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THE INDIFFERENCE OF JULIET ***



“The rich voice of the bishop was as impressive as it had ever been.” (*See p*

The Indifference of Juliet

By GRACE S. RICHMOND

Author of
“The Second Violin” “The Dixons”

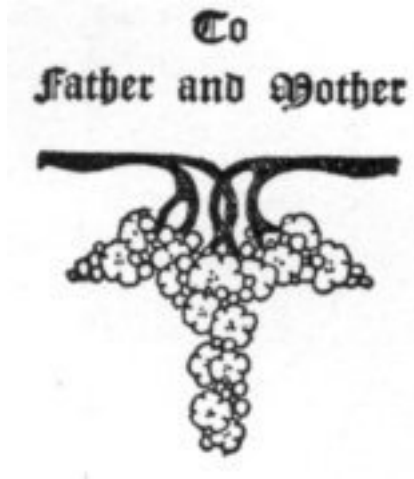


With Illustrations
By HENRY HUTT

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PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

HORATIO MARCY, an elderly New Englander of some wealth.

ANTHONY ROBESON, the last young male representative of the Kentucky ROBESONS, now making his own way in Massachusetts.

WAYNE CAREY, Robeson's former college chum, an office clerk on a salary.

DR. ROGER WILLIAMS BARNES, a surgeon.

LOUIS LOCKWOOD, an attorney-at-law.

STEVENS CATHCART, an architect.

MRS. DINGLEY, sister of Horatio Marcy.

JULIET MARCY, daughter of Horatio Marcy.

JUDITH DEARBORN, Juliet's friend since school-days.

SUZANNE GERARD, MARIE DRESSER, other friends of Juliet.

RACHEL REDDING, a poor country girl—of education.

MARY MCKAIM—in the background, but valuable.

THE INDIFFERENCE OF JULIET

I.—AN AUDACIOUS PROPOSITION

Anthony Robeson glanced about him in a satisfied way at the shaded nook under the low-hanging boughs into which he had guided the boat. Then he drew in his oars and let the little craft drift.

“This is an ideal spot,” said he, looking into his friend’s face, “in which to tell you a rather interesting piece of news.”

“Oh, fine!” cried his friend, settling herself among the cushions in the stern and tilting back her parasol so that the light through its white expanse framed her health-tinted face in a sort of glory. “Tell me at once. I suspected you came with something on your mind. There couldn’t be a lovelier place on the river than this for confidences. But I can guess yours. Tony, you’ve found ‘her’!”

“And you’ll be my friend just the same?” questioned Anthony anxiously. “My chum—my confidante?”

“Oh, well, Tony, that’s absurd,” declared Juliet Marcy severely. “As if *she* would allow it!”

“She’s three thousand miles away.”

“I’m ashamed of you!”

“Just in the interval, then,” pleaded Anthony. “I need you now worse than ever. For I’ve a tremendous responsibility on my hands. The—the—you know—is to come off in September, and this is June—and I’ve a house to furnish. Will you help me do it, Juliet?”

“*Anthony Robeson!*” she said explosively under her breath, with a laugh. Then she sat up and leaned forward with a commanding gesture. “Tell me all about it. What is her name and who is she? Where did you meet her? Are you very much——”

“Would I marry a girl if I were not ‘very much’?”

demanded Anthony. “Well—I’ll tell you—since you insist on these non-essentials before you really come down to business. Her name is Eleanor Langham, and she lives in San Francisco. Her family is old, aristocratic, wealthy—yet she condescends to me.”

He looked up keenly into her eyes, and her brown lashes fell for an instant before something in his glance, but she said quickly: “Go on.”

“When the—affair—is over I want to bring my bride straight home,” Anthony proceeded, with a tinge of colour in his smooth, clear cheek. “I shall have no vacation to speak of at that time of year, and no time to spend in furnishing a house. Yet I want it all ready for her. So you see I need a friend. I shall have two weeks to spare in July, and if you would help me—”

“But, Tony,” she interrupted, “how could I? If—if we were seen shopping together——”

“No, we couldn’t go shopping together in New York without being liable to run into a wondering crowd of friends, of course—not in the places where you would want to go. But here you are only a couple of hours from Boston; you will be here all summer; you and Mrs. Dingley and I could run into Boston for a day at a time without anybody’s being the wiser. I know—that is—I’m confident Mrs. Dingley would do it for me——”

“Oh, of course. Did Auntie ever deny you anything since the days when she used to give you jam as often as you came across to play with me?”

“Never.”

“Have you *her* photograph?” inquired Miss Marcy with an emphasis which left no possible doubt as to whose photograph she meant.

"I expected that," said Anthony gravely. "I expected it even sooner. But I am prepared."

She sat watching him curiously as he slowly drew from his breast-pocket a tiny leather case, and gazed at it precisely as a lover might be expected to gaze at his lady's image before jealously surrendering it into other hands. She had never seen Anthony Robeson look at any photograph except her own with just that expression. She had often wondered if he ever would. She had recommended this course of procedure to him many times, usually after once more gently refusing to marry him. She had begun at last to doubt whether it would ever be possible to divert Tony's mind from its long-sought object. But that trip to San Francisco, and the months he had spent there in the interests of the firm he served, had evidently brought about the desired change. She had not seen him since his return until to-day, when he had run up into the country where was the Marcy summer home, to tell her, as she now understood, his news and to make his somewhat extraordinary request.

She accepted the photograph with a smile, and studied it with attention.

"Oh, but isn't she pretty?" she cried warmly—and generously, for she was thinking as she looked how much prettier was Miss Langham than Miss Marcy.

"Isn't she?" agreed Anthony with enthusiasm.

"Lovely. What eyes! And what a dear mouth!"

"You're right."

"She looks clever, too."

"She is."

"How tall is she?"

"About up to my shoulder."

"She's little, then."

"Well, I don't know," objected Anthony, surveying his own stalwart length of limb. "A girl doesn't have to be a dwarf not to be on a level with me. I should say she must be somewhere near your height."

"What a magnificent dresser!"

"Is she? She never irritates one with the fact."

"Oh, but I can see. And she's going to marry you. Tony, what can you give her?"

"A little box of a house, one maidservant, an occasional trip into town, four new frocks a year—moderate ones, you know, in keeping with her circumstances—and my name," replied Anthony composedly.

"You won't let her live in town, then?"

"Let her! Good heavens, what sort of a place could I give her in town on my salary? Now, in the very rural suburb I've picked out she can live in the greatest comfort, and we can have a real home—something I haven't had since Dad died and the old home and the money and all the rest of it went."

His face was grave now, and he was staring down into the water as if he saw there both what he had lost and what he hoped to gain.

"Yes," said Juliet sympathetically, though she did not know how to imagine the girl whose photograph she held in the surroundings Anthony suggested. Presently she went on in her gentlest tone: "I'm not saying that the name isn't a proud one to offer her, Tony—and if she is willing to share your altered

fortunes I've no doubt she will be happy. Along with your name you'll give her a heart worth having."

"Thank you," said Anthony without looking up.

Miss Marcy coloured slightly, and hastened to supplement this speech with another.

"The question is—since the home is to be hers—why not let her furnish it? Her tastes and mine might not agree. Besides——"

"Well——"

"Why—you know, Tony," explained Juliet in some confusion, "I shouldn't know how to be economical."

"I'm aware that you haven't been brought up on the most economical basis," Anthony acknowledged frankly. "But I'll take care of my funds, no matter how extravagant you are inclined to be. If I should hand you five dollars and say, 'Buy a dining-table,' you could do it, couldn't you? You couldn't satisfy your ideals, of course, but you could give me the benefit of your discriminating choice within the five-dollar limit."

Juliet laughed, but in her eyes there grew nevertheless a look of doubt. "Tony," she demanded, "how much have you to spend on the furnishing of that house?"

"Just five hundred dollars," said Anthony concisely. "And that must cover the repairing and painting of the outside. Really, Juliet, haven't I done fairly well to save up that and the cost of the house and lot—for a fellow who till five years ago never did a thing for himself and never expected to need to? Yes, I know—the piano in your music-room cost twice that, and so did the horses you drive, and a very few of your pretty gowns would swallow another five. But Mrs.

Anthony Robeson will have to chasten her ideas a trifle. Do you know, Juliet—I think she will—for love of me?"

He was smiling at his own audacious confidence. Juliet attempted no reply to this very unanswerable statement. She studied the photograph in silence, and he lay watching her. In her blue-and-white boating suit she was a pleasant object to look at.

"Will you help me?" he asked again at length. "I'm more anxious than I can tell you to have everything ready."

"I shouldn't like to fail you, Tony, since you really wish it, though I'm very sure you'll find me a poor adviser. But you haven't been a brother to me since the mud-pie days for nothing, and if I can help you with suggestions as to colour and style I'll be glad to. Though I shall all the while be trying to live up to this photograph, and that will be a little hard on the five-dollar-dining-table scale."

"You've only to look out that everything is in good taste," said Anthony quietly, "and that you can't help doing. My wife will thank you, and the new home will be sweet to her because of you. It surely will to me."

II.—MEASUREMENTS

It was on the first day of Robeson's two-weeks' July vacation that he came to take Juliet Marcy and her aunt, Mrs. Dingley, who had long stood to her in the place of the mother she had early lost, to see the home he had bought in a remote suburb of a great city. It was a three-hours' journey from the Marcy country place, but he had insisted that Juliet could not furnish the house intelligently until she had studied it in detail.

So at eleven o'clock of a hot July morning Miss Marcy found herself surveying from the roadway a small, old-fashioned white house, with green blinds shading its odd, small-paned windows; a very "box of a house," as Anthony had said, set well back from the quiet street and surrounded by untrimmed trees and overgrown shrubbery. The whole place had a neglected appearance. Even the luxuriant climbing-rose, which did its best to hide the worn white paint of the house-front, served to intensify the look of decay.

"Charming, isn't it?" asked Robeson with the air of the delighted proprietor. "Of course everything looks gone to seed, but paint and a lawn-mower and a few other things will make another place of it. It's good old colonial, that's sure, and only needs a bit of fixing up to be quite correct, architecturally, small as it is."

He led the way up the weedy path, Mrs. Dingley and Juliet exchanging amused glances behind his back. He opened the doors with a flourish and waved the ladies in. They entered with close-held skirts and noses involuntarily sniffing at the musty air. Anthony ran around opening windows and explaining the "points" of the house. When they had been over it Mrs. Dingley, warm and weary, subsided upon the

door-step, while Juliet and Anthony fell to discussing the possibilities of the place.

"You see," said Anthony, mopping his heated brow, "it isn't like having big, high rooms to decorate. These little rooms,"—he put up his hand and succeeded, from his fine height, in touching the ceiling of the lower front room in which they stood —"won't stand anything but the most simple treatment, and expensive papers and upholsteries would be out of place. It will take only very small rugs to suit the floors. The main thing for you to think of will be colours and effects. You'll find five hundred dollars will go a long way, even after the repairs and outside painting are disposed of."

He looked so appealing that Juliet could but answer heartily: "Yes, I'm sure of it. And now, Tony, don't you think you'd better draw a plan of the house, putting in all the measurements, so we shall know just how to go to work? And I will go around and dream a while in each room. Give me the photograph, you devoted lover, so I can plan things to suit *her*."

Anthony laughed and put his hand into his breast-pocket. But he drew it out empty.

"Why—I've left it behind," he admitted in some embarrassment. "I really thought I had it."

"Oh, Tony! And on this very trip when we needed it most! How could you leave it behind? Don't you always carry it next your heart?"

"Is that the prescribed place?"

"Certainly. I should doubt a man's love if he did not constantly wear my likeness right where it could feel his heart beating for me."

"Now I never supposed," remarked Anthony, considering her attentively, "that you had so much romance about you. Do you realise that for an extremely practical young person such as you have—mostly—appeared to be, that is a particularly sentimental suggestion? Er—should you wear his in the same way, may I inquire?"

"Of course," returned Juliet with defiance in her eyes, whose lashes, when they fell at length before his steadily interested gaze, swept a daintily colouring cheek.

"Have you ever worn one?" inquired this hardy young man, nothing daunted by these signs of righteous indignation. But all he got for answer was a vigorous:

"You absurd boy! Now go to work at your measurements. I'm going upstairs. There's one room up there, the one with the gable corners and the little bits of windows, that's perfectly fascinating. It must be done in Delft blue and white. Since I haven't the photograph"—she turned on the threshold to smile roguishly back at him—"memory must serve. Beautiful dark hair; eyes like a Madonna's; a perfect nose; the dearest mouth in the world—oh, yes——"

She vanished around the corner only to put her head in again with the air of one who fires a parting shot at a discomfited enemy: "But, Tony—do you honestly think the house is large enough for such a queen of a woman? Won't her throne take up the whole of the first floor?"

Then she was gone up the diminutive staircase, and her light footsteps could be heard on the bare floors overhead. Left alone, Anthony Robeson stood still for a moment looking fixedly at the door by which she

had gone. The smile with which he had answered her gay fling had faded; his eyes had grown dark with a singular fire; his hands were clenched. Suddenly he strode across the floor and stopped by the door. He was looking down at the quaint old latch which served instead of a knob. Then, with a glance at the unconscious back of Mrs. Dingley, sitting sleepily on the little porch outside, he stooped and pressed his lips upon the iron where Juliet's hand had lain.

III.—Shopping with a Chaperon

"Five hundred dollars," mused Miss Marcy, on the Boston train next morning. "Six rooms—living-room, dining-room, kitchen, and three bedrooms. That's ——"

"You forget," warned Anthony Robeson from the seat where he faced Juliet and Mrs. Dingley. "That must cover the outside painting and repairs. You can't figure on having more than three hundred dollars left for the inside."

"Dear me, yes," frowned Juliet. She held Anthony's plan in her hand, and her tablets and pencil lay in her lap. "Well, I can spend fifty dollars on each room —only some will need more than others. The living-room will take the most—no, the dining-room."

"The kitchen will take the most," suggested Mrs.

Dingley. “Your range will use up the most of your fifty. And kitchen utensils count up very rapidly.”

“It will be a very small range,” Anthony said. “A little toy stove would be more practical for our—the kitchen. How big is it, Juliet?”

“‘Ten by fourteen,’” read Juliet. “From the centre of the room you can hit all the side walls with the broom. Speaking of walls, Tony—those must be our first consideration. If we get our colour scheme right everything else will follow. I have it all in my head.”

So it proved. But it also proved, when they had been hard at work for an hour at a well-known decorator’s, that the tints and designs for which Miss Marcy asked were not readily to be found in the low-priced wall-papers to which Anthony rigidly held her.

“I must have the softest, most restful greens for the living-room,” she announced. “There—*that*——”

“But that is a dollar a roll,” whispered Anthony.

“Then—*that*!”

“Eighty-five cents.”

“But for that little room, Tony——”

“Twenty-five cents a roll is all we can allow,” insisted Anthony firmly. “And less than that everywhere else.”

The salesman was very obliging, and showed the best things possible for the money. It was impossible to resist the appeal in the eyes of this critical but restricted young buyer.

“There, that will do, I think,” said Juliet at length, with a long breath. “The green for the living-room and for the bit of a hall—No, no, Tony; I’ve just

thought! You must take away that little partition and let the stairs go up out of the living-room. That will improve the apparent size of things wonderfully."

"All right," agreed Anthony obediently.

"Then we'll put that rich red in the dining-room. For upstairs there is the tiny rose pattern, and the Delft blue, and that little pale yellow and white stripe. In the kitchen we'll have the tile pattern. We won't have a border anywhere—the rooms are too low; just those simplest mouldings, and the ivory white on the ceilings. The woodwork must all be white. There now, that's settled. Next come the floors."

There could be no doubt that Juliet was becoming interested in her task. Though the July heat was intense she led the way with rapid steps to the place where she meant to select her rugs. Here the three spent a trying two hours. It was hard to please Miss Marcy with Japanese jute rugs, satisfactory in colouring though many of them were, when she longed to buy Persian pieces of distinction. If Juliet had a special weakness it was for choice antique rugs.

She cornered Anthony at last, while Mrs. Dingley and the salesman were politely but unequivocally disputing over the quality of a certain piece of Chinese weaving.

"Tony," she begged, "please let me get that one dear Turkish square for the living-room. It will give character to the whole room, and the colours are perfectly exquisite. I simply can't get one of those cheap things to go in front of that beautiful old fireplace. Imagine the firelight on that square; it would make you want to spend your evenings at home. Please!"

"Do you imagine that I shall ever want to spend them anywhere else?" asked Tony softly, looking down into her appealing face. "Why, chum, I'd like to get that Tabriz you admire so much, if it would please you, in spite of the fact that we should have to pull the whole house up forty notches to match it. But even the Turkish square is out of the question."

"But, Tony"—Juliet was whispering now with her head a little bent and her eyes on the lapel of his coat—"won't you let me do it as my—my contribution? I'd like to put something of my own into your house."

"You dear little girl," Anthony answered—and possibly for her own peace of mind it was fortunate that Miss Langham, of California, could not see the look with which he regarded Miss Marcy, of Massachusetts—"I'm sure you would. And you are putting into it just what is priceless to me—your individuality and your perfect taste. But I can't let even you help furnish that house. She—must take what I—and only I—can give her."

"You're perfectly ridiculous," murmured Juliet, turning away with an expression of deep displeasure. "As if she wouldn't bring all sorts of elegant stuff with her, and make your cheap things look insignificant."

"I don't think she will," returned Anthony with conviction. "She'll bring nothing out of keeping with the house."

"I thought you told me she was of a wealthy family."

"She is. But if she marries me she leaves all that behind. I'll have no wife on any other basis."

"Well—for a son of the Robesons of Kentucky you

are absolutely the most absurd boy anybody ever heard of," declared the girl hotly under her breath. Then she walked over and ordered a certain inexpensive rug for the living-room with the air of a princess and the cheeks of a poppy.

IV.—The Cost of Frocks

It may have been that Miss Marcy was piqued into trying to see how little she could spend, but certain it was that from the time she left the carpet shop she begged for no exceptions to Mr. Robeson's rule of strict economy. She selected simple, delicate muslins for the windows, one and all, without a glance at finer draperies; bought denims and printed stuffs as if she had never heard of costlier upholsteries; and turned away from seductive pieces of Turkish and Indian embroideries offered for her inspection with a demure, "No, I don't care to look at those now," which more than once brought a covert smile to Anthony's lips and a twinkle to the eyes of the salesman. It was so very evident that the fair buyer did not pass them by for lack of interest.

Altogether, it was an interesting week these three people spent—for a week it took. Anthony began to protest after the first two days, and said he could not ask so much of his friends. But Juliet would not be hindered from taking infinite pains, and Mrs. Dingley

good humouredly lent the two her chaperonage and her occasional counsel, such as only the gray-haired matron of long housewifely experience can furnish.

The selection of the furniture took perhaps the most time, and was the hardest, because of the difficulty of finding good styles in keeping with the limited purse. Anthony possessed a number of good pieces of antique character, but beyond these everything was to be purchased. Juliet turned in despair from one shop after another, and when it came to the fitting of the dining-room she grew distinctly indignant.

“It’s a perfect shame,” she said, “that they can’t offer really good designs in the cheap things. Did you ever see anything so hideous? Tony, if I were you I’d rather eat my breakfast off one of those white kitchen tables—or——”

She broke off suddenly, rushed away down the long room to a group of chastely elegant dining-room furniture and came back after a little with a face of great eagerness to drag her companions away with her. She took them to survey a set of the costliest of all.

“Have you gone crazy?” Anthony inquired.

“Not at all. Tony, just study that table. It’s massive, but it’s simple—simple as beauty always is. Look at those perfectly straight legs—what clever cabinet maker couldn’t copy that in—in ash, Tony? Then there are stains—I’ve heard of them—that rub into wood and then finish in some way so it’s smooth and satiny. You could do that—I’m sure you could. Then you’d get the lovely big top you want. And the chairs—do you see the plain, solid-looking things? I know they could be made this way. Then the dining-room would be simply dear!”

"Juliet, you're coming on," declared Anthony with satisfaction that evening as the two, back at the Marcy country place, strolled slowly over the lawn toward the river edge. "At this rate you'll do for a poor man's wife yourself some day. That frock you have on now—isn't that a sort of concession to the humble company you're in?"

"In what way?" Juliet glanced down at the pale-green gown whose delicate skirts she was daintily lifting, and in which she looked like a flower in its calyx. She had rejoiced to exchange the dusty dress in which she had come home from town for this, which suggested coolness in each fresh fold.

"Why, it strikes me as about the simplest dress I ever saw you wear. Isn't it really—well—the least expensive thing you have had in that line in some time?"

The amused laugh with which this observation was greeted might have been disconcerting to anybody but Anthony Robeson, but he maintained his ground with calmness.

"How many of these do you think you can furnish Mrs. Anthony with in a year?" Juliet inquired, her lips forcing themselves to soberness, but the laughter lingering in her eyes.

"Several, as girlishly demure as that, I fancy," asserted the young man with confidence.

But Juliet's momentary gravity broke down. "Oh, you clever boy!" she said. "I shall advise Mrs. Anthony to send you shopping for her when she needs a new frock. You will order home just what she wants without stopping to ask the price, you will be so confident that you know a cheap thing when you see it. Afterward you will pay the bill—and then

the awful frown on your brow! You will have to live on bread and milk for a month to get your accounts straightened out. Oh, Tony!—No, I shouldn't do for a poor man's wife—not judging by this 'girlishly demure' gown, you poor lamb.—But, Tony," with a swift change of manner, "I do think the little house will be very charming indeed. I can hardly wait to know that the painting and papering are done, so that we can go down and get things in order. I long to arrange those fascinating new tin things in that bit of a cupboard. Tony"—turning to him solemnly —"does *she* know how to cook?"

"I think she is learning now," he assured her. "Seems to me she mentioned it in to-day's——" He fumbled in his breast-pocket and brought out a letter.

Juliet stole an interested glance at it. She observed that there were three closely written sheets of the heavy linen paper, and that the handwriting was one suggestive of a pleasing individuality. Anthony, in the dim twilight, was scanning page after page in a lover's absorbed way. Juliet walked along by his side in silence. She was thinking of the face in the photograph, and wondering if Miss Eleanor Langham really loved Anthony Robeson as he deserved to be loved.

"For he is a dear, dear fellow," she said to herself, "and if she could just see him planning so enthusiastically for her comfort, even if he does have to economise, she'd——"

"No, it's not in this letter," observed Anthony, putting the sheets together with a lingering touch which did not escape his companion's quick eyes. "It must have been in yesterday's."

"Does she write every day?"

"Did you ever hear of an engaged pair who didn't write every day?"

"It must take a good deal of your time," she remarked. "But, of course, she can cook. Every sane girl takes a cooking-school course nowadays. It's as essential as French."

"You did, then?"

"Of course. Don't you remember when I used to edify you with new and wonderful dishes every time you dropped in to luncheon?"

"But did you learn the more important things?"

"I paid especial attention to soups, sir," laughed Juliet. "Now, if Mrs. Anthony has done that you can live very economically."

"I'll suggest it to her," said Anthony gravely.

V.—Muslins and Tackhammers

It took several trips to the small house, and a great deal of hemming and ruffling of muslin on the part of Juliet and the Marcy sewing-woman, to say nothing of many days of Anthony's hard labour, to get everything in place. But it was all done at length, and the hour arrived to close the new home and leave it to wait the oncoming day in September when it should be permanently opened.

"I'll just go over it once more," said Juliet to Mrs. Dingley. The latter lady was lying in a hammock out under the apple trees, waiting for train time and her final release from duties which were becoming decidedly wearisome. It was the first day of August, and the evening was a warm one. Anthony had gone off upon a last errand of some sort. Mrs. Dingley was too exhausted to offer to accompany her niece, and Juliet ran back into the house alone. She wandered slowly through the rooms, looking about to see if there might be any perfecting touch which she could add.

It was a charming place; even a daughter of the house of Marcy could but own to that. Under her skilful management the little rooms had blossomed into a fresh, satisfying beauty that needed only the addition of the personal adornment which Anthony's bride would be sure to bring, to become a home—the home not only of a poor man but of a refined and cultured one as well. Restricted though she had been to the most inexpensive means of bringing about this happy result, Juliet had made them all tell toward an effect of great harmony and beauty. Perhaps to nobody was this more of a revelation than to the girl herself.

She was very proud of the living-room, as she looked about it. The partition between it and the tiny hall had been removed, according to her suggestion, and the straight staircase altered by means of a landing and an abrupt turn which transformed it into picturesqueness. With its low, broad steps, its slender spindles and odd posts, it added much to the character of the room.

Like most old New England houses, this one's chief glory was its great central chimney, with big

fireplaces opening both into the living-room and the dining-room. In the former, between the fireplace and the staircase, and forming a suggestion of an inglenook, Juliet had contrived a high, wide seat, cushioned in dull green, and boasting a number of pretty pillows. It must be confessed that she had surreptitiously added a little to these in the matter of certain modestly rich bits of material, and she contemplated the result with great satisfaction. It may be remarked, with no comment whatever, that in spite of their beauty there was not a pillow of all those scattered about the house which a weary man might not tuck under his head without fear of ruining a creation too delicate for any use but to be admired.

Having seized upon the idea of staining cheap material, she had carried it out in a set of low bookcases across the end and one side of the room. These awaited the coming of the several hundreds of choice books which Anthony had saved from his father's library. Two fine old portraits, dear to the hearts of many generations of the "Robesons of Kentucky," lent distinction to the home of their young descendant. Altogether the room was both quaint and artistic, and with its few plain chairs and tables, mostly heirlooms, and all of good old colonial design, was a room in which one could readily imagine one's self sitting down to a winter evening of cosy comfort, such as is not always to be had in far finer abiding-places.

The dining-room was a study in its reds and browns, and its home-made furniture was an astonishing success—if one were not too severely critical. As she surveyed it Juliet seemed to see the future master and mistress of this little home sitting down opposite

each other in the fireglow, and smiling across.

The coming Mrs. Robeson, if one might judge by her photograph, was a woman to lend grace and dignity to her surroundings, whatever they might be. Juliet could imagine her pretty, stately way of presiding at such small feasts as the room was destined to see, making her guests quite forget that she was not mistress of a mansion equal to any in the land. Would she be happy? Could she be happy here, after all that she had had of another and very different sort of life? For some reason, as Juliet stood and looked and thought, her face grew very sober, and a long-drawn breath escaped her lips.

The little kitchen was an exceedingly alluring place, gay in the bravery of fresh paint and spotless, shining utensils. There were even crisp curtains—at eight cents a yard—tied back at the high, wide-silled, triple window with its diminutive panes. It needed only a pot or two of growing plants in the window, and a neat-handed Phyllis in a figured gown, to be the old-time kitchen of one's dreams.

But it was upon the rooms on the upper floor that Juliet had exhausted her imagination and effort. Nothing could have been conceived of more dainty than they. Here her denims and muslins had run riot. Low dressing-tables clad in ruffled hangings, their padded tops delicate with the breath of orris; beds valanced with similar stuffs; high-backed chairs, their seats cushioned into comfort—everything was done in the cleverest imitation of the ancient styles in keeping with the old-fashioned house. It all made one think of the patter of high-heeled, buckled slippers, and stiff, rustling, brocaded gowns, and powdered hair, and the odours of long ago. Anthony would never know what his friendly home-maker

had put into these rooms of sentiment and charm.

VI.—A Question of Identity

At the door of the blue-and-white room, the one upon which the girl had lavished her most tender fancies, she stood at length, looking in. And as she looked something swam before her eyes. A sob rose in her throat. She choked it back; she brushed her hand across her face. Then she tried to laugh. “Oh, what a goose I am!” she said sternly to herself. And then she ran across the room, sank upon her knees before the window-seat with its blue and white cushions, and burying her face in one of them cried her wretched, jealous, longing heart out.

Anthony, coming in hastily but softly through the small kitchen, heard the rush of footsteps overhead, and stopped. He waited a moment, listening eagerly; then he came noiselessly into the living-room and stood still. His face, always strong and somewhat stern in its repose, had in it to-night a certain unusual intensity. He looked at his watch and saw that there was an hour before train time. Then he sat down where he could see the top of the staircase and waited.

By and by light footsteps crossed the floor above and came through the little hall. From where he sat Anthony caught the gleam of Juliet’s crisp linen

skirt. Presently she came slowly down. As she turned upon the landing she met Anthony's eyes looking up. In a fashion quite unusual to the straightforward gaze of his friend her eyes fell. He saw that her cheeks were pale. He rose to meet her.

"Come and rest," he said. "You are tired. You have worked too hard. Such a helper a man never had before. And you have made a wonderful success. Juliet, I can't thank you. It's beyond that."

But she would not be led to the cosy corner by the window. She found something needing her attention in the curtain of the bookcase in the dimmest corner of the room, and began solicitously to pull it in various ways, as if there were something wrong with it. He watched her, standing with his arm on the high chimney-piece.

"I think you enjoyed it just a little bit yourself, though," he observed. "Didn't you, chum?"

"Yes, indeed," said Juliet.

Her back was toward him, her head bent down, but his quick ear detected a peculiar quality in her voice. He questioned her again hurriedly.

"You're not sorry you did it?"

"Oh, no," said Juliet.

Now there is not much in two such simple replies as these to indicate the state of one's mind and heart; but when a girl has been crying stormily and uninterruptedly for a half-hour, and is only not crying still because she is holding back the torrent of her unhappiness by sheer force of will, it is radically impossible to say so much as four words in a perfectly natural way. Anthony understood in a breath that the unfamiliar note in his friend's voice

was that of tears. And, strange to say, into his face there flashed a look of triumph. But he only said very gently:

“Come here a minute—will you, Juliet?”

She bent lower over the curtain. Then she stood up, without looking at him, and moved toward the door.

“I believe I’m rather tired,” she said in a low tone. “It has been so warm all day, and I—I have a headache.”

In three steps he came after her, stopping her with his hand grasping hers as she would have left the room.

“Come back—please,” he urged. “Your aunt is asleep out there, I think. I wanted to go over the house once more with you, if you would. But you’re too tired for that. Just come back and sit down in this nook of yours, and let’s talk a little.”

She could not well refuse, and he put her into a nest of cushions, arranging them carefully behind her back and head, and sat down facing her. He had placed her just where the waning light from the western sky fell full on her face; his own was in the shadow. He was watching her unmercifully—she felt that, and desperately turned her face aside, burying in a friendly pillow the cheek which was colouring under his gaze.

“Is the headache so bad?” he asked softly. “I never knew Juliet Marcy to have a headache before. Poor little girl—dear little girl—who has worked so hard to please her old friend.” He leaned forward and she felt his hand upon her hair. The tenderness in his voice and touch were carrying away all her defences. But he went on without giving her respite.

"Do you think *she* will be happy here, chum? Will it take the place of the old life for a few years, till I can give her more? She'll have nothing here, you know, outside of this little home, but my love. That wouldn't be enough for any ordinary woman, would it?"

She was not looking at him, but she could see him as plainly as if she were. Always she had thought him the strongest, best fellow she knew. He had been her devoted friend so long; she had not realised in the least until lately how it was going to seem to get on without him. But she knew now.

She felt a dreadful choking in her throat again. It seemed to be closely connected with another peculiar sensation, as if her heart had turned into a lump of lead. In another minute she knew that she should break down, which would be humiliating beyond words. She started up from her cushions with a fierce attempt to keep a grip upon herself.

"I know you're very happy," she breathed, "and I'm very glad. But really I—I'm not at all sentimental to-night. I'm afraid a headache does not make one sympathetic."

But she could not get past him; Anthony's stalwart figure barred the way. His strong hands put her gently back among the cushions. She turned her head away, fighting hard for that thing she could not keep —her self-control.

"Is it really a headache?" asked the low voice in her ear. "Just a headache? Not by any chance—a heartache, Juliet?"

"Anthony Robeson!" she cried, but guardedly, lest the open window betray her. "What do you mean? You say very strange things. Why should I have a

heartache? Because you are marrying the girl you love? How often have I begged you to go and find her? Do you think I would have done all this for her —and you—if I had cared?"

She tried to look defiantly into his eyes—those fine eyes of his which were watching her so intently—tried to meet them steadily with her own lovely, tear-stained ones—and failed. Swiftly an intense colour dyed her cheeks, and she dropped her head like a guilty child.

"Of course I care—that is, in a way," she was somehow forced to admit before the bar of his silence. "Why shouldn't I hate to lose the friend who used to carry my books to school, and fought the other boys for my sake, and has been a brother to me all these years? Of course I do. And when I am tired I cry for nothing—just nothing. I——"

It was certainly a brave attempt at eloquence, but perhaps it was not wonderfully convincing. At all events it did not keep Anthony from taking possession of one of her hands and interrupting her with a most irrelevant speech.

"Juliet, do you remember telling me that you should expect a man who loved you to carry your likeness always with him? And you asked me for *hers*—and I had to own I had left it behind. Yet I had one with me then—it is always with me—and that was why I forgot the other. Look."

He drew out a little silver case, and Juliet, reluctantly releasing one eye from the shelter of the friendly sofa pillow, saw with a start her own face look smiling back at her. It was a little picture of her girlish self which she had given him long ago when he went away to college.

"No," he said quickly, as he recognised the indignant question which instantly showed in her eyes, "I'm not disloyal to Eleanor Langham. Because—dear—there is no such person."

With a little cry she flung herself away from him among the pillows, hiding her face from sight. There was a moment's silence while Anthony Robeson, his own face growing pale with the immensity of the stakes for which he played, made his last venture.

"The little home is only for you, Juliet. If you won't share it with me it shall be closed and sold. Perhaps it was an audacious thing to do—it has come over me a great many times that it was too audacious ever to be forgiven. But I couldn't help the hope that if you should make the home yourself you might come to feel that life with a man who had his way to make could be borne after all—if you loved him enough. It all depended on that. As I said, I didn't mean to be presumptuous, but it was a desperate chance with me, dear. I couldn't give you up, and I thought perhaps—just *perhaps*—you cared—more than you knew. Anyhow—I loved you so—I had to risk it."

Juliet's charming brown head was buried so deep in the pillows that only its back with the masses of waving, half-rumpled hair was visible. But up from the depths came a smothered question:

"The photograph?"

Anthony's face lightened as if the sun had struck it, but he kept his voice quiet. "Borrowed—it's my old friend Dennison's. I never even saw the girl—though I ought to beg her pardon for the use I have made of her face. She's married now, and lives abroad somewhere. Will you forgive me?"

He was standing over her, leaning down so that his

cheek touched the rumpled hair. “How is it, Juliet? Could you live in the little home—with love—and me?”

It was a long time before he got any answer. But at last a flushed, wet, radiant face came into view, an arm was reached out, and as with an inarticulate, deep note of joy he drew her up into his embrace, a voice, half tears, half laughter, cried:

“Oh, Tony—you dear, bad, darling, insolent boy! I did think I could do without you—but I can’t. And—oh, Tony”—she was sobbing in his arms now, while he regarded the top of her head with laughing, exultant eyes—“I’m so glad—so glad—*so glad*—there isn’t any Eleanor Langham! Oh, *how* I hated her!”

“Did you, sweetheart?” he answered, laughing aloud now. Then bending, with his lips close to hers —“well, to tell the truth—to tell the honest truth, little girl—*so did I*!”

VII.—An Argument Without Logic

“I don’t like it,” repeated Mr. Horatio Marcy, obstinately, and shook his head for the fifth time. “I’ve not a word to say against Anthony, my dear—not a word. He’s a fine fellow and comes of a good family, and I respect him and the start he has made

since things went to pieces, but——"

Juliet waited, her eyes downcast, her cheeks very much flushed, her mouth in lines of mutiny.

"But—" her father continued, settling back in his chair with an air of decision, "you will certainly make the mistake of your life if you think you can be happy in the sort of existence he offers you. You're not used to it. You've not been brought up to it. You can spend more money in a forenoon than he can earn in a twelve-month. You don't know how to adapt yourself to life on a basis of rigid economy. I ——"

"You don't forbid it, sir?"

"Forbid it?—no. A man can't forbid a twenty-four year old woman to do as she pleases. But I advise you—I warn you—I ask you seriously to consider what it all means. You are used to very many habits of living which will be entirely beyond Anthony's means for many years to come. You are fond of travel—of dress—of social——"

"Father dear," said his daughter, interrupting him gently by a change of tactics. She came to him and sat upon the arm of his chair, and rested her cheek lightly upon the top of his thick, iron-gray locks. —"Let's drop all this for the present. Let's not discuss it. I want you to do me a particular favour before we say another word about it. Come with me down to see the house. It's only three hours away. We can go after breakfast to-morrow and be back for dinner at seven. It's all I ask. My arguments are all there. Please!—*Please!*"

So it came about that at eleven o'clock on a certain morning in August, Mr. Horatio Marcy discovered himself to be eyeing with critical, reluctant gaze a

quaintly attractive, low-spreading white house among trees and vines. He became aware at the same time of a sudden close clasp on his arm.

"Here it is," said a low voice in his ear. "Does it look habitable?"

"Very pretty, very pretty, my dear," Mr. Marcy admitted. No sane man could do otherwise. The little house might have been placed very comfortably between the walls of the dining-room at the Marcy country house, but there was an indefinable, undeniable air of gracious hospitality and homelikeness about its aspect, and its surroundings gave it an appearance of being ample for the accommodation of any two people not anxious to get away from each other.

Juliet produced an antique door-key of a clumsy pattern, and opened the door into the living-room. She ran across to the windows and threw them open, then turned to see what expression might be at the moment illumining Mr. Marcy's face. He was glancing about him with curious eyes, which rested finally upon the portrait of a courtly gentleman in ruffles and flowing hair, hanging above the fireplace. He adjusted a pair of eyeglasses and gave the portrait the honour of his serious attention.

"That is an ancestor," Juliet explained. "Doesn't he give distinction to the room? And isn't the room—well—just a little bit distinguished-looking itself, in spite of its simplicity?—because of it, perhaps. The tables and most of the chairs are what Anthony found left in the old Kentucky homestead after the sale last year, and bought in with—the last of his money." Her eyes were very bright, but her voice was quiet.

Mr. Marcy looked at the furniture in question, stared at the walls, then at the rug on the polished floor. The rug held his attention for two long minutes, then he glanced sharply at his daughter.

“The colourings of that rug are very good, don’t you think?” she asked with composure. “It will last until Anthony can afford a better one.”

Mr. Marcy turned significantly toward the door of the dining-room, and Juliet led him through. He surveyed the room in silence, laying a hand upon a chair back; then looked suddenly down at the chair and brought his eyeglasses to bear upon it.

“The furniture was made by a country cabinet-maker who charged country prices for doing it. Tony rubbed in a very thin stain and rubbed the wood in oil afterward till it got this soft polish.”

The visitor looked incredulous, but he accepted the explanation with a polite though exceedingly slight smile. Then he was taken to inspect the kitchen. From here he was led through the pantry back to the living-room, and so upstairs. He looked, still silently, in at the door of each room, exquisite in its dainty readiness for occupancy. As he studied the blue-and-white room his daughter observed that he retained less of the air of the connoisseur than he had elsewhere exhibited. She had shown him this place last with artful intent. No room in his own homes of luxury could appeal to him with more of beauty than was visible here.

When Mr. Marcy reached the living-room again he found himself placed gently but insistently in the easiest chair the room afforded, close by an open window through which floated all the soft odours of country air blowing lightly across apple orchards and

gardens of old-fashioned flowers. His daughter, bringing from the ingle seat a plump cushion, dropped upon it at his feet. But instead of beginning any sort of argument she laid her arm upon his knee, and her head down upon her arm, and became as still as a kitten who has composed itself for sleep. Only through the contact of the warm young arm, her father could feel that she was alive and waiting for his speech.

When he spoke at last it was with grave quiet, in a gentler tone than that which he had used the day before in his own library.

“You helped Anthony furnish this house?”

“Yes, father.”

“Do you mind telling me how much you had at your disposal?”

“Five hundred dollars.” Juliet maintained her position without moving, and her face was out of sight.

“Did this include the repairs upon the place?”

“Yes—but you know wages are low just now and lumber is cheap. Having no roof to the porch made it inexpensive. The painting Anthony helped at himself. He worked every minute of his two weeks’ vacation on whatever would cost most to hire done.”

“Anthony worked at painting the house?” There was astonishment in Mr. Marcy’s voice. He had known the Robesons of Kentucky all his life. He had never seen one of them lift his hand to do manual labour. There had been no need.

“Yes,” said Juliet, and the cheek which rested against her father’s knee began to grow warm.

"You have obtained a somewhat extraordinary effect of harmony and comfort inside the house," Mr. Marcy pursued. "It is difficult to understand just how you brought it about with so small an expenditure of money."

It was quite impossible now for Juliet to keep her head down. She looked up eagerly, but she still managed to speak quietly.

"It *is* effect, father, and it is art—not money. The paper on the wall cost twenty-five cents a roll, but it is the right paper for the place, and the wrong paper at ten times that sum wouldn't give the room such a background of soft restfulness. Then, you see, the old white woodwork is in very good style, and the green walls bring it out. The old floor was easily dressed to give that beautiful waxed finish. They told me how to do that at the best decorator's in Boston. The rug fits the colourings very well. Anthony's old furniture would give any such room dignity. The portrait lends the finishing touch, I think. You see, when you analyse it all there's nothing in the least wonderful. But it looks like a home—doesn't it? And when the little things are in which grow in a home—the photographs, a bowl of sweet-williams from the garden, the lovely old copper lamp you gave me on my birthday—can't you think how dear it will all be?"

Mr. Marcy glanced down keenly into his daughter's face.

"There are a great many things of your own at home which would naturally come into your married home," he said.

Juliet coloured richly. "Yes," she answered with steady eyes, "but except for the lamp, and the

photographs, and a few such very little things, I should not bring them. Anthony is poor, but he is very proud. I couldn't hurt him by furnishing his home with the overflow of mine. Besides—I don't need those things. I don't want them. All I want out of the old home is—your love—your blessing, dear!"

The sharp eyes meeting hers softened suddenly. Juliet drew herself to her knees, and leaning forward across her father's lap, reached both arms up and flung them about his neck. He held her close, her head upon his shoulder, and all at once he found the slender figure in his arms shaken with feeling. Juliet was not crying, but she was drawing long, deep breaths like a child who tries to control itself.

"You need have no doubt of either of those things, my little girl," said her father in her ear. "Both are ready. It is only your happiness I want. I distrust the power of any poor man to give it to you. That is all. Since I have seen this house the question looks less doubtful to me—I admit that gladly. But I still am anxious for the future. Even in this attractive place there must be monotony, drudgery, lack of many things you have always had and felt you must have. You have never learned to do without them. I understand that Robeson will not accept them at my hand, nor at yours. I don't know that I think the less of him for that—but—you will have to learn self-denial. I want you to be very sure that you can do it, and that it will be worth while."

There was a little silence, then Juliet gently drew herself away and rose to her feet. She stood looking down at the imposing figure of the elderly man in the chair, and there was something in her face he had never seen there before.

"There's just one thing about it, sir," she said. "I can't

possibly spare Anthony Robeson out of my life. I tried to do it, and I know. I would rather live it out in this little home—with him—than share the most promising future with any other man. But there's this you must remember: A man who was brought up to do nothing but ride fine horses, and shoot, and dance, must have something in him to go to work and advance, and earn enough to buy even such a home as this, in five years. He has a future of his own."

Mr. Marcy looked thoughtful. "Yes, that may be true," he said. "I rather think it is."

"And, father——" she bent to lay a roseleaf cheek against his own—"you began with mother in a poorer home than this, and were so happy! Don't I know that?"

"Yes, yes, dear," he sighed. "That's true, too. But we were both poor—had always been so. It was an advance for us—not a coming down."

"It's no coming down for me." There was spirit and fire in the girl's eyes now. "Just to wear less costly clothes—to walk instead of drive—to live on simpler food—what are those things? Look at these," she pointed to the rows of books in the bookcases which lined two walls of the room. "I'm marrying a man of refinement, of family, of the sort of blood that tells. He's an educated man—he loves the things those books stand for. He's good and strong and fine—and if I'm not safe with him I'll never be safe with anybody. But besides all that—I—I love him with all there is of me. Oh—*are* you satisfied now?"

Blushing furiously she turned away. Her father got to his feet, stood looking after her a moment with something very tender coming into his eyes, then

took a step toward her and gathered her into his arms.

VIII.—On Account of the Tea-Kettle

"This is the nineteenth day of August," observed Anthony Robeson. "We finished furnishing the house for my future bride on the third day of the month. Over two weeks have gone by since then. The place must need dusting."

He glanced casually at the figure in white which sat just above him upon the step of the great porch at the back of the Marcy country house. It was past twilight, the moon was not yet up, and only the glow from a distant shaded lamp at the other end of the porch served to give him a hint as to the expression upon his companion's face.

"I'm beginning to lie awake nights," he continued, "trying to remember just how my little home looks. I can't recall whether we set the tea-kettle on the stove or left it in the tin-closet. Can you think?"

"You put it on the stove yourself," said Juliet. "You would have filled it if Auntie Dingley hadn't told you it would rust."

Anthony swerved about upon the heavy oriental rug,

which covered the steps, until his back rested against the column; he clasped his arms about one knee, and inclined his head at the precise angle which would enable him to study continuously the shadowy outlines of the face above him, shot across with a ruby ray from the lamp. “I wish I could recollect,” he pursued, “whether I left the porch awning up or down. It has rained three times in the two weeks. It ought not to be down.”

“I’m sure it isn’t,” Juliet assured him. There was a hint of laughter in her voice.

“It was rather absurd to put up that awning at all, I suppose. But when you can’t afford a roof to your piazza, and compromise on an awning instead, you naturally want to see how it is going to look, and you rush it up. Besides, I think there was a strong impression on my mind that only a few days intervened before our occupancy of the place. It shows how misled one can be.”

There was no reply to this observation, made in a depressed tone. After a minute Anthony went on.

“These cares of the householder—they absorb me. I’m always wondering if the lawn needs mowing, and if the new roof leaks. I get anxious about the blinds —do any of them work loose and swing around and bang their lives out in the night? Have the neighbours’ chickens rooted up that row of hollyhock seeds? Then those books I placed on the shelves so hurriedly. Are any of them by chance upside down? Is Volume I. elbowed by Volume II. or by Volume VIII.? And I can’t get away to see. Coming up here every Saturday night and tearing back every Sunday midnight takes all my time.”

“You might spend next Sunday in the new house.”

"Alone?"

"Of course. You have so many cares they would keep you from getting lonely."

Anthony made no immediate answer to this suggestion, beyond laughing up at his companion in the dim light for an instant, then growing immediately sober again. But presently he began upon a new aspect of the subject.

"Juliet, are we to be married in church?"

"Tony!—I don't know."

"But what do you think?"

"I—don't think."

"What! Do you mean that?"

"No-o."

"Of course you don't. Well—what about it?"

"I don't know."

"Are we to have a big wedding?"

"Do you want one?"

"I—but that's not the question. Do you want a big wedding?"

She hesitated an instant. Then she answered softly, but with decision: "No."

Anthony drew a long breath. "Thank the Lord!" he said devoutly.

"Why?" she asked in some surprise.

"I've never exactly understood why the boys I've been best man for were so miserable over the prospect of a show wedding—but I know now. A runaway marriage appeals to me now as it never did

before. I want to be married—tremendously—but I want to get it over."

A soft laugh answered him. "We'll get it over."

Anthony sat up suddenly. "Will we?" he asked with eagerness. "When?"

"I didn't say 'when'!"

"Juliet—when are you going to say it?"

"Why, Tony—dear——"

"That's right—put in the 'dear,'" he murmured. "I've heard mighty few of 'em yet, and they sound great to me——"

"We've been engaged only two weeks—"

"And two days——"

"And the little house isn't spoiling, even though you're not sure about the tea-kettle and the awning. I—you don't want to hurry things——"

"Don't I!"—rebelliously.

"If I'm very good and say 'Christmas'——"

"'Christmas!'—Great Cæsar!"

"But, Tony——"

"Now see here—" he leaned forward and stared up at her, without touching her—he was as yet allowed few of the lover's favours and prized them the more for that—"do you think our case is just like other people's? Here I've been waiting for you all my days—waiting and waiting, and tortured all the time by suspense. Then I lived that month of July with my heart in my mouth—you'll never know what you put me through those days, talking and jollying about 'Eleanor Langham,' and never for one instant, until

just that last day, giving me the smallest pinch of hope that it was anything to you except just what it pretended to be. Then—I've been a long time without a home—and the little house—sweetheart—it looks like Heaven to me. Must I stay outside till Christmas—when everything's all ready? Confound it—I don't want to play the pathetic string, and the Lord knows I'm happy as a fellow can be who's got the desire of his life. But——"

A warm hand came gently upon his hair, and for joy at the touch he fell silent. Once he turned his head and put his lips against the white sleeve as it fell near, and looked up an instant with eyes whose expression the person above him felt rather than saw through the subdued light. By and by she took up the conversation.

"So you are rejoiced that I don't want a great wedding?"

"Immensely relieved."

"What would you like best?"

"I don't dare tell you."

"You may."

"Tell me what you would like, Julie."

"Of course father would say the town house, even if it were a small affair. Auntie Dingley would probably agree to having it here—if that were what you—we—wanted—that is——"

Anthony looked up quickly. "Even at Christmas?"

"Why—yes. We could come back. People do that sometimes."

"Yes. Must we do what other people do?"

"Would you rather not?"

"Ten thousand times. It seems to me that the biggest mistake people make is the way they do this thing. Juliet—think of the little house. We made it—you made it. For years, without doubt, it's to hold us and our experiences. Do you know I'd like to give it this one to begin with?—I'm holding my breath!"

Plainly she was holding hers. Her head was turned away—he could just see her profile outlined against the ruby light. And at the moment there were footsteps inside a long French window near at hand which lay open into the library. Mr. Horatio Marcy came out and stood still just behind them.

Anthony sprang to his feet, and came forward up the steps. The older man greeted him cordially. Anthony pulled a big chair into position, and Mr. Marcy sat down. He was smoking and wore an air of relaxation. He and his guest fell to talking, the younger man entering into the conversation with as much ease and spirit as if he were not fresh from what was to him at this hour a much more interesting discussion. Juliet sat quietly and listened.

It grew into an absorbing argument after a little, the two men taking opposite sides of a great governmental question just then claiming public interest. Mrs. Dingley came out and joined the group, and she and Juliet listened with increasing delight in a contest of brains such as was now offered them. Mr. Marcy himself, while he put forth his arguments with conviction and with skill, was evidently enjoying the keen wit and wisdom of his young opponent. The elder man met objection with objection, set up men of straw to be knocked down, and ended at last with a hearty laugh and a frankly appreciative:

"Well, Anthony—you have convinced me of one thing, certainly. There are more sides to the question than I had understood. I will admit that you've made a strong argument. But when I come back I'll down you with fresh material. I shall have plenty of it."

"Are you going away soon, sir?" Anthony asked with some surprise. Mr. Marcy was a frequent traveller, preferring to look after various business interests in faraway ports himself rather than entrust them to others.

"Yes—I shall be off in a few weeks—and for a longer time than usual. I haven't told these ladies of my household yet—but this is as good a time as any. Juliet, little girl—I may be gone all winter this time."

She came quickly to him without speaking, and gave him her regretful answer silently.

"When do you go, Horatio?" Mrs. Dingley asked.

"About the first of October. I hadn't fully decided till to-day. I had thought of inviting you two to go with me."

He looked with a smile at his sister and his daughter, then somewhat quizzically at Anthony. The latter was regarding him with an alert face in which, as nearly as could be made out in the dim light, were no signs of discomfiture.

"Horatio," said Mrs. Dingley, "I wish you would come into the library for a few minutes. This reminds me of a letter I had to-day from one of your old friends, asking when you were to be at home."

The French window closed on the two older people. Juliet, left sitting on the arm of her father's chair, found Anthony behind her.

"Do you want to go on a voyage to the Philippines?" he was asking over her shoulder.

"I'm not sure just what I do want," she answered rather breathlessly.

"The tea-kettle would rust while you were gone."

He got no reply.

"The dust would grow inches deep on the dining-table we polished so carefully."

Juliet rose and walked slowly to the edge of the steps. Anthony followed. "Let's go and walk on the terrace," he proposed, and they ran down to the smooth sward below. It was a warm night, with no dew, and the short-shaven grass was dry. All the stars were out. Anthony walked beside the figure in white, his hands clasped behind his back.

"Do white ruffled curtains like those at our windows ever grow musty from being shut up?" he insinuated gently.

"I don't know."

"Will you write from every port you touch at? It will take a good many letters to satisfy me."

"I suppose so."

"Suppose what? That you will write?"

Juliet stood still. "You're the greatest wheedler I ever saw," she said.

"Is that a compliment?"

"It's not meant for one. What am I to do when I'm ——"

"Married to me?—I don't know, poor child. I can only pity you. What do you think the prospect is for

me, never to be able to get the smallest concession from you except by every art of coaxing? Yet—if I can get this thing I want, by any means—I warn you I shall not give up until I've seen you sail."

"You'll not see me sail."

He wheeled upon her. He had her hand in his grasp. "And if you don't go?"

"I'll stay."

"With me?"

She laughed irresistibly. "How could I stay without you?"

"Will you marry me before your father goes?"

"Oh, Tony, Tony——"

"We can't be married without his blessing, can we?"

"No—dear father."

"Then——"

"I'll tell you to-morrow," said she.

IX.—A Bishop and a Hay-Wagon

Juliet Marcy's prospective maid-of-honour found Anthony Robeson's best man at her elbow the moment she entered the waiting-room of the big railway station. Now, although she greeted him with

a charming little conscious look, there was nothing either new or singular about the quiet rush he had made across the waiting-room the instant he saw her. The rest of the party of twenty people who were going down into the country to the Marcy-Robeson wedding understood it perfectly, although the engagement had not been announced and probably would not be until Wayne Carey should have an income decidedly larger than he had at present.

Judith Dearborn joined the group at once, and Carey reluctantly followed her. Judith had a way of joining groups and of giving her betrothed many impatient half-hours thereby.

“Just think of this,” she said to the others. “When I knew Juliet had really given in to Anthony Robeson at last I thought I should be asked to assist at an impressive church wedding. But here we are going down to what Tony describes as ‘a box of a house’ in the most rural of suburbs. If it’s really as small as he says even twenty people will be a tight fit.”

“How in the world did they come to be married there?” asked the sister of the best man. Everybody had been summoned to this wedding so hurriedly and so informally that nobody knew much about it.

The son of the Bishop—whose father was going down to perform the ceremony—answered promptly:

“Tony tells me its Juliet’s own choice. You see they furnished the house together, with her aunt, Mrs. Dingley; and Juliet fell so in love with it that she must needs be married in it. What’s occurred to that girl I don’t know. After the Robesons of Kentucky lost their money and everything else but their social standing I thought it was all up with Anthony. But he’s plucky. He’s made a way for himself, and he’s

won Juliet somehow. He seems to be a late edition of that obstinate chap who remarked 'I will find a way or make one.' By Jove—he must have made one when he convinced Juliet Marcy that she could be happy in a house where twenty people are a tight fit."

When the train stopped at the small station Judith Dearborn said in Wayne Carey's ear, as he glanced wonderingly from the train: "Is this it? Juliet Marcy must be perfectly crazy!"

"She certainly must," admitted Robeson's best man. But he stifled a sigh. If Juliet Marcy could do so crazy a thing as to marry Anthony Robeson on the comparatively small salary that young man—brought up to do nothing at all—was now earning, why must Wayne Carey wait for several times that income before he could have Juliet's closest friend? Was there really such a difference in girls?

But at the next instant he was shouting hilariously, and so was everybody else except the Bishop and the Bishop's wife, who only smiled indulgently. The rest of the party were young people, and their glee brooked no repression. The moment they reached the little platform they comprehended not only that they were coming to a most informal wedding—they were also in for a decidedly novel lark.

Close to the edge of the platform stood a great hay-wagon, cushioned with fragrant hay and garlanded with goldenrod and purple asters. Standing erect on the front, one hand grasping the reins which reached out over a four-in-hand of big, well-groomed, flower-bedecked farm horses, the other waving a triumphant greeting to his friends, was Anthony Robeson, in white from head to foot, his face alight with happiness and fun. He looked like a young king;

there could be no other comparison for his splendid outlines as he towered there. And better yet, he looked as he had ever looked, through prosperity and through poverty, like a “Robeson of Kentucky.”

Below him, prettier than she had ever been—and that was saying much—her eyes brilliant with the spirit of the day, laughing, dressed also in white, a big white hat drooping over her brown curls, stood Juliet Marcy.

In a storm of salutations and congratulations the guests rushed toward this extraordinary equipage and the radiant pair who were its charioteers. All regrets over the probable commonplaceness of a small country wedding had vanished.



“Standing erect ... one hand grasping the reins ... was Anthony Robeson.”

"Might have known they would do things up in shape somehow," grunted the Bishop's son approvingly. "This is the stuff. Conventionality be tabooed. They're going to the other extreme, and that's the way to do. If you don't want an altar and candles, and a high-mucky-muck at the organ, have a hay-wagon. *Gee!*—Let me get up here next to Ben Hur and the lady!"

Even the Bishop, sitting with clerical coat-tails carefully parted, his handsome face beaming benevolently from under his round hat, and Mrs. Bishop, granted by special dispensation a cushion upon the hay seat, enjoyed that drive. Anthony, plying a long, beribboned lash, aroused his heavy-footed steeds into an exhilarating trot, and the hay-wagon, carrying safely its crew of young society people in their gayest mood, swept over the half-mile from the station to the house like a royal barge.

As they drew up a chorus of "Oh's!" not merely polite but sincerely surprised and admiring, recognised the quaint beauty of the little house. It was no commonplace country home now, though the changes wrought had been comparatively slight. It looked as if it might have stood for years in just this fashion, yet it was as far removed from its primitive characterless condition as may be an artist's drawing of a face upon which he has altered but a line.

Mrs. Dingley and Mr. Horatio Marcy—a pair whose presence anywhere would have been a voucher for the decorum of the most unconventional proceedings—welcomed the party upon the wide, uncovered porch.

"We're going to be married very soon, to have it over," called Anthony. "But you may explore the house first, so your minds shall be at rest during the

crisis. Just don't wander too far away in examining this ancestral mansion. There are six rooms. I should advise your going in line, otherwise complications may occur in the upper hall. Please don't all try to get into the kitchen at once; it can't be done. It will hold Juliet and me at the same time—all the rooms have been stretched to do that—they had to be; but I'm not sure as to their capacity for more. Now make yourselves absolutely at home. The place is yours—for a few hours. After that it's mine—and Juliet's."

He glanced, laughing, at his bride, as he spoke from where he stood in the doorway. She was on the little landing of the staircase, at the opposite end of the living-room. She looked down and across at him, and nearly everybody in the room—they were thronging through at the moment—caught that glance. She was smiling back at him, and her eyes lingered only an instant after they met his, but her friends all saw. There could be no question that the Juliet Marcy who, since she had laid aside her pinafores, had kept many men at bay, had at last surrendered. As for Anthony——

"Why, he's always been in love with her," said the Bishop's son in the ear of the best man, as in accordance with their host's permission they peeped admiringly in at the little kitchen, "but any idiot can see that he's fairly off his feet now. Ideal condition—eh? Say, this dining-room's great—Jove, it is. I'm going to get asked out here to dinner as soon as they are back. Let's go upstairs. The girls are just coming down—hear 'em gurgling over what they saw?"

Upstairs the best man looked in at the blue-and-white room with eyes which one with penetration might have said were envious. Indeed, he stared at everything with much the same expression. He was

the soberest man present. Ordinarily he could be counted on to enliven such occasions, but to-day his fits of hilarity were only momentary, and during the intervals he was observed by the Bishop's son to be gazing somewhat yearningly into space with an abstraction new to him.

Nobody knew just how the moment for the ceremony arrived. But when the survey of the house was over and everybody had instinctively come back to the living-room, the affair was brought about most naturally. The Bishop, at a word from the best man, took his place in the doorway opening upon the porch, which had been set in a great nodding border of goldenrod. Anthony, making his way among his guests, came with a quiet face up to Juliet and, bending, said softly, "Now, dear?" A hush followed instantly, and the guests fell back to places at the sides of the room. Anthony's best man was at his elbow, and the two went over to the Bishop, to stand by his side. Mr. Marcy moved quietly into his place. Juliet, with Judith, who had kept beside her, walked across the floor, and Anthony, meeting her, led her a step farther to face the Bishop. It was but a suggestion of the usual convention, and Anthony, in his white clothes, surrounded as he was by men in frock-coats, was assuredly the most unconventional bridegroom that had ever been seen. Juliet, too, wore the simplest of white gowns, with no other adornment than that of her own beauty. Yet, somehow, as the guests, grown sober in an instant, looked on and noted these things, there was not one who felt that either grace or dignity was lacking. The rich voice of the Bishop was as impressive as it had ever been in chancel or at altar; the look on Anthony's face was one which fitted the tone in which he spoke his vows; and Juliet, giving herself to

the man whose altered fortunes she was agreeing to share, bore a loveliness which made her a bride one would remember long—and envy.

"There, that's done," said the Bishop's son with a gusty sigh of relief, which brought the laugh so necessary to the relaxing of the tension which accompanies such scenes. "Jove, it's a good thing to see a fellow like Robeson safely tied up at last. You never can tell where these quixotic ideas about houses and hay-wagons and weddings may lead. It's a terrible strain, though, to see people married. I always tremble like a leaf—I weigh only a hundred and ninety-eight now, and these things affect me. It's so frightful to think what might happen if they should trip up on their specifications."

There was a simple wedding breakfast served—by whom nobody could tell. It was eaten out in the orchard—a pleasant place, for the neglected grass had been close cut, and an old-fashioned garden at one side perfumed the air with late September flowers. The trim little country maids who brought the plates came from a willow-bordered path which led presumably to the next house, some distance down the road. There were several innovations in the various dishes, delicious to taste. Altogether it was a little feast which everybody enjoyed with unusual zest. And the life of the party was the bridegroom.

"I never saw a fellow able to scintillate like that at his own wedding," remarked the son of the Bishop to the best man's sister. "Usually they are so completely dashed by their own temerity in getting into such an irretrievable situation that they sit with their ears drooping and their eyes bleared. Do you suppose it's getting married in tennis clothes that's done it?"

"Tennis clothes!" cried the best man's sister with a

merry laugh. “If you realised how much handsomer he looks than you men in your frock-coats you would not make fun.”

“Make fun!” repeated the Bishop’s son solemnly. “I joke only to keep my head above water. I never in my life was so completely submerged in the desire to get married instantly and live in a picturesque band-box. Nothing can keep me from it longer than it takes to find the girl and the band-box. If—if—” his voice dropped to a whisper, and a hint of redness crept into his face which belied his jesting words, “you knew of the girl—I—er—say—should you mind living in a band-box?”

The best man’s sister was the sort of girl who can discern when even an inveterate joker is daring to be somewhat more than half in earnest, and she flushed so prettily that the son of the Bishop caught her hand boyishly under the little table. He had hitherto been considered a hopeless old bachelor, so it may readily be seen that, now the contagion had caught him, his was quite a serious case.

X.—On a Threshold

When it was all over Judith Dearborn went upstairs with Juliet to help her dress for her going away. The maid-of-honour looked about the blue-and-white room with thoughtful eyes.

"This is certainly the dearest room I ever saw," she said. "Oh, Juliet, do you think you really will be happy here?"

"What do you think about it, dear?" asked Juliet.

"Oh—I—well, really—I never imagined that a little old house like this could be made so awfully attractive. But, Juliet—you—you must be very, very fond of Anthony to give up so many things. How well he looked to-day. Seems to me he's grown gloriously in every way since he—since his family came into so many misfortunes."

Juliet smiled, but answered nothing.

"And you're so different, too. Never in my life would I have imagined you having a wedding like this—and yet it's been absolutely the prettiest one I ever saw. That's a sweet gown to go away in—but it's the simplest thing you ever wore, I'm sure. Juliet, where are you going?"

"We are going to drive through the Berkshires in a cart."

"Juliet Marcy!"

"'Robeson,'" corrected Juliet with a little laugh, but in a tone which it was a pity Anthony could not hear. "Don't forget that. I'm so proud of the name. And I think a drive through the Berkshires will be a perfectly ideal trip."

Judith Dearborn was not assisting the bride at all. Instead she was sitting in a chair, staring at Juliet with much the same abstraction of manner observable in the best man throughout the day.

"Of course you didn't need to live this way," observed Miss Dearborn at length. "You could have

afforded to live much more expensively."

"No, I couldn't," said Juliet with a flash in her eyes, though she smiled; "I couldn't have afforded to do one thing that would hurt Tony's pride. Why, Judith —he's a 'Robeson of Kentucky.'"

"Well, he looks it," admitted Judith. "And you're a Marcy of Massachusetts. The two go well together. Juliet, do you know—somehow—I thought it was a fearful sacrifice you were making, even for such a man as Anthony—but—this blue-and-white room ——"

"Ah, this blue-and-white room——" repeated Juliet. Then she came over and dropped on her knees by her friend in her impulsive way and put both arms around her. The plain little going-away gown touched folds with the one whose elegance was equalled only by its cost. Anthony Robeson's wife looked straight up into the eyes of her maid-of-honour and whispered:

"Judith, don't put Wayne—and—your blue-and-white room off too long. You will not be any happier to wait—if you love him."

Drawn up close to the door stood the cart. Beside it waited Anthony. Around the cart crowded twenty people. When Juliet came through them to say good-bye the son of the Bishop murmured:

"Er—Mrs. Robeson——"

"Yes, Mr. Farnham——" said Juliet promptly, her delicate flush answering the name, as it had answered it many times that day.

"When are you going to be at home to your friends?"

"The fifteenth day of October," said Juliet. "And

from then on, every day in the week, every week in the year. Come and see us—everybody. But don't expect any formal invitations."

"I'll be down," declared the Bishop's son. "I'll be down once a week."

"Please don't stay long after we are gone," requested Anthony, putting his bride into the cart and springing in beside her. He gathered up the reins. "Good-bye," he called. "Take this next train home. It goes in an hour. Lock the door, Carey, and hang the key up in plain sight by the window there. We live in the country now, and that's the way we do. Good-bye—good-bye!"

Then he drove rapidly away down the road.

"And that pair," said the son of the Bishop gravely, looking after them and speaking to the company in general, "married, so to speak, in a hay-wagon, and going for a wedding trip in a wheel-barrow through the Berkshires, is Juliet Marcy and Anthony Robeson."

"No, my son," said the Bishop slowly—and everybody always listened when the Bishop spoke: "It is Anthony and Juliet Robeson—and that makes all the difference. I think two happier young people I never married. And may God be with them."

The best man said that he and the maid-of-honour would walk the half-mile to the station. The son of the Bishop and the sister of the best man had already taken this course without saying anything about it. Nearly everybody murmured something about it being a lovely evening and a glorious sunset and a charming road, and, pairing off advisedly, adopted the same plan. The Bishop and Mrs. Bishop, Mrs. Dingley and Mr. Marcy decided on being driven over

to the station in a light surrey provided for this anticipated emergency.

The best man and the maid-of-honour succeeded in dropping behind the rest of the pedestrians. Their friends were used to that, and let them mercifully alone.

“Mighty pretty affair,” observed Carey in a melancholy tone.

“Yes—in its way,” admitted Judith Dearborn with apparent reluctance.

“Cosy house.”

“Very.”

“Tony seemed happy.”

“Ecstatic.” Judith’s inflection was peculiar.

“Nobody would have suspected Juliet of feeling blue about living off here.”

“She doesn’t seem to.”

“What’s made the difference?”

“Anthony Robeson, probably.”

“Must seem pretty good to him to have her care like that.”

“I presume so.”

“It isn’t everybody that could inspire such an—affection—in such a girl.”

“No, indeed.”

Carey looked intensely gloomy. The two walked on in silence, Miss Dearborn studying the sunset, Carey studying Miss Dearborn. Suddenly he spoke again.

“Judith, do all our plans for the future seem as

desirable to you as they did this morning?"

"Which ones?"

"Apartment in the locality we've picked out—life in the style the locality calls for—and *wait* for it all until I'm *gray*——" with a burst of tremendous energy. "Good heavens, darling, what's the use? Why—if I could have you and a little home like that——"

He bit his lip hard. The maid-of-honour walked on, her head turned still farther away than before. They were nearing the station. Just ahead lay a turn in the road—the last turn. The rest of the party, with a shout back at this dilatory pair, disappeared around it. From the distance came the long, shrill whistle of the approaching train.

The maid-of-honour glanced behind: there was not a soul in sight; ahead: and saw nothing to alarm a girl with an impulse in her heart. At a point where great masses of reddening sumac hid a little dip in the road from everything earthly she stopped suddenly, and turning, put out both hands. She looked up into a face which warmed on the instant into a half-incredulous joy and said very gently: "You may."

The sun had been gone only two hours, and the soft early autumn darkness had but lately settled down upon the silent little house, waiting alone for its owners to come back some October day, when a cart, driven slowly, rolled along the road. In front of the house it stopped.

"Where are we?" asked Juliet's voice. "This is a private house. I thought we—Why, Tony—do you see?—We've come around in a circle instead of going on to that little inn you spoke of. This is—*home*!"

"Is it?" said Anthony's voice in a tone of great

surprise. “So it is!” He leaped out and came around to Juliet’s side. “What a fluke!” But the happy laugh in his voice betrayed him.

“Anthony Robeson,” cried Juliet softly, “you need not pretend to be surprised. You meant to do it.”

“Did I?” He reached out both arms to take her down. “Perhaps I did. Do you mind—Mrs. Robeson? Shall we go on?”

Juliet looked down at him. “No, I don’t think I mind,” she said.

He swung her down, and they went slowly up the walk. “Somehow,” said Anthony Robeson, looking up at the house, lying as if asleep in the September night, “when I thought of taking you to that little public inn, and then remembered that we might have this instead—We can go on with our wedding journey to-morrow, dear-but—to-night——”

He led her silently upon the porch. He found the key, where in jest he had bade his best man put it, and unlocked the door and threw it open.

He stepped first upon the threshold, and, turning, held out his arms.

“Come,” he said, smiling in the darkness.

XI.—A Bachelor at Dinner

“Hallo there—Anthony Robeson—don’t be in such a hurry you can’t notice a fellow.”

The big figure rushing through the snow paused, wheeled, and thrust out a hand of hearty greeting. “That you, Carey? Hat over your eyes like a train robber—electric lights all behind you—and you expect me to smile at you as I go by! How are you? How’s Judith?”

"Infernally lonely—I mean I am—Judith's off on a visit to her mother. Say, Tony—take me home with you—will you? I want some decent things to eat, so I'm holding you up on purpose."

"Good—come on. Train goes in a few minutes. Juliet will be delighted."

The two hurried on together into the station from which the suburban trains were constantly leaving. As they entered they encountered a mutual friend, at whom both flung themselves enthusiastically with alternate greetings:

"Roger Barnes——"

"Roger—old fellow—glad to see you back!"

"Patient safely landed?"

"Get a big fee?"

"Where you going?"

"Let's take him home with us, Tony——" The third man looked smiling at Tony. "I'll challenge you to," said he.

"That's easy—come on," responded Anthony Robeson with cordiality. "I'll just telephone Mrs. Robeson."

"That's it," said Dr. Roger Barnes. "You don't dare not to. I understand. Go ahead. But if she's too much dashed let me know, will you?"

Anthony turned, laughing, into a telephone closet, from which he emerged in time to catch his train with his guests.

"It's all right," he assured them. "But it's only fair to let her know a few minutes ahead. You like to understand, Roger, before you start, don't you,

whether your emergency case is a hip-fracture or a cut lip, so you can tell whether to take your glue or your sewing-silk?"

"By all means," said the bachelor of the party. "And I suppose you think Mrs. Juliet Marcy Robeson is now smiling happily to herself over this little surprise. I'll lay you anything you please that if I can make her own up she'll admit that she said '*Merciful heavens!*' into the telephone when she got your message."

Anthony shook his head. "Evidently you don't know what guests in the remote suburbs on a stormy February night mean to a poor girl whose nearest neighbour is five hundred feet away. Your ideas of married life need a little freshening, too. They're pretty antique."

It was a half-mile from the station to the house—the "box of a house"—which had been Anthony's home for five months, and toward which he now led his friends with the air of a man about to show his most treasured possessions. He strode through the deepening snow as if he enjoyed the strenuous tramp, setting a pace which Wayne Carey, with his office life, if not the doctor, more vigorously built and bred, found difficult to maintain.

"Here we are," called the leader, pointing toward windows glowing with a ruddy light. The doctor looked up with interest. Carey was a frequent visitor, but the busy surgeon, old school-and-college chum of Anthony's though he was, was about to have his first introduction to a place of which he had heard much, but of whose nearness to Paradise he doubted with the strong skepticism of a man who has seen many a fair beginning end in all unhappiness and desolation.

As they stamped upon the little porch the door flew

open, the brilliancy and comfort of a fire-and-lamplit room leaped out at them, a delicious faint odour of cookery assailed their hungry nostrils, and the welcome which makes all worth having met them on the threshold.

"Wayne," said the rich young voice of the mistress of the house, "I'm so glad. Roger Barnes, this is just downright good of you; it's so long you've promised us this. Tony——"

What she said to Tony must have been whispered in his ear if voiced at all, for the two guests, looking on with laughing, envious eyes, saw their hostess swept unceremoniously into a bearlike embrace, swung into the air as one thrusts up a child, poised there an instant, laughing and protesting, then slowly lowered to be kissed, and set down once more lightly upon the floor.

"It's all right. I didn't tumble your hair a bit," said Anthony coolly. "Excuse me, gentlemen, but Wayne understands—and Roger will some day, I hope—that a man who has been thinking about it all the way home can't put it off on account of a couple of idiots who stand and stare instead of politely turning their backs. Oh, don't mention it—it doesn't disturb me at all; and Mrs. Robeson is becoming reconciled to my impetuosity by degrees. Make yourselves at home, boys. Juliet——"

"Take them upstairs, Tony, please. Of course we can't let them go back to-night, now we have them. It's beginning to storm heavily, isn't it? I thought so. Take them to the guest-room, Tony—and dinner will be served as soon as you are down."

"By Jupiter, I believe she means it," declared the doctor, with approval, as the door of the bedroom

closed on his host. “I think I can tell when a woman is shamming. She’s improved, hasn’t she, tremendously? Pretty girl always, but—well—bloomed now. Nice little house. Believe I’ll have to stay, though I ought not—just to take observations on Tony. His enthusiasm has all the appearance of reality. In fact, it strikes me he has rather——”

It was on his lips to say “rather more than you have,” but it occurred to him in time that jokes on this ground are dangerous. Wayne Carey had been married in November, was living in a somewhat unpretentious way in a downtown boarding-house, and certainly had to-night so much of a lost-dog air that it made the doctor pause. So he substituted: “—rather more than I should have expected, even of a fellow who has got the girl he has wanted all his life,” and fell to washing and brushing vigorously, eyeing meanwhile the little room with a critical bachelor’s appreciation of beauty and comfort in the quarters he is to occupy. It was very simply furnished, certainly, but it struck him as a place where his dreams were likely to be pleasant for every reason in the world.

Downstairs, Juliet, in the dining-room, was surveying her table with the hostess’s satisfaction. Opposite her stood a tall and slender girl, black-haired, black-eyed, with a face of great attractiveness.

“I wish, Mrs. Robeson,” she was saying eagerly, “you would let me serve you as your maid, and not make a guest of me. Really, I should love to do it. I don’t need to meet your friends, and I don’t mind seeming what I really am—your——”

“Rachel Redding,” Juliet interrupted, lifting an affectionate glance across the table, “if you want to seem what you really are—my friend—you will let

me do as I like."

"My shabby clothes——" murmured the girl.

"If I could look as much like a princess as you do in them——"

"Mrs. Robeson, in that lovely dull red you're a queen ——"

"—dowager," finished Juliet gayly. "Well, I'll be proud of you, and you can be proud of me, if you like, and together we'll make those hungry men think there's nothing like us. The dinner's the thing. Isn't it the luckiest chance in the world I sent for those oysters this morning? Doctor Barnes is perfectly fine, but he never would believe in the happiness of married life if the coffee were poor or the beefsteak too much broiled. Doesn't the table look pretty? Those red geranium blossoms you brought me give it just the gay touch it needed this winter night."

Three men, standing about the wide fireplace, warming cold hands at its friendly blaze, turned expectantly as their youthful hostess came in, followed by a graceful girl in gray. Juliet presented her guests with the air of conferring upon them a favour, and they seemed quite ready to accept it as such.

Anthony looked on with interest to see a person whom he had known hitherto only as a pretty but poor young neighbour whom Juliet had engaged to help her for a certain part of every day, introduced as his wife's friend, and greeted by Doctor Barnes and Wayne Carey with quite evident admiration and pleasure. He looked hard at her, as Carey seated her, noticing for the first time that she was really worth

consideration, and remembering vaguely that Juliet had more than once tried to impress him with the fact. If it had not been for the other fellows, with whose eyes as their host he was now stimulated to observe her, he might have been still some time longer in coming to the realisation that Juliet had found somebody in whom her genuine interest was not misplaced. But Anthony Robeson had all his life been singularly blind to the fascinations of most other women than Juliet. As he turned his keen gaze from Rachel Redding to the charming figure that sat on the other side of the table the satisfaction in his eyes became so pronounced that it could mean, Dr. Roger Barnes admitted to himself, as he caught it, nothing less than a very real happiness.

It was not an elaborate dinner. It was not by any means the sort of dinner Juliet might have prepared had she known that morning whom she was to entertain. It was merely a dinner planned with affectionate care to please and satisfy one hungry man who liked good things to eat—and amplified as much as possible in quantity after Anthony's message reached her. And by that admirable collusion between hostess and feminine friend which can sometimes be effected when the situation demands it, the dinner prepared for three seemed ample for five.



"Three men, standing about the wide fireplace ... turned expectantly as the in gray."

Between them Juliet and Rachel Redding served the various dishes and changed the plates which Anthony handed from his place. It was gracefully done and so simply that the absence of a maid was a thing to be enjoyed rather than regretted. When Juliet, in the softly sweeping dull-red frock which made of her a warm picture for a winter's night, slipped from her chair and moved about the room, or brought in from the kitchen a steaming dish, she seemed the ideal hostess, herself bestowing what her own hands had prepared. And when Rachel Redding offered a man a cup of fragrant coffee, smiling down in the general direction of his uplifted face without meeting his eyes, there was certainly nothing lost from his enjoyment of the beverage.

"Say, but this dinner has tasted just about right," was Wayne Carey's satisfied observation as he leaned back in his chair at last, after draining his third cup

of coffee—and the pot itself, if he had but known it.

“Went to the spot?” asked Anthony, leaning back also with the expression of the friendly host. He was young to cultivate that expression, but he appeared to find no difficulty about it.

“It did—every last mouthful.”

“Good. Now, if you fellows will come back to the fire and have a pipeful of talk we shall not be missed. In this house on ordinary occasions we reverse the order of after-dinner privileges—the men retire to the atmosphere of the sofa-pillows, and the women—I’m not allowed to tell what they do. But after remaining discreetly out of sight for some little time, during which faint sounds as of the rattle of china penetrate through closed doors, they reappear, pleasantly flushed and full of a sort of relieved joy.”

“I know what I wish,” said Roger Barnes, looking back from the dining-room doorway at young Mrs. Robeson; “I wish that when the dishes are all ready you would let me know. I should like nothing better than to have a dish-towel at them. I know all about it—my mother taught me how.”

He looked so precisely as if he meant it, and the glance he sent past Juliet at Rachel Redding was so suggestive of his dislike to be separated for the coming hour from the feminine portion of the household, that his hostess answered promptly: “Of course you may. We never refuse an offer like that. We will try you—on promise of good behaviour.”

XII.—The Bachelor Begs a Dish-Towel

When the door closed on the three Juliet produced from somewhere two aprons—attractive affairs on the pinafore order—one of which she slipped upon Rachel, the other donned herself.

"These are my kitchen party-aprons," she said gayly, noting how the pretty garment became the girl, "calculated to impress the masculine mind with the charm of domesticity in women. The doctor needs a little illustrated lesson of the sort. Life in boarding-houses isn't adapted to encourage a man in the belief that real comfort is to be found anywhere outside of a bachelor's club."

Before he was called the doctor forsook a half-smoked cigar and the seductive hollows of Anthony's easiest chair and marched briskly out to the kitchen.

"You see I distrust you," he announced, putting in his head at the door. "I'm afraid you will get them all done without me."

"Not a bit of it. Here you are," and Juliet tied a big white apron about a large-sized waist. "Here's your towel. No, don't touch the glass; a man is too unconscious of his strength."

"A surgeon?" demurred Rachel softly, from over her steaming dishpan.

"Thank you, Miss Redding," said the doctor, smiling.

"Ah, how stupid of me," Juliet made amends swiftly. "Miss Redding remembers that when I got my telephone message to-night I told her that the most

distinguished young specialist in the city was coming here to dinner. A hand trained to such delicate tasks as those of surgery—here, Dr. Roger Barnes, forgive me, and wipe my most precious goblets."

"You'll have my nerves unsteady with such speeches as that," said he, but he accepted the trust. He held the goblets and the other daintily cut and engraved pieces of glass with evident pleasure in the task.

Meanwhile Juliet and Rachel made rapid work of the greater part of the dishes, handling thin china with the dexterity of housewives who love their work—and their china. Talk and laughter flowed brightly through it all, and when the doctor had finished his glass he looked disappointed at seeing not much left to do. At the moment Rachel was scrubbing and scraping a big baking-dish, portions of whose surface strongly resisted her efforts, in spite of previous soaking. The assistant, looking about him for new worlds to conquer, fell upon this dish.

"Here, here," said he, "let me have it. I'll use on it some of the unconscious strength Mrs. Robeson credits me with."

But Rachel clung to the dish. "Proper housekeepers," she averred, "always say 'That's all, thank you,' as soon as the china is done, and finish the pots and kettles after the guest has gone back to pleasanter things."

"I see. Did you ever have a man for dish-wiper before?"

"Never a surgeon," admitted Miss Redding.

"Then you don't appreciate the fact that a man likes to do big things which make the most show and get the credit for them."

He took the dish away from her by a dexterous little twist in which conscious strength certainly asserted itself. Rachel, laughing, with a dash of colour in cheeks which were normally of dark ivory tints, accepted the dish-towel he handed her.

"Hallo, there," cried Wayne Carey's voice from the door. "You're having more fun out here than we are in there, and that's not fair. The lord of the manor is getting so chesty over the delights of a country home in a February snowbank that he's becoming heavy company."

"No room for you here," returned the doctor, removing with a flourish the last candied sugar lump from the bottom of the big dish, and beginning to swash about vigorously in the hot water. "We do something besides talk out here; we work. Our kitchen is so small we have to waste no time in steps; as we dry the things we chuck them straight into their places."

Suiting the action to the word he caught up a shining cake-tin and cast it straight at Carey. That gentleman dodged, but Anthony caught it, performed upon it an imitation of the cymbals, then turned about and laid it in a nest of similar tins upon a shelf in an open closet.

"Ah, but I'm well trained," he boasted.

"If you were you wouldn't put it away wet," observed Rachel slyly.

Anthony withdrew the tin, wiped it with much solicitude, and replaced it.

"These little technicalities are beyond me," he apologised. "Your real athlete in kitchen work is your scientific man. See him dry that bean-pot with

the glass-towel. Now, I know better than that."

"Go away, all of you," commanded the mistress of the place. "Go back to the fire and we'll join you. If you are very good we'll bring you a special treat by-and-by."

"That settles it," said the doctor, and led the retreat, but not without a backward glance at the little kitchen.

Juliet had gone into the dining-room with a trayful of glass and silver. Rachel Redding was plunging half a dozen white towels into a pan of steaming water. Barnes stood an instant, staring hard at the slender figure in the white pinafore, the round young arms gleaming in the lamplight—then he turned to follow the others. There are some pictures which linger long in a man's memory; why, he can hardly tell. With all his varied experiences Dr. Roger Barnes had never before discovered how attractive a background a well-kept kitchen makes for a beautiful woman, so that she be there mistress of the situation. Long after he had gone back to the fire his absent eyes, while the others talked, were studying the—to him—unaccustomed and singularly charming scene he had just left in the kitchen.

When Juliet and Rachel came in at length they found a plan afoot for their entertainment. Wayne Carey was standing at the window showing cause why the whole party should go out and coast upon the hill near by.

"You admit," he argued with Anthony, "that you know where we can get a pair of bobs—and if you can't I'll bribe some of those youngsters out there to let us have theirs. The storm has stopped; the boys have swept off the whole hill, I should judge, by the

way their track shines again under the moonlight. I haven't had a good coast since I left college."

He turned to Juliet. "Will you go?" he asked coaxingly.

"Of course we will," promised Juliet. "Tony wants to go—he's just enjoying making you tease. As for the doctor——"

"If my right hand has not forgot her cunning," he agreed.

In ten minutes the party was off. A young matron of five months' standing is not so materially changed from the girl she used to be that she can fail to be the gayest of company, perhaps with the more zest that the old good times seem a bit far away already and she is glad to bring them back.

As for the real girl of the party, in this case it chanced to be a country lass who had been away to school and half-way through college, had been brought home by love and duty to some elderly people who needed her, and had known many hours of stifled longing for the sort of companionship with which she had grown happily familiar.

Matron and maid—they were a pair for whose sakes the men who were with them gladly made slaves of themselves to give them an evening of glorious outdoor fun—and at small sacrifice.

"What a night!" exulted the doctor, striding up the long hill beside Rachel Redding breathing deep. "I'm thanking all my lucky stars that they led my path across Anthony Robeson's to-night. I've been intending to come out here ever since he was married—and might not have done it for another six months if I hadn't got started. He'll have all he wants

of me now. It's the most delightful spot I've been in for many moons."

"It is a dear little home," agreed Rachel warmly. "Mrs. Robeson would make the most commonplace house in the world one where everybody would want to come."

"That's evident. Yet, somehow, knowing her well as a girl, I never should have suspected just those home-making qualities. You didn't know her then, I suppose? She was a girl other girls liked heartily, and men enthusiastically—one of the 'I'll be a good friend, but don't come too near' sort, you know. But she was very fond of travel and change, ready for everything in the way of sport—and, well, I certainly never saw her before in anything resembling an apron of any description. What a delightful article of attire an apron is, anyhow. I think I never appreciated it before to-night."

"That's because you never saw one of Mrs. Robeson's aprons. Hers are not like other people's."

"She makes hers poetic, does she?"

"She certainly does—even the ones for baking and sweeping. Not ruffled or beribboned, but cut with an eye to attractiveness, and always of becoming colour."

"I see. She's an artist—that was noticeable in the oysters—if she made the dish."

"Of course she did."

"The coffee was the best I ever drank."

"Was it?"

"You made that, then," remarked the doctor astutely.

"I'm glad it was good," said Rachel demurely.

They had reached the top of the hill. Doctor Barnes insisted that Anthony had been the best steerer of coasting parties known to the juvenile world, and placed him at the helm. Next came Juliet, with both arms clasped as far about her husband's stalwart frame as they would go. Carey had wanted to be the end man, but Doctor Barnes would have none of it. "You have to take care of Mrs. Robeson," he said firmly, and placed him next. This brought Miss Redding last, and Dr. Roger Barnes, knowing man, as hanger-on behind upon bobs already fairly full. The last man, as every coaster understands, has to be alert to help out any possible bad steering, and so keeps a watchful head thrust half over the shoulder in front.

The foregoing explanation will show how it came about that all down the long, swift descent, Rachel, breathless with the unaccustomed delight of the flight, felt upon her cheek a warm breath, and was conscious of a most extraordinary nearness of the lips which kept saying merry things into her ear. The ear itself grew warm before the bottom of the track was reached.

"That was a great coast," cried the doctor as they reached the end of the long slide. "Now for another. I'm a boy again. This beats the best thing I could have had in town if I hadn't run across Anthony."

So they had another—and another—and one more. Then Rachel Redding, stopping in front of a small house which lay at the foot of the hill, said good-night to them and slipped away before Barnes had realised what had happened.

"Does she live there?" he questioned Juliet, as the four who were left moved on toward home. Anthony

and Wayne were discussing a subject on which they had differed at the top of the hill. “Somehow, I got the impression she lived with you.”

“No—but she comes over a good deal. I couldn’t get on without her.”

“As a friend?”

Juliet looked up at him. “I think it would be better that you should know, Roger,” she said, “and I’m sure Miss Redding herself would prefer it—that I pay her for several hours a day of regular work. You’ve only to see her to understand that she does this simply because it’s the only thing open to her as long as her father and mother can’t spare her to go away. She gave up her college course in the middle because she said they were pining to death for her. They are in very greatly reduced circumstances, after a lifetime of prosperity. She’s a rare creature—I’m learning to appreciate her more every day. She’s never said a word about her loneliness here, but it shows in her eyes. It’s a perfect delight to me to have her with me, and I mean to give her all the fun I can. For all that demure manner and her Madonna face she’s as full of mischief as a kitten when something starts her off.”

“Juliet,” said the doctor soberly, turning to look searchingly down at her in the moonlight, “would you be willing to let me come often?”

Juliet looked up quickly. “So that you may see her?” she asked straightforwardly.

“Yes. I won’t pretend it’s anything else. I can tell you honestly that if there were no other reason I should want to come because of my old friendship for you and Anthony, and because this evening in your little home has given me a rare pleasure. I know of no

place like it. But I'll tell you squarely that I want the chance to meet your friend often and at once. If I don't you will have other people coming out from town——"

"Yes," said Juliet, and something in the way she said it made him ask quickly: "Has that already happened? Am I too late?"

"I don't know whether you're too late, but I know that we've suddenly grown most attractive to another man from town. If you had gone into Rachel's home the odour of violets would have met you at the door. He sends them every few days."

"*Ah!*" said the doctor. It was not much of a comment, but it spoke volumes. He had been keen before—he was determined now. Violets—well, there were rarer flowers than those.

XIII.—Smoke and Talk

At the house there remained for the guests an hour before the fire, where Juliet brought in something hot and sweet and sour and spicy, which tasted delicious and brought her a shower of compliments while they drank a friendly draught to her. When she had left them, standing in an admiring group on the hearth-rug and wishing her happy dreams, they settled into luxurious positions of ease before the fire

—a fire in the last stages of red comfort before it dies into a smoulder of torrid ashes.

“Anthony Robeson,” said Wayne Carey, regarding the andirons fixedly over his bed-time pipe, “you’re a happy man.”

Anthony laughed contentedly. He had thrown himself down upon the hearth-rug with his head on a pillow pulled from the settle, and lay flat on his back with his hands clasped behind his neck. It was an attitude deeply expressive of masculine comfort.

“You’re exactly right,” said he. “And you would be the same if you would give up living in that infernal boarding-house. What do you want to fool with your first year of married life like that for? You told me that Judith was bowled over by our wedding, and was ready to go in for this sort of thing with a will.”

“I know it,” admitted Carey, “but”—he spoke hesitatingly—“we couldn’t seem to find this sort of thing. You had corralled all there was.”

“Nonsense.”

“You had. Everything we looked at was so old and mouldy, or so new and inartistic, or so high-priced, or so far away—well, we couldn’t seem to get at it, so we said we’d board a while and wait until we could look around.”

“How does it work?”

“Why, I suppose it works very well,” said Carey cautiously. “Judith seems contented. We have as good meals as the average in such houses, and the people are rather a nice lot. We’re invited around quite a good deal, and Judith likes that. I ought to like it better than I do, somehow. I’m so confoundedly tired when I get home nights I can’t

help thinking of you and Juliet here in this jolly room. There's an abominable blue and yellow wall-paper on our sitting-room—and it has a way of appearing to turn seasick in the evening under the electrics. Sometimes I think it's that that makes me feel——"

"Seasick, too?" inquired the doctor with his professional air. He was standing with his arm on the chimney-piece, looking alternately down on his friends and around the long, low room. It *was* a jolly room—the very essence of comfort and cosiness. It was a beautiful room, too, in a simple way; one which satisfied his sense of harmony in colours and fabrics—a keen sense with him, as it is apt to be with men of his profession.

"Judith likes this, too, you know," Carey went on loyally. "She thinks it's great. But how to get it for ourselves—that's another matter. Somehow, you were lucky."

"Did you ever happen to see," asked Anthony, "a photograph I took, just for fun, of this house as it was when Juliet saw it first? No? Well, just look in that box on the end of the farther bookcase, will you? It's near the top—there—that's it."

He lay looking up through half-closed lashes at the two men as they studied the photograph, the doctor leaning over Carey's shoulder.

"On your word, man, did it look like that?" cried Barnes.

"Just like that."

"Yes, I've heard it did," admitted Carey; "but I never quite believed it could have been as bad as that."

"Who planned it all?" the doctor asked, getting

possession of the photograph as Carey laid it down, and giving it careful scrutiny.

"My little home-maker."

"Jove—are there any more like her?"

"They're pretty rare, I understand. Juliet has one in training—one with a good deal of native capacity, I should judge."

"Let me know when her graduation day approaches," remarked the doctor.

When he fell asleep that night in the dainty guest-room Barnes was wondering whether Mrs. Robeson got her own breakfasts, and hoping that she certainly did not, at least when guests were in the house. He was down half an hour earlier than necessary, and to his great satisfaction found a slender figure brushing up ashes and setting the fireplace in order for the morning fire. As he begged leave to help he noted the satin smoothness of Miss Redding's heavy black hair and the trim perfection of her attire. She reminded him of his hospital nurses in their immaculate blue and white. When he saw the mistress of the house and found her similarly dressed a certain skepticism grew in his mind.

When he went out to breakfast he murmured in Anthony's ear: "Just tell me, old fellow—to satisfy the curiosity of a bachelor—do these girls of your household always look like this in the early morning? I know it's mean—but you will know how to evade me if I'm too impertinent——"

Anthony glanced from Juliet, resembling a pink carnation in her wash frock—February though it was—to Rachel Redding in dark blue and white, and smiled mischievously. "Mrs. Robeson—and Miss

Redding—you are challenged," he announced. "Here's a fine old chump who has an awful suspicion that maybe when there are no guests you come down in calico wrappers with day-before-yesterday's aprons on."

Juliet gave the doctor a glance which made him pretend to shrink behind Carey for protection. "Will you please answer him, Tony?" she said.

"On my word and honour, Roger Barnes, then," said Anthony proudly, "they always look like this."

When the doctor left he was weighing carefully in his mind an urgent problem: After waiting six months before making his first visit at the Robesons, how soon could he decently come again?

XIV.—STRAWBERRIES

"Here are yer strawberries, ma'm."

Juliet, alone in her little kitchen, ran to the door in dismay. She looked down at a freckle-faced boy carrying a big basket filled with strawberry-boxes.

"But my order was for next Wednesday," she said.

"Well, Pa said he cal'lated you'd ruther have 'em when they was at the best, an' that's now. This hot weather's a dryin' 'em up. May not be any good ones by Wednesday."

Every housekeeper knows that if there is one thing particularly liable to happen it is the arrival of fruit for preserving at the most inopportune moment of the week. It matters little what the excuse of the sender may be—there is always a sufficient reason why the original date set by the buyer has been ignored. In this case the strawberries had been engaged from a neighbour, and Juliet understood at once that she must not refuse to take them.

She stood looking at the rows of baskets upon the table, when the boy had placed them there and gone whistling away. She was in the midst of a flurry of work. It was Saturday, and she was cooking and baking, putting together various dishes to be used upon the morrow. Mr. Horatio Marcy had lately returned from abroad. He and Mrs. Dingley were to spend the coming Sabbath with Juliet and Anthony—the first occasion on which Juliet's father should be entertained in the house. It was an event of importance, and his daughter meant to show him several things concerning her fitness for her present position.

Rachel Redding was not available upon this Saturday morning. Her mother had been taken seriously ill the night before, and Rachel had sent word that she could not leave her. Juliet had not minded much, although it was a day when Rachel's help would have been especially acceptable. As it was, she had reached a point where her housewifely marshalling of the day's work was at a critical stage. A cake had been put into the oven. A large bowl of soup stock had been brought from a cool retreat to have the smooth coating of fat removed from its surface. Various other dishes, in process of construction, awaited the skilled touch of the cook.

"I shall have to do them, I suppose," said Mrs. Robeson to herself, regarding the strawberries with a disapproving eye. "But *why* they had to come to-day ——"

She went at the strawberries, wishing she had ordered less. They were fine berries—on top; by degrees, as the boxes lowered, they became less fine. It seemed desirable to separate the superior from the inferior and treat them differently. Only the best would do for the delectable preserve which was to go into glasses and be served on special occasions; the others could be made into jam less attractive to the eye if hardly less acceptable to the palate. Juliet was obliged to put down her berry-boxes every fifth minute to attend to one or other of the various saucepans and double-boilers upon the little range. Her cheeks grew flushed, for the day was hot and the kitchen hotter. It must be admitted that her occasional glance out over the green fields and the woods beyond was a longing one.

The better selection of the berries went into the clear syrup in the preserving-kettle. Juliet flew to get her glass pots ready. She stopped to stir something in a saucepan. She thrust some eggs into the small ice-chest to cool them for the salad dressing soon to be made. She kept one eye on the clock, for the strawberry preserve had to be timed to a minute—ten, no more, no less. It was a strenuous hour.

As she dipped up the fourth ladleful of crimson richness—translucent as a church window—and filled the waiting jar, a peculiar pungent odour drifted across the fragrance of the strawberries. Juliet dropped her ladle and pulled open the oven door.

The delicate cake which she had compounded with

especial care because it was Mrs. Dingley's favourite, lay a blackened ruin. Some of it had run over upon the oven bottom and become a mass of cinders. Juliet jerked the cake-tin out into the daylight and shut the oven door with a slam.

It was at this unpropitious moment that a figure appeared in the doorway—a tall, slim figure, in crisp, cool, white linen. A charming white hat surmounted Mrs. Wayne Carey's carefully ordered hair, a white parasol in her hands completed a particularly chaste and appropriate morning toilette for a young woman who had nothing to do with kitchens.

She was regarding with interest the young person at the range. Juliet wore one of her characteristic working frocks, and the big pinafore which enveloped it from head to foot was of an attractive design. But the morning's flurry had set its signs upon her, and the pinafore was not as immaculate as it had been three hours earlier. Her hair, curling moistly about her flushed face, had been impatiently pushed back more than once, and its disorder, while not unpicturesque, was suggestive of a somewhat perturbed mind. Her hands were pink with strawberry juice. She looked warm, tired, and—if the truth must be told—at the moment not a little out of temper. The smile with which she welcomed her friend could hardly be said to be one of absolute pleasure.

"I'm afraid I've come at the wrong time," said Judith, regretfully. "Did you just burn something? Too bad. I suppose all young housekeepers do that. Where's your—assistant?"

"She's not here to-day," said Juliet, ladling up strawberry preserve with more haste than caution.

Her fingers shook a little but she kept her voice tranquil. “It’s all right. A number of things had to be done at once, that’s all. Please don’t stay in this hot place. Take off your hat and find a cool corner somewhere in the house. I’ll be in presently.”

“I mustn’t bother you. I was going to stay for lunch with you, it was so hot in town, but I mustn’t think of it when you’re so——”

“Of course you’ll stay,” said Juliet with decision. “What you see before you is only the smoke of battle. It will soon clear away. Run off—and I’ll be with you presently. You’ll find the late magazines in the living-room.”

Her tone was intended to deceive and it was sufficiently successful. Judith was anxious to stay. She was also interested in the situation. She had heard much from Wayne in praise of Juliet’s successful housekeeping, and had seen enough of it herself to be curious about its inner workings. For the first time she had happened upon a scene which would seem to indicate that there were phases in this sort of domestic life less ideal than she was asked to believe. She went back into the coolness and quiet of the living-room with a full appreciation of the fact that no hot kitchens ever threatened her own peace of mind.

Juliet finished her strawberry preserve, saw that everything liable to burn was removed to safe quarters; then deliberately took off her apron and stole out of the kitchen door. She went swiftly down through the orchard to the willow-bordered path by the brook; then, out of sight of everything human, ran several rods down it with a sweep of skirts which put everything in the bird creation to flight. At a certain pleasant spot among the willows, sheltered

from all possible observation, she paused and flung herself down upon the warm ground.

But not in any attitude of despair. Neither did she cry tears of vexation and weariness. She was a healthy girl, with the perfect physical being whose poise is not upset by so small a matter as a fatiguing morning. Because a cake had burned, an extra amount of work had had to be conquered and an unexpected guest had arrived, her nerves were not worn to the rending point. But, having been reared in the belief that a breath of outdoors is the great antidote for all physical or mental discomforts born of confinement indoors, she had acquired a habit of running away from her cares at any and all times of day in precisely this fashion—and many were the advantages she had reaped from this somewhat unusual course of procedure.

Mrs. Anthony Robeson lay upon one side, her arm outstretched, her cheek pillowed upon her arm. She was drawing long, deep breaths, and looking lazily off at a stretch of blue sky cleft in the exact centre by one great graceful elm tree. One would have thought she had forgotten every care in the world, not to mention the guest from the city waiting expectantly for her hostess to appear. After ten minutes of this sort of indolence the figure in the blue and white print dress sat up, clasped both arms about her knees and remained regarding with half closed eyes the softly fluttering leaves of the willows along the edge of the brook. The hot flush died out of her cheeks; the lips whose expression a few minutes since had indicated self-control under a combination of trying circumstances, relaxed into their natural sweetness with a tendency toward mirth; and her whole aspect became that merely of the young athlete resting from

one encounter and preparing herself for another.

At length she rose, shook out her skirts, and said aloud: “Now, Judith Dearborn Carey, I’m ready to upset your expectations. Since you looked in at me this morning you’ve been thinking I wished I hadn‘t —haven’t you? Well, you may just understand that I don’t wish anything of the sort.” And in five minutes more she had walked in upon her guest by way of the front door, her pretty face serene, her hands full of pink June roses which she threw in a fragrant mass of beauty into her friend’s lap.

“Put those into bowls for me, will you?” she requested. “Arrange them to suit yourself. Aren’t they lovely? I suppose you’re getting hungry. In half an hour you shall be served with a very modest but, I trust, not insufficient lunch. Would you like hot chocolate or iced tea?”

“Iced tea, by all means,” chose Judith, who, being used to the privileges of selection from a variety of offered foods and beverages, was apt to want what was not set before her, when at a private table. Juliet understood this propensity of her friend and slyly took advantage of it. As it happened, she knew that at the moment she was quite out of chocolate, but she had counted advisedly upon Judith’s choice on a hot June day, and she smiled to herself as she chopped ice and sliced lemon.

At the end of the half hour, Judith, who found the coolness of the living-room too delightful to allow her to keep watch of her friend in the hot kitchen, much as she was tempted to do so, was summoned to an equally cool dining-room. Upon the bare table, daintily set out upon some of the embroidered white doilies of Juliet’s wedding linen, was a simple lunch of a character which appealed to the guest’s critical

appetite in a way which made her draw a long breath of satisfaction.

“You certainly do have a trick of serving things to make them taste better than other people’s,” she acknowledged, glancing from the little platter of broiled chicken with its bit of parsley to the crisp fruit salad made up of she knew not what, but presenting an appetising appearance—then regarding fondly a dish of spinach, pleasingly flanked by thin slices of boiled egg.

“It’s really too hot to eat anything very solid,” agreed Juliet with guile. “Rachel and I have a way of planning our lunches a day or two ahead, so that the leftovers we use up are not yesterday’s but the day before’s, and we remember with surprise how good the original dish was far back in the past. I wish Anthony could have his midday meal at home—though perhaps if he did the dinners wouldn’t strike him so happily. Don’t you think it’s great fun to see a big, hearty man sit down at a table and look at it with an expression of adoration? Women may deride the fact as they will, but a healthy body does demand good things to eat, and shouldn’t be blamed for liking them.”

“Wayne hasn’t much appetite,” said Judith, eating away with relish. “He dislikes the people at our table—sometimes I think that’s why he bolts his food and gets off in such a hurry. By the way, Juliet, are you and Tony coming in to the Reardons’ to-night? Of course you are.”

“I suppose we must,” admitted Juliet with reluctance. “We have refused a good many things since we’ve been here, but I did promise Mrs. Reardon we would try to come to-night.”

The little repast over, Judith offered, with well simulated warmth, to help her friend with the after work. But Juliet would have none of her. She sent her guest out into a hammock under the trees, and despatched the business of putting the little kitchen to rights with the celerity of one who means to have done with it.

In the middle of the June afternoon Judith awoke from a nap in the hammock to find her hostess standing laughing beside her, fresh in a thin gown of flowered dimity.

"Well," yawned Judith, heavily, "I must have gone off to sleep. I was tired—I am tireder. This is a fatiguing sort of weather—don't you think so? But you don't look it. And after all that work I found you in! Why aren't you used up? It *kills* me to do things in the heat."

Juliet dropped a big blue denim pillow on the ground and sat down upon it in a flutter of dimity. She lifted a smiling face and said with spirit:

"Last summer I could walk miles over a golf course twice a day and not mind it in the least. The year before I was most of the time on the river, rowing till I was as strong as a girl could be. I've had gymnasium work and fencing lessons and have been brought up to keep myself in perfect trim by my baths and exercise. What frail thing am I that a little housework should use me up?"

"Yes—I know—you always did go in for that sort of thing," reflected Judith, eyeing her companion's fresh colour and bright eyes. "I suppose I ought, but I never cared for it—I don't mean the baths and all that—of course any self-respecting woman adores warm baths. I don't like the cold plunges and

showers you always add on."

"Then don't expect the results."

"It isn't everybody who has your energetic temperament. I hate golf, despise tennis, never rowed a stroke in my life, and could no more keep house as you are doing than I could fly."

"Let me see," said Juliet demurely, pretending to consider. "What is it that you do like to do?"

"You know well enough. And little enough of it I can get now with a husband who never cares to stir." There was a suspicion of bitterness in Judith's voice. But Juliet, ignoring it, went blithely on:

"I've a strong conviction that one can't be happy without being busy. Now that I can't keep up my athletic sports I should become a pale hypochondriac without these housewifely affairs to employ me. I don't like to embroider. I can't paint china. I'm not a musician. I somehow don't care to begin to devote myself to clubs in town. I love my books and the great outdoors—and plenty of action."

"You're a strange girl," was Judith's verdict, getting languidly out of the hammock, an hour later, after an animated discussion with her friend on various matters touching on the lives of both. "Either you're a remarkable actress or you're as contented as you seem to be. I wish I had your enthusiasm. Everything bores me—Look at this frock, after lying in a hammock! Isn't white linen the prettiest thing when you put it on and the most used up when you take it off, of any fabric known to the shops?"

"It is, indeed. But if anybody can afford to wear it it's you, who never sit recklessly about on banks and fences, but keep cool and correct and stately and

____"

"—discontented. I admit I've talked like a fractious child all day. But I've had a good time and want to come oftener than I have. May I?"

"Of course you may. Must you go? I'll keep you to dinner and send for Wayne."

"You're an angel, but I've an engagement for five o'clock, and there's the Reardons' this evening. You won't forget that? You and Anthony will be sure to come?"

"I'll not promise absolutely, but I'll see. Mrs. Reardon was so kind as to leave it open. It's an informal affair, I believe?"

"Informal, but very gorgeous, just the same. She wouldn't give anybody but you such an elastic invitation as that, and you should appreciate her eagerness to get you," declared Judith, who cared very much from whom her invitations came and could never understand her friend's careless attitude toward the most impressive of them.

Juliet watched her guest go down the street, and waved an affectionate hand at her as Judith looked back from her seat in the trolley car. "Poor old Judy," she said to herself. "How glad you are you're not I!—And how very, very glad I am I'm not you!"

An observation, it must be admitted, essentially feminine. No man is ever heard to felicitate himself upon the fact that he is not some other man.

XV.—Anthony Plays Maid

After dinner that night, Juliet, having once more put things in order and slipped off the big pinafore which had kept her spotless, joined her husband in the garden up and down which he was comfortably pacing, hands in pockets, pipe in mouth.

"Jolly spot, isn't it? Come and perambulate," he suggested.

"Just for a minute. Tony, are we going to the Reardons?"

He stood still and considered. "I don't know. Are we? Did you accept?"

"On condition that you felt like it. I represented you as coming home decidedly fagged these hot nights and not always caring to stir."

"Wise schemer! I don't mind the aspersion on my physical being. She urged, I suppose?"

"She did. I don't know why."

"I do." Anthony smiled down at his wife. "Everybody is a bit curious about us these days. Your position, you see, is considered very extraordinary."

"Nonsense, Tony. Shall we go?"

"Possibly we'd better, though it racks my soul to think of dressing. The less I wear my festive garments the less I want to. For that very reason, suppose we discipline ourselves and go. Do you mind?"

"Not at all. We'll have to dress at once, for it's nearly eight now, and by the time we have caught a train

and got to Hollyhurst——"

"To be sure. Here goes, then."

Half an hour later Anthony, wrestling with a refractory cuff button, looked up to see his wife at his elbow. She was very nearly a vision of elegance and beauty; the lacking essential was explained to him by a voice very much out of breath and a trifle petulant:

"If you care anything for me, Tony, stop everything and hook me up. I'm all mixed up, and I can't reach, and I'm sure I've torn that little lace frill at the back."

"All right. Where do I begin?"

"Under my left arm, I think—I can't possibly see."

"Neither can I." He was poking about under the lifted arm, among folds of filmy stuff. "Here we are—no, we aren't. Does this top hook go in this little pocket on the other side?"

"I suppose so—can't you tell whether it does by the look?"

"It seems a bit blind to me," murmured Anthony, struggling.

"It's meant to be blind—it mustn't show when it's fastened."

"It certainly doesn't now. Hold on—don't wriggle. I've got it now. I've found the combination. Three turns to the right, five to the left, clear around once, then—Hullo! I've come out wrong. The thing doesn't track at the bottom."

"You've missed a hook."

"Oh, no. I hung onto 'em all the way down."

"Then you missed an eye. You'll have to unhook it all and begin again."

Anthony obeyed. "I'm glad I don't have to get into my clothes around the corner this way," he commented. "Here you are. We stuck to the schedule this time."

"Wait, dear. You haven't fastened the shoulder. There are ever so many little hooks along there and around the arm hole."

"I should say there were. What's the good of so many?—Where do they begin? Look out—wait a minute—Juliet, if you don't stop twisting around so I never can do it. I can do great, heroic acts, it's the little trials that floor me—There—no!—that doesn't look right."

Juliet ran to the mirror. "It isn't right," she cried. "Look—that corner shouldn't lap over like that. Oh, if I could only reach myself!"

"You can't—I've often tried it. The human anatomy —Stand still, Julie—you're getting nervous."

"If there's one thing that's trying——" murmured Juliet.

"Why do you let your dressmakers build your frocks this way? Why not get into 'em all in front, where you can see what you're doing?—Now I've got it. Isn't that right?"

"Yes. Wait, Tony—here's the girdle. It fastens behind."

Anthony surveyed the incomprehensible affair of silk and velvet ribbon she put into his hands. "Looks like a head-stall to me," he said. Juliet laughed and fitted it about her own waist. Anthony attempted to make

it join at the back of the points she held out to him.

“It won’t come together,” he said.

“Oh, yes, it will. Draw it tight.”

“I am drawing it tight. It’s smaller than you are. You can’t wear it.”

Juliet laughed again. Anthony tugged.

“Wait till I hold my breath,” she said.

“*Great guns!*” he ejaculated, and by the exertion of much force fastened the girdle. Then he stood off a step or two and looked at his wife curiously. Flushed and laughing she returned his gaze.

“Can you breathe?” he asked solicitously.

“Of course I can.”

“What with?”

“It is a little tight, of course,” she admitted. “This is one of my trousseau dresses. I’ve grown a little stouter, I suppose. Never mind, I can stand it for to-night. Thank you very much. You must hurry now, Tony.”

“I haven’t had my pay for playing maid,” he said, and came close. He surveyed his wife’s fair neck and shoulders, turned her around and deliberately kissed the soft hollow where the firm white flesh of her neck met the waving brown hair drawn lightly upwards.

“That’s the spot that tantalized me for about six years,” he observed.

Hunting hurriedly through various drawers and boxes in the blue-and-white room, in search of gloves and fan, Juliet heard her husband come in his turn to her open door.

"Will you have the goodness to look at me?" he requested, in a melancholy voice. Juliet turned, gave him one glance, and broke into a merry peal.

"Oh, Tony!—What's the matter? Have you been growing stouter, too?"

"It must be," he said solemnly.

His clawhammer coat was so tight across the shoulders that the strain was evident. He was holding his arms in the exaggerated position of the small boy who wears a last year's suit. Juliet revolved around her husband's well built figure with interest.

"It does look tight," she said. "But have you grown heavier all at once? It can't be long since you wore that coat before."

"Don't believe I have for months. It's been altogether frock-coats and informals. I haven't been to an evening affair with ladies for a good while."

"It doesn't look as it feels, I'm sure. It's getting very late—we ought to be off," and Juliet gathered up her belongings and gave him a long loose coat to hold for her which covered her finery completely.

"Now's the hour when I regret that I haven't a carriage for you," said Anthony, as they descended the stairs. He got into his outer coat reluctantly. "I shall split something around my back before the evening is over," he prophesied resignedly.

"Never mind. Remember how tight my girdle is. It grows tighter every minute."

They got out upon the porch and Anthony locked the door. "If I should show that door-key to any man I know except Carey he would howl," he remarked,

holding up the queer old brass affair before he slipped it into his pocket. He looked down at Juliet in the gathering June twilight. “Don’t you wish we didn’t have to go?”

“Yes, I do,” she agreed frankly.

“Let’s not!”

“My dear boy! At this hour?”

“We could telephone.”

“Shouldn’t you feel rather ashamed to, so late?”

“Not a bit. But of course we’ll go if you say so.”

She laughed, and he joined her boyishly. She hesitated.

“If I see you looking faint in that girdle shall I throw a glass of cold water over you?”

“Please do. If I hear a sound as of rending cloth shall I divert the attention of the company?”

“By all means.”

They were laughing like two children. Anthony sat down in one of the porch chairs. He drew a long sigh. “I never hated to leave my dear home so since I came into it,” he said gloomily.

Juliet pulled off her coat. “If you’ll do the telephoning I’ll stay,” she said.

He jumped to his feet. “Let me loosen that girdle for you. I haven’t been breathing below the fifth rib myself since you put it on, just in sympathy,” he declared.

XVI.—A House-Party—Outdoors

"The trouble is," said Anthony Robeson, shifting his position on the step below Juliet so that he could rest his head against her knee, "the trouble is we're getting too popular."

Juliet laughed and ran her fingers through his thick locks, gently tweaking them. The two were alone together in the warm darkness of a July evening, upon their own little porch.

"It's the first evening we've had to ourselves since the big snowdrift under the front windows melted. That was about the date Roger Barnes met Louis Lockwood here the first time. Ye gods—but they've kept each other's footprints warm since then, haven't they? And now Cathcart is giving indications of having contracted the fatal malady. Can't Rachel Redding be incarcerated somewhere until the next moon is past? I notice they all have worse symptoms each third quarter. That girl looks innocent, but—by heaven, Julie, I think she has it down fine."

"No, you don't," said Juliet persuasively. "I should catch her at it if she were deliberately trying to keep two such men as Roger and Louis pitted against each other. They're doing it all themselves. I've known her to run away when she saw one of them coming—so that she couldn't be found. But, Tony dear, I've a plan."

"Good. I hope it's a duel between the two principals. If it is I'm going to tamper with the weapons and see that each injures himself past help. I'm getting a

little weary of playing the hospitable host to a trio of would-bes."

"Listen. We'll entertain them all at once for a week, with some extra girls, and Judith and Wayne, and then we'll announce that we're not at home for a month."

"All at once—a house-party?" Anthony sat up and laughed uproariously. "I've tremendous faith in you, love, but where in the name of all the French sardines that ever were dovetailed would you put such a crowd?"

"I've a practical plan. Louis Lockwood belongs to a fishing club that spends every August up in Canada. They have a big tent, twenty by twenty-five, for he told me so the other day. He would get it for us; we would put it out in the orchard, close to the river. You and Wayne, and Roger and Louis, and Stevens Cathcart could sleep down there, and I could easily take care of Judith and Suzanne Gerard and Marie Dresser, here in the house. Rachel should stay here, too. And Auntie Dingley would send down Mary McKaim to cook for us, I'm sure."

"That's not so bad. But why Rachel—when you have so little room?"

"Because I want her to have all the fun; because if I don't keep her here she will be running away half the time; and because——"

"Now comes the real reason," observed Anthony sagely.

"I don't want the other girls thinking she has the unfair advantage of taking a man away from the party every evening to walk down home with her."

"Wise little chaperon. I can see Roger and Louis now,

glaring at each other as the hour approaches for her departure."

"What do you think of my plan? It's only a plan, you know, Tony—subject to your approval."

"Diplomat!" murmured Anthony, reaching up one arm and drawing it about her shoulders. "You know you're safe to have my approval when you put it in that tone. Well, provided you can figure out the finances—and I know you wouldn't propose it if you hadn't done that already—I don't see any objection. On one condition, though, Julie, mind you—on one condition."

"Name it."

"Of course, I can only be here evenings during your house party. So my condition is that I have you and the home all to myself for my vacation afterward. Not a wooer nor a chum admitted. No overdressed women out from town, taking afternoon tea—no invitations to lonesome husbands out to dinner. Just you and I. Did you ever imagine life in the rural localities would be so gay, anyhow? I want to go fishing with you—tramping through the woods with you—sitting out here on the porch with you—in short, have you all to myself—and"—he turned completely about, kneeling below her on the step, crushing her in both arms so vigorously that he stopped her breath—"eat—you—up!"

"What a prospect," she cried softly, when she found herself partially released. "Are you sure you need a vacation, just for that?"

"Certain of it. I've had to share you with other people all the year—and now I've got to give you up to a jealous lovers' assemblage. So after that, mind you, I have my satisfaction."

When Doctor Barnes was told of the plan he looked gloomy. “Going to ask Lockwood?” he inquired at once.

“Of course,” assented Juliet promptly.

“I don’t see any ‘of course’ about it.”

“What would Marie Dresser do to me if I didn’t invite him?”

“He doesn’t care for her——”

“Oh, yes, he does. Why, last winter he seemed to be on the point of asking her to marry him. Everybody expected the announcement any day.”

“Last winter and this summer are two different propositions.”

“Marie doesn’t think so.”

“She’ll get mightily undeceived, then. Whom else are you asking?”

“Stevens Cathcart.”

The doctor groaned. “Is this a dose you’re fixing for me? I’m going to be too busy—I can’t come.”

“Very well,” said Juliet placidly. She was sewing, upon the porch, and the doctor sat on the step.

He looked up with a grimace. “I suppose you think I’ll be out on the next train after the rest arrive.”

“I certainly do, Dr. Roger Williams Barnes.”

“I presume you are inviting Suzanne?” he queried.

“Why not?”

“No reason why not. Cathcart admires her immensely—or did, before he began to cultivate this place.”

Juliet laughed. “Suzanne would never forgive you if

she heard that."

"By-the-way," said the doctor slowly, "has she ever met—Miss Redding?"

"No."

He meditated for several minutes in silence, while Juliet sewed, glancing from time to time at one of the most attractive masculine profiles with which she was familiar. He was not as handsome a man as Louis Lockwood, but every line of his face stood for strength, not without some pretensions to good looks. He looked up at length and straight at her.

"Would you mind telling me," he began, "just what you intend to effect with this combination? I never gave you credit, you know, Juliet, for wanting to manage Fate, and I don't believe it now."

"No, I don't want to manage Fate," said Juliet, smiling over her work, "but I admit I want two things: I want you to see Rachel Redding beside Suzanne Gerard, and—I want Rachel to see you beside Louis Lockwood and—Suzanne."

"I see," said the doctor grimly. "In other words, you want your protégée to have fair play."

"Just that," Juliet answered, more gravely now. "I think lots of you, Roger, and well of you—you know I do—and yet——"

"And yet——"

"Let me guard my girl. She's not like the others, and you and Louis are making it tremendously hard for her between you."

"You seem to be planning to make it infinitely harder."

Juliet shook her head. "Trust me, Roger, please."

"All right, I will," promised the doctor. "But just assure me that you're on my side."

"I'm on nobody's side," was all the comfort he got.

Juliet's invitations received delighted acceptances, though Wayne Carey and Doctor Barnes would be able to come out only for the nights—in time, however, for late and festive suppers outdoors. The tent in the orchard, with its comfortable bunks, was accepted by all the men with enthusiasm.

"And to satisfy the men is the essential thing, you know, Tony," Juliet had observed sagely when she saw their pleasure in their quarters. "The girls will accept any crowding together if they have a mirror and room to tie a sash in, as long as devoted admirers are not wanting."

The moment Miss Dresser and Miss Gerard saw Miss Rachel Redding—to quote Anthony—the fun began. Mrs. Wayne Carey had already met her, and had been carefully coached by Juliet as to the bearing she must assume toward Juliet's new friend. So when Marie and Suzanne began to inquire of Judith the latter was prepared to answer them.

"She's a beauty in her way, isn't she?" Judith asserted. "Juliet's immensely fond of her, I should judge."

"But who is she?" demanded Suzanne.

"A neighbour, a country girl, a school and college girl, a comparatively poor girl—and a lucky girl, for Juliet likes her."

"Have the men met her before?"

"Goodness, yes. Haven't you heard how they beg invitations home to dinner of Anthony, just to see

her?" Judith was enjoying the situation. This statement, however, was no part of Juliet's coaching.

"I didn't see anything particularly attractive about her," said Marie promptly. "She's a demure thing. One wouldn't think she ever lifted those long lashes to look at a man—but that's just the kind. Awfully plainly dressed."

"That's her style," said Suzanne. "These poor, pretty girls are once in a while just clever enough to make capital out of their poverty by wearing simply fetching things in pale gray dimity and dark blue lawn and sunbonnets. Stevens Cathcart would be just the kind to be carried away with her. Roger Barnes wouldn't look at her twice."

"Louis might pretend to admire her, to please Juliet," admitted Marie. "He has a way of making every girl think he is in love with her—and he is, to a certain extent. But it's never serious."

Whether it were serious in this instance Miss Dresser soon had opportunity to judge.

After dinner that first night Anthony proposed taking all his guests out upon the river in a big flat-boat he had rented. But when he made up the party Rachel was not to be found.

"I'm afraid she's gone home," said Juliet.

"I'll run down and see," proposed Lockwood instantly, and was suiting the action to the word when Cathcart got off ahead of him.

"I'll have her back presently," he called as he dashed down the road. "You people go on—we'll catch you."

"We'll wait for you," Lockwood shouted after him.

"Why should we wait?" demurred Marie, beginning

to walk away toward the river.

“If we don’t he’s liable not to find it convenient to catch up with us,” Lockwood retorted.

“If they prefer their own company why not let them have it?” she said over her shoulder.

“Run along, Louis,” murmured Doctor Barnes. “One girl at a time.”

He turned to Juliet. “Shall we go?” he said.

Anthony caught his glance, and, laughing, turned to Suzanne. “Will you console an old married man, Miss Gerard?” he inquired.

But when Cathcart reappeared, which he did very soon, Rachel was not with him. “She said she had to stay with her mother,” he explained in a tone which so closely resembled a growl that everybody laughed.

“Bear up, Stevie, boy,” chaffed Wayne Carey. “I’m confident she likes you, but she may not like you all the time, you know. They seldom do.”

XVII.—Rachel Causes Anxiety

In spite of all Juliet’s efforts to bring about Rachel’s presence as one of her guests she found herself unable to accomplish it. Whenever she was needed

for help Rachel was never absent, but the moment she was free the girl was off, and that quite without the appearance of running away. The men of the party followed her, but they were not allowed to remain. The girls, confident that her disappearances were part of a very deep game, begged her to stay; it was useless. Rachel's excuses were ready, her manner charmingly regretful in a quiet way, but stay she would not.

Dr. Roger Barnes waylaid her one evening as she was vanishing down the willow-bordered path by the brook, leading to her own home.

"Here you go again," he began discontentedly. "I wish I knew why."

Rachel paused. It was difficult to do otherwise with a large and determined figure blocking a very narrow path.

"I have ever so many things waiting at home for me to do."

"At nine o'clock in the evening?"

"At whatever hour I am through at Mrs. Robeson's."

"I wish I could imagine something of what they are. It might relieve my mind a little."

"Why, I will tell you," said Rachel with great appearance of frankness. "I have to do some mending for mother, read the evening paper for father, and set the bread. Then the clothes must be sprinkled for ironing in the morning."

The doctor studied her face in the dimming light. "Who washed the clothes?" he asked bluntly.

"Do you think you ought to ask?" said Rachel.

"Yes. I'm in the habit of asking questions."

"Of patients——"

"Of everybody I care for. You don't have to answer, but if you don't I shall know who did the washing."

"Yes, I did it," said Rachel steadily. "It is easily done."

"And then you came over here and got breakfast?"

"Not at all. I helped Mrs. Robeson and Mary McKaim get it. Doctor Barnes, do you know that you are standing directly in my path?"

"Certainly," said the doctor. "It's what I'm here for."

"Then I shall have to go back and take the road home."

"If you do you will evade me only to encounter another man. Lockwood's keeping a ferret's eye on the Robeson house door; and I think Cathcart is already patrolling the road in front of your house."

The girl turned. "You are making me feel very absurd," she said. "I want to go home, Doctor Barnes. Please let me pass you."

"May I go with you?"

"I would rather not."

"Well, that's frank," he said, amusement and chagrin struggling for the uppermost. "I wonder I don't stalk angrily away——"

"I wish you would."

Roger Barnes threw back his head and laughed. "I wish you would give some other girls a leaf out of your book," he said. "The more you turn me down the more ardently I long to be with you; while the opposite sort of thing—I'll tell you, Miss Redding, if you want to be rid of me try these tactics: Say with a

languishing smile, ‘Oh, Doctor Barnes, won’t you take me a little way down this lovely path?’ Perhaps that will accomplish your ends. I’ve often felt an instant desire not to do the thing I’m begged to.”

“‘Oh, Doctor Barnes,’” said Rachel Redding—and he caught the mischief in her tone—even Rachel could be mischievous, as Juliet had said—“‘won’t you take me a little way down this lovely path?’”

“With the greatest pleasure in the world,” replied the doctor promptly, and stood aside to let her pass him. Whereupon she slipped by him, and before he could realise that she had gone was running fleetly away in the twilight down the winding, willow-hung path. With an exclamation he was off after her, but though he dashed at the pace of a hunter through the intricacies of the way he presently discovered that he was following nothing but the summer breeze rustling the willow leaves and wafting into his face the breath of new-cut hay, the aftermath of late July. He stopped at length and stared about him, baffled and half angry.

“There never was a girl like you,” he muttered. “If you are deliberately trying to make men mad to get you you are succeeding infuriatingly well. If I catch you to-night it will be your fault if I tell you what I think of you. I’ll tell you now, for I suppose you are hiding somewhere in this undergrowth till I give it up and you can get away home. You shall listen to me if you are here, for you can’t help yourself.”

He was speaking in a low, even tone, walking slowly along the path and peering sharply into the bushes on both sides. Suddenly he stood still. He had detected a spot beside a low-hanging willow which showed nearly white in the deepening darkness. Rachel was wearing white to-night, he remembered.

His heart quickened its paces and he paused an instant to get past a certain tightening in his throat.

Then he bent forward and whispered: “If that’s not you there I can say what I like, and there’ll be some satisfaction in that. If you’ll speak now you may save yourself, but if you don’t I’ve no reason to think it’s you, and so I can say——”

There was a sharply perceptible noise farther down the path toward the Redding home. Barnes turned quickly and stood up straight, waiting. Footsteps came rapidly along the path—no footsteps of hers, evidently. A man’s voice humming a tune grew momentarily plainer—then the voice stopped humming and began to sing in a subdued but clear and fine barytone:

“Down through the lane
Come I again
Seeking, my love, for you;
Run to me, dear,
Losing all fear,
Love and——”

The voice stopped. Two men’s figures confronted each other in an extremely narrow path. It was not too dark yet for each to be plainly recognisable to the other.

“Hallo—that you, Lockwood?”

“Hi there, Roger Barnes; what you doing here? Fishing?”

“Looking for something I’ve lost.”

“Getting pretty dark to find it. Something valuable?”

“Rather. Think I’ll give it up for to-night.”

“Too bad. Nice night.” Lockwood was hastening

toward the end of the path which came out near Anthony's house. Barnes looked after him grimly.

"That voice of yours, young man," he thought, "handicaps me from the start. Now, if I could just warble my emotions that way——"

He turned and peered again at the white place by the tree. He moved stealthily toward it, and ascertained presently that it was not what it seemed. He rose to his feet and walked rapidly down the path to the Redding house. When he came in sight of it he saw that the kitchen windows were lighted and that a man stood with his arm on the sill of one of them. Silhouetted against the light were the familiar outlines of Stevens Cathcart. As Barnes stood staring amazedly at this, a slender figure in white came to the window, and in the stillness he could hear the quiet voice:

"Please let me close the window, Mr. Cathcart. Thank you—no—and good-night."

"'Three Men in a Boat,' by Rachel Redding," murmured the doctor to himself, and slipped back to the willow path, from which he at length emerged to join the group upon the porch—which then, it may be observed, held for the first time that night its full complement of men.

Three big Chinese lanterns shed a softly pleasant light upon the porch and the lawn at its foot. Suzanne Gerard and Marie Dresser made a most attractive picture, one in a low chair, the other upon a pile of cushions on the step. Suzanne lightly picked a mandolin. Marie was singing softly:

"Down through the lane
Come I again
Seeking, my love, for you;
Run to me, dear,
Losing all fear,
Love and my life will be true."

It was one of the songs of the summer—foolish words, seductive music—everybody hummed it half the time. Roger Barnes smiled to himself, remembering where he had heard it last.

"Come here and give account," commanded Suzanne the instant he appeared. "Every unmarried man vanished the moment twilight fell. You are the last to show your face. I challenge you, one and all, to swear that you have not been within sight of a certain small brown house at the foot of the hill since supper."

Her voice was music; in her eyes was laughter. Marie sang on, pointing her words with smiles at one and another of the culprits.

From his seat on the threshold of the door, where his head rested against Juliet's knee as she sat behind him, Anthony laughed to himself. Then he turned his head and whispered to his wife: "Feel the claws through the velvet? Poor boys, they have my sympathy."

XVIII.—An Unknown Quantity

"Rachel," said Juliet decisively, next morning, "to-night is the last of my house party, and I refuse to let you off. I'm asking ten or twelve more people out from town. You must spend this evening with my guests, or forfeit my friendship."

She was smiling as she said it, but her tone was not to be denied.

"If that is the alternative," Rachel answered, returning the smile with an affectionate look of a sort which neither Louis Lockwood nor Stevens Cathcart nor Dr. Roger Barnes had ever seen on her face—though they had dreamed of it—"of course I shall stay. But I'll tell you frankly I would rather not."

"Why not, Rachel?"

"I think you know why not, Mrs. Robeson," Rachel answered.

"Yes, I know why not," admitted Juliet. "Girls are queer things, Ray. They defeat their own ends all the time—lots of them. Suzanne and Marie are dear girls, with ever so many nice things about them, but they don't—they don't know enough not to pursue, chase, run down, the object of their desires. And, of course, the object, being run down panting, into a corner, dodges, evades, gets out and runs away. Rachel, dear, what are you going to wear to-night?"

"My best frock," said Rachel, smiling.

"Which is——"

"White."

"Cut out at the neck?"

"A little."

"Short in the sleeves?"

"To the elbows. It was my sophomore evening dress."

"It will be all right, I know. Rachel, wear a white rose in those low black braids of yours—will you?"

"No, I think I won't," refused Rachel.

"Why not?"

Rachel did not answer. Into her cool cheek crept a tinge of rebellious, telltale colour.

Juliet studied her a minute in silence, then came up to her and laying both hands on her shoulders looked up into her eyes.

"You try to 'play fair,' don't you, dear?" she said heartily, "whatever the rest may do. And whatever they may do, Rachel Redding, don't you care. It's not your fault that they are as jealous of you as girls can be and keep sweet outside. I'd be jealous of you myself if——" She paused, laughing.

"When you grow jealous," said Rachel, "it will be because you have grown blind. If anybody ever wore his heart on his sleeve—no, not there—but beating sturdily in the right place for one woman in the world it's——"

"Right you are," said Anthony Robeson, coming up behind them, "and I hope you may convince her of it. She has no confidence in her own powers."

Rachel stood looking at them a moment, her dark eyes very bright. "To see you two," she said slowly at length, "is to believe it all."

The evening promised to be a gay one. The men of the party had sent to town for many lanterns, flags and decorations of the sort, and had made the porch and lawn the setting for a brilliant scene. A dozen

young people had been asked out, and came enthusiastically.

"We'll wind up with a flourish," said Anthony in his wife's ear as they descended the stairs together, "and then we'll send them all off to-morrow where they'll cease from troubling. I think it was the best plan in the world, but I'll be glad to prowl about my beloved home without observing Cathcart scowling at Lockwood, Roger Barnes evading Suzanne, or even my good boy Wayne with that eternal wonder on his face as to why his flat does not look like our Eden."

"Hush—and don't look too happy to-morrow, Tony. Oh, here comes Rachel. Isn't she lovely?"

"Now, watch," murmured Anthony, his face full of amusement. "It's as good as the best comedy I ever saw. See Suzanne. She never looked toward Rachel, but don't tell me she wasn't aware of the very instant Rachel came upon the porch. I believe she read it in Roger Barnes's face. I'll wager ten to one his pulse isn't countable at the present instant."

"I don't blame him," Juliet answered, smiling at her guests. "She's my ideal of a girl who won't hold out a finger to the men."

"Yes, she's your sort," admitted Anthony. "I know what it is—poor fellows—I've been through it. Your cold shoulder used to warm up my heart hotter than any other girl's kindness. Look at the boys now. They can't jump and run away from the other girls, but they'd like to. And they're all deadly anxious for fear the others will get the start. Say, Julie, you ought not to have asked those new youngsters down from town. They'll catch it, sure as fate; they're at the susceptible age. I see five of them now, all staring at Rachel."

"You positively mustn't stay here with me any longer," whispered Juliet. "Go and devote yourself to her and keep them off for a little."

"Not on your life," Anthony returned "She can take care of herself. If I mix up in this fray you're likely to be husbandless. Lockwood and Roger are getting dangerous, and I'm going to keep on the outskirts where it's safe."

They were all upon the lawn—Rachel, unable to help herself, according to Anthony's intimation, the centre of a group of men who would not give each other a chance—when a stranger appeared upon the edge of the circle of light. He stood watching the scene for a moment—a tall, slender fellow, with a pale face and deep-set eyes. Then he asked somebody to tell Miss Redding that Mr. Huntington would like to speak with her. Rachel, thus summoned, rose, looked about her, caught sight of the stranger, and went swiftly down the lawn. A dozen people, among them all the men who had been the guests of the week, saw the meeting. They observed that the newcomer put out both hands, that his smile was very bright, and that he stood looking down into Miss Redding's face as if at sight of it he had instantly forgotten everything else in the world.

Rachel, leaving him, came back up the lawn to find her hostess. As she passed it became evident to a good many pairs of sharp eyes that her beauty had received a keen accession from the sweeping over her cheeks of a burning blush—so unusual that they could not fail to take note of it.

Juliet came back down the lawn with Rachel, who presented Mr. Huntington; and presently, without a word of leave-taking to any one else, the two went away down the road.

“Now, who under the heavens was that?” grunted Louis Lockwood in Anthony’s ear, catching his host around the corner of the house.

“Don’t know.”

“Brother, perhaps?”

“Hasn’t any.”

“Relative?”

“Don’t know.”

“Just a messenger, maybe?”

“Give it up.”

“She blushed like anything.”

“Did she? Man she is going to marry, probably.”

“Oh, that can’t be!”

“The lady looks marriageable to me,” observed Anthony, strolling away.

He ran into Cathcart.

“Say, who was that fellow, Tony?” began Stevens.

“Don’t ask me.”

“He looked confoundedly as if he meant to embrace her on the spot.”

“So he did,” agreed Anthony soothingly. “Don’t blame him, do you? He may not have seen her for a month. What condition do you suppose you’d be in if a week should get away from you out of her vicinity?”

“Bother you, Tony—don’t you know who he was?”

“Intimate friend, I should judge.”

“She turned pink as a carnation.”

"Say hollyhock," suggested Anthony, "or peony. Only a vivid colour could do justice to it."

"That's right," groaned Cathcart. "She never looked like that for any of us."

"Never," said Anthony promptly, and got away, chuckling.

"Hold on, there, Robeson, man," said the voice of Dr. Roger Barnes, and Anthony found himself again held up.

"Come on, old Roger boy," said his host pleasantly. "We'll amble down the road a bit and give you a chance to get a grip on yourself. No, I don't know who he is. I'm all worn out assuring Louis and Steve of that. She did turn red, she did look upset—with joy, I infer. That girl has made more havoc in one short week—playing off all the while, too—than Suzanne and Marie have accomplished in the biggest season they ever knew. And I believe, Roger boy, you're about the hardest hit of any of them."

The doctor did not answer. The two had walked away from the house and were marching arm in arm at a good pace down the road.

"She's as poor as a church mouse," suggested Anthony.

There was no reply.

"She has a dead weight of a helpless father and mother."

The doctor put match to a cigar.

"Juliet says her brother died of dissipation in a gambling-house."

Doctor Barnes began to chew hard on a cigar that he had failed to light.

"But she's a mighty sweet girl," said Anthony softly.

"See here, Tony," the doctor burst out.—"Oh, hang it all—"

"I see," said his friend, with a hand on his shoulder. "Go ahead, Roger Barnes—there's nothing in life like it; and the good Lord have mercy on you, for the sort of girl worth caring for doesn't know the meaning of the word."

"All gone, little girl," said Anthony jubilantly, as he turned back into the house the next evening, after watching out of sight the big touring-car of Lockwood's which had carried all his house-party away at once. "They are mighty fine people and I like them all immensely—but—I have enjoyed to the full this speeding the parting guest. And now for my vacation. It begins to-morrow."

"What shall we do?" asked Juliet, allowing him to draw her into his favourite settle corner.

"Go fishing. If you'll put up a jolly little—I mean a jolly big—lunch, and array yourself in unspoilable attire, I'll give you a day's great sport, whether we catch any fish or not. There's one fish you're sure of—he's always on the end of your line: hooked fast, and resigned to his fate. Juliet, are they really all gone?"

"I'm sure they are."

"Good Mary McKaim—peace be to her ashes, for she never gets any on the toast—has she gone, too?"

"She's packing."

"Rachel safe at home with her presumable fiancé?"

"He can't be her fiancé, Tony—"

"That's what Lockwood said—but I suppose he can, just the same. Rachel away, do you say?"

"Yes. She didn't come over to-day at all, you know."

"I noticed it—by the gloom on three stalwart men's faces. Well, if everybody's safely out of the way I'm going to commit myself."

"To what, Tony?"

She was laughing, for he had risen, looked all about him with great anxiety, tiptoed to each door and listened at it, and was now come back to stand before her, smiling down at her and holding out his arms.

"To the statement," he said, gathering her close and speaking into her upturned rosy face, "that without doubt this is the dearest home in the world, and that you are the sweetest woman who ever has stood or ever will stand here in it."

XIX.—All the April Stars Are Out

It was an April night—balmy with the breath of an exceptionally early spring. All the April stars were out as Anthony came to the door of the little house, and opening it flung himself out upon the porch, drawing great breaths. He looked up into the sky and clasped his arms tightly over his breast.

"O God," he said aloud, "take care of her—"

He went back into the house after a minute, and paced the floor back and forth, back and forth, stopping at each turn to listen at the foot of the stairs; then took up his stride again, his lips set, his eyes dark with anxiety. Over and over he went to the open door to look up at the stars, as if somehow he could bear his ordeal best outdoors.

When half the night had gone Mrs. Dingley came downstairs. Anthony met her at the foot. She smiled reassuringly into his face.

"This is hard for you, dear boy," she said. "But they think by morning——"

"Morning!" he cried.

"Everything is going well——"

"It's only two o'clock. Morning!"

"She says tell you she's going to be very happy soon."

But at that Anthony turned away, where his face could not be seen, and stood by the open door. Mrs. Dingley laid an affectionate hand on his arm.

"Don't worry, Tony," she said gently.

"I can't help it."

"This is new to you. Juliet is young and strong—and full of courage."

"Bless her!"

"In the morning you'll both be very happy."

"I hope so."

"Why, Anthony, dear," said the kindly little woman, "I never knew you to be so faint of heart."

Anthony faced around again. “If my strength could do her any good I’d be a lion for her,” he said. “But when all I can do is to wait—and think what I’d do if ____”

He was gone suddenly into the night. With a tender smile on her lips Mrs. Dingley went on upon the errand which had brought her downstairs. “It’s worth something to a woman to be able to make a man’s heart ache like that,” she said to herself with a little sigh. Anthony would not have understood, but even in this hour the older woman, in her wisdom, was envying Juliet.

Morning came at last, as mornings do. With the first streaks of the gray dawn Anthony heard a little, high-keyed, strange cry—new to his ears. He leaped up the stairs, four at a time, and paused, breathless, by the closed door of the blue-and-white room. After what seemed to him an interminable time Mrs. Dingley came out. At sight of Anthony her face broke into smiles, and at the same moment tears filled her eyes.

“It’s a splendid boy, Tony,” she said. “I meant to come to you the first minute, but I waited to be perfectly sure. He didn’t breathe well at first.”

But Anthony pushed this news aside impatiently. “Juliet?” he questioned eagerly.

“She’s all right, you poor man,” Mrs. Dingley assured him. “You shall see her presently, just for a minute. The first thing she said was, ‘Tell Tony.’ Go down now—I’ll call you soon.”

Anthony stole away downstairs to the outer door again. This time he ran out upon the porch and down the lawn and orchard, in the early half-light, to the willow path by the brook. He dashed along this path

to its end and back again, as if he must in some way give expression to his relief from the tension of the night. But he was back and waiting impatiently long before he received his summons to his wife's room.

On his way up he wrung the friendly hand of Dr. Joseph Wilberforce, the best man in the city at times like these, and thanked him in a few uneven words. Then he came to the door of the blue-and-white room.

"Don't be afraid, Tony," said a very sweet, clear voice; "we're ever so well—Anthony Robeson, Junior, and I."

Anthony Robeson, Senior, walked across the room in a dim, gray fog which obscured nearly everything except the sight of a pair of eyes which were shining upon him brightly enough to penetrate any fog. At the bedside he dropped upon his knees.

"I suppose I'm an awful chump," he murmured, "but nothing ever broke me up so in all my life."

Juliet laughed. It was not a sentimental greeting, but she understood all it meant. "But I'm so happy, dear," she said.

"Are you? Somehow I can't seem to be—yet. I'm too badly scared."

"He's such a beautiful big boy."

"I suppose I shall be devoted to him some time, but all I can think of now is to make sure I've got you."

The pleasant-faced nurse in her white cap came softly in and glanced at Tony meaningly.

"If you'll come in here you may see your son, Mr. Robeson," she said, and went out again.

Anthony bent over his wife. "*Little mother*," he

whispered, with a kiss, and obediently went.

Across the hall he stood looking dazedly down at the round, warm bundle the nurse laid in his arms.

“My son,” he said; “how odd that sounds.”

Then he hastily gave the bundle back to the nurse and got away downstairs, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

“Never dreamed it was going to knock me over like this,” he was saying to himself. “I can’t look at her; I can’t look at him; I feel like a big boy who has seen a little fellow take his thrashing for him.”

And in this humble—albeit most sincerely thankful—frame of mind he absently drank his breakfast coffee, and never realised that in her confusion of spirit good Mary McKaim, who was here again in time of need, had brewed him instead a powerful cup of tea.

XX.—A Prior Claim

“Come up, come up—you’re just the people we want,” cried Anthony heartily from his own porch. “Thought you’d be getting out to see us some of these fine August nights. Sit down—Juliet will be out in a minute.”

“Baby asleep?” asked Judith Carey, as she and Wayne settled comfortably into two of the deep

bamboo chairs with which the porch was furnished.

“To be sure he’s asleep at this hour,” Anthony assured her proudly; “been asleep for two hours. Regular as a clock, that youngster. Nurse trained him right at the beginning, and Juliet has kept it up. Four months old now, and sleeps from six at night till four in the morning without waking. How’s that?”

“I suppose it’s remarkable,” agreed Wayne meekly, “but I don’t know anything about it. He might sleep twenty-three hours out of twenty-four—I shouldn’t understand whether to call him a prodigy or an idiot.”

“Why, yes, you would,” Judith interposed with spirit. “Think of that baby on the floor above us. They’re walking the floor half the night with her.”

“Girl babies may be different,” Carey suggested diffidently, at which Anthony shouted. “I don’t care —all the girls I ever knew wanted to sit up nights,” Carey insisted with a feeble grin.

Juliet came out, welcoming her friends with the cordiality for which she was famous. “It’s so hot in town,” she condoled with them. “You should get out into our delicious air oftener. Somehow, with our breezes we don’t mind the heat.”

“It’s heaven here, anyhow,” sighed Carey, stretching back in his chair with a long breath. Judith looked sober.

“You say it’s heaven,” commented Anthony, staring hard at his friend, “and you profess to admire everything we do, and eat, and say, but you continue to pay good money every week for a lot of extremely dubious comforts—from my point of view.”

“It’s one of the very best places in that part of the

city," protested Judith.

Anthony eyed her keenly. "Yes; if that's what you're paying for you've got it, I admit. If it's a consolation to you to know that the address you give when you go shopping is one that you're not ashamed of—why, you're all right. But I reckon Juliet here doesn't blush when she orders things sent home to the country."

"Oh, Juliet—" began Judith; "she doesn't need an address to make all the salespeople pay her their most respectful attention. She——"

"I understand," said Anthony. "That sweetly imperious way of hers when she shops—I remember it the first time I ever went shopping with her——"

Juliet gave him a laughing glance. "If I remember," she said, "it wasn't I who did all the dictating on that historic expedition when we furnished this house."

"We've got to go shopping again," Anthony informed them. "We're planning to put a little wing on the house, opening from under the stairs in the living-room, for a nursery and a den."

"Going to put the two together?" asked a new voice from the dimness of the lawn.

"Oh—hullo, Roger Barnes, M.D., F.R.C.S.—come up. No, I think we'll have a partition between. But I want a room below stairs for Tony, Junior, so his mother won't wear herself out carrying him up and down. That youngster weighs seventeen pounds and a fraction already."

"I was confident I'd get some statistics if I came out," said the doctor, settling himself near Juliet—with a purpose, as she instantly recognised. "It seemed to me I couldn't wait longer to learn how much he had gained since I met Tony day before yesterday. It was

seventeen without the fraction then."

"That's right—guy me," returned Anthony comfortably. "I don't mind—I've the boy."

"I want a talk with you," said the doctor softly to Juliet, as the others fell to discussing the project of the enlarged house. "I've got to have it, too—or go off my head."

Juliet nodded, understanding him. Presently she rose. "I have an errand to do," she said. "Will you walk over to the Evanstons' with me, Roger?"

"Now, tell me," began the doctor the instant they were off, "is she going to persist in this awful sacrifice?"

"Poor Rachel," breathed Juliet. "So many lovers—and so unhappy."

"Is she unhappy?" begged the doctor. "Is she? If I only were sure of it——"

"What girl wouldn't be unhappy—to be making even one man out of two as miserable as you?"

"But you know what I mean. Is she going to marry Huntington out of love as well as pity—or only pity?"

"Roger"—Juliet stood still in the road, regarding him in the dim light with kind eyes—"if I knew I wouldn't tell you. That's Rachel's secret. But I don't know. She's as loyal as a magnet, and as reserved as—you would want her to be if you were Mr. Huntington."

"She's everything she ought to be. I'm a dastard for saying it, but I could forgive her for being disloyal enough to him to show me just a corner of her heart. Even if she loves him it's what I called it—an awful

sacrifice—a man dying with consumption. If she doesn't—except as the friend of her early girlhood, when she didn't know men or her own heart—Juliet, it's impious."

"Roger, dear, keep hold of yourself," Juliet replied. "You're too strong and fine to want to come between her and her own decision—if she has made it."

"If you were a man," said he hotly, "would you let a woman marry you—dying?"

"Yes," answered Juliet stoutly, "if she insisted."

"Women are capable of saying anything in an argument," he growled. "I say it's outrageous to let her do it. She doesn't love him—she does love me," he blurted.

Juliet turned to him anxiously. "Roger, do you know what you are saying?"

"Yes, I do. I've got to tell somebody, and there's nobody but you—you perfect woman. If ever a man knew a thing without its being put into words I know that. It was only a look, weeks ago, but I'm as sure of it as I am of myself. I've had nothing but coolness from her since, but that's in self-defense. And the thought that, loving me, she's going to give herself to him—a wreck—do you wonder it's driving me mad?"

"You ought not to have told me this," said Juliet, tears in her voice. "If Rachel is doing this it's because she's sure she ought——"

"Of course she is. And that's why I tell you. You have more influence with her than any one. Can't you show her that duty, the most urgent in the world, never requires a thing like that? Let her be his friend to the last—the sort of friend she knows how to be, with a warm hand in his cold one. But never his

——”

The doctor grew choky with his vehemence, and stopped short. Juliet was silent, full of distress. She thought of the two men—Huntington, a frail ghost, in the grip of a deadly illness, yet fighting it desperately, and desperately clinging to the girl he loved: a clever fellow, educated as a mining engineer, successful, even beginning to be distinguished in his work until his health gave out; Barnes, the embodiment of strength, standing high in his profession, life and the world before him, a fit mate for the girl who deserved the best there could be for her—Juliet thought of them both and found her heart aching for them—and for Rachel Redding.

They were slowly approaching the brown house at the foot of the hill, the errand at the Evanstons' forgotten, when suddenly a familiar figure in white came toward them from the doorway. The doctor started at sight of it, and Juliet grew breathless all at once.

“I thought it was you two,” said Rachel. “This rising moon struck you full just now, and I could see you plainly. I've wanted to see you both—and this is my last chance. I am going away to-morrow.”

There was an instant's silence, while Roger Barnes tried to choose which of all the things he wanted to say to her should come first. Juliet broke the stillness.

“Walk back up the road with us, dear,” she said, “and tell us how and where you go.”

“I have but a minute to spare,” said Rachel. “Let me say good-bye to you both here——”

“No, by heaven, you shall not,” burst out the doctor

in a suppressed voice of fire which startled Juliet. “You owe me ten minutes, in place of the last letter you haven’t answered. There are a score of them, you know—but the last has to be answered somehow.”

Rachel hesitated. “Very well,” she said at length, “but only with Mrs. Robeson.”

“Can’t you trust me?” He was angry now.

“Yes—but not myself,” she answered, so low he barely caught the words. He seized her hand.

“Then trust me for us both,” he said, so instantly gentle and tender that Juliet found it possible to say what a moment before she had thought unwise enough: “Go with him, Ray, dear. I think it is his right.”

So presently she found herself crossing her own lawn alone, while the two who had just left her went slowly on up the road together. Her heart was beating hard and painfully, for she loved them both, and foresaw for them only the hardest interview of their lives.

At the end of half an hour Rachel Redding stood again upon her own porch, and Roger Barnes looked up at her from the walk below with heavy eyes.

“At least,” he said, “you have done what I never would have believed even you could do—convinced me against my will that you are right. You love him—he worships you. There is a promise of life for him in Arizona—with you. I can’t forbid the bans. But I shall always believe, what you dare not dispute, that if I had come first—you——”

She held out her hand. “That you must not say,” she

said. “But there is one thing you may say—that you are my best friend, whom I can count on——”

“As long as there is life left in me,” he answered fervently. He wrung her hand in both his, looked long and steadily up into her face as if his eyes could never leave the lovely outlines showing clear in the light from the windows, then turned away and strode off toward the station without a look behind.

XXI.—Everybody Gives Advice

“I should do it in brown leather,” said Cathcart decidedly, looking about him.

He stood in the centre of Anthony’s den. The carpenters had gone, the plasterers had finished their work, and the floor had just been swept up.

“You’re all right as far as you go,” observed Anthony, who stood at his elbow, “but you don’t go far enough. If you want me to hang these walls with brown leather you’ll have to put up the money. I may be sufficiently prosperous to afford the addition to my house, but I haven’t reached the stage of covering the walls with cloth-of-gold.”

“Burlap would be the thing, Tony,” Judith suggested.

Anthony was surrounded by people—the room was half full of them, elbowing each other about.

"Paint the walls," advised Lockwood.

"There are imitation-leather papers," said Cathcart, with the air of one condescending to lower a high standard for the sake of those who could not live up to it.

"I suppose so," admitted Anthony, "at four dollars a roll. I saw a simple thing on that order that struck me the other day at Heminways'. I thought it might be about forty cents a roll. It was a dollar a square yard. I told them I would think it over. I haven't got through thinking it over yet."

"You want a plate-rail," said Wayne Carey.

"What for?"

"Why, to put plates, and steins, and things on."

"Haven't a plate—or a stein. Baby has a silver mug. Would that do?"

Cathcart smiled in a superior way. "You had a lot of mighty fine stuff in your Yale days," he remarked. "Pity you let it all go."

"I shouldn't have cared for that truck now," Anthony declared easily, though he deceived nobody by it. Most of them remembered, if Cathcart had forgotten, how the college boy had sacrificed all his treasures at a blow when the news of his family's misfortunes had come. It had yielded little enough, after all, to throw into the abyss of their sudden poverty, but the act had proved the spirit of the elder son of the house.

"You certainly will want plenty of rugs and hangings of the right sort," Cathcart pursued.

Anthony looked at him good-humouredly. "I can see that you have got to be suppressed," he said, with a

hand on Stevens's collar. "I can tell you in a breath just what's going into this room at present. The floor is to have a matting, one of those heavy, cloth-like mattings. Auntie Dingley has presented me with one fine old Persian rug from the Marcy library, which she insists is out of key with the rest of the stuff. I'm glad it is—it'll furnish the key to my decorations. Then I've a splendid old desk I picked up in a place where they temporarily forgot themselves in setting a price on it. That's going by the window. I've a little Dürer engraving, and a few good foreign photographs Juliet has put under glass for me. For the rest I have—what I like best—clear space, pipe-and-hearth room, the bamboo chairs off the porch with some winter cushions in, my books—and that."

He pointed to the windows, outside which lay a long country vista stretching away over fields and river to the woods in the distance, turning rich autumn tints now under the late October frosts.

"It's enough," said Carey, with the suppressed sigh which usually accompanied any allusion of his to Anthony's environment. "Dens are too stuffy, as a rule. Fellows try to see how much useless lumber they can accumulate in altogether inadequate space."

"But you ought to have a couch," said Judith.

"Oh, yes, I'm going to have a couch," assented Anthony, laughing across her head at Juliet. "A gem of a couch—we're making it ourselves. You're not to see it till it's done. It'll be no brickbat couch, either—it'll be a flowery bed of ease—or, if not flowery, invitingly covered with some stunning stuff Juliet has fished out of a neighbour's attic."

"Now, come and see the nursery," Juliet proposed, and the party crowded through the door into the

living-room, around to the one by its side which opened into an attractive room behind the den, all air and sunshine.

"I refuse to suggest," said Cathcart instantly, "the decorations for this place."

"That's good," remarked Anthony cheerfully. "So much verbiage out of the way."

"It'll be pink and white, I suppose," said Judith. "Pink is the colour for boys, I'm told."

Behind all their backs Anthony glanced at his wife, affection and amusement in his face. She read the look and smiled back. It was no part of their plan to let the boy grow up alone. And as a mother she seemed to him far more beautiful than she had ever been.

"We are going to have a little paper with nursery-rhyme pictures all over it," explained Juliet. "There are all sorts of softly harmonising colours in it. And just a matting on the floor with a rug to play on, his white crib, and some gay little curtains at the windows."

"Have you made the partition double-thick, old man?" asked Lockwood. "This den-nursery combination strikes me as a little dubious."

"It's no use explaining to a fiendish old bachelor," said Anthony, leading the way out of the place, "that I'd think I was missing a good deal if I should get so far away that I couldn't hear little Tony laugh—or cry. Julie, where's the boy? May I bring him down?"

He disappeared upstairs, whence sounds of hilarity were at once heard. Presently he reappeared on the stairs, bearing aloft upon his shoulder a rosy cherub of a baby, smiling and waving a chubby fist at the

company. The beauty in his face was an exquisite mixture of that belonging to both father and mother. Anthony and his son together made a picture worth seeing.

Once more Wayne Carey smothered a sigh. But Judith hardened her heart. Since Baby Anthony had come Wayne had been difficult to manage.

Lockwood stayed after the others had gone. Sitting smoking before the fire with Anthony after Juliet had left them alone he brought the conversation around to a point which Anthony had expected.

“What do you hear of that man Huntington?” he asked, as indifferently as a man is ever able to ask a question which means much to him.

“Huntington? Why, the last was that he was improving a little, I believe. Arizona is a great place for that sort of thing.”

“Good deal of a sacrifice for her people to go with her way out there.”

“She couldn’t leave them behind. Father half-blind—mother a cripple. I understand that Arizona air is bracing them, too.”

“The fellow’s own mother was one of the party, wasn’t she?”

“I believe so. He’s all she has.”

“I don’t see, with all those people to chaperon her, why she couldn’t have gone along with him without marrying him,” observed Lockwood in a gruff tone.

Anthony smiled. “That would have been a Tantalus draught indeed,” he remarked. “I imagine poor Huntington will need all the concessions he can get if he keeps on breathing even Arizona air.”

"Anthony," said Lockwood, after a silence of some minutes, during which he had puffed away with his eyes intent on the fire, "do you fancy Rachel Redding cared enough for that man to immolate herself like that?"

"Looks very much like it."

"I know it looks like it; but if I read that girl right she was the sort to stick to anything she'd said she'd do, if it took the breath out of her body. How long had she known him—any idea?"

"A good while, I believe."

"I thought so. Early engagement, you see—ought never to have stood."

"If you'd been Huntington you'd probably have had the unreasonable notion that it should."

"She's a magnificent girl," said Lockwood, blowing a great volume of smoke into the air with head elevated and half-shut eyes. "She made those two who were here with her last summer seem like thirty cents beside her. Nice girls, too—fine girls—elegant dressers; I don't know what the matter was. Neither did they." He chuckled a little. "They couldn't believe their own eyes when they saw three of us going daft over a girl they wouldn't have staked a copper on in a free-for-all with themselves. They took it gamely, I'll say that for them. Marie won't have me back."

"I don't blame her."

"Neither do I. Haven't got to the want-to-be-taken-back stage—sometimes think I never shall. One experience like that spoils a man for the average girl. The truth is, Tony, the most of them—er—overdo the meet-you-half-way act. I want a girl to keep me

guessing till the last minute."

"Tell that to the girl," advised Anthony.

"I wish I could. Yet there were a good many times when I thought if Rachel Redding would just look my way I shouldn't take it ill of her. I wonder if she'd have been like that if she hadn't been engaged to another fellow."

"Probably." Anthony got up and stretched himself. He was growing weary of other men's confidences.

"You're right she would. She's built that way. Yet when you get to fancying what she'd be if she just let herself go and show she cared——"

"Look here, my young friend," said Anthony, "I advise you to go home and go to bed. Sitting here dreaming over Mrs. Alexander Huntington isn't good for you. What you want to be doing is to forget her. Huntington's going to get well, and they're going to live happily ever after, and you fellows out here can look up other girls. Plenty of 'em. Only, for the love of heaven, see if you can avoid all setting your affections on the same girl next time. It's too rough on your friends!"

XXII.—Roger Barnes Proves Invaluable

Time went swinging on, and by and by it came to be Tony Robeson, Junior's, second Christmas day. He rode down to breakfast on his father's shoulder, crowing loudly on a gorgeous brown and scarlet rooster, which he had found on his Christmas tree the evening before. He had been put to bed immediately thereafter and had gone to sleep with the rooster in his arms. The fowl had a charmingly realistic crow, operated by a pneumatic device upon which the baby had promptly learned to blow. He performed upon it uninterruptedly throughout breakfast.

"See here, my son," said Anthony, hurriedly finishing his coffee, "let's see if you can't appreciate some of your less voiceful toys. Here's a rabbit with fine soft ears for you to pull. There's a train of cars. Let me wind it for you. Your Grandfather Marcy must have expended several good dollars on that—you want to show up an interest in it when he comes out to see you to-day. And here's Auntie Dingley's pickaninny boy-doll—well, I don't blame you for failing to embrace that. Auntie Dingley was born in Massachusetts."





"Toys which can be relied upon to please a twenty months old infant.

The boy cast an indifferently polite eye on these gifts as their charms were exhibited to him, and clasped

the brown and scarlet rooster to his breast. There were moments, half hours even, when he became sufficiently diverted from his fowl to cease from making it crow, but at intervals throughout the day the family were given to understand once for all that it is not the most expensive and ornate toys which can be relied upon to please a twenty-months-old infant. Even the automobile presented by Dr. Roger Barnes, and warranted to go three times around the room without stopping, was a tame affair to the recipient compared with the rooster's shrill salute.

"Remember, Tony," Juliet had said, a month before Christmas, "you are not to give me any expensive personal gift this year. I care for nothing half so much as for making the home complete. If—if—you cared to give me something toward the bathroom fund——"

"All right," said Anthony promptly, for he had learned by this time to know his wife well. The bathroom fund was dear to her heart. The small room at the front of the house upstairs, which had been left unfurnished, had been temporarily fitted up as a bathroom by sundry ingenious devices in the way of a tin bath and a hot and cold water connection, but a full equipment of the best sort was to be put in as soon as practicable, and there was a growing fund therefor.

On Christmas morning, nevertheless, in addition to a generous addition to the fund, Juliet found beside her plate an exceedingly "personal gift" in the shape of a little pearl-and-turquoise brooch of rare design, bearing the stamp of a superior maker.

"Must I scold you?" she asked, smiling up at him as he stood beside her, watching her face flush with pleasure.

"Kiss me, instead," he answered promptly. "And don't expect me to give up making you now and then a real present, even though it has to be a small one. It's too much fun."

Beside his own plate he found her gift, a set of histories he had long wanted. It was a beautiful edition, and he would have looked reproachfully at the giver if she had not forestalled him by running around the table to say softly in his ear, both arms about his neck: "Just at Christmas time, dearest, let me have my way."

The day was a happy one. Mr. Horatio Marcy and Mrs. Dingley arrived on the morning train and stayed until evening. At the Christmas dinner Judith and Wayne Carey and Dr. Roger Barnes were the additional guests, and Mary McKaim was in the kitchen. Dinner over, everybody sat about the fireplace talking, when Juliet came in to carry little Tony off to bed.

"Five minutes more," begged Dr. Barnes, on whose knee the child sat, a willing captive to the arts of his entertainer. His eyes, bright with the excitement of this great day, were fixed upon the doctor's face.

"And so"—Barnes continued the story he had begun —"the rooster climbed right up the man's leg"—the toy obeyed his command and scaled the eminence from the floor where it had been hiding behind a Noah's ark—"and perched on his knee, and cried"— the rooster crowed lustily and little Tony laughed ecstatically. "Then the rooster flew up on the man's shoulder and flapped his wings, and all at once he fell right over backwards and tumbled on his head on the floor.—Got to go to bed, Tony? Shall the rooster go too? All right. May I carry him up for you, Juliet? Anthony's deep in that discussion. Get on my

back, old man—that's the way!"

Everybody looked after the two as the doctor mounted the stairs.

"That rooster has captivated the child more than all the mechanical toys he has had to-day," said Mrs. Dingley.

"What a handsome fellow he is," said Carey, his eyes following little Tony till he disappeared. "I never saw a healthier, happier child. How sturdy he is on his legs—have you noticed? He's saying a good many words, too. It was as good as a play to see him imitate that rooster."

Juliet's father and Mrs. Dingley left on an early evening train, and only the three younger guests remained when Juliet came downstairs after putting her boy to bed. She set about gathering up the toys scattered over the floor, and Barnes helped her. In the midst of this labour, during which they all made merry with some of the more elaborate mechanical affairs, Juliet suddenly said "What's that?" and went to the bottom of the stairs.

"Let me go," offered Anthony. "He's probably too excited to get to sleep easily after all this dissipation. —Hullo!—he's crowing with the rooster yet."

But Juliet went up, and he followed her, saying from the landing to his guests, "Excuse me for a little. I'll get the boy quiet, and let his mother come down. I've a fine talent for that sort of thing. That rooster will have to be given some soothing syrup—he's too lively a fowl."

"I never saw a man fonder of his youngster than Tony," Carey observed.

"The child is a particularly fine specimen," the

doctor said. “I think I never saw a more ideal development than he shows.”

He began to tell an incident in which little Tony had been involved, when he was interrupted.

“Barnes!”—called Anthony’s voice from the top of the stairs. “Come up here, please.”

There was something in the imperative quality of this summons which made the doctor run up the stairs, two at a time. Judith and Wayne listened. The rooster could still be heard crowing, faintly but distinctly.

“Perhaps he’s grown too excited over it,” Judith suggested. “They ought to take it away.”

Carey went to the bottom of the stairs and listened. There were rapid movements overhead. The doctor’s voice could be heard giving directions through which sounded the steady crowing of the toy. “Hold him so —now move him that way as I thump—now the other——”

Carey turned pale. “He’s got that rooster in his throat,” he said solemnly. The rooster was nearly life-size, but the incongruity of this suggestion did not strike him. Judith hastily rose from her chair and went to him.

“Had we better go up?” he whispered.

“Heavens—no!” Judith clutched his arm. “We couldn’t do any good. The doctor’s there. Such things make me ill. They ought not to have let him have the toy to take to bed with him. How could it get into his throat? Perhaps they are making it crow to divert him. Perhaps he’s hurt himself somehow.”

“He’s got the crow part of that thing in his throat,”

Carey persisted in an anxious whisper. “The manufacturers ought to be prosecuted for making a toy that will come apart like that.”

“Don’t stand there,” protested his wife. “Maybe it’s nothing. Come here and sit down.”

But Carey stood still. Presently Anthony came to the head of the stairs.

“Wayne,” said he rapidly, “telephone Roger’s office. Ask the trained nurse, Miss Hughes, to send a messenger with the doctor’s emergency surgical case by the first train—he can catch the 9:40 if he’s quick. Tell Miss Hughes to follow as soon as she can get ready, prepared to stay all night.”

Then he disappeared. His voice had been steady and quiet, but his eyes had showed his friend that the order was given under tension. Carey sprang to the telephone, and his hand shook as he took down the receiver.

Upstairs Roger Barnes, in command, was giving cool, concise orders, his eyes on his little patient. When he had despatched Juliet for various things, including boiling water which she must get downstairs, he said to Anthony in a conversational tone:

“It will probably not be safe to wait till my instruments get here, and there’s no surgeon near enough to call. I’m not going to take any chances on this boy. If I see the necessity I’m going to get into that throat and give him air. I shall want you and Carey to hold him. Juliet must be downstairs.”

Anthony nodded. He did not quite understand; but a few minutes later, when Juliet had brought the boiling water, he suddenly perceived what his friend meant.

"Alcohol, now, please," said the doctor. When Juliet had disappeared again Barnes drew from his pocket a pearl-handled pocket-knife and tried its blades. "It's a fortunate thing somebody made me a present of such a good one to-day," he observed, "but it needs sharpening a bit. Have you an oil-stone handy?"

With tightly shut lips Anthony watched the doctor put a bright edge on his smallest blade, then, satisfied, drop the open knife into the water bubbling over a spirit-lamp. Anthony turned his head away for an instant from the struggling little figure on the bed. Barnes eyed him keenly.

"You're game, of course?" he said.

Anthony's eyes met his and flashed fire. "Don't you know me better than that?"

"All right," and the young surgeon smiled. "But I've seen a medical man himself go to pieces over his own child. This is a simple matter," he went on lightly. "Luckily, boiling water is a more potent antiseptic than all the drugs on the market—and alcohol's another. I shall want a new hairpin or two —if Juliet has a wire one.—That the alcohol? Thank you. Now if you've the hairpins, Juliet—ah—a silver one—all the better."

This also he dropped into the boiling water. Then he spoke very quietly to Tony's mother, as she bent over her child, fighting for his breath.

"It's a bit tough to watch," he said, "but we'll have him all right presently. Suppose you go and get his crib ready for him. You might fill some hot-water bags and bottles and have things warm and comfortable."

The telephone-bell rang below. After a minute Carey

dashed upstairs. He looked into the room and spoke anxiously. “The messenger just missed the 9:40. He and the nurse will come on the 10:15.”

“All right,” said the doctor, as if the delay were of small consequence. “We’re going to want your help presently, Carey, I think. Just ask Mrs. Carey to keep Mrs. Robeson with her for a few minutes, if she can.”

Carey went down and gave his wife the message, then he hurried back and stood waiting just outside the door. And all at once the summons came. In a breath the doctor had changed his rôle. He spoke sharply:

“*Now, Robeson—now, Carey—we’ve waited up to the limit. Keep cool—hold him like a rock—*”

Wayne Carey came down to his wife, ten minutes later, smiled tremulously, sank into a chair, and fell to crying like a baby—softly, so that he could not be heard.

“But Juliet says he’ll be all right,” murmured Judith unsteadily.

“Yes, yes——” Carey wiped his eyes and blew his nose. “I’m just a little unnerved, that’s all. Lord—and he’s dropped off to sleep as quiet as a lamb—with Barnes holding the gash in his throat open with a hairpin to let the air in. When it comes to emergency surgery I tell you it’s a lucky thing to have an expert in the house. Completely worn out—the little chap. When the nurse comes they’ll get out the whistle and sew the place up. She ought to be here—I’ll go meet that train.”

He sprang to his feet and hurried out of the house. Presently he was back, followed by an erect young woman who wore a long coat over the uniform she

had not taken time to change. Carey carried the long black bag she had brought with her.

By and by Anthony and Roger Barnes came down. The former was pale, but as quietly composed as ever; the latter nonchalant, yet wearing that gleam of satisfaction in his eye which is ever the badge of the successful surgeon.

“Well, Mrs. Carey,” said the doctor, smiling, “why not relax that tension a bit? The youngster is right as a trivet.”

“I suppose that’s your idea of being right as a trivet,” Judith retorted. “In bed, with a trained nurse watching you, and a doctor staying all night to make sure.”

“Bless you—what better would you have? If it were any other boy the doctor would have been home and in bed an hour ago, I assure you. Carey—if you don’t stop acting like a great fool I’ll put you to bed too.”

For Carey was wringing Barnes’ hand, and the tears were running unashamed down his cheeks. “I gave him that rooster myself,” he said, and choked.

Upstairs all was quiet. The little life was safe, rescued at the crucial moment when interference became necessary, by the skill and daring which do not hesitate to use the means at hand when the authorized tools can not be had. Every precaution had been taken against harm from these same unconventional means, and the doctor, when he left his patient in the hands of his nurse, felt small anxiety for the ultimate outcome.

He said this very positively to the boy’s father and mother, holding a hand of each and bidding them go peacefully to sleep. He would have slipped away

then, but they would not let him go. There were no tears, no fuss; but Juliet said, her eyes with their heavy shadows of past suspense meeting his steadily, "Roger, nothing can ever tell you what I feel about this," and Anthony, gripping his friend's hand with a grip of steel, added: "We shall never thank the Lord enough for having you on hand, Roger Barnes."

But when the young surgeon had gone, warm with pleasure over the service he had done those he loved this night, the ones he had left behind found their self-control had reached the ragged edge. Turning to her husband Juliet flung herself into his arms, and met there the tenderest reception she had ever known. So does a common anxiety knit hearts which had thought they could be no tighter bound.

Judith and Wayne Carey, walking along silent streets in the early dawn of the day after Christmas on their way to take their train home, had little to say. Only once Judith ventured an observation to her heavy-eyed companion:

"Surely, such a scene as you went through last night must diminish a trifle that envy you are always possessed with, when you're at that house."

But Wayne, staring up at the wintry sky, answered, more roughly than his wife had ever heard him speak: "*No*—God knows I envy them even at a time like this!"

XXIII.—Two Not of a Kind

"Yes, they are very pleasant rooms," Juliet admitted, with the air of one endeavouring to be polite. She sat upon a many-hued divan, and glanced from the blue-and-yellow wall-paper to the green velvet chairs, the dull-red carpet and the stiff "lace" curtains. "You get the afternoon sun, and the view opposite isn't bad. The vestibule seemed to be well kept, and I rang only three times before I made you hear."

"The janitor promised to fix that bell," said Judith hastily. "Oh, I know the colour combinations are dreadful, but one can't help that in rented rooms. Of course our things look badly with the ones that belong here. But as soon as we can we are going to move into a still better place."

"Going to keep house?"

"No-o, not just yet." Judith hesitated. "You seem to think there's nothing in the world to do but to keep house."

"I'm sure of it."

"I can't see why. A girl doesn't need to assume all the cares of life the minute she marries. Why can't she keep young and fresh for a while?"

Juliet glanced toward a mirror opposite. "How old and haggard I must be looking," she observed, with —it must be confessed—a touch of complacency. The woman who could have seen that image reflected as her own without complacency must have been indifferent, indeed.

"Of course, you manage it somehow—I suppose because Anthony takes such care of you. But you

wait till five years more have gone over your head, and see if you're not tired of it."

"If I'm as tired of it as you are—" began Juliet, and stopped. "But seriously, Judith, is it nothing to you to please Wayne?"

"Why, of course." Judith flushed. "But Wayne is satisfied."

"Are you sure of it?"

"Certainly. Oh, sometimes, when we go to see you, and you make things so pleasant with your big fire and your good things to eat, he gets a spasm of wishing we were by ourselves, but——"

Juliet shook her head. "Wayne doesn't say a word," she said, "and he's as devoted to you as a man can be. But, Judith, if I know the symptoms, that husband of yours is starving for a home, and—do I dare say it?"

Judith was staring out of the window at the ugly walls opposite. It was her bedroom window, and the opposite walls were not six feet away.

"I suppose you dare say anything," she answered, looking as if she were about to cry. "I'm sure I envy you, you're so supremely contented. I don't think I was made to care for children."

"That might come," said Juliet softly. "I'm sure it would, Judith. As for Wayne, if you could see the look on his face I've surprised there more than once, when he had little Anthony, and he thought nobody noticed, it would make your heart ache, dear. Don't deny him—or yourself—the best thing that can happen to either of you. At least, don't deny it for lack of a home. I'm sure I can't imagine Tony, Junior, in these rooms of yours. They don't look,"

she explained, smiling, “exactly babyish.”

She rose to go. She looked so young and fair and sweet as she spoke her gentle homily that Judith, half doubting, half believing, admitted to herself that of one thing there could be no question: Mrs. Anthony Robeson envied nobody upon the face of the earth.

The visits of the Robesons to the various apartments which were in rotation occupied by the Careys were few. Somehow it seemed much easier and simpler for the pair who had no children, and no housekeeping to hamper them, to run out into the suburbs than for their friends to get into town. So the Careys came with ever increasing frequency, always warmly welcomed, and enjoyed the hours within the little house so thoroughly that in time the influence of the content they saw so often began to have its inevitable effect.

“I’ve great news for you,” said Anthony, coming home one March day, when little Tony was nearing his second birthday. “It’s about the Careys. Guess.”

“They are going to housekeeping.”

“How did you know?”

“I didn’t know, but Judith told me weeks ago she supposed she should have to come to it. Have they found a house?”

“Carey thinks he has. Judith doesn’t like the place, for about fifty good and sufficient reasons—to her. He’s trying to persuade her. He has an option on it for ten days. He wants us to come out and look at it with them.”

“Where is it?”

"About as far east of the city as we are north. If to-morrow is a good day I promised we would run out with them on the ten-fifteen. I suspect they need us badly. Wayne looks like a man distracted. The great trouble, I fancy, is going to be that Judith Dearborn Carey is still too much of a Dearborn to be able to make a home out of anything. And Carey can't do it alone."

"Indeed he can't, poor fellow. I never saw a man in my life who wanted a home as badly as Wayne does. Let's do our best to help them."

"We will. But the only way to do it thoroughly is to make Judith over. Even you can't accomplish that."

"There's hope, if she has agreed at all to trying the experiment," Juliet declared, and thought about her friends all the rest of the day.

It was but five minutes' walk, from the suburban station where the party got off next morning, to the house which Carey eagerly pointed out as the four approached.

"There it is," he said. "Don't tell me what you think of it till you've seen the whole thing. I know it doesn't look promising as yet, but I keep remembering the photographs of your home, Robeson, before you went at it. I'm inclined to think this can be made right, too."

Anthony and Juliet studied Carey's choice with interest. Judith looked on dubiously. It was plain that if she should consent it would be against her will.

"It looks so commonplace and ugly," she said aside to Juliet, as the four completed the tour around the house and prepared to enter. "Your home is old-

fashioned enough to be interesting, but this is just modern enough to be ugly. Look at that big window in front with the cheap coloured glass across the top. What could you do with that?"

"Several things," said her friend promptly. "You might put in a row of narrow casement windows across the front, with diamond panes. No—the porch isn't attractive with all that gingerbread work, but you could take it away and have something plain and simple. The general lines of the house are not bad. It has been an old-fashioned house, Judith, but somebody who didn't know how has altered it and spoiled it. People are always doing that. There must have been a fanlight over this door. You could restore it. And do you see that quaint round window in the gable? Probably they looked at that and longed to do away with it, but happily for you didn't know how."

Carey glanced curiously at his friend's wife, then anxiously at his own. Juliet's face was alight with interest; Judith's heavy with dissatisfaction. He wondered for the thousandth time what made the difference. He would have given a year's salary to see Judith look interested in this desire of his heart. It was hard to push a thing like this against the will of the only person whose help he could not do without. Carey was determined to have the home. Even Judith acknowledged that she had not been happy in any of the seven apartments they had tried during the less than four years of their married life. Carey believed with all his heart that their only chance for happiness lay in getting away from a manner of living which was using up every penny he could earn without giving them either satisfaction or comfort. His salary would not permit him to rent the

sort of thing in the sort of neighbourhood which Judith longed for. And if it should, he did not believe his wife would find such environments any more congenial than the present one. Carey had a theory that a woman, like a man, must be busy to be contented. He meant to try it with his handsome, discontented wife.

“Oh, what a pretty hall!” cried Mrs. Robeson, with enthusiasm. “How lucky that the vandals who made the house over didn’t lay their desecrating hands on that staircase.”

“The hall looks gloomy to me,” said Mrs. Carey, with a disapproving glance at the walls.

“Of course—with that dingy brown paper and the woodwork stained that hideous imitation of oak. You can scrape all that off, paint it white, put on a warm, rich paper, restore your fanlight, and you’ll have a particularly attractive hall.”

“I wish I could see things that are not visible, as you seem to be able to,” sighed Judith, looking unconvinced. “I never did like a long, straight staircase like that. And there’s not room to make a turn.”

“You don’t want to, do you? It’s so wide and low it doesn’t need to turn, and the posts and rails are extremely good. How about this front room?”

She stood in the center of the front room, and the two men, watching her vivid face as it glowed above her furs, noting the capable, womanly way she had of looking at the best side of everything and discerning in a flash of imagination and intuition what could be done with unpromising material, appreciated her with that full masculine appreciation which it is so well worth the trouble of any woman

to win.

Judith was not blind; she saw little by little as Juliet went from room to room—seizing in each upon its possibilities, ignoring its poorer features except to suggest their betterment, giving her whole-hearted, friendly counsel in a way which continually took the prospective homemakers into consideration—that she herself was losing something immeasurably valuable in not attempting to cultivate these same winning characteristics. And in the same breath Judith was forced to admit to herself that she did not know how to begin.

"There is really a very pretty view from the dining-room," she said, as a first effort at seeing something to admire. Both Juliet and Anthony agreed to this statement with a cordiality which came very near suggesting that it was a relief to find Mrs. Carey on the optimistic side of the discussion even in this small detail. As for Carey, he looked so surprised and grateful that Judith's heart smote her with a vigour to which she was unaccustomed.

"I suppose you could use this room as a sort of den?" she was prompted to suggest to her husband; and such a delighted smile illumined Carey's face that the sight of it was almost pathetic to his friends, who understood his situation rather better than he did himself. In his pleasure Carey put his arm about his wife's shoulders.

"Couldn't I, though?" he agreed enthusiastically. "And you could use it for a retreat while I was away for the day."

"A retreat from what? Too much excitement?" began Judith, the old habit of scorn of everything which was not of the city returning upon her irresistibly.

But it chanced that she caught Juliet's eyes, unconsciously wearing such an expression of solicitude to see her friend complaisant in this matter which meant so much, that Judith hurriedly followed her ironic question with the more kindly supplement: "But doubtless I should have plenty, and be glad to get away."

"You certainly would," asserted Anthony. "We never guessed how much there would be to occupy us in the country, but there seems hardly time to write letters. Nobody can believe, till he tries, how much pleasure there is in wheedling a garden into growing, nor how well the labour makes him sleep o' nights."

"Yes—I think I could sleep here," said Carey, and passed a hand over a brow which was aching at that very moment. "I haven't done that satisfactorily for six months."

"You'll do it here," Anthony prophesied confidently. "It's a fine air with a good breath of the salt sea in it, which we don't get. Your sleeping rooms are all well aired and lighted—a thing you don't always find in more pretentious houses. And when the paint and paper go on you'll own yourselves surprised at the transformation. I was never so astonished in my life as I was at the change in the little bedroom in our house which has that pale yellow-and-white stripe on the wall. It was a north room, and the old wall was a forlorn slate, like a thundercloud. My little artist here, with her eye for colours, instantly announced that she would get the sunshine into that room. And so she did—with no more potent a charm than that fifteen-cent paper and a fresh coat of white paint."

Carey looked at Juliet with longing in his eye. He wanted to ask her to supervise the alterations in his purchase, if he should make it. But he remembered

other occasions when he had held the sayings and doings of Mrs. Robeson before the eyes of Mrs. Carey with disastrous result, and he dared not make the suggestion. He hoped, however, that Judith might be inclined to ask the assistance of her friend, and himself hinted at it, cautiously. But Judith, beyond inquiring what Juliet thought of certain possible changes, seemed inclined to shoulder her own responsibilities.

Anthony left his wife upon the home-bound train, to return to his work; the Careys accompanied him, so that he had no chance to talk things over until he came home to dinner at night. But when he saw Juliet again almost her first words showed him where her thoughts were.

“Tony, I can’t get those people off my mind. Do you suppose they will ever make a home out of anything?”

“They haven’t much genius for utilizing raw material, I’m very much afraid,” Anthony responded thoughtfully. “Carey has the will, and he can furnish a moderate amount of funds, but whether Judith can furnish anything but objections and contrariety I don’t dare to predict. If her heart were in it I should have more hope of her. There’s one thing I can tell her. If she doesn’t set her soul to the giving the old boy a taste of peace and rest she’ll have him worn out before his time. A fellow who doesn’t know how it feels to sleep soundly, and whose head bothers him half the time, needs looking after. He’s a slave to his office desk, and needs far more than an active chap like me to get out of the city as much as he can.”

“Yes, he’s worried and restless, Tony. He’s so devoted to Judith and so anxious to make her happy, her dissatisfaction rests on him like a weight. Don’t you

see that every time you see them together?"

"Every time—and more plainly. What's the matter with her anyhow, Julie? She seemed promising enough as a girl. You certainly found enough in her to make you two congenial. She's no more like you than—electric light is like sunshine," said Anthony, picking up the simile with a laugh and a glance of appreciation.

"Judith shines in the surroundings she was born and brought up in, misses them, and doesn't know how to adapt herself to any others. She ought to have been the wife of some high official—she could entertain royally and have everybody at her feet."

"Magnificent characteristics, but mighty unavailable in the present circumstances. It carries out my electric-light comparison. I prefer the sunlight—and I have it.—Poor Carey!"

"We'll hope," said Juliet. "And if we have the smallest chance to help, we'll do it."

But, as Anthony had anticipated, there was small chance to help. Meeting Carey a fortnight later, Anthony inquired after the new home, and Carey replied with apparent lack of enthusiasm that the house had been leased for a term of three years, with refusal of the purchase at the expiration of the time. He explained that Judith had been unwilling to burn her bridges by buying the place outright, and that he thought perhaps the present plan was the better one —under these conditions. But the fact that the house was not their own made it seem unwise to expend very much upon alterations beyond those of paint and paper. With the prospect of a sale the owner had unwillingly consented to replace the gingerbread porch with one in better style, but refused to do

more. The big window, with its abominable topping of cheap coloured glass, was to remain for the present.

"And I think this whole arrangement is bound to defeat my purpose," said Carey unhappily. "The very changes we can't afford to make in a rented house are the ones Judith needs to have made to reconcile her to the experiment. She says she feels ill every time she comes to the house and sees that window. She wants a porcelain sink in the kitchen. She would like speaking-tubes and a system of electric bells. We're to have a servant—if we can find her. We've put green paper on all the downstairs rooms, and it turns out the wrong green. I wanted a sort of corn-colour that looked more cheerful, but it seems green is the only thing. I don't know what's the matter with me. Perhaps I'm bilious. Green seems to be all right in your house, but in mine it makes me want to go outdoors."

"That's precisely what you should do," Anthony advised cheerfully. "Get outdoors all you can. Start your garden. Mow your lawn yourself. Make over that gravel path to your front door."

"I've only evenings," objected Carey. "And we're not settled yet. The paper's only just on. We haven't moved. We're buying furniture. We bought a sideboard yesterday. It cost so much we had to get a cheaper range for the kitchen than seemed desirable, but Judith liked the sideboard so well I was glad to buy it. I don't know when we shall get to living there permanently. This furnishing business knocks me out. We don't seem to know what we want. I'd like —" he hesitated—"I hoped Mrs. Robeson might be able to give us the advantage of her experience, but it turns out that Judith has a sort of pride in doing it

herself, and of course—I presume you made some mistakes yourselves, eh?" He suggested this with eagerness.

"Oh, of course," agreed Anthony readily, though he wondered what they were, and inwardly begged Juliet's pardon for this answer, given out of masculine sympathy with his friend's helplessness. "You'll come out all right," he hastily assured Carey. "Once you are living in the new place things will adjust themselves. Keep up your courage. Your daily walk to and from the train will do wonders. Lack of exercise will make a rainbow look gloomy to a fellow. I think you've great cause for rejoicing that Judith has agreed to try the experiment at all. And as with all experiments, you must be patient while it works itself out."

"That's so," agreed Carey, a gleam of hope in his eyes; and Anthony got away. But by himself the happier man shook his head doubtfully. "Where everything depends on the woman," he said to himself, "and you've married one that her Maker never fashioned for domestic joys, you're certainly up against a mighty difficult proposition!"

XXIV.—The Careys Are at Home

Wayne and Judith Carey had been keeping house for two months before Judith was willing to accede to

her husband's often repeated request that they entertain the Robesons.

"We've been there, together and separately, till it's a wonder their hospitality doesn't freeze up," he urged. "Let's have them out to-morrow night, and keep them over till next day, at least. I'd like to have them sleep under this roof. They'd bring us good luck."

"One would think the Robesons were the only people worth knowing," said Judith, with a petulance of which she had the grace, as her husband stared at her, to be ashamed.

"They're the truest friends we have in the world," he said, with a dignity of manner unusual with him. "Sometimes I think they are the only people worth knowing—out of all those on your calling list."

"We differ about that. Your ideas of who are worth knowing are very peculiar. Heaven knows I'm fond of Juliet, but I get decidedly tired of having her held up as a model. And I haven't been anxious to entertain her until we were in order."

"We're certainly as much in order now as we shall be for some time. Let's have them out. You'll find they'll see everything there is to praise. It's their way."

So Anthony and Juliet were asked, and came. Wayne's prophecy was proven a true one—even Judith grew complacent as her friends admired the result of her house-furnishing. And in truth there was much to admire. Judith was a young woman of taste and more or less discretion, and if she could have had full sway in her purchasing the result might have been admirable. As it was, the unspoken criticism in the minds of both the guests, as they followed their hosts about the house, was that Judith had struck a key-note in her construction of a home a little too

ambitious to be wholly satisfactory.

"I believe in buying the best of everything as far as you go," she said, indicating a particularly costly lounging chair in a corner of the living-room. "Of course that was very expensive, but it will always be right, and we can get others to go with it. The bookcases were another high-priced purchase, but they give an air to the room worth paying for."

"I've only one objection to this room," said Wayne with some hesitation. "As Judith says, the things in it seem to be all right, and it certainly looks in good taste, if I'm any judge, but—I don't know just how to explain it——" he hesitated again, and smiled deprecatingly at his wife.

"Speak out," said Judith. She was in a very good humour, for her guests had shown so fine a tact in their commendation that she was in quite a glow of satisfaction, and for the first time felt the pleasure of the hostess in an attractive home. "It can't be a serious objection, for you've liked every single thing we've put into it."

"Indeed I have," agreed Carey, eagerly glancing about the brilliantly lit room. "I like it all awfully well—especially in the daylight. The corner by the window is a famous place for reading. But, you see, I'm so little here in the daytime, except on Sundays. Of course I know we lack the fireplace that makes your living-room jolly, but it seems as if we lack something besides that we might have, and for the life of me I can't tell what it is."

Anthony knew by a certain curve in the corner of his wife's mouth that she longed to tell him what it was. For himself, he could not discover. He studied the room searchingly and was unable to determine why,

attractive as it really was, it certainly did, upon this cool May evening, lack the look of warm comfort and hospitality of which his own home was so full.

“Possibly it’s because everything is so new,” he ventured. “Rooms come to have a look of home, you know, just by living in them and leaving things about. It’s a pretty room, all right, and I fancy it will take on the friendly expression you want when you get to strewing your books and magazines around a little more, and laying your pipe down on the corner of the mantel-piece, you know—and all that. I can upset things for you in half a minute if you’ll give me leave.”

“You have my full permission,” said Judith, laughing. “I fancy it’s just as you say: Wayne isn’t used to it yet. He always likes his old slippers better than the handsomest new ones I can buy him. Come—dinner has been served for five minutes. No more artistic suggestions till afterward.”

The dinner was perfect. It should have been so, for a caterer was in the kitchen, and a hired waitress served the viands without disaster. As a delectable meal it was a success; as an exhibition of Mrs. Carey’s capacity for home making, it was something of a failure. It certainly did not for a moment deceive the guests. For the life of her, as Juliet tasted course after course of the elaborate meal, she could not help reckoning up what it had cost. Neither could she refrain from wondering what sort of a repast Judith would have produced without help.

After dinner, as Wayne and Anthony smoked in front of the fireless mantel-piece in the den, each in a more luxurious chair than was to be found in Anthony’s whole house, Judith took Juliet to task.

"You may try to disguise it," she complained, "but I've known you too long not to be able to read you. You would rather have had me cook that dinner myself and bring it in, all red and blistered from being over the stove."

"As long as the dinner wasn't red and blistered you wouldn't have been unhappy," Juliet returned lightly. "But you mustn't think that she who entertains may read my ingenuous face, my dear. It isn't necessary that I attempt to convert the world to my way of thinking. And I haven't told you that when Auntie Dingley goes abroad with father again this winter I'm to have Mary McKaim for eight whole months. I can assure you I know how to appreciate the comfort of having a competent cook in the kitchen."

She got up and crossed the room. "Judith, what an exquisite lamp," she observed. "I'd forgotten that you had it. Was it one of your wedding presents?"

Judith followed her to where she stood examining an imposing, foreign-looking lamp, with jeweled inlets in the hand-wrought metal shade. "Yes," she said carelessly, "it's pretty enough. I don't care much for lamps."

"Not to read by?"

"It's bright enough for anybody but a blind man to read, here." Judith glanced at the ornate chandelier of electric lights in the centre of the ceiling. "The rooms aren't so high that the lights are out of reach for reading."

"But this is beautiful. Have you never used it?"

"It might be used with an electric connection, I suppose. No, I've never used it as an oil lamp. I hate

kerosene oil."

"But you have some in the house?"

"Oh, yes, I think so. Wayne insisted on getting some little hand-lamps. Something's always happening to the wires out here. That's one of the numerous joys of living in the suburbs."

"Let's fill this and try it," Juliet suggested, turning a pair of very bright eyes upon her friend. "If you've never lit it I don't believe you've half appreciated it. You're neglecting one of the prettiest sources of decoration you have in the house. Out of sympathy for the giver, whoever he was, you ought to let his gift have a chance to show you its beauty."

"Stevens Cathcart gave it to us, I believe," said Judith. "Here, let me have it. I'll fill it, since you insist. But I never thought very much of it. It was put away in a closet until we came here. It took up so much room I never found a place for it."

"Mr. Cathcart gave it to you? That proves my point, that it's worth admiring. If there's a connoisseur in things of this sort, it's he. He probably picked it up in some out-of-the-ordinary European shop."

Smiling to herself, as if something gave her satisfaction, Juliet awaited the return of her hostess. She understood, from the manner of Judith's exit with the lamp, that the free and easy familiarity with which guests invaded every portion of Anthony's little home, was not to be made a precedent for the same sort of thing in Judith's.

The lamp reappeared, accompanied by a lamentation over the disagreeable qualities of kerosene oil for any use whatever.

"You can put electricity into this and use it as a drop-

light, if you prefer," said Juliet, as she lit it and adjusted the shade. "May I set it on the big table over here? Right in the center, please, if you don't mind moving that bowl of carnations. There!—Of course you can send it back to oblivion over there on the bookcase if you really don't like it.—But you do like it—don't you?"

"It's handsomer than I thought it was," Judith admitted without enthusiasm. Juliet glanced up at the blazing chandelier overhead.

"May I turn off some of this light?" she asked. "You won't get the full beauty of your lamp till you give it a chance by itself."

Judith assented. Juliet snapped off three out of the four lights, and smiled mischievously at her friend. Then she extinguished the fourth, so that the only luminary left in the room was the lamp. Judith groaned.

"Maybe you like a gloomy room like this. I don't. Look at it. I can hardly see anything in the corners."

"Wait a little bit. You're so used to the glare your eyes are not good for seeing what I mean. Study the lamp itself a minute. Did you ever see anything so fascinating as the gleam through those jewels? An electric bulb inside would add to the brilliancy, though it's not so soft a light to read by, and the effect in the room isn't so warm. Observe those carnations under the lamplight, honey? Come over here to the doorway and look at your whole room under these new conditions. Isn't it charming?—enticing?—Let's draw that lovely Morris chair up close to the table, as if you were expecting Wayne to come in and read the evening paper by the lamp. *There!*"

Juliet softly clapped her hands, her face shining with friendly enthusiasm. There could be no question that the whole room, as she had said, had taken on a new look of homelike comfort and cheer which it had lacked before. Even Judith was forced to see it.

"It looks very well," she admitted. "But I should have more light from above. I like plenty of light."

"So do I, if you manage it well." Whereupon the guest, having gained her point and made sufficient demonstration of it, turned the conversation into other channels. But the lamp was not yet through with its position of reformer. The two men, having finished their cigars, and hearing sounds of merriment from the adjoining room, came strolling in. Anthony, comprehending at a glance the change which had come over the aspect of the room and the cause thereof, advanced, smiling. But Carey came to a standstill upon the threshold, his lips drawn into an astonished whistle.

"What's happened?" he ejaculated, and stood staring.

"Do you like it?" asked his wife.

"I should say I did. But what's done it? What makes the room look so different? It looks—why it looks like your rooms!" he cried, gazing at Anthony.

"He can say nothing more flattering than that," said Judith, evidently not altogether pleased. "It's the highest compliment he knows."

Carey stared at the lamp. "I didn't know we had that," he said. "Is it that that does it?"

"I fancy it is," said Anthony. "I never understood it till I was taught, but it seems to be a fact that a low light in a room gives it a more homelike effect than a high one. I don't know why. It's one of my wife's pet

theories."

"Well, I must say this is a pretty convincing demonstration of it," Carey agreed, sitting down in a chair in a corner, his hands in his pockets, still studying this, to him, remarkable transformation. "It certainly does look like a happy home now. Before, it was a place to receive calls in." He turned, smiling contentedly, to his wife. Something about the glance which she returned warned him that further admiration was unnecessary. The contented smile faded a little. He got up and came over to the table. "Now, let's have a good four-handed talk," he proposed.

Two hours later, in the seclusion of the guest-room upstairs, Anthony said under his breath:

"They're coming on, aren't they? Don't you see glimmerings of hope that some day this will resemble a home, in a sort of far-off way? Isn't Judith becoming domesticated a trifle? She didn't get up that dinner?"

Juliet turned upon him a smiling face, and laid her finger on her lip. "Don't tempt me to discuss it," she warned him. "My feelings might run away with me, and that would never do under their very roof."

"Exemplary little guest! May I say as much as this, then? I'd give a good deal to see Wayne speak his mind once in a way, without a side glance to see if Her Royal Majesty approves."

But Juliet shook her head. "Don't tempt me," she begged again. "There's something inside of me that boils and boils with rage, and if I should just take the cover off——"

"Might I get scalded? All right—I'll leave the cover

on. Just one observation more. When I get inside our own four walls again I'm going to give a tremendous whoop of joy and satisfaction that'll raise the roof right off the house!"

XXV.—The Robeson Will

When people are busy and happy the years may go by like a dream. So the months rolled around and brought little Tony past the third anniversary of his birth, and into another summer of lusty development. Except to the growing child, however, time seemed to bring slight changes to the little home under whose roof he grew. The mistress thereof lost no charm either for her husband or her friends—Anthony indeed insisted that she grew younger; certainly, as time taught her new lessons without laying hands upon her beauty, she gained attractiveness in every way.

"You look as much like a girl as ever," Anthony said to her one morning, as dressed for a trip into town she came out upon the porch where he and little Tony were frolicing together.

"You had ever a sweetly blarneying tongue," said she, and bestowed a parting caress impartially upon both the persons before her. "I feel a bit guilty at making a nursemaid of you for even one morning of your vacation, but——"

"That's all right. Do your errands with an easy conscience. I'll enjoy looking after the boy, and am rather glad your usual little maid is away. That's one thing my vacation is for—to get upon a basis of mutual understanding and confidence with my son. We see too little of each other."

So Juliet caught the early car, and left the two male Robesons together, father and son, waving good-bye to her from the porch. When she was out of sight the elder Robeson turned to the younger.

"Now, son," he said, "I'm going to mow the lawn. What are you going to do?"

"I is going to mow lawn, too," announced Tony, Junior, with decision.

"All right, sir. Here we are. Get in front of me and mind you push hard. That's the stuff!"

All went joyously for ten minutes. Then little Tony wriggled out from between his father's arms and went over to the porch step. He sat down and crossed two fat legs. He leaned his head upon his hand, his elbow on his knee, and watched with serious eyes the progress of the lawn-mower three times across before he said wistfully:

"Favver, I wis' you'd p'ay wiv me."

"When I get this job done perhaps I will," said Anthony, and made the grass fly merrily. Presently he put away the lawn-mower, and stood looking down at the sturdy little figure in the blue Russian blouse. "What do you want to play?" he asked. Tony's face lit up.

"Le's play fire-endjun," he proposed enthusiastically.

"Where shall we play the fire is?"

"Le's have weal fire," said Tony eagerly.

"Real fire? Well, I don't know about that, son," his father responded doubtfully. "Young persons of three are not considered old enough to play with the real thing. Won't make believe do just as well?"

"No, no—weal fire," repeated the child. "Le's put it out wiv sqi'yt watto. P'ease, favver—p'ease!"

"Sqi'wt watto," repeated Anthony, laughing. "What do you mean by——? Oh, I see——" as Tony demonstrated his meaning by running to the garden hose which remained attached to a hydrant behind the house. "Well, son—if I let you have a real fire and put it out with real water, will you promise me never to try anything of that sort by yourself?"

Tony walked over to his father and laid a little brown fist in Anthony's. "Aw wight," he said solemnly. Anthony looked down at the clasped hands and smiled at the serious uplifted face. "Is that the way mother teaches you to promise her?" he asked, with interest.

Tony nodded. "Aw wight," he said. "Come on. Le's make fire!"

The fire was made, out of a packing-box brought up from the cellar. It burned realistically down by the orchard, and was only discovered by chance when Anthony Robeson, Junior, happened to glance that way.

"*Fire!—fire!*" he shouted, and alarmed the fire company, who, as fire companies should be, were ready to start on the instant. The hose-cart, propelled by a pair of stout legs, made a gallant dash down the edge of the garden, followed by the hook-and-ladder company, their equipment just three feet long. It

took energetic and skilful work to quench the conflagration, which raged furiously and made plenty of good black smoke. The fire chief rushed dramatically about, ordering his men with ringing commands. Once he stubbed his bare toe and fell, and for a moment it looked as though he must cry, but like the brave fellow that he was he smothered his pain behind an uplifted elbow, and in a moment was again in the thick of the fray. His men obeyed him with admirable promptitude, although, contrary to the usual custom of fire chiefs, he himself took hold of the hose and poured its volume upon the blazing structure.

When the fire was out the chief, breathless, his blue blouse bearing the marks of the encounter with flood and flame, sat down upon the overturned hose-cart and beamed upon his company.

“Vat was awful nice fire,” he said. “Le’s have anuver.”

“Another? Oh, no,” protested the company, hastily. “No more of that just now. Pick up your hook-and-ladder wagon and put it back where it belongs. I’ll see to the hose.”

Anthony gently displaced the fire chief and rolled away the hose. Then he looked back down the garden and saw his son poking among the ruins of the fire. “Come here, Tony,” he called, “and bring the hook-and-ladder.”

Tony came slowly, but without the toy wagon. Anthony stood still. When the boy reached him he said, “Why didn’t you bring the hook-and-ladder cart?”

“’Cause I’m ve chief,” Tony responded gravely. “My mens’ll bring ve cart.”

"Your men aren't there. You'll have to bring it yourself."

Tony shook his head. "I'm ve chief," he repeated, and looked his father in the eye. Anthony understood. It was not the first time. There were moments in one's experience with Anthony Robeson, Junior, when one seemed to encounter a deadlock in the child's will. Reasoning and commands were apt at such times to be alike futile. The odd thing about it was that it was impossible to predict when these moments were at hand. They arose without warning, when the boy was apparently in the best of tempers, and they did not seem to be the result of any previous mismanagement on the part of those in authority over him.

Of one point Anthony, Senior, was sure. The child, like all children, and possibly more than most, possessed a vivid imagination. When he announced himself to be a fire chief, there could be no question that he believed himself to be for the time that which he pretended to be. His father understood, therefore, that to make progress with the boy it was necessary to get back to the standpoint of reality before commands could be expected to take hold. So he sat down on a rustic seat near Juliet's roses and spoke in a pleasantly matter-of-fact way.

"Yes, you've been a fire chief, son, and a good one. That was a great game. But the game is over now, and you're not a fire chief any more. You're Tony Robeson, and the little hook-and-ladder cart is your plaything. Father wants you to bring it here and put it in its place in the house. It looks a little bit like rain, and the cart mustn't be left out to get wet. See?"

But Tony still shook his head. "My men'll put it in,"

he said, with calmness undisturbed.

“You haven’t any men. You played there were some, but the play is over and there aren’t any men. If you don’t put the cart in it may get wet.”

“I’m ve chief,” said little Tony. “Chiefs don’t draw carts.”

“When they’ve turned back to little boys they do. You’ve turned back to a little boy.”

“No, I hasn’t,” said Tony, and his eyes met his father’s unflinchingly. “I’s going to be a chief all ve time.”

The argument seemed unanswerable. Anthony considered swiftly what to do. He studied the grave brown eyes an instant in silence, their beauty and the inflexibility in their depths appealing to him with equal force. He loved the tough little will. He recognised it as his own—the same powerful quality which had brought him thus far on the road to fortune after being landed at the furthermost end from the goal. He would not for worlds deal with his son’s will in any but the way which should seem to him wisest.

He rose from his seat. He spoke quietly but with force. “Very well,” he said. “If you’re still a fire chief, of course you’re too big to play. I’m much obliged to you for putting out my fire. But now that it’s out I don’t want your hook-and-ladder in my garden any longer. When your men take it away I shall be glad. But of course we can’t play any more till you stop being a fire chief and the hook-and-ladder is back in its corner in the nursery. Good-bye. When you are ready to be Tony Robeson again, you’ll find me in my den.”

He smiled at his son and walked away. Tony watched him go. Tony's hands were clasped behind his back, his legs planted wide apart.

Anthony, Senior, found it difficult to remain in the den. He was obliged to keep track of a small figure in a blue blouse from whichever of the various windows commanded the doings of that young person. He perceived that the fire chief was still holding dominion over the scene.

At the end of an hour small footsteps were heard approaching. Anthony looked up from the letter he was attempting to write. "Favver, may I have a bread and butter?" asked a pleasant voice. Anthony turned about in his chair.

"Is the hook-and-ladder in the nursery?" he inquired gravely.

Tony shook his head.

"Oh, then you are still the fire chief. Fire chiefs go to the hotel for their bread and butter. I haven't any bread and butter for the fire chief."

He turned back to his desk. The small figure in the doorway stood still a moment, then the footsteps were heard retreating. Five minutes later, Anthony, looking out, saw Tony careering about the garden on a hobby-horse.

"Obstinate little duffer," he said affectionately to himself. "He's playing go to the hotel, I suppose. Perhaps when that imagination of his gets to work at hypothetical bread and butter he'll find the reality preferable to the fancy."

In a short time Anthony again reconnoitred. The garden was empty. He looked out at the front of the house. No small figure in blue was to be seen. He

went out and took a turn about the place. He called the boy; there was no response. From past experience and from the statements of Juliet and the young girls of the neighbourhood, whom, at various times, she was in the habit of engaging to assist her in the oversight of the child at his play, he knew that Tony had a trick of getting himself out of sight in an incredibly brief space of time.

"As a fire chief he may consider himself free to do what he pleases," said Anthony to himself, and set about a thorough search of the place, having no doubt that at any moment he should come upon the boy carrying out the details of his imaginary vocation. After a time he went back into the house and scoured it from top to bottom. And when, even here, there was to be discovered no trace of the child, he began to feel a slight uneasiness.

There was no source of immediate danger to a stray child in the neighbourhood, of which he was aware, except the electric line, and little Tony had never manifested the slightest inclination to approach this by himself. There were no open ponds, no traps of any kind for the incautious feet of a three-year-old. Everybody knew Tony, and everybody admired and loved him, so that, as Anthony took up his hat and started upon a more extended search, he had no doubt whatever of finding the runaway without delay.

In a very short time it became a rousing of the neighbourhood. It was Saturday, and all the children who knew Tony were at hand. They were soon eagerly searching for him near and far, without finding the slightest trace of his passing. Anthony, now thoroughly alarmed, telephoned in every direction, warned every police station in the city,

and took every possible step for the discovery of the child. It occurred to him with tremendous force that the boy might have been stolen. Such things did happen. It seemed almost the only way to account for such a sudden and mysterious disappearance.

Before it seemed possible two hours had slipped past. And now, on every car which whirled by the corner, Anthony began to expect Juliet. He dreaded yet longed to see her. He turned cold at the thought of telling her the situation, yet at the same time he felt as if she might have some sort of a solution ready which nobody else had thought of. And while, still searching over and over the entire ground, he kept watch of the arriving cars, he saw his wife suddenly appear. He went to meet her.

“What is it?” she said, the instant her eye met his.

“I think it’s all right, dear,” he told her, as quietly as he could, “but somehow we can’t find Tony. He disappeared during five minutes when I was in the house—too short a time for him to have got very far away, but—we can’t find him. Do you think he may be hiding? Does he ever hide himself so effectually as that?”

The bright colour in her face had slipped out of it on the instant, for he could not keep the anxiety out of his voice. But she said no word of reproach, nor did she lose command of herself in any way.

“How long has he been gone?” she asked, going straight toward the house, Anthony close behind her.

“I think—I am afraid—nearly two hours. I will tell you what happened. It is possible something I said is responsible for all this, though I don’t know.”

She was going swiftly about the house, as he told her

the story of his attempt to teach the boy a lesson, and she was listening closely to every word as she examined for herself each nook and corner. She disclosed several possible hiding places of which Anthony had not thought, explaining that Tony knew them all and sometimes betook himself to them in the course of various games. The two came out upon the porch, and Juliet stood still, thinking.

"You have done everything to intercept him, if he should really have—got far away?"

"Everything I can think of, except start out myself. I am ready to do that, if you think best."

"Not until I have gone over the neighbourhood myself. I don't believe he is far away—I believe he is near. He may have heard every call you and the children have made, and wouldn't answer. If by any chance his pride has been a little hurt, he is very likely to do this sort of thing. Wait—have you looked —I wonder if the children know——"

She was off without stopping to explain, through the garden and down the old willow-bordered path by the brook. Anthony followed. "I've been down here a dozen times," he called. "The brook is too shallow to hurt him, and he's certainly not anywhere on it within a mile. The children have been all over the ground."

But Juliet did not pause. She ran along the path for some distance, then turned abruptly at a point where an abandoned lot filled with stumps joined the area by the brook. She made her swift way among these stumps, Anthony following, his hope rising as he noted the directness of his wife's aim. At the biggest stump she came to a standstill, carefully swung outward like a door a great slab of bark, and disclosed a

hollow. The sunlight streamed in upon a little heap of blue, and a tangled brown mass of hair. Anthony Robeson, Junior, lay fast asleep in his cunningly devised retreat.

Without a word his father stood looking down at the boy's flushed cheeks. Then he turned to Juliet, standing beside him, smiling through the tears which had not come until the anxiety was past. His own eyes were wet.

"That was a bad scare," he said softly. "Thank God it's over."

Then he stooped and gently lifted the fire chief and carried him home without waking him. Twenty children flocked joyfully from all about to see, and hushed their shouts of congratulation at Juliet's smiling warning.

Anthony went alone down the garden to the place where the hook-and-ladder cart had stood. It was still there. He stood and looked at it, his eyes very tender but his lips firm. "The little chap didn't give in," he said to himself. "It's going to be hard to make him, but for the sake of the Robeson will I think we'll have to take up the job where we left it. I'd mightily like to flunk the whole business now, but I should be a pretty weak sort of a beggar if I did."

When little Tony had wakened from his nap, and had been washed and brushed and fed, and made fresh in a clean frock, his mother brought him to his father.

"Is this Tony Robeson?" Anthony asked soberly. Tony considered for a moment, then shook his head.

"I's ve fire chief," he said, with polite stubbornness.

"Have your men put away the hook-and-ladder cart?"

"No, favver."

"Are they going to do it?"

"I didn't tell vem to."

"Why not?"

"Didn't want to."

"Listen, son," said Anthony. "I could make the fire chief put away the cart. I'm stronger than he is, you know. I could make him walk out to where it lies in the garden, and I could make his hands pick it up and carry it into the house, and then it would be done.—Don't you think I could?"

Tony considered. "Es, I fink 'ou could," he admitted. Evidently the question was one he could reflect upon from the standpoint of the outsider.

"But I don't want to do that. I want Tony Robeson to put the cart away because his father asks him to do it. Don't you think he ought to do that?"

"I isn't Tony Robeson, I'se ve fire chief."

"Were you the fire chief when you woke up, and mother washed you and dressed you and gave you your lunch? I don't think she thought you were. If you had been the fire chief she would have left you to take care of yourself."

Tony thought about it. "I dess I'se Tony wiv muvver," he said.

"Then you aren't Tony with me?"

The thick locks shook vehemently in the sir with the negative response. "I said I was ve fire chief, and I'se got to *be* ve fire chief," he reiterated.

Without question it was a battle of wills. But Anthony's mind was made up. For lack of time to

deal with them previous similar issues had been dodged in various ways, compromises had been effected. It was plain that argument and reasoning, the wiles of the affectionately wise adversary who does not want to bring the matter to a direct conflict, had been tried. Anthony could see no way out except to dominate the child by the force of his own resolute character. It was not the way by which he wanted to obtain the mastery, but it was becoming plain to him that, in this case, at least, it was the only way left.

His face grew stern all at once, his eyes, though still kind, met his son's with determination. "Tony," he said very gravely—and there was a new quality in his tone to which the child was not accustomed —"You are not the fire chief now. You are Tony Robeson. *I shall not let you be the fire chief any longer.* Do you understand?"

There was no threat in the words, only a decisiveness of the sort before which men give way, because they see that there is no alternative. Tony stared into his father's eyes curiously. His own grew big with wonder, with something which was not alarm, but akin to it. He gazed and gazed, as if fascinated. Anthony's look held his; the man's powerful eyes did not flinch—neither did the boy's. It is possible that both pulses quickened a beat.

Little Tony drew his eyes away at last, turned and started for the door. Silently Anthony watched him as he reached for the knob, turned again, and looked back at his father. On the very threshold the child stood still and stared back. His brown eyes filled, his red lips quivered. The stern face which watched his melted into a winning smile, and Anthony held out his arms. An instant longer, and his son had run

across the floor and flung himself into them.

When the childish storm of tears had quieted, and several big hugs had been exchanged, Anthony set the boy down upon the floor and took his hand. Silently the two walked out of the house and down the garden. The hook-and-ladder cart stood patiently waiting, just where it had waited all day. Little Tony ran to it and picked it up. Over his exquisite face broke the first smile that had been seen there since the earliest disregarded command of the morning.

“Ve fire chief’s gone,” he said. “He was a bad fire chief.”

So together the man and the boy escorted the hook-and-ladder cart to the nursery, and backed it carefully into its stall, between the milk wagon and the automobile. Then the child went to his play. But the man drew a long breath.

“I would rather manage a hundred striking workmen,” he said to himself with emphasis.

XXVI.—On Guard

While little Tony had been growing, waxing strong and sturdy: while Juliet had been tending and training him, learning, as every mother does, more than she could impart: Anthony, in his place, had not stood still. The strength and determination he had

from the first hour put into his daily work had begun to tell. His position in a great mercantile establishment had steadily advanced as he had made himself more and more indispensable to its heads.

Cathcart, the successful architect, began to talk about a new home for the man into whose hands Henderson and Henderson were putting large interests to manage for them, and whose salary, he asserted, must now justify, indeed call for, life under more ideal surroundings than the little home in the unfashionable suburb which poverty had at first made necessary.

“Let me draw some plans for you,” urged Cathcart, one evening in June, when he had run out to see his friend. Juliet was by chance away, and Cathcart took advantage of this to call Anthony’s attention, in a politely frank fashion, to the shortcomings of his present residence. “It’s all right in its way,” he said, standing upon a corner of the lawn with Anthony, and surveying the house critically. “Mrs. Robeson certainly deserves full credit for the admirable way in which she restored the old house and added just the changes in keeping with its possibilities. I’ve always said it couldn’t have been better done, with the means you’ve told me you were able to put at her disposal. But the place is too small for you now.”

“I don’t think we feel it so,” said Anthony tentatively, strolling beside Cathcart along the edge of the lawn, his hands in his pockets, lifting friendly eyes at the little house. “Since we put in the bathroom—that small room off the upper hall, you know—and added the nursery and den, we’re very comfortable. The furnace keeps us warm as toast, and we’re soon to have the water system out here, so we won’t have to depend upon our present expedients. I’m fond of the

place, and I'm confident Mrs. Robeson is devoted to it."

"I can understand that," agreed Cathcart. "Of course, the spot where you began life together will always have its charm for you both—in fact the sentiment of the matter may blind you to the real inadequacies of the place for a man in your position."

"My position isn't so stable that I want to build a marble palace on it yet," said Anthony, a humorous twinkle in his eye. He enjoyed watching another man manœuvre for his favourable hearing of a scheme. It was an art in which he was himself accomplished; it was one of the points of his value to Henderson and Henderson.

"Everybody knows that you're in a fair way to become head man with the Hendersons," said Cathcart, "and everybody also knows that you might as well have struck a gold-mine. It's superb, the way you have come into the confidence of those old conservatives."

"That's all well enough; but I don't see that it entails upon me the duty of laying out all I've saved on a new house. I know what you fellows are—when you begin to draw plans your love of the ideal runs away with the other man's pocketbook."

"Not at all," declared Cathcart. "Particularly when he's a friend and you understand just what he can afford to do."

"Why don't you talk about enlarging the old house? That's much more likely to appeal to my desires."

The two had reached the back of the house and were close by the kitchen windows. Cathcart reached up and took hold of a sill. With a strong hand he

wrenched and pounded about the window, until he succeeded in showing that it was old and uncertain.

"That's why," he said, dusting his hand with his handkerchief. "The house is old—fairly rotten in places. The minute you began to enlarge it in any ambitious way you'd find it would be cheaper to tear it down and begin again. But the site, Robeson—the site isn't desirable. The place is respectable enough, but it has no future. The good building is all going south, not north, of the city. You don't want to spend a lot of money here—you couldn't sell out except at a loss."

"Your arguments are good, very good," admitted Anthony; "so good that I'd like to put you on your mettle to draw me a set of plans for just the sort of thing you think I ought to have—or Mrs. Robeson ought to have, for she's the one to be considered. Anything will do for me. I'll let you do this—on one condition."

"Name it."

"That you also do your level best to demonstrate to me what a clever man and an artist of your proportions could make out of this house, provided he really wanted to show the extent of his ability. Now, that's fair. If you really care to convince me you won't fool with this proposition, you'll make a study of the one problem as thoroughly as you do of the other, and let me decide the case on its merits. If I thought you weren't giving the old house a fair chance I should take up its cause out of pure affection."

He smiled at Cathcart's discontented face with so brilliant a good humour that the architect cleared up.

"By Jove, Robeson," he said, "I think I see what

endears you to the Hendersons. I wouldn't have said you could have induced me to try my hand at the old house, but I'll be hanged if I don't follow your instructions to the letter—and win out, too."

"Good," said Anthony. "And don't mention it to my wife. We'll keep it for a surprise; and I promise you when the time comes I won't prejudice her in any way."

Cathcart drew out a notebook and pencil and entered some memoranda on the spot, while Anthony, coming up on the piazza of the dining-room, laid upon the old Dutch house-door a hand which seemed to caress it. He was wondering if by any possible magic Cathcart could create, in the rarest abode in the world, a new door which he should ever care to enter as he now cared to enter this.

"I think," said Juliet decidedly, "you're wrong about it."

"And I know," returned Anthony with emphasis, "that you are."

The two faced each other. They were walking through a short stretch of woodland, which lay as yet untouched by the hand of suburban property owners. It was a favourite ground for the diversions of the Robesons, when they had not time to spend in getting farther away. They had been strolling through it now, in the early June evening, discussing a matter relative to the investment of a certain moderate sum of money which had come into Anthony's hands. It developed that their ideas about it differed radically.

"It's not safe to do as you propose," said Juliet.

"To do what you propose would be only one better

than tying it up in an old stocking—or putting it away in the coffee pot. It's essentially a woman's plan—no man would do it the honour of considering it a moment."

Juliet flushed brilliantly. Even in Anthony's cheek the colour rose a little. Their eyes met with a challenge.

"Very well," said Juliet proudly. "I'll offer no more woman's plans. Invest the money as you like. Then, when you've lost it——"

Anthony's eyes flashed. "When I've lost it——" he began, and turned away with a gesture of impatience. Then he stopped short. "That isn't like you," he said.

Juliet stared at him an instant. Then she shut her lips together and walked on in silence. Anthony shut his lips together also. It was not their habit to indulge in sharp altercation. While both had decided ideas about things, both were also much too well bred to be willing to allow differences of opinion—which must arise as inevitably as two human beings live under the same roof—to degenerate into the deplorable thing commonly referred to as a quarrel.

When they had proceeded a few rods Juliet turned abruptly off from the path and picked up from the ground a slender straight stick, evidently cut and trimmed by some boy and then thrown aside. She looked about her and after some search found another, of similar size, untrimmed. She held out the latter to Anthony. He accepted it with a look of surprise. Then she walked into the path in front of him, stood stiff and straight, her small heels together, and made him the fencer's salute. "*On guard!*" she cried.

His lips relaxing, Anthony grasped his stick and fell into position. A moment more and two accomplished fencers were engaged in close combat.

Juliet happened to be wearing a trim linen skirt of short walking length, which impeded her movements as slightly as anything not strictly adapted to the exercise could do. Although her fencing lessons were some years past, the paraphernalia belonging both to herself and Anthony were in the house, and an occasional bout with the masks and foils was a means of exercise and diversion which both thoroughly enjoyed. Although Juliet was no match for the superior skill and endurance of her husband, she was nevertheless no mean antagonist, and her alertness of eye and hand usually gave him sufficient to do to make the encounter a stimulating one.

On the present occasion Anthony, challenged to combat with his coat and cuffs on, and wielding the more awkward weapon of the two impromptu foils, found himself distinctly at a disadvantage. Moreover, he was at the moment not precisely in the mood for fun, and he began to defend himself with a somewhat lazy indifference. After a minute or two, however, he discovered that his adversary's slightly ruffled temper was inspiring her hand and wrist to distinctly effective work, and he found himself forced to look to his methods.

Attack and parade, disengagement and thrust—the battle was waged over the uneven ground of the wood. And presently Anthony discovered that the richly glowing face opposite his was a smiling one. The absurdity of the match struck him irresistibly and he smiled in return. He tripped a little over an obtruding oak-root, and Juliet took advantage of her opportunity to press him hard. He fended off the

attack and himself assumed the aggressive. An instant more and he had disarmed her and had thrown his own stick flying after hers. Both were laughing heartily enough.

“Forgive the trick,” cried Anthony. “A man must disarm his wife when she becomes his enemy.”

Breathless, Juliet sank upon a small knoll, her hand at her side. “If I’d been dressed for it—” she panted.

“You need coaching on your time thrusts, but you gave me plenty to do as it was,” Anthony admitted. “More than that, you’ve presented me with a chance to recover my equilibrium. I was hot inside before. Now it’s all on the outside.”

He looked down at her affectionately. She smiled back. “I was crosser than sticks,” she said. “I really can’t imagine why, now. I apologise.”

“So do I.” He threw himself down on the ground at her feet, lay flat on his back, his clasped hands behind his head, and gazed up into the tree-tops.

“I’ll take your advice into careful consideration,” said he.

“I know you won’t do anything rash,” said she, and they both laughed again.

“How much more diplomatic that sort of talk is,” he observed. “Why do we ever allow ourselves to use any other?”

“Because we are human, I suppose.” Juliet was putting a mass of waving brown hair, disordered by the fight, into shape again. “It isn’t nice. We don’t do it often. To-night you came home tired, and found a wife who had been entertaining people from town all the afternoon. But it’s all right now, isn’t it?”

She bent forward, and Anthony took her outstretched hand in his own and gave it a grip which made it sting. He began to whistle cheerfully.

"Should we be happier if we never disagreed?" she asked thoughtfully.

The whistle stopped. "Jupiter, no! I want a thinking being to talk things over with, not a mental pincushion."

"Thank you.—Isn't it lovely here?"

"Delightful.—Julie, do you know we'll have been married five years next September?"

"It doesn't seem possible."

"I shouldn't know it, to look at you," he observed. He rolled upon his left side and regarded her from under intent brows. "You haven't grown a day older."

"I'm not sure that's a compliment."

"It's meant for one. Do you know you're a beauty?"

"I never was one and never shall be," she answered laughing, but she could not object to the obvious sincerity of his opinion as he delivered it.

"You're near enough to satisfy me. I'd rather have your good looks than all the—Well, I sat in front of a newly married pair on the way home to-night—that fellow Scrivener and his bride. *She's* what people call a raving beauty, I suppose. I wouldn't have her in the house at a dollar an hour. She's a whiner. Had him doing something to satisfy her whim every minute. I heard him trying to tell her about something that interested him, but she couldn't take time from herself to listen. His voice had a note of fatigue in it, already, or I'm not Robeson. I tell you, Juliet—that's the sort of thing that makes a bachelor vow to stay

single, and he can't be blamed."

"Suppose a bachelor had overheard us half an hour ago?"

"I'm glad none did—but if he had it wouldn't have disgusted him the way the other sort of thing did me to-day. A brisk little altercation is nothing, with unlimited hours of friendliness and understanding before and after. But a perpetual drizzle of fault finding and exactions—would make a fellow go hang himself. Mrs. Robeson, do you know, you're a very exceptional young person?"

"In what way, sir?"

"Whatever you do, you never nag. I've an awful suspicion that Judith Carey nags. You know how to let a man alone when he's in the mood for being alone. She never does. Carey had me out there not long ago, for what he called a quiet, confidential talk on some business matters. We went into what is supposed to be his private room and shut the door. Probably she came to that door not less than twelve times during that two hours. She called Carey away on every sort of pretext. Once she got him to do a stroke of work for her that took up at least ten minutes neither of us could spare. And she looked like a thundercloud every time I caught a glimpse of her face. Cæsar!—think of having to live with that sort of person. No wonder Carey looks old before his time."

"It's certainly unfortunate. But I'm not an exception, Tony. There are plenty of women who know when to keep out of the way."

"Well, then, they're erratic on some other line, that's all. You're absolutely the only thoroughly sweet and sane woman I know."

"My dear boy! Remember how snappish I was just this evening."

"I was grouchy enough to match it. I tell you, Julie—the women who don't talk you to death on every subject, important or trivial, bore you with idiotic questions or impertinence about your affairs. How do I know so much about 'em? My dear, dozens of them come into the office every day, and Mr. Henderson has acquired a habit lately of turning them all over to me. I earn a double salary every hour I spend that way—wish I could put in a demand for it. Speaking of salaries, dear"—Anthony suddenly sat up—"I've no right to be grouchy, for I'm promised another advance next month."

"Splendid!" She put out her hand, and the two shook hands vigorously again, like the pair of comrades they were.

"Juliet," said her husband, watching her face closely. "It's been a happy five years, hasn't it?"

"A happy five years, Tony."

"Do you mean it?" He smiled at her. "You've never been sorry?" Then he got to his feet and held out his hand again to help her up. "The mortal combat we engaged in gave you a magnificent colour," he commented, and passed affectionate fingers across the smooth cheek near his shoulder. "Sweetheart ——" he drew her into his arms—"I may fence with you once in a while with sharp words for weapons, but—do you know how I love you?"

"I wonder why?"

"It's strange, isn't it?—after all these years. To be really up-to-date, we should long since have become interested each in some other——"

A hand came gently but effectually upon his mouth. He kissed the hand. “No, I won’t say it. It’s a cynical philosophy, and I’ll not take its language on my lips —not with my wife in my arms, giving the lie to that sort of thing. Julie, we’re not sentimentalists because we still care——”

“Who thinks we are?”

“Plenty of envious skeptics, I’ll wager. I see it in their green-eyed glances. They can’t believe it’s genuine. Dear—is it genuine? Look up, and tell me.”

She looked up, and seeing his heart in his eyes, met his deep caress with a tenderness which told him more than she could have put into the words she suddenly found it impossible to speak.

XXVII.—Lockwood Pays a Call

“Did you know Roger Barnes was back?” asked Wayne Carey of Anthony Robeson, on the evening of the twenty-fifth of June, as the two met on the street corner from which Anthony was to take his car. Electrics ran within a few rods of his home now, but they ran only at fifteen-minute intervals and were difficult to catch.

“No. To stay this time, I hope?”

“Off again to-morrow. Never saw such a fellow—

restless as a fish. Been working all winter in Vienna —off to-morrow on the Overland Limited to sail Saturday for Hongkong. Goes to do a special operation on the Emperor's brother or some swell of the sort. He's been doing some mighty slick operating, according to the medical review I ran across in a throat specialist's office."

"I must see him. Where is he?"

"At your house now, more than likely. Said he'd got to see you, and if you haven't seen him yet you're sure to before he goes to-morrow night. By the way, Anthony, do you know what we heard lately about Rachel Redding—Huntington? That she wasn't married to Huntington till the night he died, almost three years ago."

Anthony stared.

"Guess it's straight, too," pursued Carey. "Queer she should have kept it all this time. Didn't Juliet hear from her at all?"

"Only once or twice, I believe."

"Her father and mother both died last winter."

"Are you sure?"

"The man who told me was a traveller. Said she and Huntington's mother were coming back to live East again. He was an Eastern man himself—knew Huntington, and got interested when he heard the name out in Arizona. 'Alexander Huntington's' rather an uncommon name, you know. But what could have been her motive for keeping everything so still?"

"I've no idea," said Anthony, and let Carey talk on by himself till the car came. He was unwilling to discuss Rachel Redding's affairs on a street corner even with

Wayne Carey, because she was Juliet's friend. But he had an idea as to why Rachel had been so reserved about herself. There were three men in the East whose interest in Huntington's life or death had not been an altogether unbiased one. He could understand that the girl would not be eager to declare herself free to them, though the fact of Huntington's death had reached them soon after its occurrence. But this other fact—that she had married him only at the last moment—it was obvious that the sort of girl Rachel Redding was would never make capital out of that strange occurrence, whatever its explanation might be. That Roger Barnes knew nothing of it he was quite certain.

He missed Juliet from the corner where she and the boy usually met him, and hurrying on to the house came upon his wife just as she was leaving.

"Oh, I didn't realise I was late, dear," she said, while Anthony swung his little son up to his shoulder, eliciting triumphant shouts as a reward. "Tony, Rachel is here."

"*Rachel?*"

"Hush—yes; she's upstairs, and her window is open. Walk down the orchard with me and I'll tell you. Her coming, an hour ago, was what made me forget the time."

"Carey was talking about her this afternoon," said Anthony, strolling by her side and carrying on a frolic with the boy at the same time. "He'd just heard a singular thing—that she wasn't married to Huntington till the very night he died."

"She told me. She's going away to-night, she insists; but I shall not let her. No, Mr. Huntington wouldn't let her marry him. After they went away he said he

wouldn't take her unless he got well. Tony, he was a fine character; in our sympathy for Roger Barnes we haven't appreciated him. It was only at the last that he let her do it. She found out how happy it would make him then, and she would have it so."

"I'm glad she did—poor fellow. Juliet, Roger Barnes is in town."

"Really?" Juliet stopped, her breath catching. "Oh, Tony——"

"Came day before yesterday—leaves to-morrow night for Hongkong."

"Tony!"

Anthony looked down at her, smiling. "There's a situation for you. Can you be expected to keep your friendly hands off that possibility?"

"He won't go away without coming to see us?"

"Most certainly not."

"Then he will naturally come to-night."

"It's more than probable."

"Tony, I won't be trying to manage fate—that's what the doctor calls it—if I keep Rachel here until after ——"

"Until after the Overland Limited leaves for San Francisco? Well, fate needs a little assistance once in a while. I think you may legitimately persuade Rachel to stay, if you can. What is her hurry, anyway?"

"I can't find out, except that I imagine she's afraid of meeting one of the men she most assuredly would meet if they knew she had come. She thinks Roger Barnes is in Vienna still."

"She does? Ye gods! I think my knees will begin to tremble if I see their meeting imminent. Come, son, let's try a race to the house. I'll give you to the big, crooked apple tree. One—two—three—go!"

Juliet followed more slowly, thinking busily. Rachel had been very decided about going back into the city that night. Mrs. Huntington, Senior, was with friends, who had begged her daughter's acceptance of their hospitality, and for the elder woman's sake she had acquiesced. Rachel was a keeper of promises, Juliet knew. And to tell her of the probability of the doctor's appearance would be a doubtful means of securing her detention. But if, for any reason, the doctor should fail to appear—Juliet made up her mind that she would give fate her chance until nine o'clock that night. If by that time Barnes had not come——

Juliet looked on eagerly while Anthony greeted Rachel. Her friend had never seemed to her so lovely as now, in her simple black gown, accentuating, as it did, the deep tone of her hair and eyes. Her face had gained in colour and contour in the Arizona climate —its tints were richer. The delicacy of her features was not changed, but their beauty was greater.

"You've lived much outdoors, I see," said Anthony, when dinner was over and the three had gone out upon the porch, "and it's been good for you."

"I've even slept outdoors," Rachel told them, "fully half the year; and ridden horseback every day. I can't quite think how the electrics are going to seem in place of my gallop on Scot. The people on the ranch where we were have simply made me do the things they did. The owner was a dear old gentleman; he gave me Scot. He wanted to send him after me; but

nurses have small use for horses, I believe," she ended, smiling.

"That's the plan, is it?"

"Yes. It's what I can do best, I think. I am to enter the training-school the first of July, at the Larchmont Memorial Hospital."

"I'll wager tremendous odds you don't," thought Anthony, "in spite of that confident tone. If Roger Barnes looks in to-night it's all up with your plans—or make a bigger fight than even you can do. A man who can't stay in his own town because you are out of it——"

He was sitting—purposely—where he faced the road. He had considerately offered Rachel a chair with her back to the highway. Juliet was swinging lightly in the hammock behind the vines. Anthony, talking on about Arizona and the Larchmont Memorial, kept an eye on the approach to the house from the corner where visitors always left the car. His watch was rewarded at length by the sight of a figure rapidly turning the corner and making straight for the house.

"Now we're in for it," he thought. "From now on the question with Juliet and me will be how we can most gracefully efface ourselves without seeming to do it. If I remember this young person correctly she's a little difficult to leave unchaperoned against her will."

Out of the corner of his eye he kept track of the approaching figure. It was coming on at a great pace, and in the twilight could be seen looming taller and taller as it crossed the road and turned in across the lawn, making a short cut according to Barnes's own fashion, so that the coming footsteps were noiseless, even to the moment when the figure reached the

porch itself.

"Now for it," thought Anthony, feeling as if the curtain were about to ascend on the fourth act of a play, when the third had ended amidst all possible excitement.

"I found the roses blooming just as they used to do, at the side of the house"—Rachel's warm, contralto voice was answering a question from Juliet—"only so untended. I think I shall have to come out again before I begin my work, to look after them."

Anthony did not turn as the step he had been watching for sounded upon the porch. To save his life he could not help keeping his eyes upon Rachel's face. Rachel herself looked up with the air of the visitor who does not know the guests of the house, and the expression Anthony saw upon her face showed only the slightest possible surprise—certainly no other feeling.

Juliet rose. "Ah, Mr. Lockwood," she said, with a cordiality, sincere little person though she was, Anthony knew for once she did not feel. "In the dusk I couldn't be quite sure."

Lockwood's eyes instantly turned to Rachel. That he had known in some way whom he was to see was evident from a most unusual agitation in his manner.

"Mrs.—Huntington," he got out somehow, taking her hand, and staring eagerly down into her face, "I heard you were home, and I hoped to find you here. I—you are—I am extremely glad——"

Half an hour later Anthony came upon his wife in the darkness of the dining-room. "Oh, you shouldn't have left them when I was away," she said. "Little Tony cried out and I had to go. I know Rachel

doesn't want to be left with him to-night."

"Angels and chaperons defend us," muttered Anthony. "I can't stand it forever to feel a man wanting to kill me for staying by him through a meeting like this, after three years. I didn't know but Lockwood would attempt to throw me off my own porch. Give him a chance—he hasn't any, anyhow."

"It's after nine," whispered Juliet.

"I know it. Roger's taking a terrible risk."

"He doesn't know she's here. But I thought he cared enough for us to——"

"That's what I've been so sure of. He's probably been detained by some case. He's getting so distinguished, the minute he sets foot in town now the folks with things the matter with them begin to block his path. I hope she knows what she throws over her shoulder if she refuses him now."

"I don't see that she's going to have a chance to refuse him," mourned Juliet. "Do you think he'd ever forgive us if we let him get away without knowing she was here?"

"Lockwood found it out, somehow. Carey's safe to tell him if he sees him—and he's pretty sure to, at Roger's club."

"You couldn't telephone?"

"Where? If he can he'll come here, if only to get news of her. She's never let him write to her, has she?"

"He told me she hadn't when he was here last fall. And she didn't know where he was."

"Fellow-conspirator," whispered Anthony, "we'll give fate her chance to-night. If she bungles the game

we'll take it into our own hands to-morrow. But I've a feeling I'd like to let it happen by itself, if it will."

When Lockwood had gone—which was not until eleven o'clock, in spite of the way his hosts remained in his vicinity—Rachel stood still upon the porch smiling a little wearily at Juliet.

"My staying all night has been settled for me," she said. "There was no way to go."

"Luckily for us," Juliet answered. "Sit here a little longer, dear. It's such a perfect night, and I know we shall see little enough of you when you get at work."

Rachel dropped into the hammock. "I should like to lie here all night," she said, "and watch the stars until I go to sleep. I've done that so many, many nights from under a tent flap."

All at once she looked up, her eyes widening. Upon the porch step stood a strong figure—as unlike Lockwood's gracefully slender one as possible. A man's eyes were gazing steadily down into hers—determined gray eyes, with a light in them. The two faces were plainly visible to each other in the radiance from the open door.

XXVIII.—A High-Handed Affair

If she had not been standing in the doorway Juliet

would have run away, but she had to welcome Dr. Roger Barnes, a traveler whom she had not seen for almost a year. Her presence, however, after one glad greeting, seemed not to bother him much. He turned from her to Rachel, who had risen, and took her outstretched hand in both his.

"It's been rather a long evening," he said, "wandering around and around this place, waiting for the other man to go. I explored the orchard and the willow path, and every familiar haunt. I had to refresh myself occasionally by stealing up for a glimpse of your face between the vines. But, somehow, that only made it harder to wait. I had to march myself off again with my fists gripped tight in my pockets to keep them off that fellow, eating you up with his eyes—confound him—you, who belong only to me."

He did not smile as he said the last words, but stood looking eagerly at her with a gaze that never faltered. She tried to draw her hands away; it was useless. Juliet slipped off, knowing that neither of them would see her go.

"Come down on the lawn with me," he said, but she resisted.

"Please stay here, Doctor Barnes," she said, "and please let me have my hand. I can't talk so."

"You needn't talk—for a while," he answered. He sat down facing her. "At six o'clock I found out you were here. At eight—as soon as I could get away—I came out. I told you how I spent the evening. If I had needed anything to sharpen my longing for you that would have done it—but I think I had reached about the limit of what I could bear in that line already. It has been one constant augmenting thirst for a

draught that was out of my reach. I shouldn't have kept my promise not to write you another day after I had been here this time and heard—what I have heard, Rachel."

She did not answer. Her face was turned away; she was very still. Only a slightly quickened breathing, of which he was barely conscious, betrayed to him that this was not listening of an ordinary sort.

"I shouldn't have said anything could make any difference with my feeling, to strengthen it," he went on very quietly, after a while, "but I find it has. I don't try to explain it to myself, except by the one thing I am sure of—that Alexander Huntington was the noblest and most heroic of men, and deserved to the full those last few hours of knowledge that you had taken his name. And I can understand your loyalty to him in wishing to wear it these three years. But, Rachel, I can't let you wear it any longer."

She turned her face a shade farther away.

"I am leaving to-morrow night for another year's absence." He spoke as simply as if he were discussing the most ordinary of subjects. "So I can see but one thing to do, and that is——"

He got up and came around behind her, standing in the shadow of the vines, where the light did not touch him—"and that is, to take you with me."

He had not said it doubtfully, although his inflection was very gentle. She moved quickly, startled.

"Doctor Barnes——"

"Yes, I'm ready for them. You can't raise an objection that I'm not ready for, not one that I can't meet—except one. And that you can't raise, Rachel."

She was silent, the words upon her lips held in check by this last bold declaration.

“You see you can’t, being truthful,” he said, smiling a little. “If I seem too confident, forgive me; but I’ve carried with me all these years that one look, when you forgot to veil your eyes away from me as you always had—and always have since then. When I get that look from you again——” He paused, drawing a long breath. “I don’t dare dream of it. Rachel, will you go?”

She tried to glance at him, and managed it, but no higher than his shoulders.

“I am engaged to take the training for nurses at the Larchmont Memorial——” she began.

But he interrupted her joyfully. “You don’t say, ‘I don’t love you‘—it’s only, ‘I was intending to be a nurse.’ I told you you couldn’t say it, because it isn’t true. You do love me, Rachel. Tell me so.”

Her hurried breathing was plainly perceptible now. She rose quickly, as if she could not bear the telltale lamplight upon her face any longer, and went hurriedly across the porch and down upon the lawn, into the starlight. He followed her, his pulses bounding.

“Oh, give up to me,” he said in her ear, his own breath coming fast. “You’ve been fighting it four years now—it’s no use. We were made for each other, and we’ve known it from the first. You stood heroically by your first promise—you gave him all you could; but that’s all over. You don’t have to be true to anything or anybody now but me. Give up, dear, and let me know what it feels like to have you pull a man toward you instead of pushing him away.”

They had reached the edge of the orchard—in deep shadow; and she stopped.

“I don’t know what I came down here for,” she said, in confusion.

“I do; you were running away. It’s your instinct to run away—I love you for it—it’s what first made me want to follow. But I can’t stand your running away much longer. Look, Rachel, can you see? I’m holding out my arms. Rachel—I can’t wait——”

For an instant longer she held out, while he stood silent, holding himself that he might have the long-dreamed-of joy of receiving her surrender. Then, all at once, he realised that it had been worth all his days of patient and impatient waiting, for turning to him at last she gave herself, with the abandon such natures are capable of showing when they yield after long resistance, into the arms which closed hungrily around her.

If anybody could have told what happened during the next twenty-four hours it would have been Juliet, for it was she who took the helm of affairs. She lay awake half the night, or what there was left of it after the doctor had come back with Rachel and told his friends what had happened and what was yet to happen, planning to make the hasty wedding as ideal as might be. She was a wonderful planner, and a most energetic and enthusiastic young matron as well, so by five in the afternoon she had accomplished all that had seemed to her good. Rachel’s part was only to see that her trunk was packed, her explanations offered and good-byes said, and her choice made of several exquisite white gowns which Juliet had had sent out from town.

“But I can’t be married in white, Mrs. Robeson,” she

had said protestingly when Juliet had opened the boxes.

"Yes, you can—and must. This is your only bridal, dear. The other—you know that was only what the doctor said of it once—'your hand in his to the last'—the hand of a friend. But this—isn't this different?"

Rachel had turned away her face. "Yes, this is different," she had owned. "But——"

"He asked me to beg you for him to have it so," Juliet urged, and Rachel was silent. So the simplest of the white frocks it was, and in it Rachel looked as Juliet had meant she should.

Only Judith and Wayne Carey were asked down to see them married. To humour the doctor the ceremony was performed in the orchard, near the entrance to the willow path. The time afterward was short, and before she knew it Juliet was bidding the two good-bye.

"I've got her," said the doctor, looking from Juliet to Rachel, who stood at his side. "She's mine—all mine. I have to keep saying it over and over to make sure."

"For your comfort," answered Juliet, smiling at them both, "I'll tell you that she looks as if she were yours."

"Does she?" he cried, laughing happily. "How does she look?" He turned and surveyed her. "She looks very proud and sweet and still—she's always been those things—and very beautiful—more beautiful than ever before. But do you think she really looks as if she were mine? Tell me how."

Juliet turned from him, big and eager like a boy, to his bride, "proud and sweet and still," as he had said.

"I've never seen Rachel look absolutely happy before," she told him. "There's always been a bit of a shadow. But now—look down into her eyes, Roger; there's no shadow there now."

But when he would have looked Rachel's lashes fell. "Not yet? By-and-by then, Rachel," he whispered. Then he turned to Juliet—and Anthony, who had come up to stand beside her.

"If it hadn't been for you and your home-making this day would never have come for me," he said. "You have been good friends and true, to us both. Let us keep you so—and good-bye."

XXIX.—Juliet Proves Herself Still Indifferent

On a July evening, a month later, Cathcart and a great roll of architects' paper arrived on the Robeson porch. For an hour Juliet looked and listened, while Anthony, as he had promised, said not a word to bias her decision. Cathcart laid before her plans for a new house which were—even Anthony could but admit to himself beyond praise. From every standpoint—the artistic, the domestic, the practical, even the economical, so far as the modern architect understands the meaning of the word—the plans were ideal. Juliet studied them absorbedly, showing plainly her appreciation of them.

"It would be a beautiful home," she said at length. "I can think of nothing more perfect than such a house."

Cathcart looked triumphant. Without glancing at Anthony he produced another set of plans.

"Just to please myself, Mrs. Robeson," he announced, "I have spent some interesting hours in trying to show what could be done with this old house, should any one care to lay out a reasonable sum upon it. Frankly, old houses never repay much expenditure of money, yet there is a certain satisfaction in working out the details of restoration and improvement which makes interesting study. Purely as a matter of that

sort I have fancied such extensions as these."

He laid the plans before her. Juliet looked, bent over them, cried out with delight, and called upon Anthony to join her.

"Oh, Mr. Cathcart," she said eagerly, "before you proved yourself an exceedingly fine architect; but now you show yourself a master. To make this of the old house—why, it's far the higher art."

Anthony glanced, laughing, across at Cathcart, whose face had fallen so pronouncedly that Juliet would have seen it if she had been observing. But she was too absorbed in the new plans.

"If we could do this," she was saying, "it would satisfy my best ideals of a permanent home."

"But, my dear Mrs. Robeson," stammered the man of castles, "consider the location—the neighbourhood—the rural character of the surroundings."

"I do," she answered, still studying the plans. "I love them all—and the old home most of all. Ever since I knew"—how had she known? they wondered—"that a change of houses was a possible thing for us I have been homesick in anticipation of a change I couldn't bear to think of. Yet I wondered if we ought to go. But if you can make this of the old home——"

She lifted to her husband an enthusiastic face. His eyes met hers in a long look in which each read deep into the mind of the other. Then Anthony Robeson, like a man who hears precisely what he most wants to hear, turned smiling to Cathcart.

"I think you've lost, Steve," he said.

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