Me

A Book of Remembrance

(Begun in the April Number)

XXIX

THAT Christmas visit of Roger's was the first of many in that house. From that time he came very frequently to see me, sometimes three or four times a month; in fact, a week rarely passed without his appearing. All of his visits were not so tempestuous as the one I have described, but he was a man used to ruling people, and he wished to govern and absorb me utterly. Well, I made a feeble enough resistance, goodness knows. I was really incredibly happy. I always used to come home from work with the excited hope of finding him there, and very often he was, indeed.

Of course he was exacting and at times even cruel to me. He really did n't want me to have any friends at all, and he not only chose all my clothes, but he tried to sway my tastes in everything. For instance, Bennet had cultivated in me a taste for poetry. Roger did n't care for poetry. He said I would get more good from the books he had chosen for me, and just because, I suppose, Bennet had read aloud to me, he made me read aloud to him, sometimes my own stories, sometimes books he would select; but never poetry.

The first thing he would always say when he came in, after he had examined my face, was:

"What 's my wonderful girl been reading?"

Then I 'd tell him, and after that I 'd have to tell him in detail everything that had happened through the week, several times sometimes. He knew, of course, that Bennet came regularly to see me, and he used to ask me a thousand questions about those visits; and I had a hard time answering them all, particularly as I did not dare to tell him that every day Bennet showed by his attitude that he was caring more for me. He asked me so many questions that I once asked him seriously if he was a lawyer, and he threw back his head and laughed.

I had secured a very good position through his influence, for I was private secretary to the president of one of the largest wholesale dry-goods firms in Chicago. I had easy hours, from ten till about four. I had no type-writing at all to do, for another girl took my dictation. What is more, I received twenty-five dollars a week.

Besides my good position, Fortune was smiling upon me in other ways. The Western magazine began to run my stories. I was the most excited girl in Chicago when the first one came out, and I telegraphed to Roger to get the magazine.

And now I must record something about Robert Bennet. He has been pushed from my pages, just as he was from my life, by Roger, and yet during all this time I really saw more of him than of Roger himself. The day I paid him back the money he lent me he told me he loved me. Now, I had for him something the same feeling I had for Fred O'Brien —a blind sort of fondness rather than

love, and overwhelming gratitude. It was not so much because of the money he had lent me, but for the many things he was always trying to do for me. In a way he and Mr. Butler tried to educate me. They planned a regular course of reading for me, and helped me in my study of English. I should not have dared to admit it to Roger, but those boys were really doing more for me than he was, and they wished me to enter the University of Indiana, and wrote to certain professors there about me.

It 's a fact that nearly every man (and some women) who became interested in me during this period of my career seemed to think himself called upon to contribute to my education. I must have been truly a pathetic and crude little object; else why did I inspire my friends with this desire to help me? And everybody gave me books. Why, that Western editor, after he had met me only once, sent me all sorts of books, and wrote me long letters of advice, too.

But about Bennet. When he told me he loved me—and it is impossible for me to say in what a manly way he declared himself—I was overwhelmed with mingled feelings, and I was such a sentimental, impressionable little fool, that I did not have the strength to refuse him. The first thing I knew, there I was engaged to him, too!

It was a cruel, dishonest thing for me to accept him. I see that now; but somehow, then, I was simply too weak to tell him the truth—that I loved another man. Well, then, as I 've said, I was engaged to Bennet.

In a psychological way it might be interesting to note my feelings at this time both to Roger and Bennet. I truly was more afraid for Bennet to find out about Hamilton than for the latter to find out about Bennet. To Roger I could have defended my engagement; but how could I have justified myself to Robert Bennet, whose respect and liking I desired very much? Indeed, they had become a potent influence in my life, a clean, uplifting influence.

Robert Bennet had unconsciously given me a new ideal of life. My own crude, passionate views were being adjusted. It was slowly dawning upon me that, after all, this thing we call convention, which I had previously so scouted, is in fact a necessary and blessed thing, and that the code which governs one's conduct through life is controlled by certain laws we cannot wilfully break. I had just grown, not like a flower, but like an unwieldy weed. Robert Bennet and George Butler were taking me out and showing me a new world. I was meeting people who were doing things worth while, sweet women and big men, and there were times in my life when I realized that the spell under which Roger held me was an enchantment that in the end could lead only to degradation or tragedy.

Nevertheless, I could no more break away from his influence than the poor victim of the hypnotist can from the master mind that controls him. What is love, anyhow, but a form of hypnotism? It 's an obsession, a true madness.

Yet Roger Hamilton, in his way, had not deceived me. He had never once professed to love me. On the contrary, he had denied that very thing in the presence of Mrs. Kingston and Mrs. Owens. Perhaps if he had cared for me, if he had given me even some slight return, my own passion for him, from its very force, would have spent itself. But he did not. He kept consistently to his original stand. I was his ewe lamb, his special protégé, his wonderful girl, his discovery, his oasis, and compensation for everything else in life, which he said was sordid, nasty, and wrong. But that was all I was, it seems, despite his incomprehensible jealousy, and his occasional unaccountable moods of almost fierce tenderness toward me.

There were few times that he called me by endearing terms. Twice, I think, I was his "sweetheart," and several times I was his "precious girl." Once I was his "poor little darling," and I was always his "wonderful girl."

Nor was he a man given to demonstrations of affection. My place was always on the stool at his knee. I used to put my

head there, and look with him into the fire. He never took me in his arms during those days, though I was always clinging to his hand and arm. He kissed my hands, my hair, and once my arms when I was in a new evening gown that he had chosen for me; but he never kissed my lips.

I loved him blindly and passionately. I used to save things that he had touched—absurd things, like his cigar-butts, a piece of soap he had used, his gloves, and a cap he wore on the train. He hunted everywhere for it, but I did not give it up. I was like a well-fed person, with an inner craving for something impossible to possess.

On my eighteenth birthday Roger gave me a piano. He had already given me many jewels, some of them magnificent pieces that I never wore except when he was there. I kept them locked up in the little safe. The piano, however, troubled me more than the jewels. It was big and, therefore, impressed me. When I protested to him about accepting it, he declared that he had bought it for himself as much as for me, but he arranged with a German named Heinrach to give me vocal lessons, and with a Miss Stern to teach me the piano. Heinrach said I had an exceptionally fine contralto voice, but I think Roger told him to say that. However, I enjoyed the lessons, though I soon realized that my voice was just an ordinarily good contralto. Roger said it was good enough for him, and that he wanted me to sing to him only. He chose all my songs, French, German, and English.

If I stop here to tell of the attentions and proposals I received from other men at this time, I 'm afraid you will agree with Lolly that my head was a bit turned.

But, no, I assure you it was not. I realized that almost any girl, thrown among men as I was, half-way good-looking, interesting, and bright, was bound to have a great many proposals. So I 'll just heap all mine together, and tell about them briefly.

One of the chief men in the firm where I worked asked me to marry him. He was a divorcé, a man of forty-five, but looked younger. He said he made fifteen thousand dollars a year. He wanted me to marry him and accompany him on a trip he was to make to England to buy goods. I refused him, but—away from Roger, I confess there were the germs of a flirt in me—I told him to ask me again as soon as he got back. I might change my mind. Before sailing, he brought his young son, a youth of twenty, to see me. Papa had scarcely reached the English shores before the son also proposed to me! He was a dear child.

An insurance agent offered himself to me as a life policy.

An engineer, a politician (Irish), and two clerks in our office were willing to take "chances" on me.

A plumber who mended our kitchen sink proposed to me just because I made him a cup of tea.

I had a proposal from a Japanese tea merchant who years before had been my father's courier in Japan. Now he was a Japanese magnate, and papa had told me to look him up. He made a list of every person he had ever heard me say I did not like, and he told me if I would marry him, he would do something to every one of them.

A poet wrote lovely verse to me, and the Chicago papers actually published it. Finally, that Western editor proposed to me upon his fourth visit to Chicago, and I am ashamed to confess that I accepted him, too. You see, he had accepted my stories, and how could I reject him? He lived far from Chicago, and the contemplated marriage was set for a distant date, so I thought I was safe for the present.

I was now, as you perceive, actually engaged to three men, and I was in love with one who had flatly stated he would never marry me. I lived a life of not unjoyous deceit. I had only a few qualms about deceiving Roger, for with all these other men proposing to me, I resented his not doing so, too. However, I was by no means unhappy. I had a good position, a charming home, good friends, a devoted admirer in Bennet, and was not only writ-

ing, but selling, stories, with quite astonishing facility. Add to this my secret attachment to Roger, and one may perceive that mine was not such a bad lot. But I was dancing over a volcano, and even dead volcanos sometimes unexpectedly erupt.

Bob was not an exacting fiancé. As he worked at night, he could not often come to see me; but he wrote me the most beautiful letters—letters that filled me with emotion and made me feel like a mean criminal, for all the time I knew I could never be more to him than I was then.

Like me, he was an idealist and hero-worshiper, and in both our cases our idols' feet were of clay. I deliberately blinded myself to every little fault and flaw in Roger. His selfishness and tyranny I passed over. It was enough for me that for at least a few days in the month he descended like a god into my life and permitted himself to be worshipped.

I made all sorts of sacrifices and concessions to his wishes. Time and again I broke engagements with my friends, with Bob and with others, because unexpectedly he would turn up. He never told me when he was coming. I think he expected some time to surprise me in doing some of the things he often accused me of doing, for he was very suspicious of me, and never wholly trusted me.

XXX

It was Bennet's letters that finally got me into trouble with Roger. I had been engaged to him only a little more than two weeks, and I must have dropped one of his letters in Roger's sitting-room, for on arriving home from work one afternoon I found that he had come in my absence, and, as Margaret warned me before I went up-stairs, seemed to be in a "towering rage" about something.

He was walking up and down, and he swung around and glared at me savagely as I stood in the doorway. He had a paper in his hand (Bennet's letter), and his face was so convulsed and ugly and accusing that involuntarily I shrank back as he came toward me. I have never seen a man in such an ungovernable rage. He did not give me a chance to say anything. There was nothing of which he did not accuse me. I was a thing whose meaning I did not even know. He, so he said, had been a deluded fool, and had let himself be led along by a girl he had supposed too good to take advantage of him. Yet all the while, while I was taking gifts—yes, the clothes on my back—and other favors, even my position, which I kept only because of Mr. Forman's obligations to him, I had, it seems, given myself to another man!

The accusations were so gross and monstrous and black that I could not answer him. I knew what was in Bennet's letter—terms of endearment, expressions of undying love, *and* (this is where I came under the judgment of Roger) the desire to see me soon again and hold me in his arms.

Yes, Bob had held me in his arms,—he believed I was to be his wife,—but I was not the thing Roger accused me of being. My relations with Bennet were as pure as a girl's can be. It would have been impossible for a girl to have any other kind of relations with a man like Bennet. I stood bewildered under the storm of his accusations and cruel reproaches, and the revelation of the things he had done for me without my knowledge or consent. At first, as he denounced me, I had flinched before him, because I was aware of having really deceived him, in a way; but as he continued to heap abuse upon me, some rebellious spirit arose in me to defy him. I had not had an Irish grandmother for nothing.

I waited till he was through, and then I said:

"You think you are a man, but I declare you are a brute and a coward. Yes, it is true, I am engaged to Mr. Bennet, and I defy you to say to him what you have said to me."

Then I fled from his room to my own. I locked myself in there. He came knocking at my door, and rattling at the handle, but I would not open it, and then he called out:

"Nora, I am going away now—forever

—never to come back, you understand. You will never see my face again unless you come out and speak to me now."

But I would not open my door. I heard him going down-stairs and the slam of the front door. Now I realized what had happened. He had actually gone! Never before had he left me like this. I opened my door, went down-stairs, and then I saw him waiting for me in the living-room. I tried to run back, but he was too quick for me. He sprang after me, caught me in his arms, and half carried me up to his room. There he locked the door, and put the key into his pocket. I would n't look at him, I would n't speak to him. He came over, and tried to put his arms about me, but I shoved him away, and he said in a voice I had never heard from him before:

"So I 've lost you, have I, Nora?" And then, as I would not answer him: "So Bennet cut me out. That 's it, is it?"

I said:

"No; no one cut you out but yourself. You 've shown yourself to me just as you are, and you 're ugly. I *hate* you!" and I burst into tears.

He knelt down beside me. I was sitting on the edge of the big Morris chair, and all the while he talked to me I had my face covered with my hands.

"Listen to me, Nora. I know I 've said things to you for which I ought to be horsewhipped; but I was nearly insane. I am still. I don't know what to think of you, what to do to you. The thought that *you,* whom I have cherished as something precious and different from every one else in my life, have been deceiving me all these months drives me distracted. I could *kill* you without the slightest compunction."

I looked at him at that, and I said:

"Roger, you don't think I 've done anything wrong, do you?"

"I don't know what to think," he said. "It is a revelation to me that you were capable of deceiving me at all."

"But I am only *engaged* to Bob; that 's all."

"Only *engaged!* In heaven's name! what do you mean? Do you intend to marry this man?"

"No, I never did; but—"

I was beginning to soften a bit to him. I could see his point of view. He was holding me by the arms so I could n't get away from him, and when you are very close like that to a man you love (almost in his arms) you cannot help being moved. I was, anyway, and I said:

"I 'll try and explain everything to you, if you won't be too angry with me."

"Go on."

"Well, you know when I got that fifty dollars, and gave up my position? Well, I spent it all and got down to ten cents, and I could n't get work, and I was nearly starving—honestly I was. That last day I did n't have any dinner and hardly any luncheon or breakfast. Well then, I met Bob, and I told him—that very first night—and he lent me ten dollars, and insisted that I should take something from him each week till I got a position."

"In God's name, why did you not ask *me?*"

"I *could n't,* Roger; I could n't."

"Why not? Why not?"

"Because—because—I *loved you.* I could take help from a man I did n't love, but not from one I did."

I began to sob, and he sat down in the Morris chair, and lifted me up on his knee, but he held me off, so I could continue with my story.

"Go on now."

So then I told him everything: how, later, when I at last returned the money to Bennet, he had proposed to me, and how I could n't help accepting him. "And, anyway," I finished, "engagements are nothing. I 'm engaged to two other men as well."

I thought this was my chance to make a reckless clean breast of everything.

He tumbled me out of his lap at that, stared at me, gasped, threw back his head, and burst into a sort of wild laughter, almost of relief. Then suddenly he pulled me up into his arms, and held me hard against his breast for the longest time, just as if he were never going to let me

go again, and then I knew just as well as anything that he did love me, even though he would n't admit it. So, with that knowledge, I was ready to forgive him for anything or everything.

You see, things were all turned about now, and I was in the position of the accuser and not of the accused, and that despite the attitude he pretended to assume. He wanted to know if all three of my friends had kissed me, and I had to admit that they had, and tell him just how many times. Tom had kissed me just that one time, Bob four times, and the Western editor just once.

It was a bitter pill for Roger to swallow, and he said:

"And I have been afraid to touch you."

"That 's not my fault," I said. "You can kiss me any time you wish."

He did n't accept my hint or invitation. He was walking up and down now, pulling at his lip, and at last he said:

"Nora, get your things all packed. I 'll have to take you with me."

"Where?"

"I 'm obliged to go abroad on a certain pressing matter. I came here to-day specially to be with you before leaving. I see I can't leave you behind."

"Do you mean—" I said, and for one delirious moment I imagined something that was impossible.

"I mean simply that, though it will be devilishly inconvenient, I shall be obliged to take you with me. I can't trust you here."

That thought still persisted in my foolish head, and I said:

"Roger, do you mean that we are going to be married?"

He stared at me a moment, and then said shortly:

"No. That 's impossible."

I swallowed a lump that came up hard in my throat, and I could not speak. Then after a moment I said:

"You want to take me, then, because you are afraid some other man might get me, not because you want me yourself."

He said, with a slight smile:

"The first part of your statement is certainly true; the second part is questionable."

"I 'm not going," I told him.

"Oh, yes, you are."

"Oh, no, I 'm not."

"Are we to have another combat?"

"I 'm not going."

"Can't leave your fiancé?" he asked.

"I 'm just not going, that 's all."

"What do you intend to do, then, while I 'm gone?"

"Just what I 'm doing now."

"You intend to continue your—er—engagement?"

"No; I 'll break that off." I looked at Roger. "I owe that to *him.*"

"H-m! Owe nothing to me, eh?"

My eyes filled up. I did owe much to him. He came over, picked my face up by the chin, and then drew me back to the seat by the fireplace, seating himself in the Morris chair, with me on the stool. He talked very gently to me now, and as if he were speaking to a child; but I could think only of one thing—that he was going away and I *could* not go with him. Why, he had not even told me he loved me, and though a few moments before I had believed he did, now the torturing doubts came up again. If he loved me, would he not want to marry me? Other men, like Bob and Tom, did.

"Roger, tell me this," I said. "Suppose I went to school and then to college, would I be like—other girls—I mean society girls—girls in your class?"

"You 're better than they are now. You are in a class all by yourself, Nora."

"Don't answer me like that. You know what I want to know. Would I be socially their equal, for instance?"

"Why, naturally. That 's a foolish question, Nora."

"No, it is n't. I just want to know. Now, supposing I got all that—that—culture—and everything, and I had nice manners, and dressed so I looked pretty and everything—and you would n't be a bit ashamed of me, and we could say my people were all sorts of grand folks,—they really are in England—my father's people,—well, suppose all this, and then

suppose that you really loved me, just as I do you, then would n't I be good enough to be your wife?"

"Nora, why do you persist about that? I tell you once and for all that that is absolutely out of the question. I 'm not going to marry you. In fact, I can't."

"Why?"

"I won't go into details. Let it suffice that there are reasons, and put the idea out of your head."

So, after that, there was nothing more for me to say; but he realized I would not go with him. When he at last resigned himself to this, he made me promise that while he was gone I would not only break my engagements with Bennet and the Western editor and Tom, but that I would in no circumstances let any man kiss or touch me, or make love to me in any way. He said if I 'd promise him that, he 'd be able to make his trip to Europe without undue anxiety, and that he would come back just as soon as he could.

"All right, then," I said; "I cross my neck."

I wrote three letters that night, all of which he read. If he had had his way, I would have rewritten them and worded them differently. He thought I ought to say: "Dear Mr. Bennet," "Dear Mr. Morris," etc., instead of "Dear Bob," "Dear Tom." My letters were virtually the same in each case. I asked to be released from my engagement; but I begged Bob to forgive me, and I said I should never forget him as long as I lived. Roger argued with me a whole half-hour to take that out. But I did n't, and I even cried at the thought of how I was hurting this boy who loved me. I was so miserable, in fact, that Roger said we 'd go out and hear some music, and that would cheer me up.

Conscience is a peculiar thing. We can shut it up tightly, and delude ourselves with diversions that infatuate and blind us. I did not think of Bob while Roger was with me. I put on my prettiest dress, one of the dresses I now knew that he had paid for! It was a shimmering, Oriental-looking thing that had the stamp of Paquin upon it, and I had a wonderful emerald necklace, and a wreath of green leaves, with little diamonds sprinkled like dew over it, in my hair. Roger said that there was no one in the world like me. I suppose there was not. I certainly hope there was not. I was a fine sort of person!

I think it was the Thomas Orchestra we heard. I forget. I should have enjoyed it, I suppose, in ordinary circumstances, but I could not think of anything that night except that Roger was going away and that I might never see him again. And I thought of all the accidents that occurred at sea, and even though he was holding my hand under the program, I felt that I was the most unhappy girl in the world.

We could n't stop to have even a little supper after the theater, for he was taking a train to New York, whence he was to sail.

His man Holmes (it was the first time I had ever seen him) was at the house when we got back, and had his bag and everything ready, waiting for him. I thought as he was going away on such a long trip he would at least kiss me good-by, and I could not keep from crying when, after we got in, he said right before Holmes, who *would n't* leave the room:

"I 'll have to rush now. Be a good girl."

Then he said I was to go down to Mr. Townsend's (his lawyer's) office, and he would tell me about some arrangements he himself had made for me, and I was to write to him every day, though he said nothing about writing to me. He wrote down an address in London where I was to send my letters. The only thing he did that approached a caress was that, when his man went ahead of him down the stairs, he stopped in the upper hall, lifted my face, and gave me a long, searching look. Then he said:

"I 'm not likely to think about anything but you, darling." Then he went quickly down the stairs, leaving me sobbing up there.

XXXI

I HAD enough to occupy my thoughts now without thinking of Bennet. Passionately as I loved Roger, I perceived that night, in a dim sort of way and with a burning remembrance of his brutality to me, that I was fast becoming the infatuated victim of one who was utterly unworthy. He had not hesitated to denounce and accuse me of things of which I was certainly incapable of being guilty. Though he had said I was his cherished and precious girl, and he knew I was a good girl (in the sense the world calls good), yet he did not consider me worthy of being his wife. It irritated him, that poor aspiration of mine. Yet other men, better men than he, men who, I do not doubt, though not possessing his great wealth, were his social equals,—Bennet and my editor,—had not thought me beneath them. I puzzled and tortured myself over it, but I could find no answer.

No one could deny that I was a clever girl. I was not the genius O'Brien and perhaps Roger believed, but I certainly was above the average girl in intelligence. Not many girls of eighteen are writing stories and having them accepted by the magazines. And yet, queerly enough, beyond my one precocious talent, I was in many ways peculiarly gullible and stupid. Why, Lolly and the other girls teased me in all sorts of ways because of this, and Estelle used to say a blind beggar could sell me a gold brick at any street corner, and I would believe every word he said. This peculiar streak of credulousness in me was, I suppose, the reason I never found out anything about Mr. Hamilton.

He never talked to me about his business or home affairs. I knew he was president of half a dozen big firms, because I saw his name on stationery. Sometimes he talked to me about his horses and dogs,—he had many of these,—but he always said my little dog Verley, which he had never given back to me, and which was not, after all, a thoroughbred, was his inseparable companion. Even Mrs. Kingston and Mama Owens and Lolly knew more about this man than I did.

Love, it seems, is not only blind, but deaf, dumb, and paralyzed. I heard nothing, I knew nothing, and, what is more, I would have believed nothing that was not good of him. Surely a faith like that is deserving of some reward!

There is an adage of my mother's land something like this, "Our actions are followed by their consequences as surely as a body by its shadow." That proverb recurred to me in the days that followed.

The morning after Roger went, our bell rang before I was up. Our servant "slept out," and had not yet arrived. So Margaret went down, grumbling about the girl, supposing she had lost her key. As I did n't have to be at my office till ten, and as I had been up late, I turned over to go to sleep again, when I heard Margaret at my door. She came in in her bath-robe. She said Mr. Butler was down-stairs, and wanted to see me at once.

I don't know what I thought. I know I felt panic-stricken and afraid. Roger had sent my note to Bob by messenger the previous evening, so he had had it over night.

I slipped on a dressing-gown quickly and went down-stairs.

Butler was sitting stiffly in the middle of the reception-hall, and as I came down he stood up, though he did not touch the hand I held out to him. He said abruptly:

"What did you do to Bennet?"

I felt like an overtaken criminal. I could not say a word. I could not look at the face of Bennet's friend. He said:

"Bob had a dinner engagement with me at a friend's house last night. He did n't turn up. I feared something was wrong. In fact, I 've feared for Bob ever since he became infatuated with you." Butler did not mince his words; he just stabbed me with them. "He has been walking about the city like a madman all night long. What did you do to him?"

"Oh George," I said falteringly, "I had to break it off."

As if distinctly to cut me for calling him "George" (I had always called him

that), he addressed me as "Miss Ascough."

"Miss Ascough, were you ever really engaged to Bennet?"

He asked that as if the thought of it was something not at all to his liking. I nodded.

"And you broke it off, you say?"

Again I nodded.

"Why?"

"Because I did n't love him," I said truthfully.

I was so nervous and conscious-smitten and unhappy, and the room was so cold, that I was seized with a shivering fit, and could hardly keep my teeth from chattering; but Butler did not seem at all moved by my condition.

"May I ask if you were 'in love,' as you call it, with him when you accepted him?"

I shook my head. I could not trust myself to speak.

"Why did you accept him, then?"

"He had been good to me," I faltered.

"Oh, I see. It was his reward, eh?" He sneered in my face. "I came here," he said, "with some idea of patching up things. I wanted to help Bennet. He 's in a bad way."

What could I say? After a while he said:

"Will you go back with me? I have him at our rooms."

"It would do no good."

"You mean you could not be made to reconsider the thing? You may be mistaken. You may care for him, after all. There are few like him, I assure you. You 're dead lucky to have a man like poor Bennet care for you. He 's of the salt of the earth."

"I know; but—I can't deceive him any longer. I 'm—in love—with another man."

There was a long silence after that, Butler just staring at me. Then he asked:

"Been in love long?"

I nodded.

"Before you met Bennet?"

Again I nodded.

He laughed bitterly.

"Personally I suspected you from the first. I had an intuitive feeling that there was something under cover about you. I never could see what Bennet saw in you. He was head and shoulders above you in every way. You 're not in his class at all. I don't mean that in the cheap social sense—simply morally. Bennet 's been my friend for years. I know him. There 's no one like him. It 's damned hard luck, I can tell you, for me to see him come up against a proposition like you. According to your own story, you must have deceived him from the first. Women like you—"

He stopped there, for I was crying so bitterly that mama came in to see what the trouble was. Margaret was listening all the time at the head of the stairs. Butler then just clapped his hat on his head, picked up his stick, and went.

And that was the opinion of me of one of the brightest men in the United States, a man who subsequently became internationally famous. Nothing could have equaled the contempt of his looks or his cutting words. He had stripped me bare. For one startling moment the scales dropped from my eyes. I *saw* myself! And I shrank before what I saw—shrank as only a weak coward can.

O'Brien had called me a "dead-game sport"; Roger once said I was a "mongrel by blood, but a thoroughbred by instinct"; Lolly had called me a "snake"; but George Butler, that keen-sighted, clear-headed man, knew me for something to be despised! What did I think of myself? Like every one else, I was capable of staring wide-eyed at my own shortcomings only for a little while, and then, like every one else, I charitably and hastily and in fear drew the curtains before me, and tried to hide myself behind them.

I pitied Bennet, whom I had hurt; but I had a vaster pity for myself, whom Roger had hurt.

Perhaps it will not be out of place for me to say here that Bennet achieved all that I tried to do. Such fame (if fame I may call it) as came to me later was not of a solid or enduring kind. My work

showed always the effect of my life—my lack of training, my poor preparation for the business of writing, my dense ignorance. I can truly say of my novels that they are strangely like myself, unfulfilled promises. But Bennet! He climbed to the top despite me, and there he will always be.

It may well be believed that the days that followed were unhappy ones for me. Not only had I lost my two best friends, Bennet and Lolly, but Roger had disappeared, as it were, completely from my life.

I went to Mr. Townsend's office, as he had told me to do, but I did not accept the "arrangements" that Roger had made for me, and this despite the very earnest exhortations of his lawyer. I did not want, and I would not touch, the money that Roger had directed should be put in banks for me. He ought to have known I would not do that.

All day long my face burned. Something within me, too, was burning like a wild-fire. A thousand thoughts and ideas came rushing upon me. Everything that Roger had ever done for or said to me recurred to my mind, and jumbled with these thoughts came others of Bennet.

His was the most honest heart in the world. The little he had done for me had all been open and above board. He had not even declared his love for me until the day I was out of his debt, and free to give him an honest answer.

But Roger! When I would not take what he tried to force upon me, he had found tricky channels through which they would fall upon me, anyway, and then had taunted me with their possession!

When I got home from work that night I asked Margaret if she knew that Roger had been paying for most of my clothes. She answered, with a chuckle:

"Naturally."

"What made you think that?" I asked.

"Because no girl working as you are could afford such things. That Paquin gown alone is easily worth two hundred dollars, if not more."

"I paid twenty for it," I said.

She laughed. I told her about the shop where there were "bargains," and she, as Lolly had done, laughed in my face.

"No shop," she said, "could give you a bargain in sables such as you have."

I had a brown fur set. I did not know they were sables. I had been less than a year in America. I was just eighteen. I came from a large, poor family. I did not know the value of clothes or jewels any more than poor, green Irish or Polish immigrant girls would know it in that time. What could I know of sables?

We lived very quietly now. I had to stay at home, as I had promised Roger to go out with no one till he returned. And then, of course, Bennet and Butler no longer came, and I abandoned my music lessons. I had never taken more than a half-hearted interest in them.

A restless spirit possessed me at this time, and I could not settle my mind to anything. I used to wander about Roger's rooms, with my thoughts disjointed and jumbled. I thought I was brooding over his absence, and then again I thought I was worrying about Bob. Then one day as I stood staring into the leaping flames of that fireplace, almost like an inspiration there came to me a great idea for a story.

For an hour I sat staring into the flames, the story slowly taking root in my mind, and the fascinating plot and characters unraveling before me. It was ten o'clock at night when I began to write, and I worked without stopping till the dawn.

That was how I began to write my first novel. I lived now with only one avid thought in my mind—the story I was writing. It infatuated me as nothing I had ever done before had infatuated me.

I resigned my position, and took a half-day place. I had a little over a hundred dollars saved, and the new position paid me seven dollars a week. As I supplied my own type-writer, I had the privilege of taking outside work in the afternoons.

I think Mr. Forman was really re-

lieved when I told him I had decided to go, though he asked me anxiously whether I had consulted Mr. Hamilton about it. I said that I had written and told him. I had done my work there adequately (he gave me an excellent reference), but he had dismissed a faithful secretary, to whom he was attached, to make a place for me at Mr. Hamilton's request. I never knew this when I took that position, else I would not have taken it.

I left because of what Roger had said, for one thing. I preferred not to be under obligations to him for my position. Besides, I wanted a little more time in which to write my novel. The seven a week just paid for my board, and I had enough saved to carry me along otherwise.

My new position was in a school, a sort of dramatic school where calisthenics, fencing, and other things were also taught. I had a chance to see something of the young men and women who were studying there, mostly of wealthy families. The courses were very expensive. A great many Chicago society women took fencing lessons there, and one of them was kind enough to offer to pay for lessons for me. I would have liked to learn, but I could not afford the time. Every minute that I had away from the school I gave to my precious novel. I used to get home about two. I 'd have a glass of milk and a cracker for my luncheon, and then I would write until six. Then came dinner, and then again I wrote, sometimes till as late as midnight. I wrote my novel in twenty-two days. It is impossible for me to describe my delight and satisfaction when I put the last word to my manuscript.

Then for a long time I sat by the fire and re-read my story, and it seemed to me I had created a treasure. Roger, who professed to know something about palmistry, had averred there was a gold-mine in my hand, and he said that it was he who was going to put it there; but when I read my story that night I had a prophetic feeling that my mine would be of my own creating.

I now had to revise and type-write my story, no light task.

Outside of the work I did for the school, I had secured bits of copying for a few people in the building; but I had made very little above my salary. The head of the school was an imposing and majestic woman of about fifty, very handsome and charming and gracious in her manner, though I always resented the difference between her tone to me and that she assumed to her pupils and the people who frequented her studios—she called them studios. She had a little salon in a way. Nearly all Chicago's important people, and especially the celebrities, came to her "afternoons." I had a chance to see authors who had arrived.

There was one very tall woman who wore glasses and talked through her nose. She was very well known at that time, having had a witty serial published in the very magazine that bought my first little story. She was much sought after, and was suffering from a bad case of what O'Brien always called "the big head." She looked and talked as if she were a personage of great superiority, and her sharp retorts and witty comments, always a bit malicious, were quoted everywhere in Chicago. I think she believed me to be one of her many silent admirers. I was not. I knew that when one has reached a stage of complete satisfaction with oneself, one has reached one's limitation. Chicago's celebrated writer at the zenith of her fame was not to me a particularly attractive object.

Then there was a celebrated Western author who was a giant in size and a giant in heart. I secretly adored him both as a writer and as a man. He wore his straight hair rather long, and though his face was becoming florid and full, he had a fine, almost Indian-like, profile. He was tremendously popular in Chicago, and Mrs. Martin, my employer, flattered and courted him despite his careless and rather grimy clothes and utterly unmanicured nails. Behold the measure of my sophistication! I who knew not the meaning of the word "manicure" less than a year

before, took pride in my own shining nails now, and remarked the condition of those of a great author!

There was another less famous, but more exclusive, author who fascinated me chiefly because he had a glass eye. I had never before seen a glass eye.

I have mentioned the authors because they interested me more than the artists, sculptors, musicians, and actors and actresses who also came to these studios where I worked. The building itself was full of artists' studios.

Do not think of me as being one of this distinguished "set." I was, in fact, simply on the outskirts, a rather wistful, perhaps envious, and sometimes amused observer of these great people who had obviously arrived.

Why does the average author and artist and actor, when he succeeds, make such a noise about it? They clang bells as noisily when they "arrive" as when a circus comes to town.

Few of these celebrities noticed me. Several of the artists asked me to pose for them. I did not pose, because I had no time. I did go up to the studio of a hunchback artist who painted divinely and had a pretty wife and an adorable baby. I became very friendly with that lovely family, and even shyly confessed to them that I, too, wrote. Just fancy! I, who only a few months before had forced every one to listen to my poems, now when I was in contact with people who did the very things I wished to do, experienced a panic at the thought of their finding out about it or of revealing myself to them!

Even Mrs. Martin never suspected me. I was simply a stenographer who had come to her from a mercantile firm. The only thing about me that ever appealed to her was my looks. Think of that! She said to me one day as I was going out:

"Miss Ascough, you look like a poster girl. Where did you get that hat?"

I told her, and she raised her eyebrows.

"Well," she said, studying me through her lorgnon, "your hair looks astonishingly well against that silver fur. Have you ever thought of going on the stage?"

I replied that I had not.

She regarded me speculatively a moment, and then said:

"There are worse-looking girls than you in the choruses."

I told her I could sing a little. Whereupon she said:

"Oh, I don't mean sing or act. However, you 'd better stick to what you 're doing until my season closes, and then, if you 're a good girl"—she smiled very graciously—"I 'll see what I can do for you."

Her season ended in June. You perceive I had something to look forward to!

And now I come to the author who was the cause of my discharge from this place.

Mrs. Martin herself had brought him to my desk and introduced him to me. He had with him a thick manuscript when he asked me, with a very charming smile, if I would type-write for him. You may be sure I was glad to get this extra work, as my funds were running low. So I put aside the copying of my own novel, and went hard to work upon the play of this Chicago author. It was a closely written manuscript, a play in six acts. He required eight copies, only four of which were to be carbons. In order to get the work done as soon as possible and resume the copying of my own story, I went down to the office three nights and worked till eleven.

As I have said, there were six acts, and each was of forty pages. So, you see, it was a fairly big manuscript. A public stenographer would have charged at the rate of five cents a folio,—that is, one hundred words,—and there were about two hundred and eighty words to a page. She would also have charged about two cents a page for the carbon copies. I made out my bill for five cents a page, and did not charge for the carbon copies.

He had been coming every day and going over the work as I did it, and he had me not only bind his play, but rule parts of it in red ink—the descriptive parts. I felt mightily pleased when I handed him the completed manuscript. Rather apologetically I proffered him my bill.

He took the latter, and looked at it as if much surprised and pained, and then said:

"Why, Miss Ascough, I brought this to you as a friend of Mrs. Martin."

I said:

"Yes, that 's why I did not charge for the carbons, and made you just a half-rate."

"There seems to be some mistake," he replied. "I understood from Mrs. Martin that you would do this work just as if it were for her."

"Do you mean," I said, "for nothing?"

He made a gesture with his hands, as much as to say, "Don't put it so baldly."

I stared at him. I could not believe that any one would be mean enough to let me do all that work for nothing. He was a greatly admired author. His play seemed, in my youthful judgment, a fine thing, and yet was it possible that he would impose upon a poor working-girl? Could he really believe that I, who was being paid only seven dollars a week for my morning services, would have worked afternoons and evenings to type-write his play without charge?

He put his play in a large envelop, and then he said:

"I appreciate very much what you have done, and I am pleased with your work. I shall make a point of recommending you to friends of mine." He cleared his throat. "I 've also brought you a little present in token of my appreciation." He took from his coat pocket a book, one of his own. "It 's autographed," he said, smiling, and gave it to me.

I held his book with thumb and forefinger, as if it were something unclean, and then I deliberately dropped it into the waste-paper-basket.

He turned violently red and walked into Mrs. Martin's studio.

I had started in aimlessly to change the ribbon,—I had worn out one for his play,—when Mrs. Martin sailed majestically from her room and up to my desk.

"Miss Ascough," she said, "I won't require your services any further. You may leave at once."

I shrugged my shoulders, sneered, and laughed right up in her face, as if the loss of such a job as that was a matter of supreme indifference to me. She became as red as her friend, and walked haughtily back to her private quarters.

XXXII

I CARRIED my machine home. They are heavy things. A sort of raining snow was falling, and though it was only four in the afternoon, it was beginning to grow dark. The streets were in a bad state with slush and mud and ice, and I got very wet on my way to the car, for I could n't put up an umbrella, as I had to carry my machine under one arm and my manuscript under the other.

As soon as I walked into our house, Margaret called out from the dining-room:

"Mr. Hamilton is here."

Then he got up—he was having tea with them—and came over to me. I had the type-writer in my hand, and I don't know whether I dropped it or set it down on the floor.

I had n't had any luncheon, I was soaked through. I had worked for weeks on my novel, and, besides the office work, I had type-written that long play. I had been working day and night, and I had been insulted and discharged. I was tired out, cold, and wet. Add to this the sudden shock of seeing Mr. Hamilton, and you will understand why even a healthy girl of eighteen may sometimes faint.

It was only a little faint, and I came to while Roger was carrying me up-stairs; but I did not move, for his face was against mine.

Mama had come up with us, and when Roger set me on the couch, she said she 'd take charge of me. She told him to go down-stairs and have Margaret make me a toddy, and to bring it up on a tray with my dinner. I felt like a big baby to have her fussing over me and taking off all my wet things. I had a lovely pink eider-down dressing-gown that she had made me, and she forced me to get into that and into dry stockings and slippers.

By this time Roger and Margaret came up with the tray, and all three were doing things for me. Roger himself mixed me a drink. It was hot, with brandy and lemon in it. As soon as I drank it, it went right to my head, for I had eaten nothing since morning, and I tried to tell them about Mrs. Martin's discharging me, and how that author had not paid me for all my work.

Cloudy as my head was and stumblingly as I talked, I won their sympathies. Roger said that the author was a mean little sneak, a cursed small cur, and that he 'd like to kick him all over the town.

Then, because I started to cry, they tried to make me eat something and drink some coffee; but I was so sleepy I could not keep my eyes open. The first thing I knew, I was in my bed.

I slept and slept; I slept till ten o'clock the next day. The first thought I had was that Roger must have gone. I never dressed so quickly, and I ran to his room and knocked; but he was not there.

Margaret also had departed for work, but I found mama in the kitchen. She was making me an oyster stew, a thing for which I had acquired a liking. As soon as I appeared, she cried:

"You bad girl, what did you get up for? Here 's a note for you."

With hands trembling with excitement, I read Roger's first letter to me. It was like him, those two brief, laconic sentences:

Back by noon. Stay in bed.

ROGER.

Stay in bed! I never felt better in my life. I had my stew, and then I went upstairs and finished copying my novel.

At noon to the minute Roger returned. He had all sorts of things for me: flowers,—orchids, mind you!—squab, fruit, jelly, and magazines. One would think I was an invalid, and I had to laugh at his look of disapproval when he discovered me busy at work. He said I was incorrigible.

He made no effort that day to conceal his feelings for me. It was not that he petted or caressed me; but he fussed over me all day, kept me right by the fire, and brought up my luncheon to me, as he said the lower floor was drafty. He kept feeling my head to see if I was feverish. I think I gave him a good fright the night before. He said he ought to have returned to Richmond the previous night, as there was important business there that needed his attention. He 'd been obliged to keep the wires scorching all the morning. He would have to get away that night, however; but he wanted to make absolutely certain that I had recovered.

He said that he had been obliged to hasten his return, neglecting certain business in Europe, because I had not written to him as I promised to do. I did write him once, but the letter must have miscarried. However, he was not in a scolding mood that day, and every minute I thought he was going to pick me up in his arms.

He wanted to know if I had missed him, and I tried to pretend that I had n't, that I had been absorbed in my writing. He looked so solemn over that and so far, far away from me that I wanted instantly to put my arms about his neck, and I debated with myself how I could reach him. I pulled up the stool in front of him, stood on it, and in that way reached his face. I gave him a quick kiss, and then jumped down. I thought he would laugh at that, but he did n't. I did though; but while I was laughing I suddenly thought of something that frightened me, and I asked him if he had had a fine time in Europe, and added that I supposed he had seen many lovely women.

I had a vague idea that France was simply brimming with fascinating, irresistible, and beautiful sirens whom no man could possibly resist, and the thought that Roger had been there made my heart almost stop beating; but not for long, for he said very gravely:

"I never noticed anything or any one. My mind was engrossed with one thought only—my *own* little girl in Chicago."

Then he asked me if I realized that he had spent fewer than ten days in

Europe, and that he had come here to me before even going to his home.

"Goodness!" I said slyly, "you *are* interested in me, are n't you?"

He looked at me queerly then, and he said:

"Nora, I 'm 'dippy' about you."

"Is that slang for love, Roger?" I asked, which made him laugh, and then he tried to frown at me; but he could not. So he changed the subject abruptly, and made me tell him about all the things that had happened to me while he was away.

He said I was a "precious angel" for giving up Bennet, and that Butler was a "conceited pup," and I was a "little idiot" to mind anything he said. He wished *he* had been there. He said Mrs. Martin was a sycophant and a kowtowing old snob, and that he knew her well; and as for my going on the stage! One would think I was considering jumping off the face of the earth.

I told him he was pretty nearly as bad as the little Japanese, and he laughed and said:

"That Jap 's all right. By George! I like his idea. It would give me peculiar satisfaction to wring the necks of one or two people we know," and he clapped his fist into his hand.

I said mischievously:

"Well, you know that Jap hated those enemies of mine because he loved me."

Roger chuckled, and said I might sit on that stool and hint till doomsday, but he was not going to tell me he loved me till he was good and ready.

"When will that be?" I asked, and he said solemnly, with mock gravity:

> "'I 'm sure I don't know,'
> Said the great bell of Bow."

"My father always said that there was no time like the present," I replied.

He laughed, but said seriously:

"Nora, if you play with fire, you 'll be burned. Burns leave scars. Scars are ugly things, and I love only pretty things, like my precious little girl."

"Aha!" I said triumphantly, "then you admit it at last."

He burst out laughing and said:

"Trapped! Help!"

After a while he wanted to hear my novel. So then I read it to him, my beautiful story.

I read it well, as only an author can read his own work—not well in the sense of elocution, but with every point pricked out. It took me two and a half hours to read it, and when I was through, twilight had settled. I had read the last words chiefly by the light of the blazing fire. Roger got up, and walked up and down the room. I watched him from my seat on the stool by the fire. Then he suddenly came back to me, seized my manuscript, and made a motion as if he would consign it to the flames. At that I screamed, like an outraged mother, and caught at it, and he stood towering over me, watching me curiously.

"I wanted to try you then, Nora," he said. "Now I know that I have a bigger rival in your work than any man. What am I to do?"

I held my novel out to him.

"Burn it if you wish to, then. It represents only the product of my fancy; but *you* are my life," I said.

"Do you mean that?" he asked me, and I replied:

"Oh, yes, I do, I do."

"If I asked you to give up your writing, as I asked you to give up Bennet, would you do it for me?"

"Yes, everything and every one, Roger," I replied, "if only you will love me. Won't you?" In a voice full of emotion, he then said:

"Can you doubt it?"

A moment later he seemed to regret having revealed himself like that, and he swiftly made ready to go. He was taking an early train for Richmond. His man was waiting for him at some hotel. I wanted to go down to the door with him, but he would not let me, and we said good-by before mama, who had come up to say dinner was ready. He did n't kiss me, but I kissed him right before mama, on his hand and sleeve. If I could have reached his face, I would have kissed him

there. He kept smoothing my hair. He said he would be back very soon, and that he would never stay away from me long now.

I watched him from the window. The rain of the previous day had frozen on the trees, and everything was glistening and slippery. A wind was coming from the north, and the people went along the street as if blown against their will.

Roger looked up before getting into the cab and waved to me at the window, and I thought, as once before I had thought, as I watched his carriage disappear, that perhaps it would always be like this. He would always go. Would there ever come a day when he would not come again?

That was on the twenty-sixth of February. He could not have stayed in Richmond more than a few hours, for at ten o'clock the following night he came back to me.

I was running over some new pieces at the piano when I heard the bell ring; but I had no idea it was he until he came into the room without knocking. There was something about his whole appearance and attitude that startled me. His face had a grayish, haggard look, as if he had not slept. I ran up to him, but he held me back and began to speak rapidly:

"Nora, I 've only a few minutes in Chicago. I must catch the 11:09 back to Richmond. It 's after ten now. My cab 's at the door. This is what I 've come for. I want you to go to-morrow, on as early a train as you can get, to a little hunting-lodge of mine in the Michigan woods. Holmes [his valet] will come and take you, and I want you to stay there for a week or ten days."

The oddness of his request naturally puzzled me, and of course I exclaimed about it, and wanted to know why he wished me to go there. He said irritably:

"What does it matter why? I want you to go. I insist upon it, in fact."

"But what will I do up there?" I asked.

"Anything you wish. Write, if you like. I 've a man and woman there. You 'll not be entirely alone. The change will do you good."

"Are n't you going to be there, too?"

"I 'm afraid not. I 'll try to get there for the week-end if I possibly can."

"But I don't want to go to a place all alone, Roger."

"I tell you, you won't be alone. I have a man and a woman there, and Holmes will take you."

"But I don't see the sense in going away out there in the middle of winter."

"I particularly want you to go. Are my wishes nothing to you, then? I want you out of Chicago for a few days. You 've not been well and—"

"I never felt better in my life."

"Nora, I want you to go. You must go. Do this thing to please me."

As, puzzled, I still hesitated, he began to promise that he would join me there the next day, and when I still did not assent, he tried coaxing me in another way. He said he 'd bring Verley and a hunting-dog, and he 'd teach me how to ride horseback and to shoot. He had horses, too, somewhere near there; a big stock farm, I think. I told him I did n't want to shoot or kill things.

By this time he had worked himself up to a state of exasperation at my stubbornness, and his request really seemed to me so ridiculous and capricious that I began to laugh at him, saying jokingly:

"You 're worse than a dog in a manger: you 're a Turk. You want to shut me up in a box."

"That 's true enough," he replied. "I wish I 'd done it long ago."

He was standing very tall and stiff by the door, with his coat still on, and his arms folded grimly across his breast. I looked at him, and a half-mischievous, half-tender impulse overwhelmed me. I went closer to him, and put my hands on his folded arms as I said:

"I 'll go, Roger, if you 'll take me in your arms and kiss me."

He gave me *such* a look at that, and then his face broke, and he opened his arms. I went into them. I don't know how long I was in his arms. I never wanted to leave them again.

I presently heard his voice, low and

husky, and felt he was trying to release himself from my hands. He said:

"I must go. I 'll miss my train."

"O Roger, please don't leave me now!" I begged.

"I must," he replied, and then he went quickly out of the room. I followed him into the hall, though he was striding along so swiftly I could not keep pace with him. Just where the stairs began, I caught at his arm and held him.

"O Roger, you do love me, don't you?" I asked sobbingly, and he said hoarsely:

"Yes, I *do*."

Then he went down the stairs, and I after him. At the door he said I must go back; but I was still clinging to his hand, and when he opened the door I, too, went out.

Snow was falling densely, and the great north wind had brought on its wing a blizzard and storm such as Chicago had seldom known; but Roger and I, in that porch, saw nothing but each other.

He kept urging me to go in, saying I would catch my death of cold, and stooping down, and without my asking him this time, he took me in his arms and kissed me again and again.

"I love you, Nora," he said. "You 're the only thing in the world I have ever loved. I swear that to you, darling."

Then he kissed me again, opened the door, and turned me back.

"Roger, tell me just this, at least," I pleaded. "Is there any other woman in your life?"

The question was out now. Like a haunting shadow that I dared not face there had always been that horrible thought in my mind, and now for the first time I had voiced it. With his arms still about me, looking down into my face, he said:

"No; no one that counts. I swear that, too, Nora."

Then I went in. I was like one in a beautiful trance. That room seemed to me the loveliest place on earth. Everything about it spoke of him. He had chosen the softly tinted Oriental rugs, the fine paintings, my piano, and the great long table where I wrote. He had chosen all these things for me, and now I knew why he had done it. He loved me; he had said so at last.

I went about the room touching everything, and gathering up little things of his—papers and books; I went into his bedroom, and found his bath-robe. I put it on, and for the first time—though he had said the rooms were mine, I had not used them—I threw myself down there in the room where he had slept and all night long I lay dreaming of him.

XXXIII

The next day found Chicago enveloped in one of the worst snow-storms that had ever come out of the north. Of course the idea of my going to the Michigan woods was out of the question. It was impossible even to leave the house. All the trains were stalled, and many wires were down. I could not have gone, even had I tried. So I was obliged to remain at home, and even Holmes did not appear at the house, though he telephoned to say he would be up as soon as the storm stopped.

Shut in as we were in a great city caught in the paralyzing grip of a snow-storm, I did not come out of my exalted mood of intense happiness. All through that long day, when I had nothing to do but to watch the blinding snow and the vehicles and people that had dared to venture out, I was with Roger, alone this time, never to be parted again. All the barriers were down between us. All we knew was that we loved each other. What did anything else matter? My work? Ah, it was a feeble little spark that had fluttered out before this vast flame in my heart. I had no room, no thought, for anything else.

I loved. I had loved for many months in hunger and work and pain, and now at last the gods had rewarded me. My love was returned; Roger loved me. That was the most wonderful, the most beautiful, the most miraculous thing that had ever occurred in the world.

The telephone was ringing all day, and so was the door-bell. Mama, who wan-

dered in and out to chat with me about the storm or other things, kept grumbling. She said some one had been trying to get Margaret on the long-distance telephone all day, but Margaret had to go out on a case. Whoever it was, he would leave no message.

Once I answered the telephone myself, and though the voice sounded as if it were far away, I fancied it was Roger's. Oh, I had only him on my mind! It was some one for Margaret, and when I said:

"I 'm Miss Ascough. Can't I take a message?" he replied:

"No," and rang off.

Margaret came in about five, and when we told her about the telephone, she seemed much mystified, and called up the information bureau to ask who had called her, and the bureau said Richmond had been calling.

Naturally, we were surprised that the calls were really from Richmond, and we were sure it must be Roger. Mama said he was probably anxious about me, but I could not help wondering why, if it was he on the telephone, he had not spoken to me. Margaret said it was probably his secretary or a clerk, and when I spoke of the voice, she said all Southern voices were alike.

She was called out again as soon as she had changed her clothes; but it was in the neighborhood, and she had only thrown a shawl about her and run out, saying I was to take any messages that came.

So when a telegram came, I signed for it, and then, though it was addressed to Margaret, I opened and read it, thinking it might be important. I could n't for the life of me understand it, and I handed it to mama. She read it, glanced at me, and then said that Margaret would probably understand.

It was really from Roger, but why he should telegraph Margaret not to let me see some papers, I could not understand. This was the telegram:

On no account let Nora see the papers.

While I was puzzling over this, Margaret came in, and I gave her the telegram. She took a long time to read it, and then she said carelessly that he referred to some papers,—deeds and things like that,—and he probably wished to surprise me.

It was a poor sort of explanation, but it satisfied me. I was too far up in the clouds to give the matter much thought, so Margaret and mama and I had dinner together. I prepared spaghetti, a dish of which they were fond, and which I made better than any one else. However, I burned the spaghetti,—let it go dry,—and mama said:

"You 're a nice cook, with your mind away off in Richmond."

Margaret was in the pantry, but I knew she was listening. I said, after giving mama a squeeze for forgiving me about the spaghetti:

"You 're going to find out a thing or two about him soon. You don't know what a beautiful character he has, and you know very well no man ever had a nicer smile than Roger."

Mama nodded, and went on stirring what she was cooking.

"You 're a foolish old angel," I went on. "You just don't like him because you 're fond of me. If it were n't for me, you would like him, would n't you, Mama?"

She said:

"It may be a case of prejudice, dearie, but he 's got to 'show' me first, though."

"Oh, he will," I assured her. "You 'll see." Then I added: "Anyhow, you 'll admit that he does care for me, won't you?"

"Any one can see with half an eye that he 's head over heels in love with you; but—"

Margaret had come out of the pantry, and she banged some things down so noisily that we both jumped.

"For heaven's sake! don't talk about that man!" she said.

Then mama and I laughed, and we had dinner. I had been up-stairs only a few minutes after dinner when I heard Margaret at the telephone again. I went down to learn what the trouble was. As I was going down I heard her say:

"It 's impossible. A dog could n't go

out in a storm like this." Then after a moment, she added, "I said I 'd do what I could," and then: "You need n't thank me. It 's not on your account, d—— you!" She hung up the receiver.

"Who was that?" I asked. She answered savagely—she had never spoken so crossly to me before:

"None of your business!" and slammed out into the kitchen.

The storm abated during the night, and by morning it had ceased; but the city was still snow-bound, though workers were out all night clearing the streets, and an army of snow-shovelers went from house to house as soon as daylight came. They began ringing our door-bell as early as six o'clock, and that awoke me; so I dressed and went down-stairs. Margaret was ahead of me. I went to the porch to get the papers, but she was irritable because I opened the door and let in the cold. She said she wished to goodness I 'd stay in my own room.

At breakfast we were without the papers, and Margaret told mama they had not come. The storm had probably prevented their delivery. I said I did n't mind running out to the nearest newsstand, but she said:

"For heaven's sake! Nora, find something to amuse yourself with without chasing wildly round! Now the storm 's over, that man Holmes will be here, and you 'd better get ready."

So, though I thought we 'd have some difficulty in getting a train,—none was running on time,—I packed the few things I intended to take with me.

If any one sees anything particularly immoral in my calmly preparing to go on a trip with this man, I beg him to recall my previous experiences with him. He had never done anything that caused me to fear him, and now he could do nothing that would have been wrong in my eyes.

I was love's passionate pilgrim. I could not look ahead; I turned not a glance back; I only thrilled in the warmth of the dear present.

About ten, Holmes arrived. He said we could get a train at eleven and one at four. The four o'clock one would be better, as by that time the snow would be cleared off; but Mr. Hamilton had telephoned and telegraphed instructions that we should take the very first train.

So, then, with my bag packed, I came down-stairs, and went to the kitchen to say good-by to Margaret and mama. When I opened the door, they sprang apart, and I saw the morning paper in their hands; mama was crying. All of a sudden I had a horrible fear that something had happened to Roger, and I sprang over and tried to take the paper from mama. She tried to put it behind her, and we struggled for the sheet, but Margaret cried out:

"For God's sake! let her have it! We may as well end this."

And then I had the paper.

It was on the front page, so important was he, that vile story. I saw his face looking up at me from that sheet, and beside him was a woman, and under her picture was another woman. The type danced before me, but I read on and on and on.

And this was my love, my hero, my god—this married man whose wife was divorcing him because of another woman; whose husband in turn had divorced her because of him, Roger Avery Hamilton. I read the sordid story; I read the woman's tale in court, of his many infidelities, which had begun soon after their marriage, of the gay and fast life he had led, and of his being named as co-respondent by his best friend in Richmond, whose wife had admitted the truth of the charge, and had been cast out by her husband.

This wife of his, of whose existence I had never even dreamed, said in an interview that although she did not believe in divorce and had endured her husband's infidelities for years, she was now setting him free for the sake of the other woman, whom he was in honor bound to marry. They had all been friends, they were of the same social set, and the relations between this woman and Hamilton, his wife declared, had existed for three years, and still continued.

If one's body were dead, and the mind still alive, how might that vital, mysterious organ find utterance through the paralyzed body? I have often wondered. Now I was like one dead. There was no feeling in any part of my body but my poor head, and through it surged, oh, such a long, long, weird procession of all the scenes of my life since I had left my home! It seemed as if every one I had ever known danced like fantastic shades across my memory, each one in turn beckoning to me or beating me back. And through that throng of faces, blotting out the black one of Burbank, the sensual one of Dr. Manning, the kind, grotesque face of O'Brien, and the rough, honest mask of Bennet, like a snake *his* bitter face rose, and stared at me with his half-closed, cruel eyes.

I was before the fireplace where I had often sat with him. Some one, mama or Margaret, had brought me there. They fluttered in and out of the room like ghosts, and they spoke to me and cried over me, but I do not know what they said. I had lost the power of hearing and of speech. I tell you I was dead—dead.

Then that little valet of his came up to the room and asked me if I was ready!

"Go away! Go away!" I murmured when he came around in front of me and looked at me curiously. Then Margaret came in and called shrilly at him:

"You get out of here—you and your d—— master!"

That commotion, I think, roused me slightly, for I went to my room, and I took from my lower drawer all of the foolish little things of his that I had collected at various times and treasured. I gathered them up in a large newspaper, carried them into his room, and dumped them into the fire.

Then I took that newspaper and spread it out on the desk, and I read the story all over again, slowly, because my brain worked like a clock that has run down, and pulls itself to time only in spasmodic jerks. I found myself studying the picture of that woman who was not his wife. I cared nothing about the wife, but only of that other one, the woman his wife said he still loved.

She was all the things that I was not, a statuesque beauty, with a form like Juno and a face like that of a great sleepy ox. Beside her, what was I? Women like her were the kind men loved. I knew that. Women like me merely teased their fancy and curiosity. We were the small tin toys with whom they paused to play.

I crushed that accursed sheet. No, no, she was not better than I. Strip her of her glittering clothes, put her in rags over a wash-tub, and she would have been transformed into a common thing. But I? If you put *me* over a wash-tub, I tell you *I* would have woven a romance, aye, from the very suds. God had planted in *me* the fairy germs; that I knew.

But rage! What has it ever done to heal even the slightest hurt or wound? Oh, I could tramp up and down and wring my hands till they were bruised, but, alas! would that bring me any comfort?

I went back to my own room, and I packed not my clothes—those clothes he had paid for, but my manuscripts. They at least were all my own. They filled my little old black bag—the bag I had brought from Canada.

Margaret came to my door, and when she knocked I controlled my voice and said:

"I am busy. Go away."

"O Nora dear, Mr. Hamilton is on the 'phone," she said. "He is calling from Richmond. He wants to speak to you, dearie."

"I will never speak to him again," I declared.

"O Nora," she said, "he is coming to you now. He is taking a special train. I am sure he can explain everything. He says that he can, dear."

"Everything is explained. I know *now*," I replied. Yes, that was true. I did know now.

I went stealing down the stairs on tiptoe. They had relaxed their guard, and I had watched for this moment as craftily as only one can who is insane, as indeed I was.

Outside the cold wind smote me. Snow was piled high on all sides. I passed along through great banks of it, and I climbed over sodden drifts and gigantic balls that children had rolled, and with my little black bag I went down to the beach. Where it began, I do not know, for I thought the white caps on the water, breaking against the shore, were great drifts of snow; and I went plodding on and on till I came to the water. There I stood and looked at it.

A policeman who had spoken to me when I turned down toward the lake must have followed me, fo. suddenly he came behind me and said roughly:

"Now, none of that," and I turned around and looked at him stupidly.

He took me by the arm and led me away, and he asked me what was my trouble, and when I did not answer (how could I, who could scarcely speak at all?) he said:

"Some fellow ruin you?"

Ruin!

That word has only one meaning when applied to a woman. I had not been ruined in the sense that Chicago policeman meant, but, oh, deeper than that sort of ruin had been the damnatory effects of the blow that he had dealt me! He had destroyed something precious and fine; he had crushed my beautiful faith, my ideals, my dreams, my spirit, the charming visions that had danced like fairies in my brain. Worse, he had ruthlessly destroyed Me! I was dead. This was another person who stood there in the snow staring at the waters of Lake Michigan.

Where was the heroic little girl who only a little more than a year before, penniless and alone, had fearlessly stepped out into the smiling, golden world, and boldly challenged Fate? I was afraid of that world now. It was a black, monstrous thing, a thief in the dark that had hid to entrap me.

O Roger, Roger! I loved you even as my little dog had loved me. If you but glanced in my direction, I was awake, alert. If you smiled at me or called my name, my heart leaped within me. I would have kissed your hand, your feet; and when you were displeased with me, ah me! how miserable I was! There was nothing you touched I did not love. The very clothes you wore, the paper you had read and crushed, the most insignificant of your personal belongings were sacred to me. I gathered them up like precious treasures, and I hoarded them even as a miser does his gold. I was to you nothing but a queer little object that had caught your weary interest and flattered your vanity. You saw me only through the cold eyes of a cynic—a connoisseur, who, seeking in vain for a flawless jewel, had stumbled upon a freak.

The policeman said:

"I could run you in for this, but I 'm sorry for you. I guess you went 'dotty' for a while. Now you go home, and you 'll feel better soon."

"I have no home," I said.

"That 's tough," he replied. "And you look nothing but a kid. Are you broke, too?"

"No," I said, though I really was.

"Have you any friends?"

I thought painfully. Mama and Margaret were my friends, but I could not go back there. *He* was coming by a special train. O'Brien? O'Brien was in New York. Bennet? I had stabbed Bennet even as Roger had stabbed me.

Who, then, was there?

Lolly; there was Lolly.

Drifts of feathery snow kept flying down from the housetops as the policeman and I passed along, and as icicles came crashing down upon the sidewalks he led me out into the middle of the road.

We came to Lolly's door, and the policeman rang the bell. I don't know what he said to the woman who answered the door, but I ran by her and up the stairs to Lolly's room, and I knocked twice before she answered. I heard her moving inside, then she opened the door and stood there with her blue eyes looking like glass beads, and a cigarette stuck out between her fingers. And I said:

"O Lolly! *Lolly!*" She stood aside, and I went in and fell down on my knees

by the table, and threw out my arms upon it and my head upon them.

I felt her standing silently beside me for a long time, and then her hand touched my head, and she did a strange thing: she went down on her knees beside me, lifted up my face with her hand, just as Roger used to do, and stared at me. Then she threw her arms about me and drew me up close, and I knew that at last Lolly had forgiven me.

She could cry, but not I. I had reached that stage where tears are beyond us. They precede the rainbow in our lives, and my rainbow had been wiped away. I was out in the dark, blindly groping my way, and it seemed to me that though there were a thousand doors, they were all closed to me.

"I could have told you about him long ago," said Lolly, after a while.

I said mechanically:

"You spared me. I did not you."

"No, you did the right thing," Lolly replied. "If I had told you then what I knew—that Hamilton was a married man—I might have saved you this."

There was silence between us for a time, and then Lolly said:

"Did you know that Marshall Chambers is married? He married a rich society girl—a girl of his own class, Nora."

"Lolly, I don't know what to do. I think I am going to die," I said.

Lolly threw down her cigarette, and came and stood over me.

"Listen to me," she said. "I 'll tell you what *you* are going to do, Nora Ascough. You are going to brace up like a man. You 're going to be a dead-game sport, as O'Brien said you were. *You* have something to *live* for. You can start all over again. I wish that I could, but *I* have cashed *my* checks all in."

I looked up at her. There was something in her ringing voice that had a revivifying effect upon me. It aroused as the bugle that calls a soldier to arms.

"What have I to live for that you have not?" I asked her.

"You can *write*," she said. "You have a letter in your pocket addressed to posterity. Deliver it, Nora! Deliver it!"

"Tell me how! O Lolly, do tell me how!"

"Get away from this city; go to New York. Cut that man out of your brain as if he were a malignant cancerous growth. Use the knife of a surgeon, and do it yourself. Soldiers have amputated their own legs and arms upon the battle-field. You can do the same."

She had worked herself up to a state of excitement, and she had carried me along with her. We were both standing up now, our flashing eyes meeting. Then I remembered.

"I have no money."

She dipped into her stocking, and brought up a little roll.

"There, take it! I 'll not need it where I 'm going."

Then I told her I had no clothes, and she filled her suitcase for me.

"Now," she said, "you are all ready. There 's a train leaving about seven. You 'll get to New York to-morrow morning. O'Brien will be there to meet you. I 'll telegraph to him after I 've put you on the train."

"Come with me, Lolly."

"I can't, Nora. I 'm going to another land."

O Lolly! Lolly! little did I dream what that "other land" was to be. Two weeks later, riding in an elevated train, I chanced to pick up a newspaper, and there I learned of Lolly's suicide. She had shot herself through the heart in a Chicago hotel, leaving a "humorous" note to the coroner, giving instructions as to her body and "estate."

I was in the Chicago train whirling along at the rate of sixty miles an hour. I lay awake in my berth and stared out at a black night; but in the sky above I saw a single star. It was bright, alive; and suddenly I thought of the Star of Bethlehem, and for the first time in many days, like a child, I said my prayers.

THE END