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HAPPILY MARRIED

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BY

CORRA HARRIS

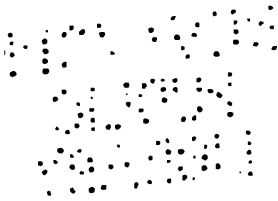
AUTHOR OF "A CIRCUIT RIDER'S WIFE,"
"THE RECORDING ANGEL," "MAKING
HER HIS WIFE," ETC.; AND IN COLLABO-
RATION WITH FAITH HARRIS LEECH:
"FROM SUNUP TO SUNDOWN"



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HAPPILY MARRIED

CHAPTER I

SULGRAVE is a Southern town entirely surrounded by the world, as an island is surrounded by water, in it, but not of it; a kind old town with many voluminous mansions spreading themselves in wings and porticos over broad lawns, rich in ancient shrubbery and the best traditions, very wide at one end where all the streets reach out into the green land like sticks of a highly decorated fan, very narrow at the other end where the same streets draw together and fold into Washington Avenue. Here the mansions are larger, the lawns are wider, and the shade of the elm trees is deeper, as if greenness and whiteness and cleanness had reached the very "I am" of gentility.

The people who lived in this place called it a city; those who did not live there called it a town. You understand. The formers are citizens of an old romance with faded covers, which incorporates the past as part of the present. The latter

are persons of no imagination, sticklers for facts and figures, the envious majority born and bred in that wide place which surrounds Sulgrave, merely human digits who belong to the national census rather than to the nation's history, to which most of the people in Sulgrave did belong at least by ties of blood.

Washington Avenue ceases to be Washington Avenue at the top of a gentle elevation three blocks beyond the Episcopal Church, and becomes "The Bow," a broad street, so named because it sweeps in a graceful curve from the end of the avenue to the river. This river divides Sulgrave proper from a very large factory and industrial district, the congested, begrimed, hollow-eyed part of the town.

The Madden National Bank stands at the end of this street nearest Washington Avenue like a temple on the Acropolis. The front is supported by Corinthian columns, the back of it is a vault and a warehouse for stocks and deeds and bonds. The shops begin by being elegant, and end near the river very low down with three gold balls for signs of their dinginess. The Court House opposite Madden's National Bank looks as if it had been built when Justice was a Southern Colonel, a sort of architectural exaggeration with a gilded dome and a hectoring front. The post office is magnificent, far beyond the means

or even the needs of the town. It is an offering made by the congressmen of that district from the Government's coffers to insure the support of Sulgrave citizens in future elections. The remainder of The Bow consists of office buildings, banks, warehouses, and all the little rag-tag enterprises of a commercial center. For this street conveniently located between the spending class and the producing class of her population is the business section of Sulgrave. Here her capitalists and merchants ordain the markets for the surrounding country and contend for that dross which so many people still believe is essential to the progress and welfare of mankind. All this they do assiduously until four o'clock in the afternoon, at which time the Washington Avenue crowd comes out still fresh from the fray. They leave the remainder of the day to their clerks and stenographers, step into their cars and are driven leisurely to the Golf and Country Club which may be called the Western Front of social life in Sulgrave.

It was four o'clock on a day in May, 1918. One of those fragrant afternoons that come in from the country on little breezes that flirt around street corners, through windows, across adding machines, into stores above counters, and into the faces of men and women, bringing the

news that love is Carrying-on outside in the open. This is a very dangerous time of the year for all humans stirred by the courting instinct and especially for that class who think they have settled the business of love once for all in marriage, because they did not get all of it, nor nearly all of it, but only one little woman of it, or one man's worth of it. The rest of love remains in the open, an enormous dividend in sentiment which you are forbidden to share, a very proper dispensation with society and the Scriptures back of it, but not always recognized by that clever devil in you which is your own heart. This circumstance no doubt accounted for what was going on in Sulgrave around four o'clock on this afternoon in May of the recently current year of 1918.

The Madden National Bank had been closed since three o'clock. It always took the impressive liberty of closing an hour earlier than other businesses in The Bow. But the side door remained open as usual for the accommodation of belated customers. Only the cashier, a little bald-headed man in a beetle-backed coat and shiny black trousers that fitted his thin legs snugly, could be seen in the long gilded cage of the bank proper. He moved about noiselessly doing the last things with the quick motions of a futilely irritated man. From time to time he glanced at the closed

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door of the President's office, marked Private, and then at the clock, implying that he was not alone, and that he was being detained beyond the usual hour. And he wanted to get out. He was a poor little cipher of a man far removed on the wrong side of love's decimal point in life, but he had a purely æsthetic interest in that May breeze scented with lilacs and roses. Besides, he liked to step down into The Bow at four o'clock when the cars were thickest there, giving an air of opulence and elegance to business, and when the crowd on the pavement elbowed him and pushed him a bit. All this stir and hurry and confusion refreshed him. It was like picking up sensations that did not belong to him, an artificial animation that lasted the length of The Bow.

It was a quarter past four when a man swung swiftly in through the side door. He wore the working clothes of polite society, a golf suit, not fashionably designed, but serviceable and the worse for wear. He was tall, powerfully set up, but for some reason this garb, which usually enhances a man merely as a man, did not become him. He wore it as he might have worn a stubble beard, from neglect, indifference, preoccupation. He had a large, motionless countenance, pale gray eyes and a thin lipped, reticent mouth, the face of a neutral, of a man who has not yet declared war. He was not a retired business

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man, he was a retired man, still young, who wore these careless clothes and played golf while he retreated. This was the impression he gave if you took the trouble to consider him with sufficient interest, which no one did in Sulgrave now, because the explanation was too well known, old stuff, no longer a matter of speculation, but accepted with decent silence.

The man glanced casually at the vacant chair behind the desk in the cut-off space beside the front door of the bank as if he expected to find it vacant and made for the door at the other end marked "Private."

"Ah, Mr. Skipwith!" the cashier called out hastily.

Skipwith nodded as he passed the wicket and went on.

"Mr. Madden left a message for you," the cashier exclaimed, hurrying out.

"Left a message?" the other repeated. "Where is Madden? We have a foursome on for this afternoon."

"Yes, so he said," the cashier answered, "but I was to tell you when you came in that he could not possibly get out. Detained by an important business engagement. He thought you might pick up Mr. Murray at the Club. He——"

Skipwith continued to stare at the door marked "Private" during the whole of this ex-

planation. Now he turned and went out without waiting for the end of it.

The cashier seized his hat, locked his cage, stepped into the lobby of the bank, paused before the door of the President's office, thrust it open an inch and said, "I am off, sir. Mr. Skipwith has been in. I delivered your message."

"All right, Kimble, leave the side door closed but not locked," a voice answered from within.

Kimble passed out into the street, carefully obeying these instructions. He had the air of a faithful servant long used to the ways of this house, who has just performed a distasteful duty conscientiously. The next moment as he whisked around the corner into The Bow he had the air of a brisk, decent, old man who is hurrying home to sprinkle his lawn.

Meanwhile, Pelham Madden, Vice-President of the Madden National Bank, leading business man of Sulgrave and Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Golf and Country Club, remained in his office waiting to keep that important business engagement.

It was a business engagement, and in his opinion important or he would not have said so in his message to Skipwith, for, while he reserved a man's right to conceal the truth, he was too well experienced to prevaricate. But whatever business this was that detained him, it could not

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have been of the usual kind having to do with stocks and bonds, or the affairs of the Bank. That is to say he was not fuming at his desk, nor smoking with his lips snared up, which is the manner of a man detained after business hours by an important appointment with another man. On the contrary, he apparently needed this time to collect his thoughts, to prepare his mind for the approaching interview. Obviously it concerned him in some intimate personal way. He was stepping up and down the floor of his office with a splendidly measured tread as a man does only in strictest privacy when he parades before himself for inspection, favorable, you understand. He was well set up, slender, not tall, distinctly handsome in a brilliant, dark fashion, and knew it, as a rooster knows he has a tail. His gray homespun fitted him like a garment made to fit personal pride. He had a masculine nose, elegantly arched, a woman's mouth, not weak but engaging, wide and well turned, corners drawn in, a smooth brow, narrow, pale as a poet's, a big head behind, indicating force of some kind or of every kind, black hair thick and straight, long on top, cropped close above his neck and ears, black eyes, small, deeply set, very keen, the kind that never pass you by without adding you or subtracting you from the sum total, always estimating, acquiring, ready to flare if flaring would

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do any good, capable of challenging with a cool and steady gaze—in short the eyes of an intensely passionate and sincere man who could be sincere about anything, either way! An actor of his own emotions who never missed his cue; and a man who could perform any deed ruthlessly to his own profit, not a rascal but a successful man with a well trained, commercial conscience. At the present moment he had an air about him, shrill, triumphant as if he was about to succeed at something.

On the wide topped desk near the window there was the photograph of a woman and a child in a silver frame, an old one, faded, made perhaps ten years before this time, because the woman, who was young with a singularly placid face, had dressed her hair in the curled and tortured fashion of that period which was as unbecoming to her as an elaborate coiffure would be to the Madonna. The child bore an infantile, idiotic resemblance to Madden after the manner of babies. The woman stared straight before her as if she had nothing to do with all this and never would have. Madden passed and repassed through this long, impersonal stare. He did not feel it. Probably he had not really seen that photograph for years. It was one of those family pictures of his past which he had out-lived. He was that kind of man. He could outlive any-

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thing without taking the trouble to live it do

Suddenly he halted, slapped his breast with one hand, not as a woman presses her throbbing heart in distress, but as a man does when he remembers something that should be in his pocket and is dismayed at the possibility of its not being there. Madden seized himself like a robber, went hastily through all his pockets. There was no doubt a paper connected with his approaching business engagement, was not in any of them. He hurried to his golf coat hanging on a rack and went through all the pockets, jerking out balls and scores, and a few papers, but not the one. He stood frowning, concentrating his thoughts.

"Gad!" he exclaimed, "I remember now. I changed before lunch, left it at home in the pocket of my other coat. What a fool thing I do!"

He was annoyed, but not uneasy. For some reason he felt a great deal of confidence in the kind of home he had, which only shows how little a man may know about that place as a safety vault, because nothing is safe there that does not strictly belong. Whatever it is will turn up, even if some one does not turn it up. You may store it in your own desk, which no one is supposed to touch, or in your own private cabinet where you keep only the things personal to you.

and it will get up and lie down beneath the handkerchiefs in your wife's dressing table where you never would think of looking for it, or it will go out and let your children play with it—because you have no desk of your own, not at home, only the one you claim, which is often a great convenience to your family in your absence. And who looks after the supply of those things personal to you in that cabinet? Your good and thoughtful wife, of course. It is the same thing with your pockets. She goes through them regularly, it is one of her duties to do so. Well then, there you are. So surely as you bring anything into that house, which is sacred to her, she will find it. She can do that without looking for it, because subconsciously she is always looking for something. That Scripture, "For Thou God seest me," is nothing to the eyes of a wife, especially a good and faithful wife. And what she does not see she knows without seeing. She only waits for you to verify it, which you usually do by endeavoring to conceal it. You forget that she is one with you. That is not merely a Scripture, nor yet a theory. It is a fact, a psychic phenomenon produced by marriage. You may not be one with her, but she is one with you. And nothing on earth you can do will change that, neither carefully practiced reserve, nor separation. If it is a thousand years or a day she can look at you

or not look at you and still know what you were capable of doing the night before or the day before, even if you did not do it. And she judges you accordingly, although you may be as innocent as the angels in Heaven, because she knows *you*, and she is one with you, on the side, quiet about it but vigilant, and nothing can change her omniscience. It is feminine and invincible.

But you cannot teach a man these things. Pelham Madden, having resolved to get whatever this was he had been looking for from the pocket of that other coat the moment he reached home, dismissed the whole matter from his mind. He consulted his watch, then he looked at the phone on his desk as if he expected it to speak to him.

But the phone remained silent.

He took another turn up and down the room, paused at the window, raked the upper end of Washington Avenue with a glance, as if Washington Avenue better produce something quick or be damned. Then he took the watch out again, held it in his hand, meaning that he would give that phone so many minutes to ring, probably three, which is the regulation limit of a dramatic threat, measured in time.

Nothing happened. That settled it. He thrust the watch into his pocket, jammed his hat sulkily over his eyes and made for the door, using his strictly business stride. With his hand on the

knob, he paused, probably he knew that he would, probably he was only trying to see if he could do it, get out and go. He missed it.

“Oh, well, I may as well stay and see it through,” he growled, retracing his steps. Then he removed his hat and dropped irritably into his chair, implying that whatever it was had now become a disagreeable business, offensive to his dignity and unworthy, really unworthy, of his attention.

CHAPTER II

By this time the character of The Bow had changed. The banks and offices were closed. It was no longer the center of big business, but of little business. Workers from the factories and machine plants were coming across the river bridge in crowds, frowsy women, hectic girls, ragged children, begrimed men, all hurrying into grocery stores and the shops, performing those hand to mouth errands by which such people live and refresh themselves. Washington Avenue was practically deserted. Society was out on the wing, taking tea, playing golf, attending to its war duties. Everything was very quiet. Only the trees remained rubbing boughs, shaking their leaves together like green palms, with an occasional elderly person walking beneath, taking his constitutional at this hour when the avenue belonged to him and his memories. The old mansions stood back white and cool in the long shadows of the day, looking very peaceful like good old houses who rarely ever went away from home, and who were for a time relieved from the wear and tear of human life within.

But you never can tell what is going on inside

from the way a house looks on the outside. The doors may be closed and the shades drawn as if nobody was at home, and still it may be the scene of a tragedy or a farce. It is a sort of immobile countenance built by man to insure privacy. It is the weather boarding he wears on his emotions and deeds. The instinct for concealment was the first architect of the human dwelling. No man, much less any woman, can live in the open, although we all might have become animal kin to the weather long since but for this desire to protect ourselves from the inclemency of the public eye. Self-consciousness is that guilty modesty of the soul from which we all suffer more than we do from just the elements, because the curiosity of man concerning man surpasses the omniscience of the Almighty in its acquisitiveness. This accounts for the fascination of the stage. It is the place where the intimate secret places of our lives is abridged and interpreted to the ravenous satisfaction of the other fellow.

But the best dramatists never write these plays. The best dramatists are the ordinary men and women who actually live the comedies and tragedies that make the tremendous epic of our common existence. And the best actors are never seen on the stage. They are those same men and women, posing perfectly and naturally, reciting their lines, not from memory, but from

emotion and experience, some times very dull people but always starring in their own rôle with a convincing sincerity that the finest art cannot successfully imitate.

Just so, the age old drama was going forward in Sulgrave this afternoon, the scenes scattered from one end of the town to the other, but each one perfectly laid and every character playing his part or her part with a finish and perfection that no manager could win from the best stars on the stage. The difference is that in living you do not act, you are always rehearsing for the next act. And a good deal of this rehearsing was going on within the quiet walls of these residences on Washington Avenue.

The Skipwith home faced the Episcopal church. It was not a mansion, but a modern residence, new, built of glazed yellow brick, very handsome, with no reserve about being an expensive house. It stood much nearer the street than the other homes on the avenue, as if it had just come to town, desired to be noticed and could afford the expense.

This was in fact exactly the case. The thing was an architectural faux pas committed by Barrie Skipwith shortly after his marriage.

Skipwith had been the beloved vagabond of Sulgrave society, a bachelor, who had a large fortune, a little wit, good manners, and a gener-

ous disposition, one of the most convenient men Sulgrave had ever produced. You could always get him to do what you did not want to do, but which should be done, and you could always get him to spend what you could not afford to spend, and which you would gladly spend if you only had it.

Some five years before this time Skipwith had gone off on a vacation. No one in Sulgrave doubted or ever had doubted that this was his sole purpose, to get a change of scenes and to fish. He was very fond of this pastime. When he returned it appeared that he had been fished. That is to say, he brought a Mrs. Skipwith home with him. Men do this sometimes, especially bachelors who have reached and then passed the age of discretion. Skipwith was forty, a dangerous age for celibate men.

Sulgrave held its breath for a time, waiting for him to explain. Skipwith offered no explanation. He simply delivered the goods, Ellen Skipwith, a woman probably fifteen years younger than he was, and of an exaggerated prettiness that far surpassed any feminine good looks in Sulgrave. She was small, petite. She had red hair, a great deal of it, and the stuff was naturally curling. She wore it high on her head like a coiled torch. Her eyes were entrancingly blue, baby eyes, that stared into the coolly appraising

face of Sulgrave with engaging candor. Her mouth was not a mouth at all except from necessity. Otherwise it was a tremulous, pink, sweet note in a fair countenance. And her nose was as perfect as if she had it in answer to prayer. Only a man could love such a woman. And there were a great many women in Sulgrave, silent, vigilant, thoughtful women.

Finally, however, Washington avenue accepted Mrs. Skipwith, for "poor Barrie's sake," much as an indignant family sometimes accepts an undesirable daughter-in-law for a dear son's sake, with the prayerful hope that they may make something of her.

Well, they could make nothing of Ellen. It appeared that she was already a finished and highly specialized product. For five years she had been a sort of vaudeville feature in Sulgrave society where the drama of living was a very fine piece of work, a trifle dull but eminently respectable. Ellen was also respectable, but not eminently so. Only so by the skin of her even white teeth. She behaved very well, but she dressed too well, not at all like a married woman. She entertained a great deal and did that well, too. She was diligent in good works, and no one trusted her goodness. This may have been due to the ardent color of her hair. It is very difficult to believe in the piety of an excessively pretty, red-

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haired woman. But the silent antagonism she excited was probably due to the effect she had on men, quite unconsciously it seemed, but noticeable to every other woman who knew her in Sulgrave. The men, all of them, from the eldest to the youngest, were interested in Mrs. Barrie Skipwith. Wherever she appeared masculinity became electric. Heroics appeared as if by magic. The language of plain men took on the glamour of romance. And sober elderly gentlemen became flippant, provocative. All these were bad signs. But you cannot prove anything by signs. In a case like this they are only the circumstantial evidence of the invincible he-nature of man.

There had been talk, of course, but every time the brands of scandal began to smolder, Mrs. Skipwith stepped from the smoke in time to save herself from the flames.

She was at the present moment in one of the upper chambers of the Skipwith residence dressing herself, but not for the afternoon. When a woman does that, she performs her toilette in a general way for no particular effect. Ellen was making a rite of this business. She had a definite personal aim in view. She had recently added Red Cross work to her virtues. And she had an important engagement to keep with some one about that. She stood before her mirror, regard-

ing her image carefully and gravely as if this toilette was a prayer she had made of herself which she hoped would be acceptable to the Red Cross. So much depended on the appeal when you were getting subscriptions. Well, she looked sufficiently appealing. There could be no doubt about that. Her gray crêpe, figured with dimmest corn flowers, floated above the silk petticoat like mist above shining water. Her broad brimmed hat had a song of wild flowers on it, maiden sweet. A very narrow blue ribbon was tied around her waist in a frivolous little bow behind. No ornaments, only a Red Cross button pinned in the folds of lace beneath her throat. She was already late for the appointment, she reflected, consulting her watch, but that made no difference. She must make sure of herself first. She did, going carefully over each detail, trying her hat at another angle, humming a little tune, carefully engaging a lock of her hair to droop over one ear. All these things she did over and over. No wonder the women of Sulgrave, maids and matrons, distrusted her! Then she seized her Red Cross list, folded it into her purse, and went leisurely down stairs. She passed the phone and hesitated whether she should call some one or not. She decided not. Then she went out, glanced down the avenue, and started for The Bow.

CHAPTER III

THE Madden home is the handsomest house on the avenue. It spreads wider wings upon a wider lawn. The veranda in front is supported by columns which reach from the coronet roof to the floor, very large and round, fluted, with splendid capitals. Above there is a portico which sticks out from the second story like an enlarged oval dish in shape with solid sides and a bottom that curves gracefully above the veranda below. The windows are gothic, fitted with old-fashioned green blinds. The lights above the front door are fan shaped. The door itself is double, with a very old black lantern hanging on either side. The paint on this house is so white, so fresh that it glistens. There is not a blade of grass on the lawn that stands above its fellows. There is not a dead bough on the two great elm trees. The hedge that divides it from the Murray place is just so. The shrubbery is very old, groups of lilacs and syringa and crepe myrtle, a little disheveled, branches warped and naked except at the end where they supported green boughs and blooms. No art or care could make them vigorous or symmetrical. They were kept as some very

poorly painted portraits of former Maddens were hung on the wall inside the house, merely to give the tone of time, a certain air of eminence and permanence.

At four o'clock precisely a little girl came out and seated herself in one of the gray Windsor chairs on the veranda. She did it with an air of precision as if she always came out at this hour and sat in that chair, and did what she was about to do. She wore a short white frock that stuck out stiffly above her naked knees as she hoisted her feet and hooked the heels of her sandals over the top rung on the chair. She was very small, her face was round and very fair, with china blue eyes and a prim mouth. Her hair was colorless, not yet golden. It was short but braided, turned up on either side and tied with smart little bows that stuck out behind her ears like blue butterflies. She sat in her chair like a flower planted in a pot sitting on a shelf, in the shade, not very hardy. She was knitting something, a muffler, no doubt for a soldier, and she was doing that with interest, to the exclusion of the whole world, as one performs a task.

A boy of nine years with stiff black hair and a narrow dark face lay, stomach downward, heels in the air, propped on his elbows upon a bench near the lilac bushes and over-looking the avenue—one of those little outlaws clad in white blouse

and breeches so often seen in the best families and the forward pews in churches and other proper places, a figure of enforced innocence, always biding his time with a sort of furtive attention to details. This youngster was apparently engaged in the obedience of studying his geography which lay open on the bench before him. He was in fact gazing with concentrated attention at a hose connected with the hydrant, which lay like a long black snake in the grass, very seductive and suggestive to the enterprising imagination of the young student. Presently he slipped from the bench, glanced slyly at the good little girl knitting on the veranda, seized the nozzle of the hose and disappeared in the lilac bushes that overhung the avenue. The instinct reducing high life to low comedy is often remarkably strong in boys of this age.

All this time the house was very quiet within, except for the gurgling, gleeful sounds a baby makes when it is being bathed. This was going on somewhere in the rear. Meanwhile a child, so young that only the cut of his clothes revealed his sex, sat on a rug outside the door of a front room upstairs. His legs were stretched far apart, his back braced firmly against the door, supported on either side by his fat palms spread upon the floor. He was staring inanely straight in front of him with an upward gaze, due to the leverage

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of his head against the door, which thrust his forehead out and his chin in. At intervals, as regular as if he had a desire in him that ticked like a clock, he beat his heels upon the floor and made incoherent demands of some one inside the room behind him. Then he lapsed into silence until the paroxysms returned when he repeated the performance.

This child was the only evidence of withdrawn providence in the house. From one end to the other it denoted the presence of a strictly feminine providence, orderly and beneficent, of a wife who performed every duty with scrupulous care, and of a mother who did her duty the same way. The little girl knitting on the veranda was the daughter of such a mother, the boy who had been on the bench, but who had now disappeared, was the son of such a mother. The infant kicking in his cart as the nurse propelled it through the back door was a scrupulous sort of an infant, weighing exactly what he should weigh at six months, clothed in talcum powder and fine linen, a human molusk of maternal care. Even the little vagabond plastered against her chamber door up stairs was delicately perfect in his appointments, as if he had just been laundered, starched, and ironed, and folded correctly against the door.

At this hour of the afternoon, Mrs. Pelham Madden was usually ready to go out, or she was

getting ready to go somewhere, or she was expecting guests for dinner, or she was not expecting guests and was being normally at home with her children waiting for her husband. In short, she was the kind of woman who lived up to and even beyond her obligations as the mother of four children, the wife of a rich and prominent man who was a difficult and temperamental person to boot, and she held a sort of regency in Sulgrave society with a correctness which left nothing to be desired except a certain animation and elasticity of spirit which she did not have, and so far had never counterfeited.

But on this day she was doing none of the usual things. She had not gone anywhere, and she was not ready to go. She was making a gift of herself to silence behind the closed door of her chamber. She sat beside her dressing table, but with her back to the mirror. She belonged to that class of women who have no interest in mirrors beyond the practical use of doing her hair and putting on her hat.

There really is no such class. When a comparatively young woman forsakes her mirror it is because some sacrificial sense of duty or misapprehension of her feminine uses has divorced her from the natural interest every woman feels in her own image. It is an impiety which she practices against herself. Mrs. Madden was in

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this period of her married life. She was the taste of her own stately beauty. A tall woman with a comfortable figure, very fair, naturally pale, cheeks still round and firm, large eyes serious. Brows delicately arched and much finer than her hair. She had quantities of the straight colorless hair which was brushed ruthlessly and worn at a disadvantage in a coil on the back of her head, as if so much was an affliction, not a glory. Her nose a perfect lady's nose, very correct, and her mouth that amounted to a gift, it was so soft and firmly turned. But she had rewritten an admirable feature, censored the soft line of her lips by the dutiful processes of her life and looked like the vow she had taken to all times. She was not, could not possibly be, haughty but she had achieved a certain austere pleasure as a religious fanatic puts on homely garments to mortify mortal pride, and all done unconsciously as so many women give up the glories of their dearer beauty. A queen's crown would have been hideously becoming to her, but no matter how skillful, could have made a woman's hat suitable for such a head. One in Sulgrave knew that Mrs. Pelham had a strangely frivolous taste in choosing hats. What they did not comprehend was that

such a woman without caricaturing her. Mrs. Madden herself did not know this, and always wore what was correct that season, poke, or toque, or laving leghorns. She had no sense at all about such things, which was unfortunate considering how much sense and sensibility Pelham Madden had along this line. He was emotionally subject to the charms of feminine adornment as a poet is to curling mists and spring skies. Therefore it had never ceased to be a matter of wonder and admiration among their friends that he had chosen so wisely, exactly the opposite kind of woman for his wife. The fact is that at the age of eighteen Mrs. Madden, then Mary Darah, was quite a different type. She resembled Leonardo da Vinci's famous portrait of a certain Florentine lady then far more than she resembled the good old Queen of England now. She had then the serene unconscious fascination of mystery rather than beauty. She was thirty-eight years old now, and she had been married ten of these years to Pelham Madden. She was the mother of four children and every thing else she ought to be, obvious, capable, dependable, but not mysterious. This was her trouble. No woman should seek perfection in the married relation. In the first place it reflects upon her husband. In the second place it defines her too accurately and leaves nothing to his imagination.

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Some time during the afternoon, Mrs. Madden would never be able to recall the hour, Thomas her third child, entered the room dragging by the sleeve his father's coat, much as one drags the skin of a slain animal. He held in the other hand a letter. He was willing to surrender the coat though he had meant to wear it, but not the letter. For some imitative, infantile reason he wished to have a letter of his own, to keep it as a treasure it.

Mrs. Madden, who was revising her toilet with reference to attending a meeting of the Red Cross Executive Committee, retrieved the letter and rebuked Thomas. This was the last she remembered for some time. She did not recall turning Thomas out and closing the door on him as if she saved him from a terrible contamination. And she was deaf to the lamentations he made from time to time in the hall. She was alone with the contamination. She held it in her hand, a small, square envelope, pure white, thick and faintly perfumed. It was not addressed, evidently delivered surreptitiously. The letter inside, however, was addressed to "Dear Pep." It referred in an interesting, intimate, and coquettish manner to an engagement the writer agreed to keep in Dear Pep's office after banking hours on this day in May, 1918. The object of the appointment was war work and imperative. There

was no signature, but the chirography was feminine, excessively feminine. The taller letters seemed to lilt on the page and kick up their skirts and show their nice little "t's" as if t's were the lady ankles of literature.

Now "Pep" was a sort of disgraceful title acquired by Pelham Madden in his young days when he was sowing his Solomon oats, before he became a husband and father, and vice-president of the bank, and so forth. Mrs. Madden had never called him by this name. She regarded it as unsavory, not to be mentioned. She supposed he had out-grown it. Now here it was disclosed like a recent portrait of him in another woman's possession.

The test of a woman's quality is not how well she loves her husband. Almost any kind of wife can do that. But it is how she conducts herself when she discovers that he is still "Pep" to some one else who is evidently and offensively of her own sex and kind.

If she has her cry out, then springs like a tearful phoenix from her own ashes to adorn herself and make herself charming you may know that she has either resolved to pay him off with a flirtation of her own, or that she is planning to compete with that other woman in the open market for her husband. And she will fail because in this case you concede too much to your adver-

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sary, an even chance. In any case you cannot it because what attracts a man to the woman never attracts him to his wife. Each occupies a totally different area in his consciousness. There is no common ground between them.

If on the other hand she paces the floor, her hair falls down in the very anguish of her grief if she pauses now and then, dry-eyed, the picture of tragedy, to consider this wreck of herself in the mirror, if she adds to the image by wringing her hands and whispering let the walls hear her, O, God! that I should ever be this, the mother of his children!" then you know that presently she will fling herself not on the bed but across it. She will dangle there by her heels and she will weep aloud, so loud that he is bound to hear her when he comes in and finds the door locked. She has made no plans for a scene between them, but she is working it out. And so soon as she is compelled to admit his crime, he do violence to the door, she will have done with him, not in words. She will by this time be past speech, ghostly pale, eyes closed, with a headache. But there will be the unspeakable evidence of his perfidy, the letter, the glove, whatever it is, in plain sight, probably on the table but where he cannot possibly miss it or even

Every woman's instinct under these circumstances

stances is to prove her sorrow by acting it. But it is better, far better not to do so. For a man can explain any kind of letter to his wife, not so that she will believe him, but so that she is compelled to seem to believe him. As for a handkerchief or a glove, there are a thousand ways to come innocently by such articles, usually regarded as sentimental but not necessarily so when picked up on the street, or in a taxi for example. And who can help receiving letters? They come through the mail. They are thrust upon him. Why should he be blamed, suspected, insulted by his own wife because some woman is a fool? Does she think for one moment that he would have left the damn thing in his pocket, where she lived, moved, and had her being, if he wished to conceal it, any thing, from her? Good Lord! Well, that point about the pocket is convincing. She is relieved. She is comforted. She only wanted to understand. She is sorry to have wounded him. It was very foolish. And now everything is all right.

But everything is not all right. She has not recovered him. She has lost some thing very important to keep, a part of his respect. He will love and cherish her in the future with a certain faint contempt. Every man concedes merely as a matrimonial joke that his wife has the inalienable right to search his pockets. But woe betide the

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one who finds there what was not meant for her to see and faces him with it. He divorces her, though she may live with him until death parts them.

Mrs. Madden was considering no such risk of her happiness. She had not made up her mind what she would do yet. She had one of those large cumbersome minds that moves slowly into action, but which stays there, never retreats, always advances, covering the situation thoroughly as it goes. She did know, however, what she would do with the letter, and presently she did it. She bent; lifted the coat from the floor at her feet, and slipped the letter into the pocket. Then she arose, passed through the door into her husband's room and hung it carefully adjusted on a hanger in the closet where he kept his clothes. She returned immediately to her own room and resumed thinking about what she was thinking about, seated as before beside the dressing table, this time facing it, but still indifferent to the mirror. She was studying a picture in a silver frame on the table. It was a photograph of Pelham Madden taken at the same time the one on the desk in his office was made of her, shortly after his first child was born. But it resembled him now far more than that photograph resembled her. It was in fact a franker, less concealing likeness of her present husband.

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If men knew how their wives sometimes regard these photographs they leave to keep them company, there would be fewer pictures of living husbands in the home. Mrs. Madden was studying this image of Pelham, coolly, intelligently, as if it were the map of a country that had broken peace with her and over which she would pass if it were the last thing she ever did. She was thinking about it as a duty, not a vengeance. Presently she glanced at herself in the mirror, merely to see that she was still good, hair combed straight back and neatly coiled, brow smooth, face calm. It all was so. Then she pulled open the drawer of her dressing table and thrust the picture under everything else, and went to the front window which overlooked the avenue, doubtless to watch for the return of her husband. During the whole of this time she had given no sign of deep emotion, such as women feel under similar circumstances. But now she sighed. She was no Cæsar, she dreaded the conflict before her. She wondered how long it would last. She wondered how she would feel and how Pelham would feel when it was over. For the moment she had forgotten her children, which she rarely did when she was in the house. She did not know that Tommy was asleep on the rug outside her door. She did not even notice that Pel was no longer on the bench beside the lilac bushes where

she had sent him to study his next day's lesson. But it is not given to any woman who has children to remain absorbed in her own deeper affairs for long at a time. Something always happens to recall her, usually with a shock, to her maternal vigilance.

It was half past five o'clock. People were beginning to return from the Club. She saw Mrs. Murray coming slowly down the avenue from the Red Cross meeting. She could see her head and shoulders framed in the black window casing of the car like the portrait of a vain and elegant old lady. The wreath of pink silk roses on her gray, round brimmed hat, showed dimly in the deepening shade. Her profile was splendid, not because she was handsome, but because she sat so perfectly erect, giving you only one side of her face as if that was all you were entitled to if you were on this side or that side of the street, meaning that she gave strict attention to whatever she was doing, not to you, whether it was presiding as chairman of an executive committee or driving her electric.

For the last half hour, as the cars began to fill the avenue again, the hose in the grass on the Madden lawn frequently moved furtively like a snake stiffening to strike, waiting only for the right victim. At this moment a horrible thing happened. Mrs. Murray's electric rolled majes-

tically past the lilac bushes, rolled and stopped, held up by a jet of water that could be heard hissing a block distant. Mrs. Murray went to pieces. She was not there except as a sort of revolving blur of pink and gray, literally sheathed in water. Then she appeared like a maniac at the window, full face, hat merely clinging to the side of her drenched head by the strength of one hat pin, arms waving frantically, speechless in the face of that ram rod of water that broke over her like a veil of pearls.

Mrs. Madden saw all this from her chamber window, astounded, lifted clear of her stronger, sadder self by the shock. The stream of water ceased as suddenly as it began. At the same instant she saw a little white figure 'bent double running from the lilacs into the shadow of the hedge toward the rear of the house. She recognized her son. And she went down to attend to him. You cannot have "one war at a time." They come in bunches. Here was her husband to be reclaimed from an insidious foreign influence. Here was Mrs. Murray, the titular deity of Sulgrave society, to be placated with apologies just at the moment when she needed all her deities. And here was her son, young Pel, to be disciplined and this was a sort of perpetual warfare that she carried on against the powers and principalities of darkness in that child. A horrible

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thought occurred to her as she descended the stairs. What if Pel was naturally incorrigible, another "Pep" in the making? Suppose it was bred in him to be brilliant, irresponsible, and dangerous like his father? It was an awful thing to become the mother of a man's children, like making yourself responsible for his faults and tendencies of which you were innocent. (All this while she was on her way to attend to Pel.) She met the nurse coming in with the baby. She felt of the baby's feet to discover if they were cold. She told the nurse to get Thomas who was asleep on the rug upstairs in the hall. She wanted to know where Elsie was. Elsie answered from the veranda, and came running into tell what had happened to Mrs. Murray and to confide her suspicions of Pel in a high shrill voice. She was told to hush and not to tell tales, which was her besetting sin and the only recreation the virtuous child had. Mrs. Madden passed out on the back porch. She stopped at the kitchen to warn the cook not to serve the roast rare because Mr. Madden would not touch meat prepared that way, also, dinner would probably be delayed. Mr. Madden had an important engagement down town and she did not know when he would come in. Then she went on again to attend to Pel. She knew where to find him. He always retired behind the currant bushes in the garden when sin

overtook him. He had the rudimentary Adam instinct for deep and concealing foilage at such times.

You observe that she was going on with her affairs as if nothing had or could interfere with the performance of her duties. It was a notable evidence of her quality and of the sense she had of her resources, all war expenses deducted.

CHAPTER IV

As Pelham Madden entered the front door the tall clock in the hall looked at him, snarled, and struck seven times. He glared at the clock, then glanced quickly to the right and left. Nobody in the parlor, and no one in the library. But he heard nursery sounds from above, shrill and rebellious yells from Tommy, softer whimperings from a disturbed infant.

He had something on his mind. He wanted to go upstairs, but he hated to ascend into that inferno. He was nervous. Suddenly the inferno ceased. He ascended, stepping noiselessly on the polished stairs. At the same moment Mrs. Madden issued from the nursery. She stood with her hand on the knob of the door, head slightly bent, eaves-dropping her young after the manner of mothers.

"I was just coming down," she whispered as he passed her on the way to his room, implying that she was just coming down to meet him.

He nodded and went on frowning. This was the furtive hour in his home when peace hung on a hair-trigger and was controlled by infants. Not for nine years had he been able to speak in the

ordinary human voice when he came in at the end of the day. He had to pussy-foot into the house like a robber. If he made a fuss changing for dinner, hummed a tune, dropped his shoes on the floor, Mrs. Madden appeared at once, thrust her noble head in through the door and admonished him.

“Be careful, Pelham, the baby is restless. He is just dropping off to sleep.” Or “she” is just dropping off, owing to which child happened to be the household tyrant at the time. Sometimes a man liked to step noisily and naturally into his house, put his feet down, shout upstairs or downstairs to somebody. Well, he never could do that. He was tired of this, this—repression. Why did not Mary have the children trained to sleep when it was time to sleep. Other mothers did. It was the way she pattered over them and humored them. His children were not neurotics! He had a mind to slam the door after him as he entered his room just to see what would happen.

He did it, jarring the whole house and causing the very windows to chatter their teeth in horror. Then he stood still with his back to it waiting. If anybody, wife, mother or the Angel of God, stuck a head in to warn him about making a noise in his own house, he would say a few things, and loud enough to be heard!

No head appeared, though the nursery became

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a bedlam, and he heard Mary go back in there bearing soothing words.

He switched on the lights and proceeded at once to settle that thing which was on his mind. He went at once to the closet, yanked the coat from its hanger, thrust his hand into the breast pocket and drew forth the letter. He knew of course it would be there. Mary had her faults, but meddling with his affairs was not one of them. Still he was relieved. One could not tell what might happen. He would take no more chances. He struck a match and held the blaze to the letter, carefully depositing the ashes behind the logs in the fireplace.

It was half past seven before he went back down stairs walking softly merely from force of habit.

Mrs. Madden was seated in a large arm chair beside the front window of the parlor. She looked like the full moon of a great lady. The folds of her pale blue gown languished about her as if they were attached to her by affection. Some thin white stuff, very stiff, stuck out around her bare shoulders like an inverted Elizabethan ruff. Her face, calm, ivory white, with the colorless hair smoothed back and coiled low on her neck showed above this singular adornment as the moon shows rimmed in mist on a clear night when the weather is about to change.

She was obviously engaged in teaching something out of a book to Elsie, who knelt beside her. It turned out to be the word "what" in her next day's lesson.

Madden was still in the querulous, domestic mood of the husband and father. There are times when a man longs to be just a man, and to be relieved of the intolerable honor of these limiting relationships. Doubtless kings and emperors feel the same way when they are surer of their thrones than they are of their pleasures.

He cast a sort of forkéd lightning glance at his wife. She might at least let up on the children in the evening, he thought. Why couldn't she be playing the piano, or doing something, anything restful and soothing. Always pegging away at the children as if she could not take her mind off them, not for a moment. It was mammalish, positively mammalish!

He strode across the room, seized the afternoon paper from the table, and flung himself into the chair beneath the reading light.

He was imitating the way he felt and acted at home after a particularly hard day at the bank, irritable and tired. And he was doing it very well Mary Madden thought as she lifted her eyes to admit him when he entered only to behold him recede in this fashion.

"Father," Elsie began at once, "Mrs. Murray

was passing our house this afternoon in her electric and Pel——”

“Hush, my dear,” Mrs. Madden interrupted. “You must not worry father now. Run and tell James to serve dinner.”

Elsie went obediently but with the suppressed expression of a small bomb that had not been allowed to explode.

Madden laid his paper aside. He supposed Mary was waiting for an opportunity to say, “You are late, my dear.” She always told him that as if it were an item of interesting news if he came in after six o’clock. And she always “my deared” him.

Well, he was in no mood to be accused of being late. Still let her fire away. He was prepared.

She did not fire. She remained stifflingly silent. He refused to glance in that direction, to see what she was doing, although he could hear the rustling of her garments.

He fidgeted like a man who feels a thorn in his side. He wished she’d begin and have done with it. He wanted to tell her why he was late. He had nothing to conceal. . . . Confound it, why didn’t James announce dinner then!

“This has been such a perfect day,” came his wife’s voice round and deep.

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“Too warm,” he returned after a perceptible pause. “I find spring weather enervating.”

“Yes, but so kind, especially toward evening, like an easy chair among the stars,” she said in a deeper, softer tone which implied that she had been sitting in that chair all day.

He flirted his head around and stared at her. She was merely gazing at him, not personally, too far off for that. He was astounded. Where did she get that flight of words? He could not recall ever having heard her use a poetic figure of speech before. And what did she mean by beginning with the weather, a day’s worth of May weather, such topics were for strangers who had nothing else in common to discuss. Besides why didn’t she mention his being late. She always asked him if he had been to the Club, if he had a good game of golf, who played, were many people out for tea, would there be a dance in the evening. Now she omitted that catechism of their common social life, and offered him the hem of a high day to kiss. He considered this a very suspicious circumstance. He wondered what she was driving at.

“Did you smell the lilacs as you came in? They are so fragrant, especially in the evening,” she said, turning her face toward the window.

“No. I’m too tired to smell!” he exclaimed irritably. “Worked like a slave all day over our

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Federal tax returns. Then I was detained at the office until half past six by this damn Red Cross business. Missed my golf."

Now she knew why he was late, truth too, he reflected, and looked at her to see how she stood toward this truth.

She was regarding him mildly. No look on a woman's face can be so accusing, under certain circumstances. He could not be sure, however, whether she was accusing him of the Red Cross or of her own cross. He realized that he had overdone the thing in his effort to establish himself upon firmer ground. He had been the Pied Piper of War Activities in Sulgrave. No man had performed his patriotic duties with more energy and enthusiasm. The fact that Sulgrave had gone over the top in every kind of drive from Liberty Bonds to Thrift Stamps and was in a fair way to double its Red Cross subscriptions was due largely to his efforts and splendid executive ability. Still, in a moment of exhaustion a man might use an expletive to express his feelings, not his convictions.

Meanwhile, his wife's mild gaze had another significance altogether. She was thinking what a pity it was that he had to lie, that while she had endeavored not to tempt him with any question he had felt obliged to prevaricate. She supposed that when a man committed a dishonorable act

the thing itself produced a lie which he was compelled to speak. She hoped this state of affairs would not last long, but she reflected that it was better to allow her husband to perjure himself than permit him to see himself degraded in her eyes. Very wise woman. For a man can bear any punishment and keep his front except that of being humiliated in the estimation of his wife, no matter if she is the sorriest little creature who would not dare to reproach him. She is that part of his regard for himself, you understand, which must not be destroyed.

“By the way, what about dinner, or have we already dined?” Madden demanded, suddenly interrupting this highly creditable train of thought.

“We are a little late to-night,” she admitted apologetically.

“Dinner is served, ma’am,” James announced from the door.

They went in. Elsie seated herself hurriedly between her parents, opposite the vacant chair on the other side. She glanced appraisingly at her mother from time to time. She had something to tell and she wanted to tell it. But she had been taught not to speak when her elders were talking. They were saying very little to each other this evening. But she felt instinctively that a lively, silent conversation was going on between them, merely punctuated by an exchange of remarks

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spoken aloud at regular intervals. Children are very psychic about their parents. These are the first texts they study, and they know them by heart long before they do the Lord's Prayer.

Finally, just before dessert was served this indefatigable child had her opportunity. Mrs. Madden was telling her husband that she had not been able to get to the Executive Meeting of the Red Cross Committee that afternoon because she had been detained at the last minute.

"And, father," Elsie exploded, "when Mrs. Murray was coming back from the meeting by our house in her electric, Pel——"

"That will do, Elsie, you may go upstairs to bed at once," her mother commanded sternly.

She slid from her chair and moved sadly crest-fallen through the door and climbed the stairs. The thing was still in her, what Pel had done. And she wanted to tell it. Pel was a bad boy. What was the use of being a good girl if she could not shine in contrast. She was too young to think all this, but not too young to feel the injustice.

"Where is Pel, Mary?" demanded Madden with a sudden flare of interest. He had been too absorbed in the genuflections of his own thoughts to notice the absence of his son until this minute.

"Pel is being punished," she answered briefly.

"I wish you could manage to have the children

serve their sentences for misdemeanor during the day when I am not around! A man does not like to come home and find one of them in the stocks. It is depressing," he complained.

"Yes, I know," she admitted, "but it is so difficult to punish a child before he does his mischief. If I only knew what Pel would do next I could punish him for it between three and four o'clock in the afternoon and have it over with before you come home. But I never do know, until he does it, you see."

Madden shot a glance at her. Then he folded his napkin, leaned back and studied her. Had she meant to be sarcastic, or was she speaking literally? That was what he wanted to know. At times she could be tediously literal. If he had been in a position to express an unbiased opinion he would have said that Mary was totally lacking in imagination. And never before had he remotely suspected her of sarcasm. Peevish, she could be, of course. She was a woman. And she certainly was dull in a grave and dignified way. But he had always regarded her as safely devoid of wit. Now this was the second time to-night that she had surprised him, recalling that luminous remark she had made about the declining day occupying an easy chair among the stars. Well, he wagered himself whimsically, she could not do it three times hand running!

"What has Pel done now?" he asked after they returned to the parlor.

She told him. Her description of Mrs. Murray's frantic struggles, imprisoned in her car and deluged with that stream of water directed by Pel, was graphic. She was barely able to find words strong enough to convey the facts.

"Any news from the victim?" he asked, his face arched with a callous grin.

"I called over the phone at six o'clock, after I had attended to Pel. The maid answered. Mrs. Murray was in bed. The doctor was with her. She was in a very bad state, the maid said."

"She would be," he snickered, "but it served her right. She needs a ducking."

"I hope you do not approve of Pel's conduct," she objected.

"Oh, no, I don't approve, but I envy him his courage. Used to have the same kind myself when I was a youngster."

She looked at him, his back, as he paced the parlor floor, smoking his cigar, meaning that she thought so. Certainly Pel did not get such tendencies from her side of the house.

He came back, knocked the ashes from his cigar, and defended himself against that charge she had just made to his back.

"If a boy is not a real boy when he is a boy, with some spirit and mischief in him, he will

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never be a man when he is a man with any initiative and force," he said impressively.

She allowed this to go unchallenged. They were getting on dangerous grounds. They always did when it was a question of managing the children. And she wished to keep off dangerous ground to-night.

"As for Mrs. Murray, she is always insufferable," he went on irritably. "And since she had charge of the Red Cross work here she behaves as if she were the head of the War Department!"

She let that go too. She forbore to remind him of how frequently he had expressed admiration for the business-like manner in which Mrs. Murray conducted the Red Cross Chapter in Sulgrave. She understood that his prejudices were of recent origin, probably dating from the engagement he had that afternoon connected with the Red Cross business.

A woman who is in the right and knows it can afford to be amiable, calm, patient, and at the same time the most exasperating person on earth. Mary Madden was now in this irreproachable and provoking relation to her husband. She had not placed herself there. She had been placed by Pelham. And she was not suffering to amount to anything.

Pelham was doing the suffering, poor man. She had seen him exhibit exactly the same symp-

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ing all the annoying and futile pangs of guilt. He was saying to himself, that he really wished a man could make a confidant of his wife. He had never tried it, because he knew it could not be done. And he was absolutely correct in this conclusion. He went on recalling the—er—interview he had had with Ellen Skipwith. They had discussed the Red Cross, positively that was the theme of their conversation! He had been deeply impressed by her sincerity, by her desire to devote herself almost with religious fervor to the work, any service for her country. She was willing to make *any* sacrifice, she told him with tears in her eyes; he noticed that, the tears, most unusual earnestness in a woman who had lived the useless, frivolous existence which society people of her type lived. It was wonderful what this war was doing to reclaim such women. And the antagonism, lack of confidence they met when they wanted to be of service, was, well it was abominable. He was moved to indignation by Mrs. Skipwith's account of the way Mrs. Murray treated her, always giving her the hardest things to do, making a slave of her, but never showing the least appreciation. Never a word of commendation. Actually treating her as if—as if—Mrs. Skipwith had a sort of anguished delicacy in finishing the sentence, he remembered. “—as if I did not belong there. She merely tolerates

me. And I would not endure it for a moment, if it were not for my country," she had finally concluded with a burst of emotion. Then she told him how wonderfully successful she had been getting subscriptions. Two thousand dollars more than any other woman in the Chapter. This had been the tenor of their conversation. If he could only repeat the whole thing to Mary, he felt sure she would stand by Mrs. Skipwith, appreciate her. He did not know how Mary thought of her. He had never heard her mention Ellen Skipwith. They moved in different arcs of the same social circle. But it was out of the question, talking it over with Mary. She would be sure to look at him in that awful silence which she employed against him, the moment he told her he had been closeted with Ellen Skipwith in his office after banking hours this afternoon for—quite a while. Of course, he would not begin it that way, but she would get it out of him by a series of questions. "When did Mrs. Skipwith call?" "When did she leave?" Well, he did not know when she left, dammit! But it was seven o'clock when he reached home. That alone would be enough. His wife would miss the real point at issue, though he talked his head off trying to make her understand the woman's devotion to patriotic service, and the raw deal she was getting from the Murray cat. Mary would never take her eye off the

clock that admitted Mrs. Skipwith to his office at say a quarter past five and kept her there until late. Not that his wife had ever shown any evidences of jealousy. But of course she was endowed with it. They all were. It was an axiom of feminine nature. Therefore, here he was, feeling like a culprit in his own house, bottled up, when nothing on earth would afford him such ease as to tell Mary all about it, well, not all, but all that was said, all that actually happened.

He flung himself into a chair with a groan. She did not lift her eyes although he had groaned. She paid no more attention to him than if a cat had mewed. He felt strangely indignant. —If the thoughts two married people have about each other in the same silent room could suddenly become voices and visible, there would be far less rush of business on the last Day when we shall know as we are known. The whole thing would take place then and there, including judgments and sentences which would blanch the cheeks of the palest angels.

He leaned forward in his chair, with the expression of a man who is bound hand and foot and strains at his bonds, and regarded his wife, that placid moon of a woman. Good Lord, why had he done this thing. What he meant was, why had he married the moon of all planets. Why had he married any woman? All men might be born

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free and equal, but hanged if a single one of them ever was after he had a wife! He resented this bondage of mind and spirit, not his duties as a husband and father. Well, he would not endure it. He would practice doing what he had a right to do without feeling obliged to explain to Mary everything personal he did. He would *practice* that, as he practiced with Indian clubs before breakfast in the morning. And he would begin right now.

"Mary," he exploded fairly leaping from his chair, "I am going out. I do not know when I shall be back."

It was with an effort that he refrained from explaining why and where he was going, that is, giving some plausible explanation.

"Very well," she said, "be sure you take your latch key then,"—as mild as that!

He had no reason for going out except to quiet himself, to escape from a stifling consciousness. He walked. That was all. He walked and walked. He passed the Skipwith residence several times. At eleven o'clock it was dark. But when he returned along the avenue some time after twelve he saw a light in one of the chambers up stairs. Merely the opalescent glow of light through the curtain. This comforted him. Some one else was awake, there was another who could not sleep. When there is no one listening at the

door of our heart, many a man or woman of us indulges in thoughts far too young and foolish for our years. Madden experienced a delicious sensation of sadness and resignation as he came up on his own lawn. He noticed the perfume of the lilacs. He entered the house, closed the door quietly and went up stairs, walking softly in kindness to his sleeping family. He felt a great deal better, quieter.

CHAPTER V

SOLOMON was a very wise man in his day, said to have been the wisest, but his wisdom was depressing, and overshadowed by the gray and golden ruins of a tremendous egotism. This was not due to his experiences as a monarch in a somewhat ruffled and chaotic period of the world's history, but to the fact that he had so many wives and acquired too much knowledge through these feminine multiples of himself. Nothing in life so profoundly affects the masculine point of view as the "woman thou gavest me" or the one he took. She is the perpetual adjective of his mind, tending to the passive and contemplative. He cannot so much as look at the stars with her beside him without taking the stars out of commission as durable, productive planets and making them romantic figures of speech. And no one knows why, but the more women a man knows the more his egotism expresses itself in pessimistic forms of philosophy. Solomon lived and died in the hopeless minority among these inferior beings, hence those famous epigrams of the Scriptures known as Proverbs, every one a warning, and those em-

bittered sermons on the vanity of all things, known as Ecclesiastes. It was Solomon throwing dust over his head.

But almost any man these days with only one wife to his name may surpass Solomon in the sadder forms of wisdom without making so much fuss about it, because women, especially the woman you marry, are far more occult, devious, dangerous, and incredible than the simple females of Solomon's time.

Barrie Skipwith was thinking about that, not about Solomon of course, but about something furtive in femininity which was always there like a rodent, a capacity every woman had for whisking out of sight while she apparently remained present, smoothing your brow or amiably engaged in carrying on the conversation with you from which she had just escaped, sunk herself, you understand, without leaving a trace behind. He had known Ellen to do that a thousand times. The rodent was very highly developed in Ellen. For five years he had been waiting in his husband's apprehensions before this secret place of exit through which she so often eluded him. He knew where it was, oh, yes, but he never could locate Ellen when she was there or not there.

He was waiting now as usual, striding up and down the library in his house. He had come home an hour earlier than he expected to come for

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various reasons, that had arisen naturally out of the situation. It was still this day in May when love was "carrying on" in the open, and when some condition had reduced the matrimonial atmosphere of several married couples in Sulgrave to a state of very low visibility. Skipwith did not know this. He thought that he was the only befogged scout of love and honor in the whole place. He did not suspect that Pelham Madden would become no more than the nervous wreck of himself before nine o'clock on this same evening, due entirely to the same adverse influence. He could not possibly know that Mrs. Pelham Madden was a changed woman. Nothing, he would have said, could change Mary Madden from what she was and always had been. He did not know that Nicholson whom he had just left seated on the terrace at the Club with his wife was explaining something to that lady which she said could not possibly be explained, nor excused. And of course he did not know that old John Murray was at this moment seated at the bedside of his wife who was having hard rigors, not from the ducking she had suffered an hour before, but because she also refused to accept Murray's explanation of the same thing. She was telling him that it was an outrage, and not to be endured, and that she would *not* stand for it, even if she had to get out of bed before she was able to move

hand or foot to attend to this thing and stop it, which she certainly would do, if she took cold and died from exposure.

All this Skipwith did not know, because the property man who arranges the scenes in the drama we actually live never takes time to let any of the characters know the parts the other stars are playing in the cast. So, without having the least comprehension of the rather villainous part he himself was to play presently, because certain influences can drive the best of men to perform mean actions, he was walking back and forth in his library making a sort of indignant grass widower of himself as he reviewed Ellen's case. He was taking his time about it, going over the whole damn thing from beginning to end, not as a woman reviews the disillusionments of her married life, with a grieving martyr's spirit, but as a man does it, reasoning from cause to effect, and always in his own favor. He had expected to get down seriously to the practice of his profession after his marriage. And he had not done that. He was always in the state of a man who must settle something vitally important to his personal peace and happiness before he could give his attention to anything else. And this something was Ellen. He could never steady himself there. He was tipsy in his married relation, fumbling in the effort to discover Ellen.

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She was elusive. What provoked him was that this was the reason he had married her. He must have done it, he thought, to place her for reference where he could be sure of her as a man is sure of his wife. And he had never enjoyed this security. He could not even love her in any peace of mind. She was his wife, and he did not question that she was, literally speaking, a good woman, but she was not a good wife. He was continually thinking of her as figuring delicately and unscrupulously in the romantic calculations of other men. He wondered if this was because she had never had a child. He thought probably it was the children that married a woman after all to her husband. There were the Maddens, for example. He did not suppose Pelham Madden ever worried about Mrs. Madden, no matter where she was. He knew her. She was the mother of his children, and a good one. Pelham had such peace of mind that he might be called a bachelor by marriage. He could give his whole time to his business. This no doubt was the explanation of his success in the bank, the reason why he had risen to such prominence and influence as a citizen. His affairs at home were settled and Mary Madden was always sitting comfortably on the lid keeping things settled. Not that he himself could ever have married a woman of Mary Madden's type. She was too, er—obvi-

ous. He supposed the rodent was entirely lacking in Pelham's wife. And he was right about that. The elusive in a woman is not always furtive.

He went back to Ellen in his thoughts. No matter what engaged his attention for the moment he always ended by beginning to think of Ellen again. He knew that she was a coquette, she was that everywhere and at all times as if nature had made her for nothing else. Recently she had become absorbed in patriotic service, going places and doing things that women never risked before. But he could not complain, since everybody was doing things they had never done before. Still, he had reason to believe that Ellen was doing business as usual under this new license she had taken out as the priestess of patriotism.

He suspected her of putting something over on him again this afternoon. She was to have met him at the Club before five o'clock. She did not meet him. She had the happiest way of not keeping engagements and of giving the best possible reasons for not doing so. She was never at a loss for an excuse or explanation. The result was that he frequently found himself in an embarrassing situation, as on this afternoon when they were to have had tea with the Nicholsons at the Club. It was all very well for a woman to

say she did not know where her husband was. Husbands were often detained by business. Everybody accepted that fact, and it was not supposed to reflect upon the wife who came bearing this excuse. But it was abominable for him to come sneaking in to the Nicholson's table and have to tell his hostess that he did not know where his wife was. That was information every husband was supposed to keep on the tip of his tongue.

When he came in at six o'clock the maid told him Mrs. Skipwith had not yet returned from the Red Cross meeting.

Well, he knew something about that Red Cross meeting. It was over before five o'clock. He had just broken all speed limits getting Murray back to town, because he had received a message saying that Mrs. Murray had a serious accident on her way home from this meeting.

What Skipwith wanted to know was where was Ellen. He wanted to know it from force of habit. She was not at that meeting, and she was not at the Club. And she was not at home. And it was not the hour when ladies paid visits on the avenue.

He was very angry in a dull way. But he had been angry so often without acting up to it that rage had become a sort of impotence. He asked himself bitterly why that was. Why had he never

put his foot down and made Ellen toe the mark. He supposed he could do it if he made up his mind to do it. Many a man thinks that until he tries it. But nothing on this earth is so elusive as a married woman who has escaped from the marital consciousness.

Skipwith began to fumble with this idea of discipline. He felt a lively sympathy with the ruffian man who chastises an undutiful wife. It was probably the only way to manage them. He wondered what the effect would be if when Ellen came in, as she would do presently, he should seize her without a word, and, and—punish her as she deserved! He stood still in the middle of the room, jaws set, hands tingling at the thought. He looked about instinctively for the chastening rod with which to do this deed. There was nothing in sight that could possibly be used for such purpose except a large peafowl fan with a long white staff for a handle, which flamed against the wall. He despised the thing. It was out of place here. He was tempted to snatch it down. He was enjoying a furious license in thinking what he might do with Ellen when she came in. There is a lot of combustible matter in every married relation, but usually it is material used in target practice only.

This kind and gentle man went on with his orgie of being a purely imaginary brutal husband.

He could see Ellen's amazement when he seized her—disheveled, terrified, trembling beneath his wrath, the little rodent soul of her in the open for once running this way and that for shelter. And there would be no such shelter, because his patience which had furnished that would be gone.

By this time he was beginning to feel very dangerous. He only hoped he would be able to control himself.

The maid came in to draw the shades and turn on the lights. He sent her out on strictly scriptural grounds. His deeds, potentially, were already evil.

CHAPTER VI

THE door bell rang.

"Has Mr. Skipwith come in?" he heard Ellen ask.

"Oh, yes, madam, quite some time ago," the maid answered.

"Where is he, upstairs?" she demanded.

"No, madam, he is in the library," the maid said, withdrawing discreetly.

Mrs. Skipwith paused a moment in the hall, regarding the open door of this darkness which was the library. This darkness was a bad sign, she thought.

"Barrie dear," she called.

No answer. That was another bad sign. Silence and darkness were the garments her husband wore when he sulked.

She approached the door, felt quickly and deftly for the button in the wall inside and turned on the light.

She beheld Skipwith apparently just flung by some violent emotion upon one of the larger chairs. He rested on the small of his back, legs sprawled, arms tightly folded. He was controlling himself, you understand. He had not

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changed for dinner, and he had not shaved. The lower part of his face was thunderous with the shadows of this approaching beard. His eyes were lowered, meaning that he did not care where his gaze rested so it did not fall like a sword upon the other person present. He still entertained the idea that the very sight of Ellen might provoke him to violence. Many a man fears himself when his wife knows that he is harmless.

Ellen, standing upon the threshold, very slim, very pretty, head tilted a little to one side, lips repressing a smile, took in these details, understood, and feared not.

“Barrie dear, are you drunk?” she asked with a humorous affectation of anxiety because Skip-with never was drunk.

He remained grimly silent. But Ellen noticed that he began to work one foot back and forth, wagging it on the heel with the sole of his shoe turned to her. This was a nervous habit he had when he was speechlessly angry.

“He is talking with his foot again!” she murmured, advancing to contemplate this wonder.

“Poor dear, I believe he is *swearing* with his foot!” she exclaimed, drawing back.

The foot became silent.

Ellen sighed and changed her tactics.

“I was so sorry not to get out for tea with the Nicholsons, but there was so much to do I just

could not manage it," she said, moving back and flattening herself against the wall beneath the fan, with her hands behind her.

"And I tried so hard to get home before you came in," she went on plaintively, "but I was detained by my Red Cross work. There is so much to do and discuss. Is it very late?"

Let her look at the clock!

"What are you staring at, dear?" she asked, seeing his gaze fixed upon something above her. Then she twisted her neck, flattened the brim of her hat against the wall in the effort to look above herself.

"Oh, the peafowl fan!" she exclaimed as if she was so glad to find out something she could do for him.

She faced about, tiptoed, drew the long white staff from the bracket. Then she advanced, stood at a sad slave's distance from him and moved it gently over him.

For one instant he was petrified at such audacity, clairvoyance and impudence. She was practicing her arts as usual. He was tired of that. But he was only able to make the same known to her by a feeble movement of displeasure.

"Oh, very well, then, we will not fan nor be fanned," she laughed. "We will have dinner. When we have dined we shall feel much better and kinder to our wife."

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She went upstairs to remove her hat, to freshen up a bit, and to look at herself in the mirror. Nothing else gave her so much fortitude to endure the present and confidence with which to face the future as a brief review of her image in the glass. This was not vanity. It was a way she had of counting her assets.

She foresaw a bad evening with Barrie. He had always been dull, but lately he was becoming crabbed. She supposed it was the ferocity of old age coming on. Old men were notoriously perverse. Still, she was cheerful, like a woman who had a secret source of happiness.

At the table she continued to be more amiable than a good wife ever is when she faces a deliberately disagreeable husband. Your good wife is quick to flare because she knows she has the right to resent whatever she chooses to resent. Ellen was one of those women who was obliged to be amiable and she made a grace of it that reflected on Skipwith's ill temper.

He had relinquished the idea of taking severe methods. But probably for the first time in his married life he was bent upon reforming the character of his wife. He was revolving a plan slowly and tediously, a plan admirable to the point of being diabolical, if only he could have the patience to bring it to pass.

Meanwhile, he listened with singular attention

to Ellen's account of her patriotic activities. She did not understand the motionless gaze with which he covered her across the table, but she was encouraged. She had not attended the Red Cross meeting that afternoon, but she knew in a general way what must have occurred. So she talked about that. Had he ever noticed that disagreeable women are so often put at the head of things? She referred to Mrs. Murray, the Regent of the Sulgrave Society for War Emergency Service.

"No other woman at the head of patriotic work in this state calls herself a Regent. They are chairman. But she must enhance herself with that scepter title," she exclaimed indignantly.

"And she is a perfect tyrant. She has worked me nearly to death this spring, without a word of appreciation. Don't you think I have worked hard?" she insisted as if she wanted to commit him to some kind of approval.

He supposed she had, he conceded without warmth.

"Mrs. Murray has her favorites too," she went on. "Mary Madden, for example, is our Prime Minister. Never does anything, but is always on hand. And the old Murray cat refers everything to her, wants her advice, when she knows nothing at all about the work."

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Skipwith listened, regarding her with an urgent gaze, as much as to say, "Go on, you have not gone far enough yet!"

"That woman affects me like a short circuit. She is positively droll she is so stupid," she said, leaning back and pretending to be overcome. "I wonder why Pelham Madden ever married her."

"I used to wonder too, but not now," he answered quietly.

"Well, why did he?"

"She is good."

"Oh, *no*, dear!" she exclaimed, laughing. "A man never marries a woman because she is good. Sometimes that is the reason he does not marry her, because she is just good and nothing else."

"Now, I am good," she went on, regarding him mischievously, "but that is not the reason you married me. You married me because I have red hair, and blue eyes, and a nice nose, and, well, because I am pretty and have ways that are becoming to me and pleasing to you."

"Go on about Mrs. Murray," he said without affirming nor denying these compliments.

"Well what about her?" She would have been glad to forget Mrs. Murray. Still she must take any bait he offered.

"You saw her this afternoon?" he suggested.

"Oh, yes," she answered after the briefest hesitation, "very important meeting. As I told you

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she kept us until, well you know how late I came in."

She did not notice then that this reply terminated his interest in her gossip, but later when they returned to the library she was aware of something sinister in his silence. She became uneasy. She had probably gone too far in discussing that meeting which she had not attended. She was on a committee to get money for a hospital fund, and she had an engagement with Pelham Madden to secure what she could from him for this purpose. She did not mention that because Barrie was foolish about some things. He did not seem to realize she had more freedom from conventions now, must have it, if they accomplished the work the Government demanded of them in this crisis.

Well, if he would not talk why didn't he read, she wondered irritably, seeing Skipwith sitting hunched up in his chair, knees crossed, working his foot slowly back and forth. She could *not* bear that senseless, rhythmic motion of his foot. If it did not stop she would scream!

"Barrie," she exclaimed in sudden desperation, "if you were going to say anything—what would you say?"

"Nothing—yet," he answered after a pause.

She flung herself back in the chair with a gesture of peevish despair.

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His foot ceased to move. She looked at him, held her breath. He must be going to speak with his mouth. He was! She felt his gaze swing slowly in her direction.

"You are tremendously interested in all this war service, aren't you?"

He astonished her with this question after half an hour's stern silence.

"Yes," she answered, "of course I am. Everybody ought to be. But why do you ask?"

"But with you it amounts to a passion," he went on thoughtfully.

"It does almost, I think," she answered eagerly. "You see it gives me something important to do. I am so glad you understand, Barrie!"

"I am beginning to understand," he returned, and then added slowly, "I am more and more awakened to the emergency myself."

"I am so glad, dear! Every man and every woman must do all they can!" she said earnestly.

"Yes," he agreed with a cold stare that did not belong to patriotism, "I have a plan under consideration, involves some radical changes in our way of living. But it is time to change that."

Later she recalled this ominous speech and understood the hidden significance, but at the moment it made no particular impression because Barrie had never been an ominous husband, only a difficult one. And she was concerned chiefly to

avoid another silence when he failed to pursue the subject.

"Did you have a good game of golf this afternoon?" she asked, trying to start something.

"We didn't play," he answered briefly.

"Why?"

"Well, we were to have had a foursome, but Madden was detained at the bank by an important engagement. We got Murray to take his place. But we had hardly started before he was called back to town by that accident.

"What accident?" she asked quickly.

"To his wife. I don't know the nature of it. Murray didn't when I brought him in, only that she was not seriously injured. She ran into something with her car I imagine. It happened sometime after five o'clock as she was returning from your Red Cross meeting," he concluded without looking at her.

She was horrified. He had allowed her to talk, to discuss this meeting, to incriminate herself when he had known from the first word she uttered that she was not there! Would he ask her where she was? If only she had not already given such an elaborate account of that she would have risked the truth now.

She waited. She would have preferred to face the Maker at this moment than this awfully silent man. Because a woman's Maker is bound

to remember of what irridescent dust she is made and be lenient accordingly, but a husband has no such breadth to his judgment.

“Barrie,” she said timidly after what seemed a very long time, “my head aches. I think I shall go to bed if you don’t mind.”

He permitted her to go without a word or look.

The best thing she could do under these circumstances was to get some sleep she thought. She was determined not to be awake when he came up lest he should reconsider and make a scene.

She managed that. She really did not hear him come up.

So the light that soothed Pelham Madden as he passed was in Skipwith’s room, not Ellen’s. When you are looking for oracles in Madden’s mood it is possible to make a very ridiculous mistake and be tenderly preserved from it by your own ignorance.

There remained this end-of-the-play hour which belonged to the day’s drama of married life in Sulgrave, where an explanatory footnote at the bottom of the page in a difficult text belongs. Usually it is something taken from an older book, printed in finer type and frequently overlooked by the casual reader.

Two blocks distant down a side street opening into the avenue there was an old fashioned resi-

dence, one of those houses that has retired and is now living on its income, with coils of vines swinging from the trellaces and a lion's head knocker on the glistening white front door.

This was the home of Mrs. Marguerite Darah, mother of Mrs. Pelham Madden and more particularly dowager mother-in-law of Pelham Madden. Ten years before this time she had received "that man" (which was the alien name he bore in her secret thoughts) into her family with a drawn sword, and without a word of warning to him that her sword was drawn, and that she would remain on guard so long as she lived if he did not change. All this in the face of the facts that he was the most eligible man in Sulgrave and very engaging.

The explanation of her antagonism was not due to his social gifts, she was talented the same way herself, but it was on account of Mary. Mary lacked the vibrant quality of her sex. How could she be safe and happy with a husband who was in Mrs. Darah's opinion only too vibrant? It was like marrying a man years younger than she was. Pelham Madden was one of those men who could and would skip any number of his years to feel what he wanted to feel and he would therefore remain younger than his wife even if he really was older. She was a psychologist in her strictly feminine way and a very

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shrewd one. Her distrust of him was you may say universal. He had managed, by a series of hops, skips and jumps in the markets, to invest certain moneys she had always kept in his bank so well that her income was doubled. She accepted the income and fixed her eyes suspiciously on the method by which he had accomplished this financial feat. Then, she tied up her fortune so that he could never risk it again in this way. After that she appeared at the bank occasionally and usually at the most inopportune times to make sure that this fortune was still safe, invested, and beyond his reach. She conducted these investigations with a politeness and thoroughness that enraged Madden and amused him at the same time.

This was one of the days she had set aside for overhauling her affairs at the bank. As a matter of fact her plans were unaccountably upset and she was not seen there until the following October when everything else in Sulgrave was settled.

She was seated in her room at twelve o'clock on this night. She had made her bed time toilette as usual. She wore a flowered lavender silk kimono over her night dress, and she looked like a doll who has actually lived and has had the very remarkable experience of growing old like

a human. Her cheeks were still round and full beneath the withered skin. Her eyes were fiercely black beneath the wrinkled lids. The snow white hair on her head was fussed up and piled high as if she retained the sense of charm and prettiness not as a fact but as a principle.

From time to time she whisked out of the chair and moved about the room, not pacing up and down in the methodical manner of people who take this leg form of metaphysical exercise to soothe their thoughts, but distractedly, as a little old hen flutters about when there is a hawk in the sky overhead. She went to the north window which commanded a sort of private, rear view of the Skipwith residence. Then she saw a man walking in the moonlight along the avenue, too distant for her to recognize him, but she reckoned she knew who carried his head like that, and pranced like that! She went back and considered the phone. She was very much tempted to speak to somebody over that phone!

Then she sighed and went back to her chair, thinking of the many temptations she had resisted about "that man," when it came to disturbing Mary's sense of security and happiness.

Every time she came back and sat down she fixed her snapping black eyes on a portrait that hung above the mantel. It was the likeness of a

large blonde man with a long face, pendent cheeks, receding chin, high forehead, and enormous blue eyes. The resemblance between Mary Darah Madden and this old gentleman was unmistakable. This was in fact Judge George Darah. But whenever Mrs. Darah was particularly disturbed about her daughter's happiness she would sit before this portrait and snap her eyes at it. It was a way she had of quarreling with her husband long since deceased. What she meant was that if Mary had been less, much less like her father and more, even a little more like her, she would know how to manage "that man."

"If a wife does not stir her husband up occasionally and unsettle his confidence some other woman will do it and reap the benefit!" she concluded, speaking aloud, having now left her husband in peace to sit in his portrait with that long blue stare.

Then she caught sight of her own image in the mirror and saw that she had not done the last things to herself. She turned at once to the dressing table and began to do them. She took off a long white braid and brushed it carefully. Then she removed two frothy little white curls, delicately attached by art above her temples, laid them carefully on the pin cushion, and unwound her own thin white locks. These she

twisted with curlers, making a double row of horns on top of her head. And still she looked like a little old doll, not homely but ridiculously pretty, absorbed, prepared for the next day of herself.

CHAPTER VII

MRS. MURRAY was worried. She had enough to worry her. She had recovered from the priestly offices of young Pel Madden. She had accepted Mrs. Madden's apology, and the explanation that Pel had been going to sprinkle the street when the hose became unmanageable just as she was passing in her electric. She did not really believe this, because she had observed that whenever this atrocious child was about to be convicted of his mischief he was always able to offer plausible evidence of his innocence. But she was still suffering from outraged dignity. She would rather have been half drowned by the bursting of a reservoir than to have been the victim of a small boy's prank. Nothing could be more diminishing to a woman who had footed it with a tyrant's tread for years through the social life of the town. The king who slipped on a banana peel before the populace was not likely to be greeted with cheers of "Long live the King!" but with laughter, discreetly suppressed, but humiliating mirth just the same. This was the way she felt about it, and she remained in proud seclusion until the wave of mirth at her expense had sub-

sided. Prominent people are often very sensitive.

As Regent of the Sulgrave Society for War Service she conducted the various activities of the organization from her residence over the phone. No, she was not able to see any one, not even on the most pressing business. She endeavored to compose herself with the reflection that there was nothing really pressing on hand. She could trust Mrs. Madden to conduct the Red Cross work. Mary was anxious to do anything she could to atone for Pel's sin. There was nothing else going forward but the collection for a small fund which the Society had volunteered to contribute to the base hospital in Atlanta for delicacies for wounded soldiers who were coming home defeated for life in the victorious advance of the Allies against the armies of the enemy. She had appointed a committee of five to canvass for this fund, one in each ward of the town. It would be some time before they could finish this canvass. It would be for small amounts and much more tedious to get than if they were out on a big drive.

Then suddenly she discovered that very pressing business was on hand, a business that involved the peace and happiness of half a dozen prominent married women connected with the Sulgrave Society for War Service. Executive

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inclemency must be administered at once, and she was the one to do it. Why was it, she asked herself impatiently, that women never, never could engage in any kind of public service without getting their private domestic relations involved. This was not the case with men. They could conduct a political campaign or a revolution without clawing one another about their sacred home ties. She did not exclude even herself in this question. She was one of the married women involved. She had not spoken to John Murray for days except to answer "Yes" or "No" and to say "Thank you"; which she did out of respect for herself, not her husband, who was passing through one of those periods of being a worm in the dust at her feet.

She had her first suspicions on the night of her accident. But at that time they were confided entirely to Mr. Murray.

She was lying low in her bed, wrapped in a blanket with a silk cover-lid over that. Her head shrouded in a pink woolen fascinator, which was far from fascinating, but soothing to her neuralgia. She was beginning to feel warmer and calmer, when Mr. Murray frisked in from dinner, observed that she was relaxed and comfortable, drew his chair close beside her bed, and regarded her with a smile. It was the explosive, beneficent grin of an old Santa Claus who had

white-cat whisker mustaches, and a goatee and who wore evening clothes.

"I have a surprise for you, my dear," he said.

It shone all over his round apple red face, the desire to distract his Flora's thoughts from the humiliating experience she had had of being ducked in the public street. He was a good husband, not very dependable, but as trustworthy as any frisky little man with plenty of money ever is.

"What is it?" she asked feebly.

"Well, it is something I did to-day for you. I expect it will raise your spirits like a cocktail," he went on by way of stimulating expectations.

She opened her eyes and stared wearily at him, meaning that she could not possibly feel cheerful or animated in the condition she was in.

"I contributed \$500 to your hospital fund," he announced gayly, cocking one eye at her.

"You did what, John?" she exclaimed, sitting up suddenly as if she had been raised from the dead in a state of violent indignation.

He fell back against his chair. His cat whisker mustaches drooped, his small blue eyes protruded in astonishment like a man who has been kicked by his gun.

"I said I gave five hundred——"

"Don't repeat it!" she interrupted, tearing off

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the fascinator and winding her few strands of gray hair fiercely into a knot, while she glared about her as if she looked for the hammer and tongs of language for this man who dared to call himself her husband.

"Will you tell me," she demanded when she had made herself into an image of fury, "why you think you can afford such a sum for this, this treacle fund, when you know you must give twice as much to the Red Cross, and liberally to a dozen other war emergency funds, and that you must buy thousands of dollars worth of Liberty Bonds twice a year, and pay taxes and sur-tax, and still conduct your business as usual?"

"But, my dear, you are the Regent of the Sulgrave Society for War Service. I wanted you to feel that your prominence was well financed," he answered in tones of injured innocence.

She tossed this explanation from her with a gesture. Then, after a moment of silence, she stiffened as if she had been pierced by the dart of an enemy. She turned her eyes upon him, measured him with a glance that shivered over him like ice water.

"You had already given me fifty dollars for this fund," she said.

"Yes," he admitted lamely.

"That was a liberal contribution," she went on, winding him in. "Now to whom did you

make the additional subscription of five hundred dollars?"

Adam would have felt no guilt about sharing the prospects of information Eve brought him if God had not walked in the Garden shortly afterwards. He would have enjoyed gossiping with her about what they would soon know about life. And the next day he would have been prowling up and down the blessed enclosure looking for a hole in the fence through which to escape. So, many a man who becomes delicately involved with some secondary Eve remains happily unconscious of his guilt until the pair of them fall beneath the far more discerning eyes of his wife.

Murray hesitated, deeply embarrassed.

"Why—er—it was to Mrs. Skipwith," he began desperately.

"I thought so," she thrust in.

"She said that five hundred dollars would be about right, that some would give more, she thought. It was a popular appeal. And she stressed the point about how pleased you would be. Honestly, she did."

"Do you know what you are? You are one of Ellen Skipwith's fools!" Mrs. Murray cried, flinging herself back on her pillows.

She drew the covers to her chin and had a hard rigor when he attempted to bluster, the last resort of a defeated husband. Then she had one

rigor after another in quick succession. He arose hastily and hurried to the phone to call the doctor.

Mrs. Murray waited after that until time should reveal the extent of Ellen Skipwith's mischief. Ten days elapsed during which she recovered from her cold, but not from her suspicions.

Then, four of the canvassers sent in their lists of donations. They were certainly normal, even approaching subnormal in the first ward where Mrs. Nicholson had collected only seventy-five dollars, of which her husband contributed ten. Likewise, Mrs. Plater from the second ward had a hundred and twenty dollars. Mrs. Tumlin from the third collected the same amount. And Mrs. Trainor thought she had gone over the top in the fourth ward with nearly two hundred dollars. No one whose names appeared on these lists had given more than ten dollars.

Mrs. Skipwith's list did not come in until several days later, then with a little note saying that she had been delayed because she was anxious to do her best before she reported.

The old Regent was as near prostration as she had ever been in her life when she read the names on this paper, her husband's leading all the rest. Every one of them had given large amounts, one hundred dollars, she noticed, was

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the minimum. Ellen it seemed had not confined her activities to the fifth ward where she belonged. She had covered the town, touching it in the high places, financially speaking. She had collected thousands where only a few hundred dollars would have been as much as Sulgrave could afford when the Red Cross was in need of supplies, and when they must presently begin a drive for all the war emergency needs.

And this was not all nor the worst of it, she thought, as she sat before her breakfast tray that morning, crushing her toast in a fury and studying the thing. By comparing this list with the others she discovered that men who had contributed sanely to their own wives for this fund had later been infamously lavish in their donations to Ellen Skipwith.

Good Heavens, what was she to do? Diplomacy would never cover a situation like this, not from those dutiful wives who had been made the victims of this woman's insolence. Some disposition must be made of Ellen Skipwith. She had her own grievance. And she had made Murray feel it. Scenes between elderly married people are conducted with a courage and frankness rarely achieved in their earlier, fiercer struggles. For by this time they are out of love, into life together, harsh partners, knowing that neither can escape the other, and taking advantage of that.

CHAPTER VIII

SHE made up her mind. It was like making out an indictment and summoning a jury. She went to the phone and invited a few friends to come in for tea that afternoon. Just enough to make a caucus, which is what many a tea party is.

The four victims arrived together. They found Mrs. Murray in a state of magnificent convalescence with a silk embroidered shawl over her shoulders.

They exclaimed about how well she was looking, and how glad they were to come to tea.

Mrs. Murray said she was still far from well, and that while there was tea, there was also business. In these war times one must combine business with pleasure. She hoped they did not object to that.

Oh no, they did not object, but in a tone and with a manner which implied that they would probably only touch business with the tips of their wings.

Their hostess served the tea, offered substantial food, all the time sounding them with ques-

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tions about the work in hand. Had they had much difficulty in getting the hospital fund?

Mrs. Nicholson replied vaguely, as if she had performed this service a long time ago, and really did not remember much about it, but, oh yes, it had not been easy, of course, the subscriptions were so small, they had been obliged to see a great many people to secure even the minimum amount. And, no, Mrs. Tumlin told her, she did not know how the Red Cross was coming on with the consignment of dressings they must send out, she had not been able to go to the work rooms for nearly a week. They all admitted this, their Red Cross hours for service had been unavoidably shortened.

Mrs. Murray shot a glance at them, loaded, aimed the best she could without putting it into words that no woman could excuse herself from the hardest kind of Red Cross work with the great drive about to begin in France. It was like firing upon four little aeroplanes sailing high above her. They missed the charge.

Something was wrong, she could not imagine what it was. Mrs. Nicholson had a long, thin strained look as if she had just suffered a tooth to be pulled. And by the glances bestowed upon her by the other three women she was now some kind of martyr or heroine, Mrs. Murray could not make out which she was. She was conscious

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however of the rarefied atmosphere and of strange currents about her with which she had no connection.

While she was engaged in trying to tap these invisible wires, very anxious, and with kindly indignation, Mrs. Madden was announced.

Mrs. Madden was a woman whose dignity was awful and natural, not a matter of grace. Usually when she entered a room she inadvertently stopped conversation. Conversation must recover and be enlarged or censored before it could go on. This did not happen as usual. The four women received her with a certain warmth, as she approached the table. They made a place for her with confidence. They all talked at once, and as Mrs. Madden talked Mrs. Plater patted her hand and told her she was looking better already. She thought it was going to do them all good.

Mrs. Murray did not notice this "It" stalking around her table.

"How is your mother, Mary?" she asked familiarly, pouring another cup of tea.

"Mother is always well, you know," Mary answered, "and I am rejoiced to find you so much improved."

"Yes, but I should not risk any strain if it were not for business that admits of no delay," she answered, ready to begin that business at once.

She would now get at the bottom of this thing whatever it was, she thought with satisfaction, for she could count on Mary Madden as she did on her own right hand. Then she was astonished to discover almost at once that she could not count on her, that Mary was also involved.

"Were you at the lecture this morning, dear?" Mrs. Trainor addressed this question to Mrs. Madden, whom she had never been heard to "dear" before.

"Yes," the latter answered.

"Wonderful, wasn't it?"

"I am just trying to grasp it," Mrs. Madden answered carefully with the look of a large child walking in the dark.

"Oh, you will. I am beginning to understand, to be able to project my thoughts into space."

"Think what it will mean to women like us during this war, so far removed from our dear boys at the Front, to realize that every one of us has the psychic power equal to wireless so that we can be right with them at any time, *know*, literally know when they are in battle——"

"I should not wish to go so far as that," Mary Madden interrupted hastily. "It is not the absent I want to follow, to be near at all times—it's my dear ones here at home."

"Yes, I know, the children. It will be a great

help to you in that way," Mrs. Trainor answered innocently.

They had withdrawn a short distance. Mrs. Plater joined them.

"Mrs. Nicholson was just telling me before we came in," she began, glancing apprehensively at Mrs. Murray, "that she can do it already. She says she saw Theo last night as plainly as if he had passed her in the light, although it was quite dark. You know he has been in France six months. She had not heard from him for weeks. She thought he must be at the Front. Now she knows he is. What she saw made her very uneasy. She thinks he was just going out alone across No Man's Land. Probably on patrol duty, I told her."

Mrs. Murray listened with furious attention in spite of the fact that Mrs. Tumlin wanted to ask her more particularly about her accident. Something was in the wind, something hysterical and feminine that had nothing to do with patriotic service. She stirred in her chair as a particularly ominous cloud revolves into a thunderhead on the horizon. She flung off her shawl and fanned herself. She snapped her eyes over Mrs. Tumlin's head at the three women still exchanging confidences, as one snaps the hammer on a little black revolver.

"She will give a lecture every morning at

eleven now," she heard Mrs. Nicholson tell them.

"It is unfortunate that she chose that hour, on account of the Red Cross work," Mrs. Madden said regretfully.

"Yes, it conflicts with that," Mrs. Trainor admitted, "but *can* we afford to miss such an opportunity!"

"What is this lecture about? War work?" Mrs. Murray asked of Mrs. Tumlin.

"In a way, yes," the latter answered vaguely after an instant's pause.

Everything was vague, it seemed.

"And who is the lecturer? I have heard nothing about all this," Mrs. Murray demanded, meaning that it was very queer that she should be kept in ignorance.

CHAPTER IX

BEFORE Mrs. Tumlin could reply, the door bell rang as if it had been mistaken for a fire alarm. There was the sound of hurrying feet in the hall and a small dark woman whisked into the room. She resembled a happy scare-crow in a high wind. She was startlingly homely, and retained traces of vivid beauty, the kind that wavers like a flame in some women to the very last. She had acquired enough color by an honest application of rouge, as much as to say her complexion required this brilliance as other women needed rice powder. Her eyes took up most of her withered face, not because they were large, but because of their overwhelming significance, black and glistening beneath hurricane brows. There was a long, smooth, white space above and between these brows like a clean, clear way for thoughts, fearless, but not calm thoughts. Her mouth left absolutely nothing to be said, it was so wide and candid, with not a single line or curve to recommend it except for veracity. The dingy black frock she wore had once been a smart frock. It was now merely a garment bravely attached to its mistress. Her hat was not a hat at all. It was

an idea she had designed somewhat in the manner of a turban and as becoming to her as a top-knot is to a bird. The ends of a white veil tied around it stuck out behind like white feathers in the tail of a fie' lark. Her collar and cuffs were stiff and immaculate.

It seemed that she was in second mourning for some one with the least possible expense, and with a great deal to do besides mourn.

She was the last surviving member of the famous Warren family, formerly very great people in Sulgrave. She was thirty-seven years old, unmarried, and earned a sparrow's livelihood as a reporter on the *Sulgrave Sentinel*. She was very essential to the town, knew it, and was glad of it. She was an inveterate gossip and always told the truth. The men called her "that little hellion on the *Sentinel*," the women called her "Rachel," and she called herself the maid of all work on the *Sentinel*.

The moment she appeared she hailed everybody at once, and everybody began to stir, to change positions like leaves suddenly lifted in a breeze. Mrs. Madden detached herself from the others and chose a seat in the background, "left field," you may say, with Mrs. Murray at the bat. Mrs. Tumlin detached herself from the table and joined Mrs. Plater, who occupied the arm end of a sofa. Mrs. Nicholson and Mrs. Trainor joined

them. The four were wedged closely together now on the sofa; in union there is strength.

Rachel pranced across the room with a jiggering, mechanical motion of figures in a moving picture, a good length of her white cotton stockings showing above her black pumps, a little rusty handbag flapping from her belt, and a general air of having come to cleave the situation.

"I am late of course," she said, addressing her hostess.

"Don't mention it. You are always late," Mrs. Murray returned, pouring her tea.

"Well, how can I be soon anywhere?" she contended. "This morning I had to cover a near-murder in Milltown. Then I had to get an interview from Madam Ciel on 'Thought Life' for the Society page. Then I had to write a column of locals about you people who would never know all about each other but for me. When I got back to the office our one and only printer was gone, drafted! So I had to set up my own stuff, a dozen sticks of it. Look at my hands!"

She held them up, lean brown fingers stained with ink.

Then she piled three sandwiches on her saucer and slid into a chair, carefully balancing the cup of tea.

"Well, you must be tired after all that," Mrs. Murray said kindly.

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"Oh, no, not tired but hungry," Rachel laughed. "And oh, yes, I made a speech this morning. I forgot to tell you that," she jerked out.

"A speech!" Mrs. Tumlin repeated.

"Yes, on the street, too. Buckhanan came down to address the factory workers at the noon hour in the interest of Wilson's candidate for the Senate in this District. No man was there to introduce him. So I popped up and did it!"

"What did you say?" Mrs. Murray asked.

"I said, an honest man is the noblest work of God. Then I made a face on the side at Buckhanan and left it with him. The crowd roared."

"My dear!" Mrs. Murray laughed. She was fond of Rachel as a good swordsman loves a keen blade. And she always pretended to disapprove of her by way of remaining true to her own type.

"Well, somebody had to do it. And we all know that women are expected to do everything now that nobody else wants to do," Rachel retorted, her black eyes making a swift flight into the faces of the other women. They rested for an instant on Mrs. Madden who returned her gaze as if she had something to do with it that was private and personal to herself.

She was still in the dark about the author of that letter she had found in Pelham's pocket. She

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viewed with suspicion every woman whom she could possibly connect with it. When Rachel Warren entered just now it occurred to her again that Rachel had known Pelham during his "Pep" days. She was the kind who might go on calling him "Pep." Years ago when they were girls together Rachel was called the beauty of Sulgrave. Why had she never married? She had had many suitors then. It was only within recent years that the men began to refer to her as "that little hellion on the *Sentinel*." She knew that Pelham was not one of her lovers back there. But that was like a man, to go back and pick up the woman whom he had passed over as a girl. And Rachel was still mutinously attractive. She had aged more than any of them. She was shockingly and brilliantly homely now, but in spite of everything she had preserved an outrageous spontaneity. What Mrs. Murray called "the valor of the feminine."

Nothing on earth is so stupid as a good wife who has reason to doubt her husband. She never begins by suspecting the right woman, but she invariably trails the logical woman. It is only by a tedious process of elimination that she finally arrives in deep amazement face to face with the real culprit.

"Have you heard the latest news?" Rachel asked of Mrs. Murray as the other women con-

gealed once more in a sibilant undertone of confidences which did not include the three nearer the tea-table.

"No, I thought I had the latest news," Mrs. Murray answered dryly. "What is it?"

"We have Madam Ciel with us, a lecturer on Finite Spiritualism," Rachel announced with suspicious soberness.

"Good heavens! What is that?" Mrs. Murray exclaimed.

"I have been trying to find out," Rachel answered, skinning every woman in the room with a raking glance of her black eyes. "And of course I will find out in time," she added.

"But who is she? Where does she come from?" Mrs. Murray insisted.

"Well, we do not know. My belief is that Madam Ciel is only her celestial nom de plume, and she comes from the last place where she lectured. She probably has no 'continuing city' at present."

"*What* did you say she is doing?" Mrs. Murray asked, raising her voice and flirting her head around to stare at the four finite spiritualists seated in a row on the sofa, who stiffened into silence and attention.

"She is teaching our Sulgrave ladies to fly!"

"Fly!"

"In the spirit, of course, by concentrating their

thoughts, say on a beloved son in the trenches in France. Ask Mrs. Nicholson. We hear that she actually saw Theo last night in No Man's Land, wasn't it, Mrs. Nicholson?" she asked smoothly, turning to that lady.

Mrs. Nicholson nodded gravely.

"It is merely the development of one's psychic faculties, dear Mrs. Murray, not at all like the seances of the ordinary spiritual medium," Mrs. Trainor explained hurriedly. She represented the Third Ward for patriotic service in Mrs. Murray's mind, and nothing else.

"You see, dear," Mrs. Tumlin began, leaning forward eagerly, "Madam Ciel is a practical spiritualist. She does not go in for messages from the dead, that horrid gruesome stuff. She teaches finite spiritualism. It is merely the power to project oneself close to some one dearly beloved, though he may be at the end of the earth."

"And such a comfort now when so many of our boys are overseas in this awful war," Mrs. Plater added in a tone which implied that no one but a brute would deny mothers and wives such a boon at such a time.

She said it that way because Mrs. Murray's stare was truly terrific. She seemed to be looking at them with her nose as well as her eyes. No one knew how she came by this turned up wide

nostril, plebeian nose, descended as she was from one of the oldest and best families, but she had it, and while it detracted from the dignity of her countenance it made up for that in force of expression. She was furious. She began to comprehend those snatches of conversation she had heard before Rachel came in.

"Of all things!" she gasped.

"But you have not heard Madam Ciel. She makes it so plain. She is eloquent, comforting, wonderful," Mrs. Nicholson defended, seeing the storm coming.

Rachel laid her palms together, elevated them to her breast like a scandalously painted, poverty-stricken saint, threw back her head and shrieked with laughter.

"You see what has happened," she said, brushing the tears of that mirth from her eyes and addressing Mrs. Murray. "Madam Ciel has a class of fifty, nearly all the women we know. I even saw Mary at the lecture this morning," she flung in, nodding mischievously at Mrs. Madden. "And she is teaching them long distance clairvoyance at the ridiculously low figure of five dollars a head. Must have funds of her own. I have no doubt she has."

Mrs. Murray had no time to utter her thoughts. She was gathering her forces.

"All the men are amused or disgusted," Rachel

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went on. "They are saying how far we are behind the times. Spiritualism, thought concentration, whatever you call it, went out of fashion in the more advanced psychic circles quite a while ago. Only her disciples take her seriously. But," she concluded, "if you do not hurry and get out on the job, you will find all your patriotic workers gone to France in the spirit!"

CHAPTER X

"I AM hurrying now," Mrs. Murray rumbled grimly as she unfolded her papers.

"We have another engagement, Mrs. Murray," said Mrs. Nicholson, rising with her companions to take leave.

"Wait, wait, my dears," she said with unexpected gentleness, as she still fumbled among the papers. "I have something here that will interest you."

She spread the subscription lists on the table.

"By the way, where is the incomparable Ellen? I thought she belonged to this canvassing committee," Rachel asked as the four ladies advanced to the table, having recognized these papers.

"She did," the old Regent answered as if Ellen belonged to the past tense of the Sulgrave society for service.

"Look at that, Mary," she said, reaching back and offering Ellen Skipwith's list.

Mrs. Madden's large countenance disappeared behind the large sheet and remained there.

The other lists were spread upon the table from which the tea things had been removed.

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The four women drew their chairs forward and compared them. They explained to each other how they had secured a contribution from this or that person supposed to be penurious. They tattled and laughed over their experiences. They wondered mildly why these papers had been submitted to them again.

"Well," Mrs. Nicholson said presently to Mrs. Murray, "don't you think we did very well?"

"You have done splendidly. We all know how difficult it is to raise a collection in small amounts," the Regent answered.

"But now look at this one," she went on. "Have you finished, Mary?" she asked.

"Yes, but I don't understand," Mrs. Madden said reluctantly, yielding the paper she had been studying.

"I just want you to compare Mrs. Skipwith's list with yours," Mrs. Murray explained, dropping the inflated thing on the table before them.

Then she leaned back again and fanned herself. She had the virtuous air of one who has exposed something that ought to be exposed.

Rachel with a diligent instinct for sensations divined something unusual in this situation and wedged herself with a quick movement closer to the table where she could see whatever this was that made the women there gasp and let out little suppressed sounds.

There was a silence during which they spat at that astounding paper with their eyes. They made motions with their hands, doing little things to themselves, straightening their hats, feeling quickly for their back hairs, tucking these up with nervous fingers. It is a hen-way every woman has of dragging her wings and ruffling her neck feathers, when she is angry, excited, and, for the moment, perfectly helpless.

"Are these donations for delicacies—for delicacies for the base hospital in Atlanta?" Mrs. Nicholson stuttered in a high voice.

The Regent nodded her head, wagging it impressively up and down.

"That is printed in large letters at the top of each page," she added, meaning that no one could have written his name there without seeing that.

"John Murray, five hundred dollars," Rachel read in amused tones.

"Yes, my husband's name leads all the rest," his wife admitted coolly. "And he gave me fifty dollars besides—*only* fifty."

"William Nicholson, two hundred dollars," Rachel went on. "Roland Trainor, three hundred. Reads like a Liberty Loan drive!—Horace Plater, two hundred."

"Horace subscribed only ten dollars on my list. I told him it was enough," Mrs. Plater put in plaintively.

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Rachel, holding one finger like a sliding exclamation point beneath each name, continued to mumble them, all prominent business men of Sulgrave, and none of them had given less than one hundred dollars.

"Anonymous, one thousand! Good heavens, who is Anonymous?" she called out.

No one answered.

"Total, five thousand two hundred dollars!" Rachel cried, fell back in her chair, and raised her eyes with droll piety to Mrs. Murray.

"——To provide wine jelly and blancmange for less than two hundred sick soldiers," the latter added as a blistering footnote on this total.

"And I did not ask Barrie Skipwith for a dollar!" Mrs. Tumlin cried in tones of deep injury.

"Naturally. And it appears that she did not either. His name is not on her list," this from Mrs. Murray again.

"And not a single woman's name," Mrs. Plater exclaimed, snatching the accursed paper from the table and reviewing it hastily.

"That," said Mrs. Murray, leaning forward and tapping the tittering sheet, "is as much as the women should raise in Sulgrave for all the War Emergency funds, including the Red Cross!"

"Ellen should have been a promoter," Rachel said, beginning to laugh.

"But how did she do it? We worked very hard. And why did they give like that when usually——"

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"Ask your good selves that," the Regent snapped. "I did ask my husband. He was completely befuddled, lamest excuses and explanation you ever heard."

"Psychological phenomenon," Rachel suggested with suspicious gravity. "Ellen has been projecting her thoughts here at home while you were chasing for France."

This remark fell flat. There is a time for all things, and this was no time to apply the science of finite spiritualism. A meanly material advantage had been taken by a person whose psychic organism was atrocious.

"But who is this 'Anonymous?'"

Somebody went back to that. Then they all went back to that. They discussed his motives for withholding his name, and the discussion was not charitable. Mrs. Murray said she knew that it was not Mr. Murray. She said it with an air which implied that her husband was even now serving a sentence for what he had contributed openly. And she was the only one who knew this much about who "Anonymous" was not. He was *not* Mr. Murray.

Then Rachel looked up and continued to stare. The other women followed her gaze. Mrs. Mur-

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ray turned her head, craned her neck, wrinkled her brow and walled her eyes at whatever this was behind her that focused so much attention.

It was Mary Madden. In the excitement of the last half hour they had forgotten Mrs. Madden, who frequently remained silent when other people were talking. Now she suddenly became the exclamation point of this excitement, a very tall one. She had risen. She was standing with her fingers tightly wound in the chain of her silver mesh bag. Her cheeks were flushed, her lips slightly parted, very red, the pupils of her eyes dilated and deeper blue as if some darkness within was gathering there that would presently change them to stormy blackness.

The sight of this placid woman, overwrought, trembling with the violence of her emotions, was astonishing, quite enough to take the minds of these women off their own confused affairs for the moment.

“You do not seem to understand,” she said, speaking with the fierce deliberation of anger, “that this woman has insulted us. It is five thousand dollars’ worth of insolence she has flung into our faces.”

There was a moment’s silence during which they coned, not what she said, but the woman herself, their thoughts circling dizzily, inquisi-

tively, about her. Here was another victim, who was exposing herself when she need not do so.

They hurried to cover her indiscretion.

"But not you, my dear. Your husband's name is not on Mrs. Skipwith's list," Mrs. Plater said when she recovered from the confirmation of an extraordinary suspicion.

They put their heads together once more over the paper, reviewing it hastily. They chimed in a chorus that Mr. Madden had not given *anything*. This made him pluperfectly innocent.

They were very generous. Well, she would not be the object of their feminine charity. She ignored it. Her mind was still fixed upon Mrs. Skipwith like a drawn sword.

"Why is a woman of that kind in our organization at all?" she demanded sternly of Mrs. Murray.

At this, the latter turned her ample self in her chair. She was not accustomed to being addressed in this manner. She adjusted her glasses as if she desired to command a stronger view of Mrs. Madden, who was acting very strangely.

"How should I know? You may ask Barrie Skipwith that!" she replied brusquely. "I did not bring her to this town. She has been among us for five years, into everything, out of nothing. You know as much about her as I do!"

"She must be dropped!" Mary said in the level tone of determination.

"Nothing of the kind!" the old Regent retorted quickly. "She would organize something at once and compete with our Society. She would rob the men again for that. And she could do it!"

"We cannot tolerate her after that," Mary persisted coolly, pointing at the paper.

"You do not need to," Mrs. Murray retorted, tapping the table as if her finger was a gavel she used to call for order.

But Mrs. Madden refused to be called to order. She would not be seated. She had the floor and she would hold it. She was making a spectacle of herself and nobody could help it. Mrs. Murray was compelled to address this impromptu statue of liberty, clad in an unbecoming brown voile frock and an equally unbecoming broad brimmed leghorn hat.

"You do not know it, Mary," she began patiently, "but nearly every organization we have for war work in this country has a thorn in its side like Ellen Skipwith. Some very effective woman whom they do not want for one reason or another. Well, do they start something by putting her out? Wherever that has been tried, trouble and dissention result. The devil himself has his advocates, and often among the best people. Persecute him, and saints will rise to de-

fend him. That is one of the misdirected virtues of human nature. Well, what do they do with these women? They use them. They *must* use them, everybody. This is no time to be particular. The Lord himself could not make our moral ends in this world meet if He did not economize our very vices."

Mrs. Murray paused. She perceived that this sermon was going over the heads of her audience, and falling under the feet of Mrs. Madden. She got down to particulars.

"Now, I have decided what to do with Ellen. We shall use her," she went on. "I shall simply change the scene of her activities. Next week I shall appoint her a committee of one to organize our work in Milltown among the factory women. She will have an allowance for this out of our funds which she is not to exceed. That will remove Ellen, and settle her."

"She will certainly decline to do that," Mrs. Trainor put in.

"She will not," Mrs. Murray returned. "They never do, that kind. Their badge of respectability is to be the slaves of virtue. We all know that Ellen has worked harder than any other member of our Society. I have made a point of getting every ounce of service from her. This is the policy adopted everywhere in dealing with women of that kind in war work."

Rachel giggled. Mrs. Murray glanced at her as if she smacked her with this glance.

This giggle riveted Mary Madden's attention on Rachel. She swept Rachel into the current of her thoughts which were still moving in the same direction, no matter what Mrs. Murray said or planned.

"These lists, are they to be turned over to Rachel as usual for publication?" she demanded.

"No, only the decent ones," the very capable old Regent answered in tones so matter-of-fact that Rachel let out a shriek of merriment. Humor was her besetting sin.

"The contributions on the Skipwith list must be collected of course," she said, with a glance that meant, "these men must pay for their folly!" "But I shall tithe them, taking only one tenth of each for the hospital fund. The remainder will be credited on our General War Emergency Fund. Make a note of that, Rachel. Just say that in addition to this very creditable sum for the comfort of convalescent soldiers, we have collected five thousand dollars for other patriotic purposes."

"But can you do that?" Rachel objected, sobered by this proposed irregularity.

She had been associated for a long time with men in business and men always kept within the

law, especially when they were about to do something illegal.

“I will do it! Do you think a single one of these men will dare protest? Certainly not. They will have come to their senses. They will thank me for preserving them from the obvious consequences of this blunder. Even ‘Anonymous’ will do that when we find out who he is.”

Mrs. Murray made this announcement with the assurance a woman always assumes when she is about to do right by doing wrong.

CHAPTER XI

MRS. MADDEN took leave of her hostess and went out accompanied by Rachel who by this time had the "decent lists" in her little black bag and had her mind crammed with sensational copy which she could not use. This is the eternal anguish of all reporters, especially society reporters. The best copy is never available for publication.

"That Skipwith list should have been destroyed," Mrs. Madden said as they came out.

Never for one moment had her attention been distracted from the main issue. She was still flushed and agitated. She had so much on her mind about that thing which could not be explained. This was why she had been obliged to yield to Mrs. Murray. She could not explain.

"But, my dear," Rachel said, "why should you feel it so? Pelham's name was not there."

They had reached the pavement and were walking along the avenue before Pelham's wife replied.

"No, his name was not there," she said as if it was necessary to tell this lie.

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"But I ask you," she went on after a pause, "what does it mean? Why did those men——"

"——Make themselves ridiculous with such enormous contributions to Ellen?" Rachel finished for her.

"Yes, when they must have known the lists would be compared.

"They acted without consideration, emotionally, on the spur of the moment. Ellen affects them that way. You would not, I don't, and evidently the four other canvassers are not that kind," she gave a short laugh by way of comment, "but Ellen is."

"I do not know her very well," Mrs. Madden said coolly.

"And you do not know men at all, my dear. You are married. So you only know one man. That limits your knowledge of them. Now take me. I am an old maid, earning my bread and bounties among them when they are just men, not husbands, nor fathers, nor lovers, and I tell you that at times they are the simplest, most helpless of all creatures. You can trust them to take a city, or build a civilization, but there is one kind of woman, just one, you understand, that can make a fool of almost any man. That is why I have never married. I found that out in time. Most of them know how to deal with an adventures or a bad one, but not a piker. She gets

them every time in the face of reason and facts.”

“A piker? What is that?” Mary asked, not soothed but interested in this startling philosophy, and anxious to learn all she could.

“Ellen Skipwith is one,” Rachel informed her cheerfully. “She belongs to the virtuous light lady class. Never goes wrong. Always has more good deeds to her credit than the best woman in town. Manages to dispose of her husband without divorcing him and without a scandal. The men like her, defend her, and the women never do like her, nor defend her. She is the woman who trims another woman’s husband of his idealistic sentimentalities, stirs his romantic forces while his wife keeps the home and looks after his comfort. She is the more dangerous because he knows and she knows that she will never go the limit. So he feels safe, so she gets him, his thoughts, his saddest, whitest dreams—and whatever she wants. . . . I say she is a piker because she plays on the sly for small stakes, the currency of admiration that men keep unconsciously on hand.”

“That is Ellen’s game. She is simply amusing herself with what is sacred to other women, making this war work her opportunity, just as the fainting saint lady makes religion her opportunity to engage in a spiritual flirtation with the minister sometimes. She is mischievous, but not

dangerous. And she never cares what her little piker game costs the other woman."

"No," Mrs. Madden assented thoughtfully.

"You may be sure," Rachel continued, "Ellen resents the treatment she has had from our Regent. She knows how she stands with all of you, how little praise she gets, how much work she is required to do. Well, that list was her retort. Triumphant feminine!"

"But Mrs. Nicholson, all of them, were so submissive. Why?" Mary asked.

"Oh, they know Ellen, just what I have been telling you about her. Besides they were only covering the situation in there a while ago. They are not so submissive as you think. Wait till they see their Williams and Rolands and Horaces this evening," she laughed, while Mrs. Madden regarded her soberly, wondering how she could be merry about a thing like this.

"Don't you wish you could have witnessed that scene between old John Murray and his Flora when she discovered that he had contributed five hundred dollars for jam to the hospital," Rachel went on, still trampling the holy ground of matrimony.

"No, I do not. Scenes between married people must be horrid," Mrs. Madden answered.

Rachel glanced at her furtively. Mary had said "must be" as if she had no wedded knowl-

edge of "scenes." Well, she would not have believed any other woman who professed such ignorance. But she knew as every one in Sulgrave did that the Maddens were happily married. She never doubted it. She was only thinking in her rambling, old maid way about the queer ingredients it took to make a happy marriage. She was sure if she had been a man she would never have chosen Mary Darah for a wife, and in Mary's place she would never have accepted Pelham Madden for a husband.

"You are wonderful, Mary. Do you know that?" she said suddenly with a look of frank admiration.

"No, I have never even suspected it," Mary answered smiling, you may say by entreaty, not that she wanted to smile.

They were now standing at the entrance of the Madden place, and she was anxious to go in, but Rachel detained her.

"Well, you are. You have put it over. Marriage is about the gravest risk anybody takes. You have achieved yourself and Pelham too. He would never have been anything better than just "Pep" if you had not married him, a good fellow, a smart fellow, with a streak of something in him that was not safe. I do not know what it was, maybe just temperament. Now look at him. He

is as steady as his grandfather clock, one of our substantial citizens.”

Mary thought she saw “Pep” still frisking close to this substantial citizen, but she gave no sign. You can talk about your husband to another woman, of course, but not and qualify him with all the adjectives he has earned in your knowledge of him.

Rachel said she must hurry to the office. Mary asked her to drop in some time. She was ashamed of the suspicions she had entertained of this good little old maid. Rachel said she would do that.

“Some day, Mary, when I am all tired out, I’ll come and have a cup of tea with you and just rest. You are that comfortable, dear,” she said amiably. Then she went bobbing down the avenue with the wisps of her white veil flirting this way and that, looking more than ever like a bird with white feathers in its tail.

CHAPTER XII

MRS. MADDEN stood for a moment watching the grotesque little figure. She wondered how any one could find her restful or comforting.

She ascended the steps from the avenue and walked toward the house as a woman moves when she is planning to remodel a frock, or put one of the children in another school, or getting a divorce from her husband, or taking the whole thing to the Lord in prayer. The gait and expression are the same—slow, absorbed.

She was reviewing the situation as one looks again with a better light for something in a dark place. She remembered with deep embarrassment her resentment about Mrs. Skipwith's list before Mrs. Murray and her guests. This was a mistake, to have shown it. Why had every woman in the room hastened to call her attention to the fact that her husband's name was not on the list? Her manner must have given color to any suspicions they had about the identity of the Anonymous contributor. She knew positively the moment she read the thing that "Anonymous" was written by the same hand which penned the letter to "Pep." And if Ellen Skipwith had done

that, and Pelham had done this, what must she do? She did not begrudge the thousand dollars, that was Pelham's money, and he could afford the absurd generosity. The point at issue was Ellen, a woman like that addressing her husband intimately by his worst name, and making an appointment with him after hours in the bank. Above all it was Pelham, the change in him. He was not the same man. He had become fragmentary in his home life, a sort of actor husband and father who frequently missed his cue, absent-minded, irritable, or unaccountably cheerful.

Well this thing could not go on. Nature said so, and Nature is very strong in the frailest of women. She had reached the veranda by this time and was standing with her eyes fixed upon the dark and threatening future, which to all outward appearances was the avenue glistening in the sunlight of a June day.

"This thing cannot go on!" She repeated that as she had done many times during the past weeks since the situation had come to her attention.

She did not know that many a wife makes the same vow of destruction and that nearly every husband frequently makes up his frowning mind that "this thing," which is the bitter name of the domestically intolerable "cannot go on." But it

usually does go on indefinitely like the squeak of outraged Nature in the matrimonial machinery.

No matter how strong she is, every woman passes through the morbid stage when she faces one of those catastrophes of love with her husband. This is a period of gestation peculiar to femininity. And no matter what she does when she comes to her senses, she must go through this "No Woman's Land" of danger, sadness, and depression. Mrs. Madden had been occupying a sort of listening post in this region since her trouble. Under ordinary circumstances she would never have attended Madam Ciel's lectures, but in her abnormal state she felt the need of psychic power. All women do. It is a piety of the nerves from which they suffer at such times. Madam Ciel made it plausible, altogether possible, to achieve this clairvoyant relation with those whom you loved. Madam held that the soul need not be blind, that by proper exercise of the spiritual faculties, it might become more and more omniscient. Well, she had struggled to obtain this passive omniscience over Pelham. She wanted to know things about her husband that she could not ask. It is dangerous to ask your husband some questions, especially if you have the right to the information you seek. If she could just know exactly what was going on between him and this,—this piker, Ellen Skipwith,

she could act accordingly, save Pelham, and without the horrible disturbances of scenes which never did any good.

She did know enough, she reflected with a sigh, not by Madam Ciel's method. It seemed that she was a trifle dumb psychically speaking, but through the revelations around Mrs. Murray's tea table she had learned much. But she was still in that mood of depression when women invariably climb to their second story of the spirit and humble themselves in prayer for strength and guidance.

She turned from the balustrade and passed through the screen doors into the hall. Then she did a queer thing. She closed the two double doors on the inside without realizing what she was doing. You do things like that when you act according to yourself, and not according to reason. It is called being absent-minded, a good phrase for saying that you do, without thinking, something that exactly reflects what you are really thinking. Mrs. Madden closed the doors because she was about to take sanctuary. She was going to engage in prayer, lay Pelham on the altar. The good wife is always a sort of priest to her husband without any of the benefits of the confessional in this business to guide her. She prays for him most when times are hardest between them, and she does it with especial fervor

when she is most indignant because she must tell somebody what she is suffering, and the Lord is the only one among us who never gossips nor betrays our confidences. And she cannot be cured of this habit, no matter how carefully you point out to her that while the Scriptures are very definite about the sacredness of marriage, they do not contain one single admonition about how to deal practically with a romantically unfaithful husband who still loves and cherishes his wife and is only flirting away his fancies on another woman.

So, Mrs. Madden climbed the stairs to her own room and closed that door also. The house was very quiet. The two older children had gone to spend the night with their grandmother, Mrs. Darah, and the two younger ones were still in the park with the nurse.

CHAPTER XIII

SHORTLY after six o'clock Pelham Madden came briskly along the avenue. He was not playing golf as usual these days. The weather was too warm, business more and more exacting, he explained to anybody who wanted to know. And he walked home from the bank for exercise. A man must keep fit in times like these. He never knew what might happen.

He had something cheerful not on his mind, but under it, lifting it, a sort of operatic sensation. He stepped along as if the earth was not there, nor needed. Air would do for so light a tread. His coat was buttoned smartly, chest thrown out. He carried his hat in one hand, swung a cane in the other, his poetic brow and his keen financial eyes faced the June breeze as if this breeze was a fair lady. No married man should look so rashly adolescent and unmarried. There is something staid and methodical in the leg-action of a husband and father, which is as unmistakable as the patient, rest-broken expression of a nursing mother. Madden's legs gave no such sober intimation of family responsibilities. He was going home like a decent man to his

family but this was not the burden of his thoughts. Why should a man be thinking always about his wife and children, any more than about his soul's salvation? Both were duties that must be attended to of course, but not dwelt upon with morbid anxiety. He was very normal in this respect and growing more so.

He had just passed the Skipwith residence. Mrs. Skipwith was coming out to her electric. This was a purely accidental occurrence, but a pleasant one. She was unusually pretty, dressed for some special occasion he supposed by the delicate softness and whiteness of her frock, and the silver satin wrap she wore. However, her radiant hair would give a thrilling effect to a sack cloth costume. It was done very simply but as usual seemed to be trying to undo itself. The younger ringlets had already escaped about her ears.

He handed her into the car. Naturally he would have done that if she had been sixty and gray.

She said she was so glad to see him because she wanted his advice about starting a canteen in Sulgrave, near the station. So many soldiers passed through now on their way to the camps, and out of the camps to the port of embarkation. Nobody seemed to have thought of how much they must need refreshments and encouragement,

but it was on her heart and conscience to do something for these dear boys. He said it was a splendid idea, and like her to think of it. She appreciated that, but where was she to get the necessary information? She was totally ignorant of how to begin. He had no doubt that part would be easy, he told her. They discussed this matter. Then she changed the subject lightly. She wanted to know what he thought of Madam Ciel. He had never thought of her at all. What about her? She told him. She described her, a globular woman who might at one time have been in the side show of a circus, and who had made a great sensation in Sulgrave teaching finite spiritualism.

"So many of the women are quite crazy about her," she concluded.

He thought that was ridiculous. No, she did not agree with him there. She thought it was pathetic, showing how women were beginning to reach out for things without knowing how to reach. She was always gracious and charitable in her judgments, he thought, and conveyed this information to her with a wordless gaze of admiration.

She wanted to know what Mrs. Madden thought of Madame Ciel's teachings. He had never heard his wife mention the woman. She probably knew nothing about her.

"Oh," Mrs. Skipwith said with a faint air of embarrassment, as if she had unintentionally said something that she should not have mentioned. She hastily covered whatever it was with a remark about what a pleasant warm day this day had been.

"As fair and sweet as a woman's face," he returned, permitting his eyes to scan the really beautiful weather of her countenance. It changed a little with the deepening color of her cheeks. She showed that she could not possibly help this by laying her hand upon the lever, meaning that she must go at once.

"Barrie and I are dining with an old crony he has picked up at the Club," she explained.

"But you are starting pretty early for that," he objected.

"I am to go by Mrs. Murray's first," she said laughing. "I am summoned to attend her insufferable highness, at this unconscionable hour, too. She called me on the phone, said she must see me on important business at once."

"Lot of important business now. World seems to be full of it," he said, grinning.

"Well, it is the first opportunity that old woman ever had to make everybody in this town do as she tells them and she is making the most of it," she said, moving off.

Then she called back to say that possibly he

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might find something at the library on canteen work. He said he would inquire to-morrow. Very well, she would meet him there to-morrow afternoon at five o'clock.

"All right, fine!" he returned.

They exchanged glances charged with innocence. Then she gave him another nod, and the most fleeting smile that was like a rose flung at the last moment. He caught it gracefully.

This accounted for the elasticity of his tread as he swung along the avenue. Mrs. Skipwith was a wonderful woman. Sane and poised for example in her attitude to Madam Ciel when other women were losing their heads over this old faker. He supposed the really masculine quality of her intelligence accounted for her unpopularity among these women, that and her beauty. He noticed that a remarkably pretty woman was always distrusted by her sex. He hoped they might find something at the library on canteen work.

He kept up this lying dialogue with himself all the way home. He knew perfectly that Ellen had no more depth of character than a looking glass, that her sanity was merely the sharpened shrewdness of a very capable and unscrupulous woman. He knew there was not and never would be any literature on canteen work in the Sulgrave library. He wondered with the stroke of a grin

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how much this confounded canteen was going to cost him. She had worked him consistently for money. He imagined that if she had not more than enough to gratify her wishes from Skipwith, if there was no Skipwith, she would have no difficulty in supplying herself—and without making any returns. He was not holding her responsible as a moral human being, you understand, but he was accepting her for what she was. And the marauding male in him was excessively vain, recalling the number of times she had indicated appointments with him, as just now when she suggested the library. Her inventiveness was refreshing. And altogether she was a good sport, the kind that needed a friend, and he was going to be that to her. The poor child could not help the way God made her.

Many a man is like that in his cynicism, his amused charity and his gallantry toward some woman whom he regards thankfully as beyond his reach when he would practice no such license of judgment toward the woman whom he must keep and trust.

He was still accompanying Ellen in his thoughts when he came up on the veranda and faced the closed doors of his house. He stared at them. They were never closed in summer except at night. He had a man's instinctive resentment against an unusually closed door in his

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own house. And they were locked! He rang the bell.

“Why are the doors locked?” he demanded curtly of the maid who admitted him.

She did not know. She had just come in with the children.

“Where is your mistress?”

She did not know that either; she had been out with the children, she had just come in, she explained again.

He liked to find his wife at home. She was a habit he had. And he usually did find her there, advancing to meet him from the parlor or the library, or bending over the banisters upstairs to say the baby was not well and for him to make as little noise as possible. She always seemed to think he was a human blunderbuss about to go off when a baby was not well!

He made for the stairs. In the hall above, the nursery door was open and evacuated. He shot a glance through the open door of his own room and went on to the next one, which was closed.

Doors are the weather vane in the home of married people. They are controlled by the climatic conditions of the woman of that place. If they are open and bright fires burning, lamps lighted, December is going to be as pleasant as May in that house no matter what the weather is outside. If one of them bangs as she passes

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through, leaving you, a mere husband behind, something is wrong. The weather is changing and no fire can warm you. If the house is wide open on a summer day, and possibly only one little dressing room door closed with snatches of a cheerful tune issuing from it, the skies are clear in that house. You may relax, take off your coat, put your feet on a sacred window sill, drop ashes from your cigar on the polished floor. All is well, and dinner will be served when you are quite ready, not before, because you are master of that house and your convenience shall be considered. Yes, of course, who ever heard of not making everything agreeable for the lord and master.

But if on a summer day this unfortunate man comes home to find it too still, like a mausoleum from which his wife has risen and departed, although she may still be there in the suffering flesh, if he finds the door of her room closed when it is usually open to receive him, there is a storm center inside. It may be on its knees engaged in prayer, or it may be brushing its hair, but it is a storm center nevertheless. And he will do well to pause before he enters long enough to think up what he will say, how he will defend himself in this or that emergency, because he is bound to face it, or it will come down stairs and face him.

CHAPTER XIV

PELHAM MADDEN stopped before this identical door. He hesitated, stood perfectly still, erect, listening. His sixth and seventh husband sense told him that the room was occupied, filled to its uttermost capacity in case—Sulgrave was a devilish place for gossip!—still, he had a right to infer that it was empty since no one had met him. Therefore he did not knock. He turned the knob quickly and stepped inside as you do when you are anxious to know what is inside.

Mrs. Madden was in there. Only the angels whose business it is to record such petitions for future reference knew what had transpired between her and her Maker during the last hour, but that was over, well over, probably never to be repeated. And there was no sad fragrance of tears in this chamber. On the contrary Mrs. Madden seemed to be infinitely removed from every emotion. She was seated beside the window, a mass of old letters spread about her on the floor. And she was holding one open in her hands, delicately and at a distance, with as many of her fingers sticking out from it as possible, as if it exhaled an odor or a lie that was distasteful to her.

"What is the matter?" he demanded in a tone which implied that he was ready for whatever it was, armed to the teeth.

"Nothing. Why?" she answered mildly.

He knew better of course, because when a woman says nothing is the matter in that tone, and with that look, it means that everything is the matter and that she will be as difficult as possible.

"Well, when I came up just now the house looked as if we'd had a funeral. Nobody downstairs, the front doors closed and locked," he said, thrusting his hands into his pockets and bending his gaze upon her.

"Too bad. Did you have to come in the back way?" she asked, dropping the letter from her two fingers to the floor and folding her hands neatly.

"Susan answered the bell," he answered irritably, "but why were the doors closed? Who did it?"

"The wind may have blown them to. And there is a spring lock, you know," she said in a tone which implied that she merely suggested this very natural explanation of a very ordinary incident.

He had not thought of that, the wind. He experienced an absurd sense of relief out of all proportion to the event. When a man becomes involved in a doubtful situation everything that

transpires in his home becomes significant. Whatever his wife says may mean what she may not have meant. Whatever she does excites his anxiety, his fears, or his temper, because he is on the defensive, very vulnerable to any flank movement she may make. She may be exactly as she has always been without the faintest suspicion of him but she keeps him strung up by the nerves, causing him to hold his breath with suspense when she was only going to say somebody's baby was ill again, or ask him if he had seen the afternoon paper.

Madden was letting himself down, not quite satisfied, but easier.

"Won't you sit down?" she said, just like that.

Gad! she had asked him to be seated in his own house, in one of his own chairs as if he were a stranger, or—er—a book agent! Her manner implied that kind of condescension.

Well, the devil was to pay, he had known that from the first, but which devil? This was what he did not know.

"Oh, thank you," he sang through his nose in imitation of the said book agent. Then he seized a chair by the back, rolled it directly in front of her, flung himself in it, crossed his legs, leaned back and became the sardonic husband waiting for the attack.

She would not see what he meant, she preferred the landscape beyond the window.

"Have you had a busy day?" she asked without concern, merely by way of breaking the silence.

"Ever day in a bank is now," he answered. "What have you been doing?" following her lead.

"The usual things. Red Cross rooms this morning, a little shopping for the children. This afternoon we went to a tea party at Mrs. Murray's. She is greatly improved," she told him.

"She never was ill, and she can't improve," he returned.

"It was really a business meeting," she went on. "She had the canvassers who collected the fund for the base hospital in Atlanta, and one or two other women."

He saw the drift and waited.

"They did very well with that canvass," she began again. "The lists were there, and showed how hard some of them had worked."

He would not yield an inch of his precious silence. But he felt her like a force marching against him.

"There were five of them, the lists, I mean. And they had raised several hundred dollars, nearly a thousand."

This announcement was surprising, seeing that he knew Ellen had over five thousand. But he

refused to be trapped into making any comment. The less he had to do with this thing the better.

"There was one anonymous contributor," she went on in her level tones.

He was hanging over the precipice now. He supposed she paused, waiting for him to ask some questions about that. People were always curious about anything done anonymously. Well, he knew more than enough about that contribution!

"No one knows who he is, but he was very generous. He gave a hundred dollars," she said, still looking out of the window.

"A hundred, did you say a hundred dollars?" he exclaimed, astounded by this announcement into speech.

"Yes, it was more than any one else gave, Rachel said. She has the lists for publication. Mrs. Murray says then everybody will know the anonymous contributor."

"How will they know?" he asked with admirable control.

"You see he has made a shining mark of himself by giving so much!"

Just one-tenth, he interpolated silently, of the amount he had really given. What had Ellen done with that money!

"So," Mrs. Madden went on, "everybody in this town will trail him until they uncover the author of that good deed."

He studied her face. He could do this without embarrassment, because she only glanced at him now and then. He had never seen Mary look so honestly and stupidly innocent. And yet the circumstantial evidence was strong. He felt something in the wind. He hoped to heaven she was as ignorant of what she was talking about as she appeared to be.

"You know about this hospital fund, don't you?" she asked, returning to that.

"There are so many funds now that I really do not know one from another," he evaded.

"Well, it is to furnish delicacies for the convalescent soldiers who have returned from France—jellies, blancmange, fruits, things like that. There are only a few of them there. So we did not need to send much, especially with the War Emergency Funds to raise here."

He felt himself sinking in his own estimation, a disagreeable sensation. He had made a mess of it, as a business man, contributing a thousand dollars when in all they only expected to raise a few hundred. He did not ask why he had done this. He knew.

"By the way, Pelham," she interrupted him, "I am chairman of the committee to raise the War Emergency Funds, which are really important. So I am going to tell you now I shall expect you to contribute at least two thousand dollars."

“Two thousand!” he shouted.

“I said at least that much.”

“We will see about that.”

“I must have it!” she said, fixing him with that gaze of unreasonable determination a woman has when she means more than she says.

He was now convinced that she knew everything, not that he minded the whole world’s knowing everything so far as he was concerned, still it was awkward, especially the way she was behaving, not coming out in the open and giving him the chance to set her right.

The next moment he was absolutely sure that she knew nothing. Her intangible mood, not meeting him as usual, sitting here in the sad seclusion of her chamber, was due entirely to something else.

This grateful knowledge came to him suddenly, when he recognized the superlative hand-writing in these letters heaped upon the floor. In his young days he had written a flourishing hand, blackening the tails of his capital letters with mighty strokes, crossing his t’s with heroic strides of the pen.

He noticed these strokes and strides on the yellowed pages as she bent over, lifting the letters one at the time from the floor, using discretion with her fingers, as if these were dead, dank things, unhallowed, disgusting scraps of paper.

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"Hello, what have you been doing?" he exclaimed with a quizzical grin.

"I was just going through some old papers when you came in," she answered without lifting her head.

He bowed himself, still grinning, far forward, swung an arm, reaching for the last letter. She raked it from beneath his hand, sat up with all this accumulative evidence against him in her lap, showing a flushed face.

"No," she said quickly, "they are mine!"

"But, my dear, I wrote them!" he protested, flattering himself with the same humorous twinkle as a man does when he is suddenly reminded of what a fellow he used to be.

One of the letters slid from the rumped mass and fell between them.

He seized it, flirted himself sidewise in the chair, leaned his head comfortably against the cushioned back, crossed his knees the other way, and opened the pages.

"Written the summer before we were married while you were off on that Western trip with the Murrays," he said, noticing the date.

"I nearly died for you, my dear!" he added, as if that was now a very amusing memory.

He became absorbed in the letter, murmuring a particularly fervid passage aloud. His face became the very travesty of love, two lean elbows

of a smile lifted the corners of his mouth. The end of his fine nose bent over at it, the corners of his eyes ridged into wrinkles. He snickered, ran his hand through his hair in a perfect anguish of mirth. Finally he gave way, shouted with laughter.

"No wonder you married me, Mary; I was a perfect hurricane of a lover," he exclaimed, glancing at her over the top of this record of hurricane love.

She was regarding him with a sort of proud insolency, the wide cold blue gaze of a woman who has been robbed and is now studying the heinous mirth of the man who did it.

"You see, I did not understand," she said, speaking slowly as if she recited in that short sentence an indictment against him for theft and perjury and sacrilege.

He refused to be condemned. He was immensely relieved to discover that nothing in the present situation had upset her.

"You should not take it like that, my dear," he said, affecting a sober kindness in his deep masculine voice.

"Nature has endowed men with this kind of voice by way of appealing to the confidence and imagination of the opposite sex. It is a sort of human thunder which indicates superior qualities which do not really exist, except in the matter

of physical strength. Still, it is important and much more significant than most people think. Personally I doubt if women will ever progress far in the public life of citizenship until their voices change, which would be a pity considering the dear sweetness of the feminine tones, designed by nature to appeal, not to convince.

"We are different now," Madden went on.

"Yes," she agreed, dropping the little word like a clod falling into some burying place inside.

"You are not the girl you were then and I am not the boy I was then. A fellow just must tear his hair when he writes to his sweetheart, you know," he told her, repressing another grin.

"But he does not mean it," she said, revealing by her tones that this was a fact, not a grief. Her weather was changing.

"Oh, he feels it," Madden laughed, "not enough words in language to tell how strongly he feels it, not enough stars in the firmament to witness his devotion!"

CHAPTER XV

Fox hunting a woman's secret thoughts is not so easy. A man frequently runs to confusion in the wrong direction. Madden was on a cold trail and did not know it. A wife never gets out her relics, drops tears on her wedding gown, reads his lover letters until something perfectly terribly happens between her and her husband. Then she becomes an expert accountant, adds up her expenses in loyalty and devotion, pain, and children, subtracts him, what he has been doing, compares it with the letters—and goes silently into the bankruptcy of love without telling him that she is about to take the homestead on her affections.

Mary Madden had been engaged in this business when Pelham interrupted her. She was preparing to purge herself, spiritually speaking, of this husband before she gave herself entirely to her own higher interests.

Now she suddenly changed her mind. No matter what a good woman resolves to do against her husband, she always changes her mind, and does something to him which evens matters up between them for the moment and enables her to go on being a faithful wife with the upper hand.

She began to gather up the letters, pressing them together in a neat package, holding them beneath her palm.

"You are just right about it, Pelham," she said, reaching for the letter he held. "But isn't it funny I never thought of it that way before?"

He noticed her use of the word "funny." It grated on his sensibilities, but he was glad to have persuaded her so easily to take a normal view. Mary was a remarkably well-poised woman!

"You really are not the same man you were then, and I am even more changed," she said, smiling at him, but just smiling.

"I do not feel the same toward you in any way," she went on. "It is as if we were two other people entirely, isn't it? Held together by other ties, not the same love that bound us then, but the children, probably—and the marriage vows we said, not knowing how changed we should be by this time. Queer, isn't it?"

It certainly was! Damn queer! But he was too much astounded to say so. He stared at her in stupefied silence, waited, thinking she would realize the significance of what she had just said and would qualify it.

"What I mean is," she explained, answering his thought as she searched the floor with a glance to make sure she had all the letters, "we no longer

love each other. We have a sort of affection, merely the habit of life together, isn't that it?"

She clinched this monstrous revelation with that and wanted him to endorse it!

"But, Mary!" he exclaimed, "you surely do not understand what you are saying. You are too sweeping."

"No, because it is not a matter of understanding, but of feeling," she replied, rising and moving. Her waste paper ruffled in her hands.

"I am just beginning to realize myself how changed I am, that I do not feel the same toward you. It is so queer," she repeated, speaking with her back turned to him, and as if this sensation of queerness was a grateful one, refreshing, and she was glad to have it.

When she reached the open fireplace she dropped the whole mass into it, then she lighted a match and bent over and let the flame run like a blazing yellow grin through it. Then she stood up, leaned upon the mantel, lifted her skirts a trifle with one hand, put out the toe of her slipper and gently thrust a few pages that had escaped on the hearth closer to the flames.

This was the straw that broke the camel's back, a very delicate back in any husband, especially in the romantic Pelham, kicking his love letters into the fire with her foot!

"Well, if that is the way you feel," he mut-

tered, coming up out of his chair with a magnificent stride, by which he meant that there was no more to be said.

"Wait, Pelham," making a faintly detaining gesture as he passed her.

He halted, reluctantly, a proud man whose pride has been offended.

"Try to be reasonable," she began.

"Reasonable, good Lord!" he repeated, lifting his voice as if this was the least appropriate word she could utter. Where did she get it?

"Yes," she went on. "Those letters were the fables of your—your youth, written in a perfectly absurd style. They do not mean anything that is lasting or true. It is morbid to keep such things. That is why I wanted to burn them," she concluded flatly.

"So you were getting ready to do that when I came in?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes," she admitted after a perceptible pause. "I was sorting them out when you came in."

When saints begin to prevaricate it is time for sinners to take to their heels.

He gave her a look, merely an eye-thrust of bitter indignation, or of disappointment, or of shattered ideals. It might have meant any one or all of these emotions combined. She received it like a kiss on her forehead, eyes lowered, still intent upon that blazing pyre of hurricane senti-

mentality on the hearth. Then he passed through the door into his own room, closed it carefully but firmly.

The little tragedies of married life are the most diverting comedies, because they are played with awful gravity by two people who have lost the sense of humor which only an audience can supply and there never is an audience.

Madden continued to stride up and down the length of his room. He was walking it off. He had just seen the love scriptures of his youth destroyed. It was a curious sacrilege Mary had committed. Of course they were exaggerated, all that, but the point she made about being reasonable was not well taken. Women did not do such things out of excessive reasonableness. Why had she burned the letters then? He hoped and believed she was ignorant of the only possible excuse she could have. But he did not know. He had seen a good deal of Ellen Skipwith. But that was not his fault. It was the war. Besides, why shouldn't a man see as much of another woman as he did of another man. What right had society to restrict his liberties as if he were—a—a criminal, simply because he was married and she was married? Talk about all men being born free and equal! They might be until they married. After that they passed into a sort of

peonage to customs invented by scandal, jealousy, and suspicion!

He was working himself up. He passed the mirror and made an impatient gesture to the image reflected there. It had suddenly occurred to him that he was an unhappy man in his home. Recently whenever he entered this place he became the prey of strange anxieties. He was at a tension, in a state of uncertainty all the time. He could not say why, but something in Mary's manner kept him on the rack. He was continually expecting her to say something that would force an issue, only to have her glide over the place where the scene should take place just at the moment he was strung for it. She was near ramming him a dozen times a day with some question that invariably turned out to be one of her blind passes. He had had a narrow squeak in there with her just now, pausing to glance at the door of "in there," when she had mentioned that Anonymous contribution. She went all around the damn thing, drawing nearer and nearer to him concealed beneath it until he felt goose bumps on the skin of his back. He suffered all the vicissitudes of a disagreeable revelation. She was continually trampling him like that and then letting him go at the last minute, as if she was wholly unconscious of what she was doing. He was always on the defensive. Why?

A dozen different images of Ellen passed before him in reply, not accusative, but explanatory. The woman appealed to him. Of course she did. She would to any man. He supposed one reason for that was that every woman in the town disliked her with a sort of jealous feminine spite. That appealed to a man, too, his chivalrous nature. It was instinct to befriend under these circumstances. His thoughts dwelt upon Ellen as if she were a defenseless orphan. In this connection he recalled similar experiences since his marriage. Other women who had engaged his attention, one in particular, shortly before Mrs. Skipwith, Sarah Giffin, a filing clerk in the bank, a remarkable girl. He thought she had a bright future before her as a business woman. He had gone so far as to contribute a considerable sum toward a business course Miss Giffin needed to take, and which she had been unable to repay.

Well, Mary had done him out of this girl, all the pleasure he had in helping her, without ever mentioning her name, or indicating in any way that she knew of her existence. That was the point. She would not recognize Sarah's existence. When she came into the bank she saw every clerk and stenographer in it but this girl who was always splendidly apparent. She would have something to say to each one, gracious and

familiar. The upshot was that he felt obliged to secure a position for Miss Giffin in another bank in another city, because he could not risk the comment Mary's manner to her would eventually excite.

By this time he was changing for dinner, jerking himself into his clothes, handling himself roughly like an ill-tempered valet.

In this way he worked off some of his suppressed irritation. At the last he became interested, chose a distinctly evening effect in his tie, adjusted it carefully. He was thinking of something else, but he was trying to think of Mary. Hanged if he knew why she had burned the letters. Perhaps she was tired out, not well. Women were always morbid then. He felt a twinge on her behalf. A man ought to be patient with his wife. After all she was only a woman and could not help it!

He looked at his watch, after seven, but not too late for a nice little dinner at the Club. Mary needed diversion. He was a bit stale himself.

He went in to arrange this pleasant reconciliation.

He found Mrs. Madden near the end of one of those dull, dutiful toilettes she made when they dined at home in silence.

"Mary, what about going out to the Club for dinner?" he proposed amiably.

She gave him a glance, mild, but measuring. Was this the man who had flung out in a fury half an hour ago? Certainly not. Pelham was a leopard who could change his spots, a myriad man. This was one of the times when he was being his better self, or some other self whom she would discover later.

"But dinner is about to be served, Pelham. I was just going down!" she objected.

"That doesn't matter. We need a change, going to the doldrums," he said, making this grimacing reference to their recent encounter.

"Oh, very well, if you think you will enjoy it," she agreed.

"We both will. Lots of people going out. I'll call Tim; tell him to bring the car around," he said, going to the phone.

CHAPTER XVI

MRS. MADDEN found Rachel Warren seated before one of the dressing tables in the cloak room, giving her virtue a last incriminating dash of rouge on each withered cheek.

"Hello, Mary," she hailed her through the mirror.

They made some talk between them, chiefly about the wretched service at the Club. No maid to-night up there to help them off and on with their things. Rachel said she was rushing to join her party who were already down stairs at the table.

"Did you look in as you came up?" she asked, grinning broadly.

"No, why?" Mrs. Madden asked indifferently.

"A vaudeville in still life going on here to-night," Rachel answered.

"Not in the dining room, I hope," the other answered.

"In there, on the terrace, and in any sweet out of the way corner. Husbands' night, my dear! Nicholson is dining with Mrs. Nicholson only. Trainor with Mrs. Trainor. Plater with poor little Mrs. Plater, who can hardly keep the tears

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out of her eyes. And Tumlin frisking around Mrs. Tumlin, as if she was his bride. What did I tell you! Those lists have been waving like red flags in this town since five o'clock. These dinners to wives only are peace offerings, not a single husband realizing that the other husbands involved would do the same thing. Oh, it is funny."

Mrs. Madden did not look as if she thought so. She did not explain that she and Pelham had decided to come out at the last moment. She hoped Rachel would not notice that they were also dining alone.

They came downstairs together and paused before the open doorway of the flagged terrace where the people had their refreshments and dinners in summer weather. There were several parties seated around the larger tables, and, yes, a rather unusual number of married people dining confidentially, as it appeared, in the presence of the whole world.

"Look at the officer, a colonel, I believe," whispered Rachel.

"Where?" Mary asked.

"On this side, at the table with Barrie Skipwith."

They both stared at this stranger, a silent, big man sitting erect, listening to his companion with a keen smile.

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That any one should have the opportunity to listen while Skipwith talked was a sufficiently unusual circumstance, because he had given up all but the most sparing use of speech for some years.

"Barrie is talking as if he had a load off his mind. Must be Ellen. Wonder where she is to-night?" Rachel whispered.

"Good evening, Rachel," Madden said, coming up at this moment.

"Oh, how do you do, Pelham. I was just taking care of Mary until somebody came to claim her," she said, moving off between the rows of tables. Then she cast a glance back at these two already seating themselves at one of the small tables. Another married couple renewing their troth! Well, she had done all she could to hold Pelham's anonymous over him.

The Murrays were at the next table with two or three guests. Mrs. Murray was seated where she commanded an excellent double-barrel view of Pelham Madden, directly opposite him, but he hoped too far away to engage him in conversation, as he bowed to her with exaggerated politeness. While Mary was considering the menu and giving her order, he scanned the room just to see who was there, and then again as if he missed some one whom he thought should be there. His gaze steadied on Skipwith and his guest. There

was a cover laid at this table for the third person. And she was not there. His gaze traveled back to Mrs. Murray. He understood Ellen to say that she was going to Mrs. Murray's, and from there to dine at the Club with Barrie who had an out-of-town guest. Well, here was Barrie and Colonel Batterson. He had met the colonel while he waited for Mary to come down. And here was Mrs. Murray. He felt like a man who is about to have his fortune told with one of the cards lost from the deck. Also, he did not like the attention he was receiving from Mrs. Murray. She was carrying on a sort of absent-minded dialogue with one of the men at her table, while she continued to peck him with her eyes, meaning that as soon as she could change the subject she had something that could be said to him across two tables.

"Pelham," she rumbled at this very instant of his worst fears, "did you see the announcement of your protégée's marriage in the morning paper?"

"No," he managed to say it naturally because it was a word of one syllable.

He wanted to add something, that he had no marriageable protégées, that he had not seen or heard of Sarah Giffin for a year. But a man cannot shriek his innocence before a room filled

with people. Confound it, his innocence was giving him a lot of trouble.

Mrs. Madden concluded her order, turned enough in her chair to bow to Mrs. Murray.

"I was just telling Pelham that the Giffin girl is married at last," Mrs. Murray explained, repeating this news as if it belonged exclusively to Madden.

"I never knew her," Mary returned with scriptural severity which might or might not have been unconscious.

The hour progressed tediously after that. Madden was distracted by vain speculations. He saw every belated guest who came in until it was no longer possible for Ellen to come. He wanted a word, just one, with Ellen. The pleasant rumble of conversation between Skipwith and Colonel Batterson grated on his nerves. Mrs. Madden passed serenely from soup to salad, making no effort to fill the noticeable breach silence was making at their table. Pelham was having one of his fits. She might have covered it if she had not more than suspected the cause of his abstraction. No woman puts herself out to entertain a man when she knows he has another woman on his thoughts.

When coffee was served she compelled him to join the Murray party by joining it herself. Murray began to tell him that he thought it highly

probable that the Government would extend the draft age from eighteen to forty-five. He agreed. And it seemed that he told Murray he personally expected to go, in reply to some question, but he did not know what he had said because he was trying to catch something Mrs. Murray was telling his wife in confidential undertones.

“I arranged that matter with Mrs. Skipwith,” he heard her say; “no use to let a thing like that hang fire. . . . Something drastic had to be done. . . . Oh, she took it just as I said she would. She could not afford to refuse. I let her know that without saying so in so many words,” she answered with a laugh to some question Mary asked which he could not catch, though he strained his listening faculty until his ears seemed to be pricked forward.

He wondered what the old termagant had done to Ellen now. When his mind was not trailing Mary, his thoughts were on Ellen, and when they were not on Ellen they were scouting after Mary. He knew that this was a ridiculous state to be in but he could not help it.

CHAPTER XVII

ON the way home Mrs. Madden remained at peace with herself. It was the kind of peace a woman keeps without her husband, a high look on her face as if her thoughts were upon other, easier things than man. There was no man to her thoughts. He made a futile effort to talk, to draw her out. She would not be drawn. She filled the car with "yesses" and "noes" like drops of ice water.

"What was it Mrs. Murray was telling you about Mrs. Skipwith?" he asked abruptly, no longer able to restrain his anxiety.

"Oh, some Red Cross work she wants her to do, I believe," she answered casually and lapsed again into her cold moonlight silence.

If there is anything more provoking than a woman who has relinquished the powers of speech, the Lord has not made it yet!

They went into the quiet house. He dutifully escorted Mary upstairs. He turned on the lights up there. She went at once toward the nursery door, listened as usual, then turned the knob gently.

"Do you want to see them?" she murmured

much as if she had asked if he wanted to kneel at the altar for prayer.

He did not! Looking at his children in the dead hours of the night had never appealed to his paternal instinct. Might start something if the baby came to and found a light shining in its face. He had known that to happen. But just now he was ready to yield to anything that seemed to him yielding or binding in Mary. He followed her, with too much alacrity. She put out a hand warningly.

“Tip?” she whispered.

He came up on his toes, sneaked in her wake to the baby’s crib.

The baby, thank heaven, was sound asleep, with the moisture from the warm summer night glistening on his forehead.

“Like a flower in the gardens of God,” she breathed.

“Hey?” he exhaled because he thought he did not hear what she said.

She looked at him, meaning why do you “hey” in here! She bent over the crib.

“Mary,” he hissed, “for goodness’ sake don’t kiss the child. You will waken him surely.”

Well, she would not then. She moved on to Thomas’s bed. He followed, stood beside her, with his hands folded over his coattails behind: He let himself down cautiously onto his heels.

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Thomas was lying in that singularly noble attitude peculiar to the very young and to warriors who fall upon the field. He had passed into sleep, it seemed, after a desperate battle with the sheet, which he had won, for he now lay on top of it with the widest possible stride of his short legs.

"Dear little spirits," Mary whispered, looking from one to the other of her children.

"Fat little bodies!" he returned.

"Spirits," she corrected.

He glanced at her, vaguely suspicious of something abnormal.

"Come, Mary, don't strip them of their birth-right to be human beings," he said.

"They are born spirits, Pelham. Even in their sleep they know that we are here. Something in them is conscious of us," she said, doing her best to make him understand.

"Whatever else may happen to them I do not know, but they are *born* flesh and blood!" he exclaimed, forgetting to whisper.

Thomas threw up a leg and smote his sheet, the baby stirred.

"H-s-s-s-sh!" she warned.

They hurried out, Madden leading this time. But when they were in the hall he looked hard at Mrs. Madden. He was tempted to ask her if she attended Madam Ciel's lectures. Never be-

fore had the ghost of her, a living woman, and his wife, seemed so frigidly near. However, this was no time to raise issues. He decided to await developments. Besides, it is not discreet to raise an issue with your wife when she may have the advantage in a counter attack. Much of the cowardice of husbands comes from this feeling they have of a possibly exposed flank.

He did not rest well that night. The next afternoon he went to the library at five o'clock. But Mrs. Skipwith did not appear. Days passed and he had no word from her nor a glimpse of her. He began to wonder if she had left town. But in that case he thought she would surely have let him know. They had been in constant communication for months. Then it occurred to him that she might be ill. Finally he ventured to call the Skipwith residence, which he had never done before. It was tacitly agreed between them that she would do the calling over the phone. The maid answered. No, Mrs. Skipwith was not at home. No, she did not know when she would come in. Would he leave a message? He decided not to do that. Ellen was still in town, she was not ill. And she had not communicated with him for days! What could have happened? Could he have possibly offended her?

He was in his private office at the bank, following this train of thought up and down the

floor with nervous strides. He made a practice of remaining in the bank now after business hours, because there was a frightful lot of business to engage him while he waited, hoping he might get a call from Ellen over the phone. She was in the habit of doing that around five o'clock in the afternoon. He was depressed by overwork, by the sultry heat of July weather, and particularly by the inner confusion of his own heart.

At this moment a girl passed the window, evidently a working girl, wearing a blue and pink plaid gingham frock and a cheap straw hat with a ribbon band around it. He noticed her because he had seen her go by at this hour for a week, and because there was something vaguely familiar in the light swinging way she stepped along, and because she had red hair. His mind had a sort of white horse association with red hair these days.

The girl disappeared around the next corner into the avenue, and he went back to the consideration of Ellen. Since she had apparently deserted him he realized that he had been having an "affair" with Ellen. And he was trying to remember how he had become involved in such a thing. It had been going on for some time. He could trace the warm trail of his interest in her through the whole of the preceding winter,

the lively pleasure he had in her presence when they met on various social occasions. His sense of gratification when she singled him out, not openly, but unobtrusively, as if they had some secret bond of sympathy. He admired her discretion. It preserved him from a certain anxiety. He was not blind to the fact that she was mischievously feminine and unscrupulous, and that she was triumphantly conscious of her charm. In view of this latest development he thought probably that she had been stringing him, amusing herself at his expense.

He was not repentant. He had not done enough to make a man repent. He had not, he reflected virtuously, ever even kissed the woman! But he regretted the whole affair.

Somebody was to blame. He thought it was his own wife. This is the kind of shield and buckler use many a man makes of his wife between him and his bad conscience. Mary was a good woman, but tiresome. She had some invincible quality that never yielded. She lacked the elasticity of life even. If she changed she would continue to be true to herself, her eternal nature. She was not adjustable to him, nor to any condition except her own conditions. No real confidence existed between them. He had noticed this, particularly of late. She was hardening into a sort of silent antagonism. Her

mind was a cool, closed place, very clean and orderly where she did a lot of thinking which was adverse to him, not his interests, but to him personally. He had made advances, he was constantly making advances to Mary now, never to be rebuffed, but always to be evaded.

He felt like a widower with an incorrigibly good wife on his hands, and at the same time like a lover with a dangerous mistress whom he had lost, whom he wanted to be rid of, and at the same time he would have given much to have the most fleeting glimpse of her, or a word with her. He wanted just one word with Ellen. And he did not care which word it was, so she answered, gave him her eyes when she did it. Queer how a man could feel, or rather not feel toward a woman who commanded his respect, and to whom he owed everything, and how much more he could feel toward another woman who held no such claims upon him! Mary did not push his debt, but she was there with it all the time. Her very presence was a promissory note he owed society, his children and her. Why had he done this thing, taken out a mortgage on his whole life that could never be paid until death parted them!

This is the way marriage is frequently pronounced by a man when a light lady, however parsimoniously virtuous, appeals to his senti-

mental nature, his former stars, and poet dust. She resurrects the lover and damns the husband in him. He becomes a dashing, frisky incurable for whom neither nature nor science has a remedy. He needs more consideration than he deserves.

CHAPTER XVIII

MRS. MADDEN was succeeding very well with her campaign in view of the fact that she had no definite plan of action. She was simply following nature which is a very good course to follow when you do not know where you are going nor how it will end. That is to say, she had made his home an impregnable fortress against her husband. He enjoyed all his rights and privileges, was served with scrupulous regard for his comfort. And he was still homeless. She had routed him this far, frequently a fatal victory for a wife to win. But she lacked the initiative to carry her advantage into the enemy's country. She did not know how to deal with such a woman as Mrs. Skipwith. She felt that she lacked the right ordnance for this kind of warfare and she did not know what to do next.

It was the last of July, some two weeks after the day Madden had been striding up and down in his office discussing with himself the unaccountable deflection of Ellen and other disagreeable matters, when she noticed a remarkable improvement in Pelham's spirits. He was now in a humor that approached extreme cheerfulness.

Nothing offended him. He was not peevish when he had been peevish. Everything agreed with him.

Now when your husband is happy when he has every reason to be unhappy, when you are Hooverizing your conversations with him down to the simplest details of your common interest, it is the strongest kind of circumstantial evidence that he is receiving sustenance from some hidden source. She knew that this must be Ellen in spite of the fact that Mrs. Skipwith had been effectually eliminated from the circle of women prominent in the Sulgrave War Emergency Society, and was supposed to be devoting herself in an exemplary manner to the Milltown Red Cross Room.

She might have been a prey to her own self-consciousness, but once or twice it seemed when she entered the Sulgrave work rooms on The Bow, her appearance had the effect of reminding other women gathered there of Ellen Skipwith.

"Have you heard how Mrs. Skipwith is coming on with her Milltown workers, Mary?" Mrs. Nicholson asked her one day.

"No. Mrs. Murray can probably tell you that," she answered.

What Mrs. Murray knew she kept to herself, affecting not to hear this question.

"I have not seen her in a month. Has anybody seen her?" This from Mrs. Nicholson.

When every woman around the table hastened to say that not one of them had seen Ellen, Mrs. Madden felt obliged to say that she had not either in order not to be conspicuous by her silence.

"I never knew Mrs. Skipwith very well, only in the most casual way," she added.

"Well, we hear the funniest things about her. She has an entirely new rôle now. It seems that she is playing the——"

"We must finish this consignment of bandages to-day, ladies," Mrs. Murray interrupted.

A significant silence followed which somebody politely offered to fill by a remark about the weather.

Mary Madden returned home vaguely depressed, feeling somehow that she had been made an object of charity, that Mrs. Murray had done her a service and a kindness when she interrupted the running comments of the women in the work room.

She met Pelham coming in to lunch. He was wearing a plaid red and green tie, hideously unbecoming, the sort of neck decoration affected by young men when they are just beginning to realize that there is another sex in the world besides their own. She was astounded at the sight

of this rooster plumage around the neck of her husband. It was obviously a "Pep" tie. She referred to it frequently with her eyes during luncheon.

Later she found another, gladder tie in the drawer in his room. Now when a man marries, if he really means it, he sobers his cravats as a wife dresses less like a love letter writ large.

This was on a Thursday afternoon, the day when Mary Madden invariably paid a dutiful visit to her mother. Usually she went accompanied by all the children. On this day she went alone. She wanted to know what was going on in the town, information which Mrs. Darah always kept on the end of her tongue. Also, she wanted counsel, advice. She had never discussed the problems of her married life with her mother, feeling that decent secrecy which belongs to the very soul of a faithful wife, and while her mother was discreetly polite, and artfully friendly in her manner to Pelham, she knew that she did not really like him, nor trust him. She received him properly, but with too much gracious formality on those state occasions when they went there to dine and likewise she wore her best things and her court manners when she came to dine with the Maddens. If she paid a visit to her daughter in the afternoon, she was either gone or going out as Pelham came in, and "sorry to

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have missed him," but determined to do so. She spoke well of him to every one, exercising her family pride in this matter, but once not long since she had remarked to Mary that she thought Pelham had the "Latin temperament." Later on she let her know that she did not think the Latin temperament was the best qualification for happiness when you were married to it.

She found Mrs. Darah fussed up as usual in a gray voile frock, with a lavender ribbon around her little thin, warped waist, a very fine lace collar, flowing sleeves, prim slippers on her prim little feet, hair crimped, face powdered, black eyes shining beneath the withered lids, a pretty little old flower, still carefully tended by her own hands, and by all the arts of her prideful vanities.

"I was just thinking it was time for you to come in, my dear," she exclaimed cordially.

Mary kissed her, asked her how she did, and settled herself in the nearest chair.

"Where are the children?" Mrs. Darah asked.

"I did not bring them," Mary said, not able to think just then of a reason sufficiently misleading to explain this omission.

Mrs. Darah hastened to tell her everything that she had heard about everybody, which was not much because nothing was going on but the war, which was perfectly terrible and growing more so every day. And had she heard that old

Mr. Kimble's son had been severely wounded. And so on and so forth until the inevitable silence fell between them, because they both understood that they wanted to talk about something very difficult to discuss.

"I hope you do not mind my not bringing the children as usual, Mother," Mary explained a bit awkwardly, "but the truth is I am, well, a little fagged. I wanted a rest from them."

"You would do better if you did that oftener, my dear. You are making a cult of your children. It is a mistake."

"But what else is a mother for?"

"You forget that you are some one else besides a mother," the old lady returned quickly. "Just a mother always makes a failure of her life, and usually of her children."

Mary remained thoughtfully noncommittal.

Mrs. Darah wore nose glasses, but not on her nose except when she actually needed them. Otherwise she kept them hooked on the curled tail of a small, splendidly fierce gold dragon, pinned on the bosom of her bodice. She deftly unhooked these glasses now and adjusted them carefully on her nose. She understood that this was not the usual filial visit that Mary made on Thursdays, but that it was the furtive return of the child to the mother. She wondered as she scanned Mary's face what Pelham Madden had

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been doing now. She had her suspicions. She always had and always would have her suspicions of that man. She knew enough of his escapade with Ellen Skipwith to be anxious and very careful what she said.

"You make a cult of your children, and of your home, and of your husband, but never of yourself," she began again, sure that she was on the right trail. "A woman should do that first, last, and all the time!"

"I do the best I can, Mother," Mary answered wearily.

"Oh, you do too well!" Mrs. Darah retorted, fanning herself. "You are too much like your father, my dear, and he was a man. You are like him and you are a woman. Your father had no imagination. He just lived reasonably, one thought at the time. I never knew him to depart an inch from the beaten track. He would not relax, nor entertain a fancy, anything that would ease the hard grind of life. He died of just that!"

"Father was wonderful!" Mary said, defending him, mildly.

"Good, my dear, yes; tediously so but not wonderful. A man cannot be that without imagination, a little freedom of his humanness."

She sighed and went on.

"You were always too much the same way. I

combated your father in you from the time you were born. But I never could make you *see!*"

"See what, Mother?"

"That a woman cannot, cannot make a drudge of herself, scrubbing just her virtues all the time without paying the price."

"I don't understand."

"You never did, my dear. Take the matter of clothes. Do you know why men and women are born without fur or feathers?"

Mrs. Madden did not know. She had never thought of it.

"Because your Maker left that to your imagination, what you should wear, by way of interpreting yourself. It is a compliment the good Lord paid you, Mary, and one which you have never deserved."

"Aren't my clothes all right?" asked the astonished victim.

"They are not! They are abominable. They do not become you. They make no appeal in your behalf. You have never studied that. You are raiment dumb, hat simple, the dupe of colors like a man. Your father would have worn the same mustard-colored frock you have on now if he had not been born to gray trousers! And you a blonde with blue eyes!"

"Mother, my gowns are made by the best modiste in Atlanta. She assures me that they are

always made according to the very latest styles!" Mary exclaimed, wounded and vaguely uneasy about this.

"And you take her word as you would a patent medicine! You spare yourself the care of studying yourself, your appearance, the contrasts you need! It is plain negligence of a sacred duty. I am nearly sixty years old, but I would not dream of allowing the best dressmaker to make a frump of me!

"I tell you these things, my dear, because no one else will do it. Some other woman with imagination, and no sense of duty at all, will take your husband away from you presently!"

It was out at last! Mary felt her face burn.

"Give more attention to yourself. Neglect something. Leave the children alone. They are morbidly well brought up. They need a little less care and more liberty. Find an interest of your own in life as Pelham has at the bank," she concluded, with a suspicion of tears in her eyes.

"You know what I mean, Mary," she said after a pause. "We cannot talk about it, but you know."

"Yes, Mother, but——" She hesitated.

"What, my dear?"

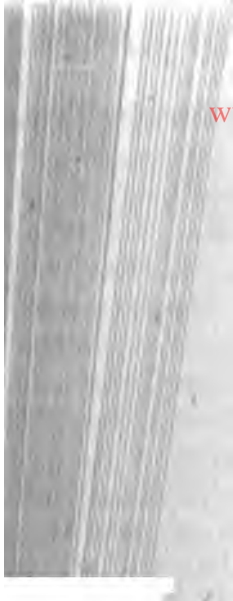
"Your remedy seems so—so mild!"

"But try it. Create a diversion. You can do it!"

“I never thought of myself that way.”

“Learn to think. Make it your prayer to heaven that you may learn how to dress and abound!” said the valorous old lady so earnestly that Mary laughed.

That settled it. Strange things were to happen. Minerva was to spring once more from Jupiter’s crown, but without a helmet on her head.



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began to hope and nothing else makes so much noise as the revival of hope in the hearts of stricken people. It was the shifting of scenery according to the energy of these hopes that made such a deafening roar. New armies suddenly appeared where old armies had stood and fought and passed. Strange new ships rose like phantoms on our shores and hurried down into the seas. And the seas were peopled with three hundred thousand soldiers, all with their faces turned one way in great haste to be where they were going in time for the next act. The First American Army in France was stiffening for the first All-American Drive. And fourteen million men in this country waited while Congress made up its exceedingly scattered mind as to whether it would or would not pass a new draft law calling them from eighteen to forty-five to register for service.

Business lost a thousand legs. And these financial "casualties" were not listed with the other casualties because they were relatively unimportant. Everything was unimportant now except preparations for the next great act in the course of which honor, ideals, humanities and civilizations must perish or be established by force of arms.

Sulgrave moved along in the ominous shadows

cast by these coming events, adjusting her ways and means to the future that might be any kind of future. The present was bad enough and hard enough but it was not considered good form to complain about that. Business men added government business to their own and worked double time. The women of Sulgrave ceased to argue with their grocers about the impossibility of making two pounds of sugar for each member of their family do. They gave up complaining about the quality of flour, because it seemed that the grocers were strangely proud and relieved of responsibility in these matters. There was another thing even more grievous to be borne. Always if you lived on the avenue you must be stirred from your first long sleep to your postscript morning nap by the concert thunder of cooks beating steak for breakfast in every kitchen from The Bow to the very end of the residence section. Now this old-fashioned culinary noise had subsided, because there were very few cooks in service. They had retired on the allotments received from their husbands and sons who now belonged to those very efficient American "midnight" regiments in France. The weather was warm, so they rested. And the ladies on the avenue prepared continental breakfasts for their families, minus steak. It was no longer done anyway, steak for breakfast! And loaf bread took the

place of beaten biscuit for dinner. As for lunch, it was the merest incident. Meanwhile they made hasty preparations to leave for the summer, take whatever accommodations that were to be had in mountains and seaside hotels. Anything was better than cooking in this heat.

Then Mrs. Murray called a meeting of the Selgrave Society for War Work at the Red Cross rooms. They went, expecting it to be the closing meeting until autumn. They were mistaken. The Regent explained that she had called the meeting in order to get pledges from every member of the society to remain in Sulgrave during the summer and continue, even double their working hours, especially for the Red Cross. Every one knew, she told them, that great battles were eminent, therefore thousands of wounded men must be provided for. What was cooking in a hot kitchen compared with the hardships of our own soldiers in France at this time.

Three hundred of the leading women in Sulgrave pledged themselves to remain at home and do their duty. They would have deserted their husbands and their homes under the circumstances, but they could not desert their soldiers in France.

Very few people realize the fact, but the regulation of food supplies and the taking over of

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manufacturing plants and public utilities by the Government would never have placed this country on a war basis if it had not been for the hold our soldiers in France have on their women at home. This is a relation established by nature for service and sacrifice which no law in this country could have enforced, because the Government was not in a position to take the women over along with the other utilities. It is an unwritten law in decent civilizations that only citizens who enjoy the rights of citizenship may be drafted for service during a war. This lets women out. And it is to their everlasting honor and credit that they have never had the sense to take an ignoble advantage of this circumstance, in times of war.

“Nothing matters now but service to our men in France,” Mrs. Murray told them on that hot afternoon during the first week in August. “We cannot afford to think of our own discomforts when we consider their needs and their dependence upon us. This is no time to think even of our rights and our wrongs,” she went on, sweeping the audience with a meaning glance, because many of the Sulgrave women were committed to certain feminist movements in a strictly feminine way without bothering the men about it.

“As for the ballot, that is a matter delivered now entirely into our own hands for settlement,”

she said, combatting the dubious expression on the upturned faces before her with an affirmative gesture. "If we fail to do our duty now, we shall not deserve the ballot. If we are faithful to the boys now in France we are sure to get it soon.

A smile crept slyly into the faces before her, the contagion of a frail hope.

She was a very shrewd old woman, like thousands of others in this country who know what they want, and they know that they will get it so soon as the talkers stop talking and their deeds are counted.

Thus it happened when on the eighth of August the Allies' great offensive began in France, the drive for every kind of war service was on in Sulgrave, as if Sulgrave had at last conceded her common relation to mankind regardless of her former somewhat pretentious attitude of being in the world but not of it.

But you may be a patriot and still be very mindful of your own affairs. And the personal affairs of several people in this town were becoming much more involved than they usually are outside of fiction. So that it seemed likely when universal peace should be declared in the world at large there would be a dearth of intimate, private, home-made peace in Sulgrave. This is why fiction is an important part of history. It is the

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history of histrionics in human nature. And with such people as Pelham Madden, Ellen Skipwith and their partners in life stirring the back fires of love and intrigue any history of Sulgrave was bound to be fiction.

CHAPTER XX

ONE afternoon near the end of July Pelham Madden, still depressed and incensed by Ellen Skipwith's silence and withdrawal, passed out of the bank and stepped down into the side street just in time to face the red-haired girl who wore the gingham frocks and the straw hat with the pale blue ribbon band around the crown.

"Ellen!" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Madden," she returned easily and coolly and would have passed on as one passes a casual acquaintance.

He was on his feet in a moment, figuratively speaking, dexterously in possession of his faculties. He was determined to have it out with Ellen. But this was no place for an encounter. It was after the closing hour. Crowds were hurrying along The Bow, filtering into this side street.

"What a lucky chance, meeting you at the very doorstep when I've just been trying to locate you," he said, copying her manner, repressing his excitement.

"Won't you come in a moment. I want some information," he invited, using his business tones.

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"How?"

“My dear, what does all this mean?” he cried. “You are not like yourself, dim, pale, as if you had been ill. And that dress, and this talk about living in the factory district.”

“I have been reduced to ranks,” she informed him, leaning back and folding her hands meekly.

“I don’t understand,” he said, frowning.

“No? You have not heard, then?” she asked.

“Not a word. And I could not ask questions,” he returned as if she would understand that.

“Mrs. Murray sent me to organize a Red Cross room in the factory district. I have been down there eight hours a day for the past two weeks,” she told him.

“The old fiend. Why didn’t she do it herself?” he cut in.

“She gave me an allowance for this work, which I must not exceed, not nearly enough. So we had to take a basement room in one of the big mills, with all the machinery roaring overhead. It—the noise is rather terrible, and the heat is dreadful,” she concluded plaintively.

“But why did you do it? Why didn’t you refuse?”

“I could not very well. And some one had to do it, get the factory women interested,” she explained.

“It is disgraceful, sending a girl like you on such a job,” he objected.

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“What was that question you wanted to ask?” she said, going back to that.

He had of course wanted to know what she had done with the thousand dollars he had contributed through her to the Hospital Fund. Mary had mentioned that this Anonymous contribution amounted to only a hundred dollars. He had held the remaining nine hundred against Ellen. At times he almost hoped to find her guilty of something like that. It would relieve him of a troublesome infatuation. He did not suppose a man could care much for a woman who filched money from him. But now all that was passed. The nine hundred dollars were still unaccounted for, but no man could look into this Ellen’s face, know what he knew of her valiant sacrifices and ask such a question.

“I have forgotten what it was I wanted to know,” he said, smiling gravely. “You yourself answer every question my heart can ask!”

“I must go,” she said and did not go, meaning that she was too weary to make the effort.

He understood perfectly, keeping his head down. He was engaged in one of those histrionic battles with himself, doing his best to keep a man’s creed of honor in these trying circumstances. She was not there to help in such a

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struggle of course. On the contrary, she was merely the audience of his imprisoned emotions, a perverted way some women have of amusing themselves.

"You, you will—stop in here on your way home sometimes, won't you? I may be able to help you," he said at last.

"I need it," she returned, rising.

You will have observed that the heroine never leaves the stage without turning just before she passes into the wings to cast her last thought from her either with a look or in a few of the best words to be found in the play. If she failed to do that her exit would be abrupt. Well, Ellen Skipwith had this instinct for clinching her own scenes. She paused now at the door, let her eyes swim through a mist of tears to Madden's face, saddened the corners of her mouth at him.

"What is it?" he asked, suiting his tones to the gentle piety of her gaze.

"It is queer, isn't it, Pep, how the right people so often miss each other until—it is too late," dropping her voice into a whisper.

He made no reply. It was damned queer of course, but the impregnable man in him would not concede that much against his wife. He was really a much better fellow than Mary supposed him to be. And the awful injustice of it all, he reflected as he dropped into a chair and held his

head in his hands after Ellen went out, was that Mary never would know how upright and faithful he was to her because he never could tell her about it, the temptations he passed through with the skirts of his soul lifted for her sake. A wife was certainly limited by nature in her sympathies for the man who was her husband!

But all this did not prevent the capering Pep male of him from purchasing the next day that tropical tie which had riveted Mrs. Madden's attention. He did not know it but this tie was the high tenor in colors to Ellen Skipwith's gingham dress. It was merely the theme of his enlivened instincts showing beneath his collar and betraying him to his wife. Men publish themselves in a thousand ways like that and then wonder irritably why their wives suddenly without reason flare up or freeze down at them.

CHAPTER XXI

MRS. MADDEN had at last settled upon what course she would pursue. The grievance of a good wife may develop into a tireless, feminine energy of purpose which can no more be destroyed than one of the forces of nature. All the reserve forces in women are that in fact. She was not sure of success, nor counting upon success, but she was now sure of herself, a tremendous victory which women sometimes achieve without so much as a change of expression. It is a subtle form of divorce, not recognized, but frequently practiced in the best society.

She was making certain preparations for this campaign, not against her husband, nor against Ellen Skipwith, whose light and fantastic shadow flitted constantly before her, a sort of familiar spirit that accompanied Pelham, but literally a campaign for herself.

No further confidence had passed between her and her mother on this subject, but one day a little withered French modiste who had been blown across the Atlantic by the horrors of war, and who had been snatched from a nearby city, arrived in Sulgrave and was conveyed to the resi-

dence of Mrs. Darah, where she remained during the whole of August fashioning the kind of frocks and gowns for Mary that Mrs. Darah had always wanted Mary to wear. This she insisted was the best plan because even as a girl Mary was fatally disposed to yield too much to the commercial advice and worn-out taste of dressmakers. For once in her life she would see to it that her daughter wore costumes designed for her, not women in general. She was at last putting down the man-Darah in Mary and she was imperiously happy in this triumph over her dead and gone husband. She frequently snapped her eyes at him sitting dully inattentive in his portrait above the mantel as she whisked in and out of her chamber, fussing over laces and fabrics and designs.

Mrs. Madden became a slave to this arrangement, a sort of belated bride-elect with a maternal middle-aged expression—submitting to the hardships of having a trousseau planned and fitted to her. It was a secret business altogether, these visits after lunch every day to the Darah residence. When you are about to be born again you do not take the public into your confidence.

She was ever more reserved about other preparations. The Darah was far more regnant in her than her mother supposed. She was applying herself with all of the old Judge's mental acumen to another matter far more important to her plans

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than mere clothes. She frequently accompanied Mrs. Murray home from the Red Cross rooms on The Bow. She invariably returned from these conferences with the old Regent laden with literature which was neither novels nor magazines. It was Government stuff, the dreariest looking printed matter produced in this country.

But when Pelham Madden took his paper in the evenings after dinner she took her pamphlet. She studied these undressed, closely written pages with an absorption that could not have failed to attract his attention if he had not been equally absorbed in something else. He was going the gait now and he was too much relieved to find Mary apparently less psychic than she had been for some time to concern himself about what she was doing. Things seemed to be going smoothly with less occult friction between them. He was not very companionable, giving Mary to understand that with the Fourth Liberty Loan to be put through in September, he had so much to do, so many adjustments to make at the bank that he was too nearly fagged out at the end of the day to be a companion. She accepted that view. She was a very sensible woman in some ways, naturally given to a sort of domestic silence which he had found irritating at times, but not now. He did not discuss the Liberty Loan with her, of course. That was a man's burden, though of

course the women of the Sulgrave Society for War Service would no doubt get a smattering subscription of bonds. He supposed that all had been arranged. Later he recalled something Mary had said in this connection about being the County Chairman of the Women's end of this work.

Repose is not a natural state of existence, and too much repose is decidedly abnormal. Nobody can endure that. We require a certain amount of irritation as we require exercise after food.

One day Pelham Madden came in later than usual. He had seen Ellen. He saw her every day now. This time he had gone over the river and overtaken her as she came out of the Red Cross room in the Mill basement. They had returned in his car, not directly. Ellen needed the air. They had gone for a spin along the country roads on that side of the river. And he certainly had not enjoyed the experience. There was a rift in the lute somewhere. He could not tell whether it was because Ellen was less provocative, apparently accepting him as an established fact, or if it was because Barrie Skipwith met them just now, coming down the steps of his house as the car stopped as if he had been waiting for the opportunity to assist Mrs. Skipwith to alight from it. Nothing offensive in his manner, quite too casual in fact. But he noticed that Ellen fluttered

considerably as if it was necessary to explain how Mr. Madden happened to pass her returning from the Red Cross room at the factory and had picked her up. So good of him! waving her hand to him, while Skipwith said, "Much obliged, Pelham!" but without looking at him. He felt vaguely damaged, cheapened somehow, as he came into his own house. He was in need of being soothed.

He went up stairs and came down again, almost at once. Everything was quiet, restful, just as it should be, fans of sunlight through the open doors and windows, summer flowers languishing in bowls and vases, not a rug ruffled, not a child's toy to be seen anywhere, a perfect haven for a man with nerves. Too much of a haven! Why was it that these days nobody ever warned him to be quiet, step lightly, and not to awaken the baby? He might rave in this place and nobody would be disturbed.

He glanced in the library and saw Mrs. Madden seated at her desk apparently taking notes from some papers spread before her. She turned her head, looked at him as if she did not see him, and said something about the weather. She offered him the weather like a toast whenever he came in! He was tired of this subterfuge for a greeting! He went into the veranda, scanned the lawn as if he was looking for what was not there. He was stirring up something. A man will do

that, as a woman will, when he is stirred himself about something else.

He came back, stood for a moment at the door of the library. His presence there had the effect of hurrying Mrs. Madden. She wrote rapidly for the fraction of a moment, then straightened herself with a sigh and began thrusting the papers into the drawer of her desk.

"I was just finishing," she said, evidently with her thoughts still on what she was doing.

"Mary, where are the children?" he demanded, for it suddenly occurred to him that he had seen nothing of them of late. He could not remember just when he had seen Thomas and the baby.

"The children?" she repeated vaguely.

"Yes, where are they?" he asked with a widening stare at the absent-minded way she received this very natural inquiry.

"I have no idea where they are," she answered.

He came in at that, sat down carefully with his eyes still fixed on her face, as a man does when he prepares for strange news. Never before had Mary failed to know all about the children down to the last track they had made, and the last deed they had done.

"Elsie must have gone for her music lesson. She usually goes at four o'clock. But she should have returned before now," she began as if she were tracing Elsie merely by her habits.

But she isn't!

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Then she leaned back, clapped her hands over her head and smiled. It was the first impish thing she had ever done in the course, of her married life, and she felt singularly refreshed.

Some very good people live and die without ever knowing the strictly human pleasure there is in being a little less good. It affords a sense of freedom, as if some imprisoned spirit of you had capered for a moment in the open, a dangerous relaxation, but invigorating and healthful.

When he came down, his face lined up in a grave and rebuking expression, she would not recognize the import of his fatherly countenance.

"I was almost sure they were up there," she said, smiling. "Susan usually brings them in before six."

"There are still two missing," he said sternly.

"Oh, yes, I remembered after you went up stairs. Pelham and Elsie are having tea with Mother this evening. They will come in presently," she assured him.

Of any other woman he would have been suspicious, but not of Mary. She was too stupidly sincere to be perverse by deliberately exciting his anxiety about the children. But some virtue essential to his peace and sense of security had gone out of her. For months he had been conscious of this loss. She was absorbed in something else, more and more removed from the things that

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fusion of her presence was in Mrs. Darah's house, not his.

One night when Mrs. Madden went up stairs after dinner to receive the bedtime petitions of her two elder children to Almighty God, as she always did with her knees for the altar, she was astounded at a postscript that Pel added to his prayer. "God bless Father and Mother—and Mrs. Skipwith!" he concluded with fervent emphasis on the last person to be blessed. Then he arose, flung himself into bed, crossed his knees, and lay with his hands clasped beneath his head, elbows sticking out like naked wings and stared at the ceiling, a small black-haired imp of a man-to-be who was now engaged in angel thoughts with reference to certain matters in his own mind.

"Mother," Elsie said, glancing reprovingly at Pel, "I do not pray for Mrs. Skipwith because she is not a member of our family."

"You must pray for everybody, dear," her mother answered in a strange voice.

"Yes," retorted the little female, "but not for her in particular."

"She is the very nicest lady," Pel insisted.

"Yes, Pel," Mrs. Madden answered after consideration. "You must always say that if any one asks you about her. But how did you find out how nice she is?"

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CHAPTER XXII

THERE was a scene on the morning of August 19th in the office of the *Sulgrave Sentinel*. This was Monday, always a day of editorial violence when copy was overhauled and preparations were begun for the next issue of *The Sentinel*.

Rachel Warren was seated behind her desk like a cat in a waste basket, old proofs and last week's exchanges riddled by her scissors were piled on the floor about her.

She was regarding the man who sat at another desk on the opposite side of the room with the avid attention sometimes bestowed by the very young on a mechanical toy which may go off again at any moment.

This was Mr. Michael O'Conner, Irishman, patriot, and editor of *The Sentinel*, a large red-faced man with an extremely bald head. He had his back to the audience at this moment, hunched over his desk with the swivel chair beneath him creaking beneath his weight. A very large handkerchief lay on the desk beside him like an emergency. He held a paper in one hand, manuscript size, and he held the forefinger of the other hand pressed hard upon his upper lip just beneath the

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"Every sentence in it treaced German propa-ganda!" he exclaimed.

"It is a Sabbath meditation on the horrors of war from the spiritual point of view. I had dinner with her at the hotel last night. She gave me that—little meditation—she called it, thinking you might like to have it for the *Sentinel*," Rachel explained.

"And did you think so?" he exclaimed indignantly.

"Oh, no, that was not my idea at all," she returned, beginning to use her scissors on a morning paper.

"What was your idea then?" he asked, letting the question slip through a tone designed to be sneering, but which was pathetically nasal, owing to his condition.

"I want you to accept it," she told him.

"What for? No honest man would publish a thing like that in this country," he exclaimed.

"Not for publication, of course," she said, looking up, "but just drop Madam Ciel a nice little note, saying you have taken it, that you are interested in getting copy of this kind and hope she will submit other articles."

"I'll be—er—kerchew!—if I do!—Don't stir up those papers, Rachel, the dust makes me sneeze!" he managed to say.

"And you might put in a little check, just to encourage her," she suggested.

"Good Lord, have you taken leave of your senses!" he cried.

"No, my faculties are, in comparison with the rest of you, singularly alert," she retorted.

He considered this enigmatical reply for a moment.

"Well, what are you driving at. Put me on," he returned irritably.

"I cannot. I know nothing, but I suspect the worst. That is why I want you to encourage Madam Ciel to show her hand, writing what seems to me the rankest kind of German propaganda."

"But I thought she was one of those fakers you women take up, teaching a class here in finite spiritualism or some such rot," he objected.

"That has fallen through. She lost all her pupils when Mrs. Nicholson received a letter from Theo, proving that he was in a rest billet twenty miles behind the firing line when Mrs. Nicholson, guided by Madam Ciel's psychic instructions, thought she saw him going to his death across No Man's Land."

O'Conner laughed.

"Well, under these embarrassing circumstances, the natural thing would have been for Madam to leave town," Rachel went on. "But she

has not gone. On the contrary, she wishes to remain here. She has joined the Red Cross——”

“But that won’t do!” O’Conner exclaimed.

“Yes, I inducted her into that service myself. Mrs. Murray understands. The dressings she makes, all materials she handles there are kept separate for examination.”

“What next?” O’Conner asked with tolerant amusement.

“No definite proofs against her so far, but her conduct is more and more suspicious. Before the Fourth Liberty Loan Drive begins we should know exactly who and what Madam Ciel is. I have already discovered that she never was in Memphis, the last place she claims to have taught her ridiculous doctrine, before she came here,” she concluded.

“Nothing in it, not a thing,” he said after a pause, “but I’ll play up. Encourage the old girl to betray herself if I can.”

He turned back to his desk. Rachel went on with her work.

“Rachel,” he said presently with his back turned to her, “you are a very smart woman.”

“Yes, I am bright in a way,” she agreed modestly.

“But you are the most perverse and exasperating example of your irritating sex I have ever known,” he announced.

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"It is very strange!" he sighed.

"Very natural," she corrected, as if he had been a galley of proof.

He had courted her in this manner for years, always after some disagreement over the policy of the paper, always with his back discreetly turned to her withering fire.

"I think you ought to put something in the *Sentinel* this week about Barrie Skipwith," she said apropos of nothing at all after ten minutes' silence.

"What for? What has he done?" he demanded, flirting around and facing her.

"Nothing yet, but there is something in the wind. He is about to come into action if I know the signs of weather in a man," she said.

"What kind of action? The last thing he did was five years ago, nuptial business."

"This isn't. It's the man himself. He is different."

"What makes you think so?" he asked.

"You will not understand if I tell you," she began reluctantly, "but he is like Barrie used to be, gay, companionable. He is calling on all of his friends. Had four or five of the men here who were in his class years ago at V. M. I. to dinner at the Club last night. Mrs. Murray says he dropped in for tea yesterday afternoon, made himself the life of the party. He's got his head

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"Thank Heaven!"

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“I imagine Barrie is all right along that line,” she said.

“You have imagined the whole thing in my opinion, two whole things, that spy stuff about Madam Ciel, and this, whatever it is about Skipwith. But write it and put it in. We can afford to risk a bet on him. No harm done. He’s a prominent golf player anyhow.”

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the property."

"Yes, he has," she said, speaking for the first time. "He was in here this afternoon to see me about it."

"To see you!" her husband exclaimed astonished.

"Yes, you know I am on the Woman's State Board for the Fourth Liberty Loan Drive.

"No, I did not know that," he said in a tone which implied that it was very queer about his not knowing.

"He wants to invest the whole amount through us in the Fourth Liberty Loan. I have his order on you for fifty registered thousand dollar bonds," she added, not as if she was making an announcement which was positively sensational, but merely an item of information she gave him.

"By Jove!" was all he could think of to say in reply.

"It is rather wonderful," she went on smoothly, "the way the Government has trusted and leaned upon the women in this crisis."

She looked at him for some kind of affirmative which he did not offer. He was thinking of several things in a confused way. Skipwith for example, not buying his bonds through the bank as usual. And Mary on a State Board. How did that happen? She had not advised with him about it.

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ll that without consulting him, merely calling m on the phone at the last minute before the ain left to tell him that she was going and suggesting that he might as well take lunch down wn that day. He supposed it was a shopping :pedition, but now he had his doubts. How did e get on that State Board?

This kind of thing was bad for the children, ot good for the home. It had to stop! But he d not know how to stop it.

He passed the window and looked in again at ary seated voluminously in her chair, still ading that damned book. She wore a pale blue gandie, figured with large deeper blue pansies id gray green leaves. Her head, crowned with e ash-colored hair, glistened in the light. As a le he did not notice how his wife was dressed. e merely forgave her that. But he noticed this :ess. The pansies seemed to rise and float above e dimmer blue, their stems curled gayly. A rge, flowered, benignant woman studying national statistics!

She looked more like just a woman than he had ver seen her, and she talked less like one, he :flected, taking another turn along the veranda. ut she was wrong of course about the war ending soon. Not only that, but it was now practically certain that Congress would pass the new raft law. He began to think about that. If men

up to forty-five were drafted there would be a pretty serious situation to face. From thirty-five to forty-five was the ten years active business career of the average man. If the man power between these ages, that is to say, the skilled brain power of the nation, should be suddenly removed, well, the Government might as well go ahead and take over business in general, as it had taken the railroads and other things. There would be no one to run it but men who had failed or men who had succeeded and quit.

He was not thinking of himself in this connection. He was, of course, well within the draft age, and rich in the moderate Sulgrave fashion, but as a banker doing a great deal of important work for the Government, he supposed he would be entitled to exemption. Besides, there were Mary and the children. He understood that it was not the policy of the Government to break up young and growing families.

Still he might be called. He permitted himself to enjoy the hardships of this idea. He saw himself in khaki, training, crossing on a transport that was struck by a torpedo from a submarine, struggling in the icy water, surviving, going on. In the trenches at last, fighting, wounded. He spared himself nothing of the terrible vicissitudes of war. And as he swept forward in the valorous vaporings of his imagination he in-

stinctively altered his civilian tread to a measured military stride. He turned sharply and came back again, glanced inside and saw Mary. She was no longer reading. She was staring with her wide blue eyes fixed on the window. He noticed that, her attentive expression, evidently thinking of him, he thought.

He had an inspiration, one of the easiest things in the world for him to get. And he invariably acted up to an inspiration to the point of unsafety, then he very sensibly relinquished that one for another one.

In fact, Mrs. Madden had noticed the change in his step when he brisked up and began to thump the floor with a sort of "Hep! Hep! Hep!" rhythm. Any one would notice such a thunder of heels on a bare floor, but she was only vaguely conscious of it, her mind was engaged with something else.

Madden came in, not the man who had gone out, but a subtly exalted man, mouth fixed in a firm line, denoting catastrophic determination, eyes very grave, as becomes the bearer of grave news.

She missed this effect although he stood directly in front of her, looking down at her. She was studying a paper, drawn from the book, Skipwith's order on the bank for those Liberty Loan Bonds.

"We were speaking of Barrie Skipwith just now," she said, folding the paper. "Did you know he had left town?"

He sat down, you may say shot down by this anti-climax to what he was about to say.

"No," he answered shortly. "He has been away most of the summer, hasn't he? I understood him to say this afternoon that he only returned last night."

"He was here just for the day I believe. And for a day last week, but it seems that he is to be away now indefinitely," she said.

"Did he tell you?" he asked, wondering where she got so much more information than he had about Skipwith.

"No, Miss Agatha told Mother. You know she has been visiting there," she explained.

He knew about this old maid aunt of Barrie Skipwith's, having heard Ellen refer to her more than once as the stone about her neck.

"It seems that Miss Agatha is not visiting at all. She is staying there for good, she told Mother, because Barrie will be away. That may account for his having arranged his affairs. Do you know where he has gone?" she asked.

He knew nothing about it. He had seen two notices about Skipwith in the *Sentinel* that afternoon, flattering. The *Sentinel* seemed to be booming him for something. Skipwith had al-

ways been a dark horse. Nobody knew what he would do. So far, however, he had not set the world on fire.

There followed one of those silences used only by married people, a kind of bomb which invariably explodes unless one or the other of them leaves the room.

Madden did not go because he had something to say. Mrs. Madden remained because now that she observed her husband she saw that he was about to stir up something. If you know one husband, you know all husbands. They are varieties of the same kind. And the last one of them will use a certain potential silence as a stage entrance when he desires to be especially impressive.

She laid the book on the desk beside her, then she pulled out a drawer and thrust Skipwith's order inside and locked it, then she reached up and pinched off a withered rose in a vase of roses on top of the desk, picked up the shattered petals, affected to be serenely unconscious of the compressed air state Pelham was in, showing by the decision of her movements that so soon as she had the last petal of that rose in the waste basket she would probably go up stairs to bed. It was late, she meant, glancing at the clock.

"Mary," he began, interpreting these signs, "I think I ought to tell you of a serious matter that I have had under consideration for some time."

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"But you would not do that," she objected quickly.

"Why not? just for the sake of argument?" he asked.

"Because you know there is enough to provide amply for me and the children. And you could close the bank if necessary.

"Close the bank!" he almost shouted. "That shows how much you know about it!" he retorted in deep disgust.

"What I mean is this, Pelham, that we have no right to consider our own fortunes at such a time as this. Property ceases to be property when the nation is in danger. It is prospective booty for the enemy."

She offered this sentiment which sounded like the oratorical fragment of a patriotic address with an air of moderation that was extremely offensive to a man who had just announced his intention of probably giving his life for his country.

The following evening the Maddens had some people in for dinner. The conversation turned as usual on various aspects of the war. Mrs. Murray said she had received that day a photograph of Angela Howard.

"You will be interested to see this snapshot of Angela in action," she said, producing the pic-

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part you see her doing so gracefully in this picture, but she wants us to send her an assistant to do the cooking," Mrs. Murray explained so grimly that the men laughed.

"How long has she been over?" some one asked.

"Less than six months," Mrs. Murray answered. "That is the way with so many women we send. About the time we have spent some thousands of dollars getting them established in the work they choose themselves, here comes a cable or an importunate letter saying they want to be relieved, and we must send some one else to do that while they do something else, usually easier!"

Madden glanced maliciously at his wife. Here was some truth about that army of volunteer women in France!

"Most of them perform prodigious labors," she said in rebuttal.

"Yes, of course, but——," Mrs. Murray began.

"It was to be expected of Angela, that she would want a cook," Mrs. Madden went on, "she has always had one. The only qualifications she had for this work in France was twelve lessons on diet, and a desire for adventure. We made the mistake when we sent a woman like that."

"It was a mistake sending Angela," Mrs. Mur-

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"No, I should volunteer as a private," he answered to all these comments and questions.

He was flushed, apparently embarrassed at this exposure of his superlative patriotism. In fact he was furious with Mary for having betrayed his confidence, committed him to military service before all these people.

"I have not decided yet what to do," he added. "That would depend upon developments. If the war ends soon as seems likely now——"

"No chance of that!" Plater interrupted.

"We are in for another year at least," Murray agreed regretfully.

"But if the German Army does begin to crack, it is bending now," Madden went on, determined to over-ride Plater's interruption. "Of course, that would alter the situation, and I should not feel justified in volunteering."

That was the sensible view to take, every one agreed except Mrs. Madden, who remained silent during this effort to rescue her husband from the dangers of war.

She was beginning to enjoy herself. There is nothing like creating a diversion, assuming a new relation to life when the old one wears out. Men do that constantly. They sell out a business for another business, or they add a new branch to the old one, or they go some where else and start again. But women rarely ever show this

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ity, and unusual. Elien still existed but no longer as a fatality. She had a wife's prescience of what was going on. But she was no longer just a wife. She was some one else in addition, another woman with other interests. She had created a diversion for herself, not a safe thing for any married woman to do, but necessary in a situation like this if she is to keep her poise, a very delicately balanced thing in women, and avoid the morbid martyr state, or the accusative mood which she frequently adopts in the outraged married relation, and which is always a form of contemptible defeat.

CHAPTER XXIV

ONE evening late in September twelve citizens of Sulgrave attended a dinner in the private dining room of the Sulgrave hotel.

This room is on the second floor at the end of a corridor with a staircase leading from it directly into the street below. Every thoughtful hotel keeps a confidential chamber of this kind for those emergencies which arise in the collective affairs of mankind. In Sulgrave it was the place where caucuses were held for the good of any cause that happened to be a cause at the time, and where plans were made during periods of political storms and stress to insure a safe majority of votes for the right man.

It was evident from the extremely diversified quality of the guests on this evening that this was not a social function. Besides Pelham Madden, Murray and other well-known citizens, there were three foremen from the mills, a grocer, a wholesale merchant and the Benjamin Jew who kept a pawn broker's shop on the river. But they were men of influence in their respective wards and they were really there to discuss ways and means for putting Sulgrave over the top in the

Fourth Liberty Loan Drive. The table had been cleared, the cloth removed and the dinner party was now a committee with Pelham Madden as chairman. Some strictly private business had just been transacted, not suitable for publication. It was the preparation of a list of persons notoriously hard to reach with any appeal for money or bonds.

Madden, with his lips snarled over a cigar, laid the list on the table.

"What about turning that over to the Woman's Committee," he suggested with a grin.

"Suits me," Murray answered. "My wife wants all she can get for her Committee to do. She said so."

"Well that will give it to them!" Tumlin chuckled.

"Mrs. Skipwith wouldn't ask no odds if she had to get bonds from them fellows. She's a hum dinger!" said Harbin, who was foreman of the mill where Ellen conducted the Red Cross room.

He wanted to go on discussing exactly what kind of hum dinger Mrs. Skipwith was, but Madden changed the subject. Everything was ready now for an enthusiastic meeting of the Citizens' Liberty Loan Committee, but there was no representative of the Press present to report this enthusiasm, which was to be an important part of the campaign propaganda.

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"O'Conner should have come, I asked him," Madden complained.

"Oh, well, he is a nuisance now, with his hay fever. Rachel Warren will cover it better anyhow. She's got the punch or whatever it is that makes the written word go," Murray put in.

"But it is nine o'clock and she is not here," Madden retorted, frowning at his watch.

He went to the telephone and called the desk downstairs. Yes, Miss Warren had come in quite some time ago. They would see if she was in the dining room. No, she was not in there. They would have her paged.

Madden stood waiting with the receiver cupped to his ear, listening to a heated argument that had sprung up between the mill foreman and the other committee-men, about the price of cotton.

"If the Government fixes the price it will be a heavy loss to the factories," Harben said.

"Why?" Tumlin demanded.

"Because then the lower grades will bring a good price, but if the Government keeps hands off, our markets will control the price, reduce it."

"You could buy cotton now at sixty cents per pound and make money in the factories," Nicholson said accusatively.

"You bet your life we could," he agreed swaggeringly. "A pound of ordinary white drilling,

that is three and a half yards, sells wholesale from the factory for one dollar and twenty cents, and we pay only thirty cents for the raw material. But we will never——”

“What?” exclaimed Madden at the phone. “Not in her room either?”

He hung up the receiver and came back, grumbling, to his chair.

“I haf heard de lady’s voice dree dimes vile you are at de phone!” the Benjamin announced, speaking himself for the first time.

“What? Heard whose voice?” Madden demanded as all eyes turned upon the little Jew, seated low in his chair with his head cocked.

“Leesen!” he whispered. They listened. The lighter furniture in the room above seemed to be involved in a sort of cat fight. Chairs collided with other chairs, a table rolled hastily across the floor and banged against the wall. This confusion was accompanied by the terrific clatter of feet, suppressed squealing sounds, and the voice of a woman evidently speaking through her clinched teeth while she performed some violent effort. A last tremendous thump!

“If you don’t get up and take your legs in I shall close the door, anyhow!”

“The voice of the little Rachel lady!” murmured the pawn broker with a one-sided smile at the ceiling.

The astounded committee-men were convinced of that. Their reporter was upstairs having an altercation with some one.

Evidently the legs mentioned so candidly were taken in, for almost immediately they heard a door slam, a triumphant "Now!" from Rachel, then a crash that shook the house.

Instantly every man was on his feet crowding through the door into the corridor. At the same moment the wildly disheveled figure of Rachel Warren appeared at the top of the next stair, arms spread like wings in flight, skirts flying, ghastly pale, her black eyes explosive with horror.

"Police!" she screamed, looking down at this flare of upturned faces.

They streamed up the stairs followed by the hotel manager, the clerk and every one else in the hotel but a very fat old lady guest who was not able to mount and stood in the corridor wailing "Murder!" and remnants of prayers.

"What's the matter!" some one shouted, as they came up.

Rachel pointed a quivering finger at the open door across the hall.

"In there," she gasped.

They hurried in, crowding and jamming, craning their necks, struggling to get at him, whoever he was.

No one was present. They saw overturned chairs, tipsy chairs leaning together for support, the table shoved against the wall, a suit case yawning upon the floor from which a mass of papers and clothing had been scattered like feathers in a high wind. All this they took in at a glance.

“Who is he! Where is he?” Madden demanded fiercely.

“In there, I told you!” Rachel quavered, indicating the wardrobe.

A dozen men flung themselves upon this prostrate piece of furniture, endeavoring to lift it, while a little bald headed shoe drummer whipped out a revolver, stationed himself in front of the crowd, stood sidewise in a magnificent pose with his pistol arm lifted and the weapon leveled at the door of the wardrobe.

At this moment, while it was still slanting up from the floor, the injured lock gave away, the door flew open and the limp form of a woman slid out upon the floor. A short globular woman in a short globular black dress, with thin fair hair. She was obviously unconscious.

No one recognized her for a moment, then the Manager caught sight of an opulent brown wig hanging to one of the dress hooks in the wardrobe.

“Madam Ciel!” he cried in dismay.

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"Frau Verzagt," Rachel corrected.

There was a stir in the crowd about the door, and a policeman entered demanding to know in his heavy voice what the trouble was, and saw it being lifted from the floor to a couch.

"She is a spy," Rachel announced, recovering herself in this emergency.

An altercation immediately set up between various persons about what was the correct first aid treatment for a fainting lady. The shoe drummer slipped unobtrusively through the crowd and disappeared. And by the glances shot at Rachel no one believed that her spy was a spy, but an innocent woman who had been made the victim of the popular spy mania.

"She was packing up to get away, when I came in," Rachel explained.

"We, Mr. O'Conner and I, had reason to suspect her. She submitted several articles to the *Sentinel* which we accepted, but of course did not publish because they were,—well, here they are," she said, taking a package of papers from her little black hand bag and offering them to the policeman.

"Also, we discovered that she was Frau Verzagt, a hair dresser in Chicago, before she became Madam Ciel, and a lecturer on finite spiritualism."

"So," she concluded, "when I found that the

porter of this hotel had purchased a ticket to New York for her this evening, I came up here, just in time. The papers there on the floor will prove what she had been doing here.”

The policeman bent and swept these documents up, waving aside all assistance.

“You will find a diagram of your mill there, Mr. Harben,” Rachel said, “and a window marked ‘Always unfastened.’ You might look into that.”

There was in fact such a diagram, and a map of the entire mill section of Sulgrave.

Madam Ciel faced this indignant inspection, apparently still unconscious.

The officer announced that he would take charge of the prisoner, and called over the phone for that celebrated ambulance connected with every police station.

Madden accompanied Rachel down stairs after everybody had congratulated her upon this gallant performance.

“It was not done in your usual original manner, Rachel,” Madden told her with a grin. “We see spy stories in every magazine exactly like it.”

“But you never heard of one turning over a wardrobe after she was inside!” she crowed.

“Why didn’t you call for help?”

“No time. I could not get to the phone without allowing her to reach the door.”

“How did you get her into that wardrobe?”

“Backed her. It would have been easy but for the chairs and table. She wanted to take them all in with her.”

“We heard the chairs protesting,” he laughed.

“And it was a squeeze, locking the door. The wardrobe was one size too small for her.”

“Built no doubt to contain dresses without ladies inside,” he said, at which they both laughed.

They were standing before the door of the private dining room. Murray and Tumlin approached, accompanied by the other guests.

“You are in no condition to report this meeting,” Madden said hurriedly.

“Oh, I have done that already,” she announced smoothly.

“But we haven’t met yet, we have only dined, been waiting for you!” Madden exclaimed.

“Well, you can’t do any better than I reported that you did. Enthusiastic meeting of Sulgrave Citizens’ Committee. A hundred thousand dollars subscribed for the Fourth Liberty Loan! That kind of thing. It’s already set up,” she told him.

“But, we didn’t, we want——” he began indignantly.

“It is up to you and your Committee to make good, Pelham, I am off,” she said shamelessly as she whisked down the stair.

CHAPTER XXV

THE period of a fervid platonic friendship between a man and a woman is short. It must be. A husband remains faithful to his wife because he has some choice of feelings in this relation. He is not compelled by law or tradition to be either her friend or her lover. He may tear around, show the evil side of his genius generally and still be her husband. But the demands of a noble, innocent and ardent friendship for the other woman inevitably becomes a burden, a strain and a fearful tariff in sentiment with no natural returns.

Madden was working furiously at his desk, hurrying to get out before five o'clock. He would not admit to himself that his purpose was to evade a possible visit from Ellen. But he was beginning to be conscious of the hardships incident to this friendship. It was still just that, but with the romance and charm fading. A man may swear that all he wants or needs of this extra woman in his life is her sympathy and understanding, and he may believe his oath. Nevertheless it is a perjury he commits against his own everlasting nature. He vows that his only desire

is to protect, serve and revere such a woman. But that is not true either. And if she holds him to it, he is as sure to default as he is a man, and for no better reason.

Ellen was holding him rigidly to this high ideal, taking him literally at his confounded word! This was what he wanted, of course. He would not have it otherwise. Still he was growing tired of practicing the articles of his Ellen worship. Why should he feel that way toward a woman who was not and never could be anything to him? He was becoming frightfully sane when he thought about her. He resented her air of proprietorship as presumptuous. She leaned on him with an assurance that was not—well it was not justified by the facts. It bored him when she confided her trials and grievances. She had as many of these now as any good woman. She was doing a splendid work, in her Red Cross room. All right, let her do it! And if she was tired of the job, of Mrs. Murray's dictatorial methods, why didn't she resign? It was no affair of his, even if she did seem to think so.

He felt without analyzing his feeling that she had not made good, as Ellen. She was not so attractive as he had supposed. She was no longer provocative and of late she was disposed to be sensative, to take offense at any little thing or nothing. She did not wear well. That was the

truth. He wondered if any woman did. He had supposed for example that she was one of those mysteries of her cryptic sex, informed with incredible charms and surprises. Well, he knew her now as one knows a primer, large type too. She was as plain to read as "See the cat." She craved admiration. What for? You might admire her hair and her complexion without admiring the woman. He had discovered this bitter wisdom, because Ellen's hair, her blue eyes, the whiteness and pinkness of her skin still charmed him. But the woman herself was too intelligible. She was not living up to the miracle of her complexion.

He recalled something old Colonel Whitson had said one day years ago. Whitson was attorney for the Madden bank. He was a sort of Solomon bachelor profoundly versed in a theoretical knowledge of life but who sustained only a timid relation to his fellow men and especially to his fellow women.

He, being "Pep" Madden at the time, had made some remark about understanding women.

"When a man boasts of that," Whitson had answered, "he confesses that his knowledge and experience of the sex is limited to the other kind of woman, not the best. They are an old story, learned by transgression long ago. But wait until you try to comprehend a good woman. You

cannot do it. She belongs to the firmament, and you think she belongs to you. Well, she never will. You may partake of her kindness, but you will never know her, nor understand more than the headings of her many chapters."

Whitson, he reflected, locking his desk, was a poetic old fool. Still there was Mary to confirm his poetry. Not much poetry about her however. But in certain moods he was willing to concede that she reminded him of noble prose.

At present she was showing an entirely new manifestation of herself as financial agent of the Government. He supposed this was due to the Murray influence. Promptly on the day the Liberty Loan Drive started every woman in the League started with it. This was contrary to the plans of the Citizens' Committee who requested that the women wait until the men finished their canvass for bonds. Well, a request amounted to nothing with women these days. Mrs. Murray had promptly turned over to Mrs. Skipwith that list of parsimonious citizens the Committee had prepared, which was probably the meanest thing she had ever done to Ellen, he thought, but he did not think it with the indignation and sympathy for Ellen he would have felt some months previous to this time. On the contrary he was amused. The sharp elbows of a grin appeared at the corners of his mouth as he

recalled the state Ellen was in when she told him of the indignity and injustice of sending her to sell bonds to all the tight-wads of Sulgrave.

Meanwhile Mrs. Murray and Mary had arrogated to themselves The Bow. It was queer seeing Mary going in and out of the offices and stores on this business. He had never before known her to take any part in a canvass for money. He regretted that she did so now. But he comforted himself with the thought that the Drive only lasted three weeks. And if they continued to succeed so well as they did on the first day it would not last that long, because they would have all the free money in Sulgrave. He received a lively impression of Mary's methods when she entered his own office late in the previous afternoon. She said she had decided that he should take five thousand dollars worth of bonds.

"But, my dear, I have already subscribed that much through the Citizens' Committee," he explained.

"Yes, I know, that is why I do not ask for ten thousand dollars," she replied coolly, and refused to argue the point. She merely sat there waiting for him to take those bonds. He suggested that they go home and talk it over. He wanted to show her why it would be impossible for him to invest so much just now. No, she

said that every woman had a certain "objective," a definite amount to raise each day, and that she lacked exactly five thousand dollars to complete her quota. If she had been a bailiff with a mortgage to collect her manner could not have been more determined. He showed impatience, frowned, worked at his correspondence. She merely sat gazing through the window. It was nearly five o'clock. Presently Ellen Skipwith would pass that window. And she was almost certain to come in, because she wanted to see him about those parsimonious citizens, find out their financial standing in order to know how much they should subscribe for bonds.

Well, if Ellen did that, came in after banking hours, he could never explain the situation to Mary. Hang it! A man could not explain anything to his wife!

He glanced at her, wondered if she knew that she had him cornered, that under no other circumstances could she possibly wring five thousand dollars from him for bonds. Apparently she did not know it. Still it was a fact. Every time he heard footsteps approaching on the pavement outside he thought it might be Ellen.

He seized the blank and signed it.

"Will you take registered or coupon bonds? You must specify," she said, indicating the place

on the blank as if he were a fool who did not know how to fill out the thing.

He specified hastily. Then he seized his hat and conducted her out through the front door of the bank, crossed The Bow and literally thrust her into the car.

As they shot around the curve of The Bow into the avenue, he saw Ellen Skipwith coming up the side street. Confound it, that devil of a woman had cost him six thousand dollars in two months! She had made a fool of him with that anonymous subscription for a thousand. Now these Liberty bonds, which were not a loss of course, but more than he could afford to take. If Mary had deliberately planned a vengeance she could not have accomplished it so successfully.

He was thinking that now as he came down the avenue, going over his experiences as he had been doing all day, abusing Ellen in his thoughts. As he passed the Skipwith place he knew without turning his head that she was standing at the drawing room window. This was the first time in many months that he had not at least returned her bow and smile. A man had to protect himself when a woman was determined to make a fool of herself.

He saw the car standing at the side entrance as he approached his own house. He supposed that Mary had just returned from another raid

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in the interest of the Liberty Loan. It amounted to a raid, the way she held people up and practically forced them to buy bonds; as for the car, she had commandeered that. He had not been in it since this campaign started. He ascended the steps, crossed the veranda and halted upon the threshold from which he commanded a view of the staircase. James, the chauffeur, was descending, loaded with luggage. He carried two suit cases, a satin pillow and a parasol. Behind him Mrs. Madden was also descending. She was evidently dressed for a journey and carried a portfolio under her arm in a business-like way.

"What does this mean?" he demanded, too much astonished to make his tones stern.

"I am glad you came in, Pelham, I have been too much rushed to call you over the phone and I doubt if we should have had time to go by your office."

She made it a remark rather than an answer, her manner slightly preoccupied, as is the way with a woman when she is going some where and is checking off things in her mind in order to make sure she has not forgotten something. She glanced briefly at her husband now from the altitude of the last step on the stairs as if he had been one of these details, and the least one at that.

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"You have the tickets, James?" she asked, addressing the chauffeur.

He had them.

"Did you get the drawing room?" He had been so fortunate as to get that. He paused to explain how difficult this had been to arrange.

"Well," she said, cutting him off, "drive around and get Mrs. Murray, then back here. We shall have to make quick time to catch the Express."

"We have been called to Washington," she said, turning to Madden, who still stood in the doorway, not exactly as an obstruction, but he was there regarding her with that expression peculiar to every woman's husband when he adds the purely psychic cubit of sternness to his stature by way of silent intimidation.

She did not see the cubit. She was not intimidated. She was still looking at him as if he was a detail for which she had arranged.

"We," he repeated, implying that there was something apocryphal about the pluralness of this pronoun.

"There is an important meeting of all the State Chairmen to be held there Wednesday," she explained easily. "I scarcely expected to attend, but the women here have sold more than their quota of bonds, and I had a wire from Washington this afternoon notifying me that I have been appointed on the Woman's National Committee.

So I feel obliged to attend the meeting. Mrs. Murray had already planned to go.”

“You are taking the children of course,” he suggested smoothly.

“Mother will keep them. Everything has been arranged. You will have no trouble at all,” she answered, coolly ignoring this thrust.

“How long shall you be away from home?” he asked politely but adding the word “home” with intention.

“I cannot tell now. You know how one thing leads to another——”

“I am beginning to learn how they do,” he interrupted virtuously.

“I shall almost surely go on to New York,” she went on quite in the manner of one who gives gratuitous information.

She kept her gaze fixed anxiously on the avenue, merely sweeping Madden with it now and then while she really watched for the car.

“There they are!” she said, hurrying down the steps and walking briskly to the curb.

He accompanied her. He was forced to do so. Mrs. Murray was leaning forward from the back seat waving and urging haste. He could not have that malicious old cat drawing inferences if he failed to accompany Mary and hand her into the car. He was obliged to bow and smile and say

something pleasant when he longed to make a scene.

He walked slowly back to the house, picked up the afternoon paper which had been flung on the veranda, entered the library and dropped into a chair, not his own particular chair beneath the reading lamp, but a remoter one in the darker part of the room.

Watch a man's legs if you want to know his mood and tense. They are the exposed barometer of the masculine temperament. They betray him when not a flicker of what is going on in his mind can be seen in his face. If he sits with them crossed it is an indication that he is in a normal, neutral mood, not stirred up about anything, just now, enjoying the freedom which trousers afford. When he uncrosses them, brings his knees to attention, sits correctly, this means that he is under some kind of restraint, that he has just met you, if you are a woman, he is not quite sure of you, or of himself. If he elevates his feet and lolls it means that you are not present, if you are a woman, or that you are his wife, in which case nothing he does with his feet matters. If he sits with his legs straight and stretched full length, he is relaxed, perfectly sure of himself and of you, even if you are *not* sure of him. But if he keeps one knee up at an acute and lets the other leg out full length and sagging like a

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fallen bough this means one thing, and one thing only. He is distraught, unhappy. He has suffered some internal injury to his vanity. The wind has blown him about. He needs repairs. And you are the cause. You are the unfeeling woman of this adverse providence which has destroyed his peace and diminished his confidence in the sex. No one can get on with you, least of all a husband who has worked and slaved and given his body to be burned that you might have a home, a position, servants and expensive furs (bitterly). Nothing ever did or can satisfy a woman!

Madden had exactly this pose, slumped low in his chair with one knee propped up like a sick elbow and the other leg supine. He stared moodily at Mary's desk across the room. He hated that desk. He noticed that it was locked. Formerly the thing was never locked. Valuable papers in it, no doubt. But whenever had he dared to lock his desk upstairs!

"A man is really helpless!" he muttered finally, "and when his wife discovers that, she may do as she pleases!"

But how, he wondered after a dark pause, did Mary make this discovery. She never used to suspect her independence. She had been a singularly docile and considerate wife. What was the origin of this cool calculating new force in

her? Certainly it was no part of their married life. In fact it was the very devil! She behaved now exactly like a man. She did things without consulting him. He would not have denied her this trip to Washington, but it was the way she had gone, much as he went on an occasional business trip at a moment's notice. But he was a man, confound it! That made a difference.

He was tempted to go out and get drunk! Men did that sometimes, with far less provocation.

He sighed heavily. He had a feeling that whatever he did would make little impression upon Mary. He decided to remain sober, to keep his wits about him. A month since he would have welcomed the opportunity of seeing more of Ellen Skipwith, now he spurned Ellen from his thoughts. Still it did seem to him that any woman would have more sense than to go off on a wild goose chase and leave her husband next door to another woman who was chasing him. Mary was a sort of fool or her instinct would have warned her long ago of Ellen's game.

During the next ten days he received several telegrams from his wife, but no letters. He was to infer that she was too deeply engaged in important affairs to write letters. Meanwhile the *Sentinel* carried daily associated press dispatches giving far more information about Mrs.

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Pelham Madden and Mrs. John Murray, who had been called to Washington to attend an important Council of State Chairmen. Then the associated press accompanied them to New York where they were among the "notable women" attending another important council.

Presently Mrs. Murray returned to Sulgrave. She called Madden on the phone. She said she just wanted to tell him how splendidly Mary was coming on.

"When is she coming home?" he asked dryly.

Mrs. Murray did not know. She doubted if Mary knew herself. She had a lot of work to do. She showed astonishing efficiency in organizing. Her judgment was splendid. People listened to her because up there they had become a bit stale and her ideas were so fresh. She had enthusiasm. Really he should see Mary in action. She was wonderful, and so forth and so on, while Madden sat frowning with the receiver cupped to his ear.

A week later he received a wire, "Arrive Sulgrave seven forty-five to-night." Signed "M. Madden."

She had not spent the allotted ten words. Such brevity was depressing.

Madden was at the station. He saw a tall, smartly tailored woman descend with other passengers from the Pullman coach, and he was still

watching for his wife to appear, when the tall, smartly tailored woman laid her fingers lightly on his arm and called him "Pelham."

"Mary!" he exclaimed.

"How are the children?" she asked at once.

"Well," he answered shortly. Then he thought better of it. "And you?" he asked agreeably as he assisted her into the car.

"Oh, I am fit enough. Hard work agrees with me," she returned easily.

It certainly did. He stared at her, not so much because he had never seen her look so well, but because he had not realized that she could accomplish it. She was set up. She had changed her figure, longer lines. She was groomed. Her snug coat seemed to be devoted to her, sleeked to her. Her hat was a crisp decision, fitted close to her head.

She wanted all the news and gave no news. The impression he received was that she did not care to discuss her affairs. The business manner exactly. But she wanted to know if the baby had cut another tooth. She thought his gums were slightly swelled when she went away. She had hurried home on that account. She really should have remained another week in New York, but she felt she must be with him. She referred to it as if the infant had been going "over the top" after a tooth.

Madden listened and stared discreetly. He was puzzled, but not nearly so indignant as he expected to be.

She wanted to know if any packages had come from New York for her. Yes, he thought there had been several boxes. She seemed relieved at this news.

The following day another box came by express, long, large, but very light. She whisked upstairs with it. She required the services of the maid. She remained for an hour locked in her room. She returned to him with an air of distinctly feminine and secret satisfaction. He expected confidences and received none.

The same evening she said she must go over and see Mrs. Murray about arrangements for a peace parade. She thought the armistice might be signed any day now.

Madden was peeved. He had expected to spend the evening cross-examining Mary about her patriotic activities in Washington and New York. The callous way with which she left him out of these affairs was very unwomanly and offensive. Absolutely the only thing he had to be thankful for was the fact that she had not come home wearing khaki, in a sloppy feminized form. A lot of women had volunteered for military service that far, with no better reason than that

they were selling bonds, or driving a taxi, or leading a parade. It proved, he hoped, that Mary still retained some sense of dignity as a wife and mother. -

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lication nor even for articulation but for his own private, personal edification. He recalled the vision of Mary seated with Mrs. Murray in a car decorated with flags at the head of the procession that morning directly behind the brass band with all the other patriotic women of Sulgrave trudging behind them, and the men bringing up the rear. Remarkable how quickly women thrust themselves in front of everybody when they had the opportunity. They all had a hankering for publicity; even Mary had it. She had permitted Rachel Warren to publish in the *Sentinel* a telegram that she had received from McAdoo during the last days of the Fourth Liberty Loan drive. It was of no consequence, that telegram, no doubt a sort of patented message which McAdoo sent to hundreds of people working for bonds. Still, it was singularly bad taste in Mary to have showed it off when the thing should have been addressed to him, the president of the only national bank in Sulgrave, and Chairman of the Liberty Loan Committee. Some feminine chicanery back of that! How could McAdoo know of Mary's existence? Well, let it go! The war was ended, thank Heaven, and he supposed, he devoutly hoped, that the women would return to private life and *stay* there. He was tired of this duet patriotism! Here his mind reverted to Ellen. She had become incessant. She was a

nuisance. He wished Skipwith would turn up and make himself more apparent as Ellen's husband. He wondered what had become of Skipwith. No one seemed to know. He doubted if Ellen did. He had been on the point of asking her more than once about her husband. But he never did. Why? he asked himself. Hang it all, he was worn out, balled up! If only Mary would settle down and become the Mary she had been; if only that Skipwith woman would leave him alone he might relax and take some comfort in life with this war ended. As it was, he had the confused and diminished feeling of being slowly overwhelmed by an inferior sex.

CHAPTER XXVII

HE saw Elsie standing on the steps of the veranda as he approached. The child had developed the female instinct of waiting for the absent male of her family this early! She was always sticking up somewhere around the front of the house like a little blue-eyed candle now when he came home in the evening. Usually, however, she flickered radiantly at the sight of him. She smacked her small hands and began at once to call out the news of the day. But now she was silent, apparently in a state of ecstasy beyond words. Her stiff skirts stood out above her thin legs. Her toes were pointed at him, her eyes solemnly fixed upon him. Evidently she was on the altar of adoration.

"Hello, Elsie, what is the good word!" he hailed her, swinging up the steps.

There were no words, it seemed. There are times when mere language is defeated. Even a child knows that. She accepted him by the little finger of his left hand, as usual, regarding him with a kind of grave anticipation as they entered the hall and ascended the stairs. But when he

turned toward the door of his own room, she broke the silence.

“Oh, Father, you must see Mother!” she whispered with the same suppressed excitement.

“Mother? What’s the matter——” he began.

The child made an exclamatory O of her eyes and mouth, signalling silence and led on.

The door of Mrs. Madden’s room was open. Madden paused before it in astonished wonder.

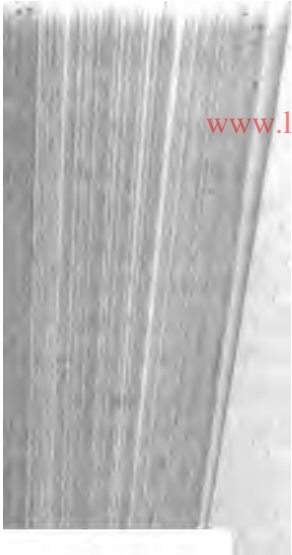
His wife stood before a long mirror, perfectly absorbed in herself. The folds of her satin gown, the color of old ivory, hung thick and straight from the girdle. Not a ripple of futile lace marred the magnificent simplicity of the bodice which parted like the stiff petals of a lily revealing the whiter colder ivory of her shoulders. Her colorless blonde hair which she had always worn in the figure eight on the back of her head and secured there with two side combs, was piled on top of her head, rolled from the nape of her neck, sleek, glistening, as if she had preened herself and crowned herself with that hair. It revealed for the first time in her life the contour of her beautiful head.

But this was not what astounded him and fairly took his breath. Mary, evidently unconscious of his presence, of any presence except her own and that glowing image in the mirror, was performing the most secret rites of her sex. She

was painting the lily. She applied a wisp of carmine colored cotton with studied strokes to each cheek. Then she studied the effect, changed her pose, stood sidewise, one satin toe elegantly advanced, glanced quickly over her shoulder at the image in the mirror, evidently in the effort to take herself by surprise to make sure how she would look when she took others by surprise.

So far so good. But she had not gone far enough, not the limit yet. She faced about, went to her dressing table and searched for something which she found. Then she seated herself, bent confidentially near her image in the smaller glass and worked dexterously with a lip stick.

All this time Madden, standing in the darkened hall, deserted now by Elsie, who whispered something about going to fetch "Mother's bouquet," watched his wife in studious amazement. He saw her move back and forth between the mirrors with all the secret animation of a beautiful woman. He was enchanted. He did not know it was in her, to be so much just the feminine. He had looked for the first time into Mary's alabaster box of vanities. He stepped back noiselessly to cover this sacrilege, coughed discreetly like a footman, to let his presence be known, give her time to achieve her manner. Then he came briskly forward as if he had just come.



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if she had not omitted this kinder name for months. He continued to reflect with satisfaction on this little circumstance while he dressed. He felt somehow that the blockade was being lifted, and he was grateful. As for Mary, she was transcendent. Where did she get that gown. It was the very satin scriptures of her. Strange that he had never realized what a handsome woman she was. And handsome was not the word. He was woefully deficient in Mary adjectives.

No prayer he might have offered for deliverance from a designing woman would have so effectually and swiftly redeemed him from the said woman as this new and wonderfully interpretation his wife had made of herself in a garment which offended no mode of the season by its eccentricity, and which was still designed for her and no one else.

Therefore it is senseless to charge women with vanity who give their time and devotion to clothes. So long as men are the fatuous idealists they have always been, women must pray to them, beguile them and enslave them and lie to them, and please them with the clothes they wear. This is not vanity. It is a kind of ignoble and compulsory religion they are forced to practice.

"It is the Murray's annual autumn reception," Mary remarked, going back to the mirror, "but

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I imagine they regard it as a sort of victory celebration as well," she concluded.

"I am just beginning to realize it," he returned, watching the feminine affection she showed for her own image in the mirror. "I feel somehow as if we were going to have all kinds of peace," he concluded significantly.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ON this evening in November the Murrays were entertaining Sulgrave *en masse*. They always did every year at this season. When you are a distinguished citizen and one of the financial over-lords of a place, when your wife is Regent of all good works and a determined woman to boot, you are compelled to sustain a broad-minded relation to the community, and to prove it once in so often with some kind of sweeping social function.

The Murrays belonged to this class in Sulgrave and they were manifesting the fact as usual with this annual reception to which everybody had been asked who could possibly be asked.

And the usual thing happened. The guests who belonged to the barely possible class arrived first with a sort of dull eagerness to be present. The drawing rooms were filled with plain people and fantastic people and that pathetic residue of old friends who used to be important, but who had lost out, with only their manners and a few insolent pieces of old jewelry pinned on them like tags to denote their former state.

This was the most enjoyable part of the evening for the Murrays. They circulated with a sort of radiant cordiality and informal kindness. Old John Murray permitted himself to laugh boisterously and smack his legs, merely, you understand, to encourage mirth in the mirthless. Mrs. Murray was at her best, a real hostess, not a reigning hostess. She exchanged homely confidences with dim old ladies and dowdy younger ones. She basted them all with the sauce of her good will and personal interest in their affairs.

Later, when their own kind began to drop in, Murray took his hands out of his pockets, composed his countenance to a cooler gravity and discussed larger matters about which there was no occasion to slap his legs and laugh. Mrs. Murray became more formal and much more formidable, like a general when his own troops come into action.

This change had taken place long before the Maddens arrived. Elegance predominated over poverty. The poppy-colored finery of fashionable ladies overshadowed the ragged-robin costumes of plainer women. The young people were dancing. Groups formed and dissolved. Real social life was slipping smoothly along its accustomed grooves, the earlier guests having retreated to the corners and the rear generally to be

merely spectators for the remainder of the evening.

Mrs. Murray was dividing her attention between receiving her guests and sending this man or that man to talk to some one who had no one to talk to and showed it, or sending Mr. Murray to relieve some man who was stuck and could not escape—the lady whom he had been sent to entertain.

Rachel Warren slid in presently wearing a niggardly little black gown of maline, which had been her reception uniform for years and which became her as the last note of poverty becomes the fierce impudence of a spirited woman. She was still the heroine of the spy episode, and was immediately surrounded by a number of people who wanted to hear all about that. The men were delighted with the tale. The women were not. Four of them detached themselves from this company and wandered off. There was a feeling among a good many women in Sulgrave that Rachel should have let them in on this spy business. And Mrs. Tumlin would not be downed. She said she had suspected Madam Ciel from the first and had consistently avoided her. Rachel's only reply was a sort of scissors smile as she moved off with O'Conner to join the dancers.

But by far the most radiant and exclamatory figure in the room was Ellen Skipwith. She wore

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a sort of singing girlish dancing frock, very short, very pretty, and very foolish. She looked more like a girl in it than a girl could have looked. She was dancing often and when she was not dancing she was attended by most of the men who should have attended the girls. She was very gay, and made no noise about it above the low ripple of her laughter.

Mrs. Murray was furious and helpless. In spite of her machinations Ellen prevailed. She said something about the way she felt to Mrs. Darah who occupied a permanent place in a small gilt chair near her hostess.

"Where is her husband?" the old lady retorted, fixing her eyes like a dart on the iridescent Ellen, who was skimming through a dance with her bright head on Nicholson's shoulder.

"That's it! Where is he? Nobody knows," Mrs. Murray answered, and went on to explain why she had been obliged to invite Ellen.

Mrs. Darah assumed a fine silence, delicate and penetrating like a thought which requires no cloth of words to clothe it.

She was not interested in Ellen Skipwith. She had accepted Mrs. Murray's invitation because she expected developments before the evening passed. She commanded a view of the door through which the guests entered this room. She

apt her eyes fixed upon it. Then she abruptly withdrew her attention.

Mary Madden, accompanied somewhat in the rear by her husband, stood for one instant framed in the doorway. She resembled one of those white and golden beauties sometimes seen in old Flemish pictures and never anywhere else, middle-aged, fair, flushed, red-lipped, with serene blue eyes that neither waver nor fall beneath any gaze. Superior eyes given only to women who have survived many defeats and who never surrender.

Mrs. Madden passed over the astounding sensation her appearance made as she advanced to speak to Mrs. Murray as if she was unconscious of it. Possibly she may have been. She had other thoughts and another purpose in view.

"Mary, my dear!" Mrs. Murray began and thought shrewdly better of what she was about to say.

"We are late, I believe," Mrs. Madden admitted, apologetically, without taking the trouble to explain why they were late, as she turned aside to speak to Mrs. Darah.

Mrs. Murray whispered something to Pelham Madden. He nodded affirmatively but with the air of one who knew that before.

He was tremendously exalted, almost condescending in the bend of his eye upon this motley

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group of people, the best Sulgrave afforded, but not up to the standard. His wife was that. It was one thing to be the president of the leading bank, prominent citizen and so forth, and quite another different, finer thing to have such a wife. He felt his importance. And to feel was to act with Pelham Madden. Every sensation of astounded admiration in this room passed through him like a megaphone.

He stood aside with affected indifference while old John Murray danced with Mary, frisking before her in the shadow of her magnificent height, like a frog in a frock coat. Then he danced with her himself. Then he had the experience of obtaining dances with her under difficulties. Every man who could put one toe before the other toe wanted to dance with Mrs. Pelham Madden. She was not the belle, she was a great lady who reflected distinction. Presently she withdrew from this lighter amusement and established her court in the wide space before the fire. She accomplished a miracle here by a silence and sympathy which inspired dull men to talk brilliantly lest they should lose the honor of her attention. Her presence admitted women. This way always is the last word, the final superlative proof of a great woman's quality, that she dares share what there is to share with her own sex.

Mrs. Murray had the excessive satisfaction of

seeing her ball room, an hour since the scene of lightness made too light by Ellen Skipwith, changed into a salon.

"We have won the war, thank God!" some one was saying.

"But that will not be the greatest victory," Mrs. Madden returned.

"What is a victory anyhow?" Colonel Whitson asked, merely to test these conversational waters.

"A victory is what remains over and above all expenses after the battle is fought and won," she replied.

"Meaning?" he angled.

"That never again shall we be accused of being a greedy nation. The American dollar is the most adventurous and generous coin in the world to-day. We are the only nation who have spent money and men in this war for nothing else but the freedom and liberty of mankind. We have raised more money in three weeks than it has taken to run this government for thirty years, and we shall spend it all to buy ideals and insure them. We have been as extravagant about that as our parvenus ever were about buying pictures and shipping English castles to their American estates!" she concluded with a smile.

Mrs. Darah caught a whiff of this conversation in her corner on the other side of the fire, and she became her daughter's only competitor

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for attention in this company. She was animated. She bobbed her elegant old head with its crisp gray curls and clapped her eyes fiercely upon any one who offered an opinion. She instantly took a piece out of this opinion with a rapier thrust of wit, keen and intolerant. She had survived all the charms and still retained the sting of her sex. She remained a naughty and fascinating old lady. Several men came over and joined the circle about her. Several women withdrew and attached themselves to the larger one about Mrs. Madden, as one migrates to a milder climate.

"Don't talk to me about your war economies," she said, turning to Murray, and referring to something Mrs. Nicholson had just said about that before she glided off to escape the consequences.

"We have suffered no privations, only a few inconveniences, a little less sugar. Well, we have always used too much sugar. Wait until you have to boil the dirt in your smoke house to get salt for your bread as my mother did during the Civil War! Yes, and weave cloth to clothe the family, and make your best dress from the parlor window curtains! Then you might know something about privations!"

Yes, of course this was a war, a very large war, but the men we sent to France were cared

for as no soldiers ever had been. They had an enormous army of doctors and nurses, and as many guardians as children in a kindergarten. They had clothes and food. The soldiers of the Confederacy had none of these comforts, practically none. Our men were fighting, yes, and they had been victorious, but she would have you remember that they were not the first or only brave men who had fought and died for liberty in this country! There were even misguided Yankees who had done the same thing.

She was jealous for that past which framed her with garlands of splendid and golden memories. But she was not adverse to tackling the present. She immediately proceeded to shoot up the present when some one changed the subject and provoked her fire by a side remark about the recent election.

Certainly the Democratic party was defeated! Why? Well, was any one stupid enough to think the Republican capitalist *liked* being taxed sixty per cent of their incomes to support the war? They did not. It was neither natural nor republican. The difference between the Democrats and the Republicans was that the former had levied enormous sums and spent it on the people, for the people, soldiers, war insurance, excessive wages for labor, all that and more. Well, the Republicans would have levied just as much and

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kept it in the party! Did any one suppose she did not know Republicans? Her husband's father, Colonel Darah, had run against one in 1872 and beat him for Congress, only because there was very little Republican money in the South at that time!

Some one laughed at that, then there was a general laugh.

She did not know why they laughed and she did not care. She was only shooting at random, not to kill, but because she was extremely and maliciously happy. Things were going her way—Mary's way.

The by-laws of polite society are not written, they are inherited, and they are based like all the other laws which we really keep, on instinct. Women, owing to their smattered nerves and easily tumbled wits, may occasionally miss one of these delicate social decisions, but men never do, because they are the real guardians of propriety, which women are only the guardians of their own virtues.

Thus it happened that Ellen reigned during the earlier part of the evening in Mrs. Murray's drawing rooms. She was a pretty rashness that prevailed there. The presence of numerous other better women made no difference, because for various reasons they were ineffective. There

was, for example, no personal issue between them and Mrs. Skipwith.

But from the moment Mrs. Madden entered the room there was a deflection. It was not that Pelham's wife had achieved herself in a costume which surpassed the frivolous, doggeral dress of the lighter woman and interpreted her character with gravé elegance for the first time, but there was a point between them not to be overlooked. Sulgrave had been sibilantly silent, but not blind to Mrs. Skipwith's recent predatory performance. And it was now apparent that Mrs. Madden would not be the victim of that performance. That was the point. When this triumphant woman appeared, the light lady became negligible, not ignored, but put off for a more convenient season. Eventually this happens. Every one accustomed to social life has seen it happen. The deference men pay quickly and without hesitation to the right woman when the wrong woman is also present. Copper coinage of femininity is never confused in any man's mind with the everlasting gold standard of womanhood.

Ellen found herself in this embarrassing situation. The younger set was still dancing. She was trying to do very well seated on a sofa at the far end of the room, not alone, but worse than alone. Harbin, the manager of the Sulgrave Cotton Mill, was hovering around. She evaded

him only by listening intently to one of the old ladies who came early and wanted to tell somebody about her family, which had been one of the leading families of Sulgrave.

She had not joined the groups around the fireplace, restrained by some instinct, but chiefly because she hoped Pelham Madden would join her. Once she caught his eye and laid her hand invitingly upon the vacant space beside her on the sofa. He declined to obey this signal, let her know that he understood and remained seated at a proud reared back angle near his wife.

She was very tired, depressed. She began to fade there before everybody, not that any one seemed to notice. But she felt it, the deadly pallor of weariness, the chill of a cold fury. She wanted to go, get out of this horrible place, the air was stifling, but she could not bear to confess defeat so openly. Besides that old herring, Barrie's Aunt Agatha, was having the time of her life in a corner with three other old frumps and would probably decline to go. She never did want to leave when she went anywhere!

There was an exclamation, a chorus of exclamations. A tall man wearing khaki had entered the room. He was standing with his back to her, bowing to Mrs. Murray, when she saw him, and that for the briefest moment, before he was surrounded by the crowd down there. She could

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only catch occasional snatches of what was being said, and nothing from the soldier himself, only Murray's voice booming some question about the Judge-Advocate's Department, which was evidently contradicted by some reply about the Regular Army.

All this and much more while the tall soldier appeared and disappeared between bows in the circling throng.

Then before she could move, oppressed by a strange prescience, Mrs. Murray's voice reached her above the strident tones of welcome.

"Oh, yes, she is here! Has any one seen Mrs. Skipwith?" looking around. "There she is!" nodding her head.

The soldier faced about, stared at her.

"Barrie!" she cried, rising.

Not until this moment had she known that he was in the service. But she must guard that ignorance from all these people, she reflected, coming to meet him in her short frock, looking every haggard day of her thirty-five years.

"I was not expecting you," she gasped.

"No, I suppose not," he returned coolly but not too loud.

"I must speak to Mrs. Madden," he went on. "Go up and put on your things. I will meet you at the door."

She recognized his husband tone and obeyed.

For once in her life she was glad to obey. If only she had known that he had volunteered! And he was splendid in khaki. And it meant that he would be away—for—well, the duration of the war. She had not heard him tell Murray in reply to the question about whether he had entered the Judge-Advocate's office, that he had a commission in the Regular Army and was only home on a furlough following the Armistice.

CHAPTER XXIX

WHEN Madden reached his bank the next morning there was a memoranda on his desk, "Call Main 752."

He decided with a frown not to call Main 752. This was the number of the Skipwith phone.

That made no difference because almost immediately the phone rang.

"Is that you?"

"This is Pelham Madden, Mrs. Skipwith," he told her and wished her good morning.

She wanted to see him at five o'clock. She *must* see him. It was important.

He was afraid he could not manage that. He had an engagement at five o'clock.

Well, would he stop in then on his way home?

No, coolly, that would be impossible. Well, good-by.

He hung up the receiver, leaned back, dusted his hands, signifying that he was done with something. And a good riddance.

But he was not done with it. He was still reading his correspondence half an hour later when the door opened and Ellen Skipwith walked in. Confound the woman! he had been expecting

her to do some such brazen thing, with the bank full of people!

"Pep," she said with a catch in her voice, "I had to see you!"

"Well, what can I do for you?" he asked in his polite banking tones.

"Do you know what has happened?" she quavered.

He did not know, but he did hope she was not going to cry. She had done everything else to provoke him.

"He, Barrie, has sold the house, furniture, everything!" she announced, tears in her eyes.

"Whom did he sell to?" Madden asked, after a pause.

She looked her reproach. He was interested in the purchaser, not the catastrophe.

"But don't you understand, it means that I must go away," she sobbed.

"That would follow, of course," he agreed.

The cruellest man on earth is the one who has recovered from you.

"Pep, what is the matter?" she asked plaintively.

"Nothing," he returned briefly.

"But you are different," she insisted.

"I am just busy, infernally busy," he said, fussing with his papers to indicate how little time he had to spare.

"But what has happened between us?" she wanted to know.

"Nothing," he answered, giving her his direct gaze for the first time.

"Is that the way you feel?" she asked dully.

"I have no feeling about it at all," he retorted smilingly.

"And never did have?" rising.

"Never did have," he repeated, still smiling.

She was making for the door. He arose and accompanied her, the whole distance of the bank, bowed her out with the good-morning used for all the customers of this institution.

CHAPTER XXX

PELIAM MADDEN took his punishment for the next few weeks as only a recently frail, but now irreproachably, faithful, husband can. He took Mrs. Madden for long drives in the keen November weather, and did not want to take the children at the same time.

She perceived that her husband was courting her. But she had been married to this man before, and she was never to be hopelessly, entirely won again. She wore a series of exceedingly becoming gowns, and maintained a position which he did not fully share. She had plans that she carried out without consulting him. Nothing wrong about that, but usually when a man's wife was going to do something she told him about it before she did it. She at least gave him the opportunity to approve. Well, Mary had gone to Atlanta and addressed a convention of women about some kind of constructive peace service without telling him. He found Mrs. Darah in charge of his home and children one day, and a telegram from Mary saying that she was unavoidably detained. The morning paper carried a complimentary report of this convention, with

Mrs. Pelham Madden's name in the headlines. Mrs. Madden had made a wonderful address. It was. He read it and was astonished at the dignity and eloquence of its periods. He was peeved, but he concealed his feelings when she did return. An able woman like that could not be suppressed of course. He felt like the Prince Albert Consort of this able woman, and he would much rather have felt more like an ordinary husband. The relation of the average husband to his wife is much more dignified than that of a mere consort. Still he took occasion to hide his wounds by speaking of Mrs. Madden's work. He mentioned that to Rachel Warren. What he said was very complimentary. He resented the quizzical black humor in the little "hellion's" eyes as she listened. He resented much that he could not help.

The great thing was that now there was nothing between him and Mary, literally nothing. She had never known of course about that regrettable performance of Ellen Skipwith's, but she must have felt the effects unconsciously. For now she was very companionable, much more so than formerly, somewhat exalted at times in her views, but at least within reach. He could have been contented with a less intelligent wife. He found himself competing with her, pitting his mind against her mind in some argument. And

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it annoyed him that she invariably dropped the subject when he became wrought up and flared.

Things were not altogether as they had been, or as he could have wished them to be. But this was offset by the really remarkable gain in Mary's appearance. She was a beautiful woman and had somehow discovered the art of dressing herself. It was very unusual for a woman to develop a sense of clothes in her thirties, when she had seemed singularly lacking in this sense.

In December he was called to New York on business. He persuaded Mary to accompany him. He wanted to begin over again, pay her more attention than he could with the children always about and everybody in Sulgrave looking on. She deserved it.

One day as they walked briskly through the streaming crowds along Fifth Avenue, he said, "Mary, I am sorry for these people."

"Why?" she asked.

"Well, they may not be married, a lot of them are not, and a lot more of them may be unhappily married."

"Yes," she agreed, "you never can tell, but I should think a good many of them may be doing very well," she concluded, laughing.

"It is a great thing, the most wonderful thing in the world to be happily married," he announced, giving her arm beneath her furs a

squeeze—to make sure she caught his exact meaning.

“I am glad you feel that way about it, Pelham,” she answered, serenely.

He was contented at the time with this reply. Later he recalled it with shrewder consideration. She was glad *he* felt that way, as if he was more married than she was, or happier than she was.

Well, let it go, he supposed he would never understand her. He was a fatuous fool for ever thinking he understood Mary. Any man was who thought that about his wife. Marriage complicated women. He supposed that was the explanation. But, so help him heaven, he would never complicate his own life with more than one woman, not even in the most innocently sentimental way. Marriage limited a man's capacity for innocence anyway, to just one woman.

All this he honestly believed, but Mrs. Madden believed only from day to day in her husband. She was prepared for a renaissance of the Pep bachelor in him. But she was prepared.

THE END

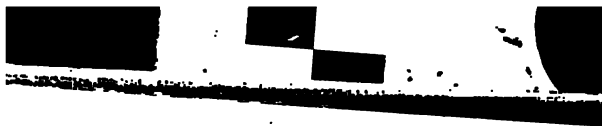


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