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THE LION'S MOUSE

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Suddenly he became conscious of a perfume, and saw a young and beautiful woman hovering at the door.
"'Oh, do help me!' she said."

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THE LION'S MOUSE

BY

C. N. & A. M. WILLIAMSON

FRONTISPIECE BY

HARRY STACEY BENTON

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK

DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY

1919

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THE LION'S MOUSE

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Though she was young and girlish, and spoke impulsively, there was something oddly regal about her. Princesses and girl-queens ought to be of her type; tall and very slim, with gracious, sloping shoulders and a long throat, the chin slightly lifted: pale, with great appealing violet eyes under haughty brows, and quantities of yellow-brown hair dressed in some sort of Madonna style.

"You needn't be afraid," he said. "Men aren't allowed to insult ladies in trains."

"This man hasn't insulted me in an ordinary way. But I'm in dreadful danger. American men are good to women, even strangers. You can save my life, if you will —or more than my life. But there's only one way." Her words came fast, on panting breaths, as though she had been running. The girl had stood at first, her hand on the door-knob, but losing her balance with a jerk of the train, she let herself fall into the seat. There she sat with her head thrown wearily back, her eyes appealing to the eyes that looked down at her.

A queer fancy ran through the man's brain. He imagined that a woman being tried for her life might look at the judge with just that expression. "What do you mean?" asked Sands.

He had resisted the jerk of the train, and was still on his feet. Instead of answering his question, the girl begged him to sit down.

"I can't think properly while it seems as if you were waiting to turn me out," she said.

Sands sat down.

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"I hardly know how to tell you what I mean. I hardly dare," the voice went on, while he wondered. "It's a tremendous thing to ask. I can't explain . . . and if I hesitate it will be too late. I don't know your name, or your character, except what I judge from your face. The way to save me is to keep me in this stateroom with the door shut, as far as Chicago."

"Good heavens! That's . . ." Sands was going to end his sentence with "absolutely impossible!" But he stopped in the midst. Her eyes made him stop. It was as if he were pronouncing a death sentence. He was silent for a few seconds.

"I'd have to say . . . no, I could not say you were my wife, because everyone knows I've not got a wife. I'll say you are my cousin: say you've come late. I want you to have this stateroom, and I'll take another . . . or a section. I—I could do that."

"Will you?" she breathed.

"Yes. I will."

He said this almost sullenly. He was thinking: "Pretty smart new dodge! Neat way to get a stateroom all the way from Albuquerque to Chicago."

"I'll go out now and fix things up with the conductor," he promised. "We must settle on a story. You came on board at Albuquerque just now?"

"Yes. The last minute before the train started. I have a berth in this car. I thought I was safe, that everything was right for me. Then I saw the man . . . not the one I expected; worse. He wasn't in this car, but the next. I saw him

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standing there. He was looking at some ladies passing through. One had on deep mourning, and a crepe veil. Perhaps he believed it was I. I turned and rushed this way. Your door was open, and you . . . you looked like a real man. That's all."

"What about your baggage?"

"I have nothing. I . . . was in a hurry."

"In what name did you make your reservation?"

"Miss Beverley White. White isn't my real name: Beverley is . . . one of my names. I can't tell you more."

"All right. The porter will get some toilet things for my cousin whom I'm to chaperon from Albuquerque to Chicago, and who nearly missed the train owing to illness. He'll bring your meals in, as you're not able to leave your stateroom."

"That's what I'd have asked," she said. "I may trust the porter?"

"The porter knows me. Your idea is," he went on, his hand on the door, "that the man you don't want to see will try pretty hard to see you?"

"Yes. When he searches the train and can't find me (I'm sure he's begun the search already) he can't be certain I'm on board, but he won't give up easily. If the deepest gratitude——"

"I don't need consolation. Any other instructions to give before I leave you?"

"No. Yes . . . there's one thing. Will you take charge of a very small parcel? I daren't keep it myself, in case anything unexpected should happen.

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"It is inside my dress," the girl explained. For an instant she turned her back, then, rebuttoning her blouse with one hand, held out to him in the other a long, thick envelope, unaddressed, and sealed with three gold-coloured seals. Roger took the parcel.

"You see how I trust you," she said. "This packet is the most valuable thing I have in the world, yet I feel it is safe."

"You told me you didn't know my name. But if I'm your cousin you'd better know it. I'm Roger Sands——"

"Roger Sands, the great—what is the word?—corporation lawyer? The man who saved the California Oil Trust king?" She looked surprised, almost frightened.

"It isn't a 'Trust,' or I couldn't have saved him. That was just the point."

"How lucky I am to have such a man stand by me! For you will?"

He slipped the long envelope into an inside breast pocket of his gray tweed coat. "It's as safe there as in a bank," he assured her. "Now I'll go and make everything straight. If you want me, you've only to ring for the porter and send me word. I won't come till you do send."

Whether or no her terror was justified, Roger resolved to give it the benefit of the doubt. Instead of trying to secure another stateroom, he would try to get a section close to Stateroom A, in order to play watch-dog.

It wasn't difficult to do. The section he wanted

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was engaged from the next stopping place, but an exchange could be made. The Pullman car conductor took it upon himself to attend to that. Sands' suitcase, coat, and magazines were arranged on both seats, and he sat down to keep guard. The porter had been told that Miss White wasn't to be disturbed unless she rang, except at meal times, when he—Sands—would choose dishes from the menu and send a waiter from the dining-car.

A few toilet things were somehow procured by the negro, and handed into Stateroom A, with a contribution of novels, magazines, and a box of chocolates, from Miss White's cousin.

Night, Roger realized, would be the dangerous time, if danger there was, and he decided not to sleep. Lying awake wasn't, after all, very difficult, for the portrait of the girl was painted on Roger's mind. He saw things in that portrait he'd seen but subconsciously in the original. He thought that her beauty was of the type which would shine like the moon, set off with wonderful clothes and jewels. And from that thought it was only a step to picture the joy of giving such clothes and jewels. The man was surprised and ashamed to find himself thrilling like a boy.

Daylight released him from duty. He dressed, and had his section made up. Though all peril—if any—had vanished with the night, Roger couldn't bring himself to leave his post for breakfast until he saw the porter tap at the door of Stateroom A in answer to a ring.

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"I hope Miss White's feeling better," he said to the negro, when the door shut once more.

"Yes, sah, she wants her room fixed up.' Ah'm gwan do it raight now, but Ah'm bound to give yuh the lady's message fust. She thought you'd like to heah she's mighty well, considerin'. An' she'll thank yuh, suh, to order her some coffee an' toast."

Roger added cantaloupe to the order, and a cereal with cream. The mysterious girl hidden in his stateroom was no longer an adventuress, sponging on his idiotic generosity: she was an exquisite, almost a sacred, charge. As he ate his breakfast in the dining-car he saw a man he knew sitting directly opposite him at the next table. Their eyes encountered. Roger felt that the other had been staring at him and hadn't had time to look away. He bowed, and paused at the table which he was obliged to pass on his way out.

"How do you do, O'Reilly?" he said, with a slight stiffness. He would have preferred to walk past with no more than the nod, but in that case the man would believe his late absent-mindedness had been deliberate. Roger didn't wish to leave this impression. Justin O'Reilly was nearly ten years younger than he, but had got the better of him once, and not long ago. Sands was too proud to let it seem as if the memory rankled.

O'Reilly rose and shook the offered hand. He was tall and lean, and brown-faced as a soldier back from the war. He had a boyish air, younger than his thirty-one or thirty-two years: but under that look

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was the same sort of hardness and keenness which was the first thing a stranger noticed about Sands.

"I'd no idea you were out west."

"It's been a flying trip," O'Reilly answered.

"Queer I missed seeing you before. Suppose you've been on board since Los Angeles?"

"I caught sight of you last night for the first time," said the other. "I'm not in your car, and I've been resting up. I came on board tired. One usually does come on board tired!"

"Yes," said Roger. "Well, we shall knock up against each other now and then, here in the diner."

"Sure to. I shall be spending a few days in New York before Washington," O'Reilly volunteered.

"Right! But don't let your coffee get cold for me." Roger passed on.

If his thoughts had not been focussed on the occupant of Stateroom A he would have wondered a good deal as to what had taken Justin O'Reilly on a "flying trip" west. This was O'Reilly's first year in Congress, and he'd manœuvred to make himself a conspicuous figure in Washington one way or other. His own present interests could not, Roger thought, be interfered with by Justin O'Reilly. The man was a Democrat, and opposed on principle to the cause of John Heron, whom Miss White had called the "California Oil Trust King": but personally the two were friends, even distantly related, and O'Reilly would wish to do Heron no secret injury.

When he got back to his own car Sands found the porter waiting.

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"Lady's through breakfus, suh, and would like to see yuh w'en convenient," was the message: and two seconds later Stateroom A's rightful owner was humbly knocking at the door.

The girl's beauty struck the man anew as she smiled him a welcome. She was as well groomed as if she had had a lady's maid.

"Has anything happened? Have you had any trouble on my account?" she inquired.

When Roger said no, nothing had happened, she drew a breath of relief.

"No one in any way noticeable has tried to get acquainted with you?"

"The conductor and porter and a waiter or two are the only persons I've exchanged a word with—except a fellow I know slightly, named O'Reilly, a Congressman from California. I suppose he doesn't interest you?"

"No man interests me . . . unless the one who is saving my life," the girl answered surprisingly. As she spoke, a wave of rose-colour poured over her face, and she turned quickly away in confusion. Roger felt that she had blurted it out, scarcely knowing what she said until too late. Instead of liking her less, he liked her better. He brought forth the envelope to show. It had been under his pillow all night, he told her.

"I don't know what I should have done without you!" she said, with a gratitude that was almost humble. There'd be a certain blankness, Roger

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couldn't help seeing, when the time came to do without *her!*

"When we get to Chicago," he asked, "how can I help you there?"

"Oh, I expect to be met by a friend. I suppose I shan't see you again: but I shall never forget."

Roger Sands felt a horrid twinge of some unpleasant emotion. He loathed the "friend" who would take the girl away from him.

"But Chicago's a long way off," she said when he did not speak. "It must seem a wild story to you, but the danger I'm in . . . the danger that this envelope is in . . . won't be over for one minute till you've put me into my friend's hands. You will do that, won't you? You'll see me through till the last?"

"I will," said Roger.

"And meanwhile you'll come and call on me in the stateroom sometimes if you don't mind?"

Roger smiled. A silver lining began to glimmer through the cloud.

By good luck he knew no one on board save O'Reilly, who fortunately was in another car, and he hoped that few people knew him. He could not resist her invitation. He began by deciding to spend a half hour with his "invalid cousin" now and again. As through the veil of beauty he caught glimpses of something like character within, Roger felt that the mystery thickened.

The inevitable moment came. The porter was

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brushing men's hats and coats. Suitcases were being fastened up. The Limited was slowing down in the big station. Then, and not till then, did Miss White show herself at the door of Stateroom A. Sands, who had knocked to tell her that she had better come out, was waiting to guard her for the last time. Neither had much to say. The hope of haven had not raised the girl's spirits. As Sands gave her a hand, stepping on to the platform, he saw Justin O'Reilly, already out of the train and looking about with the air of expecting someone. O'Reilly took off his hat, with an unnecessarily cordial smile for Sands. At heart they were enemies. Roger took the smile to mean amusement at sight of his companion. He felt annoyed. Miss White was looking straight ahead, a brilliant colour staining the cheeks usually pale.

The rendezvous, she had explained to him, was at a news stand. "There!" she said, "that is where he will be. There's such a crowd, I can't see him yet."

They neared the news stand, and as "Miss White" was a tall girl whose head could be seen above the hats of average women, he expected a man to start eagerly forward. But no man separated himself from the crowd. She was beginning to look anxious: there was no flush on her cheeks now.

"Where can he be?" she said. "Something must have happened."

"Taxi broken down, perhaps," Roger tried consolation.

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"Oh, if only it's nothing worse! I must just wait. But you, Mr. Sands, I oughtn't to ask . . ."

"You needn't," Roger cut her short. "I'm not going to desert you."

"I might have known you wouldn't. He can't be long!"

"What about the envelope? Will you have it now?" Roger asked. She had begged him to keep it until they were out of the train.

"Not yet. I daren't. You're sure it hasn't been stolen from you? Do please make certain!"

He put his hand inside his coat, and felt the envelope, which was safe, of course. "It's there, as large as life."

"Thank heaven!" she breathed.

Minutes passed: fifteen minutes; twenty; thirty. The girl was white as ashes, and dark shadows lay under her eyes. "All hope is over!" she said, as Sands glanced at his watch, when they had stood for three-quarters of an hour. "Some terrible thing has prevented him from meeting me. I don't know what's going to become of me now!"

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II

THE NET

"You made no plan what to do if your friend didn't turn up?" Roger enquired. "Have you any other friends in Chicago?"

"Not one."

"Have you ever lived here, or stayed here?"

"No."

If he had now been capable of suspecting her, all his first suspicions of Miss Beverley White would have marshalled themselves in his brain. Nothing had happened during the whole journey to justify her fantastic story of mysterious danger. As for the wonderful envelope, who could tell that it didn't contain blank paper? But Sands had got beyond this stage. If he were a fool, he asked to be nothing better.

"Is that friend you talk of more than a friend?"

"No, only a person I trusted for reasons I can't tell you."

"I see. And you don't know what will become of you since he's failed you, and you're turned adrift in a strange town?"

"I don't know at all. I feel stunned—as if it didn't matter."

"It does matter to a girl like you, left alone with-

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out friends in a big city where you're a stranger. Have you money?"

"I had enough and more than enough for my journey here, enough to pay you back for all you've done. I expected to get more money, and to be looked after in Chicago. Perhaps I can find work."

"Do you think after all that's passed I can go coolly on my way leaving you alone in Chicago? I may be a fool, but I have another proposal to make." He paused.

She looked up as if startled.

"What do you say to marrying me and going on to New York as my wife?"

For a minute he thought she was going to faint. She seemed suddenly to become limp. She swayed a little on her feet, and he caught her arm.

"You're tired out, standing so long," he exclaimed.

"No, it's not that. Forgive me. It was almost too much, finding out the height of your goodness. Yet, 'height' is the word!"

"You'll marry me, then!" he cried.

"No," the girl answered, "I thank you with my whole heart, but I can't."

"Why . . . why?" he stammered. "Unless you're married already."

"I'm not married. No man has ever been anything to me. I swear that to you! But I can't tell you any more about myself."

Roger did not speak for a minute. At last he said:

"See here, you and I have got to talk. We can't do that where we are, with people jostling us this

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way and that. There's one thing certain. However this ends, I'm not going to leave you alone in Chicago. We've got plenty of time. Will you let me take you to a quiet restaurant? We can thrash matters out across the table."

"Very well," she agreed.

Roger knew Chicago. When he had arranged to have his luggage put in safe keeping, he got a taxi and took the girl to a dull but good place, sure to be practically empty at that hour. They sat down at a table in a corner, and Sands ordered an oyster stew.

"Do you dislike me?" he began his catechism. "Could you like me enough to think of me as a husband, if we'd met in a conventional, society sort of way?"

"Yes, I could. I do want you to know that. You've been so splendid to me."

"So far so good, but I haven't been splendid. I've fallen in love with you. I haven't been in love before . . . that is, not since I was twenty. I've never had time . . ."

"You haven't taken much time in doing it now!" She gave a queer little laugh with a sob in it.

"I've learned the lesson that time isn't the thing needed. I want you more than I ever wanted anything in my life, and I'll take you . . . as you stand."

"You haven't stopped to think . . . to count the cost," she said. "Imagine what it would be for a man like you to have a wife he knew nothing about, just a single figure cut off its background, in

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a picture he'd never seen. People would ask: 'Who was she?' and there'd be no answer."

"They'd not ask me that," said Roger obstinately. "And I wouldn't care what they asked each other. I'm not a society man, though I might enjoy putting my wife on the top floor. And I can do that with you if I choose! You say I'm a man of importance. I'm important enough anyhow to take the wife I want, and to put her where I want her to be."

"Yes, perhaps. But it wouldn't be only for a little while that I'd not be allowed to tell you about myself. It would be for always. You couldn't love me enough to be happy in spite of that."

"I could be happy," Roger insisted, "if you'd love me."

"I'd adore you! But . . ."

"Then there isn't any 'but'. I don't say I shouldn't like to know all about my wife and her people and her past. Still, I'd rather have you with a future and no past than any other woman with both. I can't do without you, and I'm going to have you . . . now, to-day, as soon as I can buy a license and get a parson to make us man and wife."

"But if you should regret it?"

"I never will be sorry, if you'll do what you just said, adore me . . . half as much as I'll adore you."

Her eyes gave him a beautiful answer. Roger Sands felt that nothing could make him regret the coming of such a romance into his hustling life.

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This, then, was the story behind the sensation when Roger Sands came back from a short trip to California bringing a wife, a girl who had been a Miss Beverley White, a girl nobody had ever seen or heard of before.

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III

THE MOUSE

ON THE same September day, in Moreton and Payntor's department store in New York, might have been seen a wisp of a girl "cheeking" a manager into giving her a situation on the strength of her being Irish.

By chance, the side door of the big Sixth Avenue shop opened for Clo Riley (her true, Irish, baptismal name was Clodagh, but she didn't think that would "go" in New York), on the day when Roger Sands' stateroom door, on the Santa Fé Limited, opened for a very different girl and for Romance. No one would have thought that they could be in the same story—the mysterious Vision and the little, sharp-faced thing from County Cork. Yet without Clo Riley it would have been another story altogether, even though, for more than six months, she and Mr. and Mrs. Roger Sands never heard each other's names, nor saw each other's faces.

It was in the April after her marriage that Mrs. Sands came upon an advertisement in a newspaper. Moreton and Payntor were making a splash about their lately started department for antique furniture. They had obtained "eight magnificent, unique pieces of satinwood furniture painted by Angelica

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Kaufmann, bought by a representative of Moreton and Payntor, from a titled family in England."

Beverley Sands (her husband called her "Bev") loved painted satinwood, when it was good. How she knew that things were good or bad, Roger sometimes wondered: but she did know. Roger had taken a house at Newport which had come into the market, and Beverley was picking up "beautiful pieces" with which to furnish it. The house would, they hoped, be ready to move into by June.

When she read Moreton and Payntor's advertisement, Beverley decided to see the satinwood suite and buy it if genuine. Her present wealth emphasized her astonishing, incredible happiness. "He gives me everything I want, he trusts me to do everything I like," she thought. Life was wonderful. Slowly she was coming out from under the cloud of fear, and had ceased to be afraid of Something terrible that might happen.

Roger went every morning to the offices of the firm which had his name at its head. She had breakfasted with him in a kind of super-dressing gown which Roger said was like an opal seen through a sunrise mist. As her maid hooked up her frock she sang for happiness. She wished she could earn it by making someone else happy. Roger didn't count in that way. The credit would be to do things for a person you didn't love.

"To the first creature I meet to-day, who needs help, I'll give it," she said to herself. "I'll do something big . . . like sacrificing on an altar."

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She went out in Roger's latest present, a limousine car, so silent and so swift that it travelled like a cloud-shadow. Outside the car was dark blue; inside, the pale azure of a robin's egg. Beverley told the chauffeur to drive to Moreton and Payntor's, avoiding traffic because she was in a hurry. To do this, he approached the shop by passing through a side street in which was the entrance for employees, as well as that leading to minor departments, and so connecting with the main shop. It was comparatively a quiet street, but to-day there was a crowd. Something had happened, and only a moment ago, for a policeman was just coming up. The chauffeur would have hurried by to spare Mrs. Sands what might be an unpleasant sight, but on one of her impulses she stopped him. The car windows were open. Beverley heard the words "Poor child" and "Ambulance." She opened the door and jumped out. Because she was beautiful and beautifully dressed, and had a fine car, people made way for her.

On the pavement a girl was lying. There was some blood, and that would have made Beverley sick, if the face streaked red hadn't struck her as the most tragic, the most pathetic face she had ever seen. It was so ghastly white, so thin, and yet so young!

"What is it? What's happened?" she inquired of the innermost group.

"Chucked herself out of a fourth story window," a fat woman answered. "Somebody was beastly to her, I guess."

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"Is she dead?" Beverley asked.

"Not yet . . . though she must be a bag o' broken bones. She'll die on the way to hospital, likely, in the ambulance, with nobody to care."

At that instant, as if she heard the terrible words, the girl's eyes opened. It seemed to Beverley that they looked straight at her.

Suddenly she remembered her own resolve. It had been almost a vow: "To the first creature I meet to-day who needs help I'll give it."

Here was the creature. If ever there were an appeal in human eyes, it was in these. Perhaps it was an unconscious appeal. Perhaps the brain had been stunned asleep, but the deep-down soul was awake. It was calling to Beverley's soul, and the call had to be answered, or the vow would be broken. Roger Sands' wife dared not break such a vow lest she should be punished and lose her magical happiness.

She hated the sight of blood. She wanted to think that, if the girl were dying, she could do no good. Yet, while reason argued, instinct had already decided that this was the claimant of the vow. Beverley knelt down beside the curiously flat-looking body which lay on the pavement. Her dress dipped into a widening pool of blood, but she did not sicken as she had thought she would. And to her own surprise she found her hand stroking back a lock of dark red hair from the upturned face. Poor, thin, child's face!

"Don't be afraid, you're going to be loved and cared for," she promised.

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By this time a doctor had arrived. He, too, knelt by the sufferer. He spoke to Beverley, thinking she had some acquaintance with the injured girl. The police had cleared away the sensation seekers, but the lovely lady of the blue automobile was left in peace. She seemed to be helping the doctor.

"Keep off, please, keep off," the policemen repeated. "The ambulance'll be round any instant."

But the ambulance did not take its cue. This was strange, for the service was splendidly prompt. A man ran up bringing news that there'd been a collision with a trolley. No one was hurt, but it meant a delay before another ambulance could be called and respond.

"Can't we take her away in my car?" asked Beverley. "Oh, why shouldn't I have her at my house? She's only a child, so thin and frail! Loving care might save her. I'd have a trained nurse in. I'm Mrs. Roger Sands. You may know my husband's name."

The name of Roger Sands was impressive. So was Beverley, and so was the car. The ambulance wasn't at hand, and time pressed. It seemed as if the offer might be accepted. The doctor was the physician engaged to attend the employees of Moreton and Payntor, and had authority in the neighbourhood. To test Mrs. Roger Sands' character he abruptly ordered her into the surgical department—"ground floor, close by the side street entrance"—to "fetch out a stretcher and be quick." Beverley responded without hesitation, and in two minutes a

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startled boy appeared with a canvas thing like a cot.

The doctor and one of the policemen got the childish body on to this while Beverley darted to her waiting chauffeur. He—Robbins, an elderly Englishman—was furious, but short of giving notice then and there, could do nothing save obey. The folding chairs were pulled out: on one was piled the car's best ornament, a large chinchilla rug, and some blue silk cushions. These gave support for the foot of the stretcher, its head resting on the seat; and the other folding chair was taken by the doctor who, sitting there, could hold his patient safely in place. Mrs Roger Sands scrambled up beside her chauffeur, and did not even notice that the man's face was a thundercloud.

Robbins could have cried. His last situation in England had been with a duke. He would still have occupied it, had he not long passed the "smart" age. Roger Sands had thought him an excellent guardian for Beverley. Robbins didn't approve of America, but he had approved of his mistress. There had seemed to him something queenly about her which "reminded him of home," but to-day he was ashamed of her: to drive through the streets of New York sitting on the front seat beside him, as if she were a lady's maid! Worse than all, her dress, her gloves, were stained with blood. As for the inside of the new car, it would be ruined. The man felt responsible, and believed that his master would consider him so. Sitting beside Mrs. Sands, with the

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look of an inferior Roman statue on his square face, the chauffeur resolved to see Mr. Sands before the tale of this morning's work could be told by Sands' American chauffeur, who drove him to and from the office. The Englishman decided to bribe the American to "lend his job" that afternoon. They could arrange an excuse. Harter had a cold. But, as it happened, Roger Sands read of the affair in a second edition of an evening paper while he waited for his car.

To see Beverley's name in big letters gave him a shock. He became conscious that somewhere within him had always been a horror of finding his wife's name in a newspaper, heading "scarelines." His first feeling as he read on was of relief. Why, this was nothing!

Some reporter had worked up the incident into a romance, and his editor, appreciating Roger Sands' importance, had given it nearly a whole column. On the surface it was a tribute to Mrs. Sands' goodness of heart; but as Roger's rush of thankfulness passed, he began to see an unpleasant side of the business.

The reporter had interviewed various persons in the firm of Moreton and Payntor. He had learned that the girl befriended by Mrs. Roger Sands was employed in the restaurant for women "assistants." By certain of these, she had been suspected of small thefts. They had watched her, and it was in the midst of a "scene" following an accusation, that the waitress had suddenly flung herself out of a fourth story window. She was an Irish girl not long in

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New York. Her name was Clo Riley, and she had been in the employ of Moreton and Payntor for nearly seven months. She had made no friends, and was considered "Mysterious."

At the Park Avenue apartment of Mr. and Mrs. Roger Sands an interview had been refused; but the reporter had learned from a servant that, if the invalid were "a dear relative" of Mrs. Sands, she could not be more lovingly cared for. The largest and handsomest spare room had been hastily prepared, a trained nurse engaged, and a famous surgeon had been called in consultation with the doctor who had undertaken the case. Following these details came a description of Mrs. Roger Sands, gleaned from an "eye witness" of the "sensational scene" enacted in the street.

The story developed strangely to Roger. He saw something behind it. He knew things about Beverley which, he trusted, few others knew, and saw the affair in another light.

Roger's marriage experiment was a success. He was glad that he had taken the girl "as she stood." To have what she had called a "figure cut off its background out of an unseen picture," was better than to have lost forever a figure of such beauty. He believed that Beverley was as good as she was sweet, but she had been right in her prophecy; it was hideous, sometimes, to see her outlined against darkness.

The incident had happened close to Moreton and Payntor's department store. Beverley had been

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in the habit of going there lately. She might have had a reason for choosing that shop. Indeed, it struck Roger as incredible that even her impulsiveness could lead her so far, for a stranger's sake. Besides, why hadn't she telephoned? It looked as if she were determined to carry out her scheme before he could oppose it.

In this mood he went to his automobile. He was surprised to see Robbins, but not sorry, because Robbins had been mixed up in the morning's affair.

"What's this I've been reading in the *Evening Star?*" he broke in.

Here was luck for Robbins! He began to excuse himself for the disgrace which had fallen upon the new car. "It was the mistress's order, sir, and I had no choice; but I can't help thinking if she'd known what a mess the blood would make, she'd 'ave let me call a taxi."

"Another lining is easily put in," said Roger, coolly; but he was angry for the first time with Beverley. Of all women, she was the one who ought to think twice before doing a thing to get herself talked about; but she never thought twice. As he drove homeward, doubts of her crowded into his mind.

At home, Beverley was in the room which had been turned into a hospital ward. The nurse had called her, to announce that the "patient" had returned to consciousness and had begun asking questions.

"I saw it would worry her to be put off," went on Sister Lake, "so I told her a few things. She remembered throwing herself out of the window, and

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the fall, and then waking up, lying in the street. She said she'd dreamed of an angel-girl bending over her. When she heard what you'd done, she insisted on speaking to you."

"I'll go at once!" Beverley exclaimed.

"Just for a few minutes," the nurse hinted.

Beverley let herself be led in. The room looked strange to her. The servants, directed by the doctor, and later by the trained nurse, had swiftly, noiselessly made the changes before the girl came back to herself. The curtains had been taken down, and rugs cleared away from the parquet floor. Most of the furniture had disappeared, and on a glass table were a number of botties. The bed faced the door, and as Mrs. Sands softly entered a pair of eyes looked at her. Beverley's heart jumped as her eyes met them. She had not known how immense and dark they were, or that they were beautiful.

The nurse drew Mrs. Sands near to the bed, and issued her orders before the girl could open her lips.

"Neither of you must talk much," she commanded. "Mrs. Sands has come to let you see that she exists, and you can thank her if you like, but she mustn't stay many minutes."

"Sister Lake is right," said Beverley. "You mustn't excite yourself. You're going to get well; and this is your home."

"I'm not excited," the girl answered, in a low, monotonous voice, hardly above a whisper. "But I had to see you, and tell you this one thing. I didn't want to live, because . . . I was miserable,

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and everyone hated me; still, it seemed awful to die. You saved me. I wish to live now, if only to show you what gratitude can be. I expect you're awfully rich. I'm poorer than any church mouse. It doesn't look as if I could do anything for one like you. But who knows? There was a mouse once helped a lion. It gnawed a hole in a net. I feel as if the time must come when I can do as much, because I want to so dreadfully. That's all!"

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IV

THE MURMUR OF THE STORM

IT SEEMED that everything were to go wrong with Roger Sands that day. He had felt for the last few months that a cloud had risen between him and John Heron, whose cause he had won in California. If ever a business man owed a debt of gratitude to the brains of another, John Heron owed such a debt to Roger Sands, who had risked not only his reputation, but even his life against the powerful enemies of the alleged "California Oil Trust King." Heron had appeared fully to appreciate this; and before Roger left for New York had been almost oppressively cordial, begging in vain that Roger would visit him and his wife, a famous beauty with Spanish blood in her veins. He had written once, immediately after Sands' departure, and had telegraphed congratulations on reading the news of Roger's marriage. But the friendly reply had remained unacknowledged. The wedding present of a gold tea service had been accompanied by no letter, only a card with the names of "Mr. and Mrs. John Heron." With Sands' thanks the correspondence ended. . . . This had vexed Roger, who liked Heron and was not used to being slighted. The only thing he could think of was Beverley's failure to enclose a note to Mrs.

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Heron in his letter of thanks. She had argued that the present was for him, really, and that if she wrote Mrs. Heron it would look "pushing."

Roger let the matter slide, and had written in his wife's name and his own. At last he read in some newspaper that "Mr. and Mrs. John Heron intended shortly to start for the east, where they would spend the summer." Without waiting to consult Beverley he wrote, saying he had read the news, and he and his wife hoped for a visit in their Newport house as soon as it was ready. He had written, not from the office, but from home, with the Park Avenue address on the paper. To-day, as he entered his study, his eye lit on an envelope with John Heron's writing upon it.

The letter lay on the top of others on his desk, and instead of going to find Beverley at once, as was his lover's custom, he sat down to read his correspondence.

The first letter he opened was Heron's, which consisted of a few lines on one page. Roger's eyes took in the whole at a glance.

DEAR MR. SANDS:

My wife and I are obliged to you for your kind invitation, but owing to the fact that we have already made a great number of engagements I fear we shall be unable to give ourselves the pleasure of accepting.

Yours truly,

JOHN HERON.

The blood rushed to Roger's forehead. He realized that this was a deliberate insult.

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The last letter had begun "Dear Sands," and had been signed "Yours gratefully ever." Roger was even more furious than mystified. "Next time he wants me to pull him out of a death trap, he can whistle for his pains!"

At that instant Beverley tapped at the door, and half opened it to peep in.

This irritated Roger. He had told her from the first that she need not knock at his study door.

"How often have I begged you not to knock?" he broke out at her. "Come in if you want to."

It was the first time he had ever spoken crossly. Beverley started, and the look on her face, instead of overwhelming Roger with remorse, hardened him.

Beverley's colour had been bright, but she turned pale as Roger flung at her his scolding words. Seeing the letter in her husband's hand the blood streamed back to her cheeks. If she could possibly have known and recognized Heron's writing, it might have seemed that the sight of it had struck her with fear. But no such far-fetched thought occurred to her husband.

"I—I'm sorry!" she said hastily. "I heard your voice—I supposed someone was with you——"

Roger forgot that he had spoken aloud. In silence he let the girl cross the floor and sit down in the easy chair she called "hers." She dropped into it as if her knees had given way, and looked at Roger. When he did not speak, she could bear the suspense no longer.

"You—you're reading a letter—I interrupted you?"

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"The letter's of no importance," said Roger, throwing it upon the desk. "It's only from John Heron to tell me that he and his wife won't be able to come and see us at Newport. One would suppose by his tone that he was offended. Probably Mrs. Heron expected you to gush over the wedding present, and has put him up to snubbing me because you didn't."

"You asked the Herons to visit us? I—didn't know——"

"I did ask them," Roger cut her short. "I heard they were coming East."

"Oh, Roger, I couldn't have met them! If they'd accepted I should have had to be ill, or—or go away!" Beverley exclaimed on one of her impulses, which instantly she appeared to regret. "I'm glad you don't like Mr. Heron's letter, because—you'll never ask them again! I haven't done anything to annoy you, have I?"

"You know best whether you have or not."

"What do you mean?"

"Is it necessary to ask? I came home intending not to question you. But I must make one comment: you're surprised that I invite a friend to visit us without consulting you. That seems inconsistent with what you've done. I've read the evening paper, and——"

"Oh, Roger! It's in the paper . . . about that poor child and me?"

"Naturally! You and I aren't nonentities."

"You don't think I did wrong?"

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"Wrong's a big word. You've done something foolish, and inconsiderate to me."

"What harm can the child do to you?"

"That depends upon what sort of 'child' she is! Perhaps you can give me a better account of her than the *Evening Star* gives!"

"I can't give you any," said Beverley, in a trembling voice, "except that she was the most pitiful thing I ever saw . . . so young and desperate, lying in pools of blood."

"Which pools of blood you transferred to your new motor car, my present, that I thought you valued."

"Roger! What did the motor matter, compared with saving a life?"

"Saving a life wasn't in question. An ambulance would have been on the spot in a minute to take the girl to a hospital."

"She wouldn't have had love in a hospital. I felt it was for lack of love she'd tried to kill herself. . . ."

"A girl who steals her companions' money can't expect to have their love. . . ."

"Oh! So that's what the newspaper says? I don't believe she stole. Wait till you see the poor little thing, Roger."

"I don't want to see her. Now she's here, she'll have to stay till she dies, or can be safely moved. I've no wish to be cruel. But when she can go, I want her to do so. I don't mind giving. . . ."

"You do mind giving faith and sympathy!"

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Beverley burst out. "Why should you take me on faith, and refuse it to another? You knew nothing about me . . . I know nothing about this child. . . ."

"Ah, you're sure you know nothing about her!" His tone was bitter.

"What could I know?" she echoed. "I brought her straight home, and she hasn't been able to talk . . . except a few words."

"It occurred to me as rather odd you should do so much for a complete stranger."

"Oh, I see! You think I knew her . . . before?"

"I thought it possible. Her name put the idea into my head. I heard you say it once . . . in your . . . sleep . . . Riley . . . or something like that."

For the third time Beverley blushed, one of her fatal, agonized blushes. The rush of blood forced tears to her eyes; and a certain strained look in them, a quivering of the lips, brought back to Roger's mind a picture of her in the train. That was the first time he had seen her blush. She had said—he remembered well—"You are the only man I'm interested in," and had blushed furiously. He had been sure then that she was no adventuress. She had looked like a frightened child, and she looked like one now. With that picture of the girl in the train came back another recollection. She had asked if any man had inquired for her, or if any "noticeable" person had sought his acquaintance. He had replied

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that he'd not spoken with a soul except a man he knew slightly, a Congressman from California named O'Reilly. He supposed that O'Reilly didn't interest her? Upon this, with a desperate blush, she had made her startlingly frank reply.

As this came back, Roger's heart was no longer soft. What a fool he had been, that day in the train, not to connect the girl's change of colour with his mention of O'Reilly! She might have blurted out her compliment to excuse the blush, instead of the blush having followed the compliment. Good heavens! could Justin O'Reilly have been the man from whom she wished to hide?

"Perhaps the name you spoke in your sleep was O'Reilly!" he flung at his wife.

Beverley gathered herself together.

"So all this time," she said, "you have been suspicious of me! And I was so happy. I thought you were happy, too, but it's just as I was afraid it would be, if I married you. You can't endure the strain!"

"I have endured the strain," Roger defended himself; "because I loved you as few men have ever loved, but the question is, have you deserved it all?"

"This is the moment I felt must come!" she said. "If I had only myself to think of, don't you know I'd have told you everything? I warned you how it would be . . . how I should have to keep the secret not for a little while, but for always! If you don't believe, if you think I lied when I said no man had ever been anything to me . . . if you think I lie now, when I say I never saw or heard of this girl

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till I found her in the street. . . . I can go out of your life. . . . I can go to-day!"

As she spoke slowly, sentence by sentence, with a sobbing breath between, Beverley looked straight into her husband's eyes. Hers did not falter though they swam in tears. With her last words, she rose and stood facing him as he sat at his desk.

Roger gave her back gaze for gaze, as if he would read her secret written in cypher on her soul. He saw that she meant what she said. A word from him, and their experiment was at an end. She would go. It seemed to him that never had her beauty been so gentle, so womanly.

"You shan't go!" he cried, springing to his feet. "I can't give you up!"

But she held him off.

"No!" she panted. "I won't stay if you want me only in that way—because you have a kind of love for me, whether you believe in me or not. I love you too much to be shamed by you! Either you trust me, or you don't. Say which it is, and I'll stay, or go."

"I've got to trust you! I do!" The words seemed to burst from him. "You know I love you more than all the world. It would kill me to lose you."

"I'd rather die from the shock of losing you, Roger, than from such a hateful pain, going on and on——"

'It shan't go on," he said. "I've been happy, too. I'm a changed man since the hour I saw you and loved

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you. It's only to-day I've been wretched. Forgive me, Bev—and God forgive you if——"

"There's an 'if' for you?"

"No—no, there's no 'if' any more. You're to forgive me——that's all!"

"Oh, I do! The hard thing would be not to forgive. But—can we go on being happy again, just as if nothing had happened?"

"Of course we can, silly child. Nothing has happened." Roger had her in his arms now. He kissed her over and over again, till she gasped for breath. "This has only cleared the air. As for that beastly child, I don't care if she's a murderess. Keep her forever, if you choose. Train her as your maid——"

"But she's not 'beastly!' And she's not the kind to have for a maid. I think she's a lady. She seems——"

"Well, do whatever you like with her. Can I go further, to show you I want to atone?"

"No, you can't, Roger——" Beverley nestled her face into his neck. "I adore you!"

She closed her eyes, but opening them she happened, looking over Roger's shoulder, to see John Heron's letter on her husband's desk. A faint shiver ran through her body, and Roger felt it.

"What's the matter, my darling?" he asked.

"Nothing!" she answered. "A mouse ran over my grave."

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V

ON THE WAY TO THE CAR

BEVERLEY found that she could "be happy again, as if nothing had happened" between her and Roger. For one thing, it was wonderful to feel that she had the power to "save" a fellow-being, and wonderful to be worshipped as Clo worshipped her. Of course, Roger "worshipped" her, too, but it was Beverley who looked up to him. Clo looked up to her. When Beverley went into the room presided over by Sister Lake, the child's great black eyes dwelt upon her as the eyes of a devotee upon the form of a goddess "come alive." Roger Sands' wife felt simply that she was repaying God for saving her, by what she was able to do for this Irish girl.

As soon as Clo was allowed to talk she insisted upon telling Beverley about herself. There was, apparently, no romance or mystery in the story of her eighteen years of life. Her mother had died when she was less than three, but Clo could "remember her perfectly." It wasn't only the photograph she had (a badly taken one of a young woman with a baby in her arms), but she could see her mother's colouring. Oh, such lovely colouring! Not dark red hair, like her own, but gold, and eyes more brown than gray. And mother had been only twenty-four

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when she died. Clo had to admit that most of what she knew of mother was from the Sisters who looked after the orphans. Yes, it was in an orphan asylum that the child had been brought up. About father she knew nothing, except that mother had "lost" him before her baby was born, and that he "came from America." Evidently his name had been Riley, because mother was Mrs. Riley, and Clo was Clodagh because "that was a name in mother's family."

The Sisters had been particularly kind. Mother had given Clo into their care, because she lodged, and had fallen ill, in the street of the orphan asylum. There had been a little money, which was placed in a bank for the child. The Sisters had known that mother was a lady; but the orphan girls, when they grew up, were supposed to be put into service. Neither Clo nor the Sisters had wanted her to be a servant, and when she was sixteen a situation was found for her as "companion" to an old lady. Clo "stuck it out" for nearly two years. Then she ran away and sailed for the United States, her unknown father's land, with the sixty pounds which was her fortune. This money was all spent, and she was nearly starving when she snatched at what she could get with Moreton and Payntor.

"But I just couldn't eat and dress on my wages," Clo explained, in her soft, rich voice, rather deep for so young and small a girl, and made creamy by a touch of Irish brogue. "One has to do both in New York. I was so hungry all the time, if the girls left a crust on their plates I used to hide it. I expect the way

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I'd look to see if there'd be anything left gave them the idea I was a sly piece. They thought I put on airs, too. Me! P'raps it was my not knowing their kind of slang. And it's true I did steal once, or almost the same thing as steal. There was a dollar bill on the floor under a table one afternoon. 'Stead of trying to find who was the owner, I slipped it inside my dress. I must have been nearly off my head, or I'd never have done it, darling Mrs. Sands! When the time came to go home to my room that night, I didn't go. I went to a restaurant, and I ate. I ate a whole dollar's worth of dinner, just so I couldn't give any money back if I changed my mind next day. Well, next day was the day you know of. And what with knowing I was a thief, and the girls knowing it, too—though there was no proof—I thought the best thing for a lost child was to die!"

Beverley had by this time "made everything right" for Clo at Moreton and Payntor's. Indeed, Mrs. Roger Sands having taken her up, she had become quite a classic figure of romance among her late enemies. When Beverley told the girl that when she got well she wouldn't have to go, but could stop and be "a sort of secretary," Clo Riley almost had a relapse from the shock of joy.

By the end of May Clo's broken ribs had mended. The first day when she was up and dressed, able to go downstairs, and out for a spin in the renovated blue car, she was a very different looking girl from the battered wisp of humanity whose blood had stained the "robin's-egg" cloth and silk.

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It was Sunday, and Clo was burning with excitement. She was to meet her Angel's husband for the first time. She had pictured him a dragon. The Angel loved him, but the Angel was such a saint, and would love any old husband. Clo imagined that Beverley had been poor (she must have known poverty to be so sympathetic!) and that she'd married an elderly man because—well, not entirely because he was rich (that wouldn't be like an Angel) but because she needed protection. Clo expected to see a grumpy graybeard.

Roger expected to see a washed-out invalid of indefinite type, a young woman of the shabbiest shopgirl order.

What Clodagh saw, when she followed Mrs. Sands into the study, was a strong, dark man, not old at all, apparently, and almost interesting enough in looks to be worthy of the Angel. Still, she was not sure she was going to like him.

What Roger saw was a small, slender girl, too childish, too impish, to think of as a "young woman." She had a little oval face with a pointed chin. It was pale, but not washed-out, and her lips were red. An obstinate, impudent mouth, Roger thought. As for her eyes—he had never seen such great eyes in a human face. They were like holes in a blanket, so big, so black, as they stared up at him. She had curly auburn hair, that looked even redder than it was, in contrast with her eyes. But though the face was impish, not pretty precisely, with its high cheek bones and impertinent chin, he had to admit that it

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was noticeable, and, in some odd way, attractive. The girl was charmingly dressed. He might have known that Bev would see to that. Clo was a surprise to him, as he was to her. Each saw that the other was a distinct and interesting personality; and Roger realized that Beverley was right; the girl had the air of being a lady. There was something else about her, too, which piqued him. He could not make out what it was. Did she look like someone he knew?

He was polite, as he had promised to be, and called Clo "Miss Riley." When Beverley said that they were going out for the invalid's first drive, Roger replied that he was glad; but Clo, catching his eye, fancied she saw a sarcastic gleam.

"He's thinking of the time I came here in that same car," she told herself. "I know I must have spoilt it—got it all messed up with blood. Probably he had to give a lot for doing it over. And my goodness, the dollars of his that Angel has been pouring out for me every day since! No wonder he looks sick! But some day I shall pay. I don't know how, only I shall—I shall!"

Beverley and Clo went down in the gorgeously decorated elevator.

"If Angel lived in a garret, it would be a palace to me," she reflected.

A hall porter opened the door of carved bronze over glass. Without seeming to look, he took in every detail of the slim figure in white cloth; the small white hat tilted over the dark red hair, the

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tiny white shoes, the dainty ankles in silk stockings. Clo could have laughed aloud. Of course, the giant in livery knew the whole story. He was contrasting the way she came out with the way she had come in.

Drawn up at the pavement was the glittering blue automobile, with the statuesque Robbins at the wheel. Clo remembered both, with a queer, sick pang. She had not been wholly unconscious when the stretcher was pushed into the car. "What I owe this darling woman!" was the thought she breathed like a prayer.

As the two crossed the pavement—tall, beautiful Beverley and quaint little Clo—a man who must have been loitering close by started toward them with a limping step, and took off his hat.

"Is this Mrs. Roger Sands?" he asked.

Beverley stopped short, within a yard of her car. For such a graceful, softly moving person, her movement seemed jerky. Clo glanced from the man to Mrs. Sands in surprise. One would say the Angel looked frightened, only that would be absurd! Besides, the man wasn't a creature worth being afraid of. He was short, and very thin, as if he had been ill. He hadn't a nice face. Sallow and sickly it was, like a prison bird, with hollows under the red-rimmed eyes. He was badly lame, too, if he wasn't pretending; and altogether, in spite of her newly mended ribs, Clo felt that she herself would be equal to knocking him down.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Sands," Beverley answered, as

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if against her will. "I don't—but perhaps someone has sent you with a message?"

"In a way, yes, that's it," said the man. "I had a message for you. I'm the man sent to meet you in Chicago, September 21st of last year."

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VI

THE PARCEL WITH THE GOLD SEALS

THERE was a second of suspense for Clo, and then Beverley spoke quietly:

"Oh, I see! That's very interesting," she said. "I hope—the news is good?"

"It's a long message," the man answered. "I was told to let you have it in person. I thought you'd be goin' out sooner or later. If your husban' 'ad bin along, I'd have left a line, but——"

"Never mind what you would have done, please," Beverley cut him short. "The best thing I can think of now, is this" (she hurried on in a low tone, and Clo who had stepped aside, nearer to the car, did not catch the words), "Take a taxi, and follow my automobile. We're going into the Park. When you see us stop, you must stop too, at a distance.

"I shall get out and let the motor, with my friend in it, go on without me for a while. Then we can talk. Do you understand?"

"I'll be there," said the man.

He touched his hat and moved away, as if his errand were done.

"Drive slowly through the Park," Beverley instructed Robbins, and gently made Clo get into the car before her. "I'm so sorry to have kept you

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standing, dear," she said. "I hope you don't feel weak or 'tottery'?"

Clo did feel very weak, not from fatigue, but from excitement. She replied that she felt "grand." And Mrs. Sands forgot to say that she was glad.

The girl glanced at the older woman, and saw that she was staring straight ahead, with a withdrawn look in her eyes, which told that she saw nothing. Clo's heart beat fast. This drive was to have been a glorious experience. She had seen Central Park more than once, and had walked there, miserable in her loneliness. Now, though she looked out of the window, it was to let Beverley feel that she was not being stared at. The girl saw only a blur of colour, as if a kaleidoscope turned before her eyes.

At last Beverley spoke.

"Dear child," she said, "I'm sure you understand that the man who was waiting for me brought a message I'm anxious to hear. And—I'm sure of another thing—that I can trust you!"

"I'd die any minute for you, sure I would!" she cried.

"I believe you would! But I don't want you to die. All I want is for you to listen while I explain——"

"As if you needed to explain to me!" the girl broke out.

"I don't need to, perhaps, yet I wish to say just this: I love Roger dearly. I've told you so often enough! I'd give anything on earth not to have

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a secret from him. But to save a life—not my own—there is a secret I must keep. This man and his message are part of it. Now, that's all I'm going to explain, except that—that nothing must be said."

"I'd bite my tongue out sooner!" Clo protested.

"Thank you, dear! Now we've had this talk, it's a comfort, not a worry, having you with me. You won't mind if I send you on while I get down and walk in the Park?"

"I'd love it!" said Clo.

At once Beverley took the speaking tube and ordered the chauffeur to stop. He drew up at the side of the road. They were in the midst of the Park now, an exquisite green and gold world of peace and beauty.

"I feel like taking a little exercise," Beverley said to Robbins, as she stepped out of the car. "Miss Riley isn't strong enough to walk. Go as far along Riverside Drive as Grant's Tomb, and then come back, but slowly, so she can see everything. You'll find me waiting here."

It seemed that Robbins carried out his instructions too laboriously. Clo didn't like the ferret-man, and she didn't believe that Beverley liked meeting him.

When at last Robbins brought the car back to the rendezvous there was the tall graceful figure in gray, standing alone.

"Oh, have we kept you?" the girl cried, throwing open the door before the automobile stopped.

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Beverley did not answer, or seem to hear. She did not even look at Clo.

"Home!" she said to Robbins. "As fast as you can!"

Clo was shocked into silence, and hardly breathed when Beverley had sunk on to the seat, covering her face with her hands. The car had nearly reached the Sands' corner of Park Avenue before the elder girl spoke. Then she said abruptly, as if waking from a dream:

"Forgive me! I couldn't talk! I'm in dreadful trouble! I must ask you to help me. Are you strong enough to take a longer drive, and to walk a few steps alone?"

"Rather!" said Clo.

"Well, when we stop in front of our house, sit still in the car. I don't want Sister Lake or Roger to know we're back. I'll run in, get a parcel which must be taken to a certain place, and give it to you. Then Robbins will drive (I'll tell him) to a hotel on Broadway, called the Westmorland. I never heard of it before, but it seems that it's near 33d Street, and quiet and respectable. Go into the restaurant and order tea. While you're there, that man you saw will come into the room, and you'll hand him the packet. That's all."

"It sounds too easy," Clo said.

"I hope it will be easy. I'll bring you a latch-key when I come down with the parcel. Let yourself in when you get home, and go straight to your room. I don't want you to fib, but try to make it seem to

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Sister as if we'd just come back. She'll think it strange if she knows I've sent you out on an errand by yourself."

"She shan't know," the girl promised.

"You *are* a comfort! You see, I told Roger I'd be at home by four, and I couldn't be, till long after if I took the parcel myself. I shall only just be in time as it is. Here we are at the door! Now I'll rush. In five minutes I hope to be with you again. Oh, if only Sister Lake isn't at the window!"

The five minutes passed, and Beverley didn't return. Clo watched the silver-gilt clock under the vase of violets. Ten minutes; fifteen minutes; no Mrs. Sands! The girl was wondering whether she ought to wait indefinitely, or seek her friend to see what had happened when Beverley appeared. She was breathless with haste.

"Here, take this, and do just as I told you to do," she said, thrusting into Clo's hands a bag, not a parcel. "Inside you'll find what I spoke of, and money to pay for your tea. I had to hide the parcel. I can't stop to explain more now." She turned to the chauffeur, and hastily ordered him to drive to the Westmorland Hotel. Miss Riley had to meet a friend there; Robbins must wait till she was ready to come home.

Only as the car slowed down in front of the third-rate hotel did Clo touch the hasp of the gray suede bag. It was not locked, and save for a crumpled dollar bill, its sole contents was a large, unaddressed envelope fastened with three gold seals. On each of

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these seals was the same elaborate monogram, which Clo did not try to make out; but it was not composed of Beverley Sands' initials. Evidently the parcel had been crammed into the first handy receptacle, for it was all but too big to go in, and Clo found it difficult to extract without damaging the seals. Leaving the bag on the seat, she hid the envelope under the smart, white cloth cape which went with her new frock.

The restaurant of the hotel opened off the hall. At that hour, a little after four o'clock, there was no one in the room but a waiter. Afternoon tea was evidently not a daily custom of the Westmorland's guests, but when it was brought at length, the ferret-man had not yet arrived.

"Oh, dear, what shall I do if he doesn't come?" Clodagh asked herself, thinking fearfully about the chauffeur—and about Sister Lake.

Just then the face of the ferret man appeared at the door. He glanced about, fixed the girl with his red-rimmed eyes, slouched into the room, and limped briskly to the table.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, with a familiar grin, and pulled out a chair to sit opposite Clo. He kept on his hat. His breath reeked spirits, and the girl was disgusted, but she was the faithful servant of Mrs. Sands, and the waiter was staring.

"Here's the parcel Mrs. Sands sent. She particularly wanted me to get back as soon as possible."

The long envelope, with the gold seals uppermost, was lying on the table. Clo removed a napkin she

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had laid over it, and pushed the parcel across the table. As she did this she rose.

"Looks right enough!" remarked the ferret man, sitting still. "This is what she told me to expect: long white envelope, three gold seals——" He picked the parcel up, holding it to his sharp nose and near-sighted eyes. "Yeh, munergram, or what yuh call it, right, too."

"Then that's all," said Clo, Beverley's dollar bill in her hand. "I'll call the waiter——"

"Don't be too previous, cutie, *if* you please!" and a not immaculate hand helped itself to a fold of her dress. "Yuh an' me ain't workin' this show on our own. You're for Mrs. Sands, I'm fur—well, I'm fur someone I guess is even more particular than her. It's as much as my job's worth to let yuh make your get-away till I've had a squint inside this yere envelup."

"Mrs. Sands didn't tell me there was anything to wait for after I'd put it in your hands," Clo objected. "I don't see——"

"It's me that's got to see. Now yuh keep yer hair on, gurlie, while I lamp this thing. No good tryin' the sneak game, because I'd be on to yuh like a thousand o' brick before yuh'd took a step——"

"I've no intention of running away," Clo assured him, with a dignity copied from her idol. "Mrs. Sands has nothing to hide."

The man chuckled, as with a knife taken from the table he opened the envelope without breaking the seals. He did this slowly. Clo sat down again.

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The ugly hands drew out from the envelope another smaller envelope. There were no seals on it, but the flap was stuck with gum. The man swore under his breath as he used the knife again. Clo was deeply interested. Her idea was that the fellow would pull out a quantity of greenbacks; but in an instant she saw that she had guessed wrong. There were many sheets of paper folded together, at least a dozen, and this seemed to astound the man. With a jerk he opened out the sheaf of papers, and having stared an instant, slammed them on to the table. "Curse her, she thought she'd do us, did she?" The words tumbled out between his brown, broken teeth, as he dashed his fist on to the papers. "So this is why she sent you—you catspaw!"

Clo was far from being a coward. Her hot, defiant temper rose at the least alarm, but she was so amazed at the result of her errand that she was struck dumb. Mechanically her eyes had turned to the papers. She saw that the upper sheets consisted of blank stationery taken from a train, the Santa Fé Limited.

"If you're trying to scare me, you can't," she said. "You're acting like a fool. If something's gone wrong in your business, it isn't my fault, and I'm sure it isn't Mrs. Sands. If there's a trick, she's tricked, too. Try to have common sense."

The girl's fearless gaze and quickly spoken words calmed the man.

"It's darned rot to say my lady who stayed at home ain't in the trick. Why, dumbhead, this paper

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shows! She was on board the Limited. Gee! Don't I have cause to know that? It's easy as slidin' off a log to see what she done. She helped herself to what was in this yere envelope, an' filled it with train stationery. Then she sealed it up with the same kind o' seals. Stole the stamp and wax on purpose. Thought she could get away with it. I take off my hat to her."

"I know nothing except that I agreed to bring the parcel," said Clo.

"You go back to her ladyship as fast as you can scamper, and tell her I wasn't soft enough to bow myself off the stage without peepin' at what Santa Claus had put in my stockin'. Tell her 'twould only o' bin a matter o' time if I hadn't peeped. As it is, it's a matter o' less time. Tell her a life will pay for this, and she jolly well knows whose!"

The man had ceased to bluster, and now that he had got himself in hand again his fierce eyes and his low, hissing voice thrilled the girl as his threats had not thrilled her. This time he allowed her to rise, which she did, tottering slightly. She had forgotten about paying for her tea, but the dollar bill lay in a crumpled wad on the table. The man placed one of his oddly repulsive hands over it.

"I'll see to the waiter," he said. "I'm stayin' in this hotel. You cut along and tell your lady friend she's got till ten o'clock to-night to explain herself, not a minute more. Good day to you, Miss Baby Doll!"

Without answering, Clo walked out of the room,

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ashamed that her knees were weak, and hoping that she could get safely to the car without making a fool of herself. Physically, it was a great relief to lie back against the soft cushions of robin's egg blue, and shut her eyes. What would Angel do when she heard how dreadfully the errand had failed?

Clo had forgotten the difficulty of making Sister Lake believe, without a fib, that she and Mrs. Sands had only just come in from their drive together. But she remembered as she went up in the elevator. It was very late now—long after five. Sister was sure to be cross; but if she were cross only with Clo, and not Mrs. Sands, that wouldn't matter.

Few things work out according to expectations. Sister Lake had been at the window, it seemed, when the car brought back Mrs. Sands and Clo before four o'clock, and had been alarmed when the former descended to hurry alone into the house.

"I was afraid you'd fainted," she said when Clo arrived at last. "I flew out of this room to go down in the elevator, and bumped into Mr. Sands in the hall, and while I was apologizing and making him understand she appeared on the scene."

"My goodness, the fat *is* in the fire!" Clo thought desperately. Aloud she said: "Well?"

"She said you wanted to go to tea with someone, and she was hurrying to her room to get money for you, so that you could stand treat. I objected, as I had a right to do," went on Sister Lake. "You're still my patient, if my time is up to-morrow. And if you have a relapse I shall be in a nice fix, as I'm due

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at Mrs. Jardine's Tuesday morning! Mrs. Sands really acted very queer, she was so determined you should go. Even when her husband backed me up, she was as obstinate as—as—if she wasn't such a sweet woman, I should say a pig!"

"It was my fault," pleaded Clo. "I'm not tired a bit." Yet as she argued, a voice was saying inside her head: "No wonder the poor darling was a long time coming down with the parcel!"

But this, though exciting enough, was as naught beside the great question: "What would Beverley say, what would she feel, when Clo had to confess all that had happened at the Hotel Westmorland?"

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VII

THE QUEEN'S PEARLS

ROGER also had a secret that Sunday. He waited for Beverley and Clo to be gone (reminding his wife that she had promised to be back by four) and then called up the Belmont Hotel by telephone.

"Give me Count Lovoresco's room," he said, and presently a foreign conception of the word "Hello!" rumbled through the receiver.

"Hello, Count," Roger replied, recognizing the voice. "My wife's safely off. I'll send my own car round at once. Now you've got the letter of confirmation we can settle our business. What? You're ready? Thank you. My man'll be at the hotel as soon as you can get down. Good-bye."

Fifteen minutes later a dark, dapper, elderly man with magnificent eyes was ushered into Roger's study.

"You've brought the pearls, of course?" Roger asked.

"Yes, Mistaire Sand, I bring ze pearls," announced Count Lovoresco.

"And the letter from the Queen?"

"From 'er Majesty's secretaire," Count Lovoresco corrected. "'Ere it is." He drew from a breast pocket a square envelope with a crown and a monogram on the flap. This he handed to Sands, and as

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the latter opened it, he took from another pocket a purple velvet box, oval in shape, about eight inches long by two in height. On the cover appeared a gold crown, and the same monogram as that of the envelope. Roger had seen this box and its contents; so, instead of watching a tiny gold key fitted into a miniature padlock, he read the letter authorizing Count Lovoresco, in the name of his Queen, to sell in America a rope of pearls, for the benefit of the soldiers' orphans of her country.

"This clears the deck," remarked Roger. The cover of the oval box was raised, and lying in a series of concentric grooves he saw the pearls which he intended to buy for Beverley. They were two hundred and fifty in number, as he knew, and were graduated in size, the largest being as big as a giant pea. All were exquisitely matched in shape and colour, and the one fault—if fault existed—was a blue whiteness disliked by some connoisseurs. Roger was aware, however, that Beverley loved snow-white pearls.

"Any minute Simon Lecourt may be here," he said to Lovoresco. "When he's looked at the things, I'll sign and hand you my cheque for two hundred and sixty thousand dollars."

Lovoresco smiled under his dyed moustache, but the wonderful eyes, for which men of his race are famous, lit angrily.

"You are ze most prudent of gentlemen!" he exclaimed. "Your great Franco-American pearl expert, 'e 'as valued ze pearls one time already at 'is own

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place, under your eye, Mistaire Sand. Now 'e 'as to come to your 'ouse! Mazette! But you must tink me a smart one, saire, if I could change false tings for real in ze last minute!"

"I think some other smart men might have changed them without you or me being smart enough to know the difference," Roger explained. "I believe in making a ship watertight before she goes to sea."

"You are right," Lovoresco said, shrugging his shoulders. "I am pleased once more to meet ze expert."

"Mr. Simon Lecourt," announced the butler.

At a quarter to four—the cheque having been signed—Roger was shaking hands with the jewel expert he had summoned, and bowing to Count Lovoresco. The pearls were his, and he was impatient for Beverley. In five or six minutes she ought to arrive.

Beverley stepped into the lift as Count Lovoresco and Simon Lecourt stepped out. As they passed she heard Roger's name, and her heart jumped. These were strangers to her, but they had perhaps been calling on Roger. What if they were connected with the past terror which had begun lately to seem as dim as a dreadful dream? What if they had been telling Roger?

Such a thought would not have come, save for the scene she had gone through. With her nerves keyed to breaking point she went up to her own floor with somewhat the sensation she might have had in step-

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ping from the tumbril to the guillotine. It was all she could do not to scream at Sister Lake in the hall; and when Roger appeared also it seemed to Beverley that she would faint.

Roger did not share the nurse's interest in Clo's outing; but he wanted Beverley.

"Good girl!" he exclaimed, trying to be gay. "You're back ahead of time. Send one of the servants down with money for Miss Riley. Come into the study; I've got something to show you. When you've seen it you'll know why I asked you to be home by four."

"I'll be there in a minute!" Beverley answered. "Let me take off my hat first. I've rather a headache!"

She turned toward her room, hoping that Roger would wait in the study, thus giving her a chance to find what she had to find, and take it to Clo in the waiting auto. But Roger, remorseful already for his disloyal thought connecting her with O'Reilly, followed.

"If you'd a prophetic soul," he said, "your headache would go. Are you good at guessing, Bev.?"

The girl was at her wits' end. Already she had almost fibbed, in explaining Clo's errand. If only, now, she could have five minutes' grace!

"You ought to know I never guess anything right!" she laughed. "It's not quite four. Show me the wonderful thing just as the clock strikes!"

Roger pulled out his watch. "All right, baby!" he teased her. "You've got just three minutes and

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a half. Perhaps you think a woman needs that time to take off her hat; I'll show you you're wrong!"

He neatly extracted a hat pin which Beverley had twisted into her veil. Then off came the hat. Roger led his wife by the hand to the door of his study. Beverley was in despair. Her one cause for thankfulness lay in the fact that he had forgotten Clo. If he'd remembered to send down money, the girl would have been bewildered, and perhaps have come in to ask for instructions. There was room in Beverley's brain for no other thought than "How am I to get that parcel and give it to Clo?"

"Shut your eyes," said Roger. "The clock's going to strike four now; don't open your eyes till it stops."

Beverley obeyed, as in that mood she would have obeyed an order to stand still and be shot through the heart. "One—two," slowly struck the grandfather clock in the corner; and she felt something cool and heavy dropped over her neck. "Three—four!" the clock finished. "Open your eyes," Roger gave the signal.

"Oh!" cried Beverley, almost aghast. On her delicate gray dress the double line of pearls glistened like huge drops of dew on a spider-web. The rope hung down below her waist, and each pearl had a light in its heart as if it held the ghost of a rainbow. "It can't be true! It's a dream!" the girl stammered. She loved pearls, and knew that these were marvels beyond common knowledge. But oh, if they could have come to her at another time!

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She managed, however, to put a world of emotion into one kiss and clasp of her arms. Her silent anguish was disguised as awe. By this time she had an inspiration. She felt like the Queen of New York, she said. She must run to her room for a look in the glass, as there was only a weird old convex mirror in the study. In just a minute—or maybe two minutes—she would come back. She could have sobbed out "Thank God!" when Roger, laughing at her vanity, let her go. This time he did not follow. He stood examining the purple velvet case with the Queen's crown and monogram. He had not told Beverley the price he had given for the pearls. He wondered if she guessed that they had cost a fortune. Why didn't she come back?

Beverley had not even thrown a glance at the mirror. In her own room she tore open the drawer where her handkerchiefs were kept in rose-scented sachet cases. The largest of these cases she snatched, throwing the contents back into the drawer. With fingers that shook, she ripped the top of the padded silk cushion, and extracted a long envelope sealed with three gold seals. She would hardly have remembered the Queen's pearls had the rope not caught in the key of the drawer as she turned hastily to go. Before she could save it, the string broke, and pearls big as peas began falling like hailstones.

With a cry, she caught the broken ends of the rope together, dragged it over her head and bundled it into the drawer among scattered handkerchiefs. She did not even stop to close the drawer. As for the

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fallen pearls—a dozen at least—there was no time to think of them, or of what Roger would say when he heard of the accident.

Crushing on her hat, which still lay on the bed where Roger had thrown it, she ran from the room, stuffing the envelope into her handbag. Luck favoured her. She got out of the flat and into the lift without being seen.

When five minutes had passed and Beverley was still away, Roger decided to join her. He opened the bedroom door, and looked in. Something rolled away from Roger's foot on the threshold. He stooped and picked the thing up: it was an enormous pearl.

A shock of fear thrilled through him. He thought that news of his purchase might already have reached the underworld. In these few minutes, while he calmly waited for Beverley, she might have been murdered. Things like that did happen. He stepped on a second pearl, and saw that others lay on the pale rose carpet. He stood staring. At the foot of the bed a tall screen had been placed to keep the light from Beverley's eyes in the morning. What if behind it he should find her lying?

As he braced himself to go and look, Beverley herself came into the room. It seemed that she shrank at sight of him.

"I thought you'd been kidnapped or killed!" he gasped. "What's happened?"

"N-n-nothing," she stammered. "It was only—we forgot about Clo—I had to take her that money.

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I——" She broke off, seeing the pearl in Roger's hand. "Oh, wasn't it dreadful that the rope snapped?" she hurried on. "I wanted to get back to you quickly. I knew the pearls were safe here. I just shut the door, and ran down."

"So I see," Roger said drily. All the joy he had felt in his splendid gift was gone.

"What are a few pearls more or less compared to Miss Riley's convenience?"

"Oh, Roger!" Beverley burst into tears. "Don't look at me like that! Don't speak to me like that! You think I don't value the pearls? I do!—for themselves, and for your love! I acted on impulse——"

"Quite so. You've done that before. Don't apologize, my dear girl. It's not worth it. I care less for the things than you do. Ring for your maid and let her sweep them up. I dare say she'll find them all to-day or to-morrow!"

"No," said Beverley, fighting back the hysterical sobs that choked her. "No, I won't have anyone look for the pearls but myself. Unless you, Roger, would show your forgiveness by helping me?"

"I have an appointment," he answered. "I'm late for it now. I shall have to go at once."

It was not true. He had no appointment. But he felt that he must be alone, and out of doors, in the fresh air.

Clo Riley, returning from her errand at the Hotel Westmorland, did not see him as she tripped from car to door, but Roger on his way home saw the girl

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hurry in as if each second were important. Hardly had she vanished when a man strolled round the corner. He was walking slowly, and looking up at the façade as if interested. Roger, at the farther end of the block, recognized Justin O'Reilly.

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VIII

BEVERLEY TALKS

Clo remembered Beverley's instructions, and went straight to her own room, but the threat of the ferret-man rang in her ears. "Tell your lady friend a life will pay for this. She's got till ten o'clock to-night, and not a minute more."

It was now after five, and Sister Lake was firmly bent upon undressing her charge. Clo had to let herself be tucked into bed. Meekly also she received the order to lie quite still and rest till dinner time.

Rest! As though she could rest, not knowing what ought to be done next to help the Angel! A passive plan occurred to Clo, which could do no harm, and her quick wit suggested how best to carry it out.

"I'll be as good as gold," she promised, "if you'll forgive me, Sister, and do me a favour. I feel sick because I spoilt your afternoon! You stayed in, waiting for me to come back, instead of taking your walk. Will you go out now, instead? I'll rest better if you will. Do, please!"

All Clo's Irish powers of persuasion were needed to coax Sister into consenting. Eventually she relented. Clo could have sung for joy as Sister Lake bade her "good-bye for an hour." As the door of

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the room closed, the girl began counting the seconds which must pass before the outer door shut.

"Sixty-two—sixty-three—she ought to be gone!" Clo was whispering, when her heart sank. The room door opened. She feared that Sister Lake had changed her mind; but it was the Angel who came in.

"I was racking my brain how to get rid of Sister when I saw her go out," Beverley said. "I'm sure you managed it. I've been desperate. You can't think what things have happened! Tell me, did all go well?"

The blow must be struck. In a few words Clo described the scene at the Westmorland; told how the ferret-man had kept her waiting; how he had said that the envelope looked all right, but had insisted upon opening it; how he had flown into a rage at finding only folded sheets of blank paper.

"Blank paper!" Beverley gasped. "But that's impossible! I know what was in the envelope. There were letters. The man must have tricked you."

Clo shook her head.

"I was watching him. He had no time, or chance, to play a trick. The blank paper was there, and nothing else. It was writing paper, quite a lot of sheets that seemed to have been taken from some train, 'Santa Fé Limited,' or a name like that."

Beverley gave a cry, as if she had been struck over the heart.

"Let me think," she groaned. "How can that have been? Writing paper taken from the train?"

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Suddenly she turned, and came back to the bed, putting out her hands in a groping way to Clo. The girl caught and held them tightly. They were very cold.

"Angel! is there nothing I can do?" she whispered.

Beverley sank on the bed once more.

"My head feels as if I'd been given ether," she said. "I can't think things out clearly. That isn't like me! A terrible day! One shock after another. If I talk to you, will you swear by all that's sacred never to give away one word?"

"I swear by my love for you. That's the most sacred thing I have, except my locket with mother's picture," the girl answered.

"You see," Beverley went on, "I've no one else but you, Clo. If I told my husband anything, I should have to tell all. I daren't do that. Not because I couldn't trust him. But I've taken an oath ten times more solemn than the one you took just now, to keep a secret that isn't only mine. Another's life depends on the secret being kept. To save that life I was forced to do what I hate to think of. And it's no concern of yours, but it would be Roger's if he had the faintest inkling! Now, I'm going to tell you one or two things, and you must use your brains to explain the mystery. You're clever, and true as steel. You've proved that! Suppose a case; suppose you'd undertaken a dangerous mission. You have in your charge some documents which could make or break a man. You know you'll be followed. You nearly miss your train, but you jump on board

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at the last minute. You see a man—not the one you expect, but another just as much to be feared—more, perhaps, because he's a great deal cleverer, if not so violent. You think you're lost, but you find a friend, a man who helps you. You give him the envelope that has the papers in it—a sealed envelope. You've seen it, Clo! He keeps it through the journey. At a stopping place on the way he offers to hand it back to you, but you refuse. You feel that the thing is safer with him. Later, in New York, he returns the envelope intact, the seals unbroken. This friend who comes to the rescue is the soul of honour. Never since that moment has the envelope been out of your own keeping. Yet it is opened to-day for the first time, and the papers that were in it are gone, changed for stationery of that train, the 'Santa Fé Limited.' How can this have been done? Who did it?"

"The other man must have done it, the one who followed you on to the train."

"But he was never near Rog . . . never near the man who . . . oh, I might as well tell you right out that it was Roger who kept the envelope for me. I'll tell you the name of the other man, too. It's sure to slip out! His name is Justin O'Reilly."

"O'Reilly?" Clo echoed. "How dare the brute have a name like mine?"

"Why, so it is like," said Beverley. "But there's an 'O,' and he spells it differently."

"Beast! He'd better, or I'd have to change," snapped Clo. "Well, whatever his name is, I believe he must have stolen your papers. Can

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"Still, his coat not being buttoned would make it easier to steal the envelope, if somebody very clever got a chance to try."

"Perhaps. But O'Reilly could never have done such a thing. It would take a trained thief."

"Can people send off telegrams from those Limited trains?" Clo took up her catechism again.

"Yes, of course they can."

"Would there have been time for this O'Reilly chap to wire Chicago, after he followed you on board the train, and have a man meet him?"

"Yes, plenty of time."

"Well, what if he wired to some detective people, and told them to send him the 'smartest pickpocket in America'?"

"But . . . . . the police couldn't . . . wouldn't . . . do such a thing!"

"I don't mean the real police," Clo explained. "Haven't you often read books about private detectives? I have. They might get reformed thieves to work for them. Can you remember what O'Reilly did next, after you both passed him on the platform?"

"No. I didn't look back."

"You don't know, then, whether the person he seemed to expect ever turned up?"

Beverley shook her head. "Roger and I went straight ahead to a newsstand where *I* expected to meet a person. Two or three minutes after we passed O'Reilly we were mixed up in a big crowd, almost fighting our way through. . . ."

"Oh, a big crowd!" Clo broke in. "A chance

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for that pickpocket. Suppose he came the minute you had turned your backs on O'Reilly, and he sent his trained thief after you, hot foot, to get that envelope?"

"Ah, but you've forgotten something!" cried Beverley. "A thief might get the envelope: I'll admit that. But how could he have another one exactly like it, with the same seals, the same monogram, to put into Roger's pocket, when he took the original?"

"He could only have it if O'Reilly could have given it to him. Could he have done that?"

Suddenly Beverley began to see. A vivid idea sprang into her head, and was imaged in her eyes.

"You've thought of something!" Clo exclaimed. "You see how O'Reilly might have got the seal with the monogram, and the gold wax, and an envelope like the one you had?"

"Oh, yes. I do see!" Beverley groaned. "He could have brought the things from—from . . . But never mind. That part's nothing to you."

"I want only to know the part you want me to know," said Clo.

"It isn't a question of what I want. It's a question of my sacred oath," Beverley answered. "There was a house where I had been, to get the envelope. O'Reilly was there, too. Someone . . . no matter who! . . . could have given him all the things, so he could change envelopes if he got the chance. Oh, child, I keep stumbling on to a path where I dare not step."

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"We'll go back to the train," said Clo. "If O'Reilly had the gold wax and the seal, and the right kind of envelope, he could have made his plan, and sent his telegram, and had everything ready for the right minute . . . in the Chicago station."

"Ye—es, he could. But it's almost impossible!"

"It's more possible than Mr. Sands' changing the envelopes, isn't it?"

"That is the one impossible thing. The worst remains. I have lost the papers! Whether O'Reilly has them or someone else, I can't get them back. Without them, I'm ruined!"

"You shan't be!" Clo cried, twining her thin arms round her idol's waist. "You must be saved somehow. We've got till ten o'clock to think."

"If I were the only one, it wouldn't matter so much," Beverley said. "But there's somebody who can be tortured as well as killed, if I have no bribe to offer. Those papers gave me all the power I had."

"Wouldn't money . . ." Clo began, but Beverley cut her short.

"No money I could get would be of any use," she said. "A million might be!"

"See O'Reilly and make him give up the papers!" cried Clo. "Oh, but is he in New York?"

"He doesn't live in New York, but he's here now. I know, because that man you saw, Peterson, told me. It was part of a threat he held over my head that O'Reilly and some people connected with him should be in town just now. I know the hotel he's staying in, the Dietz. But even if O'Reilly would come, how

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