hands. And I think that she cannot have understood, even when Doctor June touched her hair and said something of the little leaven which leaveneth the whole lump.

Last, the Reverend Arthur Bliss arose, and there was a sudden hush among us, for it

was as if a new spirit shone in his strong young face.

"Dear friends," he said, "dear friends ..." And then, "Lord God," he prayed abruptly, "show me what is that in my hand—thy tool where I had looked for my sword!"

XVII

PUT ON THY BEAUTIFUL GARMENTS

"I donno," Calliope said, as, on her return, we talked about Ellen Ember, "I guess I kind o' believe in craziness."

Calliope's laugh often made me think of a bluebird's note, which is to say, of the laughter of a child. Bluebirds are the little children among birds, as robins are the men, house-wrens the women, scarlet tanagers the unrealities and humming-birds the fairies.

"Only," Calliope added, "I do say you'd ought to hev some sort o' leadin' strap even to craziness, an' that I ain't got an' never had. I guess folks thinks I'm rill lunar when I take the notion. Only thing comforts me, they don't know how lunar I rilly can be."

Then she told me about 'Leven.

"A shroud, to look rill nice," Calliope said, "ought to be made as much as you can like a dress—barrin' t' you can't fit it. Mis' Toplady an' Mis' Holcomb an' I made Jennie Crapwell's shroud—it was white mull and a little narrow lace edge on a rill life-like collar. We finished it the noon o' the day after Jennie died,—you know Jennie was Delia's stepsister that they'd run away from—an' I brought it over to my house an' pressed it an' laid it on the back bedroom bed—the room I don't use excep' for company an' hang my clean dresses in the closet of.

"In the afternoon I went up to the City on a few little funeral urrants,—a crape veil for Jennie's mother an' like that,—you know Jennie died first. We wasn't goin' to dress her till the next mornin'—her mother wanted we should leave her till then in

her little pink sacque she'd wore, an' the soft lavender cloth they use now spread over her careless. An' we wanted to, too, because sence Mis' Jeweler Sprague died nobody could do up the Dead's hair, an' Jennie wa'n't the exception.

"Mis' Sprague, she'd hed a rill gift that way. She always done folks' hair when they died an' she always got it like life—she owned up how, after she begun doin' it so much, she used to set in church an' in gatherin's and find herself lookin' at the backs of heads to see if they was two puffs or three, an' whether the twist was under to left or over to right—so's she'd know, if the time come. But none of us could get Jennie's to look right. We studied her pictures an' all too, but best we could do we got it all drawed back, abnormal.

"I was 'most all the afternoon in the City, an' it was pretty warm—a hot April followin' on a raw March. I stood waitin' for the six o'clock car an', my grief, I was tired. My feet ached like night in preservin' time. An' I was thinkin' how like a dunce we are to live a life made up mostly of urrants an' feetache followin'. Yet, after all, the right sort o' urrants an' like that is life—an', if they do ache, 'tain't like your feet was your soul. Well, an' just before the car come, up arrove the girl.

"I guess she was towards thirty, but she seemed even older, 'count o' bein' large an' middlin' knowin'. First I see her was a check gingham sleeve reachin' out an' she was elbowed up clost by me. 'Say,' she says, 'couldn't you gimme a nickel? I'm starved hollow.' She didn't look it special—excep' as thin, homely folks always looks sort o' hungry. An' she was homely—kind o' coarse made, more like a shed than a dwellin' house. Her dress an' little flappy cape hed the looks o' bein' held on by her shoulders alone, an' her hands was midnight dirty.

"I was feelin' just tired enough to snap her up.

"'A nickel!' s'I, crisp, 'give you a nickel! An' what you willin' to give me?'

"She looked sort o' surprised an' foolish an' her mouth open.

"'Huh?' s'she, intelligent as the back o' somethin'.

"'You,' I says, 'are some bigger an' some stronger'n me. What you goin' to give me?'

"Well, sir, the way she dropped her arms down sort o' hit at me, it was so kitten helpless. I took that in rather than her silly, sort o' insultin' laugh.

"'I can't do nothin',' she told me—an' all to once I saw how it was, an' that that was what ailed her. I didn't stop to think no more'n as if I didn't hev a brain to my name. 'Well,' I says, 'I'll give you a nickel. Leastways, I'll spend one on you. You take this car,' I says, 'an' come on over to Friendship with me. An' we'll see.'

"She come without a word, like goin' or stayin' was all of a piece to her, an' her relations all dead. When I got her on the car I begun to see what a fool thing I'd done, seemin'ly. An' yet, I donno. I wouldn't 'a' left a month-old baby there on the corner. I'd 'a' bed to 'a' done for that, like you do—I s'pose to keep the world goin'. An' that woman was just as helpless as a month-old. Some are. I s'pose likely," Calliope said thoughtfully, "we got more door-steps than we think, if we get 'em all located.

"When we got to my house I pumped her a pitcher o' water an' pointed to the back bedroom door. 'First thing,' s'I, blunt, 'clean up'—bein' as I was too tired to be very delicate. 'An',' s'I, 'you'll see a clean wrapper in the closet. Put it on.' Then I went to spread supper—warmed-up potatoes an' bread an' butter an' pickles an' sauce an' some cocoanut layer cake. It looked rill good, with the linen clean, though common.

"I donno how I done it, excep' I was so ramfeezled. But I clear forgot Jennie Crapwell's shroud, layin' ready on the back bedroom bed. An' land, land, when the woman come out, if she didn't hev it on.

"I tell you, when I see her come walkin' out towards the supper table with them fresh-ironed ruffles framin' in her face, I felt sort o' kitterin'-headed—like my i-dees had fell over each other to get away from me. The shroud fit her pretty good, too, barrin' it was a mite long-skirted. An' somehow, it give her a look almost like dignity. Come to think of it, I donno but a shroud does become most folks—like

they was rilly well-dressed at last.

"She come an' set down to table, quiet as you please—an' differ'nt. Your clothes don't make you, by any means, but they just do sort o' hem your edges, or rhyme the ends of you, or give a nice, even bake to your crust—I donno. They do somethin'. An' the shroud hed done it to that girl. She looked rill leaved out.

"How she did eat. It give me some excuse not to say anything to her till she was through with the first violence. I did try to say grace, but she says: 'Who you speakin' to? Me?' An' I didn't let on. I thought I wouldn't start in on her moral manners. I just set still an' kep' thinkin': You poor thing. Why, you poor thing. You're nothin' but a piece o' God's work that wants doin' over—like a back yard or a poor piece o' road or a rubbish place, or sim'lar. An' this tidyin' up is what we're for, as I see it—only some of us lays a-holt of our own settin' rooms an' butt'ry cupboards an' sullars an' cleans away on them for dear life, over an' over, an' forgets the rest. I ain't objectin' to good housekeepin' at all, but what I say is: Get your dust-rag big enough to wipe up somethin' besides your own dust. The Lord, He's a-housekeepin' too.

"So, with that i-dee, I got above the shroud an' I begun on the woman some like she was my kitchen closet in the spring o' the year.

"'What's your name?' s'I.

""Leven,' s'she.

"'Leaven,' s'I, 'like the Bible?'

"'Huh?' s'she.

"'Why—oh, 'leven',' s'I, 'that ain't a name at all. That's a number.'

"'I know it,' s'she, indiffer'nt, 'that was me. I was the 'leventh, an' they'd run out a'ready.'

"'For the land,' s'I, simple.

"An' that just about summed her up. They seemed to 'a' run out o' everything, time she come.

"She hadn't been taught a thing but eat an' drink. Them was her only arts. Excep' for one thing: When I ask' her what she could do, if any, she says like she had on the street corner:—

"'I can't do nothin'. I donno no work.'

"'You think it over,' s'I. She had rill capable hands—them odd, undressed-lookin' hands—I donno if you know what I mean?

"'Well,' s'she, sort o' sheepish, 'I can comb hair. Ma was allus sick an' me an' Big Lil—she's the same floor—combed her hair for her. But I could do it nicest.'

"Wan't that a curious happenin'—an' Jennie Crapwell layin' dead with her hair drawn tight back because none of us could do it up human?

"'Could you when dead?' s'I. 'I mean when them that has the hair is?'

"An' with that the girl turns pallor white.

"'Oh ...' s'she, 'I ain't never touched the dead. But,' s'she, sort o' defiant at somethin', 'I could do it, I guess, if you want I should.'

"Kind o' like a handle stickin' out from what would 'a' been her character, if she'd hed one, that was, I thought. An', too, I see what it'd mean to her if she knew she was wearin' a shroud, casual as calico.

"But when I told her about Jennie Crapwell, an' how they had a good picture, City-made, of her side head, she took it quite calm.

"'I'll try it,' she says, bein' as she'd done her ma's hair layin' down, though livin'. 'Big Lil always helps dress 'Em,' she says, 'an' guess I could do Their hair.'

"I got right up from the supper table an' took 'Leven over to Crapwell's without waitin' for the dishes. But early as I was, the rest was there before me. I guess they was full ten to Crapwell's when we got there, an' 'Leven an' I, we walked into the

sittin'-room right in the midst of 'em—that is, of what wasn't clearin' table or doin' dishes or sweepin' upstairs. Mis' Timothy Toplady an' Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss was the group nearest the door—an' the both of 'em reco'nized that shroud the minute they clamped their eyes on it. But me, bein' back o' 'Leven, I laid my front finger on to my shut lips with a motion that must 'a' been armies with banners. An' they see me an' kep' still, sudden an' all pent up.

"'This,' s'I, 'is a friend o' mine. She's goin' to do up Jennie's hair from her City photograph.'

"Then I hustled 'Leven into the parlour where Jennie was layin' under the soft lavender cloth. Nobody was in there but a few flowers, sent early. An' it was a west window an' open, an' the sky all sunset—like the End. 'Leven hung back, but I took her by the hand an' we went an' looked down at Jennie in that nice, gentlin', after-supper light—'Leven in Jennie's shroud an' neither of 'em knew it.

"An' all out o' the air somethin' says to me, Now—now—like it will when you get so's you listen. I always think it's like the Lord had pressed His bell somewheres for help in His housekeepin'—oh, because how He needs it!

"So I says, "Leven, you never see anybody dead before. What's the differ'nce between her an' you?'

"'She can't move,' 'Leven says, starin' down.

"'Yes, sir,' s'I, 'that's it. She's through doin' the things she was born to do, an' you ain't.'

"With that 'Leven looks at me.

"'I can't do nothin',' she says again.

"'Why, then,' says I, brisk, 'you're as good as dead, an' we'd best bury you, too. What do you think the Lord wants you 'round for?'

"An' she didn't say nothin', only stood fingerin' the shroud she wore.

"'Here,' s'I, then, 'is the comb. Here is Jennie's picture. The pins is in her hair. Take it down an' do it over. There's somethin' to do an' ease her mother about Jennie not lookin' natural.'

"An' with that I marched myself out an' shut the door.

"Mis' Toplady an' Mis' Holcomb was high-eyebrows on the other side of it, an' they come at me like tick lookin' for tock.

"'Well,' s'I, 'it is Jennie's shroud she's wearin'. But I guess we'll hev to bury 'Leven in it to get it underground. I won't tell her.'

"I give 'em to understand as much as I wanted they should know,—not includin' exactly how I met 'Leven. An' we consulted, vague an' emphatic, like women will. There wasn't time to make another one an' do it up an' all. An' anyway, I was bound not to let the poor thing know what she'd done. The others hated to, too—I donno if you'll know how we felt? I donno but mebbe you sense things like that better when you live in a little town.

"'Well said!' Mis' Amanda bursts out after a while, 'I'm reg'lar put to it. I can scare up an excuse, or a meal, or a church entertainment on as short notice as any, but I declare if I ever trumped up a shroud. An' you know an' I know,' she says, 'poor Jennie'd be the livin' last to want to take it off'n the poor girl.'

"'An',' s'I, 'even if I should give her somethin' else to put on in the mornin', an' sly this into the coffin on Jennie, I donno's I'd want to. The shroud,' s'I, "s been wore.'

"Mis' Holcomb sort o' kippered—some like a shiver.

"'I donno what it is about its bein' wore first,' s'she, 'but I guess it ain't so much what it is as what it ain't. Or sim'lar.'

"An' I knew what she meant. I've noticed that, often.

"In the end we done what I'd favoured from the beginnin': We ask' Mis' Crapwell if we couldn't bury Jennie in her white mull.

"'A shroud,' says Mis' Crapwell, grievin', 'made by a dressmaker with buttons?'

"'It's the part o' Jennie that wore it before that'll wear it now,' I says, reasonable, 'an' her soul never was buttoned into it anyways. An' it won't be now.'

"An' after a while we made her see it, an' that was the first regular dress ever wore to a buryin' in Friendship, by the one that was the one.

"I'll never forget when 'Leven come out o' that room, after she'd got through. We all went in—Mis' Crapwell an' Mis' Toplady an' Mis' Holcomb an' I, an' some more. An' I took 'Leven back in with me. An' as soon as I see Jennie I see it was Jennie come back—hair just as natural as if it was church Sunday mornin' an' her in her pew. We all knew it was so, an' we all said so, an' Mis' Crapwell, she just out cryin' like she'd broke her heart. An' when the first of it was over, she went acrost to 'Leven, an' 'Oh,' s'she, 'you've give her back to me. You give her back. God bless you!' she says to her. An' when I looked at 'Leven, I see the 'Huh?' look wasn't there at all. But they was a little somethin' on her face like she was proud, an' didn't quite want to show it—along of her features or complexion or somethin' never havin' had it spread on 'em before.

"Nex' mornin' o' course 'Leven put on the shroud again. I must say it give me the creeps to see her wearin' it, even if it did look like everybody's dresses. I donno what it is about such things, but they make somethin' scrunch inside o' you. Like when they got a new babtismal dish for the church, an' the minister's sister took the old one for a cake dish.

"S'I, to 'Leven, after breakfast:—

"We're goin' to line Jennie's grave this mornin'. I guess you'd like to go with us, wouldn't you?'

But I see her face with the old look, like the back o' somethin', or like you'd rubbed down the page when the ink was wet, an' had blurred the whole thing unreadable. An' I judged that, like enough, she knew nothin' whatever about grave-linin', done

civilized.

"'I mean, I thought mebbe you'd like to help us some,' I says.

"'I would!' s'she, at that, rill ready an' quick. An' it come to me 't she knew now what help meant. She'd learnt it the night before from Jennie's mother—like she'd learnt to answer a bell when Somebody pressed it. Only, o' course she never guessed Who it was ringin' it—like you don't at first.

"So I made up my mind I'd take her to the cemet'ry. We done the work up first, an' 'Leven spried 'round for me, wipin' the dishes with the wipin' cloth in a bunch, an' settin' 'em up wrong places. An' I did hev to go in the butt'ry an' laugh to see her sweep up. She swep' up some like her broom was a branch an' the wind a-switchin' it.

"Mis' Toplady an' Mis' Holcomb stopped by for us, with the white cotton cloth an' the tacks, an' by nine o'clock we was over to the cemet'ry. The grave was all dug an' lined with nice pine boards, an' the dirt piled 'longside, an' the boards for coverin' an' the spades layin' near. Zittelhof was just leavin', havin' got in his pulley things to lower 'em. Zittelhof's rill up to date. Him an' Mink, the barber, keep runnin' each other to see who can get the most citified things. No sooner'd Zittelhof get his pulleys than Mink, he put in shower-baths. An' when Mink bought a buzz fan, Zittelhof sent for the lavender cloth to spread over 'em before the coffin comes. It makes it rill nice for Friendship.

"'Who's goin to get down in?' says Mis' Toplady, shakin' out the cloth.

Mis' Toplady always use' to be the one, but she can't do that any more since she got so heavy. An' Mis' Holcomb's rheumatism was bad that day an' the grave middlin' damp, so it was for me to do. An' all of a sudden I says:—

""Leven, you just get down in there, will you? An' we'll tell you how.'

"'In the grave?' says 'Leven.

"I guess I'm some firm-mannered, just by takin' things for granted, an' I says, noddin':—

"'Yes. You're the lightest on your feet,' I says—an' I sort o' shoved at her, bird to young, an' she jumped down in, not bein' able to help it.

"'Here,' s'I, flingin' her an end o' cloth, 'tack it 'round smooth to them boards.'

"'Mother o' God,' says she, swallowin' in her breath.

"But she done it. She knelt down there in the grave, her poor, frowzy head showin,' an' she tacked away like we told her to, an' she never said another word. Mis' Toplady an' Mis' Holcomb didn't say nothin', either, only looked at me mother-knowin'. Them two—Mis' Toplady more'n anybody in Friendship, acts like bein' useful is bein' alive an' nothin' else is. They see what I was doin', well enough—only I donno's they'd 'a' called it what I did, 'bout the Lord's housekeepin' an all. An' I knew I couldn't gentle 'Leven into the i-dee, but I judged I could shock it into her—same as her an' the Big Lil kind have to hev. Some folks you hev to shoot i-dees at, muzzle to brain.

"I donno if you've took it in that when you're in a grave, or 'round one, your talk sort o' veers that way? Ours did. Mis' Banker Mason's baby had just died in March, an' the choir'd made an awful scandal, breakin' down in the fifth verse of 'One poor flower has drooped and faded.' They'd stood 'em in a half circle where they could look right down on the little thing. An' when the choir got to

"But we feel no thought of sadness For our friend is happy now, She has knelt in heartfelt gladness Where the holy angels bow,

they just naturally broke down an' cried, every one of 'em. An' then the little coffin was some to blame, too—it was sort of a little Lord Fauntleroy coffin, with a broad white puff around, an' most anybody would a' cried when they looked in it, even empty. But Doctor June, he just stood up calm, like his soul was his body, an' he begun to pray like God was there in the parlour, Him feelin' as bad as we, an' not

doin' the child's death Himself at all, like we'd been taught—but sorrowin' with us, for some o' His housekeepin' gone wrong. An' by the time Banker an' Mis' Mason got in the close' carriage an' took the little thing's casket on their knees—you know we do that here, not havin' any white hearse—why, we was all feelin' like God Almighty was hand in hand in sorrow with us. An' it's never left me since. I know He is.

"We talked that over while 'Leven tacked the evergreen on the white cloth. An' I know Mis' Toplady says she'd stayed with Mis' Banker Mason so much since then that she felt God had sort o' singled her—Mis' Toplady—out, to give her a chanst to do His work o' comfortin'. 'I've just let my house go,' s'she, 'an' I've got the grace to see it don't matter if I have.' Mis' Toplady ain't one o' them turtle women that their houses is shells on 'em, burden to back. She's more the bird kind—neat little nest under, an' wings to be used every day, somewheres in the blue.

"So 'Leven done all Jennie Crapwell's grave. She must 'a been down in it an hour. An' when she got through, an' looked up at us from down in the green, an' wearin' Jennie's shroud an' all, I just put out my hands, to help her up, an' I thought, almost like prayin': 'Oh, raise up, you Dead, an' come forth—come forth.' Sort o' like Lazarus. An' I know I wasn't sacrilegious from what happened; for when Mis' Toplady an' Miss Holcomb come up to 'Leven an' says, rill warm, how well she'd done it an' how much obliged they was, I see that little look on the girl's face again like—oh, like she'd wrote somethin' on the blurry page, somethin' you could read.

"Jennie was buried that afternoon at sharp three. It was a sad funeral, 'count o' Jennie's trouble, an' all. But it was a rill big funeral an' nicely conducted, if I do say that done the managin'. Mis' Postmaster Sykes seated the guests—ain't she the kind that always seems to be one to stand in the hall at funerals with her hat off, to consult about chairs an' where shall the minister lay his Bible, an' who'd ought to be invited to set next the bier? An' she always takes charge o' the flowers. Mis' Sykes

can tell you who sent what flowers to who for years back, an the wordin' on the pillows. She's got a rill gift that way. But I done the managin' behind the scenes, an' it went off rill well, an' I got the minister to drop a flower on Jennie's coffin instead of a pinch o' dirt. An' one chair I did see to: right in the bay, near Jennie, I set 'Leven—I guess with just a kind of a blind feelin' that I wanted to get her near. Near the flowers or the singin' or what the minister said or,—oh, near the mystery an' God speakin' from the dead, like He does. Anyway, I shoved her into the bay window back o' the casket, an' there I left her in behind a looped-back Nottingham—settin' in Jennie's shroud an' didn't either of 'em know it.

"It was a queer chapter for Doctor June to read, some said—but I guess holy things often is queer, only we're better cut out to see queer than holy. Anyway, his voice went all mellow and gentle, boomin' out soft an' in his throat, all over the house. It was that about ..." Calliope quoted piecemeal:—

"'Awake, awake, put on thy strength ... put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city ... shake thyself from the dust, arise and sit down ... loose thyself from the bonds of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion ... how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion: Thy God reigneth! Break forth into joy, sing together ... depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing ... be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord....'

"Sometimes a thing you've heard always will come at you sudden, like a star had fell on your very head. It was that way with me that day. 'Put on thy beautiful garments ...' I says over, 'Put 'em on—put 'em on!' An' all the while I was seein' to the supper for the crowd that was goin' to be there—train relations an' all—I kep' thinkin' that over like a song—'Put 'em on—put 'em on—put 'em on!' An' it was in me yet, like a song had come to life there, when they'd all gone to the cemetery—'Leven with

'em—an' I'd got through straightenin' the chairs—or rather crookedin' 'em some into loops from funeral lines—an' slipped over to my house, back way. For I ain't sunk so low as to be that sympathetic that I'll stay to supper after the funeral just because I've helped at it. There's a time to mourn an' there's a time to eat, an' you better do one with the bereaved an' slip home to your own butt'ry shelf for the other, I say.

"I was just goin' through the side yard to my house when I see 'em comin' back from the cemetery, an' I waited a little, lookin' to see what was sproutin' in the flower-bed. It was a beautiful, beautiful evenin'—when I think of it it seems I can breathe it in yet. It was 'most sunset, an' it was like the West was a big, blue bowl with eggs beat up in it, yolks an' whites, some gold an' some feathery. But the bowl wa'n't big enough, an' it had spilled over an' flooded the whole world yellowish, or all floatin' shinin' in the air. It was like the world had done the way the Bible said—put on its beautiful garments. I was thinkin' that when 'Leven come in the front gate. She was walkin' fast, an' lookin' up, not down. Her cheeks was some pink, an' the light made the shroud all pinkey, an' she looked rill nice. An' I marched straight up to her, feelin' like I was swimmin' in that lovely light:—

"'Leven,' I says, "Leven—it's like the whole world was made over to-night, ain't it?'

"'Yes,' says she—an' not 'Huh?' at all.

"'Seems like another world than when we met on the street corner, don't it?' I says.

"'Yes,' she says again, noddin'—an' I thought how she'd stood there on the sidewalk, hungry an' her hands all black, an' believin' she couldn't do anything at all. An' it seemed like I hed sort o' scrabbled her up an' held her over a precipice, an' said to her: 'See the dead. Look at yourself. Come forth—come forth! Clean up—do somethin' to help, anything, if it's only tackin' on evergreens an' doin' the Dead's hair up becomin'—' oh, I s'pose, rilly, I was sayin' to her: 'Put on thy beautiful garments. Awake. Put on thy strength.' Only it come out some differ'nt from me than it come from Isaiah.

"I took a-hold of her hand—quite clean by the second day's washin', though I ain't much given to the same (not meanin' second day's washin's). I didn't know quite what I was goin' to say, but just then I looked up Daphne Street, an' I see 'em all sprinkled along comin' from the funeral—neighbours an' friends an' just folks—an' most of 'em livin' in Friendship peaceful an'—barrin' slopovers—doin' the level best they could. Not all of 'em hearin' the Bell, you understand, nor knowin' it by name if they did hear. But in little ways, an' because it was secunt nature, just helpin', helpin', helpin' ... Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, Liddy Ember, Abagail Arnold an' her husband, that was alive then, hurryin' to open the home bakery to catch the funeral trade on the funeral's way back, Amanda an' Timothy Toplady rattlin' by in the wagon an' 'most likely scrappin' over the new springs ... an' all of 'em salt good at heart.

""Leven,' I says, out o' the fulness o' the lump in my throat, 'stay here with us. Find somethin' honest you can do, an' stay here an' do it. Mebbe,' I told her, 'you could start dressin' the Dead's hair. An' help us,' I says, 'help us.'

"She looked up in my eyes quick, an' my heart stood still. An' then it sunk down an' down.

"'I want to go back ...' she says, 'I want to go back ...' but I'm glad to remember that even for a minute I didn't doubt God's position, because I remember thinkin' swift that if Him an' I had failed it wasn't for no inscrutable reason o' His, but He was feelin' just as bad over it as I was, an' worse.... 'I want to go back,' 'Leven finished up, 'an' get Big Lil, too.'

"Oh, an' I tell you the song in me just crowded the rest o' me out of existence. I felt like a psalm o' David, bein' sung. I hadn't dreamed she'd be like that—I hadn't dreamed it. Why, some folks, Christian an' in a pew, never come to the part o' their lives where they want to go back an' get a Big Lil, too.

"We stood there a little while, an' I talked to her some, though I declare I couldn't

tell you what I said. You can't—when the psalm feelin' comes. But we stood out there sort o' occupyin' April, till after the big blue bowl o' feathery eggs had been popped in the big black oven, an' it was rill dark.

"I forgot all about the shroud till we stepped in the house an' lit up, an' I see it. An' then it was like the song in me gettin' words, an' it come to me what it all was: How it rilly hadn't been Jennie's funeral so much as it had been 'Leven's—the 'Leven that was. But I didn't tell her—I never told her. An' she wore that shroud for most two years, mornin's, about her work."

Calliope smiled a little, with her way of coming back to the moment from the four great horizons.

"Land," she said, "sometimes I think I'll make some shrouds an' starch 'em up rill good, an' take 'em to the City an' offer to folks. An' say: Here. Die—die. You've got to, some part o' you, before you can awake an' put on your beautiful garments an' your strength. I told you, you know," she added, "I guess sometimes I kind o' believe in craziness!"

XVIII

IN THE WILDERNESS A CEDAR

In answer to my summons Liddy Ember appeared before me one morning and outspread a Vienna book of coloured fashion-plates.

"Dressmakin' 'd be a real drudgery for me," she said, "if it wasn't for havin' the colour plates an' makin' what I can to look like 'em. Sometimes I get a collar or a cuff that seems almost like the picture. There's always somethin' in the way of a cedar," she added blithely.

"A cedar?" I repeated.

She nodded, her plain face lighting. "That's what Calliope use' to call 'em," she

explained; "'I will plant in the wilderness the cedar,' you know—in the Bible." And I did recall the phrase on Calliope's lips, as if it were the theme of her.

From this one and that one, and now and then from her herself, I had heard something of Calliope's love story. Indeed, all Friendship knew it and spoke of it with no possibility of gossip or speculation, but with a kind of genius for consideration. I did not know, however, that it was of this that Liddy meant to speak, for she began her story far afield, with some talk of Oldmoxon house, in which I lived, and of its former tenants.

"Right here in this house is mixed up in it," she said; "I been thinkin' about it all the way up. Not very many have lived here in the Oldmoxon house, and the folks that lived here the year I mean come so quiet nobody knew it until they was here—an' that ain't easy to do in Friendship. First we knew they was in an' housekeepin'. Their accounts was in the name of a Mis' Morgan. We see her now an' then on the street—trim an' elderly an' no airs excep' she wouldn't open up a conversation an' she wouldn't return her calls. 'Most everybody called on her inside the two weeks, but the woman was never home an' she never paid any attention. She didn't seem to have no men folks, an' she settled her bills with checks, like she didn't have any ready money. Little by little we all dropped her, which she ought to of expected. Even when it got around that there was sickness in the house, nobody went near, we feelin' as if we knew as good as the best what dignity calls for.

"But Calliope didn't feel the same about it. Calliope hardly ever felt the same about anything. That is, if it meant feelin' mean. She was a woman that worked, like me, but yet she was wonderful differ'nt. That was when we had our shop together in the house where we lived with the boy—I'll come to him in a minute or two. Besides lace-makin', Calliope had a piano an' taught in the fittin'-room—that was the same as the dinin'-room. Six scholars took. Sometimes I think it was her knowin' music that made her differ'nt.

"We two was sittin' on our porch that night in the first dark. I know a full moon was up back o' the hollyhocks an' makin' its odd little shadows up an' down the yard, an' we could smell the savoury bed. 'Every time I breathe in, somethin' pleasant seems goin' on inside my head,' I rec'lect Calliope's sayin'. But most o' the time we was still an' set watchin' the house on the corner where the New People lived. They had a hard French name an' so we kep' on callin' 'em just the 'New People.' He was youngish an' she was younger an'—she wasn't goin' out anywheres that summer. She was settin' on the porch that night waitin' for him to come home. Before it got dark we'd noticed she had on a pretty white dress an' a flower or two. It seemed sort o' nice—that bein' so, an' her waitin' there dressed so pretty. An' we sort o' set there waitin' for him, too—like you will, you know.

"The boy was in the bed. He wa'n't no relation of Calliope's if you're as strict as some, but accordin' to my idea he was closer than that—closer than kin. He was the grandchild of the man Calliope had been goin' to marry forty-some years before, when she was twenty-odd. Calvert Oldmoxon he was—born an' bred up in this very house. He was quite well off an'—barrin' he was always heathen selfish—it was a splendid match for Calliope, but I never see a girl care so next to nothin' about that. She was sheer crazy about him, an' he seemed just as much so about her. An' then when everything was ready—Calliope's dress done an' layin' on their best-room bed, the minister stayin' home from conference to perform the ceremony, even the white cake made—off goes Calvert Oldmoxon with Martha Boughton, a little high-fly that had just moved to town. A new girl can marry anything she wants in Friendship if she does it quick. So Calliope had to put up from Martha Boughton with just what Jennie Crapwell had to take from Delia, more'n twenty-five years afterwards.

"It was near thirty years before we see either of 'em again. Then, just a little before I'm tellin' you about, a strange woman come here to town one night with a little boy; an' she goes to the hotel, sick, an' sends for Calliope. An' when Calliope gets to the hotel the woman was about breathin' her last. An' it was Mis' Oldmoxon—Martha

Boughton, if you please, an' dyin' on the trip she'd made to ask Calliope to forgive her for what she done.

"An' Calliope forgive her, but I don't imagine Calliope was thinkin' much about her at the time. Hangin' round the bed was a little boy—the livin', breathin' image of Calvert Oldmoxon himself. Calliope was mad-daft over children anyway, though she was always kind o' shy o' showin' it, like a good many women are that ain't married. I've seen her pick one up an' gentle it close to her, but let anybody besides me come in the room an' see her an' she'd turn a regular guilt-red. Calliope never was one to let on. But I s'pose seein' that little boy there at the hotel look so much like him was kind o' unbalancin'. So what does she do when Mis' Oldmoxon was cryin' about forgiveness but up an' ask her what was goin' to be done with the boy after she was dead. Calliope would be one to bring the word 'dead' right out, too, an' let the room ring with it—though that ain't the custom in society. Now'days they lie everybody 'way into the grave, givin' 'em to understand that their recovery is certain, till there must be a lots o' dumfounded dead, shot into the next world—you might say unbeknownst. But Calliope wasn't mincin' matters. An' when it come out that the dyin' woman hadn't seen Calvert Oldmoxon for thirty years an' didn't know where he was, an' that the child was an orphan an' would go to collateral kin or some such folks, Calliope plumps out to her to give her the child. The forgiveness Calliope sort o' took for granted—like you will as you get older. An' Mis' Oldmoxon seemed real willin' she should have him. So when Calliope come home from the funeral—she'd rode alone with the little boy for mourners—she just went to work an' lived for that child.

"'"In the wilderness the cedar," Liddy,' she says to me. 'More than one of 'em. I've had 'em right along. My music scholars an' my lace-makin' customers an' all. An', Liddy,' she says to me sort o' shy, 'ain't you noticed,' she says, 'how many neighbours we've had move in an out that's had children? So many o' the little things right around us! Seems like they'd almost been born to me when they come acrost

the street, so. An' I've always thought o' that—"In the wilderness the cedar"' she says, 'an' they's always somethin' to be a cedar for me, seems though.'

"'Well,' says I, sort o' sceptical, 'mebbe that's because you always plant 'em,' I says. 'I think it means that, too,' I told her. An' I knew well enough Calliope was one to plant her cedars herself. Cedars o' comfort, you know.

"I've seen a good many kinds o' mother-love—you do when you go round to houses like I do. But I never see anything like Calliope. Seems though she breathed that child for air. She always was one to pretend to herself, an' I knew well enough she'd figured it out as if this was their child that might 'a' been, long ago. She sort o' played mother—like you will; an' she lived her play. He was a real sweet little fellow, too. He was one o' them big-eyed kind that don't laugh easy, an' he was well-spoken, an' wonderful self-settled for a child o' seven. He was always findin' time for you when you thought he was doin' somethin' else—slidin' up to you an' puttin' up his hand in yours when you thought he was playin' or asleep. An' that was what he done that night when we set on the porch—comes slippin' out of his little bed an' sets down between us on the top step, in his little night-things.

"'Calvert, honey,' Calliope says, 'you must run back an' play dreams. Mother wants you to.'

"She'd taught him to call her mother—she'd had him about six months then—an' some thought that was queer to do, seein' Calliope was her age an' all. But I thought it was wonderful right.

"'I did play,' he says to her—he had a nice little way o' pressin' down hard with his voice on one word an' lettin' the next run off his tongue—'I did play dreams,' I rec'lect he says; 'I dreamed 'bout robbers. Ain't robbers distinct?' he says.

"I didn't know what he meant till Calliope laughs an' says, 'Oh, distinctly extinct!' I remembered it by the way the words kind o' crackled.

"By then he was lookin' up to the stars—his little mind always lit here an' there, like

a grasshopper.

"'How can heaven begin,' he says, 'till everybody gets there?'

"Yes, he was a dear little chap. I like to think about him. An' I know when he says that, Calliope just put her arms around him, an' her head down, an' set sort o' rockin' back an' forth. An' she says:—

"'Oh, but I think it begins when we don't know.'

"After a while she took him back to bed, little round face lookin' over her shoulder an' big, wide-apart, lonesome eyes an' little sort o' crooked frown, for all the world like the other Calvert Oldmoxon. Just as she come out an' set down again, we heard the click o' the gate acrost at the corner house where the New People lived, an' it was the New Husband got home. We see his wife's white dress get up to meet him, an' they went in the house together, an' we see 'em standin' by the lamp, lookin' at things. Seems though the whole night was sort o'—gentle.

"All of a sudden Calliope unties her apron.

"'Let's dress up,' she says.

"'Dress up!' I says, laughin' some. 'Why, it must be goin' on half-past eight,' I told her.

"'I don't care if it is,' she says; 'I'm goin' to dress up. It seems as though I must.'

"She went inside, an' I followed her. Calliope an' I hadn't no men folks to dress for, but, bein' dressmakers an' lace folks, we had good things to wear. She put on the best thin dress she had—a gray book-muslin; an' I took down a black lawn o' mine. It was such a beautiful night that I 'most knew what she meant. Sometimes you can't do much but fit yourself in the scenery. But I always thought Calliope fit in no matter what she had on. She was so little an' rosy, an' she always kep' her head up like she was singin'.

"'Now what?' I says. For when you dress up, you can't set home. An' then she says

slow—an' you could 'a' knocked me over while I listened:—

"'I've been thinkin',' she says, 'that we ought to go up to Oldmoxon house an see that sick person.'

"'Calliope!' I says, 'for the land. You don't want to be refused in!'

"'I don't know as I do an' I don't know but I do,' she answers me. 'I feel like I wanted to be doin' somethin'.'

"With that she out in the kitchen an' begins to fill a basket. Calliope's music didn't prevent her cookin' good, as it does some. She put in I don't know what all good, an' she had me pick some hollyhocks to take along. An' before I knew it, I was out on Daphne Street in the moonlight headin' for Oldmoxon house here that no foot in Friendship had stepped or set inside of in 'most six months.

"'They won't let us in,' I says, pos'tive.

"'Well,' Calliope says, 'seems though I'd like to walk up there a night like this, anyway.'

"An' I wasn't the one to stop her, bein' I sort o' guessed that what started her off was the New People. Those two livin' so near by—lookin' forward to what they was lookin' forward to—so soon after the boy had come to Calliope, an' all, had took hold of her terrible. She'd spent hours handmakin' the little baby-bonnet she was goin' to give 'em. An' then mebbe it was the night some, too, that made her want to come up around this house—because you could 'most 'a' cut the moonlight with a knife.

"They wa'n't any light in the big hall here when we rung the bell, but they lit up an' let us in. Yes, they actually let us in. Mis' Morgan come to the door herself.

"'Come right in,' she says, cordial. 'Come right upstairs.'

"Calliope says somethin' about our bein' glad they could see us.

"'Oh,' says Mis' Morgan, 'I had orders quite a while ago to let in whoever asked. An'

you're the first,' she says. 'You're the first.'

"An' then it come to us that this Mis' Morgan we'd all been tryin' to call on was only what you might name the housekeeper. An' so it turned out she was.

"The whole upper hall was dark, like puttin' a black skirt on over your head. But the room we went in was cheerful, with a fire burnin' up. Only it was awful littered up—old newspapers layin' round, used glasses settin' here an' there, water-pitcher empty, an' the lamp-chimney was smoked up, even. The woman said somethin' about us an' went out an' left us with somebody settin' in a big chair by the fire, sick an' wrapped up. An' when we looked over there, Calliope an' I stopped still. It was a man.

"If it'd been me, I'd 'a' turned round an' got out. But Calliope was as brave as two, an' she spoke up.

"'This must be the invalid,' she says, cheerful. 'We hope we see you at the best.'

"The man stirs some an' looks over at us kind o' eager—he was oldish, an' the firelight bein' in his eyes, he couldn't see us.

"'It isn't anybody to see me, is it?' he asks.

"At that Calliope steps forward—I remember how she looked in her pretty gray dress with some light thing over her head, an' her starched white skirts was rustlin' along under, soundin' so genteel she seemed to me like strangers do. When he see her, the man made to get up, but he was too weak for it.

"'Why, yes,' she answers him, 'if you're well enough to see anybody.'

"An' at that the man put his hands on his knees an' leaned sort o' hunchin' forward.

"'Calliope!' he says.

"It was him, sure enough—Calvert Oldmoxon. Same big, wide-apart, lonesome eyes an' kind o' crooked frown. His hair was gray, an' so was his pointed beard, an' he was crool thin. But I'd 'a' known him anywheres.

"Calliope, she just stood still. But when he reached out his hand, his lips parted some like a child's an' his eyes lookin' up at her, she went an' stood near him, by the table, an' she set her basket there an' leaned down on the handle, like her strength was gone.

"'I never knew it was you here,' she says. 'Nobody knows,' she told him.

"'No,' he says, 'I've done my best they shouldn't know. Up till I got sick. Since then—I—wanted folks,' he says.

"I kep' back by the door, an' I couldn't take my eyes off of him. He was older than Calliope, but he had a young air. Like you don't have when you stay in Friendship. An' he seemed to know how to be easy, sick as he was. An' that ain't like Friendship, either. He an' Calliope had growed opposite ways, seems though.

"'I'll go now,' says Calliope, not lookin' at him. 'I brought up some things I baked. I didn't know but they'd taste good to whoever was sick here.'

"With that he covers one hand over his eyes.

"'No,' he says, 'no, no, Calliope—don't go yet. It's you I come here to Friendship to see,' he told her.

"'What could you have to say to me?' asks Calliope—dry as a bone in her voice, but I see her eyes wasn't so dry. Leastwise, it may not have been her eyes, but it was her look.

"Then he straightens up some. He was still good-lookin'. When you was with him it use' to be that you sort o' wanted to stay—an' it seemed the same way now. He was that kind.

"'Don't you think,' he says to her—an' it was like he was humble, but it was like he was proud, too—'don't you think,' he says, 'that I ever dreamed you could forgive me. I knew better than that,' he told her. 'It's what you must think o' me that's kep' me from sayin' to you what I come here to say. But I'll tell you now,' he says, 'I'm

sick an' alone an' done for. An' what I come to see you about—is the boy.'

"'The boy,' Calliope says over, not understandin'; 'the boy.'

"'My God, yes,' says he. 'He's all I've got left in the world. Calliope—I need the boy. I need him!'

"I rec'lect Calliope puttin' back that light thing from her head like it smothered her. He laid back in his chair for a minute, white an' still. An' then he says—only of course his words didn't sound the way mine do:—

"'I robbed your life, Cally, an' I robbed my own. As soon as I knew it an' couldn't bear it any longer, I went away alone—an' I've lived alone all exceptin' since the little boy come. His mother, my son's wife, died; an' I all but brought him up. I loved him as I never loved anybody—but you,' he says, simple. 'But when his father died, of course I hadn't any claim on the little fellow, I felt, when I'd been away from the rest so long. She took him with her. An' when I knew she'd left him here I couldn't have kep' away,' he says, 'I couldn't. He's all I've got left in the world. I all but brought him up. I must have him, Cally—don't you see I must have him?' he says.

"Calliope looks down at him, wonderful calm an' still.

"'You've had your own child,' she told him slow; 'you've had a real life. I'm just gettin' to mine—since I had the boy.'

"'But, good God,' he says, starin' up at her, 'you're a woman. An' one child is the same as another to you, so be that it ain't your own.'

"Calliope looked almost as if he had struck at her, though he'd only spoke a kind o' general male idea, an' he couldn't help bein' a male. An' she says back at him:—

"'But you're a man. An' bein' alive is one thing to you an' another thing to me. Never let any man forget that,' she says, like I never heard her speak before.

"Then I see the tears shinin' on his face. He was terrible weak. He slips down in his chair an' sets starin' at the fire, his hands hangin' limp over the arms like there wasn't

none of him left. His face looked tired to death, an' yet there was that somethin' about him like you didn't want to leave him. I see Calliope lookin' at him—an' all of a sudden it come to me that if I'd 'a' loved him as she use' to, I'd 'a' walked over there an' then, an' sort o' gentled his hair, no matter what.

"But Calliope, she turned sharp away from him an' begun lookin' around the room, like she see it for the first time—smoky lamp-chimney, old newspapers layin' 'round, used-up glasses, an' such like. The room was one o' the kind when they ain't no women or children. An' then, when she see all that, pretty soon she looked back at him, layin' sick in his chair, alone an' done for, like he said. An' I see her take her arms in her hands an' kind o' rock.

"'Ain't the little fellow a care to you, Cally?' he says then, wistful.

"She went over towards him, an' I see her pick up his pillow an' smooth it some an' make to fix it better.

"'Yes,' she says then, 'you're right. He is a care. An' he's your grandchild. You must take him with you just as soon as you're well enough,' she says.

"He broke clear down then, an' he caught her hands an' laid his face on 'em. She stood wonderful calm, lookin' down at him—an' lookin'. An' I laid the hollyhocks down on the rug or anywheres, an' somehow I got out o' the room an' down the stairs. An' I set there in the lower hall an' waited.

"She come herself in a minute. The big outside door was standin' open, an' when I heard her step on the stairs I went on ahead out to the porch, feelin' kind o' strange—like you will. But when Calliope come up to me she was just the same as she always was, an' I might 'a' known she would be. She isn't easy to understand—she's differ'nt—but when you once get to expectin' folks to be differ'nt, you can depend on 'em some that way, too.

"The moon was noon-high by then an' filterin' down through the leaves wonderful soft, an' things was still—I remember thinkin' it was like the hushin'-up before a

bride comes in, but there wasn't any bride.

"When we come to our house—just as we begun to smell the savoury bed clear out there on the walk—we heard something ... a little bit of a noise that I couldn't put a name to, first. But, bless you, Calliope could. She stopped short by the gate an' stood lookin' acrost the road to the corner house where the New People lived. It was late for Friendship, but upstairs in that house a lamp was burnin'. An' that room was where the little noise come from—a little new cry.

"'Oh, Liddy,' Calliope says—her head up like she was singin'—'Oh, Liddy—the New People have got their little child.'

"An' I see, though of course she didn't anywheres near realize it then, that she was plantin' herself another cedar."

XIX

HERSELF

After all, it was as if I had first been told about refraction and then had been shown a rainbow. For presently Calliope herself said something to me of her having been twenty. One would as lief have broken the reticence of a rainbow as that of Calliope, but rainbows are not always reticent. I have known them suggest infinite things.

In June she spent a fortnight with me at Oldmoxon house, and I wanted never to let her go. Often our talk was as irrelevant to patency as are wings. That day I had been telling her some splendid inconsequent dream of mine. It had to do with an affair of a wheelbarrow of roses, which I was tying on my trees in the garden directly the original blossoms fell off.

Calliope nodded in entire acceptance.

"But that wasn't so queer as my dream," she said. "My dream about myself—I mean my rill, true regular self," she added, with a manner of testing me.

I think that we all dream our real, true, regular selves, only we do not dream us until we come true. I said something of this to Calliope; and then she told me.

"It was when I was twenty," she said, "an' it was a little while after—well, things wasn't so very happy for me. But first thing I must tell you about the picture. We didn't have so very many pictures. But in my room used to be an old steel engraving of a poet, a man walkin' 'round under some kind o' trees in blossom. He had a beautiful face an' a look on it like he see heaven. I use' to look at the picture an' look at it, an' when I did, it seemed almost like I was off somewheres else.

"Then one night I had my dream. I thought I was walkin' down a long road, green an' shady an' quite wide, an' fields around an' no folks. I know I was hurryin'—oh, I was in such a hurry to see somebody, seems though, somebody I was goin' to see when I got to the end o' the road. An' I was so happy—did you ever dream o' being happy, I mean if you wasn't so very happy in rill life? It puts you in mind o' havin' a pain in your side an' then gettin' in one big, deep breath when the pain don't hurt. In rill life I was lonesome, an' I hated Friendship an' I wanted to get away—to go to the City to take music, or go anywheres else. I never had any what you might call rill pleasure excep' walkin' in the Depot Woods. That was a gully grove beyond the railroad track, an' I use' to like to sit in there some, by myself. I wasn't ever rill happy, though, them days, but in the dream—oh, I was happy, like on a nice mornin', only more so."

Calliope looked at me fleetingly, as if she were measuring my ability to understand.

"The funny part of it was," she said, "that in the dream I wasn't me at all. Not me, as you know me. I thought somehow I was that poet in my picture, the man in the steel engravin' with a look like he see heaven. An' it didn't seem strange to me, but just like it had always been so. I thought I rilly was that poet that I'd looked at in the picture all my life. But then I guess after all that part wasn't so funny as the rest of it. For down at the end o' the road somebody was waitin' for me under trees all in

blossom, like the picture, too. It was a girl, standin' there. An' I thought I looked at her—I, the poet, you know—an' I see that the girl was me, Calliope Marsh, lookin' just like I looked every day, natural as anything. Like you see yourself in the glass.

"I know I wasn't su'prised at all. We met like we was friends, both livin' here in the village, an' we walked down the road together like it had always been that way. An' we talked—like you do when you're with them you'd rather be with than anybody else. I thought we was goin' somewhere to see somebody, an' we talked about that:—

"'Will They be home, do you think?' I says.

"An' the girl that was me says: 'Oh, yes. They'll be home. They're always home,' she told me. An' we both felt pleased, like when you're sure.

"An' then—oh," Calliope cried, "I wish I could remember what we said. I wish I could remember. I know it was something that seemed beautiful, an' the words come all soft. It was like bein' born again, somewheres else. An' we knew just exactly what each other meant, an' that was best of all."

She hesitated, seeking to explain that to me.

"When I was twenty," she said, "I use' to want to talk about things that wasn't commonly mentioned here in Friendship—I mean, well, like little things I'd read about noted people an' what they said an' done—an' like that. But when you brought 'em up in the conversation, folks always thought you was tryin' to show off. An' if you quoted a verse o' poetry in company, my land, there was a hush like you'd swore. So gradually I'd got to keepin' still about such things. But in that dream we talked an' talked—said things about old noted folks right out an' told about 'em without beginnin' it 'I happened to read the other day.' An' I know I mentioned the sun on the leaves an' the way the clouds looked, right out, too, without bein' afraid the girl that was me would think I was affected. An' I said little things about—oh, like about goblins in the wood an' figgers in the smoke, without bein' scared that

mothers would hear of it an' not let their children come to see me. An' then I made up things an' said—things I was always wantin' to say—like about expectin' to meet Summer walkin' down the road, an' so on: things that if I'd said so's they'd got out around Friendship, folks would 'a' thought I was queer an' not to be trusted to bring up their mail from town. I said all those kind o' things, like I was really born to talk what I thought about. An' the girl that was me understood what I meant. An' we laughed a good deal—oh, how we laughed together. That was 'most the best of all.

"Well, the dream dwindled off, like they will. An' when I woke up, I was nothin' but Calliope Marsh, livin' in Friendship where folks cut a loaf o' bread on a baker's headstone just because he was a baker. Rill life didn't get any better, an' I was more an' more lonesome in Friendship. Somehow, nobody here in town rilly matched me. They all knew what I said well enough, but when I spoke to 'em about what was rill interestin' to me, seemed like their minds didn't click, with that good little feelin' o' rilly takin' it in. My i-dees didn't seem to fit, quite ball an' socket, into nobody's mind, but just to slide along over. And as to their i-dees—I rec'lect thinkin' that the three R's meant to 'em Relations, Recipes, an' the Remains. Yes, all I did have, you might say, was my walks out in the Depot Woods. An' times like when Elder Jacob Sykes—that was Silas's father—said in church that God come down to be Moses's undertaker, I run off there to the woods feelin' all sick an' skinned in soul, an' it sort o' seemed like the gully understood. An' still, you can't be friends when they's only one of you. It's like tryin' to hold a dust-pan an' sweep the dirt in at the same time. It can't be done—not thorough. An' so settin' out there I used to take a book an' hunt up nice little things an' learn different verses, in the hopes that if that dream should come back, I could have 'em to tell—tell 'em, you know, to the girl that was me. Because it hed got so by then that it seemed to me I was actually more that poet than I was Calliope Marsh. An' so it went along till the day I met him—the man, the poet."

"The man!" I said. "But do you mean the man—the poet—the one that was you?"

Calliope nodded confidently.

"Yes," she said, in her delicate excitement, "I do. Oh, I'll tell you an' you'll see for yourself it must 'a' been him. It was one early afternoon towards the end o' summer, an' I knew him in a minute. I'd gone up to the depot to mail a postal on the Through, an' he got off the train an' went into the Telegraph Office. An' the train pulled out an' left him—it was down to the end o' the platform before he come out. He didn't act, though, as if the train's leavin' him was much of anything to notice. He just went up an' commenced talkin' to the baggageman, Bill. But Bill couldn't understand him—Bill was sort o' crusted over the mind—you had to say things over an' over again to him, an' even then he 'most always took it different from what you meant. So I suppose that was why the man left him an' come towards me.

"When I looked up in his face I stood still on the platform. He was young. An' he had soft hair, an' his face was beautiful, like he see heaven. It wasn't to say he was exactly like my picture," Calliope said slowly. "For instance, I think the man at the depot had a beard, an' the poet in my picture didn't. But it was more his look, you might say. It wasn't like any look I'd ever seen on anybody in Friendship. His hands were kind o' slim an' wanderin', an' he carried a book like it was his only baggage. An' he had a way—well, like what he happened to be doin' wasn't all day to him. Like he was partly there, but mostly somewheres else, where everything was better.

"'Perhaps this lady will know,' he says—an' it wasn't the way most of 'em talks here in Friendship, you understand—'I've been askin' the luggageman there,' he says, an' he was smilin' almost like a laugh at what he thought I was goin' to answer, 'I've been askin' the luggageman there, if he knows of a wood near the station that I shall be likely to find haunted at this hour. I've to wait for the 4.20, an' it's a bad time of day for a haunted wood, I'm afraid. The luggageman didn't seem to know.'

"An' then all at once I knew—I knew. Why, don't you see," Calliope cried, "I had to know! That was just the way we'd talked in my dream—kind of jokin' an' yet

meanin' somethin', too—so's you felt all lifted up an' out o' the ordinary. An' then I knew who he was an' I see how everything was. Why, the girl that was me an' that was lonesome there in Friendship wasn't me, very much. Me bein' Calliope Marsh was the chance part, an' didn't count. But things was rilly the way I'd dreamed o' their bein.' Somehow, I had another self. An' I had dreamed o' bein' that self. An' there he stood, on the Friendship depot platform."

Calliope looked at me wistfully.

"You don't think I sound crazy, do you?" she asked.

And at my answer:—

"Well," she said, brightening, "that was how it was. An' it was like there hadn't been any first time an' like there wouldn't be any end. Like they was things bigger than time—an' lots nicer than life. An' I spoke up like I'd always known him.

"'Why, yes,' I says to him simple, 'you must mean the Depot Woods,' I said. 'They're always kind o' haunted to me. I guess the little folks that come in the en-gine smoke live in there,' I told him, smilin' because I was so glad.

"I remember how su'prised he looked an' how his face lit up, like he was hearin' English in a heathen land.

"'Upon my word,' he says, still only half believin' in me. 'An' do you go there often?' he ask' me. 'An' I daresay the little smoke folk talk to you, now?' he says.

"'I go 'most every day,' I told him, 'but we don't say very much. I guess they talk an' I listen,' I says.

"An' then the funny part about his askin' Bill for a haunted wood come over me.

"'Bill!' I says. 'Did you actually ask Bill that?'

"Oh, an' how we laughed—how we laughed. Just the way the dream had been. It seemed—it seemed such a sort o' special comical," Calliope said, "an' not like a Sodality laugh. 'Seems though I'd always laughed at one set o' things all my

life—my everyday life. An' this was a new recipe for Laugh, flavoured different, an' baked in a quick oven, an' et hot.

"Well, we walked down the road together, like it had always been that way. An' we talked—like you do when you're with them you'd rather be with than anybody else. An' he ask' me, grave as grave, about the little smoke folks.

"'Will They be home, do you think?' he says.

"An' I says: 'Oh, yes. I know They will. They're always home.'

"An' we both felt pleased, like when you're sure.

"We went to walk in the Depot Woods. I remember how much he made me talk—more than I'd ever talked before, excep' in the dream. I know I told him the little stories I'd read about noted people, an' I said over some o' the verses I'd learned an' liked the sound of—I remembered 'em all for him, an' he listened an' heard 'em all just the way I'd said 'em. That was it—he heard it all just the way I said it. An' I mentioned the sun on the leaves an' the way the clouds looked, right out—an' I knew he didn't think I was affected. An' I made up things an' said, too—things that was always comin' in my head an' that I was always wantin' to say. An' he'd laugh almost before I was through—oh, it was like heaven to have him laugh an' not just say, 'What on earth are you talkin', Calliope Marsh?' like I'd heard. An' he kep' sayin', 'I know, I know,' like he knew what I meant better than anything else in the world. Then he read to me out o' the book he had an' he told me—beautiful things. Some of 'em I remember—I've remembered always. Some of 'em I forgot till I come on 'em, now an' then, in books—long afterwards; an' then it was like somebody dead spoke up. I'm always thankful to get hold o' other people's books an' see if mebbe I won't find somethin' else he said. But a good many o' the things I s'pose I clear forgot, an' I won't know 'em again till in the next life. Like I forgot what we said in the dream, till they're both all mixed up an' shinin'.

"We talked till 'most time for the 4.20 train. An' when it got towards four o'clock, I

told him about my dream. It seemed like he ought to know, somehow. An' I told him how I dreamed I was him.

"'You don't look like the one I dreamed I was,' I told him, 'but, oh, you talk the same—an' you pretend, an' you laugh, an' you seem the same. An' your face looks different from folks here in Friendship, just like his, an' it seems somehow like you saw things besides with your eyes,' I told him, 'like the poet in my picture. So I know it's you—it must be you,' I says.

"He looked at me so queer an' sudden an' long.

"'I'm a poet, too,' he said, 'if it comes to that. A very bad one, you know—but a kind of poet.'

"An' then of course I was certain sure.

"When he understood all about it, I remember how he looked at me. An' he says:—

"'Well, an' who knows? Who knows?'

"He sat a long time without sayin' anything. But I wasn't unhappy, even when he seemed so sad. I couldn't be, because it was so much to know what I knew.

"'If I can,' he says to me on the depot platform, 'dead or alive, I'll come back some day to see you. But meanwhile you must forget me. Only the dream—keep the dream,' he says.

"I tried to dream it again," Calliope told me, "but I never could. An' dead or alive, he's never been back, all these years. I don't even know his name—an' I remembered afterwards he hadn't asked me mine. But I guess all that is the chance part, an' it don't really count. Out o' the dream I've been, you might say, caught, tied up an' couldn't get out,—just me, like you know me,—with a big unhappiness, an' like that. But in the dream I dreamed myself true. An' then God let me meet myself, just that once, there in the Depot Woods, to show me it's all right, an' that they's things that's bigger than time an' lots nicer than life."

Calliope sat silent, with her way of sighing and looking by; and it was as if she had suggested to me delicate things, as a rainbow will suggest them.

XX

THE HIDINGS OF POWER

I divined the birches, blurred gray and white against the fog-bound cedars. In the haze the airy trunks, because of their imminence, bore the reality of thought, but the sterner green sank in the distance to the faint avail of speech. It was well to be walking on the Plank Road toward seven o'clock of a June morning, in a mist which might yield fellowship in the same ease with which it breathed on distinctions.

Abel had told how, on that winter way of his among the hills, the sky has fallen in the fog and had surrendered to him a fellowship of dreams. But in Friendship Village, as I had often thought, there are dreams for every one; how should it be otherwise to us faring up and down Daphne Street (where Daphne's feet have been)? And yet that morning on the Plank Road where, if the fancy seized her to walk in beauty, our lady of the laurels might be met at any moment, her power seemed to me to be as frail as wings, and I thought that it would not greatly matter if I were to meet her.

As if my thought of Abel Halsey had brought him, the beat of hoofs won toward me from the village; and presently Major Mary overtook me, and there was Abel, driving with his eyes shut. I hailed him, laughed at him, let him pick me up, and we went on through door after door of the fog, with now a lintel of boughs and now a wall of wild roses.

"Abel," I remember saying abruptly, "dreams are not enough."

"No," he replied, as simply as if we had been talking of it, "dreams are just one of the sources of power ... but doing is enough."

I said weakly—perhaps because it was a morning of chill and fog, when a woman may feel her forlornest, look her plainest, know herself for dust: "But then—what about everybody's heart?"

"Don't you know?" Abel asked, and even after those months in Friendship Village I did not know.

"... use it up making some little corner better—better—better by the width of a hand..." said Abel. "As I could do," he added after a moment, "if I could get my chapel in the hills. Do you know, I've written to Mrs. Proudfit about it at last. I couldn't help it—I couldn't help it!"

We came to the rise of the hill, where, but for the fog, we might have looked back on the village, already long astir. To the left, within its line of field stone and whitewashed rails and wild roses, the cemetery lay, like another way of speech. A little before us the mist hid the tracks, but we heard the whistle of the Fast Mail, coming in from the end of the earth.

"Ah, well, I want some wild roses," said I—since a woman may always take certain refuges from life.

"I'm coming back about noon," Abel told me; "I'll bring you a thousand."

He drew up Major Mary, and we sat silent, watching for the train. And the Something which found in Abel its unfailing channel came companioning us, and caught me up so that I longed unspeakably to be about the Business which Abel and Calliope followed, and followed before all else.

But when I would have said more, I noted on Abel's face some surprise, and then I myself felt it. For the Fast Mail from the East, having as usual come roaring through Friendship station with but an instant's stop, was now slowing at the draw. Through the thick white we perceived it motionless for a breath, and then we heard it beat away again.

I wonder now, remembering, how I can have known with such singing confidence

what was in store for me. It is certain that I did know, even though in the mist I saw no one alight. But as if at a summons I bade Abel let me descend, and somehow I gave him good-by; and I recall that I cried back to him:—

"Abel! You said the sky can fall and give one dreams."

"Yes," he answered. "Dreams to use in one's corner."

But I knew then and I know now that Abel's dreams flowed in his blood, and that when he gave them to his corner of the world he gave from his own veins; and I think that the world is the richer for that.

When he had gone I stood still in the road, waiting. I distinguished a lintel of elms, a wall of wild roses; I heard a brave little bird twittering impatient matins, and the sound of nearing footsteps in the road. And then a voice in the mist said my name.

There in the fog on the Plank Road we met as if there had come a clearness everywhere—we two, between whom lay that year since my coming to Friendship. Only, now that he was with me, I observed that the traitor year had slipped away as if it had never been, and had left us two alone in a place so sightly that at last I recognized my own happiness. And I understood—and this way of understanding leaves one a breathless being—that his happiness was there too.

And yet it was only: "You.... But what an adventure to meet you here!" And from him: "Me. Here. Please, may we go to your house? I haven't had an indication of breakfast." At which we laughed somewhat, with my, "How absurdly like you not to have had breakfast," and his, "How very shabby of you to feel superior because you happen to have had your coffee." So we moved back down the road with the clear little space in the fog following, following....

A kind of passion for detail seized on us both.

He said: "You're wearing brown. I've never seen you wear brown—I'm sure I haven't. Have I?"

"My fur coat was brown," I escaped into the subject, "but then that hardly counts."

"No," he agreed, "fur isn't a colour. Fur is just fur. No, I've never seen you in brown."

"How did they let you off at the draw? How did you know about getting off at the draw?" I demanded.

"You said something of your getting off there—in that one letter, you know...."

"Yes, yes...."

"You said something about getting off there on a night when you left the train with a girl who was coming home to the village—you know the letter?" he broke off, "I think it was that letter that finally gave me courage to come. Because in that I saw in you something new and—understanding. Well, and I remembered about the draw. I always meant to get off there, when I came."

"You always meant ... but then how did you make them stop?"

"I told the man I had to, and then he had to, too. There were four others who got off and went across the tracks, but we are not obliged to consider them."

"From that," I said, "I would think it is you, if I didn't know it couldn't possibly be!"

Then I hurried into some recital about the Topladys, whose big barn and little house were lined faintly out as if something were making them feel hushed; and about Friendship, hidden in the valley as if it were suddenly of lesser import—how strange that these things should be there as they were an hour ago. And so we came to Oldmoxon House and went up the walk in silence save that, at the steps, "How long shall I tell them to boil your eggs?" I asked desperately, to still the quite ridiculous singing of the known world. But then the singing took one voice, a voice whose firmness made it almost hard, save that deep within it something was beating....

"You know," said the voice simply, "if I come in now, I come to stay. You do know?"

"You come to breakfast...." I tried it.

"I come to stay."

"You mean—"

"I come to stay."

I rather hoped to affirm something gracious, and masterful of myself—not to say of him; but suddenly that whole lonely year was back again, most of it in my throat. And though I gave up saying anything at all, I cannot have been unintelligible. Indeed, I know that I was not unintelligible, for when, in a little while, Calliope, who was still with me, opened my front door and emerged briskly to the veranda, she seems to have understood in a minute.

"Well said!" Calliope cried, and made a little swoop down from the threshold and stood before us, one hand in mine and one outstretched for his; "I knew, as soon as I woke up this morning, I felt special. I thought it was my soul, sittin' up in my chest, an' wantin' me to spry round with it some, like it does. But I guess now it was this. Oh, this!" she said. "Oh, I sp'ose I'd rilly ought to hev an introduction before I jump up an' down, hadn't I?"

"No need in the world, Calliope," he told her; "come on. I'll jump, too."

And that was an added joy—that he had read and re-read that one Friendship letter of mine, written on the night of Delia More's return, until it was as if he, too, knew Calliope. But before all things was the wonder of the justice and the grace which had made the letter of that night, when I, too, "took stock," yield such return.

It was Calliope who led the way indoors at last, and he and I who followed like her guests. From the edges of consciousness I finally drew some discernment of the place of coffee and rolls in a beneficent universe, and presently we three sat at his breakfast table. And not until then did Calliope remember her other news.

"Land, land," she said, "I like to forgot. Who do you s'pose I had a telephone from

just before you come? Delia. She'd just got home this morning on the Fast Mail. An' the Proudfits'll be here, noon train."

Delia indeed had come on the same glorified train that Abel and I had seen stop at the draw, only she had alighted at Friendship station and had hurried up to the Proudfits' to make ready for their home-coming. And since those whom we know best never come to Friendship without a welcome, it was instantly incumbent on us all to be what Calliope called "up in arms an' flyin' round."

As soon as we were alone:—

"I've planned noon lunch for 'em," Calliope told me; "I'm goin' to see to the meat—leg o' lamb, sissin' hot, an' a big bowl o' mint. Mis' Holcomb's got to freeze a freezer o' her lemon ice—she gets it smooth as a mud pie. Mis' Toplady, she'll come in on the baked stuff—raised rolls an' a big devil's food. An'—I'd kind o' meant to look to you for the salad, but I s'pose you won't want to bother now...." And when I had hastened to assume the salad, "Well, I am glad," she owned, with a relieved sigh. "The Proudfit salads they can't a soul tell what ingredients is in 'em, chew high though we may. I know you know about them queer organs an' canned sea reptiles they use now in cookin'. I've come to the solemn conclusion I ain't studied physiology an' the animal sciences close enough myself to make a rill up-to-date salad."

Before noon we were all at Proudfit House—to which I had taken care to leave word for Abel to follow me—and we were letting in the sun, making ready the table, filling the vases with garden roses; and in the library Calliope laid a fire "in case they get chilly, travellin' so," she said, but I think rather it was in longing somehow to summon a secret agency to that place where Linda Proudfit's portrait hung. For we had long been agreed that, as soon as she was at home again, Linda's mother must be told all that we knew of Linda. Thus, to Calliope and me, the time held a tragic meaning beneath the exterior of our simple cheer. But the time held many

meanings, as a time will hold them; and the Voice of its new meaning said to me, as we all waited on the Proudfit veranda with its vines and its climbing rose and its canaries:—

"I marvel, I marvel at your bad taste. How can you leave the dear place and the dear people for me?"

I love to recall the bustle of that arriving and how, as the motor came up the drive, Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss and Mis' Amanda ran down on the gravel and waved their aprons; and how Mis' Postmaster Sykes and Mis' Mayor Uppers and Mis' Photographer Sturgis, having heard the machine pass their doors, had issued forth and followed it and arrived at the Proudfits' with:

"I was right in the midst of a basque, cuttin' over an old lining, but I told Liddy Ember: 'You rip on. I've got to run over.' Excuse my looks. Well said! Back!"

And, "Got here, did you? My, my, all tired out, I expect. Well, mebbe you think we won't feel relieved to see the house open again an' folks in it flyin' round. An' you look as natural as the first thunder-storm in the spring o' the year!"

And, "Every day for two weeks," Mis' Sturgis said, "I've said to Jimmy: 'Proudfits back?' 'No, sir,' s'he, 'not back yet.' An' so it went. Could you sleep any on the sleeper?"

Then Calliope and Mis' Toplady and Mis' Holcomb and the three newcomers hurried all but abreast to the kitchen to "see what they could find"; and when Mis' Proudfit and Miss Clementina and Delia More had taken their places at the burdened table, we all sat about the edge of the room—no one would share in the feast, every one having to "get right back"—and asked of the journey, and gave news of Friendship Village in the long absence. I love to remember it all, but I think that I love best to remember their delicate acceptance of what that day had brought to me. Of this no one said a word, nor did they ask me anything, or seem to observe, far less to wonder. But when they passed me, one and another and another squeezed my hand

or patted my arm or gave me their unwonted "dear."

"What gentlefolk they are," my stranger said.

"Noon lunch" was finished, and I had seen Calliope go with Madame Proudfit to the library and close the door, and we were all gathered in the hall, where Miss Clementina had opened a trunk and was showing us some pretty things, when some one else crossed the veranda and appeared in the doorway. And there was Abel, come with my wild roses.

I do not think, however, that it can have occurred to Abel that I was in the room. Nor that any of the others were there, intent on the pretty things of Miss Clementina's trunk. But, his face shining, he went straight to Delia More; and he laid my roses in her arms, looking at her the while with a look which was like a passionate recognition of one not met for many years.

I have said nothing of Delia More as she seemed to me that day of her return, for indeed I do not well know how to tell of her. But as he looked at her, it was all in Abel's eyes. I do not know whether it was that her spirit having been long "packed down in her," as Calliope had said, was at last loosed by the mysterious ministry of distance and the touch of far places, or whether, over there nearer Tempe, she had held converse with Daphne herself, who, for the sake of the Friendship bond between them, had taken for her own all that was wild and strange in the girl's nature. But this I know: that Delia More had come back among us a new creature, simple, gentle, humble as before, and yet somehow quickened, invested with the dignity of personality which, long ago, she had lost. And now she stood looking at Abel as he was looking at her.

"Delia!" he said, and took her hand, and, "I brought you some wild roses to tell you we're glad you're back," said he, disposing of my hedge spoils as coolly as if I were not.

"That's nice of you, Abel," she replied simply, "but it's nicer to think you came."

"Why," Abel said, "you couldn't have kept me away. You couldn't have kept me away, Delia."

He could not have done looking at her. And even after we had closed in before them and had gone on with our talk about the tray of the trunk, I think that we were all conscious, as one is conscious of a light in the room, that to Delia and Abel had come again the immemorial wonder.

When the library door opened and Madame Proudfit and Calliope came out, a little hush fell upon us, even though none but I knew what that interval held for Linda's mother. Her face was tranquil—indeed, I think it was almost as if its ancient fear had forever left it and had given place to the blessed relief of mere sorrow. She stood for a moment—looking at them all, and looking, as if she were thankful for their presence. Then she saw Abel and held out both hands.

"Abel!" she said, "Abel! I had your letter in Lucerne. I meant to talk it over with you—but now I know, I know. You shall have your little chapel in the hills. We will build it together—you and I—for Linda."

But then, because Abel turned joyously and naturally to Delia to share with her the tidings, Madame Proudfit looked at Delia too, and saw her eyes. And,

"You and Delia and I," she added gently.

On which, with the kindliest intent, the happiness of us all overflowed in speech about the common-place, the trivial, the irrelevant, and we all fell talking at once there in the hall, and told one another things which we knew perfectly already, and we listened, nodding, and laughed a great deal at nothing in the world—save that life is good.

We three walked home together in the afternoon sunshine—the man who, through all this time in Friendship, had been dear, and Calliope and I. I thought that Daphne Street had never looked so beautiful. The tulip beds on the lawns had been re-filled for summer, a touch of bonfire smoke hung in the air, Eppleby Holcomb was

mending his picket gate, and over many magic thresholds of the cool walks were lintels of the boughs. Down town Abigail Arnold was laying cream puffs in the home bakery window; at the Helmans' Mis' Doctor Helman, wound in a shawl and a fascinator, was training her matrimony vine; the Liberty sisters had let out their chickens and, posted in a great triangle, were keeping them well within Liberty lawn confines; Doctor June was working in his garden and he waved his hat at us like a boy. ("It's a year ago now they give him his benefit," Calliope remembered; "ice-cream an' strawberries an' cake. An' every soul that come in he treated, one after another. An' when they got hold of him an' told him what that was doin' to the benefit box, he wanted to know whose benefit it was, anyway. An' he kep' on treatin' folks up to the last spoonful o' cream. He said he never had such a good time since he was born. I donno but he showed us how to give a benefit, too.")

We were crossing the lawn to Oldmoxon House when I said to Calliope what it had been decided that day that I should say:—

"Calliope," I asked, "could you be ready in a month or two to leave Friendship for good, and come to us in town, and live with us for always?"

She looked up at one and the other of us, with her little embarrassed laugh.

"You're makin' fun o' me," she said.

But when we had explained that we were wholly serious, she stopped and leaned against one of the great trees before the house; and it was at Oldmoxon House rather than at us that she looked as she answered:—

"I couldn't," she said quickly, and with a manner of breathlessness, "I couldn't. You know how I've wanted to leave Friendship, too, you know that. An' I want to yet, as far as wantin' goes. But wantin' to mustn't be enough to make you do things."

She stood, her head held up as if she were singing, as Liddy Ember had said of her, her arms tightly folded, her cheeks flushing with her fear that we would not understand.

"Oh," she said, "you know—you know how I've always wanted nice things. Wanted 'em so it hurt. Not just from likin' 'em, either, but because some way I thought I could be more, do more, live up to my biggest best if I could only get where things was kind of educated an'—gentle. But every time I tried to go, somethin' come up—like it will, to shove you hard down into the place you was. Then I thought—you know 'bout that, I guess—I thought I was goin' to live here in Oldmoxon House, an' hev a life like other women hev. An' when that wasn't to be, I thought mebbe it was because God see I wasn't fit for it, an' I set to work on myself to make me as good as I knew—an' I worked an' worked, like life was nothin' but me, an' I was nothin' but a cake, to get a good bake on an' die without bein' too much dough to me. An' then all to once I see that couldn't be the only thing He meant. It didn't seem like He could 'a' made me sole in order to save me from hell. An' I begun to see He must 'a' made me to help in some great, big hid plan or other of His. An' quick as I knew that an' begun wantin' to help, He begun showin' me when to. That's how I mean what I said about the Bell. Times like Elspie, or 'Leven, or like that, I can hear it just as plain as plain—the Bell, callin' me to help Him."

She looked hard at us, and, "I donno if you know what I'm talkin' about——" she doubted; but, at our answer,

"Well," she added, "they's somethin' else. It's somethin' almost like what you've got—you two—an' like what Delia an' Abel have got. Lately, I don't need to hear the Bell any more. I know 'bout it without. It's almost like I am the Bell. Don't you see, it's come to be my power, just like love will be your power, if you rilly understand. An' here—here I know how. I've grown to Friendship, an' here I know what's what. An' if I went away now, where things is gentle an' like in books, I wouldn't know how to be any rill use. I can be the Bell here—here I can have my power. In town I expect I couldn't be anything but just cake again—bakin' myself rill good, or even gettin' frosted; but mebbe not helpin'. An' I couldn't risk that—I couldn't risk it. It looks to me like helpin' is what I'm for."

I think, as she said, Calliope was become the Bell; and at that moment she rang to us the call of sovereign clearness. This was the life that she and Abel followed, and followed before all else, and there lay the hiding of their power. "Just like love will be your power," she had said.

When she had gone before us into the house—that was to have been her house—we two stood looking along the sunny Plank Road toward Daphne Street. And in the light lifting of the bonfire smoke it seemed to me that there moved a spirit—not Daphne, but another; one who walks less in beauty than in service; not our lady of the laurels, but our lady of the thorns.

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