



Me

A Book of Remembrance

XXI

FRED was to leave for New York on the first of November, and that was only a week off. The firm had decided to retain me, after all, in the Chicago offices, but I was determined I would not remain there, and planned to go to New York as soon as possible, when Fred would immediately engage me. He said he 'd "fire" any girl he had then for me.

I had been saving from week to week for my fare and a set of furs. My suit, though only two months old, had already begun to show wear, and it was thin, as Mr. Hamilton had said. The girls at the yards were already wearing furs, but furs were beyond my purse for months to come. Lolly had beautiful furs, black, silky lynx, that some one had given her the previous Christmas.

It was now five weeks since I had seen Mr. Hamilton, and two since Tom had gone. I had had a few letters from Tom. They were not exactly love-letters. Tom's letters were more, as it were—well, written for publication. I don't know why they seemed like that to me. I suppose he could not help writing for effect, for although he said tender things, and very brilliantly, too, somehow they did not ring true to me.

I did not think very seriously of our engagement, though I liked my ring, and showed it to all the girls at the yards.

My stories came back with unflattering regularity from the magazines to which I sent them. Lolly, however, gave two of my stories to her paper, and I was to be paid space rates (four dollars a column, I think it was) on publication. I was a long time waiting for publication.

Dissatisfied, unhappy, and restless, as I now really was, I did not even feel like writing at night. I now no longer ran up-stairs to my room, with an eager, wishful heart, hoping that *he* might be there. Alas! I felt sure he had abandoned me forever. He had even ceased, I told myself, to be interested in me.

Then one night he came. I had had a hard day at the yards. Not hard in the sense of work; but Fred was to leave the following day, and a Mr. Hopkins was to take his place. We had spent the day going over all the matters of our department, and it 's impossible for me to say how utterly wretched I felt at the thought of working under another "boss" than Fred.

So I came home doleful enough, went out and ate my solitary dinner in a nearby restaurant, and then returned to the house.

He called, "Hello, little girl!" while I was opening the door.

I stood speechlessly staring at him for a moment, so glad was I to see him. It seemed an incredible and a joyous thing to me that he was really there, and that he appeared exactly the same—tall, with his odd, tired face and musing eyes.

"Well, are n't you glad to see me?" he asked, smiling, and holding out his hand.

I seized it and clung to it with both of mine, and I would n't let it go. That made him laugh again, and then he said:

"Well, what has my wonderful girl been doing?"

That was nearly always his first question to me.

"I wrote to you four times," I said, "and you never answered me once."

"I 'm not much of a hand at letter-writing," he said.

"I thought that you 'd forgotten me," I told him, "and that you were never going to come and see me again."

He put his hand under my chin, raised my face, and looked at it searchingly.

"Would it have mattered so much, then?" he asked gently.

"You know very well I 'm in love with you," I told him desperately, and he said, as always:

"Nonsense!" though I know he liked to hear me say that.

Then he wanted to inspect me, and he held me off at arm's-length, and turned me around, too. I think it was my suit he was looking at, though he had seen it before. Then he made me sit down, and said we were going to have a "long talk." Of course I had to tell him everything that had happened to me since I had seen him. I omitted all mention of Tom!

I told him about Fred's wanting me to join him in New York, and he remarked:

"Fred can jump up. You 're not going."

I did not argue that with him. Now I did n't want to go. I was quite happy and contented now that he was here. I did n't care whether he returned my love or not. I was contented as long as he was with me. That was much.

He always made me tell him every little detail of my life, and when I said I found it difficult to write, because of so many men coming to see Lolly,—I did n't mention that they were coming to see me, too!—he said:

"You 're going to move out of this place right away. We 'll look about for rooms to-morrow."

So then I knew he was not going back that night, and I was so glad that I knelt down beside him and cuddled up against his knee. I wished that he would put his arm about me, but all he did was to push back the loose hair that slipped over my cheek, and after that he kept his hand on my head.

He was much pleased with my description of the rooms at Mrs. Kingston's. He said we 'd go there the next day and have a look at them. He said I was to stay home from work the next day, but I protested that I could n't do that—Fred's last day! Unless I did just what he told me, it exasperated him always, and he now said:

"Then go away from me. I don't want anything to do with a girl who won't do even a trifling thing to please me."

I said that it was n't trifling, and that I might lose my position; for the new man was to take charge to-morrow, and I ought to be there.

"Damn the new man!" he said.

He was a singularly unreasonable man, and he could sulk and scowl for all the world like a great boy. I told him so, and he unwillingly laughed, and said I was beyond him. To win him back to good humor, I got out some of my new stories, and, sitting on the floor at his feet, read them to him. I read two stories. When I was through, he got up and walked up and down, pulling at his lower lip in that way he had.

"Well," I challenged, "can I write?"

He said:

"I 'm afraid you can." Then he took my manuscripts from me, and put them into his pocket.

It was late now, for it had taken me some time to read my stories, but he did not show any signs of going. He was sitting in our one big chair, smoking, with his legs stretched out in front of him, and although his eyes were half closed, he was watching me constantly. I began to yawn, because I was becoming sleepy. He said he supposed I wanted him to get out. I said no, I did n't; but my landlady probably did. She did n't mind our having men callers as long as they went before midnight. It was nearly that now. He said:

"Damn the landlady!" just as he had said, "Damn the new man!" Then he added, "You 're not going to be run by every one, you know."

I said mischievously:

"Just by you?"

"Just by me," he replied.

"But when you stay away so very, very long—"

It irritated him for me to refer to that. He said that there were certain matters I would n't understand that had kept him in Richmond, and that he had come as soon as he could. He added that he was involved in some lawsuit, and that he was being watched, and had to be "careful." I could n't see why he should be watched because of a lawsuit, and I asked:

"Would you be arrested?"

He threw back his head and laughed, and said I was a "queer little thing," and then, after a while, he said very seriously:

"It 's just as well, anyway. We must n't get the habit of *needing* each other too much."

I asked slyly:

"Do you think it possible *you* could ever need *me*?" To which he replied very soberly:

"I need you more than you would believe."

Mr. Hamilton never made a remark like that, which revealed any sentiment for me, without seeming to regret it a moment later. Now he got up abruptly and asked me which room I slept in. I said generally in the inner one, because Lolly came in late from assignments and engagements.

"I want to see your room," he said, "and I want to see what clothes you need."

He knew much about women's clothes. I felt ashamed to have him poking about among my poor things like that, and I grew very red; but he took no notice of me, and jotted down some things in his note-book. He said I would need this, that, and other things.

I said weakly:

"You need n't think I 'm going to let you get me clothes. Honestly, I won't wear them if you do."

He tilted up my chin, and spoke down into my face:

"Now, Nora, listen to me. Either you are going to live and dress as I want you

to, or I am positively not coming to see you again. Do you understand?"

"Well, I can get my own clothes," I said stubbornly.

"Not the kind I want you to have, not the kind I am going to get you."

He still had his hand under my chin, and I looked straight into his eyes.

"If you tell me just once," I said, "that you care for me, I 'll—I 'll—take the clothes then."

"I 'll say anything you want me to," he said, "if you 'll do what I tell you."

I took him up at that.

"All right, then. Say, 'I love you,' and you can buy pearls for me, if you want to."

He gave me a deep look that made me thrill, and I drew back from his hand. He said in a low voice:

"You can have the pearls, anyway."

"But I 'd rather have the words," I stammered, now ashamed of myself, and confused under his look.

"Consider them said, then," he said, and he laughed. I could n't bear him to laugh at me, and I said:

"You don't mean it. I made you say it, and therefore it has no meaning. I wish it were true."

"Perhaps it is," he said.

"Is it?" I demanded eagerly.

"Who knows?" said he.

Lolly came in then. She did not seem at all pleased to see Mr. Hamilton there, and he left soon after. When he was gone, she told me I was a very silly girl to have taken him into my room. I told her I had n't; that he had just walked in. Lolly asked me, virtuously, whether I had ever seen *her* let a man go in there, and I confessed I had not. She wanted to know whether I had told Mr. Hamilton about Tom. Indeed, I had not! The thought of telling him frightened me, and I besought Lolly not to betray me. Also I took off Tom's ring. I intended to send it back to him. It was impossible for me to be engaged to him now.

Lolly said if she were I, she would n't let Mr. Hamilton buy clothes for her. She said once he started to do that, he

would expect to pay for everything for me, and then, said Lolly, the first thing I knew, people would be saying that he was "keeping" me. She said that I could take dinners, flowers, even jewels from a man,—though in "high society" girls could n't even do that; but working-girls were freer,—and I could go to the theater and to other places with him; but it was a fatal step when a man began to pay for a girl's room and clothes. Lolly added that once she had let a man do that for her, and— She blew out a long whiff of smoke from her lips, saying, "Never again!" with her hand held solemnly up.

So then I decided I could n't let him do it, and I felt very sorry that I had even weakened a little bit in my original resolve not to let him spend money on me. I went to sleep troubled about the matter.

XXII

As soon as I got up next day I called him on the telephone. It was so early that I probably woke him up, but I had to tell him what was on my mind.

"It's Nora," I said.

He replied:

"Last time you telephoned to me you were in trouble; do you remember? Are you in trouble now, little girl?"

I said I was n't, but I just wanted to say I *could* n't and would n't let him buy clothes for me.

I knew just as well as if I could see him how he was looking when I said that. He was used to having his own way, and that I dared to set my will against his always made him angry. After a moment he said:

"Will you do something else to please me, then?"

"What?"

"Don't go to work to-day."

"I've got to; truly I have."

"You only think that. Call up O'Brien and ask to be excused. If you don't, I will. Now I'll be up at your place about ten. I've something special to give you, anyway."

"What?"

"I can't tell you on the phone." That was a happy morning for me!

"We-ell," I weakened; "all right, then."

I was rewarded beautifully for that.

"That's my little girl!" he said.

Then he rang off. I never would have.

So I stayed home from work, the first time since I had been at the yards—and Fred's last day! Mr. Hamilton came over about ten. Lolly was still sleeping, so I had to see him down-stairs in the parlor. As soon as I saw him, I held out my hands and said:

"Where's the special thing?"

He laughed. I could make him laugh easily now, though I don't believe any one else could. He pinched my chin and said:

"Get your hat on. We're going shopping."

"Now, Mr. Hamilton, honestly, I am not going to let you buy things for me."

"Did I say I was going to do that?" he demanded.

"Well, then, how can we shop?"

"You have some money of your own, have n't you?"

"Yes, but I was saving it for furs and to go to New York."

"Well, you can get the furs later, and you're not going to New York. The main thing is you need a decent suit and a—er—heavy coat to wear to work, since you *will* work; and you need gloves and—let me see your shoes—" [I showed them] "and shoes, a hat and—"

"I have n't the money for all those things."

"Yes, you have. I know a place where you can get all kinds of bargains. Ever hear of bargain-shops?"

No, I had never heard of bargain-shops, though I had of bargain-sales, I told him. Well, it was the same thing, he said, except that this particular shop made a specialty of selling nothing but bargains.

That, of course, tempted me, and I went up to my room and put on my coat and hat. I had thirty dollars, and I borrowed ten from Lolly. So I was not so badly off. He was right, I really needed new things, and I might as well let him choose them for me.

There have been few happier in my life. All girls love to "shop," and there was a joy in trying on lovely things, even if I could n't afford them. It was a small shop to which he took me, but the things there were really beautiful and astonishingly cheap. He made them try many things on me, not only suits, but negligees and evening gowns.

Then he chose a soft dark-blue velvet suit, trimmed with the loveliest gray fur at the neck and sleeves. I thought it must be very expensive, but the saleswoman said it was only fifteen dollars. I had never *heard* of such a bargain, especially as a hat, trimmed with the fur, and a muff also went with the suit. I made up my mind I'd bring Lolly here. I told the lady who owned the store that I would bring a friend. That made her laugh, but she stopped, because Mr. Hamilton frowned and looked very angry. He liked to laugh at me himself, but he did n't want others to do so, and I liked him for that.

Still, I felt uncomfortable. The woman's laugh had been peculiar, and the saleswomen were watching me. I bought, too, a heavy navy-blue coat, with a little cape, and belted, just the thing for every day, and gloves and two pairs of shoes. She said that, as I'd bought so much, she'd give me silk stockings to go with the shoes.

Of course I know now that I was a blind fool; but then I was only seventeen, and nine months before I had never been outside my home city, Quebec. For that matter, I hardly knew Quebec, so limited and confined is the life of the poor. I thought my forty dollars paid for all; I *did* think that!

Mr. Hamilton was in a fine humor now, and he made me wear the velvet suit and the hat to go to luncheon with him, and where do you suppose he took me? Right to his own hotel. There he introduced me to a man named Townsend who was waiting for him. I did n't at all like the way Mr. Townsend looked at me; but Mr. Hamilton did not seem to mind it, though he was quick to notice such things. When I had dined with him

before, if any man stared at me, he used to lean over and say, without the slightest suggestion of a smile:

"Well, what shall I do to him? Turn the seltzer on him or push his face in?"

Mr. Townsend, however, was not trying to flirt with me, as, for instance, Mr. Chambers always was. He studied me curiously and, I thought, suspiciously. He talked in an undertone to Mr. Hamilton, and I am sure they were talking about me. I did hope that Mr. Townsend had not noticed any mistakes I made about the knives and forks.

I was glad when luncheon was over. We entered a cab again, and Mr. Hamilton directed the driver to take us to Mrs. Kingston's. I asked him who Mr. Townsend was. He said his lawyer, and began to talk about something else. He wanted to know if I was n't curious to know what that special thing was he had to give me. I had forgotten about it. Now, of course, I wanted to know.

"Well," he said, "'open your mouth and shut your eyes, and in your mouth you'll find a prize.'"

I thought he was going to give me a candy, so I shut my eyes and opened my mouth, just like a foolish child; and then he kissed me. It was n't like a kiss at all, because my mouth was open; but he seemed to think it very funny, and when I opened my eyes, he was sitting back in the carriage, with his arms folded, laughing hard. I think he thought that a good joke on me, because I dare say he knew I wanted him to kiss me. I did n't think it a good joke at all, and I would n't speak or look at him, and my face grew hot and red, and at last he said teasingly:

"I'll have to keep you angry all the time, Nora. You look your prettiest then."

I said with dignity:

"You know very well I'm not even a little bit pretty, and I wish you would n't make fun of me, Mr. Hamilton."

He was still laughing, and he said:

"You know very well you are pretty, you little fraud, and my name is Roger."

I never called him Mr. Hamilton again.

XXIII

WHEN I introduced Mr. Hamilton to Mrs. Kingston, she put on her glasses and examined him curiously, and he said, with a rather formal smile, not at all as he smiled at me:

"I've heard quite a lot about you from Miss Ascough, and am glad to meet you."

"I've known all about you for some time," she said, chuckling. And then she added, "I don't know what I expected to see, but you don't quite measure up to Nora's extravagant ideal."

"No, I suppose not," he said, his eyes twinkling. "I doubt if any man could do that."

We were all laughing, and I said:

"Oh, well, I know he's not much to look at; but I'm crazy about him, anyhow, and he wants to see the rooms."

He did n't think the little room nearly good enough for me, but he said that big suite of rooms in front was just the thing. That made me laugh. Did he suppose any stenographer could afford a luxurious suite of rooms like that? There was a long room that ran across the front of the house, with big bay-windows and a wonderful fireplace, and opening out from this room was a large bedroom, with a bathroom adjoining it. As one may see, they were n't exactly the rooms a girl getting fifteen dollars a week could afford.

I said:

"Tell him just how much you intend to 'soak' your prospective roomer for these palatial chambers."

She started to say, "Twenty-five dollars a week," which was what she had told me she expected to charge, when I saw him make a sign to her, and she hesitated. Then I knew he intended to get her to name a cheap price just for me, and pay the difference himself. But now I was too quick for him. He had actually deceived me about those clothes. I had not the remotest idea till months afterward that he had paid for them and for many other things I subsequently bought, or thought I bought; but Mrs. Kingston had already told me the price of that room. So I said:

"It's no use. I know the price."

"Yes, but for a friend," he replied, "I'm sure Mrs. Kingston would make—er—a considerable reduction."

She said nothing. I don't know how she felt. Of course she knew that I was in love with him, but, as she told me afterward, she could n't quite make out just what our relations were.

"That's all very well," I said, "but Mrs. Kingston has to get her rent."

Then he said:

"Well, but—er—I'm sure her practice is going to soar from now on. A great lawyer like Mrs. Kingston need not rent rooms at all."

Still she said nothing; but I saw her watching us both. He went on to urge me to have these rooms, but of course the idea was absurd. It was really provoking for him to keep pressing me to have things I simply could not afford and did not greatly want. I said all this. Besides, I added, it would be foolish for me to make any change at this time. Things were uncertain with me at the yards, now that Fred was leaving, and I should have to speak to Lolly, anyhow.

He argued that if I expected to write, I should have to move. No one could write in such disturbing circumstances. Of course that was true enough, and I said I'd talk it over that night with Lolly.

He took out some money then, and wanted to pay Mrs. Kingston so much down on the rooms, when I exclaimed that even if I did leave Lolly, I did n't mean to take these rooms, but the little one, if Mrs. Kingston was still willing to let me have it. She said she certainly was; that she badly wanted me to come. Both she and Mrs. Owens (the woman with her) needed a young person about the place to make them forget what old fogies they were, and that it would be like a real home to have me there, and we'd all be very happy.

It ended like this: *he* took that suite of rooms. He said they'd be there for me to have at any time I wanted them. I told him it was just a waste of money, for

I simply would not let him pay for my room any more than I would let him pay for my clothes, and that was all there was to it.

He smiled curiously at that, and asked Mrs. Kingston what she thought of my clothes. She said:

"I have n't been able to take my eyes off them. Nora is *wonderful*! Does it seem possible that clothes can make such a difference?"

She wanted to know where I got them. I told her, and how cheap they were. She was amazed at the price, and Mr. Hamilton went over to the window and looked out. How clearly this all comes back to me now!

All the way back to my rooms he argued with me about the matter. He said if I had a pleasant place like that to live in, I'd soon be writing masterpieces (ah, he knew which way my desires ran!), and soon I'd not have to work in offices at all. To take rooms like those, he said, was really an investment. Business men all did things that way. It was part of the game. He wanted me to try it for a while, and at last I said in desperation:

"What 's the use of talking about it? I tell you, I have n't got the money."

Then he said (I never knew a man who could so persist about a thing on which he had set his heart):

"Now, look here, Nora, I've got more money than is decent for any one person to have, and I *want* to spend it on *you*. I want to give you things—comforts and luxuries and all the pretty things a girl like you ought to have. If you could see yourself now, you'd realize what a difference even clothes make. And so with other things. I want to take hold of you and make you over. I never wanted to do anything so much in my life before. Now you're going to be a good girl, are n't you, and not deny me the pleasure—the real *joy* it gives me to do things for you, dear little girl?"

By this time I was nearly crying, but I set my teeth together, and determined not to be won over to something I knew was not right.

"You told me once," I said, "that all any one had ever wanted of you was your money—your dirty money, you called it; and now, just because I won't take it from you, you get angry with me."

"Well, but, confound it! I did n't mean you then."

"Oh, yes, you did, too; because you said I'd be sending for more money in a week, and you said that I was made to have it, and men would give—"

He put a stop to my too vivid recollections.

"But, *child*, I had no *idea* then of the kind of girl you were,"—he lowered his voice, and added tenderly, he was trying so hard to have his way!—"of the exceptional, wonderful little girl you are."

"But I would n't be exceptional or wonderful," I protested, "if I took your money. I'd be common. No; I'm not going to let people say you *keep* me!"

"Where did you hear that word?" he demanded roughly.

"From Lolly—and the other girls that I know. Oh, don't you suppose I know what that means?" I was looking straight at him now, and I saw his face turn red, but whether with anger or embarrassment, I do not know. He said in a sort of suppressed way:

"Don't you know that men who keep women are their lovers?"

I nodded.

He sat up stiffly now, and he gave me a cold, almost sneering, look that made me shiver. Then he said:

"Have I ever given you the slightest reason to suppose I wanted to be *your* lover?"

I shriveled up not only at his words, but at his look, and I turned my face away, and looked out of the window of the cab without seeing anything. It was true he had never pretended to care for me. I was the one who had done all the caring, and now it almost seemed as if he were throwing this up to me as something of which to be ashamed. But though my face was burning, I felt no shame, only a sort of misery.

"Well?" he prompted me, for I had

not answered that last brutal query. Without looking at him, I said, in a shaking little voice, for I was heartbroken to think that he could use such a tone to me or look at me in that way:

"No, you have n't. In fact, if you had, perhaps I might have done what you wanted."

He came closer to me in the carriage when I said that, but I shrank away from him. I was nearer to disliking him than than at any time in my acquaintance with him.

"You mean," he said, "that if I *were* your lover, you *would* be willing to—live with me—like that? Is that what you mean, Nora?"

"Oh, I don't know what I mean," I said. "I don't pretend to be respectable and good in the way the women of your class are. I suppose I have no morals. I'm only a girl in love with a man; and if—if—he cared for me as I did for him, I'd be willing to do anything in the world he wished me to. I'd be willing to die for him. But if he did n't—if he did n't care for me, don't you see, I could n't take *anything* from him. I should feel degraded."

It was a tangled, passionate sort of reasoning. For a long time after that we rode along in silence, I looking out of the window, and he looking constantly at me. I could *feel* his eyes on me, and I did not dare to turn around. Then presently he said:

"I'm all kinds of a rotter, Nora, but I'm straight about you. You're my wonderful girl, the oasis in my life. I would n't harm a hair of your precious little head. If I were to tell you I loved you, I would precipitate a tragedy upon you that you do not deserve. So I am not going to say any such thing to you." He cleared his throat, and as I said nothing, he went on strongly, it seemed to me:

"Your friend Lolly is right about men, and I'm no different from other men as far as women are concerned; but in your case I am. My desire to do things for you is based on no selfish design. I assure you of that. I simply have an overwhelm-

ing desire to take care of you, Nora, to help you."

I said this with as much composure as I could command:

"Thank you, I don't need help. I'm not so badly off as you think. I make pretty good money, and, anyway, I'm independent, and that's a big thing."

"But you have to work like a slave. I can't bear to think of that, and as for being independent, you won't be any the less so if you let me do things for you. You may go on with your life in your own way. I'll never interfere or try to dictate to you about anything."

Almost hysterically I cried out:

"Oh, please stop talking about this! Every time you come here you scold me about something."

"Why, Nora," he said aggrievedly, "I have never asked you to do anything but this. That's the only thing I ever scolded you about."

"Look how you acted that first night, when you saw me with Lolly and Mr. Chambers, and then the night I was up with Fred. You wanted to *beat* me! I saw it in your face. You could no more help dictating to and scolding me than you can help coming to see me now."

The last sentence slipped out before I knew it, and he sat up sharply at that, and then laughed uncomfortably.

"I am a dog in the manger as far as you are concerned," he said; "but I'll turn over a new leaf if you'll let me do these things for you."

I smiled ruefully, for I was beginning to know him so well now, and I sighed. He asked me why I sighed, and then I asked him in turn just why he wanted to do these things for me. He paused a moment, and then said slowly, and not without considerable emotion:

"I've told you why before, Nora. I'm interested in you. You're my find, my discovery. I take a special pride in everything connected with you. You're my 'ewe lamb,' the one thing in life I take a real interest in, and I want to watch you, and see you develop. I have n't the slightest doubt of your eventual success."

"Hum! You look upon me as a sort of curiosity, don't you?"

"Nonsense! Don't talk so foolishly!"

But I knew that that was just how he did regard me, and it made me sick at heart. My beautiful day had clouded over. I supposed that nothing in the world would ever induce this man to admit any feeling for me but interest. Well, I wanted to love and to be loved, and it was a cold sort of substitute he was offering me—pretty clothes and fine rooms. No, I could earn all those things myself in time.

"Now, then," he said, "you *are* going to be my darling, reasonable little girl, are n't you? After all, it is n't so much I am asking of you. All I want you to do is to leave your position and go to live with this Mrs. Kingston. She struck me as being all right, and the rooms are exceedingly attractive, though we'll furnish them over ourselves. And then you are going to let me get you the proper kind of clothes to wear. I'll choose them myself for you, Nora. Then, since you won't go to school,—and, you see, I'm willing to let that go,—why, we can arrange for you to take special lessons in languages and things like that, and there are certain English courses you can take up at Northwestern. And I want you to study music, too, piano and vocal—the violin, too, if you like. I'm specially fond of music, and I think it would be a good thing for you to take it up. Then in the spring you shall go abroad. I have to go myself about that time, and I want to see your face when you see Europe, honey." That was the only Southern endearing term he ever applied to me, and I had never heard it used before. "It will be a revelation to you. And now the whole thing is settled, is n't it?"

I hated, after all this, to have to refuse again, so I did n't answer him, and he said, taking my hand, and leaning, oh, so coaxingly toward me:

"It's all settled, is n't it, dear?"

I turned around, and shouted at him almost hysterically:

"No, it is *n't*. And I wish you'd shut

up about those things. You only make me miserable."

If I had stung him, he could not have drawn back from me more sharply.

"Oh, *very* well," he said, and threw himself back in his seat, his face looking like a thunder-cloud.

He did n't speak another word to me, and when the carriage stopped at my door, he got out, assisted me from the carriage, and then immediately got in again himself. I stood at the curb, my hand on the door of the carriage, and I said:

"Please don't go like this!"

"I'm sorry, but I am taking the 6:09 train."

"Take a later train."

"No, thank you."

"Please!"

"Sorry. Good-by."

"Please don't be angry with me!"

He did n't answer. It was terrible to have him go like that, and I asked him when he was coming back.

"I can't say," was his curt response. Then his angry glance fixed me, and he said slowly:

"You can let me know when you take those rooms I chose for you. I'll come then—at once."

And that is the cruel way he left me. I was heartbroken in a way, but I was angry, too. I went up to my room, and sat on the couch, and as I slowly pulled off my new gloves, I was not thinking kindly of Mr. R. A. Hamilton. No man had a right to impose his will in this way on a girl and to demand of her something that she could not do without losing her self-respect. I asked myself whether, because I loved this man, I was willing to make of myself a pusillanimous little door-mat, or if I had enough pride to stand by my own convictions?

I had humbled myself enough to him; indeed, I had virtually offered myself to him. But he did not want me. He had made that clear enough. If, in the circumstances, I took from him the gifts he offered me, I would roll up a debt I could never wipe out. Now, although poor and working, I was a free woman. What I

had, I honestly earned. I was no doll or parasite who needed to be carried by others. No! To retain my belief in my own powers, I must prove that they actually existed. Only women without resources in themselves, without gifts or brains, were "kept" by men, either as mistresses or wives or from charity, as Hamilton wished to "keep" me. I had the youthful conviction that I was one of the exceptional souls of the world, and could carry myself. Was I, then, to be bought by the usual foolish things that attract the ordinary woman? I asked myself scornfully. No! Not even my love could alter my character.

Now, there really was a fine streak in me, for I did want pretty things (what young girl does not?), I hated my work, and I loved this man, and wanted above all things on earth to please him.

Lolly said, to jerk one's mind from too much brooding over one man, one should think of another. I discovered another method of distraction. Pretty clothes are a balm even to a broken heart, and although I was clever, I was also eternally feminine. My things had arrived from the shop, and they were so lovely,—so much lovelier than I had thought,—that I was enchanted. Lolly came in while I was lifting the things from the boxes. I had n't taken off my suit, and she turned me around to look at me.

"Is n't it stunning, Lolly?" I asked. "And, just think, it was only fifteen dollars, suit, hat, muff, and all."

Lolly's unbelieving glance swept me, then she threw her cigarette down, and said spitefully:

"For the love of Mike, Nora, cut it out! You're a poor little liar!"

"Liar! What do you mean, Lolly Hope?"

I was furious at the insult, capping all I had gone through.

"That suit you have on never cost one penny less than \$150. The fur alone is easily worth half of that. It's silver fox, an inch of which is worth several dollars, and that muff—" She laughed disgustingly. "What do you take me for, any-

how, to try to spring that fifteen-dollar gag on me?"

"It was marked down, I tell you, at a bargain sale."

"Oh, come off, Nora! Don't try that on me. I know where you got those clothes. That man Hamilton gave them to you. You did n't follow my advice, I see." She shrugged her shoulders. "Of course it's your own affair, and I'm the last to blame you or any other girl for a thing like that, but, for heaven's sake, don't think it necessary to make up fairytales to me!"

"Lolly, I swear to you that I paid for these myself."

"Tell it to the marines!" said Lolly.

"Then see for yourself. Here are the price-tags, and here's the bill," I cried excitedly, and I thrust them upon her. Everything came to exactly forty dollars. Lolly looked the bill over carefully; then she put her cigarette in her mouth, and looked at me. All of a sudden she began to laugh. She threw her head back upon the sofa pillows and just laughed and laughed, while I became angrier and angrier with her. I waited till she was through, and then I said, very much injured:

"Now you can apologize to me, Lolly Hope."

"You blessed infant," she cried, "I'm in the dust at your feet. One thing's sure, and I guess friend Hamilton is wise to that: there's no one like *you* in this dull old world of ours!"

XXIV

My new "boss" at the yards was a sharp-nosed, sharp-eyed old-young man who seemed to think that his chief mission in life was to crack a sort of mental whip, like an overseer, over the heads of those under him, and keep us all hustling and rushing like frightened geese.

I had been accustomed to answer the correspondence of the soap department myself, Fred merely noting a few words in pencil on each letter, giving the gist of what he wanted said; but Mr. Hopkins dictated everything, and as soon as I was

through one batch of correspondence, he would find something else for me to do. It seemed to give him a pain for my type-writer to be idle a moment. I think I was on his mind all the time except when he was busily thinking up work for Red Top.

My position, therefore, had become a very hard one. I worked incessantly from nine till six. Fred had let me off at five-thirty and often at five; but Mr. Hopkins kept me till six. I think he 'd have made it seven, but the bell rang at six, and the office was supposed to close after that.

Many a time I 've seen him glance regretfully at the clock or make an impatient movement with his shoulders at the clanging of the bell, at which moment I always banged close my type-writer desk, and swiftly departed.

How I missed Fred! He had made life at the yards tolerable and even amusing for me with his jokes and confidences. And, then, there 's a pleasure in working for some one you know approves of you and likes you. Fred *did* like me. In a way, I don't think any one ever liked me better than poor Fred did.

It makes me sad to think that the best girl friend I ever had, Lolly, and the best man friend, Fred, are now both gone out of this world, where I may have still such a long road to travel.

I hated my position now. I was nothing but an overworked machine. Moreover, the routine of the work was deadening. When I answered the letters myself, it gave a slight diversion; but now I simply took dictation and transcribed it, and when I was through with that, I copied pages of itemized stuff. My mind became just like a ticker that tapped off this or that curt and dry formula of business letter in which soap, soap, soap stood out big and slimy.

I now neither wrote at night nor went out. I was too tired from the incessant labor at the type-writer, and when I got to sleep,—after two or three hours, in which I lay awake thinking of Mr. Hamilton and wondering whether I would ever see him again; I always wondered about

that when he was away,—I declare I would hear the *tap-tapping* of that type-writer all night long in my sleep! Other type-writers have had the same experience. One ought to escape from one's treadmill at least in sleep.

But this is a world of miracles; doubt it who can.

There came a glorious day late in the month of November—to be exact, it was November 24. No, Mr. Hamilton did not come again. He was still waiting for my capitulation anent the rooms at Mrs. Kingston's.

This is what happened: I was type-writing, when Red Top came in with the mail. He threw down on my desk some personal letters that had come for me. Although Mr. Hopkins was at his desk, and I knew it was a criminal offense to stop any office work to attend to a personal matter, I reached over and picked up my letters. I heard my "boss" cough significantly as I glanced through them. Two were from home, and I put them down, intending to read them at noon. One was from Fred. I put that down, too. And the other! Oh, that other! It was from—listen! It was from—the editor of the great New York magazine! I opened it with trembling fingers. The words jumped up at me and embraced me! My story was accepted, and a check for fifty dollars accompanied that brief, but blessed, note.

Mr. Hopkins was clearing his throat so pronouncedly now that I turned deliberately about in my chair and grinned hard at him. He glared at me indignantly. Little idiot! He thought I was trying to flirt with him!

"Are you through, Miss Ascough?" he asked.

"No, Mr. Hopkins," I responded blandly, "and I never will be now. I 've just come into some money, and I 'm not going to work for you any more."

"What! What!" he said in his sharp little voice.

I repeated what I had said, and I stood up now, and began gathering my things together—my pocket-book, handkerchief,

odds and ends, in my desk, and the rose that Mr. Smith had given me that day.

Mr. Hopkins had a nasal, excitable, squeaking sort of voice, like the querulous bark of a dog—a little dog.

"But, Miss Ascough, you don't mean to say you are leaving now?"

"Yes, I do mean to say it," I replied, smiling gloriously.

"But surely you 'll finish the letter on the machine?"

"I surely will not," said I. "I don't *have* to work any more. Good-by." And out I marched, or, rather, flew, without waiting to collect three days' pay due me, and resigning a perfectly good fifteen-dollar-a-week job on the first money I ever received for a story!

I did not walk on solid ground, I assure you. I flew on wings that carried me soaring above that Land of Odors, where I had worked for four and a half hard months, right up into the clouds, and every one knows the clouds are near to heaven.

Mr. Hamilton? Oh, yes, I did remember some such person. Let me see. He was the man who thought I was incapable of taking care of myself, and who grandiloquently wanted to "make me over"; who once said I was "ignorant, uncivilized, undisciplined," who would never get anywhere unless I followed his lordly advice. How I laughed inwardly at the thought of the effect upon him of those astounding conquests that *I* was to make in the charming golden world that was smiling and beckoning to me now.

As soon as I got to my room, I sat down and wrote a letter to him. I wanted *him* to know right away. In fact, I had a feeling that if *he* did n't know, then all the pleasure of my triumph might go. This is what I said to him:

Dear Roger: [Yes, I called him Roger now.]

Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the inclosed thrilling, extraordinary, and absorbing indorsement of

Your abused and forsaken

NORA.

How had he the heart not to answer that letter of mine? I wondered.

Girls love candies, pretty clothes, jewelry, gewgaws, and, as the old song has it, "apples and spices and everything nicest." They like boys and men and all such trifling things. Those are the things that make them giggle and thrill and weep and sometimes kill themselves; but I tell you there is n't a thrill comparable with that electric and ecstatic shock that comes to a young girl writer when, after many rebuffs, her first story is accepted. Of course, alas! that thrill is brief, and soon one finds, with wonder, that the world is actually going on just the same, and, more wonder of wonders! there is still trouble and pain and tragedy and other ugly things crawling about upon the face of the earth. Ah me! They say the weird, seeking sound of a new soul is the most beautiful music on earth to the ears of a mother. I think a poet feels that way toward his first poem or story that comes to life. The ecstasy, the pain, and thrill of creating and bearing—are they not all here, too? I know that often one's "child" is unworthy, uncouth, sometimes deformed, or, worse, a misshapen and appalling monster, a criminal product, as it were; but none the less he is one's own, and one's love will accompany him, even as a mother's, to the gallows.

"It never rains but it pours," says a homely old adage. I thought this was the case with me now. Within a few days after I got that letter and check, lo and behold! I had three stories accepted by a certain Western magazine. I was sure now that I was not only going to be famous immediately, but fabulously wealthy.

Three stories, say, at fifty dollars each, made a hundred and fifty; add the fifty from the great New York magazine, and you perceive I would possess two hundred dollars. Then do not forget that I had as well a little black suitcase full of other stories and poems, and an abortive effort at a novel, to say nothing of a score of articles about Jamaica. Besides, my head was teeming with extraordinary and un-

usual plots and ideas,—at least they seemed extraordinary and original to me,—and I felt that all I had to do was to shut myself up somewhere alone, and out they would pour.

I now sat down on the floor, with my suitcase before me, and I made a list of all my stories, put prices opposite them, added up the list, and, *bedad!* as O'Brien would say, I was a rich girl!

In fact I felt so confident and recklessly happy that nothing would do but I must treat Lolly and Hermann to a fine dinner and the theater. My fifty dollars dropped to forty. But of course I was to get one hundred and fifty for those other three stories. It's true, the letter accepting them did not mention the price, but I supposed that all magazines paid about the same, and even though in the case of the Western magazine I was to be "paid upon publication," I was sure my stories would be published soon. In fact, I thought it a good thing that I was not paid all at once, because then I might be tempted to spend the money. As it was, it would come in just about the time I was through with the fifty.

If my ignorance in this matter seems infantile, I think I may confidently refer my readers to certain other authors who in the beginning of their careers have been almost as credulous and visionary as I. It's a matter of wonder how any person who is capable of writing a story can in other matters be so utterly impractical and positively devoid of common sense.

I never saw fifty dollars fly away as quickly as that fifty dollars of mine. I really don't know *what* it went for, though I did swagger about a bit among my friends. I took Mrs. Kingston and Mrs. Owens, the woman who lived with her, to the theater, too, and I went over to the Y. W. C. A. several times and treated Estelle and a lot of my old acquaintances to ice-cream sodas and things like that.

I avidly watched the news-stands for the December number of that Western magazine to appear, and when it did come out, I was so sure at least *one* of my stories

was in it, that I was confounded and stunned when I found that it was not. I thought some mistake must have been made, and bought two other copies to make sure.

I was now down to my last six dollars. I awoke to the seriousness of my position. I would have to go to work again and immediately. The thought of this hurt me acutely, not so much because I hated the work, but because I realized that my dream of instant fame and fortune was just a dream.

The December number of the New York magazine also was out, but my story was not in it. I wrote to the editors of both the Eastern and Western magazines, and asked when my stories would appear. I got answers within a few days. The Eastern magazine said that they were made up for several months ahead, but hoped to use my story by next summer,—it was the first week in December now,—and the Western magazine wrote vaguely that they planned to use my stories in "the near future."

I wrote such a desperate letter to the editor of that Western magazine, imploring him to use my stories very soon, that I must have aroused his curiosity, for he wrote me that he expected to be in Chicago "some time next month," and would be much pleased to call upon me and discuss the matter of the early publication of my stories and others he would like to have me write for them.

I said my fifty dollars flew away from me. I except the last six dollars. I performed miracles with that. I paid my share of our room-rent for a week—three dollars—and lived eleven days on the other three. At the end of those eleven days I had exactly ten cents.

For two reasons I did not tell Lolly. In the first place, while I had not lied to her, I had in my egotistical and fanciful excitement led her to believe that not only had I sold the four stories, but they had been paid for. And in the second place, Lolly at this time was having bitter troubles of her own. They concerned Marshall Chambers. She was suffering untold

tortures over that man—the tortures that only a suspicious and passionately jealous woman who loves can feel. She had no tangible proof of his infidelities, but a thousand little things had occurred that made her suspect him. They quarreled constantly, and then passionately “made up.” So I could not turn to Lolly.

I had not heard a word from Mr. Hamilton, and after that glowing, boastful letter I had written, how *could* I now appeal to him? The mere thought tormented and terrified me.

Toward the end, when my money had faded down to that last six dollars, I had been desperately seeking work. I think I answered five hundred advertisements at least, but although now I was well dressed, an asset to a stenographer, and had city references (Fred’s), I could get nothing. My strait, it will be perceived, was really bad, and another week’s rent had fallen due.

I did not have any dinner that evening when I went over to Mrs. Kingston’s, but I had on my beautiful blue velvet suit. My luncheon had been a single ham sandwich. Mrs. Kingston had called me up on the telephone early in the day, and invited me over for the evening, saying she had some friends who wished to meet me.

Her friends proved to be two young men from Indianapolis who were living and working in Chicago. One, George Butler, already well known as a Socialist, was head of a Charities Association Bureau (I hysterically thought it an apropos occasion for me to meet a man in such work), and the other, Robert Bennet, was exchange editor of the “News.” Butler was exceedingly good-looking, but he had a thick, baggy-looking mouth that spoiled his face, and he dressed like a poet,—at least I supposed a poet would dress something like that,—wearing his hair longish and carelessly tossed back, a turn-over soft collar, flowing tie, and loose clothes that looked as if they needed to be pressed.

Bennet had an interesting face, the prominent attribute of which was an al-

most shining quality of *honesty*. It illuminated his otherwise rugged and homely face, and gave it a curious attraction and strength. I can find no other word to describe that expression. He wore glasses, and looked like a student, and he stooped a little, which added to this impression. Both boys were in their early twenties, I should say, and they roomed together somewhere near Jane Addams’s Hull House, where both worked at night, giving their services gratuitously as instructors in English. They were graduates of the University of Indiana.

Butler talked a great deal about Socialism, and he would run his hand through his hair, as Belasco does on first nights. Bennet, on the other hand, was a good listener, but talked very little. He seemed diffident and even shy, and he stammered slightly.

On this night I was in such a depressed mood that, despite Mr. Butler’s eloquence, I was unable to rouse myself from the morbid fancies that were now flooding my mind. For the imagination that had carried me up on dizzying dreams of fame now showed me pictures of myself starving and homeless; and just as the first pictures had exhilarated me, now the latter terrified and distracted.

Mrs. Kingston noticed my silence, and asked me if I was not feeling well. She said I did not seem quite myself. I said I was all right. When I was going, she asked me in a whisper whether I had heard from Mr. Hamilton, and I shook my head; and then she wanted to know whether he knew of my “success.” Something screamed and cried within me at that question. My success! Was she mocking me then?

Bennet had asked to see me home, and as it was still early,—only about nine,—he suggested that we take a little walk along the lake.

It was a beautiful moonlight night, and though only a few weeks from Christmas, not at all cold. Mrs. Kingston had apparently told Mr. Bennet that I wrote, for he tried to make me talk about it. I was not, however, in a very communica-

tive mood. I talked disjointedly. I started to tell him about the New York magazine and the Western magazine, and then all of a sudden I remembered how I was fixed, and then I could n't talk at all. In fact, I pitied myself so that I began to cry. It was dark in the street, and I cried silently; so I did n't suppose he noticed me until he stopped short and said:

"You're in trouble. Can't you tell me what is the matter?"

"I've got only ten cents in the world," I blurted out.

"What!"

"Just ten cents," I said, "and I *can't* get work."

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "You poor girl!"

He was so sorry for me and excited that he stammered worse than ever, and I stopped crying, because, having told some one my secret, I felt better and knew I'd get help somehow.

So then I told him all about how I had come down to such straits; how I had worked all those months, and my implicit belief that that fifty dollars would last till I was paid for the other three stories.

When I was through, Bennet said:

"N-now, l-look here. I get thirty dollars a week. I don't need but half of that, and I'm going to give you fifteen a week of it till you get another place."

I protested that I would n't think of taking his money, but I was joyfully hailing him in my heart as a veritable savior. Before we had reached my lodging-place, I had not only allowed him to give me ten dollars, but I agreed to accept ten dollars a week from him till I got work.

It is curious how, without the slightest compunction or any feeling even of hurt pride or shame, I was willing to accept money like this from a person whom I had never seen before; yet the thought of asking Hamilton filled me with a real terror. I believe I would have starved first. It is hard to explain this. I had liked to think of myself as doing something very unusual and fine in refusing help from Hamilton, and yet where was my logic,

since without a qualm I took money from Bennet? Our natures are full of contradictions, it seems to me. Perhaps I can explain it in this way, however. There was something so tremendously *good* about Bennet, so overpoweringly human and great, that I felt the same as I would have felt if a woman had offered to help me. On the other hand, I was desperately in love with Hamilton. I wanted to impress him. I wanted his good opinion. I unconsciously assumed a pose—perhaps that is it—and I had to live up to it. Then I have often thought that almost any woman would have confidently accepted help from Bennet, but might have hesitated to take anything from Mr. Hamilton.

Some men inspire us with instant confidence; we are "on guard" with others. I can write this analysis now; I could not explain it to myself then.

XXV

Now my life assumed a new phase. No man like Bennet can come into a woman's life and not make a deep impression. I have said that Tom was my "shadow." Bennet was something better than that. He was my protector, my guide, and my teacher. He did not, as Tom had done, begin immediately to make love to me, but he came persistently to see me. Always he brought some book with him, and now for the first time in my life the real world of poetry began to open its doors for me. I a poet! Oh me!

Hamilton had filled my bookshelves with novels, chiefly by French authors. They were of absorbing interest to me, and they taught me things just as if I had traveled; but Bennet read to me poetry—Keats, Shelley, Byron, Browning, Tennyson, Heine, Milton, and others. For hours I sat listening to the jeweled words. No, I could not write poetry,—I never shall,—but I had the hungry heart of the poet within me. I know it; else I could not so vividly, so ardently have loved the poetry of others.

I cannot think of my acquaintance with Bennet without there running immediately

to my mind, like the refrain of an old song, of some of those exquisite poems he read to me—read so slowly, so clearly, so subtly that every word pierced my consciousness and understanding. Else how could a girl like me have gasped with sheer delight over the “Ode on a Grecian Urn”? What was there in a poem like that to appeal to a girl of my history?

When we did not stay in and read, Bennet would take me to some good theater or concert, and I went several times with him to Hull House. There twice a week he taught a class in English poetry. The girls in his class were chiefly foreigners,—Russian Jewesses, Polish and German girls,—and for the most part they worked in factories and stores; but they were all intelligent and eager to learn. They made me ashamed of my own indolence. I used to fancy that most of his pupils were secretly in love with Bennet. They would look at his inspired young face as if they greatly admired him, and I felt a sense of flattering pride in the thought that *he* liked only me. Oh, I could n't help seeing that, though he had not then told me so.

Sometimes he took me over to his rooms. They were two very curious, low-roofed rooms down in the tenement-house district, completely lined with books. Here Butler, with his pipe in his loose mouth, used to entertain me with long talks on Socialism, and once he read me some of Kipling's poems. That was my first acquaintance with Kipling. It was an unforgettable experience. In these rooms, too, Bennet read me “Undine,” some of Barrie's stories, and Omar Khayyam.

Those were clean, inspiring days. They almost compensated for everything else that was sad and ugly in my life. For sad and ugly things were happening to me every day, and I had had no word, no single sign, from Mr. Hamilton. I tried to shut him from my mind. I tried hard to do that, especially as I knew that Robert Bennet was beginning to care for me too well. Through the day, it was easy enough. I could do it, too, when Bennet read to me from the poets; but, ah, at

night, that was when he slipped back insidiously upon me! Sometimes I felt that if I did not see him soon, I should go mad just from longing and desire to see his dear face and hear the sound of his cruel voice.

I got a position about two weeks after I met Bennet. It was in a steel firm; I stayed there only two days. There were two other stenographers, and the second day I was there, the head of the firm decided to move me from the outer to his private office, to do his work. Both of the girls looked at each other so significantly when my desk was carried in that I asked them if anything was the matter. One of them shrugged her shoulders, and the other said:

“You 'll find out for yourself.”

Within ten minutes after I was in that inner office I did. I was taking dictation at a little slat on his desk when he laid a photograph upon my book, and then, while I sat dumfounded, trying to look anywhere save at what was before me, he laid more photographs, one after the other, on top of that first one, which was the vilest thing I have ever seen in my life.

The girls at the Y. W. C. A. and the girls at the stock-yards used to talk about their experiences in offices, and we used to laugh at the angry girls who declared they did this or that to men who insulted them. As I have written before, I had become hardened to such things, and when I could, I simply ignored them. They were one of the dirty things in life that working-girls had to endure. But now, as I sat at that desk, I felt rushing over me such a surge of primitive and outraged feeling that I could find no relief save in some fierce action. I seized those photographs, and slammed them into the face of that leering old satyr.

After that I went from one position to another. I took anything I could get. Sometimes I left because the conditions were intolerable; sometimes because they did not pay me; usually I was allowed to go after a brief trial in which I failed to prove my competence. I was very bad at figures, and most offices require a cer-

tain amount of that kind of work from their stenographers. These were the places where I failed.

Of course, changing my position and being out of work so much, I made little progress, and although I had had only twenty dollars from Bennet, I was unable to pay him back. I had hoped to by Christmas, now only a week off.

And now something happened that caused a big change in my life; that is, it forced me at last to separate from Lolly. For some time she had been most unhappy, and one evening she confided to me her suspicions of Chambers. She said she had "turned down" Hermann, who wanted to marry her, for Chambers, though friends had warned her not to trust him; but that though he had at times been brutal to her, she adored him. Pacing up and down the room, she told me that she wished she knew some way to prove him. It was then that I made my fatal offer. I said:

"Lolly, I could have told you long ago about Chambers. I *know* he is no good. If I were you, I'd have nothing more to do with him."

Lolly stopped in her pacing, and stared at me.

"How do you know?" she demanded.

"Because," I said, "he's tried several times to make love to me."

"You lie, Nora Ascough!" she cried out in such a savage way that I was afraid of her. If I had been wiser, perhaps, I might have reassured her and let her think I did lie. Then the matter would have ended there; but I had to plunge in deeper.

"Lolly, I'll prove it to you, if you wish."

"You can't," retorted Lolly, her nostrils dilating.

"Yes, I can, I say. He's coming to-night, is n't he? Well, you stay in that inner room, by the door. Let me see him alone here. Then you'll see for yourself."

She considered the suggestion, with her eyes half closed, blowing the smoke slowly from her lips, and looking at the tip of

her cigarette. Then she shrugged her shoulders and laughed sneeringly.

"The trouble with you, Nora, is that because a lot of muckers at the Union Stock-yards got 'stuck' on you, a few poor devils of newspaper men are a little smitten, and a fast rich man tried to keep you, you imagine every other man is after you."

I could n't answer that. It was untrue. None the less, it hurt. I had never in my life boasted to Lolly about men. I supposed she knew that, like every other girl who is thrown closely into contact with men, I naturally got my share of attention. I had long ago realized the exact value of this. The girls at the yards, for instance, used to say that the men would even go after a hunchback or a girl that squinted if she gave them any encouragement. And as for Robert Bennet and Tom, it was mean of Lolly to refer to them in that contemptuous way. Lolly, I think, regretted a moment later what she had said. She was as generous and impulsive as she was hasty in temper. Now she said:

"Forget I said that, Nora. Just for fun I'll try your plan. Of course, it's ridiculous. Marshall has never looked upon you as anything but a joke. I mean he thinks you're a funny little thing; but as for anything else—" Lolly blew her cigarette smoke in derision at the notion.

Chambers came about eight-thirty. They never announced him, but we knew his double knock, and Lolly slipped into the inner room, but did not close the door tight.

I had taken up Lolly's mandolin, and now I painfully tried to pick out a tune on the strings. Chambers stood watching me, smiling, and when I finally did manage "The Last Rose of Summer," he said:

"Bully for you!"

Then he looked about quickly and said: "Lolly out?"

I nodded. Whereupon he sat down beside me.

"Want to learn the mandolin?" he asked.

I nodded, smiling.

"This is the way," he said. He was on my left side, and putting his arm about my waist, and with his right hand over my right hand, he tried to teach me to use the little bone picker; but while he was doing this he got as close to me as he could, and as I bent over the mandolin, so did he, till his face came right against mine, and he kissed me.

Then something terrible happened. Lolly screamed. She screamed like a person gone mad. Chambers and I jumped apart, and I felt so weak I was afraid to go inside that room. Just then Hermann came rushing in with the landlady. She had heard Lolly's screams, and she wanted to know what was the trouble. I said Lolly was ill; but as soon as she went out, I told Hermann the truth. When Chambers realized that he was the victim of a trap, and while Lolly was still crying,—a moaning sort of cry now,—he picked up his hat and made for the door. There he encountered Hermann, all of whose teeth were showing. Hermann's hand shot up to Chambers's collar, and he threw him bodily from the room. How he did this, I am sure I don't know, for Chambers was a larger and seemingly much stronger man than Hermann. Then Hermann went in to Lolly, and I, feeling like a criminal, followed.

I had never seen a woman in hysterics before. Lolly was lying on her back on the bed, with her arms cast out on each side. Her face was convulsed, and she was gasping and crying and moaning and laughing all at the same time. Hermann put his arms about her, and tried to soothe and comfort her, and I, crying myself now, begged her to forgive me. She screamed at me, "Get out of my sight!" and kept on upbraiding and accusing me. She seemed to think that I must have been flirting with Chambers for some time, and she said I was a snake. She said she hated me, and that if I did not go "at once! at once! at once!" she'd kill me.

I did n't know what to do, and Hermann said:

"For God's sake! Nora, go!"

I packed my things as quickly as I could. I had no trunk, but two suitcases, and I made bundles of the things that would not go into them. I told Hermann I'd send for the things in the morning. Then I put on my coat and hat, and took the suitcase with my manuscripts and my night things. Before going, I went over to the bed and again begged Lolly to forgive me, assuring her that I never had had anything to do with Chambers till that night. I told her that I loved her better than any other girl I knew, better than my sisters even, and it was breaking my heart to leave her in this way. I was sobbing while I talked, but though she no longer viciously denounced me, she turned her face to the wall and put her hands over her ears. Then I kissed her hand,—women of my race do things like that under stress of emotion,—and, crying, left my Lolly.

XXVI

I WENT direct to Mrs. Kingston's. As soon as I walked in with my bag in my hand, she knew I had come to stay, and she was so delighted that she seized me in her arms and hugged me, saying I was her "dearest and only Nora." She took me right up to what she thought were to be my rooms, but I said I preferred the little one, and after we had talked it over a bit, she said she agreed with me. It was much better for me to have only what I myself could afford.

I did n't tell her a word about Lolly. That was my poor friend's secret; but I told her of my straitened affairs, my poor position, and that I owed money to Benet. When I ended, she said:

"That boy's an angel. I can't wish you any better luck than that you get him."

"Get him?"

"He is simply crazy about you, Nora. Can't talk about anything else, and you could n't do better if you searched from one end of the United States to the other. He's of a splendid family, and he's going to make a big name for himself some day, you mark my words."

I agreed with all her praise of Bennet, but I told her I thought of him only as a friend, as I did of Fred O'Brien for instance.

She shook her head at me, sighed, and said that she supposed I still cared for "that man Hamilton," and I did n't answer her. I just sat on the side of the bed staring out in front of me. After a moment she said:

"Of course, if that 's the way you feel, for heaven's sake! let poor Bennet alone; though if I were you, it would n't take me long to know which of those two men to choose between."

"You 'd take Bennet, would n't you?" I asked heavily, and she replied:

"You better believe I would!"

"Don't you like Mr. Hamilton?" I asked wistfully.

"I don't entirely trust him," said she. "Candidly, Nora, that was a nasty trick he tried to play us here. I was 'on to him,' but I did n't know just where you stood with him, and I 'm not in the preaching business. I let people do as they like, and I myself do what I please; and then, of course, Lord knows I need all the money I can get." She sighed. Poor woman, she was always so hard up! "So if he wanted to take those rooms and pay the price, I was n't going to be the one to stand in the way. Still, I was not going to let him pull the wool over your eyes, poor kiddy."

"I suppose not," I assented languidly. I was unutterably tired and heartsick, with the long strain of those weeks, and now with this quarrel with Lolly, and I said, "Yet I 'd give my immortal soul to be with him again just for a few minutes even."

"You would?" she said. "You want to see him as much as all that?"

I nodded, and she said pityingly:

"Don't love any man like that, dear. None of them is worth it."

I did n't answer. What was the use? She said I looked tired out, and had better go to bed, and that next day she would send the man who looked after the furnace for my belongings.

Mrs. Kingston was really delighted to have me with her. She said she could have had any number of girls in her house before this, but that she had set her heart on having "just me," because I was uncommon. She had a funny habit of dismissing people and things as "ordinary and commonplace." I was not that, it seems.

Here was I now in a really dear little home, not a boarder, but treated like a daughter not only by Mrs. Kingston, but by Mrs. Owens, who quickly made me call her "Mama Owens." She was a pretty woman of about sixty, with lovely dark eyes, and white wavy hair that I often did up. She had periodical spells of illness, I don't know just what. Both Mrs. Kingston and Mrs. Owens were widows.

I brightened up a bit after I got there, for they would n't give me a chance to be blue. We had a merry time decorating the house with greens and holly, and we even had a big Christmas-tree. Mama Owens said she could n't imagine a Christmas without one. Just think, though I was one of fourteen children, I can never remember a Christmas when we had a tree!

Bennet came over and helped us with the decorations, and he and Butler were both invited to the Christmas dinner. Butler could not come, as he was due at some Hull House entertainment, but Bennet expected to have dinner with us before going to work. He was working nights now, and would not have Christmas off.

I was getting only twelve dollars a week at this time, so I had little enough money to spend on Christmas presents. I did, however, buy books for Bennet and Mrs. Kingston and Mrs. Owens. Also for Lolly, to whom I had written twice, begging her to forgive me. She never answered me, but Hermann wrote me a note, advising me to "leave her alone till she gets over it."

I had to walk to work for two days after that, as I did n't have a cent left, and I did without luncheon, too. I rather enjoyed the walk, but it was hard getting

up so early, as I had to be at the office at eight. I was working for a clothing firm not unlike the one Estelle was with, and I had obtained the position, by the way, through Estelle.

On Christmas eve Margaret had to go to the house of a client in regard to some case, so mama and I were left alone. We were decorating the tree with strings of white and colored popcorn and bright tinsel stuff, and I was standing on top of a ladder, putting a crowning pinnacle on the tree,—a funny, fat little Santa Claus,—when our bell rang. Our front door opened into the reception hall, where our tree was, so when mama opened the door and I saw who it was, I almost fell off the ladder. He called out:

"Careful!" dropped his bag, came over to the ladder, and lifted me down. You can't lift a girl down from a ladder without putting your arms about her, and I clung to him, you may be sure. He kept smoothing my hair and cheek, and saying,—I think he thought I was crying against his coat,—"Come, now, Nora, it 's all right! Everything 's all right!" and then he undid my hands, which were clinging to his shoulders, and shook himself free.

Mama Owens had never met him, so I had to introduce them. She scolded me dreadfully afterward about the way I had acted, though I tried to explain to her that it was the surprise and excitement that had made me give way like that.

It was queer, but from the very first both Margaret and Mama Owens were prejudiced against him. Both of them loved me and were devoted to Bennet. They were planning to make a match between us. Hamilton was the stumbling-block; and although in time he partly won Margaret over, he never moved mama, who always regarded him as an intruder in our "little family."

I now hinted and hinted for her to leave us alone, but she would n't budge from the room for the longest time. So I just talked right before her, though she kept interrupting me, requiring me to do this or that. She did n't ask him to do a thing, though if Bennet had been there,

she would have seated herself comfortably and let him do all the work.

However, I was so happy now that it did n't matter if all the rest of the world was disgruntled. I hugged Mama Owens, and told her if she did n't stop being so cross, Mr. Hamilton and I would go out somewhere and leave her "all by her lonesome." I could do almost anything with her and Margaret, and I soon had her in a good humor; she even went off to get some Christmas wine for Mr. Hamilton.

I had in a general way told Roger something of what I had been doing since I had seen him; but I did not tell him of the straits to which I had come, or of the money I had borrowed from Bennet. He suspected that I had passed through hard times, however. He had a way of picking up my face by the chin and examining it closely. The moment we were alone, he led me under the gas-light, and looked at me closely. His face was as grave as if he were at a funeral, and I tried to make fun of it; but he said:

"Nora, you don't look as well as you should."

I said lightly:

"That 's because you did n't come to see me."

"I came," he returned, "as soon as you did what I told you. As soon as Mrs. Kingston sent me word that you were here, I came, though it was Christmas eve, and I ought to be in Richmond."

I saw what was in his mind: he thought I had taken those rooms! I put my arm through his, just to hold to him in case he went right away, while I told him I had only the little room.

He said, with an expressive motion:

"Well, I give you up, Nora."

I said:

"No, please don't give me up. I 'll die if you do."

Margaret came in then, and she greeted him very cordially. She chuckled when I called her a "sly thing" for writing to him, and she said she had to let him know, since he had paid for the big room.

"Yes, but you did n't tell him I had the little room," I said.

"What does it matter?" laughed Margaret. "You two are always making mountains out of molehills. Life 's too short to waste a single moment of it in argument."

Roger said:

"You are perfectly right. After this, Nora and I are not going to quarrel about anything. She 's going to be a reasonable child."

I had to laugh. I knew what he meant by my being reasonable. Nothing mattered this night, however, except that he had come. I told him that, and put my cheek against his hand. I was always doing things like that, for although he was undemonstrative, and the nearest he came to caressing me was to smooth my cheek and hair, I always got as close to him as I could. I 'd slip my hand through his arm, or put my hand in his, and my head against him; and when we were out anywhere, I always had my hand in his pocket, and he 'd put his hand in over mine. He liked them, too, these ways of mine, for he used to look at me with a queer sort of grim smile that was nevertheless tender.

He was a man used to having his own way, however, and he did n't intend to give in to me in this matter of the rooms. So this is how he finally arranged things: I was to have the little room, and he would take the suite in front. When he was in Chicago, he would use these rooms; but when he was not, I was to have the use of them, and he made me promise that I would use the big room for writing.

This arrangement satisfied Mrs. Kings-ton and delighted me, but mama was inclined to grumble. She wanted to know just why he should maintain rooms in the house, anyway, and just what he was "after" me for. She was in a perverse mood, having drunk far too much Christmas wine. She talked so that I put my hand over her mouth and said she had a bad mind.

Roger explained to Margaret—he pretended to ignore mama, but he was talking for her especially—that they need have no

anxiety in regard to his intentions toward me; that they were purely disinterested; in fact, he felt toward me pretty much as they did themselves. I was an exceptional girl who ought to be helped and befriended; that he had never made love to me, and, he added grimly, that he never would. My! how I hated mama at that moment for causing him to say that. In fact he talked so plausibly that Margaret and I threw black looks at mama for her gratuitous interference, and Margaret whispered to me that it should not happen again. Mama "stuck to her guns," however, and finally said:

"Well, let me ask you a question, Mr. Hamilton. Are you in love with Nora?"

He looked over my head and said:

"No."

That was the first time he had directly denied that he cared for me, and my heart sank. I would n't look at him, I felt so badly, nor did I feel any better when, after a moment, he added:

"I 'm old enough to be Nora's father, and at my time of life I 'm not likely to make a fool of myself even for Nora."

"Hm!" snorted mama, "that all sounds very fine, but what about Nora? Do you pretend that she is not in love with you?"

His stiff expression softened, but he said very bitterly, I thought:

"Nora is seventeen."

Then he laughed shortly, and added: "I don't see how it can hurt her to have me for a friend, do you? As far as that goes, even if she does imagine herself in love with me, a closer acquaintance might lead to a complete cure and disillusionment, a consummation, I presume, much to be desired."

He said this with so much bitterness, and even pain, that I ran over to him and put my face against his hand.

"Wait a bit, Nora. We 'd better get this matter settled once and for all," he said. "Either I am to come here, with the understanding and consent of these ladies, whenever I choose and without interference of any sort, or I will not come at all."

"Then I won't stay, either," I cried.

"Margaret, *you* know that if he never comes to see me again, I 'll jump into Lake Michigan."

They all laughed at that, and it broke up the strained conversation. Margaret said in her big, gay way:

"Of course you can come and go as you please. The rooms are yours, and I should n't presume to dictate to you." And then she said to mama: "Amy, you 've had too much wine. Let it alone."

XXVII

EVERYTHING being made clear, Roger and I went up to his rooms. He shut the door, and said that "the two old ones" were all right enough, but he had come over 250 miles to see me, and he did n't care a hang what they or any one else thought, and that if they 'd made any more fuss, he 'd have taken me away from there without further parley. Then he asked me something suddenly that made me laugh. He wanted to know if I was afraid of him, and I asked:

"Why should I be?"

"You 're right," he replied, "and you need never be, Nora. You can always trust me."

I said mischievously:

"It 's the other way. I think *you 're* afraid of me."

He frowned me down at that, and demanded to know what I meant, but I could n't explain.

He lighted the logs in the fireplace, and pulled up the big Morris chair and a footstool before it. He made me sit on the stool at his knee. Then we talked till it was pretty late, and mama popped her head in and said I ought to go to bed. I protested that as I did n't have to go to work next day, I need not get up early. Roger said she was right, and that he must be going.

I had thought he was going to spend Christmas with me, and I was so dreadfully disappointed that I nearly cried, and he tried to cheer me up. He said he would n't go if he could help it, but that his people expected him home at least at Christmas. That was the first time he

had ever referred to his "people," and I felt a vague sense of jealousy that they meant more to him than I did. But I did not tell him that, for he suddenly leaned over me and said:

"I 'd rather be here with you, Nora, than anywhere else in the world."

I sat up at that, and said triumphantly:

"Then you *must* care for me if that 's so."

"Have I ever pretended not to?" he asked.

"You told them down-stairs—"

He snapped his fingers as though what he had said there did n't count.

"Well, but you must be more than merely interested in me," I said.

"Interest is a pretty big thing, is n't it?" he said slowly.

"Not as big as love," I said.

"We 're not going to talk about love," he replied. "We 'll have to cut that out entirely, Nora."

"But I thought you said you wanted me to go on loving you, and that I was not to stop, no matter what happened."

He stirred uneasily at that, and then, after a moment, he said:

"That 's true. Never stop doing that, will you, sweetheart?"

You see, I was succeeding beautifully with him when he called me *that*. He regretted it a moment later, for he rose and began fussing with his bag. I followed him across the room. I always followed him everywhere, just like a little dog. He took a little package out of his bag, and he asked me if I remembered the day in the carriage, when he told me to open my mouth and shut my eyes. Of course I did. He said that I was to shut my eyes now, but I need not open my mouth. He 'd give me the real prize now.

So then I did, and he put something about my neck. Then he led me over to the mirror, and I saw it was a pearl necklace.

At that time I had not the remotest idea of the value of jewelry. I had never possessed any except the ring Tom had given me. In a vague sort of way I knew that gold and diamonds were costly things,

and of course I supposed that pearls were, too. It was not, therefore, the value of his present that impressed me, for I frankly looked upon it merely as a "pretty necklace"; but I was enchanted to think he had remembered me, and when I opened my eyes and saw them, they looked so creamy and lovely on my neck that I wanted to hug him for them. However, he held me off at arm's-length, to "see how they looked" on me.

He said I was not to wear them to work, but only on special occasions, when he was there and took me to places, and that he was going to get me a little safe in which to keep them. I thought that ridiculous, to get a safe just to keep a string of beads in; and then he laughed and said that the "beads" were to be only the forerunner of other things he was going to give me.

He was going to create in me a taste for the best in everything, he said. I asked him why. It seemed to me that nothing was to be gained by acquiring a taste for luxurious things—a girl in my position, and he replied in a grim sort of way:

"All the same, you 're going to have them. By and by you won't be able to do without them."

"Jewels and such things?"

"Yes—jewels and such things." Then he added:

"There need never be a time in your life when I won't be able to gratify your least wish, if you will let me."

When he was putting on his coat, he asked me what sort of position I had, and I told him it was pretty bad. He said he wished me to go down to see Mr. Forman, the president of a large wholesale dry-goods firm. He added that he had heard of a good position there—short hours and good salary. I was delighted, and asked him if he thought I'd get the position, and he smiled and said he thought I would.

He was drawing on his gloves and was nearly ready to go when he asked his next question, and that was whether I had made any new acquaintances; what men

I had met, and whether I had been out anywhere with any particular man. He usually asked me those questions first of all, and then would keep on about them all through his visit. I hesitated, for I was reluctant to tell him about Bennet. He roughly took me by the shoulder when I did not answer him at once, and he said: "Well, with whom have you been going out?"

I told him about Bennet, but only about his coming to see me, his reading to me, and of my going to his and Butler's rooms and to Hull House. He stared at me so peculiarly while I was speaking that I thought he was angry with me, and he suddenly took off his coat and hat and sat down again.

"Why did n't you tell me about this chap before?" he asked me suddenly.

"I thought you would n't be interested," I quibbled.

"That is not true, Nora," he said. "You knew very well I would."

He leaned forward in the chair, with his hands gripped together, and stared at the fire, and then he said almost as if to himself:

"If I had come on, this would n't have happened."

"Nothing has happened," I insisted.

"Oh yes, this—er—Bennet is undoubtedly in love with you."

"Well, suppose he is?" I said. "What does it matter to you? If you don't care for me, why should n't other men?"

He turned around and looked at me hard a moment. Then he got up, walked up and down awhile, and then came over and took my face up in his hand.

"Nora, will you give up this chap if I ask you to?"

I was piling up proof that he cared for me more than he would admit. I said flippantly:

"Old 'Dog in the Manger,' will *you* love me if I do?"

He said in a low voice:

"I *can't*."

I said sadly:

"Is it so hard, then?"

"Yes, harder than you know," he said.

Then he wanted to know what Bennet looked like. I painted a flattering picture. When was he coming? To Christmas dinner, I told him.

It was now very late, and I heard the clock in the hall strike twelve, and I asked him if he heard the reindeer bells on the roof.

"Nora, I don't hear or see anything in the world but you," he replied.

"If that's so, you must be as much in love with me as I am with you," I told him.

He said, "Nonsense!" and looked around, as if he were going to put his things on again.

"Stay over Christmas!" I begged, and after staring at me a moment, he said:

"Very well, I will, then."

That made me tremendously excited. Mama came down the hall and called:

"Nora, are n't you in bed yet?" I called out:

"I'm going now." Then I seized his hand quickly, kissed it, and ran out of the room to my own.

XXVIII

EARLY next morning while we were at breakfast, a huge box of flowers and a Christmas package from Bennet came for me. It was fun to see Roger's face when I was unwrapping the flowers. I think he would have liked to trample upon them, he who did not love me! They were chrysanthemums, and the other present was a beautiful little painting. Mama asked Hamilton to hang it for us, and he said curtly that he did n't know anything about such things.

Christmas morning thus started off rather badly, for any one could see he was cross as a sore bear, which, I don't mind admitting, gave me a feeling of wicked joy. To make matters worse, mama began to talk about Tom. I tried to change the subject, but she persisted, and wanted to know when I had heard from him last and whether he was still as much in love with me as ever. There was no switching her from the subject, so I left the table, and pretended to fool with the

books in the library. He followed me out there, and his face was just as black!

"So," he said, with an unpleasant laugh, "you've been having little affairs and flirtations right along, have you? You're not the naïve, innocent baby child you would like me to think, eh?"

"Now, Roger, look here," I said. "Did n't you tell me you were n't going to scold me any more, and you said I could do as I pleased, and be independent and—"

"I supposed you would be candid and truthful with me; I did n't suppose you'd be carrying on cheap little liaisons—"

When he got that far, I turned my back on him and walked out of the room.

I adored him, but I was not a worm.

I went back to the kitchen, and watched Margaret clean the turkey and make the stuffing. I thought I was much interested in that proceeding, but all the time I was wondering what he was doing, and soon I could n't stand it any longer, and I went back to the living-room, which was also our library, but he was not there. I went up-stairs, with "my heart in my mouth," fearing he had gone. I found him, if you please, in *my* room. He was looking at the photographs on my bureau.

I came up behind him, slipped my hand through his arm, and rubbed my cheek against his sleeve. I could see his face in the mirror opposite us slowly softening.

"Are you still angry with me for nothing, Roger?" I asked.

"Was this fellow Morris in love with you, too?"

I nodded.

"All men are n't like you," I said slyly. "Some few of them do like me."

He took that in as if it hurt him.

"He's in Cuba, you say?"

I nodded.

"You hear from him?"

"Yes."

"Where are his letters?"

I could n't show him the letters, I said. So then he tried to free himself from my hand, but he could n't; I held so tightly.

"It would n't be square to Tom to show you his letters," I said.

"So it's 'Tom,' is it?" he sneered.

I nodded.

"Yes, just as it was 'Fred' with O'Brien."

"O'Brien was n't in love with you."

"Oh, well, maybe Tom is n't. He just thinks he is."

"Any understanding between you?"

I hesitated. I really think he would have taken pleasure in hurting me then for that long pause. I said at last:

"He asked me to wait for him, but I'm not going to, if you'll come lots to see me."

"Did you promise to?"

Again I paused, and this time he caught up my face, but savagely, by the chin.

"Well?"

I lied. I was afraid of him now.

"No," I said.

I showed him all the photographs on my bureau, but he swept them aside.

"Hang your family! I'm not interested in them. Now, about this Bennet—" and he started in all over again.

Finally, thoroughly exasperated, I turned on him and said:

"You have no right to question or accuse me like this. No man has that right unless I specially give it to him."

He said roughly:

"Give me the right then, Nora."

"Not unless you care for me," I said.

"You say you are only interested in me. Well, say you love me, and then I'll do anything you wish. I won't look at or speak to any other man in the world."

"Well, suppose I admit that. Suppose I were to tell you that I do love you, what would you want then, Nora?"

"Why, nothing," I said. "That would be everything to me, don't you see? I'd go to school then, just as you want me to, and I'd study so hard, and try to pull myself up till I was on your level—"

"Oh, good God!" he said, "you are miles above me now."

"Not socially," I said. "In the eyes of the world I'm not. I'm just a working-girl, and you're a man in—in—fashionable society, rich and important. I guess

you could be President if you wanted to, could n't you?"

"Oh, Nora!" he said, and I went on:

"Yes, you might. You can't tell. Suppose you got into politics. You said your grandfather was governor of your State. Well, why should n't you be, too? So to be your wife, I'd have to—"

"To be—what?" he interrupted me, and then he said sharply and quickly:

"That's out of the question. Put all thought of anything like that out of your head. Suppose we change the subject. What do you say to a little sleigh-ride?"

I nodded and I tried to smile, but he had hurt me as hard as it is possible for a man to hurt a woman.

It was not that I looked upon marriage as such a desirable goal; but it was at least a test of the man's sincerity. As he had blundered on with his senseless jealousy of men who did want to marry me, I had dreamed a little dream.

We had our ride, and then dinner in the middle of the afternoon. Bennet was there for dinner. He thought Mr. Hamilton was our new lodger, and before him at least I did conceal my real feelings. Anyhow, I confess that I felt none too warmly toward Roger now. He had descended upon me on this Christmas day, and while putting his gifts on my neck with one hand, he had struck me with the other. Do not suppose, however, that my love for him lessened. You can soothe a fever by a cooling drink; you cannot cure it.

Bennet had to go immediately after dinner, and I went with him as far as the door. All our rooms on the ground floor ran into one another, so that from the dining-room one could see directly into the reception-hall. Bob—for I always called him that—led me along by the arm, and suddenly mama clapped her hands loudly, and he seized me and kissed me! I was under the mistletoe. Roger knocked over his chair, and I heard him swear. Bob also heard, but neither of us cared.