

THE REDEMPTION OF ANTHONY

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CHAPTER I

"I FEEL that this night has witnessed Venus presiding over the feast of Lucullus, while at her right hand sparkled the wit of Æschylus—he was a wit, wasn't he?" Mr. Peter Schuyler bent low over Mrs. Kaley Martin's hand.

"Good gracious, Peter, you're getting awfully complicated!"

"Well, in words of one syllable, what I wish to say is that you look your loveliest, Tony was great, and I've had a splendid time."

"For all of which I am exceedingly grateful. You off, too, Nan?"

"I am. Peter, move on, so I can say my

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'day-day.' I've had a very nice time, Louise, and lost my heart to The Parson."

"Good! Isn't he a dear? But I warn you, Nan, that you're to let him alone. He's much too nice for you to play with."

"My dear, he's actually clever! Think of anything in the church being clever! And he never said one word about my sins!"

"He knew there was no time—at a dinner."

"*Au contraire*, he thinks I'm a sort of worldly angel. See if he doesn't—here he comes." Mrs. Crompton nodded gaily at the handsome man approaching his hostess, and went on.

"I have to thank you, my dear Mrs. Martin, for a very pleasant evening," The Parson said. "Such a delightful woman—Mrs. Crompton—real spiritual quality."

"Spiritual, did you say, Parson?" Mrs. Martin laughed. "I should never have thought of that adjective for Mrs. Crompton."

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"No? She seemed so to me. When does the little girl arrive, Mrs. Martin?"

"Priscilla? She comes to-morrow at five."

"Good! I shall come soon to see her, if I may. Good night."

"Good night."

He passed on toward the dressing-room, and a voice behind her said: "Well?" She turned, to face Mrs. Crompton's laughing eyes.

"He thinks you have 'spiritual quality'—them's his words," she gibed.

"Dear old soul!" Mrs. Crompton said. "I remembered that hundred and fifty I won last week at bridge, and promised him an altar-cloth. Spiritual quality—that's great!"

She disappeared, laughing, and one by one the guests departed, until the door finally closed upon the last, and Mrs. Martin turned, with a sigh of relief, to the man who stood waiting.

"Shall I go?" he asked.

"Oh, no—smoke here."

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He rolled an armchair toward the fire, and when she was comfortably ensconced he turned off the electric lights and came and stood before her in the firelight, looking down at her.

"Well?" said she, looking up at him.

"Well," he replied, lighting a cigar.

"Aren't you going to say anything pleasant, Tony?"

"It was a great success."

"Oh, the dinner—yes; but—"

"But what?"

"Tony, you're so unsatisfactory! Why can't you say that I never looked better in my life; that I made an exceptionally difficult dinner go by sheer force of will; that you think I'm the eighth wonder of the world, and a few comfy things like that?"

He blew smoke leisurely before he answered. "What's the use? I think it, and you know it, so what's the use of babbling about it?"

"How like a man! It's the babbling that counts; not the truth."

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"What nonsense!"

"It's not nonsense. If you think agreeable things, it's your Christian duty to say them. It helps more than anything in the world."

"Well, everybody else has done his Christian duty to-night, so can't you let me off?"

"No—for you're the only one who counts."

"I don't know, you know. I always put my foot in it when I try."

Mrs. Martin sighed and smiled. "No matter—it's really too hard work to extract it. You were great at the table. I should never have swung it without you."

"Ground out a few ancient tales—that's all I did. You were the whole thing."

"I had a splendid time. I felt as if it were my last fling."

"Your last fling?"

"Yes. To-morrow, you know—"

"To-morrow? Well, what happens to-morrow?"

"Priscilla comes home."

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"Priscilla? Oh, yes, the girl. Well, what's the difference?"

"Mrs. Kaley Martin, the mother of a *débutante*, is not the same person as this Mrs. Kaley Martin."

"What difference can she make in your life?"

"I don't know—she may make none; and yet I have a feeling, a foreboding, that she is going to make a great deal."

"What sort of a girl is this daughter of yours, anyhow?"

"I don't know—really, I don't. I've never gotten at her much. You see, she's been away to school for so long, and before that there were governesses—" She leaned toward him impulsively. "Tony, do you think it's a horrible thing for me not to want this strange young woman to come here and interfere with my whole scheme of life?"

"She'll probably marry."

"I don't know—perhaps. She's rather pretty, I think; but she is not clever."

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"That won't hurt her chances any. Most men prefer the other kind—at home."

Mrs. Martin looked at him fixedly a moment. "I wonder what she'll think of you, Tony?"

He flicked his ashes into the grate. "I assure you it's a matter of total indifference to me. I don't like girls."

"I suppose she'll think it's shocking for an old lady like me to have a beau."

"Am I a beau?"

"Aren't you?"

"No; I'm your creature—a thing you made with your own hands."

"Don't. I only helped you use what the gods gave you."

"You only saved what I was determined to destroy. Don't think I don't know what you've done, Louise."

"Tony, if you should thank me, I'd hate you!" she flung out at him.

"Even I couldn't be so altogether banal as that."

The silence grew heavy.

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"Perhaps the girl is going to bring you a new interest."

"Perhaps"—indifferently.

"She may prove a great comfort to you. You must be lonely sometimes—"

"Tony, you talk like an old woman. Go home—do!"

"You deny that you're lonely?"

"I never think of it. I haven't thought of myself for three years."

"What have you been thinking of?"

"Your success."

"My success! Well, I suppose most people would say that it had come."

She looked at him quizzically. "Most people! What was the sale of the last book? Three editions in—how long was it?"

"Editions? You don't measure success by editions. Do *you* think I've succeeded?"

"Splendidly."

"You're sure?"

"Quite sure. To me you succeeded from that day you came to me and said: 'From this day I'll never touch a drop to drink.'"

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"Lord, what a drunken sot I was! What on earth ever gave you the hint that there was a spark in me worth saving, Louise?"

"You haven't forgotten that night we met at the Carltons'? How delightfully you talked about your work and your ideals—"

Drake broke in crisply. "And then drank too much champagne and blubbered my failures. I remember only too well, unfortunately. The question is, why did you send for me later?"

"Because I thought it might prove worth while to redeem you."

He laughed. "I remember I tossed up to see whether or not I'd come in answer to your note."

"You were a perfect bear at first; determined not to be patronized, nor made friends with."

"What a brute I must have been, dear!"

She winced, and smiled up at him. "You were an uncouth creature those days, Tony. I feel quite proud of you now when I think back to them."

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"How you lugged me up, didn't you?—step by step! Why, I don't think I ever knew a lady until I knew you."

"Nonsense!"

"Don't belittle any of it. You shamed me into being a decent creature, and what I am I owe to you. I've worked like a slave these three years just to prove to you that you weren't mistaken—that there was something to save, perhaps—and now, as far as the world goes, I'm a successful man."

"Why do you say, 'as far as the world goes'? Don't you consider yourself successful?"

"No, there's no such thing. I write books and they sell, and so some little men who call themselves critics say I'm the hope of the future, and such rot. Does that make me a big man? Does it make me a happy man? Does it make my life rounded, complete?"

He walked to and fro, out of the light into the shadow and back again, Mrs. Martin watching him.

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"What you need is change. Why not go away for awhile? Why not go abroad?"

"I can't. I must work."

"Take your work along."

"Will you go, too?"

"I? I can not. There's Priscilla—"

"Then I can't go. I can't work without you"—impatiently.

"You haven't tried."

"There's no use trying. I know. Your judgment, your taste—I must have them until I'm bigger, surer of myself."

"And then?"

He stopped as if she had interrupted a train of thought. "What?"

"Nothing—nothing."

"Do you think it's been worth your while?"

"Eminently."

"And what have you gotten out of it—except a little vicarious joy?"

"I'm essential to you in your work—you've just said it—that is my reward."

He drew a chair up beside her and took

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her hand. "And now, what next?" he said.

She rose and walked away from him, breathing heavily. "I'm too tired to-night to talk of—that."

"What a selfish brute I am not to remember that! I'll go."

"Yes, please do."

She came to him and gave him both her hands, and he held them closely a minute, looking at her. Suddenly and for the first time he took her in his arms and kissed her lips; then without a word he went out, and Mrs. Martin hid her face in her hands for joy, and—wept.

CHAPTER II

“**E**VERYTHING in order, Mary?” asked Mrs. Martin, entering the room intended for Priscilla and looking about casually.

“Yes, madame; I think so.”

“Have some flowers on the dressing-table.”

“Very well, Mrs. Martin. Are you driving to the station to meet Miss Priscilla?” she continued, with the privilege of an old servant.

“No, oh, no! I’ve sent James for her. We’ll have tea in my dressing-room when she comes, Mary.”

“Very well.”

Mrs. Martin wandered about aimlessly, rearranging things absent-mindedly, and finally went back to her own part of the house. She was restless; the absurd real-

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ization began to dawn upon her that she dreaded her daughter's home-coming, dreaded the first half-hour and the first weeks of adjustment. She even blamed herself a bit that she knew so little of the girl's real self. Her physical needs and habits she had always considered religiously, but farther than that she had never gone.

Mr. Kaley Martin's death, ten years before, had been a distinct relief, and she had wilfully set aside all reminders of him—and Priscilla came under that head.

Mrs. Martin threw herself into a comfortable chair, and gave herself up to a consideration of the evidence at hand in regard to Priscilla. She recalled the rather prim little miss of fifteen who had spent the summer vacation at home two years before (that was the last real visit, for the girl had been abroad all the time since); she recalled the stiff letters, sometimes so childish in their outlook upon life as to be pathetic. She realized that she had no idea of the

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girl's tastes or thoughts, and she got up petulantly.

"I suppose good mothers are born, not made; it's evidently not my *forte*. The truth remains, Priscilla is a trial."

The door behind her opened swiftly, and she turned. The girl stood there a moment, motionless, while mother and daughter measured each other. Mrs. Martin's first impression was half pleasure, half dismay—the girl was a beauty, there was no doubt of that.

"Mother!" she said, in a little, half-choked voice. "Mother!"

She put her arms about her mother's neck and clung tightly, so tightly that Mrs. Martin could feel the beating of her heart. She almost resented the passion of the embrace.

"How do you do, Priscilla?" she said, releasing her gently. "My dear, how you've grown! Let's have a look at you." She held her off and took an inventory of gold hair, hazel eyes wet with tears, mouth quiv-

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ering with emotion, slight, straight young figure.

"Mother, are you glad? Oh, I suppose you couldn't be as glad to have me home as I am to be home!"

"You wanted to come, then?" Mrs. Martin inquired.

"Wanted to? It's been my dream for years—to belong at home. This last year I've marked off each day and night that brought me nearer."

Mrs. Martin turned and rang for tea. "Take off your things, Priscilla. Didn't you like it at school?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose I did," she answered, putting her things aside. "It was all very well, but, of course, it wasn't home."

"No, I suppose not. Put the things here, please, Mary."

Priscilla flew at the maid. "Oh, Mary, I'm so glad to see you! How are you? And how's the cook, and Hannah, and all of them?"

"They're well, thank ye, Miss Prissy, and

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we're all delighted to have ye home fur good."

"Thanks—it's just heavenly to be here."

Mrs. Martin watched Mary's pleased exit and the girl's flush of pleasure. "I thought you were going to kiss her, Priscilla," she said, in amused sarcasm.

The girl flushed. "Was I too enthusiastic? You see, I just love Mary; she means home to me—she and Hannah and the cook. They were so good to me that last time I was here—I was hardly ever lonesome."

"Indeed?" said Mrs. Martin, with a flash of anger at something the unconsidered speech implied. "How do you take your tea?"

"Lemon and two lumps, please."

Priscilla drew her chair opposite her mother's and fixed her eyes on her steadily. "Isn't this sweet for us to be sitting here having tea together, mother?"

"Yes, isn't it nice? Now tell me about your two years of Europe."

"Oh, don't let's! Some other day for

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Europe—now let's talk about things that count—about you and me. Mother, have you wanted me ever?"

Mrs. Martin moved uneasily. "Don't let us be emotional, Priscilla; it is too great a strain. Let us just stick to the facts. We've lived our lives practically apart, and now we're going to try to live together in peace and happiness, but we mustn't demand too much of each other all at once."

"So—you haven't," Priscilla concluded simply, and her eyes never wandered from her mother's face. "Of course I don't see why you should, but I hoped— I think I don't care for any more tea." She got up and wandered to the window.

Mrs. Martin felt uncomfortable, futile. She was not handling the situation in her usual brilliant way. "I hope you are going to be very happy here. We'll have parties and dinners and balls, and amuse ourselves splendidly. I've planned a cotillion for you in a couple of weeks, and you're to lead it with Peter Schuyler, the most popular

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youth in town. Oh, we'll amuse you, my dear!"

"Thank you, mother," the girl said, turning to her.

Mrs. Martin continued to fight for time. "Then we'll induce Tony to have a house-party for you down in the country. You'll enjoy Tony—Mr. Anthony Drake, you know."

"Drake? The Drake who wrote *The Soul of Ignace*?"

"Yes; you know about him, then?"

"He's wonderful, isn't he?"

"You haven't read *The Soul of Ignace*?" demanded Mrs. Martin, in astonishment.

"Oh, yes; several times."

"Good gracious! didn't they choose your books for you?"

"I've read all his things."

"He's an interesting man—he's here a great deal."

"Here—in this house? Then, I shall meet him!"

"Doubtless"—smiling.

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A knock at the door interrupted them, and the man brought in a card.

"He's here now. Run down and talk to him until I get into another gown."

Priscilla actually turned white. "I? Go and talk to *him*? Oh, I couldn't!"

"Nonsense! Run along."

"Mother, I'd be frightened to death. I couldn't!"

"Don't be silly, Priscilla; he's nothing but a man. I'll be down in a minute."

She disappeared into her bedroom, and Priscilla watched her go with frightened eyes.

"She *wants* me to go," she whispered, and turned and walked down-stairs.

Mr. Anthony Drake was pacing to and fro in the drawing-room, his thoughts upon the coming half-hour. The developments of the night before seemed to him to demand immediate readjustment of his relations to Mrs. Martin. He had spent the night going over the past and interrogating the future, and had arrived at the obvious con-

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clusion that they could not go on for ever in the halcyon camaraderie of the last three years, especially now that the daughter was arriving to complicate the situation. He turned at the step on the stair, and faced Priscilla, who stood between the curtains, transfixed with fear in the presence of the great man. He stared silently.

"I am Priscilla," she said, in a faint voice. "I am Priscilla Martin—"

She advanced and held out her hand, and Drake recalled himself with difficulty.

"Oh, yes, to be sure!" he said. "How do you do?"

She eyed him gravely, noting his evident irritation. "I shouldn't have come at all—I shouldn't have dreamed of coming down—but my mother wished me to talk to you for ten minutes until she is dressed. Will you sit down?"

"Thanks. I—I suppose you're glad to get home?" he said uncomfortably, looking across at her.

"Oh, yes, very."

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"We've heard a good deal about you lately."

She leaned toward him impulsively. "Have you? Has my mother talked of me?"

"Yes. She's been wondering what she's going to do with you."

"Oh!"

So long a pause ensued that Priscilla finally hurled herself into the breach. "You're the first great person I've ever met, so I don't know what to say to you."

"I? I'm not a great person. If I were, I'd know what to say to you. I don't get on with girls—they frighten me."

"Are you frightened now? If you're half as frightened as I am, don't you think I might go tell mother that we couldn't talk?"

He looked at her and laughed. "I'd hate to confess to your mother that I was afraid of anything."

"Oh, you're that way, too, are you?"

"Your mother isn't afraid of anything."

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"No, I suppose not."

"She'd laugh at us."

"Yes, she always laughs at things."

Again he glanced at her. "I suppose you liked it at school?"

"No."

"Oh, is that so? Why didn't you?"

"It would take four years really to tell you."

He laughed. "We'd better postpone it, then, for it's rather near dinner-time."

"Besides, I couldn't tell you, anyhow—you wouldn't understand."

"You don't think much of my intellect, then?"

"Oh, I think you're very great, but I don't think you could understand just a plain girl—like me."

Mrs. Martin came in, and he went to meet her, half-way across the room.

"Why, what's the matter?" he asked of her.

"Mother, may I be excused? I'm a little tired—I—"

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"By all means, Priscilla. Dinner at seven-thirty."

"Yes, mother. Good afternoon, Mr. Drake."

He bowed silently, then turned to Mrs. Kaley Martin.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked again.

"Don't ask me. I've been through the hardest half-hour of my life."

"You mean?"

"Did you ever hear of people being transformed in an hour? That's what's happened to me. What did you think of her? Is she a beauty?"

"I don't know—I didn't notice. But never mind her—let us talk of you. What is this change you talk about? What did she do to you?"

"She swamped me in a sea of emotions; she tugged me hither and thither, where I didn't want to go; she put her hands ruthlessly on old wounds and opened them up

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again; she arraigned me before the past, and, worst of all, she loves me."

"What a strange woman you are, Louise! Didn't you want her to love you?"

"I wanted her to be fond of me; but love—there are such terrible obligations in being loved!"

"I've come to talk to you about love, myself."

"Don't—I can't bear anything more to-night. You are to stay to dinner, Tony, and protect me. You must keep that child's unblinking eyes off me, you must be the safety-valve, or I shall do something insane."

"Very well," he said quietly, "my case can wait, and to-night we'll attend to the case of Priscilla—that's her name, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's her name—Priscilla. And to think that we counted on the chance that her coming would make no difference!"

"Possibly you exaggerate your problem just now."

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“Tony, it takes the most finished diplomat years to prepare himself to face a situation of half the vitalness of this one of mine; and I’ve thrown away all my years of preparation!”

CHAPTER III

“WELL, Priscilla, how have you put in the morning?” asked Mrs. Martin, kissing her daughter’s cheek as she sat down to the luncheon-table.

“Pretty well—but it’s been rather long,” the girl admitted. “I’ve arranged all the flowers, and settled my things in my room, but it didn’t take quite all the time. Couldn’t I have some regular morning things to do, mother, so I’d feel more settled here?”

“My dear, your regular morning thing to do will be to sleep, as soon as you get started socially. We must look over your clothes and get Madame Sonci started on some new gowns, and that will take time. We’ll keep you busy enough, never fear.”

“Thanks. You see, I’m used to being busy. At school we had things to do every hour of the day, so it’s pretty hard to drift.”

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"Yes, I suppose you'll miss it—the routine life, and your friends, and all. We might ask some of the girls to visit you—would you like that? Who was your best friend?"

Priscilla hesitated. "Well, I don't know that I really had one. I didn't go about with the other girls very much; I always had my—I always spent my time with—"

"Well, with whom?"

"I'd rather not tell you, if you don't mind."

"You'd rather not tell? Why, what do you mean, Priscilla? Who was this mysterious companion?"

"Please don't laugh, mother—it was just somebody I pretended."

"Your best friend was somebody you pretended?" repeated Mrs. Martin curiously.

Priscilla nodded.

"What a strange child you are! Didn't you like the girls?"

"Oh, yes—some of them. But if you just pretend your best friend, she's always with

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you, and she never says mean, spiteful things, nor hurts your feelings, nor laughs at you—”

Mrs. Martin smiled—but it was a winning smile, instead of her habitual satiric one. “It has obvious advantages—you could shut her out when she bored you.”

“Oh, but she never bored me!”

“Really? She *must* have been pretended. I shall ask Mr. Drake to take you in hand—we may make a great novelist of you.”

“I liked him. I wasn’t a bit afraid, after the first.”

“I told you he was harmless. Did he talk to you?”

“At first he was annoyed at my being there, but I told him I only came because I was sent, so then he talked to me, just to be polite.”

“He doesn’t usually take the trouble.”

“I wished he wouldn’t. I liked him better when he was quiet. It wasn’t stupid quiet; it was just *quiet* quiet.”

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"My conscience, Priscilla! I'm almost afraid you're clever!" said Mrs. Martin, rising.

"Oh, no, I'm not. I'm sorry if I've talked too much."

"Nonsense! You've quite amused me, and I've been bored to death all morning."

"Oh, I'm glad!"

"Now, what do you want to do this afternoon? I'm going to drive to town to do some errands, and I've asked a few people in to tea at five to meet you. Now, will you come with me, or do you want to amuse yourself until five?"

"If you don't mind, I'll take Mary and go to the park and skate."

"Skate? Mercy! Isn't it too cold?"

"It's just right. You don't mind, then?"

"Of course not—only, be back at five."

"All right, Madame Mother," she called, as she flew up-stairs.

.
Five o'clock found Peter, Mrs. Crompton and The Parson gathered at the tea-table.

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"Peter," said Mrs. Martin, looking at him sternly, "I relied on your tact and judgment, and they have played me false."

"Say not so, fair lady; what shall the owner do to redeem them?"

Mrs. Martin shook her head. "I knew it would come, and I hoped it wouldn't. I am relegated to the position of the mother of my daughter. The Parson, here, comes to my tea-party, and even while he inquires for my health, his eye wanders and he says: 'Where is she?' Nan, here, blows in upon us and ignores us all, demanding: 'Where's your girl?' And now you—my erstwhile slave of the lamp—find me inadequate!"

"Stuff, Louise!" broke in Mrs. Crompton. "You asked us here for a private exhibition of your latest, and we want to see whether it is a signed proof or a copy."

"We hope it is a copy," said The Parson gallantly.

"Well, my exhibit has gone skating, under strict orders to return at five, and, my dears, it is an original, not a copy."

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"Humph! I don't care much for girls myself. Boys are more my style," quoth Mrs. Crompton.

"Thanks," said Peter, offering her tea.

"Oh, you! Peter, you're a perennial youth, like Cupid. You've been the boy wonder of society for ten years."

"Spare me!" cried the victim, on his knees at once, hands raised.

"Pick on some one your own age, Nan," interposed Mrs. Martin.

"I can't—they're all dead."

"In the person of old age, I offer myself as victim, Mrs. Crompton," said The Parson, sitting down beside her.

Peter returned to Mrs. Martin and the tea-table. "Where's Tony?" he asked.

"I don't know—he'll probably turn up later, but I never depend on him."

"Idiosyncrasies of genius, I suppose."

"No, just a Tonyism. It is one of the things that make him interesting."

"Ah, do you mind if I jot that down? Be unreliable and you will be interesting. If

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any man could be all that the world thinks Tony to be, he'd be the only living world-wonder in captivity."

"You're jealous, Peter."

"I am. I think the whole world runs mad on celebrities. When every third man is a celebrity, why isn't it a distinction to be a commonplace man, like me?"

"You're not commonplace enough; you're —Peter."

The door opened at this juncture, and Priscilla entered. "Oh, mother, I'm so sorry to be late!" she began impulsively, and then stopped.

"Great Jupiter!" said Peter, and they all sat and looked at her.

She certainly was a charming vision, this red-cheeked, bright-eyed Priscilla, in her close-fitting blue velvet skating-suit, setting off her slimness, and Mrs. Martin admitted, with unexpected pride, that this was Priscilla at her best.

"Come in, wicked one," she said, holding out her hand to the girl, suddenly very shy.

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"This is Priscilla, everybody. This is Mrs. Crompton, this is The Parson, and this is—Peter."

"Last but not least—Peter," reiterated that gentleman, bowing.

"How do you do?" said Priscilla gravely.

"Mercy, Louise! why didn't you tell us she was a beauty? You've no right to spring it on us like this."

Mrs. Martin smiled down at the girl. "Priscilla, Mrs. Crompton thinks you're a beauty," she said, in experiment.

"I'm afraid she's making fun of us, mother," the girl answered simply, and turned away.

"Pour yourself some tea, dear, and talk to Peter. But be careful—Peter's very young."

Priscilla obediently took her seat at the table and poured her tea.

"I hope you won't think me too young to be noticed, Miss Martin," said Peter, watching her.

"Are you so very young?" she asked,

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looking at him directly. "You don't look it."

He laughed. "Thanks—I'm not, really. But I live under that constant curse of eternal youth, due to pink cheeks and curly hair."

"Oh, I see."

"But in spite of it I'm a very nice sort of a chap, and I hope you'll like me."

"I hope so."

"Your mother and Mrs. Crompton will recommend me, I'm sure."

"What's that, Peter? I heard my name. What scandal are you telling that child about me?"

"Miss Martin, I appeal to you—was it a scandal?"

"It may be—he says you recommend him."

This shot was greeted with much laughter, and Mrs. Martin inspected her daughter with surprise. What a combination of *naïveté* and ease!

"Don't let him mislead you, my dear,"

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Mrs. Crompton said; "he's a whited sepulcher, and there are people who think he uses rouge."

"I think poor Schuyler has been punished enough this afternoon," said The Parson, coming over to Priscilla.

"Poor Peterkin! Come over here and sit on my lap," said Mrs. Martin.

Peter and The Parson exchanged places.

"We're very glad to welcome you home, Miss Priscilla," said The Parson, in his genial way.

"Thank you, I'm glad to be home," she answered.

"I suppose it is quite a marked change from the schoolroom to such an atmosphere as this."

"Yes, it is, and I don't know what they're talking about at all; do you?"

He looked at her smilingly. "Not always. You see, their idea is to talk in such a manner as to hide what they really think, and you and I regard conversation as a means of expressing our thoughts."

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"I suppose that's it. I hope I'll get used to it, but it makes me afraid just now."

"You needn't be. If the thoughts are worth revealing, I think our way is the best. What shall you do with yourself?"

"Mother is going to introduce me soon."

"Dear, dear! What a pity! Now, that's the old-fashioned part of me, and the new-fashioned part says: 'What a fine time you'll have.' But I always regret that that mother of yours wastes her brain on social frippery; but there—she's made Drake, and that will stand as her epitaph."

"Made him? How?"

The Parson hemmed a little uncertainly. "Well, the story goes that your mother discovered Drake's genius, saved him from himself, and made him what he is."

"How splendid!" cried Priscilla, her eyes shining.

"What's splendid?" broke in Mrs. Crompton, looking at them.

"Don't tell her," said Priscilla impulsively.

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"Why, Priscilla!" Mrs. Martin said.

"Faith, and why shouldn't he tell me?" inquired Mrs. Crompton.

"Because you'll laugh, and I don't want you to."

Priscilla appealed to her mother, flushed and miserable. "I beg your pardon," she said then.

"Priscilla has not yet acquired social tact," Mrs. Martin explained.

"Priscilla still dares to speak the truth," The Parson substituted. "Let her alone; she'll soon learn better."

"I never heard you preach before," laughed Mrs. Crompton.

"Some day I shall take for my text 'Laughers and Scoffers,' and then, Mrs. Crompton, beware!" he added lightly.

Drake was announced.

"Come in—do. We're about to have a sermon from The Parson. 'Parlor Talks by a Prominent Parson!'" cried Mrs. Crompton.

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"How do you do?" said Drake to Mrs. Martin, who stood smilingly by, watching the encounter. He bowed to the rest, and his eye hovered a moment about Priscilla, who blushed furiously.

"No doubt the sermon is needed," he replied to Mrs. Crompton's fling. "What's the text?"

"Laugh not—that ye be not laughed at!" said Peter.

The Parson took him up. "That does very well—there is obvious need of a protest. We laugh at everything—political juggling, moral intriguing, business dishonesty, they all amuse us—as part of a game. It is the crying evil of our day—to shrug the shoulders and to laugh."

"That's the text of my next book, Parson," Drake said. "Mrs. Martin really suggested it in something she said once, about how we moderns shift responsibilities—from personal to national ones—"

"Louise ought to make a good agitator—

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she's had hers away at school," Mrs. Crompton put in.

"I say, that's a mean shot!" cried Peter.

"It's always unwise to sail too close to a personality, don't you think, Mrs. Crompton?" said Drake. "It always stimulates curiosity about one's own practises."

"Well, I haven't any principles, and my practises are scandalous, so I've a perfect right to cast the first stone."

"You're behaving very badly, Nan," Mrs. Martin said. "There's no vestige left of the spiritual quality."

"It's useless to encourage illusions about yourself in other people's breasts, don't you think so, Parson?" she demanded.

"Illusions are so often safeguards, Mrs. Crompton. Even the best of us like a little haze between the observer and our innermost selves."

"If you weigh nearly two hundred, as I do, there is quite a thick haze between the observer and your innermost self," murmured Peter softly.

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"Oh!" said Priscilla in protest.

The Parson smiled, turning to her. "My dear, they're all sick of this disease save you and me. We must be very careful or we'll catch it."

He offered his hand to Mrs. Martin. "I must run along," he said. "I'm delighted to have met the daughter, and I think"—here he took Priscilla's hand—"I think we are going to be great friends."

"Thank you," said the girl gratefully.

"Parson, if you can put up with me for ten minutes longer, I'll drop you at the parsonage," Mrs. Crompton said.

"Charmed."

"I want to try to reinstate the illusions," she explained. "Hope you aren't determined not to like me," she said to Priscilla. "Bring her around for tea, Louise. Adieu, Tony. Ta-ta, Peter."

Upon their exit, Peter once more joined Priscilla. "We've made a bad impression on you, haven't we?" he said.

"No, only I'm stupid, and I don't know

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how to talk to you," she answered frankly, as he sat down beside her.

"Why so abstracted?" said Mrs. Martin to Drake.

"I'm not. I came to ask you to marry me."

"Tony! What do you mean?"

"Just that. I've tried to do it twice before and been interrupted, and I want to get it settled."

"Oh, but not here and now!"

"Why not?"

"With Peter and Priscilla here, and all."

"Well, they can't hear us; they seem quite absorbed."

"But, Tony, it's like proposing in a street-car—it's *so* unromantic!"

"Oh, well, if you come to that, I *am* unromantic, and no one knows it better than you."

"No, no one does."

"Why not settle it right here, then, and be done with it? I've been thinking over your idea of going abroad, and it seems a good

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one. We can go somewhere in Italy for June—”

“Are you asking me because you love me, Tony, or because you need me?”

“Why, both.”

“Oh, you only mentioned one, you know.”

“I thought you understood me well enough to know that I can’t do this sort of thing like a *matinée* hero; but I do want and need you more than anything else in the world, Louise.”

“I suppose it is thoroughly like a woman to want you to say: ‘I love you better than anything on earth.’” She rose. “I want to think it over, Tony; you’ll have to give me time.”

He rose, too, a trifle annoyed and quite surprised. “Of course, but—”

“You’re in a hurry to make your plans? I understand. Peter, you must go now, unless you’ll stay on to dinner. We have to dress.”

“Mark how she speeds the parting guest! Are you dismissed, too, Tony?”

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"I think I am," Drake replied ruefully.

"Say a good word for me to Miss Priscilla," Peter said in parting. "She thinks I'm unregenerate."

"I don't know what that means," said Priscilla gravely.

"Well, don't learn," Drake said, and bowed his farewell.

CHAPTER IV

OUTSIDE, the carriage doors closed with an unremitting bang-bang-bang, and the crowd of guests hurried on past the idle crowd of onlookers, up the stairs to the dressing-rooms, whence later it merged itself into the stream flowing into the ballroom.

It seemed to Priscilla as if the whole world was marching up to her, shaking her by the hand, greeting her monotonously, and passing on again. She stood beside her mother, very straight, her head up, her face flushed, determined not to disgrace this glorious mother of hers, no matter what the cost. But it seemed strange to her that any one could think this clatter and crowding pleasant.

Her thoughts flew back to the little school dances which constituted her idea

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of social events, when the girls with handkerchiefs tied about their arms were the only men; then she looked about her at the beautiful ballroom—a dazzle of lights—the brilliant throng that moved about it, and men—there were apparently thousands. She glanced up at her mother, who was fairly radiant to-night, and recalled Mrs. Crompton's remarks in passing: "You may call it your swan-song, if you like, Louise, but it's the best song I ever heard you sing!" Whatever it meant, her mother had laughed gaily.

"I don't often go to balls, Miss Priscilla," said a familiar voice, "but I couldn't resist the temptation of coming to yours."

"Oh, goody!" she cried impulsively as she came out of her dream to find The Parson shaking her hand.

The Parson and Mrs. Martin laughed.

"Priscilla's flattery is direct," said Mrs. Martin. "Suppose you take her along and get her a cup of coffee, Parson; the poor child's tired to death already. I think every

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one is here. The cotillion is at ten, you know."

"Won't you go in my place, mother?"

"Mercy, no, child, I'm used to it! You run along."

"Come along, and make me the proudest man here," said The Parson, offering his arm.

"I wish to tell you once again that never in your life have you looked so 'gorjoose,'" murmured Peter to Mrs. Martin, as he joined her.

"It helps greatly, Peter, thank you," she answered. "Priscilla is in the dining-room with The Parson, so when you want to start things go and get her."

"The Parson? Why didn't you let me take her to the dining-room?"

"You have privileges enough. The Parson can't dance the cotillion with her, you know."

"Drat the Parson!" said Peter, hurrying on.

Some other people held Mrs. Martin's at-

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tention for a time, and when they passed on Drake was beside her.

"So you decided to come?"

"Yes, I didn't want to hurt the little girl's feelings."

"Oh, I thought perhaps you came to see me."

"I did."

"Well, you're just in time to lead me away to the other end of the ballroom. It is time for Peter to get people seated. Isn't it a nice party, Tony?"

"Yes, great," he answered, as if he had just noticed that it *was* a party. "Where is your little girl?"

"Gone to get some coffee with The Parson. How do I look, Tony?"

"You look fine," he answered promptly—much too promptly.

"Tony, Tony, what am I going to do with you?" she objected despairingly.

"Marry me, I hope," he replied.

Mrs. Martin overlooked this entirely. "Wait until you see Priscilla, and then you'll

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think I look like old Aunt Sadie from the country."

He laughed and looked at her, in the full bloom of her womanhood, brilliant, beautiful, perfectly poised, and began to voice his protest at her gibe, when suddenly he stopped and looked straight ahead, as if at a vision. The stream of people following stopped, too, and looked. At the far end of the room, two steps above the level of the ballroom floor, there was a door leading into the dining-room, which had been twined with vines and roses, and there, poised a minute before she descended, stood Priscilla, in her white tulle gown, her eyes shining, and the light on her yellow hair making an aureole about her head—Priscilla, like an artist's ideal of youth.

"Elaine, the Lily-maid," Drake murmured, half to himself. Then the moment passed, Peter led Priscilla into the room, the music began, and Mrs. Martin pulled herself together sharply.

"She's very lovely to-night, isn't she?"

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"Yes," said Drake.

"She had twenty-two bouquets, and she chose to carry yours. It was sweet of you to send lilies of the valley, Tony, and so significant—the violets for me!"

"She is carrying my flowers," Drake repeated.

"We *both* are," she answered, pointing to her own corsage.

"I am very proud," he said.

"Mother, Mr. Schuyler thinks we'd better begin. Oh, how do you do, Mr. Drake? I'm *so* glad you came."

"Thank you," he said, looking at her intently.

"I'm frightened to death, mother. If it wasn't for Mr. Peter, I couldn't possibly do a thing."

"Priscilla, you're getting on," said her mother. "Go ahead, Peter. I'm dancing with Colonel Bracken—ah, here he is now. Sorry you don't dance, Tony. Go make yourself agreeable to some other old lady!"

The dance began, and Drake betook him-

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self to a vantage-point and watched the throng. Quite unconsciously, his attention concerned itself with the two figures, mother and daughter, that dominated the scene. Priscilla blew about the room like a bit of thistledown, a white butterfly, as he put it to himself, while Mrs. Martin, regal, imperious, directed and managed it all, as ever, the power and motive force. As the evening wore on he wandered about, smoked, talked, and came back to his comparisons. As he stood watching, after an elaborate figure, he saw Mrs. Martin go to Priscilla and say a word, and then Priscilla, after an apparent moment of hesitation, came to him.

"Mr. Drake, mother is going to lead this figure, and I'm to rest. Will you take me away for a bit? I won't have to talk to you," she added, as she took his arm and led him to a seat in the music-room.

"Are you having a good time?" he asked, looking down at her.

"Oh, splendid!" she answered. "I'd no

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idea coming out was like this. It's such fun, and everybody is so nice, and Peter—I mean Mr. Schuyler—dances grandly!"

"You don't tell me! I have never had my attention called to Peter's grandeur before."

"I think he's fine, don't you?"

"Yes—but let's talk about you instead of Peter."

"Oh, that's the trouble with me—there's never anything to say about me. Doesn't mother look lovely?" she added, catching sight of her as she passed the door.

"Yes, she does. She always does."

"Yes, but not always like to-night. I think people have heights of looks, like heights of happiness, don't you?"

"Do they? I'm afraid I don't notice those things much."

"No, I don't think you do—it shows in your books."

"Oh, does it?"

"Yes, you never make any one want to

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see your heroines, because you never care anything about seeing them yourself."

He laughed. "What do you know about my heroines?"

"I know all about them. I've read all your books."

"Poor child. I feel for you."

"Now, don't *you* do it, too."

"Do what?"

"Laugh at me."

"Forgive me—I won't ever again. How did you happen to read my things?"

"Well, I found *The Soul of Ignace* in Paris, and I liked that pretty well, so I got the others. *The Soul of Ignace* is the best thing you've done."

"I agree with you. It was written when I had the most to say."

"Were you Ignace?"

A dark flush mounted Drake's face, and burnt itself out in his hair. It might have been anger or embarrassment or shame. "Yes," he answered finally.

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"I thought so."

"No one ever dared to ask me that before," he added.

"Perhaps no one ever guessed," she said.

"Your mother knows," Drake confessed.

"Oh, mother—she knows everything. Isn't she wonderful?"

"She's the most wonderful woman I know."

"I'm so glad you think so, too. You see I've never had any one to talk to before about mother—any one who would understand, I mean."

He nodded.

"I don't know why I chatter along this way to you."

"I like it," he said simply. "Your mother has played the most important part in my life of any one who has ever come into it."

"Has she? How?"

"I can't tell you—but she came and hauled me up out of the mire and made a man of me."

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"I'm so glad mother did that. You see, I used to feel badly sometimes because she never let me stay with her, but all those years she was helping you, and that was better worth while than just helping me."

"I'm not so sure of that. Perhaps you could have given her more in return than I ever can."

"Oh, well, I should always love her just the same, no matter what she did—she's so wonderful. I don't see how I ever happened to belong to her."

Mrs. Martin appeared at the door. "Come along, Lady-bird; it's my time to rest now. Oh, Tony—you're here, are you? Take her along back and then come and talk to me."

"Shall I send you in some coffee, mother?"

"No, thanks."

Mrs. Martin leaned back and closed her eyes. She was glad of the quiet. Priscilla's ball was a great success, but it had been a strain, and she was tired. She al-

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most envied Priscilla her thrills; but there—she wanted her girl to drink the pleasure of it to the full. How she was stealing into her heart and interest, with her honest eyes and her unrepressed adoration!

“Oh, no, he won’t—at least, I hope he won’t. It would ruin his chances of greatness if he married Louise,” came Mrs. Crompton’s clear voice from the other side of the divan. “He ought to marry the daughter—he needs just such a spontaneous young thing to stir him up. He’s twisted Louise’s mind dry of all ideas; and, then, she’s too old for him. He doesn’t care for society, of course”—the voice dwindled off as the couple disappeared again.

Mrs. Martin sat there as if carved in stone. “He ought to marry the daughter—he’s twisted Louise’s mind dry of all ideas—she’s too old for him”—she went over it and over it. How often she had said that Nan Crompton’s tongue went to the heart of things, like a surgeon’s knife to the seat of a disease. Was she right now? Had she

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played her part in Tony's life, and must she march on now and give her place to—

"Here I am—why, what's the matter, Louise?" he asked in quick alarm.

"Nothing. Why?"

"You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"I have."

He took her hand with rare tenderness. "You're overdoing lately. Why don't you let me take you away?"

"I can't. You remember what we were saying the other day about shifting responsibility, and how Nan Crompton hit the nail on the head by saying that I kept my responsibility in school while I preached?"

"Odious woman!"

"But it was the truth, Tony, and now I want to make it up to Priscilla—a little. I'm finding out that the shirked responsibilities are coming back to me doubled."

"She's been talking to me about you tonight. She seems to adore you."

"I know, and I think I'm going to love her better than I have ever loved anything

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in my life. I think, perhaps, I am going to give her the thing I hold most dear."

"Oh, I don't think you're called on to do that," he said lightly.

"Do you think her very sweet, Tony?"

"Yes, and interesting, too—strangely interesting."

"I want you to like her tremendously."

"Of course I'd do that, because she's yours."

"No, I want you to because she's herself."

"When are you going to answer that question I asked you the other night?"

"I don't know. If I answered it to-night, I should say that it can never be."

"Then I won't speak of it again until you wish me to."

"Thanks. I shall not be long, but it takes some time to face the truth fairly and squarely, and give it welcome."

Later, when the house was dark and quiet, Mrs. Martin went to Priscilla's door. The girl sat before the fire, toasting her toes,

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and at sight of her mother she sprang up joyfully.

"Why, mother, how nice of you to come! Sit down here"—she pushed a big chair up—"and we can talk."

Mrs. Martin let herself be pushed into the chair, and a pillow placed behind her head, then Priscilla sat down cross-legged on the hearth, facing her.

"Wasn't it too lovely, all of it? I'm just trying to begin at the beginning, and remember everything everybody said to me, and how many times I was favored."

Mrs. Martin smiled. "I'm glad you had such a good time. You were a great success, Priscilla. I prophesy that you will be a belle."

"Me a belle? Oh, mother, how could I be?"

"Modesty is a sort of a disease with you, dear."

"I might be just because I'm your daughter, but not because I'm me," she said, leaning her cheek against her mother's hand.

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She looked very slight and childish in her white gown, her hair about her face.

Mrs. Martin touched a chain she wore about her neck. "What's this?" she said, examining the locket which fell into her hand.

Priscilla flushed. "You wouldn't care to know," she said.

"But I do care. May I look?" Mrs. Martin persisted, suspecting some childish love-affair.

"If you like," Priscilla whispered. "It is the picture of my pretended best friend."

She put her head down, and waited centuries while her mother looked, and then she heard a sob—deep, rending, like the breaking up of ice long hardened. She was drawn into her mother's arms, and on her face she felt the rain of tears.

CHAPTER V

“THIS day is good enough to put away in sweet lavender and keep for always,” said Mrs. Martin, lazily swinging in the hammock, her hands locked under her head. “Tony, how did you ever think of having us all down here? It is too lovely!”

“Well, it certainly is time for me to precipitate myself into the social whirl,” he answered, smiling; “and you people are witnessing my first feeble strokes.”

“This is no feeble stroke,” interrupted Peter; “this is a headlong dive. The Associated Press ere now, no doubt, has telegraphed the news of this house-party from one end of the civilized globe to the other.”

At this point Mrs. Crompton appeared, parasol in hand, followed by The Parson.

“Where are you going?” Drake inquired.

Mrs. Crompton pulled a long face, the

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corners of her mouth turned down, her wicked eyes turned up. "We are going out into the wilderness," she said, in a muffled voice; "and there the saintly Parson is to read aloud to me from Thomas à Kempis—or is it Thomas à Becket? I never can get them straight. Also he is to read the *Prayers for the Damned*."

"How cheerful!" murmured Peter.

They all laughed, including The Parson.

"What are you going to do with the hammock?" demanded Mrs. Martin.

"Sit in it," replied the lady promptly.

"Both of you?" asked Drake.

"Certainly. It can be done with care, you know."

"That," said The Parson, "is our concession to things worldly."

"You've no idea how nice he looks lying at the other end of the hammock, preaching to me. Oh, even conversion may be made interesting if you just know how to go about it."

"Who's converting whom?" asked Tony.

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Mrs. Crompton gave him a dazzling smile. "We're converting each other," she replied. "*En avant*, spiritual pastor and master!"

The Parson held the door open for her, and surveyed their smiling faces, smiling himself. "The only question is, which one wins out first in the conversion," he said.

Mrs. Crompton's laugh floated back to them as they tramped off Woodward.

"It really isn't a bad idea—this flirtation of Nan and The Parson," said Mrs. Martin.

"It's all very well for Mary Ann,
But a little tough on Abraham,"

quoted Peter. "He's too good a sort for her to make a fool of."

"I'm not so sure she'll succeed there," said Drake. "I think she's met her match."

"Where's Miss Priscilla?" demanded Peter.

"I don't know, I'm sure. She's playing around somewhere," her mother replied. "Priscilla's having a splendid time."

"I'm so glad," Drake said sincerely.

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"I'm not," said Peter. "She treats me like a dog." He slammed the screen door after him, and marched off in search of her.

"Do you think Peter is in love with Priscilla?" Mrs. Martin asked idly.

A slow red crept into Drake's face, and a look of utter surprise and consternation engraved itself there. "I don't know—I hadn't thought of it—of course, he must be."

Mrs. Martin turned and looked at him. "It would be only natural, of course. She's such a dear."

"I suppose he's just the sort she would like—jolly and good-looking, and all that."

"I don't know. It's hard to tell just what is going on in that queer little head of hers. I'm constantly surprised at her good sense."

"You're modest."

"Oh, no! I came by mine through hard knocks, but hers is instinctive; and such a power of love as she has packed in her heart—it is alarming!"

"We'll hope Peter is worthy of it."

"I suppose every woman has it—this

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power of love," she went on; "and the failure or success of her life depends on her getting the right outlet for it."

"The right outlet?"

"I mean the right object. It's a question which is the greater tragedy—to squander your whole treasure of love upon a man who is not worthy, or not to find the man at all, and find this power growing and growing, with no outlet, until it fairly chokes out life, or—"

"Or?"

"To keep it for a man who does not want it."

"Yes, that must be the worst of all. But all that belongs to the romantic age. You and I have gone beyond that. You said once about Priscilla—'the obligations of being greatly loved'—they so disturb life."

"What do you know about it?" she flung out at him. "You've never loved in all your bloodless life."

"Louise!"

"I mean just that. You've no right to an

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opinion. You've gone along your way, watching, dissecting emotions, and putting the results in books. Well, what of it? What does that amount to—to you, Anthony Drake, the man? You've never leaped to heights undreamed of, and been flung to depths unthinkable, at the merest look of some one you love."

"Why, Louise, what's come to you? The cold-hearted advocate of things Platonic!"

"Ridiculous, isn't it? I'm making out a case for the other side, you see."

"We're too—too settled, you and I, to consider that side now. Fifteen years ago, perhaps—well, we'll do very well without the demands; we'll go abroad and work together, and come out here sometimes in the summer and loaf. Haven't you nearly decided, Louise?"

"Yes, I have nearly decided that if there is no bread a stone must do."

"Which means?"

"Perhaps some day you'll know, Tony, but I hope not."

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Peter, meanwhile, strolled until he was out of sight, and then he started off on what might be called a purposeful quickstep. He searched among the willows, and she wasn't there; he tried the hilltop, and she wasn't there; then, hot and irate, he made for the edge of the river, and nearly stepped on her, lying flat on her stomach in the grass, looking into the depths of the water.

"Well," Peter fairly snorted, "so here you are!"

No reply.

"I've been all over the country looking for you, and I'm nearly dead with heat and anxiety."

"I'm sorry."

"Sorry? You don't know what it means. You wouldn't care a rap if I dropped dead at your feet with sunstroke!"

"Yes, I would. How would I ever get you home?"

He flung himself down dejectedly and watched her. "Why did you give me the slip?"

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"I didn't. I just came away to be by myself."

"Oh, if that's the case, perhaps you'd like me to go?"

She considered a moment. "No, I'd just as soon you'd stay—if you won't chatter."

"Humph!"

He relapsed into enforced silence, and she resumed her scrutiny of the water's depths. Shortly she began to speak softly, as if to herself:

"And after awhile the King, who lived in the Palace of Shells, far under the water, grew old and didn't care about anything in the kingdom, so the people threatened to kill him and get a new king. The King went to the Wise Old Woman of the Sea and asked her what to do, and she said that if he could find the Water-Lily Maiden and induce her to give him one drink from her golden goblet, he would grow young again, and all would be well.

"Whereupon the King sent out his courtiers to the end of the kingdom to find her.

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He sent water-bugs and fish and snakes, and they all searched in vain. At length the King set forth himself on a prancing dolphin, and he rode to all the countries under the sea, but he found her not; he went to the surface of the water and rode clear round the world, but he found her not; and all the time he was growing older and older, and finally he said to the dolphin: 'Take me home to die.'

"So the dolphin took him homeward, and just as he was about to descend beneath the water, where the Palace of Shells grew, the King spied a clump of water-lilies, and he cried out to them:

" 'Know ye where the Water-Lily Maiden dwells who holds the golden goblet?'

"And they answered: 'Yes, she lives here in this village.'

"So the King entered the village of Water-Lilies, and there on a lily pad, swaying with the water's ripple, sat the Water-Lily Maid; and when she saw the King she smiled.

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“ ‘I’ve been around the whole world twice, once under sea and once atop,’ grumbled the King.

“ ‘And I’ve lived beside your door all the time,’ she said to him.

“ ‘Give me to drink of the golden goblet,’ he commanded.

“ ‘ ‘Tis only for the wise to drink,’ said she. ‘One drop gives supreme happiness, two drops satiety, and three drops death.’

“ ‘Give it me!’ cried the King.

“So she lifted the goblet to his lips, and he drank one drop.

“ ‘ ‘Tis sweet!’ cried the King.

“ ‘Beware!’ said the Water-Lily Maiden.

“She raised it again to his lips, and he drank two drops.

“ ‘ ‘Tis bitter,’ moaned the King.

“ ‘Beware!’ cried the Water-Lily Maiden.

“Eagerly he seized the cup and drank three drops, and then the King fell dead of too much joy, even at his own threshold.”

“What was in the cup?” demanded Peter.

“I don’t know,” she said.

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"Well, I'll tell you," said Peter, with sudden passion. "It was love—love—love! Oh, Priscilla, unless you come to the rescue, I shall drink three drops and die!"

Priscilla sat up and inspected him. "What are you driving at?" she said impatiently.

She looked very young, and Peter felt a thousand years old.

"Priscilla, did you ever hear of love?"

"Of course."

"Do you know what it means?"

She nodded.

"Well, I've got it—I've got it terribly. I'm dying of it."

Her face showed swift concern. "Dear me! I'm so sorry, Peter."

"Of course I know I'm not good enough for her."

Priscilla leaped to a swift conclusion. "No, you're not."

"No fellow could be. She's the sweetest thing on earth."

"Isn't she?"—warmly.

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"But I love her so—"

"Everybody does," said Priscilla promptly.

"Y-e-s, I know," he acknowledged in some surprise.

"Well, then, why on earth should she care most for you? You're too young for her, Peter, and you talk too much, and you act so silly sometimes; and, besides, you just simply couldn't be my father!"

Peter sprang to his feet. "Your father?" he cried. "Your father? Who wants to be your father?"

Priscilla rose, too, and faced him. "I mean that I don't think mother is in love with you."

"Well, what of it? You're the only one I care about."

"Me?"

"Yes, of course."

She blushed furiously. "Oh, Peter!" she gasped. "You don't mean—*me*? I thought—oh, Peter!"

She ran away into the woods as fast as

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she could go, and Peter gave chase. At the first turn in the woods she plunged into Drake's arms. He stood quietly and held her until Peter was almost upon them.

"What is it?" he asked softly, but she only burrowed her head into his coat.

"Take me away—take me away from Peter."

"Priscilla, I insist upon being treated seriously," said Peter firmly, approaching her, and paying no attention at all to Drake.

She raised her head and glared at him. "Go away—go away! I never want to see you again!" she cried.

With one groan Peter flung away and disappeared among the trees.

"Now, what's it all about?" said Drake.

"He's been saying such things to me!" she confessed. "I thought all along he meant mother, and I said such awful things back, and then he meant—*me!*"

"Dear me! I suppose he's in love with you—is he?"

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"Don't say it! I hate him—it makes me feel so terrible—and grown up."

The last tragic words came out with a burst of tears, and poor Drake stood in helpless amazement, wondering what to do. Finally he put his arm about her shoulders and drew her to him, and the yellow head went down on his breast, and then, all at once, a new and utterly unexplainable thrill of happiness went through him and left him trembling.

"You're very good," Priscilla sobbed. "I don't feel at all grown up with you."

"Thanks—I don't with you, either. You're all right now. Come along and play, and forget about Peter."

He led her down to the water's edge again, and found her a seat.

"Want some water-lilies?"

She nodded. He sat down, took off his shoes and stockings, and waded in.

"It's great," he said, grinning back at her. "Come on in."

"Lovely! I'll do it!" cried Priscilla, and

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jerked off her shoes and stockings, tucked up her skirt, and marched in, with many a squeal of delight.

They made fairy boats of the lilies, and sailed large fleets off to the Islands of the Blest. They laughed and called out to each other like veritable children; and in the midst of things Mrs. Martin appeared on the bank and beheld the spectacle.

"Why, Priscilla Martin," she gasped. "Tony!"

He turned a boyish face to her. "We've just sent off a splendid cargo of poppy seeds and forgetfulness flowers, bound for the Island of Childhood!"

"Oh, mother," cried Priscilla, "it's such fun! Come in—do."

"No, dear, it is not for old ladies to invite the rheumatism. I've sent my ship from another port—I wonder will our fleets come home again?" she added softly.

CHAPTER VI

“**P**RISCILLA MARTIN, what on earth have you done to Peter?” asked Mrs. Crompton abruptly, at the lunch-table two days later. “He acts like Death at the feast.”

Priscilla cast a sympathetic glance at Peter’s solemn fare. “I think Peter doesn’t feel very well—do you? It’s so hot—”

“Hot? Nonsense! It isn’t a heat rash that Peter has; it’s another disease; isn’t it, Peter?”

“You ought to recognize the symptoms,” he retorted.

“It isn’t right to tantalize,” interposed Drake. “Anybody feel up to an automobile ride after lunch?”

“Mercy! Tony, in this heat?” Mrs. Martin protested.

“Coolest place you can find,” he said.

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"I'd like to go," volunteered Priscilla.

"How about you, Peter?"

"No, thank you."

"Are you going to use The Parson, Mrs. Crompton? If not, I'll take him."

"Take him, and welcome," said she, pushing back her chair; "but don't lead him into mischief."

"That's your prerogative, I suppose," said Peter.

"Exactly. I'll exercise it on you in his absence, Peter, Peter, Pumpkin-eater."

"I think 'I'll wrap the drapery of me couch about me,' and lie down to pleasant dreams," said Mrs. Martin. "It's a fine day to sleep."

So The Parson, Priscilla, and Tony set forth in the machine, Priscilla on the front seat with Tony, and The Parson stretched out in perfect comfort on the roomy back seat.

"Where shall we go?" Tony asked the girl.

"Over there to the sky-line," she an-

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swered, pointing to where sky and woodland met.

He smiled and started. They rode swiftly by the rich valley farms which flanked the road on either side, stretching away to the sky, that shut down over the earth like a lid to a huge pot. The air was hot and vibrant with midsummer noises.

"Things feel sort of at their height," Priscilla said.

"So they are," Drake answered. "In another day or so we're over the edge and down toward fall."

"Too bad things can't ever stay at the height."

"You won't think so ten years from now."

They were silent for awhile, and when Priscilla looked around, The Parson was asleep.

"We're in the Seven League Boots," she said. "We're running away from the Devil to save The Parson."

"Poor Mrs. Crompton! Is *she* the Devil?" Drake laughed.

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"Oh, no; I quite like Mrs. Crompton, don't you? She isn't as bad as she acts."

"None of us are—that's the saving grace."

"Let's go faster; I hear the Devil's footsteps."

"It's dangerous," he warned, letting out the machine a little.

"Faster!" she laughed. "I feel his breath on my neck."

He laughed and changed the speed recklessly to please her. He wanted to feel her close beside him, and to hear the childish laugh of delight.

"Faster! I hear his voice in my ear!"

The machine leaped at his hand like a living thing, and then the inevitable happened. Out into the road a baby toddled from a farmyard. Drake threw on the brake, called out, and tried to turn out. It was so sudden an onslaught that the machine did not respond, and the next thing he knew he lay beside a fence, a cold stream trickling down his face. Something near him groaned, and he sat up quickly and crawled

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to the heap of clothes lying against the fence. It was Priscilla, and she lay white and still, like a broken flower.

"God!" said Drake, and touched her face weakly.

"Drake! Drake!" called The Parson from somewhere. He turned and beheld the reverend gentleman struggling from under the upturned car, his head appearing unexpectedly among the cushions.

"Drake, if you could get me out I'd be obliged."

Drake tried to drag himself to his feet. "In a moment," he said. "Are you hurt?"

"I don't know—I think not. Where's Priscilla?"

"There!" Drake almost sobbed.

"Is she hurt?" demanded The Parson, renewing his struggle.

"I'm afraid so."

"We haven't killed her, Drake?"

"God forbid!"

He finally dragged himself to the side of

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the machine and extricated The Parson, who was only shaken up. They went and bent over the girl, who had not moved. The Parson knelt down and listened for her heart-beats. To Drake it was an eon of agony before he nodded.

"It beats faintly," he said. "We must get help. You stay here while I go for the farm people."

He limped off, and Drake sat down, lifted Priscilla's head into his lap, and sat looking down at her. He didn't touch her, nor speak to her, nor did he mind the steady drip, drip, of blood from his cut head; he just sat and looked at the white face in his lap, and knew what it was to watch joy go; knew what Orpheus felt as Eurydice faded; knew what every man knows who faces the loss of his heart's desire. All the years of his life marched before him—empty-handed because they had not known Priscilla; the years to come approached with bowed heads, for they were not to know Priscilla; and the lit-

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tle present-in-between, where she had blossomed suddenly, like a morning-glory, grew all radiant with her.

Presently The Parson returned with the farmer and his wife, and very gently they lifted her and took her in, Drake following dully. The woman began to work over her, rubbing her hands and dashing water in her face.

"I telephoned Mrs. Crompton that we'd had a slight accident and would be home in an hour. She will have the doctor there."

Drake assented absently. All he cared about was the flutter of those eyelids, so long quiet.

"Let me tie up your head, Drake—it's a bad cut," said The Parson.

Drake pushed him aside and stood by the bed. Slowly, as if creeping back from the dead, Priscilla came to. Her eyes opened at last, and she sighed.

"Thank God!" said Drake; and it was a prayer to which The Parson said, "Amen."

"Mother!" breathed the girl.

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"We'll see her presently," said The Parson.

"Where am I?"

"In a farmhouse. The automobile went into a ditch—"

"Oh, yes! The baby?"

"It's all right. We didn't touch it."

"You're hurt!"

"It's nothing. Are you better?"

"Yes, yes," she said, and tried to lift her hand to his head, but it hung limp, and she cried out with the pain.

Drake groaned as if it were his own.

"Tie his—head—up," she ordered.

Drake protested.

"Please—Tony," she whispered; and he sat still while The Parson and the farm woman washed and bandaged his wound.

"Don't tell mother—it will frighten her," Priscilla said.

"She knows we've had a slight accident," The Parson explained. "We're going to try to get you home in a wagon, if you think you can be moved."

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"Yes, let's go home."

They put a mattress into a farm wagon and made her as comfortable as possible, the Parson sitting at her feet, to keep the rough bed steady, and Drake at her head. The farmer drove slowly and carefully. Every once in a while Drake swayed with heat and dizziness, but he pulled himself together, and once or twice, when Priscilla groaned, he came back from some other world, it seemed.

"Lie down beside her, Drake. I don't think you can hold out."

"I'll hold out," said Drake.

It seemed hours before the low bungalow came into view; and when they drove up, Drake saw Mrs. Crompton and the doctor in a mist. The doctor and The Parson lifted Priscilla's bed out and took her indoors. At the threshold of the living-room stood Mrs. Martin, pale and frightened. Drake went in and stood before her.

"See what I've done to her," he said.

Mrs. Martin glanced at Priscilla's white

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face, and then up at the man's hollow eyes and bloody head.

"Tony!" she cried. "Tony—you're hurt!"

She touched his head with her hand, but he threw it off.

"Never mind me," he said roughly. "Look at her."

They carried Priscilla up-stairs and put her on her bed, leaving Mrs. Martin and the doctor there. Drake stumbled down-stairs and into his den, where he could be alone. Once there, he put his head in his hands and groaned: "God! she can not die, do you hear me? She can not die!" Over and over he cried out his defiance to the powers of life and death, until it became mechanical.

The door flew open and Peter burst in, white-eyed and haggard. "Damn you, Drake!" he cried. "Damn you! You've killed her—you've killed her!"

He threw himself down beside the table and burst into tears, but Drake said not a word.

CHAPTER VII

IT was a week later that Mrs. Martin came into the library, where Mrs. Crompton, Drake, Peter, and The Parson were playing bridge.

"How is the patient to-day, Louise?" asked Mrs. Crompton.

"Good news! She's so much better that she's to be brought down-stairs for a couple of hours."

"Really?" said Drake, rising.

"Really?" said Peter, at the same moment on his feet.

Mrs. Crompton laughed as they hastily sat down. "I'm thinking some of jumping off the bridge, in order to work up a little interest in my own case," she said.

"You don't ever let interest in your own case flag," said The Parson.

"Doesn't he do well? I'm going to start a training-school for parsons."

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"We'll give you a hand when she's ready to be moved," said Drake.

"Who's ahead this morning?" asked Mrs. Martin.

"The Parson and I are the only ones in our right minds, so it stands to reason we're ahead. Play, Peter."

"Oh, is it my play? Well, what is—" he began absently.

"For pity's sake, Louise, take Peter's hand and let him moon in peace!" snorted Mrs. Crompton, in high dudgeon.

Peter rose, mumbling something about "nagging women"; Mrs. Martin took his place, and the game went on in silence for an hour.

Peter fled, and horrified the gardener by cutting all the lilies ruthlessly and carrying them off to the dining-room, where he assembled all the vases in the house and made the rooms bewilderingly sweet.

"Poor old Peter!" said Mrs. Martin, watching him.

"Hardest attack Peter's had in years. Is

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she going to take him?" asked Mrs. Crompton.

"Do pay attention," ordered The Parson.

Drake threw down his cards. "We none of us are in the humor. Why bore ourselves this way?"

"'None of us' meaning Anthony Drake," snapped Mrs. Crompton. "Peter, those lilies make me sick."

Peter grinned. "That's what I put 'em there for!"

Mrs. Crompton rose peevishly, then laughed. "Do you remember the little boy who was spanked for being so poor in arithmetic, and how he went to the drug store and asked for a nickel's worth of 'rithmetic pills? I wish somebody would give me a bottle of temper tonic."

"Come and try a dose of ozone," said The Parson."

"All right; come along."

They went out, and Mrs. Martin went upstairs, leaving Peter and Drake alone together.

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"Cigarette?" Drake asked, offering him the box.

"'Bliged," answered Peter, lighting up. "Tony, are you in love with Priscilla?"

Drake turned angrily. "What right have you to ask me such a question as that?" he demanded.

"Maybe I haven't the right—but I want to know."

"What difference does it make to you?"

"A good deal. I'm in love with her myself, and I don't suppose I'd have much chance against you."

"Do you think she loves you?"

"I don't know—sometimes I think she does."

Drake squared his shoulders and walked to the door. "You needn't worry about me," he said. "I won't interfere with your chances."

Peter walked to and fro excitedly after Drake's departure. The field was clear, then; Drake was interested in her only as Mrs. Martin's daughter.

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"Tony! Oh, Tony!" came a voice from above.

Peter went to the foot of the stairs.

"Drake's gone out. Anything I can do?"

"We're ready to come down now. Do you think you could get Priscilla down alone?"

He cleared the steps three at a time.

"Try me," he said, and stopped at the apparition of a little figure in a soft white *peignoir*.

"Hello, Peter!" she said, holding out her hand.

Peter dropped on his knees and kissed her hand. "I'm so glad, I'm so glad!" was all he could manage to say.

"Now, you must get her up very carefully, Peter," said Mrs. Martin. "She mustn't be jiggled at all; and if you should fall down-stairs with her, Peter, I would have you shot."

"Go 'way, lady," murmured Peter. He lifted Priscilla as if she were made of fragile china, and if his progress down the stairs

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and into the living-room was a trifle slow, one couldn't blame him, for Priscilla's head was on his breast and her arm about his neck. He put her down gingerly on the couch, and looked at her anxiously. "Are you all there?" he asked.

"That was splendid, Peter!" she smiled back. "Just as good as flying."

"I'll take you up and back again, if you like it," he said boyishly.

"Oh, how sweet it is! Aren't the lilies lovely?" she exclaimed.

"Peter did that," said Mrs. Martin, putting another pillow behind her.

"How good you are, Peter! Oh, everybody's been so good, it's almost worth getting hurt!"

"Don't say such a thing, Baby," said Mrs. Martin, kissing her forehead.

"And mother—well, mother has been—has been—mother!" Priscilla added, her eyes shining.

"Isn't she pretty? Doesn't she look fine?" Peter said.

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Mrs. Martin smiled. "Peter, I'll leave you on guard for a bit. I've a note to write and—"

"God bless you!" said Peter fervently, and hurried her out. He drew up a chair beside the girl's couch. "Do you know what torture this last week has been to me?" he said.

"I suppose it has been hard for all of you," she replied evasively.

"But, you see, your mother and I love you the most, so we have suffered the most."

"Yes, mother couldn't let me go—this time," she mused.

"Priscilla, have you any idea how I love you?"

"Oh, Peter, I don't want you to love me! Won't you please not?"

"You don't care at all?"

"I care a great deal, Peter dear, but—"

"Don't say the 'but,' please. Do you think you ever could care? I know I'm not much, but if you cared about me, Priscilla, I've been thinking what a lot I could do with

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myself to make more of a man for you. I'd go to work, and—and—"

"Oh, Peter, don't; please don't!" Priscilla put her head down on her arm.

"I'm a brute to worry you now with it, Priscilla. Never mind about it, dear. Are you *crying*?"

Mrs. Martin, entering, stopped at the door. "Why, Baby! Peter—what's the matter with you children?"

Peter turned away and left them, and Mrs. Martin took Priscilla in her arms.

"The idea of his getting you all excited like this! I could spank him! What's he been saying to you, Lady-bird?"

"He wants me to love him, and I can't; and I don't want him to love me, and he does," sobbed Priscilla.

"Dear me! What a tragedy!" said Mrs. Martin, kissing her hair. "Peter will recover."

Priscilla regarded her gravely. "You don't think it's my duty to marry him, do you, mother? He said that if I did it would

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make a new man of him, and he'd go to work—”

“My dear, if it was your duty to marry all the men who need your saving touch, this would be a shocking world. Peter's heart will get itself together again, so if you don't want him, send him about his affairs.”

“Oh!” sighed Priscilla. “I'm so glad it's not my duty.”

“Hello, there!” cried Mrs. Crompton, swooping down upon them. “How is our heroine?” She kissed Priscilla warmly. “It's fine to have you down, and to note the decorative touch to the room once more.”

“Where's The Parson?” asked Priscilla, smiling.

“I had to leave him in the garden to recover his wounded dignity.”

“What have you done to him, Nan?” Mrs. Martin inquired.

“My dears, would you believe it?—he tried to kiss me out in the garden!”

“Oh, dear!” cried Priscilla in horror. Mrs. Martin laughed.

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"Now, it's one thing to be kissed by a beau in the moonlight," Mrs. Crompton continued; "but by a parson in broad daylight, out in the garden—why, it's a scandal!"

"Are you going to spoil everything for my Parson, Mrs. Nan?" demanded the girl.

"I can't say—it looks a little like it," Mrs. Crompton answered. "But don't you worry about him, Pussy-cat," she added. "Any man, be he parson or prodigal, can take care of himself in affairs of the heart."

She picked up a magazine, nodded to them, and went out on the porch. Mrs. Martin gave Priscilla her book, and then went and threw herself down on the couch at the end of the room, behind the grand piano. All was silent for awhile, and then the door slammed, and Priscilla looked up to see Drake at the door of the living-room. A lightning-like change went over his face, and he took two quick steps toward her.

"Priscilla!" he said breathlessly. "Priscilla!"

She half rose, and held out both her hands.

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In a moment he was beside her, on his knees, her hands held close to his face and lips, and last of all crushed to his breast.

"Oh!" said Priscilla, striving to free the moment from its weight of emotion. "I was wondering where you were."

"Priscilla, you're well again—you're well again!" he said, with a thrill in his voice that made her wince.

"Yes, I'm all right again; are you?"

"Oh, yes; it didn't matter about me. But you'll never know what it meant to me to think that perhaps I'd hurt you for good and all. Oh, you'll never know!"

"But it was all my fault. I made you go faster and faster. I ought to have suffered, because I was so wickedly silly."

"No, I was the one who had the responsibility in hand, and just to please you I took the risk. I ought to have been killed for it," he finished bitterly.

She drew her hands away and shook her head. "It's all over now, so let us never speak of it again."

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He sat down beside her, and she threw herself into conversation. "It's fine to be down again, and everybody's been so good! Peter carried me down—oh, so carefully!"

"Oh, yes, Peter. Where is he?"

"He's gone," she said simply.

He leaned toward her eagerly. "Priscilla, did you send him away?"

"Why, I—yes—that is—"

He breathed deeply and rose. "Thank Heaven!" he said softly; then: "You're tired—we're all exciting you."

"Well, I am tired," she admitted. "I suppose I'm not as strong as I thought I was."

He picked up her book, open on her lap, and began to read aloud softly. She smiled her thanks, and lay back on her pillow, watching him. His strong, lean face showed signs of the past week of anxiety, and a new softness had found place there. His voice went on and on, and then she lost track. Tony looked up and saw that she was asleep. He closed the book over his finger, and sat and looked at her—drank in

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the freshness of her—knew an abandon of feeling that he'd never known before.

There was a movement from behind the piano, and he turned and faced Mrs. Martin. Not the Mrs. Martin who thirty minutes before had thrown herself down there, but an old, whitefaced, haggard Mrs. Martin, whose dry lips refused to speak. She came slowly and stood beside Priscilla, looking down at her; then she looked at the man, who stood waiting.

"You love her?" she said simply.

"Yes," he answered; "I love her."

Mrs. Martin leaned over and kissed the sleeping girl, then she went out of the room, swiftly, as one struck with age.

CHAPTER VIII

THE next night Mrs. Martin put the last touches of Priscilla's room to make it comfortable for the night, put out the light, and leaned over to kiss the girl good night. Priscilla threw her arms about her neck and drew her down to her passionately.

"Lie down beside me a little, mother, and let's talk," she said.

Without a word Mrs. Martin obeyed, kissing the hand that soothed her face and brow.

"Mother, do you remember how sorry you were when I came home to stay? How you didn't want me?"

"Yes, I remember."

"But now you do want me, don't you, mother?" She slid into the circle of her mother's arms, sure of her welcome.

"Yes, sweetheart, now I want you. You

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are making up to me for a great many barren years."

"Mother, you never speak about my father. Did you love him?"

"No, not after the first six weeks of living with him," she admitted bitterly. "That's the reason I didn't want you. I suppose you were a reminder. Not that that excuses my neglect," she added.

"I don't mind now. Of course I hate to think of all those years we missed together; but I loved you so, that if you'd never cared at all, it would have made no difference in my feeling."

"I am the one who has lost, dear—all your sweet freshness, your new interests, your revivifying youngness. I shall have to make up for my wilful loss in the years to come."

The arms clung closer in the darkness. "You love me enough to make me your friend now, don't you, mother?"

"Of course, dear."

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"Could you tell me what it is that has come to you these last two days?"

Mrs. Martin stirred uneasily. "Come to me?"

"Yes; all day to-day and yesterday I've felt as if something has gone out—a light in you, mother—I don't know how to say it."

"I have not been well to-day; the strain and anxiety of the week has told on your old lady mother."

Priscilla felt that her question had been evaded. "'Old lady mother!' My most beautiful lady!" she protested. "Mother, I want to ask you about Mr. Drake."

"Well, dear, what of him?"

"You like him very much, don't you?"

"Yes, I like him very much, Priscilla."

"The Parson told me, when I first came home, that you made Mr. Drake."

"That's absurd, dear. No one makes a great man; he's born."

"But you helped him?"

"Yes, I helped him."

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"I thought at first that perhaps you cared for each other."

Mrs. Martin turned her head on the pillow as if it burned her. "We did—we do—we care for each other greatly; we're fast friends," she said, trying to be casual.

"Yes, I see now that it was only that, but I thought at first—it seemed as if he must want you for always, to help in his work."

"He doesn't need me any longer for his work."

"But it doesn't seem fair for you to have helped him to be great, and then that—that some one else should have his life when he *is* great."

"That's the way of the world, Priscilla."

"Mother, he says he loves me. I don't know what to do." She clung to her mother as if she faced some great danger.

"Do you love him, Priscilla?"

"I don't know. I think he's the most wonderful person I know—next to you."

"He asked you to marry him?"

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"Yes; he wants me to go abroad with him."

Mrs. Martin caught her breath painfully. "And you said?"

"I'm not sure just what I said, but I remember I told him I couldn't possibly go away without you."

Mrs. Martin laughed harshly.

"So he said we'd take you, too, of course."

The woman got up and went to the window and flung the curtain high, and put her hand to her throat, as if she choked. Presently she turned and said quietly:

"That was very sweet of you both, but, of course, I couldn't go."

"Then *I* won't. I don't want to think of it, anyway."

"But you must think of it, you must think of it," Mrs. Martin repeated, coming to sit on the edge of the bed. "It is not as it was with Peter; this is the treasure of a mature man, hoarded long and grown heavy with concealment. You must not tamper

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with Tony's love. If you want it, take it; if not, you must let him go."

"But, mother, how could I fill his life? Little, stupid me married to that great man! Suppose he should get tired of me; suppose he should expect me to help him the way you did, and I couldn't! I'd die of the shame of it."

"He's offered you his love; never mind about anything else."

"He frightened me so! He's so quiet usually, but to-day he was—he was like somebody else; somebody fierce and breathless and frightened."

Mrs. Martin sat still several moments before she spoke. "This experience has come into his life late, to make or mar it. It is a terrible responsibility for the woman, Priscilla, but I know you are equal to it, if you love him."

"You think it would be a good thing for him to marry?"

"I think it is a tremendous thing for him to love!"

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"Mother, do you want me to marry him?"

Silence.

"Do you, mother?"

Mrs. Martin went to the window again, and came back. "I want the happiness of you two people more than anything on earth. If it is to come to you through each other, then I want to see you married."

"If you'd like it, mother, I'll marry him."

"You must be sure of yourself, Priscilla. It would be very terrible if a child of mine should fail him," she added, half to herself.

"Oh, I want so to please you both, mother—you and him. You are the two people I admire the most. But I don't see how I could bear it to go away from you. We'll all have to live together, won't we?"

"We'll see, dear, when the time comes. I think I'll go now—I'm a little tired." She gathered the girl into her arms and kissed her tenderly. "I hope this man may bring all the happiness to you, my girl, that I haven't brought, and I hope you'll give all

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the happiness to him that I couldn't bring," she added softly.

"Oh, mother, don't—it makes me cry. It's just as if you were saying good-by to something."

"It's sort of good-by to my little girl."

"No, no—not for a long time yet."

"Good night, sweet one."

CHAPTER IX

MRS. CROMPTON tiptoed down the hall to the top of the stairs, and there she met The Parson, also tiptoeing. She laughed, nodded, and offered him her hand, which he promptly kissed. Together they slipped down the stairs silently.

"Mercy!" said Mrs. Crompton. "Isn't it creepy at this hour? I never was up so early in my life."

"It's fine," he answered; "you have room to breathe. Now, here's the fishing-tackle, the poles, and the bait, and I've got a few sandwiches, in case we're late in getting in. You might take the poles."

"Yes, I suppose it would be civil, but I must say I do hate to carry things, and I feel sort of sickly within. I think I'm going to regret this."

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"Not at all; you'll be all right when you get out into the air."

"Where's the sun? Isn't it time for it?" she asked, as they set out.

"Yes, it's time, but he hasn't appeared yet. A cloudy day, you know, means fisherman's luck."

"How far is it to the place we're going to fish?"

"Oh, about a mile and a half."

Mrs. Crompton heaved a gentle sigh. "I don't think you'll ever be able to make a sportsman of me, Parson."

"My dear madam, when once the fascination of angling has taken possession of your soul, physical discomforts will be as naught."

"I doubt it. Nothing has ever so taken possession of my soul that discomforts counted for naught."

"Then you are facing a new experience."

"Well, that's some compensation."

The Parson breathed rapturously. "Just breathe in that air, and see how fresh everything looks, and be content."

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"The air's all right, but it's just as good later. I've no patience with these people who think that nature isn't fit to be seen after eight in the morning. It's very narrow-minded, I think. It seems to me distinctly dreary at this hour."

"Early to bed and early to rise, you know."

"No wonder it's counted a virtue; it's disagreeable enough to be one!"

The Parson stopped. "Very well, we'll go back." He started to retrace his tracks.

"Oh, no, now we're started—"

He kept on. "Come along—back we go. I'd no idea my little pleasure-party would prove such a burden."

"It isn't—only you mustn't expect me to be good-natured at this hour. Wait, Parson!" she called after him, but he kept straight ahead. Mrs. Crompton hesitated one moment, and then gave chase. "*Please wait!*" she called, hurrying after.

There was a perceptible slowing up in The Parson's gait. "We'll get back for breakfast," he said cheerfully.

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"But I don't want to go back for breakfast; I want to go on and fish."

"You've done nothing but complain since we started, so we'd better go back."

"Give me the basket and I'll go fishing alone," she commanded.

"Not at all. I *want* to go fishing."

"So do I. Please—please, dear Parson, let us go fishing."

He stopped and faced her sternly. "Will you do your part of the work?"

"Yes."

"Will you put up with the discomforts without grumbling?"

"Y-e-s. Can't I give just one little kick?"

He picked up the basket and started off again.

"All right, all right, I won't!" she cried, seizing his arm.

"Very good," said The Parson. "Now we'll go fishing."

They turned and started in the other direction.

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"Turn again, Whittington, Lord Mayor of London," said Mrs. Crompton softly. Then they both laughed.

"You're a very nice woman—sometimes," said The Parson, "but in great need of training."

"Oh!" exploded Mrs. Crompton.

In due time and without further recrimination they arrived at the part of the river where fish abounded. The Parson fitted up the poles and turned to Mrs. Crompton. "Pass over a handful of bait," he said.

Mrs. Crompton opened the bucket and promptly dropped it, whereupon a writhing mass of worms squirmed at her feet, and she fled.

"Oh, drat it!" said The Parson, on his knees, shoveling them back. "I forgot you were a woman."

"How *can* you!" she protested. "Why don't you shovel them in with the lid of the bucket?"

"They don't bite, you know," he assured her, baiting her hook. "Now we'll throw

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in our lines and walk along the shore until we get a good place."

"Not at all," said she; "I'll get a comfortable rock and sit there, and let the fish come to me."

She acted on this decision, much to The Parson's amusement.

"Would you like a book?" he derided.

"The brook is my book—*this* day's sermons in stones."

"I shall fish up-stream. When you get tired, follow."

"But suppose I get a bite?" she called after him.

"You won't—there. But if you do, haul it in, take off the fish, and rebait."

"But I couldn't—I wouldn't rebait for a thousand dollars."

"Then come along with me and fish," he answered.

Mrs. Crompton rose slowly, wrath in her eye. She was used to the brand of cavalier whose whole thought was for her comfort and pleasure. In fact, comfort and pleas-

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ure were Mrs. Crompton's household gods, to whom she offered constant libation. Consequently, The Parson's nonchalant indifference to her wishes piqued and interested her as much as it irritated her—or a little more. She followed him slowly. "I feel like a squaw!" she called to him.

"Won't hurt you," he called back. "I promised you a new sensation. Take care of that rock—it's slippery."

Alas for Mrs. Crompton!—the warning came too late. She stepped on the edge of the slippery rock, plunged forward, full length, and dug her arms into the soft, mucky bank up to the elbows, saluting Mother Earth with her forehead. With a shout of dismay, The Parson flew to the rescue. He had fairly to dig her out, and, strange to say, the voluble Mrs. Crompton was absolutely silent—whether from rage or pain he couldn't make out.

"Are you hurt, Nan?" he asked anxiously.

"Hurt? Hurt?" she blazed. "Can you look at me and ask if I'm hurt?"

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She held out her blackened arms and lifted a strangely mottled face.

"But where? But where?" he reiterated anxiously.

"In my feelings, of course. Do you suppose anybody could look like this and not be hurt?"

He got a flat stick and began to scrape her off, solemnly. His expression suddenly struck her, and she sat down on the rock and laughed until the tears came.

"I'm so sorry—" he began, in alarm at this mirth.

"You look it," she said, with another outburst.

"We'll go straight home," he promised.

"We'll do nothing of the sort. Would you mind fishing out my shoe over there?"

She pointed to a partly submerged object, and he waded in and rescued it, scraping it carefully before returning it.

"I am so sorry," he protested again.

"You poor old dear, don't you bother," she said. "It was a case of pride coming

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before—and the fall was awful. But I'm going to catch a fish now, if I stay a week."

"Really?" he cried. "Oh, Nan, you're the real thing!"

"And that from the Right Reverend—"

"Don't! Give us your hand and come along."

"We'd better wash the hand first. You hold on to my feet, so I won't go in head first."

Whereupon The Parson laid hold of Mrs. Crompton's feet, and she hung over the edge of the rock and washed her hands and sleeves.

"If any one sees us we're compromised for life," she said.

"Birds and bees don't gossip," he answered.

They got up and away again, and this time The Parson looked after his partner carefully.

"I'm glad I tumbled," she said; "you're so much nicer to me."

They fished for awhile with no success,

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and then, when hope was almost dead, they struck a place where they were biting. Mrs. Crompton almost repeated her plunge when she got her first bite. After that she was insatiable. Even The Parson had no fault to find. Finally he looked at his watch.

"Do you know that it's one o'clock?" he cried.

"One? You don't mean it!"

"I do. Let's stop and eat the sandwiches."

"By all means—I'm starved."

So they picnicked under the trees, like ravenous children, laughing and comparing notes. Then they were off and at it again, until The Parson's weather eye warned him that they were in for a storm. He insisted upon turning back toward the farm, although Mrs. Crompton was for risking all for the joy of another bite. It grew blacker and blacker, and they finally took in their lines and hurried toward home. The lightning crashed down among the trees, and the thunder filled the woods.

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"Let's run for it," said The Parson, when they came in sight of the stables.

"All right," said Mrs. Crompton, and started. The poles she carried caught in things, and the string of fish flopped about The Parson's legs; but they kept on, and just as they reached the clearing the storm broke.

"Make for the dog-house!" shouted The Parson; and they tumbled into it, much to the consternation of the resident puppy families.

"Well," said Mrs. Crompton, sinking on the floor in a heap, "if I don't die right here of heart-disease, I miss my guess. Why, I haven't run like that for twenty years."

"You did splendidly," said The Parson, sitting beside her.

"There really isn't room for you," she protested.

"Very well, put out the pups, then," he replied.

"You look perfectly frightful," she said, inspecting him.

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"I don't doubt it—so do you. And yet I never saw you look so sweet!"

"Is that a compliment or an insult?"

"Now you look like—you! Not the fashionable Mrs. Crompton, nor the clever Mrs. Crompton, but just Nan Crompton, the sweetest woman in the world."

"Don't! I feel very young and reckless at this moment."

"Good! Then put your hand in mine, dear woman, and say that you will make me happier than I ever dreamed of being."

"I can't—I simply cannot—marry a parson. I've too much sense of humor."

"I don't ask you to marry a parson—I ask you to marry me."

"Aren't you the same?"

"No, the parson is a type, and I am a man."

Just here a terrific crash of thunder shook the dog-house, and Mrs. Crompton's head was buried on The Parson's breast. Here it seems well to draw the curtain. Somewhat later Mrs. Martin and the rest of the

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party saw a strange sight. Approaching across the garden came the irreproachable Mrs. Crompton, hatless, bespattered with mud, wading along through the wet grass; behind came The Parson, a large straw hat hanging limply about his neck. They laughed and "squashed" along through the water, apparently oblivious of onlookers.

"*Mon Dieu, Nan!*" cried Mrs. Martin, as they came up, "where have you been?"

"Fishing," replied that lady.

"Catch anything, Parson?" asked Tony.

The Parson put down his burdens and faced them all boyishly. "Yes, dearly beloved; I caught a wife."

But Mrs. Crompton was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER X

PRISCILLA wandered aimlessly between the close-cut hedges of her garden; idly trailed her hand in the fountain where Aphrodite disported herself; took up her book and sat for a few moments on the terrace; gazed at the blue Italian sky, and sighed. "Oh, dear, I wish he would get through with it!"

"It" was Anthony's book, at which he was working heart and soul, early and late; and it was the only cloud in the clear sky of Priscilla's happiness. She called the book her rival, and sometimes openly rebelled at the time her husband spent with it and away from her. But he was so filled with it, and he made up to her for his neglect in so many gentle ways, that she bore it as patiently as possible even though the days were long and lonely.

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The Drakes had been in Italy nearly a year now, delightfully situated in an old Italian palace, with a wonderful garden. Anthony called it "Priscilla's garden," and threatened to write a poem thereon. Priscilla, however, found herself rebelling sometimes at the very perfection of their life. Her young, restive spirit longed for change, or for the old conditions of life at home in America. Then, too, her mother's letters of late seemed to hint at a loneliness too deep for words, and a want which none but Tony and Priscilla could fill.

The year had brought slow but steady changes in Priscilla. The child whom Anthony Drake had married had blossomed into a woman during the days spent so much alone, and slowly into her life had come a love for Anthony so great and all-absorbing that it frightened her. She thought with wonder of the childish affection she had given him at the time of their marriage, and she shuddered away from the thought that she had married him mainly to please her

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mother, who had seemed to wish it so strongly.

A servant interrupted her thoughts. "Will you have the tea on the terrace, madame?"

"No, bring it to the pergola in fifteen minutes, please," she replied, and walked slowly down the steps and through the garden. She stood silently between the pillars of the pergola and waited. Anthony had a desk here in this quiet place, and here the book was being written. He worked now in a very fury of speed and excitement. He did not hear nor see Priscilla at all. Page after page was completed and tossed aside. The servant appeared with the tea, and she motioned him to set it down in silence. Anthony wrote in a very frenzy of effort; Priscilla thought she had never seen him so uncontrolled. At last he threw down the pencil and stretched his arms straight above his head, with a deep sigh, as of a man coming out of a trance.

"Thank Heaven!" he said, and then he

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saw his wife. "Dearest, it's finished, it's finished!" he said boyishly, coming to her. He took her in his arms, and she almost sobbed.

"Oh, Tony, I'm so glad! I'm so glad!"

He put her aside and began to pace up and down, in his excitement. "It's a big book, Priscilla; it's a great book!"

"Tony, I hate it!" she cried, and all the concentrated loneliness and jealousy of the last ten months came out in the outburst.

He turned suddenly and looked at her in astonishment—at her flushed face and tense body. He went to her quickly. "What is it, Priscilla? What is it you hate?"

"The book. It takes all your thoughts and time and hopes; there is no room for me."

"Priscilla!" he said, and drew her into his arms again. "Tell me what you mean."

"All day long I have to wait for you to be through with it. I sit and sit, and try to be patient, but I want you so, and I want to talk to you, and I'm so lonesome."

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"Heart's dearest," he said, "I never knew, I never thought! To me the inspiration of the hours we spent together had to have its outlet; all that you awakened in me, dear, that I had never dreamed of, had to come to fruition, and it has blossomed in this book—this book that is you! Dear, I'll burn the book, if that will be atonement;" he said it solemnly, like a father offering to sacrifice his child.

"Oh, my dear, my heart of hearts, don't say such a thing! Don't say anything more. I didn't mean it—it just came out in spite of me. Oh, Tony, it's just as I feared! I'm not worthy, I'm not worthy."

"Worthy, Priscilla? Don't!"

"I'm only a hindrance."

"Priscilla, you hurt me more than you know."

She drew his face down to her and kissed his forehead, his eyes, and, last of all, his lips. "Forgive me, and love me, Tony—love me half as well as I love you, and I'll be satisfied." She went to the tea-table, and mo-

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tioned him to his place. "Come and get your tea—you're tired out."

"I feel as if something had burst in my head, and the relief—you've no idea how great it is!"

She passed him his tea and poured her own. "I'm so glad, dear, for you. And now I've a suggestion to make."

"I'm all ears, madame."

"I've had a letter from mother to-day."

"Did you? Good! Lord! if she were only here to-night!"

She glanced at him wistfully. "Yes, if she only were! It's a very ostensibly cheerful letter, but very lonely between the lines, and so I say, let's go home to mother."

"All right; there's no reason why we shouldn't—now," he said promptly.

She leaped to her feet. "Tony—really?" she cried joyously.

He looked at her curiously. "Has it been as bad as that, my wife?"

"Bad? No, it's perfect—almost. I'm just homesick and mother-sick."

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"When shall we go?"

"Tony, you're such a dear! Let's go right away—next week—and surprise her."

"Whenever you say. I can scarcely wait to get the manuscript into her hands," he added.

While the shadows lengthened, and the sun went down behind the yew-trees in the garden, they sat hand in hand and planned their homeward journey.

"It's as good as planning our honeymoon, isn't it? I never knew before how much I could miss mother," Priscilla said.

"I never knew before how much I could miss her," Tony added.

CHAPTER XI

MRS. MARTIN sat on the couch, the chapters of Tony's book about her. Drake himself walked nervously about the room. She had been silently tearing out the heart of it for hours, and he had been on the rack, awaiting judgment.

Priscilla came in and out, watching them curiously, but they paid no attention to her. She felt the atmosphere charged with the same excitement that had surrounded Anthony that day she watched him put the finishing touches to the book. Indeed, there was the same strain in her mother's quick breathing, and the way she tossed aside page after page as she read them. Priscilla stood at the door, like a child shut out.

Mrs. Martin read the last word and sat like one in a dream, and Anthony came and stood before her, waiting. She rose slowly

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and looked at him, her eyes shining, her heart in her face, her hands outstretched.

"Oh, Anthony, Anthony!" she said softly, "you are redeemed!"

He took her hands and bent his forehead on them, and drew in his breath sharply in a sob of relief. Then he turned and went past Priscilla swiftly.

She stood a moment, tottering, like one dazzled by a sudden stroke of lightning, then she walked to the couch and faced her mother. The glory still rested on Mrs. Martin's face.

"Mother, mother!" Priscilla whispered in horror.

Mrs. Martin looked at her absently.

"Mother—you love Anthony!"

Mrs. Martin started as if struck.

"You do—I saw it then, a moment ago, in your face!"

"Well?"

"You don't deny it?"

Mrs. Martin looked her daughter squarely in the eye, measuring her.

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"No, Priscilla, I don't deny it."

"And you have loved him all along?"

"Yes, I've loved him all along."

Priscilla blazed out in a fury of rage.

"How dared you? How dared you?" she said. "You gave me to him. I never would have thought of marrying him if you had not wanted me to. I didn't love him at all when you married me to him."

"Well?"

"And now I've grown to love him as I never loved anything in my life, not even you, our love is the—the most wonderful thing in the world—and now you—you—"

"Well?"

"I can't give him up to you, mother; I can't, I can't!"

"There is no need of any such talk between us. If you will listen to me—"

"I can't—my heart is broken. Why, all my love for you is just a sword to stab you with, and my love for him is—"

Mrs. Martin put her hand on Priscilla's arm and drew her down beside her. "Now,

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listen. It seems best that there should be truth between us at last. Years ago, when Tony first began to monopolize my life, I knew that I loved him, and after a year of bitter suffering I realized that he did not love me. After awhile I grew to believe that even a love that is unreturned was better than no love at all. Then you came, and battered down the ramparts I had so carefully built around my heart, and crept inside. There was only room for you and Tony.

"It was fate, I suppose, that decreed that Tony should fall in love with you. I had given him all there was in me, mentally and emotionally, and now it was left me to give him—you. I knew he had come to the time when he needed this tardy awakening. You were young, impressionable, fond of him. I was not sure that you could fill his life alone, but I could help you, always hiding my secret. There was no sacrifice of you, Priscilla."

"No, there was not," she admitted; "but

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you loved him then—why didn't you marry him?"

"Because he didn't love me, and he needed love to make him what he is to-day—what you have made him."

"But what of *us*, mother?"

"We loved him, and what is loving but giving?"

"He asked you to be his wife, mother?"

"Yes."

"And you let *me*, when you loved him so?"

"Yes."

"Did you think of my happiness, mother?"

"Yes. I knew you would grow to be—what you are, dear. I knew what your power of love could do for him, and what it would do for you. You have been happy, Priscilla?"

"Happy? Oh, mother, there is no word—"

"I know—I am so glad."

"But now what are we going to do?"

"To do? Need we do anything? I ask only for whatever place in your lives you can

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spare me—you and Tony, you two people whom I love dearest and best.”

“But, dear, doesn’t Tony know?”

“No, and he must never know.”

“Perhaps if I had never come home at all you might have had this happiness.”

“Priscilla, don’t make me regret that I have laid my soul bare to you.”

Priscilla touched her mother’s hand with her cheek. “You gave your happiness to me! I’d like to give mine all to you.”

“It was not meant for me. Some of us grow to our full height through joy and fulfilment, some through suffering and renunciation.”

“But does growth count without the joy?”

“Can you ask me that, dear, when you see the serenity of my life, now grown big with loving?”

“I wonder if my joy will bring me to the height you’ve reached!”

“You should go farther, with your husband’s help, and as for him, you’ve brought him to his own—”

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"Not I, mother, but you and I—we've done it together."

"Yes, the redemption of Anthony has come through love, and since his greatness means so much to the world, perhaps we were put here just for that."

"What's that about Anthony?" Drake asked, coming in and throwing himself down beside them.

"It's mostly love—about Anthony," Priscilla said.

THE END