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THE PRISONER OF ORNITH FARM

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THE PRISONER OF ORNITH FARM

BY

FRANCES POWELL Case.

AUTHOR OF "THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON"

"Ne faites jamais couler les larmes, Dieu les compte."

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1906

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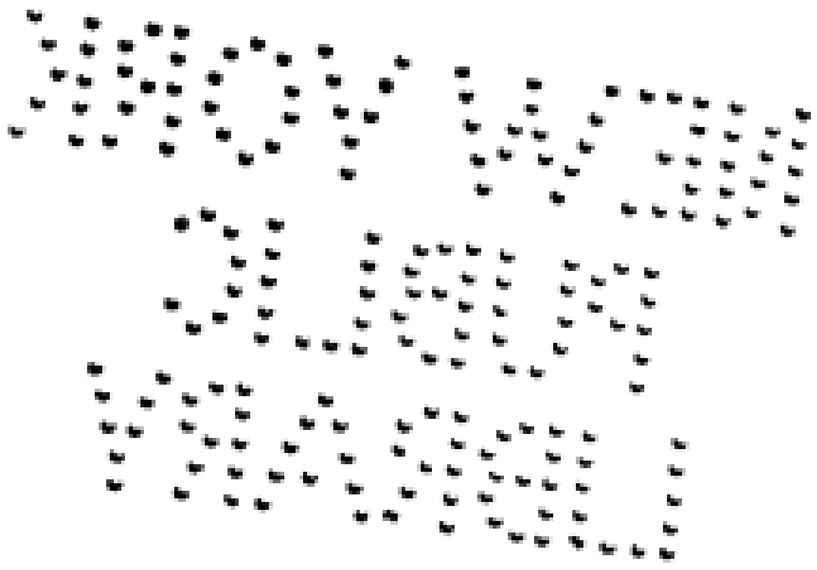

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THE PRISONER OF ORNITH FARM

I

"An' that's the end of the story," said my nurse in her comfortable voice, "an' it's glad I am that little Prosherpina got safe home to her poor mither! Now, my lammie, do you run about a bit. You've sat long enough for one while."

We were seated close under an old stone wall, Katie and I, on the broad stretch of grass that bordered one side of the country road. On the other side was more grass, then flat gray rocks, and below these a curving beach of cobblestones. The little waves plashed so softly upon the rough shore, they but made a rhythmic accompaniment to Katie's pleasant voice; and while I watched them I could almost believe that I saw Proserpina's friends, the sea-nymphs, peeping up at me from beneath the clear green water.

Then I fell to thinking of my mother. Had she seen the mermaids? Had she stayed with them awhile before going to heaven? For the fate of many who go down to the sea in ships had befallen my bright young mother. The yacht—*Mary's Hope*—upon which she and my father had set sail for the West Indies, four years before, had never been heard from. The *Hope*, one of the life-boats of the doomed vessel, had found its way ashore. But it came alone, and empty; so told no story, save the pitiful one of shipwreck.

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Hope was my mother's pet name for me, since she, too, was a Mary, and had no wish to give up her name even to her little daughter. And I, of course, had to be christened Mary. There had always been a Mary Carmichael ever since the first had been chosen by the Queen as one of her four Maries.

"There was Mary Beaton, Mary Seaton,
And Mary Carmichael and me"

So runs the old ballad in which we Carmichaels believe.

I looked wistfully at the sea—was I wrong to love it when it had treated my parents so cruelly? Because of their fate I might never bathe in its cool green waves, or sail upon its shimmering blue surface. Aunt Caro said that the sea would bring me misfortune. A great fortune-teller, a gypsy, had bidden her guard me from it until after I had passed my twenty-first birthday. After that there would be no danger, but before——?

Aunt Caro's guardianship ceased when I should become eighteen, since then I was to marry Max Errol. This arrangement had been made by my father and Mr. Errol when I was born. If Max or I objected, when the time came (when I should be eighteen and he twenty-five), we might break the agreement. The two fathers were close friends, and their lands—on the Hudson—"marched," as the Scotch say; so their wish was perhaps but natural.

My aunt, widow of my father's only brother, took her duties as guardian very lightly; as, indeed, she took everything, from the bringing up of her four boys, my cousins, to the ordering of her household. She was a handsome, dark-eyed creature, liking to see all those about her comfortable and happy—if she were not obliged to bestir herself in order to accomplish this. She gave us all our own way, and when

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her sons took undue advantage of their freedom she shed a few placid tears, and told them not to forget that she was a widow.

"Your dear father thought you would take care of me," she would say in plaintive remonstrance, "but I don't see how you can, if you grow up reckless and imprudent!"

As they were really good boys they seldom let their wild spirits carry them too far. They felt responsible for their mother's comfort; she was so amiable—so helpless.

"So selfish!" Katie grumbled, under her breath. But this I set down to Katie's jealousy. For gentle as was my aunt's authority Katie resented it, she having been my mother's nurse before she was mine.

I adored my handsome aunt. I liked the way in which she treated me, always talking to me as if I were grown up. She gave me all I asked for—save only a bathing-suit and a boat. And we were by the salt water so much! Aunt Caro—a New England woman by birth—loved the New England coast. Every summer our stay by the sea grew longer; and every summer my desire to bathe in it, and sail upon it, grew more intense.

On that particular afternoon, in late September, eighteen hundred and seventy, I had a great longing to be in one of the white-sailed boats off shore. Aunt Caro, with the boys, was out sailing. However, I was to be eight years old to-morrow, I said to myself, striving for consolation, and eight from twenty-one left—how much? Why was it that reading was such an easy matter, and arithmetic an impossibility? When I was twenty-one I would bathe all the morning and sail all the afternoon; and Katie, poor Katie, who now must always stay ashore because of me, should bathe and sail too.

I looked with great affection into the strong face

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of my dear nurse; then wondered, for the hundredth time, why she would strain her hair back so tightly from her forehead. Every hair seemed in danger of snapping. Should I speak to her of the future joys in wait for us, upon my twenty-first birthday? But my eyes fell upon the volume in her lap, and I forgot the sea. It was a blue book, with gilt lettering: "Tanglewood Tales." I read the title lovingly. I knew all the tales by heart. Sometimes Katie read them to me, sometimes I read them to myself. For two years I had read easily. I felt very old; I should be eight on the morrow! How old was Proserpina when Pluto had carried her away from her mother, from the kind sea-nymphs, from the flowers and the sunshine? It must have been so very awful, that descent underground!

I stood up and looked across the low stone wall into the meadow behind us; a wide-spreading meadow, with a grove of dark pines in a distant corner. On its farther side—it seemed very far away—tall spears of golden-rod, growing in a clump, were swaying to and fro in the sea-breeze. They looked very splendid. The sun, hanging low in the west, sent glowing shafts of light through the masses of yellow bloom, turning them into burnished gold. Never had I seen golden-rod so magnificent. I thought of the gorgeous flower that had tempted Proserpina away from her companions. I climbed over the wall.

"Don't go far, my lam'," warned Katie, who was knitting busily, "keep near hand the fence." And she fell to counting her stitches, "One—two—three——"

I did not answer. I intended to disobey. I wanted the golden-rod; it seemed as if it nodded to me from the distance. I walked slowly toward it. If only it did not grow so near that dark mass of pines! Then, looking in wonder at the beauty of the stately

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golden shafts, I forgot to be afraid. Was the plant enchanted? If I were to put my arms about its three tall spears and pull, what would follow? How foolish I was! Eight years old to-morrow, and pretending——

But what if the earth were to crumble away, and the hole grew larger and larger, and deeper and deeper, and——

I gave a great tug, expecting strong resistance from deeply embedded, close-clinging roots. Instead, they came away with such ease that, having braced myself to encounter opposition, I lost my balance, staggered back, and would have fallen had not some one deftly caught me just in time.

"Pluto!" I gasped in childish terror, as I glanced quickly up into the strange face bent close over mine.

"Pluto?" a rather harsh voice repeated inquiringly, as the owner of the face—a tall, powerfully built man—set me gently upon my feet, and looked at me with amused interest. "Ah," as his keen gray eyes noted the sprays of golden-rod that I still held tightly to my breast, "I understand! I have often heard of the beautiful Persephone, and of what befell her when she was gathering flowers. I only wish that I were Pluto, lovely child, and that I had all the gold and silver mines in the country at my disposal."

He thrust his hands deep down into his pockets and stared at me moodily. I examined him with half-frightened curiosity. I wished that I had been good, and remained near my nurse. The stranger must have been carrying his hat in his hand and have dropped it when he caught me, for he was bare-headed. He had very thick brown hair—much ruffled by the breeze—a brown mustache, and a long slightly aquiline nose. His light gray eyes had an odd greenish glint in them as he watched me. Thinking me still afraid, he smiled. His teeth were very white

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and gleaming. I forgot about Pluto; my mind was suddenly flooded with memories of Red Riding Hood. Then shame at my own foolish imaginings banished fear. What would the boys say did they know I had been so silly? I drew myself up haughtily, vowing that they should never know. I must say good-bye to this stranger politely; he had meant to be kind.

"I thank you for catching me," I said gravely. "I did not know that golden-rod had such weak roots. Good-bye."

I held out my hand to him; he took it in both his own. "Good-bye, little Proserpina," he said.

I blushed, mortified that he had fathomed my folly. I shook my head. "I am not Proserpina"—I made the announcement seriously, I dreaded being laughed at—"I am Hope."

A deep flush swept across the stranger's tanned face, his eyes flashed, he stooped, and looked as if he intended to kiss me; then, reading my unwillingness in my eyes, stood erect as before as he said: "If you are Hope, I refuse to say good-bye!"

At this juncture we were joined by Katie, who, very indignant with me, yet not wishing to scold and so betray my evil-doing to a strange gentleman, was too much flustered by contradictory emotions to do aught but bow stiffly to my companion and throw meaning looks at me. She laid a stern hand upon my shoulder and began to put on my coat.

"September's no summer, sir," she said at last, in solemn tones, "an' though the child was better wantin' her jacket an hour gone—for the day's been as midsummer, so hot even—it's growin' chill now, an' the sun will be sinking soon."

"Hope carries the sunshine with her," said the stranger, smiling down upon me, "since she is crowned with it." He glanced admiringly at my

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hair that, cut short to please me, curled in tight rings all over my small head. "Hope is beautiful," he added, as if but announcing a well-known fact.

I did not know if he spoke of hope the sentiment or of me. Katie, however, received the remark as a compliment.

"Pretty is as pretty does," was the severe response, "an' it's far better to be good than pretty."

This awful allusion to my past misdeeds I thought unfair, and I was glad that the stranger, even while he listened politely, still looked at me as if he thought me a nice child. Presently he began to talk to Katie and, to my great surprise, she responded to his advances at once. Before many minutes had passed, she chatted with my new acquaintance as though he were an old friend. Katie, who was ordinarily called close-mouthed! She told everything concerning me. In a few moments the stranger had heard of the sad death of my parents, of my betrothal to Max, of Aunt Caro and her careless ways, and, lastly, of the infinite superiority of my mother's family.

"Talk of the ridin', is it?"—I had heard no question of horsemanship—"why, that child," pointing a proud finger at me, "can show the Carmichaels the way! But seven the day——"

"I shall be eight to-morrow," I piped shrilly, in eager interruption, but Katie paid no heed.

"Seven the day," she repeated, raising her voice to drown mine, "yet look till her! As well bareback as in the saddle, as well standin' as sittin', and over the hurdles wi' the best—an' a crumb higher, a piece furder, than Wild Will himself! Yes, sir, an' it's in the blood. Now then, my lam'," she turned to me, "say the bit piece I learned you, the bit verse your grandpapa—an' a grand jantleman he was, too—used to say." I looked at her, then glanced at the flowers I still held. She understood. "Not a word,

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if you'll say the bit piece—begin, now! Give here the flowers, an' act it out—singin'."

Glad to escape rebuke for my sin of disobedience thus easily, I gave her the golden-rod and began to sing—to a tune of my own making—this doggerel:

"One white foot—buy a horse,
Two white feet—try a horse."

I ceased singing and pretending to mount an animal of whose good points I was doubtful, put the imaginary steed through a variety of paces, then took up my song again:

"Three white feet—look well about him."

I puckered my brows, lifted each foot of the horse carefully, passed a testing hand down the legs as though fearing to discover spavin or other defect, and so on to the end.

The stranger applauded, apparently as much astonished as delighted. Katie beamed with pride.

"Four white feet—go without him,"

I sang in solemn recitative; then, breaking into a lively measure:

"Four white feet, *and* a white nose—
Cut off his head and throw him to the crows."

"An' that's the way *we* say it," said Katie, in her odd mixture of Scotch and Irish—an inheritance from Irish father and Scotch mother—"but the bairn knows the common givin' of the poetry. Go on, my lam'."

I docilely repeated another version of the old belief:

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"One white leg, inspect him;
Two white legs, reject him;
Three white legs, sell him to your foes;
Four white legs, feed him to the crows!"

"Not but what that's all nonsense," I said, as, after courtesying my thanks for the praise given me, I again took possession of my golden-rod. "Dexter's changed all that, you know. Dexter is just four years older than me."

"Tell about Dexter now," coaxed Katie, taking it for granted that my childish accomplishments must interest this outsider as much as they did her.

I looked at the stranger inquiringly. Would he think me a chatter-box? But the expression in his gray-green eyes gave me a strong desire to continue.

"Dexter," I went on, "was born and bred in our county. Sire, Hambletonian; mother, little black mare, daughter of American Star." (The boys saw to it that I should not hear—and so learn—the rough parlance of stable and race-course.) "Color, rich brown; four white feet, and a blaze in the face; fifteen hands and an inch high—'a big-little one.' He won in his first race, by half a dozen lengths, against——"

Here loud shouts and the tooting of horns from the shore told us that the sailing party had returned, putting an end to my recitations. Katie bade me say good-bye to the stranger. Moved by a friendly impulse—I was a friendly child—I offered him a sceptre of golden-rod. He broke off, however, but one of its tiny yellow fronds, and, putting this carefully away in a leathern case that he drew from his breast pocket, he gave me in return a small hard something, folded in a bit of paper. This he said I must keep until he came to ask it back again.

"I will not say good-bye," he spoke very gravely, "but *au revoir*. I cannot say good-bye—to 'Hope.'"

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He shook hands with me, bowed civilly to Katie, and, walking quickly to the grove of pines, disappeared in its black depths.

"Whatever is it, my lam'?" asked Katie, scanning with eager curiosity the folded paper in my small palm.

I opened it. It was a piece of an English coin—the half of a broken sixpence.

"Give it me quick, then," said my nurse in great haste, "till I run till him wi' it. It'll no do, takin' money fra' strangers. An' whativer will Mr. Max say? A broken saxpence!"

But I held the bit of coin fast. "I shall keep it," I said imperiously.

"No, no," pleaded Katie, "a prisint from a stranger, my lammie, a——"

I interrupted her. "A stranger?" I said. "Why, Katie, you told him everything!"

"So I did, so I did," she assented, in great perturbation, "an' I'm not knowing why! He had a way wi' him—and a compelling eye. But, quick, give here the money, my child. It's not for a Carmichael to be given charity, like a beggar."

"Nonsense!" I cried indignantly. "What could I buy with a broken sixpence? I shall keep it." I backed away from her, putting the piece of coin into my small pocket.

Without another word my nurse walked away toward the road, beside which we had sat, at a great pace. I followed, sorry that she was displeased, regretting that I had taken my own way, yet oddly fascinated by my new possession. Why was it more important to Katie because it happened to be a sixpence, I wondered?

Katie climbed over the wall in such haste that several of its loosely piled stones followed her in a noisy avalanche. She paid no heed, but continued

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her way toward the small dock—a mere strip of planking upheld by iron stanchions forced in between the rocks—where Aunt Caro had just disembarked with the boys. I had to run at last to catch up with her.

"Are you very angry with me, Katie?" I asked, looking anxiously up into her stern face.

She did not answer, but taking my hand in hers pressed it firmly—a caressing pressure—as she hurried along.

The boys rushed to meet us. The twins, lads of thirteen, Wild Will and Sam the Cool (these nicknames because of their widely differing natures), came first. Between them they carried a basket, heavy with fish, the spoils of the day. Dodging around them, giggling, fisticuffing, lashing each other with long banners of the beautifully ruffled sea-weed, were the two younger boys, nicknamed respectively "Lord" Ronald and "King" Jamie. Max walked with Aunt Caro, carrying her wraps.

The twins set their basket down with a thump before us. Lord Ronald and King Jamie instantly offered me their sea-weed, and were dismayed to find that their wild use of it had damaged its beauty. Will's quick eye noted Katie's wrathful look.

"Why weep ye by the tide, ladye?" he inquired. Then, wringing his hands, he lifted up his voice in a howl of lamentation, in pretended sympathy.

"May this appease the angry goddess," said Sam smoothly, as, selecting a large fish from the basket, he deposited it, with an air of abject humility, in the dust at her feet.

"What have you been up to, Hope?" asked the younger boys in an excited whisper, draping their sea-weed across my shoulders.

Here Aunt Caro, with Max, coming up, Katie herself gratified their curiosity.

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"Mrs. Carmichael, ma'am," she began firmly, "it's ashamed of myself I am."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Aunt Caro, looking frightened, "what has happened, Katie?"

"I met a stranger," said Katie solemnly, "an' I had a gabbing fit."

A deep silence, broken only by the soft plash, plash of the waves upon the beach, followed this strange announcement.

"Yes, ma'am," continued poor Katie, "a gabbin' fit. He were a jantleman, an' ast no questions, but he had a way wi' him and a compelling eye. 'Fore God, I tell't him everything I knew. An' he gave the child——"

She ceased speaking, looked down at me, then repeated in a lowered voice: "An' he gave the child——"

It seemed as if she dared not finish her sentence for fear of getting me in trouble. My heart suddenly swelled with sympathy.

"It was all my fault," I said, pushing myself in front of her, "and Katie has done nothing wrong. I ran away from her into the field and she had to come after me. He gave me the half of a broken sixpence. I am to keep it till he comes for it."

Wild Will burst into a shout of laughter, delighted laughter. I was glad some one was pleased—but mischief was apt to please Wild Will. Sam the Cool lifted his eyebrows until they almost vanished in his dark hair. The younger boys each stood first on one leg, then on the other, as if the uncertainty of coming events deprived every attitude of comfort and stability. Aunt Caro flashed an amused glance at Max.

"You had best accustom yourself, Max dear," she said softly. "It was bound to begin some time. Lovely little Hope!"

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But if I was a wayward child, I had a warm heart of my own, and seeing that Max looked really pained, it melted. I drew the half sixpence from my pocket and held it out to him.

"You may have it for nothing, Max," I said.

Max sought everywhere for the stranger, but in vain. He could not even learn his name, nor where he had been stopping. Aunt Caro took possession of the half sixpence, and it was put carefully away—to be returned later.

Katie never forgot the incident, and for a time spoke of it so often that it became one of my memories.

"You mind the day I had the gabbin' fit?" always prefixed the story.

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II

"Do you bide here, thin," said Katie, "an' I'll run till the house an' fetch your whup. And do you keep the bit cloak about you."

I sat down on a rock, under the dark pine near us, and told Sergius Boris Best, my companion, to lie down and rest while Katie was gone. The tall wolfhound had grown old, he was now ten; and my short curls had grown long—I was fourteen. Although it was early June, when the steady warmth of summer had not yet come to the coast of New England, the day was uncomfortably hot because of a fiery land breeze—a really burning wind that made my cheeks feel feverishly hot, and obliged old Serge to loll his pink tongue very far out indeed. The scarlet flag on top of the large tent, discernible through a distant screen of firs, stood straight out in the breeze, showing to great advantage the piebald horse on its field of red, and the big white letters below, C. F. (Carmichaels' Folly).

I contemplated both tent roof and flag with great complacency; then, disobeying my nurse, flung off the long cloak of sapphire-blue silk that shrouded me to my feet and, standing up, transferred my admiring gaze to my own frock—what I could see of it. My short skirts were very full and very many. They were of white gauze, the outer one glittering with spangles—tiny silver stars. The waist was cut low, the sleeves short. Starting from the left shoulder a long spray of morning-glories crossed the front of the corsage, wound itself about my slim waist, and fell to the skirt's edge. Its trumpets, pale blue and

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purest white, were quite firm, since they were Parisian morning-glories, not natural flowers. I touched the spray lightly with regretful fingers, wishing that my flower—the flower of my month—were less fragile; then put up my hand hastily to find if the ribbon that kept my curls in check were in place. Katie had gathered them close at the back of my neck, and tied the pale blue ribbon firmly.

"They do dance of thimselves, I'm thinkin'," she had said, sighing over the refractory tendrils that seemed to take a mischievous pleasure in escaping her fingers.

As I lifted my arm to make sure of the ribbon, a clear whistle blew shrilly from the tent. Sergius rose quickly, if a trifle stiffly. Again the whistle sounded. The old wolf-hound looked anxiously up at me. He knew that he must obey his master's summons—it was Max who called—yet he did not wish to leave me unattended.

"Run along, you dear old thing," I said reassuringly; "Katie is coming back."

But the dog moved away unwillingly. Every motion of his lank body showed discontent. He strained his ears tight back to his long, thin head, in token of disapproval. I now ranked Max in his affection. He belonged to Max—but I belonged to him, and he desired to keep me constantly under his watchful eye.

Max had been absent for a long year. He had finished his college course, and Mr. Errol had rewarded him for carrying off many honors by giving him a year of travel. Max was seven and a half years older than I—he was already twenty-two! My cousins admired and looked up to him, making no secret of his being their ideal. But, although I shared this hero-worship, I was careful not to let its object discover my deplorable weakness. It was natural

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and very right, I thought, that the boys should bow down before one who was, in every way, their superior. In my case, however, it was different. I was a girl—*place aux dames*! Let Max kneel, if one of us must. So I held my head up as proudly as King Jamie, who had won this sobriquet because of his haughty carriage, and smiled no more graciously upon Max than upon all.

Before Sergius Boris Best had reached the scattered pines that stood between my resting-place and the distant tent, his heart failed him, and, turning, he bounded back to make sure that it was quite safe to leave me. I caught his dear head gently between my outspread hands; I kissed his long, kind nose, first on one side, then on the other.

"I love you," I said tenderly, "but you must mind Max. Remember, you are a very great person, indeed—and the great must never fail us. Your grandfather was just Sergius Boris; your father, Sergius Boris Better; but you, my darling" (I slid my arms around his neck), "are Sergius Boris *Best*. So when Max whistles, *go*!"

Quite understanding, proud of his name, delighting in my praise, the dog trotted resolutely away and disappeared among the trees. Left alone I spread my discarded cloak upon the rock and seated myself very carefully, fearful of crushing my gauzy skirts and marring their filmy beauty. Then I began to listen to the river, and forgot my bravery. It was such a fascinating little river! To a child brought up on the banks of the stately Hudson it seemed but a big brook. A light-hearted, wayward, babbling stream, either rippling gayly inland with the tide—its constant companion—or lamenting noisily when this playmate, summoned home, rushed tumultuously seaward. It was then that one heard both tide and river roaring angrily as they gained their freedom,

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and the wide stretch between the banks just below, by forcing their waters through the narrow rock-edged chasm over which hangs the ancient bridge of chains, the oldest suspension bridge in New England.

Moaning Pines, the neglected country seat that Aunt Caro had lately leased for a summer home, was but a narrow strip of acres between the high-road and the river. Its stretches of rough grass were separated from the country road by a tangle of trees and underbrush, while on the river side it boasted a magnificent ledge of rocks. And it was in the many crevices of these rocks that the grove of stately pines, which had given the place its name, had found firm foothold. The house was roomy and comfortable, commanding a pretty view of the ever-restless river. As it was several miles distant from the sea, Aunt Caro felt that in taking it she was keeping me sufficiently far from my hereditary enemy. For her belief in the gypsy's warning remained unshaken, although Mr. Errol and Max argued against, and the boys alternately scolded and laughed at, her superstitious fears. I was not allowed to learn to swim or to row—even boating upon fresh water being denied me. The boys would have preferred spending their summers at their home on the Hudson, since in winter they were obliged to leave it for school and college. And it was to quiet their discontent that Aunt Caro had consented to the purchase of the circus tent, that they might indulge in their favorite—some said foolish—amusement.

Years before, when I was but five years old, Mr. Errol, who was in sympathy with this fad of ours, had had a large rotunda built on his place. It had been supplied with a heating apparatus, dressing-rooms for the youthful performers, and luxurious seats for the very small audience. Only relatives and intimate friends were admitted, and each year

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the circle was more closely drawn. This was because I was a member of the troupe, and as I grew older Max disapproved more and more of my being seen by any save the favored few.

Mr. Errol and the old ring-master whom he had engaged to train us had been foolishly proud of the ease with which I learned my "business." But since I was supple, fearless, and had inherited the odd instinct that enables its possessors to manage horses—for instinct one might read sympathy, I think—there were really very few difficulties to be overcome. Then, too, I strove hard to acquire skill; defeat was galling to me. To this day I can remember my misery of shame when the piebald—an old circus horse, well accustomed to the vagaries of beginners—continued his routine-like canter around the ring, leaving me, a tyro, dangling high in air. I was perfectly safe, for I was fastened, by means of a stout leathern belt and long strap, to a horizontal bar. This, so long as I kept my footing on the piebald's padded back, gyrated, with the iron ring to which it was attached, around the central pole. But what was safety of limb to a proud child whose vanity was hurt? It was not many times that my awkwardness thus put me to shame. I took great pains, and soon excelled—to the delight of kind Mr. Errol and my teacher.

Max said that I must give up playing circus when I was sixteen. He was ring-master when at home. When he was away a steady, cool-headed old groom took his place. This was because Wild Will and I sometimes forgot that we were only playing, and took risks that made Mr. Errol stand up on his chair and roar out remonstrances, and sent Katie's apron over her head through fear of seeing us killed. Then it was that the ring-master called us to order. As our superior officer, we obeyed him—because of early

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training—when deaf to the voices of the family. Aunt Caro never distressed us by joining in these foolish alarms. She had full faith in our ability to take care of ourselves.

On that hot June morning we were to have a dress rehearsal. In the afternoon a grand performance was to be given in honor of Mr. Errol and Max, who had just arrived on a visit to Moaning Pines.

It seemed to me that Katie took a long time to find my whip. To amuse myself I began to sing—for, like some birds, I was born a singer. As I was very happy and free from care (ignorant of evil, and guarded from such hateful knowledge by the tender love of those who formed my world), I naturally chose to sing of sorrow, and to weave a melody of minor cadences for the heart-broken words that I sang.

Because I was Mary Carmichael I had been taught the greater part of the long ballad of Mary Hamilton. But the six verses that told the reason for her tragic death I was not to hear until I was grown up. Until then I must only know that her fate had been a cruel one, and so Katie—in her ever-varying dialect—declared:

"An awfu' dishgrace to that graceless Queen Mary o' Scots, wha lost her own head later, glory be an' thanks to good Queen Bess, wha, God bless her, were but a bit fond thin of passin' the pleasant word wi' all men—wi'out first marryin' one an' thin t'other. An' if (wearyin' o' thim) she did cut the heads from off some twa or three greedy lords wha were lookin' for being made king (an' not payin' complimints an' the like for the sake o' true love alone), why not, I asks? Sure she was but a woman thin, when all's said an' done! An' to know a man has laid a fair word on his lip but to land it out for his ain glory (through hopes of so gainin' a kingly crown

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by marriage), why, a woman of ony spirit would ha' his head off an' she could—an' Queen Bess were a *queen*. So pay no heed, my lam', whin you hear folks say that Mary, Queen o' Scots, were a martyr. She thought o' hersel' only—niver o' the good of her people. An' belike she thought to wile away all hearts fra' the English Queen whin she crossit the Border in fear o' her life! An' it's I that am afther tellin' you that passin' the pleasant word wi' all does no harm, but the woman wha will be iver marryin' will know trouble." (Katie was unmarried.) "An' as for that poor ill-treated bit creature, Mary Hamilton, wha lost her life because o' her Queen's choosin' to wed bad men by the dozen—" Here Katie always came to an abrupt stop, to finish with this complaint against Aunt Caro: "Then it's I that am wishin' Mrs. Carmichael would be afther teachin' you these same verses hersel'! They bring the tears too near hand the eyes wid the sorrow in thim. But your Aunt Caro will no' cry hersilf whin she can find those forninst her to do it for her!"

So that morning I sang a chosen few of the many verses that I had learned when a little child—Katie had taught me sixteen.

"When I was a babe, and a very little babe,
And stood at my mither's knee,
Na witch nor warlock did unfauld——"

I broke off abruptly. Did I see something moving under the pines that rose, black and sombre, between me and the river? I looked intently. No, nothing but a swaying shadow, flung probably by some heavy branch. I recommenced singing, but went on to the second verse:

"But my mither was a proud woman,
A proud woman and a bauld,
And she hired me to Queen Mary's bower
When scarce eleven years auld.

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"O happy, happy is the maid,
That's born of beauty free!
It was my dimpling rosy cheeks
That's been the dule o' me;
And wae be to that weirdless wicht
And a' his witcherie."

Again I ceased my song. A robin, a very young robin, had alighted upon a low branch of my pine. I held myself motionless, fearing to terrify the little fluffy thing. It was learning to fly. I thought of my own first flight across the silken banners—held by the nervous boys as I rode around the ring—and watched the little tyro on the branch with the kindly protecting sympathy of the finished professional. Presently it gathered sufficient courage for a new effort, spread its awkward wings, and attained a neighboring stretch of grass where its mother hopped, twittering instructions.

I returned to Mary Hamilton and, skipping many verses, sang:

"Yestreen the Queen had four Maries,
The nicht she'll hae but three;
There was Mary Beaton, Mary Seaton,
And Mary Carmichael, and me."

The song suddenly took possession of me, swayed me. I sang Mary Hamilton's appeal to the mariners as though it were my very own. There was heart-break in the inflections of my clear soprano.

"O a' ye mariners, far and near,
That sail ayont the faem,
O dinna let my father and mither ken,
But what I am coming hame."

The world seemed very silent when, with the cessation of my song, I swung back into every-day life. Then the heavy shadow under the pines suddenly took shape, detached itself, and I forgot Mary

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Hamilton in my interest in the tall, powerfully built man, who came quickly toward me across the grass. The stranger carried his hat in his hand, and his thick brown hair was roughened by the wind as he strode along. That he knew me, and was very glad to see me, was evident, for in his eyes there was an expression of unmistakable delight, and from beneath his heavy brown mustache his white teeth gleamed in a pleased smile of recognition. Although I was sure that I had seen him before, I could not remember when or where. I blushed with mortification as I realized that I could not call this old acquaintance by name. To make up for my forgetfulness I stepped forward to meet him, holding out my hand and smiling a welcome:

"How do you do?" I said graciously, trusting to hide by this cordiality my lack of memory. "Did you leave your boat below? Aunt Caro will be so glad to see you."

Dropping his hat the stranger took my outstretched hand in both his own, but all he said was: "Hope!"

I had a sudden unaccountable desire to draw my hand away, accompanied by an odd sensation of dread, as I met his steady gaze—his gray eyes had a greenish glint. The next moment I could only wonder at this foolish feeling, which vanished as quickly as it had come. Then I remembered my gay circus toilet, and turned to get my cloak. The stranger, divining my wishes, gathered up the silken mantle and hung it over my shoulders.

"So you don't remember me!" he said, and his deep, rather harsh voice had an intonation of regret. "It was foolish of me to expect it—you were only a baby then."

I blushed again; this time at being found out.

"I am so sorry to have forgotten," I said. "Won't you please tell me your name?"

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For answer he drew a flat leathern case from his breast pocket and took from it a miniature which he handed to me. It was the picture of a child; a child with hair like rings of gold and large blue eyes. The little creature's eyebrows were dark and delicately arched; the saucy little nose had an upward tilt; the rosy lips had gay, upward-curving corners. A very sunshiny little face, indeed. The frame of the miniature was of gold, and the design an odd one. It was as if the child had parted tall shafts of golden-rod and looked out at you from between their yellow fronds. Under a bit of glass let into the back of the frame was a tiny sprig of withered golden-rod.

I gazed wonderingly at the miniature, and at the withered flower. Then lifted my eyes to the stranger's face. "Pluto!" I said.

There came from the near distance the sound of bitter-voiced denunciation. Katie was advancing, making known her woes.

"An' beneath his coat it were all the time, an' he sayin', 'I'm sure I spied it somewheres, Katie.' An' leadin' me from room to room an' I niver shuspectin' nothing—a lam' in his hands! Of all the limbs of Satan, thin, Master Willie's the worst, an' well named Wild. An' 'twas only whin I was wellnigh dishtracted wi' keepin' you waitin' that I spied the bit whup stickin' out fra' beneath his ridin' jacket, an' thin only because o' the glint o' the sappheer in the handle o' it, an'——"

In her angry haste she failed to see that I was not alone until, red-faced and breathless, she stood close beside me. But if I had forgotten the stranger, Katie's recognition was instantaneous, and he remembered her. Disregarding her frosty stare of discomfited bewilderment, and the rigid determination shown in face and figure to ignore past acquaintanceship, he stepped quickly forward and shook her un-

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willing hand. Then, while making civil inquiries as to her well-being since their past meeting, he took the miniature that I still held and slipped it back into his pocket. He did this with such swift dexterity that Katie, in her embarrassment, noticed nothing. Indeed her one and only effort seemed to be not to look at him.

Because of the picture I, too, was ill at ease. I felt that the man had taken a very great liberty in painting it, and in carrying it about with him. Yet as he appeared to be quite unconscious of having broken an unwritten law, I was at a loss how to express my displeasure. I was but fourteen. My small world was made up of county neighbors, who lived all the year round upon their own estates. I did not understand—or know how to meet—those who had not always been acquainted with the Yorkes and Carmichaels. I was given no opportunity, however, to recover my self-poise or to decide upon what I ought to do and say.

"Mrs. Carmichael, sir," said poor Katie, rushing into embarrassed speech, "will doubtless, thin, be pleased to see you if you'll but walk till the house. Miss Carmichael, sir, wud be wishful to accompany you, but she is expectit elsewhere. An' being but her maid, an' she needin' an attendint, you'll doubtless excuse me——"

"It would give me great pleasure to call upon Mrs. Carmichael," was the civil response, "but unfortunately I am pressed for time."

He looked at me for a long moment as if wishing to add a new picture to his memory, then, bidding us good-bye, walked rapidly back to the little forest of pines and vanished within its glooms of shade.

"Wid God's help," said Katie solemnly, "I avoided his compellin' eye! Did he say aught of the half saxpence, my bairn?"

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"No," I said briefly.

I had no wish to be questioned. My mind was in a turmoil in regard to the miniature. Did I confide in Aunt Caro she would laugh, and talk of conquest. If I told the boys they would vow vengeance. As for Max—where might not his anger lead him should he learn of the stranger's stolen possession! For stolen it was, since even the picture of one's child face should be one's own to give or withhold. But surely I might tell Katie. Her great unselfish love made her a safe confidante and a wise counsellor. And it was not fair, I decided, to keep from her what would interest her so very much. I laid my hand upon her arm, staying our rapid progress toward the tent, and told my story.

"Aweel, aweel!" she exclaimed, but not loudly; and then, closing her lips tightly and staring at me (without seeing me), she fell into deep thought.

I stood waiting beside her, twisting my whip this way and that—Max had given it to me—admiring the play of light across the sapphire sunken in its handle. I did not trouble further about what to do in the matter; Katie was thinking for me, that was sufficient. Presently my oracle spoke—but to herself, not to me.

"An' a painter jantleman, most likely, an' could ha' sold the bit picture (he bein' thin wi'out money an' needing it sore), for many wud ha' been glad an' proud to have bought sae winsome a face. But no, not him! For he's gentle born, as all may see, and no' just a common artist, like. No, he keepit the bit bonnie face for his ain silf an' it's luck it's been afther bringin' him. He lookit grand, dressit in the best! I canna blame him greatly though, belike, I ought. 'Tis but the wee winsome face o' a bit bairnie, when a's said an' done! An', mayhap, he had lost a young shister, an' my lam' put him in mind o' her, and he made the bit picture an' put it forninst his

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lonely heart. No, no"—addressing me at last—"we'll keep our ain counsel, Miss Hope. I'd not be afther mentionin' the picture—best not tell everything! Let us not grudge the sad at heart a ray o' our own sunshine. (Whin"—again communing with herself—"it's but a weak-like reflection of that same, afther all; an', I'll be bound, not half sae bonnie as the child hersel' at the time.") She turned severely upon me. "You were a beauty *thin*, Miss Hope—but that's years ago. Ah, mony's the time I said to you as pritty is that pritty does!"

"Yes," I assented, as we moved on together, "and you must be glad to be able to stop, you poor Katie. It's a pity that I should not be as good looking as all the Carmichaels," I continued, swayed by a mischievous desire to rouse my dear companion. "They are a handsome race."

"An' it's han'some, is it?" was the sarcastic rejoinder. "But maybe, thin, you're afther admirin' crows! An' I wonder at you, Miss Hope. You, wi' all the beauty o' the Yorkes, to be talkin' of the black Carmichaels! And finding fault wid your ain mither's looks! The hair like sunshine, the big blue eyes, an' skin like the snaw-drift touched wi' the color o' the wild rose. To say naething of the grace o' figure—light as the wind-tossed flower. Ah, she could dance, could your mither! An' you, the very image o' her, findin' fault wid your appearance; I'm ashamed for you, thin, Miss Hope. The black Carmichaels, indeed!"

By two o'clock the land-breeze had died away, and when, at four, I again walked with Katie to the tent, a wind from the sea was moaning through the pines. We could hear the roar of the breakers sweeping in upon the bar at the river's mouth. I was glad of this change in the atmosphere, since the cool

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sea-breeze would enable us to do our best. The heat in the tent that morning had been oppressive.

Our audience was a very small one—Aunt Caro, Mr. Errol, and Katie. Their high stand was on the side opposite our greenroom; they liked to see us ride in. The brass band had its place near the main entrance. The musicians were all old men, and had been engaged for the summer. Each man was sworn to secrecy in regard to our circus mania. We had no wish to have Moaning Pines invaded by the populace of the neighboring villages. As it was, the gay music, with the heavy boom of the big drum that always accompanied a *tour de force*, brought many a keen-eared boy too near the tent. The grooms often had their hands full driving off the overcurious.

To please Mr. Errol old circus customs were held to, but we always introduced some nonsense of our own devising. The performance that afternoon commenced, as usual, by the entrance of our small troupe, riding two by two with dignified solemnity around the ring. Then my beautiful chestnut mare, dear Lady Disdain, showed her paces. We believed that her waltzing and other feats of skill could not be surpassed by the best-trained professional. Later (arrayed in my star-bespangled frock with its floating garland of morning-glories), I sprang from her back over the broad blue banners stretched across the ring. Then the boys held hoops, covered with blue, pink, and white paper, through which I burst to the accompaniment of a mighty clash of cymbals and the boom of the big drum. Dear Lady Disdain was always in constant fear lest I might fail to return to her in safety, after each of these flights aloft. Her ears were never quiet and betrayed the strain she endured. Yet she was ever eager to enter the ring, and showed as great pride in my triumphs as I felt in hers.

Sergius Boris Best, on the contrary, detested the

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entire performance. He spent the time on guard outside the tent, whence an occasional howl of melancholy protest came to remind us of his near neighborhood and unalterable disapproval. But sometimes he had to enter and lend his services. This was when we played Lord Ronald and Lady Clare, and Mr. Errol had chosen to demand the little pantomime for that afternoon.

"It was the time when lilies blow,
And clouds are highest up in air,
Lord Ronald brought a lily-white doe
To give his cousin, Lady Clare."

Poor Serge had to be the doe. He disliked his part very much. He would have refused to play it, I believed, had he known what meek animal he personated.

Jamie, clad in one of Katie's lilac calicoes and wearing a cap, was Alice the nurse. Lord Ronald had won his title by taking this rôle when a very small boy. Max read the poem while we enacted it.

The great wolf-hound played his part well. Years of practice had taught him the exact moment when, as the lily-white doe, he must leap up and, dropping his head in my hand, follow me

"—— —— all the way."

He was graceful, gentle, always to be depended upon. I loved him very dearly. So dearly, indeed, that when Max, according to his wont, the play being over, stepped forward to take the "single rose" from my hair, I denied it him, fastening the flower instead to the collar of my pet. Mr. Errol applauded, while the dog, holding his head haughtily, supremely conscious of my favor, stalked proudly from the tent. Aunt Caro laughed, well amused to see Max look grave.

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"Are you even jealous of Old Serge?" she questioned, in her rich contralto.

"Yes," said Max steadily. "Why did you slight me, Hope?"

I smiled and blushed. I thought him foolish, but his folly pleased me.

"Give him this, Lady Clare," cried Mr. Errol, flinging another rose over the railing of his high stand. "You mustn't snub poor Max, child, when he's just come home."

Teasing Ronald sprang forward to catch it. Alice the nurse, suspecting mischief, flung herself upon his lordship, tripped upon the unaccustomed skirt, and went down bearing him with her. The rose was crushed. I laughed out with delight, made my reverence quickly, and escaped to my dressing tent. Then, as always, I was sorry to have pained Max, and determined to behave better in future. Later I rode around the ring with him—both standing, my hand upon his shoulder—while he guided our two bare-backed steeds, Gray Griffith and Lady Disdain. Max rode superbly, managing the horses so skilfully that I flitted from one to the other and back again without difficulty or danger. When at the last we rode up to the grandstand to receive Mr. Errol's compliments, and the pretty bouquet prepared for me, I made amends for past ill behavior.

"Max is the best rider of us all," I announced positively, nodding gayly at Mr. Errol. "See, I salute him, and bow the head!"

So saying I kissed my finger tips, and swaying lightly toward my companion gently patted his cheek. But Max, to my surprise and embarrassment, caught my hand and pressed his lips to the place my own had touched.

"Bravo, bravo!" roared Mr. Errol, with such stentorian approval that the horses, alarmed, started

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away in great haste and carried us out of the main tent.

"Are you angry?" Max asked softly, as he lifted me to the ground. He did not release me but, bending his handsome head, strove to look into my eyes. "Are you very angry, dear little Hope?"

Here a frightful and blood-curdling in-drawing of the breath through closely shut teeth made us both start. I shrieked faintly, for close behind us stood an Indian with uplifted knife.

"Will Carmichael!" exclaimed Max in disgust, recognizing the painted savage. "What an infernal nuisance you are!"

"Come, hurry up and change your togs, Hope, my infant," said the Indian, wagging his be-feathered head at me and grinning hideously, "or I'll scalp you where you stand. I want to finish up this nonsense and get a swim before dinner."

"No swim for you this afternoon, William," said Max. "Don't you hear the breakers on the bar? There must have been a storm offshore. There's a very heavy sea on."

We listened as with one accord. Above the drawling tones of Sam's voice, as he amused Mr. Errol by propounding old conundrums and giving new answers, could be heard the angry roar of the surf on the sand spit at the mouth of the river. The breeze, rushing inland laden with foam breath, grew wilder each moment. The tent awnings flapped; we heard the snap, snap, of the big red flag as it whipped gayly overhead. A pleasant invigorating freshness made itself felt everywhere.

"When is a door not a door?" demanded Sam lazily in the near distance.

"When it is a-jar, my cool young friend," came Mr. Errol's prompt answer.

"Wrong again, sir"—Sam's voice was heavy with

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compassion. "A door is not a door when it is a-creek."

"Rubbish!" from Mr. Errol. "You'd better try again, Sammy."

"I will"—Sam spoke gently—"for I love to please. When is a door like dear Lady Disdain?"

"Give it up," cried Mr. Errol.

"When it's bolted."

"Hope, Hope," implored Will, "do hurry up!"

I ran away to my dressing tent and changed my tulle and spangles for the simple attire of a stage country girl—a frock of blue and white striped cambric, with sun-bonnet to match, and a white apron. The entertainment was to end with a new pantomime composed by Jamie. It was entitled:

"A man's a man for a' that,
In Quaker's gray or cleric's hat."

As I entered, mounted upon my beautiful mare, I looked about the large tent with happy eyes. I was excited. Max had shown so much affection. I was never quite sure that I might always please him—and I wished to, very much. I dropped the reins on Lady Disdain's glossy neck and she walked quietly once around the ring. The tent was pleasant; the sunshine shut out, the fresh breeze stealing in.

"This fair young creature," read Max from Jamie's manuscript, "is Doris Day, daughter of a wealthy ranchman. She is out for a ride upon the prairie; she seeketh flowers."

I leaned from my saddle, scanning the grass of the prairie earnestly. I was so busy looking for flowers that I failed to observe a handsome youth in clerical garb (Jamie), who rode up and joined me. He had hardly done so when Sam, dressed as a Quaker in the old-style costume—flapping gray coat and broad-brimmed beaver—came up on the other side. Doris

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Day now proved herself a gay coquette, distributing her smiles equally between her two suitors. Her sun bonnet was pushed back; she stuck a Quaker nosegay in her belt, a clerical posy in her hair. Then, growing saucy, she presented each aspirant with a flower from his rival's bouquet. Both men showing undue temper, she dismissed them and rode away. They retired from the ring.

"The lovely damsel loseth her way," Max announced. "Night is coming on. She feels alarmed."

Dear Lady Disdain now strayed from the ring. As we passed the entrance flap I caught a glimpse of Sergius sitting bolt upright just outside. His head was stretched forward, his ears cocked—I wondered what he was watching so intently. Then I turned my attention to counterfeiting the anxiety my trying position demanded. An ear-piercing screech now came from the greenroom, and Will, with Ronald—also in paint and feathers—rushed in. They bestrode bronchos, and looked far too wild and savage for the nerves of my excitable mare.

I was to have been captured by the red men and, later, rescued by my two suitors; the one forgetting his cloth, the other his habit of turning the cheek, in their determination to free me. Will and Ronald were to have been slain by these men of peace, but Lady Disdain ordered otherwise. No sooner did she see the oncoming savages than—as the boys said—she went wild, starting off on a mad race around the ring as if for very life. At first I strove to soothe and stop her, but Wild Will, thus gaining vantage, came very near and stretched out a sinewy arm to snatch me from my saddle. His dark eyes gleamed with excitement. To make his appearance more terrible he had painted spots, to represent blood, upon his arms and chest. At this moment a cloud partially obscured the sun. The sudden gloom, and the wicked

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look that the paint and strange dress gave my cousin's dark face (transforming its cheerful features into the aspect of a red devil), filled me with an unreasoning terror. I screamed in real fear, and giving the mare her head urged her toward the grandstand.

Delighted, and not at all comprehending the state of my nerves, the savages gave chase and headed me off. Sam the Cool, an onlooker, awaiting his cue in the entrance to our greenroom, understood better, and rode in, followed by Jamie, hoping to mend matters. They only made things worse, however, since they pursued the Indians who were pursuing me, and the race grew dangerous. Max could not ply his whip because the horses were already nearly crazy with excitement, neither could he catch the bridle of my mare without risk, since those following might then run me down before they could stop their mad pace. He stormed and commanded in vain; no one heeded. Mr. Errol, adding his voice to the general clamor, pounded upon the railing of the stand, entreating, expostulating, scolding. Katie sat back in her chair, her apron over her head. Aunt Caro, a red spot on either smooth cheek, applauded; and the band, thinking this the time for much noise, clashed out a wild hunting chorus. The air was filled with the dust of tan bark, uprising from flying hoofs.

Crouching low in my saddle, or swaying first far to one side, then as far to the other, in my efforts to evade Wild Will, my foremost pursuer, as he made desperate efforts to seize me, I circled the ring like a hunted creature on the now frantic mare. Suddenly a streak of sunshine flashed across my face and, an instant later, a fierce sound cut through the uproar like a knife—the war-cry of the old wolf-hound. It startled me back into my senses. I realized that we were but playing. The dog was in deadly earnest.

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My foolish fears were forgotten in my anxiety as to what might be taking place outside. Why had the sunlight dazzled me? The tent had no opening on that side. Something must be done, and at once.

I ceased my endeavor to escape my wild cousin, and as he leaned toward me, his eyes glittering, his cheeks ablaze under their war-paint, I flung myself into his outstretched arms. Surprised, he clasped me close, half his fierceness already quelled by the necessity of managing the frightened pony—unaccustomed to the double burden.

I threw my arms about Will's neck, I put my lips close to his cheek. "I'm tired, Willie," I cried. "I give up."

He shouted his triumph to those who followed; laughing gayly, half in exultation over the victory, half in amusement at the lengths to which his imagination had carried him. The band stopped playing the hunting chorus and struck up the march to the strains of which the horses were accustomed to make the grand entrance. This quieted them better than voice or rein. Lady Disdain trotted snorting into the side tent, where the grooms easily handled her. My captor would have carried me to the grandstand, there to receive congratulations upon his prowess, but I quickly told him of my fear that Serge was in trouble. This fear was added to by seeing that the servants, who had been deputed to keep guard outside had, attracted by the uproar, come into the tent. Max hastened out, and the boys, dismounting, followed. Mr. Errol, calling me to him, began to scold me gently for yielding to such childish panic; while Katie, pretending to approve this chiding, tenderly smoothed my disarranged hair. I submitted to both reproof and caresses, listening intently to what was going on outside. Where was my dog?

There came a loud exclamation, followed by a

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silence that was unnatural. I broke away from my nurse and ran swiftly to the side of the tent whence the sound of the boys' voices had come. As I approached I saw that there was a long slit in the canvas, and realized that it must have been through this that the sunshine had flashed. I parted it and looked out. Stretched upon the grass but a short distance from me lay the old wolf-hound. I knew that he was dead.

My cry of anguish brought Max quickly to me. The boys, with eager kindness, ranged themselves between me and my darling, striving to hide the cruel truth. I paid no heed to Max or to them. Weeping bitterly I made my way to my faithful old companion, and gently lifted his beautiful head upon my lap. The rose that I had fastened to his collar had been broken from its stem in the death struggle, but its pale pink petals were unhurt. It lay, fresh and fragrant, beside him on the grass.

It was supposed that the overcurious intruder, who had cut the canvas that he might see our wild race, had been caught in the act by the dog. Furious, the old hound must have sprung upon the eavesdropper, who, seizing him by the throat, had killed him with one sledge-hammer blow of the fist. Because of the strength necessary to make such an act possible, suspicion fell upon the blacksmith of the neighborhood and his assistant. But they were able to prove an alibi, and the murderer of Sergius Boris Best could not be found. That he had used his fist, and not a knife, was the only comfort Max and the boys had to offer me. The dog, they said, had died painlessly.

We buried my old playmate under the moaning pines, in a spot where he had loved to stretch himself on hot summer noons.

"Grieve nae mair for poor Serge, my lam'," said my warm-hearted nurse, her pleasant voice not so steady

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as usual, "for you'll meet him again, one time. (His murderer walks accurst—his doom will fall.) For it's I that believe that the grand old hound, wha died doin' his duty bravely, wull be granted to stand at heaven's gate to welcome his little Hope Carmichael —when she's called till her mansion there!"

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III

It was early June, and the morning of my betrothal day. For I was seventeen, and it had been thought best that Max and I should be formally engaged—if I were willing. In a few months my eighteenth birthday would arrive when—according to the plans made years before—we were to be married. Max made no secret of his wishes, although, because it was in the bond, he had never told me outright that he loved me. But if all the members of our household knew how Max felt, no one, not even Katie, could be sure of my ultimatum. I had thought it only fair that Max should chose for himself, and not be tied down by old arrangements made when we were children. And, in order to give him a sense of complete freedom, I had pretended to care no more for him than for my wild cousins. At first pride had suggested this rôle, then the love of justice, and lastly, when it became evident that Max had eyes for me alone, I fear a wayward spirit prompted my manner of affectionate indifference. Although I loved him very dearly, and secretly thought that no one might compare with him, I enjoyed the admiration I received from others; amusing myself, in childish fashion, to the top of my bent. Aunt Caro, disapproving, in her gentle way, of the early marriage arranged for me, managed so that I might have a little gayety by allowing me, so soon as I was sixteen, to go to the few balls and parties given in our neighborhood. Mr. Errol scolded, and Max remonstrated, in vain. Aunt Caro amiably insisted that I must have early what all my friends would get later, a

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season of girlish pleasure. And for once she had Katie on her side.

"An' it's glad I am, Mrs. Carmichael, to see you batin' the divil around the bush!" said my once nurse. "'Twould be a shame, thin, I'm thinkin', did our Miss Hope settle down marrit and a' wi'out a few hearts achin' o'er the pain o' it. Sure 't will do Mr. Max nae harm to fight for her favor—as did mony a gran' young jantleman for her mither's, when she were the beautiful Mary Yorke. An' I'm no sayin' but what you yoursel', Mrs. Carmichael"—Katie spoke with good-natured condescension—"may ha' had ane or twa wearin' the willow for the sake o' your dark een. For some do, I know, prefer a black eye to a blue. (God, maybe, undershtandin' why, He choosin' to mak' baith kinds!)"

Poor Katie! It was a trial to her that I had so small a world to conquer. It was only in summer and during the winter holidays that any entertainments were given. The conquests made by my blue eyes were not so many as my doting nurse boasted, although sufficient in number to make Max uneasy. I later regretted my waywardness. But I was a wilful, overpetted child.

Mr. Errol, with Max, and my two guardians—precise legal gentlemen—had arrived at Moaning Pines the evening before. The betrothal was to be very formal. I rather dreaded the solemn ceremony, but not so much as I feared what must precede it—Max's informal declaration. Nervous excitement over this kept me awake half the night. I could not understand why. It seemed absurd that what I had looked forward to all my life, my real engagement to Max, should so affect me. That he was excited was natural enough and, so I thought, quite as it should be. I could see that Aunt Caro and Katie enjoyed his doubt and anxiety, while themselves too uncertain

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of what my decision might be for entire ease of mind.

At first, being quite unaccustomed to lying awake, I found pleasure in the strange sounds and silences of the late night. The perfect quiet, broken now and again by the fitful sighing of the pines and the far-off moan of the breakers on the bar; and at times, as the hours slipped past, the eerie cry of some uneasy night bird jarring through the soft, melancholy cadences of murmuring sea and whispering firs. But as the night wore on the loss of sleep began to tell upon my unwontedly excited nerves. Old tales of weird happenings, stories of ghosts, hobgoblins, and werewolves, followed each other in quick succession —like moving figures in a magic lantern—across my tired brain. When toward dawn I fell into a heavy slumber, it was nightmare ridden.

I thought that I was in the life-boat once named for me, the *Hope*, that had drifted ashore to tell of shipwreck when I was a tiny child. A thick fog hung heavy upon boat and billows—great oily-looking sea swells, over which the *Hope* slipped helplessly, whither I did not know.

I was not alone. In the prow there crouched a young girl, richly but oddly clad. For she wore a quaintly fashioned gown of blood-red satin, and around her graceful throat a high, stiff ruff. In her beautiful eyes there was a look of great anguish and the terror that a child might show were it about to be done to death. As I stared at the lovely white face, showing ghostlike in the murky light, I felt so great a pity that I forgot my own peril. As I would have asked her who she was, she began to sing:

"I'll no put on the dowie black,
Nor yet the dowie brown,
But I'll put on the robes o' red
To sheen thro' Edinbruch town."

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Then I knew that I was looking at Mary Hamilton.

She continued singing, but she changed the words of the verse that she sang, and I grew faint with dread:

"Yestreen the Queen had four Maries;
The nicht she'll hae but *two;*
There was Mary Beaton, Mary Seaton;
And *there was me—and you.*"

And then, in spite of myself, I was obliged to join in—to sing with her:

"O a' ye mariners, far and near;
That sail ayont the faem,
O dinna let *our kinsfolk* ken
But what *we* are coming hame."

I dreamed that, rebelling against this fate, I seized the ponderous oars—unseen till then—and thrusting them through the rowlocks began to urge the boat landward, guided by the low muttering of the surges on the beach. It was with exultation that I found I could row with ease. The heavy craft sped over the oily billows like an arrow, and soon I saw lights upon the distant stretch of sand toward which we were hastening. These were great bonfires shooting up snaky tongues of flame. Dark shapes flitted about, feeding the fires. I thought that the boys, my cousins, were waiting there for us—that we should soon be safe. But Mary Hamilton, lifting her white arms in warning, cried out that these were wreckers, and the friendly blaze but a lure.

I thought that I made a desperate effort to turn the boat, and failed. The next instant I was telling my beautiful companion not to fear, since, safe beneath the dark water, my fair young mother lay sleeping. We would go to her, and be at rest. But Mary Hamilton looked at me strangely, pityingly.

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"I am dead," she whispered; "*my* weird is dree'd."

A great horror came upon me, a loud roaring filled my ears. The boat was among the breakers, surrounded by the wreckers. "Mother!" I cried, "O mother!" and awoke.

Katie was bending over me, her kind face full of anxiety.

"There, there, my heart's bairn," she said soothingly, "dinna greet! Sure the ugly dream's gone now. An' look what I found forninst the treshold o' your door!" She laid a great sheaf of the beautiful purple iris on my pillow. "And this bit paper tied till it. Open it, thin, an' read."

I blushed as I recognized the handwriting, and, to please my dear nurse, read the verse I found written there, aloud:

"O flower de luce, bloom on; and let the river
Linger to kiss thy feet!
O flower of song, bloom on, and make forever
The world more fair and sweet."

"Flower o' song!" said Katie, looking at me fondly, "an' it's right well he's named ye. Yis, Flower o' song—and our ain bonnie bird! 'Fore God, an' it's thankful all should be that you'll bide at hame, in the home nest, instead o' marryin' some stranger lad wha would be afther carryin' away our Hope. See, thin, what Mr. Errol himsel' sends ye for the ceremony of betrothal—he brought it wi' him last night."

She opened a box that lay on a chair near the door, and taking from it a mass of lace, shook it out. I sat up in bed, my eyes wide with admiration.

"Yis," announced Katie proudly, "woven specially for Miss Mary Carmichael, wi' a pattern o' her ain flowers rinnin' here an' there an' everywhires t'roughout. Mornin'-glories!—a many of thim. But 'tis

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like a spider's web, or the work o' the frost on our winder panes! Fair lovely—an' no mistake! To be worn over a slip of white satin, or blue, if your fancy pleases." She held up the wonderful flower-woven gossamer and gazed meditatively at it, her lips pursed up. "Belike," she continued, musingly, "belike Mr. Errol—wha is a wily though gran'-hearted jantleman—just said to himself that it wud do nae harm to mak' sure o' your answer till Mr. Max by prisintin' you wi' this. A gown that the Fairy Queen hersel' might be fine and proud to wear. A kind o' lure, I'm thinkin', till our Flower o' song! For mark my words, my bairn, the men be iver the same. Yis, rich or poor, gentle or simple, good or evil, they strive iver to gain their way wi' us poor women i' the same fashion—wi' gifts and flattery, flattery an' gifts! You'll mind, thin, the Serpent an' poor witless Eve? 'Twas him gave her thim apples. (In his ain fashion—wi' specious words o' guile; not havin' arms nor hands he couldna just break 'em offen the Tree.) Mr. Errol kens weel a Yorke wouldna tak' a gift falsely. Sure he knows that an' you accept it, it means 'yis.' But there's ane thing he doesna ken and that I, God forgi'e me, was near hand forgetting, and that is that the Yorkes—ride straight."

Katie lifted her head proudly and, looking me in the eyes, said steadily: "I ken now what I might ha' knowed lang syne, if I hadna been an old foolish body. If ye hadna been for sayin' 'yis,' Mr. Max would ha' been let to know it before this day. An' he up by four the morn, Tummas says, saddlin' his ain horse an' ridin' the country o'er for hours!" A delighted smile, which she strove in vain to repress, irradiated her strong face. "I'm thinkin' he's no so easy as to what the day'll bring forth! Aweel, aweel, it does a young man no harm to be a bit

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anxious an' downhearted. I'd no be in too great a hurry, my lam', to mak him o'er proud o' himsel'. But wha am I, thin, to be givin' counsel to the daughter of Miss Mary Yorke! Born Carmichael you are, Miss Hope, and I'm no gainsayin' it; but fra' the crown o' your golden head to the soles o' your bonnie feet ye are just a Yorke. Wi' a knowledge o' hearts and horses in your blood that taches you how to win the ane an' manage the ither! And now you'd best get up or you'll be late till your breakfast —an' that wud niver do wid Mr. Errol and the twa strange jantlemen here——"

Wild Will, dominated as always by a spirit of mischief, saw to it that Max had no interview with me that morning. He was by my side constantly, showing an unswerving devotion that amused Mr. Errol and delighted Aunt Caro. Prompted by their wild brother, Ronald and Jamie followed suit, overwhelming me with their audacious laughter-provoking attentions. But Max, careless as ever of on-lookers, put an end to their nonsense after luncheon when he asked me—before them all—to spend the afternoon with him. We were assembled upon the veranda. The silence that fell upon the gay little company told me that my answer would mean everything to them. Mr. Errol, Aunt Caro, the two lawyers, and my four cousins watched me with breathless interest, forgetting their manners in their eagerness to hear my reply.

I felt the hot color sweep across my face from brow to chin, my heart beat to suffocation. Unconsciously, I rose to my feet. Then, true to the traditions of the Yorkes—rode straight. Although I could not, somehow, raise my voice much above a whisper, I am sure my answer was distinctly heard. Max, stepping quickly forward, took my face between his strong hands, and, after gazing deep into my eyes

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as if to make sure that my heart had spoken, kissed me on the lips.

"I thank God that it is yes," he said simply.

That was our real betrothal. But in the evening, to please dear Mr. Errol, we went through with the formal ceremony, just as it had been planned for us years before. I wore the beautiful lace frock over its slip of white satin. About my throat Aunt Caro clasped my mother's string of pearls; the boys gave me a morning-glory fashioned of sapphires for my hair; and Max placed a splendid sapphire, set in diamonds, upon my finger—my betrothal ring.

We were a gay little party enough when, all formality ended, I was called upon to sing. Each asked for his or her favorite ballad; my guardians—grown as light-hearted as we—called for many.

"And now, Hope, my little daughter," said Mr. Errol, smiling upon me fondly as he emphasized my new title, "sing 'Angels, ever bright and fair,' and then we old folks will have had our share of your evening."

I sang Handel's soul-lifting melody; sang it gravely, with a solemn ecstasy thrilling through the words, through the swinging cadences. But this was because, born a singer, I unconsciously lent myself to the interpretation of the thoughts, the feeling, the inspiration of the composer. In reality I was so very happy that I did not in the least realize what I was singing. I was a trifle awestruck when I thought how different all might have been had either Max or I chanced to care for some one else. I looked with deep affection at the family group surrounding me. What a fortunate girl I was, I thought, and sang:

"Angels ever bright and fair,
Take, oh, take me, to your care."

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Max and I lingered long on the veranda. It was nearly twelve when I stole softly into my room. Katie, tired out by the day's excitement, had fallen asleep on the lounge where she had sat down to wait for me. I did not wake her, but set about preparing for the night without her help. I unclasped my pearls, took the morning-glory from my hair, and, first pressing my lips to the sapphire—September's jewel—that gleamed upon my hand, slipped it off. There was no light save moonlight in the room. I put my trinkets down softly upon the dressing-table, then moving quietly to the window, leaned far out.

The moon hung low in the west; in a half hour she would be gone. No wind was stirring and the pines, their tops softened into velvet by the moonlight, were unwontedly silent. It was as if they were listening to the soft voice of the sea, that in the deep silence of the night made itself heard, calling, calling.—And presently this call was answered both by tide and river, that together, as by one impulse, turned, hastening to obey.

A desire to see their waters flowing swiftly seaward, shimmering under the moon's rays, took possession of me. Accustomed to following my impulses, and thinking it could do no harm were I to yield to this one—although never before had I been out alone at so late an hour—I crept noiselessly from the room, stole downstairs, and opening one of the drawing-room windows, went out into the night. As I left the veranda and crossed the short lawn between the house and the little wood of pines, I looked back. The upper windows were gayly lighted; there was plenty of time to run to the river's edge and back before the house was dark. I felt quite safe; the river was but a stone's throw away. But I shivered a little as I entered the black shadow of the trees. I had forgotten to bring a wrap and my gown was open at the throat.

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I lifted the train from my arm, where I had thrown it to keep it from the dewy grass, and drew it over my shoulders; then hastened along the path, slippery with pine needles and hardly discernible under the gloom of the thick branches. How fragrant the cool air was, sweet with the wholesome odor of the pines and the crisp salt tang of the sea!

The spot toward which I was hastening was where a little dock had been constructed, just two planks upon rough supports, leading out into the water. Here a heavy dory was always kept, used only by the workmen on their errands to the town below. I walked out upon the dock, wishing that its few boards were longer. If only I might look down upon the rushing river, darting now like a silver arrow seaward. The dory had not been pulled close beside the small pier; only its bow was drawn in and rested against the planking, the body and stern projected into the stream. I thought that I might allow myself the pleasure of stepping in and, seated far aft, be almost in the space of hurrying moonlit water. Near enough to enjoy its charm, while out of reach of its strong, dangerous currents. To suppose that a boat, simply because it was a boat, would bring me into danger, was but foolish superstition. Foolish, yet sweet, since it meant that my kinsfolk loved me very dearly. But I was alone, no one to see and worry over me, I would just step into the clumsy tub for a moment. Then I paused, unwilling to do what might mean disloyalty.

I was turning away when I saw something gleaming in the water, just beyond the dory. Something that floated—now seen in a stray moonbeam, now but a dark patch upon the ripples. I forgot everything save my desire to see the flowers or water-weeds that lay cradled so near. I sprang quickly into the boat, and making my way to the stern, looked over.

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To my surprise I found the object was fastened to the boat by a rope of braided rushes. I recognized Jamie's handiwork, and, wondering what he had tethered so carefully, undid the knotted end and pulled in my prize. As I drew it along the surface of the water I saw that it was a wreath, woven of ferns and the purple flower-de-luce. A sudden rush of tears blinded me, for I knew Jamie intended it for the grave of Sergius Boris—Best.

I strove to find my handkerchief, and in my careless haste turned too quickly; the chain of rushes slipped from my hand, and wreath and slender rope fell back into the stream. Conscience stricken, I leaned far over the stern trying to regain Jamie's treasure. I made a desperate effort to grasp the wreath, succeeded, drew back aglow with delight. I would refasten the chain—then hurry home. With dripping fingers I tied a clumsy knot and rose to leave the boat.

But it was no longer beside its little pier, under the shadow of the moaning pines. Who had last used it had forgotten to fasten it securely, and my effort to reclaim the flowers had set it free. Already there was a space of black water between its prow and the landing-place. As, realizing the need for instant action, I hastened forward, preparing to spring ashore, the swift tide caught the clumsy craft, swung it sharply around, and in another instant it was in mid-stream, borne along like a feather toward the narrow passage beneath the old chain bridge, whence came the roar of the torrent as it rushed seaward.

The quick turn of the dory as the swirl of the mad current seized it would have thrown me down, perhaps overboard, had it not been for my circus training. Although because of this I kept my poise for the moment, I dared not trust to my feet, but hastily crouching down made ready for the coming rush

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beneath the bridge. The low moon illuminated but faintly the miniature rapids. Did the boat pass these in safety it might drift ashore below, where the stream in broadening gained placidity. Above the bridge, as it tore along, it seemed like a wilful wild creature, and the noise of its hemmed-in waters a snarl of threatening protest. On one side a giant boulder lifted to the bridge its slippery shoulder, as support—a mimic precipice. On the other, rocky ledges fretted the hurrying water into froth. I braced myself for the jar of sudden shipwreck—and was swept beneath.

The dory passed so close to the boulder that a fern, which had found foothold in some unseen crevice, drew its graceful leaves—wet with spray—caressingly across my cheek. My ears were deafened by the sound of the brawling water. The chill was intense. Then the boat was out again in the waning moonlight, and I sighed with relief, thinking the worst danger past.

There were no oars in the boat. These were always kept concealed under low-growing bushes near the little dock. For a few moments after passing under the bridge I was at ease about myself, but anxiety for those at home began to harry me. If Katie woke to find me gone she would be almost crazed with terror. And the boys—and Max? As these thoughts began to crowd my mind, and imagination painted vivid pictures of what might even now be taking place at Moaning Pines, I scanned the shores with eager eyes to see if the boat were approaching either side of the river. But as the stream grew quieter the land receded, and soon lengths of gleaming water separated the northern from the southern shore. The dory, swung this way or that as the current willed, was now and again turned completely around. But whether it floated stern forward or bow on, it

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kept in mid-stream and drifted steadily eastward toward the ever-calling sea.

Presently houses began to show dark against the sky to the south. The boat would soon be opposite the old seaport town. The sight of these distant irregular outlines, silhouetted against the horizon, brought me to a sudden, to a dreadful realization of my helplessness. I had been so sure that the dory would float ashore on the sedgy meadows. My chief fear had been of the walk back, alone; my greatest anxiety, for the terror of those at home. Now——

I drew in my breath carefully, following the instructions of my singing teacher as never before, then with all my strength called for help. Again, and yet again, I cried out, flinging my voice far. Then I sat silent—listening. And from the warehouses on the river's edge—warehouses neglected, long disused, since the commerce of the old town was dead—the echo of my appeal was flung back to me, musical, mocking. There followed the deep silence of the night, broken only by the lapping of the water against the drifting boat and the voice of the sea from the bar.

Although accustomed all my life to facing danger, to the taking of risks in the ring and when riding cross-country with my reckless cousins, I had never been in such peril before alone. And while a runaway horse had never daunted me, a runaway boat was something I did not understand. I felt completely helpless—ignorant, desolate. Once more I lifted my voice in long-sustained cries for help, and again the echo only returned from the sleeping town. Then I heard, far to the northward, an answering cry. But even while my heart was throbbing with the joy of reawakened hope, I knew that the shrill sound came from the brazen throat of a locomotive. Another instant and the night express, the

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windows of its cars alight, swept across the long railroad bridge beneath which I had but just drifted, and rushed on through the town.

I struggled to regain courage, telling myself that Max and the boys would soon come. I scanned the broad river with such intensity that my vision blurred. At last I did not know what I saw or what I did not see, imagination playing strange tricks with my tired eyes. I called for aid unwearyingly, persistently, until great sobs choked me dumb. The moon had set, only the stars remained. I was far past the town. I could not see the long sand bar that stretched almost across the river's mouth, but each moment I heard more clearly the rhythmical beat of the waves as they broke upon its farther shore.

The channel between the end of this sand spit and the northern bank was very narrow, and close by the low yellow dunes a ramshackle summer hotel had been built. As I neared this I made a desperate effort, overcame my sobbing, and cried out once more. My voice sounded unnatural, so weak, so forlorn. No answer came. If the boat would but approach either bank I might, I thought, jump ashore. I stood up on the seat, poising myself lightly as when riding, and prepared to spring. But the dory, like some dull live creature, kept obstinately in the middle of the short channel. The long swell of the ocean caught it, slid it outward.

I sank down lower, lower. Flinging my arms across the seat I pillowed my weary head upon them and fell to crying hopelessly, like a frightened child, for Katie—for Max.

The far-off rote of the surges on the shore roused me. I was already a long distance from the land. I sat up and looked about me. The stars had grown dim. I could see but a short distance; the black

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water and the horizon line merged. My pretty frock was wet to the touch, my bare throat like ice. I drew the pins from my hair, and although it, too, was damp, its soft warmth as it fell about my shoulders brought comfort. In a very short time the darkness increased, the stars disappeared, and all the world was blotted out from me by a heavy fog.

I had been certain of being seen and rescued directly daylight came, so many fishing smacks haunted the coast, besides the chance steamers and trading vessels. But their presence now added to my peril. By and by I heard the hoarse note of fog-horns uttering their cries of warning. They sounded now far away, again so near that I called out in answer. Once or twice I was sure that I had been heard. There came the sound of voices, men's voices, of talking close at hand. I listened intently, miserably, feverishly, till at last I was convinced that my own wild heart throbs, and the slap, slap of the waves as the dory slid heavily over them, were the only sounds to be heard.

My eyes ached with staring into the blackness, colored lights danced before them. My throat was dry, parched, I had cried out for help so long. My head was on fire, yet I shivered with the cold. Strange fancies began to take possession of my tired brain. I thought of Mary Hamilton—was she, even now, seated in the prow? How had my mother felt, I wondered, as she sank beneath the dark water? Had her last thought been of me, her baby? I commenced the prayer for those who go down to the sea in ships, the prayer that—because of my mother's fate—I had been taught to say morning and evening since I could first lisp the words.

"O eternal God," I whispered piteously, "who alone spreadest out the heavens, and rulest the raging of the sea——"

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I became silent. Sobs choked me. Katie, my Katie, was even now praying thus for me. But presently I was able to repeat devoutly that appeal intended for those in immediate peril, beginning: "O most powerful and glorious Lord God, at whose command the winds blow, and lift up the waves of the sea and who stillest the rage thereof——"

So the night wore on. No sleep came to bring even a moment's forgetfulness. But before the dawn appeared, turning the impenetrable black veil of fog into a luminous gray shadow, I had fallen into a half stupor. From this I was roused at sunrise by a chill breeze from the east that rent the vapor, driving long mist wreaths before it and disclosing stretches of pale blue water. I sat up, staring dully, and saw close above me, almost upon me, the slippery side of a vessel. I strove to rise; my brain reeled and I could not. I moistened my parched throat and cried out; my voice sounded hoarse and low. But, as if in answer, two men leaned over the gunwale and looked down. They seemed to fear me, for they drew back, muttering to each other and making the sign of the cross. The dory was slipping, slipping past——

I held out my arms imploringly. "Help, oh, help!" I wailed.

The men were now joined by another, a tall man, with rough brown hair and keen gray eyes. I recognized him, and crying "Pluto!" rose to my feet, only to fall forward unconscious.

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IV

The dory struck against the larger vessel as I fell, and I was severely bruised. Of this, however, I knew nothing for some hours, as the chill of the long night, the exposure to the fog, and the intense nervous excitement brought on fever. I fancied always that I was in danger of shipwreck—either drifting upon lonely, rock-bound islets, or rolling ashore—swung high on gigantic surges—toward stretches of sandy beaches where wreckers lighted their beacons of destruction. Mary Hamilton was my constant companion, her warning cry coming ever just too late to save. And the nightmare ended only to recreate itself—a phœnix of fresh horror rising from the ashes of the old.

When I regained consciousness I thought that I was still in the dory, and I dared not open my eyes. I felt weak and faint. My head and side ached; I was as if steeped in dull, sickening pain. Then I became aware that I was in a bed, and clad in a garment of coarse cotton. But the swinging motion and the plash, plash of water against a boat's side convinced me that I was yet adrift. Then I heard some one moving near me. I held my breath, listening intently. Was it Mary Hamilton in her blood-red satin? Silence again, broken in another moment by a subdued cough. A rush of joy sent the blood surging through my veins. Was Katie with me? Was I safe at last? I opened my eyes.

I was in the lower berth of a small cabin. The upper berth and the curtains had been taken away. The little room was simply fitted up and scrupu-

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lously clean. The glass of the port-hole was open, its curtain drawn, making a dull green twilight, pleasant to weary eyes. Upon a small lounge sat a woman, darning a coarse woollen sock. She was short, and squarely built; her flat face swarthy, her black hair shiny and very straight. I saw that she was part Indian, a half-breed, and I remembered the men who had looked at me over the side of the vessel before I fell. I realized where I was, and wondered how long I had been lying there. I spoke.

"Are you taking me home?" I asked, and I tried to sit up. But pain and the swinging motion made me giddy. I sank back.

The woman did not answer. She stared at me stolidly for a moment, then left the cabin. Disappointment brought the big tears. I closed my eyes tightly, forcing them back. I must be brave. But the tears were so tiresome, coming thick and fast. And I had no handkerchief! I felt childishly aggrieved at this lack. Katie always tucked one under my pillow. As, because of this fancied neglect, sobs began to rise, my want was supplied. A handkerchief, fragrant with cologne, was placed in my hand, and I felt a firm touch upon my wrist. I dried my eyes hastily. The man whom I called Pluto was beside me and was feeling my pulse. I was very glad to see him. He seemed an old friend. I looked up gratefully.

"You are taking me home?" I said.

He smiled kindly, and strove to soften his harsh voice as he answered in the affirmative. "Yes, dear child," he said.

"And I do not know your name," I murmured. My voice was strangely weak; it annoyed me.

"My name is Rollis Lannion," he said.

"Aunt Caro—and——"

"I have telegraphed her," he interrupted. "I sent

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a man ashore at once to get word to her of your safety. And now you are not to worry, but just lie still and dream of pleasant things—of birds and flowers." He smiled again, and I caught myself wishing that his teeth were not so big and white. "Your fever is gone," he continued, "and I have some nice broth for you. See, here it is!"

The woman entered, carrying a tray on which was a bowl of blue china filled with the steaming liquid. Mr. Lannion took a napkin from the tray and himself spread it carefully over me; then he fed me, spoonful by spoonful. The broth was very nice, of chicken, with rice in it. I could take but little, and he looked grave over my inability to swallow easily. I made a great effort to hide my lack of appetite, since it seemed to distress him.

"Just one spoonful more," he urged coaxingly, when I at last refused. (He held the spoon close to my lips, as though he would persuade a captious child.) "Just one little sip—it is so good. I had it put in this pretty bowl for you—with its blue pagodas and quaint figures."

"No," I said, pushing it away gently, "no. It is nice, and you are kind—but I am so tired. When is Aunt Caro coming? And—and Katie?"

The woman had remained in the adjoining cabin —the main cabin—while her master cared for me. She now re-entered and carried the tray away. Mr. Lannion taking my hands in his, began to stroke them gently. There was something very soothing in his firm touch; something rhythmical in the slow even movement. His hands were large and powerful, long-jointed, the knuckles developed, the finger tips square. Because of my own athletic training, I noted his splendid physical condition. He was sinewy, vigorous, superbly muscular—not a spare inch of flesh on him, as the boys would have said.

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As he continued to stroke my hands and wrists I grew oddly dreamy. His gray eyes looked steadily into mine, but this did not embarrass me. No, I stared reflectively up at him, as he bent over me, wondering at the greenish glint in those strangely narrowing pupils. Were they narrowing—or did I only imagine—ah!

I started violently. A thought stung me back into the consciousness I was so rapidly losing.

"Jamie's wreath?" I questioned eagerly. "Lost?"

"Yes," was the brief answer.

"I am so sorry," I wailed, "so sorry, so very sorry." Again my tears began to flow.

Mr. Lannion dried my eyes gently. He looked distressed. He called to the woman, speaking in a language that I did not understand—the patois of the French-Canadians. She brought a bottle of cologne and with this he bathed my forehead, while he tried to comfort me.

"You shall have as many wreaths of flowers as you wish," he said, "only you must not fret, but try to sleep, and grow well and strong. Loison shall sing to you—an Indian lullaby."

He spoke to the half-breed, and she commenced to chant strange unfamiliar words in a plaintive minor key. Mr. Lannion again stroked my hands and wrists firmly, steadily, keeping his gray-green eyes fixed upon mine. Soon the chanting seemed to come from a great distance; the strange eyes looked upon me from out of a mist. I slept.

The fever did not return, and as I was a healthy young creature—sound, wind and limb—before two days had passed I felt quite myself again. I was not allowed to leave my berth, however, and Mr. Lannion persisted in treating me as though I were still ill. As I was shy about questioning him in regard to my return home, not liking to be a weari-

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some as well as an unlooked-for passenger, I said nothing of my homesickness until the evening of the fourth day. Then my patience gave way.

Mr. Lannion had come to pay me his usual evening visit. He had seated himself upon the little sofa near the open port-hole and looked through it as he talked to me. The sea was in gentle humor. Gay little waves rippled across its moonlit surface. The vessel moved quietly, the breeze being only strong enough to fill its sails.

"There is just enough wind to-night," said my companion. "You will be gently rocked to sleep. I fear you would never make a good sailor, even if you spent a year afloat."

"Why am I still here?" I asked impetuously. "It seems to me we are a long time in arriving at Moaning Pines."

"I am taking you to Boston," was the quiet answer. "We shall be there very soon."

"Why—" I began, and then stopped. If my kind host had been on his way to Boston when he picked me up, I ought not to expect him to retrace his journey. Yet surely we had had more than sufficient time to reach Boston.

"This boat does not belong to me," Mr. Lannion went on when I failed to continue speaking; "it has only been lent me by a friend. He is to take possession when we get to New York; he is making the journey from Canada by train. He expects to cross the ocean in her; she is perfectly sea-worthy."

"Aunt Caro and—and the others" (I did not like to mention Max) "will meet me in Boston?" I inquired eagerly. "But you telegraphed them to do so, of course!"

"Of course," was the brief answer.

"Shall we arrive in a few hours?" I asked. "I

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am afraid that they must be very anxious. Haven't we been a long time on the way?" I spoke nervously. I began to feel strangely ill at ease.

Mr. Lannion rose, and coming to my side laid his hand upon my forehead. "If you begin to fret," he said reprovingly, "your fever will return. Try to wait patiently; there's a dear little girl."

"I don't wish to be disagreeable when you have been so kind," I said apologetically. "Forgive me, please. Of course I will wait." I wished to cry, the tears were uncomfortably near.

Mr. Lannion brought a camp-chair and placing it beside my berth sat down. Then he would have taken my hands in his, but I drew them away. I had no desire to be treated like a sick child and soothed to sleep.

"I thank you for your visit," I said, "but I think I will say good-night."

He smiled tolerantly. "You poor little thing," he said gently, "your nerves are on edge from dulness. I wish you understood Loison's patois. If you did you might amuse yourself talking to her—not that she is very amusing. Should you like to go on deck for an hour? Loison shall roll you in blankets and I will carry you up."

"Yes," I said eagerly, "but I prefer to dress first. Ask her to bring me my things, please."

"I am so very sorry," said Mr. Lannion. "I really hardly know how to tell you what has happened. It is so annoying, yet so ridiculously unbelievable! The truth is these people are idiotically superstitious—they thought bad luck attached to your pretty clothes. Loison made them up into a bundle, weighted it, and threw it overboard."

I laughed, then remembered that my lace frock had been Mr. Errol's gift, and became grave. Mr. Lannion watched me keenly. He looked anxious.

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"It does not matter," I said hastily, unwilling to distress my rescuer by letting him see my regret.

"I shall have plenty of new things here for you by to-morrow night," said Mr. Lannion.

I stared at him in surprise. "You are very kind" —I spoke a trifle stiffly—"but my aunt and my maid will have thought of all that; they will bring what is necessary." Then, thinking I had perhaps appeared ungrateful, I added: "They will realize my need of a travelling dress, Mr. Lannion, but I thank you for your thoughtfulness all the same."

He went to the port-hole and stood looking out.

"What about going on deck?" he asked. "Will you try it?"

I thought he felt hurt, and not wishing to be ungracious, I accepted his suggestion. "I should like it very much," I said. "I suppose we shall see the lights of Boston soon. Are we entering the harbor? Is that the reason there is so little motion?"

He did not speak for a moment; then he said, as if he had not heard my questions: "On second thoughts, I think you had better not make the effort to-night. You are still weak."

There came a sharp knock at the door and he was called away, and again I began to wonder over the length of time spent in making so short a trip. It was unaccountable; so unaccountable that I grew alarmed as I pondered. It was not like Katie to submit to being parted from her bairn so long. And easily as Aunt Caro took most things, she must be disturbed by my present situation. The more I thought, the more bewildered I became. I longed to question Loison who had returned and was now seated by the open port-hole, but she understood only enough English to take my orders. Should I send for Mr. Lannion and ask him to tell me plainly why we had been so long on the way?

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My feelings toward Mr. Lannion puzzled me. When he was present I believed in him. Something about him—his splendid physique, perhaps—gave me confidence. I had been guarded and cared for all my life and he took charge of me in the way to which I had ever been accustomed. Now that I had commenced to analyze my feelings—a task quite new to me—I could not account for the sensation of distrust that assailed me in his absence. This had been previously so vague that it had passed unnoticed. I strove to push it away as ungrateful; it but returned with renewed strength. A hundred ways in which Max and Katie might have got to me rushed into my mind. In a few moments my imagination had conjured up and overcome every obstacle that could have arisen to keep them. At last I was sure that something was being hidden from me—some awful tidings of disaster.

"I want Mr. Lannion," I said imperiously. "Please tell him to come quickly."

Loison rose and looked at me stolidly, but she did not leave the cabin. I repeated my order, speaking very slowly. I thought that she did not understand. She came to the berth and arranged my covering gently. There was an odd look of pity in her usually expressionless eyes. Moved by a sudden impulse—by gratitude for her faithful care—I patted her swarthy cheek, smiling up at her.

"Good Loison!" I said softly, "you have been so kind. I hope to give you something pretty when my aunt comes for me. Do you understand me, Loison? You are to choose what you will have." I repeated my words in French, taking great pains to speak clearly. "Do you understand how much I wish to thank you, Loison?" She nodded. "And now call Mr. Lannion, please."

She eyed me strangely for a moment; she looked at

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the door, then back at me. She opened her lips, as if about to speak, then closing them firmly, left the cabin. Presently Mr. Lannion entered.

"What can I do for you?" he inquired.

I wondered why he never called me by my name. I asked him. "Have you forgotten my name, Mr. Lannion?" I spoke irritably.

"A foolish little question from a very weary little girl," was the good-tempered answer. "But you are over-excited. I will bring something to put you to sleep."

"I wish to remain awake," I said, with childish imperiousness. "I want to be ready for Aunt Caro and—and Max" (I colored hotly) "when they arrive."

"Plenty of time for a nap first," said Mr. Lannion composedly. "You will want to feel strong and bright to go ashore."

He left the room, returning in a few moments with what he said was a sleeping draught. I was already ashamed of my distrust. He was so good-natured, so friendly, so kind. Yet I hated to drink the mixture he held persuasively to my lips. What if I slept too long? I pushed the glass away.

"No, no," I insisted, "I don't wish to sleep heavily. I must not keep them waiting."

The gray eyes looked steadily into mine, and I suddenly wished to please, to be obedient.

"That is a good child," he said approvingly, as I meekly swallowed the stuff. "And you may sleep peacefully, for there is no man living who would not be willing to wait—for you."

This pretty speech amused me and made me feel at ease. Such foolish, affectionate admiration was the atmosphere to which I was accustomed. I smiled.

"You treat me like a child," I said. "First the bitter medicine and then the sugar! But you have

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been good to me, and my people all will thank you. Good-night."

I awoke at sunrise. The curtain of the port-hole was drawn, but I knew that the day was fine, for the reflection of the sunlit water danced upon the ceiling. Loison was sound asleep on the lounge. I lay still, fearing I might wake her should I rise and peep out. Then to my dismay I noticed that the schooner was still under way; it rushed along briskly, with steady keel. I watched Loison with nervous eagerness, wishing that she would wake. Surely in another moment the sails would be furled and the anchor dropped! I strained my ears, listening breathlessly whenever the soft pad, pad, of a sailor's quiet footfall sounded overhead. But I heard only the customary noises, the creaking of the cordage, the flapping of the sails, the occasional hoarse commands of the captain, and the ripple of the water along the sides.

All my doubts of the past evening swept back, and, forgetting the sleeping Loison, I slipped from my berth, ran to the port-hole, drew aside the curtain and looked out. It was a very beautiful morning. Too beautiful, since so clear a sunrise betokened clouds before night. The water was ruffled by a breeze from the east, and the vessel ran before it gayly. By afternoon, I thought, the sky would be gray, and the breeze might develop into a gale. To the south I saw land—then Loison's hand was upon my shoulder, and she drew me away in grave, though silent, disapproval.

"Boston, Loison?" I asked, pointing landward, as she led me back to my berth.

But she shook her head and, readjusting the curtain, gave me to understand that I was not to get up again. I did not disobey. My mind was in a whirl. If we were not approaching Boston, then where were

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we? Not at sea, surely; that, the motion of the vessel betrayed. Directly I had had my breakfast I sent for Mr. Lannion to ask this question. He told Loison that he would be with me at once. I waited and waited, listening for his coming with ever-increasing discomfort and impatience. But the moments grew into hours, the boat still sped onward, impelled by the fast freshening breeze, and it was not until eleven o'clock that he tapped at my door. He made no apology for his tardy answer to my summons.

"You must have an early luncheon," he said, after bidding me good-morning. "Loison tells me that you woke before dawn. And you must try to sleep all the afternoon, so that you may feel strong and well when we land to-night."

"To-night!" I exclaimed in relief. "Oh, I am so glad. And at what time, Mr. Lannion?"

"Quite late," he said. He drew up a chair and sat down. "I have a confession to make," he continued, "and I hope that you won't be displeased. I have full warrant for what I am doing from"—he looked away for an instant, hesitating—"from the highest authority."

"Aunt Caro and—and Mr. Errol?" I asked, meaning Max.

"We were in Boston harbor the night that you had fever," he said, not answering my question directly, "and it was thought best not to move you. I could not wait, so I was permitted to keep you with me. The little voyage has done you good."

"I do not understand," I said, bewildered. "Did they come on board?"

"No, they were not in Boston. Everything was arranged by telegrams."

"By telegrams!" I exclaimed. "But where are they to meet me, then?"

"They are lending you to me for a little while,"

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said Mr. Lannion. He looked at me very steadily as he spoke. "I am taking you home with me. I hope that you may not object to going."

I was silent. I was weak, and disappointment brought the tears to my eyes. Of what was Aunt Caro thinking, to allow me to visit the home of this stranger? And it did not seem possible that Max would consent to this separation. We were but just engaged.

Mr. Lannion watched me closely. "It is a visit of charity," he said, his harsh voice tuned to a low key. "There is a young girl living with me who is bedridden—my cousin's wife. She is but twenty-three, yet she may never hope to run about again. It is thought that she cannot last the year out. I hope that you will not grudge her a little of your sunshine. To have you with her will brighten, cheer her more than I can say."

I swallowed hard to keep back the lump that had, somehow, risen to choke me. Of course if I could do anything for a poor suffering girl—still—yet——

"Katie?" I questioned in faltering tones.

"Your maid?" said Mr. Lannion hastily. "Yes, you will have your maid." He did not notice my distress, apparently. "Here is Loison with your broth. Shall I feed you? No? You prefer not? Very well; but I shall remain until you have drunk every drop."

The disappointment, though great, had not robbed me of my appetite, and the thought that I should see Katie—and of course Max—that very night gave me comfort and steadied me. Indeed I was so hungry that I took all the broth. Mr. Lannion's rather grim face softened as he watched me.

"I have been but a dull companion, I fear," he said, and he sighed. "Men of thirty-seven must seem

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tiresomely old and dull to a young creature like you."

"I don't care about age," I said. "And I have not found you dull."

"You are just the same friendly child that you were when Fate first tossed you into my arms, a little less than ten years ago," he said thoughtfully. "You have changed very little—to me."

"I am grown up now," I said, smiling tolerantly, as young people are apt to smile upon the reminiscences of their elders. "I shall be eighteen in September." Then I blushed as I added, speaking sedately, with the dignity that I thought the subject demanded: "My engagement to Mr. Errol is just announced. We are to be married in September."

"Indeed?" said Mr. Lannion with polite indifference.

It was the first time he had appeared unsympathetic. I felt suddenly very young, and as if my engagement and approaching marriage were matters of little importance. "That is Long Island," he went on, pointing toward the blue stretch of land on the horizon.

"Your home is on Long Island?" I inquired.

"No," he said; "but it is not very far from the Sound—six or seven miles, at most." He rose, and stood looking down at me very kindly. "You have been very sweet and patient"—his old protecting manner had returned—"I will try to make you happy at Ornith Farm."

"The name of your place?" I asked, my confidence and friendly feeling restored.

"Yes, because of the many birds there," he said. "Your voice will make them all jealous, and I hope you may sing to me often—and to my poor sick Aileen."

"I will do my best," I said, and he went away.

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I was happy. I had suddenly realized that Max could at once find his way to Ornith Farm. And I promised myself to do all that I could to cheer the suffering invalid. I might in this way make some small return for Mr. Lannion's kindness.

Presently I wondered at the drowsy feeling that was creeping over me—I had felt very wide awake but a moment before—my head was heavy with sleep —very heavy——

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V

I slept long, not waking until night had come. The vessel was darting forward like an arrow. The water hissed against the sides as we rushed along. A gray twilight filled the little cabin. The glass of the port-hole was closed, to keep out the keen east wind that followed so sharply, but the curtain was pushed aside. Loison was not with me. I felt as dull and heavy as when I had fallen asleep, quite unrefreshed by my long nap. I lay still, staring dully into vacancy, my mind torpid. An hour or more slipped by before my customary alertness began to return, and when Loison entered I did not speak, as usual. By and by I became aware that the odd gray light was caused by the moon, shining dimly through a veil of clouds. Then I realized the lateness of the hour, and a rush of delightful excitement roused me.

"Loison," I cried, sitting up in my berth, "Loison, we must be nearly there!" Then I sank back, unaccountably sick and giddy.

The woman came quickly to my side and bathed my temples with ice-cold water. This refreshed me, and I thanked her gratefully. "Kind Loison!" I said.

Presently she brought me a cup of black coffee, which she made me drink. I did not wish it, feeling a distaste for anything of the kind. Her real anxiety, however, made me swallow the strong stuff rather than distress her. She arranged my pillows with affectionate solicitude, and, seating herself beside my berth, began to chant her strange lullaby. I sang the

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pathetic melody with her, weaving through it trills and swinging cadences as they floated into my mind. But soon I was dreamily chanting the old ballad of Mary Hamilton, setting its tragic words to the plaintive minor of Loison's slumber song. We sang softly, very softly, Loison and I, our united voices blending with the song outside, the shrill whistle of the pursuing wind, the sharp hiss of the water as the vessel's prow cut through it, and the insistent creak of the timbers peevishly urging the sails to do their best.

I sang the ballad through—those verses of it that Katie had taught me—then Loison, continuing her chant, recommenced. After a time the vessel's mad race slackened, soon we slipped along very quietly.

"Rise up, rise up, Mary Hamilton,"

I sang, and as I sang I listened to the sounds without:

"Rise up, and dress ye fine,
For you maun gang to Edinbruch
And stand——"

I broke off abruptly and sat up.

"Loison," I cried, "we are stopping! We must be close to land!"

The usually impassive half-breed started, and even in the murky light I could see that it was in alarm. She leaned forward, and taking both my hands in hers, murmured what sounded like a prayer. I scarcely heeded, so absorbed was I in listening for the dropping of the anchor, the lowering of the sails. This happened soon, and was done quietly; so quietly, indeed, that I wondered at the men's skill and silence. I had fancied that sailors always sang or were noisy when at work.

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Loison went to the port-hole and looked out. There came a gentle knock at the door, and Mr. Lannion entered.

"All in the dark!" he exclaimed. "You will need a light now. You are to dress and go ashore. Do you feel rested?" He leaned over me, taking my hand as if to feel my pulse.

"Yes, yes," I said quickly, "and quite, quite well, Mr. Lannion. Has Katie come? Did she bring my things?"

"No, she is not here," he said soothingly. "And I am sorry, but you will have to manage with what I have had brought for you."

As he spoke Loison drew the curtain and made a light, and I saw that a large box had been placed upon the lounge. Although disappointed at Katie's non-appearance, and by being obliged to wear clothes not my own, I was in no mood for asking questions. My one desire was for haste. Mr. Lannion apparently shared this feeling, for he left me immediately, saying that we were to land directly I was ready.

Though Loison could speak but little English, I had fallen into the habit of talking to her, content that she had the air of being an attentive listener. I chatted away volubly while she helped me dress; and I needed a good deal of help, since not only was I weak, but the new clothing required attention—a pin here, a few stitches there. It fitted me ill and had been oddly chosen. The undergarments were of common material, over-trimmed with machine-made embroidery and imitation lace. The serge yachting suit was of an aggressive glaring blue; both jacket and skirt were lined with purplish-crimson silk; while the stars and anchors, lavishly embroidered upon the pale blue blouse, were of a bright yellow-red.

Naturally, I said nothing derogatory in regard to Mr. Lannion's provision for my comfort, but Loison's

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lack of admiration surprised me. I had fancied that the gay garish colors would please her. She dressed me as slowly as possible, seizing every pretext for delay, her dark face growing more melancholy each moment. At last, however, I was quite ready, my toilet being completed by a yachting cap as vulgarly showy as the rest of the suit.

"Dear Loison," I said, and I spoke very gently, thinking that her sadness was caused by our approaching parting and ashamed that I could feel only happy, "dear Loison, I must say good-bye, but I want your promise to come and see me soon. All my family will wish to thank you for having been so good to me. And—but wait a moment!"

I hastened into the main cabin to look for Mr. Lannion. I had remembered my penniless condition, and that I must borrow of my host in order to fee Loison. He was standing by the steps that led upward to the deck, waiting for me. Laying my finger upon my lips, I motioned to him to remain where he was, and crossed to his side.

"Hush!" I whispered. "I don't wish Loison to hear." And I told him what I had come for. Then I went quickly to a sofa and sat down; standing was impossible.

Mr. Lannion looked grave. "You are very weak," he said.

"It is nothing," I said hastily, and at once consulted him as to the amount I should give Loison. "Five dollars?" I questioned, looking at him earnestly. "Would five dollars be right, do you think? Or should it be ten?" I puckered my brows; I thought hard. I had never feed any one. That sort of thing had always been done by my elders. But I had heard the subject discussed. To give too much was vulgar and did harm; so Aunt Caro had said. I turned to my companion, seeking advice. He was

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