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e House of Another

Beatrice Mantle

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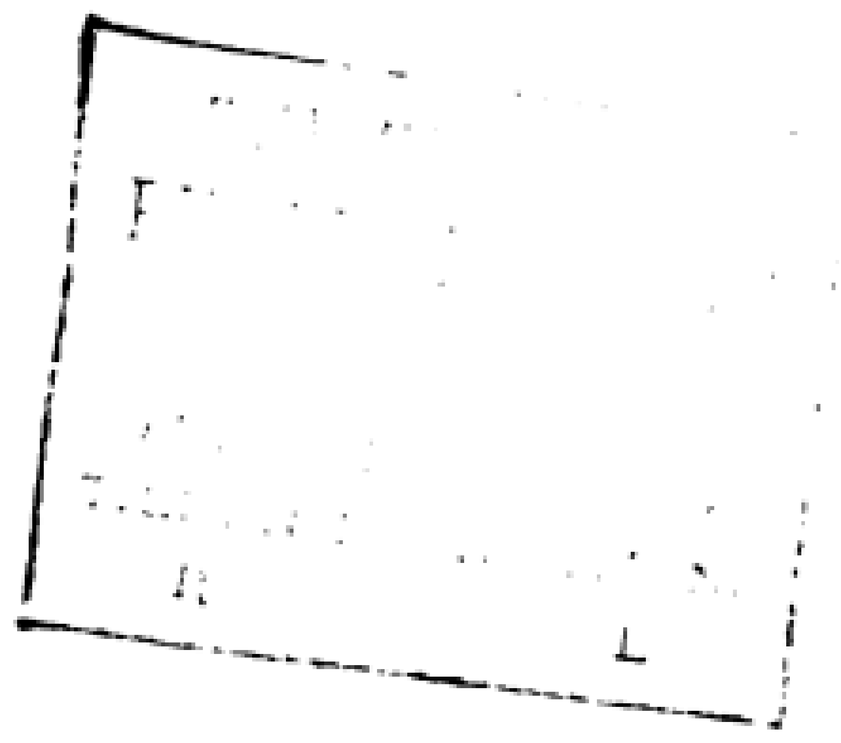

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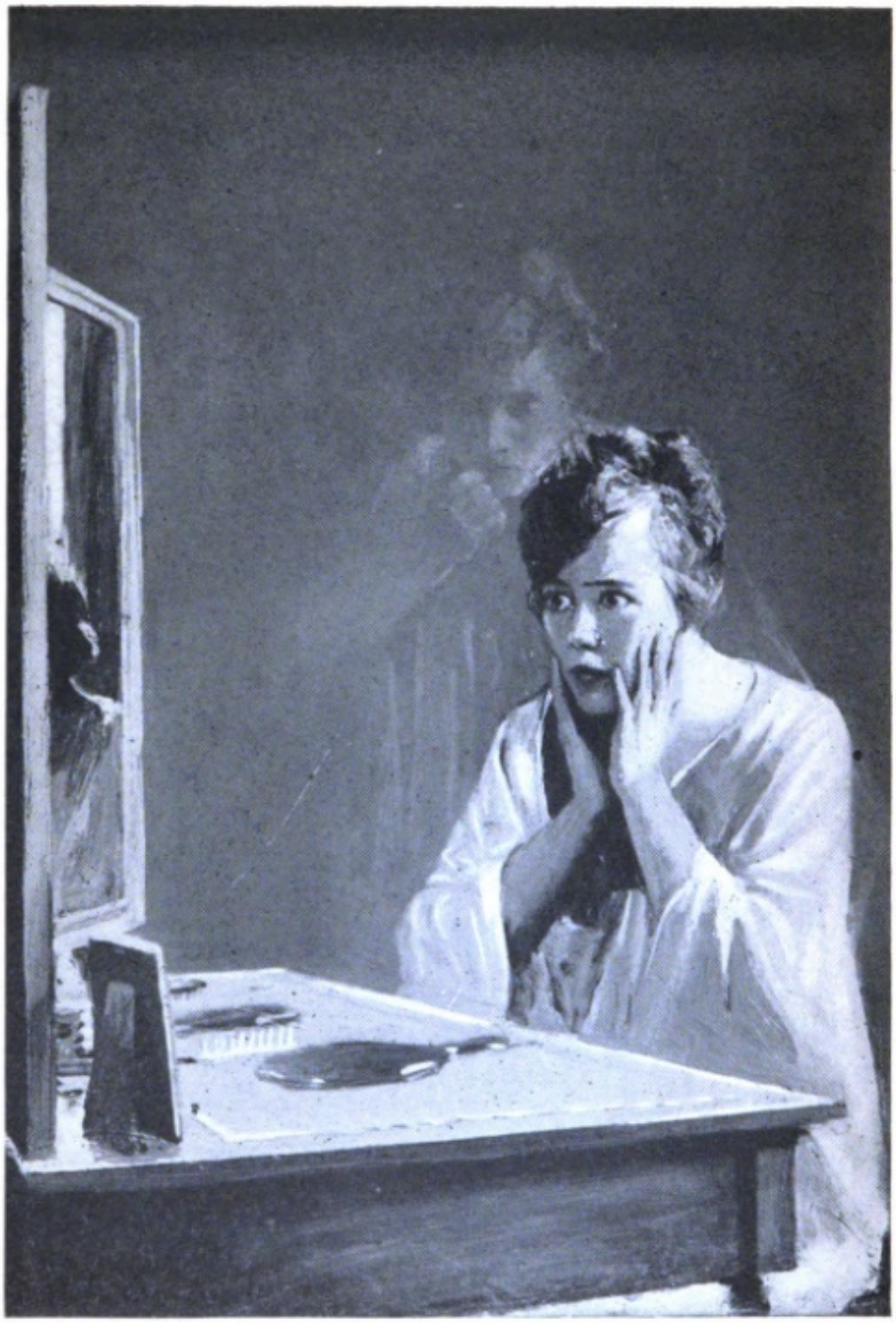

And then she crept back to the mirror

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IN THE HOUSE OF ANOTHER

BY

BEATRICE MANTLE

Author of "GRET," etc.

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IN THE HOUSE OF ANOTHER

CHAPTER I

UNA waked partially. She could hear voices and could dimly see faces bending over her. Faces suspended in mid-air, as it were.

"I really think it will be quite safe to let her sleep," said a man's voice. "There is absolutely no sign of —"

She fell back, down into that river of velvety soft darkness that bore her along past eerie cliffs and whispering caverns, through great living silences that caressed and soothed her soul. She did not think as she entered that wonderful darkness again. Still, she knew she was not asleep: only floating in the most profound peace she had ever known.

Again she came to a place where voices murmured. Some of the words came down to her in the river of darkness. She heard them impersonally as if the words floated idly with her and did not refer to her.

"Una," said a voice. And the name seemed to

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echo softly from bank and cavern. "Yes — it is a queer name."

"Una." The soft darkness whispered it. "A queer name — a queer name. Una — a queer name."

"No, it was a collision," said another voice. Many murmurs, it might be of still more voices, floated about her. But only some of the words came to her: "Oh, no. . . . He 's an oldish man. . . . Stenographer. . . . He had detained her at the office, and was just taking her home."

The murmuring went on. Una did not listen, and yet it seemed as if every part of her quiescent body could hear. She heard, but did not heed.

"She never had a very good time. And she must have wanted it. All girls do. Just had to work and support her mother."

Just had to work and support. . . . Just had to work. . . . The words tried to follow her, but the river was getting deeper and swifter; she went on into that profound but living darkness, where not even the sound of a voice could come.

After countless miles of voyaging, Una came to where there was light. It penetrated her eyelids. And though for a while she still lay with closed eyes, yet she knew the time had come for her to wake. Presently she opened her eyes.

She was wide awake, immensely refreshed and rested, like a child waking from a night of dream-

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less sleep. There may have been a slight languor of body, for she realized with a content that stretched the full length of her the yielding softness of the bed; but her senses were fully alert, and she looked about the spacious room with pleasure and interest. It was quite plainly a woman's room, and the room of a dainty woman, too. Una followed every detail of its arrangement with approval — the cream wicker-paneled bed in which she lay, the triple-mirror dressing-table that stood well to the middle of the room, the polished floor and delicately tinted rugs, the ivory panels and exquisite vining morning-glories of the walls, and the softly flowered drapings edging the big windows. How more than satisfying life must be with such surroundings! she thought.

Before the window sat a nurse, reading. She had not noticed Una's reëntrance into the world of things, and Una made no effort to enlighten her. She lay idly for a while, enjoying to the full the delights of absolute repose. Then she considered the nurse again, and presently, studying this starched, professional presence, it was borne in on her that she had forgotten to investigate herself. She wondered whimsically whether she were broken somewhere, or supposed to be ill. She certainly felt well enough — not a single ache nor pain. Gently, beneath the covers, she tested each hand, each foot, and sensed the comfortable length of her spine. All was easy obedience. She turned her head from side

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to side — and then froze into a very paralysis of bewilderment.

On the pillow beside her right cheek, and quite evidently depending from her own scalp, lay a shining braid of hair — warm, sunny hair, shot through with glints of red and gold. It was at least twice the length and thickness of Una's hair, and about as much like it as sunlight is like shade, for Una's hair had been nearly black. She stared at it fixedly for a moment. Then, yielding to a quick instinct of fear, closed her eyes and retreated suddenly into darkness again. Even before she had time to think a trembling horror seized her. Perhaps, after all, her brain had been injured, and hereafter illusions would be with her. And illusions were the beginning of insanity. She shivered and shut the lids still more tightly over her eyes. She tried to calm herself, to reason. Perhaps she had been dreaming. The room and the nurse — it must be all a dream. She opened her eyes gently and was bitterly disappointed. Every one of the unfamiliar objects was still there; she could not even delude herself into believing it was a dream. She backed into darkness and safety again. Perhaps she had been ill a long time, and that hair had grown out. Sometimes, perhaps, it did — She opened her eyes and spoke. The idea of the dream was still upon her, and she put so much unnecessary effort into the speech im-

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pulse that the words fairly burst out. The nurse jumped as if she had been shot and hurried to the bedside. A glance at Una's face, however, seemed to reassure her. She smiled, a pleasant, professional smile.

"Well, you've wakened. Feeling almost yourself again?"

"Yes, thank you. How long have I been here?"

"Oh, just since last night. Don't you remember?"

"No-o. Why did your bring me here?"

From her expression the nurse evidently considered that a somewhat foolish question. "Well, you were unconscious, of course. But there seemed absolutely no injury done, no need to take you to a hospital. And so — they brought you home."

Home! Last night! Una closed her eyes again, while a wave of sick apprehension passed over her. What terrible muddle was it? And yet she could remember the accident — every detail of it.

"What — how —? Were the others hurt?" she asked, and her voice sounded sweeter and rounder than usual, even in spite of her fears.

"Well, not much, considering. The lady in the other car had her collar-bone fractured. And she may have internal injuries; they don't know yet. The — the gentleman with you"— Una could almost believe the nurse looked prim as she said this —

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"had his wrist rather badly sprained. But no one was very seriously hurt, I guess. It was really a very lucky accident."

Una closed her eyes, and turned her head away. She was entirely lost, entirely at sea. She could not even think. There seemed to be no starting-place from which to begin to think.

As she lay, panting internally as it were, there came a knock at the door. The nurse went and opened it, and a man's deep voice spoke as the owner thereof evidently entered the room. "Well, nurse, how is she now?"

"Excellent," replied the nurse, as both approached the bedside. "She woke up a moment ago and spoke to me. She was quite normal. Just a little languid, perhaps, from the shock, but otherwise perfectly normal."

"That 's good," said the man's voice. It was a very agreeable, well-bred voice. And — so much can one judge from a voice when intuitive attention is not divided by visual consideration — Una instinctively knew that the man uttering those tones was master of himself and the life he lived. Also, she thought she detected a faintly tired note, the echo of a spirit disappointed somewhere. "Well, you had better remain with her until she herself tells you what she wishes done."

Una felt that he stood and looked at her a moment longer; and she lay like a frightened fugitive

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behind the wall of her tightly closed eyelids. Then he went, and she heard the nurse go back to her seat.

She lay for a while, trying desperately not to think. But thoughts came trooping, crowding, like frightened multitudes coming to view a tragedy. Presently, almost as frightened of the internal state as she was of the exterior, Una opened her eyes again. The nurse noticed this and came back to the bedside.

"Mr. Leland came in to see you a few minutes ago."

"Yes?" Una was almost sullenly unresponsive.

"Yes. You had fallen asleep again."

As this was stating an apparently obvious fact, Una made no reply. She felt hunted, wary, like a fugitive hiding in a strange house. And that, out of the chaos and turmoil of her feelings, was as yet the only impression definite enough to produce any resultant action. She was distrustful of the nurse, too, of the faint intimation of something withheld in her manner. She closed her eyes again.

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CHAPTER II

UNA was glad when the nurse, after vainly trying to tempt her patient with proposed delicacies, went down to luncheon. She was glad to be rid, if only for half an hour, of what she felt to be a watchful presence. When the woman returned to the room, she kept her head steadily averted.

Toward the middle of the afternoon Una yielded to a desire that embodied both fear and fascination. She wanted to remain in bed. Tucked under the clothes, with her eyes shut, she felt safer from inspection and detection. Yet she was conscious of an ever-growing, more urgent impulse to rise and look in that triple mirror to see who she was. Or was it she? What would it show? Una slowly passed her hand from the strange luxuriant hair over her forehead, the bridge of the nose, and the mouth, down to the chin. Were these really her features? She shivered with nervous fear and the watchful nurse looked up inquiringly.

"I think I shall get up."

"And dress?" inquired the nurse. "Or just for the bedroom?"

"Just for the bedroom," replied Una. Sitting on the edge of the bed, she surveyed unaccustomed

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feet with wonder, a queer satisfaction, and dismay. They were slender feet, beautifully kept — feet that no girl might object to owning. But Una looked at them with distrust and dislike, as the feet of another brought into close contact with herself. And then she noticed for the first time that she had new and strange rings on her hands: a slender wedding-ring — Una's eyes grew wide as she looked at it — and a half-hoop of diamonds; and on her right hand a pearl marquise — a large, wonderfully lovely pearl, surrounded with diamonds.

Meanwhile the nurse opened a door paneled with a full-length mirror, inspected the contents of the spacious closet for a minute, and selected a loose negligée of pretty flowered crêpe and lace.

"I wonder whether this will be warm enough," she deliberated as she came across the floor with the garment held critically up before her.

Una nodded. "Yes. I shall slip it over my nightgown."

The nurse helped her to put the negligée on, produced a pair of fur-topped slippers from somewhere, and Una stood up. She felt perfectly safe on her feet and walked unhesitatingly to the dressing-table. She sat down before it, inhaled sharply, and raised her eyes.

Before her she saw other eyes, wide, solemn, dilated — eyes that stared into hers and besought. She saw a finely sculptured face, with curved, pas-

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sionate lips, tightly closed now, as though forcibly to keep something back. Quietly, almost rigidly, Una looked for a moment or so; then, leaning her arms on the table, she suddenly covered her face with her hands and blotted out the vision.

"Are n't you feeling well, Mrs. Leland?" came the anxious voice of the nurse behind her. With a quick stab of fear and caution, Una was recalled to herself, and saved from the attack of grief and terror about to overwhelm her.

"Oh, yes; I 'm all right, thank you." Una knew that her voice, coming in answer to so civil and harmless a question, sounded curt and strange. She forced herself to rise and leave the fascinating mirror without another glance. To stay before it was to betray at least the fact of something unusual.

She walked to a deep, cretonne-upholstered chair and sat down. In all that she did just now Una hardly seemed dependent upon either her will or her reason. She was impelled, hypnotized into right action by the pursuing, sickening fear of being adjudged insane.

From the chair she looked through the window upon an unusually beautiful suburban garden. With a certain faint sense of rest Una's troubled eyes followed the green lawn spaces into shady corners, where, between piled, mossy stones ferns were growing. Contemplating these beauty spots, Una forgot her sorrows for a moment. But they re-

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turned, almost swooping on her, as it were; and with an unconscious gesture of weariness she turned her eyes from the garden to meet those of the nurse intently watching her face. Out of the depths of an unreasoning and unreasoned resentment, Una returned the woman's gaze with a cool stare. With unbroken professional calm the nurse's eyes traveled from Una's face to the bed from which she had lately risen, and getting up in a matter-of-fact way, she went over to throw it wide open.

Una turned over in her mind the best way of getting rid of the nurse. Though in the utmost extreme of nervousness and bewilderment, in a chaos of fears and apprehensions, Una still could plan for her own safety. Paradoxically speaking, the only period of rest from strain that her brain apparently knew was when scheming to find an explanation or a way out. So now she considered the nurse problem. She did not know how the woman would be paid, nor even who would pay her. She held her breath when she thought of the man who had come to see her. The nurse called him Mr. Leland, and her Mrs. Leland. Again from Una's heart welled the silent cry that in the last few hours had risen so often: "Oh, what shall I do? Where shall I turn? Where can I go?"

The nurse came back to the window-seat, remarking upon the pleasant outlook provided by the garden beneath. Una answered perfunctorily and be-

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gan the diplomatic task of trying to rid herself of her unwelcome attendant in a pleasant and natural manner.

"There won't be the least necessity for your remaining with me to-night, nurse. I 'm perfectly myself. And I suppose you were up the whole of last night."

"Oh, yes. It was necessary to watch you," replied the nurse. "But I thought perhaps I had better find a way of getting some sleep in here for another night, until we are quite sure —"

"I am already quite sure that I am perfectly right," said Una quickly. "And who should know better than I?" Usually controlled and patient, she felt her temper slipping unaccountably. "Go and find a real bed, and get a good night's sleep."

This was obviously to the nurse's liking. "There is a spare bedroom across the hall —"

"Yes. Is the bed made up?" inquired Una with diplomatic coolness.

"It appears to be. And if not —"

"Yes." Again with a deceptive resource and facility that she felt were previously foreign to her, Una passed her hand over her eyes as if too preoccupied and weary for detail. "Arrange things to suit yourself and be comfortable. When you go down to breakfast in the morning —"

"Oh, I shall come in to see you before doing that."

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"Very well. And then —"

"Well, then, if you no longer need me, I can make my report to Mr. Leland," hazarded the nurse.

"Yes. That will be all right." Una tried to curb into politeness her determination to be rid of this watchful, professional presence. "Now go and take a walk. Some fresh air will improve your night's sleep."

The nurse smiled and rose.

When she had been safely away a few minutes Una, fascinated by the mirror and yet afraid to face it, explored the room she was in. She peered into the wardrobe closet, filled with delicate and apparently rich clothing, and opened drawers full of woman's belongings, glancing in furtively as if expecting the rightful owner to appear and resent the impertinence. She opened the door into a tasteful, square hallway, glanced down the staircase, and noiselessly withdrew in a panic. She tried another door and found herself in a handsomely appointed bath-room. Facing her, another door led out of this room. This one, too, after listening nervously and intently for a few seconds, Una opened. She looked into another bedroom, more plainly and massively fitted than the one she was in, and lacking the feminine quality. It was, even to her uninitiated gaze, a man's room. Moreover, her wandering eyes discovered on the solid-looking bureau a case of military brushes and a man's collar. With a rapidly

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beating heart Una returned softly to her room and locked the door connecting it with the bath-room.

And then she crept back to the mirror. She gazed and gazed at the sweet face that rose to meet her; only when she began to feel that it was hypnotizing her, that she was losing hold of herself and all that she knew, could she force herself to rise and go out of the reach of that magic reflection.

Before Una could finally lock her door on all the world and face the night she longed for and yet dreaded, she had to endure a visit from the doctor and the nurse. The doctor wisely opined that she was still somewhat excitable and feverish as a result of the shock, but that a few days' quiet would doubtless bring everything back to normal. In the meantime, if she felt the least discomfort mentally or physically she was to summon him, and in any case he would drop in again in the course of a day or so.

She allowed the nurse to put her to bed. She could think as well there as anywhere — if she could think at all.

When the last enemy, for so they all seemed, had departed, she was left not in peace but at least alone.

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CHAPTER III

IT would not have been strange if this first night under the new and amazing condition of her being had really driven Una into that state of insanity she so much dreaded. No victim of delirium ever faced a night of more terrifying unreality, insecurity, and loneliness. She could not think; for to think one must have some safe and accepted — or at least accepted — premise from which to start. She had none. Nothing was left upon which to stand and take a perspective. Nothing was left of the life she thought she had known and she could form no concept of a new one, for she had nothing upon which to base a concept. She was in the midst of a grotesque and horrifying nightmare, in which everything she looked upon suddenly overturned and was something else, and in which she herself was at once the nightmare and the subject thereof. She was absolutely alone. She dared go to none. Neither was there any place to which she could go. She must stay and face — what?

She did not know who she was, or what she was. If her brain had been injured, and the past was all gone, why did she remember anything? Why was part of life familiar and the rest strange? It was

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always written of those who had sustained complete loss of memory that their minds were a blank. But she wondered. Were they always? Perhaps some kept silence from fear, as she was doing. And then again, perhaps some tried to tell of their changed mental states and thereby doomed themselves to the insane asylum. Grimly it floated through her mind that asylums held many a tragedy that stupid medical psychology failed even to suspect.

Once or twice Una gravely considered whether after all she might not be really insane. And yet she felt she would be most completely and sanely equipped if once she could decide — or could be shown — upon what personality to take a stand.

As the sounds, the noises of the street, died away, from very excess of thinking she suddenly ceased to think at all. She lapsed into a boundless sea of immensity, in which she seemed but a point of consciousness. But that point included all that had been or could be, and she felt confident and very much at peace.

So very vague did her hold on things, and even on herself, become, that, recalled from time to time by some slight movement or contact with the bedclothing, she roused sufficiently to feel faint alarm. Finally she forced herself to rise and sit up in bed. And so she sat, staring into the partial darkness of the starry April night.

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More to gather into some sort of focus the merging, shifting states of her consciousness, she deliberately set herself to recall the scene in the office before the accident. And although already it seemed but a scene that she could recall, with great ease and in perfect detail, still she sensed all the life that lay back of that scene.

So easy was it in spirit to enter that office that immediately she was back, sitting before her typewriter. It was a little past office hours and her employer had explained that he would have to detain her somewhat, but that to make up for lost time he would afterward run her home in the machine. Now she was waiting the completion of the transaction, the closing of which would need a little of her work. She had an idea that her mother would have supper ready, and would be chafing at the delay. But that could not be helped.

She was resting now, while she waited. She was very tired. Her hands were folded, and so great was the veritable hypnosis of repose into which she had fallen that the keys of the typewriter before her were a blurred mass. Life lay behind her like a dead weight. She did not think of it, but merely sensed the weight. It was a woman's life, not a girl's — never had been a girl's. Girls had parties and love-affairs; and bought things because they were pretty and not always because they were useful.

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As relaxation became more complete the rebellious thoughts faded. So great was her abstraction that even her employer's entrance with papers for typewritten inserts failed fully to rouse her. It seemed to her that the brains in her skilful fingers did the work.

Then she went down and got into her employer's machine, which slid off with the silent speed of a greyhound. The street and office lights were twinkling out, but daylight still somewhat overpowered them. Una sat and with hardly awakened interest watched the different vehicles approach and speed by.

Suddenly one of the big machines swerved, sprang into the air and, like a beast of prey, leaped upon her.

So much she remembered. When she tried to go back of this, her brain reeled with sudden impotence or fatigue, and when she went forward in her thoughts and began to wonder about the body that had been hers so recently, about that other mystery-tortured soul that must now be hidden there, she sickened with the impossible problem of it all.

Toward the middle of the night, threatened again with a panic of fear and nervousness, she rose and turned on the lights. The radiators were still warm; she softly closed the windows and drew down the shades. The light, the sight of the solid, everyday objects comforted her somewhat. She put on the

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negligée and seated herself in the chintz chair. She would endure the darkness no more.

As morning approached and the magnifying influences of the night upon the emotions were gradually withdrawn, the fever in her brain died down. Worn with her frantic endeavors to think, Una let go, and of her own volition tried to think no more. And then it seemed as if, strengthened by her passivity, her brain began to scheme of its own accord for the safety, mental and physical, of the entity she then presented. It was borne in upon her that it was useless, hopeless, to try to grasp in its entirety the puzzle confronting her. And as from the very first her most distinct feeling had been that of a fugitive, so now her strongest anxiety was to hide, and hide safely. She reflected and realized with growing relief that none could actually penetrate the wall of flesh behind which she hid. It would be like living behind a glass mask through which she could see and they could not. She might often imagine they could, but they really could not. If she never told any mortal being the secret of what had happened to her, none could ever guess. She must never forget that the only clue any one could have to the way things appeared to her was whatever clue she herself chose to afford.

To this shortened statement of the logic of the situation she clung as to the one plank of her salvation. Over and over again she formulated it in

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so many actual words. "If I never tell, they can never know. And if they don't know what I think, they can't think me insane."

So soothing to the nerves is the effect of words or a statement quietly and persistently repeated, that presently Una began to feel almost comforted. She was like one who, having come breathlessly through a tunnel of darkness and horror, at length reaches light and sits down to breathe. Unconsciously she had fastened on a great secret of power — concentration. Over and over again she mentally reiterated this reassuring thought: "They can only know what I tell them."

Several times, though, during the morning paroxysms of fear threatened to attack her again, and those wild, chaotic thoughts tried to close in upon her.

Perhaps after all she was insane and these surroundings that seemed so real were but a delusion. Perhaps she would not be allowed to stay even where she now was, but would be hurled forth again into some other strange phase of existence. Perhaps —

Knowing instinctively that the firm grasp upon one clear and well-established fact was her only chance for mental safety, Una repeated her formula, clinging to it as a man in a torrent clings to a rock. This much seemed fairly certain, and it was all she needed to begin with: if she kept strict silence she

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was safe. Surely there could never come a time when she could not at least be silent.

Toward seven o'clock Una heard water running in the bath-room, with much sound of splashing and ablutionary activity. Soon the sounds ceased; but they had wakened in Una a great desire to bathe and refresh herself. She listened intently at her door. All was quiet. She entered the now empty bath-room and listened at the door of the man's room opposite. No sound. Turning the little thumb-key that appeared on both sides of each door, she began her own bathing operations. The room was equipped with a shower, so she took first a very hot and then a cold one, emerging greatly refreshed and rested.

Back in her own room she busied herself coiling up the long waving hair. Engrossed in her task and delighted with the beauty of her hair, she actually forgot her troubles for the time being, until recalled to herself by a knock at the door she had forgotten to unlock. She admitted the nurse.

"I see everything is all right," said that pleasant professional after the first keen glance. "Do you find any stiffness developing anywhere?"

"Not at all. I am quite myself," responded Una, much encouraged by her own coolness. She felt exactly as if she were taking a part in some play and playing the rôle successfully. "You haven't had your breakfast yet, have you, nurse?"

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"No. I have just left my room."

"Well, have a good meal before you go." She wondered whether there was any one to cook it for her. "Can you see to getting it yourself?"

"Certainly," she replied, with the pleasant smile that seemed part of the uniform. "Annie will put it on the table for me, I 'm sure."

Una sat down before the mirror again with a brave show of resuming her hair-coiling operations. No doubt the nurse would think it odd she did not tell her to bring up her own breakfast and wait on her patient. But she was determined not to have that. She was not going to have those experienced, professional eyes watching her.

The nurse approached the back of her chair. "Let me do your hair for you, Mrs. Leland. It 's so beautiful."

"No,' thank you." Una laughed nervously. "I 'm a freak about my head. It soothes me to brush it myself, but I don't like any one else to handle it."

The nurse retreated with a smile. "Then you are sure there is nothing more you would like me to do for you?"

"Nothing, indeed. Thank you for the care you have taken of me, nurse." She turned away with a nod of dismissal. "Your check —"

The nurse came all unwittingly to the rescue. "Mr. Leland is down already, I think," she volun-

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teered. "I'll speak to him about it. Good-by."

Having dressed her hair to her satisfaction, Una went on a search for suitable morning attire. In the closet, ivory-paneled, light and airy as a room, she found everything that the heart of woman could desire — except plain house clothing. She opened a hat cupboard containing seven or eight costly hats, and in deep drawers underneath this she found lingerie and underwear calculated to fill any feminine eyes with delight. On the hanger rails, mingled with gowns, coats and negligées, were petticoats of many and various shades and fabrics.

Una turned over the contents of the drawers with a pleasure that was not unmixed. She could not shake off that furtive, dishonorable feeling as of one who pries secretly into the belongings of another. Hastily but more or less completely she investigated the contents of the big closet and came finally to the conclusion that the former owner, though dainty and most essentially feminine in all the details of her apparel, had been, to Una's way of thinking, a little given to over-elaboration and richness. From the wide choice at her disposal she was able to find underwear pretty much to her taste; but nowhere could she discover anything at all approaching her idea of a morning house dress. Finally Una took the plainest gown she could find, a smoke-gray cloth. In the smooth-rolling drawers of the dressing-table she found, among an astonishingly varied and much-

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tossed-over collection of neckwear, a fichu collar of embroidered muslin. It made a pretty and demure finish to her toilette.

When she was ready to go down, Una stood a minute with her hand on the door-knob. Already the room she was in had become somewhat familiar, had begun to have a friendly aspect. It was all she knew. She was going down to she knew not whom or what. However, out of dire extremity a certain grim courage is always born. The very lack of choice which an extremity presents is in itself a strength, as all forces are marshaled to meet the one course possible. So, mentally repeating her resolution to maintain at all costs silence as to that almost unbelievable thing which had happened, Una began her descent of the staircase.

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CHAPTER IV

HALF-WAY down, the stairs opened upon a square, continuing at a different angle. From the square, through leaded glass, Una looked down into what appeared to be a morning- or sun-room. It was long and rather narrow, mostly glass overgrown with vines, with a brown-stone fountain urn and basin at one end. At the farther end, his breakfast on a small table beside him, sat a man reading a newspaper. Una glanced at him, obtaining a fleeting impression of graceful outline and ease of attitude, and looked involuntarily down at the narrow gold band on her finger. Undoubtedly this man was her husband, whoever she was, and Una's eyes grew wide at the thought. She grasped the wall to steady herself. However, she had decided at dawn that it would be madness to attempt to forecast the probable outcome of anything that presented itself just now. She must strictly keep all her wits at home and focused on the happening of each hour. Hour! Each moment, almost.

She went down the remaining stairs and stepped into a large and exceedingly pleasant living-room. Almost all one side of it was taken up by wide win-

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dows; at one end was a large red granite fireplace; near her were quaint sliding doors of leaded glass, through which a well-appointed dining-room could be seen. A few handsome rugs on the hardwood floor, a piano, a library table, and chairs of many and inviting shapes constituted about all the furnishings of the room. But the dark woodwork and the hangings were so harmoniously subdued that the room seemed a picture of deep-toned beauty.

Una felt exactly like a guest going to breakfast after a first night's sleep in a strange house. She had to fight the inclination to sit down and wait for some one to come and greet her. Instead, after giving herself a moment's grace, she walked resolutely toward the small archway leading from the farther end of the living-room into the morning-room and into the presence of the master of the house. He heard her coming and quietly put aside his paper. Evidently he was not the man who had been with her in the car, for both this man's wrists were uninjured.

Forgetting for the moment to be other than curious, Una saw how nearly from the sound of his voice last night, and the manner of his spoken words, her intuition had been able to outline the owner. She saw all that she had somehow expected to see, even felt that she had expected to meet the direct and exceedingly discerning glance bent on her.

He looked her over. The night had left faint

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blue shadows beneath the wide, eager eyes; a fever spot of color was still on each cheek, and the vivid, full-engined body was languid after the night's struggle. All this increased the essentially feminine charm of her, but Una was entirely unconscious of any such effect. Instead she was rapidly revolving in her mind the obvious necessity of saying something. As the man before her was a total stranger, this was decidedly a puzzle. However, she decided that the usual morning greeting would be safe and non-committal. With an embarrassed smile and a still more embarrassed walk she approached the table.

"Good morning."

"Good morning, Elsie," he replied, drawing a chair forward for her. "Are you feeling quite yourself again?"

"Quite, thank you," she answered, seating herself.

He sat and looked at her, detecting a difference in her manner. Nothing else, of course, would have been possible. The very concentration which Una was bringing to bear on the situation was a force emanating from her, and contradicting all the man knew and expected of this woman who was — and was not — his wife. Having absolutely no clue to the real state of affairs, Leland sought for an explanation in some assurance which circumstances might have given her.

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"And so," he went on then, "Nemesis did not overtake you this time."

He referred, Una did not doubt, to the accident of the night before. And also, quite apparently, to much more; but of that she could not even guess. "Would you call it an overtaking?" she parried in reply.

"I suppose not — literally." He pointed to the paper on the floor beside him. "I see Renshaw has been able to keep it out of the papers. That is rather easy for him, anyway. But where do you consider I stand in the matter?"

Una looked at him in silence. She could not possibly make any safe reply.

"I mean," he went on, "in respect to what I once told you about bringing my name into actual public disfavor. Do you remember?"

Una made answer what was for her the truth. "No, I don't remember what you particularly refer to."

"I think you do," Leland contradicted quietly. "I told you that the first time you made a public parade of my name I should banish at once the reluctance I feel at giving a woman the first actual turn into the downward path. Not to mince matters, that I should begin divorce proceedings. I suppose you 'll say that my name has n't been paraded yet. It has n't — in print."

He paused, as if expecting her to make some re-

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ply. But it was impossible for Una to speak. She was expected to take up the thread of a story she knew nothing of. His words, however, conveyed a great deal to her shamed, intent understanding. Some of the terror and helplessness of the night returned to her. What was going to become of her, after all?

"You have always ridiculed what you were pleased to call my unfounded suspicions," he went on after a moment. "But I was n't suspecting — I knew. Still, I let it go at that, as being less undignified on the whole. But what are we going to do now? We can't either of us pretend that we don't know — and know that the other knows."

It was a direct question and demanded an answer. Gathering as firm a grasp of the situation as she could, Una voiced what seemed to her the only possible course. "You must do whatever you think best," she said gently.

Again Leland looked at her with faint curiosity in his eyes. "Well, I like that better than the silly tears and denials that I have been treated to of late," he observed.

Until he spoke, Una, with all her perplexity and trouble, had never once thought of tears. But now that he mentioned them she was conscious of a sense of fullness about the eyes, as if they would flood at a moment's notice; and she was both surprised and disgusted. Tears had never been one of her weak-

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nesses. However, she combated the suggestion in the best possible way. She dismissed it, and turned her whole attention to meeting the odds against her.

Leland leaned forward a little, resting his arm on the arm of the chair and his chin on his hand.

"I often wonder what it is you're banking on, Elsie. Well, of course I know it's one of two things. Perhaps both. But I can't account for your crediting either. Because usually you're no fool.". A slight, reflective smile was on his lips, but in his eyes neither resentment nor sadness. He was too strong a man for either to last long. "But I suppose that as long as a woman of your kind can look into her mirror and see that her bodily charms are still undiminished, she cannot possibly conceive of any man's infatuation waning. Mind and character have nothing to do with the matter, seeing that the physical was all that was ever taken into account. I'll wager "— his smile deepened — "that you're as confident as you are that you're sitting there before me, that it's my still unbroken infatuation for you that makes me so wilfully blind to many things. Doubtless you think I'm breaking my heart in secret. And it's so romantic! Neither you nor your associates — who must think me either a great idiot or a spiritless cur — could understand that, though my love and respect for you are dead, I still have a shade of respect left for the vows I

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took to protect and cherish you. I know your nature; I know the man you are dealing with. I know that as soon as I withdraw my name and the protection of my home from you, your path will be one steady, even if slow, descent. I 've seen it all before. But "— his tone was quieter, more deliberate — "don't go too far. Just as soon as I 'm obliged to take official cognizance, I shall — in only one way. And there will be no withdrawing from that stand, once taken."

His cool, deliberate gaze still rested on her face, and Una returned the gaze, almost fascinated, unable, it seemed, to think, much less speak. Then Leland bent over and picked up the paper which he had cast loosely on the ground.

"I don't believe Annie knows you 're down," he said. "Better ring."

After Leland had left the house, going presumably to his office or business, Una remained at the table, too confused, too dazed to ring. The maelstrom of her thoughts and emotions was so great that, as if by some centrifugal force born of it, she herself seemed in the center of the wild current, motionless, feelingless, thoughtless.

Presently Annie came in to remove the breakfast dishes. She proved to be a strong, competent-looking young woman of probably Swedish or Finnish extraction. She exclaimed with surprise on seeing Una, explained that she had been about to go up

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to see if she would n't like her breakfast in bed, and promised her a dainty breakfast in a few minutes. She talked as if to a spoiled child, and Una's strained, unnaturally alert perceptions had no difficulty in discovering that Annie had managed the house pretty much to suit herself, petting and pampering her mistress as part of the process. Womanlike, a resolution shot across Una's troubled consciousness to the effect that, if her stay in the house should be of any duration, she would most certainly manage it herself.

In a few minutes Annie came back, bringing a breakfast of hot toast, eggs, fragrant coffee, thick cream, and marmalade; and to Una's surprise, in spite of her overwrought state, the sight of food was unmistakably pleasant. She ate all that the tray contained and was astounded at the amount she had consumed. Apparently, however, Annie did not share this surprise when she came to take the tray away.

Annie had evidently been in the confidence of her mistress. She talked a great deal, describing her feelings when her mistress was brought home unconscious and commented on the affability of the nurse.

"You could talk to her," she observed. "Some of them are so stuck up, you don't dare say a word to them."

Una did not share her enthusiasm on the subject.

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She looked at the servant so thoughtfully that Annie decided her mistress must be still ill-tempered and moody. So she took up the tray and went.

The food seemed to act as a tonic to Una. After Annie had gone, she no longer tried to think of everything at once. Her thoughts cleared. One subject now occupied her attention, but that just now seemed the bitterest of all. It was Leland and his words. As she thought them over a sense of injustice amounting to a perfect rage possessed Una. It seemed impossible to contemplate seeing much of this man and not telling him — insisting and shouting it — that she was not, and never could be, what he evidently thought she was. The fact that she was plainly not going to be troubled with any displays of conjugal affection failed to comfort her. The relief that this fact might have afforded was swallowed up in shame and disgust at the character he invested her with — justly, no doubt, as far as he knew. If he had been a man she could dislike it would have been easier. But he was not. She liked him.

Seeing that like and dislike are not a matter of personal choice, but a demand made with mathematical precision by the worth of the accosting spirit and paid willy-nilly with like precision, it stands decided that no man or woman can be in the company of another for even the first half-hour and not really know beyond any doubt what it is to be

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—like or dislike. Una did not attempt to argue away the fact that she liked Leland. She liked the level, unwavering glance; the ease and grace of movement that gave silent assurance of balanced nerves as well as balanced muscles; the calm strength of a character that could not be diverted from its course by woman's tears or men's sneers.

Moreover, and this seemed to give most of the sting to the situation, Una felt quite ridiculously sure that Leland would like her, too, did he really know her.

Here Una rose abruptly, as if bringing to a close an unpleasant conversation with herself. She realized very vividly that much thought along these lines would bring back the dread sense of unreality and insecurity, that her present salvation lay in contemplating and handling only strictly material things.

She went into the living-room and investigated it more closely. On each side of the fireplace wide bookcases were built into the wall. The volumes on the shelves announced, as if with staring placards, the diverse characters of the two occupants of the house. It was quite plain that the two had never shared the same literary tastes. Una divined that some fiat of Leland's had produced so clean a division. In the one case were engineering works, mathematical books, encyclopædias, dictionaries in

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several languages, poets and philosophers. Among these latter were some volumes that Una felt she was glad to see. In the other case stood books on card games, on tennis, musical works, and dozens of novels by modern writers. On the library table at one end of the room were heaped indiscriminately fashion papers and music; on the piano stood a row of songs, some good and some merely popular. Una looked lovingly at the keys of the instrument. She had a feeling that she played a little, and loved music exceedingly. But she did not dare to touch the inviting ivory keys. She might be so much less of a musician than the other woman that they would inevitably betray her even to so great a novice in the art of piano-playing as Annie probably was. So she turned away and went into the dining-room. She admired the fine oak woodwork; the massive, simple sideboard built boldly out from the wall; the plain, heavy-beamed ceiling. She went up to the sideboard and examined each piece of silver and cut glass: pulled doors and drawers open and busied herself, like a bride in a newly furnished house, with an inspection of its contents. While she was still engaged in this fascinating occupation, she was startled by the distant ringing of a telephone bell.

She looked round almost helplessly. The telephone was not in the room with her, and she hurried back into the living-room. Again it rang.

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Now she recognized the sound as coming from the morning-room. She reached the instrument and automatically placed the receiver to her ear before realizing her predicament.

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CHAPTER V

"IS this Park two-five-seven?" inquired a woman's voice.

"Yes," said Una, wondering if it was.

"Is that you, Elsie?" asked the voice dubiously.

"Of course." Una's face was a study in concentrated attention. It was as if her wits would reach out across the space that hid her interlocutor from her.

There was a moment's silence, as if the speaker detected something strange in the voice — perhaps a lack of friendliness where there should have been full and instant recognition. And then, "It did n't sound a bit like you."

"I was breathless. I ran to the telephone," explained Una. She waited. She could not say any more, had nothing more to say.

Again a second's speculative silence. And then, in a slightly lowered, confidential tone, "Are you alone?"

"Yes," answered Una, endeavoring to pattern her tones likewise.

"Well, I 'm so awfully glad you 're up and about. I was coming over anyhow if you were not. They would n't let me yesterday: Said you 'd be best left

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alone," went on the voice. It was a charming voice, with a quaint little affected gasp in it. "How are you now? Feeling all right?"

"Oh, yes," replied Una. Hastily bethinking herself of the necessity of having something to cloak the inexplicable, her tones took on a languor to fit the statement: "Of course I feel considerably shaken up."

"Of course, you poor dear," agreed the invisible one instantly. "But, oh, is n't it a blessing you got off as well as you did? When Willett called me up I — Well, I just held my breath. Just think what it might have been."

"Yes, indeed," agreed Una — with much apparent fervor, but with a grim little smile. "Just think what it was!"

"Willett did n't say exactly where you had been going," went on the voice, "but he said you had changed your mind, and that you had turned round and were headed for home. That 's such a blessing. Supposing, you know — it had been out in the country —"

"No, I don't want to suppose," said Una.

"No. But as it was —" the voice appeared to contemplate matters again for a moment. And then: "Did Alan — How did you explain?"

"I did n't," replied Una, truthfully enough.

"Oh!" A moment's thought. "Well, did he know, then?"

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"Oh, yes."

"Goodness!" breathed the voice. "Did you — oh, good Lord! — get an awful scolding?"

"No-o: not a scolding."

"Humph!" the voice took on a dry quality. Probably, Una reflected, the voice was acquainted more or less with Leland. "Not much, but strictly to the point, I suppose."

"Yes," agreed Una, with a little involuntary sigh.

"Oh, well, don't mind," comforted the voice. "What do you care — the old crank!"

"Well, of course —" said Una, deprecatingly. Her sympathies were all on Leland's side. She hated to hear him spoken of slightingly.

"Oh, yes, of course it 's awkward," agreed the voice, judicially; "but then it was still daytime. Whatever he may think, I don't see that he can make so very much capital —" The sentence was left trailing in the air, which Una decided was a very artistic ending for just that kind of sentence.

"He won't try to use it," she said.

"Not this time, I suppose," rejoined the voice, with a little laugh.

"No."

"But you feel you have to be very careful — on probation, as it were," guessed the voice with a sort of dry understanding.

Una divined that her predecessor — which was

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the name she had for all that had gone before — had made so much of a confidante of this girl, or woman, that she was intimately acquainted with all possibilities, both of personalities and circumstances.

"Yes, something like that," she agreed quietly.

"Bother!" complained the voice petulantly. "That makes things so awkward. And that reminds me. Willett 's just crazy to see or hear from you. He called me up just a little while ago. I can't remember half the things he told me to tell you. How can he see you?"

"I don't know," replied Una, easily enough.

"Well, you 'd better come on over. And then he can let his man drive him out. You know he can't drive the car himself on account of his wrist. He —"

"Oh, no — I don't believe I 'd better," demurred Una. "I — I don't feel so sure of myself yet."

"You 've had a good scaring, have n't you?" said the voice reflectively after a moment.

"No. No; but I don't want to come out to-day," said Una. Recognizing the necessity of being explanatory and friendly, she added: "Honestly, I don't feel myself yet. I 'm not hurt or anything like that — but — oh, I 'm just not myself. If I come I 'm liable to cry, or laugh in the wrong place — or do something silly."

There was a moment's silence before the voice spoke again. "Well, you poor kidlets, I expect you

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have gone through a lot." Whether the soft tones were full of sympathy or disbelief Una could not tell. "But you 'll get over it in a day or so, and laugh to think how scared you were. What shall I tell Willett?"

"Oh"— Una was inclined to be impatient at this insistent mention of a man she knew nothing of —"oh — tell him anything."

"Well!" Una heard a distinct gasp. "No thank you. I want to live a little longer."

Una laughed — a bubbling laugh of real mirth. The amazement at the other end of the telephone was so apparent and so funny. "Oh, well," she amended then. "You know I did n't exactly mean that. Oh, you know what to tell him," she coaxed.

"I don't. I won't even try to think."

Una tried to for herself. She hated to send any kind of message to the man. She felt it was added disloyalty, though she could not have told why nor how she reasoned it. At the same time she was so utterly in the dark as to this other man — his identity, how far involved with him she was — and as to the extent of his hold on her, that obviously her only safety lay in making no decisive move whatever.

"Tell him," she said, "that I 'm sorry about his wrist. And tell him that I feel foolish and shaken up, and don't want to come out yet. That 's all. That will be enough. Men hate hysterical women."

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The voice laughed. "Well, maybe. But I don't believe he hates you in any mood. You know, I had no idea how great a—" She paused. "I don't think you realize what a—" She seemed to have an odd, expressive way of leaving sentences suspended at advisable points.

Una sniffed in audible and sincere disgust. Already she outlined some conceited society fop. Rich, no doubt, but—bah! This disgust was not intended to travel over the wire, and did not in its entirety. But the listener sensed a very independent, troublesome mood.

"Well, I can tell you 're not yourself one little bit," she avowed with conviction. "For goodness' sake, go and lie down again. Put in the whole of to-day in bed, and then call me up in the morning and tell me you 're sorry."

"No, you call me," said Una quickly.

"Why?"

"Oh—just because."

"Because," mimicked the voice. "You have a reason, of course. And I shall make you tell me everything when I see you. You—why, I 'd like to spank you!" She laughed. "Now go to bed."

"I will," agreed Una meekly.

"See you do. Bye-bye, old lady."

Una hung up with a sigh of relief, and laughed, really laughed. What a fairy tale! What an incredible farce! How long could it last?

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After hanging up the telephone receiver, Una slowly and reflectively took down the telephone directory. Leland had spoken of one Renshaw, and the unknown woman had talked incessantly of a Willett. They were probably one and the same. She opened the directory at W, and found nothing nearer than Willard. Then she looked for Renshaw, and found what she expected: "Renshaw, Willett R., Fairview Drive," and beneath: "Office, 220 Renshaw Building."

Renshaw Building. Yes, that sounded as if he were a rich man, as she had surmised. She pondered a moment, considering the possibilities of the book as a source of additional information concerning the strangers who so unaccountably had come into her life.

She turned to the L columns, and looked for Leland. Yes, it was there. "Leland, Alan T., civil engineer, Lake View and Eastern Railroad Co., Blain Building." And just below, the same name with the residence address, "945 Schuyler Ave., June Park."

That was it. Una glanced out at the window with fresh approbation. June Park was evidently one of the nice, conservative suburbs of the town. She hung up the directory again. It was, of course, useless for her to try to look up her recent telephone visitor. That identity time alone would disclose. She frowned — a puzzled, worried frown, and rose

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hurriedly. Puzzling and worrying would not help her.

Like a restless spirit, she wandered from room to room that morning. She looked each room and all its appointments over closely. The only room she did not go into was the kitchen. Not being able to guess whether the former Mrs. Leland had frequented the kitchen much, nor what she had done when she was in there, Una stayed out of it for the present.

About one o'clock she heard two taps on the dinner gong. Guessing that it was for luncheon, she went down with some misgivings, wondering whether or not Alan Leland came home for the midday meal. Evidently he did not, for the table was laid for one, and that one very plainly a woman.

Hot chocolate and whipped cream, crab Newberg on toast, cake, and fruit formed a dainty luncheon. Recollecting what she had eaten for breakfast, Una was surprised to find that the prospect of consuming another meal was not unpleasant. She ate the Newberg and toast, and drank the chocolate; but for some reason, possibly out of deference to the small appetite she felt she ought to have, she denied herself the fruit.

Luncheon over, Una went quietly upstairs. She was going to prepare to take the step which her mind, ceaselessly busy, like a captive in a laby-

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rinth, had decided upon as her next in her search for herself. She was terrified at the idea of what it might lead to. But, like the desire to see herself in the mirror, it was irresistible and had to be obeyed. Besides, a sort of rule had formulated itself within her during the last twenty-four hours, a mandate imposed by she knew not what. She felt that, whatever confronted her in her new life from hour to hour, she must walk boldly up and face it. In hesitation she would be lost.

So now she was going down into the city — to where she felt she must have been many times before, to the center of it, whence most roads must surely diverge. She felt that the force of association could give her at least a clue to the mystery. Of course, as far as locality was concerned, she appeared to be at present just where she belonged; but if, on reaching the city, she had even the least inclination in one direction more than another, she was going to take it. It might take her to that mother she felt was still somewhere in the background waiting. Just now anything, even the worst, would be better than this horrible uncertainty.

Entering her room, she sought with much interest among her new wardrobe for a plain street suit. It was not to be found, as regards the plain part. The severely neat tailored suit had evidently found no place in the previous Mrs. Leland's scheme of dressing. Among the many coats, wraps, and cos-

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tumes Una discovered three street suits; and of these the plainest was a lovely wistaria chiffon cloth, which she proceeded to put on.

Una surveyed with free and open admiration and pleasure the handsome reflection thrown upon her mirror. She did not feel for a moment as if she were admiring herself. All the love of beauty and of beautiful things that was so strong in her welled up and was satisfied as she turned slowly from side to side.

As she stepped outside the heavy street door of the residence and was about to close it behind her, Una stopped and clutched it suddenly. It had just occurred to her that she was going out without one cent of money. What was the matter with her? She hurried back upstairs. This might mean a final setback to her plans. Though surely there must be some money belonging to her predecessor somewhere, if she could only find it. She remembered to have seen, while glancing into the drawers of her dressing-table, a beaded hand-bag. That might have some money in it.

She investigated that first of all, and was rewarded by finding within it a small-change purse containing a five-dollar bill, a fifty-cent piece, and a few pennies; also, in an inside pocket of the bag, a card-case with Mrs. Alan T. Leland's cards; and besides these things two small keys, whose use Una promised herself to investigate when she returned —

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if she did return. Indeed, if she returned she was going to examine her room very thoroughly — the desk, drawers, even the pockets of the coats — to see what information of one kind or another they might contain.

Again Una made a start for the street. This time she looked the house over very carefully from the outside, noting its surroundings and memorizing the appearance of both corners of the block. Though at the back of her mind was really a lurking doubt that she would ever return to this particular scene at all, still, if she were not claimed elsewhere, she might need to return to this last known anchorage, and she must know how to find it.

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CHAPTER VI

THREE blocks below her house, walking in what she took to be the direction of the city, Una came upon a car line. She did not know in which direction the car she wanted ran; but she made up her mind to board the next one. She could at least stay on to the end of the run, and then go back down-town with it. As it happened, the next car was going to the city; and so she was soon started on her adventure.

As she sat on the car, Una felt like a person who had suddenly found herself on another planet and was trying desperately not to attract attention to the fact that she was a stranger. She almost marveled that no one seemed particularly interested in her appearance. The ride into town was not a long one; but to Una it was surely the strangest ride she had ever taken in her life. She was traveling with Aladdin's lamp and any minute she might accidentally rub it. Only, for her the lamp would work inversely and kill the brief dream of splendor. She sighed involuntarily. Two things already she liked more than well — the man and the home.

She alighted at a point that must certainly be one of the most central spots of the city. One of the

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main arteries ran through this point, and five apparently important streets debouched into it. Street cars came and went in all directions. She stood on one of the corners, near the doors of a department store.

After waiting a few minutes, watching the people come and go until her mind was calmer and more easily concentrated, she began to examine the cars to see if she were drawn to one more than to another. She looked at the buildings about her, but no faintest inclination to go in any particular direction could be detected or even imagined. And still she did not feel like a woman in an entirely strange city; she felt at home and comfortable.

Baffled, she turned and went into the department store near her. It was an immense concern, doubtless one of the largest in the city, and she must certainly have been in it before. But as she wandered through its aisles nothing opened up before her, neither was the veil rent that had fallen behind her. Suddenly she wearied and decided to go home — back to that place whence she had started. She would go back and wait. Just wait and see what she was shown — what seemed to come to her to do.

As Una rode back to her new home on the June Park car, she reflected. One thing, at all events, this effort — unrewarded and a failure though it seemed to be — had done for her. It had shown her that for the present she was Elsie Leland. To

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think of herself as Una and try to answer to the name of Elsie would bring about confusion sooner or later. So she left Una behind in the city and turned her face determinedly toward the new phase of life she had to deal with.

So deeply, in spite of the almost hypnotic influence which material forms have upon it, does the human soul realize that circumstances are but a set of conditions encircling a certain state of perception, changing as time, which is change of perception, goes on, that before Elsie was half-way back to her new home she had accepted the startling state of affairs thrust upon her and was almost breathlessly diverted and interested.

Elsie got back to Schuyler Avenue without further surprises, save that an unknown lady smiled and bowed to her in the car. Elsie hastened to return the greeting and reflected that among her many difficulties would be that of meeting people whom she would be supposed to know and naturally could not.

On her way up Schuyler Avenue from the car it occurred to Elsie that possibly one of those two keys in her purse might be the latch-key to Number 945. She chose the larger of the two, and when she reached the door, tried it. It worked; and she felt a wave of decided satisfaction pass over her — a sense of reality, of taking possession of her new life.

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Annie was caroling loudly in the kitchen as she entered, but dropped three or four keys in pitch as she heard the closing of the front door. Elsie went straight up to her room and changed her suit for a crêpe de chine gown of a deep, rich blue. When all was done she delighted in herself before the mirror for the space of four or five round-eyed, delicious moments.

She discovered by the ivory timepiece on her dressing-table that it was nearly five o'clock. She wondered at what time dinner was usually served and whether Annie did the entire cooking and serving. But in this, as in everything else, she must wait and see. If she were supposed to help in any way and did not, perhaps it would be set down to her indisposition.

She went downstairs and amused herself taking in the view from each window. Now that it seemed likely that she would be here for at least some time she was interested anew. A little later the telephone bell rang. Elsie answered it with that strained apprehension, that keen summoning of all her wits which each new happening called forth. Her heart gave a quick little beat as she recognized the voice of the man speaking.

"Is this you, Elsie?"

"Yes."

"I find I shall have to go up the line," went on the voice. Elsie decided as she listened that it must

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be the railway line with which he was connected. "So I sha'n't be home for dinner."

"That 's too bad," replied Elsie, with a mingled feeling of relief and resentment.

There came the sense of a moment's consideration at the other end of the line. Then. "Well, I wanted you to know. Good-by."

Elsie hung up the receiver and went into the kitchen. It was beautifully light and clean, modern and up-to-date. She glanced round in quick, covert admiration. On the table, dressed and ready for the oven, in a pan of the latest glass cooking-ware, was a duck. Annie turned inquiringly from the range as Elsie entered.

"Mr. Leland won't be home for dinner, Annie."

"Oh! You 're going out, then?"

"No."

Annie seemed both surprised and disappointed. "You need not get up a full dinner for me. What have you got besides that?" nodding at the duck.

Annie meditated a moment. "Some veal cutlets. And then there 's ice-cream and cake; and potatoes in the oven."

"That will do nicely. And you can put it on as soon as you like, Annie. I 'm hungry."

Elsie felt as she turned away that Annie stood looking after her, faintly puzzled. It was embarrassing, but would have to be lived through in the case of each person coming into contact with her life.

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Her physical appearance and movements would be the same — for a time at all events — as those of her vanished predecessor; the inflection of her voice would be the same, or nearly the same. But the manner of expressing her individuality could not possibly resemble that of the woman whose place she had usurped. There was one comforting thought, however, she must keep rigidly in mind: though people might marvel, they could never guess the clue to the change. Unless she were exposed, unless the real Elsie reappeared, they would soon get used to the change and cease to notice it.

After dinner Annie came to her again: "You going to the show to-night?"

"No." Elsie shook her head, divining what was behind the question. "Why? Do you want to go out, Annie?"

"Yes, I'd like to. But you'd be afraid, would n't you?" From her easy manner of speaking Annie evidently had always been on familiar terms with her mistress.

"Oh, no!" Elsie laughed and turned back to the fashion magazine whose pages she had been turning, noting the many points of similarity between the costumes depicted therein and those hanging in her wardrobe upstairs. "You may go out, Annie. Only don't be late. I want to go to bed early."

Annie departed with promptness. After Elsie had heard her somewhat heavy steps go down the

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cement walk and away, she turned at once to do what she had already longed so many times to do. She sat down before the piano, touching softly and tentatively the mellow-sounding keys of the upright. She felt somehow as if the ends of her fingers craved to play and she allowed them to place themselves. After a few chords, she turned over the array of music on the piano and chose a popular, semi-classic song with a fairly simple accompaniment as being the nearest to her mark for a beginning.

She was not surprised at the ease with which her fingers found the required notes and chords. She had always been able to play and somehow she expected these new shapely fingers to obey her. But she had always envied those who could sing. Could she? she wondered with a great thrill of hope, and knowing the melody of the song before her, began softly to sing. As she listened to the first bar, her joy was unbounded. She sang in a full, round mezzo-soprano, which she felt was trained. As a matter of fact, the training was but partial and the voice was full of technical faults, but Elsie was no judge of this. She only felt the ease with which it rolled out of her mouth, and noted the volume, and was almost beside herself with joy. The beautiful home, the jewels in her case upstairs, the pretty clothes in her wardrobe — none of these had given her the warm glow of delight, almost ecstasy, that

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this new-found possession did. She almost felt like speaking aloud and begging that, whatever else might fade, this one thing might be left her.

For about two hours she sat there, oblivious of time, trying one thing after another. But at last her voice grew husky and tired and with reluctance she rose. It was best not to overdo things at first.

She stood in the middle of the floor for a few minutes, undecided what to do — to be exact, undecided what to do to keep herself from thinking. At the back of her brain an idea, a course, was shaping itself, and as yet she only knew that she wanted to keep away from it. She would read. She went over to the bookcase — Alan's — and took from it Maeterlinck's "Wisdom and Destiny" and seated herself in a big leather sleepy-hollow chair.

She read for a while, frowned and fidgeted a little, and then read again. The page before her was a dry collection of words. Not that she did not understand the English words before her — their definition, that is. But that was all. They were a mere collection of words. The idea, the spirit of which they were but the symbol, she could not conjure up. Perhaps she was just tired and stupid. But even as she tried to think it she knew she was not. On the contrary, her mind was keyed up to the fullest possible pitch. She took up the book again and carefully read a sentence. Of course she understood it; and for a brief instant, like a lightning

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be the railway line with which he was connected. "So I sha'n't be home for dinner."

"That 's too bad," replied Elsie, with a mingled feeling of relief and resentment.

There came the sense of a moment's consideration at the other end of the line. Then. "Well, I wanted you to know. Good-by."

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exposure, the idea for which the words stood flashed across her understanding — and then was gone, leaving the words staring at her.

She closed the book and laid it on her knees. It was useless to struggle with a state of affairs she did not fully understand. Not fully: a glimmering of the truth came to her.

The other woman had not been dull — far from it; in a way she had been brilliant. Her intuitive faculty — that link between the mind and the understanding back of it — was large, and its use had been developed, though perhaps perverted. She could scheme with amazing facility and skill; and her grasp of affairs, her judgment of the probable outcome of a course of action and its effect on the actions of others, was far-reaching and accurate. The quality of brain that the present incumbent tried to use was not less, but different — and that merely from the manner of its use. The things that this woman wanted to love and think much upon, that other woman had not cared for. Each habit of the body is a habit of the mind, and each habit of the mind must become a habit of the body.

And so, for the present, Elsie gave up and put the book away. She was going to know and learn to love these books, but not to-night. She could not begin to-night. She laid her head back in the chair and gave up to that brain that nowadays seemed to be her master. The delight and interest of the

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music had given her a short surcease; but as soon as that was ended her thoughts flew back to her problem.

She had told herself as she came home from the city that afternoon that she would take things as they were presented to her and await the outcome. But it seemed she could not. Here she was, back at her scheming and puzzling. And it almost seemed to her as if, while her attention was diverted elsewhere, her brain, that anxious and faithful schemer and protector, had been unceasingly busy. For, upon the return of her attention, she found a decision almost formed. Not, to be sure, clothed in much detail as yet, but still shaped or shaping.

She must find that other girl in the accident. Reduced to the simplest terms, the main factors of her problem seemed to have reduced themselves to this. If she was living in some other woman's body, who was living in hers? When she thought of it like this, that other girl rose up in her mind. She had tried to find a clue leading to that shadowy mother, and had been thrown back on herself. She must find the girl. That she could surely do, though not easily perhaps. The nurse who had told of her was gone, and Elsie felt she would not have cared to question her in any case. No doubt Alan knew who she was; but she hesitated about broaching the subject to him. Perhaps that Willett had told the Lady-of-the-Telephone. Anyway, she

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would find out. Instinct for her own safety told her to leave well alone. But she could not. The clue to the puzzle might be worse than the puzzle itself; but still she had to find it if she could. Somehow, in a manner hardly reasoned out, she felt she would be wronging some other if she did not.

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CHAPTER VII

ELSIE was a long time getting to sleep that night. Dread of the plans she herself had formed kept her awake. But so weary was she when at last she did fall asleep that she slept soundly — so soundly that she was amazed on waking the next morning to find it was full eight o'clock. She jumped out of bed, bathed, and dressed at once. On going downstairs she found that Alan had not returned the night before.

As she passed through the dining-room after breakfast, Elsie was greatly amused at the floral decorations of the dining-table. The silver-and-glass epergne of slender and lovely design was filled with flowers — heads mostly. In each of the branch-like receptacles a tight round posy was wedged. Elsie took the epergne into the butler's pantry between the dining-room and the kitchen, and here she discovered the scissors with which Annie had evidently but recently performed on the luckless flowers. Armed with these, she went out into the garden through the French window leading from the morning-room. The garden was beautiful and carefully tended — by some visiting gardener, Elsie presumed, for none was in sight. She walked round pleased and satisfied.

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She had been in the garden but a few minutes and was still gathering flowers and foliage to her liking when Annie came in search of her.

"'Phone," she said, adding in a business-like way, "Mrs. McKeene."

Elsie hastened into the house, preceding Annie's substantial, gingham-clad figure across the sward. She thought rapidly as she went. It was doubtless the same woman who had talked to her yesterday; if so, she needed to know her given name.

"Yes?" she said, seating herself at the telephone.

"Is this you, Elsie?" demanded the voice — that of yesterday — a trifle dubiously.

"Yes." Elsie drawled it affectedly. "Is this you, Lily?"

"Lily!" indignantly. "No. It 's me — Addie."

Elsie laughed. "Oh-h! I should never have guessed it,"— which was truthful enough.

"Well, you 'd better. Lily! What Lily, I 'd like to know?"

"Oh, almost any kind." Elsie bubbled with real amusement. It had come to be something of a game — an intensely fascinating because dangerous one. And then she quickly curbed her mirth and told herself that she had better be careful and keep her wits about her. Still, her ruse had worked. Addie McKeene — Mrs. McKeene.

"Well," observed the voice after a second,

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"you 're evidently feeling very funny this morning. But anyway, I 'm thankful you 're better-tempered than you were yesterday. What are you going to do to-day?"

"Be good," parried Elsie.

"Too big an order," returned the voice dryly. "But no joking, now — what are your plans?"

"I have n't made any."

"Well, come over and have lunch. And then we 'll decide what we want to do this afternoon."

Elsie thought hastily. She did not see how she could accept the invitation in any case, seeing she did not know where it came from. "Can't be done," she declared laughingly then. "I 'm doing penance."

This statement was received with a moment's silent consideration. And then, "I 'm coming straight over. Look for me, Elsie." And the receiver was abruptly hung up.

Elsie still sat by the telephone stand. Seeing that inevitably she would have to do so soon, she was glad she was going to see this woman at once. She felt something like the player of a game, about to enter into a great test of skill. That really was what it was and somehow she felt very alert and able. But this was a crucial encounter. She must not forget that. It seemed almost incredible that she could succeed in passing herself off on this woman who had been an intimate friend of that other. And

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yet, on the other hand, how could that woman look at her and suspect anything different!

She rose and went into the living-room to watch for the arrival of this new friend. As far as she allowed herself to speculate, she was not going to like her. To begin with, all and any friends of Addie McKeene's ways of thinking were going to be so many obstacles in the new path she had, perhaps, to make — obstacles, though, that could not be removed abruptly.

As she was thinking these things over and gazing absently out upon the road she saw a handsome little dark-blue electric glide silently up. In a second out jumped a slight and exceedingly elegant figure, which banged to the door behind it and ran lightly up the cement walk. Elsie opened the house door and the figure tripped in with a quick little swish of skirts. Elsie had a fleeting vision of a bright, dark face, and then an arm went round her shoulders and a soft cheek rubbed kitten-like against hers.

"Well, you dear, bad old girl! I 's awful glad to see it all right again — even if it is a cross old thing."

She was released and Addie tossed a rich wrap of brocade and fur upon a near-by chair. Then she turned back to Elsie, who was standing gazing at her and realizing once for all that speculating on the unseen is worse than waste of time. Elsie was not

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aware that she had actually outlined her ideas of this woman specifically, but she found she had. She had covertly expected to see a large, languid-eyed, possibly overdressed and much-made-up woman — a professional perverter of young married women, a mistress of intrigue and a manager of risqué affairs. Instead, here was this dainty, high-bred looking little thing about as likely to lead any one as a butterfly.

With an air of gay satisfaction, Mrs. McKeene placed herself in a chair, clasped her hands round her knees, and laughed out loud. But neither the action nor the laugh was the least bit vulgar. Addie was one of those fortunate persons born once in a while who can say and do almost anything without by any chance appearing vulgar.

"Elsie, sit down," she exclaimed. "For goodness' sake — what is this? A Mrs. Siddons act, or a study for the statue of Repentance?" Elsie laughed, and sat down. "That 's better. Now look pleasant while I give you the 'once over.'"

It was a very frank inspection and Elsie bore it better than might have been, owing to the fact that she herself was busy returning it. She admired very much and could not help liking on sight the face before her. It was so palpably the index of a thoroughly amiable nature. The dark eyes were bright and fun-loving, the small mouth a veritable rosebud of good nature, the cheeks two smooth, dimpled peaches.

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"Well," summed up Addie, after her mock solemn examination, "you do look a wee bit different, though I don't know whether it 's a tiny shadow 'way down in your eyes or merely a chastened expression. Yes — the effect is still distinctly visible. You did get a good scolding, whatever you may say."

"No, that is n't Alan's way." Elsie shook her head with conviction. Already she knew that much. "But — Oh, I felt horribly cheap! That 's all."

Addie nodded, watching her friend with bright eyes. "I suppose so. Well, I don't know how some men look at those things. Of course, Terry 's so decent about it. He does just as he likes himself and never dreams of objecting to my doing the same, provided I don't make a fool of myself. Just look what a terribly dull time he 'd have if he did n't, being away from home so much of the time! — and me, too," she added with a mirthful pucker of the lips.

"Yes." Elsie kept thoughtful eyes on the ground. She felt the need of very guarded speech — else previous concepts would be smashed at one meeting and both be left wide-eyed over the ruins. "Only, you see, when the man does n't happen to want to — to do as he likes —" She paused. Then looked up. Addie McKeene's face was mirthful.

"Lordy, lordy! — as if such a man was ever made!" Addie laughed softly and swayed to and fro in her mirth. "They *all* do as they like, when

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they like. Only some like oftener than others. And some like openly and some prefer cover. And some like to do one thing and some another. And there you are."

Elsie listened with a smile, but offered no amendment to this sweeping classification. And Addie went on, merry, quizzical eyes on her friend's face:

"But I came over with the full intention of allowing you to moralize as much as ever you wanted to. I knew it would make you feel better. I never knew you to do it before. But then, one does n't get shaken up in automobiles every day, either. Bound to come out of the shuffle with a few derangements, I suppose. Besides, of course, it was a very narrow escape —" From Addie's unfinished tone Elsie did not take the escape to be from physical injury alone.

"So now,"— Addie took the clasping hands from her knees, and arranged herself neatly in the chair, with the comical air of a curly little judge about to take evidence —"we 'll start with your statement that you 're going to be good. How are you going to do it — whatever it may mean?"

Elsie opened her eyes. "Dear me!" she laughed. "This is worse than writing the Declaration of Independence on a dime, as some misguided person or other did. How does any one be good?"

"That depends on any one 's idea of being good," responded Addie promptly. "What is yours?"

"Oh, I have n't got it formulated and ready for

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publication yet," answered Elsie, keeping up the quizzical strain. In reality she had no intention of being led into a serious discussion, supposing Addie McKeene capable of it, which she doubted.

"Perhaps not. But you 've thought it over and arranged a few foolish little ideas in a row," insisted Addie. "I can tell you what being good means for you just at present. It means doing just what Alan wants you to and substituting his ideas for yours."

"It does n't — is n't — at all," contradicted Elsie promptly. "Can't I have ideas of my own about being good?"

"Yes — and they 're not Alan's," responded Addie cheerfully. And then the whole discussion was evidently so amusing that she could hardly keep that laughing little mouth of hers straight. "Are you going to take the veil?"

"I had n't thought of it, exactly."

"Or are you going to stay at home all day and sit on a cushion and sew a fine seam? Or like the dear good ladies of old, weave gorgeous tapestries for the sitting-room walls? Only, as far as I remember, those same ladies always kept an eye on the bend of the road in expectation of the appearance of a knight — in armor or otherwise."

"The prospect does not appeal to me with any great force," responded Elsie gravely.

"Oh! Well, your brand of goodness is evidently an entirely new one." And then with a little sigh

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and an air of banishing all jest from the proceedings, "Now, dearest, tell your own Addie everything. What is it you have on your mind?"

"Well,"— Elsie accepted the invitation at face value —"you 've heard of a coating of ice being formed sometimes over a certain warm place, have n't you? That 's the kind I 've been skating on lately, I fancy. And I feel I 'd better stop while —"

"While the stopping 's good," finished Addie, with a queer little grimace at her own slang. "Hm! Well, I know in art it 's horrid taste to begin with details. But in real life details have a dreadful knack of getting in the way. How about Willett?"

"Oh — Willett." Elsie looked impatient. Already she disliked the mere name of the man — unprincipled fop that she knew he must be. And then because she knew so little of the extent of his affair with her, she concluded half-heartedly, "He will be the least of my troubles."

"Oh, will he?" said Addie, dryly. "You can't persuade me that you know so little of him as all that."

"You mean that heretofore he has always done the winding up of affairs himself?" ventured Elsie.

"No," reflectively. "No, I don't believe Willett 's a bad-hearted man at all. He 's too big. But — he won't see any sense in the whole thing. And neither do I. I 've never known you to have such a violent spasm. In fact, I have never known you

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to have any spasms at all. That is one thing I have always loved about you. Life with you was just one big, joyous bubble. And now —" She laughed again, as if at the mere sight of the metamorphosed Elsie. "Of course, though —" she checked herself then —"I don't know what kind of ultimatum —"

Elsie thought a moment. Quite evidently she had been in the habit of making a full confidante of this woman. She did not want to seem to do less now. "No ultimatum exactly," she said then, slowly. "He is going to let me hang myself, unless I get into the papers. Then he will — finish the hanging. That 's all," she sighed as the position, outlined afresh by the words she had spoken, occurred to her again. But she had to adopt this character, whether or no. The more thoroughly she could enter into what it had been, the better she could begin to shape what it was to be — if she were left to do the shaping. "Only it made me think, Addie," she went on. "Really, sooner or later, women who do — do things as I do, end up in just about one way. Don't you think they do?"

"No, I don't," responded Addie shortly and promptly. "Idiots end up as idiots, and fools as fools, of course. But so they do in every connection. And if you take long chances you 're likely to break your neck, whether it 's in the stock-market, on the race-course, or — or in life. Moral: don't

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take long chances. Women — and men, too — who bungle their affairs, of whatever sort, are the ones, of course, that you hear of. The others you don't hear of. That's all."

Elsie nodded and accepted this argument with a thoughtful little smile. The logic of it appeared irrefutable; and would have been but for one thing. It was based on an unsound premise. Elsie felt this — knew it. Only at that time she could not think it out. And she would not have expressed herself if she could.

"Of course," went on Addie, tapping the carpet with her toe, and with the quaint air of really trying to think the thing out with total impartiality, "if you 've thought it all over and really want to —" She paused, and allowed that sentence to end itself with decorum. "It 's amusing, though, when you think about it — so childish and inconsistent — men, I mean. They calmly appropriate a woman who has been accustomed to living in a certain way. They themselves, perhaps, have n't been accustomed to living that way, or don't want to — comes to the same thing. And they can't, or won't, let the woman go on living in the only way she knows how to live."

"Well, I suppose," said Elsie, gently, "they expect the woman to think that all over before she marries."

"Not at all!" disagreed Addie, with comically cheerful and good-natured cynicism. "They be-

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come infatuated with a woman and don't rest till they get her. Then, when infatuation is over, they expect her to remodel herself entirely to suit present conditions, which generally means themselves. Now, look at you. Look at the life you had with your mother — one long, continual round of pleasure. And after you married, a complete reversal. Not supposed to need anything but home and hubby. And you tried to live up to the program, too. You kept it up much longer than I should ever have thought you could — much longer than was good for you, really; for you were only holding yourself in, whether you knew it or not. And besides, what on earth would you do with fifty dollars a month?"

Elsie laughed outright, Addie's expression was so comical.

"Of course you could manage to dress on it, I suppose, and pay car fare and so forth. But what sort of life would you have?" And Addie opened her eyes as if in contemplation of its hideous bareness. "No bridge, no opera boxes, no dansants, no matinée luncheons, no — oh, well, simply nothing! You'd have to join a thimble club, and have a nice circle of ladies call on you, and have mild little teas at one another's houses in turn. And you might have a five-hundred afternoon once in a while by way of a debauch." Addie laughed in real and unaffected amusement at the career she had conjured up.

Elsie laughed, too. But she made no verbal criti-

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cism of this sketchy outline of her new life. A sense of something more weighty than usual about the woman before her entered into Addie McKeene's dancing but still sensitively attuned mind. The feeling was not analyzed, hardly recognized, but still intuitively acted upon.

"Of course, dear old girl, if you really feel —" Again Addie trusted to the spirit of the sentence to end it with greater taste than spoken words, which it did. "I don't want to be a troublesome buttinsky. Only," and she pulled a wry little mouth, "I feel this is just a spell — you know, from the shock, and the — the unpleasantness you have come through. And I do hate to have you do things while it lasts that perhaps you can't undo afterward. But you 've always been so clever at arranging and engineering things, so I don't believe —"

The look and tone of real affection that accompanied these words warmed Elsie's heart to an extent that surprised her. She realized for the first time that she was in the way of being lonely. She smiled, a smile of genuine friendliness.

"I won't do anything rash," she promised.

"Then we 're safe," with an assumption of relief. Addie jumped up. "And now tell Annie — Oh, but I forgot! Does your scheme of salvation include me among the damned?"

"No — it does n't," replied Elsie, shortly.

"Oh! Well, then, tell Annie you 're not going to

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be home for lunch. And hurry. Madame George is sending me out that white hat this afternoon, and if the wing is n't on at exactly the tilt I told her, it goes back. I don't want it to come while I 'm away."

Annie was upstairs officiating with much dusting and shaking in her master's room; and Elsie, on her way to get a wrap, informed her of her contemplated absence.

"Mr. Leland 'll be home for dinner, won't he?" inquired that personage by way of answer.

"I suppose so. I have n't heard anything yet," replied Elsie.

"Well, got to cook that duck, anyway," with an air of announcing the inevitable.

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CHAPTER VIII

ELSIE took a wrap from her wardrobe and then went down and entered the electric. It was deeply and luxuriously lined in a soft French gray, and Elsie seated herself with covert delight.

Addie McKeene drove the car with swift, light precision that won Elsie's immediate admiration. As near as Elsie could judge, she drove about six blocks in all, and then turned the machine into a narrow cement driveway and sent it without any manœuvering into the garage at the back of the lawn.

Elsie's new home, while in good taste, even approaching the luxurious, presented in comparison with Mrs. McKeene's house an almost masculine solidity of appearance. Addie's home was a rampant reflection of herself. The living-room, though of good size, was more like a lady's boudoir than anything. Apparently, too, all her life the little lady had been the recipient of rich gifts — gifts whose taste, although always good, was immensely varied. Only in that way could the almost bazaar-like collection of rugs, cushions, pottery, and statuary be accounted for. At one end of the room, forming a big alcove, was the music-room; Elsie

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glanced with much respect at the polished floor and the grand piano.

Shortly after the two women had settled themselves to argue the respective merits of a Paul Poiret and a Lucille model of gown, a maid came into the room, acknowledging Elsie's presence with a pleasant smile. There was about the same difference between this girl and Annie as there was between the two houses; and Elsie wondered in passing whether she herself had discovered and hired Annie. Of course Annie was a good worker. The state of the house testified to that; and Elsie had not as yet learned that she herself was supposed to do anything in connection with keeping it up. And then she was a good cook. Possibly Addie's maid was not such a treasure in all these ways, but she was certainly of a more pleasant personality. Sallow and dark, with dark expressive eyes, she appeared to idolize her mistress, and listened with deferential yet indulgent affection to her airily elaborated requests.

"Lottie, I want you to get us just the very darlingest lunch. And Lottie, we don't need a truly, sit-up-to-the-table lunch. Put it on our little table with all the wings, and wheel it up to us."

Lunch was well over. The hat had arrived and the angle of the wing had been found to be mathematically correct. Elsie, having resisted Addie's coaxing to go down-town with her, was about to go up to her room to chat while Addie dressed, when

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the telephone bell rang. Addie went to it and rested her arms nonchalantly on the stand.

"Yes?" And then, "Yes. All right."

She rose and came back to Elsie, a half-comical expression on her face. She gave a little backward toss of her head, motioning Elsie to her late place at the instrument. "It 's Willett. After you 've done talking, come on upstairs." She ran lightly up the staircase and out of hearing.

Elsie went reluctantly enough to the waiting telephone. "Yes?"

"Well, sweetheart, how are you?"

Elsie had already made up her mind to dislike the owner, but she could not help admiring immediately the voice that traveled to her. It was so deep and resonant. She disliked, however, the easy affection displayed in the greeting; and her answer was sarcastic, though leisurely.

"Oh, I believe I can be said to be out of immediate danger."

There was a second's pause. And then a slight amused laugh. "I perceive that a certain little lady is not in a very good humor this afternoon. What is the matter, pet?"

The tone was very gentle, very tender, a whole caress in itself; Elsie was amazed to find that seemingly in spite of herself something within her stirred to meet it. She was instantly disgusted with herself.

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"Nothing — nothing that can be expressed just now, at all events," with indifference.

"Oh, I see," thoughtfully. "Well, I was very careful about that matter, was n't I? I don't think I neglected any precautionary detail. As far as I can ascertain, except for the immediate bystanders, no one was any the wiser. But, of course — I suppose you had the deuce to pay at home."

"Well — something like that," not seeing any advantage in disturbing that impression.

"I suppose so," regretfully. "But there seemed nothing to do but take you home, did there? I was awfully anxious about you and could n't get anything out of Addie the next day, except that you were pretty well yourself again. I 'm so sorry, darling. It was an unfortunate business altogether. But — well, we were both rather upset, distracted, were n't we? And you know, Elsie," he paused, and then spoke in an even lower, softer voice, "if you had let me have my way we should n't have been at that spot just when —" He paused again. Elsie was listening with all her understanding, and she was impatient when the break came in what promised to be valuable information.

"Just when what?" she demanded.

"Oh, just when the other fellow decided to cut a corner," finished Renshaw somewhat lamely.

Elsie was quick to detect the lameness. However, that might merely indicate that he was more to blame

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for the accident than he had so far indicated. So she asked, "Whom do you blame for the accident?"

"Both. He cut corners, and I was speeding, and not paying the attention to my wheel that I should." This last was added with a half-laugh. Evidently there was some reason for his inattention that Elsie was supposed to understand. However, she did not; and she could not wait just now to pursue that particular vein of research. There was other and more important information that she wanted.

"Who were they in the other car?" she asked.

"An oldish man and a girl," with a short laugh.

"Well, but who?" insisted Elsie, wondering why the laugh.

There was a moment's silence. And then, in a casual tone, "Calthorpe and his secretary."

Elsie could not be quite sure. Listening with attention strained to catch any possible clue, every possible inflection, she knew she might easily imagine this thing or that. Still, it almost seemed to her that the tone was over casual.

"Were they much hurt?"

"Oh, no-o. Calthorpe was n't hurt at all. The — the girl was thrown against the wheel and her shoulder hurt — collar-bone fractured or something. Nothing serious, I believe. Why, sweetheart?"

"I could n't — or did n't — ask Alan any particulars, so I 'm asking you," replied Elsie with some crispness.

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"I see," apologetically. "Well, don't bother your little head about them — the other parties in the accident. They 're all right and just as much to blame as we. And there 's nothing particularly out of the way in my running you home at the end of an afternoon in the city."

That all depended. But Elsie did not challenge the statement. "What is the name of the girl — the secretary?" she asked.

"This is quite a cross-examination," observed Renshaw with a short laugh. "Has any one been talking to you?"

"Of course not," sharply, but rather surprised nevertheless. "How could any one, when I did n't even know who the people were until you told me? But I can't understand why you won't answer a straightforward question."

"Oh, certainly. But you 're not a girl to bother with details as a rule," stiffly. "Her name is Hamby."

"Oh! And what is her given name?"

Renshaw laughed — a slightly sarcastic laugh. "I see plainly enough that you 're running to earth some rumor or theory. Her name is Una."

It seemed to Elsie that her heart gave one great leap and then sank back. Now she knew that his reluctance to pursue the subject was real and not imaginary. But what could he possibly know or

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suspect? What —? But she must not forget. She had to find that girl.

"Did — where is she?" she asked then, after a pause of a second or so. "Did they take her home, too?"

"No — to some hospital, I think. There's a chance, of course of some internal injury. But don't worry about it, dear."

"Which hospital?"

"Now, Elsie,"— Renshaw's voice was almost sharp —"it's foolish for us to work in the dark. What do you want to know all this for? What are you driving at?"

Elsie caught herself up sharply, and the quick instinct for self-preservation flew uppermost warningly. On no account, whatever others might do or think, must she indicate by her words or actions that anything out of the ordinary was happening — or thought of.

"Why, I think it's you that is so strange," she said almost fretfully. "I can't see that I've asked any but very ordinary questions. I just thought it would be nice if she were at a hospital to call and see her and perhaps take a few flowers. You see, I was in the same accident and got off so lightly."

"Oh, I would n't bother, if I were you," promptly. "I doubt very much whether she'd like it. Probably think you were condescending. She — if you

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want to do something sweet, call up the hospital and inquire. That would be all any one would expect of you. Everything possible is being done for her anyway."

"Oh, well, perhaps so." Elsie decided not to argue the matter. She would not even ask the name of the hospital. Now that she knew the name she could easily find out for herself by calling those institutions up one by one. So many lightning-like thoughts were darting hither and thither in her brain that when Renshaw spoke again she forgot to be as courteous as caution would have dictated.

"Are you coming to town this afternoon, Elsie?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Oh-h! Don't feel like it." The tone was airy and not in the least apologetic.

"Well, but — if I don't see you to-day, I can't for a week or two," went on the man. "Of course I can't take my part now on account of this wretched wrist, but I 'm going down to the opening tournament just the same. I wish there were some way of getting you down to it. But I suppose there is n't —"

"No, of course not," decidedly. And then, suddenly recollecting that she had not even been decent enough to inquire about his injury, in fact had forgotten that he had sustained one, "How is your wrist?"

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"Oh — the swelling has gone down somewhat. But it 'll be a month or two before I can use it much. A bad sprain is worse than a clean break, you know." And then, "Well, shall I see you to-day?"

Elsie laughed slightly to cover the harshness of her attitude. "No, I think not."

"Oh, well —" A moment's silence, in which Elsie divined this man was doing much thinking. She was upset, scolded, perhaps threatened — out of sorts altogether. A week or so to herself would perhaps be the best thing after all. Then, cheerfully, "Well, if you won't, you won't. I must wait till I get back. But I 'll think of you every day, sweetheart."

"Thank you."

Willett Renshaw laughed. "Such a sarcastic little girl! This is the very newest thing in the way of a mood, is n't it? Never mind. Wait till I see you — until I get within reach of you: I 'll settle all the moods. Good-by for a little while, Lily Girl."

"Good-by."

She hung up, and stood quietly by the instrument for a moment or so. Somehow her heart was beating heavily. Then she went up the shallow winding staircase and, guided by her ears, entered a delightful bedroom having an oriel window. Before a rosewood duchesse table Mrs. McKeene was critically smoothing off her face the last trace of powder.

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"Well? Are you going down with me?" she inquired, without turning her head.

"No, dear," replied Elsie gently.

Then Addie did turn her head — quickly. She gazed at her friend with frankly curious eyes. "You certainly are in the funniest mood — for you. Well!" She turned back to the glass again. She was full of curiosity, dying to have Elsie make full confession of all that had transpired, that was now actuating her. But she was too well-bred to question even her closest chum past a certain mark. "I must just run round with you and drop you at your door, then."

She did this. And Elsie entered her quiet home with a sense of vast relief. Time to be alone and to think.

But when she sat down and tried to think she could not. A thousand issues, a thousand questions and possibilities and fears rushed at her and assailed her like a horde of furies. She got up quickly. She was going to find that girl, and she would go at once. That was the next and only thing to do. No good thinking about it.

She went to the telephone prepared to call up all the hospitals given in the classified section of the directory. However, the second hospital called — St. Stephen's — gave her what she wanted. "Miss Hamby? Just a minute. Yes, Room two-thirty-six."

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Elsie hung the receiver up quietly and then went straight up to dress. No use hesitating. No use fearing. This thing had to be done.

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