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AND OF ITS AUTHOR
BLIND MICE

I

The suburban train was crowded and the stops were frequent.

Two young men, who had secured seats near the end of their car, were occupied, one in reading an evening paper and the other in making some calculations in a note book. The one reading stopped often to quote a news item to his companion, or to make some remark. This was John Winter. He was rather short and well nourished, one of the men who indicate that in later years they will grow stout. He had very blue eyes and fair hair and his clear skin was smoothly shaven. His cheeks were pink and white, his lips very red. His clothing, which was of the latest cut, was dark blue. He wore, as was his invariable custom, a necktie the exact color of his eyes, which was for him a most becoming combination. With this exception, however, his dress showed a noticeable lack of care. He had a somewhat boisterous and affectionate manner, and a rather loud voice. When excited or interested he had a boyish way of removing his hat and running his fingers through his hair.

His friend, James Sprague, did not seem to mind John’s interruptions and replied good naturedly. Both appeared in the best of spirits and the good understanding between them was evident.

Sprague was tall and slender, with large hands and feet. An even color glowed through his darkly tinted skin. He had deep set brown eyes. The other features were large: the mouth straight. A brown moustache, closely cut as was his dark hair, shaded his heavy upper lip. He wore fastidiously
selected clothing that displayed an exaggeratedly quiet taste; the cravat chosen in stripes too minute for good general effect, and the cuffs, shoes, and other details of attire immaculate and suggestive of extreme thought for appearance. Sprague's voice was low pitched and subdued. He spoke slowly and smiled occasionally in an extraordinarily attractive manner.

It was raining. At one of the stations a pretty girl entered the car, her mackintosh and umbrella dripping. John Winter, although farthest from the aisle, jumped quickly to his feet to offer her his place. Sprague moved next to the window, to allow her to sit down without passing him, and at once resumed his figuring. Winter hung to a strap and continued the reading of his paper and his frequent remarks to his friend, glancing now and then at the girl's profile which was particularly pleasing. She looked demurely at her gloves, smiling slightly at some of John's conspicuously uttered sallies to Jim. After three stations were passed she arose, and, with a hasty glance at the pleasant boyish face of the young man standing, left the car. Winter's gaze followed her to the door.

"Why don't you sit down, John?" asked Sprague without lifting his eyes from his work. Winter sat down rather suddenly. "We ought to put cement into that cellar wall of Howland's house," Sprague continued. "I told him so today and it was included in the estimates."

"I didn't know he came to the office," returned Winter. "When was he there?"

"Just before you got back from lunch," answered his companion.

"I was looking at some designs for art tiles," explained John, "and so I was late. I wanted to see Howland badly. Did he say anything about my decoration scheme for the interior?"

"I showed it to him," responded Sprague, "but he said he couldn't afford it."

"I'm sorry we ever touched his rotten house!" exclaimed Winter. "He has no more taste than a billy goat."

"He's coming in again tomorrow." Sprague smiled a little. "So you can talk with him yourself." Then, after a pause,
“Lucy is expecting her mother, you said. When does she get here?”

“Tomorrow,” replied John with a grimace, taking up his paper again.

Jim resumed his figuring.

“Here, wake up,” he said a few minutes later, glancing out of the window as the train slowed down at a small station. “This is Rosedene. Suppose we get off here.” And the two alighted from the car.

When they turned into the street where John lived the rain had ceased falling, and they saw Mrs. Winter and Dimmie waiting at the gate in front of the pretty yard.

Lucy Winter’s smile was of the slow but warming kind. Her child’s was also warm, but quicker, like his father’s. As Lucy kissed John, Dimmie (who was named for Sprague, “Jimmie” having been corrected into “Dimmie” by the young gentleman himself at a fabulously tender age) attacked Jim with such demonstrations of esteem as would have disconcerted a less robust and self-contained individual.

Lucy was of medium size, with hands and feet not too small. She had a rather generous figure, the waist large and bosom low. Her hair, fine in texture and not abundant, was of a nondescript shade of brown, and was arranged low over her ears. Her nose was extremely shapely, her mouth large, but so well cut as to be beautiful. Her grey eyes had a wonderful clarity and frankness of gaze. She could not be called pretty, partly because the impression of her personality suggested too much seriousness, and partly because the line from her ear to her chin was too long. She wore a simple house dress of wash goods. The gingham sleeve apron, which she had taken off before going to the front gate, hung over one arm. While not over strong physically Lucy suggested an atmosphere of wholesomeness. And she was direct, almost abrupt, in speech.

Dimmie was a slim child of four with features and complexion like John’s, but he had his mother’s fine grey eyes. Dressed in clean white blouse and breeches, white shoes and socks, his yellow hair bobbed in Dutch fashion, he made a picture of health and buoyancy.
BLIND MICE

"What a glorious rain, Lucy." John chuckled exuberantly. "The train went through it like a ship in a storm."

"Did it?" She smiled, feeling his coat sleeve to see if it was damp. "Are your feet wet, John? And you too, Jim?" shaking hands warmly with Sprague.

"No," they both answered. "Just like chorus girls," John added, at which they all laughed.

"Don't step in the water, dear," Lucy cautioned Dimmie as they turned to go into the house.

The first thing Jim did, after hanging his hat and rain coat in the hall, was to offer to help put the dinner on, as this was his usual task on such occasions.

"I don't need any help," said Lucy briskly, leading him back into the dining room. "You two boys fix yourselves some near cocktails while I finish. It'll only take me a minute. You know where the ingredients are, Jim."

Jim mixed the cocktails, going out in the kitchen to the refrigerator for ice, and swearing when he could not find the shaker.

"Where is it, Lucy?" he asked.

"Why don't you look for it?"

"I have," he protested.

"Here it is." She brought it from the pantry where he had just been. "If it had been a snake it would have bitten you."

"Say, but that soup smells good," he exclaimed as she removed a cover and placed a tureen on the kitchen table. "What kind of soup is it?"

"Wait and see," she replied. "You go and fix that cocktail or the soup will get cold—and call John."

Jim obeyed. John came in from the living room, where he had been playing "The Evening Star" from Tannhäuser on the piano, with many mistakes in the execution, and Lucy put the soup on.

"Sit down," she commanded. "You know your place, Jim. Where's Dimmie?"

"I'll get him," offered Jim, going out through the kitchen. "There's some cocktail left for you," he called back.
Lucy took up the glass and tasted its contents gingerly. "I don't like it," she objected to John, making a face.

"Oh, women usually don't like dry cocktails," he laughed. "That's a Martini. We make Manhattans for the ladies. But it's almost as good as a real one. Old Jim's supply of alcohol and synthetic flavors won't last much longer though."

Jim came in with Dimmie, and dinner was begun.

"I've been thinking a long time," Jim looked alternately at Lucy and John as he spoke, "that we ought to combine with some such firm as Layard's occasionally so that we can swing bigger things. They are close to all the supply companies."

"Have some more soup," urged Lucy.

"Believe I will." Jim handed her his soup plate. "It's as good as I suspected. What kind of soup is it anyway?"

"If you can't tell after eating it, I think its name would be wasted on you," said Lucy, laughing.

"Now that contract for the new incinerator," Jim continued unruffled, "might just as well have come our way. In fact it was offered to me, but we couldn't consider it because we weren't in touch with people handling the materials, and hadn't capital to tackle it alone."

"Do you mean going into partnership with Layard's?" inquired Lucy, cutting up Dimmie's meat for him.

"Oh, no." Jim smiled. "We're too small fry for that. Just an understanding, so we can have more leeway, agreeing of course to let them supply us in our other projects."

"I see," Lucy nodded. "Aren't you hungry, dear?" she asked John. "You didn't finish your soup."

"Oh, I'm all right," John assured her. "I was thinking out a color combination for Howland's house. I don't like the shade of the slate roof he wants. It doesn't go well with Milwaukee brick."

"Well, eat your dinner, dearie. You'll have a headache if you don't."

John began to eat with appetite.

"What was that you were spouting about?" he asked Jim. "The incinerator," repeated his friend. "I want to get hold of such things. Otherwise we will have to stick to small
dwellings, and there’s very little in them under present conditions, except of course on a large scale.”

“Incinerator!” John ran his fingers through his hair. “What a dream for an architect! I suppose you’d decorate it with conventionalized garbage cans.”

“Well,” insisted Jim, “there’s money in such things, and that’s what we’re after.”

“It sure is,” Lucy put in. Then, turning to Dimmie, “Don’t eat with your knife, baby. That’s not nice. Let mother show you. Hold your fork so. That’s right.”

“Money’s all right, but it’s not everything!” exclaimed John. “An artist has dreams that are more than meat and raiment. But it’s some job to achieve anything artistic in this country!”

“Or in any other country,” amended Jim.

“Well, ours is the limit,” John retorted. “That’s the reason I wanted to go to Europe—to drink in an atmosphere. To live and study where the almighty dollar isn’t supreme! I’ve tried to hang on to ideals, but grubbing for bread first drags you down to designing ugly cottages for fools and ends by offering you an incinerator. We’ll probably wind up on packing houses and the city dump yard.”

Jim laughed.

“Let’s get hold of the money, and then you can swim in early Tuscan and post-impressionism and dabble in water colors all you want to.”

“Yes, money means opportunity to do the things we want to—for us and for Dimmie,” Lucy added more seriously.

“You two will have us running a contracting and jobbing concern before long, instead of an architect’s studio.”

“I’d run a fertilizer plant if there was money in it,” declared Jim.

“Well I wouldn’t, and I don’t think my boy would want advantages purchased at the cost of his father’s soul. Would you, son?” John rumpled Dimmie’s hair.

“I want a balloon,” remarked Dimmie.

“Heredity,” chuckled Jim, and Lucy laughed.

“You’re all atavism,” John retorted.

“What’s atavizzen?” queried Dimmie.

“Ask your uncle Jim, son.”
Dimmie looked at Jim who said, "I'll bring you some next time I come out, Dimmie."

"By the way, Lucy," resumed John, "that reminds me. What train does your mother come on tomorrow?"

"On the seven o'clock, I think." Lucy rose and took a letter from a drawer in the table by the kitchen door. "Seven ten C. and W.," she corrected, consulting the letter.

"Morning or evening?"

"She didn't say." Lucy glanced again through the letter.

"We'll have to get a time table."

"Now isn't that just like a woman?" John looked at Lucy teasingly.

"It's the morning train," Jim informed them. "There's no through evening train on the C. and W. at seven ten and there is in the morning."

"By George, you must be taking Professor Forgetproof's correspondence course for strengthening the memory, Jim. You certainly do carry around a bunch of useless facts in your head."

"This one wasn't," said Lucy smiling.

"I thought it wasn't till night." John sighed and lighted a cigarette.

"He wanted all day to talk Howland into a Byzantine decoration scheme for his interior," Jim explained to Lucy, getting out his pipe meanwhile.

"That's right," admitted John, blowing smoke rings and poking his finger through them.

There was a moment's silence. Jim's pipe seemed to be out of order.

"I want to get down," announced Dimmie, and a slight tension was broken.

"Let mother untie your bib first, dear. Where are you going, baby?"

"I'm goin' to sit in Uncle Jim's lap."

"Why Uncle Jim hasn't had his coffee yet, son."

"Come on, kid," invited Jim, moving his chair sidewise to the table. "I can attend to coffee and you too."

"There's no use getting self conscious about this matter of
your mother, Lucy.” John returned to the unwelcome subject. “We’ve no desire to keep anything from Jim.”

“Of course not,” Lucy agreed quickly.

“This is our last evening alone, Jim.” John ran his fingers through his hair. “It’s all right for Lucy’s mother to forgive me, I suppose, but as my chief crime seems to have been marrying her daughter, I’m not so grateful as she probably imagines.”

“She felt unkindly toward me long before I ever met you, John,” Lucy said seriously, looking at Dimmie.

“But more since,” John insisted.

“To be sufficient for yourselves is the greatest crime toward other people,” remarked Jim, straightening Dimmie’s collar. “Believe it’s begun to rain again,” he added, glancing toward the window.

“You’ll be surprised when you see mother,” averred Lucy irrelevantly.

“Jim laughed.

“I shouldn’t feel much anxiety about anybody kin to Lucy.”

“Joking aside,” interrupted John, “to be blamed as I was has been a pretty painful experience.”

Lucy smiled at him.

“I don’t think anybody was to blame,” she decided.

“You never do, Lucy,” returned Jim.

“That’s a fact,” John complained. “Now I think there are times when it’s up to a man’s self-respect to blame the other fellow a little.”

Jim puffed at his pipe, staring at the ceiling.

“Well, John, if Lucy can overlook things you ought to be able to. She’s the one who has been up against it. You shouldn’t kick.”

“Yes, he should, Jim,” put in Lucy hastily. “Anybody but John would feel resentment still.”

John lighted another cigarette.

“Oh, that’s nothing, Lucy. I couldn’t very well feel hard toward anyone who seems as cut up as your mother in—in her present situation.”

“Plenty of people could,” insisted Lucy.
"I guess she resented your father's having been here," said John, laughing uncomfortably.

"Well, Papa has done so much for me that nothing can make me turn against him," declared Lucy.

John rumpled his hair again.

"Hang it all, you can't blame me for not being crazy to have a stranger in the house indefinitely, no matter how nice she might prove to be!"

"Especially one who neglected to seek your acquaintance until she was in trouble," put in Lucy with an unaccustomed approach to bitterness.

Jim knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"I don't blame you for feeling a little sore toward your mother, Lucy," he remarked.

"I try not to," said Lucy impatiently, "but——"

Jim smiled.

"If it had been anyone else but John, eh?"

"If it had been anyone else but John," she repeated; "exactly."

"He's an honor to the family," Jim declared, reaching over and pulling John's rebellious hair.

"He is," Lucy was emphatic.

John arose and went around the table to Lucy.

"You're a good kid, Lucy," he said, leaning down and kissing her forehead.

She stood up and smoothed his rumpled hair.

"Where's Dimmie gone to?" she asked.

"Here I am, Mamma," Dimmie called from the floor on the opposite side of the table.

"Come and help Mother clear off the table, Sonny."

"I'll help too," offered Jim.

"You can wipe the dishes," she conceded.
II

It was eight o'clock in the morning.
In the dining room of the Winter home Lucy sat at the breakfast table with Jim who had remained at Rosedene overnight. John had gone to catch the early suburban train in order to bring Lucy's mother from the station. Dimmie was out under an old elm tree in the yard, swinging. Lucy had been up since half past five, had served John's breakfast at six, and disposed of Dimmie's bath and appetite, preparing a second meal for herself and Jim. She now contemplated the disheveled table.

"I must get cleaned up before they come!" She rose and settled her apron more precisely, then began to clear away the dishes and brush the crumbs from the cloth.
Jim took out his pipe and filled it.
"Maybe your mother won't have had breakfast," he said.
Lucy shook her head.
"John is going to take her some place in town. It would make it too late for her to wait until she got out here."
Jim rose to help with the remaining plates.
"You go on with something else," he insisted. "I can finish these things in a jiffy."
"No, you can't!" Lucy motioned him away. "You must go on with the work you brought in the portfolio. John said he found you hard at it when he went after you yesterday evening."
"All right, Lucy. Just as you say. I'm making some calculations on our new contract." Jim moved toward the next room.
"I won't disturb you in there but you'd better shut Dimmie out," Lucy called after him.
"I'm nearly through with the estimates." Jim turned in the
doorway. Lucy had stopped her work and was gazing out the window with an abstraction unusual to her.

"You don't see them?"

Lucy shook her head, her profile half averted.

"Lucy—you're not crying?" Jim's voice showed astonishment and more feeling than he commonly expressed. He had never before seen Lucy in tears.

She faced him, smiling uncertainly.

"Jim, I try so hard to be just to everybody!" she explained irrelevantly.

"Nothing infuriates people like receiving justice, Lucy."

She glanced at him appreciatively.

"You can put things into words, Jim. When I was a little girl I used to think and think, trying to explain things to myself." Her voice trailed off. "I know Mamma'll want me to blame Papa, Jim, and I can't."

An automobile horn was heard outside and the sound of a machine stopping. Lucy started.

"Hello!" Jim turned to face Dimmie who ran into the room crying, "They're here! They're here!" and scurried out again.

Lucy seemed bewildered.

"Why the train never gets to Rosedene at this hour!"

Jim smiled encouragingly.

"Don't borrow trouble, Lucy," he said. "John's brought your mother out in a machine. They can't have made a very bad impression on each other."

Lucy started for the hall but hesitated. There was the sound of a door opening and of several footsteps.

"Come right in, Nannie," John's voice was heard saying, and then, in direction to the chauffeur, "put the things inside." In an instant John and Lucy's mother entered the dining room followed by Dimmie who was unnoticed and looking rather rueful.

The new arrival, Mrs. Merwent, was petite, with quick undecided gestures. While giving an impression of prettiness and studied femininity, her features, with the exception of her eyes, were not remarkable. These eyes were the color of Lucy's and unusually prominent. She was attired in a
faultless traveling costume of a cut and shade too youthful for her, and she was conscientiously powdered, rouged, and penciled. She would have passed for thirty-odd years old among the unobservant.

She and Lucy regarded one another a moment in silence. They appeared not to know how to greet each other.

"Surprised you, did we?" John was almost boisterous.

Mrs. Merwent gave a tinkly nervous laugh.

"Aren't you going to kiss me, Lucy?" she asked. Her lightness of manner was uncertain. Her eyes strayed over Lucy's shoulder to Jim who leaned against the mantel shelf.

Lucy kissed her mother silently. Their lips barely brushed. In order to conceal her agitation Mrs. Merwent gave Lucy's hair and shoulders meaningless pats.

"I'm glad you've come, Mamma." Lucy's voice was almost inaudible.

"Oh, dear, such a journey!" Mrs. Merwent twittered.

Lucy's clear eyes looked at her mother steadfastly. John turned to Jim.

"Nannie, this is Jim Sprague, the best friend in the world, and the worst enemy." 

Jim came forward and shook hands.

"Forewarned is forearmed," she said, smiling up at him. "I hope we'll not be enemies."

"No fear of it, Mrs. Merwent." Jim smiled in reply.

"She says we must all call her Nannie, Jim," broke in John. "That's what everybody calls her."

Jim bowed and smiled again.

Mrs. Merwent glanced first at Jim and then at her daughter. "We thought you'd gone out," she observed to Lucy.

Lucy answered quickly.

"I started for the door, but you came in so suddenly I didn't get there in time. I didn't expect you in an automobile, you know, and so didn't pay any attention till you actually opened the door."

"Were you upstairs?" John inquired.

"No, I was here," returned Lucy.

Mrs. Merwent put her hand on her son-in-law's arm. "It's all right," she murmured; then to her daughter, "Now,
Lucy, I think I'll go up to my room, if you don't mind, and make myself presentable after my journey."

"Of course," acquiesced Lucy. "Your things are in the hall, aren't they? We'll just——"

At this juncture Dimmie, who had slipped around to Lucy and hidden his face in her dress, began to cry. Lucy stooped down.

"What's the matter, darling?" she inquired.

"She d—d—didn't e—e—even——," he sobbed.

"Why of course!" put in Mrs. Merwent. "How stupid of me! Come and kiss your Nannie now."

Lucy pushed Dimmie forward.

"Come on." He hung back.

"I'm afraid you're a very sensitive little boy," smiled Mrs. Merwent.

John frowned.

"Dimmie, kiss Nannie. What makes you act that way?"

"Don't, John," expostulated Mrs. Merwent. "It's because I'm strange. He'll be all right bye-and-bye." Then, to the child, "Won't you, Jimmie?"

Dimmie continued to cling to his mother's hand and did not reply.

"Dimmie," ordered John sternly, "answer Nannie."

"Now, John," put in Mrs. Merwent again, "let the poor child be. It's such a trifle."

"I'll show you to your room now, Mamma," Lucy offered quietly.

Mrs. Merwent glanced questioningly at John and then followed her daughter. Dimmie accompanied them, still holding his mother's hand.

"You sure did it up in style," Jim remarked as the two women mounted the stairs.

"Yes," admitted John. "It seemed so mean to bring her in the train after such a long trip. You know she's been used to all sorts of things—comforts I mean."

Jim relighted his pipe in silence.

The men smoked and discussed their new contract until the women reappeared. Both avoided any further reference to the addition to their circle. When Lucy and her mother
came down, the elder woman was tastefully arrayed in a charming house dress of some pale green sheer material that was a miracle in its sophisticated simplicity. John expressed his admiration and Mrs. Merwent gave a silvery laugh.

"Oh, this! It's an old easy dress I wear around the house. Mr. Sprague will have to get used to seeing me in such things. I hear he's quite one of the family."

Jim, who had been watching Lucy as she passed to and fro from the kitchen, answered, "I'm sure it's very becoming, Mrs. Merwent."

Nannie made a little mouse at John while Jim continued:

"We'd better get down town, John. You know Howland is coming at ten o'clock to look over the final plans for his house and sign the papers, and you especially wanted to talk to him about that decoration scheme of yours."

"Do you think my trunks are safe with that express company, John?" interrupted Mrs. Merwent.

"Why, yes, perfectly, Nannie. They'll probably be here before night."

"Well, would you mind going to the express office and asking if they've been sent? I'm so worried about them."

"Sure. I'll call them up as soon as I get to the office," agreed John heartily.

Nannie sighed a trifle resignedly.

When the two men were seated in a car of the train bound for the city John commented enthusiastically on the incidents of Mrs. Merwent's arrival.

"I'm glad the strained feeling is over with. It'll be fine for Lucy to have her mother with her," he said.

Jim did not answer.

"Mrs. Merwent's all alone now," pursued John. "She's been very badly treated. A woman needs a man to look after her."

For reply Jim grunted.
III

Mrs. Merwent had watched John and Jim until they turned the corner. When they were out of sight she came and sat by the kitchen table where Lucy was washing the breakfast dishes.

“Let me help you, dear,” Nannie offered.

“No, thank you, Mamma. It isn’t much and it’ll be done in a minute.”

“Now you mustn’t hesitate to ask me to do anything I can,” went on the older woman. “I don’t want to be a burden on John and you. I want you to realize that I am willing to help and that I cherish no ill feeling about anything that has happened.”

Lucy looked at her in surprise.

“Well, you rest up today from your journey,” she answered after a moment. She was placing dishes in the china cupboard. “You must be tired.”

“I never saw such a poor service on any railway,” resumed Mrs. Merwent, having interrupted the conversation by going into the dining room and bringing a rocking chair out into the kitchen for herself. “There were no sterilized drinking cups and no electric lights in the berths. I don’t think they should be allowed to run such old, out-of-date cars.”

Lucy worked a moment in silence.

“But I must say the service on the diner was good,” pursued Nannie. “I had some fried spring chicken that was so tender and juicy it fairly melted in your mouth.”

“I haven’t been on any but a suburban train since our wedding journey,” Lucy observed.

“Oh, Lucy, what a terrible time that was for me!” Mrs. Merwent drew out her handkerchief.

“I thought you said in your letter that we wouldn’t discuss what happened, Mamma,” Lucy accused gently.
"Oh, Lucy, anyone who went through what I did can't forget it all at once," Mrs. Merwent protested.
Lucy was silent again.
"But I cherish no hard feelings," Nannie went on, "although poor Mother never got over your going away."
After a few moments Nannie returned to the subject of travel.
"Don't you ever go away from the city, Lucy? I should think it would be dull staying in one place so long."
"We can't afford travelling," Lucy spoke emphatically.
"Well, I can't either, now." Mrs. Merwent settled herself more comfortably in the rocking chair. "It was only the kindness of my dear friend, Professor Walsh, that made it possible for me to have any comfort at all on the way. He came part way with me and arranged that I was to be looked after until the end of my journey."
Lucy busied herself with the preparations for luncheon.
"I do wonder if my trunks are safe!" exclaimed Nannie after a short pause. "I didn't like the looks of the man who took the checks."
"They're safe," Lucy assured her. "Don't worry about them."
"Have you got a cup of coffee made, Lucy?" her mother then asked, surveying the kitchen.
"Why, I thought you and John had had breakfast," Lucy apologised.
"We did, but it was so early and I was so excited I hardly ate a bite. If you could let me have a cup of coffee and a tea cake or two—I'm afraid it will give me the headache if I eat nothing until luncheon."
"Why, of course, Mamma. It'll only take me a minute to make coffee." Lucy measured the water as she spoke.
"I thought it was already fixed or I wouldn't have asked for it," protested Nannie. "I don't want to make any extra work."
"Oh, that's nothing." Lucy put cup, saucer, spoon, and plate on the kitchen table.
"Now you must let me wait on myself," Mrs. Merwent ob-
jected as Lucy placed the sugar bowl and cream pitcher before her.

"It's all ready, Mamma."

"I had no idea you'd do all this," Nannie remarked as she resigned herself to the consumption of coffee, cookies, and some muffins left from breakfast.

"We'll be all alone for luncheon. John never comes home at midday," Lucy informed her mother. An inviting odor rose from the range as she raised the lid of a pot.

"Let's have strawberries and ice cream," suggested Nannie. I just love strawberries. It makes me fairly tremble with delight when they go down my throat."

"I don't know whether they're in yet," said Lucy.

"Oh, yes, they are. I saw some in a big fruit store in the city, and John got me some for breakfast."

"I doubt whether we can get any out here, but I'll send Dimmie to the store around the corner with a note to see."

"Now don't let me interfere with your arrangements. It doesn't make any difference what I eat. I don't want to make any bother while I'm here."

"It's no bother," disclaimed Lucy.

She had already planned the dessert but did not know what else to say.

When Dimmie returned from the fruiterer's he came into the kitchen and, with great pride, delivered the parcel to his mother.

"The man only had two boxes," he announced, "an' he said the money wasn't enough for 'em, but it was all right. It's all wrote in the note."

"Thank you, darling," said Lucy, kissing him.

"You should wipe your feet before you come into the house, Jimmie," remonstrated his grandmother. "See how you have brought dirt into the kitchen. Little boys should learn to be thoughtful of others and not make work unnecessarily. That's not helping."

"Oh, it's not mud. It will sweep out easily," explained Lucy, smiling at Dimmie whose face had grown troubled.

"Well, I'm sure I didn't mean to interfere, Lucy," said Nannie. "I was only trying to help. You're the one who
has to clean up after him, not I. You are so different from
what you used to be. We never used to have the slightest
difference of opinion.”

Lucy continued to smile.

“I don’t think I am any different,” she replied.

“Yes, you are,” insisted her mother. “Getting married has
changed you. I must say, though, I was agreeably surprised
in your husband. John is really delightful, so kind and con-
siderate. I overlooked everything and we became friends in
no time. Now much does he make?”

Lucy opened her eyes wide.

“He and Mr. Sprague are in partnership in business for
themselves. Some months they make more than others.”

“What a sweet little house you have,” went on Nannie,
whose conversation consisted mostly of beginnings. “How I
long to have a home again!”

“John and Jim and I planned it out together,” explained
Lucy, ignoring the last remark. “All those water colors in
the dining room and sitting room are John’s. I think they
make the house look intimate and homelike.”

“This Mr. Sprague seems to be quite at home here,” Nan-
nie interrupted. “Aren’t you afraid people will say things?”

Lucy gazed at her mother a moment without answering.

“Let me tell you about the house,” she suggested finally.

“You really must have a sideboard in your dining room,
Lucy. It looks so bare. Do you remember the rosewood
sideboard that Papa bought for Mamma when I was born? 
Cousin Minnie has gotten a table and chairs from an antique
store and they match it beautifully.”

Lucy’s sense of humor came to her rescue.

“When we get rich we’ll have rosewood sideboards and lots
of other things,” she said laughingly.

“Now you’re making fun of me, Lucy,” her mother com-
plained in a hurt tone. “I only thought you might have a
little interest in the furnishings of my old home. I didn’t
mean that you could get one like it.”

Lucy went up and put her arms around Nannie.

“No, I wasn’t making fun of you, Mamma. Come into the
sitting room and I’ll show you Dimmie’s baby pictures.”
“Really I’m so tired I think I’ll look at them later. I think I’ll lie down till luncheon is ready, if you don’t mind. I always make it a point to rest thoroughly for a few minutes during each day. You have no idea what a difference it would make in your looks, Lucy. You ought to make that a rule which nothing should interfere with. I think we owe it to others to keep ourselves attractive.”

“I’m afraid that’s easier said than done, Mamma. But try to get your nap. It will refresh you. I’ll call you when luncheon is ready.” Lucy spoke with determined good humor.

“Are you sure those trunks of mine are in safe hands, Lucy?” Nannie questioned again as she rose to go. “I have a presentiment that something will happen to them.”

“Now please don’t worry any more about them, Mamma. John wouldn’t employ any firm that was not perfectly reliable.”

“Well, I hope so,” sighed Nannie, moving toward the hall.

When, at six o’clock, the gate clicked and John’s step sounded on the walk, Lucy was occupied in making a gravy that Nannie had suggested, and so was unable to run with Dimmie to meet him as she usually did. She was conscious of a queer feeling of being left out as she heard him and Nannie come into the dining room together.

Mrs. Merwent had on a gown of lavender organdie, open at the throat, and a net fichu was draped about her shoulders. In the less trying light she looked more out of place in her maternal rôle than on the occasion of her arrival in the morning.

“Where’s Lucy?” John asked. He appeared to be tired and there was perspiration on his forehead. He smiled on Nannie’s fresh appearance.

“In the kitchen, I believe,” Nannie answered. “I’ve been busy getting the table ready.” She held some flowers in her hand, and as she spoke she was occupied in placing them in a vase. One half-opened rose she laid by John’s plate.

He went into the kitchen and kissed Lucy as usual. Her muslin dress was covered by an apron. Her face was flushed
and a loose strand of hair brushed her cheek as she bent over her cooking. She replied to his greeting without stopping her work. Instead of sitting across the old rush bottomed kitchen chair with his arms over the back and talking about his experiences in the city, as was his custom, he returned at once to the dining room.

Notwithstanding John's water colors on the walls, it was rather a bare little place, as Nannie had said. The twilight entered between the muslin curtains, however, and the modest array of silver and glassware glittered on the table. A breeze scattered the odor of the small bouquet of flowers.

As John entered Nannie switched on the electric light.

Lucy placed the food on the dishes and Nannie carried them to the table.

"My, that smells good!" John exclaimed boyishly. "What have you got for us?" He and Nannie had seated themselves.

"It's a steak en casserole with mushrooms," explained Nannie, picking a tiny bit of lint from his sleeve. "I hope you enjoy it. Poor boy, how hungry you must be working until this hour of the day!"

"I'm hungry, too," announced Dimmie, who had come in and seated himself unnoticed.

Lucy now appeared, her apron removed. "Are you, dear?" She hesitated by the table without seating herself.

"Why don't you sit down, Lucy?" John asked.

Lucy seated herself.

"Will you hand me my napkin ring, Mamma," she requested, at the same time passing a folded napkin without a ring to her mother.

"Why, is this your place?" exclaimed Nannie, rising.

"Come, let's change. I didn't notice."

"It makes no difference, Nannie," put in John. "Sit down and let's have dinner."

"No, it makes no difference," acquiesced Lucy, and Mrs. Merwent reseated herself.

"Well, as I'm here, I might as well serve the plates," remarked Nannie. "I want to do something to help."

During the meal John talked of art, his manner youthfully
eager, and his hair falling over his forehead from which he pushed it back with the graceful gesture peculiar to him.

"I have to design cheap houses, Nannie," he bewailed whimsically, "instead of listening to the voices of the unseen that are calling to me."

"It's a pity you haven't money so you could follow your natural bent and be an artist," said Nannie.

"I am an artist," John rejoined, rather warmly. "One doesn't need to hold oneself aloof from common life to be an artist. On the other hand one must learn not to despise common things, but to see beauty in them."

"I only meant I wished you didn't have to worry about money," she persisted.

"Of course, I know you understand, Nannie, but one doesn't need to crowd his soul with small things just because he's poor. If he will he can see beauty that is not for the eye of his senses." John glanced up at his pictures.

"Lucy tells me all these beautiful water colors are yours, John." Nannie let her gaze travel about the room. "They're simply exquisite."

"Well," John's tone was deprecating, "if I'd had a chance I might have done something at it."

"It's too bad you don't have time to be more with artistic people, John," Lucy put in with an affectionate look at her husband.

"I love pretty things too, John," Nannie said quickly. Lucy glanced at her mother, who was regarding John.

"I'll have to play for you after dinner," Nannie offered a few minutes later.

"I remember Lucy told me you played," he answered. "We got the piano over a year ago, but Lucy never has time to touch it, and I can't do anything but drum."

"It takes a lot of will power to practice regularly," replied Nannie, "but then I love my music so. I never let a day go by without practicing."

"We'll have to go to some concerts next winter," John continued.

"How nice," Nannie smiled, "but I don't know whether I shall be here next winter. There may be somebody else who'll..."
have something to say about that.” She glanced down demurely.

“Listen to that, Lucy!”

“Of course you’ll be here next winter, Mamma.” Lucy spoke with an effort.

“And we’ll go to the symphony concerts.” John was enthusiastic. “It’ll be great, Nannie. Lucy and I went to some of them, but it’s hard to drag her out of the house in cold weather. You remember, Lucy, we heard Beethoven’s Symphony in C Minor. It was simply grand, Nannie.”

“It must have been,” Nannie agreed sweetly.

“The allegro makes me think of the human soul struggling against its fate.” John’s gaze was rapt. “The andante is—is the doubt and questionings of the heart—and their answer.” His face was flushed. Dimmie, his mouth open, stared at his father with a fascinated look.

“Music makes me feel just that way, John,” Nannie confided, “but I can’t express myself as well as you.”

“It takes me right off my feet, Nannie. There’s the scherzo of that C Minor. There’s where the struggle gets breathless. The trio and recapitulation sort of wonder about the struggle and tragedy. Then there’s a little pianissimo that is near the answer. Then the finale comes along and takes it up till it winds up in a kind of shout of victory. It’s great, Nannie!”

Lucy watched John admiringly.

“You ought to have been a critic, John,” Nannie declared. “Music means so much to me, too.”

“I’m nutty about it, Nannie,” John vowed boisterously. “We’ll go to all the concerts that come along and have a general good time.”

Lucy said nothing.

“Can I have a good time, too?” asked Dimmie suddenly.

“Sure, Son,” John agreed. “Now Nannie’s here we’ll all have a good time, won’t we?”

After dinner John and Nannie went into the living room where John smoked while she played to him. The Winters had a good piano but Lucy played indifferently and, being very busy and not strong, had discontinued practice. They
had often talked of buying a player piano, but the amount
asked by the dealer above the value of their own instrument
had put the luxury out of their reach.

Dimmie helped his mother clear the table and wash the
dishes, and when the tasks were done these two joined John
and Nannie. However, Dimmie soon grew sleepy and Lucy
led him away to bed, remaining with him to tell stories and
sing lullabies until he was sound asleep.

When she returned to the living room John and her mother
were talking earnestly.

“Come here, Lucy,” John called from the lounge. “Nannie
has been telling me more about her trouble with your father.
I had no idea how badly he had treated her. It’s a real
shame!”

“I can’t talk about Papa, John. I thought we weren’t going
to discuss the past, Mamma.” Lucy’s tone was strained.

“She wasn’t accusing anyone.” John drew Lucy to the
lounge beside him. “Don’t be so touchy,” and he put his arm
around her and kissed her forehead.

Lucy began to smooth back his disheveled hair.

hope it will always be so with you.” She put her hand to her
eyes. “My life has turned into nothing but unhappiness—
nothing but a tragedy—that is if it had not been for the
friendship and understanding of—the person whom neither of
you know—” She stopped.

“Poor Nannie!” John reached and took her hand.

“I want some affection, too,” she pleaded, pressing his hand.
John drew her from her chair and down to the lounge, so
that he was between her and Lucy.

“You will be happy here with us and forget your trouble.
We must go out more, Lucy, now that Nannie is here. It will
take her mind off the past and keep her from dwelling on it.”

Lucy gently disengaged herself from John’s embrace and
rose.

“Where are you going, Lucy?” he asked.

“I forgot to count the clothes. The washerwoman is com-
ing for them early in the morning.”

“Poor Lucy! She don’t realize that this is your only time
to relax, John. I could easily have counted the clothes before
dinner if she had told me about it," remarked Nannie when
she and John were alone.

After some time Lucy was heard ascending the stairs and
John called out, "Why don’t you come in here, Lucy?"
"I am going to bed early," she answered. "I’ve a lot to do
tomorrow. Is there anything I can do for you, Mamma?
You know where everything is, don’t you?"
"Why of course I do," responded her mother, coming out
into the hall. "I can look after myself. I don’t want you to
ever worry about me. Kiss me good night." Lucy leaned
over the balustrade and kissed her.
"I hope you rest well. You’ve been working too hard. I’m
glad I’m here to help you now. I used to think when we were
separated how much you needed my care. Poor Mother often
spoke of it. You must get strong again."
"I’ll be up in a little while," called John.

Lucy undressed herself and lay down. The murmur of the
voices of her mother and her husband came to her faintly.
She lay and thought.

When John came to bed he supposed her to be asleep, and
tip-toed about the room, undressing in silence without a light
and getting into bed with the greatest gentleness to avoid wak-
ing her. Before reclining on his pillow he leaned over her
and saw her eyes wide open.
"Why, Lucy, I thought you had gone to bye-bye," he said,
and, lying down, took her in his arms.
She drew away from him.
"Why, Lucy, what’s the matter?" he asked in a hurt tone.
She made no answer but he could feel that she was silently
sobbing. He took her in his arms again. This time she did
not resist.
"Tell me what it is, darling," he pleaded.
"Oh, John, do you want anybody but me?" She wept.
"Of course I don’t," he returned vehemently. "What made
you think that?"
"I don’t know," she answered evasively, vaguely comforted
by his ardent denial.
"Was that what you were crying about?" he asked.
"No."
"Well, what was it? Won't you tell me, sweetheart?"
"Oh, John, it wasn't anything—except I'm—so tired."
"I know you must be," he whispered. "It's been an exciting day for you. But now that Nannie's here she can take a lot of things off your hands. It will make things easier for you. You poor little girl, you have had to work so hard, and you aren't strong."
"I don't think so, John."
"Don't think what?"
"That she will make it easier."
He considered a minute.
"Lucy."
"Yes?"
"Were you crying because I stayed and talked with Nannie instead of coming upstairs with you?"
"No—not that alone. I——"
He caught her tightly to him.
"You dear, sweet, foolish, jealous little thing," he whispered, laughing. "The idea! Why you precious darling, I was only trying to be nice to your mother on her first day for your sake. Lucy, don't you ever, ever dream for a second that any one could take your place for a tiny instant. Why, sweetheart, I love you. I only like other people."
Lucy kissed him.
Soon they were asleep in each other's arms.
IV

Mrs. Merwent’s maiden name was Anna Lockhart. She was born in a southern state, of a family that was considered to be aristocratic and distinguished. None of its members had ever accomplished anything noteworthy, but they had lived a long time in Russellville, there were a large number of them, and they had usually raised sugar and cotton instead of corn and tobacco.

Her earliest memories were of a large, square, white house with a front porch supported by Corinthian pillars, a long drive-way lined with great trees on either side, and much display of lavish hospitality.

From early childhood her whims were gratified and it never occurred to her that the numerous things given to her, the clothes, the pony, the negress who nursed her, the rings and brooches, were not a part of her own charm and importance.

Her first pleasure was to attract attention; whether by doing things that earned her the name of “Tomboy,” by being able to show dresses and ribbons finer than her playmates, or by any other device her ingenuity could discover.

She liked negroes because they were obsequious, and she was saucy to white children supposed not to be her social equals whom, in imitation of her elders, she designated as “trash.”

Anna, or Nannie as she was called, delighted in showing her power, and was relentless in exacting notice and recognition of her position. She stuck pins into the arms of Aunt Martha, her nurse, while the old negress was dressing her; she stepped on the bare toes of the small black children on her father’s place, and invented punishments for the dogs, cats, and other domestic animals that happened to be at her mercy.

Especially she enjoyed her tyranny over Troupe, as the large family dog was named. It pleased her to see him grovel before her when she scolded him. She often played a game that she called “circus.” She would tie the dog with a rope that had a loop which she could slip over a stake driven into
the ground, and with a buggy whip she would make him run round and round. He would look back at her with pleading eyes, his tail clamped to his body, but she did not pity him. When he was completely exhausted he would lie down, his tongue lolling and the saliva dripping from his mottled black gums. After she untied him he would run about, crazy with joy, barking and licking at her hands and ankles. She paid no attention to these demonstrations.

Nannie was called stingy, as she seldom divided her sweetmeats or other good things with her playmates, and would not allow them to touch her toys. But occasionally, when glory could be gotten out of giving, she would bestow some old or broken plaything, always demanding profuse expressions of gratitude, however, from the recipient.

No attempt was made to teach Nannie any useful occupation, and, as she cared neither for stories nor for books, the task of amusing her became no sinecure.

As she grew older she loved to go shopping with her mother in the little town. They always went in the family carriage and Mrs. Lockhart, who considered that she could insult salespeople with impunity, invariably asked for the best in a haughty voice and inquired the price after she had decided on the article.

Nannie's desire to attract notice increased with the years. She was fond of having her picture taken in fancy dress in imitation of various popular actresses. One, in which she was represented as Iphigenia, was most flattering and was displayed for some months in the windows of the establishment of the local photographer.

She begged a riding horse from her father, and she liked to be seen in elegant riding habits, and at parties in sumptuous gowns too old for her. She adopted a pertness and flippancy of speech that was described as "smart" and assumed a domineering manner toward the servants which was, it is true, less marked as regarded the "house boy" who was a handsome young mulatto.

She also picked out for condescending notice an admiring girl friend at the private school which they both attended and made a chum of her. This girl, Roberta White, was far from pretty, and could be patronized, but was not unintelligent, and
possessed considerable personality. Unfortunately Nannie’s first boy admirer soon transferred his callow devotion to “Bob White,” as Nannie had dubbed Roberta. There was a curious scene in which Bob White was forever disowned, and Nannie ever after, in referring to it, spoke of Roberta’s “ingratitude.”

Nannie was eighteen years old when she left school. It was a disastrous year for her father. He had inherited money which he invested and spent with equal display and absence of judgment, but he awoke one day to find that creditors were impervious both to the dignity of the Lockhart name and the impressiveness of the ancestral mansion. Mrs. Lockhart was an efficient person, however, and brought to bear upon the situation many of the practical qualities in which her husband was lacking. The same could not be said of Nannie, who had absorbed from those around her what seemed a tacit recognition of divine right as regarded the members of her family. If she had been subject to her father alone it is probable that only the jolt of an absolute downfall would have aroused her to an appreciation of financial values, but fortunately Mrs. Lockhart exercised her authority as decisively as was her custom and gave Nannie to understand that, for the time being at least, she might enjoy few dresses and fewer parties.

Not to be cut out of the gaieties in which the once envious Bob White was participating, Nannie astonished no one more than her mother by displaying considerable taste and talent in the improvisation of very effective frocks with the simplest means. Nannie was not a good seamstress. The hastily devised costumes were never neatly made and were often in actual danger of falling apart, but a ribbon here or a flower there was applied with a discrimination that Russellville was not too provincial to recognize as “chic.”

Though such haphazard dressmaking was her only contribution to the household economy, it had a value that was more than apparent, and Mrs. Lockhart recognized it. She had determined that Nannie should find salvation for the family by attracting a husband whose pretensions to that distinction should rest on a solid financial basis.

It seemed almost a divine intervention to insure the Lock-
harts' future when Arthur Merwent, a young lawyer from
the north, came to the home town.

Young Merwent rented an office and bought some furniture.
He purchased steel engravings of famous jurists to decorate
his walls, unpacked his law books, and had a sign painted and
hung over his door.

Mrs. Lockhart knew, by hearsay at least, that Merwent held
expectations of inheriting some money, and, as the young man
was attractive and a stranger, it was soon arranged that
Arthur should live at the Lockhart home. He insisted on
paying for his board and, after some perfunctory objections
which embarrassed Nannie and Mr. Lockhart but did not dis-
turb the mother, this was agreed to.

Arthur was agreeable but uncommunicative. His reserve
pleased Nannie's father, who was pompous of manner and
weak of purpose, but invariably inclined to be enthusiastic
about a new acquaintance.

"That young man can keep his mouth shut. He'll rise," Mr.
Lockhart often said.

From the beginning Nannie assumed a light and jesting at-
titude toward Arthur. She was saucy and capricious, de-
manding services and attentions calculated to convince him of
her superior birth and position, and suggesting with uncon-
scious skill potentialities that she neither possessed nor appreci-
ated. He said little, as was his wont, but Nannie was clever
enough to perceive the favorable impression she was making.

Thrown into a continuous semi-intimacy the two young
people reacted as might have been expected and soon the im-
perturbable Arthur gravely declared himself. Mrs. Lockhart
preserved a grim neutrality in the affair. True, his financial
prospects were inclined to soften her, but with all that he was
a Yankee and there existed a grave doubt as to the aristocracy
of his connections. Her husband, who had visited the Mer-
wents and had been considerably impressed by the prosperity
evined in their domestic establishment, was, however, posi-
tive in his approbation. This did not alter his wife's opinion or
change her attitude, for she was not accustomed to take his
point of view seriously; but when a friend made a self imposed
pilgrimage to the Merwent home and returned with enthusiastic
corroboration of Mr. Lockhart’s report, Mrs. Lockhart relented and her negative aloofness became encouragement.

Nannie, who shared the common conviction that Arthur was a rising young lawyer and a desirable catch, consented to become engaged.

This did not hinder her from indulging in coquettish tricks of a number and variety that her fiancé found disconcerting.

Finally he brought things to an issue, refusing to be played with longer, and, after exhausting her ingenuity in the endeavor to gain more delay, she fixed the wedding day for a date four months ahead.

Twice in the midst of the work on the extensive trousseau, Nannie and Arthur quarrelled, and on each occasion she returned his ring. But the misunderstandings were adjusted and the wedding morning finally arrived.

Nannie had shown much interest in the more obvious preparations for the ceremony, insisting that her gowns must be of such and such a price, that her bridesmaids outnumber those of her previously married friends, and that the affair as a whole be conducted with an éclat which strained the resources of the Lockharts’ reduced finances to the uttermost.

Nevertheless, on the day before the wedding she showed herself to the household in a state of extraordinary depression, wandering listlessly from room to room, striking discordant notes on the piano, and finally, having fled from Arthur’s presence, she was discovered face downwards on an old horsehair sofa in a violent paroxysm of weeping.

Mrs. Lockhart, who had gone to seek her, was unable to elicit any explanation of her distress and called Merwent. But it was a mistake. Nannie turned on him with a storm of accusations.

“You’ve wrecked my life! I don’t know what’s to become of me!” she wailed.

“It’s not too late yet, Nannie,” Arthur answered. His voice was slightly unsteady and his eyes shone dangerously, but his manner was quiet.

“Oh! Oh! How dare you! I was never so insulted in my life! You don’t care how much disgrace and humiliation you
heap on me! It doesn't make any difference to you what they say about me!"

Arthur was left alone. He sat on the sofa Nannie had quitted and held his head in his hands. After a few moments he rose and lighted a cigar. He was smoking when Mrs. Lockhart came in search of him a quarter of an hour later. She brought with her a glass of hot eggnog which she had made to comfort him.

"It's all the perfectly natural result of her high strung state," remarked Mrs. Lockhart emphatically. "You must remember this is the last day of her girlhood," she added in a significant manner.

Arthur drank the eggnog and said nothing.

The next day, however, Nannie was radiant. Her mother and her cousin, Mrs. Sheldon, had helped to dress her. The wedding gown bore the mark of an expensive Louisville house, the bouquet was of white orchids, and the diamond pendant which Arthur had given her, though modestly small and fragile, glittered becomingly on her plump throat.

Arthur entered the church gravely, his head bent, and even as Nannie came toward him at the chancel rail he did not lift his eyes. It was only as they stood side by side that he glanced at her face. Every trace of depression had vanished. She held her head high with the slightly insolent air that she had so often been told was aristocratic, and she really looked prettier than he had ever seen her.

The recessional was played. As the bridal couple emerged from the church he turned slightly toward her.

"Well, Nannie," he whispered, smiling a little.

They were close to the carriage steps. Arthur moved back to assist her. By some chance awkwardness his heel caught in a loop of satin. There was a tearing sound and Nannie flung herself from his grasp.

"I'm sorry," he murmured.

An impassioned but enigmatic "Ah!" was her only reply, and until the house was reached she sat far away from him on the carriage cushions, replying in monosyllables until Arthur relapsed into moody silence. When they arrived at their des-
BLIND MICE

tination Nannie left the carriage hurriedly and unassisted.
A supper had been planned but the hour of the departure of the train they were to take prevented their presence. There was, however, no way to escape the brief reception. At this function Nannie, who had looked almost defiantly spirited during the ceremony, assumed a sudden appearance of disconcerting melancholy. The pair stood under an arch of smilax, and Nannie could see herself quite plainly in the long pier glass opposite and appreciated how large and dark her eyes seemed in the shadows that fell on her face.
The affair as a whole was not gay. Mrs. Lockhart shed a few impressive tears, glancing somewhat apprehensively from time to time at her daughter's unresponsive features. Bob White had come to the reception, being herself engaged. Nannie greeted her with effusive sadness and clasped her in an embrace that was like a despairing renewal of devotion. The two girls talked in low tones, and Arthur was conscious of being ignored. A few moments later Nannie went off to prepare for travel and he was able to excuse himself.

It was half past eleven at night. The Pullman was dimly lighted. Merwent had avoided a stateroom and every appearance that might indicate that he and Nannie were a bridal couple, but he felt that the fresh modishness of Nannie's costume betrayed them. They sat down in a vacant seat while the beds were being made up. Arthur kept an unresponsive profile turned to his wife. He had resolved not to make any more advances.
The two swayed stiffly with the motion of the car. The woodwork creaked. Long shadows moved up and down at the end of the passage. Snoring from a curtained berth was audible.
Nannie touched Arthur's arm lightly. He looked down at her in surprise. She was regarding him with a new and softened expression.
"Arthur!" Her voice shook slightly.
His face cleared.
"Nannie!" They kissed stealthily.
When the conductor came down the aisle they were sitting consciously far apart and Arthur's face was flushed.
VI.

Lucy was born about a year after the Merwent wedding. Although everything was normal and the baby a fine healthy child, Nannie persistently vowed that she had gone through an experience never before equalled and that she could never have another child.

Toward the end of their wedding journey, over some slight misunderstanding at a hotel, Nannie had given way to a hysterical fit of passion that amazed and dismayed her husband, but this was nothing compared with the scene when she discovered that she was pregnant. Tears, screams, striking Arthur in the face, with threats of killing herself, him, and the child were only the beginnings of the drama. However, Arthur had by this time begun to perfect his attitude of non-reaction to the stimuli she employed, and went to his office unworried.

Nannie afterward in a thousand ways suggested that the coming of the child was in the nature of a crime and a calamity, and that Arthur was to blame for it. Nannie’s father died a month before her confinement and she even implied that Arthur was responsible for this coincidence. To add to her sense of disappointment and injury Mr. Merwent senior, who had been ill for some time, died also, leaving an involved estate, and the hope that Nannie had secretly treasured of inheriting his money died with him. Arthur’s future, from the Lockhart standpoint, had ceased to be. Mrs. Lockhart, calling to ascertain the truth of the rumor already circulated by gossiping neighbors, met Nannie’s tearful announcement with, “I always thought so!” and when Arthur entered the house a few moments later, she greeted him with marked coldness. After her mother’s departure Nannie turned on him with fresh reproaches.

“Now we are penniless and you don’t seem to care!” she exclaimed.

Arthur did not reply.
"I seem to be the only one who ever thinks about the baby's future. You haven't opened your mouth since we got the letter!"

Arthur took out a cigar and lighted it.
"O—oh! Why don't you say something? I'll go crazy!" she almost screamed.

"I don't see just what there is to say," Arthur answered quietly, and left the room.

Nannie's bitterness was accentuated by the fact that Arthur could not afford to buy the Lockhart residence which had to be sold to clear her own father's estate, and she was forced to see the property pass into the hands of "Cousin Minnie Sheldon" whom she cordially hated. The spirit of rivalry between Nannie and her cousin, the fruit of a childhood antipathy, had reached its climax in a contest for the affections of the well-to-do young business man who afterward became Minnie's husband, and when he and his wife took formal possession of Nannie's ancestral home she felt it as the cruel affirmation of her first defeat.

Mrs. Lockhart, who on previous occasions had not hesitated to express her own disapproval of "Cousin Minnie," after feeble and unconvincing protestations to the effect that she did not wish to inconvenience her prosperous relatives, accepted a grudging offer which allowed her to remain in the old place on the bounty of its new owner.

Little Lucy was weaned soon after she was born, for Nannie declared that she could not nurse a baby. By great good fortune, however, sterilized cow's milk agreed with the child and she thrived, thanks to the devoted care of old Martha who came to live with Nannie and Arthur and "bring up" their baby. Nannie continually quarreled with the old negress but Aunt Martha stayed on, partly from a habit of allegiance to the family and partly from real devotion to little Lucy.

Nannie gave scant attention to her baby until other people began to notice and praise the child, when she promptly asserted her proprietorship, pointing out with great pride the little thing's remarkable feats and insisting that Lucy be given to her whenever visitors were present. Nevertheless, the child preferred Aunt Martha and even Arthur, as the latter
often held his daughter during the evenings and sang lullabies to her. Nannie resented this deeply, and it made her secretly furious to see Lucy toddle toward him as he came into the room. She often said things to drive Arthur out of the house so that he need not divide the child’s affections.

Lucy did not begin to go to school until she was eight years old. Even then her mother objected to the separation, and in the little girl’s absence wandered restlessly about the house. Lucy, on her return, was covered with kisses. Acquaintances remarked on the unusual affection between the two, although Nannie spoke crossly and often cruelly to the child when they were alone, and not infrequently struck her. In attitude she placed herself on an equality with Lucy and at times depended on the little girl’s judgment and ideas.

Nannie could never help Lucy with her lessons at night, saying that the figures in the book made her head ache, and if Arthur attempted to offer any assistance a situation was usually precipitated that resulted in driving him from the house. Left alone with the little girl, Nannie played and sang, or produced candy from some hiding place, while she persuaded the child to talk to her about teachers and schoolmates. She enjoyed giving her piano lessons because Arthur knew nothing of music. However, she never wanted Lucy to try to sing and always insisted that her daughter had no voice for singing.

Nannie, however, resented Lucy’s growing self-sufficiency as the girl became graver of manner and expressed herself positively on all sorts of subjects.

Arthur’s law practice did not increase and, as there were no more expectations from his father’s estate, it was decided to discharge Aunt Martha. After the old woman had gone Nannie made a few half-hearted experiments at cooking, but soon relegated this undertaking to her daughter, who at sixteen was virtually the head of the domestic establishment.

But, though Lucy was responsible under this arrangement for the selection and quantity of food bought for the family, Mrs. Merwent reserved for herself the prerogative of giving orders to the grocer. The young solicitor, who always made a punctual appearance, had soft brown eyes and a beau-
tiful complexion. Nannie never opened the back door to him without first looking into the mirror.

"Are you sure your eggs are fresh today?" she would ask coquettishly. She tapped him on the arm with the pencil she held as she objected to the exorbitant price of bacon.

Lucy, who was annoyed by his habit of staring, expressed her dislike.

"Well, you don't have to give the orders to him!" was her mother's pettish answer.

Lucy worked too hard and, as a result, became ill. Arthur was away at the time. Nannie called the family physician and annoyed the girl with useless attentions. The doctor telegraphed Merwent that his daughter's condition was serious. Arthur returned on the first train and, arriving at the house, found Nannie walking the floor with senseless gestures. He went into the sick room and seated himself beside Lucy's bed. His quiet, emotionless manner seemed to drive Nannie to distraction. Her chief resentment, however, seemed to arise from the fact that he did not comfort her but only concerned himself with Lucy.

"Are you going to eat your dinner, or sit there all night?" she asked, her voice trembling with vindictiveness.

Arthur went into the dining room without answering. Nannie shut the door between them. She would not eat because she did not want to leave Arthur and Lucy alone together, and the doctor was obliged to order her to begin her meal. When she did go, however, her appetite was as hearty as usual.

After a few critical days Lucy's condition improved and on the fourth morning, when the crisis was passed, she smiled at Arthur. Nannie, in the room at the time, bent over the bed.

"Why don't you smile at Nannie?" she asked accusingly, and Lucy smiled at her mother too.

Arthur, as was his wont when he saw the approach of a useless scene, left the room.

During the convalescence Nannie invented a thousand meaningless attentions with which she endeavored to fix upon herself the regard of the invalid, but as Lucy grew stronger and began to walk about Nannie forgot to flutter around her and their life together resumed its former course.
Even after reaching the age when young girls begin to notice the opposite sex, Lucy preferred girls to men. She also delighted in caring for younger children and babies. Nannie laughed at Lucy for not having beaux.

“I had dozens at your age,” she would say.

The most common cause of misunderstanding between the mother and daughter was Nannie’s trick of regarding every remark about other people, or about human nature in general, as a covert slur on herself. Each mention of an ignoble quality brought forth, “That’s just like me,” from Nannie, while any reference to an admirable characteristic was greeted with, “I haven’t got that.”

“I wish Mamma wasn’t that way,” Lucy confided to her father one night, after a number of irritating experiences with this mania. “It makes things so unpleasant.” The evening had ended in a quarrel and Nannie had gone upstairs to cry.

“Your mother has every defect of character that can be mentioned,” Arthur replied, “so I suppose she shouldn’t be blamed for being sensitive.”

Lucy was surprised by the bitter feeling in the tone of her usually silent and impassive father, and remembered his remark.

Nannie spent a great deal of time in beauty culture. She tried all sorts of exercises and devices for preserving her figure and warding off wrinkles. Every recipe she saw in the women’s columns of the newspapers she tested carefully. Each day a large part of the morning was devoted to a faithful observance of these rites, and she never neglected to take her “beauty nap” during the afternoon. Often she would gaze with envy at Lucy’s charming color and clear eyes.

“I don’t want to grow old and ugly, Lucy,” she would say.
“I’m so afraid of growing old! Do you think I am beginning to show my age?”

“Why, Mamma, what nonsense! You look like a girl,” Lucy would reply, for Nannie’s efforts were not without a certain kind of effect.

“Do you really think so?” she would ask happily. “Don’t tell anybody I use rouge, will you?”

“I won’t,” Lucy always promised.

After taking up her residence with “Cousin Minnie Sheldon” Mrs. Lockhart seldom visited her daughter.

One summer afternoon, however, a carriage stopped before the Merwents’ gate.

“Why, I believe that’s Mamma coming here,” Nannie whispered excitedly, as the carriage door was opened. “There’s a young man with her!” she added. “Who in the world can it be? You stay here to receive them, Lucy. Tell Mamma I’ll be down in a minute,” and she ran upstairs to change her dress and improve her complexion.

“Well, well, is this my grandbaby?” Mrs. Lockhart ejaculated as she entered the hall and offered her cheek for Lucy to kiss. “You’re a young lady already,” and she surveyed Lucy’s reddened cheeks and well developed figure with approval.

The young man remained in the background, ill at ease.

“This is Kingsley Dodd,” Mrs. Lockhart announced, waving him forward. “He saw you at your father’s office and has given me no peace till I brought him over to call on you.”

Young Dodd, red to his hair, bowed and shook hands awkwardly.

“Where’s Nannie?” Mrs. Lockhart asked, entering the parlor and seating herself. “Sit down, Kingsley,” she commanded her follower.

“Mamma will be down in a minute,” explained Lucy.

Nannie delayed many minutes, and Lucy became more and more self-conscious under the influence of her grandmother’s continued scrutiny and the confusion of the new acquaintance, answering briefly his timid observations and Mrs. Lockhart’s peremptory questions.
At last Nannie appeared on the stairs in her best afternoon frock.

"Why, Mamma," she exclaimed, "how nice of you! I'm so glad to see you."

"You kept us waiting long enough if you are glad."

"I was in my bath," lied Nannie, "and couldn't come sooner."

Lucy looked at her mother.

"Well, I'm glad you still take baths," remarked Mrs. Lockhart as Nannie kissed her.

Nannie laughed.

"We're not that poor," she tittered.

"This is Mr. Kingsley Dodd." Mrs. Lockhart motioned her companion forward again. "Judge Dodd's only son. You remember Judge Dodd, Nannie."

"Yes indeed!" Nannie smiled her sweetest and shook hands with Kingsley. "We're delighted to know you, too," she declared as she beamed on the youth.

"Nannie, I want to see that old dresser your father gave you. We're furnishing a guest room in antiques and maybe it will just fit in. If it does, I'll give you another," said Mrs. Lockhart after a brief conversation.

"But, Mamma——" Nannie began.

Mrs. Lockhart frowned at her meaningly.

"All right," Nannie acquiesced hastily, and the two women ascended the stairs.

"Young Kingsley is greatly taken with Lucy," explained Mrs. Lockhart, coming to the point at once as soon as they were out of hearing of Lucy and her guest. "You know all Judge Dodd's money will go to Kingsley. It's Lucy's great chance. I don't know how she did it. He's just come back from college and all the girls in town have set their caps for him. Now I am going to look to you to see that Lucy doesn't do anything foolish."

Nannie nodded obediently.

"I'll do all I can," she agreed, "but Lucy is hard to manage. She——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Mrs. Lockhart. "If you will only use sense and firmness she will do anything you want her to."
BLIND MICE

You made a mess of your own marriage. If you marry your daughter to the heir of Judge Dodd it isn’t too late to get back where you ought to be.”

“I will,” put in Nannie enthusiastically.

“Well, let’s go down again,” ordered her mother, after a few minutes further consultation. “We shouldn’t make things too marked the first visit.”

“We must go, Kingsley.” Mrs. Lockhart spoke imperatively as she reentered the room where the two young people were seated.

The docile youth rose.

“You must come again.” Nannie smiled invitingly.

“Thank you,” he replied, glancing first at her and then at Lucy. “I’ve had a mighty nice time. What evening can I come?” He glanced at Lucy again.

“You haven’t anything for Thursday evening, have you, Lucy?” inquired Nannie, assisting him.

“No,” returned Lucy, who indeed had no engagements for any evening.

“Thanks,” Dodd said quickly, “then I’ll come Thursday.”

“Come early and have tea with us,” urged Nannie in response to a nod from her mother.

“Thanks,” he repeated, “I will. Good-by,” shaking hands with Lucy. Then, “Good-by, Mrs. Merwent. Thank you so much.”

“Oh, the pleasure will be ours,” Nannie declared.

Mrs. Lockhart kissed Nannie and Lucy, pinching the latter’s cheek.

“We’ll have to give a little party for my grandbaby. She’s the picture of her grandpapa,” the old lady declared, smiling.

“Did you hear what she said, Lucy?” Nannie asked delightedly as soon as their callers were gone.

“Yes,” answered Lucy.

“Isn’t it just grand?” continued Nannie with enthusiasm.

“What? The party?”

“Why, no—yes—the party and everything.”

“I don’t think so, Mamma. As for the party, I won’t have it. So far as the rest goes, you already have been invited to
Cousin Minnie’s and I don’t want to be invited, so I don’t see what you have gained.”

“I!” exclaimed Nannie indignantly. “Why, Lucy, I wasn’t thinking of myself at all. It’s you I’m glad for.”

“But I don’t see what I have to do with it, Mamma. Cousin Minnie and Grandmamma have never paid any attention to me before and I wouldn’t thank them for their attention now.”

“But, Lucy——”

“What, Mamma?”

“Lucy, it isn’t only Mamma and Cousin Minnie. It means that—it means——” Lucy’s steady eyes were upon Nannie, “It means that others—that we will be——”

“If you mean that you want me to go around with Kingsley Dodd so as to be taken up by the people who dropped us when Papa failed to make money, I won’t do it, that’s all.”

“Why, Lucy!”

“Our own relatives have treated Papa like dirt and the others have followed them, so I, for one, don’t want anything to do with them.”

Nannie assumed a maternal and authoritative tone.

“Lucy, you don’t realize what you are saying. I won’t allow you to ruin your chances in any such manner. You told Kingsley Dodd that he could come Thursday night and——”

“You mean you invited him, Mamma.”

“Well, you agreed and it’s the same thing.”

“I’ll see him when he comes Thursday,” Lucy conceded, “but I won’t again, and I won’t go to the party, so you had better tell Grandmamma not to count on it.”

“What in the world have you got against Kingsley?” Nannie demanded, now on the defensive.

“I don’t like him, and if I did I wouldn’t have anything to do with him under the circumstances.”

Nannie lost her temper.

“You shan’t act this way!” she almost screamed.

Lucy’s gaze did not waver. “Yes, I shall,” she said steadily. Nannie burst into tears. Lucy hesitated a moment before she continued.

“I’m sorry, Mamma, but I can’t help feeling this way,” she said at last.
Nannie made no reply and went on sobbing. Looking rather miserable, Lucy left her and went to the kitchen to prepare supper.

The day after Kingsley Dodd's presentation Nannie paid a visit to her mother.

"Lucy, your grandmother wants you to go over and see her in the morning," Nannie announced on her return.

"All right, Mamma," Lucy acceded without hesitation.

The following morning Lucy made her appearance at the Sheldon home with her customary punctuality.

"Well, well, it's a long time since my grandbaby came to see me," began Mrs. Lockhart kindly as Lucy entered the library where she sat tatting.

"It's been a long time since I was asked," Lucy answered simply.

"Yes, of course," agreed her grandmother hastily. "I haven't a home of my own, as you know, Lucy, and can't always do as I would like to."

Lucy did not reply to this but continued to regard her grandmother expectantly.

"You remember what I said yesterday?" resumed Mrs. Lockhart briskly. "Well, we've begun to make the arrangements for a little dance in your honor. It's high time you were introduced to society."

"I don't know whom you want to introduce me to, Grandmamma. Everybody in town knows me already."

"Oh, you know what I mean, Lucy. You ought to take your place as a young lady, and this is the nicest way to do it."

"Thank you, Grandmamma, but I'd rather not have the dance."

"Stuff and nonsense! I never saw a young girl yet who didn't love parties and attentions. We'll consider it all settled then."

"No, we won't, Grandmamma. I am not going to have a party of any kind."

"Lucy, you're crazy, my child. Why people will think you're queer. I've already told several people of our plans."
“I don’t dance, Grandmamma.”

“What? Well, Nannie must have paid lots of attention to your education! I’ll have a little talk with her. The idea of a young lady who can’t dance! Well, we’ll have a little bridge party then.”

“I don’t play bridge, either.”

“Don’t play bridge!” Mrs. Lockhart eyed her granddaughter quizzically. “Then we’ll have just an old fashioned party,” she said at length.

“Thank you, Grandmamma, but I don’t want the party,” reiterated Lucy.

“I really believe you don’t,” admitted Mrs. Lockhart with a grim smile, “but we’ll have it anyway. What night next week shall we decide on?”

“I don’t want to seem ungrateful, Grandmamma, but I’m not coming to any party.”

Mrs. Lockhart stared at Lucy only to encounter a gaze as firm as her own.

“Very well, Lucy,” she said at last in an icy tone. “I had intended to do a great many things for you, but if you want to throw away your chances like this I can do nothing. You evidently don’t want either friends or relations. You must excuse me now as I’m going out.” And Mrs. Lockhart rose and left the room.

Lucy made her way through the hall alone and went into the street.

Thursday evening came and Kingsley Dodd appeared very promptly. The day had been rainy and the remaining clouds were tinged crimson by the setting sun. The windows of the Merwents’ house were open and as the visitor went up the walk he saw Lucy lighting the gas jets in the parlor. She was the only one ready to receive him, for Nannie had not yet completed her careful toilette and Arthur was away from home, being engaged on a legal case out of town.

Nannie soon descended the stairs, however, and the three sat down to supper. During the meal she and young Dodd became such friends that it was with an obvious effort that she excused herself, when they had risen from the table, and
returned to her bedroom, leaving the young people together.

"We're going to have an all-day picnic out at Dad's country place next Saturday," Dodd observed, after some ordinary conversation, "and I want you to come. Your grandmother and Colonel and Mrs. Mainter and Dad and Aunt Sally are going to be the chaperones, and we'll have a great time. I'll come around with a single buggy and my bays and drive you out. The rest are going in surreys and on horseback. We better start early so as to——"

"Thank you, Mr. Dodd," Lucy stopped him, "but I shan't be able to go."

"Why, have you got something on for Saturday?" he asked. "Well, I'll have the thing put off till next week."

"No, it's not another engagement but I can't go because——"

"Because you don't like picnics," he laughed. "All right. We'll get up something at the house here in town. What shall it be?"

Lucy opened her lips to speak, but hesitated. At the same instant a gust of wind blew through the room and one of the window curtains fluttered out and threatened to overturn some ornaments on a nearby table. She hastened to secure the drapery.

"Let me fix it!" he offered, starting toward her. Lucy turned to face him as he reached her side.

"It's fixed, thank you," she began, then hesitated, flushing painfully. "Mr. Dodd," she met his eyes steadily, "I know you mean to be nice in giving me the picnic, and coming here to see me, and all that. We are glad to have you and I hope we shall always be friends, but Grandmamma is trying to throw us at each other's heads, and I won't have it!"

Kingsley stared at her a moment. His glance fell.

"I couldn't help it," she resumed, finally. "I had to say it. I hope we will be friends, but if you are angry I can't help that either."

"I guess I'd better go." Kingsley's face was a dull brick red. Lucy stood in the same place while he took his hat from the hall tree, and she did not move until the front door had closed behind him.
"Lucy! Lucy!" Nannie called almost instantly, as she leaned over the stair rail in the upper hall, "Are you and Mr. Dodd going out?"

"He's gone," Lucy announced, coming out of the parlor and looking up into her mother's anxious face.

"Why, what in the world's the matter?" Nannie asked agitatedly, descending the stairs as she spoke.

"Nothing's the matter, Mamma, except that I don't intend to let you and Grandmamma dispose of me as though I were an animal."

"Did you say such an awful thing to Kingsley?" gasped Nannie, wringing her hands.

"Not exactly," replied Lucy, almost smiling in spite of herself. "I told him we were being thrown at each other and I wouldn't permit it."

"Why, how could you say such a thing as that!" she protested. "Was he mad?" Then, before Lucy could answer, "Why couldn't you have waited till you saw whether you liked him or not?"

"I don't need to wait, Mamma."

"But, Lucy, there are other things to be considered."

"No, there aren't, Mamma."

Nannie's tone changed.

"Well, I think you might consider me a little at any rate!" Lucy eyed her mother squarely.

"I don't, Mamma—not in this matter. I'm willing to work for you."

"You are certainly an ungrateful child, Lucy!" Lucy winced. "Nobody knows what I sacrificed when I married your father. He has done nothing and nobody pays any attention to him. His father died with everything in a muddle and he's never made anything for himself. All the society or notice I get is through my own people, and now when they are disposed to take you up, and give us a chance to be somebody, you won't even look at one of their friends! I should think you would be glad of the chance to help your family. You would if you had any feelings at all!"

Lucy was white. Without answering she walked past her mother and went upstairs to her room.
VII

Late on the night of Kingsley Dodd’s visit Arthur returned from his trip, and the next morning he had only time for a hasty greeting to his family before leaving to keep an early appointment with the out-of-town client who engaged his services at the moment. An hour after his departure Lucy appeared in the hall with her hat on and her gloves and sunshade in her hand.

“Where are you going, Lucy?” Nannie demanded.

“I’m going to Papa’s office,” replied Lucy as she passed out the door.

When Lucy reached her father’s place of business she found Mr. Merwent alone. As his daughter entered he was reading a letter. He put it into a drawer in his desk and turned the lock.

“Well, Lucy?” He leaned back in his chair and smiled his slow smile as he spoke.

She gazed around on the dingy furniture, the old books, the discolored steel engravings, the dusty floor, and other signals of her father’s run-down law practice. Her heart almost failed her, but the memory of the preceding day rushed back upon her.

“Papa,” she began, “I want to earn my own living.”

Her father scrutinized her face kindly.

“I don’t blame you, speaking in general,” he observed, “but why have you so suddenly decided it?”

“Mamma and Grandmamma are trying to marry me to Kingsley Dodd in spite of myself, and Mamma thinks I am ungrateful because I object. I don’t think I ought to be dependent on any one any longer.”

“You seem to have all the self respect in the family, Lucy,” Mr. Merwent commented, “but what can you do?”

“I can learn book binding,” she responded without hesitation. “The pay for fine tooled hand binding is good. Mamie
BLIND MICE

Willis, who used to be in my class at high school, has been to Chicago Art School to learn it. I think I should like to go there. I want to go right away."

"Let me think, Daughter," he said meditatively. "I have a friend I should like to consult about it. It is very possible that it may be the best thing. We'll talk it over again tomorrow. Come down here about this time and we'll decide."

Lucy kissed her father, amazed at his complaisance.

"I wonder who the friend he spoke of is," she said to herself as she went back to the house. "Papa'll probably have to borrow money of him to send me away."

The following day Mrs. Merwent preserved an air of gentle sadness and grief, replying softly to her daughter's remarks but avoiding any reference to what had happened. When Lucy went out a little before the hour appointed for the conference at the office, Nannie did not ask her errand, but returned the girl's kiss and volunteered statement that she would not be gone long, with a look of patient melancholy.

"Well, it is all arranged," were Arthur's first words, as he greeted Lucy. "You are to go to Chicago where I have planned for you to stay with the relative of a friend. We agree—that is, I agree that you couldn't do better than go to the Art School, as it is a recognized institution and the courses are reliable."

"Oh, Papa, thank you so much!"

"The thanks are due to someone else, Lucy, and I hope some day you can thank the friend who has made it possible."

"Who is it, Papa? Is it someone I know?"

Mr. Merwent looked at her a moment before replying. "It's a woman friend, Lucy, Mrs. Ellen Low."

He continued to regard his daughter. Lucy's face turned pink.

"I didn't know you knew her, Papa," she said.

Mr. Merwent, though he did not take his eyes from the young girl's, seemed, in his turn, somewhat embarrassed.

"Yes, I've known her quite a while. When her husband died I was retained with Mr. Blair to settle up the estate," he answered.

"Oh!" Lucy relapsed into thoughtful silence.
She knew Mrs. Low by sight and in spite of herself rather liked the pleasant homely face with its strongly marked features, though she had, almost against her will, absorbed some of the prejudiced tone in which she had heard her mother and grandmother make occasional references to the woman.

Mrs. Low was the widow of a handsome man, who had been very fond of the ladies, and she had not lived happily with him. She appeared, in a whimsical way, to hold men in little awe. The unpopularity of her outspoken manner, which voiced a point of view that Russellville found unbecoming in a lady, had sent her to seek a more congenial atmosphere with relatives in Chicago. However, she continued to spend several months of each year in her native town.

"I expect you have accepted the family's hostility to Mrs. Low, Lucy," Arthur went on after a minute.

"I've hardly ever heard Mamma speak of her," Lucy returned, her glance drooping before the bitter, slightly amused expression that crept into her father's face.

"Mrs. Low is too big a woman for her environment. She's got too much self respect to be understood by the people in this place. It's because she's too big-hearted to be prudent, she's let herself be unpleasantly criticised!" Mr. Merwent's manner was warm.

Lucy, surprised at her father's outburst, stared at him in silence, her lips slightly parted. He rose from his chair and walked over to the open window. He stood there for a moment with his back turned, and when he finally reseated himself he appeared as self-contained and emotionless as usual.

"Are—are the people you want me to stay with Mrs. Low's friends?" Lucy paused, once more embarrassed by her father's calm scrutiny.

"Her cousin, Miss Storms," he explained. "She is very well known in Chicago and could do a lot for you, we think."

This time he used the plural pronoun without hesitation. "You haven't told your mother anything about this yet?"

"No, Papa, I'm afraid Mamma won't like it."

"So am I, Daughter. We'll have to talk it over with her tonight."

Lucy looked troubled.
"I'm afraid she won't consent."
"Yes, she will. You go on back now, and we'll see after supper."

Lucy was very thoughtful as she walked home. She had been much astonished to learn that Mrs. Low and her father were acquainted.

"Lucy is going to Chicago to school," Mr. Merwent announced that night without preamble, toward the end of the evening meal.

Nannie looked up from her plate with a startled expression.

"What in the world are you talking about, Arthur?"
"About Lucy going away to school, as my words implied," returned Mr. Merwent.

"But who said Lucy was going away?" insisted Nannie.
"I did," responded her husband shortly.
"Lucy, what is all this about?" asked Nannie, appealing to her daughter.

"It's about Lucy going away to school. Do you think you can manage to understand or shall I repeat it a few more times?" interrupted Arthur almost menacingly.

Nannie studied the face of her long silent husband and read in it something that experience taught her to be the signal of an occasion when tears, arguments, and tantrums would avail nothing. She rose suddenly and left the table and not long after they heard the front door close as she went out.

"A council of war," remarked Arthur with a wry smile.

Lucy shut herself in her room and cried.

About nine o'clock Nannie returned from the "big house" as the Sheldon home was called, where she had received neither comfort nor suggestion.

"Don't ask me to take over the management of your husband too, Nannie!" Mrs. Lockhart had exclaimed with asperity. "Any effort to help you is wasted because you make no attempt to cooperate." And Nannie had left in tears.

When it became apparent that both Arthur and her daughter must be taken at their word, curiosity got the better of the secret resolve Nannie had made to show no interest in the matter of Lucy's future.

"Of course it's none of my business, Lucy, but I should
think you and your father would at least tell me where you are going to stay when you get to Chicago. You don't know a soul there and you've never been away from home in your life."

"I told you I was going to stay with Miss Storms," replied Lucy, repeating information she had previously offered, to which Nannie, being in a temper at the time, had refused to listen. "She is the friend of somebody Papa knows," Lucy hesitated and flushed, "and he wrote and asked her if she'd take me."

"I don't know what your father is thinking about to let you go off like this to people he knows nothing of. She may be as common as dirt for all we know. I'd like to find out who the mutual friend is. I notice he don't mention his name," Nannie finished with a sneering intonation.

Lucy, her cheeks still scarlet, glanced away but said nothing.

During the days in which Lucy was preparing for departure Nannie relapsed into tearful silence and repelled her daughter's advances and demonstrations until the girl, still not much more than a child in experience, was almost ill and about to relinquish her plan.

At this point a note came from Mrs. Lockhart which spurred Nannie to more decisive speech.

"I want to tell you something," she announced, calling Lucy to her. "You had better think carefully before you leave home for if you go you can't come back here! It will be final."

"But, Mamma, Papa——" Lucy began.

"This is my final decision," interrupted Nannie in a manner almost ludicrously like Mrs. Lockhart's.

"Very well, Mamma," replied Lucy, hardly able to keep back the tears, and choking with a sense of injustice. Arthur came in at this juncture.

"What's this, Anna?" he inquired peremptorily.

Nannie was silent and avoided his gaze. He turned to Lucy who told him what had taken place.

"My child shall come to my home as often and as long as she pleases," he declared. "Lucy, come upstairs. I want to talk with you."
The father and daughter left the room together. Aunt Martha had been called in to help with the arrangements for Lucy’s departure. Nannie heard the old negress’s voice, then the voices of Arthur and Lucy, and the sound of a trunk being moved. Shut in her own room she was conscious of the feet that hurried past her door and the general bustle of packing for a journey. When there was no one about she stepped into the hall and listened. She convinced herself that Lucy would not really take this step but that the appearance of unusual preparation was arranged to deceive and punish her.

After a time, the father and daughter went out, Lucy locking her door. Aunt Martha went home at the same time. Nannie, from a window, watched them until they were out of sight and, notwithstanding her determination to discredit all evidences of Lucy’s decision, began to feel very forlorn.

She prepared herself some luncheon, eating as heartily as usual, but she was convinced that she was heartbroken. She was indeed bothered by the uncertainty and, most of all, by the fact that her daughter and husband were together.

Late in the afternoon Lucy and her father returned with a number of packages.

“Where did he get the money to buy all those things? I wonder what they are?” Nannie said to herself.

She could hear the murmur of their voices in Lucy’s room as they opened the packages and arranged the contents of the trunk and valises. When Lucy descended to the kitchen to prepare supper Nannie tip-toed to the open door of the bedroom and peered in at the still scattered belongings of her daughter. She saw a pair of new shoes and an unfamiliar hat which were a concrete affirmation of all that she had tried to deny.

“Lucy leaves in the morning on the nine fifteen,” volunteered Arthur when the three were seated at their evening meal.

Nannie was speechless. She gave him one scathing look and fled to her room.

Lucy followed her and knocked but Nannie would not open the door. She could be heard sobbing. What disturbed
the girl was that the supper she carried up on a tray and left outside her mother’s door was not eaten. At bed time Nannie had not appeared. Lucy kissed her father good night, but when she lay down she could not sleep.

When Arthur and Lucy were eating breakfast the next morning an expressman came for the trunk. Nannie had not yet descended to the dining room and still refused to open her door though Lucy had been to her several times and asked for admittance. When Mrs. Merwent saw the baggage carried away, however, her tragic resolution was broken, and, after hesitating at the head of the stairs, she composed her face to what seemed an appropriate expression of her state of mind and went down.

It was a beautiful late summer morning. The lawn was visible through the half open front door. The grass was parched, and the vines on the porch were beginning to turn yellow. There was a tinge of autumn crispness in the air, but the sunshine that flooded the hall was golden.

Lucy came out of the dining room and laid her gloves, coat, and a little hand bag on the hat stand. She had on the new hat, which was very becoming, and wore a new blue serge frock. She was excited by the unusual prospect of a journey and looked exceptionally pretty.

“Lucy!” Nannie began in an ominous voice. The girl, a little startled, turned to face her mother.

Mrs. Merwent wore a soiled lace negligée. Her hair hung down her back, loose and uncombed. Her habitual precautions to ward off wrinkles and retain her good looks had been neglected. She seemed much older than on the previous day when Lucy had seen her carefully dressed, rouged and with well ordered hair.

“You wicked, selfish, cruel girl!” continued Nannie in high pitched strident tones. “You mean, hard hearted, wretched beast!” She suddenly advanced toward Lucy who retreated in frightened astonishment.

Arthur appeared in the hall doorway.

“That is enough!” he said sternly.

_Nannie suddenly_ lost all self control.
"Get out of my house!" she screamed. "You stinking— — I!" and a stream of awful invectives that seemed from a brothel poured from her lips. She picked up Lucy's belongings from the hat stand and threw them against the front door where they fell on the threshold.

"Anna!" Arthur spoke calmly, but he only succeeded in evoking another paroxysm of screams and vile words directed at himself.

"Put your things on, Lucy," he said, and in a moment the two fairly fled into the street, leaving Nannie in a state of hysteria bordering on madness.

"I can't go on this way, Papa!" exclaimed Lucy, looking back at the house after they had walked half a block.

"All right. Do as you wish," he responded without emotion.

"Yes, it's better that I should go," she decided as if to herself, and they did not speak again until they reached the station.

As they stood waiting for the train Lucy studied Arthur's set face furtively.

"I don't want my going to make more trouble between you and Mamma," she ventured at last, timidly.

Arthur's eyes sought hers slowly.

"Don't worry," he replied heavily in his deep voice. "What you saw today is only a fair sample of what I've enjoyed for years. In the beginning I used to hold a quarter of an hour's argument to get two minutes' peace. Then I quit that and she tried to punish me with long periods of curdled gloom. Finally I took to staying away from the house in self-defense. Long before you grew up things were as bad as they could be, so don't blame yourself, Daughter. You have had nothing to do with it."

Lucy was surprised by this unprecedentedly long speech.

"Don't you think that maybe when I'm gone you and Mamma— — " she did not know how to proceed.

"I wouldn't ask her for a drink of water if I were dying," Arthur answered. Lucy had never heard such suppressed hatred and vehemence in his tone. "There's the train," he added in his ordinary manner, and they moved toward the platform.
"Here are your tickets, and here is your money," explained Arthur as they entered the Pullman. "Miss Storms will meet you. She will wear a bunch of white carnations. Here is a white carnation for you to wear. Miss Storms knows all about your plans." He removed a flower that was in his button hole and Lucy fastened it on her jacket. They kissed. The train began to move.

"Good-bye, Daughter. Write often. I will try to get up there to see you soon," he called.

The journey began.

It was late at night and rain was falling when Lucy arrived in Chicago. Leaving the train she was bewildered by the people, noises, and bustle about her. As she stood looking around the thronged platform misted by the radiance of many lights, a very tall woman, dressed in a grey linen tailored suit with a grey hat, and holding some white carnations in her hand, came up and spoke.

"I think you are Lucy."

"Are you Miss Storms?"

"I am. Where are your baggage checks, dear?"

Lucy handed over her single check and pointed out her smaller baggage which Miss Storms entrusted to a leather coated chauffeur. In a few minutes Lucy found herself in a luxurious limousine gliding through the crowded streets of the city.

A few evenings later, at a small dinner to which Miss Storms had invited some young people of her acquaintance, Lucy found herself between a red haired girl and a fresh faced young man, both from the Art School.

"Lucy, this is Nora Stimpson," began Miss Storms, and Lucy bowed to the red haired girl. "Your right hand partner is John Winter," continued Miss Storms.

Lucy, following Miss Storms' direction, looked into the smiling blue eyes of John. He rose and reached out his hand to take hers.

Lucy's romance had begun.
After Lucy’s departure the Merwent home went from bad to worse. In times past her presence had often sufficed to prevent the more sordid expressions of the disgust and contempt which Arthur felt for Nannie, and of Nannie’s feeling of fear and distrust toward him. He now avoided being at home alone with his wife until he became almost a stranger in the house.

The scandal loving people of Russellville, like the inhabitants of all small towns when similar opportunity is afforded, began to talk, and Arthur’s name was linked with that of Mrs. Low. This, in time, came to Nannie’s ears.

Arthur’s law practice, now that he was put to extra expense for Lucy’s maintenance and education, barely supported the family, and Nannie began to feel the pinch of poverty more keenly, especially in the matter of her wardrobe. Mrs. Lockhart was bitter toward her daughter and made no effort toward consolation. In short, Nannie felt herself hardly used by the world.

She exerted all her ingenuity, however, in making an appearance that belied her pocket book, and achieved a certain amount of success.

“You could turn a good many pennies dressmaking, if you only had horse sense, Anna. Minnie could get you work among her friends. She could put it to them that it was a kind of favor, and if you’d keep your mouth shut nobody would be the worse for it,” remarked Mrs. Lockhart one day, eyeing one of Nannie’s costumes with reluctant approval.

But Nannie was very much hurt by such a suggestion. She had no desire to use her arts to teach other and more prosperous women to dress becomingly.

It was evident, nevertheless, that something must be done to supplement Arthur’s earnings. She still attended social events at the “big house” as often as she could squeeze an in-
vitation from "Cousin Minnie," and it was to "Cousin Minnie's" influence, rather languidly exerted in her behalf, that she applied for a solution of her problem.

It came in the shape of a position in a small private school in Russellville.

The school, which had existed precariously for several generations, was usually referred to as "The Academy." A short while previously it had appeared to be almost moribund, but it had lately been taken over by one Mr. Walsh, called "Professor Walsh," though he held no degree or official position; and it had, for the time being at least, awakened to unwonted patronage.

Though Professor Walsh was from a nearby town, no one seemed to know much of his antecedents. He was a large slow-spoken man with a low-pitched pleasant voice. He had fat features and was rather pale. His hair, parted in the middle, was wetly and thinly combed over a glistening scalp. He had thick curveless lips. His eyes were a nondescript blue and he wore nose glasses which glittered inscrutably.

He had an air of decorum and responsibility, and his smile, which displayed double rows of perfect teeth, was full of warmth and condescension. He was peculiarly apt as a listener, showed a subdued but flattering appreciation of the broad talk of men, and was earnestly sympathetic, though somewhat noncommittal, when he gave ear to the ladies.

His personality was such that he impressed one, in his genial restraint, as being responsible for the group.

He was enough of an enigma to overawe people and acquired the reputation of being learned. The teachers in the school were afraid of him. By patronizing some and snubbing others, and by frequent vague allusions to distinguished acquaintances and remote but exalted relations, the Professor forced the first families of Russellville, so styled by themselves, into receiving him. At the institution over which he presided Nannie gave piano lessons to the younger pupils. She rather enjoyed than disliked her task, for her position allowed her to remind Arthur that he could not support her, and besides Professor Walsh soon became interested in her and was, as she told herself, exceedingly kind and sympathetic.
BLIND MICE

She also found it pleasant to meet the grown boys, or "young gentlemen," as they were called, who attended some of the higher classes. Professor Walsh left her little opportunity to talk with these youths but their presence lent a piquancy to his attentions.

She was rather afraid of him, but the envy with which the teachers looked on such signal favor as she received from this august person reconciled her to those things in his make-up which she found incomprehensible. She was further led to encourage his attentions by the fact that there was no one to contest with him the rôle of exclusive admirer.

Professor Walsh, being of ambiguous antecedents, realized fully the advantages of a connection with some family which exemplified the southern tradition. He easily perceived that Nannie Merwent was susceptible to influence, and he hoped through her to cement an alliance with the Shelonds, the most prosperous and dictatory citizens of Russellville.

Professor Walsh's plans were not laid in a day; but, without her realizing it, he considered each circumstance of Nannie's life as she presented it to him, and decided on its possible relation to his own future.

At one of the few receptions which Arthur had felt bound to attend in Russellville, he met Professor Walsh.

"I am honoured to know you, Mr. Merwent," remarked the educator affably, when they were introduced. "I have the deepest admiration for your profession. A—ah—distant connection of mine—though our names are not spelt the same—James K. Walshe of Chicago. You may have heard of him?"

"Every lawyer knows the reputation of your relative, Mr. Walsh," replied Arthur. "In criminal cases he has few equals."

"In case you ever go to Chicago I shall be most happy to give you a letter of introduction to him," offered the Professor.

"Thank you," returned Arthur, "I hardly think——" Then he appeared to reconsider. "It is true that I shall probably go to Chicago in the near future, and I should be very glad to go to see your relative."

"Well, sir, you shall have the letter." The Professor compressed his lips, put the tips of his fingers together and—
garded Arthur curiously. "Without fail. I will send it to your office tomorrow," he added.

"Thank you," repeated Arthur. And the two separated.

Nannie, on one of the rare occasions when Arthur was at home, sneeringly alluded to his attentions to Mrs. Low.

"You will kindly not interfere with the conduct of my personal affairs while you are so careless of your own," he requested in a tone that closed the conversation.

A few days later the gossips of Russellville were informing their friends that Mrs. Low had gone to Chicago for an indefinite stay. Nannie at once wrote furiously to Lucy accusing her of plotting with deliberate intent to wreck her mother's life.

Nannie's accusations were so obviously ill founded that the only recourse left for Lucy's wounded pride was silence, and she made no reply to a succession of violently worded letters.

Arthur appreciated in part the difficult situation in which his daughter was placed, and did his best to prevent her being drawn into this conflict. It was not long after Mrs. Low's arrival in Chicago that Lucy learned that her father was spending most of his time in the state capital, where he was making important legal affiliations. In this way Nannie, left almost entirely to herself, began to depend more and more on the benevolent Professor, who showed a reserved but unfailing interest in her affairs.

He had a way of regarding her enigmatically through his twinkling glasses that made her always a little afraid of him, but he was also always able to impress other people, and her cautious instincts prompted her to lean toward his poise and aplomb while her vanity still further urged her to his conquest. Nannie was not unaware of the fact that the town had begun to comment on her association with him but her terror of being alone was greater than her habit of caution.

One evening after leaving school, a note from the Professor was delivered to her, in which he suggested that she come to the school building that night, as he had heard some rumors of Arthur's doings which he thought she should know.

Nannie dressed herself and went out without hesitation,
but she was careful to find her way along obscure streets and hoped fervently that neither "Cousin Minnie" nor her other relatives would hear of the visit.

The Academy was a large old fashioned red brick building with many additions and one wing which had a private entrance in a little-frequented lane where the Professor's office was situated.

As Nannie came up the walk she could see his large shadow as he bent over his desk between the window and the light. She rang the bell at the side door and he himself admitted her. For some reason which she could not explain she felt at first an unusual discomfort in his presence, and, when he leaned forward and took her hand in a kind but casual manner, her heart gave a sudden leap and she glanced up at him suspiciously. However, he patted her shoulder comfortingly, and, as he repeated to her in a low tone some incidents of gossip about Arthur which had lately come to his ears, she was completely reassured. She was certain that he admired her tremendously, and she was determining in her heart that she would use his devotion as a weapon of defense against the continual disapprobation of "Cousin Minnie."

Professor Walsh talked so long and so comfortingly that Nannie was startled when she looked at a clock on his book shelf and realized that she had allowed herself to remain until an hour which Russellville would consider scandalous. When Professor Walsh offered to escort her home she protested vehemently. If he were seen walking with her at such a time it might rob her of the position of an injured party which was what she desired the world to permit her in view of Arthur's neglect.

It was a terrible moment for Nannie when she had told the Professor good night and walked into the street, only to find herself confronted at the very gate by a strange man who stepped up to her with an air of quiet determination and inquired if she were Mrs. Merwent.

"Y—yes," stammered Nannie doubtfully, terror clutching her throat, though she was unable to conceive of what was about to happen.

"Why yes, this is Mrs. Merwent," affirmed a brisk mas-
culine voice as, from the deep shadow thrown by the Academy walls, Mr. Blair, Arthur’s colleague in several law cases, stepped out, followed by Arthur himself and another strange man.

Nannie, though technically guiltless of wrongdoing, was almost in a state of collapse and, scarcely knowing what she did, agreed to coöperate in the arrangements Arthur desired for a divorce.

Only once during the conversation, which was carefully listened to by all of Arthur’s companions, did she weakly demur; whereupon he coldly declared he would bring suit on a graver charge, would not shrink from publicity and would use the incident of the night to prove his case, as the two men unknown to her were reputable witnesses.

Nannie was conquered.

After a few days of reflection, however, Mrs. Merwent persuaded herself that her husband could never bring himself to the point of taking the step he contemplated.

The scene which followed the actual filing of Arthur’s suit for divorce, therefore, was no worse than numerous other scenes to which she had treated her husband at frequent intervals throughout their married life, many of them precipitated by trifles.

When she perceived that rage, abuse, and sarcasms all failed to affect Arthur’s calm, she grew really frightened and began to weep hysterically.

Arthur gazed at her still unmoved.

As a last resort she referred pathetically to their life together.

“You can’t mean that you will carry this thing through, Arthur!” she moaned. “For Lucy’s sake you can’t do such awful things.”

His sudden cold fury was terrible.

“For Lucy’s sake,” he repeated slowly and gratingly, “after you have driven her out of the house and poisoned her youth! Yes, it would be highly appropriate for us to stay together for Lucy’s sake.”

“Arthur, I can’t believe that you hate me that much!” Nannie pleaded. “You don’t hate me, do you?”
“I can’t put my feelings into words,” he answered mercilessly. “You poison the air. I wonder the flowers don’t die as you pass by.” His tone was coldly implacable and he did not raise his voice.

She gazed at him an instant with silent and helpless animosity.

“You cruel monster!” she shrieked, springing suddenly from her chair.

Arthur turned on his heel and went out.

Nannie’s first act following this interview with her husband was to see Professor Walsh. Since Lucy’s rebellion she had grown afraid of Mrs. Lockhart’s comments on family difficulties. Nannie felt that the Professor’s accidental rôle in her embarrassment constituted a sort of obligation on his part.

Their meetings of late had been slightly constrained. But once in his private office he listened gravely and kindly to her agitated story.

Without much having been said on either side Professor Walsh had understood for some time from Mr. Sheldon that the family would not look unkindly on the prospect of some one eventually taking Nannie off their hands.

“My advice is that you do not contest the suit,” he said, when she had finished, “but I should try to get him to agree to something for your support if I were you, Anna. This could be done amicably and out of court. It is no more than right that he should do something for you financially.”

Nannie had not noticed that he called her by her given name and broke in with, “But, Professor Walsh——”

“Call me Edward, Anna,” he interrupted, taking her hand. She tried to withdraw her hand but he retained it.

“We are such good friends,” he continued. “Aren’t we, Anna?”

“Yes,” she admitted uncomfortably.

“Well, it is agreed then. I should refuse to talk about it to others if I were you. And anything new that may come up you will let me know at once, won’t you, dear?”

“Yes—Edward,” answered Nannie, hesitating slightly, somewhat bewildered by the new aspect which her affairs had taken.
IX

After the scene in which he announced the beginning of his divorce proceedings Arthur never entered his house again. He had established a residence in the state capital but was still compelled, in the course of various suits and details of the legal practice he was disposing of, to make frequent visits to Russellville. On such occasions he slept in his office and ate his meals at the local hotel.

Nannie, who was always panic stricken when alone, less from fear than from lack of resources within herself, went, on her own initiative and despite a grudging welcome, to live with Mrs. Lockhart at “Cousin Minnie’s.”

The divorce was granted in due time and all Russellville was agog with the news. Nannie considered it a matter of propriety that she should stay in semi-retirement for a while, and so went out very little. However, when she did leave the sanctum which “Cousin Minnie” had provided, she always managed to see Professor Walsh, to whom she came to look for advice and help in every situation.

It was the same season, the second of Lucy’s attendance at the Art School, that Lucy and John Winter were married. On account of Nannie’s violent reproaches at the time of the divorce Lucy had not communicated with her mother for many months, but when she decided to marry John she immediately wrote to Nannie.

“John is only beginning business and we shall have to be very economical for a while at least,” the letter said. “Miss Storms has asked us to be married at her flat, but we shall have a very simple wedding. I would be glad to have you come here but I suppose you had rather not under the circumstances. We have rented some furnished rooms that will be convenient for light housekeeping but I hope soon we can
get out in the suburbs where it will be cheaper and healthier."

Although Professor Walsh had questioned Nannie closely regarding Lucy and the girl's attitude toward family affairs, Nannie replied to her daughter's letter without consulting him.

"I am only your mother," Nannie wrote, "so of course it would be preposterous to consider me in regard to the step you are taking. I have suffered a great deal at the hands of your father but I have not lost my pride and self respect yet, and if there was anything more you could do to further alienate me, this was it. You forfeited all right to my affection when you deserted me in my hour of trial in order to pursue your own selfish aims, but this marriage to a man I know nothing about, who may be a nobody from Heaven knows where, is the climax. I think from now on there is not much use in our writing to one another."

Arthur was still engaged in an important case at the capital and could not be present at the wedding.

"I am sorry I can not be there," his letter read. "All the advice I can give you, Lucy, is don't let your mother intrude on your happiness."

John sent an invitation to his parents, but Dr. Winter, a clergyman, was old and in ill health, and was not able to bear the double strain of the journey and the cold weather. Mrs. Winter, a kindly sentimental lady who would never have thought of leaving her husband, sent tearful regrets, and bemoaned the fact that John and Lucy did not come to the home town and so make it possible for Dr. Winter himself to officiate at the wedding of his only son.

In the end only Jim Sprague and Miss Storms witnessed the quiet affair. These two had liked each other since the day of their first meeting. Miss Storms' interest in Jim had risen from the fact that he was John's business associate and intimate. Later she gave him her friendship for his own sake and often referred to him affectionately as "our Jim." There was an unanalysable and very subtle comprehension between the two, though Miss Storms remained quite as kindly aloof from him in her manner as she did with John and Lucy; and Jim, as in all his relations, was ungiven to self-revealing speech.
"Well, Jim, Lucy has good taste in friends as well as in husbands," Miss Storms remarked, smiling at him with quizzical complaisance when the wedding ceremony was over. "I hate all the immodest fol-de-lol of church weddings," she went on, changing the subject, "but it is a shame that anything as pretty as Lucy in those new togs should be wasted on the desert air. For you and I don't count."

While she was speaking Lucy came up. Miss Storms took her hand.

"Well, dear?"

Lucy's eyes swam with tears. She clasped Miss Storms' hand in both her own and squeezed it impulsively. Miss Storms kissed her forehead.

"I'm jealous, child," the older woman declared.

"So am I," John laughed.

"Neither of you need be." Lucy smiled unsteadily.

"What about you, Jim?" Miss Storms turned to the other guest.

"I've always been jealous of John," Jim answered, flushing a little as he spoke.

Arthur and Mrs. Low, for reasons best known to themselves, were not married in Chicago as expected, but at the state capital where Arthur's new practice had begun to flourish. When the notice of the wedding was copied by the Russellville Weekly Clarion, another outburst of gossip occurred, but, as neither of them returned to the place after their marriage, it did not disturb them. Arthur made two visits to Chicago, and on one of these, not long after Dimmie's birth, he spent a night at Rosedene. Here he met Jim Sprague for whom he afterward expressed a strong liking.

Nannie had no means of escape from the public attention attracted to herself and her interests, and the wounds to her vanity were keenly felt. The protest of her self-esteem was her conspicuous appearance in frequented places with Professor Walsh. Again Russellville talked, but not for long. Nannie's persistent recklessness of opinion in this matter palled. She ceased to be a popular object of criticism. Events settled into the routine that is characteristic of small communities.
The years glided by without any outward change in Nannie’s life. Of Arthur’s doings, she knew nothing except an occasional hint. Mrs. Lockhart had issued an ultimatum on Lucy’s marriage by forbidding any further relation with such an undutiful daughter, and Nannie, overawed by the old lady and more or less dependent on her, dared not disobey.

Professor Walsh was often at the “big house” and, chiefly through his universally acknowledged friendship with the Sheldons, was yearly becoming more and more a power in the community. He paid much special and flattering attention to Mrs. Lockhart, who was rapidly growing deaf and would otherwise have been lonely.

Although the professor’s interest in Nannie was tacitly recognized by the family, Mrs. Lockhart employed all the ingenuity of a jealous and neglected old woman to curb impatience on the part of her niece and nephew, while Professor Walsh, who was already receiving for nothing the benefits that Nannie represented, constantly abetted the old lady’s wiles in so subtle a manner that Nannie hardly realized her own position.

After four years of this régime Mrs. Lockhart died, and Nannie was left in “Cousin Minnie’s” house with no one upon whom she could persuade herself she had the semblance of a claim. “Cousin Minnie” herself, on whom seemed to have descended Mrs. Lockhart’s mantle of decision, soon banished any doubts that Nannie may have had regarding her status in the “big house.”

“When are you going to marry Professor Walsh?” she asked Nannie abruptly one day not long after Mrs. Lockhart’s death.

“Why—I never said I was going to marry him,” responded Nannie with a demurely girlish giggle.

“Well, everybody has been expecting you to for the last three or four years, and if you don’t intend to you will please not give people further reason to gossip about you while you are in my house. The best people have dropped you for it and I don’t care to be included.”

“Why, Cousin Minnie—” began Nannie, tearful in an instant.
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"Where do you get so many good clothes?" "Cousin Minnie" interrupted.
"Why—why——" Nannie faltered. But "Cousin Minnie" did not remain to discuss the matter.

This, and a number of similar happenings, led Nannie to consider her position seriously, and she made a surreptitious pilgrimage to consult her oracle, Professor Walsh, regarding her future.

"We can not marry for another year, at least, Anna," said he didactically. Nannie's eyes opened wide at this.
"Of course, Edward," she acquiesced dutifully.
"Could you not visit your daughter for a while?" he suggested. "As a rule it is not best to remain too long with one relative."

Nannie swallowed hard, as the recollection of her letter on the occasion of Lucy's marriage came over her.

"But, Edward, I've told you how matters are between Lucy and me. You know how Mother took her going away and marrying a stranger afterward."

"Just a minute, Anna. Don't become so excited. Remember what I have told you so often, that 'stillness of form and steadiness of feature are signal marks of good breeding.' I was just about to say that now your mother is dead, it is a good time to write your daughter and renew your old relations with her. She will be most useful to us, and besides, a mother and daughter should not be separated."

"I'm sure I have no hard feelings toward Lucy," admitted Nannie, somewhat uneasily.

"Quite so, quite so. A letter properly written would in all probability readjust matters satisfactorily to all. You might advert to the fact that your mother persisted in a hostile attitude and that you were dependent on her. Also you had best adopt a generous tone."

"Very well, Edward," agreed Nannie.

"Good. Now that is settled. You had better write at once, my dear. And you might let me see the letter before sending it."

Nannie wrote that night.
The letter began vaguely. Mrs. Lockhart's memory was
invoked. Forgiveness was offered, though for what was not specified, a reconciliation was taken for granted, and a visit to Lucy proposed in terms that were difficult to ignore or refuse.

Nannie pathetically reminded Lucy that Arthur paid no alimony, and recounted indignantly the heartlessness of the Sheltons. The letter contained no mention of Professor Walsh. “I am thrown on the world,” concluded the epistle. “Your father has deserted me and my own relatives have threatened to put me in the street.”

In a few days came Lucy’s reply. It was an invitation to pass an indefinite time at Rosedene.
Nearly a week had passed since Mrs. Merwent's arrival at Rosedene and Jim had not visited the Winter home. This was an unprecedented length of time for him to stay away.

"How is Mr. Sprague, your partner?" Nannie queried one evening at dinner.

"Oh, he's all right," responded John, and then added, "Why, he's not been out since the day you came! I'll ask him out to dinner tomorrow night. He's no extra trouble."

Lucy was silent.

"I'd like to get acquainted with him," pursued Mrs. Merwent. "Of course if it's too much work for Lucy——"


"Lucy hasn't said anything," persisted Nannie. "I think she'd rather not have anybody."

"No, it's all right," agreed Lucy. "Jim's no extra trouble, ever."

The next morning John told Jim.

"Nannie and Lucy want you for dinner," John said. "You didn't use to have to be asked. Why didn't you come out before?"

"I've been going over the books," explained Jim. "We must raise our prices on those small houses. We don't make anything on them at present figures."

That evening they took the train out to Rosedene together. When they arrived Lucy was in the kitchen and Mrs. Merwent met them at the door.

"Are you tired?" she murmured solicitously as she kissed John's cheek, then, smiling and extending her hand to Jim, "How do you do, Mr. Sprague? You're quite a stranger. Lucy thought you had deserted us."
"No, I've been busy," he replied, taking her hand and smiling in turn.

When the three entered the dining room, Mrs. Merwent picked up two boutonnieres from the table and pinned first one on Jim's coat lapel, and then the other on John's.

"Thank you, Mrs. Merwent," said Jim.

John patted her shoulder.

"Why, how sweet of you, Nannie!" he exclaimed.

At this juncture Dimmie rushed in and, throwing himself headlong into Jim's outstretched arms, yelled delightedly, "Uncle Jim, Uncle Jim, the cat's got kittens!"

"Why how boisterous you are, Jimmie." Mrs. Merwent spoke reprovingly. (She never called him "Dimmie.")

"Yes," said John. "You make too much noise, Dimmie."

"He's all right. I'm used to him," put in Jim. He realized as he spoke that never before had he interfered in the child's training.

"Well, if you like it." Mrs. Merwent smiled. "I'm afraid you spoil him, Mr. Sprague," she added.

Jim lifted Dimmie to his shoulder and went off to inspect the kittens. On the way they passed through the kitchen.

"Hello, Lucy." Jim held out his hand. "Heard you thought I'd deserted you."

"I can't shake hands with you. My hands are all over flour," she explained. "You know I never thought any such thing!"

"Yes, I know," he answered.

Dimmie grew impatient.

"It'll get dark and you can't see the kittens," he complained.

After Jim and Dimmie had left the dining room, Nannie, who was standing by the table, began to look about as if in search of something.

"Why, Lucy must have forgotten to order it," she observed, as if to herself. Then she turned to her son-in-law, placing her hand on his arm.

"John," she asked, smiling, "would you do Nannie a favor?"

"Sure," he consented. "What is it?"

"I wish you would get me a little fruit to keep in my room. I like to eat a little before going to bed."
"Of course. I'll have some sent around in the morning."
"I meant tonight—if you didn't mind."
"All right. Jim and I'll go and get it after dinner."
"You cruel boy! You want to advertise my weakness to the world. I didn't want anybody to know."
"Good. I'll just pop out and get it right away. How's that?"
"You're a dear boy. I'm afraid Lucy wouldn't approve of spoiling me this way." Mrs. Merwent walked into the hall where John followed her.
"Well, we won't tell anybody," declared John. He took his hat from the rack and went out the front door, closing it gently after him.
Jim and Dimmie came back from the kitten inspecting expedition and, entering the living room, found Mrs. Merwent alone.
"Mother was asking for you a minute ago, Jimmie," she told the little boy.
Dimmie ran to the kitchen.
Jim sat down by the fire place.
"Everybody has left me to amuse myself, Mr. Sprague." Nannie looked up at him challengingly from the depths of the Morris chair in which she was reclining.
"Why where's John?" he asked.
"He's gone out some place for a few minutes. I don't know where," she said. "Wouldn't you like to smoke?" She rose. "I'll get some of John's cigarettes."
"No, thank you. I don't smoke cigarettes. I'll fill my pipe if you don't mind."
"I smoke cigarettes sometimes, when I'm quite alone," she confided, laughing slightly.
"Yes?"
"I suppose you don't approve of ladies smoking, do you?" she insisted.
"If they want to."
"Does Lucy smoke?"
"No."
Mrs. Merwent laughed again.
"I didn't know," she declared.
Jim gazed at her steadily. The front door clicked and she started.

"Was that John?" she asked.

Jim rose and glanced through the window.

"No," he responded. "It was Dimmie. He threw his ball into the street. Did you want anything, Mrs. Merwent?"

"Oh, no," she assured him. "I just wondered. He said he was coming right back. Well, we don't need a chaperone, do we?"

"Hardly," replied Jim.

Mrs. Merwent dropped a marquise ring she had been pulling on and off her finger. Jim picked it up and handed it to her.

"Thank you. I shouldn't be wearing rings with this old gown. I just put it on from force of habit."

"Which?" asked Jim, smiling.

"The ring, of course, you sarcastic thing," she retorted, striking his knee with the lace handkerchief in her hand.

"The dress is charming, Mrs. Merwent."

"Oh, thank you. You're going to be nice after all. Well, I was quite prepared to find you so. Lucy and John can't say enough good things about you."

"I'm much obliged to them," he remarked, smiling again. "I can say the same of them."

"How lovely! I do think real friendship is the grandest thing—and so rare."

"No doubt about that, Mrs. Merwent." Jim smiled once more.

"Now I believe you're making fun of me, Mr. Sprague."

"I can assure you I'm not, Mrs. Merwent."

"I envy them, you know. I've been so lonely since my—trouble."

"I can quite imagine," said Jim sympathetically. "But now you are with your children and—"

"Yes," she interrupted hastily, "and isn't John just the dearest fellow? I do so regret our misunderstanding. Though I was not to blame for it," she added.

"John's a good sort," Jim agreed.
"And Lucy," Mrs. Merwent now smiled. "You haven't said anything about Lucy."
"We weren't talking about her."
"Well, she's a dear girl, although—why I've burnt my slipper!" she broke off. "Do you know, Mr. Sprague, that I have the hardest time to get shoes narrow enough. It seems that most women, especially here in the North, have big feet. Lucy takes after her father. He was a Northern man."
Jim seemed amused, and Mrs. Merwent concluded hastily.
"But here I am chattering on about me," she said, "and you haven't told me anything about yourself."
"There isn't much to tell, Mrs. Merwent."
"Well, if you could hear Lucy and John talk about you you wouldn't be so modest."
"Neither of them has much critical acumen in matters of friendship."
"But you are their only intimate friend."
Jim laughed.
"That's just it," he asserted.
"You cynical thing!" she reproved banteringly. "I know you men with no illusions. I declare I'm afraid of you."
"Not dangerous—believe me, Mrs. Merwent."
"No. You despise us women too much to take us seriously."
"Some of the biggest individuals I have met have been women," Jim answered gravely.
"Lucy, for instance."
"Yes, Lucy," agreed Jim.
"Well, I'm not much like her. Do you think so?"
"Our acquaintance is pretty brief to justify a fundamental judgment of that sort."
"Oh, I'm not at all intellectual or deep. I can't talk about Bergson and books like Jean Christophe that Lucy reads. I'm afraid you won't like poor little me much."
"There are lots of people I don't like who talk about philosophy and musical novels." His tone was pleasant.
"Well, I have a feeling already that you don't like me very well."
"I don't think I could help liking Lucy's mother," Jim answered without conviction.

"Thanks! I don't know that I care to be liked because I'm Lucy's mother," she replied, laughing nervously. "Your liking seems to be confined to Lucy and things belonging to her. That's not very complimentary to the rest of us."

Jim, who had been staring at the empty grate, glanced up and met Mrs. Merwent's eyes. Her gaze dropped.

"Yes, I do like Lucy, and the people she likes," he acknowledged frankly, "and if anybody liked me on the same recommendation I should feel honored. She is a person any man or woman must feel it a great privilege to know."

Mrs. Merwent arched her brows.

"Of course I think just as you do about Lucy, Mr. Sprague, but if I were John I might" (she smiled again) "object the tiniest bit to your—enthusiasm."

"Object?" Jim looked blank.

"Maybe that is the wrong word." Nannie's smile grew more meaning. "It isn't every man who enjoys having his wife admired too much."

"If John objects he only needs to say so. I don't think you quite understand the atmosphere of this household yet, Mrs. Merwent."

"This household?"

"Your daughter then."

"Well, I certainly think I ought to know her."

"You ought, but the most charitable thing is to believe you don't." There was decided asperity in Jim's tone.

Mrs. Merwent's manner changed. She rose haughtily.

"What do you mean by that, Mr. Sprague!" she exclaimed. Jim rose also, and the two scrutinized each other in silence for a moment.

"No offense intended," he protested, turning and knocking his pipe out on the mantel shelf.

Nannie was still injured.

"I don't see how such innocent remarks can be so misinterpreted," she insisted, crumpling her handkerchief.

Jim did not answer at once. When he spoke his manner was authoritative.
"Don't you think it would be wise to drop this topic, Mrs. Merwent?"

She preserved her air of dignity, but her uneasiness was obvious.

"I don't understand you," Mr. Sprague. "I certainly will not be stopped from doing my duty in protecting Lucy no matter if you do misunderstand me."

"Protecting Lucy?" Jim's eyes hardened.

Mrs. Merwent twisted her handkerchief nervously.

"Do you think Lucy needs to be protected from me, Mrs. Merwent?" he went on inexorably.

Lucy's voice was heard calling Dimmie. Nannie backed toward the hallway.

Jim heard Lucy too.

"I think Lucy needs protecting from her own ignorance and inexperience," explained Nannie defensively. "I've suffered enough from public opinion even though I was innocent, Mr. Sprague, and I can't be expected to welcome the same thing for her."

Jim seemed nonplussed.

"I confess you have the best of me, Mrs. Merwent."

Nannie was mollified by seeing how disturbed he looked.

"I knew you would consider Lucy's welfare just as I do." Then she seemed to dismiss the discussion. "There she is now. She does spoil Jimmie so!"

"It has begun to rain, Dimmie. You mustn't stay out in the rain. Where's Papa?" Lucy was heard saying.

"Dear me! It is raining. I left a coat suit airing in the window. I'm packing away my winter things. You will excuse me while I go and take it in, Mr. Sprague?" Mrs. Merwent was smiling now, though she continued to regard Jim with apprehension.

Jim turned to face her suddenly.

"Hold on, Mrs. Merwent!" he began in an odd tone, his voice not quite under his control.

Nannie continued to smile impersonally but in spite of herself she hesitated.

"You will please tell me now just what you mean about Lucy and myself," he demanded rather than asked.
"Maybe Uncle Jim knows where Papa is." Lucy came toward the living room door.

Nannie raised her brows again and nodded at Jim significantly.

"Ahem—I really don’t think we had better——" she murmured.

Jim shrugged his shoulders with a baffled air and began to refill his pipe. At the same moment Lucy appeared in the doorway behind her mother.

"Where’s John?" Lucy asked, entering the room with Dimmie and glancing about inquiringly.

"Why he went out for a few minutes. I must run upstairs and take my clothes out of the rain," Mrs. Merwent murmured, brushing past her daughter into the hall.

"Whatever made John run away just when dinner was ready? And it’s begun to rain too!" Lucy walked over to the fireplace and placed a screen in front of it.

"Tell me a story, Uncle Jim," Dimmie begged, pulling Jim’s coat tails and indicating the Morris chair which Nannie had quitted.

"It’s too near dinner time," Lucy remonstrated, noticing how abstracted Jim appeared. She looked at the clock on the writing desk. "Is it as late as that?" she asked in surprise.

Jim took out his watch.

"Seven fifteen," he informed her, replacing his time-piece, and walking over to the darkened window he remained, with his back to her, gazing into the faintly lit street.

She scrutinised his half averted face.

"Are you bothered about something, Jim?"

He started slightly.

"Why, no, not particularly. I was figuring out what would be the cheapest material we could put into that new row of houses," he lied. "I’ve got to send in the final estimates tomorrow." He moved away from the window and seated himself in the Morris chair with Dimmie in his lap.

"I can’t imagine what keeps John," Lucy remarked again.

Jim slid Dimmie to the floor.

"Don’t you want me to go and hunt him up?"
“Why—no-o. I——” Lucy demurred. “I don’t think——”

Just then there was the sound of a key turning in a latch and Dimmie darted forward into the hall shouting, “There’s Papa! There’s Papa!”

John left a parcel on the stand with his hat and overcoat and entered the living room.

“Why didn’t you tell me that you intended going out, John? I wouldn’t have taken dinner up. I’m afraid it is spoiled,” Lucy said good naturedly as she came forward to meet him.

“Oh, you know I—well——” John explained running his fingers through his hair with an embarrassed gesture.

“What in the world did you have to buy that couldn’t wait until after dinner?” Lucy walked into the hall and picked up the package which lay beside his hat.

“Why, it’s some fruit. I thought it might be nice to have some,” he said lamely, following her to the hat stand.

“But there’s plenty of fruit in the house.”

Nannie appeared on the stairs.

“Why, where have you been, John? We were all looking for you,” she called rather uneasily.
John and Nannie entered the dining room together. Jim followed with Lucy and Dimmie.

"Did Nannie give you those flowers, Uncle Jim?" Dimmie asked as they went through the hall. He reached for the **boutonnière** which Jim was wearing.

"Yes. Do you want some?" Jim answered, taking the sprig of blossoms from his button hole and halting to decorate Dimmie's blouse with it.

In the dining room there was a little confusion as John pulled out a chair for Nannie and she seated herself with a rustle. She began to serve the soup. Jim observed Lucy stealthily.

When the plates were distributed Nannie noticed Dimmie's adornment.

"Why, you've lost your flowers, Mr. Sprague!" she exclaimed, without looking at Jim.

"I gave them to Dimmie," he answered quickly.

"Oh," said Nannie.

John regarded Jim with an expression of surprise but lowered his eyes as Jim met his gaze.

"I don't believe Mr. Sprague likes flowers, does he, Lucy?" inquired Mrs. Merwent sweetly.

"Of course he does, Mamma," Lucy declared patiently. There was a brief silence.

"Now we'll have one of the good old evenings!" cried John, rubbing his hands. "By the way, you two are too formal, Nannie. Why don't you call each other by your names?"

"Mr. Sprague doesn't approve of getting acquainted too rapidly," retorted Nannie.

"I see by the paper that some rich guy has loaned a lot of Corots to the Field Museum. That ought to interest you, John," remarked Jim, changing the subject.
“Do you know, I was thinking of Corot today,” responded John enthusiastically. “His art is a fairy art. He gives you the poetry of Nature without being irritatingly subjective.”

“I just love Corot,” put in Mrs. Merwent ecstatically.

“Don’t you!” pursued John eagerly. “I tell you, Nannie, that lots of greatly admired things make me sick, jammed full of Christian sentiment, or reminding one of literary illustrations. Why can’t artists stick to their purpose! What was that you said the other evening, Jim, about Botticelli’s Spring—that it was both pagan and subtle, wasn’t it?”

“Forgotten,” said Jim, who was helping Dimmie to potatoes.

“That was it.” Lucy smiled approvingly. “Won’t you have another croquette, Mamma?”

“I believe I will, thank you,” assented Mrs. Merwent, even as she spoke accepting the helping. “There! There! That’s more than plenty, Lucy. You’ll have Mr. Sprague thinking I’m a gourmand.”

“Good stuff, Lucy,” declared Jim, taking a second croquette himself. “Wouldn’t blame your mother if she were.”

“But really, Mr. Sprague, as a rule—”

She was interrupted by John.

“Jim, why on earth can’t you call Nannie by her name! One would think she was a perfect stranger.”

“She is, nearly,” said Lucy, smiling again.

“Well, we’re all starting over now,” returned John in a tone of mild reprimand, “and she won’t be in the future, so let’s not be so formal.”

An uncomfortable pause followed.

“You’ve dropped your flower, John.” As Nannie spoke at last, she picked up the boutonnière from the table and replaced it in the lapel of his coat. “What was that you were saying about art?”

“Oh! Well you know, Nannie, I was just going to say that I don’t have any more use for these new movements in art than for the moralizing and story telling things of the last century. These cubist and futuristic cranks forget the same thing the others do. That is that the artist’s purpose is to create beauty. Why can’t they give us the beauty they see
and let us judge of it, instead of trying to tell us something about it we aren't interested in. Now take Inness, for instance—"

"I just love him! Aren't his things fine!" Nannie chimed in.

John rumpled his hair.

"Yes, an Inness," he repeated. "Doesn't it give you enough? Can't you look at it and hear the wind in the trees? It isn't only atmosphere, it's the beauty of nature in its simplicity, and that's what we want in art—simplicity." He looked around the table.

"You've thought a lot about such things," exclaimed Mrs. Merwent admiringly.

"It isn't so much an intellectual conception as a feeling for the true thing that counts in art, Nannie," replied John.

"That's what I mean," she explained.

"Your dinner'll get cold, dear," interrupted Lucy.

John began to eat again and silence reigned for some moments.

Lucy turned to Jim.

"The croquettes aren't all gone yet. Have another?" she in-
vited.

"No, thanks."

"I'll take one, Lucy, if you don't mind," interposed Nan-
ie. Lucy passed the dish hastily.

"Why of course, Mamma."

Silence descended again on the group.

"We seem to be a quiet family," Mrs. Merwent observed after a few moments.

John looked up from his plate.

"What's the matter with you, Jim? And you too, Lucy?" he inquired, glancing from one of them to the other. "It seems as though a funeral had struck the place. Neither of, you have a word to say tonight."

"Seems to me I'm talking as much as usual," said Jim de-
fensively, laughing a little. "The trouble is that you've quit talking. We always listen to you."

"Rot!" retorted John. "You haven't said half a dozen words."
"I thought you all discussed the most abstruse things," put in Nannie.

"We do," avowed John. "I can’t understand what’s come over them."

"Do talk about something profound, Mr. Sprague. I love to listen even if I can’t join in the discussion," she urged.

"You’re really mistaken, Mrs. Merwent. I talk very little, Jim protested. "John’s joking."

"I suppose it depends on the company you’re in," she parried.

"I talked a lot to you before dinner." Jim turned his eyes on her.

Nannie avoided his gaze.

"My friend Professor Walsh, who is head of the school at home, has a better opinion of me than some other people," she declared after a pause, ignoring Jim’s remark and speaking to the table at large.

"What nonsense, Mamma!" Lucy interrupted gently. "Whoever made any comparison!"

"Comparisons can be made by inference," Mrs. Merwent insisted with dignity. "Professor Walsh knows all kinds of erudite things and he never considers it any condescension to talk to poor little me!" she finished.

"Neither do we! What’s got into you, Nannie?" John exclaimed, slightly irritated, but laughing.

"I know you don’t, John." Nannie smiled at him.

Lucy rose.

"Help me bring in the dessert, Jim," she invited.

"Lucy does need a servant," Nannie declared when she and John were alone together.

After dinner the men remained in their places to smoke as was their custom, and a little later they all drew their chairs back and the conversation became more animated as John related at length some of his experiences at the art school. Then Lucy began to clear the table.

Jim glanced once or twice at Mrs. Merwent who was listening to John and asking questions about various girls mentioned by him in the course of his narrative.
“Let me help you with the dishes, Lucy,” Jim lowered his voice slightly.

“Why of course, Jim. I thought you had forgotten your job,” Lucy agreed, at the same time regarding her mother, who seemed much amused by something John had just said and entirely oblivious to her daughter.

Jim removed his coat and he and Lucy carried the dishes to the kitchen, Dimmie assisting with invaluable efforts and advice.

While the dish washing was in progress Mrs. Merwent appeared in the kitchen doorway, and surveyed the scene of activity: Jim, coatless and aproned, Lucy with her sleeves rolled up, and Dimmie in general administrative charge.

“Why, Lucy, I didn’t know you were washing the dishes! Do let me help!” Nannie begged rather weakly.

Lucy replied pleasantly.

“No, thank you, Mamma. We’ll be through in a minute.” Nannie went back to the dining room.

“They don’t seem to need us out there,” she informed John. “Do tell me some more about that Miss Stimpson at the Art School—the one with the red hair. I think she’s so interesting.”

Soon Lucy and Jim returned to the dining room. Dimmie was hanging to his mother’s skirt and rubbing his eyes. She looked down at the child.

“I think I know a little boy who wants to go to sleepy town.” She smiled at him and took his hand. “Kiss Papa and Uncle Jim,” she continued, leading him up to John.

“And Nannie! Would you forget poor Nannie?” complained Mrs. Merwent, presenting her cheek which Dimmie dutifully kissed.

“Good night, Dimmie,” Jim called after the child.

“You’re quite domestic, Mr. Sprague,” Nannie commented after Lucy and Dimmie had gone upstairs.

“Lucy turns old Jim into a regular hired girl when he’s here.” John grinned at his friend.

Jim was lighting his pipe and did not show that he had heard Nannie’s remark. When he spoke it was to John.

Dimmie fell asleep in the midst of the first bedtime story,
and Lucy soon left him. When she came into the dining room her mother was moving about as though searching for something.

“What is it, Mamma?” inquired Lucy.

“Why a piece of sheet music I put here on the bookcase doesn’t seem to be here. Jimmie must have moved it.”

“Let me help you find it,” offered John, jumping to his feet.

“Perhaps it’s on the piano where you were practicing this afternoon,” suggested Lucy.

Mrs. Merwent disappeared into the living room, followed by John, and a moment later the strains of Massenet’s *Ouvrez tes Yeux* floated in to the dining room.

“Sit down, Jim,” Lucy bade Sprague, who was standing with his hands in his coat pockets.

He seated himself a little distance from her.

“Well, Jim, Mamma and I are not much alike, are we?” Lucy remarked, smiling with a tired expression.

“Wait till I pinch myself,” Jim answered.

There was a brief pause.

“We’ll just have to do the best we can with things,” Lucy said, rising and averting her face as she spoke. She walked over to the mantel and arranged some flowers in a vase.

“I’m outclassed,” Jim admitted.

“Maybe it’s not for always.” She spoke consolingly, looking at the floor and continuing to smile determinedly. “When people see things clearly there’s always a way, so let’s not get panicky.”

“The trouble is we don’t all see through things.” Jim shrugged his shoulders uncomfortably.

The music ceased abruptly but almost immediately began again and Nannie sang, *Vous Dansez Marquise.*

“Give John a little time, Jim. He’ll see more than the rest of us before long,” Lucy went on, as though defending her husband from an unspoken accusation.

Jim smoked fiercely.

“I hope so,” he said at last, “but, as a rule, meeting a problem on the installment plan is pretty poor spiritual economy.”

“Lucy,” he resumed after a pause, “your mother and I had a talk before dinner.”
"I thought so."
"Well, unless I'm greatly mistaken——" Jim hesitated. The music had stopped.
"Lucy, why don't you and Jim come in and listen?" John stood in the doorway.
Mrs. Merwent's laugh tinkled from the other room.
"John, you dear silly boy!" she called. "You should allow people to enjoy themselves in their own way."
"I was just going back to town," announced Jim, standing up. Lucy stared at him with a surprised expression.
At this juncture Nannie appeared in the doorway behind John. Both entered the dining room.
"Why what do you mean, Jim?" John inquired.
"I've got to get to the office early tomorrow."
"I thought Mr. Sprague always spent the night," remarked Nannie. "Lucy showed me his room."
"He does," declared John, and turned to Jim. "You'll have plenty of time in the morning. We'll take the six forty."
"I must look over the specifications for those houses, and they're in my room."
"Well, if you must, you must," John agreed, "but why didn't you say so before?"
"I'll go to the station with you," John offered.
"No," declined Jim. "No need. I've just time to catch the nine five. Good night." He went into the hall and seized his hat from the rack.
"Good night," called John. "See you in the morning."
Dimmie, awakened by the noise in the hall, cried out, "Mamma!"
Lucy went to him.
An hour later she heard John and her mother tip-toeing up the stairs, trying to avoid disturbing her.

John had breakfast early the succeeding morning as he wished to reach the office simultaneously with Jim. When Mrs. Merwent came downstairs it was already close to the
lunch hour and she asked to have her breakfast in the kitchen so that she might talk to Lucy who was at work there.

"Your friend, Mr. Sprague, doesn’t like me," Mrs. Mer-went began as she buttered her toast contemplatively.

"Why, Mamma, I don’t see what makes you say that." Lucy measured some flour.

"Do you mean you didn’t notice what he said after dinner about parents being in secret competition with their children?"

"Yes, I heard that, but he was speaking generally. He was probably not thinking about you at all."

"No, he doesn’t consider me intellectual enough to be worth thinking about. Professor Walsh is a great deal better educated than Mr. Sprague, so I guess I can console myself with the fact that he does find me worth talking to."

Lucy referred again to her recipe book.

"Really, Mamma, you have no reason to feel this way. I’m sure Jim was as attentive to you as you let him be."

"Well, it was mere politeness. He wasn’t at all interested in anything I said."

"I’m sure I don’t know how you know. He listened to everything you said to him. Of course he doesn’t know any of the people you talked about, and he isn’t good at small talk, and besides you talked almost entirely to John, but I thought he was very nice."

"Very patronizing, you mean, Lucy. I can see very plainly that he has a low opinion of women—except you, of course. He seemed anxious enough to talk to you."

"Mamma, I wish you wouldn’t speak that way."

"Speak what way?"

Lucy paused in her task and gazed steadily at her mother.

"You know perfectly well, Mamma. The reason he talked to me was that you wished it, and besides I ask you not to talk about Jim in that tone."

"Well, anyone could see that he was crazy to be with you," Nannie began angrily.

"Mamma!" Lucy was indignant.

Her mother’s eyes filled with tears.

"Why, Lucy, I don’t see how you can twist my words so. I didn’t mean there was anything between you."
Lucy gasped.

"Who said you did?" she ejaculated, articulating with difficulty. "I only meant that you were unjust to Jim."

Mrs. Merwent continued to regard her daughter reproachfully.

"You don't know him, Mamma. He's the very best kind of a man," Lucy went on honor gently.

"Yes! I suppose I am incapable of appreciating him. Well, you seem to at any rate," Nannie taunted.

Lucy paused ominously.

"Well, Mamma, if you don't like him, I can't help it," she resumed at last in an odd strained voice. "He's our friend, but I'm not responsible for him or his opinions. You'll just have to like him or dislike him for yourself."

"I never said I disliked him," retorted Nannie. "I said he disliked me. Any one would think to hear you talk that he was—"

"Suppose we don't discuss it any longer, Mamma," Lucy interrupted shortly.

"Oh, very well. If I had known you couldn't bear to have the slightest hint of criticism of him I'd have kept still."

Lucy said no more.
XII

The friendship between John and Jim was of the sort that has its roots deep in the past. They had been playmates and chums since early childhood.

Jim was two years the elder and one of his first memories was of wishing he had a mother like John's. His own mother had died when he was an infant and Mrs. Winter gave the lonely child many a happy hour mothering him along with her own child.

Jim's father, a dry minded man who owned a hardware store, was mystified by the boy's quaint fancies.

"Are the flowers lonesome at night?" the child asked Mr. Sprague one day. And once when it was raining he said, "The sky is crying and the trees are sorry," as the latter bent in the wind.

His father always laughed at such speeches and advised him not to be a fool. At first Jim would slip from the room and weep, but later he learned to conceal his hurt feelings as his father whipped him if he found him crying. So the child gradually acquired the habit of keeping his thoughts to himself.

Though Jim's faith in things mystical had in early childhood been the most eager and ardent, he was the first of the two boys to become a sceptic. Mr. Sprague in his hardware store had a business which seemed to be an appropriate emblem of his nature, and he had never attempted to meet his imaginative son half way; but it was Jim's own habit of inquiry regarding the world around him, rather than the fault of his unsympathetic parent, which brought about a change in his childish outlook.

"I don't believe in Santa Claus any more, John," he confessed the first Christmas after his faith had forsaken him.

"Well I do!" John answered indignantly. "He's going to
BLIND MICE

bring me a new sled too. You're jealous because he's not going to bring you one." And John ran away out of earshot of heresy.

Jim went home and threw himself face downward on the bed in the bare room where he and his father slept. While he lay there he admitted to himself that he was jealous of John but that did not alter his painfully won conviction.

Jim loved companionship with animals. A tailless cat, a lame gosling, chickens, and anything else that needed care, shared his affection. If one of these outcasts became ill he ministered to it as though it were a baby. One Sunday he sat for three hours holding a dying puppy in his lap.

Mr. Sprague did not like pets and was often cruel to Jim's charges, refusing food for them. Then Jim would deny himself and save the food from his plate for his protégés. His father grew angry at this, regarding it as disobedience to the spirit of his commands, and one day ordered Jim to turn the pets loose, in his rage kicking a little puppy. Jim rebelled and, as was usual on such occasions, was whipped. As soon as his father released him Jim gathered up the hurt puppy tenderly. After this he tried to keep his pets out of his father's sight.

At school John was, as a rule, the head of his class, but Jim always had to help him with his mathematical problems. Jim never obtained more than fair marks except in mental arithmetic, in which study he rapidly became the pride of all his teachers.

Although Jim took the initiative and led in all their games and expeditions it was tacitly understood that John was, in some way, the superior of the two. This tradition dated from their earliest memories. It was not founded solely on the fact that John had a mother, for John's father, too, was a cultured man and wrote for a religious review, while Jim's only sold hardware. Even in later years when Jim faced life and weighed values this attitude never quite left him.

During their high school days John fell in love with Gertie Pierce, who had red cheeks and yellow hair. This lifted him still higher in Jim's opinion. John wrote poetry about Gertie, which he read to Jim. In these poems he called her a "dryad."
explaining to Jim what the word meant, and pointing out how beautifully it rhymed with "sad."

As a rule Jim paid scant attention to his girl acquaintances and schoolmates. They made him uneasy with their giggling and whispering, and he always imagined that they were talking about him and making fun of him.

After his graduation from high school Jim entered his father's store. It had been decided that John was to go to college and he left the following autumn. Jim, robbed of the old companionship, felt his isolation more than ever before in his life. He wanted something, he hardly knew what. It seemed to him that life was cheating him, but he looked in vain for understanding from the boys and girls with whom he had grown up. Occasional enthusiastic letters from John in which college life was described to the stay-at-home, not without a note of condescension, added to Jim's dissatisfaction and unrest.

One day, about a month after John's departure to attend college, a young widow of the town, Mrs. Johnson, whom Jim had often seen on the street and admired for her brilliant coloring and dashing though somewhat overdressed appearance, came into Mr. Sprague's hardware store. She wished to order some gas fittings for her house, which was being remodeled. Jim had heard laughing references to her powers as a siren and these remarks were of a nature that reflected rather darkly on her moral conduct, so when he went forward to wait on her it was with some inward trepidation.

He advised her to choose plain square brass brackets which he thought much prettier than the ornate scrolled gilt ones which she seemed to prefer. She hesitated and then looked up at him.

"Well, if you think these are prettier, I'll take them. Please have them sent around to the house this afternoon, for the plumbers are coming tomorrow."

Jim, put at his ease by her deference to his taste, promised, and carried over the fixtures himself about three o'clock. Mrs. Johnson met him at the door. Jim, remembering the very stylish street costume she had worn that morning, was
somewhat taken back by the sight of her none too clean wrapper, run over slippers, and hair loose down her back.

"Come in," she invited, smiling and showing extremely pretty teeth. "If I'd known it was you who were coming I'd have fixed myself up. Take a seat," she continued volubly, laughing as she removed some sewing from a chair. "I'm all alone."

Jim deposited his hat and bundle on a table in the center of the room and seated himself. She drew another chair for herself very close to his.

"I expect I look the limit!" she exclaimed, leaning her head back and shaking her hair out in a rippling cascade over her shoulders. "I've been washing my hair."

Jim glanced timidly at her wide opened pale blue eyes, smooth fair skin, pink cheeks, and the rounded arm which was displayed to advantage as she modestly held her wrapper together over a salient bosom. The sunlight fell on her blond hair which was really exquisite.

"I think you look beautiful," said Jim impulsively, turning very red at his own temerity.

"I could almost kiss you for that," she answered with another laugh. "Wait till I get you some beer to pay you for your compliment," and she rose and went toward the kitchen, humming a tune as she disappeared.

Jim's gaze followed her. Delia Johnson made a pleasant picture and Jim had missed the shallowness, indolence, and sensuality in her face and the incipient heaviness in her figure. As her yellow hair was lost to view through the doorway he gave a sigh.

She returned in a few minutes with a bottle of beer and two glasses.

"Good luck," she chattered, laughing once more as she poured a glass for him and another for herself.

They clinked glasses and drank, Jim, who did not like the taste of beer, being careful not to make a wry face.

"Don't you smoke, Mr. Sprague?" she asked when they had finished the beer.

Jim did not smoke, but in view of Delia's eyes and the "Mr."
he answered, "Yes," adding, "but I haven't any cigars with me."

"I'll get you some cigarettes," she offered, opening a drawer in the table. "I'll have one too," she went on with her inevitable laugh, as she removed a cigarette from the package before handing it to him.

They smoked a moment in silence, Delia inhaling her cigarette with evident pleasure.

"Are you a partner in your father's business?" she inquired, at length, knocking the ash from her cigarette.

"No," returned Jim hastily, "I'm only clerking for him. I've just finished high school."

"How much does he pay you?" she pursued.

She was smiling at him bewitchingly and Jim put aside the crudeness of her questions.

"He don't pay me anything," he admitted honestly.

"That's better," she declared. "It shows that he intends to give you a share in the concern."

Jim shook his head dubiously.

"I don't know about that."

"You're his only child, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Of course he will," she affirmed with emphasis, "and in time you'll have it all. He's rich, isn't he?"

"Why, no," began Jim.

"Pretty well fixed, anyway," she put in laughing. "Well, there's many that would like to be in your shoes, Mr. Sprague."

Jim placed his half finished cigarette on the ash tray.

"Have some more beer?" she queried.

"No, thank you."

"What's your given name?" she demanded suddenly.

"James." He was smiling now.

"Do they call you Jimmie?"

"No, Jim," he replied, glancing at her hair.

"Then I'm going to call you Jim too."

"All right, Mrs. Johnson, I'm——"

"You mean I'm like me a bit!" she interrupted. "I don't believe you
Jim looked surprised.
"Do you?" she insisted.
"Why, yes." He studied her a moment, then, with increasing emphasis, "Of course I do. I like you fine."
She reached over and touched his cheek lightly.
"Then you must call me Delia," she stipulated, and added, "I like you, too, Jim, awfully well."
He blushed and trembled a little at the caress.
"I—I must go," he stammered, rising.
"Don't be in such a hurry," she pleaded. "Let's talk a minute."

Jim hesitated and then reseated himself. Delia moved her chair a little farther from him.
"Wasn't that awful in the morning's paper about their killing the strikers in Chicago?" She spoke in a more impersonal tone.

Jim drew a long breath.
"I think it's terrible!" he exclaimed. "Those men have no other way of protesting against injustice than by striking."
"The paper says they're trying to wreck business."
"They're not any such thing!" he insisted. "They're most of them fathers of families and dependent on their wages. It's nonsense to suggest such things. What they want is enough to live on."
"You aren't an anarchist, are you?"
"No," he disclaimed, "but I hate lies and hypocrisy, and that sheet" (pointing to the paper lying on the floor where Delia had dropped it) "is in the pay of the capitalists, and people read it and swallow any dope they hand out. This country will never progress till labor is represented in the capital at Washington and—and until things are reorganized on a basis of justice and equality," he concluded rather lamely.

He was flushed and seemed somewhat startled by his own outburst.
"My, but you think a lot!" Delia applauded admiringly.
"It's time men began to think," resumed Jim, encouraged.
"It's the duty of citizens to think and act. The good men stay away from the polls and let things slide, and the bad element
gets in its dirty work, and the poor suffer. When I'm old enough to vote I'm never going to miss—"

"Why, aren't you twenty-one yet?" put in Delia.
Jim was abashed.
"I'm only seventeen past," he admitted reluctantly.
"You look at least twenty-two or three," she insisted.
Jim was pleased and grateful.
"And you understand things so well. I like to hear you explain them, but I can't talk—only about women's things." Delia looked demure.

Jim, who as a rule talked little on any subject, was uncomfortable over having expressed himself so freely. Delia changed the subject again.
"Have you seen Will Bennett since his wife died?" she inquired.
"No," replied Jim, relieved.
"I saw him yesterday on the street," said she. "Did you go to the funeral?"
"No," answered Jim again.
"He looked as chipper as a sparrow. That's the way men are. The funeral was beautiful," and Delia launched into a minute description of the obsequies, Jim listening attentively.
"I really must go," he declared, at last, rising once more as she concluded, and extending his hand.
"Well, you must drop in again to see me," she invited, holding his hand as she spoke. "I've enjoyed it immensely."
"Thank you. So have I," returned Jim.
She released him as he took his hat from the table, and followed him to the door.
"Don't forget," she smiled.
"I'll not forget," he smiled back.

When Jim returned to the store Mr. Sprague looked up from his ledger.
"It took you a long time to deliver those fixtures," he grumbled.
"I—I didn't come right back," stammered Jim.

Mr. Sprague scrutinized his son's flushed face.
"I should think you didn't. Well, next time you come right back! Do you hear?"
Jim passed behind the counter without replying.
Jim remembered his promise to Delia. He thought of her almost constantly during his waking hours. The day following his visit he walked past her house. The plumbers were laying gas pipe from the street through the yard. He did not see Delia and went on.

"It's too soon yet," he said to himself.
The next day he passed the house again. The window shutters were all closed and he did not ring the bell, telling himself that Delia was not at home. He continued to pass the house once or twice every day, without asking for admittance, wondering each time if she were there, or if some one else were with her, or if she really meant that she wanted him to come again. He was amazed that such a beautiful woman had remained without remarrying. He had decided that the slurs cast on her reputation were unjust. She was too innocent-hearted and Bohemian. The narrow minded people who made up the population of the town could not understand her. Jim found her like the heroine of a French novel he had been reading. He dreamed about her at night.

About three o'clock in the afternoon, a week after his first visit, he passed her house as usual and saw no sign of life. He proceeded down the street and walked a block or two. Then he retraced his steps. As he came by the house again he heard someone call his name. Before he could decide what to do the curtains in a window were parted and Delia's smiling face confronted him.

"Why don't you come in, Jim?" she called.
He hesitated.
"Wait, and I'll unlock the door," she added, and, with a final smile, left the window.
Jim entered the gate, and had not crossed the small lawn when the door was opened.
"You mean thing! You wouldn't have come in at all if I hadn't called to you!" was her greeting.
"I thought you weren't at home," he explained.
"Well, let's not talk about it," she said, shutting the door.
"You're here anyway. I've been wondering what had become
of you. I thought you had gone out of town. Sit down and tell me about yourself,” she invited, leading the way to the sitting room he remembered so well. “Here! Give me your hat. You’re at home here.”

Jim was surprised to feel himself suddenly at ease.

Delia chatted volubly, smiling and laughing, without giving him an opportunity to talk about himself. She produced a flattering atmosphere of dependence and admiration that led Jim unconsciously to assume the part of the conquering male.

“You didn’t really forget me, did you?” she asked, her ingratiating manner anticipating his reply.

“Not quite,” Jim told her with new-found assurance.

Delia gazed into his eyes a moment and came over to his chair and, bending down, put her cheek against his.

“You didn’t, did you, Jim?” she repeated in a whisper.

He drew her to him and kissed her on the mouth.

Delia was in a fresh wrapper, with her beautiful hair becomingly arranged, and a scent of violets clung about her. Jim was considerably surprised at his own passion.

“You naughty boy!” she cried, laughing. Then she sat on his knees and pulled his hair. Jim kissed her again.

This was the beginning of frequent visits which soon became daily.

“I see you’re hanging around that Johnson woman,” Jim’s father remarked one evening at supper.

Jim turned pale, then red, and poured himself some more tea without replying.

“You stay away from there. Do you hear?” the elder Sprague went on.

“I hear, but I’ll do as I see fit,” retorted Jim.

“You’ll do as I see fit, or I’ll know the reason why,” snapped his father.

“Father,” began Jim, “I’m old enough to——”

“Old enough be damned!” Mr. Sprague fairly roared.

“You’re old enough to do what I tell you until you’re twenty-one years old, and that ain’t all—you’ll do what you’re told, if you expect to stay in my house!”

Jim rose and seized his hat.

“I don’t intend to have you running around with a bitch
like that at your age," continued the older man, as though
closing the discussion.
"You have no right to call her that!" Jim's eyes flamed
as he faced his father excitedly.
"How do you know what right I've got?" asked Sprague
unmoved.
"Be careful what you say," Jim was pale with anger, his
fists clenching.
Mr. Sprague looked at his son with interest. Jim felt very
young and at a disadvantage. He turned to go.
"Just see that you remember what I said," Sprague com-
manded, as the boy reached the door.
Jim went out without a word. He went straight to Delia's
house.
"Who is it?" a voice demanded, as he knocked, forgetting
to ring the bell.
"It's Jim," he replied.
The sound of bare feet in the hall was heard, and Delia,
unlocking the door, pulled at his sleeve.
"Come in, Jim," she whispered.
Jim began to explain his errand as soon as they reached
the sitting room.
"Delia, we must be married at once," he announced.
She was yawning, but stopped to gaze at him curiously. Jim
returned her regard steadily. He was in deadly earnest. Her
eyes avoided him but he continued to observe her hungrily.
Her wrapper had fallen open at the neck and the swell of
her full white breasts showed. Her hair was in two long
braids.
"Why, Jim, what's the matter? We're all right as we are." She
yawned again.
"Something has happened, Delia. I owe it—that is, it is
best for us to be——" He fell back on his first declaration,
"We must be married right away."
Delia went up to him and put her arms around his neck.
Her loose sleeves slid back. As he looked down on her he
could see only her white arms and bosom.
"People know. I've got you talked about," he said as she
kissed him.
Delia laughed.
"I don't care about that," she assured him.
Jim was puzzled.
"Come and sit down, dearie," she added, pushing him into
a chair and seating herself on his knees.
"But, Delia——"
"We can't get married now, Jim," she said. "You haven't
anything to support us and if I marry I'll lose all the money
Johnson left me."
Jim's face showed his revulsion of feeling. Delia saw the
change and clung to him.
"Let's just love each other, Jim, and everything will come
out all right."
"But, Delia, I want to do what's right and——"
She kissed him passionately. Jim felt a curious sense of
drifting.
"Come on, dearie," she whispered.
It was late when Jim left the house.

Mr. Sprague said nothing more to Jim on the subject of
Delia, which circumstance disconcerted and worried the boy
more than he was willing to admit to himself.
He tried to consider the matter calmly but his thoughts
seemed to dissolve in a mist of beautiful hair, wide opened blue
eyes, and white arms and bosom.
"She is right," he told himself. "We can't marry now, and
we love each other so much that we must be all in all to each
other."
However, his conscience made him very miserable. He felt
that one who had no religion should be morally strong. With
all this he continued to go to Delia's house.
He did not understand why she designated certain even-
nings for his visits and forbade him to come on others. One
evening, rather late, feeling very lonely and very much in
love, he turned his steps toward her house, notwithstanding
the fact that it was a proscribed day.
He had nearly reached the gate when a man emerged from
the doorway, and Jim, halting beneath one of the large trees
that shaded the sidewalk, recognized his father.
His first feeling was of anger that he was being spied upon, but this turned to amazement and cold rage as Delia called Sprague back and, through the half closed door, kissed him, straightening his hat which she had knocked awry, calling, "Good night, dearie," as he went off.

Jim watched his father disappear, and, after a moment's hesitation, walked away with rapid strides. He sought his home when it was daybreak.

The old standards by which Jim had measured values were of no more use to him.
XIII

Jim came to look at the world and people with clearer eyes. He saw that his father kept him in the store to save clerk hire and not with any intention of giving him a share in the business. He realized that he had no home or career in his native town. He thought matters out very carefully and fully.

One morning at breakfast, after reading a letter just received from John, the complacent tone of which threw his own forlornness into relief, he announced to his father that he was going away to college.

"You're going to stay right where you are," responded Mr. Sprague from his side of the table.

"No, I'm going," repeated Jim quietly.

"Well, you won't get a cent from me," exclaimed his father with the air of saying the last word in an argument. "I suppose this is another of the fool notions you've got from that Winter boy."

"I didn't expect anything from you," explained Jim.

Mr. Sprague passed one hand over his stubbly chin and regarded his son with cold curiosity. The elder Sprague was burly and inclined to stoop. He wore reading glasses and now he peered through them with as much detachment as an entomologist who has a mildly interesting insect under the microscope. He was, as usual, in his shirt sleeves, and his deliberate untidiness of dress seemed the aggressively flaunted signal of that coarseness of spirit which was a matter of pride with him.

"Don't fool yourself into thinkin' I don't mean what I say," he remarked.

A month after this incident Jim informed his father that he was leaving for college.

"Well, remember, you needn't come back," Mr. Sprague told him.

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Jim went to the station alone, carrying a small bundle under his arm, and climbed on the car unnoticed. As the train pulled out of the place he looked back on the little town. This was his last glimpse of his childhood home.

He arrived at college with one suit of clothes, a few extra shirts and other accessories, and three dollars in his pocket, having borrowed the money from Dr. Winter, John's father, to pay for his ticket. His first act was to hunt up John who received him with his old affection.

"Gee, but I'm glad to see you!" John exclaimed boisterously, slapping Jim on the back.

He insisted that Jim share his room and allowance, but Jim had no intention of being dependent on anyone. He shoveled snow, cared for the furnaces in the college dormitory, sawed wood and split kindling for the families near the campus, and by working early and late managed to remain in the college and even won the scholarship in mathematics. The first money he earned above his living expenses was sent back to pay the debt he had incurred for his journey.

He and John now shared room and funds on equal terms and Jim, by imperceptible degrees, assumed his old responsibility for John's welfare and progress.

John had never really decided what his profession or occupation should be. Jim brought the question up by declaring that he did not intend to follow a stated college course but planned to fit himself to be an architect. John believed himself a born artist and talked of studies in Rome and Paris after his course in college was ended. One day he rushed into the room and flung his cap into a corner.

"Jim!" he cried enthusiastically, "I've decided to be an architect too!" He went on to talk of the opportunities of the true artist in a profession that had lured the greatest masters from the Greeks to Michelangelo.

"But modern architecture is more of a science than an art," Jim pointed out. "The calculations of stresses and strength of materials has more to do with it than the 'visions of a dream in marble' you are talking about."

However, John was not to be dissuaded and the two boys
were soon entered in the special courses marked in the institution's catalogue as leading to proficiency in architectural science.

John's difficulty with mathematics was a handicap in most of these courses, and Jim had to help him in his work as in the days of their early boyhood. Notwithstanding this aid, John (who always took high marks in more general courses) found it hard to keep pace with his fellows, and, after the end of the first semester, decided to abandon their plan. It was only Jim's initiative and generous giving of time to help him that decided John on the continuation of their design.

John always went home for the holidays and vacations, while Jim stayed on alone in the almost empty dormitory, working and studying.

The characteristics of the two boys became more evident as they approached majority. John conceived confidence in anybody who pleased him, each new acquaintance possessing, for the time being, all the perfections. Jim developed an almost uncanny insight into the motives of those around him, and was slow to form friendships.

"Never mind what people say," he would tell John. "Fix your attention on finding out why they say it. That's the way to get at things."

When they graduated, or rather, completed their courses, for neither received his degree, Jim began work at once in an architect's office in the college town, and settled down with his customary methodical perseverance to make a place for himself. John returned home for a few months and then persuaded his parents to send him to the Art School in Chicago to study what he felt to be the higher aspects of his profession.

Soon after his entrance into the School of Art he returned to painting, and left designing to study oils and water color work. The former companions were separated but exchanged frequent letters and remained as close friends as ever. John always thought of Jim as "good old Jim." Jim never quite analyzed his feelings for John, much as he loved to evaluate the motives of others. He had always needed and would al-
ways need some one to care for, and John was in his life. He
did not go further than this.

A year after their separation, Jim's employer gave him a
share in the small business, and, dying a few months later, left
Jim in full charge of his affairs. Jim, whose success and
promise had been noticed by many, easily borrowed enough
capital to buy the business outright from the heirs, and in a
brief period had paid his debt and won the independent op-
portunity of which he had dreamed for years.

It was not many months after this that John, in one of his
letters, interested his friend by announcing that he had fallen
in love, and by raving in a school boy fashion over the object of
his devotion. Jim for some time had considered the wisdom
of transferring his business to Chicago. It seemed to have
reached the limit of development in the little college town,
and he was anxious for a field that put no restrictions on his
ability. John's letter spurred him to a decision as to the fu-
ture and he replied with the news that he was coming to the
city himself, and asked John to meet him at the station. At
their first sight of each other they renewed the old familiar
relation.

John discussed everything with all his former frankness and
enthusiasm and Jim, listening, felt more than ever that John
was his to care for and watch over.

"But what are you going to do to support a wife?" was
Jim's first question.

"Jim, I'm through with experiments. I'm going to work,"
replied John earnestly.

"Where?" asked Jim.

"I've got a place as a draughtsman with Layard's, a big
building supply firm here," the younger man explained. "Life
is serious now and I'm going to do something."

Jim said no more.
The following day John took him to call on Lucy Merwent.

The two young men went into partnership a few weeks
before John and Lucy were married and it was not many
months before it was evident that the business venture was
succeeding on a fairly safe basis.
Nora Stimpson, the red-haired art student of Miss Storms' first party, called on Lucy after the wedding. She also came to the office several times to see John, and each time the two talked and laughed like old friends. She smiled on Jim in a most friendly manner. He managed to be in the office whenever she was there but, as his air was far from cordial, she finally ceased visiting them.

The business developed but never became important. John did the draughting and Jim attended to the practical details of specifications and dealt with contractors.

When Lucy's baby was born it was christened James Sprague Winter. The second year after their marriage John paid a flying visit to his parents; and on one occasion Dr. Winter attended a church convention in Chicago and stayed a week with his son and daughter-in-law. He questioned Lucy regarding her soundness in doctrine and was aghast at her honest replies. Nevertheless he liked her and carried back to Dimmie's grandmother a favorable report of "John's wife."

Jim matured and developed during the years after John's marriage, but he who had long ago learned to understand others never quite came to understand himself. Lucy did not puzzle him, but it was only after knowing her that he realized the idealism and emotionalism of John. The realization did not cool his affection. He only smiled to himself when his friend allowed enthusiasm to blind discretion, and said, "John has his rose-colored spectacles on again."

While his old idolatry of John was thus tempered by ripening judgment, it was an incident of brief duration and apparently trivial consequence that caused, as Jim thought, the scales to fall from his eyes and forced him entirely to turn, with a feeling of slight bitterness, to Lucy rather than her husband for the expression of the hidden things in his nature.

The involuntary arbiter of Jim's spiritual destiny, according to his own interpretation, was a pretty Irish girl, Miss Brennan, whom he and John had employed as their accountant and stenographer. She was a silly, sentimentally-inclined young woman who accepted admiration indiscriminately from all sources. She had troubles, the chief of which were a drunken father and a cross-grained mother.
BLIND MICE

Under the influence of John's expansive sympathy, which she soon appraised, her secrets were unfolded to him and he, with constant ardency, accepted the rôle of father confessor. She did not like Jim, whose disapproval she felt, and most of her interviews with John were reserved for hours when the two were almost certain not to be interrupted. She was a devout Roman Catholic and John, under her tutelage, began to evince a sudden interest in Catholicism.

"You know that little Miss Brennan, she's so beautifully simple," he told Jim one day at luncheon. "I happened to be passing her church when she was going in the other day and just for curiosity I went in with her. Catholicism is the only religion left for an artist anyway. You don't know how much it affected me when I saw how in earnest she was with her beads and genuflections. The whole thing reminded me of a mediæval picture. It's about the only naive thing left in our sophisticated age."

"Catholics may be naïve but not the Catholic Church," remarked Jim unsympathetically. He was not thinking of questions of religious feeling however as he studied John's face. John was irritated by this scrutiny.

"You seem to have lost all your temperamental appreciation of things, Jim," he observed in a vexed tone.

The first confirmation which Jim's unadmitted suspicions received came when John insisted on raising Miss Brennan's salary.

"She's almost the only dependence of her family, and the things she has to put up with to keep things going are pitiful," he declared.

"How much do you think we ought to give her?" asked Jim.

John hesitated, and, glancing away as he spoke, named the sum Miss Brennan had suggested, which almost doubled the amount she was receiving.

There was a brief pause.

"We can't afford to turn the business into a philanthropic enterprise," Jim answered laconically.

It was the next day that Jim, entering the office at an unanticipated moment, surprised Miss Brennan in tears and John soothing her with unconventional tenderness. Jim passed
on into the draughting room, not seeming to observe the confusion of the pair, and it was John himself who, with a guilty air, referred to the subject an hour later when the stenographer was out for luncheon.

"I guess you were surprised when you came in and found Miss Brennan crying like that?" he suggested.

"Not particularly." Jim looked out the window as he spoke.

"But Miss Brennan—Jim, she's got the most wonderful lot of grit! It makes a fellow spiritually sick to see a woman young and pretty as she is up against such an awful proposition!" And he launched into a eulogy of Miss Brennan which embraced all of the adjectives which Jim, on other occasions, had heard him apply to Lucy.

The day following Jim waited until John had gone around the corner to Layard's to get some prices on furnishing lumber, and he and Miss Brennan were the sole occupants of the office.

"Miss Brennan," he announced, "I want to tell you that your services are not required any longer. Your salary will be paid until the end of the month."

Miss Brennan opened her lips to speak. She looked into Jim's eyes. Her small mouth quivered.

"Why I don't know what you mean! Mr. Winter——" She hesitated, eyeing Jim an instant with fear and bewilderment. Then a confused understanding dawned in her face.

"I was never so insulted in my life, Mr. Sprague!" she exclaimed indignantly, a catch in her voice.

Jim did not answer, and two large tears rolled down her cheeks as she moved away from him.

When John returned to the office Jim was walking up and down the inner draughting room, smoking. His tall shadow, as he paced back and forth, moved across the ground glass partition. Miss Brennan outside had on her hat and coat.

Jim heard John's exclamation and knew that she was breaking the news to him. In a few moments sobs were audible. John opened the inner door. His face was crimson. He and Jim stared at one another like strangers.

"What the hell does this mean, Jim?" John demanded, his
voice shaking with suppressed feeling and his manner almost threatening.

"I think you know about as well as I do, John."

"The devil I do! I won't have it, that's all! It's a shame!"

He seemed ready for battle as he spoke.

"All right, John," answered Jim quietly.

John went out into the office again, slamming the door behind him.

Miss Brennan was close to the corridor entrance.

"I think I'd better go, Mr. Winter. You are so good to me, but I couldn't stay in Mr. Sprague's employ," she answered, when John insisted on her remaining.

So she went away, and whether she and John met again was a mystery which Jim did not try to solve, but he felt that he had at least kept the affair from reaching a development which would come to Lucy's ears.

The partners tacitly-avoided employing a successor to Miss Brennan, going across the hall of their office building to a public stenographer, when a stenographer was necessary, while Jim posted and cast their accounts in his room each evening after his day's work.

The incident caused a passing coolness between them. Indeed there were some weeks during which John scarcely spoke to Jim. The clouds were dispelled however. John showed a sudden warmth and simultaneously came an invitation to dinner from Lucy.

Jim did not question the impulse or try to guess whether it had originated with John or his wife. He was too anxious to accept any terms which allowed him to go to the Winter home as before and enjoy the companionship of Lucy who treated him like a good friend and a brother.

John told himself, after the incident of the stenographer, that he was a little disappointed in Jim, who lacked the qualifications for comprehending the finer feelings, but the change in John's regard did not appear on the surface.

Jim remained the counselor for the family in all practical matters, and was looked upon by the expansive Dimmie as almost the equal of his father. Jim paid frequent visits to the
house at Rosedene, often remaining from Saturday until Monday. A bedroom which Lucy had referred to as “Jim’s room” when the house was under construction, was always at his disposal, and when he was present Lucy accepted him with a naturalness and lack of ceremony which he found more flattering than the most exaggerated attention.

After his return from Rosedene on the night of his first tête-à-tête with Mrs. Merwent, who had rather taken his breath away by her display of mingled clumsiness and cunning, he sat and smoked in silence in his room until very late. An amazing new factor had entered his world. As he finally grew sleepy and prepared himself for bed, he decided that his first problem was to help Lucy in her immediate predicament.

“Poor child,” he murmured as he knocked out his last pipe and lay down.
XIV

It was eight o'clock in the morning and Rosedene was looking its best. The late spring weather was perfect and the flower beds and shrubs about the Winters' home were faintly misted with bloom.

Lucy was weeding a border of violets and Dimmie assisted her. She wore a clean gingham dress and the customary wide apron. An old hat tied on with a black silk ribbon, and worn gloves of John's completed her costume. There was a light wind and her skirts billowed out as she bent over the flowers and the ribbon under her chin fluttered.

"Don't sit down in the mud. You'll take cold, Dimmie," Lucy admonished, observing the clayey tint on the seat of Dimmie's rompers as, panting and perspiring with his exertions, he laboriously replanted an uprooted violet.

Nannie came in from the street. She had been seeing John off to his train and was in a simple but charming morning costume.

"I met the postman on the way," she observed as she stood removing her gloves.

"Were there any letters for us?" Lucy asked.

"None for you. I got one." Nannie hesitated. "It was from Professor Walsh," she added, laughing rather uneasily.

"So you've read it already, have you?" Lucy smiled as she spoke but did not look up from her work.

"Now, Lucy, you are trying to make game of me!"

"Indeed I'm not, Mamma. I always like to see what's in a letter as soon as I get one."

"I didn't have to think very hard to guess what would be in this one. The poor man is so alone in Russellville. You know yourself how in a small place there are so few really cultured people." Mrs. Merwent smoothed out the fingers of the gloves she held.
"I thought you always stood up for Russellville, Mamma," Lucy said.

"Now, Lucy, I didn’t mean of course that there were no really well bred people in Russellville. There are few enough here in the North, heaven knows, but Professor Walsh is an unusually well educated man."

"Yes. There are few enough anywhere," Lucy continued, ignoring Mrs. Merwent’s last allusion.

"But you and John lead such an isolated life," Nannie went on. "I don’t see how you can judge. Don’t you know any of your neighbors, Lucy?"

"Well, we haven’t any neighbors in the sense we used to have in Russellville, but there are a few really pleasant people near by. There are the Hamiltons just back of us. She is the one who sent the jellied chicken for our luncheon the day you came. Don’t put so much water on the flowers, dear." (This last remark was addressed to Dimmie.)

Dimmie began to drum on the tin sprinkler with a trowel.

"Jimmie, for heaven’s sake stop that noise," exclaimed Nannie. "You’ll split my head. I can’t hear myself talk."

Dimmie ceased drumming and ran off to swing.

"Of course I know you don’t have neighbors like in small towns," Nannie pursued, speaking to Lucy again, "but I don’t mean people like the Hamiltons. I meant your social circle. Don’t you know any smart people?"

"I think the Hamiltons are very nice," said Lucy slowly. "We’re very small potatoes here, Mamma."

"Well, at home children of the first families move in the best society, even if they are poor."

"We don’t belong to the first families." As Lucy talked she was pulling weeds from among some clumps of jonquils.

"Well, you certainly do, and John has told me that his father is a distinguished clergyman, and his mother is one of the Montgomerys of Virginia."

"We only know a few people and those slightly," explained Lucy, still intent on her task. "We don’t go out much and when we do we only go to a theatre or concert with Jim."

"That’s just it, Lucy! You make no attempt to get out into the world. All these years you’ve done nothing at all. If
you’d started at once, by now you would be at least on the outskirts of good society, and as fast as John made more money you could get into more select things. It’s a woman’s duty to advance herself all she can.”

“We none of us care for society, Mamma, even if we could afford it.”

“We—who do you mean by ‘we,’ Lucy?”

“Why John and Jim and me, of course,” replied Lucy with some surprise.

“That’s just it, Lucy! It’s Mr. Sprague who doesn’t like to have you go out. John is as fond of society as anyone could be. I’ll tell you candidly, I think you are making a great mistake in letting an outsider—”

Lucy had paused in her weeding.

“I thought we had decided not to discuss Mr. Sprague,” she put in with an approach to irritation.

“Oh, dear me! Now I’ve done it again! I declare, Lucy, you are certainly abnormally sensitive on the subject of Mr. Sprague,” Nannie complained, hastening on to prevent a reply, “but it’s certainly dull never seeing anybody from one day’s end to another. I don’t mean for myself. It makes no difference about me. But for your own sake you ought to go out occasionally, and have a few friends in once in a while.”

Lucy returned to her jonquils.

“I expect it does seem rather quiet to you, Mamma. I’ve gotten so used to it I don’t notice it. We’ll have to take in a theatre some evening this week. I’ll have John get tickets.”

“You needn’t do it on my account, but I really think it would do you good. You are stuck here in the house night and day. Doesn’t anyone besides Mrs. Hamilton ever call on you?”

“Yes. At least a number did call, but I’m not very good at keeping up formal acquaintances, and most of them have stopped. Miss Storms used to come here often, but she’s so busy, and I’ve gotten into the habit of dropping in on her when I go down—”

“Lucy, I should think you’d have at least consideration enough not to mention that woman in my presence!”
"Well, Mamma, we won’t discuss her either then," responded Lucy quietly.
"Well, of course people will call on me, now that I’m here."
"I doubt if anybody knows it except those in the next houses, and we only know them by sight."
"You oughtn’t to let yourself be forgotten like this, Lucy. If you don’t push yourself a little nobody will notice you."
Lucy straightened up from her work. She was thinking.
"I’ll invite a few women acquaintances out to meet you, Mamma. Maybe you’ll like some of them, and it will give you a chance to get out a little afterwards."
"I don’t like to think of your going to trouble and expense for me."
"It won’t be much trouble or expense."
"You could have a little tea, couldn’t you? You make such darling little cakes and sandwiches."
"All right, we’ll do it."
"Now you’re sure it’s not too much for you, Lucy?"
"Quite sure," affirmed Lucy, smiling.
"I’m sure it’s very nice of you. I’ll help decorate the table. I must look through my trunks and fix up something to wear."
Lucy bent over her plants.

John that night approved the plan for the tea.
"You can get some things from the caterer’s," he suggested.
Lucy, however, counting the money on hand, decided to prepare the refreshments herself. She asked two young girls who lived near to help her serve, and the simple affair was conducted without a hitch.

Nannie’s toilette, made by herself, was the admiration of all, and she referred to her home and friends in Russellville in a way that made several of the ladies wish they might see her in such lovely surroundings.

One of the guests was a Miss Powell, a voluptuous and very smartly dressed brunette. She was evidently impressed with Nannie.
"I suppose you will find it hard to stay long away from Russellville, even to be with your daughter," remarked the new acquaintance.
"Oh, I hope to stay a little while yet, Miss Powell," returned Nannie laughing. "It's been so long since we could arrange it to be together and we are both enjoying it," she declared, becoming serious.

When the guests had gone, Lucy bravely attacked the huge pile of dishes in the kitchen sink.

"Are there any sandwiches left, Lucy?" Mrs. Merwent inquired, entering the room where Lucy was in the midst of her work.

Lucy indicated a plate which had been set aside with the idea that it might contribute to the morrow's luncheon.

"We've been in such a rush all day that I've hardly had time to eat anything," Nannie explained as she helped herself to the largest sandwich. "I wish you would leave all those things until I get back. I promised to meet John," she went on as she selected her second sandwich.

"I must finish up and put dinner on," Lucy informed her mother somewhat irritably.

Mrs. Merwent halted in the kitchen doorway.

"I hope you aren't displeased because I promised to meet John," she challenged resentfully.

"Oh, Mamma, please don't start any argument now!" Lucy exclaimed.

Nannie gave her daughter a reproachful glance and turned away without speaking, even the set of her shoulders as she left the room expressing offended virtue.

She changed her frock and went to meet John's train as she had been in the habit of doing. When he alighted from the car it was not yet dusk. Nannie stepped out of the crowd to greet him. They smiled at each other, and a few moments later were walking back to the house together, their arms linked.

"Keep step, Nannie." John, amused by the shortness of her stride, admonished her gaily. Mrs. Merwent looked up at him and they both laughed.

"You have to work so hard, yet no matter how tired you are you are so cheerful, John," she said. "It ought to make Lucy and me ashamed of ourselves."

"What's the matter with you and Lucy?" John asked, the
cheerful note dying out of his voice. Nannie gave him a quick side look.

"Why, nothing, John, except that Lucy is upset by her day, I suppose. She's irritable now and then, you know, but I certainly don't hold it against her."

There was silence for a moment.

"John," Nannie continued diffidently, "Lucy misunderstands so many things—— I've been wanting to ask you a favor and I didn't dare do it!"

John glanced down at her.

"I'm not afraid of Lucy if you are, Nannie," he protested, smiling, but with his brows still fretfully corrugated.

"I want you to cash a check for me. It—it—Professor Walsh was the only person I could go to for help, John, and he has been kind enough to take charge of my financial affairs. I know so little of such things. The check is from him," she finished apologetically.

"I don't see why you have to depend on Professor Walsh while I'm here!" John answered, dropping her arm.

"But remember, John, I didn't know until I got here——" She stopped speaking, then added, "it is hard not to treasure it up against Lucy when I think how long her siding with her father against me kept us from knowing each other, John."

John did not reply at once.

"I understand, Nannie," he said after a minute.

"Here is the check. It's already endorsed. I knew you would realize in what a position I was placed—without a person in the world to call on!" Mrs. Merwent's voice broke.

John took the check and put it in his inside pocket.

"Lucy is not as charitable as she might be, John," Nannie sighed, taking his arm again. They walked on in silence.

"I wish Professor Walsh would choke!" John ejaculated in a savage undertone, as they entered the gate at their destination.

Nannie laughed and pressed his arm.

"You are a dear boy, John," she whispered.

Lucy heard them come in laughing and talking. Dimmie did not run to meet them.
"Is dinner ready?" John called as they entered the dining room.

"No," responded Lucy.

"Whew!" he exclaimed with mock chagrin. "Got a grouch on, Lucy?"

Busied in placing on the table those of the dishes which she had washed to use for the evening meal, she did not reply. Dimmie appeared behind his mother.

"Hello, son! You sore too? Why didn't you come with Nannie to meet me?" John inquired breezily.

"I did want to," acknowledged Dimmie, "but Nannie said I couldn't."

"Why, Jimmie!" Mrs. Merwent cried. "What an awful story!" She turned to John. "Did you ever see such a child! Lucy had changed his clothes after the ladies left and I only said to him that his mother was too tired to change him again just to go out for a few moments."

"What do you mean by telling an untruth, Dimmie?" demanded John.

Dimmie began to cry. Lucy took the child's hand.

"I don't see any untruthfulness," she contended. "Mamma didn't want him and her exact wording doesn't matter."

"Why, Lucy," said John reproachfully, "you surely don't think your mother would——"

Nannie laid her hand on his arm.

"Don't, John," she urged. "Lucy is tired, and it's really only a trifle. Let's talk about something pleasant."

"All right, but I must say you're awfully good natured, Nannie!"

"I saw you carrying a roll of something. Did you get my music?" she asked.

"Yes. It's in the hall with my hat. Do you want to try it now?"

"Why, if there's time before supper. Is there, Lucy?"

"Yes," said Lucy, and John and Nannie started toward the living room.

That night when John came whistling to bed, he found Lucy by the window staring out.

"Why, Lucy, aren't you in bed yet?" he asked cheerfully.
"John, I wish you'd mow the lawn again," she said, as though not hearing his question. "It's been over two weeks since you did and it looks ragged. You used to keep it so beautifully."

The next morning Lucy was dusting the dining room furniture. Mrs. Merwent had just finished her usual tardy breakfast.

"Who was that woman with her hat stuck on the back of her head who came so early yesterday?" she asked, pushing her chair away from the table.

Lucy frowned slightly.

"I suppose you mean Mrs. Hamilton. I never noticed how she wore her hat but she was the one who came earliest. I told you she was our neighbor when I introduced you. I like her the best of all those who were here," Lucy returned with antagonistic emphasis.

"Well, I could never like a woman who wore her hat like that," Nannie asserted. "Now that Miss Powell was the smartest one present at your tea. The way she put her hat on had real dash to it. She studies herself and dresses to bring out her points to the best advantage. I think that it's a woman's duty to look as well as she can."

"I never cared for Miss Powell," said Lucy stubbornly. "She always seemed so selfish to me."

"Well, I thought she was nice," persisted Nannie injuredly. "Her brother is William J. Powell of Powell and Powell. John knows the firm. She's going to call on me soon and before the season's over we're going to a matinée together. I tell you, Lucy, you're making a mistake, living by yourself. You owe it to John to make friends. A woman can advance her husband in lots of ways if she's clever about it."

Lucy opened her lips to speak but restrained the impulse before she had put her reply into words.

"Now one thing we could do to extend your acquaintance would be to have nice teas on Sundays," Nannie resumed. "Then you could have friends in, and in time keep sort of open house evenings."
"We can't afford extra things, Mamma. Our means won't allow it."

"But, Lucy, it wouldn't cost hardly anything. You are so clever about making things. Why your biscuits and fricasseed chicken the other day were the best things I ever tasted. Let's try it next Sunday."

"But whom shall we invite, Mamma?"

"Let's invite your friend, Mr. Sprague," suggested Nannie smiling.

"He's not my friend any more than he is John's, and not as much," said Lucy coldly.

"Why, Lucy, who said he was! I meant yours and John's both. I only wanted to please you. I declare, we can't mention Mr. Sprague's name without your getting offended."

Lucy changed the subject and did not refer to it again, but Nannie brought up her suggestion when John came home, and he seconded the plan heartily.

"Yes. Let's have Jim out Sunday!" he cried. "He's moping around these days like he'd lost his grandmother. It'll do him good."

"All right," suddenly agreed Lucy. "We will."

Nannie seemed surprised at her ready acquiescence.
XV

Jim appeared punctually at the appointed hour on Sunday evening. It had been a brilliant spring day. The late sunshine was now mellowed by shadows that fell thick on the front of the Winter house and made it look cool and inviting. As he came up the walk he saw Mrs. Merwent on the front porch.

She wore an elaborate white lingérie dress with a wide lavender sash. She had just cut some lilacs from the bush under the dining room window and as she mounted the steps she held them out for him to admire.

"I won't offer you any more flowers, Mr. Sprague," she began, referring to the incident of the boutonnière on the occasion of his first visit.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Merwent. They are certainly pretty," Jim answered without returning her smile.

"They would go well with your grey suit too," she persisted teasingly.

Jim was very careful of his attire but shy of personalities of any nature. He ignored Mrs. Merwent's remark and turned to John who had just emerged from the house.

"Hello, John," he called. "Where's Lucy?"

"In the kitchen as usual." John laughed. "She seems to have adopted cooking as her life work lately. It's a good thing I have Nannie to console me."

Jim scrutinized John but did not speak. The three made their way to the living room.

"Hello, Uncle Jim! The cookies are made in stars!" Dimmie cried, rushing up to Jim and embracing his knees.

"Everything seems to be in gala array," Jim observed, looking around the room and noticing a bowl of violets and narcissi, and two or three bunches of lilacs on the piano and mantel shelf.

"Nannie is a real artist at arranging flowers, Jim," John declared admiringly.
Mrs. Merwent smiled.

"With John's pictures the house hardly needs any other decoration," she began. "I think they're——"

"Come and see Mamma, Uncle Jim," Dimmie begged, tugging at Jim's trouser leg.

"Did she tell you to call him, Jimmie?" Nannie inquired quickly.

"Come on, Uncle Jim," Dimmie begged, not heeding his grandmother.


"She won't say my name," protested Dimmie.

"Do what I tell you. Answer Nannie."

"Now, John, I'm sure Jimmie doesn't mean to be rude."

"Well, he's got to learn not to be."

"I want to go back to Mamma," wailed Dimmie.

"Come along, kid," Jim said, as though he were oblivious to the discussion between John and Nannie. He lifted the child to his shoulder and the two left the room.

"Of course he has to go to Lucy as soon as he gets here. There are few men as big souled as you, John, who wouldn't resent such devotion to their wives."

"I don't know what you mean, Nannie." John looked at Mrs. Merwent in a worried, perplexed way.

"Of course you don't, you great-hearted fellow! Suppose we go out on the veranda until tea is ready."

Not long after Lucy sent Dimmie to call them in.

Nannie and John praised the hot biscuit and fricassee chicken. When tea was over they returned to the living room leaving Jim and Lucy still at the table.

"I'm going to sing the new song John brought me," Nannie explained as she went out.

"Let's go too so we can hear better," said Lucy to Jim.

Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were unusually bright. She and Jim seated themselves near the piano, Dimmie perched on Jim's knee, while John stood by Nannie and turned the music for her.

"I think it's pretty. Don't you, Jim?" Lucy commented when the last notes died away.

"Very," agreed Jim.
"'Pretty' isn't the word," put in John. "It's a beautiful little gem. And how well Nannie sings it! Don't you think her expression is perfect?"

"You'll make me blush if you don't stop, John," protested Nannie with her silveriest laugh.

"Well, I want you to be appreciated," insisted John warmly. "Don't you think we appreciate Mamma's singing?" asked Lucy.

"You don't either of you seem much moved by it," answered John.

"Now, John," interrupted Nannie soothingly, smiling up at him.

"Sing that other one, the one I got last week," urged John. "Here it is," and he laid a piece of music open on the rack. "Now wait a minute! Let me rest," Nannie objected.

There was a pause.

"Let's not sing any more now. You forget that perhaps everybody isn't as fond of music as you are, John," she began after an awkward moment.

"Do sing it, please," pleaded Lucy. "Jim and I both love music, and Jim hasn't heard it."

"No, I'm not in very good voice tonight. It's a mistake to sing when you're not feeling like it. You lose your reputation."

"Please," Lucy begged again.

"I should like very much to hear it," Jim joined in.

"Thank you, but you'll have to excuse me this time," said Nannie.

Again silence descended on the little group.

"Singing makes me thirsty," announced Nannie at length, rising and moving toward the dining room.

"Let me get you a drink," offered John, following her. "Don't you want some lemonade? I'll get the ice for you."

"Let's you and I make lemonade for everybody," proposed Nannie as they entered the dining room.

"All right," acceded John gleefully. Then, raising his voice, "You two stay in there. Nannie and I are fixing a surprise for you."

"Good," said Jim grimly.
For a moment Lucy sat looking at Jim without a word. The voices of John and Nannie and the tinkling of glasses and ice came faintly from the other room.

"You can't make a square into a circle, Lucy," Jim began very soberly, breaking the silence.

Lucy's lip quivered and her eyes filled with tears.

"Thank you for understanding, Jim," she replied unsteadily.

Jim glanced at her.

"I'm going to smoke," he decided sourly.

Lucy smiled.

"I wish you would, Jim. I must take Dimmie up to bed. I'll be right down."

She led the child away, but in a short time rejoined Jim in the living room. He was walking up and down. His pipe was still in his mouth but it had gone out.

"I feel better," she informed him. "Dimmie is the sweetest thing after he gets into bed at night."

"He's a great kid," Jim growled approvingly.

John appeared with one of Nannie's dainty tea aprons around him, carrying a tray on which were two glasses. Nannie followed him with the pitcher of lemonade.

"Mrs. Winter." She stopped in front of Lucy and made a curtsey. "Hold the tray straight, John," and she poured one of the glasses full.

Lucy took it.

"Do you think the mistress is pleased with us, John?" Mrs. Merwent murmured, with mock humility.

"Give Jim some too, Mamma," Lucy interrupted gently.

"Wait a minute! I'm going as fast as I can, Lucy!" Nannie exclaimed with some irritation.

She led John over to Jim.

"Mr. Sprague," she said with another curtsey.

"Aren't you going to have any, Mrs. Merwent?" asked Jim.

"Oh, Mr. Sprague, the mistress wouldn't like us to drink with the gentlefolk," she answered coquettishly. "We'll have ours later in the dining room."

"That's right, Mary. I'm glad to see you know your place. I'm strong for the proprieties myself," Jim responded, drink-
ing the lemonade. "You needn't wait, either of you," he added, returning the glass to the tray. "When we want you we'll ring for you." Jim was gazing straight into Nannie's eyes and she tittered uneasily.

John laughed extravagantly.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "Come on, Nannie," and he departed, followed by Mrs. Merwent, who glanced back covertly at Jim as she passed him.

"Don't you see, John!" Nannie exclaimed as soon as they reached the dining room. "They had rather be alone. Lucy don't want us."

"It was only Jim's way of joking. He didn't mean anything," John explained soothingly, looking worried in spite of himself, as he remembered Nannie's enigmatic remark earlier in the evening.

"Yes, he did. You didn't see the hostile look he gave me. Lucy and he always manage to make us seem foolish!"

"Now, Nannie, you're imagining," said John soothingly. Lucy didn't say anything.

"That's just it!" retorted Mrs. Merwent. "She never does but she always sees to it that she and Mr. Sprague—" Nannie's eyes and mouth opened for, chancing to turn, she saw Lucy in the doorway.

"Lucy, you're spying on us! I didn't think you'd stoop to do a thing like that!" she cried excitedly, recovering from her surprise.

"No, I wasn't, Mamma. I came to ask you and John to come into the sitting room," replied Lucy, eyeing her mother squarely.

"I won't stand it!" cried Nannie hysterically, and as she spoke she almost ran into the hall, and seizing a scarf as she passed the hat and umbrella stand, went out, slamming the front door behind her.

John stood undecided and uneasy by the dining table.

"Lucy, you oughtn't to have come in like this without saying a word——" he faltered.

"Why not?" demanded Lucy.

"Because—because—Nannie wasn't saying anything," he stammered.
Lucy turned to leave the room.
"Where do you think she’s gone?" he asked nervously.
"I don’t know," replied Lucy.
"Shall I go and look for her?" he continued.
"I don’t know," she repeated, and disappeared into the sitting room.
As Lucy entered the room where Jim was the front door clicked after John. She seated herself in a chair near Jim.
"Don’t you think I’d better go home, Lucy?" queried Jim in a low voice.
"Please don’t go," she begged, laying a hand on his sleeve.
"Let’s talk."
"What about?" he asked with a grimace.
"Tell me about when you were a little boy, Jim. Don’t you wish we never had to grow up!"
"No," replied Jim. "But I’ll tell you about my first day in school," he added with a slight smile.
"All right." Lucy smiled back at him and settled herself comfortably in her chair.
She wore a dress of blue and white striped voile that was deeply open at the throat, and Lucy’s throat was youthfully lovely. To Jim she appeared more girlish than he had ever seen her.
"The teacher whipped a little girl and I bit him in the leg to make him stop," began Jim.
"Tell me all about it," begged Lucy, drawing her chair closer.

It was nearly an hour before John and Nannie returned.
"What do you suppose is keeping John and Mrs. Mer-went?" Jim had repeated uncomfortably more than once before the time had elapsed.
"I don’t know, Jim. Go on with what you were telling," Lucy always answered.
Jim had frowned but resumed his narrative.
All the while Lucy showed no perturbation whatever at the continued absence of her mother and husband. Jim told story after story of his boyhood experiences, she asking questions and adding comments at which they both laughed.
When John and Mrs. Merwent entered the house they came through the hall straight into the living room.

"We've been for a walk," John announced breezily. "It's a great night. Did you people see the moonlight?"

"I hadn't noticed," said Jim.

Nannie's eyes showed traces of tears and her voice was subdued.

"You two look cosy in here," she remarked as if in search of something to say.

"We have been," Lucy told her.

"Well, I must go." Jim rose.

"Hadn't you better stay till morning?" John suggested.

"No."

Lucy was silent.

After good nights were exchanged Jim left the house.

"I'm going to bed." Nannie did not speak to any one in particular.

"Good night," responded John and Lucy, and Mrs. Merwent ascended the stairs.

"I could hardly get her to come back," John told Lucy after they had gone to their room. "She's so sensitive, Lucy. She talked about the way you felt toward her. She doesn't think you have ever gotten over your old hard feelings."

"It wasn't my hard feelings, John." Lucy spoke in an emotionless tone.

"Now, Lucy," John remonstrated, "anyone would think that you and I were perfect and nobody but Nannie was ever to blame for anything." Lucy was silent and he went on. "She was so upset she talked about going home and marrying that Professor Walsh. I must say I think things are pretty bad when your own mother feels as though she was so little at home in her daughter's house that she has to turn to a man like that—" He stopped.

"It's your house, too, John," put in Lucy, her lip quivering.

"Well, heaven knows, I don't want to run her out of it!" he answered pettishly.

Lucy lay down on the bed, her face turned away from him. No more words passed between them and soon John, at least, was sleeping.
The morning following Jim’s visit it was raining. Dismal little rivers trickled along the eaves of the houses and Dimmie, kneeling in an arm chair by the dining room window, flattened his nose against the glass and regarded disconsolately the damp length of the rope swing that trailed from the elm tree. It swayed gently in the wind and its motion suggested many tantalizing possibilities to the small prisoner.

“Don’t mash your nose like that! You’ll get it all out of shape,” Nannie called to him. She had been eating her breakfast in mournful solitude. It was late and John had long ago gone to catch his train and Lucy was busy in the kitchen.

“Are you still angry with me, Lucy?” Mrs. Merwent questioned when Lucy came into the room for a moment.

“No,” said Lucy in a matter-of-fact voice. “I’m going shopping this afternoon if it clears off. Don’t you want to go? Mrs. Hamilton is going to look after Dimmie.”

“I suppose you despise me too much to be angry,” persisted Nannie.

“Let’s think of something else, Mamma.”

“How can I think of anything else when the only person I have in the world feels hard towards me?”

“But I don’t feel hard toward you, Mamma.”

“No! You can take a lofty attitude, Lucy. I was the one who was put in a humiliating position.”

“I didn’t suppose you were saying nasty and untrue things behind my back, Mamma, or I wouldn’t have come into the dining room.”

“You are so unjust, Lucy!” Nannie was in tears now. “You overhear a playful and joking word or two and immediately jump to the conclusion that I was backbiting you. Anybody can take a single phrase without the context and twist it into something mean.”

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“I heard plenty, Mamma, to know just the sort of situation you were trying to create. But nothing is gained by talking about what’s past, so let’s try and forget it.”

“Oh, Lucy, I don’t see how you can be so cruel! There is absolutely no generous spirit in you. I have overlooked everything and never refer to it.”

“I didn’t refer to this, Mamma.”

Nannie sobbed violently.

“I see that you will never, never forgive me, Lucy.”

“I have forgiven you, Mamma.”

“Well, you wouldn’t say so. You would rather let me suffer.”

“No, Mamma. I don’t want you to suffer. It is I who have suffered about this matter.”

“That sounds a lot like you had forgiven me.”

“Well, I have,” repeated Lucy in a gentler tone.

Mrs. Merwent went to her daughter and put her arms around Lucy’s neck.

“Kiss me, Lucy,” she implored. “I can’t bear to have you not love me and respect me. I hate to be forgiven by my own child!”

Lucy softened suddenly and returned Nannie’s kiss, but without speaking.

The sky cleared later in the day, and when Dimmie was dispatched to Mrs. Hamilton’s house with a note Lucy and Nannie took the train to the city.

Mrs. Merwent wore a black tailored suit and a black and white hat. Her heavily figured veil was very becoming.

As they were leaving the station Miss Storms in her car called out: “Lucy! Are you going to give me the dead cut, dear child? How are you?” and she descended from the automobile.

“You’re looking fagged, dear,” she observed as she kissed Lucy. Then her eye caught Nannie’s.

“This is my mother, Mrs. Merwent, Miss Storms,” Lucy explained.

Nannie bowed stiffly, ignoring Miss Storms’ smile and half extended hand. Lucy showed that she was disturbed. Miss
Storms stood very straight, drew herself up to her tallest, and kept one hand on the open door of her limousine.

"How are John and dear little Dimmie?" she inquired. "And Jim Sprague too? I haven't seen him for a month."

"Oh, we're all well, thank you," replied Lucy. "I would have been in to see you but I've been very busy since Mamma came."

"I can imagine so." Miss Storms smiled impersonally. "I'm sure you are enjoying your mother's visit." Then, including Nannie, "How do you like Chicago, Mrs. Merwent?"

"Very much indeed," stated Nannie with great dignity.

"By the way, Lucy, I've been wanting to see you, but I'll call you up on the 'phone in a day or two." Miss Storms then spoke in a general tone. "Can I take you two anywhere?"

"No, thank you," answered Lucy.

"Well, good-bye, dear. Don't work too hard," and she pinched Lucy's cheek. Again in the impersonal tone she had used a moment before, "Good-bye, Mrs. Merwent," and Miss Storms returned to her seat in the car and snapped the door to, scarcely waiting to hear Nannie's response.

As the machine whirred away Miss Storms waved her hand to Lucy, who waved back with a smile.

"Shall we walk, Mamma, or had you rather take a street car?" asked Lucy.

"Lucy," said Nannie, her voice trembling, "I shouldn't think you'd have the face to introduce that woman to me!"

"What could I do, Mamma?" retorted Lucy.

"You could have ignored her. I should think that your mother would come before a mere acquaintance."

"But, Mamma, she's not a mere acquaintance."

"Well, I should think a woman who was your mother's enemy would hardly be the one to make an intimate of."

"She's been very good to me, Mamma."

"Of course that excuses all she has done to me, Lucy. All you know is that she hates me and that is sufficient to make you idolize her."

"But, Mamma, I know lots about her. She is one of Papa's friends and——"

"Yes! That's it! Anybody he picks up on the street is good.
enough for you. Don’t think of me or my feelings, I beg of you, Lucy. Anybody, no matter what her reputation——"

"Mamma, Miss Storms is one of the most distinguished women in the United States. Here in Chicago her influence is greater than almost any man’s in public life. The whole city is proud of her."

"How do you know all this?"

"Why you only have to read the newspapers. Everybody knows it."

"Is she rich, Lucy?"

"I don’t know, I’m sure. I think she must be, she gives so much away."

"Was that her machine?"

"Why, yes. She has an electric too, and her flat is the most beautiful thing you ever saw."

"She certainly dresses elegantly," admitted Nannie, "doesn’t she!"

"Yes," agreed Lucy.

"Does she entertain much?"

"No, Mamma. She’s too busy."

"I suppose she doesn’t go into society, then?" pursued Nannie interrogatively.

"Why, yes indeed, Mamma. Her name is always among those who were at the biggest functions. The McCullochs, the Porters, the Flemwells, and all the other social leaders try to get her. I’ve seen the invitations. Mrs. Porter used to come to the flat to persuade her to give up a board meeting or some committee, to help receive at her things."

"She has a very aristocratic manner," acknowledged Nannie.

"Shall we take a car?"

"All right," agreed Lucy. In a few minutes the two were in the big department store.

"Let’s go to a matinée," suggested Nannie when they had made their purchases. "We’ll be just in time if we hurry through our lunch."

"Let’s see if we’ve money enough for the tickets," considered Lucy, searching through her purse. "All right," she decided. "What play do you want to see?"

"Why it makes no difference to me, Lucy. You choose."
“Nazimova is playing *Hedda Gabler* at the Standard. This is the end of the season and just about our last chance,” said Lucy. “I’ve been wanting to see the play ever since I read it at Miss Storms’. Shall we go there?”

“Aren’t there any musical comedies playing now?” inquired Nannie. “They have such beautiful costumes in them.”

“We can see as we are eating,” planned Lucy, leading the way into a small restaurant and tea room. “We’ll look at a paper.”

“What a cheap looking place!” commented Mrs. Merwent, staring around as they sat down.

“If we go to a dear one we’ll have to give up the matinée,” retorted Lucy rather wearily.

“Oh, I didn’t mean that I mind,” returned Nannie quickly. “You always try to twist everything I say into something mean, Lucy,” she added petulantly.

“Mamma, please let’s not quarrel again,” pleaded Lucy. “I’m so tired.”

“I’m sure I’ve not been trying to quarrel. I’ve been as nice as I knew how to be all day. You’re the one who always seems to want to quarrel.”

The waitress came up with a menu.

Lucy scrutinized her mother in silence. Then, turning to the waitress who had come back to the table, she gave an order and asked for a morning paper.

Nannie preserved an injured silence until the food was placed before her, but she could not resist its expansive effect. Lucy picked up the paper and scanned it.

“There are no musical comedies playing near here, Mamma,” she announced. “The only other theatre near enough is giving a revival of *As You Like It*. The rest are too far away for us to get there before the curtain goes up.”

“Well, let’s see Nazimova then,” conceded Mrs. Merwent. “These sandwiches are so good I could eat a dozen!”

Lucy had ended her meal.

“We’ll be late if you do!” she said warningly. “It’s half past one.”

“Wait a minute, Lucy. You hurry me so I hardly know what I’m eating,” Nannie protested.
Only the highest priced seats were left when they reached the theatre, and, by the time they were in their places, the curtain had risen and the first act was in progress.

"If I'd known we were going to be late I wouldn't have come," grumbled Nannie. "I hate to come in after a piece is started. It's so hard to get the threads of the plot."

During the progress of the play Mrs. Merwent insisted on whispering personal remarks regarding the actors and actresses, until Lucy could no longer endure it with equanimity.

"Please, Mamma, do wait till after the act is over!" she requested irritably.

"I never saw any one in my life who was so hard to get along with as you," murmured Nannie in a savage undertone. After this she preserved an injured silence, not speaking again until they had reached home.

Here Lucy changed into her house dress and apron and began dinner, and Nannie went to her room.

At the end of an hour Mrs. Merwent appeared in a pretty light green demi-toilette. On Dimmie's return from the Hamiltons' Lucy had changed his clothes and he too was spotless.

As John's step was heard, Nannie ran to the door. Dimmie followed rather timidly. When John entered the dining room it was with one hand on Nannie's arm, while Dimmie clung to his other hand.

"How's everybody?" John asked. "You look like a débutante, Nannie."

"Everybody's well," she replied. "We've been to a matinée."

"I didn't go," volunteered Dimmie. "I stayed with Mrs. Hamilton."

At this juncture Lucy came in with a dish from the kitchen.

"You look like you'd been to a funeral," said John, regarding her. "What's the matter?"

"I have a slight headache, but it's nothing. Let's have dinner."

When they were seated at the table she began to talk with determined agreeableness.

"We went to see Nazimova as Hedda Gabler. She's wonderful."
BLIND MICE

"And that dress she wore in the last act!" interrupted Nannie. "Did you get a good look at it, Lucy? It was black silk with tiny pink rosebuds."

"But didn't you think her portrayal of Hedda was splendid?" persisted Lucy.

"I didn't like the piece," returned Mrs. Merwent. "I don't enjoy sad things."

"She certainly has a marvellous temperament. Don't you think so, John?" pursued Lucy.

"Yes. I admired her as Nora very much."

"She's a brunette," observed Nannie. "Now what are you laughing at, Lucy? You ridicule everything I say! I'm sure I don't see anything funny in what I said. And John is laughing too!"

"We weren't ridiculing you, Mamma," said Lucy.

"No! I think it was cute!" supplemented John warmly. "I like naïveté. People are generally so sophisticated."

"Well, you like me a little, anyway. Don't you, John?"

"I should say I did, Nannie!"

"So do I," added Lucy.

"Thank you, John," said Nannie, smiling again.

The next evening Nannie and John walked about the front yard waiting for Lucy to announce dinner. It was just after sunset and the tints in the sky were gorgeous.

"Oh look at the lovely delicate mauve tint under that cloud!" exclaimed John, pointing. Lucy joined them as he was speaking.

"Yes," agreed Nannie. "It's just the color of a dress I once had. Do you remember that little dress, Lucy?"

"Yes, Mamma." Lucy's voice was weary. "Come on, or dinner will get cold," she added.

"Speaking of colors, what did you ever paint your house that horrid shade for?" Nannie asked a moment later, when the family was seated and she was serving the plates.

"Why I don't thing it's horrid," objected Lucy. "We all agreed it was pretty. Jim selected it and——"

"Yes!" sneered Mrs. Merwent, "Mr. Sprague has to be pleased even in the color of your house!"
Lucy was pale and silent.

"I've thought myself since that a slate grey would have been more effective," said John.

"Why, John, you were the most enthusiastic of all over this fawn and brown color scheme!" defended Lucy.

"Well? Is that any reason why I shouldn't change my mind?" demanded John sharply.

"It certainly is!" retorted Lucy with equal emphasis.

"People ought to know their own minds."

"Like you!" snapped John.

"Dear me," cooed Nannie, "you two have your little tiffs like other people! I had always thought you so happy."

Lucy burst into tears and left the table.

After finishing his meal, John went to the door of Lucy's room and found it locked. He knocked.

"Please go away, John," called Lucy.

"But, Lucy, you shouldn't get angry at every suggestion Nannie makes."

"I can't talk, John. I'm so tired."

John returned to Nannie.

"Let's us two wash the dishes," he proposed. Dimmie had gone to sleep in the Morris chair.

"Well, wait a minute, John. There was so much of this dessert left I thought I'd take another helping," Nannie explained, beginning to eat again.

By the time they had cleaned the dishes and undressed Dimmie Nannie had reiterated a favorite opinion.

"John, you must get a servant for Lucy. I help her all I can but the work is too heavy for her."

Lucy objected strenuously to the scheme when it was brought up by John the following morning. She was proud of her plan of putting the amount of a servant's wages in the bank every month.

"Well, Lucy, it's only for your own good that I suggested it," argued Nannie.

"I can do the work all right," Lucy protested. "I've not been very well lately, but I'll be all right."

"I agree with Nannie," decided John. "It will be a good thing for her, too, for then you can go out with her more."
BLIND MICE

She's had to stay in most of the time because there was no one to go with."

"I'm not thinking of myself at all, John," put in Nannie.

"I know you're not," returned John, "but we are."

"But, John," demurred Lucy, "we can't afford it. Our bills are getting bigger every week."

"Well, a few dollars a month for servant hire isn't going to make any appreciable difference."

"It isn't only the wages, John, but a servant eats, and wastes, and steals, and there are a lot of things to be thought of!" Lucy began to weep.

"There! That's an example. You're all nervous and worn out and ready to blow up at any time," said John.

"Yes! And her friends blame it on me!" Nannie interrupted. "Mr. Sprague and that Miss Storms both told me that Lucy was working too hard."

"I'd be obliged if both of them would attend to their own business," remarked John testily. "Well, it's settled, and I'll send a girl out at once."

"Please don't, John," begged Lucy as she followed him into the hall a moment later. He took his hat from the rack.

"Yes, I will," he repeated, laughing. "Good-bye," and he was gone.

John, to Lucy's relief, neglected to put into immediate execution his threat of hiring a servant. She tried to conceal from him the extent of her fear and perplexity as he seemed to regard her concern for their affairs as a justification of his intention, and to evade Nannie's persistence was even more difficult.
Late in the afternoon of the first day of the month, Mrs. Merwent found her daughter bending over some papers on the writing table in the living room.

“What are you looking so cross about?” Nannie asked as she entered the room.

“I didn’t know I was looking cross,” said Lucy. “I was worried.”

“Well, you were, and you oughtn’t to do it. The lines on your forehead are already deeper than they are on mine. What in the world have you got to worry over? If your life had been like mine you might have a right to worry! With a husband like John you ought to be as happy as a bird.”

Lucy did not reply.

“What is it especially that’s worrying you?” Nannie asked again.

“I’m worried about finances,” answered Lucy. “Our grocery bills have already doubled and extra expenses have more than trebled.”

“Well, I certainly hope that my coming hasn’t had anything to do with it, Lucy.”

Lucy glanced up hesitantly. “Well, to be frank, Mamma, we have a good many people here at odd times since you came,” she said with sudden resolution, “and I do wish you wouldn’t always be encouraging John to spend money.”

“I encourage John to spend money!” exclaimed Nannie. “I must say that’s a considerate way to talk to a guest, especially when it’s your own mother, and isolated as I am! You’re very kind and thoughtful. Very, Lucy!”

“Listen, Mamma,” Lucy began patiently.

“I should think ordinary tact would keep you from saying such things as that, Lucy, even if I were as callous as you
BLIND MICE

seem to think, but when I’ve tried so hard to help you—”
Nannie was close to tears.

Lucy sighed.

“Such a speech is complimentary to your husband, too,”
persisted Nannie.

“Now, see here, Mamma,” said Lucy, stung by the last re-
mark, “I didn’t mean anything you seem to imply, and if you
can’t understand, we won’t talk any more about it.”

“Oh, very well, Lucy! Of course I’m to blame as usual.
I started it. This is the gratitude I get for overlooking the
past and coming here. Poor Mamma, until the day of her
death, never could get over the way you treated her, and why
should I expect anything different? Well, it’s just as you
like!” Nannie rose and swept into the hall.

Before she could ascend the stairs, John’s step was heard
on the porch and the front door was unlocked.

“Hello, Nannie!” he almost shouted. “Get your best bib
and tucker on. We’re going to see the Madcap Girl! It’s
a dandy clear evening. You said you wanted to see it and
I’ve got tickets. Where’s Lucy? Let’s have dinner at once,”
and he passed on into the dining room where Nannie followed
him.

Lucy, who had gone into the kitchen, reappeared.

“Hurry up dinner, Lucy.” John’s manner was impatient.
“We’re going to the theatre.”

She stopped, with a dish in her hand, and considered an
instant.

“What about Dimmie?” she asked. John frowned irritably.
“Hang Dimmie!” he ejaculated, petulantly. “I should think
if Mrs. Hamilton is such a friend as you say she might take
care of him one night!” Again Lucy was silent a moment.
“All right,” she acquiesced finally.

“You don’t seem very jubilant about it,” commented Nannie,
who was now all smiles. “I appreciate it,” she added.

When they were seated at the table John produced the
tickets.

“Oh! A box!” cried Nannie, examining them gleefully.
“How nice! I’ve wanted to see the Madcap Girl for so
long!”
"It's certainly a great play, by all accounts," observed Lucy acidly.

"Why, everybody says the costumes are lovely, and there are some of the newest dances introduced," contended Nannie. "I've been crazy to see it."

"We can't afford a box, and besides I've no clothes suitable for a box." Lucy's voice grew sharper with each word. "If you _would_ throw away money, John, why didn't you pick out something worth seeing? I'd rather have seen Ethel Barrymore in _Midchannel_, even if I sat in the gallery, than this nasty, silly thing in the best box in the house!"

"Why, you can see _Midchannel_ too," interrupted John, somewhat crestfallen.

"No, I can't. We've spent twice as much on theatres already this month as we ought to in half a year!"

"Well, Lucy, Nannie especially wanted to see this play, and I think we ought _sometimes_ to sacrifice our own tastes for her."

"I'm sure I didn't know John was going to get tickets when I innocently said I had wanted to see the play," said Nannie. "I don't see that I am to blame for it."

"No one's to blame, Nannie," championed John. Then, turning to Lucy, "I don't know what's gotten into you lately, Lucy. If you don't want to go, say so."

"Yes, indeed," chimed in Nannie. "I don't need to go. It's not a matter of life and death. In fact I have had a little headache anyway, although I wouldn't _think_ of spoiling the evening after poor, dear John has been so thoughtful."

"Well, what are you going to do?" demanded John in the captious tone he had come to use more and more often of late.

Lucy glanced at her mother before speaking. "I'll go," she decided, rising from the table, "that is if Mrs. Hamilton is going to be at home."

As Nannie rose also a glance of sympathetic understanding passed between her and John.

The two women ascended the stairs.

Lucy prepared Dimmie for the night, and, before changing her clothes for the street, went out the back way and through
an alley gate into the Hamiltons’ yard. Dr. Hamilton called to her from the porch and she made her request. She returned home without telling John the result of her mission but when she dressed herself and descended to the living room she found him waiting. She wore a blue foulard dress and a black hat and as she came in she was drawing on her gloves.

“Mrs. Hamilton will be over here in a moment,” she informed him coldly in answer to his glance of inquiry. The two sat in silence as they waited for Mrs. Merwent to descend and the neighbor to arrive.

“I’m afraid we’ll be late,” remarked John regretfully, after a restless pause. “When did Mrs. Hamilton say she could come? Hadn’t you better call Nannie?”

“Mother knows perfectly well what time it is,” responded Lucy, and added, “Mrs. Hamilton had just come in from a long day in town and had to change her dress.”

“You’re not very considerate of Nannie, Lucy.”

“Well, you make up for it!” Lucy’s manner as she said this was a surprise to John.

“Lucy, I don’t understand you at all.”

“Be careful not to try too hard, John.”

“Oh, well, if you want to be sarcastic, all right!” Silence descended again.

Mrs. Hamilton entered the house through the kitchen where Lucy had left a door ajar for her. She looked tired but apologized good humoredly for her delay. John greeted her stiffly.

“The doctor may be called out,” she explained, “in which case he’ll carry Dimmie over to our place.” Lucy bit her lips.

“I appreciate so much your doing this,” she said earnestly.

“My goodness! What are friends for!” Mrs. Hamilton laughed, trying to draw John into the conversation.

After a quarter of an hour had elapsed Lucy walked into the hall and called, “We’re waiting, Mamma.”

“Wait a minute, Lucy. You hurry me so I can’t half dress,” Nannie shouted back.

When she finally appeared she wore a grey and green evening gown, a grey opera cloak, and grey satin slippers.

She greeted plainly garbed Mrs. Hamilton with unusual geniality.
"We really ought to have a machine to go in!" John exclaimed when he saw Nannie.

"Oh, no," said Nannie cheerfully. "We'll get through all right—although it's dear of you to think of such things, John."

When they were seated in the train John said, "Jim is going, too. He thought he couldn't leave his work but I persuaded him."

"Did you tell him we were all coming?" queried Nannie.

"Oh, yes," John answered.

Jim, in evening clothes, met them at the station.

"You go ahead with Lucy," he suggested to John, after greetings were exchanged. "You've got the tickets."

"No. You go with Lucy," said John, "and I'll come on with Nannie."

By the time they reached the theatre and entered their box the overture was ending. The curtain rose as they seated themselves.

"Now, didn't you like it?" Nannie asked Lucy as the curtain fell on the final tableau of the first act.

"I certainly didn't like that song," returned Lucy.

"What song? The one about the butterfly?"

"No. The other one, 'What Would Robinson Crusoe Have Done?'"

"Why, I thought it was cute."

"It was vulgar."

"Why, I didn't think of it's being vulgar till you spoke of it just now." Nannie smiled at John.

"It sure was," said Jim, rising. "May I go and smoke?"

he asked Lucy.

"Yes," she replied.

"And I, too," said John.

"You sure can, John," smiled Nannie.

"Didn't you think the dresses in that yachting scene were just grand?" she continued when the men had left her and Lucy alone.

"Yes," agreed Lucy absently.

Nannie began to study the audience through her opera glass.
“Why, there’s Miss Powell!” she ejaculated in a pleased tone. “She’s bowing to us. Don’t you see her, Lucy?”

“No,” answered Lucy, barely glancing in the direction her mother indicated.

Nothing more was said until John and Jim appeared.

“Now let’s go and have a little supper,” John proposed when the performance was at an end.

“That will be delightful!” cried Nannie, clapping her hands. Lucy looked at John.

“We’ll get home so late,” she objected, “and Mrs. Hamilton can’t leave until we get back.”

“Darn Mrs. Hamilton!” he declared. “She’s probably carried Dimmie over to her house and there’s plenty of time before the last train.”

“I don’t want any supper,” persisted Lucy.

“Oh, come on, Lucy!” said John with his newly acquired querulousness. “What do you want to spoil everything for?”

“But I’d rather not,” Lucy insisted.

“Why?”

“Well, I have a headache, for one thing.”

“All right,” acquiesced Nannie, in the tone of a patient martyr. “Let’s go home then.”

“It’s a shame!” John asserted. “Your evening will be spoiled, Nannie.”

“Oh, my pleasure don’t matter, John. If Lucy would rather not it’s all right.”

“I’ll take Lucy home and you two can stay,” interrupted Jim in a rather aggressive tone.

“Oh, no,” refused Mrs. Merwent. “You needn’t do that. We’ll go.”

“I’m not very strong for eating at this hour myself,” Jim continued, “and I don’t mind seeing Lucy home a bit.”

“Well, all right, Jim—if you don’t mind,” agreed John, helping Nannie with her opera cloak.

In the foyer they met Miss Powell, in an elegant black décolleté gown, and an opera cloak of old rose.

“Why, how do you do, Mrs. Merwent?” She came up to Nannie and shook hands. “I’m so glad to see you.” Then, turning to John and Lucy, “Mr. Winter, Mrs. Winter.”
"You know Mr. Sprague, Miss Powell," said Lucy.
"Why, yes. How do you do, Mr. Sprague?" She turned to Nannie again.
"How are you enjoying your stay in Chicago by this time, Mrs. Merwen?"
"Oh, very much, thank you," replied Nannie.
"You are looking so well," Miss Powell pursued. "I declare I'm jealous. No one would ever dream of taking you for Mrs. Winter's mother."
"Thank you," cooed Nannie once more.
"Won't you have some supper with us?" John invited.
"We'll see you safely home afterwards."
"Oh, no, thank you very much. My brother is waiting for me. I must run!" And with a smile and handshake, Miss Powell was gone.
"Come on, Lucy," urged Jim, taking her arm. The two left the theatre, John and Nannie going in the opposite direction, toward a fashionable restaurant.

Jim and Lucy were both very quiet in the car that took them toward Rosedene. It was moonlight outside. Jim scrutinized Lucy's profile a long while as she stared through the window, but he said nothing. When they had alighted at their station and walked to the house, even after the door was unlocked, Jim delayed a little on the porch, as if hoping that Lucy would invite him in. But she did not.

It was very still down the street. Rosedene seemed to be asleep. On the side of the house toward the country stretched the dim, misty vista of a meadow, with here and there real estate agents' sign boards looming like crucified ghosts. The air had a tang of cold that belied the promise of the summer which, according to the calendar, was already upon them.
"Thank you so much for bringing me home," was all Lucy said.
"Thank you for letting me," he responded. "You know I would thank you for letting me do more, Lucy."
"I know, Jim." Her tone was frank and friendly.
"Lucy—"
"What, Jim?"
“Oh, well—nothing. Good-by,” and he held out his hand. Lucy put hers in it. His clasp was unwontedly warm. As he turned away and she went into the hall she felt her fingers tingle.

Mrs. Hamilton had remained upstairs near Dimmie and when Lucy entered the bedroom was seated in a rocking chair with her eyes closed wearily. She started and looked up.

“I’m so sorry!” Lucy began feelingly, but Mrs. Hamilton interrupted her.

“Don’t say anything about it, Mrs. Winter. Under ordinary circumstances I wouldn’t have even been tired, and it doesn’t matter a bit. I’ll just go over home now.” She rose and smoothed down her dress.

“Aren’t you afraid to go alone? Let me go with you.” Lucy started after her friend but Mrs. Hamilton was already half down the stairs.

“Not a bit!” she called cheerily over her shoulder, waving Lucy away. “Shut the door after me.” Lucy descended to the kitchen and bolted the door, then she went back to the bedroom and undressed but she did not go to sleep.

It was a long time before John and Nannie arrived. They came in a taxicab, their voices betraying high spirits, and before ascending the stairs they talked and laughed in the dining room for a while.

Finally Nannie said warningly, “We might wake Lucy, John,” and the voices and laughter became more subdued.

At last they tip-toed upstairs, where John found Lucy yet awake. He called Nannie. As she came into the bedroom, Lucy reached for a dressing sacque and threw it around her shoulders. Nannie and John sat on the edge of the bed and described the supper.

“You don’t know what you missed, Lucy! We had a lobster à la Newburg, and the best wine! Sparkling Burgundy, wasn’t it, John? I didn’t know you could get wine now. I never ate so much in my life. But dear John has such perfect taste in ordering refreshments! We met Miss Powell again in the restaurant,” Nannie rattled on, “and she introduced her brother. That’s how the head waiter let us have the wine. I’m going to a theatre with them next week. He’s said to be worth two million dollars.”
"We missed the last train," volunteered John.
"We had the best time," declared Nannie ecstatically.
"Is your head better?" John inquired of Lucy.
"Yes, poor, dear Lucy! I was so sorry. But I suppose you had a good time too," Nannie finished slyly.
"What do you mean, Mamma?"
Nannie laughed.
"Why, you and Mr. Sprague had a fine chance for a tête-à-tête."
"Did Jim stay long?" John asked suddenly.
"No. He didn’t come in at all," answered Lucy with forced naturalness.
"Well, I must go to sleep, or I’ll look a fright in the morning. Good night, Lucy."
"Good night, Mamma."
"Good night, Nannie," said John.
"Good night, dear John," returned Nannie. "Here, wait a minute. I’ve got to kiss you for giving me such a lovely evening," and she suited the action to her words. Then, with a silvery, "I hope you rest well," she tripped out of the bedroom and across the hall.
"You ought to have stayed, Lucy," remarked John, as he was preparing for bed. "We had lots of fun."
Lucy did not speak.
"I would have come home with you if Jim hadn’t offered," he went on, in the tone of one combating an argument, "but seeing that he didn’t care for any supper either, I thought there was no need for spoiling Nannie’s enjoyment. Those Hamiltons are always bragging about liking us and this is the first time we’ve ever asked anything of them as far as I know."
Lucy was still silent.
John completed his preparations for bed, whistling softly one of the airs they had heard at the play. When ready, before turning off the light, he came around to Lucy’s side of the bed and bent down to kiss her.
She buried her face in the pillow.
"Oh, very well. Just as you like," he said, and switched off the light.
The morning after John's theatre party Nannie breakfasted in high spirits and when she had done with her meal she made her way into the living room to practice the accompaniments to the two songs she had admired in the Madcap Girl, the music of which John had purchased in the theatre entrance after the performance.

Dimmie was amusing himself in the hall.

"Don't make so much noise, Jimmie," she called from the piano.

He stopped running about and sat down on a rug. In a few minutes he began drumming on the floor with his heels.

"Jimmie! Did you hear me? I tell you to stop that noise!" Nannie's tone was one to which Dimmie was a stranger.

"What can I do?" asked the child.

"Be still, like a good boy," his grandmother answered.

"I am a good boy," averred Dimmie, secure in his lifelong experience of the approval of himself expressed by his parents and "Uncle Jim."

"You're not. You're a very bad little boy," declared Nannie. Dimmie's lip quivered. Then his eyes flashed, and a look came into them which recalled Lucy.

"I ain't a bad boy! You're a bad woman to say I'm a bad boy!"

"Well, it's true, or I wouldn't say it."

"It ain't true, neither. You're a story to say what ain't true about me."

"Do you mean to say that I lie, Jimmie? Don't you know that it's very rude and wicked to call anybody a liar?"

"Well, you are a liar!" shouted Dimmie in righteous wrath. Lucy, entering from the kitchen, heard the indictment.

"Why, Dimmie! What in the world possessed you to say
such an awful thing?” demanded his mother in astonishment.

Dimmie began to cry.

“She said I was a naughty boy,” he wailed.

“Well, you are, when you talk like that,” affirmed Lucy. “You can go upstairs to your room and stay till I tell you you can come out. I won’t have my little boy saying things like this!”

A few minutes later Mrs. Merwent peered into Dimmie’s room and saw him sitting on the floor in a corner, his mouth trembling and his eyes red and tearful.

“Come here, Jimmie,” she tempted.

“I won’t,” he refused vehemently, in all the exaltation of bursting pride that takes no heed of consequences.

“Come on, dear,” she pleaded.

“Go ’way!” he ordered gallantly. “I hate you!”

Nannie entered the room and went over to the child, kneeling down beside him. Dimmie turned his back, resolutely winking away the additional tears that flowed at the indignity of being spied on in his humiliation.

“Don’t hate Nannie,” she whispered. “Nannie loves you. Poor Nannie!”

Dimmie, still silent, winked harder than ever.

“Nannie didn’t punish you. It was Mamma,” she pursued.

“You made her,” he insisted accusingly.

“No, I didn’t, Jimmie. If I had known she was going to send you up here I wouldn’t have said anything.” Nannie’s voice was sweet and low.

“My name ain’t Jimmie. It’s Dimmie,” he stipulated, weakening.

“Oh, yes. I forgot, Dimmie. See I’ve brought you some candy,” she continued, displaying the treasure.

Dimmie’s face lighted and he put out his hand.

“Wait a minute, Jimmie—Dimmie, I mean.” Nannie pushed his hand away.

The tragedy fell on Dimmie’s soul again.

“It’s yours, Jimmie, but you mustn’t try to grab things like that.”

“Can I have all of it?” he asked anxiously.

“Yes. It’s all for you if you will love Nannie.”
The bribe changed hands. Dimmie was beaming.
“Now kiss Nannie,” she commanded. “Don’t touch me with your sticky fingers,” she warned as he obeyed.
“Come on. Let’s go and find Mother,” she smiled invitingly.
“She won’t let me,” declared Dimmie, reminiscent of past similar attempts.
“Yes, she will. I’ll go with you,” and Nannie led him down the stairs. “You’ll mind Nannie after this, won’t you, dear?”
“Yes,” he promised.
“He’s going to be a good boy now, Lucy,” Nannie announced as they reached the dining room, “and he’s sorry he was rude to Nannie. Aren’t you, Jimmie?”
The culprit looked at the paper bag in his hand.
“Yes,” he said, “but my name’s Dimmie.”
“Oh, yes! I forgot. Of course it is,” smiled Nannie.
“Well, I hope my sonny boy won’t say anything like that again,” Lucy said.
Dimmie went off with his candy, meditating.

An hour later Lucy decided to take some patterns over to Mrs. Hamilton who, a few days before, had expressed a wish to borrow them.
“Now, you stay with your grandmother,” she bade Dimmie.
“I won’t be long.”
“All right,” he agreed, examining the interior of the now empty paper bag with evident regret.
A few moments after Lucy’s departure he began to whistle.
“Don’t whistle, Jimmie,” commanded Nannie from the rocking chair where she sat embroidering.
Dimmie ceased obediently and climbed into the Morris chair.
“Don’t sit with your feet under you,” she advised. “You’ll scratch the chair.”
Dimmie dutifully altered his position. After a time he slid to the floor and, going over to the side table where some of his nursery books were kept, selected *Mother Goose* from among them.
“Don’t carry your book that way,” warned Nannie as he trudged back to the seat he had quitted, his favorite volume hugged under his arm. “You’ll wrench the cover off.”
Dimmie duly reversed the position of the book.

"Don't put your fingers in your mouth, Jimmie. You're too big a boy to do that," she continued, when he had seated himself for a comfortable examination of the illustrations he admired.

He glanced up from his book and at the same time thrust the offending fingers into a pocket.

"Now, don't sit with your hands in your pockets. You'll pull your clothes all out of shape."

"How shall I sit?" demanded Dimmie somewhat belligerently.

"Sit straight in your chair like you ought to."

"Uncle Jim never makes me sit straight in my chair," objected Dimmie.

"I don't care what Uncle Jim does. You do as I tell you. And use your handkerchief. Don't sniff."

"I ain't got any handkerchief," he complained, rummaging in his pockets.

"I don't know what your mamma means by not giving you a handkerchief. Why, there it is on the floor by your chair, right where you dropped it!"

"Don't rumple your hair, Jimmie! It makes you look like a scarecrow," was the next admonition.

"What can I do?" demanded Dimmie, looking about desperately.

"You can sit still and be a good little boy until Mamma comes back."

"I don't want to sit still," he insisted.

"But I want you to."

"When is Mamma coming home?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I'm goin' to Mis' Hamilton's to find her."

"No, you're not going to do any such thing." Dimmie began to cry.

"Now, Jimmie, there's no use in your crying, just because I want you to behave yourself half decently. Stop this instant!"

"I—I—w-want my m-mamma," sobbed Dimmie louder than ever.
“What in the world is the matter?” cried Lucy agitatedly, at this moment coming in through the kitchen on her return from her neighbor’s.

“It means that you have a very naughty little boy, Lucy. He wouldn’t do anything I told him while you were away.”

“I d-did too,” declared Dimmie between sobs. “I d-did lots of things.”

“Well, you wouldn’t sit still when I told you,” said Nannie.

“He’s a very little boy to have to sit still such a long time,” replied Lucy, taking Dimmie on her lap where he began to cry comfortably with his head against her bosom.

“Lucy, I’d like to know how you expect me to have any control over the child when you take his part like that!” Nannie protested.

“I don’t expect anyone to have control over him except his father and myself,” said Lucy.

“Yet you expect me to look after him without any authority over him whatever!” retorted Mrs. Merwent.

“I won’t worry you with him again, Mamma,” returned Lucy. “I didn’t think you would mind for a few minutes.”

“There you go, Lucy! Misunderstanding me again, as usual. And over such a trivial thing, too! Much gratitude I’ve received for overlooking the past and coming more than half way! I sometimes think dear Mother was right when she said you had no heart. She never got over the way you treated her.”

After John and Lucy had retired to their room that night, Lucy said, “I am going to send Dimmie to kindergarten, John. Mrs. Hamilton’s little girl goes, and I believe it’s a good thing for young children.”

“All right,” consented John, yawning.

Dimmie was in such a state of excitement over the prospect of going to kindergarten with Stella Hamilton that he could hardly eat his breakfast. Lucy had dressed him in his prettiest suit, and, after the meal, he wandered aimlessly about the house, too conscious of his ceremonious costume to play.

“Ain’t it time yet, Mamma?” he asked again and again.

“No, dear, not yet,” his mother replied on each occasion.
Mrs. Merwent was still asleep when Lucy telephoned to the kindergarten for the carryall to call for Dimmie. When Nannie came downstairs she was surprised to find him in such gala array.

"Why, what are you so fixed up for, Jimmie?" she asked.

Just then Lucy entered from the back yard with some flowers in her hand. It had rained during the night and the blossoms were wet and glistening.

"I'm going to take him to kindergarten," Lucy explained. "He's beginning this morning." She was dressed for the street. "You can breakfast alone, can't you, Mamma?"

"Why, of course!" explained Nannie. "That isn't it. In fact you needn't keep any breakfast for me when I'm not up to eat with you and John, as far as that's concerned. I never want any extra trouble taken for me."

"There's the wagon! There's the wagon!" shouted Dimmie impatiently as he ran in from the hall.

"Let me get your sailor hat," said Lucy as she turned away, a note of impatience in her voice.

"What made you decide all of a sudden to send him to kindergarten?" asked Nannie. "It's the first time I've heard of such a plan."

"Hurry up," commanded Dimmie. "They'll go past."

"They won't go without you," smiled Lucy. "Here's your hat. Let me put it on for you."

"Why are you sending him?" persisted Nannie.

"Why, he's old enough to go, and he's a good deal of bother, and John and I thought it would be good for him."

"Come on, Mamma," urged Dimmie, pulling at her skirt.

"Bother! I suppose it's because I try to correct him a little occasionally. Oh, I comprehend perfectly, Lucy! You never let a chance slip to humiliate me and——"

The bell rang, and through the open front door a man's voice was heard. Lucy went into the hall.

"Is your little boy going with us this morning?" the man inquired.

"Yes, we're ready," replied Lucy. "Come on, Son."

Nannie heard them as they descended the steps. Dimmie's shrill chatter was wafted back with the click of the gate, the
crack of a whip, and the clatter of the horse's hoofs as the carry-all passed up the street.

John was much occupied with new work and, to Lucy's relief, continued to neglect to carry into effect his threat regarding a servant. However, try as she might to keep down the level of her expenditures, on the first day of the next month she found herself faced with an unexpected deficit.

The evening meal was over and Nannie, according to her habit, had gone into the living room to play some of her songs. John rose and was about to follow her when Lucy called him back. He sat down again.

"I want you to go over some accounts with me, John."

"What for?" he demurred.

"Well, we're running behind, John, and we must do something about it."

"We've always had to figure closely, Lucy." John's manner was nervous and instead of looking at his wife, he glanced about the room. "We're not rich people but I don't see why it should be any worse now than any other time."

"Our expenses have about doubled since Mamma came," persisted Lucy.

"Oh, I don't think she's had anything to do with it, or, at least, very little. One more person makes practically no difference." John made a motion as if to rise.

"Just a minute, John. It isn't the household expenses so much, John, but we are spending money on flowers and fruit and candy and theatres and other amusements that we didn't use to. Miss Powell and other people have taken to dropping in to tea in the afternoon. And it all counts up."

"Well, it's a sort of special time, now that Nannie's here." John's tone was half apologetic yet showed a tinge of irritation. His gaze kept wandering toward the living room. "We can't make her stick in the house all the time, and never give her any little pleasures. I've only bought her flowers once or twice, anyway."

"Yes, John, but Mamma may stay a long while. We can't go on this way," said Lucy gravely.

Nannie appeared in the doorway.
"Can't go on what way?" she echoed interrogatively, smiling at John.

"Oh, Lucy is having her monthly fret over money matters," John explained with uneasy lightness. "She has us in the poor house about once in so often."

"What's the matter, John? Is your business going badly?" Nannie inquired.

"Well, no worse than usual, Nannie, but it's a small business and doesn't bring us in as much as we'd like."

"Mr. Sprague is a full partner with you, isn't he?"

"Yes, but he's a bachelor, and a half interest is enough for him to be comfortable on."

"Jim gave John our interest in the business," put in Lucy.

"Well, I'm sure he was thinking of his own good when he did so," commented Nannie. "He probably had to have somebody."

"Of course," agreed Lucy hastily. "He needed a partner and was glad to get John."

"Exactly. He knew what he was about," averred Nannie. "Mr. Sprague is not the kind of a man to lose anything on account of friendship."

"Jim is very loyal," put in Lucy again, "and has been a good friend to John."

"I didn't say he wasn't loyal, Lucy. I only said he knew which side his bread was buttered on," retorted Nannie.

"Well, you implied that he was thinking only of himself, Mamma, and Jim is not a selfish man."

"I guess I've not been a bad investment for the firm," interrupted John, "even if I didn't put any money into it at the first."

"Well, I should fancy not!" Nannie applauded quickly.

"Of course not, John. That isn't what I meant at all," added Lucy. "Jim himself has said a dozen times that he couldn't have gotten along without you. But I was just objecting to the idea that Jim had exploited you for his own interest without considering ours."

"Lucy is always ready to defend Mr. Sprague," remarked Nannie, smiling at John once more. "She's loyal even if the rest of us may not be."
John regarded Lucy as instant, then lowered his eyes.
"No, Mamma! That isn’t it,” said Lucy, flushing, “but I
do so like to be just to everybody."
"Well, are John and I unjust to Mr. Sprague?” continued
Nannie.
"John hasn’t been, but I thought what you said was,” reiter-
ated Lucy steadily.
"Nannie didn’t say any more than I did,” insisted John
aggressively. “I guess Jim doesn’t need our sympathy over
having gotten me for a partner.”
"Why, John, how can you think I meant such a thing?”
Lucy’s voice showed that she was hurt.
"Oh, well, let’s not think about it, as Lucy is always say-
ing,” suggested Nannie sweetly.
"Yes, for the Lord’s sake!” exclaimed John. “Let’s quit
stewing. We’re no poorer than we’ve always been,” he
finished, as though dismissing the subject, “and we have some
schemes on hand at the office that ought to net us a good
thing during the next few months.”
"I’m sure you work too hard down at that old office, poor
boy,” and Nannie timidly put back from John’s forehead the
lock of hair which he had disarranged while talking.
"I like the work."
"And you ought to be better paid for it,” Nannie went on.
"We have hopes,” smiled John.
"I don’t believe in women interfering in business, but if
you went into something for yourself, don’t you think you
could make more? As it is, you work yourself nearly to
death, and Mr. Sprague gets half the profits.” Nannie’s voice
and manner were very gentle.
"I’ve never thought about it,” John replied, rumpling his
hair again.
"I’m sure it would be a great mistake,” advised Lucy
quickly.
"Why?” inquired Nannie, looking at John.
"In the first place, it wouldn’t be right,” argued Lucy, some-
what eagerly, “after all Jim has done for us—for John—it
would be——"
"Disloyal, I suppose," said Nannie, supplying the word as Lucy hesitated, and appearing amused.
"Yes, disloyal," repeated Lucy emphatically.
"Mr. Sprague certainly has a good friend in Lucy," Nannie spoke to John.
Lucy flushed again. Her eyes flashed but she made no verbal retort.
"Is that your only reason, Lucy?" pursued Nannie in a purring tone.
"No!" Lucy's attitude was almost defiant. "It's not Jim's ability and judgment are worth a great deal in any business, and it would be foolish to——"
"I suppose, then, you think John is not capable of running a business for himself," interposed Nannie accusingly before Lucy had finished speaking.
"Lucy is not very flattering." John's lip curled slightly. He produced a cigarette from his case. "But I guess I'd probably have found some way to support her, even if I had never known Jim."
"Do you really think so, John?" asked Nannie ironically.
"Don't you?" challenged John, half laughing.
"You dear boy, you know I think you could do anything," she responded, squeezing his arm. "Shall we go in and try the music now?"
"Come on," urged John, stopping, however, to light his cigarette.
They went into the living room.
Lucy remained seated in the same position, a baffled expression on her face. Dimmie had gone to sleep in a chair and a few moments later she lifted him to her shoulder and carried him upstairs to bed.
She did not return.
"John said he was going to Benton Harbor today," Nannie observed to Lucy, who was seated near a window, darning Dimmie's socks. She had just washed her hair and come down to the sunny dining room to dry it.

"Did he?" Lucy raised her eyes in involuntary surprise, but glanced quickly down at her sewing.

"Yes," continued Nannie, seating herself in a comfortable rocker. "He is going to see somebody about a house decoration contract."

"Well, he'll be back for dinner, won't he?" Lucy inquired.

"Oh, yes. But he'll be late, he said. He wanted me to go with him but I was afraid of getting seasick. It's a beautiful day after all, though!" and she gazed out the window regretfully. "I have to look through a trunk, anyway," she added, as if comforting herself.

"I didn't know he was going," said Lucy.

"He was worried last night and I guess he forgot to tell you."

Lucy began to sew with renewed determination.

"I was right sorry for John last night," Mrs. Merwent declared. "You should be more careful what you say, Lucy."

"What do you mean, Mamma? What have I said?"

"Why, things that make John feel that—that—why, about Mr. Sprague."

"What about him?"

Nannie's gaze fell before Lucy's.

"Nothing in particular, except that you show so plainly that you—"

"That I what?" Lucy demanded almost fiercely.

"Well, that you are interested in him," murmured Nannie, with attempted calmness, adding at once, "of course I know
that there is nothing between you and Mr. Sprague, but you should consider——” She stopped abruptly.

“Consider what my husband might think, I suppose,” interrupted Lucy hotly.

“Well, when you take his part against John and me you must admit that you give people a right to think things.”

“You, and not John, were the one who tried to queer Jim, and I would have taken the part of anyone under the circumstances,” returned Lucy indignantly, “and if you want to think evil of it, you can do so.”

“Well, John agreed with everything I said,” defended Nannie.

“Then, if he wants to think badly of me, he can too!” Lucy exclaimed angrily. “It would evidently suit you if he did.”

“How can you say that, Lucy, when I was trying to save you from just such things! That’s the gratitude a mother gets—especially if she’s forgiven a lot in her child,” complained Nannie in a tremulous voice.

“Most of the evil you are always so anxious to save me from only exists in your own mind, Mamma. I would be much more grateful if you would quit thinking of nasty things to forgive me for,” retorted Lucy bitterly.

“Well,” replied Mrs. Merwent, “I’m sure I’ve done my duty. I didn’t want John to get suspicious, but——”

“That’s why you keep suggesting vile interpretations of innocent things to him!” interpolated Lucy disgustedly, springing to her feet and gathering up her mending.

“Why, Lucy,” began Nannie, on the verge of tears. But Lucy went into the hall, and ascended the stairs. A few moments later she returned with her hat and coat on.

“I’m going out,” she announced. Her voice was harsh. She paused in the doorway.

Nannie looked up and met her daughter’s eyes uncomfortably.

“Where are you going?” she asked finally, pulling at the handkerchief in her lap with uncertain fingers.

“I’m going to see Jim.”

“Lucy!” gasped Mrs. Merwent as the front door closed after her daughter.
Jim was alone and hard at work when Lucy reached the office. The windows were open and a breeze fluttered the papers on his desk.

"Sit down," he invited, leaning back in his chair and reaching for his pipe. "How are you all getting along at your house? Where's the kid?"

"Dimmie's at kindergarten."

"Didn't know he'd started to go," said Jim.

"Lots of things have happened since you were out," remarked Lucy quietly.

"Yes?" Jim lighted his pipe.

Lucy did not say more and Jim smoked a moment in silence.

"What is it, Lucy? Are you worried about something?" he inquired at last, blowing out a cloud of smoke.

Lucy nodded her head without speaking.

"Well, women always worry about one of two things, money, or another woman," pursed Jim in a bantering tone.

"Which is it?"

"Both," said Lucy seriously.

Jim looked grave, and when he spoke again it was with a different manner.

"Can I help, Lucy?"

"I think you can, Jim. That's why I've come."

He waited for her to go on.

"John is spending too much, Jim, and Mamma encourages him in it," Lucy began, rather suddenly, "and things are—are so I can't do anything. I thought maybe if you—suggested to John—it might—" Lucy's voice trailed off in embarrassment, and she opened and shut her purse nervously.

"I will," Jim promised earnestly. "You can depend on me, Lucy."

"I know I can, Jim."

"And, Lucy——"

"Yes?"

"About the money. If your expenses have swamped you—you know I have something laid up. My living costs me very little, and you are awfully welcome to what I have."

"Thank you, Jim, but you know I couldn't take any money."
Blind Mice

Besides, we don’t need it yet, but I am frightened at the amount we are spending.”

“I didn’t mean—I mean you could pay it back if you wanted to.” Jim was very red.

“I understand, Jim, but it isn’t necessary.”

“I don’t see what’s gotten into John!” he ejaculated with feeling.

“It isn’t John,” said Lucy, “it’s Mamma.”

“Well, he ought to know—” Jim stopped speaking and glanced at Lucy.

“Yes, Jim, but so had she.”

Jim thought.

“Do you know yet if she’s going to stay—permanently?” he inquired after a pause.

“I don’t know, Jim. I shouldn’t be surprised. She talks sometimes as though she were eventually going to marry a Professor Walsh, back in Russellville. But I don’t know.”

Jim smoked hard for a while. When he spoke again his voice was low.

“Lucy, you know I would do anything in the world for you,” he said. “Anything,” he repeated vehemently.

“Yes, Jim. You are the best friend that ever was.” Lucy smiled at him frankly. “But I don’t see just how you can help in anything else.”

“I’d like to help,” he offered, almost wistfully.

“You have,” she declared, still smiling. “I feel a lot better already.”

“Do you, Lucy?” he asked eagerly. “Do I—do you—am I—” he stammered, growing red again.

“Why, of course you do,” she responded heartily and naturally. “It always does me good to talk to you.” Then she added rather plaintively, “Oh, Jim, why can’t people be honest with themselves and with others?”

“I’m damned if I know!” he declared savagely, not looking at her.

“I’m sure I don’t either,” she said, regarding him affectionately. “Well, good-bye. I’m going home.” She rose and shook hands.
“Good-bye, Lucy. You can depend on me.” Jim held her hand.
“Thank you, Jim,” she answered, pressing his hand.
And she was gone.

Mrs. Merwent was at the piano, practising, when Lucy reached home.
“Well, did you see Mr. Sprague?” Nannie asked sarcastically, going into the hall when she heard the front door open.
“Yes,” returned Lucy calmly.
“You ought to be careful, Lucy,” reminded Nannie. “Of course I wouldn’t say anything to John, but others might.”
“You can say anything you like to him,” retorted Lucy in a disgusted tone. “I’m going to tell him myself.”

That night John returned late. Nannie, Lucy, and Dimmie had finished their evening meal, and Lucy had tucked Dimmie safely into bed, when the front door clicked and a cheerful voice was heard in the hall.

“Now, Lucy, your croaking was all for nothing,” were John’s first words. “Look there!” he commanded, rushing into the living room and throwing a pile of bills on the table, his manner almost hilarious.
“How nice!” murmured Nannie.
“Where did that come from?” Lucy inquired quickly.
“Why, Jim put over a deal today while I was away, and this is my share of the lucre,” and John put his hands in his pockets and began to whistle.
“What kind of a deal was it?” persisted Lucy.
“Oh, some private scheme of his. Sold building materials or something on commission,” answered John.
Lucy looked nonplussed.
“Didn’t Mr. Sprague say anything to you about it?” Nannie inquired of Lucy in an innocent voice.
“Why, was Jim out here today?” asked John in surprise.
“No. I was at the office,” Lucy explained without hesitation.
“Why, he didn’t tell me,” said John, as though mystified. Then, apologetically, “I was only there a minute, Lucy. Went
to Benton Harbor on business. I forgot to say anything about going last night."

"Your dinner's getting cold," was all Lucy's reply.

As John seated himself at the table a faint cry was heard from the upper floor and Lucy, exclaiming, "That's Dimmie!" left the room quickly.

"John, I wish you would ask Mr. Sprague out again," requested Nannie, when she thought her daughter was safely upstairs.

John looked teasingly at her.

"What's the matter? Are you getting lonesome, or just yearning for more of Jim's society?"

"Will you ask him out?" she repeated.

"Yes. Of course I will. Let's see. Today is Tuesday. I'll bring him out Thursday night. He's going to work late tomorrow, I heard him say."

"Now, don't forget," warned Nannie.
Mrs. Merwent came downstairs with a headache, but after her insistent complaints elicited some sympathetic remarks from Lucy, she settled herself resignedly to mend a small hole in one of the grey silk stockings which she had worn to *The Madcap Girl*. It was a dull day. Lucy picked up the morning paper from the floor where John had dropped it as he went out, halted near a window and read aloud at random the few items which she thought her mother might find of interest.

"I see here that Miss Powell was one of hostesses last night at the Ravenswood Golf Club," said Lucy in a determinedly pleasant voice, laying the paper down.

"She has relatives with money so she can do such things," her mother sighed, dropping the stocking into her lap and staring moodily out the window. "Little did I think I would ever be dependent on your charity," she mourned, after a pause.

Lucy looked quickly at her mother.

"Well, I don't envy Miss Powell. She's too self centered to be very happy," said Lucy.

"Like me, I suppose you mean," complained Nannie. "I've ceased to expect any sympathy from you, Lucy."

"I didn't mean any such thing, Mamma, and you know it!" Lucy spoke with forced good nature. "You know I don't make oblique or sarcastic comments."

"Well, do I?" demanded her mother. "Did I ever imply that you envied Miss Powell or anyone else?"

"I didn't mean you envied her, either," explained Lucy. "I only said I didn't." She spoke over her shoulder as she left the room.

She had passed up the stairs when the tinkling of the telephone sounded from the hall and Nannie rose to answer it.

"This is John," was the reply to her faint "hello." "Is this Nannie speaking?"
"Yes," she affirmed weakly, remembering her aching head.
"Well, I was mistaken about Jim's working tonight. It's
tomorrow night. So I'm going to bring him out this eve-
ning. Tell Lucy, will you?"
"Certainly," responded Nannie in a livelier tone.
"How's your headache?"
"Oh, it's ever so much better, thank you; it's about all gone."
"That's good," said John, and he hung up the receiver.
Lucy, dressed for the street, soon came down stairs.
"I'm going to do some shopping," she informed Nannie.
"I didn't suppose you would care to go with your headache.
I'll be back by the time Dimmie comes from kindergarten and
get him ready to go to Mrs. Hamilton's. Your lunch is all
fixed and in the refrigerator. There's ice tea already made in
the blue pitcher."
"My headache's not as bad as it was."
"Well it's too late now to wait for you to dress," began Lucy.
"Oh, don't worry, Lucy. I have no intention of going. I've
got sense enough to know whether I'm wanted or not."
"Mamma, please," Lucy begged, almost in desperation.
"Well, Lucy, you started it."
Lucy hurried toward the hall.
"Mr. Sprague is coming to dinner tonight," Nannie called
importantly.
Lucy halted an instant.
"Well, there's plenty," she called back enigmatically, and
went out.
Nannie looked blank until the front door shut.

It was evening when Lucy returned from the city. On the
train she encountered Mrs. Hamilton who had invited Dim-
mie to take tea with Stella. John and Jim had already ar-
rived and were smoking in the dining room when Lucy came
back from the Hamiltons' where she had left Dimmie. Nan-
nie, in a careful toilette with a rose in her hair, was chatting
and laughing in the highest of spirits.
"Hello, Lucy!" exclaimed Jim cordially, rising and shaking
hands. "How are you?"
"Oh, I'm all right," Lucy told him, smiling.
“You’re not looking any too well,” he observed, glancing at her face.
“Well, I’m feeling fine, anyway.”
“Where’s Dimmie?” he inquired.
“He’s gone out to tea.”
“Getting to be quite a swell.” Jim smiled affectionately.
“Yes, and with a young lady, too,” she laughed.
“Mr. Sprague, I was talking to you,” interrupted Nannie, pouting.
“Beg your pardon, Mrs. Merwent,” said Jim, hastily resuming his chair.
“Oh, don’t apologize. I don’t expect to compete with Lucy,” she declared with the sweetest intonation of voice.
Jim colored.
“What were we talking about?” he asked, straightening his cravat.
“There! That shows how much attention you pay to me,” she gibed. “Come on, John! Let’s leave them together.” She rose and moved toward the living room.
“Well, dinner’s ready, so there’s no use in your taking John away,” remarked Lucy, without heat. And the four sat down at the table.
“It’s been a long time since you were here, Mr. Sprague,” began Nannie in a sprightly manner as she was serving the soup.
“Yes,” conceded Jim.
“You used to come out at least once every week before I came, so Lucy tells me, and always stayed all night, and sometimes over Sunday.”
“I have been very busy lately.” Jim’s tone was defensive and he glanced at Lucy.
“And very successful lately, I believe,” Nannie continued. “You made a fine deal yesterday, didn’t you? John told me all about it.”
“Yes—it was a good deal.”
Jim reddened again and stared at the table cloth.
Lucy’s eyes were upon him.
Shortly after dinner, Dimmie, escorted to the back gate by Mrs. Hamilton and Stella, came in through the kitchen.
“Mrs. Hamilton brought me to the back gate,” he volunteered as he entered the dining room. Then, catching sight of Jim, he yelled, “Hello, Uncle Jim!” and rushed for his idol.

“You must go to sleepy town now, dear,” suggested Lucy, a few minutes later. “Say good night.” And Dimmie obeyed reluctantly, but with a special tight hug for “Uncle Jim.”

Soon the sound of Lucy’s voice as she sat upstairs singing Dimmie to sleep was heard by the trio in the dining room.

“I’ve often wondered why Lucy never sang before people,” declared Jim, lighting his pipe. “She certainly has a beautiful voice.”

“I gave her piano lessons for years,” answered Nannie quickly, “but she hasn’t kept it up. The reason I didn’t have her voice trained is that her ear is not true.”

“I never noticed that and I have overheard her singing a number of times,” persisted Jim. “Now take that thing from *Butterfly* she is singing now, for instance. She places the difficult intervals with absolute precision. And Puccini’s music is tricky.”

“Oh, I never knew you understood music, Mr. Sprague. You never seemed particularly interested in it.”

“Why, I have listened to your singing with much pleasure, Mrs. Merwent.”

“You couldn’t get away from it,” Nannie laughed. “Come on, John. Shall I sing for you? Mr. Sprague can shut the door if he doesn’t like it!” Nannie passed into the living room, followed by John.

Lucy came down stairs.

“Well, Jim, are you deserted?” was her question, as she opened the dining room door and saw him there alone.

He nodded his head without speaking.

“Let’s go in and hear Mamma sing,” she suggested.

He hesitated an instant as if about to make some comment, and then followed her.

Mrs. Merwent ceased singing and swung around on the piano stool as they entered.

“Go on, Mamma. Don’t stop,” Lucy urged, seating herself and indicating a chair to Jim.

*Mr. Sprague had rather hear you,* said Nannie.
"Nonsense, Mamma. You know I never sing," protested Lucy, looking embarrassed. "What were you singing?"
"It's a little thing called Juliet at the Window."
"There's to be a revival of Romeo and Juliet at the Standard Theatre next week," observed John.
"Yes. I saw by the papers that that little Hilda Knowlton is going to play Juliet. She's much too young for the part," said Nannie.
"I don't see how she well could be," objected Jim.
"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Sprague," began Nannie. "I've seen Mary Anderson, and Adelaide Neilson, and Julia Arthur, and Eleanor Robson, and Julia Marlowe, all in the part, and they weren't young girls in their teens."
"Well, according to the play a young girl in her teens would be exactly suited to the rôle," answered Jim tenaciously.
"I'm sure that's the first time I ever heard anyone say such a thing," retorted Nannie.
"I'm not the only one who said so." Jim was smiling but obstinate.
"For instance?" demanded Nannie sneeringly.
"Shakespeare," replied Jim.
"Nonsense!" Nannie exclaimed irritably.
Jim walked to the bookcase and took down a volume of Shakespeare's plays.
"'Act one, scene three,'" he read. "'She's not fourteen. Come Lammas-eve at night, she shall be fourteen.'"
"Well, I've always thought she was older anyway," insisted Nannie, "and I'm sure almost everybody thinks so. I've never seen a young chit of a girl take the part, and it would generally be considered ridiculous."
"Perhaps Shakespeare didn't know," said Jim.
"Oh, well, if you want to be sarcastic and nasty about it, we better not discuss it. I suppose you feel very superior and triumphant over having gotten the best of me. I'm sure it makes no difference to me how old Juliet is supposed to be. Of course you never make any mistakes, Mr. Sprague."
"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Merwent, for having ventured to offer an opinion on the subject," apologized Jim coldly.
"Here! You two people will be pulling hair in a minute."
interrupted John, breezily. “Let’s talk about something else.”
“With pleasure,” agreed Jim in the same frigid tone.
Mrs. Merwent rose without a word and made her way to the dining room.
“Where are you, Nannie?” John called after a few minutes. Receiving no reply, he stepped to the door.
“What are you sitting out here alone for?” he began. Then, in response to a sign from her, he entered the room.
“You and Jim don’t seem to get on very well tonight.” He spoke in a lowered voice as he seated himself by her side.
“Well, I’m amazed that you do,” she responded cryptically.
“What do you mean, Nannie?”
Mrs. Merwent raised her eyebrows significantly.
“You watch him,” she advised, almost in a whisper.
“Remember what I say!” she whispered. “You watch his attitude toward Lucy. Didn’t you notice how anxious she was to defend him last night?”
An expression of understanding came into John’s eyes.
“Why, Nannie, you don’t mean——” He paused.
“I don’t mean anything.” She paused. “But it’s as I said the other night,” she added; “you’re too good and trusting, John.”
In the other room Jim had risen to take his departure.
“It’s early yet,” Lucy was saying.
“I must get back,” he insisted.
“Well, thank you for coming, anyway.”
“I’m afraid I’ve done no good,” he answered, discouragedly.
“You’ve certainly done no harm, Jim.”
“I don’t know.” He shook his head.
They went into the hall and he took up his hat.
“Good-bye, Mrs. Merwent. Good night, John,” he said formally, stepping to the dining room door.
“Good night,” returned John absently.
“Good-bye, Mr. Sprague,” Nannie responded in her usual silvery tones.
As he was leaving, Jim grasped Lucy’s hand warmly.
After he had gone, Lucy came to the dining room door and glanced in at Nannie and John. Then she turned away and ascended the stairs. Neither of them had noticed her.
Egged on by Nannie, John, though temporarily distracted by other matters, had not relinquished his determination to secure a servant, and one morning, as the result of his efforts, a girl from an employment agency presented herself.

“My name is Grace Stanley,” she announced, handing Lucy the note of introduction which John had sent, “and I do no washing, ironing, or mending, and I want Thursday and Saturday afternoons off. Of course I’ll stay today,” she concluded.

Lucy, whose protests had been in vain, had been warned of John’s intention the morning before and now without comment led the girl to the servant’s room.

About noon Nannie appeared, carefully made up and tastefully dressed in a white and green linen gown. The new servant had removed her corsets and exchanged her shoes for felt house slippers. And, when Nannie entered the dining room, was cleaning the silver ware. Grace, from the corner of her eye, gave Mrs. Merwent a shrewd glance.

“Good morning,” said Nannie, passing on to the next room where she sat down to the piano.

She finished running over some music and turned on the stool.

“My, but you sing pretty!” exclaimed Grace, who had been watching unnoticed in the doorway.

“Thank you.” Nannie smiled condescendingly, rising to pick up a volume of songs which she had laid on a nearby chair.

“Is there anything I can do for you before I start luncheon, Mrs. Winter?” the servant inquired, still hesitating in the doorway.

“I am Mrs. Merwent. Mrs. Winter is my daughter. Yes,
you can come upstairs with me and I will show you how I wish my room done every day.”

“Certainly, Mrs. Merwent,” acceded Grace. And the two went upstairs together.

“I surely never would have taken you to be Mrs. Winter’s mother,” the girl asserted with conviction, as they entered Nannie’s room.

“Grace!” Lucy called from the lower hall a few minutes later. “Where are you, Grace?”

“I’m busy, Mrs. Winter,” the girl called in answer.

“Well, leave whatever you are doing. I want you to begin luncheon. It’s late already.”

“I can’t come now, Mrs. Winter,” was Grace’s retort. “I’m helping Mrs. Merwent.”

“Wait a minute, Lucy. I’m explaining the work to Grace,” Nannie shouted impatiently.

Lucy went to the kitchen and began to prepare the meal herself.

“Is that a picture of you, Mrs. Merwent?” Grace was asking Nannie, pointing to a photograph on the dressing table.

“Yes, but it was taken a long time ago,” Nannie explained modestly.

“It’s a good likeness,” declared Grace.

“Oh, I look lots older than that now!” protested Nannie.

“Well, maybe you do look a teeny bit older, but I didn’t notice it,” Grace admitted, scrutinizing the picture again.

“Ain’t Mrs. Winter your step-daughter?” she pursued.

“No. She’s my own daughter,” confessed Nannie.

“My, but you must have got married young!” exclaimed the girl.

“Now, you can go down and help Mrs. Winter,” suggested Nannie pleasantly. “You understand how I want things. And don’t forget to do my room first always.”

“I’ll not forget,” Grace promised, “and whenever you want anything, you just call me, Mrs. Merwent.”

“I will, thank you, Grace.” Nannie smiled, and the servant descended to the kitchen.

Lucy was looking hot and tired when luncheon was served. "Why is it that Jimmie always goes so early to kindergarten
now-a-days?” Mrs. Merwent asked her when they had seated
themselves at the table.

“He goes over to Mrs. Hamilton’s after his breakfast,” re-
plied Lucy, “and the wagon calls there for both children.”

“I should think you would let him go from here,” observed
Nannie. “I don’t see the advantage of his going over to Mrs.
Hamilton’s so early. And after he comes back you always
send him or take him some place. A child ought not to be
away from home so much. It’s not good for him.”

Lucy made no answer.

“One would think that you’d like to see more of your child,
Lucy. I used to be miserable when you were at school. But
it looks as though you send him away on purpose. Perhaps
you want to keep him away from my evil influence?”

Lucy continued silent.

“Why don’t you say right out, Lucy, that you don’t want me
to have anything to do with him?”

“That isn’t true, Mamma, that I don’t want you to see any-
thing of him.”

“I suppose, then, you didn’t send him to kindergarten to get
him away from me?”

“Well, I thought he bothered you a great deal, Mamma, and
you and he are always quarreling.”

“Quarreling! I quarrel with a five year old child! You
have a very dignified mother, I must say! No, that excuse
won’t work. The real reason is that you want to estrange
the child from me so you can have his affection all for your-
self.”

“No, Mamma. That’s not so. But I do think it is bad for
Dimmie to have you correcting him every time he breathes.
Children should have a great deal of consideration.”

“And I have no consideration for him! I nag him every
time he breathes! Lucy, of all the unjust, unkind things to
say, and from my own daughter, too! After all I’ve gone
through for you! If I’d only followed poor Mother’s advice
and never come! Well, I’ll tell you this much, Lucy, I have
some rights in the matter too, and I will not have my own
grandson poisoned against me!”
“Well, I have some rights, too!” flared Lucy. “I will not have my child badgered to death by anybody!”

“Badgered! Well, I never! The child doesn’t belong to you alone, Lucy. He has a father, too, and we’ll see what John has to say about it!”

“It makes no difference what he says,” returned Lucy hotly. “You shall not ruin my boy, and neither shall his father!” Her eyes shone and her breast heaved.

“Why, Lucy! What are you getting into such a rage about?” Nannie temporized suddenly. “Anyone would think I was asking permission to murder him instead of——”

“That’s exactly what you are doing!” cried Lucy bitterly. “You would like to murder his soul. You want to interfere with every thought and impulse the child has!”

“Why, Lucy——” Nannie began again indignantly.

“Don’t ‘Lucy’ me!” interrupted her daughter vehemently, rising from her chair. “I tell you I won’t have my child tortured by you or anyone else. If it’s to be that or nothing we had better decide to part right now. So far as my own life goes, I say nothing, but my child——” She halted for breath, trembling with emotion.

“Lucy!” Nannie almost shrieked, rising also.

Lucy stared at her mother steadfastly for a moment, and did not speak. Nannie broke into hysterical sobbing. Lucy continued to regard her unmoved.

“Oh, Lucy, do you want to break my heart?” Nannie wailed.

“No,” said Lucy at last, the peculiar hard expression on her face relaxing slightly.

“Things used to be so different,” moaned Mrs. Merwent between sobs. “We were so congenial. And now that poor Mother’s dead, when I’m all alone and need affection so badly, and have forgiven all the past, to think that you could say such things to me!” And she wept afresh.

Lucy gazed at her with a look which mingled pity with contempt.

“Oh, Lucy, do you hate me?” Nannie’s voice was beseeching.

“No,” Lucy repeated impassively, hesitating a moment before she answered.
"Then, love me, Lucy! Don't look at me that way!" Nannie threw her arms around her daughter's neck.
For a moment Lucy submitted to the caress without responding. Then she put her arms around her mother.
"I can't bear to have anything between us. We have always been so close together," said Nannie, sniffing gently.
Lucy glanced across her mother's shoulder and saw Grace standing in the doorway.
"You can clear the table," Lucy ordered the girl sharply, at the same time loosening herself from Nannie's embrace.
"Yes, ma'am," agreed Grace cheerfully.
Nannie went upstairs to her room. She was followed, almost at once, by Grace.
"Poor Mrs. Merwent," the girl began, coming into Nannie's room without knocking. "You look all pale and wore out."
Nannie observed her rouged cheeks in the mirror, peering over the girl's head surreptitiously.
"Am I pale, Grace?" she inquired nervously.
"No. Not exactly pale," amended the girl, "but your eyes look tired and you are worried."
"Do I show wrinkles?" insisted Nannie.
"Not at all," said Grace hastily, "but it breaks my heart to see you look so sad."
"It's nothing, Grace. We all have our troubles. But you are a good, kind-hearted girl. Thank you."
"Is there anything you want?" offered Grace solicitously.
"No. Not now. You can help Mrs. Winter. If I need you, I'll call."
"All right, Mrs. Merwent. I'll run up again after a while." And Grace descended the stairs, humming a song under her breath.
Lucy was in the kitchen beating eggs.
"Did you move some money that was on the writing table in the living room, Grace?" she asked as the girl entered.
"Why, no ma'am. Of course not!" denied Grace vigorously.
"I can't find it," said Lucy.
"Well, I didn't touch it," reasserted the girl with some indignation. "I don't do such things, Mrs. Winter."
“I didn’t say you took it, Grace,” responded Lucy patiently. “I thought you might have moved it, that’s all. I’ve looked every place for it.”

“No, I didn’t touch it,” Grace repeated.

Lucy went upstairs.

“Mamma, did you put away some money that was on the desk in the dining room?” she inquired.

“Why, no, Lucy, I never touch anything,” Nannie stated. “Well, it’s very funny. I laid it down and came up here, and when I went back it was gone.”

“Maybe you locked it up, Mrs. Winter, and then forgot it.” Grace’s voice startled them both.

Lucy turned toward the girl who was standing in the hall just outside the door.

“What do you mean by following me about, Grace?” she reproved with vexation.

“I only came up to see how Mrs. Merwent was.” Grace had an injured air.

“Why, are you sick?” Lucy faced her mother quickly.

“No-o. Just a slight headache, that’s all,” murmured Nannie with some confusion.

“You didn’t tell me anything about it,” said Lucy.

“Why, it’s nothing.

“You better start your work, Grace, if you expect to have dinner on time.” Lucy spoke to the girl again.

Grace went off sulkily.

“I don’t like that girl,” Lucy complained when Grace had gone.

“Why, I don’t see anything the matter with her. She is extremely thoughtful and respectful.”

“Well, she doesn’t do her work, for one thing, and eavesdrops for another, and I am going to have the matter of this money cleared up.”

“I don’t think you ought to accuse her of stealing without any proof, Lucy. It is so easy to be unjust. I know what it is to be misunderstood myself.”

“Injustice is the last thing I have in mind,” declared Lucy as she was leaving the room, “but I can’t let a thing like this pass without doing something.”
In about an hour Grace tapped at Nannie’s door.
“Come in,” Nannie called.
The girl entered noiselessly, as usual. She carried a tray on which were a teapot, cup and saucer, and a plate of buttered toast.
“I’ve fixed you a little tea and toast, Mrs. Merwent,” she announced. “Maybe if you eat a little it will make you feel better.”
“Wait a minute, till I put these things away.” Nannie glanced up from the open bureau drawer before which she was kneeling. Then, seeing the tray, she rose to her feet.
“Thank you, Grace, but I don’t feel like eating,” she protested mournfully.
“Oh, try just a teeny bit. Here, I’ll pour the tea out for you. Eat just this little bit of toast. See how brown and crisp it is. You ought to try to eat, Mrs. Merwent. I noticed you ate hardly any lunch at all.”
“Well, all right, Grace, seeing that you have been thoughtful enough to fix it.” And Nannie began to eat with good appetite. “I didn’t think I could touch a bite, but you’ve fixed everything so nicely. I don’t usually eat much,” she declared defensively after a few moments. She smiled wanly at Grace, munching the toast as she spoke.
“That’s right,” said the girl approvingly. “You ought to eat more.”
There was a pause.
“Did Mrs. Winter find the money she misplaced?” Grace questioned casually. “Here, let me pour you another cup of tea,” she added.
“I don’t think so, Grace. But it will turn up some place or other,” replied Nannie, holding out her cup for the girl to fill.
“Well, if it don’t, I never touched it.”
“I’m sure you didn’t, Grace.”
“We’re going to have cold roast and hot potatoes for dinner, Mrs. Merwent. How do you like potatoes best? Shall I fix them au gratin?” asked Grace, mispronouncing the French very badly.
“I like scalloped potatoes best,” specified Nannie.
"All right. I'll fix 'em that way. And the salad, shall I fix mayonnaise or French dressing?"

"Mayonnaise, if it's not too much work."

"Oh, I don't mind the work." Grace laughed. "I want to have things as you like 'em." She picked up the tray. "If you want me, just call me," she reminded Nannie, and departed as before, humming the same song.

Lucy came into the kitchen a little later.

"You can get the potatoes ready to bake, Grace," she directed, "and make the French dressing for the salad while they are baking."

"I was goin' to scallop the potatoes," objected Grace. "Mrs. Merwent said she liked 'em that way, and she wanted mayonnaise for the salad."

"Well, I don't care, if you have time to do it. Mr. Winter likes to have his dinner promptly."

"I'll get it in time, all right, all right. You just leave me alone," stipulated Grace.

It was several days before Lucy made an issue of Grace.

About ten o'clock one morning, missing the girl from the kitchen, she tapped at the door of the servant's room. Receiving no response to her knock, and hearing the sound of snoring, she looked in. Finding Grace asleep, she awakened her.

"Haven't you anything to do, Grace? Go and start luncheon at once."

The girl descended the stairs, Lucy following her.

"You can hash and brown the potatoes that were left. They're in the refrigerator."

"There ain't no potatoes left," objected Grace sulkily.

"Why, where are they? I told you to save them for luncheon."

"I threwed 'em away."

"What did you mean by throwing them away after I told you to put them in the refrigerator?"

"I don't like warmed over things," Grace informed her insolently.

"You will not be needed after tomorrow, Grace," pro-
nounced Lucy angrily. "Your week is up then. Of course I will pay you an extra week's wages."

"Why, what have I done, Mrs. Winter?" was the answer in a tone of injured innocence.

"We need not discuss it. It is sufficient that I shall not require your services after tomorrow."

"If you are hinting that I took that money, Mrs. Winter, I will just let you know that there is protection for a girl who is accused falsely of stealing."

"I'm not accusing you," returned Lucy. "The money disappeared. So did a dollar bill I purposely placed on the table. I have no proof that you took either sum, but I am not compelled to keep anyone in my employ unless I wish, so we will consider the matter settled."

Grace sought Nannie's room without delay.

Not long after, Nannie presented herself in the living room where Lucy was engaged in straightening some papers on the desk. The girl had remained upstairs.

"What are you discharging Grace for, Lucy?" Nannie began excitedly.

"I think I have good reasons, Mamma, or I shouldn't do it."

"I'm afraid you are prejudiced against her, Lucy. She complains to me that you are not treating her fairly."

"I must be the judge of what I am doing, Mamma."

"Well, I should be careful about reflecting on her character and honesty. You don't know that she took that money, and I am convinced that she didn't. A girl who is considerate and thoughtful of others is not likely to be a thief."

"I have accuses her of nothing, Mamma, but I will not have her around."

"Now, Lucy, of course I know that you think I should never say a word in this house, but I think it's my duty to protest in this matter." Mrs. Merwent assumed an expression of great dignity.

"I'm a better judge than you are of what kind of a servant I want," retorted Lucy, her cheeks flushing.

"In other words, I should attend to my own business."

"Well, Mamma, you certainly ought to know that I am the one to take the responsibility in such matters."
"Without considering the wishes or comfort of anyone else in the family!" snapped Nannie. "Of course I might have known that I needn't expect to be considered. I never count for anything."

"I think the lack of consideration is on your part, Mamma. You don't care if the girl is lazy and inefficient and dishonest. Just so long as she flatters you and pays you special attention, you stand up for her. The welfare of the family is nothing."

"Of course I might have expected to be insulted. It's not true, I tell you! I wasn't thinking of myself at all. I know you are jealous and resentful whenever anybody pays me the least attention, but my only thought was simple justice to the girl. I don't propose to see anybody misused. We'll see what John says to your putting a girl in the street without provocation."

"You can tell John, or anybody else you want to, but I shall do as I please in my own house," flared Lucy, and left the room.

When John came home that evening he found Nannie alone in the living room. She was in tears.

"Why what's the matter, Nannie?" he cried in consternation.

"Oh, John!" She wept. "I don't know what has come over Lucy! I've tried so hard to overlook everything, and came here with a fixed determination to forget the past and all I've suffered on account of her, and now she treats me like this! She knows that I'm at her mercy, too. I was brought up to expect such a different fate!"

"Why, what has she done?" he asked anxiously.

"She wants to dismiss Grace just because the girl likes me, and Lucy can't bear to have anybody prefer me to her."

Lucy entered the living room.

"What's this about your wanting to discharge the girl, Lucy?" he questioned. "Have you got any reason for it?"

"I certainly shouldn't want to unless I had," replied Lucy, coldly.

"Well, Lucy, you know you acknowledged yourself that you
had no proof that she took the money,” put in Nannie gently, wiping her eyes.

“Yes. I didn’t think she took it when you told me, Lucy,” supplemented John.

“It was twice——” began Lucy.

“You probably spent it and forgot all about it,” interrupted John.

“No, I didn’t.” Lucy’s tone was rebellious. “I always put down every cent I spend, and besides, I don’t like the girl anyway.”

“You’ve never liked her, Lucy,” put in Nannie again.

“Now, Lucy, you shouldn’t let personal prejudices make you unjust.” John’s manner was lofty. “If Grace has faults, speak to her about them, but don’t allow a whim to destroy the girl’s livelihood. If Nannie wants the girl to stay, surely it is a little thing to make enough effort to readjust things, instead of putting her in the street.”

“John,” Lucy began once more in a suppressed voice, “my comfort and convenience and welfare used to be enough to justify any change I saw fit to make in our home.”

“Of course I have changed you into an inconsiderate husband, John,” jeered Nannie.

“Oh, nonsense, Lucy,” answered John irritably. “You are always magnifying every suggestion into some terrible injury now-a-days. You should get more sense of humor. There’s no sense or reason for discharging Grace and you shouldn’t act babyish about it.”

Lucy controlled herself with an effort. Tears stood in her eyes.

“There is a reason, more than one reason, John.”

“What?”

“Well, she is wasteful, for one thing. She uses a third more groceries than I did.”

“Rot! That’s just an excuse. You don’t like the girl because Nannie does. She’s going to stay. I’m not going to hunt up a new girl every week!”

Lucy gave him a look that startled him with its hostility, and left the room without a word. When she did not appear
for dinner Mrs. Merwent went upstairs to call her, but returned alone.

"She says she doesn't want any dinner," Nannie informed John. "Shall we begin without her?"

"Why, of course. If she wants to pout, let her."

"You poor boy!" continued Nannie, straightening his cravat. "It isn't pleasant for you to come home and find things like this, when you work so hard all day. But you must be patient with Lucy, John. I used to have to be when she was a girl."

Without waiting for him to reply Nannie went into the kitchen.

"You can put the dinner on, Grace," she instructed.

"Do I have to go, Mrs. Merwent?" asked Grace in a low tone.

"No, Grace, but you must be careful not to offend Mrs. Winter again."

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Merwent."

"Hurry up, Grace, and serve the soup. Mr. Winter is waiting for his dinner."

"All right, Mrs. Merwent. Go in and sit down. It won't be a minute."

Lucy had begun to grow pale and silent, speaking only when addressed, or when necessary orders were to be given the servant. Late one afternoon she entered the kitchen to inspect preparations for dinner.

"You can put this cauliflower in the ice chest when it is done," she directed, "and we'll have it for salad with French dressing."

"Mrs. Merwent told me to serve it hot with cream dressing," answered Grace.

"I don't want to use up the milk for cream dressing," Lucy informed her sharply. "There won't be enough for Dimmie."

"I can go out and get some more," returned Grace stubbornly.

"It isn't necessary. We're getting a quart of milk a day extra already. You fix the cauliflower as I said."

"Well, what about what Mrs. Merwent says?" inquired Grace impudently.
BLIND MICE

"I am mistress here. You do as I say, or leave the house," ordered Lucy angrily.

"I dunno as I have to do either," sneered Grace.

Lucy went into the dining room and returned with some money.

"Here are your wages. Get out of the house," she commanded, a curious expression in her eyes that impressed Grace against her will.

"Mrs. Winter——" the girl began to parley.

"Get your things together and go," repeated Lucy, moving slowly toward her.

Grace backed out of the kitchen, and, turning, ascended the stairs, sobbing. She was followed by Lucy. In a few minutes the two came through the upstairs hall. Grace had her hat and coat on and carried her suit case in her hand. Nannie, hearing the girl's sobs, opened her door and looked out.

"Why, Grace, what in the world is the matter?" she queried.

"Oh, Mrs. Merwent, Mrs. Winter is sending me away," cried the girl.

"Now, Lucy," Nannie began, taking hold of her daughter's arm.

Lucy shook off Nannie's hand and faced her threateningly.

"Will you keep out of this, Mother?" she asked with a suppressed vehemence that staggered Nannie.

"Come now. Go at once," Lucy told Grace, who, cowed as she was, allowed herself, without further protest, to be bundled down the stairs and through the front door.

Lucy then went to the kitchen to complete the preparations for dinner. Mrs. Merwent came after her, sad and injured.

"Mother!" Nannie repeated, echoing Lucy's intonation.

"You'll be calling me Mrs. Merwent next! Lucy, you are certainly the hardest hearted——"

"Please! Don't talk to me," interrupted Lucy.

"But, Lucy——"

"Don't talk to me!" ordered Lucy, her voice shrill.

Nannie retreated to her bedroom.

Soon after John entered the house whistling. Meeting no one in the hall and living room, he peered into the kitchen.
"Where's Nannie?" he inquired of Lucy.
"I don't know," she replied shortly.
"What are you doing in the kitchen? Where's your girl?" he persisted.
"I don't know," reiterated Lucy in the same tone.
Nannie, who had heard John's voice, hurried down the stairs and came into the kitchen.
"Let me help you put the dinner on, Lucy," she offered, after smiling at John.
"Please leave me alone," answered Lucy in the same hostile enigmatic manner.
"Whew!" ejaculated John. "Let me get out of this! Come on, Nannie!" And the two went into the living room.
When Lucy had placed the dinner on the table, she returned to her bedroom. The meal had not been announced and it was not until Dimmie, entering the living room, wanted to know why Papa and Nannie did not come to dinner, that Nannie followed the child back to the dining room and discovered the cooling dishes.
"Why, John, dinner is on the table and getting cold!" she called. "There is cream pea soup, too. It's so good when it's hot and now it's all spoiled," she added disappointedly.
"Well, let's eat," said John, appearing in the doorway.
"I wonder whether Lucy is coming or whether she is not," he remarked when they were seated.
"I'll go and see," offered Mrs. Merwent.
"No. If she wants to sulk, let her sulk," John declared.
"I'm getting tired of this kind of thing."
Nannie rose and went to the kitchen.
"Where's Grace?" John asked when Mrs. Merwent reseated herself.
"She's gone." Nannie's air was mysterious.
"Gone where?"
"Well, John, I don't want to say anything——"
"Did Lucy send her away?"
"Yes, John."
"What for?"
"I don't know, John. I was in my room and heard the girl
BLIND MICE

crying, and when I came out Lucy was in such a temper I was afraid to inquire or say anything.”

John struck the table with his fist.

“I’m not going to stand Lucy’s tantrums much longer!” he cried. His lips were drawn back and showed the edges of his teeth.

Dimmie, who had with difficulty climbed from his mother’s chair into his own highchair, sat there unnoticed, staring at his father, his eyes very wide open and his lips parted.

“Now, John,” Nannie began soothingly. “I know you have been like a saint, but you mustn’t get discouraged. I’m going to talk to Lucy and maybe things will be better.”

“You’re the saint, Nannie.”

“Well, now promise me that for my sake you will go on being just as forbearing as you have been so far? I couldn’t bear to have anything come between you and Lucy.”

“I don’t enjoy quarreling, Nannie, but I’m sick of coming home every night and finding a situation like this all fixed up for me.”

“I know it, poor fellow, but you just must promise me that you will be patient till I can bring Lucy to see what she is doing.” Then, after a moment, she continued. “I got another letter from Professor Walsh today. He is as anxious to have me back as ever, but I can’t bear to think of leaving you and Lucy, especially when you need me so, John, dear.”

There was a short silence.

“I should hope not,” John said, at last, stirring his soup viciously. “You’re a good sort, Nannie,” he finished, not looking at her as he spoke.

“Thank you, dear boy,” cooed Mrs. Merwent. “After dinner I’m going to sing all your favorite songs. Let me help you to a little more meat, won’t you?”

“Thanks, I will.” John passed his plate.

“But you mustn’t call me good,” she objected archly, as she put the meat on the plate. “You’re the one who’s good.”

“You’re an angel,” declared John.

“Ain’t I goin’ to have any dinner?” asked Dimmie.
XXII

The Winter's second servant was a stout negress. Nannie received her at the front door.

"Go 'round to the back door. What is your name?" she greeted the newcomer.

"Yes, ma'am. My name's Katy, ma'am," replied the woman, bowing several times, and she waddled breathlessly around the house.

Nannie, passing through the hall and dining room, met her in the kitchen.

"Now, we want things taken care of without any nonsense, Katy. I'm from the South, Katy, and I know how things ought to be done."

"Yes, ma'am, Miss—Miss—— What's yo' name, miss?"

"I'm Mrs. Merwent."

"I mean, what's yo' baby name?"

"My name is Anna, but my family call me Nannie."

"Nannie! Dat's sho' a fine name, an' I'll take keer o' you, Miss Nannie. Don't you fret any. When you doan' like things you jes' scold old Katy, an' it'll be all right."

"Well, you can begin luncheon now, and anything you can't find you can ask me or Mrs. Winter. That's my daughter."

"What's her name, Miss Nannie?"

"Her name is Lucy."

"Dat's a fine name, too. All right, Miss Nannie. You jes' run away an' 'muse yo'se'f an' quit studyin' 'bout de kitchen, an' old Katy'll look after things. Run on now. I doan' want you all pesterin' 'round when I'se busy."

Nannie went upstairs to where Lucy was sewing.

"The new servant has come," she announced. "John wrote that she is just from Tennessee and has never worked in the North before. She'll take care of us like a servant ought to. You won't need to worry about anything now. I showed her where things were and set her to work."

Lucy continued to sew without replying.
"Northerners don't understand negroes," went on Nannie. "If you'll leave this Katy to me you'll see how a servant ought to be handled. There's no sense in having to worry over every detail in the house. That's what negroes are for."

Yet Lucy did not speak.

"What in the world's the matter with you? Can't you say anything?"

Lucy stared at her mother for a moment in a disconcerting manner.

"I don't see what there is to say, Mother," she answered finally.

"'Mother!'" repeated Nannie. "I declare I don't know what has gotten into you, Lucy! You treat me like a perfect stranger. Anyone would think you had no affection whatever in your makeup to hear you."

Lucy went on sewing in silence.

"Lucy!" exclaimed Nannie nervously. "What's the matter with you? I feel like I wanted to shake you. Why don't you talk?"

"I don't feel like talking," said Lucy quietly.

"Now, Lucy, just because we may have had an occasional little tiff or two, that's no reason why you should be resentful and act like this. Such trifles are not worth mentioning, much less brooding over." And Mrs. Merwent went to Lucy's chair and bent down over her.

Lucy rose hastily and left the room.

In a few minutes Nannie found her in the living room.

"Lucy," Nannie began, "I don't think you ought to treat me this way. When I make all the first advances you ought at least be ready to make up."

"I'd rather not talk about it, Mother," insisted Lucy.

"There you go again! 'Mother'! Lucy, if you want us to be enemies instead of friends, why don't you say so and be done with it?"

"Well, aren't we enemies?" Lucy gazed into her mother's eyes.

"Lucy!" Nannie's eyes filled with tears. "What in the world is the matter? Are you crazy?"

"I'm not sure," answered Lucy in a low voice.
“Come on, Lucy,” pleaded Nannie. “Let’s be friends again. Kiss me,” and she moved toward Lucy.

Lucy rose again.

“Don’t!” she ejaculated excitedly. “I can’t stand it!” and she put out her hand as though to hold her mother away.

They stood staring at each other.

Lucy made a motion as if to go.

“Oh, don’t bother to leave!” snapped Nannie angrily. “If my presence is so distasteful to you I will go.” And she left the room.

When John came home Mrs. Merwent met him at the door and there was a short conference between them before he entered the living room alone.

“Lucy,” he began, “what in creation do you want to treat Nannie this way for?”

Lucy eyed him without stirring or answering.

“She’s gone upstairs to cry, you hurt her feelings so. You’ll drive her into marrying that Walsh man yet. She heard from him only today, she says. I should think you’d have a little pity in your makeup.”

“John,” said Lucy, at last, “you don’t understand or you would have a little pity.”

“Understand what?” he responded irritably. “What has she done?”

“If you can’t see, I doubt if there’s any use telling you.” Lucy’s voice was that of one suffering physical pain.

“Well, I’m sure I don’t know what it is, and she says she doesn’t. If it’s a little fancied slight, or some such thing, for heaven’s sake say what it is, and don’t be babyish.”

A little shiver went through Lucy, but she controlled herself and her voice was steady.

“I don’t think I am babyish, John, and I don’t think I am merely pouting over a fancied slight. And as you can’t see how things are, and have asked me, I will tell you.”

John’s eyes swerved a little.

“I don’t say mother is consciously trying to come between us, John. She doesn’t think things through sufficiently for that. But unless you and I can understand each other, she will ruin our home.”
"I don't know what you are driving at, Lucy. Nannie said it began with some trifling misunderstanding about the servant."

"It isn't anything in particular. Oh, John, can't you see?"

"I sure can't. I'm blest if I can figure out any reason for all this tragic stuff. I didn't take any stock at first in what Nannie said, that you had always been jealous of her, ever since you grew up, but I'll swear it looks a little like it."

Lucy regarded him in silence, her face drawn.

"What are you going to do about it? Are you going to keep on like this? You can't put your mother in the street. She's got no place to go. Your cousin has written her practically saying right out that she doesn't want her."

"No. That's true," Lucy almost moaned. "She has no place to go! Oh, John, what has changed you so? If we could only stand together in this!"

"Stand together in what?" John's voice and manner were increasingly impatient. "You're the one who has changed. You talk and act as if Nannie were a villainess in a melodrama, and yet you can't state a single thing she has done. I'm getting about at the end of my forbearance."

"So am I," echoed Lucy, as though mentioning an unimportant fact.

"So far as I can see, Nannie has done absolutely nothing, and you are the one to blame for getting things into this beautiful mess." John's voice was like that of a judge, cold and impersonal.

Tears sprang to Lucy's eyes.

"Oh, but she has, John. I am not to blame. Oh, why can't you see through her! Look at our home. Look at us. See how everything is changed. Even Jim sees it. He realizes——" Lucy bit her lip.

"Yes, that's probably the great trouble. Jim Sprague is more sympathetic than I am!"

"Oh, don't, John," pleaded Lucy, her eyes darkening.

"Yes. Nannie has been unfortunate enough to object to your showing so much interest in him. I had never thought anything about it, but it certainly explains——"

Lucy sprang to her feet.

"Be careful what you say," she commanded.
“Well, be careful what you do,” he retorted weakly, his eyes falling before hers.

Lucy left him standing there.

John and Nannie again sat down to dinner alone, talking in low tones. Dimmie came into the room while they were having soup and Nannie lifted her brows to John significantly.

“Tell the new servant to give you your dinner out in the kitchen. Your mother’s not coming down,” John told the child.

Dimmie hesitated, looking very much disappointed.

“Run along. That’s a good boy, Jimmie,” Nannie urged, smiling at him.

He turned on his heel and went out. A few minutes later he could be heard ascending the stairs to his mother’s room.

“Do you know, John, dear,” said Nannie after the child had gone, “that I sometimes think that Lucy is getting into an abnormal state. She is so melancholy and sensitive.”

“It certainly begins to look like it,” admitted John.

“If that is true, we must both be patient with her,” added Nannie.

John did not reply.

“That is one reason I hate so terribly to think of leaving you,” she remarked after a pause.

“Leaving us?” John glanced up quickly.

“I—I told you how I felt about Professor Walsh’s letter.”

Nannie’s voice was unsteady and she stared at her plate.

“Nannie!” John leaned forward earnestly and laid his hand on hers where it rested on the table. “I want you to cut that nonsense out! Do you hear me?”

Nannie lifted her eyes.

“But, John—” she began.

“Don’t you ever talk of leaving us,” he interrupted. “It’s as you say. Lucy is in an abnormal state. She needs you to put some sanity into her. This is your home for as long as you will—for as long as you live—” John’s voice broke.

Nannie smiled uneasily. The two gazed at one another in silence.

“Thank you, dear John,” said Nannie, averting her face. John withdrew his hand.
There was another long pause.

"Will you pass me the spinach, John, dear," Nannie requested in a tone different from that in which she had previously spoken.

On the succeeding morning Nannie rose early to eat with John. Lucy dressed Dimmie for kindergarten and sent him downstairs but she herself did not appear for breakfast.

John had hardly reached the office when the telephone rang. "Miss Storms wants to speak to you, John," said Jim, who had answered the call.

John took up the receiver.

"Good morning, Miss Storms."

"Good morning, John. How did you leave Lucy this morning?"

"Oh, she's all right," he responded after a moment's hesitation.

"I didn't call up the house because I fancy Mrs. Merwent feels I am a sort of female Machiavelli." Miss Storms laughed slightly. "I want to ask a favor, John. I am all tied up with engagements and can't get down to your office. Can you come in for a few minutes this afternoon? I want to speak with you about something very important."

John thought an instant.

"Yes," he acceded.

"Could you come about four o'clock?"

"All right. Good-bye." And he hung up the receiver.

Jim was silent all morning and seemed to be pondering something. When the two went out to luncheon together he unburdened himself.

"John, don't you think Lucy is looking badly?" he demanded suddenly.

"I hadn't noticed it," John answered shortly.

"She's thinner and paler and looks terribly worried," Jim persisted.

John stared at his plate and made no reply. Jim was not to be discouraged.

"See here, John. You and I have been pretty close together
ever since we were small kids—and I doubt if there's anyone in the world who has the welfare of you and Lucy more at heart than I have.” Jim paused before resuming his unwonted loquacity.

John was still silent.

“I've got something on my mind, John, and I hope you won't be offended at what I say?” Jim hesitated questioningly. “I know you are in a hard place, and it's a hard thing to say, but if you don't do something radical, Lucy's mother is going to play hell in your home.” Jim stopped and showed his embarrassment. “I hope you don't think I'm meddling. I've thought a long time before saying anything, and I expect you've lost more sleep over it than I have.”

“No, I'm not offended,” said John, flushing, “but I don't think you understand the situation. It's evident enough that you don't like her.”

“Don't like Lucy?” Jim almost gasped. “Since when?”

“Oh, I don't doubt that you like Lucy,” returned John coldly.

Jim set down his stein and motioned the waiter to bring his check.

“I'm going down the street. I'll be back to the office about three o'clock,” he volunteered, after paying the cashier, and he went off in a direction opposite to that taken by John.

John rang at Miss Storms' apartment at four o'clock.

“Come in, John,” she invited, opening the door.

She was alone. The servant was not to be seen.

“I was just going to make some tea for myself. Sit down.” She indicated an easy chair.

“I don't believe I care for any tea, thanks,” John said a little stiffly when she was ready to pour it.

“No? Well, you smoke then. This is an age of nerves.”

“I think I will, thank you.” John lighted a cigarette.

“That's right.” Miss Storms sipped her tea. “I hope I didn't interrupt any business this morning when I called you up. I saw Lucy day before yesterday, and she frightened me. I never saw her looking so worn and harassed. She said she was well, but I couldn't get her out of my mind.”

“She has seemed nervous and——” John paused uncom-
"Irritable?" suggested Miss Storms, smiling kindly.
"Yes, irritable," admitted John, looking at his cigarette.
"Lucy is a dear girl," Miss Storms remarked.
John smoked moodily.
"I was thinking yesterday about the time when she was here. I shall always remember it and what a privilege and pleasure it was to have her. I did so miss her when she left me. She met you at my first little party for her, didn't she?"
John nodded his head.
"And then the day you were married—she looked radiant. You know an old maid loves to watch things she can't have." This was the first time Miss Storms had ever spoken intimately to John.
Without replying John lit another cigarette.
It was not Miss Storms's way to be devious.
"I'm not asking you to confide in me, John," she said, looking at him directly, "but something ought to be done."
"There is nothing to confide, Miss Storms," he answered, still distantly. "Lucy seems to have gotten a case of nerves lately, that's all. I have about decided to have a doctor look her over. I'm sure I'm quite as interested in her health as you are."
"Of course you are, more than I am," agreed Miss Storms heartily, ignoring his tone, "but," and her voice became grave, "I'm afraid you are the doctor, John."
"I know you are fond of Lucy, Miss Storms," returned John, nettled, "and I appreciate your interest. But if you think I am responsible for her state of mind you are mistaken."
"If I had thought that I shouldn't have asked you to come here," was Miss Storms's reply. "I know exactly who is to blame. And I realize that you are in almost as difficult a situation as Lucy. I have known a great deal of Mrs. Mer- went for years."
"From others," put in John.
Miss Storms looked startled.
"Yes, from others," she admitted, gazing curiously at him, "but certainly enough to understand some things."
"You can discount most of what you hear from her enemies," said John, coloring.
"Men are stronger on justice than women." Miss Storm's smile was a little bitter. "They can afford it better. But listen to my plan. Mrs. Merwent is fond of society and—well, admires rich people. Now I have some friends to whom I can get Miss Powell to introduce her, and they will invite her to their country place, and in general take her out of the way for a part of the summer at least. You and Lucy can—"

"I don't see any need at all for any such thing, Miss Storms. You entirely misjudge Mrs. Merwent. She is as anxious about Lucy as—"

Miss Storms set down her cup.

"Have you seen the Art Loan Exhibition?" she inquired in a changed manner. "We have a fine showing of the younger Spanish schools, loaned from Madrid."

"No," said John, surprised.

"Well, you must take Lucy and Mrs. Merwent to see it. It's really worth while."

"I will," promised John perfunctorily, rising with a dazed air.

"Must you go? Well, good-bye. It was good of you to come. Give my love to Lucy, and remember me to Jim Sprague. I haven't seen him for a long time."

They touched hands stiffly.

When John had gone, Miss Storms went into her bedroom and shook her fist at her reflection in the pier glass.

John walked toward the office with his head bent and his eyes fixed on the ground, a puzzled, abstracted expression on his face. He did not see Jim who came out of the office building as he reached it. Jim passed on down the street in the direction of Layard's.

It had begun to drizzle. John went into the draughting room and closed some windows which had been left open. Then he sat down in front of his desk with his hat on.

Lucy's picture in a leather easel frame confronted him. He took it up and studied the clear eyes and beautiful mouth. Resting his chin on his hand he remained so, frowning at the wall.
XXIII

John left the office earlier than usual and reached home before anyone expected him. Nannie had just completed her toilette, however, and she fluttered into the hall to meet him.

"Are you tired, John, dear?" she asked as he hung up his hat.

"No, I'm not tired," he answered without glancing at her.

"Where's Lucy?"

"I'm sure I don't know," she replied in a hurt tone of voice.

"I suppose she is in her own room."

John ascended the stairs without further conversation.

Left alone, Nannie examined her carefully groomed image in the hall mirror, and saw there a rather nonplussed face.

John entered the bedroom and found Lucy seated in a rocking chair crooning to Dimmie who was in her lap. The light in the room was dim, and her profile, as she bent over the child, was silhouetted against the glowing square of a western window.

"How do you feel, Lucy?" John asked, going over to her and hesitating awkwardly by her chair.

"I'm feeling all right. Why?" she returned, looking up quickly.

"Why—nothing. That is, I've been thinking that you haven't looked very well of late. And you weren't downstairs so I came up to see if anything was the matter."

"Oh, thank you, John! I thought you—" Lucy could say no more. The tears began to roll down her cheeks.

"Thought what? You little goose!" His voice shook slightly but it had something of its old time tone of affectionate banter. "You're all frazzled out nervously. That's what's the matter with you. I've been noticing for some time that you didn't look well. Come on down to dinner and quit thinking about imaginary troubles."

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Lucy's eyes were grateful. Her lips quivered a little.

"All right," she answered, smiling with tears still on her lashes.

"Come on, Son," invited John, lifting Dimmie to his shoulder. And the three descended the stairs.

Mrs. Merwent was sitting in the shadowy dining room without a light. John opened the electric switch.

"Kin I put de dinnah on?" asked Katy, emerging from the kitchen.

"Yes, Katy. I think everybody is ready at last," responded Nannie, rising from her chair with reproachful dignity.

"Gee, but I'm hungry!" exclaimed John.

"Me, too!" chimed in Dimmie.

"How about you, Lucy?" laughed John.

"I think I am, too." Lucy smiled rather wanly.

"Well, let's eat." John picked up his napkin. "The soup smells good."

"It's crawfish bisque," Nannie put in quickly. "I had it made especially for you."

"Can't the rest of us have any?" asked Lucy with a slight attempt at pleasantry.

"I didn't mean that," observed Nannie acidly. "I only meant that I thought of John. He said the other day that he had never eaten any. But of course I might have expected that you would misunderstand me."

"Now, Nannie," expostulated John, "that was only an innocent joke. For heaven's sake let's not have another quarrel! I'd like a little peace."

Mrs. Merwent's eyes filled with tears.

"Well, I'll go and—leave you in peace," she sniffed, laying down her napkin and rising from the table.

"Well, what do you know about that!" ejaculated John after Nannie had left the room. "You two women will run me crazy. If it's not one it's the other."

"John, I'm not to blame!" Lucy uttered this in the form of a statement but her tone was tremulously beseeching.

"I'm hanged if I know who's to blame!" declared John petulantly. "All I'm certain of is that I've got about all I can stand of it."
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Katy rushed breathlessly into the room.
“Miss Lucy,” she wheezed, “I ’spec’s Miss Nannie am dretful sick. She am groanin’ an’ cryin’ pow’ful bad.”
John sprang to his feet.
“I wonder what’s the matter?” he exclaimed questioningly.
“Why don’t you go and see, Lucy?” he added accusingly.
“She’s only angry, John,” answered Lucy, watching his face with anxiety.

Nannie’s moans could be heard.
“People don’t make sounds like that because they are angry,” retorted John. “If you’re not going upstairs, I am!”
Lucy rose.

She ascended the stairs to Nannie’s room. John followed her almost immediately, but remained in the hall outside the door.

“What is the matter, Mother?” Lucy inquired, approaching the bed where Nannie lay in an abandon of weeping, her face hidden by the pillows.
“Oh, go away! Go away!” cried Mrs. Merwent, breaking into a fresh paroxysm of sobs.
“Now, Mother, don’t act this way.” Lucy spoke as to a child. “Tell me what it is you’re crying about.”
“Oh, Lucy, is it—oh, it was John—oh, I can’t——” she moaned.
“What did he do?” insisted Lucy. “If you mean what he said at dinner, I don’t see anything to get into this state over.”
“It wasn’t that alone. It was when he came home. O-oh——” and Nannie lamented afresh.

“Mother,” ordered Lucy impatiently, seizing Mrs. Merwent’s shoulder as though with intent to shake her, “either stop crying or tell what you are crying about. You’ll drive everybody crazy. John is half distracted already, and nobody can do anything for you while you act like this.”

Nannie continued to weep, but less violently.
“Tell us what it is so we can do something, and let John go down and eat his dinner.”

“Is he upstairs?” inquired Nannie, glancing at the door.
“Yes, of course. He’s standing outside in the hall.”
Nannie redoubled her sobs and wails.

"Well, if you intend to keep on like this, I am going," threatened Lucy, losing her temper.

"Oh, don't go, Lucy! Please don't go!" moaned Nannie.

"Well, then, stop acting as though you were dying, and say what you're crying about."

"Oh, you are so cruel," sighed Nannie.

"Very well. I'm going." Lucy moved toward the door.

"Come back! Come—back—and I—will tell—" Nannie entreated brokenly.

"Well?" Lucy returned to the bed.

Nannie seized her hand.

"It was when—he—came home. I—went to meet—him—and he—he was so cold and cross with me! I have just written to Professor Walsh—and told him—I couldn't go—back to Russellville yet—and now—John—makes me feel like I ought—to have gone right away. O-oh!" and a fresh fit of weeping began.

"What did John say?"

"Why—why he—he hardly answered me—and—and—o-oh what have I done?" she wailed again in a storm of sobbing.

"I'm sure you misunderstood him, Mother. He was probably worried and tired. John is human like the rest of us, and you are foolish to make a mountain out of a mole hill."

"No, I didn't misunderstand him, Lucy," persisted Mrs. Merwents, forgetting to cry. "He has never spoken to me in that way before. Something has happened to make him hate me."

Lucy smiled in spite of herself.

"Well, let's not have any more tragic scenes over it. It's doubtless something very simple, and I'll speak to him about it. Come on down and finish your dinner."

"Oh, I couldn't see him like this. I don't care for any dinner." Nannie sat up in bed and reached for the hand mirror which lay on her dressing table.

"I'll send you up some then."

"All right. You can tell Katy to bring me up a little something. I'd like some of the bisque I had her fix for John.
He'll feel hurt if I don't taste it,” asserted Nannie apologetically.

Lucy made a motion toward the door but Mrs. Merwent held her hand.

"Wait a minute. Kiss me, Lucy. I'm so lonely."

Lucy hesitated almost imperceptibly, and then bent down and kissed her mother's cheek.

"Tell Katy she can send up the saucer of blanc mange she saved for me yesterday," Nannie instructed as her daughter reached the door.

"What was the matter?" inquired John anxiously as he descended the stairs behind Lucy.

"Why, she was crying because she thought you were angry with her when you came home," replied Lucy.

"Angry? I didn't say anything to her."

"I think it was your manner as much as what you said."

"Well, I can't be eternally thinking of my every word and intonation in this house. I'll lose my mind. It's first on one side, and then on the other. A man don't know how to talk or act."

"I don't think you can quite compare us, John. I haven't made any scenes like this."

"No, but here you are jumping on me for not keeping your mother in a good humor, while I was only worried about you. You're a very appreciative person, I must say!"

"I'm not jumping on you, John."

"Well, you said I was the cause of all this to-do."

"I didn't say you were to blame, John."

"Well, my good intentions weren't very successful, if that's so. You go around like the chief mourner at a funeral, and then when I make any attempt to help, you give me a slap like this."

"You certainly don't help me when you start situations like this one." Lucy's voice became cutting. "You don't have to spend all day with her. It will take me a week to get her over the fit of blues she has."

"Yes! That's all the thanks I get for trying to show consideration! Talk about being misunderstood! I think I'll
keep my mouth shut after this." John reseated himself at the table, and began to eat again in gloomy silence.

"John, what has gotten into you? You are so changed I hardly know you. You didn’t use to be so sensitive and childish."

"Thank you," he retorted sarcastically.

"Well, you are. Since Mother came you have gotten to be more like her every day. I think I am the one who has a hard time. I feel sometimes as though I would lose my mind."

"That’s the second time you have said I was changed," he snapped. "You are the one who is changed, and I think I can guess the reason. It’s not your mother half so much as it is someone else."

"What do you mean?" demanded Lucy, her cheeks paling.

"Never mind what I mean. I don’t want to hear you accuse Nannie of anything more. If you are so warped that you think she has destroyed my manhood and made me into a baby, the less we have to say to each other, the better. She may be sensitive but she at least appreciates attempts at kindness, which you don’t."

"I don’t want to talk any more," announced Lucy wearily, with an effort at self control.

"Neither do I. I’m going down town," he declared savagely. He threw down his napkin and went into the hall. Taking his hat from the stand, he left the house. Lucy heard the gate slam.

She took Dimmie up to bed.

It was Saturday night. John did not come in until past midnight.

Nannie did not get downstairs even for the usual late Sunday breakfast, and Katy took coffee, toast, eggs, and fruit to the bedroom. When the invalid finally appeared she was wearing an elaborate negligée. She clung to the walls, chairs, and tables, as she walked, and otherwise exhibited symptoms of extreme prostration.

When she came into the dining room, John, who was seated by the table, reading, looked up with an air of constraint.

Nannie greeted him in a faint voice.
“Good morning.”
“Good morning,” he answered.
After a second’s hesitation, he put down his paper and rose and went toward her.
“You look pale, Nannie,” he remarked in a low tone, pushing forward an armchair, but avoiding her glance as he did so.
“I’m all right, John. It’s nothing,” she replied in the same weak voice. “Thank you so much,” she added, sinking into the chair.
“Let me get you a little port wine,” he offered, standing beside her and watching her face as she leaned back with closed eyes.
“Oh, no, John. Don’t bother. I’ll be better in a minute,” she protested, smiling bravely. Then, with a sigh, she reached into the bosom of her gown and took out an envelope. “I want you to mail this letter for me,” she continued, with an obvious effort.
John took the letter from her and stared at the address uncomfortably.
There was a pause.
“I slept so badly last night,” said Nannie, moving her head from one side to the other as it rested against the chair.
“Nannie!” John blurted out, unconsciously crushing the envelope in his hand as he spoke, “I didn’t mean anything last night. I didn’t intend to hurt your feelings at all. I was tired and worried, that’s all.”
His face flushed and he hesitated, gazing at her expectantly. She did not answer at once, but when she opened her eyes she was smiling faintly. Reaching out her hand she laid it on his. He gave a relieved sigh.
“I know, John, dear! Lucy is so abnormal,” she breathed, tenderly sympathetic, lowering her voice and glancing toward the kitchen as she spoke.
“And you won’t talk any more about this confounded Professor Walsh?” John spread out the envelope and looked at it.
“I must write to him and acknowledge the check,” Nannie protested, accepting the letter which he held out.
“But you’ll tear this one up?”
Nannie tore the paper in two and replaced the fragments in her dress.

"I thought you didn’t want me here any longer, John," she murmured, averting her face.

"And that’s what you wrote him?" John was too full for further utterance.

"I told him I was coming back soon," she admitted.

"Nannie!" John gasped reproachfully.

She touched his hand again. He caught her fingers and clasped them, but his expression was still hurt.

"You mustn’t be angry with me, John, dear!" she begged, lifting her face to his.

"I can’t be angry with you very long, but if you do that again——!"

"I won’t, John! I—I—" With an effort that looked heroic Nannie tried to rise but sank back in her chair. "I’m still so faint," she apologised almost inaudibly.

"Don’t move, Nannie. I’ll get you the wine," and John hurried to the pantry, returning with a glass and a bottle. "Take a good stiff drink," he urged, pouring some of the liquor into the tumbler as he spoke.

She made a wry face as she sipped it.

"You are so good, John. I feel better now."

"So do I," said John.

"While Lucy is so morbid we must try to coöperate, John." She lowered her voice again.

"You’re right, Nannie," he agreed with conviction.

When Lucy entered the room a few moments later John and Mrs. Merwent were talking as though there had never been a misunderstanding between them.
On Monday morning Nannie was descending the stairs when the telephone on the landing rang and she stopped to answer it.

"Is this Mrs. Winter?" a voice responded to her "hello."

"Who is this speaking?" interrupted Nannie.

"It's Miss Storms. Is that you, Lucy?"

Nannie hesitated a second.

"No. This is Mrs. Merwent. Mrs. Winter is upstairs. Is there anything I could tell her?"

"If you wouldn't mind asking her to step to the 'phone I should be so obliged," said Miss Storms.

"Oh, very well. Wait a minute. Hold the wire." And Nannie went into the kitchen.

"That woman wants to speak to you on the 'phone," she told Lucy. "It must be something very private as she insisted on your coming to the 'phone yourself. I told her you were busy."

Lucy turned from the table where she mixing cake batter.

"Whom do you mean? Miss Storms?" she asked.

"Of course. Who else!" Nannie replied impatiently.

Lucy went into the hall and, mounting to the landing, picked up the receiver.

"Good morning, Miss Storms," she called.

"I'm sorry to bring you downstairs, but I wanted to speak to you personally, Lucy," began Miss Storms.

"Why, I wasn't upstairs," Lucy explained.

"Well——" and Miss Storms paused, "anyway I've some news for you. Your father is here, and his wife. I wondered if you would like to see them here. Can you come and have a cup of tea with us this afternoon?"

"Oh, thank you. Of course I'll come. When did they get in?"
“Last night. Well, we'll expect you, dear.”
“What time?”
“We'll have tea about four o'clock, but you come as early
as you can and stay as long as you can. Good-bye till after-
noon.”
“Good-bye,” answered Lucy, “and thank you so much.”
Nannie had been listening.
“What did she want?” was demanded of Lucy as soon as
she hung up the receiver.
“She wants me to take tea with her this afternoon.”
“Who is that you asked when they arrived? Some friends
of hers she wants you to meet?”
“Yes,” returned Lucy, not knowing what else to say.
“She didn’t say anything about me?” pursued Nannie.
“No,” responded Lucy, relieved.
“Well, she doesn't have to invite me if she doesn’t want to.
I'm sure I'm not dying to have anything to do with either
her or her friends. Of course it makes no difference to you
whether your mother is given the cold shoulder or not. You
go running after her just the same. Well, I don't care. It
doesn't make any difference to me. She needn't think I give
it a single thought. I wouldn't go to her teas if she begged me
to, and I shouldn't think you would either after the way she's
treated me. First, she puts that Mrs. Low up to making
trouble between me and your father, and then she tries to
ignore me. But all she has to do is to crook her finger, and
you go tagging after her. I should think you'd have more
pride about you than that, Lucy.”
“But, Mother——” expostulated Lucy.
“Oh, well, don't mind me. Go on. I'm used to being ig-
nored and humiliated. I can forgive and forget, but little
credit do I get for it. Anybody is better than I am, in your
eyes. Go on. Go to your tea. I'll find someone who thinks
I'm worth looking at. I was going down town with Miss
Powell this afternoon anyway.” And Nannie sat down to her
as yet untouched breakfast.

Lucy had just returned from her visit and was removing
her hat and gloves before the hall mirror when John entered. She turned to face him and greeted him expectantly.

"Hello," he answered sulkily.

"I've been to Miss Storms'," Lucy volunteered:

"Oh, I know all about your Miss Storms!" John told her.

"Where's Nannie?" He glanced about inquiringly.

"She's upstairs." Lucy's tone had become as distant as his own.

"I don't think your father ought to have come to Chicago while Nannie was here," he began, speaking in a low voice, but with some heat.

"What do you mean, John? I didn't know you knew they were here."

"Miss Storms brought them by the office in her machine. She said she had just driven you to the station. I don't think you ought to have gone under the circumstances." His speech became louder.

"Why?" demanded Lucy, looking at him.

"Out of consideration for Nannie, of course."

"What would you have done?"

"I should have told Miss Storms."

"Told her that I wouldn't see my own father? I couldn't do that, John. He's dearer than anyone else in the world, after you and Dimmie, and——" Lucy paused.

"More so than your own mother," accused John.

A noise was heard. John stepped to the foot of the stairs and saw Nannie disappear in the upper hallway.

"I wonder if she heard," he mused, frowning.

Lucy's face grew hard. She turned and mounted the stairs.

"Dinner is ready, Mother," she called, knocking at Mrs. Merwent's door.

There was no answer. Lucy repeated the knock several times, always with the same result. John had followed her.

"I'll talk to Nannie," he announced pugnaciously.

Lucy turned away.

He tapped at the door. "Don't you want some dinner?" he called in a voice that he tried to make careless.

Mrs. Merwent did not reply, but he could hear the sound of soft sobbing within. He tapped again.
"Please try to eat some dinner, Nannie," he called once more pleadingly. "You'll make yourself sick."

"No thank you, dear John. I couldn't bear it. I couldn't swallow food. I o-oh," and the sobbing was redoubled.

When John returned to the dining room Lucy was at the table. He seated himself in silence.

"She won't come," he announced gloomily after a few moments. "Now you see what you've done. Nannie is heart-broken."

"I don't see that I've done it," retorted Lucy quickly. "I couldn't help their coming to Chicago, and I didn't tell her about it."

"Well, if you had refused to go," argued John, "and told Miss Storms you didn't care to see the woman your father had deserted your mother for——"

"That would have been a good way to keep it from Mamma, who was listening to every word I said!" Lucy gazed at John defiantly.

"At any rate, if you had refused without any explanation Nannie would have needed to know nothing."

"If she had not listened to what wasn't intended for her ears she would have needed to know nothing."

"How could she help hearing when we were talking in the hall?"

Lucy did not reply.

"I think you ought to take your stand, Lucy, without vacillating."

"What do you mean by taking my stand, John?"

"Well, you are either on Nannie's side, or you are on your father's side. You can't be on both."

"I don't see why not. That is just the stand I've taken. I'm not to blame for the divorce and I have a right to see my father whenever I wish."

"Not after the way he has treated Nannie!" John answered hotly.

"I see her after the way she has treated him!" Lucy returned with equal heat.

"Lucy, do you mean to say that you have taken your father's side against Nannie?" John interrogated incredulously.
“I’ve just said that I’ve taken neither side.”
“But if you took sides, it would be for him,” persisted John.
“Yes,” admitted Lucy.
Dimmie came in through the kitchen doorway and halted by the table. Lucy drew her to him, and he leaned against her chair. John took no notice of him.
“Lucy, I am surprised. How a woman can turn against her own mother—”
“What about her own father?” Lucy interrupted angrily.
“You are unjust, cruel and ungrateful,” continued John, paying no attention to her question.
Lucy was white.
“It is entirely my own affair,” she said coldly. “Suppose we don’t discuss it further.”
“It’s not your own affair,” contradicted John, “and I don’t propose to see you insult and humiliate your mother in any such way.”
“You have no right to dictate to me in this matter or any other.” Lucy rose from the table, her eyes blazing.
John sprang up and went out through the hall, slamming the front door after him.
“What is Papa mad about?” Dimmie asked of his mother.
Lucy sat down again and buried her face in her arms on the table.

As Lucy had not taken any dinner to her the previous evening, Mrs. Merwent appeared at the breakfast table at an unwonted hour, shortly after John’s departure for the office. She was almost without rouge and wore the negligee of the previous Sunday, a creation of grey and rose.
“I’m not hungry,” she explained as she seated herself and began to eat. “Every bite I take chokes me. But I am so empty and weak that I must take some nourishment or I’ll be sick.”

Lucy sat down wearily, saying nothing.
“I never saw such coarseness before in my whole life,” resumed Nannie. “The idea of that woman calling you up to go and see your father and that creature while I was actually
in your house! I suppose that is fine feeling here in the North.”

Katy had gone to market, so it was Lucy who went into the kitchen when Nannie was ready for hot waffles.

“I suppose you saw her,” continued Mrs. Merwent, when Lucy returned.

“Have another cup of coffee, Mother.”

“I think I had better. I feel faint and dizzy.”

Lucy poured the coffee and pushed the bacon and eggs nearer her mother’s plate.

“You saw her, didn’t you?” repeated Nannie, helping herself to waffles and taking more bacon and eggs.

“Saw whom?” asked Lucy.

“You know whom I mean, Lucy. There’s no use trying to get out of it.”

“I’m not trying to get out of anything, Mother. I saw Miss Storms and Papa and—Papa’s wife.” Lucy hesitated a little over the last two words.

“I hope she dresses better than she used to in Russellville,” remarked Nannie.

Lucy was silent.

“Did she say anything about me?” Nannie took another waffle.

“No, Mother. No one mentioned you.”

“I see. Nobody even thought of me. Did that woman seem very fond of your father?”

“Who? Miss Storms?” interrogated Lucy, in a lame attempt at pleasantry.

“You know whom I mean, Lucy. It’s not funny to me if it is to you.”

“Let’s not discuss Papa’s wife.” Lucy showed that she anticipated an outburst.

“Why not?” insisted Nannie virtuously.

“Because—” Lucy looked out the window.

“Because what?” demanded her mother.

“Why, don’t you think it’s in—well, bad taste, Mother?”

The explosion came.

“You’re a nice one to try to teach me good taste and propriety!” Nannie’s voice was suddenly raised to its highest
BLIND MICE

pitch. "I may be divorced but I was never talked about while I was living with your father."

"I don't know what you mean." Lucy regarded her mother steadily.

"No, of course you don't!" taunted Nannie. "Well, other people do. A married woman ought to be satisfied with the friendship of her husband."

"If you are referring to Jim Sprague," Lucy's tone was menacing, "my friendship for him or anybody else is none of your business."

She had risen. Her breast heaved and her nostrils widened as she gazed at her mother.

"Why, Lucy! How can you fly into such a passion!" Nannie was frightened. "I didn't say there was anything wrong about it."

"You said people were talking about us," accused Lucy in a trembling voice.

"Why, no, I didn't. I only meant that I was afraid people might talk."

"That wasn't what you said." Lucy was very pale and continued to eye her mother steadily.

"You misunderstood me, Lucy. You are always misunderstanding me," protested Mrs. Merwent soothingly. "I only consider your own welfare, and at the least thing you flare up like you hated me—over the merest trifles. I think I'm the one who ought to get angry." Nannie assumed an air of injury.

"Oh, I'm too tired to talk about it, Mother." Lucy's eyes filled with tears.

"Yes, 'Mother'! You always used to call me 'Mamma'." Lucy did not reply.

"I suppose you didn't get a chance to talk a minute alone with your father," resumed Mrs. Merwent, as if nothing had happened. "Did you?" she repeated after a moment's silence.

"Yes."

"Did he say anything about me?" Nannie went on.

"I told you once, Mother, that nobody said anything about you."
"Well, did he seem conscience stricken and ashamed of what he had done?"

"No. Please let's not talk about it."

"I suppose then he looked happy?"

Lucy did not answer.

"Of course he did," concluded Nannie, "and you said nothing at all about it. You were afraid to tell him what you thought of his crime. You are a nice daughter—"

Lucy went into the kitchen.

Nannie, having finished her meal, rose from the table and followed.

"Did you tell him what we think of his cruel and contemptible action? I suppose that creature gloats over it. What did you say to him, Lucy?"

Dimmie bounded into the room, breathless from play.

"Mother," Lucy's manner was defensive, "I wish you wouldn't insist on knowing what it is better not to discuss." Then, turning to the child she added, "Get your hat, Son. It's time for you to go to Mrs. Hamilton's. The wagon will be there pretty soon."

"Then you did not take my part at all?" continued Mrs. Merwent tenaciously.

Again Lucy made no reply.

"You took his side, and the side of that odious snake in the grass who tempted him away from us. I should have thought that your self respect would have kept you from making friends with her, even if your mother's suffering couldn't. She's no better than a common—"

"Mother!" Lucy's eyes were dangerous once more.

"And that sneaking Miss' Storms is no better. I—"

"Stop!" cried Lucy in a voice of command.

Mrs. Merwent paused involuntarily and shrank back.

"So far I have taken nobody's part in this matter, Mother, and have tried to blame nobody. But if you are wise you will not make it too hard for me."

"I suppose that means that you are going to take your father's side," sneered Nannie.

"It means just what I say," Lucy was growing angrier with every word, "but I will not listen to you insult my father,
or Miss Storms, who is my friend, or my father's wife—"

"Who is also your friend," supplied Nannie with another

sneer.

"Yes, she is," declared Lucy defiantly. "And they all had
the decency not to discuss you in your absence," she finished
bitterly.

"And I'm not decent!" her mother almost screamed, throw-
ing a cup she held in her hand on the kitchen table.

The cup broke into a dozen pieces and Dimmie, who had
been listening with open mouth, began to cry from fright.
Mrs. Merwent rushed from the kitchen upstairs.

Lucy took Dimmie to Mrs. Hamilton's house. The carry-
all arrived as they were approaching. After Stella and Dim-
nie were safely ensconced in the vehicle Lucy followed Mrs.
Hamilton into the house.

"You look all tired out, Mrs. Winter," Lucy's neighbor
observed as they seated themselves in the neat kitchen.

The tears started to Lucy's eyes.

"I just felt as if it would do me good to see you, Mrs.
Hamilton," she replied.

"How is your mother?" Lucy's hostess inquired pleasantly,
a few moments later. "I'm afraid she thinks I'm never going
to get over to see her. She was out when I called after the
tea, and I'm just so busy I haven't time to turn around. I
wish she'd do as I said and just run in now and then."

"She's been going out a good deal. Is little Stella over her
cold? She seems quite well again." Lucy changed the sub-
ject quickly, looking uncomfortable.

Mrs. Hamilton had risen to open a window and did not
hear.

"Mrs. Merwent is so wonderfully young looking. You
ought to learn her secret, whatever it is, and take care of your
nerves, Mrs. Winter." Mrs. Hamilton smiled sympathetically
and patted Lucy's arm as she spoke.

Lucy bit her lip.

The telephone in the Winter home rang shortly after Lucy's
depture and Nannie came downstairs to answer.

A voice asked for Lucy.
"Is this Miss Storms?" interrogated Nannie.
"Yes."
"Well, this is Mrs. Merwent. If you wish to insult me again in my daughter's house, please don't do it over the telephone, Miss Storms. If you want to crow over your cousin's success in——" Miss Storms had hung up the receiver with a jerk. Nannie, after listening a minute, hung up her receiver also.
When Lucy returned Nannie met her in the hall. She smiled nervously into her daughter's unresponsive eyes.
"Where have you been, Lucy?" she began in a conciliatory manner.
"I went over to Mrs. Hamilton's for a few minutes."
"I suppose you felt you needed sympathy, with such a difficult mother," said Mrs. Merwent in a joking tone.
"No, Mother," Lucy answered a little wearily. "I don't take my troubles to others."
"Except Mr. Sprague!" Nannie's tone became quickly caustic.
Lucy met her mother's eyes coldly.
"What I meant was that I do not tell my troubles to the neighbors."
"I'm much obliged, I'm sure," retorted Nannie cuttingly.
Lucy moved toward the stairs.
"Lucy," Mrs. Merwent resumed in a voice which showed a desire to propitiate.
Lucy ascended the stairs without heeding her.

The next morning being Sunday, breakfast was late and Nannie took her meal with the rest of the family. She asked John for the woman's page of the morning paper and soon became engrossed in a perusal of "Complexion Hints."
The door bell rang. Katy answered it and returned with a letter, which she handed to Lucy, who, without opening it, laid it by her plate.
"Who's your letter from?" questioned Mrs. Merwent, looking up from her paper.
"It's from—Miss Storms." Lucy hesitated as she glanced at the handwriting on the envelope.
Nannie's expression became disturbed and she watched her daughter silently.

"Good Sunday atmosphere," remarked John sarcastically, not raising his eyes from the paper he was reading. "Cheerful as a funeral."

Lucy took up her letter and opened it.

"Now, Lucy," her mother began uneasily, her voice gentle, "Miss Storms will probably have something mean to say about me in that letter, because she called up on the 'phone yesterday and I answered. But just remember that you haven't heard my side."

"Why didn't you tell me she rang up?" demanded Lucy, with the open letter in her hand.

"Why—I—she didn't leave any message, and I forgot it," explained Nannie with embarrassment.

"What difference does it make anyway!" put in John. "Miss Storms had no right to call up while Nannie was here and it served her right."

Lucy read the letter.

"What does she say?" inquired Nannie, trying to sound casual but not succeeding.

Lucy, her lips compressed, folded up the letter and put it in the envelope before she answered.

"Why don't you tell?" urged John impatiently. "What's the use of keeping Nannie in hot water about it?"

"She says she's sorry for what happened," announced Lucy quietly.

"She ought to be!" declared John. "I hope you gave her a piece of your mind, Nannie."

"No. I only said that I didn't think she ought to call up here under the circumstances," cooed Nannie softly.

"Well, I think you were too forbearing," returned John. "I'll put it in stronger terms when I see her."

"I don't think either you or Mother have any right to treat my friends in any such way!" exclaimed Lucy feelingly.

"Lucy thinks I've already robbed her of Mr. Sprague's friendship," insinuated Nannie in the same silvery tone, "and now I suppose I'm to blame for Miss Storms considering herself injured."
"In the first place, you have no right to have any friends who insult your mother," began John dictatorialy.
"I have no obligation to defend my mother when she insults my friends," retorted Lucy, rising from the table, pale with anger.
"Nor your husband, either," interposed Mrs. Merwent pointedly.
"No! Nor my husband either!" Lucy exploded stormily, looking straight at John.
"Lucy, you ought to think about what you say," warned Nannie virtuously. "A woman who has as good a husband as you have should——"
"It's no use, Nannie," interrupted John gently, laying his hand on Nannie's arm, "but thank you, all the same. It's a comfort that someone still thinks I'm not a brute."
"John," Lucy spoke steadily, controlling herself with an effort, "be careful what you do. Consider well before you side with my mother against me. I warn you, John—think before you do this." The last words were imploring.
"She is warning you against me, John," commented Mrs. Merwent, smiling bitterly.
"Wherefore all this tragedy, Lucy?" inquired John, returning to his sarcastic manner. "I only ask you to be just to Nannie."

Dimmie looked from one to the other, his lip trembling. Lucy burst into tears and left the room, leading him by the hand.
"Now what do you know about that, Nannie?" John's voice floated out to Lucy as she ascended the stairs.
"Poor John," Nannie answered softly.
"If it wasn't for you, I'd go crazy," he declared.
"I know, John, dear."
"Lucy acts as if her mind was unbalanced," he went on.
"Now you see what I have had to bear. It's the Merwent characteristic to have a tendency toward melancholia. Lucy's father—but I won't talk about my own troubles."
"You're a brick, Nannie!" John cried emotionally.

*During most of the day Lucy remained in her room reading*
and talking with Dimmie. Dinner and tea were silent meals. That night, when she undressed Dimmie, she put him in her bed, and then lay down beside him. In about an hour John knocked at the locked door. Lucy took no notice.

"Where is the money I gave you the first of the month?" he called from the hall.

"It's in the desk drawer," Lucy replied. "Here is the key," and she tossed it through the open transom above the door.

In a few minutes Mrs. Merwent tapped at the door.

"Good night, Lucy. We're going to the theatre," she volunteered.

"Hurry up, Nannie. We'll be late." John's voice could be heard as he shouted from the hall beneath.

"I'm coming, John," Nannie responded, not waiting for Lucy's answer, and she hastened down the stairs.

The front door slammed and the house became silent.

When she and John returned, Mrs. Merwent stopped again before her daughter's closed door.

"Good night, Lucy," she called. There was no response.

Soon John came up and, finding the door still locked, rapped. There was no sound.

"All right. Just as you like," he growled, and went to Jim's room to sleep.
XXV

John and Lucy met the following morning without speaking. Nannie, who had been treating her face with alternate applications of hot water and ice, came down late as usual. She found Lucy in a white linen dress and wide black hat, ready for the street, while Dimmie, who had not been dispatched to kindergarten, wore one of the duck suits with hand embroidered collars that were generally reserved for late afternoons and Sundays.

"Why, where are you going, Lucy?" was Nannie's immediate question. "Why hasn't Dimmie gone to kindergarten?"

"I'm going down town," Lucy replied distantly, ignoring her mother's query in regard to the child.

"I was going down town, too, with Miss Powell," Mrs. Merwent stated genially. "If you'll wait till I can get ready, we can go that far together."

"I haven't time," returned Lucy. "Come, Dimmie." And she went out.

When Lucy and Dimmie reached home it was late. They found John and Nannie in the dining room. Nannie was apparently in the best of spirits.

"We've been out, too," she announced, her voice raised to a higher pitch than usual and her eyes unnaturally bright, "and we had the nicest time. Didn't we, John?"

"Yes, indeed," agreed John, giving Lucy a resentful look.

"I ran across John going over to Layard's, or whatever you call them, and took him for a half holiday. He works too hard down at that old office anyway." Mrs. Merwent showed great animation.

Lucy went upstairs to remove her hat, leaving Dimmie in the dining room.
"Where did you and Mamma go, Jimmie?" Nannie asked, as soon as Lucy was out of hearing.

"We went to Miss Stormses, and see all the things I've got!" He showed several packages.

"Who did you see? Who gave them to you?" Mrs. Merwent inquired.

"Oh, we saw Miss Storms, and she give me this necktie, and my new grandpapa, he said he'd buy me a watch and chain. He said I could wear it all the time, and it ain't going to be a play one neither. It'll go just like a grown-up one."

"Who else did you see?" persisted his interrogator.

"Oh, my new grandmamma, too. While I was there she didn't give me nothing but cakes, but she kissed me a lot, and there's something in one of my bundles she put there, she told me. She says, I'm like my grandpapa. And do you know——" Dimmie stopped open mouthed, in the midst of his expansive confidences, and stared at his grandmother who had begun to sob violently, with her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Come away from there, Dimmie," commanded John.

The child obeyed, approaching his father with a wondering gaze.

"Now you've made poor Nannie cry," John looked at Dimmie sternly.

The child's eyes filled and his lips began to quiver.

"I—I—d-didn't m-make her c-cry!" Dimmie wailed, his face full of woe. "I d-didn't hurt her!"

"Yes, you did hurt her," John insisted firmly.

Dimmie dissolved into a rain of tears.

"It isn't his fault, John—poor child," interrupted Nannie gently through her own tears. Then to Dimmie, "Come here, darling. Come to Nannie."

Dimmie held back suspiciously.

"Go to Nannie," ordered John severely.

"Wait, John." Mrs. Merwent had wiped her eyes and was smiling at Dimmie. There was an unusual tensity in her manner. "Come on, Jimmie. See! I've brought you something, too," and she lifted a small square parcel from the table and held it out to him.

Dimmie approached her chair.
“See. It's a box of chocolates your papa bought for Nannie, and I'm going to give it to you.”
Dimmie held out his hand.
“Wait a minute,” she demurred.
“What do you say, Dimmie?” demanded John.
“Thank you,” Dimmie whispered, securing the prize.
Mrs. Merwent put her arms around the child.
“So you love Nannie, Jimmie?” she whispered back.
He did not reply to this, but stood in rapt uncertainty contemplating the box of chocolates he held.
“Come on. Let me untie it for you. Here, sit in my lap.”
She lifted him up. “There! Aren’t they nice? You can eat one if you want to.”
Dimmie placed a chocolate in his mouth.
“Now, do you love Nannie?” she whispered again.
“Yes,” said Dimmie.
“Do you love me better than the people you saw today?”
This, too, was spoken in a whisper.
“Better than granpapa?” he inquired.
“Yes.”
“And Miss Storms?”
“Yes, and the other woman.”
“My new grandmamma?”
“She's not your grandmamma.”
Dimmie replied stoutly:
“Grandpapa said she was.”
“Well, she isn't. Nannie is your truly grandmamma. That woman only wants to be your grandmamma. Your papa's mamma that you've never seen is your other grandmamma. This other woman at Miss Storms' isn't any relation to you. A little boy can't have three grandmamas, can he?”
Dimmie considered this problem gravely.
“Stella Hamilton's only got two,” he admitted.
“Yes. One is Mrs. Hamilton's mother, and the other is Dr. Hamilton's mother. I'm your mamma's mother, and your papa has a mother. So this woman at Miss Storms' isn't your grandmamma at all.”
“All right. I don't love her any more,” Dimmie decided bravely. “She didn't give me nothin' but cookies anyway.”
"And you love Nannie, don't you?" Her words were inaudible to John.
"Yes," he responded, leaning against her with his face close to hers.
"As well as you do Papa and Mamma?"
"As much as Papa, but Mamma is nicer," he answered accurately.
"Don't you love Nannie as much as you do Mamma? I'll cry then. See all your chocolates! You've only eaten one."
Dimmie took another chocolate.
"Yes, I love you as well as Mamma," he confided under his breath.
Nannie kissed him.
"Now go and play," she suggested, pushing him gently away from her, "and don't get chocolates on your clean suit," she added warningly.
Dimmie went in search of his mother. In a few moments he returned to the dining room.
"Mamma says she don't want no dinner," he announced.
"She's got a headache."
"Let's not wait any longer," urged John.
"You can serve dinner, Katy," Mrs. Merwent bade the servant.
"Yes, Miss Nannie. It won't be a minute," declared Katy, going out of the room and coming back with the soup tureen which she placed on the table.
John and Nannie seated themselves, and Dimmie climbed into his chair.
"Go upstairs and see if Mrs. Winter doesn't want a little something to eat, or at least a cup of tea, Katy," directed Nannie.
"No, Miss Nannie. She say she caint eat nothin' 't'all," Katy reported when she reappeared.
"I'm afraid Lucy has another of her nervous spells," Nannie remarked to John. "Those people at Miss Storms' have been filling her head with all kinds of stuff and she probably thinks she is very badly used."
"Nervous spells! A fit of dumps, you mean," replied John.
“She’s cryin’,” Dimmie explained impassively between large mouthfuls of potato.

“I’ll swear life has gotten to be almost unbearable in this house,” continued John, frowning. “Not a day passes without some kind of a stunt. It’s either funereal gloom or hysterics. It’s enough to drive a man dippy.”

“I know, dear.” Mrs. Merwent smiled sympathetically.

“And such a thing as consideration for me never enters her head. But this deliberate disregarding of my wishes is going to be the last. She and I are going to have an understanding once for all.” John’s expression was relentless.

“Now, John, dear,” remonstrated Nannie gently, “you must be patient. I know it’s hard, but you know how abnormal Lucy is now. And I’m afraid it’s growing on her.”

Lucy was coming down the stairs.

When she reached the dining room John and Mrs. Merwent, who had heard her approach, both rose as though by a previous agreement.

“Lucy,” John began in a tone that was gravely didactic, “notwithstanding the fact that your mother has pled with you not to go near those people again, to say nothing of your husband’s wishes in the matter, you have been to Miss Storms’ to see them and taken my child with you.”

Lucy looked from John to her mother. Nannie’s eyelids were red but her eyes were hard and glittered brightly. Lucy’s own face was pale and she bit her lip to control its involuntary inclination to tremble. John returned her startled glance with a gaze that might have greeted a stranger.

“He is my child, too, John, and his grandfather wished to see him before he left,” she said in a suppressed voice.

“Didn’t I tell you not to go again?” he asked accusingly, taking no notice of her statement. His voice was unsteady and his face flushed.

“You have no right to order me to do or not to do anything, John.”

John’s flush grew deeper and duller. Dimmie had slid from his chair and run out to play.

“I won’t have it!” John broke out violently, seizing a chair and setting it down on the floor with a bump.
Lucy regarded him steadfastly.

"I think it's time you thought very seriously about what you are doing, Lucy," advised Nannie loftily.

Lucy continued to face them and spoke with self control, although the twitching of her lip was apparent. Her eyes seemed to grow wider and deeper without altering their expression.

"I think it is time you two also thought very seriously about what you are doing," she began slowly. "It seems never to have occurred to either of you that there is anybody else to consider except my mother. But I will tell you," here Lucy raised her voice a little, "that I will not endure this kind of treatment from you two for always. I have struggled and hoped that you, John, at least, might come to your senses and see what all this is leading to, but——"

"I won't hear you vilify your mother any longer," John interrupted harshly. "I'm not a baby being led around by the nose, and she's not an adventuress plotting to ruin you. If there is anything about your present situation you don't like, you can blame yourself for it. You have sneered at her and belittled her ever since she came, and the minute you get a chance you go and tag around after your father and the woman he deserted Nannie for, and you and Miss Storms try to wean my child away from his own father and grandmother to please them. You have taken your stand with them and against us, and if you think we are going to sit by tamely and submit to it you are mightily mistaken."

John's manner had grown more and more violent during this speech. He lifted the chair he held and struck it on the floor to emphasize each phrase, and his face was distorted with passion.

"You must admit, Lucy, that this quarrel is of your own making and not our fault," put in Nannie again.

Lucy ignored her.

"John, please try to think what you are saying. Oh, John, please think of me. Think of Dimmie. Don't make things impossible for us all." Lucy was pleading and her voice shook. She clasped and unclasped her hands nervously.

"Impossible!" repeated John bitterly. "Things are already..."
impossible. And you’ve made them impossible.” He was almost shouting. “I tell you I won’t have you ignoring my wishes and making a fool of me in my own house.”

Lucy’s eyes kindled.

“And I tell you I won’t have you shouting at me, John Winter. And I won’t have you treating me as though I were a servant to be dictated to. If you have no decent pride, I have. Dimmie is not far away, and Katy is in the kitchen.”

“Lucy, Lucy——” interrupted Nannie.

Lucy turned on her with vicious suddenness.

“And you will please attend to your own business, Mother. If it includes running John’s affairs, that is no reason for its including my life. When I want your advice and interference in my relations with my husband I’ll ask you for them.”

Mrs. Merwent stopped short with open mouth.

“Why, Lucy——” she gasped.

“Don’t speak to me,” commanded Lucy, her eyes glowing. Nannie crept closer to John and took hold of his arm.

“It seems to me you ought to remember the servant yourself, Lucy,” she protested feebly.

“You shall not treat your mother this way!” John had raised his voice until it could be heard all over the house.

“No?” Lucy inquired in a curious tone.

“No, you shall not,” he repeated.

“No?” she asked again in the same peculiar manner.

“Lucy, Lucy, what is the matter with you?” cried Nannie hastily. “You act so strangely!”

“Do I?” asked Lucy, still in a voice so unlike her usual self.

“Lucy! You frighten me! Don’t look like that!” insisted Nannie nervously. “How can you look as if you hated me? Is all your love for me gone out of your heart?”

Lucy began to laugh hysterically. As John and her mother appeared more and more astounded, she laughed louder and louder.

“Lucy! Stop that!” ordered John sharply. “I don’t know you. I never saw you act like this. What’s the matter with you?” He shook her arm as he spoke.

She only laughed the more wildly.

“Lucy!” John’s voice was uncertain now. “Lucy! Stop,
I say. What on earth has gotten into you? Why, you act as if you were crazy."

"Do I?" she reiterated with the same weird intonation. She laughed again, her voice growing shriller and shriller with each breath. Katy's frightened face peered through a crack in the kitchen doorway, but no one observed it. John's grip on Lucy's arm tightened.

"Stop that laughing," he repeated, but, as he shook her, this time more roughly, there was fear in his tone and glance. Lucy ceased laughing and looked at him. "Oh, John!" she exclaimed. "What is it, John? What have I done?" Then she hid her face in her hands and sobbed.

He loosened his hold on her.

Nannie gave a sigh of relief.

"Lucy, you should control yourself and not give way like that," she admonished.

Lucy uncovered her face and gazed at John. The tears were streaming down her cheeks.

"Come now, Lucy," he went on more quietly, "don't act this way any longer. Any one would think, to see and hear you, that you had been terribly abused."

"You have hurt me so. Oh, John, how you have hurt me." Lucy's tears continued to flow, but she did not sob.

"You have hurt us, too, Lucy," said Nannie.

"I depended on you to understand, John," Lucy pursued, without noticing her mother, "and you were the first to fail me. Others have been better to me than you have—been more true—"

"Lucy!" Mrs. Merwent interrupted sharply, "I should think you could do better than to bring Mr. Sprague in at a time like this!"

"Yes," echoed John, flushing again. "If he has been more sympathetic than your husband, you might at least keep from throwing it up to me."

"I wasn't even thinking——" Lucy began in a dull voice. Then, suddenly, her eyes glittered angrily. "You two evil minded beings!" she almost screamed. "Do and say what you like, I despise you!"
"Lucy, I warn you——" articulated Mrs. Merwent.
"Don't speak to me! I'm ashamed that you are my mother."

Nannie cowered at the whip-like words. John moved toward Lucy once more, but she retreated before him defensively.
"Don't touch me! Don't come near me! Oh, how I hate myself that I ever thought you worthy to be the father of my child! Why did you ever seek me in the first place? Why did you? Why did you? Oh—oh—why did you?"
"John," said Nannie, as Lucy paused for breath, "I think we'd better——"
"Yes, leave me!" Lucy broke in shrilly. "Leave me! Go away! I can't look at you! Get away from me!" She was waving her hands at them excitedly. "Go! Go away! Oh, you—go—go now! Go at once! Go!" Her words ended in a shriek.

All at once she drew her breath in painfully and, before John could catch her, fell forward in a heap by the table. She lay there still and white.

Nannie knelt beside her calling her name and chafing her hands. Dimmie had run in and was crying at the top of his lungs. Katy stood in the kitchen doorway with mouth and eyes wide open.
"For heaven's sake, be still!" John snapped at the child.
"Come on, Katy. Let's get Mrs. Winter on to the sofa. She's been taken sick."
"Yes, sah," gasped Katy. "Suttenly, sah." And they lifted Lucy from the floor.
"Keep still," John commanded again, shaking Dimmie violently.

The child obeyed, still whimpering.
"Get me a wet towel to bathe her forehead, Katy," directed John. The negress did as she was told.
"Go upstairs and get some smelling salts, Nannie," he ordered Mrs. Merwent, and when she returned with the bottle, he added, "Let her smell of them, and sit by her till I get back. I'm going to bring Dr. Hamilton. It'll be quicker
BLIND MICE

than telephoning.” Almost before finishing his speech he had
his hat on and was gone.

“Poor Lucy! Poor girl!” Mrs. Merwents ejaculated time
after time, as Lucy lay with closed eyes. “I told John he
was too hasty. Oh, my poor child!” And she continued to
pat the pillows, rub Lucy’s hands and forehead, and apply
the smelling salts with nervous and jerky movements.

Scarcely five minutes had elapsed when John reentered fol-
lowed by Dr. Hamilton, who dropped his hat on the table,
swung his medicine case beside it, pushed Mrs. Merwents
gently out of his way, and seated himself by the sofa without
a word.

John, Nannie, and Katy stood watching him anxiously while
he felt Lucy’s pulse, observed her breathing, and lifted her
eyelids, staring carefully at her pupils. Then he deftly pre-
pared a hypodermic and injected its contents beneath the skin
of her arm.

“Mrs. Winter has had a bad nervous shock,” he informed
the group about him at length. As he talked he was still
watching Lucy intently. “Her heart is none too strong. How-
ever I think that strychnine will pick her up in a minute.”

Soon Lucy’s eyelids fluttered, and then opened.

“Where am I? What is the matter?” she asked, staring
about her wildly, and attempting to raise herself on her elbow.

“You were taken ill, Mrs. Winter,” replied Dr. Hamilton
in a reassuring manner, gently forcing her back on the pillow.
“You just lie quiet for a few minutes and you will be all
right.”

Lucy obeyed and closed her eyes once more. When she
opened them again her face had regained a little of its color.

“Come on, Mr. Winter,” suggested the doctor. “We’ll
carry her upstairs now so she can be put to bed. That’s the
place for her.”

“Can’t I walk?” Lucy asked in faint protest.

“No. We had better carry you.”

Lucy made no further objection. When she was in her
room, Dr. Hamilton turned from her and spoke to Nannie
who followed close behind.

“You had best get her undressed and quiet at once, Mrs.
Merwent," he said, "and when that's done, leave her, and on no account disturb her."

To John in the hall at the moment of departure he added, "Keep her perfectly quiet. On no pretext allow her to become excited, and if anything you don't understand comes up, call me at once. I'll look in again in the morning."

Nannie arranged a lounge in Lucy's room and slept near her, getting up a dozen times to ask, "Do you want anything, dear?"

Lucy, generally awakened by these queries, always answered, "No, thank you."

After midnight, however, Mrs. Merwent slept soundly, and Lucy attended to her own needs.
XXVI

It was late the next morning when Nannie awoke, and Lucy had already combed her own hair and arranged herself for the day. Dr. Hamilton came in before Mrs. Merwent was dressed and there was a scurrying when she ran to her own room as she heard him on the stairs.

“You will be all right, now, Mrs. Winter,” he announced, after listening to her heart. “I advise you, however, to spend a few days in bed so as to insure against a repetition of this business. I won’t come any more unless you need me.” He turned to John, who stood by the bed. “You use your marital authority and make her keep still, Mr. Winter.”

“All right, Doctor,” promised John.

When John was ready to leave for the office he came in, hat in hand, and stood by Lucy’s bed.

“Good-bye, Lucy. I’m going down town.”

“Good-bye,” she answered listlessly.

After looking at her a moment, he went out. He reached the office later than usual.

“Anything wrong?” inquired Jim, looking up from his desk as John entered.

“Lucy’s not very well.” John hung up his coat and stood by his desk, fitting a pen into a holder.

Jim watched his face with growing anxiety.

“She’s not seriously sick, is she?” Jim tried to control his voice but it was unsteady in spite of him.

“I don’t know,” John answered, his eyes on what he was doing.

Jim said no more, but he remained a long time eyeing the plan of a building before him, his pencil idle in his hand. After a time, he rose.

“I’m going to dictate a letter to Miss Burns,” he remarked.
referring to the public stenographer whose office was only a few doors down the hall.

Jim went to Miss Burns' room but, finding her occupied, paced the corridor for a quarter of an hour or more. When he finally went back to John his manner displayed none of the agitation which had been apparent while he was alone.

"I'm going out to Rosedene with you to-night, if you don't mind, John. I'm worried about what you say about Lucy," he announced as he reseated himself and began to work.

John hesitated perceptibly before he replied.

"All right," he conceded somewhat ungraciously.

At one o'clock Katy brought up Lucy's luncheon. During the course of the morning Mrs. Merwent had been to the bedroom several times to make inquiries regarding her daughter's condition, but Lucy, a cloth wet with eau de Cologne on her forehead, her eyes closed defensively, had made barely audible replies to her mother's interrogations. Nannie, on these occasions, patted the bed clothes, raised and lowered the window shades, and set to rights Lucy's bureau and wash-stand, but, finding no further excuses for lingering, was finally obliged to leave the invalid in peace.

When Nannie reentered the room early in the afternoon Lucy started to rise.

"Don't get up. I only wanted to ask you a question," began Nannie. "Why, Lucy, you have been crying again."

"I still have a very bad headache," interrupted Lucy.

"You ought to control yourself and not give way to this abnormal melancholy." Nannie's tone was virtuous.

Lucy rose and stood looking at her mother.

"It's about a pudding," resumed Nannie. "I'm making it for dinner—that baked lemon custard you used to make at home; you remember. Do you use one dozen eggs, or two?"

"It depends on how much custard you want to make," said Lucy.

"Oh, well—you know what I mean—enough for our family."

"I should use five eggs," Lucy replied, holding one hand to her drawn forehead.
"Wait a minute till I put it down." Mrs. Merwent wrote on a scrap of paper which she had brought with her.
"And how many lemons?"
"Two."
"And two cups of sugar?"
"No, three fourths of a cup."
"Why don't you call me by my name, Lucy? Anyone would think you were talking to one of the tradesmen. You're so brusque and curt. It makes me feel like I had done something terrible."
"Is that all?" demanded Lucy.
"Why, yes—no—let's see. Two cups of sugar?"
"Three fourths of a cup," repeated Lucy.
"Wait a minute. I think I'll just have Katy bring the things up here, so you can show me how to do it." And Nannie ran down stairs, returning, followed by the old negress who was panting from the exertion of her hasty ascent to the upper floor, her arms laden with bowls and pans.
Katy went back to the kitchen twice to bring the full assortment of ingredients and utensils.
"Now," said Nannie, when she had completed the mixing of the pudding under Lucy's direction, "I hope it'll be good. What are you wrinkling up your forehead so for, Lucy? Does your head still ache?"
"Yes," Lucy answered.
"Law's sakes, Miss Nannie, dere wa'n't no sense in pesterin'. Miss Lucy wid dat 'ere custard at all. I c'u'd 'a' done it mase'f. I done made 'em a thousand times." Old Katy glanced anxiously at Lucy's pale face.
"You just attend to what you're told, Katy, and don't give advice when you're not asked for it," Nannie retorted pettishly.
"Yes, Miss Nannie. Suttenly, Miss Nannie. I didn't mean no ha'm," Katy apologized, beginning to carry the dishes and materials back to the kitchen.
"Now I must go down and see that it doesn't burn," remarked Mrs. Merwent, bustling out the door. "I won't be long," she called back as she descended the stairs.
Lucy rubbed her head again with eau de Cologne, lay down
on the bed and placed a cloth wet with cold water over her eyes. The afternoon was dull and cloudy and it soon began to rain. Soothed by the patter of drops on the tiled roof of the veranda just outside her window, she gradually relaxed and dozed lightly, but her peace was not for long. In a short time Nannie appeared again. As Lucy heard footsteps in the hall she removed the cloth from her eyes.

"Lucy, I wanted to ask you if you think the pudding is ready to take out."

"How long has it been in?" inquired Lucy.

"Oh, I haven't timed it, but one edge is getting brown already."

"Katy will know when it's done."

"I'm afraid to trust her judgment,

"I'm so anxious for it to be just perfect."

"I'll go and see," said Lucy, rising.

"Now I didn't mean for you to go," protested Mrs. Merwent. "I just wanted your opinion, that was all."

Lucy started into the hall.

"Lucy, come back," besought Nannie, following her. "You know Dr. Hamilton ordered that you should be perfectly quiet. Don't go, Lucy." They were at the head of the stairs. "Well, Lucy, if you will go, remember that I didn't ask you to, and did all I could to keep you from it."

"Why, where is it?" she inquired agitatedly as Lucy reached the kitchen and opened the door of the empty oven.

"I done tuk it out, Miss Nannie. H'it's in de pantry," explained Katy.

"What did you mean by touching my pudding, Katy?"

"Shucks! H'it 'ud 'a bin all spoiled if I hadn't," Katy expostulated respectfully, bringing the pudding out for inspection.

"It's just right," decided Lucy, examining it carefully.

"I'm so glad," announced Nannie with a sigh. "I should have felt awfully if it hadn't been just perfect."

Lucy turned to enter the dining room.
Now, Lucy, you must go right back to bed,” said her mother. “You shouldn’t have come down at all.”

Lucy went through the dining room into the living room without replying.

“Please go back to bed,” pleaded Nannie, following her.

“No. I’m going to sit up a while,” answered Lucy.

“Well, if you’re sure it won’t hurt you, but remember I don’t want you to. Shall we eat some of the pudding now?”

“I don’t care for any, thank you.”

“Just taste it. I can hardly wait to see if it’s good or not.”

“Why don’t you try it?”

“Oh, I wouldn’t eat any unless you did.”

Lucy drummed nervously on the arms of the chair she sat in.

“Do you remember how we used to send out and get oysters——?” Nannie began suddenly.

Lucy rose.

“Lucy!” exclaimed Mrs. Merwent, following her daughter who was leaving the room.

In the hall Lucy put on her raincoat and took an umbrella from the stand.

“Where are you going?” asked her mother.

“I’m going for a walk.”

“Wait a minute. Don’t go! Please don’t!” But Lucy had passed through the door.

When she returned from her outing it was nearly sunset. The rain was over and a dim, yellow-green light shone on everything.

Nannie met her in the hall.

“Now, Lucy,” Mrs. Merwent’s voice was reproachful, “you are going to be sick for all this.”

“On the contrary, I feel much better.” Lucy’s appearance supported her assertion.

“Well, change your clothes at any rate,” Nannie advised.

“I think I will put on dry shoes and stockings,” agreed Lucy.

It was almost time to close the office, on the same evening.
when there was a knock at the outer door and it was slightly opened.

"Come in," John called. He was alone, Jim having left him to keep an engagement with the firm of Layard's in the next street.

Miss Storms walked into the room.

"Well, John, I see you are alone," she observed, hesitating just inside the door.

"Good evening, Miss Storms. Won't you sit down?" he answered distantly, rising and making a motion toward the coat which he had removed some time before.

"Don't bother about that coat. I shan't stay," she interrupted, smiling kindly.

But John put on the coat.

"Ellen and Arthur are leaving in the morning. They had hoped Lucy would be in today—though she said yesterday that she didn't think it would be possible." Miss Storms paused.

"As there seems to be no way for them to communicate with her——" she paused again with significant emphasis, raising her eyebrows but continuing to smile in the same manner, "I have brought this parcel from them. It is for Dimmie. His grandfather promised him a watch."

John did not speak at once and the two stared at one another. His face grew red and sullen under the enigmatic inquiry of her expression.

She laid the parcel on the desk. Still John said nothing.

"If it is possible for Lucy to get in in the morning——" she began again.

"Lucy is sick in bed," John informed her shortly.

"Oh! I'm sorry. Poor child! What is—it isn't anything serious, is it?"

"No. Only an attack of nerves."

Miss Storms continued to gaze at John, and he partially averted his face, fingering some papers on the desk beside him.

"John," interrogated Miss Storms, making a step forward, "isn't there anything to be done?"

He glanced up quickly and his hand on the paper shook.

"No," he said, looking at Miss Storms almost defiantly, "I
don't see that there is. Not so long as Mr. Merwent and—his wife insist on thrusting their attention where it's not wanted."

"Oh?" Miss Storms lifted her eyebrows again and bit her lip. She continued to regard John with an expression that was a mixture of rather bitter humor and bafflement.

"Perhaps you'd rather not deliver my message?"

John frowned slightly.

"I'll deliver it, Miss Storms. I'm not the one to settle Lucy's attitude toward her father."

"Well, I certainly hope the dear child is stronger than she looks. I'll send over here tomorrow to inquire after her." Miss Storms declared with insistent good humor. "Goodbye."

Smiling rather impersonally, she nodded to John and went out.

John walked to the window and stood staring into the rain, and he did not hear Jim when he came in a few minutes later, his umbrella dripping and his shoulders wet.

When Miss Storms reached home she told Merwent and his wife of her visit.

"Well, I'm sorry," Arthur said slowly, shaking his head as he spoke. "It means that I have lost my daughter. I don't wonder that she's sick, poor girl. I could see that she was nearly frantic yesterday. I'll write to her." Then his voice grew bitter. "Of all the fiends in human form—!" Ellen laid her hand on his arm. He was silent.

"I don't think I'll ever call myself a diplomat again," announced Miss Storms grimly.

John and Jim closed the office and walked to the station in silence. Even in the close proximity of the suburban train they exchanged only a few desultory remarks.

Lucy had hardly put on her dry clothes and returned downstairs after her walk when John's key was heard in the front door.

"Come in," he said to Jim.

The two men hung their rain coats on the hat tree and
John led the way to the dining room. Lucy, who was seated by a window, rose at their entrance.

"Well, Lucy, I concluded I'd turn myself into a surprise party. I told John not to 'phone out," Jim declared. "I thought you were sick a-bed."

"No. I'm feeling better this evening," she replied rather coldly, shaking hands.

"Good evening, Mr. Sprague. What a nice surprise for Lucy! I hope you weren't worried about her." Nannie came forward.

"Good evening, Mrs. Merwent," returned Jim, ignoring her observations. His perplexed gaze followed Lucy as he looked over her mother's head.

"Where's Dimmie?" he inquired at last.

"He has gone to the Hamiltons'. He's getting to be quite a runabout." Nannie proffered the information.

"Kin I put dinnah on right away, Miss Nannie?" asked Katy, coming to the door.

"Wait a minute, Katy," replied Mrs. Merwent. "You must put an extra plate on." Then, addressing John and Jim, "Shall I mix you two some of Mr. Sprague's near cocktails before you eat?"

"Not for me, Mrs. Merwent, thank you," Jim refused hastily.

"Well, let me make one for you, anyway, John," she urged.

"All right, Nannie. I don't mind if you do."

"Then, come into the kitchen while I fix it." John followed her.

"I invited myself out," Jim remarked to Lucy, when they were alone. "I was worried about you. And John told me on the train you had a fainting spell and the doctor had to be called in."

"It wasn't serious," Lucy explained impassively. "I was a little nervous and unstrung. That's all."

"Well, that's enough," asserted Jim grimly.

"It's not an uncommon female failing," said Lucy. Jim regarded her so long without speaking that she flushed under his scrutiny.

"There's no use trying to deceive me, Lucy. Your looks tell that you've been through something serious."
"There's no use in trying anything, Jim." Her tone was new to him.

"Lucy!" he exclaimed. "You know that I——"

John and Nannie came in and Jim stopped speaking.

"You can serve dinner now, Katy," Mrs. Merwent called as she left the kitchen.

The family were soon seated at the table.

"You're quite a stranger, Mr. Sprague," Nannie began.

"Yes, Mrs. Merwent," said Jim stiffly.

"We have spoken of you so often. Haven't we, Lucy?"

Mrs. Merwent turned to her daughter.

Jim interrupted before Lucy could reply.

"Business very engrossing, Mrs. Merwent. We have new competition. A lady architect has rented offices in the same building with us."

"You must mean the lady architect is very engrossing, Mr. Sprague," smiled Nannie. "You seem to have quite forgotten poor Lucy and me—though of course I don't count."

"The lady architect is designing small houses too rapidly to leave either herself or me time for personal interests," responded Jim.

"Well, I think she might be better employed than in trying to compete with men in business," declared Nannie vigorously. "I don't believe in women earning their own living. The woman's place is in the home."

"Why, more than the man's?" Jim questioned.

John answered for her.

"Because she's not fitted by nature to compete with men."

"Our new competitor has gotten four contracts this month right under our nose." Jim smiled slightly.

"That's only because she's a sort of novelty. It won't last."

There was no lightness in John's manner.

"Well, according to Layard's she's been at it for six years, and made enough in a small place to enable her to break into big-city practice, just as we did."

"A woman can't attend to her home and her children and be in business," persisted John.

"This one's got neither, being unmarried, and there are thousands of others in the same fix." Jim warmed to his
subject. "If a man wants money and success, he's free to get out and go after them, and I fail to see why a woman hasn't the same right. I don't see why she lowers herself any more than by living on charity."

"Like me and Lucy," put in Mrs. Merwent quickly.

"I don't mean every woman," said Jim. "You know what I mean, Lucy. You and I have discussed it a dozen times. What's the use of insisting a woman's place is in the home whether she has any home or not, or whether she and her children have enough to make them comfortable or not?"

Lucy did not answer.

"Woman's place is in the home because she has the babies and man doesn't," John asserted again.

"I don't see that she has them any more than the man does," retorted Jim.

"You don't? Well, I don't think you'd find many women to agree with you!" John's tone was finely sarcastic.

"Don't you think that woman's influence is destroyed when she becomes masculine, Mr. Sprague?" parried Nannie, looking at John.

"What do you mean by masculine?" queried Jim sharply.

"It used to be that a woman had to turn all her money over to her husband when she married. Now she can hold on to at least some of it. Is she any less attractive? If she has a voice in the making of the laws that govern her and her children, will she become coarsened by it? Why don't you help me out, Lucy? You know more about it than I do."

"I had rather not discuss the subject," objected Lucy coldly, her eyes downcast.

"I think she is wise," approved John, "since you only care to ridicule and sneer at opinions other than your own."

"Nonsense, John. I wasn't ridiculing you or anybody else. But that stuff about woman's place in the home is mediæval. What a decent woman wants is less chivalry and more real respect and consideration."

"Then you don't believe that women should expect politeness and deference from men at all?" insinuated Nannie.

"Well, I don't exactly believe in fighting with them," conceded Jim, smiling once more.
"I'm sure I'm not trying to get up a fight, Mr. Sprague," Nannie snapped. "I was simply asking your view. I don't think anybody can say I like quarrels."

"I don't either, Mrs. Merwent, and I don't think we are going to quarrel." Jim spoke as though dismissing the subject.

"Well, I don't care to quarrel either," John's cheeks were flushed, "but I must say that I reserve the right to hold my own opinions on the subject, and do not care to be dismissed as though I were impertinent in daring to express them."

"What's the matter with you, John?" Jim looked straight at his partner. "I don't object to your having your opinion on this or any other subject, but I suppose I may have mine too."

"Well, please don't call mine mediæval," retorted John.

"As I am at your table and you choose the occasion to read me a lesson in manners," Jim flushed also, "I will of course not presume to question any further opinion of yours."

"Here! You two men frighten me," protested Mrs. Merwent, laughing forcibly. "Let's change the subject. What shall we talk about—golf?"

"I don't play golf, Mrs. Merwent." Jim drank some water.

"Oh, dear!" Nannie made a gesture of despair. "What shall we discuss then? Lucy, you know lots of things to talk about. You suggest something."

"It makes no difference to me what you talk about," stated Lucy enigmatically.

Jim glanced at her in surprise. She did not seem to notice his troubled eyes.

"Wasn't that a terrible scandal about Mrs. Farnsworth?" Nannie ventured again. She addressed Jim as before. "Don't you think her husband ought to get a divorce?"

"I don't know much about it," he answered.

"Why, the papers have been full of it."

"I have only seen the headlines. I didn't read the details."

The conversation lagged during the remainder of the meal, John hardly speaking, and Lucy saying not a word.

As Katy brought in the dessert Nannie whispered to John, "I made the pudding."

"It's fine," John whispered back.
When they rose Mrs. Merwent and John went into the living room at once, and sat without a light talking in low tones.

"Did you notice how strangely Lucy acts even with Mr. Sprague?" Nannie glanced toward the door as she spoke.

"He's enough to make anybody act strangely," was John's irritated response.

"He is, John, dear, and you were so wonderfully patient with him. But Lucy is sick. There's no doubt about that. Mentally sick, I mean. Oh, John, I do so want to help you out of this terrible situation!"

He pressed her hand.

"You help me every time you breathe, God knows, Nannie," he asserted feelingly.

Lucy and Jim were silent in the dining room. Contrary to his custom, Jim was not smoking.

"Lucy, are you offended with me?" he asked at length.

"No, Jim," was the reply.

"What's the matter?"

Tears started to Lucy's eyes and she shook her head.

"I can't tell you, Jim," she said in a low tone, after a pause. Jim's eyes were deep as he watched her pale face and quivering lips.

"I would do anything, Lucy, anything—to help you."

"Thank you, Jim. I know you would."

"Won't you let me try?" he began.

She shook her head.

"No, Jim. It's no use. Nobody can help anybody. I—I—"

The tears stood in her eyes again.

"Lucy," Jim's voice was tense, "if you knew how much I—prize your friendship—how much I—"

"Don't—Jim—" She spoke under her breath.

Nothing was said by either for several minutes. The murmur of John's and Nannie's voices continued in the living room.

"I'm going." Jim rose and held out his hand.

Lucy placed hers in it. His clasp was warmer and longer than it had ever been before.

"Lucy, if you need me—that is if I—" His voice trem-
bled but his eyes sought hers insistently. "If you need me," he repeated, and paused.

"Thank you, Jim."

"Tell Dimmie good-bye for me."

He went out without saying good night to John and Nannie. Lucy did not go to the door with him.

"Excuse me," Mrs. Merwents called from the living room after a time. "I'm coming in." She did not show herself immediately.

Lucy made no reply, and Nannie approached the door and looked in.

"Why, where is Mr. Sprague?" she inquired.

"He has gone home." Lucy's expression was hostile. "And if he were here, you need not insult us both by warning us that you were coming."

"Why, Lucy, I only thought——"

"You only thought something vile, as usual," Lucy interrupted.

"What right have you got to say such a thing as that to me?"

"You have given me the right to say far worse things to you. You are not in a position to defend yourself from anything I care to say." Lucy's tone was hard. Nannie could not meet her daughter's eyes.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Mrs. Merwents angrily.

"You know very well what I mean," declared Lucy evenly, rising and starting toward the hall.

John appeared on the threshold.

"Where's Jim?" he questioned.

"He's gone home," Nannie informed him.

"Well, what did he sneak out without saying a word for?" Lucy's eyes glinted, but she only said, "You'd better ask him. I don't know."

Dimmie ran in from the kitchen.

"Mamma! Mrs. Hamilton wants——" he began.

"Come to bed. You can tell me upstairs." Lucy caught the child's hand.

The two went out.
"John, what in the world do you suppose is the matter with Lucy? She treats me terribly."
"I'm damned if I know!" exclaimed John fiercely. "I'm sick of it."
"I don't know what's to become of us if she keeps on like this," Nannie continued.
"Well, I know what will become of me if it goes on much longer!" His tone was eloquent.
"Now, John," Mrs. Merwent placed her hand on the sleeve of his coat. "For my sake, John. I have suffered so much for Lucy already." Tears seemed near.
"I'll sit tight and do the best I can, Nannie, but as much as you've done for me, there are some things I can't bear." Nannie sighed.
"I've noticed that every time she sees Mr. Sprague she's worse," she remarked significantly a moment later.
She and John stood looking into each other's faces.
"Poor John." She took one of his hands in both hers.
He returned appreciatively the pressure she gave it, then moved away.
"Are you going to bed so early?" she interrogated uneasily.
"No. I'm going to take a walk," he answered. And the door slammed after him.
Lucy rose early the following day, and when John and Nannie came downstairs they found her, pale and haggard, moving about the kitchen giving instructions to Katy.

"Now, Lucy," objected Mrs. Merwent, "you shouldn't do this. Dr. Hamilton said you were to have absolute rest." Nannie herself looked fresh and immaculate. "If you don't stop frowning like that," she added, "nothing on earth will ever take the wrinkles out of your forehead."

Without replying to her mother, Lucy finished her marketing list.

"Put breakfast on, Katy," she said to the servant.

"Yes, you may put breakfast on, Katy," repeated Mrs. Merwent. "Mr. Winter is waiting."

"Yes, Miss Nannie. Right dis minute," replied the negress with alacrity.

The postman's whistle blew and, as Katy was busy with the dishes, Nannie went to the door. She returned with a letter in her hand.

"I suppose your father has some more insults to heap on me," she observed acridly, as she gave the envelope to Lucy.

Lucy glanced at it and recognized Mr. Merwent's handwriting. She left the room.

"Oh, don't be afraid! I'm not going to ask you what's in it!" Nannie called after her in a trembling voice.

John was reading the morning paper in the living room and Dimmie was out of doors, so when Lucy mounted the stairs the upper floor was deserted. She entered her bedroom and, locking the door, seated herself weakly on the edge of her bed. She opened the letter.

"Dear Daughter," it began. "We leave in the morning as I expected. Ellen and I had hoped to see you and the boy once more before our departure, but Miss Storms learned through
your husband that you were not coming again, and also that you were not well. I can understand that your nerves have been nearly ruined and imagine your condition.

"It seems strange that peace loving people like you and me and Ellen should be forced to quarrel with each other. I do not blame you (you will say I have no right to do so), nor is it my place to comment on the attitude your husband has taken. Sufficient to say that he has accepted your mother's assessment of values in family matters.

"I know that you wish to remain neutral, but I have learned to my own sorrow the impossibility of a neutral peace where your mother is concerned. It seems to me, as things are, that the kindest thing Ellen and I can do in your interest is to do nothing and consider ourselves entirely out of the matter.

"Remember, Lucy, no matter what you may think of me, that I blame you in nothing, and that I try to regard your husband's hostility to us with as much detachment as is in accord with my respect and affection for Ellen and the right I feel to demand that respect from others.

"Kiss the little boy for us both. We hope from our hearts that your indisposition is not serious. You know the cure. Ellen, in particular, regrets the impossible circumstances, etc. But why say more of that?

"Your friend and father,
   "Arthur Merwent."

Lucy sat for some time with the letter in her hand. When she finally rose it was to begin to dress for the street.

A little later she descended the stairs, wearing her hat and carrying her gloves and purse. Nannie and John were breakfasting when she entered the dining room and took her place at the table.

"You're not going out this morning, are you, Lucy?" Nannie inquired, staring at her daughter's apparel. "You know the doctor said you were to keep quiet."

"Yes, I'm going out," Lucy told her.

"Now, Lucy, you ought not to disobey the doctor's orders. You will be much better quiet here at home."

Lucy did not reply.
“Where are you going?” Mrs. Merwent persisted.
“I’m going down town.”
“Are you going shopping?”
“No.”
“Well, I don’t think you ought to go. Do you, John?”
“What I think is of little consequence in this house,” answered John. He scanned the newspaper at his elbow as he spoke.
“Didn’t you say last night that you were going to Benton Harbor again today, John?” Nannie asked somewhat irrelevantly, glancing sharply at Lucy’s face.
“Yes.” John picked up his paper.
“And you won’t be back till night?” she pursued with her eyes still on Lucy’s profile.
“No.” John went on reading.
“Well, I’m certain Lucy ought not to go.” Nannie returned to the first topic with seeming carelessness.

Though Lucy had scarcely tasted her breakfast she rose and, taking up her purse and gloves, went upstairs again. She did not take Dimmie to Mrs. Hamilton’s until her husband and mother had gone to the station.

Dr. Hamilton, after a sleepless night with a bad patient, was sitting with his wife at the table finishing a late breakfast, when Lucy and Dimmie came in.

“I thought you were taking the rest cure,” the doctor greeted Lucy jocularly. He got up and lifted Stella from her high chair beside him. The little girl flew enthusiastically to welcome Dimmie.

“I am.” Lucy smiled rather wanly.

“How is your mother? She ought to have used her influence to keep you at home today,” Dr. Hamilton resumed.

“Mrs. Merwent is very well, thank you.” Lucy stooped to kiss Stella.

“I hope you’ve come to spend the day,” suggested Mrs. Hamilton cordially.

“No. I’m going down town,” replied Lucy.

“I don’t know about that,” objected the doctor doubtfully.

“Please don’t, Dr. Hamilton,” Lucy protested quickly.

He glanced at her keenly.
"I think perhaps going out a little may do you good," he conceded after a moment.

Lucy had seated herself in a bow window commanding the street. Soon she saw Nannie returning from the station.

"When does the train leave, Doctor?" Lucy asked.

"In eight minutes," he informed her, after consulting his watch.

"Well, then, I'll be going," Lucy rose and shook hands.

"Come over whenever you can and bring Dimmie and stay as long as you can, won't you, Mrs. Winter?" urged Mrs. Hamilton earnestly. "And your mother, too. I'm afraid she's standing on ceremony."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hamilton; I will," Lucy smiled evasively. In less than an hour she rang the bell at Miss Storms's apartment.

"Why, Mrs. Winter!" exclaimed the maid as she opened the door and saw Lucy. "Miss Storms is out. She went to see Mr. and Mrs. Merwent off but she'll be back at ten. Won't you wait? I'm sure she would be disappointed at not seeing you. I think she thought you'd be at the station."

"Yes, I'll wait," agreed Lucy.

"Come right in and take a chair, Mrs. Winter."

Lucy entered the pleasant reception room and, taking up a book from a table, sat down by a window. Although the volume was the translation of a Russian novel she had often wished to see, her interest evidently was not in what she read. Most of the time while the book was in her hand she spent in staring over the roofs of the city that stretched before her. Finally Miss Storms' key was heard in the latch and the door opened.

"Why, Lucy! Bless your heart. I'm so glad you're better," Miss Storms ejaculated, kissing her friend's cheek. "They've just gone. If you'd come to the station you could have caught them."

"I wanted to see you," replied Lucy, not responding to her hostess's smile.

Miss Storms was studying Lucy's face carefully.

"I see you have been reading Sanin. What do you think of it?"
"I didn't read much," Lucy confessed. "You said that if ever I was in trouble I must come to you."

"Yes." Miss Storms' tone became sympathetic at once and she took the younger woman's hand.

"Well, I've come." Lucy's voice trembled slightly. There was a pause.

"What is it, dear?" Miss Storms asked at last, stroking the hand she held.

"Oh, Miss Storms, I got a note from Papa this morning just before I left. I—I—" Lucy stopped.

Miss Storms nodded comprehendingly.

"I hardly know what to say, dear," she began.

Lucy lifted strange eyes with dilated pupils, then turned away.

"Arthur is terribly hurt by John's attitude," Miss Storms continued, scrutinizing Lucy's half averted profile. "He resents John's position in regard to Ellen. That's natural, but don't think that he ever, for one moment, mistakes the source of it, or holds it against you."

Lucy's hands moved uneasily.

"Oh, it isn't just Papa, Miss Storms!" she burst forth.

Her voice was hoarse. She kept her eyes on the open window where the blue sky showed, overcast by the city smoke.

There was another long pause before Miss Storms went on. "You must get your mother out of the house, Lucy." Her tone was emphatic.

"But where can she go? She has no place to go, Miss Storms! Since my grandmother died there's nobody but Cousin Minnie Sheldon, and she doesn't want Mamma." Lucy's hands beat the air in a gesture of futility.

She rose and, walking to the window, stood with her back to Miss Storms, her shoulders shaking spasmodically.

Finally Lucy regained her self control and faced her friend. "I'd advise you to poison her, dear, if I weren't afraid of getting you in worse trouble than you are."

Lucy smiled slightly but almost simultaneously her lip twitched and the tears started to her eyes.

"Oh, don't! Please don't, Miss Storms," she begged hysterically.
"There, dear. Sit down again." Miss Storms rose and led her to the chair. "Lucy, I have to confess a spinster's tendency to meddle, I suppose. I asked John around here the other day and talked to him about this."

Lucy glanced at her quickly.

"He didn't tell me he was here," she said in a low voice, staring at her lap. "Oh, Miss Storms——I!"

"Yes, dear?"

Under Miss Storms' touch Lucy trembled violently.

"John shouldn't treat me the way he does," she wailed like a child. "He shouldn't believe her insinuations. He has no right to be suspicious of me. Oh, Miss Storms, it's awful! Jim Sprague was at our house last night and I didn't dare to treat him decently." Lucy began to weep softly.

"Does he think that you and Jim——" Miss Storms interjected incredulously.

"I don't know what he thinks!" cried Lucy passionately. "I don't know anything about him any more. If it wasn't for Dimmie——" and she broke into violent sobbing.

Miss Storms sat with her chin in her hands, her elbows on the arms of her chair. It was several minutes before she spoke again.

"I don't know what to say, Lucy," she admitted finally. "I realize that your mother is a moral idiot, and that John ought to see through her, but I know more about men and women than you do, dear, and I understand what a woman can do to a man."

"Ain't I a woman, too?" Lucy demanded fiercely, relapsing into the language of her childhood.

"Yes, dear, but you're not the courtesan type. You're the mother type, and you don't understand the other. I used to think I was the cerebral type," Miss Storms pursued musingly, smiling her gently ironical smile, "but I'm not. I'm the mother type, too, and I wish this minute that you were my child."

"So do I," said Lucy quickly, returning the pressure of Miss Host's hand.

Miss is the most of life, dear. One can't escape it any more.

"I say one can death, and the most fatal thing is to try to escape it?" asks for example. I have learned a great deal in
forty years, Lucy, and I knew when I advised you to marry, that John was not great individually. But he is nature, dear, and the thing to do is to get the other woman out of the way. It frightens me to think of anything else, Lucy."

"But I want to be loved, Miss Storms." Tears were in Lucy's eyes again. "I want— I want——" She could not go on. "Lucy! Do you love Jim Sprague?" Miss Storms' voice was sharper.

"No!" cried Lucy vehemently.

"And you do love John, don't you?" Miss Storms almost pleaded.

"I—I would if I had a chance." Hesitating over the first words, Lucy finished determinedly.

Miss Storms kissed her cheek.

"The only thing is to get rid of your mother, no matter what the difficulties are," Miss Storms resumed in a practical tone. "Oh, why doesn't that Mr. Walsh say or do something! At all events we must get her away. And then you mustn't even forgive John. You must put the past out of your mind—never give it a thought. It must disappear as if it had never existed. Make all the responsibility yours. John must never be humiliated, never know that you have suffered."

"But what about me?" Lucy reminded her indignantly.

Miss Storms' smile was rather bitter as she answered.

"I know you think I am only considering the man, Lucy," she replied. "As a rule, I do. I did in your father's case. Women have to take the responsibility for life. Besides, the man is the potential father, and until the woman has children she worships the potential father. Afterward she worships the children. But I'm not ignoring you, dear. I am thinking of you, too. John is still the potential father, to you—of more children, I hope."

Lucy was silent as she gazed out the window.

"You may think me hard on women, Lucy. Nature is hard on them. You may think there are other men—Jim Sprague, for instance—but there aren't. The female is the type—the responsible one. They are the race. Men are their possessions. You chose John to be the father of your children—and you didn't Jim."
Lucy was still silent.

"I have no highfalutin' ideas about the sanctity of marriage, or any such nonsense," Miss Storms went on in the same half musing tone, "although I realize that, in spite of what is perhaps some intellectual breadth, I have an old maid's emotional idealism. But the fact remains, dear, that sex is greater than we, just as life and death are greater, and we can escape neither its ecstasy nor its agony. We mate to suffer as well as to joy, Lucy, and you are happier than I."

Here Miss Storms reverted abruptly to her practical mood.

"You just hold on, dear," she advised. "Men, even the greatest of them, never grow up. I think I have a plan that will do the trick. Let me gnaw over it tonight, and I'll see you in a day or two. Everything's going to be all right." Miss Storms nodded reassuringly.

Lucy hesitated a moment. Then she arose.

"Won't you stay for luncheon, dear?"

"No. I must go."

"Well, you will hear from me soon. But on account of John's attitude toward Arthur and Ellen, and toward me, he must never know—more than he already knows—about my having anything to do with it. Women are always deceiving men for their own good, you know, dear." Miss Storms jested sourly.

Lucy made no sign and Miss Storms proceeded in a business-like tone.

"Now, Lucy, you're strong—women have to be—and sensible. You can handle this situation, dear. You must. I'll help. I believe my idea will work. If it fails we'll try another."

"I don't think it's any use," Lucy confessed hopelessly.

"Oh, yes it is. Don't lose heart."

From the apartment Lucy went to the park, and, seeking a secluded spot, seated herself on a bench and leaned her head against her hand. She remained thus for more than an hour. Tears sometimes flowed down her cheeks, but she made no sound.

Finally she rose and turned her steps toward the office.
XXVIII

The torpor of summer was in the air, but it did not affect Jim's industry. Coming into the office from a luncheon he had scarcely tasted, he removed his coat, and settled himself for a hard afternoon's work. The windows were raised but not a breath came to stir the papers on his desk. The murmur of the street sounded as remote as the echo of the ocean in a shell.

The door opened and Lucy came in. Jim glanced up, startled, but did not speak.

"I want to talk to you, Jim," Lucy said without preamble. Her face was set.

"Sit down," he replied, looking at her keenly. The pencil in his hand trembled.

"I couldn't say anything last night, Jim. I am in the greatest trouble of my life." She picked up a paper weight and examined it as she spoke.

"I know, Lucy," he said, laying down his pencil.

She shivered as though chilled by the warm summer atmosphere. Her forced calmness forsook her suddenly.

"Oh, Jim!" she sobbed, and leaning forward on the desk, hid her face in her arms.

He reached out his hand to take hers, then withdrew it, and, picking up the pencil again, began tapping the desk with it.

"What shall I do, Jim?" Lucy lifted her head. She had command of herself now.

Jim went on tapping the desk until Lucy reached over and took the pencil from him and laid it down.

"Your mother must go away," he declared at last.

"But where can she go? She has no money. Cousin Minnie doesn't want her. She has no other relations, and besides, John won't hear of her going."

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"She must go anyway," he repeated.

"I can't put her in the street. Oh, Jim, I don't know what to do! She's changed John so he's not himself any more. Everything she does is perfect in his eyes. I'm always to blame. Everything I say is wrong. She's even turned him against Dimmie. What shall I do? What shall I do?" and Lucy wrung her hands, her eyes fixed upon Jim's in hungry appeal.

Sprague stared at her. His own eyes widened. His self control went to the winds.

"Do, Lucy? Do! Why come to me!" he cried, seizing her hand and gripping it until she winced.

"Jim!" she gasped.

"I've stood all I can." His tone grew more intense with each word. "I've never been too honest with myself about you, Lucy, but I knew I loved you a long time ago. I've resented seeing your youth slipping by, and John not noticing it. I've tried not to covet his wife, because I thought he wanted her. But now I've got to tell you, Lucy. I want you. And I don't want just a mystical idea of you either. I love you, dear, and you won't have to be afraid of my ever stopping. Let's leave the people who don't want us and take each other. We know we're good enough for each other. Come on, Lucy. I need you. You are the only person in the world I ever trusted implicitly. You must. I won't give you up. I can't give you up. Lucy, Lucy——"

She had withdrawn her hand from his and was regarding him now with an expression of wonder.

"Why, Jim, what do you mean?" she asked, aghast at his torrent of words. She had never before seen him under stress of uncontrollable excitement.

"I mean what I say. Can't you see how I love you?"

Lucy had forgotten the troubles which brought her there and rose from her chair with fear in her eyes.

"Stop, Jim," she commanded. "I've trusted you, too, and you have no right to talk this way."

Jim had risen also, and now he came around the desk and stood in front of her, his eyes seeking hers insistently.

"Right!" he repeated. "I have the right that my love gives
me, a love that never let me think of another woman since I first saw you. You’ve trusted me and you ought to have, because I’m worthy to be trusted. You trusted your husband too, and he allows the first miserable flirt that comes into his house to—"

"I’m going, Jim. I can’t listen to such things." Lucy moved toward the door.

"Stop, Lucy," he pleaded. "Don’t go."
She hesitated. Her manner was hunted.
"I’ll talk reasonably," he promised. He was very pale. His voice was low again. "Sit down, please," he added as she remained undecided.

She reseated herself, smoothing out her gloves over and over with shaking fingers. Jim took his place in his chair by the desk and picked up the pencil. They regarded each other with fear and questioning. He had the look of a man prepared to overcome hard things.

"I suppose you’re thinking of John’s confidence in me, and what I owe myself in view of it, and all that," he began.

"No, I don’t judge you. You have always seemed so like a—no, not like a brother, but like a dear friend and comrade that I could always depend on—I never thought—" The words would not come and Lucy continued smoothing her gloves.

Jim had himself in hand again and began speaking very carefully, drawing circles and squares on a piece of paper as he talked.

"John and I have been together nearly all our lives. I am not going to say anything against him, Lucy, but before I knew you I realized that he was—was not as strong as he should be. When I saw you I gave you the devotion of my soul that—I needed somebody, Lucy—that I had been trying to give him, because you were worthy of it. I knew you were the most desirable woman I had ever seen and I acknowledged this to myself without cant. I was proud to give you this honor in my heart, and I was prouder that I gave it to you as you really were. What John gave to was a hazy outline of a woman seen through a mist of sex idealism. Anyone else
would have done as well as you. But I never doubted the reality of his love, such as it was."

Lucy began to show uneasiness again. Jim noticed it and hastened on.

"When your mother came I realized at once that you were in for a hard time and I stood ready to help John. I saw that she wanted to be a high priestess between you two and I set out to combat her influence over him. I tried my best, but he didn't want any help. He could have stood with you and it would have been easy, for your mother is too cowardly to carry anything through against opposition. But he fell for any suggestion she put out, and turned against me, which wasn't so bad, and then against you who were more loyal to him than I even. Every cheap, despicable little woman's trick that a baby could see through was another excuse for turning away from the straightest and most lovable woman in the world and putting a little contemptible, shallow—"

"Jim, please," interrupted Lucy, stretching out her hand and touching his.

His body stiffened at the contact, but with a strong effort he restrained himself from another outburst.

"Lucy, I can't help it. His idea of woman is the harem idea. He doesn't want you because you are too big and too good. She suits him better. They don't want you. They don't want us. We've only got each other. We need each other, Lucy. I would never have said a word or made a sign if he'd been square—if he'd appreciated you and wanted you. But you've wanted honesty in your relation with him, and he couldn't stand it. He's failed. He's had his chance. You don't owe him anything more, and I don't. We're free, Lucy. We're free to take each other. My darling, if you knew how I love you—" His voice grew husky with emotion.

Lucy rose again, pale as he. Jim sprang to her and placed his hands on her shoulders.

"Lucy! You can't, you shan't leave me without saying you love me. I won't allow you to let a convention rob you of my
love. You're mine, Lucy, mine, mine, mine!" and he strained her to him.

For an instant her resistance was broken and she rested in his arms as though it were at last a place where she could be safe. Then she gently drew herself away and Jim sank into the chair beside her, his head in his hands.

"I'm sorry," she began in a shaking voice. "I believe you are a noble man, Jim. You stand for more to me now than anyone else in the world, but—I can't. Poor Jim, I—I—"

She was crying softly.

Jim raised his head and looked at her. His eyes hungrily took in the rounded forehead, the straight nose, beautiful in profile, the ear set too high for harmony and spoiling the effect of the line of the jaw, the almost perfect mouth and chin, so appealingly feminine. His gaze devoured her eyes with their clear unflinching depths of honesty, suggesting little of sex as it is generally sought for by men; the brown of her hair with almost golden strands arranged, as always, low on her too generous brow and swept down over her ears with the exact curve that she instinctively knew would hide and pick out all the points that needed suppression or emphasis; her clear skin, so really white and delicate of texture as he knew by the glimpses her morning dresses had given him of her neck down by the shoulder and of the inner surface of her forearms; her hands and feet of normal efficient size, the hands with supple slender fingers widened at the tips; her body, the waist but moderately restricted and the bosom low, suggesting the long and willing nursing of her child—he knew her so well!

Suddenly he groaned. Beads of cold moisture were on his brow.

"I can't give you up." He spoke with difficulty. "Lucy, Lucy, he's not fit for you!"

Lucy did not try to hide the tears that cours ed down her cheeks.

"My whole life is yours," he continued with suppressed intensity. Then, springing to his feet again he strode toward her. "Nothing can keep me away from you, Lucy!" he said hoarsely.

She put out her hand and as it touched his breast he stopped.
"I can’t, Jim! Oh, don’t you see I can’t?" she begged.
Then she turned and went swiftly out of the office.
Jim stared at the closed door for several minutes. At last
he sat down slowly at his desk. He covered his face with his
hands and began to sob.

Lucy walked the streets and the park until dusk.
When she reached home neither John nor Nannie was there.
"Dey’s done et deir dinnah. I 'lows dey’s gone to de
t’eayter, Miss Lucy," volunteered Katy.
Dimmie was asleep on the sofa in the dining room. Lucy
carried him upstairs and undressed him.
When the child, whom she but half awakened, had gone to
sleep again she lay face downward on the bed and wept until
John and Nannie were heard ascending the stairs.

Lucy did not go to breakfast the next morning. Katy came
up with a tray.
"I don’t care for any, thank you," Lucy said through the
locked door.
When she descended the stairs she was surprised to find
John still at home, smoking by the dining room table. Mrs.
Merwent was not to be seen.
"Aren’t you going to the office?" Lucy inquired of him.
"No. I want to talk to you," he answered. His face was
stern and his voice was cold.
"Where’s Mother?"
"She has gone some place with Miss Powell."
Lucy seated herself by the window.
"I came back to the office yesterday evening," John began.
Lucy looked at him.
"As I came around the corner I saw you coming out of the
building. I went in to see if there were any letters and Jim
Sprague was there alone, and, what is more, he seemed very
surprised to see me."
"Well?" Lucy’s tone was dull.
"I want to know what this means. That’s what I want to
know." His voice grew less controlled as he proceeded.
They gazed at each other with hostile faces. Dimmie entered the room.

"I'm ready to go to Mrs. Hamilton's," he announced.
Lucy kissed him, inspected his clothes, and straightened his hat.

"Good-bye, little son," she smiled.
"Good-bye, Papa," Dimmie called as he went out.
"Good-bye," John responded impatiently.
"What do you send that boy over to Mrs. Hamilton's every day for?" he demanded harshly.
"To go to kindergarten."
"Kindergarten! There's no sense in his going to kindergarten in the summer. But if there was, why couldn't he go from here?"
"He could."
"Then what's the use of bothering your neighbors?"
"I send him early so as to get him away from Mother as much as possible," admitted Lucy.
"We'll discuss that later," John's lip curled, "but first I want an explanation of why you went to the office yesterday."
"I shall explain nothing, John," Lucy answered.
"Did you see Jim Sprague?"
"Yes, I did."
"Well, didn't you know I wouldn't be there?"
"I did."
"Then why did you pick out a day when I would be away?"
"I wanted to see Jim alone."
"What for?" John's face grew redder.
"I wanted to consult him."
"Alone?" sneered John.
"Yes, alone."
"What did you need to consult him about?" John demanded in a more peremptory tone.
"That is my own affair, John."
"Well, it just isn't your own affair. I'm not going to stand this kind of thing any longer."
"Neither am I."
"You won't have to," snarled John.
"Exactly. I have decided just that."
He stared at her in astonishment.
"What do you mean, Lucy?" He lowered his voice.
"I mean that I am going to leave."
"With Jim Sprague?" John almost shouted, springing to his feet and walking back and forth.
"Katy will hear you, John."
"Damn Katy! I don’t care who hears!" he snapped.
"Very well then. Neither do I," returned Lucy calmly.
"I’ll just tell you one thing right here," John continued, "and that is that you and Jim Sprague are not going to take my child away from me." He was breathing heavily and his eyes were suffused.

"We will settle about the child legally," replied Lucy, in the same manner, "but you are mistaken about Jim. I am not going away with him. I am going alone."

"How will you support yourself? I suppose your father’s wife will do that." John almost ground his teeth.

"She knows nothing about my plans. I shall do anything I can to earn a living for myself and Dimmie. Miss Storms will take me in till I can get started. I can do book binding. I don’t intend ever to be dependent on anybody again."

A frightened expression came into John’s eyes.
"Lucy, you are crazy! You’re trying to scare me. What reason have you got for leaving your home—your husband and child?"

"I don’t intend to leave my child!" she retorted.
John gazed at her in silence, his face paling. When he spoke again his manner was conciliatory.
"Lucy! Lucy, you don’t know what you are saying."
"Yes, I do. I know precisely what I am saying."
"Lucy," John was on the defensive now. "I can’t understand what has changed you so. I’m not accusing you of anything in regard to Jim Sprague, but it’s natural that I shouldn’t want you to get yourself talked about. You used to think I was always right, but now you seem almost to despise me." His voice quivered a little. "Let’s talk things over, Lucy, and not go on like this." The last words were almost beseeching.
"Very well, John, if you really want to talk over matters and are ready to see things squarely, I am ready, too, but if
not, I have made up my mind and know exactly what I shall do."

John sat down again and tried to light a cigarette, but his hand shook so that he desisted and put the cigarette in his pocket.

"What is it, Lucy?" he asked at length.

"Well, in the first place, my mother must leave here."

"Now, Lucy," he began querulously, "I knew you were going to say that. Why you should be so prejudiced and so vindictive against Nannie is beyond me. What earthly reason is there for putting her in the street—for she's got no place to go if she leaves here!"

"If you hadn't flattered her and influenced her she would probably have been married by now."

"Lucy!" John was horror stricken. "Married to that——!" He could not find a word to express his feelings. "You are absolutely without heart, Lucy," he protested.

"Well, if you insist on her staying," cried Lucy, rising from her chair, "I will apply for a divorce and the custody of my child and will name my mother as correspondent in the case!"

"Lucy!" articulated John. "You're crazy!"

"No, I'm not crazy," she went on tensely. "That's a dozen times you've told me I was since she came, but I'm not. You are the one who is crazy, and if you can't come to your senses in any other way, I'll bring you to them right now."

"You wouldn't dare do such a thing, Lucy! Why, it's ridiculous," John argued. "How could you prove such a fantastic joke? Where are your witnesses?" John grew almost hysterical. "You're crazy, Lucy!"

"You'll find out I'm sane." Lucy's calm was ominous. "There are witnesses enough to prove what she is—my father, Miss Storms, Jim Sprague, the Hamiltons, the two servants we've had, and plenty in Russellville. If you think it's a joke, John Winter, you just go on and find out who the joke is on. Everybody but you sees through her contemptible tricks. I won't stand it!" she continued wildly. "I'll go right now. I'm going to kindergarten to get Dimmie. Oh, to think that I ever thought I loved such a pitiable excuse for a man! Let me get away from the sight of you! I hate you! I despise
you! I—I—oh! How can I say what I feel for you! Get out of my way!” and she started swiftly for the hall door.

John caught hold of her hand.

“Don’t touch me again—ever—ever!” she almost screamed, wrenching herself free.

“Lucy, Lucy—please—how can you say such things!” John was cowed. He regarded her pleadingly. Tears were in his eyes.

Lucy stood pale and defiant, her eyes shining as if with exaltation.

“Then choose this instant between me and my mother!” she commanded hotly.

“I will, Lucy—I will. If you think best for her to go, I won’t say anything more. But, Lucy—”

“There are no ‘but’s’ about it,” interrupted Lucy remorselessly.

“I don’t mean that I want her to stay,” explained John hastily, “but you hurt me so when you say such awful things. You have told me a thousand times how you looked up to me, and now, after what you have said, I can never feel that you respect me.” He appeared almost ridiculously like a small boy.

“You’ve hurt me, John, for a long time, and that’s why I said them,” Lucy replied more gently.

John sat down in a chair and buried his face in his hands. Suddenly he began to sob, his shoulders heaving and the tears dripping through his fingers. Lucy hesitated and then came slowly up to him and laid her hand on his hair.

“Don’t, John,” she entreated in a soft, almost maternal tone.

“You’ve hurt—me—so,” he faltered abjectly, his voice choked.

“Have I, John? Poor boy! Oh, John, why couldn’t you see without all this?” she whispered wistfully.

“Lucy——” John reached up and put his arm around her.

“Lucy—you didn’t mean all those things you said about—about—me—about my being—only an excuse for a man, and about—despising me?” He still kept one hand over his eyes. Lucy hesitated an instant.
"No—John. I don’t think I really meant them," she admitted.

John reached for his handkerchief and wiped his eyes.

"And you didn’t mean that you hated me?" He pulled her down to his knee. "You still love me, don’t you, Lucy?"

"Yes, John, I still love you."

They sat several minutes in silence.

"Now I’m going down to the office." He lifted Lucy up gently and rose from his chair.

She followed him to the hall.

"Good-bye," he said. He took up his hat and held out his arms. She came into them and he kissed her forehead as of old.

"Good-bye, dear. Come home as early as you can." Lucy smiled at him as he went down the steps.

She watched him as he halted in the gateway to light a cigarette.
XXIX

John entered the office and, after hesitating slightly, greeted Jim rather ungraciously. Jim’s reply was scarcely audible. Their eyes met for an instant but each showed that he was anxious to avoid the other’s gaze. They exchanged a few necessary remarks. Jim held out the photograph of a lately completed house. His hand was unsteady as he called John’s attention to the picture. John barely glanced at it. Coughing nervously, he walked to the window. After a few moments he murmured something unintelligible about Layard’s and, taking up his hat, went out.

When Jim was alone, he stood irresolute for a time, then, taking his own hat and coat, followed John’s example.

In the street, Jim took the first surface car, without even noticing the destination indicated on the front, and he did not reappear at the office until late that evening.

Nannie did not return to Rosedene until nearly five o’clock in the afternoon. She came at once, through the dining room, into the kitchen where Lucy was making a dessert.

“Just look at my clothes! I have little enough without having this ruined.” Mrs. Merwent held out her linen skirt which was ripped at the hem and had a small tear suggestive of the imprint of a man’s boot heel. “The cars were so crowded! It was so hot standing there and I missed the first train. Miss Powell had an engagement and couldn’t wait with me. If I had only known I was going to be so late I could have gone to John’s office. Hasn’t he come yet?” Nannie’s air was injured.

“No, he hasn’t come yet.” Lucy bent over her work.

“Why, I already told Katy to have peaches and cream!” Mrs. Merwent’s eye took in Lucy’s preparations and her voice rose irritably.

Lucy made no response.
“Did you fix the celery soup?” Mrs. Merwent asked the negress.
“No, Miss Nannie. You see Miss Lucy wanted me to have——”
“You needn’t bother about the dinner. Everything is ready,” interrupted Lucy, looking full at her mother.
“Now, Lucy, there was no need for your working in the kitchen. I had instructed Katy about everything, and two heads only make confusion.”
“There’s only one head,” replied Lucy.
“Of course I know that you are the mistress, but I have taken things over for you, and it only mixes things up——”
“You haven’t taken things over,” Lucy interrupted. “I don’t need your help any longer.”
“Why, Lucy——”
“From now on I shall attend to my own household. There is absolutely nothing for you to do.”
“Why, Lucy, what has happened?” demanded Nannie in a voice in which was mingled astonishment and alarm.
“A lot of things have happened, but suppose we don’t talk them over before the servant.” Katy had gone into the dining room.
“Well! When John comes home I think I’ll ask about this!”
“Do,” advised Lucy as Katy returned to the kitchen.
Nannie left the room and went upstairs to experiment with a new device for curling the hair, one of the day’s purchases.
“Hello, Mamma!” shouted Dimmie shortly afterward, coming in from the back yard.
“Hello, Sonny,” beamed Lucy. “Here, let me get you ready for dinner. Papa will be home soon.”
“Has Nannie come?” inquired Dimmie.
“Yes,” answered Lucy, washing his face and hands.
“Where is she?” he insisted. “Don’t wash so hard, Mamma. It hurts.”
“Oh, she’s upstairs, I think. Now come let me brush your hair.”
“I’m goin’ upstairs to see what Nannie’s got for me!” Dimmie was impatient.
John’s key was heard in the latch.
"There's Papa!" exclaimed Lucy. "Let's run to meet him."
And catching Dimmie's hand, she ran with him into the hall.

Smiling uneasily, she waited for John. She wore a blue muslin dress and had fastened a half opened white rose in her hair.

"Well, dear," she greeted him.

His glance passed abstractedly over the dress and the rose. He kissed her forehead but said nothing. He seemed worried and depressed.

"Is anything the matter, John?" she asked, regarding him timidly.

"No-o," he responded indefinitely.

"I'm here, Papa," called Dimmie who had not been kissed. "Yes?" John noticed absently.

"Get washed, dear. Dinner is all ready to put on the table," said Lucy.

"Has Nannie come back yet?" He avoided Lucy's gaze as he spoke.

"Yes. She's in her room."

John's frown deepened. He mounted the stairs.

Lucy superintended the placing of the meal on the table and John reappeared almost immediately.

"Isn't she coming down to dinner?" he inquired nervously.

"Go and call Mrs. Merwent, Katy," Lucy bade the servant.

Nannie followed Katy downstairs and entered the dining room. Her hair was beautifully curled and as she came in she put her hand to her head with a self conscious gesture.

"Why, how are you, John?" she began. "I didn't know you had come home."

The meal proceeded in constrained silence.

"Miss Powell and I had such a nice day," remarked Nannie at length, "but this evening I got into a jam on the car. I did so wish you had been with me, John. The most insulting man! He crowded me so I almost ruined my dress. But that's the way with these Chicagoans. If you had been around he would have behaved mighty differently."

John smiled slightly but kept his eyes on his plate. Neither he nor Lucy replied to the remark.
“We thought of coming past your office but we were afraid you might be busy.”
“I’ve been very busy today,” said John.
“Then I’m glad we didn’t. And John, sometime next month I want you to take me up the lake. Miss Powell says it’s such a lovely trip in the early summer. You will, won’t you?”
John fidgeted uncomfortably and Lucy attended assiduously to Dimmie’s wants.
“Why—of course,” John agreed after some hesitation. “That is, so far as I know now.” He laughed uneasily and added, “We may all be dead by that time.”
Silence hovered over the group once more.
“You look frightfully glum, John. I’m almost afraid of you tonight,” observed Mrs. Merwent after some minutes. She, too, laughed rather forcibly as she spoke.
“I didn’t know I was glum,” apologized John. “I’m rather tired. I’ve had a hard day.” It was obvious that he talked with an effort.
“I’m through,” Dimmie announced with a sigh of satisfaction.
“Are you, Son?” Lucy untied his bib.
“Yes, and I want you to tell me stories like you promised to.”
“All right,” Lucy consented brightly. “Come on. Get down from your chair and kiss Papa good night, and we’ll go upstairs and I’ll tell you ever so many stories till you’re ready to go to bed.”
“Will you sing, too?” stipulated Dimmie.
“Yes, I’ll sing too,” she promised.
“I want to kiss Nannie, too,” Dimmie declared, climbing out of his chair.
“Of course you do. You wouldn’t forget Nannie, would you, Jimmie?” Mrs. Merwent put in quickly. “Wait a minute. Wipe your hands first.”
“Poor John!” sympathized Nannie as soon as they were alone. “I could see that you were tired before you spoke of it.”
“Oh, I’m all right,” exclaimed John irritably, at the same time lighting a cigarette.
"I know you never let on, John, but you can always be sure that I understand you, whether anyone else does or not."

John drummed on the table.

"Let's go into the sitting room," suggested Mrs. Merwent, rising as Katy entered to clear the table. "Shall I sing for you?" She passed into the living room and moved toward the piano.

"I don't believe I've got time," explained John hurriedly. "I've got to go out tonight. I ought to catch that next train."

"I'm so sorry," said Nannie. "I especially wanted to talk some things over tonight. I got another letter from Professor Walsh," she added significantly.

"Talk what things over?" John gave her a quick scrutiny.

Mrs. Merwent turned with a surprised air.

"Why, about Lucy principally, John, and—and about what ought to be done."

"What about Lucy?"

"Well, nothing in particular, but she's getting all worked up again about the housekeeping, and I thought you might speak to her."

"Why should I speak to her?" John's manner was combative. Nannie gazed at him reproachfully.

"Well, you know what you say has more effect on her than what I say. If you would just tell her to leave things to me as they have been, and not go and bother Katy with a lot of counter orders and that sort of thing. It's pretty hard, John, for me to look after everything and then be interfered with all the time."

John stood twirling the charm on his watch fob. When he spoke his voice showed embarrassment.

"I think, Nannie, that—that is—that it would be better—if you didn't try to—to take things out of Lucy's hands so much."

Mrs. Merwent's eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, John, how can you say such a thing when I try so hard, and all I do is for her sake? I've never considered myself at all."

"I know you haven't, Nannie," acceded John miserably, "but
I'm—I'm in a hard place. I wish you and Lucy didn't have to—to disagree so much. I'm almost at my wits' end."

Nannie studied his perplexed face. Suddenly she seemed to decide something.

"All right, John. I'll do anything you say," she promised, wiping her eyes. "I would do anything for you, John. You have been so good to me."

John remained in an attitude of thought.

"Just try your best to get along without any friction, Nannie," he begged. "I know it's hard for you sometimes. Lucy's peculiar about some things. But I'm about to go dippy with matters as they are, and I want you to help me out."

"Poor John! Of course I will. If I had my way you would never have a care or a worry."

"Thank you, Nannie. I knew you would help me all you could. Lucy is in a terribly nervous state and we've got to get her out of this silly notion that—that—well, that she's left out—or she'll do something foolish."

"I understand, John. Lucy has always been curious and babyish, but now—" She paused expressively. "There has been so much tragedy in my life, John, and now to see you going through the same thing!"

"I guess you never had anybody to help you out, Nannie."

John's voice was almost inaudible.

"John—"

"Yes, Nannie. I've got to be going, you know." He moved toward the door.

Nannie linked and unlinked her fingers.

"We do sympathize with and understand each other, John! You know I told you I got another letter from Professor Walsh."

"Well?"

"Oh, John, if it were anyone but you I would rather die than ask money of them—but the check didn't come—and—Oh, John, what shall I do?" She began to cry.

"How much do you want, Nannie?"

"Just a little, John. But Lucy always misunderstands things—and I have no one else to go to!"

He took a bill from his pocket and pressed it into her hand.
"But, John!" she protested, glancing at the denomination of the money.

"Cut that out, Nannie!" John's voice was gruff with emotion. "Some things may happen that I can't help, but just remember, first, last, and always, that what belongs to me and Lucy belongs to you too, and if she——" He broke off abruptly and strode into the hall.

"Oh, John, I can't tell you——" Nannie began; but for response the front door clicked.

She sighed and looked down at the money.

John walked up and down the street for more than half an hour. At the end of this time he met Dr. Hamilton returning from a patient.

"Well, Mr. Winter," the doctor halted and shook hands, "you seem to be wandering around like a lost soul."

"I had a slight headache," lied John, "and came out to get a little fresh air."

"Good stunt," approved the doctor. "You lead a pretty sedentary life, and exercise is good for you. How is Mrs. Winter?"

"Oh, I think she's all right now." John shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

"Don't allow anything to worry or excite her, Mr. Winter," Dr. Hamilton urged earnestly. "Her nerves and heart won't stand it. Well, good night. I'm going to get a cup of cocoa and go to bed."

"Good night," answered John. "I think I'll turn in too." And he made his way toward home.

Letting himself in through the front entrance, John found both living room and dining room dark.

"Where's Mrs. Merwent?" he queried of Katy, who came in after locking the kitchen door and windows.

"Why, she done went to bed, Mr. Winter, right after you all went out."

As he ascended the stairs, he saw through the transom of Lucy's door that her light was burning. He had been sleeping in Jim's room for some time past, and now made his way
toward it. As he was opposite Lucy's door he heard her call softly.

"Why don't you come in, John?" she asked.

He halted and, after a slight hesitation, turned the handle of the lock and entered. Lucy was sitting on the edge of the bed braiding her hair. She smiled pityingly at his troubled face.

"I heard you go out," she said. "I expect you had a disagreeable time, didn't you? What did she say?"

"Why, I had a talk with Nannie," John parried somewhat uncertainly, "and she has agreed to—to—not to—interfere in the running of the house, and to—well, you know—cut out the kind of things that get on your nerves. I thought that if she would quit worrying you," he went on rapidly, "that it would be more—more, well, more considerate and—better, not to actually put her out of the house, at least not without any warning." He rattled the keys in his pocket, avoiding Lucy's gaze. "Of course if she continues to—to—that is, I mean if you don't want her at all, we can later gradually—and—"

"And you didn't dare tell her to go?" Lucy sprang to her feet. Her loose hair flowing down from her pale face gave her a ghost-like appearance.

"Now, Lucy," pleaded John, his eyes meeting hers for an instant and then falling, "I really don't think we ought to—" His voice died away.

Lucy gathered up some clothing from the bed and walked past him into the hall. A second later he heard the door of Jim's room shut and the key turn.

John went twice to the locked door, but did not knock. Finally he went to bed in Lucy's room. He lay restless for a long time. Once he imagined he could hear Lucy sobbing, and at length he rose to investigate. He could distinguish nothing but Nannie's gentle snoring, and returned to bed.

After midnight he fell into a sound sleep.
XXX

When John awoke it was late and he hastened to dress. On reaching the lower hall he found the front door open. Mrs. Merwent stood on the porch staring up and down the street.

"Where in the world is Lucy?" she began. "I heard her go to Mr. Sprague's room last night, but the door was open this morning when I went past to go down to the kitchen."

John had a frightened expression.

"She must have gone out for an early walk," suggested Nannie, after a minute's time. "She used to do such things often when she was a girl, whenever she got angry."

"It looks like it was going to rain, too," commented John worriedly.

He reentered the hall and took his hat from the stand.

"Did you have a quarrel last night?" Nannie catechised in a matter of fact way.

"No," he denied shortly.

"Well, come on in, John. Don't go out now. Wait a minute." He had made a motion toward the door. "Eat something first. She'll probably be back before we finish."

He hesitated, turning his hat in his hands.

"Come on," she coaxed. "There's nothing to worry about." Then, as he vacillated, she caught hold of his arm. "I'll give you some coffee right away. The waffles won't be fit to eat if you let them get cold, and Katy has already put them on the table. You can go and look for Lucy afterwards. She's not gone far."

As they turned to go in Dimmie appeared on the stairs in his night clothes.

"I want my breakfast," he clamored. "Where's Mamma? She ain't in her room."
“Mamma will be back in a little while, Jimmie,” said Mrs. Merwent soothingly. “Come on and I’ll give you your breakfast.”

Lucy was in the train bound for the city. She sat staring straight before her at the back of the next car seat. There were very few people going to town so early, and no one was seated beside her. Her lips moved as the train sped on.

“Jim is the only one,” she repeated over and over. She was, if possible, paler than ever, and her eyes shone with a peculiar light.

At the station she boarded an electric car that passed the apartment house where Jim lived. She and John had been there several times together. In front of her sat a little boy in a wide sailor hat, and on the same seat was a middle-aged woman. The boy evinced all a child’s interest in his surroundings, and at length, turning around, wriggled to his knees and smiled up into Lucy’s face. His blue eyes, bobbed hair, and fresh color really suggested Dimmie, and to Lucy, in her overwrought state, the resemblance was startling.

“I can’t! Oh, I can’t do it!” she murmured passionately, to the child’s intense surprise.

His eyes opened wide and he stopped smiling, half frightened as she bent over and kissed his cheek. The middle-aged woman jerked him back into the seat and scrutinized Lucy suspiciously. Lucy rang the bell and descended from the car at the next corner.

“I’ll go back! I’ll go back!” she whimpered, as a punished child submits to an angry parent.

It had begun to drizzle. She was unmindful of the rain falling on her hat and of her bedraggled skirts. Tears rolled down her cheeks and fell with the rain drops to the pavement. She walked unsteadily and her breast heaved. Reaching the station she took the next train to Rosedene.

Midway between the station and the house she met John, who was striding along quickly, and anxiously scanning the street up and down.

“Where in the world have you been, Lucy? I’ve been wor-
ried almost crazy!” he exclaimed pettishly, coming up to her.
Staring straight before her, she did not answer or pause.
John followed her to the house, glancing furtively, from time
to time, at her immobile profile.
“Lucy! What in the world do you go out without telling
anybody for?” cried Nannie who had been waiting in the
hall. “It’s been raining, too. John and I were nervous about
you.”
Without replying, Lucy proceeded upstairs. Dimmie ran
through the upper hall to meet her.
“Hello, Mamma!” he called. “I thought you’d runned
away. Nannie dressed me.”
Lucy caught him in her arms and went into her room, lock-
ing the door. Pulling him down beside her on the bed, she
burst into a terrifying paroxysm of weeping. Dimmie soon
began to cry also, from fright, and Lucy grew calmer.
“Oh, little son, little son!” she moaned again and again.
Soon Dimmie slipped to the floor and began to play with
her work box, while she remained in the same position, utterly
exhausted.
“It’s past time for you to go to Mrs. Hamilton’s, dear,” she
observed finally, looking at the alarm clock on the table by
the bed, and, at the same time, rising.
She brushed his hair and brought his hat from the ward-
robe.
“Kiss Mother.”
Dimmie obeyed, then clattered down the stairs.
Once alone, Lucy rearranged her hair carefully, put on a
fresh house dress, and descended to the living room.
John was walking up and down when Lucy appeared. They
could hear Nannie in the dining room instructing Katy re-
garding luncheon. The windows were open and the breeze
that stirred the curtains smelled of the rain and of some
aromatic weed that grew high and thick in the adjoining
meadow.
“You’ll miss your train, John,” Lucy suggested gently as she
entered the room. She had regained her usual composure.
John consulted his watch.
"It's gone long ago," he replied moodily.
"Well, you can catch the next one if you start at once." Lucy picked up the small clock that stood beside Nannie's metronome on the piano. "Go on," she continued as he hesitated. "There's no need for your staying."
"Well, Lucy, if you're going to do things like this at a moment's notice, how can I——?"
"I'm not going to do anything more," she returned calmly. "Go on to the office. You needn't worry about me any more."
"Well, if I was certain that you——"
"You can be certain," assured Lucy quickly.
"Well, good-bye, then." John moved slowly toward the hall.
"Good-bye, John," Lucy answered.
The front door had scarcely closed after him when Nannie came in from the dining room.
"I was just giving Katy orders about luncheon, Lucy," remarked Nannie suavely, "but of course if you want something different you can tell her and it will be all right."
"It's all right as it is, Mamma," said Lucy.
Mrs. Merwent raised her eyebrows.
"Well! I'm glad you've started to call me by my right name." Lucy did not speak and Nannie continued virtuously.
"It's just as you say about luncheon, Lucy. You are the mistress. I'm sure I don't want to do or say anything that will make unpleasantness. John has enough to worry about without us disagreeing. I wish we could get along without so many misunderstandings, Lucy. I'm sure I do my part."
"I wish so too, Mamma." Lucy's tone was free from irritation or sarcasm.
"Well, Lucy, maybe we can from now on. I know nobody tries harder or wants more to have things pleasant than I do."
"Did you notice where my mending was put, Mamma?" Lucy inquired after a moment in the same propitiatory manner.
"Wait a minute. I think it's under that flower stand."
BLIND MICE

Nannie brightened appreciably. "Did you find it?" she called back, on her way to the kitchen.

"Oh, yes. Here it is. Lucy gave a trembling sigh and seated herself.

At almost the same moment that Lucy took up her sewing Jim was walking slowly down the boulevard, his fists in his coat pockets and his eyes fixed on the ground.

He did not notice Miss Storms's car until it was drawn up to the kerb beside him, almost within reach.

She opened the door and leaned out.

"Get in, Jim. I want to talk to you a little," she called.
Jim obeyed without a word.

"Where were you going?" she asked, shaking hands with him.

"Nowhere in particular," he answered.

Miss Storms gave an order through the speaking trumpet to her chauffeur, and the car started slowly.

"Jim, you're a good boy," she began.

"I'd rather have you think so than almost anyone," he replied with a slight smile.

"But you're not very deep," she continued, smiling back at him.

"That's no news," he returned.

"I've been thinking of Lucy night and day lately. It's up to you to straighten this thing out, Jim. I've tried and I can't."

Jim stared at the passing vehicles for several moments before he spoke.

"I know what you mean, Miss Storms. It's no go. I've tried too, and only balled things all up." He looked straight at her an instant, then glanced away once more, coloring painfully.

"But I'm helpless, Jim."

"So am I."

"Just wait a second." Miss Storms touched his sleeve with her gloved fingers. "It isn't just that Lucy's mother thinks I've aided and abetted Ellen Low in stealing her husband. The trouble is that I'm not a man."
Jim's smile was wry.
"Being a man wouldn't help you any, Miss Storms." He fumbled a tassel on the window curtain at his side. "I've tried to help Lucy all I could—and John," he added.
Miss Storms scrutinized him with kindly eyes. He grew red to his hair.
"You poor boy!" she said at length, squeezing his hand. "Do you know, I'm inclined to fall in love with you myself."
"Miss Storms," he stammered, "that is—I'm afraid you don't—"
"I'm afraid I do." She contradicted him affectionately, releasing him and turning to the window. "Do you want to smoke?" she resumed abruptly.
"I'm afraid I'll contaminate your cushions and curtains," he objected.
"I wish they never had anything worse than you and your pipe around them!" Her expression was whimsical.
Jim lit his pipe.
"You're a bad strategist, Jim," she went on. "What is needed is attack and not defence. And Jim," she laid her hand on his arm again, "we must save things as they are."
"I understand." He nodded. "You needn't be afraid of me now." He did not see the pity in her eyes at the "now." "I don't know what more I can do—either good or harm," he supplemented.
"You can do everything—nearly."
"I don't see what you mean, Miss Storms."
The ironical lines about her mouth deepened.
"Nobody sees," she retorted almost impatiently. "That's just it. Jim, I want you to memorize something. It may do you good."
"What is it?" Jim looked puzzled.
Miss Storms held up one finger as though speaking to a child, and repeated gravely,

"Three blind mice,
See how they run.
They all run after the farmer's wife."
She cut off their tails with a carving knife.
Did you ever see such fools in your life,
As three blind mice?"

Jim regarded her with a curious expression.
"That’s it," she ended. "There’s nothing more that could be said."
"We’re blind mice, all right," Jim remarked without spirit, as if to himself.
"Poor boy!" Miss Storms spoke simply, almost with tenderness.
"She’s cut more than our tails off," he growled huskily.
Miss Storms laid her hand softly on his.
"Miss Storms, if you'll tell me what to do, I'll do it." His voice had a new note.
"A flank movement is the best, Jim. You must tell Lucy’s mother that you are going to Russellville and will see the Professor Walsh she is going to marry."
"Oh!" There was understanding and admiration in Jim’s voice.
"You might mention Minnie Sheldon, too, and I’ll find out a few more from some old letters of Ellen Low’s I have. As I told you, I am helpless on account of Ellen and Arthur Merwent. Anything I might do would make things worse, but you are exactly in the position to succeed, Jim, and it will be easy."
"I wonder where Lucy’s mother could go," he mused.
"Ruthlessness appears to be a purely female trait." Miss Storms’ half humorous air was full of bitterness.
"Oh, I’ll do it all right," Jim promised. "Don’t you worry."
"I won’t. I’ll call you up and give you the ammunition early in the morning."
"We’re only two blocks from the office. Let me out here," requested Jim, observing the buildings. "Good-bye."
"Good-bye, Jim." They shook hands warmly.

John’s expression as he came into the house in the evening was worried and uncertain.
He had left the office a little earlier than usual and reached Rosedene on a train which arrived there before the customary hour. He found Lucy, Dimmie, and Nannie sitting in the dining room. Lucy was reading aloud to Dimmie from a book of fairy tales and Mrs. Merwent was embroidering some underwear she had purchased on the previous day in consultation with Miss Powell. As John entered both women ceased their employment.

"Did you find everything all right at the office?" Lucy inquired with her usual simple manner.

"And are you all tired out, John?" added Nannie, smiling at him.

"No, I’m not tired," he answered. "I was worried, that’s all." As he spoke, he seated himself and lit a cigarette.

"Don’t worry, John," Lucy said, drawing Dimmie to her side.

"No," supplemented Mrs. Merwent. "There’s nothing to worry about, you poor boy."

"Well, I’m glad if there isn’t." He drew a long breath.

"I’m going down town again in the morning," Nannie continued a moment later. "I just must get some more of this lingerie. It’s perfectly lovely. I’m going to show you part of what I bought after dinner, John." She laughed coquettishly.

"Anyone would think you were making a trousseau," he commented jealously.

Nannie became suddenly serious.

"No, John. Not for the present, at least."

There was a brief pause.

"I see Carter’s are selling out. You might add to your collection there, Mamma." Lucy’s hands moved uneasily over Dimmie’s hair as she talked. As she turned toward the child the light falling on her face revealed its haggard outlines.

No one responded to her remark. She glanced up and caught John’s gaze fixed on her mother. He drew another sigh of evident relief.

"Do you know," he began with something of his old ex-
pensive manner, pushing his hair back from his forehead, "I went to see the sculptures of that new Polish artist today at lunch time. He is the beginning of a new movement away from the Rodin worship of sex and emotion in art."

"I don't think they ought to allow some statues to be exhibited," declared Nannie.

"It isn't so much the moral or ethical objection that influences me," John elaborated, "but, as I have said before, I don't believe in the emotional and literary in art. The artist's business is to create beauty, not to comment upon it. The public is intelligent enough to understand and appreciate real artistic achievement, without tricks to call their attention to it. You really ought to see the exhibit, Lucy."

"I should like to," said Lucy encouragingly.

"And I too," seconded Nannie.

"Well, we'll all go," he proposed.

John talked much during dinner. When it was over and Lucy had accompanied Dimmie up to bed, Nannie turned to John sweetly.

"I'll sing to you a little, John," she suggested.

"Yes, Nannie," he acquiesced. He stretched his arms over his head in a gesture of well being. "I feel in the mood for music tonight," he added comfortably.

Nannie seated herself at the piano. Lighting a cigarette, John reclined in the Morris chair beside her.

The next day John whistled as he walked to the station.

"Good morning," he called as he entered the office.

Jim was bending over a filing case and looked up with slight surprise.

"Good morning," he said. "How is everybody at your house?"

"Oh, everybody's well," John answered, and, picking up his mail, began to whistle again. "Nannie is coming down town on the nine-thirty to do some shopping," he observed as he was opening a letter a moment later.

Jim glanced up again, but was silent.

The two worked on without further conversation until about nine o'clock, when Jim rose. He reached for his hat.
"When will you be back?" John inquired, tilting his chair toward the wall and opening his cigarette case.

"Not till after lunch," Jim informed him. "I'm going several places, Layard's among them."

On reaching the street, however, Jim boarded a car from which he descended near the station that was the terminus for suburban trains from Rosedene, and when Mrs. Merwent emerged from the building he was one of the first pedestrians she encountered.

"How do you do, Mrs. Merwent?" He greeted her pleasantly, raising his hat as he spoke. "Aren't you lost in this great city all alone?"

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Sprague?" cooed Nannie, shaking hands. "What a pleasant surprise! I thought you were at the office with John."

"I was until a few minutes ago," he explained, turning and walking beside her. "I'm out hunting for lath and cement now, but I'm glad to have run across you. I've been wanting to have a little talk with you for a long time."

"Yes?" responded Nannie, scrutinizing him sharply from under her hat.

"Are you in a hurry now?" continued Jim. "Can't I take you somewhere where we can sit down and have a soft drink?"

"Why, thank you, Mr. Sprague," she declined, "but I am rather in a hurry. I am anxious to get back to Lucy, you know. She depends so on me, and just now she's not as well as usual."

"Is she worse?" Jim half halted.

"No. Just about as usual." Nannie took note of his perturbation. "I think the summers here are trying on her. I wish she could get away to the country for a couple of months."

Jim quickened his pace.

"Well, of course I don't want to detain you, Mrs. Merwent, but what I want to say won't take more than ten minutes. Suppose we walk about in this little park a moment. It's almost empty and we'll be practically alone."
"Why, Mr. Sprague," Nannie laughed nervously, "you almost frighten me. You talk like a—conspirator!"

"Don't be afraid. I'm not dangerous. Here, let's go this way." And he led her from the street into a shady promenade.

Nannie, hesitating slightly at first, smiled and conversed about the weather, the occasional people they met in the course of their walk, and other irrelevant topics.

"Now what was it you wanted to tell me, Mr. Sprague?" she insisted suddenly as they neared the center of the park.

"Well, it is this, Mrs. Merwent. I am going to Russellville."

Nannie, of course, could not change her artificial color, but her eyes and mouth opened their widest.

"On business?" she inquired uncomfortably.

"No. I am going to see Professor Walsh, and Mr. and Mrs. Sheldon, and Mr. Blair, and Judge Dodd, and several other friends of yours."

Nannie sat down on a bench by the path. Jim seated himself on the same bench, a little distance from her. His brown eyes appeared yellowish in the sunlight as they looked straight into hers.

"Wha—what for?" she faltered in a voice she strove in vain to control.

"I want to talk to them."

"Why, you don't know any of them," objected Mrs. Merwent perplexedly, her eyes falling before his.

"No. But I shall take letters of introduction from Professor Walsh's cousin and others—letters which will enable me to know them and to have their confidence."

"Professor Walsh's cousin?" interpolated Nannie, her voice unsteady. "How did you know about Professor Walsh? I never heard of his cousin. Where does he live?"

"Here in Chicago."

"Why, Professor Walsh never told me," she confessed blankly. "He never even said he had a relative near here. Who is he?"

"He's a lawyer. He was consultant to Mr. Merwent's attorney in the divorce case against you. Professor Walsh himself gave Mr. Merwent the letter of introduction."
Nannie's eyes opened even wider, if possible, at this. "But what are you going for? What are you going to do?" she continued.

"I'm going to talk to your friends, Mrs. Merwent."

"You're trying to scare me." Nannie made a feeble attempt at bravado. "What have I got to do with all this? You have nothing to tell my friends about me."

"Yes, I have," Jim asserted vigorously.

"What?" demanded Mrs. Merwent, her hands shaking as she played with her purse and parasol handle.

"I'm going to ask them, especially Professor Walsh, if they approve of what you are doing to your daughter's home."

Nannie gazed at him defiantly.

"What am I doing?"

"We probably shouldn't agree as to that, Mrs. Merwent, but I shall give them my version of it."

Nannie was visibly working up her anger.

"This is pure spite, Mr. Sprague. You have never liked me, because I saw through your weakness for Lucy, but you can't frighten me. I suppose she's put you up to this! I can tell my story, too, and we'll see who comes out of it best."

"Now, you're bluffing, Mrs. Merwent, and it won't go. I am quite ready to believe that you would befoul your daughter's name to try to clear yourself, but you know as well as I do that it wouldn't save you. In any case your daughter could not possibly be in a worse situation than she is, and, if you want war, we'll leave it to your friends and hers to decide. She hasn't the slightest idea that I am doing this. I think that's all I wanted to say, Mrs. Merwent." And Jim rose.

"Have you written to Professor Walsh?" inquired Nannie weakly.

"Not yet," Jim admitted grimly.

"It will be a fine thing for a man to do, going around talking about a woman behind her back!"

"We won't discuss that, Mrs. Merwent."

"I don't know—I don't understand what you mean by all this, Mr. Sprague. One thing is sure, I shall tell Lucy and John about your threats."
"Do!" Jim dared, turning to go.
"Wait a minute, Mr. Sprague." Nannie was staring about aimlessly in every direction. "I—I don't know how long I shall stay in Chicago. Of course your insinuations are ridiculous, but I hate to hurt Lucy's feelings, especially when she is already in such a nervous state, and make trouble between you and John. So far as I am concerned you could go to Russellville every day, but Lucy is very dear to me. She is my only child. If you made trouble for me remember it would involve her." As Mrs. Merwent stared at Jim tears rose to her eyes but they did not altogether veil her look of hate and bafflement.

"I'm not going for a week, Mrs. Merwent," Jim told her inexorably. Then, raising his hat, he left her sitting on the bench.

In the station, before taking the Rosedene train, Mrs. Merwent lingered for twenty minutes or more in the neighborhood of the telegraph office. Finally, with sudden decision she approached the desk and dispatched a message.
XXXI

When Nannie alighted from the train at Rosedene she walked up the street to the Winters' house with a more rapid stride than was her custom, and showed signs of nervousness and impatience while she waited for Katy to open the front door.

Entering the hall, she almost ran up the stairs. In her room she removed her gloves but left her hat on, and, without even glancing in the mirror, sat down to write a letter.

The missive was quickly finished and addressed to Professor Walsh. She then took up her gloves once more and descended to the street, dropping the envelope in the nearest post box. After noting the time of the next mail collection, she returned slowly to the house.

Katy appeared somewhat surprised at being summoned to the door by Mrs. Merwent a second time. Nannie made no remark.

On reaching her room she now removed hat and gloves and carefully touched up her rouge, washed her hands, and repolished her nails. Making her way to the dining room she encountered Lucy.

"You're back early, Mamma," Lucy commented when she saw Nannie. "Did you get the underwear you wanted?"

"No," sighed her mother sadly. "It was all gone when I got to the store, so I came right back." She stared at Lucy's hair, which was arranged with more care than usual, and at the white organdie dress which was only donned occasionally. "You must be expecting Mr. Sprague out tonight, Lucy," she gibed, viciously. "Well, don't accuse me of being the only one weak enough to care about my looks."

"I don't, Mamma." There was a barely perceptible tremor in Lucy's voice, but her manner was as calm and unswerving as ever.

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Mrs. Merwent walked to the window and stood gazing at the gnarled elm tree and Dimmie's dangling swing. She passed her hand over her forehead several times and tapped her foot uneasily on the floor.

"Don’t you feel well?" Lucy inquired at last.

Nannie turned and her eyes were full of tears.

"Oh, Lucy," she cried piteously, "you haven’t meant all the terrible things you’ve said, have you? We’ve got nobody in the world but each other, and—it hurts me so for there to be any kind of hard feelings!"

Lucy hesitated only an instant.

"I don’t think there are any hard feelings, Mamma," she replied. Her voice was low. Her eyes rested on Dimmie, who was looking at a picture book as he lay stretched on his stomach on the floor beside her.

Nannie came over and knelt by her daughter.

"Kiss me, Lucy! Oh, Lucy, I couldn’t bear to go away so misjudged and——" Mrs. Merwent broke off her speech with a half sob.

Dimmie, laying aside his book, sat up and regarded the two with interest.

"You aren’t going away, Mamma," Lucy said, trying to make her tone matter of fact, and at the same time submitting to her mother’s kiss. Her breast heaved and two vivid spots of color tinged her cheeks.

"Oh, Lucy, you don’t want me to go! Say you don’t want me to go!" Nannie implored.

"Why, no-o, Mamma," Lucy answered reluctantly, moistening her lips. "I thought that was all settled," she added. "I didn’t know that——" She stopped speaking and regarded her mother with eager surprise.

Nannie rose to her feet.

"I have made up my mind to go. Of course I’m glad you’ll miss me, and I shall leave without any hard feelings. But I’ve been so misunderstood, and now that I——" She clasped and unclasped her hands.

"But where can you go? You can’t go back to Cousin Minnie." Lucy’s tone was strange. She caressed Dimmie’s hair with trembling fingers and avoided her mother’s glance.
“No, Lucy. I certainly couldn’t accept Minnie Sheldon’s charity again, after the way she has treated me.”

Lucy stood up too. Her eyes were very bright. Involuntarily she put one hand on her bosom. Nannie watched her.

“Oh, Lucy, I want to be loved! I want to be loved!” Nannie protested suddenly, dissolving into tears again.

Placing one arm about her mother’s shoulders, Lucy’s eyes sought Dimmie across Nannie’s bent head.

“So do I,” she murmured fervently, almost as if to herself.

“What makes you look so nice?” Dimmie asked Lucy suddenly.

Mrs. Merwent lifted her head.

“You’re not glad I’m going away! Oh, Jimmie, you don’t want Nannie to go, do you?”

He jumped up and ran to her.

“When Nannie goes away on the cars, do you want to go with her? I’ve got some more chocolate drops upstairs,” she whispered.

“You bet I would!” he replied enthusiastically. “Where are they?”

“Don’t give him candy just before meals, Mamma,” Lucy requested gently.

“Oh, it won’t hurt this time. I’m going upstairs and I’ll get them.”

“I’m so afraid it’ll make him sick,” remonstrated Lucy.

“Here, Son, wait till after dinner. Don’t eat them now. Be a good boy.”

“No,” returned Dimmie rebelliously, backing away from his mother. “I want ’em now. Please get ’em, Nannie.”

“We must mind Mamma or she’ll be angry. Because I’m going away, you know, Jimmie. Wait a minute, dear. Dinner’ll soon be ready, and I’ll take you on the train with me if you’re a good boy.”

Ddimmie compromised without further parley.

When John arrived Lucy greeted him with suppressed excitement, but he seemed to observe nothing unusual. Dinner was served. Nannie entered the dining room smiling mournfully, and placed a rose at his plate.

“Did you get your shopping done?” he queried.
“No,” she responded. “I didn’t get what I wanted and came back early.”

After a few moment’s silence John laid down his knife and fork.

“What’s the matter, Nannie? You’re not eating anything,” he commented.

“Mamma ain’t eatin’ nothin’ neither,” observed Dimmie.

“Yes, I am.” Lucy hastily took up her knife and fork.

“Why, I’m eating as much as usual, John.” Nannie resumed her meal. “You know I never eat very heartily. Did you have a hard day at the office?”

“No, indeed,” John declared. “I’m feeling fine. When shall we go and see the sculptures?”

Mrs. Merwent was neglecting her food again, and seemed not to hear. She wiped her eyes furtively.

“Why don’t you answer, Nannie?” he insisted reproachfully. “I asked you when you wanted to go and see the sculptures. And you aren’t eating again. What’s the matter? Are you dreaming?”

“No, John,” she sighed, “I’m not dreaming. What was it you said?”

John glanced from Nannie to Lucy and frowned.

“When do you want to go and see the sculptures I spoke of?” he repeated with less enthusiasm.

“Why—I don’t know. Let’s see—— When had you rather go, Lucy?”

“Any day that is convenient for John.”

“Well, let’s see——” Nannie regarded her plate abstractedly.

“Would day after tomorrow do?” suggested John, still covertly scrutinizing the two women.

“Why, yes—let’s see—day after tomorrow——” Mrs. Merwent’s eyes and voice trailed off into space again.

“I’ll declare, Nannie,” remarked John with some irritation, “you act as though you were a thousand miles away. Are you worried about anything?”

“No-o. That is—nothing in particular,” she amended.

“Well, then, shall we settle on day after tomorrow?”

“Why, yes, day after tomorrow will suit me.”
“Well, then, you two come down to the office after lunch and we’ll go.” John took up his fork again.

The door bell rang and Katy came from the hall with a telegram in her hand. Nannie reached for it, but John, unaware of her motion, took the envelope from the servant. He read the address and passed it across the table.

“It’s for you, Nannie.”

“Thank you.” She dropped the envelope in her plate and picked it up again.

“Why don’t you read it?”

“I don’t like telegrams!” interjected Lucy. “I’m afraid of them. Maybe something’s the matter with Cousin Minnie.”

“Nonsense!” ejaculated John. “It’s probably something very simple. Read it and see. Where is it from?”

“It’s from R-Russellville,” Nannie stammered, opening it with uncertain movements and tearing the message half across in the process.


“Who is it from?” insisted John.

“It’s—it’s from—it’s from Professor Walsh,” Mrs. Mer went informed them unsteadily, reading the telegram.

“What’s the matter with him?” sneered John.

“Why, he—you know he—his interest in me—” Nannie began with a changed air of mingled relief and importance.

“Does he have to send telegrams to tell you about it?” demanded John contemptuously. “Can’t he wait for the mails? He’s gotten along with letters pretty well, so far!”

Lucy was observing her mother strangely.

“He’s been trying his best for weeks and weeks to get me to say when—when—to name—to decide—” Nannie hesitated, regarding John beseechingly.

“To name the day, eh!” snorted John, ignoring the look intended for him.

Lucy sat tense in her chair.

“Yes, John,” Nannie spoke almost apologetically, “that’s what he wants. He—he’s very persistent. He wants me to come to Russellville at once.”

“Humph! It’s a funny notion to get all of a sudden. He’s been patient enough until now.”
“John!” Mrs. Merwent’s voice quavered.
His glance encountered hers reluctantly.
Lucy was the personification of palpitating expectation.
The color flamed in her cheeks and her eyes were like scintillating stars.
“When do you think you will go, Mamma?” she asked, taking Dimmie’s hand in hers and leaning forward as she spoke.
“Why, I don’t know. I——” Nannie began evasively.
John watched Lucy an instant. Becoming aware of his scrutiny, she turned her head and their glances met. John’s lip curled.
“Well, I’ll be damned!” he exclaimed, throwing down his napkin and pushing his chair back from the table.
Lucy said nothing, but the color left her face. Her grip on Dimmie’s hand tightened. John rose.
“Of all the contemptible scheming and plotting! If you were determined to insult your mother why did you have to do it behind my back? If we have to fight, let us at least be decent about it, and fight in the open!” John’s tone was scathing and with each word his voice reached a higher pitch. He stared at Lucy scornfully.
“What do you mean, John?” she began in a bewildered manner. Then she exclaimed indignantly, “Oh, how dare you!” She rose. One hand still clutched Dimmie.
“Now, John, Lucy didn’t mean——” Nannie, showing her fright, spoke soothingly.
“Oh, I know, Nannie! ‘Lucy didn’t mean!’ She don’t want you out of the house, I suppose! She hasn’t been driving you and me half crazy ever since you came with her suspicions and jealousy!”
“Remember what I told you, John Winter!” Lucy warned, her eyes steely.
“Oh, I’ll remember!” John’s gaze was lowered for an instant. Then his ire came to the aid of his courage. “I’ll remember, but you can’t threaten me into forgetting my self respect!” he declared defiantly.
“I don’t know what you are talking about. The news that Mamma was going was as much a surprise to me as it was to you.”
“John—” Nannie went no further.

“Oh, I know you didn’t have anything to do with the telegram, but that doesn’t alter what I say.” He glared at Lucy.

“I saw how you were looking at Nannie, as if you could hardly wait for the moment to come when you could get her out of the house!”

“Now, John, surely when I’m willing to forgive Lucy—” Nannie’s air was soft and uncertain.

“Come, Dimmie!” Lucy almost jerked the whimpering child from his chair, and, holding his hand, led him into the kitchen.

She left her own yard by the gate which adjoined Dr. Hamilton’s premises.

“Come right in, Mrs. Winter,” Mrs. Hamilton’s maid-of-all work greeted them at the back door. “Mrs. Hamilton is in the dining room.” And the girl led Lucy through the kitchen.

“May I come in?” petitioned Lucy in an unsteady voice at the threshold of the dining room.

“Dear me, yes,” Mrs. Hamilton said encouragingly.

She was rocking Stella to sleep and did not rise but held out her hand. Lucy seized it.

“I just wanted to sit with you a little while, Mrs. Hamilton.”

“I’m so glad you came.” Mrs. Hamilton reached her unoccupied arm around Stella and patted Lucy’s hand. “Draw up the other rocking chair. The Doctor is out on another maternity case and I’m all alone again. I was thinking about you. How is your mother?”

Without answering, Lucy placed a rocking chair near Mrs. Hamilton and took Dimmie into her lap.

As soon as she and John were alone, Mrs. Merwent, who had risen also during the altercation between John and Lucy, reseated herself at the table in silence and wiped her eyes with her handkerchief.

“Won’t you sit down, John?” she urged compassionately.

Without speaking, he complied. He lighted another cigarette and, when Katy entered, asked for a second cup of coffee.

“Is Mrs. Winter in the kitchen?” Nannie inquired of the negress.
"No, Miss Nannie. She done went out de back way. I 'specs she's over to Mis' Hamilton's."

"Oh, John, if there was anything else I could do I wouldn't need to leave you," faltered Nannie sadly after Katy had returned to the kitchen. "I was driven to this because Lucy has made no other course possible!"

"Driven to it!" echoed John savagely. "Lucy's got nothing to say about it! What did you say to make that fellow send you such a telegram?"

"Nothing, John." Nannie gazed at him with swimming eyes. He rumbled his hair viciously. "You dear boy," she murmured with tears in her voice.

John look at her sceptically. His lip quivered slightly.

"Really, didn't you fix this thing up, Nannie?" he asked with a wounded, distrustful air. "I never believed you'd lead me on into thinking things were getting better while you were planning to——" He could say no more. He crumpled his napkin into a ball and turned his face away, placing one hand to his eyes.

"John!" Nannie reproached, "do you suppose it's been easy for me to seem lighthearted when I realized that I must give up—so much—that which means so much to me?"

"Then why not cut it out? You must cut it out! It's absurd! It's ridiculous! I won't believe it. Why only this morning—— I don't see how you can torture me like this, Nannie. You know you've come here to stay with us always. Why you're a part of my home—part of my life, Nannie! Do you think I'm going to submit to all this tamely, to please Lucy! She'll find out I'm not the weak, soft proposition she imagines. We'll fight it out and see who's running things in this house. Never you fear, Nannie, I won't have you shoved out in the street. We'll stand together and Lucy can rant and rave all she pleases. By God, I won't have it! I'll fight it to the last ditch! You're her own mother, and if she doesn't realize that she owes anything to you, I do, and I'll make her—make her stand up to her obligations whether she wants to or not. She'll either accept my standards in this household or—if she's going to have me she's got to——I'm the master here whether she likes it or not! She evidently
thought when she married me that I was a man without any backbone, exactly the opposite of Jim Sprague! I'll show her! I'll show her, I tell you! She shan't tear you away from me, Nannie! She—” Almost inarticulate with angry emotion, he was striding up and down the room. He halted near Nannie's chair, clenching and unclenching his fists as he stared away from her.

“John, dear,” Nannie's voice was subdued, “we must talk reasonably.”

He snorted.

“I suppose that means bend to Lucy’s will!” he interjected bitterly.

Nannie was patient.

“No, dear. But don’t you see, John, what staying under the circumstances would mean? It puts me in a position—Lucy will stop at nothing, John. I think she's capable of making us trouble with other people. I’ve—I’ve—” Here Nannie looked at the floor, embarrassed. “I’ve heard her go so far as to hint that she'd write to Cousin Minnie and Professor Walsh and—and old friends of the family like Judge Dodd and other people!”

“Professor Walsh!” John almost roared. “Let her write to Professor Walsh! I’ll go to Russellville and break his neck if necessary!”

“I know, John,” Nannie was fearful now, “but that wouldn’t save me, if slurs were cast on my—my reputation. I’m a misjudged woman, John, and after Arthur’s heartlessness has placed me in such a false position I can’t afford to risk such a thing.”

John regarded her undecidedly.

“Don’t you think I’m able to take care of you, Nannie?” he asked in a trembling voice.

“You would do all you could, John,” Nannie’s voice broke too, “but some things are beyond your power.”

“And do you mean to say that we have to submit to this because Lucy has the drop on us—that we can’t stop her from stooping to a lot of underhand lying?” he demanded, defiance in his tone.

“Remember she’s done none of this,” Nannie continued.
hastily. "It's only," again she looked away from him, "that
certain things she's said have made me afraid she might.
Anyway—now it's all arranged——"

Katy came in to clear the table and Nannie led the way
into the living room.

"Don't turn on the light," John objected peevishly as she
moved toward the electric switch.

They seated themselves in the dim radiance that filtered in
from the hall.

"Nannie, you've got to give it up," he repeated suddenly.
"Put it off for a month or two anyway," he begged unsteadily.
"If Lucy were different! Oh, John, if Lucy only
would——" She took one of his hands in both of hers.

John's fist clenched.
"I won't forget what she's done to us in a hurry!" he
cried, glancing away from Nannie as he spoke. There was
a cruel edge to his tone.

"It's her abnormal state. Oh, you poor, dear boy! And to
think you must bear all this and that I can't do anything
to ease your burden! I saw this coming, John, and I didn't
dare to tell you what she was forcing me to." Nannie talked
hurriedly. Half sobs broke in on her words.

John bent forward and leaned his brow against the hands
that held his own. There was a long pause.

"How long ago did you decide this?" he demanded, looking
up suddenly and pressing her fingers so that she winced.

"I've been trying to decide a long time, John. You don't
know all Lucy says to me when you're away. I made up my
mind definitely a—a few days ago. The telegram really has
nothing to do with it, though I half expected from what Pro-
fessor Walsh had written that he would send one."

"When are you going?" John went on with painful in-
tensity.

"It's better for me to go right away, dear. I think I'll leave
day after tomorrow."

John withdrew his hand and clasped his bowed head.

"Day after tomorrow!" he repeated, almost groaning. "The
day we were to see the sculptures!" He laughed bitterly.

"Don't, John," begged Nannie. "You frighten me."
Again the two became silent.
"If only you weren't the one to suffer!" Nannie exclaimed at last. "There is so much in our lives that is the same!"
"Yes, Nannie."
"Your attitude toward Lucy is so noble, John! She doesn't realize how much she has to be thankful for in your forbearance. Oh, John, to think that I should be in any way responsible, even innocently, for ruining your life!"
"You're not responsible for what Lucy does, Nannie."
"Oh, John, perhaps later——"
"Yes, yes!" he said eagerly.
"Maybe Lucy won't always be so strange and exacting."
Another pause.
"Nannie!" John's voice was smothered and his breath came quickly. "If you'll only cut out that talk about marrying! I can stand anything but that! I can't stand it, Nannie. I can't stand it! Say you're not going to be married, Nannie?"
She did not answer at once.
"Not—right away, at least, dear boy," she conceded finally, stroking his hair with her free hand.
John lifted his head and sighed deeply.
"Well, Nannie, if you really think it's for the best, I suppose you'll have to go, for the present, at least," he resumed in a different tone.
"Don't you want me to sing to you now, John?" Nannie offered, smiling bravely. "I'll be too tired tomorrow night."
"Yes, sing to me."
Nannie sang *Ouvrez tes yeux*.
When Dr. Hamilton reached home he found Lucy and Dimmie still there. Dimmie was sound asleep. At Lucy's request the Doctor picked the little boy up and carried him through the back way to the Winter home, delivering him into his mother's arms at the kitchen door.
Lucy entered the house softly. As she mounted the stairs with her burden she saw John and Nannie in the living room. They did not observe her and she did not make her presence known.
It was late when they followed her. John found her door locked. All was dark and quiet. He slept in Jim's room.
XXXII

"Shall I stay at home and help you with your trunks?" John offered at breakfast. He seemed depressed and addressed his remarks only to Nannie.

"No, thank you, John," she replied. She gazed at him sympathetically. As a concession to unwontedly early rising she wore a beribboned negligée and a boudoir cap that was very becoming. "It's so good and thoughtful of you to offer, but I can pack my things very well alone. But you mustn't forget to send the express man out early this evening, for I don't want any doubt about the baggage going on the same train with me."

The two spoke as though they were alone. A perfect understanding seemed to exist between them. Lucy did not make a comment.

"Well, I'll go to the office, then," he decided, rising.

"It's time for you to get ready, Dimmie." Lucy turned to the little boy who sat beside her.

"Let him stay at home today, Lucy," proposed Mrs. Merwent.

"Why, he oughtn't to miss a day," Lucy objected.

"Very well, if you dislike my seeing him my last day here!" Nannie assumed her most aggrieved air.

"Let him stay," John ordered shortly.

"All right," acquiesced Lucy without further discussion.

Nannie followed John to the front door where they held a whispered colloquy. When he had gone she went upstairs to begin her packing.

"Lucy!" she called after a few minutes.

Lucy came into the bedroom.

"Will you help me fold these things? I can't do everything alone."

"Of course," Lucy responded impassively, beginning to ar-
range the garments indicated. "Where do you want them put?"

"Well, wait a minute. Give me time to turn around. Not that way, Lucy! If you’re going to mix things all up, you’d better leave it for me to do." Mrs. Merwent’s tone showed increasing irritation. "I might have known you couldn’t bear to do anything for me. I ought to have learned that much this summer. I’ve learned several other things."

"Tell me how you want them done, and I’ll do my best to please you." Lucy’s manner was still composed.

"Oh, don’t try to be a martyr at this late hour, Lucy!" snapped Nannie. "It’s too transparent. You’ve gotten rid of me and so you can afford to be saintly about it. Your Mr. Sprague was very clever but I understand perfectly well now why you went to consult him."

"I haven’t the faintest idea what you mean." Lucy gazed blankly at her mother.

"Oh, no! Of course you haven’t! You know a great deal better than I do. You needn’t lie to me."

Lucy seemed scarcely to heed.

"Let’s not quarrel the last day we are together," she said in a low voice.

"No, ‘let’s not quarrel,’" mocked Nannie. "Let’s sit here and have you crow over me."

"How am I crowing over you?" Lucy inquired almost listlessly.

"You know just as well as I do," accused Mrs. Merwent. "If you think I haven’t seen through the scheme you and your Mr. Sprague have worked from the very beginning, you’re greatly mistaken. But let me tell you one thing, Lucy. You haven’t got as much to feel jubilant over as you think you have."

"I’m sure I don’t know what you mean," reiterated Lucy.

"Well, you’ll see what I mean."

"You’re right that I have nothing to feel jubilant over."

Lucy lifted spiritless eyes to her mother’s face. Nannie turned away.

The two women worked for some time in silence.

"Here, you pack these wash things in the bottom of the other trunk. I want to go over my laces and see if they’re all
here,” instructed Nannie at length. “I suppose Mr. Sprague will begin to come out here twice a week to spend the night again, as soon as I’ve left.”

“Please don’t talk about Mr. Sprague,” requested Lucy dully, beginning the work her mother had ordered.

Nannie’s expression was virtuous.

“Yes! I should think you’d be ashamed to talk about him,” she remarked reprovingly.

“I’m not ashamed of anything,” Lucy’s voice gained involuntary vehemence, “but if you intend talking like this I’m going out of the house.”

“Oh, it’s not necessary, Lucy. It’s not necessary. I’m going out of the house tomorrow, and if you want me to I can go today. I’ll go down town and stay at a hotel as soon as my baggage is ready.”

Lucy continued to pack in silence for several minutes.

“Not that way, Lucy. I showed you once how I wanted them folded,” complained Mrs. Merwent, interrupting the work with an impatient gesture.

“I’m doing the best I can.”

“That’s right! Lose your temper. One would think we might get along without a fuss for one day, especially as I’m going away for I don’t know how long.”

“I’m not quarreling.”

“No, but you’re so hard, Lucy. You don’t seem to have a grain of affection in your heart.”

“I don’t think I’m the only one who’s hard.”

“Why can’t you be like you used to before you left home? I do long for a little affection sometimes. You’re my only child, and I’ve tried so hard.” Nannie ceased her occupation in order to wipe her eyes. “But you are so cold and hostile! Every trifling thing is an excuse for getting angry and hurting me.” Sitting by the trunk, Mrs. Merwent began to weep.

“Oh, Lucy, you are so ungrateful. I overlooked all the past and came here, and—and you’ve treated me so! I’m sure it’s not my fault. If I were at all to blame—if—why, the fact that your husband and even your own child feel kindly toward me shows I’m not. It’s only you. You are so cold and unnatural. I feel sometimes that I haven’t got any child. I’m
all—alone—in the world—" and Nannie hid her face in her hands and sobbed aloud.

Lucy went on laying garments in the trunk.
"You've got Professor Walsh," she said.
"Lucy!" Nannie's tone was eloquent of reproach. "How cruel of you! How cruel—!" The sobs were redoubled. "I don't know—that I—would ever have—thought of marrying—again, if you had been—different," she asserted brokenly.
"How different?"

"Oh, I know it's no use, Lucy," Nannie spoke reproachfully, drying her eyes. "You don't know what a daughter could mean to a mother's heart."

"Yes, I do," affirmed Lucy softly, pausing in her work.

"Well, I hope if you ever have one, she won't misunderstand you as you have me. I know how much the sympathy of my own dear mother meant to me."

Lucy began to lay garments in the trunk again.
"Is there anything else?" she asked after a moment.

"No, but wait a minute. Let's make up. Let's not separate with hard feelings like this." Nannie left the pile of clothes she was sorting and came toward her daughter. "I can't bear to have you hate me," she explained, tears in her eyes again.

"I don't hate you."

"I'm glad." Nannie bent over Lucy. "I shall go away now feeling different. I'm sure by the next time I visit you we will have come to understand each other better."

Lucy hastily scrambled to her feet. Murmuring something about luncheon, she almost ran from the room and down the stairs.

About two o'clock the transfer wagon came and the trunks were loaded into it. Mrs. Merwent's expression became worried as she watched the departing motor truck.

"I'm sure that man won't take them to the right station," she prophesied to Lucy.

"Yes, he will. That's the largest express company in the city. They'll be perfectly safe."

"The man didn't look honest to me, Lucy." But Lucy had left the hall.
Nannie was still at the front door when John opened the gate.

"I came early," he remarked in an undertone as he greeted her.

"Yes. It's our last evening, John," answered Nannie sorrowfully. "I've just been telephoning Miss Powell to say good-bye. She says she's coming to the station in the morning to see me off."

"That's nice," he commented indifferently.

He regarded her careful toilette and the white rose in her belt with melancholy approval.

"I'm all in over this thing, Nannie," he told her, lowering his voice confidentially. His face evidenced his perturbation.

"Dear John! I know!" She squeezed his arm. "Did you tell Mr. Sprague I was going?" she inquired abruptly a little later.

"Yes," answered John.

"What did he say?"

"He said that you had made quite a long visit."

"He didn't say he was coming to the station, did he?"

"No, he didn't say anything else about it."

"Do you know, John, Mr. Sprague hasn't even treated me with common ordinary courtesy since I've been here?"

"Don't you worry, Nannie. He'll hear from me about it, all right. Jim Sprague has changed. He's not the man he used to be at all."

"I don't think he ever was a true friend to you, John."

"Well, I've got my eyes open at last, Nannie—thanks to you."

"Oh, John, if I didn't have to think about how Lucy is treating you. She—she's not—her morbidness is really bad for Jimmie, too. But then you bear everything so nobly. You are—oh, I don't know what to call it! If all men had your patience and forbearance this world would be a very different place for some of us. I appreciate it for her if she don't for herself." There was a catch in Nannie's voice.

"You've had nothing from me you don't deserve, Nannie." John did not look at her as he spoke.

"I've always tried to help you and study your interests,
John. I feel so grateful to you. I'll never forget how kind and good you've been to me. You've been better than anyone else in the world—"

"I don't see how anybody could help being good to you, Nannie."

At this juncture Lucy appeared on the stairs with Dimmie. Almost simultaneously Katy thrust her head through the dining room doorway.

"Dinnah's ready, Miss Nannie. Kin I put it on de table?" she inquired.

"Don't ask me, Katy," said Nannie peevishly. "Mrs. Winter is your mistress. You'll have to ask her."

"Yes, Katy, you may serve dinner," Lucy put in quietly.

Just as the family were seating themselves there was a clap of thunder. Katy waddled from one window to another, lowering the sashes. As she closed the last a flurry of rain spattered on the glass.

"Ugh! Lucy, I must say your Chicago climate is awful," remarked Mrs. Merwent. "I wouldn't live here for any consideration on earth. I don't see how you stand it. I can't understand why so many people stay here when there are other places fit to live in."

"Lots of them can't help themselves."

"Well, at least I should think that you'd want to live in a little more accessible part of town. It's practically impossible to get down to the shopping district unless the weather happens to be good."

"We can't afford to live anywhere closer in."

"Maybe we can some time," interposed John. "I've often thought we ought to try to get a place that was nearer to where respectable people live. Jim Sprague is the one who wished this proposition on us."

"We were as much in for it as he was," Lucy stated coldly.

"May be you were," retorted John sharply.

"And I certainly think, Lucy, that you have the most unfriendly and unattractive set of neighbors. That Mrs. Hamilton that you think so much of, for instance. She has absolutely no taste at all. I wouldn't be seen on the street with her. Miss Powell is the only one I have met here who is at all congenial."
“Mrs. Hamilton is a good woman and a beautiful mother.” Lucy defended her friend warmly.
“A contrast to me,” Nannie suggested bitterly.
“I wasn’t comparing her to anybody,” retorted Lucy. “I only meant I wouldn’t be ashamed to be seen with her any place.”
“Well, anyway it was meant as a rebuke for what I said. You can’t get out of that, Lucy.”
“I wasn’t rebuking anybody,” contested Lucy wearily.
“Then you shouldn’t make that kind of speeches,” John argued indignantly.
“I didn’t start this,” said Lucy rebelliously.
“No, but you never miss a chance to give me a dig, no matter what the conversation is about,” Nannie persisted accusingly.
“It’s not true!” Lucy flushed angrily.
“It is true,” declared John remorselessly.
Lucy’s eyes filled with tears. She rose from the table and went into the hall.
“Now what’s the matter?” Nannie called after her.
Without replying, Lucy mounted the stairs.
“Let her go, Nannie, if she wants to lose her temper and pout about nothing again. I might as well get used to this sort of thing now that you’re leaving.” John drummed on the table with his knuckles.
Nannie took his hand.
“Dear John,” she whispered.
“Don’t Mamma want Nannie to go?” asked Dimmie, who was staring curiously at the interchange of glances in which his elders were indulging.
“Oh, hell, Dimmie! You go to bed!” John exclaimed nervously, rising and moving to the window where he remained with his back turned.
“You are sorry, aren’t you, Jimmie?” Nannie’s voice was full of emotion.
“Uh huh, but you’re goin’ to take me with you,” Dimmie replied, with his mouth full. He swallowed hastily.
“Yes, of course,” agreed Mrs. Merwent. Then, to John, “He’s so much like you, John. Oh, John, won’t it be awful
if Lucy—" She stopped, looking unspeakable things. "A morbid atmosphere reacts so on a child," she explained.

"Uncle Jim says I'm like Mamma," observed Dimmie, taking another bite of bread and butter.

"Of course he would say so." Nannie nodded and raised her brows significantly.

John glowered out the window a moment, then came back to his place at the table in silence.

When dinner was over, Dimmie followed John and Nannie into the living room.

"Go upstairs to bed as I told you," reiterated John to the child.

"But I want to stay," Dimmie parleyed.

"Do as I say," commanded his father.

The little boy left the room, his chin quivering and the tears in his eyes about to fall. Mrs. Merwent ran after him.

"Here, kiss Nannie," she whispered. "I'm going to get you some more candy when I go down town in the morning."

Dimmie, after allowing himself to be kissed, ascended the stairs reluctantly. Nannie went back to John, sighing as she seated herself near him.

"Oh, John," she sighed regretfully, "there are so few hours left!"

He smoked in moody silence.

"John." She laid a hand on his knee.

"Yes?" He turned his head away and tried vainly to control his shaking voice.

"You will think of me, John?"

"My God, Nannie, don't talk rot!" He tossed his cigarette into the empty fireplace.

"And, John—I'm afraid Lucy wouldn't understand it—but we might—might write to each other now and then." She spoke softly. Her hand continued to rest on his knee, but her face was averted. John did not reply at once and she added, "I might send the letters to the office." Then, after a moment's hesitation, "If it wasn't for Mr. Sprague."

"Damn Mr. Sprague!" John rose and ran his fingers through his hair. "I could arrange that, Nannie. People are
so confoundedly evil minded! But you could write to a box number."

"Oh, John, can you bear it without me? My thoughts will be with you all the time, John."

Nannie rose too, and they confronted one another.

"Yes, Nannie, I suppose I can bear it," he answered at last. He placed one hand over his eyes. "I wish there wasn't so confounded much light!" he supplemented with agitated irrelevance.

Nannie's response was to go to the switch and press the button. The only light which now remained in the living room was the faint glow that came through the dining room transom. The summer rain beat against the window panes.

"Sit here, John," Nannie suggested softly, and the two seated themselves on the sofa.

They remained silent for a long time. Katy, on her way to bed, knocked on the door discreetly. Mrs. Merwent made a little exclamation.

"What do you care what Katy thinks? She's not the first person who has seen evil in innocent things," growled John, at the same time rising.

"I've locked up all de back. You all wants breakfas' pow'ful soon, don' you, Miss Nannie?" the negress inquired in the doorway, not accepting Mrs. Merwent's hasty invitation to enter.

"Yes, Katy, I want early breakfast," Nannie informed her.

"Good night, Miss Nannie. Good night, Mr. Winter."

"Good night," responded Mrs. Merwent.

John made no response.

It was after midnight when Nannie declared that she must retire in order to rest herself for her journey. John switched on the light.

"John——" she hesitated.

"Yes, Nannie?"

"There is nothing in the world so unpleasant to me as asking for money, but——" She paused.

"Yes, Nannie?" John repeated, his tone warm.

Her face flushed under the rouge.

"Dear boy!" she murmured gratefully. "You see I didn't
have time to write to Professor Walsh, and there are all the expenses of the journey," she added apologetically.

John took out his pocket book with trembling fingers.

"I don't see where he comes into it," he grumbled unsteadily, taking out some money. "Will this be enough?" Rather shamefacedly he held up two bills.

Mrs. Merwent glanced at the denominations as she received them.

"Oh, John, you oughtn't—ought you?" she protested weakly.

"There would be more than that if I had it to give!" he insisted.

"When I get to Russellville— Oh, John!" Nannie crumpled the money in one hand. The other she placed on his shoulder.

He met her eyes. She leaned forward with a hasty movement and kissed his cheek.

"I may not have a chance tomorrow," she whispered, then, turning quickly into the hall, went up the steps.

John heard her door close. He ascended the stairs after her very slowly.
XXXIII

Nannie's alarm clock roused her when the sky was yet grey with dawn, but the details of her toilette were so exactingly executed and the final preparations for departure so numerous that the air had already begun to lose its early freshness when she emerged from her room.

"Lucy!" she called to her daughter in a flustered manner. "Please come and help me finish packing these suit cases."

Lucy obeyed.

When all was ready Mrs. Merwent halted in front of her.

"You are a hard woman, Lucy. Maybe we'll never see each other again."

"I haven't any hard feelings," Lucy reasserted, staring over her mother's head.

"Well, let's have breakfast then. I don't want to be late and hurried at the last. It makes you look like a fright."

The two descended the stairs.

"I can't eat in such a rush," Mrs. Merwent complained at the table. "I do hope there'll be a good dinner on the train."

She turned to John. "When does the suburban leave, John?"

"Oh, I've ordered a machine for you, Nannie. It's muddy from the rain last night and it will be much more comfortable going down."

"Thank you, John. You are always thinking of other people's comfort and welfare. It was just like you to do that."

The automobile came as they were finishing the meal.

Nannie ran into the kitchen.

"Good-by, Katy," she said.

"Good-by, Miss Nannie. I hopes you all has a fine trip," Katy responded, smiling her widest.

"I'm going to carry down your grips," declared John. And he and Mrs. Merwent mounted the stairs together.

"The last time!" she breathed.
As they turned to quit her room she stared around her.
"I'm so sorry to leave it," she murmured, her eyes dim.
John bit his lips.
Nannie removed the rosebud which she had pinned to her
travelling suit.
"Wear it for me, John," she sighed as she thrust it into the
lapel of his coat.
He picked up the satchel and suit case and went out.
As the automobile moved off Nannie gazed back long and
solemnly at the house. With the exception of Dimmie, who
was still clamoring to go on the train with his grandmother,
the party of four was silent during the ride.
Once inside the station John excused himself.
"Stay here a minute and I'll get the tickets," he instructed
the women.
"Buy me a small box of candy, too, John," Nannie re-
quested.
"All right," he acceded.
He soon returned carrying several magazines, a basket of
fruit, a bunch of carnations, and the box of chocolates Nan-
nie had requested.
During his absence Miss Powell had joined Lucy and Nann-
ie. She greeted him affably as he approached the little group.
"Good morning. You look like a regular Santa Claus," she
smiled, extending her hand as John raised his hat. "Where's
Mr. Sprague? Didn't he come?"
"Oh, no," interrupted Nannie. "Mr. Sprague doesn't put
himself out for everybody in the family."
John handed over the tickets, the flowers, and the parcels.
"How lovely!" Nannie whispered, burying her nose in the
bouquet. "Here, Jimmie." She bestowed the box of sweet-
meats on the child. "Don't forget Nannie, will you, darling?"
"I want to go with you," he stated, holding tightly to the
box.
"Here, Nannie, you're not treating yourself fair," objected
John. "If you ladies will excuse me again?" He bowed in-
terrogatively toward Miss Powell.
"Certainly," smiled the lady. "You aren't going to allow
Mrs. Merwent to deny herself, are you?"
“No,” said John. He walked across the waiting room to a fruit stand on the other side. When he came back he presented Nannie with a box of bonbons three or four times the size of the package she had given Dimmie.

“So you are going away, Mrs. Merwent?” resumed Miss Powell, after she and Nannie had expatiated on the dimensions of the sweetmeat box. “I hope you’ve had a pleasant visit. It has been so nice for Mrs. Winter to have had you with her. You’ll come back every year, I hope. When you return we must see more of each other.”

Nannie smiled graciously.

“Mother is going to be married,” announced Lucy suddenly. Mrs. Merwent looked up quickly, then averted her face, and finally glanced at John. His air indicated that he was furious.

“Why, Lucy! Why—why, you mustn’t believe everything my daughter says, Miss Powell.” Nannie laughed nervously.

“O-oh, but I do. I’ve never had occasion to doubt Mrs. Winter’s veracity. My congratulations to the happy man!” and Miss Powell kissed Nannie. “I don’t blame him. You look like a girl. No one would believe that you were Mrs. Winter’s mother,” regarding Lucy. “Why didn’t you tell me before? Be sure you send me an invitation.”

“I’ll not forget—if it ever happens,” Nannie promised rather shamefacedly. She kept edging toward John whose eyes were fixed on the ground.

A uniformed official droned something unintelligible in a sing-song voice.

“That’s your train, Nannie,” John informed her abruptly. The party moved toward one of the gates.

“Good-bye, Lucy, I’m sorry to go,” Nannie murmured, hugging and kissing Lucy. “We may have had our little tiffs but it has done us both good. By the time I come back we’ll have forgotten all about them. Be sure to write me every week.”

“Good-bye, Jimmie.” She turned to her grandson.

“Dimmie,” he corrected, adding, “Ain’t I goin’?”

Nannie bent down and kissed him.

“I wish you were, darling,” she whispered.

“I want to go,” wailed Dimmie.
“No, you can’t go now,” she continued in the same whisper. “Your Mamma won’t let you. But when I come back we’ll ask Papa.”

The child began to cry lustily.

“Good-bye, Miss Powell.” Nannie kissed the newcomer again.

“No, John.” Nannie drew him slightly apart from the others and raised her veil. “I’m going to kiss you after all,” she said, putting her arms around his neck. “Don’t forget me, dear John,” she murmured, sobbing a little. And try to get along with Lucy, no matter how hard it is.”

John thrust a slip of paper into her hand.

“You can write me there, until I get a box number, Nannie,” he advised brokenly.

A porter took her bags and she passed through the gate. Before entering the train she turned and waved her handkerchief.

“Well, I must go to the office.” John gulped, blowing his nose and wiping his eyes.

“I’m going to do a little shopping. Won’t you come along, Mrs. Winter?” Miss Powell invited perfunctorily.

“No, thank you.” Lucy grasped Dimmie’s hand. “I must take this little boy home.”

Half an hour later, as John’s step was heard in the corridor, Jim, who was sitting at his table with his face buried in his hands, straightened himself and took up his drawing pencil.

John entered without any greeting and, going to his desk, began to examine his mail. After a moment he paused with an air of abstraction, and, removing from his button hole the flower that Nannie had given him, locked it in a convenient drawer and returned the key to his pocket.

Jim worked for some minutes and then rose from his chair. “I believe I’ll go over to Benton Harbor and see about that material for Wilson’s next houses. Layard’s say that it would be best for one of us to look over the stone before cutting, as we can save considerable on the specifications by taking advantage of the natural rock wherever possible. It’s certainly
worth while spending three days to save thirty per cent on the shaping expenses."

"I'll go over," offered John quickly.

"Why, there's no use going for one day. I don't expect to be back till—let's see—today is Wednesday—Thursday—Friday—Saturday—at least not till Sunday noon."

"I'll go," repeated John. "You said yesterday that you ought to keep a close eye on that concrete work in the foundations of the other row of houses we're building for Wilson. That's more important than the stone."

"But I didn't like to ask you to be away from your family so long," protested Jim.

"I'd like the trip," explained John. "I'm in a state of nervous fidgets, and a change would do me good."

"All right. Just as you like," returned Jim with a curious expression.

"I'll go home for lunch, and get off at three o'clock," John continued.

"The drawings and specifications are in that file marked 'W,' indicated Jim. John took the papers and went out.

He was soon in the Rosedene train.

"I'm going across the lake on business and won't be back till Sunday or Monday," he announced when he reached home, coming into the dining room where Lucy was seated, sewing.

She looked startled, but her only remark was, "All right, John."

"I'll pack my suit case now," he told her, and started upstairs.

"Shall I have luncheon at once?" she called to him.

"No. I haven't time. I'll get something on the boat going across," he answered over his shoulder.

As he passed Nannie's room the door was ajar and he saw that the windows were open and that the room had already been scrubbed and the bedding hung out to air.

In a few minutes he returned to the lower hall, his bag in his hand. Lucy was still seated in the dining room but she rose when she heard his step.

"Are you going, John?" she asked, coming to the hall door and leaning out. He hastened his pace.
"Good-by," he called, going out on the veranda without looking back.
"Good-by, John."
She sat down to her sewing again, the tears slowly chasing each other down her cheeks.
That evening when dinner was served Lucy called Dimmie and began the meal.
"Where's Papa?" he inquired.
"Papa's gone away for a little while, Son."
"Has he gone where Nannie is?" pursued Dimmie eagerly.
"No—I don't think so," said Lucy after a little hesitation.

When Jim left the office for the day, he made his way to a restaurant where he often dined.
"What shall I bring you, Mr. Sprague?" questioned the waiter who always served him.
Jim took up the menu listlessly.
"The fish is very nice tonight," suggested the man.
"I don't want any fish!" exclaimed Jim with unwonted irritation. "I don't want any dinner," he decided abruptly, noticing that the waiter was lingering by the table. "Bring me a large cup of black coffee."

When he had finished his coffee, he paid his bill and went out to the street. Here he boarded a surface car and was soon at his apartment house. Reaching his room, he put on a smoking jacket and lighted his pipe. He shoved his hands into the pockets of his jacket and began slowly pacing up and down the floor.
"He'll never grade that stone right," he remarked to the bookcase, pausing in his walk and relighting his pipe which had gone out.
Suddenly he went to the telephone and took down the receiver.
"Give me Rosedene—" He paused.
"What number did you say?" asked the operator.
"Never mind, thank you," he responded, hanging up the receiver again.
Going to his wardrobe he exchanged the smoking jacket for a coat, and, taking his hat, descended in the elevator to the
street. It was after nine o'clock when he found himself in front of a familiar station for suburban trains.

Entering the building he was soon seated in a departing car. He alighted at Rosedene and walked in the direction of the Winters' house. As he passed it he gazed fixedly at the darkened upstairs windows. Half a block further on he turned back and repassed the house, still staring at the darkened panes. Then he continued his way to the station and from there returned to the city.

Lucy was lying in her room. She wept silently with Dimmie asleep in her arms.

After breakfast the next morning Dimmie began to search for his hat.

"You don't need to go to kindergarten, Son. You can stay at home with Mother if you like," said Lucy.

"But I want to go," he argued. "There's lots of little boys and girls goes and the teacher is dandy. We have lots of fun."

"All right, Son. You can go if you'd rather," consented Lucy sadly, "but there's no use in your going over to Mrs. Hamilton's any more so early. You can go from here when the wagon passes."

"But I like to go early," protested Dimmie. "Mrs. Hamilton always laughs an' Stella an' me play till the wagon comes. It's too lonesome here."

Lucy tied his little cravat and, fixing his hat on properly, allowed him to depart without further words.
XXXIV

When John returned on Sunday he again found Lucy seated in the dining room by an open window, a book in her lap.

"Hello!" he greeted, pausing in the doorway and setting down his suitcase.

Lucy looked up.

Going over to her chair, he bent and kissed her forehead lightly. He seemed to have regained some of his former cheerful spirits. His color was nearer normal and his eyes were brighter.

"I think we ought to get rid of Katy, John," advised Lucy that evening after dinner. "There are not so many in the family now and it will save money. I don't really need her. I can do the work without any difficulty."

"I don't want you tied up here at home all the time," he replied. "You need a girl."

"But, John, a servant costs so much and I don't mind the work a bit."

"No. We can't stay shut in the house night and day. We'll go dotty."

"All right, John. Just as you say." Lucy sighed as she spoke.

"I'm sleepy," said Dimmie yawning.

"All right, Sonny," she said. "Kiss Papa good night." And Lucy led the child away.

John entered the living room, and, seating himself at the piano, attempted to play the accompaniment to Ouvrez tes yeux.

When Lucy came downstairs again after putting Dimmie to bed, John rose.

"Let's walk over to the Hamiltons' for a few minutes," he suggested.

"Why——" she began, and hesitated, adding hastily. "All
right, John. Let me get a scarf from my room and speak to Katy.

In her room she scrutinized her face in the mirror. Tears rolled down her pale cheeks. She wiped the tears viciously away, and, seizing a coarse wash cloth, rubbed her cheeks fiercely until a little color appeared in them.

When they arrived at the Hamiltons' home the doctor met them at the door.

“Come in,” he invited cordially. “Mrs. Hamilton is putting Stella to bed. She'll be down in a minute. How are you feeling by this time, Mrs. Winter? You’re looking better.”

“I'm feeling all right, thank you, Doctor.”

Doctor Hamilton pushed forward chairs for his visitors and they seated themselves.

“Your mother went away yesterday, didn’t she?” he continued. “Is she coming back soon?”

“Oh, probably not till next summer, anyway,” put in John. “She’s been gone several days. She’s going to be married soon,” supplemented Lucy.

John gave her a quick accusing glance.

“Indeed,” commented Doctor Hamilton.

Mrs. Hamilton appeared in the doorway.

“Come on into the study, Mr. Winter, and smoke a cigar. We’ll leave the ladies to talk gossip,” urged the Doctor, rising.

“You mean leave the ladies in order to talk gossip.” Mrs. Hamilton laughed as she straightened her husband’s cravat.

It was after ten o'clock when John and Lucy reached home.

“Let's go to a show tomorrow night,” he proposed as he unlocked the front door. “I'll get the tickets when I go down town.

“All right, John,” Lucy acquiesced without demur.

“We ought to get out more than we've been in the habit of doing,” he went on. “It's a good thing to know more people. We have practically no friends at all.”

“I don't——” Lucy ventured. Then, checking herself, “We have a few good friends, John.”

“I don't know who they are. I don't count Jim Sprague as a friend any more, and Miss Storms, that you used to be so
crazy about, has shown herself to be a two-faced cat. The Hamiltons are all right in their way, but—"

"I don't think you are just to Miss Storms, John. She—"

"Now, see here, Lucy," John's face began to grow red, "if you are going to stick up for that woman after all she's done, we might as well understand each other right now. I simply won't have you—"

"Don't be angry, John," pleaded Lucy humbly. "I won't say any more about her."

"I don't want you to have any more to do with her, either," he dictated with suppressed vehemence.

"All right, John," Lucy submitted again.

The following Sunday Mrs. Hamilton invited John and Lucy to tea.

"I suppose we might as well accept," John had remarked when Lucy told him of the invitation. "We've no place else to go."

They arrived early. The summer was established and a crimson sunset ended a brilliant day. Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton were seated on the porch and both rose as their visitors came up the walk.

"We were enjoying the view over our park," Mrs. Hamilton observed facetiously, nodding toward the vacant ground which permitted an unobstructed view of the sky, and extending her hand as she spoke.

"Yes, indeed. There are worse places to live than Rosedene," declared the doctor, pulling forward a rocking chair for Lucy.

"You used to stay at home so closely," Mrs. Hamilton told her guests when the party was seated, "but now you seem to go out 'most every evening, and we want to see something of you."

"How pretty!" interrupted Lucy uneasily, calling their attention to the thin new moon as it rose above the straggling houses.

"I suppose you are missing your mother," Mrs. Hamilton resumed when the conversation paused again. "It was so long since you had seen her. I envied you having her with you. I
haven't seen my own mother for over two years. I was surprised when the doctor told me Mrs. Merwent was going to be married, though I don't know why I should have been. She is certainly a wonderfully well preserved woman. I suppose you and Mr. Winter will go to the wedding."

"I don't think so." Lucy glanced at John and Doctor Hamilton, who had withdrawn a little from the two women and were smoking together.

"I don't care much for the Hamiltons," John commented, as he and Lucy were on their way home. "I want to make friends that are not so dull and commonplace. Their idea of high-brow art goes about as far as the pictures on the popular magazine covers. I think I'll join the Craftsman's Club. Mathews of Layard's belongs and he's offered several times to put my name up. It will cost fifty dollars a year dues. A lot of artists belong and it would be a good place to spend an evening now and then."

As they were preparing to retire John returned again to the subject of society.

"I think we ought to give a little dinner, Lucy," he said. "We have been several places and we ought to do something to pay them all back. Besides, in that way you gradually get a larger circle of acquaintances."

"All right, John," agreed Lucy, "if you would like to—if you think we can afford it. I've no dinner gown, you know."

"Oh, go ahead and get something. We'll make up the list of people we want tomorrow night," he insisted.

The next evening at dinner he burst forth in a sudden impatient tirade.

"What's the matter with Katy, Lucy?" he exclaimed. "Since your mother's not here to push her along she seems to have forgotten how to cook! This is certainly what I call a thin dinner."

"It isn't Katy, John. We have just the same cooking that we used to have before Mother came. I thought better to cut down our expenses." Lucy colored as she spoke, but looked steadfastly at him.
“Well, I’m not ready to starve yet to save a penny, even if you are!”

After the meal they considered the list of invitations for the dinner.

“Miss Powell we want, of course,” John began. “I’ll think of a man for her. Oh, yes! There’s Mathews, Layard’s head bookkeeper. He’s a bachelor. Then there’s the Hamiltons. I suppose they’ll have to come. Miss Storms we don’t want—we don’t know many people, Lucy. Let’s see—There’s Miss Lyle, and Mrs. Morris, too. They came to the tea you gave for Nannie, didn’t they? We must invite Mrs. Morris’s husband, too. I know him slightly. And we can find a man for Miss Lyle. Oh, yes. Jim Sprague. I’d rather not invite him, but I’m afraid people will talk. He used to practically live here. I guess we can’t get out of it. And we mustn’t leave out Nora Stimpson, although she’s seemed to forget that we are alive since we came out here. But she’s still at the Art School. I saw her the other day on the car. She’s on the faculty now. I’ll have to think of a man for her. Why, it’ll be quite a little dinner—just about the right size!”

The succeeding morning at the office, John handed Jim an envelope.

“Lucy is giving a little informal dinner,” he explained. Jim read the invitation and put it in his pocket.

“I’m afraid I can’t come,” he observed after a moment’s consideration. “I was going to run over our Layard’s materials bills with Mathews Wednesday night.”

“Mr. Mathews is coming, too,” stated John stiffly, “so he won’t be able to work Wednesday night.”

“I had planned to see Wilson later in the evening,” pursued Jim, flushing. “He thinks he may want still another row of cottages built in the spring. However, I’ll see and let you know a little later.” And Jim left the office.

He took a car that passed Miss Storms’ apartment. It was a warm day.

“I hardly expected to find you in,” Jim remarked as he greeted her.

She smiled.
"You shouldn't have found me, but the heat was stronger than my good resolutions."
They began to talk earnestly.
"Thank you for coming, Jim," she told him after a short conversation. He had risen and taken his hat. "I'm not invited. In fact things look as though I were dumped. I don't know all—but you go." She rose and laid her hand on his arm. "Don't lose sight of that dear child," she added seriously.
Jim nodded his head.
"You might call me up before the evening is over," he suggested. "Neither one of them will answer the 'phone at a dinner party. It will give me a chance to get away in case my welcome is worn out."
A half an hour later he entered the office.
"I think I'll be able to come after all," he said to John.
XXXV

The day before the dinner Lucy went shopping and purchased a ready-made dinner dress and some rouge.

"You're looking so well, dear Mrs. Winter," remarked Miss Powell, the next night when the guests were arriving.

Lucy's gown was a white demi-toilette and her hair was dressed high. Her cheeks glowed brightly.

When Jim came he shook hands with kindly formality.

"I'm glad to see you looking better," he said to Lucy.

"Thank you," she replied, smiling.

When the dinner was over and the ladies had retired to the living room, Doctor Hamilton, who had moved next to Jim, offered him a cigar.

"You're getting thin, young man," the doctor observed. "I expect you're working too hard."

Jim took the cigar.

"See here, Doctor," he replied in a joking tone, "you can't get a new patient here. I'm feeling as fine as silk."

"Well, don't work too hard." Doctor Hamilton lighted his own cigar.

Soon the hired waiter came to the table.

"A telephone message for Mr. Sprague," he announced.

"Now you're trying to make me jealous," laughed the doctor. "If you were a colleague I'd accuse you of trying to make us think you had more patients than I."

Jim rose and went to the hall.

"Hello!" he called, taking up the receiver. "This is Mr. Sprague speaking."

"I've called you up as you asked, Jim." It was Miss Storms' voice. "Is everything all right?"

"I'll be there in about half an hour," he answered, his tone louder than necessary, and hung up the receiver.

"I'm sorry to interrupt such a pleasant evening." He ap
proached the table and addressed John. "I'm afraid I'll have to leave."

"Excuse me," apologized John to the others, and he stepped to the living room door.

"Lucy!" he motioned to her. "Mr. Sprague is called away. He's going."

"I'm so sorry you couldn't stay," she declared, extending her hand.

"I too," responded Jim, "but it was very nice of you to let me come."

Taking his hat and coat he went out to catch the train.

"Excuse me a minute." Lucy smiled to the other ladies. "I must run up and see if my baby is asleep."

Once in her room she sat down by the dressing table and cried a little, her face hidden in her hands. Suddenly she lifted her head.

After carefully examining her eyes in the mirror she put a tiny bit more rouge on her cheeks, patted her hair, and returned to her guests.

When the male visitors joined the ladies, John seated himself by Miss Powell. She wore an old gold evening gown that displayed her handsome shoulders, and she turned her dark eyes on him.

"I hear you are quite an artist, Mr. Winter," she commented agreeably. "Mrs. Merwent told me you were responsible for these lovely pictures." She nodded toward the water colors on the wall. "I've admired them so much."

"Well, Miss Powell, 'artist' is a big word, but I can say that I am interested in art."

"You are too modest, Mr. Winter. I can't call myself an artist, certainly, but I appreciate good work when I see it."

"I might have done something, but it's my fate to design cheap houses instead of painting great pictures, Miss Powell. I attended the Art School here and I thought of going to Europe afterwards, but I married and—well, here I am."

His listener's dark eyes were sympathetic.

"The beauty of a Corot, or an Inness," he continued, "cannot fail to thrill one, even if he is bound down to humdrum tasks. I have always held that it is the artist's business to
create beauty—simply and purely. There's little enough of it in common life."

"That's just how I feel, Mr. Winter."

"I don't approve of the didactic spirit of some of the modern schools," he ended. "For me art must be purely idealistic."

John met Miss Powell's gaze earnestly.

Lucy, who was talking with Mr. Mathews quite near, overheard snatches of this conversation, and from time to time her glance sought John and his companion. Miss Powell noticed her preoccupation.

"We're talking about art, Mrs. Winter," she volunteered at length. "Don't you adore it?"

"I'm afraid I'm deficient in the finer feelings, Miss Powell," answered Lucy somewhat waspishly, and turned again to Mr. Mathews.

Miss Powell looked at John and lifted her brows.

"I understand and sympathize with your appreciation of sentiment and beauty, Mr. Winter," she resumed in her low, rich voice. "Thank you for telling me of it."

"We must talk again some time, Miss Powell," declared John with feeling. "It was so good of you to come this evening. We must get better acquainted."

"Thank you. I think so, too," she agreed with her most brilliant smile.

When the little party broke up there were murmurs of pleasure from the guests.

"I've had the best time. I'm coming out again right away," declared Miss Stimpson, who had been talking with John all the latter part of the evening.

"Do," he smiled. "We'll love to have you."

"I'm so glad to see you and Mr. Winter going out some at last!" exclaimed Mrs. Morris to Lucy. "It's a good thing to get out occasionally. You must come to us some evening."

The next morning at breakfast John was in good spirits.

"I think it went off all right," he remarked approvingly, "but you shouldn't be so abrupt to people as you were to Miss Powell. You must cultivate tact."
"I think Miss Powell’s nice," decided Dimmie, spoon in air.
"You’ve got good taste, Son," commented his father, opening the morning paper.
When John and Lucy came to make up the list of guests for their next dinner, Jim was excepted.
"Jim Sprague acted last time like it was a condescension for him to come, so we’ll just leave him off altogether." John frowned as he spoke.
Lucy was silent.
"We’ll invite Mathews, of course. He’s a fine fellow. I’m going to bring him out some evening to stay over night."
"I wish——" began Lucy, then stopped. She stared at John and as she did so she seemed to shrink up, physically as well as spiritually, and her pupils widened. John was busy with the list and did not appear to notice.
"I’ll bring Mathews out some night," he said again.
"All right, John," she replied quite naturally.
Dimmie’s manner was perplexed.
"Why don’t Uncle Jim ever come any more?" he demanded. Neither of his parents answered him.
Several times during the weeks that followed the query was repeated.
"Dimmie, don’t ask that again!" commanded John angrily on one occasion. "He doesn’t come because he doesn’t want to."

On the first of the month the mail brought an unusual number of bills, the largest of which was that of the caterer from whom Lucy had several times ordered cakes and ices. After dinner, while John was still seated at the table, she went to the desk in the living room and took them out. Coming back into the dining room, she laid them before him without speaking.
"Well?" John glanced up at her with a resentful air.
"John, don’t you think I ought to send Katy away? We oughtn’t to spend so much money." There was a tremor in Lucy’s voice.
"See here, Lucy, if I’m going to have to stand for curtain lectures every time I’m at home, I’m going out."
“I’m not giving curtain lectures, John.”
“Well, I’m going out anyway. The atmosphere of this house is enough to drive a man to anything.”
He went into the hall and seized his hat.

Lucy and Dimmie were in Lucy’s room alone. Lucy bent her head and pressed her cheek to the little boy’s hair.
“Oh, Dimmie, Dimmie,” she said.
“You can tell me a story,” he replied consolingly.

About one o’clock John came in. Lucy had retired, but she was still awake, and the night lamp in the adjoining room, where Dimmie slept, was burning.
John’s step, as he mounted the stairs, was halting. He entered the room unsteadily, and did not greet Lucy as he opened the electric switch. When he turned toward her and she saw his flushed cheeks and dull bloodshot eyes, she buried her face in the pillows.
He swore over his refractory collar as he took it off, but refrained from addressing her.
Long after he lay, sleeping heavily on the pillow beside her, she remained with wide open eyes, staring at the night lamp.
XXXVI

It was more than a month after Nannie's departure when Lucy visited the office again.

For the trip to town, she selected a morning when John had mentioned that Jim was going out of the city for several days. She entered the office timidly. John was working at an interior decoration scheme. He glanced up as she came in but did not trouble himself with more than a greeting. She went to the window and gazed out for a time, then sat down at Jim's desk.

Suddenly Jim himself opened the door and came briskly into the office.

"I decided to wait till next week——" he began. Then, catching sight of Lucy, he stopped.

She rose.

The even red color flowed up over his face and he stood undecided an instant. Then he shook hands formally.

"Are you keeping well this hot weather?" he inquired stiffly.

"Very well, thank you."

"And how is Dimmie?"

"He's well, too, thank you," she replied.

"Excuse me. I must see a man at Layard's before lunch," he explained awkwardly, going out.

He did not return.

"Jim Sprague is growing more peculiar every day," John complained to Lucy, as the sound of Jim's steps died away. "He's become impossible to get along with, even in business."

Lucy did not speak. She sat down near John, her face averted.

"I was going to tell you last night," he continued, "but didn't. He has offered me his share of the business—at a low price—in fact almost nothing—and on liberal terms: time payments. He has an offer from Layard's and wants to get out.
It's far and away a better position than I had with them. That shows what kind of a friend he was."

Lucy stared at the papers on the table before her.
"I think you'd better buy it," she advised at last.
"I think so too," John agreed. "I couldn't do it alone because I'm very badly in debt now—" Lucy looked up at him startled—"but Mathews thinks he's had enough of bookkeeping. He's been at it fifteen years now, and has got something laid by, and he'll go in with me. His experience with Layard's will be very useful to us. What do you think?"

Lucy shivered slightly.
"I think that will be the best scheme," she declared without hesitation.
"All right," concluded John, "I'll begin to make plans that way, then. Now you sit here a minute, Lucy, while I go across the hall to a lawyer's office about this contract, and then we'll go and get lunch together." And John passed into the corridor.

Lucy rose again and, walking rather unsteadily to Jim's desk, laid her hands softly upon it. She rested so for a minute. Then she went slowly to the window opposite the street and gazed across the roofs to the tall building in which Layard's offices were situated.

THE END