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THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

FRANCES POWELL

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BY

FRANCES POWELL

NEW YORK
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1903

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THE HOUSE ON THE HUDSON

I

"Do you see this ring?
What of it? 'Tis a figure, a symbol, say;
A thing's sign: now for the thing signified."

"Some lapidary, in a narrow home of European cities, had perhaps spent his prime upon the precious toil, cutting it by dawn and sunset, and retouching it at starlight."

"I repeat it, Mrs. Derohan, I repeat it," cried Lord Ebbrides, his usually well-modulated voice high and harsh through irritation. "Every man, woman, and child has their price!"

"Bad grammar—and a false creed," said my mother.

Lord Ebbrides's angry tones attracted the attention of my mother's other guests, who filled almost to overflowing the narrow strip of garden in front of our tall French villa, and they ceased their own gay chatter to listen.

"I'll back my opinion to any amount, Mrs. Derohan. You can buy——"

But he was interrupted by a clamor of voices. Everybody had an opinion and gave it loudly. Everybody talked, nobody listened. I, least of the company, was unconscious that I did either, being absorbed in watching my fat puppy, "Prince Hal," gobble up a saucerful of bread and cream; but, after

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the odd manner of children, I later remembered what had been said.

Presently the pretty girl who presided over the tea-table made her shrill voice dominate all others. "Grown people may be as horrid as that," she cried, "but not children."

The tumult died away and the Viscount Ebbrides was heard to say that children were a rotten lot; greedy, time-serving, deceitful;—as bad as their elders and as easily bought. Another babel followed this trenchant announcement, then I heard my name.

"Look at little Athena! Look at the little golden-haired angel's great, steadfast gray eyes, and dare to say——"

I gathered up my over-fed pup and walked away to the end of the garden. There, in the tall trees of our boundary line, I found another house-party engaged in shrill discussion. These were magpies, in quaint suits of pepper-and-salt. They did not talk of my looks—a tiresome, never-ending topic—but politely ignored my existence and turned a deaf ear to the sharp yaps of Prince Hal.

Although it was but May, splendid roses clambered up the brick walls of the villa, and summer had come. The villa had been rented for a month that my mother might rest before the London season, but it was crammed with people, as she disliked being dull. The French coast pleased her near Dinard. Its fields of cardinal-colored clover against a background of blue sky, the little waves dancing about the myriads of golden-brown islets off shore, the days of brilliant sunshine, suited her. She found the place gay and she loved gayety—of every kind. We had no settled home, but flitted from place to place, rarely pitching our tent anywhere for longer than two months. My mother had had

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but a dreary girlhood—teaching music all the year round in a country town—and after her marriage she indulged her fancy for society and for constant change. My father shared her tastes and was equally fond of living in Europe, until the Civil War began. Then he wished to return home and fight for the preservation of the Union—the question of slavery did not interest him—but my mother would not let him go. This was very natural. She was not only delicate and tender-hearted, dreading the horrors of war, but quite alone in the world—an orphan, with the memory of relatives who had snubbed her when she was poor.

So my father remained abroad and they wandered far a-field, perhaps to be out of hearing of home echoes. When they were in Athens I was born, and they named me for that city and its tutelar goddess. During my childhood I heard nothing of home politics, but much of Athena; nothing of the rights and wrongs of North and South, or of the miseries arising out of the negro question, but much of the wisdom and strength that must be acquired by a little girl who bore the name of a great and good goddess. Unfortunately, I was but a humdrum child.

My poor mother declared that I had a taste for the commonplace, even preferring plain-looking, commonplace people. This was because of my affection for Percy Stuart, a good-tempered young Englishman who, like his cousin, Lord Ebbrides, spent most of his time in our everchanging homes. Although he was over twenty, and I but eight years old that May, he never teased me, but always treated me with the consideration due a sensible and much-liked companion. So I was much pleased on that May afternoon when he joined me in my end of the garden.

"Have you been to St. Malo, Percy?"

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"No, Athena."

"Then where have you been? Listen to the sea; how it is singing!"

He paid no attention. I stared at him, wondering.

"Athena," he burst out after a moment, "is there anything that you want most awfully?"

"Yes," I said without hesitation, "I want a doll."

I had never had a doll. Even the poor make-shift of a towel with a string tied around its middle, and pencilled face, was denied me. I possessed but two toys—a racing-stable with its stud, and a beautifully rigged schooner-yacht. With these I seldom cared to play; indeed, I had but little time for playing. What with studying wise books all the mornings of the year, and learning to ride, swim, box, fence, or shoot every afternoon, playtime was crowded out. Yet I wanted a doll, and fearing Percy had not heard me I repeated what I had said.

"Yes, Percy, I do wish for a doll most awfully!"

He turned on his heel abruptly and left me, muttering as he went:

"I feel a Judas!"

Presently my mother called to me. She had left her *chaise longue*, and I knew, because of the great brilliancy of her eyes, that she was excited over something.

"Athena," she cried as I drew near, "Athena, my little goddess, pray say you do not want a doll."

I could not say so. I remained silent. The curiosity of the company was aroused as to why I might not wish for one. Everybody demanded the reason. I wished to know, too.

"Because I don't choose to have what is called the maternal instinct awakened in my daughter," said my mother, scornfully. "Maternal instinct, forsooth! Say rather the nurse-maid instinct! No, my beautiful Athena shall never care to weary herself

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with domestic miseries if I can prevent it. Therefore I banish dolls."

"But if she marries?" someone asked.

"I hope she may never marry." My mother's sweet voice was less silky than usual. "Thank God, she will never need to. She will be lovely, rich, and free as air! I hope she may never wear galling chains —my little Queen of Hearts!" Stooping, she kissed my cheek.

Lord Ebbrides was rolling a cigarette. He eyed my mother curiously for a few moments, then said, indifferently:

"So our bet is off?"

My mother liked a wager. She hesitated. At last she said, very slowly:

"N—o; I suppose you may try. It can do no harm."

. . . . . .

Two days passed. On the evening of the third Nurse Margaret, a hard-featured, soft-hearted old Scotch body, had just tucked me in bed when my mother came in. She was wrapped in a white peignoir and evidently about to dress for dinner. Her hair, already arranged, was ornamented with a spray of fine emeralds. As she came toward me, smiling, her splendid eyes and the great jewels in her fair curls seemed to flash and sparkle in unison. I gazed adoringly up at her as she bent above me, but, as usual, said nothing. Words come to my lips with no more readiness when I am deeply moved than at any other time.

My mother bade me say my prayers and I obeyed, repeating the same prayer in Greek, Latin, German, French, and Italian. She was pleased, while I, I wondered if the Lord God were not a-weary of these "vain repetitions." Did He think me a very tiresome child?

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Meanwhile, my mother continued putting me through my paces.

"When I say, 'The Hand of Douglas is his own,' what do I mean, darling?"

"That my lips belong to me," I answered, docilely, charmed to have her with me, "and I need not kiss anyone unless I choose, but I must refuse politely, making a civil excuse, even if I tell a fib. Society fibs don't count as sins, being but White Lies, meaning—" Here I broke off. "Shall you wear all your emeralds to-night, mamma?"

"Only a few, Athena." And my mother went on to tell how, some day, I was to have her collection of these green gems—it was said to be unrivalled—some day when I should be a young lady and she—an old one. As she kissed me good-night she bade me never forget the meaning of "The Hand of Douglas."

"When I raise my hand—so—Athena," lifting her hand as she spoke; but a burst of jolly laughter cut her short as my father entered the room. Catching her around the waist he shook her playfully.

"Is this fair play, wicked girl?" he cried. "Creeping into the favorite's stall and slipping a powder in among her oats!"

I sat up in bed, wide awake and eager, but Margaret, asking angrily if they wished to keep "the bairn fra' her night's sleep wi' their daffin?" turned them out and shut the door. The following morning, Sunday—when no wearisome lessons were to be learned—my mother told me that I might accept, if I wished, the next doll offered me. Many had I been obliged to decline. I think I never was happier in my life than at that moment. "Perhaps some one may give me a doll on Christmas," I hazarded.

"Perhaps," said my mother, "who can say?"

In every odd moment I thought of that doll.

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Christmas was a long way off, but the pleasure of anticipation was already mine, and I had a large store of patience to draw upon.

On Friday afternoon of that week I found Percy Stuart waiting to accompany me on my daily ride. As he swung me into my saddle Lord Ebbrides called to him to wait a moment. My high-spirited mare—I had long outgrown ponies—refused to stand, and I rode on. As Percy rejoined me he called back to his cousin irritably:

"Yes, yes, I said I'd be back in time, but for the rest of your beastly plot manage it yourself—and be hanged to you!"

"You don't like him, either, do you, Percy?" I said, very sorry for my friend because of the cousinship.

"Not very much. Why doesn't he please you, Athena?"

I had been taught that Derohans were never tell-tales, and that the great Minerva was not a gossiping goddess. But I had been instructed as well that a gentlewoman was always civil—even greeting Death politely when he called. To be strictly truthful, yet polite, was sometimes, I found—for I disliked white lies—extremely difficult. Percy's question posed me. At last I said:

"He has the Evil Eye."

Percy burst out laughing and exclaimed, "Oh, bosh!"

I thought him rude, and he, realizing that he had been so, quickly apologized. I then explained further. "Some people, Percy, have the Evil Eye and can't help it."

"Like being born with a squint," he suggested.

"Yes. Poor people! It makes them unhappy, Percy. When they find it out they try to live alone."

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"Hermits," said Percy. "I've often read about 'em."

"Lord Ebbrides is not that kind," I went on, "but he may not know he has it, Margaret says."

"He certainly is not an old-style anchorite."

I looked earnestly at my companion. Was he taking the matter seriously? His expression was grave, even solemn.

"Percy?"

"Yes, Athena."

"I think Lord Ebbrides has the Evil Eye, and knows he has, and enjoys having it!"

"It's as plain as the nose on your face," said Percy, soberly, "which is a vulgar expression and you mustn't use it, Athena."

I said I would not, and fell to thinking of Lord Ebbrides—of the kindness he showed me in public, of the small torments he inflicted when no one was near. Often I dreaded going from my nursery to the drawing-room, knowing he might be lurking behind some half-open door, or crouching in some dark corner ready to pounce upon me as I passed.

"Now, then, little Minerva," he would whisper as he caught me, "how many kisses am I to have? Not one? Oh, but I'll help myself! Where's your owl, wise goddess? What, no helmet! No spear to hurl! Why don't you arm yourself or cry out for help? I know why. Because you love me, though you pretend you don't."

This last taunt rankled, and he knew it, as he also knew that I would not tell or cry for aid, while, well aware of my skill with my fists, he held my arms close clasped at my sides, avoiding punishment.

"He is a scoundrel," I said to myself. Then our horses broke into a run and I forgot Lord Ebbrides.

My father was waiting to lift me from the saddle when we got home. He bade me run upstairs and

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be dressed quickly, as I was wanted in the drawing-room. Storm-signals were so plainly visible in the nursery that I did not ask questions, but hurried down to the drawing-room as I had been bidden. There, all our guests were assembled. As I entered the conversation stopped abruptly, and my mother slipped from the room. My father came to meet me. He patted my cheek fondly as he said:

"I told you to be quick, Athena, because a beautiful present has come for you." And he led me to a small table placed in the middle of the room. I looked, and looked again. I could hardly believe my eyes. There, close before me, lay the most exquisite doll I had ever seen, and my father said it was for me!

A doll with flaxen hair and blue eyes—in a frock of white lace over a blue silk slip! Beside her stood her trunk, wide open, disclosing her dainty wardrobe. And this angel was for me! Wide-eyed and solemn I gazed in rapture at my treasure, forgetting that I was not alone. The sound of Lord Ebbrides's voice roused me. Glancing up I saw him standing opposite me at the other side of the table.

"See, little Athena," he smiled as he spoke—I did not like his smile—"here is a doll from Paris—a gay little lady. Will you accept her from me?"

The Viscount Ebbrides was considered handsome, because of his black eyes and hair, and his wonderful complexion, which did much to relieve the coarseness of his features. He was of medium height, broad-shouldered, and very strong. His love of sport recommended him to my father, whose intimate friend he was. As I looked at him across the table I thought him the ugliest man in the world, and, so thinking, forgot to answer his question. I turned to seek my father. He had vanished. Percy Stuart was nowhere to be seen. I suddenly felt very much

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alone. The silence of the people crowded about me weighed my spirits down.

"Look! See all the pretty things Dolly has to wear!" Lord Ebbrides was again speaking. "All for you, my beautiful little playmate."

"Thank you."

I spoke with chill civility. I did not offer to touch the doll. Very lately I had read of the deceitful mirage of the desert. The doll, I thought sadly, was a mirage—nothing more.

"Do you really want a doll, Athena?"

"More than anything in the world, Lord Ebbrides."

"Then take this one"—he took her up and tried to place her in my arms—"and give me a kiss in return."

As he advanced I retreated.

"Why do you wish to give me a doll when you don't like me?" I asked.

At this there was much laughter among the spectators.

Lord Ebbrides looked displeased. Then one of the men present—men were always greatly in the majority in our house-parties—spoke rather sharply:

"Give her a plain answer, Ebbrides. You can't expect a child to understand innuendoes. I vote for fair play."

A murmur of approval followed. Lord Ebbrides's brow darkened still more, but he paid no attention to the speaker.

"I love you dearly, Athena," he said, "and I want you to love me in return. That is why I sent for this doll. Take her, and give me, in return, twelve kisses every day, six in the morning and six at night. Come, is it a bargain?"

Alas! at that moment I forgot my daily lessons on politeness, forgot that the Recording Angel was understood to overlook Society Fibs, forgot every-

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thing, in short, that I should have remembered, and spoke my mind:

"I would rather never have a doll than take one from you."

"Why?"

A quick-witted child might have evaded a direct answer. Even I, remembering that he was my father's friend and guest, might, I now think, have replied civilly. But I was deeply moved, and so told the rough truth, saying, quietly:

"Because you are a coward and a liar."

Making my little reverence to the company, I walked proudly from the room.

Once out of the house I ran, trying to escape from the strange sensations of grief, loneliness, and resentment that filled my heart to bursting. Like a wounded animal I sought blindly for a hiding-place, and might have fled far had not Percy Stuart caught me as I rushed through the gate. As he lifted me in his kind arms and carried me back into the house and to his own room, I burst into a bitter flood of tears.

"There, there," whispered the good-hearted young man as he placed me in an easy-chair, "you needn't say a word, Athena. I understand." And he muttered, "Butchered to make a Roman holiday!"

His sympathy did more to restore my peace of mind than the splendid doll he presently took from its box and laid in my arms.

"Tell you what it is, Athena," he said, cheerfully, "two can play at every game, and this I've won. You and I have come out ahead, haven't we, in spite of Evil Eyed Anchorites?" I thought we had.

Lord Ebbrides, pleading a business engagement, left for London the next day. I had been the cause of his losing a great deal of money, as I had been heavily backed to win. He had to endure, as well,

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much chaffing from the men and reproaches from the women.

On our way to London we stopped in Paris where, with her winnings, my mother bought herself a ring, an antique intaglio. In the gem, a large emerald of great beauty, was carved the bust of a winged woman—a Psyche, the jeweler said. The face was exquisite, its expression one of sadness so intense as to seem severe. The emerald was set in diamonds that never ceased sparkling—so I thought. At first, because it reminded me of past pain, I disliked the ring. Later, because of the rare beauty of the face in the emerald's heart, I learned to love it well. My mother wore it constantly, always on the fourth finger of her right hand.

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II

Nurse Margaret read but three books: the Bible, Burns's Poems, and Uncle Tom's Cabin. This last I was never permitted to read, but I knew its few illustrations well, and because of the one where Eliza was shown crossing the river on the ice-blocks, her child in her arms, my doll lost her looks. I was not told Eliza's story, nor that she was not white. Nurse merely said that she was a brave woman, saving her child from worse than death. So later in the summer, when stopping near Baden-Baden—a favorite halting-place with my parents, the gaming-tables not being suppressed until nearly two years after—a convenient brook being, unluckily, at hand, I must needs play Eliza's part.

With big stepping-stones for cakes of ice, Prince Hal and two dachshunds for bloodhounds, I started across. My foot slipping, I fell in, and Percette Stuart Derohan was submerged. When she was rescued and thoroughly dried her complexion was gone, and her flaxen curls came out in spots. My mother, shocked by her ugliness, begged me to throw her away; then suggested a new head. But to me Percette was—Percette. I insisted that she should remain as she was.

"Should you cease to love me, mamma," I asked, "if I had the small-pox and grew ugly?"

I can never forget the pallor that overspread my mother's lovely face at this, or the shudder that she could not repress as she told me not to suggest so

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great a calamity. She had an exquisite nature, a pure and tender soul. Rough thoughts hurt her.

Poor Percette! I kept her only two years. We were in England visiting friends who lived in a grand old castle—much celebrated in song and story—when I lost her. Several children were of this house-party, and royalty condescended to be present. A few days before our departure we children lunched with our elders in the great dining-hall, whose walls were panelled from floor to ceiling in white and gold. I thought that my mother in her gown of pale green muslin, covered with a net-work of wonderful embroidery, a rope of pearls around her throat, was the most beautiful woman present. His Royal Highness agreed with me, apparently, for he joined her as she entered the deep-set window of the cedar drawing-room—so called because of the carvings in that wood around windows and doors—and began paying her graceful compliments. But my mother pouted.

"I feel cross, and disappointed," she said, complaining that I would not talk or be gay like the little Lady Gladys Trevor, whose witticisms had kept the table in a roar of laughter. I, meanwhile, looked from the window to the river, gray and sluggish, sliding slimily past far, far below (for the castle stood with its feet in the water), and felt ashamed.

The Prince was kind, trying to comfort my mother by praises of my beauty, admiring my level eyebrows and fair hair.

"Curiously enough, I feel that I must have met the child before," he said at length; "her face is strangely familiar to me—yet I never forget a name. I confess I am puzzled."

My mother smiled. An odd, far-away look came into her dark eyes.

"My Athena is a Greek, Monseigneur," she said,

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dreamily, "and her kinsfolk—marble people—are to be met with in the great art galleries of the world."

The poor gentleman looked bewildered, but, kissing my cheek, bade me run away and play.

In the court-yard—where screaming peacocks had supplanted the old-time pages and men-at-arms—Gladys waited for me. In her arms she held Percette with respectful care, while she dangled her own doll carelessly by what she called its "hind-leg." Sighing with relief, she relinquished Percette to my keeping.

"She's a care!" she said. "Not because of her face, which is most awfully knocked up, but because of your embroidery on her frock. Mamma says she never saw such needlework—says the flowers look real enough to smell sweet—says she wonders you could do 'em—says you're such a stupid little thing. Oh, Athena! I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to say that—it just slipped out. Please forgive me."

I had nothing to forgive. She had spoken the simple truth.

We stopped on a stretch of greensward that topped a steep bank above the river. Here a dolls' *fête-champêtre* was soon in full swing. All the children had brought all their dolls. It was like a real party, we decided. Such a crowd! Thinking ourselves well concealed from castle and flower-gardens by a screen of young larches, our dismay was great when a young Frenchman, whom we detested, bounced suddenly into our very midst. Grinning with delight over our evident terror, he stood in the centre of our green ball-room seeking a prey. A doll, a wall-flower for the nonce, was sitting out the dance. Her he seized, and began to spring about in a strange and alarming manner.

"La-la-la," sang the sallow-faced little dandy, gayly pirouetting and bounding high in air. "*Tiens*,

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I go to dance the can-can to make amusement to the *petites demoiselles Anglaises!*"

The doll was Percette. First, she was held by an arm, then a leg, next by her waist, and all the time so banged and whirled about that each moment I feared to hear her stitches give, to see the air filled with her sawdust insides. All tried to rescue her in vain—he eluded us with fiendish dexterity. Suddenly our hopes rose. Monsieur le Marquis ceased leaping up and down. Picking up a doll's table, made of iron, he fastened it to Percette's sash and sprang to the top of the bank overhanging the river.

"You reely wish, *très chère* Ateena, to me separate from this your lofely child?"

"Oh, please give her to me!" I entreated, running toward him.

With a mocking laugh he lifted Percette high in air, and calling out, "She say *jamais*, nevare! Better ze death than ze life wizout me," flung her into the middle of the stream, then stood stock-still, staring stupidly at the spot where she had disappeared.

Before Percette touched the water I was down the bank and tearing off my shoes; as she sank I struck out to her assistance. But the little table held her down, the river bottom was muddy, and dive as I would I could not find her. My father came in time to pull me out before I was drowned, but not before my strength was exhausted, for to give up what should be achieved is a heart-breaking matter, and—I loved Percette.

It was Lady Gladys who had run for my father. It was Lady Gladys who, roused to wrath by the sight of the evil-doer standing idle on the bank, rushed upon him with such furious onslaught that her child's push sent him toppling into the river. There, amid rough sedges, in but two feet of water, the Marquis

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splashed about in real terror, believing himself to be drowning.

The gay crowd from the flower-garden, where Gladys had found my father, had followed to the river and now greeted with mocking laughter the piteous cries of the French bully. None lent him aid. He scrambled out, and slunk homeward alone. But to me they were very kind. I tried to thank them, but could not. Percette was dead.

"Never mind, darling," cried my mother, helping Nurse Margaret wrap me in shawls brought in haste from the castle, "I will get you a new Percette."

"Percette? What an odd name!" exclaimed a sympathetic bystander.

"Yes, named for young Stuart," someone explained. "Awfully sad about him, isn't it? Good-hearted chap."

"What about him?" asked the other.

"Dead. Hadn't you heard? Crushed by the roof falling in at the Shaws's fire. You had not? Why, it was all in the papers. Whole house gone—pictures, furniture, jewels, laces—Lady Shaws had a stunning lot of lace; showed it me once. Well, it's all gone now. Young Stuart? Oh, yes! Well, he went in after the youngest boy's dog, a collie. They say the howls of the creature turned you sick and the boy, lame you know, insisted on going back for it, so Stuart went. There, don't let's talk about it—crushed to death, and so young. They say the crowd worked like devils to get him out—why, look at that child! Athena, what is it, dear?"

I did not answer. A great black wave seemed to roar above, around me. I lost consciousness.

. . . . . .

I never owned another doll. I did not wish for one. Percy was dead, and his gift, Percette. I turned my face away when people, meaning to be

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kind, offered to replace her, seeming not to realize that the place of the dead may never be filled. Nurse Margaret, learning that Lord Ebbrides was heir to Percy's large fortune, mourned openly over the strange ways of Providence.

"The flow'r ta'en," she complained, "the weed left to flourish!"

Poor nurse! A year later she was sent back to Scotland, and I had a French maid. I missed my Margaret sadly.

We had a house in Paris the May I was thirteen—a large house, that my mother might entertain. The ball-room was very splendid, and my mother's boudoir resembled a *bonbonnière* with its frescoed ceiling and hangings of green satin. In it was an armoire that I thought beautiful. It was of oak, the tall mirror of its door supported on either hand by a nymph or dryad, whose diaphanous drapery, clinging closely to her graceful limbs, was drawn, where it floated free, just above the head, by an upcurved arm. From under these veils each sister looked forth upon you as if, well-knowing the past, she might foretell the future. They fascinated me, and I felt that the sad-eyed dryads were the guardians of my mother's emeralds, since she kept them on the upper shelf of the armoire.

Her collection grew each year. My father's income had yearly increased since, his former man of affairs dying, our fortune had been placed in the hands of a brisk young lawyer. Then, too, Lord Ebbrides added many gems to my mother's store. These she disliked accepting, for she could not esteem him and realized, I feel sure, that they were given only because of his friendship for her husband. Lord Ebbrides was with us always—he and my father had become inseparable. That May he had apartments in our neighborhood and we saw him daily.

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Although my old nurse, Scotch Margaret, was very superstitious, she had failed to imbue me with her quaint beliefs, and I state but a plain fact when I say that misfortunes have generally befallen me in the month of May, and always on a Friday. It was on a Friday afternoon when, crossing the hall to dress for my daily ride, I met my father, his cheerful, high-colored face so drawn with pain that I feared he was dying.

"Papa!" I cried, running to him, "what is it? Are you ill?"

For answer he caught me in his arms.

"My poor little daughter!" he groaned, "my beautiful, helpless little child!" and staggered as if he would have fallen.

Just then the door of the boudoir—on the floor above—opened, and I heard my mother's musical laugh.

"In that case I might," she said in sweet, low tones; "but now a truce to your folly—*cela m'ennuie.*"

My father's heavy sigh echoed through the hall. Startled by the sound, my mother came to the head of the staircase, behind her Lord Ebbrides.

"Hurry, mamma!" I cried. "Papa is very ill."

Slowly, as if deprived of her strength, she descended the stairs. Lord Ebbrides would have supported her, but she thrust him away.

"Oh, Millicent, Millicent!"—my father's voice was hoarse and strange—"that damned scoundrel—I trusted him!"

"Go away, Athena," said my mother, in a fierce whisper. "Go to your room and—be silent."

Without a word I obeyed.

. . . . . .

It was, indeed, a great calamity that had broken my father down. His fortune was gone, lost in mad

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speculation. I feel sure that for himself ruin would have mattered little, but the thought of wife and child reduced to penury—a mere pittance remained to us—wrung his heart. To a vigorous young creature like myself poverty meant little, but, like my father, I dreaded it for my sensitive mother. She bore the blow bravely, making no complaint, though each day her lovely face grew more haggard, her great eyes more feverishly bright.

Lord Ebbrides placed his purse at my father's disposal for immediate expenses. As soon as possible, everything of value was to go under the hammer, save the emeralds. These Lord Ebbrides offered to buy. This sale was particularly bitter to my father. It was an additional blow to deprive my mother of her jewels, and for that reason, perhaps, he was eager to have them go at once. It was on the last Friday in May that, entering the green boudoir, I heard him ask if they had been sent to Lord Ebbrides. My mother answering in the negative, he showed displeasure. "I grudge them to him, of course," he said, irritably, "but he's paid up handsomely, Millicent, and I wish to God you'd give 'em to him and be done with it."

"As you please, Charles," she answered, coldly. "Is he to have the ring, too?" half-drawing the intaglio from her finger.

"No, no! Not Athena's Psyche—God forbid!" He hurried from the room.

My mother lay back among the pale green cushions of her sofa, staring with sombre eyes at the flashing jewels on her finger. Her golden hair gleamed like sunshine, a red spot burned on either cheek. She was surpassingly beautiful. Presently she became aware of my steady gaze.

"Well," she said, a note of contempt in her voice, "are you discovering the worm?"

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"The worm, mamma?"

"Yes, the nasty, crawling, evil worm! That's what is left when the butterfly's wings are pulled off." With a dreary laugh she rose and surveyed herself in the armoire's mirror. "I see it plainly," she continued, "for, thank God—or the Devil—I have never blinked plain facts. Come here, Athena, stand beside me—so. Now look well at those two reflections and learn a lesson in physiognomy. Ah! I am grown a hag already—in two short weeks!"

"Short weeks?" I echoed thoughtfully. "They seem years!"

"Athena! Is it possible you feel that way? But no, like all children, you only repeat what others say. You resemble a statue—like a statue, will rest content forever in some dusty, out-of-the-way niche! I—like my kind—need warmth, sunshine, flowers! I must have them. Well for you that you care for nothing, since nothing is left you to care for! Poverty is like death."

I remember I flung my arms around her, crying out, in a very passion of love and pity, that while I had her I had everything, everything—that to purchase her happiness I would gladly die!

"Then hold me close, Athena, do not let me go!" she spoke breathlessly, clinging to me as if in terror, "while you are near me——"

"A note for Madame."

Julie, my mother's maid, stood in the doorway, disapproval in her hard, dark eyes.

"A voice from the Pit!" said my mother, laughing hysterically. "Well, agent of the Devil, what does your master want?"

Julie was handsome—tall, dark, imposing. In the Reign of Terror she might have led a mob. She stood before her mistress erect and calm, holding

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out the note. My mother put both hands behind her and stepped back.

"I shall not touch it, Julie."

"Is it, then, to be returned, Madame?"

"Wait—" cried my mother. "If I only knew what to do! Who was it, Athena, that was pursued by Death and the Devil?"

"Sintram, mamma."

"Poor creature! If I could but decide——"

"Perhaps with a coin," suggested Julie.

"The very thing!" Taking from her purse a ten-franc piece my mother called out, "Heads, Death! Tails, the Devil!" and tossed it high in air.

It fell with a soft rustle on the gay rug at her feet. She knelt to examine it. The glitter of fierce excitement gleamed in Julie's eyes. Slowly, very slowly, my mother rose, her face ghastly white. She stretched out her hand for the letter.

"Go, Athena," she said.

"Yes, but first let me kiss you, mamma."

"No, no!" she cried, shrinking back. "Don't touch me, don't come near me!"

Seeing that her nerves were on edge I went quietly away. When, at midnight, a frightful storm broke over the city, waking me, I remembered my mother's excited condition, and could not sleep because of my anxiety until the noises of the tempest died away. She breakfasted always in her room, and when she failed to appear at luncheon I believed that she was but taking a much-needed rest, and felt no alarm. Neither was my father uneasy until Julie, pale-faced and wild-eyed, startled us.

"The door of the boudoir has been locked since daybreak, Monsieur," she cried, entering unannounced. "Perhaps Madame is ill!"

Fearing we knew not what, we hurried upstairs. My father knocked softly at the door.

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"Millicent!"

No answer. In the silence I could hear my heart beat. Again—knocking loudly, peremptorily—

"Millicent! Millicent! Open the door!" entreatingly—violently—despairingly. Then, to the huddled group of frightened servants: "Stand back, damn you! Can't you do something besides stare? Athena, can you hear anything?"

I shook my head.

"Stand aside, then," he commanded hoarsely, and, driving his shoulder against the door, broke it down. It crashed, splintering, inward. He covered his face with his hands. "I can't do it!" he whispered, and —I entered. The atmosphere was close, tainted with the odor of a dying night-lamp. When, groping my way to a window, I flung it wide and looked about me, I thought the room empty. But the armoire had fallen forward. It was flat upon the floor, its door, the great mirror, showing to one side and cracked from end to end. I ran forward, strove to lift it. The servants came to my aid. Underneath lay my mother—dead.

She wore a travelling dress. Beside her was the small bag in which the emeralds were carried when we moved. Some were in it, others scattered about the floor. Her right hand, palm outward, was pressed close against her mouth. When, tenderly lifting the beautiful head I pillowed it on my breast, her hand slipped aside, and I saw upon her lips the imprint of the intaglio.

One of the many doctors, summoned in vain, returned the next day to talk with me, an old man, with beetling eyebrows and a mane of iron-gray hair.

"Thy mother, dear child," he said, gently, "had lost her mind. Had she lived she would have been parted from thee—always. Thy sorrow is, then, truly a blessing. See, it was like this. The storm

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came. She arose, imagining she was to make a journey. She seeks her jewels—in the armoire. As she draws them from the shelf she feels it totter, lifts her hand quickly to push it back, but—it falls! The hand against the shelf's edge is forced down upon her face, and the ring— Ah! this is the ring upon thy small right hand? It is permitted—yes?"

He drew it from my finger, and, taking a small magnifying glass from his pocket, examined it closely.

"A Psyche, Monsieur," I faltered, as my tears flowed fast.

The old man shook his head.

"*Mais non, mais non!*" he cried, with sudden imperiousness. "The Psyche wears butterfly wings, while these—" he transferred his gaze from the emerald to me, was silent for a long moment, then said, quietly: "This is—Nemesis!"

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III

My father was never the same again. The loss of fortune had tried him, but if my mother had lived he might have become his old genial self once more. Without her, however, life lost its charm. Only the necessity of caring for me prevented him from killing himself. This he frankly acknowledged. Lord Ebbrides, his sworn friend, deserted him. Perhaps Charles Derohan poor proved too dull a companion for so gay a man. Lord Ebbrides neither came to my mother's funeral nor expressed sympathy for us in our sorrow. He left Paris at once, and my father never saw him again. Cray, his valet and confidential man, came for the emeralds and—married Julie. My father gave her a handsome dot, though he could ill spare the money.

"She served your mother faithfully, Athena," he said.

Our house in Paris was given up and my father, before sailing for New York, placed me in the care of a melancholy French lady who lived in the country. He had hoped to retrieve his shattered fortunes, but his efforts met with no success. He was not fitted for business. Poverty, the necessity of asking favors, broke him down. When I went to him, ten months later, he had grown an old man.

I was fourteen when I first saw the flat, green meadows and gray dunes of Long Island. I love the eastern end of that strange length of sand better than any place on earth. In an old gray farm-house,

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half a mile from the sea, we set up housekeeping. For five years, winter and summer, I lived there, often quite alone, but too busy to be lonely, as I took entire charge of the house. I grew proud of my skill in cooking. My cake was in demand at the village fairs.

My father spent most of his time, and all his money, in Wall Street. He took no comfort in being with me, realizing too keenly the change in my position. He was pleased when I learned to launch the fishermen's dory through a high surf, to understand the weather signs and the management of crops; rejoiced that my complexion stood wind and weather, and sighed because, disliking the noise of firearms and taking the lives of birds, I refused to go shooting. He predicted that I should lose my skill.

Boxing I was not allowed to forget. Prize-fights still aroused his enthusiasm, and when one came off he read me every detail from his sporting-paper. If he returned from town in a happy mood he always renewed my lessons, calling me to the barn where they took place. Thankful to give him pleasure, I tucked up my long braids, rolled up my sleeves, and drew on the gloves with feigned zest.

The barn was a pleasant place to loiter in, smelling sweet of the hay that Mr. Welborn, our landlord, stored there. But on the broad floor I found a square chalked out—the ring, in fighting parlance—and there was no loitering for me! Sometimes, because of the swallows and pigeons circling past the wide-flung doors, the sunshine checking the dusty floor, the cadence of waves on the distant shore, I would grow dreamy, forget myself, and so get a fall! Again, my father forgot that his adversary was his daughter and I, remembering, fell again. I did not mind the bruises, but boxing is an unwomanly exercise, and this I often hinted.

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"Nonsense, Athena!" he would cry, indignantly. "No woman is the worse for understanding the art, the noble art, of self-defence! Say you met a tramp, would you run away screaming? Or become helpless through terror if you saw he meant mischief? Not much," chuckling, "not much, my dear! You'd simply play for his head, smartly, with your left, hitting straight. Or, better still, if you could manage it—mind what I'm saying, Athena—give him two hard rights over the heart, driving him back, then send a straight left to the neck and—you'll have him guessing in no time!" Sighing, he would add, "If you'd only let yourself go, not be so infernally anxious to spare your old dad hard knocks, you'd daze me, have me helpless straight off! Few men could get the better of you, my girl, though you look so dainty. What you lack in weight you make up for in skill. Your style's perfect, if I say it who shouldn't! You're supple as an Indian, your grip is iron, your muscles steel. Tell you what, my slender goddess, you'll do!"

But moments of contentment—when he rejoiced in my strength—were rare. The thought of my nun-like existence harried him perpetually since he wished to see me launched in the gay world. My nineteenth birthday was approaching fast when, bent upon making money for me, he took the small sum he had in hand and went up to town. He was absent some time. When he returned he looked startlingly ill.

"I'm all right," he said in answer to my questions; "for God's sake, don't badger me!"

But he could not eat, and later I heard him pacing his room, up and down, up and down, till he came back to me and said, his eyes averted, his voice low and husky:

"Athena, I must raise money on the ring. Put

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it in my room. I go back to town early to-morrow."

"Nemesis?" I cried. "Oh, papa!"

He turned upon me fiercely as if about to speak harshly, then his expression changed to one of feeble bewilderment.

"It's got to go," he muttered, "got to go! Put it in my room."

After my mother's death he had given it me, the only jewel remaining us, and to me the emerald with its Nemesis was no trinket, but a live thing. Parting with it was bitter. I opened the case and looked long at the gem—it was less brilliant than usual; then, in memory of my mother, pressed my lips against the intaglio. It was, I thought, my last farewell. Going softly to my father's room I placed the case, still open, on the table by his bed.

At midnight a great cry rang through the house:

"Millicent, Millicent, Millicent!"

Swiftly as I answered it, I could give no help, since, wild with fever, my father did not know me. The sight of the ring seemed driving him mad. As I caught it up I wondered that I had thought the gem grown dull, for it blazed with fierce, green light from the midst of its diamonds.

My father was very ill for two weeks—at the last peaceful and quite happy. He had forgotten his troubles, and become as a little child. I laid him to rest in the graveyard of the tiny hamlet, near which we had lived so long. This was his wish—the last I was able to gratify. Then I turned to face the world—alone.

. . . . . .

During their years of wandering my parents had made few friends. These few were foreigners—they had avoided their compatriots. My mother disliked

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her kinsfolk—who had ill-treated her—and never spoke of them. My father often told me that I had no "kith nor kin." When he left me there was no one either to share my grief, or, save for kind neighbors, hold out a friendly hand. I knew I must support myself, and this knowledge held no terrors for me, but when I opened my father's desk to find its pigeon-holes stuffed with unpaid bills, my heart sank within me.

It was a lovely morning in May, but I sat like a stone before the old-fashioned secretary, unconscious of the beauty of the outside world. I stared from the window without seeing the stretch of fresh, green meadows, the blue waters sparkling in the sunshine, or the spray of apple-blossoms tapping gayly against the pane. I saw only a mountain of debt, and realized, with a sharp pain at my heart, that for the past four years we had lived upon charity. I knew that had my father lived he would have paid in full, but—did his creditors understand? A firm knock at the door startled me to my feet, and I turned to face the chief among them, our landlord, Mr. Welborn.

They were his unpaid bills that I still held in my hand. He saw them, and, taking them from me, vanished with them into the kitchen. I followed in time to see them thrust into the stove. Refusing to listen to my remonstrances, to my eager assurances that I had money with which to pay my debts—Nemesis remained to me—he insisted that I should make my home under his roof until I saw fit to leave the island.

It was noon when he left me. I went to the barn-yard to feed the poultry, my heart almost light again, through the fresh courage instilled by the splendid generosity of this kind friend. But where might I find a purchaser for the ring? The crisp

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sea-breeze blowing back my hair, the soft May sunshine, the sweet May scents, brought me comfort, but no solution to this difficulty. It was hard to puzzle my brains, in the sudden reaction that had come with the knowledge of the world's kindness.

I tossed a handful of corn into the air for my doves. The chickens, rushing pell-mell from every direction, crowded about my feet, scolding, pushing, gobbling—a greedy lot! The pigeons, appearing less so because of their beauty, flashed and whirled about me in the sunshine, alighting now on my shoulders, now on my outstretched arm with soft rustle of furling wings.

Suddenly I heard a step, and, glancing around, saw a town-bred man, of easy carriage, standing by the fence. He was watching my doves with evident admiration, but, when I turned, took off his hat and entered the yard.

"Miss Derohan?"

I bowed.

"I am Richard Thorpe, junior partner in the firm of Beverley and Thorpe," said the stranger, smiling so pleasantly that I forgot to think him plain-looking.

I bowed again and he looked a trifle embarrassed. I had been expected to know about him and his firm, I saw. Since this failed, he tried again.

"I come from your cousin, Mrs. Spuyten."

"From Mrs. Spuyten?" I echoed as I led the way into the house. "But I fear you have made a mistake, Mr. Thorpe. I don't know Mrs. Spuyten, and I have no cousins."

The situation had grown comical. Mr. Thorpe laughed, but ruefully, then said, "May I ask if you are not the daughter of the late Charles Derohan?"

I bowed.

"Then, I am sorry to say, Mrs. Cornelia de Rohan Spuyten is most certainly your cousin, and I, equally

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certainly, must deliver a most unpleasant message —one I was very unwilling to have anything to do with. But on junior partners falls the dirty work."

"Tell me of Mrs. Spuyten first," I said, trying to make matters easier.

Then I learned that my grandfather had taken a poor orphaned niece to live with him, but, when he died, had failed to provide for her. My generous father had at once settled a large sum of money upon her, that she might be quite independent. She had not been grateful, but had quarrelled with him, and Mr. Thorpe at last gave me to understand that this was because of slighted affection. Cornelia Derohan had loved her handsome young cousin—eight years her junior—and her love had not been returned. Later she had married a rich widower, Mr. Spuyten, who had died a few years before my mother. Mrs. Spuyten, so Mr. Thorpe hinted, again hoped to gain my father's affection, but failed. She lived in New York with her two step-daughters, and had sent Mr. Thorpe to invite me to spend a week with her—to tell me that she had obtained a position for me, as housekeeper and companion, in a wealthy family, and to hand over to me a cheque for one hundred dollars.

When Mr. Thorpe had placed the slip of paper in my unwilling fingers a silence fell between us which lasted a long time. He stood by the western window, staring into the orchard, an uninviting spot in spite of its gay blossoms. A stout pig, with a contemplative eye, its feet buried in dank earth, luxuriously rubbed its side against the rough bark of a tree, its fellow-pigs rooting and grunting hard by. I envied them as I fought my pride down inch by inch. They need not accept favors from a stranger.

"With regard to that old pig," Mr. Thorpe began.

"Pig?" I interrupted.

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"I beg your pardon, I said Mrs. Spuyten."

I smiled.

"Well, never mind if I did say pig, the name suits her. If you should decide to visit her—and all that," waving his hand vaguely, "please remember that she owes you a lot of money."

I shook my head. "What is given is given."

"I don't see it in that light, Miss Derohan. I wish, before you decide upon anything, you'd consult your legal adviser."

"I have none."

Mr. Thorpe's face flushed as he said, eagerly yet a trifle shyly, "I wish you would accept my services, Miss Derohan."

"As adviser?"

"Yes, and lawyer—all that sort of thing. I'm said to understand my business pretty well. Won't you give me a try?"

I liked Mr. Thorpe's frank manner and honest face. He looked good, as well as clever. Mr. Welborn was as ignorant of business matters as I, yet I needed advice. Should I trust this young man? I wished to very much, and I recollected that, whatever my decision, I alone should be involved. If only he were elderly!

"If you don't mind, how old are you?" I asked.

"Twenty-three"—then, seeing my disappointment, "but I'll grow! It's not age that counts, Miss Derohan, but experience, and I've had a great deal," and he smiled. His smile was really charming. Suddenly I remembered that lawyers must be paid. I had not a cent in the world. This I told Mr. Thorpe, and I thanked him for his interest.

"Is it as bad as that, Miss Derohan? I'm awfully sorry. As for paying me—yes, yes," as I would have interrupted him, "I quite understand. I'll send in my bill, never fear, but there's no hurry about it,

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is there? And now, may I go through Mr. Derohan's papers? Unless," stopping short and looking rather haughty, "you prefer trusting them to someone else."

When Mr. Thorpe's task was ended I gave him luncheon. I enjoyed his enjoyment of my omelet—for it was good. When he found I had made it—and the bread—and everything—he seemed annoyed, and gave me no peace till I let him come into the kitchen and wash the dishes! He did it extremely well, and when I praised his dexterity, said he had learned how when camping, and that he was "a dab" at cooking, too!

He had supper and stopped over night at the Welborns', and discussed my affairs with them. He was to dispose of my ring for me, and came for it with Mr. Welborn. As I stood on the old porch saying good-bye to my visitors, I opened the shabby leather-case and looked once more at Nemesis. The moon had just risen, flooding meadow and sea with its light. The air was full of sweet spring scents. From the distant pond came the plaintive cry of a whip-poor-will. It was very lovely, but my heart ached. The circle of diamonds sparkled brilliantly, but the emerald, translucent in the moonlight, gave forth no ray.

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IV

The ring was bought by Mr. Thorpe's uncle, Mr. St. John Beverley, a collector of curios. Very wealthy, he was able to give a fancy price, and with this money, added to Mrs. Spuyten's loan, my debts were settled. I never quite understood, although given elaborate explanations, how it was done, since the debts were many and large, but Mr. Welborn assured me that my creditors were satisfied.

A week after Mr. Thorpe's visit, saying good-bye to my friends and to Long Island, I started on my journey into the unknown. It was the first of June —a sad, rainy day, the landscape blurred, the sea sobbing on the shore. The wind sighed through the dark cedars of the tiny grave-yard, but swept gently across the one new-made grave.

The Welborns waited with me on the wet platform of the country station until the train thundered in, when they introduced me to their cousin, the conductor, saying, "Have an eye to her, Sam!" and left me in his charge. He was a kind young man and, meaning to do his duty, bought me all the "Illustrated Weeklies"—so he called them—and countless prize packages of candy. Although grateful, I should have been glad to be quite alone. Not having left home in five years I felt oddly, and the dread of meeting Mrs. Spuyten added to my discomfort. As we drew near New York these disagreeable sensations increased, and it was with a feeling of intense relief that I saw Mr. Thorpe come on board the

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train. He was much surprised to meet me, but took charge of me at once, in his kind way.

"I'd give anything to go with you to Mrs. Spuyten's," he said, as he put me in a cab, "but I think it may be easier for you if you arrive alone. To speak frankly, she's a trying old party—and, in short——"

I held out my hand to say good-bye. I thought I understood—I did not in the least—and I told him I should get on nicely.

"May I come to see you, Miss Derohan?"

I only hoped he might find the time—I was already lonely. Leaning through the window, he again shook hands, told me that the fare was paid, and bade the man drive on.

The lack of air in the streets stifled me—a savage fresh from the wilds! It seemed but a moment before the cab stopped in front of a tall, brown-stone house. I climbed its steps slowly, summoning all my courage, and rang the bell. I was told that Mrs. Spuyten would receive me upstairs, and, following the butler, was in the dreaded presence. By one of the lace-draped windows was seated a stout, fair-haired woman. I saw, with disappointment, that she did not resemble my father. Until then I had not realized how much I had hoped that she might, at least, look like him. He had been handsome and pleasing. His cousin was plain. Her flattened, aquiline nose, hard eyes, and broad-lipped mouth promised an uncertain temper.

As I advanced toward her, my black draperies hanging heavily about me, she did not rise, but, holding out a short, soft hand, said, peevishly:

"So this is Charles de Rohan's daughter! Dear me! Well—I might have expected nothing better!"

The insolence of this greeting shocked me. I looked at Mrs. Spuyten in haughty surprise.

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"You may sit down." She spoke as to an inferior inclined to be impertinent. "I was surprised to see you in a cab."

"I did not know my way, Mrs. Spuyten," I murmured, at a loss how to answer. I had never been so spoken to before.

"Why didn't you pay the driver?"

"A friend did so for me," I said, coldly, "since you sent no one to meet me. I have no money. What you were good enough to lend me is spent, but I hope very soon to return it;—in a few months, if the situation that you have kindly secured for me brings in sufficient money."

It was a long speech for me. Mrs. Spuyten sat and stared, intense dislike in her small green eyes. Erect and indignant I endured this disapproving scrutiny, then—I felt my hair beginning to come down! The crape veil hanging down my back dragged on my bonnet, the bonnet on my hair. I sat very still, hoping my hairpins might stay in. Suddenly a long yellow snake slipped over one shoulder and coiled in a heap on my lap.

"Hoity-toity!" exclaimed my hostess, her eyes flashing in anger, "high-falutin nonsense! If you earn enough to keep out of the poor-house or from coming back on my hands like a bad penny, I'll give you the money! Because you're a de Rohan I'll help you, and I'll tell you how to show you're grateful. Drop that name. No de Rohan has ever been a servant—not that you will really be one"—thinking she had gone too far. "An excellent situation—housekeeper and companion to an old lady, an invalid. Lives up the river, somewhere near Droneton. Mrs. Erranti. Fifty dollars a month! Few impoverished country girls could get such a home."

I thanked her.

"The advertisement and de Rohan's death were

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in the same paper. God's providence!—for I knew you'd come upon me. His guiding hand has always led me. I strive humbly to follow in all meekness."

Moistening her lips, she leaned back with a fat sigh.

Since she was one of my father's beneficiaries I might eat her salt, I told myself, without loss of self-respect. It was none the less trying, however.

"I suppose de Rohan often talked of me? What?" for I hesitated. "Can't you speak out? Have you lost your wits—as well as your hair-pins?"

I had. Mr. Thorpe had frankly confessed that no kind message accompanied Mrs. Spuyten's offer of assistance, had warned me that she was charitable only through fear of the world's tongue, yet—I was unprepared for her brutality of manner. She was old; I wished to be civil, but I was shocked into answering her question by a rude "No."

"No?" she echoed, incredulously. I marvelled that so fat a person could have a voice so shrill. "Do you mean to say, Miss, that he never spoke of me?"

"Until your lawyer came I had never heard your name, Mrs. Spuyten."

A carriage stopped before the house as I ceased speaking. Mrs. Spuyten rang her bell and a prim maid appeared. "Gregson, the young ladies are home. Show Miss de Rohan to her room quickly. They will need you."

Mrs. Spuyten's voice was hard, her face very pale —the blow had gone home.

I met the Misses Aurora and Eva Spuyten at dinner. My mother would have called them "old young ladies." Oddly enough, the elder resembled her stepmother. The younger was pretty, with curly hair and pink cheeks. They treated me with

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cold indifference, not caring to conceal that they thought me a nuisance.

"What made you so late getting home, girls?" asked Mrs. Spuyten.

"Eva was talking to young Brown. I couldn't get her away." Aurora darted a spiteful glance at her sister.

"Mary Grace's fiancé? What were you saying to him, Evie?"

"He did the talking," Miss Eva pouted, looking cross.

"What did he say?" Mrs. Spuyten spoke pleasantly. Eva was evidently her favorite.

"Nothing."

"Nothing!" repeated Aurora. "I heard Dick Thorpe's name."

"Let's hear about Richard Thorpe, dear." Mrs. Spuyten's smile was arch and knowing. "What's your friend, Master Dick, been doing?"

"Dancing attendance on Princesses, wasn't that it, Evie?" said Aurora.

"Since you listened, tell yourself," was the tart rejoinder. "I like to hear about beautiful women—though I suppose it's hard for ugly old maids to understand my taste!"

"Hush, hush, girls!" besought Mrs. Spuyten, as the butler entered. "Dear me, what a hot day it's been!"

Her feeble attempt to preserve peace failed. Aurora, taking the bit in her teeth, was off—*au grand galop!*

"I'll tell you if Evie won't, mamma," shooting a wicked glance at her sister. "I'm not above liking a bit of gossip, and not selfish enough to refuse to pass it on—but, dear me," pretending to hesitate, "it may hurt dear Evie's feelings. Poor child—perhaps Dick——"

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"I don't care a button for Dick Thorpe!" cried Eva, her voice shrill with irritation. "What's it to me if he does escort other girls and put them in cabs? She was a married woman, most likely, anyway!"

"Mamma," said Aurora, impressively, "Eva is over-excited. Brown only said he saw Dick on the train when he was coming up from Babylon. He got on at Jamaica, Brown said, and joined the most perfectly beautiful girl he'd ever seen—'a daughter of the gods, divinely fair!' Dick was so 'mashed,' Brown said, 'he couldn't see straight'—was as rude to him as 'get out!' "

"One of the Lympet girls, I dare say," commented Mrs. Spuyten, uncomfortably. "They're related to the Thorpes through the Beverleys."

"No," said Eva, with sudden sharpness, "Mr. Brown said Mr. Thorpe said she wasn't."

I was ill at ease, dreading questions. I was sufficiently disliked already by the Misses Spuyten, who had a perfect right to resent my presence in the house. They were under no obligation to my father. Aurora was unpleasantly shrewd. She suddenly fixed me with her bright, malicious glance.

"You came on that train, Miss Derohan?"

"Yes."

"It was you Mr. Thorpe put into a cab?"

"Yes, Mr. Thorpe was so kind."

Aurora laughed disagreeably.

"Young Brown's a fool!" cried Mrs. Spuyten. "Dick Thorpe's a shrewd fox! I'll have to pay for his forced civility—he'll put it on my little bill. Go to bed," turning fiercely upon me, "go to bed! Your mother's own daughter! I've heard enough!"

. . . . . .

I was obliged to remain a week under Mrs. Spuyten's inhospitable roof. I had but little over a

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dollar in my purse. Mrs. Erranti had not engaged me to come to her immediately, so there was nothing for it but to stay. Gregson, the maid, took me about on her shopping excursions. When indoors I spent my time in a dismal upstairs library. Mr. Thorpe called twice, but did not ask for me, Mrs. Spuyten said. She gave me to understand that he was the same as engaged to Eva, only this was not yet announced. He had been kind to me because of his affection for her.

I was ashamed that I felt Mr. Thorpe's neglect keenly. I regretted that he had been kind—that I had liked him so much—that I was under obligations to him. I despised myself for these feelings, and tried not to think of him at all. The task was difficult.

The last evening I was in town the house was fragrant with flowers—every vase and bowl the drawing-room contained heaped high with lilies-of-the-valley.

"How lovely!" I cried, leaning over a forest of the tiny bells to inhale their exquisite perfume. "I thought they were done blooming."

Mrs. Spuyten stared at me oddly.

"Yes," she said, slowly, "their season is over here, but—men are fools when they lose their heads about a girl. These have come from farther north, sent for—" she paused as if out of breath, "sent for—by Mr. Thorpe—for Eva."

That evening Eva wore a spray, with its sheaf of glossy leaves, in her fair curls. They looked pretty there. When I said so she flushed painfully, and I saw I had displeased her. Later, when I told Mrs. Spuyten that I could not change my name, I was equally unfortunate. She was very angry, becoming violent when, trying to comfort her, I sug-

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gested that no one would guess our relationship, since I never used the small d.

"The last touch," she screamed; "insulting the old name! I wish you were not a de Rohan! With God's help, you sha'n't be thought one much longer!"

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V

From the time I was a little child my beauty had been constantly talked of. To my mother good looks were of vital importance. She rejoiced daily over mine. The gay people among whom she lived discussed my points as though I had been a valuable colt, unable to understand. Later, my beauty was an added distress to my father, who felt it needed a rich setting. During childhood my good looks were my most tiresome possession, and as I put on my bonnet for my journey, I feared they might prove an unfortunate one. Because of them I had failed to please the Spuytens. Mrs. Erranti might share their prejudices.

The day was depressing, with drizzling rain and heavy mist. Gregson, who went with me to the station, bought my ticket, and put me on the train, was in low spirits. With many apologies for the liberty, she gave me some good advice as to the management of servants. Then, handing me a letter and saying:

"For you to read when started—and may Heaven bless you and keep you, my dear young lady, and bring you to your own again!" she ran away, and I knew she was crying.

I had an odd, breathless sensation when Gregson left me. I suppose it was caused by fright. I felt exactly as one does when swung too high. I looked

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about me at my fellow-passengers and then at the note in my hand, and in a few moments recovered my breath and my composure. An apparently unending succession of tunnels and startling flashes of daylight now and again, prevented my reading Mrs. Spuyten's letter, and even when we were once more in the open I put off breaking the seal. The contents were sure to be unpleasant.

It was a disappointment that rain and mist blotted out the view. I had heard much of the majestic beauty of the Hudson. All I saw from the car-window was a stretch of gray water lapping a muddy shore.

I opened the letter. It ran thus:

"My Dear Athena:—After sincere prayers for guidance, I decide to overlook your obstinate ingratitude. Without thought of self I do my duty as a true Christian. I have written to Mrs. Erranti that Miss *Augusta Dean* will arrive at Droneton at twelve this morning. The girls helped in the selection of your future name. It will save changing the marking of your clothes. Gregson informs me that yours have richly embroidered initials! We know no Deans, so awkwardness will be avoided.

"Strive to do your duty in the position to which Providence has called you, with the voice of His humblest instrument. Strive to overcome your besetting sin, sullen pride. Strive to forget the iniquitous years spent among gamblers and reprobates. Under Mrs. Erranti's sober guidance, in a remote country-house, you will have time for meditation and prayer.

"Do not answer this. I have done all that is possible to help you. 'Heaven helps those who help themselves'—so spare me begging letters.

"I send no messages to your employer. I have

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not the pleasure of her acquaintance, nor do I wish for it, under present circumstances.

Your sincere well-wisher,
CORNELIA DE ROHAN SPUYTEN."

"Friday morning."

I glanced at the envelope. It was addressed to "Miss Augusta Dean."

Rigid with displeasure, I re-read the letter, hoping I had made a mistake; but no, I was indeed introduced under this hateful name to Mrs. Erranti. In the first flush of indignation I determined to explain Mrs. Spuyten's motive, to enter into full particulars, to tell my employer the truth. A half hour of sober reflection taught me this could not be done. Mrs. Spuyten vouched for me as Augusta Dean. A stranger might look upon me as an impostor if I called myself by my own name. Then, without money, what should I do? How obtain another situation? I decided to remain quiet, to work very hard, to pay Mrs. Spuyten what I owed her. After that—the Deluge!

The car was disagreeably close. Because of the rain the windows could not be opened; only cinders seemed to filter through the ventilators. My long veil tugged at my bonnet—clung, sticky and uncomfortable, about my throat and shoulders. The heat was intense. A tired baby began to wail. From its various discomforts the short journey grew interminable, but at last the brakeman shouted, "Droneton!" Again feeling very breathless I drew my veil across my face and, as Augusta Dean, left the car.

A coachman, in a heavy rain-coat, stood on the steps of the long station scanning each passenger who left the train. A neat young woman preceded me. The coachman stepped forward.

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"Miss Dean?" he asked, touching his hat.

"No, I ain't!" replied the young woman. She tossed her head and scurried away. The man looked disappointed.

"You are from Mrs. Erranti?" I said, stopping beside him.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Sent to meet—Miss Dean?"

The name fairly stuck in my throat. An alias was too new, too unaccustomed a garment. It fitted me ill.

"Yes, ma'am."

I gave him my check and went to the waiting-room, where he came for me almost immediately. Oppressed by the heat, I had thrown back my veil, and, as I followed my guide to a shabby, covered wagon, he began to apologize.

"I'm sorry, Miss"—wrenching open the curtained door—"that I didn't fetch the brougham. The master he's away to-day, and I got my orders from Madam's maid. She said I could as well bring you up in the market-wagon, but she's a French woman, and them furriners don't be knowin' much, I'm thinkin'! The seat's dry, Miss, and I'll have them baskits out to once."

The things he had put in were not in my way, and I said so, but out they came and in I got. My trunk and the baskets shared the damp front seat with him, and off we drove. Because of the rain and the curtains, I saw very little of the country. The coachman told me that Highgrove Hall, the Erranti place, was five miles north of Droneton, and added, with pride, that the private avenue was over a mile long! From the glimpses I caught over the man's shoulders I judged that the road was a lonely one, bordered by meadows and woodland, with here and there the gate-house of some estate. We were

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whirled along at a rattling pace by an excellent roadster. The wagon might be shabby, but the horse was thoroughbred. In a surprisingly short time we drew up before a tall, iron gate, swung between giant pillars of red brick, and a cry of "Gate!" brought a sour-faced man limping from the lodge hard by.

"Come, hurry now, will ye?" cried my driver, as the gate was slowly unfastened—to my surprise it was chained and padlocked. "Here's the beast soakin' wet, an' the lady perishin' with the damp!"

"Lady!" ejaculated the lame man, with a harsh laugh, as the gate swung wide. "Lady!"

We dashed through into a dark avenue winding under trees dripping with moisture. The woods advanced close to the road on either side, thick, overgrown, melancholy-looking.

"You'll not be mindin' old Pat, Miss," apologetically; "he's an ugly divil."

I made no reply. I did mind old Pat!

The long avenue was monotonous, unchanging. No attempt had been made to open up views, yet I felt sure we were following a high ridge commanding, but for the impenetrable woodland, a prospect of the river. At last there came an opening in the trees; we passed a mass of buildings on the right, a long garden wall, and in another moment stopped in front of a large, square house.

Highgrove Hall was a red brick mansion, three stories in height, a ponderous structure with great windows, and a broad veranda encircling it on three sides. On the east, the side away from the river, what had once been veranda had been built up to make a new room. The window looking toward the front in this addition was heavily shuttered, but through a glass door which led from it to the veranda shone a bright pink glow. Evidently the occupant

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of this room, finding the day too dark and dreary, had had recourse to lamplight. Inside the glass door hung a pink silk curtain. This was the one cheerful object anywhere to be seen.

To the east of the house rose a steep, rocky knoll, surmounted by a grove of pines. This the driver pointed out to me, saying it was the grove for which the house was named. As he spoke, the heavy front door swung open, a tall, sallow-faced young man appeared on the threshold and languidly invited me to enter and sit down.

"I'll see to your trunk," he said, with an air of gentle endurance of the evils of life. "My, ain't your horse awful wet, Larry. This damp goes right straight to my throat;" then, in answer to some remark of Larry's, "Oh, you're a tough, you are—in every sense of the word!"

The hall into which the butler ushered me was very large and handsome, running the length of the house. The end opposite the front door was entirely of glass, through which one caught a glimpse of distant woodland. One might have seen more had not a mass of palms and flowering plants, in big, green tubs, filled this immense window. They formed a charming background, however, for a beautiful marble statue of Fortune, with her wheel, which stood before them. The goddess looked as though just emerging from this bower of greenery, to smile a greeting to incoming guests, a graceful figure, with the air of being the presiding genius of the place.

The floor of the hall was of white marble—in great square blocks—and the lofty frescoed ceiling was supported by slender pillars of the same cold, shining stone; six on either side. Two rooms opened off the hall on the left—the river side of the house—but their doors were shut; to the right, but one, at the back of the hall, the space in front being occupied

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by a great staircase. It rose, massive yet graceful in its deep recess, to a broad landing, above which was a large window of stained glass. There it branched to right and left, winding to the second story. Underneath the window, in a spacious niche, gleamed another white statue—the Venus de Medici.

So far the hall was perfect—imposing in its spaciousness, and cold severity of marble—but the furnishings were barbarous and out of keeping. Between the pillars were broad divans, covered with rich, red satin, or white-and-gold brocade, piled high with luxurious cushions, while above them great mirrors in broad gold frames covered the walls nearly to the ceiling, reflecting the marble pillars, great staircase, and smiling Venus, until one lost oneself in endless vistas.

On the white floor—a shining floor of ice it might have been—were strewn richly colored rugs, tiger-skins, and one great Polar bear-skin, this last not out of place on the ice-like marble. Because of the oriental magnificence, I might have imagined myself in the hall of some Indian potentate—a mighty Rajah! I was so much interested it did not seem long before the butler reappeared, coming from the back of the recess which the staircase filled. He advanced toward me with slow and languid tread, and remembering he was one over whom I was to hold authority I looked at him curiously. He was tall, slender, and melancholy-looking, but with something comic in his appearance—as if the air of dejection might be an affectation merely. His brown hair was worn long in front to allow of its being arranged in a love-lock, curling loosely over his high, sallow forehead. His eyebrows were raised, as if in constant surprise that anyone should care to exist in so sad a world, and his long nose seemed contemptuously a-droop in its profound disgust with its surroundings.

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"Madam will see you now, Miss Dean," he drawled, as he approached, adding, as I rose and followed him across the hall. "It's one of her bad days —but you needn't mind—'rooms to let,' you know!" and he tapped his forehead, significantly.

He led me to the door from which he had just entered the hall, to the left of the staircase at the back of its recess, and I knew it led to the part of the veranda that had been enclosed. He opened it, and I found myself in a narrow passage with three doors—besides that by which I had entered—leading from it. The butler, noticing my glances of interest, pointed with his long thumb from one to the other, saying:

"This to the left, pieazza; in front, Madam's maid's room—oh, she's a caution, she is!—that one, down the entry, Madam's own apartment," and, flinging open this last with much ceremony, he ushered me in, saying impressively, "Miss Dean, Madam!"

I entered—and found myself in a new world.

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VI

The little entry had been very dark, as was the great hall, in spite of its huge window, for the June day itself was sombre. The dull mist which hung over woodland and river had stolen into the house, filling it with dark shadows. But the room I entered was so brilliant in its pink radiance that for a moment my eyes were dazzled and I could hardly see. In every nook and corner lamps and candles were burning brightly, each provided with a pink shade. Like the great hall, the walls were lined with mirrors in broad gold frames; beneath these again were ranged divans covered with pale pink silk and heaped with cushions. The ceiling was gayly painted with garlands of roses, over which hovered myriads of bright-winged butterflies and birds of dazzling plumage. The windows were curtained with pink silk under white lace; the bed of highly polished rosewood wore a counterpane to match.

In the bed, propped up by lace-edged pillows, in lace cap and dressing-gown a-flutter with pink ribbons, sat a little, old lady, taking her mid-day meal; a pretty old lady—although her head was too large, her cheek-bones too high, and her features irregular—with clear, olive skin, large brown eyes as bright as diamonds, and cheeks as pink as her room.

On a table by the bed was the lunch-tray, and bending over it, her back toward me, the old lady's maid, a gay figure, in pink cambric frock and snowy

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cap and apron. When I entered she had just given her mistress a chicken pinion. Madam Erranti, holding it in her fingers, was gnawing it with luxurious enjoyment, when she heard me announced. She stopped eating to look, but directly her eyes fell on me she shut them tight, like a child who sees something frightful, and cried out in French:

"She is like the day! All black, all black! I won't look at her! Send her away!"

She turned her head from me, warding off my approach with the half-picked pinion. At this the maid rose from her stooping posture to see the cause of the commotion, but no sooner had she glanced at me than, growing very pale, she exclaimed:

"*Mon Dieu!*—Mademoiselle Derohan!"

I was no less astonished to find in Mrs. Erranti's attendant, Julie, my mother's maid.

"You, Julie!" I cried, in my turn. "In America! —and Cray?"

"He, too, mademoiselle. And why? *Ma foi*, as all the rest, for money!"

We had forgotten the autocrat in the bed. She recalled us to a sense of our proper positions by saying, sharply:

"Take off her bonnet, Julie! Cover her black robe with my white shawl. So—now I will look at her. *Dieu! Qu'elle est belle!*"

After staring for some moments, she added:

"I would see her hair. Take it down, Julie."

Julie obeyed, silently, swiftly. She was a perfect maid.

I sat quite still, submissive, uncomfortable. The room was warm, the silken shawl was warm, my hair, hanging over the shawl, was more than warm: it was suffocating.

But Madam Erranti was pleased.

"Magnificent!" she cried, in sudden excitement.

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"It is gold! Pure gold! It is like rays of sunshine! No red—I detest red—pure, golden sunshine!" In English—she had spoken in French—she now quoted the line:

"'A little sunshine in a shady place.' You know that, *n'est-ce pas?* But yes, of course, for you are not a common person—like Julie here—no, no, no! You are a lady, an aristocrat, *une grande dame—comme moi!*"

She leaned back among her pillows, dropping the chicken-bone on a plate on her bed-tray. "Yes, yes, I, too, am a lady.—Julie, wash my hands."

Julie, as impassive as I remembered her always to have been, offered a finger-bowl. I could not see that she had altered in any way—the same handsome, hard-featured Julie of six years ago.

"Yes, yes, I am a lady," Madam Erranti went on, holding out her dripping fingers to Julie, who dried them carefully; "a lady, a true lady—so I never ask rude, tiresome, disobliging questions, but I use my eyes; yes, yes, and my ears, too!" She screwed up her eyes, looking cunningly at me. "I know you have changed your name! Philip said Miss Dean was coming, but—Julie called you something else, de—something—what was it? Julie knows you, Philip does not. De—something—de—de——?"

Glad to be found out, I told her of Mrs. Spuyten's wish, and why she wished it, and the reason Julie knew me. In spite of her remark to the contrary she asked very many questions, then nodded her head gravely and approvingly several times.

"Your cousin is quite right," she said, "so Philip and the servants shall know you as Miss Dean. Augusta! What a name! Gussie! I detest it! For a girl of thy remarkable grace and beauty—ah, *Mon Dieu!* horrible! Julie may call thee Mademoiselle, it is sufficient; but I, I shall call thee Athena,

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for we are of the same class, we two, and can understand each other. I have been lonely, yes, very lonely! A solitary old woman—all, all, alone!"

Her eyes began to glitter strangely; she beckoned me to come nearer.

"Come close, closer still, let me touch thy pretty hair."

As I obeyed, leaning over the bed, she drew a long lock caressingly through her fingers and I saw that they were badly swollen and twisted by rheumatism.

"Pure gold," she said, "pure gold—so pale, yet shimmering like sunshine." Then, lowering her voice, she whispered, hastily, "If you would hide your name you must do as I did—first shoot it, then bury it deep, then run, run, run!—and never tell."

Julie's voice sounded close at my elbow.

"Madame must eat her strawberries," she said, dexterously edging in so that I had to draw back, "Behold them then! They are magnificent," and she placed a plate of great red berries on the tray across which her mistress was leaning.

"May hell engulf thee!" cried the old lady furiously as, lifting a swollen hand, she struck at the intrusive maid. "*Que l'enfer t'engouffre!*"

Julie avoided the blow with a dexterity born of long practice, while Madam began to eat her strawberries as if nothing had happened, and for a time nothing was heard save the cracking of the seeds as she ground them between her strong teeth.

"The music?" she demanded presently—speaking always in French—"you love it, yes?"

She was pleased to hear that I did, but unhappy when she learned that I could neither sing nor play.

"*Mon Dieu*, what a pity! But I will play for you—the guitar to-day, the piano to-morrow. I am a fine musician, truly. But I am naughty, I do not

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study enough. I will begin soon now, very soon. I'll study my scales to-day—no, to-morrow. I will teach thee, Athena. Julie!" turning suddenly upon the Frenchwoman, "Pig! Imbecile! Give me my guitar."

Julie obeyed in silence, but her eyes flashed dangerously.

Madam took the beautifully inlaid instrument without troubling to say "Thank you," and began to strum with nervous, uncertain fingers.

"Philip keeps it in tune for me," she explained; "keeps it ever ready."

She began to sing, in a thin, cracked voice, inexpressibly pathetic, *"La Départ Pour La Syrie."*

" Partant pour la Sy-ri-e,
Le jeune et brave Du-nois,
Venait pri-er Mari-e
De-de-de—"

She could get no further, seeking vainly for forgotten words and notes.

"De—mais de quoi? Which fret was I pressing? This—no—that? No—oh, *bon Dieu!* Why may I not remember?"

She looked helplessly at me, tears blurring the brightness of her eyes. Julie came forward.

"Monsieur will sing it for Madame when he returns," she said, an odd note in her voice, "Monsieur who sings so beautifully! I speak of Monsieur Erranti, Mademoiselle, the son of Madame—Monsieur Philip. Ah, but Mademoiselle should hear him! He sings as the birds! So handsome, also, though not with the look of Madame, his mother. A grief to Monsieur Erranti, doubtless, that he should not resemble Madame, Monsieur is so entirely devoted to Madame—*sa mère!*"

Julie's handsome face through this rhapsody re-

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mained as coldly expressionless as usual. I looked at her mistress. She had lost her color, the sweet old face wore a hunted, frightened look. Then I knew that in some hidden way the maid had revenged herself for insults endured. Madam held out the guitar in two shaking hands.

"Take it away," she said feebly. "I am tired. I want my nap." I rose to go. "No," she cried, motioning me to sit down again. "No, I forgot. See, Julie, open the oak chest there—the third."

Going to a divan, Julie pushed aside the cushions, removed its cover, and disclosed a large chest of oak.

"*Eh bien, Madame!*" she said, awaiting further orders.

Madam looked at me.

"For whom do you mourn, my child?"

I told her.

"But I can't live with black people!" she cried pettishly, "I don't like black people! And you, do you like black people?"

"Black people?" I repeated stupidly, bewildered both by the heat and Madam's oddities. "Do you mean negroes, Madam?"

She burst out laughing.

"Absurd child! I mean—" she stopped laughing, frowned, looked at me suspiciously. "Negroes? What did I say about negroes? Nothing, nothing, nothing! What do you know of negroes? Speak, child, what, what, what?"

"Nothing at all," I said, ashamed of my dulness as I realized she had but alluded to my black clothes. "I have never known any negroes—I have seen very few."

"*Grand Dieu!*" exclaimed the old lady. "Never known a nigger! Seen very few! *Grand Dieu!* What a strange child—while I, I——"

"Perhaps Mademoiselle will consent to wear white

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when with Madame," broke in Julie, unconscious, apparently, that she was rudely interrupting. "See," pointing to her pink frock with a shrug of her shoulders, "when I had the honor of serving Mademoiselle's mother I wore always black, as a *femme de chambre* should—while now, behold me!" she raised her eyebrows, spread out her hands. "To please Madame! A livery—*rien de plus!*"

"May I think it over, Madam?"

Every moment the room grew warmer and I more befogged.

"Yes, yes," said the old lady peevishly, "This afternoon, when I have had my siesta—"

Julie drew from the chest a number of morning-gowns, pink, blue, many-tinted.

"All mine!" cried Madam proudly, "and many, many more! Every box is full—yes, they are all great boxes"—a sweeping gesture toward the divans—"and heaping, heaping full! Open some, Julie; let Mademoiselle see."

Nothing loath, Julie complied. Soon the floor was covered with displaced cushions, while chairs and bed disappeared beneath mountains of finery. Madam Erranti was evidently a magpie, since many of the gowns were cut after a fashion of twelve years before. Brocades, rich silks that would stand alone, shimmering satins, India muslins, shawls, laces, embroideries, undergarments, even gloves came out of the chests that lined the walls.

Julie had two passions, money and dress. In her element among Madam's treasures she forgot their owner, who now lifted her voice in complaint.

"I am so tired, so tired!" she wailed. "I want my nap—I want it immediately—I want it now! Put up her hair, send her away. *Vite, vite, vite!*"

Julie came to herself with a start, and hurrying to me coiled up my hair with nimble fingers.

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"I will ring for Claude, Madame, Mademoiselle will desire her luncheon."

"*Mais oui, oui, oui!*" screamed Madam, irritable through fatigue. "*Vite, vite, vite!*"

As I left the room Julie whispered: "When Madame sleeps I will come, that together we may arrange this little matter of the toilette, *n'est-ce pas?*" I said yes, quickly, only anxious to escape from the heat and the weary old lady. It was with a keen sensation of relief that I re-entered the cool marble gloom of the great hall. Mentally, I was very, very tired.

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VII

It was quite two o'clock when I left Madam Erranti's room. The butler, who had come to fetch me in answer to Julie's summons, led the way at once to the dining-room, a handsome apartment in oak on the same side of the hall as the staircase. It boasted as many mirrors as the hall and Madam Erranti's bedroom. On the table was spread a slender luncheon of cold chicken, bread and butter, and tea. To my surprise the butler did not leave the room after he had gone through the ceremony of seating me, but took up his position by the chimney-piece, against which he lounged in a would-be elegant attitude. He looked supremely ridiculous.

"I imagine this is your first place, Miss Dean," he began, in his gentle drawl.

"Yes."

"Think you'll get on with the old lady?"

I said I could not tell yet. The bread, I noticed, was abominable, and I foresaw trouble with the cook.

"She ain't bad if you get on her right side, though she does say awful things when she gets mad—cusses like fury!" and he giggled suddenly. "But then my mother does the same. I guess likely it's a way all old ladies has. My mother's a Irish-woman, and my father, he was the same—he's dead. I was born in this country. I ain't a bit Irish myself. Are you American?"

"Yes."

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"Parents, too?"

"Yes."

He was silent. I wondered if my short answers had hurt his feelings. I hoped not, but he looked all feeling, somehow. In spite of his affectation, and his familiarity, there was something kindly and pleasing about him. Presently he removed my plate, asking if I would have some pie, and I was glad to see from his manner that I had not offended him.

"It's custard pie," he said, sadly. "Norah makes splendid pie. Not that I've eat any, but I know by the look of it. I guess it's goin' on two years since I've eat a piece of pie. Dispepsy. Do you have it?"

Explaining that I was always well, but did not care for pie, I rose to leave the room.

"Say," he burst out with an excited titter, "the girls are in a terrible way about you! No housekeepers allowed on the premises—and so forth!" Winking knowingly, he pointed downward with his thumb.

I stared at him bewildered. He was very strange.

"A thousand pardons!" came Julie's voice from the door-way. "Mademoiselle is finished?"

"Can't you speak English, Jewlee?" asked the butler, with a teasing grin, "What do you want comin' parlezvooin' 'round here for? Miss Dean don't understand your gibberish no more than me."

She turned upon him fiercely.

"When you address me, sir, have the kindness to remember that I am Mrs. Cray!"

"That's somethin' Cray would as leave forget, I guess," said the man with a delighted giggle.

"Mr. Claude Melnotte Raffarty, you are impertinent," retorted Julie, "but you are a fool! It matters little what you say. Mademoiselle permits that I accompany her to her room?" she asked with exag-

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gerated respect. "It is the wish of Madame that I do so. For you, butler—you may carry the basket!"

"Oh, come off!" remonstrated Claude. "What are you givin' us?"

He stood aside to let me precede him in leaving the room, not from respect to a superior—he thought me of his own class—but as a man of gallantry and fine manners! I could not but feel lowered by his air of equality, though indignant with myself for my inward objections. What did it matter, so long as I paid my debts and earned my bread? Yet Julie seemed to share my discomfort. She hated aristocrats and, thinking me one, enjoyed seeing me brought low. Still she disliked seeing a fellow-servant—as a Frenchwoman she felt immeasurably superior—too familiar with the daughter of her former mistress. Desiring to treat me with the freedom allowable in an old servant, longing to put the butler in his proper place, she became captious toward him, absurdly respectful to me.

At the foot of the great staircase was a clothes-basket overflowing with silks, muslins, laces. To my surprise Claude's long sallow face lighted up at sight of this finery.

"For the Land's sake, Mrs. Cray," he ejaculated, fingering the silks caressingly, "what's up? What ever are you goin' to do with all this elegant stuff?"

"Help me to carry it to the room of Mademoiselle and you shall see, *grand enfant!*" said Julie, taking a handle of the basket.

"Call me pet names, dearest!" giggled Claude as, seizing the other, he ran upstairs so quickly that Julie—panting, shrieking remonstrances in French and English—had much ado to keep up with him.

I followed slowly, admiring the beauty of the staircase and examining with interest the upper hall. This

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was arranged as a smoking-room with divans, easy-chairs, and, in a handsome cabinet, a quantity of pipes of all shapes and sizes. On the wall hung a wonderful collection of weapons, and beside a door stood a huge iron safe. As I was gazing at this Claude appeared, out of breath, but grinning with delight.

"Thought you might not know the way"—he spoke very loudly—"so I told the old girl I'd run down and show you up."

He pointed a flexible thumb over his shoulder toward the door from which he had emerged. An indignant exclamation floating down from above in answer to his speech told me that Julie was waiting for me at the top of a back staircase. Claude giggled again, then, seeing my interest in the safe, said, more soberly, "That's where we keep our valuables. Peggy—she's the mastiff, lives at the stables daytimes—is chained to that ring you see clamped in the side there at night. That's Mr. Erranti's room it stands by. If he hears anyone tamperin' with it, or with Peg, he'll just step out and giv' 'em kingdom come. He's an awful light sleeper—sleeps mighty little, too. 'Twould bust me all up to live the way he does, but then I ain't as strong as I'd like to be, I ain't"—he gave himself a languid thump on his chest. "Want to see the rooms? 'Twon't take a minute; there's only five of 'em, see"—he opened the door on the left.

I entered. It was a large room with two great windows, the furniture handsome but uninteresting. I saw that it had been left entirely to the upholsterer. Everything possible was draped in cream-tinted cretonne sown with pink roses—the "Pink Room," as the butler now announced.

"Sweet, ain't it? The view across the river is lovely—fine days. Exposure, southwest. I'm told

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it's the healthiest. Drawing-room is under this—'tain't much used, though."

He led the way through a small dressing-room into another corner room, where big poppies took the place of the roses. "Red room," said the man; "handsome, very. Boss's apartment; exposure, northwest. Grand view across and up river, good weather. This damp goes to my throat, it's real weak"—coughing slightly. "You can see old Mr. Beverley's estate from this window, when this horrid fog ain't mizzlin' down. His land's north of ours. Got a gorgeous big house, gray stone; Beverley Towers they call it. He's awful rich, they say. This"—opening another door—"is the Boss's dressin'-room. Monstrous big for a hall room, but, you see, the hall is wide. Seems a pity to use it for a dressin'-room, but then there's only one window, and it's north, so 'tain't to say so desirable for bedroom purposes—that is, if health's considered. This"—with an air of still greater importance—"is the Blue Room, the last of the suit. Has a dressin'-room, too, t'other side. Handsome large room, but kinder gloomy, this window bein' north and that other, though east, under the hill—sort of shut in, ain't it? My! Just listen to that French woman tiradin' in the distance! Ain't she fearfully mad! Taking on in her native tongue, I guess—Hail Columbias and big D's *ad libertum!* Comin'—comin' directly, lady fair! What, can't you live without me one minute?"

He opened the door into the hall, which was near the narrow dark passage leading to the back staircase. At its end a steep flight of stairs led upward.

"You open the door just behind and you'll find the way down, but you might as well use the front stairs while the Boss is away," said my companion, good-naturedly. Then addressing Julie, angry and impatient at the top of the narrow flight, "No, I can't stay

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another minute with you, Mrs. Cray, so there's no use coaxing. Dear me! and you a married lady, too! I'm astonished at your goin's on!"

"*Canaille!*" fiercely, from the stair-top.

"Can I? No, it's can't I, this time, Mrs. Cray—so adoo, adoo!"

Giggling wildly over his own witticisms, he opened the door he had pointed out to me and vanished below.

The third story of Highgrove Hall was as plain as the others were handsome. Around the small hall as many bedrooms as possible had been made. A little corner one fell to my share. I was glad that it was simply furnished. Julie asked permission to unpack my trunk, and, though she made no comments, I saw that its slenderness and shabbiness astonished her.

"These frocks of cotton," she observed, as she put my ginghams in a drawer, "Mademoiselle may wear in the morning, very early, when superintending the affairs of the household—the *ménage*. Not later than ten of the clock. At that hour Mademoiselle will do well to rearrange her toilette. I have Madame's orders to see Mademoiselle well supplied with toilettes—and of a pleasing variety; *voila!*" indicating, with a superb gesture, the contents of the basket.

I did not wish to accept garments of silk and lace from a stranger. This I told Julie, but she refused to listen to my objections. Madame, she said, was old, whimsical, out of health. Her physicians ordered that she should be humored in every way. Her son insisted that these orders should be carried out to the letter. Madame would never consent to my appearing before her in black. If I found the situation not to my taste—"*Ma foi*, might Mademoiselle not leave the robes behind when she went away? The materials were not, after all, of a richness so

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remarkable—*pas du tout!* As a child Mademoiselle had ever been robed as a princess, she was accustomed——"

Here I interposed, saying the very servants might be expected to look askance at a housekeeper flaunting such fine feathers.

"Not at all!" cried Julie, "I myself will explain—they will comprehend. Mademoiselle was ever gentle, amiable, as a child. Will she now deny pleasure to an old lady—*une vrai dame*—solitary, *souffrante?* Ah, *jamais!*"

At last I consented, feeling that she was in the right.

After all there was nothing so miserable, so flimsy as false pride. I put mine behind me while Julie rummaged among the silks and muslins.

"*Eh bien,* Mademoiselle," she exclaimed, gayly, "it is necessary to make a beginning! Ah, if Mademoiselle could but sew as she embroidered when a mere child! *Ma foi,* I remember yet that embroidery! Marvellous, truly—but sewing, that is different."

I exclaimed that I could also sew, having made all my clothes for years.

"*Juste ciel!*" cried my mother's *ci-devant* maid, in tones of real horror, "is it then possible!"

We set to work together. Seeing Julie reminded me of something Mrs. Spuyten had told me—that Lord Ebbrides had been robbed of my mother's emeralds shortly after he had gained possession of them, but the thieves had replaced them almost immediately, putting them back in the very safe from which they had taken them; a strange story, hardly to be believed. Since Cray had been in Lord Ebbrides's service at that time, and had taken Julie, as well as the emeralds, back to London with him, I asked her about this robbery. She seemed disin-

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clined to talk about it, protesting that she knew nothing of the matter.

"It is all so long ago, Mademoiselle. A thousand pardons for turning thus"—rising to place her chair close in front of the window—"with my back to Mademoiselle—a great rudeness truly, but what will you? It is like night, so dark!"

"Did it happen while you were there, or after you left, Julie?"

"Did what happen, Mademoiselle? Hark! What was that? Did I hear calling?"

I listened, but heard nothing save the drip, drip, drip of the rain upon the veranda roof, a story below.

The afternoon was, as Julie said, like night. The thick mist hung heavily about the house, the rain fell soft and fine, making no sound save that of its ceaseless dripping, dull, monotonous, never-ending—a death-watch drip.

"About the robbery, Julie?"—I was interested—"Had you and Cray already left Lord Ebbrides's service?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, and—I know nothing. It will be well," she gathered up her work, "if we descend and sew in Madame's room. There it is always light, while here, *mon Dieu*, the darkness is horrible!"

I followed, though dreading the heat of that gay, scented room. All the afternoon and, after supper until nine o'clock, we sewed and sewed and sewed! Madam, bright and cheerful after her nap, kept us hard at work. It amused her to see the garment grow under our fingers. In the fashioning of fine raiment for her companion she had found a new diversion; in me, the companion, a new toy—a doll.

And I—I longed with a feverish intensity, foreign to my nature, for my old life on Long Island; for

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the shabby old gray farm-house, where I was mistress—as well as maid. I longed for the breeze sweeping in off the breakers; for the wild, sweet song of the sea.

As I looked about the strange luxurious cage in which I found myself, my spirit beat in rebellion against the bars of my poverty. I grew desperate in my longing to be free.

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VIII

At half-past six the next morning I was awake and astir. The moment I opened my eyes I saw that the world was bright again, and, anxious to see the river, I ran at once to the window and looked out. Ah, what a view! I stood, fascinated, till the wild north wind drove me to dress in haste. The great river was as blue as a sapphire, and the turbulent wind had whipped it into angry, foam-capped waves. Broad and majestic, it flowed grandly southward to join the sea, obeying tidal-laws without nervous hurry. It satisfied and half cured me of my home-sick longing for the sea.

The opposite banks, backed by fine hills, seemed very far away. To the south, over the mass of trees which shut out the view, I caught a glimpse of a dark, straight line against the horizon—the Palisades. Close beneath my north window a stretch of lawn ended in a belt of woodland, beyond which, on the summit of a gentle eminence, two lofty gray stone towers showed themselves above a mass of trees. These I recognized as "Beverley Towers," and knew I was looking at the home of Richard Thorpe's uncle —and of Nemesis.

Highgrove Hall was so buried in its encircling woods that I was thankful for my room in the third story, where I had an outlook over the river. The lower rooms were completely shut in. Wishing to

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see more, I determined to go down to the river, and as it was but seven, and breakfast would not be ready till eight, I had plenty of time. Stealing softly downstairs, I saw the butler standing before the front door, which he had evidently just opened. Under his arm he carried a duster, and his long, slim person was enveloped in a long, white apron.

It covered him almost completely and was fastened by a great number of narrow, white strings. As I crossed the hall he was gazing, with an air of gloomy abstraction, at the antics of a young mastiff on the road before the house. The big puppy was lumbering around and around in pursuit of its own tail, with an earnestness comical enough.

"Good morning," I said, not knowing whether to call the man Raffarty or Claude.

"Oh!" he said, turning, "so it's you, Miss Dean. Good morning! Just look at that purp! Ain't he a fool! A great, big dorg, two years old next May! I should think he'd be ashamed of himself! There"—in deep tragic tones, as the puppy, having succeeded, was brought suddenly to a sitting posture and yapped dismally over the pain his own teeth had inflicted—"there—I knew he'd be sorry if he done it! Don's an awful silly creature, and his mother's as wise as wise."

I tried to comfort the foolish, jolly, young dog, who advanced to meet me wagging the bitten tail and looking absurdly sheepish and self-conscious.

"Where is his mother?" I asked.

The butler, strolling to the veranda edge, watched me as I petted the mastiff and tried to avoid the long pink tongue thrust out to lick my face.

"She's in the stable. It's Peggy, the one I was tellin' you of yesterday. He"—pointing at the puppy—"is called Don. His name is Don Jew-Anne—Don June some folks pernounce it, I'm told—but

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no one calls him that, and no wonder. It's a queer, heathenish name. Spanish, they say."

"What am I to call you," I asked, "Claude or Raffarty?"

"You may suit yourself, Miss Dean"—he spoke solemnly, it was evidently a matter of importance. "The Boss calls me Raffarty. He says Claude and Melnotte are too absurd for a butler. They are romantic"—he folded his arms and looked melancholy —"but my mother is romantic. Some—ladies of my acquaintance—think it suits me rather well.— He arranged his curl on his forehead, and sighed.

"Very well, then, I will call you Claude."

"Thank you, Miss Dean; you are very considerate and kind."

A moment of silence followed; then, exclaiming, "Lordy! It wants a whole hour till breakfast! Just wait here a minute, Miss Dean," Claude hurried away, returning almost immediately, bearing a tray aloft on his outspread hand, after the wonderful fashion of waiters. On the tray was a pitcher of milk and a glass. "An empty stummick's a bad thing," he said, "'specially if you're thinkin' of a stroll. So you'd better drink a glass of milk. It's what you call 'fresh from the cow!' It makes me sickish, myself, but most folks seem to like it."

It was a kindly action and I was grateful. So might Don have been had he been allowed to dip his black muzzle into the glass, but Claude politely warded him off with the toe of his highly polished shoe. While drinking the milk I looked about me with much interest. Everything, hidden in mist the day before, now showed so clearly in the early morning sunshine. But even sunshine could not make Highgrove Hall, or its surroundings, look cheerful, because of the dense woods which closed in, dark and impenetrable, scarce a stone's throw from the house.

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To my left rose the high brick wall of the garden, and beyond, almost buried in trees, the stables and gardener's house.

Little of the northwest wind, racing at such a mad pace down the river, penetrated to the veranda of the Hall. The tops of the trees rustled finely, but the leaves of the underbrush scarcely stirred. The air was cold and pure, what there was of it, but I longed for the rush of the wind. I had felt choked ever since leaving Long Island.

"My, ain't it chilly!" said my companion, shivering. "Who'd think 'twas June! If you're going to the river, Miss Dean, you'd better take a wrap of some sort. I'll run get you one if you say the word." I thanked him, but declined, saying the exercise would keep me warm. At the mention of a walk Don pricked up his ears and asked to go along, and of this Claude approved. "There's a precious lot of tramps in these diggin's, and though Don June is nothin' but a purp, still"—eying the big creature dispassionately—"he don't show at first sight what a everlastin' fool he is. He looks fierce—yes, his appearance is awfully ferocious, and appearances is the main thing after all, these days."

I am fond of dogs and was glad of Don's company. Together we crossed the short lawn and, traversing a thicket of firs which topped the steep bank above the river, found a flight of steps which led down to the railroad track, and beyond, by another flight, reached the shore. On either hand the shore was rocky, but directly in front a pretty, grassy point stretched out into the river. On its south side was a red brick boat-house, a miniature Highgrove Hall. Where the point joined the land were tiny, pebbly beaches, and on one of these lay a fisherman's dory, drawn up just out of reach of the mimic ocean surges, which were beating against the pebbles with great violence.

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The wind rushed upon us as we struggled out to the end of the point, as though it wished to fling us into the water. It exhilarated me, but Don, by turns barking angrily at the noisy waves and bouncing away from them when a drop chanced to strike him, told me plainly he would prefer returning home, though determined not to go without me.

Few craft were to be seen. Far to the right a tug was laboriously dragging a line of canal-boats up stream, while as far away to the left a big sailing vessel, close-reefed, was scudding southward. But one other boat was in sight. This last, a tiny cat-boat, was dancing in a dangerous fashion upon the stormy river half a mile off shore. A few moments' observation convinced me that it was sailed by one ignorant of boat-craft, and I knew that little short of a miracle could prevent its capsizing in one of the sudden squalls that swept the river. The crisis came even sooner than I had expected. Down rushed the wind upon the pretty toy and, as if in wanton sport, flung it down upon the water. The waves lifted the shining side into view, but no one was to be seen clinging to it.

I raced for dear life to the old dory on the beach. It was half full of water, and the oars were gone. As, thinking they might be hidden in the bushes growing among the rocks, I searched eagerly for them, Don, delighted by my activity, tripped me up in his endeavors to join the game. At last, when I had given up hope, I came upon them. The blade of one was broken, but it was better than none. I heaved the old boat over on its side, but before the water had time to run out had righted her again and launched her, in my desperate fear of arriving too late.

I had to fight my way inch by inch to the wreck. The heavy dory leaked—I had to stop to bail—the

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wind buffeted me, the tide dragged me sideways, and all the time a horror of what I might find entangled in the sail sapped my courage. This was spared me, for although the face of the young man whom I found clinging to the hull, was already blue with chill and exhaustion, he was alive, though little more. When I had succeeded in dragging him by main strength into the boat, for he helped himself but little, he fell in a heap on the bottom and showed no inclination to move.

"You had better take an oar and try to row, even if you don't know how," I said, "the effort may start your circulation."

This insult stung him into life, and crawling feebly upon a seat he took the oar I offered, in his shaking hands. On one there blazed a splendid ring—an emerald of great beauty, set in diamonds. It was Nemesis! But I had no chance to look at her wearer in my struggle to get the boat safely to shore, where Don, who had begun to howl the moment I had left him, still stood wailing dismally. He had not howled in vain, for by his side I saw the ubiquitous Claude, his long apron fluttering in the wind, gazing toward us with intense anxiety. The butler was emotional and did not hide his feelings. As we drew near I saw that he was wringing his hands in his distress, and his agitation, more than the wind, seemed to cause the numberless strings of his apron to shiver in sympathy. By his side was one of the under-gardeners, who rushed with him, knee-deep, into the water and dragged the boat high and dry upon the shore.

"If it ain't Mr. Randal St. John!" Claude exclaimed at sight of my shivering companion. "For the land's sake, sir, run up to the house and change your clothes. There's plenty of Mr. Erranti's things in his dressin'-room, and I'll come with you and

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get you a drink. No, no, don't stop to thank Miss Dean," as the young man would have spoken to me. "Don't you see she's soaked through, too, 'long o' savin' you? Go 'long up to the Hall, do, sir! Dolan'll see to your boat; and you too, Miss Dean, 'fore you catch your death of cold." Then, seeing me petting Don, who whimpered with as much delight over our reunion as if we were old friends, he turned upon Mr. St. John again. "Will you have the goodness to run ahead, sir, and get off them wet things? I'll see to Miss Dean," and as Mr. St. John obeyed, "He's awful sickly, ain't he? Why, he couldn't have been immersed very long, yet just look at him! As white as chalk, and as blue as an indigo bag! And you looking as ca'm and steady—not to say rosy cheeked, for that I should judge you seldom be, Miss Dean—but as nice and cool and healthy-lookin' as usual."

I began to walk homeward briskly. My wet clothes were uncomfortable, but as yet I was not cold. Like Claude, I had been astonished, and not a little alarmed, by the evident delicacy of my whilom companion. If I had not reached the boat when I did I fancied he might have dropped into the water and sunk—from exhaustion and cold. I was thankful I had arrived in time to save him—and, yes, I had to admit to myself that I was almost, if not quite, as glad to have saved Nemesis.

"I was real mad," said Claude, joyously stepping along beside me—"I was real mad when I sounded the gong for breakfast, and you never showed up at all! And just as I was tearing out to see if you was never coming I heard Don howling his big head off down here. Says I to myself, 'Somethin's up, Claude Melnotte Raffarty, you may bet your life, and 'stead of raising Cain round here you'd just better waltz down to the shore and see. It's tramps, like as not!'

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so down I run, and, Land o' Goshen, there you were in the midst of those raging billows saving a human life! Never have I experienced such shame! 'Claude,' I says to myself, 'you'd better do somethin' to help, 'stead of howlin' like poor Don, here!' So I skipped up to the stable like a house afire, and yelled to Jimmie Dolan to come quick, for there was wrecks off shore, and mercy me, here we be at the house already—and, dear me, I was forgettin' your wet things—do change 'em. I'll fetch you up somethin' hot when I bring the same to young St. J."

As for me, I thought of Nemesis—of Nemesis on the finger of a careless young man! I had imagined her guarded carefully in the velvet-lined drawer of some cabinet, treasured as a rare antique. There came a tap at my door. "Cup of coffee, Miss Dean! Hot as hot—you'll please drink it at once. Open your door on a crack which you can haul it in when I'm gone, which I'm goin' d'rectly, only please come down as soon as able to preside over the breakfast which I'm about to offer to our guest, Miss Dean."

I said I would come very soon.

"Can you hear me through the door, Miss Dean?"

"Yes, Claude."

"Then I just want to say," came through the keyhole in a hoarse but dramatic whisper, "that if R. St. J. acts queer, don't you mind. He's full to the brim with whiskey! My remonstrances met with no success, Miss Dean, though I went so far as to mention a lady's presence. His insides is copper-lined, that's evident. But don't you worry, Miss Dean, for it may go to his legs alone—and anyway I'll be there."

He tramped away heavily, to let me know that he was gone. I took in the coffee; it was hot and comforting.

When I went downstairs Mr. St. John, rising from

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the divan on which he was lolling, came forward with both hands outstretched to greet me. This I failed to see, thinking an ordinary hand-shake quite sufficient. The whiskey had not gone to his legs.

Mr. St. John was tall and slender, small-featured, with pale blue eyes, and fair hair which curled closely about a very white forehead. As he smiled down upon me he showed a row of very perfect teeth, but his smile was disagreeable because of the scantiness of the upper lip, which disclosed much of its lining as it drew back, transforming the smile into a sneer.

"How can I thank you enough, Miss Dean," he said, in well-modulated tones, "for risking your valuable life to save my worthless one? I shall be, believe me, eternally grateful"—he squeezed my hand very hard and gazed tenderly into my eyes. I remembered the whiskey and made allowances. From the door of the dining-room came a discreet cough, betraying the presence of my self-elected chaperon. "I scarcely know what to say to you," he continued; but I cut him short by asking him to stay to breakfast. This he declined with effusive regrets.

"I should love above all things to breakfast with you, Miss Dean, but I must see to getting the boat in trim before my uncle, Mr. Beverley, of 'Beverley Towers,' gets wind of my adventure. I hope to keep the affair a secret from him, for he is old, Miss Dean"—with a look expressive of tender consideration for the aged—"and I should hate to have him upset, one upset being enough in a family, don't you think?"

Again remembering the whiskey I begged him to eat something before he left. The idea of so much liquor without food was appalling.

"Raffarty gave me a glass of milk, with a teaspoonful of whiskey in it, Miss Dean, to keep off cold, so I really don't need anything more. Erranti and I

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are great chums, Miss Dean, and neighbors into the bargain, so I'll hope to see you often—when I'm not so deadly dull as I am now, after my soaking in that beastly ice-water," and, saying good-bye, he went away.

Claude at once bounced out of the dining-room in a whirlwind of indignation.

"A teaspoonful! A *tea*spoonful!" he exclaimed. "Well, if he ain't the greatest I ever saw! But it was just like him—just exactly like him! And milk, too! Not one drop of milk, Miss Dean, and so little water you couldn't scarcely see it! I don't mind sayin' to you, Miss Dean, that I ain't got no sort of use for that young man—he's the biggest fraud goin'. I hope to gracious you won't be deceived by his high-pocricies."

In this fashion Claude ran on all the time I was eating my nice, hot breakfast. I did not know whether to stop him or not. I did not want to hurt his feelings. I had begun to like him. His familiarity was but the ease of one free-born American citizen toward another. No impertinence was intended. He was frankly and simply my equal. I said to myself, why not?

"What do you s'pose?" with a wild giggle of amusement, "he's goin' to be a minister! Leastways he's foolin' his old uncle up yonder," indicating Beverley Towers, with a motion of his curved thumb, "by pretending that he's goin' to be one. Him a minister! It would just make a ordinary cat laugh to think of it! Not but what he could play at bein' one good enough. Yes, he could. Mr. R. St. J., Miss Dean, is the best out-and-out mimic I ever saw! His talent is something extryordinary. Why, he can do the old Madam at her guitar to perfec—tion! You'd think 'twas her, playin' and singin'—and cussin', when she couldn't just remember—to the

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life! Kinder mean, too, I call it, makin' fun of a poor, loony old lady! You just bet he don't dare do it when the Boss is 'round! No sir-ree! He'd give him fits, the Boss would—though he only laughs when Mr. St. John mimics him! He does that good, too. He could mimic anyone. I'm always glad when he's 'round that *I* ain't peculiar. I'd sorter hate to have him take me off—folks laugh so."

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IX

Two weeks had passed since my coming to Highgrove Hall. June, the month of roses, was nearly over. Mr. Erranti was still absent. I wished he would come home, for until then I might not enter upon my duties as housekeeper. The servants neglected their work. The bread was uneatable; often the shining floor of Madam's room was strewn with the bits thrown from her in disgust, yet she would not allow me to teach the cook or to make it myself.

"Wait till Philip returns to 'back you,' *ma chère*," she insisted, "though he may not wish to. Who dare say? He likes Norah's cooking, does Philip, but of her he has no fear—no, none at all; but then he fears not the devil himself—I saw him shoot the devil once! Hush, that I must not speak of; my head then grows hot, so hot! Norah is a devil, an Irish devil—I fear her. If Philip says, 'You may make bread, you may keep house!' he'll see you have your way. Philip never gives up, never, never, never!"

Madam was herself headstrong, imperious. I had to obey. I did not earn my salary. Free until ten in the morning, for an hour after luncheon, dismissed at nine in the evening, I was too idle, and wished for the return of Mr. Erranti, who, more courageous than most men, stood in no awe of his cook.

In the meantime I tried to find something to do. Books possess no attraction for me, but Mr. Erranti

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had a fine library, and I knew I should take advantage of it. My mother had wished me to excel as a linguist, and I was forgetting every language save my own. I began to rub up my Italian by selecting a volume of short stories and reading one every morning. It was because of de Amicis that my friend the butler ceased to regard me as his equal. One morning he followed me to the library to complain of the dulness of Highgrove Hall.

"You see, before I came here, Miss Dean," he began in his plaintive drawl, "I lived the winter in town with Mr. Erranti. He only bought this place this last March because of the Madam's poor health, and he kept the ball a-rollin' lively, I can tell you! Stag-parties he called 'em, meaning only gentlemen present, and if I wished to pun I might say it did come very 'dear' to some of 'em. Cards?" ironically, with eyebrows raised, "Oh, no! not at all!" Then, very solemnly, "The way them brokers play for money, Miss Dean, is enough to turn your hair gray!"

I asked if Mr. Erranti was a stock broker.

"You may rest assured he is, Miss Dean," was the languid response—Claude's usual manner was languid—"and I'm thankful I ain't, that's all! A life of excitement wears me out," forgetting his complaint of its lack. "I was glad enough to come into a quiet neighborhood to rest. I was in a refreshment-room to a railway-station once. A place where you changed cars for everywhere most—a junction. My nerves couldn't stand the wear and tear of it, so I just lit out. Trains comin' in at all hours of the day, and over a hundred people all yellin' for different things at once. Only fifteen minutes for you to serve an' them to gobble the vittles down—all told! It was sickenin' to see the way folks forgot their manners. Behavin' like so many hogs!

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Hustlin', callin' names, an' swallerin' pieces of pie whole—I simply had to get out!" He broke off to inquire what I was going to read. "*I*-talian, did you say, Miss Dean? For the land's sake, can you read that queer gibberish? My! You'll be readin' Latin and Greek next—p'raps you do now?"

I smiled as I said I should be able to, seeing I had studied them until I was fourteen.

"Land o' Goshen!" Claude ejaculated, his air of languid indifference gone. "Did you attend night-school 'sides goin' daytimes? Seems to me you must have burned the candle to both ends, as the saying goes, to have learned so much by the time you was fourteen!"

I smiled, but remained silent, and Claude burst out:

"If you won't think me impertinent or—or—snooping, Miss Dean, I should like to know why you studied Greek. Was you thinkin' of being a teacher?"

"No," I said, "I never expected to teach;" then, thinking it could do no harm to gratify his burning curiosity: "You see, I was born in Greece, Claude, in Athens, so my mother wished me to understand the language of that country. I have never been to school. I studied at home. When I was fourteen my father was not able to give me teachers, for we had become very poor. I don't know so much as I should—only a few languages."

"Well, I never!" murmured the butler.

"Please don't repeat this, Claude. It hurts me to talk of the past."

"Not for worlds, Miss Dean."

He had become very solemn and pale, being the kindest, most sympathetic of creatures. After a long silence he sighed and said, in low, mournful tones:

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"I feel proud to have been thus far honored of your confidence, Miss Dean. If it ain't cheeky I'd like to ask one question."

I smiled an assent.

"Did you know that Julie Cray before you came here?"

"Yes."

"And—and, as how, Miss Dean?"

"She was my mother's maid," I said, thoughtlessly, and was sorry the moment after.

"H-um! That accounts!" was the mysterious comment, as Claude gently withdrew.

This conversation changed his attitude toward me. He was still my friend, but, because of my education, my very humble friend. For good birth Claude cared nothing, being, indeed, incapable of seeing any difference between well-bred people and the vulgar rich. The finely clad were all "gentle people" to poor Claude. I have since noticed that the children born in this country of Irish parents are totally lacking in the subtle penetration which characterizes their parents. The newly arrived immigrant recognizes at once the "raal quality." Their children born on American soil, never.

But Claude, though he had no respect for old families, fairly reverenced knowledge, and he chose to think me very learned. When, by dint of questioning, he discovered that, besides French, Greek, and Latin, I understood German and Spanish, his admiration knew no bounds.

"And yet," he would occasionally say, in a burst of confidence, "you can't play the pie-anner! It does beat all! I b'lieve you could good enough if you only tried, and this house is just stuffed full of 'em!"

This last was quite true—the Hall was overfull of pianos and mirrors. They were everywhere, and

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there was enough music in the house without my "trying." Poor Madam Erranti had days when she was haunted by music she had played when young. Opening her piano, she would sit for hours striving to recall old pieces, forgotten exercises, even scales, till my heart ached for her. She could not learn the new music—arranged for children—that her son brought her. The poor, bewildered brain could master nothing new, and its power over old knowledge was gone.

It was my most trying duty to sit beside Madam while she tried to practice, a bright, pink spot flaming in each cheek, her eyes sparkling feverishly, the knotted, swollen hands wandering over the keys, seeking vainly for the melody they might never again call forth. At such times she complained bitterly of her son's absence.

"I love much," she would say in French, the language she preferred, "the music that fills the house when Philip is at home. He sings like a nightingale. Didst ever hear the song of the nightingale? Yes? I, never, never in my life; but I am told the bird sings less well than my Philip. Listen, *belle et bonne*. I will tell thee of his voice. It is rich, sweet, tender, pathetic, and—passionate!" emphasizing each adjective with a pat of her hand against my cheek. Then, lowering her voice and nodding her head with energy, "If ever Philip sings of love to a woman he will wile away her heart; yes, her poor, sick, feverish, weary heart! Not thine, *très chère*, ah, no! Thou shalt not listen; if thou didst, what matter after all? *Ma foi*"—smiling, patting my cheek again—"what matter, I ask? Thou art an ice-maiden, a Lorelei, as cold as—as you appear! Have I not seen thee with young Randal, whose life was saved by thy efforts? Is he not charming, winning—of an intelligence ex-

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treme? I, an old woman, admire him, while you, young, without experience, therefore to be pleased easily, regard him without favor! Cold, indifferent, unmoved by his efforts to please! And he tries to please, the young Randal, tries hard! Oh, I see, I see—tries hard—in vain! I admire thy hard heart," she added, in a mysterious whisper, "and I am glad!"

Leaning forward, she kissed me; leaning back, smiled with strange approval.

A very singular old lady, but she was kind in her whimsical, selfish way.

Randal St. John did spend much of his time with us. For a few days after his ducking he was kept at home by a feverish cold, but when he recovered he almost lived at the Hall. He strolled about the garden, lounged on the veranda, strummed on the pianos, and was generally on hand when Madam went for an airing in her wheeled chair, when he walked beside her. An idle young man, he found Madam amusing.

I did not like him, and avoided him when I could. He wearied me with his nonsense, talking almost exclusively about himself and me, discussing, comparing, and commenting upon what he called "our complex natures," till I was fain to wish neither of us had ever been born!

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Madam Erranti's feelings toward her son were of a variable nature. Some days she would seem very proud of him, boasting of his beauty, superb voice, strength of character, and fine education. Yet it seemed to me the deep affection felt by most mothers for an only child was lacking. Her sentiment appeared rather a compound of pride, admiration, and wondering awe. The days when this feeling swayed her I learned to call her good days.

On her bad days his name might not be mentioned. It was as if she hated to be reminded of his existence. She would close her eyes and turn her head away if he were even distantly alluded to. Julie told me that if the subject were pursued Madame had, later, "an attack of the nerves." It did not escape my notice that Julie availed herself of this peculiarity to avenge herself for slights received. I remembered her praises of Mr. Erranti on the day of my arrival, after Madame had insulted her by the epithets "pig" and "imbecile."

Unfortunately, Mr. Erranti chose to return on one of his mother's bad days. The letter announcing his coming arrived late, not till noon, owing to the carelessness of the men about going for the mail during their master's absence. I had been called a half-hour earlier to Madam's room that morning than was customary, and found her very

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irritable and hard to please. Seated in her wheeled chair, clad in a morning-gown of lilac silk a-flutter with lace and ribbons, her white-lace cap gay with a fresh pink rose, she was amusing herself playing with her many handsome rings. These she could not wear because of her swollen fingers. She acknowledged my salutation on entering, coldly, and when I asked if I should read to her or get my embroidery she did not answer, but broke out into peevish complaints.

"*Mon Dieu!* No one loves me! Ah, that I were dead! The bread that one gives me to eat is disgusting. The *femme de chambre* who serves me is a fool—of a wicked temper, without heart; and thou, Athena, for whom I have affection, deniest me the small thing I ask of thee, and demand, 'Shall I read? Shall I sew?' I tell thee no, no, no!"

"Dear Madam," I asked, gently, "what is it you wish? I am anxious to please you."

She turned her head away, saying, "But no, thou wilt not consent. I have asked thee again and yet again. It is always 'No!' Thou art beautiful, but cruel. Thou hast no heart!"

This meant that I refused to wear her rings, an old grievance. That I might not do so because I could not replace a gem should I lose one she thought no reason, arguing that the rings were hers, to throw away even, should she see fit. Why might she not wear them by proxy? I could not yield, and she would not, returning on her bad days to the charge.

"I am sorry," I said; "think of something else I might do for you, Madam."

Her brown eyes twinkled with malicious mischief.

"Go, then, to the green door in the wall and wait the coming of young Randal. I like him well, the

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young Randal. He is always amiable and polite. Say to him he shall accompany me in my promenade. Go quickly, my child."

Julie looked at me and shrugged her shoulders despairingly. Following me to the door she whispered, "Mademoiselle will not go there alone! But, no. Pretend only, and return."

I did not answer. She opened the door for me; she seemed very eager to advise.

"It is not *comme il faut!*" she whispered. "Monsieur is young, and Mademoiselle also!"

"It does not matter, Julie, and it may quiet Madame."

The woman's handsome eyes flashed.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she exclaimed, "what folly! But these Americans—they are all the same. Barbarians!"

Stepping from the veranda, I struck into a path skirting the knoll, which rose above the house to the east, and was soon in the belt of woodland dividing the lands of the Hall and Beverley Towers. Don, rising lazily from his nap on the veranda, trotted after me, his clumsy, puppy feet scuff-scuffing along the gravel in slovenly fashion. It was a beautiful but intensely hot day, and the heat brought out the sweet scents of the woods. Few sunbeams contrived to shoot their quivering darts through the thick network of leaves overhead, and, in contrast to the outside world, the little forest seemed cool. It was refreshing, and I caught myself hoping that Mr. St. John might be long in coming.

The path divided at the summit of the hill, sweeping to right and left. Following the left division I found myself before the green door in the high brick wall which was our boundary line. Opening it I peeped through. The path descended rapidly, and I heard, far below me, the musical tinkle of a

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brook, but I saw nothing save trees and ferns and mosses. Returning to the top of the knoll I seated myself, carefully, for fear of staining my pretty new frock, on a moss-cushioned rock, and waited for Mr. St. John.

I had three new frocks, all white, however—two filmy muslins and one silk, this last yellowed by its long retirement in one of Madam's chests. They were oddly made, Madam's fancy being followed instead of the fashion of the year.

"Open at the throat, Julie, and flowing sleeves—angel sleeves—and yes, plaits, Watteau plaits, falling from between the shoulders; a train, yes, for Athena has dignity—and plenty, plenty, plenty of lace and embroidery!"

Distinctly a livery it was, an absurd one for the wearing of a companion and housekeeper!

I had not waited long before I heard the door click to sharply, and presently Mr. St. John lounged into sight. As he saw me he called out, in his gentle voice:

"You here, Miss Dean! What a pleasant surprise! I wish I dared hope you came to meet me. What"—to Don, who, hair bristling, teeth bared, and growling fiercely, had planted himself before me—"don't you know me, you young goose? That pup dislikes me, Miss Dean, and I can't imagine why. Can you? No, don't get up," as I moved, "it's lovely and cool here, and hotter than thunder everywhere else. I vote we spend the morning in the woods." But I was already upon my feet. "You are the strangest girl I ever met," he spoke, peevishly; "you don't care a button what I say to you. Most women like me awfully. Their gentle hearts go out to me!"

I laughed. Mr. St. John behaved like a spoiled child.

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"My heart is a jog-trot, stay-at-home organ," I said, walking on swiftly; "it seldom stirs abroad."

"Well, you needn't run, at any rate," seizing one of my braids as he spoke, and bringing me to a stand-still. "I like hair braided *à la Marguerite.*"

I turned and looked at him, and, as his eyes met mine, he dropped the braid he held as if it were a snake. I resumed my former rapid pace.

"Yet she came to meet me!" in plaintive soliloquy, following closely at my heels; "and now I venture merely to touch one of the rays of sunshine hanging down her graceful back and she turns into a Medusa! I'm very hot, and I'm not at all strong, yet I have to walk as if the thermometer were below zero, and circulation had to be promoted at any cost! Miss Dean—sweet Miss Dean—gentle spirit—stay!"

We had arrived at the house. Madam was not in her room, so I went on to the garden, Randal walking beside me.

"Are you mad yet?" he inquired, smiling at me ingratiatingly.

"No," I said, calmly; "I suppose you can't help your nature."

His innocent blue eyes had an odd expression as they scanned my face.

"Madam sent me for you," I continued. "She is not very well to-day."

"And I am to soothe her troubled mind, I suppose. To please you I will try."

I made no answer, but entered the garden. This was large and exquisitely neat, a charming place, set in a frame of greenery. Above its walls waved the trees of the encircling woodland, and the walls themselves were hidden beneath the vines and fruit-trees that they upheld. In its centre a giant basin of stone, circled by white-trunked birch-trees, was

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filled to the brim with a bubbling spring of limpid water, in whose cool shallows gold-fish darted gayly. Under the birch-trees were rustic benches, a pleasant lounging-place in hot weather, and here we found Madam in her wheeled chair.

"You have been gone a very long time," she cried, as we drew near, "a very long time indeed! Well, sir," to Randal, who lifted her hand to his lips as he greeted her, "well, sir, what have you got to say for yourself? Did you linger on the road, *mauvais sujet?*"

"It was cool in the woods, dear Madam,"—a swift side glance at me; "we could not hurry back into the heat. How sweet you look with that rose in your hair! May I have it by and by to keep as a souvenir?"

"It is not in my hair but in my cap," said Madam, peevishly, "and if you stayed long in the woods you stayed alone. You had best speak the truth to me. People try to deceive me in vain. Miss Dean never tries, that is why I love her. I love her dearly."

"So do I," murmured Randal; "you and I always agree, dear Madam."

Julie was standing behind her mistress, her hands on the pushing-bar of the chair. At this moment she jerked it suddenly, by accident, I supposed. Not so thought Madam, but turned fiercely upon her maid, her eyes bright with anger.

"Go away, you spiteful French cat!" she shrieked; "go to the servants' hall and scratch your equals! What, you stand listening behind backs to discover our secrets! Eavesdropper, jealous fool, begone!"

Julie, her usually impassive face distorted with anger, darted away and vanished through the gate.

"I'm tired of it here, Randal," said Madam; "call Dolan, and go with me down the avenue."

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Dolan, a sad-faced young Irishman, came hastily at the summons, and we were soon in the cool shade of the avenue, less melancholy on sunny, summer mornings than at other times.

"Athena is so quiet," complained the older lady; "she never talks at all."

"She is a sphinx—and a Medusa," said Randal, smiling across Madam's head at me.

"She is a very beautiful girl, but old Pat doesn't like her. I hate old Pat, but he keeps the gate locked tight and fast so they can't get in, even if they try."

"Who can't get in?" asked Randal, curiously.

"You are a rude, inquisitive young man," was the reply; "send him home, Athena, I'm tired of him."

"Oh, no you're not," said Randal, gently; "I'm going to be very attractive and entertaining. I want to see old Pat."

When we arrived at the gate-house we saw its custodian cutting grass on his tiny lawn; but, pretending not to see us, he hastened around the corner of the lodge and disappeared.

"Do you hear wheels?" asked Madam. She looked scared. We all listened. There was nothing to be heard.

"Pat!" shouted Randal, "will you come and see Madam, or must I come and fetch you?"

Dolan chuckled as old Pat slowly limped into sight, and, gruffly saluting his mistress, stood awaiting orders. He was a surly, sour-faced man; a very Cerberus.

"Yes," said Madam, speaking to herself, and quite unaware that she was overheard, "he is a dreadful old man! A gatekeeper for the devil! I am sure he will go to hell by and by. The devil will find him useful!" Then, very graciously, and as if speaking for the first time, "How do you do, good Patrick? You look faithful and true. Keep

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the gate carefully, good Patrick, and I will come again to see you. Home, Dolan, home! Good-by, good old man," again to herself. "An evil old ruffian, I hate the sight of him! Hurry, Dolan, hurry," turning to the man, "I want to get home."

The subject of this strange speech scowled angrily after us. Randal and Dolan had, during the interview, been at no pains to conceal their amusement, thus adding to Pat's discomfiture. I was sorry for him; but in my sympathy I stood alone.

We had reached the stables on our way home when Madam suddenly called a halt.

"Dolan," she said, "I must go back. I forgot to give old Pat orders to admit no one."

"Sure, you told him that same when we was there," remonstrated Dolan, unwilling to retrace his steps.

"I want to say to him," continued the old lady, as if Dolan had not spoken, "Patrick, in case ladies come to call, say to them very respectfully, 'Madam Erranti regrets that the delicate state of her health prevents her receiving visitors.' Hurry back, Dolan. People may come before I can tell him. Hurry, I say."

But Dolan was obdurate. "Best go home, ma'am," he said, comfortably, "it's getting toward noon. It's tired out you'll be; an' as for them orders, sure you've give them to Pat twinty times an' more. See them gray squ-urls beyant! They're dancin' to plaze you!"

Madam looked at the pretty little creatures scampering away into the thicket, but reiterated obstinately that she would "go back, go back, go back!"

Randal next tried his powers of persuasion.

"Dear Madam Erranti"—he used his gentlest tones—"pray don't over-tire yourself. Erranti'll never forgive us if we allow you to overdo. That

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handsome son of yours is capable of scalping the lot of us if we let you get sick. He may be home at any moment now! Do think of him!"

At the first mention of her son's name she turned her head away and closed her eyes. I tried in vain to stop the flow of Randal's eloquence. He did not —or would not—see my signals; but however unwelcome his words were to Madam they served their purpose.

"Athena," she said, when he had finished speaking, opening her eyes again, "Athena, I want to go home. I am tired. I want my luncheon. I want my nap, and," turning sharply upon Randal, "I want to be alone. You had better go home. Go home and study something. You have no tact; go home and study tact—tact, tact, tact! Do you hear, Randal St. John? Good-bye!"

He smiled, and taking his departure preceded us to the Hall. There Julie met him, and I saw they spoke earnestly together. Then he vanished around the corner of the house, and Julie, her good temper apparently quite restored, came to meet us, and made herself agreeable to her mistress. Later, when Madam had been made comfortable in her cool, darkened room, Julie, motioning me to follow, slipped into the hall.

"Mademoiselle," she said, taking a letter from her pocket, "behold a letter from Monsieur! What shall I do? I dare not give it to Madame at present, but—it must be read. Perhaps he returns to-day, even, and we must know to make preparation. Will Mademoiselle read it? Why not! Mademoiselle is already as a daughter to Madame——"

Covert impertinence lurked in her manner, usually so respectful. Slow of speech, I did not answer at once. When I did I ignored her insolent suggestion, saying only that the letter might be

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given Madame after her nap, when, it was to be hoped, she might have recovered her serenity—and then turned my back upon Julie. My duties were over for the morning.

After luncheon I settled myself in a great basket-work chair on the veranda for an hour's reading. I opened my book with an effort, feeling I should improve my mind—my lazy mind refused to be improved. Then, a tall, slim young man lounged into sight, on the path from the knoll, and in another moment had stretched himself on the edge of the veranda at my feet, his back against a pillar, a cigarette between his teeth.

"I may smoke, serene-eyed lady?"

"Yes;" and, after a moment of silence, "I wonder you felt like a stroll so early in the afternoon; I thought you found the heat disagreeable."

"If any other member of the fair sex had made that remark," said Randal, "I should think she yearned for a compliment from yours truly. I came because I find your lofty presence cooling—not to say freezing."

No reply being necessary, I made none. Mr. St. John smoked industriously for some time, in silence, then he said, smiling so broadly that a great deal of the lining of his upper lip came in view, "Grandma was in a fearful state of wax this morning, wasn't she? A dear old lady! So gentle, with such winning ways! Why does she call you 'Athena'? Because you look like a goddess? I never see you that I don't think of who-do-you-call-him's lines:

Solemn and sweet was her smile, and their hearts beat loud at her coming!

"My heart always beats loud at your coming. I often wonder you don't hear it! You're such a

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queer, silent, reserved girl! I defy anyone to make out what you hear and see, and what you don't. Erranti may. He's a queer Dick, himself."

"I wish he would come home."

"Why?" asked Randal, greedy curiosity in his blue eyes.

"I wish to keep house," I said, seriously; "I haven't enough to do."

"Well, you are a queer girl! I wonder if Erranti will—well, never mind what. Anyone told you about him?"

"Only his mother."

Randal leaned back against his pillar, blowing a thin wreath of smoke from his lips. "I feel largely, generously conversational," he said; "to tell the truth, that's why I happened in. I knew the old tigress would be asleep, and you probably here. I feel like telling you 'all, all, everything!' Here goes for a portrait of Erranti. Ask what questions you choose, but please keep awake!"

He lighted another cigarette—he smoked incessantly—and Nemesis flashed grandly as he lifted his left hand.

"You're looking at my ring, Miss Dean. A beauty, isn't it? My beloved uncle has lent me the loan of it for a year. If during that time I abstain from my pet weakness, the ring becomes mine. Won't you look at it?" drawing it from his finger and offering it to me. "It's Nemesis. The jewels are splendid. Come to think of it, Nemesis is not unlike you. Just turn your head a little, will you? Yes, the profile is almost the same. Strange I never noticed it before!"

"You were speaking of Mr. Erranti," I said, giving back—with what reluctance!—my mother's ring.

"Erranti?" slipping it on his finger with a sigh. A very white finger, but with an ugly pink lurking

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under the whiteness. "Erranti—oh, yes! Well, here's his portrait, and you'll see at once that he's almost as handsome as you and I, only he's dark, and I prefer blonds myself. Erranti is tall, and his figure just about perfect. Broad shoulders, small hands and feet, well-shaped head. Carries himself splendidly. He don't strike one as tall somehow, he's so confoundedly well-made. Awfully graceful chap, and as romantic-looking as the dickens! Not that he knows what that word means. I believe he could play the very deuce with the women if he wanted to, but he don't care a rap about them," and Mr. St. John sank into meditative silence.

"What does Mr. Erranti care for?" I asked.

"Money," was the prompt response; "money—and games of chance."

"You mean stocks?"

"I mean games of chance of every kind."

I remembered Claude's description of the card-parties in town.

"The beggar has a handsome face, too," Randal went on; "splendid eyes—dark, long, gleaming. Hair like black velvet—wears it cropped close; too short, you know. Skin's dark—tanned a deep brown—but it's clear and smooth. He wears gorgeous togs. I like giddy garments. You wear fetching raiment, Miss Dean."

"Please finish the portrait."

"Oh, well, let's see—nose? Delicate aquiline; chin, stunning, cleft in it! His sole defect is his mouth—his lips are awfully full, I think, but some fellows don't object to 'em. Men admire Erranti, you know. There's nothing he can't do—all 'round chap, so to speak."

"Tell me now of your uncle, Mr. Beverley," I said; "are you to live with him always?"

Randal sighed. "I'm sure I don't know," he

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said, "and I wish I did. Sometimes I feel I'm settled for life, sometimes I know I'm on trial still. Uncle B.'s a bachelor, and he has a pile of tin to leave! Grandpapa left him and his two sisters plenty to begin with, but my mother would marry my father, you see, and he, a good fellow no doubt, but a merry, merry artist, let the money slip through his fingers. My parents died when I was a tiny child, Miss Dean. Had my mother lived I might be a better sort of chap."

He sighed again, and, opening the back of his watch, handed it to me, saying, "My mother's picture."

It was a faded likeness of a small-featured, pretty woman, Randal, without Randal's disagreeable expression. I admired the gentle face, and then asked about the other sister—Richard Thorpe's mother; she was in my thought.

"Both sisters married cousins, Miss Dean. A mistake, I think—narrows down the family connections. When Uncle Thorpe died—for die he did—she was goose enough to marry again, and a foreigner into the bargain, a fat German baron! It was partly her son's fault, though. Dick Thorpe's the most obstinate chap I ever saw! Wouldn't live abroad with his mother, and enjoy life, loitering around Europe. No, sir, not he! Cut up an awful shindy when he was fourteen! Swore he was an American, born and bred, and he must come home—and work! 'Stars and Stripes! My Country, 'tis of Thee! Columbia's the Gem of the Ocean!'—that sort of rot. Oh, yes; home he came, and to work he went—all the uncles backing him up no end. His mother promptly gave her hand—and her yearly stipend—to Baron Fat German—I forget his name this minute."

I listened with deep interest. It was the first

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time Randal had ever spoken of his cousin. Still very grateful to Mr. Thorpe for his kindness, still unaccountably hurt by his later neglect, I thought of him much more often than was wise, and listened with controlled eagerness to all Randal had to say.

"Dick's a good-natured chap," he continued, "but queer. Sharp as a razor in a business way, and bound to get on, because of his frightful obstinacy; yet"—he laughed gently, then said, in his sweetest tones—"a very foolish fellow, after all. Uncle B. wanted him to study for the ministry—the old man is a bigoted Episcopalian—and Dicky had scruples! Said he wasn't good enough! Stuck to the law, and lost his chance of coming in for Beverley Towers and a pot of money!"

"And you?"

"Oh, I'm grateful to the old chap for paying my bills in the past, so I mean to make him happy in his own way by studying for the ministry, when I'm in better health."

In spite of his sweet, sad expression Mr. St. John failed to impress me by this generous devotion to his uncle's wishes.

"I'm twenty-two," he said, presently. "I know I don't look it."

I thought he did, but was silent.

"Three years older than you, Miss Dean;" and his eyes said, "Ask me how I know."

I did not gratify him, and, Claude appearing in search of me, our interview was over.

"You're in for a terrible time, Miss Dean, I'm 'fraid," said Claude, as I followed him into the hall. His brow was dark with care—he had ostentatiously ignored Mr. St. John's presence upon the veranda, pretending not to see him—and he had retreated into the house immediately after summoning me. "Looks as if the old lady was goin' to have one of

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her screechin' fits. Julie, she's read her a letter from the Boss. He's comin' up the river on his yacht some time this evening—time not known! I'm to sit up for him. What that French woman's said or done I don't know, but Madam is raisin' Cain in there. The fat's got into the fire some way or 'nother. You can hear it sizzlin' through the door!" pointing toward that object with his flexible thumb, and adding, as he opened it for me, in a dramatic whisper, "You'd better watch out!"

It was as he said. Madam Erranti was in a painfully excited condition. I soon found that it was because of me she so dreaded her son's arrival. He had really engaged me as housekeeper, and Madam had herself prevented me from assuming my duties as such. She feared, too, that he might disapprove of my rich toilettes, yet she would not permit me to exchange the fine gown of her providing for one of my own simple ones. A strange old lady, sometimes as easy to understand as a wayward child, at others concealing her thoughts with the cunning said to accompany insanity.

A fresh breeze, springing up at five o'clock, did us all good—while it lasted—quieting Madam's over-excited nerves; but it died away after supper, and there followed an ominous stillness, betokening storm. By nine the atmosphere had become almost stifling, and Madam, allowing Julie to put her to bed as usual, commanded us both to remain with her and to amuse her.

"I am afraid," she said, "I feel thunder in the air. Divert me, you two light-hearted young people, quick, divert me!"

We eyed each other helplessly, Julie and I. Since three o'clock we had striven to amuse, to distract her mind.

"If you could only make music, Athena," she

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cried, fretfully; "but thou art good to look at only. Thou canst do—nothing, nothing, nothing!"

She was quite right, I could do nothing.

"Shall I read to you?" I faltered, ashamed of my incompetence.

"No! I am weary of thy reading. Go, put on the gown of white silk. Julie shall do thy hair *à la mode*."

Hastening to my room I obeyed, glancing from time to time with dread at the ink-black sky. Suddenly a low growl of thunder, like the snarl of a wild beast about to spring, stirred the heavy atmosphere. I ran swiftly back to Madam's brilliantly lighted room. How might she endure that threatening sound! She sat up in bed, fingers in ears, when I entered, but withdrawing them at sight of me ordered Julie to rearrange my hair. I seated myself obediently before the dressing-table, and Julie, throwing a peignoir over my shoulders, unbraided my hair and shook it free. Hardly had she done so when there came a clap of thunder so violent and terrible that I started to my feet in alarm, and with it an almost blinding flash of lightning, its blue glare dominating the rosy lamp-light.

Uttering scream after scream, Madam Erranti writhed in terror upon her bed, one moment striving to bury her head in the pillows, the next staring about her with wild, awful eyes, as if expecting to see horrible things lurking in the corners of her gay, luxurious room. Julie, her courage gone, cowered on the floor, and cried aloud on God to save her, for the storm was upon us in all its strength. During an hour it raged about Highgrove Hall, as if with intent to destroy both house and inmates; but it was as nothing when compared with the tempest of fear and agony that racked the half-crazed brain of Madam Erranti. Deeply pitying her suf-

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fering I did what little I could to soothe her, but without avail. To prevent her springing from her bed in her mad efforts to escape the horror which pursued her, I was obliged to hold her close within my arms, and, at times, to exert all my strength to prevent her wresting herself free.

"Hush!" she would whisper, when there was a momentary cessation of the uproar without, "hush! do you hear them coming—or is it only the wind in the trees? Ah, what was that?" holding herself rigid to listen. Then, as the storm broke loose again, came the wild cry, "The dogs! The dogs!—they are coming! Philip, Philip, Philip—save me!" striving, after, to free herself from my encircling arms, with a wild frenzy that made me uncertain whether it were best to loose or hold her, fearing she might, in either case, do herself serious mischief.

After such a paroxysm had passed she would hide her head on my shoulder, and, drawing my loosened hair over her, would bid me keep very still, that they might pass us by.

"He has sharp eyes," she would murmur, "and he is very cunning, but these tangled vines hang close. I wish Philip would not leave me so long alone."

Another moment she would recognize me, and remember where she was; but before I had time to congratulate myself on her being herself again, she would again cry out that the dogs were baying close at hand. This lasted until nearly eleven o'clock, when, the storm ceasing as suddenly as it had begun, she fell asleep from exhaustion. She lay beside me on the bed, her arms about my neck, her head pillowed on my shoulder. I dared not move for fear of awakening her. From the floor came the sound of heavy snoring, where, in the farthest corner, Julie lay. Soon I, too, slept, but

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not peacefully. I was troubled with horrid dreams, owing to the trying scene I had just experienced, and also because my arm, on which Madam Erranti rested, was becoming cramped. Her weight lay heavy upon it, and I was tired.

I dreamed I was in some jungle or tropical swamp. Underfoot grew tangled grasses and rankly luxuriant ferns. The earth, wet and black, seemed anxious to suck me down. Overhead, branches and vines had woven themselves into a close, dark canopy, shutting out light and air and sunshine. Behind me, at the foot of a gigantic tree-trunk, crouched Madam Erranti, trembling with fear, for advancing toward us, through lush grasses and nodding fern, came two great dogs—Siberian bloodhounds. Even in my dream I wondered that I feared two creatures belonging to the canine race; but in the eyes of these so stealthily advancing upon me there was none of the intelligence belonging to their dog brothers—these were wild beasts.

I thought Madam called to warn me of our danger, and because I did not answer, fancied me unaware of the dogs' approach. In reality I made no sign, because I was absorbed in preparation for the coming struggle. I could fight but one—which one? My hands, trained to activity and usually so strong, felt strangely weak. I looked anxiously at the beasts as they drew nearer, staring at me with dreadful, glaring eyes, striving to decide which was the stronger of the two. In the eyes of the smaller there was an expression of slyness, of furtive doubt. Should I conquer his companion, he would run. I dreamed I turned, with a feeling of relief, to examine the larger dog—and shuddered. The look which met mine from those strange, blood-shot eyes made me sick with horror—the look of a devil! I braced myself for the coming struggle, for I knew

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which dog I must fight—and I was at bay. If but my hands would obey, and squeeze the breath from that ugly throat—or beat out those devilish brains —or— He was close upon me—I sprang forward —ah!

I was again in Madam's bright room, and awake. At the foot of the bed two men were standing —Claude, staring with an expression of intense scorn at the prostrate form of the snoring Frenchwoman, and a tall, handsome man, with long, gleaming, dark eyes. He was scrutinizing me closely. I tried to move, but could not—Madam still lay within my arms. The dark eyes understood my difficulty. Instantly their owner moved to Madam's side, and, lifting her with the gentleness possible only to those who possess great strength, laid her among her pillows. Still I was powerless to rise, and I did not wonder when, the clock on the mantelpiece chiming half-past three, I realized that I had held Madam over four hours. Mr. Erranti, for I had at once recognized him, saw my predicament also, and, lifting me firmly and gently from the bed, placed me on my feet. I murmured my thanks and slipped from the room, where I was no longer needed. Claude was rousing Julie with no gentle hand!

As I reached the first landing of the great staircase I heard a step behind me, and turning saw the master of Highgrove Hall close at my elbow.

"I fear you are tired out, Miss Dean," he said, and his beautiful dark face wore an expression of great kindness; "may I send you a glass of wine?"

Thanking him, I assured him that I needed no refreshment. "I am very strong," I said.

"Raffarty has told me, Miss Dean, what I owe to your kindness. He saw your tender care of my poor mother, this evening. Believe me, I am grate-

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ful. I knew she was happy in your companionship, but it was left for me to learn to-night that she had found a guardian angel," and, raising my hand to his lips in old-time fashion, Mr. Erranti bowed low, and was gone.

Turning to continue my way upstairs, I chanced to glance at the statue of the Medicean Venus in her niche above the landing. The flickering light from the hall lamps played strange tricks with her handsome, sensual features. The full lips seemed twisted into an ugly smile. I shivered. Someone was "walking over my grave." I hurried to my room and to bed.

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XI

I was up betimes the next morning—a bright, fair morning after the storm. The river, blue and gay in the early morning sunshine, danced merrily. The tree-tops rustled fresh and green. It was as if the storm of the night, with its attendant horrors, had been but a dream. I enjoyed the feeling of homely ease and comfort that the day brought.

On my table lay the last volume borrowed from the library—a richly but gravely bound little book: "Locke's Essay of the Conduct of the Understanding." This, I had hoped, might benefit my understanding, together with the Essays by Francis Bacon—Baron Verulam, Viscount St. Alban, and Lord High Chancellor of England—which were in the same book. The two wise men, Locke and Bacon, hunting in couples, as it were! It occurred to me that Mr. Erranti might object to my reading his books. This thought worried me, and picking up the little book—so light to carry, so heavy to read—I ran downstairs and into the library, never dreaming I should find it occupied. I was the one early riser in Highgrove Hall. In the window stood its owner and Claude.

Claude was talking earnestly. He had the air of a person engaged in the performance of a solemn duty. His very apron seemed to say, "It is our duty, and we will." He emphasized his remarks with the large feather duster, which he always carried in the mornings.

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"You may not care to hear what I now say to you," said the duster, "but hear it you shall."

Mr. Erranti, handsomer than ever in his suit of spotless white duck, stood listening with an air of patient submission. Claude was, when once embarked on the flood of his own eloquence, not to be stopped easily; but when I entered he ceased abruptly, looking so caught and conscious that I knew I was the subject of his discourse. On the stage Claude would have made an excellent conspirator; the youngest, dullest boy in the most distant part of the house would have known from his expression that he was conspiring.

Mr. Erranti, an amused smile lurking about the corners of his mouth, came forward to meet me. The guilty Claude beat a hasty retreat.

"I hope you feel none the worse for the fatigue of last night, Miss Dean," said my employer, kindly. "No? I am very glad. You don't look tired, but like the morning itself—so fresh and bright and fair!"

I explained my errand to the library.

"Ah!"—taking the book from my hand and glancing at the title—"you like these Essays?"

"No," I said, simply, "I find them wearisome."

"Then—if I may ask—why read them?"

I thought the question absurd. "To improve my mind."

"You are fond of reading, Miss Dean?"

"No," and I sighed, ashamed that I had to give such an answer.

"Only of novels, perhaps?"

I shook my head. "I like to listen to reading, and," remembering my duties as companion, "I don't mind reading aloud."

Mr. Erranti looked at me curiously.

"When you do feel inclined to improve your

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mind, as you are pleased to call it—I doubt very much if there is any room for improvement myself." (I bowed.)—"Pray remember that my small collection is quite at your disposal."

I thanked him and turned to go, but begging me to remain for a moment, he placed a chair for me and seated himself opposite. For an instant I thought I was to be scolded, then I saw that the dark face wore a very friendly expression. It was a very remarkably handsome face, in spite of the too full lips, as Randal had said; with something odd and foreign-looking about it—and the man. Mr. Erranti used few gestures when talking, and his face was—almost always—as expressionless as a mask, yet I knew instinctively that if he let himself go, both face and hands would tell his thoughts plainly to all the world. His was a cultivated composure, and I, because I was really cold, slow-thinking, and calm, recognized it as such.

"I wish to apologize to you, Miss Dean," he began, "for the burden laid upon you last night. When I learned from Raffarty that all care and responsibility had been thrown upon you, I was very angry. It is Julie's business to look after Madam Erranti when she is suffering. I have spoken to the woman. She won't forget her duties again."

"She was badly frightened by the storm," I said, gently. "She lost her head, poor thing."

"And you, Miss Dean, you were not frightened?"

"Not by the storm."

"Ah!" Mr. Erranti rose abruptly, and, going to the window, stood with his back toward me, looking out. "Raffarty tells me my mother had one of her worst attacks last night. Did she talk wildly?" turning swiftly and eyeing me keenly. "Were you terrified by what she said?"

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"I feared she might hurt herself. The thunder and lightning gave her nightmare fancies."

"That is it," he spoke with some eagerness, "nightmare fancies, nothing more. My mother has had much trouble in her life, many sorrows to endure. Ten years ago she was very ill. She has never been the same since. Sometimes she is not quite herself. Her mind—but you were with her last night, and understand. Poor child! How white you looked as you lay beside her, your protecting arms around her! As white and fragile as a lily—a lily flooded in sunshine—the sunshine of your golden hair!"

I had been looking past Mr. Erranti out upon the summer sweetness of trees and river. At this high-flown speech I turned my eyes full upon him. He smiled faintly, but appeared neither embarrassed nor discomfited. Evidently he had not meant to be impertinent. He was, as Randal had said, very romantic looking, the kind of person whose ordinary conversation might be expected to be flowery, highfalutin, romantic. I wondered if Erranti *père* had been an Italian.

"I am very strong, Mr. Erranti—rarely tired. But I should tell you at once that I am slow-witted. I was worried last night that I did not know how to calm Madam. I was stupid about it—that is the truth."

To my surprise he appeared pleased, smiling kindly and approvingly upon me.

"You don't look dull, Miss Dean, but very intelligent. One might, I think, call you large-minded. Your great gray eyes are so passionless—so calm."

Deciding that Erranti *père* had been a Spaniard, I rose to go, but again Mr. Erranti stopped me.

"Oh, by the way, Miss Dean. will you be so very

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kind as to continue to preside at my table while the Hall is empty? Later I shall have a raft of men coming, when you'll be more comfortable in your own room, but at present——"

"Certainly, if you wish," I said, and I colored. Until that moment I had forgotten that housekeepers always eat and live in the "Housekeeper's Room."

Waiting in the garden for the breakfast-gong to sound, I reflected that I did not even know if there were a housekeeper's room at the Hall! I was ashamed. Mr. Erranti had every right to regard me as an impudent upstart, returning to find the new housekeeper dressed in lace and silk, and taking her meals in the dining-room! Perhaps his flowers of speech had been in mockery of my false position. I was thankful that I had on a plain gingham frock. Madam must explain why I was dressed like a lily of the field. Was that Mr. Erranti's reason for comparing me to a lily? Having always been accustomed to hearing praises of my beauty, I had failed to detect the sarcasm hidden in my employer's honeyed speech. I was, in truth, I said to myself severely, a very stupid girl—a very remarkably stupid girl; and, the sweet tones of the bronze gong floating out upon the air, I slowly returned to the house, dreading the necessity of meeting Mr. Erranti at breakfast.

Upon entering the hall I saw that Claude was, in imagination, sounding a pæan of victory. His sallow cheeks were slightly flushed, and he thumped the gong with a rapturous energy. When he saw me he stopped short, and gave vent to an excited giggle.

"Say, Miss Dean," he whispered, as he followed me into the dining-room, "I've settled it all for you. The housekeeper's room ain't a fit place for you,

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downstairs among the help, so I just up and told the Boss as much, and he said, 'Certingly; of course!' My"—with another wild giggle—"won't the girls be mad!" Then, seeing Mr. Erranti coming from the library, he became exceedingly dignified and stately, and relapsed into deferential silence.

Little was said at breakfast. Mr. Erranti was preoccupied, and I rarely have anything to say. Less that morning than usual, because of my bitter thoughts. By and by Mr. Erranti, pushing away his sour, flabby roll with an air of disgust, caught my eye, and said:

"I like good bread, Miss Dean, but Norah can't make it. I must see if there is a good baker at Droneton, or import bread from town—I can't stand this stuff."

"Yet it's so easy to make," I said, and sighed.

"You think so, perhaps," smiling good-humoredly, as if tolerant of a child's nonsense; "but it may be more difficult than you imagine."

I looked at my employer gravely. It was many, many years since I had been treated as a child. There was a teasing light in the dark eyes. I, and my remark, amused him.

"I have never found it difficult," I said, quietly.

Mr. Erranti laughed. He thought I was talking for effect.

"I wish you'd give Norah a few hints on the subject, then. You might teach her how!"

He spoke in jest, but I seized my opportunity.

"I have your permission to try?"

"Indeed you have, my child!" was the laughing answer, as he rose and left the room.

I looked at Claude. Would he be my witness downstairs, if my right to enter there were questioned?

"You bet I'll stand by you," he said, understand-

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ingly. "Land o' Goshen, Miss Dean, but you're in for it!"

I quite agreed with him. Asking to be told when breakfast belowstairs was over, I went out on the veranda to await the awful interview. Some time passed before Claude—his sallow face white with suppressed excitement—reappeared, and solemnly beckoned me to follow him. As he crossed the hall with mincing step it came to my mind that I had heard he was "keeping company" with Norah. Dolan had imparted this information to Anthony Cray, who had told Julie, who had told Madam, who had passed the intelligence on to me. I had hardly time to realize that this might complicate matters before I was in the head-quarters of the enemy.

Norah was a handsome creature, stout, rosy, blue-eyed. Pretty brown hair curled thickly about her broad, white forehead. Her cotton frocks, spotlessly clean, fitted neatly, and instead of a collar she wore a chain of thin gold, twisted many times around her throat. She was thirty, seven years older than Claude, a point on which she was said to be sensitive. She was a picture, standing, arms folded, in the centre of her great kitchen, awaiting my coming that warm June morning, with fierce defiance in her blue eyes.

"Miss Dean, this is Norah," said the excited Claude, solemnly performing the ceremony of introduction. "Norah, here's Miss Dean come to see you."

"Oh, indeed!" ejaculated Norah, tossing her head angrily.

She neither offered me a chair nor vouchsafed any answer to my civil words of greeting.

Two maids were in the kitchen, one embarrassed, the other, Ellen, a housemaid, eagerly expectant of battle. While I stood silent, wondering how I might

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rid myself of these women and speak to the cook alone, Claude, nettled by his lady-love's rudeness, took her to task.

"For the land's sake, Norah," he exclaimed, "ain't you never goin' to ask Miss Dean to be seated? If you won't, then I will," angrily seizing a chair and placing it behind me with a thump. "One would think, to see you, you'd never been learnt manners!"

"I don't need you to teach me, anyways, Claude Raffarty," cried the indignant Norah, her eyes flashing. "I'll thank you to walk out of my kitchen and mind your own business! Manners indeed! Where's yours, I'd like to know!"

"I'm ashamed of you, Norah Milligan!" was the sharp retort. "I should think you was old enough to know better!"

This shot told. Face flushed and arms a-kimbo, Norah turned upon her "young man."

"I mayn't be so young as some folks"—with withering scorn—"but, thank God, I've got me own teeth in me head yet, anyways!"

This sally won applause from Ellen, Claude's showy set not being his own. I felt the time had come for me to bring the unpleasant scene to a close. Holding up my hand to impose silence, I bade Claude return to his duties in the pantry; then, turning swiftly upon the housemaid, I reminded her of her neglected work.

"Mr. Erranti is at home," I said, severely; "neglect will no longer pass unnoticed," and when she, with Claude, had left the kitchen, I told the cook plainly of his comments upon her bread. "How shall you like your master's going to a baker for bread? Yet he must, when you send up rolls that are both sour and flabby. A strange combination, Norah."

"P'raps you's thinkin' you could make better!" she cried, ironically, with a shrill, angry laugh.

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"I can, Norah."

"An' it's meself as would like to see you do that same!" screamed poor Norah, the brogue of her childhood shaken uppermost in her wrath.

"Then you shall," I said, taking prompt advantage of her words. "I will make my own yeast, and be ready to set the sponge to-night. I expect fair play from you, Norah. You will do nothing to spoil my work, I am sure."

Nor did she. Sullen, angry, disdainful, she kept carefully in the background, and though she would not help, did nothing to hinder me. I have always been lucky about my cooking, and my luck did not fail me at Highgrove Hall. I was successful in my breadmaking, pleasing both Madam and Mr. Erranti, and that part of the cooking fell, henceforth, to my share. I was, after this incident, allowed to assume my duties as housekeeper, and time no longer hung heavy on my hands.

A week before the Fourth of July the number of servants was greatly increased. Guests were expected. We were to have a house full, over the Fourth. I had seen little of Mr. Erranti, save at breakfast and dinner each day, since his return. He went to town every day, sometimes by train, and sometimes in his yacht, the Charlotte, named for his mother. He was invariably kind, but absorbed in his own affairs. A few days before the house-party I was summoned to the library, to consult about the preparations necessary. The bedroom question was the difficulty. There were only three, each with a dressing-room, in the second story, and but six on the third. One of these, I reminded Mr. Erranti, I was occupying, when he counted them all as vacant."

"I'm afraid you've been lonely," he said, "shut away up there by yourself. I'm sorry I didn't know

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of it before. One of the maids might have slept near you. Are you timid?"

I smiled. "No, Mr. Erranti, I am accustomed to being alone."

"The men who are coming are a noisy lot," he said, musingly; "I wish you were somewhere else. What do you say to moving down into the second story, Miss Dean? Into the northeast room—the Blue Room? It seems to me that would be an excellent plan."

The idea was kind, but ridiculous. I had no intention of occupying the finest room in the house. When I refused, Mr. Erranti asked permission to see my room, and at once ran upstairs to examine it. Returning, he surprised me still more by saying he should order a new bolt put on the door. I looked for an explanation, but none was given. The next morning, running in for my work-basket, I found Claude, his mouth full of screws, busy putting on the bolt. His countenance expressed deep gloom, and when I said cheerfully that I hoped bolts and bars did not mean burglars, he only sighed heavily, vouchsafing no reply.

"Why, Claude," I cried, in astonishment, when I had really looked at his work, "you are putting on two! Why that chain-bolt? You may be sure I sha'n't wish to hold parley with midnight marauders!"

Removing the last screw from his ample mouth, Claude surveyed me severely for a moment, and then said:

"I should hope—not, Miss Dean,"—when, resuming his former stooping position, he screwed away with great energy.

I stood and watched him in silence. I had nothing more to say. Suddenly he remarked, gloomily:

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"I guess you ain't seen much of Noo York brokers or Westerners come East on a toot, Miss Dean!"

I acknowledged my ignorance.

"Well, fresh ain't no name for 'em! Their goin's-on is what I call disgustin'," curling up his long nose, "and, if I had my way, they'd never get invited here. Bolts!" he exclaimed suddenly, with violence. "Yes, indeed, and a good thing, too! When the Boss mentioned your needin' one—seein' there was nothin' but this lame old lock on your door—I just procured two, and I hope, Miss Dean, you'll so far favor me as not to forget to use 'em. And—if you'll pardon my taking the liberty, Miss Dean—I'd suggest your takin' a back seat while them rampagin' ruffians is visiting these diggin's. By which I mean the back staircase as much as possible—avoidin' the hall and front."

So saying, and nodding gloomily, he picked up his basket of tools and departed, whistling a mournful air.

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XII

At six, on the afternoon before the Fourth, our guests arrived. They came from town on the Charlotte, and we watched them, Madam, Julie, and I, from Madam's glass door as they crossed the lawn, to the house from the river. Madam was greatly excited, and had been so all day, demanding more attention than usual, although she knew I was very busy, superintending the new servants, and arranging sleeping-quarters for the coming party. The drawing-room had to serve as a bedroom, for the nonce. Three cots had been put up there, and the large bedrooms were to be crowded. Mr. Erranti had assured me that the men would consider every discomfort in the light of a frolic. Later, rooms were to be fitted up in the gardener's house, for any overflow. Claude grumbled to me in confidence that he should "Just dump 'em in the sty, the whole kit and boodle of 'em, Miss Dean, the fitting place for pigs, ain't it?"

The men, fifteen in all, accompanied by their handsome host, came, laughing and talking uproariously, toward the house, a fashionably clad, red-faced, noisy crowd. The afternoon was hot, and, judging from appearances, cooling drinks had been freely resorted to by these very jolly gentlemen.

"Pull in the blind-door, Julie! *Vite, ma fille!* They advance rapidly, and I would not be seen," said Madam, shrinking back as her son's guests drew near.

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Julie obeyed, and we peeped through the slats unobserved. As they crossed the veranda and entered the hall I noticed that in one way they resembled each other closely. They were all sporting men. This was a look I knew well, having learned it in my childhood.

"*Ma foi*, but they are handsome—*ces messieurs!*" exclaimed Julie, watching them eagerly, eyes shining, cheeks aflame.

As she spoke, three whom I thought especially disagreeable looking were directly in front of our door: a large man, resembling a buffalo, with his chunky shoulders and heavy beard; one middle-sized, whose vacuous, white face was pitted and scarred; and a short, young fellow, whose retroussé nose, mop of black curls, and fiercely waxed moustaches, gave him an odd likeness to a French poodle. These three excited Julie's particular admiration.

"They handsome!" cried Madam, "they handsome! Look, then, at Philip, thy master! A god among satyrs! A crowd of dissipated, chattering chimpanzees! Take me away, Julie—look not upon them, Athena! I detest them—noisy buffoons—wicked men—pah!"

Dinner was over. I had had mine in my room. On my way downstairs I heard the men noisily leaving the dining-room and entering the hall. I drew back, not wishing to be seen on the grand staircase, and was turning to retrace my steps when curiosity impelled me to peep through the banisters at the scene below. The stately beauty of the hall, with its richly colored furnishings, made a fitting background for the master of the house. As he stood, surrounded by his guests, in the soft light shed by the myriads of lamps and candles, he might have been an Eastern prince receiving the homage of

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some Western embassy: He was magnificently handsome. Beside him most of the men looked coarse, ill-shaped, or washed-out.

"A song, Erranti, a song!" cried the man who was like a poodle.

"Yes, yes," was heard on every hand; "give us a song to cheer!"

"Sing, sweet bird!" called one.

"Of 'Love' only, sing!" quoted another; "and here's the boy to play your accompaniment," and the speaker, laying his hands on the shoulders of a blond young man, playfully pushed him toward the piano.

It was Randal St. John. He was flushed, and looked less weary of life than usual. Philip joined him at the piano, they consulted together, and Randal began the simple, rhythmic prelude of Schubert's Serenade. It was time for me to go to Madam, but Philip began to sing—and I remained.

"Leise flehen meine Lieder
Durch die Nacht zu dir,
In den stillen Hain hernieder,
Liebchen, komm zu mir."

The exquisite words floated up to me borne on a melody more exquisite still. I forgot Madam, forgot my duty, forgot everything—save the perfect voice which filled the night with its passionate sweetness. I closed my eyes, and, leaning my head against the banisters, gave myself up to the rapturous ecstasy of the moment.

The music ceased. The audience, applauding loudly, demanded another song.

"Give us something English this time, will you?" shouted the Buffalo; "I can't catch on to Dutch!"

"Plain American's good enough for us all, I guess," said another.

Philip good-humoredly sang what they chose, and I was amazed at their choosing, for they asked for

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"The Bridge," "A Warrior Bold," and many Scotch and English ballads. The faster the man the simpler his taste in songs, Philip said afterward. When the music ceased Claude, with his white-aproned assistants, brought many little tables into the hall, placing chairs around them and cards upon them.

"Come, Randal," cried the Poodle, "come, take a hand with me, and we'll whip the lot of them!" He wore eye-glasses, and spoke with a slight German accent.

"No, no," said Randal; "can't possibly. I've sworn off."

This elicited a burst of laughter, and everyone remonstrated with him at once. Randal listened, smiled, and said nothing, but as I rose to go I saw that he had yielded to temptation, and had seated himself at the table with the curly headed man. It was three in the morning before these merry-makers sought repose. I heard them skylarking in the hall outside my heavily barred door, and it seemed to me but a few moments later that I was roused again from sleep by someone knocking. Glancing at my clock I saw that it was five, and, throwing on a wrapper, I opened my door, to find Claude, worried and nervous, waiting.

"For the Land's sake, Miss Dean," he whispered, hoarsely, "do dress as quick as you can and come down. Norah's awful sick and Ellen's a born fool—can't do nothin' for her, and who's to get breakfast the Lord only knows!" and he wrung his hands.

"I will, Claude," I said, and he went away comforted.

Poor Norah was in bed, with Ellen beside her, relating awful tales of sudden death. I thought her suffering from a severe bilious attack, and this, she assured me, was the case, begging me not to send for a doctor.

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"It's only one of me bad sick-headaches, Miss," she said, faintly; "an' it's not the pain but thinkin' of me work that's killing me! Sure, I can't stand on me feet when I'm took like this, and how all them meals is to be cooked this day it's God Almighty that maybe knows, but not poor Norah Milligan," and she began to cry.

Assuring her that I would take her place, I thought to comfort her, but professional jealousy made the moment bitter.

"Sure, the maynoo cards is all wrote out," suggested Ellen, wearying of the rôle of sick-nurse; "Miss Dean can follow them."

So it was settled in the kitchen, but with Madam I had difficulty. I could not play cook and companion both, the duties of the former being no sinecure. Breakfast dragged on till twelve o'clock, when it was time to prepare for half-past one luncheon! With Julie's help I finally persuaded Madam to dispense with my services, and to promise to keep Norah's illness a secret from her son. This last pleased the strange fancy of the whimsical old lady.

Claude did much to help me, telling me what was expected.

"Coffee at seven sharp for the Boss, and he'll want his breakfast at eight, Miss Dean."

I expressed the surprise I had long felt, and said I wondered how Mr. Erranti could stand rising so early, when he went to bed so late.

"That's his way, Miss Dean! He never seems to need his sleep like other folks. I only wish I was the same," yawning prodigiously, and covering his large mouth with delicately uplifted fingers. An hour later he burst into the kitchen, giggling delightedly. "Boss says coffee's A1 this morning! Says he's glad Norah's woke up at last, and as she ain't done well lately! Oh, my, I thought I should

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ha' bust! Norah'll be mad enough to bite!" and he tittered wildly.

To make a diversion I asked what was in the wine-glasses he was carrying on his try.

"Cocktails, Miss Dean! And you wouldn't catch me astonishin' my insides with any such stuff in the mornings—nor at night, neither! But the gents upstairs thinks different. It'll be sody-water and cocktails from now on till one or two o'clock, maybe," and he stalked away, his whole person expressing the liveliest sensations of disgust and scorn.

Breakfast and luncheon were over, and Norah was feeling better, though still unable to cook the eight o'clock dinner, or late supper at twelve. I was to devote the afternoon to Madam, but after luncheon was out of the way I found I should have an hour to myself before she expected me. Still in kitchen trim—gingham frock, linen apron, sleeves rolled up, and braids snugly bound about my head—I betook myself to the garden to rest. The kitchen had been uncomfortably hot on that blazing July day. All the morning our guests had been setting off giant fire-crackers, the early risers striving to destroy the peace of the sluggards. It was pleasant to have them engaged at luncheon, and the place quiet for a time.

I was a little tired. The responsibility had weighed rather heavily upon me; I had worked hard. Under the shade of a mass of evergreens—pungent-scented arbor-vitæ—at the end of one of the garden paths, was a rustic sofa, and on this I lay down. Just outside this green bower splendid carnations exhaled their spicy odors, luring a host of drowsily humming bees to sip their honey. The warmth, the sweet scents, and the bees' slumber-song lulled me to sleep. From this nap I was roused

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by the smell of tobacco and the sound of feet crunching on the gravel near by.

"Some of the gardeners," I thought, lazily; "they will not come in here," and lay still, loath to be disturbed. The footsteps stopped directly in front of the arbor. I kept my eyes shut. "It is Dolan," I said to myself. "If I pretend to be asleep he will go away," and I did not move.

"Jove, what a picture!" said a coarse voice. "Now's your chance, Sturgis! Go in and win a pair of gloves!"

"You bet I will," came the drawling answer.

Opening my eyes at last, I saw, within a few inches of my own, the vacuous, pock-marked face of the man I had seen the day before. With him were his boon companions, the three blocking up the entrance to my retreat. The Buffalo and the one with the black curls were egging on their friend, making bets as to his ultimate success. When I opened my eyes Sturgis drew back, daunted by my unexpected wakefulness. He was a pale, faded-out blond, looking both weak and vicious.

"Go it, Sturgis!" shouted the big man, with a fat laugh. "What, you ain't afraid of a pretty girl, I hope!"

"If—at—first—you—don't—succeed,
Try—try—again,"

jeered the Poodle.

Sturgis, sniggering feebly, stood still. I rose slowly to my feet, looking straight at him. He avoided meeting my eyes, tittered again, and backed in between his two friends.

"Well, well," remonstrated the Buffalo, "I'd no idea you had so little go in you, Sturgis! Better stand aside and make room for a better man," stepping forward.

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"No, no; she's goin' to pay toll to me," cried Sturgis, recovering himself. "You like me best, my beauty, don't you!" extending both arms to prevent my passing.

I did not speak. Of what use to appeal to such half-tipsy creatures! Instead, I examined Sturgis swiftly, saw he was not properly balanced on his feet—few people are—stepped quickly forward, and struck him heavily on the side of his head with my open palm. He fell with some force into the arms of his stout companion, who sat down at once in the bed of carnations behind him. The curly headed man burst into frantic laughter as his friends rolled among the flowers. I hurried homeward, my heart sick with disgust.

Was this what I must look forward to, I asked myself, as I swept through the garden, cold with anger. To be insulted by every stranger who chanced to turn his insolent eyes upon my much-praised face? At this moment I saw Mr. Erranti strolling toward me, on his way to join his friends. Classing him with his associates, I felt I hated him, and would have passed without a word, but he stopped me. A look of pleasure at first lighted up his handsome face, but this changed to one of alarm.

"Athena!" he cried, "what is it? What has happened? Your face frightens me, it is so set—so white. I insist upon knowing—speak!" and he grasped my arm.

I stood quite still, looking him full in the eyes. It was difficult for me to articulate.

"Nothing has happened," I said at last, in low, even tones; "kindly remove your hand, and let me go," but he held me fast. "If you must know, Mr. Erranti"—laughing coldly—"I have been learning a lesson—as to incidents likely to occur in the life of an upper-servant."

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"You speak in riddles," he said, slowly, paling under his tan; "pray what are the lives of upper-servants to you, Athena?"

"I am one"—icily—"and learning how to meet the exigencies of my position. How, you would ask? Plainly, then—with a box on the ear!"

He stood close to me, searching my face with his clever dark eyes, but there now leapt into them so tigerish an expression I drew back involuntarily.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, under his breath, "I understand. It will not occur again," and releasing me, he went on into the garden.

Fortunately Madam slept late that afternoon, and I had time to slip upstairs and think awhile, as well as to dress, before I joined her.

That was a typical Fourth of July on the Hudson! —very hot until six, then with gathering clouds gradually obscuring the sky, as under a heavy pall, and by nine o'clock rain descending in floods, putting out all fireworks save those of heaven's providing.

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried Julie, as the time for cooking the dinner drew near, "what a day have I passed! Alone all the morning with Madame, and now, behold, a storm approaches, and what to do I know not! I fear the lightning! I fear Monsieur, who commands me to soothe Madame! Ah, *juste ciel, quelle journée!*" and the usually impassive Frenchwoman wrung her hands. "Hush!" she exclaimed suddenly, staring out of the window. "Behold Monsieur! He walks with Monsieur Sturgis! What does he say?"

It had grown so quiet every sound was distinctly heard. As Mr. Erranti with his friend approached the house from the avenue we heard him say in sweet, silky tones:

"You'll give me my revenge to-night, Sturgis?"

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"Certainly, Erranti, if you wish it," replied Mr. Sturgis, but he laughed uncomfortably.

Julie's eyes gleamed as she said, "Monsieur Sturgis will do well to beware." Her smile was unpleasant, but I had no time to wonder at it or her words. Madam had detained me so long that I was forced to return to the kitchen in my delicate muslin, which worried me. The maids pinned my flowing sleeves behind my shoulders, and, tucking up my train, I enveloped myself in a huge apron and went to work. When, at half-past nine, I hurried back to Madam, I found her in bed, shivering with terror at the noises of the storm, the wailing of the wind through the trees, and the rumbling of still distant thunder.

"God be praised!" cried Julie; "you are come at last, Mademoiselle! Hear, then, the thunder which approaches! Ah, Mademoiselle, remain with Madame, I beg, I implore!"

"Athena!" cried Madam from the bed, "come close to me. Don't leave me to the care of that woman, *ma bien-aimée!* She fears the devil, her master, who comes for her in the storm!" Taking my hands she drew me down beside her. "Lay thy sweet face by mine, *chérie*"—stroking my cheek with her poor swollen hand—"and leave me not. I love thee, dear child, and fear nothing when thou art near, for thou art one of God's angels." Then, with swift change of tone, cowering with sudden terror in my arms, "Ah, the thunder! Hold me fast, Athena, I am afraid!"

At that moment Mr. Erranti entered, calm, smiling, and handsome. As his eyes encountered mine there came into their lustrous depths an expression I failed to understand. Madam, making a great effort, sat up in bed, greeting him with a tremulous smile. She clung to my hands, keeping me beside her.

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"Philip," entreatingly, her voice trembling, "Philip, I want Athena to stay with me to-night."

"If she will be so kind," added her son, looking down upon me with the odd expression in his eyes.

"She has cooked for thee and those noisy men all day," said Madam, vehemently; "surely she might stay with me all night."

Julie and I exchanged glances. Was this how poor Norah's secret was kept!

"What?" questioned Philip, sternly, yet as if he could not believe his ears. "What are you saying, *ma mère?* Miss Dean cook for me? I don't understand."

"Thou art usually quick enough, Philip," whimpered Madam, observing my startled glance at Julie, "seeing all about thy house with those great eyes of thine! Yes, Athena, *chérie*, I now remember thou didst say I was not to tell; but I am old, and the old forget. Yes, old, old, old! A feeble old woman, *rien de plus!*"

She covered her face with her hands, but watched us all through her fingers.

"Is this true, Miss Dean?" Philip asked.

Much annoyed, I replied in the affirmative. "Norah is ill. I am housekeeper. *C'est mon métier!*"

"It shall not occur again," said Philip. I thought of our interview in the garden. "Cray can get supper, grill bones, devil lobsters—what you order. He cooks well, though not as you can, Miss Dean. I know now what I have to guard against in this—foe of mine own household! We can't have this lovely child killing herself in our service, *Maman.*"

"No," said Madam, under her breath. She looked frightened, unhappy.

"Try to spare her, *Maman*, to control thyself for her sake. Try not to dim this sunshine that has

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come to brighten our dull home. Promise me to be calm and kind." He stooped and kissed her cheek.

"Yes, Philip," Madam spoke meekly.

"You consent to remain here for to-night? I would rather know you to be here than upstairs," said Mr. Erranti, turning to me.

I disliked the tone the conversation had taken. After saying coldly that I should, of course, do as Madam wished, I asked him not to rebuke the servants for obeying my orders in keeping silent about the illness in the house.

"They must always obey your orders," was the suave answer. "I myself will be the first to set them an example."

There came a tap at the door, and Claude thrust his head in.

"Mr. Sturgis a-hollerin' his head off for you, sir. Hadn't you better come along?"

Mr. Sturgis was not kept waiting.

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XIII

Madam endured the noises of the storm quite bravely that night, even falling asleep while the thunder still growled. But I, who slept so well at all times, lay broad awake for many hours. Every time I almost drowsed I saw, close to my own, the face of Mr. Sturgis, and waked with a shudder of disgust. I could not forget the insult offered me. I felt degraded. I had always been treated with respect; how had I changed that strangers now dared deny it me? Mr. Erranti's manner displeased me. He called me by my first name as if he had the right to do so. His very expression when he looked at me I resented, although why it angered me I could not say; there was a certain freedom in his way of speaking to me—as to a petted child. In short, his manners grated on me, and, resolving to put him in his proper place, should it cost me my position, I finally fell asleep.

I waked early. Faint light was stealing through the slats of Madam's blinds. The dawn was near. A great disgust for my surroundings swept over me as I glanced about the gayly furnished room. I was sick of luxury. It choked me. I longed for fresh air and solitude. Still fully dressed, in my dinner toilet, I picked up an old white silk, swan's-down bordered, opera cloak—Madam's latest gift—from off the couch where it had been flung, and wrapping it around me slipped from the house.

The eastern sky was flushed with pink; in the

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heart of its rose-colored splendor trembled and sparkled the morning star. I stood still, awed by the beauty of the scene, and folding my hands, prayed for the true courage of a humble spirit. Cares and vexations suddenly became petty, in the peace of this new day. I banished all angry thoughts—unworthy now—and was at rest.

The birds in the garden chirruped and sang on every hand. The flowers beside the path, still limp from the evening's shower, gave forth a faint fragrance. I went to the spring under the birch trees to see the rosy dawn reflected in its limpid depths. . . .

On its surface there floated a dead thing—a man in evening dress.

He lay face downward, his head a little under water. Around the neck was twisted a leathern strap; below, at the bottom of the basin, a small dark object, the weight of iron on the other end of the horse-tether, which had been used to make death certain. A frightful water-weed, with root and ghastly flower!

For a moment everything reeled about me, then, dropping my cloak, I flung myself on the wet flagstones edging the basin, and, every nerve tense, strove to drag it out. All my strength and will were needed, for I was sick with the horror of it. At last, beside me, staring with sightless eyeballs up at the morning sky, lay the man who had offered me insult—Mr. Sturgis.

Some moments passed before I could force myself to place my hand on his heart. It had ceased to beat. The man was dead. Still, every means to revive him must be tried. I strove to rise, but could not. Then, to my great relief, I heard steps upon the gravel.

"The bird's plumage!" said a sweet, rich voice, Mr. Erranti's. "Where is the bird? The Swan of

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Highgrove Hall! Ah, little Athena—my God, child, what have we here?" Seizing me almost roughly, he drew me back to a rustic bench beneath the birches. "You found him? The damned coward, to do it here! There, sit still, till I make sure."

He went to examine in his turn, and, for a moment, giving way to my horror, I covered my face that I might not see. Steadied by the presence of Philip, I was soon able to offer the help he needed.

"You there, Athena! Don't look at him again, child. Yes, he's quite dead, no use trying to revive him. Don't take it hard—he was a vicious beast." He began to go through the dead man's pockets with marvellous rapidity. A handful of small silver, a few old letters, a bunch of keys—nothing more.

"Humph!" muttered Philip to himself, "worse than I thought. Damn the silly fool!" Then, very sharply, "Still here, Athena! Run away, child—or, no, stay a moment," and, drawing me again to the bench, he laid his hand on my shoulder and looked steadily into my eyes. He was weighing me in the balance. I shivered. "Cold? But of course you are." Seizing my cloak he wrapped it so tightly about me that I could not move. "Poor little woman! It's enough to make you ill—yet I must beg for your help. Will you help me, Athena?"

"Yes."

"Then listen—I wonder if I dare trust you"—sighing impatiently—"well, I suppose I must. That fool yonder, who might at least have shown some regard for decency in the manner of his death, has a wife and children. They must never know how he died—do you understand?"

"I think so," I murmured.

"Think so," echoed Philip; "surely you must know so, dear child! You wouldn't have a good

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woman and innocent children bear the disgrace of that man's suicide, when it can be so easily prevented?" He spoke with great gentleness, pity for those injured in every intonation of his sweet voice. He was so handsome in his white morning suit, strong, clever, determined; a contrast, indeed, to the dead man by the spring.

"You will aid me in keeping this secret, Athena? *Maman* must not know. It would agitate her terribly—perhaps might kill her. Promise me you will keep silence."

I gave my word.

His manner changed. A load seemed lifted from his shoulders. Taking a note-book from his pocket he wrote rapidly, and tearing out the leaf folded and gave it me. This, with his bunch of keys, I was to give Cray.

"Cray is in the kitchen," he explained, "making coffee for the men who are leaving on the early train. You will have to take his place, to do his work—I am so sorry, Athena!"

Sorry! The very idea of nice, humdrum coffee-making was a happiness. Different indeed from the nightmare horror surrounding me. I turned to go without a word. I wanted to run, in my anxiety to escape. Philip stopped me.

"One moment," he spoke hurriedly. "You should know what will happen. At breakfast I shall express surprise that Sturgis is absent. Cray, hurrying in, will bring news that his body has been found in the river. Drowned while taking an early bath. Cramp, it will be supposed. The body shall remain in the boat-house. I won't have it brought near you and *Maman*. Now run, dear child! For the sake of that poor wife be swift and secret."

The sun had risen. Its bright rays shone through the branches of the forest trees which topped the

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eastern wall. Skirting the house, I ran down the steps of the basement area into the kitchen, where I found Cray noiselessly preparing breakfast. He received my news and his master's orders as coolly as if such events were of daily occurrence in his life. Telling me what remained to be done, he vanished, like the shadow he had grown to be. America did not agree with the man, if one might judge by his dispirited appearance;—a strange man, Anthony Cray, but an excellent confidential servant.

I was in the kitchen when Claude brought the news I expected. Bursting in, his face ashen, his eyes starting from their sockets, and wringing his long hands, he exclaimed:

"Oh, for the Land's sake, Miss Dean, such a awful tragedy as has taken place!"

He sank into the nearest chair, the excited servants crowding close about him.

"Oh, mercy me! It's too awful! There sat the Boss eatin' and drinkin' his coffee as usual when he up and says, 'By the way, where's Sturgis?' says he! Oh, my Land"—poor Claude covered his face with his hands—"it's too horrid and blood-curdling for anythin'!"

The eager crowd surrounding him urged him on, crying:

"For goodness' sake, Claude, don't stop!"

"'Where's Sturgis?' says the Boss, ca'm, never suspectin' nothing." Claude, uncovering his face, looked around with eyebrows raised, giving an exaggerated imitation of Mr. Erranti's composed manner. "'Where's Sturgis?' says he"—the servants held their breath—"and with that in comes Anthony Cray"—rising so suddenly that his audience shrank back—"in comes Anthony Cray, and I will say Tony done it well, so quiet and decent—'May I speak

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with you, sir?' says he, lookin' at the Boss. 'Yes, yes; what is it?' says the Boss, kinder impatient, but you know his way"—the servants nodded violently —" 'I'd better see you alone, sir, I think,' says Cray, still very ca'm and respectful, you know his way"— a chorus of nods with cries of "*Do* go on!"

"Cray glances around the table at the other guests, kinder doubtful. 'Speak out, man!' says the Boss; 'is the house on fire?' 'Worse than that, sir,' says Cray; 'I wish 'twas only fire, but I'm afraid it's death!' 'My God!' says the Boss under his breath, in a kind of awful whisper, '*Mamong!*' —you know what he calls Madam. 'No, no, sir,' says Cray, mighty quick, 'it's Mr. Sturgis, sir; early swim, sir; cramp, sir. I think he's dead, sir,' and with that everybody round the festal board looked kinder queer and green, and we all trailed down to the dock as fast— Sure enough, 'twas him—dead —drown-dead! I wish I hadn't seen—it, I do," and again poor Claude hid his face with his long hands. "I have doubts if I ever forgit that sight! When they begun to examine the—the—corpse, I just lit out for home as fast as get out. Somehow I feel mighty sickish and—and—queer!"

A cup of strong black coffee, piping hot, that I hastened to give the poor fellow, revived his courage. The servants huddled together like frightened sheep. I was obliged to speak sharply to them, reminding them of their duties and telling them that Madam must not learn of the accident.

"Such a shock might kill her," I said. "You must control yourselves."

"Sure, it's Miss Dean as is right," said Norah, who had become my friend and ally. "If the Madam hears a whisper 'twon't be my fault. Them as has long tongues in their heads had best be care-

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ful"—glancing significantly at a talkative housemaid.

"If Madam should learn of this most unpleasant circumstance," drawled Claude, "I shall make it my business to find out who done the deed. And—I shall feel it my bounden, if painful dooty, to inform the Boss of what I know!" He stared severely around him, and left the kitchen with dignified tread.

But they all behaved well, poor things, and Madam was kept in ignorance. As Mr. Erranti had promised, everything was done at the boat-house. The necessary unpleasant formalities were gone through with there, and the Charlotte served to transport people to and from Droneton.

At noon that day I was again in the garden, under the birches by the pool. As I embroidered tall lilies on the dull, green silk of Madam's new curtain, I forced myself to glance now and then into the depths of the spring. Its clear waters bubbled up as fresh and limpid as if they had never borne the burden of that awful weed. Goldfish darted gayly hither and thither in its sun-illumined depths. In the branches rustling above me birds twittered in subdued, mid-day fashion. It was all so peaceful, while in the boat-house——

"Athena," said Madam, breaking in upon my disagreeable thoughts, "Athena, thou art very pale to-day! Yes, yes; I know I need not to be told that thou art always pale—to-day it is different; but yes, of a difference to be seen. Thou hast wearied thyself in that hot kitchen. Obey Philip, and do no more cooking. Except for the bread," she added, mindful of her own comfort, "that does thee no harm. A womanly occupation, the making of bread, *n'est-ce pas?* Thy arms and hands are very strong, yet they do not look so. They are beautiful, Athena; but that is not for you to remember, my

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child. 'Handsome is as handsome does'—have I said that right? 'It's better to be good than pretty,' 'All that glitters is not'—no, that's not it; 'Beauty is only skin deep!' They are untrue, these sayings; I don't believe them! *I* am pretty, and good also. Thou art beautiful—and as the angels!—though dull. (Dost suppose the angels are dull, *ma belle?* But they can play. I like the harp, but not too many harps—played all at once, as in Heaven.) Julie is handsome and she is—but no, Julie is bad. A devil. My mother used to say"—she stopped short, confused—"No, no,"—in a whisper—"I must not think of her! When I was young, Athena, the people used to say—for I was born and bred up in—no! no! no!!"—a look of terror in her bright eyes—"never mind where I was born, I did not say, did I, *très chère?* But no, of course not. I am old. I forget of what I talk. Look at the little lake, Athena! How lovely, with the sunbeams sparkling on the water! It is the Heart of the garden, *n'est-ce pas, ma bien-aimée?* A pure heart, like thine, with no black secret to hide! No horrid dead secret, to shoot, and bury, and—" Her voice rose high and shrill. I leaned forward and caught both her hands.

"My lilies, dear Madam! Don't they please you, that you refuse to watch them grow?" I laid my cheek against hers.

"I am ashamed!" she cried, gayly, forgetting her strange fancies. "In looking at the garden flowers I did forget thy silken lilies for a moment! Let me see them now."

By evening Highgrove Hall was empty save for its master, its mistress, and the servants. The visitors had left. Claude was wandering about the upper hall when I went to dinner.

"Say, Miss Dean," he began, in a mysterious whis-

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per, "just hold on a minute, will you? I want to tell you something."

"About the house, Claude?"

"Lord, no; we ain't thinkin' about houses and as how they're kep these days—my Landy, no! It's about the Boss. What do you suppose them gentlemen friends of his had the cheek to say this morning, when they heard of that poor creature's tragical demise?"

"What, pray?"

"Said as he done it himself, 'cause the Boss had cleaned him out last night! Case of sue-side, they said!"—and Claude snorted with scorn.

I was silent, not knowing what to say.

"Had the cheek to say the Boss had roped in his little all! Said he tempted him to play when the corpse had swore off to please his wife! Said the Boss meant mischeef last night—that the corpse didn't want to play. Tornted him into it—askin' for his revenge; and so on, an' so forth!"

"How dreadful!" I exclaimed, horrified by Claude's story.

"Yes, sir-ree! But they had to take it all back. Had to eat humble pie, chunks of it"—and Claude giggled nervously—"and it's the pie as gives me dispepsy worst of all!" Then, severely and mournfully, "I should think they'd be ashamed; but Lord, them fellers don't know the first meaning of the word. Well, to perceed—when that corpse's pockets come to be investigated, over five hundred was found in them!"

"Five hundred—dollars, Claude?" I was aghast.

"Yes, ma'am, five—hundred—dollars! And some change; but that ain't worth mentioning, of course. So you see he wasn't to say busted clean through! And them men sung small, I can tell you! I thought you'd be interested to hear, Miss Dean, for you do

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love fair play. A baby could see that. And the Boss he tore up the I. O. U.'s he had from the dead, and behaved honorable all round. He's a kind man, Mr. Erranti—a very kind man. Has his faults, like the rest of us—I know I got plenty, but I ain't seen yours yet, Miss Dean. Yes, he's a kind man. Good to his aged mother, and generous to all. There's nothin' mean about him, I guess."

"Claude."

"Yes, Miss Dean."

"Is Mrs. Sturgis poor, do you know?"

"Lord, no, Miss Dean! An only child, they say, and her parents just rollin' in their wealth!"

"I'm very glad," I said, thoughtfully.

"So'm I," said Claude; "and I'm mighty glad, too, that he had a pocketful of money—him, the corpse, I mean. If he hadn't—well, things would have maybe looked ugly for the Boss. He *is* fond of playing for money, and he does most generally win! But that ain't his fault—he's smarter than most, that's all. But it's time I gonged for dinner," and Claude ran lightly downstairs.

Mr. Erranti had something taken to the library for him, and sent polite messages begging me to excuse his absence. He was very busy, Claude said. But when I left Madam's room that night I found him waiting for me in the hall. And I was not glad to see him.

"Dear child," he said, very gently, taking my hand as he spoke, "do you think you can sleep after the sad adventure of this morning, or shall I mix you a sleeping-draught?"

I tried to draw my hand away, but pretending not to notice my effort he only held it the closer. Not choosing to have a scene at the foot of the great staircase I let him have his way, but declined the sleeping-draught.

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"Strong little hand," he said, looking deep into my eyes, "strong little hand! Swift to succor those in peril, swift to avenge an insult!"—and lifting it to his lips kissed it before releasing me. "Are you sorry, now, that you struck him, Athena?"

"No."

Philip laughed. And I did not like his laugh. It was fatuous with proprietary pride.

"Good-night," I said, coldly, and bowing slightly turned to the staircase.

"One moment, Athena! Let me tell you that our plan worked smoothly. Thanks to your sweet helpfulness Mrs. Sturgis will never know the truth."

"I am glad she is not poor, Mr. Erranti. Good-night."

"No, not poor, Athena. Don't go just yet. How did you discover that?"

"Claude told me."

"Indeed!" Mr. Erranti frowned slightly. "Did he tell you of the money I stupidly overlooked?"

"Yes. I did not know people ever carried so much about with them."

"They do when they want to play on the sly"—he smiled grimly. "Cheques and I. O. U.'s are tell-tales—not so, dollar-bills!"

I stood still, thinking, then said, slowly, "Weak people who do what he did usually leave letters saying why they did it, don't they?"

"Usually."

"It is fortunate he did not."

"Very fortunate."

I looked earnestly at Philip. His eyes were bent upon the rug at our feet, his face expressionless, yet I knew as certainly as if he had told me that there had been letters—and that these letters had been destroyed.

I turned and ascended the staircase, forcing my-

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self to walk slowly. I wished to run. I forced myself to bow an acknowledgment to his "Sleep well, sweet child!" but I drew a long sigh of relief when I reached my room, and shot the many bolts of its door into place.

It had been a trying day, and this interview with Philip was the last straw. My mind was tired out. I sat down by my open window to rest, hoping the cool night air might enable me to regain my accustomed serenity before I tried to sleep. I wished to forget, for the time, the events of the day, to cease thinking of its horrors—and of Mr. Erranti. But this last seemed impossible. In spite of reminding myself that I was at Highgrove Hall to earn my living, and not for the purpose of enjoying the society of its owners; in spite of telling myself that because Mr. Erranti's manners offended me, there was no need for me to go over and over what he had said, how he had looked and acted; still I sat by my window and thought of him. I wondered about his father—an Italian adventurer, probably. Madam was a gentlewoman, but her son was not quite a gentleman. He had odd ways—Italian ways?—loved to bask in the sun, bareheaded. Would his complexion be white, or olive, were it free from tan? He was tanned so evenly, a clear, pale brown, on face, throat, and hands. I thought of his sporting tastes, his passion for gambling;—then, my mind reverting suddenly to what I had found in the pool, I hurried to my prayers, and to bed.

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XIV

"I wish a kindly Providence had seen fit to endow me with a humdrum, jog-trot nature—like Dick Thorpe's, for instance, instead of giving me the sensitive organization I now possess."

Randal St. John was the speaker. He lounged comfortably in his favorite place, on the edge of the veranda at my feet, and, as usual, was smoking a cigarette.

"Mine is a complex nature," he continued, "and, I must say, I find it hard to get on with."

I remained silent.

"You are thinking that other people find me hard to get on with, Miss Dean. You never do me justice!"

"Perhaps not," I acquiesced, composedly.

"I wish"—he spoke with sudden energy—"I were like Dick. He always knows what he wants, and goes for it, saving your presence, tooth and nail! Now I"—becoming reflective—"know what I want in the big, but I'm continually led off in pursuit of the little. I'm like a lovely butterfly, Miss Dean, who sees in the distance an enormous rose, filled to the brim with honey. The charming creature—I allude to the insect, of course!—goes for the rose as fast as it can skip; but right and left it sees smaller, but equally fetching flowers, which lure it from the straight and narrow path along which it is clambering. That butterfly is your devoted admirer here present, and he's what I call in a hole! What do you say?"

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I had nothing to say, for my mind was troubled by my own concerns. Randal's never interested me. Several days had passed since the death of Mr. Sturgis. Everything was peaceful and serene at the Hall, which was well, as Madam's birthday was to be celebrated on the morrow. What troubled me that lovely Friday morning was that I had nothing to offer Madam as birthday gift. The fête day, Saturday, was that on which my salary fell due. My first month at Highgrove Hall was over.

I had no money in my purse with which to purchase a trifle for my kind mistress. I could not demand my pay at peep of dawn, and run to Droneton to buy one! Randal complained of being "in a hole!" I was in a dilemma! I sighed. Randal thought I paid tribute to his sad reflections.

"It's a comfort to know I've got your sympathy, at any rate," he said, echoing my sigh. "It's so rare I appreciate it doubly when you do honor me with a little. I'm awfully fond of you, Miss Dean."

Randal talked nonsense constantly.

"Yes," stretching his legs out still more comfortably, "I'm much to be pitied. My nature demands variety in life, and I'm doomed to be a clergyman, to grow insipid and solemn. Don't say what you wish to, please, for there isn't a particle of the 'Onward, Christian Soldier' in my make-up. I know you're awfully religious, though you don't talk about it. I dare say I shock you. Quite right—it suits your style. Not mine, by a long shot. My nature demands variety. I like the mazy dance, a game of cards, the theatre, the race-course, etc. And I like quiet chats with a serene-eyed goddess!"

This last meant he liked the freedom of Highgrove—and its veranda. It was very pleasant. The glimpses of the river, with its distant background of blue hills, were charming. Between the pillars that

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supported the veranda roof, trellises of wrought iron, the width of a ladder, were massed with vines, turning the veranda into a bower of green.

"When I become a serious divine"—Randal loved to discourse about himself—"I may never again enjoy a good ballet! As for holding converse with the gentle denizens of the green-room—no, no, a descent into hell! As for playing cards for money—gambling is such a nasty word—angels and ministers of grace defend us! Not that I do play any more—given it up, Miss Dean."

"How long since?" I asked, remembering he had joined the game I had watched begin in the hall a few nights since.

"Not for ages, Miss Dean. I swore a solemn swear to the old gentleman that I wouldn't, never-no-more! I wear this giddy ring" — indicating Nemesis — "as a reminder. Should I break my promise—a thing *I* couldn't do, Miss Dean"—looking earnestly at me with innocent, blue eyes—"I lose Nemesis. Looks severe enough to keep a fellow straight, doesn't she?"—making the jewel flash in the sunshine. "To tell the truth, I'm half afraid of her! The Goddess of Vengeance! I'll bet you were the image of her when you clipped poor Sturgis over the head, and sent him and Dodd flying into space! There, you needn't open your big eyes so wide—Von Schlange told me, curly haired chap—little black-poodle man. Said you couldn't have laid Sturgis out better if you'd been in training for a boxing match! Wish I'd seen it." He was silent a moment, then said, "You're a very strange girl, Miss Dean. I can't make you out."

"Is there any reason that you should?" I asked, not unnaturally; but he went on as though I had not spoken.

"You're so wise about some things and so—well.

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so simple about others. You like to work! To cook! To sew! Yet, about languages, you're a walking Tower of Babel! Come"—coaxingly—"tell me, Miss Dean—are you awfully deep, or only——"

"Only shallow," I said, finishing his sentence for him.

Randal smiled very broadly. Much of the inner lining of his upper lip came into view. A disagreeable curiosity was in his eyes. There came the noise of wheels on the veranda, and Madam appeared, pushed by Julie, whose face darkened at sight of us.

"*Eh bien, mes enfants!*" cried the old lady, as she approached. "But no, no French at present! This *Vaurien* does not understand!"

"When you swear at me in French, I do," said Randal, rising with languid grace and going to Madam's side. "What was the little cuss-word you used just now? Something very naughty-bad?"

Madam laughed, in high good humor. Her pretty brown eyes sparkled, her cheeks wore the pink of a half-faded rose. A handsome old lady was Madam, when well and gay—as on that summer morning long ago.

"To-morrow is my birthday, Randal"—she spoke with childish glee—"and all the world will do my bidding! I have asked much of Philip—and to all he said yes, yes, yes!" She clapped her hands.

"Of course," said Randal, "who wouldn't? I always obey you because I'm so awfully fond of you, dear Madam!" smiling sweetly as he spoke.

"Go away, Athena, for a moment. I would speak alone with Randal."

"You see," said Randal, as I turned to obey, "I have cut you out, Miss Dean!"

I walked to the end of the veranda. Something was coming up the avenue—a large furniture van.

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I hurried back to Madam; the sound of wheels on the avenue always alarmed her. To my surprise she was still gay.

"What is coming, *ma belle?* A carriage with boxes or a truck with furniture?" She broke into a little mischievous laugh at the surprise in my face. "You, too, must promise, like Randal here, to do as I wish to-morrow. Will you, my Athena?"

"With all my heart, dear Madame," I said quickly, but rather sadly; "if only I had something besides my obedience to offer!"

She stretched out both hands to me, and, drawing me to her, kissed me fondly.

"Dear child," she murmured, "dear, lovely child! Thou hast already given me much! Thy sweet, ungrudging service, thy gentle companionship. I want nothing more. Only remain ever with me, Athena."

She spoke in French. Randal watched us curiously. Madam, releasing me, saw his expression.

"Philip says, Randal, that he feels as if Athena were some lovely young niece, or cousin, come to brighten our quiet home. He thinks we should do our best to make her happy and contented." Folding her hands in her lap she leaned back, with a childish air of importance.

"Erranti is quite right," murmured Randal, with eyes cast down. "Oh, very right indeed."

"Athena, go with Julie to my room, and remember, you have promised obedience! No, no, the other way"—I had turned toward the front of the house—"through the door which leads into my room past Julie's from the veranda. Randal"—smiling graciously—"will take charge of me; won't you, Randal?"

"Gladly," was the ready answer; but Mr. St. John looked seriously alarmed as he watched us depart.

In Madam's room a strange woman was opening

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two large paper boxes and spreading their contents upon the bed.

"Here is Mademoiselle," announced Julie, as I entered; then, turning to me, "The person sent to try on the new evening gown, Mademoiselle."

I bowed, and asked an explanation. Julie crossly snapped out a few ill-humored words about Madame's "*jour de fête*," "*toilette extraordinaire!*" "*sortie du bal*," until I stopped her, none the wiser, but not caring to hear more.

"This is the dress ordered," said the woman, taking up a mass of exquisite white brocade and holding it for me to admire.

It was, indeed, very beautiful, splendid enough for a princess, far too magnificent for me. Through the fabric ran a wonderful pattern of lilies, each flower delicately outlined by a thread of silver that, catching the light, added to the shimmer of the stuff. The silk was so soft, a fold could be gathered and crushed into a ball without wrinkling, yet so rich it could stand alone. The gown was fashioned simply, as the material required. A fall of rich lace trimmed the low corsage and served as an apology for sleeves. Julie's ill-humor melted away as she dressed me. Fine clothes to her were rapture. "Ah, heaven!" she cried, in ecstasy, "but that is beautiful!"

I stood before one of Madam's long mirrors, and looked at myself earnestly. I had never worn a ball gown, and saw myself for the first time with arms and shoulders bare. I thought of my mother, and my eyes filled with a sudden rush of tears. Had she lived what might not this gay attire have meant to me—a happy home, my mother's tender pride—while now! I turned from the mirror, sick at heart. What to me was the costly finery worn to gratify the whim of a kind but strange old lady?

"Mademoiselle is not pleased?" broke in the anx-

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ious voice of the dressmaker. "But the fit is perfect! Perhaps the brocade does not suit."

"Yes," said Julie, authoritatively, "the fit is perfect. I saw myself to the measurements sent. The material suits Mademoiselle *à merveille!*"

"Monsieur Erranti," went on the other Frenchwoman, "was indeed particular. The pattern must be of lilies, he would have no other. And no time given us—a few days only! To speak truth, we were allowed to set our own price—one must pay well to be served so quickly. I hope Mademoiselle is pleased——"

"A great success," I said, sorry for the woman's distress.

"One moment," she cried, beaming with satisfaction, "the evening wrap—behold it!" And she slipped over my shoulders a mantle of the same brocade, fringed with silver.

This, too, I praised, reflecting that if I was uncomfortable there was no reason others should be. The woman then measured me, saying she would hope for further orders. I did not tell her that this must never be, but went at once in search of Madam, who had, Julie said, mounted to the second story. Owing to her rheumatism Madam never went upstairs, and I wondered what could have taken her there. I found her seated on a divan in the upper hall, Randal lounging beside her. Scattered about the floor was a quantity of twine and paper, showing that unpacking had been going on. From behind the closed door of the Blue Room came the sound as of many people at work, and against the opposite wall was pushed the furniture of that room. Madam watched my evident surprise with pleasure, Randal with a curiosity he strove vainly to hide.

"*Eh bien, très chère,*" cried Madam; "you find

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us busy, yes? We are making changes, great changes, in our new home—and all for you, *mignonne!* Sit down beside me"—patting the divan with her poor, swollen hand—"and Randal and I will tell you what is doing to please you. Yes, yes, I am an old woman, 'tis true, but I have my way once a year!" She laughed like a child. "See, then," pointing to the door of the Blue Room, "that room has on one side the corridor leading to the third-story stairs, on the other Philip's dressing-room, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Yes, Madam."

"Then the very room for you! Hush, do not interrupt me, it is well arranged. Philip moves into his dressing-room—a well-sized room, truly—giving up his own room to his guests. He will be on one side of you, the corridor on the other, the noisy men can have the third story to themselves, which is quite what should be."

I remained silent, being ever slow of speech. "I have been anxious," Madam went on, in low, confidential tones, "but have said nothing"—nodding her head and looking very wise—" till I could talk the matter over with Philip. We decided you were too young to be left alone in that out-of-the-way third story."

"Dear me, yes," murmured Randal, "much too young—and too handsome! Erranti will make a lovely chaperon——"

Madam stared at him, puzzled. "I am Miss Dean's chaperon," she said, severely; "she needs no other."

"Dear me, no," Randal made answer, "of course not!"

"You see, Athena," said the old lady, giving up the effort to understand Mr. St. John, "if you should feel alarmed in the night you can tap three

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times on the big mirror that shuts off your room from Philip's—you remember there was a door of communication, *chérie?* Shut now, forever, tight and fast, by a great mirror! But Philip would hear the tapping, and *vite!*—out into the hall he would run, his revolver ready! He shoots well, poor Philip. I saw him shoot the devil once——"

"Madam, dear Madam," I cried, interrupting her, for I not only feared the effect of this sad fancy upon her nerves, but wished to guard her from Randal's cruel curiosity, "how thoughtful you are for me! Please—why is the Blue Room furniture out here?"

Her look of painful excitement vanished, Randal looked disappointed.

"Why, *ma chère?*" She spoke gleefully. "Because the room is being done over—to please me! Philip has chosen everything; but, since his taste is sometimes odd I have advised him. Your room will be perfect. I am here now, with young Randal, to view the effect."

"Yes, oh, yes, to view the—effect!" echoed Randal, gazing with an air of profound abstraction at the tips of his highly polished shoes.

The door of the Blue Room was now cautiously opened on the merest crack, and a man's head thrust through the aperture. At sight of Madam the body followed, and the foreman stood before us. His manner of closing the door behind him, as if his small secret were a wild beast bent on escape, so tickled Randal that he laughed aloud. Owing to the intense interest of the moment his mirth passed unnoticed.

"We've done all we can, ma'am," said the upholsterer to Madam, in a deferential whisper, "only the bric-à-brac remains to be set round. Mr. Erranti 'll see to that, I guess."

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"No, no," cried Madam, imperiously, "finish the room yourself."

"We've done about all we can, ma'am,"—coughing gently behind his hand. "I should like to get back to N'York by an early train, if possible. We're driven with orders just now."

"That's nothing to me," said Madam, sharply. "I suppose you are paid to attend to this."

"Oh, yes, ma'am, I've no complaint to make, I'm sure. We had a real scramble to get the things, Mr. Erranti being so set on a certain pattern; but he gave us *carte blanche*"—then, looking at me—"Perhaps this is the young lady for whom the room's being altered? I hope, miss—ma'am——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Madam, "it's done to please me! My birthday gift!"

"Oh, indeed," stammered the foreman, confused by Madam's irate manner. "I understood it was for a young—that is—for a—a very young lady."

Madam stared disapprovingly, and began to think aloud.

"The man's a fool!" she grumbled. "A fool returns to his folly as a dog to—to what he's thrown up! He don't understand his business. I know the room is badly done—I'll look at it before he runs away. A sly rogue, I'll be bound!"

Affecting a gracious manner, Madam begged the unhappy foreman to accompany her on a tour of inspection, commanded Randal to lift her into her chair, and vanished, with her victim, into the Blue Room.

"Please follow her, Mr. St. John," I said, "she wished to have you with her. I am the only one who is not to see it to-day."

"I'd rather stay with you," was the plaintive answer.

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I crossed to the long railing which edged the gulf between the two branches of the staircase, leaned on its broad top, and stared down into the cool hall below. I was disturbed, ill at ease. Why, I could not quite understand. My mind works slowly. Presently Randal joined me.

"If a chap were shut out of Paradise with you," he said, peevishly, "he'd never need to complain of hot weather! If Dives had caught a glimpse of you he'd have preferred your icy society to the drop of water he wanted old Thing-um-bob to fetch him! I never saw such a hard-hearted lovely girl! Never, no, never!"

He, too, rested his elbows on the railing, and looked down.

"Fortune with her wheel downstairs"—he spoke less peevishly—"Venus on guard over yonder"—nodding toward the statue in the niche—"meaning, I suppose, that the Goddess of Love is Queen up here!"

I was silent.

"If I had been Paris," he continued, "I'd have bestowed that historic apple upon—Athena!"

"Then you don't care for a beautiful wife?"

"That's so, Miss—Athena! I forgot they'd each made a bid for that apple. Curious what a mischievous fruit the apple has always been, from Eve's time down!"

"Not now," I said, earnestly. "It's a very healthy fruit. So many nice dishes, desserts especially, can be made with apples."

He burst into wild laughter, exclaiming, when his strange mirth was over:

"You'll be the death of me some day! I never saw anyone to beat you! But, as you just reminded me, Paris got a wife for that apple—such a wife! I wonder the offer tempted him!"

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"His price," I said. I thought of Lord Ebbrides —and the doll.

"I'd give a great deal to know yours!" cried Randal. He was in earnest.

"Nemesis?" I said, glancing at the emerald.

"No"—very slowly—"no, I think not. To confess the truth, I have a very strange feeling about this ring—a creepy feeling. However"—laughing rather affectedly—"I'm determined that nothing but death shall part us. Death—or the pawnbroker! As for your price, Miss Dean, I shall learn it simply by waiting."

I smiled, if a little sadly. I wished to be civil, but his nonsense wearied me.

"Instead of being shallow—as you say you are—you are very deep," he continued. "You play your cards with consummate skill."

There was, I fancied, a sneer lurking in the sweet tones of his carefully modulated voice. Could he imagine that I liked the favors heaped upon me, I wondered. Did he believe me capable of truckling to Madam Erranti for the sake of obtaining silken raiment and refurbished rooms? Impossible, I decided, but I sighed. Such thoughts were unpleasant.

"Don't sigh," said Randal; "you have, for once, your sister goddess on your side." He pointed toward the Venus. I looked with cold dislike at her sensual face. How might anyone admire her? "She's a beauty, Miss Athena; but she's not a patch on you! Come"—coaxingly—"what did you do to gain her good-will? Offer her a pair of turtle doves, or a basket of flowers?"

"In the company of three such powers you should tremble," I said, lightly.

"Three?" Randal looked at me searchingly. "Oh, you count in Fortune. Why, when we can't

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see her from here? I'd like to have her with me for once. I do have the most beastly luck! Lose straight along. And Erranti, who doesn't need money—he's rich as a Jew—always wins. He needn't tremble, as you call it, in presence of the three divinities. Fortune is for him; Venus—loves gold. As for the third"—he smiled into my eyes—"what about her, Athena?"

I did not smile back, but looked at him gravely. He was indeed ignorant.

"The gods themselves cannot buy Nemesis, the Avenger."

"By Jove! I forgot her," he cried, his eyes upon the ring. "I was thinking of you."

"She will not forget," I said, slowly, "and you will do well to—remember."

The door of the Blue Room opened, and Madam's chair whirled into the hall. She was turning its wheels herself with a strength born of anger.

"*Vite*, Athena!" she cried. "Come to me, help me away! Ah, the disappointment! It cannot be changed—too late! It is in Philip's blood, this love of rich stuffs, I cannot quell it—born in him! 'Let all be simple,' I said, 'and white, for a young girl,' thinking of muslin only. White it is, but of the richest silk, the costliest lace—and lilies everywhere! Philip is mad! No, no"—as I would have entered the room—"not till to-morrow. Philip would be displeased—as you are now, who love simple things, as a young girl should."

She gave the wheels another violent push. Her hands shook, her eyes were full of tears. The chair turned the wrong way, and, like some vicious creature, rolled swiftly to the staircase. There was an instant of suspense, then—I had distanced it in its race and stopped its headlong rush downward.

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Randal, realizing the danger a second too late to catch the chair, ran forward to help me.

Madam clung to me, moaning, her feeble nerves upset by the near approach to disaster.

"It was death," she muttered, "death, death, death!"

"Wine," I said to Randal, who was as white as Madam. He brought it quickly, and tried to soothe her by recurring to her remarks about her son. This was unfortunate, frightening anew the poor old lady.

"Send him away," she whimpered. "He says I talked too much, and of Philip, of Philip's blood. Send him away, Athena." He went, gladly.

Next the upholsterer appeared. Not having seen the almost accident, he thought Madam's agitation due to disappointment, and tip-toed about uneasily, anxious to be off yet not daring to go. Something had to be done, and quickly. Madam was making herself ill.

"I shall see the Blue Room for myself," I announced, abruptly. "Will you come with me, Madam, or remain here?"

Madam sat upright, stopped moaning, and brushed away her tears, that she might see clearly.

"Philip will be angry. *Mon Dieu*, he will be furious!"

"What matter?" I spoke placidly. "The room is for me, *n'est-ce pas?*"

Madam laughed. Her eyes, tear-stained, began to sparkle with mischief. She clapped her hands.

"A secret from Philip!" she cried. "And to-morrow thou shalt affect surprise!—wonder!—pleasure! Come quickly, *chérie*, I cannot wait for thy opinion."

The Blue Room was no longer blue, but white and gold. Windows, bed, toilet-table, were draped alike

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with rich white silk trimmed with heavy lace. Through the silk ran a pattern of white lilies, while lilies of gold looped the draperies into place. There were white rugs on the inlaid floor, white cushions in the basket-chairs; on the walls enormous mirrors, framed in dull gold. The effect was handsome, if odd.

"How does it please thee, Athena?" said Madam. "Too elaborate, rich, heavy—for a young girl, yes?"

"It is beautiful," I said; then, to the unhappy foreman, "You deserve credit, sir, for your swiftness and skill."

The idea of living behind such a mass of drapery made me feel faint. I detested every kind of suffocating luxury. Yet, how could I be ungracious when everyone meant to be kind! Since I must submit to being smothered I determined to do so with a good grace, and I admired everything. Madam and the upholsterer were pleased. The latter, indeed, became garrulous, describing his difficulties until cut short by Madam.

"It is done," she cried, impatiently, "so why talk about it? I am pleased that this young lady is pleased, and Philip will be pleased because—Athena, I am getting mixed up in my head! And it's your fault"—turning upon the astonished foreman. "You worry me to death! Go away, do! Have luncheon and return to your shop, good man, only go, go, go!"

He obeyed, thankfully.

"I see that sly cat, Ellen, in the hall, a sneaking creature!" Madam went on. "Call her to stay with me, and go thyself, dear angel, for Julie. She may now see thy room. Go, Athena, else she will be spiteful all day—the French devil! I detest her, but go!"

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I met Claude in the lower hall coming for orders about luncheon. He opened the door into Madam's private corridor for me. This corridor ended on one side in a glass door, like that in Madam's room, which opened on the veranda. It now stood wide, and I looked through. Beneath a vine-covered trellis stood two people, Julie and Randal. I hesitated before calling her, and Randal, putting his hand under her firm chin, tilted her face upward and kissed her.

Involuntarily I drew back into the main hall, and Claude closed the door of the corridor noiselessly.

"What was you wishing, Miss Dean?" He spoke in subdued tones.

I told him.

"Then you just go upstairs again, Miss Dean, and I'll deliver your message. Don't you mind about what you just seen—Land, they're always goin' on like that! Julie, she's French, so I s'pose she don't know no better, poor thing, and as for that R. St. J. —that embri-o D.D.—which, I'm told, stands for minister—he's no more nor less than a bad egg!"

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XV

It was Madam's birthday, and seven o'clock in the morning; a lovely day, with sunshine and a soft little breeze from the southwest. I stood by my window enjoying the beautiful view, and regretting that it was my last morning in my little sky-parlor. The new room was at the back of the house, its eastern windows overhung by the knoll, its one north window commanding a view of Beverley Towers only. I said to myself that doubtless Mr. Erranti was as much disturbed by the change as I. In spite of his flowery speeches and compliments, he probably considered me a very great nuisance. Did he grudge the affection Madam showed for me? I looked ruefully at my lace-trimmed muslin—Madam had commanded me to be fine, and idle, on her birthday—and wished she were less oddly kind.

The sweet tones of the gong, languidly tapped by Claude, here put an end to my reflections. Philip met me in the dining-room. I looked at him a little wistfully. Was he vexed because of the room? He answered the look with a kind smile, and said, "You have been with us a month to-day, Miss Dean. I dare hope the first month of many years to come."

I thanked him for his wish. I did not share it.

"I bring you a rose, one of your near relations." He placed a half-open tea-rose—the dew still upon its lovely petals—by my plate.

I admired its beauty, thanked him again, and laid the flower down.

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"I hoped you might wear it." He looked disappointed.

"Have a pin?" drawled Claude, taking a pin-cushion, a red silk heart, from his breast-pocket.

Accepting the pin, I fastened the rose in my gown.

"Thank you," murmured Philip. "I wish it were a white moss-rose; it would suit you best. I am fond of roses. Once they were my favorite flowers—but not now."

For politeness' sake I inquired his present preference.

"Lilies—white lilies! When I look at you, Miss Dean, I always think of lilies. I'm sure you were a lily in a previous state of existence. A pure white garden-lily. There is nothing lovelier," and he looked affectionately across the table at me.

Claude slipped swiftly into his pantry, either feeling *de trop* or on the verge of one of his giggling fits. If I had not been angry I might have shared his feelings. What did Mr. Erranti mean by talking such arrant nonsense to his mother's companion?

"I have displeased you, Athena." He spoke earnestly, but there was a gleam of amusement in his brilliant eyes. "I won't offend you again—by thinking aloud."

Erect and haughty at the head of the table I sat silent, ignoring both speech and man. Something in his manner grated upon me far more than foolish compliments warranted. These, born of his Italian blood, meant nothing; but his way of looking at me— In vain I strove to understand my resentment, but it remained. I rose from the table, thankful the meal was over.

"Come into the library and let me make peace with you, Athena," said Philip, holding out his hand. "I can't be happy when you are displeased."

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Because of Madam I kept silence, and so grew the more angry.

"Even if you are vexed, Athena, you haughty child"—laying his slender brown hand upon my arm —"you won't refuse to let me discharge my debt toward you, surely!"

There lurked amusement in the would-be humble tones; his touch was a caress. My flowing sleeve left my arm bare, and the remembrance of Madam vanished when her son forgot himself. I looked at him as I felt. I did not speak. There was no need.

"I beg your pardon," he said, and he released me, as angry as I.

A long silence followed, which was at last broken by Philip. He again asked me into the library, but his voice was coldly business-like. I went without a word, satisfied by his change of manner, and took the chair he offered me beside his desk. When he drew out his check-book I spoke, begging him to make the check out payable to Mrs. Cornelia de Rohan Spuyten—forty dollars—and asked for the remainder in ready money. He nodded stiffly, wrote the check, and, taking a thick roll of bills from his pocket, selected one, laid it on the slip of paper, and pushed it toward me. Then I realized, as I coolly picked up the money, that I had dreaded the payment of my salary! Anger had chased away such foolish sensitiveness, fortunately.

Philip watched me with an air of sullen gloom, until, remembering my manners, I thanked him, when his expression changed to one of great kindness.

"My dear," he said, leaning across his desk, "you make me feel ashamed! You are wretchedly underpaid for your really inestimable services. No, don't speak until I have confessed. Do you know" —dropping into the softest whisper—"I haven't the

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faintest idea what you ought to receive! Have you?"

I shook my head. "No," I said, "I know nothing about such positions as mine, only I am sure you give me more than I have really earned, Mr. Erranti."

"Nonsense, arrant nonsense, Athena! I don't know how we managed to live at all before you came. I wanted a housekeeper, but when *maman* asked for a companion, I thought it but one of her momentary whims. I told Julie to attend to the matter, and gave it no further thought till coming home I found—you! I wonder your friends and relations didn't make better arrangements for you!"

"My few friends," I said, sadly, "are simple folk, as ignorant of money matters as I. I have no near relations, only one cousin, not an agreeable person. She, also, dislikes me."

"Then you are quite alone in the world?" Philip's voice sounded as if he hoped I might be. I looked at him in astonishment, but his handsome face was mask-like, expressing nothing.

"Quite alone," I said.

"Well, you shall have all the money you want, at any rate. God knows I don't lack that, if other good things are denied me! Here, child"—and my strange employer tossed the fat roll of bills into my lap—"put it in your pocket, and when you want more come to me. I ask no greater happiness than to be your banker—the more you ask at my hands the better pleased I shall be, if only you will be—kind, Athena!"

I was at my wits' end. Mechanically I replaced the money on the desk. Madam had said that Philip was always kind, but sometimes—odd! Did odd mean daft? Had he, as the Scotch say, a bee in his bonnet? His behavior pointed that way. Or,

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since Madam had said, that he looked upon me as a niece, did he wish me to understand that I was now formally adopted into the family? I was silent for some time after his remarkable speech. He did not disturb my thoughts, but watched me closely. I raised my eyes and met his steady gaze. He smiled faintly.

"Weighing me in the balance, Athena? May I not be found wanting!"

His voice was very sweet, but I did not want him for an uncle. I did not quite like him. Did he know, I wondered, that he treated me too familiarly?

"Mr. Erranti."

"Yes, dear child."

"May I ask you not to call me——"

"No, no, Athena, don't ask me that! Please don't look stern any more! There"—putting the money back in his pocket—"if you don't want it now, come for it when you do. If money doesn't please you—I thought all women were spendthrifts—perhaps something else may. This, for instance."

He took from a drawer in his desk a stiletto, long, sharp, terrible, and laid it before me. "Look at the emerald in the hilt, Athena. A beautiful one, in spite of its nicked corner. Shall I have it taken out and set in some other way? It is yours, my child, to do with as you please—only let me use my mother's pet name for you."

Madam had kept my secret, since he thought me Augusta Dean! I sighed. What a trying pair they were, mother and son, with their rich gifts and strange whims. Then, examining the emerald, I forgot them both, it was so like one my mother had worn as a brooch. Not only the same size, shape, and color, but nicked in the same way. Slipping my finger over its smooth surface, touching its

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one roughened corner, I was again a little child, playing with my mother's well-remembered gem.

"You will keep it," murmured a sweet voice at my elbow, "and grant me the favor I beg?"

As I returned to the present, with a little shiver of discomfort, someone knocked.

"Come in!" cried Philip, sharply, angry at the interruption, and Julie entered.

She had opened her lips to speak when her eyes fell upon the deadly bauble in my hand, and the words died away unspoken. A look of terror crept into her eyes, her color faded. She shrank back as if to leave the room, but her master stopped her.

"What is it, Julie? You surely did not disturb me for nothing?"

I glanced quickly at him, for there was cruel amusement in his voice, and his smile expressed cruel enjoyment of her fear. She made another effort to speak, and again failed. I was sorry for her.

"See, Julie," I said, holding up the stiletto, "this emerald is exactly like the one in my mother's favorite brooch—you remember? The one set in diamonds—she wore it constantly! It had a notch in one corner, you have not forgotten, I am sure, and, strangely enough, this one has, too. Curious, *n'est-ce pas*, Julie?"

I had done my best. Rarely did I string so many words together. Julie tried to collect herself.

"Madame Derohan's brooch?" she faltered, "Madame Derohan's brooch?"—then grew paler than before.

"You must be ill—or crazy!" cried Philip, sternly, and pushed her from the room, bidding her ask Claude for a glass of wine. Then, resuming his former place, he leaned both arms on his desk and looked questioningly at me. "And now," he said, his voice silky, but an oddly fierce expression in his

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eyes, "may I understand what this means? What does Julie know of your mother—or her brooches? Why did she speak of Madame de Rohan? Why are you handing over your few pennies to a Mrs. *de Rohan* Spuyten? What is this mystery? Or am I to be denied your confidence as—as—your friendship?"

At last we were in sympathy. I, too, detested mysteries, and could well understand his feelings. I made haste to clear up this coil by telling him of Mrs. Spuyten's loan, and of her changing my name.

"She is very snobbish," I said, "and I owe her money—*voilà tout!*"

"And Julie—and the brooch?"

"Julie was my mother's maid; so, of course, she knew her jewels."

"Your name, then, is—?" Philip leaned forward, his eyes a-light, his voice eager.

"Athena Derohan," I said, smiling a little at his eagerness, "and now you know all."

I would have risen, but he motioned me to remain seated.

"One moment," he urged, "just one moment! This is so very surprising."

He went to the window and stared out, absorbed in thought, apparently.

Why what I had just told him proved so very interesting I failed to understand. I turned my attention to the great emerald in the dagger's hilt, and fell to recalling the days when its double had flashed at my mother's throat, until I suddenly remembered this one had been given me, on a condition! I looked at the graceful figure in the window with a sensation of actual dislike. How wearisome the man was! I did not want his money, his weapons, or his jewels. I wanted to be allowed to attend to my work in peace, to jog along soberly in accordance

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with my nature. I have been called obstinate. I made another effort to gain my own way.

"Mr. Erranti."

"Yes, child."

He remained looking out of the window, his back toward me, as if unable to give me his entire attention; but I continued:

"Mr. Erranti, since it pleases your mother to keep my name a secret, I think it might better remain one. She has little to amuse her."

"Your will is my law, Athena."

I looked at him in despair. Another foolish speech!

"It is kind of you to say so, Mr. Erranti. I need not hesitate, then, to ask this favor——"

"Name it!"—his voice was vibrant with pleasure, his eyes shone, he left the window.

"Please call me Miss Dean in future."

He sat down again by his desk.

"Athena," he said, quietly, and as if he weighed each word before speaking, "Athena, a belief so sweet has arisen in my mind I hardly dare yield to it, for what if I should be disappointed! Athena, my dear child, are you the daughter of Charles Derohan?"

"Yes," I said, wondering what was coming.

"Of the Charles Derohan who died—in May?"

"Yes."

"Athena"—holding out both hands to me—"your father was my dearest friend — I loved him." Philip's voice shook, his eyes were full of sadness, his expression was one of almost passionate regret.

"You knew my father?" I exclaimed in amazement. "When and where?"

"In Wall Street."

I shrank back, involuntarily

"Athena! Surely you won't do me so gross an

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injustice as to think that of me—of me, his most sincere friend!"

The rare color stained my cheeks. I was ashamed of my suspicion.

"If he had listened to me"—Philip spoke very gravely—"he would never have dabbled in those wretched speculations. He was too generous in his belief in others, too noble-hearted for such work. To think"—taking my hands in his—"that Charles Derohan's daughter has found a home beneath my roof! It is almost too great a happiness to be true!"

Then I had the joy of listening to a very beautiful tribute to my dead. It was sweet to me. If, now and again, Philip dwelt lovingly upon little characteristics that I had never observed, little ways that I had not known I inherited from my father—I was never thought to resemble him greatly—I realized but the more clearly how much more discerning strangers are than kin, on points of resemblance. Philip did not say how much I was like him. It was from his description that I learned of my inheritance.

Ashamed of my past doubts of one who had been my father's friend, anxious to atone for secret distrust, I went against my nature, which is reserved, and, of course, went too far.

"I hope you may always call me Athena," I said, smiling through a mist of tears. "I am sorry I spoke as I did just now. You see, I did not know."

The sadness cleared from the handsome dark face.

"And you—you won't say 'Mr. Erranti' in that formal way again?"

Once more my color rose. This was more than I had bargained for, yet how draw back?

"When you think of me, Athena, do you call me 'Mr. Erranti'—or 'Philip'!"

Because of Madam's constant use of his Christian

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name I did think of him as "Philip." I flushed crimson. Philip's eyes sparkled.

"I am answered!" he cried, gayly; then, with sudden seriousness, "No, call me what you please, Athena, only give me the right to be your friend, as I was your father's."

I made a great effort, conquered my reserve—and a certain incomprehensible feeling of repugnance—rose to my feet, and, holding out my hand, said, very gravely:

"Because of your affection for my father I accept your friendship—Philip."

He bent low over my hand, raising it to his lips. He did not look at me, and I saw he had paled slightly under his tan. Seeing him so deeply moved I tried to help him recover himself.

"Lock up the stiletto, please," I said, lightly, "and never offer it to a friend. Knives cut friendship."

He laughed, a little unsteadily.

"I may settle with that Mrs. Spuyten, Athena?"

"Certainly not."

"Your father's own daughter!" he murmured.

"Please remember that Madam is not to know—that you know!" I said, anxious to preserve her small amusement. Then I recollected another secret that must be shared. To tell it was unpleasant, somehow. I felt suddenly a strong desire to run away from my father's friend. I took my courage in both hands.

"I must tell you that I have seen the room you and Madam were kind enough to have refurnished for me." I stopped, a little out of breath.

Philip laughed. His eyes flashed.

"Little daughter of Eve! So you couldn't wait! I'm thankful you possess some of the ordinary feminine weaknesses! I began to believe you a veritable little goddess of stone," and again he laughed.

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To be thought a second Mrs. Bluebeard—a woman I had always despised—was unpleasant, but without betraying Madam's little adventure I could not explain. Then I remembered Madam wished her son to think the room a surprise to me. I found myself tangled in a mesh of falsehoods.

"If you don't object," I said, shamefacedly, "I will pretend not to have seen it before."

"Just as you choose, dear child." Philip looked astonished. "Of course I'll keep your little secret. What I don't understand is why you told me at all."

"I am a poor actress."

"You thought I should see through you, so told?" —very much amused. "I had no idea you were such a crafty little person! As for this toy"—playing with the dagger—"I must find you a less deadly *gage d'amitié.*"

"The top of the morning to you both!" cried a gay voice, and Randal strolled in by the window. "What's that, Erranti? By all the gods, a dagger! Better not play with edged tools, old man, or you'll get your fingers cut." He glanced at me.

Philip smiled, and locked it away in his desk.

"Dear me," said Randal, plaintively, lounging into a chair, "I should like to know what you two quiet people talk about when you're all, all alone! Do you talk or simply—" He broke off, glancing inquisitively from me to Philip. "She's a sphinx" —pointing a solemn finger at me—"and you"—turning upon Philip—"are a volcano! You're quiet enough now, old man, and we, so to speak, sport gayly about you, and gather flowers on your manly brow; but some day you'll explode—and may I be there to see!"

"I'll blow you into fragments," laughed Philip. He was in high spirits. "You deserve to be knocked to bits for your nonsense!"

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"How about the Sphinx? I doubt if even hot lava would melt her. Is she a sphinx, or only a pagan, caught young and educated among Christians? Do you know what she says, Erranti, when I tell her I can't make her out? 'Is there any reason that you should, Mr. St. John?' "

I started, for it was my own voice that I heard. Randal was a marvellous mimic. Philip frowned.

"Enough of that." He spoke sternly, not hiding his displeasure. "Confine your nonsense to me, if you must indulge in it."

"I'm sorry you're mad, Erranti," said Randal, quickly. "I didn't mean to be saucy. Miss Dean has such a wonderful voice—the kind of grave, sweet tones that belong to goddesses. I couldn't help trying it on. Please forgive me, Miss Dean."

I smiled my forgiveness, and said I must go.

"No, please, not yet," said Randal. "Just stay long enough to prove you're not offended. Say, I bet you five dollars that, for all you're such a sphinx, I can tell what you've been saying to Erranti. May I give a guess?"

Had he been eavesdropping? He was, I thought, none too scrupulous. Before I could answer Philip cried out:

"I bet you fifty you can't——"

"Done!" Randal was overjoyed. "She was telling you how she saved your mother's life yesterday."

A profound silence followed. Randal, thinking he had hit the mark, prepared for new triumphs.

"I'll bet another five that I know something she has not told you."

"Fifty that you fail," said Philip, an odd inflection in his voice.

"She has seen the changes in the Blue Room," said Randal, smiling in his unpleasant way.

"You have lost in both—as you deserve," said

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Philip, coldly. He followed me to the door, opening it for me. "This evening"—speaking so softly that even Randal's sharp ears must fail to catch his words —"I shall try to tell you how grateful I am, Athena."

I found it difficult to meet the admiration in his eyes, and was glad to hasten across the hall to Madam's quarters. I went so swiftly I nearly collided with Julie on her way to fetch me. She still looked pale and shaken. I asked how she felt.

"Better, Mademoiselle." Then, with evident effort, "May I be permitted to ask a question?"

"Yes."

"That—that dagger! It is yours, Mademoiselle?"

"No," I said, "it belongs to Mr. Erranti. Was it the dagger that frightened you, Julie? Or were you ill?"

"The cold steel"—shivering as she spoke—"the sight of the cold steel. From a child I have been so. A sharp knife, a dagger's point, makes me ill. I rejoice this weapon belongs not to Mademoiselle."

She darted into Madam's room, as if wishing to be rid of the subject. Yet she had looked, in spite of her words, as though sorry the dagger was not mine. I remembered that when, as a child, Julie had been sent with me to my fencing-master, she had watched with much interest, and no symptoms of illness, the play of the rapiers. However, people were said to change as they advanced through life. Probably Julie had lost her nerve. Poor Julie!

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XVI

On Madam's birthday her one anxiety was that everyone might rejoice that she had been born. To that end she gave largely to all her dependents, and was amiable and easy to please all day. I was installed in my new room with much ceremony, Philip so cleverly taking it for granted that I saw it for the first time, that I had nothing to do save admire. At six o'clock Julie was sent to dress me in the brocade. To please Madam I had consented to wear her diamonds as well, and I was very magnificent.

"Are you satisfied with me, Julie?" I asked, walking to the end of the room that she might judge the better.

"*Mon Dieu, oui!*"—surveying me through half-shut eyes, as an artist his work. "But it is ever agreeable to make the toilette for Mademoiselle. Some, though beautiful, are unable to do credit to a work of art, but even as a child Mademoiselle might be depended upon."

The silver thread outlining the lilies caught the light as I moved, gleaming in a dozen places at once. The brocade was a work of art.

"The ornaments are old-fashioned," she continued, eying with disapproval the low-hanging zigzag necklace, "and Madame and I contend for powdering the hair. Monsieur protests, however. 'Dress it high, weave through it the *rivière*, but no powder, Julie.' Madame argued in vain. Monsieur

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said it, the hair, was 'of shining gold!' So—no powder!"

On the staircase landing, when I went to dinner, I stood enchanted. For the gardeners had transformed the great marble hall into a forest of flowers and climbing vines. Fortune's wheel was clogged with blossoms—stopped for the hour. I glanced over my shoulder. Had Venus been forgotten? I caught myself hoping so—but no. She wore a crown of roses, and a long wreath of ferns and flowers hung over her naked limbs.

Opposite the staircase, between two pillars, was a low platform covered with tiger-skins, the stuffed heads thrust out as though guarding the easy-chair, Madam's throne, placed above them. Then two cavaliers emerged from the library and came to meet me—Philip, with Randal St. John. Both men wore powder. Philip was in white satin, diamond buckles on his high-heeled shoes; Randal in pale-blue silk, a gold-laced hat under his arm, enamelled snuff-box in his hand. A gay pair! They bowed low, I courtesied profoundly, and Philip, stepping to my side, placed in my hand a fan with jewelled sticks.

"The *gage d'amitié*," he whispered.

I thanked him. I was pleased. I never used a fan.

Madam now appeared, magnificent in her white silk brocaded in pink roses, and lace cap fastened with diamond pins. Claude pushed her chair, and, conscious that all eyes were upon him, advanced with mincing step and fiercely solemn demeanor. He wore a red velvet coat, black satin knee-breeches, and silver-buckled shoes. He was superb, but grandly overlooked the fact, while Madam was at no pains to conceal her enjoyment of her own and her footman's magnificence.

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"Charming, charming!" she cried, looking about her. "Ah, you, too, all are charming, as I, also, and this good Claude here! But, *mon Dieu*, Athena, thou art the Queen! *Ma chère*, how wonderful thou art! My diamonds suit thy splendid beauty well. Give her a name for to-night, Randal."

"The Queen of Hearts, of course."

"'The Queen of Hearts, she made some tarts'—no, no, *vaurien!* It's bread, not tarts, that Athena makes! Excellent bread! Made for me because she loves me. Like me, she is a *grande dame*, and that is why she makes it so well; for the well-born can cook better than cooks, sew better than our maids—yet are ever great ladies! But come"—nodding her head at Randal—"a name for to-night."

"She might be Jack Frost's wife in that gown. It gleams like frost-work. The diamonds would do for icicles."

Madam clapped her hands.

"The Frost Queen! You are a good lad, Randal."

"What's that sparkling in your lap, *Maman?*" asked Philip.

"My rings—for Athena to wear. You won't refuse to-night, Athena?"

Her eyes sparkled with mischief. She was like an elfish child. I slipped them on my fingers. They were many, and my fingers felt heavy and clogged. Madam beamed with satisfaction at gaining the long-disputed point. Randal watched her curiously.

"You're very different from most women, Madam Erranti"—he spoke in honeyed tones—"when you have a daughter-in-law you won't mind handing over your jewels."

Madam pursed up her lips, frowning.

"I shall never have a daughter-in-law, sir!"

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Dinner was announced, and the question in his eyes was not asked. Madam had my usual place at the head of the table, while I sat at Philip's right hand. It was a merry party. Madam and Randal talked, Philip and I listened. The dinner was not long because of Madam. Her cake was to be cut in the hall in the presence of the servants, who were each to have a piece. Suddenly we heard music.

"The band from Droneton," explained Philip. "The servants are to dance in the carriage-house later. I am to open the ball with Norah!"

"What a pity it's Saturday night!" said Madam, delighted with the music.

"I'll make that all right—I understand clocks—but don't tell," laughed Randal. He had drunk a great quantity of wine, but appeared little affected by it. I hoped his legs might prove as strong as his head.

"Athena, you won't refuse to drink my health?" cried Madam, anxiously.

"Are you a temperance girl? Do you wear a blue ribbon, color of my eyes, in your bonny yellow hair?" demanded Randal.

I did not answer, but, clinking a glass of champagne against Madam's, drained it, with best wishes for her health.

"You'd make a splendid wife for me," said Randal, plaintively. "I've all the vices, and you've none! You'd cure me of my evil habits and turn me into a sweet little parson. Wish I could muster courage to pop the question this very minute!"

"Nonsense!" cried Madam, vehemently. "You're not good enough for my Athena, and far too young —Sower of Wild Oats!"

"How about Erranti?"—a wicked look in his blue eyes. "He must be old enough. It's time he settled down—to reap what he's sown! Won't he do?"

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