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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE THING BEYOND REASON \*\*\*

The Thing Beyond Reason

A COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL—THE STORY OF THE STRANGE

ADVENTURE THAT LED LEXY MORAN TO A HOUSE

OF TRAGEDY AND MYSTERY IN THE

SUBURBS OF NEW YORK

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

Author of "Angelica," etc.

The house was very quiet to-night. There was nothing to disturb Miss Alexandra Moran but the placid ticking of the clock and the faint stir of the curtains at the open window. For that matter, a considerable amount of noise would not have troubled her just then. As she sat at the library table, the light of the shaded lamp shone upon her bright, ruffled head bent over her work in fiercest concentration. She was chewing the end of a badly damaged lead pencil, and she was scowling.

"No!" she said, half aloud. "Won't do! It can't be 'fix'; but, by jiminy, I'll get it if it takes all night!"

She laid down the pencil and sat back in the chair, with her arms folded. Though her present difficulty concerned nothing more serious than a crossword puzzle, an observer might have learned a good deal of Miss Moran's character from her manner of dealing with it. The puzzle itself, with its neat, clear little letters printed in the squares, would have been a revelation that whatever she undertook she did carefully and intelligently—and obstinately.

She was a young little thing, only twenty-three, and quite alone in the world, but not at all dismayed by that. Her father had died some three years ago, and, instead of leaving the snug little fortune she had been taught to expect, he had left nothing at all; so that at twenty she had had her first puzzle to solve—how to keep alive without eating the bread of charity.

It was no easy matter for a girl who was still in boarding school, but she had done it. She had come to New York and had found a post as nursery governess, and later as waitress in a tea room, and then in the art department of an enormous store. She had gained no tangible profit from these three years, she had no balance in the bank, but that did not trouble her. She had learned that she could stand on her own feet, that she could trust herself; and with this knowledge and the experience she had had, and her quick wits and splendid health, she felt herself fully armed against the world. Indeed, she had not a care on earth this evening except the crossword puzzle.

"It must be 'tocsin,'" she said to herself. "There's something wrong with the verticals. It can't be 'fix,' and yet—"

The telephone bell rang. Still pondering her problem, Lexy went across the room.

"Is Miss Enderby there?" asked a man's voice.

"She's out," answered Lexy cheerfully.

"No!" said the man's voice. "She can't—I—for God's sake, where's Miss Enderby?"

"She's out," Lexy repeated, startled. "She went to the opera with her mother and father."

"Who are you?"

"I'm Mrs. Enderby's secretary."

"Look here! Didn't Miss Enderby say anything? Isn't there any sort of message for me?"

"Nothing that I know of. The servants have gone to bed, but I'll ask them, if it's anything important."

"No!" said the voice. "Don't! No, never mind! Good-by!"

"That's queer!" said Lexy to herself, as she walked away from the instrument, and then she dismissed the matter from her mind. "None of my business!" she thought, and returned to her puzzle.

Suddenly an inspiration came.

"It *is* 'fix'!" she cried. "And it's not 'tocsin,' but 'toxins'! Hurrah!"

This practically completed the puzzle, and she began to fill in the empty squares with the peculiar satisfaction of the crossword enthusiast. It was perfect, now, and she liked things to be perfect.

As she leaned back, with a contented sigh, the clock struck twelve.

"Golly! I didn't realize it was so late!" she reflected. "Queer time for any one to ring up!"

She frowned again. Her special problem solved, she began to take more interest in other affairs; and the more she thought of the telephone incident, the more it amazed her. Caroline Enderby wasn't like other girls. The mere fact of a man's telephoning to her at all was strange and indeed unprecedented.

"And he was badly upset, too," thought Lexy. "He asked if she left a message for him. Think of Caroline Enderby leaving a message for a man!"

She began to feel impatient for Caroline's return.

"I'll tell her when we're alone," she thought; "and she'll have to explain—a little, anyhow."

Lexy wanted an explanation very much, because she was fond of Caroline, and very sorry for her.

Mrs. Enderby was a Frenchwoman of the old-fashioned, conservative type, with the most rigid ideas about the bringing up of a young girl, and her husband—Lexy had often wondered what Mr. Enderby had been before his marriage, for now he was nothing but a grave and dignified echo of his wife. Between them, they had educated Caroline in a disastrous fashion. She had never even been to school. She had had governesses at home, and when a male teacher came in, for music or painting lessons, Mrs. Enderby had always sat in the room with her child. Caroline never went out of the house alone. She was utterly cut off from the normal life of other girls. She was a gentle, lovely creature—a little unreal, Lexy had thought her, at first; and she, at first, had been afraid of Lexy.

Mrs. Enderby had advertised for a secretary, and Lexy had answered the advertisement. Mrs. Enderby had wanted personal references, and Lexy had supplied them, some five or six, of the highest quality. Mrs. Enderby had investigated them with remarkable thoroughness, and had asked Lexy many questions. Indeed, it had taken ten days to satisfy her that Miss Moran was a fit person to come into her house, and Lexy had lived under her roof and under her eagle eye for a month before she was allowed to be alone with Caroline. After that first month, however, Mrs. Enderby had made up her mind that Lexy was to be trusted, and the thin pretext of "secretary" was dropped.

Mrs. Enderby suffered from a not uncommon form of insomnia. She could not sleep at convenient hours—at night, for instance—but could and did sleep at very inconvenient hours during the day; and what she wanted was not a secretary, but a companion for her daughter during these hours.

She realized, too, that even the most strictly brought up *jeune fille* needed some sort of youthful society, and in Lexy she had found pretty well what she wanted—a well mannered, well bred young woman of unimpeachable honesty. So she had permitted Lexy and Caroline to go shopping alone, and sometimes to a matinée or to a tea room. She asked them shrewd questions when they came home, and their answers satisfied her perfectly. They had never even spoken to a man!

"And yet," thought Miss Moran, "somehow Caroline has been carrying on with some one, without even me finding out! I didn't know she had it in her!"

Lexy yawned mightily. She was growing very sleepy, but not for worlds would she go to bed until she had seen Caroline. She lay down on the divan, her hands clasped under her head, and let all sorts of little idle thoughts drift through her mind. Now and then a taxi went by, but this street in the East Sixties was a very quiet one. The house was so very still, and there was nothing in her own young heart to trouble her. Her eyes closed.

She was half asleep when the sound of Mrs. Enderby's voice in the hall brought her to her feet. It was a penetrating voice, with a trace of foreign accent, and it was not a voice that Lexy loved. She went out of the library into the hall.

"Did you enjoy—" she began politely, and then stopped short. "But where's Caroline?" she cried.

"Caroline? But at home, of course," answered Mrs. Enderby.

"At home? Here?"

"But certainly! She had a headache. At the last moment she decided not to go with us. You were not here when we left, Miss Moran."

"I know," murmured Lexy. "I had just run out to the drug store; but—"

"She went directly to bed," Mrs. Enderby continued. "I thought, however, that she would have sent for you during the course of the evening."

"Oh, I see!" said Lexy casually.

At heart, however, she was curiously uneasy. Mr. Enderby stopped for a moment, to give her some kindly information about the opera they had heard. Then he and his wife ascended the stairs, followed by Lexy; and with every step her uneasiness grew. She was sure that Caroline would have sent for her if she had been in the house.

Mrs. Enderby paused outside her child's door.

"The light is out," she said. "She will be asleep. I shall not disturb her. Good night, Miss Moran!"

"Good night, Mrs. Enderby!" Lexy answered, and went into her own room.

She gave Mrs. Enderby twenty minutes to get safely stowed away; then she went out quietly into the hall, to Caroline's room. She knocked softly; there was no answer. She turned the handle and went in; the room was dark and very still. She switched on the light.

It was as she had expected—the room was empty. Caroline was not there.

II

Lexy's first impulse was to close the door of that empty room, and to hold her tongue. It seemed to her that it would be treachery to Caroline to tell Mrs. Enderby. She and Caroline were both young, both of the same generation; they ought to stand loyally together against the tyrannical older people.

"Because, golly, what a row there'd be if Mrs. Enderby ever knew she'd gone out!" Lexy thought.

That was how she saw it, at first. Caroline had pretended to have a headache so that she would be left behind, and would get a chance to slip out alone. It was simply a lark. Lexy had known such things to happen often before, at boarding school; and the unthinkable and impossible thing was for one girl to tell on another.

"She'll be back soon," thought Lexy, "and she'll tell me all about it."

So she went into Caroline's room, to wait. It was a charming room, pink and white, like Caroline herself. Lexy turned on the switch, and two rose-shaded lamps blossomed out like flowers. She sat down on a *chaise longue*, and stretched herself out, yawning. On the desk before her was Caroline's writing apparatus, a quill pen of old rose, an ivory desk set, everything so dainty and orderly; only poor Caroline had no friends, and never had letters to write or to answer.

"I wonder who on earth that was on the telephone," Lexy reflected. "It *was* queer—just on the only night of her life when she'd ever gone out on her own. And he sounded so terribly upset! It *was* queer. Perhaps—" She was aware of a fast-growing oppression. The influence of Caroline's room was beginning to tell upon her. Caroline didn't understand about larks. She wasn't that sort of girl. Quiet, shy, and patient, she had never shown any trace of resentment against her restricted life, or any desire for the good times that other girls of her age enjoyed. The more Lexy thought about it, the more clearly she realized the strangeness of all this, and the more uneasy she became.

When the little Dresden clock on the mantelpiece struck one, it came as a shock. Lexy sprang to her feet and looked about the room, filled with unreasoning fear. One o'clock, and Caroline hadn't come back! Suppose—suppose she never came back?

Lexy dismissed that idea with healthy scorn. Things like that didn't happen; and yet—what was it that gave to the pink and white lamplit room such an air of being deserted?

"Why, the photographs are gone!" she cried.

She noticed now for the first time that the photographs of Mr. and Mrs. Enderby in silver frames, which had always stood on the writing desk, were not standing there now.

She turned to the bureau. Caroline's silver toilet set was not there. She made a rapid survey of the room, and she made sure of her suspicions. Caroline had gone deliberately, taking with her all the things she would need on a short trip.

"I've got to tell Mrs. Enderby now," she thought. "It's only fair."

She went out into the corridor, closing the door behind her, and turned toward Mrs. Enderby's room. She was very, very reluctant, for she dreaded to break the peace of the quiet house by this dramatic announcement. She hated anything in the nature of the sensational. Level-headed, cool, practical, her instinct was to make light of all this, to insist that nothing was really wrong. Caroline had gone, and that was that.

"There's going to be such a fuss!" she thought. "If there's anything I loathe, it's a fuss."

And all the time, under her cool and sensible exterior, she was frightened. She felt that after all she was very young, and very inexperienced, in a world where things—anything—things beyond her knowledge—might happen.

She knocked upon the door lightly—so lightly that no one heard her; and she had to knock again. This time Mrs. Enderby opened the door.

"Well?" she asked, not very amiably.

"I thought I ought to tell you—" Lexy began; and still she hesitated, moved by the unaccountable feeling that this might be treachery to Caroline.

"Tell me what?" asked Mrs. Enderby. "Come, if you please, Miss Moran! Tell me at once!"

"Caroline's gone."

The words were spoken. Lexy waited in great alarm, wondering if Mrs. Enderby would faint or scream. The lady did neither. She came out into the corridor, shutting the door of her room behind her, and her first word and her only word was:

"Hush!"

Then she glanced about her at the closed doors, and, taking Lexy's arm in a firm grip, hurried her to Caroline's room. Not until they were shut in there did she speak again.

"Now tell me!" she said. "Speak very low. You said—Caroline has gone?"

"Yes," said Lexy. "I came in here after you'd gone to bed, and—you can see for yourself—the bed hasn't been slept in. She's taken her things—her brush and comb and—"

"And she told you—what?"

"Me? Why, nothing!" answered Lexy, in surprise. "I didn't see her. I haven't seen her since dinner."

"But you know," said Mrs. Enderby. "You know where she has gone."

She spoke with cool certainty, and her black eyes were fixed upon Lexy with a far from pleasant expression. Lexy looked back at her with equal steadiness.

"Mrs. Enderby," she said, "I *don't* know."

Mrs. Enderby shrugged her shoulders.

"Very well!" she said. "You do not know exactly where she has gone. *Bien, alors!* You guess, eh?"

"No," answered Lexy, bewildered. "I don't. I can't."

"She has spoken to you of some—friend?"

Seeing Lexy still frankly bewildered, Mrs. Enderby lost her patience.

"The man!" she said. "Who is the man?"

"I never heard Caroline speak of any man," said Lexy.

She spoke firmly enough, and she was telling the truth; but she remembered that telephone call, and the memory brought a faint flush into her cheeks. Mrs. Enderby did not fail to notice it.

"Listen!" she said. "There is one thing you can do—only one thing. You can hold your tongue. Tell no one. Let no one know that Caroline is not here. You understand?"

"But aren't you going to—"

"I am going to do nothing. You understand—nothing. There is to be no scandal in my house."

"But, Mrs. Enderby!"

"Hush! No one must know of this. To-morrow morning I shall have a letter from Caroline."

"Oh!" said Lexy, with a sigh of genuine relief. "Oh, then you know where she's gone!"

"I?" replied Mrs. Enderby. "I know nothing. This has come to me from a clear sky. I have always tried to safeguard my child. I—"

She paused for a moment, and for the first time Lexy pitied her.

"It is the American blood in her," Mrs. Enderby went on. "No French girl would treat her parents so; but in this country— She has gone with some fortune hunter. To-morrow I shall have a letter that she is married. 'Please forgive me, *chère Maman,*' she will say. 'I am so happy. I, at nineteen, and of an ignorance the most complete, have made my choice without you.' That is the American way, is it not? That is your 'romance,' eh? My one child—"

Her voice broke.

"No more!" she said. "It is finished. But—attend, Miss Moran! There must be no scandal. No one is to know that she is not here."

She turned and walked out of the room. Lexy sank into a chair.

"I don't care!" she said to herself.

"She's wrong—I know it! It's not what she thinks. Caroline's not like that. Something dreadful has happened!"

III

It seemed perfectly natural to be awakened in the morning by Mrs. Enderby's hand on her shoulder, and to look up into Mrs. Enderby's flashing black eyes. Lexy had gone to sleep dominated by the thought of that masterful woman. She vaguely remembered having dreamed of her, and when she opened her eyes—there she was.

“Get up!” said Mrs. Enderby in a low voice. “Go into Caroline’s room. When Annie comes with the breakfast tray, take it from her at the door. I have told her that Caroline is ill with a headache. You understand?”

“Yes, Mrs. Enderby,” answered Lexy.

She sprang out of bed and began to dress, filled with an unreasoning sense of haste. It wasn’t a dream, then—it was true. Caroline had gone, and there was something Lexy must do for her. She could not have explained what this something was, but it oppressed and worried her. She could not rid herself of the feeling that she was not being loyal to Caroline.

“And yet,” she thought, “I had to tell Mrs. Enderby she wasn’t there. I suppose I ought to have told her about that telephone call, too, but I hate to do it! I know Caroline wouldn’t like me to; and what good can it do, anyhow? Whoever it was, he didn’t know where she was. It was the queerest thing—a man asking, ‘For God’s sake, where’s Miss Enderby?’ when she wasn’t here! No, Mrs. Enderby is wrong. Caroline hasn’t just gone away of her own accord. She’s not that sort of girl. Something has happened!”

Lexy finished dressing and went into Caroline’s room. In the gay April sunshine, that dainty room seemed almost unbearably forlorn.

She went over to the window and looked down into the street. People were passing by, and taxis, and private cars—all the ordinary, casual, cheerful daily life at which Caroline Enderby had so often looked out, like a poor enchanted princess in a tower. A wave of pity and affection rose in Lexy’s heart.

“Oh, poor Caroline!” she said to herself. “Such a dull, miserable life! I do wish—”

There was a knock at the door, and she hurried across the room to open it. The parlor maid stood there with a tray. Lexy took it from her with a pleasant “good morning,” and closed the door again. Caroline’s breakfast! There was something disturbing in the sight of that carefully prepared tray, ready for the girl who was not there.

The door opened—without a preliminary knock, this time—and Mrs. Enderby came in. She turned the key behind her, and, without a word, went over to the bed and pulled off the covers. Then she went into the adjoining bathroom and started the water running in the tub. This done, she sat down at the table and began to eat the breakfast on the tray.

Lexy stood watching all this with indignation and a sort of horror.

“All she cares about is keeping up appearances,” the girl thought. “The only thing that worries her is that some one might find out. She doesn’t know where poor Caroline is—and she can sit down and eat! I’m comparatively a stranger, and even I—”

Lexy was an honest soul, however. The fragrance of coffee and rolls reached her, and she admitted in her heart that she, too, could eat, if she had a chance.

Mrs. Enderby was not going to give her a chance just yet. She finished her meal and rose.

“Now!” she said. “Just what is gone from here? We shall look.”

So they looked, in the wardrobe, in the drawers, even in the orderly desk. Very little was gone.

“And now,” said Mrs. Enderby, “you lent her—how much money, Miss Moran?”

“I never lent her a penny in my life,” replied Lexy.

Mrs. Enderby’s tone aroused a spirit of obstinate defiance in her. Those flashing black eyes were fixed upon her with an expression which did not please Lexy, and Lexy looked back with an expression which did not please Mrs. Enderby.

“So you will not tell me what you know!” said Mrs. Enderby, with a chilly smile.

It was on the tip of Lexy’s tongue to say, with considerable warmth, that she *had* told all she knew; but the memory of the telephone call checked her.

“If I tell her about that,” she thought, “she’ll just say, ‘Ah, I thought so!’ And she’ll be surer than ever that Caroline has eloped with a fortune hunter, and she won’t make any effort to find her. No—I’m not going to tell her until she gets really frightened.” Aloud she said: “I’ll do anything in the world that I can do, Mrs. Enderby, to help you find Caroline.”

“It is not necessary,” said Mrs. Enderby. “I shall have her letter.”

There was another tap at the door. Mrs. Enderby closed the door leading into the bathroom, and then called: “Come in!”

The parlor maid entered.

“You may take away the tray,” her mistress said graciously. “Miss Enderby has finished.”

Again a feeling that was almost horror came over Lexy. There was the bed Caroline had slept in, there was the breakfast Caroline had eaten, there was Caroline’s bath running—and Caroline wasn’t there! Lexy wanted to get out of that room and away from Mrs. Enderby.

"Do you mind if I go down and get my own breakfast now?" she asked, when the parlor maid had gone out with the tray.

"But certainly not!" Mrs. Enderby blandly consented. "We shall go down together."

She turned off the water in the bath, and, following Lexy out of the room, locked the door on the outside. The girl dropped behind her as they descended the stairs, and studied the stout, dignified figure before her with indignant interest.

"A mother!" she thought. "A mother, behaving like this! How long is she going to wait for her letter, I wonder? Well, if she won't do anything, then, by jiminy, I will!"

A fresh example of Mrs. Enderby's remarkable strength of mind awaited them. Mr. Enderby was already seated at the table in the dining room. As his wife entered, he rose, with his invariable politeness, and one glance at his ruddy, cheerful face convinced Lexy that he knew nothing of what had happened.

"Caroline has a headache," Mrs. Enderby explained. "It will be better for her to rest for a little."

"Ah! Too bad!" said he. "Don't think she gets out in the air enough. Er—good morning, Miss Moran!"

Lexy almost forgot to answer him, so intent was she upon watching Mrs. Enderby open her letters. There must, she thought, be some change in that calm, pale face when she didn't find a letter from Caroline, there must be something to break this inhuman tranquillity.

But nothing broke it. Mr. Enderby ate his breakfast, and his wife chatted affably with him while she glanced over her mail. The sunshine poured into the room, gleaming on silver and linen, and on the cheerful young parlor maid moving quietly about her duties. It was a morning just like other mornings; and, in spite of herself, Lexy's feeling of dread and oppression began to lighten. Mr. Enderby was so thoroughly unperturbed, Mrs. Enderby was so serene and majestic, the house was so bright and pleasant in the spring morning, that it was hard to believe that anything could be really amiss.

"But I don't care!" she thought sturdily. "*I* know there is!"

Mr. Enderby finished his breakfast and rose, and, as usual, his wife accompanied him to the front door. Alone in the dining room, Lexy made haste to finish her own meal. Just as she pushed back her chair, Mrs. Enderby returned.

"I shall ring, Annie," she told the parlor maid, and the girl disappeared. Then she turned to Lexy. "The letter has come," she said.

Lexy stared at her with such an expression of amazement and dismay that Mrs. Enderby smiled.

"You are very young," she said. "You wish always for the dramatic. When you have lived as long as I, you will see that such things do not happen."

She spoke kindly, and Lexy saw in her dark eyes a look of weariness and pain.

"No, my child," she went on. "In this life it is always the same things that happen again and again. At twenty, one breaks the heart for a man; at forty, one breaks the heart for one's child. There is only that—and money. Love and money—nothing else!"

Lexy felt extraordinarily sorry for Mrs. Enderby; but even yet she couldn't quite believe that Caroline could have done such a thing.

"But do you mean that she's really—that she's—" she began.

"See, then!" said Mrs. Enderby. "Here is the letter!"

Lexy took it from her, and read:

Chere Maman:

I only beg you and papa to forgive me for what I have done; but I knew that if I told you, you would not have let me go. When you get this

I shall be married. To-morrow I shall write again, to tell you where I am, and to beg you to let me bring my husband to you.

Oh, please, dear, dear mother and father, forgive me!

Your loving, loving daughter,

Caroline.

"You see!" said Mrs. Enderby. "It is as I told you."

There were tears in Lexy's eyes as she put the letter back into the envelope.

"It doesn't seem a bit like Caroline, though," she remarked.

Mrs. Enderby smiled again, faintly, and held out her hand for the letter. Lexy returned it to her, with an almost mechanical glance at the postmark—"Wyngate, Connecticut."

All her defiance had vanished. She was obliged to admit now that Mrs. Enderby was wise, and that she herself was—

"A little fool!" said Lexy candidly to herself.

#### IV

"Do you mind if I go out for a walk?" asked the crestfallen Lexy; for that was her instinct in any sort of trouble—to get out into the fresh air and walk.

"No," answered Mrs. Enderby; "but I shall ask you to return in half an hour. There is much to be done."

"Done!" cried Lexy. "But what can be done—now?"

"That I shall tell you when you return," said Mrs. Enderby. "In the meantime, I trust you to say nothing of all this to any person whatever. You understand, Miss Moran?"

Miss Moran certainly did not understand, but she gave her promise to keep silent, and, putting on her hat and coat, hurried out of the house. Mighty glad she was to get out, too!

"But why make a mystery of it like this?" she thought. "Every one has to know, sooner or later, and it's so—so ghastly, pretending that Caroline's there! Oh, it doesn't seem possible, Caroline running off like that, and I never even dreaming she was the least bit interested in any man! I don't see how she could have seen any one or written to any one without my knowing it. It doesn't seem possible!"

She had reached the corner of Fifth Avenue, and was waiting for a halt in the traffic, when she became aware of a young man who was standing near her and staring at her. She glanced carelessly at him, and he took off his hat, but he got no acknowledgment of his salute. He was a stranger, and she meant him to remain a stranger. The bright-haired, sturdy little Lexy was a very pretty girl, and she was not unaccustomed to strange young men who stared. She knew how to handle them.

As she crossed the avenue, he crossed, too. When she entered the park, he followed. Now Lexy was never tolerant of this sort of thing, and to-day, in her anxiety and distress, she was less so than ever. She turned her head and looked the young man squarely in the face with a scornful and frigid look; and he took off his hat again!

"Just you say one word," said she to herself, "and I'll call a policeman!"

Yet, as she walked briskly on, something in the man's expression haunted her. He didn't look like that sort of man. His sunburned face somehow seemed to her a very honest one, and the expression on it was not at all flirtatious, but terribly troubled and unhappy.

"Perhaps he thinks he knows me," she thought. "Well, he doesn't, and he's not going to, either!"

And she dismissed him from her mind.

"When did Caroline go?" she pondered, continuing her own miserable train of thought. "While I was doing cross words in the library? If she went out by the front door, she must have gone right past the library. She must have known I was there—and not even to say good-by!"

It hurt. She had grown very fond of the shy, quiet Caroline, and she had firmly believed that Caroline was fond of her. What is more, she had thought Caroline trusted her.

"She didn't though. All the time, when we were so friendly together, she must have been planning this and—*what?*"

She stopped short, her dark brows meeting in a fierce frown, for the unknown man had come up beside her and spoken to her.

"Excuse me!" he said.

Lexy only looked at him, but he did not wither and perish under her scorn.

"I've *got* to speak to you," he said.

"It's—look here! I've been waiting outside the house all morning. Look here, please! You're Lexy, aren't you?"

This was a little too much!

"If you don't stop bothering me this instant—" she began hotly, but he paid no heed.

"*Where's Miss Enderby?*" he cried.

Lexy grew very pale. Those were the words she had heard over the telephone last night, and this was the same voice.

For a moment she was silent, staring at him, while he looked back at her, his blue eyes searching her face with a look of desperate entreaty. All her doubts vanished. She had not been wrong. She had been right—she was sure of it. She knew that something had happened—something inexplicable and dreadful.

"Please tell me!" he said. "You don't know—you can't know—she told me you were her friend."

"But who are you?" cried Lexy.

His face flushed under the sunburn.

"I—" he began, and stopped. "I'm afraid I can't tell you," he went on. "I'd like to, but, you see, I can't. If you'll just tell me where Car—Miss Enderby is! She's safe at home, isn't she? She—of course she is!

She *must* be! She—she is, isn't she?"

“Well,” said Lexy slowly, “I don’t see how I can tell you anything at all. I don’t know what right you have to ask any questions. I don’t know who you are, or anything about you.”

“No,” he replied, “I know that; but, after all, it’s not much of a question, is it—just if Miss Enderby’s all right?”

Lexy felt very sorry for him, in his obvious struggle to speak quietly and reasonably. She wanted to answer him promptly and candidly, for his sake and for her own, because she felt sure that he could tell her something about Caroline; but she had promised Mrs. Enderby to say nothing.

“It’s so silly!” she thought, exasperated. “If I could tell him, I might find out—”

“Find out what? Hadn’t Caroline written to say that she had gone away to get married? In a day or two, probably to-morrow, they would learn all the details from Caroline herself. This unhappy young man couldn’t know anything. Indeed, he was asking for information. Who could he possibly be? A rival suitor? Lexy remembered Caroline’s pitifully restricted life. *Two* suitors of whom she had never heard? It wasn’t possible! “No,” she thought. “There’s something queer—something wrong!”

“Look here!” the young man said again. “Aren’t you going to answer me? Just tell me she’s all right, and—” “What makes you think she isn’t?” asked Lexy cautiously.

He looked straight into her face.

“You’re playing with me,” he said. “You’re fencing with me, to make me give myself away; and it’s a pretty rotten thing to do!”

“Rotten?” Lexy repeated indignantly. “Rotten, not to answer questions from a perfect stranger?”

“Yes,” he said, “it is; because that’s a question you could answer for any one. I’ve only asked you if Miss Enderby is—all right.”

This high-handed tone didn’t suit Lexy at all. He was actually presuming to be angry, and that made her angry.

“I shan’t tell you anything at all,” she said, and began to walk on again.

He put on his hat and turned away, but in a moment he was back at her side.

“Look here!” he said. “Caroline told me you were her friend. She said you could be trusted. All right—I am trusting you. I’ve felt, all along, that there was—something wrong. I’ve got to know! If you’ll give me your word that she’s safe at home, I’ll clear out, and apologize for having made a first-class fool of myself; but if she’s not, I ought to know!”

Lexy stopped again. Their eyes met in a long, steady glance.

“I can’t answer any questions this morning,” she told him. “I promised I wouldn’t.”

“Then there is something wrong!” the young man exclaimed.

He was silent for a long time, staring at the ground, and Lexy waited, with a fast beating heart, for some word that would enlighten her. At last he looked up.

“I’ve got to trust you,” he said simply. “Caroline meant to tell you, anyhow. You see”—he paused—“I’m Charles Houseman, the man she’s going to marry.”

“Oh!” cried Lexy.

“Now you’ll tell me, won’t you?”

She stared and stared at him, filled with amazement and pity. Such a nice-looking, straightforward, manly sort of fellow—and such a look of pain and bewilderment in his blue eyes!

“But—did she *say* she would marry you?”

“Of course she did! She—look here! You don’t know what I’ve been through. It was I who telephoned last night. I—”

“But why did you? Oh, please tell me! I am Caroline’s friend—truly her friend. I want to understand!”

“All right!” he said. “I telephoned because I was waiting for her, and she didn’t come.”

“Waiting for—Caroline?”

“We had arranged to get married last night. She was to meet me, but she didn’t come,” he said, a little unsteadily. “Perhaps she just changed her mind. Perhaps she doesn’t want to see me any more. If that’s the case, I’ll trust you not to mention anything about me—to any one. You see now, don’t you, that I—I had to know?”

Lexy’s eyes filled with tears. Moved by a generous impulse, she held out her hand.

“I’m so awfully sorry!” she cried.

“Why? You mean—for God’s sake, tell me! You mean she has changed her mind?”

“I can’t tell you—not now.”



"You can't leave it at that," said he. He had taken her outstretched hand, and he held it tight. "I ought to know what has happened. I can't believe that Caroline would let me down like that. She—she's not that sort of girl. Something's gone wrong. She wouldn't leave me waiting and waiting there for her at Wyngate."

"Wyngate!" cried Lexy. "But that was—"

She stopped abruptly. Caroline's letter had been postmarked "Wyngate." She had gone there to meet—some one. She had married—some one.

"I can't understand," Lexy went on. "It's terrible! I can't tell you now; but I'll meet you here this afternoon, after lunch—about two o'clock—and I'll tell you then."

She turned away, then, in haste to get back to Mrs. Enderby, but he stopped her.

"Remember!" he said sternly. "I've trusted you. If Caroline hasn't told her people about me, you mustn't mention my name. I gave her my word that I would let her do the telling. I didn't want it that way, but I promised her, and you've got to do the same. If she hasn't told about me, you're not to."

"Oh, Lord!" cried poor Lexy. "Well, all right, I won't! Now, for goodness' sake, go away, and let me alone—to do the best I can!"

V

Lexy was late. The half hour had been considerably exceeded when she ran up the steps of the Enderbys house. She rang the bell, and the door was opened promptly by Annie.

"Mrs. Enderby would like to see you at once, miss," the parlor maid said primly.

But Lexy stopped to look covertly at Annie. Did she know anything? It was possible. Anything was possible now. Lexy was obliged to admit, however, that Annie had no appearance of guilt or mystery. A brisk and sober woman of middle age, who had been with the family for nearly ten years, she looked nothing more or less than disapproving because this young person had presumed to keep Mrs. Enderby waiting for several minutes.

"Anyhow, I can't ask her," thought Lexy. "That's the worst part of all this—I can't ask anybody anything without breaking a promise to somebody else; and yet everybody ought to know everything!"

In miserable perplexity, she went upstairs to Mrs. Enderby's sitting room. Only one thing was clear in her mind, and that was that she must be freed from her weak-minded promise not to mention Caroline's absence.

"And that's not going to be easy," she reflected, "when I can't explain to her. There'll be a row. Well, I don't care!"

She did care, however. She respected Mrs. Enderby, and in her secret heart she was a little afraid of her. She felt very young, very crude and blundering, in the presence of that masterful woman; and she doubted her own wisdom.

"But what can I do?" she thought. "He said he trusted me. I *can't* tell her! No, first I'll get her to let me off that promise, and I'll go and tell that young man. Then I'll make him let me off, and I'll come and tell her. Golly, how I hate all this fool mystery!"

Mrs. Enderby was writing at her desk as Lexy entered the room. She glanced up, unsmiling.

"You are late," she said. "I asked you to return in half an hour."

"I'm sorry," Lexy replied meekly.

"Very well! Now you will please to come with me."

She rose, and Lexy followed her down the hall to Caroline's room. Mrs. Enderby unlocked the door, and, when they had entered, locked the door on the inside.

"In fifteen minutes the car is coming," she said. "I wish you to put on Caroline's hat and coat and a veil, and leave the house with me."

"You mean you want me to pretend I'm Caroline?" cried Lexy.

"I wish it to be thought that you are Caroline," Mrs. Enderby corrected her. "Please waste no time. The car will be here—"

"Mrs. Enderby, I—I can't do it!"

"You can, Miss Moran, and I think you will."

But Lexy was pretty close to desperation now. Her honest and vigorous spirit was entangled in a network of promises and obligations and deceptions, and she could not see how to free herself; but she would not passively submit.

"No," she said, "I can't. I've found out something—I can't tell you about it just now, but this afternoon I hope—"

"This afternoon is another thing," said Mrs. Enderby. "In the meantime—"

"But it's important! It's—"

“You think I do not know? You think this letter sets my mind at rest?” Mrs. Enderby demanded, with one of her sudden flashes of temper. “That is imbecile! I know how serious it is that my child should leave me like this; but I know what is my duty—first, to my husband. That first, I tell you! It is for me to see that no disgrace comes upon his house, no scandal—that first! Then, next, I must see to it that the way is left open for Caroline to come back—if she wishes.” She came close to Lexy, and fixed those black eyes of hers upon the girl’s face. “I tell you, Miss Moran, there will be no scandal!”

In spite of herself, Lexy was impressed.

“But suppose—” she began.

“No—we shall not suppose. I have told the servants that to-day Miss Enderby goes into the country, to visit her old governess for a few days. Very well—they shall see her go. If there is no other letter to-morrow, I shall tell Mr. Enderby.”

“Doesn’t he know?”

“Please make haste, Miss Moran!” said Mrs. Enderby.

As if hypnotized, Lexy began to dress herself in Caroline’s clothes; but, as she glanced in the mirror to adjust the close-fitting little hat, the monstrosity of the whole thing overwhelmed her. She had so often seen Caroline in this hat and coat!

“Oh, I can’t!” she cried. “I can’t! Suppose something terrible has happened to her, and I’m—”

“Keep quiet!” said Mrs. Enderby fiercely. “I tell you it shall be so! Now, the veil. No, not like that—not as if you were disguising yourself! So!”

She unlocked the door, and, taking Lexy by the arm, went out into the hall. Together they descended the stairs, Mrs. Enderby chatting volubly in French, as she was wont to do with her daughter. None of the servants would think of interrupting her, or of staring at her companion. It was an ordinary, everyday scene. Annie was crossing the lower hall.

“Miss Moran will be out all day,” said Mrs. Enderby. “There will be no one at home for lunch.”

“Yes, ma’am,” replied Annie.

The maid would not notice when—or if—Miss Moran went out. There was nothing to arouse suspicion in any one.

They went out to the car. A small trunk was strapped on behind. Everything had been prepared for Miss Enderby’s visit to the country. The chauffeur opened the door and touched his cap respectfully, the two women got in, and off they went.

“Now you will please to dismiss this subject from your mind,” said Mrs. Enderby. “I do not wish to talk of it.” She spoke kindly now. “You will have a pleasant day in the country.”

“Day!” said Lexy. “But what time will we get back?”

“Before dinner.”

“Oh, I’ve got to get back this afternoon! I’ve got to see some one! It’s important—terribly important!”

Mrs. Enderby smiled faintly.

“The chauffeur must see you descend at Miss Craigie’s house,” she said. “Once we are there, I have a hat and coat of your own in the trunk. I shall explain what is necessary to Miss Craigie, who is very discreet, very devoted. You can change then, but you must go home quietly by train; and I think there are not many trains.”

Lexy had a vision of the young man waiting and waiting for her in the park that afternoon—the young man who had trusted her, who was waiting in such miserable anxiety for some news of Caroline.

“Mrs. Enderby,” she protested, “I can’t come with you. I’ve got to get back this afternoon.”

“No,” said Mrs. Enderby.

Lexy made a creditable effort to master her anger and distress.

“It’s important—to you,” she said. “I have to see some one about Caroline—some one who can tell you something.”

This time Mrs. Enderby made no answer at all. There she sat, stout, majestic, absolutely impervious, looking out of the window as if Lexy did not exist. What was to be done? She couldn’t communicate with the chauffeur except by leaning across Mrs. Enderby, and a struggle with that lady was out of the question.

“But I’m not going on!” she thought.

She waited until the car slowed down at a crossing. Then she made a sudden dart for the door. With equal suddenness Mrs. Enderby seized her arm.

“Sit down!” she said, in a singularly unpleasant whisper. “There shall be no scene. Sit down, I tell you!”

“I won’t!” replied Lexy, but just then the car started forward, and she fell back on the seat.

“You will come with me,” said Mrs. Enderby.

That overbearing tone, that grasp on her arm, were very nearly too much for Lexy. She had always been quick-tempered. All the Morans were, and were perversely proud of it, too; but Lexy had learned many lessons in a hard school. She had learned to control her temper, and she did so now. She was silent for a time. "All right!" she agreed, at last. "I'll come. I don't see what else I can do—now; but after this I'll have to use my own judgment, Mrs. Enderby."

"You have none," Mrs. Enderby told her calmly.

Lexy clenched her hands, and again was silent for a moment.

"I mean—" she began.

"I know very well what you mean," said Mrs. Enderby. "You mean that you will keep faith with me no longer. I saw that. You wished to run off and tell your story to some one this afternoon. I stopped that. After this, I cannot stop you any longer. You will tell, but I think no one will listen to you. I shall deny it, and no one will be likely to listen to the word of a discharged employee."

Lexy had grown very pale.

"I see!" she said slowly. "Then you're going to—"

"You are discharged," interrupted Mrs. Enderby, "because I do not like to have my daughter's companion running into the park to meet a young man."

"I see!" said Lexy again.

And nothing more. All the warmth of her anger had gone, and in its place had come an overwhelming depression. For all her sturdiness and courage, she was young and generous and sensitive, and those words of Mrs. Enderby's hurt her cruelly.

She sat very still, looking out of the window. They had left the city now, and were on the Boston road. It was a sweet, fresh April day, and under a bright and windy sky the countryside was showing the first soft green of spring.

Lexy remembered. She remembered the things she had so valiantly tried to forget—the dear, happy days that were past, spring days like this, in her own home, with her mother and father; early morning rides on her little black mare, and coming home to the old house, to the people who loved her; her father's laugh, her mother's wonderful smile, the friendly faces of the servants.

She was not old enough or wise enough as yet, for these memories to be a solace to her. They were pain—nothing but pain. There was no one now to love her, or even to be interested in her. She had cut herself off from her old friends and gone out alone, like a poor, rash, gallant little knight-errant, into the wide world to seek her fortune. Caroline had disappeared, and Mrs. Enderby had dismissed her with savage contempt. She would have to go out now and look for a new job.

She straightened her shoulders.

"This won't do!" she said to herself. "It's disgusting, mawkish self-pity, and nothing else. I'm young and healthy, and I can always find a job. What I want to think about now is Caroline, and what I ought to do for her."

So she did begin to think about Caroline. The first thought that came into her head was such an extraordinary one that it startled her.

"Anyhow, she's a pretty lucky girl!"

Lucky? Caroline, who had lived like a prisoner, and who had now so strangely disappeared, lucky—simply because a sunburned, blue-eyed young man was so miserably anxious about her?

"I suppose he's thinking about her this minute," Lexy reflected; "and I'm sure nobody in the world is thinking about me. Well, I don't care!"

VI

The car took them to a drowsy little village, and stopped before a small cottage on a side street. Mrs. Enderby got out, followed by Lexy, the living ghost of Caroline. Side by side they went up the flagged path and on to the porch. Mrs. Enderby rang the bell, and in a moment the door was opened by a thin, sandy-haired woman in spectacles.

"Mrs. Enderby!" she cried, her plain face lighting up in a delighted smile. "And my dear little Caroline!" She held out her hand to Lexy, and suddenly her face changed. "But—" she began.

Mrs. Enderby pushed her gently inside and closed the door.

"But it's not Caroline!" cried Miss Craigie.

"Hush!" said Mrs. Enderby. "I shall explain to you. Please allow the chauffeur to carry upstairs a small trunk, and please have no air of surprise."

Evidently Miss Craigie was in the habit of obeying Mrs. Enderby. She opened the front door and called the chauffeur, who came in with the trunk.

"Turn your back!" whispered Mrs. Enderby to Lexy. "Go and look out of the window!"

Lexy heard the man go past the sitting room and up the stairs. Presently he came running down, and the front door closed after him.

"Now, Miss Craigie," said Mrs. Enderby, "if you will permit Miss Moran to go upstairs?"

"Oh, certainly!" answered the bewildered Miss Craigie. "Whatever you think best, Mrs. Enderby, I'm sure."

"Go!" said Mrs. Enderby.

The lady's tone aroused in Lexy a great desire not to go. Of course, now that she had gone so far, it would be childish to refuse to continue; but she meant to take her time. She stood there by the window, slowly drawing off her gloves, her back turned to the room. Suddenly Mrs. Enderby caught her by the shoulder and turned her around.

"Go!" she said again. "Take off those things of my child's. *Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!* Have you no heart?"

There was such a note of anguish in her voice that Lexy no longer delayed. She followed Miss Craigie up the stairs to a neat, prim little bedroom, where the trunk stood, already unlocked.

"If you want anything—" suggested Miss Craigie, in her gentle and apologetic way.

"No, thank you," replied Lexy.

Miss Craigie went out, closing the door softly behind her. Lexy took off Caroline's hat and coat and laid them on the bed.

"I wonder if I'll ever see her wearing them again!" she thought.

For a long time she stood motionless, looking down at the things that Caroline had worn. Most pitifully eloquent, they seemed to her—the hat that had covered Caroline's fair hair, the coat that had fitted her slender shoulders. Lexy looked and looked, grave and sorrowful—and in that moment her resolution was made.

"I'm going to find her!" she said, half aloud. "I don't care what any one else does or what any one else thinks. I *know* she's in trouble of some sort, and I'm going to find her!"

The last trace of what Lexy had called "mawkish self-pity" had vanished now. She was no longer concerned with Mrs. Enderby's attitude toward herself. It didn't matter. Finding another job didn't matter, either. She had a little money due her, and she meant to use it—every penny of it—in finding Caroline.

She washed her hands and face, brushed her hair, put on her own hat and jacket, and went downstairs again.

Mrs. Enderby was standing in the tiny hall, and from the sitting room there came a sound of muffled sobbing.

"She is an imbecile, that woman!" said Mrs. Enderby, with a sigh; "but she will hold her tongue. And you?"

"I've got to do as I think best," answered Lexy. "I'll say good-by now, Mrs. Enderby."

"There is no train until three o'clock. It is now after one. We shall have lunch directly."

"No, thank you," said Lexy. "I'd rather go now. I dare say I can find something to eat in the village."

She was not in the least angry now, or hurt; only she wanted to get away, by herself, to think this out.

"Good-by?" repeated Mrs. Enderby, with a smile. "You think, then, never to see me again?"

"No," said Lexy. "I mean to see you again—when I have something to tell you; but just now I want to go back and pack up my things."

"And leave my house?"

"Yes."

They were both silent for a moment. Then, to Lexy's amazement, Mrs. Enderby laid a hand gently on the girl's shoulder.

"My child," she said, "you think I am a very hard woman. Perhaps it is so; but, like you, I do what seems to me the right. Certainly it is better now that you should leave us; but not like this. You must have your lunch here, then you must return to the house and sleep there, all in the usual way. To-morrow you shall go." She paused a moment. "You shall go, if you are still determined that you will not keep faith with me."

It was not a very difficult matter to touch Lexy's heart. Whatever resentment she may have felt against Mrs. Enderby vanished now, lost in a sincere pity and respect; but she was firm in her purpose.

"I've got to tell one person," she said. "If I do, I shall be able to tell you something you ought to know. I wish you could trust me! I wish you could believe that all I'm thinking of is—Caroline!"

"I do believe you," said Mrs. Enderby. "You are very honest, and very, very young. You wish to do good, but you do harm. Very well, my child—I cannot stop you. Go your way, and I go mine; but"—she paused again, and again smiled her faint, shadowy smile—"if I think it right that you should be sacrificed, it shall be so. I am sorry. I have affection for you. I shall be sorry if you stand in my way."

Lexy met her eyes steadily.

"I'm sorry, too," she said.

And so she was. There was nothing in her heart now but sorrow for them all—for Caroline, for Mrs. Enderby, for the luckless Mr. Houseman, even for Miss Craigie; but most of all for Caroline.

"I've got to find her," she thought, over and over again; "and *he'll* help me!"

She had lunch in Miss Craigie's cottage—a melancholy meal, with the hostess red-eyed and dejected and Mrs. Enderby sternly silent. Then, after lunch, poor Miss Craigie was sent out for a drive, in order to get rid of the chauffeur while Lexy slipped out of the house and down to the station.

Everything went as Mrs. Enderby had willed it. Lexy caught the designated train, and returned to the city. All the way in, her great comfort was the thought of Mr. Houseman. He would help her. Now she could tell him that Caroline had gone, and he would help her.

"Of course, I've missed him to-day," she thought; "but he's sure to be in the park again to-morrow. Perhaps he'll telephone. He's not the sort to be easily discouraged, I'm sure."

It was dark when she reached the Grand Central, but, at the risk of being late for dinner, Lexy chose to walk back to the house. She could always think better when she was walking.

"I want to get the thing in order in my own mind," she reflected. "Mrs. Enderby is so—confusing. Here's the case—Mr. Houseman says Caroline promised to meet him last night at a place called Wyngate, and they were to be married. She left the house. This morning there was a letter from her, postmarked Wyngate; but he says she didn't go there. Well, then, where did she go?"

Impossible to answer that question with even the wildest surmise.

"I'll have to wait," Lexy went on. "I'll have to find out more from Mr. Houseman. Perhaps they misunderstood each other. It's no use trying to guess. I'll have to wait till I see him."

She recalled his honest, sunburned face with great good will. He was her ally. He was young, like herself, not old and cautious and deliberate. She liked him. She trusted him. In her loneliness and anxiety, he seemed a friend.

Annie opened the door with her customary air of disapproval.

"Yes, miss," she answered. "Mrs. Enderby came home in the car half an hour ago. Dinner'll be served in ten minutes. Here's a letter for you. A young man left it about twenty minutes ago."

"If I'd taken a taxi from Grand Central, I'd have seen him!" was Lexy's first thought.

Even a letter was something, however, and she ran upstairs with it, very much pleased. Of course, it was from Mr. Houseman. She locked the door, and, standing against it, looked at the envelope. It was addressed to "Miss Lexy" in a good clear hand. That made her smile, remembering her first indignation that morning.

The letter ran thus:

Dear Miss Lexy:

Please excuse me for addressing you like this, but I don't know your other name. I forgot to ask you.

I waited in the park for you all afternoon. When it got dark, I couldn't stand it any longer, so I went to the house and asked for Miss Enderby. The servant told me she had gone away to the country with her mother this morning.

Please tell Miss Enderby that I understand. I am sorry she didn't tell me before that she had changed her mind, instead of letting me wait like that; but it's finished now. Please tell her she can count on me to hold my tongue, and never to bother her again in any way.

We are sailing to-night, or I should have tried to see you to-morrow. In case you have any message for me, you can address me at the company's office, J. J. Eames & Son, 99 State Street. I expect to be back in about six weeks.

Very truly yours,

Charles Houseman.

"Sailing to-night!" cried Lexy. "Then he's gone! He's gone!"

VII

"So you are still of the same mind?" inquired Mrs. Enderby.

"More so, if anything," Lexy answered seriously.

It was after breakfast the next morning. Mr. Enderby had gone to his office, and Mrs. Enderby and Lexy were alone in the dining room. There was an odd sort of friendliness between them. Lexy felt no constraint in asking questions.

"There isn't any letter this morning, is there, Mrs. Enderby?"

"There is not."

"Then I suppose you're going to tell Mr. Enderby?"

"This evening."

"And then?"

"Then I shall be guided by his advice," Mrs. Enderby replied blandly.

Lexy could have smiled at this. She knew how likely Mrs. Enderby was to be guided by her husband; but she kept the smile and the thought to herself.

"I don't want to interfere with your plans—" she began.

"I have no plans."

"I mean, if you're going to take steps to find her—"

"My child," said Mrs. Enderby, "it is clear that you wish to amuse yourself with a grand mystery. I tell you there is no mystery, but you do not believe me. I ask you to say nothing of this matter, but you refuse. So I say to you now—go your own way, proceed with your mystery. I do not think you can hurt me very much."

Lexy flushed.

"I don't want to hurt any one," she declared stiffly. "I just want to help your daughter."

"Proceed, then!" said Mrs. Enderby.

Lexy rose.

"Then I'll say good-by, Mrs. Enderby," she said. "My trunk's packed. I'll send for it this afternoon."

"And where are you going in such a hurry?"

"I'm going to Wyngate," said Lexy.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Enderby. "It is a pretty place, is it not?"

"I don't know. I've never seen it."

"Pardon me—you saw it yesterday. It is a small village through which we passed on the way to Miss Craigie's house."

"I didn't know that."

"Now that you do know, perhaps you will spare yourself the trouble of going there," said Mrs. Enderby. "I assure you you will not find Caroline there. I myself made certain inquiries. No such person has arrived in Wyngate."

There was a moment's silence.

"But I observe by your face that you are not convinced," Mrs. Enderby went on. "'This Mrs. Enderby, she is a stupid old creature,' you think to yourself. 'I shall go there myself, and I shall discover that which she could not.'"

Lexy reddened again.

"I don't mean it that way," she said. "It's only that we look at this from different points of view, and I feel—I feel that I've got to go."

"Very well!" said Mrs. Enderby, and she, too, rose. "You will please to come to my room with me. There is part of your salary to be paid to you."

Lexy followed her, still flushed, and very reluctant. She wished she could afford to refuse that money.

"But I've earned it," she thought; "and goodness knows I'll need it!"

Mrs. Enderby sat down at her desk and took out her check book. While she wrote, Lexy looked out of the window.

"The amount due to you, including to-day, is thirty-two dollars," said Mrs. Enderby. "Here is a check for it."

"Thank you," said Lexy.

"One minute more! Here, my child, is another check."

Lexy stared at it, amazed. It was for one hundred dollars.

"But, Mrs. Enderby, I can't—"

"You will please take it and say nothing more. I give you this because I shall give you no reference. I shall answer no inquiries about you. You understand?"

"But I don't want—"

Mrs. Enderby pushed back her chair, and rose. She crossed the room to Lexy, put both hands on the girl's shoulders, and then did something far more astonishing than the gift of the check. She kissed Lexy on the forehead.

"Good-by, and God bless you, little honest one!" she said, with a smile. "I think we shall not see each other again, but I shall sometimes remember you. Go, now, and bear in mind that you can always trust Miss Craigie. She is an imbecile, but she can be trusted. *Adieu!*"

Lexy's eyes filled with tears.

"*Au revoir!*" she said stoutly; and then, with one of her sudden impulses, she put both arms around Mrs.

Enderby's neck and returned her kiss vigorously. "I'm sorry!" she said. "I'm awfully sorry!"

This was their parting. Lexy was thankful that it had been like this, very glad that she could leave the house in good will and kindness. It strengthened her beyond measure. She wanted to help Caroline, and she wanted to help Mrs. Enderby, too.

“And I will!” she thought. “I know that I’m right and she’s wrong! She’s rather terrible, too. Sometimes I think she’d almost rather not find out the truth, if it was going to make what she calls a scandal. She will have it that Caroline’s gone away of her own free will, to get married; and if it’s anything else, she doesn’t want to know. She *is* hard, but there’s something rather fine about her.”

There was no one in the hall when Lexy left, and this was a relief, for she supposed that Mrs. Enderby had told the servants, or would tell them, that Miss Moran had been discharged.

She went out and closed the door behind her. A fine, thin rain was falling—nothing to daunt a healthy young creature like Lexy; yet she wished that the sun had been shining. She wished that she hadn’t had to leave the house in the rain, under a gray sky. Somehow it made her only too well aware that she was homeless now, and alone.

As was her habit when depressed, she set off to walk briskly; and by the time she reached the Grand Central her cheeks were glowing and her heart considerably less heavy. She learned that she had nearly three hours to wait for the next train to Wyngate; so she bought her ticket, checked her bag, and went out again.

In a near-by department store she bought a little chamois pocket. Then she went to the bank, cashed both her checks, and, putting the bills into her pocket, hung it around her neck inside her blouse. It was very comfortable to have so much money.

Then, only as a forlorn hope, she rang up the offices of J. J. Eames & Son, on State Street.

“I don’t suppose they keep track of their passengers,” she thought; “but it can’t do any harm.”

So, when she got the connection, she asked politely:

“Could you possibly tell me where Mr. Charles Houseman has gone?”

“Certainly!” answered an equally polite voice at the other end of the wire. “Just a moment, please! You mean Mr. Houseman, second officer on the Mazell?”

“I don’t know,” said Lexy, surprised. “Has he blue eyes?”

There was an instant’s silence. Then the voice spoke again, a little unsteadily.

“I—I believe so.”

“He’s laughing at me!” thought Lexy indignantly, and her voice became severely dignified.

“Can you tell me where the—the Mazell has gone?”

“Lisbon and Gibraltar. We expect her back in about five weeks.”

“Thank you!” said Lexy. “And that’s that!” she added, to herself. “So he’s a sailor! I rather like sailors. Well, anyhow, he’s gone.” She sighed. “Carry on!” she said.

She went into a tea room on Forty-Second Street and ordered herself a very good lunch.

“Much better than I can afford,” she thought. “Goodness knows what’s going to happen to me! Here I am, without visible means of support. I suppose I’m an idiot. Lots of people would say so. They’d say I ought to be looking for a new job this instant; but I don’t care! I’m not going back on Caroline. Mrs. Enderby won’t do anything, and Mr. Houseman’s gone away, and there’s nobody but me. Perhaps I can’t do very much, but, by jiminy, I’m going to try!”

There was still an hour to spare, and she passed it in a fashion she had often scornfully denounced. She went shopping—without buying. She wandered through a great department store, looking at all sorts of things. Some of them she wanted, but she resolutely told herself that she was better off without them.

Then, at the proper time, she went back to the Grand Central, recovered her bag, bought herself two or three magazines and a bar of chocolate, and boarded the train. For all that she tried to be so cool and sensible, she could not help feeling a queer little thrill of excitement. Her quest had begun, and she could not in any way foresee the end.

## VIII

Now it certainly was not Lexy’s way to take any great interest in strange young men. There was not a trace of coquetry in her honest heart, and she had always looked upon the little flirtations of her friends with distaste and wonder.

“*I’m* not romantic!” she had said more than once.

She believed that. She would have denied indignantly that her present mission was romantic. She thought it a matter-of-course thing which she was in honor bound to do for her friend Caroline Enderby. She felt that she was very cool and practical about it, and a mighty sensible sort of girl altogether.

Certainly she saw the young man on the train, for her alert glance saw pretty well everything. She saw him, and she thought she had never set eyes on a handsomer man.

He was very tall, and slenderly and strongly built. He was dressed with fastidious perfection, and he had an air of marked distinction. In short, he was a man whom any one would look at—and remember; but Lexy, the unromantic girl, thought him inferior to the blue-eyed Mr. Houseman. She preferred young Houseman’s

blunt, sunburned face to the dark and haughty one of this stranger. She simply was not interested in dark and haughty strangers, however distinguished and handsome. She looked at this one, and then returned to her magazines.

She had a weakness for detective stories, and she was reading one now—reading it in the proper spirit, uncritical and absorbed. Whenever the train stopped at a station, she glanced up, and more than once, as she turned her head, she caught the stranger's eye. She wondered, later on, why she hadn't had some sort of premonition. People in stories always did. They always recognized at once the other people who were going to be in the story with them; but Lexy did not. Even toward the end of the journey, when she and the stranger were the only ones left in the car, she was not aware of any interest in him.

Even when he, too, got out at Wyngate, Lexy was not specially interested. It was only a little after five o'clock, but it was dark already on that rainy afternoon, and the only thing that interested her just then was the sight of a solitary taxi drawn up beside the platform. Bag in hand, she hurried toward it, but the stranger got there before her. When she arrived, he was speaking to the driver.

There was no other taxi or vehicle of any sort in sight, no other lights were visible except those of the station. It was a strange and unknown world upon which she looked in the rainy dusk, and she felt a justifiable annoyance with the ungallant stranger. He jumped into the cab and slammed the door.

"Driver!" cried Lexy. "Will you please come back for me?"

But before the driver could answer, the door of the cab opened, and the stranger sprang out.

"I *beg* your pardon!" he said, standing hat in hand before Lexy. "I'm most awfully sorry! Give you my word I didn't notice. I should have noticed, of course. Absent-minded sort of beggar, you know! Please take the cab, won't you? I don't in the least mind waiting. Please take it! Allow me!"

He tried to take her bag. His manner was not at all haughty. On the contrary, it was a very agreeable manner, and the impulsive Lexy liked him.

"Why can't we both go?" said she.

"Oh, no!" he protested. "Please take the cab! Give you my word I don't mind waiting."

"It's a dismal place to wait in," said Lexy. "We can both go, just as well as not."

The driver approved of Lexy's idea. It saved him trouble.

"Where do you want to go, miss?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Lexy. "I suppose there's a hotel, isn't there?"

"I say!" exclaimed the stranger. "Just what I'd been asking him, you know! He says there's no hotel, but a very decent boarding house."

"Mis' Royce's," added the driver. "She takes boarders."

"All right!" said Lexy cheerfully. "Miss Royce's it is!"

The stranger took her bag, and put it into the taxi. He would have assisted Lexy, but she was already inside; so he, too, got in. He closed the door, and off they went.

"I *am* sorry, you know," he said, "shoving ahead like that; but I didn't notice—"

"Well, please stop being sorry now," requested Lexy firmly.

"Right-o!" said he. "You won't mind my saying you've been wonderfully nice about it?"

"No, I don't mind that a bit," replied Lexy. "I like to be wonderfully nice."

There was a moment's silence.

"Will you allow me to introduce myself?" said the stranger. "Grey, you know—George Grey—Captain Grey, you know."

"Captain of a ship?" asked Lexy, with interest. She thought she would like to talk about ships.

"Oh, no!" said he, rather shocked. "Army—British army—stationed in India."

"I knew you were an Englishman."

"Did you really?" said he, as if surprised. "People do seem to know. My first visit to your country—six months' leave—so I've come here to see my sister—Mrs. Quelton. She's married to an American doctor."

Lexy thought there was something almost pathetic in his chivalrous anxiety to explain himself.

"I'm Alexandra Moran," she said.

"Thank you!" said Captain Grey. "Thank you very much, Miss Moran!"

There was no opportunity for further polite conversation, for the taxi had stopped and the driver came around to the door.

"Better make a run fer it!" he said. "I'll take yer bags."

So Captain Grey took Lexy's arm, and they did make a run for it, through the fine, chilly rain, along a garden path and up on a veranda. The door was opened at once.

"Miss Royce?" asked Captain Grey.



"Mrs. Royce," said the other. "Come right in. My, how it does rain!"

They followed her into a dimly lit hall. She opened a door on the right, and lit the gas in what was obviously the "best parlor"—a dreadful room, stiff and ugly, and smelling of camphor and dampness. Captain Grey remained in the hall to settle with the driver, and Lexy decided to let her share of the reckoning wait for a more auspicious occasion. She went into the parlor with Mrs. Royce.

"You and your husband just come from the city?" inquired the landlady.

"He's not my husband," replied Lexy, with a laugh. "I never set eyes on him before. There was only one taxi, and we were both looking for a hotel. The driver said you took boarders, and that's how we happened to come together."

"I don't take boarders much, 'cept in the summer time," said Mrs. Royce. She was a stout, comfortable sort of creature, gray-haired, and very neat in her dark dress and clean white apron. She had a kindly, good-humored face, too, but she had a landlady's eye. "People don't come here much, this time of year," she went on.

"Nothing to bring 'em here."

These last words were a challenge to Lexy to explain her business, and she was prepared.

"I passed through here the other day in a motor," she said, "on my way to Adams Corners, and I thought it looked like such a nice, quiet place for me to work in. I'm a writer, you know, and I thought Wyngate would just suit me."

"I was born and raised out to Adams Corners," said Mrs. Royce. "Guess there's no one living out there that I don't know."

"Then perhaps you know Miss Craigie?"

"Miss Margaret Craigie? I should say I did! If you're a friend of hers—"

"Only an acquaintance," said Lexy cautiously.

"Set down!" suggested Mrs. Royce, very cordial now. "I'll light a nice wood fire. A writer, are you? Well, well! And the gentleman—I wonder, now, what brings him here!"

"He told me he'd come to see his sister," said Lexy. "Mrs. Quelton, I think he said."

"Quelton!" cried the landlady. "You didn't say Quelton? Not the doctor's wife?"

"Yes," said the captain's voice from the doorway. "Nothing happened to her, has there? Nothing gone wrong?"

Mrs. Royce stared at him with the most profound interest, and he stared back at her, somewhat uneasily.

"No," said she, at last. "No—only—well, I'm sure!"

There was a silence.

"Could we possibly have a little supper?" asked Lexy politely.

"Yes, indeed you can!" said Mrs. Royce. "Right away!" But still she lingered. "Mrs. Quelton's brother!" she said. "Well, I never!"

Then she tore herself away, leaving Lexy and Captain Grey alone in the parlor.

"Seems to bother her," he said. "I wonder why!"

Lexy was also wondering, and longing to ask questions, but she felt that it wouldn't be good manners.

"People in small places like this are always awfully curious," she observed.

"Yes," said he; "and Muriel may be a bit eccentric, you know. I rather imagine she is, from her letters. I've never seen her."

"Never seen your own sister!"

Lexy would certainly have asked questions now, manners or no manners, only that Mrs. Royce entered the room again, to fulfill her promise to make a "nice wood fire." Amazing, the difference it made in the room! The ugliness and stiffness vanished in the ruddy glow. It seemed a delightful room, now, homely and welcoming and safe.

"It's real cozy here," said Mrs. Royce, "on a night like this. I'm sorry the dining room's so kind of chilly."

"Oh, can't we have supper here, by the fire?" cried Lexy. "Please! We'll promise not to get any crumbs on your nice carpet, Mrs. Royce!"

"I guess you can," replied the landlady benevolently.

And so it happened that the ancient magic of fire was invoked in Lexy's behalf. Probably, if she and Captain Grey had had their supper in the chilly dining room, they would have been a little chilly, too, and more cautious. They might not have said all that they did say.

## IX

It was an excellent supper, and Captain Grey and Lexy thoroughly appreciated it. They ate with healthy appetites, and they talked. Mrs. Royce, from the kitchen, heard their cheerful, friendly voices, and their

laughter, and she didn't for one moment believe that they had never met before. Listening to them, she wore that benevolent smile once more, and felt sure that she had encountered a very charming little romance. It was all Lexy's doing. It was Lexy's beautiful talent, to be able to create this atmosphere of honest and happy *camaraderie*. Before the meal was finished, Captain Grey was talking to her as if they had known each other since childhood, and he didn't even wonder at it. It seemed perfectly natural.

Mrs. Royce came in to take away the dishes.

"Going to set here a while?" she asked, looking at the two young people with a smile of approval. "I'll bring in some more wood." She hesitated a moment, and the landladyish glimmer again appeared in her eyes. "If it was me," she observed, in the most casual way, "the fire'd be enough light. If it was me, now, I wouldn't want that gas flaring and blaring away—and burning up good money," she added, to herself.

"You're right," Lexy cheerfully agreed. "We'll turn it down."

The rain was falling fast outside, driving against the windows when the wind blew; and inside the young people sat by the fire, very content.

"Queer thing!" said Captain Grey meditatively. "Never been in this place before—never been in this country before—and yet it's like coming home!"

"I know that feeling," said Lexy. "I've had it before. I think only people who haven't any real homes of their own ever have it."

"But haven't you any real home?" he asked, evidently distressed.

"No," she answered; "but please don't think it's tragic. It's not."

"You haven't impressed me as tragic," he admitted.

Lexy laughed.

"Thank goodness!" she said. "I do want to keep on being—well, ordinary and human, even when outside things seem a little tragic."

"Miss Moran!" he said, and stopped.

It was some time before he spoke again. Lexy took advantage of his abstraction to study his face by the firelight. When you come to understand it a little, it wasn't a haughty face at all, but a very sensitive and fine one.

"Miss Moran!" he said again. "About being ordinary and human—of course, one wants to be that; but the thing is—I don't know quite how to put it, but if you have a feeling, you know—I mean a feeling that something is wrong—" He paused again.

"I mean," he went on, "if you have a feeling like that—a sort of—well, call it uneasiness—the question is whether one ought to laugh at it, or take it as"—once more he stopped—"as a warning," he ended.

A strange sensation came over Lexy.

"I've been thinking a good deal about that very thing lately," she replied. "I believe feelings like that *are* a warning. I'm sure it's wrong—foolish and wrong—to disregard them. Even if every one else, even if your own mind tells you it's all nonsense, you mustn't care!"

"I think you're right," he gravely agreed. "I've been trying to tell myself that I'm an utter ass, but all the time I knew I wasn't. I knew—I know now—that there's something—"

An unreasoning dread possessed Lexy. She felt for a moment that she didn't want to hear any more.

"I'd like to tell you about it, if you wouldn't mind," he said. "Somehow I think you could help."

For an instant she hesitated.

"Please do tell me," she said at length. "I'd be glad to help, if I can."

"It's this," he said. "Do you mind if I smoke? Thanks!"

He took a cigarette case from his pocket. As he struck a match, she could see his face very clearly in the sudden flame; and, for no reason at all, she pitied him.

"It's this," he said again. "It's about my sister."

"The sister you've never seen?"

The sensation of dread had gone, and she felt only the liveliest interest. She wanted very much to hear about Captain Grey's sister.

"It wasn't quite true to say I'd never seen her," he explained, in his painstaking way. "I have, you know; but not since I was six years old and she was a baby. Our mother died when Muriel was born, out in India. An aunt took the poor little kid to the States with her, and I stayed out there with my father."

He drew on his cigarette for a minute.

"She's twenty-one now," he said. "Last picture I had of her was when she was fourteen or so. A pretty kid—a bit more than pretty—what you'd call lovely."

He was silent for a little, staring into the fire.

“When I was at school in England, it was arranged that she was to come over; but she didn’t, and we’ve never met again. Twenty-one years—it’s a long time.”

“Yes, it is,” said Lexy gently, for something in his voice touched her.

“We’ve written to each other, on and off. I’m not much good at that sort of thing, but I thought her letters were—well, rather remarkable, you know; but I dare say I’m prejudiced. She’s the only one of my own people left.”

“You poor, dear thing!” thought Lexy, with ready sympathy, but she did not say anything.

“Anyhow,” he presently continued, “I got an impression from her letters that she was rather an extraordinary girl. She was studying music—said she was going on the concert stage—awfully enthusiastic about it; and then she married this doctor chap. She never said much about him, only that she was very happy; but—well, I don’t believe that.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. Anyhow, she was married about two years ago, and a few months after her marriage she began writing oftener—almost every mail. She was always wanting me to come over here and see her; and lately, in her last letters, I—somehow I fancied she wanted me rather badly. It—it worried me, so I arranged for leave. On the very day when I wrote that I would be coming over this month, I had a letter from her, asking me not to make any plans for coming this year. She said she’d taken up her concert work again, and would be too busy to enjoy the visit, and so on. I’d already made my plans, you see, so I went ahead. Then, about a fortnight later, after she’d got my letter, I suppose, I had a cable. ‘Don’t come,’ it said. I cabled back, but she didn’t answer.”

He looked anxiously at Lexy, but she said nothing. She sat very still, curled up in a big chair, staring into the fire with an odd look of uncertainty on her face.

“You know,” he went on, “I’ve tried to think that she was simply too busy, or something of that sort. But, Miss Moran, didn’t this woman’s manner rather make you think there was something a bit—out of the way?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” replied Lexy, in a casual tone which very much disconcerted him.

“I’ve been making a fool of myself!” he thought, flushing. “Why the devil didn’t I keep my old-woman notions to myself? Now she’ll think—”

But Lexy was not thinking that Captain Grey was a fool. She was only very much afraid of being one herself, and was engaged in a severe struggle against this danger. That dread, that vague and oppressive dread, had come back, and she was fighting to throw it off. She wanted to be, she *would* be, her own normal, cheerful self again, living in a normal, everyday world.

“All this about his sister, and about Caroline!” she thought. “It’s really nothing—nothing serious. Our both being here in Wyngate—that’s nothing, either. It’s just a coincidence. If the gas wasn’t turned down, I wouldn’t feel like this.”

She would have risen and turned up the gas, only that she was ashamed to do so. The fire was blazing merrily, shedding a ruddy light upon the homely room, the most commonplace room in the world. There was Captain Grey sitting there smoking—just an ordinary young man come to visit his sister. There was herself—just Lexy Moran, well fed and warm and comfortable, with more than a hundred dollars in a bag round her neck. She could hear Mrs. Royce moving about in the kitchen, humming to herself in a low drone.

“I will *not* be silly!” she told herself.

And just then a train whistled—a long, melancholy shriek. Lexy had a sudden vision of it, rushing through the dark and the rain. She had a sudden realization of the outside world, vast, lonely, terrible, stretching from pole to pole—forests, and plains, and oceans. The monstrous folly of pretending that everything was snug and warm and cozy! Things did happen—only cowards denied that.

“Captain Grey!” she cried abruptly. “What you’ve told me—it *is* queer; and it’s even queerer when I think what has brought me here to this little place. Both of us here, in Wyngate! I think I’ll tell you.”

And she did.

He listened in absolute silence to the tale of Caroline Enderby’s disappearance. Even after Lexy had finished, it was some time before he spoke.

“I’ll try to help you,” he said simply.

“Oh, thank you!” cried Lexy, with a rush of gratitude. She wanted some one to help her, and she could imagine no one better for the purpose than this young man. He would help her—she was sure of it. Even the fact of having told him most wonderfully lightened her burden. She gave an irrepressible little giggle.

“We have almost all the ingredients for a first-class mystery story,” she said; “except the jewel—the famous ruby, or the great diamond.”

“It’s an emerald, in this case,” said Captain Grey.

Lexy straightened up in her chair, and stared at him.

"You don't really mean that?" she demanded. "There isn't really an emerald?" He smiled.

"I'm afraid it hasn't much to do with the case—with either of the cases," he said; "but there is an emerald—my sister's."

"It didn't come from India?"

"It did, though!"

"Don't tell me it was stolen from a temple! That would be too good to be true!"

"I'm sorry," he said; "but as far as I know, it's never been stolen at all, and its history for the last eighty years hasn't been sinister. One of the old rajahs gave it to my grandfather—a reward of merit, you know. When my father married, it went to my mother. She never had any trouble with it. She never wore it, because she didn't like it."

"Why?"

"Well, you see, it's an ostentatious sort of thing, and she wasn't ostentatious." He paused a moment. "My father told me, before he died, that he wanted Muriel to have it when she was eighteen; and so, three years ago, I sent it over to her."

"But how?"

"You're a good detective," said he, smiling again. "You don't miss any of the points. It was a bit of a problem, how to send the thing; but I had the luck to find some people I knew who were coming over here, and they brought it. So that's that!"

"An emerald!" said Lexy. "This is almost too much! I think I'll say good night, Captain Grey. I need sleep." As she followed Mrs. Royce up the stairs, she saw Captain Grey still sitting before the fire, smoking; and it was a comforting sight.

X

Lexy slept late the next morning. It was nearly nine o'clock when she opened her eyes. She lay for a few minutes, looking about her. The gray light of another rainy day filled the neat, unfamiliar little room, and outside the window she could see the branches of a little pear tree rocking in the wind.

"I'm here in Wyngate," she said to herself. "I was bent on coming here to find Caroline; and now, here I am, and how am I going to begin?"

She got up, and washed in cold water, in a queer, old-fashioned china basin painted with flowers. She brushed her shining hair, and dressed, feeling more hopeful every minute.

"One step at a time!" she thought. "The first step was to come here; and the next step—well, I'll think of it after breakfast. Perhaps Captain Grey will have thought of something."

But Captain Grey had gone out.

"Jest a few minutes ago," Mrs. Royce informed her. "He was down real early—around seven, and he waited and waited for you. At half past eight he et, and off he went."

"Did he say when he'd be back?"

"No," said Mrs. Royce. "He didn't say much of anything. He's a kind of quiet young man, ain't he? Well, he'd ought to get on with his sister, then."

"Is she very quiet?" asked Lexy.

"Quiet!" repeated Mrs. Royce. "Set down an' begin to eat, Miss Moran. I've fixed a real nice tasty breakfast for you, if I do say it as shouldn't. Corn gems, too. Mis' Quelton quiet? I should say she was! Quiet as"—she paused—"as the dead," she went on, and the phrase made an unpleasant impression upon Lexy. "An' her husband, too. I never saw the like of them. They never come into the village, an' nobody ever goes out there to the Tower. About twice a week the doctor drives into Lymewell—the town below here—and he buys a lot of food an' all, an' he goes home. I can see him out of my front winder, an' the sight of him, driving along in that black buggy of his—it gives me the shivers!"

"But if he's a doctor—"

"Don't ask *me* what kind of doctor he is, Miss Moran! He don't go to see the sick—that's all I know."

"But his wife—what is she like?"

"Miss Moran," said the landlady, with profound impressiveness, "I guess there ain't three people in Wyngate that's ever set eyes on her!"

"But how awfully queer!"

"You may well say 'queer,'" said Mrs. Royce. "There she stays, out in that lonely place—never seeing a soul from one month's end to another. She's a young woman, too—young, an' just as pretty as a picture."

"Then you are—"

"I'm one of the few that has seen her," said Mrs. Royce, with a sort of grim satisfaction. "That's why I take a kind of special interest in her. I seen her the night the doctor brought her here to Wyngate a young bride. That'll be three years ago this winter, but I remember it as plain as plain. There was a terrible snowstorm, and he couldn't git out to his place, so he had to bring her here, and she sat right in this very room, just where you're sitting."

Instinctively Lexy looked behind her.

"I feel that same way myself—as if she was a ghost," said Mrs. Royce solemnly. "Near three years ago, and her living only three miles off, an' I've never set eyes on her again. I've never forgotten her, though, the sweet pretty young creature!"

"But why do you suppose she lives like that?"

Mrs. Royce came nearer.

"Miss Moran," she said, "that doctor is crazy. I'm not the only one to say it. He's as crazy—hush, now! Here's that poor young man!"

The "poor young man" came into the room, with that very nice smile of his.

"Good morning!" he said. "I say, I'm sorry I didn't wait for you a bit longer, Miss Moran."

"I'm glad you didn't," said Lexy. "I'd have felt awfully guilty."

"I went out to telephone," he explained. "Thought I'd tell Muriel I was here, you know; but they have no telephone. Dashed odd, isn't it, for a doctor not to have a telephone in the house?"

"I don't think he's a real doctor—a physician, I mean," said Lexy. She glanced around and saw that Mrs. Royce had gone. Springing up, she crossed the room to Captain Grey. "Has Mrs. Royce—has any one said anything to you?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

"No!" answered the young man, startled. "Why? What's up?"

"Mrs. Royce says—I suppose I really ought to tell you."

"No doubt about it!"

"Mrs. Royce says Dr. Quelton is crazy!"

Captain Grey took the news very coolly. Lexy observed that he suppressed a smile.

"Oh, that!" he said. "But you know, Miss Moran, in these little villages any one who's at all out of the ordinary is called crazy. I've noticed it before. I can soon find out for myself, though, can't I? I thought, if you didn't want me this morning, I'd go over there—pay a call, you know. I understand it's three miles from here, so I shouldn't be very long. I'd come back here for lunch."

"But, Captain Grey, you mustn't think I expect you to—"

"It's not that," he said. "Only you said you'd let me help you in your little job, and I want to!" He smiled down at her. "So," he said, "I'll be back for lunch;" and off he went.

Lexy went to the window and looked out. She saw Captain Grey striding off up the muddy road, perfectly indifferent to the rain, and curiously elegant, in spite of his wet weather clothes. She was thinking of him with great friendliness and appreciation; but she was not thinking of him in the least as Mrs. Royce imagined she was thinking.

Mrs. Royce stood in the doorway, watching Lexy watch Captain Grey, smiling and even beaming with benevolence; but she would have been disappointed if she had suspected what was in Lexy's head.

"He's awfully nice," thought Lexy, "and awfully handsome, and I'm certain that he's absolutely trustworthy and honorable, but—"

But somehow he wasn't to be compared to Mr. Houseman. She knew practically nothing about Mr. Houseman. She had talked with him for five or ten minutes in the park, and his conversation had been entirely about Caroline Enderby. He had shown himself to be quick-tempered and sadly lacking in patience. He had written Lexy a stiff, offended, boyish letter, and then he had disappeared. There was no sensible reason in the world why she should think of him as she did, no reason why she should hope so much to see him again; but she did.

"Well, now!" said Mrs. Royce, at last. "You'll be wanting a nice quiet place for your writing."

"Writing!" said Lexy. "I never—" She stopped herself just in time, remembering her shocking falsehood of the night before. "I never care much where I write," she ended.

"Well, I've fixed up the sewing room for you," said Mrs. Royce. "I've put a nice strong table in there with drawers, where you can keep your papers an' all."

"You're a dear!" said Lexy warmly.

She said this because she thought it, and without the least calculation. She liked Mrs. Royce, and when she liked people she told them so. That was what made people love her.

Mrs. Royce was completely won.

"I'm real glad to do it for you," she said. "I won't bother you, neither, while you're working. I know how it is with writing. My cousin, now—her husband was writing for the movies, an' he was that upset if he was disturbed!"

Still conversing with great affability, Mrs. Royce led the reluctant writer upstairs to the small room prepared for her, and shut her in. Lexy sat down in a chair before the workmanlike table, and grinned ruefully. She had said she was a writer, and now she had to be one.

"Well," she reflected, "here's a chance to write to Mr. Houseman, anyhow."

She never had the least difficulty in writing letters. For one reason, she never bothered about them unless she had something to say, and then she said it, briefly and lucidly, and was done. She told Mr. Houseman all she knew about Caroline's disappearance, and explained that she had gone out to Wyngate in the hope of picking up some trace of her.

"Of course," she wrote, "I don't know whether I'll still be here when you get back. If I've gone, I'll leave my address with Mrs. Royce, in case you should want to communicate with me."

This was admirable, so far; but, reading it over, Lexy was not satisfied. She remembered the misery, the trouble and anxiety, in Mr. Houseman's blue eyes. She imagined him sailing the seas, bitterly hurt because he thought Caroline had changed her mind. She thought of him coming back and getting this letter, to revive all his alarm for Caroline. This wasn't, after all, a business letter. She took up her pen again, and added: I think I can imagine how you feel about all this, and I am more sorry than I can tell you. I hope we shall meet soon.

This last phrase rather astonished her. She hadn't meant to write just that. She picked up the letter, intending to tear it up and write another; but she thought better of it.

"No!" she said to herself. "Let it stay. It's true; why shouldn't I hope that we'll meet again?"

So she addressed the letter and sealed it, and then sat looking out of the window at the rain. It was a hopeless sort of rain, faint and fine—a hopeless, melancholy world, without color or promise.

"I'd better take a walk!" thought Lexy, springing up.

Before she reached the door there was a knock, and Mrs. Royce put her head in.

"He's here!" she whispered. "He's asking for you."

"Who?" cried Lexy.

"Hush! The doctor!" answered Mrs. Royce. "You could 'a' knocked me down with a feather!"

XI

Feathers would not have knocked down the sturdy Lexy, however. On the contrary, she was pleased and interested by this utterly unexpected visit. The sinister doctor here, in this house, and asking for her! She started promptly toward the stairs.

"Miss Moran!" cautioned the landlady, in a whisper. "Don't tell him nothing!"

"Tell him!" said Lexy. "But I haven't anything to tell!"

"Well, you'd best be very careful!" said Mrs. Royce.

With this solemn warning in her ears, Lexy descended the stairs. She saw Dr. Quelton standing in the hall, hat in hand, waiting for her. The doctor was rather a disappointment. He was not the dark, sinister figure he should have been. He was a big man, powerfully built, with a clumsy stoop to his tremendous shoulders. His heavy, clean-shaven face would have been an agreeable one if it had not been for its expression, but that expression was not at all an alarming or dangerous one. It was an expression of the most utter and hopeless boredom.

He came toward her.

"Miss Moran?" he asked.

Even his voice was listless, and his glance was without a spark of interest.

"Yes," said she.

"My brother-in-law, Captain Grey, told us you were here, and I did myself the honor of calling," he went on.

"You certainly were quick about it!" thought Lexy. "Captain Grey couldn't have reached his sister's house an hour ago, and it's three miles from here. Won't you come into the sitting room?" she asked aloud.

"Thank you," he replied, and followed Lexy into the decorous and dismal room.

He sat down opposite her in a small chair that cracked under his weight, and he smiled a bored and extinguished smile.

"A writer, I believe?" he said.

"Well, yes, in a way," answered Lexy, growing a little red.

"My wife and I were very much interested," he went on, with as little interest as a human being may well display. "We don't have many newcomers here. It's a very quiet place."

His apathetic manner exasperated Lexy.

"But I don't care how quiet it is," she observed.

"My wife and I like a quiet life," he said. "My wife asked me to explain, Miss Moran, that she is something of a recluse. Her health prevents her from calling upon you; but she wished me to say that she would be very happy to see you at the Tower, whenever it may be convenient for you to call, any afternoon after four o'clock."

"Thank you," replied Lexy. "Please thank Mrs. Quelton. I shall be very pleased to come."

And now why didn't he go away? This visit was apparently a painful duty for him. He had delivered his message, and yet he lingered.

"A very quiet place," he repeated; "but perhaps you are not sociably inclined?"

"Oh, I'm sociable enough—at times," said Lexy.

"But at the present time you prefer solitude? For the purposes of your work? As a change from the stimulating atmosphere of the city?"

Any mention of her work made Lexy uncomfortable.

"Well, yes," she answered in a dubious tone.

"I lived in New York myself for a number of years," he went on. "I wonder if you—may I ask what part of the city you lived in, Miss Moran?"

Lexy hesitated, and she meant him to see that she hesitated. After all, however, it was not an unnatural or impertinent question, and she couldn't very well refuse to answer it.

"In the East Sixties, near the park," she said. "It wasn't my own home, though—I was a companion," she added.

She always liked people to know that. She was far from being cynical, but she was aware that this information made a difference—to some people.

She was astonished to see the difference it made in Dr. Quelton. He raised his black, weary eyes to her face and stared at her with unmistakable insolence.

"Ah!" he said. "I see! I thought so!"

There was a moment's silence.

"And you've come to Wyngate to—er—to write?" he went on. "Very interesting—very!"

Lexy felt her cheeks grow hot. She wished with all her heart that she had not involved herself in that stupid falsehood. It humiliated her so much that she couldn't answer Dr. Quelton with her usual spirit. He noticed her confusion—no doubt about that.

"Poetry, perhaps?" he suggested.

"No!" said Lexy vehemently. "Not poetry!"

He leaned forward a little, looking directly into her face.

"Perhaps," he said, "you write detective stories?"

"Yes!" said Lexy.

The doctor rose.

"The solving of mysteries!" he said, with his unpleasant smile. "That makes very interesting fiction!"

Lexy rose, too. His tone, his manner, exasperated her almost beyond endurance. She felt an ardent desire to contradict everything he said. What is more, she was in no humor to hear mystery stories made light of. She had had enough of that—first Mrs. Enderby pretending there was no mystery, and then Mr. Houseman going off and pretending it was solved, so that she was left alone to do the best she could. Wasn't she in a mystery story at this very minute, and without a single promising clue to guide her?

"There are plenty of mysteries that aren't fiction," she observed curtly.

"But they are never solved," said Dr. Quelton.

"Never solved?" said Lexy. "But lots of them are! You can read in the newspapers all the time about crimes that—"

"The mystery of a crime is never solved," the doctor blandly proceeded. "Never! Let us say, for example, that a murder is committed. The police investigate, they arrest some one. There is a trial, the jury finds that the suspect is guilty, the judge sentences him, and he is executed. Public opinion is satisfied; but as a matter of fact, nothing whatever has been solved. It is all guesswork. Not one living soul, not one member of the jury, not the judge, not the executioner, really *knows* that the accused man was guilty. They think so—that is all. What you call a 'solution' is merely a guess, based upon probabilities."

Lexy considered this with an earnest frown.

"Well," she said at last, "quite often criminals confess."

"In the days of witchcraft trials," said he, "it was not uncommon for women to come forward voluntarily and confess to being witches. In the course of my own practice I have known people to confess things they could not possibly have done. No!" He shook his head and smiled faintly. "An acquaintance with the psychology of the diseased mind makes one very skeptical about confessions, Miss Moran."

This idea, too, Lexy took into her mind and considered for a few minutes.

"Even an eyewitness," Dr. Quelton went on, "is entirely unreliable. Any lawyer can tell you how completely the senses deceive one. Three persons can see the same occurrence, and each one of the three will swear to a quite different impression. Each one may be entirely honest, entirely convinced that he saw or heard what never took place."

"Do you mean that you think it's never possible to find out who's guilty?"

"Never," he replied agreeably. "It can never be anything but a guess, as I said, based upon probabilities. Human senses, human judgment, human reason, are all pitifully liable to error."

Lexy was silent for a time, thinking over this.

"Maybe you're right," she said slowly, "about the senses, and judgment, and reason. Perhaps their evidence isn't always to be trusted; but there's something else."

"Something else?" he repeated. "Something else? And what may that be?"

Lexy looked up at him. There was a smile on his heavy, pallid face, aloof and contemptuous; but she was chiefly concerned just then in trying to put into words her own firm conviction, more for her own benefit than for his. It was not reason that had brought her here to look for Caroline, it was not reason that sustained her.

"There's something else," she said again, with a frown. "There's a way of knowing things without reason. It's—I don't know just how to put it, but it's a thing beyond reason."

He laughed, and she thought she had never heard a more unpleasant laugh.

"Certainly!" he said. "Beyond reason lies—unreason."

"I don't mean that," said Lexy. "I mean—"

She stopped, because he had abruptly turned away and was walking toward the door. She stood where she was, amazed by this unique rudeness; but in the doorway he turned.

"The thing beyond reason!" he said, almost in a whisper. Then, with a sudden and complete change of manner, he went on: "It has been very interesting to meet you, Miss Moran. My wife will enjoy a visit from you. Any afternoon, after four o'clock!" He bowed politely. "After four o'clock," he repeated, and off he went.

Lexy stood looking at the closed door.

"Crazy?" she said to herself. "No—that's not the word for him at all. He's—he's just horrible!"

## XII

At half past twelve Captain Grey had not yet returned, and Mrs. Royce declared that the ham omelet would be ruined if not eaten at once; so Lexy went down to the dining room and ate her lunch alone.

The rain was still falling steadily, and the little room was dim, chilly, and, to Lexy, unbearably close. She wasn't particularly hungry, either, after such a hearty breakfast and no exercise. She felt restless and uneasy. When Mrs. Royce went out into the kitchen to fetch the dessert, she jumped up from the table, crossed the room, and opened the window.

The wild rain blew against her face, and it felt good to her. She drew in a long breath of the fresh, damp air, and sighed with relief.

"I'm going to go out this afternoon," she said to herself, "if it rains pitchforks! I can't—"

Just then she caught sight of Captain Grey coming down the road. Her first impulse was to call out a cheerful salutation, but after a second glance she felt no inclination for that. He was tramping along doggedly through the rain, his hands in his pockets, his collar turned up. He was as straight and soldierly as ever, but his face was pale, with such a queer look on it!

"Oh, dear!" thought Lexy. "Something's gone wrong! Oh, the poor soul! And he set off so happy this morning."

She went into the hall and opened the front door for him. Filled with a motherly solicitude, she wanted to help him off with his overcoat, but he abruptly declined that.

"Am I late?" he asked. "I thought one o'clock, you know—I'm sorry."

"Mercy, that doesn't matter!" said Lexy. "Aren't you going to change your shoes? You ought to. Well, then, you'd better come in and eat your lunch this minute."

"You're no end kind, to bother like that!" he said earnestly. "I do appreciate it!"

"Who wouldn't be?" thought Lexy, glancing at him. "You poor soul, you look as if you'd seen a ghost!"



He took his place at the table, and Lexy sat down opposite him, her chin in her hands, anxiously waiting for him to begin to tell her what had happened.

"Beastly day, isn't it?" he said, with an obvious effort to speak cheerfully.

"Awful!" agreed Lexy.

"And yet, you know," he went on, "I rather like a walk on a day like this. The country about here is pretty, don't you think?"

Lexy glanced around, to make sure that Mrs. Royce had closed the door behind her.

"Captain Grey!" she said, leaning across the table. "Tell me, did you see her?"

He did not meet Lexy's eyes. He was looking down at his plate with that curious dazed expression in his face.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, I saw her."

Lexy was hurt and disappointed by his manner. Evidently he didn't want to tell her anything, didn't want to talk at all. Very well—the only thing for her to do was to maintain a dignified silence. She did so for almost ten minutes, but then nature got the upper hand.

"Well?" she demanded. "Was everything all right?"

"All right?" he repeated. "Oh, rather! Oh, yes, thanks—absolutely all right."

This was too much for Lexy.

"That's good," she said frigidly. "I'm going upstairs now, to write some letters."

Her tone aroused him. He sprang to his feet, very contrite.

"No! Look here!" he said. "Please don't run away! I—I want to talk to you, but it's a bit hard. You can't imagine what it's like to see one of your own people, you know—after such a long time."

Lexy sat down again.

"Was she as you expected her to be?" she asked.

"I don't quite know what I expected," he said. "Only—"

He paused for a long time, and Lexy waited patiently, for she felt very sorry for Captain Grey. At first sight she had imagined him to be haughty, stiff, and aloof. She knew now that he was a very sensitive man. He was terribly moved, and he wanted to tell her, but he couldn't.

She tried to help him.

"Dr. Quelton came to see me this morning," she observed.

"Yes—he said he would. Very decent sort of chap, don't you think?"

"Do you mean you *liked* him?" asked Lexy.

Captain Grey was a little startled by this Yankee notion of liking a person at first sight.

"Well, you see," he said, "I've only met him once; but he seems to me a very decent sort of chap. He's clever, you know, and—and so on, and my sister seems very happy with him."

"Happy?"

"Yes. I've been an ass, imagining all sorts of silly rot. She's not very strong, I'm afraid, but she's happy, and—well, you know, their life out there is lonely, of course, but there's something about it, rather—rather charming, you know. I'd like you to see it for yourself. I was speaking about you to Muriel. She wants to know you, and I think you'd like her. Would you come out there to tea with me this afternoon?"

"Yes!" cried Lexy, with a vehemence that surprised him.

There was nothing in the world she wanted more at that moment than to see Captain Grey's sister and to visit Dr. Quelton's house. She didn't exactly know why, and she didn't care, but she wanted to.

Her trunk had not yet arrived. Indeed, she had only sent to Mrs. Enderby's for it that morning, but she was able to make herself presentable with what she had in her bag, and excitement gave her an added charm. She was in high spirits, gay and sparkling, so pretty and so lively that Captain Grey was quite dazzled.

He had engaged the one and only taxi.

After they were settled in it, and on their way along the muddy road, he said:

"I say, Miss Moran, are there many American girls like you?"

"No!" replied Lexy calmly. "I'm unique."

"I can believe that!" he said. "I've never seen any one like you. I was telling Muriel how much I hope that you and she will hit it off. It would be a wonderful thing for her to have a friend like you in this place."

Something in his tone made Lexy turn serious. He was speaking as if she was simply a nice girl he had happened to meet, as if she had nothing to do but go out to tea and make agreeable friendships.

"Yes," she said, "but I don't know how long I'll be here. I certainly haven't accomplished much so far."

He was silent, and to Lexy his silence was very eloquent.

"I came here for a definite purpose," she told him. "I haven't forgotten that, and I'm not likely to forget it."

"I know," said he, "but—"

“But,” interrupted Lexy, “I know very well what you’re thinking—that it’s a wild-goose chase, and that I’m a young idiot. Isn’t that it?”

“I don’t mean that,” he protested; “only—don’t you see?”

“I don’t!” Lexy grimly denied. “You’ve thought over the talk we had last night, and you’ve decided that it was all nonsense.”

“No, Miss Moran—not nonsense; but we were both a bit tired then, and perhaps a bit overwrought.”

“All right!” said Lexy. “Don’t go on! No—please drop it. I’ve talked too much, anyhow. From now on I’m not going to talk to any one about my little job. I’m going to go ahead in my own way, alone.”

“You can’t,” said Captain Grey firmly. “I’m here, you know.”

This did not appease Lexy, and she remained curt and silent all the rest of the way. For a couple of miles the taxi went on along a broad, smooth highway; then it turned off down a rough lane, bordered by dark woodland, and entirely deserted. The rain drummed loud on the leather top of the cab, the wind came sighing through the gaunt pines and the slender, shivering birches; but when there was a lull, she heard another sound, a sound familiar to her from childhood and yet always strange, always heart-stirring—the dim, unceasing thunder of the sea.

“Is the doctor’s house near the shore?” she inquired.

“Yes—just on the beach.”

“Oh, I’m so glad!” cried Lexy. “Our old house, where I was born, was on the shore, and on days like this I used to love to go out and walk with father. I love the sea so!”

Captain Grey gave her an odd look, which she didn’t understand. Perhaps that was just as well, for her words and her voice had troubled the young man to an unreasonable degree. He wished he could say something to comfort her. He wished he could offer her the sea as a gift, for instance; and that would have been a mistake, because Lexy did not like to be pathetic.

Just at that moment, however, the taxi turned into a driveway, and there was the house—the Tower. Lexy was disappointed. The name had called up in her mind the picture of a gloomy edifice of gray stone, more or less medieval, and altogether somber and forbidding; and this was nothing in the world but a rather shabby old house, badly in need of paint, and forlorn enough in the rain, but very ordinary and very ugly. Even the tower, which had given the place its romantic name, was only a wooden cupola with a lightning rod on top of it.

“Can you get a good view of the sea from the windows?” Lexy demanded.

“Well, not from the library, where I was,” he answered; “but perhaps—”

“Captain Grey, I want to get out! I want to run down on the beach for one instant!”

“In this rain?” he protested. “You can’t!”

“I’m not made of sugar,” said Lexy scornfully, “I’ve *got* to run down there just for an instant, before I go in.”

“But, I say, your nice little hat, you know!”

Lexy pulled off the nice little hat and laid it on his knee. Then she rapped on the window, the driver stopped, and Lexy opened the door.

“No! Look here! Please, Miss Moran!” cried Captain Grey. “Very well, then, if you will go, I’ll go with you!”

“I’d rather you didn’t,” said Lexy. “I feel as if I’d like to go alone just for one look. You know how it is, sometimes. I haven’t had even a smell of the sea for so long; and it reminds me—”

She looked at him with a shadowy little smile, and he did understand.

“All right!” he said. “Then slip on my coat.”

She did so, to oblige him, and off she went, half running, down the lane, in the direction of the sound of the surf. Captain Grey looked after her—such an absurd little figure in that aquascutum of his that almost touched the ground! He watched her till she was out of sight; then he sat down in the cab and lit a cigarette.

He thought about her, but Lexy had forgotten him. She found herself on a desolate stretch of wet sand, with the gray sea tossing under a gray sky. She smelled the hearty, salt smell, she remembered old things, sad and sweet. Tears came into her eyes, and she felt them on her cheeks, warm, salt as the sea. If only she could go running home, back to the house where her mother used to wait for her! If only she could find her father’s big, firm hand clasping her own!

“I mustn’t be like this,” she said to herself. “Daddy would feel ashamed of me.”

In a cavernous pocket of the captain’s overcoat she found a handkerchief. She dried her eyes with it, and turned back. The Tower faced the lane, and the left side of it fronted the beach, rising stark and high from the sands. She looked up at it. On the first floor a sun parlor had been built out, and through the windows she could see a woman sitting there in a deck chair.

“I suppose that’s Muriel,” she thought, with a reawakening of her lively interest.

She came a little nearer. The woman was wearing a negligee and a coquettish little silk cap. Her back was turned toward Lexy. She lay there motionless, as if she were asleep. Lexy drew closer. The woman turned, straightened up in the chair, and rose. A shiver ran along Lexy's spine. She stopped and stared and stared. The woman had raised her thin arms above her head, stretching. Then, for a moment, she stood in an odd and lovely pose, with her hands clasped behind her head. Oh, surely no one else ever stood like that! That figure, that attitude—it couldn't be any one else! "Caroline!" cried Lexy. "Caroline!" The woman did not hear. She was moving toward the long windows of the room, and her every step, every line of her figure, was familiar and unmistakable to Lexy. "Caroline!" she cried, running forward across the wet sand. "Wait! Wait for me, Caroline!" A hand seized her arm. With a gasp, she looked into the pale, heavy face of Dr. Quelton. He was smiling. "Miss Moran!" he said. "This is an unexpected pleasure—" Lexy jerked her arm away, and looked up at the windows of the sun parlor. The woman had gone. "I saw Caroline!" she said. "In there!" "Caroline?" he repeated. "I'm afraid, I'm very much afraid, Miss Moran, that you've made a mistake." Their eyes met. In that instant, Lexy knew. He was still smiling with an expression of bland amusement at this extraordinary little figure in the huge coat; but he was her enemy, and she knew it. "Suppose we go on?" he suggested. "I believe it's raining." They turned and walked side by side around the house to the front door, where Captain Grey stood waiting. "I say!" he exclaimed anxiously. "Your hair—your shoes—you'll take a chill, Miss Moran!" "I feel anxious about Miss Moran myself," said Dr. Quelton. "I'm afraid she's a very imprudent young lady." But Lexy said nothing.

### XIII

The doctor's library had a charm of its own. It was a big room, careless, a little shabby, but furnished in fastidious taste and with a friendly sort of comfort. A great wood fire was blazing on the hearth, and Dr. Quelton drew up an armchair before it for Lexy. "There!" he said. "Now you'll soon be warm and dry. Anna!" "Yes, sir!" the parlor maid responded from the doorway. "Please tell Mrs. Quelton that Miss Moran is here." "Yes, sir!" repeated the maid, and disappeared. Lexy sat down. Captain Grey stood, facing her, leaning one elbow on the mantelpiece. Dr. Quelton paced up and down, his hands clasped behind him. He looked like a dignified middle-aged gentleman in his own home. A door opened somewhere in the house, and for a moment Lexy heard the homely and familiar sound of an egg-beater whirring and a cheerful Irish voice inquiring about "them potatoes." It was surely a cheerful and pleasant enough setting; but Lexy did not find it so. "I saw Caroline!" she insisted to herself. "I don't care what any one says. I saw Caroline!" A strange sensation of pain and dread oppressed her. What should she do? Whom should she tell? "Captain Grey," she thought; "but not now. It's no use now. Dr. Quelton would deny it. I'll have to wait until we get out of here; and then, perhaps, it'll be too late. He knows I saw her. Something—something horrible—may happen!" A shiver ran through her. "Miss Moran is nervous," said the doctor, with solicitude. "I'm not!" replied Lexy sharply. "I hope it's not a chill," said Captain Grey. "I should be inclined to think it nervousness," said Dr. Quelton. "Our landscape here is lonely and depressing, and Miss Moran has the artist's temperament, impressionable, high-strung." "Not I!" declared Lexy, in a tone that startled Captain Grey. "Lonely places don't bother me. I don't believe in ghosts." "Oh!" said the doctor. "But here's Mrs. Quelton. Muriel, this is Miss Moran, the young writer of fiction." Mrs. Quelton was coming down the long room, a beautiful woman, dark and delicate, with a sort of plaintive languor in her manner. She held out her hand to Lexy. "I'm so glad you've come!" she said. "George has told me so much about you—the first American girl he's known!"

She glanced at her brother with a little smile. Lexy glanced at him, too; and she was surprised and very much touched by the look on his face. He couldn't even smile. His face was grave, pale, almost solemn, and he was regarding his sister with something like reverence.

"Oh, poor fellow!" thought Lexy. "Poor lonely fellow! It's such a wonderful thing for him to find his sister—some one of his own. I only hope she's as nice as she looks."

This thought caused her to turn toward her hostess again. She *was* beautiful, and in a gentle and gracious fashion, and yet—

"I don't know," thought Lexy. "There's something—she doesn't look ill—perhaps she's just lackadaisical; but certainly she's not simple and easy to understand. She must know about Caroline Enderby. The thing is, would she help me, or—"

Or would Mrs. Quelton also be her enemy? Lost in her own thought, Lexy sat silent. She had, indeed, certain grave faults in social deportment. The head mistress of the finishing school she had attended had often said to her:

"Alexandra, it is absolutely inexcusable to give way to moods in the company of other people!"

In theory Lexy admitted that this was true, but it made no difference. If she didn't feel inclined to talk, she didn't talk. It was so this afternoon. She merely answered when she was spoken to—which was not often, for Dr. Quelton was asking his brother-in-law questions about India, and Mrs. Quelton seemed no more desirous to talk than Lexy was. What is more, Lexy felt certain that the doctor's wife was not listening to the talk between the two men, but, like herself, was thinking her own thoughts.

The parlor maid wheeled the tea cart in, and Mrs. Quelton roused herself to pour the tea and to make polite inquiries, in her plaintive tone, as to what her guests wanted in the way of cream and sugar. The maid vanished again, and Dr. Quelton passed about the cups and plates.

"It's China tea," he observed. "I import it myself. It has quite a distinctive flavor, I think."

Captain Grey praised it, and Lexy herself found it very agreeable. She sipped it, staring into the fire, glad to be let alone. Behind her she could hear Captain Grey talking about the Ceylon tea plantations. His voice sounded so pathetic!

"Another cup, Miss Moran?" asked Mrs. Quelton.

"Yes, thank you," answered Lexy, and the doctor brought it to her.

Poor Captain Grey and his precious, new-found sister! The sound of his voice brought tears to her eyes.

"But this is idiotic!" she thought, annoyed and surprised.

Still the tears welled up. She gulped down the rest of her tea hastily, hoping that it would steady her, but it did not help at all. Sobs rose in her throat, and an immense and formless sorrow came over her.

"This has got to stop!" she thought, in alarm. "I can't be such a chump!"

She turned to Mrs. Quelton.

"Are you going to grow any—" she began, but her voice was so unsteady that she had to stop for a moment.

"Any flowers in—in your—g-garden?"

The question ended in a loud and unmistakable sob. They all turned to look at her, startled and anxious.

She made a desperate effort to regain control of herself.

"S-snapdragon," she said. "So—so p-pretty!"

Then, suddenly, all her defenses gave way. The teacup fell from her hand and was shattered on the floor, and, burying her head in her arms, she cried as she had never cried in her life.

Mrs. Quelton stood beside her, one hand resting on Lexy's shoulder. Captain Grey was bending over her, profoundly disturbed. She tried to speak, but she could not.

"Miss Moran!" said Dr. Quelton solicitously. "Will you allow me to give you a mild sedative?"

"No!" she gasped. "No—I want to go home!"

"I'll telephone for the taxi," suggested Captain Grey. "He wasn't coming back until half past five."

"Unfortunately we have no telephone," said the doctor; "but I'll drive Miss Moran home."

"No! I want to walk."

"Not in this rain," the doctor protested, "and in your overwrought condition."

"I must!" She got up, the tears still streaming down her cheeks. "I must!" she said wildly. "Let me go! Please let me go!"

The doctor turned to Captain Grey. In the midst of her unutterable misery and confusion, Lexy still heard and understood what he was saying.

"In a case of hysteria—better to humor her—the exercise and the fresh air may help her."

The doctor's wife helped Lexy with her hat and coat. She was very gentle, very kind, and genuinely concerned for her unhappy little guest. Lexy remembered afterward that Mrs. Quelton kissed her; but at the moment nothing mattered except to get away, to get out of that house into the fresh air.

Without one backward glance she set off at a furious pace, splashing through the puddles, almost running. Captain Grey kept easily by her side with his long, lithe stride. Now and then he spoke to her, but she could not trust herself to answer just yet. The storm within her was subsiding. From time to time a sob broke from her, but the tears had stopped.

And now she was beginning to think.

Twilight had come early on this rainy day, and it was almost dark before they reached the end of the lane. Lexy slackened her pace. Then, as they came to the corner of the highway, she stopped and laid her hand on her companion's sleeve.

"Captain Grey!" she said.

He looked down at her, but it was too dark to see what expression there was on her pale face. He was vastly relieved, however, by the steadiness of her voice.

"Captain Grey!" she said again. "If I told you something—something very important—would you believe me?"

"Yes, yes, of course," he answered hastily. "Of course, I would always believe you; but I wish you wouldn't try to talk about anything important just now, you know. Let's wait a bit, eh?"

Lexy smiled to herself in the dark—a smile of extraordinary bitterness. He wouldn't believe her if she told him about Caroline. He would think she was hysterical. She saw quite plainly that by this strange outburst she had lost his confidence.

She could in no way explain her sudden breaking down. Such a thing had never happened to her before. She could not understand it, but she was in no doubt about the unfortunate consequences of it. She was discredited.

XIV

Lexy sat on the edge of the bed, her hands clasped loosely before her, her bright head bent, her eyes fixed somberly upon nothing; and she could see nothing—not one step of the way that lay ahead of her. She could not think what she ought to do next. For the first time in her life, she had a feeling of utter confusion and dismay.

"It's because I'm so tired," she said to herself. "I've never been really tired out before."

But that in itself was a cause for alarm. Why should she feel like this, so exhausted and depressed? Horrible thoughts came to her. Dr. Quelton had called her nervous, high-strung, hysterical. Was that because he had seen in her something which she herself had never suspected? Was she hysterical? Mrs. Enderby had laughed at her. Mr. Houseman had gone away, satisfied with his own solution. Captain Grey, chivalrous and kindly as he was, had obviously lost interest in her affairs. Nobody believed in her. Was it because every one could see—

She remembered the intolerable humiliation of the day before, her wild outburst of tears in the Queltons' house. Even in her childhood she had never done such a thing before.

"What does it mean?" she asked herself in terror. "What is the matter with me? Is this whole thing just a delusion? I came here to find Caroline, and I thought—I thought I did see her. Am I mad?"

That was the awful thing that had lain in ambush in her mind ever since yesterday, that had haunted her restless sleep all night. She had not admitted it, but it had been there every minute. All her actions, all her words, to-day, had the one object of showing Mrs. Royce and Captain Grey how entirely normal and sensible she was.

"That's what they always do!" she whispered with dry lips.

All day, hiding her terror and weakness, talking to Mrs. Royce, sitting at the lunch table and talking and laughing with Captain Grey, trying to make them believe her quite cheerful and untroubled—and all the time perhaps they knew. Perhaps they were humoring her!

She sprang up and went over to the window. The sun was beginning to sink in a tranquil sky. It had been a beautiful day, but Lexy felt too weary and listless to go out. She remembered now that both Captain Grey and the landlady had urged her to do so, that they had both said it would do her good. Then they must have noted that something was wrong with her. What did they think it was? Did she look—

She crossed the room and stood before the mirror. The rays of the setting sun fell upon her hair, turning it to copper and gold. It seemed to her to shine with a strange light about her pallid little face. Her eyes seemed enormous, somber, and terrible.

She covered her face with her hands and flung herself on the bed, sick and desperate. She could not see any one, could not speak to any one. When a knock came at her door, she thrust her fingers into her ears and lay there, with her eyes shut tight, trembling from head to foot; but the knocking went on until she could endure it no longer.

"Yes?" she said, sitting up.

"Supper's all on the table!" said Mrs. Royce's cheerful voice.

"I don't want any supper to-night, thank you," replied Lexy.

Mrs. Royce expostulated and argued for a time, but she could not persuade Lexy even to unlock the door; and at last, with a worried sigh, she went downstairs again.

The room was quite dark now, and the wind blowing in through the open window felt chill; but Lexy was too tired to close the window or light the gas. She was not drowsy. She lay stretched out, limp, overpowered with fatigue, but wide awake, and with a curious certainty that she was waiting for something.

There was another knock at the door, and this time Captain Grey's voice spoke.

"I say, Miss Moran!" he said anxiously. "You're not ill, are you?"

"No!" she answered, with a trace of irritability. "I'm just tired."

"But don't you think you ought to eat something, you know? Or a cup of tea?"

"No!" she cried, still more impatiently. "I can't. I want to rest."

"Can you open the door for half a moment?" he asked. "I've some roses here that my sister sent to you. She wanted me to say—"

The door opened with startling suddenness. Lexy appeared, and took the roses out of his hand.

"Thank you! Good night!" she said, and was gone again before he quite realized what was happening.

Then he heard the key turn in the lock, and, bewildered and very uneasy, he went away.

Lexy flung the roses down on the table, not even troubling to put them into water.

"Anything to get rid of him!" she said to herself. "I want to be let alone!"

She lay down on the bed again, pulling a blanket over herself. Downstairs she could hear Mrs. Royce moving about in the kitchen, and Captain Grey's singularly agreeable voice talking to the landlady. It seemed to her that they were in a different world, and that she was shut outside, in a black and terrible solitude.

"If I can only sleep!" she thought. "Perhaps, in the morning—"

She was beginning to feel a little drowsy now. How heavenly it would be to sleep, even for a little while! To sleep and to forget!

The wind was blowing through the dark little room, bringing to her the perfume of the roses—a wonderful fragrance. It was wonderful, but almost too strong. It was too strong. It troubled her.

"I'll put them out on the window sill," she murmured. "It's such a queer scent!"

But she was too tired, too unspeakably tired. She didn't seem able to get up, or even to move. She sighed faintly, and closed her eyes. The wind blew, strong and steady, heavy with that sweet and subtle odor.

"Look out!" cried Mr. Houseman. "She's going about!"

Lexy laughed, and ducked down into the cockpit while the boom swung over. The little sailboat was flying over the sunny water like a bird. There was not a cloud in the pure bright sky, not a shadow in her joyous heart.

"I am so glad you came!" she said.

"Of course I came," he answered. "I had to swim all the way from India."

"Mercy!" cried Lexy. "That must have been dreadful! But why?"

Mr. Houseman leaned forward and whispered solemnly:

"There was a tempest in a teapot."

This frightened her.

"Do you think there's going to be another one?" she whispered back.

"Sure to be!" said he. "Don't you see how dark it's getting?"

It was getting very dark. Lexy couldn't see his face now.

"Hold my hand!" he shouted, and she reached out for it; but she couldn't find him at all.

"Mr. Houseman!" she cried.

There was no answer. She stared about her, numb with terror. What was it that rustled like that? What were these black, tall things that were standing motionless about her on every side?

"I've been dreaming," she said to herself. "I'm in my own room, of course. If I go just a few steps, I'll touch the wall. I'm awake now—only it's so dark!"

And what was it that rustled like that—like leaves in the wind? What were these black, still forms about her? Trees? No—they couldn't be trees.

In a wild panic she moved forward. Her outstretched hand touched something, and she screamed. The scream seemed to run along through the dark, leaping and rolling over the ground like a terrified animal. She tried to run after it, stumbling and panting, until her shoulder struck violently against something, and she stopped. And into her sick and shuddering mind her old sturdy courage began to return. She tried to breathe quietly. She struggled desperately against the awful weakness that urged her to sink down on the ground and cover her eyes.

“No!” she said aloud. “I won’t! I’m here! I’m alive! I will understand! I will see!”

She was able now to draw a deep breath, and the horrible fluttering of her heart grew less. She stood motionless, waiting. It was coming back to her, that immortal, unconquerable spirit of hers. The anguish and the strange fear were passing.

“I’m here,” she said. “I’m in a wood somewhere. These are trees. What I hear are only the leaves in the wind. I don’t know where it is, or how I got here; but I’m alive and well. I can walk. I can get out of it.”

She moved forward again, quietly and deliberately. Her eyes were more accustomed to the darkness now, and she made her way through the trees, looking always ahead, never once behind her.

“The wood must end somewhere,” she said. “The morning will have to come some time. All I have to do is to go on.”

Patter, patter, patter, like little feet running behind her.

“Only the leaves on the trees,” said Lexy. “All I have to do is to go on.”

And she went on. Sometimes a wild desire to run swept over her, but she would not hasten her steps, and she would not look behind. The primeval terror of the forest pressed upon her, but she cast it away. Alone, lost, in darkness and solitude, she kept her hold upon the one thing that mattered—the honor and dignity of her own soul.

“I’m not afraid,” she said.

And then she saw a light. At first she thought it was the moon, but it hung too low, and it was too brilliant. Even then she would not run. She went on steadily toward it. In a few minutes she stepped out of the woodland upon a road—a hard, asphalt road with lights along it. It was quite empty, it was unfamiliar to her, but she would have gone down on her knees and kissed the dust of it. It was a road, and all roads lead home.

XV

There were no stars and no moon, for the sky was filled with wild black clouds flying before the wind. Lexy could not guess at the time. She had no idea where she was, but it didn’t matter. The morning would come some time, and the road would lead somewhere.

“It’s better here,” she said to herself. “I’d far, far rather be here, wherever it is, than shut up in that room with the thoughts I had!”

Those thoughts, those fears, had utterly gone from her now, but the memory of them was horrible. She shuddered at the memory of the hours she had spent locked in her room, with that monstrous dread of madness in her heart. Thank God, it had passed now! She walked along the interminable empty road, her old self again, but graver and sterner than she had ever been before in her life.

“I’ve got to understand all this,” she said to herself. “I’ve got to know what’s been the matter with me. That breakdown at the Queltons’, that awful time yesterday afternoon, and this! I suppose I’ve been walking in my sleep. I never did before. Something’s gone wrong with my nerves, terribly wrong; and I’ve got to find out why.”

She quickened her pace a little, because a trace of the old panic fear had stirred in her.

“It’s over!” she thought. “I’ll never imagine such a thing again; but I wonder if I’ll ever feel quite sure of myself again!”

For all her valiant efforts, tears came into her eyes. She had always been so proudly and honestly sure of herself, she had always trusted herself, and now—now she knew how weak, how untrustworthy she could be. Now she would always have that knowledge, and would fear that the weakness might come again.

“I don’t know whether I really did see Caroline. I can’t feel certain of anything. Perhaps I ought to give up all this and go away and rest; only I’ve no place to go. There isn’t any one I can tell.”

She straightened her shoulders and looked up at the vast, dark sky, where black clouds ran before a wind that snapped at their heels like a wolf; and the sight assuaged her. This world that lay under the open sky—the woods, the hills, and above all, the sea—was her world. It belonged to her equally with all God’s creatures.

She had her part in it and her place. There was no one to whom she could turn for comfort, her faith in herself was cruelly shaken, and yet somehow she was not forsaken and helpless. Some one was coming. It was dark, but the light was coming!

She went on, her brisk footsteps ringing out clearly in the silence. The road was bordered on both sides by woods, where the leaves whispered, and there was no sign anywhere of another human being; but the road must lead somewhere. It began to go steeply uphill, and she became aware for the first time that she was very tired and very hungry, and that one of her shoes was worn through; but she had her precious money in the bag around her neck, and, if she kept on going, she couldn't help reaching some place where she could get food and rest.

"At the top of the hill I'll be able to see better," she thought.

It was a long, long hill, and the stones began to hurt her foot in the worn shoe; but she got to the top, and then below her she saw the lights of a railway station.

She went down the hill at a lively trot, and it was as if she had come into a different world. Dogs barked somewhere not far off, and she passed a barn standing black against the sky. It was a human world, where people lived.

When she reached the platform, the door of the waiting room was locked, but inside she could see a light burning dimly in the ticket booth, and a clock. Half past one!

With a sigh of relief, she sat down on the edge of the platform. She wouldn't in the least mind sitting here until morning, in a place where there were lights and a clock, and she could hear a dog barking. She took off her shoe and rubbed her bruised foot, and sighed again with great content. In four hours or so somebody would come, and then she would find out where she was, and how to get back to Mrs. Royce, and Mrs. Royce's comfortable breakfast—coffee, ham and eggs, and hot muffins.

She started up, and hastily put on her shoe again, for in the distance she heard the sound of a motor. She told herself that it would be the height of folly to stop an unknown car in this solitary place, for there were evil men abroad in the world; but there were a great many more honest ones, and if she could only get back to Mrs. Royce's now!

She crossed the road and stood behind a big tree. The purr of the motor was growing louder and louder, filling the whole earth. Her heart beat fast, she kept her eyes upon the road, excited, but not sure what she meant to do.

It was a taxi. She sprang out into the road and waved her arms.

"Taxi!" she shouted joyously.

The car stopped with a jolt, and the driver jumped out.

"Now, then! What's up?" he demanded suspiciously. From a safe distance, the light of an electric torch was flashed in her face. "Well, I'll be gosh-darned!" said he. "Ain't you the boarder up to Mrs. Royce's?"

"Yes! I am! I am!" cried Lexy, overwhelmed with delight. "Can you take me there?"

"I can," he replied; "but what on earth are you doing out here?"

"I got lost," said Lexy. "Where is this, anyhow?"

"Wyngate station," said he. "I'll be gosh-darned! I never! Lost?"

"Yes," said Lexy. "Aren't you the driver who took me up the day I came here?"

"That's me—only taxi in Wyngate. Took you out to the Queltons', too. Hop in, miss!"

His engine had stalled, and he set to work to crank it, while Lexy stood beside him.

"Drive awfully fast, will you?" she asked.

He was too busy to answer for a moment. Then, when his engine was running again, he straightened up and looked at her.

"No, ma'am!" he said firmly. "No more of that for me! Not after what happened a while ago. No, ma'am! I had my lesson!"

"An accident?" inquired Lexy politely.

"Well," he said slowly, "I s'pose it was; but the more I think it over, the more I dunno!"

In the brightness cast by the headlights, Lexy could see his face very well, and the look on it gave her a strange little thrill of fear. It was not a handsome or intelligent face, but it was a very honest one, and she saw, written plain upon it, a very honest doubt and dismay. Like herself, he wasn't sure.

"It was this way," he went on. "About three miles up Carterstown way there's a bad piece of road. There's a steep hill, and a crossroad cuts across the foot of it, and it's too narrrer for two cars to pass. It's a bad piece, and I always been keerful there. I was keerful that night. I was coming along the crossroad, and I heard another car somewhere, and I sounded the horn two or three times before I come to the foot of the hill. Jest as I got there, and was turning up the hill, down comes another car, full tilt. I couldn't git out o' the way. There's stone walls on both sides. I tried to back, but he crashed into me. I kind of fainted, I guess. My cab was all smashed up, and I was cut pretty bad with glass. They found me lying there about an hour after. The other fellow—he was killed." He stopped for a minute. "If it hadn't been fer his license number, nobody could 'a'



known who he was, he was so smashed up. Seems he was from New York, driving a taxi belonging to one of them big companies.”

“Poor fellow!” said Lexy.

“Yes,” said the other solemnly. “I kin say that, too, whatever he meant to do.”

“Meant to do?”

The countryman came a step nearer.

“I keep thinking about it,” he said in a half whisper. “This is the queer thing about it, miss. That there car didn’t start till *I got to the foot of the hill!* The engine was just racing, and the car wasn’t moving along—I *know* that. It was as if he’d been waiting up there for me, and then down he came as if he meant”—the speaker paused again—“to kill me,” he ended.

“But—” Lexy began, and then stopped.

She had a very odd feeling that this story was somehow of great importance to her, but that she must put it away, that she must keep it in her mind until later. This wasn’t the time to think about it.

“Joe,” she said, “I want to hear more about this—all about it; but not now. I’m too tired.”

He gave himself a shake, like a dog. Then he turned to her with a slow, good-natured smile.

“I guess you are!” he said. “Lucky for you I just happened to be late to-night, taking them Ainsly girls ’way out to their house after a dance. Hop in, miss!”

Lexy got in, and they set off. She leaned back and closed her eyes, but they flew open again as if of their own accord. There was something she wanted to see. Through the glass she could see Joe’s burly shoulders, a little hunched—Joe, who, like herself, wasn’t sure.

“Not now!” said something inside her. “Don’t think about that now. Try not to think at all. Wait! Something is going to happen.”

At the corner of the road leading to Mrs. Royce’s, she tapped on the window. Joe stopped the cab with a jerk, sprang down from his seat, and ran around to open the door.

“What’s the matter, miss?”

“Nothing,” said Lexy. “I’m sorry if I startled you, Joe. I thought I’d get out here and slip into the house quietly, without disturbing any one.”

Joe grinned sheepishly.

“I’ve got kind of jumpy since—that,” he said. “Howsomever, come on, miss!”

“Oh, I don’t mean to trouble you!”

“I’m going to see you safe inside that there house!” Joe declared firmly.

Grateful for his genuine kindness, Lexy made no further protest. Side by side they walked down the lane, their footsteps noiseless in the thick dust, and Joe opened the garden gate without a sound.

“I thought perhaps I could climb up that tree and get in at my window,” Lexy whispered.

“I’ll do it for you,” said Joe, “and come down and let you in by the back door.”

He was up the tree like a cat. He went cautiously along a branch, until he could reach the roof of the shed with his toes. He dropped down on the roof, and Lexy saw him disappear into her room. She went to the back door. In a minute she heard the key turn inside, and the door opened.

“Thank you ever so much, Joe!” she whispered.

But he paid no attention to her. He stood still, drawing deep breaths of the night air.

“Them roses!” he said. “The smell of ’em made me kind of sick, like. Throw ’em out, miss! Don’t go to sleep with them roses in the room!”

Lexy did not answer for a time.

“I’ll see you to-morrow, Joe,” she said. “I’ll pay you for the taxi, and have a talk with you. And thank you, Joe, ever so much!”

He touched his cap, murmured “Good night,” and off he went.

Lexy went in, locked the kitchen door behind her, and stood there, leaning against it, half dazed by the great light that was coming into her mind. She was beginning to understand! The roses—the roses with their strange and powerful fragrance! Her hysterical outburst after her tea at Dr. Quelton’s house! She was beginning to understand, not the details, but the one tremendous thing that mattered.

“He did it,” she said to herself. “He made all this happen. I didn’t just break down. I haven’t been weak and hysterical. He made it all happen!”

For a time her relief was an ecstasy. She could trust herself again. She was so happy in that knowledge that she could have shouted aloud, to waken Mrs. Royce and Captain Grey, and tell them. The monstrous burden was lifted, she was free, she was her old sturdy, trustworthy self again.

She sank into a chair by the kitchen table, staring before her into the dark, her lips parted in a smile of gratitude and delight; and then, suddenly, the smile fled. She rose to her feet, her hands clenched, her whole body rigid.

"He did it!" she said again. "It's the vilest and most horrible thing anyone can do. He tried to steal my soul. He turned me into that poor, terrified, contemptible creature. I'll never in all my life forgive him. I'm going to find out—about that, and about Caroline. I'll never give up trying, and I'll never forgive him!"

She groped her way through the dark kitchen and into the hall. That was where she had first seen Dr. Quelton. She stopped and turned, as if she were looking into his face.

"I'm stronger than you!" she whispered.

XVI

Lexy came down to breakfast a little late the next morning, but in the best of spirits, and with a ferocious appetite. She had no idea how or when she had left the house the night before, but obviously neither Mrs. Royce nor Captain Grey knew anything about it, and that sufficed. She could go on eating, quite untroubled by their friendly anxiety. Let them think what they chose—it no longer mattered to her.

For, in spite of the warm liking she had for them both, she felt entirely cut off from them now. If she told them the truth, they would not believe her, they would not and could not help her. Nobody on earth would help her. She faced that fact squarely. Whatever Dr. Quelton had meant to accomplish, he had perfectly succeeded in doing one thing—he had discredited her. Anything she said now would be regarded as the irresponsible statement of a hysterical girl.

Very well! She had done with talking. She meant to act now.

"It was awfully nice of your sister to send me those roses," she observed.

Captain Grey was standing by the window in the dining room, keeping her company while she ate. He turned his head aside as she spoke, but not before she had noticed on his sensitive face the odd and touching look that always came over it at any mention of his sister. Evidently he worshiped her, and yet Lexy was certain that he was somehow disappointed in her.

"She likes you very much," he said.

"I'm glad," said Lexy; "but how did you manage to keep the roses so wonderfully fresh, Captain Grey?"

"The doctor wrapped them for me—some rather special way, you know—damp paper, and then a cloth. He told me not to open them until I gave them to you. Very clever chap, isn't he?"

"He is!" agreed Lexy, with a faint smile.

"Mind if I smoke, Miss Moran?" asked the young man. "Thanks!"

He lit a cigarette and sat down on the window sill. He was silent, and so was Lexy, for she fancied that he had something he wished to say.

"Miss Moran," he said, at last, "you'll go there again to see her, won't you?"

Lexy considered for a moment.

"Why?" she asked. "Why did you think I wouldn't?"

"I was afraid you might think—it's the atmosphere of the place—I'm sure of it—that made you nervous the other afternoon. It's something about the place, you know. I've felt it myself. I was afraid you wouldn't care to go again, and I don't like to think of her there—alone."

"She's not alone," observed Lexy blandly. "She has her clever husband."

"Yes, I know that, of course, but he's—well, he's not very cheery," said the young man earnestly.

Lexy couldn't help laughing.

"No, he's not very cheery," she admitted. "Of course I'll go again—this afternoon, if you'd like."

"I say! You are good!" he cried. "I know jolly well that you don't want to go."

"I do, though," declared Lexy.

"Shall we walk over?"

"If you don't mind," said Lexy, "I'll go by myself. There's something I want to attend to first. I'll meet you there at four o'clock."

"Right-o!" said he. "Then you won't mind if I go there for lunch?"

She assured him that she wouldn't.

"You poor dear thing!" she added, to herself. His solicitude touched her. He seemed to feel himself responsible for her, as if she were a very delicate and rather weak-minded child. "You're not very cheery, either!" she thought. And indeed he was not. His meeting with his sister had upset him badly. Ever since he had first seen her, he had been troubled and anxious and downcast. "And that's because she's not human," thought Lexy. "She's beautiful, and gentle, and all that, but she's like a ghost. Of course it bothers him!"

She did not give much more thought to Captain Grey, however. As soon as he left the house, she went upstairs into the little sewing room, and until lunch time she was busy writing the clearest and briefest account she could of what had occurred. This she put into an envelope, which she addressed to Mr. Charles Houseman and laid it on her bureau.

"If anything happened, I suppose they'd give it to him," she said to herself. "I'd like him to know."

Somehow this gave her a good deal of comfort. Not that she expected anything to happen, or was at all frightened, but she did not deny that Dr. Quelton was a singularly unpleasant sort of enemy to have; and he was her enemy—she was sure of it.

Just because he had made such a point of her arriving after four o'clock, she had made up her mind to reach the house well before that hour—which would not please him. Directly after lunch she walked down to the village. She found Joe taking a nap in his cab, outside the station; and, regardless of the frightful curiosity of the villagers, she stood there talking to him for a long time. He assured her, with his sheepish grin, that he had told no one of his having met her the night before, and he willingly promised never to mention it to any one without her consent.

"I ain't so much of a talker," he said.

That was true, too. He was reluctant, to-day, to talk about his strange adventure with the cab on the hill; but Lexy made him answer her questions, and he wavered in no respect from his first version.

"There was an inquest, an' all," he said. "I'm darned glad it's all over!"

"It isn't!" thought Lexy. "Somehow it belongs with other things. It's a piece of the puzzle. I can't fit it in now, but I will some day!"

So she thanked Joe, and paid him for last night's trip, though he made miserable and embarrassed efforts to stop her. Then she set off on her way.

It was four o'clock by her watch when she reached the garden gate. She stopped for a moment with her hand on the latch, and, in spite of herself, a little shiver ran through her. The battered old house in the tangled garden looked more menacing to-day, in the tranquil spring sunshine, than it had in the rain. It was utterly lonely and quiet. Lexy could hear nothing but the distant sound of the surf, which was like the beating of a tired heart.

Against the advice of Mrs. Enderby, almost against her own reason, she had come here to Wyngate, and to the house—and she had seen Caroline. The thing which was beyond reason had been right—so right that it frightened her; and now it bade her go on. It was like a voice telling her that her feet were set in the right path. Lexy pushed open the gate and went in. The pleasant young parlor maid opened the door. She looked alarmed.

"I don't know, miss," she said. "Mrs. Quelton—I'll go and ask the doctor."

But from the hall Lexy had caught sight of Mrs. Quelton in the drawing-room alone, and, with an affable smile for the anxious parlor maid, she went in there.

"I'm afraid I'm awfully early—" she began, and then stopped short in amazement.

Mrs. Quelton did not welcome the visitor, did not smile or speak. She lay back in her chair and stared at Lexy with dilated eyes and parted lips. Her face was as white as paper, and strangely drawn.

"Are you ill?" cried Lexy, running toward her.

Mrs. Quelton only stared at her with those brilliant, dilated eyes. Lexy took the other woman's hand, and it was as cold as ice, and utterly lifeless.

"Mrs. Quelton! Are you ill?" she asked again.

Somehow it added to her horror to see, as she bent over her, that the unfortunate woman's face was ever so thickly covered with some curious sort of paint or powder. It made her seem like a grotesque and horrible marionette.

"She's old!" thought Lexy. "She's terribly, terribly old!"

She drew back her hand, for she could not touch that painted face. She didn't fail in generous pity, but she could not overcome an instinctive repugnance. She turned around, intending to call the parlor maid, and there was Dr. Quelton striding down the long room with a glass in his hand. Without even glancing at Lexy, he stooped over his wife, raised her limp head on one arm, and put the glass to her lips. She drank the contents, and lay back again, with her eyes closed. Almost at once the color began to return to her ashen cheeks. Her arms quivered, and then she opened her eyes and looked up at him with a faint, dazed smile.

"You're better now," he said.

"Better!" she repeated. "But you were late! I needed it—I needed it!"

"Come, now!" he said indulgently. "The faintness has passed. Now you must go up to your room and rest a little before tea."

She rose, and to Lexy's surprise her movements showed no trace of weakness. Then, turning her head, she caught sight of the girl, and her face lighted with pleasure.

"Miss Moran!" she cried. "How very nice to—"

"Miss Moran will wait, I'm sure," the doctor interrupted. "You must rest for half an hour, Muriel."

Taking her by the arm, he led her down the room. In the doorway she looked back and smiled at her visitor; and if anything had been needed to steel Lexy's heart against the doctor, that smile on his wife's face would have done it—that poor, plaintive little smile.

Standing there by Mrs. Quelton's empty chair, she waited for him to return, a cold and terrible anger rising in her. She heard his step in the hall, heavy and deliberate, and presently he reëntered the room and came toward her, his blank, dull eyes fixed upon nothing. She was quite certain that he wanted to put her out of his way, and that he had no scruple whatever as to methods; yet for all her youth and inexperience, her utter loneliness, she felt that she was a match for him.

"So you've come back to us, Miss Moran," he said in his lifeless voice. "I was afraid you might not."

"Oh, but why not?" Lexy inquired in a brisk and cheerful tone. "I like to come here!"

A curious thrill of exultation ran through her, for she saw on the doctor's face the faintest shadow of a frown. He was perplexed! She baffled him, and he didn't know whether she understood what had happened.

"It is a great pleasure to Mrs. Quelton and myself," he said politely. Then he raised his eyes and looked directly at her. "Perhaps," he went on, "you would be kind enough to spend a week here with us some time? Although I'm afraid you might find it very dull."

"Oh, no!" Lexy assured him. "I'd love to come—whenever it's convenient for you."

They were still looking directly into each other's eyes.

"Suppose we say to-morrow?" suggested Dr. Quelton.

"Thank you!" said Lexy. "I'll come to-morrow!"

## XVII

Captain Grey was enchanted with the idea of Lexy's spending a week with his sister. He was going, too. Indeed, Lexy felt sure that Mrs. Quelton had wanted him to go there some time ago, and that he had refused simply on her own account. He didn't like to leave her alone at Mrs. Royce's, and after her nervous breakdown that afternoon nothing could have induced him to do so. He was anxious about her. He tried, with what he believed was great tact, to find out her plans for the future. He was genuinely troubled by the loneliness and uncertainty of her life.

Lexy appreciated all this, and she liked the young man very much—perhaps as much as he liked her; but the sympathetic understanding which had promised to develop on the night when they talked together in the firelight had never developed.

Something had checked it. They were the best of friends, but Captain Grey never again referred to what Lexy had told him about Caroline Enderby, and about her reason for coming to Wyngate; and Lexy said nothing, either. Evidently he thought that it had been a far-fetched, romantic notion of hers, and hoped that she had forgotten all about it.

Lexy did not try to undeceive him. Her story would be too fantastic for him to believe. Nobody would believe it, except a person with absolute faith not only in her honesty but in her intelligence and clear-sightedness; and there was no such person. She was not resentful or grieved over this. She accepted it quietly, and prepared to go forward alone.

It had occurred to her lately that perhaps Mr. Houseman had been right, and that Caroline had gone away of her own free will; but she meant to *know*. She had seen the missing girl in Dr. Quelton's house. Whatever the doctor might say about the false evidence of the senses, Lexy's confidence in her own clear gray eyes was not in the least shaken. She had seen Caroline once, and she was going to see her again. That was why she was going to the Tower.

"It'll do Muriel no end of good," said Captain Grey, when they were in the taxi. "She's—to tell you the truth, Miss Moran, I don't feel altogether easy about her."

"Why?" asked Lexy, very curious to know what he thought.

"Well," he said, "it's hard to put it into words; but that's not a wholesome sort of life for a young woman, shut away like that. The doctor says her health's not good, but it's my opinion that if she got about more—saw more people, you know—"

Lexy felt a great pity for him. Apparently he did not even suspect what she was now sure of—that the unfortunate Muriel was hopelessly addicted to some drug, which her husband himself gave to her.

"And I hope he'll go back to India before he does find out," she thought. "It's too horrible—he worships her so!"

"I've tried, you know," he went on. "I wanted to take her into the city, to a concert. Seems confoundedly queer, doesn't it, the way she's lost interest in her music? She didn't want to go. Then about the emerald—" "Oh!" said Lexy, who had forgotten about the emerald.

"Chap I know designed a setting for it. It's unset now, you know, and I thought I'd like to do that for her while I was here; but she doesn't seem interested. I can't even get her to let me see the thing. I've asked her two or three times, but she always puts me off. Do you think it bores her?"

"Perhaps it does," replied Lexy.

"Well," said the young man, "when a woman's bored by a jewel like that, she's in a bad way. I wish you could see it!"

"I wish I could," said Lexy, and added to herself: "But I don't think I ever shall. Probably her husband's got it."

They had now reached the Tower. The parlor maid opened the door for them, and at once conducted Lexy upstairs to her room.

It was a big room, with four windows, and very comfortably furnished; but even a fire burning in the grate and two or three shaded electric lamps could not give it a homelike air. There was a musty smell about it, and there was an amazing amount of dust. It was neat, but it wasn't clean. Dust rose from the carpet when she walked, and from the chair cushions when she sat down. She saw fluff under the bed and under the bureau.

"Not much of a housekeeper, poor soul!" thought Lexy. "It's a pity. One could do almost anything with a house like this, and all this beautiful old furniture!"

But this, after all, was a minor matter. She took off her hat, washed her hands and face, brushed her hair, and left the room, closing the door quietly behind her.

"The house is strange to me," she said to herself, with a grin. "I shouldn't wonder if I turned the wrong way, and got lost!"

That was what she intended to do. She did not expect to make any sensational discoveries, for Dr. Quelton did not seem to be the sort of person who would leave clues lying about for her to pick up; but she did hope that she might see or hear something—Heaven knows what—that might bring her nearer to Caroline.

So, instead of walking toward the stairs, she turned in the opposite direction, along a hall lined with doors, all of them shut. At the end there was a grimy window, through which the sun shone in upon the dusty carpet and the faded wall paper. There was a forlorn and neglected air about the place, a stillness which made it impossible for her to believe that there was any living creature behind those closed doors.

"I wish I had cheek enough to open some of them," she thought; "but I'm afraid I haven't. I shouldn't know what to say if there was some one in the room. After all, I'm supposed to be a guest. I've got to be a little discreet about my prying."

She went softly along the hall to the window, to see what was out there. When she reached it, she was surprised to see that the last door was a little ajar. She looked through the crack. It wasn't a room in there, but another hall, only a few feet long, ending at a narrow staircase.

"That must be the way to the cupola," she thought. "I suppose a guest might go up there, to see the view."

So she pushed the door open and went on tiptoe to the stairs; and then she heard a voice which she had no trouble in recognizing. It was Dr. Quelton's.

"My dear young man," he was saying. "I am not a psychologist. It has always seemed to me the greatest folly to devote serious study to the workings of so erratic and incalculable a machine as the human brain. It is a study in which there are, practically speaking, no general rules, no trustworthy data. It is, in my opinion, not a science at all, but a philosophy; and philosophy makes no appeal to me. I frankly admit that I am entirely materialistic. I care little for causes, but much for effects. Consequently, I have devoted myself to medicine, in which I can produce certain effects according to established rules."

"But I meant more particularly the effect of—of things on the mind—the brain, you know," said Captain Grey's voice.

Again Lexy felt a great pity for him. He sounded very, very young in contrast to the doctor—so young and earnest, and so helpless!

"Exactly!" said the doctor. "You were, I believe, trying to lead to a suggestion that psychology might be of help to Muriel. Am I right?"

There was a moment's pause, during which Lexy very cautiously went halfway up the stairs.

"I did think of that," said the young man valiantly. "It seems to me she's a bit—well, morbid, you know; and I've heard about those chaps—those psychoanalysts, you know. Simply occurred to me that one of them—merely a suggestion, you know. I'm not trying to be officious."

"A psychoanalyst," said Dr. Quelton, "is a man who analyzes the psyche, who solemnly and expensively analyzes something of whose existence he has no proof whatever."

There was another silence.

By this time Lexy had reached the head of the stairs. Beside her was an open door, through which she could look, while she herself was hidden from view. Beyond it was, as she had thought, the cupola—a small octagonal room with windows on every side, through which the sun poured in a dazzling flood. There was nothing in the room except a white enamel table, a stool, a porcelain sink, and an open cabinet, upon the shelves of which stood rows and rows of bottles, each one labeled. Facing this cabinet, and with their backs toward the door, stood the two men—the doctor with his shoulders hunched and his hands clasped behind him, and Captain Grey, tall, slender, straight as a wand.

"Materia medica—that is my art," said the doctor. "I have devoted my life to it, and I have learned—a little. I have made experiments. A psychologist will offer to tell you why a man has murdered his grandmother. I can't pretend to do that, but I can give that man a tablet which will make it practically certain that he *will* kill his grandmother if they are left alone together for ten minutes."

"But, I say!" protested Captain Grey.

"I can assure you that I have never made the experiment," said Dr. Quelton, with a laugh; "but I could do it. I have learned that certain states of mind can be produced by certain drugs."

Captain Grey turned his head, so that Lexy could see his handsome, sensitive face in profile.

"That seems to me a pretty risky thing to do," he said, with a trace of sternness. "I hope, sir, that you don't—"

"Don't give Muriel drugs that make her disposed to murder her grandmother?" interrupted the doctor, with another laugh; but he must have noticed that his companion was unresponsive, for he at once changed his tone. "No," he said gravely. "I have made a particular study of Muriel's case. She seriously overtaxed herself in her musical studies. Don't be alarmed, my dear fellow—there is no permanent injury. It is simply a profound mental and nervous lassitude—obviously a case where artificial stimulation is required, until the tone of the lethargic brain is restored. I am able to do for her what, I feel certain, no one else now living could do. In this bottle"—he tapped one of them with his forefinger—"I have a preparation which would make my fortune, if I had the least ambition in that direction. Five drops of that, in a glass of water, and her depression and apathy are immediately dispelled. There is an instantaneous improvement in—"

Lexy waited to hear no more. She slipped down the stairs as quietly as she had come up, hurried along the hall, and went into her own room again. Her knees gave way and she collapsed into a chair, staring ahead of her with the most singular expression on her face.

She was, in fact, looking at a new idea, and it was not a welcome one.

"No!" she said to herself. "It's out of the question. It's too dangerous. I can't do it!"

But the idea remained solidly before her; and the more she contemplated it, the more was her honest heart obliged to admit the possibilities in it.

"It can't do any real harm," she said; "and it might do good—so much good! All right, I'm going to do it!"

Half an hour before dinner she went down into the library, a polite and quiet young guest, even a little subdued. Dr. Quelton took Captain Grey out for a stroll on the beach. He asked Lexy to go with them, but she said she would prefer to stay with Mrs. Quelton.

It was very peaceful and pleasant there in the library. The late afternoon sun shone in through the long window, touching with a benign light the shabby and graceful old furniture, picking out a glitter of gold on the binding of a book, a dull gleam of silver or copper in a corner. A mild breeze blew in, fluttering the curtains and bringing a wholesome breath of the salt air.

Mrs. Quelton was at her best. To be sure, she was not very interesting. She talked about rather banal things—about the weather, about a kitten that had run away, about the flowers in the conservatory; but Lexy, as she watched her and listened to her, could understand better than ever before what it was in Captain Grey's sister that had so seized upon his heart. Languid and aloof as she was, there was nevertheless an undeniable charm about her, something sweet and kindly and lovable. She said, more than once, how very glad she was to have Lexy with her, and Lexy believed she meant it.

The two men had strolled out of sight.

"I must have left my handkerchief upstairs," said Lexy. "Excuse me just a minute, please!"

But she was gone more than a minute, and when she returned her face was curiously white.

### XVIII

The clock struck eleven. Lexy glanced up from her book, in the vain hope that somebody would speak, would stir, would make some move to end this intolerable evening; but nobody did.

Dr. Quelton and Captain Grey were playing chess. They sat facing each other at a small table, in a haze of tobacco smoke, silent and intent, as if they had been gods deciding human destinies. Mrs. Quelton lay on her *chaise longue*, doing nothing at all. If Lexy spoke to her, she answered in a low tone, but cheerfully enough; but she so obviously preferred not to talk that Lexy had taken up a book and vainly attempted to read. It was the most wearisome and depressing evening she had ever spent. Her lively and restless spirit had often enough found it dull at the Enderbys', and at other times and places; but this was different, and infinitely worse.

To begin with, a sense of guilt lay like lead upon her heart. She hoped and believed that what she had done was right, but she was afraid, terribly afraid, of what might result. She could not keep her eyes off Mrs. Quelton's face. She watched the doctor's wife with a dread and anxiety which she felt was ill concealed; and she had a chill suspicion that the doctor was watching her, in turn.

"Of course, he's bound to find out some time," she said to herself. "I wasn't such a fool as to expect more than a day or two, at the very most; but I did hope there'd be time just to see—"

Again she glanced at Mrs. Quelton. Was it imagination, or was there already a faint and indefinable change? "No, that's nonsense," she thought. "There couldn't be, so soon—although I don't know how often he gives her that priceless tonic."

Suddenly she wanted to laugh. She had a very vivid memory of Dr. Quelton tapping that bottle with his finger, and saying to Captain Grey that he had a preparation in there which would make his fortune, if he chose.

"It wouldn't now," she thought, struggling with suppressed laughter.

There was nothing in that bottle now but water. Just before dinner she had run up to the cupola, emptied its contents into the sink, and filled it from the tap.

The idea had come to her when she overheard the two men talking. It had seemed to her then a plain and obvious duty to destroy the drug that so horribly affected Mrs. Quelton. Fate had allowed her to see which bottle it was. Fate gave her an undisturbed half hour when the doctor and Captain Grey were out; and, to make her plan quite perfect, the liquid in the bottle was colorless and almost without odor.

She had thought it possible that the doctor would not notice the substitution until his unhappy wife had had at least a chance to return to a normal condition. Lexy had meant to wait and to watch, and, when the moment came, to speak to Mrs. Quelton. She had thought that she could warn the doctor's wife, and implore her not to submit to that hideous domination.

She had scarcely thought of the risk to herself, and it had not occurred to her that there might be serious risk to Mrs. Quelton. She knew almost nothing about drugs and their effects. Her one idea had been to destroy the thing that was destroying Mrs. Quelton. Only now, when it was done, did she realize the mad audacity of her act. A man like Dr. Quelton couldn't be tricked by such a childish device. He would know what had happened, and who had done it. Very likely he had plenty more of the drug somewhere else. If he hadn't—"He'd feel like killing me," thought Lexy. "I suppose he could, easily enough. He must know all sorts of nice, quiet little ways for getting rid of obnoxious people. Perhaps there was something in my dinner to-night!" She dared not think of such a possibility.

"No!" she said to herself. "He asked me here just to show me how little I mattered. He knew I'd seen Caroline here, and he asked me to come, because he was so sure I couldn't do anything. I'm too insignificant for him to bother with. He knows that nobody would believe what I said. He'd only have to say that I was hysterical, and Captain Grey and Mrs. Royce would be obliged to bear him out. He won't trouble himself about me!"

She stole a glance at him, and, to her profound uneasiness, she found him staring intently at her. A shiver ran down her spine, and she turned back to her book with a very pale face. If only it had been an interesting book, so that she might have forgotten herself for a little while!

The clock struck half past eleven.

"After all, I don't see why I have to sit here," she thought. "I shouldn't exactly break up the party if I went to bed."

And she was just about to close her book when Mrs. Quelton spoke.

"I'm so tired!" she said in a high, wailing voice. "I'm so tired—so tired—so tired!"

Dr. Quelton hastily rose and came over to her chair.

"Then you must go to bed," he said. "Come!"

He helped her to rise, and she stood, supported by his arm, her face drawn and ghastly.

"I'm so tired!" she moaned.

Captain Grey came toward her, making a very poor attempt to smile.

"Good night, Muriel!" he said, holding out his hand.

She did not answer, or even look at him. Leaning on the doctor's arm, she went out of the room, into the hall, and up the stairs. Her wailing voice floated back to them: "I'm so tired—so tired!"

For a moment Captain Grey and Lexy were silent. Then—

"Good God!" he cried suddenly. "I can't stand this! I—"

Lexy came nearer to him.

"Don't stand it!" she whispered. "Take her away! Can't you *see*? Take her away!"

"How can I? Her husband—she doesn't want to go."

"Make her! Oh, can't you see? He's giving her some horrible drug!"

"You mustn't be alarmed," said Dr. Quelton's voice from the hall. They both looked at him with a guilty start, but his blank eyes were staring past them, at nothing. "It is unfortunate," he said. "The little excitement of this visit—"

He walked past them into the room and over to the table, where his pipe lay among the chessmen. He lit it deliberately and stood smoking it, with one arm resting on the mantelpiece.

"In her present highly nervous condition," he went on, "the little excitement of this visit has proved too much for her. I shall drive over to the hospital and fetch a nurse—"

"A nurse!" cried the young man. "Then she's—"

"There is absolutely no occasion for alarm, as I told you before. A few days' rest and quiet—"

"Look here, sir!" said Captain Grey. "It seems to me—I've no wish to be offensive, or anything of that sort, but it seems right to me"—he paused for a moment—"to get a second opinion."

"I shouldn't advise it," replied the doctor blandly.

"Possibly not, sir; but perhaps you would be willing to oblige me to that extent. I don't want to insist—"

"I wouldn't, if I were you."

There was a faint flush on the young man's dark face.

"Nevertheless—" he began, but again the doctor interrupted him.

"My dear young man," he said, "you oblige me to be frank. I should have preferred a discreet silence; but as you are obviously determined to make the matter as difficult as possible, you must hear the truth. For some years your sister has been addicted to the use of certain drugs. When I discovered this, I set about trying to cure the addiction. You probably have no idea what that means. I venture to say that there is nothing—absolutely nothing—more difficult in the entire field of medicine. I have been working on the case for more than a year, and I have made distinct progress; but it will be some time before the cure is completed, and I can assure you that it never will be unless I am left undisturbed. There is no other man now living who can do what I am doing."

He spoke gravely and coldly, and his blank eyes were fixed upon Captain Grey with a sort of sternness; but Lexy had a curious impression—more than an impression, a certainty—that within himself Dr. Quelton was laughing.

"If you care to take another doctor into your confidence," he went on, "I can scarcely refuse permission; but you will regret it."

The young man said nothing. He turned away and stood by the open window, looking out into the dark garden. Lexy waited for a moment. Then, with a subdued "Good night," she went out of the room, up the stairs, and into her own room.

"It's a lie!" she said to herself.

## XIX

"Then you're not going to do anything?" asked Lexy.

"My dear Miss Moran, what in the world can I do?" returned Captain Grey, with a sort of despair.

They were sitting together on the veranda in the warm morning sunshine. They had had breakfast in the dining room, with the doctor—an excellent breakfast. The doctor had been at his best—courteous, affable, very attentive to his guests. Everything in his manner tended to reassure the young soldier.

Everything in the world seemed to tend in that direction, Lexy thought. A Sunday tranquillity lay over the country. Church bells were ringing somewhere in the far distance. The windows of the library stood open, and the parlor maid was visible in there, flitting about with broom and duster. Everything was peaceful and ordinary, and Captain Grey had come out on the veranda and attempted to begin a peaceful and ordinary conversation.

But Lexy had no intention of allowing him to enjoy such a thing. She felt pretty sure that her time in this house would not be long. She had caused Dr. Quelton an anxiety that he could not conceal. She had got in his way. She could not tell whether he had discovered her trick yet, but the effects were manifest; and if he didn't know now, he would very soon, and then—



Captain Grey must carry on when she was gone.

"You're properly satisfied—with everything?" she went on mercilessly. "You're not allowed even to see your sister. No one can see her. You're not allowed to call in another doctor."

"Even if I'm not properly satisfied," he answered, "what can I do? In her husband's house, you know—I can't make a row."

"Why can't you?"

He looked at her, startled and uneasy. Her question was ridiculous. Why couldn't he make a row? Simply because he couldn't; because he wasn't that sort; because it wasn't done; because almost anything was preferable to making a row.

"Of course, if you have a blind faith in Dr. Quelton—" she persisted.

"Well, I haven't," he admitted; "but—"

"Then let's go upstairs and see her. The doctor has gone out."

"But the nurse—"

"Put on your best commanding officer's air," said Lexy. "You can be awfully impressive when you like. If I were you, there's nothing I'd stop at."

"Yes, but look here—what can I say to Quelton when he hears about it?"

"Laugh it off," said Lexy.

The idea of Captain Grey trying to laugh off anything made her grin from ear to ear.

"Not much of a joke, though, is it?" he said rather stiffly. "Suppose he hoofs us out of the house?"

"Oh, dear!" cried Lexy. "You're not a bit resourceful! Let's try it, anyhow. It's horrible to think of her shut up like that. Perhaps she's longing to see you."

He rose.

"Right-o!" he said. "Let's try it!"

Together they went up the stairs and down the hall of the other wing, opposite that in which Lexy's room was. Captain Grey knocked on a door, and a quiet, middle-aged little nurse came out.

"I'll just pop in to see how my sister's getting on," said the young man, and Lexy silently applauded his toploftical manner.

"I'm sorry," said the little nurse, "but Dr. Quelton has given strict orders—"

"Er—yes, quite so!" he interrupted suavely. "I shan't stop a minute."

He came nearer, but the nurse drew back and stood with her back against the door.

"Dr. Quelton has given strict orders—" she repeated.

"No more of that, please!" he said with a frown. "I'm going to see Mrs. Quelton for a moment. Stand aside, please!"

He did not raise his voice, but the quality of it was oddly changed. Lexy felt a thrill of pleasure in its cool assurance and authority. Perhaps he objected very much to "making a row," but what a glorious row he could make if he chose! If he would only once face Dr. Quelton like this!

"Stand aside, if you please!" he repeated, and the poor little nurse, very much flustered, did so.

"I'm afraid Dr. Quelton will be—" she began, but Captain Grey had already entered the room.

The nurse followed him, closing the door after her. Lexy opened it at once and went in after them. She caught a glimpse of the young man and the nurse vanishing through one of the long windows that led out to the balcony. For a moment she hesitated, looking about her at the big, dim room. The dark shades were pulled down, and not a trace of the spring's brightness entered here.

Then she heard Captain Grey's voice speaking.

"My dear, my dear!" he said. "Can I do anything in the world for you? My dear!"

There was no answer. Lexy crossed the room to the window and looked out. The balcony, too, was dim, with Venetian blinds drawn down on every side, and on a narrow cot lay Muriel Quelton. There was a bandage over her forehead and covering her hair, and under it her face had a mystic and terrible beauty. She was as white as a ghost, with great dark circles beneath her eyes; and she was so still—so utterly still—that Lexy was stricken with terror.

Captain Grey was sitting beside her in a low chair, holding one of her lifeless hands, and Lexy saw on his face such anguish as she had never looked upon before.

"My dear!" he said again.

Her weary eyes opened and looked up at him. Then the shadow of a smile crossed her face.

"Stay!" she whispered.

Lexy drew nearer. Tears were running down her cheeks. She tried to read the nurse's face, but she could not.

"How is—she—getting on?" she asked, speaking very low.

“Lexy!” came a voice from the cot, almost inaudible. “Take it—the top drawer—of the bureau—for you.”

“But do you mean—I don’t understand!” cried Lexy.

“Hush, please!” said the nurse severely. “Mrs. Quelton is not to be excited.”

Lexy was silent for a moment. Then, just as she was about to speak, her quick ear caught a very unwelcome sound—the sound of a horse’s trot. She turned away and went back through the window into the room. Dr. Quelton was coming home. She couldn’t wait to find out what Muriel Quelton had meant. Once more she was compelled to do the best she could amid a fog of misunderstanding.

“Lexy—take it—the top drawer—of the bureau—for you.”

That was what she thought Mrs. Quelton had said, and she acted upon that premise. She crossed the room to the bureau, and opened the top drawer. In the dim light that filled the shuttered room she could not see very clearly; but, as far as she could ascertain, there was nothing in the drawer except some neatly folded silk stockings, a satin glove case, some little odds and ends of ribbons, and a pile of handkerchiefs. She looked into the glove case—nothing there but gloves. There was nothing hidden away among the stockings, nothing among the ribbons.

She heard the front door close and a step begin to mount the stairs, deliberate and heavy, in the quiet house. In haste she went at the pile of handkerchiefs. There were dozens of them, all of fine white linen, all with a “2” embroidered in one corner—very uninteresting handkerchiefs, Lexy thought; but halfway through the pile she came upon one that she had seen before.

It was so familiar to her that at first she was not startled or even surprised. It was a handkerchief that she had embroidered for Caroline Enderby.

She took it up and looked at it with a frown. Then she heard Dr. Quelton’s step in the hall outside. She tucked the handkerchief in her belt, and tried to close the drawer, but it stuck. Her heart was beating wildly, her knees felt weak. He would find her there, like a thief!

But the footsteps went on past the door. She waited for a moment, and then went noiselessly across to the door, opened it, looked up and down the empty corridor, and ran, like a hare, back to her own room.

Caroline’s handkerchief! Was that what Mrs. Quelton had meant her to find? Or had she discovered it by accident? Did it mean that Mrs. Quelton was at heart her ally? Or was this little square of linen all that was left of Caroline?

Lexy took it out of her belt and looked at it again, and her tears fell on it. Whatever else it might imply, it told her clearly enough that her friend *had been there*. Poor Caroline—the helpless little captive who had left her prison to be lost in the strange world outside—had come here, and she had brought with her the handkerchief that Lexy had embroidered for her. It had come now into Lexy’s hand, a mute and pitiful emissary, whose message she could not understand.

“What shall I do?” she thought. “Oh, what must I do? Perhaps it’s time for the police. Perhaps, if I show this to Captain Grey, he’ll believe me. There must be some one, somewhere, who’ll believe me and help me!” There was a knock at the door.

“Yes?” she said.

“Open the door!” ordered Dr. Quelton’s voice.

“No!” Lexy promptly replied.

She put the handkerchief inside her blouse and stood facing the closed door, with her hands clenched. Now he knew! She heard him laugh quietly.

“Perhaps you’re right,” he said. “It is better, perhaps, for us not to meet again. Even making every allowance for your hysterical, unbalanced mind, I find it difficult to excuse this latest manifestation which I have just this moment discovered. It was you, of course, who filled that bottle with water?”

She did not answer.

“Why you did it, I don’t know,” he went on, “and probably you don’t know yourself. It was the wanton mischief of an irresponsible child, but the consequences in this instance are serious—very serious. Mrs. Quelton will suffer for them. I doubt if she will recover. No, Miss Moran, you are too troublesome a guest. You had better go—at once!”

“All right!” said Lexy, in a defiant but trembling voice.

“At once!” he repeated. “I shall send your bag this afternoon.”

XX

“I don’t care!” said Lexy to herself. “I’ll come back!”

She did not wish to have her bag sent after her. She packed it in great haste, put on her hat and coat, and, opening the door of her room, stepped out cautiously and looked up and down the corridor. There was no one in sight, so she picked up her bag and set forth.

She was running away—worse than that, she was being driven away; but just at the moment she could see no other course open to her. She could not appeal to Captain Grey while he was in such distracting anxiety about his sister. It would be cruel, and it would be useless. What could he do? If Dr. Quelton did not want her in his house, certainly his brother-in-law could not insist upon her staying.

“No!” she reflected. “He would only think it was his duty as a gentleman to leave with me, and he would be miserable, not knowing what became of his sister. I’ve got to go, that’s all; but, by jiminy, I’ll come back! And then we’ll see how much more wanton mischief this irresponsible child can manage!”

There was in her heart a steady flame of anger. Hatred was not natural to her, but her feeling for Dr. Quelton came dangerously near to it. For Caroline’s disappearance, for Mrs. Quelton’s pitiful state, for her own humiliation and suffering, she held him responsible; and she meant to settle that score.

She met no one on her way through the house. She went down the stairs, opened the door, and stepped out into the dazzling sunshine. It was a warm day, her bag was very heavy, and the three-mile walk to Mrs. Royce’s was not inviting. It had to be done, however, and off she started.

The lane was thick with dust, and it was hard walking with that heavy bag, but she went on at a smart pace as long as she thought any one could possibly see her from the cupola. Then she set down the bag and rested for a moment.

“There’s a certain way to carry things without strain,” she thought. “I read about it in a magazine. You use the muscles of your back, or your shoulders, or something.”

But she couldn’t remember how this was to be done; so, picking up the bag in her usual way, went on again. Obviously her way was a very wrong way, for by the time she had reached the end of the lane her fingers were cramped and painful, and her arms ached; and there was the highway, stretching endlessly before her under the hot noonday sun—two miles of it or more. There was no reasonable chance of a taxi, and she knew no one in the neighborhood who might come driving by. There was nothing in sight but a man walking along the road toward her, and that didn’t interest her.

She went on as far as she could, and then stopped under a tree, to rub her stiffening arms.

“I wonder,” she thought, “if I could hide this darned old bag somewhere, and send Joe for it later!”

But her nicest clothes were in it, and the risk was too great. With a resentful sigh she lifted it and stepped out again. The man coming along the road was quite close to her now. She stopped short, and so did he.

“Lexy!” he shouted, and came toward her on a run, with a wide grin on his sunburned face.

She dropped the bag with a thump, and stood waiting for him. He held out both hands, and she took them.

“Oh, golly!” she cried. “I’m so glad you’ve come, Mr. Houseman!”

“So am I!” he said. “Ever since I got that last letter from you—”

“Last! I only wrote one.”

“Well, I got two,” he told her. “The second one came yesterday, about this doctor, and the roses, you know.”

“Mrs. Royce must have posted it!” said Lexy. “I wrote it, but I didn’t mean it to be sent to you unless something happened to me.”

“Enough has happened to you already!”

“More things are going to happen,” said she. “Lots more!”

It suddenly occurred to her that the proper moment had come for withdrawing her hands from Mr.

Houseman’s firm grasp. Indeed, she thought the proper moment might already have passed, and a warm color came into her cheeks.

The young man flushed a little himself.

“I didn’t mean to call you that,” he said; “but Caroline used to write a lot about you, and she always called you ‘Lexy,’ so I got into the way of thinking of you—like that.”

“I don’t mind,” Lexy conceded.

There was a moment’s silence.

“Charles is my name,” he observed.

Another silence.

“Queer, isn’t it?” he said seriously.

“Here we’ve only seen each other once, and yet somehow it seems to me as if I’d known you for years!”

“Well, the circumstances are rather unusual,” said Lexy.

“You’re right! But look here—we’ve got to talk about all this. Where were you going?”

“Back to Mrs. Royce’s.”

“Let’s go!” he said cheerfully, and picked up the bag as if it were nothing at all.

“But where were *you* going?” asked Lexy.

“To find you. You see, we ran into some awfully bad weather, and the engines broke down, and we came back for repairs; so I got your letters. I explained to the old man that I’d have to have leave, for some very important business, and off I came to Wyngate. Your Mrs. Royce told me you’d gone out to the Queltons’. I didn’t like that. Why did you go there, after what had happened?”

“I’ll tell you all about that later,” said Lexy; “but now you’ve got to tell me things. How did you ever meet Caroline? How in the world did she manage to write to you?”

“Well, you see, I met her about a year ago, on board the Ormond. She and her parents were coming back from France, and I was third officer, you know. Her mother and father were seasick most of the time, so we had a chance to—to talk to each other; and, you see—”

“Yes, I see!” said Lexy gently.

“One of the servants—a girl called Annie—used to post Caroline’s letters for her, and I used to write to her in care of Annie’s mother. We never had a chance to meet again, after that trip. I wanted to come to the house and see her people, but she said it wasn’t any use; and from what I saw of them on the Ormond I dare say she was right. I wouldn’t have suited them. I haven’t any money, you know—nothing but my pay; but it was enough for us to live on. Other fellows manage!”

He was silent for a moment.

“After all,” he said, “I’m not a beggar. I can hold my own pretty well in the world, and I could look after a wife.”

“I know it!” cried Lexy, with vehemence. She felt curiously touched by his words, and quite indignant against the Enderbys and any one else who did not appreciate him.

“I asked Caroline to marry me,” he went on. “I told her I couldn’t give her much, but we could have had a jolly sort of life. Look here! Are you crying?”

“A little bit,” Lexy admitted; “but don’t pay any attention to it. Go on!”

“That’s about all there is. She said she would meet me here in Wyngate, because that’s the nearest station of the main line to some little place where a nurse or a governess of hers lived.”

“Miss Craigie!”

“Never heard the name. Anyhow, she wanted to go there after we got married, and—I wish you wouldn’t look like that!”

“But I’m so *awfully* sorry for you!”

“It was pretty hard, at first,” he said; “but—well, you see, I’ve thought a bit about it, and after all I’m glad we didn’t get married.”

“Oh!” cried Lexy, profoundly shocked. “But that’s—”

“Because I—you see, she didn’t—well, I don’t think she really liked me very much.”

Lexy was astounded.

“Fact!” said he. “What she wanted was romance, and all that sort of thing. She wanted to get away from home, and I was the only chance she had; so there you are!”

“That wasn’t very fair to you!”

“I don’t blame her,” he said thoughtfully. “We were both—but what’s the sense of talking about all that? The thing is to find her!”

Lexy agreed to that promptly.

“Now I’ll tell you everything that’s happened,” she said.

He listened to her with alert attention. He interrupted her often to ask questions, but they were always questions that she could answer. He wanted all the facts, and what Lexy told him he unquestioningly accepted as fact. When she said she had seen Caroline at the doctor’s house, he believed her. He didn’t suggest that her eyes might have deceived her. He trusted her—not only her good intentions, but her good sense.

At last she came to the part of her story about which she was most doubtful—the episode of the emptied bottle. She told it with reluctance.

“I don’t know now,” she said. “Perhaps I did wrong. Perhaps that really was wanton mischief. I did so hate that horrible drug that changed her so! When I did it, it seemed right; but now—”

“It was right,” said he. “Any one’s better off dead than being drugged. Everything you’ve done was right and splendid. You’re the pluckiest girl I ever heard of—the best and most loyal little pal to poor Caroline! There’s no one like you!”

After Mrs. Enderby’s cold and skeptical smile, after Dr. Quelton’s parting sneer, after Captain Grey’s doubts and uncertainties, this speech rather went to Lexy’s head. The world seemed a different place. She glanced at the young man, and he happened at that moment to be looking at her. They both looked away hastily.

“This fellow—this Captain Grey,” said Charles. “He seems to me to be rather a chump!”

"Oh, he's not!" protested Lexy. "He's as nice as can be!"

Charles Houseman, who had believed everything that Lexy had said, did not appear convinced of this; and for some inexplicable reason Lexy was not greatly displeased by his lack of belief.

XXI

Mrs. Royce was very much pleased to see her pet, Miss Moran, return. She was well disposed toward Mr. Houseman, too, and willingly agreed to put him up for a few days. She set to work at once to cook a good lunch for them, but she did not hum under her breath, as was her usual habit. In fact, she was greatly perplexed and worried.

When her guests were seated at the table, she retired, leaving them alone; but she did not go very far. She remained close to the door, so that she could look through the crack. She observed that Miss Moran seemed very lively and cheerful with this newcomer—though she had been quite as lively and cheerful with Captain Grey.

"Well, I don't know, I'm sure!" said Mrs. Royce to herself, with a sigh. "It beats *me!*"

For the question which so troubled her was—which young man was *the* young man?

"Both of 'em as nice, polite young fellers as you'd want to see," she repeated. "T' other one's handsomer, but he's kind of foreignlike and gloomy. This one's got more gumption. The way he walked in here, smart as a whip, and asked for Miss Moran, an' when I says she's gone to visit the Queltons, why, off he went, after her! I like a man with gumption!"

So did Miss Moran. Charles Houseman seemed to her the only living, vigorous creature in a world of ghosts, the only one whom she could really understand. There were no shadowy corners about him. He was altogether honest, direct, and uncomplicated. He had no tact and no caution. He had come now, in the midst of this wretched tangle, and she completely believed that he would cut the Gordian knot.

He had suggested that they should let the subject drop for a time.

"I think I've got the facts straight," he said; "and now I want to think them over a bit. Let's take a walk, and talk about something else."

Lexy agreed to the entire program. If she was tired, she either didn't know it, or she forgot it in the joy of this beautifully careless companionship. She could say exactly what came into her head to Charles Houseman. He understood her. He was interested in every word she spoke, and, what is more, she was aware of the profound admiration that underlay his interest. He thought she was wonderful, and that made her strangely happy.

"Do you know," he said, "the first time I saw you, there in the park, I—I liked the way you talked to me!"

"How?" asked Lexy, with great interest. "I thought I must have seemed awfully irritating and mysterious." He grinned.

"You were awfully mad when I spoke to you," he said; "but I liked that. I don't know—somehow you made me think of Joan of Arc."

"Me?" cried Lexy. "With freckles, and such a temper? You couldn't imagine me listening to angels, could you?"

"Yes," he said, "I could."

She glanced at him to see if he was laughing, but he was not. His eyes met hers with a quiet and steady look.

"I didn't need to imagine much," he said. "You've told me what you've been through, and I can see for myself what you are. I don't think there ever was another girl like you!"

"Nonsense!" said Lexy, looking away. "I'm just pig-headed—that's all."

They had wandered across the fields until they came to a little river, running clear and swift under the elm trees. By tacit consent they sat down on the bank. They didn't talk much. Houseman skipped stones with skill and earnest attention, and Lexy watched the minnows flitting past through the limpid water. The sky was an unclouded blue. The sunlight came through the branches, where the leaves were scarcely unfolded, and made little golden sparkles on the hurrying current. It was all so quiet—and yet it wasn't peaceful. The world seemed too young, too warmly and joyously alive, for peace. The spring was waiting in eagerness for the summer. This still, fresh, sunlit day was only an interlude.

Casually, Houseman told her a good deal about himself.

"From Baltimore," he said. "My people wanted me to go into the navy. My father and grandfather were both navy, but I couldn't see it. Too cut and dried! I'm on a cargo steamer now, and I like it."

And this information—with the additional facts that he was twenty-six, that he had two brothers in the navy and three married sisters, and that both of his parents were living—was all that he had to give about himself. Lexy was satisfied. There he was, and anyone with eyes to see and ears to listen could understand him.

Honest, blunt, and careless, fearing nothing, shirking nothing, and facing life with cheerful unconcern, he was, she thought, a comrade and an ally without an equal.

The sun was setting when they turned homeward. The sky was swimming in soft, pale colors, and a little breeze blew, stirring the new leaves. It was a poetic and even a melancholy hour; but Houseman found nothing better to say than that he was hungry.

“So am I!” said Lexy.

They looked at each other as if they had discovered still another bond between them. They were happy—so happy!

Mrs. Royce saw them from the kitchen window. They were strolling along leisurely, side by side. They were quite composed and matter-of-fact, and their desultory conversation was upon the subject of shellfish. The young Baltimorean was an authority on oysters, but Lexy, as a New Englander, had something to say on the subject of clam chowder.

Mrs. Royce was suddenly enlightened.

“He’s the one!” she said to herself. “Well, I’m real glad, I’m sure!”

So glad was she that she at once began to make a superb chocolate cake, and she hummed a song about a young man on Springfield Mountain, who killed a “pesky serpent.”

George Grey heard her. He was in the sitting room, smoking, and apparently reading a book; but he never turned a page. He lit one cigarette after another, and his hand was steady. He looked as he always looked—fastidiously neat, self-possessed, and a little haughty; but in spirit he was suffering horribly.

Lexy knew that as soon as she saw him, because she knew him and liked him so well. She held out her hand to him, not even pretending to smile, but searching his face with an anxious and friendly glance.

“Here’s Mr. Houseman, Caroline Enderby’s *fiancé*,” she said. “I’ve told him the whole thing, so if there’s anything new—”

Captain Grey stiffened perceptibly. He couldn’t see what possible connection anybody’s *fiancé* could have with his affairs. He shook hands with Houseman, but not very nicely; and Houseman was not excessively cordial.

Lexy took no notice of this nonsense. Her mood of happy confidence had passed now, and the dark and mysterious shadow had come back. There was something of greater importance to think about than her personal affairs.

“Captain Grey,” she said, with a sort of directness, “I didn’t tell you before, but I’m going to tell you now. I saw Caroline in that house, and this morning I found—this.”

He looked at the handkerchief, and then at Lexy.

“But—” he began.

“It means that she’s been there, or that she’s there now,” Lexy went on. “It’s time we found out. Of course, I know how you feel about Dr. Quelton. He’s your sister’s husband, and you didn’t want—”

“It doesn’t make much difference now,” he said. “If you’ll wait a day or so, she—”

He turned away abruptly, and took out his cigarette case.

“What do you mean?” cried Lexy.

“It won’t be long,” he said quietly. “She—my sister—he says it won’t be more than twenty-four hours, at the most.”

“Oh, no! It can’t be! Captain Grey, don’t believe him!”

“I tried not to,” he said. “I—well, we had a bit of a row, and I made him let me bring in another doctor from the village here. He said the same thing.”

“What did the doctor say it was?” asked Houseman.

“Pernicious anæmia. There’s nothing to be done.”

Captain Grey seemed to find some difficulty in lighting his cigarette; but when he had done so, and had drawn in a deep breath, he turned back toward Lexy with a smile that startled her. She had never imagined he could look like that. It was a wolfish kind of smile, lighting his dark face with a sort of savage mirth.

“When it’s over,” he said, “I’ll be very pleased to help you to hang him, if you can; or I’ll wring his neck myself.”

The other two stared at him in silence for a moment.

“You think he’s—” Houseman began.

“I don’t know whether he has actually murdered her or not,” said Captain Grey, “but he has destroyed her—utterly wasted and ruined her life. He taught her to take that damned drug; and when Miss Moran broke the bottle—”

“Oh! Did he tell you?”

“He did. He says you’ve killed her. There was some rare drug in it that he can’t get for a fortnight or so, and she can’t live without it.”

“Captain Grey!” she cried, white to the lips. “I didn’t—”

“I know,” he said gently. “You meant to help, and I’m glad you did it. She’s better dead. This afternoon, for a little while, she was—herself. She talked to me. She was very weak, but she was herself. She asked me to help her not to take it again. She thought she was getting better. Then that”—he paused—“that damned brute brought in a lawyer, so that she could make her will. She couldn’t believe it. She looked up at me. ‘Oh, I’m not going to *die*, am I?’ she said. Before I could answer her, he told her she must be prepared. Then I—”

Again he turned away.

“And you let him alone?” inquired Houseman.

“It’s not time to settle with him—yet,” said the other. “That’s why I came away, because I don’t want to kill him—yet. She’s unconscious now. She will be, until it’s finished. I’m going back later, but I wanted to come, here—” He ceased speaking. “To you,” his eyes said to Lexy.

She forgot everything else, then, except this tormented and suffering human being who had turned to her for comfort. She pushed him gently down into a chair, and seated herself on the arm of it. She took both his hands and patted them, while she racked her brain for the right thing to say.

“We’ll do *something!*” she said. “There’s no reason to be in despair. That young country doctor was probably entirely under the influence of Dr. Quelton. We’ll get some one else. We’ll telephone to one of the big hospitals in New York and find out who’s the very best man, and we’ll get him out here. Mr. Houseman will ring up—”

But Mr. Houseman had disappeared. Worse still, Mrs. Royce’s telephone was out of order.

“Never mind!” said Lexy. “We’ll have a nice hot cup of tea, and then we’ll go to the grocery store. There’s a telephone there.”

She made the captain drink his tea and eat a little. Then she ran upstairs for her hat; and she was very angry at Charles Houseman for running away.

XXII

They set off together down the village street. There was no one about at that hour. All Wyngate was partaking of its Sunday night supper within doors, and one or two of the little wooden houses showed lights in the front windows; but for the most part life was concentrated in the kitchen.

The drug store was locked, but a dim light was burning inside, and a vigorous ringing of the night bell brought Mr. Binz, the owner, to open the door. He was deeply interested in their errand. He suggested St. Luke’s Hospital, for the reason that he had once been there himself, and therefore held it almost sacred.

“But,” he said, in his slow and impressive way, “if I was you, I’d ring up Doc Quelton first, and find out how things are going up there; because you may find out—”

Lexy interrupted him hastily, for she didn’t want him to say what he evidently wished to say.

“There won’t be any change in Mrs. Quelton,” she said. “It would only be a waste of time.”

It was not so much for that poor woman, who she feared was beyond hope, that she wanted the New York specialist, as for Captain Grey. It would help him so much to feel that something was being done, that some one was hurrying out here!

“Might be more of a waste of time,” said Mr. Binz, “if some one was to come all the way out here after she—”

“Oh, all right!” cried Lexy impatiently. Then suddenly she remembered. “They haven’t any telephone at the doctor’s house,” she said.

“Suppose I go out there first, and see?” suggested Captain Grey.

“No!” said Lexy. “Don’t!”

But the idea impressed him as a good one, and go he would.

“I’d rather see how she is, first,” he repeated. “If there’s no change, I’ll come back.”

Lexy looked at Mr. Binz with an angry and reproachful frown, which the poor man did not understand. He had only wanted to give helpful advice.

“Come on, then!” she said to Captain Grey.

“I’ll leave you at Mrs. Royce’s,” he told her.

“No, you won’t!” she contradicted with a trace of severity. “If you *will* go, I’m going with you!”

He protested against this, but she would not listen, and so they went to the garage for Joe’s taxi; but Joe and his taxi had gone out. An interested bystander said that they could get a “rig” from the livery stable with no trouble at all. They had only to find the proprietor, and he, in turn, would find the driver, who would harness up the horse.

“No, thanks,” said Captain Grey. He turned to Lexy. “I can’t wait,” he told her. “I’m going to walk. Thank you for—”

"I can walk, too," said Lexy. "It's only three miles."

"I don't want you to, Miss Moran."

"I'm coming anyhow," she replied.

For that instinct in her, the thing which was beyond reason, drove her forward. She could not let him go alone. She had walked that three miles once before to-day, and she had walked farther than that with Houseman in the afternoon. She was tired, terribly tired, and filled with a queer, sick reluctance to approach that sinister house again; but she had to go. She had said to herself that morning that she was coming back, and now she was going to do so.

They did not try to talk much on the way. What had they to say? They were both filled with a dread foreboding. They hurried, yet they wished never to come to the end of the journey.

They turned down the lane, leaving the lights of the highway behind, and went forward in thick darkness, under the shadow of the trees. The sound of the sea came to them—the loneliest sound in all the world.

"There's a light in the house, anyhow!" said Lexy suddenly.

Her own voice sounded so small, so pert, so futile, in the dark, that she felt no surprise when Captain Grey showed a faint trace of impatience in answering.

"Naturally!" he said.

Only, to her, it did not seem natural, that one little light shining out through the glass of the front door. It would be more natural, she thought, if there were only the darkness and the sound of the sea.

They turned into the drive. Their footsteps sounded strangely and terribly loud on the gravel, and became as sharp as pistol shots when they mounted the veranda. The captain rang the bell, and the sound of it ran through the house like a shudder; but no one came. He rang again and again, but nothing stirred inside the house. He knocked on the glass, and they waited, looking into the bright and empty hall; but no one came. Captain Grey turned the knob, the door opened, and they went in. The door of the library was open, showing only darkness. The stairs ran up into darkness. Nothing moved, nothing stirred. Then, suddenly, a little breeze rose, and the front door slammed with a crash behind them. Lexy cried out, and caught the young man's arm. "Don't be afraid!" he said; but his face was ashen. For a moment they stood where they were. "Miss Moran," he went on, "would you rather wait here while I go upstairs?"

"No," said Lexy. "I'll come with you."

He started up the stairs, and she followed him closely. At almost every step she looked behind her, and she did not know which was the more horrible to her, the brightly lit hall or the darkness before them. Suppose she saw some one in the hall behind them!

Captain Grey did not once glance behind. He went on steadily. When he reached the top of the flight, he took a box of matches from his pocket and lit the gas. There was the long corridor, with the row of closed doors. He turned down in the direction of Mrs. Quelton's room, but Lexy touched him on the shoulder.

"I think you had better let me go first," she suggested. "Perhaps she won't be ready to see you."

Their eyes met.

"Thank you, Lexy!" he said simply, and went on again.

He had never used her name before. He was trying to tell her that he understood what she had wished to do for him. She had offered to go first, alone, into the silent room, to see whatever might be there—to spare him something, if she could.

But he would not have it so. He stopped outside the door, and knocked twice. Then he went in.

It was dark and still in there, with the night wind blowing in through the open windows. He struck a match and lit the gas. The room was empty.

He went across to the long windows and out on the balcony. There was no gas connection there. He struck one match after another, and went from one end of the balcony to the other. There was nothing.

"Not here!" he said, in a dazed, flat voice.

Lexy could not speak at all. She had come out on the balcony, and stood beside him. The sound of the sea was loud in her ears—or was it the beating of her own heart? She held her breath and strained her eyes in the darkness.

"There's—something—here!" she whispered tensely.

"No!" he said aloud. "I looked. Come! We'll go through the house."

She followed close at his heels. He went into every room, lit the gas, looked about, and found nothing. Lexy grew confused with the opening and closing of doors, the sudden flare of light in the darkness, the succession of empty rooms.



He went up into the cupola. Nothing there, nor in the servants' rooms. Then downstairs, through the long library, the dining room, the sitting room, the kitchen, the pantry. He proceeded with a sort of merciless deliberation, opened every door, looked into every cupboard.

Finding a stable lantern in the kitchen, he lighted it and carried it with him. The door to the cellar stood open. He went through it, down the steep wooden stairs, and Lexy followed him.

To her exhausted and frightened gaze the cellar seemed enormous—as vast and august as some great ancient tomb. The lantern made a little pool of light, and outside it the shadows closed in on them thickly. She came near to him and caught him by the sleeve.

“Oh, let's go away!” she cried. “Let's go away! We've looked—”

“This is the last place,” he said gently. “After this, we'll give it up.”

Fighting down the sick terror that had come over her, she walked beside him in the little circle of light, and tried not to look at the shadows.

“What's that?” he exclaimed.

“Oh, what?” she cried.

He went back a few paces and set down the lantern. Then he advanced again and bent over, staring at the floor.

“Do you see?” he asked.

She did see. A narrow strip of light lay along the floor.

“It comes up from below,” he said. “There must be a subcellar. Let's see!”

He brought back the lantern and examined the floor by its light, going down on his hands and knees.

“Stand back!” he said suddenly. “It's a trapdoor. See—here's a ring to lift it.”

Captain Grey pulled at the ring, but nothing happened.

“I'm on the wrong side,” he said.

Moving over, he pulled again, and a square of stone lifted. A clear light came from below, showing a short ladder clamped to the floor.

“Stay there, please,” he told Lexy. “You have the lantern. I shan't be a minute.”

But as soon as he had reached the foot of the ladder, Lexy climbed down after him; and just at the same moment, they saw—

They were standing in a tiny room with roughly mortared walls. A powerful electric torch stood on end in one corner, and at their feet lay the body of a man, face downward across a wooden chest. It was Dr. Quelton.

With a violent effort Captain Grey lifted the doctor's heavy shoulder, while Lexy covered her eyes. She knew that he was dead. No living thing could lie so.

Her head swam, her knees gave way, and she tottered back against the wall, half fainting, when the captain's voice rang out, with a note of agony and despair that she never forgot.

“My God! My God!” he wailed. “Oh, Muriel!”

She opened her eyes. For a moment she was too giddy to see. Then, as her vision cleared, she saw him on his knees beside the chest.

Not a chest—it was a coffin; and on it was a strange little plate glittering like gold, with an inscription:

MURIEL QUELTON

BELOVED WIFE OF PAUL QUELTON

XXIII

When she looked back upon the experiences of that dreadful night, it seemed to Lexy that both she and her companion displayed almost incredible endurance. Since morning they had lived through a very lifetime of emotion, to end now in this tragedy more horrible than anything they could have feared.

Yet, not five minutes after his cry of agony, Captain Grey had recovered his self-control. He was able to speak quietly to Lexy, and she was able to answer him no less quietly.

“We'd better go,” he said. “We can do nothing here. It's a case for the police now.”

“I've got to go back to the balcony,” Lexy told him. “There was something there.”

“Very well!” he agreed, and, without another word or a backward glance, he went up the ladder.

They returned through the house. He had left the lights burning and the doors open, so that there was a monstrous air of festivity in the emptiness. They went into Mrs. Quelton's room again, and crossed through it to the balcony. He carried the lantern with him, and by its steady yellow flame they could see into every corner. There was the couch upon which she had lain—disarranged, as if she had just risen from it. There was a little table with medicine bottles on it. All the usual things were in the usual places.

“Nothing here,” said Captain Grey.

Lexy was sure, however, that there was. She stepped to the balcony railing, to look down into the garden below, and there, on the white paint of the railing, she found something.

"Look!" she said, in a matter-of-fact voice. "What's this?"

He came to her side.

"It's the print of a hand," he said. "In blood, I should imagine."

For a moment they stared at the ghastly mark, a strange evidence of pain and violence in this quiet place.

"We'd better look in the garden," he suggested.

They went down. The grass beneath the balcony was beaten down in one place, but there was nothing else.

Some one had come and gone. They could not even guess who it had been. They knew nothing.

"Come, Lexy!" the captain said.

They both turned for one last look at the accursed house, blazing with spectral lights. Then they set off, away from it, over that weary road again.

"There's no police station in the village, is there?" he asked.

"I've never seen one, but I've heard Mrs. Royce talk about the constable. Anyhow, she can tell us."

"Yes," he said, and was silent for a moment. "Rather a pity, isn't it," he went on, "that there has to be—all that? Because it doesn't matter now. It's finished. Better if the house burned down to-night!"

In her heart Lexy agreed with him. She had no curiosity left, and scarcely any interest. As he had said, it was finished. She wanted to rest, not to speak, not to think, not to remember; but it couldn't be so. They would both have to tell what they had seen, to answer questions. It wasn't enough that two people lay dead in that house of horror. All the world, which knew and cared nothing about them, must have a full explanation.

"I suppose we couldn't wait till morning?" she suggested.

He took her hand and drew it through his arm.

"You're worn out," he told her. "It's altogether wrong. There's no reason why you should be troubled any more, Lexy. Slip into the house quietly, and get to bed and to sleep. Nobody need know that you went there."

"No!" she said. "We'll see it through together."

The thought of Charles Houseman came to her, but she disowned it with a listless sort of resentment. She felt, somehow, that he had failed her. He had not been there when she needed him. He had not taken his part in this ghastly and unforgettable sight.

There was a light in Mrs. Royce's front parlor. Perhaps he was in there, waiting for her, cheerful and cool, a thousand miles away from the nightmare world in which she had been moving. She did not want to see him or speak to him just now. He hadn't seen. He wouldn't understand.

Captain Grey opened the gate, and they went up the flagged walk. Before they had mounted the veranda steps, the front door was flung wide, and Mrs. Royce appeared.

"Oh, my goodness!" she cried. "I thought you'd never come!"

Her tone and her manner were so strange that they both stopped and stared at her.

"Oh, my goodness!" she cried again.

"Oh, *do* come in! I don't know what to do with her, I'm sure!"

"Who?" asked Lexy.

"Poor Mis' Quelton. There she is, lyin' upstairs—"

"Mrs. *Quelton*?"

"Joe, he brought her in his taxi, jest a little while after you'd gone."

"Brought Mrs. Quelton here?"

"Brought her here and carried her up them very stairs," declared Mrs. Royce impressively; "right up into the east bedroom, and there she lies!"

She stood aside, and Lexy and Captain Grey entered the house. The young man turned aside into the parlor, sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. Lexy stood beside him, looking down at his bent head, her face haggard and white.

"Why did Joe do that?" she asked.

"Don't ask *me*, Miss Moran!" replied Mrs. Royce. "It beats me!"

There was a silence.

"But ain't you going upstairs to see what she wants?" inquired Mrs. Royce anxiously.

Captain Grey sprang to his feet.

"Good God!" he shouted. "What are you talking about?"

Mrs. Royce backed into a corner, regarding him with alarm.

"I jest thought you'd like to talk to her," she faltered.

"Do you mean she's *not dead*?"

"Dead? Oh, my goodness gracious me!" cried Mrs. Royce. "I never—"

"Wait here," Lexy told the captain.

"No!" he replied. "I must—"

But, disregarding him, Lexy turned to Mrs. Royce.

"Let me see her," she said.

Mrs. Royce led the way upstairs. She went at an unusual rate of speed, so that she was panting when she reached the top.

"Kind of vi'lent!" she whispered, pointing downstairs, where Captain Grey was.

"This room?" asked Lexy. "Shall I go in?"

"Well," said Mrs. Royce, "seems to me I'd knock, if I was you."

Knock on the door of the room where Mrs. Quelton lay? Knock, and expect an answer from that voice? It seemed to Lexy, for a moment, that she could not raise her hand.

But she did. She knocked, and she was answered. She turned the handle and went in. An oil lamp stood on the bureau, and outside the circle of its mellow light, in the shadow, Mrs. Quelton was sitting on the edge of the bed; and it seemed to Lexy that she had never seen such a forlorn and pitiful figure.

"Oh, my dear!" she cried impulsively, and held out her arms.

Mrs. Quelton rose. She came toward Lexy, her hands outstretched—when a sudden cry from Mrs. Royce arrested her.

"But that ain't Mrs. Quelton!" cried the landlady.

#### XXIV

If Lexy had not caught the unhappy woman, she would have fallen; but those sturdy young arms held her, and, with Mrs. Royce's help, they got her on the bed. White as a ghost, incredibly frail in her black dress, she lay there, scarcely seeming to breathe.

"It *ain't* Mrs. Quelton!" repeated Mrs. Royce, in a whisper.

"I know!" said Lexy softly. "Will you get me water and a towel, please?"

Mrs. Royce went out of the room, and Lexy knelt down beside the bed. She did know now—the woman whom they had all called Muriel Quelton was really Caroline Enderby.

Lexy did not blame herself for not having known before. Looking at that face now, in its terrible stillness, she could trace the familiar features easily enough, but how changed! How worn and lined, how *old*! The brows, the lashes, the soft, disordered hair, were black now instead of brown; but that merely physical alteration was of no significance, compared with that other awful change. It was Caroline Enderby, the gentle and pitifully inexperienced girl of nineteen, but it was Mrs. Quelton, too, that tragic and somber figure.

Mrs. Royce came back with a basin of water, clean towels, and a precious bottle of eau de Cologne.

"Poor lamb!" she whispered. "Ain't she pretty?"

Lexy wet a towel and passed it over that unconscious face again and again. Mrs. Royce watched, spellbound; for the dark and haggard stranger was passing away before her very eyes, and some one else was coming into life—some one quite young and—

The closed lids fluttered, and then opened.

"Lexy!" murmured the metamorphosed one.

"I'm here, Caroline!" said Lexy, with a stifled sob. "Everything's all right, dear! Don't worry—just rest!"

"I can't, Lexy! I can't!" she answered, and from her eyes, now closed again, tears came running slowly down her cheeks.

"Yes, you can!" said Lexy. "We'll—"

"Supposing I get her some nice hot soup?" whispered Mrs. Royce, and, at a nod from Lexy, she was off again. Caroline reached out and caught Lexy's hand.

"Oh, Lexy, Lexy!" she said. "Can you ever forgive me?"

"No!" her friend replied cheerfully. "Never! But don't bother now. You can tell me later, when you feel better."

"I'll never, never feel better till I've told you! Oh, Lexy, I knew yesterday, and I didn't tell you! Oh, Lexy, Lexy, I don't understand! I want to tell you! I want you to help me!"

A flush had come into her cheeks. She was growing painfully excited. She tried to sit up, but Lexy firmly prevented that.

"Lie down, darling!" she said. "We'll get a doctor."

"No! No! I'm not ill—not ill, Lexy, only tired. Oh, you don't know! You won't let *him* come here, Lexy?"

"I promise you he'll never trouble you again," replied Lexy quietly.

She saw Captain Grey standing in the doorway, behind the head of the bed. She glanced at him, and then at Caroline again. Let him stay! Whatever had happened, he ought to know.

"I don't understand," said Caroline, clinging fast to Lexy's hand. "I want to tell you—all of it. You know, Lexy, I did a horrible, wretched thing. I said I'd marry a man. I promised to meet him here in Wyngate, because it was near to dear Miss Craigie's. I didn't tell you, but it wasn't because I didn't trust you, Lexy—truly it wasn't! It was only because I knew mother would be so angry with you. I told him I'd take the train that got here at eleven o'clock that night; but after I'd left the house, I got frightened. I'd never gone out alone before. I couldn't bear it. If I hadn't promised him, I'd have gone home again. I *wanted* to go home. I was sorry I'd promised."

"Don't try to go on now, dear!"

"I must! So I took a taxi. I thought I'd get here as soon as the train, but when it was eleven o'clock we were still miles away. I thought perhaps Charles wouldn't wait, and there'd be nobody in Wyngate, and I didn't dare go home again; so I kept begging the driver to go faster. Oh, Lexy, it was all my fault! He did go—terribly fast. It was wonderful to be alone, and rushing along like that; and then I think he ran into a telegraph pole, turning a corner. There was a crash, and I didn't know anything more for—I don't know how long it's been."

"Soup!" whispered Mrs. Royce, but Caroline was too intent upon her confession to stop.

Lexy took the broth and set it on the table.

"I don't know how long it was," Caroline went on. "It must have been days, or perhaps weeks. Sometimes I seemed to know, in a sort of dream. Oh, it was horrible! Oh, Lexy, I can't explain! I didn't really know anything, only that sometimes my mind seemed to be struggling—"

"Take some of this soup," said Lexy. "You've *got* to, Caroline, or I won't listen."

Obediently Caroline allowed herself to be fed. She took fully half of that excellent soup, and it did her good. "Yesterday," she said, "I did know. I couldn't sleep all night. I felt so ill, I thought I was going to die; and all the time it was coming back to me. I couldn't think why I was there in that place. I was frightened—worse than frightened. The nurse kept calling me 'Mrs. Quelton,' and I told her I wasn't Mrs. Quelton—I was Caroline Enderby. She must have told him. He came, he kept looking at me, and saying, 'You are Muriel Quelton, I tell you!' Then he sent the nurse away, and he said: 'If you insist that you are Caroline Enderby, you're mad, and I'll send you to an asylum.' I was—oh, Lexy, I'm not brave!—I was afraid of him. When you came that morning, I didn't dare to tell you. I hoped you'd find the handkerchief, and know; and then—" Suddenly she turned and buried her face in the pillow.

"Then I didn't want you to know!" she sobbed. "Captain Grey—he sat there with me. Lexy! Lexy! I didn't know there was any one like him in the world! I wanted to stay, then. I thought, if you found out, I'd have to go away—to go home again, or to marry Charles. I'd promised to marry him, Lexy, but I can't! Not now!"

"Hush, darling!" said Lexy hastily.

This was something Captain Grey had no right to hear, but he did hear it. He was still standing outside the door, motionless.

"He was so kind!" Caroline went on. "And his face—"

"Never mind that!" Lexy interrupted sternly. "Tell me how you got away."

"When *he* came back, he found George there—I had to call him George."

"Yes, I see. Never mind!"

"George went away, and then—he told me. He said his wife had died a few months ago, and that in her will she'd left some jewel—a ruby—"

"An emerald," corrected Lexy.

"Yes—it was an emerald. She'd left it to her brother, and he—Dr. Quelton—had taken it long ago, and sold it, to get money for his horrible drugs. She never knew that, and he didn't tell her lawyer that she'd died. I don't know how he managed, or what he did, but nobody knew. Then there came a letter from her brother, to say that he was coming; and the doctor said—I'll never forget it:

"'Consequently, Muriel Quelton had to be here, and she was; and she'll remain here until her purpose is served!'

"He told me what had happened. He said that as soon as he knew Captain Grey was coming, he began to look for some one to take his poor wife's place. The captain hadn't seen his sister since she was a baby, you know, and all he knew was that she was tall and dark. Dr. Quelton said he had arranged for some one to come from a hospital; and then he found me. He drove by just a little while after the accident, and he found the poor driver dead and me unconscious. He found a letter to mother in my purse, and he mailed it afterward. Then he heard another car coming along the road, and he started the engine and sent the taxi—with the dead driver in his

seat—crashing down the hill, to run into the other car. He wanted the driver's death to look like an accident. He didn't care if the other man were killed. He's—he's not human, Lexy! He told me he had never in his life cared for any one except his wife. He told me what a beautiful, wonderful woman she was—and yet he had stolen her emerald when she was dying. Love! He couldn't love any one!"

But Lexy remembered her last glimpse of Dr. Quelton, lying dead across the coffin of the woman he had robbed. Who would ever know, who was to judge now, what might have been in his warped and utterly solitary heart?

"He told me," Caroline went on, "that he had never felt any great interest in me. A mediocre mind, he said I had. He told me he had never so much as touched my finger tips. He sat there, talking so calmly! He said he had kept me under the influence of some drug that made my mind suggestible—I think that's the word. He meant that whoever took that drug would believe anything, accept anything. He had told me I was Muriel Quelton, and I believed I was. Then he told me to dye my hair, and to make up my face with things he gave me. He told me I was ill and tired and growing old, and I felt so. Lexy, he said that even without that, without making the least change in my appearance, no one would have known me, because my *mind* was changed. He said there was no disguise in the world like that. Was it true, Lexy? Was I old, and—and horrible to every one?"

"No," Lexy briefly replied.

"Then he went on. He said he had no more of the drug left, and that he'd have to dispose of me. 'You know you're very ill,' he said. 'The nurse and that young fool of a doctor agree with me. I think you're likely to grow worse—very much worse—to-night. You're very likely to die.' Oh, Lexy! What could I do but agree? I was shut up—so weak and ill—I knew he could so easily give me something to kill me! He said that if I would make a will and sign it as he told me, he would let me go and be—be myself again. I couldn't help it! And his wife was dead. It couldn't do her any harm if I signed her name. He wrote it, and I traced it on another sheet of paper. I had to, Lexy! I knew it was wrong, but what else could I possibly do?"

"Never mind, Caroline!" said Lexy. "It didn't do any harm, dear. And then did he let you go?"

An odd smile came over Caroline's face.

"Not exactly," she said. "After I'd signed the will, leaving him the emerald, he sent away the nurse. Then he came out on the balcony, sat down, and began to talk to me. He was so pleasant and kindly! He made plans for my getting away unnoticed, and brought me some sandwiches and a cup of tea. He said I would have to eat a little, or I wouldn't have strength enough to go. It was getting dark then, and he couldn't see my face. I pretended to believe him, but I knew all the time. He kept urging me to hurry up, and to eat the sandwiches and drink the tea. I *knew*! I had made the will, and now, of course, I had to die. I tried to think of a way out; and at last, when he saw that I didn't eat or drink, he spoke out plainly. He said that he had sent the servants away for the afternoon, and that we were alone in the house. He got up; he stood there and looked down at me.

"'That tea is an easy way out—quite painless and easy,' he said; 'but if you won't take it, there's another way—not so easy!'

"He had some sort of hypodermic needle; but just then some one began pounding on the door downstairs, and he had to go. He locked the door after him, and he knew I was too weak to move. I tried. I got off the couch, but I fell on the floor beside it; and then Charles came—"

"Charles?"

"He climbed up over the balcony. It was too dark to see him, but I heard his voice, whispering, 'Where are you?' He found me, lifted me up, and helped me over to the railing. Then we heard Dr. Quelton coming back. There was another man, down in the garden, with a taxi. Charles called out to him, and he stood below there. I heard Dr. Quelton unlock the door, and I was so frightened that I felt strong enough to do anything to get away. Charles helped me over, and the other man caught me. Then I heard Charles shout, 'Quick! Get her away!' The other man pushed me into the taxi and started off across the lawn. I fainted, and I didn't know anything more until I opened my eyes here."

"But where *is* he?" cried Lexy. "What happened to him?"

"I don't know."

"And you don't seem to care, either!" said Lexy hotly. "He saved your life, and now—"

She thought of that bloody hand print, and the grass beaten down. The young man who had no caution, no regard for the proprieties, had done the direct and simple thing which appealed to his audacious mind. Perhaps he had been killed in doing it. He would know how to face death in the same straightforward way.

Lexy would be as straightforward as he. She would find him, and she wouldn't try to think how much she cared about finding him.

She rose.

"I'll get Mrs. Royce to stay with you, Caroline," she said.

"But where are you going, Lexy?"

"I'm going to find Charles."

In the doorway she encountered Captain Grey.

"Do you think she could stand seeing me?" he asked anxiously. "I mean do you—"

But Lexy didn't even answer.

XXV

After all, Lexy's search for Charles Houseman was neither difficult nor heroic, except in intention. She found him in the Lymewell Hospital. Joe told her where he was, and Joe took her there.

Houseman himself was rigidly determined not to be heroic. He had refused to go to bed, and Lexy found him in a bare, whitewashed waiting room, where he sat on a bench.

"Just came in to get the hand dressed," he said. "I'll go back with you now."

The doctor advised him not to, but Charles was not very susceptible to advice. He wished to be entirely casual and matter-of-fact, and Lexy tried to humor him. They stood together in the hall of the hospital while a nurse went to get him a bottle of lotion from the dispensary, and he talked in what he intended to be an offhand manner; but Lexy could see that he was in pain, and almost exhausted, and his hair was all on end.

Somehow, that was the thing she couldn't bear—that his hair should be so ruffled. She could respect his determination to ignore the throbbing anguish of his hand, she would, if he liked, pretend that there was nothing at all tragic or unusual in the night's adventure; but his hair—

The nurse returned with the bottle, gave him directions for its use, and told him sternly that he must come back the next morning for a dressing.

"All right!" he said impatiently. "Come on, Lexy!"

They got into Joe's cab together, and off they went.

"What happened to your hand?" inquired Lexy, as if it didn't much matter.

"Knife through it," he answered. "You see, I held the old fellow, to give Mrs. Quelton a chance to get away. When I thought it was all right, I gave him a shove backward, and started to climb over the balcony; and he jabbed a knife through my hand. That's what kept me so long—I couldn't get it out; and after I did, I—rested for a while. Then I started for Wyngate, and I met Joe coming back to look for me. He said he'd landed Mrs. Quelton all right. So that's all!"

Lexy was silent for a moment.

"Of course you didn't know it *wasn't* Mrs. Quelton," she said. "It was Caroline all the time."

"Caroline?" he cried. "What do you mean? It couldn't have been Caroline!"

Lexy gave him a very brief, very bare account of Caroline's narrative.

"Oh!" he said, when she had done; and again there was silence for a time. "Does she still want to go on with the thing—marrying me, I mean?" he asked finally, in a queer, flat tone.

"No," said Lexy pleasantly. "No—she does not."

"Oh!" he said again, with undisguised relief. "Well, then—it's all right, then!"

"You don't seem to be much surprised," said Lexy. "Don't you think it's the most extraordinary story you ever heard?"

"Well, you see—I'm a bit tired," he explained. "I haven't grasped it all yet; only, if she doesn't want to marry me now, Lexy, dear, will you?"

At last Lexy could do what she had longed to do for the last half hour—she could stroke down his ruffled hair.

And this, as far as they were concerned, was the last act and the fitting climax of the play. They were ready now for the curtain to rise upon another play; but there were other people not so young, or not so sturdy, for whom the first drama was not so readily dismissed.

There was Captain Grey, who was never to see his sister now, never to know if she had really wanted him and needed him. He did not soon forget what had happened at the Tower.

Mrs. Enderby was sent for, and arrived that morning before sunrise, with her husband. She listened to Caroline's strange story, and made what she could of it. She had not one word of reproach for her daughter.

"We shall not cry over the spilled milk," she said. "Let us see what is to be done, before the police come."

She had a thoroughly European point of view about the police. "If we are fortunate enough to find an officer with discretion," she added, "even yet a scandal may be averted."

For that was still her passionate resolve—that there should be no scandal. She thought and planned with desperate energy; she directed every one as to the part he or she should play; and in the end she succeeded.

Nobody knew that Caroline had disappeared, and nobody ever would know. Nobody knew that the so-called Mrs. Quelton was Caroline, and that, too, would never be known. Only let Joe and Mrs. Royce be persuaded to hold their tongues; as for Lexy, Captain Grey, and Houseman, she could of course rely upon them.

So the police were, as they say, baffled. Mr. Houseman told them a tale. He had been alarmed about the lady whom he knew as Mrs. Quelton, and he had climbed up on the balcony, hoping to see her alone; but he had met Dr. Quelton instead, and had been hurt in trying to escape from him.

Captain Grey also had a tale. He, too, had been alarmed about the lady whom he believed to be his sister. He had gone with Miss Moran to call upon her, and they had found the doctor dead, lying across the coffin.

There was an inquest, and Mr. Houseman had a very unpleasant time of it, being the last one who had seen the doctor alive; but there was no really serious suspicion against him. The *post-mortem* showed that the doctor had died of some unknown poison, at least half an hour after the young man had arrived at the hospital. The verdict was suicide, although the coroner's jury had its own opinion about the mysterious dark woman who had posed as the doctor's wife. An autopsy revealed that Mrs. Quelton had died from a natural cause—phthisis of the lungs. In short, as far as could be discovered, there was no murder at all.

This was a disappointment to the public, but there was always the mysterious dark woman. The police instituted a search for her, and there was much about her in the newspapers, but she was never found.

Miss Enderby returned to the city from her visit to Miss Craigie, and friends of the family were interested to learn that while away she had met such a nice young man—a Captain Grey, from India. He had to return to his regiment, but, before he went, Caroline's engagement to him was announced. Later he was to retire from the army and come back to live in New York.

There was another item of news, of minor importance. That pretty little secretary of Mrs. Enderby's got married, and the Enderbys were wonderfully kind about it—surprisingly so. It didn't seem at all like Mrs. Enderby to let the girl be married from her own house, and to give her a smart little car for a wedding present. What is more, Mr. Enderby found a very good position in his office for the young man.

"My dear Sophie," said one of Mrs. Enderby's old friends, with the peculiar candor of an old friend, "I've never known *you* to do so much for any one before!"

Mrs. Enderby was standing on the top doorstep of her house, looking after the car in which Lexy and her Charles had driven off for their honeymoon, with Joe, of Wyngate, as their chauffeur.

"So much for her?" she said. "It's not enough—not half enough!"

And there were actually tears in her eyes as she went back into the house where Caroline was.

Transcriber's Notes

1. This story appeared in the February 1926 issue of *Munsey's Magazine*.
2. The cover image was created by the transcriber and placed in the public domain.

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