WHITE CAT

GELETT BURGESS

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Joy Fielding

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THE WHITE CAT

By

GELETT BURGESS

Author of Vivette
A Little Sister of Destiny
etc.

With Illustrations by

WILL GREFÉ

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I

I came to myself with a disturbing sense that something was wrong with me. My discomfort, increasing steadily, resolved itself into two distinct factors—a pain in my side at every breath and a throbbing ache in the top of my head. I realized that I was in bed, and the first strangeness of it struck me. I could not account for it. The wild, spicy odor of flowers came to me, adding to my perplexity. Then I opened my eyes.

The place was so dimly lighted that for some seconds my sluggish wits were unable to interpret the blotches of shadow and the vague glimmering spots. These, however, gradually resolved themselves into comprehensible forms. I perceived that I was in a strange room, large and airy; for even in

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the obscurity I got a feeling of free, clean space, and of that chaste emptiness which is apt to distinguish the guest-chamber of a well-kept house. I heard, now, the steady, deliberate ticking of a clock a little way off, and somewhere below was a small grinding sound, so low as to be almost a mere vibration, like a coffee-mill in operation. Near by, a door closed and latched softly.

I moved and attempted to sit up, but a sharp stab in my side warned me that my hurt was perhaps more serious than I had thought. There was a lump on my head, too, which probably accounted for my lapse of consciousness.

Setting my memory painfully to work, groping back through the darkness of my mind for something to explain the mystery, much as one might descend a dark, unlighted stairway, I came upon the last fact that had been recorded by my brain. I had been putting on speed—the road through the woods was straight, level and deserted—hoping to get up to town early in the afternoon. The

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steering-gear of my motor-car had given way. I had felt the wheels suddenly veer, then, before I put on my brake, the front of the car went down and the rear was thrown up and over with the momentum, sending me flying through the air.

I wondered, lazily, how much the machine had suffered. Then, I must have dropped off to sleep again, for when I next opened my eyes there was a flickering ray of light in the room. This time I was keenly alert mentally, desirous of some explanation of my situation. Where was I, and who had cared for me?

The light grew brighter, still wavering, slanting across the wall where it rocked and shifted, casting long, distorted shadows that danced up and down. Some one was evidently coming up-stairs with a light. The door was hidden by a projecting angle of the wall, however, and so for a few moments I saw nobody.

In those seconds the room was illuminated gradually more and more, showing a white-

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painted wainscot with a dull green wall above, where a few Japanese prints hung. Opposite my bed was a window with small, old-fashioned panes; there was another beside me. The rays glinted on the polished sides of several pieces of old mahogany furniture and flared yellow on brass candlesticks and on the gilded frame of an eagle mirror. Finally the glare stopped its undulating, the shadows grew steadier on the wall, and, as I gazed eagerly for a first glimpse of my visitor, a young woman, bearing a silver candlestick, came into the room.

She looked immediately over to where I lay, and then, catching my surprised stare, her expression changed wonderfully from a rather pathetic abstraction to an animated interest. With something not quite a smile on her face she walked nearer my bed, and stood for a moment without speaking, still looking at me. Her attitude hinted that she saw in me something—as if, for instance, it were a sort of picturesqueness which was unexpected enough to appeal to her imagina-

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tion. She rested for a moment, poised and calm, but intensely attentive, fascinated.

And I, at the same time, was instantly conscious of so curious a sentiment that I must stop to attempt to describe it.

I conceived myself to be a connoisseur in women, and I estimated her at first sight as one unique, even extraordinary. But though to my mind she was indubitably beautiful, it was not her beauty that for the moment thrilled me. It was chiefly her "newness," the very novelty of her visitation. I felt a sudden, compelling desire to prolong the mystery of her presence rather than to have it explained. I tried, mentally, to delay her first word, to hold her back from any definite explanation till my eyes had had their fill of her—till they had, so to speak, solved her equation—till my wonder had spent itself in the vision, exhausting all its possibilities of delight. Her charm was, in its unexpectedness, so alluring, that she was like a pleasant dream which one lingers with and detains.

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She was small, but her head was so exquisitely proportioned to her body that one did not notice her size. I have called her young, though she was twenty-seven, for her graceful figure and pose were still girlishly maintained. The shape of her small head was defined by a quaint coiffure, the dark, fine hair being banded in an encircling plait up past her tiny ears and over, like a coronal, showing a sweeping high-bred curve over her low brow. All this gave her a tender, virginal aspect; but her soft, deep brown eyes were so saddened by warm shadows below the lids, her mouth was so tremulously sensitive, with its slightly parted lips, and the little lines that women fear had begun to write her history so suggestively upon her face, that, as I gazed at her, I saw a woman who had lived and suffered, a woman as intense as she was delicate in all her moods.

She was clad in a bewilderingly feminine peignoir of lace and embroidery, open at the neck, and covered with another long, straightly hanging garment of shimmering

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pale-green silk, richly decorated with odd patterns. This gave her to my wondering eyes quite the appearance of a medieval princess, or the heroine of some old fairy tale. The impression was intensified by the long chain she wore, set with fire opals which flashed in the candle-light. From it, below her waist, there hung a golden star.

And, strangest of all, most provocative to my fancy, she also appeared, with extraordinary sympathy, almost with prescience, to feel something of my wonder as she paused and stood silent, retarding her greeting, in answer to my unspoken thought. While our eyes held each other in that marvelous communion, she did not smile; it was rather from her quivering mouth that I got the idea that she, too, was touched by the spell, and was keenly alive to the potentiality of the situation. She seemed to hold her breath lest the wonder should pass too soon.

That moment was as sublimely unreal as anything I have ever known, and, within its unmeasurable limits, as potent. It was tense,

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instinct with fine, secret emotions too faint for analysis. Messages came and went, electric. It was, in short, the psychological moment that comes but once to any friendship, and, coming, is usually hurried past without appreciation of its mysterious charm. It was that most suggestive of preludes, an instinctive, conscious pause upon the magic threshold of Romance. That she felt its quality also overpowered me. The minute passed like a falling star, and in its glory we seemed to travel miles together.

Then, with a visible effort, she spoke.

Her voice was light and clear, so expressively modulated that I have, despite myself, to compare it only to fairy footsteps passing over flower-tops. Its tones poised and hovered as if on the wing, though they were as sure as the melody of an old song. It was, above all else, graceful, and usually it held a trace of mental eagerness, but its characteristic quality came more from delicate nuances of feeling than from any vibrant intensity. It had the fluidity of running water.

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With her first word she smiled, and some of the melancholy escaped from her eyes.

"Oh, you are better now! I'm *so* glad!"

The silver thread of magic that had bound us was broken, and the episode became real and humorous on the instant. I could not help smiling in my turn, for assuredly, from my point of view, I was, physically, decidedly the worse. I took it from her, by her remark, that I had been ill.

"Yes," I replied, "I suppose I must be better, since you say so, but I seem to be quite bad enough. How long have I been here?"

"Twenty-four hours. You have been a little delirious, you know. I was getting quite anxious about you, though the doctor said there was no danger."

She came nearer, and put her small beautiful hand upon my cheek. I noticed that she wore no rings. The touch of her fingers was soft and cool.

"I'm glad your fever has gone," she said. "Have you much pain?"

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I felt sore all over, and there was trouble with my side when I moved; my head seemed to be splitting. But I was so much more interested in her, and how I came to be there, that I dismissed my symptoms with a shrug, and asked what had happened.

"You were thrown from your automobile," she said, "and you were pretty badly shaken up. There was a rib broken, and a slight concussion of the brain, I believe, but nothing serious. You'll have to stay here several days, at least, and keep quiet. Doctor Copin had to go back to town, and I must notify him that you are all right now. You mustn't fret about it, for you are perfectly welcome to stay here and it won't trouble us in the least. Only I'm afraid you'll be terribly bored. It's quiet here, and I'll be rather dull company."

"I'm not worrying, I assure you," I said. "I'm in no hurry to get well."

She smiled again, faintly but with a quick appreciation, and took a seat in an arm-chair which stood beside my bed. I caught a

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glimpse of a green silk stocking and an exquisitely small foot in a fantastically shaped slipper. She went on:

"I have been a good deal troubled because we have, of course, no idea who you are. I was afraid that some of your friends might be alarmed about you. So, if there is any one we can notify, or send for, give me the address and the message, and I'll send it over to the telegraph office at the Harbor, or I can telephone for you, if there's any one in town. Doctor Copin could call and explain your condition, if you prefer."

As she leaned her face on her slender hand and looked at me, she added: "Your motor has been taken care of, so you needn't worry about that. Uncle Jerdon hauled it into the stable, and it can stay there until you have a chance to have it repaired."

"You were good to take me in and to get a doctor," I said, watching the tiny vertical lines come and go in her forehead.

"Oh, Doctor Copin happened to be with me when you were brought in by Uncle

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Jerdon. I really don't know how you managed to escape with your life."

"I didn't deserve to escape. I was running considerably over the speed limit, I imagine. I wanted to get back to town early." How much rather would I have discussed the queer little corners of her lips that changed so distractingly, and the transparent shadow under her cheek-bone that spiritualized her whole expression now and again!

"Oh, I must take your message!" she exclaimed, a little embarrassed by the pause that had fallen.

She rose and went over to an antique secretary, bringing back a pad of paper and a pencil. Reseating herself, she waited for me to dictate. I thought a while and then gave her a short report of my condition to be sent to my partner. Having written this down she went out of the room quietly, leaving the candle with me. No sooner had she left than my pain returned. For the time I had forgotten all about it.

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In spite of this, the thought of her filled me with a restful peace. I didn't in the least want to know who she was, so long as I might see her, and hear her talk to me in that smooth, melodious, eager voice, whose sound had established her convincingly as a lady of rare promise. The prospect of having to spend several days in her society, or at least near her, was as pleasant a thought as I could well imagine. The fruit of our moment was a mystery, rich and fragrant, which I wished only not to destroy. I found myself trying, in her absence, to recall each feature of her face, her poses, and her hands so keenly alive and full of graceful gesture. That I did not wonder who she was—what was her name, her situation, her history—came, perhaps, from the state of bodily weakness in which my accident had left me, but it seemed to me then that it was not merely the passivity of my physical state; it was an epicurean joy I took in tasting my impressions drop by drop.

Meanwhile, as I thought it all over, my eyes wandered over that part of the room

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visible in the candle-light, from the four-posted bed in which I lay, and almost unconsciously I noted the many evidences of taste and wealth. The furniture was all of antique style, undoubtedly genuine specimens of the best designs of the later colonial period.

The Japanese prints were the only pictures visible that I could see. They seemed like Utamaro's and Hiroshige's mostly, though near by were a couple of Yoshitora's and Toyokuni's brilliant actresses, veritable riots of color against the dull green of the wall. The floor was of oak parquetry, covered with Persian rugs of what I knew to be rare weaves. Altogether, the room had, in its severe formal way, the dignity of a museum.

She came back, after about ten minutes, with a tray of toast and tea, a jar of Bar-le-duc, and the most appetizing of lamb chops.

"Do you feel hungry?" she asked, setting the tray down upon a stand at the head of the bed.

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As I assented most heartily, she leaned over and propped the pillows up behind my back, and then set the silver salver before me on the spread. Drawing up her chair, she sat down near enough to pour the tea and hand me what else I required. As she did so I noted the delicate way she held everything she touched—her fingers slightly parted naturally, curling like an acanthus leaf.

"You say that I have been out of my head?" I began.

"Yes, at intervals, since yesterday afternoon."

"I dimly remember it, now. Yes, it was curious. Somehow, though, it seems to me that there were two women here, though never at the same time, I think—but no doubt I got it all mixed up."

She looked down quickly, as if confused, but she replied, "Oh, it must have been Leah, —the other one. She's my maid; or, perhaps, rather more my companion. You must see her. I think she's wonderful. I wonder if *you* will!" She made the last remark

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under her breath, as if she spoke to herself rather than to me.

She went to the door and called, "Leah!" So few persons can raise their voices prettily, that I was delighted to hear it sound as musical as when she spoke to me. As she returned, the light shone on her soft-flowing, silken gown, making it look like frosted silver. In a few moments Leah entered the room, bearing a lighted lamp.

I was surprised, I confess, after what my hostess had said, perhaps as a test of my sensibility, to see that the maid was a negress, but, after giving her my first glance, I was still more surprised to see that she was of a kind one seldom sees, the best type, in fact, of Northern negro. As she approached us she had the bearing of a woman of great refinement and a face which, though uncompromisingly dark, showed an extraordinary mental if not moral caste. Her skin was a warm brown, something of the color of a Samoan, though more reddish than mulatto in tinge. This, I found afterward, was the

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result of a remote crossing with American Indian blood; it was just enough to enrich the color, and to keep down some of the negroid fullness of the lips and modify the crispness of her curling hair. Leah might, indeed, be considered beautiful; what could not, at least, be denied, was the impression of character which was stamped upon her. It was patent in her face, her carriage and her voice. I watched her in admiration. There was a neatness and an immaculate cleanness about her, and I could easily understand how my hostess might regard her as a friend.

Leah's affection for her mistress was evident by the sympathetic manner in which she listened, and by the softness of her look when her eyes fell on my hostess. There was in that look more than the traditional fondness of a negro "mammy" for her charge. I felt immediately one of those quick reactions one sometimes has with servants, or with other persons whom social customs have relegated to a conventionally

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inferior position. It was a case of spiritual *noblesse oblige.* Seeing her so fine, so sensitive, so tactful, I was myself put unconsciously upon my best behavior. I could not forget this in any look or any word I gave her. I was constantly watching myself lest I, a guest, a man of a dominant race, should, in consideration and in delicacy, fall behind this servant, this negress. It was a curious delicacy she seemed to enforce.

I can give this effect of Leah upon me, but it is not so easy to describe the cause. She effaced herself, she kept her place rarely. But with all this, she radiated—she had a potent personality. She put down the lamp, she straightened the covers of my bed, answered a few questions, speaking in a rich contralto voice, and went out. That was all. But in those few moments she had impressed me.

It was, no doubt, because of my enjoyment in watching, silently, what went on, that gave my companion the idea that I was exhausted. She apparently inferred that I wished to be left alone, and, rising, she took the tray from

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my lap and set it down while she readjusted my pillows. Then, removing a little silver Nuremberg bell, she took up the tray again, and rose to leave me.

"I'll leave the bell here at the head of your bed, Mr. Castle," she said (she had learned my name, of course, when she took my message), "and Leah will be glad to do anything for you that you wish."

As she turned, she looked back, smiling.

"Oh, I haven't told you my own name, yet, have I? I'm Miss Fielding—Joy Fielding. There's nobody here but Leah and me, except Uncle Jerdon, our man-of-all-work, and King, the Chinaman. Midmeadows is a lonely place, though it's lovely in the summer. Well, I hope you'll be able to sleep well, and be much better in the morning. I'll hope to see you then. Good night." She left me after placing the lamp just out of sight.

Later, Leah entered, bringing me some books to read, in case I should be wakeful. I dipped into them all immediately, seeking for further evidence of Miss Fielding's taste.

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One was of poems, one of essays, one of short stories, and one a novel.

The house was silent. I heard nothing until quite late, when the two women came up-stairs to retire. By their voices and footsteps, I made out that Leah slept in the room next to mine, and Miss Fielding across the hall, farther off. There was some soft conversation, Leah's voice deep and rich, Miss Fielding's rising several notes above, always with that fluttering, delicate quality which I had noticed. Then the doors closed, and I heard nothing more except, somewhere below, a heavy rhythmic snoring which I assumed came from Uncle Jerdon's room.

There came to me now one of those weary, irksome vigils of the sick, when the darkness and the pain seem to coöperate to stretch out the hours to infinite lengths. I tried one position and another, I lighted the candle and put it out again, but my discomfort and my sleeplessness persisted. I could think of nothing else but Joy Fielding, Joy Fielding, Joy Fielding! I think that a little of my de-

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lirium returned, also; but all through my torment I kept repeating to myself that I did not want to know who she was. I refused to speculate upon that, except in ways that were romantic and fantastic. What matter-of-fact, commonplace explanation of her life there might be, I wanted to hold off as long as possible.

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II

I was awakened early by the sunshine which came pouring across my bed from the window opposite, lighting up the white wainscoting and showing the room now, clean and brightly distinct to the least detail of the crisp Japanese prints upon the wall.

One sash and the window-shade had been left up, and I could see the slope of a hill which rose behind the house, seeming to shut the place in. The other window was filled with the waving boughs of an apple-tree. The day was fine and balmy; the fresh air of the morning swept deliciously over my bed. It was maddening to have to lie there helpless.

Before long I heard doors opening and closing below, and the sounds of preparations for breakfast—the rattling of a stove, a pump that squeaked whimsically like a bray-

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ing donkey, the clatter of pots and pans, and a Chinaman's voice singing in a queer falsetto. With the odors of flowers and damp earth the smell of coffee came up to me, mingled, too, with a whiff from the stable. Then the clock, whose hourly chimes had measured for me the slow march of the night, struck seven with a peal of golden notes.

I heard footsteps come up-stairs to the hall outside my half opened door. There was a soft tapping across the way, and Leah's voice asked quietly:

"What would you like for breakfast, Miss Joy?"

I could just make out the reply in Miss Fielding's blithe tones:

"Oh, just a couple of butterflies' wings, Leah, and a drop of rose-dew, please."

How prettily it sounded! From another it might have seemed silly to me, but not from her. I was amused at her fancy. Miss Fielding, then, was a poet. It was all so in key with the freshness of the morning and the gay sweet sunshine!

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I was more comfortable now, and more sane. So, as I lay awaiting her, I wondered how such a woman, so instinct with refinement and with the air of having had considerable social experience, was to be found in so far-away a place. I knew of no residences in this vicinity except an occasional farmhouse; it was remote even from any village. The sight of her as she appeared last night in her elegant negligée came back to me, like the scene of a play. I longed to see her again, to discover if, perhaps, I had not exaggerated it all, or even, perhaps, had dreamed of one so exquisitely gracious.

Leah, also, was a part of the strangeness. She had none of the disturbing beauty of the quadroon—her beauty was without *diablerie*, it was far from showing any sensuality. It was even spiritual in type. Her face, as I brought it up, was more than intelligent, it was lighted by an inward vision. The more I thought of her, the more I wondered if I had not been tricked by my impressionability, by the strangeness of my adventure, by the gla-

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mour of the night awakening. To put it to the test, I took advantage of Miss Fielding's suggestion and rang the bell.

Leah appeared in a few moments, and came a little shyly into the room. She wore a clean, fresh, crisp gown of blue, like a hospital nurse's uniform, and was as trim and dignified. No, I had not been mistaken. The light of day showed her still more remarkable than I had remembered. Her regular features, her smooth, coffee-colored skin, her well-kept shapely hands, all testified to an extraordinary breeding.

"Are you ready for your breakfast, sir?" she asked. Her voice was like honey as she inquired how I had passed the night, and apologized for Uncle Jerdon's snoring.

"I'll bring your water first," she suggested, and retired noiselessly, to return in a moment with a bowl, some towels and toilet articles.

She seemed a little embarrassed by the situation, but assisted me in sitting up. Then, finding that I could do for myself well

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enough, she went down-stairs, and by the time I had finished my washing, she was back with the tray.

"Miss Joy will be in to see you in a little while, sir," she said as she made me comfortable with dexterous adjustments of my pillows.

But for her "sir," she had in no way acted as a servant, though, on the other hand, she had assumed no attitude of equality. I could not help admiring the fine neutrality she maintained without committing herself to either rôle. All my first impressions of her were intensified by this demeanor, and I awaited the opportunity of assuring her by my own manner of my lack of prejudice on account of her color. Indeed, it was not long before I was almost as unconscious of it, so far as any social distinction was concerned, as a child might have been.

Miss Fielding came in a little later, dewy and shining, dressed all in white—an embroidered linen blouse and a short skirt of serge, which made her seem even younger

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than I had remembered. The sight of her expressive, thoughtful, eager face, and the music in her sympathetic voice gave my room quite another aspect. It became a stage again where last night's drama would go on. How long I had waited for her, and now she was come! Only an invalid, perhaps, can understand the difference in atmosphere in that first quick sight of an expected delightful presence to one who has waited for the weary hours to go by and bring the wished-for vision.

She made a few kind inquiries as to my condition, moving meanwhile about the room, disposing of the fresh roses she had brought, lowering the window-sashes and raising the shades, rapid and graceful as a bird on the wing. She was all modern, now; the medieval princess had given place to something more complex, and as much more interesting. Every word, every inflection of her voice, every gesture of her hand, every expression of her mobile face showed subtlety of thought and sentiment; she was obviously a creature

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of fine distinctions, of nuances of feeling, though at present her talk was as simple and joyous as a child's. That simplicity of hers, however, was the simplicity of a Greek temple, made up of subtle ratios and proportions, of imperceptible curves and esoteric laws.

She drew up a chair, at last, and sat down beside me. We looked at each other frankly, and smiled, aware of a common thought, the desire to prolong the situation as far as we might. This quickness of her imagination was a delight. But the game was becoming too humorous, now, in broad daylight, for us to keep it up. Our romance was in danger.

"I'm bursting with the obvious," I remarked.

She shook her finger at me with spirit. "If you dare!"

"Oh, I'll not be the first. Man though I am, I can restrain my curiosity."

How quickly her face changed! An almost infantile look came into it, as she said:

"There are so many more curious things than curiosity, if you know what I mean.

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Curiosity is such a destructive process, don't you think?"

"And this is creative? The not satisfying it, I mean."

"Yes, wonder is—and mystery. It ramifies so. It splits the ray." She made a queer, mystical gesture, all her own.

"Oh, it quite blossoms!" I said. "I breathe all sorts of perfumes never smelt."

Her eager look came back, and she smiled joyously. "How quick you are! I wish we could keep it up a while! I should have liked to marry Bluebeard! What a splendid dowry he gave! Oh, I would never have opened the door! There was so much more outside than in, wasn't there? But now the rôle is yours; you must be Bluebeard's wife—or Robinson Crusoe. Oh, you must stay on the island—this island with me, and not try to get off. There are a few little places we can explore without danger—will you be satisfied with them?"

Somehow I got the spirit of it, as at hearing some words of a strange language elo-

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quently spoken. She was warning me off—but from what? I would find out soon enough, should the meaning need to be made more definite. It was like a game of jack-straws; if I did not play gingerly I should bring down the commonplace upon us. My situation was delicate—it almost seemed that I had arrived, in some way, inopportunely.

But she had gone on. "Did you read my books?" she asked, taking up one of them.

"I read that one—the poems. I got quite lost in them."

"Which ones?" She looked up from the book eagerly.

"*The Journey,* and,—" I hesitated, "—*The Riders.*" I was watching her face earnestly.

"Oh, how right you are!" She was perfectly simple about it. There was no conceit in her. "It means, doesn't it, that we already have a language? But you must read the essays, too. Then maybe we'll have a philosophy."

"I'll explore them with pleasure." I tried

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to keep the appeal out of my voice. "I have such a lot of things to do before I go."

She got this quite as I intended. "Well, we'll be perfectly natural and let come what may, as it seems to be all decided for us. We won't force the game. But I'm afraid you'll never be contented. You'll leave the island first, I'm quite sure."

I protested; she shook her head slowly. I knew she was thinking very hard of something. Her smile was wistful, her eyes, always fixed on mine, were almost somber in their expression.

"Would you dare promise?"

I knew now there was something behind all this; some fear of my presence.

"Shall I?" I fenced, more to draw her on than from any doubt of her meaning or reluctance to agree with her wish.

"It's base of me—it's foolish, too, for it can really do no good. But, you see, I don't quite know you, do I?"

"And don't quite want to?" I was unkind enough to say, but only with the same

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motive as before. I wanted to get at the bottom of it—find out what it was she dreaded, and dared not acknowledge that she did.

She was a little hurt and said that it wasn't fair to say so, that I wasn't playing the game. I was properly contrite, and, for the moment, gave up the duel.

"Let it be a promise, then," I said.

At this, I thought she looked relieved; and that she should be so at my bare word touched me. It did cross my mind that, perceiving my adaptability to this sort of affair, she might perhaps have taken an adventitious means of heightening the romance of the situation with such innuendo; but she seemed to me to be altogether too direct for that, and too sapient, as well.

"Thank you. I may hold you to that promise. Does that seem ungracious?"

There it was. There was most definitely something which she didn't wish me to know, and which my advent jeoparded. I was truly sorry for her now, and a little embarrassed at my position. Meanwhile her eyes were

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steadily questioning mine, as if to make sure that I was to be trusted. I took up her last remark to relieve the tensity of her mood.

"You couldn't be ungracious, I'm sure. I should as soon suspect Leah!"

She laughed more freely. "Oh, I'm so glad you appreciate her! That says more for you than all the rest."

"The rest?" I insisted, quite ready for a compliment.

She gave it to me with her head a little on one side, and her right eyebrow, the irregular one, whimsically upraised.

"Yes. Your keeping it up so well, you know."

"Oh, I'll keep it up! It's the chief charm of being here, flat on my back, in a strange place. I'm sure it will be most amusing."

"I'm not so sure. I'm full of moods and whims—you're going to be terribly disappointed in me sometimes—though that sounds like vanity—and I may take advantage of your complaisance, of your promise, that is. I hope you won't regret it."

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So it rested, my promise not to be too inquisitive (for I took its meaning to be that), given and accepted. It quite whetted my appetite, you may be sure. If all this talk seems fine-spun, it is my fault in the telling of it, for in the give-and-take we perfectly understood each other. I can not, of course, give her delicate inflections, but these, with her looks and gestures, said as much as her words.

But if this equivocal conversation was vague and shadowy, she could pass into the sunshine as deftly. She seemed to do so now, as she rose and went to the open window and whistled. A chorus of barks answered her. She turned to me.

"I must go down to my dogs," she said. "I wish you could see them—that is, if you like collies. I have five, all thoroughbreds—they're beauties! You'll have to get acquainted with them as soon as you're able to go down-stairs."

She leaned a little out of the window and

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called, "Hi! Nokomis!" drawing out the vowels. A deep bark responded.

"Hiawatha!" she called next, and she was answered by a sharp, frenzied yelping. "Minnehaha!" followed—she almost sang the name, which was replied to like the others. Then Chevalier and John O'Groat greeted her in turn.

"I'm going to take them for their morning run," she said, as she left me. "I'll examine you on the essays when I come back."

She went down, and soon after I heard her talking, evidently to Uncle Jerdon and to King. Then the barking rose ecstatically, receded in the distance, and finally was lost. I took up the essays and read for a while. My head was much better, and my soreness was slowly disappearing, but the constrained positions I had to hold to keep my rib from paining me made me too weary and impatient to put my mind on my book. I could hardly wait for Miss Fielding to return, and lay inert, watching the flies drift lazily through

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the sunshine that filled the room, hoping that Leah, at least, might come in to break my ennui. I welcomed even the hoarse, squeaky cry of King's pump, the occasional crowing of a rooster, the twittering of birds in the apple-tree, and the many little homely sounds of country life. The fragrant perfume of the roses in the room was a blessed reminder of Miss Fielding's kindness.

In a half-hour, I heard the dogs approaching, and she came into the room again, hatless, bringing a new breath of June with her. Her hair was blown to a silky veil through which her eyes shone and her rosy cheeks glowed as she smiled at me over the footboard of my bed. Throwing off her little white bolero, a saucy thing with black velvet collar and cuffs, she went to the mirror and gathered up the loose strands of hair, tucking them in, here and there, with deft touches of her fingers, and adjusting them with dark tortoise-shell pins, until her little head, coiffed high, was as smooth as a cat's.

She came up to the bedside and was quick

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to notice by my nervous movements that I was suffering. Sitting down she began to tell gaily of her walk over the hill, and, as she spoke, my aching was calmed as if she had laid a finger on the electric switch that controlled it. Then she suggested reading to me, and took up the volume of poems we had discussed.

Her voice was not quite intense enough for strong emotion; it had not the momentum, so to speak, to carry the lines along with the swing and rhythm necessary. It was too light for that, but it more than made up for it by its sympathetic tenderness and the delicacy of its inflection. Her tones lulled me, and I fell asleep.

In the afternoon she brought her mending, and we talked for a couple of hours or so, always keeping, as she expressed it, "on the island." What personalities we discussed, that is, had no reference to her history or her plans. She warned me off very cleverly several times when the talk approached her circumstances or even her moods and tastes.

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When she confessed that she played a little on the piano and violin, I positively insisted upon my rights as an invalid to be amused. She rolled up her work and went to get her violin without excuses or apologies.

I waited with considerable anxiety to hear what and how she would play, not committing myself as to my own choice of composers. She began in her own room, and through the opened doors I heard the strains of the *Prize Song* played with great verve and sentiment. I was delighted. She came, still playing, into my chamber, her sleeves rolled up (she said she could not play else), and accepted my compliments graciously and simply. Then, walking up and down, absorbed, she gave me fragments of César Franck's sonata for the violin and piano. To watch her, supple, virile, rapt, to note her clever, accomplished technique, her passionate, free-armed command of the bow—I have seldom seen such a splendid attack or so sure and true a vibrato—was a joy beautifully associated with the clarity and subtle craftsmanship of the mastèr.

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So she ran on, alternating her renditions with scraps of talk that showed a keen musical sense and an appreciation of the radical, ultra-modern movement of the time. Next she burst into a vibrant, dramatic Polish folk-song that excited me like a fire. And finally, as a *tour de force*, her eyes dancing as she watched me over her shoulder with some new audacious devil in her smile, she enchanted me with a vivid piece most astonishingly enlivened with flights of technique—trills, brilliant chord passages, and runs with the upward and downward "staccato bow." Then she threw down her fiddle and came up to me, laughing.

That evening she had another delight for me, coming to my bedside and reading Villon and Verlaine in the original, translating the old French for me when I was perplexed by the *argot*. And for the picture, I need only add that Leah was of the circle, and made her own comments!

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III

There was, next morning, a little dialogue much like that which I had overheard the day before, except that this time it was "stewed rose-leaves with a small pot of sunshine," which Miss Fielding was fanciful enough to demand. I wondered what, after such a pleasantry, she did have; for I took it to be some joke between her and Leah, who, no doubt, translated the metaphor into something more substantial.

As I ate breakfast, I could hear Miss Fielding singing in her room. She came in before I had finished my egg and coffee, bringing an armful of new magazines. This time she was dressed in pongee and wore a short string of graduated white coral beads which was mimicked, when she smiled, by her little teeth.

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"I've found out about you—quite by accident, though, Mr. Castle, really," she said gaily; and, opening one of the magazines, she tapped with her hand the picture of a country house my firm had just rather successfully completed. "So you're an architect! And I'm the first to get off the island, after all!"

"It doesn't matter, I suppose, so long as I stay on?" I asked.

"Oh, this doesn't by any means absolve you of your promise," she answered, examining the illustration carefully, still standing at the foot of the bed.

"You aren't really very much wiser, are you? There are architects *and* architects, you know."

"Yes," she said, apparently thinking of something else. "Quite as there are women and women," she added, turning over the pages idly.

"There's only one of *your* sort!" I exclaimed.

A queer smile passed and was repressed

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upon her lips, molding them into new curves.

"Yes, only one of *me*."

"I don't exactly mean that, either," I went on. "The fact is, rather, that there *is* more than one of me. There's the architect and the man in me—and how many more! One is always astonishing the others. Aren't there, after all, several of you, Miss Fielding?"

She gave me a frightened glance, then tossed the magazine on the bed. It wasn't petulance; she seemed to be disturbed at the subject.

"Oh, I'm only a White Cat!" she said cryptically.

She seemed anything but that, to me.

"I'll tell you about it sometime—perhaps," she added. "But not now."

She stood with her hands behind her back, raising herself on her toes, and changed the subject. "I'm awfully anxious to show you this house, now that I know you're an architect. It's one of the oldest hereabout, and it was a wreck when I bought it. I've had it all

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done over inside, and I shall expect you to compliment me on my taste, for it's mainly my own ideas."

"What I've seen of it is charming—but a bit impersonal, perhaps."

"Oh, this is only the guest-chamber. One doesn't inflict one's ideas on the transient visitor. Of course this is a bloodless, sexless place. You'll find personality enough in my room, I fancy. I hope you'll be able to get down-stairs by day after to-morrow, and have a chance to look about at the place. I'm sure you'll love Midmeadows. I'm expecting the doctor down here this afternoon, and he'll probably be able to tell you how long you'll have to stay. I do hope you won't get well too fast, Mr. Castle."

"Trust me for that," I said. "I give you fair notice, I shall probably do some malingering. But I shall be glad to see the doctor, if only to make sure that I can impose on him."

My heart sank, nevertheless, at the thought of his interruption of our idyl. I felt an

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illogical right to her by discovery, a certain franchise in her good graces that Fate herself had given me. The possible weakening of our alliance, however, was only the negative side of my annoyance. The positive aspect was that Doctor Copin seemed to be an old acquaintance, even a friend; for Miss Fielding had mentioned that she was going to walk over to the Harbor to meet him. It was possible, even—and the idea was poison—that she was in love with him. Well, I must needs wait and see him before I decided as to that chance.

I asked her to call her dogs again, and, seeing that it might amuse me, she offered to bring Nokomis, the best-behaved, and matron of the kennel, up to see me. I accepted eagerly, and, from the window, she called her favorite.

Nokomis was one of the most beautiful collies I have ever seen, a tawny red, or sable, with white ruff, feet, and tail-point. Her head was very finely shaped—not too dull for keenness, nor with too much of the silly grey-

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hound's tapering muzzle, as not a few flat-headed prize-winners, bred chiefly for color and coat, have. She had dark brown eyes set with that obliqueness that gives the breed its characteristic look of brightness, kindness and craft. Her small ears, as she entered, were semi-erect, giving her, as she stopped with her head slightly on one side, the sharp, doubtful expression of the fox. She came with her flag up, as if she were on exhibition before judges, marched to Miss Fielding and waited for orders.

"Isn't she a darling?" Miss Fielding said affectionately, rubbing her pet's neck. "*You* hasn't got flappy, saddle-bag ears and a high forehead and a velvet jacket, *has* you! I don't see no snipey nose! Hasn't she got an 'honest, sonsie, bawsint face,' Mr. Castle? Only it isn't 'bawsint.' And look at her gawcie tail, wi' upward curl!' She has old Cockie herself for an ancestor, *she* has!"

Nokomis gravely stood on her hind legs with her forepaws on her mistress' skirt, panting—smiling, I might well say. Then,

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in obedience to a word and a gesture, she dropped and came over to me in so dignified and friendly a way that I fell promptly in love with her. Her outer coat was abundant, straight and stiff, the under one so thick and soft and furry that I could not find the skin. Her ruff was magnificent, her chest deep and strong. I was sure she would be a good worker; her wit had already been proved.

Miss Fielding was pleased with my appreciation, and consented to having Nokomis remain, and so, for the rest of the day, except for occasional inquisitive excursions, she lay on the floor beside my bed, thumping her tail and listening attentively whenever I looked down to speak to her.

Early in the afternoon Miss Fielding put on a fresh linen waist and corduroy skirt to set out for the station. Before she went she moved about the room, readjusting the flowers, drawing a shade or two which threatened to let the sun into my eyes, renewing my pitcher of water and so on, giving me in five minutes a dozen evidences of her tact,

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thoughtfulness and consideration. Then, with a last warning to Nokomis to take good care of me, she went away, leaving the apartment depressingly empty.

Leah came in occasionally, however, to see if I was comfortable, but I could get little talk from her. She answered all my questions, looking at me with her melting, deep brown eyes, which were really not a little like those of old Nokomis, but volunteering no remark of her own. Between the two I managed to be fairly patient till, at about three o'clock, Miss Fielding returned with the doctor. I was aware of their approach for some time before they arrived by the joyous barking of the collies in front of the stable. At this Nokomis pricked up her ears, but was too well-bred to pay more attention. I had laughed at her for yawning wide with her wolf-like jaws, and she was sensitively on her dignity.

Doctor Copin was tall and thin and younger than I had expected; and like most young doctors he attempted to make much of his years

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by a pointed, reddish beard. Nature had assisted him in this attempt, also, by removing enough of his hair to give him a shiny bald forehead almost to the crown of his head, and making him near-sighted enough to require strong eye-glasses. But all this could not induce me to think him more than twenty-seven or eight years of age. His eyes were of that china blue which, with red hair, is so apt to give a selfish, heartless expression, which went very well with his general bloodlessness. Except for those protruding blue eyes he might, with his yellowy-brown suit and his slender, long hands, have been an animated caricature, done in red chalk. Worst of all, to my mind, he made puns.

He approached me with the jocose air affected by physicians, and looked me over with a grin. I could see, under his sparse beard, that he had a lizard chin receding comically.

"Well, Mr. Castle," he said, "I expect you haven't been climbing any more trees with your machine lately, have you? Feeling like Adam, after the creation of Eve, with that

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fourth rib of yours? Let me have a feel of it. Ah!"

He prodded me a little. "Well, we're doing so-so," he went on. "If you were a football player you'd be up in five minutes. How's the head? I suppose you haven't had quite such a big one since you put on long pants. You're not having many long pants these days, I fancy, with that cracked bone in your chest, are you?" And so on. I tried to smile, and did not succeed till I had caught sight of Miss Fielding's face frowning over his shoulder.

I was doing well, it seemed. It was nothing but a matter of time and patience. The worst of it was the shaking up, and for that, rest was all that was necessary.

I answered his pleasantries, asked him the news in town, and thanked him for what he had done, which, indeed, was not much. If I have given the impression that he was an ass, that was not at all how he impressed me. Though he persistently refused to talk sense, and turned everything I said into jest, I was

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ready enough to believe that he knew his business and stood well in the profession. I got little more than this however, for he soon left for a talk—likely a professional one, I imagined—with my hostess. This lasted till, after an early dinner, he left the house to be driven back to the station by Uncle Jerdon. Idle and bored as I was, while alone, I speculated upon his relations with Miss Fielding; but from what I had seen I could hardly regard him as a rival. Still, I knew well enough that one could not predicate from a man's appearance how women might like him. Doctor Copin would not be here in attendance, much less as a visitor, unless there was some value in him. He evidently knew the place well enough to have been at Midmeadows often. It made me, for no particular reason that I could name, uncomfortable.

It was still and warm, the beginning of the hush of twilight, the birds' chattering quieted, when voices came plainly up to me through the open window beside my bed. Miss Fielding and the doctor were coming

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round a corner of the house on their way to the stable.

"I wish when she comes, next time, you'd have Leah let me know," I heard Doctor Copin say earnestly.

"I won't promise to do that," was her reply.

"Why not?" he asked sharply.

"Why do you want to know?" she asked.

"You know well enough. You know how interested I am in her."

"I wish I *did!*"

This was the last I could make out, for they passed into the yard behind the house. I heard the carriage drive off, and soon after Miss Fielding's voice inside the house, calling for Leah to come down. I thought that I detected a strain of excitement, even of alarm in her tones.

A half-hour afterward, she came into my room with a chess-board, and asked me if I played the game. I was delighted to try it with her, though I was poor enough at it, and she beat me easily.

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She was quite as charming as ever, but, as I studied my strategy, she had time in the silent pauses to fall into little moods of reverie, letting the talk drop naturally. I was not too absorbed in my play to notice it, and once or twice I looked up from the board to see her face show a tragic expression, clearing, under my surveillance, with what seemed to be a forced smile. The little lines near her eyes seemed to have deepened since morning, and two vertical ones came, at times, cutting upright clefts between her brows. Once or twice she put her hand to her head suddenly. Her listlessness accented her grace, but she seemed distinctly older.

After she had announced mate in three moves she awaited my capitulation. Then she put the board and men aside wearily.

"You'll find it desperately stupid here, I know, Mr. Castle," she began. "I wish we could be more amusing, but I'm a bit blue tonight."

"I only reproach myself for not being able to make you forget it," I said. "As for my-

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self, I always feel like the hero of a fairy tale when you're about."

She gave her head a quick, backward shake, as if to free her mind of some disturbing thought. "Oh, I told you I was the White Cat, you know!" she replied. "Can't you imagine how interesting it must be for us to have any one here at all, and you most especially? Why, I feel that you are a friend, already. If it hadn't been so, I shouldn't have dared to confess so frankly that I'm depressed."

"What can I possibly say of you, then, who have proved yourself so friendly? I shall be glad when it comes my turn to give, and yours to receive."

"Oh, that time will come soon enough, I'm afraid," she said, folding her hands in her lap, and looking down at them.

"You make me quite long for it!"

"Oh, don't long for it!" she exclaimed, and then rose nervously to stand facing the lamp with a fixed, entranced gaze. "It will mean, perhaps, that I shall need all your sympathy,

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all your charity," she added, turning, ever so slowly, to look down at me.

"I will give anything you ask——"

"And I shall ask nothing," she put in quickly. Again she threw her head back with that quick, freeing gesture. I saw what she meant. It would be put to my tact and intuition.

She held out her hand impulsively and put it into mine. It seemed very small and slight, and it was cold. Then, summoning a smile so rapid that it came and went in a flash, she bade me good night and left the room.

For fully an hour after that, I heard her voice and Leah's in a steady, low conversation in the room across the hall. At nine, Leah came in to adjust the light and see that I wanted nothing. I fell into an uneasy sleep, waking at every cock-crow.

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IV

The next day was harsh and cloudy. There was a light fog in from the sea, enough to make it a little cold, and to depress my spirits. It was, therefore, with great impatience that I awaited the matutinal visit from my hostess. She was usually up betimes; to-day she slept late.

It had already become one of my chief diversions to listen for the little morning colloquy in the hall, but to-day I heard nothing till after eight o'clock, when Leah came upstairs, knocked on the opposite door, which was always half-open at night, and put her usual question.

Miss Fielding's voice came sharp and clear, a little querulous.

"Oh, I'll have bacon and eggs, I think; but wait a while, Leah; I'm sleepy and I don't want to get up yet."

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Leah closed my own door softly and went down-stairs. I was disappointed. I hoped Miss Fielding was not in a bad humor, though that seemed impossible. When Leah came up with the tray and gave me a "good morning," I said:

"Leah, I wish you'd ask Miss Fielding if Nokomis can't come up into my room this morning, will you?"

She hesitated just long enough for me to notice that she was troubled; then she put down the tray, saying:

"Nokomis is a queer old dog, Mr. Castle, and I don't know that she'll come."

"Why, she was here all day yesterday and we had a beautiful time together!"

"I know." Leah turned to leave. "I'll speak about it, of course, but—well, these dogs have all sorts of fancies, and you can't always depend upon them. They will and they won't." She did not look at me as she answered, and went out immediately.

I felt that I had somehow blundered into an indiscretion, though what it was I couldn't

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possibly see. It made me exceedingly uncomfortable, for I would have done anything rather than take advantage of the kindness and hospitality with which I had been treated. I remembered that I had not yet heard the dogs barking; that might possibly mean something, but it gave me no clue. I had to give it up and try to make amends as well as I might.

A little later I heard Miss Fielding's door slam, and her footsteps running down the stairs. That she had not come in to see me, even if for only a few words, did not decrease my annoyance. Shortly after came a chorus of barks, but I fancied that they were not of the same mood that I had noted before; there seemed to be something antagonistic in their protesting notes, as if some stranger had perhaps passed the house. I had got the idea that Midmeadows was a lonely place, though I had not yet seen the outside of the building, and no doubt the collies were distrustful of visitors. I waited expectantly to hear Miss Fielding call them, one by one, as

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she had before; but, if she did so, I missed it.

For half an hour or more there was a steady pounding down-stairs, and, when Leah came for my tray, I heard some one whistling, the least bit out of tune. Leah was silent and reserved. She asked how I had slept, and if I were better, and there the conversation ended.

Finally, at about eleven o'clock, Miss. Fielding came in. I looked up eagerly.

She wore a stiffly laundered shirt-waist, noticeably stained and soiled, though it had evidently been put on clean that morning. She wore no stock, and the neck was turned away in a V, carelessly, showing a little gold chain with a sapphire pendant, and the sleeves were rolled up above her dimpled elbows. She had a heavy walking-skirt and heavy mannish shoes whose soles projected a full half-inch beyond the uppers. Her hair, which, before, I had always seen exquisitely coiled high on her head, was done in a full pompadour, though now it fell in flat folds

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over her forehead and wisped out in the back of her neck.

She came up to my bedside and smiled frankly at me. I got a pronounced odor of Santal.

"Well, how are you to-day?" she said jovially. "Do you feel better?"

I said that I did, noticing that she wore three rings on her left hand. It was good to see her so full of life and energy.

"You certainly were a sight when you were brought in," she went on; "I was frightened to death. I never saw any one unconscious before, and I thought you were dead, for sure. Isn't it lucky the doctor was here? I'm awfully sorry your auto was smashed up so, for I'd like to try it myself. I've been wanting one. Yours is a foreign make, isn't it? I've been looking it over. It's a water-cooled engine, I see. But I want a six-cylinder. I'm going to see if Uncle Jerdon and I can't patch it up so that it'll go."

"Fancy a girl's caring about machinery!" I said, smiling at her enthusiasm. "You're

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the last person in the world I'd ever think would have any interest in it."

"Why?" she said, sitting on the edge of the bed, and, turning down her sleeves, covered her round, strong arms.

"I thought that you were more of the artistic temperament."

"Oh, I like to use my hands," she said. She held one out, its fingers stiffly opened, then clenched her fist firmly. "They're stronger than they look. Try it!"

She took my hand in hers and gave me a grip as strong as any ordinary man's.

"That comes from your violin practice, I suppose," I remarked.

Her eyes were on mine, and I saw that the pupils were dilated, and the irises so dark as almost to appear black. She did not answer me for a moment, and then simply nodded vaguely and changed the subject.

"I've taken the clock apart more than once. The dining-room one, I mean. When the hands point to eight, it strikes four and it's half-past two, really. I have to tell time by

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an algebraic formula. I'm going to dissect it again and see if I can't get it right." She laughed merrily, swinging her foot back and forth.

At that moment the collies began to bark again. She sprang up impatiently, and went to the window.

"Darn those dogs!" she complained, "don't they make a horrid racket, though! I can't keep them quiet." Then she raised the sash abruptly, leaned out and cried, "Hush up, there!"

Their answer was a chorus of indignation. She let down the window with a clatter, and walked to the mirror to rearrange her hair, using silver pins that shone conspicuously in her dark locks. Her skirt had sagged away from her belt, at the back, from the violence of her work, no doubt, and she reached to fix it, turning to smile at me coquettishly after she did so.

"Do you like my hair done high or low?" she asked.

"I like it best the way I first saw it, that

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night," I said. "It was done in a fillet, or a bandeau, wasn't it?"

"Why, no! It was pompadoured, wasn't it? Oh, yes—perhaps it was—I forget—but it's so fine that I can't do anything with it."

Except for these little lapses of abstraction when she stared so puzzlingly at me, she was in high spirits. Her presence filled the room with electricity; she surcharged its atmosphere. She seemed more virile than ever, more full of life, so full that it actually seemed to splash over in all sorts of energetic gestures of her head and hands. As she stood, now, in the center of the room, she made a quick dash at a fly that drifted past, caught it in her hand, smiled at her dexterity, and tossed it aside. She made passes and rapid motions with her arms, as if she were swinging a tennis racket, and tapped her toes and heels in a little clog-dance as she walked. I saw that she was getting bored.

"Well," she said at last, "I must go to work. If there's anything you want Leah will do it for you. You can call her. There's

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the bell. Don't hesitate to ring it. I'll be so glad when you can come down-stairs and see the place. It's a jolly old shack—you'll like it!"

She waved her hand jauntily and swung out of the room. I heard her run down-stairs, and a little later the pounding and the whistling recommenced.

She semed different to-day, but I imagined that perhaps it was only that she was feeling better in health and mind, though she had not appeared really ill before. She seemed younger than ever, too, the little lines in her face seemed to be mostly ironed out. No doubt it was, as women say, "her day." Her beauty was more obvious; it was undeniable.

Yet something about her manner troubled me. I was distinctly disappointed; she seemed less subtle, less imaginative. She was no longer the princess of my fairy tale; the spell had waned. But if her familiarity and naturalness upon further acquaintance were less romantic, they were more real, and had some of the actuality of prose. We could

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still be good friends, for I liked her immensely. Perhaps she had thought we had gone too far sentimentally, and was trying to put our relations upon a firmer and more matter-of-fact basis. Perhaps, even, Doctor Copin's visit had, in some way, affected her, and she had considered that her *entente* with me was becoming dangerous. Well, it was certainly my place, as a stranger thrust upon her hospitality, to take whatever cue she gave me, disappointing as that line of conduct should prove. For I had been stirred and awakened by her. I could not deny that to myself. And no doubt I had taken her altogether too seriously.

I saw no more of her till late in the afternoon, but, meanwhile, Leah made me a welcome visit. After luncheon she asked me, quite modestly, if I would like her to read to me or would rather play chess. I chose the reading, wanting very much the opportunity of studying her. Her attention seemed, however, to be distracted; I was sure of it when, a little later, she excused herself to go down-

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stairs. Then I noticed the barking of the dogs, high-pitched and excited.

She came back soon to finish her reading, and, that done, we fell to talking. As she sat, her dark face was outlined against the white woodwork of the alcove like a silhouette. Her white teeth shone.

I asked her about her education.

"I went to a school for colored women," she said, "fitting myself to be a teacher. But of course it's hard for a colored girl to get a chance, except with her own race, and I didn't want to go South. Then I got this place with Miss Fielding."

"I can't imagine any situation more delightful," I said, watching her.

Her eyes burned, smothered in quickening tears, but her voice was calm enough. "It's lovely here. I don't mind the loneliness a bit. It's nothing to what I have endured in big cities."

She gave it to me simply, with no apparent bid for sympathy, but I knew enough of the pathetic isolation of the educated negro, cut

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off from any real mental communion with the blacks as well as with the whites, to interpret the repression of her manner. There was a tragedy in her words.

"Well," I said, "it strikes me that you're in luck to be here with such a companion as Miss Fielding. And she's as fortunate, too. I'm sure you get on beautifully. Still, how *she* can stand it, away off from every one, I don't see quite so well."

"Do you think she's—unhappy?" Leah asked after a pause.

"Certainly not to-day, at least. Yesterday I shouldn't have been quite so sure that she wasn't."

"Oh, she has her moods," Leah admitted. "I do my best to indulge them." She looked up at me. "So must you, too, Mr. Castle!" She held my eyes deliberately, as if expecting my promise.

"How could I be so ungrateful as not to, in the circumstances?"

"I mean—you see, she doesn't like to be questioned. I have to be very careful. She

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has her fancies, and often seems inconsistent, even a bit eccentric. It may be her life here alone. You know she sees so few people. You won't notice it?" Still her eyes appealed to me.

"I shan't at least show that I do."

She seemed dissatisfied.

"Except, perhaps, to you," I added, trying, as I had tried with Miss Fielding, to get to the bottom of her dread.

"Oh, not to me," she begged. "She's too fine for us to be discussing. I've said too much already, I'm afraid. I don't know why I did. Only——"

I said it for her. "Only, I am quartered on you, here, and you can't get rid of me. You have, in a way, a spy in camp. By an accident, I'm here, and you're at my mercy. Isn't that it? You don't, I mean, quite know what I am, and you'd like to be able to trust me, whatever happens." It was a jump in the dark for me.

I could see her fingers working; she had clasped her hands.

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"Oh, I hope I haven't given you the idea that anything is likely to happen," she said anxiously. "If I have, I'm quite sorry I spoke. If you'll only take everything quite as a matter of course—that's all I mean—her moods, you know, and not think things—" She ended without attempting to be more lucid, for there was a sound of some one coming up-stairs.

Miss Fielding came into the room, and her delicate right eyebrow rose at seeing Leah sitting there, doing nothing.

"Leah, go down and tie up the dogs; they're chasing all over the place!" Her voice was crisp and peremptory.

Leah went away quietly; I got a swift glance of mute appeal at me as she left. Miss Fielding came to my side and looked down at me quizzically, her thumbs in her belt.

"Do you mind telling me your name?" she said. "It's rather awkward not to know, you know."

"Oh, Castle's my real name, right enough," I answered.

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"Castle?" she repeated, and then, as if recollecting: "Of course, but I meant your first name." Her face cleared.

"Chester Castle," I enlarged. "A good name for an architect, isn't it?"

"An architect, really? Then I'll have to get you to help me on my little house. But you're too good-looking for an architect," she laughed. "I thought they always wore pointed beards, like doctors."

"Oh, I'm not a Beaux-Arts man," I said, keeping up with her mood.

"Are you married?"

"No, I'm happy to say I'm not."

"So am I!" she laughed. "That is to say, I'm glad *I'm* not, and I'm glad you're not. My name is Joy. Isn't it silly? It doesn't fit me at all. I ought to have been called Edna."

"Very well, then, you shall be!" I volunteered.

She took it without surprise or annoyance. "Oh, I don't stand on ceremony. That's silly. If you're going to stay here for a week

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I shall have to call you Chester. Do you mind? It's an awful bore to have to say 'Mr. Castle' all the time."

"By all means. My mother and my friends call me 'Chet'—"

"That's better still. Chet." She tried it audibly. "I rather like that."

"You're welcome to it." I laughed at her directness.

"But you haven't asked me any questions! I should think you'd be curious. Really, it isn't at all complimentary to have you so indifferent."

"Oh, I'm only keeping 'on the island'," I returned.

"Keeping—what?"

"Don't you remember—about staying 'on the island'? You know you asked me yourself to."

"Oh, yes—did I? I forget." The puzzled look on her face had appeared again, but was driven away. "Well, there really isn't much to know about me. It's stupid enough here at Midmeadows. It's my own

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place, you know. It used to belong to my grandfather. I've had it ever since he died. I suppose it's good for me here, for I'm ill a good part of the time. I'm up and I'm down. But when I'm up, I'm up pretty high, and when I'm down, I'm 'way down in the depths."

She had sat down in a chair and had crossed her legs, one over the other, wagging one foot and clasping her hands across her knees so tightly that the blood was driven from her white knuckles to the ends of her purple fingers. It is always an awkward pose; I have often wondered how a pretty girl could ever take it. Now she drew her chair closer to the bedside and took my hand.

"Let me see your hand," she said suddenly. "I'll read your palm, if you like."

She bent over it, drawing so near that her head was quite close to mine, so close that, had it not been for the perfume she used, I should have got the odor of her hair. When she turned to me, smiling, she seemed very near indeed, though none too near me. She

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began her reading of the lines, holding my hand in both hers, pointing to the signs with one finger, trying the resistance of my thumb, squeezing the flesh to determine its firmness, kneading it and handling it in quite the professional manner. It took her some time. The opinions she gave me were not particularly affording, but they were rather cleverly put. She made a good deal of my "magnetism," saying that she could actually feel it. I was properly flattered. I could feel hers, easily enough.

Then she dropped my hand, rose and yawned as freely as had Nokomis herself.

"I'm starving!" she exclaimed. "I must see what's the matter with dinner. I'm sorry you can't come down, Chet. I hate to eat all alone."

"Why, doesn't Leah eat with you?" I asked, surprised.

"No, I can't quite go *that!*" she said emphatically, as she made an irrelevant athletic gesture. "I have to draw the line somewhere, you know. I have Uncle Jerdon

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sometimes, though, just for the fun of seeing him eat. He's perfectly lovely! He holds his fork in the Kansas City style, this way—" She illustrated a familiar restaurant attitude, with the thumb and little finger of her left hand braced under a paper-knife, the three middle fingers curled atop. "Then he always loads up his fork with his knife, a little piece of meat, and a little piece of potato, and a little dab of butter and a little swish of gravy and then—" She showed me how, pretending to toss it into her mouth, and wiped her lips with the back of her hand, in a way that made me laugh aloud. "You could hear him eat, 'way up here! Golly! it makes me hungry to talk about it!" she added. "I'll see you later, Chet. Oh—I'll send you up some current jelly. I made it myself; sure cure for the measles! Remember, you have to like it!" And she was off in a two-step.

I smiled to myself at her pantomime, after she was gone. How I had misjudged her at first! She seemed commoner, but our friend-

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ship was, perhaps, more natural. She was no longer the wonderful, exotic, medieval princess in the tower, but she was a frank, wholesome creature, full of human charms and faults. I decided, by reason of that sane analysis, that I was improving in health. My bang on the head, no doubt, had made me unduly impressionable.

She did not keep her word in regard to coming in after dinner. Leah brought up my tray, as usual, and took it away, saying that she was unable to stay with me. She seemed abstracted and nervous, and I forbore to question her. I spent a dreary evening alone.

The pounding went on for two hours or more after dinner, and then Miss Fielding came up-stairs to her room. She contented herself with putting her head through the doorway and calling out "Good night, Chet!" and then I heard her door slam. There was no talk between the two women that I could hear.

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V

"Sliced kisses, fried in tears," were the words I heard Miss Fielding reply to Leah's morning call, early the next day. I had waited long, for the day was bright and I wakened at sunrise. Her fanciful order put me immediately into a good humor, and I was intensely curious to see what the day would bring forth.

The collies were barking vociferously, joyously. Suddenly they stopped, and then, one by one, I heard them greet their mistress. It was very prettily done. Leah, coming in, found me smiling, and smiled back at me. Seeing me so much better, she offered timidly to help dress me, and I welcomed her proposal to bring me hot water and what was necessary for shaving. My own clothes had been sent down, so I prepared myself for my châtelaine's visit.

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Joy came into my room with a sweet, low, "Good morning, Mr. Castle!" which threw me back not a little, after what had taken place on the yesterday. I was about to hazard some good-natured sarcasm, but the sight of her face inhibited it, and something of what Leah had said came back to me. I answered the greeting without comment, therefore, and waited for her to set the pace.

She was in an exquisitely fresh, simple organdy frock, and had on a garden hat and gauntleted garden gloves; her arms were filled with roses. Her brow wrinkled slightly as she noticed the fading blossoms which had been left in the vases.

"I'm afraid I neglected you yesterday," she said, as she set about removing the dejected roses and putting fresh ones in their places. As she came near me, I noticed little dewy drops on her neatly coiled hair, where she had dashed it with violet water. There was no trace of any other scent, save that of the roses. She drew off her gloves and I saw that she wore no rings.

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She sat down for a moment. I had observed before that not only could Miss Fielding be remarkably graceful in pose and in action, but that she could be as astonishingly *gauche* as well. Astonishingly, that is, for her—for one who *could* be so graceful. This, however, was decidedly one of her graceful days, or rather, perhaps, as Leah had said, moods. Her lines melted and composed. There was positive elegance in the way she used her hands, gesticulating freely. It enhanced the charm of her voice, so limpid and full of feeling.

"Isn't it a beautiful morning! What a shame it is that you can't get up. You must hurry and convalesce—just enough to be able to see the place, and not so much as to have to go away. Perhaps you can get into a chair by to-morrow. Did you hear my doggies? I can recognize each of them by the voice, and you will be able to, too, if you only stay here long enough. Nokomis is the deepest-toned one. She's the oldest, you know, and the most dignified. Hiawatha is

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the little yappy one. He's a very silly little pup!"

"I'm sorry Nokomis didn't want to come up to see me, yesterday," I said. "But I hope you'll pardon my taking the liberty of asking for her. I know you probably don't often allow them in the house."

"Why, of *course* Nokomis can come up; the idea! She'd love it. Would you like to see her now?" Then, with her eyes on mine, and noticing my bewildered look, no doubt, she added, with a queer expression, "Nokomis wasn't quite well yesterday. She is getting old, you know." She rose restlessly. "Will you wait a moment, please? I want to speak to Leah," and she went out.

Something had passed over her spirits, I couldn't tell what. It was like the shadow of a cloud sweeping rapidly across a sunny hillside. Whatever it was, it was gone when she returned.

She went directly to the window, threw up the sash, and called down, "Nokomis! Hi, Nokomis!" A bark responded.

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"Come up here, old lady! Yes, come right up. Wipe your feet, please. Wipe your *feet*, Nokomis!"

The next thing there was a pattering of feet upon the stairs, and the bitch bounded into the room, her tail wagging. She ran up to Miss Fielding immediately for orders.

"Go and say 'How d'you do?' to Mr. Castle, Nokomis," said Miss Fielding, pointing at me.

Nokomis dropped to the floor again, and with the dignity of a duchess walked over to where I lay, raised her beautiful eyes to mine, lifted a forepaw and laid it on the bed. I shook it and felt for the dog's neck.

"Now, Nokomis—" Miss Fielding began.

She was down on the instant, went to her mistress and stood waiting, her head on one side, her ears half erect, her tail low.

"Go and bring up Chevalier, please," was the command. Nokomis was off like an arrow, and presently there was a to-do in the yard. By this time I could recognize Nokomis' heavy note among the others. Then

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she and a tan-and-black collie came rollicking into the room. Both came immediately up to their mistress.

"Here's Chevalier, Mr. Castle. He's a pretty good show dog, isn't he? He hasn't got a fancy livery, but he's all right, except his tail's set on a bit too high, and there's a little feather to his hind legs below the hock."

Chevalier whined, and looked up at Miss Fielding. I was quite ready to believe the dog understood what she said.

"Oh, that's all right, Chev, you's a booful, good doggie, and I love you! Chevalier's strain harks back to the original Scott—he's quite a swell, in his way, and has got blue ribbons. But they all want tri-colored calico dogs, now. Go over and pay your respects, Chevalier, please!"

The dog came up to me, was patted, and left with Nokomis, who was next instructed to return with John O'Groat, a big dog, almost wholly black, with a rather blunter muzzle than the others.

"John's got pretty good blood, too, and his

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mother was from the Lothian Hills, like Norval—no, that was the Grampians. A little hollow-backed, and his forelegs aren't quite straight, but Jack's a good dog, aren't you, Jack? A fine worker, too."

Jack was certainly listening to every word attentively, whether he understood or not. After he had gone, Nokomis brought up Minnehaha, one of her own youngsters, pure white.

"Poor little Minnie," said Miss Fielding, "she's got yellow eyes and a thin coat, but I love her just as much!" Taking the forepaws she held her own face tantalizingly near the dog's tongue. "Just as much, I do. Now go over to Mr. Castle, Miss!"

Last of all came Hiawatha, a frenzied, wriggling, capering puppy, sable-and-white like his mother, yelping, crouching, bounding, hysterical with joy. Miss Fielding and I fell to laughing at his antics, but Hiawatha was too young to care. He was up on top of my bed in half a minute, and stifling me with his eagerness, lapping my face and hands, growl-

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ing, snarling, biting, scratching all at once. When this frisky, capering bunch of enthusiasm had departed, quite out of his head with the excitement of the visit, Miss Fielding talked dog for ten minutes. She had not forgotten, however, to compliment her pets with a lump of sugar apiece, filched from my tray and dropped from the window with strict precedence.

"Oh," I said, looking at her with admiration, "I do think your own name is the best! It's so like you."

"What d'you mean?" she asked, coming up to me.

"Why—Joy," I replied.

"Of course it is! Isn't it fun to have a name like that? One has quite to live up to it, though. It inspires me, sometimes, when I'm blue."

"Yes; it has distinction. I don't see why you ever should prefer Edna."

"Oh, Edna—" she said seriously. She waited a moment, to shake from her skirt the sand the dogs' paws had left. "Well, I do

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like Edna, sometimes. It depends upon my mood, I suppose. You know I told you I had moods. Don't try to reconcile me, I know I'm inconsistent. But I'm a woman," she added, looking up more brightly, "and I suppose I have that right."

"I haven't decided whether you're a woman or not," I returned. "Sometimes I have thought you were a princess in disguise."

"Oh, that's nice of you! But why?"

"You're so mysterious, so whimsical, so detached, so romantic."

"Take care!" she warned severely. "You aren't trying to swim off the island, are you?"

I opened my eyes at this.

"You still hold me to my promise—after yesterday?"

"Why not?" she said, a little blankly.

"Why, I thought we were well off the island—at least *you* were. I thought that you had given up the game."

"Why?" she asked, looking at me directly,

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in seeming surprise. "I think you must have mistaken my meaning."

I couldn't quite get it. "You asked me all sorts of questions, anyway, you know," I ventured.

Her eyes begged for mercy. "I'm sorry if I was impertinent——"

"Oh, I don't mean that, of course. You couldn't be. You had a perfect right to ask, of course."

"Can't I row back in a boat, please?" she pouted whimsically. "Don't give it up yet. Not till I give you specific leave of absence. I suppose I'm spoiled. I want my cake to keep and eat, too."

I was a little relieved at her recognition of her own inconsistency, though I felt a queer hiatus somewhere. It was as if, mentally, I had tried to go up a step where there was none. But I let the subject drop. She took up the books on the stand and began to look them over.

"Don't you think Leah reads beautifully?" she asked.

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"It's charming to hear her, but, if you don't mind, I prefer to hear *you*."

She took all my compliments so graciously, without either embarrassed denial or vanity, that I loved to watch her when I tried a gallantry. Now she only nodded to me, sweepingly, with mock deference, and went on:

"Leah and I disagree somewhat. I have more manner, perhaps, and less rhythm. We read a good deal together. I think she sees Browning much more clearly than I. Perhaps I feel him more keenly."

"She's a remarkable girl—I was going to add 'for a negress,' but I needn't qualify it."

"Oh, no! You don't *know* how fine she is." Seating herself she added, as if to herself, in a sort of sigh: "What that girl has done for me!"

"I am sure that she would say just that of you," I remarked.

"Oh, I try her a good deal, sometimes. Her mother was my nurse. When I sent for Leah, I didn't expect to get anything more than, perhaps, some of the hereditary de-

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votion darkies have, even if I got that. But I got a friend. You can't trust her too far, Mr. Castle, believe me! She's pure gold.''

It happened that, as she spoke, Leah herself came into the room with letters for me. Miss Fielding took the girl's hand and pressed it against her own cheek affectionately. As she did so, I noticed a peculiar scar—a livid U-shaped mark on Leah's wrist. It was the sort of scar that might be left from the wound of a carving-tool—one of the narrower gouges.

"Was I very horrid yesterday, Leah?'' Miss Fielding asked, looking up into the fine brown face.

"Oh, *please,* Miss Joy!'' Leah begged uneasily.

"Of course *you* understand, Leah; I only want Mr. Castle to know I'm sorry,'' Miss Fielding insisted.

"I need only to look at you to be sure you're sorry, and to look at Leah to be sure that there's no need of it,'' I declared. "At any rate, there's no need of my understand-

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ing. In fact that's just what I thought you *didn't* want me to do. Isn't it?"

Leah looked quickly from me to Miss Fielding, and back again.

"Yes, I suppose it is," Miss Fielding said slowly, thoughtfully. "Let's get back on the island again. I'm sure it's big enough for us."

We stayed, therefore, "on the island" all that afternoon, touching, that is, but lightly on personal topics. But though we did not go wide, we went deep enough to make the talk hold us absorbed for an hour or more. In quite another way, I think, we went far, as well. Miss Fielding was a stimulating conversationalist. She made me feel at my best. She had that happy way of meeting me on my ground every little while, then going on, and giving me a hand up to hers, and so, by a series of alternate agreements and divergencies, keeping the discussion both sympathetic and various. In most of this quick give-and-take Leah was a passive listener unless specially appealed to, at which

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times she often expressed herself so succinctly and sapiently that Miss Fielding and I looked at her, and then at one another with a comic expression of admiration and depreciation of our own powers.

With such conversation the day went fast. In the afternoon Miss Fielding read to me, and in the evening I spent two or three hours in passive delight listening to her violin.

My pain had almost subsided, now, and I looked forward with something more poignant than regret at being able to be up and about, knowing that would mean the beginning of the end of our companionship.

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VI

The next morning Miss Fielding slept late, and her breakfast order was, as it had been two days before, prosaic. Then, also, she had slept late. This coincidence struck me and gave me a presentiment. I looked curiously for the first sight of her to confirm or destroy a theory that I had been incubating during my long night hours alone. The fact that, as I ate my breakfast, I could hear her whistling in her room helped along my hypothesis. So did Leah's apparent mental detachment.

Miss Fielding romped into my room at about half-past nine, and with a laugh and a "Good morning, Chet!" pirouetted up to my bed. My theory instantly gained plausibility. Her manner was what I had anticipated. Her dress, also, was significant.

She had on a fussy sort of silk waist, in-

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appropriate, I thought, with her cloth walking-skirt. Her hair was elaborately "marcelled," and she wore bangles that clinked on her wrists; there was the same odor of Santal that I had previously noticed. What was most suggestive was that this get-up was apparently meant to impress me. At least, that was how I interpreted her coquettish smile. I shouldn't care to say that she showed actual poor taste—it was only, I thought, poor taste for *her*. She needed such adjuncts of fashion so little!

"See here," she said, tossing her head and pointing at me dramatically, "you're getting altogether too lazy! I think that you've been in bed long enough. I'm going to get you down-stairs to-day. The doctor said three or four days in bed would do, and now it's five. How do you feel?" She shook the post of my bed with mock ferocity, as if to expend some surplus energy. There seemed to be an extra ounce of blood in her this morning.

"Oh, I'm game!" I replied. "Nothing would suit me better."

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"I'll get the library ready, then; Leah and Uncle Jerdon will help you down. Then you can watch me work, if you don't mind. I'm trying to finish my coffret." She felt thoughtfully of her biceps. "I'll get quite a muscle before I'm through. I shall have driven about twelve hundred nails by the time it's done."

She walked to the door, swinging her arms, and called, "Leah! Come up here! Quick!"

Leah appeared, out of breath, as if, for the moment, she had expected that an accident had happened. She gave a quick apprehensive look about.

"Leah, we're going to get Mr. Castle down-stairs to-day. Is Uncle Jerdon about?"

"Do you think Mr. Castle is well enough to be moved, yet?" Leah ventured.

"Didn't I say he was going down-stairs?" Miss Fielding repeated impatiently. "I think we can decide that question. You do as I say. Go and get Uncle Jerdon, and be quick about it, too!"

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"She's spoiled. She thinks she runs this house," Miss Fielding complained to me, when Leah had left.

I said nothing, watching her closely. My theory was now pretty well substantiated. I could not pass this scene off as merely one of the "moods" that she and Leah had both mentioned. There was something definitely wrong with Miss Fielding to-day—something more than a mere whim of temper. There had been something wrong two days before, when she had acted similarly. She was distinctly not herself, if her normal self was the graceful, delicate, tactful creature who had first charmed me.

It was not only her mood or her taste in costume that seemed different. It was something not quite describable which seemed to permeate her whole personality. She had taken a chair and sat with her right arm cast up over the back. The angle of her raised elbow threw her into a distinctly awkward position. Her gestures, too, were characteristic of this mysterious difference. When

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they were not distinctly imitative, as in mimicking Uncle Jerdon's table-manners, they were irrelevant, mere spasmodic exhibitions of activity—as when she caught the fly, or swung her arms with active tennis-like gestures. This spontaneous irrelevancy she showed now in the way she doubled her fists and brought them athletically to her shoulders, as she talked, or, raising her foot a little, made circles with her toe, showing the slenderness and suppleness of her ankle. I don't say that all this ebullition of high spirits wasn't, in its way, charming. It was. But it was different from the way she had acted yesterday. Perhaps I can best describe it by saying that she seemed quite ten years younger.

She sprang up and, apropos of nothing at all, proceeded to dance or hop sidewise across the room and back hilariously, in sheer excess of vigor. It was what she called "galumphing," and, from time to time, during the day, usually at the end of some little overserious conversation, she repeated the per-

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formance, to my great amusement and delight. It was the absurdly meaningless gamboling of a kid, but it was so delicious in its inconsequence that every time it provoked my laughter.

While we were talking nonsense there, Leah came up with Uncle Jerdon. Uncle Jerdon was distinctly a New England type—the chin-bearded, straw-chewing farmer, quaintly original, confident, droll. He was well on in years, a dried-up, wrinkled, toothless bachelor with sparse, straw-colored hair, long in the neck, and twinkling blue eyes full of good nature. He wore overalls and reeked of the stable.

Miss Fielding introduced him, and I shook his skinny hand.

"Wall," he drawled, "thinkin' abeout movin', be ye? I guess Leah an' me'll make a pretty good elevator. I'll help ye get dressed, fust-off, an' then we'll take ye up tenderly, lift ye with care."

The two women left while I got my clothes on. It felt good to leave the bed.

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"We been a-tinkerin' on that air machine o' yourn, but it's a leetle bit too much for us, I guess," Uncle Jerdon said. "You'll have to send deown a man, I expect. I wouldn't ride in one o' them pesky things for all the gold of Ophir, no sirree, bob! When I want to go to ride I want to see the back of a good hoss—I know I'll get home by sun-deown."

He monologued away thus as he helped me into my clothes, and, when I had finished, called to Leah.

She came in, and I took an arm of each, though I scarcely needed their help. We descended a narrow, paneled stairway slowly but safely, without causing me any pain, and turned into a door on the left-hand side of the lower hall. There I found a morris chair ready for me, drawn up before a wide brick fireplace where an oak log was burning. Uncle Jerdon left me with a wink at seeing Leah placing a foot-stool for me and drawing up a taboret on which were cigars and cigarettes. There ensconced, I looked about with interest.

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It was a large room, finished all in paneled unvarnished redwood, most beautiful in color—a lighter red than mahogany, with more softness and bloom. Two sides were lined with book-cases, except for the chimney-breast; another was almost filled with a broad bow-window of leaded glass with a deep seat covered with corduroy cushions. There was a narrow shelf supported by carved brackets part way up, and a cornice above that. Between the adzed beams of the ceiling were panels of old Spanish leather, lacquered and stamped. The whole effect was a modified French Renaissance worked out with many charming originalities of detail. The pilasters, and the elaborate mantel with its ornamented moldings and graceful consoles, showed handicraft of an interesting sort. They seemed to have been carved by some artistic amateur, being boldly cut without the machine-like regularity of the professional. There was, besides the unusualness of the wood, much to interest me as an architect.

The library was well filled without appear-

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ing crowded, and everything, furniture and appointments, betokened, as had my chamber, not only taste, but luxury. It was evident that Miss Fielding was very well off, and knew how to use her money. It was as evident that she had a strong personality, for there were details that were unique. A large prism of rock-crystal, for instance, carelessly resting in the sunshine upon the dull brown cushions of the window-seat, threw a prismatic spot of splendor upon the ceiling. It was like a gorgeous butterfly pinned to the leather. There was a silver cage of waltzing Japanese mice upon the mantel, little grotesque, pied creatures that spun wheels, washed their necks with their paws and nibbled at rice. The books, too, were arranged upon the shelves apparently not as regards subjects, but rather on account of their bindings, giving masses of color, green and red and brown and black and white.

But it had all been indubitably so well lived in, its properties all ministered so to one's comfort, and the tones were all so restful and

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admirably composed, that I could imagine no more charming environment for a rainy day with Miss Fielding.

A great library table stood in the center of the apartment, one end of which was covered with magazines—everything from *The Journal of Abnormal Psychology* to the *Pink 'Un.* Upon the other end, resting on a hide of ooze leather, were scattered tools and materials, and the unfinished chest upon which Miss Fielding had been working. This was covered with young calfskin, the soft hair still on, a pretty brindled tan and white, and it was bound on the edges with brass strips. These were fastened in place by close rows of brass-headed nails, which accounted for the pounding I had heard. I was admiring the workmanlike way in which the chest was made, when Miss Fielding came in.

"What d'you think of my 'bossy coffret'?" she said. "Isn't it going to be a beauty? My own invention. Don't steal the scheme, and I'll show you how."

She stood up to the table, and, taking one

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of the brass strips, laid off the divisions and punched holes for the nails, and then hammered it on. She kept up, meanwhile, a running fire of persiflage. Occasionally she would stop to toss her hammer into the air and catch it nimbly by the handle as it fell.

"I thought you were going to call me Edna," she said after a while, pausing with some nails in her mouth to look over at me. "Don't you like the name?"

"I thought *you* didn't like it," I said, my eyes turning from her brisk, clever hands, to her absorbed face. A wave passed over it as I looked—that baffled expression I had noticed before.

"Did I say so?" Her hammer was poised in mid air.

"Why, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. It doesn't matter. Nicknames seldom stick, anyway." She placed a nail in the hole.

"Oh, I don't object to 'Chet' at all."

"'Chet' goes, then." She drove in her nail with a frown.

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Before I had thought of my promise, I said: "It's funny you don't remember it!"

Bang, *bang-bang!* Another nail went in, driven viciously.

I fully expected that she would speak of "the island" again, but she didn't. Instead, she dropped her tools, and said:

"I'm building a house, too!"

"Where?" I asked.

She laughed and galumphed across the room and back again without looking at me, before she answered. Then she stopped at the door and called up for Leah to bring down her bunch of keys. When these had come, she knelt in front of the window-seat and unlocked a cupboard below it. From this she brought out a little model house, built of pasteboard, perfect in all its details.

It had windows of mica, behind which were white sashes and lace-paper curtains. The house, an old-fashioned New England homestead, was placed in a little yard of green velvet divided by paths of sandpaper, and set out with toy trees. A child would have loved

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it. A fairy would have appropriated it at first sight. As an architect, the model made a great appeal to me. It had charm and atmosphere, good massing, good proportions, detail and color. I complimented her enthusiastically.

She was poking about the little front porch and the platform in the rear, where a miniature ash-barrel stood, adjusting the doors and blinds with her slender forefinger, when she frowned and said:

"Why, some one's broken that tree in front! Leah, have you been touching this house? There's a blind gone, too!"

"No, Miss Joy, I haven't touched it!" Leah protested.

Miss Fielding stamped her foot. "You *must* have! It was all right when I left it here last. Who could have done it, if you didn't?"

Leah grew more and more uneasy, but stood her ground. "Indeed, I didn't touch it, Miss Joy!" she repeated.

"You're all the time meddling with my

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things. I've caught you at it before. You know altogether too much. Well, go back to your work now!"

Leah left in silence, and Miss Fielding put back the house and locked it up. A hard look came into her face that I had not seen before.

Her temper passed off almost as soon as it had risen, and she was as gay as before. So until luncheon-time, she worked while I looked over the magazines and talked with her.

We sat, at luncheon, on opposite sides of the table in a long and rather narrow room without windows, lighted by a huge skylight. The walls of this strange place were covered with an old-fashioned imitation tapestry paper whose fanciful patterns consisted of consecutive scenes from *The Lady of the Lake*. Everything about the table was heavy, spotless, valuable and old, from the yellow linen to the hand-made forks and spoons. We were waited upon by King, a smiling, round-faced Chinaman with a cue coiled up on top

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of his head, and wearing a snowy white uniform. He moved like a ghost in and out. Leah and Uncle Jerdon I noticed, when the door was opened, eating at a table in the kitchen.

Miss Fielding and I spent the afternoon together in the library. She worked and talked alternately; it appeared that she could not do both at once, and always had to stop with her tool in hand when she spoke to me, like a child. Occasionally she would come over to my chair and seat herself familiarly upon the arm as she joked with me. Then she would spring up, to galumph up and down the room, sidewise, running her hand mischievously through my hair as she passed. I took no notice of the liberty, but I was a little surprised at it. It began to rain that afternoon and by five o'clock it was so dark that Leah came in to light the candles in the silver sconces on the walls. Miss Fielding's spirits were gradually tamed. I asked her to play the violin for me but she refused moodily without excuses.

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Our talk fell to books, and I went back to Leah's surprising love for Browning.

"Oh, Leah knows more than is good for her," Miss Fielding said. She was on the window-seat, looking out at the steadily falling rain, her feet curled up under her. "Leah's so educated that she's unhappy; it's a great mistake, that. I can't seem to keep her in her place any more. But really, I don't see any poetry in Browning, do you?"

"Why!" I said, "I thought you were fond of Browning—that you 'felt' him, even if you didn't 'see' him. Didn't Leah do that for you?"

"Leah! Fancy! What d'you mean by 'seeing' and 'feeling' him, anyway?" She turned to me with her chin resting on the curled back of her hand.

"They're your own words," I answered, testily perhaps.

She opened her eyes wider. "Oh, I mean what do *you* mean?"

I didn't answer.

"If I said it," she continued slowly, as if

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searching for a plausible excuse, and then giving it up, "I suppose I was trying to impress you. You mustn't expect me to be consistent *all* the time."

"I'll never expect you to be again," I said, now irritated by her contrariness. I suppose I showed it in my tone.

She came right over to me, and took my hand, sitting on the arm of my chair. "Oh, Chet," she pleaded, "don't mind me. I'm a fool, and I know it. I know you don't approve of me any more, but I can't stand it to have you cross with me. I can't bluff you any longer, so I might as well tell you. The fact is, my memory is bad. It's really a disease. Amnesia is the name of it. Now do you see? It isn't my fault, is it? I can't depend upon myself for anything. Sometimes I absolutely forget all about a thing that happened only yesterday. I have great blank spaces in my life when I don't know what has happened. It's perfectly awful! Did you ever hear of any one like that?"

"Do you really mean to tell me that you

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forget what you said to me about Browning?" I asked her, taking her hand, for I was filled with a sudden pity.

"Yes, Chet, sure I do!" She rolled my seal ring between her fingers as she looked down.

"And about preferring 'Joy' to 'Edna', too?"

"Oh, did I say that, too? Yes, I forget."

"It doesn't seem possible!" I exclaimed. Then, tentatively, almost fearfully, for it seemed the crux: "And about 'the island'?" I held my breath.

"What 'island'?"

I dropped her hand. It was too much for me. "Oh, never mind." I sighed. "I'm very sorry. But I don't quite see, yet. Has this anything to do with your refusal to play for me?"

She rose, now, and tossed her head back, with that shake I had noticed before. The gesture seemed to be the only link between her two moods, and, for a moment, she seemed to be again the melancholy princess. But the

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phase passed instantly, and she grew petulant.

"I don't know how to play well enough. It bores me."

I refused to let her off, however. "Then how about playing chess?"

She shrugged her shoulders and said: "Oh, I haven't got the kind of brain for chess."

My mind leaped over the remark, obviously untrue, to get to the other side of the perversity, where I might see more clearly.

"But it's incredible!" I cried. "How do you get along? How do you account for things? Do you mean to tell me that you can't remember yesterday, for instance? Not even what you did?"

She was growing more and more impatient. "No—sometimes I don't know how much time I've lost at all. You see, it's like being asleep, that's all. That's what Doctor Copin comes down here for."

"Oh, I see!" I exclaimed.

"That, and other things—" she hinted coquettishly.

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"Ah?" I raised my eyebrows. "Among the other things, I suppose, is the fact that you're perfectly charming."

"Oh, I don't think he quite ignores that," she laughed, and then, her mood changing, as if it had been pent up by such serious discussion and sought relief, she bounded away and galumphed madly up and down the room, waving her hands.

After dinner we spent the evening by the fire. She had put on an evening gown of black net over silver tissue, in which she looked more like a princess than ever. But it was only the costume now; her demeanor was far from royal. She snuggled herself into a bunch on the fur rug by the hearth, disclosing one slender ankle and a stocking of snaky silver silk. Had she not been so slender and *petite,* I might almost say she sprawled, though her hoidenish abandon was not quite immodest. She had her coffee and a cigarette or two, chattering a steady stream meanwhile. I could get no more about her malady out of her; the subject seemed to an-

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noy her. But I could not get it out of my mind. I went back over what had passed, and found that her explanation accounted for much that had baffled me. Still, it did not account for everything. It did not account, for instance, for the way she now treated me.

She got up, after a while, as if annoyed at my abstraction, and began to roam up and down the room.

"I guess coffee makes me a little drunk," she remarked. I did not quite get the point of this till she stopped behind my chair and ran her fingers through my hair carelessly.

"What a jolly wig you've got, Chet! Your hair is almost as fine as mine."

The familiarity made me, I confess, somewhat uncomfortable. I was neither a prig nor a prude, but her talk of the afternoon had wrought on me. I couldn't quite see my way. I didn't at all like, for instance, what she had said about Doctor Copin's coming down —for more than one reason. Perhaps it was this, more than any instinctive dislike of her unconventionality, that put me on my guard

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with her, and made me appear to ignore what, I acknowledge, in other circumstances I might have been tempted to take advantage of. For she was distinctly making up to me. I could see that very plainly. She did like me. So I was unchivalrous enough, or chivalrous enough, if you like, to try to keep her at arm's length, though that is putting it rather too strongly.

It was not so easy, though, that night, with the seclusion, the comfortable open fire, the soft lights, and the rain outside. The situation was romantic; I was alone with a pretty girl, prettily gowned, and quite frankly desirous of a little more intimate companionship than I vouchsafed. Somehow I was rather proud of myself, having at that time, after all, such hazy reasons for forbearance. I scarcely need add to this that I was becoming fond of Miss Fielding, in spite of the puzzling mystery about her. She was alluring in any mood. My intuitions, however, were all for caution.

With such distractions the hours flew fast.

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The candles burned low and flickered till we talked only by the light of the fire. She told me a good deal of her life as a girl—there were no lapses of memory at that time—how she had been left an orphan and had always been more or less of a hermit thereafter. Part of the time she played with my hand, quite as a child might. Part of the time she sat, her chin at her knees, gazing into the dying flames in the fireplace. Then she would smile, look up suddenly, and quote some nonsense rhyme, or make fun of my discretion. Her body was never quite still; she was nervous and restless. If nothing else about her moved, her toe would be describing little circles on the rug.

She and Leah helped me up-stairs at ten o'clock. Miss Fielding flung me a cheery "Good night, Chet!" and went into her room alone.

A few minutes after, I heard a soft tapping at my door. Leah was there with a jug of milk and some biscuits.

"I thought you might like something to eat,

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perhaps, before you went to bed," she said. "Miss Joy forgot to speak of it."

"Thank you, Leah," I said, taking the little tray. I was about to close the door when she gave me a look that delayed me.

"Did you want anything else?" I asked.

"Do you mind if I speak to you for a minute?" she asked. She stopped and listened intently for a moment.

"Leah, where in the world are you?" Miss Fielding called impatiently.

Leah spoke in an undertone to me. "Please wait. I'll be in as soon as I can." Then she went into Miss Fielding's room.

I left my door ajar and sat down by the window. The rain had ceased, and a full moon was breaking through masses of drifting cumulous clouds over the top of the hill behind the house. I could hear the dogs snapping and growling occasionally in their sleep, and below, in his little box of a room off the library, Uncle Jerdon's deep snoring. I must have been there for fifteen minutes before Leah reappeared with her candle. She

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shut the door noiselessly and came softly up to my side.

"Mr. Castle, how are you feeling, now?" she asked.

"Oh, I'm afraid I'm getting well," I said, smiling. "Why? Do you think I ought to be leaving?" I asked the question jocosely, but she took it up with seriousness.

"I'm really afraid you'd better, Mr. Castle." She looked me square in the eyes. Her own shone very wide and deep.

"I don't wish to hurry you," she went on, "but it will be much better for you to leave as soon as you can. You'll forgive me for mentioning it, won't you? I hope that you won't think that I don't realize my position; but—I can only say that I am doing what I think is best. If I weren't so sure that you are a gentleman, and a friend of Miss Joy's, I'd never dare mention it. But, oh, there'll be trouble if you stay, and Heaven knows we've had trouble enough." Her voice grew lower at the end of her sentence, and then she breathed poignantly, "Oh, *please* go!"

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I felt a pang of self-reproach and a great pity for her. "Oh, I'll go!" I reassured her. "I understand. Or, at least, if I don't quite understand, I'm sure you're quite right. I think I can get away to-morrow morning, if you'll get the carriage for me."

"I'll attend to that. Uncle Jerdon can drive you to the station. And don't, please, mention it to Miss Joy that I spoke to you about it. She may ask you to stay—she likes you, really; but she doesn't know what I know, and I don't dare tell her." She clasped her hands and pressed them closely to her breast in the intensity of her feeling, as she added, "You must help me, Mr. Castle! I have nobody else to turn to."

"Are you sure that I can't help you by staying here?" I asked. "I'll do anything you suggest. Why can't you trust me? I dread to think of your having to fight it out alone, whatever it is."

"Oh, I don't dare to tell—I have no right to tell," she moaned, turning half away, looking down. "Indeed, I wish I might. It's

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breaking my heart." She turned to me again with a desperate glance. "We'll get on, somehow."

"The doctor will help you, won't he? Surely you can trust him?"

She gave me a frightened look, and her white teeth shone through her parted lips, gleaming in contrast to her fine dark face. Then her eyes strayed again, and she said, slowly, "Do *you* think he can be trusted?"

"Why not?" I replied, watching her sharply. "How, at any rate, can I tell, after having seen him only once?"

She gave a quick indrawn sigh. "Oh, once was enough for *me!*"

"You mean—that you *don't* trust him?" I exclaimed in surprise.

"I mean I'm not sure that I do." She was speaking slowly now, choosing her words with an effort. "That's quite as bad, isn't it? For I don't know what to do about him. I am afraid that I may make things worse, perhaps."

"You're sure that you can't tell me?"

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"Oh, I daren't! If I were only sure, I might, but even then it would be hard." Her voice was plaintive, and yet her accent was decisive.

There was a pause in which I thought of many things. As I waited, uncertain, my eyes stayed on the fine, erect, colored girl before me, so passionately loyal to her mistress, so delicately sensitive to the anomalous part she was playing. Though her resolution had in no way broken down, I could see how she was wrought upon, how difficult a position was hers in that strange house.

"Well," I said finally, "there's of course nothing for me to do, then, but to leave. Miss Fielding has told me explicitly that your judgment can be depended upon. I have no right here, of course; I'm an interloper——"

She put a dark, well-shaped hand on my arm, in timid reproach.

"Yet, I hope you can trust me," I added, not hesitating to clasp that hand in friendship and confidence.

She took it away quickly, but looked at me

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with her soul in her dark eyes. "Oh, I'm sure of you!" she said simply.

"You make it very hard for me to go," I ventured.

"I shall think of you," she replied. "I shall long for your strength and judgment. I must think it over, more, and try to decide on a line of action. It may be—I won't promise—that I shall send for you to come down."

"I'll come at a moment's notice!" I exclaimed. "Oh, do let me help in some way!"

"Would you?" She clasped her hands to her breast again and sighed, as if I had really helped her by my promise. Then, "I'm glad to be able to know that. Miss Joy likes you. I think you have a rare sympathy for her condition. It's a relief. Then we'll leave it that way. So you'll go?

"To-morrow morning," I answered.

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VII

We met, next morning, in the library, for I could move alone, now, and had gone down early. My hostess, dressed in white duck, was in her most exquisitely graceful mood, quite the delicate, refined, intense woman I had first known.

"Do you really think that it's safe for you to leave to-day?" she asked, when I had announced my intention to her. "I am afraid we shall miss you very much, Mr. Castle. I feel quite as if I had made a friend."

"If you do, it more than repays me for my accident, Miss Fielding. It only remains for you to prove it by permitting me to do something for you."

She smiled quickly. "Stay here a while longer, then!"

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"Ah, you know how glad I'd be to! But I really must get back. I've imposed on your hospitality unconscionably, already."

"Oh, well," she turned to the window, "if you're going to pay me the conventional compliments, we won't press it."

"If you knew what an immensely unwarranted interest I've begun to take in you, you'd spare *me*," I replied.

She held out her hand to me, her graceful fingers slightly divergent, exquisitely posed. "Thank you for your gallantry," she said. "You came out of the dark, were literally dumped here, you know, and it has been wonderful that we have understood each other as well as we have." She stayed my interruption, with a wave of her hand. "Oh, I understand you, I think, at least well enough to be sure of you. But, let's be frank—you don't *quite* understand me, yet. You don't quite approve of me. Nevertheless, you like me, and we can be friends. It may indeed be that I shall put you, sometime, to the test, and give you the chance of proving it. Until

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that time comes, you'll have to stay on the island, Mr. Castle, I'm afraid."

I saw by these words that she must have forgotten her revelations of the night before. It didn't seem quite fair not to let her know. So, risking her displeasure, I came out with it.

"May I venture to remind you of what you said last night?"

She looked hard at me. "What did I say? What do you mean? About what? We talked of so many things, you know." She was embarrassed, on the defense, watching eagerly my first word of enlightenment.

"About your memory," I prompted.

"My memory? I don't quite recall—" Her lips were parted and her fists closed a little as she waited.

"About your having amnesia, you know." Her hand went to her heart.

"I only mention it," I said, "because I don't want to take advantage of any ignorance you may have concerning my position —and what I *do* know. If you have forgot-

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ten possibly, I think I ought to tell you, for I can't pretend to be on the island when I am not. It seems to me that quite in spite of myself I've got off it. What you said about Doctor Copin——"

She caught me up, now, a little wildly, discarding further attempt at evasion. Her face had suddenly grown white. "What did I say?" she asked.

"Oh, only that he was treating you for the amnesia," I replied. I couldn't possibly repeat the rest of it.

She put her hands to her face for a moment, hiding its expression. Then she withdrew them, compressed her lips, and, tipping her head back a little, shook it with the old gesture, as if to regain control of herself. Then she came up to me and put both her hands on my shoulders.

"It isn't your fault, I know, Mr. Castle. But you *are* off the island, and I'm afraid—that it's all over, now."

"Isn't it really all begun, rather?" I replied.

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Her hands dropped to her sides, and she walked away to the window. "Oh, I don't know, I don't know!" she moaned. "You have made me think terrible things. But never mind. I didn't want you to know about me, I hoped we could be friends without. I couldn't risk it, I can't risk it now. You mustn't try to find out, you mustn't even wonder. Just be a little sorry for me—and wait."

She sat down in the broad window-seat, and laid her head back for a moment among the silk pillows, with a wearied settling of her body, closing her eyes. I didn't know what to say or do, so I did nothing, and was silent. She sat up again, took the crystal prism that still lay there, and gazed into it abstractedly, as if she were seeing visions. Then, still holding it, she looked up at me with a far-away smile. It was a new expression I saw on her face; it had the pathetic look of some elf, lost in a strange, terrible land. At last she said, "Come over here, and sit down beside me, please!"

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I did so; and, still fondling the prism, which shot prismatic colors into the room, she said, as with great effort:

"Did you ever, in your childhood, read the story of the *White Cat?* It's a fairy tale, you know."

The name had struck me as familiar when she used it before, but I could not recall the story.

"It was one of those tales of the three quests, wasn't it?" I said.

"Yes; there are many variations of the same theme. It is the story of a king and his three sons. The father decided first to leave his throne to the one who would find the smallest dog in the world; then he gave them another quest, to find a piece of cloth that would go through the eye of a needle. Of course, the youngest son won each time, but the king wasn't contented, and for the final test commanded them to find the most beautiful lady in the world."

"And the youngest son won, of course. He always does, but he never plays fair.

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He's always helped by a fairy godmother or something."

"Of course. Such are the ethics of Fairyland. This prince was helped by a white cat. While he was on his travels he found her castle in a deep forest, and he was carried in by invisible hands."

"Just like me," I remarked.

She looked at me for a moment with an amusing expression of surprise, and a timid smile crept to her face. "That's so, isn't it? How queer! Why, I'll have to give you my little Hiawatha, to carry it out, won't I? Will you take him?"

"Oh, if you would!" I said. "I'd love to have him. It will be delightful to have something that has belonged to you."

"He's not the smallest dog in the world, but he's yours."

"And the third quest?" I reminded her.

"The third quest was the hardest of all. He came to White Cat's castle again, and he stayed a year. They had a most delightful time together."

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"I can understand *that*. Just as we have had."

Her gaze went down to her feet. "Yes, just as we have had here at Midmeadows."

I reached over and took the prism from her hand. I couldn't help wanting to touch her, however casually.

"And of course—you don't need to tell me—he *did* find the fairest lady in the whole world."

She smiled dimly and clasped her hands. "Thank you," she said, not too absorbed to pay me most graciously for my compliment. Then, more seriously, she added, "Yes, I am the White Cat. That is the way you must think of me, when you have gone. The enchanted White Cat!"

I dared not answer. All the peculiar moods she had shown me came up for a new vision. So she knew that something was the matter, something of which her amnesia was only a symptom. She had never come so close to it before. I stooped down, took her hand and carried it to my lips.

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"White Cat," I said, "I don't know whether you are enchanted or not, but I know you're enchanting!"

"Be careful I don't scratch you!" she said, a little bitterly.

"Ah, White Cat never did that, I'm sure."

"Yes, once, when she was invisible. The Prince doubted her. Do you know how it ended?" she asked.

"How?"

"White Cat told the Prince that, to destroy the fatal work of the fairies, it was necessary for him to cut off her head and her tail and fling them into the fire." She put her hand gently upon mine. "Would you do that for me, if I asked it?"

I puzzled with it. There was something tragic in her tone, but I was quite at a loss to interpret her symbolism.

"Would it ever come to that? Are you likely to call on me?" I asked her.

She tipped back her head again, shaking away some unpleasant idea.

"Ah, this is only the first quest, you know.

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You may never come again to my palace. But *would* you?"

A dreadful meaning came straight from her eyes to mine.

"No, I'm afraid I would not. It would be too terrible!"

She threw off a light laugh, and rose and walked to the book-case beside the chimney. Here she took down an old, tattered, red-covered volume and rapidly turned the pages till she found her place. Then she came back to her seat beside me, and, pointing to the lines, read aloud:

"'I!' exclaimed the Prince. 'Blanchette, my love! I be so barbarous as to kill you! Ah! you would doubtless try my heart; but rest assured it is incapable of forgetting the love and gratitude it owes to you.'

"'No, son of a king,' continued she, 'I do not suspect thee of ingratitude. I know thy worth. It is neither thou nor I who in this affair can control our destiny. Do as I bid thee. We shall both of us begin to be happy, and, on the faith of a cat of reputation and honor, thou wilt acknowledge that I am truly thy friend.'"

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"But it ended happily, like all fairy tales. So will yours, I'm sure," I remarked.

She let the book drop wearily. "It must end some way—why not that?"

I clasped her hand. "You must not think of it, Miss Fielding! It appals me."

"Well, I won't speak of it again. But I should be glad to have a friend who would help me, if worst came to worst."

"You forget that, in spite of what I know, I am still on the island, after all; I can't yet judge of such a necessity."

"Well, Leah and I will fight it out."

"You said, once, that I could trust Leah in everything. Do you still mean that?"

"Absolutely. In fact, you can trust her when you're uncertain of me. Do you understand? I can't make it too emphatic."

"I understand," I said.

It was almost time to go now, and so, while I went up-stairs to see that my things were ready, Miss Fielding and Leah got Hiawatha, fixed a collar and chain on him, and put him into the carriage, highly excited at

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the prospect of traveling. Leah shook my hand and looked into my eyes with gratitude.

Uncle Jerdon drove up to the front door, and I got in beside him and captured the frisky puppy, who proceeded to bite my hand playfully. It had been arranged that I was to send some one down to repair the automobile, and I permitted myself to hope that I might find in that a sufficient excuse to come back myself. So it was not altogether with a feeling of permanent parting that I finally gave my hand to Miss Fielding.

"Well, good-by, White Cat," I said, as Uncle Jerdon took up the reins.

"Good-by, Prince!" she answered, smiling.

We drove off, and, as we turned into the long lane which led to the highroad, I saw the two women standing in the sunshine, at the front door, and waved a last farewell to them. With all the sinister suggestions that had been crowding upon me, I could not bear to leave them alone. "White Cat White Cat," was still echoing in my ears.

Uncle Jerdon winked at me.

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"Lord, she's as crazy as a loon, ain't she?"

"Do you think so?" I asked coldly.

"Plum' crazy. She ought to be into an asylum, and would be, if she had any folks to send her there. But she's a dandy when she's all right, you can bet on that!"

I did not encourage him to go on, and for the rest of the way to the station we talked of his rheumatism and the extravagance of his nephew's second wife.

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I

My machine had been repaired for a week, but I had not had it brought up to town, when I received a note from Leah. It was dated "Tuesday."

"Come down immediately," she wrote, "if you can think of a plausible pretext, but don't say that I sent for you. Miss Fielding will not ask you, herself, but we need you very much. I trust to you."

I took an early afternoon train the next day, and, finding no one to meet me at the station, engaged a carriage to take me over to Miss Fielding's place. My driver would, I am sure, have been glad to gossip with me upon the lady's affairs, but I headed off all his hints, knowing pretty well from Uncle Jerdon's insinuations what the tenor of the neighborhood talk must be.

Midmeadows was about four miles from

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the station, and a half-mile back from the county road. The house was approached by two long lanes overgrown with shrubbery and hazels, one from the seaside on the east, and one from the main road on the north. We took the latter, a wild and tangled wagon-track, filled with stones and hummocks, and worn into deep holes. The boughs of trees constantly scraped across the top of the buggy and often hung low enough to threaten our eyes. Near the house, the lane took a turn round the corner of an extensive, old-fashioned garden of hollyhocks, rose-bushes, poppies and violets, then swung up to the green, eight-paneled front door, with its transom of old bull's-eye panes. The copse came in close to the garden, partly inclosing it on two sides. To the right of the house vegetables were planted, with meadows beyond, and behind, the hill rose almost from the stable. The whole place had a charming natural wildness, and seemed, as indeed it was, miles away from any other human habitation; but it was not

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uncared-for; its natural features had been amended and composed with the care of a true artist.

The house itself was long and low, covered with unstained shingles. A great square brick chimney rose from the middle of the gambrel-roof. The lower windows were leaded and built out into wide bays, but they showed above the little-paned sashes of the original building. The front was almost hidden by climbing Cecil Bruner roses, now odorously in bloom. The southern side was lined with a row of geraniums which rose in huge bushes. Here, in the second story, was another bay-window of curious construction, somewhat resembling the stern of an old galleon. It was Miss Fielding's sitting-room, which I had not yet visited.

The place seemed deserted, for not even the dogs were visible. I got out and knocked, while my driver waited curiously to catch what was, probably, a rare glimpse of the mistress of the house.

Joy herself, wearing a white duck sailor

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suit, with a red handkerchief knotted about her neck, answered my knock. She held her hand to her eyes to shade them from the rays of the afternoon sun, so that I could not, at first, quite make out her expression. The first thing she showed, after her surprise, was a most cordial satisfaction at seeing me. She did not, apparently, expect me, but my presence delighted her. I saw next that she was in trouble. The very intensity of her welcome alarmed me. The two vertical lines between her brows were deeply cut into her forehead, her lips were quivering, there were dark circles under her eyes.

She drew me quickly into the library, and I saw terror in her look. Her cheeks were pale and wan. Her hand trembled, as it lay on the back of a chair where she leaned.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come!" had been her first speech, murmured in the hall, and it was repeated now as I stood before her. "I am *so* glad you have come! I need you so!"

I had fancied before that her face was one

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capable of expressing tragedy—not every woman's is. Tragedy shadowed her face now, giving her a newer, more dramatic beauty so moving that, despite my alarm, I could not help wondering at it.

"You are not well," I exclaimed.

"Oh, well enough—" she replied.

"Something is the matter—what is it?"

"Sit down and I'll try to tell you." She dropped into a chair, with her elbow on the table, letting her cheek fall into the hollow of her palm. Her eyes closed for a moment, the soft, long lashes shading her pale cheek. Then she shook herself and sat erect. "I'm so sleepy!" she moaned. "I haven't slept since night before last."

I sprang up from the window-seat. "Won't you lie down here and rest? Do!" I pleaded.

"Oh, I don't dare! I don't dare!" she cried.

"Tell me what is troubling you, so that I may try to help you!"

She looked up and said, "Leah has gone!"

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and she put out a hand that trembled with a despairing gesture.

"Gone?" I repeated. "Where?"

"I don't know where. I don't know when she went. I don't know even why."

"Do you fear she has met with an accident, then?"

"Oh, no, not that. Worse than that!" She spoke helplessly.

"Worse?" I could not understand.

"I mean I think I must have driven her away."

I still could not guess. "Why, how could you have done that? You mean that she took offense at something, perhaps?"

"Oh, I must have made it impossible for her to stay."

"But what did you do? She was devoted to you."

She sprang up and wailed out with bitter vehemence, "Oh, I don't know! I don't *know!* If I only knew, I could do something. But what can I do, now? She's gone. She was my right hand, my eyes, my ears, my memory

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—but it's not *that!* It's that I could have been cruel enough to her to drive her away. Where is she? Where could she have gone, do you think? I've waited and waited to hear from her, or for her to come back—two whole days! I didn't go to bed at all last night. I didn't dare, lest she should come while I was asleep."

"You expect her to return, then?"

She was walking up and down the room, her hands clasped behind her back tightly. I could see that she was on the verge of hysteria. She turned to me again, and said:

"Oh, Leah would never abandon me, never! She's too true for that. But she's afraid to come back!"

I went up to her and led her gently to the seat.

"Now," I said, "tell me exactly what has happened."

She broke out again wildly, her face twitching with excitement. "I don't *know!* Don't you *see* I don't know? That's the horror of it! I may have killed her, for all I know!"

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"Ah! Do you mean," I began, afraid to say it, "that you've forgotten?"

She stared at me. "Forgotten? Well, you may call it that. Yes, I've forgotten."

She put her face into the pillow and began to sob convulsively. After this nervous crisis had spent itself she sat up, wiped her eyes and said with a faint, spectral smile:

"Oh, I'll have to tell you everything, now. I can't bear it any longer. It was bad enough while I had Leah to depend upon, but now I must have somebody to confide in, or I shall go mad—if I haven't already gone mad."

I looked over at the table where I noticed a coffee-pot and a cup on a salver. "How much coffee have you drunk?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know. Cup after cup. I've been drinking it all day to keep me awake."

"That accounts for your nerves. You must rest. If you sleep a little, you'll get your strength back."

She sprang up suddenly, her gripped fists raised, her head thrown back in a sudden new

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access of alarm. "Oh, no, no, no! You don't understand! I *daren't* sleep! I'm afraid—afraid! How do I know what may happen, now when I'm so worn out!"

I had done considerable thinking while I was away, and I had done some reading as well. I was beginning now to make it out, piece by piece, and put it together in an astonishing whole. It was too late, in this crisis, for reserves, too late for me to keep to my promise of not trying to know. The girl was distraught and alone. And, indeed, the door to the cupboard where her skeleton had been hidden was now well ajar.

"You are afraid, you mean, of the *other* one?" I brought it out deliberately.

She stared at me, like a somnambulist.

"Yes," she whispered, "of the 'other one.'"

Then for the first time, and quite unconsciously, I think, she used my name. It seemed so natural to me that I was not surprised.

"Oh, I'm so glad you know, at last, Ches-

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ter. I'm so glad that it will be easier to tell you." She put her hand on my arm and looked up at me in tenderest confidence. "Now you know why I called myself the 'White Cat.'"

"Yes, I see. Don't be alarmed. I'll help you. You must calm yourself and we'll find out a way. I know *her*, you know."

"Yes, I know you do. You must tell me all about her, sometime. How you must have hated me!"

"Perhaps I can manage her, but no matter about her, now. We must think it all out, and decide calmly what to do. I'm not afraid. Trust me, and I'll see you through. It will all come out right, I'm sure."

I went on so, purposely iterating such phrases to lull her, and key down the intense strain which wrought upon her. Her eyes kept on me, and I saw my influence work—my suggestion, I might say, since it was purposely hypnotic. Her hysteria made her abnormally sensitive to the treatment. She relaxed her attitude slightly, sighed, and

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dropped back among the silken pillows behind her.

"Oh, you're so good!" she breathed.

"You *will* help me, I'm sure. You have helped me already! You're so strong—it's such a comfort to have you here!" She reached her hand out shyly and put it in mine, where it lay, small and cold. It was the first time she had done so, except under the direct stress of an earnestness strong enough to rob the act of any personal suggestion. It was a distinct caress, fearless and genuine.

"Now," I said, "begin at the beginning, and tell me all about what has happened."

She took it up again with a new courage. "As I've said, I don't know when Leah left. I only know that when I rang for her yesterday morning she didn't come. I went into her room and she wasn't there. She wasn't down-stairs. King didn't know anything about it."

"Nor Uncle Jerdon?"

"Uncle Jerdon has been away for three days, visiting his nephew, who's ill. You

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