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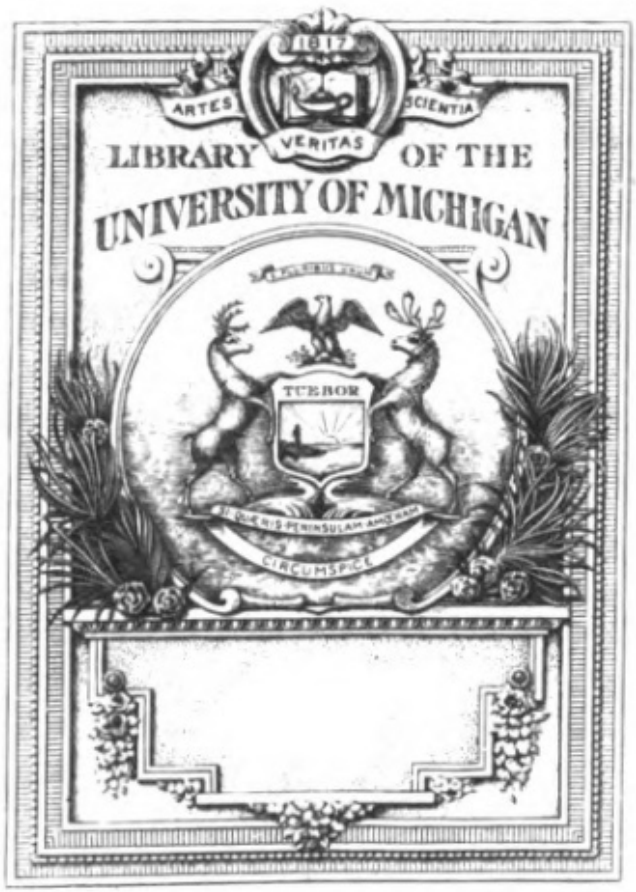

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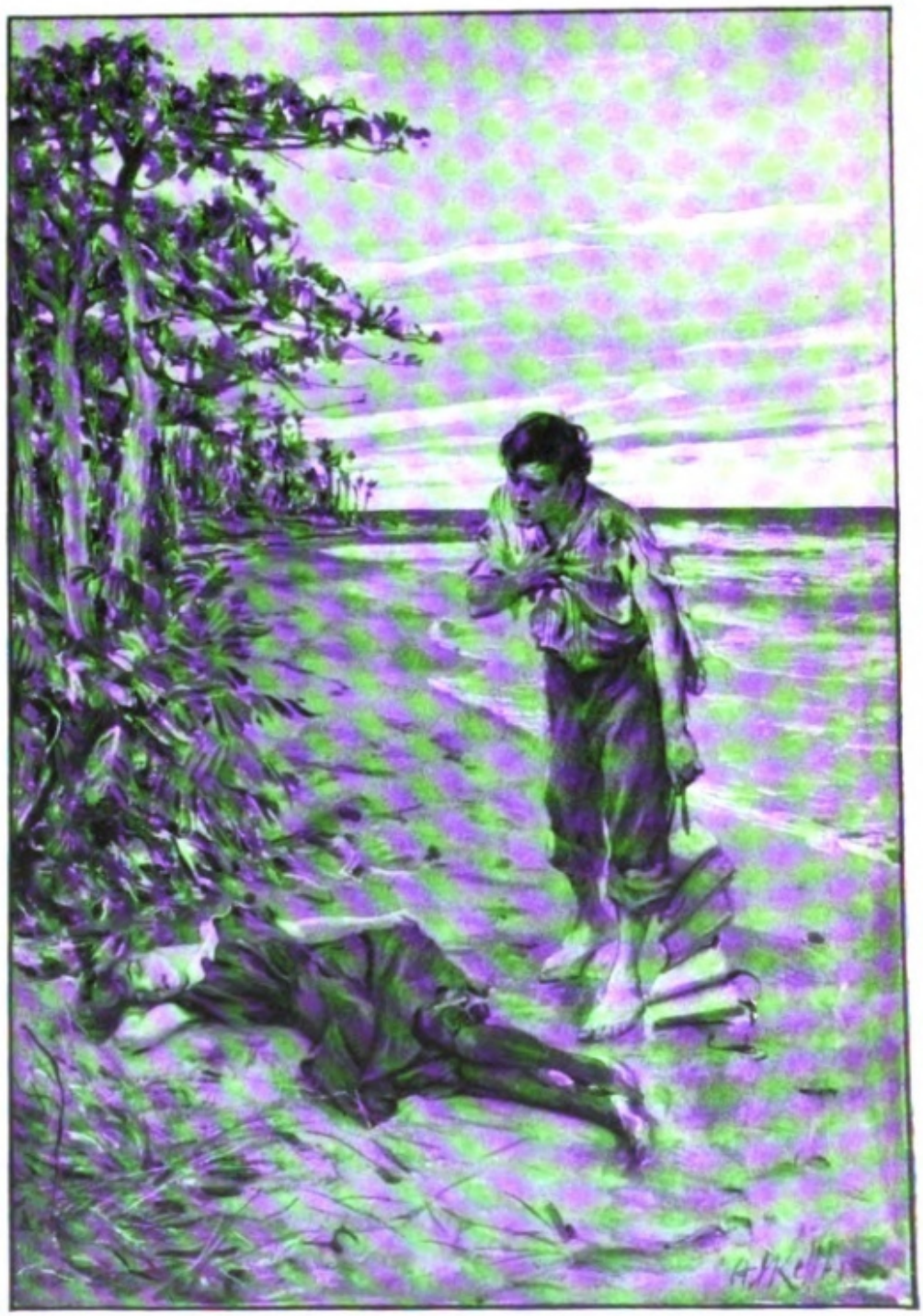

Now, having tracked her down, he gazed upon the substance of his fears and dreams alike, still bewildered (Page 311)

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Cynthia-of-the-Minute

A Romance

By Louis Joseph Vance

Author of "The Brass Bowl," "No Man's Land," Etc.

Illustrations by

Arthur I. Keller

New York

Dodd, Mead and Company

1911

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as "The Crimson Rambler"

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To

MY WIFE

to whom all that is good in it belongs

I dedicate this book

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CONTENTS

		Page
I	Drifting	1
II	Derelicts	14
III	The Man without a Smile	26
IV	White Moth	52
V	Ashes	60
VI	The Amethyst Ring	80
VII	Cinderella	100
VIII	The Changeling Cynthia	118
IX	Who Knows?	136
X	Contretemps	153
XI	Punic Faith	175
XII	Pillage	189
XIII	Truth	203
XIV	Aftermath	231
XV	Coffin Cay	253
XVI	Blows	266
XVII	Cynthia's Gambit	285
XVIII	Marooned	308
XIX	The Sentimental Scamp	334
XX	In a Garden	348

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Now, having tracked her down, he gazed upon the substance of his fears and dreams alike, still bewildered . . . . . *Frontispiece*

"If you want to marry that pretty young woman I saw this evening — you'll have to do the divorcing yourself, Bruce" . . . . . *Facing page* 72

Presently he did spring, with neat calculation launching himself from the topmost step through the air to land on Rhode's head and shoulders . " " 182

The Brazilian returned to the attack — swinging an arm round Cynthia's waist and catching her close to him . . . . . " " 280

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I

DRIFTING

FROM the harsh hot glare of midsummer noon on Broadway, to the perennially shadowed southerly sidewalk of the cross-town street — ordinarily the transition would have proved a grateful one. To-day, however, Cynthia Grayce was numb to the contrast: the heat was everywhere so great that the difference between phase and phase seemed negligible. If she sighed softly as she slipped out of the main channel through which roaring tides of life surge without end or rest, the sigh was more of fatigue than of relief.

Swayed by an instinct as true as that of the homing pigeon (heartless though the simile may appear) with lagging footsteps she drifted westwards; drifted rather than willed to go; so overborne by stress of heat and dreary circumstance that she went in a sort of daze, almost thoughtless, scarcely aware of the movements of her aching limbs and feet: drifting like the bit of unconsidered flotsam that she was, aside from the fairway to rest a little in a still and sluggish backwater of existence.

Beneath the broad brim of her simply trimmed straw her pretty young face shone with a pallor more than normal, a trifle drawn and jaded, a thought thin — but not yet thin enough to mar the graciousness residing in those salient curves of cheek

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and chin and brow. In her brown eyes dwelt fathomless abstraction, wistful and wondering.

Strong upon her spirit, oppressing it like some grim dumb menace, she felt the consciousness of the city, the sweltering city of steel and stone, as selfish and as heartless as the sun beating ruthlessly down upon it from out a sky of brass and fire. And with this she endured a sense, poignant and unnerving, of her unfitness, her poor pitiful impotence in opposition to this cruelly impersonal antagonism. In her mood of the minute, detached, depressed, sensitive to the point of clairaudience, the dull hum of the life swarming round her seemed articulate with the message of the city: *You are not of me and I will none of you.*

Long since she had heard the message, like a whispered warning endlessly iterated in the thick, sullen droning of the hive; but always bravely she had closed her ears to it, denying the futility of her untrained and almost aimless efforts to overcome the dreadful, neutral hostility of the soul of the city, refusing to believe it held no place for her, to which she might win through continual striving: the barest living with a little peace — she asked no more than this.

But to-day she might no longer be insensible to the message. Dinned upon her heed by every wave of sound that swept the streets, she heard it in the crash and clangour of the trolley cars on Broadway, in the roar and rumble of the Sixth Avenue Elevated, in the minor motif beaten out by a myriad blending footsteps, rhythmical with a cadence like

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that of the surf. Her eyes read it written in letters of fire upon walls of iron and stone, and saw it lined in the sea of faces flooding past her: set and impassive masks of indifference, of ignorance and self-seeking. Even the hot and dusty smell of the softened asphalt, and the vagrant gusts of heavy, burning air dancing dervish-like through man-made gullies and touching her face and hands with scorching breath, bore the message to her senses. She was not wanted. She was unfit.

To-day she surrendered, her strength gone out from her so utterly that she could no longer either fight or hope. She had come near to the end of the chapter; everything had failed her; it was almost over; after a day or two would come — what? The End? What else?

What manner of end she neither knew nor tried to name, not greatly caring — if only it might be swift and sure and shameless. . . .

Absorbed, she held steadily on her way, beneath the gaunt, drab skeleton of the Elevated, past a corner saloon (heedless alike of the indifference and the interest she excited) and on until, about midway in the block, she came to and entered Suzanne's.

There had been a time when the shabby, four-storey brick building with the English basement and brownstone stoop had posed as the home of wealth and respectability. Now it was — with little loss of good repute — simply Suzanne's. There was another name for it, a name bitten deep into the door-plate whose brass was peering guiltily through its

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vanishing coat of silver; but few, if any, of the patrons knew the place as anything but Suzanne's, a middle-class French restaurant and boarding house where one might lunch sufficiently for forty cents and dine with surprising relish and satisfaction for the equally modest sum of fifty-five.

To lunch at Suzanne's had become a settled habit with Cynthia. Rarely did she miss a day. Lunch there was as much a matter of her diurnal routine as was the morning egg and coffee cooked over the single gas-jet in her hall bed-room in another quarter of the city, or her supper of a handful of crackers and a bowl of milk at Child's on Twenty-third street. That lunch was the mainstay of her daily life, her dinner. The evening meal she could no longer afford, even at Suzanne's trifling price.

And after to-morrow she would have to forego lunch.

There was little to disturb the quiet of Suzanne's at noon-day. As a rule there was present merely a handful of patrons: a few guests of the boarding house, a scattering of stout Frenchmen in small ways of business in the neighbourhood, three or four outsiders like Cynthia attracted from afar by the usual combination of low cost and palatable food, now and again a bird of passage — generally dissatisfied and wishing himself at Martin's — or less frequently a small, loud-voiced luncheon party eagerly a-sniff for the rare fragrance of the true Bohemia.

To-day the number of guests was more scant than

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usual. Suzanne herself, sitting at the little table by the door to which Jean flew for change and where one stopped for a trite but cheerful word on entering or departing—Suzanne herself, fat and rosy and perspiring generously, dozed fitfully or, rousing anon, surveyed the tables with lacklustre eyes. On a day so stifling not many of her guests would care to heat themselves with *apertifs* or cordials or a better grade of claret than that supplied with the meal: Suzanne consequently felt little need to keep on the alert against possible small peculations on the part of that *cochon*, Jean.

It was the latter, as always, who showed Cynthia to her table by the window in the rear of the room —it was Jean, that extraordinarily animated phenomenon of thinness, suavity and dexterity, who held her chair for her and then vanished with apron whipping briskly about his amazingly long and thin black legs, only an instant later to reappear (with his smirk of the successful conjurer) bearing the service for Cynthia's place. Unruffled, assiduous, sempiternally courteous Jean, serenely ignoring the paucity and infrequency of mademoiselle's tips!

Cynthia's heart smote her when she contemplated his unfailing alacrity and attentiveness; and when the waiter had performed another of his astonishing feats of levitation and legerdemain, returning with her cup of chilled consommé in much less time than another man had required to leave the room without hurdling the tables, and serving her with a low word of solicitude for mademoiselle's

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ability to endure this execrable heat, Cynthia rewarded him with the first smile she had been able to force in days, together with thanks in his own tongue that seemed to delight him to excess.

But she could not eat. The food which she was accustomed to anticipate with a desire almost painful, to-day was flat and tasteless to her palate, ashes in her mouth. She sent away her consommé barely tasted, refused the fish, choked down a mouthful of chicken and played with her salad. Only the finger-wide slice of parti-coloured ice-cream she consumed slowly — and was sorry when it was gone.

And now what . . . ? What way to turn, what to do to fill the empty, aching hours until bed-time?

She lingered on in purposeless indecision, thoughts far astray in a dull, dim void, forgetful of her surroundings, forgetful of the flight of time.

Later, feeling a little thirsty, she coloured the water in her glass with a little of the wine from the small, corkless, green-glass bottle, and touched it to her lips.

Then again she permitted herself to relapse into dreary dreaming.

Gradually the guests departed. Presently there remained only herself, Jean idling near the entrance, the Red Man and one other, for whom she had no nickname, unless it were "that boy" — as she always thought of him when it occurred to her to think of him at all.

He was, of the three of them, the senior *habitué* of Suzanne's; he had been there, at his table in the opposite corner of the room, the first time Cynthia

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had entered the restaurant; doubtless (she thought wearily) he would be there long after she had passed out of its hospitable door for the final time — to-morrow; or at least until that day when he too would have reached the end of everything, and like her would go forth to seek some unnamed circle of oblivion. Meanwhile she would be forgotten, while he sat on, smoking his interminable caporal cigarettes between the courses, which (she guessed) he induced Jean purposely to delay, that he might have the more excuse for dawdling.

In the beginning, surmising intuitively that their lots were not dissimilar, that he likewise was one of those rejected of the city, she had vaguely wondered about him and tried to reason why the world had no need for that keen intelligence she sometimes saw glowing in the dark eyes set in his dark, thin, finely-featured face. He was not dissipated, she believed — though he *did* smoke much too many cigarettes; his wine more often than not was taken from the table untouched. There was something too fine and open in his expression, something too steady and straightforward in his eyes and too human in his smile, to leave ground for belief that he was addicted to any degrading habit, the victim of a drug, for instance; as she had heard men sometimes were. No — she had concluded — he was merely another like herself, an incompetent turned out to fight for a living with no weapons aside from honesty and a good intent.

And with that she had ticketed the "boy" and tucked him away in a pigeonhole of her memory and

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forgotten him, save when now and again their eyes met casually in passing. He had become to her just a bit of the furnishing of Suzanne's — even as herself, if possibly less transitory.

As for the Red Man, he was comparatively a newcomer. He had first appeared in Suzanne's within the last ten days, but since that début had become what Jean would have termed a "regular."

At sight Cynthia had dubbed him the Red Man, because he *was* red. He was the reddest human being she had ever seen. His broad, bluntly modelled face was red with the burnt redness of a brick, and so were his thick, strong neck and big, outstanding ears. In that sanguine expanse his eyes were like blue stones, hard and cold and penetrating — a blue almost turquoise in tint and quite as opaque. And his hair was outrageously aflame, a hot reddish-brown matching nearly the colour of the baggy ready-made coat and trousers which, apparently, he never changed. His shirts were always (or else it was always the same shirt) barred with vivid pink stripes; just as a small "bat-wing" tie of crimson satin always nestled cosily up under the incarnadined folds of his fat chin. Even his high-cut shoes (Cynthia, having been bred abroad, would have called them boots) were of that deadly russet-red leather that is as a general thing only to be seen calling attention to the feet of the "swellest dressed feller" in some small inland town. And finally, one of his huge but chubby red hands was adorned with a garnet ring, and he wore cuff-links set with carbuncles. O, decidedly *the* Red Man of all red men!

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Another thing that made him memorable, if anything were needed aside from his feverish colour-scheme, was his seriousness. Large, fat, red-faced men are, in the popular conception, good-humoured and jolly. But the Red Man of Suzanne's never smiled — so far as Cynthia knew, at least; she had never seen him save when his features were set and hard and his eyes cold and calculating. Sometimes she thought his expression one of anxiety, as if he too had grave troubles to contend with; but this impression was modified by the fact that he seemed to have plenty of money. He ate ferociously and enormously, frequently sending Jean back to the kitchen for double and treble orders of some dish he fancied; and he drank in proportion — always at least one large bottle of table wine at a meal and more often two — but without ever seeming affected by the quantity of cheap alcohol thus consumed. And several times she had noticed, when he paid his reckoning, that he drew from his trouser-pocket a great, fat wad of bills with yellow backs, all rolled up tight and bound together with a twisted rubber-band.

After he had finished luncheon the Red Man always smoked a very large and thick and dark cigar with a very large red-and-gold band round its middle — meanwhile staring impertinently round the room, fastening his chilly blue stare on one patron or another and prolonging it until, Cynthia sometimes thought, it must be unendurable. She was relieved that he never seemed to think her worth more than a fugitive glance. Thrice she had noticed him rise

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and approaching a table occupied by some one he had been staring out of countenance, pull out a chair, sit down and begin talking, apparently without preface or apology — talking in a thick, dull, rumbling voice that filled the room like the growl of some caged animal — no more intelligible, at a distance of a few feet. Two of the persons so addressed (they were invariably men) had listened, at first with interest, then with diminishing attention, finally cutting him short by calling to Jean for the *addition*. The third (a short, burly man who somehow made Cynthia think of a sailor out of work) had heard him out to the end and then, evidently in an assenting humour, gone away with the Red Man. That event was two days old; and now that she thought of it, the man with the seafaring air had not since then been seen in Suzanne's, although previously he had figured as a regular attendant.

So she was interested distantly, but not in any way surprised when the Red Man, after glaring at "that boy" for a period of fully five minutes, suddenly got up, lumbered heavily over to the other's table and sat down — first, as in other instances she had remarked, pushing before his victim a piece of pasteboard shaped like a calling card, but considerably larger.

A moment later his heavy voice was reverberating between the walls, more than ever reminiscent of the purring of a huge cat; but, when one came to analyse it, without the contented note.

She noticed that the "boy" (who was probably three or four years older than herself) started

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slightly and then smiled as his gaze fell on the Red Man's card. Thereafter he listened somewhat eagerly, nodding at times or interjecting a quick word.

Her interest in this episode was at the time too remote to hold her regard more than a moment or two, and presently the Red Man's accents merged into the roar of the city that insinuated itself even into this quiet retreat. And, in considering what she could do to deaden the irk of the hopeless hours that must elapse before sleep would bring her forgetfulness, she forgot their slow flight, and sat on, staring vacantly out of the window on the dismal scenery of the backyard of Suzanne's, with its bare, unlovely fence, its network of clothesline, its parched patch of dejected grass, and its array of ash- and refuse-cans.

When at length she aroused herself, she was alone — save for Jean. She guessed that the "boy" had gone away with the Red Man, just as the sailorman had; and wondered if, like the latter, he would never return. Not that it mattered. . . .

She paid Jean, adding shamefacedly a gratuity of five cents which he received with the air of one who has been presented with a modest competence. Then, as he flapped off to hand over forty cents to Suzanne, she started to go.

As a matter of fact, she did leave Suzanne's within the next few moments, but first she paused in the outer hall to satisfy a whim of curiosity.

At her feet, just within the threshold of the street

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door, she chanced to see a large white card, conspicuous against the soiled and frayed oilcloth. If the print on it had not been unusually legible and if her eyes had not been young and strong and quick she would doubtless have passed on; but these things being as they were she read at a glimpse enough of the inscription to fix her interest. She stooped, picked it up, and stood knitting her delicately-lined brows over it.

It was the card the Red Man had handed that "boy"; she knew as much from its size and shape. It had been printed on a press from common type and one edge showed the marks of perforations, as though it had been bound with several others in a book, to be torn off at convenience. Its face bore this legend:

Inventor of Occupations

GEORGE O. RHODE
250 Broadway
New York

Hours: 1 *to* 4 P. M.

Pardonably puzzled and intrigued, the girl turned the card over, and her eyes widened. Of course (she was instant to admit) it was simply coincidence; but after all, coincidences *are* interesting, however commonplace they may be outside of book covers. And to find her own first name staring up at her seemed at first more than a little astonishing.

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On the back of the card some one (the Red Man, at an easy guess) had scrawled in pencil the memorandum:

Cynthia (Cydonia)
pr Y Erie 9 p 8/10

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II

DERELICTS

A MOMENT longer the card held Cynthia lingering irresolute there in the dingy hallway of Suzanne's, wondering what she ought to do with it. Should she call Jean and leave it with him to be returned to its putative owner, the Red Man? Or was that worth while — would it not be dignifying the thing with an undue importance, since apparently it had been thrown away as worthless?

The cryptic scrawl on the back inclined her to the latter conclusion. She could trace no intelligible connection between the words "*Cynthia*" and "*Cydonia,*" and the rest of it seemed quite meaningless — merely a purposeless scribble such as one is apt to make if playing with a pencil while conversing.

She was on the point of dropping the card where she had found it, when she heard a sound of quick footsteps ascending the brownstone stoop, and before she bethought herself to move out of the way the entrance was again darkened by the slender, well-poised figure of "that boy."

At sight of Cynthia, pausing there with the card in her hand, he halted short, momentarily confused. He said, "I beg your pardon," between breaths, and removed his hat with a sudden graceful gesture.

Cynthia's confusion, however, was greater than

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any he betrayed. For a moment she was assailed by a wholly unreasonable sense of mortification, as if she had been caught doing something unworthy of her — something almost as contemptible as eavesdropping. This was in part due to his questioning attitude; she realized at once, of course, that he had come back for the card and was surprised to find it in her possession. She flushed sensitively, thereby rendering herself rather more pretty than usual, collected her wits and in response to his uncalled-for apology, tendered him the card.

"This is yours?" she said. "I happened to see it here on the floor . . . "

He took it with a little bow of thanks that reminded her of the minor courtesies she was accustomed to expect of men abroad rather than of the nervous and self-conscious civility of the average American man of affairs.

"Thank you," he said. "I missed it just a minute ago and hurried back. . . . I 'm greatly obliged — would n't have lost that for a good deal."

She heard herself say "No?" with the inquiring inflection; and caught her breath with surprise that she should have forgotten herself so far. It was n't like her to offer encouragement to young men unknown to her — or *vice versa*, for that matter; whereas her monosyllabic reply had been distinctly an invitation to him to explain, if he wished, why he valued the card so highly. An explanation would involve some acknowledgment on her part and that would prolong the passage sufficiently to provoke his interest.

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She had, perhaps, a trace less vanity than most women who could boast as much attractiveness. She was normally aware of her good looks, and glad of them, but wholesomely glad — much as she rejoiced in her sanity, or in the health of her body, or in owning two feet; it is good to be pleasing to the eye, and Cynthia knew it; but she was n't in the habit of forcing herself upon the heed of beholders. Furthermore, there was grained in her understanding that cardinal precept of a Continental upbringing, that a young unmarried woman may not knowingly excite the attention of man and remain womanly.

So she was surprised at herself with a surprise that was nothing lessened by her subsequent conduct: something which remained inexplicable to her long after the incident might well have been forgotten. The real explanation of her acceptance of the situation, not only at that moment but as it developed, probably resided in the young man's manner; which was perfection. She was even then discovering that his smile, viewed at close quarters, was both disarming and insidious, and could be, when he chose, positively charming with its suggestion of humour, deference, and some little reserve, all coloured by a suggestion of admiration to which no woman could remain totally indifferent. And he chose that it should convey a great deal when it accompanied his prompt response.

"It means a lot to me," he said with an engaging hint of candour; "you see, I struck a bit of luck

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to-day and this" — indicating the card — "is the token thereof."

"You 've found something to do?" she said; and the query came as impulsively, as naturally as had its predecessor. "I am glad," she added, feeling that since she had gone so far with impunity she might venture a step further without loss of dignity. Momentarily she was gaining confidence in him, that he was not the sort to impose upon her generosity.

"Yes," he said, gravity shadowing his smile, while his glance clung to her, keenly inquisitive. "Yes, I seem to have stumbled on something I think I can do. It 's promising, anyway, and I 'm going to have a try at it."

Cynthia repeated a shade vaguely, beginning to remember that she must find an excuse to terminate the incident, "I am glad . . . "

He was quick to divine her thought, and at once stood aside, leaving the doorway clear; but at the same time he pursued the subject with a question that had every excuse: "But how did you guess — ?"

"Why, the card of course," she said with a smile that shyly extenuated her presumption. "'Inventor of occupations,'" she quoted. "You see, I noticed him go over and speak to you. Apparently he does n't wait in his den for clients; he goes boldly forth and hunts them down and forces his inventions upon them."

"It does look like that," admitted the other.

Somehow it seemed quite natural that he should follow her out and down to the sidewalk. But at

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the foot of the steps he hesitated, took a couple o steps by her side, then paused.

"Would it annoy you," he said, "to have me walk with you as far as Fifth Avenue — if you go that way? It did n't occur to me, at first, that I might seem impertinent . . . You see, having seen you so often at Suzanne's . . . " He broke off with a short, embarrassed laugh.

"No," returned Cynthia quietly. "I quite understand."

He thanked her in a curious tone, as if he had not yet quite recovered from the realization of his effrontery; and for a minute or two neither spoke as they walked soberly toward Sixth Avenue. Then he said abruptly: "I beg your pardon. My name is Bruce Crittenden. I don't know why you should be interested to know that, but perhaps it will help excuse — somehow — "

"I quite understand," she said again, not understanding in the least; the name, Bruce Crittenden, conveyed nothing to her intelligence, nor did she comprehend his thought that possibly it might. "I am Cynthia Grayce," she added with a kindly if hazy notion of setting him more at his ease.

Crittenden looked at her sharply. "Cynthia!" he repeated. "That 's odd!"

"Is n't it?" she agreed. "I had just read the name on the card, and was wondering who she might be when you surprised me."

"Oh, *that* Cynthia!" he laughed. "She 's not a woman, she 's . . . But I must n't tell; that 's one of the stipulations laid down by the Inventor of

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Occupations. He swore me to secrecy before he 'd open up —"

"Open up?" Cynthia iterated, perplexed.

"Disclose," Crittenden interpreted promptly. "You have n't been long in this country, have you?" he pursued.

"How do you know that?"

"For one thing you 're not acclimatised to our slang. Then you 've the Parisian touch about your clothes and the ghost of an accent — just enough to show you 're accustomed to speaking French. I don't mind risking an impudent guess: you 've been over not more than three months."

"Five," she corrected, smiling. "And I don't consider your guess impudent."

"That 's good of you. If I were n't bound by awful oaths," Crittenden laughed, "I 'd reward you by a full account, with all the hideous details, of the occupation Mr. Rhode thinks he has invented for me."

"But you 've accepted, have n't you?"

"I have; with much joy; but I 'm not at all sure I 'll make good, of course."

"I 'm sure you will," she said softly; "I do hope you will. It must be terrible —"

"What must be terrible?" he asked gently as her voice fell.

Temporarily she had forgotten the tenuousness of their acquaintance and was thinking only of the mid-world of misery in which they both had existed for so long, and from which he was now to escape, while she must remain, to suffer and endure

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until the coming of that End which she foresaw so clearly.

"It must be terrible," she said, "to wait and wait so long and patiently, and then to have your chance and fail: more terrible even than never to have your chance at all."

He was silent for a little time. Cynthia was looking another way, seeing nothing, lost in her sombre thoughts, quite unconscious of his scrutiny, now more close and keen than any he had previously accorded her.

Crittendon missed nothing, raking her from her inconspicuous but becoming hat to the tips of the small shoes that were just beginning to exhibit ineffaceable signs of wear. He saw that her neatness, which had impressed him long before he had spoken to her, was the neatness of extreme poverty making the best of souvenirs of days of affluence. The materials of her skirt and shirtwaist were of the best, but worn threadbare — almost. He could reconstruct mentally the particulars of the daily struggle that alone served to keep her presentable: the constant wielding of the brush, the darning and mending, the scrubbings with naphtha, the pressings with an iron surreptitiously heated over a gas jet when the landlady was absent. And he could see other signs which her prettiness served wellnigh wholly to disguise: the lines that wearing care had furrowed in her face, faint, thin, almost indistinguishable, but still to be detected by the solicitous eye; and the surfaces once rounded, that privation had gently hollowed out.

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Something else, hidden from the eye but very real for all that, told him that the days of even such Spartan existence were numbered for her; that she was perilously near the verge of the precipice.

He took thought hurriedly, covering his abstraction with a steady flow of talk as to the coherence of which he was dimly dubious.

"Well, yes. . . . But I 'm not going to fail. In fact, I don't see how I can, with the opportunity I 'm offered. . . . We 'll both win — you with your chance, and I with mine. Confidence is half the battle. . . ."

She said nothing. He added a banality or two. . . .

Something certainly must be contrived for her, and that quickly. The corner at which, he suspected, their ways would part, was altogether too near to leave him time to consider ways and means. He must manage somehow to stick beside her for a little longer. There was one way. . . .

Once conceived, the notion took shape and colour rapidly, and began to seem most desirable in his understanding. If only he could induce her to consent; if only she were so worn down and weary of everything as to be ductile to persuasion. . . .

In his pocket he had nearly fifteen dollars, the balance of fifty realized by the hypothecation of his watch ten days ago. And there remained his cigarette-case; it would bring in enough to tide him over at a pinch. Or, failing that — over on Fifth Avenue he could see a corner of the façade of the only club that now maintained his name on its membership

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roster; his credit was still good there, he need not want for food for a day or two — though he would rather starve than face the eyes of those who once had made him welcome there, the stares, the slights, and none too covert sneers of those who ran with the pack contemptuous of him who was crippled and down. . . . But, if needs be, he could stand it, for a little while at least.

"I say," he broke off suddenly, with all the elation in his voice that becomes one who has happily chanced upon an idea, "I wonder if you'd do me a favour."

His change of tone brought the thoughts of the girl back to him. Surprised, she turned to look at him steadily.

"Why —" she began, doubtful.

"Wait till you hear," he interrupted. "I've got a scheme — a sure-enough scheme. It isn't every day one strikes a streak of pay-luck as I have to-day. Honestly, it looks good to me: there really isn't any question about my ability to get away with it. And naturally I want to celebrate a bit. Now you know a fellow can't celebrate properly all by his lonesome. Can he?"

His open, friendly, and frank smile left her little foothold for resentment. Cynthia could not but smile faintly in return. But she shook her head.

"Really —"

"Oh, now!" he protested with a very winning, boyish impatience. "Don't say no till you think it over. Remember we're in much the same boat — at least, you've said enough to lead me to believe

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we are; and we both would be the better for a little change. We need to get out of this — this heat and misery, and all that — and play like sane people and — forget. But there 's no forgetting, and no good playing, when you 've no one to talk to and play with. That 's no fun at all. Why not come with me, just for this afternoon — some place where one can see the sky, where there 's clean sand underfoot instead of dusty pavements, where there are waves to watch and listen to and clean air to breathe? Please don't shake your head like that. It is n't as if we were utter strangers: people who lunch at the same restaurant every day for a couple of months ought to know one another, even if they don't. Come along! Let 's pretend we 're old friends with nothing to discuss, no memories to dissect, nothing to do but take a day off from the fret and worry of things. Do say yes — it 'll be awfully good of you!"

She withheld her decision only a minute, while she regarded him openly with clear, thoughtful eyes. Strongly the suggestion tempted. She wanted to accept. She needed to go, badly. And why not?

Only the habits of convention stood between her and a few hours of happiness — or if not happiness, at least forgetfulness. And what was convention to such as they, hapless wanderers astray in the baffling maze of things?

Six years of existence in European *pensions* had not left her without a balance of experience in which to weigh men; and he who stood before her, awaiting her answer with his face glowing with enthusiasm

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in his plan and confidence that she would consent, deceived her greatly if he were not sound and worthy of the little trust and tolerance he asked. Nor had those years left her wanting in self-knowledge; she was a woman of twenty-two, and could care for herself. Then why not humour his wish and accept this boon the gods offered her?

Crittenden read the answer in her eyes before she could utter it.

"You will? That 's fine of you!"

"Wait!" She checked him, but with a reassuring smile. "One question —"

"Name it."

"Can you — afford this, Mr. Crittenden?"

"Of course I can. I 'm a good distance from the end of my tether, really; I could hold on for months yet, if I had to. But I won't have to. In a day or two I 'll be independent."

"Then one condition: the one you yourself suggested. We 're to pretend we 've known one another since ever so long; we 'll have no questions to ask, no memories to dissect — as you said — no plans for the future. To-day must be a day apart, a day that somehow mysteriously managed to slip in between yesterday and to-morrow and so will slip out, leaving no trace of itself — not so much as the ghost of a memory. Is that agreed?"

"Certainly it is," he assented gayly. "I 'd promise anything you asked — and stick to it, too — to get you to go."

Her smile was shadowy and wistful. "I

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should n't," she said slowly; "but it will be jolly, and I want to awfully, and — I 'm going!"

"That 's the best news I 've heard since Mr. Inventor of Occupations told me about the job he was going to patent for me," Crittenden declared, hurriedly consulting the nickel-plated watch that had replaced an heirloom. "We 've got a little over twenty minutes in which to catch the boat at the Battery: not enough time if we depend on either the L or the Subway. But there 's a taxi across the street and — I 'm curious to know how it feels to ride in one again."

She experienced a sensation akin to that of one strong to swim yet powerless to breast the current; the tide had her in its grasp, was sweeping her away — who should say whither?

A heightened colour glowed in her cheeks as she rested, sensing luxury, on the cushions of the taxi-cab. She leaned blissfully back and for an instant closed her eyes. The town air, rushing past, touched her face with fingers gentle and warm, no longer blistering and unkind. A vague content welled in her bosom: it was good to be so caught up and whisked away, willy nilly — in the grasp of the tide.

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III

THE MAN WITHOUT A SMILE

It was rather late, on the verge of twilight, when hunger drove Cynthia and Crittenden to offer themselves to the critical consideration of the person presiding over the destiny of one of the seaside hotel restaurants near New York.

At first glance this head waiter was inclined to treat the applicants with an access of hauteur approaching disdain and presaging neglect. They were as modest of manner as of attire, if that were possible; and to this large and dictatorial person, who in the winter months was accustomed to lording it over the money-spending clientele of one of the largest establishments on Longacre Square, they conveyed a cursory impression of belonging to that class of casual strays who infrequently drift into superior restaurants and dine unhappily with diffidence for their sauce and the red ink figures at the foot of the impending bill dancing before their appalled eyes.

But because he was really an excellent head waiter, if harassed by and impatient of the demands of a heterogeneous crew of guests characteristic of summer, he indulged in a second, if hasty, glance. And immediately his manner was moderated by a very perceptible thaw. Not for nothing had he attained to his awful estate through sedulous culti-

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vation of the qualities named tact and discretion, with the further assistance of a good, working memory.

He was able to see that beyond question madame was a lady of a caste to which the best he had to offer would prove nothing startling, while the gentleman accompanying her was the Mr. Bruce Crittenden, whose recent total and inexplicable self-expunction from the circles he had once frequented and adorned was only just ceasing to be a matter of debate. From his present appearance Franz would have been inclined to diagnose the cause of Crittenden's troubles as collapse of the financial system (though other things were being whispered); but that was none of his concern. He was himself (incredible though it may appear) a human being not devoid of human sensibilities, in the number of which gratitude had its place; he could not be unmindful of the several notes of legal tender which had, in time gone by, found their way from Mr. Crittenden's pocket to his own.

He bowed, then, with precisely the proper shade of respectful recognition, and allotted them a desirable table, one not too conspicuously placed yet not too far from the orchestra.

It is a curious fact that even the best head waiters seem to consider music not incongruous with the process of mastication. Perhaps, however, it is n't altogether their fault; the tastes of the American restaurant-going public must be remembered.

While Franz stood by, attentive to take Crittenden's order, Cynthia settled herself in her chair with

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a luxurious movement suggesting an incarnate sigh of content. She was a little tired and glad to rest. A throng of new impressions besieged her fancy: of the boat trip down the bay and through the Narrows, with the clean salt breath of the Atlantic reinvigorating every wearied fibre of her being; of the landing in the tawdry seaside city of tinsel, paint, and plaster, weird and extravagant as the nightmare of a scene-painter; of fluent throngs of people amusement-mad, seeking the bubble sensation at the barker's mouth; of a thousand smells of food and animals and melting sugar, of dust, smoke, and humanity; of a deafening roar of blending dissonances, — shrieks, cries, yells, groans, windy roaring of megaphones, brassy blaring of bands, crashing and whineing of *carrousel* organs, barking of motor horns — as wild and wrong as a symphony composed during delirium by an apostle of the New Music; of their flight therefrom to a lonely spot of sand and sounding waves; stronger than all else, of Crittenden's constant sympathy, courtesy, and quiet humour. . . .

"Is this normal — does it go on this way all the time?" she had asked in consternation.

"The summer through," he answered. "And this is a quiet day — Monday."

"It all seems so strange to me." This in apology for her slowness to comprehend the spirit of her native land.

"You 'll get used to it. Unlike the English, we take our pleasures raw — and ravenously." . . .

If Crittenden's choice of a diversion seems curious

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it had none the less proven effective: it had diverted. Cynthia had forgotten, temporarily.

And this hour was the best of all.

Their table commanded, on the one hand, the best part of the open-air dining-room with its vine-laced trellis overhead, where electric bulbs glowed softly in the living green, and its rows of glistening, glittering tables dotted with parties of diners for the most part quite as immaculate; and on the other hand, beyond a low rail and a width of sand, a spreading vista of the sea over whose unresting waters brooded infinite depths of gloaming rich in shades of violet enchantment.

Faint airs were fanning in from offshore, cool yet bland; and all along the glimmering crescent of the beach there ran a constant movement of breaking waters, droning a deep diapason above which there sounded, now and again, gusts of string music or the gay laughter of women, like the froth that sometimes flashed frosty-white along the crest of some dark and sluggish roller, heaving in to annihilation.

Slowly withdrawing her gloves, Cynthia let her gaze seek rest in the dimming distances of twilight on the sea. To excitement succeeded relaxation, a gentle fatigue enveloping body and limbs with a touch as soothing as that of approaching sleep. Just then she was ignorant of a care in life: languor saturated her thoughts like an anodyne. Her eyes were warm with the stuff of dreams, and her barely parted lips shadowed with that vague, pensive smile which Crittenden, even in the few hours he had known her, had learned to look for.

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After the waiter had departed with his carefully considered order, Crittenden rested his forearms on the edge of the table, joined his hands, and watched the woman, his own eyes thoughtful.

He wondered, speculated idly about her. Than this he could do no less nor more, their bond of understanding debarring him from any inquiry the least intimate. Probably he was never to know more of her than he did now. In a few brief hours they must say good-night, good-bye. A slender chance, that they would ever meet again. Only another day, two at most, and he would have dropped completely out of the scheme of things that thus far had concerned him. Heaven alone knew what was to become of him!

What did it all mean, then? Life, as he had found it, was altogether made up of just such things — a look, a smile, a touch of hands, a word in passing: then forgetfulness — all inconsequent.

Through these, his questing fancies, ran a refrain, oddly apposite, he thought — a half-remembered verse of Henley's:

"Now die the dream, or come the wife,
The past is not in vain,
For wholly as it was your life
Can never be again,
My dear,
Can never be again."

Was it true? Were all these unconsidered bubbles in the draught of life — words, glances, fancies, impulses, aimless meetings and partings — were these all charged with inscrutable significance, to

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wield for aye influences imperceptible and leave their marks indelible? . . . Not that that was Henley's meaning. Not that it mattered. . . .

His humour veered, fickle as the weathervane.

As for this Miss Grayce, he little doubted her way would somehow be made smooth for her. Extremely pretty women rarely have a very hard time of it.

He did not mean to be cynical; indeed his thoughts inclined to another bias. At the bottom they were that this woman was very charming: it would be strange indeed if she did n't, before long, meet and marry some lucky chap. Crittenden hoped the man would be the right one. But there was in his musings nothing whatever of self-consciousness. His attitude toward Cynthia was more detached than he would have believed possible, a year ago, where pretty women were concerned.

And Cynthia was rather more than merely pretty; he had been quick to concede that, whose taste was exacting when feminine beauty was involved. She had that inexplicable quality which men call charm. She had, besides, distinction and, when she chose to exercise it, a pretty turn of wit. Give her but a moiety of happiness, he predicted, and she would be radiant.

Well, if so, another would see his prophecy fulfilled — not he, save by the strangest trick of chance. The road he was to take when their ways parted — Crittenden doubted it; it was dark, dark as a tunnel, and so long that he might not see what light, if any, shone at its far end. . . .

With a slow movement of her head, recalled to

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herself, Cynthia looked back to him. Her smile deepened insensibly, out of sheer friendliness, as their glances met.

Against the background of the dusk her face, framed in its blushing russet hair, shone like a cameo of pale, tinted ivory. The soft lights overhead lent her eyes a world of shadowed mystery, infinitely enhancing their allure.

"Tired?" he asked, solicitous.

"A little," she conceded, amending quickly: "not very."

"You were so quiet," he explained.

"Was I? Pure animal enjoyment, I presume: contentment lulling thought to sleep. Still, I was thinking — wondering if you, too, would now forsake Suzanne's."

"Why 'too'?" he asked. "Are you going to desert?"

"Perhaps. . . . I didn't mean myself. I was thinking of the other man who went away with the Inventor of Occupations. Did you notice that he never returned?"

"Which?"

She described the man whose bearing she had thought suggestive of the sea. Crittenden readily recalled him.

"Yes, I remember. That's so, too: he hasn't been back. Wonder why? Perhaps his new-found occupation is much the same as mine."

"Then you may never lunch at Suzanne's again, you think?"

"It may be." He lifted his shoulders slightly,

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with a quiet laugh. "That would be hard to say."

"You leave New York?"

"I may have to, I 'm told."

"I 'm sorry," she said gravely. "But I should n't be, I presume. I ought to offer you congratulations: you 're very fortunate."

"Am I?" he queried as soberly. "I wonder?"

They were interrupted by the waiter.

Silent and serious for a span, Cynthia's attention was apparently held by the show of life and gayety on whose border they sat, observing when they would but almost altogether unobserved.

Her eyes grew dark with thought and a pucker showed, all but imperceptible, between her delicately lined brows.

Crittenden, whose interest was nowhere else, was moved to inquire: "Why the frown?"

It vanished in a twinkling, and she smiled. But then again the pucker insensibly marred the smoothness of her forehead.

"I don't like mysteries," she averred with a trace of petulance.

"No more do I," he said, his tone meaningful.

"But we must respect our bargain," she insisted. "'No questions to ask —'"

"'No memories to dissect,'" he recited, "'no plans for the future.' . . . But for one thing that would be a hard bargain."

"Yes?"

"That we 're friends — the other half of the bargain: old friends, just for to-day." His regard

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was steady and intent upon her. And again the thought that had been Henley's stirred his mood like a whiff of an old perfume. "Friends," he said softly —

"'Friends . . . old friends . . .
What is it ends
With friends?'"

There was a flash like summer lightning in the eyes that held her own. She caught her breath sharply. A sudden swirl of half-formed emotions bewildered her. Something, somehow (she had no time to analyse) had surprised her off-guard and filled her being with sweetly strange confusion and alarm.

Now for the first time she was brought to face the fact that he was a man and she a woman.

She looked hastily away, with frightened eyes, striving to readjust the subjective balance of their relations. She flushed deliciously. . . .

Yet he had said nothing, positively nothing; he had done nothing she could name to bring about this change in their attitudes, one toward the other. The responsibility for it lay with her as much as with him. It was all in nature; as she had long since learned, between man and woman one must constantly anticipate the unexpected: it must inevitably come, soon or late — the recognition of sex. It may mean nothing, herald nothing, lead to nothing: but invariably it will come where friendship is.

Constraint lay between them for a space.

She stole a glance at him. He was staring sombrely at his plate. She fancied a slight movement

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of his lips; and it was real, but she could not guess that he was swearing very softly, but very bitterly. . . .

A second time the waiter disturbed them, earning the gratitude of both. When his services were for the time discharged and he had retired to a discreet distance, the situation was saved. Crittenden quickened to an amused commentary on their experiences of the afternoon, so wittily phrased that Cynthia's laughter swept her mood away and with it his. The surface of their intercourse became as it had been, both tacitly ignoring that instant of the senses which had shown them what depths might lie beneath the most quiet calm.

The meal passed off, under cover of light table-talk as impersonal as politics and infinitely more diverting.

Still, however, was the evening young. Content to watch it age and loath to leave this spot where quiet and forgetfulness had been found, they lingered on, dawdling over their coffee, Crittenden steadily consuming his interminable cigarettes.

Slowly the dinner parties rose and left; the restaurant remaining only moderately busy with the demands of an intermittent trickle of belated patronage.

Silences lengthened between them, as each anticipated with refreshed regret the approach of that moment when their rising must signal the preliminary of their parting. To both came a sensation of gentle melancholy, of whose pleasures, of late so few, this was the last. In the shadow of the impending mor-

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row with its insistent problems which one of them at least thought to find insolvable, the tide of their spirits slackened and began to ebb in sadness.

From beyond the railing at their elbows, masked by the sombrous night, sounded the endless complaining of the unsleeping sea.

At length, unwillingly, Crittenden looked at his watch, then signalled to their waiter.

"I 'm sorry," he said, apologetic. "We 've just time to catch our boat."

"I 'm sorry, too — very," she said softly. "It has been very sweet — this changling day that knew no yesterday and no to-morrow."

"Innocent at once of parentage and posterity," he laughed covering his realization that the waiter was making off with every cent he owned aside from a single half-dollar.

She began to draw on her gloves. "You have been kind," she said, without meeting his look, "more than kind. I have no way of thanking you but by my appreciation — but is it too much to ask you for a further kindness, a word of advice?"

"You could n't gratify me more," he said.

"I want to know if you think" — she coloured, stammering — "if you think that possibly the Inventor of Occupations might be induced to invent — something for a woman — like myself." Her laugh was brief and self-conscious.

"You might ask him," said Crittenden quietly. "He 's a curious creature — I 've found that out already — though I know little about him. If you like, I 'll ask him over."

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'How — what do you mean?" she demanded, puzzled.

Crittenden indicated a direction with a faint nod. "He 's over there now," he said, smiling. "I saw him roll in — like a sure-enough fire-ball — about ten minutes ago."

"Truly?" But her eyes had been instant to his hint and she knew already that the veritable Red Man was seated, quite by himself, at a table near the other edge of the veranda. There was no mistaking that ensanguined shape. The only wonder was, she had not noticed him before.

"Has he seen us?"

"The instant he came in," said Crittenden. "Those blue-glass eyes of his have been bulging ever since; he 's positively aching with curiosity — quivering all over like one of those hairless Mexican terriers. Shall I put him out of his misery — ask him over?"

"We will miss our boat . . . ?"

"What 's that compared with the advantage of setting his inventive brain to work on your behalf? Besides, we can as easily — more, in fact, from this place — go back by trolley."

"You don't mind?"

"Not in the least." Crittenden summoned the waiter — who required no description more specific than "that man in red" before he trotted off.

"You must make allowances," Crittenden advised her hastily. "He 's an odd fish — I doubt if ever you met his like."

"I understand," she murmured.

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In another moment the Inventor of Occupations was heaving his huge bulk impatiently down the long aisle between tables.

"A pillar of fire by night," observed Crittenden irrepressibly, rising.

"Evenin', Mr. Crittenden." The Red Man halted, perfunctorily seizing and dropping the other's hand. His blue eyes remained steadfast to Cynthia. He bobbed his bullet-shaped head uncertainly in her direction.

"Miss Grayce, this is Mr. Rhode."

"Please' t' meet you," said Mr. Rhode, projecting a big red hand suddenly and enveloping Cynthia's in a moist, warm grasp.

As she acknowledged the introduction she was shaken by a mad desire to do something to mitigate the awful seriousness of that wide red countenance. Features hewn out of red marl would have conveyed an effect of no more immutable immobility. Cynthia discovered another nickname for him presently: the Man Without a Smile. Surely in the hour of his birth the minds of men and the preterhuman sentience of the spheres as well must all have been concentrated upon the inconceivable concept of Eternity.

A waiter brought a chair. Mr. Rhode took it from the man with an air of forestalling a practical joke — *he* was not to be fooled into permitting that chair to be withdrawn from under him at any critical moment — planted it firmly at the unoccupied side of the table, between Cynthia and Crittenden, and resolutely sat down. His stony blue eyes shifted from face to face suspiciously.

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"Did n't know you two knew each other," he observed with fine directness.

"Indeed?" answered Crittenden suavely.

"We did n't," Cynthia interposed frankly, "until this afternoon."

Here the Inventor of Occupations interjected an "Oh," as inexpressive as his face.

"I happened to see your card," Cynthia continued with winning directness, her voice calm above the tumult of her emotions: somehow to her the instant seemed crucial; as though she were venturing her all upon a single throw. And indeed she felt this to be a last resort, this appeal to a Fortune as inscrutable as its cardinal envoy. "And I asked to meet you. Your business must be a fascinating one, Mr. Rhode."

The Red Man shifted his cigar thoughtfully, from corner to corner of his mouth. "Well, yes, it is," he assented grudgingly. He no longer took account of Crittenden: his cold blue stare was all for Cynthia.

"I understand you have found — invented an occupation for Mr. Crittenden."

Rhode removed the cigar from his mouth. "What 's he been tellin' you about it?" he demanded in a breath.

"Simply that," said Cynthia.

Crittendon shrugged and laughed quietly. Rhode received the assertion with an unintelligible grunt.

"You do, really," the girl pursued, a little timidly, "invent occupations?"

"You might call it that," rumbled the Red Man. "I just put that line on my card to fix people's

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attention, as you might say. Anyway, I do find some folks work. Why? You want a job?"

"I . . ." faltered Cynthia, confused.

"Thought so. Funny, us meetin' this way. I was goin' to look you up t'night." Rhode reinserted the cigar and mumbled it through a long moment. "Then all of a sudden something immediate turns up this evenin', and I 'm sort of wishin' I could lay my hand on you, and I 'm comin' down here in my car to look for a feller — and here you are puttin' it to me. Now *I* call that funny," he concluded.

But it seemed doubtful if he had ever thought anything really amusing.

A great wave of hope flooded Cynthia's consciousness, as potent as old wine. She felt a little dizzy. Words to encourage him to continue were not at her command. She sat silent, her gaze fixed and intent upon this great red face, which for a moment seemed as mysteriously beautiful with promise as a harvest moon.

"Yes," she breathed at length.

"Uh-huh," Rhode concurred without emotion. "You really want work, now?"

"Very badly . . ."

"Bad enough to take most anythin'?"

Cynthia nodded, breathless.

"Well, then y' understand this is business with me. I got to know all about you. I got to ask questions and you got to hand it to me straight."

"Hand it to you — ?"

"Come through on the level," Mr. Rhode paraphrased neatly.

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"Tell the plain unvarnished truth," Crittenden interpreted.

"Oh! . . . Certainly. I understand."

"Well, then —" Rhode paused to clear his throat importantly.

"Perhaps," Crittenden suggested, "you'd like me to go away for a few minutes?"

Cynthia shook her head. "No," she said intently; "oh, no. Stay, please."

The Red Man had been excavating one of his breast pockets, producing a bulky sheaf of torn and thumb-marked papers — mainly, to all appearances, letters in their original envelopes. From these he sorted out one with an unmarked back; its fellows, one noticed, were for the most part blackened with innumerable memoranda in fine, clear penmanship.

Placing the envelope on the table before him, he unlimbered a fountain-pen, decorated the cloth with a casual spatter of ink, and looked up at Cynthia.

"Name, please?"

"In full? Cynthia Urcilla Grayce."

The blue eyes looked a trace more opaque.

"What's that?"

With careful enunciation Miss Grayce reiterated.

"Spell it," suggested Rhode brusquely. "I mean the middle name. The others are easy."

"U-r-c-i-l-l-a."

"Why not s-u-l-a?" the inquisitor demanded aggressively.

"I'm sure I don't know," admitted Cynthia, blankly.

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"Ur*sula* I've read in a book somewhere," said the Red Man, plainly making every allowance; "but 'Cilla,' ne-ver."

"It has always been so spelled in our family," Cynthia explained.

Rhode put down his pen to stare. "You don't mean to say it's your *real* name? *Family* name?"

"Of course," she said, colouring slightly. "I have no other."

He raked her with a calculating glance. "Sounded somethin' like a stage name," he justified his comment.

"I am not on the stage."

"Never been?"

"No." To which, resentful of what seemed incredulity, she added decidedly: "Certainly not."

"Why not?" Rhode wanted to know, permitting surprise to tinge his tone.

"For one thing, I have no voice."

"No more have most of 'em."

"And no stage training," she concluded.

"Most women'd think 'emselves trained up to the minute if they had half your looks," pronounced Rhode sagaciously. "Trainin's got nothin' more to do with stage success than voice has, these days," he added. "Why don't you try?"

Again the blood dyed her cheeks a deeper hue. "I — a family prejudice."

"Oh. . . . Parents livin'?" The Red Man took up his pen again.

"No."

"Relations?"

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"None. . . ."

His ears were quick to defect the note of hesitancy.

"None you care to speak about, huh?"

"No one I can ask for aid," she corrected a trifle primly.

"*Hmm*. . . . Where do you live?"

"At present —" She hesitated, then gave him the address of the third-rate boarding house where she had a room, and was relieved when neither he nor Crittenden seemed to think the neighbourhood undesirable.

"Age?"

"Twenty-two," she said.

"Married or single?"

"I am unmarried."

"Engaged? Excuse me, but I gotta know."

"No," she said evenly, "I am not engaged to be married."

"Health good?"

"Yes."

"Occupation?"

"I have none."

"Never studied no trade or profession at all?"

"Unfortunately" — her voice was almost a whisper — "no. . . . I once thought I might be able to earn a living with my brush," she added; "I am fond of painting. . . . But I have not had sufficient experience, I find."

"Have you any resources?"

Cynthia shook her head.

"No friends to turn to?"

"No."

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"You mean you won't — too proud," Rhode observed calmly.

"No," she said patiently; "I mean what I say. I am practically a stranger in New York. I was born in America, but have been in this country for the last five months only, since I was a young child."

The Red Man sat up at attention and with a nod encouraged her to: "Go on."

"My father," she said after a retrospective pause, "was a scientist well-known abroad — Dr. David Grayce, the biologist. He was said to be well-to-do. We had our own home in Paris — everything. He died some years ago, and when his estate was settled up it was discovered that he had been speculating unfortunately on the Bourse. My mother and I had a bare living left. . . . My mother died last year, leaving me about a thousand dollars. I had no friends from whom I could ask or accept aid. . . . Then there were other reasons why I didn't want to live in Europe. I came here at length, hoping to be able to make money by painting . . ."

She concluded with an eloquent movement of her hands.

Rhode grunted unintelligibly, to signify he had heard and understood, jotted down several more notes, read the whole over, and took thought obviously, his dense blue eyes staring away into the night that lurked beyond the rail, his cigar (which had gone out) quivering violently to his ruminative champings.

Cynthia took a deep breath, sought Crittenden's

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eyes with a smile both timid and deprecating and, suddenly made conscious of her unthinking revelation of self, looked away, confused, and waited in tense anxiety.

Crittenden helped himself to a cigarette, dissembling his interest, his mind already engaged in profitless endeavor to piece out the gaps in Cynthia's story. She had been frank and candid — to a point. But there were gaps. He was not at all inclined to question the absolute truth of what she had disclosed about herself, but he was very keen to know much that she had not told. What had happened to that "bare living" to reduce Cynthia's inheritance from her mother to a lump sum of "about a thousand dollars"? A living meant an income sufficient for support from year to year, and to draw such an income, however meagre, one must have more than a thousand dollars invested. . . . And, that aside, what were the reasons why Cynthia, bred to the ways of life abroad, almost wholly ignorant of her own country, had preferred not to continue living abroad, or trying to? . . .

He made sure that he would never know these things. It was a most unlikely chance that the employment Rhode contemplated offering the girl would throw them together. By his own acceptance of the Red Man's cautiously-worded proposition he stood committed to an enterprise of whose nature he knew little, save that it was probably hazardous and possibly lawless and most unquestionably no business for a woman.

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At about this stage Crittenden's profitless train of conjecture was diverted and abrupted by Mr. Rhode, in whose person premonitory symptoms of speech, like seismic tremors, were beginning to be noticeable.

He shifted suddenly in his chair and sat back, glancing from one to the other of his companions. He grunted subterraneously and cleared his throat in a most candid and public-spirited manner. Then he slipped the Cynthia memoranda into one breast pocket and from the other brought forth a second considerable handful of letters and papers, mostly more or less shopworn, assorting which he selected one: a yellow telegram form wearing every indication of freshness.

Opening this out he read it through with profound deliberation, then handed it to Cynthia.

"I guess," said he, "you can fill that bill all right, all right — goin' by what you tell me. Huh?"

Cynthia spread the form out upon the cloth, afraid to trust her hands to hold it, lest by their trembling they should betray her agitation. She was all a-quake with rapturous hope — to have been weighed and not found wanting! To her good faith and judgment, it seemed, was left the decision whether or not she should accept the position now being offered her by this wonderful red wizard, the Inventor of Occupations.

For a moment or two the lines of typewritten words, blurred and befogged with purple by the copy-press, melted all and merged together incoherently beneath her eager eyes. But gradually she

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was able to force herself to recognise and comprehend them.

Addressed to Rhode at his downtown office — the address given on his card — and with the date of that same day affixed, the body of the communication ran something in this fashion:

"Herald tuesday help wanted ads companion desired by elderly lady must be young educated refined able to discharge light secretarial duties play good hand at bridge married or single no objection ocean travel good remuneration no agents old maids or parties with pet dogs apply tues a m desk hotel monolith ask for Mme A B S row today Biddle fired old woman on warpath get busy and dont let this get past you

"CYD."

Cynthia read and re-read with a puzzled frown, then showed bewildered eyes to Rhode.

"Well?" he asked. "How does it strike you?"

She hesitated. "Perhaps I don't quite understand. . . . I don't like to seem stupid. . . . Or does this simply mean, that somebody you know intends to advertise for a companion to-morrow morning, in the *Herald*, and you think I could fill the position?"

"You 'll do," said Rhode, applauding Cynthia's insight in the cryptic tongue he habitually employed.

"You really think so?" she asked anxiously.

Crittenden enjoyed his smile alone, unheeded.

"You 've doped it out right," Rhode asserted vigorously. "Now this Madum A. B. S. is a party by the name of Savaran, widow of a side-partner of mine that died recent'. She 's got money to burn —

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but when it comes to that kind of a Glorious Fourth she 's strong for the safe-and-sane thing."

This statement was made in a moderately aggrieved tone. Crittenden laughed spontaneously. But Cynthia seemed only the more perplexed, and in the face of Rhode's resentful glare he subsided and permitted the other to continue.

" As I was sayin', this Biddle party that was on the companion-job did n't make a hit, so she got the hook, Madum Savaran preferrin' young folks — lively — same 's yourself. This Biddle tried too hard to live up to her name: besides, she called herself a spinster. That 'll give you a line on what to side-step. What the old lady is out for, is first her own way and second a good time."

He shifted his cigar, contemplative. " Now what you want to do," he continued, " is to get up with the chickens and be ready at the gate while the rest of the field 's warmin' up. There 'll be more 'n a million dames mobbin' the desk-clerk at the Monolith by nine o'clock. You gotta be there by eight or there won't be no party. Of course, it 's a gamble, but if Savaran don't fall for you the first pike I 've got the wrong ticket."

Here Crittenden interrupted out of sheer compassion for the girl, whose mystification was plainly becoming more and more acute as her untrained ear was subjected to fresh assaults of the New York argot of the moment.

" Just a minute, Mr. Rhode," he said with a laugh; " Miss Grayce has n't been in this country long enough to be wise to — ah — the line of talk you 're

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unwinding. If you don't mind my translating," he pursued, addressing Cynthia, "Mr. Rhode means you to understand that Madame Savaran is well-to-do but careful of her money. I assume you gathered he advised you to call at the Monolith Hotel no later than eight, in order to forestall all other applicants. His last remark was intended to convey his belief that, while it 's all a chance, if you succeed in seeing the lady she 's sure to like you."

Rhode endured this effort at interpretation with a bored and pained air. "That 's what I meant," he admitted ungraciously, "but I don't see how your way of handin' it out has got anything on mine. However . . ."

He consulted Cynthia's face with the manner of intense anxiety peculiar to him.

"I understand perfectly," she said with gratitude, "and I don't know how to thank you. Of course, I shall tell Madame Savaran — "

"No!" Rhode broke in, almost in panic. "Nothin' like that. You 'll queer everythin' if you as much 's mention my name. She don't like me so 's you 'd notice it, and if she suspected I 'd put you wise to this, it would be exit runnin' for yours. You just want to have a copy of the *Herald* with you and say nothin' at all about me; she 'll naturally take it you piped the ad. in the usual way, and so you 'll get in right. . . . You see," he amended hurriedly, before the girl could object, "Savaran and me was good friends, but he could n't get on with the old lady, nor she with him; they had n't lived together for twenty years when he cashed in, but all the same

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he was strong for her, and I promised him I 'd keep an eye on her and — well, see she did n't get buncoed. Now there 's a party I 'm on to, what they 'd call a designin' female in a play, laying for the Madum, wanting to get next to her bank roll. I 'm workin' against that, and so I 'm puttin' this chance up to you. All you 've got to do is to be on the square with the old lady and forget you ever met me, and you 'll be doing us all a favour — me and her and yourself. Believe *me*, this is a swell opening for you, and you don't want to let it get by you."

He paused with the attitude of one to whom altruism is second nature: a pose that, in Crittenden's understanding, assorted oddly with his laboured and quasi fictitious explanation. What little the young man's perspicacity told him of the character of the Red Man was not calculated to inspire him with belief in the unselfishness of his plans and motives; and he believed that something lay beneath this, something odd and, for the present, at least, to remain insolvable.

But Cynthia had no such doubts to disturb her. Excitement and the stimulus of new-born hope rendered her insensible to questions she might otherwise have raised. For that matter, her experience of life had not been such as to infuse her with proper and normal mistrust of all men without exception. Certain types she knew well enough to distrust on principle; but these, her present companions, were of no order familiar to her exotic observation — save that Crittenden seemed a gentleman like fine silver, hall-marked with the stamp of sincerity.

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"I think," she said to Rhode with sweet seriousness, "that you are very good and kind."

"You 'll try it on, then?"

For the briefest instant she hesitated, with precisely what reason she could hardly have said. An instinct moved her to guide herself by Crittenden's advice; she had no one else to ask for counsel; and yet she did not know him well enough. . . .

But he took advantage of her pause to interpose of his own notion. "If you don't mind," he said to Cynthia, "I 'll venture to urge you to accept — that is, to do all you can to secure this employment. Mr. Rhode asks nothing of you," he continued slowly and distinctly, "in return for his suggestion, other than that you give loyal service to the widow of his late friend. If I were you I 'd at least see her, the first thing to-morrow."

"Thank you," Cynthia answered; and to them both, brightening distractingly, she announced: "I will."

"That 's sensible! " grunted Rhode, pushing back his chair with an abrupt and hasty movement. "Lucky I run into you two down here. But I don't see nothin' of the party I was lookin' to find, and I gotta hustle back to town. And if you 're going my way, I 'll be pleased to have you come with me in my car. There 's all the room in the world in it."

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IV

WHITE MOTH

CRITTENDEN offered no objection when Cynthia consulted his wishes with a shyly formal glance which for some reason pleased him uncommonly. She herself seemed ready enough to fall in with the Red Man's offer, and since they had missed the last boat for New York a motor ride seemed infinitely preferable to its only alternative, the trip by trolley or elevated, in cars crowded to the point of suffocation with the dregs of Coney Island's floating population.

So presently this singularly assorted trio rose and passed back through the hotel to the carriage entrance.

Here a stalwart person not less imposingly invested in livery than in the habit of authority, consented to accept of Mr. Rhode a quarter of a dollar together with the numbered ticket for his waiting car, and went languidly away to sort out that particular vehicle from what seemed little less than half a hundred others, all parked in a shadowy reservation to one side of the carriage-drive.

Then the Inventor of Occupations suddenly discovered his cigar-magazine to be quite empty, and after snorting immitigable disdain of the cigarette Crittenden gravely offered, hurried off to lay in a fresh supply of his preferred deadly black projectiles with brilliantly illuminated stomachers.

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"I wanted to ask you —" Cynthia began, the moment they were alone.

"And I wanted to tell you," Crittenden interrupted. "We may not have another chance. . . . This man Rhode I know practically nothing about; he seems to be a rather unusual type of the *chevalier d'industrie*, and I would n't advise anybody to trust him out of hand. But Madame Savaran is quite another proposition. I don't know her personally but I do know a little something about her; in fact, almost everybody in New York does; she 's a — well, an original. But she 'll probably tell you all about herself, if you get the job, and there is n't time now. . . . There 's no reason whatever why you should n't engage yourself to her, if you want to — especially since you 're in no way bound to Rhode. Don't forget he has done nothing but give you advance advice of the opportunity. Of course — there 's no question but — I — he has — ah . . ."

Crittenden's words were trailing off into hopeless incoherence even as his voice fell to an inarticulate mumble. Cynthia, who had been listening attentively enough while idly watching the arrival of a belated but evidently high-spirited motor party, whose car had just then run in to the carriage landing, turned to look wonderingly at her companion.

She surprised him in a state of utter consternation, stammering to a full stop. Even in the semi-dusk of the veranda the hue of pallor replacing the healthy colour in his dark face was noticeable, while the eyes she had thought so kind and pleasant were cold and staring, just as the gently humorous lines

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of his mouth had hardened into a set, thin line of lips. She thought his appearance that of one to whom an ineradicable affront has suddenly been offered, judging from the struggle to retain his self-command that obviously was taking place within the man.

Naturally she sought the source of this unpresaged change, and with a woman's unerring instinct found it in another woman — one of the newly-arriving party.

There were four of this company — two men in dinner clothes and two women all in white. Of these last, the first to be helped from the body of the car was just then coming up the steps to the veranda.

Even though she were a thought too strikingly attired, Cynthia thought her ravishingly beautiful — thought so even when conscious of that first antagonistic and resentful pang which invariably assails a pretty woman confronted by a rival of equal if not superior physical attractions and more fortunate in the possession of a wardrobe better calculated to set off her charms.

She was what reporters are fond of calling a golden blonde, with very regular and handsome features and a really superb, if slightly exaggerated, habit of carrying her head and finely proportioned body. The languorous grace with which she moved, Cynthia thought inimitable. She seemed to resemble nothing so much as a magnificent white moth with a woman's head and shoulders; for she had discarded her dust wrap before leaving the car, revealing a costume whose trailing draperies of filmy

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white matched in splendour even the wonderful scarf of lace and golden spangles falling negligently away from her perfect shoulders. And the last-named garment, the watcher knew at a glance, was worth the cost of many a woman's happiness.

As she reached the level on which Cynthia and Crittenden stood waiting, her glance embraced the two, at first indifferently, a suggestion of lazy insolence in her large and heavy-lidded eyes, then recognising the man with a swift flash of surprise as swiftly veiled. She paused the hint of an instant, looked from Crittenden to Cynthia and back again, and nodded coolly.

"Why, Bruce," she drawled in a soft, rich voice, "what a surprise!"

By this time he had himself well in hand; his bow was immediate, if distant and unaccompanied by spoken reply. But the woman had not waited for this acknowledgment; already she was trailing past them, moving slowly toward the hotel entrance, while her companions raced up the steps to overtake her.

To the latter Cynthia gave little heed after receiving an impression that the second woman was rather more plain and plainly dressed than the other, and that neither of the men was particularly distinguishable from those types of well-groomed and well set-up Americans to the sight of whom she had become accustomed in the last few months.

One of the men, however, knew Crittenden and threw him a greeting with a cordial wave of his hand, *en passant:*

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"Hello, Crit! Thought you were out of town."

To this Crittenden responded, with an air as casual and good-natured: "Good evening, Tommy."

And the entire party disappeared in the direction of the restaurant, leaving Cynthia to try to realise that the encounter, to her intuitions so fraught with provoking significance, had passed off in hardly more than a minute of real time. Already Crittenden, quite the same cool and collected, friendly-mannered young man of that afternoon and evening, was saying in accents of amused detachment: "Fancy people who live in New York being surprised to meet one another at Coney Island!" And already the Red Man was rolling heavily back to them in the wake of one of his huge cigars; while, the other car having drawn aside, the important and bedizened flunky was ushering in Rhode's car and with much pomp and circumstance making ready to open its door.

In so far as she analysed the situation at all, Cynthia laid at the door of regret, that their pleasant companionship should have been thus clouded, the blame for the discomfort of which she was sensible. She was unsophisticated enough to aim close to truth the shafts of her mental inquiry into the incident: to guess that there had been love between that mother woman and Crittenden, where there was love no longer, but only pain and vain regret — for him, at least.

Whether or not because of the discord sounded by this untoward meeting in the harmony of their association, they were a silent company on the homeward

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way. The Inventor of Occupations, not a man to dim his lustre in the comparative obscurity of a tonneau, elected to ride beside the driver, into whose defenseless ear he poured tobacco smoke and a stream of conversation in about equal proportions throughout the ride. What he said was, however, couched in his favourite rumble, merging with the purring of the motor, indistinguishable to the two behind. Crittenden, after one or two abortive attempts to be amusing, lapsed into thoughtful silence; and Cynthia was quite too tired to talk. Besides, she was content with her thoughts; they occupied her not unhappily, once she succeeded in laying the memory of the white moth-woman. Her bent was toward optimism: she saw a sanguine promise in the morrow, not in the least doubting that she would secure employment as companion to this Madame Savaran or that, having it, she would find it congenial. Her future seemed quite serene and settled to Cynthia: she was young enough for that.

Air pungent with the odour of marshes, salty-sweet, gave way to air hot with the smell of earth and man; the gentle darkness of meadows and country roads to the illumination of city streets. The hour was late, late enough for the thoroughfares to be moderately clear of traffic other than cars like their own, most of which were bound in the same direction. They climbed a long ascent between rows of trees, swung into a broad, smoothly paved avenue, and shot without a break down and down its lengthy decline to the water. Then the air grew thicker and more foul, only thinning for a little time as they

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drove at a steady, lawful pace over a narrow roadway suspended in mid-air by a multitude of tiny threads shining like wrought silver in the light of electric arcs — the East River flowing black and broad and far beneath. And then again, miles upon miles of choking streets. . . .

Drowsily conscious of this all, as through a mist of dreams, Cynthia roused only when the machine drew up before her lodgings.

Crittenden got out and turned to help her to alight. Rhode rose and turned, proffering a great moist paw over the back of the seat. As her own hand was smothered in its fervid grasp it encountered a slip of cardboard.

"M' card," explained Rhode. "If you don't cop out that job t'morrow mornin', le' me know about it soon 's you can. G'dnight. Hope you enjoyed the ride."

"It was delightful," she told him prettily. "You 've been very kind — you have both been very kind. I can't thank either of you enough."

"Don't mention it," said the Inventor of Occupations, and sat down again.

Her fingers rested an instant in Crittenden's palm as she descended to the sidewalk. He moved a pace or two with her toward the brownstone stoop.

"If possible — and if I may," he said — "I 'll lunch at Suzanne's to-morrow. Shall you be there?"

"I 'll try," she said a bit doubtfully.

"I 'm anxious to know about Madame Savaran," he pursued. "You won't mind —?"

"Indeed," she said, disturbed by something in his

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attitude, "I shall be glad. . . . And — O, thank you, thank you, Mr. Crittenden!"

His smile was curious, as revealed by the half-lights of the street: a smile somehow wistfully whimsical.

"It 's you who were kind," he insisted quietly, "to take pity on my loneliness. . . . Good-night, Miss Grayce."

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V

ASHES

As the driver skilfully swung the motor-car into Broadway, Rhode twisted and leaned back over his seat, to address Crittenden, who now occupied the tonneau in lonely state.

"You in any rush to get home?"

"No," said Crittenden pleasantly.

Rhode stared sombrely at an open trolley-car they were passing. Then he nodded abruptly, ejecting a huge cloud of stifling smoke. "A' right," said he.

A few minutes later the car slackened speed and swept to a standstill by the curb, a block or two north of Thirty-fourth street.

As Crittenden stepped out he was aware that Rhode, on the sidewalk by the driver's seat, was thumbing over an impressive bundle of bills. Presently discovering one of the right denomination, he stripped it off and presented it to the chaffeur.

"That 's right, huh?" he inquired.

The driver inspected the legal tender narrowly, approved it and stuffed it in his pocket with a curt nod. "Right," he said, "g'dnight."

Rhode turned away. "Come on over to the Marlborough and have a drink," he said, embarrassed. "I got somethin' I wanta say to you."

Crittenden assented amiably, quietly amused.

"Anyway," volunteered the Red Man, abruptly

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defensive, in the act of pushing wide the swinging doors — "Anyway, it was *my* car so long 's I paid for it, huh? That 's all anybody can do — pay for a thing."

"Surely," agreed Crittenden without prejudice.

But the thought seemed to rankle in his companion's bosom. Sometime after they had found seats at a table, he broke a spell of taciturnity with the observation:

"A man that buys one of them cars and pays for its keep 's a fool, when he 's got as little use for it 's I have."

"True," said Crittenden. Intensely diverted, he watched Rhode toss up his glass and, with far more evidence of enjoyment than he ordinarily betrayed, inject into his system a full-grown drink of red whiskey.

"You said you had something you wished to talk to me about."

"Yeh." Rhode pushed aside his empty glass and frankly wiped his lips on the back of his hand. "*Hrrrhm!*" he said resoundingly. "That girl," he demanded — "what d' you know about her?"

"Just as much as she told you — not a thing more."

Rhode concentrated a hard blue stare on the young man's face. "Funny," he averred. "You would n't take her for the kind you could pick up without a knock-down."

"I should n't advise anybody to attempt it," said Crittenden dryly. He considered a moment, then briefly narrated the circumstances under which he

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had made Cynthia's acquaintance. "Is there anything else you need to know?" he concluded.

The Inventor of Occupations shook his head morosely. "No," he rumbled; "I had a hunch it happened like that, but I wanted to be sure. A fellow in my line 's gotta be careful who he takes up with."

"But are you?" Crittenden's surprise was patent.

"Careful? You bet I am!" said Rhode with an emphasis that drew the eyes of the room.

"I would n't think so."

"You would n't, huh? I guess you 've got an idea I go stumbling around with my eyes shut, just because I happened to speak to you without a letter of introdùction?"

"What would you think, if you were I?"

"I 'd think hard, that 's what I 'd think. I ain't in business for my health; I gotta know everythin' about the people I do business with. Take yourself: I spotted you two weeks ago, but I knew all about you before I as much as looked cross-eyed at you."

"Indeed?" said Crittenden civilly.

"Yes, indeed, I did. I got a line on you that showed me just what kinda fellow you was."

"And your sources of information?"

"Well, that waiter Jean told me your name. The rest was easy, considerin' what you 've been in this town. A man don't hit Broadway as hard as you did a coupla years ago without leaving his mark on it."

"Now you *are* interesting," said Crittenden. "May I ask just what you learned about me?"

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"Sure. Here . . ." Rhode delved into one of his pockets and brought out its store of folded documents, running through which rapidly he selected an envelope densely darkened with his singularly fine handwriting. "How 's this, now?" He began to read: "Born, Baltimore, Eighteen-eighty-three. Educated U. of P. Came to N' York Nineteen-one. First job, clerk in law-office — Higginbotham & Hunt, Wall Street. Nineteen-five, on your own, writing stories and books. Nineteen-eight wrote a show called *Bridge* — made a pot of money. Next year, another show, called *Faustine*. That fell down. Since then you have n't been doing anything."

Rhode paused, met Crittenden's glance, and looked hastily away.

"Go on," said Crittenden in a level tone.

"That 's all."

"That 's not all you have written down there."

"No . . ." Rhode admitted reluctantly. He looked down at the envelope in his hand, then with a quick movement of his strong fingers tore it across, placed the halves together and tore it again and again. "The rest of it 's none of my business," he growled surlily as the cloud of scraps drifted from his hand to the floor.

For several moments neither spoke. The Red Man employed the time with the trimming and lighting of a fresh cigar. Crittenden sat staring at his glass; then slowly his face regained his normal colouring and his eyes their calm.

"And on the strength of that," he said, "you feel justified in offering me a job."

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"Sure," assented the other, visibly relieved.

"Just what kind of a job, precisely?"

"Well . . . we gotta have a purser —"

"On the *Cynthia*, late *Cydonia?* That 's a position of some responsibility, is n't it?"

"Yeh," admitted Rhode, faintly abstracted.

"And you have that much confidence in me?"

"I ain't worryin' about you. You 're all right."

"Then suppose you go a step farther and tell me what this is all about?"

But the red head was shaken in slow but firm negation. "I told you this afternoon," said Mr. Rhode sadly, "you 'll be told everything good for you to know, once we get clear of New York."

Realising he would have to be content with this, Crittenden refrained from pressing the inquiry. But after a moment coloured by the Red Man's air of gentle melancholy, he saw fit to inquire:

"And Madame Savaran?"

Rhode started. "Huh?" he demanded in confusion.

"What 's your interest in Madame Savaran?"

"Oh, you don't gotta worry about *her*," Rhode evaded.

"I think she can take care of herself, if there 's anything in rumour —"

"She can do that, all right, all right."

"I 'm thinking about Miss Grayce."

"That 's all right; she won't get hurt."

"But why do you want her, rather than anybody who might chance to see that advertisement, to get the situation?"

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"Well . . ." The Inventor of Occupations studied the ash of his cigar thoughtfully. "I got a hunch that girl 's straight," said he, slowly.

"I think you 'll find she 's too straight to be your cat's-paw."

Rhode subjected the cigar to a still more keen inspection. Then, moving back his chair, "That 's just what I 'm countin' on," he said inscrutably. "Come on; we gotta be movin'. They 're shuttin' up."

It was so; the front doors had been closed and the shades drawn. Now the bartenders were busy clearing up, and the lights were being lowered.

Baffled and wondering, Crittenden followed the adventurer through the side door to the hotel lobby and then on out to the street, where they paused.

"Goin' downtown, I suppose?" said Rhode. "Well, g'dnight. Remember, if anythin' turns up to change our plans, I 'll call you up or wire you. Otherwise, you come aboard by nine, if not before."

"Very well," said Crittenden shortly. "Good-night."

He walked slowly down Broadway, suddenly aware he was acutely tired. Of him no less than of the city's millions the heat of the day had taken its toll of stamina. He would be glad to reach his room and bed.

On the corner of Thirty-fifth street he paused an instant, his eyes instinctively seeking one of the huge painted signboards raised above the roofs of a row of buildings on the south side of Thirty-fourth, at the corner of Sixth Avenue. Only that morning he

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had noticed painters at work, blocking out a new design: it was finished now, glaring in its coat of gaudy colours beneath a row of electric lights.

"'Opening Tuesday, September fifth,'" he read aloud: "'Princesse Theatre — Letty Noon in *Witchcraft* — comedy by Tynan Dodd.'"

He lifted his shoulders, smiled oddly and moved on, lips framing noiselessly unspoken thoughts. If he had until that moment entertained any lingering doubt as to whether he would in the last analysis close with the proposition put before him by Rhode, it was now altogether swept away and as if it had never existed.

Borne northwards from the bay, on the wings of a vagrant breeze, a welcome breath of coolness came stealing through the thermal channels of steel and stone: like a sigh of the city turning in the oppression of its sleep. Otherwise the quiet seemed unusual, even for that late hour; so much so that the ordinary, never-ending traffic in the street, of trolley-cars and skulking nighthawk hansoms and flitting bat-like taxicabs, forced itself upon the notice that at another time had accepted all as commonplace.

He turned into Twenty-fourth street just as the great clock in the Metropolitan tower across the Park was telling the hour of half-past one. The sonorous echo, dying, left a hush disturbed only by the footsteps of a solitary pedestrian: but for Crittenden the block was silent and deserted — save that a somnolent taxicab stood before a door two or three removes from his own lodgings.

Midway between Broadway and Sixth Avenue, as-

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cending iron steps to an iron stoop, he let himself into a dark hallway, then groped his way, through gloom made sensible by a single light turned low upon the second landing, up three flights to the topmost floor, where, in the back of the house, he came to his door.

It stood ajar — presumably he had neglected to lock it that morning. With a slight exclamation of annoyance he pushed it open, entered, and closed it behind him. Then, confused, he paused for a long moment, half inclined to believe that through some strange aberration he had found his way into the wrong room, perhaps into the wrong house.

There was a scent in the air, a perfume as delicate as the ghost of a dead caress, yet potent to dissipate that familiar atmosphere and to evoke in its stead a dream of yesterday so sad and poignant with memories that his breath caught in his throat and he gasped as if stifling.

Troubled, perplexed, he peered about him. Through the wide north-light overhead a dull glow stole, a wraith of twilight, barely tempering the shadows. The dimensions of the room spread round him, indistinctly as intimate as the palm of his hand, yet as strange and unreal as a vision in illness.

He forced composure upon himself with an effort of will. He must not permit imagination so to trick him. What he fancied was madness, bred of that shock of meeting and recognition. . . . He drew a deep breath, strode hastily to a wall-bracket, struck a match and lit the gas.

Then, when he turned to review his surroundings,

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out of their sombrous obscurity, warmed to life and colour by the flaring jet, leaped the incarnate substance of his apprehensions. In the deeper gloom of the room beyond the skylight, a woman was waiting, disposed at indolent, graceful ease on an old settee, filmy, white draperies drooping round her like the weary wings of a resting moth: an elbow on the arm of the settee, chin cradled in the hollow of her palm, her face turned to him, eyes in the shadow of her hair of gold seeking his face with a look wide, pensive, and inscrutable.

A gust of anger shook him like a wind. He took a step toward her with an unconscious gesture of incredulity, as if he would exorcise an hallucination, then halted and dropped his hand and stood staring at her.

"Letty," he said in a voice so low that it was almost a whisper — "Letty!"

Slowly the moth-woman inclined her head, then again moveless watched him with a regard unwaveringly intent and curious.

"What do you want?" he asked unsteadily.

"To see you, Bruce." Her tone was calm, even, and bell-clear.

He tried to control his own. "How did you get in here?"

She raised the arm that had lain in her lap, and the gas light struck a myriad dazzling rays of iridescence from her gem-incrusted wrist and the fingers that offered him a key.

"I happened to remember having this," she said slowly, "and thought I'd drop round and see if

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you had changed the lock. I could n't find matches — so waited in the dark. You 're late."

A note of biting raillery blended with the silken richness of her tones. He felt it, resented it, lost grip of himself for an instant. In another stride he stood over her, snatched the key from her unresisting grasp and tossed it away, through a nearby window.

"You 've forfeited your right to that . . ." he said, trembling.

The woman smiled provokingly. "You have n't forgotten how to be melodramatic, have you, Bruce?"

"You taught me," he said sullenly. "You made a fool of me from the first."

"Are you sure?" she asked with a quiet laugh. "Are you sure, Bruce? I 've always wondered!"

The distilled malice of her words and manner sobered him suddenly. His face hardened even as the eyes that stared openly into her own until her smile faded and a slow, hot colour burned in her cheeks and temples.

"No," he said quietly; "you 're right, Letty. I have given you too much credit. You simply improved in your own way the raw material I furnished you."

"Meaning, I presume, you were a fool to marry me, Bruce?"

"That 's my meaning." His jaws snapped on the words.

"Then . . . why did you?"

"Because you . . . !" Crittenden broke off,

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aware that he was raising his voice. Without finishing, he turned, crossed the room and dropped heavily into a chair.

"Well, Bruce?" the woman goaded him. "Well, because I —?"

"Because I thought I loved you," he replied in a more guarded tone.

"And you did n't, really?"

"God knows I did!"

"I did n't value you highly enough, you think?"

"No; I would n't say that: you valued me exactly — to the last dollar, Letty."

With a swift and graceful movement the woman sat up, signals of danger in her eyes; but Crittenden was not even looking at her. His elbows on his knees, his hands clasped low, he sat with abstracted gaze directed toward the floor.

"You played the game by the rules you knew," he continued bitterly. "You found me pretty well fixed and well thought-of; it seems only yesterday they were calling me the coming man, along Broadway. You thought so, too, else you would n't have consented to marry me; you had your eye on royalties — and a play to exploit yourself in. You got the former, every damned cent, and you got the latter — only that failed. And because it failed you rid yourself of me, just as you 'd have sent back a gown you 'd ordered and then thought shabby. You cast me off like an old glove and — went to the arms of a man with money. There 's only one thing that saved you . . ."

"From what, Bruce? Did you really think of

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killing me? How dramatic!" Letty bent forward, watching him closely with eyes alight. "I think that would have made me love you a little, Bruce — if you 'd shown that much spirit. Why did n't you try it, anyhow — throw the bluff, at least?"

"Because I 've got a decent name, for one thing," he told her coolly; "even you could n't destroy my pride in that. And then the man you went to — poor Tommy! — was my friend."

"But either of those reasons was enough, Bruce — "

"You forget," he interrupted quietly; "Tommy knew nothing of our relations — any more than the world did. You provided for that when you insisted that our marriage be kept a secret — it was I who insisted on marriage, you know, Letty — because you could n't live without the footlights, and if managers knew you were married it would work against their interest in you. You made that stipulation, and because I loved and had faith in you and wanted to please you, I consented—like the fool you thought me, doubtless."

"Well, yes," she admitted lightly.

"And so," Crittenden pursued without heeding the interpolation, "it was kept secret — no one knew. Some guessed, of course; but not Tommy, and not my family. If I 'd lost my head, I 'd have broken Tommy's heart — for he 'd sooner have cut off his hand than play double with me; and then I 'd have had the name of Crittenden shrieking at the world from every newspaper headline — coupled with the name of a — "

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"Don't say it!" Letty Noon interrupted sharply, rising. "I did n't come here to have you —"

"Oh, yes, I know," he said wearily. "You need n't remind me you can tear a passion to tatters in private as well as in public. I 've seen you do it often enough. Is that what you hunted me up for — to raise a row and rant and rage? What 's the matter? Is Tommy already beginning to be bored by your temper? Or is n't the stage of the Princesse big enough for your rehearsals?"

The woman had moved over to him, cheeks and eyes hot with anger. Now, however, after a moment-long downward look of contemplation, she compressed her lips, laughed briefly, and turned away.

"That was clever of you," she said in a cutting voice. "You 're improving, Bruce. Why don't you get back into harness?"

He made no answer other than a gesture by which, unwittingly, he pictured the emptiness of effort, for him.

Soft, lustrous draperies trailing, the woman strolled languidly to the window, looking out, then since he threatened to permit the scene to fall flat, turned impatiently back.

"You ought to be in good form, after so long a rest," she said. "Why not dramatise this harrowing story you 've been telling me? I 'm sure it would make a hit."

He looked up, his glance keen and speculative. "I wonder that that did n't warn me what you were," he said.

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"If you want to marry that pretty young woman I saw this evening—you'll have to do the divorcing yourself, Bruce"

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She paused beside him, and asked sharply: "What do you mean?"

"That streak of coarseness in you," he said earnestly, absorbed in an analysis that interested him so thoroughly for the moment that his attitude toward its subject was wholly impersonal. "I used to notice it — it jarred; and wondered about it, wondered how you could be two women at once: the one I loved, the actress with intelligence enough to ape the woman of delicate sentiment and sensitiveness, and the other woman, crude enough to suggest things such as you said just now — even in anger. That should have shown me what you were at heart — but, Lord! I was infatuated, blind!"

"Well," she said harshly, "you 've got your eyes open now, have n't you?"

He nodded listlessly. "What do you want?" he asked after a span of silence, while the woman continued to move quietly to and fro, her eyes appraising the changes that had come to pass in the room since last she had seen it. "I presume you 're after something —?"

"Just now," she returned lightly, "I 'm after a cigarette."

"I think you 'll find some over there on the table."

She swung away to the farther side of the room and for a moment stood with her back to him. Then she struck a match, touched it to the cigarette between her full, crimson lips, and returned, puffing.

"Caporal," she said abruptly. "That 's pretty poor stuff for you to smoke, Bruce." She threw

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the cigarette away with a little *moue* of disgust. "What 's become of your desk?"

"Sold," he said.

"And the rest of the things — your rugs?"

"Sold," he iterated in the same uninterested voice.

"*Hmm* . . ." She began to move back and forth again, restlessly. "There 's a paper on your door — did you see it?"

"This morning," he said: "my landlord's gentle way of suggesting he 'd prefer my room to my tenancy."

"Dispossess notice — what?"

"Yes."

"And all because of me!" She laughed affectedly. "How romantic, how touching! He 's going to the bow-wows because of a woman! Or are you?" She paused, swaying, before him. "Are you going to the dogs on my account, Bruce?"

He shook his head. "No," he returned; "I daresay I might have, if I 'd had a taste for drink. That would have killed thought. As it was, my mind remained clear enough for me to think, to understand a little just how worthless a thing you were. You are n't worth a man's damnation, Letty."

"But," she argued, puzzled, "you *are* going down-hill, you know. You 've let go — people are forgetting you."

"I 'm working out my cure in my own way," he said. "If I 'd been making money all this time, there might have been the temptation . . ."

"To try to buy me back, Bruce?"

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He said nothing. She considered briefly, then came and stood near to him.

"What," she purred gently — "what if I had come to tell you I 'd found out my mistake, Bruce?"

Startled, he lifted his head, his glance meeting her eyes in mute inquiry. She smiled slowly down upon him.

"What," she went on in her silken accents, "if I *wanted* you to take me back?"

His eyes clouded and turned blank. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed in utter disgust; and rising, moved away.

Presently, from the open window, where he stood with an elbow against the frame, his gaze wandering blindly through the gulf of darkness that yawned below, he resumed: "No; I 'm not down. Only I 've had my taste of hell, this past year. It took time to get over that, and regain my belief in right and decency and the worth of work. I 'm not wholly sound, even yet, but it 's coming. It won't take forever. I 'll come back."

"There 's a woman in this," said his wife from the room behind him.

"No . . . "

"There sure' is," she insisted. "I guess I know men well enough . . . Who is she? That kid you were with tonight? She 's good looking; I always said it would take a good-looking woman to make you forget me."

"You 're mistaken," he said quietly. "And it 's getting late and I want sleep. Can't you come to the point and go?"

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"Who was she?" queried the actress, ignoring his attitude. "I 'm curious."

"No one you 'd know — or understand," he said impatiently.

"Well, then, the man with you: who was he?"

"Calls himself Rhode, if that 'll satisfy you." Crittenden lounged away from the window, irritated. "Is that all?"

Delicately, shielding her mouth with a dainty, jewelled hand, Letty yawned. "It *is* late," she conceded. "I 'm getting tired, too — you 're making me tired, if you must know, Bruce." She flashed a dazzling, mocking smile at him. "Don't you care?"

In the depths of his impatience and contempt, he was dumb.

"Dear me, is it really as bad as that? Have you actually grown so cold to me, Bruce? Have you nothing to say to me? Not a word, not a sign of encouragement to offer the erring spouse? Think — "

"What did you come here for?" he demanded in exasperation.

"Simply to see you, Bruce. That glimpse I had of you — well, it startled me. I could n't forget it. You 've no idea how seedy you look. I could n't rest for thinking about you, after I 'd got home. Remorse — "

"Damn your emotions!" he cried. "If you were n't dead to every decent one, you 'd end this and get out."

Again she yawned fastidiously. "How rude!"

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she jeered. "How awfully rude! You *have* changed, Bruce. . . . Very well." She gathered up her wrap and turned toward the door. "You 'll be sorry some day. See if you are n't. I 'm going to be sorry right away: I daresay I 'll have the deuce of a taxi bill to pay, all for the pleasure of this interview."

"Letty — " he said, as her fingers closed round the door-knob.

She looked inquiringly over her shoulder. "Well, my dear?"

He crossed the room to her. "Letty," he said gravely, "tell me one thing. . . . You 're going to divorce me, of course?"

"I?" She simulated surprise admirably, then thoughtful consideration, to end which she shook her head gravely. "No; I really had n't thought about it, Bruce. But it *is* white of you to give me the chance."

He paled slightly. "You have legal grounds, if you wish to use them — non-support, you know. I shant enter a defense; of course you understand that. It can be arranged."

Letty allowed herself still another histrionic pause for deliberation. Then, "No," she repeated. "I 'm not anxious; married life suits me — this sort. It 's quite convenient to have a tame husband to fall back upon in case of emergency, really."

His face burned crimson; in wrists and temples his pulses throbbed. She pretended not to notice.

"If you want to marry that pretty woman I saw this evening — you 'll have to do the divorcing your-

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self, Bruce. That way I 'll even things up a bit, out of revenge for your rudeness. Good-night."

She turned calmly, opened the door and passed out.

His temper had passed the stage of resentment. He was conscious only of the sickness of self-contempt as he stood watching the moth-shape disappear over the edge of the landing, and heard the slow, steady tapping of his wife's heels on the lower steps and landings.

Then the front door closed with an echoing bang.

Later, while still he remained in the doorway, chained in thought, he heard from the street the staccato rattle of a taxicab motor, a whine, a deepening hum, the squawk of a horn; then silence.

He shut the door and dropped into a chair, covering his face with both hands.

For nearly an hour he continued in that position, without stirring. Then with an effort he roused, pulled himself together, glanced at his watch, and rising, took off his coat.

In unconscious obedience to the promptings of his habit, he moved thoughtlessly over to the table and took up the packet of cigarettes from the spot where his wife had dropped it. The wrapper round it was loose and came away in his hand. Incuriously he looked down to find he held a bit of yellow-backed paper, crisp and clean from the engravers' press.

Thunderstruck, he smoothed the Treasury note out between his fingers. Its value was that of one hundred dollars.

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Then slowly his face darkened with a suffusion of blood, and for a time he stood trembling in every limb with the sense of outrage.

Suddenly seating himself by the table, he drew pen and paper to him, and wrote:

"My dear Letty, — I return, enclosed herewith, the $100 you left on my work-table.

"Even were I positive the money was yours — or a remnant of my own — I should not keep it. You, of course, knew that. Even in your world, there are conventions which the majority observes for the preservation of its self-respect. One of them is that in affairs such as ours — the marital tie being conceded nothing more than a mere form — it is always the man who must pay.

"Bruce Crittenden."

While still his anger burned like slow-fire in all his body, mind, and soul, he sealed and addressed this communication, slipped on his coat, left the house and posted the letter at a corner box.

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VI

THE AMETHYST RING

In the leisure of what, with a curl of her lips signifying her contempt for the implication, she was accustomed to term her old age, Madame Savaran was learning to recognise the hateful soundness of the axiom, to wit, good habits are as binding as the worst. The routine which for forty years, more or less, had dictated what she esteemed early rising, was not to be sloughed like the cares of the business which had necessitated that routine.

For some forty years Madame Savaran had wakened without reluctance at the hour of seven: but for upwards of thirty-nine she had anticipated with the keenest intimations of pleasure those days to come when she would be free to time her arising at her own sweet will — a faculty so highly esteemed by its possessor that she was accustomed to humour its slightest whims and to see that others either humoured them or else rendered satisfactory explanation of their failure to oblige.

And now, at the age of sixty, Madame Savaran found herself a free agent in every sense of the phrase — within mundane bounds — but a slave to habits she herself had assiduously cultivated. She was wealthy; she was willingly a widow; she had sold her business, retaining only an interest large enough to permit her to interfere when other diver-

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sions palled; she had nothing to do but nurse her crotchets; and withal she was bound to the wheel of wont. And the most disgusting link in the chain that constrained her she held to be this inability to sleep as late as she liked.

It was the only annoying circumstance which, in the long run, whether through some freak of favouring fortune or her own contrivance, she had not been able to circumvent. She had got rid of poverty, she had got rid of her worthless husband, she had got rid of the harness of affairs, she had got rid of that immaturity which had once hampered her freedom of speech: but she could n't get rid of the subconscious alarm-clock which roused her unfailingly at an ungodly hour, whether she retired early or late.

Small wonder that the poor lady vented her resentment in what can be called nothing else but a snort, when she turned her handsome head upon the pillow and looked the clock in the face and discovered that on this day as on all others she was awake at seven. It availed nothing to mitigate her indignation that on this day, especially, she had need to be up betimes and stirring, who had three-score details demanding her attention and supervision. She elected to be in an ill humour, and spent several minutes lying there, staring at the ceiling and making up her mind on whom to visit her wrath.

All things considered, Sidonie seemed to be the predestined vessel.

With a grim expression Madame raised on her elbow and agitated the small silver call bell on the bedside stand.

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Presently Sidonie appeared; but in the meantime Madame Savaran had exercised her inalienable prerogative of changing her mind. Not that she had abandoned her intention of making the morning an interesting one for Sidonie; simply that she had employed the interim to dramatise the contemplated explosion and had decided it would prove more effective if temporarily withheld but ominously presaged.

Therefore her mistress was merely cold and sharply taciturn with Sidonie. She demanded in icy accents her matutinal draught of hot water and lemon-juice; she commanded her dressing-gown to be produced forthwith in the most terrifying and peremptory manner; she snapped for her slippers and barked for her breakfast and ordered her paper in phrases of sardonic humour — a form of expression in whose use she had few peers: all, oddly enough, without losing jot or tittle of her magnificent dignity.

Let none waste sympathy on Sidonie; not only was she inured to Madame's temper, but she deserved more of it than she got. Her name was not rightfully Sidonie and she was neither French nor young nor trim nor a maid — although she performed the office of lady's maid to admiration. She was a Belgian woman only some ten years the junior of Madame Savaran, she was homely of feature and figure, she was an inveterate petty peculator, and she would have sold every amazing secret of the morning toilet of her employer for anything that might excite her inordinate cupidity, however trifling. Also she

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carried tales and, when occasion offered, she drank.

Why did Madame Savaran retain Sidonie in her service? Sidonie was a habit, and had besides the inestimable virtue of being imperturbably patient. Madame Savaran could tear the English language into strips and lash Sidonie with the cat-o'-nine-tails so extemporised and Sidonie would not even wink.

From which it will be seen that Sidonie was indispensable.

The suit of rooms Madame Savaran occupied in the Hotel Monolith consisted of "parlour, two bedrooms and bath." One of the bedrooms had until the previous day been occupied by the unhappy Miss Biddle — the latest of a long series of indigent lady companions whom Madame had suffered to the best of her endurance and whom Sidonie had conspired to oust with ultimately invariable success.

Now after Madame had had her cold bath and Sidonie had dressed her to the breakfast-gown point and had performed sundry wondrous acts of skill and daring in the arrangement of Madame's hair, crowning the achievement with a coquettish cap of lace and ribbons, which the wearer would have died rather than don, had not the mode of the moment prescribed that article for all matrons without respect to age — after all this, Madame frigidly called for her cane and hobbled into the so-styled parlour, where her breakfast was served.

The cane, like the hobble, should be accounted for, by the way: both were cherished mementos of the aristocratic disease known as gout, from which Mad-

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ame Savaran had n't suffered for so long that she could not recall her last twinge, but the semblance of which she would as willingly have abandoned as she would the component parts of that miraculous edifice Sidonie had just builded beneath her breakfast-cap. Gout at sixty lends one an air; it is besides a sovereign excuse for grumbling and an excellent mask for the infirmities of advancing years.

As Madame Savaran sat at table, enjoying the clean and sweet if slightly warm breeze that sighed in through the window at her elbow, and likewise enjoying iced canteloupe, she looked easily five years younger than the hard-faced Belgian woman attending her. But then Sidonie looked older than her age by an equivalent span — easily fifty-five. So that the mistress would have passed for fifty at face value. And a valuable face it was to her, with a better natural colour than many a girl of thirty could boast, and a fine and prideful cast of feature that told truthfully the tale of a youth of unusual beauty. The adjective patrician, though overworked, seems the most fitting wherewith to characterise Madame's cast of countenance; it betokened breeding, intelligence, a proper self-esteem, and a good, strong will whose constitution had by no means been undermined through lack of exercise. Her person was plentiful but ductile; its abundance never brimmed over or bulged unbecomingly. Her eyes were handsome: blue-grey, strong and humorous, if capable of ominous fire-play. In European terminology she would doubtless have fallen under the classification of *grande dame;* in the King's English, unquestionably,

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a deuced fine woman; in every-day American, a mighty well-preserved lady.

At sixty one does not trifle with one's digestion. Madame's morning meal comprised simply fruit, dry toast, and coffee. She consumed it at leisure, a newspaper propped before her: an encroachment on the bestial ways of man in itself betraying an advanced state of intelligence which, had Madame been twenty years younger, would certainly have made of her a militant suffragist.

The meal concluded, Sidonie removed the tray, in its place presenting the morning mail and one long and corpulent cigarette. Though Madame Savaran restricted herself to a single matutinal smoke, she procured for the purpose the largest cigarette she could find.

It was really astonishing how daintily she could wield so massive a roll of paper-wrapped tobacco.

Smoking, she poked through the batch of letters, to a running accompaniment of trenchant comment. Their majority went to the waste-basket half read; and with these went the picture post-cards, as to the place of which in polite correspondence Madame Savaran entertained profound and unpolite convictions. The remainder of the mail was intrusted to Sidonie to be placed in the leather writing-case Madame used when travelling.

And now Madame Savaran rested and smiled a sweetly dangerous smile, with dilated nostrils scenting the imminent hour of battle.

"Sidonie," said she in deceptively dulcet tones.

But Sidonie was too old in Madame's service to

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be deceived. She replied submissively, "Yes, Madame?" But she rolled up her eyes, shrugged her shoulders, and shivered as she spoke.

"Sidonie, fetch my jewel-case."

Sidonie said a naughty word, but obeyed without demur.

It was a commodious strong-box, that jewel-case, whose nickel-steel construction was concealed by a sheath of grained leather. To open it one required both a key and a pass-word with which to cajole the combination-lock. Its interior was arranged with four trays of varying depths, each divided into compartments, and yielding only to individual keys.

Sidonie kept the keys, her mistress the combination. But sometimes Madame Savaran neglected the latter, being, in spite of her keen business instinct, inordinately heedless and negligent.

In this instance the key alone served to release the hinged front, which fell flat on the table, permitting the trays to be removed. Madame Savaran attended to this with her own jealous hands, and when the four trays lay in a row before her, their glittering, glistening hoard disclosed, she sighed a little and then her breath came momentarily fast, while her eyes shone greedily and her shapely, well-cared-for hands trembled as they hovered over the treasure.

In opening the case, Madame Savaran had unlocked her soul. Its ruling passion lay revealed. She adored jewelry with a devotion not even transcended by her love of having her own way, but not as ignobly as one might fancy: its intrinsic value

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was little to its owner; it was the beauty of fine stones and cunning settings that enslaved the heart of Madame Savaran; historical association came second in her esteem, money-worth last and least.

As may be imagined from this explanation, the collection was in the main composed of curious pieces and antiques. Its value was indisputably very great, but by no means so staggering as they were led to believe who heard rumours of the old lady's wealth in gems and jewels.

Each piece had its individual niche or compartment. One tray was entirely given over to rings, another to necklaces, a third to bracelets and brooches, the last to a heterogeneous assemblage of strange, rare articles whose uniquity alone had been enough to render them irresistible to the heart of the amateur.

Deliberately, piece by piece, Madame Savaran took up and examined the selection of rings. It is n't too much to say that she forgot, temporarily, her fell intent with regard to Sidonie; but presently she came to that which reminded her thereof, to wit, an empty place.

"Sidonie," she said blandly.

"Madame?" returned Sidonie in accents as suave.

"The amethyst ring of the Duc de Guise . . ."

"Doubtless Madame will recall that the setting was loose and that she instructed me to take it to the jeweller to repair."

But now Madame Savaran was sitting back in her chair, watching Sidonie with catlike attention, a smile of open derision in her eyes and on her lips.

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"Positively, Sidonie, you bore me. Do, the next time this happens, have the sense to divert me with an original lie. To be entertained with the same old story, Sidonie, wearies me of you. How much did you get on it?"

"Ten dollars," replied Sidonie, placidly.

"Is that all?"

Sidonie grimaced her deprecation of the insult to the collection.

"These pawnbrokers, Madame—! What would you? They have no soul!"

"Beast!" said Madame Savaran slowly and distinctly.

It was like the puff of wind that darkens the surface of calm waters, forerunning the storm. Sidonie prepared to bow her head to the withering blast. It is no good, trying to fight the elements.

"You have the ticket, I presume?"

"It is here, Madame." Sidonie readily opened her hand, exposing a scrap of paper.

Madame Savaran gripped her cane and leaned forward. Forked lightnings could be no more terrifying than the flashes from her steel-grey eyes.

Just then the situation was saved for Sidonie by the telephone bell.

Madame Savaran heard it ringing in the adjoining chamber, snorted viciously, and called Sidonie a devil. "Go and see what that is!" she commanded with violence. And when Sidonie hastily disappeared she settled back in the black temper of a tigress balked of her prey.

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The inevitable, however, was but temporarily deferred. She would yet have it out with Sidonie.

"Well?" she demanded acidly, when Sidonie returned.

"A young lady calling, Madame; she gave her name as Miss Grayce. I told the office to send her up at once."

"You did!" The mistress gathered herself together again, ready to launch the thunderbolt. "What right —"

"Pardon, Madame, but one presumed the young person was calling in response to Madame's advertisement," explained Sidonie hastily. "Madame was so concerned to replace the excellent Miss Biddle without loss of time that I —"

"Be silent, you!" snapped Madame, hastily replacing the trays and shutting the jewel-case.

Accordingly Sidonie closed her thin lips. She was on the point of treating herself to a secret smile, to think of how she had outwitted Madame this once when she was thrown into complete consternation (or a condition as nearly approximating that as her completely cold and calculating nature would permit) to see an open and an inexplicable smile on the face of Madame Savaran: a smile that said "*Aha!*" or Sidonie's painfully acquired lore of Madame Savaran's weather-signals counted for nothing.

It hinted at hideous things, that smile, of a reservation of secret strength of awful potentialities. Sobered by alarm and wonderment, the woman hurried away to the door, grateful for the respite promised by the knocking that summoned her.

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She opened, and there was Cynthia.

Heaven alone, it is believed, knows how women manage these things. Certain it is Cynthia had had little sleep, the previous night. Before she dared go to bed, she had much to do to make herself presentable in the morning: mending, cleaning, pressing — a task of tedious difficulty when the iron must be heated by means of a patent attachment which subdues the solitary gas jet to a mere ghastly blue flicker. And after that, when at length free to lay herself down, there had been what seemed endless hours of half-conscious dozing, excitement — a froth in her mind of fresh impressions and emotions — working with care to hold back the craved loss of consciousness.

A man who had undergone as much would have felt and looked wretchedly seedy.

But Cynthia, faltering on the threshold there, was as fresh and pretty as any dew-drenched rose at dawn. Her colour was clear and glowing with health; something with which, no doubt, her rapid walk across- and up-town had much to do. Her manner of composure moderated by reserve became her wonderfully well. That incredible ingenuity of the impoverished woman of sensibility cunningly concealed and denied a score of lacks and faults and incongruities in her attire. Her eyes alone may have betrayed her, fatigue rendering them unusually dark and big, though at the same time they were luminous with hope and confidence inspired of the ease with which she had gained to this presence of bountiful promise. For while she had been, womanlike, a

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bit late getting away and had lost some time vainly scanning the *Herald* columns for Madame Savaran's advertisement, she had found none to dispute precedence with her when she applied at the hotel desk.

In fine she was altogether charming. Madame Savaran and her maid granted this at a glance, though otherwise both received her appearance with surprise, wonder, and doubt: a community of feeling of which Sidonie, unhappily, was entirely unsuspicious.

Cynthia's gaze, moving from the maid's face, fixed upon that of the handsome old lady behind the small table by the window. She inclined her head a little diffidently.

"Madame Savaran?" asked she.

"I am Madame Savaran," said that person. "Won't you come in?"

Cynthia entered and Sidonie shut the door.

"Come here, please — to the light," said Madame in her most impressive manner; and when Cynthia had complied: "You wished to see me?"

"Your advertisement in the *Herald* . . ."

"Ah," said Madame Savaran dispassionately. In fact, she was disappointed. She had hoped for something different, Cynthia's appearance prepossessing her.

"I wish to apply for the position." This supererogatory explanation Cynthia felt to be somehow demanded by Madame's manner.

The latter performed a miracle of diplomatic chemistry, coating seething deeps of feeling with the

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thin, smooth ice of judicial calm. This operation is understood to be known under the name of Tact.

"Sit down," said she with just enough hauteur to render Cynthia vaguely uncomfortable, as obediently she took the seat indicated by a motion of Madame's graceful hand. "Your name, please?"

"Cynthia Urcilla Grayce."

"Ah!" This time the interjection was unmistakably pregnant with meaning: only the meaning remained indecipherable.

With keen old eyes, Madame Savaran looked the young woman up and down, without apology for her rudeness; and you may be certain nothing escaped her. Cynthia felt herself stripped of every sorry trick of artifice to which she had resorted to cloak her crying deficiencies. In that one, long, lingering scrutiny she was read through and through: it shrewdly surmised in a single cast her life to that hour and her logical future; she no longer was comforted by her mantle of personal privacy; everything was revealed to that dreadful and relentless old woman, and — the chiefest horror — against the virgin innocence of her soul that deceit she had been told to practise stood out as publicly as a blotch of soot on a snowbound waste.

She stirred uneasily. A look of satisfaction lit up Madame's eyes; she smiled a smile faintly sardonic and the tip of her tongue showed between her strong white teeth and touched her lips. Actually, Madame Savaran licked her lips in anticipation of what was to come.

In the unnaturally prolonged pause, distressed,

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Cynthia even shivered. Sidonie, more wise in her day and generation, saw that look, interpreted it, and felt her soul shudder. Madame unquestionably had a trump card up her sleeve, and as soon as that was played, the game was up so far as Sidonie was concerned.

Only a fearful incredulity held her spellbound. It seemed incredible that her apprehensions could have any root in fact. . . .

"What," queried Madame Savaran — "what precisely is your understanding of your duties, should I engage you?"

"Why," replied Cynthia faintly, "I understand you wanted a companion and secretary, some one who had no objection to travel — "

"Yes," Madame interrupted. "You saw all that in the advertisement?"

Cynthia's lips sought to shape the affirmative, but her tongue would not utter it. She had not yet learned to lie. So she was silent.

"No," the old lady presently answered for her; "you did not see it in the advertisement. Do you know why, Sidonie? Because I did n't insert the advertisement after all, you she-devil! I thought you were a bit too interested in it, when I caught you patching together the scraps of the first draft; so I said nothing and simply pretended to go out to the *Herald* office. Then you sold me, Sidonie. Really, I 'd have been an old fool not to expect it of you. Don't you think so, Sidonie?"

The pallor in the maid's sallow face spoke for her more truthfully than her stammered negative.

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"What a liar you are, Sidonie!" observed Madame with irony as corrosive as an acid. She turned upon Cynthia with something less of personal hostility in her manner. "Who sent you here?" she demanded.

"I — why —" Cynthia said in crimson confusion and shame.

"Who told you about the advertisement I had in mind? It was that scoundrel Rhode! Was n't it?"

"Yes," said Cynthia of the pitiful eyes.

"You admit it? You dare tell me to my face he sent you here to win my confidence and spy on me and sell me to him — like Sidonie there?"

Her spirit came to Cynthia's rescue, tardily but not too late. "That is not so," she said clearly. "There was no such understanding. You have no possible right to assume so much — or to talk to me this way."

There was now a fighting light in Cynthia's eyes and a brilliant spot on her either cheek. She made no move to go, for she was determined this hateful creature should know the absolute truth about her application. In justice to herself she would tell that story, whether the old woman chose to believe her or not.

Madame Savaran stared in surprise to see her sitting there, facing bravely her anger, giving her look for look and betraying no hint of desire to escape. She liked that: she liked spirit in her sex, and had scant patience with a will that dared not cross her own. None the less, there was

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no suggestion of her mollification in her instant rejoinder.

"Indeed?" said she in her most caustic tone. Just so would her grandmother have said: "Hoity-toity!"

"Yes, indeed!" Cynthia insisted courageously. "I came to you simply because I was poor and needed work. From Mr. Rhode, by the merest accident, I learned that you needed a companion. I never knew him before yesterday, and I hardly know him now. There was n't the least intimation that I was to deceive you in any way; only he advised me not to mention his name."

"I should fancy," said Madame Savaran with edged significance. "And how, pray, did all this come about?"

"I was dining with a friend." Cynthia told her brief story as succinctly as she could, concerned only to get it told and feel free to go away. "After dinner he — Mr. Rhode — came in. He knew this friend and so was introduced to me. He calls himself an Inventor of Occupations — I presume you know that?"

"I do. Go on," said Madame severely. "Sidonie, stop making those hideous faces instantly. Stand behind Miss Grayce — anywhere, so she does n't see you."

Sullenly Sidonie complied.

"I was pretty desperate because I needed work; that made me ask him if he could invent an occupation for me. He said he could, and showed me a telegram to him giving the wording of an adver-

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tisement which it stated was to appear in the *Herald* this morning. He told me I had a chance of getting the position if I got here early enough. It was distinctly understood I was in no way bound to him for telling me about this chance."

"And why was that so distinctly understood, please?" As yet Madame's voice had lost nothing of its edge of sarcasm. But already her eyes were twinkling.

"Because my friend mentioned it — indeed, insisted upon it. . . . And that," added Cynthia, rising, "is all I have to say to you, Madame Savaran."

"But it 's not all I have to say to you, young woman. Sit down."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," replied Cynthia, moving toward the door.

"But I have n't finished with you, girl!"

Still Cynthia did not turn back, and in this extremity, faced out, Madame had need to have recourse to wheedling. "Miss Grayce!" she pleaded with so complete a change of tone and manner that Cynthia looked round in surprise, her hand on the door-knob. "Just a minute longer, please . . . "

"Not if you 're going to continue being incivil," stipulated Cynthia.

At this, to her, the old lady's sense of humour was so tickled that she laughed outright. "Come back, you droll creature!" she gasped. "I promise to handle you with gloves, my dear. Please — to please an old woman — just for a minute!"

Uncompromising of mien, the younger woman

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consented and came back to her chair. By the time she was seated Madame Savaran's temper toward her had undergone a complete *volte-face*. She had a not unfriendly smile for the girl.

"My dear," said she in this new and kindly voice, "you should have more patience with a lonely woman of my age who is harried by cares and upset by treachery. And you must admit you came to me with the worst credentials imaginable."

"I know nothing about Mr. Rhode," said Cynthia, relenting slightly. "You should know best what he is."

"I do. Now, before we have a little talk — I believe you are truthful, my dear; those big eyes could n't lie — tell me one thing. . . . You say you saw this telegram?"

"Yes."

"What signature did it have? Or perhaps you did n't notice — ?"

"I remember perfectly," Cynthia asserted. Then she spelled it out: "C-y-d."

"Ah!" commented Madame with a return to her earlier, fighting manner. "C-y-d," she iterated; and if looks could wither Sidonie had been shrivelled then and there. "*C-y-d* or *S-i-d* — Sidonie!"

"Madame?" The maid's tone was frightened.

The mistress dissembled her covert joy: it was something, it was much, at last to have brought this creature to the fear of God. Almost Madame Savaran could have forgiven her, in this time of triumph. But not quite: there be crimes too heinous for forgiveness, and treachery heads the list.

"Your trunk is packed, Sidonie?"

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Sidonie's face was ghastly. "Practically, Madame," she mumbled.

"Go to your room, take out of your trunk whatever it holds that is mine, telephone for the porter, and get away as quick as you can. I give you ten minutes to leave my rooms. If you are here at the end of that time, I will telephone for the police and give you in charge for the theft of the amethyst ring of the Duc de Guise!"

"Yes, Madame. Very well, Madame." The accents of the maid were barely audible.

"Wait." Madame Savaran pushed her jewel-case out of the way, pulled the writing-case before her, found a loose cheque, and with a fountain-pen rapidly filled it in.

"Where is that pawn-ticket, Sidonie?"

"Here, Madame."

"Give it me." She took it roughly from the maid's fingers, examined it closely, and put it away in the writing-case, accompanying the action with a snort of satisfaction. "Here," she added, tendering the cheque: "your wage to date and a month in advance, minus the ten dollars necessary to redeem the ring. Now go."

Her voice was frigidly uncompromising, yet Sidonie in her despair dared a single attempt to regain her forfeited place.

"But, Madame," she whined, "I —"

"And if you take anything more of mine, I shall send detectives after you. It is now fifteen minutes of nine. By five minutes of nine you must be out of this hotel. You have no time to waste."

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Sidonie lifted bony shoulders to her ears and hypocritical eyes to heaven. "Madame will regret this," she began.

But inasmuch as her mistress was synchronously grasping her cane and rising from her chair, Sidonie retired at accelerated discretion. On the way she flashed Cynthia a poisoned look of endless hatred.

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VII

CINDERELLA

"BEAST!"

That crisp epithet, barbed with whole-hearted rage and contempt, fell sharp upon the closing of the door behind gaunt, unpleasing, sullen Sidonie. Uttering it, Madame Savaran sank heavily back into her chair, replacing her cane in its corner. She sat in silence for a long minute, her eyes scintillant.

Then her mood veered. The ten plump and active fingers of her two hands drummed the devil's tattoo on the polished top of the little table before her. Her handsome old face clouded. "Whatever shall I do?" she soliloquised in despair. "I can never replace her, never!"

To that instant Cynthia, untroubled by the envenomed glance the discharged maid had given her in parting, had been faintly amused. She was so no longer. She detected in the old lady's exclamations a very real and poignant distress. Sympathy stirred in the girl's generous bosom.

"You must n't think that," she said soothingly. "I 'm sure there must be plenty of maids —"

"There 's only one Sidonie!" declared Madame with vigour. "That animal!" she cried. "Think of it! For ten — no, for more years than I can say without stopping to reckon, she has been my servant. One does n't uproot from one's heart the association

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of that time and not feel it! She was a paragon of maids; she understood me thoroughly; I never had to tell her a word of her duties. It is true she would steal my trinkets and pawn them for money to get drunk on, she would lie to me and carry tales to turn me against my companions — she had got rid of at least one rival every year by such means; but then I could say anything to her. She was the only maid I ever had who could endure my temper. I have a filthy temper," said Madame Savaran complacently.

"And you don't think you could take her back?"

"What? That snake? That ingrate! *Neverrr!*" the old lady swore cheerfully. "Anything but treachery I could stand; but let that once show its head, and it is over — all — everything is finished!" She waved her hands excitedly, folded them, and breathed, or rather sighed plaintively, a three-ply, copper-rivetted malediction on the head of the departing maid.

Shocked, Cynthia involuntarily sat bolt upright, eyeing Madame in wide dismay. The movement did not pass unremarked.

"I do swear wonderfully," observed Madame. "Sometimes I surprise even myself. But it *is* a great comfort. You must n't mind: you 'll get used to it in time."

"I!" Cynthia exclaimed, amazed.

"You — certainly — my dear. Why, do you imagine, did I call you back if I intended to let you leave me?"

"But —"

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"You need n't think I hold it against you that you were sent me by that red-headed blackguard, Rhode. It only goes to prove that good may come of evil. You see, my dear, I believe you, and I don't believe that if you were to attach yourself to me you 'd sell me, like that . . . *that*," repeated Madame slowly; then she got her faculties well in hand and with the careful deliberation of the true artist, thoughtfully, fully, and freely delivered herself of a character sketch of Sidonie, forgetting, extenuating, and omitting nothing, working up through well-chosen epithet and simile neatly applied to a soul-stirring, hair-raising, blistering, blasting peroration that borrowed its bolts from the skies and sifted the abyss for its metaphors.

When she had finished, Sidonie's ante-mortem obituary had been written by a master-hand.

Stunned, breathless, hardly able to credit her hearing, Cynthia remained spell-bound, unable to associate such fearful powers of expression and the comely old lady with the stately manner moderated by a glow of creative enthusiasm and obvious self-approval, from whose lips the tirade issued.

Then the heavens cleared. Madame Savaran folded her hands, compressed her mouth primly, and smiled, radiating good nature.

"I feel better now," she remarked. "We 'll forget it and say no more about it." It was Cynthia's thought that she had left nothing unsaid. "It 's a great comfort to be old enough to have a safety-valve like that, really: ever so much better than what fools call a good cry. Besides, women don't

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cry much, except in novels, unless there 's a man concerned. Now we will talk about yourself. How old are you?"

Recovering, Cynthia told her.

"And your middle name — how do you spell it?"

Cynthia detailed the orthography of Urcilla.

"Don't you wonder why I ask?"

"Perhaps you thought the name unusual," Cynthia ventured.

"Rather," Madame Savaran affirmed with a strong, humourous drawl. "But I had another reason. But no matter: I 'll explain later. Now tell me more of yourself?"

In the course of the next ten minutes she proved herself an exceedingly able practitioner of the art of cross-examination. Cynthia was not permitted time to think how entirely she was surrendering her personal history and character into the hands of this pragmatical person, so swiftly did question follow upon the heels of answer. Things she had never dreamed to tell another ran off her tongue ere she thought to impeach Madame's right to know. Beneath the fire of interrogation lay warmth of sympathy, a personal and friendly interest, anæsthetic to maiden reticence. Before this, reserve melted like ground mists before the sun of morning: Cynthia innocently revealed herself, with neither suspicion nor misgiving.

Afterwards, wondering at this, she was never able to account for it, save under the excuse of white magic: Madame Savaran seemed undoubt-

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edly a witch of sorts, to have been able so to insinuate herself beneath a stranger's guard.

Cynthia told everything, indeed: what Crittenden had missed in her more constrained self-accounting of the evening previous: the story of her mother's arrant infatuation with the notion of marrying her child to money, through pursuit of which her small competence had ebbed as she moved wearily on from Continental *spa* to *bad* and *bad* to capital, capital to seaside watering-place and thence to gambling centre, dragging with her the poor, overdressed, shrinking, sullenly mutinous girl and thrusting her beneath the notice of the fashionable crew they followed; and the story of the senile devotion of a certain Englishman, to whom she had reluctantly engaged her hand before her mother's death, only to beg and plead and pray and finally to fly for freedom, when death came to ease her of the necessity for self-sacrifice upon the altar of daughterly love.

Guilelessly she disclosed everything: and absorbed, the old woman listened, drinking in the least, last detail with her gossip-loving ears, and when the inquisition was temporarily suspended, proving herself no less candid in the matter of unveiling her personality.

"And now, my dear," she said, sleek with satisfaction at her success in pumping the girl, "I 'll tell you why your middle name interested me. The only woman I ever knew who wore it with the same spelling was Miss Urcilla Wayne, of the Waynes of Washington Square."

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"My mother!" cried Cynthia. "You knew her?"

"Of course I knew her," returned Madame with some asperity. "Why not? Not intimately, you understand, but still in a somewhat personal way. I designed the gown she was married in — to say nothing of the rest of her trousseau — I, Adèle Blessington. . . . I remember her perfectly: you are very like her, only, I should say, a mite prettier. And you should know that Urcilla Wayne was considered the most beautiful bride of her year. So you see . . ."

"You, Madame Savaran — you were Madame Blessington? Really?"

"Mademoiselle Blessington I was in those days, my dear. That, you see, was before I made a fool of myself, marrying that villain Savaran. Yes," reaffirmed the old lady, placidly self-conceited, "I was that same Adelaide Blessington. Adelaide was my given name, you know, my dear; but I changed it. It always sounded to me like something spoiled — and nobody ever spoiled me, not even that brute Savaran, when we were first married." She choked and lifted her voice. "Sidonie!"

"But —" began Cynthia.

"To be sure," said Madame with a flush. "Bless your heart, my dear, you made me forget my troubles. No matter." She assumed a look of obstinate cheerfulness, expectation a-glitter in her eyes.

A door opened noiselessly and the maid showed herself on the threshold.

"Madame called?" she inquired in a voice of velvet fawning.

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"Go to the devil, you!" said Madame briskly. "Why are you still there? Your time is up!"

"But, Madame —"

"If the porter delays another instant, go wait in the hall. Get out of my apartment. You understand me? Go!"

Dumb with rage, Sidonie shut herself out of the room.

Madame Savaran chuckled like a mischievous child. "Loathsome insect!" she commented, and then dropped the subject for good and all. "Cynthia, my dear, will you fetch me a cigarette — that box on the console there. If I am to talk of myself — and I know I shall — I must smoke; although as a rule I smoke but once between breakfast and lunch. But this is an exceptional day."

Cynthia obligingly brought the cigarettes and matches, her European upbringing having made her so thoroughly accustomed to the practice of smoking on the part of women of station and refinement, that she thought nothing of it in this instance.

"Yes," resumed Madame, puffing contentedly, "it was I who founded the great Blessington dressmaking establishment, and made it what it is, easily the foremost house on Fifth Avenue. I 'm out of it now — and they feel the loss of me, *I* can tell you; but that 's another matter. Savaran was responsible for that, the beast. He was my head-cutter, in the beginning. I married him — let me see — yes, the year your mother married Dr. Grayce. Immediately he stopped working: he seemed to think the husband of the head of the house ought to do nothing. And

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then he took to drink. I stood it for a while. Then I discharged him."

She smiled sweetly in reminiscent enjoyment.

"You discharged your husband, Madame?"

Madame nodded emphatically. "Assuredly. Do you think I would stand his nonsense? Not I. I refused to have him hanging round the establishment. He lowered its tone. It did the business no good to have a half-drunken creature acting as my right hand — and letting not the left hand know what the right was up to. The animal used actually to flirt with my assistants the moment I turned my back. And then they would complain to me and threaten to go. Besides, he disturbed my temperament. How is one to dream creations with a pig of the gutter like that at one's elbow? Certainly I discharged him. . . .

"He would not believe me, at first; but soon I convinced him. Even then I had my famous temper: the thing was known. So one day he went. And then it was I who could not believe it true — that blessed relief! — until I discovered the thief had absconded with ten thousand dollars of my money. It was cheap at the price, I told myself: of course, after that he would never return. And he did n't: I am always right. I never saw him again until a month or so ago, when he was dying. Then he sent for me, and at first I would n't hear of going. But finally I went: I went to find out what he had done with my money."

Madame paused, puffed her cigarette viciously until the smoke grew too hot for comfort, and put it aside.

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"My dear," she pursued, "fancy my feelings! That blackleg, Rhode, came with the longest face imaginable to tell me Savaran was dying and had asked for me. I flew to him, repentant, prepared to forgive him — to forgive him even the ten thousand dollars. Besides, I had made my mind up that he had long since squandered it in reckless profligacy. I figured to myself the scene: the poor man dying in want and misery, the deserted and wronged wife hastening to his side to comfort his last moments, angelically pitiful and compassionate. . . . And I found him on the point of expiring, it 's true, but surrounded by every imaginable comfort and luxury! Never was woman so disillusioned. Do you believe he had sent for me to beg my forgiveness? Not he: not Savaran. He merely wanted to do Rhode an ill-turn. They were associated in a business venture none too savory, and had quarrelled, so he summoned me to make me a present of his interest in it, that I might be a thorn in Rhode's side. . . .

"What a deathbed! I thought it was I who would die of amusement, as soon as I got over being indignant. I bear George Rhode no love myself; he is my son-in-law. He 's a bad one, a cut off the same piece as Savaran — only a rarer cut, you might say. He married my only daughter against my will, and got what he deserved. She was more Savaran's daughter than mine, anyway, and she left George Rhode after making him properly miserable for a year, more or less."

The old lady paused to rejoice with unnatural glee

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over the discomfiture of the Red Man; and Cynthia, fascinated, interjected an excusable query.

"Is she living, Madame — your daughter?"

"Of course. We never die, we Blessingtons. But she 's no good. I have nothing to do with her, beyond giving her money when she 's broke. . . . But no matter: I never talk of her. To get back to my husband: we had it hot and heavy, right and left, Savaran, Rhode, and myself. Rhode wished to prevent his talking: he 's slow, that one; he 'd never guessed what Savaran was up to when he asked for me in his pathetic whisper. And in the end I had to put the hulking red brute out of the room; and he let me do it. Just fancy that! He was afraid of me, the great coward.

"Then Savaran told me something about his affairs. It seems he had not wasted the stolen money; and that was like him; he never by any chance did what one would expect. He actually had the face to insist it was my temper that made him drink, and that once free of it he straightened out, went on the water-wagon and into the restaurant business in Boston, and positively made money. My ten thousand grew to twenty in as many years. Meanwhile he had got acquainted with George Rhode, through my daughter, somehow — I 'd never suspected she ever saw her father — and when Rhode proposed his scheme to make cent per cent. by a questionable means (to say the least, questionable) Savaran sold out his business, retired on a quarter of his capital and put the rest of it into Rhode's venture. On the eve of its inception, he

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fell ill; the matter had to be postponed, against Rhode's wishes. Delays exasperate that devil. So they began to fight — and I inherited a fifteen-thousand-dollar interest in their plant."

The semi-occasional and always abrupt descents into current slang which were apt to punctuate the voluble onward flow of Madame's vivacious narrative, as cascades a mountain torrent, were always mystifying to Cynthia. She had not the slightest notion of what a "plant" might be, any more than she understood the term "water-wagon" save by a process of connotation in itself vague and unsatisfactory. But she was too interested to interrupt, even had the manner of Madame been such as to make interruption seem advisable, which it was not. So, after finishing her cigarette and extinguishing its glowing tip upon the ash-tray, Madame Savaran took up her tale.

"The dickens of it was, the money was tied up: I could n't get it out without losing most of it. And by every right it was mine, though yoked to a scamp for a rogue's march. Savaran was a fiend for cunning; he got even with both of us by that move. And then he turned his back to us and died chuckling. It was as good as any play. . . .

"So here am I, on the verge of stepping off into the unknown with my arm crooked through a rascal's — for I would n't trust George Rhode out of my sight with a dollar of my money. And here are you sent me by him to be my comfort and delight — he 'll bite his cigar in two when he finds out how things stand with you and me. Not that I 'm not

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