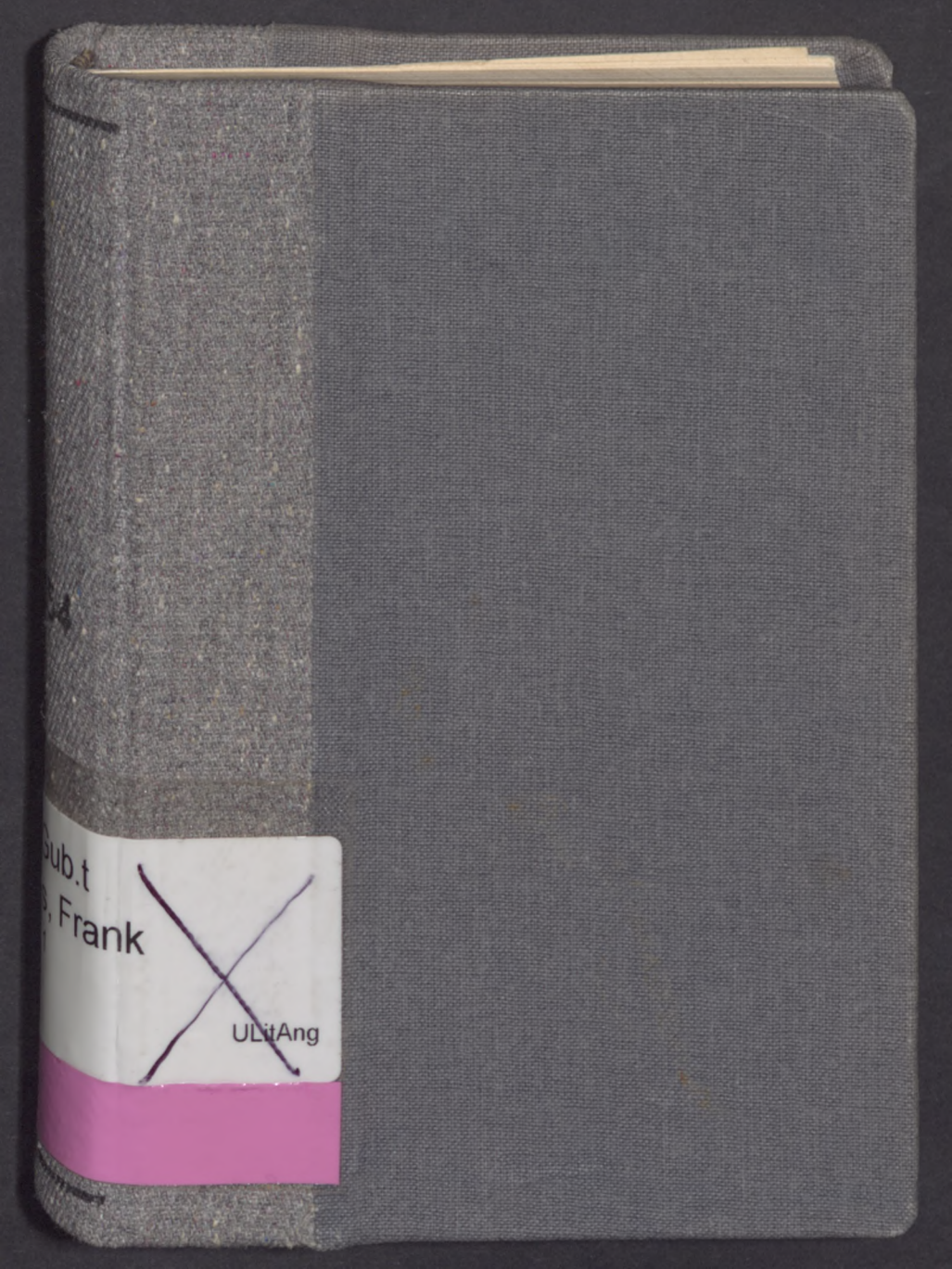
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THE PIT. By FRANK NORRIS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

THE OCTOPUS . . . . . 2 vols.

THE EPIC OF THE WHEAT

THE PIT

A STORY OF CHICAGO

BY

FRANK NORRIS

AUTHOR OF "THE OCTOPUS," ETC. ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES. — VOL. I

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1903.

DEDICATED TO MY BROTHER

CHARLES TILMAN NORRIS

IN MEMORY OF CERTAIN LAMENTABLE TALES OF THE ROUND (DINING-ROOM) TABLE HEROES; OF THE EPIC OF THE PEWTER PLATOONS, AND THE ROMANCE-CYCLE OF "*GASTON LE FOX*," WHICH WE INVENTED, MAINTAINED, AND FOUND MARVELLOUS AT A TIME WHEN WE BOTH WERE BOYS.

The Trilogy of The Epic of the Wheat includes the following novels:

THE OCTOPUS, *a Story of California.*
THE PIT, *a Story of Chicago.*
THE WOLF, *a Story of Europe.*

These novels, while forming a series, will be in no way connected with each other save only in their relation to (1) the production, (2) the distribution, (3) the consumption of American wheat. When complete, they will form the story of a crop of wheat from the time of its sowing as seed in California to the time of its consumption as bread in a village of Western Europe.

The first novel, "The Octopus," deals with the war between the wheat grower and the Railroad Trust; the second, "The Pit," is the fictitious narrative of a "deal" in the Chicago wheat pit; while the third, "The Wolf," will probably have for its pivotal episode the relieving of a famine in an Old World community.

The author's most sincere thanks for assistance rendered in the preparation of the following novel are due to Mr. G. D. Moulson of New York, whose unwearied patience and untiring kindness helped him to the better understanding of the technical difficulties of a very complicated subject. And more especially he herewith acknowledges his unmeasured obligation and gratitude to Her Who Helped the Most of All.

F. N.

NEW YORK, *June* 4, 1901.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL.

CURTIS JADWIN, capitalist and speculator.

SHELDON CORTHELL, an artist.

LANDRY COURT, broker's clerk.

SAMUEL GRETRY, a broker.

CHARLES CRESSLER, a dealer in grain.

MRS. CRESSLER, his wife.

LAURA DEARBORN, *protégée* of Mrs. Cressler.

PAGE DEARBORN, her sister.

MRS. EMILY WESSELS, aunt of Laura and Page.

THE PIT.

I.

At eight o'clock in the inner vestibule of the Auditorium Theatre by the window of the box-office, Laura Dearborn, her younger sister Page, and their aunt—Aunt Wess'—were still waiting for the rest of the theatre-party to appear. A great, slow-moving press of men and women in evening dress filled the vestibule from one wall to another. A confused murmur of talk and the shuffling of many feet arose on all sides, while from time to time, when the outside and inside doors of the entrance chanced to be open simultaneously, a sudden draught of air gushed in, damp, glacial, and edged with the penetrating keenness of a Chicago evening at the end of February.

The Italian Grand Opera Company gave one of the most popular pieces of its repertoire on that particular night, and the Cresslers had invited the two sisters and their aunt to share their box with them. It had been

arranged that the party should assemble in the Auditorium vestibule at a quarter of eight; but by now the quarter was gone and the Cresslers still failed to arrive.

"I don't see," murmured Laura anxiously for the last time, "what can be keeping them. Are you sure, Page, that Mrs. Cressler meant here—inside?"

She was a tall young girl of about twenty-two or three, holding herself erect and with fine dignity. Even beneath the opera cloak it was easy to infer that her neck and shoulders were beautiful. Her almost extreme slenderness was, however, her characteristic; the curves of her figure, the contour of her shoulders, the swell of hip and breast were all low; from head to foot one could discover no pronounced salience. Yet there was no trace, no suggestion of angularity. She was slender as a willow-shoot is slender—and equally graceful, equally erect.

Next to this charming tenuity, perhaps her paleness was her most noticeable trait. But it was not a paleness of lack of colour. Laura Dearborn's pallor was in itself a colour. It was a tint rather than a shade, like ivory; a warm white, blending into an exquisite, delicate brownness towards the throat. Set in the middle of this paleness of brow and cheek, her deep brown eyes glowed lambent and intense. They were not large, but in some indefinable way they were important. It was very natural to speak of her eyes,

and in speaking to her, her friends always found that they must look squarely into their pupils. And all this beauty of pallid face and brown eyes was crowned by, and sharply contrasted with, the intense blackness of her hair, abundant, thick, extremely heavy, continually coruscating with sombre, murky reflections, tragic, in a sense vaguely portentous, — the coiffure of a heroine of romance, doomed to dark crises.

On this occasion at the side of the topmost coil, a white aigrette scintillated and trembled with her every movement. She was unquestionably beautiful. Her mouth was a little large, the lips firm set, and one would not have expected that she would smile easily; in fact, the general expression of her face was rather serious.

"Perhaps," continued Laura, "they would look for us outside." But Page shook her head. She was five years younger than Laura, just turned seventeen. Her hair, dressed high for the first time this night, was brown. But Page's beauty was no less marked than her sister's. The seriousness of her expression, however, was more noticeable. At times it amounted to undeniable gravity. She was straight, and her figure, all immature as yet, exhibited hardly any softer outlines than that of a boy.

"No, no," she said, in answer to Laura's question.

"They would come in here; they wouldn't wait outside —not on such a cold night as this. Don't you think so, Aunt Wess'?"

But Mrs. Wessels, a lean, middle-aged little lady, with a flat, pointed nose, had no suggestions to offer. She disengaged herself from any responsibility in the situation and, while waiting, found a vague amusement in counting the number of people who filtered in single file through the wicket where the tickets were presented. A great, stout gentleman in evening dress, perspiring, his cravat limp, stood here, tearing the checks from the tickets, and without ceasing, maintaining a continuous outcry that dominated the murmur of the throng:

"Have your tickets ready, please! Have your tickets ready."

"Such a crowd," murmured Page. "Did you ever see—and everyone you ever knew or heard of. And such toilettes!"

With every instant the number of people increased; progress became impossible, except an inch at a time. The women were, almost without exception, in light-coloured gowns, white, pale blue, Nile green, and pink, while over these costumes were thrown opera cloaks and capes of astonishing complexity and elaborateness. Nearly all were bare-headed, and nearly all wore aigrettes; a score of these, a hundred of them, nodded

and vibrated with an incessant agitation over the heads of the crowd and flashed like mica flakes as the wearers moved. Everywhere the eye was arrested by the luxury of stuffs, the brilliance and delicacy of fabrics, laces as white and soft as froth, crisp, shining silks, suave satins, heavy gleaming velvets, and brocades and plushes, nearly all of them white—violently so—dazzling and splendid under the blaze of the electrics. The gentlemen, in long, black overcoats, and satin mufflers, and opera-hats; their hands under the elbows of their women-folk, urged or guided them forward, distressed, preoccupied, adjuring their parties to keep together; in their white-gloved fingers they held their tickets ready. For all the icy blasts that burst occasionally through the storm doors, the vestibule was uncomfortably warm, and into this steam-heated atmosphere a multitude of heavy odours exhaled—the scent of crushed flowers, of perfume, of sachet, and even—occasionally—the strong smell of damp sealskin.

Outside it was bitterly cold. All day a freezing wind had blown from off the Lake, and since five in the afternoon a fine powder of snow had been falling. The coachmen on the boxes of the carriages that succeeded one another in an interminable line before the entrance of the theatre, were swathed to the eyes in furs. The spume and froth froze on the bits of the horses, and the carriage wheels crunching through the

dry, frozen snow gave off a shrill staccato whine. Yet for all this, a crowd had collected about the awning on the sidewalk, and even upon the opposite side of the street, peeping and peering from behind the broad shoulders of policemen—a crowd of miserables, shivering in rags and tattered comforters, who found, nevertheless, an unexplainable satisfaction in watching this prolonged defile of millionaires.

So great was the concourse of teams, that two blocks distant from the theatre they were obliged to fall into line, advancing only at intervals, and from door to door of the carriages thus immobilised ran a score of young men, their arms encumbered with pamphlets, shouting: "Score books, score books and librettos; score books with photographs of all the artists."

However, in the vestibule the press was thinning out. It was understood that the overture had begun. Other people who were waiting like Laura and her sister had been joined by their friends and had gone inside. Laura, for whom this opera night had been an event, a thing desired and anticipated with all the eagerness of a girl who had lived for twenty-two years in a second-class town of central Massachusetts, was in great distress. She had never seen Grand Opera, she would not have missed a note, and now she was in a fair way to lose the whole overture.

"Oh, dear," she cried. "Isn't it too bad. I can't imagine why they don't come."

Page, more metropolitan, her keenness of appreciation a little lost by two years of city life and fashionable schooling, tried to reassure her.

"You won't lose much," she said. "The air of the overture is repeated in the first act—I've heard it once before."

"If we even see the first act," mourned Laura. She scanned the faces of the late comers anxiously. Nobody seemed to mind being late. Even some of the other people who were waiting, chatted calmly among themselves. Directly behind them two men, their faces close together, elaborated an interminable conversation, of which from time to time they could overhear a phrase or two.

"——and I guess he'll do well if he settles for thirty cents on the dollar. I tell you, dear boy, it was a *smash!*"

"——Never should have tried to swing a corner. The short interest was too small and the visible supply was too great."

Page nudged her sister and whispered: "That's the Helmick failure they're talking about, those men. Landry Court told me all about it. Mr. Helmick had a corner in corn, and he failed to-day or will fail soon, or something."

But Laura, preoccupied with looking for the Cresslers, hardly listened. Aunt Wess', whose count was confused by all these figures murmured just behind her, began over again, her lips silently forming the words, "sixty-one, sixty-two, and two is sixty-four." Behind them the voice continued:

"They say Porteous will peg the market at twenty-six."

"Well he ought to. Corn is worth that."

"——Never saw such a call for margins in my life. Some of the houses called eight cents."

Page turned to Mrs. Wessels: "By the way, Aunt Wess'; look at that man there by the box office window, the one with his back towards us, the one with his hands in his overcoat pockets. Isn't that Mr. Jadwin? The gentleman we are going to meet to-night. See who I mean?"

"Who? Mr. Jadwin? I don't know. I don't know, child. I never saw him, you know."

"Well I think it is he," continued Page. "He was to be with our party to-night. I heard Mrs. Cressler say she would ask him. That's Mr. Jadwin, I'm sure. He's waiting for them, too."

"Oh, then ask him about it, Page," exclaimed Laura. "We're missing everything."

But Page shook her head:

"I only met him once, ages ago; he wouldn't know

me. It was at the Cresslers, and we just said 'How do you do.' And then maybe it isn't Mr. Jadwin."

"Oh, I wouldn't bother, girls," said Mrs. Wessels. "It's all right. They'll be here in a minute. *I* don't believe the curtain has gone up yet."

But the man of whom they spoke turned around at the moment and cast a glance about the vestibule. They saw a gentleman of an indeterminate age — judged by his face he might as well have been forty as thirty-five. A heavy mustache touched with grey covered his lips. The eyes were twinkling and good-tempered. Between his teeth he held an unlighted cigar.

"It *is* Mr. Jadwin," murmured Page, looking quickly away. "But he don't recognise me."

Laura also averted her eyes.

"Well, why not go right up to him and introduce yourself, or recall yourself to him?" she hazarded.

"Oh, Laura, I *couldn't,*" gasped Page. "I wouldn't for worlds."

"Couldn't she, Aunt Wess'?" appealed Laura. "Wouldn't it be all right?"

But Mrs. Wessels, ignoring forms and customs, was helpless. Again she withdrew from any responsibility in in the matter.

"I don't know anything about it," she answered. "But Page oughtn't to be bold."

"Oh, bother; it isn't that," protested Page. "But it's just because—I don't know, I don't want to—Laura, I should just *die,*" she exclaimed with abrupt irrelevance, "and besides, how would that help any?" she added.

"Well, we're just going to miss it *all,*" declared Laura decisively. There were actual tears in her eyes. "And I had looked forward to it so."

"Well," hazarded Aunt Wess', "you girls can do just as you please. Only I wouldn't be bold."

"Well, would it be bold if Page, or if—if I were to speak to him? We're going to meet him anyways in just a few minutes."

"Better wait, hadn't you, Laura," said Aunt Wess', "and see. Maybe he'll come up and speak to us."

"Oh, as if!" contradicted Laura. "He don't know us,—just as Page says. And if he did, he wouldn't. He wouldn't think it polite."

"Then I guess, girlie, it wouldn't be polite for you."

"I think it would," she answered. "I think it would be a woman's place. If he's a gentleman, he would feel that he just *couldn't* speak first. I'm going to do it," she announced suddenly.

"Just as you think best, Laura," said her aunt.

But nevertheless Laura did not move, and another five minutes went by.

Page took advantage of the interval to tell Laura

about Jadwin. He was very rich, but a bachelor, and had made his money in Chicago real estate. Some of his holdings in the business quarter of the city were enormous; Landry Court had told her about him. Jadwin, unlike Mr. Cressler, was not opposed to speculation. Though not a member of the Board of Trade, he nevertheless at very long intervals took part in a "deal" in wheat, or corn, or provisions. He believed that all corners were doomed to failure, however, and had predicted Helmick's collapse six months ago. He had influence, was well known to all Chicago people, what he said carried weight, financiers consulted him, promoters sought his friendship, his name on the board of directors of a company was an all-sufficing endorsement; in a word, a "strong" man.

"I can't understand," exclaimed Laura distrait, referring to the delay on the part of the Cresslers. "This was the night, and this was the place, and it is long past the time. We could telephone to the house, you know," she said, struck with an idea, "and see if they've started, or what has happened."

"I don't know—I don't know," murmured Mrs. Wessels vaguely. No one seemed ready to act upon Laura's suggestion, and again the minutes passed.

"I'm going," declared Laura again, looking at the other two, as if to demand what they had to say against the idea.

"I just couldn't," declared Page flatly.

"Well," continued Laura, "I'll wait just three minutes more, and then if the Cresslers are not here I will speak to him. It seems to me to be perfectly natural, and not at all bold."

She waited three minutes, and the Cresslers still failing to appear, temporised yet further, for the twentieth time repeating:

"I don't see—I can't understand."

Then, abruptly drawing her cape about her, she crossed the vestibule and came up to Jadwin.

As she approached she saw him catch her eye. Then, as he appeared to understand that this young woman was about to speak to him, she noticed an expression of suspicion, almost of distrust, come into his face. No doubt he knew nothing of this other party who were to join the Cresslers in the vestibule. Why should this girl speak to him? Something had gone wrong, and the instinct of the man, no longer very young, to keep out of strange young women's troubles betrayed itself in the uneasy glance that he shot at her from under his heavy eyebrows. But the look faded as quickly as it had come. Laura guessed that he had decided that in such a place as this he need have no suspicions. He took the cigar from his mouth, and she, immensely relieved, realised that she had to do with a man who was a gentleman. Full of trepidation as she

had been in crossing the vestibule, she was quite mistress of herself when the instant came for her to speak, and it was in a steady voice and without embarrassment that she said:

"I beg your pardon, but I believe this is Mr. Jadwin."

He took off his hat, evidently a little nonplussed that she should know his name, and by now she was ready even to browbeat him a little should it be necessary.

"Yes, yes," he answered, now much more confused than she, "my name is Jadwin."

"I believe," continued Laura steadily, "we were all to be in the same party to-night with the Cresslers. But they don't seem to come, and we—my sister and my aunt and I—don't know what to do."

She saw that he was embarrassed, convinced, and the knowledge that she controlled the little situation, that she could command him, restored her all her equanimity.

"My name is Miss Dearborn," she continued. "I believe you know my sister Page."

By some trick of manner she managed to convey to him the impression that if he did not know her sister Page, that if for one instant he should deem her to be bold, he would offer a mortal affront. She had not yet forgiven him that stare of suspicion when

first their eyes had met; he should pay her for that yet.

"Miss Page,—your sister,—Miss Page Dearborn? Certainly I know her," he answered. "And you have been waiting, too? What a pity!" And he permitted himself the awkwardness of adding: "I did not know that you were to be of our party."

"No," returned Laura upon the instant, "I did not know you were to be one of us to-night—until Page told me." She accented the pronouns a little, but it was enough for him to know that he had been rebuked. How, he could not just say; and for what it was impossible for him at the moment to determine; and she could see that he began to experience a certain distress, was beating a retreat, was ceding place to her. Who was she, then, this tall and pretty young woman, with the serious, unsmiling face, who was so perfectly at ease, and who hustled him about and made him feel as though he were to blame for the Cresslers' non-appearance; as though it was his fault that she must wait in the draughty vestibule. She had a great air with her; how had he offended her? If he had introduced himself to her, had forced himself upon her, she could not be more lofty, more reserved.

"I thought perhaps you might telephone," she observed.

"They haven't a telephone, unfortunately," he answered.

"Oh!"

This was quite the last slight, the Cresslers had not a telephone! He was to blame for that, too, it seemed. At his wits' end, he entertained for an instant the notion of dashing out into the street in a search for a messenger boy, who would take a note to Cressler and set him right again; and his agitation was not allayed when Laura, in frigid tones, declared:

"It seems to me that something might be done."

"I don't know," he replied helplessly. "I guess there's nothing to be done but just wait. They are sure to be along."

In the background, Page and Mrs. Wessels had watched the interview, and had guessed that Laura was none too gracious. Always anxious that her sister should make a good impression, the little girl was now in great distress.

"Laura is putting on her 'grand manner,'" she lamented. "I just know how she's talking. The man will hate the very sound of her name all the rest of his life." Then all at once she uttered a joyful exclamation: "At last, at last," she cried, "and about time, too!"

The Cresslers and the rest of the party—two young

men—had appeared, and Page and her aunt came up just in time to hear Mrs. Cressler—a fine old lady, in a wonderful ermine-trimmed cape, whose hair was powdered—exclaim at the top of her voice, as if the mere declaration of fact was final, absolutely the last word upon the subject, "The bridge was turned!"

The Cresslers lived on the North Side. The incident seemed to be closed with the abruptness of a slammed door.

Page and Aunt Wess' were introduced to Jadwin, who was particular to announce that he remembered the young girl perfectly. The two young men were already acquainted with the Dearborn sisters and Mrs. Wessels. Page and Laura knew one of them well enough to address him familiarly by his Christian name.

This was Landry Court, a young fellow just turned twenty-three, who was "connected with" the staff of the great brokerage firm of Gretry, Converse and Co. He was astonishingly good-looking, small-made, wiry, alert, nervous, debonair, with blond hair and dark eyes that snapped like a terrier's. He made friends almost at first sight, and was one of those fortunate few who were favoured equally of men and women. The healthiness of his eye and skin persuaded to a belief in the healthiness of his mind; and, in fact, Landry was as clean without as within. He was frank, open-hearted, full of fine sentiments and exaltations and enthusiasms.

Until he was eighteen he had cherished an ambition to become the President of the United States.

"Yes, yes," he said to Laura, "the bridge was turned. It was an imposition. We had to wait while they let three tows through. I think two at a time is as much as is legal. And we had to wait for three. Yes, sir; three, think of that! I shall look into that to-morrow. Yes, sir; don't you be afraid of that. I'll look into it." He nodded his head with profound seriousness.

"Well," announced Mr. Cressler, marshalling the party, "shall we go in? I'm afraid, Laura, we've missed the overture."

Smiling, she shrugged her shoulders, while they moved to the wicket, as if to say that it could not be helped now.

Cressler, tall, lean, bearded, and stoop-shouldered, belonging to the same physical type that includes Lincoln—the type of the Middle West—was almost a second father to the parentless Dearborn girls. In Massachusetts, thirty years before this time, he had been a farmer, and the miller Dearborn used to grind his grain regularly. The two had been boys together, and had always remained fast friends, almost brothers. Then, in the years just before the War, had come the great movement westward, and Cressler had been one of those to leave an "abandoned" New England farm

behind him, and with his family emigrate toward the Mississippi. He had come to Sangamon County in Illinois. For a time he tried wheat-raising, until the War, which skied the prices of all food-stuffs, had made him—for those days—a rich man. Giving up farming, he came to live in Chicago, bought a seat on the Board of Trade, and in a few years was a millionaire. At the time of the Turco-Russian War he and two Milwaukee men had succeeded in cornering all the visible supply of spring wheat. At the end of the thirtieth day of the corner the clique figured out its profits at close upon a million; a week later it looked like a million and a half. Then the three lost their heads; they held the corner just a fraction of a month too long, and when the time came that the three were forced to take profits, they found that they were unable to close out their immense holdings without breaking the price. In two days wheat that they had held at a dollar and ten cents collapsed to sixty. The two Milwaukee men were ruined, and two-thirds of Cressler's immense fortune vanished like a whiff of smoke.

But he had learned his lesson. Never since then had he speculated. Though keeping his seat on the Board, he had confined himself to commission trading, uninfluenced by fluctuations in the market. And he was never wearied of protesting against the evil and the danger of trading in margins. Speculation he ab-

horred as the small-pox, believing it to be impossible to corner grain by any means or under any circumstances. He was accustomed to say: "It can't be done; first, for the reason that there is a great harvest of wheat somewhere in the world for every month in the year; and, second, because the smart man who runs the corner has every other smart man in the world against him. And, besides, it's wrong; the world's food should not be at the mercy of the Chicago wheat pit."

As the party filed in through the wicket, the other young man who had come with Landry Court managed to place himself next to Laura. Meeting her eyes, he murmured:

"Ah, you did not wear them after all. My poor little flowers."

But she showed him a single American Beauty, pinned to the shoulder of her gown beneath her cape.

"Yes, Mr. Corthell," she answered, "one. I tried to select the prettiest, and I think I succeeded—don't you? It was hard to choose."

"Since you have worn it, it *is* the prettiest," he answered.

He was a slightly built man of about twenty-eight or thirty; dark, wearing a small, pointed beard, and a mustache that he brushed away from his lips like a Frenchman. By profession he was an artist, devoting himself more especially to the designing of stained

windows. In this, his talent was indisputable. But he was by no means dependent upon his profession for a living, his parents—long since dead—having left him to the enjoyment of a very considerable fortune. He had a beautiful studio in the Fine Arts Building, where he held receptions once every two months, or whenever he had a fine piece of glass to expose. He had travelled, read, studied, occasionally written, and in matters pertaining to the colouring and fusing of glass was cited as an authority. He was one of the directors of the new Art Gallery that had taken the place of the old Exposition Building on the Lake Front.

Laura had known him for some little time. On the occasion of her two previous visits to Page he had found means to see her two or three times each week. Once, even, he had asked her to marry him, but she, deep in her studies at the time, consumed with vague ambitions to be a great actress of Shakespearian *rôles,* had told him she could care for nothing but her art. He had smiled and said that he could wait, and, strangely enough, their relations had resumed again upon the former footing. Even after she had gone away they had corresponded regularly, and he had made and sent her a tiny window—a veritable jewel—illustrative of a scene from "Twelfth Night."

In the foyer, as the gentlemen were checking their coats, Laura overheard Jadwin say to Mr. Cressler:

"Well, how about Helmick?"

The other made an impatient movement of his shoulders.

"Ask *me,* what was the fool thinking of—a corner! Pshaw!"

There were one or two other men about, making their overcoats and opera hats into neat bundles preparatory to checking them; and instantly there was a flash of a half-dozen eyes in the direction of the two men. Evidently the collapse of the Helmick deal was in the air. All the city seemed interested.

But from behind the heavy curtains that draped the entrance to the theatre proper, came a muffled burst of music, followed by a long salvo of applause. Laura's cheeks flamed with impatience, she hurried after Mrs. Cressler; Corthell drew the curtains for her to pass, and she entered.

Inside it was dark, and a prolonged puff of hot air, thick with the mingled odours of flowers, perfume, upholstery, and gas, enveloped her upon the instant. It was the unmistakable, unforgetable, entrancing aroma of the theatre, that she had known only too seldom, but that in a second set her heart galloping.

Every available space seemed to be occupied. Men, even women, were standing up, compacted into a suffocating pressure, and for the moment everybody was applauding vigorously. On all sides Laura heard:

"Bravo!"

"Good, good!"

"Very well done!"

"Encore! Encore!"

Between the peoples' heads and below the low dip of the overhanging balcony—a brilliant glare in the surrounding darkness—she caught a glimpse of the stage. It was set for a garden; at the back and in the distance a *château;* on the left a bower, and on the right a pavilion. Before the footlights, a famous contralto, dressed as a boy, was bowing to the audience, her arms full of flowers.

"Too bad," whispered Corthell to Laura, as they followed the others down the side-aisle to the box. "Too bad, this is the second act already; you've missed the whole first act—and this song. She'll sing it over again, though, just for you, if I have to lead the applause myself. I particularly wanted you to hear that."

Once in the box, the party found itself a little crowded, and Jadwin and Cressler were obliged to stand, in order to see the stage. Although they all spoke in whispers, their arrival was the signal for certain murmurs of "Sh! Sh!" Mrs. Cressler made Laura occupy the front seat. Jadwin took her cloak from her, and she settled herself in her chair and looked about her. She could see but little of the house or audience. All the lights were lowered; only through

the gloom the swaying of a multitude of fans, pale-coloured, like night-moths balancing in the twilight, defined itself.

But soon she turned towards the stage. The applause died away, and the contralto once more sang the aria. The melody was simple, the tempo easily followed; it was not a very high order of music. But to Laura it was nothing short of a revelation.

She sat spell-bound, her hands clasped tight, her every faculty of attention at its highest pitch. It was wonderful, such music as that; wonderful, such a voice; wonderful, such orchestration; wonderful, such exaltation inspired by mere beauty of sound. Never, never was this night to be forgotten, this her first night of Grand Opera. All this excitement, this world of perfume, of flowers, of exquisite costumes, of beautiful women, of fine, brave men. She looked back with immense pity to the narrow little life of her native town she had just left forever, the restricted horizon, the petty round of petty duties, the rare and barren pleasures—the library, the festival, the few concerts, the trivial plays. How easy it was to be good and noble when music such as this had become a part of one's life; how desirable was wealth when it could make possible such exquisite happiness as hers of the moment. Nobility, purity, courage, sacrifice seemed much more worth while now than a few

moments ago. All things not positively unworthy became heroic, all things and all men. Landry Court was a young chevalier, pure as Galahad. Corthell was a beautiful artist-priest of the early Renaissance. Even Jadwin was a merchant prince, a great financial captain. And she herself—ah, she did not know; she dreamed of another Laura, a better, gentler, more beautiful Laura, whom everybody, everybody loved dearly and tenderly, and who loved everybody, and who should die beautifully, gently in some garden far away—die because of a great love—beautifully, gently in the midst of flowers, die of a broken heart, and all the world should be sorry for her, and would weep over her when they found her dead and beautiful in her garden, amid the flowers and the birds, in some far-off place, where it was always early morning and where there was soft music. And she was so sorry for herself, and so hurt with the sheer strength of her longing to be good and true, and noble and womanly, that as she sat in the front of the Cresslers' box on that marvellous evening, the tears ran down her cheeks again and again, and dropped upon her tight-shut, white-gloved fingers.

But the contralto had disappeared, and in her place the tenor held the stage—a stout, short young man in red plush doublet and grey silk tights. His chin advanced, an arm extended, one hand pressed to his breast,

he apostrophised the pavilion, that now and then swayed a little in the draught from the wings.

The aria was received with furor; thrice he was obliged to repeat it. Even Corthell, who was critical to extremes, approved, nodding his head. Laura and Page clapped their hands till the very last. But Landry Court, to create an impression, assumed a certain disaffection.

"He's not in voice to-night. Too bad. You should have heard him Friday in 'Aida.'"

The opera continued. The great soprano, the prima donna, appeared and delivered herself of a song for which she was famous with astonishing *éclat*. Then in a little while the stage grew dark, the orchestration lapsed to a murmur, and the tenor and the soprano reëntered. He clasped her in his arms and sang a half-dozen bars, then holding her hand, one arm still about her waist, withdrew from her gradually, till she occupied the front-centre of the stage. He assumed an attitude of adoration and wonderment, his eyes uplifted as if entranced, and she, very softly, to the accompaniment of the sustained, dreamy chords of the orchestra, began her solo.

Laura shut her eyes. Never had she felt so soothed, so cradled and lulled and languid. Ah, to love like that! To love and be loved. There was no such love as that to-day. She wished that she could loose her

clasp upon the sordid, material modern life that, perforce, she must hold to, she knew not why, and drift, drift off into the past, far away, through rose-coloured mists and diaphanous veils, or resign herself, reclining in a silver skiff drawn by swans, to the gentle current of some smooth-flowing river that ran on forever and forever.

But a discordant element developed. Close by—the lights were so low she could not tell where—a conversation, kept up in low whispers, began by degrees to intrude itself upon her attention. Try as she would, she could not shut it out, and now, as the music died away fainter and fainter, till voice and orchestra blended together in a single, barely audible murmur, vibrating with emotion, with romance, and with sentiment, she heard, in a hoarse, masculine whisper, the words:

"The shortage is a million bushels at the very least. Two hundred carloads were to arrive from Milwaukee last night——"

She made a little gesture of despair, turning her head for an instant, searching the gloom about her. But she could see no one not interested in the stage. Why could not men leave their business outside, why must the jar of commerce spoil all the harmony of this moment.

However, all sounds were drowned suddenly in a long burst of applause. The tenor and soprano bowed

and smiled across the footlights. The soprano vanished, only to reappear on the balcony of the pavilion, and while she declared that the stars and the night-bird together sang "He loves thee," the voices close at hand continued:

"——one hundred and six carloads——"

"——paralysed the bulls——"

"——fifty thousand dollars——"

Then all at once the lights went up. The act was over.

Laura seemed only to come to herself some five minutes later. She and Corthell were out in the foyer behind the boxes. Everybody was promenading. The air was filled with the staccato chatter of a multitude of women. But she herself seemed far away—she and Sheldon Corthell. His face, dark, romantic, with the silky beard and eloquent eyes, appeared to be all she cared to see, while his low voice, that spoke close to her ear, was in a way a mere continuation of the melody of the duet just finished.

Instinctively she knew what he was about to say, for what he was trying to prepare her. She felt, too, that he had not expected to talk thus to her to-night. She knew that he loved her, that inevitably, sooner or later, they must return to a subject that for long had been excluded from their conversations, but it was to have been when they were alone, remote, secluded, not

in the midst of a crowd, brilliant electrics dazzling their eyes, the humming of the talk of hundreds assaulting their ears. But it seemed as if these important things came of themselves, independent of time and place, like birth and death. There was nothing to do but to accept the situation, and it was without surprise that at last, from out the murmur of Corthell's talk, she was suddenly conscious of the words:

"So that it is hardly necessary, is it, to tell you once more that I love you?"

She drew a long breath.

"I know. I know you love me."

They had sat down on a divan, at one end of the promenade; and Corthell, skilful enough in the little arts of the drawing-room, made it appear as though they talked of commonplaces; as for Laura, exalted, all but hypnotised with this marvellous evening, she hardly cared; she would not even stoop to maintain appearances.

"Yes, yes," she said; "I know you love me."

"And is that all you can say?" he urged. "Does it mean nothing to you that you are everything to me?"

She was coming a little to herself again. Love was, after all, sweeter in the actual—even in this crowded foyer, in this atmosphere of silk and jewels, in this show-place of a great city's society—than in a mystic garden of some romantic dreamland. She felt herself a

woman again, modern, vital, and no longer a maiden of a legend of chivalry.

"Nothing to me?" she answered. "I don't know. I should rather have you love me than—not."

"Let me love you then for always," he went on. "You know what I mean. We have understood each other from the very first. Plainly, and very simply, I love you with all my heart. You know now that I speak the truth, you know that you can trust me. I shall not ask you to share your life with mine. I ask you for the great happiness"—he raised his head sharply, suddenly proud—"the great honour of the opportunity of giving you all that I have of good. God give me humility, but that is much since I have known you. If I were a better man because of myself, I would not presume to speak of it, but if I am in anything less selfish, if I am more loyal, if I am stronger, or braver, it is only something of you that has become a part of me, and made me to be born again. So when I offer myself to you, I am only bringing back to you the gift you gave me for a little while. I have tried to keep it for you, to keep it bright and sacred and unspotted. It is yours again now if you will have it."

There was a long pause; a group of men in opera hats and white gloves came up the stairway close at hand. The tide of promenaders set towards the en-

trances of the theatre. A little electric bell shrilled a note of warning.

Laura looked up at length, and as their glances met, he saw that there were tears in her eyes. This declaration of his love for her was the last touch to the greatest exhilaration of happiness she had ever known. Ah yes, she was loved, just as that young girl of the opera had been loved. For this one evening, at least, the beauty of life was unmarred, and no cruel word of hers should spoil it. The world was beautiful. All people were good and noble and true. To-morrow, with the material round of duties and petty responsibilities and cold, calm reason, was far, far away. Suddenly she turned to him, surrendering to the impulse, forgetful of consequences.

"Oh, I am glad, glad," she cried, "glad that you love me!"

But before Corthell could say anything more Landry Court and Page came up.

"We've been looking for you," said the young girl quietly. Page was displeased. She took herself and her sister—in fact, the whole scheme of existence—with extraordinary seriousness. She had no sense of humour. She was not tolerant; her ideas of propriety and the amenities were as immutable as the fixed stars. A fine way for Laura to act, getting off into corners with Sheldon Corthell. It would take less than

that to make talk. If she had no sense of her obligations to Mrs. Cressler, at least she ought to think of the looks of things.

"They're beginning again," she said solemnly. "I should think you'd feel as though you had missed about enough of this opera."

They returned to the box. The rest of the party were reassembling.

"Well, Laura," said Mrs. Cressler, when they had sat down, "do you like it?"

"I don't want to leave it—ever," she answered. "I could stay here always."

"I like the young man best," observed Aunt Wess'. "The one who seems to be the friend of the tall fellow with a cloak. But why does he seem so sorry? Why don't he marry the young lady? Let's see, I don't remember his name."

"Beastly voice," declared Landry Court. "He almost broke there once. Too bad. He's not what he used to be. It seems he's terribly dissipated—drinks. Yes, sir, like a fish. He had delirium tremens once behind the scenes in Philadelphia, and stabbed a scene-shifter with his stage dagger. A bad lot, to say the least."

"Now, Landry," protested Mrs. Cressler, "you're making it up as you go along." And in the laugh that followed Landry himself joined.

"After all," said Corthell, "this music seems to be just the right medium between the naïve melody of the Italian school and the elaborate complexity of Wagner. I can't help but be carried away with it at times—in spite of my better judgment."

Jadwin, who had been smoking a cigar in the vestibule during the *entr'acte*, rubbed his chin reflectively.

"Well," he said, "it's all very fine. I've no doubt of that, but I give you my word I would rather hear my old governor take his guitar and sing 'Father, oh father, come home with me now,' than all the fiddle-faddle, tweedle-deedle opera business in the whole world."

But the orchestra was returning, the musicians crawling out one by one from a little door beneath the stage hardly bigger than the entrance of a rabbit hutch. They settled themselves in front of their racks, adjusting their coat-tails, fingering their sheet music. Soon they began to tune up, and a vague bourdon of many sounds —the subdued snarl of the cornets, the dull mutter of the bass viols, the liquid gurgling of the flageolets and wood-wind instruments, now and then pierced by the strident chirps and cries of the violins, rose into the air dominating the incessant clamour of conversation that came from all parts of the theatre.

Then suddenly the house lights sank and the foot-

lights rose. From all over the theatre came energetic whispers of "Sh! Sh!" Three strokes, as of a great mallet, sepulchral, grave, came from behind the wings; the leader of the orchestra raised his baton, then brought it slowly down, and while from all the instruments at once issued a prolonged minor chord, emphasised by a muffled roll of the kettle-drum, the curtain rose upon a mediæval public square. The soprano was seated languidly upon a bench. Her *grande scène* occurred in this act. Her hair was unbound; she wore a loose robe of cream white, with flowing sleeves, which left the arms bare to the shoulder. At the waist it was caught in by a girdle of silk rope.

"This is the great act," whispered Mrs. Cressler, leaning over Laura's shoulder. "She is superb later on. Superb."

"I wish those *men* would stop talking," murmured Laura, searching the darkness distressfully, for between the strains of the music she had heard the words:

"——Clearing House balance of three thousand dollars."

Meanwhile the prima donna, rising to her feet, delivered herself of a lengthy recitative, her chin upon her breast, her eyes looking out from under her brows, an arm stretched out over the footlights. The baritone entered, striding to the left of the footlights, apostrophising the prima donna in a rage. She clasped her

hands imploringly, supplicating him to leave her, exclaiming from time to time:

"Va via, va via—
Vel chieco per pietà."

Then all at once, while the orchestra blared, they fell into each other's arms.

"Why do they do that?" murmured Aunt Wess' perplexed. "I thought the gentleman with the beard didn't like her at all."

"Why, that's the duke, don't you see, Aunt Wess'?" said Laura trying to explain. "And he forgives her. I don't know exactly. Look at your libretto."

"—a conspiracy of the Bears . . . seventy cents . . . and naturally he busted."

The mezzo-soprano, the confidante of the prima donna, entered, and a trio developed that had but a mediocre success. At the end the baritone abruptly drew his sword, and the prima donna fell to her knees, chanting:

"Io tremo, ahimè!"

"And now he's mad again," whispered Aunt Wess', consulting her libretto, all at sea once more. "I can't understand. She says—the opera book *says* she says, 'I tremble.' I don't see why."

"Look now," said Page, "here comes the tenor. Now they're going to have it out."

The tenor, hatless, debouched suddenly upon the scene, and furious, addressed himself to the baritone, leaning forward, his hands upon his chest. Though the others sang in Italian, the tenor, a Parisian, used the French book continually, and now villified the baritone, crying out:

"O traitre infâme
O lâche et coupable."

"I don't see why he don't marry the young lady and be done with it," commented Aunt Wess'.

The act drew to its close. The prima donna went through her "great scene," wherein her voice climbed to C in alt, holding the note so long that Aunt Wess' became uneasy. As she finished, the house rocked with applause, and the soprano, who had gone out supported by her confidante, was recalled three times. A duel followed between the baritone and tenor, and the latter, mortally wounded, fell into the arms of his friends uttering broken, vehement notes. The chorus—made up of the city watch and town's people—crowded in upon the back of the stage. The soprano and her confidante returned. The basso, a black-bearded, bull-necked man, sombre, mysterious, parted the chorus to right and left, and advanced to the footlights. The contralto, dressed as a boy, appeared. The soprano took stage, and abruptly the closing scene of the act developed.

The violins raged and wailed in unison, all the bows moving together like parts of a well-regulated machine. The kettle-drums, marking the cadences, rolled at exact intervals. The director beat time furiously, as though dragging up the notes and chords with the end of his baton, while the horns and cornets blared, the bass viols growled, and the flageolets and piccolos lost themselves in an amazing complication of liquid gurgles and modulated roulades.

On the stage everyone was singing. The soprano in the centre, vocalised in her highest register, bringing out the notes with vigorous twists of her entire body, and tossing them off into the air with sharp flirts of her head. On the right, the basso, scowling, could be heard in the intervals of the music repeating

"Il perfido, l'ingrato"

while to the left of the soprano, the baritone intoned indistinguishable, sonorous phrases, striking his breast and pointing to the fallen tenor with his sword. At the extreme left of the stage the contralto, in tights and plush doublet, turned to the audience, extending her hands, or flinging back her arms. She raised her eyebrows with each high note, and sunk her chin into her ruff when her voice descended. At certain intervals her notes blended with those of the soprano's while she sang:

"*Addio, felicità del ciel!*"

The tenor, raised upon one hand, his shoulders supported by his friends, sustained the theme which the soprano led with the words:

"*Je me meurs*
Ah malheur
Ah je souffre
Mon âme s'envole."

The chorus formed a semicircle just behind him. The women on one side, the men on the other. They left much to be desired; apparently scraped hastily together from heaven knew what sources, after the manner of a management suddenly become economical. The women were fat, elderly, and painfully homely; the men lean, osseous, and distressed, in misfitting hose. But they had been conscientiously drilled. They made all their gestures together, moved in masses simultaneously, and, without ceasing, chanted over and over again:

"*O terror, O blasfema.*"

The *finale* commenced. Everybody on the stage took a step forward, beginning all over again upon a higher key. The soprano's voice thrilled to the very chandelier. The orchestra redoubled its efforts, the director beating time with hands, head, and body.

"*Il perfido, l'ingrato,*"

thundered the basso.

"*Ineffabil mistero,*"

answered the baritone, striking his breast and pointing with his sword; while all at once the soprano's voice, thrilling out again, ran up an astonishing crescendo that evoked veritable gasps from all parts of the audience, then jumped once more to her famous C in alt, and held it long enough for the chorus to repeat

"*O terror, O blasfema*"

four times.

Then the director's baton descended with the violence of a blow. There was a prolonged crash of harmony, a final enormous chord, to which every voice and every instrument contributed. The singers struck tableau attitudes, the tenor fell back with a last wail:

"*Je me meurs,*"

and the soprano fainted into the arms of her confidante. The curtain fell.

The house roared with applause. The scene was recalled again and again. The tenor, scrambling to his feet, joined hands with the baritone, soprano, and other artists, and all bowed repeatedly. Then the curtain fell for the last time, the lights of the great chandelier clicked and blazed up, and from every quarter of the house came the cries of the programme sellers:

"Opera books. Books of the opera. Words and music of the opera."

During this, the last *entr'acte,* Laura remained in the box with Mrs. Cressler, Corthell, and Jadwin. The others went out to look down upon the *foyer* from a certain balcony.

In the box the conversation turned upon stage management, and Corthell told how, in "L'Africaine," at the Opéra, in Paris, the entire superstructure of the stage—wings, drops, and backs—turned when Vasco de Gama put the ship about. Jadwin having criticised the effect because none of the actors turned with it, was voted a Philistine by Mrs. Cressler and Corthell. But as he was about to answer, Mrs. Cressler turned to the artist, passing him her opera-glasses, and asking:

"Who are those people down there in the third row of the parquet—see, on the middle aisle—the woman is in red. Aren't those the Gretrys?"

This left Jadwin and Laura out of the conversation, and the capitalist was quick to seize the chance of talking to her. Soon she was surprised to notice that he was trying hard to be agreeable, and before they had exchanged a dozen sentences, he had turned an awkward compliment. She guessed by his manner that paying attention to young girls was for him a thing alto-

gether unusual. Intuitively she divined that she, on this, the very first night of their acquaintance, had suddenly interested him.

She had had neither opportunity nor inclination to observe him closely during their interview in the vestibule, but now, as she sat and listened to him talk, she could not help being a little attracted. He was a heavy-built man, would have made two of Corthell, and his hands were large and broad, the hands of a man of affairs, who knew how to grip, and, above all, how to hang on. Those broad, strong hands, and keen, calm eyes would enfold and envelop a Purpose with tremendous strength, and they would persist and persist, unswerving, unwavering, untiring, till the Purpose was driven home. And the two long, lean, fibrous arms of him; what a reach they could attain, and how wide and huge and even formidable would be their embrace of affairs. One of those great manœuvres of a fellow money-captain had that very day been concluded, the Helmick failure, and between the chords and bars of a famous opera men talked in excited whispers, and one great leader lay at that very moment, broken and spent, fighting with his last breath for bare existence. Jadwin had seen it all. Uninvolved in the crash, he had none the less been close to it, watching it, in touch with it, foreseeing each successive collapse by which it reeled fatally to the final catastrophe. The voices of the two

men that had so annoyed her in the early part of the evening were suddenly raised again:

"——It was terrific, there on the floor of the Board this morning. By the Lord! they fought each other when the Bears began throwing the grain at 'em—in carload lots."

And abruptly, midway between two phases of that music-drama, of passion and romance, there came to Laura the swift and vivid impression of that other drama that simultaneously—even at that very moment—was working itself out close at hand, equally picturesque, equally romantic, equally passionate; but more than that, real, actual, modern, a thing in the very heart of the very life in which she moved. And here he sat, this Jadwin, quiet, in evening dress, listening good-naturedly to this beautiful music, for which he did not care, to this rant and fustian, watching quietly all this posing and attitudinising. How small and petty it must all seem to him!

Laura found time to be astonished. What! She had first met this man haughtily, in all the panoply of her "grand manner," and had promised herself that she would humble him, and pay him for that first mistrustful stare at her. And now, behold, she was studying him, and finding the study interesting. Out of harmony though she knew him to be with those fine emotions of hers of the early part of the evening, she

nevertheless found much in him to admire. It was always just like that. She told herself that she was forever doing the unexpected thing, the inconsistent thing. Women were queer creatures, mysterious even to themselves.

"I am so pleased that you are enjoying it all," said Corthell's voice at her shoulder. "I knew you would. There is nothing like music such as this to appeal to the emotions, the heart—and with your temperament——"

Straightway he made her feel her sex. Now she was just a woman again, with all a woman's limitations, and her relations with Corthell could never be—so she realised—any other than sex-relations. With Jadwin somehow it had been different. She had felt his manhood more than her womanhood, her sex side. And between them it was more a give-and-take affair, more equality, more companionship. Corthell spoke only of her heart and to her heart. But Jadwin made her feel —or rather she made herself feel when he talked to her—that she had a head as well as a heart.

And the last act of the opera did not wholly absorb her attention. The artists came and went, the orchestra wailed and boomed, the audience applauded, and in the end the tenor, fired by a sudden sense of duty and of stern obligation, tore himself from the arms of the soprano, and calling out upon remorseless fate

and upon heaven, and declaiming about the vanity of glory, and his heart that broke yet disdained tears, allowed himself to be dragged off the scene by his friend the basso. For the fifth time during the piece the soprano fainted into the arms of her long-suffering confidante. The audience, suddenly remembering hats and wraps, bestirred itself, and many parties were already upon their feet and filing out at the time the curtain fell.

The Cresslers and their friends were among the last to regain the vestibule. But as they came out from the *foyer,* where the first draughts of outside air began to make themselves felt, there were exclamations:

"It's raining."

"Why, it's raining right down."

It was true. Abruptly the weather had moderated, and the fine, dry snow that had been falling since early evening had changed to a lugubrious drizzle. A wave of consternation invaded the vestibule for those who had not come in carriages, or whose carriages had not arrived. Tempers were lost; women, cloaked to the ears, their heads protected only by fichus or mantillas, quarrelled with husbands or cousins or brothers over the question of umbrellas. The vestibules were crowded to suffocation, and the aigrettes nodded and swayed again in alternate gusts, now of moist, chill atmosphere from without, and now of stale, hot air that exhaled in long

puffs from the inside doors of the theatre itself. Here and there in the press, footmen, their top hats in rubber cases, their hands full of umbrellas, searched anxiously for their masters.

Outside upon the sidewalks and by the curbs, an apparently inextricable confusion prevailed; policemen with drawn clubs laboured and objurgated: anxious, preoccupied young men, their opera-hats and gloves beaded with rain, hurried to and fro, searching for their carriages. At the edge of the awning, the caller, a gigantic fellow in gold-faced uniform, shouted the numbers in a roaring sing-song that dominated every other sound. Coachmen, their wet rubber coats reflecting the lamplight, called back and forth, furious quarrels broke out between hansom drivers and the police officers, steaming horses with jingling bits, their backs covered with dark green cloths, plunged and pranced, carriage doors banged, and the roll of wheels upon the pavement was as the reverberation of artillery caissons.

"Get your carriage, sir?" cried a ragged, half-grown arab at Cressler's elbow.

"Hurry up, then," said Cressler. Then, raising his voice, for the clamour was increasing with every second: "What's your number, Laura? You girls first. Ninety-three? Get that, boy? Ninety-three. Quick now."

"The carriage appeared. Hastily they said good-bye; hastily Laura expressed to Mrs. Cressler her appreciation and enjoyment. Corthell saw them to the carriage, and getting in after them shut the door behind him. They departed.

Laura sank back in the cool gloom of the carriage's interior redolent of damp leather and upholstery.

"What an evening! What an evening!" she murmured.

On the way home both she and Page appealed to the artist, who knew the opera well, to hum or whistle for them the arias that had pleased them most. Each time they were enthusiastic. Yes, yes, that was the air. Wasn't it pretty, wasn't it beautiful?

But Aunt Wess' was still unsatisfied.

"I don't see yet," she complained, "why the young man, the one with the pointed beard, didn't marry that lady and be done with it. Just as soon as they'd seem to have it all settled, he'd begin to take on again, and strike his breast and go away. I declare, I think it was all kind of foolish."

"Why, the duke—don't you see. The one who sang bass——" Page laboured to explain.

"Oh, I didn't like him at all," said Aunt Wess'. "He stamped around so." But the audience itself had interested her, and the *décolleté* gowns had been particularly impressing.

"I never saw such dressing in all my life," she declared. "And that woman in the box next ours. Well! did you notice *that?*" She raised her eyebrows and set her lips together. "Well, I don't want to say anything."

The carriage rolled on through the darkened downtown streets, towards the North Side, where the Dearborns lived. They could hear the horses plashing through the layer of slush—mud, half-melted snow and rain—that encumbered the pavement. In the gloom the girls' wraps glowed pallid and diaphanous. The rain left long, slanting parallels on the carriage windows. They passed on down Wabash Avenue, and crossed over to State Street and Clarke Street, dark, deserted.

Laura, after awhile, lost in thought, spoke but little. It had been a great evening—because of other things than mere music. Corthell had again asked her to marry him, and she, carried away by the excitement of the moment, had answered him encouragingly. On the heels of this she had had that little talk with the capitalist Jadwin, and somehow since then she had been steadied, calmed. The cold air and the rain in her face had cooled her flaming cheeks and hot temples. She asked herself now if she did really, honestly love the artist. No, she did not; really and honestly she did not; and now as the carriage rolled on through the

deserted streets of the business districts, she knew very well that she did not want to marry him. She had done him an injustice; but in the matter of righting herself with him, correcting his false impression, she was willing to procrastinate. She wanted him to love her, to pay her all those innumerable little attentions which he managed with such faultless delicacy. To say: "No, Mr. Corthell, I do not love you, I will never be your wife," would—this time—be final. He would go away, and she had no intention of allowing him to do that.

But abruptly her reflections were interrupted. While she thought it all over she had been looking out of the carriage window through a little space where she had rubbed the steam from the pane. Now, all at once, the strange appearance of the neighbourhood as the carriage turned north from out Jackson Street into La Salle, forced itself upon her attention. She uttered an exclamation.

The office buildings on both sides of the street were lighted from basement to roof. Through the windows she could get glimpses of clerks and book-keepers in shirt-sleeves bending over desks. Every office was open, and every one of them full of a feverish activity. The sidewalks were almost as crowded as though at noon-time. Messenger boys ran to and fro, and groups of men stood on the corners in earnest conversation. The

whole neighbourhood was alive, and this, though it was close upon one o'clock in the morning!

"Why, what is it all?" she murmured.

Corthell could not explain, but all at once Page cried:

"Oh, oh, I know. See this is Jackson and La Salle streets. Landry was telling me. The 'commission district,' he called it. And these are the brokers' offices working overtime—that Helmick deal, you know."

Laura looked, suddenly stupefied. Here it was, then, that other drama, that other tragedy, working on there furiously, fiercely through the night, while she and all those others had sat there in that atmosphere of flowers and perfume, listening to music. Suddenly it loomed portentous in the eye of her mind, terrible, tremendous. Ah, this drama of the "Provision Pits," where the rush of millions of bushels of grain, and the clatter of millions of dollars, and the tramping and the wild shouting of thousands of men filled all the air with the noise of battle! Yes, here was drama in deadly earnest—drama and tragedy and death, and the jar of mortal fighting. And the echoes of it invaded the very sanctuary of art, and cut athwart the music of Italy and the cadence of polite conversation, and the shock of it endured when all the world should have slept, and galvanised into vivid life all these sombre piles of office buildings. It was dreadful, this labour through the

night. It had all the significance of field hospitals after the battle—hospitals and the tents of commanding generals. The wounds of the day were being bound up, the dead were being counted, while, shut in their headquarters, the captains and the commanders drew the plans for the grapple of armies that was to recommence with daylight.

"Yes, yes, that's just what it is," continued Page. "See, there's the Rookery, and there's the Constable Building, where Mr. Helmick has his offices. Landry showed me it all one day. And, look back." She raised the flap that covered the little window at the back of the carriage. "See, down there, at the end of the street. There's the Board of Trade Building, where the grain speculating is done,—where the wheat pits and corn pits are."

Laura turned and looked back. On either side of the vista in converging lines stretched the blazing office buildings. But over the end of the street the lead-coloured sky was rifted a little. A long, faint bar of light stretched across the prospect, and silhouetted against this rose a sombre mass, unbroken by any lights, rearing a black and formidable façade against the blur of light behind it.

And this was her last impression of the evening. The lighted office buildings, the murk of rain, the haze of light in the heavens, and raised against it the pile of

the Board of Trade Building, black, grave, monolithic, crouching on its foundations, like a monstrous sphinx with blind eyes, silent, grave,—crouching there without a sound, without sign of life under the night and the drifting veil of rain.

II.

LAURA DEARBORN'S native town was Barrington, in Worcester County, Massachusetts. Both she and Page had been born there, and there had lived until the death of their father, at a time when Page was ready for the High School. The mother, a North Carolina girl, had died long before.

Laura's education had been unusual. After leaving the High School her father had for four years allowed her a private tutor (an impecunious graduate from the Harvard Theological School). She was ambitious, a devoted student, and her instructor's task was rather to guide than to enforce her application. She soon acquired a reading knowledge of French, and knew her Racine in the original almost as well as her Shakespeare. Literature became for her an actual passion. She delved into Tennyson and the Victorian poets, and soon was on terms of intimacy with the poets and essayists of New England. The novelists of the day she

ignored almost completely, and voluntarily. Only occasionally, and then as a concession, she permitted herself a reading of Mr. Howells.

Moderately prosperous while he himself was conducting his little mill, Dearborn had not been able to put by any money to speak of, and when Laura and the local lawyer had come to close up the business, to dispose of the mill, and to settle the claims against what the lawyer grandiloquently termed "the estate," there was just enough money left to pay for Page's tickets to Chicago and a course of tuition for her at a seminary.

The Cresslers on the event of Dearborn's death had advised both sisters to come West, and had pledged themselves to look after Page during the period of her schooling. Laura had sent the little girl on at once, but delayed taking the step herself.

Fortunately, the two sisters were not obliged to live upon their inheritance. Dearborn himself had a sister —a twin of Aunt Wess'—who had married a wealthy woollen merchant of Boston, and this one, long since, had provided for the two girls. A large sum had been set aside, which was to be made over to them when the father died. For years now this sum had been accumulating interest. So that when Laura and Page faced the world, alone, upon the steps of the Barrington cemetery, they had the assurance that, at least, they were independent.

For two years, in the solidly built colonial dwelling, with its low ceilings and ample fireplaces where once the minute-men had swung their kettles, Laura, alone, thought it all over. Mother and father were dead; even the Boston aunt was dead. Of all her relations, Aunt Wess' alone remained. Page was at her finishing school at Geneva Lake, within two hours of Chicago. The Cresslers were the dearest friends of the orphan girls. Aunt Wess', herself a widow, living also in Chicago, added her entreaties to Mrs. Cressler's. All things seemed to point her westward, all things seemed to indicate that one phase of her life was ended.

Then, too, she had her ambitions. These hardly took definite shape in her mind; but vaguely she chose to see herself, at some far-distant day, an actress, a *tragédienne,* playing the *rôles* of Shakespeare's heroines. This idea of hers was more a desire than an ambition, but it could not be realised in Barrington, Massachusetts. For a year she temporised, procrastinated, loth to leave the old home, loth to leave the grave in the cemetery back of the Methodist-Episcopal chapel. Twice during this time she visited Page, and each time the great grey city threw the spell of its fascination about her. Each time she returned to Barrington the town dwindled in her estimation. It was picturesque, but lamentably narrow. The life was barren, the "New England spirit" prevailed in all its severity; and this

spirit seemed to her a veritable cult, a sort of religion, wherein the Old Maid was the priestess, the Spinster the officiating devotee, the thing worshipped the Great Unbeautiful, and the ritual unremitting, unrelenting Housework. She detested it.

That she was an Episcopalian, and preferred to read her prayers rather than to listen to those written and memorised by the Presbyterian minister, seemed to be regarded as a relic of heathenish rites—a thing almost cannibalistic. When she elected to engage a woman and a "hired man" to manage her house, she felt the disapprobation of the entire village, as if she had sunk into some decadent and enervating Lower-Empire degeneracy.

The crisis came when Laura travelled alone to Boston to hear Modjeska in "Marie Stuart" and "Macbeth," and upon returning full of enthusiasm, allowed it to be understood that she had a half-formed desire of emulating such an example. A group of lady-deaconesses, headed by the Presbyterian minister, called upon her, with some intention of reasoning and labouring with her.

They got no farther than the statement of the cause of this visit. The spirit and temper of the South, that she had from her mother, flamed up in Laura at last, and the members of the "committee," before they were well aware, came to themselves in the street outside the front gate, dazed and bewildered, staring at each

other, all confounded and stunned by the violence of an outbreak of long-repressed emotion and long-restrained anger, that like an actual physical force had swept them out of the house.

At the same moment Laura, thrown across her bed, wept with a vehemence that shook her from head to foot. But she had not the least compunction for what she had said, and before the month was out had said good-bye to Barrington forever, and was on her way to Chicago, henceforth to be her home.

A house was bought on the North Side, and it was arranged that Aunt Wess' should live with her two nieces. Pending the installation Laura and Page lived at a little family hotel in the same neighbourhood. The Cresslers' invitation to join the theatre party at the Auditorium had fallen inopportunely enough, squarely in the midst of the ordeal of moving in. Indeed the two girls had already passed one night in the new home, and they must dress for the affair by lamplight in their unfurnished quarters and under inconceivable difficulties. Only the lure of Italian opera, heard from a box, could have tempted them to have accepted the invitation at such a time and under such circumstances.

The morning after the opera, Laura woke in her bed —almost the only article of furniture that was in place in the whole house—with the depressing consciousness of a hard day's work at hand. Outside it was still

raining, the room was cold, heated only by an inadequate oil stove, and through the slats of the inside shutters, which pending the hanging of the curtains they had been obliged to close, was filtering a gloomy light of a wet Chicago morning.

It was all very mournful, and she regretted now that she had not abided by her original decision to remain at the hotel until the new house was ready for occupancy. But it had happened that their month at the hotel was just up, and rather than engage the rooms for another four weeks she had thought it easier as well as cheaper to come to the house. It was all a new experience for her, and she had imagined that everything could be moved in, put in place, and the household running smoothly in a week's time.

She sat up in bed, hugging her shoulders against the chill of the room and looking at her theatre gown, that —in default of a clean closet—she had hung from the gas fixture the night before. From the direction of the kitchen came the sounds of the newly engaged "girl" making the fire for breakfast, while through the register a thin wisp of blue smoke curled upward to prove that the "hired man" was tinkering with the unused furnace. The room itself was in lamentable confusion. Crates and packing-boxes encumbered the uncarpeted floor; chairs wrapped in excelsior and jute were piled one

upon another; a roll of carpet leaned in one corner and a pile of mattresses occupied another.

As Laura considered the prospect she realised her blunder.

"Why, and oh, why," she murmured, "didn't we stay at the hotel till all this was straightened out?"

But in an adjoining room she heard Aunt Wess' stirring. She turned to Page, who upon the pillows beside her still slept, her stocking around her neck as a guarantee against draughts.

"Page, Page! Wake up, girlie. It's late, and there's worlds to do."

Page woke blinking.

"Oh, it's freezing cold, Laura. Let's light the oil stove and stay in bed till the room gets warm. Oh, dear, aren't you sleepy, and, oh, wasn't last night lovely? Which one of us will get up to light the stove? We'll count for it. Lie down, sissie, dear," she begged, "you're letting all the cold air in."

Laura complied, and the two sisters, their noses all but touching, the bedclothes up to their ears, put their arms about each other to keep the warmer.

Amused at the foolishness, they "counted" to decide as to who should get up to light the oil stove, Page beginning:

"Eeny—meeny—myny—mo———"

But before the "count" was decided Aunt Wess'

came in, already dressed, and in a breath the two girls implored her to light the stove. While she did so, Aunt Wess' remarked, with the alacrity of a woman who observes the difficulties of a proceeding in which she has no faith:

"I don't believe that hired girl knows her business. She says now she can't light a fire in that stove. My word, Laura, I do believe you'll have enough of all this before you're done. You know I advised you from the very first to take a flat."

"Nonsense, Aunt Wess'," answered Laura, good-naturedly. "We'll work it out all right. I know what's the matter with that range. I'll be right down and see to it so soon as I'm dressed."

It was nearly ten o'clock before breakfast, such as it was, was over. They ate it on the kitchen table, with the kitchen knives and forks, and over the meal, Page having remarked: "Well, what will we do first?" discussed the plan of campaign.

"Landry Court does not have to work to-day—he told me why, but I've forgotten—and he said he was coming up to help," observed Laura, and at once Aunt Wess' smiled. Landry Court was openly and strenuously in love with Laura, and no one of the new household ignored the fact. Aunt Wess' chose to consider the affair as ridiculous, and whenever the subject was mentioned spoke of Landry as "that boy."

Page, however, bridled with seriousness as often as the matter came up. Yes, that was all very well, but Landry was a decent, hard-working young fellow, with all his way to make and no time to waste, and if Laura didn't mean that it should come to anything it wasn't very fair to him to keep him dangling along like that.

"I guess," Laura was accustomed to reply, looking significantly at Aunt Wess', "that our little girlie has a little bit of an eye on a certain hard-working young fellow herself." And the answer invariably roused Page.

"Now, Laura," she would cry, her eyes snapping, her breath coming fast. "Now, Laura, that isn't right at all, and you know I don't like it, and you just say it because you know it makes me cross. I won't have you insinuate that I would run after any man or care in the least whether he's in love or not. I just guess I've got some self-respect; and as for Landry Court, we're no more nor less than just good friends, and I appreciate his business talents and the way he rustles 'round, and he merely respects me as a friend, and it don't go any farther than that. 'An eye on him,' I do declare! As if I hadn't yet to see the man I'd so much as look at a second time."

And Laura, remembering her "Shakespeare," was ever ready with the words:

"The lady doth protest too much, methinks."

Just after breakfast, in fact, Landry did appear.

"Now," he began, with a long breath, addressing Laura, who was unwrapping the pieces of cut glass and bureau ornaments as Page passed them to her from the depths of a crate. "Now, I've done a lot already. That's what made me late. I've ordered your newspaper sent here, and I've telephoned the hotel to forward any mail that comes for you to this address, and I sent word to the gas company to have your gas turned on——"

"Oh, that's good," said Laura.

"Yes, I thought of that; the man will be up right away to fix it, and I've ordered a cake of ice left here every day, and told the telephone company that you wanted a telephone put in. Oh, yes, and the bottled-milk man—I stopped in at a dairy on the way up. Now, what do we do first?"

He took off his coat, rolled up his shirt sleeves, and plunged into the confusion of crates and boxes that congested the rooms and hallways on the first floor of the house. The two sisters could hear him attacking his task with tremendous blows of the kitchen hammer. From time to time he called up the stairway:

"Hey, what do you want done with this *jardinière* thing? . . . Where does this hanging lamp go, Laura?"

Laura, having unpacked all the cut-glass ornaments,

came downstairs, and she and Landry set about hanging the parlour curtains.

Landry fixed the tops of the window mouldings with a piercing eye, his arms folded.

"I see, I see," he answered to Laura's explanations. "I see. Now, where's a screw-driver, and a step-ladder? Yes, and I'll have to have some brass nails, and your hired man must let me have that hammer again."

He sent the cook after the screw-driver, called the hired man from the furnace, shouted upstairs to Page to ask for the whereabouts of the brass nails, and delegated Laura to steady the step-ladder.

"Now, Landry," directed Laura, "those rods want to be about three inches from the top."

"Well," he said, climbing up, "I'll mark the place with the screw and you tell me if it is right."

She stepped back, her head to one side.

"No; higher, Landry. There, that's about it—or a *little* lower—so. That's *just* right. Come down now and help me put the hooks in."

They pulled a number of sofa cushions together and sat down on the floor side by side, Landry snapping the hooks in place where Laura had gathered the pleats. Inevitably his hands touched hers, and their heads drew close together. Page and Mrs. Wessels were unpacking linen in the upstairs hall. The cook and hired man

raised a great noise of clanking stove lids and grates as they wrestled with the range in the kitchen.

"Well," said Landry, "you are going to have a pretty home." He was meditating a phrase of which he purposed delivering himself when opportunity afforded. It had to do with Laura's eyes, and her ability of understanding him. She understood him; she was to know that he thought so, that it was of immense importance to him. It was thus he conceived of the manner of love making. The evening before that palavering artist seemed to have managed to monopolise her about all of the time. Now it was his turn, and this day of household affairs, of little domestic commotions, appeared to him to be infinitely more desirous than the pomp and formality of evening dress and opera boxes. This morning the relations between himself and Laura seemed charming, intimate, unconventional, and full of opportunities. Never had she appeared prettier to him. She wore a little pink flannel dressing-sack with full sleeves, and her hair, carelessly twisted into great piles, was in a beautiful disarray, curling about her cheeks and ears. "I didn't see anything of you at all last night," he grumbled.

"Well, you didn't try."

"Oh, it was the Other Fellow's turn," he went on. "Say," he added, "how often are you going to let me

come to see you when you get settled here? Twice a week—three times?"

"As if you wanted to see me as often as that. Why, Landry, I'm growing up to be an old maid. You can't want to lose your time calling on old maids."

He was voluble in protestations. He was tired of young girls. They were all very well to dance with, but when a man got too old for that sort of thing, he wanted someone with sense to talk to. Yes, he did. Someone with *sense.* Why, he would rather talk five minutes with her——

"Honestly, Landry?" she asked, as though he were telling a thing incredible.

He swore to her it was true. His eyes snapped. He struck his palm with his fist.

"An old maid like me?" repeated Laura.

"Old maid nothing!" he vociferated. "Ah," he cried, "you seem to understand me. When I look at you, straight into your eyes——"

From the doorway the cook announced that the man with the last load of furnace coal had come, and handed Laura the voucher to sign. Then needs must that Laura go with the cook to see if the range was finally and properly adjusted, and while she was gone the man from the gas company called to turn on the meter, and Landry was obliged to look after him. It was half an

hour before he and Laura could once more settle themselves on the cushions in the parlour.

"Such a lot of things to do," she said; "and you are such a help, Landry. It was so dear of you to want to come."

"I would do anything in the world for you, Laura," he exclaimed, encouraged by her words; "anything. You know I would. It isn't so much that I want you to care for me—and I guess I want *that* bad enough—but it's because I love to be with you, and be helping you, and all that sort of thing. Now, all this," he waved a hand at the confusion of furniture, "all this to-day—I just feel," he declared with tremendous earnestness, "I just feel as though I were entering into your life. And just sitting here beside you and putting in the curtain hooks, I want you to know that it's inspiring to me. Yes, it is inspiring; it's elevating. You don't know how it makes a man feel to have the companionship of a good and lovely woman."

"Landry, as though I were all that. Here, put another hook in here."

She held the fold towards him. But he took her hand as their fingers touched and raised it to his lips and kissed it. She did not withdraw it, nor rebuke him, crying out instead, as though occupied with quite another matter:

"Landry, careful, my dear boy; you'll make me prick my fingers. Ah—there, you did."

He was all commiseration and self-reproach at once, and turned her hand palm upwards, looking for the scratch.

"Um!" she breathed. "It hurts."

"Where now," he cried, "where was it? Ah, I was a beast; I'm so ashamed." She indicated a spot on her wrist instead of her fingers, and very naturally Landry kissed it again.

"How foolish!" she remonstrated. "The idea! As if I wasn't old enough to be——"

"You're not so old but what you're going to marry me some day," he declared.

"How perfectly silly, Landry!" she retorted. "Aren't you done with my hand yet?"

"No, indeed," he cried, his clasp tightening over her fingers. "It's mine. You can't have it till I say—or till *you* say that—some day—you'll give it to me for good—for better or for worse."

"As if you really meant that," she said, willing to prolong the little situation. It was very sweet to have this clean, fine-fibred young boy so earnestly in love with her, very sweet that the lifting of her finger, the mere tremble of her eyelid should so perturb him.

"Mean it! Mean it!" he vociferated. "You don't know how much I do mean it. Why, Laura, why—why, I can't think of anything else."

"You!" she mocked. "As if I believed that. How many other girls have you said it to this year?"

Landry compressed his lips.

"Miss Dearborn, you insult me."

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Laura, at last withdrawing her hand.

"And now you're mocking me. It isn't kind. No, it isn't; it isn't *kind.*"

"I never answered your question yet," she observed.

"What question?"

"About your coming to see me when we were settled. I *thought* you wanted to know."

"How about lunch?" said Page, from the doorway. "Do you know it's after twelve?"

"The girl has got something for us," said Laura. "I told her about it. Oh, just a pick-up lunch—coffee, chops. I thought we wouldn't bother to-day. We'll have to eat in the kitchen."

"Well, let's be about it," declared Landry, "and finish with these curtains afterward. Inwardly *I'm* a ravening wolf."

It was past one o'clock by the time that luncheon, "picked up" though it was, was over. By then everybody was very tired. Aunt Wess' exclaimed that she could not stand another minute, and retired to her room. Page, indefatigable, declaring they never would get settled if they let things dawdle along, set to work

unpacking her trunk and putting her clothes away. Her fox terrier, whom the family, for obscure reasons, called the Pig, arrived in the middle of the afternoon in a crate, and shivering with the chill of the house, was tied up behind the kitchen range, where, for all the heat, he still trembled and shuddered at long intervals, his head down, his eyes rolled up, bewildered and discountenanced by so much confusion and so many new faces.

Outside the weather continued lamentable. The rain beat down steadily upon the heaps of snow on the grass-plats by the curbstones, melting it, dirtying it, and reducing it to viscid slush. The sky was lead grey; the trees, bare and black as though built of iron and wire, dripped incessantly. The sparrows, huddling under the house-eaves or in interstices of the mouldings, chirped feebly from time to time, sitting disconsolate, their feathers puffed out till their bodies assumed globular shapes. Delivery waggons trundled up and down the street at intervals, the horses and drivers housed in oil-skins.

The neighbourhood was quiet. There was no sound of voices in the streets. But occasionally, from far away in the direction of the river or the Lake Front, came the faint sounds of steamer and tug whistles. The sidewalks in either direction were deserted. Only a solitary policeman, his star pinned to the outside of his

dripping rubber coat, his helmet shedding rivulets, stood on the corner absorbed in the contemplation of the brown torrent of the gutter plunging into a sewer vent.

Landry and Laura were in the library at the rear of the house, a small room, two sides of which were occupied with bookcases. They were busy putting the books in place. Laura stood half-way up the step-ladder taking volume after volume from Landry as he passed them to her.

"Do you wipe them carefully, Landry?" she asked.

He held a strip of cloth torn from an old sheet in his hand, and rubbed the dust from each book before he handed it to her.

"Yes, yes; very carefully," he assured her. "Say," he added, "where are all your modern novels? You've got Scott and Dickens and Thackeray, of course, and Eliot—yes, and here's Hawthorne and Poe. But I haven't struck anything later than Oliver Wendell Holmes."

Laura put up her chin. "Modern novels—no indeed. When I've yet to read 'Jane Eyre,' and have only read 'Ivanhoe' and 'The Newcomes' once."

She made a point of the fact that her taste was the extreme of conservatism, refusing to acknowledge hardly any fiction that was not almost classic. Even Stevenson aroused her suspicions.

"Well, here's 'The Wrecker,'" observed Landry,

handing it up to her. "I read it last summer-vacation at Waukesha. Just about took the top of my head off."

"I tried to read it," she answered. "Such an outlandish story, no love story in it, and so coarse, so brutal, and then so improbable. I couldn't get interested."

But abruptly Landry uttered an exclamation:

"Well, what do you call this? 'Wanda,' by Ouida. How is this for modern?"

She blushed to her hair, snatching the book from him.

"Page brought it home. It's hers."

But her confusion betrayed her, and Landry shouted derisively.

"Well, I *did* read it then," she suddenly declared defiantly. "No, I'm not ashamed. Yes, I read it from cover to cover. It made me cry like I haven't cried over a book since I was a little tot. You can say what you like, but it's beautiful—a beautiful love story—and it does tell about noble, unselfish people. I suppose it has its faults, but it makes you feel better for reading it, and that's what all your 'Wreckers' in the world would never do."

"Well," answered Landry, "I don't know much about that sort of thing. Corthell does. He can talk you blind about literature. I've heard him run on by the hour. He says the novel of the future is going to be the novel without a love story."

But Laura nodded her head incredulously.

"It will be long after I am dead—that's one consolation," she said.

"Corthell is full of crazy ideas anyhow," Landry went on, still continuing to pass the books up to her. "He's a good sort, and I like him well enough, but he's the kind of man that gets up a reputation for being clever and artistic by running down the very one particular thing that everyone likes, and cracking up some book or picture or play that no one has ever heard of. Just let anything get popular once and Sheldon Corthell can't speak of it without shuddering. But he'll go over here to some Archer Avenue pawn shop, dig up an old brass stewpan, or coffee-pot that some greasy old Russian Jew has chucked away, and he'll stick it up in his studio and regularly kow-tow to it, and talk about the 'decadence of American industrial arts.' I've heard him. I say it's pure affectation, that's what it is, pure affectation."

But the bookcase meanwhile had been filling up, and now Laura remarked:

"No more, Landry. That's all that will go here."

She prepared to descend from the ladder. In filling the higher shelves she had mounted almost to the topmost step.

"Careful now," said Landry, as he came forward. "Give me your hand."

She gave it to him, and then, as she descended, Landry had the assurance to put his arm around her waist as if to steady her. He was surprised at his own audacity, for he had premeditated nothing, and his arm was about her before he was well aware. He yet found time to experience a qualm of apprehension. Just how would Laura take it? Had he gone too far?

But Laura did not even seem to notice, all her attention apparently fixed upon coming safely down to the floor. She descended and shook out her skirts.

"There," she said, "that's over with. Look, I'm all dusty."

There was a knock at the half-open door. It was the cook.

"What are you going to have for supper, Miss Dearborn?" she inquired. "There's nothing in the house."

"Oh, dear," said Laura with sudden blankness, "I never thought of supper. Isn't there anything?"

"Nothing but some eggs and coffee." The cook assumed an air of aloofness, as if the entire affair were totally foreign to any interest or concern of hers. Laura dismissed her, saying that she would see to it.

"We'll have to go out and get some things," she said. "We'll all go. I'm tired of staying in the house."

"No, I've a better scheme," announced Landry. I'll invite you all out to dine with me. I know a place

where you can get the best steak in America. It has stopped raining. See," he showed her the window.

"But, Landry, we are all so dirty and miserable."

"We'll go right now and get there early. There will be nobody there, and we can have a room to ourselves. Oh, it's all right," he declared. "You just trust me."

"We'll see what Page and Aunt Wess' say. Of course Aunt Wess' would have to come."

"Of course," he said. "I wouldn't think of asking you unless she could come."

A little later the two sisters, Mrs. Wessels, and Landry came out of the house, but before taking their car they crossed to the opposite side of the street, Laura having said that she wanted to note the effect of her parlour curtains from the outside.

"I think they are looped up just far enough," she declared. But Landry was observing the house itself.

"It is the best-looking place on the block," he answered.

In fact, the house was not without a certain attractiveness. It occupied a corner lot at the intersection of Huron and North State streets. Directly opposite was St. James' Church, and at one time the house had served as the rectory. For the matter of that, it had been built for just that purpose. Its style of architecture was distantly ecclesiastic, with a suggestion of

Gothic to some of the doors and windows. The material used was solid, massive, the walls thick, the foundation heavy. It did not occupy the entire lot, the original builder seeming to have preferred garden space to mere amplitude of construction, and in addition to the inevitable "back yard," a lawn bordered it on three sides. It gave the place a certain air of distinction and exclusiveness. Vines grew thick upon the southern walls; in the summer time fuchsias, geraniums, and pansies would flourish in the flower-beds by the front stoop. The grass-plat by the curb boasted a couple of trees. The whole place was distinctive, individual, and very homelike, and came as a grateful relief to the endless lines of houses built of yellow Michigan limestone that pervaded the rest of the neighbourhood in every direction.

"I love the place," exclaimed Laura. "I think it's as pretty a house as I have seen in Chicago."

"Well, it isn't so spick and span," commented Page. "It gives you the idea that we're not new-rich and showy and all."

But Aunt Wess' was not yet satisfied.

"*You* may see, Laura," she remarked, "how you are going to heat all that house with that one furnace, but I declare *I* don't."

Their car, or rather their train of cars, coupled together in threes, in Chicago style, came, and Landry escorted them down town. All the way Laura could

not refrain from looking out of the windows, absorbed in the contemplation of the life and aspects of the streets.

"You will give yourself away," said Page. "Everybody will know you're from the country."

"I am," she retorted. "But there's a difference between just mere 'country' and Massachusetts, and I'm not ashamed of it."

Chicago, the great grey city, interested her at every instant and under every condition. As yet she was not sure that she liked it; she could not forgive its dirty streets, the unspeakable squalor of some of its poorer neighbourhoods that sometimes developed, like cancerous growths, in the very heart of fine residence districts. The black murk that closed every vista of the business streets oppressed her, and the soot that stained linen and gloves each time she stirred abroad was a never-ending distress.

But the life was tremendous. All around, on every side, in every direction the vast machinery of Commonwealth clashed and thundered from dawn to dark and from dark till dawn. Even now, as the car carried her farther into the business quarter, she could hear it, see it, and feel in her every fibre the trepidation of its motion. The blackened waters of the river, seen an instant between stanchions as the car trundled across the State Street bridge, disappeared under fleets of tugs, of lake

steamers, of lumber barges from Sheboygan and Mackinac, of grain boats from Duluth, of coal scows that filled the air with impalpable dust, of cumbersome schooners laden with produce, of grimy rowboats dodging the prows and paddles of the larger craft, while on all sides, blocking the horizon, red in colour and designated by Brobdignag letters, towered the humpshouldered grain elevators.

Just before crossing the bridge on the north side of the river she had caught a glimpse of a great railway terminus. Down below there, rectilinear, scientifically paralleled and squared, the Yard disclosed itself. A system of grey rails beyond words complicated opened out and spread immeasurably. Switches, semaphores, and signal towers stood here and there. A dozen trains, freight and passenger, puffed and steamed, waiting the word to depart. Detached engines hurried in and out of sheds and roundhouses, seeking their trains, or bunted the ponderous freight cars into switches; trundling up and down, clanking, shrieking, their bells filling the air with the clangour of tocsins. Men in visored caps shouted hoarsely, waving their arms or red flags; drays, their big dappled horses, feeding in their nose bags, stood backed up to the open doors of freight cars and received their loads. A train departed roaring. Before midnight it would be leagues away boring through the Great Northwest, carrying Trade—the life blood of

nations—into communities of which Laura had never heard. Another train, reeking with fatigue, the air brakes screaming, arrived and halted, debouching a flood of passengers, business men, bringing Trade—a galvanising elixir—from the very ends and corners of the continent.

Or, again, it was South Water Street—a jam of delivery waggons and market carts backed to the curbs, leaving only a tortuous path between the endless files of horses, suggestive of an actual barrack of cavalry. Provisions, market produce, "garden truck" and fruits, in an infinite welter of crates and baskets, boxes, and sacks, crowded the sidewalks. The gutter was choked with an overflow of refuse cabbage leaves, soft oranges, decaying beet-tops. The air was thick with the heavy smell of vegetation. Food was trodden under foot, food crammed the stores and warehouses to bursting. Food mingled with the mud of the highway. The very dray-horses were gorged with an unending nourishment of snatched mouthfuls picked from backboard, from barrel top, and from the edge of the sidewalk. The entire locality reeked with the fatness of a hundred thousand furrows. A land of plenty, the inordinate abundance of the earth itself emptied itself upon the asphalt and cobbles of the quarter. It was the Mouth of the City, and drawn from all directions, over a territory of immense area, this glut of crude subsistence

was sucked in, as if into a rapacious gullet, to feed the sinews and to nourish the fibres of an immeasurable colossus.

Suddenly the meaning and significance of it all dawned upon Laura. The Great Grey City, brooking no rival, imposed its dominion upon a reach of country larger than many a kingdom of the Old World. For thousands of miles beyond its confines was its influence felt. Out, far out, far away in the snow and shadow of Northern Wisconsin forests, axes and saws bit the bark of century-old trees, stimulated by this city's energy. Just as far to the southward pick and drill leaped to the assault of veins of anthracite, moved by her central power. Her force turned the wheels of harvester and seeder a thousand miles distant in Iowa and Kansas. Her force spun the screws and propellers of innumerable squadrons of lake steamers crowding the Sault Sainte Marie. For her and because of her all the Central States, all the Great Northwest roared with traffic and industry; sawmills screamed; factories, their smoke blackening the sky, clashed and flamed; wheels turned, pistons leaped in their cylinders; cog gripped cog; beltings clasped the drums of mammoth wheels; and converters of forges belched into the clouded air their tempest breath of molten steel.

It was Empire, the resistless subjugation of all this central world of the lakes and the prairies. Here, mid-

most in the land, beat the Heart of the Nation, whence inevitably must come its immeasurable power, its infinite, infinite, inexhaustible vitality. Here, of all her cities, throbbed the true life—the true power and spirit of America; gigantic, crude with the crudity of youth, disdaining rivalry; sane and healthy and vigorous; brutal in its ambition, arrogant in the new-found knowledge of its giant strength, prodigal of its wealth, infinite in its desires. In its capacity boundless, in its courage indomitable; subduing the wilderness in a single generation, defying calamity, and through the flame and the *débris* of a commonwealth in ashes, rising suddenly renewed, formidable, and Titanic.

Laura, her eyes dizzied, her ears stunned, watched tirelessly.

"There is something terrible about it," she murmured, half to herself, "something insensate. In a way, it doesn't seem human. It's like a great tidal wave. It's all very well for the individual just so long as he can keep afloat, but once fallen, how horribly quick it would crush him, annihilate him, how horribly quick, and with such horrible indifference! I suppose it's civilisation in the making, the thing that isn't meant to be seen, as though it were too elemental, too—primordial; like the first verses of Genesis."

The impression remained long with her, and not even the gaiety of their little supper could altogether

disperse it. She was a little frightened—frightened of the vast, cruel machinery of the city's life, and of the men who could dare it, who conquered it. For a moment they seemed, in a sense, more terrible than the city itself—men for whom all this crash of conflict and commerce had no terrors. Those who could subdue it to their purposes, must they not be themselves more terrible, more pitiless, more brutal? She shrank a little. What could women ever know of the life of men, after all? Even Landry, extravagant as he was, so young, so exuberant, so seemingly innocent—she knew that he was spoken of as a good business man. He, too, then had his other side. For him the Battle of the Street was an exhilaration. Beneath that boyish exterior was the tough coarseness, the male hardness, the callousness that met the brunt and withstood the shock of onset.

Ah, these men of the city, what could women ever know of them, of their lives, of that other existence through which—freed from the influence of wife or mother, or daughter or sister—they passed every day from nine o'clock till evening? It was a life in which women had no part, and in which, should they enter it, they would no longer recognise son or husband, or father or brother. The gentle-mannered fellow, clean-minded, clean-handed, of the breakfast or supper table was one man. The other, who and what was he? Down there in the murk and grime of the business district

raged the Battle of the Street, and therein he was a being transformed, case-hardened, supremely selfish, asking no quarter; no, nor giving any. Fouled with the clutchings and grapplings of the attack, besmirched with the elbowing of low associates and obscure allies, he set his feet toward conquest, and mingled with the marchings of an army that surged forever forward and back; now in merciless assault; beating the fallen enemy under foot, now in repulse, equally merciless, trampling down the auxilaries of the day before, in a panic dash for safety; always cruel, always selfish, always pitiless.

To contrast these men with such as Corthell was inevitable. She remembered him, to whom the business district was an unexplored country, who kept himself far from the fighting, his hands unstained, his feet unsullied. He passed his life gently, in the calm, still atmosphere of art, in the cult of the beautiful, unperturbed, tranquil; painting, reading, or, piece by piece, developing his beautiful stained glass. Him women could know, with him they could sympathise. And he could enter fully into their lives and help and stimulate them. Of the two existences which did she prefer, that of the business man, or that of the artist?

Then suddenly Laura surprised herself. After all, she was a daughter of the frontier, and the blood of those who had wrestled with a new world flowed in her body. Yes, Corthell's was a beautiful life; the charm

of dim painted windows, the attraction of darkened studios with their harmonies of colour, their orientalisms, and their arabesques was strong. No doubt it all had its place. It fascinated her at times, in spite of herself. To relax the mind, to indulge the senses, to live in an environment of pervading beauty was delightful. But the men to whom the woman in her turned were not those of the studio. Terrible as the Battle of the Street was, it was yet battle. Only the strong and the brave might dare it, and the figure that held her imagination and her sympathy was not the artist, soft of hand and of speech, elaborating graces of sound and colour and form, refined, sensitive, and temperamental; but the fighter, unknown and unknowable to women as he was; hard, rigorous, panoplied in the harness of the warrior, who strove among the trumpets, and who, in the brunt of conflict, conspicuous, formidable, set the battle in a rage around him, and exulted like a champion in the shoutings of the captains.

They were not long at table, and by the time they were ready to depart it was about half-past five. But when they emerged into the street, it was discovered that once more the weather had abruptly changed. It was snowing thickly. Again a bitter wind from off the Lake tore through the streets. The slush and melted snow was freezing, and the north side of every lamp post and telegraph pole was sheeted with ice.

To add to their discomfort, the North State Street cars were blocked. When they gained the corner of Washington Street they could see where the congestion began, a few squares distant.

"There's nothing for it," declared Landry, "but to go over and get the Clarke Street cars—and at that you may have to stand up all the way home, at this time of day."

They paused, irresolute, a moment on the corner. It was the centre of the retail quarter. Close at hand a vast dry goods house, built in the old "iron-front" style, towered from the pavement, and through its hundreds of windows presented to view a world of stuffs and fabrics, upholsteries and textiles, kaleidoscopic, gleaming in the fierce brilliance of a multitude of lights. From each street doorway was pouring an army of "shoppers," women for the most part; and these—since the store catered to a rich *clientèle*—fashionably dressed. Many of them stood for a moment on the threshold of the storm-doorways, turning up the collars of their sealskins, settling their hands in their muffs, and searching the street for their *coupés* and carriages.

Among the number of those thus engaged, one, suddenly catching sight of Laura waved a muff in her direction, then came quickly forward. It was Mrs. Cressler.

"Laura, my dearest girl! Of all the people. I *am* so glad to see you!" She kissed Laura on the cheek,

shook hands all around, and asked about the sisters' new home. Did they want anything, or was there anything she could do to help? Then interrupting herself, and laying a glove on Laura's arm:

"I've got more to *tell* you."

She compressed her lips and stood off from Laura, fixing her with a significant glance.

"Me? To tell me?"

"Where are you going now?"

"Home; but our cars are stopped. We must go over to——"

"Fiddlesticks! You and Page and Mrs. Wessels—all of you are coming home and dine with me."

"But we've had dinner already," they all cried, speaking at once.

Page explained the situation, but Mrs. Cressler would not be denied.

"The carriage is right here," she said. "I don't have to call for Charlie. He's got a man from Cincinnati in tow, and they are going to dine at the Calumet Club."

It ended by the two sisters and Mrs. Wessels getting into Mrs. Cressler's carriage. Landry excused himself. He lived on the South Side, on Michigan Avenue, and declaring t[illegible] knew they had had enough of him for one [illegible]elf off.

[illegible]s. Cressler had to tell Laura, she

evidently was determined to save for her ears only. Arrived at the Dearborns' home, she sent her footman in to tell the "girl" that the family would not be home that night. The Cresslers lived hard by on the same street, and within ten minutes' walk of the Dearborns. The two sisters and their aunt would be back immediately after breakfast.

When they had got home with Mrs. Cressler, this latter suggested hot tea and sandwiches in the library, for the ride had been cold. But the others, worn out, declared for bed as soon as Mrs. Cressler herself had dined.

"Oh, bless you, Carrie," said Aunt Wess'; "I couldn't think of tea. My back is just about broken, and I'm going straight to my bed."

Mrs. Cressler showed them to their rooms. Page and Mrs. Wessels elected to sleep together, and once the door had closed upon them the little girl unburdened herself.

"I suppose Laura thinks it's all right, running off like this for the whole blessed night, and no one to look after the house but those two servants that nobody knows anything about. As though there weren't heaven knows what all to tend to there in the morning. I just don't see," she exclaimed decisively, "how we're going to get settled at all. That Landry Court! My goodness, he's more hindrance than help. Did you ever *see!* He

just dashes in as though he were doing it all, and messes everything up, and loses things, and gets things into the wrong place, and forgets this and that, and then he and Laura sit down and spoon. I never saw anything like it. First it's Corthell and then Landry, and next it will be somebody else. Laura regularly mortifies me; a great, grown-up girl like that, flirting, and letting every man she meets think that he's just the one particular one of the whole earth. It's not good form. And Landry—as if he didn't know we've got more to do now than just to dawdle and dawdle. I could slap him. I like to see a man take life seriously and try to amount to something, and not waste the best years of his life trailing after women who are old enough to be his grandmother, and don't mean that it will ever come to anything."

In her room, in the front of the house, Laura was partly undressed when Mrs. Cressler knocked at her door. The latter had put on a wrapper of flowered silk, and her hair was bound in "invisible nets."

"I brought you a dressing-gown," she said. She hung it over the foot of the bed, and sat down on the bed itself, watching Laura, who stood before the glass of the bureau, her head bent upon her breast, her hands busy with the back of her hair. From time to time the hairpins clicked as she laid them down in the silver trays close at hand. Then putting her chin in the air,

she shook her head, and the great braids, unlooped, fell to her waist.

"What pretty hair you have, child," murmured Mrs. Cressler. She was settling herself for a long talk with her *protégée*. She had much to tell, but now that they had the whole night before them, could afford to take her time.

Between the two women the conversation began slowly, with detached phrases and observations that did not call necessarily for answers—mere beginnings that they did not care to follow up.

"They tell me," said Mrs. Cressler, "that that Gretry girl smokes ten cigarettes every night before she goes to bed. You know the Gretrys—they were at the opera the other night."

Laura permitted herself an indefinite murmur of interest. Her head to one side, she drew the brush in slow, deliberate movements downward underneath the long, thick strands of her hair. Mrs. Cressler watched her attentively.

"Why don't you wear your hair that new way, Laura," she remarked, "farther down on your neck? I see everyone doing it now."

The house was very still. Outside the double windows they could hear the faint murmuring click of the frozen snow. A radiator in the hallway clanked and strangled for a moment, then fell quiet again.

"What a pretty room this is," said Laura. "I think I'll have to do our guest-room something like this—a sort of white and gold effect. My hair? Oh, I don't know. Wearing it low that way makes it catch so on the hooks of your collar, and, besides, I was afraid it would make my head look so flat."

There was a silence. Laura braided a long strand, with quick, regular motions of both hands, and letting it fall over her shoulder, shook it into place with a twist of her head. She stepped out of her skirt, and Mrs. Cressler handed her her dressing-gown, and brought out a pair of quilted slippers of red satin from the wardrobe.

In the grate, the fire that had been lighted just before they had come upstairs was crackling sharply. Laura drew up an armchair and sat down in front of it, her chin in her hand. Mrs. Cressler stretched herself upon the bed, an arm behind her head.

"Well, Laura," she began at length, "I have some real news for you. My dear, I believe you've made a conquest."

"I!" murmured Laura, looking around. She feigned a surprise, though she guessed at once that Mrs. Cressler had Corthell in mind.

"That Mr. Jadwin—the one you met at the opera."

Genuinely taken aback, Laura sat upright and stared wide-eyed.

"Mr. Jadwin!" she exclaimed. "Why, we didn't have five minutes' talk. Why, I hardly know the man. I only met him last night."

But Mrs. Cressler shook her head, closing her eyes and putting her lips together.

"That don't make any difference, Laura. Trust me to tell when a man is taken with a girl. My dear, you can have him as easy as *that.*" She snapped her fingers.

"Oh, I'm sure you're mistaken, Mrs. Cressler."

"Not in the least. I've known Curtis Jadwin now for fifteen years—nobody better. He's as old a family friend as Charlie and I have. I know him like a book. And I tell you the man is in love with you."

"Well, I hope he didn't tell you as much," cried Laura, promising herself to be royally angry if such was the case. But Mrs. Cressler hastened to reassure her.

"Oh my, no. But all the way home last night—he came home with us, you know—he kept referring to you, and just so soon as the conversation got on some other subject he would lose interest. He wanted to know all about you—oh, you know how a man will talk," she exclaimed. "And he said you had more sense and more intelligence than any girl he had ever known."

"Oh, well," answered Laura deprecatingly, as if to say that that did not count for much with her.

"And that you were simply beautiful. He said that he never remembered to have seen a more beautiful woman."

Laura turned her head away, a hand shielding her cheek. She did not answer immediately, then at length:

"Has he—this Mr. Jadwin—has he ever been married before?"

"No, no. He's a bachelor, and rich! He could buy and sell *us*. And don't think, Laura dear, that I'm jumping at conclusions. I hope I'm woman of the world enough to know that a man who's taken with a pretty face and smart talk isn't going to rush right into matrimony because of that. It wasn't so much what Curtis Jadwin said—though, dear me *suz*, he talked enough about you—as what he didn't say. I could tell. He was thinking hard. He was *hit*, Laura. I know he was. And Charlie said he spoke about you again this morning at breakfast. Charlie makes me tired sometimes," she added irrelevantly.

"Charlie?" repeated Laura.

"Well, of course I spoke to him about Jadwin, and how taken he seemed with you, and the man roared at me."

"*He* didn't believe it, then."

"Yes he did—when I could get him to talk seriously about it, and when I made him remember how Mr. Jadwin had spoken in the carriage coming home."

Laura curled her leg under her and sat nursing her foot and looking into the fire. For a long time neither spoke. A little clock of brass and black marble began

to chime, very prettily, the half hour of nine. Mrs. Cressler observed:

"That Sheldon Corthell seems to be a very agreeable kind of a young man, doesn't he?"

"Yes," replied Laura thoughtfully, "he is agreeable."

"And a talented fellow, too," continued Mrs. Cressler. "But somehow it never impressed me that there was very much *to* him."

"Oh," murmured Laura indifferently, "I don't know."

"I suppose," Mrs. Cressler went on, in a tone of resignation, "I suppose he thinks the world and all of *you?*"

Laura raised a shoulder without answering.

"Charlie can't abide him," said Mrs. Cressler. "Funny, isn't it what prejudices men have? Charlie always speaks of him as though he were a higher order of glazier. Curtis Jadwin seems to like him. . . . What do you think of him, Laura—of Mr. Jadwin?"

"I don't know," she answered, looking vaguely into the fire. "I thought he was a *strong* man—mentally I you. And that he would be kindly and—and—generous, don't say ," she said, musingly, "I didn't think he would crazy to have man that women would take to, at first—

"I'd love to't know. I saw very little of him, as I have to see—it impress me as being a *woman's* man." so much to do a ," said the other. "Who would want have time. But 's man? *I* wouldn't. Sheldon Cor-

thell is that. I tell you one thing, Laura, and when you are as old as I am, you'll know it's true: the kind of a man that *men* like—not women—is the kind of a man that makes the best husband."

Laura nodded her head.

"Yes," she answered, listlessly, "I suppose that's true."

"You said Jadwin struck you as being a kindly man, a generous man. He's just that, and that charitable! You know he has a Sunday-school over on the West Side, a Sunday-school for mission children, and I do believe he's more interested in that than in his business. He wants to make it the biggest Sunday-school in Chicago. It's an ambition of his. I don't want you to think that he's good in a goody-goody way, because he's not. Laura," she exclaimed, "he's a *fine man.* I didn't intend to brag him up to you, because I wanted you to like him. But no one knows—as I say—no one knows Curtis Jadwin better than Charlie and I, and we just *love* him. The kindliest, biggest-hearted fellow—oh, well, you'll know him for yourself, and the· see. He passes the plate in our church." .lk seriously

"Dr. Wendell's church?" asked Laura. ɔer how Mr.

"Yes *you* know—the Second Presbyteg home."

"I'm Episcopalian myself," obser sat nursing her thoughtfully gazing into the fire. long time neither

"I know, I know. But Jadwin isack marble began

sort. And now see here, Laura, I want to tell you. J.—that's what Charlie and I call Jadwin—J. was talking to us the other day about supporting a ward in the Children's Hospital for the children of his Sunday-school that get hurt or sick. You see he has nearly eight hundred boys and girls in his school, and there's not a week passes that he don't hear of someone of them who has been hurt or taken sick. And he wants to start a ward at the Children's Hospital, that can take care of them. He says he wants to get other people interested, too, and so he wants to start a contribution. He says he'll double any amount that's raised in the next six months—that is, if there's two thousand raised, he'll make it four thousand; understand? And so Charlie and I and the Gretrys are going to get up an amateur play—a charity affair—and raise as much money as we can. J. thinks it's a good idea, and—here's the point—we were talking about it coming home in the carriage, and J. said he wondered if that Miss Dearborn wouldn't take part. And we are all wild to have you. You know you do that sort of thing so well. Now don't say yes or no to-night. You sleep over it. J. is crazy to have you in it."

"I'd love to do it," answered Laura. "But I would have to see—it takes so long to get settled, and there's so much to do about a big house like ours, I might not have time. But I will let you know."

Mrs. Cressler told her in detail about the proposed play. Landry Court was to take part, and she enlisted Laura's influence to get Sheldon Corthell to undertake a *rôle*. Page, it appeared, had already promised to help. Laura remembered now that she had heard her speak of it. However, the plan was so immature as yet, that it hardly admitted of very much discussion, and inevitably the conversation came back to its starting-point.

"You know," Laura had remarked in answer to one of Mrs. Cressler's observations upon the capabilities and business ability of "J.," "you know I never heard of him before you spoke of our theatre party. I don't know anything about him."

But Mrs. Cressler promptly supplied the information. Curtis Jadwin was a man about thirty-five, who had begun life without a sou in his pockets. He was a native of Michigan. His people were farmers, nothing more nor less than hardy, honest fellows, who ploughed and sowed for a living. Curtis had only a rudimentary schooling, because he had given up the idea of finishing his studies in the High School in Grand Rapids, on the chance of going into business with a livery stable keeper. Then in time he had bought out the business and had run it for himself. Someone in Chicago owed him money, and in default of payment had offered him a couple of lots on Wabash Avenue. That was how

he happened to come to Chicago. Naturally enough as the city grew the Wabash Avenue property—it was near Monroe Street—increased in value. He sold the lots and bought other real estate, sold that and bought somewhere else, and so on, till he owned some of the best business sites in the city. Just his ground-rent alone brought him, heaven knew how many thousands a year. He was one of the largest real estate owners in Chicago. But he no longer bought and sold. His property had grown so large that just the management of it alone took up most of his time. He had an office in the Rookery, and perhaps being so close to the Board of Trade Building, had given him a taste for trying a little deal in wheat now and then. As a rule, he deplored speculation. He had no fixed principles about it, like Charlie. Only he was conservative; occasionally he hazarded small operations. Somehow he had never married. There had been affairs. Oh, yes, one or two, of course. Nothing very serious. He just didn't seem to have met the right girl, that was all. He lived on Michigan Avenue, near the corner of Twenty-first Street, in one of those discouraging eternal yellow limestone houses with a basement dining-room. His aunt kept house for him, and his nieces and nephews overran the place. There was always a raft of them there, either coming or going; and the way they exploited him! He supported them all; heaven

knew how many there were; such drabs and gawks, all elbows and knees, who soaked themselves with cologne and made companions of the servants. They and the second girls were always squabbling about their things that they found in each other's rooms.

It was growing late. At length Mrs. Cressler rose.

"My goodness, Laura, look at the time; and I've been keeping you up when you must be killed for sleep."

She took herself away, pausing at the doorway long enough to say:

"Do try to manage to take part in the play. J. made me promise that I would get you."

"Well, I think I can," Laura answered. "Only I'll have to see first how our new *régime* is going to run—the house I mean."

When Mrs. Cressler had gone Laura lost no time in getting to bed. But after she turned out the gas she remembered that she had not "covered" the fire, a custom that she still retained from the daily round of her life at Barrington. She did not light the gas again, but guided by the firelight, spread a shovelful of ashes over the top of the grate. Yet when she had done this, she still knelt there a moment, looking wide-eyed into the glow, thinking over the events of the last twenty-four hours. When all was said and done, she had, after all, found more in Chicago than the clash and trepidation of empire-making, more than the reverbera-

tion of the thunder of battle, more than the piping and choiring of sweet music.

First it had been Sheldon Corthell, quiet, persuasive, eloquent. Then Landry Court with his exuberance and extravagance and boyishness, and now—unexpectedly—behold, a new element had appeared—this other one, this man of the world, of affairs, mature, experienced, whom she hardly knew. It was charming she told herself, exciting. Life never had seemed half so delightful. Romantic, she felt Romance, unseen, intangible, at work all about her. And love, which of all things knowable was dearest to her, came to her unsought.

Her first aversion to the Great Grey City was fast disappearing. She saw it now in a kindlier aspect.

"I think," she said at last, as she still knelt before the fire, looking deep into the coals, absorbed, abstracted, "I think that I am going to be very happy here."

III.

On a certain Monday morning, about a month later, Curtis Jadwin descended from his office in the Rookery Building, and turning southward, took his way toward the brokerage and commission office of Gretry, Converse and Co., on the ground floor of the Board of Trade Building, only a few steps away.

It was about nine o'clock; the weather was mild, the

sun shone. La Salle Street swarmed with the multitudinous life that seethed about the doors of the innumerable offices of brokers and commission men of the neighbourhood. To the right, in the peristyle of the Illinois Trust Building, groups of clerks, of messengers, of brokers, of clients, and of depositors formed and broke incessantly. To the left, where the *façade* of the Board of Trade blocked the street, the activity was astonishing, and in and out of the swing doors of its entrance streamed an incessant tide of coming and going. All the life of the neighbourhood seemed to centre at this point—the entrance of the Board of Trade. Two currents that trended swiftly through La Salle and Jackson streets, and that fed, or were fed by, other tributaries that poured in through Fifth Avenue and through Clarke and Dearborn streets, met at this point —one setting in, the other out. The nearer the currents the greater their speed. Men—mere flotsam in the flood—as they turned into La Salle Street from Adams or from Monroe, or even from as far as Madison, seemed to accelerate their pace as they approached. At the Illinois Trust the walk became a stride, at the Rookery the stride was almost a trot. But at the corner of Jackson Street, the Board of Trade now merely the width of the street away, the trot became a run, and young men and boys, under the pretence of escaping the trucks and waggons of the cobbles, dashed across

at a veritable gallop, flung themselves panting into the entrance of the Board, were engulfed in the turmoil of the spot, and disappeared with a sudden fillip into the gloom of the interior.

Often Jadwin had noted the scene, and, unimaginative though he was, had long since conceived the notion of some great, some resistless force within the Board of Trade Building that held the tide of the streets within its grip, alternately drawing it in and throwing it forth. Within there, a great whirlpool, a pit of roaring waters spun and thundered, sucking in the life-tides of the city, sucking them in as into the mouth of some tremendous cloaca, the maw of some colossal sewer; then vomiting them forth again, spewing them up and out, only to catch them in the return eddy and suck them in afresh.

Thus it went, day after day. Endlessly, ceaselessly the Pit, enormous, thundering, sucked in and spewed out, sending the swirl of its mighty central eddy far out through the city's channels. Terrible at the centre, it was, at the circumference, gentle, insidious and persuasive, the send of the flowing so mild, that to embark upon it, yielding to the influence, was a pleasure that seemed all devoid of risk. But the circumference was not bounded by the city. All through the Northwest, all through the central world of the Wheat the set and whirl of that innermost Pit made itself felt; and

it spread and spread and spread till grain in the elevators of Western Iowa moved and stirred and answered to its centripetal force, and men upon the streets of New York felt the mysterious tugging of its undertow engage their feet, embrace their bodies, overwhelm them, and carry them bewildered and unresisting back and downwards to the Pit itself.

Nor was the Pit's centrifugal power any less. Because of some sudden eddy spinning outward from the middle of its turmoil, a dozen bourses of continental Europe clamoured with panic, a dozen Old-World banks, firm as the established hills, trembled and vibrated. Because of an unexpected caprice in the swirling of the inner current, some far-distant channel suddenly dried, and the pinch of famine made itself felt among the vine dressers of Northern Italy, the coal miners of Western Prussia. Or another channel filled, and the starved moujik of the steppes, and the hunger-shrunken coolie of the Ganges' watershed fed suddenly fat and made thank offerings before ikon and idol.

There in the centre of the Nation, midmost of that continent that lay between the oceans of the New World and the Old, in the heart's heart of the affairs of men, roared and rumbled the Pit. It was as if the Wheat, Nourisher of the Nations, as it rolled gigantic and majestic in a vast flood from West to East, here, like a Niagara, finding its flow impeded, burst sud-

denly into the appalling fury of the Maëlstrom, into the chaotic spasm of a world-force, a primeval energy, blood-brother of the earthquake and the glacier, raging and wrathful that its power should be braved by some pinch of human spawn that dared raise barriers across its courses.

Small wonder that Cressler laughed at the thought of cornering wheat, and even now as Jadwin crossed Jackson Street, on his way to his broker's office on the lower floor of the Board of Trade Building, he noted the ebb and flow that issued from its doors, and remembered the huge river of wheat that rolled through this place from the farms of Iowa and ranches of Dakota to the mills and bakeshops of Europe.

"There's something, perhaps, in what Charlie says," he said to himself. "Corner this stuff—my God!"

Gretry, Converse & Co. was the name of the brokerage firm that always handled Jadwin's rare speculative ventures. Converse was dead long since, but the firm still retained its original name. The house was as old and as well established as any on the Board of Trade. It had a reputation for conservatism, and was known more as a Bear than a Bull concern. It was immensely wealthy and immensely important. It discouraged the growth of a *clientèle* of country customers, of small adventurers, knowing well that these were the first to go in a crash, unable to meet margin

calls, and leaving to their brokers the responsibility of their disastrous trades. The large, powerful Bears were its friends, the Bears strong of grip, tenacious of jaw, capable of pulling down the strongest Bull. Thus the firm had no consideration for the "outsiders," the "public"—the Lambs. The Lambs! Such a herd, timid, innocent, feeble, as much out of place in La Salle Street as a puppy in a cage of panthers; the Lambs, whom Bull and Bear did not so much as condescend to notice, but who, in their mutual struggle of horn and claw, they crushed to death by the mere rolling of their bodies.

Jadwin did not go directly into Gretry's main office, but instead made his way in at the entrance of the Board of Trade Building, and going on past the stairways that on either hand led up to the "Floor" on the second story, entered the corridor beyond, and thence gained the customers' room of Gretry, Converse & Co. All the more important brokerage firms had offices on the ground floor of the building, offices that had two entrances, one giving upon the street, and one upon the corridor of the Board. Generally the corridor entrance admitted directly to the firm's customers' room. This was the case with the Gretry-Converse house.

Once in the customers' room, Jadwin paused, looking about him.

He could not tell why Gretry had so earnestly de-

sired him to come to his office that morning, but he wanted to know how wheat was selling before talking to the broker. The room was large, and but for the lighted gas, burning crudely without globes, would have been dark. All one wall opposite the door was taken up by a great black-board covered with chalked figures in columns, and illuminated by a row of overhead gas jets burning under a tin reflector. Before this board files of chairs were placed, and these were occupied by groups of nondescripts, shabbily dressed men, young and old, with tired eyes and unhealthy complexions, who smoked and expectorated, or engaged in interminable conversations.

In front of the black-board, upon a platform, a young man in shirt-sleeves, his cuffs caught up by metal clamps, walked up and down. Screwed to the black-board itself was a telegraph instrument, and from time to time, as this buzzed and ticked, the young man chalked up cabalistic, and almost illegible figures under columns headed by initials of certain stocks and bonds, or by the words "Pork," "Oats," or, larger than all the others, "May Wheat." The air of the room was stale, close, and heavy with tobacco fumes. The only noises were the low hum of conversations, the unsteady click of the telegraph key, and the tapping of the chalk in the marker's fingers.

But no one in the room seemed to pay the least at-

tention to the blackboard. One quotation replaced another, and the key and the chalk clicked and tapped incessantly. The occupants of the room, sunk in their chairs, seemed to give no heed; some even turned their backs; one, his handkerchief over his knee, adjusted his spectacles, and opening a newspaper two days old, began to read with peering deliberation, his lips forming each word. These nondescripts gathered there, they knew not why. Every day found them in the same place, always with the same fetid, unlighted cigars, always with the same frayed newspapers two days old. There they sat, inert, stupid, their decaying senses hypnotised and soothed by the sound of the distant rumble of the Pit, that came through the ceiling from the floor of the Board overhead.

One of these figures, that of a very old man, bleareyed, decrepit, dirty, in a battered top hat and faded frock coat, discoloured and weather-stained at the shoulders, seemed familiar to Jadwin. It recalled some ancient association, he could not say what. But he was unable to see the old man's face distinctly; the light was bad, and he sat with his face turned from him, eating a sandwich, which he held in a trembling hand.

Jadwin, having noted that wheat was selling at 94, went away, glad to be out of the depressing atmosphere of the room.

Gretry was in his office, and Jadwin was admitted

at once. He sat down in a chair by the broker's desk, and for the moment the two talked of trivialities. Gretry was a large, placid, smooth-faced man, stolid as an ox; inevitably dressed in blue serge, a quill tooth-pick behind his ear, a Grand Army button in his lapel. He and Jadwin were intimates. The two had come to Chicago almost simultaneously, and had risen together to become the wealthy men they were at the moment. They belonged to the same club, lunched together every day at Kinsley's, and took each other driving behind their respective trotters on alternate Saturday afternoons. In the middle of summer each stole a fort-night from his business, and went fishing at Geneva Lake in Wisconsin.

"I say," Jadwin observed, "I saw an old fellow out-side in your customers' room just now that put me in mind of Hargus. You remember that deal of his, the one he tried to swing before he died. Oh—how long ago was that? Bless my soul, that must have been fifteen, yes twenty years ago."

The deal of which Jadwin spoke was the legendary operation of the Board of Trade—a mammoth corner in September wheat, manipulated by this same Hargus, a millionaire, who had tripled his fortune by the corner, and had lost it by some chicanery on the part of his associate before another year. He had run wheat up to nearly two dollars, had been in his day a king all-

powerful. Since then all deals had been spoken of in terms of the Hargus affair. Speculators said, "It was almost as bad as the Hargus deal." "It was like the Hargus smash." "It was as big a thing as the Hargus corner." Hargus had become a sort of creature of legends, mythical, heroic, transfigured in the glory of his millions.

"Easily twenty years ago," continued Jadwin. "If Hargus could come to life now, he'd be surprised at the difference in the way we do business these days. Twenty years. Yes, it's all of that. I declare, Sam, we're getting old, aren't we?"

"I guess that *was* Hargus you saw out there," answered the broker. "He's not dead. Old fellow in a stove-pipe and greasy frock-coat? Yes, that's Hargus."

"What!" exclaimed Jadwin. "*That* Hargus?"

"Of course it was. He comes 'round every day. The clerks give him a dollar every now and then."

"And he's not dead? And that was Hargus, that wretched, broken—whew! I don't want to think of it, Sam!" And Jadwin, taken all aback, sat for a moment speechless.

"Yes, sir," muttered the broker grimly, "that was Hargus."

There was a long silence. Then at last Gretry exclaimed briskly:

"Well, here's what I want to see you about."

He lowered his voice: "You know I've got a correspondent or two at Paris—all the brokers have—and we make no secret as to who they are. But I've had an extra man at work over there for the last six months, very much on the quiet. *I* don't mind telling *you* this much—that he's not the least important member of the United States Legation. Well, now and then he is supposed to send me what the reporters call "exclusive news"—that's what I feed him for, and I could run a private steam yacht on what it costs me. But news I get from him is a day or so in advance of everybody else. He hasn't sent me anything very important till this morning. This here just came in."

He picked up a despatch from his desk and read:

"'Utica — headquarters — modification — organic — concomitant—within one month,' which means," he added, "this. I've just deciphered it," and he handed Jadwin a slip of paper on which was written:

"Bill providing for heavy import duties on foreign grains certain to be introduced in French Chamber of Deputies within one month."

"Have you got it?" he demanded of Jadwin, as he took the slip back. "Won't forget it?" He twisted the paper into a roll and burned it carefully in the office cuspidor.

"Now," he remarked, "do you come in? It's just

the two of us, J., and I think we can make that Porteous clique look very sick."

"Hum!" murmured Jadwin surprised. "That *does* give you a twist on the situation. But to tell the truth, Sam, I had sort of made up my mind to keep out of speculation since my last little deal. A man gets into this game, and into it, and into it, and before you know he can't pull out—and he don't want to. Next he gets his nose scratched, and he hits back to make up for it, and just hits into the air and loses his balance—and down he goes. *I* don't want to make any more money, Sam. I've got my little pile, and before I get too old I want to have some fun out of it."

"But lord love you, J.," objected the other, "this ain't speculation. You can see for yourself how sure it is. I'm not a baby at this business, am I? You'll let me know something of this game, won't you? And I tell you, J., it's found money. The man that sells wheat short on the strength of this has as good as got the money in his vest pocket already. Oh, nonsense, of course you'll come in. I've been laying for that Bull gang since long before the Helmick failure, and now I've got it right where I want it. Look here, J., you aren't the man to throw money away. You'd buy a business block if you knew you could sell it over again at a profit. Now here's the chance to make really a fine Bear deal. Why, as soon as this news gets on the

floor there, the price will bust right down, and down, and down. Porteous and his crowd couldn't keep it up to save 'em from the receiver's hand one single minute."

"*I* know, Sam," answered Jadwin, "and the trouble is, not that I don't want to speculate, but that I *do*— too much. That's why I said I'd keep out of it. It isn't so much the money as the fun of playing the game. With half a show, I would get in a little more and a little more, till by-and-by I'd try to throw a big thing, and instead, the big thing would throw me. Why, Sam, when you told me that that wreck out there mumbling a sandwich was Hargus, it made me turn cold."

"Yes, in your feet," retorted Gretry. "I'm not asking you to risk all your money, am I, or a fifth of it, or a twentieth of it? Don't be an ass, J. Are we a conservative house, or aren't we? Do I talk like this when I'm not sure? Look here. Let me sell a million bushels for you. Yes, I know it's a bigger order than I've handled for you before. But *this* time I want to go *right into it,* head down and heels up, and get a twist on those Porteous buckoes, and raise 'em right out of their boots. We get a crop report this morning, and if the visible supply is as large as I think it is, the price will go off and unsettle the whole market. I'll sell short for you at the best figures we can get, and you can cover on the slump any time between now and the end of May."

Jadwin hesitated. In spite of himself he felt a Chance had come. Again that strange sixth sense of his, the inexplicable instinct, that only the born speculator knows, warned him. Every now and then during the course of his business career, this intuition came to him, this *flair,* this intangible, vague premonition, this presentiment that he must seize Opportunity or else Fortune, that so long had stayed at his elbow, would desert him. In the air about him he seemed to feel an influence, a sudden new element, the presence of a new force. It was Luck, the great power, the great goddess, and all at once it had stooped from out the invisible, and just over his head passed swiftly in a rush of glittering wings.

"The thing would have to be handled like glass," observed the broker thoughtfully, his eyes narrowing. "A tip like this is public proverty in twenty-four hours, and it don't give us any too much time. I don't want to break the price by unloading a million or more bushels on 'em all of a sudden. I'll scatter the orders pretty evenly. You see," he added, "here's a big point in our favour. We'll be able to sell on a strong market. The Pit traders have got some crazy war rumour going, and they're as flighty over it as a young ladies' seminary over a great big rat. And even without that, the market is top-heavy. Porteous makes me weary. He and his gang have been bucking it up till we've got an abnormal

price. Ninety-four for May wheat! Why, it's ridiculous. Ought to be selling way down in the eighties. The least little jolt would tip her over. Well," he said abruptly, squaring himself at Jadwin, "do we come in? If that same luck of yours is still in working order, here's your chance, J., to make a killing. There's just that gilt-edged, full morocco chance that a report of big 'visible' would give us."

Jadwin laughed. "Sam," he said, "I'll flip a coin for it."

"Oh, get out," protested the broker; then suddenly —the gambling instinct that a lifetime passed in that place had cultivated in him—exclaimed:

"All right. Flip a coin. But give me your word you'll stay by it. Heads you come in; tails you don't. Will you give me your word?"

"Oh, I don't know about that," replied Jadwin, amused at the foolishness of the whole proceeding. But as he balanced the half-dollar on his thumb-nail, he was all at once absolutely assured that it would fall heads. He flipped it in the air, and even as he watched it spin, said to himself, "It will come heads. It could not possibly be anything else. I *know* it will be heads."

And as a matter of course the coin fell heads.

"All right," he said, "I'll come in."

"For a million bushels?"

"Yes—for a million. How much in margins will you want?"

Gretry figured a moment on the back of an envelope.

"Fifty thousand dollars," he announced at length.

Jadwin wrote the check on a corner of the broker's desk, and held it a moment before him.

"Good-bye," he said, apostrophising the bit of paper. "Good-bye. I ne'er shall look upon your like again."

Gretry did not laugh.

"Huh!" he grunted. "You'll look upon a hatful of them before the month is out."

That same morning Landry Court found himself in the corridor on the ground floor of the Board of Trade about nine o'clock. He had just come out of the office of Gretry, Converse & Co., where he and the other Pit traders for the house had been receiving their orders for the day.

As he was buying a couple of apples at the news stand at the end of the corridor, Semple and a young Jew named Hirsch, Pit traders for small firms in La Salle Street, joined him.

"Hello, Court, what do you know?"

"Hello, Barry Semple! Hello, Hirsch!" Landry offered the halves of his second apple, and the three stood there a moment, near the foot of the stairs, talk-

ing and eating their apples from the points of their penknives.

"I feel sort of seedy this morning," Semple observed between mouthfuls. "Was up late last night at a stag. A friend of mine just got back from Europe, and some of the boys were giving him a little dinner. He was all over the shop, this friend of mine; spent most of his time in Constantinople; had some kind of newspaper business there. It seems that it's a pretty crazy proposition, Turkey and the Sultan and all that. He said that there was nearly a row over the 'Higgins-Pasha' incident, and that the British agent put it pretty straight to the Sultan's secretary. My friend said Constantinople put him in mind of a lot of opera bouffe scenery that had got spilled out in the mud. Say, Court, he said the streets were dirtier than the Chicago streets."

"Oh, come now," said Hirsch.

"Fact! And the dogs! He told us he knows now where all the yellow dogs go to when they die."

"But say," remarked Hirsch, "what is that about the Higgins-Pasha business? I thought that was over long ago."

"Oh, it is," answered Semple easily. He looked at his watch. "I guess it's about time to go up, pretty near half-past nine."

The three mounted the stairs, mingling with the

groups of floor traders who, in steadily increasing numbers, had begun to move in the same direction. But on the way Hirsch was stopped by his brother.

"Hey, I got that box of cigars for you."

Hirsch paused. "Oh! All right," he said, then he added: "Say, how about that Higgins-Pasha affair? You remember that row between England and Turkey. They tell me the British agent in Constantinople put it pretty straight to the Sultan the other day."

The other was interested. "He did, hey?" he said. "The market hasn't felt it, though. Guess there's nothing to it. But there's Kelly yonder. He'd know. He's pretty thick with Porteous' men. Might ask him."

"*You* ask him and let me know. I got to go on the floor. It's nearly time for the gong."

Hirsch's brother found Kelly in the centre of a group of settlement clerks.

"Say, boy," he began, "*you* ought to know. They tell me there may be trouble between England and Turkey over the Higgins-Pasha incident, and that the British Foreign Office has threatened the Sultan with an ultimatum. I can see the market if that's so."

"Nothing in it," retorted Kelly. "But I'll find out —to make sure, by jingo."

Meanwhile Landry had gained the top of the stairs, and turning to the right, passed through a great doorway, and came out upon the floor of the Board of Trade,

It was a vast enclosure, lighted on either side by great windows of coloured glass, the roof supported by thin iron pillars elaborately decorated. To the left were the bulletin black-boards, and beyond these, in the north-west angle of the floor, a great railed-in space where the Western Union Telegraph was installed. To the right, on the other side of the room, a row of tables, laden with neatly arranged paper bags half full of samples of grains, stretched along the east wall from the doorway of the public room at one end to the telephone room at the other.

The centre of the floor was occupied by the pits. To the left and to the front of Landry the provision pit, to the right the corn pit, while further on at the north extremity of the floor, and nearly under the visitors' gallery, much larger than the other two, and flanked by the wicket of the official recorder, was the wheat pit itself.

Directly opposite the visitors' gallery, high upon the south wall a great dial was affixed, and on the dial a marking hand that indicated the current price of wheat, fluctuating with the changes made in the Pit. Just now it stood at nine-three and three-eighths, the closing quotation of the preceding day.

As yet all the pits were empty. It was some fifteen minutes after nine. Landry checked his hat and coat at the coat-room near the north entrance, and slipped into an old tennis jacket of striped blue flannel. Then,

hatless, his hands in his pockets, he leisurely crossed the floor, and sat down in one of the chairs that were ranged in files upon the floor in front of the telegraph enclosure. He scrutinised again the despatches and orders that he held in his hands; then, having fixed them in his memory, tore them into very small bits, looking vaguely about the room, developing his plan of campaign for the morning.

In a sense Landry Court had a double personality. Away from the neighbourhood and influence of La Salle Street, he was "rattle-brained," absent-minded, impractical, and easily excited, the last fellow in the world to be trusted with any business responsibility. But the thunder of the streets around the Board of Trade, and, above all, the movement and atmosphere of the floor itself awoke within him a very different Landry Court; a whole new set of nerves came into being with the tap of the nine-thirty gong, a whole new system of brain machinery began to move with the first figure called in the Pit. And from that instant until the close of the session, no floor trader, no broker's clerk nor scalper was more alert, more shrewd, or kept his head more surely than the same young fellow who confused his social engagements for the evening of the same day. The Landry Court the Dearborn girls knew was a far different young man from him who now leaned his elbows on the arms of the chair upon the floor of the

Board, and, his eyes narrowing, his lips tightening, began to speculate upon what was to be the temper of the Pit that morning.

Meanwhile the floor was beginning to fill up. Over in the railed-in space, where the hundreds of telegraph instruments were in place, the operators were arriving in twos and threes. They hung their hats and ulsters upon the pegs in the wall back of them, and in linen coats, or in their shirt-sleeves, went to their seats, or, sitting upon their tables, called back and forth to each other, joshing, cracking jokes. Some few addressed themselves directly to work, and here and there the intermittent clicking of a key began, like a diligent cricket busking himself in advance of its mates.

From the corridors on the ground floor up through the south doors came the pit traders in increasing groups. The noise of footsteps began to echo from the high vaulting of the roof. A messenger boy crossed the floor chanting an unintelligible name.

The groups of traders gradually converged upon the corn and wheat pits, and on the steps of the latter, their arms crossed upon their knees, two men, one wearing a silk skull cap all awry, conversed earnestly in low tones.

Winston, a great, broad-shouldered bass-voiced fellow of some thirty-five years, who was associated with Landry in executing the orders of the Gretry-Converse house,

came up to him, and, omitting any salutation, remarked, deliberately, slowly:

"What's all this about this trouble between Turkey and England?"

But before Landry could reply a third trader for the Gretry Company joined the two. This was a young fellow named Rusbridge, lean, black-haired, a constant excitement glinting in his deep-set eyes.

"Say," he exclaimed, "there's something in that, there's something in that!"

"Where did you hear it?" demanded Landry.

"Oh—everywhere." Rusbridge made a vague gesture with one arm. "Hirsch seemed to know all about it. It appears that there's talk of mobilising the Mediterranean squadron. Darned if I know."

"Might ask that 'Inter-Ocean' reporter. He'd be likely to know. I've seen him 'round here this morning, or you might telephone the Associated Press," suggested Landry. "The office never said a word to *me.*"

"Oh, the 'Associated.' They know a lot always, don't they?" jeered Winston. "Yes, I rung 'em up. They 'couldn't confirm the rumour.' That's always the way. You can spend half a million a year in leased wires and special service and subscriptions to news agencies, and you get the first smell of news like this right here on the floor. Remember that time when the Northwestern millers sold a hundred and fifty thousand

barrels at one lick? The floor was talking of it three hours before the new slips were sent 'round, or a single wire was in. Suppose we had waited for the Associated people or the Commercial people then?"

"It's that Higgins-pasha incident, I'll bet," observed Rusbridge, his eyes snapping.

"I heard something about that this morning," returned Landry. "But only that it was——"

"There! What did I tell you?" interrupted Rusbridge. "I said it was everywhere. There's no smoke without some fire. And I wouldn't be a bit surprised if we get cables before noon that the British War Office had sent an ultimatum."

And very naturally a few minutes later Winston, at that time standing on the steps of the corn pit, heard from a certain broker, who had it from a friend who had just received a despatch from someone "in the know," that the British Secretary of State for War had forwarded an ultimatum to the Porte, and that diplomatic relations between Turkey and England were about to be suspended.

All in a moment the entire Floor seemed to be talking of nothing else, and on the outskirts of every group one could overhear the words: "Seizure of custom-house," "ultimatum," "Eastern question," "Higgins-pasha incident." It was the rumour of the day, and before very long the pit traders began to receive a multitude of de-

spatches countermanding selling orders, and directing them not to close out trades under certain very advanced quotations. The brokers began wiring their principals that the market promised to open strong and bullish.

But by now it was near to half-past nine. From the Western Union desks the clicking of the throng of instruments rose into the air in an incessant staccato stridulation. The messenger boys ran back and forth at top speed, dodging in and out among the knots of clerks and traders, colliding with one another, and without interruption intoning the names of those for whom they had despatches. The throng of traders concentrated upon the pits, and at every moment the deep-toned hum of the murmur of many voices swelled like the rising of a tide.

And at this moment, as Landry stood on the rim of the wheat pit, looking towards the telephone booth under the visitors' gallery, he saw the osseous, stoop-shouldered figure of Mr. Cressler—who, though he never speculated, appeared regularly upon the Board every morning—making his way towards one of the windows in the front of the building. His pocket was full of wheat, taken from a bag on one of the sample tables. Opening the window, he scattered the grain upon the sill, and stood for a long moment absorbed and interested in the dazzling flutter of the wings of innumerable pigeons who came to settle upon the ledge, pecking the grain

with little, nervous, fastidious taps of their yellow beaks.

Landry cast a glance at the clock beneath the dial on the wall behind him. It was twenty-five minutes after nine. He stood in his accustomed place on the north side of the Wheat Pit, upon the topmost stair. The Pit was full. Below him and on either side of him were the brokers, scalpers, and traders—Hirsch, Semple, Kelly, Winston, and Rusbridge. The redoubtable Leaycraft, who, bidding for himself, was supposed to hold the longest line of May wheat of any one man in the Pit, the insignificant Grossmann, a Jew who wore a flannel shirt, and to whose outcries no one ever paid the least attention. Fairchild, Paterson, and Goodlock, the inseparable trio who represented the Porteous gang, silent men, middle-aged, who had but to speak in order to buy or sell a million bushels on the spot. And others, and still others, veterans of sixty-five, recruits just out of their teens, men who—some of them—in the past had for a moment dominated the entire Pit, but who now were content to play the part of "eighth-chasers," buying and selling on the same day, content with a profit of ten dollars. Others who might at that very moment be nursing plans which in a week's time would make them millionaires; still others who, under a mask of nonchalance, strove to hide the chagrin of yesterday's defeat. And they were there, ready, inordinately alert,

ears turned to the faintest sound, eyes searching for the vaguest trace of meaning in those of their rivals, nervous, keyed to the highest tension, ready to thrust deep into the slightest opening, to spring, mercilessly, upon the smallest undefended spot. Grossmann, the little Jew of the grimy flannel shirt, perspired in the stress of the suspense, all but powerless to maintain silence till the signal should be given, drawing trembling fingers across his mouth. Winston, brawny, solid, unperturbed, his hands behind his back, waited immovably planted on his feet with all the gravity of a statue, his eyes preternaturally watchful, keeping Kelly—whom he had divined had some "funny business" on hand—perpetually in sight. The Porteous trio—Fairchild, Paterson, and Goodlock—as if unalarmed, unassailable, all but turned their backs to the Pit, laughing among themselves.

The official reporter climbed to his perch in the little cage on the edge of the Pit, shutting the door after him. By now the chanting of the messenger boys was an uninterrupted chorus. From all sides of the building, and in every direction they crossed and recrossed each other, always running, their hands full of yellow envelopes. From the telephone alcoves came the prolonged, musical rasp of the call-bells. In the Western Union booths the keys of the multitude of instruments raged incessantly. Bare-headed young men hurried up to one another, conferred an instant comparing despatches,

then separated, darting away at top speed. Men called to each other half-way across the building. Over by the bulletin boards clerks and agents made careful memoranda of primary receipts, and noted down the amount of wheat on passage, the exports and the imports.

And all these sounds, the chatter of the telegraph, the intoning of the messenger boys, the shouts and cries of clerks and traders, the shuffle and trampling of hundreds of feet, the whirring of telephone signals rose into the troubled air, and mingled overhead to form a vast note, prolonged, sustained, that reverberated from vault to vault of the airy roof, and issued from every doorway, every opened window in one long roll of uninterrupted thunder. In the Wheat Pit the bids, no longer obedient of restraint, began one by one to burst out, like the first isolated shots of a skirmish line. Grossmann had flung out an arm crying:

"'Sell twenty-five May at ninety-five and an eighth," while Kelly and Semple had almost simultaneously shouted, "'Give seven-eighths for May!"

The official reporter had been leaning far over to catch the first quotations, one eye upon the clock at the end of the room. The hour and minute hands were at right angles.

Then suddenly, cutting squarely athwart the vague crescendo of the floor came the single incisive stroke of a great gong. Instantly a tumult was unchained. Arms

were flung upward in strenuous gestures, and from above the crowding heads in the Wheat Pit a multitude of hands, eager, the fingers extended, leaped into the air. All articulate expression was lost in the single explosion of sound as the traders surged downwards to the centre of the Pit, grabbing each other, struggling towards each other, tramping, stamping, charging through with might and main. Promptly the hand on the great dial above the clock stirred and trembled, and as though driven by the tempest breath of the Pit moved upward through the degrees of its circle. It paused, wavered, stopped at length, and on the instant the hundreds of telegraph keys scattered throughout the building began clicking off the news to the whole country, from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from Mackinac to Mexico, that the Chicago market had made a slight advance and that May wheat, which had closed the day before at ninety-three and three-eighths, had opened that morning at ninety-four and a half.

But the advance brought out no profit-taking sales. The redoubtable Leaycraft and the Porteous trio, Fairchild, Paterson, and Goodlock, shook their heads when the Pit offered ninety-four for parts of their holdings. The price held firm. Goodlock even began to offer ninety-four. At every suspicion of a flurry Grossmann, always with the same gesture as though hurling a javelin, always with the same lamentable wail of distress, cried out:

"'Sell twenty-five May at ninety-five and a fourth."

He held his five fingers spread to indicate the number of "contracts," or lots of five thousand bushels, which he wished to sell, each finger representing one "contract."

And it was at this moment that selling orders began suddenly to pour in upon the Gretry-Converse traders. Even other houses—Teller and West, Burbank & Co., Mattieson and Knight—received their share. The movement was inexplicable, puzzling. With a powerful Bull clique dominating the trading and every prospect of a strong market, who was it who ventured to sell short?

Landry among others found himself commissioned to sell. His orders were to unload three hundred thousand bushels on any advance over and above ninety-four. He kept his eye on Leaycraft, certain that he would force up the figure. But, as it happened, it was not Leaycraft but the Porteous trio who made the advance. Standing in the centre of the Pit, Paterson suddenly flung up his hand and drew it towards him, clutching the air—the conventional gesture of the buyer.

"'Give an eighth for May."

Landry was at him in a second. Twenty voices shouted "sold," and as many traders sprang towards him with outstretched arms. Landry, however, was before them, and his rush carried Paterson half-way across the middle space of the Pit.

"Sold, sold."

Paterson nodded, and as Landry noted down the transaction the hand on the dial advanced again, and again held firm.

But after this the activity of the Pit fell away. The trading languished. By degrees the tension of the opening was relaxed. Landry, however, had refrained from selling more than ten "contracts" to Paterson. He had a feeling that another advance would come later on. Rapidly he made his plans. He would sell another fifty thousand bushels if the price went to ninety-four and a half, and would then "feel" the market, letting go small lots here and there, to test its strength, then, the instant he felt the market strong enough, throw a full hundred thousand upon it with a rush before it had time to break. He could feel—almost at his very fingertips—how this market moved, how it strengthened, how it weakened. He knew just when to nurse it, to humour it, to let it settle, and when to crowd it, when to hustle it, when it would stand rough handling.

Grossmann still uttered his plaint from time to time, but no one so much as pretended to listen. The Porteous trio and Leaycraft kept the price steady at ninety-four and an eighth, but showed no inclination to force it higher. For a full five minutes not a trade was recorded. The Pit waited for the Report on the Visible Supply.

And it was during this lull in the morning's business that the idiocy of the English ultimatum to the Porte melted away. As inexplicably and as suddenly as the rumour had started, it now disappeared. Everyone, simultaneously, seemed to ridicule it. England declare war on Turkey! Where was the joke? Who was the damn fool to have started that old, worn-out war scare? But, for all that, there was no reaction from the advance. It seemed to be understood that either Leaycraft or the Porteous crowd stood ready to support the market; and in place of the ultimatum story a feeling began to gain ground that the expected report would indicate a falling off in the "visible," and that it was quite on the cards that the market might even advance another point.

As the interest in the immediate situation declined, the crowd in the Pit grew less dense. Portions of it were deserted; even Grossmann, discouraged, retired to a bench under the visitors' gallery. And a spirit of horse-play, sheer foolishness, strangely inconsistent with the hot-eyed excitement of the few moments after the opening invaded the remaining groups. Leaycraft, the formidable, as well as Paterson of the Porteous gang, and even the solemn Winston, found an apparently inexhaustible diversion in folding their telegrams into pointed javelins and sending them sailing across the room, watching the course of the missiles with profound

gravity. A visitor in the gallery—no doubt a Western farmer on a holiday—having put his feet upon the rail, the entire Pit began to groan "boots, boots, boots."

A little later a certain broker came scurrying across the floor from the direction of the telephone room. Panting, he flung himself up the steps of the Pit, forced his way among the traders with vigorous workings of his elbows, and shouted a bid.

"He's sick," shouted Hirsch. "Look out, he's sick. He's going to have a fit." He grabbed the broker by both arms and hustled him into the centre of the Pit. The others caught up the cry, a score of hands pushed the newcomer from man to man. The Pit traders clutched him, pulled his necktie loose, knocked off his hat, vociferating all the while at top voice, "He's sick! He's sick!"

Other brokers and traders came up, and Grossmann, mistaking the commotion for a flurry, ran into the Pit, his eyes wide, waving his arm and wailing:

"'Sell twenty-five May at ninety-five and a quarter."

But the victim, good-natured, readjusted his battered hat, and again repeated his bid.

"Ah, go to bed," protested Hirsch.

"He's the man who struck Billy Paterson."

"Say, a horse bit him. Look out for him, he's going to have a duck-fit."

The incident appeared to be the inspiration for a new

"josh" that had a great success, and a group of traders organised themselves into an "anti-cravat committee," and made the rounds of the Pit, twitching the carefully tied scarfs of the unwary out of place. Grossmann, indignant at "t'ose monkey-doodle pizeness," withdrew from the centre of the Pit. But while he stood in front of Leaycraft, his back turned, muttering his disgust, the latter, while carrying on a grave conversation with his neighbour, carefully stuck a file of paper javelins all around the Jew's hat-band, and then—still without mirth and still continuing to talk—set them on fire.

Landry imagined by now that ninety-four and an eighth was as high a figure as he could reasonably expect that morning, and so began to "work off" his selling orders. Little by little he sold the wheat "short," till all but one large lot was gone.

Then all at once, and for no discoverable immediate reason, wheat, amid an explosion of shouts and vociferations, jumped to ninety-four and a quarter, and before the Pit could take breath, had advanced another eighth, broken to one-quarter, then jumped to the five-eighths mark.

It was the Report on the Visible Supply beyond question, and though it had not yet been posted, this sudden flurry was a sign that it was not only near at hand, but would be bullish.

A few moments later it was bulletined in the gallery

beneath the dial, and proved a tremendous surprise to nearly every man upon the floor. No one had imagined the supply was so ample, so all-sufficient to meet the demand. Promptly the Pit responded. Wheat began to pour in heavily. Hirsch, Kelly, Grossmann, Leaycraft, the stolid Winston, and the excitable Rusbridge were hard at it. The price began to give. Suddenly it broke sharply. The hand on the great dial dropped to ninety-three and seven-eighths."

Landry was beside himself. He had not foreseen this break. There was no reckoning on that cursed "visible," and he still had 50,000 bushels to dispose of. There was no telling now how low the price might sink. He must act quickly, radically. He fought his way towards the Porteous crowd, reached over the shoulder of the little Jew Grossmann, who stood in his way, and thrust his hand almost into Paterson's face, shouting:

"'Sell fifty May at seven eighths."

It was the last one of his unaccountable selling orders of the early morning.

The other shook his head.

"'Sell fifty May at three-quarters."

Suddenly some instinct warned Landry that another break was coming. It was in the very air around him. He could almost physically feel the pressure of renewed avalanches of wheat crowding down the price. Desperate, he grabbed Paterson by the shoulder.

"'Sell fifty May at five-eighths."

"Take it," vociferated the other, as though answering a challenge.

And in the heart of this confusion, in this downward rush of the price, Luck, the golden goddess, passed with the flirt and flash of glittering wings, and hardly before the ticker in Gretry's office had signalled the decline, the memorandum of the trade was down upon Landry's card and Curtis Jadwin stood pledged to deliver, before noon on the last day of May, one million bushels of wheat into the hands of the representatives of the great Bulls of the Board of Trade.

But by now the real business of the morning was over. The Pit knew it. Grossmann, obstinate, hypnotised as it were by one idea, still stood in his accustomed place on the upper edge of the Pit, and from time to time, with the same despairing gesture, emitted his doleful outcry of "'Sell twenty-five May at ninety-five and three-quarters."

Nobody listened. The traders stood around in expectant attitudes, looking into one another's faces, waiting for what they could not exactly say; loath to leave the Pit lest something should "turn up" the moment their backs were turned.

By degrees the clamour died away, ceased, began again irregularly, then abruptly stilled. Here and there a bid was called, an offer made, like the intermittent

crack of small arms after the stopping of the cannonade.

"'Sell five May at one-eighth."

"'Sell twenty at one-quarter."

"'Give one-eighth for May."

For an instant the shoutings were renewed. Then suddenly the gong struck. The traders began slowly to leave the Pit. One of the floor officers, an old fellow in uniform and vizored cap, appeared, gently shouldering towards the door the groups wherein the bidding and offering were still languidly going on. His voice full of remonstration, he repeated continually:

"Time's up, gentlemen. Go on now and get your lunch. Lunch time now. Go on now, or I'll have to report you. Time's up."

The tide set toward the doorways. In the gallery the few visitors rose, putting on coats and wraps. Over by the check counter, the right of the south entrance to the floor, a throng of brokers and traders jostled each other, reaching over one another's shoulders for hats and ulsters. In steadily increasing numbers they poured out of the north and south entrances, on their way to turn in their trading cards to the offices.

Little by little the floor emptied. The provision and grain pits were deserted, and as the clamour of the place lapsed away the telegraph instruments began to

make themselves heard once more, together with the chanting of the messenger boys.

Swept clean in the morning, the floor itself, seen now through the thinning groups, was littered from end to end with scattered grain—oats, wheat, corn, and barley, with wisps of hay, peanut shells, apple parings, and orange-peel, with torn newspapers, odds and ends of memoranda, crushed paper darts, and above all with a countless multitude of yellow telegraph forms, thousands upon thousands, crumpled and muddied under the trampling of innumerable feet. It was the *débris* of the battlefield, the abandoned impedimenta and broken weapons of contending armies, the detritus of conflict, torn, broken, and rent, that at the end of each day's combat encumbered the field.

At last even the click of the last of telegraph keys died down. Shouldering themselves into their overcoats, the operators departed, calling back and forth to one another, making "dates," and cracking jokes. Washerwomen appeared with steaming pails, porters pushing great brooms before them began gathering the refuse of the floor into heaps.

Between the wheat and corn pits a band of young fellows, some of them absolute boys, appeared. These were the settlement clerks. They carried long account books. It was their duty to get the trades of the day into a "ring"—to trace the course of a lot of wheat

which had changed hands perhaps a score of times during the trading—and their calls of "Wheat sold to Teller and West," "May wheat sold to Burbank & Co.," "May oats sold to Matthewson and Knight," "Wheat sold to Gretry, Converse & Co.," began to echo from wall to wall of the almost deserted room.

A cat, grey and striped, and wearing a dog collar of nickel and red leather, issued from the coat-room and picked her way across the floor. Evidently she was in a mood of the most ingratiating friendliness, and as one after another of the departing traders spoke to her, raised her tail in the air and arched her back against the legs of the empty chairs. The janitor put in an appearance, lowering the tall coloured windows with a long rod. A noise of hammering and the scrape of saws began to issue from a corner where a couple of carpenters tinkered about one of the sample tables.

Then at last even the settlement clerks took themselves off. At once there was a great silence, broken only by the harsh rasp of the carpenters' saws and the voice of the janitor exchanging jokes with the washerwomen. The sound of footsteps in distant quarters re-echoed as if in a church.

The washerwomen invaded the floor, spreading soapy and steaming water before them. Over by the sample tables a negro porter in shirt-sleeves swept entire

bushels of spilled wheat, crushed, broken, and sodden, into his dust pans.

The day's campaign was over. It was past two o'clock. On the great dial against the eastern wall the indicator stood—sentinel fashion—at ninety-three. Not till the following morning would the whirlpool, the great central force that spun the Niagara of wheat in its grip, thunder and bellow again.

Later on even the washerwomen, even the porter and janitor, departed. An unbroken silence, the peacefulness of an untroubled calm, settled over the place. The rays of the afternoon sun flooded through the west windows in long parallel shafts full of floating golden motes. There was no sound; nothing stirred. The floor of the Board of Trade was deserted. Alone, on the edge of the abandoned Wheat Pit, in a spot where the sunlight fell warmest—an atom of life, lost in the immensity of the empty floor—the grey cat made her toilet, diligently licking the fur on the inside of her thigh, one leg, as if dislocated, thrust into the air above her head.

IV.

In the front parlour of the Cresslers' house a little company was gathered—Laura Dearborn and Page, Mrs. Wessels, Mrs. Cressler, and young Miss Gretry, an awkward, plain-faced girl of about nineteen, dressed

extravagantly in a *décolleté* gown of blue silk. Curtis Jadwin and Cressler himself stood by the open fireplace smoking. Landry Court fidgeted on the sofa, pretending to listen to the Gretry girl, who told an interminable story of a visit to some wealthy relative who had a country seat in Wisconsin and who raised fancy poultry. She possessed, it appeared, three thousand hens, Brahma, Faverolles, Houdans, Dorkings, even peacocks and tame quails.

Sheldon Corthell, in a dinner coat, an unlighted cigarette between his fingers, discussed the spring exhibit of water colours with Laura and Mrs. Cressler, Page listening with languid interest. Aunt Wess' turned the leaves of a family album, counting the number of photographs of Mrs. Cressler which it contained.

Black coffee had just been served. It was the occasion of the third rehearsal for the play which was to be given for the benefit of the hospital ward for Jadwin's mission children, and Mrs. Cressler had invited the members of the company for dinner. Just now everyone awaited the arrival of the "coach," Monsieur Gerardy, who was always late.

"To my notion," observed Corthell, "the water-colour that pretends to be anything more than a sketch oversteps its intended limits. The elaborated water-colour, I contend, must be judged by the same standards

as an oil painting. And if that is so, why not have the oil painting at once?"

"And with all that, if you please, not an egg on the place for breakfast," declared the Gretry girl in her thin voice. She was constrained, embarrassed. Of all those present she was the only one to mistake the character of the gathering and appear in formal costume. But one forgave Isabel Gretry such lapses as these. Invariably she did the wrong thing; invariably she was out of place in the matter of inadvertent speech, an awkward accident, the wrong toilet. For all her nineteen years, she yet remained the hoyden, young, undeveloped, and clumsy.

"Never an egg, and three thousand hens in the runs," she continued. "Think of that! The Plymouth Rocks had the pip. And the others, my lands! I don't know. They just didn't lay."

"Ought to tickle the soles of their feet," declared Landry with profound gravity.

"Tickle their feet!"

"Best thing in the world for hens that don't lay. It sort of stirs them up. Oh, everyone knows that."

"Fancy now! I'll write to Aunt Alice to-morrow."

Cressler clipped the tip of a fresh cigar, and, turning to Curtis Jadwin, remarked:

"I understand that Leaycraft alone lost nearly fifteen thousand."

He referred to Jadwin's deal in May wheat, the consummation of which had been effected the previous week. Squarely in the midst of the morning session, on the day following the "short" sale of Jadwin's million of bushels, had exploded the news of the intended action of the French chamber. Amid a tremendous clamour the price fell. The Bulls were panicstricken. Leaycraft the redoubtable was overwhelmed at the very start. The Porteous trio heroically attempted to shoulder the wheat, but the load was too much. They as well gave ground, and, bereft of their support, May wheat, which had opened at ninety-three and five-eighths to ninety-two and a half, broke with the very first attack to ninety-two, hung there a moment, then dropped again to ninety-one and a half, then to ninety-one. Then, in a prolonged shudder of weakness, sank steadily down by quarters to ninety, to eighty-nine, and at last—a final collapse—touched eighty-eight cents. At that figure Jadwin began to cover. There was danger that the buying of so large a lot might bring about a rally in the price. But Gretry, a consummate master of Pit tactics, kept his orders scattered and bought gradually, taking some two or three days to accumulate the grain. Jadwin's luck—the never-failing guardian of the golden wings—seemed to have the affair under immediate supervision, and reports of timely rains in the wheat belt kept the price inert while the trade was being

closed. In the end the "deal" was brilliantly successful, and Gretry was still chuckling over the set-back to the Porteous gang. Exactly the amount of his friend's profits Jadwin did not know. As for himself, he had received from Gretry a check for fifty thousand dollars, every cent of which was net profit.

"I'm not going to congratulate you," continued Cressler. "As far as that's concerned, I would rather you had lost than won—if it would have kept you out of the Pit for good. You're cocky now. I know—good Lord, don't I know. I had my share of it. I know how a man gets drawn into this speculating game——"

"Charlie, this wasn't speculating," interrupted Jadwin. "It was a certainty. It was found money. If I had known a certain piece of real estate was going to appreciate in value I would have bought it, wouldn't I?"

"All the worse, if it made it seem easy and sure to you. Do you know," he added suddenly. "Do you know that Leaycraft has gone to keep books for a manufacturing concern out in Dubuque?"

Jadwin pulled his mustache. He was looking at Laura Dearborn over the heads of Landry and the Gretry girl.

"I didn't suppose he'd be getting measured for a private yacht," he murmured. Then he continued, pulling his mustache vigorously:

"Charlie, upon my word, what a beautiful—what beautiful *hair* that girl has!"

Laura was wearing it very high that evening, the shining black coils transfixed by a strange hand-cut ivory comb that had been her grandmother's. She was dressed in black taffeta, with a single great cabbage-rose pinned to her shoulder. She sat very straight in her chair, one hand upon her slender hip, her head a little to one side, listening attentively to Corthell.

By this time the household of the former rectory was running smoothly; everything was in place, the Dearborns were "settled," and a routine had begun. Her first month in her new surroundings had been to Laura an unbroken series of little delights. For formal social distractions she had but little taste. She left those to Page, who, as soon as Lent was over, promptly became involved in a bewildering round of teas, "dancing clubs," dinners, and theatre parties. Mrs. Wessels was her chaperone, and the little middle-aged lady found the satisfaction of a belated youth in conveying her pretty niece to the various functions that occupied her time. Each Friday night saw her in the gallery of a certain smart dancing school of the south side, where she watched Page dance her way from the "first waltz" to the last figure of the german. She counted the couples carefully, and on the way home was always able to say how the attendance of that particular evening compared with that of the former occasion, and also to inform Laura how many times Page had danced with the same young man.

Laura herself was more serious. She had begun a course of reading; no novels, but solemn works full of allusions to "Man" and "Destiny," which she underlined and annotated. Twice a week—on Mondays and Thursdays—she took a French lesson. Corthell managed to enlist the good services of Mrs. Wessels and escorted her to numerous piano and 'cello recitals, to lectures, to concerts. He even succeeded in achieving the consecration of a specified afternoon once a week, spent in his studio in the Fine Arts' Building on the Lake Front, where he read to them "Saint Agnes Eve," "Sordello," "The Light of Asia"—poems which, with their inversions, obscurities, and astonishing arabesques of rhetoric, left Aunt Wess' bewildered, breathless, all but stupefied.

Laura found these readings charming. The studio was beautiful, lofty, the light dim; the sound of Corthell's voice returned from the thick hangings of velvet and tapestry in a subdued murmur. The air was full of the odour of pastilles.

Laura could not fail to be impressed with the artist's tact, his delicacy. In words he never referred to their conversation in the foyer of the Auditorium; only by some unexplained subtlety of attitude he managed to convey to her the distinct impression that he loved her always. That he was patient, waiting for some indefinite, unexpressed development.

Landry Court called upon her as often as she would

allow. Once he had prevailed upon her and Page to accompany him to the *matinée* to see a comic opera. He had pronouced it "bully," unable to see that Laura evinced only a mild interest in the performance. On each propitious occasion he had made love to her extravagantly. He continually protested his profound respect with a volubility and earnestness that was quite uncalled for.

But, meanwhile, the situation had speedily become more complicated by the entrance upon the scene of an unexpected personage. This was Curtis Jadwin. It was impossible to deny the fact that "J." was in love with Mrs. Cressler's *protégée*. The business man had none of Corthell's talent for significant reticence, none of his tact, and older than she, a man-of-the-world, accustomed to deal with situations with unswerving directness, he, unlike Landry Court, was not in the least afraid of her. From the very first she found herself upon the defensive. Jadwin was aggressive, assertive, and his addresses had all the persistence and vehemence of veritable attack. Landry she could manage with the lifting of a finger, Corthell disturbed her only upon those rare occasions when he made love to her. But Jadwin gave her no time to so much as think of *finesse*. She was not even allowed to choose her own time and place for fencing, and to parry his invasion upon those intimate personal grounds which she pleased herself to

keep secluded called upon her every feminine art of procrastination and strategy.

He contrived to meet her everywhere. He impressed Mrs. Cressler as auxiliary into his campaign, and a series of *rencontres* followed one another with astonishing rapidity. Now it was another opera party, now a box at McVicker's, now a dinner, or more often a drive through Lincoln Park behind Jadwin's trotters. He even had the Cresslers and Laura over to his mission Sunday-school for the Easter festival, an occasion of which Laura carried away a confused recollection of enormous canvas mottoes, that looked more like campaign banners than texts from the Scriptures, sheaves of calla lilies, imitation bells of tinfoil, revival hymns vociferated with deafening vehemence from seven hundred distended mouths, and through it all the disagreeable smell of poverty, the odour of uncleanliness that mingled strangely with the perfume of the lilies and the aromatic whiffs from the festoons of evergreen.

Thus the first month of her new life had passed. Laura did not trouble herself to look very far into the future. She was too much amused with her emancipation from the narrow horizon of her New England environment. She did not concern herself about consequences. Things would go on for themselves, and consequences develop without effort on her part. She never asked herself whether or not she was in love with

any of the three men who strove for her favour. She was quite sure she was not ready—yet—to be married. There was even something distasteful in the idea of marriage. She liked Landry Court immensely; she found the afternoons in Corthell's studio delightful; she loved the rides in the park behind Jadwin's horses. She had no desire that any one of these affairs should exclude the other two. She wished nothing to be consummated. As for love, she never let slip an occasion to shock Aunt Wess' by declaring:

"I love—nobody. I shall never marry."

Page, prim, with great parades of her ideas of "good form," declared between her pursed lips that her sister was a flirt. But this was not so. Laura never manœuvered with her lovers, nor intrigued to keep from any one of them knowledge of her companionship with the other two. So upon such occasions as this, when all three found themselves face to face, she remained unperturbed.

At last, towards half-past eight, Monsieur Gerardy arrived. All through the winter amateur plays had been in great favour, and Gerardy had become, in a sense, a fad. He was in great demand. Consequently, he gave himself airs. His method was that of severity; he posed as a task-master, relentless, never pleased, hustling the amateur actors about without ceremony, scolding and brow-beating. He was a small, excitable man who wore a frock-coat much too small for him, a flowing purple

cravat drawn through a finger ring, and enormous cuffs set off with huge buttons of Mexican onyx. In his lapel was an inevitable carnation, dried, shrunken, and lamentable. He was redolent of perfume and spoke of himself as an artist. He caused it to be understood that in the intervals of "coaching society plays" he gave his attention to the painting of landscapes. Corthell feigned to ignore his very existence.

The play-book in his hand, Monsieur Gerardy clicked his heels in the middle of the floor and punctiliously saluted everyone present, bowing only from his shoulders, his head dropping forward as if propelled by successive dislocations of the vertebræ of his neck.

He explained the cause of his delay. His English was without accent, but at times suddenly entangled itself in curious Gallic constructions.

"Then I propose we begin at once," he announced. "The second act to-night, then, if we have time, the third act—from the book. And I expect the second act to be letter-perfect—let-ter-per-fect. There is nothing there but that." He held up his hand, as if to refuse to consider the least dissension. "There is nothing but that—no other thing."

All but Corthell listened attentively. The artist, however, turning his back, had continued to talk to Laura without lowering his tone, and all through Monsieur Gerardy's exhortation his voice had made itself heard.

"Management of light and shade" . . . "colour scheme" . . . "effects of composition."

Monsieur Gerardy's eye glinted in his direction. He struck his play-book sharply into the palm of his hand.

"Come, come!" he cried. "No more nonsense. Now we leave the girls alone and get to work. Here is the scene. Mademoiselle Gretry, if I derange you!" He cleared a space at the end of the parlour, pulling the chairs about. "Be attentive now. Here"—he placed a chair at his right with a flourish, as though planting a banner—"is the porch of Lord Glendale's country house."

"Ah," murmured Landry, winking solemnly at Page, "the chair is the porch of the house."

"And here," shouted Monsieur Gerardy, glaring at him and slamming down another chair, "is a rustic bench and practicable table set for breakfast."

Page began to giggle behind her play-book. Gerardy, his nostrils expanded, gave her his back. The older people, who were not to take part—Jadwin, the Cresslers, and Aunt Wess'—retired to a far corner, Mrs. Cressler declaring that they would constitute the audience.

"On stage," vociferated Monsieur Gerardy, perspiring from his exertions with the furniture. "'Marion enters, timid and hesitating, L. C.' Come, who's Marion? Mademoiselle Gretry, if you please, and for the love of God remember your crossings. Sh! sh!" he cried,

waving his arms at the others. "A little silence if you please. Now, Marion."

Isabel Gretry, holding her play-book at her side, one finger marking the place, essayed an entrance with the words:

"'Ah, the old home once more. See the clambering roses have——'"

But Monsieur Gerardy, suddenly compressing his lips as if in a heroic effort to repress his emotion, flung himself into a chair, turning his back and crossing his legs violently. Miss Gretry stopped, very much disturbed, gazing perplexedly at the coach's heaving shoulders.

There was a strained silence, then:

"Isn't—isn't that right?"

As if with the words she had touched a spring, Monsieur Gerardy bounded to his feet.

"Grand God! Is that left-centre where you have made the entrance? In fine, I ask you a little—*is* that left-centre? You have come in by the rustic bench and practicable table set for breakfast. A fine sight on the night of the performance that. Marion climbs over the rustic breakfast and practicable—over the rustic bench and practicable table, ha, ha, to make the entrance." Still holding the play-book, he clapped hands with elaborate sarcasm. "Ah, yes, good business that. That will bring down the house."

Meanwhile the Gretry girl turned again from left-centre.

"'Ah, the old home again. See——'"

"Stop!" thundered Monsieur Gerardy. "Is that what you call timid and hesitating? Once more, those lines. . . . No, no. It is not it at all. More of slowness, more of— Here, watch me."

He made the entrance with laborious exaggeration of effect, dragging one foot after another, clutching at the palings of an imaginary fence, while pitching his voice at a feeble falsetto, he quavered:

"'Ah! The old home—ah . . . once more. See—' like that," he cried, straightening up. "Now then. We try that entrance again. Don't come on too quick after the curtain. Attention. I clap my hands for the curtain, and count three." He backed away and, tucking the play-book under his arm, struck his palms together. "Now, one—two—*three.*"

But this time Isabel Gretry, in remembering her "business," confused her stage directions once more.

"'Ah, the old home——'"

"Left-centre," interrupted the coach, in a tone of long-suffering patience.

She paused bewildered, and believing that she had spoken her lines too abruptly, began again:

"'See, the clambering——'"

"*Left*-centre."

"'Ah, the old home——'"

Monsieur Gerardy settled himself deliberately in his

chair and resting his head upon one hand closed his eyes. His manner was that of Galileo under torture declaring "still it moves."

"*Left*-centre."

"Oh—oh, yes. I forgot."

Monsieur Gerardy apostrophised the chandelier with mirthless humour.

"Oh, ha, ha! She forgot."

Still another time Marion tried the entrance, and, as she came on, Monsieur Gerardy made vigorous signals to Page, exclaiming in a hoarse whisper:

"Lady Mary, ready. In a minute you come on. Remember the cue."

Meanwhile Marion had continued:

"'See the clambering vines——'"

"Roses."

"'The clambering rose vines——'"

"Roses, pure and simple."

"'See! The clambering roses, pure and——'"

"Mademoiselle Gretry, will you do me the extreme obligation to bound yourself by the lines of the book?"

"I thought you said——"

"Go on, go on, go on! Is it God-possible to be thus stupid? Lady Mary, ready."

"'See, the clambering roses have wrapped the old stones in a loving embrace. The birds build in the same old nests——'"

"Well, well, Lady Mary, where are you? You enter from the porch."

"I'm waiting for my cue," protested Page. "My cue is: 'Are there none that will remember me.'"

"Say," whispered Landry, coming up behind Page, "it would look bully if you could come out leading a greyhound."

"Ah, so, Mademoiselle Gretry," cried Monsieur Gerardy, "you left out the cue." He became painfully polite. "Give the speech once more, if you please."

"A dog would look bully on the stage," whispered Landry. "And I know where I could get one."

"Where?"

"A friend of mine. He's got a beauty, blue grey——"

They become suddenly aware of a portentous silence. The coach, his arms folded, was gazing at Page with tightened lips.

"'None who will remember me,'" he burst out at last. "Three times she gave it."

Page hurried upon the scene with the words:

"'Ah, another glorious morning. The vines are drenched in dew.'" Then, raising her voice and turning toward the "house," "'Arthur.'"

"'Arthur,'" warned the coach. "That's you, Mr. Corthell. Ready. Well then, Mademoiselle Gretry, you have something to say there."

"I can't say it," murmured the Gretry girl, her handkerchief to her face.

"What now? Continue. Your lines are 'I must not be seen here. It would betray all,' then conceal yourself in the arbour. Continue. Speak the line. It is the cue of Arthur."

"I can't," mumbled the girl behind her handkerchief.

"Can't? Why, then?"

"I—I have the nose-bleed."

Upon the instant Monsieur Gerardy quite lost his temper. He turned away, one hand to his head, rolling his eyes as if in mute appeal to heaven, then, whirling about, shook his play-book at the unfortunate Marion, crying out furiously:

"Ah, it lacked but that. You ought to understand at last, that when one rehearses for a play one does not have the nose-bleed. It is not decent."

Miss Gretry retired precipitately, and Laura came forward to say that she would read Marion's lines.

"No, no!" cried Monsieur Gerardy. "You—ah, if they were all like you! You are obliging, but it does not suffice. I am insulted."

The others, astonished, gathered about the "coach." They laboured to explain. Miss Gretry had intended no slight. In fact she was often taken that way; she was excited, nervous. But Monsieur Gerardy was not to be placated. Ah, no! He knew what was due a

gentleman. He closed his eyes and raised his eyebrows to his very hair, murmuring superbly that he was offended. He had but one phrase in answer to all their explanations:

"One does not permit oneself to bleed at the nose during rehearsal."

Laura began to feel a certain resentment. The unfortunate Gretry girl had gone away in tears. What with the embarrassment of the wrong gown, the brow-beating, and the nose-bleed, she was not far from hysterics. She had retired to the dining-room with Mrs. Cressler, and from time to time the sounds of her distress made themselves heard. Laura believed it quite time to interfere. After all, who was this Gerardy person, to give himself such airs? Poor Miss Gretry was to blame for nothing. She fixed the little Frenchman with a direct glance, and Page, who caught a glimpse of her face, recognised "the grand manner," and whispered to Landry:

"He'd better look out; he's gone just about as far as Laura will allow."

"It is not convenient," vociferated the "coach." "It is not permissible. I am offended."

"Monsieur Gerardy," said Laura, "we will say nothing more about it, if you please."

There was a silence. Monsieur Gerardy had pretended not to hear. He breathed loud through his nose, and Page hastened to observe that anyhow Marion was

not on in the next scenes. Then abruptly, and resuming his normal expression, Monsieur Gerardy said:

"Let us proceed. It advances nothing to lose time. Come. Lady Mary and Arthur, ready."

The rehearsal continued. Laura, who did not come on during the act, went back to her chair in the corner of the room.

But the original group had been broken up. Mrs. Cressler was in the dining-room with the Gretry girl, while Jadwin, Aunt Wess', and Cressler himself were deep in a discussion of mind-reading and spiritualism.

As Laura came up, Jadwin detached himself from the others and met her.

"Poor Miss Gretry!" he observed. "Always the square peg in the round hole. I've sent out for some smelling-salts."

It seemed to Laura that the capitalist was especially well-looking on this particular evening. He never dressed with the "smartness" of Sheldon Corthell or Landry Court, but in some way she did not expect that he should. His clothes were not what she was aware were called "stylish," but she had had enough experience with her own tailor-made gowns to know that the material was the very best that money could buy. The apparent absence of any padding in the broad shoulders of the frock coat he wore, to her mind, more than compensated for the "ready-made" scarf, and if the white waistcoat

was not fashionably cut, she knew that *she* had never been able to afford a *piqué* skirt of just that particular grade.

"Suppose we go into the reception-room," he observed abruptly. "Charlie bought a new clock last week that's a marvel. You ought to see it."

"No," she answered. "I am quite comfortable here, and I want to see how Page does in this act."

"I am afraid, Miss Dearborn," he continued, as they found their places, "that you did not have a very good time Sunday afternoon."

He referred to the Easter festival at his mission school. Laura had left rather early, alleging neuralgia and a dinner engagement.

"Why, yes I did," she replied. "Only, to tell the truth, my head ached a little." She was ashamed that she did not altogether delight in her remembrance of Jadwin on that afternoon. He had "addressed" the school, with earnestness it was true, but in a strain decidedly conventional. And the picture he made leading the singing, beating time with the hymn-book, and between the verses declaring that "he wanted to hear everyone's voice in the next verse," did not appeal very forcibly to her imagination. She fancied Sheldon Corthell doing these things, and could not forbear to smile. She had to admit, despite the protests of conscience, that she did prefer the studio to the Sunday-school.

"Oh," remarked Jadwin, "I'm sorry to hear you had

a headache. I suppose my little micks" (he invariably spoke of his mission children thus) "do make more noise than music."

"I found them very interesting."

"No, excuse me, but I'm afraid you didn't. My little micks are not interesting—to look at nor to listen to. But I, kind of—well, I don't know," he began pulling his mustache. "It seems to *suit* me to get down there and get hold of these people. You know Moody put me up to it. He was here about five years ago, and I went to one of his big meetings, and then to all of them. And I met the fellow, too, and I tell you, Miss Dearborn, he stirred me all up. I didn't "get religion." No, nothing like that. But I got a notion it was time to be up and doing, and I figured it out that business principles were as good in religion as they are—well, in La Salle Street, and that if the church people—the men I mean—put as much energy, and shrewdness, and competitive spirit into the saving of souls as they did into the saving of dollars that we might get somewhere. And so I took hold of a half dozen broken-down, bankrupt Sunday-school concerns over here on Archer Avenue that were fighting each other all the time, and amalgamated them all—a regular trust, just as if they were iron-foundries—and turned the incompetents out and put my subordinates in, and put the thing on a business basis, and by now, I'll venture to say, there's not a better *organised*

Sunday-school in all Chicago, and I'll bet if D. L. Moody were here to-day he'd say, 'Jadwin, well done, thou good and faithful servant.'"

"I haven't a doubt of it, Mr. Jadwin," Laura hastened to exclaim. "And you must not think that I don't believe you are doing a splendid work."

"Well, it *suits* me," he repeated. "I like my little micks, and now and then I have a chance to get hold of the kind that it pays to push along. About four months ago I came across a boy in the Bible class; I guess he's about sixteen; name is Bradley—Billy Bradley, father a confirmed drunk, mother takes in washing, sister—we won't speak about; and he seemed to be bright and willing to work, and I gave him a job in my agent's office, just directing envelopes. Well, Miss Dearborn, that boy has a desk of his own now, and the agent tells me he's one of the very best men he's got. He does his work so well that I've been able to discharge two other fellows who sat around and watched the clock for lunch hour, and Bradley does their work now better and quicker than they did, and saves me twenty dollars a week; that's a thousand a year. So much for a business-like Sunday-school; so much for taking a good aim when you cast your bread upon the waters. The last time I saw Moody I said, 'Moody, my motto is "not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, praising the Lord."' I remember we were out driving at the time, I took him out

behind Lizella—she's almost straight Wilkes' blood and can trot in two-ten, but you can believe *he* didn't know that—and, as I say, I told him what my motto was, and he said, 'J., good for you; you keep to that. There's no better motto in the world for the American man of business.' He shook my hand when he said it, and I haven't ever forgotten it."

Not a little embarrassed, Laura was at a loss just what to say, and in the end remarked lamely enough:

"I am sure it is the right spirit—the best motto."

"Miss Dearborn," Jadwin began again suddenly, "why don't you take a class down there. The little micks aren't so dreadful when you get to know them."

"I!" exclaimed Laura, rather blankly. She shook her head. "Oh, no, Mr. Jadwin. I should be only an encumbrance. Don't misunderstand me. I approve of the work with all my heart, but I am not fitted—I feel no call. I should be so inapt that I know I should do no good. My training has been so different, you know," she said, smiling. "I am an Episcopalian—'of the straightest sect of the Pharisees.' I should be teaching your little micks all about the meaning of candles, and 'Eastings,' and the absolution and remission of sins."

"I wouldn't care if you did," he answered. "It's the indirect influence I'm thinking of—the indirect influence that a beautiful, pure-hearted, noble-minded woman spreads around her wherever she goes. I know what

it has done for me. And I know that not only my little micks, but every teacher and every superintendent in that school would be inspired, and stimulated, and born again so soon as ever you set foot in the building. Men need good women, Miss Dearborn. Men who are doing the work of the world. I believe in women as I believe in Christ. But I don't believe they were made—any more than Christ was—to cultivate—beyond a certain point—their own souls, and refine their own minds, and live in a sort of warmed-over, dilettante, stained-glass world of seclusion and *ex*clusion. No, sir, that won't do for the United States and the men who are making them the greatest nation of the world. The men have got all the get-up-and-get they want, but they need the women to point them straight, and to show them how to lead that other kind of life that isn't all grind. Since I've known you, Miss Dearborn, I've just begun to wake up to the fact that there *is* that other kind, but I can't lead that life without you. There's *no* kind of life that's worth anything to me now that don't include you. I don't need to tell you that I want you to marry me. You know that by now, I guess, without any words from me. I love you, and I love you as a man, not as a boy, seriously and earnestly. I can give you no idea *how* seriously, *how* earnestly. I want you to be my wife. Laura, my dear girl, I *know* I could make you happy."

"It isn't," answered Laura slowly, perceiving as he

paused that he expected her to say something, "so much a question of that."

"What is it, then? I won't make a scene. Don't you love me? Don't you think, my girl, you could ever love me?"

Laura hesitated a long moment. She had taken the rose from her shoulder, and plucking the petals one by one, put them delicately between her teeth. From the other end of the room came the clamorous exhortations of Monsieur Gerardy. Mrs. Cressler and the Gretry girl watched the progress of the rehearsal attentively from the doorway of the dining-room. Aunt Wess' and Mr. Cressler were discussing psychic research and *séances,* on the sofa on the other side of the room. After a while Laura spoke.

"It isn't that either," she said, choosing her words carefully.

"What is it, then?"

"I don't know—exactly. For one thing, I don't think I *want* to be married, Mr. Jadwin—to anybody."

"I would wait for you."

"Or to be engaged."

"But the day must come, sooner or later, when you must be both engaged and married. You *must* ask yourself *some time* if you love the man who wishes to be your husband. Why not ask yourself now?"

"I do," she answered. "I do ask myself. I have asked myself."

"Well, what do you decide?"

"That I don't know."

"Don't you think you would love me in time? Laura, I am sure you would. I would *make* you."

"I don't know. I suppose that is a stupid answer. But it is, if I am to be honest, and I am trying very hard to be honest—with you and with myself—the only one I have. I am happy just as I am. I like you and Mr. Cressler and Mr. Corthell—everybody. But, Mr. Jadwin"—she looked him full in the face, her dark eyes full of gravity—"with a woman it is so serious—to be married. More so than any man ever understood. And, oh, one must be so sure, so sure. And I am not sure now. I am not sure now. Even if I were sure of you, I could not say I was sure of myself. Now and then I tell myself, and even poor, dear Aunt Wess', that I shall never love anybody, that I shall never marry. But I should be bitterly sorry if I thought that was true. It is one of the greatest happinesses to which I look forward, that some day I shall love someone with all my heart and soul, and shall be a true wife, and find my husband's love for me the sweetest thing in my life. But I am sure that that day has not come yet."

"And when it does come," he urged, "may I be the first to know?"

She smiled a little gravely.

"Ah," she answered, "I would not know myself that that day had come until I woke to the fact that I loved the man who had asked me to be his wife, and then it might be too late—for you."

"But now, at least," he persisted, "you love no one."

"Now," she repeated, "I love—no one."

"And I may take such encouragement in that as I can?"

And then, suddenly, capriciously even, Laura, an inexplicable spirit of inconsistency besetting her, was a very different woman from the one who an instant before had spoken so gravely of the seriousness of marriage. She hesitated a moment before answering Jadwin, her head on one side, looking at the rose-leaf between her fingers. In a low voice she said at last:

"If you like."

But before Jadwin could reply, Cressler and Aunt Wess' who had been telling each other of their "experiences," of their "premonitions," of the unaccountable things that had happened to them, at length included the others in their conversation.

"J.," remarked Cressler, "did anything funny ever happen to *you*—warnings, presentiments, that sort of thing? Mrs. Wessels and I have been talking spiritualism. Laura, have *you* ever had any 'experiences?'"

She shook her head.

"No, no. I am too material, I am afraid."

"How about you, 'J.?'"

"Nothing much, except that I believe in 'luck'—a little. The other day I flipped a coin in Gretry's office. If it fell heads I was to sell wheat short, and somehow I knew all the time that the coin would fall heads—and so it did."

"And you made a great deal of money," said Laura. "I know. Mr. Court was telling me. That was splendid."

"That was deplorable, Laura," said Cressler, gravely. "I hope some day," he continued, "we can all of us get hold of this man and make him solemnly promise never to gamble in wheat again."

Laura stared. To her mind the word "gambling" had always been suspect. It had a bad sound; it seemed to be associated with depravity of the baser sort.

"Gambling!" she murmured.

"They call it buying and selling," he went on, "down there in La Salle Street. But it is simply betting. Betting on the condition of the market weeks, even months, in advance. You bet wheat goes up. I bet it goes down. Those fellows in the Pit don't own the wheat; never even see it. Wouldn't know what to do with it if they had it. They don't care in the least about the grain. But there are thousands upon thousands of farmers out here in Iowa and Kansas or Dakota who do, and hundreds of thousands of poor

devils in Europe who care even more than the farmer. I mean the fellows who raise the grain, and the other fellows who eat it. It's life or death for either of them. And right between these two comes the Chicago speculator, who raises or lowers the price out of all reason, for the benefit of his pocket. You see, Laura, here is what I mean." Cressler had suddenly become very earnest. Absorbed, interested, Laura listened intently. "Here is what I mean," pursued Cressler. "It's like this: If we send the price of wheat down too far, the farmer suffers, the fellow who raises it; if we send it up too far, the poor man in Europe suffers, the fellow who eats it. And food to the peasant on the continent is bread—not meat or potatoes, as it is with us. The only way to do so that neither the American farmer nor the European peasant suffers, is to keep wheat at an average, legitimate value. The moment you inflate or depress that, somebody suffers right away. And that is just what these gamblers are doing all the time, booming it up or booming it down. Think of it, the food of hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people just at the mercy of a few men down there on the Board of Trade. They make the price. They say just how much the peasant shall pay for his loaf of bread. If he can't pay the price he simply starves. And as for the farmer, why it's ludicrous. If I build a house and offer it for sale, I put my own price on it, and if the price offered don't

suit me I don't sell. But if I go out here in Iowa and raise a crop of wheat, I've got to sell it, whether I want to or not, at the figure named by some fellows in Chicago. And to make themselves rich, they may make me sell it at a price that bankrupts me."

Laura nodded. She was intensely interested. A whole new order of things was being disclosed, and for the first time in her life she looked into the workings of political economy.

"Oh, that's only one side of it," Cressler went on, heedless of Jadwin's good-humoured protests. "Yes, I know I am a crank on speculating. I'm going to preach a little if you'll let me. I've been a speculator myself, and a ruined one at that, and I know what I am talking about. Here is what I was going to say. These fellows themselves, the gamblers—well, call them speculators, if you like. Oh, the fine, promising manly young men I've seen wrecked—absolutely and hopelessly wrecked and ruined by speculation! It's as easy to get into as going across the street. They make three hundred, five hundred, yes, even a thousand dollars sometimes in a couple of hours, without so much as raising a finger. Think what that means to a boy of twenty-five who's doing clerk work at seventy-five a month. Why, it would take him maybe ten years to save a thousand, and here he's made it in a single morning. Think you can keep him out of speculation then? First thing you

know he's thrown up his honest, humdrum position—oh, I've seen it hundreds of times—and takes to hanging round the customers' rooms down there on La Salle Street, and he makes a little, and makes a little more, and finally he is so far in that he can't pull out, and then some billionaire fellow, who has the market in the palm of his hand, tightens one finger, and our young man is ruined, body and mind. He's lost the taste, the very capacity for legitimate business, and he stays on hanging round the Board till he gets to be—all of a sudden—an old man. And then some day someone says, 'Why, where's So-and-so?' and you wake up to the fact that the young fellow has simply disappeared—lost. I tell you the fascination of this Pit gambling is something no one who hasn't experienced it can have the faintest conception of. I believe it's worse than liquor, worse than morphine. Once you get into it, it grips you and draws you and draws you, and the nearer you get to the end the easier it seems to win, till all of a sudden, ah! there's the whirlpool. . . . 'J.,' keep away from it, my boy."

Jadwin laughed, and leaning over, put his fingers upon Cressler's breast, as though turning off a switch.

"Now, Miss Dearborn," he announced, "we've shut him off. Charlie means all right, but now and then someone brushes against him and opens that switch."

Cressler good-humouredly laughed with the others,

but Laura's smile was perfunctory and her eyes were grave. But there was a diversion. While the others had been talking the rehearsal had proceeded, and now Page beckoned to Laura from the far end of the parlour, calling out:

"Laura—'Beatrice,' it's the third act. You are wanted."

"Oh, I must run," exclaimed Laura, catching up her play-book. "Poor Monsieur Gerardy—we must be a trial to him."

She hurried across the room, where the coach was disposing the furniture for the scene, consulting the stage directions in his book:

"Here the kitchen table, here the old-fashioned writing-desk, here the *armoire* with practicable doors, here the window. Soh! Who is on! Ah, the young lady of the sick nose, 'Marion.' She is discovered—knitting. And then the duchess—later. That's you, Mademoiselle Dearborn. You interrupt—you remember. But then you, ah, you always are right. If they were all like you. Very well, we begin."

Creditably enough the Gretry girl read her part, Monsieur Gerardy interrupting to indicate the crossings and business. Then at her cue, Laura, who was to play the *rôle* of the duchess, entered with the words:

"I beg your pardon, but the door stood open. May I come in?"

Monsieur Gerardy murmured:

"Elle est vraiment superbe."

Laura to the very life, to every little trick of carriage and manner was the high-born gentlewoman visiting the home of a dependent. Nothing could have been more dignified, more gracious, more gracefully condescending than her poise. She dramatised not only her *rôle*, but the whole of her surroundings. The interior of the little cottage seemed to define itself with almost visible distinctness the moment she set foot upon the scene.

Gerardy tiptoed from group to group, whispering:

"Eh? Very fine, our duchess. She would do well professionally."

But Mrs. Wessels was not altogether convinced. Her eyes following her niece, she said to Corthell:

"It's Laura's 'grand manner.' My word, I know her in *that* part. That's the way she is when she comes down to the parlour of an evening, and Page introduces her to one of her young men."

"I nearly die," protested Page, beginning to laugh. "Of course it's very natural I should want my friends to like my sister. And Laura comes in as though she were walking on eggs, and gets their names wrong, as though it didn't much matter, and calls them Pinky when their name is Pinckney, and don't listen to what they say, till I want to sink right through the floor with mortification."

In haphazard fashion the rehearsal wore to a close. Monsieur Gerardy stormed and fretted and insisted upon repeating certain scenes over and over again. By ten o'clock the actors were quite worn out. A little supper was served, and very soon afterward Laura made a move toward departing. She was wondering who would see her home, Landry, Jadwin, or Sheldon Corthell.

The day had been sunshiny, warm even, but since nine o'clock the weather had changed for the worse, and by now a heavy rain was falling. Mrs. Cressler begged the two sisters and Mrs. Wessels to stay at her house over-night, but Laura refused. Jadwin was suggesting to Cressler the appropriateness of having the *coupé* brought around to take the sisters home, when Corthell came up to Laura.

"I sent for a couple of hansoms long since," he said. "They are waiting outside now." And that seemed to settle the question.

For all Jadwin's perseverance, the artist seemed—for this time at least—to have the better of the situation.

As the good-byes were being said at the front door Page remarked to Landry:

"You had better go with us as far as the house, so that you can take one of our umbrellas. You can get in with Aunt Wess' and me. There's plenty of room. You can't go home in this storm without an umbrella."

Landry at first refused, haughtily. He might be too

poor to parade a lot of hansom cabs around, but he was too proud, to say the least, to ride in 'em when someone else paid.

Page scolded him roundly. What next? The idea. He was not to be so completely silly. She didn't propose to have the responsibility of his catching pneumonia just for the sake of a quibble.

"Some people," she declared, "never seemed to be able to find out that they are grown up."

"Very well," he announced, "I'll go if I can tip the driver a dollar."

Page compressed her lips.

"The man that can afford dollar tips," she said, "can afford to hire the cab in the first place."

"Seventy-five cents, then," he declared resolutely. "Not a cent less. I should feel humiliated with any less."

"Will you please take me down to the cab, Landry Court?" she cried. And without further comment Landry obeyed.

"Now, Miss Dearborn, if you are ready," exclaimed Corthell, as he came up. He held the umbrella over her head, allowing his shoulders to get the drippings.

They cried good-bye again all around, and the artist guided her down the slippery steps. He handed her carefully into the hansom, and following, drew down the glasses.

Laura settled herself comfortably far back in her corner, adjusting her skirts and murmuring:

"Such a wet night. Who would have thought it was going to rain? I was afraid you were not coming at first," she added. "At dinner Mrs. Cressler said you had an important committee meeting—something to do with the Art Institute, the award of prizes; was that it?"

"Oh, yes," he answered, indifferently, "something of the sort was on. I suppose it was important—for the Institute. But for me there is only one thing of importance nowadays," he spoke with a studied carelessness, as though announcing a fact that Laura must know already, "and that is, to be near you. It is astonishing. You have no idea of it, how I have ordered my whole life according to that idea."

"As though you expected me to believe that," she answered.

In her other lovers she knew her words would have provoked vehement protestation. But for her it was part of the charm of Corthell's attitude that he never did or said the expected, the ordinary. Just now he seemed more interested in the effect of his love for Laura upon himself than in the manner of her reception of it.

"It is curious," he continued. "I am no longer a boy. I have no enthusiasms. I have known many women, and I have seen enough of what the crowd calls love to know how futile it is, how empty, a vanity of vanities. I had imagined that the poets were wrong, were idealists, seeing the things that should be rather

than the things that were. And then," suddenly he drew a deep breath: "*this* happiness; and to *me*. And the miracle, the wonderful is there—all at once—in my heart, in my very hand, like a mysterious, beautiful exotic. The poets *are* wrong," he added. "They have not been idealists enough. I wish—ah, well, never mind."

"What is it that you wish?" she asked, as he broke off suddenly. Laura knew even before she spoke that it would have been better not to have prompted him to continue. Intuitively she had something more than a suspicion that he had led her on to say these very words. And in admitting that she cared to have the conversation proceed upon this footing, she realised that she was sheering towards unequivocal coquetry. She saw the false move now, knew that she had lowered her guard. On all accounts it would have been more dignified to have shown only a mild interest in what Corthell wished. She realised that once more she had acted upon impulse, and she even found time to wonder again how it was that when with this man her impulses, and not her reason prevailed so often. With Landry or with Curtis Jadwin she was always calm, tranquilly self-possessed. But Corthell seemed able to reach all that was impetuous, all that was unreasoned in her nature. To Landry she was more than anything else, an older sister, indulgent, kind-hearted. With Jadwin she found that all the serious, all the sincere,

earnest side of her character was apt to come to the front. But Corthell stirred troublous, unknown deeps in her, certain undefined trends of recklessness; and for so long as he held her within his influence, she could not forget her sex a single instant.

It dismayed her to have this strange personality of hers, this other headstrong, impetuous self, discovered to her. She hardly recognised it. It made her a little afraid; and yet, wonder of wonders, she could not altogether dislike it. There was a certain fascination in resigning herself for little instants to the dominion of this daring stranger that was yet herself.

Meanwhile Corthell had answered her:

"I wish," he said, "I *wish* you could say something —I hardly know what—something to me. So little would be so much."

"But what *can* I say?" she protested. "I don't know —I—what *can* I say?"

"It must be yes or no for me," he broke out. "I can't go on this way."

"But why not? Why not?" exclaimed Laura. "Why must we—terminate anything? Why not let things go on just as they are? We are quite happy as we are. There's never been a time of my life when I've been happier than this last three or four months. I don't want to change anything. Ah, here we are."

The hansom drew up in front of the house. Aunt

Wess' and Page were already inside. The maid stood in the vestibule in the light that streamed from the half-open front door, an umbrella in her hand. And as Laura alighted, she heard Page's voice calling from the front hall that the others had umbrellas, that the maid was not to wait.

The hansom splashed away, and Corthell and Laura mounted the steps of the house.

"Won't you come in?" she said. "There is a fire in the library."

But he said no, and for a few seconds they stood under the vestibule light, talking. Then Corthell, drawing off his right-hand glove, said:

"I suppose that I have my answer. You do not wish for a change. I understand. You wish to say by that, that you do not love me. If you did love me as I love you, you would wish for just that—a change. You would be as eager as I for that wonderful, wonderful change that makes a new heaven and a new earth."

This time Laura did not answer. There was a moment's silence. Then Corthell said:

"Do you know, I think I shall go away."

"Go away?"

"Yes, to New York. Possibly to Paris. There is a new method of fusing glass that I've promised myself long ago I would look into. I don't know that it interests me much—now. But I think I had better go.

At once, within the week. I've not much heart in it; but it seems — under the circumstances — to be appropriate." He held out his bared hand. Laura saw that he was smiling.

"Well, Miss Dearborn—good-bye."

"But *why* should you go?" she cried, distressfully. "How perfectly—ah, don't go," she exclaimed, then in desperate haste added: "It would be absolutely foolish."

"*Shall* I stay?" he urged. "Do *you* tell me to stay?"

"Of course I do," she answered. "It would break up the play — your going. It would spoil my part. You play opposite me, you know. Please stay."

"Shall I stay," he asked, "for the sake of your part? There is no one else you would rather have?" He was smiling straight into her eyes, and she guessed what he meant.

She smiled back at him, and the spirit of daring never more awake in her, replied, as she caught his eye:

"There is no one else I would rather have."

Corthell caught her hand of a sudden.

"Laura," he cried, "let us end this fencing and quibbling once and for all. Dear, dear girl, I *love* you with all the strength of all the good in me. Let me be the best a man can be to the woman he loves."

Laura flashed a smile at him.

"If you can make me love you enough," she answered.

"And you think I can?" he exclaimed.

"You have my permission to try," she said.

She hoped fervently that now, without further words, he would leave her. It seemed to her that it would be the most delicate chivalry on his part—having won this much—to push his advantage no further. She waited anxiously for his next words. She began to fear that she had trusted too much upon her assurance of his tact.

Corthell held out his hand again.

"It is good-night, then, not good-bye."

"It is good-night," said Laura.

With the words he was gone, and Laura, entering the house, shut the door behind her with a long breath of satisfaction.

Page and Landry were still in the library. Laura joined them, and for a few moments the three stood before the fireplace talking about the play. Page at length, at the first opportunity, excused herself and went to bed. She made a great show of leaving Landry and Laura alone, and managed to convey the impression that she understood they were anxious to be rid of her.

"Only remember," she remarked to Laura severely, "to lock up and turn out the hall gas. Annie has gone to bed *long* ago."

"I must dash along, too," declared Landry when Page was gone.

He buttoned his coat about his neck, and Laura followed him out into the hall and found an umbrella for him.

"You were beautiful to-night," he said, as he stood with his hand on the door knob. "Beautiful. I could not keep my eyes off of you, and I could not listen to anybody but you. And now," he declared, solemnly, "I will see your eyes and hear your voice all the rest of the night. I want to explain," he added, "about those hansoms—about coming home with Miss Page and Mrs. Wessels. Mr. Corthell—those were *his* hansoms, of course. But I wanted an umbrella, and I gave the driver seventy-five cents."

"Why of course, of course," said Laura, not quite divining what he was driving at.

"I don't want you to think that I would be willing to put myself under obligations to anybody."

"Of course, Landry; I understand."

He thrilled at once.

"Ah," he cried, "you don't know what it *means* to me to look into the eyes of a woman who really understands."

Laura stared, wondering just what she had said.

"Will you turn this hall light out for me, Landry?" she asked. "I never can reach."

He left the front door open and extinguished the jet in its dull red globe. Promptly they were involved in darkness.

"Good-night," she said. "Isn't it dark?"

He stretched out his hand to take hers, but instead his groping fingers touched her waist. Suddenly Laura

felt his arm clasp her. Then all at once, before she had time to so much as think of resistance, he had put both arms about her and kissed her squarely on her cheek.

Then the front door closed, and she was left abruptly alone, breathless, stunned, staring wide-eyed into the darkness.

Her first sensation was one merely of amazement. She put her hand quickly to her cheek, first the palm and then the back, murmuring confusedly:

"What? Why?—why?"

Then she whirled about and ran up the stairs, her silks clashing and fluttering about her as she fled, gained her own room, and swung the door violently shut behind her. She turned up the lowered gas and, without knowing why, faced her mirror at once, studying her reflection and watching her hand as it all but scoured the offended cheek.

Then, suddenly, with an upward, uplifting rush, her anger surged within her. She, Laura, Miss Dearborn, who loved no man, who never conceded, never capitulated, whose "grand manner" was a thing proverbial, in all her pitch of pride, in her own home, her own fortress, had been kissed, like a school-girl, like a chambermaid, in the dark, in a corner.

And by—great heavens!—*Landry Court.* The boy whom she fancied she held in such subjection, such profound respect. Landry Court had dared, had dared to

kiss her, to offer her this wretchedly commonplace and petty affront, degrading her to the level of a pretty waitress, making her ridiculous.

She stood rigid, drawn to her full height, in the centre of her bedroom, her fists tense at her sides, her breath short, her eyes flashing, her face aflame. From time to time her words, half smothered, burst from her.

"What does he *think* I *am?* How dared he? How dared he?"

All that she could say, any condemnation she could formulate only made her position the more absurd, the more humiliating. It had all been said before by generations of shop-girls, school-girls, and servants, in whose company the affront had ranged her. Landry was to be told in effect that he was never to presume to seek her acquaintance again. Just as the enraged hussy of the street corners and Sunday picnics shouted that the offender should "never dare speak to her again as long as he lived." Never before had she been subjected to this kind of indignity. And simultaneously with the assurance she could hear the shrill voice of the drab of the public balls proclaiming that she had "never been kissed in all her life before."

Of all slights, of all insults, it was the one that robbed her of the very dignity she should assume to rebuke it. The more vehemently she resented it, the more laughable became the whole affair.

But she would resent it, she would resent it, and Landry Court should be driven to acknowledge that the sorriest day of his life was the one on which he had forgotten the respect in which he had pretended to hold her. He had deceived her, then, all along. Because she had—foolishly—relaxed a little towards him, permitted a certain intimacy, this was how he abused it. Ah, well, it would teach her a lesson. Men were like that. She might have known it would come to this. Wilfully they chose to misunderstand, to take advantage of her frankness, her good nature, her good comradeship.

She had been foolish all along, flirting—yes, that was the word for it—flirting with Landry and Corthell and Jadwin. No doubt they all compared notes about her. Perhaps they had bet who first should kiss her. Or, at least, there was not one of them who would not kiss her if she gave him a chance.

But if she, in any way, had been to blame for what Landry had done, she would atone for it. She had made herself too cheap, she had found amusement in encouraging these men, in equivocating, in coquetting with them. Now it was time to end the whole business, to send each one of them to the right-about with an *un*-equivocal definite word. She was a good girl, she told herself. She was, in her heart, sincere; she was above the inexpensive diversion of flirting. She had

started wrong in her new life, and it was time, high time, to begin over again—with a clean page—to show these men that they dared not presume to take liberties with so much as the tip of her little finger.

So great was her agitation, so eager her desire to act upon her resolve, that she could not wait till morning. It was a physical impossibility for her to remain under what she chose to believe suspicion another hour. If there was any remotest chance that her three lovers had permitted themselves to misunderstand her, they were to be corrected at once, were to be shown their place, and that without mercy.

She called for the maid, Annie, whose husband was the janitor of the house, and who slept in the top story.

"If Henry hasn't gone to bed," said Laura, "tell him to wait up till I call him, or to sleep with his clothes on. There is something I want him to do for me—something important."

It was close upon midnight. Laura turned back into her room, removed her hat and veil, and tossed them, with her coat, upon the bed. She lit another burner of the chandelier, and drew a chair to her writing-desk between the windows.

Her first note was to Landry Court. She wrote it almost with a single spurt of the pen, and dated it carefully, so that he might know it had been written immediately after he had left. Thus it ran:

"Please do not try to see me again at any time or under any circumstances. I want you to understand, very clearly, that I do not wish to continue our acquaintance."

Her letter to Corthell was more difficult, and it was not until she had rewritten it two or three times that it read to her satisfaction.

"My dear Mr. Corthell," so it was worded, "you asked me to-night that our fencing and quibbling be brought to an end. I quite agree with you that it is desirable. I spoke as I did before you left upon an impulse that I shall never cease to regret. I do not wish you to misunderstand me, nor to misinterpret my attitude in any way. You asked me to be your wife, and, very foolishly and wrongly, I gave you—intentionally—an answer which might easily be construed into an encouragement. Understand now that I do not wish you to try to make me love you. I would find it extremely distasteful. And, believe me, it would be quite hopeless. I do not now, and never shall care for you as I should care if I were to be your wife. I beseech you that you will not, in any manner, refer again to this subject. It would only distress and pain me.

"Cordially yours,

"LAURA DEARBORN."

The letter to Curtis Jadwin was almost to the same effect. But she found the writing of it easier than the others. In addressing him she felt herself grow a little more serious, a little more dignified and calm. It ran as follows:

"My dear Mr. Jadwin:

"When you asked me to become your wife this evening, you deserved a straightforward answer, and instead I replied in a spirit of capriciousness and disingenuousness, which I now earnestly regret, and which I ask you to pardon and to ignore.

"I allowed myself to tell you that you might find encouragement in my foolishly spoken words. I am deeply sorry that I should have so forgotten what was due to my own self-respect and to your sincerity.

"If I have permitted myself to convey to you the impression that I would ever be willing to be your wife, let me hasten to correct it. Whatever I said to you this evening, I must answer now—as I should have answered then--truthfully and unhesitatingly, no.

"This, I insist, must be the last word between us upon this unfortunate subject, if we are to continue, as I hope, very good friends.

"Cordially yours,

"Laura Dearborn."

She sealed, stamped, and directed the three envelopes, and glanced at the little leather-cased travelling clock that stood on the top of her desk. It was nearly two.

"I could not sleep, I could not sleep," she murmured, "if I did not know they were on the way."

In answer to the bell Henry appeared, and Laura gave him the letters, with orders to mail them at once in the nearest box.

When it was all over she sat down again at her desk, and leaning an elbow upon it, covered her eyes with her hand for a long moment. She felt suddenly very tired, and when at last she lowered her hand, her fingers were wet. But in the end she grew calmer. She felt that, at all events, she had vindicated herself, that her life would begin again to-morrow with a clean page; and when at length she fell asleep, it was to the dreamless unconsciousness of an almost tranquil mind.

She slept late the next morning and breakfasted in bed between ten and eleven. Then, as the last vibrations of last night's commotion died away, a very natural curiosity began to assert itself. She wondered how each of the three men "would take it." In spite of herself she could not keep from wishing that she could be by when they read their dismissals.

Towards the early part of the afternoon, while Laura was in the library reading "Queen's Gardens," the

special delivery brought Landry Court's reply. It was one *roulade* of incoherence, even in places blistered with tears. Landry protested, implored, debased himself to the very dust. His letter bristled with exclamation points, and ended with a prolonged wail of distress and despair.

Quietly, and with a certain merciless sense of pacification, Laura deliberately reduced the letter to strips, burned it upon the hearth, and went back to her Ruskin.

A little later, the afternoon being fine, she determined to ride out to Lincoln Park, not fifteen minutes from her home, to take a little walk there, and to see how many new buds were out.

As she was leaving, Annie gave into her hands a pasteboard box, just brought to the house by a messenger boy.

The box was full of Jacqueminot roses, to the stems of which a note from Corthell was tied. He wrote but a single line:

"So it should have been 'good-bye' after all."

Laura had Annie put the roses in Page's room.

"Tell Page she can have them; I don't want them. She can wear them to her dance to-night," she said.

While to herself she added:

"The little buds in the park will be prettier."

She was gone from the house over two hours, for she had elected to walk all the way home. She came

back flushed and buoyant from her exercise, her cheeks cool with the Lake breeze, a young maple leaf in one of the revers of her coat. Annie let her in, murmuring:

"A gentleman called just after you went out. I told him you were not at home, but he said he would wait. He is in the library now."

"Who is he? Did he give his name?" demanded Laura.

The maid handed her Curtis Jadwin's card.

V.

THAT year the spring burst over Chicago in a prolonged scintillation of pallid green. For weeks continually the sun shone. The Lake, after persistently cherishing the greys and bitter greens of the winter months, and the rugged white-caps of the northeast gales, mellowed at length, turned to a softened azure blue, and lapsed by degrees to an unruffled calmness, incrusted with innumerable coruscations.

In the parks, first of all, the buds and earliest shoots asserted themselves. The horse-chestnut bourgeons burst their sheaths to spread into trefoils and flame-shaped leaves. The elms, maples, and cottonwoods followed. The sooty, blackened snow upon the grass-plats, in the residence quarters, had long since subsided, softening the turf, filling the gutters with rivulets. On all sides

one saw men at work laying down the new sod in rectangular patches.

There was a delicious smell of ripening in the air, a smell of sap once more on the move, of humid earths disintegrating from the winter rigidity, of twigs and slender branches stretching themselves under the returning warmth, elastic once more, straining in their bark.

On the North Side, in Washington Square, along the Lake-shore Drive, all up and down the Lincoln Park Boulevard, and all through Erie, Huron, and Superior streets, through North State Street, North Clarke Street, and La Salle Avenue, the minute sparkling of green flashed from tree top to tree top, like the first kindling of dry twigs. One could almost fancy that the click of igniting branch tips was audible as whole beds of yellow-green sparks defined themselves within certain elms and cottonwoods.

Every morning the sun invaded earlier the east windows of Laura Dearborn's bedroom. Every day at noon it stood more nearly overhead above her home. Every afternoon the checkered shadows of the leaves thickened upon the drawn curtains of the library. Within doors the bottle-green flies came out of their lethargy and droned and bumped on the panes. The double windows were removed, screens and awnings took their places; the summer pieces were put into the fireplaces.

All of a sudden vans invaded the streets, piled high

"Why, of course you love him, Laura," insisted Mrs. Cressler. "You wouldn't have promised him if you hadn't. Of course you love him, don't you?"

"Yes, I—I suppose I must love him, or—as you say—I wouldn't have promised to marry him. He does everything, every little thing I say. He just seems to think of nothing else but to please me from morning until night. And when I finally said I would marry him, why, Mrs. Cressler, he choked all up, and the tears ran down his face, and all he could say was, 'May God bless you! May God bless you!' over and over again, and his hand shook so that— Oh, well," she broke off abruptly. Then added, "Somehow it makes tears come to my eyes to think of it."

"But, Laura," urged Mrs. Cressler, "you love Curtis, don't you? You—you're such a strange girl sometimes. Dear child, talk to me as though I were your mother. There's no one in the world loves you more than I do. You love Curtis, don't you?"

Laura hesitated a long moment.

"Yes," she said, slowly at length. "I think I love him very much—sometimes. And then sometimes I think I don't. I can't tell. There are days when I'm sure of it, and there are others when I wonder if I want to be married, after all. I thought when love came it was to be—oh, uplifting, something glorious like Juliet's love or Marguerité's. Something that would—" Sud-

denly she struck her hand to her breast, her fingers shut tight closing to a fist. "Oh, something that would shake me all to pieces. I thought that was the only kind of love there was."

"Oh, that's what you read about in trashy novels," Mrs. Cressler assured her, "or the kind you see at the *matinées*. I wouldn't let that bother me, Laura. There's no doubt that *'J.'* loves *you.*"

Laura brightened a little. "Oh, no," she answered, "there's no doubt about that. It's splendid, that part of it. He seems to think there's nothing in the world too good for me. Just imagine, only yesterday I was saying something about my gloves, I really forget what —something about how hard it was for me to get the kind of gloves I liked. Would you believe it, he got me to give him my measure, and when I saw him in the evening he told me he had cabled to Brussels to some famous glovemaker and had ordered I don't know how many pairs."

"Just like him, just like him!" cried Mrs. Cressler. "I know you will be happy, Laura, dear. You can't help but be with a man who loves you as 'J.' does."

"I think I shall be happy," answered Laura, suddenly grave. "Oh, Mrs. Cressler, I want to be. I hope that I won't come to myself some day, after it is too late, and find that it was all a mistake." Her voice shook a little. "You don't know how nervous I am these

days. One minute I am one kind of girl, and the next another kind. I'm so nervous and—oh, I don't know. Oh, I guess it will be all right." She wiped her eyes, and laughed a note. "I don't see why I should cry about it," she murmured.

"Well, Laura," answered Mrs. Cressler, "if you don't love Curtis, don't marry him. That's very simple."

"It's like this, Mrs. Cressler," Laura explained. "I suppose I am very uncharitable and unchristian, but I like the people that like me, and I hate those that don't like me. I can't help it. I know it's wrong, but that's the way I am. And I love to be loved. The man that would love me the most would make me love him. And when Mr. Jadwin seems to care so much, and do so much, and—you know how I mean; it does make a difference of course. I suppose I care as much for Mr. Jadwin as I ever will care for any man. I suppose I must be cold and unemotional."

Mrs. Cressler could not restrain a movement of surprise.

"You unemotional? Why, I thought you just said, Laura, that you had imagined love would be like Juliet and like that girl in 'Faust'—that it was going to shake you all to pieces."

"Did I say that? Well, I told you I was one girl one minute and another another. I don't know myself these days. Oh, hark," she said, abruptly, as the cadence of hoofs began to make itself audible from the end of

the side-street. "That's the team now. I could recognise those horses' trot as far as I could hear it. Let's go out. I know he would like to have me there when he drives up. And you know"—she put her hand on Mrs. Cressler's arm as the two moved towards the front door—"this is all absolutely a secret as yet."

"Why, of course, Laura dear. But tell me just one thing more," Mrs. Cressler asked, in a whisper, "are you going to have a church wedding?"

"Hey, Carrie," called Mr. Cressler from the stoop, "here's J."

Laura shook her head.

"No, I want it to be very quiet—at our house. We'll go to Geneva Lake for the summer. That's why, you see, I couldn't promise to go to Oconomowoc with you."

They came out upon the front steps, Mrs. Cressler's arm around Laura's waist. It was dark by now, and the air was perceptibly warmer.

The team was swinging down the street close at hand, the hoof-beats exactly timed, as if there were but one instead of two horses.

"Well, what's the record to-night, J.?" cried Cressler, as Jadwin brought the bays to a stand at the horse-block. Jadwin did not respond until he had passed the reins to the coachman, and taking the stop-watch from the latter's hand, he drew on his cigar, and held the glowing tip to the dial.

"Eleven minutes and a quarter," he announced, "and we had to wait for the bridge at that."

He came up the steps, fanning himself with his slouch hat, and dropped into the chair that Landry had brought for him.

"Upon my word," he exclaimed, gingerly drawing off his driving-gloves, "I've no feeling in my fingers at all. Those fellows will pull my hands clean off some day."

But he was hardly settled in his place before he proposed to send the coachman home, and to take Laura for a drive towards Lincoln Park, and even a little way into the park itself. He promised to have her back within an hour.

"I haven't any hat," objected Laura. "I should love to go, but I ran over here to-night without any hat."

"Well, I wouldn't let that stand in my way, Laura," protested Mrs. Cressler. "It will be simply heavenly in the Park on such a night as this."

In the end Laura borrowed Page's hat, and Jadwin took her away. In the light of the street lamps Mrs. Cressler and the others watched them drive off, sitting side by side behind the fine horses. Jadwin, broad-shouldered, a fresh cigar in his teeth, each rein in a double turn about his large, hard hands; Laura, slim, erect, pale, her black, thick hair throwing a tragic shadow low upon her forehead.

"A fine-looking couple," commented Mr. Cressler as they disappeared.

The hoof beats died away, the team vanished. Landry Court, who stood behind the others, watching, turned to Mrs. Cressler. She thought she detected a little unsteadiness in his voice, but he repeated bravely:

"Yes, yes, that's right. They are a fine, a—a fine-looking couple together, aren't they? A fine-looking couple, to say the least."

A week went by, then two, soon May had passed. On the fifteenth of that month Laura's engagement to Curtis Jadwin was formally announced. The day of the wedding was set for the first week in June.

During this time Laura was never more changeable, more puzzling. Her vivacity seemed suddenly to have been trebled, but it was invaded frequently by strange reactions and perversities that drove her friends and family to distraction.

About a week after her talk with Mrs. Cressler, Laura broke the news to Page. It was a Monday morning. She had spent the time since breakfast in putting her bureau drawers to rights, scattering sachet powders in them, then leaving them open so as to perfume the room. At last she came into the front "upstairs sitting-room," a heap of gloves, stockings, collarettes—the odds and ends of a wildly disordered wardrobe—in her lap. She tumbled all these upon the hearthrug, and sat down upon the floor to sort them carefully. At her little desk near by, Page, in a blue and white shirt-waist and golf

skirt, her slim little ankles demurely crossed, a cone of foolscap over her forearm to guard against ink-spots, was writing in her journal. This was an interminable affair, voluminous, complex, that the young girl had kept ever since she was fifteen. She wrote in it—she hardly knew what—the small doings of the previous day, her comings and goings, accounts of dances, estimates of new acquaintances. But besides this she filled page after page with "impressions," "outpourings," queer little speculations about her soul, quotations from poets, solemn criticisms of new novels, or as often as not mere purposeless meanderings of words, exclamatory, rhapsodic —involved lucubrations quite meaningness and futile, but which at times she re-read with vague thrills of emotion and mystery.

On this occasion Page wrote rapidly and steadily for a few moments after Laura's entrance into the room. Then she paused, her eyes growing wide and thoughtful. She wrote another line and paused again. Seated on the floor, her hands full of gloves, Laura was murmuring to herself.

"Those are good . . . and those, and the black *suèdes* make eight. . . . And if I could only find the mate to this white one. . . . Ah, here it is. That makes nine, nine pair."

She put the gloves aside, and turning to the stockings drew one of the silk ones over her arm, and spread out her fingers in the foot.

"Oh, dear," she whispered, "there's a thread started, and now it will simply run the whole length. . . ."

Page's scratching paused again.

"Laura," she asked dreamily, "Laura, how do you spell 'abysmal'?"

"With a 'y,' honey," answered Laura, careful not to smile.

"Oh, Laura," asked Page, "do you ever get very, very sad without knowing why?"

"No, indeed," answered her sister, as she peeled the stocking from her arm. "When I'm sad I know just the reason, you may be sure."

Page sighed again.

"Oh, I don't know," she murmured indefinitely. "I lie awake at night sometimes and wish I were dead."

"You mustn't get morbid, honey," answered her older sister calmly. "It isn't natural for a young healthy little body like you to have such gloomy notions."

"Last night," continued Page, "I got up out of bed and sat by the window a long time. And everything was so still and beautiful, and the moonlight and all—and I said right out loud to myself,

"My breath to Heaven in vapour goes——

You know those lines from Tennyson:

"My breath to Heaven in vapour goes,
May my soul follow soon."

I said it right out loud just like that, and it was just as

though something in me had spoken. I got my journal and wrote down, 'Yet in a few days, and thee, the all-beholding sun shall see no more.' It's from Thanatopsis, you know, and I thought how beautiful it would be to leave all this world, and soar and soar, right up to higher planes and be at peace. Laura, dearest, do you think I ever ought to marry?"

"Why not, girlie? Why shouldn't you marry. Of course you'll marry some day, if you find——"

"I should like to be a nun," Page interrupted, shaking her head mournfully.

"——if you find the man who loves you," continued Laura, "and whom you—you admire and respect—whom you love. What would you say, honey, if—if your sister, if I should be married some of these days?"

Page wheeled about in her chair.

"Oh, Laura, tell me," she cried, "are you joking? Are you going to be married? Who to? I hadn't an idea, but I thought—I suspected——"

"Well," observed Laura, slowly, "I might as well tell you—someone will if I don't—Mr. Jadwin *wants* me to marry him."

"And what did you say? What did you say? Oh, I'll never tell. Oh, Laura, tell me all about it."

"Well, why shouldn't I marry him? Yes—I promised. I said yes. Why shouldn't I? He loves me, and he is rich. Isn't that enough?"

"Oh, no. It isn't. You must love—you do love him?"

"I? Love? Pooh!" cried Laura. "Indeed not. I love nobody."

"Oh, Laura," protested Page earnestly. "Don't, don't talk that way. You mustn't. It's wicked."

Laura put her head in the air.

"I wouldn't give any man that much satisfaction. I think that is the way it ought to be. A man ought to love a woman more than she loves him. It ought to be enough for him if she lets him give her everything she wants in the world. He ought to serve her like the old knights—give up his whole life to satisfy some whim of hers; and it's her part, if she likes, to be cold and distant. That's my idea of love."

"Yes, but they weren't cold and proud to their knights after they'd promised to marry them," urged Page. "They loved them in the end, and married them for love."

"Oh, 'love'!" mocked Laura. "I don't believe in love. You only get your ideas of it from trashy novels and *matinées*. Girlie," cried Laura. "I am going to have the most beautiful gowns. They're the last things that Miss Dearborn shall buy for herself, and"—she fetched a long breath—"I tell you they are going to be creations."

When at length the lunch-bell rang Laura jumped to her feet, adjusting her coiffure with thrusts of her long, white hands, the fingers extended, and ran from the

room exclaiming that the whole morning had gone and that half her bureau drawers were still in disarray.

Page, left alone, sat for a long time lost in thought, sighing deeply at intervals, then at last she wrote in her journal:

"A world without Love—oh, what an awful thing that would be. Oh, love is so beautlful—so beautiful, that it makes me sad. When I think of love in all its beauty I am sad, sad like Romola in George Eliot's well-known novel of the same name."

She locked up her journal in the desk-drawer, and wiped her pen point until it shone, upon a little square of chamois skin. Her writing-desk was a miracle of neatness, everything in its precise place, the writing-paper in geometrical parallelograms, the pen-tray neatly polished.

On the hearthrug, where Laura had sat, Page's searching eye discovered traces of her occupancy—a glove-button, a white thread, a hairpin. Page was at great pains to gather them up carefully and drop them into the waste-basket.

"Laura is so fly-away," she observed, soberly.

When Laura told the news to Aunt Wess' the little old lady showed no surprise.

"I've been expecting it of late," she remarked. "Well, Laura, Mr. Jadwin is a man of parts. Though, to tell the truth, I thought at first it was to be that Mr.

Corthell. He always seemed so distinguished-looking and elegant. I suppose now that that young Mr. Court will have a regular conniption fit."

"Oh, Landry," murmured Laura.

"Where are you going to live, Laura? Here? My word, child, don't be afraid to tell me I must pack. Why, bless you——"

"No, no," exclaimed Laura, energetically, "you are to stay right here. We'll talk it all over just as soon as I know more decidedly what our plans are to be. No, we won't live here. Mr. Jadwin is going to buy a new house—on the corner of North Avenue and State Street. It faces Lincoln Park—you know it, the Farnsworth place."

"Why, my word, Laura," cried Aunt Wess' amazed, "why, it's a palace! Of course I know it. Why, it takes in the whole block, child, and there's a conservatory pretty near as big as this house. *Well!*"

"Yes, I know," answered Laura, shaking her head. "It takes my breath away sometimes, Mr. Jadwin tells me there's an art gallery, too, with an organ in it—a full-sized church organ. Think of it. Isn't it beautiful, beautiful? Isn't it a happiness? And I'll have my own carriage and *coupé,* and oh, Aunt Wess', a saddle-horse if I want to, and a box at the opera, and a country place—that is to be bought day after to-morrow. It's at Geneva Lake. We're to go there after we are mar-

ried, and Mr. Jadwin has bought the dearest, loveliest, daintiest little steam-yacht. He showed the photograph of her yesterday. Oh, honey, honey! It all comes over me sometimes. Think, only a year ago, less than that, I was vegetating there at Barrington, among those wretched old blue-noses, helping Martha with the preserves and all and all; and now"—she threw her arms wide—"I'm just going to live. Think of it, that beautiful house, and servants, and carriages, and paintings, and, oh, honey, how I will dress the part!"

"But I wouldn't think of those things so much, Laura," answered Aunt Wess', rather seriously. "Child, you are not marrying him for carriages and organs and saddle-horses and such. You're marrying this Mr. Jadwin because you love him. Aren't you?"

"Oh," cried Laura, "I would marry a ragamuffin if he gave me all these things—gave them to me because he loved me."

Aunt Wess' stared. "I wouldn't talk that way, Laura," she remarked. "Even in fun. At least not before Page."

That same evening Jadwin came to dinner with the two sisters and their aunt. The usual evening drive with Laura was foregone for this occasion. Jadwin had stayed very late at his office, and from there was to come direct to the Dearborns. Besides that, Nip—the trotters were named Nip and Tuck—was lame.

As early as four o'clock in the afternoon Laura, sud-

denly moved by an unreasoning caprice, began to prepare an elaborate toilet. Not since the opera night had she given so much attention to her appearance. She sent out for an extraordinary quantity of flowers; flowers for the table, flowers for Page and Aunt Wess', great "American beauties" for her corsage and a huge bunch of violets for the bowl in the library. She insisted that Page should wear her smartest frock, and Mrs. Wessels her grenadine of great occasions. As for herself, she decided upon a dinner gown of black, *décolleté,* with sleeves of lace. Her hair she dressed higher than ever. She resolved upon wearing all her jewelry, and to that end put on all her rings, secured the roses in place with an amethyst brooch, caught up the little locks at the back of her head with a heart-shaped pin of tiny diamonds, and even fastened the ribbon of satin that girdled her waist, with a clasp of flawed turquoises.

Until five in the afternoon she was in the gayest spirits, and went down to the dining-room to supervise the setting of the table, singing to herself.

Then, almost at the very last, when Jadwin might be expected at any moment, her humour changed again, and again, for no discoverable reason.

Page, who came into her sister's room after dressing, to ask how she looked, found her harassed and out of sorts. She was moody, spoke in monosyllables, and suddenly declared that the wearing anxiety of house-

keeping was driving her to distraction. Of all days in the week, why had Jadwin chosen this particular one to come to dinner. Men had no sense, could not appreciate a woman's difficulties. Oh, she would be glad when the evening was over.

Then, as an ultimate disaster, she declared that she herself looked "Dutchy." There was no style, no smartness to her dress; her hair was arranged unbecomingly; she was growing thin, peaked. In a word, she looked "Dutchy."

All at once she flung off her roses and dropped into a chair.

"I will not go down to-night," she cried. "You and Aunt Wess' must make out to receive Mr. Jadwin. I simply will not see anyone to-night, Mr. Jadwin least of all. Tell him I'm gone to bed sick—which is the truth, I am going to bed, my head is splitting."

All persuasion, entreaty, or cajolery availed nothing. Neither Page nor Aunt Wess' could shake her decision. At last Page hazarded a remonstrance to the effect that if she had known that Laura was not going to be at dinner she would not have taken such pains with her own toilet.

Promptly thereat Laura lost her temper.

"I do declare, Page," she exclaimed, "it seems to me that I get very little thanks for ever taking any interest in your personal appearance. There is not a girl in

Chicago—no millionaire's daughter—has any prettier gowns than you. I plan and plan, and go to the most expensive dressmakers so that you will be well dressed, and just as soon as I dare to express the desire to see you appear like a gentlewoman, I get it thrown in my face. And why do I do it? I'm sure I don't know. It's because I'm a poor weak, foolish, indulgent sister. I've given up the idea of ever being loved by you; but I do insist on being respected." Laura rose, stately, severe. It was the "grand manner" now, unequivocally, unmistakably. "I do insist upon being respected," she repeated. "It would be wrong and wicked of me to allow you to ignore and neglect my every wish. I'll not have it, I'll not tolerate it."

Page, aroused, indignant, disdained an answer, but drew in her breath and held it hard, her lips tight pressed.

"It's all very well for you to pose, miss," Laura went on; "to pose as injured innocence. But you understand very well what I mean. If you don't love me, at least I shall not allow you to flout me—deliberately, defiantly. And it does seem strange," she added, her voice beginning to break, "that when we two are all alone in the world, when there's no father or mother—and you are all I have, and when I love you as I do, that there might be on your part—a little consideration—when I only want to be loved for my own sake, and not—and not——when I want to be, oh, loved—loved—loved———"

The two sisters were in each other's arms by now, and Page was crying no less than Laura.

"Oh, little sister," exclaimed Laura, "I know you love me. I know you do. I didn't mean to say that. You must forgive me and be very kind to me these days. I know I'm cross, but sometimes these days I'm so excited and nervous I can't help it, and you must try to bear with me. Hark, there's the bell."

Listening, they heard the servant open the door, and then the sound of Jadwin's voice and the clank of his cane in the porcelain cane-rack. But still Laura could not be persuaded to go down. No, she was going to bed; she had neuralgia; she was too nervous to so much as think. Her gown was "Dutchy." And in the end, so unshakable was her resolve, that Page and her aunt had to sit through the dinner with Jadwin and entertain him as best they could.

But as the coffee was being served the three received a genuine surprise. Laura appeared. All her finery was laid off. She wore the simplest, the most veritably monastic, of her dresses, plain to the point of severity. Her hands were bare of rings. Not a single jewel, not even the most modest ornament relieved her sober appearance. She was very quiet, spoke in a low voice, and declared she had come down only to drink a glass of mineral water and then to return at once to her room.

As a matter of fact, she did nothing of the kind. The

others prevailed upon her to take a cup of coffee. Then the dessert was recalled, and, forgetting herself in an animated discussion with Jadwin as to the name of their steam-yacht, she ate two plates of wine-jelly before she was aware. She expressed a doubt as to whether a little salad would do her good, and after a vehement exhortation from Jadwin, allowed herself to be persuaded into accepting a sufficiently generous amount.

"I think a classical name would be best for the boat," she declared. "Something like 'Arethusa' or 'The Nereid.'"

They rose from the table and passed into the library. The evening was sultry, threatening a rain-storm, and they preferred not to sit on the "stoop." Jadwin lit a cigar; he still wore his business clothes—the inevitable "cutaway," white waistcoat, and grey trousers of the middle-aged man of affairs.

"Oh, call her the 'Artemis,'" suggested Page.

"Well now, to tell the truth," observed Jadwin, "those names look pretty in print; but somehow I don't fancy them. They're hard to read, and they sound somehow frilled up and fancy. But if you're satisfied, Laura——"

"I knew a young man once," began Aunt Wess', "who had a boat—that was when we lived at Kenwood and Mr. Wessels belonged to the 'Farragut'—and this young man had a boat he called 'Fanchon.' He got

tipped over in her one day, he and the three daughters of a lady I knew well, and two days afterward they found them at the bottom of the lake, all holding on to each other; and they fetched them up just like that in one piece. The mother of those girls never smiled once since that day, and her hair turned snow white. That was in 'seventy-nine. I remember it perfectly. The boat's name was 'Fanchon.' "

"But that was a sail boat, Aunt Wess'," objected Laura. "Ours is a steam-yacht. There's all the difference in the world."

"I guess they're all pretty risky, those pleasure-boats," answered Aunt Wess'. "My word, you couldn't get me to set foot on one."

Jadwin nodded his head at Laura, his eyes twinkling.

"Well, we'll leave 'em all at home, Laura, when we go," he said.

A little later one of Page's "young men" called to see her, and Page took him off into the drawing-room across the hall. Mrs. Wessels seized upon the occasion to slip away unobserved, and Laura and Jadwin were left alone.

"Well, my girl," began Jadwin, "how's the day gone with you?"

She had been seated at the centre table, by the drop-light—the only light in the room—turning over the leaves of "The Age of Fable," looking for graceful and

appropriate names for the yacht. Jadwin leaned over her and put his hand upon her shoulder.

"Oh, about the same as usual," she answered. "I told Page and Aunt Wess' this morning."

"What did they have to say?" Jadwin laid a soft but clumsy hand upon Laura's head, adding, "Laura, you have the most wonderful hair I ever saw."

"Oh, they were not surprised. Curtis, don't, you are mussing me." She moved her head impatiently; but then smiling, as if to mitigate her abruptness, said, "It always makes me nervous to have my hair touched. No, they were not surprised; unless it was that we were to be married so soon. They were surprised at that. You know I always said it was too soon. Why not put it off, Curtis—until the winter?"

But he scouted this, and then, as she returned to the subject again, interrupted her, drawing some papers from his pocket.

"Oh, by the way," he said, "here are the sketch plans for the alterations of the house at Geneva. The contractor brought them to the office to-day. He's made that change about the dining-room."

"Oh," exclaimed Laura, interested at once, "you mean about building on the conservatory?"

"Hum—no," answered Jadwin a little slowly. "You see, Laura, the difficulty is in getting the thing done this summer. When we go up there we want every-

thing finished, don't we? We don't want a lot of workmen clattering around. I thought maybe we could wait about that conservatory till next year, if you didn't mind."

Laura acquiesced readily enough, but Jadwin could see that she was a little disappointed. Thoughtful, he tugged his mustache in silence for a moment. Perhaps, after all, it could be arranged. Then an idea presented itself to him. Smiling a little awkwardly, he said:

"Laura, I tell you what. I'll make a bargain with you."

She looked up as he hesitated. Jadwin sat down at the table opposite her and leaned forward upon his folded arms.

"Do you know," he began, "I happened to think— Well, here's what I mean," he suddenly declared decisively. "Do you know, Laura, that ever since we've been engaged you've never— Well, you've never— never kissed me of your own accord. It's foolish to talk that way now, isn't it? But, by George! That would be—would be such a wonderful thing for me. I know," he hastened to add, "I know, Laura, you aren't demonstrative. I ought not to expect, maybe, that you— Well, maybe it isn't much. But I was thinking awhile ago that there wouldn't be a sweeter thing imaginable for me than if my own girl would come up to me some time—when I wasn't thinking—and of her own accord put her two arms around me and kiss me,

And—well, I was thinking about it, and—" He hesitated again, then finished abruptly with, "And it occurred to me that you never had."

Laura made no answer, but smiled rather indefinitely, as she continued to search the pages of the book, her head to one side.

Jadwin continued:

"We'll call it a bargain. Some day—before very long, mind you—you are going to kiss me—that way, understand, of your own accord, when I'm not thinking of it; and I'll get that conservatory in for you. I'll manage it somehow. I'll start those fellows at it to-morrow—twenty of 'em if it's necessary. How about it? Is it a bargain? Some day before long. What do you say?"

Laura hesitated, singularly embarrassed, unable to find the right words.

"Is it a bargain?" persisted Jadwin.

"Oh, if you put it that way," she murmured, "I suppose so—yes."

"You won't forget, because I shan't speak about it again. Promise you won't forget."

"No, I won't forget. Why not call her the 'Thetis?'"

"I was going to suggest the 'Dart,' or the 'Swallow,' or the 'Arrow.' Something like that—to give a notion of speed."

"No. I like the 'Thetis' best."

"That settles it then. She's your steam-yacht, Laura."

Later on, when Jadwin was preparing to depart, they stood for a moment in the hallway, while he drew on his gloves and took a fresh cigar from his case.

"I'll call for you here at about ten," he said. "Will that do?"

He spoke of the following morning. He had planned to take Page, Mrs. Wessels, and Laura on a day's excursion to Geneva Lake to see how work was progressing on the country house. Jadwin had set his mind upon passing the summer months after the marriage at the lake, and as the early date of the ceremony made it impossible to erect a new building, he had bought, and was now causing to be remodelled, an old but very well constructed house just outside of the town and once occupied by a local magistrate. The grounds were ample, filled with shade and fruit trees, and fronted upon the lake. Laura had never seen her future country home. But for the past month Jadwin had had a small army of workmen and mechanics busy about the place, and had managed to galvanise the contractors with some of his own energy and persistence. There was every probability that the house and grounds would be finished in time.

"Very well," said Laura, in answer to his question, "at ten we'll be ready. Good-night." She held out her hand. But Jadwin put it quickly aside, and took

her swiftly and strongly into his arms, and turning her face to his, kissed her cheek again and again.

Laura submitted, protesting:

"Curtis! Such foolishness. Oh, dear; can't you love me without crumpling me so? Curtis! Please. You are so rough with me, dear."

She pulled away from him, and looked up into his face, surprised to find it suddenly flushed; his eyes were flashing.

"My God," he murmured, with a quick intake of breath, "my God, how I love you, my girl! Just the touch of your hand, the smell of your hair. Oh, sweetheart. It is wonderful! Wonderful!" Then abruptly he was master of himself again.

"Good-night," he said. "Good-night. God bless you," and with the words was gone.

They were married on the last day of June of that summer at eleven o'clock in the morning in the church opposite Laura's house—the Episcopalian church of which she was a member. The wedding was very quiet. Only the Cresslers, Miss Gretry, Page, and Aunt Wess' were present. Immediately afterward the couple were to take the train for Geneva Lake—Jadwin having chartered a car for the occasion.

But the weather on the wedding day was abominable. A warm drizzle, which had set in early in the morning, developed by eleven o'clock into a steady down-

pour, accompanied by sullen grumblings of very distant thunder.

About an hour before the appointed time Laura insisted that her aunt and sister should leave her. She would allow only Mrs. Cressler to help her. The time passed. The rain continued to fall. At last it wanted but fifteen minutes to eleven.

Page and Aunt Wess', who presented themselves at the church in advance of the others, found the interior cool, dark, and damp. They sat down in a front pew, talking in whispers, looking about them. Druggeting shrouded the reader's stand, the baptismal font, and bishop's chair. Every footfall and every minute sound echoed noisily from the dark vaulting of the nave and chancel. The janitor or sexton, a severe old fellow, who wore a skull cap and loose slippers, was making a great to-do with a pile of pew cushions in a remote corner. The rain drummed with incessant monotony upon the slates overhead, and upon the stained windows on either hand. Page, who attended the church regularly every Sunday morning, now found it all strangely unfamiliar. The saints in the windows looked odd and unecclesiastical; the whole suggestion of the place was uncanonical. In the organ-loft a tuner was at work upon the organ, and from time to time the distant mumbling of the thunder was mingled with a sonorous, prolonged note from the pipes.

"My word, how it is raining," whispered Aunt Wess', as the pour upon the roof suddenly swelled in volume.

But Page had taken a prayer-book from the rack, and kneeling upon a hassock was repeating the Litany to herself.

It annoyed Aunt Wess'. Excited, aroused, the little old lady was never more in need of a listener. Would Page never be through?

"And Laura's new frock," she whispered, vaguely. "It's going to be ruined."

Page, her lips forming the words, "Good Lord deliver us," fixed her aunt with a reproving glance. To pass the time Aunt Wess' began counting the pews, missing a number here and there, confusing herself, always obliged to begin over again. From the direction of the vestry room came the sound of a closing door. Then all fell silent again. Even the shuffling of the janitor ceased for an instant.

"Isn't it still?" murmured Aunt Wess', her head in the air. "I wonder if that was them. I heard a door slam. They tell me that the rector has been married three times." Page, unheeding and demure, turned a leaf, and began with "All those who travel by land or water." Mr. Cressler and young Miss Gretry appeared. They took their seats behind Page and Aunt Wess', and the party exchanged greetings in low voices. Page reluctantly laid down her prayer-book.

"Laura will be over soon," whispered Mr. Cressler. "Carrie is with her. I'm going into the vestry room. J. has just come." He took himself off, walking upon his tiptoes.

Aunt Wess' turned to Page, repeating:

"Do you know they say this rector has been married three times?"

But Page was once more deep in her prayer-book, so the little old lady addressed her remark to the Gretry girl.

This other, however, her lips tightly compressed, made a despairing gesture with her hand, and at length managed to say:

"Can't talk."

"Why, heavens, child, whatever is the matter?"

"Makes them worse—when I open my mouth—I've got the hiccoughs."

Aunt Wess' flounced back in her seat, exasperated, out of sorts.

"Well, my word," she murmured to herself, "I never saw such girls."

"Preserve to our use the kindly fruits of the earth," continued Page.

Isabel Gretry's hiccoughs drove Aunt Wess' into "the fidgets." They "got on her nerves." What with them and Page's uninterrupted murmur, she was at length obliged to sit in the far end of the pew, and just

as she had settled herself a second time the door of the vestry-room opened and the wedding party came out; first Mrs. Cressler, then Laura, then Jadwin and Cressler, and then, robed in billowing white, venerable, his prayer-book in his hand, the bishop of the diocese himself. Last of all came the clerk, osseous, perfumed, a gardenia in the lapel of his frock-coat, terribly excited, and hurrying about on tiptoe, saying "Sh! Sh!" as a matter of principle.

Jadwin wore a new frock-coat and a resplendent Ascot scarf, which Mr. Cressler had bought for him, and Page knew at a glance that he was agitated beyond all measure, and was keeping himself in hand only by a tremendous effort. She could guess that his teeth were clenched. He stood by Cressler's side, his head bent forward, his hands—the fingers incessantly twisting and untwisting—clasped behind his back. Never for once did his eyes leave Laura's face.

She herself was absolutely calm, only a little paler perhaps than usual; but never more beautiful, never more charming. Abandoning for this once her accustomed black, she wore a tan travelling-dress, tailor made, very smart, a picture hat with heavy plumes set off with a clasp of rhinestones, while into her belt was thrust a great bunch of violets. She drew off her gloves and handed them to Mrs. Cressler. At the same moment Page began to cry softly to herself.

"There's the last of Laura," she whimpered. "There's the last of my dear sister for me."

Aunt Wess' fixed her with a distressful gaze. She sniffed once or twice, and then began fumbling in her reticule for her handkerchief.

"If only her dear father were here," she whispered huskily. "And to think that's the same little girl I used to rap on the head with my thimble for annoying the cat! Oh, if Jonas could be here this day."

"She'll never be the same to me after now," sobbed Page, and as she spoke the Gretry girl, hypnotised with emotion and taken all unawares, gave vent to a shrill hiccough, a veritable yelp, that woke an explosive echo in every corner of the building.

Page could not restrain a giggle, and the giggle strangled with the sobs in her throat, so that the little girl was not far from hysterics.

And just then a sonorous voice, magnificent, orotund, began suddenly from the chancel with the words:

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company to join together this Man and this Woman in holy matrimony."

Promptly a spirit of reverence, not to say solemnity, pervaded the entire surroundings. The building no longer appeared secular, unecclesiastical. Not in the midst of all the pomp and ceremonial of the Easter

service had the chancel and high altar disengaged a more compelling influence. All other intrusive noises died away; the organ was hushed; the fussy janitor was nowhere in sight; the outside clamour of the city seemed dwindling to the faintest, most distant vibration; the whole world was suddenly removed, while the great moment in the lives of the Man and the Woman began.

Page held her breath; the intensity of the situation seemed to her, almost physically, straining tighter and tighter with every passing instant. She was awed, stricken; and Laura appeared to her to be all at once a woman transfigured, semi-angelic, unknowable, exalted. The solemnity of those prolonged, canorous syllables: "I require and charge you both, as ye shall answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed," weighed down upon her spirits with an almost intolerable majesty. Oh, it was all very well to speak lightly of marriage, to consider it in a vein of mirth. It was a very solemn affair, after all; and she herself, Page Dearborn, was a wicked, wicked girl, full of sins, full of deceits and frivolities, meriting of punishment—on "that dreadful day of judgment." Only last week she had deceived Aunt Wess' in the matter of one of her "young men." It was time she stopped. To-day would mark a change. Henceforward, she resolved, she would lead a new life.

"God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost . . ."

To Page's mind the venerable bishop's voice was filling all the church, as on the day of Pentecost, when the apostles received the Holy Ghost, the building was filled with a "mighty rushing wind."

She knelt down again, but could not bring herself to close her eyes completely. From under her lids she still watched her sister and Jadwin. How Laura must be feeling now! She was, in fact, very pale. There was emotion in Jadwin's eyes. Page could see them plainly. It seemed beautiful that even he, the strong, modern man-of-affairs, should be so moved. How he must love Laura. He was fine, he was noble; and all at once this fineness and nobility of his so affected her that she began to cry again. Then suddenly came the words:

" . . . That in the world to come ye may have life everlasting. Amen."

There was a moment's silence, then the group about the altar rail broke up.

"Come," said Aunt Wess', getting to her feet, "it's all over, Page. Come, and kiss your sister—Mrs. Jadwin."

In the vestry-room Laura stood for a moment, while one after another of the wedding-party—even Mr. Cressler—kissed her. When Page's turn came, the two sisters

held each other in a close embrace a long moment, but Laura's eyes were always dry. Of all present she was the least excited.

"Here's something," vociferated the ubiquitous clerk, pushing his way forward. "It was on the table when we came out just now. The sexton says a messenger boy brought it. It's for Mrs. Jadwin."

He handed her a large box. Laura opened it. Inside was a great sheaf of Jacqueminot roses and a card, on which was written:

"May that same happiness which you have always inspired in the lives and memories of all who know you be with you always. "Yrs. S. C."

The party, emerging from the church, hurried across the street to the Dearborns' home, where Laura and Jadwin were to get their valises and hand-bags. Jadwin's carriage was already at the door.

They all assembled in the parlour, everyone talking at once, while the servants, bare-headed, carried the baggage down to the carriage.

"Oh, wait—wait a minute, I'd forgotten something," cried Laura.

"What is it? Here, I'll get it for you," cried Jadwin and Cressler as she started toward the door. But she waved them off, crying:

"No,, no. It's nothing. You wouldn't know where to look."

Alone she ran up the stairs, and gained the second story; then paused a moment on the landing to get her breath and to listen. The rooms near by were quiet, deserted. From below she could hear the voices of the others—their laughter and gaiety. She turned about, and went from room to room, looking long into each; first Aunt Wess's bedroom, then Page's, then the "front sitting-room," then, lastly, her own room. It was still in the disorder caused by that eventful morning; many of the ornaments—her own cherished knick-knacks—were gone, packed and shipped to her new home the day before. Her writing-desk and bureau were bare. On the backs of chairs, and across the footboard of the bed, were the odds and ends of dress she was never to wear again.

For a long time Laura stood looking silently at the empty room. Here she had lived the happiest period of her life; not an object there, however small, that was not hallowed by association. Now she was leaving it forever. Now the new life, the Untried, was to begin. Forever the old days, the old life were gone. Girlhood was gone; the Laura Dearborn that only last night had pressed the pillows of that bed, where was she now? Where was the little black-haired girl of Barrington?

And what was this new life to which she was going

forth, under these leaden skies, under this warm mist of rain? The tears—at last—were in her eyes, and the sob in her throat, and she found herself, as she leaned an arm upon the lintel of the door, whispering:

"Good-bye. Good-bye. Good-bye."

Then suddenly Laura, reckless of her wedding finery, forgetful of trivialities, crossed the room and knelt down at the side of the bed. Her head in her folded arms, she prayed—prayed in the little unstudied words of her childhood, prayed that God would take care of her and make her a good girl; prayed that she might be happy; prayed to God to help her in the new life, and that she should be a good and loyal wife.

And then as she knelt there, all at once she felt an arm, strong, heavy even, laid upon her. She raised her head and looked—for the first time—direct into her husband's eyes.

"I knew—" began Jadwin. "I thought— Dear, I understand, I understand."

He said no more than that. But suddenly Laura knew that he, Jadwin, her husband, did "understand," and she discovered, too, in that moment just what it meant to be completely, thoroughly understood—understood without chance of misapprehension, without shadow of doubt; understood to her heart's heart. And with the knowledge a new feeling was born within her. No woman, not her dearest friend; not even Page had ever

seemed so close to her as did her husband now. How could she be unhappy henceforward? The future was already brightening.

Suddenly she threw both arms around his neck, and drawing his face down to her, kissed him again and again, and pressed her wet cheek to his—tear-stained like her own.

"It's going to be all right, dear," he said, as she stood from him, though still holding his hand. "It's going to be all right."

"Yes, yes, all right, all right," she assented. "I never seemed to realise it till this minute. From the first I must have loved you without knowing it. And I've been cold and hard to you, and now I'm sorry, sorry. You were wrong, remember that time in the library, when you said I was undemonstrative. I'm not. I love you dearly, dearly, and never for once, for one little moment, am I ever going to allow you to forget it."

Suddenly, as Jadwin recalled the incident of which she spoke, an idea occurred to him.

"Oh, our bargain—remember? You didn't forget, after all."

"I did. I did," she cried. "I did forget it. That's the very sweetest thing about it."

VI.

THE months passed. Soon three years had gone by, and the third winter since the ceremony in St. James' Church drew to its close.

Since that day when—acting upon the foreknowledge of the French import duty—Jadwin had sold his million of bushels short, the price of wheat had been steadily going down. From ninety-three and ninety-four it had dropped to the eighties. Heavy crops the world over had helped the decline. No one was willing to buy wheat. The Bear leaders were strong, unassailable. Lower and lower sagged the price; now it was seventy-five, now seventy-two. From all parts of the country in solid, waveless tides wheat—the mass of it incessantly crushing down the price—came rolling in upon Chicago and the Board of Trade Pit. All over the world the farmers saw season after season of good crops. They were good in the Argentine Republic, and on the Russian steppes. In India, on the little farms of Burmah, of Mysore, and of Sind the grain, year after year, headed out fat, heavy, and well-favoured. In the great San Joaquin valley of California the ranches were one welter of fertility. All over the United States, from the Dakotas, from Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and Illinois, from all the wheat belt came steadily the reports of good crops.

But at the same time the low price of grain kept the

farmers poor. New mortgages were added to farms already heavily "papered;" even the crops were mortgaged in advance. No new farm implements were bought. Throughout the farming communities of the "Middle West" there were no longer purchases of buggies and parlour organs. Somewhere in other remoter corners of the world the cheap wheat, that meant cheap bread, made living easy and induced prosperity, but in the United States the poverty of the farmer worked upward through the cogs and wheels of the whole great machine of business. It was as though a lubricant had dried up. The cogs and wheels worked slowly and with dislocations. Things were a little out of joint. Wall Street stocks were down. In a word, "times were bad." Thus for three years. It became a proverb on the Chicago Board of Trade that the quickest way to make money was to sell wheat short. One could with almost absolute certainty be sure of buying cheaper than one had sold. And that peculiar, indefinite thing known—among the most unsentimental men in the world—as "sentiment" prevailed more and more strongly in favour of low prices. "The 'sentiment,'" said the market reports, "was bearish;" and the traders, speculators, eighth-chasers, scalpers, brokers, bucket-shop men, and the like—all the world of La Salle Street—had become so accustomed to these "Bear conditions," that it was hard to believe that they would not continue indefinitely.

Jadwin, inevitably, had been again drawn into the troubled waters of the Pit. Always, as from the very first, a Bear, he had once more raided the market, and had once more been successful. Two months after this raid he and Gretry planned still another coup, a deal of greater magnitude than any they had previously hazarded. Laura, who knew very little of her husband's affairs—to which he seldom alluded—saw by the daily papers that at one stage of the affair the "deal" trembled to its base.

But Jadwin was by now "blooded to the game." He no longer needed Gretry's urging to spur him. He had developed into a strategist, bold, of inconceivable effrontery, delighting in the shock of battle, never more jovial, more daring than when under stress of the most merciless attack. On this occasion, when the "other side" resorted to the usual tactics to drive him from the Pit, he led on his enemies to make one single false step. Instantly—disregarding Gretry's entreaties as to caution—Jadwin had brought the vast bulk of his entire fortune to bear, in the manner of a general concentrating his heavy artillery, and crushed the opposition with appalling swiftness.

He issued from the grapple triumphantly, and it was not till long afterward that Laura knew how near, for a few hours, he had been to defeat.

And again the price of wheat declined. In the first week in April, at the end of the third winter of Jadwin's

married life, May wheat was selling on the floor of the Chicago Board of Trade at sixty-four, the July option at sixty-five, the September at sixty-six and an eighth. During February of the same year Jadwin had sold short five hundred thousand bushels of May. He believed with Gretry and with the majority of the professional traders that the price would go to sixty.

March passed without any further decline. All through this month and through the first days of April Jadwin was unusually thoughtful. His short wheat gave him no concern. He was now so rich that a mere half-million bushels was not a matter for anxiety. It was the "situation" that arrested his attention.

In some indefinable way, warned by that blessed sixth sense that had made him the successful speculator he was, he felt that somewhere, at some time during the course of the winter, a change had quietly, gradually come about, that it was even then operating. The conditions that had prevailed so consistently for three years, were they now to be shifted a little? He did not know, he could not say. But in the plexus of financial affairs in which he moved and lived he felt—a difference.

For one thing "times" were better, business was better. He could not fail to see that trade was picking up. In dry goods, in hardware, in manufactures there seemed to be a different spirit, and he could imagine that it was a spirit of optimism. There, in that great

city where the Heart of the Nation beat, where the diseases of the times, or the times' healthful activities were instantly reflected, Jadwin sensed a more rapid, an easier, more untroubled run of life blood. All through the Body of Things, money, the vital fluid, seemed to be flowing more easily. People seemed richer, the banks were lending more, securities seemed stable, solid. In New York, stocks were booming. Men were making money—were making it, spending it, lending it, exchanging it. Instead of being congested in vaults, safes, and cash boxes, tight, hard, congealed, it was loosening, and, as it were, liquefying, so that it spread and spread and permeated the entire community. The People had money. They were willing to take chances.

So much for the financial conditions.

The spring had been backward, cold, bitter, inhospitable, and Jadwin began to suspect that the wheat crop of his native country, that for so long had been generous, and of excellent quality, was now to prove—it seemed quite possible—scant and of poor condition. He began to watch the weather, and to keep an eye upon the reports from the little county seats and "centres" in the winter wheat States. These, in part, seemed to confirm his suspicions.

From Keokuk, in Iowa, came the news that winter wheat was suffering from want of moisture. Benedict, Yates' Centre, and Douglass, in southeastern Kansas,

sent in reports of dry, windy weather that was killing the young grain in every direction, and the same conditions seemed to prevail in the central counties. In Illinois, from Quincy and Waterloo in the west, and from Ridgway in the south, reports came steadily to hand of freezing weather and bitter winds. All through the lower portions of the State the snowfall during the winter had not been heavy enough to protect the seeded grain. But the Ohio crop, it would appear, was promising enough, as was also that of Missouri. In Indiana, however, Jadwin could guess that the hopes of even a moderate yield were fated to be disappointed; persistent cold weather, winter continuing almost up to the first of April, seemed to have definitely settled the question.

But more especially Jadwin watched Nebraska, that State which is one single vast wheat field. How would Nebraska do, Nebraska which alone might feed an entire nation? County seat after county seat began to send in its reports. All over the State the grip of winter held firm even yet. The wheat had been battered by incessant gales, had been nipped and harried by frost; everywhere the young half-grown grain seemed to be perishing. It was a massacre, a veritable slaughter.

But, for all this, nothing could be decided as yet. Other winter wheat States, from which returns were as yet only partial, might easily compensate for the failures elsewhere, and besides all that, the Bears of the Board

of Trade might keep the price inert even in face of the news of short yields. As a matter of fact, the more important and stronger Bear traders were already piping their usual strain. Prices were bound to decline, the three years' sagging was not over yet. They, the Bears, were too strong; no Bull news could frighten them. Somehow there was bound to be plenty of wheat. In face of the rumours of a short crop they kept the price inert, weak.

On the tenth of April came the Government report on the condition of winter wheat. It announced an average far below any known for ten years past. On March tenth the same bulletin had shown a moderate supply in farmers' hands, less than one hundred million bushels, in fact, and a visible supply of less than forty millions.

The Bear leaders promptly set to work to discount this news. They showed how certain foreign conditions would more than offset the effect of a poor American harvest. They pointed out the fact that the Government report on condition was brought up only to the first of April, and that since that time the weather in the wheat belt had been favourable beyond the wildest hopes.

The April report was made public on the afternoon of the tenth of the month. That same evening Jadwin invited Gretry and his wife to dine at the new house on North Avenue; and after dinner, leaving Mrs. Gretry and Laura in the drawing-room, he brought the broker up to the billiard-room for a game of pool.

But when Gretry had put the balls in the triangle, the two men did not begin to play at once. Jadwin had asked the question that had been uppermost in the minds of each during dinner.

"Well, Sam," he had said, by way of a beginning, "what do you think of this Government report?"

The broker chalked his cue placidly.

"I expect there'll be a bit of reaction on the strength of it, but the market will go off again. I said wheat would go to sixty, and I still say it. It's a long time between now and May."

"I wasn't thinking of crop conditions only," observed Jadwin. "Sam, we're going to have better times and higher prices this summer."

Gretry shook his head and entered into a long argument to show that Jadwin was wrong.

But Jadwin refused to be convinced. All at once he laid the flat of his hand upon the table.

"Sam, we've touched bottom," he declared, "touched bottom all along the line. It's a paper dime to the Sub-Treasury."

"I don't care about the rest of the line," said the broker doggedly, sitting on the edge of the table, "wheat will go to sixty." He indicated the nest of balls with a movement of his chin. "Will you break?"

Jadwin broke and scored, leaving one ball three

x Five cents Fiat nine dollars.

inches in front of a corner pocket. He called the shot, and as he drew back his cue he said, deliberately:

"Just as sure as I make this pocket wheat will—not go—off—another—*cent.*"

With the last word he drove the ball home and straightened up. Gretry laid down his cue and looked at him quickly. But he did not speak. Jadwin sat down on one of the straight-backed chairs upon the raised platform against the wall and rested his elbows upon his knees.

"Sam," he said, "the time is come for a great big change." He emphasised the word with a tap of his cue upon the floor. "We can't play our game the way we've been playing it the last three years. We've been hammering wheat down and down and down, till we've got it below the cost of production; and now she won't go any further with all the hammering in the world. The other fellows, the rest of this Bear crowd, don't seem to see it, but I see it. Before fall we're going to have higher prices. Wheat is going up, and when it does I mean to be right there."

"We're going to have a dull market right up to the beginning of winter," persisted the other.

"Come and say that to me at the beginning of winter, then," Jadwin retorted. "Look here, Sam, I'm short of May five hundred thousand bushels, and to-

morrow morning you are going to send your boys on the floor for me and close that trade."

"You're crazy, 'J.,'" protested the broker. "Hold on another month, and I promise you, you'll thank me."

"Not another day, not another hour. This Bear campaign of ours has come to an end. That's said and signed."

"Why, it's just in its prime," protested the broker. "Great heavens, you mustn't get out of the game now, after hanging on for three years."

"I'm not going to get out of it."

"Why, good Lord!" said Gretry, "you don't mean to say that——"

"That I'm going over. That's exactly what I do mean. I'm going to change over so quick to the other side that I'll be there before you can take off your hat. I'm done with a Bear game. It was good while it lasted, but we've worked it for all there was in it. I'm not only going to cover my May shorts and get out of that trade, but"—Jadwin leaned forward and struck his hand upon his knee— "but I'm going to *buy*. I'm going to buy September wheat, and I'm going to buy it to-morrow, five hundred thousand bushels of it, and if the market goes as I think it will later on, I'm going to buy more. I'm no Bear any longer. I'm going to boost this market right through till the last bell rings; and from now on Curtis Jadwin spells B-u double l—Bull."

"They'll slaughter you," said Gretry, "slaughter you in cold blood. You're just one man against a gang—a gang of cutthroats. Those Bears have got millions and millions back of them. You don't suppose, do you, that old man Crookes, or Kenniston, or little Sweeny, or all that lot would give you one little bit of a chance for your life if they got a grip on you. Cover your shorts if you want to, but, for God's sake, don't begin to buy in the same breath. You wait awhile. If this market has touched bottom, we'll be able to tell in a few days. I'll admit, for the sake of argument, that just now there's a pause. But nobody can tell whether it will turn up or down yet. Now's the time to be conservative, to play it cautious."

"If I was conservative and cautious," answered Jadwin, "I wouldn't be in this game at all. I'd be buying U. S. four percents. That's the big mistake so many of these fellows down here make. They go into a game where the only ones who can possibly win are the ones who take big chances, and then they try to play the thing cautiously. If I wait awhile till the market turns up and everybody is buying, how am I any the better off? No, sir, you buy the September option for me to-morrow—five hundred thousand bushels. I deposited the margin to your credit in the Illinois Trust this afternoon."

There was a long silence. Gretry spun a ball between his fingers, top-fashion.

"Well," he said at last, hesitatingly, "well—I don't know, 'J.'—you are either Napoleonic—or—or a colossal idiot."

"Neither one nor the other, Samuel. I'm just using a little commonsense. . . . Is it your shot?"

"I'm blessed if I know."

"Well, we'll start a new game. Sam, I'll give you six balls and beat you in"—he looked at his watch—"beat you before half-past nine."

"For a dollar?"

"I never bet, Sam, and you know it."

Half an hour later Jadwin said:

"Shall we go down and join the ladies? Don't put out your cigar. That's one bargain I made with Laura before we moved in here—that smoking was allowable everywhere."

"Room enough, I guess," observed the broker, as the two stepped into the elevator. "How many rooms have you got here, by the way?"

"Upon my word, I don't know," answered Jadwin. "I discovered a new one yesterday. Fact. I was having a look around, and I came out into a little kind of smoking-room or other that, I swear, I'd never seen before. I had to get Laura to tell me about it."

The elevator sank to the lower floor, and Jadwin and the broker stepped out into the main hallway. From the drawing-room near by came the sound of women's voices.

"Before we go in," said Jadwin, "I want you to see our art gallery and the organ. Last time you were up, remember, the men were still at work in here."

They passed down a broad corridor, and at the end, just before parting the heavy, sombre curtains, Jadwin pressed a couple of electric buttons, and in the open space above the curtain sprang up a lambent, steady glow.

The broker, as he entered, gave a long whistle. The art gallery took in the height of two of the stories of the house. It was shaped like a rotunda, and topped with a vast airy dome of coloured glass. Here and there about the room were glass cabinets full of bibelots, ivory statuettes, old snuff boxes, fans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The walls themselves were covered with a multitude of pictures, oils, water-colours, with one or two pastels.

But to the left of the entrance, let into the frame of the building, stood a great organ, large enough for a cathedral, and giving to view, in the dulled incandescence of the electrics, its sheaves of mighty pipes.

"Well, this is something like," exclaimed the broker.

"I don't know much about 'em myself," hazarded Jadwin, looking at the pictures, "but Laura can tell you. We bought most of 'em while we were abroad, year before last. Laura says this is the best." He indicated a large "Bougereau" that represented a group of nymphs bathing in a woodland pool.

"H'm!" said the broker, "you wouldn't want some of your Sunday-school superintendents to see this now. This is what the boys down on the Board would call a bar-room picture."

But Jadwin did not laugh.

"It never struck me in just that way," he said, gravely.

"It's a fine piece of work, though," Gretry hastened to add. "Fine, great colouring."

"I like this one pretty well," continued Jadwin, moving to a canvas by Detaille. It was one of the inevitable studies of a cuirassier; in this case a trumpeter, one arm high in the air, the hand clutching the trumpet, the horse, foam-flecked, at a furious gallop. In the rear, through clouds of dust, the rest of the squadron was indicated by a few points of colour.

"Yes, that's pretty neat," concurred Gretry. "He's sure got a gait on. Lord, what a lot of accoutrements those French fellows stick on. Now our boys would chuck about three-fourths of that truck before going into action. . . . Queer way these artists work," he went on, peering close to the canvas. "Look at it close up and it's just a lot of little daubs, but you get off a distance"—he drew back, cocking his head to one side—"and you see now. Hey—see how the thing bunches up. Pretty neat, isn't it?" He turned from the picture and rolled his eyes about the room.

"Well, well," he murmured. "This certainly is the real thing, J. I suppose, now, it all represents a pretty big pot of money."

"I'm not quite used to it yet myself," said Jadwin. "I was in here last Sunday, thinking it all over, the new house, and the money and all. And it struck me as kind of queer the way things have turned out for me. . . . Sam, do you know, I can remember the time, up there in Ottawa County, Michigan, on my old dad's farm, when I used to have to get up before daybreak to tend the stock, and my sister and I used to run out quick into the stable and stand in the warm cow fodder in the stalls to warm our bare feet. . . . She up and died when she was about eighteen—galloping consumption. Yes, sir. By George, how I loved that little sister of mine! *You* remember her, Sam. Remember how you used to come out from Grand Rapids every now and then to go squirrel shooting with me?"

"Sure, sure. Oh, I haven't forgot."

"Well, I was wishing the other day that I could bring Sadie down here, and—oh, I don't know—give her a good time. She never had a good time when she was alive. Work, work, work; morning, noon, and night. I'd like to have made it up to her. I believe in making people happy, Sam. That's the way I take my fun. But it's too late to do it now for my little sister."

"Well," hazarded Gretry, "you got a good wife in yonder to——"

Jadwin interrupted him. He half turned away, thrusting his hands suddenly into his pockets. Partly to himself, partly to his friend he murmured:

"You bet I have, you bet I have. Sam," he exclaimed, then turned away again. ". . . Oh, well, never mind," he murmured.

Gretry, embarrassed, constrained, put his chin in the air, shutting his eyes in a knowing fashion.

"I understand," he answered. "I understand, J."

"Say, look at this organ here," said Jadwin briskly. "Here's the thing I like to play with."

They crossed to the other side of the room.

"Oh, you've got one of those attachment things," observed the broker.

"Listen now," said Jadwin. He took a perforated roll from the case near at hand and adjusted it, Gretry looking on with the solemn interest that all American business men have in mechanical inventions. Jadwin sat down before it, pulled out a stop or two, and placed his feet on the pedals. A vast preliminary roaring breath soughed through the pipes, with a vibratory rush of power. Then there came a canorous snarl of bass, and then, abruptly, with resistless charm, and with full-bodied, satisfying amplitude of volume the opening movement of the overture of "Carmen."

"Great, great!" shouted Gretry, his voice raised to make himself heard. "That's immense."

The great-lunged harmony was filling the entire gallery, clear cut, each note clearly, sharply treated with a precision that, if mechanical, was yet effective. Jadwin, his eyes now on the stops, now on the sliding strip of paper, played on. Through the sonorous clamour of the pipes Gretry could hear him speaking, but he caught only a word or two.

"Toréador . . . horse power . . . Madame Calvé . . . electric motor . . . fine song . . . storage battery."

The "movement" thinned out, and dwindled to a strain of delicate lightness, sustained by the smallest pipes and developing a new motive; this was twice repeated, and then ran down to a series of chords and bars that prepared for and prefigured some great effect close at hand. There was a short pause, then with the sudden releasing of a tremendous rush of sound, back surged the melody, with redoubled volume and power, to the original movement.

"That's bully, bully!" shouted Gretry, clapping his hands, and his eye, caught by a movement on the other side of the room, he turned about to see Laura Jadwin standing between the opened curtains at the entrance.

Seen thus unexpectedly, the broker was again overwhelmed with a sense of the beauty of Jadwin's wife. Laura was in evening dress of black lace; her arms and

neck were bare. Her black hair was piled high upon her head, a single American Beauty rose nodded against her bare shoulder. She was even yet slim and very tall, her face pale with that unusual paleness of hers that was yet a colour. Around her slender neck was a marvellous collar of pearls many strands deep, set off and held in place by diamond clasps.

With Laura came Mrs. Gretry and Page. The broker's wife was a vivacious, small, rather pretty blonde woman, a little angular, a little faded. She was garrulous, witty, slangy. She wore turquoises in her ears morning, noon, and night.

But three years had made a vast difference in Page Dearborn. All at once she was a young woman. Her straight, hard, little figure had developed, her arms were rounded, her eyes were calmer. She had grown taller, broader. Her former exquisite beauty was perhaps not quite so delicate, so fine, so virginal, so charmingly angular and boyish. There was infinitely more of the woman in it; and perhaps because of this she looked more like Laura than at any time of her life before. But even yet her expression was one of gravity, of seriousness. There was always a certain aloofness about Page. She looked out at the world solemnly, and as if separated from its lighter side. Things humorous interested her only as inexplicable vagaries of the human animal.

"We heard the organ," said Laura, "so we came in. I wanted Mrs. Gretry to listen to it."

. . . . .

The three years that had just passed had been the most important years of Laura Jadwin's life. Since her marriage she had grown intellectually and morally with amazing rapidity. Indeed, so swift had been the change, that it was not so much a growth as a transformation. She was no longer the same half-formed, impulsive girl who had found a delight in the addresses of her three lovers, and who had sat on the floor in the old home on State Street and allowed Landry Court to hold her hand. She looked back upon the Miss Dearborn of those days as though she were another person. How she had grown since then! How she had changed! How different, how infinitely more serious and sweet her life since then had become!

A great fact had entered her world, a great new element, that dwarfed all other thoughts, all other considerations. This was her love for her husband. It was as though until the time of her marriage she had walked in darkness, a darkness that she fancied was day; walked perversely, carelessly, and with a frivolity that was almost wicked. Then, suddenly, she had seen a great light. Love had entered her world. In her new heaven a new light was fixed, and all other things were seen only because of this light; all other things were

touched by it, tempered by it, warmed and vivified by it.

It had seemed to date from a certain evening at their country house at Geneva Lake in Wisconsin, where she had spent her honeymoon with her husband. They had been married about ten days. It was a July evening, and they were quite alone on board the little steam-yacht the "Thetis." She remembered it all very plainly. It had been so warm that she had not changed her dress after dinner—she recalled that it was of Honiton lace over old-rose silk, and that Curtis had said it was the prettiest he had ever seen. It was an hour before midnight, and the lake was so still as to appear veritably solid. The moon was reflected upon the surface with never a ripple to blur its image. The sky was grey with starlight, and only a vague bar of black between the star shimmer and the pale shield of the water marked the shore line. Never since that night could she hear the call of whip-poor-wills or the piping of night frogs that the scene did not come back to her. The little "Thetis" had throbbed and panted steadily. At the door of the engine-room, the engineer—the grey MacKenny, his back discreetly turned—sat smoking a pipe and taking the air. From time to time he would swing himself into the engine-room, and the clink and scrape of his shovel made itself heard as he stoked the fire vigorously.

Stretched out in a long wicker deck chair, hatless, a

drab coat thrown around her shoulders, Laura had sat near her husband, who had placed himself upon a camp-stool, where he could reach the wheel with one hand.

"Well," he had said at last, "are you glad you married me, Miss Dearborn?" And she had caught him about the neck and drawn his face down to hers, and her head thrown back, their lips all but touching, had whispered over and over again:

"I love you—love you—love you!"

That night was final. The marriage ceremony, even that moment in her room, when her husband had taken her in his arms and she had felt the first stirring of love in her heart, all the first week of their married life had been for Laura a whirl, a blur. She had not been able to find herself. Her affection for her husband came and went capriciously. There were moments when she believed herself to be really unhappy. Then, all at once, she seemed to awake. Not the ceremony at St. James' Church, but that awakening had been her marriage. Now it was irrevocable; she was her husband's; she belonged to him indissolubly, forever and forever, and the surrender was a glory. Laura in that moment knew that love, the supreme triumph of a woman's life, was less a victory than a capitulation.

Since then her happiness had been perfect. Literally and truly there was not a cloud, not a mote in her sunshine. She had everything—the love of her husband,

great wealth, extraordinary beauty, perfect health, an untroubled mind, friends, position—everything. God had been good to her, beyond all dreams and all deserving. For her had been reserved all the prizes, all the guerdons; for her who had done nothing to merit them.

Her husband she knew was no less happy. In those first three years after their marriage, life was one unending pageant; and their happiness became for them some marvellous, bewildering thing, dazzling, resplendent, a strange, glittering, jewelled Wonder-worker that suddenly had been put into their hands.

As one of the first results of this awakening, Laura reproached herself with having done but little for Page. She told herself that she had not been a good sister, that often she had been unjust, quick tempered, and had made the little girl to suffer because of her caprices. She had not sympathised sufficiently with her small troubles —so she made herself believe—and had found too many occasions to ridicule Page's intenseness and queer little solemnities. True she had given her a good home, good clothes, and a good education, but she should have given more—more than mere duty-gifts. She should have been more of a companion to the little girl, more of a help; in fine, more of a mother. Laura felt all at once the responsibilities of the elder sister in a family bereft of parents. Page was growing fast, and growing astonishingly beautiful; in a little while she would be a young

woman, and over the near horizon, very soon now, must inevitably loom the grave question of her marriage.

But it was only this realisation of certain responsibilities that during the first years of her married life at any time drew away Laura's consideration of her husband. She began to get acquainted with the real man-within-the-man that she knew now revealed himself only after marriage. Jadwin her husband was so different from, so infinitely better than, Jadwin her lover, that Laura sometimes found herself looking back with a kind of retrospective apprehension on the old days and the time when she was simply Miss Dearborn. How little she had known him after all! And how, in the face of this ignorance, this innocence, this absence of any insight into his real character, had she dared to take the irretrievable step that bound her to him for life? The Curtis Jadwin of those early days was so much another man. He might have been a rascal; she could not have known it. As it was, her husband had promptly come to be, for her, the best, the finest man she had ever known. But it might easily have been different.

His attitude towards her was thoughtfulness itself. Hardly ever was he absent from her, even for a day, that he did not bring her some little present, some little keepsake—or even a bunch of flowers—when he returned in the evening. The anniversaries—Christmas, their wedding day, her birthday—he always observed with great

éclat. He took a holiday from his business, surprised her with presents under her pillow, or her dinner-plate, and never failed to take her to the theatre in the evening.

However, it was not only Jadwin's virtues that endeared him to his wife. He was no impeccable hero in her eyes. He was tremendously human. He had his faults, his certain lovable weaknesses, and it was precisely these traits that Laura found so adorable.

For one thing, Jadwin could be magnificently inconsistent. Let him set his mind and heart upon a given pursuit, pleasure, or line of conduct not altogether advisable at the moment, and the ingenuity of the excuses by which he justified himself were monuments of elaborate sophistry. Yet, if later he lost interest, he reversed his arguments with supreme disregard for his former words.

Then, too, he developed a boyish pleasure in certain unessential though cherished objects and occupations, that he indulged extravagantly and to the neglect of things, not to say duties, incontestably of more importance.

One of these objects was the "Thetis." In every conceivable particular the little steam-yacht was complete down to the last bolt, the last coat of varnish; but at times during their summer vacations, when Jadwin, in all reason, should have been supervising the laying

out of certain unfinished portions of the "grounds"—supervision which could be trusted to no subordinate—he would be found aboard the "Thetis," hatless, in his shirt-sleeves, in solemn debate with the grey MacKenny and—a cleaning rag, or monkey-wrench, or paint-brush in his hand—tinkering and pottering about the boat, over and over again. Wealthy as he was, he could have maintained an entire crew on board whose whole duty should have been to screw, and scrub, and scour. But Jadwin would have none of it. "Costs too much," he would declare, with profound gravity. He had the self-made American's handiness with implements and paint-brushes, and he would, at high noon and under a murderous sun, make the trip from the house to the dock where the "Thetis" was moored, for the trivial pleasure of tightening a bolt—which did not need tightening; or wake up in the night to tell Laura of some wonderful new idea he had conceived as to the equipment or decoration of the yacht. He had blustered about the extravagance of a "crew," but the sums of money that went to the brightening, refitting, overhauling, repainting, and reballasting of the boat—all absolutely uncalled-for—made even Laura gasp, and would have maintained a dozen sailors an entire year.

This same inconsistency prevailed also in other directions. In the matter of business Jadwin's economy was unimpeachable. He would cavil on a half-dollar's

overcharge; he would put himself to downright inconvenience to save the useless expenditure of a dime—and boast of it. But no extravagance was ever too great, no time ever too valuable, when bass were to be caught.

For Jadwin was a fisherman unregenerate. Laura, though an early riser when in the city, was apt to sleep late in the country, and never omitted a two-hours' nap in the heat of the afternoon. Her husband improved these occasions when he was deprived of her society, to indulge in his pastime. Never a morning so forbidding that his lines were not in the water by five o'clock; never a sun so scorching that he was not coaxing a "strike" in the stumps and reeds in the shade under the shores.

It was the one pleasure he could not share with his wife. Laura was unable to bear the monotony of the slow-moving boat, the hours spent without results, the enforced idleness, the cramped positions. Only occasionally could Jadwin prevail upon her to accompany him. And then what preparations! Queen Elizabeth approaching her barge was attended with no less solicitude. MacKenny (who sometimes acted as guide and oarsman) and her husband exhausted their ingenuity to make her comfortable. They held anxious debates: "Do you think she'll like that?" "Wouldn't this make it easier for her?" "Is that the way she liked it last

time?" Jadwin himself arranged the cushions, spread the carpet over the bottom of the boat, handed her in, found her old gloves for her, baited her hook, disentangled her line, saw to it that the mineral water in the ice-box was sufficiently cold, and performed an endless series of little attentions looking to her comfort and enjoyment. It was all to no purpose, and at length Laura declared:

"Curtis, dear, it is no use. You just sacrifice every bit of your pleasure to make me comfortable—to make me enjoy it; and I just don't. I'm sorry, I want to share every pleasure with you, but I don't like to fish, and never will. You go alone. I'm just a hindrance to you." And though he blustered at first, Laura had her way.

Once in the period of these three years Laura and her husband had gone abroad. But her experience in England—they did not get to the Continent—had been a disappointment to her. The museums, art galleries, and cathedrals were not of the least interest to Jadwin, and though he followed her from one to another with uncomplaining stoicism, she felt his distress, and had contrived to return home three months ahead of time.

It was during this trip that they had bought so many of the pictures and appointments for the North Avenue house, and Laura's disappointment over her curtailed

European travels was mitigated by the anticipation of her pleasure in settling in the new home. This had not been possible immediately after their marriage. For nearly two years the great place had been given over to contractors, architects, decorators, and gardeners, and Laura and her husband had lived, while in Chicago, at a hotel, giving up the one-time rectory on Cass Street to Page and to Aunt Wess'.

But when at last Laura entered upon possession of the North Avenue house, she was not—after the first enthusiasm and excitement over its magnificence had died down—altogether pleased with it, though she told herself the contrary. Outwardly it was all that she could desire. It fronted Lincoln Park, and from all the windows upon that side the most delightful outlooks were obtainable—green woods, open lawns, the parade-ground, the Lincoln monument, dells, bushes, smooth drives, flower-beds, and fountains. From the great bay window of Laura's own sitting-room she could see far out over Lake Michigan, and watch the procession of great lake steamers, from Milwaukee, far-distant Duluth, and the Sault Sainte Marie—the famous "Soo"—defiling majestically past, making for the mouth of the river, laden to the water's edge with whole harvests of wheat. At night, when the windows were open in the warm weather, she could hear the mournful wash and lapping of the water on the embankments.

The grounds about her home were beautiful. The stable itself was half again as large as her old home opposite St. James's, and the conservatory, in which she took the keenest delight, was a wonderful affair—a vast bubble-like structure of green panes, whence, winter and summer, came a multitude of flowers for the house—violets, lilies of the valley, jonquils, hyacinths, tulips, and her own loved roses.

But the interior of the house was, in parts, less satisfactory. Jadwin, so soon as his marriage was a certainty, had bought the house, and had given over its internal furnishings to a firm of decorators. Innocently enough he had intended to surprise his wife, had told himself that she should not be burdened with the responsibility of selection and planning. Fortunately, however, the decorators were men of taste. There was nothing to offend, and much to delight in the results they obtained in the dining-room, breakfast-room, parlours, drawing-rooms, and suites of bedrooms. But Laura, though the beauty of it all enchanted her, could never rid herself of a feeling that it was not hers. It impressed her with its splendour of natural woods and dull "colour effects," its cunning electrical devices, its mechanical contrivances for comfort, like the ready-made luxury and "convenience" of a Pullman.

However, she had intervened in time to reserve certain of the rooms to herself, and these—the library, her bed-

room, and more especially that apartment from whose bay windows she looked out upon the Lake, and which, as if she were still in her old home, she called the "up-stairs sitting-room"—she furnished to suit herself.

For very long she found it difficult, even with all her resolution, with all her pleasure in her new-gained wealth, to adapt herself to a manner of living upon so vast a scale. She found herself continually planning the marketing for the next day, forgetting that this now was part of the housekeeper's duties. For months she persisted in "doing her room" after breakfast, just as she had been taught to do in the old days when she was a little girl at Barrington. She was afraid of the elevator, and never really learned how to use the neat little system of telephones that connected the various parts of the house with the servants' quarters. For months her chiefest concern in her wonderful surroundings took the form of a dread of burglars.

Her keenest delights were her stable and the great organ in the art gallery; and these alone more than compensated for her uneasiness in other particulars.

Horses Laura adored—black ones with flowing tails and manes, like certain pictures she had seen. Nowadays, except on the rarest occasions, she never set foot out of doors, except to take her carriage, her coupé, her phaeton, or her dogcart. Best of all she loved her saddle-horses. She had learned to ride, and the morn-

ing was inclement indeed that she did not take a long and solitary excursion through the Park, followed by the groom and Jadwin's two spotted coach-dogs.

The great organ terrified her at first. But on closer acquaintance she came to regard it as a vast-hearted, sympathetic friend. She already played the piano very well, and she scorned Jadwin's self-playing "attachment." A teacher was engaged to instruct her in the intricacies of stops and of pedals, and in the difficulties of the "echo" organ, "great" organ, "choir," and "swell." So soon as she had mastered these, Laura entered upon a new world of delight. Her taste in music was as yet a little immature—Gounod and even Verdi were its limitations. But to hear, responsive to the lightest pressures of her finger-tips, the mighty instrument go thundering through the cadences of the "Anvil Chorus" gave her a thrilling sense of power that was superb.

The untrained, unguided instinct of the actress in Laura had fostered in her a curious penchant toward melodrama. She had a taste for the magnificent. She revelled in these great musical "effects" upon her organ, the grandiose easily appealed to her, while as for herself, the *rôle* of the *"grande dame,"* with this wonderful house for background and environment, came to be for her, quite unconsciously, a sort of game in which she delighted.

It was by this means that, in the end, she succeeded

in fitting herself to her new surroundings. Innocently enough, and with a harmless, almost childlike, affectation, she posed a little, and by so doing found the solution of the incongruity between herself—the Laura of moderate means and quiet life—and the massive luxury with which she was now surrounded. Without knowing it, she began to act the part of a great lady—and she acted it well. She assumed the existence of her numerous servants as she assumed the fact of the trees in the park; she gave herself into the hands of her maid, not as Laura Jadwin of herself would have done it, clumsily and with the constraint of inexperience, but as she would have done it if she had been acting the part on the stage, with an air, with all the nonchalance of a marquise, with—in fine—all the superb condescension of her "grand manner."

She knew very well that if she relaxed this hauteur, her servants would impose on her, would run over her, and in this matter she found new cause for wonder in her husband.

The servants, from the frigid butler to the undergroom, adored Jadwin. A half-expressed wish upon his part produced a more immediate effect than Laura's most explicit orders. He never descended to familiarity with them, and, as a matter of fact, ignored them to such an extent that he forgot or confused their names. But where Laura was obeyed with precise formality and

chilly deference, Jadwin was served with obsequious alacrity, and with a good humour that even livery and "correct form" could not altogether conceal.

Laura's eyes were first opened to this genuine affection which Jadwin inspired in his servants by an incident which occurred in the first months of their occupancy of the new establishment. One of the gardeners discovered the fact that Jadwin affected gardenias in the lapel of his coat, and thereat was at immense pains to supply him with a fresh bloom from the conservatory each morning. The flower was to be placed at Jadwin's plate, and it was quite the event of the day for the old fellow when the master appeared on the front steps with the flower in his coat. But a feud promptly developed over this matter between the gardener and the maid who took the butler's place at breakfast every morning. Sometimes Jadwin did not get the flower, and the gardener charged the maid with remissness in forgetting to place it at his plate after he had given it into her hands. In the end the affair became so clamorous that Jadwin himself had to intervene. The gardener was summoned and found to have been in fault only in his eagerness to please.

"Billy," said Jadwin, to the old man at the conclusion of the whole matter, "you're an old fool."

And the gardener thereupon had bridled and stammered as though Jadwin had conferred a gift.

"Now if I had called him 'an old fool,'" observed Laura, "he would have sulked the rest of the week."

The happiest time of the day for Laura was the evening. In the daytime she was variously occupied, but her thoughts continually ran forward to the end of the day, when her husband would be with her. Jadwin breakfasted early, and Laura bore him company no matter how late she had stayed up the night before. By half-past eight he was out of the house, driving down to his office in his buggy behind Nip and Tuck. By nine Laura's own saddle-horse was brought to the carriage porch, and until eleven she rode in the park. At twelve she lunched with Page, and in the afternoon —in the "upstairs sitting-room"—read her Browning or her Meredith, the latter one of her newest discoveries, till three or four. Sometimes after that she went out in her carriage. If it was to "shop" she drove to the "Rookery," in La Salle Street, after her purchases were made, and sent the footman up to her husband's office to say that she would take him home. Or as often as not she called for Mrs. Cressler or Aunt Wess' or Mrs. Gretry, and carried them off to some exhibit of painting, or flowers, or more rarely—for she had not the least interest in social affairs—to teas or receptions.

But in the evenings, after dinner, she had her husband to herself. Page was almost invariably occupied by one or more of her young men in the drawing-room,

but Laura and Jadwin shut themselves in the library, a lofty panelled room—a place of deep leather chairs, tall bookcases, etchings, and sombre brasses—and there, while Jadwin lay stretched out upon the broad sofa, smoking cigars, one hand behind his head, Laura read aloud to him.

His tastes in fiction were very positive. Laura at first had tried to introduce him to her beloved Meredith. But after three chapters, when he had exclaimed, "What's the fool talking about?" she had given over and begun again from another starting-point. Left to himself, his wife sorrowfully admitted that he would have gravitated to the "Mysterious Island" and "Michael Strogoff," or even to "Mr. Potter of Texas" and "Mr. Barnes of New York." But she had set herself to accomplish his literary education, so, Meredith failing, she took up "Treasure Island" and "The Wrecker." Much of these he made her skip.

"Oh, let's get on with the 'story,'" he urged. But Pinkerton for long remained for him an ideal, because he was "smart" and "alive."

"I'm not long very many of art," he announced. "But I believe that any art that don't make the world better and happier is no art at all, and is only fit for the dump heap."

But at last Laura found his abiding affinity in Howells.

"Nothing much happens," he said. "But I *know* all those people." He never could rid himself of a surreptitious admiration for Bartley Hubbard. He, too, was "smart" and "alive." He had the "get there" to him. "Why," he would say, "I know fifty boys just like him down there in La Salle Street." Lapham he loved as a brother. Never a point in the development of his character that he missed or failed to chuckle over. Bromfield Cory was poohed and boshed quite out of consideration as a "loafer," a "dilletanty," but Lapham had all his sympathy.

"Yes, sir," he would exclaim, interrupting the narrative, "that's just it. That's just what I would have done if I had been in his place. Come, this chap knows what he's writing about—not like that Middleton ass, with his 'Dianas' and 'Amazing Marriages.'"

Occasionally the Jadwins entertained. Laura's husband was proud of his house, and never tired of showing his friends about it. Laura gave Page a "coming-out" dance, and nearly every Sunday the Cresslers came to dinner. But Aunt Wess' could, at first, rarely be induced to pay the household a visit. So much grandeur made the little widow uneasy, even a little suspicious. She would shake her head at Laura, murmuring:

"My word, it's all very fine, but, dear me, Laura, I hope you do pay for everything on the nail, and don't run up any bills. I don't know what your dear father

would say to it all, no, I don't." And she would spend hours in counting the electric bulbs, which she insisted were only devices for some new-fangled gas.

"Thirty-three in this one room alone," she would say. "I'd like to see your dear husband's face when he gets his gas bill. And a dressmaker that *lives* in the house. . . . Well,—I don't want to say anything."

Thus three years had gone by. The new household settled to a *régime.* Continually Jadwin grew richer. His real estate appreciated in value; rents went up. Every time he speculated in wheat, it was upon a larger scale, and every time he won. He was a Bear always, and on those rare occasions when he referred to his ventures in Laura's hearing, it was invariably to say that prices were going down. Till at last had come that spring when he believed that the bottom had been touched, had had the talk with Gretry, and had, in secret, "turned Bull" with the suddenness of a strategist.

The matter was yet in Gretry's mind while the party remained in the art gallery; and as they were returning to the drawing-room he detained Jadwin an instant.

"If you are set upon breaking your neck," he said, "you might tell me at what figure you want me to buy for you to-morrow."

"At the market," returned Jadwin. "I want to get into the thing quick."

A little later, when they had all reassembled in the

drawing-room, and while Mrs. Gretry was telling an interminable story of how Isabel had all but asphyxiated herself the night before, a servant announced Landry Court, and the young man entered, spruce and debonair, a bouquet in one hand and a box of candy in the other.

Some days before this Page had lectured him solemnly on the fact that he was over-absorbed in business, and was starving his soul. He should read more, she told him, and she had said that if he would call upon her on this particular night, she would indicate a course of reading for him.

So it came about that, after a few moments' conversation with the older people in the drawing-room, the two adjourned to the library.

There, by way of a beginning, Page asked him what was his favourite character in fiction. She spoke of the beauty of Ruskin's thoughts, of the gracefulness of Charles Lamb's style. The conversation lagged a little. Landry, not to be behind her, declared for the modern novel, and spoke of the "newest book." But Page never read new books; she was not interested, and their talk, unable to establish itself upon a common ground, halted, and was in a fair way to end, until at last, and by insensible degrees, they began to speak of themselves and of each other. Promptly they were all aroused. They listened to one another's words with studious attention,

answered with ever-ready promptness, discussed, argued, agreed, and disagreed over and over again.

Landry had said:

"When I was a boy, I always had an ambition to excel all the other boys. I wanted to be the best base-ball player on the block—and I was, too. I could pitch three curves when I was fifteen, and I find I am the same now that I am a man grown. When I do a thing, I want to do it better than anyone else. From the very first I have always been ambitious. It is my strongest trait. Now," he went on, turning to Page, "your strongest trait is your thoughtfulness. You are what they call introspective."

"Yes, yes," she answered. "Yes, I think so, too."

"You don't need the stimulation of competition. You are at your best when you are with just one person. A crowd doesn't interest you."

"I hate it," she exclaimed.

"Now with me, with a man of my temperament, a crowd is a real inspiration. When everyone is talking and shouting around me, or to me, even, my mind works at its best. But," he added, solemnly, "it must be a crowd of men. I can't abide a crowd of women."

"They chatter so," she assented. "I can't either."

"But I find that the companionship of one intelligent, sympathetic woman is as much of a stimulus as a lot of men. It's funny, isn't it, that I should be like that?"

"Yes," she said, "it is funny—strange. But I believe in companionship. I believe that between man and woman that is the great thing—companionship. Love," she added, abruptly, and then broke off with a deep sigh. "Oh, I don't know," she murmured. "Do you remember those lines:

> "Man's love is of his life a thing apart,
> 'Tis woman's whole existence.

Do you believe that?"

"Well," he asserted, gravely, choosing his words with deliberation, "it might be so, but all depends upon the man and woman. Love," he added, with tremendous gravity, "is the greatest power in the universe."

"I have never been in love," said Page. "Yes, love is a wonderful power."

"I've never been in love, either."

"Never, never been in love?"

"Oh, I've thought I was in love," he said, with a wave of his hand.

"I've never even thought I was," she answered, musing.

"Do you believe in early marriages?" demanded Landry.

"A man should never marry," she said, deliberately, "till he can give his wife a good home, and good clothes and—and that sort of thing. I do not think I shall ever marry."

"You! Why, of course you will. Why not?"

"No, no. It is my disposition. I am morose and taciturn. Laura says so."

Landry protested with vehemence.

"And," she went on, "I have long, brooding fits of melancholy."

"Well, so have I," he threw out recklessly. "At night, sometimes—when I wake up. Then I'm all down in the mouth, and I say, 'What's the use, by jingo?'"

"Do you believe in pessimism? I do. They say Carlyle was a terrible pessimist."

"Well—talking about love. I understand that you can't believe in pessimism and love at the same time. Wouldn't you feel unhappy if you lost your faith in love?"

"Oh, yes, terribly."

There was a moment's silence, and then Landry remarked:

"Now you are the kind of woman that would only love once, but love for that once mighty deep and strong."

Page's eyes grew wide. She murmured:

"'Tis a woman's whole existence—whole existence.' Yes, I think I am like that."

"Do you think Enoch Arden did right in going away after he found them married?"

"Oh, have you read that? Oh, isn't that a beautiful poem? Wasn't he noble? Wasn't he grand? Oh, yes, yes, he did right."

"By George, I wouldn't have gone away. I'd have gone right into that house, and I would have made things hum. I'd have thrown the other fellow out, lock, stock, and barrel."

"That's just like a man, so selfish, only thinking of himself. You don't know the meaning of love—great, true, unselfish love."

"I know the meaning of what's mine. Think I'd give up the woman I loved to another man?"

"Even if she loved the other man best?"

"I'd have my girl first, and find out how she felt about the other man afterwards."

"Oh, but think if you gave her up, how noble it would be. You would have sacrificed all that you held the dearest to an ideal. Oh, if I were in Enoch Arden's place, and my husband thought I was dead, and I knew he was happy with another woman, it would just be a joy to deny myself, sacrifice myself to spare him unhappiness. That would be my idea of love. Then I'd go into a convent."

"Not much. I'd let the other fellow go to the convent. If I loved a woman, I wouldn't let anything in the world stop me from winning her."

"You have so much determination, haven't you?" she said, looking at him.

Landry enlarged his shoulders a little and wagged his head.

"Well," he said, "I don't know, but I'd try pretty hard to get what I wanted, I guess."

"I love to see that characteristic in men," she observed. "Strength, determination."

"Just as a man loves to see a woman womanly," he answered. "Don't you hate strong-minded women?"

"Utterly."

"Now, you are what I would call womanly—the womanliest woman I've ever known."

"Oh, I don't know," she protested, a little confused.

"Yes, you are. You are beautifully womanly—and so high-minded and well read. It's been inspiring to me. I want you should know that. Yes, sir, a real inspiration. It's been inspiring, elevating, to say the least."

"I like to read, if that's what you mean," she hastened to say.

"By Jove, I've got to do some reading, too. It's so hard to find time. But I'll make time. I'll get that 'Stones of Venice' I've heard you speak of, and I'll sit up nights—and keep awake with black coffee—but I'll read that book from cover to cover."

"That's your determination again," Page exclaimed. "Your eyes just flashed when you said it. I believe if you once made up your mind to do a thing, you would do it, no matter how hard it was, wouldn't you?"

"Well, I'd—I'd make things hum, I guess," he admitted.

The next day was Easter Sunday, and Page came down to nine o'clock breakfast a little late, to find Jadwin already finished and deep in the pages of the morning paper. Laura, still at table, was pouring her last cup of coffee.

They were in the breakfast-room, a small, charming apartment, light and airy, and with many windows, one end opening upon the house conservatory. Jadwin was in his frock-coat, which later he would wear to church. The famous gardenia was in his lapel. He was freshly shaven, and his fine cigar made a blue haze over his head. Laura was radiant in a white morning gown. A newly cut bunch of violets, large as a cabbage, lay on the table before her.

The whole scene impressed itself sharply upon Page's mind—the fine sunlit room, with its gay open spaces and the glimpse of green leaves from the conservatory, the view of the smooth, trim lawn through the many windows, where an early robin, strayed from the park, was chirruping and feeding; her beautiful sister Laura, with her splendid, overshadowing coiffure, her pale, clear skin, her slender figure; Jadwin, the large, solid man of affairs, with his fine cigar, his gardenia, his well-groomed air. And then the little accessories that meant so much —the smell of violets, of good tobacco, of fragrant coffee; the gleaming damasks, china and silver of the breakfast table; the trim, fresh-looking maid, with her white cap,

apron, and cuffs, who came and went; the thoroughbred setter dozing in the sun, and the parrot dozing and chuckling to himself on his perch upon the terrace outside the window.

At the bottom of the lawn was the stable, and upon the concrete in front of its wide-open door the groom was currying one of the carriage-horses. While Page addressed herself to her fruit and coffee, Jadwin put down his paper, and, his elbows on the arms of his rattan chair, sat for a long time looking out at the horse. By-and-by he got up and said:

"That new feed has filled 'em out in good shape. Think I'll go out and tell Jarvis to try it on the buggy team." He pushed open the French windows and went out, the setter sedately following.

Page dug her spoon into her grape-fruit, then suddenly laid it down and turned to Laura, her chin upon her palm.

"Laura," she said, "do you think I ought to marry —a girl of my temperament?"

"Marry?" echoed Laura.

"Sh-h!" whispered Page. "Laura—don't talk so loud. Yes, do you?"

"Well, why not marry, dearie? Why shouldn't you marry when the time comes? Girls as young as you are not supposed to have temperaments."

But instead of answering Page put another question:

"Laura, do you think I am womanly?"

"I think sometimes, Page, that you take your books and your reading too seriously. You've not been out of the house for three days, and I never see you without your note-books and text-books in your hand. You are at it, dear, from morning till night. Studies are all very well——"

"Oh, studies!" exclaimed Page. "I hate them. Laura, what is it to be womanly?"

"To be womanly?" repeated Laura. "Why, I don't know, honey. It's to be kind and well-bred and gentle mostly, and never to be bold or conspicuous—and to love one's home and to take care of it, and to love and believe in one's husband, or parents, or children—or even one's sister—above anyone else in the world."

"I think that being womanly is better than being well read," hazarded Page.

"We can be both, Page," Laura told her. "But, honey, I think you had better hurry through your breakfast. If we are going to church this Easter, we want to get an early start. Curtis ordered the carriage half an hour earlier."

"Breakfast!" echoed Page. "I don't want a thing." She drew a deep breath and her eyes grew large. "Laura," she began again presently, "Laura . . . Landry Court was here last night, and—oh, I don't know, he's so silly. But he said—well, he said this—well, I said that I understood how he felt about certain things, about

'getting on,' and being clean and fine and all that sort of thing, you know; and then he said, "Oh, you don't know what it means to me to look into the eyes of a woman who really understands.'"

"*Did* he?" said Laura, lifting her eyebrows.

"Yes, and he seemed so fine and earnest. Laura, why—" Page adjusted a hairpin at the back of her head, and moved closer to Laura, her eyes on the floor. "Laura—what do you suppose it did mean to him—don't you think it was foolish of him to talk like that?"

"Not at all," Laura said, decisively. "If he said that he meant it—meant that he cared a great deal for you."

"Oh, I didn't mean that!" shrieked Page. "But there's a great deal more to Landry than I think we've suspected. He wants to be more than a mere money-getting machine, he says, and he wants to cultivate his mind and understand art and literature and that. And he wants me to help him, and I said I would. So if you don't mind, he's coming up here certain nights every week, and we're going to—I'm going to read to him. We're going to begin with the 'Ring and the Book.'"

In the later part of May, the weather being unusually hot, the Jadwins, taking Page with them, went up to Geneva Lake for the summer, and the great house fronting Lincoln Park was deserted.

Laura had hoped that now her husband would be

able to spend his entire time with her, but in this she was disappointed. At first Jadwin went down to the city but two days a week, but soon this was increased to alternate days. Gretry was a frequent visitor at the country house, and often he and Jadwin, their rocking-chairs side by side in a remote corner of the porch, talked "business" in low tones till far into the night.

"Dear," said Laura, finally, "I'm seeing less and less of you every day, and I had so looked forward to this summer, when we were to be together all the time."

"I hate it as much as you do, Laura," said her husband. "But I do feel as though I ought to be on the spot just for now. I can't get it out of my head that we're going to have livelier times in a few months."

"But even Mr. Gretry says that you don't need to be right in your office every minute of the time. He says you can manage your Board of Trade business from out here just as well, and that you only go into town because you can't keep away from La Salle Street and the sound of the Wheat Pit."

Was this true? Jadwin himself had found it difficult to answer. There had been a time when Gretry had been obliged to urge and coax to get his friend to so much as notice the swirl of the great maelstrom in the Board of Trade Building. But of late Jadwin's eye and ear were forever turned thitherward, and it was he, and no longer Gretry, who took initiatives.

Meanwhile he was making money. As he had predicted, the price of wheat had advanced. May had been a fair-weather month with easy prices, the monthly Government report showing no loss in the condition of the crop. Wheat had gone up from sixty to sixty-six cents, and at a small profit Jadwin had sold some two hundred and fifty thousand bushels. Then had come the hot weather at the end of May. On the floor of the Board of Trade the Pit traders had begun to peel off their coats. It began to look like a hot June, and when cash wheat touched sixty-eight, Jadwin, now more than ever convinced of a coming Bull market, bought another five hundred thousand bushels.

This line he added to in June. Unfavourable weather—excessive heat, followed by flooding rains—had hurt the spring wheat, and in every direction there were complaints of weevils and chinch bugs. Later on other deluges had discoloured and damaged the winter crop. Jadwin was now, by virtue of his recent purchases, "long" one million bushels, and the market held firm at seventy-two cents—a twelve-cent advance in two months.

"She'll react," warned Gretry, "sure. Crookes and Sweeny haven't taken a hand yet. Look out for a heavy French crop. We'll get reports on it soon now. You're playing with a gun, J., that kicks further than it shoots."

"We've not shot her yet," Jadwin said. "We're only just loading her—for Bears," he added, with a wink.

In July came the harvesting returns from all over the country, proving conclusively that for the first time in six years, the United States crop was to be small and poor. The yield was moderate. Only part of it could be graded as "contract." Good wheat would be valuable from now on. Jadwin bought again, and again it was a "lot" of half a million bushels.

Then came the first manifestation of that marvellous golden luck that was to follow Curtis Jadwin through all the coming months. The French wheat crop was announced as poor. In Germany the yield was to be far below the normal. All through Hungary the potato and rye crops were light.

About the middle of the month Jadwin again called the broker to his country house, and took him for a long evening's trip around the lake, aboard the "Thetis." They were alone. MacKenny was at the wheel, and, seated on camp-stools in the stern of the little boat, Jadwin outlined his plans for the next few months.

"Sam," he said, "I thought back in April there that we were to touch top prices about the first of this month, but this French and German news has coloured the cat different. I've been figuring that I would get out of this market around the seventies, but she's going higher. I'm going to hold on yet awhile."

"You do it on your own responsibility, then," said the broker. "I warn you the price is top-heavy."

"Not much. Seventy-two cents is too cheap. Now I'm going into this hard; and I want to have my own lines out—to be independent of the trade papers that Crookes could buy up any time he wants to. I want you to get me some good, reliable correspondents in Europe; smart, bright fellows that we can depend on. I want one in Liverpool, one in Paris, and one in Odessa, and I want them to cable us about the situation every day."

Gretry thought awhile.

"Well," he said, at length, ". . . yes. I guess I can arrange it. I can get you a good man in Liverpool—Traynard is his name—and there's two or three in Paris we could pick up. Odessa—I don't know. I couldn't say just this minute. But I'll fix it."

These correspondents began to report at the end of July. All over Europe the demand for wheat was active. Grain handlers were not only buying freely, but were contracting for future delivery. In August came the first demands for American wheat, scattered and sporadic at first, then later, a little, a very little more insistent.

Thus the summer wore to its end. The fall "situation" began slowly to define itself, with eastern Europe —densely populated, overcrowded—commencing to show uneasiness as to its supply of food for the winter; and

with but a moderate crop in America to meet foreign demands. Russia, the United States, and Argentine would have to feed the world during the next twelve months.

Over the Chicago Wheat Pit the hand of the great indicator stood at seventy-five cents. Jadwin sold out his September wheat at this figure, and then in a single vast clutch bought three million bushels of the December option.

Never before had he ventured so deeply into the Pit. Never before had he committed himself so irrevocably to the send of the current. But something was preparing. Something indefinite and huge. He guessed it, felt it, knew it. On all sides of him he felt a quickening movement. Lethargy, inertia were breaking up. There was buoyancy to the current. In its ever-increasing swiftness there was exhilaration and exuberance.

And he was upon the crest of the wave. Now the forethought, the shrewdness, and the prompt action of those early spring days were beginning to tell. Confident, secure, unassailable, Jadwin plunged in. Every week the swirl of the Pit increased in speed, every week the demands of Europe for American wheat grew more frequent; and at the end of the month the price—which had fluctuated between seventy-five and seventy-eight—in a sudden flurry rushed to seventy-nine, to seventy-

nine and a half, and closed, strong, at the even eighty cents.

On the day when the latter figure was reached Jadwin bought a seat upon the Board of Trade.

He was now no longer an "outsider."

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