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MINNIE FLYNN



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BY
FRANCES MARION



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**DEDICATED
TO
MY FATHER AND MOTHER**

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MINNIE FLYNN

CHAPTER ONE

§ 1

THE brisk autumn wind tilted Minnie Flynn's faded straw hat to a rakish angle. She walked with swift bouncing steps, her taut body showered by the recurrent sweepings blown from the alleyways of the tenement houses. A rippling stream of dust and débris, made bright by spinning bits of colored papers, ran down the gutters to the street corners, where they were sucked into one of those dank, slimy tributaries of the open sea. Minnie, quickening her steps, followed a leaf of tinsel as it rose with the swell of the wind, sought the last ray of sunlight shot between gaunt buildings, spun in gay pirouette, then sank once more into the dust stream, its golden promise lost in the dun and grimy débris.

Minnie veered over toward the shop windows, now blinking squares of light, for dusk was swiftly descending and the shopkeepers hastened to display their wares to the tides of people hurrying homeward. She was a part of the current of dun-colored humanity, buffeted by casual but friendly contacts.

At the corner of Ninth Avenue and Forty-sixth Street, two blocks from The Fashion Department Store where Minnie worked, was a saloon. No men were standing around the swinging doors, so she paused before the plate-glass window, a flattering mirror, with incomplete reflection which allowed

Minnie's vanity to create its own illusion. She hated the narrow mirrors of the shop windows which reflected with cruel precision the hard, white faces of vain passersby who stopped, shocked by what they saw, yet held spellbound by their grotesque unreality. At sixteen she had been unafraid of them; at eighteen the white liquid powder looked mottled, the rouge seemed laid on in hard bright spots as if, in a moment of clowning, she had pasted a patch of red tissue paper upon each cheek.

The plate-glass window of Sullivan's saloon was to Minnie like the warming smile of a good-looking man. She saw her figure delicately soft and rounded, the ugly suit pastelled in shadows, her gloveless hands little and white. As she held them above her head to adjust her hat, to smooth out its long green quill, they looked like two lilies on long waving stalks. Minnie loved herself when she looked in this window. There was a caressing tenderness in her own fingers as she hiked up her skirt in the back, smoothed the yellowing collar to her coat, drew a cool powder-puff lightly over her face and touched up her lips with a vermilion lip stick. She spat upon the second and third fingers of her right hand, before patting into place each crescent, bandolined curl. She might have thrown a kiss to her smiling reflection had she not been afraid of leering eyes through the louvered swinging doors. An intense curiosity possessed her to see if this mirror would betray her as those slender shafts set in the frames of shop windows had done. She leaned so close that a faint spot of white powder was left upon the chilled pane.

Minnie Flynn, smiling and posing, uttered a sharp cry when a swaying figure lurched through the swinging doors and fell at her feet. "Oh!" Her voice was pierced with fright. And then, when the man staggered to a sitting posture, and she recognized an old friend, she laughed as shrilly as she had screamed.

"Lord, Papa Grouse, you sure gave me a fright. You'd think I'd never seen a drunk before!"

He lurched again, now to his feet, and rocked upon them.

She reached out to help him, but he shot away from her. Bent almost double he was sidling over toward the lamp post. "Papa Grouse," she laughed again, "you look just like an open safety pin."

"Go t'hell!"

"I'm on my way, old man!" Now she was shaking with shrill merriment. "Steady now! Crack! I knew you'd do it!" . . . "Oh, God," she said to herself, "when he hit his head on the fire plug he closed up slow—just like a safety pin!"

"Just like a safety pin," she kept repeating to herself as she walked swiftly away, not waiting to see him roll to the edge of the sidewalk and tumble into the gutter. "Bet that old woman of his gives him the devil when he gets home. Poor Papa Grouse!"

As she rounded the corner she heard the shuffle of running feet in back of her and a woman's voice, choppy and rasping, calling her name. She wheeled around and saw Elsie Bicker. Elsie was breathless from her run and her gray, anæmic face was flushed with a sudden, unnatural color. "Say, what's the idea of the marathon?"

"To keep warm," Minnie answered good-humoredly, "and then I'm feelin' kind of O. K. to-night. I was just thinkin' to myself, Els, that life ain't so rotten, is it?"

"Aw, I'm onto you," said Elsie with a superior air. Elsie prided herself on her frankness. "You're feelin' good because the girls laughed at your cuttin' up tonight."

The recollection of Minnie's performance in the locker room brought a faint smile to Elsie's eyes. Again she saw the girls of The Fashion Department Store in a restless semi-

circle around Minnie. Cheap, tawdry ballads Minnie had heard in the vaudeville houses on Ninth Avenue seemed sparkling with fresh vitality when sung in her nasal falsetto. She always accompanied these songs with amazing gyrations of her lithe body, and gestures, pert and meaningful. Her favorite imitation was of a little Chinese girl learning to speak English, which she called "The Chink Act." She tapered her eyes, stuffed cotton in her nose to widen her nostrils, and made a fan out of the comic section of a Sunday paper. She sang, "Chinky, Chinky, Chinaman, sabe washee clo'es," over and over, executing a stiff, formal cakewalk, the finger of her left hand pointing to the ceiling, her right hand fluttering the paper fan.

After "The Chink Act," Minnie, with a pretense of self-consciousness, announced: "The next on the program, ladies and girls, will be a brand new take-off."

Shrills of laughter and applause echoed through the long close locker room. Girls scurried from all corners to watch Minnie, eager for the relaxation of laughter, for the day had been a long, trying one under the first onslaught of late autumn sales.

Minnie drew into a shadowed recess. There was a sharp command from Elsie Bicker that absolute silence was to prevail. Then after a dramatic pause, from out of the darkness came a long, rasping, wheezing sound.

There were shrieks of laughter. "Jeeps!" came hysterically from a dozen voices.

When Elsie had again silenced them, Minnie, still wheezing, emerged from the shadows. "Jeeps!" rose the cry again.

To the girls it was a perfect imitation of Mortimer Jeeps, the floorwalker of the basement: his splay-footed walk, his sheeplike expression, his asthmatic wheeze. They laughed

hysterically when Minnie smiled, revealing yellow buck teeth made of orange peel.

The final touch to Minnie's imitation was the way Jeeps stood, rocking on his broad flat feet, his hands clasped in back of him, his open frock coat revealing a faded green silk vest and a ponderous gold watch chain.

All this Elsie was thinking about as the two girls, bodies bent to brace the wind, were hurrying homeward. Minnie broke the long silence.

"Say, Els, what you moonin' about? A fellow would think you was deaf and dumb."

"I was goin' over the fun we had in the locker room tonight. Honest, Min, I'd just die if they ever took you out of the Odds and Ends and put you on the main floor."

Elsie linked her arm through Minnie's and a contented look came into her dull eyes; *men* were looking at them. What if their eyes measured hers and lingered upon Minnie—she was being looked at just the same. She liked their personal, appraising stares; it made her believe for the moment that she too was desired. Elsie wanted men more than Minnie. She was ten years older. Her body had been wracked with torturing illnesses, and with needs more mental than physical. A fear tormented her, gnawed at her—the bitter fate of growing old unmated. Some of the girls were afraid of her. The men despised her. She was seldom invited anywhere, but often forced herself into Minnie's parties. Like most homely girls who are aware of their looks, she tried to hide her self-consciousness by an assumed boisterousness, her pain and need by a callous indifference. She was insulting to the men and girls, morose and resentful.

Arm and arm they walked, Elsie finding it difficult to keep up with Minnie's quick steps.

"Honest, the way them fellows eye us gives me a pain. Ain't they fresh!" Elsie whispered to Minnie.

Minnie knew the men were looking only at her, but she said: "It's that new hat o' yours, Elsie. It gives you a swell air. Really, when I first seen it I was terrible struck with it. It sets off your face. Red's such a good color. Me with my red hair can never wear it."

Elsie's moist hands trembled. "Do you think it's too early for velvet, Min? I suppose I should o' waited, but I couldn't when I passed that Tenth Avenue shop and seen it in the window."

"Did you get it at The Bon Ton?" Minnie asked, looking past the hat, slyly, at a tall gangling boy leaning against the lamp post.

"Say, what do you think I am, a millionaire? No, I got it at The Palace Bazaar."

"Never would o' guessed it." Minnie's eyes met those of a chauffeur driving slowly past in a rattling taxi, and a jerk of her head declined his motion that she ride up the street with him. "What'd you pay for it, Els? It's got a lot o' style."

"One eighty-five."

"Whew! You don't care how you spend your dough, do you?" and Minnie smiled. Her eyes met those of a flashily dressed man. There was a momentary salute between them, he paused, then ambled around the corner as the two girls hurried on.

"Well, it's my only extravagance," came defensively from Elsie, "and it's worth it. Look close, Min, you couldn't get a remnant of velvet like that in our basement for under seventy-five cents. And the near-feather. . . ."

"I ain't criticizin' you. I like to see a girl spend money on

herself, and believe me, if Nettie wasn't sick I wouldn't be wearin' my straw clean into October neither."

They stopped before a shoe store. Minnie wanted to look at pumps.

"Oh, God, how I hate shoes," whined Elsie, wetting her dry lips. "My bunions is somethin' fierce! I never get a pair that don't look big and clumsy. I wish I had feet like yours, Min. What size do you wear?"

Minnie wore three and a half, but she answered, "Oh, about two's, I guess."

Elsie sighed. "Gee, but you're a lucky girl, Minnie," she said, giving her a long envious glance. "You got good looks and you're young. Of course you ain't got much of a shape," she added, glancing critically at Minnie's straight, boyish figure. "Why don't you stuff an old stockin' and wear it over your chest?"

"I hate bein' flat." Minnie threw out her chest with a quick intake of breath. "But if I was to pad, Jimmy would certainly make it hot for me. He'd tease the life out o' me."

"If that ain't like a kid brother. They'd rather see their sisters lookin' like frights." After a long pause, somewhat embarrassed, she said, "Pete don't worry you though, does he, Min?" As she mentioned Pete's name Elsie's voice changed. It lowered in key and trembled perceptibly.

"Pete don't know he's alive," said Minnie evenly. "He gives me a pain."

Elsie was silent. The hot blush which mounted to her temples beat the pulses in her throat. Minnie saw it and her lips quivered contemptuously. "Els, you're a fool to be stuck on a fellow that don't care about nobody but himself."

After a minute's silence, Elsie said, staring at Minnie with stern condemnation, "I'm surprised at you talkin' that way

about your own brother, Minnie. If I had a brother like him, I'd be so proud I'd have nothin' but nice things to say."

Minnie's laugh was tauntingly bitter. "Poor old Els, it's because you're stuck on him! It's because you don't know how tough he is to get along with. Honest," she looked with contemptuous pity at Elsie's plain face, "there's a bunch of other fellows you oughta try to land, and give Pete the air. He don't know you're on earth, Els, and even if he did he wouldn't show you no more consideration than he does for ma. He's just a born loafer, that's all Pete is."

Elsie flared up savagely. "He's just unfortunate, Min, and you know it. He told me all about it the other day. He says every time he lands a new job somethin' happens to keep him from it, like as if some invisible black hand was movin' against him. There's his very words the way he said 'em. Poor Pete. I didn't think it was like you to kick a fellow when he's down, especially when he's your own flesh and blood."

"Aw, can it, Elsie. Now you're goin' on like ma does, and it gives me a pain. I get enough of that at home without lectures on the side from my girl friends. Look here, Els, don't pull it on me again or we don't walk home together, do you get me?"

Elsie's thin lips closed tightly over her projecting teeth, drawing in the hollows of her cheeks. The blush had gone and in its place was a gray pallor, so dead that it did not even reflect the flame of the bright red hat. In her sunken eyes was such a look of despair that it aroused Minnie's pity. She slipped her arm around Elsie's waist. "I'm awful sorry if I said anything to hurt you, Elsie," she whispered placatingly. "It's only because I'm so fond of you that I want you to lay off Pete and go lookin' around for somebody else before it's too late."

Elsie's eyes filled with tears and she turned her face toward the shop windows so Minnie couldn't see them. She spoke so low that Minnie had to bend her head to hear. "You can't help who you love, Min, so there's no use fightin' against it. You love or you don't love, and there's no regulatin' it like you do your meals, or work, or anything else."

"I suppose so," Minnie replied indifferently, "or I wouldn't o' turned down Dan Sullivan with his prospects of gettin' his father's saloon some day, and started keeping steady company with Billy MacNally."

"By the way, Min, goin' out with Billy tonight?" Whenever Elsie spoke of "going out" there was a wistful note in her voice.

"Yeh, I guess we'll go out tonight." Minnie always pretended an indifference to Billy. "But I don't care much about it, though."

"Where'll you go?" The words came breathlessly from Elsie. It excited her to talk about a good time. "Will you go to a movie?"

"I dunno. I don't care much. Anywhere's better than sittin' in the dining room. Pa always comes in and planks himself down and takes off his shoes. You'd think he'd have the decency to stay in the kitchen, but not him. Oh, no, he's got to hang around and gas all night about the plumbin' business and never give Billy a chance to talk about the meat business, just as if that was nothin' at all."

"And where does Pete go?" Elsie was just a poor soft fool, Minnie thought to herself, and suddenly the sight of that eager, sickly face splotched with pimples sickened her, and she broke away from her with a shudder of disgust.

"To bed," she answered laconically, "and snores. Makes a noise you could hear a city block."

Elsie's voice sunk to a dead whisper as she echoed, "To

bed." A ponderous sigh escaped her which sounded such a note of intense physical longing that it struck Minnie as ludicrous and she burst into uncontrollable laughter.

Elsie, her gray face suddenly convulsed with raging hatred, reached over and pinched her. "You shut up!" she shrilled. "You make me tired. You walk alone, Minnie Flynn, that's what you can do. Walk your fool head off, for all I care!" and she rushed away, down the street and around the corner, Minnie's taunting laughter trailing after her.

§ 2

The Flynnns lived on Ninth Avenue between Forty-eighth and Forty-ninth Streets, in what was called in that locality "a classy brownstone brick front." It was the most pretentious tenement house in the neighborhood. Four stories high, it housed sixteen families. Eight of the apartments had narrow front windows which afforded a view of the street, while the other eight overlooked dingy backyards webbed with clothes-lines and fire-escapes.

The entrance to the house justified the pride of its tenants. Two discolored and badly chipped marble columns supported a shell-shaped canopy, the iron framework of which still held a few of the original mosaics of colored glass. The floor and the two crumbling steps to the sidewalk were also marble. A panel of art glass decorated with a gaudy design was set into the door, and in scroll letters was written, THE CENTRAL. It was the only door in the neighborhood not scrawled over with initials.

When Minnie met a new fellow at a dance and he asked to see her again she was always pleased to give him her address. "You'll know the house by the marble entrance,"

she would say, trying to appear casual. "Our apartment's in the front, third floor, nine."

Minnie searched a long time through her deep, messy pocketbook before she found her key. Click, she heard the lock slip. She put her shoulder to the door and leaned her weight against it. It sagged on its rusty hinges and it took all of her strength to move it even far enough to let her slender body slip through. It closed with a screech.

Minnie was in the dark, dank, foul-smelling lower hallway that tunneled to the rear of the house. The narrow stairway which coiled in a spiral, was half covered with worn linoleum, its pattern lost in stains and greasy layers of dirt.

Minnie paused for a moment on the first landing to tie her shoelace. She winced. Like a shallow well the hall was a sounding board which reverberated with all the chaotic noises of the sixteen apartments. Those brats! Weak-looking kids, but how they screamed! Cursing, phonographs, dishes rattling, the thunder of the elevator as it tore past the house, high, shrill voices—God, what a racket, she thought.

On the second flight Minnie felt her way through the stifling darkness, thumbing the wall to keep from stumbling over empty milk bottles or newspaper bundles of garbage. Clinks of light outlined two doors. One led into the apartment occupied by an Italian family. In three rooms lived a man, his wife, her mother and father, and five little children. Minnie was resentful that "Wops" were allowed in her apartment house, even though Carlotti was a first-class barber with a job in an uptown hotel. As if the place wasn't stinking enough without the acrid smell of garlic and rancid olive oil.

Minnie hated offensive odors. Her dream was to own a bottle of expensive perfume. She called it perfumery, and her favorite extracts were lilac and carnation.

The Flynn's apartment was one of the largest in The

Central. The window of the room which served as a parlor and dining room overlooked the elevated tracks, but because of the noise and whirling dust, it was seldom open. A musty closeness made the room oppressive. There lingered the faint sickening perfume of Chinese punk sticks which were always burned before the arrival of company.

On the drab walls of the parlor was a patchwork of bright colored pictures; family groups, post cards, Harrison Fisher heads, plaques, calendars sent by Ninth Avenue tradespeople, and innumerable clippings from papers and magazines. Wired to the gas jet which vibrated when the elevated passed the house was a Chinese musical lantern which was her sister Nettie's only contribution to the home. The lantern, composed of little brass bells and long pieces of glass wired together, tinkled monotonously.

There was a red plush sofa in the room, and five oak-stained pine chairs which matched the center table. The table was covered with a red damask cloth heavily bordered with tangled fringe. In the center of the table was a paper palm; another paper plant stood on the mantelpiece, a flowering geranium; in the window two small flower pots held perennial paper carnation blooms. In one corner was a glided easel on which rested a large framed crayon of Minnie as a squirming, fat, naked baby lying upon a fuzzy rug—a horrid picture that made Minnie blush.

The fuzzy rug was a graying Angora which still served the Flynn family as a decoration. It had been meant for the floor, but Mrs. Flynn, always upset when it was carelessly scuffed by anyone except visitors, nailed it to the back of a dilapidated morris chair. No one in the family was ever permitted to lean against it.

Minnie often spoke of her flat as a "swell little place,"

for it was better furnished and cleaner than most of the others in the neighborhood.

Minnie and Nettie slept in a dark bedroom. The window opened out on a light well. A curtain shut off their room from the larger adjoining bedroom which was occupied by their father and the two boys. Mrs. Flynn slept on the red plush sofa in the combination parlor and dining room. But when Minnie talked of the flat to girls who had never been there, they always visualized it as large, airy and comfortable. For Minnie always spoke of Nettie's room, and her room, and the boys' room, and mother's room, and the dining room, and the parlor.

§ 3

Nettie had been sick in bed for two weeks with tonsilitis, so they moved her from the bedroom to the parlor's red plush sofa. For a few hours in the afternoon the sun crept into the room and took some of the autumn chill away.

The parlor was in disorder when Minnie opened the door and stepped inside; the floor littered with papers, the table covered with bottles, a basin, towels and dirty dishes. Nettie lay sprawled out on crumpled pillows, her face flushed with fever, her greasy black hair matted and disheveled. Nettie was only twenty, but she looked twenty-five. Her features were coarse and a pendulous underlip gave her a dull sensuous expression. Her eyes, steel gray—very large and heavily lashed like Minnie's—were her only charm.

Nettie didn't look up from the paper-bound novel she was reading until Minnie had said "Hello" twice. Then she nodded her head, adjusted the wet towel around her throat and went on reading.

"Gee, I thought you'd be out o' here by tonight." Minnie

was looking at the untidy room with disgust. "It's been two weeks since we've had a decent place to sit in, and I get sick of eatin' off the kitchen sink."

"Of course you would." Nettie always sneered when she spoke. "You'd be glad if I kicked the bucket. I know you."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Nettie, can that kind o' talk. Don't you think a family ever gets tired of hearing it? You've always got a chip on your shoulder about somethin' or other. Try bein' a sport for once."

Nettie stared at her sharply. "That's easy enough for you to talk. You're the only one that ever gets a good time as far as I can see. I don't notice anybody tryin' to be nice to me so I guess I'll. . . . Oh, hell—" Her angry tug at the towel around her throat pulled it off and it fell to the floor.

"Don't move, I'll get it." Minnie leaned down to pick it up, then refolded and wrapped it around Nettie's throat. "I'm sorry if you thought I was sore about the place, Net, but you know why I hoped you'd be moved tonight."

"Billy comin' here?"

"Yeh, but that's all right. I can meet him downstairs again. He always whistles first. Don't make much difference, except the hall is gettin' awful cold these nights."

Nettie looked at her sister's thin cotton serge suit, the sheer lisle stockings, and the cheap lace waist. "What's the matter with bundlin' up in your old check coat? Ain't that good enough for Billy MacNally?" She added maliciously, "he ain't so much, you know."

Minnie didn't answer. She stood staring at Nettie, frustrated and furious. Nettie was sick or she would have hurled herself upon her.

Billy MacNally was a steady, plodding boy who had left grammar school to work in Hesselman's butcher shop. He had begun humbly, as a delivery boy. Through the years

of hard faithful service he had worked up slowly, from the driver of the wagon to a door-to-door solicitor, and finally, reaching the goal of his ambitions, a position behind the counter, working beside old Hesselman himself, with vague, pleasant prospects of a future partnership. Billy was full of schemes. He already saw Minnie and himself married and settled down in a little flat. He saw the name MacNally instead of Hesselman over the door and on the windows. His contentment made him seem stupid. There was no challenge against the routine of his life to stimulate his imagination. He believed that all blessings were his because he deserved them. To live simply, to want little, to love normally, to go to church on Sundays, and to be scrupulously honest with his customers (not even permitting himself the pleasure of giving more meat to the pound when Minnie was buying); these were the divine laws by which Billy MacNally lived.

Why Minnie, with so many admirers, chose Billy she could never understand. He wasn't even a good dancer. She might have tired of him quickly had it not been for Nettie's vicious ridicule of him.

Again Nettie's guttural voice broke into unexpected laughter. "Billy MacNally!" she drawled out. "Minnie's little butcher boy. As if the old check coat ain't good enough for *him!*"

Minnie sprang to her feet. She swayed, her nails pressing into the palms of her hands. She stared at Nettie with an ominous calm, then fearing to speak, rushed out of the room into the kitchen where her mother was stooping over the stove.

"Ma," she said between her clenched teeth, "Nettie gets my goat! I'm goin' to stay in the kitchen to keep out of her way. There are times when I can hardly stand her."

Mrs. Flynn clicked her tongue and wagged her head. Then

she sighed. She always did that when a quarrel started in the family.

"Oh, ma, please don't act like a martyr," Minnie begged, her temper collapsing at the sight of her mother's panic-stricken expression. "You always take everything too serious."

Mrs. Flynn sighed again. "I wish you two girls would try to get along better," she said in a thin, tired voice. "First it's one and then it's the other. Your pa was sayin' only the other night that he's never seen such a family for quarrelin'. It's just wearin' my life out."

Minnie sank down on a three-legged stool and watched for several minutes in silence while her mother peeled the potatoes. She noticed her mother's hands, large, swollen and red, and she wondered if they had ever been well-shaped like hers. Old friends of the family said that she looked like her mother, and Minnie searched, almost fearfully, for the resemblance. Her mother was ill-proportioned now, though she boasted of having been "skinnier" than Minnie, as she called it. Her thin gray hair had once been red. "Two thick red braids the size of your wrists," Michael Flynn always described them. Her eyes had lost their luster, her drooping mouth was grooved with fine wrinkles, and the years of neglect had rotted her teeth, once, little white even teeth like Minnie's.

"Ma, dear, it makes me sick to see you always workin' so hard," Minnie reached over to lay her arm across her mother's back as the latter bent over the stove. "When Billy gets his raise I don't see why we should wait any longer. We can afford to have a little place of our own, and that makes one less to cook and wash up after."

Mrs. Flynn turned to her placatingly. "Now, look here, Minnie. I don't want you goin' off and gettin' married just to make things easier for *me*. You're the kind of a girl that likes to have a good time, to be always on the go, a party here—

a party there. Marriage means givin' 'em all up, Minnie. . . ."

Minnie smiled tolerantly. "I know, ma, you've gone all over that before. You got a lot of old-fashioned ideas in your head about marriage, and you don't seem to see that things is different now than they used to be. Men don't expect women to be their slaves no more, they want 'em to be pals—sweethearts."

"That's what they all say, Minnie, before they get you."

"No, ma—you needn't worry about me havin' to give up everything when I marry Billy MacNally, because I ain't! Us women is too advanced to make such mistakes nowadays like they used to. *Advanced*," emphasized Minnie.

Her mother went on with her work, saying nothing, but a faint smile brightened her face.

"Why, only the other night at the movies," Minnie continued, "Billy and me saw a picture about a couple startin' out on a fifty-fifty plan—and maybe it didn't work out swell. We talked about it on the way home and Billy says it's exactly how we'll do it, ma, just like a couple o' pals. No, none o' that old slave stuff for Billy and me."

Mrs. Flynn looked up and smiled at her daughter's pretty, eager face. Then the smile died away as she asked: "Do you love him, Minnie—enough to stand for him day in and day out, when he's sick and tired and discouraged, and out of a job—and dirty?"

"Honest, ma, the way you go on is a holler." Minnie's laughter filled the kitchen. "O' course I love him. Or believe me, I wouldn't be thinkin' of marrying him. And you know, ma, that I'm wise to the fact that no man's a bed o' roses. I'd like to know if I ain't had a good trainin' as to what men are like, with their dirty, stinkin' tobacco, and always needin' a shave, with a guy like Pete around givin' his sisters a liberal education!"

At the scorn in Minnie's voice when she spoke Pete's name the same look came into Mrs. Flynn's eyes as had flamed into Elsie Bickers's.

Minnie saw the look. "Oh, Lord, now I've put my foot in it," she thought as she walked uneasily over to her mother. "Don't carry on, ma, I'm saying nothin' much against your little pet except that he's no *matinée* idol. Honest I ain't."

Her mother caught her by the arm.

"The first thing we know," she whispered in a pitiful whimper, "Pete's goin' to get sick of hearin' what a loafer he is from you and your father and he's goin' to clear out again. Clear out again! Do you get me? And if he does, Minnie, as God is my judge, I won't be able to stand it." Her voice, ascending into a trembling falsetto, broke off suddenly, and the tears rushed to her eyes.

Though Minnie was used to these outbursts, she always felt sorry for her mother. "Please, ma, don't get so excited over it. I promised you the last time that Pete got sore and threatened us, I'd never say anything about it again, and I've kept my word, ain't I? Even when he took that dollar bill out o' my purse, did I say anything to him about it outside of askin' him what he done with it? Go on, ma, tell me—did I nag him about it? Did I?"

"Pete never took that bill out o' your purse, Minnie Flynn, and you know better. You're careless, and like enough you lost it. Or maybe you never had it in the first place, you just thought you did."

"Oh, ma, what's the use of goin' into that again? I had the bill, and you know it, too. You seen me put it into my purse and five minutes later with nobody in the house but Pete it was gone."

Mrs. Flynn's hand was trembling as she seized hold of Minnie's arm.

"I don't care whether you're my daughter or not, I'm not goin' to let you stand there and call your own brother a thief. Do you understand? He's your own flesh and blood, and I tell you, Minnie, as my father used to say, 'It's a foul bird that dirties its own nest.'"

"Ssh, ma. Stop yellin' like that. I just heard the door slam. Maybe it's Pete, and if it is, you better not let him see you cryin' like this—he hates it, and if he sees too much of it he'll like as not clear out on us. . . . Fat chance," Minnie added, and her voice trembled, "not so long as he gets somethin' for nothin'. Not that bird!"

It was Pete. He shuffled into the room and fixed his small, red-rimmed eyes upon them. "What's the big idea?" he asked. "You been cryin' again, ma?"

"I been fixin' onions," Mrs. Flynn forced a sudden nervous smile. "Kiss me, dearie, I'm glad you're home so early. Gonna have hamburger for dinner."

Pete bent over and turned his cheek so that his mother could kiss him.

"My, but your face is cold. You shouldn't be goin' out without them newspapers on your chest, Pete. You know that last cold, how it hung on. If I hadn't watched it, maybe you would of come down with pneumonia."

"Disappointed, ma?" He laughed and winked at Minnie. "I swear, Minnie, ma's hankering for a wake."

"Oh, Pete darlin,' what a thing to say to your old ma. You—you big kidder, you." She reached up and pinched him on the cheek.

"Gee, ma, your hands stink of onions. I should say you *was* fixin' 'em."

Minnie hurried out of the kitchen because she knew just what was coming. She was to be the next victim of Pete's humorous abuse. How he had tormented her when they were

children! How he had tormented her pets! He would sit for hours poking a pencil into the canary cage, laughing to see the bird's fluttering attempts to escape. When he was a little boy, afraid to tease the cat, he caught flies and pulled off their legs, one by one.

§ 4

When Pete was a little boy he had often watched his mother make her nightly pilgrimage through his father's pockets in search of stray coins. It was a jolly game to Pete, this search, and once when they were caught, and his father called them dirty sneak-thieves, he knew his father was just a rotten, stingy old man, and that he would never like him.

Up to fourteen Pete had run away from school so often that his father decided to let him go to work. He tried to get him a job in the plumbing shop, but the boss had heard of Pete's dishonesty and refused to employ him. He tried selling papers, but he was so clumsy, overgrown, and lazy that the other boys outran him and often at the end of the evening he found that he had lost money on the day's investment. At eighteen Pete ran away from home and joined the navy. His father was content because he was sure that the men would pound some of the cussedness out of him, but his mother's heart was broken. For two years his mother cried and prayed, and prayed and cried. Then he returned to them—unchanged. And she lived in a perpetual torment that he would leave again.

Minnie's younger brother, Jimmy, had a disposition very much like her own—happy-go-lucky. He let the years pass by without any serious regard for the future. He and Minnie measured their success by the laughs they could crowd into each day. They awoke in the morning singing, went to work

with light, careless hearts, and enjoyed the evenings when they went to the movies or to dances.

Jimmy was a handsome boy; small, slender and well-built. He had been pitcher on the school baseball team and at sixteen had won quite a reputation as an amateur boxer. At the Three Sports Club, he had knocked out Mickey McGovern, the East Side lightweight champion. He won a small purse, and the following morning, in the newspaper, the Flynn family glowed to see this paragraph:

"We prophesy big things for a newcomer, Kid Sparrow, known out of the ring as Jimmy Flynn, the West Side amateur lightweight. He will fight Terry Donovan at the Three Sports Club next Friday night, six rounds.

"Last night's performance puts Young Sparrow out of the curtain-raiser class. Watch his step!"

The ten-dollar purse he won that memorable Friday evening paid for two false teeth and the care of a torn ear. But his wounds made him the hero of Ninth Avenue from Forty-second Street to the Circle.

Minnie adored this smiling, easy-going younger brother, and his very weaknesses made him dearer to her. Though he hated work he was not a loafer. He hung onto his job because he dreaded facing a Saturday night without a pay check. Three dollars always went to his mother, the other three he spent on what he styled a blowout. This consisted of a table d'hôte at an Italian restaurant (sixty-five cents, a quart of wine included), a dance at the free pier, or the movies, and sometimes a vaudeville show.

Jimmy had no steady girl; in fact he preferred taking Minnie out. She was the best dancer of their set, and Jimmy was proud of her. For a long time he resented Billy MacNally, and was jealous of him. And when Saturday night came he was lonesome for his sister's company. Beside Minnie, other

girls all seemed drab and colorless. But he was never seen with Pete or Nettie.

§ 5

At seven-thirty, Michael Flynn came home from work. His ashen face told how tired he was, though he never complained. When he spoke it was in a dull voice that had lost all of its vitality.

"I couldn't get the eight dollars today, Annie, because Carter never come in. But I got a loan of two off Mitchell. He's the new pipe fitter I been telling you about. It's through him we got the sample line of new pipes in today, with the swellest automatic joints you ever seen. I tell you, Annie, that fellow——"

"Oh, my God, he starts right in gabbin' about the rotten plumbin' business before he even gets his coat off!" Nettie's voice shrilled above the noise of the elevated. "I swear I'd drop dead if pa ever got off on another subject."

"You ain't so fast under the hat that you should be criticizing anybody else!" Minnie came to the defense of her father who stood before them, looking like a small gray animal.

"That's right, Minnie, you take your father's part like a good girl," Mrs. Flynn's voice rose. "It's a pretty sorry day for parents when their own children starts ridiculing 'em, just as if they hadn't sacrificed their whole lives for 'em——"

Nettie flung herself back among the pillows with an angry gesture. "Oh, Lord, now it starts all over again. I'm sick, I tell you, but a hell of a lot *you* care."

"Nettie!" Her mother's voice rose again in pained reproof. "How many times have I asked you not to use swear words the way you do? It's awful common, and after me doing my best to bring you children up respectable—in spite

of the little money that I've got from your father to do it on." The hollows in Michael Flynn's face deepened.

"Let's not get on to that subject again, Annie. You know how you get sick every time you work yourself up to it."

"Oh, hell! I don't blame Nettie for cussin' around this joint. It's nothin' but a free-for-all every time the family gets together." Pete swung out his fist to emphasize his remark. It struck the chair and sent it crashing into the corner.

"Sic 'em, Fido!" laughed Minnie. "All we need is a parrot squawkin' and a jazz band record on the phonograph. Maybe when Jimmy comes in he'll step on the cat's tail. Jimmy's the only one in the family that don't do his share o' the battlin', thank God."

"Aw, shut up—can't you see I'm tryin' to read the paper?"

"Shut up yourself, you big loafer!" Minnie was now quivering with rage. "Always stickin' up for Nettie against Jimmy and me, ain't you? You make me sick, and I ain't afraid to tell it to you, either. You're a bum, that's all you are, just a bum!"

A shrill cry from Mrs. Flynn.

"Shame on you, Minnie—after what you promised me," Mrs. Flynn wailed.

Pete flung the paper aside, and rose threateningly. "So she *promised* you, did she? So you've been talkin' about me behind my back, have you? I might of known it! A bum and a loafer! I'll fix you for that! You'll see! I'll fix you!"

Michael Flynn stepped between his son and his wife. "For God's sake, Pete, not another word out o' you. You can't talk to your mother like that."

"Well, Minnie started it," Pete answered resentfully.

Nettie staggered to her feet and slung the crazy quilt coverlet to the floor. "Minnie always does," she cried. "Every

time that Jimmy's name is mentioned it means a fight in the family. Jimmy! The dirty little sneakin' quitter—that's what he is."

"Who's a quitter—*me*?"

They turned and saw Jimmy's head edging around the door. His broad warming grin told them that he had overheard everything and that, as usual, it amused rather than angered him.

"Lo, Jimmy." All anger went from Minnie's voice at the sight of him. She slipped her arm affectionately through his. "You're just in time to put on the gloves," she said laughingly, "the crowd's all rootin' for you."

"I get you, kid," answered Jimmy, "it looks like a big night tonight," glancing from one distorted face to the other. "Who's in the ring, folks?"

No one volunteered to speak but Minnie.

"All the West Side champions, Jimmy," she answered his bantering tone, "two to fight to the finish—and two that will last about two rounds before I throw the sponge in the ring."

"O. K! I'm ready for 'em," and Jimmy started shadow-boxing.

Minnie laughed at Jimmy and the atmosphere cleared. Mrs. Flynn's sigh of relief was so ludicrous that even Pete relaxed and grinned sheepishly as he picked up his paper.

"Come, children, let's set down to supper before the things is cold. Hamburger, Jimmy. Go wash your hands."

Michael Flynn tried to be friendly with his children. "You'd think he was in the plumbin' business, ma," he said, laughing awkwardly, "he's that black and greasy."

"Got it working on an old motorbike, pa. MacNally's paid a deposit on a last year's model. Been in a smash-up but we're overhaulin' it. Tomorrow we'll show up at the shop

and graft a couple o' bolts offen you, if you can dig 'em up for us."

"You sure can, Jimmy." Mr. Flynn glowed with pleasure when any one of the family turned to him for advice or help. Flushing with timid importance he tapped Jimmy on the shoulder. "There's that fellow Mitchell down to our place, that new pipe fitter, Jimmy. He's a regular wiz when it comes to fixing up mechanical contraptions."

"Thanks, pa. I'll run MacNally over there tomorrow. He says——"

"Billy MacNally?" interrupted Minnie.

"Yeh—who'd you suppose it was?"

"Why—I didn't know——" Minnie paused. Her large eyes narrowed in fury. "I like his nerve buyin' motorbikes when he couldn't even afford to get me a dinky turquoise engagement ring." Minnie was troubled; she had told all the girls at the store about the ring and had gone so far as to describe it just as if the first instalment were already paid on it.

By this time the dinner was almost ready. The rooms were filled with a thin smoke and reeked of many odors; frying grease, onions and boiling coffee.

Nettie, with lugubrious self-pity, had risen and gone into the bedroom. Pete sprawled on the sofa in her place and read the comic supplement out loud, while Jimmy played on the harmonica, and Michael Flynn helped his wife set the table.

Minnie was getting ready for the evening, because at eight-fifteen she expected Billy. She combed her hair and rolled it into so many puffs that it looked like a bright red, padded cushion. She re-bandolined the two curls that lay flat on her cheeks and again touched up her eyelashes.

"Puffs certainly do set your hair off, Min," ventured Nettie as a peace offering after a long, sullen silence. "I sure wisht

I had a mess o' hair like that. Mine's so straight I've give up tryin' to do a thing with it."

"Maybe if you washed it offener," Minnie suggested in an even tone, "and braided it around your head, you'd keep them stray hairs from lappin' over your ears. You know, Net, any girl can improve herself if she's a mind to."

"I s'pose so," and defiance crept again into Nettie's voice. "But what difference does it make how *I* look? I might be as ugly as Elsie Bicker for all the good times I get out o' life. Is it any wonder that I'm soured, Min?"

Minnie reached over for a bottle of home-made cologne—(lemon-verbena leaves soaked in alcohol)—and poured some of the liquid into the palm of her left hand. Then she dipped the fingers of her right hand into it and brushed it over her hair, behind her ears and across her mouth.

"Nettie," she said at last, "you'd have just as good times as me if you'd be willing to give somethin' toward it. You take life too serious, Net. Why, you and Elsie Bicker act as if you was a couple of tragedy queens. Laugh up! Don't be a couple o' glooms always goin' around feelin' sorry for yourselves. That's no way to make a bunch of friends, and hold 'em. Now I ask you, Nettie, who wants the measles to come to a party? And that's the way you act, you and Elsie Bicker."

"But I ain't got your talent for kiddin' and makin' other people laugh," whined Nettie. "You was just born with it, you know it. Ma marked you, Minnie, sure as there's a God, she did. She never went to no burlesque show before *I* was born."

"Maybe," answered Minnie, "but them are things we ain't sure of. Whether she marked me or not, Net, I learned this much when I was only a kid: that everything in life is

fifty-fifty. If you're gonna get you gotta give 'em somethin' in return."

"Yeh, and you can do it, Min. But not me. I ain't a born four-flusher like you. I can't put on what I don't feel, even to be popular like you and Jimmy. Say, Minnie," she added after a contemplative pause, "if you was a man I bet you'd be in politics. Honest, I mean that, I bet you'd work up to be a top-notch. You're that slick."

Minnie considered this a compliment, so she leaned over and kissed Nettie before she went into the dining room for her dinner.

§ 6

Mrs. Flynn made it seem quite an event to have dinner in the dining room again. Ever since Nettie's illness they had crowded into the kitchen, single file, and filling their plates, had set them upon the sink. All had gobbled to get out of the heat and the unbearable stuffiness.

"Lord, you'd think there was company, ma, the way you carry on," Minnie remarked as she sidled through the door and into the vacant chair next to her father. "What you usin' the servin' dishes for?"

Her mother flushed. "I dunno, Minnie, except that—well, *you* like 'em, don't you, Pete?" Losing all control of herself, she lapsed into a nervous titter. "Pete says the food tastes better out o' chinaware than out o' the pots and kettles on the table."

"Oh, Mr. Astor would, o' course. He's that elegant—" Minnie laughed scornfully.

Pete turned toward his mother. "There!" he cried triumphantly. "You see how Minnie always starts it, the dirty little sneak, tryin' to put it off on me and Nettie, and gettin'

away with murder. Do you wonder I want to get out of here, ma, now do you?"

Minnie laughed again because she enjoyed tantalizing Pete. It was the only way she knew of getting back at him. She looked into his surly face and saw the red flush mount to his bulging forehead as he clamped his teeth and cursed under his breath. At last he reached over and pushed his plate from him.

"Oh, Pete!" cried his mother tremulously, "you ain't through yet. Please don't let Minnie spoil your dinner for you. Please don't let her, Pete. I got rice puddin' for dessert with raisins in it. I made it special for you, Pete. You know she's only teasin'. Ain't you, Minnie? Tell Pete you're only teasin', Minnie dear. Tell him please . . . for my sake. . . ."

Pete and Minnie quarreled through the meal. Then Pete rose and cried out with sudden ferocity, "You go to hell every one of you. I'm through!"

"Oh, God, Pete!" and the tears gushed to his mother's eyes. "Minnie! Look what you done to your brother. You're a bad girl, that's what you are."

She swayed as she saw Pete make for the door, and reached out her arms as he went out.

"Pete!" A cry was torn from Mrs. Flynn, and its echo followed Pete down the two flights of stairs and into the lower hallway. It was like the cry of an animal in pain. But Pete was unmoved.

Mrs. Flynn lay against her husband's breast, with convulsive, rasping sobs that only annoyed Minnie.

"Cheer up, ma," Minnie said. "I'll be out of here myself before long. You know what I told you. I'm goin' to settle that tonight."

"Settle what, Minnie?" Mr. Flynn turned toward her and his voice was querulous.

"Oh, nothin', pa. Just a little promise to ma about Billy MacNally."

"Don't call it no promise to me," cried Mrs. Flynn from the kitchen. "The first thing you know you'll be lettin' everybody think it was me that drove my daughter outta my own house."

"I like Billy MacNally," ventured Mr. Flynn with nervous uncertainty, "but Minnie, you're too young to be thinkin' of gettin' married."

"I ain't no younger than ma was."

Mr. Flynn moistened his lips. "That's just what I want to tell you, Minnie. If your ma and I had to do it all over again we would of waited until I'd got a good start. There was even times when I didn't have a job."

"I ain't afraid o' hard work," answered Minnie, polishing her fingernails on the palm of her hand.

"Neither was your ma, Minnie. But there was times when it looked as if we'd have to let you kids go to a home, we was that hard up."

"Say, pa," Minnie squinted her eyes to admire the polish—"You and ma oughta do team work in vaudeville. You two can sob the neatest duet I ever heard."

Jimmy, leaning back in his chair, reached for the paper. He put his feet upon the edge of the table, and was soon lost in the sporting page. Minnie leaned against the window, waiting for the familiar whistle.

§ 7

Hesselman had kept Billy at the shop going over accounts, so he didn't come until ten o'clock. A cold wind whistled

around the lower hallway as Minnie opened the door and let him in. They stood under the sputtering gas jet, and shook hands, solemnly. Billy's expression of contentment made her want to laugh at him. His mouth was slightly open in a fixed grin, his head wagging foolishly. His huge, clumsy fingers trembled.

"Minnie," he said, embarrassed by her quizzical stare, "you just make me sick with happiness."

"Yeh?"

"What do you say," and his voice lowered to a husky whisper, "if we sit on the stairs and spoon a while?"

Minnie laughed pleasantly.

He sat on the third stair, and drew Minnie onto his lap, circling her body with his arms and drawing her head to his shoulder. She could hear his heart thumping. Sometimes when he whispered to her the words were inarticulate, and when he kissed her she noticed that his lips were hot against her cool ones. Poor Billy! He wasn't much, she thought, as she listened to his plans for the future, but he was a decent boy. She wished he were tall and handsome and wore a little mustache like the men she admired in the movies.

Billy's desire for kissing grew as the hours passed all too swiftly. He moved down to the second step, resting his head against her waist. She lay in his arms enjoying his kisses, often putting her head far back so that his lips brushed her neck. Sometimes his almost furious onslaught confused her, but it never frightened her. Minnie had spooned with all her beaux. It seemed a natural thing to do, and she was unashamed of enjoying it. Sometimes her curiosity was aroused when she became conscious of the emotional perturbation of the boys who held her so fiercely in their arms, but within herself there were seldom any tumultuous longings. At times she felt a vague restlessness, an inner glow, but it generally

came from complete mental satisfaction: she was enjoying her power over them—at these times when they needed her, they became humble and abject before her. Then, too, their warmth was nice on the cool nights during the late fall and winter.

§ 8

The girls with whom Minnie associated discussed this quite frankly. In the summer they cared little for spooning. There were the pier dances, the trips to Coney, the walks in Central Park, the open-air skating rinks, with an occasional kiss, but not long hours given up to spooning. Their moral code was simple and understandable; there were physical laws which must be obeyed; inescapable punishment if these laws were ignored. Only once with Dan Sullivan had Minnie been aroused beyond the complacent contemplation of the effect she had upon the boys. She and Dan Sullivan, with four other couples, had gone for a boat ride up the Hudson River. They danced all day, ate their lunch under the trees while the boat was docked at a pier on the Jersey coast, sang to the accompaniment of accordions and harmonicas, played handball, had a cheap shore dinner aboard the boat; then they sat in couples on the deck, waiting for the moon to rise in cool glittering dignity. When the girls, secure in the deepening dusk, permitted the outstretched arms of the boys to find them, Minnie leaned back until her head rested upon Dan Sullivan's breast. His lips found hers and they kissed long and fervently. It seemed as if her heart had lifted and was suddenly detached from its moorings. An ecstasy which she knew only as pain raced through her. She clung to Dan and kissed him with feverish haste, as if she dared lose no time—in a few seconds this terrifying but exquisite joy might be gone forever.

The shrill strident whistles cut into the air, whistles which warned other boats nosing their way along the dark waters. Minnie sprang, startled, from Dan's arms. These hideous sounds crashing so violently into her enfolding dream awoke her to sudden consciousness. She felt as if, groping through darkness, she had hurtled against a door which had sprung open. . . . Her mind was flooded with light, blinding, relentless, uncompromising. It brought out everything in stark reality: Dan, the spooning couples, her own ecstasy, now so remote an emotion it left barely an impression upon her. . . . When the whistles ceased Dan pulled her to him again. Once more they had tumbled into concealing shadows. He was laughing because she had been so frightened. His voice was coarse, his hands on her seemed rude. She was shocked at the way he plunged his mouth upon hers. The pressure of his arms around her waist seemed a strangling vise. Her scream startled him, infuriated him. "You little devil!" he said, pinioning her in his strong grip, silencing with kisses, now ugly and terrible to her, Minnie's intermittent screams. Revolted, she struggled free from him, slapping him with hysterical violence when he groped for her in the darkness, escaping and running blindly away from him, reaching the lighted saloon of the boat, sinking down on one of the benches, seeing a reflection of her white, startled face in the mirror opposite her, wondering why she had enjoyed his kisses one minute, only a few minutes later to be terrified and repelled by them.

§ 9

Dan and she had parted after this open rebellion which had made him a laughing stock. She soon forgot him.

To Billy, on the other hand, her response was tender, not

passionate, for she feared that again passion would trick and betray her.

At two o'clock they were still sitting in the lower hallway of the tenement house. A damp chill enveloped them; no longer did the contact of bodies pressed close warm them. Minnie drew away from him. "I'm cold, Billy. You gotta go home."

"Aw, Minnie, the nights is so darn short."

"They won't be when we're married, Billy. You get over this kind of stuff awful quick. Nothin's very romantic when you're married, I guess."

Billy was sure it would be.

They rose, and pulled open the heavy squeaky door. The streets were almost deserted; intermittently the elevated roared past. The wind had died down but the sidewalks were littered with débris. Two doors from The Central, an ash-can had fallen over and they saw the slinking shadows of half-starved alley cats circling around it. From Sullivan's saloon came ribald cries and muffled drunken songs. Sometimes the swinging doors opened and figures sprawled out onto the sidewalk. A fight, the shrill police whistle, scurrying of feet, then silence.

"This ain't such a rotten neighborhood to live in," Minnie remarked after the fight in the saloon had been quelled. "There's always somethin' doin'. Imagine the people who have to live clear over in Jersey."

"Jersey ain't so bad," answered Billy, almost wistfully, "they got gardens over there. A fellow come into our shop the other day lookin' for a job. He says he's got a place in Jersey and wouldn't live in New York if you was to give him the Flatiron Building. Why, Minnie, he's got lettuce an' onions an' spuds in his back yard. He's gonna have two apple trees bearin' next year."

Minnie's laughter echoed down the deserted street. "Billy," she said, "you sure talk like you was a hick. First thing you know you'll be wantin' to give up the butcher business and go to *raisin'* animals. I'd be a swell nurse-maid to a lot of cows and pigs, now wouldn't I, Billy?"

"Aw, Minnie, you got a way of makin' fun of a fellow every time he gets serious."

As usual Minnie answered, "Well, Billy, if you don't like it you know what you can do," and closed the door upon him. "Good night!" she called from the hallway, "and good-by. If I let you, you'd keep me up all night."

Billy stared at the closed door for several seconds. He beat his hands together nervously, then cleared his throat to call out to her. He stopped short, turned his head quickly and saw two people walking down the street. In a few moments they would pass him. His desire to protect Minnie conquered his longing to hold her once more in his arms so he turned and walked hurriedly down the street.

Minnie heard the retreating footsteps. So he had dared leave her without that last apology! Perhaps he was only fooling her. She opened the door cautiously and peeked out. Billy had crossed the street and was hurrying along without looking back. On the sidewalk she heard a shuffle of feet, low mumbling voices, then two people blocked the entrance way. Minnie closed the door. She heard Pete's voice saying: "S' nice of you, Elsie, to see me home. Damn nice, I say. Damn nice girl!"

Minnie drew in her breath sharply and her eyes widened. Elsie Bicker and Pete! Cautiously she opened the door. She was curious to know why these two were together because Pete always cursed at the mention of Elsie's name and so far as Minnie knew, Pete had never given her any encouragement.

What a flat, insipid voice Elsie had, Minnie was thinking as she strained forward to catch the drift of the whispered conversation. A voice like her colorless face!

"Pete, dear, you know I'm awful glad to help you get home. . . ." Minnie started at the intimacy of the "Pete dear. . . ." "And some day I hope you'll tell your ma that if it wasn't for me you'd never of gone home at all."

"Sure will, Elsie. Never gone home a-tall. Damn little snip, Minnie, gonna wring her neck!"

"She's just a crazy kid, Pete. She don't mean nothin' by it."

Pete's swaying figure struck one of the marble columns. The sudden jar caused him to belch violently.

Elsie's long thin arms reached out to steady him. "Pete, darlin'," she cried, "go inside now. Go upstairs and sleep so you'll feel O. K. in the mornin'."

"Whash time we get spliced?"

"S-sh! Somebody might hear you." Elsie raised on tip-toe so her mouth was close to his ear. "I'll be outside Sullivan's at two o'clock. We'll get a license. Then Father Duffy'll marry us tomorrow night. Tomorrow night, Pete," she emphasized this strangely. "For God's sake, don't forget it."

"You sure you got enough money, now? You ain't holdin' out on me. Damn it! If you're holdin' out on me!"

"Pete, I swear upon everything holy that I got four hundred dollars. I've been savin' up for ten years I—I got a hope chest, too."

"Whash t'hell's that?"

"A box filled with things I've been makin' up ever since I was a kid. Towels and napkins. Classy little table covers with flowers embroidered on 'em. Kitchen aprons. Oh, Pete, don't laugh at me. I—I got——"

"No chance laughin'! Funny as a crutch you are. Go on, Els, shoot!"

"I got baby things made up. Oh, God, Pete, don't you laugh at me!"

Minnie closed the door and hurried upstairs. She couldn't bear to hear any more of it. She felt sorry for Elsie though she hated her for the open acknowledgment of her sentiment. Minnie saw what was ahead for them but she thought it was none of her business to stop them. They were going to be married just because Elsie had four hundred dollars which Pete would blow in for her. They would move away into a rented flat for a couple of months and then come crowding home to her mother. But she didn't care. She wouldn't be there. She would marry Billy MacNally just to get away from it all.

That night she lay awake for an hour trying to make up her mind whether or not to tell her mother what she had overheard. She went to sleep deciding that it would be rather interesting to see what came of the marriage, so she said nothing.

Two days later Pete and Elsie were married.

CHAPTER TWO

§ 1

ON the night of the dance, Minnie wore her white machine-embroidered dress, from which the yoke had been carefully cut, to reveal her smooth round shoulders and long slender neck. She had bought new white slippers for the occasion, and white cotton lisle stockings. Her hair, elaborately dressed, rather startled Billy at first, though he agreed with Minnie that it did show it off to advantage.

"Oh, my Lord, Billy, what a time I had doin' it! Seventeen puffs if there's a one, and ma's hands so shaky she wasn't a bit o' help."

"I guess she ain't got over Pete's gettin' married."

"Honest, Billy, it would make your heart ache to see how ma cries and cries for Pete. You'd think that he was dead instead o' married. She won't listen when we tell her it might be the best thing that ever happened to him; and the nice kind of a girl that Els is, even if she *is* as homely as a mud fence."

"I seen Pete in the street the other day and he don't seem any the worse for wear," answered Billy. "He stopped me and told me that Elsie was a damn fine girl and he was out lookin' for a job. He means to support her even if she *did* have a neat little roll laid away."

"He said that, did he?"—Minnie always clamped her teeth together when she talked about Pete—"The dirty loafer! A lot of jobs he'll get, and Elsie knows it too. But she'd rather

have a bum hangin' around her to support than be a decent, self-respectin' old maid."

"She loves him, Min," and Billy sighed so lugubriously that Minnie laughed outright. "When you're dead stuck on somebody else, you're just a mush pot. You ain't responsible. I can't make fun o' Elsie because I'm in the same boat as her."

"Aw, go on, Billy, you're soft as butter."

They were in the subway on their way to the Harlem Dance Hall.

"Jimmy says the decorations at the Hall will knock your eye out. And they've got a nigger band there, twelve pieces and seven drums. My feet are just achin' for a good dance, Billy, so you mustn't get sore if I step out a little bit tonight."

"There you go, Min,"—and the dull, hurt look came into Billy's eyes again. "I thought you said I could have most of your dances if I took you there. Now the first thing you pull on me is that I'm not to be a sorehead while you go off dancin' with everybody else."

Minnie felt the color slowly mount to her temples; a hot resentment flared against this boy who wanted to spoil her whole evening by his selfishness. An overwhelming desire to slap his face, before everybody, possessed her. It seemed, as she looked at him, as if she hated him more than anything else in the world, even more than Pete; that she would scream if he spoke to her or put his clumsy, freckled hand upon her. She sat there, erect, transfixed, her eyes watching his hand as it hovered uncertainly over her knee, threatening to descend at any moment in a familiar possessive caress. Then the hand withdrew to meet his other one and they clasped and unclasped until the palms glistened with sweat. They were still moving restlessly when Billy whispered to her: "I'm sorry if I put a damper on your good time, Min. I take it all back."

I don't blame you for wantin' to give me the cold shoulder. I know that I'm a rotten dancer."

"One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street!"

"Here we are! Come on, Billy! Don't sit there gapin' at the signs! Pick up your feet! Can't you look where you're goin'?"

He didn't answer until they were outside and stumbling down the long iron stairway. Then he ventured a protest, though a mild one: "Gee, Min, everybody gave me the horse laugh when you called me for not hurrying. Why a girl always wants to make a fool out of a fellow when he's crazy about her is more than I can understand. But she does. I've noticed lately that the fellows who get by and are shown any respect by girls are the ones that treat 'em like the devil."

"You just try it on me, Billy, and see what a surprise package *you* get!" And her laughter dinned in his ears until his face was suffused in a deep red glow.

They walked in silence until Minnie exclaimed, "My God, Billy, look at *that!*"

§ 2

The Harlem Dance Hall on Second Avenue loomed up before them, its huge doorways festooned in red and blue electric lights. On the sidewalk a crowd of men, women and children pushed close to the swinging doors to catch a glimpse of the festivities within. When a new couple arrived, or when one of the bouncers came storming out, half dragging, half carrying a limp sodden figure which he dumped upon the sidewalk, the crowd sent up clamorous cries of laughter and applause. The swinging doors, opening and closing, disgorged a confusion of sounds, a sudden burst of pounding discordant music. It acted like whips upon the feet of the eager restless

crowd outside. They shuffled noisily. A hum rose from a hundred throats.

As Billy shouldered his way through the crowd, Minnie Flynn caught their eye, and a dozen male voices rose above the chorus crying out: "Oh, you chicken! Oh, you cutie cute! Chase me, boys, my hair is red."

"I'd like to smack 'em in the jaw," Billy whispered when they were caught and held in a human pocket, "they're too damn fresh."

"Oh, they ain't so fresh. They don't mean nothin' by it," answered Minnie, smiling to herself as her ears heard only the flash of many compliments. "Don't try to start anything you can't finish, Billy. I'm in no mood for a scrap tonight."

The crowd surged, split like a drilled rock, and Billy and Minnie (Minnie now laughing and kidding the boys) rushed through the swinging doors. There was an annoying pause while Billy struggled to find the tickets, then the doors closed in back of them and they were immersed in another swarming, loud-voiced crowd that filled the entrance hall. What a glare of bright lights, and how hot and feverish the air seemed after the cool of the night! There swirled around the huge chandeliers a filmy gauze of tobacco smoke which was fast lowering in a dense fog.

At every step Minnie's pulses quickened until her tension was almost painful. As she stood in the slow-moving line to check her hat and coat, her eyes peered among the scrambling figures in search of Jimmy. She saw many important looking ushers wearing large red, white and blue badges. The people seemed to respect them, and make way for them. Think of it! Jimmy was an usher. She wondered what he would say when he saw her there. She was certain of one thing: he would be angry because she had cut the yoke out of her dress. Jimmy was a funny kind of a kid, he had queer ideas.

He seemed to think sisters had to be regular prudes and old maids.

The wail and the crash of the orchestra! The shuffle of hundreds of feet upon the floor! The hysteria of the voices beat upon Minnie's ears until her senses were deadened to everything but the impulse to spring into the heterogeneous mass and become a part of it.

"Billy, for the love o' Mike, hold me and let's get into the dance. I've never been so excited in all my life. Feel as if I was just goin' to blow up!"

They whirled onto the floor and he swung her around and around in dizzying circles to the pulsing rhythm of a waltz.

The cymbals clashed, the drums beat a furious challenge. Encore. Then a shout and a scramble for the benches slapped up against the sides of the dance hall.

Four hours of this procedure passed before the real adventure of the evening came to Minnie Flynn. She was introduced to Al Kessler by Jimmy. "Al," he whispered, "is a movie actor."

Movie actor!

It seemed to Minnie that when Al shook her hand, holding it in both of his, squeezing it, that every girl in the Harlem Dance Hall was looking at her enviously.

"I am certainly pleased to meet the Kid's little sister. I am certainly pleased to meet her," he was saying.

It wasn't what he said but how he said it that made Minnie's hand tremble in his. He had such a low, well-modulated voice, and he laid such stress upon his inflections that it gave the words a personal, caressing quality.

"And some little peach, if you don't object to me speaking out my mind, Miss Flynn. That's the kind of a fellow I am, little girl, I can't hide anything. Frank and aboveboard, no

matter if it gets me into all kinds of hot water. You don't mind, do you, Miss Flynn?"

Minnie couldn't answer. She tried to, but she only moistened her lips with her tongue. She didn't know how to talk to a man who was a movie actor. She felt that he was in a social plane above hers, and for the first time in her life she was unhappily self-conscious. She knew that when she spoke she would lower her voice (it was quite shrill and raucous) until its tones matched the quality in his.

She was also abashed by his style, which was so distinctive that it eclipsed all the varied modes of dress in the dance hall. Al Kessler, not wishing to be mistaken for an usher, had not worn his dinner jacket. (He told this to Minnie five minutes after he met her and she would have given anything to have known what a dinner jacket was. Did he mean a "soup and fish"?) Al wore a black suit, cut with such wide lapels that their tips reached above his shoulders. Instead of the conventional three his coat had one button that was set just four inches below his large cravat pin. Minnie had never seen a collar quite so small as Al's, in girth or height. It wasn't much larger than his green tie, which matched the stripes in his socks. *Silk socks!* They made Minnie ashamed of her cotton lisle. When Al walked, the skirt of his coat flared out. Sometimes it whipped back and revealed a gray silk lining, the monotone of the gray relieved by a broad green stripe. Even at that hour (it was 2 A. M.) his trousers held their crease. He was tall and slender, and rather well-built, looking for all the world like one of the advertisements for ready-made clothing. His features were clean-cut, and when his face was in repose he gave the impression of being rather a handsome, though commonplace type. It was when he laughed, however, that his eyes narrowed with a glint of cunning and his full lips parted over long narrow teeth which

gave his mouth the look of a ferret's. His eyes would have been very attractive had they not been set so close together. Among all the impressions that kaleidoscoped through Minnie's mind as she looked at him the fact stood out that here was a fellow rich enough to have a tailor press his trousers, a gentleman who, one could see at a glance, was entirely too refined to sweat.

What a contrast to Billy MacNally! By twelve o'clock Billy's shirt was wringing wet and his trousers clung to him, limp and creaseless, while he gave out a strong odor of—well, why think of it! Here she was standing face to face with the classiest man in the room. And as she drew in her breath she inhaled the fragrance of heliotrope, Al's favorite perfume, and the acrid odor of bay rum mingled with Sure-Stay pomade.

Al Kessler seemed to sense Minnie's embarrassment and, gentleman that he was, did the talking for her, keeping up a running fire of friendly little compliments. Minnie didn't believe *all* of them. Only when Al turned to address him were they aware that Jimmy had wandered away from them.

"Well, what do you know about that?" he laughed as he circled her arm, "I guess that shows how interested I am in a certain party, I guess that shows you."

"I'm very pleased to of met *you*, too." Minnie almost whispered this, her tenseness relaxing as they sauntered toward one of the deserted benches. She looked shyly at him from under her long black lashes. Minnie wished . . . but what was the use? He probably wouldn't even ask her for a dance.

Minnie was afraid that Billy MacNally would spy them out and break in upon this little meeting. Almost as if he divined her thoughts, Al suggested that they wander away from the crowd and into some corner where they could be alone. The hall was getting hot and stuffy, and he had been

dancing for three hours until he was worn out. Minnie suffered a pang of disappointment. She would have liked to be seen dancing with Al Kessler!

They found a bench. "Come on, Miss Flynn, let's give the dogs a rest for a while. How about parkin' 'em in this nice cozy kennel? How about it, eh?"

"Dogs?" Minnie smiled in bewilderment.

"Sure, dogs, pedal extremities, violin cases,—in other words, feet!"

Little staccato shrieks from Minnie. "Oh, that's the funniest crack I ever heard. Dogs!" Then she sat down on the bench beside him and relaxed completely. She was no longer embarrassed by Al Kessler. She spoke his language.

§ 3

They were there an hour before Billy came to take her home. By that time Al called her "honey" whenever he reached over and pinched her cheek, which was his way of emphasizing a particularly merry quip. He told her that she was one of the prettiest girls he had ever met, and scorned the idea that her red hair was a drawback. Some day, when he knew her more intimately, he was going to show her how to fix her hair, after the fashion of one of the movie queens, a particular friend of his, by the way. Minnie was touched by the interest he showed in her, which was more than brotherly, without being the least bit "fresh."

"Puffs, honey," he said as he stroked her head with his long soft white hand, "puffs are a thing of the past. Really, you'd look like a little queen yourself if you'd only fix your hair simple, in two braids around your head. I'll bet you have a sweet little head, honey, I'll bet you have."

Minnie listened breathlessly while Al told about his life on the stage and in the studios. He enjoyed the telling immensely for no one loved to hear Al Kessler talk better than himself. He drew a graphic and fascinating picture of studio life. He told her intimate details of the lives of the motion picture actresses and actors. He made them all beautiful and clever and extremely wicked. He told of his own work, of how he had left a very successful juggling act in vaudeville to go into the movies, not because he could express his talents as well on the screen as on the stage, but because "the great machinery of movieland was grinding out golden coins and showering them over the earth." He repeated this several times because Minnie seemed to find it so clever and original. He was eager to know if Minnie had seen him on the screen and named several pictures. She had seen two or three of them, but dared not tell him, afraid that she would hurt his feelings; she couldn't remember the parts he had played in them. Al was disappointed, but began at once to describe the rôles he had played, and to tell with elaborate detail how cleverly he had put them over. He never spoke of the characters as Sam, or The Weasel, or The Boy from the Country. They were all "Al's." . . . "*I* come into the room right after the old lady is killed, and *I* kneel down to see if *I* can't do something. And the door opens and the cops come in. And there's where *I* make the big stand and put up the big fight. Gee, honey, what a fight! But of course the story says that *I* have to go to prison. So *I* stall along and let up on 'em and they slip the handcuffs onto me. And off to prison *I* go."

"Oh, how wonderful!" repeated Minnie after everything he told her, "and what happened then?"

"They cut out the best part of the film, that's what they did," answered Al savagely, "they cut out the part where

I break down and go all to pieces and cry and hit my head against the side of the cell."

"Oh, how wonderful! How wonderful to have all that happen to you! Imagine livin' a different story every day, instead of the same old grind. I get sick of life sometimes, it's so rotten slow."

"Oh, life isn't so slow," replied Al Kessler, which gave him the opening to tell Minnie all about his own life. First of all, he had a family who didn't understand him and a father who made his life hell on earth, trying to force him to study medicine when he had this great talent for the stage. He was a born actor. He could remember back to the days when he had the whole schoolroom in an uproar every time he pulled off one of his stunts. And he wasn't only a comedian. He could bring tears to his mother's eyes with his recitations. Why, there was one little thing, "God wanted a baby in Heaven, so He took my little one there," that made her break down every time he recited it. He intoned two verses of it to Minnie. His voice was low, and the droning monotone went straight to Minnie's heart. When Al's voice died to a tremulous whisper, and the last eloquent gesture had been made, Minnie turned her head away from him, ashamed of the tears that had come so easily to her eyes.

"What's the matter, honey, didn't you like it?" he asked, and his voice was silken. "Come on now, little girl, don't walk out on me. That's no kind of an audience, you know."

His arm circled her shoulders, then he drew her toward him. "Why, honey!" he said, "your eyes are glistening. You——"

His eager pride banished all her embarrassment. "Honest, Mr. Kessler——"

"Call me Al, honey."

"Honest, Al, if I could recite that dramatic, I'd leave the

place where I work and try for the stage. I've always been just crazy for the stage. But *my* family's got a lot o' old-fashioned ideas, too. Every time I suggest it they throw cold water on it."

"That's a family all over, honey. But I wouldn't let them worry me if I were you. If you've got talent for the higher art, they can't nag it out of you, or *beat* it out of you! No, by God, they couldn't out of me, though, honey, you can believe it if you want to or not, but there were times when I was so blue and downhearted that I even tried to kill myself."

§ 4

Minnie sat spellbound. Her heart beat violently. How strange, she thought, that they, whose lives had been so much alike, should have found each other. Her eyes glowed with interest. Her head arched on her slender neck. Unconsciously she drew back her shoulders, and as she breathed Al noticed the rise and fall of her small, firm breasts.

A change was coming over Minnie. She felt as if she had just awakened from a long sleep. The past, drab and uneventful, seemed far, far behind. Now the road before shone brilliant with promise. Strange new dreams and latent ambitions laid hold of her. Her eyes mirroring the surge of her emotions sparkled and grew lustrous.

Al, not conscious of what produced the change, nevertheless saw it.

"You—you're a little beaut, honey, that's just what you are, a little beaut!"

"Oh, Al, if you talk like that I'll run away from you."

"Try it and I'll chase you to Hell and gone. That's the kind of a fellow I am, persistent. Glue's my middle name,

honey. You just try to get away from Al Kessler, and watch him stick. Yep, that's the kind of a fellow I am."

A strange new happiness cast its glow upon Minnie Flynn. It was romance. She said to herself: "I'm stuck on this guy already."

Then the shadow that she had been dreading fell upon them.

How common Billy MacNally looked as he stood there, glowering down at them! His old brown suit was the color of rust, his shoes, with their bull dog toes, were shabby. He wore a frayed brown tie, and a coarse cotton shirt. His hands dangled awkwardly from his sides while the detached cuffs slipping over his wrists added a final touch to his grotesque appearance.

Minnie was confused. "Mr. Kessler," she said, "I'd like to have you meet a friend o' mine, Bil—Mr. MacNally."

"Glad to meet you, MacNally. Won't you join us in a little *tête-à-tête*?"

"In a what?"

Minnie blushed with mortification. Billy took Al's hand as if it were a shovelful of hot coals.

"Come on, MacNally," Al urged, "Miss Flynn and I have been having a serious little talk here. We need somebody to liven us up a bit. Don't we, honey?" he said turning his back on Billy and winking broadly at Minnie.

"I've been lookin' all over the place for you," Billy said sullenly, "It's time we was leavin' for home."

"*We*?" echoed Al with a significant glance from one to the other.

"Yes," Billy was aggressive, "*we*. Her and I. We come together and we're goin' away together. Now put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

Minnie turned apologetically to Al and her distress was pitiful as she forced a titter into her voice: "Ain't he the

scream though, Mr. Kessler? He's always tryin' to kid a fellow, and he don't mean a word of it. Do you, Billy dear?"

The "dear" was like a douche of cold water, laying Billy's fever.

"I guess so," he answered lamely, "I guess I was only kiddin', Kessler. At that, it's time to be goin'."

Minnie's hand reached in back of her and dropped the small knitted bag that held her powder-puff upon the bench. Only Al's shifting eyes saw this move, and he knew at once why Minnie had made it. When she bade him a pleasant, though formal good evening, and Billy had condescended to shake hands again, Al watched them walk away, a confident smile turning up the corners of his mouth. He took out a long near-amber holder and stuck a cigarette in it. Then he lighted it slowly, flicking the match after the retreating figures.

When Minnie came back for the little pink bag, they arranged a meeting for the following evening.

"I'll be in front of my house on Ninth Avenue between Forty-eighth and Forty-ninth Streets at eight o'clock," she whispered to him.

"What's the number of the apartment?" he asked, jotting a memo of the engagement in a small red book.

A lie came swiftly to her lips. "My sister's havin' a bunch of friends to the house tomorrow night," she replied. "If you come up there we'll get dragged into the party, and couldn't get away."

"Then you'd rather see me alone?"

"Yeh, I'd rather see you alone."

"All right, honey girl, how will I know the place when I see it?"

"It's The Central. You'll know the house," said Minnie casually, "by the marble entrance."

CHAPTER THREE

§ 1

MINNIE FLYNN marked off a date on the calendar that hung in the kitchen over the sink. It was October 24, 1914.

On that day, she began her career as a motion picture actress. She made three dollars and fifty cents as an extra girl at a moving picture studio in New Jersey, and signed the voucher slip, Mineola Flynn. All this, even to the Mineola, which lent some distinction to the commonplace name of Flynn, was inspired and arranged by Al Kessler.

On that memorable morning, when Mrs. Flynn came into her daughter's bedroom to awaken her at six o'clock, for the first time in her life Minnie sprang out of bed without protest. Mrs. Flynn had already put a quarter in the gas meter, so there was light to dress by. They moved around the room quietly so as not to awaken Nettie.

"I've got good coffee ready for you, Minnie dear," whispered Mrs. Flynn, "and some warmed-up beans."

"Lord, ma, how do you expect me to eat anything? I'm sick to my stummick right now with excitement."

Mrs. Flynn made a grimace of despair. "Look here, Minnie dear," she implored, "how can you *act* if you ain't got a good meal in you? Your pa went out and got them beans himself last night at the delicatessen. He says to me, 'Annie, don't let that child go out of this house, clean over to Jersey, without a good breakfast in her.' So the least you can do, Minnie, is to take a bit if only to please your father."

"All right, ma, dearie, but stop gabbin' about it. I've got to look good and there's no sense in gettin' me all worked up over a plate o' beans."

As she leaned to study herself in the piece of broken mirror, she noticed with fear the ravages of a wakeful night; puffs under her eyes and a dry pallor of her lips. "I'll need two cups o' coffee to steady myself," she said, turning to her mother. "Look at me, I'm a sight! My nerves is all on ends."

Mrs. Flynn, almost as feverish as Minnie, tried to convince her that it was only the overhead gaslight which threw the unbecoming shadows upon her face. "I wouldn't stand there worryin' about it. You'd better begin dressin' right away. Look, dear, I got everything ready for you."

On the chair beside the bed Minnie's suit had been carefully laid out (sponged and pressed the night before by her mother); her dotted Swiss shirtwaist (which Nettie had washed and ironed); and a pair of new tan gloves (Jimmie's contribution). Under the chair were Minnie's shoes (carefully polished by her father). Pete had done nothing, but Elsie came over the night before to loan Minnie her skunk scarf and the lace handkerchief which the girls in the Odds and Ends had given her for a wedding present.

After Minnie slipped off her nightgown she bathed her body, even her legs and feet, in a liberal sprinkling of Carnation Talcum Powder (Elsie also loaned her this accessory, which had been part of her trousseau). The powder gave forth a sickish sweet odor as it caked upon her moist flesh. Mrs. Flynn, who was starting out of the room to set the table so Minnie could have her breakfast served with some style, as befitting a motion picture actress, paused at the doorway and watched her daughter. She spoke with some concern: "You're sure you're tellin' us the truth, Minnie, about goin' to get a job in the movies, and not—not——"

"What's eatin' you, ma? What do you think I'm goin' to do?"

"All these preparations, Minnie. I thought—maybe——"

Minnie's explosive laughter awakened Nettie who raised her crumpled face from the pillow and blinked stupidly. But she wasn't grouchy when she spoke to them. "What's so funny at this hour of the mornin'?" she asked, smothering her yawn.

"Ma's a scream, Net. Just because I'm puttin' on clean underwear in the middle of the week and some o' that talcum powder Els brought me, she thinks me and Al are goin' to run off and get married."

"I didn't say so, Minnie Flynn!"

"Well, you looked it anyhow. And you certainly hinted at it. Where d'you put my new stockings, ma?"

"There in the other room, dearie, I was showing 'em to your pa last night. He thought they was somethin' swell."

"Sure they are," Minnie answered casually, setting the can of talcum back on the washstand and reaching for her shirt. "Al's got good taste. He wouldn't buy a girl nothin' that wasn't up to snuff. Al's not that kind of a fellow. He would of bought me two pair, if I'd of let him."

"They don't look as if they'd last very long, Minnie, they're so thin. I wish I could put a darn in the heels for protection."

"Oh, ma, what's the use of havin' something new if you fix 'em up to look old and wore before you've even had 'em on? Of course I won't. Do you suppose if I undress before a lot of stuck-up acktresses, like Al said I would, that I'd want 'em to see that I got darned stockings on, the first crack out of the box?"

"I should say not!" Nettie chimed in. "Minnie's perfectly right, ma. Just as Al says, you got to put on a little side to make people respect you."

"Well, you know how it worked out, even with Al," came

Minnie to the rapid-fire defense. "I'll bet if we didn't have that chicken stew the night Al come to dinner, and if you and pa hadn't got out your best clothes and Nettie fixed up her hair, he'd never have stuck around me the way he done, and seen to it that I was put on the right track of earnin' a lot o' money."

Money.

That is what had changed the attitude of the whole family toward Minnie. Al Kessler told them that if ever a girl stood a chance of making good in the movies, it was Minnie. He had been around the studios long enough to know how well her features would photograph. He'd get her into that line of work and he was willing to bet (yes, he'd put up real money if any of them wanted to take him up on it) that Minnie, inside of three months, would be earning no less than fifty dollars a week.

Fifty dollars a week!

Minnie, though still in a daze, could remember well the expressions on the faces of her family when Al's fist had pounded out the dazzling sum upon the dining room table. He had concluded with: "Maybe I'm wrong about the fifty bucks a week. But I believe in being conservative. That's the kind of a fellow I am, not given to exaggeration. But I know girls who haven't one half of Minnie's looks" (Minnie blushed and glanced shyly over at the mirror to arrange a stray lock of hair) "that are making today in the moving picture business close to one hundred dollars a week!"

"One hundred dollars a week! Oh, my God!" It staggered Michael Flynn. He repeated the sum several times to himself with the credulity of a child frightened though intrigued by the gross exaggeration of a fairy story.

"Why, that's nothing, Mr. Flynn," said Al easily, "there are actresses in this business that get as high as a thousand

a week. I don't know whether it's true or not, but they tell me that Mary Pickford gets twice that much."

"Gets twice that much!" echoed Michael Flynn, slapping his hands together helplessly. "You can't clear that much a year on a good plumbing business the way things are now. Just think of it. Two thousand dollars. I'll have to tell that new pipe fitter down to our place all about it. Annie, what'll you bet he won't believe me?"

Minnie silenced her father with a look, but his head kept wagging foolishly as he leaned back to listen to further revelations.

Al told them about his own prospects. A clever young juvenile like himself would some day be earning several hundred a week, owning his own car, his own apartment, an extensive wardrobe, including an overcoat with a sealskin collar, gold cigarette cases and a large ring with a diamond set in the yawning mouth of a tiger. It was only a matter of getting in right with one of the directors, or casting directors, or backers of the company, he said. No one in the Flynn family knew what he was talking about, but they wouldn't for anything in the world show their ignorance by asking him to repeat or to explain anything.

He sat with his chair tilted back, his feet on the rungs of Mrs. Flynn's chair, while he talked persuasively. What a striking figure he was in that drab little hole of a room, Minnie thought, as she looked at him through half-closed eyes. He wore a high belted checked suit, a red tie and *spats*. True, Minnie blushed when she first looked out of the window and saw him coming down the street, but it was from fear and not from shame. Rotten neighborhood. Hundreds of dirty, fresh little brats of kids. They had formed a procession and were marching after Al, surrounding him, yelling and gesticulating. For half a block Al pretended that he

didn't see them. He walked, his head up, his eyes straight before him as if the street were entirely clear and he was happily alone. But by the time he reached the doorway of The Central he was mobbed by the children. Their voices rose in such uproar that Minnie's warning threats, as she called from the window, were not heard by them. She saw Al peppered with wads of paper, stones and beans from well-aimed slingshots as he struck right and left with his bamboo cane.

"Oh, you Lizzie-boy! Oh, you Boiled Shirt!" "Hey there, Percy" (pointing to the spats), "Your underdrawers is slip-pin' down." "Oh, you Minnie Flynn!"

The name "Minnie Flynn" rose from a hundred throats like the scream of a siren.

"Damn this neighborhood!" Minnie cried in her shame and humiliation. "Thank God, I got a chance to get away from it."

Al was so nice about it all. He said, without even raising his voice, "Well, what can you expect of those poor, ignorant little devils. I wouldn't hold that against 'em. I'm not that kind of a fellow, Mrs. Flynn. I might have been one of those little kids myself, without a chance."

Mr. Flynn dreaded Al's visits to his home; life was made very uncomfortable for him. He was forced to wear a collar, and keep on his shoes all evening. So it is quite natural that at first he showed a definite dislike for Al. He spoke only once during the first dinner and that was to ask who took care of the plumbing for the movies.

Al laughed as if Mr. Flynn had said something very funny, but as Minnie mentioned it later to her family, Al passed it off like a gentleman by completely ignoring her father's stupidity.

Michael Flynn then lapsed into silence until Al began to

talk about Minnie's chances in the motion picture business. He listened in, first credulous; then, a little resentful. He was surprised to see that already his wife and Nettie were trembling with eagerness as they stared at Minnie while Al pointed out her charms; stared as if they were conscious of her existence for the first time.

"Of course I don't expect you to see it right away," Al cried with enthusiasm, "but look at Minnie's nose!"

"What's the matter with her nose?" asked Nettie while her mother took off her glasses, wiped the lens, put them on again and leaned more closely to make a complete survey of Minnie's features.

"It's Grecian!"

"There ain't a drop o' Greek blood in our veins," said Mr. Flynn with a quiver of indignation. "Only foreign blood is on her mother's side. The rest of us is pure Irish."

"Mama's ma was French," said Nettie.

"But thank God her pa was born in Cork. I don't believe much in mixed races. Am I right, Annie?"

Al paid no attention to Mr. Flynn. "Her nose will be something wonderful on the screen. So straight, and yet it gives the impression that it tips up a little bit. Sassy, that's the word."

Laughter.

"Her eyes——"

"Would her hair look red in the movies?" interrupted Mrs. Flynn, eager to have the interest move to her for a moment.

"Of course not," answered Al, casting a pitying glance at Mrs. Flynn. (Minnie saw that her mother's ignorance was a constant source of annoyance to him.) "Red photographs jet black on the screen."

"But how can her hair photograph black if it's red?" persisted Mrs. Flynn.

Minnie smiled, drawing Al's attention to her, while her right foot reached under the table to her mother's shin. "You started to tell me something about my eyes, Al," she said, "when you was interrupted—as usual."

"Gee, honey, your eyes would look like pansies on the screen. They're so big and dark and soft. I tell you, Minnie, for your own good, you're a fool not to try to break into the game. As I said before, why slave at a rotten job for— for——"

"Nine dollars a week," Minnie supplied hesitatingly. "That's slavery all right, ain't it?"

"It's, well—" answered Al, "if you'll excuse my French, it's just plain hell."

Nettie's pendulous underlip drooped until her face looked like a grinning mask. She rested her chin in the palms of her hands and stared long and earnestly at Minnie.

"So you're pretty sure that Minnie can make a lot o' dough?" she asked.

Al nodded.

"Think of it! Min makin' fifty dollars a week!"

"Probably a hundred, some day. Fifty may only be a starter."

"God, what luck that kid runs into. What did I tell you, Min, only the other day? Born with a horseshoe in your mouth, that's what I said you was."

"Maybe," Minnie said laconically, as she gave her polished nails a final touch-up by rubbing them on the edge of the table. "You can't tell how far I'll go in the movies once I get started."

"No, you can't," echoed Al, "and what's more I'm not going to leave a stone unturned until I see you on your way."

The following Saturday, Minnie gave notice to the manager

of the basement that he must find some other girl to take her place.

§ 2

Al Kessler met Minnie at the Fort Lee Ferry and they caught the seven-thirty boat to Jersey. As they stood in the prow of the boat, the air was so crisp and invigorating that Minnie responded with sparkling life to the beauty of the morning.

White clouds dappled a brilliant blue sky. Great cobalt streamers shuttled across the gray green stretches of the water; long shafts of sunlight made high lights of emerald and cool silver. The flames of autumn had already died, but here and there upon the Jersey Palisades were trees that lay like glowing coals amid gray and blackening ashes.

She was sorry when the boat docked in the slip.

In the hubbub of landing, Al pressed close to her side, guiding her through the crowd, his arm around her shoulder in a proprietary manner. Many people, hurrying past, turned to smile at them. Evidently they were co-workers at Al's studio, because they called out greetings to him, casting side-long glances at Minnie. When one of them winked at Al, she felt the pressure of his hand on her arm, drawing her closer to him. Embarrassed by his attentions, she tried to sidle away, wondering why it was that Al always seemed so much more familiar with her in public than when they were alone. He had never tried to make love to her, and there was nothing suggestive in his overtures. Minnie was wise enough to know that strangers would get a different impression of the situation; yet not wise enough to know that that was just what Al intended.

In the street car on the way to the studio, Al checked off his final instructions to Minnie. More important than any-

thing else she mustn't let anyone know, especially the casting director, Sam Binns, that she had had no previous experience before a camera.

Minnie was yet to learn how dreaded the casting director is, for this man, though his power is primarily negative, is the stepping stone into the "movies."

"Well, little girl, here we are at last," said Al.

Minnie was disappointed in the studio. She wasn't quite sure how she had dreamed this money market would look, but she certainly hadn't expected to find, on a half-acre lot, a ramshackle, rambling old building with several newly added wings.

They passed through the Employees' Entrance, not unlike the one in the department store. Then they walked down a long dark hall until they came to the door of Sam Binns' office.

"You're here now," whispered Al, "don't be self-conscious, and don't make any slips. Sam's a shrewd little guy, and if he gets on to it that you're lying, he'll block your way into every other studio."

"Then why can't I tell him the truth?" Minnie's throat was so contracted that her voice was stifled and thin.

"My God, Min, do I have to go over all that with you again? No! You could have said you were a rank out-and-out amateur a year ago. But it's different now. They're sick of having people come to the studios that don't know anything about the game; that can't act or never saw a camera before. As Sam says, 'There's thousands of people come flocking to the studios every day looking to break into the movies.' He was up in Alaska during the gold rush, and in California when the oil gushers came in, and he says that people are always ready to stake anything on a gamble that lets them in on the ground floor of any get-rich-quick proposition."

Al was beating Minnie down by this rattle of talk, of which she understood little. She tried to silence him with a pressure of her trembling hand on his arm, but to no avail. "They come from every part of the world, he says, old folks and kids, bums, broken-down actors, and restless, married people all crazy to get into this game because they think they're going to dig a fortune out of it with no investment and very little effort."

"Oh, Al, for heaven's sake, shut up, or I'll have to go back. I can't stand it any longer. Let's go in there and get it over with."

Sam Binns had two offices; a large waiting room and his own private office where the aspirants were interviewed.

The waiting room was already filled with men and women of all ages and types, and pathetic, dowdy, overdressed children. Minnie and Al wandered around until they found a bench in one corner of the room, self-conscious because their entrance had attracted a little attention. But as soon as they were seated the others sank back and a deadly silence once more hung over the room. There they sat, their tense, eager eyes fastened upon the door leading into Binns' private office. The silence was broken only when the office boy opened the door and snapped: "Next!" Then they all bent automatically forward, their faces transfigured by mechanical smiles.

One by one they left the room, their ghastly, nervous smiles deepening as they reached the doorway of Binns' private office. No one ever returned through the waiting room, for the inner office contained two other doors. On one was the sign: "Stage and Dressing Rooms"; and on the other: "Exit."

The atmosphere depressed Minnie; the people's faces seemed so gray and colorless. In the overhead gas light they looked to her like sick people waiting at the Free Clinic for treatment.

Even the children were unnatural, sitting there still and wan as wax figures. From time to time a mother would lean over, smooth out her child's dress, pat a spit-curl into place, or whisper instructions. Minnie wondered why the woman next to her repeated over and over again: "Smile pretty at Mr. Binns, darling. Mama'll give you a nice big piece of candy if you're a good little girl. Tell mama what you're going to say to Mr. Binns, Doris."

"Next!"

The mother and child left the waiting room. Before the open door closed again Minnie saw the little girl make an awkward curtsy and heard her say, "'Lo, Mr. Binns, I love 'oo." There followed a pretense of embarrassment from the mother as she playfully remonstrated with the child, but Minnie heard no response from Binns. "He must be a cold-blooded fish," she thought to herself.

"Next!"

An old man tottered into the office. Why, the mother and the child couldn't have been in there more than three minutes. Minnie wondered if that was all the time Binns was going to give her. She felt it hardly a fair test to any woman, though Minnie was certain that Binns would be attracted to her because she was pretty and would appear shy and modest. She would lower her lashes at him as she had done at Al the night she met him at the dance. Mentally she rehearsed every word and gesture. She couldn't fail. Binns was certainly a human being.

§ 3

Sam Binns was a little man, impersonal, intense, and filled with the romance of reality. Most people, thinking him

cynical and hard, feared him. His large dark eyes, schooled by his continual search, easily pierced the many shams presented to him, and he was left disappointed and impatient. He was considered cold, emotionless, without any enthusiasm; whereas, in reality, he was so much the slave of his emotions and enthusiasms when once they were aroused, that in self-defense he refused to let himself be drawn into a response that would trick and disillusion him. All about him in the picture business he saw men indulging in sham romance; false analysis colored to seem real; failure explained away or colored so as to seem success.

Al ushered Minnie into Binns' office. Before the steady, appraising glance of the little man, she forgot all her artifice, and sensed only a keen humiliation. Even Al's braggadocio manner flattened out, and he seemed almost as nervous as she when he introduced her. "Mr. Binns, I've brought a little friend of mine over here this morning. Had some experience, and I thought you'd be glad to give her a chance at this studio. It's her first visit here. She photographs very well as you can see for yourself."

"Name?" asked Binns without seeming to glance up.

"Miss Flynn," answered Minnie.

Binns leaned back in his chair, put his feet upon the desk, and tossed her a card. "Write it down," he said shortly.

"Write what?" asked Minnie, telescoping her words, "do you mean I'm to write my name?"

"Yes—in full."

Minnie wrote with a nervous, trembling hand: "Mineola Flynn."

"Fill out the address."

Minnie started to obey him. She reached to dip the pen in the ink. A huge blot pooled across the card.

Binns smiled.

"Shall I write another one?" Minnie asked, ashamed under his scrutiny.

"No, never mind." Then Binns slunk deeply into his chair and puffed at his cigarette for several moments before he asked her, completely ignoring what Al had said to him. "Had any experience?"

"Yes, sir."

"What studios?"

"The Biograph Studio, and once over to the Vitagraph Studio."

"Ever given a part to play?"

"Yes—*no*, sir. I'm an extra girl."

"I see you are."

Behind the mask of his disconcerting immobility, his keen, incisive mind built up this index: Features good. Eyes will screen well. Posture bad, but figure attractive. Hair negative, will go black and uninteresting. Vain and arrogant if she gets by. She's lying about the experience. But she's better than the average, has possibilities, no intelligence or ability, but if handled right could seem to have them all. She might be a bet, I'll let her get by.

While he was making these mental calculations the ticking of the clock irritated Minnie almost to the point of an hysterical outburst. It was a sudden let-down when he spoke again. "Who's going to help you make up?"

Al stepped forward with something of his familiar poise. "When she gets it on, I'll be glad to look her over, Mr. Binns."

"I thought so."

Al's shifty eyes narrowed at the sting of sarcasm, but he dared make no protest. "Miss Flynn's brought a dress along in case you can use her in the ballroom scene that Bacon is shooting today."

"You're a smart young fellow, Al, but you're a little premature. This time, however, I'll let you get away with it. Show her to Letcher. Tell him I O. K'd her."

He dismissed them with a wave of his hand.

"Burt, call the next one. No, wait a minute! Hal Deane 'phoned over for a woman to play an Irish mother. Got any Irish mothers out there?"

"Three or four of them might make up like it, sir. But Mrs. Riley's coming in this morning about nine."

"That's good, but we better play safe. I'll look the other women over while we're waiting."

He fixed his attention upon Al and Minnie who were still standing there. "What's the idea, Kessler?" he called out, annoyed. "Pick up your things and get out of here. You're cluttering up the office."

"But you told Miss Flynn to fill out the card," Al protested. "I thought you wanted her to do it now."

"Plenty of time for that," answered Binns. "We'll see how she gets along today. We may not even want her to fill out a card. Can't tell. Clear out of here! Can't you see I'm busy?"

§ 4

Al opened the door marked, "Stage and Dressing Rooms", and Minnie left Binns' office without so much as turning back to cast him one of her luring glances. She realized that all efforts to attract Binns would meet with failure. But there was this comforting thought; he must have found her pretty, or perhaps clever, or he wouldn't have given her a chance. She completely discounted Al's introduction; she had seen too clearly how little stress Binns laid upon Al's recommendation.

The dimly lit circular stairway leading to the dressing rooms drummed under a hundred scurrying feet. The walls reverberated with inarticulate voices. Strange faces, stark and white in their make-up, leapt out of the darkness. An atmosphere of ghostly unreality prevailed. It seemed to Minnie as if she were rushing through the chaos of a grotesque nightmare.

They paused outside a door on which there was a sign reading: Extras. Female.

"Here's where you're to make your change," said Al, handing her the paper parcel containing her party dress.

"Come on in there with me," pleaded Minnie, dreading to face a new world of hostile strangers.

"I can't," whispered Al, "it's against the rules. Only the assistant directors are allowed in the dressing rooms. You go in, take your place at one of the tables in front of a mirror, and put the make-up on just the way I showed you. If you get stuck, ask the girl next to you. That is—but maybe you'd better not. You've got to be awful careful who you confide in. The place is full of stool-pigeons and I'm scared to death that Binns'll get on to you."

"What'll I do when I get the make-up on? Shall I come out in the hall again?"

"No, wait there until I get hold of Letcher. He'll go in and look you over. He's Bacon's assistant director."

"Is he anything like Binns?" asked Minnie.

"I should say not," laughed Al, "he's as soft as mush. Big fat slob, just as fresh as he can be but he don't mean anything by it. Put the works on him, and he'll fall for you like a ton of bricks."

"How will I know him when he comes in to see me?"

"You'll know him all right," answered Al. "He's so loud-mouthed you can hear him a city block. But remember, Min,

don't get sore if he puts his hands on you. He likes to squeeze the girls a little bit. But honest, honey, he don't mean anything by it. You'll get used to that around the studios, more or less."

"I hate a fresh guy."

"So do I, honey. That's why I'm putting you wise to everybody in the studio. Binns wouldn't fall for the Queen o' Sheba herself. Bacon's another one of those tough birds. Cold as halibut. Hal Deane—he's the crack director on the lot—he'll single a girl out every once in a while, but he's got to size 'em up a long time before he makes any advances."

Al paused to look at his watch. "You got about fifteen minutes to make up in, honey," he said, falling back into his old patronizing manner. "Now run along and get busy. Don't worry about anything. I'm here to see you through all right."

Al opened the door, gave her a last encouraging smile, then waved her into the dressing room.

The chitter-chatter of twenty girls stopped when Minnie walked among them, looking for an empty place at one of the tables. Afraid of betraying herself, she assumed an indifference which they interpreted as snippiness. She gave a casual nod to the few who looked up and smiled welcome. Then she found a vacant chair and sank down in it with a sigh of relief. She opened her paper parcel and took out the white dress, slippers and stockings. The girls exchanged glances; one pointed to the cheap little dress, another to the cotton lisle stockings, and a third to the slippers.

"Woolworth's," someone said, and a titter ran through the room.

Minnie went mechanically about the business of putting on the make-up, watching out of the corner of her eye the girl on her left. She rubbed off all her face powder with cold

cream, and then applied the thick pinkish paste that Al had bought for her. She darkened her eyelids with a light green pencil. In her nervousness she did it all so jerkily that the only result was a distortion of her features.

The girl next to her had dipped her little finger in a pot of red grease and was making a Cupid's bow by covering her own thin lips. Forgetting Al's instructions that she was to follow only the lines of her mouth, which was small, curving up prettily at the corners, she imitated the girl at her left.

As she brushed out her hair (it was gloriously red and hung to her waist), she sighed, thinking of the sacrifice she must make for Art. How stupid she was to promise Al that she would braid her hair into two simple braids when with a little back ruffing she could transform it into twenty-one puffs.

Her face powdered, she undressed to her chemise. Just as she had taken off her stockings and shoes and was reaching for the white ruffled petticoat that went under the party dress, the door flew wide open and Letcher entered. His voice bellowed out, "Hello, girls!" as he slammed the door shut, and laughing, always laughing, walked in among them. Minnie uttered a cry of dismay and snatching her dress, held it up in front of her. Under the thick white paste she felt the burn of her blush.

But Letcher hadn't seen her. He had his arm around one of the girls, hugging her to him, while she squealed protests—though she seemed to make very little resistance. He let her go only to catch another whom he called "Baby Doll."

"Gee, Baby Doll, you look cute today," and his voice was muffled with laughter. "Give us a kiss, will you?"

"I'll give you a slap in the face," answered the girl, making no attempt to draw away from him. "Gee, you're fresh, Letcher, you're fresh as they make 'em."

"But I'm not a bad guy in spite of it, am I, Baby Doll?"

"No, you bet your sweet life you're not, Letcher. I'd rather have 'em rough like you than a little sneaky skunk like Warner."

Minnie was dismayed by Letcher's easy familiarity. When he walked down the aisle looking at their costumes, their make-up, he seemed scarcely aware that they were half-dressed. Minnie frantically slipped her petticoat over her chemise when his back was turned, but he spied her out before she was able to get into her dress.

"Well, look who's with us!" shouted Letcher, bellowing with laughter again. "Got a new cat in our alley. What's *your* name, sweetie?"

"Miss Flynn," Minnie answered as she made a screen of the white dress and the coat of her suit.

"Hell! What's the idea of the Lady Godiva stuff?" He reached over, caught the dress and pulled it away from her. "Say, listen, kid, I read once in a book that modesty is a bum figure. That needn't worry *you*."

Tears came to Minnie's eyes.

Letcher saw them. "Well, what do you know about that?" His smile suddenly collapsed and an expression of blank dismay took its place. "Well, I'll be—" and he turned defensively to the girls— "What do you know about that?" he repeated with heavy scorn. "I've insulted her! Come on, girls, tell her that she needn't be afraid of me, that I was only kiddin' her."

"Hand me my dress," Minnie demanded, "I'm going to get out of here!"

The girls, whose antagonism had been aroused by Minnie's indifferent manner, laughed uproariously. Their laughter branded her with hot irons. She dropped to her knees,

holding her hands in front of her breasts, which were only half hidden by the low-cut chemise.

"Aw, come now, kiddie." There was a ring of sincerity in Letcher's voice. "The girls will all tell you that I didn't mean anything by it. It's just my way. I'm kind of rough, but that's as far as it goes."

He handed back her dress and turned away so she would no longer be embarrassed. Minnie picked up the towel and started to wipe off the make-up. Try as hard as she could to control them, the tears rolled down her cheeks. The girl who had been sitting next to her leaned over and whispered: "I guess you don't know much about studio life or you wouldn't be so upset by a little thing like that. Come on now, don't be unhappy. You're a pretty kid and you don't want to take this first disappointment too hard. If you don't mind, I'd like to help you with your make-up."

Minnie buried her head in her arms. When she looked up again the tears were gone; her jaw was set. In her face the girl next to her read a keen determination to see it through.

A few moments later, Letcher returned. He saw out of the corner of his eye that Minnie's neighbor had loaned her a protective kimono. "You don't happen to be Mineola Flynn?" he asked, his manner so changed that Minnie felt as if she were in the presence of another person.

Minnie nodded.

"Kessler just told me about you," he said. "Binns thought we might be able to use you today."

Minnie looked up.

"Surest thing you know. You're just the girl we're looking for," said Letcher. "Get your little duds on, and come down to the stage; set number fourteen."

Minnie nodded again, and smiled forgivingly at Letcher. She was willing to sacrifice *anything* for a career.

§ 5

While the girl next to her helped Minnie put on the make-up, Minnie wondered why she was in the movies. She certainly wasn't pretty or even young; twenty-eight if she was a day. But she had a nice wide reassuring smile, a pretty mouth, (now that the Cupid's bow was painted over her thin lips), and straightforward, sympathetic eyes. Her nose was long and pinched; she tried to cover a high forehead by loops of thin marcelled hair. When she spoke her voice was husky. She started to cough and hurried out of the dressing room into the lavatory. Her muffled coughing could be heard through the door.

"Looks as if the old bug's bit Eleanor, all right."

"What bug?"

"T. B."

"What bug?" she asks, can you imagine! What d'you think it was, the kissing bug?"

The gale of laughter that followed left Minnie bewildered and resentful. She was using Eleanor's theatrical powder at the time, and she thought her a very nice girl.

"I'll bet Eleanor hasn't had a kiss since Beauregard threw her over," said Alicia Adams, "but what can you expect at *her* age?"

Alicia was seventeen, a silver blonde, with transparent skin, pink as a seashell. Her pouting mouth gave an immature expression to her small pointed face. Her eyes, large and heavy lidded, were her most noticeable feature. Dreamy eyes, they were called, but no dreams slumbered in them.

They were hard and green-yellow as a cat's; cruel eyes, guided by a cruel animal cunning; often they were lit with a strange, unnatural glitter.

Alicia's voice was soft and well modulated when she spoke. "Poor Eleanor should come to her senses and get out of the game. Doesn't she know that she's through?"

"I'm afraid not," said Mrs. Lee, the character actress, with a wise, sad shake of her head.

"Who's Beauregard got now, Mrs. Lee?"

"A kid he's picked out of the chorus. Funniest looking thing you ever saw. Got her hair cut off."

"Got what?"

"Hair bobbed like a kid's. Dutch cut. I almost laughed in her face the other night when I seen her."

"He doesn't always run to pretty girls, does he?" Alicia, with arched brows, motioned toward the lavatory. She was smiling.

"Ssh, she'll hear you. There's no sense rubbing it in."

The fat character actress wobbled unsteadily to her feet. "I've known Eleanor for years," she said. "When Beauregard picked her up, she was one of the prettiest girls I'd ever seen."

Mrs. Lee's voice always dropped to a confidential whisper when she gossiped. She half covered her mouth with her plump white hand, loaded with old-fashioned rings set with semi-precious stones.

"Eleanor wasn't common looking like the others, but awful refined. And smart, too. I want to tell you she led that old bird a merry song and dance before she came across."

"Ohs . . ." from the girls. Alicia laughed.

"But I'm not criticizing her for it, even if you do, because as I've always said, how on earth is any girl to hold out on a man that spends money the way Beauregard does?"

"I suppose he did give her everything," said Alicia, the glint coming into her yellow eyes.

"But she paid for it, you bet!" This judgment came from Myrtle Song, who was considered a prude by the girls.

"What if she did?" snapped Alicia. "She enjoyed it when she had it. Did he give her an apartment?"

"The classiest little flat I ever set foot in. And girls, you may not think it to look at her now, but I knew the day that Eleanor Grant had *three* nigger servants."

"Three?" they echoed in awed voices, while Minnie Flynn wondered how she had dared be so familiar with her.

"One Christmas that man gave her a diamond and emerald lizard that went clear across her bosom."

"Did she have a car of her own?" asked Alicia, bending forward, her full red lips parted over her little pointed teeth.

"No, but the same as having one. He's got three. Why, the way Eleanor was riding around in cars you'd of thought she owned a garage."

"Is that so?" murmured Alicia. "Think of the luck a girl like that fell into. But he always throws his dames over, don't he?" She glanced into the mirror, wondering if a man like Beauregard would admire her type.

"Poor devils," said Mrs. Lee, "but I've seen them come and go in my day. Some women are weak enough to take their own life; they can't stand the hard knocks. They could if they had faith though. That's why I advise you girls to cling to your religion like I've done. God is the only friend we can ever be sure of, girls." And Mrs. Lee's eyes filled with tears. "It makes my heart ache to hear her," she said. "She ought to be in the Adirondacks instead of hanging around the studios trying to get on her feet again."

Myrtle Song told them that Weaver, who was Hal Deane's new assistant, had promised Eleanor a good part in "David

Copperfield," the next picture, if they made it. He said that she was just the type for the Marchioness.

"Maybe he was only kidding her. Weaver's full of bull when he's got something up his sleeve," said Alicia, bitterly.

"Say, you'd think it was up to him to pick out the people to play the parts. You know what a fat chance *he's* got to make the final selection for Deane."

"What'll you bet that Eleanor isn't staking him to a little cash on the side?"

"She's doing worse than that," said Mrs. Lee with pious unction. "I hope none of you girls will ever lose your heads like poor Eleanor."

Minnie strained forward, afraid of missing a word of this enlightening conversation, which she regretted was at times unintelligible.

"When Beauregard got sick of her," Mrs. Lee droned monotonously, "she didn't have sense enough to listen to good advice, though I did my best to influence her. I said to her, 'Strike him *now* for a tidy little bankroll, for it's been my experience that when a man's ready to quit he'll be glad to settle any amount on you to get rid of you.' But no, Eleanor wouldn't take any sensible person's advice. She tried to hold Beauregard by spending everything he'd given her on clothes and parties, and you know how some girls carry on—hysterical and everything. Of course the more they cry the more a man hates them. She used to talk freely to me then as I was the only one the poor child could ever trust."

Minnie was nodding her head seriously, afraid that she might forget one golden word of this advice. What a fine, big-hearted woman Mrs. Lee was, Minnie was thinking, as she

watched that placid face lifted by smiles, those kindly eyes rolling upward.

"Did everything collapse at once when Beauregard threw her over?" asked Alicia.

"They had an awful row over some other girl, then Eleanor cleared out. She told him he could go to the devil, that she was already started on her career and nothing could stop her."

Mrs. Lee paused impressively, looking from one girl to another.

"What do you think that poor little fool did, in spite of my advice?" she asked them.

A moment of suspense.

"She cleared out and left him without a coat on her back or a cent in her stocking."

"Well, you'd never think Eleanor was so dumb to look at her, would you?"

"You can't judge a girl by her forehead, Alicia. A high forehead don't mean brains, you know!"

"Gee, what happened after that?" cried Minnie, suddenly breaking the long, contemplative silence.

They all started.

"I beg your pardon, dearie, have we ever been introduced?" asked Mrs. Lee in a honeyed voice, rising and ambling over to her. "I don't seem to have met you before."

"My name is Minnie Flynn—Mineola," she corrected quickly.

"How do you do?" said Mrs. Lee, her face pocketing into a smug, fatuous smile. "I'm Evangeline Lee, you've probably heard of me. I'm very pleased to meet you."

"Thank you," almost inarticulately from Minnie. "I'm very much obliged to you."

"Don't mention it, Mineola. You're a new girl in this studio, aren't you?"

"Yeh, it's my first day here. But I've been other places," she added hastily.

"Friend of anybody?" asked Mrs. Lee, taking Minnie's slender hand in her soft, plump one and stroking it in a kind but patronizing manner.

"Yes, I am," answered Minnie with a touch of pride. "Mr. Al Kessler is a particular friend of mine. He brought me here."

"Al Kessler!" shrieked Alicia, and his name rose to a dozen throats. "So Al's your particular friend, is he? Well, that's nice, ain't it, girls? I'll bet you thirty dollars he told her that she'd be a raving beauty on the screen. Who'll take me up on it?"

"I'll bet fifty dollars he told her he was the white-haired boy in the studio and he'd get her in right with Binns. Didn't he, Mineola?"

Mrs. Lee put her arms protectingly around Minnie's shoulder.

"You girls make me tired," she said in her soft, kind voice. "You're always trying to kid somebody. Al Kessler may not be the most popular fellow in the world but he's a clever kid."

"Oh, Al Kessler," the girls were still whispering, "wouldn't that make you laugh?"

Minnie sat there, hating them, yet fascinated and longing to be accepted on an equal footing by them. She was relieved when Eleanor came back into the room. She already looked upon her as a friend and sensed her protective interest.

Eleanor, walking unsteadily, reached for the corner of the dressing table.

"You'd think I had whooping cough to hear me go on," she said as she sank onto the bench, "when all I've got is just a little tickling in my throat—a touch of bronchitis."

The girls exchanged significant glances, but no one spoke. Minnie didn't know whether the silence was cruel or kind. She wanted to break it but could think of nothing adequate to say.

The entrance of Mrs. Skerrit, the wardrobe woman, came as a great relief for in the scramble that followed Eleanor was forgotten.

"Who gets the riding habit?" Mrs. Skerrit asked.

"I do," Alicia took it and held it up. "I'll bet it's a lousy fit," she said, and all the girls laughed. "Lousy" was a new word in the vocabulary of the moving picture people. They all thought it a splendid, expressive appellation, so it had traveled from one studio to the other.

Mrs. Skerrit paid no attention to her.

"Who wears the Spanish costume?"

"I do. Got a comb and lace thingamajig to go with it?"

"You mean a lace mantilla to drape over the comb? Yes, I've got it here. Don't snatch, please."

Minnie watched with childish longing as Mrs. Skerrit distributed the costumes. There was a beautiful satin bridal gown embroidered with pearls, and Minnie's hand reached out to touch it, lingering on its delicate surface.

"Do I get a costume, too?" she asked Mrs. Skerrit. "I'd be glad to wear anything that you'd pick out for me."

Mrs. Skerrit's eyes opened with amazement.

"What do you mean, child, you'd wear anything?"

"Oh, nothin'," answered Minnie, realizing she had made a mistake, "only they're much prettier than any costumes I've ever seen."

A snicker rippled around the room.

"I guess we've got somebody's number," said Alicia pointedly, "that's all right, dearie, nobody's going to tip it off. We'll let you get away with it."

But three of the girls made up their minds to tell Binns, convinced absolutely that it was their duty. Minnie was too pretty!

§ 6

Al Kessler, waiting outside the girls' dressing room, paced up and down impatiently. He was attired in conventional evening dress. But he wore a bright yellow shirt and collar which puzzled Minnie. Al explained that white was not used under the banks of lights in the studio because white caused a noticeable halation on the film.

"Take that dress of yours," Al said, "by way of illustration. It's lucky that it's yellow with age or they'd call you off the set. At that, I'm afraid when they give you the 'once over' they're not going to like it very much. It's not what you'd call the classiest looking thing I've ever seen. I thought I told you, honey, to bring your best duds along."

"I guess I didn't understand you," said Minnie, who, though tired of this incessant lying, was trying to carry out Al's advice to her, "Never put all your cards on the table." "I should of brought one of the others, I guess, but you know why I wore this, don't you, Al?"

Al didn't answer. He was thinking that perhaps he had made a mistake in bringing Minnie. She looked all right in the Harlem Dance Hall but among those well-dressed girls at the studio she was embarrassingly out of date; cheap. Angry at his own poor judgment he was willing to put the blame on her so he smiled contemptuously and shrugged his shoulders.

"This is the dress I wore the night we met, Al," she said, forcing a lukewarm sentimentality.

"That's so. So it is. Well, I'd put it away in moth-balls if I were you, honey, and keep it for a souvenir."

Minnie stared at him for a moment, then flung at him: "Listen, Al, that kind of stuff don't go very far with me. I'm onto you. I know what's the matter. You're ashamed of me. You're ashamed of the way I look. You think I'm a fright."

Al was a little disconcerted. "Fishing," he said with forced pleasantness, "but I've got no time for that now, honey. Come on. We might as well go down and have Letcher look you over."

"I can't come now. I've got to wait for somebody."

"Who, for heaven's sake?"

"Eleanor Grant. She was awful nice to me, Al. Loaned me a lot of things. She said if you didn't have time she'd introduce me around the studio."

Al welcomed the chance to escape.

"Eleanor's a great girl," he said. "She can do the honors better than I can, honey, so I'll toddle along as soon as she gets here."

When Eleanor opened the door and came out into the hall Minnie gasped. She thought she had never seen anything so beautiful in all her life. A green velvet dress was draped gracefully over her thin body. Décolletée, the bodice was held up by straps of rhinestones. Rhinestones sparkled in the hollow of her throat. Rhinestones swayed like pendulums from her ears. Set low on her forehead a wide band of rhinestones and pearls held in place a spray of black aigrettes. On her hands were many rings, imitation pearls and opaque diamonds the size of canary eggs. She carried a jewel-handled

feather fan which she waved gracefully back and forth. Minnie thought the jewels were real.

"My God, Eleanor," she exclaimed, "you're the swellest lookin' thing I ever seen."

"Miss Grant looks very charming this morning," said Al, pointedly. "She looks very charming. But for that matter she always does."

"Thank you very much," answered Eleanor. "My dress is nice, though it's just a simple little thing."

"Well, folks, I'll breeze along now. I've got to stop at the wardrobe for one of those accordion pleated opera hats."

Minnie's eyes were staring with wonder at Eleanor. . . . *Her own dress!* When they walked downstairs where all the others were what a contrast she would be to Eleanor. How people would laugh at her! Frightened by this thought she tried to stop Al, but he was already hurrying in the other direction.

"Al's a skunk," said Eleanor quietly, who had seen at once that he was ashamed of Minnie. "Come on, dearie, don't let it worry you, there's better fish in the sea."

They hurried through the long alleyway until they reached the door on which was the sign: Stage. Keep off unless working on the sets.

"We must find Letcher the first thing," Eleanor explained. "He'll have to check us in."

Minnie followed the gorgeous figure through a maze of half-completed bedrooms, drawing rooms, kitchens, sweat-shops, to most of which only three walls stood, and very often but two.

§ 7

The confusion was terrific. The studio reverberated with the pounding of many hammers, the scurry of footsteps,

voices . . . and far off, merging into the babble of sounds, the whining strains of music. Then above this tangled obbligato there arose a long shrill whistle. Instantly the hammers, voices, footsteps and music ceased. Eleanor gripped Minnie's arm to keep her from stumbling over a heavy cable stretched across the floor from the switch blocks to the bank of lights. A hissing sh-shush carried its echo. Then silence. Crashing into this came a roaring voice through a megaphone.

"Everybody working on Bacon's set get a move on!"

"That means us," whispered Eleanor, "we've got to hurry a bit. Follow me."

Minnie had seen many ballrooms on the screen so the sight wasn't unfamiliar when they stepped in full view of the set. There were the musicians in the balcony behind the palms. There were the four butlers. (Minnie had remembered there were always *four* butlers in the movie homes of the most refined rich.) There were the men in swallow tails, and the women nearly naked above the waist.

Minnie was thinking that it wasn't a very good floor to dance on, as they paused for a moment, their way blocked by a group of men who were moving the platform on which straddled the three-legged camera.

"What's that thing for?" she whispered.

"Pull a boner like that and they'll sure get onto you," warned Eleanor. "It's the camera."

"It don't look like one," said Minnie, who had noticed a display of kodaks in a shop window only the night before.

"Take a good look at it," said Eleanor. "It's like a living thing. Do you know why? Because it can be your best friend or your worst enemy. God, but it's cruel."

She talked about the camera in such dread tones, about its power to make you or destroy you, with what diabolical

cruelty it shows up every little defect in your face, how it catches every hidden thought and reveals it upon the screen, that she personified it so that Minnie felt a growing awe for it. She looked up into the steel face as it leaned over her and saw its cold unblinking glass eyes looking down, passive in its terrible power.

"You don't have to be afraid of it now," concluded Eleanor, seeing a shadow of fear fall upon Minnie's face. "You haven't any telltale lines yet. Wait until you're my age, sick and thin and discouraged."

The platform was moved out of their way so they hurried on to join the eager group pressing around Letcher. Letcher wasn't laughing now. He was working furiously, the sweat standing out on his brow as he checked over the names of the people who were to work in the set.

"Grant!" he called. "Grant! Where the hell is she?"

"Here I am. What's the idea of yelling like that?"

"Beg your pardon, Eleanor. Didn't see you. You're not to get any number. Bacon will probably pick you out to do a bit."

Eleanor was placated.

"Oh, there you are, little one," to Minnie. "Stand out so I can give you the double O."

With confused alarm Minnie edged away from him.

"Stand out as I told you. How do you suppose I'm going to look you over if you hug the wall?"

He motioned for her to turn around, and she mechanically obeyed him, feeling like a rat in a trap. He drew his brows together, puckered his mouth into a long whistle. At last he spoke.

"What are you made up for, girlie, a Sunday School picnic?"

Giggles; and Al Kessler was seen slinking behind a large pillar.

"Say, who told you to come down in that outfit? This is a classy ball at a Duke's house! Can you imagine a society dame wearing an outfit like that? If Kessler told you to bring your wardrobe he certainly gave you a bum steer. If I was you I'd lay him out for it. Sorry, we can't use you today."

Eleanor stepped forward. "Don't put her out, Letcher," she protested. "I've got a dress upstairs that I think will do."

Minnie pressed her hand gratefully.

"All right, then, get a wiggle on! Bacon's coming on the set in five minutes."

They rushed back into the now deserted dressing room. Minnie's distracted breathing sounded above the rustle of paper as Eleanor opened the box.

"Here it is, a spangled gown with a train," cried Eleanor. "Do you think it will do?"

Minnie wanted to laugh. She wanted to cry. "Oh, my God," she was saying, "if it hadn't been for you I'd of—" She was hysterical with relief.

"Don't worry about that now, we've got no time to lose. Bacon's an old crank. Heavens, you can't wear this gown over that chemise, it comes up too high on your neck."

Desperately, "It's all I got."

Eleanor tossed her one of hers, a pink silk slip. "Put that on," she ordered peremptorily, "and hand me your slippers. I'll black them while you're getting into the dress."

It was the first time Minnie had ever worn silk next to her body and when she drew it on she quivered at the feel of its clinging softness.

"I'm all goosefleshy," she said, "I'm that excited."

Eleanor almost ruined the slippers but the dress was long enough to cover them.

"We'll stop at the wardrobe room and ask Skerrit for some jewelry and a fan," she said as she drew Minnie toward the mirror.

The reflection in the mirror dazzled Minnie. How white her shoulders rose above the low cut V. How becoming was that fullness of half-revealed breasts.

"I don't blame you standing there gaping at yourself. You sure look like a different person."

The train was difficult to manage. When Minnie carried it over her arm she was conscious of her mottled slippers; when it swished after her it whipped the floor like the broken wing of a bird.

Mrs. Skerrit gave her a string of pearls the size of moth-balls and fastened to her ears large jet pendants. Then she handed her a black ostrich fan.

"You look rich enough to be Mrs. Vanderbilt, herself." It was Mrs. Skerrit's favorite phrase. It meant that she had taken a fancy to Minnie. She liked them bright and eager and appreciative, though she knew Minnie would soon get like the others, bored and ungrateful.

Fortunately for them Letcher hadn't finished checking over the extra people when they returned.

"Well, what do you think of her?" Eleanor said triumphantly, turning Minnie around so Letcher could see her every curve.

Minnie waved her fan and arched her neck in imitation of Eleanor.

Letcher whistled approvingly.

"O. K. for me," he said, giving Minnie's arm a pleasant squeeze. "Some chicken, I'd say. All white meat."

Minnie was the only one who laughed. The others, that is the pretty ones, had heard this before. They knew exactly what would follow. Minnie would not get a number which would herd her in with one of the groups, but she would be set aside with the favored few for Bacon to choose from. So they exchanged glances when Letcher said:

"Don't want to separate you two girls, so, Miss Flynn, you go over and sit on the bench with Eleanor. Bacon will look you over later."

Minnie smiled with a fresh assurance and when she walked, following Eleanor, she tilted her head and drooped her eyelashes. Under their lowered veil she could see the other girls staring after her in jealousy mingled with admiration.

To think that she, Minnie Flynn, late of the Odds and Ends, was in the movies!

§ 8

When Bacon came on the set Letcher blew his shrill whistle again. Silence clapped down upon the stage. All the people stood there rigid, tense, their eyes on Letcher as he raised the huge megaphone.

"Places," he bawled. "*Ones*—to the stairway."

Instantly there was a stir in the crowd and those given the number one scurried to the stairway.

"*Twos*—take your places on the floor." The twos moved swiftly to the positions given them.

"Where do we come in?" whispered Minnie, her heart pounding.

"Wait till the numbers are given out. He'll tell us where to go."

"*Threes*—beat it to the lobby."

Minnie shivered as if a cold blast of air had swept around her. How white and stupid the people looked, their eyes glassy under the hideous blue-green lights. They were staring for all the world like the pigs' heads that decorated Hesselman's butcher shop during the holidays.

"*Fours*—get off the set and be ready to come back when you're called."

Then Letcher turned to the group which included Minnie, Eleanor and Al Kessler, who had slipped among them without having been noticed.

"Come toward the platform, you!" he shouted, beckoning. They walked solemnly toward the platform. Bacon mounted it and all but Minnie bowed and smiled with forced animation when he nodded good morning.

"That's Bacon," prompted Eleanor, "for heaven's sake, don't stand there like a dummy."

Minnie was bewildered. She glanced swiftly at the others to see what they were doing. They were still smiling. She smiled, too, very nervously.

Bacon was looking right at them. He nodded to Eleanor. He had been compelled to take her as leading lady in one of the pictures he had made for Beauregard. The picture suffered as a result and Bacon was criticized for the stupid mistake of miscasting the leading rôle; the public, even the press, know so little of what goes on behind the scenes, what elements of petty politics and love affairs enter into the making of a picture!

Bacon had borne a keen resentment against Eleanor, though at heart he was not an uncharitable man. He thought he was being magnanimous when he gave her extra work in his pictures now.

"Eleanor, you're looking very well today," he said in a

flat, meant-to-be-kindly voice. "I'll pick you out to be one of the three women on the reception committee. You're to stand at the foot of the stairway and meet the guests as they come down."

"Letcher," he said, turning to his assistant, "speak to me later about a close-up of Eleanor."

"Yes, chief," Letcher replied, making a note of it in a thumbd manuscript.

Eleanor, inspired with new hope, glided away from them, lazily waving her fan.

Bacon was looking at Minnie now.

"Who's this girl?" he called to Letcher without taking his eyes off Minnie. "Has she worked for me before?"

"No, chief," answered Letcher. "A good little type, don't you think?"

"Not bad."

"Thought you might want to single her out for a bit. The kid's clever they tell me."

Minnie fluttered before Bacon's hypnotic gaze like a helpless bird.

"Can you dance?"

She caught herself just in time from saying, "Bet your sweet life I can. . . ."

"Yes, chief," she answered, addressing him with the same marked respect shown him by Letcher.

Bacon smiled and chewed on his heavy blond mustache.

"Very well, young lady. Sit down on the bench over there. I'll call you when I need you."

Minnie imitated as best she could the manner in which Eleanor had bowed, then she sidled out of the scene, slowly waving her fan. She, too, was triumphant.

"Who let that little ass in here?" Bacon asked as soon as she had gone beyond hearing.

"I had nothing to do with it, chief." Letcher's eyes were shifting restlessly and he mopped his brow with his handkerchief. "On my honor I didn't. Binns sent her to us."

"Binns has got to quit foisting a lot of inexperienced idiots on me. I won't stand for it."

"They say she photographs like a dream," insisted Letcher, afraid the blame might fall upon him. "I didn't want to overlook a bet for you. That's the only reason I called her out of the crowd."

"And gave her a little extra squeeze, I suppose. Don't try to pull the wool over my eyes, Letcher, or pass the buck. You're as transparent as glass."

"Yes, chief."

Here Al Kessler stepped forward with elastic step. "Good morning, Mr. Bacon," he said effusively. "Anything I can do for you today?"

"Yes, keep out of my sight!" stormed Bacon.

"Very good, sir," answered Al, undaunted, delighted to be the center of interest no matter how he earned the distinction.

Bacon turned to Letcher, snapping his fingers at each order. "Get everybody ready for rehearsal. Send Bill out for more cigars. Have this lousy new leading lady we've got cued to be on the set in ten minutes. We've got to get started early this morning. I want to clean up all the ballroom scenes by tomorrow night."

Letcher's fat face was most ridiculous in repose, and when he walked it quivered like a bowl of jelly. Minnie smiled at him flirtatiously when he passed by but he paid no attention to her; he was afraid Bacon was watching him.

A rehearsal began which seemed endless and stupid to Minnie. Letcher bawled the numbers through a megaphone while the extra people moved like uninspired automatons,

carefully following every direction. Some walked down the stairs while others crossed the dance floor; a group fluttered in from the lobby; another group moved toward the exits. They talked or laughed only when the megaphone ordered them to.

And Letcher was behind the megaphone!

What an important person Letcher was, Minnie thought when she saw how blindly everybody obeyed him. She didn't notice that Bacon was sitting back placidly smoking a cigar and guiding Letcher's every move. How proud she was to think that Letcher had singled her out from among all the pretty girls there. Minnie had seen that at once, so it was clear to her she must 'play up to him.' She wished he weren't such a fat, ungainly creature, but were slim and handsome like Al Kessler. She sighed at the thought of Al, but she saw through him now, with his cheap sentiments, tawdry and insincere.

Now they were rehearsing with music.

"Get them to talk! To laugh! My God, are they dead?" growled Bacon. "What in hell's the matter with the music?"

Letcher sprang to the platform. "Talk! Laugh! My God, are you dead!" he bawled. "Music! What in hell's the matter with the music!"

As if touched by electric switches they leapt into action. The organ whined and the violins screeched. Hollow laughter and meaningless chatter came from their lips.

"Very good," called Letcher after he caught the nod of approval from Bacon. "Now choose your partners for the dance!"

Al Kessler, so much more animated than the others, scurried among them, keeping well in the foreground.

"Don't be a lens-hog, Kessler," yelled Letcher.

Minnie didn't know what a lens-hog was but she realized

that Al was being called down. She was glad because it fitted in with her new estimate of him. "I'll bet he feels like thirty cents," she said to herself, but she didn't know Al.

The partners were chosen and the extra people danced. Rotten dancing, Minnie thought, because Bacon didn't let them sway their bodies or hug shoulder to shoulder. He bawled them out, saying that they were supposed to be dancing on Fifth Avenue instead of Sixth. He made the men hold their partners away from them as if they were afraid of catching the measles. Minnie was disgusted, and glad she wasn't called upon to dance. She told the girl next to her she'd hate to be seen stalking around the floor like that. Dancing wasn't anything unless one body fitted in closely with another.

Over and over and over again they rehearsed the dance until she could see their limbs were aching from the strain.

Then Bacon called out, "Let's shoot!"

"Shoot what?" Minnie turned to the girl next to her, her eyes round with excitement.

"Shoot the scene," answered the girl, stifling a yawn. "It's about time. Keep this up and they'll never get to us. That's always my luck."

"Places!" shouted Letcher. "This is the picture."

How frightened they all looked as they grouped together, then scrambled back to their positions! Letcher blew three times on his shrill whistle and there was again silence. Then Bacon rose, took off his coat, carefully laid his cigar on the edge of the table and reached for the megaphone.

"*Lights!*" he called.

There was a sharp, staccato splutter which died away in a hissing sound as the hard, dead-white lights came on, striking the eyes like a physical blow.

"*Music!*" The orchestra opened with a crash of cymbals,

and there was a restless movement of the crowd like race horses at the barrier.

"Camera!"

The cameraman who had been waiting for the signal squinted into the camera for his last focus; then the grinding off of film could be heard as he turned the crank.

"Ones!" shouted Bacon. "Moving quickly! Pick up your feet, ones!"

"Twos! What're you stalling for, twos?"

"Twos! What're you stalling for?" echoed Letcher, running breathlessly on the outskirts of the set, ordering, cursing, prodding the laggards into action.

Bacon was growing more frantic every moment. "Choose your partners for the dance," and his voice roared above the confusion.

"Music! Louder!" he cried. "Kessler, get the hell out of the foreground. . . . *You*, you with the blond hair! Don't look into the camera . . . dance! Put some pep into it, some spirit! Hey, there, Eleanor. Those boys standing over there by the stairway. Get rid of them!"

He was now leaping upon the platform shouting in a frenzy.

"Laughing! Talking! Having a hell of a good time!"

"Having a hell of a good time!" echoed Letcher. "Ha-ha-ha! That's it! Ha-ha-ha!" with forced laughter that was terribly grotesque.

§ 9

Then something happened. . . .

No one noticed when Bacon gave the signal to Bill, the property man, or saw the latter wave a handkerchief to one of his carpenters. That is why they were unprepared for what followed.

"Keep up your dancing and laughing!" yelled Bacon to whip up their wearying feet. "Music! Laughter!" with irritating persistence. "Laughter! Louder!"

The carpenter hidden behind one of the painted drops raised a forty-four, cocked it and at the signal from the property man fired off half a dozen blank cartridges. The explosion in that closed space was terrific, and for one moment pandemonium broke loose. Women screamed. The dancers mobbed together. . . . Then they stopped still, rigid, electrified with fear.

Down the stairway rushed the leading woman with hair and gown disheveled, wild screams tearing out of her.

"Rush to her! Surround her!" bawled Bacon, jumping up and down the platform, raging. "You blockheads! You idiots! Don't look this way or by God I'll——"

Frothing, inarticulate, he swung the megaphone into the crowd as they stood there, frozen in wonder and bewilderment, gripped by a fear they could not understand.

"Lights out!" shouted Letcher. "Stop the camera! Back to your places, you blockheads! You idiots!"

Minnie had fled to the far end of the stage at the explosion. She returned when she saw the workmen going methodically back to their usual tasks, and crept up to the platform to find out what had happened. She wasn't one who suspected a trick on Bacon's part to force realism artificially into the scene.

Still cursing, Bacon paced the platform. He might have known he couldn't expect anything from those sheep, he was ejaculating. What a fool he was to be wasting his time!

Binns and the director-in-chief of the studio, Hal Deane, who were watching the scene from the background, now stepped forward. Both were smiling enigmatically.

"Did you see that?" Bacon roared. "Tried an experiment

and it failed as usual. I should have known better than to expect intelligence from that crowd. They've got no intelligence."

"How can *you* judge that?" came very quietly from Deane.

Bacon snorted. "They've got no heads, I tell you. Even their instincts are tricky. I wanted to get a scene of real panic. Thought if I rehearsed them the whole thing would look mechanical and spiritless. What did they do when they were faced with something that scared hell out of 'em? Stood like sheep. Never budged. Faces frozen. That's how much sense they've got!"

"It's not their fault," Deane began in quiet defense. "It's your own for expecting anything else. They've always been taught to obey; every gesture—every expression—every step is laid out for them. If they dared disobey orders they were called for it. Called hard. Fired! Then you stick a bomb under them and expect them to do just the opposite of all their training. Of course they freeze right where they are. Scared stiff. If you were in their places you'd do the same."

Binns, walking among the extra people, passed Minnie. He stopped, recognizing her in spite of her elaborate disguise.

"Well, what do you think of it all?" he asked her, a little curious to see if she would confess any sincere impressions.

"Oh, I don't mind it," she tried to answer casually. "I'm used to it."

The lie antagonized him for a moment, then he shrugged his shoulders indifferently. Poor little kids, he was thinking to himself . . . no background, no education. . . . So ready to sacrifice pride, independence, honor, so willing to prostitute themselves for the cheap return of easy money and personal popularity. Pretty faces and empty heads. A few that got on because they were clever. Most of them riding to success on the tide of public whim . . . always the victim,

the tool of the more intelligent minds who were responsible for their success. They succeeded when success was doled out to them and failed when their producers failed them.

Thinking of all this he spoke kindly to Minnie. "You make up very well," he said. "I'll try to use you again."

"Oh, thanks awfully, Mr. Binns."

"Don't thank me. You may regret the circumstances that brought you here." (Which Minnie thought was a foolish thing for a man to say, especially one whom Al had cracked up as knowing so much.)

She watched his retreating figure, shoulders hunched up, hands in pockets, his hat cocked on the back of his head over his obstinate black hair. Funny little man he was but she was glad he had taken such a fancy to her. What with Letcher and Binns (and Bacon wasn't entirely unmoved by her or he wouldn't have placed her among the extras chosen for individual work), she was bound to find it easy sailing in the "movies."

§ 10

The afternoon brought no definite advance to Minnie. Bacon succeeded only in getting to his satisfaction what he called his "big scene," while Minnie sat all day long, waiting to be called. The interest of watching didn't hold her very long; she was too restless and eager to take part.

Twice Al Kessler drifted over and made overtures, only to be repulsed. He was really pleased to be seen in her company now that the clothes she came in were hidden in the dressing room.

"You certainly look sweet, honey, you certainly look sweet," he murmured in his most caressing tone. "I'm glad Eleanor fixed you up the way she did. But if she hadn't, you can bet I would of done it. I certainly would of, honey."

Minnie wanted to imitate Alicia's disdainful expression as she answered, "I've accepted all I'm goin' to from you, Al Kessler, and I want you to know you showed yourself up for what you was this morning." Then with undisguised triumph as she turned to walk away from him, "I guess I can make some friends without your help, Mr. Kessler, I ain't poison ivy."

While Bacon was rehearsing the leading woman, Eleanor slipped away from her tiresome post by the stairway and sought Minnie.

"Am I getting on, Eleanor?" Minnie asked eagerly. "Do you think I got a chance here, with Binns so nice to me?"

Eleanor nodded. She had been through enough to make her bitterly cynical. "Play them for all they're worth, Minnie," she advised, "and give them *nothing*. You don't have to, and you can get away with it. I mean," she added, "the small fry. Of course it's different with the big ones. They're worth landing, especially if they've got something that you want. Gee, if you could only get a fellow like Hal Deane interested in you. Or Binns. They'd treat you decently. I've heard it rumored that Binns is going West to be the studio manager of a big new organization."

"Al Kessler told me to put the works on Letcher, Eleanor. I've certainly done it, too."

"I see you have. But that's just what I'm advising you against. Letcher is a four-flusher. He's just old Bacon's echo and Bacon's got no real confidence in him. You can't go very far with a fellow like that. He belongs to the little fry I'm talking about."

She kept repeating with irritating persistence, "Play for the big ones. That's the best advice I can give you. Somebody's bound to come along when you're young and pretty."

"Don't any of the girls make good by themselves?" asked Minnie.

"Sure they do," replied Eleanor, "lots of them. But that's the hardest way around. Sometimes you work years and don't get half as far as some other girl who's wise enough to cop off a fellow with a big job in the picture business."

"But if you've got talent as an acktress," persisted Minnie, her mind flashing back to the time when her imitations of people on the stage had amused the girls at the Odds and Ends.

"I don't like to seem conceited, but everybody says I'm cut out for the stage, Eleanor. I've acted all over the place ever since I was a kid. Like Mary Pickford," she added. "I was readin' in a movie magazine only the other night how Mary Pickford began her career when she was five years old. She didn't need a pull to get on, did she?"

"Sure she didn't. But how many Mary Pickfords are there? Thousands of girls in the moving picture business—and only one Mary."

"Gee," said Minnie after a long, thoughtful pause. "It sure is different than I thought it would be. In some ways it's a lot nicer. In others it scares me skinny. It's an awful complicated business, ain't it?"

They were standing in a draft which made Eleanor cough, an ugly strangling cough.

"Gee, Eleanor, can't you do something for it?" Minnie asked as her arms held the racking shoulders. "Don't you think it would help if you kept a Smith Brothers in your mouth all the time?"

"It's nothing much," Eleanor reassured her, "but it's rotten to have bronchitis the way I've got it. Lord, it's hot in this place, isn't it? Let's ask Letcher if we haven't time to go to the dressing room."

"Anything your little heart desires," Letcher assured her, after looking around to make sure that Bacon was out of hearing. "I'll run up and call you myself when you're wanted."

Minnie gave him what Billy McNally called her Kewpie smile. It made her pretty mouth turn up quaintly at the corners and pressed her dimples deep into her cheeks. Her big eyes sought his eagerly to see if he were impressed.

"Oh, you cute little devil, you," was all that Letcher could say. "You'd better not do that when we're alone. Wild horses couldn't keep me from kissing you."

"Try it and I'll crown you," threatened Minnie, though she held the dimples in place, the corners of her mouth still turned up.

"Crown me. I'd like to be king." And amazed at his own ready retort, Letcher repeated, his huge body shaking with laughter, "You cute little devil, you. You cute little queen."

§ 11

Up in the dressing room the two girls discussed Minnie's serious need of a wardrobe. Without doubt she would work the following day as Bacon hadn't finished with his ballroom scenes. Eleanor said if she were only in a position to give Minnie the evening gown she would do so gladly, but under the circumstances she felt that she couldn't afford such generosity. The gown had cost her—at a sale—fifty-five dollars. The sum made Minnie gasp, for in the second-rate department store where she had worked the most elaborate evening gown had never been marked over forty dollars. Eleanor explained that because she knew she and Minnie were going to be friends, she would let her have the gown for the trifling sum of fifteen dollars.

After much figuring Minnie saw how she could pay for it in ten working days. That was fair enough, Eleanor said, and it also gave Minnie the chance to buy some other things she

needed. Eleanor knew of a shop where Minnie could get an afternoon frock (she simply *must* have an afternoon frock in her wardrobe), an evening cloak, extra slippers and *lingerie*. Minnie laughingly repeated the word "lingerie" several times before she could pronounce it. Funny word to call underwear. Eleanor explained that all the girls had their own wardrobes. If they were called for costume plays the company would supply the costumes, but there would be dozens and dozens of other calls for afternoon teas, garden parties, boarding-school scenes and dance halls.

That evening when Minnie signed the voucher slip and was given three dollars and a half for her day's work, she paid a dollar and a half on account to Eleanor.

"I feel as if I was cheating you to get that classy dress for fifteen dollars," she said. "I never dreamed of owning anything like it. I'll take it home and show the folks. Bet it'll be an eye-opener for them, too."

Minnie's name was on the callboard for the following morning.

"That makes seven dollars in two days," she figured, "and I've been slaving for a whole week in that rotten basement for only nine dollars."

She thought of what a contrast Eleanor was to the girls she'd been going with; Elsie Bicker and her friends of the basement. Not that she'd throw over her old friends because she had found new ones, but they could never interest her again. They didn't know anything, when she compared them to Eleanor who had been everywhere, who had seen so much of life and had known so many of its experiences. For Eleanor had traveled to California and back; she had gone up to Maine on a picture, and had been out on ocean boats many times. And how wise she was, how well she knew men. Eleanor had had a flat with three nigger servants in it. She was also going

to make it clear to Minnie how it was possible for her to have all of that, too—and clothes with spangles on—and silk things next to the skin, *lingerie*.

“Oh, God, I’m lucky,” cried Minnie to herself as she hurried from the studio to wait at the street corner for Letcher. “Just as Nettie says, I was born with a gold horseshoe in my mouth.”

CHAPTER FOUR

§ 1

MINNIE and Letcher held hands as they stood in the prow of the Fort Lee ferry boat; Minnie, because she thought it was through Letcher she would make another step toward her goal, and Letcher because he was always pleased to be seen in that intimate gesture with a pretty girl.

"I thought you was Al Kessler's sweetie," he told her, when he saw she wasn't going to draw her hand away from his. "Al stands ace-high with the ladies. I didn't think a poor fat slob like me had a chance."

"Say, you ain't so indifferent to the girls yourself," she said, recalling how he had halfway made love to all the girls in the dressing room.

"I don't do it because I really care about 'em," he replied. "It's just because I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings. It's part of my business to kid 'em all along and keep 'em happy. But on my honor, Mineola, I'm not a fellow that often falls for a girl. She's got to be some baby when I do."

"Yeh?" she smiled archly, "and what kind of a girl *do* you fall for?"

"The real kind, sweet and innocent. Say, do you know you made the biggest kind of a hit with me today when you got sore at me for pullin' your dress away. I wouldn't of blamed you if you'd given me a good slap in the face."

"Is that the kind of a girl men really like, even in the movie business?"

"Sure it is. I've known some hard-boiled guys in my day.

They hate a woman that's common. You'll see a lot of 'em in this game too, fresh and vulgar. But that don't get 'em anywheres. Look at the men, how they fall for the innocent sweet girls. Look at me, for instance. I'm sure gone on *you*."

He drew her closer to him and she could feel his warm breath on her cheek. She wanted to play up to him, to simulate a response, and she couldn't understand why his advances seemed repulsive to her.

Letcher went as far as One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street and Broadway, where Minnie was to take the subway downtown. In the jostling crowd they paused to say good night, Letcher still holding her hand in his.

"There's such a mob around here nobody will see you," he laughed. "Kiss me good night, will you, dearie?" he bent his fat face toward her, his lips puckered ludicrously.

Minnie quickly tempered her action with Letcher's advice. "You know I ain't that kind of a girl," she said, looking hurt.

"But just a little one. There's nothing wrong about a little one."

"I don't think me and you are goin' to be very good friends if you keep this up," she said, drawing away from him, upturning her face so he could see the hurt deepening in her eyes.

"Oh, come now, dearie, I didn't mean anything by it. You're a sweet little kid and I respect you. On my honor, I'd die rather than lose you for a friend."

Minnie smiled charitably and pressed his hand.

"Of course we'll be friends," she said, wondering if she had gone too far, "I'd love to have you come to my house some night and meet my old lady, Mr. Letcher. Ma's an awful good cook. Let me know a day or so in advance and I'll have her get up a chicken stew or some little simple thing like that. She'd be very pleased to meet you. So would my old man."

"Look here," said Letcher suddenly. "You might as well know it right now. I'm married."

"Married!" echoed Minnie. "Honest, you're kiddin', ain't you?"

"Wish I was sometimes. Married and got a couple o' kids, boy and a girl. Look!"

He drew from his pocket a thumbed photograph of two fat youngsters.

Minnie felt a hot wave of nausea race over her. It blurred out the image of his grinning face.

"Oh," she cried. "Oh, I never would of guessed it. Why didn't somebody tell me before? Why didn't Eleanor tell me?"

"You won't be shocked by a little thing like that after you've been around the studios awhile," Letcher laughed. "Funny little kid you are. Well, good night, dearie. There's my car. Got to beat it or the wife's goin' to meet me on the top step with a flatiron. So long, Mineola, see you tomorrow!"

Riding downtown in the subway Minnie was almost overcome with fatigue. The paper bundle weighed heavily on its string as she swayed back and forth, clinging to the strap.

Why she should think of him she didn't know, but suddenly Billy McNally loomed up before her, as one tired would think of a broad comfortable couch. Maybe it was only because she was used to him—but at that it was pleasant to concentrate upon someone dependable, someone who wasn't a four-flusher like the others. Was all honest love uninteresting? Minnie asked herself. Half dreaming of Billy she could almost feel the warm pressure of his kisses. She wondered what he had been doing. She hadn't seen him since he had caught her in a lie; she had told him that because of her neuralgia the chilly night air made it impossible for her to sit in the lower hallway, and he had seen her at the drugstore with Al Kessler, sitting there at the counter, warm and con-

tented, being treated to an expensive "sundae." He had looked in the window with such a shocked expression that she had laughed. Poor Billy, he had eyes just like a good dog's. She felt so sorry for him that she made up her mind to send Jimmy to his boarding house that evening with a note to come on over and see her. At that there was always a kick in making up with a fellow even though you weren't really crazy about him.

§ 2

Mrs. Flynn had made dumplings that evening to garnish the stew but they were cold and soggy by the time Minnie reached home. It was the first night dinner had ever been delayed for any one member of the Flynn household; but not even Nettie complained as she sat darning a pair of Minnie's stockings.

"I wonder if she'll bring Al home, ma?" Nettie asked, as she glanced into the mirror to see if her hair would meet with Minnie's approval.

"I hope not," Mrs. Flynn replied. "My dinner's absolutely ruined."

"Don't you think Minnie would rather we'd not wait for her?" ventured Mr. Flynn who had been hungry so long that a dull pain gnawed at the pit of his stomach.

They all pounced upon him.

"My God, pa, I'd think you'd have the decency to make *that* little sacrifice for Minnie. I'd like to bet you'll be the first one to ask favors of her when she gets fifty per."

"Don't, Nettie, your father eats his lunch early and I give Minnie all the meat that was left over for hers. You was stuffin' all the afternoon on pretzels," Mrs. Flynn added accusingly, "it's easy enough for you to wait for your dinner."

When Jimmy came into the dining room he had on his blue suit.

"Glad you dressed up, dearie," his mother remarked, reaching to straighten his tie and pick a piece of lint off the lapel of his coat. "It will be kind of a celebration tonight. Minnie's got a lot to tell us, and Pete's comin' over."

"Elsie too?"

"Oh, yeh, I suppose so."

Footsteps outside hurrying up the stairs. . . .

"There she is!" they cried in a breath.

But it was the girl who lived in the flat above them.

Minnie's entrance was different from what they had anticipated. She came stodgily into the room lugging the paper bundle now slipping from its loosely tied string. Her face was pallid with fatigue and there was none of that exuberance they had been confident of.

"Minnie!" cried her mother in a voice filled with fear, "you didn't lose your job, did you?"

They all pressed eagerly forward, waiting her answer.

"Don't worry," she said finally, "everything's O. K."

Mrs. Flynn with a prodigious cry of relief rushed to help her out of her coat, and as Minnie flung down her hat Nettie picked it up, brushed it off, and hung it on the nail in the door.

"I think it would rest you to take off your shoes," suggested Michael Flynn, hoping to stimulate a desirable precedent, for his own feet were burning in their brogans.

"Put 'em up, sis. I'll unlace 'em," said Jimmy.

With an effort Minnie obeyed him. She stretched out on the chair, her head lolling to one side.

"Gee, you look all in, sis."

"Don't she, though," said Mrs. Flynn. "That's all right, Minnie dear, you needn't tell us anything about what you

done today if you don't want to, though we're crazy to hear about it. I guess you're too tired to talk, ain't you?"

"I'm awful tired."

"I should say she would be," came Nettie's defense. "Al says it's no cinch to act."

"Did you act very much today, Min?"

"Not at all," she answered wearily, "but I guess I will tomorrow."

"She'll act tomorrow," repeated Mr. Flynn, "just think of it." He had only a vague idea of what acting was, but it was a prodigal profession when Minnie could earn more in a day than an experienced pipe fitter.

"What do you say we dish up, ma?"

"All right, Jimmy dear. I guess our little girl's half starved."

"No, I ain't, mama, and I don't want to eat. Had a hot lunch over to the studio, hash with eggs on it."

"Do they give you lunch, too?" cried Mr. Flynn. "Hash with eggs on it? Honest, I don't see how they can do it, Annie."

"Easy," answered Minnie with her first smile, "you pay for it."

"Pay for it," sneered Jimmy. "Well, if I don't call that snide. They ought to give it to you. They make enough offen you, Al says. He told me it was something fierce the way they keep you sweatin' under the bright lights and don't care a hang for union hours, either. He's worked all day and half the night for the same pay. . . . What'd they soak you for the lunch, Min?"

"I don't know. A fellow named Letcher treated me and a personal friend of mine, Eleanor Grant. Say, ma, she used to have a flat with three nigger servants in it."

"Oh, my God, used she?" Mrs. Flynn made a clucking

sound as she hovered over Minnie. "*Three niggers*, and I'd be glad to have Mrs. Plotz come over once a week to help me with the washin'."

"We'll have a couple of Plotzes before I'm through with it," said Minnie, leaning back to put her stockinged feet upon the table. "I won't go into no details now, folks, but you can take it for what it's worth—nothin' can stop me after the start I made today. Nothin'!"

Minnie didn't join in any of the hilarity at dinner. She drank a glass of beer as she lay stretched out on the red plush sofa. What a change had come over them all. Maybe she had misjudged Nettie. Poor old Net. When she got to making big money she'd stake Nettie to some decent new clothes. She'd probably give her the spangled gown if Net weren't too fat for it by that time.

After dinner when Pete and Elsie were there Minnie unwrapped the paper parcel; she was not disappointed, for their enthusiasm was even greater than she had hoped. Only Pete was silent.

"Who gave it to you?" asked Nettie, "Al?"

Minnie held it up for her mother to touch but Mrs. Flynn was afraid her grimy hands would soil it.

"No, I bought it. A dress worth eighty-five dollars and I got it for fifteen."

"You mean to tell me you paid fifteen dollars for a dress, Minnie Flynn? You're a fool!" shouted Pete, pounding his fist upon the table.

"Pete's right," wailed Mrs. Flynn. "You could get a coat for that much money. Or a suit. You need a suit awful bad, too."

Minnie waited for them to calm down.

"You're the fools," she said in an even voice, "and if it weren't for Pa and Jimmy"—they had voiced neither ap-

proval nor disapproval—"I wouldn't take the trouble to explain."

"The only thing I want to hear explained is how you got the money to pay for it," challenged Pete, pounding out his words accusingly. "At that, I don't think you'd be any too particular."

Minnie rose. She steadied herself, trying to hold her anger in check, but to no avail. The sight of Pete's leering face drove all reason from her, and she cried out in a fierce spasm of angry protest:

"You'll remember that dirty crack, Pete Flynn, you'll remember it. I'm goin' to be *rich*, d'you get me? *Rich!* I'm goin' to give Jimmy Flynn everything on earth that his heart's been set on. I'm goin' to give ma a nigger servant. Two of 'em! I'm goin' to give Nettie clothes that'll knock your eye out. I'm goin' to set my father up in the plumbin' business. D'you get me?"

Her voice was rising to a hysterical crescendo. Jabbing her finger at Elsie, she screamed with triumphant malice, "I'm goin' to give *her* a real fox fur whether you like it or not. D'you get me?"

Then whirling him around and seizing him by both lapels she shook him until her strength ebbed away.

"But *you*, damn you! You can come crawling on your knees to me, starvin'—and I won't give you a crust of bread. That's all I got to say to you, Pete Flynn. Now get up and clear out of here!"

Mrs. Flynn crumpled into a chair with a tortured moan, wringing her hands helplessly.

"Pete," she cried, when Minnie had flung herself sobbing on the sofa. "It's your fault this time. You had no business talkin' to your sister that way—I—I'm ashamed of you."

An awed silence fell upon them . . . why was Pete so

subdued? Was it because he was hurt by his mother's treason? Perhaps a little. But Nettie knew by his expression that his mother was a secondary consideration and that Minnie's threats were effective.

To the astonishment of everyone but Nettie he walked over to the sofa and rested his hand upon Minnie's shoulder.

"Min," he said, "I ain't such a dirty stinker after all. You can take it or leave it—but I'm sorry for what I said. Damn it, I'm sorry."

It was a jolly evening after that. Michael Flynn made two trips to Sullivan's; the first time he carried one pair, the second, two.

They saved a little for Billy MacNally, but when midnight came and he hadn't shown up Pete drank it, toasting to Minnie's future.

When Minnie crawled into bed beside Nettie (Nettie was snoring in a sodden sleep) she cried a little. She didn't know whether she was happy over her success or—of course she didn't really care about Billy MacNally—she was just curious to know why he had refused to come there that evening. . . .

§ 3

After three days' work at the studio set, the contacts seemed less formidable to Minnie; the road to success more difficult.

On the third day when Bacon called her up to his platform, she thought he was going to give her a chance to show what she could do. The day before she had seen Alicia Adams dance for Bacon; so she was prepared to do the only stunts she knew, "the Chink Act," and the imitation of Jeeps, the old floorwalker of the basement. She had practiced them the

night before at home and Jimmy, doubled with laughter, had rolled off his chair onto the floor. Of course her father hadn't laughed but he had joined in the general applause and thought that whatever Minnie was trying to do, she was doing it very well. He was willing to bet anything he had that Minnie would show them all up when it came to "performing." (They could never get him to use with ease the words "acting" or "actress.")

"Well, young lady," said Bacon, as Minnie stood before him, "I'm beginning to wonder what you are going to do for us."

Minnie was undaunted by his bantering smile or the sarcasm in his voice. She was getting used to men like this. Binns was sarcastic and Letcher tried to imitate Bacon. The girls had told her how Hal Deane often lashed the people working for him with stinging ridicule.

"Have you got anything particular in mind?" she asked, adding with unmasked assurance, "If you ain't, I got a couple o' things I can do if you want me to."

Bacon merely nodded, but this was encouragement enough for Minnie.

"Shall I do the Chink Act for you?" she asked eagerly. "It's a little stunt I got up by myself."

"My God," he finally managed to say to Deane, who had ambled over to the set, "this is a hell of a rag-tag and bob-tail business. If it weren't for the money in it I'd go back to the stage. At least you've got to have a little pretense of intelligence in that profession."

Minnie, not understanding him, didn't know whether Bacon was laughing because she had spoken in such a cute little voice and with such a cute little smile, or because he was making fun of her. She dismissed the latter thought immediately; he couldn't have singled her out if he hadn't taken a personal interest in her.

"Well, my child, what's the Chink Act?" asked Bacon who was now composed. "Stick around, Deane," he lowered his voice for Deane's ears. "I need sympathy. This last week I've been driven almost crazy. We've had three laundresses on the set, two nurse girls, half a dozen Slovaks and a flock of married women who stick their kids in day nurseries to pick up silk stocking money."

"So have I, Bacon. But what's the use of kicking. There aren't enough people in the theatrical business to supply the studios. We've got to choose from the masses and there can't be any great discrimination until we've weeded them out. I know they're nurse girls and shop girls and factory hands, but we don't dare turn any of them away. Look at our popular stars. Few of them came from the stage. You know yourself, Bacon, the success of the picture star is nine times out of ten a fluke."

Bacon, irritated, was scratching his head.

"Dammit," he said. "I know it, but it's enough to drive a man crazy just the same."

Deane recalled the names of several well-known stage stars whose resilient, intelligent personalities were entirely lost on the screen: their features were unphotographic.

Bacon groaned. "I can understand now why sheep-herders go mad," he said with genuine despair in his voice.

In the pause that followed Minnie stepped forward. "I'm ready," she spoke gaily, though her voice trembled with nervousness. (She wished that Deane wouldn't stand there looking at her, with his keen, searching eyes focused upon her.) "Shall I begin now, Mr. Bacon?"

"All right, fire ahead."

She cleared her throat and spoke with a childish roundness and clarity of tone. "I'm pretendin' that I'm a little Chineese girl learnin' to dance like the Americans," she said. "Shall

I sing the verses that go with it, or just do the act without singing?"

"For God's sake, sing!" said Bacon, winking broadly, significantly, at Letcher and Deane. "You've heard the story, Hal?"

Deane didn't answer but Letcher's reply was a roar of disconcerting laughter.

"Go on, Min," he ordered, seeing the chief was being amused and taking some of the credit for having brought Minnie to his notice. "Make it snappy. If it's good we'll book you for vaudeville."

"But I don't want to go into vaudeville," protested Minnie, her face flushing with timid happiness, her eyes making a rapid survey of the studio to see if Al Kessler were taking note of her triumph. "I'm perfectly satisfied with the movies. Everybody's been so awful nice to me here."

"Go on," ordered Bacon, "I haven't got all day to give you."

Minnie went on. . . . She danced; she pirouetted; she mimicked the high, lisping patter of the Chinese when she sang "Chinky, Chinky, Chineeman—sabe washee clo'es."

Twice Bacon turned away, and once he made a motion as if to stop her, but Minnie went right on. It was no time to stop when the act was only half over, and the finale was the best part.

There were peals of laughter. Letcher had to hold to the sides of his chair. Bacon wiped his eyes twice. But Deane was like her father, he had no humor; he just stood there looking at her, tugging at the lock of hair that fell over his forehead.

Spurred on by their applause she fell into the floorwalker act. She walked flat-footed, she imitated his wheezy, asthmatic voice.

"That's enough," shouted Bacon. "Any more of it and I'll blow my brains out."

Funny remark for Bacon to make, but Minnie had given up trying to understand the men in the picture business.

"Rotten cruelty," said Deane, lowering his voice so Minnie couldn't overhear. "I can't get any pleasure out of it. I'd just as lief stand before a caged animal and poke sticks at it. Same principle."

"The hell it is," exploded Bacon, "animals are sensitive. Look at these creatures. The more you make fun of them the more you compliment them. I haven't had a laugh like this for a week. I tell you, the girl's a moron."

Minnie was parading before them, waving her fan as she walked with a quaint, undulating swing of her hips. She had grown so used to the low-necked, long-trained evening gown that she was no longer conscious of it. She held her chin up and arched her eyebrows as all ladies do (according to Eleanor). Her heart was now pumping in steady, rhythmic beats. The excitement was over. She had had her chance and there wasn't a doubt that she had succeeded.

"What's the name of that girl, Letcher?" Deane had turned his back on Bacon.

"Her!" exclaimed Letcher incredulously, pointing a fat finger at Minnie.

"Yes, quite an unusual type, isn't she?"

"Solid ivory from the neck up," said Letcher, cued by Bacon's expression of disgust. "Name is Mineola Flynn."

"I've just been sizing her up. Darn good figure, hasn't she?"

"Do you call *that* a shape?" Letcher's astonishment grew. "Why, she's built like a boy."

"Not exactly," Deane smiled. "I'd say very feminine."

"Well, it's all a matter of taste," continued Letcher, "the

chief here couldn't be annoyed with her. She's just made an awful fool of herself."

"I know, I saw it."

But neither Deane's eyes nor ears were for Letcher. He was intently watching Minnie. Then he electrified them by a prophecy they were never to forget.

"Mark my word, Bacon," he said to them, "that girl is going to rise to the top one of these days. She's got that something which makes for success. If I had time I'd work with the youngster. Yes, she's got the stuff in her. Look at her now. See how her eyes light up, how her mouth trembles under the pressure of any excitement. She's little and lithe. She could be taught to handle herself very well. If I weren't doing cut and dried feature stuff now, just grinding them out for so much per picture, I'd pick up a bet like that and try to make something out of her."

"I tell you it can't be done!" stormed Bacon again. "The girl's an idiot."

Bacon was antagonized by Deane's enthusiasm, his acceptance of a type which he had rejected, so he took it out on Letcher. "The next time you bring anyone like that to me and allow her to take up my time," he said in an even tone more ugly than his normal explosiveness, "I'm going to fire you, do you understand?"

"But I wanted to give you a laugh," whined Letcher. "I did, didn't I?"

Bacon turned livid with rage.

"Are you trying to argue with *me*?" he roared.

"No, chief."

"Then keep your mouth shut."

"Yes, sir."

The result of this call-down was that Letcher gave Minnie such a surly look as he passed her by that fear again laid

hold of her. Baffled, she sought the answer to it, only to come from under another shadow triumphantly. Letcher was jealous of her. He was jealous of Bacon. Excited by this thought she smiled naïvely at Bacon (Letcher was watching her) and hurried to the dressing room in search of Eleanor.

"Eleanor," she cried. "Everything's worked out great. Bacon called me over, put me through the paces and you oughta heard him laugh at my stuff. I thought Jimmy was kiddin' me when he said how funny it was, but, gee, Bacon carried on something fierce. Got a laugh out of everybody but Deane, who was stickin' around for some reason or other, but I don't care."

Eleanor's silence was disconcerting.

"You think I'm gettin' on, don't you, dearie? Tell me the truth now, ain't I?"

"You're doing very well, Minnie—I guess. Did Bacon promise you anything definite?"

"Sure he did . . . well, that is . . . well, anyway, he let me go clear through my act without stoppin' me. Say, Eleanor," eager to change the subject, "did Letcher tell you how long we got to work today?"

"No, but I heard the head electrician say we'd be stalled this afternoon for lights. They'll need all they've got for Deane's set. He's going to start shooting his big scene today. Did you see that Roman banquet hall, Minnie?"

"Yeh, but I didn't think much of it, nothing cozy about it. Wonder why they didn't have a lot of palms in the place to dress it up like the Duke's palace we worked in today! Oh, Eleanor——"

Eleanor was getting tired of the endless chatter.

"What?"

"Would you mind comin' down to those stores you told

me about? I'd like to start gettin' some of my wardrobe on the instalment."

"All right. I'll go with you just as soon as Letcher calls it a day."

§ 4

Letcher called it a day at 3:15.

Minnie, confident that her name was listed among those to work the following morning, signed her voucher slip, cashed it and hurried to meet Eleanor. Neither of them noticed that Letcher avoided saying good-by. They were too busy speculating how much Minnie would need to complete the first layout of her wardrobe. Eleanor suggested three dresses (she had another one she could sell Minnie for eight dollars), a suit and several hats. Minnie had already made three payments, reducing her debt to Eleanor by four dollars and a half.

Madame Papillon's on 59th, a few doors from Lexington, to which Eleanor took Minnie, was a shop where one could get the most remarkable bargains. "If you want to look chic," said Eleanor, "you've got to get your fashions from these French modistes."

Madame Papillon, who spoke with a charming French accent, began life as Sadie Moskowitz. She was born of German-Polish parents, in the rear of a dingy second-hand store on the lower East Side. At ten Sadie was working in a sweatshop. By the time she was fourteen she was head embroiderer in a wholesale factory; at eighteen, Sadie Moskowitz, who had changed her name to Moss, was a designer for a second-rate dressmaking establishment. At twenty-five she bought a store on Lexington, near 59th, and became Madame Moskowitz; a year later she moved around the corner and called herself Madame Papillon. When she made

this move she knew just as definitely as if she had calculated the compound interest on her savings that by the time she was thirty she would own her own establishment on 57th West and would charge vain, gullible women three hundred dollars for the same quality of gowns she had sold for seventy-five when the shop was on 59th Street, East.

That afternoon, as the result of Madame Papillon's expert salesmanship, Minnie bought a red velvet gown, a charmeuse afternoon frock and hat, and she had had her first fitting on an elaborate, fur-trimmed serge suit. She paid thirteen dollars on account, three dollars out of her own earnings and ten dollars which Eleanor lent her.

It terrified her when she realized that she was one hundred and thirty-five dollars in debt to Madame Papillon, and that she owed Eleanor Grant thirty-two dollars and fifty cents. She turned in panic to Eleanor, and implored her to come home that evening for dinner. She believed that Eleanor could explain her extravagance better than she and make it seem more readily justifiable.

Eleanor was curious to know what Minnie's family was like, so she intended to accept the invitation, even while she was saying, "Oh, I don't want to impose on your mother, dear, butting in without giving her any notice. But of course, if you insist. . . ."

Minnie insisted feverishly, and hurried home, her mind now occupied with planning some little extras to be fixed for their distinguished guest.

§ 5

Fortunately when Minnie came in her mother was in the kitchen and Nettie visiting down the street. No need to get them all upset over the new wardrobe, so she swiftly slid the

box under the bed before she sought her mother in the kitchen.

"Say, ma," after a perfunctory peck on the cheek, "what you got for dinner tonight?"

"Pigs' knuckles, Minnie, the finest I've seen in Hesselman's this fall. Billy put 'em aside for me. He looks kind o' pale, dearie, asked how you was and if you'd opened your bank account on Fifth Avenue yet. Said it joking. Poor Billy."

"Pigs' knuckles!" cried Minnie shrilly. "Oh, my God, ma, if that ain't my luck to ask somebody home for dinner and you'd have pigs' knuckles."

"I'd like to know who's comin' to this house that's too good for pigs' knuckles, Minnie Flynn," said her mother indignantly, "with fresh cabbage, too. Pete would rather have it than chicken stew any day."

"Of course he would. He's that common. Cabbage! Phew, what a stink! It's enough to turn anybody's stummick. We'll never get the house cleared by the time she arrives. Listen, ma, that girl I told you about, Eleanor Grant, the one who had a flat with three nigger servants, is comin' to dinner."

"Tonight?"

"Sure. She'll be here in an hour. A girl that's used to everything, ma, that wears nothin' but silk next to her skin."

Mrs. Flynn spun around helplessly. "Why didn't you make it tomorrow night, Minnie, and give me notice? I could of made a cranberry pie. Oh Lord, you do get me so upset. . . ."

"Douse the pigs' knuckles, ma, the first thing. Then set the cabbage out on the fire-escape. Is Hesselman's closed at this hour?"

"You know it is, Minnie, it's after five-thirty. But Shultz is open. He's got a pretty good line o' cooked meats now. Oh, my Lord, how you do turn things upside down!"

Minnie flew for her hat and coat. "Do you have to pay cash there?" she screamed to her mother above the roar and rattle of the passing elevated. "All I got left is thirty-five cents."

"Thirty-five cents! Why, Minnie Flynn!" her mother gasped, "what have you done with all your money?"

"I got no time for that now. Don't stand there gapin' at me, ma. Do you want that swell girl to get here and find the house lookin' like a pigsty? Where's Net?"

"Maybe that's her comin' up the steps now. I gave her a dollar to get a bottle of Horse Liniment for my rheumatism. She's got change from it."

"Nettie! Nettie! Is that you?"

"What's the excitement, ma?" Nettie came trudging up the stairs leaning heavily on the wobbly banister. "House on fire?"

The neighbors in the flat below heard Mrs. Flynn's breathless answer:

"That rich girl Minnie's been goin' with is comin' home for dinner. How much change you got from that dollar, Nettie?"

"Fifty cents."

"Give it to me, quick!"

"What's the hurry?"

"Min's got to get to Shultz's before it closes. We can't sit a girl like that down to pigs' knuckles and cabbage. That's the girl that used to have the three niggers. . . . My God, you've only got forty cents!"

Minnie came tearing into the room. "'Lo, Net," she cried excitedly, "give me the change, quick! And while I'm gone, set the table nice with the red fringe tablecloth and the paper carnations in the center of it."

"Minnie Flynn, you talk as if you was out o' your head. Carnations on a table when there's food on it."

"No, I ain't. All swell tables at the studio got flowers on 'em. Burn two punk sticks. Honest it smells like a dago joint. Ma, see if you can't get Mrs. Molowonsky to loan you her glass butter and sugar set, and, when pa comes in see that he don't take his shoes off. Tell him he's got to keep his coat on all evening if it *kills* him! Open a quart o' peaches, ma, I'll get a loaf cake. And be sure to peel the potatoes. I don't want Eleanor to think we're any low-down Irish family that sets the potatoes on in their peelings. How about a can of tomato soup, ma? We ought to start with some kind of a soup. I wish Mrs. Molowonsky would lend you them soup plates, too, they're awful up-to-date."

Mrs. Flynn and Nettie set the table, brushed the gathered dust and lint under the rug, burned the punk sticks and laid down the law to the bewildered Mr. Flynn who came home, as usual, exhausted from his work.

At the delicatessen Minnie bought a can of soup, a can of corn, some cooked macaroni, potato salad, six very thin slices of magenta colored roast beef, two dill pickles and half a pound of raisin cake. On her way home she stopped at Sullivan's, hurried in through the Ladies' Entrance and ordered two quart bottles of beer.

"Barrel stock?" asked the bartender.

"Not on your life," answered Minnie rather airily, "the best you got!"

"You must be entertainin' society this evening," he said. "How's your old man?"

"He's all right. Say, if you don't mind, I'm in a hurry. Got any quarts on ice?"

"Surest thing you know. Flush enough for Budweiser?"

"You bet I am, and make it snappy."

On her way home she met Jimmy and imparted the news to him, emphasizing the importance of Eleanor's visit.

"You can't tell what may come of this friendship," she repeated over and over again. "I've certainly been lucky to meet a girl like her. She knows everybody in the business. You ought to see the way Bacon treats her. None of that upstage stuff around Eleanor. Think of it, Jimmy, he used to be workin' for her; when she was a star in the company out West he was only the director and she got more money than he did."

"Like to cop off a girl like that myself," said Jimmy banteringly. "Glad you brought her home with you."

They walked in silence a few moments, then a sharp outcry from Minnie brought them to a sudden halt. She seized hold of Jimmy's arm dramatically. "Jimmy," she said solemnly, "swear to me on everything holy that you won't forget one thing at the dinner table tonight."

Jimmy raised his right hand.

"Don't ask for any soup! I only got a can and it's tomato, the kind you can't thin out so well."

§ 6

Eleanor wasn't astonished at the neighborhood in which the Flynn's lived, but from Minnie's description she had visualized better surroundings than The Central. When she walked up the dingy, winding stairway the hot, fetid odor of the unaired lightwell assailed her nostrils.

Minnie met her in front of the Flynn apartment and tittered nervously an excuse for the dark hallway.

"All apartment halls are dark," said Eleanor to make her feel comfortable. "I paid two hundred dollars for a flat once and the hallways were terrible."

"You hear that, mama?" asked Minnie as she ushered Eleanor into the apartment. "She paid two hundred dollars for a flat once—and would you believe it, the hallways was as dark as ours. Oh, I'm so excited I almost forgot to introduce you. Eleanor, I'd like to have you make the acquaintance of ma—Mrs. Flynn."

Eleanor's face was paled by the exertion of the long walk upstairs and there was a bright red spot on each cheek, which Minnie thought was poorly applied rouge. Her eyes seemed unnaturally bright and when she spoke her voice lowered to a husky whisper.

"Mrs. Flynn, I'm delighted to meet you," she said with an air. "I hope I haven't put you out by dropping in unexpectedly."

Mrs. Flynn bobbed up and down, curtseying and as she pumped Eleanor's hand (held at the level of her eyebrows) she said, "Indeed you ain't. I'm always glad to have my daughters bring their friends home for pot-luck any time. We never put ourselves out or go to any extra work for 'em. Pa always says what's good enough for us is good enough for anybody. Sit right down and make yourself to home, dearie, I . . ."

A nudge in the back from Minnie made her break off suddenly; unstrung, she pounced upon Eleanor's hat as she drew the hatpins out of it and carried it into the other room.

"You've got a very nice place," said Eleanor. After a pause, a bit embarrassedly, "Doesn't the noise get on your nerves, though?"

"Shucks, I'm used to the L's tearing by. I'd hate to live on them side streets. They're like graveyards. Yeh, give me a noisy place for company every time."

Mr. Flynn came in to be presented. He was wearing his best black suit which smelled strongly of mothballs; and his

thin corrugated neck protruded above one of Pete's collars, three sizes too large for him.

"Pleased to meet you, ma'am. Make yourself to home," he mumbled, glancing sideways at Minnie to see whether he was conducting himself according to her orders. "You can sit in the morris chair with the angora cover to it. Yes, ma'am, sit right down and make yourself to home."

"Thank you," said Eleanor, with a distant expression in her eyes, "but I prefer to sit in a straight-backed chair."

Mr. Flynn's hands made a grating sound as he rubbed them together. When he walked his new shoes squeaked. Eleanor could hardly keep from laughing.

Nettie came in, her face coated with a heavy leaded white powder. Her hair was neatly combed.

"I hope you don't mind the way the house looks," she said, after the introduction. "If Minnie had give us notice we'd of had it all fixed up for you."

"I'm glad I didn't put you to that trouble," said Eleanor politely. "It looks very nice the way it is. I'm sure if any-one dropped in unexpectedly on me they'd never find such a well-kept establishment."

"It's not a bad little joint," said Nettie, reaching over to sweep away the fallen ashes from the punk stick. . . . "We like it pretty well, don't we, Min?"

Minnie could have cried from mortification. The idea of Nettie having so little sense that she failed to pick up a cue from a girl like Eleanor, but had to follow the classy word "establishment" with "joint."

Mrs. Flynn saw the angry flash in Minnie's eyes and with an awkward laugh tried to cover it up.

"Nettie likes to tease her sister, Miss Grant," she apologized, "always calls this place a joint. Don't she, Minnie dear?"

"Sure she does, the old tease," and Minnie put her arm around Nettie's waist to draw her close enough to whisper, "Watch your step, do you get me?"

There was quite a little hubbub when Jimmy came in. After he had shaken hands with Eleanor he cried, "Well, Miss Grant, what d'you say if we put on the feed bags?"

"I'd say fine," smiled Eleanor politely. "I guess that's what you'd want me to say."

Strained laughter.

A moment later Minnie was in a panic of fear. Looking up she caught Jimmy's eye focused upon the glass butter dish. She tried to get over a signal but Jimmy's glance never rose to meet hers. Just when Nettie reached across the table to pass Eleanor the butter, Jimmy bawled out:

"Ain't that the Molowonskys' dish, ma?"

"Why, Jimmy Flynn!" cried Mrs. Flynn in accusing tones, while Minnie flushed scarlet, "if that ain't just like a boy!" Turning apologetically to Eleanor, "Have a couple o' pieces of butter, won't you, dearie? Don't be afraid of it. It's the very best. Minnie got it after she come home over to Shultz's. She. . . ."

"Yeh, have a couple o' pieces," urged Minnie, while she signaled frantically to Jimmy.

But Jimmy paid no attention to the four flashing pairs of eyes. He was thinking, here was his chance to take his family off their high horse, and he sincerely believed it his duty. "It is the Molowonskys'," he persisted. "I seen it there the other night. Ivan got 'em saving premium coupons on tobacco. He says he collected two hundred coupons in eighteen months and bought 'em for his folks."

"Who'll have soup?" cried Mrs. Flynn, now almost unbalanced. "Speak up, we got lots of it in the kitchen."

Without waiting for any response she hurried out of the

room. Over the stove she pondered as to the advisability of serving the soup in the Molowonsky soup plates. She reached to the shelf and took down their own china bowls. They were so badly discolored and chipped that she decided to venture in with the borrowed ones. So she filled one plate brimming full (for the guest), while the three others were scantily filled. Jimmy and she were to refuse soup, on the excuse they never ate it. Soup was fattening.

Eleanor was very glad to lean upon the crutch of this excuse after the first spoonful; it was too thin and tasteless.

"Gee, ain't you gonna eat more of it?" questioned Jimmy when he saw her shove her plate ever so slightly away from her.

Eleanor declined with profuse apologies.

The dinner progressed with no mishaps, other than Eleanor's not eating everything that was set before her, and the social error on the part of Mr. Flynn when he passed her the toothpicks, insisting that she have one. . . . "Make use of 'em freely, miss, just as if you was in your own home."

Jimmy came in triumphantly with the beer but Eleanor refused it with a very elegant gesture, saying, "I never take anything with my dinner but a little light wine."

"I like the dark wines the best," said Mrs. Flynn (she had had a sip or two of sacramental wine at the Molowonskys') "but I don't approve of it for the children."

After dinner Minnie brought out the box of new gowns and paraded them before her astonished family, while Eleanor explained at length the necessity of possessing such a wardrobe. Mr. Flynn, with a sickening pallor, sank into the morris chair.

One hundred and forty-three dollars . . . to think that his own daughter had run into such debt. He glanced up to see what Mrs. Flynn thought of it and was amazed at her

unperturbed smile as she gingerly lifted out of the box the charmeuse frock.

"It's an awful lot of money," he said over and over half to himself, "and so little to show for it. An awful lot of money——"

CHAPTER FIVE

§ 1

FOR a week Minnie arrived at the studio every morning at eight o'clock and remained until late in the afternoon, sitting, white-faced, in the waiting room adjoining Binns' office. There was no work for her, the office boy told her several times a day, and Binns refused to grant her an interview. Many times she tried to see Letcher but somehow or other he was successful in dodging her.

On the second day, Mrs. Lee had come into the waiting room and from her Minnie learned that Eleanor and Al Kessler were working at one of the New York studios called The Vitagraph. For two days they sat there side by side, Mrs. Lee's volubility checked by that dread atmosphere of uncertainty.

Sometimes the room was so overheated that the air became stagnant. A nasty moisture lay upon the red walls like the coating on a tongue. Often it was dismally cold, with a dank odor. Old people, young people, children; a solemn procession continually filed in and out again, and Minnie noticed how many wan, haggard, desperate faces there were among them.

What nights she passed at home! . . . The memory of them rose before her like so many distorted and hideous dreams. She closed her eyes to shut out the vision of Nettie's leering face, and her mother's, swollen with weeping. On the night that Eleanor had sent a note asking for five dollars more and warning her not to forget her bi-weekly

payment to Madame Papillon, her father had cried too. Tears welled into his faded blue eyes and coursed down his cheeks. He said it was because he couldn't bear to see mama so worried. He didn't want to touch that little nest egg they had saved by years of self-denial, yet how were they going to pay off Minnie's terrible debts? Pete and Elsie had been over twice, Pete continually probing the wound by his tantalizing, "Didn't I tell you so?" Jimmy alone had never reproached her. He thought she'd better go back to the store and see if Jeeps wouldn't speak to the manager about taking her on again. Or else . . . how about making up with Billy MacNally? Better grab him before it was too late, Jimmy warned her, he'd heard that Billy was now keeping company with Madge Connors. That news somewhat startled Minnie; Madge Connors wasn't a pretty girl, but her father was a well-to-do grocer.

On the eighth day, weakened by the fever of fear and uncertainty, Minnie reached the studio at 7:30. She was determined to wait on the street corner for Binns, believing that he alone would help her.

Binns was late that morning. As Minnie stood watching for him Bacon passed in his huge closed car. Minnie smiled and bowed to him after she had scrambled out of the way, but he didn't see her. A second later Letcher jumped off the street car and if he hadn't been looking straight ahead he would have noticed Minnie's quick, eager smile, as she stretched out her hand to signal him. He was hurrying to spring upon the running board of Bacon's car. She ran after them, but a swirl of dust completely veiled her. Then a sense of helplessness came over her, leaving in its wake a physical pain, a gnawing in her stomach, a pounding headache.

Many street cars passed before Binns arrived. He was

very kind. He explained why there was no work. They were not dissatisfied with her, but only sixty extra people were needed in Deane's set and his assistant, Weaver, had chosen them while Minnie was working on the Bacon set.

"But Mr. Bacon wasn't through with me," she persisted, "he was going to give me something to do and he didn't. You was there when I showed him my two acts, and saw how he was pleased with them."

Binns wasn't hardened, but her appeal was one out of hundreds a day. He was abrupt only because he felt it to be a kindness.

"Studio work is very uncertain," he explained to her. "There are several studios which employ extra people. We've had nothing here since Bacon finished. That's five days now. Two of our directors are away on location. Deane and Bacon won't begin new pictures until next month. Why don't you try some of the other studios? Here, I'll give you one of my cards. Go and see Reeves of the Biograph. That's down on the twenties off Broadway, not very far from where you live. He may have something for you."

Binns touched his fingers to his hat and hurried away.

For several minutes she stood staring at the line of people who were waiting to be admitted to the outer office. There was one comforting thought. She saw Alicia Adams among them, Alicia who had been so confident of her charm and her assured popularity with the assistant directors.

The gate opened and the restless line pushed steadily forward. "Sheep," Bacon had called them.

§ 2

Reeves of the Biograph Studio was a very different type from Binns. Minnie found him much more agreeable to talk to. His face seemed to hold the perpetual creases of

a broad, kindly smile and he babbled pleasantly to everyone whom he interviewed. He told Minnie she was a dear, pretty little girl but he regretted he couldn't use her at once. He smiled benignly. If she came there on Friday morning, however, he would find a place for her—as extra girl on the set with Mary Pickford.

There were tears in Minnie's eyes when she walked out of his office; the relief was almost as much pain as the doubt and worry. Friday she was to work! *Four dollars.* Reeves had promised her and she was to bring a dress to wear at an afternoon tea.

On the way home Minnie tried to decide which gown to wear, the spangled one with the train she had bought from Eleanor, or the afternoon frock from Madame Papillon's. She decided to take both of them. It wouldn't hurt to let the gang at the Biograph see how well she was outfitted.

That evening, Minnie received a curt note from Eleanor which read:

"I've got to have ten dollars at once to buy a new pair of shoes for the picture I'm in. Thanks for the five dollars. You only owe me seventeen-fifty now.

"Love,

"ELEANOR."

Minnie took it to her father. She was afraid to face the others.

"Pa, dear," she pleaded, sitting on his lap and drawing his head toward hers, "it means everything to me. You remember what Al Kessler said, 'If you ain't a good gambler you'd better not go into the game.' We know what it means now, don't we, papa?"

Her father was frightened, terribly frightened. "I hate to touch any more of that nest egg your mother and me have been savin'," he said in despair, "but if you've got to have it I guess I can't deny one of my own children. Wouldn't she be satisfied with five dollars, Minnie?"

They read the note over again and its businesslike tone worried them.

"I don't think so, papa. Eleanor's been awful good to me. I don't see how I'm goin' to stall her along."

After dinner Minnie went to Eleanor's boarding house to pay the debt in person. (Temporarily Eleanor was "residing with a refined German family" until she found an apartment to her liking, so she had told all her friends.)

She needn't have made any apologies to Minnie, for Minnie thought it was a palatial residence . . . and so near Riverside Drive! Just a little walk of two blocks or so and there you were on the Drive itself. Once she had hoped that the Flynnns would be moving uptown into a classy brownstone front like that.

Eleanor was unfriendly only because she was worried. She accepted the ten dollars and asked to know specifically just when Minnie intended paying her the next instalment. The prospect of Minnie's work at the Biograph Studio held slight promise to Eleanor. Times were slack. The public was objecting because so many poor pictures had been foisted upon it. From one end of the country to the other they had set up a hue and cry, "Fewer and better pictures. . . ." All of the producing organizations were at a standstill. They were worrying over their output. . . . Meanwhile the wheels had ceased grinding and work had been suspended. Mutable as the tides these chaotic crises would come and go. . . . Always after the boom, the depression.

Thursday was a day of tragic happenings. In the morning Madame Papillon sent her delivery boy for the deferred payment of the clothes bought at her store. She also notified Minnie that she was ready for the second fitting on the suit. Adding that unless she came for it within three or four days she would have to go to law about it.

Minnie sent back word that she was very ill and would start her payments beginning Saturday. The boy accepted this message without protest. But he had had his orders from Madame Papillon, and when fifteen minutes later Minnie hurried out of the house to go to the plumbing shop where her father worked, he was hiding in the shadows of the house next door.

"The skinflint!" shrieked Madame Papillon, when he reported how Minnie had lied about being ill. "I've had all I'm going to take from that movie crowd. Morris, hurry over to Sol Greenbaum's and tell him I've got a job for him this afternoon."

Michael Flynn refused to let Minnie take any more money from his store of savings. She would have to work it out as best she could. Not even when Minnie cried that her whole future was in danger did Michael Flynn relent. He didn't care about himself, he told her, but he wasn't going to let the mother of his children be buried in the Potter's Field.

Minnie ran home and threw herself into her mother's arms.

"Mama," she cried, "I tried to keep it from you but I can't. I don't want to worry you but you simply got to know what's goin' on. Everything's at stake. There's that new job comin' along, me playin' with Mary, think of it, and a dollar more'n I got at the other place, and pa won't listen to reason."

Mrs. Flynn, still under the spell of the "movie" lure, now there was another opportunity in sight, told Minnie she

would do all she could to persuade her father to lend her twenty-five dollars to pay Madame Papillon.

§ 3

But that afternoon Sol Greenbaum came to call upon them. He was large, impressive, and he talked in a voice that rang through the hallway as if a gong had been sounded. No amount of shushing from the humiliated Flynnns could make him lower his strident tones.

He was crying out, "I represent the law, ladies, law and order! I'm a man who loves justice, respects it and what's more, this is for you, Miss Flynnn, as well as your mother, I'm here to see that justice is done. I don't want trouble but I want things regulated. *And I mean to do it!*"

Minnie reached out; tugging at his arm she dragged him into the apartment while Mrs. Flynnn closed the door after him. Then Minnie faced him.

"Say, listen here, mister, we ain't bilks. I didn't lie about being sick. Look at me! Do I look well? Do I now?"

Sol Greenbaum shouted her down. "Madame Papillon is a good woman," he said, pounding his fist upon the table. "She sold you those dresses in good faith. She trusted you. She didn't ask for any security. She——"

Minnie interrupted him. "I'm goin' to pay it back all right," she cried, "I ain't tryin' to cheat her."

"Very well, if you're going to pay her, give me proof of your good intentions. Give me twenty dollars on account. That's fair enough according to law, isn't it now?"

"I can't pay anything today," and Minnie's voice reached a high pitch of desolation, "but tomorrow, if you only come around tomorrow night——"

Sol Greenbaum shook his head. "The law knows no to-morrow," he said gravely. "Personally I'd like to let you off but it's my duty to handle this little matter in all fairness to Madame Papillon. She's the injured party."

Into Minnie's eyes crept a look of horrified realization. "What're you going to do to me?" she cried, growing very pale, "you ain't goin' to arrest me?"

Mrs. Flynn rushed for Minnie, putting her arms around her. "Oh, my God, my God!" she wailed, "go get papa, quick!"

Sol Greenbaum raised a protesting hand. "No need of carrying on, folks," he told them. "Just be calm and sensible. I'm not here to arrest anybody. I merely came to collect money on the merchandise purchased at Madame Papillon's shop, or take it away."

Minnie glanced at him apprehensively, "You don't mean that you intend to take 'em away, all of 'em?" she asked.

He nodded.

"That afternoon dress an' everything?"

"If you can't pay me any money I've got to hold them until they have been paid for. Clothes are perishable merchandise. If you've worn them you can see for yourself that Madame Papillon couldn't get them off her hands. There's no call in a shop like that for second-hand stuff."

"Well, you can't have them!" cried Minnie with sudden defiance. "I need them and I won't let them go. Do you understand that? *I won't let them go!*"

Sol Greenbaum looked calmly from mother to daughter as he put his notebook and the contract Minnie had signed with Madame Papillon back into his pocket. Then deliberately buttoning his overcoat, he reached for his hat and gloves, wished them a pleasant good afternoon, and started for the door.

"Wait a minute!" screamed Minnie. "What're you going to do about it?"

"There is only one thing to do under the circumstances," said Greenbaum, as if annoyed because they had recalled him. "When a contract is signed and isn't lived up to we place it in the hands of the police. What I'd do, ladies, if I were you, is to notify your attorney at once so he can prepare your defense."

If he had talked of long-term imprisonments and electric chairs his words could not have been more terrifying. This dread sentence whipped around them leaving a stinging, physical pain. It frightened them into an easy triumph for Greenbaum.

Fifteen minutes later he arrived, laughing, at Madame Papillon's shop and handed over the box labeled, "Perishable. Maison Papillon."

At home Minnie and her mother huddled on the sofa in despair, whispering their decision not to let any one of the family know that Minnie had lost the clothes.

"It's all right, ma," said Minnie feebly. "I still got the gorgeous gown that Eleanor sold me. At that I bet I'll make something of a hit in it. I seen a lot of 'em at the studio and there ain't one that can touch it."

"You'll make a hit, dearie, don't worry," comforted her mother. "Come now, help me get the dinner ready. As Jimmy says, it'll all come out in the wash."

Nettie had dinner with Elsie and Pete; Michael Flynn went back to work, after a hurried bite. The evening dragged unhappily. The "L" tearing past shut off for a few moments the monotonous ticking of the clock. Tick-tick-tick. Minnie thought at times she would hurl it out of the window. Tick-tick-tick. Gee, the hours were long and dull now. What was Billy MacNally doing, she wondered? Probably out to

a movie or maybe to a dance, now The Cinderella Slipper had started its winter season in the basement of Kelly's. Or maybe spooning with Madge in the swell parlor of the Connors' new flat.

"Minnie, don't cry like that. Your eyes will be all swole in the morning. Don't cry, Minnie darlin'. Here, drink a glass of water. Come, baby. There's nothin' to break your heart about. When you get started to makin' money you can have all them things back again. You go to work tomorrow in that new studio and maybe you'll have a chance to make your hit there. You'll watch 'em close this time and won't let anybody double-cross you. I swear I'll kill that Grant girl if I ever get my hands on her. I never liked her the minute I set eyes on her, with her sneaky ways and hifalutin' manners. Sittin' there like a queen on a throne, turnin' up her nose at thirty-five cents a pound roast beef."

"Keep quiet, ma. My head's bustin'! I ain't sore at Eleanor. She don't know I got done out o' them clothes. . . . She's sick, ma. It's that Jew-woman, I bet, and if I find out it's up to her I'll fix her for it. I'll keep people away from her store! I'll walk right in and tear everything in the old place to pieces! I'll, I'll . . . where's that vinegar? Oh, my head's just killin' me."

§ 4

An hour later Michael Flynn passing Minnie's room heard a tremulous sigh rise out of the deepening gloom. He paused, and his heart sank at the sound of it. His girl was unhappy; perhaps she was crying. He rose on tiptoe and bent to listen. The hand on the jamb of the door trembled. He wanted to go in to Minnie and take her in his arms, as he had done so often in her childhood, but he dared not. He

could only rest there, glowing with an awakened pride as he remembered the trust with which she had always turned to him when a child. But she was a child no longer. It was a woman's sigh that came from out the darkness, a woman he was almost afraid of, a stranger, though of his own flesh and blood.

Chaotic thoughts were filtering through his tired head as he stood in silent communion with his memories, but somehow he saw in their relationship the parable of the green vine which feeds its sap to the blossoming fruit that it might yield its harvest when the vine is waste. And he questioned himself, "The vine gives all. Have *I* given all? Have I even given enough?" . . . The answer beat down upon him with blows that were almost tangible; no, no, no! Not everything! Not even enough! Though the fruit was fed with the blood of his own heart. What had he done for his children? Michael Flynn's conscience cried out to him. Yes, what had he done? What *could* he do—he, a failure . . . a plumber's assistant after twenty years of ceaseless toil, a failure who could never reach those heights of which he had dreamed, where he, master of his own shop, could support in comfort his wife and children . . . a failure . . . who had nothing but love to give.

And then, when another sigh came from Minnie a shudder passed through him. It was as if an icy blast had wrapped itself around him. Stark fear possessed him . . . had he come too late?

"Minnie!" he cried, and his voice crashed upon the silence. "Minnie!"

It awakened her from a heavy, dream-disturbed sleep. She sat bolt upright in bed, her heart thumping with the reaction of the sudden shock. "What is it? Who's that standing there? Nettie!"

He came stumbling into the room, guiding his way by the dim diffused light from the lightwell. "It's papa, darling. I come in to kiss you good night. I didn't mean to wake you up."

"You did though."

"I'm sorry, dear, I thought you was awake. I—" He paused, struggling for expression, glad of the dark that hid his ashen face. "There's a little matter I wanted to talk over with you. It's about the funeral money. I don't need it, I——"

A sob came from Minnie. "Papa," she said, as his arms closed around her, "I won't do it, papa dear. I won't touch a cent of it."

"Sh-h-h, Minnie, don't let mama hear you."

They sat there in choked silence for several minutes, then she whispered in his ear which was wet with her tears. "Don't get it out of your sock, papa darlin', because I won't touch it. If I don't make good this time I'll work my fingers to the bone but I won't touch any more of that money. Kiss me good night," she added hastily when she heard the door in the front room slam and knew that Nettie was home. "I'm glad you came in here, papa darlin', it's comfortin' like it was when I was a kid."

Michael Flynn was in a feverish ecstasy after he left Minnie. His arms ached from the weight of her as they had ached so many years ago. His fingers traced her tears upon his face. Unconsciously he bent back his head so they could pocket in the hollow of his cheek. She had kissed him with such tenderness and she had called him "papa darlin'!"

Michael Flynn was a simple man and grateful for all blessings that came to him, so in the dark he kneeled before his cot, cautiously, so Jimmy wouldn't wake.

CHAPTER SIX

§ 1

THE Biograph studio was in the loft of a ramshackle building on Twenty-sixth Street, near Broadway. Minnie felt at home in this neighborhood; it was similar to her own noisily crowded settlement. How differently she had approached the studio in Fort Lee; it seemed far out in the country and the country frightened her. The bare branches of the trees, denuded by the winds of late autumn, threw fantastic shadows on the dusty roads; the quiet had some of the awesomeness of a darkened church. But here it was different. Life exploded at one's elbow; children scuttled across the street like black beetles; peddlers shouted their wares; voices rose shrill to answer other voices; the gongs on cars clanged; horses' hoofs pounded on the cobbles; men and women with tense, hard faces hurried past on their way to work. Here and there at the dark entrances of office or factory buildings they were herded together for a moment, then, as if swept by a gust of wind, disappeared.

Minnie paused in the doorway of the studio, waiting for the elevator. Others swarmed in and soon the hallway was jammed by the onrush of people. Minnie saw many familiar types; eager, aggressive faces; young, timid, appealing faces; white and terrible faces. When the elevator door opened she sprang inside. She was hemmed in by the frantic crowd all fighting not to lose one of the minutes which seemed so

precious. Only so many places to be filled, twice as many people to fill them.

As the elevator slowly climbed upwards a child's scream startled them; someone had stepped on her foot. They strained to back away from the mother and the crying youngster. One man leaned down and lifted her to his shoulder but her screams only mounted higher. The elevator came to a standstill and they swarmed out of it. The man abruptly set the child down and edged his way into the long queue that stretched from the barred window of the casting director's office.

Minnie fell into line, the mother and child in back of her. Jerking the child's arm, the mother whispered threats of punishment.

"Look at your face all swollen, you bad girl," Minnie heard her say, "you've spoiled yourself. You won't get any gumdrops today just for that. Shame on you, making such a fuss about nothing at all."

"He hurted me."

"Stop that crying, do you hear me?"

"Not crying," in a wee, small voice.

"Then put your hands down. Look at you. You've mussed your hair. You're a bad, bad girl I tell you."

The stifled sobs became hiccoughs which wrenched her tiny body but she smiled mechanically when she saw Minnie looking down at her.

"Powder, mama?" she asked when she saw her mother's hand searching through the huge misshapen bag she carried over her arm. The mother didn't answer but under the screen of Minnie's back she drew a powder puff over the child's face, then applied a little rouge to each cheek. She brushed the little tight curls, pale and brittle with too many applications of peroxide.

The line was moving one by one as the people were being turned away from the window. Some went wearily toward the elevator, others through the door which led to the dressing rooms. By the time Minnie's turn came her body was damp with a cold sweat. Where was Reeves? Who was that man in his place? Would he know that Reeves had promised her she was to have work. Binns' card, how far would that take her?

Reeves' assistant was a tall young man who peered at Minnie with near-sighted eyes through his thick, distorting glasses. Without a word he handed her a card to fill out, then started to walk over to the ledger in which was filed the names of the extra people.

"Just a minute please," she called to him. "I'm Minnie Flynn. I seen Mr. Reeves on Tuesday and he said I was to work today."

"What name was that?" asked the young man in an uninterested tone.

"Mineola Flynn," she corrected quickly. "He said I was to work on the Pickford set."

"Oh, he did, did he? Well, I think they've got all the people they can handle. Fill out the card, young lady, and be sure to put down your phone number. I'll call you when we have anything for you."

Minnie's knuckles wrapped upon the iron grating, "Please, just a minute," she repeated in a quavering voice, "but he promised it to me. I been countin' on it. Look, here's a card from Mr. Binns. That's how he come to see me. He promised!"

"Step aside just a minute, you're blocking up the line, I'll see Mr. Reeves and find out if they can make room for you."

The mother slid eagerly into her place and raising the

child onto the ledge of the window, introduced herself as the mother of little "Buddy" Green who had done such remarkable work for them in the Marguerite Clark picture. Buddy was ill with the mumps but she had brought his little sister "Peaches" along as she knew they would be delighted to discover another infant prodigy . . . which brought no response from the impersonal young man other than slight jerks of his head and a request that she fill out a card stating age of child, experience, child's telephone number, etc.

Minnie waited fifteen minutes before she was again called to the barred window. He had very little to say to her, asking briefly whether she had brought an afternoon dress. She nodded eagerly and held up the brown paper parcel. Motioning that she was to go through the door into the dressing rooms he handed her an admission slip and turned again to the swelling line.

There were a dozen girls in the dressing room when Minnie entered, but no one looked up or paid any attention to her. The first call to the set had been shouted down the corridors and there was no time to lose. They were painting, powdering, white-washing arms and necks, sliding into rustling costumes or sheer, delicate dresses.

Minnie put on her makeup quickly. Then she lifted out of the paper parcel the shimmering evening gown and held it up, surveying it critically as if she didn't quite approve of it. A swift glance around the room told her there wasn't another dress to compare with it, and Minnie couldn't resist the temptation to flaunt it before them. She was hoping someone would exclaim over it so she could answer as Eleanor had done, "Yes, it's a sweet little thing but simple, quite simple."

A man came to the door, evidently an assistant director. He spoke in a low, well modulated voice. "All the girls

will please see Mrs. Letts before going downstairs," he said. "Kindly report on the stage as soon as possible."

No loud voice, no freshness, no slamming of doors as he went out. What a strange fellow for an assistant, Minnie thought. Were there others like him in the movies?

She followed a group of girls hurrying toward the wardrobe room where Mrs. Letts held court. She didn't keep them long, merely looked them over, tied a sash here, adjusted a corsage of imitation flowers there, removed superfluous false jewelry, hair ornaments, a diamond stomacher from one girl, huge flaring buckles from the slippers of another, and so on down the line until she came to Minnie. She leaned back and smiled approvingly.

"I don't think I've ever seen you before," she said warmly, "that's a very pretty gown, dear. A little elaborate—but nice lines. Mr. Dorsey's set, of course."

"I don't think so," Minnie answered, "the man downstairs said the director's name was Porter." With a nod of triumph, "I'm going to play in Mary Pickford's picture."

Mrs. Letts threw up her hands and uttered an exclamation, "But someone has made a mistake!" she cried. "It's an afternoon tea."

"That's it," cried Minnie eagerly, "that's what I'm to be in."

"But, my dear," protested Mrs. Letts, "look at the gown you've got on."

Minnie's words were almost inaudible, "What's the matter with it? Ain't it good enough? It cost sixty-seven dollars at a sale. It photographs swell. I——"

"It's an evening gown," interrupted Mrs. Letts, "don't you know that you can't wear a gown like that to an afternoon tea?"

"Oh, my Lord," and Minnie reached over to grasp Mrs.

Letts' hand. "It don't mean that I can't work today, does it, ma'am? Honest, I'll go crazy if I got this far and can't go through with it."

Inexorable laws which dare not be broken. . . .

"If I had any kind of a dress in this wardrobe room I could give you, my poor child," said Mrs. Letts, "I'd do it in a minute. But I've used everything we have in stock. I'm sorry, dear, but I can't pass you. However, I'll be able to give you a very good recommendation and if you like I'll speak to Mr. Reeves personally and tell him how well you look in an evening gown. Don't be discouraged, you'll probably be called within a day or so."

Minnie turned and fled from the room. Hastily she undressed and wrapped the gown in the brown paper. Again in her suit she rushed through the corridor and out to the elevator. It was only 8:45 and if she reached the Vitagraph Studio before nine by some unexpected good fortune they might be able to use her.

But the casting director at the Vitagraph told her to drop around again in a day or so.

§ 2

It was five o'clock before Minnie arrived home. She had been walking the streets since two. She had gone to a pawnbroker with the dress. "Four thirty-five, though it's worth only two," he told her. Her courage failed when she started to hand it across the counter . . . the first pretty thing she had ever owned. With that money, though, she could silence those bitter tongues, Pete's and Nettie's and her mother's. They couldn't flaunt her failure at her again. She would give them to understand the money was paid her for work at the studio. The following day she planned to try

to get her old position back. She wouldn't even have to go to her father and ask for help. *Her father* . . . the memory of his trembling arms around her, his unhidden joy when called upon for sympathy touched some latent depths of tenderness in her nature. It steadied her; it gave her a clearer vision; a keener, more incisive determination to see her failure through courageously.

There was a trace of satiric gleam in the pawnbroker's eyes as Minnie gathered up the bundle and flung out of the store, head up, chin round and firm, eyes looking straight ahead.

"She'll come back tomorrow," he said to himself.

Nettie and her mother advanced to meet her as she opened the door and went in.

"Well, dearie," said her mother, "I see you got good news for us. When you didn't return by ten me and Net knew everything was all runnin' smooth and nice. Did you act today, Min?"

She faced them (she felt there was something very dramatic about this) and told them how she had gone from one studio to another without finding work, that she was ready to give up because she could afford to gamble no longer, with Nettie out of work and no funds to buy the wardrobe which was so necessary to success.

They did exactly what she expected them to do. Nettie's raucous voice filled the room with lamentations and curses. Her mother looked upon the disappointment as punishment meted out to her alone, another cross to carry on her poor, frail shoulders. Then when she could bear it no longer Minnie went quietly out of the house and down the street. . . .

§ 3

She didn't know that Billy saw her the first time she passed Hesselman's shop. He ducked behind the counter

to avoid what he thought would be an awkward meeting. The second time she passed she walked more slowly, all resilience gone from her step. How pale she was, how deep the circles under her eyes. Dissipation no doubt. . . . Billy had heard that the movie crowd were a fast lot. Must be, the way Minnie looked. He had never seen her walk with lagging steps before. He rose from his hiding place and dodged behind a huge quarter of beef. What in the devil was Minnie stalling around the butcher shop for? To make *him* miserable, he asked himself? What a chance! What a fat chance. It was she who had wiped off the slate. Now he was going to stay where he was put. No girl could make a fool twice out of Billy MacNally.

He stepped from out his hiding place as indifferently as if she weren't strolling past the window, stopping to look in to see if her skirt weren't slightly hiked in the back. It was almost closing time. He would put on his new brown derby, walk out past her, tip his hat, smile, keep on whistling and walking until he came to the doorway of the French Bakery where Madge Connors would be waiting for him.

Minnie was also fighting with her pride. If she hadn't made that unprofitable and expensive trip to Fort Lee she would have had enough money to walk right into the shop, ask for fifteen cents' worth of Hamburger and give Billy the chance to make the first overtures. But she knew she would stand there ashamed before him if he suspected her motive.

Billy was glad he had worn his best suit and a white collar. He hoped Madge was sporting the new sealskin coat she had bought at the store for a hundred and twenty-five bucks. Guess that would set Minnie back somewhat, as he and Madge walked away from her, arm-in-arm to the Hungarian restaurant where they were to dine. . . . The only

thing that took away from the pleasure of hurting Minnie was that tired, unhappy look in her eyes.

Minnie, bitterly disappointed, slowly rounded the corner and bumped right into Madge Connors.

"Why, Minnie!" cried Madge, her first impulse to rush up to her former friend with that careless caress which has become so much a woman's habit. Suddenly, instinctively they both withdrew, Madge embarrassed because she was sure she had taken Minnie's place in Billy's heart; Minnie because of that sealskin coat! They stood there, rigid, chilled by the reproaches in each other's eyes.

Then Minnie, in icy tones, said, "How do you do, Madge, you're lookin' very well."

"Thank you," replied Madge in much the same tone. "It's cold tonight, ain't it?"

Minnie laughed ironically. "Maybe for you, Madge, but not for me."

As if rooted to the spot they stood there teetering slightly, Madge buttoning and unbuttoning her sealskin coat.

Finally she spoke, "I seen somebody that was talkin' about you the other day."

"Oh, *was* they?" said Minnie arching her eyebrows, and holding out her hand in Eleanor's accepted style. "Well, good night, Madge."

"Good night."

Minnie had heard Billy's thumping footsteps behind her. Her face was red. If Billy saw it he would guess what lay in her heart. She quickened her steps . . . someone running in back of her. . . .

"Min! Wait a minute. I got something to say to you."

"To *me*, Billy?"

"Yeh, don't get sore, Min. I just wanted to ask if you'd have dinner with Madge and I."

"What's the idea? Think I want to be the extra spoke to the wheel? Not me!"

"You'd never be an extra spoke where I'm concerned, Minnie, and you know it. Tell me the truth, honest now. I want to know why you walked past the store tonight. Did you want to see me, Minnie? Did you?"

"I always exercise before dinner," she answered. "It's good for the complexion. Your friend's waitin' for you, Billy. She seems to be sufferin' from cold in spite of her swell new coat. So long! Drop around to the house some time, the folks would love to see you."

"Minnie!" He caught her by the arm and drew her toward him. "Got anything on for tonight?"

She knew what he intended to ask . . . if her spirits hadn't been so low she would have turned away from him.

"Sure, but only a dinner date."

"So've I, but I mean after dinner?"

With a shrug of her shoulders Minnie feigned indifference. "Nothing definite. My gentleman friend's goin' to a the-ayter party uptown. I had a headache this evening, I didn't feel like joinin' 'em. Surely Madge ain't the kind of a girl that's goin' to pass you up after you've fed her, is she?"

She was thinking, "Poor Billy is still stuck on me." The lids of his eyes drooped at the corners giving them a lugubrious expression. Sympathy for Billy almost equaled her sympathy for herself.

"Do you really want to see me," she asked him, "very much?"

"Oh, God, Min."

"Don't look at me like that, Billy, your friend might see you."

"I don't care who sees me, Minnie, the whole world for that matter. Listen, I can break that date with Madge. It

won't hurt her feelings. I want to see you. I want to see you something fierce. There's lots I got to talk over with you. What do you say if I meet you in front of Sullivan's at seven-thirty? Is that too early for you, Min?"

"Make it eight," said Minnie, who figured she would have time to get out to Eleanor's and back.

"Eight! Say, I'll be there, Minnie, with bells on."

"So long, Billy . . . *dear*."

§ 4

Minnie was strangely, unexpectedly contented for the first three weeks of her married life. It was a relief to get away from the untidy Flynn home into the small but comfortable sky-parlor of Mrs. Schultz's rooming house. The rooming house was only two doors from Hesselman's butcher shop, so Billy often ran home, making quite a happy interlude in her long, quiet day. Minnie seldom went home. It always meant an hysterical scene. Elsie and Pete were living there, Mrs. Flynn having moved into the bedroom with Nettie, so Elsie and Pete could sleep in the living room.

With Pete out of a job, they sat around like half-doped creatures from morning until dinner time, talking about Minnie. They despised her because they felt she had lied to them and cheated them. She had promised so much and given nothing.

Minnie wanted to go back to work, but there was no opening in the Odds and Ends. Jeeps, the floor-walker, told her that he'd have her in mind when one of the girls left, and would recommend her to the manager of the basement. Jeeps did not mean to be unkindly when he said to her, "Never expected to see Miss Flynn back in the Odds and Ends. Certainly expected to see Miss Flynn in the movies.

Certainly expected to pick up a paper and see Miss Flynn's photo in it——”

Minnie wanted to scream at the thought of their hidden laughter. She was a failure, and because of it she had lost her popularity. In such moments of loneliness and ostracism, Minnie, filled with self-pity, sought comfort in Billy's arms. He held her on his lap, and they rocked back and forth in the squeaky rocker. She could close her eyes, relax, and dream of the future. Billy *was* nice—and nobody's fool. He would do very well in a few years. . . . Hesselman had no relations and he couldn't live on forever. . . . Billy and she would have a flat in the Bronx. Children, of course. And on Saturday night they'd all go to a vaudeville show. . . . She'd probably get fat like her mother. But Billy was like her father. He would never forget how she had looked when she was young, and he would always love her, work for her, fight for her, and protect her. . . . If only he didn't sleep with his mouth open, and soap could rub from off his hands the odor of cold storage meat and the entrails of fowl and animals. . . .

Talking about meat was another thing that sickened Minnie. And Billy talked of nothing else. Cuts, ribs, livers, bones, the rise in beef, the fall in lamb, the weight of each new carcass. He took great pride in the new meat grinder Hesselman had bought. He urged Minnie to come into the shop late one afternoon just before closing time to see it. With a proprietary air he led her over to it. It was red, and the knives were new and highly polished.

“I'll let you turn the handle, honey, while I throw the meat in. Just old scraps so we won't waste nothin'.”

Minnie turned the handle. Billy, grinning, passed in several pieces of discolored meat. Minnie turned away.

“Look at it, sweetheart,” triumphantly from Billy. “A

few whirls of the knives and out it comes minced fine enough for sausage."

"No, Billy. Don't make me look at it! I can't!"

"Why, Minnie!"

"I can't bear it! It makes a squishy sound. It makes me sick to my stummick."

Billy was disappointed. She would never make an A-Number One butcher's wife. Before Mrs. Hesselman died he remembered how much pleasure she took in working with her husband, how cleverly she had learned to use the big knives and cleavers. She could go to the wholesalers and pick out better cuts than old Hesselman himself. Billy gave up all hopes that Minnie would be what his father had always called his hard-working mother, "a good wife." But she was a dear little wife, pretty, full of fun, and he was proud of her.

§ 5

Minnie turned for companionship to the cheap novels which were lying on a dusty shelf. But the fine print hurt her eyes, and she preferred to sit there with her hands hanging listlessly over the rungs of an old armchair and stare into space, reviewing as in a daze her experiences at the studios. How drab and colorless the every-day reality seemed by comparison to the glitter of the "movies." This very room she was in, a bedroom; a great oak-stained, sway-backed bed covered with coarse sheets, cheap blankets, and a crazy quilt; oak furniture, crumbling mantelpiece . . . *gas jets!* How different it was from the bedroom built on the stage at the studio; the one they called the *boudoir*. Minnie had slipped in unaware one afternoon and slid her hand over the pink satin coverlet. A gilded bed with a

canopy overhead, trailing its silken draperies to the floor. Pink lamps. And a polar bear rug before a fireplace. A room fit for a queen, Minnie thought, the kind of setting any woman could be absolutely happy in—provided, of course, she had the right man. Minnie could never see Billy in a room like that. Al Kessler might be at home there, but never Billy. His hands would taint the satin coverlet. She shuddered when her imagination pictured Billy's old working suit, blood-stained, lying over the back of one of those gilded chairs.

One afternoon Elsie came to see her, and when she stepped out of the murky shadows of the narrow hallway into the sunlit room, Minnie uttered a sharp cry. Elsie's face was so distorted, that Minnie, though stricken with pity for her, felt an uncontrollable impulse to laugh. One eye was discolored, her right cheek swollen and her thin lips puffed into a tragic pout.

"He beat you, the dirty swine!" Minnie cried compassionately, drawing Elsie with a swift caress into her arms. "Oh, you poor kid, you. Why didn't you hit him back, Elsie? Believe me, I'd o' *killed* him. . . ."

Elsie had struggled away from Minnie's embrace. "No, Min, it wasn't Pete! Honest to God! I fell down the stairs."

Minnie knew she was lying, but felt no admiration for this loyalty. The women that she had known took a personal pride in their loyalty to their men, and some of them accepted their punishment as part of a thorough martyrdom. Others welcomed abuse as a proof of their husbands' love. Michael Flynn had never struck his wife, and once Minnie overheard her mother speak of this almost regretfully, as if she had been cheated out of one of the essential pleasures of married life.

This was the first time Minnie had actually come in contact with a woman whose man had beaten her. There came over her a strange, inexplicable desire to talk about it, to probe deep into the other woman's emotions, and enjoy them vicariously.

"Don't tell me Pete didn't do it, Elsie, because I know you're lyin' about it. Pete told me so himself—he was awful sorry he done it——"

"Oh, Minnie," and the guileless Elsie fell into the trap. "I didn't want to give it away. Even your own mother ain't on to it——"

"It's a dead secret with me, Elsie, so you needn't worry about it. I cross my heart to die. . . . *Why did he do it?*"

"I don't even remember, Minnie, but he was so terrible sorry for it he——"

"Did you cry out, Elsie, or did you just stand there and take it all? Did he hurt you very much?"

"Somethin' fierce, Minnie. Once he hit me so hard I screamed—and fell down on the floor——"

Minnie leaned closer to Elsie; her whisper was almost inaudible. "Wasn't your heart poundin' somethin' terrible?"

"Yeh, I couldn't speak—I laid there in Pete's arms with him cryin' over me and it seemed as if I was floatin' through space—what with the awful pain I was in and the way Pete was kissin' me——"

With unsteady footsteps Minnie walked over to the bed and sank down, gripping the foot-board with taut, trembling fingers. "I don't think Billy'll ever beat me," she said after a strained silence. "I don't think I am ever goin' to get much of a kick outa Billy MacNally."

"Love is a wonderful thing," sighed Elsie, who had now chosen the rocking chair and was rocking back and forth. "I'd rather be dead than live without him."

They sat there in silence for a few minutes, Minnie staring at Elsie resentfully. This girl whom she had despised and pitied knew a phase of life that she was cheated out of. She knew what it was to love unrestrainedly, to give unquestioningly, to be possessed wholly. . . .

She was roused from her reverie by Elsie's sharp cry, "Minnie, can you imagine—lookit!" She was pulling a long envelope out of her pocket. "Here's why I'm over today. And I almost forgot it! It's for you. It says 'Mammoth Studio, Elite Productions,' on the envelope. Do you think——"

Minnie snatched the envelope away from her, tore it open, and her face grew pale. She read aloud in a high-pitched voice:

"Dear Miss Flynn:

"We are very eager to have you get in touch with us regarding a part in Mr. Deane's next picture. Will you kindly telephone at your earliest convenience so we can make an appointment with Mr. Deane?

"Sincerely yours,

"ELMER PHELPS,

"*'Casting Director.'*"

"At your earliest convenience" was the phrase that intrigued Elsie. It distinguished Minnie as nothing had ever done before. "What're you goin' to do about it?" For Minnie's blank expression gave no clew to her sensations.

"I dunno," she said dully. "It might be all a fake."

"A fake, rats! Nobody fakes a letter that's set up in that style."

"In Deane's picture—a part, it says——"

"At your earliest convenience——"

"Oh, Els, wouldn't it be wonderful if——"

"If what?"

"Nothin'! But some people run into the rottenest luck. Why didn't it come before. . . ." She checked herself before she said aloud "I married Billy." "Elsie, have you got any o' that rouge left, I'm awful pale."

"What you gonna do, hon?"

"It's one-fifteen. . . . Guess I can make the two o'clock ferry to Fort Lee."

CHAPTER SEVEN

§ 1

HAL DEANE had already attracted considerable attention. The producers of motion pictures, as well as the press, had applauded his sincere, intelligent efforts to vitalize the plots of the screen pictures. He seemed to recognize that striking individual characterization and humor would revive the lagging interest of a public jaded by commonplace plots. Deane was one of the pioneers in this field.

Men like Bacon, who had gotten their schooling in the second-rate theaters, scoffed at his "radicalism."

Bacon had been a barnstormer; a stock actor in small towns; later, a producer of cheap, tawdry road shows. He had fed the audiences highly colored, sensational melodramas played in an artificial and flamboyant manner. Even when plays had real merit, Bacon managed by his interpretation to destroy in them any semblance of reality. He was convinced that theater audiences liked exaggeration of style in dress, mode of speech, of emotional expression. He carried this idea into the picture business, and it met with the approval of most of the producers who were equally ignorant of audience reactions; only a very few among them had had experience in any branch of the theatrical profession. Characterization of individual rôles was a waste of effort to him. He scorned Deane's insistence that the only hope for the screen lay in individual interpretation of type.

Bacon believed in physical comedy, bald, obvious cartooning which would provoke what he and the men of his school

called "belly laughs." Deane achieved a more subtle humor. By balancing laughter and tears he made real the marionettes on the screen. He chose stories about real people. When he launched them upon their melodramatic ways, guided them through situations often vague and distorted, he made them seem plausible because of the sincerity and the reality of the playing. He wanted the audiences to see themselves in these simple interpretations of every-day people—and they did.

The public soon began watching for the pictures which Deane was directing. They could laugh at them, they could cry over them. "Human," they called them.

Deane was a skilled mechanic. He would not have himself called anything else. He could not see much art in the "movies." If the public wanted pap, he would give it to them. He would grind out happy endings, which would bring success and money both to him and George Beauregard, for whom he was working.

At college, while he was studying to be a chemist, he had noted the possibilities of motion pictures as a new prosperous industry with Gargantuan power. He saw that with intelligent coördination this new medium possessed potentialities for the actual enlightenment and amusement of the masses.

When he finished college, received his Bachelor's Degree of Science, and knew he had a profession to fall back upon, he turned to the moving picture studios, keenly curious. He was interested in the amazing strides already made in the studio laboratories. Each year new inventions made more beautiful the photography on the screen. Each year more skilled mechanics improved the electrical department, until there had been perfected gigantic powerful lights which brought a semblance of clear crystal daylight onto the very stages of the studios. Architects were contributing their

skill in designing stage settings. Costumers were learning photographic values of all fabrics. Skilled artisans from all over the world were turning toward the "movies."

Deane began in one of the laboratories. His quick, incisive mind soon attracted the attention of those in charge. They dismissed his radical ideas on labor-saving devices. They were amused at his worry over the useless, vulgar waste of money in the careless hands of the so-called creative people of the studios. But they were awed by his college education and often turned to him for advice or information. Being well-read, Deane suggested many stories which were screenable. He corrected the doubtful English of the titles written upon the screen. He even took a fling at writing copy for the advertisements of their productions.

At first directing pictures had not seemed an opening wedge to him. Most of the directors were men with some experience in the theater, but many of them failed in this new medium. During that period, when the motion picture industry was aching from its growing pains, artisans sprang to the positions formerly held by artists. Many of this new school of directors were making good. Among them were men without academic training, but with vision, a keen sympathetic understanding of the masses, and the humor of the streets. Above all things, they were fearless, because they were not fettered by the traditions of the theater. Deane saw their success, and realized that here was the channel through which his opportunity was to come. He began as an assistant director and worked in this capacity for several months. Then his chance came, though oddly enough he didn't succeed at once. His pictures were quite mediocre. Deane realized this to his chagrin, and with wry humor confessed to the producer: "I guess I am cross-eyed with introspection. I've been too full of theories, and I've found

them difficult to put into practical use." He marshaled all these theories, evaluated between what was practical and what was merely visionary, finally rejecting everything but the idea of humanizing the characters of the stories given him to produce. His success was of slow but definite growth. After five years of tireless application, he was recognized as one of the most capable, intelligent directors of the screen.

Beauregard paid him a larger salary than was being paid to any other director. For this reason alone Beauregard acceded to all his demands.

Deane bought a story of the tenement districts of New York. The locale was lower Ninth Avenue, and he knew that in order to give a semblance of reality to the characters they must be chosen carefully from among the actors and actresses who typified such an environment. The story was the romance of a shallow, ignorant little girl who succeeded because of a pretty face and native wit.

"I've got the girl!" Deane cried out, his arms cutting through the heavy fog of tobacco smoke swirling to the low ceiling of Beauregard's office. "I've got her!"

The men bent forward eagerly. They had deliberated long and seriously over a girl to play the rôle of Margie Tait in "Women for Sale."

"Who?"

"Big star?"

"Nobody you ever heard of before. Can't even remember her name. Extra girl. Send for Letcher!"

Letcher was brought in, his fat pulpy face gray with fear. "The boss has got something up his sleeve," Letcher was thinking as he hurriedly followed the office boy through the winding corridors to Beauregard's private office.

When Letcher came into the room and stood there in a half-cringing, apologetic attitude, Deane asked:

"Who was that kid who worked on Bacon's set? Girl—Minnie-something-or-other? Did some stunts one day—made you all laugh. Think she called it a 'Chink Act.'"

"Oh, gee, that little chippy?" Red suffused Letcher's face. A mist was swimming before his eyes. He turned to Beauregard, a choking sound in his throat. "Don't fire me for a thing like that, Mr. Beauregard," he pleaded, his huge head rocking on his neck, "it was Binns that lied to me about her. On my honor, I ain't laid eyes on the little fool since that day. I——"

"What's her name and address?" said Deane's quiet, compelling voice. "I want to send for her."

Beauregard laughed at the blank, crestfallen expression on Letcher's face. "Yes, sir. Yes, sir!"

When Letcher was gone: "He's right—she *is* stupid. Pitiful little kid though. Tried to bluff her way into the studio. They were making a fool of her on Bacon's set. But I watched her. I saw the old spark that we're always searching for. She'll photograph well, and after all the main thing is—she's the type! Pliable if I have patience. I've thought it all over, and I know it's worth the experiment."

"If you believe she's the one, I won't argue over it," and Beauregard relaxed in the swivel chair, drew a cigar from his pocket and held it to his nostrils. "I'll be glad to have you start on the picture, Deane. Don't stint on this one—I'm ready to spend some money. We need a knock-out right now. We always depend on you to give one to us."

"You'll get it in this one. It's commonplace enough to be a great commercial success," Deane laughed. "Box office written all over it. Poor girl, rich villain, honest lover, sweet self-sacrificing mother, train wreck, rescue—all the tried and true ingredients of hokum."

George Beauregard moved uneasily and lowered the tight,

red lids of his large pop-eyes. Deane saw the color mount to his temples, saw the nervous tug that he gave to the end of the cigar, and smiled. He knew Beauregard hated to hear pictures spoken of as being ground out of a sausage machine. Beauregard wanted to call them "Art." And this is why. . . . Beauregard resented his own background, the poverty-stricken childhood where he had first learned the trade of hoarding up refuse, securing by physical effort something for nothing, and selling it for profit. For years he had been pointed out as the Junk Man,—as the Junk Man of Mott Street; then the Junk Man of Third Avenue; the Junk Man of Sixth Street; even the Junk Man of Fifth Avenue, when, after successful years on Wall Street, he retired and bought himself one of the conspicuous palatial residences on the Avenue between Sixty-sixth and Sixty-seventh Streets. Three years he had spent abroad, trying to wipe out the stigma. Junk man. He returned as George Beauregard, man of affairs, searching for artistic fields in which to invest his fortune. He bought an interest in a new publishing house—and two popular sellers established them. He backed a play, an artistic triumph, but a commercial failure. But he cared nothing about its failure, or the loss of money, because the critics, praising the play, lauded the producer, George Beauregard. Evidently the world had forgotten the Junk Man. Longing to satisfy the creative force in him, and realizing that his dull commercial mind could never have a natural outlet of expression, there was only left to Beauregard the subsidizing of creative artists. He became a patron of all of the tributaries of art. The man who sold him the controlling stock in the motion picture organization known as "The Elite Productions," spoke of the movies as the great new Art, and cleverly stressed the promise that all pioneers in the field would meet with international recogni-

tion. So Beauregard became a producer in order that he might command these armies of artisans, vainly hoping that he, at the head, would be recognized as the artist.

Beauregard was always uncomfortable in the presence of Deane. He felt that he was being ridiculed though there was no index of Deane's thoughts in his quiet composure, his deliberate gestures, his frank, smiling eyes.

Beauregard boasted of Deane's college education. There was only a handful of college men in the whole profession—several of them were actors. Beauregard, who dared tell no lies about his own lack of education, which was apparent in spite of a superficial veneer, always mentioned this:

"I've got college men working for me. Deane's a clever chap from Harvard. He's had a better education than I have, but you'd be surprised how little he really knows about Art. Art, I guess, is born in a man. Take me, for instance. I love every branch of it! I'd have been an actor or a musician myself if I hadn't been destined to be a Wall Street broker, and a producer of plays and pictures."

How Beauregard hated Deane's remarks about *Art* in the moving picture industry!

§ 2

Beauregard was there when Deane interviewed Minnie. He saw at once why Deane wanted her, with her delicate, oval face, the waving lustrous hair, white, even teeth, gray eyes, shadowed by long lashes, and full, laughter-loving mouth.

Deane sat in his chair behind the desk looking at her with keen appraising eyes. He weighed his words, at the same time intensely studying the reaction on Minnie. Beauregard stirred uneasily. He failed several times to light his cigar, letting the match burn to his highly polished nails. Baiting

human beings, especially pretty young girls, always seemed a cruel sport to him. Bacon openly ridiculed them, though often his brutality seemed to his victims a sort of coarse appreciation, and many, like Minnie Flynn, never knew how hideous or insinuating was his laughter. Deane's cruelty was more subtle. He made them laugh, hope, and suffer poignantly so that he could analyze their emotions and reactions.

Deane told Minnie briefly but with dramatic emphasis the story of "Women for Sale." She listened dazedly, awed because she was the focus of his attention. Her ears heard little above the beating of her heart.

"It's a great story, isn't it?"

She flushed, "Yeh. It sure is!" she answered nervously. "Thanks awfully for telling it to me, Mr. Deane. He tells stories something swell, don't he?" she asked others.

Beauregard, spitting out another piece of his cigar, swallowed and nodded.

"Well, young lady. What do you think of the part of Margie Tait?"

Minnie wanted to answer quickly and intelligently, but the silence in the room stifled her. So she repeated in the same unsteady voice, rising in crescendo to a titter, "Yeh—I think the part is swell, isn't it?"

"Look here, Miss Flynn. How would you like to play that part? The star in the picture, do you understand?"

"Oh, God—*me*?"

"Yes, *you*. I picked you out for it. You're just the type of girl I want. What's more, I believe you can act."

"Oh, Mr. Deane! Honest— Oh, you're kiddin' me!"

"No, he's not," interposed Beauregard. He was growing more uncomfortable. He was beginning to wish that Minnie were a homely girl.

Tears sprang to her eyes. "I sure can do it, Mr. Deane, if you only give me the chance. Please tell me that you're not kiddin' me!"

"What salary do you want?"

"Anything—nothin'!"

She leaned for support against the big oak table, resting her damp hands upon it, bending forward queringly, her eyes growing black with dilating pupils, searching Deane's face, fascinated, yet terrified by his enigmatic smile.

"Here's what I'm going to do for you, Miss Flynn. Let you play the part and give you seventy-five dollars a week."

Minnie made no outward move. But within came a violent physical disturbance. Her stomach seemed wrenched and twisted—nausea overcame her. The figures of the men merged into one and swayed like heat vibrations. Again she grasped the oak desk, straddling out her legs to get her balance.

"Quick—a glass of water!" cried Beauregard, who thought that she was going to faint.

"No, don't bother!" She forced a wan smile. "I got sick to my stummick for a minute. I'm all right now. . . . How much did you say you was going to give me? That wasn't by the week, was it?"

Deane turned to Weaver. "Bring that contract here. I want her to sign it."

Minnie was afraid. She had signed something once—that paper at Madame Papillon's. "If you don't mind, I'd rather not. I'll take your word for it. Do I work a couple o' weeks?"

"You'll have to sign the contract. Don't worry. There's no catch in it. It's very simple, merely a form. You're going to have at least eight weeks' employment. This picture is a special."

Minnie Flynn gasped, "You mean to say you're gonna pay me seventy-five dollars a week for eight weeks?"

Deane nodded, "Not only that, Miss Flynn,—I'm going to give you one hundred advance. Buy some wardrobe with it. You'll need two hats with feathers on them."

"Two hats with feathers on 'em," echoed Minnie in a dazed monotone.

"You'll need a sweater and a tam. Do you like red?" Deane was smiling, though his voice was cold.

"You bet your sweet life I do," Minnie answered, brought out of her hysteria by his commonplace question. Then she added hastily, her face burning, "If you don't mind, I'd like to get a green tam. It goes lots better with my hair."

"Get anything you like," answered Deane. "Buy a few bangles for your wrists. Girls like bracelets, don't they?"

Minnie had lost all her self-consciousness. "Sure, I like bracelets. I'm a girl, ain't I?"

"You're *the* girl, that's more to the point," Deane answered, always with that detached smile.

Weaver returned and put the contract and a check in front of Deane, who glanced over them casually, made a slight notation, then read the contract aloud to Minnie. She listened, standing there swaying slightly, her mouth open, her eyes half-closed, her fingers unconsciously keeping time to the emphasis in Deane's voice.

"You can sign here," Deane pointed to the dotted line. When Minnie reached for the pen, he felt her finger tips cold against his. "She can act," he thought to himself. "I'll be able to get something out of her. Ignorant, but emotional."

Minnie signed on the dotted line, "Minnie Flynn."

"I thought your name was Mineola?" This was the first time Weaver had spoken.

"Yeh, it is. Minnie for short. Ain't it funny—I'm that nervous!"

"It's not such a pretty name for the screen," Beauregard said in his soft colorless voice, made so expressionless by his desire to simulate the cultured tone of a gentleman. "Don't you think we had better suggest to the young lady that she change it?"

"If she doesn't mind."

"Gee, of course not. I've got another name. Do you think MacNally is any better than Flynn?"

Weaver looked swiftly to the ceiling and put his tongue in his cheek. Minnie saw the gesture and hated him for it. It reminded her of Pete. Like a bird in swift flight Minnie's thoughts flew home, and for a breathless second she felt sharp pangs akin to ecstasy as she visualized her triumphant return. How she would astonish them, tantalize them, how she would shame them by her generosities. The men's voices were droning in her ears, but she stood there transfixed, numbed by the poignant satisfaction of a contemplated revenge upon Pete, then caressed by the conjured vision of Billy, Jimmie and her father in new suits and flaming neckties, with silver-foil wrapped cigars protruding from vest pockets. . . . And she was drunk with this ecstasy of sudden possession.

"We've been talking over several *noms de plume*, Miss Flynn," began Beauregard. "We——"

"A new name for you!" The sharp, decisive inflections of Deane's voice brought her back to sudden consciousness. "Mr. Beauregard thinks it wiser to give you another name."

"Yes, we are planning to christen you today."

"Oh, but Mr. Beauregard, I ain't dressed for a christenin'. I——"

Smiles.

"Not a formal christening, Miss Flynn." Beauregard slowly lowered his lids over the protruding eyeballs, and more slowly smiled. He was beginning to be attracted by the prettiness

of Minnie Flynn. He made pleasant mental note of the smooth, voluptuous yet slender column of her throat, the delicate roundness of her breasts half-revealed above the low cut of her blouse as she bent over the desk. She was ignorant, but he did not resent this ignorance. It offered him material to work with, and like many who had acquired an education late in life, he enjoyed teaching those more ignorant than he. It gave him a sense of power over them, and to Beauregard this had become the most insidious form of self-flattery. In the picture business it was not difficult to be looked upon as an intellectual. Beauregard's veneer easily fooled them: his bombastic phraseology; his too Chesterfieldian manner. Even his notorious love affairs dignified his position, because of the very boldness with which he flaunted them, to the ignorant minds of the studios; unmasked, uncurtained vice was the privilege of aristocrats and intellectuals.

Deane glanced swiftly from Minnie to Beauregard with an expression of disgust. "We were discussing names, Beauregard, you gallantly suggested something like Sweet, Tender or Gay."

"A rose by any other name, Deane——"

Deane cut him short. "Read the list, Weaver. I've written down all you suggested, Beauregard. You'll find the crop has been pretty well culled."

Weaver read the list. "Love—Lovely—Sweet—Pretty—Gay—Joy—Darling—Caprice——"

"Ah, yes, I'm afraid you're right. They've all been used. I'm sorry about Caprice—it seems to fit the young lady. 'Capriciousness, thy name is woman.'"

Deane shot him a contemptuous glance. But Beauregard didn't see it. He was looking at Minnie under half-closed lids, and smiling—"like an old bullfrog," raced through Minnie's mind, "but a nice old gent at that"—and how Eleanor had lied about him—from all she had told, Minnie had thought

that Beauregard was a skunk instead of a fat, kindly man in his forties, who certainly was showing that he had a lot of respect for women. . . .”

“Yes, Beauregard, the name of Caprice has been used. They are all used—even Mona Lisa.”

“Lady of the Inscrutable Smile! Remarkable name for a picture star, especially a vampire. I wish I had thought of it first.”

Deane had a sense of humor. He was laughing at Beauregard, at the stupidity of the game as he saw it played every day in the studios. But the procedure bored him, and he resented its interference with work.

“Opal would be the name for this charming young lady.”

Minnie giggled.

“There’s a chorus girl who does extra work here. Her name is Opal Escent,” said Weaver. “She hasn’t had the name very long, and she may be persuaded to change it,—for a slight consideration.”

“Escent—Opal Escent—Miss Escent—” Beauregard was ruminating aloud. “No, I don’t like the name of Escent, it isn’t quite euphonious enough.”

“Have you a middle name, Mineola?” Weaver asked her.

Minnie had always wished that her mother had given her the middle name of June instead of May. “Yeh—it’s June.”

“June! Not half bad. In fact, I rather like it. What goes well with June, Deane?”

“June Day,” with a scarcely veiled smile from Deane.

“June Day!” echoed Beauregard, bringing his short fat hand down upon his knee with a resounding thud. “You’ve hit it! May Day—June Day. Yes, that’s the name for this young lady. Well, young lady, how do you like it?”

“Swell,” answered Minnie, flushed with the triumph of the moment. “I think it’s swell!”

"We'll christen her right in this office. Weaver! Open that cabinet and get me a bottle of Scotch. Four glasses!" He was already searching the desk drawer for the corkscrew. "Ring for the photographer, Deane. I'm going to give out the story of our new acquisition. Don't be stingy with the Scotch, Weaver. June Day! We've got to drink a toast to you."

Deane's mouth was drawn into a thin, jagged line. He rose abruptly, "Come on, Weaver. We have work to do."

"Not one highball?" asked Beauregard with a pretense at regret, but welcoming the chance to be alone with Minnie.

Deane didn't answer. He turned to Minnie. "Step into my office in a few minutes, please. I'll have a hundred dollars in cash for you. There are two or three things I wish to discuss."

Minnie was instinctively uneasy before Deane. "Yes, sir."

The door swung open, and the photographer entered. "Flashlight, Mr. Beauregard, or do you want to step outside?"

"Flashlight," he set the bottle and the two glasses under the desk, so they could be hidden by the waste paper basket. "This is Miss Day, Walter. Don't go, Deane. I want a still of Miss Day signing the contract. Miss Day had better stand between us two. There! That's it, little girl. Lean over, pen in hand as if you were signing the contract, then look up into the camera and smile. No, I guess it's better if you look at *me* and smile."

"Then I'll look at both of you and smile," said Deane with obvious sarcasm.

Minnie had had many snapshots taken. She looked right into the camera and smiled boldly. The sharp report and the puff of smoke startled her.

"Well, that's over," said Beauregard, "and now the preliminaries are on. Develop the negative right away, Walter,

and turn a couple of prints over to the publicity department. I want the story in tomorrow's papers."

Minnie shook hands with Walter. He left, grinning, followed by Weaver. Deane slammed the door after him.

"You'll like Deane when you know him better," Beauregard said. "He's a great director. I'll see that he makes you."

"Gee, but you're awfully good to me, Mr. Beauregard. I don't know how to thank you."

"Little June Day," said Beauregard, and his voice dropped. "All the joy we get out of life is but a reflection of the joy we bring into the lives of others. Your happiness is to be my happiness. Shall we drink a merry old highball together?"

"No, I don't want to, really. I gotta get home. You heard what Mr. Deane said. He wants me to do some shoppin'." With childish eagerness, she added, "Think of it, Mr. Beauregard—a hundred dollars! Why, I never dreamed I'd ever hold that much money in my own hands. I can't believe it. Pinch me, and see if I wake up!"

He leaned over and took hold of her arm, pressing it between his two soft palms. "Dear little arm, I couldn't bear to pinch it. Very well, June Day, run away from me and get your hundred dollars." He sighed ponderously. "It's a great joy to be able to give it to you. I'd like to be there with you while you're spending it. It's a veritable passion with me, enjoying another's happiness."

Minnie let him hold her hand. She was hardly conscious of his presence. Racing madly through her mind were fragmentary pictures of the heights she was to climb, of money, power, of position, and Billy MacNally.

"Good-by, June Day. I'll drink my toast to you alone."

"Aw, that's a shame, but you heard what Mr. Deane said—in a few minutes.' Honest, it's gettin' terrible late, and the

stores'll be closin' on me if I don't look out. I'll come in again tomorrow, Mr. Beauregard."

"Promise, little June Day."

"Sure, what do you think I am? Ungrateful, or somethin'?"

"I've only just begun to do for you, my child. Wait—wait until I have worked out more definite plans for your future."

"The stores'll be closin'."

"All right then, June Day, run away from me."

Minnie's hand had already turned the door knob. With a flashing happy smile, she called her farewell.

Beauregard smiled sadly, the pretense of hurt in his eyes. Minnie saw this, and tossed him a kiss. It was a frank, childish gesture. She had no thought of playing the game that she had with the others. To her he was a nice old man, old enough to be her father, and she owed him everything. She wanted to laugh outright when he quivered at the salute. "Posey old man, like an actor," she thought to herself.

"By-by," she called, "see you tomorrow."

When she turned to walk away, Eleanor Grant was standing there, rigid as a dead thing, her white face blue-shadowed, the two bright red spots on her high cheek-bones gone, a hideous glaze over her eyes.

"Minnie Flynn!"

Minnie backed away from her. She couldn't understand why she was suddenly afraid of Eleanor. But without a word, she turned and fled in the direction of Deane's office. She heard the door to Beauregard's office slam, and she saw in a swift glance that Eleanor had gone inside.

Later, when she passed by, she heard Eleanor's hollow cough. Eleanor was still in Beauregard's office. Minnie stopped short. She heard Eleanor speak her name, calling her "that little Flynn kid." She wondered what they were talking about. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

§ 1

MINNIE telephoned from Fort Lee to Billy. It was several minutes before he recognized her voice, it was so high-pitched; then the sentences were so fragmentary he could scarcely make sense out of them. Bewildered he hung up the receiver. Only so much did he understand: Minnie was back in the movies. Minnie had found a hundred dollars somewhere and was spending it—this terrified him—Minnie ordered him to send word to her mother that she and Billy would have dinner there.

Two hours later the Flynn family was waiting nervously for Minnie, hardly daring to hope, though Elsie laid persistent stress upon the importance of the engraved letterhead and the personal tone to the letter.

"You'd be sick as a dog, Pete Flynn, if Minnie put one over, after the way you've talked about her," challenged Mrs. Flynn from her vantage point at the window where she had been waiting since the five o'clock whistles had blown.

"She'll have nothin' to crow about—not that dirty little sneak," came Pete's surly reply. A look from Elsie silenced him.

"Them raised letters, Pete, and the almost beggin' way it was worded, 'If you please come to my office,' as if they was sorry they hadn't seen her lately. Don't be too hasty, Pete dear."

Billy came in, pale with unexplained nervousness. A strange tight pain lay under his heart. Mrs. Flynn, perceiving at once

that Billy wasn't himself, drew him to one side and asked what was troubling him. He pressed her hand over the spot where the pain was.

"Why, Billy MacNally, it ain't nothin' but indigestion." Then she ordered Michael Flynn to mix a spoonful of soda in a glass of hot water. Billy drank it, but it didn't relieve the pain. Billy was worried. In his inner consciousness tugged an inexplicable premonition, and he sat there, overpowered by the tumultuous emotions that had so unexpectedly laid hold of him; fear of losing her, fear that any success away from their humdrum existence would take her away from him. Agonizing fear!

Minnie turned the handle of the door and kicked the door open.

"Hello!" she cried in a voice that rose like a sharp report. "Well, here I am!"

It had come . . . Minnie had won out! They read her triumph in her eyes. Mr. Flynn was awed by it, Minnie's mother hysterically relieved, Elsie and Nettie and Jimmy and Billy knew it. Pete knew it, too. For one fleeting moment he could have struck her to the floor, and stamped upon her, feeling a personal insult in her triumph.

"Oh, Minnie!" It was Billy's voice.

She threw down the packages that had laden her arms, and rushing across the room hurled herself upon Billy's breast, kissing him wildly and passionately. "Billy," she cried, "I'm almost crazy. I'm almost out of my head! What do you think has happened to me?—I've been spendin' money for the last two hours—I got a hundred dollars off the director at the studio!—I signed something—I got my name changed—Billy, I bought you a silver toothpick—Mama, I got a present for you, look in my pocket—Oh, Lord! I can hardly get my breath! Seventy-five dollars a week, for eight weeks!—And

I'm to be a star with my picture in the papers—Papa I got you a mustache cup!—I start to work tomorrow, rehearsals, he called it. Oh, I'm crazy, Billy, I tell you I'm just off my nut with it! Look at me! Ain't I shaking from head to foot?"

The breathing in the room made strange rasping sounds as they crowded around her.

"Minnie, lower your voice—you're screamin' so! I'm afraid I'll miss some of it. Tell it to us all over again—please, Minnie."

"She's either drunk or cuckoo," said Pete. He leaned down quickly and picked up a bill which Minnie had dropped as her trembling hands emptied her pockets.

"A lip-stick for Nettie, and I got a green tam like the director wanted me to—" A sob choked off her laughter. "Oh, Billy, we're rich, honey! Just think of it! For heaven's sakes, somebody quick—figure up what eight times seventy-five dollars is!—and the old boss is goin' to give me much more work when I finish the eight weeks."

Pete had ironed out the bill.

"~~Just~~" he cried when he saw that its denomination was ten dollars.

"Look here, Pete Flynn! There's no reason why you should take the Lord's name in vain just because Minnie's got all this money—I'm ashamed of you!"

"Don't get so excited, mama. Here, Minnie—here's your dough." And Pete handed it back to her, his little jealous eyes riveted upon the bill.

Minnie laughed, folded it up, started to drop it into Billy's pocket when her eyes sparkled. "Mama, what you got for dinner?"

"Lamb stew, Minnie. Billy paid for it out of his own pocket."

"Stew nothin'! What do you say, folks, if we all go out and

celebrate?—Make one big night of it! I'll blow you to the whole ten!—I'll take you to some swell chop suey joint for supper, and after that, we'll all go to the movies. Mama,—papa—what do you say, folks? Come on, Billy, let's stir 'em up and get out of here!"

They stood there saying nothing, their nerves jarred by the sharp staccatos of Minnie's voice. Jimmy was the one to break the silence. "I think you've got the right idea, sis. What's the good of money if you don't spend it. Let's put on the big works. Everybody kick over the traces. Ma, you're gonna step out and dance with me tonight!"

"But it's lamb stew, Minnie—Billy and your pa's favorite."

"Warm it up for tomorrow night, dearie. Tonight's the night, ma. Ain't I right, Jimmy?"

For the first time, Michael Flynn spoke. His voice was trembling; he was afraid of his family. "Are you sure, Minnie, that it's not like the last time, when they promised you such a swell job and then never gave it to you?"

"Oh, papa!" Minnie's voice whined with irritation. "Please don't be a kill-joy tonight! Didn't I explain to you how different this was?—that I signed something?—that I got a hundred bucks from the director for just signing it?" With studied tolerance she put her arm around her father's neck. "Didn't I make it clear to you, papa dear, how I'm goin' to get seventy-five dollars a week, collectin' it on every Saturday night?—As regular as if I was workin' in a plumbin' shop?"

"Sure—just as regular as if she was workin' in a plumbin' shop," repeated Jimmy. "Come on, pa, get your shoes on. We can't spoil Minnie's good time by throwin' cold water on it. Ma, get out the old bonnet. I know the niftiest chop suey joint that's got a good floor and a nickel piano, and everything! We're goin' to step out with some little style tonight!—Minnie's brought home the bacon!"

§ 2

Bustle and confusion, and in the center of it was Minnie. Several times Billy tried to get close to her, but he was pushed away by eager, grasping hands. And so they clattered down the narrow steps, stopping at each neighbor's door to tell the news, adding to their story every time they told it in spite of Michael Flynn's warning and Billy's embarrassed protests.

Billy felt uneasily alone, isolated from these people, whose very friendliness made them seem strangers to him. Even Minnie and he seemed to have drifted far apart. Later, in the chop suey restaurant, Billy warmed under the glow of many glasses of beer, and the feel of Minnie's palpitating body against his. They danced furiously to the whang and pulse of the electric piano, kept noisy by the succession of nickels Minnie dropped into it. He and Michael Flynn had figured up the sum that Minnie was going to make. "What'll you do with it, Minnie? Six hundred dollars," he kept repeating as they danced around and around.

"Oh, I dunno," and her voice trailed off dreamily. "Buy a lot of things for me and you, honey—a new overcoat and some silk stockings—and a swell brass bed like the one we seen in the window at Macy's the other evening, and. . ."

"Maybe it would be wiser if we invested it in the meat business, Minnie. There's goin' to be an opening in Hesselman's this fall."

"I know, Billy dear, but let's wait till we get the fur coat, and the brass bed—you said yourself how swell the bed was, and you was wishin' that we had one like it."

The music came to a cacophonous finale. Feet shuffled over the dance floor, and when all were seated, Minnie again made herself conspicuous by rushing across the empty floor,

to drop with exaggerated gesture another nickel into the slot. "Come on, Jimmy!" she cried out. "My feet are achin' from dancin', but I've never had such a good time in all my life."

"It's gettin' so late, Minnie," protested her mother, who had called her over to the table. "It's after midnight. Papa's awful tired, and he gets up at five, dearie."

Minnie was tired, too. She had lived so fast and furiously in the last few hours. "All right, ma. I'm ready to go home. I don't feel that it's the end of a big night, because all nights are goin' to be big nights from now on for the Flynn family. What do you say, Pete? Havin' a good time lappin' up the beer and noodles?"

"Sure I am," said Pete sheepishly, "But I ain't got nothin' on the old man. Caught pa sittin' back in his chair tonight like a millionaire, and smokin' an Owl. I notice that nobody else got a whack at 'em."

Minnie leaned over and gave a swift kiss to her father's bald head. "Pa's goin' to be smokin' two-for-a-quarters before I'm through with him, ain't you, papa dear?"

Mr. Flynn was always embarrassed when he was the center of attention. "Oh, go on, Minnie. Chewing tobacco is good enough for me. I ain't used to cigars. I don't want you to spend your money on me. I don't know what the boss of the plumbin' shop would say if he seen me smokin' a cigar."

Minnie squeezed his hand. "I love you, papa," she said. And she did love him more than any of the others. "I'll have every cent that I borrowed of your funeral money paid back to you by the end of the first week, you see if I don't!"

The ten-dollar bill was in Billy's pocket. His hand had gone swiftly to it many times during the evening. He would draw his hand away, as if the bill were a live coal. He didn't know why he should feel that way about money that

Minnie had given him, but he did. To take that money and invest it for her was one thing, to spend it was another.

"Hey, Chinky!" Minnie's voice had jarred on him all evening. Now it was raucous, shrill, even cutting above the din of the electric piano. "Bring us the bill, and pronto. Savvy?"

When Michael Flynn thought about the bill, he cringed as if expecting a physical blow. He had noted every order that went forth from the table. He had been counting all evening the glasses of beer set in front of Pete and Jimmy. "It's gonna be pretty steep, little girl," he said to her nervously. "You went on orderin' all those funny names, and I never seen you once look to the right side o' the bill o' fare."

"Oh, papa, you're a scream! All my life I've been wishin' that I could eat a meal without havin' to look at the right side o' the bill o' fare and order from the prices instead of the dishes. And now that time has come, don't you see, papa? We'll never have to look at the price list first."

The bill was eight dollars and twenty-five cents. It was madness to Michael Flynn.

When they filed out, through the ornate, Chinese door, Minnie linked her arm through her father's. It pleased Michael Flynn and flattered him. A faint blush mounted to his graying temples. "The old man's steppin' out," he said, attempting to make light of it, but his arm trembled when Minnie tightened her grasp.

"Let's fall behind the crowd a bit. I got somethin' to tell you," Minnie whispered in his ear.

"Sure, Minnie, what is it?" The quaver in his voice revealed a new concern.

"Don't worry, it's nothin' to be scared about." She watched and waited until Billy, swinging off in stride with Jimmy, was out of hearing.

"Papa."

"Yes, baby."

"I give the studio your telephone number instead of Billy's. They're gonna call some time tomorrow and leave a message for Miss Day. You know that's what I told you they're gonna call me, papa—Miss Day. I don't want Billy to know I gave 'em your plumbing shop instead of the butcher shop."

"Aw, Minnie, why did you ever do such a thing as that!"

"Shh! Papa, they'll hear you. It's hard to explain now, but I couldn't tell 'em over at the studio that I was married."

"Why, Minnie MacNally!"

"Papa dear, you're old-fashioned and you don't understand."

"Thank God I don't, Minnie. This is gettin' to be a terrible world if girls is ashamed of their own good husbands."

"It ain't because I'm ashamed of him, papa—honest, it ain't—but I've heard a lot of girls at the studios say that you'll be queered the minute they find out that you're married. "You see, papa, there are so many girls lookin' for work, they won't give the married girls a chance if they got husbands to support 'em. That's fair, ain't it, papa? And after all I've been through, I got as much right to success as if I was single, ain't I, papa?"

§ 3

Michael Flynn could not understand it at all. Life had always seemed simple when the children were little.

"Minnie, you're takin' a wrong step. The minute you start any kind of crooked business, you're gonna make everybody unhappy——" Minnie's sudden, unexpected laughter came as a startling interruption.

"Oh, papa," she was saying. "You certainly are a funny one. This ain't no right time for lecturin' me, I'm too happy."

"I'm sorry, Minnie, but Billy's a good boy, and don't you forget it."

"I won't, papa. I'm crazy about him, honest I am."

That evening when her husband's strong arms held her close to him, she protested her love for him more warmly than she had ever done before. "Kiss me, Billy. Kiss me a lot tonight. I'm awful nervous. My heart's shakin' my whole body. Feel it? Gee, I'd just die if I didn't have you. You're like that big red sofa in the parlor at home. It's been there ever since I can remember. I'd hate that place if it wasn't for that sofa. It sounds terrible silly, I know, but you *are* like that sofa, Billy."

Billy never had any answer for such talk as this. He stroked her hair with his clumsy hand, and wondered what a sensible woman like Hesselman's dead wife would have thought about a girl like Minnie. As he lay there looking off into the darkness, he was thinking, he knew not why, of this strange comparison. He was thinking of the bread that Mrs. Hesselman had made, of the children that she had borne and buried, how she had helped her husband in his work. And he was ashamed of it, but he was thinking also that Minnie had never even cooked a breakfast for him.

"A penny for your thoughts, sweetheart."

"Oh, nothin,' honey——"

"There was somethin' more than that to *my* thoughts. Guess what *I'm* thinkin' about, Billy dear."

"I dunno, honey."

"All the things I'm gonna buy you!"

"Me?"

"Yeh, *you*."

"But I don't want you to buy me anything, honey. I got everything I want."

Minnie laughed and buried her face into the curve of his

neck. "You old silly! Why, I know a dozen things that I'm gonna get you," came her half-smothered answer. "You're gonna make Al Kessler look like thirty cents—that's what you are!"

"But I can't afford it, Minnie!"

"That's just it, but *I* can. *I'm* gonna begin to help you, Billy. Think of that six hundred dollars the first crack out of the box. Oh, I'm so excited, Billy! It all seems too good to be true. Kiss me on the mouth—kiss me hard! I want to make you so happy, Billy, honest, I do."

Minnie fell asleep, exhausted by the play of her imagination as her dreams shuttled back and forth from Ninth Avenue to the studio, from the studio to Ninth Avenue.

But Billy lay awake long into the night, the burden of Minnie in his arms, his own hands in tight lock as if to hold her there, her face glowing even in her sleep with this new-found happiness and one of his tears glistening upon a strand of her loosely braided red hair.

§ 4

The Flynnns had only one bitter regret about Minnie's success—the changing of her name. Even the consolation of her picture in an evening paper couldn't lessen their disappointment. Michael Flynn, who alone remained passive through these swift moving changes, commented upon it. Flynn was no name to be discarded. A good name that stood for good honest people. He could not understand a business which discounted all that your father and your father's father had stood for.

To Minnie, this hectic new life had assumed distorted proportions; her days were too short, her nights too long. The days were filled with hard work, little triumphs, often unhappy

conflicts; her nights restless, made unpleasant by the realization that Billy MacNally would never fit into this new scheme of things. His stolid patience soon became an irritation to her. She resented his silent martyrdom, and tried to stir up an antagonism, feeling that she would be better able to cope with this. When night came, she was physically exhausted by the hard day's work. The excitement, the effort to succeed, lashed her brain with little, sharp, stinging blows. She would sink back, her body aching from the mental strain as if from physical punishment. Then Billy would come to her and in his dull, droning voice, recount in maddening detail all that had passed during the day; who had come to the shop, what had been bought, the success of the new block and cleaver, the few moments' conversation with her father wherein plans were made for Minnie's future after Billy had saved enough money to buy an interest in Hesselman's butcher shop. But never once did he ask her what the day had held for her, with whom she had come in contact, never once demanded an explanation of the character of her work, never once talked about the possibilities of her success. He ignored it as completely as if their life held only his work and his future. Minnie resented his lack of interest in her career, chafed under his dry recital, and despised him when he smiled upon her with patronizing tenderness. She could not forget the excitement of the day. She wanted sympathy for her disappointments, praise for her triumphs.

Her family gave her the mental support she missed from Billy. They listened with awed enthusiasm to all she had to tell them. They followed her through the maze of every step, wide-eyed, their minds too dull to grasp what Minnie pictured. What terrified them was the fear that the money should prove utterly unreal. Like gaunt, half-starved birds, they hovered around her, each one's reactions different, but all greedy for

a share of what they considered their rightful portion of position and riches.

To give to them—to hear their incoherent expressions of wonderment—to buy and spend became a passionate vice with Minnie. Her father and Billy alone disappointed her. They apparently had no interest in the work she was doing or the money she was receiving, once they found that money would never mean anything else to Minnie than the spending of it.

Billy accepted the fancy vests she bought him. Her father was inordinately proud of the gold-banded brier-wood pipe. But their gifts were laid away with the sentimental cards she had written to accompany them.

So Minnie concentrated her charities upon the other members of her family. Instinct warned her against the sudden warmth of Nettie and Pete. She knew it would stop if the money ceased coming in; but her senses were made drunk at the sight of them wallowing before her, grunting like hungry, rooting animals. Nettie. Pete. Elsie. Her mother. She was herself conscious of a soothing narcotic on her open sore, which was Pete. She picked and prodded him with barbed raillery, but never once now did he lose his temper. What was sniveling pride to the joy of getting drunk on good whisky bought with money he did not have to earn? Then there was Elsie, sick in mind and body, hovering close to him, whispering advice in his ears—her fetish was Pete's comfort, no matter how it was bought. Sometimes Minnie hated them, when their huddling presence smothered her like foul air. But the longing to satisfy the self-vanity of generosity made it impossible to free herself from these parasites. It drew them the closer until that unhealthy group had become incurably adherent to her life.

CHAPTER NINE

§ 1

WORK at the studio after that period of readjustment which precedes each new production settled into a fairly comfortable routine. So many weeks are allowed for the completion of a picture. The time varies. There can be many unexpected delays; illness of one of the principals in the cast, insufficient room at the studio to build all the necessary sets, or inclement weather.

Deane's company had been keeping abreast of their schedule in spite of the fact that Deane was finding it more difficult than he had anticipated to make an actress out of Minnie Flynn. Her first four or five days' work had astonished the studio. They had gathered in the projection room to see the film run off, Beauregard more eager than any of the others to see whether his judgment was vindicated, for he had been willingly blinded by Minnie's gratitude into believing that it was he and not Deane who had discovered her.

Minnie photographed beautifully. The camera, relentless as it is to age, seems to find in youth charm and intelligence which the human eye can never perceive. The camera, hearing nothing but seeing everything, passes judgment only on contours. A beautiful face may lose all its beauty when accompanied by a harsh, grating voice and uncultured speech; but the camera, being deaf, gives double credit to what it sees. It is neither charmed into believing a plain face is less plain because a sweet cultured voice goes with it, or is it ever

disillusioned because a winsome face is carried by one of crude speech.

On the screen Minnie Flynn's pathetic, yet laughter-loving mouth, was full of charm of an elfin quality. Her eyes, large and rather vacant to the casual observer, seemed, under their shadow of long lashes, to possess a deep solemn tenderness while her face was in repose—a fire and richness when the high light of a smile illuminated them. Her long slender fingers suggested a remote patrician forebear. Her body, flexible, small, was vibrant with youth.

Beauregard was jubilant. "We've got the greatest bet in the business today!" he said enthusiastically. "What did I tell you, Deane? Go the limit with this girl! Build up your story, give her a fatter part. By gad, she's beautiful!"

Deane smiled and said nothing. He hated unbridled hysterical enthusiasm. He alone knew how much work had to be done if this stupid little girl was to become a star. But he liked work; it was always an interesting experiment to take raw material to mold. The only drawback was that he dreaded the time when Minnie, like all the others, would believe each triumph to be the success of her own petty endeavor. And how she would resent the very process of molding, as if it were impertinent meddling! Frankensteins, all of them, ready to destroy their creators!

§ 2

Sometimes he hated Minnie. She seemed so shallow, so lacking in womanliness. Then a great pity for her welled up in him. He saw only the child in her, a spiritually undernourished child with no protective inhibitions. He knew that in her ancestry there was no limiting puritanism and he could tell her environment from the flat, brittle quality of her voice.

All about him in the picture business were men and women of lowly birth, who had been nourished in the sordid atmosphere under the webbed shadows of eerie New York bridges. Many of them, foreign born, had been disgorged from the stinking bowels of ships plying between Russia, Germany, Austria, Italy and America. Their success had been prodigious because of the spectacular growth of the motion picture industry. Deane could see before him dwarfed bodies made grotesque by the paunches that prosperity had brought them; gray, pale, pock-marked flesh, eyes ferret-sharp, peering at the world, appraisingly, yet with a baited look, a mute defiance underlying their arrogant and odious bombast. A few of the screen's women stars were marked by their early environments. They too had been reared in tenements such as Minnie Flynn's. Their home lives were such as hers, their brains dulled by their early surroundings. But their photographically beautiful faces had brought them sudden, unexpected fame and riches. Deane had watched them; he had seen their meteoric rise; he had watched each bitter, heart-breaking step downward; had seen the roots of their very beings wilt and rot, and disintegrate back into the dirt from which they had sprung.

The men did not degenerate so quickly as the women; they were fortified by instinctive determination against failure and obscurity. In the field of finance and organization, at least, there need be no time limit. Their pride and fear of poverty, moreover, curbed the vices of vanity which would otherwise have found them an easy prey.

The women, hungering for praise, self-adornment, satisfied vanities, were more readily unbalanced. Success, depending entirely upon their physical features, was too short-lived. It was so easily marred and scratched by the sordid contacts that sudden riches bring. Youth is cruelly transient. To the motion picture actress, her youth is a season in which she

plants her seeds of bitterness, because the beauty of that youth brings a return which is denied maturity.

"Poor little youngster," Deane thought as he sat watching Minnie Flynn, already surrounded by studio parasites. Her arm was thrown lightly over Alicia Adams' shoulder. She was smiling at Mrs. Lee's gushing praise of the scene just rehearsed, a scene only fairly well done by Minnie. Beauregard, Bacon, Letcher, Weaver now recognized in Minnie, before she was certain of it herself, an affluent success. Minnie would soon rise to a position where she could choose her own satellites. The leeches were aware of it. They were already showering her with favors, massaging her with flatteries.

Deane permitted himself no conscious sentimentality. But as the days passed he found himself protecting Minnie from the sly, yet vicious advances of Beauregard. He didn't know that Minnie was married. There was about her an almost detached virginity, emphasized by her slender, boyish body, her studied modesty, the stimulus she found in schoolgirl flirtations and her romantic curiosity.

Although Beauregard could have fired him for his impudence, Deane told him to keep his hands off Minnie. A rankling suspicion was born in Beauregard's mind. Minnie had been working six weeks with Deane in close proximity.

Deane was an attractive man of thirty-five. Physically he was powerful, with a deep chest and sinewy arms. He was square-jawed, and there was a serious intentness in his deep-set dark gray eyes. His features were so regularly formed that his face in repose was set almost stonily. But his rather heavy, conventional face was transformed when he smiled; then his entire personality seemed changed. A wide smile showing strong white even teeth softened his face into a network of fine lines. He seemed young and very alive when he smiled. Minnie thought he was quite handsome. But she was

afraid of him, his keen analyses, his rapid mental deductions which checked up and blocked each false move before she made it, his cryptic speech, his long intent silences. Only when he smiled did she lose this fear.

Minnie would have been amazed had she known that in spite of her ignorance, by that constantly recurrent triumph of the elemental passions over all superficialities, Hal Deane was falling in love with her.

§ 3

Beauregard was planning far ahead to make Minnie his mistress, and had, in spite of Deane's zealous guardianship, spent many hours with her. He warded off any active resentment on Deane's part by having a Mrs. Lowell present during almost all their meetings. Mrs. Lowell was a personable woman, middle-aged, quiet, reserved, with a precision of speech and a marked Boston accent. She moved slowly, with great dignity. Her costumes were "old-fashioned" to Minnie, but Beauregard explained that Mrs. Lowell's severity of dress was an expression of her ultra-refined breeding.

He employed Mrs. Lowell as a teacher. Her duties were to level his intonations to what she styled a well-modulated voice; to teach him elaborate English phrases so that he might appear cultured; to direct his reading; and to write his letters, which she couched in the most formal phraseology. Her duties extended also to the little girls whom Beauregard culled from the studios. Some she taught manners, others the very rudiments of English. She was to teach Minnie all the social niceties.

Mrs. Lowell disliked Beauregard, but she was secretly amused by the girls. There was a cruel streak in her nature. She enjoyed arming them with the same superficialities as

Beauregard had; this gave the girls confidence and soon made them independent of him.

Deane was very friendly with Mrs. Lowell, but he saw through her prattle of philanthropy. He knew the harm of an artificial veneer, and he was eager that Minnie should acquire a sensible basis of education and culture. He spoke to her frankly about going to night school. She listened attentively while Deane outlined her need for some elementary training before she could feel comfortable in the presence of anyone outside her own class. If she were to be even a screen actress (and he told her he was certain she would have her chance at success), then she would meet, socially and in business, men and women who would judge her by the first impression she made upon them.

Minnie understood what he was telling her. She was quick to perceive the need. But the course Deane outlined was a hard one. She couldn't go to night school, she was too tired. And there was Billy—always Billy, and her people who crowded around her the moment she returned to hear the events in her day which gave promise of a future.

So Beauregard's offer of an education not only seemed more comfortable, but was certainly much more satisfying. During these long periods of waiting to be called for scenes, Minnie would go into Beauregard's office. Then Mrs. Lowell was summoned. She came into the office, walking, smiling, thinking correctly, carrying books in one hand, a basket in the other. The basket held knives, forks, spoons, glasses, and other perquisites borrowed from the Property Department.

During the lessons, which were punctuated by loud giggles from Minnie, Beauregard sat in his huge mahogany chair, his hands resting upon his round abdomen, his eyes half-closed, the lids obliquely drawn to the outer corner, like a Chinese mandarin. His head was moving in a rotary motion as if his

neck were set in a greased socket. He made up his mind that Minnie Flynn should appear before the world beautiful, and apparently well educated. Clever little mimic; he listened daily to the changes in her voice. It was like tuning and giving resonance to a musical instrument. The flat "a's" were losing their sheep-like bleats. Under the persistent guidance of Mrs. Lowell, she would soon be freely using the broad "a's." Yes, June Day, the motion picture actress, would be acclaimed for her beauty and intelligence, and thus would his own vanity be ballooned. For Beauregard never dreamed of any possibility of his not possessing Minnie. . . . No one knew better than he the demands and sacrifices of ambition.

§ 4

So Minnie Flynn was in the process of metamorphosis. Deane was molding her, teaching her how to give expression physically to the artificial emotions required in any particular rôle, teaching her the tricks of facial expression which was the basic register of these emotions. Beauregard was teaching her the artifices of social relationships. Deane's help was the more needed and substantial, though Minnie, misled by soft kindness, was grateful only to Beauregard.

All this had happened during the making of the first picture, which because of early winter storms, was held up for several weeks. The ten weeks were the most stimulating that Minnie had ever known!

Ten weeks at seventy-five dollars a week—that was their only real significance to the Flynn family. They were there, standing in line every Saturday night like park bums, hands out, their mouths working as if they were tasting of the money. Pete was husky-voiced with reiterated flatteries. Alternately hating and loving them, Minnie emptied her pay

check upon the red damask tablecloth in the Flynn's front parlor.

Billy stood by like a stranger looking through a window. He loved Minnie, but he wanted nothing from her. He could never be like Jimmy, recklessly finding ways she could spend her money, though Minnie seemed to love Jimmy for the very buoyant spirit of his improvidence.

Minnie was his wife, and he had once felt proud of the possession. But now he had become only Minnie's husband. Since he had acknowledged his miserable shame, a dumb submission had come into his eyes.

One Saturday the shop closed for the afternoon. An Odd Fellow had died and Hesselman, of the same order, had declared it a holiday.

Minnie was working. Though Billy had never been to the studio, he knew from countless descriptions where to locate it in New Jersey.

Billy had been planning a surprise for Minnie. It was to have been kept for her birthday, but the chances were he wouldn't have a holiday then. He had turned in the old motor bicycle, and paid several instalments on a second-hand motorcycle with a side car attachment. When they were first married, how Minnie had wished for one! She enjoyed the seat in back of Billy; they had taken many rides to Coney in this fashion, but it lacked the "class" of the basket side car.

How was Billy to know that in ten weeks Minnie's entire perspective of life had been changed?

Before Billy reached the studio, Minnie was passing through a crisis, her first assured triumph. The completed picture had been run off for a critical group of studio and newspaper men. Everyone had voiced his enthusiasm; here was a girl worthy of development and opportunity.

Blinded by their praise, Minnie groped her way into Beauregard's office.

"Oh, Mr. Beauregard," she cried, "you should have stayed there and heard what all those men had to say to me. Longer words than Mrs. Lowell uses. I was never so happy in all my life. And it's you, *you!*"

She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him. He recoiled as if she had struck him, and stood there, looking at her, with an evil malevolence in his eyes. He resented this impersonal salute, which betrayed, unmistakably, Minnie's lack of sex consciousness in his presence. Almost brutally he pushed her away from him.

"Words are cheap," he flung at her. "It's always easy to *talk* appreciation. But when it comes right down to really proving it, then that's a different matter."

"Why, Mr. Beauregard, what do you mean?"

"That you will have plenty of chances to show how sincere you really are. You're going to make another picture here."

"Oh, am I? *Am I?*"

Beauregard continued, with an air of generous concession, "Of course you are, little June Day. I flared up a minute ago because I meet with so many disappointments. But you will be different from the others I know. At least I hope so, little girl."

Deane came into the office at this moment. His quick glance took in Beauregard's arm around Minnie's waist. Color rose swiftly to his forehead. His throat clutched convulsively, but he said nothing. A break with Beauregard might separate Minnie from him forever. He doggedly tried to make himself believe at this time his interest in her was purely platonic, that he was thinking only of her success, which was to be his own triumph.

"I have just been telling Miss Day that she is to make an-

other picture for us," Beauregard began in his flat, stilted voice. "Just as you came in, I was going to announce to our young aspirant that she was also to receive a lucrative raise in salary."

Deane knitted his brows; he didn't believe in rapid salary increases. It was too unbalancing. But his frown disappeared when he saw the childishly eager expression on Minnie's face, making it as radiant as if she had stepped into bright sunlight.

"One hundred dollars a week, covering a period of ten weeks, and possibly at the end of the second picture a year's contract—at a slight advance, of course."

Minnie had nothing to say. She sank limply into a chair. At last, with an attempt at poise and lightness, she motioned to Beauregard.

"Bring in your li'l ole contracts and I'll sign on any ole dotted line that you want me to."

§ 5

Minnie's senses were drugged when she left the studio that afternoon. She hurried out through the gate, waving a farewell to the gate-keeper. She sang noisy greetings to familiar faces. She kissed Alicia and Mrs. Lee good night. She was even tolerant of an interruption from Eleanor Grant, who looked so red and white, so thin and haggard. She leaned upon Minnie wearily.

"I'm stepping my pride into the dirt, Minnie——"

"Ssh! They'll hear you. It's June now."

"Right into the dirt, June, but I've got to ask help from you."

"Help—from *me*?"

"Sure, Minnie—June. I'm sick, dreadfully sick. This bron-

chitis is going to be the death of me. Look at me. I'm a fright. I've done nothing but eat, and I can't put enough flesh on my bones to keep me from looking like a scarecrow."

"Oh, Eleanor, really I'm sorry for you. I'll never forget how good you were to me that first day. I—well, I've forgotten all about how you pressed me for that money. But I can't blame you. I was so irresponsible then."

Though Eleanor was listening attentively, thinking only of what Minnie was going to say, she became aware of the changes in her mode of speech. And she smiled with mocking bitterness. Beauregard! The old routine was in motion.

Minnie was opening her purse, going through it with nervous fingers. "Here, Eleanor, here's ten dollars. You can have it, every cent of it!"

Eleanor looked at her with shocked reproach. "Minnie!" she said, and her voice carried her pain. "I'm not asking you for money. How could you think I meant a thing like that, as if I'd sunk *that* low, as if I were a beggar! Oh, how *could* you!"

Minnie was bewildered by all these double and triple standards of virtue which she had found among the girls in the picture business. Back in Ninth Avenue, moral requirements had been the one positive thing. Matters of kindness, culture, artificial delicacy had been considered nice but secondary. Whereas now, morals were considered nice, but secondary. Minnie knew Eleanor's moral status. She could not evaluate between false and real modesty; to have taken money from Beauregard without shame, but to have blushed when she offered it.

"But you said you needed help, Eleanor. I guess I don't quite get—get—understand you. Please tell me what I can do for you."

Eleanor fastened herself upon Minnie by pinioning her

arms, and looked her so long and steadily in the eyes that Minnie was frightened by the unnatural aggressiveness.

"Minnie!" Eleanor talked quickly because she saw that Minnie was eager to get away from her. "I don't know whether to warn you, or be silent and just pity you. If I do tell you what I'd like to say you'll think I'm preaching. You'll do what I did when other girls tried to steer me right. But always remember this: success is so damned elusive! It lasts only long enough to give you a taste of the comfortable things in life and then you're kicked out again. Why, look at *me*, Minnie. Look what I *had*! . . . For God's sake, Minnie, *don't be immoral*, and treasure your youth, it's *all* you've got. . . ." After a violent wrenching coughing spell, she continued—"I guess, Minnie, I'll have to take the ten dollars, after all, if you can spare it, but for the love of heaven, don't let any of that gossiping crowd know that I'm down to that."

Eleanor's voice was rasping. Trembling in her tight grasp upon Minnie's arms, it sent a shudder through her body. They were so close that Minnie could feel the fever of Eleanor's breath.

"Minnie, you're so little and pretty. Oh, God damn this rotten motion picture business! It saps us so! Don't give in to a lecherous old devil like Beauregard. Don't do *that* to succeed. It doesn't get you anywhere. Look at *me*. I did! What did it do for *me*? What does it do for *any* of them? They're like leeches, men like that. Blood-suckers. What they can give you is so short-lived. The people at the studios, the ones with brains, who can really make you, they're prejudiced and work against you if you are one of the boss's girls. You'll see that in every studio. They get it over to the public, too. Only a few of them have been successfully foisted upon the public, and they could have made good, anyway, got much further in the business legitimately if they

had worked hard at it, and been willing to climb slowly and decently."

"S-sh! Eleanor," Minnie interrupted her, and in her voice was a hint of trembling eagerness to escape. "You're wearing yourself out. I understand, dear. I'm no spring chicken. Nobody can ever put anything over on *me*."

Eleanor's hysteria riding on a crescendo left her nerves broken and jangling. She shook as if palsied.

Touched, Minnie threw her arms around Eleanor and drew her close. She kissed her, little fumbled, half-embarrassed kisses. So many people were passing by. "Eleanor," she whispered, "I'll help you again when you need it. Call on me any time you want to. Are you sure there isn't anything else I can do for you?"

Eleanor said if she would she could speak to Deane and see if there wasn't some small part which she could play. "He doesn't know my work, in fact I've never been able to get a chance with his company. But if you don't mind, Minnie, you can tell him what I've done and show him some of my photographs. I'll come over to the studio tomorrow and bring you a portfolio of them."

When Minnie hurried away, Eleanor lifted her face, her eyes wildly straining to catch a last glimpse of Minnie. It was like looking into the past; Minnie was her own youth come back.

§ 6

Deane's car rolled out of the studio garage. Leaning forward, he caught a glimpse of Minnie. "She walks like a young boy, arms swinging clear of her sides, head up, elastic step. She *is* pretty," Deane ruminated. Then he called to his chauffeur to stop.

"Want to ride with me?"

"Sure I do, what could be sweeter?"

Deane didn't mind her flippancy as Beauregard did. It characterized her. He began to believe that Minnie, polished, might be rather uninteresting.

Minnie was thinking when Deane drew up beside her: "Poor Eleanor—but if I ever get a swell flat with three nigger servants in it like Eleanor used to have, I'll have sense enough to keep it and play the game lots more cleverly than she did."

Just as Deane tucked the fur robe around Minnie, for it was an open car and the air was nipped with frost, Billy MacNally's voice penetrated her consciousness with the tearing process of a bullet.

"Minnie," he called. "Ooh-hoo!"

She sat there, too numb to know at once just which was the best course to take to cover her shame and keep Deane from knowing that Billy was her husband.

Billy was grinning with his cap pushed off his broad, flat perspiring forehead; his motorcycle was churning under him.

"Good night, Mr. Deane, don't wait for me—that's a friend of mine over there to see me about something—I guess it must be awfully important or he wouldn't have come way over here—" she telescoped her words as she scrambled over his feet to escape.

"Here, wait a minute!"

Deane sprang out of the car and held the door open for Minnie. He was intensely curious.

Billy stopped the motor, swung off the seat and came forward. He was beaming with breathless happiness. "Gee, Minnie, I pretty near lost you, didn't I? Well, what do you think of it, hon?" he asked, looking back, his thumb pointing to the side car, apparently unconscious of Deane's presence.

Minnie's teeth were chattering. "Good night, Mr. Deane,

I'll see you tomorrow." She began to back away from him.

Billy looked up and seemed to see Deane for the first time. "I was just telling my wife how I pretty near missed her," he said in a low embarrassed voice as if he owed Deane an apology.

Minnie drew in her breath so sharply that it whistled through her teeth.

"Oh, Mr. Deane," she cried, not knowing why she could say nothing more than that. "Oh, my Lord, Billy!"

No one knew what lay back of Deane's inscrutable smile. He walked over to Billy and held out his hand. "You're Mr. Flynn, of course. My name is Hal Deane."

Billy laughed vacuously. "Mr. Flynn!" He thought it was a sample of Deane's sense of humor. He wanted to show Deane how quickly he had caught on. "You're right. I guess I'm more Flynn than MacNally at that. My wife's little, but she's the boss of *our* house."

Minnie could have killed him.

"Well, honey, what do you think about your birthday present?" Billy was so filled with the success of his plans he could think of nothing else. He talked because the others were silent. Deane seemed interested in what Billy was saying because he bent his sharp eyes upon him. He made no move to get back into his car and drive away.

"Oh, is this your birthday?" Deane finally asked, speaking in a mechanical sort of way, with a detached politeness Minnie had never before observed. His harshness had been much more personal.

"No, it ain't," Billy answered, "but we had an afternoon off in the butcher shop where I'm workin' and so I came over to spring it on Minnie as a grand surprise."

Minnie.

Somehow or other though he never thought of it until that

moment, Deane had always known that her name was Minnie, had always known that she was married to a man who worked in a butcher shop, that she never would or never could be other than just what she had always been. . . . He laughed silently to himself all the way home with no bitterness only disappointment in the laughter. But Deane was honest enough with himself to admit that in another month there would have been bitterness. And for this he was disgusted; the whole situation was so ludicrous for a man who had counted himself so wise.

CHAPTER TEN

§ 1

FOR Minnie's second picture, Deane chose a story in which she played the rôle of a chorus girl. In this, she was still "true to type." He had the characterization cleverly developed, and saw to it that no scenes were beyond the range of the mechanics he had taught her.

A capable cast was chosen to surround Minnie. Whenever Beauregard wanted to lend dignity to a production he always engaged a well-known actor or actress from the speaking stage. It meant that he had to pay exorbitant salaries, often four or five times as much as they earned on the stage. They believed they were selling themselves and knew that Beauregard would advertise their appearance in the picture.

Minnie insisted that Alicia Adams be given one of the minor rôles, and Mrs. Lee was to portray exactly what she was in real life, a purveyor of gossip.

For leading man, Beauregard hoped to engage Gilbert Carlton, who had been attracting considerable attention. He was the type which appeals to a certain class of audience made up of impressionable young girls. Only two years before he had left his position of salesman in a Fifth Avenue store to enter the movies. At one time he had been a haberdasher's model, and had posed for some of the well-known commercial illustrators. He was a tall, slender-bodied young man with a V-shaped torso, wide shoulders and a small waist—the type of man whom people who know nothing about athletics call an athlete. He had a round, small head, with heavy waving black

hair highly polished with Coty's brilliantine. His lips were full red, and sensuous, his nose well-chiseled; his large, heavily lashed eyes were set wide apart under femininely arched brows. He presented a graceful figure on the screen, though slightly feminine despite his physique.

Deane knew and disliked Carlton, though he was amazed at his natural talent for acting. With no experience on the stage, he stepped into the motion picture business and acquired, after a year's schooling a rather dexterous facility in the portrayal of superficial emotions. Deane despised the man's arrogant personality, his conceit, his drawling, insolent speech and his attitude toward women. Women thought him handsome. He had acquired a facility of patter, which not only was mildly amusing but served as fairly good copy. Married women liked him, because he flirted with studied discretion. Young girls mistook his insolence for the charm of indifference and his curious precision of manner for the very essence of good breeding.

Minnie and Carlton met in Beauregard's office. Her heart quickened at his smile, and he held her hand in his long, warm clasp until she was conscious of the moisture of his palm, until her unquiet eyes had seen the flash of the diamond ring upon the third finger, until she noticed that his nails were pink with a thick coating of liquid nail polish. He was saying pleasantly, "Charmed, Miss Day," laying such emphasis on each word, that it gave her the impression he had inferred some subtle compliment. Al Kessler had just such a trick, but played it crudely. (At least Minnie had grown to detect its crudities.)

Gilbert Carlton was apparently always affable. His manners while not exaggerated were noticeably gallant. He kept his voice within a low range, and when he laughed he filled the room with a ripple of tones, of sharp musical resonance like a

xylophone. Until you knew Carlton the laugh seemed spontaneous.

"This is the young lady we wish you to support, Carlton."

Carlton's glance rested with good-humored tolerance upon Minnie, who was suddenly aware of a strange, mounting joy.

"*Indeed!* How perfectly charming, Miss Day. Corking of you to ask me." Then he turned to Beauregard, giving him a searching, reproachful look: "But why didn't you 'phone a day or so sooner? I'm booked for the next picture, you know. Had no idea that it was something to do right away."

Minnie could not hide her disappointment. When Beauregard motioned her out of the room, she lingered in the hall at the door. She heard the two men talking, Carlton's words jetting forth, brutal, uncomplimentary: "Who the hell do you think I am—asking me to play opposite a nobody!—Whoever heard of this silly little fool?—*your* girl, I suppose!—Look here, Beauregard, I can play leads with the best of them——"

"But there's money in it."

"I don't care how much money there's in it——" and then his voice dropped into the cultivated mellowness again: "No offense, Beauregard, considering that we're old friends—of course she's not a bad looking little Jane and may, as you say, have a very big future before her—sure she's pretty—but what the hell?—the woods are full of them——"

Minnie shut her teeth upon a scream. She fled, her face scarlet, tears in her eyes, her heart fiercely insurgent, incoherent threats crowding into her mind, an intensive eagerness for success, only as a weapon with which to humble such a man as Gilbert Carlton.

She sought Deane and frankly told him all about it. "Don't be unhappy over Carlton," he said. "Never worry about a cad. Be glad *his* bad influence is kept away from

you. Men like that only value women for what they get out of them. They're ruthless. They're the takers of the world, they give nothing."

"He isn't any better than Al Kessler," was Minnie's condemnation.

"No better. Smoother. Rating a little bit higher, but in exactly the same scale. I prefer Kessler. He's so obvious that he's harmless. Hams. Both of them suffering from Narcissism. Keep away from them, Minnie."

§ 2

In the five weeks that passed, Minnie could not forget Carlton. She went to the cafés which she heard he frequented. She saw him several times, but he never recognized her. Some day she would be in a position to strike back. Somehow or other he gave a stinging lash to her ambition: he had called her ignorant, a nobody, a silly little fool.

Deane saw the rapid progress Minnie was making under Mrs. Lowell's tutelage, and regretted it. He despised her new affectations, especially when he caught their reflections in her work. Part of his job was retaining his first impressions of Minnie, holding her to the very gestures she was learning so rapidly to discard.

The first picture reached the public. It opened Sunday at one of the Broadway theaters. The Flynn family was there when the doors of the theater opened. They sat in loge seats, spellbound, all the afternoon, nor did they leave for dinner, though Michael Flynn protested faintly that he was hungry.

The only thing about the picture Mrs. Flynn, Nettie and Elsie did not like were the cheap, drab dresses Minnie wore in her character of shop girl. "Lord, Minnie," whispered her mother, "you'd think you was as poverty-stricken as them

Russians down our block. Don't you *never* put on one of your new outfits?"

Minnie shook her head. "No," she answered, angrily. "Deane wouldn't let me. That's the old tam I got with the first money he gave me. And that sleazy old sweater! I *begged* him to let me wear my new blue velvet, but do you think that he would?"

Nettie eagerly took up Minnie's criticism of Deane. "He's only got something against you, Minnie. I didn't like that bird the only time I met him. Lord, you would think he was the police judge the way he laid you out stinkin' for just bein' an hour late."

"She won't have to put up with him long," whispered Pete, leaning over to smile upon Minnie. "You've got 'em all *skinned*, I'll tell the world. Look the way you make the people in this theayter laugh and cry. Honest, Minnie, I never knew it was in you. What do you think about her, papa? Ain't she the berries?"

§ 3

Michael Flynn was studying the screen as the image of his daughter flickered on and off. "I guess it's all right, Pete. It looks a lot like Minnie up there on the wall, but I somehow can't get used to her bein' in two places at once. I think it's makin' my head ache a little."

Even in the darkness he felt rather than saw his family's sharp critical eyes upon him. His lips moved soundlessly. He knew they were thinking that he hadn't given her enough praise. He said, hurried and confused, "I'd like to have that new pipe fitter down to our place see it. He's a smart fellow. He goes a lot to the movies. They never did make very much sense to me."

Mrs. Flynn sighed. "Your papa was always that backward, Minnie. I've put up with a lot in my life."

"Papa's all right," said Minnie with fond concern. "When I dress him up and take him around with me a little bit, he'll brighten up. You learn most of what you know from other people, anyway. That's what Deane says. You just wait until I get papa out of that rotten old plumbing shop."

A frightful chill passed over Michael Flynn as if Minnie had opened a door and let a brisk cold wind sweep around him. She had become such a force, that she had completely absorbed the others. They followed her blindly, obeyed her implicitly, all but Billy, who was groping for a foothold, struggling to remain himself in spite of Minnie's dominance.

Michael Flynn was more afraid of his children than ever. All Minnie's caresses—her happiness found an outlet in demonstrative affection—drew her away rather than to him. He saw already, with a father's eyes, the ill effects of too much unearned money upon Jimmy and Pete. Neither of them attempted now to look for a steady job. Jimmy never got up before ten o'clock. Introduced to Alicia Adams he spent his evenings, either in her apartment or, when Minnie provided him with enough money, at a vaudeville show, and a cabaret afterwards. He held himself in abeyance, however, for Minnie's calls on the evenings that she wanted to be seen in public. They were generally the evenings following a shopping expedition. Billy never went with them, not after that unhappy evening at Shanley's where Minnie had given her first party to celebrate Nettie's birthday. Billy had humiliated all of them. In the first place he wouldn't let Minnie buy him a new suit of clothes, or even rent him a dinner coat, as she had done for Pete and her father. (Mrs. Lowell had made it clear to Minnie that all *gentlemen* wore dinner jackets.) And Minnie was so eager to acquire gentility that it was a mortal

blow to have around her anyone so unwilling to learn as Billy.

He had sat all through that gay dinner, stonily indifferent to her flushed success, for Minnie was pointed out by several groups of people who recognized her as the girl they had seen so lately on the screen.

Minnie had ordered the dinner, oyster stew, fried chicken, mashed potatoes, ice cream and cake, and two bottles of claret. The claret made her voice rise higher and higher in shrill falsetto. She laughed with no excuse for laughter. Billy had whispered to her father that Minnie was playing the fool. Minnie overheard. They quarreled, and Billy left the table. Michael Flynn, sitting there, rigidly encased in his first stiff shirt, thrust out his head, his wrinkled neck like a turtle's, and cried out in vain to Billy to return.

That evening Minnie would have gone home to sleep if there had been room for her. She and Nettie spent the night in a lower Broadway hotel.

This very hotel room was responsible for another step in Minnie's upward climb. It was the most attractive bedroom Minnie had ever slept in. The wallpaper was blue and the coverlet on the brass bed was blue. The curtains were a blue figured cretonne, faded though still effective. A plain blue rug covered an inlaid polished floor.

Upon arising, Minnie opened the window and looked out over the roof tops. "Classy beds, aren't they," she remarked to Nettie when the latter turned over and rubbed her eyes. "I like blue in a bedroom, it sets off my hair. I was just thinking to myself that with all the money I make I ought to be living in a better place than Schultz's old rooming house."

"I should say you ought to."

"What I should have is an uptown place, an apartment.

Somewhere I wouldn't be ashamed to ask the crowd at the studio. I wouldn't have them know the kind of a hole I am living in for anything in the world."

"I don't blame you, Min, with all of your money."

"I've just stayed in that place because of Billy, and he thinks it's nice because he doesn't know any better."

"Honest, Min, how you can stand for that stick-in-the-mud is more than I can see."

"Billy's not so bad, Nettie, he's just stubborn."

"Stubborn, rats! He's pig-headed. I wouldn't have him for a gift, and you, with all of your money, that could pick and choose——"

"The only thing I've got against Billy is that he just simply won't try to learn anything. You don't know how hard I've tried to teach Billy little things like saying, '*I*' instead of '*me*,' and '*did*' instead of '*done*,' and not to eat with his knife, but switch his fork over from one hand to another. I've found it all simple enough if only you put your mind to it."

Nettie grunted.

"I don't know why I ever took him away from that poor Madge Connors. She's still stuck on him."

"Let her have him then, Minnie——"

"Don't forget, Nettie, I ain't—I'm not the only one that's got money. Madge Connors' father can't live forever with that kidney trouble he's got. He's going to leave her a lot of money. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if she invested it in Hesselman's. Billy mentioned the other night that she was in to see him about it. He says it's as safe as in a bank. Wanted me to put *my* money into it. Can you imagine, Net, doing a fool thing like that with *my* money?"

Nettie laughed scornfully. "Sounds crooked to me," she said. "What's his idea? He won't take little things from you, does he want to hog it all?"

Every one in her family except her father had urged her to leave Billy. But their attack resulted in fostering a protective feeling in her heart. She went back to Billy without protest after he had promised to move from their rooming house.

§ 4

Minnie found an apartment on Ninety-seventh Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue. She paid sixty-five dollars a month for it. It was a long, narrow, dark apartment, with small coffin-shaped rooms. The rear outlook was dingy yards webbed with clotheslines, but through the front room windows was a glimpse of more pretentious house fronts than Minnie had ever known. A negro, in faded spotted livery, stood in the entrance hall. He opened the door, operated the house telephone exchange, and ran the elevator. To the Flynns, he was the very symbol of luxury.

When Minnie and Billy moved in, she asked Elsie and Pete to live with them. Minnie would have preferred Nettie, but the arrangements were made with Pete and Elsie because Elsie could cook and keep house, and Nettie had never learned to do either.

For the first two weeks, Elsie studied Minnie's appetites and tried to serve them. But when Pete kicked about the diet she forgot her obligations to Minnie and sought to please her husband.

Billy seemed no part of the household. He came home, sat silently through dinner, read the evening paper and went to bed, often long before Minnie.

"If Billy didn't look at me with eyes like a dog that's been hurt, I would clear right out and leave him flat," she confided to Elsie one night.

Elsie always thought that Pete would have a better hold on Minnie if Billy were out of the way. "That ain't a dog look," she retorted. "It's just rank stupidity. Billy hasn't got sense enough to get out of his own way. He sits around here all evening as unsociable as if you was nobody at all—hardly answering you when you talk to him. When I showed him your photo in the morning paper and the article about you bein' finished with your second picture, do you think that Billy MacNally read it? I should say not. He laid it over to one side and on my word of honor, he never picked it up again. Pete says he don't give a damn about you, that it's a lucky thing your own family loves you the way it does. Why, look at the way Billy acted tonight when Pete asked him to go down to shoot pool. Told him he couldn't afford to gamble with somebody else's money. Said it so insinuating as if he thought me and Pete didn't work like dogs for every cent we get."

Elsie had a terrible breath. When she got excited she always seemed to cough her words. Minnie drew away from her and went into her own room. She saw she had made a mistake having them there, but it was too late. Elsie served her purpose fairly well, and Pete was going to be of great use to her. Minnie was already looking at second-hand automobiles, and Pete, who had once driven a truck, was going to drive for her. She would buy him a uniform and a cap, and no one at the studio would know that he was her brother. The few who had been at her apartment had never seen Elsie and Pete; part of the arrangement was that they were to remain hidden in the background. Minnie gave them their board and Pete his spending money.

On the day that Minnie signed a year's contract with Beauregard for two hundred and fifty dollars a week she bought a large bright red second-hand Winton.

Minnie never forgot the thrill of driving to the studio in her own car, of her arrival before them all, or of the moment when Pete opened the door for her, stood aside, touched his fingers to his cap and said:

“Shall I wait, miss?”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

§ 1

MINNIE'S second and third pictures were tremendous successes. The newspapers gave columns of praise to the new star. Her name appeared in electric lights on Broadway. She was asked to address the Women's Goal Club. Several Broadway druggists made window displays of her photographs. A new cold cream and perfume were named after her. She received five hundred to endorse "Sure-to-Grow" hair tonic. On the bottle was a picture of Minnie, her long hair tumbled to her waist. Under her elaborate signature was a brief statement to the effect that "Sure-to-Grow" had proven successful with June Day. Picture fans began their hectic correspondence; Minnie was already receiving several hundred letters a month. Interviews with Miss June Day appeared in all magazines devoted to the picture industry; intimate pictures of her life at the studio, her love for books, her devotion to her brother and mother, even stories of her beautiful pampered childhood. To illustrate these stories, Minnie was photographed in her own pale green dressing room which Beauregard had decorated for her; she was photographed lying in studied relaxation upon a satin pillowed chaise longue reading with deep absorption Bernard Shaw's "Man and Superman"; she was shown with her arm lovingly around her mother's shoulder, Mrs. Flynn stiff, silent and awed in the rustling silk dress bought for the occasion; they photographed her kissing a beautiful full-blown rose. This accompanied an article tell-

ing about her love for flowers, how they had always influenced her life, bringing at times a note of the spiritual, at other times a more passionate appeal. She confessed quite frankly that she was born in New York City far away from the fields of spring blossoms which so enchanted her. But during her girlhood, her love of flowers kept her always in touch with some sweet symbol of meadow or hothouse. And even as Minnie Flynn was telling this, there came no halting of conscience. . . . Didn't the thought constitute the deed? Wasn't there always on the table of their old flat a paper palm, and upon the mantelpiece perennial carnation blooms?

So the public, through the newspapers and magazines, learned much about this charming, intelligent new star, June Day. They were kept in touch with her. They read articles signed by her, advising young girls how to prepare themselves for a career in the movies. Splendid advice, Miss Day always gave: to study hard all the branches of the arts, especially dancing, literature and music. To live simply, think clearly, make an exhaustive study of the needs of the screen and requirements of an actress, learn to sew (it would often come in handy when designing costumes) diet to keep in form, ride horseback, and develop the spiritual side of your nature. "Thoughts are things," said Miss June Day at the conclusion of one of her beautiful articles, "and things can be photographed. The purity of a woman's soul is reflected through her eyes which on the screen are the windows of her soul. Life holds many complexes for us, but we who are little shadows of the screen must smother our emotional reactions to our tragedies, lest our eyes grow dim with tears and we fade and grow uninteresting and you turn away from us. Therefore, dear friends and screen aspirants, learn to rise above material matters. Live upon the higher plane,

think clearly, beautifully, intelligently. I have found this the golden key to my own meteoric success."

No one knew quite what it was all about, except possibly the press agent who wrote it, but it lent an air of distinction to June Day. Minnie read it aloud to her family, and Mrs. Flynn's eyes filled with tears at the beauty and length of the words. Michael Flynn was still in a daze. He wondered where Minnie had learned these strange, unnatural sentences which even the smart pipe fitter at the plumbing shop could not understand.

Sometimes he thought so long and seriously over the change worked in his home and in his life, that he grew ill. Once he lay in bed three days tossing and twisting in fever. Billy came to see him and held his hot, crinkled hand. They sat in stifling silence for several hours, then Billy went home to the new apartment they had since taken on upper Riverside Drive.

§ 2

It was a warm late spring evening, and many people were promenading on the Drive. Billy saw sharp silhouettes against the metallic sheen on the river, for the moon was full and her cold radiance far-flung. Under the black and silver lace of the trees were couples, throwing but one shadow upon the moonlit ground. The far-away mooing of the river boats, the dolorous music of a passing hurdy-gurdy, the light laughter echoing from contented hearts, made Billy conscious of a feverish longing again to hold Minnie in his arms.

They had been living under the same roof, but Minnie treated him as if he were a stranger. She was seldom home for dinner, and when she returned late in the evening, often

early in the morning, she went to her own room, shut and *locked* the door. When they did meet she was strangely formal with him. Billy knew he was no longer welcome, but he understood only one thing—the fact that he and Minnie were man and wife. Marriage meant a life's job to Billy. It never occurred to him that anything could happen which would separate Minnie and himself. Among his acquaintances there were no divorced ones.

He was desperately unhappy. He hated the life they were leading. He saw that he did not fit into these new brilliant surroundings as Jimmy did. Since they moved to the Riverside apartment, Jimmy had also been living with them. Minnie loved his happy companionship; he was looking very smart now in the suits she was buying him, derby, spats and cane. On his birthday, Minnie had given him a silver cigarette case and Jimmy had bought himself a long amber holder. He always wore a silk monogrammed handkerchief in the pocket of his coat, and carried chamois gloves. The only work he did was to call for Minnie at the studio and take her out to dinner and dancing almost every evening. Billy heard many comments on this from the family, but no criticisms. They were pleased when they read the items in the newspapers about the beautiful companionship between Miss June Day and her brother, James Day. Billy wondered why he was never mentioned, though it never occurred to him that Minnie kept her marriage a secret. Unsuspicious, truthful, he decided it was because he, unlike the others, had not changed his name to Day. Billy wanted to do anything to make Minnie happy, but he was afraid that if he discarded the name MacNally, when he died he would not dare face his father, who had been proud of that name. He had a childish belief that his name and record on the Judgment Book were down as MacNally.

Minnie and he often quarreled about his job at Hesselman's. She did not know what else he could do, but she would rather he didn't work at all than let it be found out that he was a butcher. Billy liked his work and was proud of it. He could not leave old man Hesselman, and why should he, when he knew that Hesselman was already planning for a partnership?

He had advised against the move to the new expensive apartment. It was unfurnished, and Minnie was now hundreds of dollars in debt. She had furnished it to look like the sets built at the studio. In the parlor—why did Minnie always get angry when he forgot to call it the 'drawing room'?—there were too many pieces of furniture, all covered with satins and velvets. He couldn't sit on them in his working clothes. The rug was pale rose. He dared not walk upon it. He hated all the gilt mirrors in the room which made him see himself red-faced and seedy in the midst of all this gilt and satin splendor. Two other ornaments he didn't like; why did a nice girl like Minnie want a big marble statue of an undressed woman near the window where it could be seen by passersby on the street? And over the mantelpiece was a painting called "Paul and Virginia." Michael Flynn and Billy always turned embarrassed eyes away from the two bold figures flaunting their half-nakedness. If that was art, they didn't want art; the art Minnie was learning around the movies was stealing from her all sense of shame and decency.

Even in the cozy corner of the den Billy dared not sit. It was a broad, comfortable couch, but covered with fussy cushions, satin, silk, velvet and burnt leather. There was a draped canopy overhead held by two long, menacing spears, fastened at right angles from the wall. Close to the couch on a small inlaid-mother-of-pearl table was a brass Russian

teapot and a hammered brass box for cigarettes. There were five lamps in this small room, tall and graceful, or squat and round-bellied. Most of the lamp shades were hand painted and very expensive.

Minnie had called her bedroom a "boudoir," "a symphony in blue." Over the bright, Chinese blue carpet, before the diminutive gas log fireplace, was a large polar bear rug. The bed was white paint and wicker, decorated with baskets of flowers in bas-relief. Minnie had outgrown brass beds by now. The dresser, desk and chairs were white, the lamp shades shell pink. On the bed was a lace spread with a satin lining. Six or seven small embroidered pillows were piled upon it. On the wall were several photographs of Minnie framed in elaborate gilt frames. On the mantelpiece was another photograph of herself in a beautiful frame made entirely of seashells.

Jimmy's room was furnished in mahogany. Minnie and he had chosen it. On the wall were several posters of prize fighters. Minnie thought they added a masculine touch, though she did not want Jimmy to let the girls at the studio know he had ever boxed, even as an amateur. Jimmy was sorry. He would like to have told Alicia Adams. Minnie wasn't the only one who had achieved something in the Flynn family.

In Billy's room was the bird's-eye maple dresser and the brass bed they had bought for their bedroom in the Ninety-seventh Street apartment.

Pete and Elsie's room contained the furniture they had bought for the parlor of the old apartment. Billy liked these two rooms the best in their new home. He could fearlessly stand on the rugs, sit on the chairs and lie down on the beds.

But often he longed to be again in the Schultz rooming house where he and Minnie had been so happy.

Billy's slow mind plodded back over the past year. He sat there on a bench facing the river that stretched out in the soft darkness like a long, winding ribbon of silver. Couples found the next bench, whispered in the masking shadows, then wandered on, often holding hands; sometimes the boy's arm was around the girl's waist. The sight of their contentment made him want Minnie with maddening desperation. If they could again sit and spoon in the lower hallway of The Central! His heart ached in memory of the evenings they had spent in the park before their marriage. He hardly dared think of those first few weeks after their marriage.

At midnight he rose and paced up and down restlessly, glancing at his watch every few minutes. Minnie had told him that she would not be home before one-thirty.

At one o'clock, he entered their apartment. He tiptoed quietly so as not to waken Elsie. He stole into his own room, stood there for a moment, almost in guilty debate, then with his jaw set in resolution, he went into the bathroom and turned on the water in the bathtub. This irregularity made him slightly nervous. He shaved in spite of his fumbling fingers. He shampooed his hair, then used some of Jimmy's pomade. This done, he searched in the closet for the package still tied up and labeled, "Merry Christmas to Billy, from his loving wife." He opened it gingerly and took out a pair of white and blue striped silk pajamas. After his bath, he slipped into them and stood in front of the mirror looking at himself. Of course he preferred his night shirts, but Minnie evidently liked these two-piece things. He lit a cigarette and sat down in the morris chair, leaving his door slightly ajar so he could hear them when they arrived. He tried to stop the irregular beating of his heart by concentrating upon the Butcher's Manual.

§ 3

That evening Minnie was in the height of her glory. Jimmy escorted her to the annual ball given by the cameramen of the industry. She wore a new gown, silver cloth trimmed with silver lace, which was made especially for her by Mme. Papillon—since Minnie's success, they were close friends. Jimmy was in a full-dress suit made for him by the tailor who made all of Gilbert Carlton's smart outfits.

They were driven to the ball, which was at the Astor Hotel, in Minnie's car. Pete was still the chauffeur and even saluted Jimmy.

When she arrived and entered the ballroom, the electricians in the balcony swung the huge luminous head of the spotlight in her direction, and a path of light reached to embrace her. She stood alone in its dazzling radiance, bowing in acknowledgment of the applause. Through a megaphone roared a masculine voice : "Ladies and gentlemen, this is Miss June Day, star of the Elite Productions." The patter of applause grew until it exploded noisily around her, thundering its echoes to the far corners of the room before it ceased. Her heart was beating wildly, sending bright color to her mouth and cheeks. Her eyes were like deep-cut sapphires. Soon she was surrounded by eager young men, all clamoring for dances. Women in boxes looked at her through opera glasses. Hal Deane sought her and asked for the first dance. He held her firmly in his strong arms. How beautiful she was . . . if only he could have her to cherish and protect—protect her from the world and from herself!

While they were dancing and he was guiding her through the crowded room, he felt her body suddenly stiffen, grow taut in his arms. Then Gilbert Carlton danced past them, his tall, graceful body swaying to the pulse-beats of the

music. Carlton's voice struck upon their ears. He was saying heartily: "Hello, Hal! Glad to see you here," and then lowering his voice to pleasant cadences: "How do you do, Miss Day? Marvelous dance, isn't it?" The music ceased, and above the babel his voice rose again, calling to them. He had left his partner and was hurrying toward them.

"Don't dance with him, June," whispered Deane. His tone was compelling.

Minnie was thinking, "He's a dirty dog, but how handsome he is—the handsomest man in the whole ballroom."

"Why not?" she demanded, icily formal.

Deane left her as soon as Carlton reached them.

Carlton was charming. He could be. It was difficult to hold any resentment against anyone whose frankness was so disarming. He said to Minnie with a penitent smile, "Wasn't I the cad to forget you? I remember now the evening you bowed to me in the café. I turned to the girl I was with. I said, 'Confound it, I know that pretty youngster, but I can't think where I've met her.' And when you had gone, I exclaimed, 'Why, that's the Day girl they wanted me to play opposite.'"

He saw Minnie's eyes narrow and her lips thin to a hard line. His laughter had an apologetic ring to it. It gave him time to think. When the laugh died away, he said contritely: "I'm not only a cad where you're concerned, but a fool as well. Do you mind if I am terribly, brutally frank with you?"

Minnie shook her head.

"You'll never speak to me when you hear this confession. . . . I didn't play opposite you just because I didn't think you were a big enough star, idiot that I was."

"I know it," said Minnie quietly, trying to keep the hate alive in her heart.

"We don't make selfish moves like that without paying. In losing your respect and friendship, I know that I have lost more than I deserve for my stupidity. Please forgive me, Miss Day. I shall never trouble you again, but I thought it only fair that you should know how humbled I have been for my insolence." His face was drawn into lines of suffering. He could say no more. He raised her hand to his lips, kissed it, then turned and hurried away. Minnie's straining eyes soon lost him among the gay figures. She pressed her hand to her heart as if a sharp pain had twisted it.

Carlton was thinking, "Not a bad move—she'll dance with me several times this evening—I'll play the lead in her next picture."

He carefully avoided her eager glances all evening, but arranged to dance past her often, choosing for his partners not only the beautiful girls, but the best dancers in the ballroom. He was easily the most distinguished dancer there. Why was it that when they passed close enough so that their elbows almost touched she was either dancing with Beauregard who held her pressed awkwardly against his fat stomach, or with Hal Deane, who was only a methodical, un-inspired dancer?

It was midnight before a man, backing away from a partner, lurched into Minnie. She wheeled around, so did he, and it was Gilbert Carlton!

"Oh, Miss Day, I beg your pardon. I assure you I didn't do this on purpose."

"Why, Mr. Carlton," said Minnie breathlessly, eager to talk with him, "of course I know that. Don't rush away! I've been waiting to tell you all evening that I—I——"

He reached forward and eagerly seized her hand, holding it almost as if he were terrified lest she withdraw it. "Do you mean—do I dare interpret from this—that I am forgiven?"

Minnie blushed. She was afraid that she was going to titter, her nerves seemed jangling. Thoughts came tumbling through her mind like the little pieces of glass in a kaleidoscope forming their colorful or strange patterns—she was so afraid Hal Deane would single her out and look at her with his sharp, weighing eyes. If he once smiled at her—her whole evening would be ruined.

"Answer me, Miss Day—*June Day!*"

She looked into his face searchingly. What she saw in his frank, gracious, hopeful smile laid all the anger in her heart.

Remote wailing strains of violins, music swelling in sound as the deep-throated saxophones pumped forth their melancholy harmonies, music rising in slow, inexorable crescendo until Minnie Flynn became aware of its siren call. To dance—and with Gilbert Carlton! He caught her breathless longing, saw the pendulum movement of her head, swept her into his arms and swayed with her in the sensuous measures of the dance. The crowded floor held them in a pocket. Now they rocked back and forth, back and forth, advancing imperceptibly, spinning around and around in a dizzying circle; rich warm contact of bodies; the very recurrence of the dance movements playing its part to stimulate latent and feverish longings. Dizzily happy, Minnie clung to him, her heart-beats quickening until the mounting fever left a damp glow upon her forehead. She was repeating breathlessly, "I had this dance with Hal Deane—I tell you, Mr. Carlton, I had this dance with Hal Deane—I had——"

His hand pressed into her body. "But you have this dance

with me, June Day, and the next dance, and the next dance, and the next dance. . . ."

It was 1:30 before they left the ballroom. What an evening of triumph! Happiness! Dreams fulfilled! On all sides people clamoring to congratulate her—the prettiest girl in the ballroom—the best dancer in the ballroom—the most sought after girl in the ballroom. Minnie laughing! Jimmy laughing! Carlton laughing! All three of them conscious of a warm glow from the champagne they had drunk; Minnie's first champagne and drunk only because Carlton had ordered it at supper and had toasted to *her*. The bubbles had tickled her throat, but once it was down, her feet, lagging and tired from the long evening of dancing, were winged and full of teasing life again. Carlton handsome and attentive. . . . How popular he was. . . . How the girls envied her. . . . Even the head waiter in the café knew him and ran to meet them at the snap of Carlton's fingers, giving them the most desired table near the fountain, bowing low at every instruction from Carlton—about the caviar (nasty black stuff)—the chicken à la King—the champagne, which he called wine just as if it were only claret. . . . And how nice he was to everybody—how democratic—why, he even called the waiter "brother" and the cigarette girl "sister." . . . How beautiful his table manners were—the smart way he held his little finger when he raised the long queer stemmed glass to his lips. . . . Minnie had imitated him and felt more comfortable in his presence.

Hal Deane passed by while they were at supper and old Beauregard, looking red and disgruntled, both men jealous, of course. Thank God Carlton saw it and remarked upon it. Oh, what a night, always to be remembered, to look back upon as a treasured dream come true. . . . How soon it was all over . . . and he had kissed her hand good night, the

palm of her hand—it made queer chills race up and down her spine . . . and he had escorted her to her own automobile and called out to Pete, "Hey there, brother, be careful how you drive through this traffic—you've got a precious cargo . . ." and Pete, God bless him, saluted gravely and stood at attention and acted like a Duke's chauffeur— And Jimmy and Minnie had laughed . . . and Carlton remained standing at the curb tugging at his slender black mustache, a tall, handsome, romantic figure—so different from Beauregard and Hal Deane and—Billy MacNally . . . Oh, my God, Billy MacNally! . . . *She had forgotten all about him!*

§ 4

Minnie's senses were drugged with happiness when she reached home. Her heart and mind seemed detached from her body, her heart flying to Carlton, her mind, like a bubble in the air, was rising, wafting, revolving, catching the prismatic tints of a rainbow. Glowing with life, she sprang from the car, hurried into the dark foyer of the apartment house, Jimmy close behind her. As the elevator carried them up the two flights, she threw her arm around his waist. They looked at each other and laughed. Just laughed. Not about anything in particular, but about everything. Youth!

They laughed again when they entered the hall of their apartment and kissed good night. Then Minnie rustled silkily down the hall to her own room, her footsteps light and resilient with happiness.

Billy in his room, waiting, heard them.

Minnie flung her white satin cape over the chaise longue, kicked out of her silver slippers, unfastened the hooks on her dress and let it fall to the floor. She emerged from this shimmering shell garbed in delicate pink lingerie. She

laughed softly to herself as she pulled off her stockings and in a mood of silly playfulness, tossed them over the huge pink-bellied kewpie which stood on her dresser. Swiftly drawing out the hairpins her burnished red hair fell to her waist. She took a few prancing steps, rubbing her scalp with her tingling fingers until the electricity in her body leapt to this point of contact and her hair, bristling and snapping with life, made a brilliant halo around her head. As she danced toward the mirror she was wishing that Carlton could see her like this. Again she laughed softly, her laughter like bubbles rising from her heart.

She sought a nightgown to fit her mood, something in harmony with her thoughts, silky and lacy, diaphanous, *clinging*. She sprayed herself with Houbigant's "Quelques Fleurs." She had bought it because a heroine in one of the "ten best sellers" used it. And there was something wonderful about a perfume you couldn't even pronounce the name of. She hummed snatches of the melodies which had been played during the evening. She danced two or three times around the room. She almost forgot her prayers and as she kneeled at the bedside, she was shocked to hear Carlton's name somehow mixed up with the Lord's prayer. Or was she only asking a blessing for him? Or why should she at a time like this be thinking about him? So she did penance and prayed five minutes longer than usual.

When she rose, she turned toward the door and Billy was standing there. She started back confused, staring at him, not understanding why he had come into her room at such an hour. "Are you sick, Billy?" she said at last when she saw he was not going to volunteer any excuse.

He nodded his head in the affirmative.

"Why, for pity's sake, Billy, is it anything serious? Have you got that indigestion again?"

He seemed too choked for speech. He kept moving toward her, staring at her with a slightly rapt look as if he were walking in his sleep.

"Minnie," he said huskily, his words ringing with sudden warmth, "I've been sittin' up waitin' for you all night long. I'm not sick, except—it's my heart, Minnie, it *aches* so."

"Your *heart*, Billy?"

He came closer to her. "It pains me, Minnie, only because I'm so stuck on you, and lonesome for your company—and tonight, Minnie—" A sickly smile made him seem hideous to her. "—There was couples spoonin' in the park——"

"*'Were* couples!" was out before she realized she had corrected him.

"—*Were* couples, Minnie. And I just got sick with longing. It wasn't like this before we moved up here, Minnie, and brass beds was out of date to you, and you was so nervous you had to have a room all to yourself— Oh, Minnie, this ain't no way for us to be livin', even if you *are* in the movies with your pictures in the papers all the time, you don't want to let it spoil you, Minnie darlin'——"

"Oh, for heaven's sakes, Billy! What's come over you? Don't look at me like that, I——"

He was walking almost stealthily toward her.

"Minnie, I can't help lookin' at you. I never seen you so pretty, all dressed up as if you was expectin' me. . . ." His arms groping for her— "Minnie, I'm crazy about you. I been sittin' up all night. Look, dearie, what do you think about me in your Christmas present?" He laughed low, embarrassedly. "I thought you'd be glad to see me out of them nightshirts, you always hated 'em so. . . ." With a heavy, throaty sigh, "Oh, Minnie, I'm so crazy about you——"

She knew now why he was there.

There was a frozen smile on her face as she said, backing away from him, "Yes, Billy, I know. Go on back to bed, dear, and get some rest. You've got to get up early in the morning. So do I, Billy, and I've had such an exciting evening. I'm all worn out——"

He stood staring at her for a few minutes—almost as if he did not realize the significance of her words. But when she smiled, nervously—then *laughed*, an apologetic but slightly scornful staccato—a fierce, insurgent resentment swept him. He reached over and grabbed her by the wrist. It was the first time Minnie had ever seen him angry, "Look here, Minnie!" and he was shaking with violent emotion, "I don't know what's come over you lately, but I'm damned if you can go on treatin' me like this. Kickin' me around as if I was a dog! You seem to have forgotten somethin', Minnie MacNally, and that is that *you're my wife! Wife!* Do you realize what that means? That you're *mine!*—and I'm *yours!*"

She tried to whip her arm out of his grasp.

"What's more, I've stood for all the nonsense I'm goin' to! I've put up with things a man like Hesselman would kick a woman out of his house for! I——"

Still she couldn't free herself.

"Away every night when I come home! Out to parties and dances—dancin' with other men's arms around you, while I'm sittin' home as if I wasn't good enough for you——"

A shrill cry shot from between Minnie's clenched teeth. It silenced him. "You said it, Billy MacNally! You said it! You're *not* good enough for me, *that's* what the trouble is! You're *not* good enough,—do you understand me! You're only a common ignoramus, you—you *butcher*, you!"

Her rising temper seemed to stun him. It was *her* turn now.

"A *butcher!* And you'll never be anything else but a butcher!"

He managed to say, "It's a good, honest job, and I'm not ashamed of it."

"Shut up! Do you hear me?—and listen to me: *I've* got something to say this time. Something that *you* can think over and worry over, and when I get through with it, you can do as you damned well please—get up and get out of here for all I care—out of *my* room, *my* house, *my* life! That's what I want, if you must know the truth. I want to get *rid* of you! I'm *sick* of you! I married you just because I wanted to get away from home and I thought I was done for in the movies. I married you and I never loved you, and you know it!"

A thin wail broke from Billy's lips: "Oh, God, Minnie, that's a lie! You *was* in love with me!"

She stamped her foot in impotent rage. "No, no, no!" she screamed. "You know better than that, because you spoke about it often enough. Love to you meant the kind of a woman who slaves in a man's kitchen and brings up his kids and washes, and washes and washes, until her back's bent double and her hands are knotty, and full of rheumatism. But *I* wasn't that kind—and you bellyached about the good wife that Mrs. Hesselman was. I was sick and tired of it, even then—and you'd have been satisfied with a lousy little room in a place like Schultz's all your life—and when the chance came to pull ourselves up and make something out of ourselves and speak decent grammar and live like white people, you started in to crab again and cling to the old landmarks as if they were something sacred——"

"Oh, Minnie, they *are* sacred——"

"No, they aren't!" she shouted. "They're rotten, I tell you! Our old flat and the Schultzs' and the dingy old apartment on Ninety-seventh Street! Why, every time I come into this place I thank God I've left all the old joints behind me!"

"You said I wasn't good enough for you. . . ." He stood before her, his mouth blubbling, tears gushing from his eyes and streaming down his cheeks. "I never thought about it, Minnie, the way you did, and I guess you're right in a way, but I can change, Minnie—I never knew how much it meant to you, until tonight . . . I love you, Minnie, and I can *change*!"

"Oh, no you can't!" with an ugly ring of triumph in her voice. "You'll never change, no more than Pete could. What's more, Billy, I'm *through*! It's all over with me. I've been realizing it for a long time, but I never said anything about it. But tonight I know. Why, when you came into the room I—" A shudder of repulsion told him what she couldn't explain. "Don't you see, Billy, how *through* I am? I could *never* love you or stand to have you near me. I'd go crazy if you even tried to pull on me again that I am *yours*, because I was married to you. I hate marriage! I don't believe in it! Damn laws that tie two people together who don't belong! Damn them, I say!"

Billy choked out, "Don't, Minnie, don't talk that way. God will strike you dead if you go on like that. Marriage is sacred—you don't know what you're sayin'."

"I do! I do! And this is the *end*! Everything is over between you and me—and you've got to pack your things and clear out of here!"

"Oh, God, Minnie, don't do anything like that to me—" He was shaking now as with ague. He fell to his knees. "Minnie, I'm crazy about you! My heart's all wrapped up

in you! I can't live without you! Oh, Minnie, I'd die without you! Gimme a chance—I'll *change*, Minnie——"

She screamed when he grabbed her around her knees and tried to beat him away from her. His hot tears in drenching floods fell upon her bare feet.

"Billy, for God's sake, stop that!"

"I'll *change*, Minnie."

It was the hopeless reiteration that fanned her bitter resentment against him; too unbearably symbolic of the man, dullard and unimaginative.

"You *won't*! You know it, Billy. Oh, why can't you have sense enough and realize that I don't love you! That it's all been a mistake! That I'm *free*!"

"You're *not* free, Minnie! Go to Father Riley—he'll tell you what a wicked girl you are to talk like that——"

She screamed.

"*Shut up!*" She felt as if her head were bursting. "I'm *sick* of you! I *am* free! Free as the air! I'm independent! I don't need any husband! I'm rich and can support myself. Have I ever taken a cent from you since the day I went to work in the movies?"

"I put it all into insurance for you, Minnie." He was crawling along the floor on his hands and knees, a grotesque but terribly pitiful, humorous figure. Minnie was hysterical.

"Go—go!" she screamed again. "Get up on your feet and get out of here! *Get out of here*, I tell you! Get out of here *tonight*! I never want to see your face again! You—you *butcher*, you!"

Billy staggered to his feet. His face was white except around his eyes, which were red and furiously swollen, and his bulbous nose. He leaned against the door like a drunken man. He made a heavy effort to speak but his exhortation was soundless. He raised a trembling finger and pointed at her.

. . . Then he backed out of the room, still pointing at her.

There raced through Minnie's mind the astounding realization that if Billy had dragged her across the room, if he had beaten her, even as Pete had beaten Elsie, if she could have lain half senseless, swooning in his arms, he would have proved his manhood and she might have forgiven him and forgotten Gilbert Carlton.

Jimmy, who had been listening at the door, sighed with relief when he heard Billy leave and go into his own room. Later he heard Billy packing. He was amazed when he became aware that Minnie was sobbing.

§ 5

Minnie's conscience troubled her, and the next morning she telephoned to the shop.

"Hello, Mr. Hesselman, is Billy there?"

"Who? Vat? Is it you, Minnie?"

"Yes, it's I."

"Ida?"

"It's me, Minnie. Can't you hear me now, Mr. Hesselman?"

"Ja, ja."

"Is Billy there?"

"No, he ain't here, Minnie. He goes out on the wagon today."

"Is that so?"

"Sure it's so. Such a headache that boy's got, I sent him out myself, for the air to do him good. Billy is sick, Minnie, from last night. I'm your old friend, so he tells me all about it."

"Oh, he did, did he!"

"Ja, he did it. Is it strange that he should do it when

we're so close, I ask you, Minnie?—like father and son, since my wife died."

"I know, Mr. Hesselman, you've been so good to Billy."

"Only so good he gets as he deserves. Billy's a fine boy. In the movies you find prettier faces, maybe, but I bet you no better boys than Billy MacNally. I could do worse than wish that he was a son from mine."

"Will you tell him I called him up, Mr. Hesselman?"

"No, Minnie, that I cannot do."

"But why not?"

"He told as I shouldn't. Of his own free will he told me it was all over between you."

"He had no right to tell you that. I've been crying all night, Mr. Hesselman. I was wondering if maybe we wouldn't be making it up."

"A man that's got his face kicked by the woman he loves don't get over it so quick, Minnie. You've lost yourself Billy for sure this time."

"Why, Mr. Hesselman——"

"I'm an old man. Lots of people come into my butcher shop for thirty years. I know human nature better than I do my own business. I know when a man's love is dead, Minnie. Billy is all night suffering, but today he comes and he's numb. He says, 'Hesselman, I'm through. I'm sick and all broke up, but I'm through.'"

Minnie was crying.

Hesselman heard her. "Don't take on so, Minnie. Maybe it's all for the good. For an old-fashioned fellow like me, it's saying something to tell two people they're better off without each other, in cases like you and Billy. Once a woman gets ahead from a man, he can't pull her back to him. . . . Minnie!"

"Yes, Mr. Hesselman."

"You be a good girl."

In a child's pitiful whimper: "I'm not a bad girl, really I'm not."

"Joost a leetle bit spoiled. Some day maybe you and him get together again. Maybe you get tired of those fancy fellows you meet over in the movies. I got to go, Minnie—a customer comes in by the doorway."

She heard the sharp click of the phone. It shut her off forever from Billy MacNally.

CHAPTER TWELVE

§ 1

DEANE was a sympathetic confidant. Minnie called upon him often because she found so much relief in the recital of her troubles. She respected his advice though she seldom followed it. He knew all about her parting from Billy; about her increasing contempt for her family, her growing ambitions. But she told him nothing about Gilbert Carlton.

As the days passed, Deane noted the change in the pattern that was once Minnie Flynn. How rapidly she was learning the mechanics of acting, how much more facile and broad was her range of expression. Cleverly he led her out, in her acting, to express her daily experiences. Before the sting was gone from her last scene with Billy, Deane had her react it before the camera. Deftly he had woven this very scene into the story they were making, and before Minnie was aware of it she was playing upon the screen the part she had played in real life. And as she was reliving it, the sordid memories of her past came back to her; Billy's sickening desire for her; his hands red and pulpy, reaching out for her; all the past—cramped, incongruous and fouled with tenement dirt. Deane had chosen for the actor to play opposite her a type similar to Billy. Though Minnie was aware of this deliberate tricking of her emotions, when the scene was under way, she lost herself amid her memories, and the past so merged into the present that she lived again that dramatic crisis.

"How cruel a woman can be when she no longer loves a man," Deane was thinking as he watched her, mechanically repeating almost word for word what she had said to Billy. He checked a nervous impulse to laugh. How inexorable the laws of passion; she was already hurting *him* and he was so much more sensitive than Billy.

"Knowledge of life is growth," he told Minnie. "Your experience with Billy has made an interesting contribution to your development as an actress. That scene we have just finished will stamp you as an 'emotional actress.' Another rubber stamp of our profession."

"Do I have to go through some terrible sorrow to express suffering?" she asked, afraid that life was to be too turbulent if success was to be bought at such a cost.

"Not necessarily," Deane answered. "There are certain elemental emotions which are more easily conveyed by situations than by individual expression. Almost infallible rules, especially on the screen. You know by now, Minnie, that it is more difficult to make an audience laugh than cry. We have certain prescribed rules which are nearly always successful. Any inexperienced actress can make a portion of the audience weep if she portrays a child at the deathbed of her mother, a youngster grieving over the death of a faithful dog, a girl bidding farewell to her soldier sweetheart, a mother whose child is torn from her. You should understand that by now, Minnie, for I have fitted you into just such situations as if I were pouring you into a mold."

She bit her lower lip. "But the audience was crying over *me!*"

"No, Minnie, over the situation. The audiences are as schooled to cry at these situations as they are to laugh if one man kicks the other man in the seat of the trousers, or when a fat man sits on his opera hat."

"Are you trying to discredit all that I've done?" Minnie asked rather petulantly.

He shook his head. "I only want you to realize that picture technique is knowing your mechanics and learning to photograph upon your mind every physical interpretation of the human emotions. Some day you may not have a director who studies you, who knows your limitations, who helps in the construction of a story which will avoid your deficiencies and give full scope to your acquired talents."

Minnie was thinking while he was talking that Deane was unnecessarily frank; she might do much better with a director who was more complimentary, kind. Beauregard had already hinted at a possible change. She had no idea that Beauregard attributed her indifference to him to a secret attraction to Deane.

The day Beauregard saw Minnie's dramatic scene upon the screen, he sent for her. He was excited. He saw in her a Pickford, a Gish or a Talmadge. Her development was nothing short of amazing. She would make him famous as a producer. Though his praise to Minnie was discreetly circumspect, his promises for her future filled her with joy. She was to have the star rôle in a special melodrama which he had been long advertising, her choice of directors (she preferred Bacon who was now eager to direct her), her choice of leading man and supporting cast.

After much hesitancy, she decided to let Deane make another picture with her, and she cleverly made Beauregard suggest Gilbert Carlton for her leading man. At the end of the long interview, Beauregard presented her with a gold vanity case and told her that he loved her with "a deep and holy passion." Partly because she was grateful, and partly because she was happy, and also because she did not want to antagonize him at a time he seemed so ready to bring

about her success, she let him draw her into his trembling arms and kiss her. Not upon the mouth! That was entirely too romantic, and how could romance go with a fat stomach and a shiny, naked head? But she turned her cheek and let him kiss her neck, though she wanted to laugh at the funny picture they made in the mirror in back of his desk. Why did men like him puff so? Easily winded—she decided— Awfully stupid and slobbery. . . . And she wondered how Gilbert Carlton kissed a woman. . . . And suddenly a warm glow moved over her—she would soon know how he kissed, for in all pictures there were love scenes, and he would hold her in his arms. Yes, she would know!

Beauregard had locked the door because he was afraid Deane would come into the office. He had a habit of doing that when Minnie was there. So the violent knocking on the door annoyed, but did not startle him. He reluctantly released Minnie, hurried across the room, then deftly turned the key in the lock. It was only a messenger boy with a telegram.

Eleanor Grant had committed suicide.

"Why in hell didn't they phone this message to my secretary?" he demanded of the boy. "Who directed you to this office?"

The boy didn't know it was Deane.

Beauregard crumpled the telegram in his hand, fired the boy out of the room, then sank trembling into his chair before the huge mahogany desk. He didn't care anything about Eleanor, but the news was stark, terrifying. When Minnie solicitously pressed him to tell her what had so upset him, he made a long story of it and in the telling whipped up a lot of false sympathy for Eleanor, so that when he came to the suicide, which he said he couldn't understand in the

face of his having offered to do anything in his power to help her, he was gulping.

Minnie cried with wholesome relief. "Poor Eleanor," she kept saying over and over to herself, "and I promised to get her a part in the last picture—and I forgot all about her, and I——"

"Yes, poor little Eleanor," said Beauregard huskily. "We've got to do everything in our power to make her funeral a success. I'll turn out the whole studio if necessary." He was ringing for his secretary while he was talking. "I'll spare no expense for flowers, and June, dear, you can pick out the most beautiful headstone and not have to count the cost any more than if it were for my own sister."

The secretary entered. Beauregard ordered her to send for the publicity man. "I want all the papers to run the story and give Eleanor a lot of praise, poor little Eleanor." And he drew out the vest pocket silk handkerchief this time. "I'll pay for the cuts of a two-column portrait no matter what it costs—even if I have to steal the space from you, June dear."

"Oh, I'll give it up—I'll gladly give it up," Minnie was crying warm, painless tears.

"Go to the wardrobe room," was Beauregard's last order to his secretary, "and tell Mrs. Skerrit that I want the prettiest white dress in the department, and that she can put it on the books as dead loss, because I am going to give the dress away."

There were only four people at the funeral. They sat in the chapel of the undertaking parlors, afraid to walk around the white coffin which was like a shaft of light cutting into the gloomy shadows. Minnie was terrified by the silence, broken by the drone of the minister's voice. . . . Why did the Lord's Prayer seem so much more significant

than ever before? "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from all evil." . . . Why was grief so uncontrollable when the emanciated organist played "Nearer My God to Thee"? Weakness and nausea laid clammy hands upon Minnie—she wanted to scream and run away. But she sat there, transfixed, listening to the hum of the minister's voice and to the low, wheezing tones of the organ. Her flowers—a huge out-jetting shower of white roses—lay still and wax-like upon the coffin. But Beauregard's enormous gay wreath leaned drunkenly against the table which held the coffin. It was the largest and most expensive wreath which the florist adjoining the undertaking parlors had ever made up, something he took pride in.

§ 2

Deane knew all about Eleanor's death, and he knew what Minnie's emotional reactions would be. He ordered them at the studio to prepare for the so-called "sad scenes" to be taken the afternoon of the funeral. "She is the harp upon which I play the song of my own heart," he said to himself. And then after a contemplative pause, "What an ass I am!"

He met her outside the Undertaking Parlors and drove her to the studio. She had brought along a heavy veil and a black bordered handkerchief. "Props"—and he smiled. "Even in moments of consecration, passion, dismantling sorrows, a woman never forgets her 'props.'"

He let Minnie enjoy her sorrow, even carrying his pleasant cruelties so far as to let Minnie visualize herself in Eleanor's place. So intense then was her suffering that she sobbed aloud, leaning against Deane's broad shoulders. As soon as the violence of this grief had ebbed away, Deane called

upon her to play the scenes which they had counted upon to bring tears to the eyes of the audience. She played them with a depth of feeling and a wistfulness which made them seem sincerely touching.

When this picture reached the public, their silent applause of tears was called a tribute to the art of the new rising star, June Day.

So Deane caught and prisoned Minnie's experiences. He sought her in her home; he made studies of her family; he dreamed and hoped and planned for her. He fought to keep Beauregard away from her; to give her a clean, sane outlook on life. Around her like eddying gusts were new-found friends, studio satellites who called themselves "exponents of the freedom of the ego." *They* were pulling at her—he was pulling at her—Minnie was on the rack between them.

Then Gilbert Carlton came back to the studio, playing his nasty game of studied indifference, flattering her by his well-turned compliments, pressing upon her a personality as smothering as a woolen blanket on a hot day.

"I have taught her many of the physical attributes of love, but I will never be able to show her the heights that love can reach." Deane's introspective mind worked like a shuttle, always weaving. His analyses were disconcerting even to himself. "But I'm damned if I'll let a cub like Carlton awaken that instinct in her!"

He did his best, quietly, to show up Carlton's petty vanities, his arrogance and selfishness. But to no avail. Minnie saw only the handsome face, the broad, strong shoulders, the tapering waist. She heard only his ringing laughter, so cleverly sincere at times; his charming, graceful compliments; his passionate voice that made chills like soft fingers run down her spine. What good company he was, never at a loss for

a story. He could play the piano, too, and had a well-modulated singing voice.

She thought Carlton was the most amusing man she had ever met and she laughed uproariously when he called her "Pumpkin." She had once been called "Carrots"—her red hair being the magnet for nicknames, but nothing she thought so cute as "Pumpkin." The name became "Punkin" as the picture progressed. It made Deane furious, then he realized that he was beginning, like Beauregard, to want to dignify Minnie.

Carlton was clever. He never made love to Minnie, though he knew she was ready for it. He wanted to be sure of her future before he committed himself. He would play at love-making however; when the day came for the taking of their love scenes in the picture, he admitted to Gordon Carilla, his best friend, that he would frankly give her some thrills.

§ 3

Deane, more unhappy than he ever dreamed it would make him, saw Minnie falling in love with Gilbert Carlton. Like a man putting off an operation he knew to be necessary, Deane postponed taking the love scenes until the very end of the picture. He had thought of several stupid excuses for leaving them out entirely, but he knew Beauregard would order them taken; romance, love episodes, were the necessary treacle of every movie.

He found himself pacing up and down the studio floor going in and coming out of the tent he had put up as a temporary private office, acting, so he warned himself, like a fool college boy. It wasn't reasonable that he should love a girl like Minnie, but he couldn't argue or ridicule himself out of this one absorbing passion in his life. He loved her.

When he walked on the set Carlton strolled over to him. "What scene is this, Deane?"

He repeated his question twice before Deane answered, in a low steady voice, "The scene following the rescue, Carlton, the—" There was a noticeable hesitancy, "—the love scene."

"Oh, the love scene, is it? Umm-m."

Minnie felt a sharp sting of resentment at the note of satisfaction in Carlton's voice. She didn't quite like the manner in which he pursed up his lips, drew his tongue over them to moisten them, or the way the eyelids of his right eye closed to a slit, up-turned at the far corner like the eye of a cat. Yet the gleaming look in them seemed to hypnotize her, and she found herself moving closer to him, so close that her outstretched hand touched his arm and closed over it. She pinched it.

"Oh, the love scene, is it? Umm-m." She thought she was mocking him, and in doing so was making it clear to him how aware she was of his conceit.

Neither Deane nor Carlton was fooled. Both men were rather shaken by Minnie's look of intense longing. They saw in her quivering mouth the sudden release of tumultuous passions. Her body, taut, defiant, betrayed the fight that was going on within her, a subconscious struggle against conscious desire.

Deane walked hurriedly away from them. He paused for a moment as if making up his mind what to do. He was standing now in front of the tent. Then with a nervous move, he jerked aside the flap of the tent and went inside. He sank down in a chair, and groaned audibly. Minnie was in love with this ham actor. She wanted him much more than he would ever want her.

Deane ground his teeth. He felt as if Minnie's soul had

become a tangible thing and he was grappling with it, a soul which leapt and struggled in his impotent fingers, a soul, which, if it escaped him, would go plunging into impenetrable darkness, a gaudy light-struck empty thing like a child's balloon, lost forever.

He sprang to the opening of the tent. "Minnie!" he cried out, and his voice was heard above the thundering echoes of the hammers, the syncopations of the jazz band, the splutter and hiss of the powerful arc lamps. "Come in here, I want to talk to you!"

"Oh, Lord!" she said to herself. "Deane knows or he wouldn't have called me Minnie before the whole crowd."

Carlton had also caught the warning note in Deane's voice. "Look, here, Punkin," he whispered to her hurriedly. "Deane's got something up his sleeve. He's a queer nut—I can't make him out. But don't you listen to a word he says about me, because there isn't any truth in it."

"I won't, honestly. Why, no one could influence me—even if he tried to."

"He's jealous of you—that's all. I got it the moment he said that you and I were to do the love scene."

"Oh, no, he's not——"

"Sure he is. You can't fool *me*! He's going to be stark, staring mad the moment I take you into my arms, and—" He closed his eyes, drew in his breath and made the gesture of encircling arms. "He's afraid to have me make love to you, don't you see? Yes, even in front of the camera."

"Make love to me," she mechanically repeated as if she were thinking aloud. She couldn't get away because he was holding her by the arm.

"Damn him! If he tries any of his funny stuff on me I'll go straight to the old man and shoot the whole story to

him. If he thought Deane was trying to get you for himself, he'd can him in a minute."

"MINNIE!"

"He's got a hell of a nerve calling you that. You'd think you belonged to him. . . . You're *my* little girl, aren't you?"

"Let me go, please."

"Good God! You *aren't* anything to him, are you, June?"

"What do you mean—'anything to him?'" What he meant was clear enough. Tears sprang to Minnie's eyes. "How *dare* you talk to me like that! Of course I'm nothing to him. Let go of me, please. Everybody on the stage is watching us. What'll they think, anyway?"

"I don't care what anybody thinks. I'm not ashamed of the way I like you. What's more, I respect you. I'm not afraid to have the whole world know that, if you want me to tell it to them. You can even throw that in Deane's face, if you like. Maybe it'll teach him a good lesson."

"He's going to be awfully put out if I don't go to him."

"All right, dear, but if you've got any loyalty you won't let him pull anything about me that'll frighten you away."

Minnie was bewildered. She wondered if he was making love to her. If so, why did he choose such a crowded moment? Could it be possible that he, too, like the others knew so little of romance?

"Dearest—" Now he was so close to her she could hear his irregular breathing. His breath was heavy with the sweet perfume of violets.

"As God is my judge, you are as sacred to me as my own mother. There! That's what I've kept locked in my heart,—it's out at last!"

Minnie trembled with feverish ecstasy. To have been loved so silently, so secretly. To be respected. To be such a man's ideal.

§ 4

Each step nearer to Deane tightened the muscles around her mouth, deepened the glint in her eyes. When she pulled aside the flap, entered the tent and faced him, there was triumphant savagery in her defiance. "Well, what do you want of me?"

Deane knew every word that Carlton had been saying.

"I want you to marry me."

"To—what?"

"Marry me."

"Gee, but you are certainly developing a sense of humor—or something." She started to say, "What's the big idea?" but his sober sincerity made her realize how cheap any light mockery would be.

"Look here, Minnie! I never felt so responsible for you as I do right this minute. I don't think I ever realized how desperately you need protection. I want to give you that protection. That's secondary, of course. The real reason I want you to marry me is because I love you. Not wildly or romantically, but quietly, with a sincerity which I hope you will some day understand."

A silence fell upon them. Deane was unashamed of this humbling of a fine pride. To him it would have been a false pride, had he been ashamed of it, though he sensed the ignominy of his own position; he was standing before an ignorant little girl, offering her the protection of a name proud of its family traditions, a position, a dignified home, social and moral advantages. Minnie was silent because she was frightened. She wondered if any blame would fall upon her, because in some inexplicable fashion, she had attracted to her such a love as Hal Deane was offering her. Then she was dazed because he had proposed to her, a proposal so

cruelly unprepared for. She was also deeply touched by it, and began to cry.

Deane knew her tears were to be her only articulate response. He put his arms around her, and held her close to him, interminable minutes, it seemed to Minnie. She wondered how he could talk so quietly, so evenly, apparently with no passion at all, about love. There was no perceptible trembling of *his* body as he held her in his arms, his breath was cool, and strong of cigarette smoke. He made no attempt to seek her lips, but held her reservedly, in what seemed to her scarcely an embrace.

Her quick ears caught the shuffle of feet outside the tent, and a tall shadow fell upon it. She wondered if it were Carlton, if he had followed her, and if he were standing there waiting to hear what Deane had to say about him. A tiny shaft of triumph. . . . It was she and not Carlton who concerned Deane. Her tears stopped suddenly as if the tear ducts had contracted.

"Minnie——"

Oh, that detestable name!

"You're just a youngster after all. You seem so little to me. Helpless in the midst of all this cheap, rotten trafficking. I want to get you away from it."

There came over Minnie a tingling desire to laugh hysterically; two men stirring up her emotions by talking of love: Deane's tiresome repetitions of his protective love; the thrill of Carlton's sly, meaningful glances, the magnetism of his long, caressing fingers, the promise in his rich, full voice.

Deane's own voice rang out sharply, "Look here, Minnie! You little fool, you're laughing! You're standing here facing one of the greatest crises of your life and you haven't sense enough to know it!"

"I'm not laughing. I'm hysterical, I tell you. Why have

you done a thing like this, in the middle of the day, without any preparation at all, asking me such a serious question as that? And I——”

“You’re right, Minnie. I should have known better. To me the offer of a man’s love needs no artificial background. I have made a very unfortunate choice of time and location. I’m not an actor.”

“You’re getting sarcastic again.”

“That’s my way, perhaps. It may be as much of a pose as the suaveness of others. I wouldn’t be surprised if that were the truth, as much as I fear it. In trying to be so different from them, I have created a character equally as artificial.”

“Are you trying to make me hate you by talking like that? Please don’t, Hal.”

“No, Minnie, I was only hoping that I could make you care for me.”

She relaxed from the tension at once, sighing, glancing past Deane and worried because the shadow had gone.

“You will some day understand my love. Appreciate it, I think. Marry me, dear.”

“I can’t, Hal. I don’t know why I should hesitate. Don’t think for one moment I don’t know that you are better than I am, that a girl like me ought to be thankful that a man like you would want to make her his wife, and that I would be looked up to as somebody the rest of my life, but I——”

“It’s because you think you’re in love with Carlton, isn’t it?”

“Oh, how can you say that, Hal, when I— How do I know if I love him or not. . . . Why, he’s never even kissed me.”

Deane winced at this. “Is that your ultimate test of love, Minnie?”

“Of course it isn’t. But he—well, we’ve never once mentioned such a thing. You know yourself how indifferent he

is, how he treats all of the girls who are crazy about him as if they were dust under his feet."

"Look here, Minnie, Carlton is a cad, and I detest him! A stupid, selfish rotter! He's going to make love to you—I know the symptoms. And you'll believe him. He's going to do this because you're now in a position to help him."

Minnie flung herself into a rigid pose again. Deane talked quickly: "Let me tell you something about Carlton. He's worse than Beauregard. Beauregard takes, but he gives something in exchange. It's rotten salvage, but at least it's something. Carlton takes, but gives nothing. He's without decency, honor. He's just a petty cheat!"

Minnie struck out with her fists blindly. Her face was convulsed. Finally she managed to gasp: "You keep your mouth shut, Hal Deane! You don't know what you're talking about!"

"I thought so, Minnie. I'm sorry for you."

"Then if you're so sorry for me, you'd better watch your step and not be insulting people who've been as nice to me as Gilbert Carlton. Yeh, you'd better watch your step if you and me—and I—are going to be friends. Do you get me?"

Strange that at a time like this he should make a mental note of how quickly in these unguarded moments Minnie degenerated into old habits of gesture and speech.

"What proof have you got that he's what you say he is?" sputtering incoherently. "Yeh, come on now, with your damned old preaching. Where's your proof!"

"He talks about women who have been foolish. He *intimates* about the ones who have not. And here's something you ought to know, and probably don't—he has a wife and baby hidden away somewhere in Connecticut."

"It's a lie!"

"A rather foolish defense, Minnie. It's the truth. I happen to know it."

"You're trying to turn me against him."

"Of course I am. For your sake."

"No—for yours! You're like all the rest of them! You want something and you're damned if you won't get it no matter what it costs the other fellow. You—with your nagging old protection stuff! You're not as good as he is! I hate you, I tell you! You've tormented me long enough. It's a rotten lie about Gilbert Carlton! That's all it is! I know it! I'm going to ask him! To *hell* with you, that's what I think about you!"

Again she struck out blindly, her fists cutting through the air. He reached out and seized one of her hands. She whipped it from his grasp. He wanted to grip her by the wrists, force her into a chair and hold her there until she steadied herself. She screamed when he touched her, flung his hands away, thwarted his attempt to reach the opening of the tent first, and was gone.

"Poor little kid," he said to himself as he stood there swaying slightly, looking at the long uneven deepening red line on the back of his hand where Minnie had scratched him. He suddenly felt as if he had appeared ridiculous, and a slow blush mounted to his forehead. He was too numb with pain to feel conscious of any heartbreak.

§ 5

A few moments later, outwardly calm, Deane left the tent and walked out on the stage. Weaver was busy giving orders, the musicians had been cued to choose from their portfolios only sentimental songs for the love scenes, the electricians stood in position behind their lamps, the carpenters were nail-

ing up their last boards on the scaffolding holding up the walls of the set. Deane glanced around quite casually. "Where is Miss Day?" he asked Weaver with no perceptible quaver in his voice, though he was conscious of a muscular tugging at his throat.

"Maybe in her dressing room. I saw her running across the stage a few minutes ago. She seemed to be looking for somebody,—you, I guess."

"Go to her dressing room and tell her that I'm ready to take the scene."

"Yes, sir."

"Where is Carlton?"

"Right in back of the set, touching up his make-up," Weaver began to chuckle. "This may hand you a laugh, Deane," he said, "but when I walked around there a few minutes ago he was spraying his throat with some kind of a pinkish stuff which smelled like peppermints and perfume mixed together. If one of these he-men electricians don't drop a lamp on that bird's head some day, I'll miss my guess!"

Deane had heard little of what Weaver was telling him. He was rubbing his hands together nervously, wringing them, though he felt a slight stinging pain where the scratch streaked across the back of his hand. "Call both of them quickly. I want to get the love scene over with and move into the boarding house set. Carlton doesn't work in that, does he?"

Weaver reached for the thumbled script, turned over a few pages, then shook his head. "Carlton doesn't work any more today after the love scene." Weaver laughed again. He was unusually talkative. Deane wanted to silence him, but was afraid of betraying his own agitation. He felt suddenly self-conscious under the sharp scrutiny of Weaver's little ferret eyes. "It ought to be some love scene, if I can read the cards. She's off her head about him as far as I can see. If she isn't,

she *will* be after today. Lovemaking is his dish, all right. Poor little kid."

An echo of Deane's own words, but they sounded patronizing, coming from Weaver's lips, and Deane resented them. "She can take care of herself, Weaver. Get them on the set."

Minnie had been crying. The mascara on her lashes had run, and the black tears had trickled in tiny grooves down her cheeks. Her mouth was still working convulsively. Weaver found her trying to repair her make-up. "You don't have to worry about it," he said to her consolingly. "It's after he's rescued you from drowning, and you're supposed to look all topsy-turvy." He was wondering why she had been crying. Deane had probably given her a call-down. "The boss is waiting for you. He seems impatient. When you're ready, call me. I've got to have somebody hose you down, you come into the scene all wet. You know—continuation of the drowning sequence."

Minnie shuddered. "I hate to have that water thrown all over me. I'm going to catch my death of cold."

Weaver laughed. "Don't worry, Carlton will keep you warm, he's all primed up for it. Perfume, atomizer, breath of violets. . . ."

"You keep quiet," she said evenly. A few seconds later: "I'm ready now."

Carlton was furious because he had to stand under the hose until he was dripping wet. But walking back to the set he passed in front of a long cheval glass and caught sight of himself. The wet clothes clung to his body, revealing the muscles on his arms and legs. Intriguing. He tightened his fists, pressing his fingers well into the palms of his hands and watched smilingly the rippling play of muscles. And as he stood there looking at himself he wondered if Minnie's wet clothes would be so pleasantly revealing of charms, hitherto half hidden.

Minnie's dress was of a sleazy material, which clung to her body in limp drapes as she emerged from the cascade of water. Her wet hair fell to her waist. Pulled from off her forehead, revealing her ears, her hair became a mysteriously dark frame as if it were carved from rosewood. Her face was the color of old ivory. The scarlet mouth eager for the soothing caress of Carlton's. Eyes like two velvet pansies.

"Do I really love this girl?" Carlton asked himself, amazed. "Hell, no! I mustn't let myself slip like this. There's too much at stake."

"I love you, I love you." The wail of the music. The hum of the lights. Deane's white face peering over the shoulder of the cameraman. Carlton. Minnie in his arms. The warmth of their two bodies, Minnie's heart pounding wildly. A thin vapor of steam arising from their wet clothes.

"Do you mean it, Gilbert, with all your heart? Oh, I love you so!"

"Of course I mean it. Kiss me. Kiss me, darling."

She lay back in his arms, swaying lightly.

"Kiss me again, Gilbert, it's just—as I dreamed it would be. I love you so. I—I've never loved before . . . never loved before."

He laid his lips upon hers. "Sweetheart," he said, "I'm crazy about you, too. And that's no lie. I'm not acting now. It's the real thing——"

Not acting now? Acting! Yes, it *was* so—they were acting—in front of the camera. Deane was directing the scene. A hundred people were looking on. And she had forgotten. She had felt as if they were a thousand miles away.

Acting! Were his burning words of love only a part of the paint and pretense?

"Gilbert!" He was startled when she clutched him in taut, trembling arms. "Tell me the truth—do you love me—I mean

outside of this scene? I mean—oh, I don't know what I'm talking about——”

His mouth sought hers again, pressed hard upon it in a long embrace.

Weaver laughed. “Putting the works on her, all right. Is she falling?”

One of the musicians, drawing the bow of his 'cello over the sobbing strings, laughed and winked. “I'll say she is—like a ton of bricks!”

The wink traveled from the property boys to the electricians straddling the beams high over the set. The cameraman read aloud: “Two hundred and fifty feet, Deane—running out of film——”

“Might as well cut it now—they'll cut it in Philadelphia,” said Weaver facetiously.

Deane cried, “Lights out!” The studio was plunged in darkness. Deane was glad. No one saw his face, which he knew was livid with shame and grief.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

§ 1

MINNIE was unashamed of her infatuation for Gilbert Carlton. What if he *were* married? Hadn't she made a stupid mistake herself? Gilbert explained how he had been drawn into a veritable net with a girl he didn't love. Trapped—that is what had happened.

But Minnie wasn't entirely blind to his faults. She often chafed under his domineering manner and was frightened by his nasty suspicions. But when he held her in his arms, her heart lifted again—she felt a passionate contentment, as if she were lying in a hammock under swaying, whispering birch trees, the warm moist kiss of summer upon her half-open mouth.

The rumor of Minnie's infatuation reaching Beauregard, he came spying around the studio. There he saw Minnie's eager hands always seeking Carlton's, the pressing, pleading look in her eyes, and Carlton's arrogant triumph. He knew then that he had been blocked, outwitted, but he was in no position to protest. Minnie was the first of his personal enthusiasms to bring remuneration. Her promised success would yield him a harvest, and a reflected glory in which he would bask. He hated her now that he had lost her, but he would go on hiding his hatred, and make her success pay for his wounded vanity. There were others. There are always others. Every day Alicia Adams, little blond, with yellow magnetic eyes, walked past him and said, "Good morning," an inviting tone in her voice. Her figure was more voluptuous than Minnie's, her

mouth more certain to respond. When she smiled she showed her little white pointed teeth. The day Beauregard was certain that he had lost Minnie, he sent for Alicia. An hour later he opened a bottle of wine in his office, and Walter, the photographer, took a flashlight of her signing a contract. That evening, pink with triumph, she rode home in Beauregard's limousine. A week of shopping. Alicia bought the same things Minnie had bought: a gold mesh bag, a bird of paradise, a coat with an ermine collar. She and Minnie had dreamed of ermine coats. She wondered if she would get hers before Minnie. She laughed softly to herself; Minnie was fool enough to work for it.

Each succeeding picture that Minnie made brought fresh acclaims. Now the critics, attracted by her beauty, her apparent facility at expressing emotions, began to lament the type of story she was playing in; and the interested public, aroused by the criticisms, also voiced a protest. These protests reached her through fan letters, published letters in the trade journals, and in those columns of the newspapers devoted to the picture industry. Their complaint was that June Day wasn't given vehicles worthy of her. They wanted her no longer as the inexperienced child-actress, she had proven herself an emotional actress of great power, depth and feeling. When Minnie read these criticisms, she went to Beauregard, and growing resentment against Deane was the result of these conferences. It was he who had held Minnie down to inferior rôles. It was he who had insisted that she play the simple, wistful characters, when it was obvious, even to the public, that she was capable of any far-flung range of emotion.

"Good Heavens!" Minnie cried, her anger pyramidding every time she thought of it, "do you realize, Beauregard, that I haven't been given a chance,—a *real* chance to show what I can do? Why, look at this, what it says about me—an

editorial, too—'June Day, cramped into rôles of tenement girls, chorus girls, farmers' daughters, when she is worthy of a Juliet, a Leah Kleschna or a Magdalene!'"

Beauregard motioned for Mrs. Lowell to take Alicia into the outer office for the continuation of her lesson in grammar, because he didn't want Alicia to hear him knock Deane. His plans were for Deane to take Alicia, so she mustn't be prejudiced. When he and Minnie were alone, he began:

"You know, June, I wanted to give you the best, and Deane looked like the only one who could put you over."

Minnie agreed that he had succeeded and that she owed much to Deane, but in the future she wanted a director who wasn't so determined against her playing the big, dramatic rôles. "Romeo and Juliet"—that's what she wanted to do. She had never heard of it until Carlton had told her all about it. A wonderful story for the two of them. He brought her Lamb's "Romeo and Juliet." Minnie never knew it wasn't Shakespeare's. She was sincere when she told an interviewer, "I just love Shakespeare, and I hope to play him some day. He's really one man in a thousand!" She tried to feel Deane out. When she suggested herself as Juliet he smiled, his enigmatic smile, and his eyes were full of pity for her.

"Minnie," he said. "Now that you're out of my hands, don't make any false moves. As much as it hurts your vanity, keep my advice in the back of your head—you'll need it. Don't sell yourself the idea that you're a great actress, because you're not! You're young, and pretty, and an instinctive mimic. You have a cute little personality. You've learned your bag of tricks, and the public likes them. They may criticize you and appear eager to see you step into broader fields, as they blindly express it, but they will be the first to condemn you when you fail to hold your own with the more experienced actresses."

Deane evidently made this clear to Beauregard, because he called off the production for "Romeo and Juliet" even after some money had been spent on the building of sets and the designing of costumes. Minnie, urged on by Carlton, stormed into Beauregard's office when it was whispered about that Beauregard had changed his mind. Her tears and threats left him unmoved. Bacon, eager to direct the production, came to Minnie's aid, using his weapons of defense more cleverly than she, having made it clear to Beauregard that it was time Beauregard's name was again linked with Art, and there was no Art so everlasting as Shakespeare.

For two days to think it over before her decision. In those two days much occurred. Minnie's life, this time brought about so

Beauregard about made any definite de Another crisis in M unexpectedly by Pet

§ 2

the studio, sitting there in the long, idle hatred or their liking for their employers. President of the Ætna Film Corporation ce with Beauregard. His chauffeur, wag- ad knowingly, told the other chauffeurs ss had come on: it was to borrow June odrama they were going to make at the

arently dully, but attentively. He bought r. He told him he was Day's driver, and le peach. The chauffeur agreed with him, y seen her on the screen. It was quite know how much in demand his employer eur was pleased to tell him all about it. conversation between the manager of the

The chauffeurs of hours, gossiped their One afternoon, the came for a conferen ging his narrow he what mission his bo Day for a big melo Ætna Studio.

Pete listened, appa the chauffeur a cigar that she was one litt though he had only evident Pete didn't was, and the chauff He had overheard a

studio and his boss—it was just before they had left for Fort Lee. Morton (that was the manager of the Ætna Studio) had said to John Wright (his boss, and the President), “Offer Beauregard five hundred a week, if necessary, to get June Day.”

Pete’s big moment had come. The Flynn family were invited to Minnie’s apartment that evening for dinner. Elsie had cooked the dinner, though Pete, strolling into the kitchen, had whispered mysteriously, “About the last dinner you’ll have to cook, honey. I guess me and you ain’t gonna be treated like servants in this outfit any longer. I’ve got something up my sleeve, I have. You wait and see—you wait!”

Pete was chafing with the news, but he waited until dinner was over and they had all strolled into the den. Michael Flynn, Mrs. Flynn, Nettie, Jimmy, Elsie, and Minnie. He rose, trembling slightly, and addressed them with the formality of a candidate making a political speech. This was his plan: to have some cards printed, to call upon the President of the Ætna Film Company, as Minnie’s business representative, and to discuss Minnie’s future plans. Minnie had her doubts, but her hinted protests were drowned by the outcries of Mrs. Flynn and Elsie. It was quite evident that Beauregard had turned down Ætna’s proposition of hiring Minnie for a picture at *twice* the salary she was getting. So why should Minnie consider a dirty old dog like him? That’s what Pete wanted to know. His mother’s voice and Elsie’s, like echoes in the hollow of a mountain, reiterated his own words. Then Jimmy and Nettie joined in. Minnie had said that she would buy herself an ermine coat on the instalment plan when she got more money, and Nettie knew the evening coat with the ermine collar would then fall to her. Minnie had also said she would some day buy a roadster, so Jimmy saw himself at the wheel of a smart yellow Stutz.

Always that flapping sound of Michael Flynn's helpless hands beating together. The talk of so much money, so much spending of money, always frightened him. He stood in the center of that flushed, excited, loud-talking group and turned round and round, as if he were caught in a trap.

The following morning, Jimmy drove Minnie to the studio. Elsie and Nettie went with Pete to Gimbels. They bought Pete a black and white checked suit, a yellow and black tie, and tan shoes. He had never worn gloves: his hands in chamois gloves dangled awkwardly away from his body. He protested against the cane, but he liked the narrow-rimmed derby cocked well over his ear. Elsie, pale with an almost sickly happiness, thought that he looked like a swell drummer or a gambler. He could hold his own with any of them, she whispered to him as she clung to his arm. Her gray, stringy body in its ashen dress made her look like a long beard of moss swaying on the arm-branch of an oak.

No time to have cards engraved as Minnie had ordered, but they found a man who wrote with elaborate curlicues the name, "Mr. Pete Flynn Day." And under the name, "Business Manager for Miss June Day."

Pete thought he would have difficulty getting past the hawk-eyed sub-managers, but to his astonishment he was led at once into the President's private office. He was offered a seat and a twenty-five-cent cigar.

"I see by your card you are a relative of Miss Day's," said Wright pleasantly.

"Her brother," said Pete, "and manager. Now, look here, Wright, let's me and you get down to business and put all the cards on the table. What do you say, old man?"

"That's the way I do business, Mr. Day." Wright held his hand before his face under the pretext of lighting a cigarette. He was always amused by ignorance, and stepping

from the banking business into the picture business, his sense of humor was always well kindled.

Pete was talking pompously now, loud-voiced as if Wright were deaf, or a foreigner. "Through some leak at the studio my sister got wind of your offer to Beauregard. Five hundred per—am I right? Speak up! The cards are on the table, ain't they?"

"Yes, we offered Beauregard five hundred dollars a week for a period of six weeks."

"And like fun you got her!"

"Beauregard said they were about to start a production and he couldn't loan her at this time. He thought perhaps in the fall——"

"He did, did he! Well, a fat chance he's got to loan her *any* fall! Her contract's up in four months. Do you get me, Wright? Cards on the table! Ain't gonna hold out anything on each other, are we?"

"In that case," mused Wright, "we're interested. The fact is, Day, we were given to understand that Beauregard held a contract for two years more."

"Not on your sweet life, he don't! Say!" and he stretched out in the chair, "what kind of a business man do you think I am with a great little bet like June Day!"

Wright was thinking aloud: "I've seen contracts made by Beauregard's lawyer before—always some clever little catch in them." Leaning closer to Pete, "We've got a wonderful story and are planning to make a great picture. Going to spend two hundred thousand dollars on it—that gives you some idea of how much faith we have in it, doesn't it, Day?"

"Bet your sweet life!"

"We went to Beauregard because we need your sister in the star part. To be frank, it gave us quite a jolt when we

couldn't get her. Look here, Day, let's go over to the Plaza for a drink and talk this over!"

Pete slapped Wright on the back as they walked to the elevator. He, Pete Flynn, was going to have a drink with the President of the Ætna Film Corporation at the Plaza Hotel. Then he stopped short.

"How far is the Plaza?" he asked with warning premonition.

"About four blocks. Make it in two minutes in my car."

Pete knew the chauffeur would recognize him. The cat would be out of the bag. "No! Let's walk. I need a bracer! Been cooped up in the office all morning talking big biz with the World Film Company. I tell you they're all after that kid."

Pete had never tasted good Scotch. It loosened his tongue as if it had been pried from its moorings. He told Wright Minnie was so dissatisfied she would be glad to break her contract.

§ 3

The following morning, Pete and Wright took the contract to Wright's lawyer. The lawyer studied it and found several loopholes of escape for Beauregard had Minnie disappointed him, and a possible loophole of escape for her. There were several clauses which hadn't been lived up to in the letter of the law. If Pete wanted to engage a lawyer, they recommended Lew Benz, a shrewd ferret who specialized in the business of breaking just such contracts. Minnie, furious because Beauregard had finally decided to cancel the production of "Romeo and Juliet," told Pete to make the first grandstand play. Its thunderbolt threw Beauregard into a panic!

For three weeks Minnie stayed away from the studio, and paid many surreptitious visits to Wright's office.

Pete was magnificent. He engaged a colored chauffeur to drive Minnie's car and sat in the back seat giving loud orders and making many trips from one studio to the other. Amusing items about him appeared in the newspapers. Their sting of ridicule was lost to everyone in the Flynn family except Minnie. Growth. The chrysalis of mental development. A subconscious struggle to grope her way out of the darkness. Why were their grasping hands always tugging at her, to hold her back? Yet each tentacle was sucking her to the body of her family: her love for her father and Jimmy; a sense of obligation to her mother (a contempt and yet sympathy for her perpetual martyrdom); Elsie's adaptability to the management of the house, though Elsie no longer accepted the position of servant; Nettie's whining gratitude; and now, unexpectedly, Pete had proven of real service.

The lawyer of the Ætna Corporation found a clause in Minnie's contract with Beauregard which made it possible for her to be free from him—free—and five hundred dollars a week! Minnie was dazed. Twice as much to spend. She could live twice as well. Dress twice as extravagantly. Buy the ermine coat and pay the first instalment on the roadster. Carlton had no car—they decided it was foolish of him to buy one when they were together all the time, but he could be of great help to Minnie by driving hers. Then, during the early autumn, she could turn in the touring car and get a closed car. A girl in Minnie's position should own her own limousine. It was expected of her. Carlton told her she would attract the attention of all the producers if she showed a little more "class." They wouldn't have the nerve to offer her only five hundred a week if she drove up in her own limousine and wore a long mink coat. An ermine coat! a mink coat! a limousine! When she was working down in the basement of a department

store, if she could have dreamed then of her success and all that money—five hundred dollars a week!

Beauregard was beside himself when Pete ("Special Representative and General Manager" on the engraved cards now) put his feet up on the mahogany desk and told him that Minnie was through.

§ 4

Minnie and Carlton, in the parlor of Minnie's Riverside Drive apartment, were reading the story of the first picture that she was to make for the Ætna Corporation. Minnie was leaning back on the satin-cushioned divan in a silk and lace negligée, smoking a cigarette. She disliked cigarettes—they were biting to her tongue, and she didn't know how to smoke them—but she felt backward and stupid when all the smart actresses said it was the "chic" thing to do. Carlton had bought her a long delicate cigarette holder. All ladies smoked cigarettes. She didn't want to look unsophisticated, so she tried to imitate their obvious languor. To achieve this she kept her eyes always half closed and drew down the corners of her mouth. This gave a slight sneer to her expression, though Minnie thought it a disdainful, bored look, which added charm to her in the eyes of a man of the world like Carlton. Minnie rang for the butler. A rippling, warm, delightful laughter inside. To have a Japanese butler in a crisp white jacket bow low and inquire what madam wished! Saki knew. He had long been employed by the parvenu. He was unctuous to a degree.

"A Scotch highball!" Scotch was the smart thing to drink in the afternoons, with men. Some day she would serve tea when she found out how it was done. Perhaps Saki knew. She would try him out when they were alone. Did the hostess

pass the tea, or pour it? Exactly what were the duties of a hostess? Minnie wondered if she would ever give a tea, or a grand dinner party where they had several courses of food and finger bowls.

Carlton was such a gentleman that he could drink nothing but Scotch. He was nice enough to order several cases for her, paying for the first one in spite of her protests. Minnie drank the whisky, but she thought it was dreadful. Sometimes Saki brought her ginger ale, but only she and Saki knew. She would have been mortified had Carlton found it out.

Carlton was sipping the Scotch and reading the manuscript aloud. Minnie was listening more to his voice than to the story. It seemed dull and long-drawn out, exactly the kind of thing she had been playing in at the Elite Studio. Not even a remote chance of wearing pretty clothes, or being really dramatic. And as for the hero's rôle, he scarcely figured. He was only the love interest lurking in the background. Before the story was finished, Carlton threw the manuscript aside with an ugly gesture.

"A mess of tripe!" he said. "Put it in the fire and forget it. You're an actress! You've got to make them all realize it! Trying to sell you this kind of trash when you're worthy of 'Romeo and Juliet.' Think of it, sweetheart! You and I in the tomb scene! You lying there all covered up with a pall of white net and lilies. And look, darling!" He seized his cane, parrying at the blue satin kidney couch. "Sword play—believe me, I can swing a nasty sword!" His graceful body was darting in and out among the upholstered chairs. "Two of us in the tomb—the other guy a dub compared to me."

"Oh, Gilbert, you're wonderful! Hold that pose a moment, won't you, darling? The way your muscles stick out under the thin sleeve. You're right, dear, you'd be marvelous in tights, simply marvelous! Kiss me, sweetheart!"

He kissed her eagerly, cupping his mouth over hers tensely. Then he sprang away from her with a cry, "I've got it! A whale of an idea!"

"Well, what is it?" she asked, pouting a little.

"You don't like this story, and you're not going to do it!" he decided, dropping to the floor at her feet, resting his chin on her knee as he looked up eagerly into her face. "You're going right over now and see Beauregard. You're going to tell him that you'll go back to him if he'll let you make 'Romeo and Juliet.'"

"But five hundred dollars a week, Gilbert? . . ."

He interrupted her. "Of course you're going to get it, but out of Beauregard. He's put thousands of dollars into advertising you. He isn't going to lose you now if he can help it. I know that sly old fox. He won't let you go. He'll pay you the money. See if he won't. What's more, he'll make 'Romeo and Juliet.'"

While Minnie and Gilbert were on their way to Fort Lee, Pete was sweating Beauregard into giving Minnie seven hundred and fifty dollars a week, if she refused to make the story for the Ætna Productions and came back to him. Pete was drunk with triumph when he reeled out of Beauregard's office, ran to where the car was waiting for him, and ordered the chauffeur to drive back to New York. The cars, traveling at high speed, passed each other. But Pete, staring straight ahead, was working out a twisting scheme whereby Minnie was to pay him a salary worthy of his service to her. A hundred dollars a week! No! A hundred and fifty a week—that's what he'd demand from her. Seven hundred and fifty dollars per! And he was the one responsible for getting it.

When Minnie came into Beauregard's office, he knew that she was not aware of Pete's visit. Before she left she signed a contract agreeing to make one more production for him.

"Romeo and Juliet," and, under sly protest, he was to pay her five hundred dollars a week.

When Pete heard this he was like a wild animal which spends its anger upon the bars of its cage. She had taken two hundred and fifty a week less than he could have gotten for her. How that two hundred and fifty a week magnified when they realized just how much they could have bought with it—two hundred and fifty dollars a week for seven weeks! Minnie hysterically cried out her loss—one thousand seven hundred and fifty dollars! That would have paid for the ermine coat. Pete, furious, snarled at her and twitted her for her stupidity in not letting him manage her affairs. Helpless now, Minnie was willing to pay him one hundred and fifty dollars a week. This was her first quarrel with Carlton. He would have managed her and taken nothing for it. But no, she would rather have her dirty, ignorant brother.

Two days later, Pete and Elsie moved into their own apartment. Elsie in a red plush dress and a picture hat with a large willow plume on it was hideous. From her thin wrists dangled eighty clumsy bracelets, set in rhinestones and varicolored synthetics.

Minnie's contract did not specify a starting date, and it was three weeks and a half before the production of "Romeo and Juliet" began. With no money coming in for that period, and already heavily in debt, Minnie felt the first steel jaw of a trap sprung upon her. They knew nothing of the Finance Companies who would lend money on contracts. Again it was her father to whom she explained her desperate situation. She assured him it would soon be over. Five hundred dollars a week! They would be on their feet in no time. Carlton would be glad to let her have it if she asked him for it, but she didn't want to let him know how improvident she had been. Carlton was above them in many ways. His looks,

his manners. She loved him! To talk money and debts to him would be cheap and unromantic. Would her father lend her what he had laid aside? There was the old nest egg, the funeral money, and there was one hundred dollars that Minnie had given him for Christmas—and twenty dollars for his birthday. She knew that those bills, folded with the others, were nestling in the toe of the old woolen sock.

To her surprise she found that her father had three hundred dollars. Most of it was money she had given him. A dollar here, five there, generously pressed into his hand at vivid peaks of happiness.

§ 5

During these four weeks of preparation for "Romeo and Juliet," she saw little of Carlton. He was busy with fencing masters, costumers, wig-makers. Many an evening he spent at Bacon's home rehearsing. He found it necessary to go on a diet. Twice a week he had his face massaged, and a mask of mud to erase the lines under his eyes, the sagging droop to his mouth. This was to be his great opportunity, and he must make the most of it. In the dreaming and planning for it, he forgot about Minnie. He saw her once in her unbecoming costume. The "Juliet" he had visualized was fair and quite tall. It took height to carry those costumes. Minnie looked short and dumpy in them. When they decided that she was to wear a blond wig, she was delighted, but though it was silver and silken, the edges of it around her face were hard and gave a squat, low look to her forehead. She soon lost what little grace she had acquired. Her gestures became stilted and unnatural. The springing step was gone from her walk in an effort to glide along, swanlike, in the heavy silken, velvet robes.

Bacon groaned. "Gad, Carlton, you're going to be immense in the part! Nothing like these Romeo costumes to show off a man's figure. But, damn it, it takes a great actress to play Juliet! Grace and youth . . . the ability to carry herself. There never was a Juliet born on Ninth Avenue and never will be."

Carlton was embarrassed. "You've got to do a little work with her, Bacon. She'll probably get it across. They might criticize her in the big cities, but the hicks will never know the difference. And don't, for Heaven's sake, let her suspect that you're not pleased with her! She's getting sensitive. If she thinks you haven't any faith in her, it might break her spirit." Carlton was worried for fear that Minnie's discouragement would result in her throwing aside the vehicle and refusing to go on. He saw his future—his career—stretched out before him once he had made a success of "Romeo."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

§ 1

MINNIE'S "Juliet" was held up to ridicule. One critic facetiously called her "the little pink pig in the parlor." Had Deane directed her he might have injected enough whimsical humor into her characterization to have given it a lifelike semblance. But Bacon's delineations were stagy, unreal. In all, it was a grotesque failure. Carlton alone escaped the jibes of the critics and audiences. His "Romeo" was rather pleasing, his movements graceful, his interpretation of the character, eager, boyish, passionate.

Deane saw all this long before the picture was released. He used to steal into the dark projection room while they were running the film to observe Minnie, self-conscious and blundering in a rôle of which she had no conception, her pretty face immobile, her eyes empty, like two blue-glass marbles. Her hands had always attracted him. Slender palms, a concave thumb held close to the first finger, long-pointed fingers with oval nails. Unconsciously her gestures were few and simple, which had made them seem quite eloquent. He had often noticed their similarity to the hands of Japanese women. After Mrs. Lowell's lessons in table manners, he observed the first change in Minnie's hands. In their attempt to be at ease in those conventional relationships with knives and forks, they lost the charm of simple movements. Minnie strained them to ridiculous awkwardness until the fingers sprayed from her palms like the petals of honeysuckle, her little finger bent back and crooked like a trellis. Deane laughed when he saw

the movement of her hands in her new rôle. She so exaggerated their gracefulness they became graceless, expressionless. They looked like a child's hands illustrating curlicues. He was certain that Minnie was satisfied with their aimless rotation on her small stiff wrists, because in her close-ups she looked at them, delighted as a child who timidly observes movement and is pleased to discover those pink, intriguing objects a part of itself! The beauty of Minnie's hands was gone. Deane had a feeling that he was seeing Minnie being slowly dissected. Ghoulish thought. It made him look around at the other women in the profession and study them more appraisingly. A few were building, but could they ever go beyond a certain point? They came to the screen bringing their youth. But there were only a few instances where physical youth had been preserved beyond the normal rush of years. It was impossible to hold mental youth very long in the sophisticated atmosphere of the studios; each contract took its toll.

Beauregard was thrown into a panic by the failure of the picture, and he communicated this terror to the Flynn family. Feverishly they read the biting criticisms of Minnie's acting and saw their house of cards tumbling upon them. The production which had gone into one of the big theaters for a three weeks' run was taken off at the end of the first week. This was a news item, universally read. Trades people, landlords, the Broadway jeweler where Minnie had made only a few payments on her diamond ring, saw Minnie's collapse. They feared what so often happens: that she would hide behind that protective subterfuge of bankruptcy. They clamored around her. The photographer whose studio was filled with her pictures threatened suit. She had paid eight hundred dollars on a new roadster, and, not able to make the second payment, the car was held by the company.

Pete tried frantically to see the President of the Ætna Film Company, but Wright sent out word that he was no longer interested in Miss Day. But he was. He sat back and watched her every move. A much more sensible and far-sighted man than Beauregard, he knew that one poor vehicle would not lose public favor for her, that while stars are climbing the public is tolerant of them. But once they have become passé, the public seems to resent personally a poor picture, as if the star were entirely responsible for the story.

Wright was certain that Minnie would be chastened by the experience. He knew Beauregard wanted no further contracts with her. He was too clever to set a trap, but he just sat by quietly biding his time. With Minnie out of work for a month, he knew that he could make any arrangement he wanted regarding salary. She would probably accept two hundred dollars a week. He could tell by Pete's cringing servility and worried patience as he waited hours in the outer office that Minnie had had no offers. It was the policy of some of the other companies (headed by merchants and money lenders) to beat down the actor or actress to his or her lowest salary figure. Wright wanted the best out of them—a half-hearted performance was more expensive to the company than a slightly higher salary, so the day the High-grade Film Organization sent their representative to see Minnie, Wright offered her seven hundred dollars a week for the first six months, and one thousand dollars a week for the last six months—a full year's contract.

Minnie's relief was electrical. Wright, exactly calculating this reaction, was ready. He had bought two comedy dramas, popular, frothy stage successes perfectly suited to Minnie and her present frame of mind, and she proved the keenness of Wright's judgment by playing both rôles with brilliant *esprit*. Never had she displayed such utter self-confidence: her inner happiness was projected upon the sensitized silver sheet.

§ 2

Summer; autumn; Christmas holidays came and passed by. Minnie had released herself to an orgy of buying extravagant gifts for her family and Gilbert. She drove to church on Christmas morning in her new limousine.

After church she wanted to do some fine, generous thing for the poor. She felt noble, pleasantly conscious of a spiritual uplift. After a rather unhappy scene with Carlton, she had let him go to Hartford to spend Christmas with his baby. The wife's lawyer had made it clear to Carlton that if he and Minnie were to marry, both must secure their divorces. Minnie's lawyer had already seen Billy and there had been secret arrangements for Billy's discovery in a Jersey hotel with a veiled woman, a middle-aged employee of the attorney. Billy was persuaded to do this only when they convinced him that Minnie's happiness and future career depended upon it. Her conscience troubled her about the divorces, they cut her off from the spiritual balm of her creed.

As the limousine rolled through lower Ninth Avenue, over the corrugated streets, Minnie laid her hand caressingly upon her father's. "It gives me the queerest feeling when I think that we actually lived in a rotten neighborhood like this. It's more like a dream than reality. Ugh!" she shuddered.

Michael Flynn did not answer. He was peering out of the plate-glass window. Now they were passing the old familiar landmarks. The once rival plumber shop. Lagomarsino's fruit store. Sullivan's saloon. Hesselman's butcher shop—wasn't that Billy MacNally's name on the sign over the door? Tilden's grocery store. Crazy Pete, the old cobbler. The same cop on the corner, Smiling Big Tim. Around the corner—the Plumbing Shop—the window! Oh, why had they changed the window display? Was the pipe fitter still there?

If Michael Flynn were only walking now instead of moving so fast in this terrible hearselike automobile Minnie had bought, he could see a few of his old cronies. His heart was pounding with irregular beats against his body. A fine mist seemed blown upon the pane of glass—or was it his eyes? It had been eight months since Minnie had moved them away from there. Uprooted them, that's what she had done. She said she wanted to make them more comfortable, so she rented a flat on Ninetieth Street. An elevator. How Michael Flynn hated elevators—and it was a long walk, since he had had rheumatism, up and down five flights. Thirty-five years in one neighborhood. It had become a personal, almost a living thing to Michael Flynn. The old houses seemed to lean against each other for support. The dingy brick. The stained and cracking plaster ones. He had known them when they were new, vigorous, upright, and stood like young men with shoulders erect. He had watched them settle, crumble under the weight of years, their stairs worn by the brush of feet; little scuffling shoes; the tap-tap of high-heeled slippers, and hob-nailed boots. The windows once had bright eyes, blinking with open and drawn shades. Now they were dim like the eyes of old people, their lids faded and crumbled. Yesterday's children were today's men and women. Yesterday's men and women were now withered like apples left upon the trees of a forgotten orchard.

There were memories for Mrs. Flynn, too. But she enjoyed them chiefly because they permitted her to dwell upon her own martyrdom. She thought of them as years of patient toil, child-bearing, child nursing, cooking and sewing and washing. Now she was free from it. What would the Molowonskys say when she told them she had a "nigger" servant and that she didn't even have to make her own bed if she didn't want to?

The limousine rolled down the street. The colored chauff-

feur, at a signal from Minnie, shut off the engine. Children surrounded the car. Like muffled reports came the banging open of windows. Heads and shoulders shot out and collapsed over the sills, like jack-in-the-boxes. . . . Cat calls, whistles, hellos. Voices rising shrill to advise the neighbors who had not seen the car that Minnie Flynn was on the street. . . . Stairs, creaking under the pushing, rushing families who had lived in the same tenement house. . . . The children, hopping as if there were springs in their shoes, wanted to run their hands down Minnie's sealskin coat. . . . The old people were afraid of catching their scaly fingers in the long fine veil that fell from her feathered hat. Mrs. Flynn was crying and talking so excitedly that her new expensive set of false teeth made a strange clacking sound. Minnie was sweet and friendly to them all, but her eyes kept shifting to the colored chauffeur. She knew from Pete how they gossiped at the studio, so she had told him pointedly that she was on a little slumming party to bring Christmas presents to the poor.

Michael Flynn carried all the packages into the parlor of the McCarthys' flat. No fire had ever brought the crowds like Minnie's triumphant return. Her former girl friends stood in awed, giggling, flushed groups. Their eyes saw the diamond rings sparkling on Minnie's hands; the sleeves of real lace; the jeweled pendant hung on a slender chain—she told each one confidentially that it was given to her by her most ardent admirer, that wonderful actor, Gilbert Carlton. They noticed also that she wore sheer silk stockings, and real patent leather pumps.

They told Michael Flynn he was as dressy as the undertaker, and were delighted to hear that Mrs. Flynn had had her hair "done up" by a regular hairdresser. Her nose was powdered, and she wore white kid gloves like Minnie's; but they noticed when she took them off her hands were still red and the joints

swollen. When she spoke it was with a peculiar hesitancy. Whenever she faltered, she glanced nervously toward Minnie, but none of them guessed that it was because she was trying to guard against any mistakes in her grammar. "I done," and "you was" seemed as natural to her as these old familiar faces. Why *was* Minnie so particular?

There were toys for the children. Handkerchiefs, silk stockings for the ex-girl friends. Money for the old people. And their tearful gratitude gave Minnie a floating sensation.

Now she must walk down the street to the Minks' flat, and see old lady Minks, who was bedridden. The neighbors in turn drew her into their homes. . . . Horrible places, Minnie was thinking, low, damp walls, they made her ill. They closed over her like hot, fetid bodies. Minnie was famous now. Posters of her and newspaper clippings were pinned upon the stained wall paper in every flat.

The Central. Where she had lived! Michael Flynn walked through the dingy old flat. . . . Minnie said laughingly, as fearfully as if a coffin lay in state in every room. . . . All the old furniture. . . . Minnie had made them leave that dreadful stuff there—she had sold it to the O'Briens, who had moved in. That red tablecloth! The paper palm, all flyspecked. The tinkling glass on the Chinese lantern. Even the morris chair, its arms looking like crutches. In the kitchen a new calendar pinned over the old one—Hesselman's annual gift. . . . In the bedroom, the lopsided bed Minnie and Nettie had slept in. The piece of broken mirror which had reflected her eager, white, scared face the first morning that she had gone to the studio with Al Kessler.

"Papa, you're walking as if you were drunk," said Minnie. "I don't blame you. Doesn't it give you the creeps to come through this hole in the wall, and to think we used to *live*

here! Oh, darling," as she linked her arm through his, "thank God, I got you and mama away from it!"

Michael Flynn asked Mrs. O'Brien if he could take the starfish nailed on the wall of the room he had occupied with the boys. In the excitement of their departure he had overlooked it. The starfish was Jimmy's. They had found it together on the Coney Island beach when Jimmy was a little boy, and it had been a prized possession of Jimmy's childhood.

Out in the crowded street again. Minnie made a farewell speech when it was time to leave. She mouthed prettily, saying: "It may be some while before I see you all again. Papa and mama will probably drive down, but as you know I'm awfully busy with my pictures, and you have probably read in the papers that I signed a contract with the biggest organization in the industry."

"Hooray!" shouted Isidor Ginsberg, who hadn't understood what Minnie had said, but had caught from her rising inflection a triumph worthy of salute.

Minnie silenced the clamor that followed: "I am not used to making speeches, that is—if they're not written for me. I guess you've all read in the papers that I made quite a big hit making a speech at the DeLuxe Theater where my latest picture was shown—the one called 'The Slavey'—but I must be truthful and say that somebody had to write it out for me, and here I am trying to make it all up and——"

"Hooray!" interrupted the children again.

"Shut your damn mouths!" yelled O'Brien. "Can't you be decent enough and be quiet when a lady's talkin'!" Minnie smiled a deep, pleased smile; she was now a lady to them all.

". . . But I do want you to know from the bottom of my heart that I or the folks will never forget you, even when we are clear out to Hollywood, where we are going next spring when I start on my new contract. Furthermore, I'm going to

send you all tickets when my latest picture, 'The Slavey,' is playing in the lower Broadway theaters—everybody says it's by far the best thing that I've done—in fact, if you get up past Forty-second Street you'll see my name is over the theater in electric lights, *so high*—holding her hand over Timmy Dwyer's shaved head. "Yes, and you'll be happy to know that Nettie—(she had a date this morning, or she'd have been here with us)—is going to have a part in my next picture."

"Oh, gee! Net a movie, too!" from Nettie's old chum, Lilla Swartz.

"Yes, I made them promise Nettie a part, and if you girls haven't seen her for a long time, you'll be surprised at the change in her. She's gone on a pineapple and lamb chop diet. You ought to try it, Mrs. Molowonsky." Laughter. Mrs. Molowonsky weighed nearly three hundred pounds. Her huge, bloated chin colored fiery red. "And she's had her hair done in a permanent wave. You can't imagine the improvement. It has just changed her entire personnel." She paused, wondering if she hadn't made a mistake in the use of the word, but caring little—they wouldn't know the difference. She would look it up when she got home.

The men began to think that Minnie was getting a little silly. They hated the colored driver. He curled his thick, blue lips at them and rolled his eyes. If he hadn't belonged to Minnie's automobile, they would have pelted him as the car drove down the street.

They were all talking about her. "Can you imagine?—She says she's gonna get two thousand dollars a week with this new movie joint she's working for! Do you think it's a lie?"

"Sure!"

"But it ain't all a lie. What d'ya say she paid for that bus she rides around in?"

"Two thou?"

"Two thousand, my foot! More like four!"

"Maybe she only rents it."

"To come down here and show off?"

"Yeh! You seen the way she acted when she drove off? Threw a kiss to us like she was French, and we was manure!"

"Aw! can that, Louie! You'd knock the block off a guy in any other neighborhood that pulled anything against her."

"Sure, but ain't we gotta right to knock her? She belonged to our gang, didn't she?"

"Yeh, she *did*!"

"It's somethin' to brag that a friend o' ours is a movie queen. Old Fish here, he's got a stamp photo of her in his watch. She's wrote her name on it. I guess he's some oil can at the gas works, showin' it around!"

"Say, if she gets two thou a week, you'd 'a' thought she wouldn't have had the nerve to only hand us out silk stockin's marked down to one ninety-eight a pair, and only one measly pair apiece, now would you, Madge?" Madge Connors' throat relaxed. It had been clutched in painful tension. Minnie hadn't seen her standing in the shadows of the bakery shop watching the crowd gathering around the limousine. Madge was terrified. What was Minnie MacNally doing down there if it wasn't to try to see Billy again? Madge had a date with him. He was going to eat lunch at her flat. She had made doughnuts and cranberry pie. Billy had told her that Minnie wanted a divorce from him. He would be free again—and she had always loved him.

§ 3

On their way home, Minnie hummed a little ragtime tune. "Lord, I'm happy!" she kept saying over and over. "I shudder every time I think of that terrible neighborhood. Isn't it won-

derful, papa, to think all that I've accomplished in the last two years? . . . You remember how Nettie used to say I was born with a gold horseshoe in my mouth?" She pulled down the shade to shut out the ugly buildings. "I wonder what California is like! I'm crazy to see Hollywood. Gilbert says he would rather live out there than Italy. He's never been to Italy, but he goes with an ultra class that have traveled all over the world. We'll be going to Paris ourselves, maybe on a honeymoon."

Michael Flynn winced and crossed himself.

"Oh, papa! You're such a fool about a little simple thing like a divorce."

"It's against your religion."

Minnie interrupted him, annoyed: "As Gilbert says, papa, one creed is as good as another. If you're a Christian at heart, that's all that is necessary."

Mrs. Flynn was uneasy only about the newspaper notoriety. "Alicia Adams' mother was telling me the other day that a divorce almost ruined the career of one of the biggest movie stars, the public's gettin' so particular."

"It's none of their business!"

"They helped to make you," ventured Mr. Flynn.

"Oh, papa, you read that somewhere. That drives me almost crazy. We don't ask them to make idols of us, do we? False idols they've got to fall down before and worship—totem poles, as Gilbert says. We're human, aren't we? So long as we amuse them and give them pleasure, what business is it of theirs what our private life is? Private life! That's the laugh . . . *public* life, I'd call it."

"Mrs. Adams says this star lost all of her church following, and the mothers' clubs wouldn't let their kids go to see her, even in her purest pictures!"

"Mrs. Adams should talk, with everybody knowing how Alicia got to be a star!"

"They might suspect it, Minnie, but they give her the benefit of the doubt. They ain't sure of it. It ain't somethin' you can put your finger on like you can a divorce."

Minnie looked contemptuously at her mother. "Mama, you've got an awfully dirty mind! Your idea of virtue is keeping the blinds down so the neighbors can't see how naughty we are!"

"Shame on you, Minnie, talking to your own mother that way! I never done——"

"Did!"

Mrs. Flynn clicked her false teeth and sank back against the velour upholstery.

Michael Flynn looked unhappily at Minnie. "Little girl, mama don't mean to butt into your business—only to help you. We like Gilbert Carlton a whole lot, mama and I—he sort of scares us, he knows so much about everything, and I guess we're kind of old-fashioned folks to him. But he's a sensible fellow, I hope, and if he thought that your life is gonna be ruined by a divorce, he'd give you up and forget you, and maybe later marry some nice girl who wasn't already married."

Minnie would rather give up her career, all the comfort that the money brought, all the promises of her future, than lose Carlton. She smiled tolerantly upon her father. "I love you, papa," she said, nestling close to him, "in spite of the fact that you're a funny old fuss-buttons." But she hoped it would be a long time before he found out that Carlton was married, too.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

§ 1

THE following April, Hal Deane moved his company to Chicago to make some scenes in the giant packing houses and stockyards. He timed his departure so he left New York the day Minnie Flynn and her family left for their first trip to Hollywood. Old habits cling: Deane's introspective mind, always at work with its analyses, made him curious to get Minnie's reactions on her first transcontinental trip. He arrived at the Grand Central Station early, and kept well in the background. "Everything is running true to form," he said to himself as he watched Minnie's friends gathering for their conspicuous farewells. Hustle, bustle, laughter: Minnie's excited voice shrilling above the drumming echoes as she herded her friends around her so the studio publicity men could photograph the distinguished party.

Minnie wore an expensive traveling frock trimmed with silver fox, and a large corsage of orchids. Messenger boys with last minute telegrams were pushing through the crowd calling her name. Two enormous boxes of roses were set at Minnie's feet, a case of champagne added to the huge pile of luggage. Down the broad stairway came an eager, self-conscious group of girls, one of them holding a box of home-made cookies wrapped in mussed tissue paper and tied with a large red ribbon . . . Minnie's Ninth Avenue friends.

Shuttling in and out of the crowd could be seen Mrs. Flynn, dazed, but afraid that her daughter would miss a reporter. Michael Flynn stood near the iron gates holding the tickets

in his trembling hand. Close to him was Lily, Minnie's colored maid, trusted with the jewel case and the Pekinese dog in a wicker basket.

Jimmy's girl friends were gathered in a chattering, colorful circle around him, Alicia enveloped in her new chinchilla coat.

Minnie was photographed with everyone except her Ninth Avenue friends. The last snapshot was carefully posed, for it was to appear the following morning under the caption, "June Day blowing farewell kiss to New York."

Deane was standing apart from the others, watching, smiling rather ironically when a friendly hand clasped his arm, and Sam Binns' voice saluted him. "This is luck, all right! I thought I'd missed you. They told me at the Lambs' you had gone to Chicago."

"Leave on the Century."

"So am I—on my way back to California."

"Wish I were going out with you. May get there for my next picture if we make the Western we're planning to. But you'll have company, Sam. Our little friend, June Day, will be on the train."

Sam Binns laughed. "Mineola Flynn!" he said. "I don't know why, but I always think of her as that. Lord, what a few years can do in this topsy-turvy business! Yesterday's shop-girls, high school kids, cabaret dancers, are today's stars. But who'd have thought that youngster would have made the grade so quickly. They tell me she's getting two thousand a week now."

"Something like that, and a three-year contract."

"I know she's signed up. The West Coast Company I'm studio manager for made her an offer, but her brother turned it down."

"Seen her new pictures?"

"Some of them—she's still got magnetism and personality,

but they're putting her in the wrong kind of stuff. Why doesn't she stick to the type of picture you were making with her? Hasn't she sense enough to know her public by now?"

Deane shook his head. "She's at the stage where you can't tell her *anything*. She's the axis, the world revolves about her. What can you expect, surrounded as she is by drooling parasites? Look over there, Sam; pretty familiar sight, isn't it?"

Binns laughed again, but there was a note of pity in the timbre of his voice. "I've watched these little stars come and go for so many years I could write out the formula and I bet it wouldn't vary an iota—friends, orchids, brass bands, dogs in wicker baskets, colored maids, trunks and trunks, photographers, telegrams, champagne, the star wanting to cry but afraid to for fear the mascara will run down her cheeks. What a business! It's lots of fun, though, while it lasts. I've often wished I'd been fortunate enough to have a taste of that petty, personal triumph. I bet they get a great kick out of it. Look at that kid, how her eyes are dancing. Little Mineola Flynn!"

"Little Mineola Flynn," Deane repeated half to himself.

"Say, Hal, isn't that Al Kessler with her?"

"I suppose so. He's engaged to her sister, Nettie. Strange how two sisters can be so unlike—in type, I mean. And Nettie's uglier than ever in her beautiful, expensive clothes. She's the dark, full-lipped girl standing to the right of Minnie."

"Looks like a country mule in a city stable, as our Western cowboys would say," smiled Binns. "I suppose *she's* a movie actress by now. They're never content until the whole family is in the business!"

Deane nodded. "Her younger brother is drawing down a salary as publicity adviser, whatever that is. You know—same old story—enough rope——"

"Don't I know it, though!"

Sam Binns had heard nothing of Deane's interest in Minnie. A man's fine, clean, serious love for a woman offers little to intrigue the scandalmongers. They dismiss such romances casually, but there had taken root in Hollywood the seeds of gossip linking Minnie's name with Gilbert Carlton.

"I don't see Carlton anywhere," Binns remarked, as he stepped forward to look over the crowd surrounding Minnie. "Any truth in the scandal that's going the rounds?"

"It's true, I'm afraid."

"Kind of a skunk, isn't he?"

"You know the type—selfish, playing her for all she's worth to him."

"And she's in love with him?"

"Pathetically so."

"I never knew she was even married until I read about her divorce. She was pretty broken up over that, wasn't she?"

This far-distant perspective made Deane smile. "Collusion," he said. "Bargain was made with MacNally, the husband."

"But the papers had it that she loved him and was heart-broken when he was caught in a Jersey hotel with another woman. I saw a two-column cut of her in the courtroom, all in black, holding a handkerchief to her eyes."

"The new company she's with doctored up that yarn. They wanted her to appear in a favorable light. Now they've persuaded Carlton to lay low for another year and not get his divorce until the gossip has worn itself out."

"The affair serious between them?"

"If it wasn't, it will be *now*. They've got orders not to be seen together in public. Meeting incognito gives them a great thrill. She was already beginning to chafe under a restless search for something new. They found it in opposition! Began exaggerating their own dangers and discovered that it lent

flavor to the situation. You know the old formula—opposition has kept the fires burning under many a romance that might otherwise have perished from the cold.”

“What’s going to come of it?”

“Gossip is already beginning to hurt her. The stars can’t get away with it like they used to.”

“Where’s Carlton?”

“He left for the West two weeks ago. He’ll probably be her leading man in her first Western production—that is, if the part’s big enough for him.”

Binns was laughing heartily now, and he didn’t see the look of dull pain in Deane’s eyes. “I suppose Carlton’s leaving first was to mask their movements—sort of throwing red pepper in the eyes of the world. I have to laugh—as if their every move wasn’t watched!”

“Come on, Binns, let’s get on the train before the June Day party.”

“All right, but I’d like to see Mineola tripping down the chute to the tracks. Ever notice the glitter of the silica in the pavement?”

Deane nodded.

“Then watch the effect it has on that movie gang. Ten to one Mineola will have a sense of treading upon diamonds. She’ll think the studded, sparkling silica is a compliment to her light footsteps. Rather symbolic, isn’t it?”

If Deane thought so, his eyes didn’t betray him. He was staring straight ahead as they plunged into semi-darkness where the long trains lay in parallel steel alleyways.

§ 2

Minnie was glad to see Deane. His love had been a pleasant compliment, she felt that she could always depend upon his proffered friendship.

They sat in the flower-filled drawing room and discussed nothing but her future. As the door was open, she smiled and bowed to the procession of curious, appraising tourists who passed and repassed, while the porter shuffled smilingly in and out, making it obvious that he was always eager to serve any of the generous movie stars.

In the ladies' dressing room, Lily's color was forgotten in the importance of her position, being the star's own personal maid. She was surrounded by travelers who were eager to hear all about Miss Day's beautiful and expensive wardrobe and to be allowed to peek in the Pandora jewel box.

Pete had brought a portfolio of Minnie's photographs. He kept them with him in the smoker and came only to her drawing room when he wanted her to autograph them for the most prosperous-looking tourists with whom he had picked up a chance acquaintance. Deane noted her elaborate scrawl as she wrote: "Best wishes, from June Day." These messages of light cheer, filtering like sunlight through a sieve, were speckling America, since the custom had been to send out photographs to everybody who wrote and demanded one.

"Say, June," ordered Pete, "I want you to autograph a couple of nice ones for the President of the railroad and his wife."

"But we don't know the President of the road," in mild protest, "and we don't know if he's married or not. Why, it's absurd, Pete. We don't even know their names!"

He fumbled in his pocket for a piece of paper. "What do you think I am—a dumbbell? I got 'em from the conductor. The President travels around in his private car and sometimes it's attached to this very train. I tipped the conductor off, and he's goin' to slip the photos to him. Not a bad little idea, is it? A personal word to the boss of this outfit, and you'll be sure of nifty service. Do you get my idea?"

Minnie and Deane looked into each other's eyes and Minnie laughed. "Oh, Pete, how ridiculous!" she said at last. "If it were anyone else but Hal, I'd blush with shame. Imagine the President of the railroad caring whether he had a photograph of me or not!" But later, when she and Pete were alone, she autographed one of her most expensive photographs, and gave it to the conductor. Her first snap judgment had been wrong and Pete was partly right; wasn't *she* better known, after all, than the mere President of a railroad?

§ 3

When the train pulled into Chicago, there was a delegation at the station to meet the star. Another stiff sheaf of flowers: "Chicago welcomes June Day." A prominent theater owner informed her that he was giving her a luncheon. Seeing Deane at the station, he invited him, and Deane accepted; he wanted to see Minnie at just such an affair, and listen to her speech.

The Flynn family was whisked in limousines from the station to the Blackstone Hotel. "What elegant, airy rooms! Do you suppose anybody would notice if we took one of these beautiful towels—or the letter paper?"

When Minnie looked out of the window, she saw it was a gray, drizzling early spring day. A lowering mist crouched over the leaden waters. So *that* was the Lake! She had imagined it would look like the lake in Central Park, only on a much larger scale, of course, but pretty—with lovely boats on it, and lots of cute little wooded islands. How disappointing—it looked just like a dirty ocean!

A pounding rhythm of music coming nearer and nearer to the hotel made her heart quicken. The family rushed to the window. When Michael Flynn opened it, the damp air reached in like a cold moist tongue and licked their faces. Mrs. Flynn

threw the new mink coat around Minnie's shoulders. . . . Nearer and nearer came the music. Crowds were following. . . . Could it possibly be—of course it was! Chicago was sending a band to serenade June Day!

"Why under the sun did they give us a room on the seventh floor?" cried Mrs. Flynn hysterically. "Quick, Pete, run downstairs and see if you can't get an American flag for Minnie to wave! I think it would make a grand impression, her wavin' a flag, so patriotic. . . ." But the band swung down the boulevard and passed their hotel, and they lowered their windows with a bang. . . . Rotten, strident music! A band and a calliope! Barnum and Bailey Circus was in town!

During the long-winded luncheon, Minnie whispered to Deane that she was tired of listening to a lot of bearded men talk about the picture business being in its infancy; tired of hearing the producer lament the high cost of stars; and the theater owners lament the high cost of the pictures! At the conclusion of the luncheon, four of the guests who were invited from the Rotary Club sang a quartet, dedicating their song to the star: "Star Light, Star Bright." Mrs. Flynn, immensely touched, asked if they wouldn't sing that old favorite of hers, "Silver Threads Among the Gold." When they complied willingly and dedicated this song to her, she was so nervous that she upset a glass of water and had hiccoughs.

Minine's speech had been written by the press agent. It concluded with:

"Deeply touched by your great kindness to me, I will never forget your beautiful city. Seeing Chicago for the first time I am impressed by its fine American spirit. I shall never forget my thrill when I beheld, rising above the ant hill huddle of busy streets, the tall, magnificent turrets of its fine office buildings. Or that first vista of the giant lake, whose blue

waters lap the very feet of one of the world's most magnificent boulevards."

Applause.

"Or the kindness of its people who have given so much of their precious time to poor, obscure little me . . ." (with a pleasant affectation of modesty).

Protests and cries of: "Oh, yes—obscure!" "I'd hate to open all of your fan mail, I bet I'd be muscle bound!" "Here's to the most charming star who ever passed through our fair city!"

The luncheon was a great success. That evening after the California Limited had pulled from the station, Deane glanced over the newspapers. June Day's photograph smiled happily at him. He was curious to know how she had impressed her interviewers. He smiled at the discretion of the reporters, "June Day is one of the most intelligent, charming and cultured stars," he read. *Little Mineola Flynn!*

At Albuquerque, New Mexico, the train stopped for forty minutes. Minnie came out of her drawing room looking very fresh and attractive. Lily had given her a mud pack, brushed and dressed her hair. It was quite warm, so she wore no hat and discarded the long mink coat in favor of the sports coat trimmed in gray fox. There were so many interesting things to see at the station: the Indians selling their wares; postal cards to be bought and mailed East; filigreed Mexican silver jewelry to be exclaimed over. The reporter from the Albuquerque *Daily News* brought a graflex to the station and paid old Chief Red Leggins to have his photograph taken shaking hands with the star. . . . A delegation of school children presented her with a gilded pine cone, and a box of shelled piñons, the fruit of the pine.

Sam Binns heard Minnie say to the conductor: "Whoever told me the desert was beautiful was certainly having a pipe

dream. Nothing in the world but miles and miles of country without a single town to brighten it up. And flat-looking mountains without any trees on them. Nothing to compare with the White Mountains where I made a picture last summer. Why, you couldn't go five miles in those mountains without seeing a perfectly wonderful summer resort, filled with such stylish people."

When Binns asked her if she wasn't tired of the trip, she smothered a little yawn. "It is long, but then everybody is so good to me. Today the steward sent me a platter of the nicest fish I've ever eaten. He said they were mountain trout, and I replied that I was darned glad something good came out of those barren old mountains!"

Nettie's loud voice rose above the conductor's: "Say, where are those swell-looking cowboys with fuzzy trousers I've seen in the movies? I expected to fall in love a dozen times traveling through the West."

"They are *in* the movies," said the conductor with a dry smile. He pointed out of the window. The train was slowing into a station. "See those fellows on horseback?"

"Those whiskery old guys in overalls?"

"Yes, *they* are cowboys!"

"Gee, no! Then thank heavens the movies have got the pick of the bunch! I'll probably see the real thing in Hollywood."

Minnie laughingly said the descent into the California Valley was more perilous than the giant dipper at Coney. Sam Binns, who had been such an eager guide, who had pointed out Twin Sister Peaks, the Elephant Tusk, the prairie dog, the Giant Needle, Indian adobes, insisted the star's whole party view the descent from the platform of the observation car. It made Mrs. Flynn and Elsie dreadfully car sick. Pete, in a loud voice muffled by whisky, said the engineering job wasn't so

much, it had nothing on the Horseshoe Bend in Pennsylvania where he had once taken Minnie's company to make a picture.

§ 4

A huge box of flowers was carried aboard the train at San Bernardino for "June Day." Gilbert's note: "My darling: I am waiting impatiently for you. Three weeks away from you are three weeks gone from life. We can never make up our loss. I shall be at the station. In thoughts only shall I crush you into my arms, but I will be in your suite at the hotel long before you, because my heart and feet are on nightingale's wings, and will carry me there in swift and happy flight. Kisses from your lonesome papa, to his boofullest baby."

"How beautifully he expresses himself," said Minnie to herself. "No wonder I am so in love with him." She turned in languid ecstasy and looked out of the window. Spring had scattered her harlequin prodigality upon the meadows in a riot of golden poppies, lupins, buttercups and bluebells. The orange trees were lacy with heavy perfumed blossoms. Ambitious rose vines had climbed the eucalyptus to hide their red blooms among the oblique olive shafts of leaves. Sheer blue-toned hills stood like monuments over the valleys . . . etched in faint purple were the mountain ranges beyond, the sentinel crest of one snow-capped peak rising in silent majesty. Cloudless blue skies, deep and vaulted. All these wonders before Minnie's eyes, and she saw nothing, felt nothing, but the irksome slow march of the hours which held her from Gilbert. "How beautiful love is," Minnie was saying to herself, "and how it overshadows everything else. How colorless and uninteresting all else is compared to it. What could there possibly be in life worth living for if love were to be taken away?"

"Oh, heavens, conductor! When *do* we get there?"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

§ 1

ON Minnie's twenty-fourth birthday, Hal Deane gave her a diary. "Minnie, dear," he said when he handed it to her, "you're going to be amused at my gift."

"It's a bracelet!" Minnie cried, shaking the box. "One of those lovely Chinese jades I was admiring the other day. Have I guessed right?"

Deane smiled, but not with embarrassment. "No, Minnie, not a semi-precious stone. But a precious one! That is, if you wear it close to you it will some day be more precious than even a jade bracelet."

"Oh, what is it?" Minnie cried, childishly eager. "No, it's not a bracelet; it's too heavy for that. Is it one of those fascinating ivory bead belts?"

"Open it and see," said Deane, "but prepare yourself. My birthday offering isn't a surprise—it's a shock! It's such a bold, simple gift to one who has so much. Too much," he added.

Minnie had torn away the tissue paper. "Oh," she said, her voice unconsciously flattening, "It's a book. But a very pretty little book. That's awfully nice of you, Hal."

"It's a diary, Minnie."

"One of those things you write in yourself? Oh, yes, I see it is. Look here, Hal, you don't suppose I'm going to have time to fill up all these empty pages, do you?"

"Take time for it, Minnie."

"But, Hal——"

He took the book and opened it. "See how little space is set aside for each day's record. Just a few lines. Minnie, I want you to do this for *me*. Every day, or every few days, pick up this book and jot down—sometimes what you are thinking—sometimes what you are doing—a line here about the people you meet, a line there about what you hope to build to in your future."

"Oh, heavens, Hal, I'm no novelist. I have a hard enough time reading books, let alone writing them. What's the idea? Want to develop a new talent in me? Getting tired of making an actress out of me?"

"Here is why I want you to do it, Minnie: so you'll have some record of your footsteps, to be sure whether they're marching forward, upward, or if they are traveling zigzag and starting downhill. We are all so blinded by petty momentary triumphs, it is easy to forget the immanent failures, unless we have a concrete record of them. We need a definite perspective on all our movements to gauge how direct is our travel. At the end of each year, sit down with this little book and read over all you have written. Observe how you are making the grade, if you're climbing straight upward shooting on all cylinders, or swerving far off your course. Be frank with yourself. Everybody's cheating Minnie Flynn—don't *you* cheat her! Be loyal enough to tell her the truth. Promise me, Minnie, you'll do this." Then he added with twinkling eyes, "Promise that you'll keep the record in this book so straight they'll refer to it on Judgment Day."

Minnie laughed. "Hal, you're a darling, but you do have the darnedest, most radical ideas I ever listened to. All right, I'll keep the silly old diary. To prove I'm serious, I'll let you read it on every one of my birthdays. And that will be sesame for more of your delightful lectures on virtuous lives and how to lead them. Hal, you do make virtue so blah!

If I listened to you, I'd have to cut out half the fun there is in life, booze and cards and all-night parties, and spooning fests . . . why, I do believe you'd even make me give up ducky old Gilbert, though you have to admit he's just a lamb these days."

"Oh, is that his latest disguise?" with cryptic humor.

"Hal! Shame on you. Now I'm sure you still care enough for me to be jealous."

"Zealous, not jealous. I admit it was my conceit to want to save you from yourself. I'm still working for that objective, but making so little headway. I would have to lead your lamb to slaughter before you'd ever harken to me. Loud as my voice is, his is louder."

"You've been shouting at me like a camp meeting evangelist for—for—let me see—it's six years, now."

"I shout, and your ears don't hear me. He whispers, and your very heart listens. Sly, whispering men. Hell must be paved with them."

"They won't be lonesome there," she laughed banteringly. "All the pretty girls whose ears have turned toward them will be there with them, and you'll be in that nice, cool virtuous heaven——"

"—and still shouting!"

"—to ears that can't hear you." Minnie was laughing now. "And that will be the hell of it!"

"I give up," said Hal. "What's the use of lecturing to a marble statue——"

"—who is chipping so fast you won't be able to recognize the old resemblance soon. Thank heavens for that," she added hastily. "I'm not going to stand still. Virtue be damned! I'm not a child, Hal, but a pretty sufficient person these days. Apologies for my conceit, but don't forget, young man, I'm

a self-made star, and I've pulled myself up out of nothing to the big position that I hold now."

Deane made an extravagant bow. "I sweep my hat on the ground," he teased. "I would endow you with all the virtues of spirit and brain that have already been given you by your press agents."

"You sarcastic devil!"

"Substitute that to angel, Minnie. Don't forget that you have just visualized me sitting on a cool cloud playing a harp."

"Kiss me, Hal. I don't know whether to love you or despise you. You're the only man who has nerve enough to make me angry."

His lips scarcely brushed her cheek.

"Don't forget your promise, Minnie," he called to her as he walked from her dressing room onto the stage. "A few lines every day in my birthday gift."

"All right, stingy. I'll jot down a few lines this very minute." She wrote:

Hal Deane is my best friend. He's jealous, because after two years I'm still in love with Gilbert. Today I had the scare of my life. A newspaper reporter who came to get an interview on my ideas about woman suffrage said it looked as if America was going to get into the war. I nearly died. Business is bad enough now without having the whole country stirred up. I can just see Gilbert as the handsomest officer, but if he went over I'd go as a nurse. I couldn't bear to be separated from him.

It was a long time before Hal Deane saw the little diary again. Much had taken place in those epochal years. America's prodigal hand had sowed France with the seeds of new

life. Deane had left Hollywood before the papers, blasting the terrific news of war, had fallen from the trembling hands of the picture colony. Quietly in the night he slipped away to San Francisco. He was in training camp before Hollywood missed him.

Minnie wrote in her diary:

I'm sure hurt at Hal Deane. Went away without saying good-by. Has left Presidio for Camp Upton. Sending him a platinum wristwatch today. Pete's eyes got him out of the draft. That was a wonderful idea of his to put glasses on just as soon as war was declared. Jimmy is having a grand time in the chemical division hobnobbing with a lot of smart young millionaires. I'd simply die if Gilbert was drafted too. Thank God they haven't got him yet.

§ 2

When Hal Deane returned to Hollywood two years later he was shocked to find life ticking on as regularly as if the pulse of the whole country were not throbbing from its blood transfusion to weakened France. Starred banners floated from the turrets of the studios, a few lonely, undecorated graves of Hollywood boys lay in the scarred meadows of the Marne, there were moments of exaltation and rejoicing when California troops returned, there were the hungry mouths of many charities to be fed by the generous picture people—but under the ripple of its surface the heart of Hollywood seemed strangely undisturbed. Minnie's joy at his return was sincerely touching. He had been wounded.

"Oh, how wonderful, how terribly wonderful," she cried out to him. "And you won't even let us talk about it. Dismiss it as if it were a piffling hundred dollar a week contract."

Deane laughed rather bitinglly. "I can remember a little girl who had to struggle to keep back the tears when I told her she was to have a hundred dollars to spend—a whole hundred dollars."

"Isn't it unbelievable, Hal? I spend twice that sum on perfumes now, and think nothing about it. A hundred dollars. Puff! I blow it like a feather into the air. It's gone—floating away on the breeze."

With a swift, sweeping glance around him, Deane could see how little money had been valued. "Ever save anything?" he asked.

"Heavens, Hal, how can I? You know the war was an awful drain on us, so many charities. I nearly died every time I thought about those poor boys over there—I *did* give until it hurt! Then it costs so much to live—and you've got to keep up your share of the entertaining."

"But surely you haven't spent all of it."

Minnie was delighted with her own improvidence. She felt rather distinguished by her careless indifference to money, felt that it made her rather an interesting character to be so wanton with the vast sums she had earned. She leaned back indolently, and her eyes were dreamy with the caress of self-approval. "I'm a reckless, casual sort of person, Hal, utterly improvident. Can't be fettered to any conventional hitching post. Once in a while I'm scared to death for fear I'll go broke. Loathe being advised, hate to talk business, really don't think any great artist should be annoyed with these vulgar details." When she saw he was amused, she stopped short. "I suppose you think I'm a damned fool," she said after a pause, waiting for the words which trembled on his lips.

"Not damned yet."

Minnie threw back her head and laughed. "How a pulpit ever got away from you is more than I can see."

"In two years you haven't changed a bit. I've quit arguing with you. You belong to the class Ben Jonson spoke of when he said, 'Argue with a woman for an hour, and she'll still be of the same opinion if she can remember what it is.'"

"Wait a minute. Let me put that down in my diary." And she was laughing as she spoke, though Deane's pointed criticisms were little needle pricks under her skin.

"I haven't forgotten that you promised to let me see the diary."

"Please, Hal, don't look at it. You won't like it at all——"

"Why not?"

"It's—well, it's full of Gilbert. You wanted me to write of all that is in my heart, so I wrote about Gilbert."

"I understand, Minnie. I'm making no criticism. I won't even see what you've said about him. I'm interested only in Minnie. And I *do* want to see what you've said about her."

"All right, I'll let you peek, but for pity's sake, don't criticize the spelling."

"Don't worry, I'm going to look far beyond even that."

He turned over the pages, his eye catching and lingering on items that amused him, shocked him, or enlightened him:

April 16th.

Bought a house today, fifty thousand dollars. Beautiful Spanish style, with great big trees in the front yard. Gave wonderful house warming. Jimmy is sure crazy about Alicia Adams. She gave him diamond cuff links, slipped the present to him right

under Beauregard's nose. I was furious with Pete because he said Alicia was buying off Jimmy, to get back her letters.

Sept. 26th.

Preview of latest picture awful flop. Trying new director. Gilbert got fine notices. I won't hold out if they don't get me better material. Wish Hal were back. Certainly my luck to have the war break at this time.

A sneer flickered to Deane's lips as he read:

Nov. 16th.

Awfully upset over scandal in newspapers about Gilbert's getting out of draft. Makes me furious everybody blaming him because he admitted having a baby to support to keep him from going over. A sensitive soul like Gilbert couldn't stand the filthy hardships. At that, I wish he had done something brave, or even made a pretense like Jimmy. I'm afraid this scandal is hurting us. I don't see why they had to drag my name into it.

Six months of barren pages. No writing in Minnie's childish hand. "Why not?" Deane asked, "Was there nothing to say?"

"Nothing but worry, worry, worry."

"About your pictures?"

"Yes. I wasn't getting over as well as I had been. They weren't giving me good material."

"And you were not at all to blame?"

With a little quaver of indignation: "What do you mean, Hal? How could I be?"

"Weren't you having such a good time you began to

grow rather indifferent to your appearance, to your work? Success is a jealous, demanding mistress."

"Do you expect me to be a slave to success?"

"All successful people are slaves."

"But, Hal, I've got to live a little while I'm still young. I'm—why, I'm nearly twenty-five, you see."

"You'll be twenty-seven next November."

"Ssh, you traitor! What do you mean, talking friendship in one breath, then telling a woman's real age in the next? Shame on you!"

"Why is age such a bugbear to women? Men take pride in growing old. All their cumulative knowledge pleases them. Tickles their vanity."

Minnie looked around furtively. "For the love of heaven, don't tell Gilbert I'm nearly twenty-seven! He thinks I'm only twenty-five."

Deane rocked with laughter.

"What's so funny about it? I don't get your amazing sense of humor."

"Carlton is at least five years older than he admits he is."

"I don't believe it. You just said men didn't mind growing old."

"Men don't."

Minnie didn't recognize the sting in this brutally frank analysis of Carlton until days later. Then she wrote in her

~~Gilbert Carlton isn't appreciated by most men because he has a sensitive, feminine soul. A poet's soul. I'd despise him if he were any different. Some day, perhaps long after I am forgotten, he will be remembered as a great artist. He will have reached the heights before he is through.~~

But this writing was only a subconscious trick to ward off a creeping fear of imminent disillusion. She wanted to be blind. Gilbert Carlton alone satisfied the complete, sensuous release of her own passions. She believed she loved him in spite of all that he had cost her. Though she admitted it to no one, Minnie knew the most definite reason for her losing some of her popularity was through the back lash of scandal. Gilbert Carlton's divorce was a nasty affair. The public resented it. Minnie's name was whipped through it like a long train through the mud. When the press agents tried to paint beauty and tenderness into their romance, it was discounted as false, unsavory. The opinion of one wounds; the opinion of a hundred thousand kills. The hundred thousands were killing Minnie Flynn.

§ 3

When her three year contract with the Western Studios was up, they did not renew their option. They didn't want to balance any unsteady weight upon their shoulders. From the reports pouring in through all the tributaries of their New York office, Minnie was losing ground. Making six pictures a year, the organization found it necessary to back their output with more and more spectacular and forced advertising to attract any attention to them. The public promised so much in the glittering advertisements, but finding always the same pattern upon the screen, was indignant.

So certain was Minnie that she would immediately sign another contract, she was amazed when her option was waived aside. Indignantly she turned to the other organizations. No one was interested in a contract. They talked making independent pictures with her, but there was no offer for a position yielding a harvest of weekly remuneration until Horace G.

Watson, the self-appointed representative of New York capital, called upon her with his startling proposition for making the June Day Productions. Unlimited money, he told her. For her, five thousand a week drawing account, and ten per cent of the gross earnings of the picture. Her choice of studios, directors, stories, leading men.

"Who is Horace G. Watson?" Minnie inquired eagerly among the picture colony. No one had heard of him. But what did it matter. He was a veritable horn of plenty. Wall Street money, he said. He made her see money flowing like a molten stream down the wide cañons of Broad Street, its shining tides emptying at her feet. Watson was one of those men who talked very fast, tripping their protagonists with dexterous phrases. He seemed amazingly clever, but he was only shrewd. His scheme was to get June Day's name to a contract, then act as the middleman, the promoter, going in search of men with money who were eager to get into this new booming, fascinating gamble, picture production. Watson knew that Minnie was already counted as *passé*. But hers was the best name he could juggle before men whose knowledge of the picture industry was very slight, whose eyes were blinded by the glare of electric display over Broadway theaters. Watson had pages of the last company's advertisements of June Day, actress, to lay before them.

Watson deliberately sought men who he knew were already intrigued by this new form of gambling, and it was easy for him to sell one man a hundred thousand dollar block of stock in the June Day Production Company, another a fifty thousand block, and still another twenty-five thousand. There were always a certain number of "suckers," who blindly took small blocks of stock.

And so the new company was launched. Millions were supposed to be in back of it! But there were only two hundred

thousand in the treasury. Horace G. Watson had already transferred forty thousand to his own account, his commission for organizing the company.

Pete was too ignorant to understand the dexterous magical moves of wildcat financing. Some of Minnie's faith in Pete had been shaken since she had lost thirty thousand in oil. She had bought stock in the Four Leaf Clover well. Pete thought the name would be lucky.

She closed her ears again to Deane's advice, though she did engage Sam Binns, who had crossed and recrossed her path through the years of her steady climb, as studio manager. Her trust in him equaled her trust in Hal Deane. Pete was made Binns' assistant. It meant a good salary, an office, and a title. He would seldom be there to bother her. On the days when he wasn't drunk, he lay in sodden sleep in his own gaudy apartment.

Minnie spent most of her first week's salary in a series of fêtes announcing her forthcoming marriage to Gilbert Carlton.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

§ I

THREE months before her marriage, Gilbert persuaded Minnie to buy a home worthy of her. Now that she was earning five thousand dollars a week, he told her she was a fool to live in a bungalow, especially one far off the route traveled by the sight-seeing buses. What she must have was a big showy place near enough to the boulevard so the spieler on the buses could inform the eager tourist: "See that swell big house to the right of those eucalyptus trees?—well, that's where June Day, the celebrated moving picture actress, lives!" Here was Minnie getting five thousand dollars a week and living in a dinky fifty thousand dollar place with so many old trees in the front yard that nobody could even see the house!

Minnie loved her home. Gilbert could never understand how weary she was of being looked at. Those waving willows and the tall sweet-smelling pines grew like a protective screen in front of her window. In that room she felt pleasantly remote from the turbulent noisy life of Hollywood's movie circles. All year long the birds caroled their morning song. In the spring they built their nests in the honeysuckle vine which framed her windows. It was cool and fragrant and restful in the warm days of summer. Winters, when the bare branches of the willow flowed before her window like an exquisite fine-lined etching, she could see the purple-shadowed mountains and the azure skies. How could she leave that quiet room? And yet—perhaps they were right—she wasn't

making quite enough show for one of her position. Her public was expecting it, and what right had she to disappoint them? Wasn't she, after all, their servant?

So she said nothing of her tears at the thought of parting from this home, but helped in their search for a "mansion." Within voice range of the spielers' megaphones, they found a huge show place; of bastard architecture and with a stupid conventional garden, cluttered with plaster statuary. The house itself looked like a grimacing face, in bas-relief on the side of a hill. The Flynns all thought it was delightfully conspicuous; Michael Flynn alone was daunted by the price of it—one hundred thousand dollars!

Minnie laughed when the color drained from her father's face. "Poor papa! The movies will be the death of you yet! But really, dear, there's nothing to worry about. It's a bargain and we only have to pay ten thousand dollars cash. Think of it—why, it's almost absurd, so little down and three years to pay it in. You don't seem to realize that I'm making two hundred and sixty thousand dollars a year! If I have a good break in my pictures, I'll double my salary at the end of my contract." She was looking at her father and wondering why he had aged so in the last few years with nothing to do but enjoy life, with more than plenty to eat, and the fun of watching her skyrocketing success. Minnie had never been so aware of how shabby and insignificant a figure her father was until she saw him against the background of the drawing room of this enormous, garish house. They stood in the empty room under the sparkling glass chandelier. The walls were covered with heavily embossed gold paper. Over the carved fireplace hung a Louis XV gilt mirror. Gilbert was saying:

"You'll have to sell that old stuff in your house, June, because this must be furnished absolutely true to period,

Louis XV in this room. In the music room beyond, you can have a slightly Chinese motif if you want. I don't deplore the lack of the conventional in the sun porch or music room. In fact, speaking of Chinese, I'm going to do my room entirely in the Oriental tone, huge carved teakwood—the old teakwood, you understand—none of this terrible stuff you see in these tourists' hotels. I'm going to put my order in right away. In fact, it wouldn't be a bad idea if you would open an account at Marsh's. They've got the only stuff in town I'm interested in."

Minnie wasn't listening to him, she was still looking at her father. His clothes were always shabby, and he would never wear gloves to hide his gnarled, veined hands. He stood there awkwardly fumbling an umbrella which was bright and shiny against the frayed coat. Above his collar protruded his neck, red grooved, with sparse, mouse-colored hair growing unkempt upon it. His head kept jerking back as if Gilbert's words were hands flecking the tip of his nose. Minnie wanted to do something, say something which would take that beaten look out of his eyes. She floundered hopelessly. "Papa, we're going to fix you the most wonderful room of your own—a room fit for a king!"

"Please don't spend any more money on me, little girl."

"Listen to him, Gilbert. And nothing I could do would be half good enough for him!"

Gilbert's foot was tapping the floor, but he had made up his mind to be patient with Minnie's stupid affection for her father.

"Oh, papa, I've got it!—A job for you! I want you to go down in the basement and see what kind of a layout we've got in the plumbing line. There ought to be some wonderful water heaters in this house, and you heard what the agent

said about the gas furnaces being the finest that money could buy."

A timid smile flickered on Michael Flynn's face. "There's one thing I can say for this house, Minnie—the man who done the plumbing job knew what he was about. Them tubs and showers and toilets has the very latest fixin's. There's too many of 'em for a place this size, but they're all up to date and work without a hitch."

Minnie felt triumphant. "You see, papa, it's going to keep you busy looking after the plumbing, and think what your experience is going to save me."

"They do charge somethin' fierce out here for just the ordinary work that I ain't too old to do myself." Michael Flynn was warming up to the subject. "I guess it won't take me no time to learn how to run them patent furnaces. My old boss used to say I was the smartest plumber in his shop when it come to workin' out any new——"

Carlton said, "S-sh!" because the agent was approaching. It jarred on his æsthetic nerves to listen to this jargon which belonged to a past he wanted to forget.

§ 2

In the weeks that followed, there was a noticeable change in Michael Flynn; *he was busy*. He had an excuse to keep out of sight. He wore overalls and carried a tool kit. His face was smeared with grease. Minnie often heard him whistling, as he disappeared down the steps into the vaulted basement, and she smiled, her father had come into his own at last. She kept his mind off the approaching wedding by giving him complete charge of the wiring for the electrical display. They were to be married in the home, and it was to be a brilliant affair. Mrs. Flynn told the reporters they were plan-

ning to spend at least a thousand dollars for decorations and supper; two thousand dollars for the bootleggers' best! Two orchestras had been engaged: an Hawaiian orchestra for the early hours of the evening, the jazz band to arrive at midnight. Her daughter's wedding gown was made by the studio wardrobe department and cost eight hundred dollars. The bridal veil was of real old Spanish lace. She didn't know how much they had paid for *that*, but some big sum, no doubt, because a queen had once worn it. The reporters hid their smiles when they asked her if it wasn't rather unusual for the bride of a second marriage to wear the conventional virginal white satin and bridal veil. It was Mrs. Flynn who smiled. She asked: "Isn't it conventional for a widow to wear mournin' for her second husband if she wants to?"

As the day for the wedding drew near, Minnie was troubled. She was more in love with Carlton than ever, she could forgive his selfishness, and his egotism, but a specter crept into the waking hours of her nights to warn and terrify her: was he marrying her only because of her position? Did he really love her? Were his protestations sincere? How would he treat her after they were married? What of the sly suggestive glances she had seen exchanged between Gilbert and Alicia Adams? One evening when Jimmy had been drinking more than usual, he had blurted out his fierce resentment against Gilbert. He didn't mind Beauregard's claims to Alicia Adams, he had a right to her favors, seeing that he had made her a big star, but Alicia had no business starting any flirtation—especially when Gilbert had such a classy girl as his own sister. How this confession terrified Minnie! She felt as one does in a nightmare, as if she were standing on the brink of a precipice waiting with growing terror for the long, slow, spinning fall through space. Carlton was ugly when she questioned him about it. Said her nasty suspicions irritated and

shamed him. He flung out of the house and though she searched for him all night, she could not locate him. She telephoned to the home of Alicia Adams, but there was no answer. She never knew that Gilbert and Alicia were laughing at the futile ringing of the telephone bells.

§ 3

Minnie's company waited for her until two o'clock the following afternoon. When she did arrive, her face was drawn into haggard, sagging puffs, her eyes swollen from weeping. For days they had difficulty photographing her. Sam Binns pleaded with her to take better care of herself. He showed her relentless articles in the magazines that spoke regretfully of the marked change in her! Why would they insist upon June Day in rôles more suited to a young girl? Club women had ruled her name off their approved lists. Ministers, preaching from their pulpits against the picture people whose notoriety had thrown them into the limelight's yellow glare, named Minnie. The flooding volume of fan mail grew less. For the first time, Minnie began feverishly reading them, ashamed and outraged by the challenge she found in so many of the letters. Now she had permitted this scandal to smirch her name, they said they no longer idealized her. They told her frankly that she wasn't so pretty, and the old ladies advised her to guard herself against all evil, because it was leaving its scars upon her face. Hurt, angry, afraid, she threw these letters into the waste-paper basket. A victim of their stupid imagination! She *wasn't* changed. Maybe a little bit stouter, but everybody around her said that it was becoming and that she didn't look a day over twenty. If there *were* any fine lines on her face it was the rotten sun in California. A good cold cream would soon get rid of them. Her ex-

pression changed? Well, she wasn't going to look like a sap all of her life. What did they expect? If they could only see her in real life they wouldn't notice any change in her, but a moving picture camera is so pitiless, it seems deliberately to ferret out the toll of the years, scarcely perceptible to the eye. Now, a still camera was kinder. In that photograph of her in her wedding gown, she really didn't look a day over eighteen. She gave Pete orders to send copies of this photograph to all of the newspapers and magazines. "What's the idea, sis," laughed Jimmy, "trying to cheat yourself at solitaire?"

On the night of the wedding, Minnie looked almost as young and beautiful as the photograph. The excitement of the final preparations had been so intense she had forgotten even her jealousy of Alicia. For Jimmy's sake, Alicia had been asked to be one of the bridesmaids.

The wedding was as elaborate and formal as if it were a scene in a moving picture. It *was* a moving picture, Deane remarked to himself, with only an occasional semblance to reality.

When the ceremony was over, he found Michael Flynn and together they sought the seclusion of the broad veranda. There, through the windows, they could watch the slow dissolution of the formal setting as night rolled on and the flow of champagne unloosened and then unbalanced the wedding party. Deane watched grimly, though at times rather amused. But Michael Flynn was terrified; he saw Minnie drinking and teetering and laughing. She had thrown her bridal veil to the fat comedian who put it on, whipped the bouquet out of the bridesmaid's hands who had caught it, and proceeded to amuse them. His cavortings were nastily suggestive, but no one cared. They laughed uproariously at all his vulgarity.

Michael Flynn was shocked to see Minnie laughing. He

whispered to Deane that Minnie wasn't a girl who had liked "fence words" as they had called them when little children. "I'm going to get my umbrella and hit that fat fellow," Flynn said to Deane. "He can't talk that way in front of my little girl."

"Minnie wouldn't want you to make any scene," Deane said as he caught Michael Flynn by the arm. "She's been drinking too much, poor kid. She's laughing just because the others are, because Carlton is laughing the loudest of any of them. She probably isn't paying any attention to what he really *is* saying. You see, Mr. Flynn, you can't stop their doing what they want when they've reached Minnie's age and her independence."

A crash of glassware as the fat comedian kicked the tray from the butler's hand. And again they laughed.

Deane put his arm around Michael Flynn's shoulder. "I think it's time we went to bed. We're working men, Flynn. You get up before six, they tell me. There's a big day's work ahead of you disconnecting all these globes."

"Oh, my God, Deane, look what Minnie's doin' now!"

Her train had been stepped upon and torn so often she was unfastening her skirt. It dropped to the floor and Minnie danced out of it. Another uproar of laughter. Through her lace petticoat could be seen her shapely limbs in their sheer stockings. The fat comedian screamed to the leader of the jazz band to play "London Bridge Is Falling Down." This was their cue to join hands and dance in a swaying circle around the bride and groom.

"There can't be a bridge without water," roared the fat comedian. Seizing an open bottle of champagne, he shook it violently, then aimed the stream of spouting wine at Minnie and Gilbert. Screams, but of laughter, and a rush for the serving tables.

"The fountains of Versailles were pikers compared to us!" bawled the fat comedian. "Come on, let's all drown our sorrows!"

Michael Flynn collapsed in Deane's arms, and lay there moaning like something that was hurt. Deane carried him around to the back stairs and up to his room where he undressed him and put him in bed. Something had snapped in Michael Flynn's brain.

Deane heard a terrific crash of glass, a clap of laughter, Minnie's voice rising to a shrill scream—then silence. Fearing that someone was hurt, he hurried downstairs and into the living room. Minnie's face was white and drawn. Her disheveled hair was falling to her shoulders, her clothes, wet with wine, were clinging to her trembling body. "You!" she was crying as she jabbed her finger at the fat comedian. "You hoodlums! Get out of my house, do you hear me? I've had enough of this! and I won't stand for any more of it!"

Gilbert seized her outstretched hand and dragged her toward him. "June, be quiet. You don't know what you're saying. You're making a fool of yourself!"

She was sobbing, "I'm the one that's being made a fool of, and I won't have these drunks in my house any longer. On—on our wedding night."

Gilbert's face was livid now. "You damned little idiot," he said to her, "*you* were drunk, too, and having a lot of fun until you let that cold wine sober you up." His friend, Gordon Corilla, was passing. "Hey, Corilla! Bring me a good stiff Scotch for my bride, she's getting a flat tire and wants to spoil the party."

He was trying to hide his rage under a forced pleasantness. "Come on, sweetie, cut out the tragedy. There's no camera within five miles of the place! We were going great a few

minutes ago, and now look what you've done—almost queered it."

The leader of the jazz band, schooled to hide the chaos of drunken voices, urged the men behind the cymbals and drums to redouble their efforts. Minnie's voice could be heard above their emphases, screaming for the music to cease and the dancers to go home. When she again rushed forward to stop them, she swayed and groped blindly to keep from falling, though she was cold sober now. Several sputtering groups left, their ribald laughter following in the wake of their limousines like long, gay-colored ribbons.

"Go upstairs and get into some kind of a dress," Gilbert whispered to her, his hot breath jetting on her cheek. "Don't make an ass out of me in front of all my friends. I'm not Mr. Day, you know, I've got a position of my own! If they hadn't been *my* friends, they'd have all cleared out by now." The memory of her calling them hoodlums rankled deep. "When you come downstairs, you'd better apologize to them, or——"

"Our best glasses and that rug, Gilbert. I paid fifteen hundred dollars for that rug—and cigarette butts dropped on it—all burns and everything. Oh, Gilbert dear——"

He brushed her hand off his arm. "I'm not your 'Gilbert dear'—go on upstairs."

When she passed Hal Deane, she knew that he had overheard. She smiled bravely at him. "Hello, Hal, the party's a riot, isn't it? Did you see me almost crab their act? But sometimes I hate these Hollywood crowds who can't have a good time without smashing the furniture and glasses." Then she added hastily, "But I don't blame Gilbert's resenting my attitude—I shouldn't have bawled them out the way I did. I seem to be only a kill-joy when I've had too much to drink. Funny how you can get sober in a minute, sometimes."

"Oh, Minnie!" It was wrung out of Deane before he was aware the cry had escaped him.

"Don't look at me like that, Hal—as if—as if I were dead—or something!"

"Or something," he repeated mechanically. "Minnie, for God's sake, get a grip on yourself. You're going downhill so fast, you'll soon find that you can't stop. All these drunken parties are debauching. I know I appear like a meddling old psalm-singer, but I've been in the business so long I know what I'm talking about."

"Really, Hal, I can't help drinking. I *need* it. My nerves are all on edge. I've got to have something to let me down."

"Do you ever try sleep?"

"No, Hal!"

He laughed: it was rather a hollow sound. "This fatherly advice is pretty much of a bore, isn't it? But you know, Minnie, that is the pleasant vice of friends."

Her eyes were searching his face. "You *are* my friend, Hal. I guess the only friend I'm really sure of. That sounds like a pretty bitter statement when I'm surrounded by people who call me friend. But every day I grow more sceptical. What scares me is the attitude of your so-called friends toward you when you've lost out—the minute they think you're a failure. Look at the girls who have been bigger stars than I am—when their day is over—" She stopped short, the pupils of her eyes suddenly contracted. "Lord, but I'll bet they're lonely. It must be terrible—*terrible!*"

"Minnie dear—" He laid his hand over hers in a tender, but impersonal caress. "All of them face the end of their roads some day—and don't be one of the few who aren't ready to meet that failure."

"Hal, you terrify me when you talk to me like that. Oh, *what* can I do to help myself?—"

"Guard your health, Minnie. Don't spend *all* your money—and try to live a more normal life."

He did not withdraw his hand. Hers seemed so cold he felt pleasantly aware of warming Minnie through this protective contact. "Your poor father was so frightened tonight. I think, Minnie, *he* sees what I see."

"What, Hal?"

He didn't answer her. He was wondering how he was going to tell her.

"You—you don't think I'm through already! No, no—not that, Hal!"

His eyes told her.

"But *how* can I be through when I'm only just started—with my own company—five thousand a week——"

"I'm worried about the new company, Minnie. The men backing it aren't listed in Bradstreet's—I heard from a Wall Street broker they were only speculators—two of them have unsavory reputations—and I wouldn't bank too much on them. Watson looks like a slicker to me. Perhaps I'm prejudiced. I despise the parasitical middlemen. I'll find out all about them when I get back to New York."

A shudder passed through her. "You're not going away!" She reached out her free hand and grasped the lapel of his coat. "Why, Hal, nobody told me you were leaving—they were talking about your directing me again—only yesterday it came up, and Binns said Watson was going to approach you."

"I've signed for a year—going back with Beauregard again."

Her face blanched. "You're not going to direct Alicia Adams, are you?"

"I suppose so, in one or two pictures. You see, Minnie, Beauregard has learned his lesson. So long as Alicia is under

his management, he is going to star her in the type of production in which she is best qualified to make a success."

Minnie thought she was going to collapse. "But I depend so upon you——"

"I couldn't do the type of picture you have chosen, Minnie, it goes against my grain."

Gilbert, stalking into the hall, saw them standing there. His footsteps fell softly upon the deep rugs. They didn't hear his approach until he cried out, "What in hell are you and June trying to pull on me?—Pretty raw, isn't it?"

For a moment they didn't know what he was referring to, until they saw his leering, accusing eyes focused upon their friendly handclasp. Deane shot a warning glance to Minnie. She walked quietly but swiftly up the stairs.

When she reached the upper hall, she ran to her room, threw herself upon the bed and buried her hot white face in the gay pyramid of boudoir pillows.

§ 4

Because the newspaper men liked Deane, they kept the story of the fight between the two men out of the morning papers. The brief, ugly fight—Deane, the more powerful of the two men was mercifully swift in the punishment he dealt out. Minnie heard nothing of it until weeks later. She thought the cut on Gilbert's forehead had been made by a flying piece of broken glass, for it was dawn when he entered her room sufficiently sobered to talk fairly coherently.

Minnie had fallen into an exhausted sleep. She awakened when Gilbert was bending over her, and his soft hands tangled in her hair. "Darling," he was whispering, "if you'll only forgive me—I didn't intend to make a scene—my rotten jealous nature—only because I love you so. June, June sweetheart,

oh, what a cad I am, when I have the dearest, sweetest woman in the world."

Why should that word "woman" startle her at a moment like this? "*Girl*!" was the word.

"Don't draw away from me like that. Look, darling, I'm kneeling before you—so humble—on my knees—let me crawl over to you and kiss your feet. I'm not worthy of you—say you'll forgive me, my darling, my little wife."

"Little wife" stirred her strangely. She moved uneasily but not away from him. Then his mouth sought hers in the darkness, and when he found her half-open lips he crushed them fiercely—her neck, her throat, the white flesh on her shoulders. His cry was triumphant when she lay limp and yielding in his arms, "I *knew* that you loved me—I knew it!"

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

§ 1

MINNIE carefully cut this article out of the paper and pasted it in one of her scrapbooks:

Lord and Lady Throckmorton were guests of honor at a tea given this afternoon at the beautiful home of Mrs. Gilbert Carlton, née Day. Many celebrities enjoyed the hospitality of this charming hostess.

Among them was Madame Handle, the opera singer; Adolph Metzgar, the eminent scientist; Robert Henshaw, the playwright; Jan Hofelt, the pianist; Nador, the renowned magician; Mrs. Wilbur Matthews, one of the most popular leaders of our social set, and the élite of the picture colony. Robert Henshaw gave a brilliant talk on "Retributive Fate, the Basis of all Greek Drama." Jan Hofelt delighted them with an interpretation of Schoenberg's latest piano compositions.

The hostess wore a Paquin model, pale wisteria velvet, a necklace of uncut emeralds, and a square emerald ring.

Lady Throckmorton looked very distinguished in a severe Worth gown. She wore no jewelry.

Alicia Adams was very beautiful in a Boué Sœurs. She wore only her pearls. Particularly admired was a large black pearl said to have belonged to the Russian Crown jewels.

Mrs. Al Kessler, née Day, wore a brilliant gown made from a Spanish mantilla,

long jade earrings, jade necklace and jade rings.

Mrs. P. Bicker Day, sister-in-law of the hostess, was very colorful in an elaborate Lucille model. Her slender wrists were almost entirely covered by bracelets. She wore a curiously wrought lavallière of semi-precious stones. Mrs. P. Bicker Day was one of the first women in Hollywood to introduce the DuBarry cane.

For those who wished to play cards, there were charming prizes: a rare Ming Cloisonné, a point d'esprit handkerchief bought from the collector Muchon, and said to be former possessions of the Empress of Germany.

"To think, mama," Minnie said as she emitted a long gratified sigh, "Lords and Ladies are delighted to pal around with us. I do believe Lady Throckmorton would let me call her by her first name if I wanted to, but I wouldn't if I could, because I like to rattle off the 'Lady' Throckmorton. It sounds so *distingué*! Don't you hope the Eastern papers will carry this story? The Throckmortons are so well-established in Newport society. Wouldn't it be wonderful if I could be entertained there? Gilbert and I were talking about it last night. He can hold his own in any set now. He has so much *éclat*! So much *savoir faire*!"

"It costs an awful lot of money, dearie, giving an affair swell enough for nobility. I don't see why you went into it so deep, with you worryin' about not gettin' your salary for three weeks."

Minnie's smile suddenly collapsed. "I *am* worried, mama," she said. "This morning I went into Watson's office and he stalled around for a couple of hours. I couldn't get anything out of him. Binns wasn't there. He was at the bank again. Looks to me as if they hadn't enough money to go on with the

productions, and were trying to borrow more. We are beginning to skimp on the picture we are making now, and I tell you, if we do, we're lost. It isn't a good story and the only thing that will save it are the magnificent sets. I thought it was a mistake when we dropped that Prince Charming legend into it. It has nothing to do with the story, but Gilbert loved it. Of course, he *does* look perfectly wonderful in it, but there is so little for me. And a fairy tale legend doesn't seem to fit in with a sex story."

"Oh, *why*, Minnie, must you do these sex pictures?" inquired Mrs. Flynn timidly. "I ain't so religious as your father, but I hate to see you always lying on them fancy couches with men who ain't your husband even in the picture."

"We've got to make that kind of picture now, mama. It sells better than the others, although," she admitted rather worriedly, "perhaps I was wrong about doing 'Camille.'"

"Is that the picture where you wear the costume that's naked to the waist?" asked Mrs. Flynn.

Minnie nodded. "That's only in one scene, mama. I had to do it. You see, I'm a courtesan."

"A what, Minnie?"

"A fast girl, mama, of the eighteenth century. You'll see the picture tonight."

"I hope your papa won't be there. He hates to see you playing them chippy parts, Minnie."

"But 'Camille' is a classic, mama. Don't, for heaven's sake, let anybody hear you talking like that. They'll think we're just a common, ignorant family."

They were interrupted by the entrance of the butler. "Your private secretary on the phone, Miss Day. She's calling from the studio."

Mrs. Flynn stood there watching her daughter as she talked

in quick, gathering sentences, her lips twitching nervously, her fingers beating a tattoo on the table. "But, Miss Graham," she was saying, "you've got to get in touch with them again. They've just *got* to come! The dinner party was in their honor. Don't, for heaven's sakes, let the papers know they've changed their minds. I guess maybe I'd better phone Lady Throckmorton myself. . . . Oh, I'd gladly give a big donation to that charity fund, I know she's the patroness. . . . After I've talked with her, I'll call you right back."

She hung up the receiver with a nervous, despairing gesture. "Mama," she said, "Lord and Lady Throckmorton sent their regrets—can't come to the dinner party."

"Oh, oh, that's terrible, June! Those engraved invitations you sent out with our family crest on them cost eighty-five dollars. What nerve they've got! I told you when you went and ordered that special Russian caviar, and those fancy birds, I had a hunch they'd do a dirty trick like this. Leave it to the English to have bad manners."

"It's because everybody's trying to get them to their houses, you can't blame them. The picture colony is simply wild over them, especially since they found out they're so intimate with the Prince of Wales. Gilbert will be furious with me. He's counting so on their being here. Last night he rehearsed all the butlers, and wrote the cleverest impromptu speech."

"And you givin' five hundred dollars to that English hospital! Oh, the nerve of them!"

"Ssh—mama, don't begin to cry. I haven't talked to them yet. Maybe I can persuade them to change their minds again. Call Lily, quick! I think it would look rather common for me to ask for her directly."

Lady Throckmorton smiled to herself as she heard over the phone: "This is Miss June Day's personal maid speaking.

My mistress would like to address Lady Throckmorton, if you'll kindly announce who it is."

"I'm sorry," said Lady Throckmorton, when she recognized Minnie's voice, "really, I had no idea you'd made such elaborate plans. I'm shockingly tired. Wednesday afternoon is the garden fête at the Children's Hospital."

"I'll be there," pleaded Minnie, "and I'll be so glad to help you. You're in charge of the Lace Bazaar, aren't you?"

"How nice of them to give it to me."

"You'll make the greatest showing of them all! Right now, let me put in my order. A thousand dollars' worth of lace—and you can keep the lace——"

"June!"

"Mama, be quiet! . . . Oh, that's nothing, Lady Throckmorton, it's my pleasure to do it for you—just a little proof of the sincerity of my friendship. . . . Oh, you *must* let me do it, then for those dear little children. . . . Really, it's nothing to what I gave during the war."

The tears were coursing down Mrs. Flynn's cheeks as she leaned close to her daughter and whispered, "A thousand dollars with you getting no salary for three weeks!"

"Mama, will you be quiet? . . . Oh, that's awfully nice of you, Lady Throckmorton, yes, dinner at eight. . . ." As she hung up the receiver, "Thank God, she's coming, mama. I feel weak enough to faint."

§ 2

All through the afternoon, a threatening pall of great clouds made a dismal canopy over the somber hills of Hollywood. A low, complaining whisper carried from the eucalyptus trees to the tall, rustling sycamores in the garden of the Carlton home. A warm, damp, oppressive moisture in the air, an

early sultry sunset. The storm broke at nine o'clock, a frightful downpour that lashed at the sea, swept ruthlessly over the plains, and roared down the many cañons. A fierce, insurgent wind tugged at the moorings of the sturdy oak that stood in the center of the Carlton garden. Thwarted, it whipped out its anger on the bending, frightened palms, tearing them from the protective ground and hurling them against the side of the house. They fell with muffled sound like Gargantuan fists beating upon the wall.

Lady Throckmorton screamed and rose from the table. "How dreadful," she cried. "Is it an earthquake?"

Minnie, pale with fear that her dinner party would be a failure, cued Gilbert, so they both laughed emptily. "Heavens, no! It's only raining. You'll get used to that, Lady Throckmorton. We must have these rains to keep the country beautiful and green. It's really nothing to be alarmed about."

"Most unusual weather, I suppose!" This was the first time Lord Throckmorton had spoken. Handsome old man, thought Minnie, so *distingué*. Too bad these Englishmen had no sense of humor.

The rain swished against the huge French windows of the dining room, rattling the locks. In the room above, a forgotten window, open, welcomed the drench of rain. When the floor was pooled, a dark stain showed upon the ceiling of the dining room.

Lady Throckmorton, relaxing rather wearily after the elaborate serving of the fourth course, glanced upward. She saw one of the painted cupids upon the ceiling carrying on its shoulders an enormous, rapidly spreading burden. Lady Throckmorton sat there transfixed, reading into the distortion of this picture a parallel of her own position since she had bent to accept the burden of "movie" society. Schooled to

hide her emotions, she sat there quietly eating, save when she glanced upward, and then a mild curiosity showed in her expression.

Caviar; green turtle soup; terrapin, sauce Charlemagne; breast of wild duck and mushrooms under glass; pheasant; artichoke soufflé; heart of palm salad; a huge glittering dessert which was a veritable festival of ices. Limpid white wines with the terrapin, a rare old sherry with the wild duck and mushrooms, sparkling Burgundies for the pheasant. After dinner, Napoleon brandy—"the only bottle in America, bought from a millionaire's cellar," whispered Mrs. Pete Day, and heavy, perfumed cordials in tall, delicate frosted glasses. Exquisitely served. Minnie's thoughts were singing as she made note of everything, *en passant*. She used that little French phrase, too, rolling it over and over on her tongue, *en passant*. Nothing had been overlooked. Six solemn figures in back of the table, who were always watching the guests, like gaunt birds of prey ready to swoop upon the rejected feast and carry it away.

In the drawing room, an orchestra played Brahms, Debussy. As the dinner guests left the table, the Liszt "Les Préludes." Later, there would be lighter, gayer music when the dancing began. Dignified, austere dancing. Minnie didn't want these people who hobnobbed with the Prince of Wales to think Americans couldn't dance anything but the modern athletic jazz. They were going to waltz that evening, and as a pleasant surprise, all would join in the old-fashioned minuet, the square dances and perhaps the Virginia Reel. Minnie felt that Lord and Lady Throckmorton would enjoy a glimpse of the old, American folk dances.

Mrs. Flynn was cautioned by Minnie not to lose control of her voice during these dances. They excited her mother, perhaps because they recalled too vividly gay memories of her

youth—those evenings at the Golden Harp Club when Michael Flynn was courting her.

A happy clatter of voices and applause followed Gilbert's announcement of this amusing innovation. Charming music, notes light as feathers floated through the haze of cigarette smoke and rare incense that swirled to the sparkling chandeliers. The costumed musicians, the patter of jeweled slippers on the polished floor, the brilliant groups pausing to drink champagne, the hostess in an ecstasy of triumph, her husband handsome, flushed, self-confident—all these colored pictures passed before the eyes of the distinguished guests as rapidly as if they were watching the unfolding of a fairy tale upon the screen.

The echoes of the laughter could be heard even in the basement. The feet of the dancers were tapping upon the ceiling. Outside, the infuriated wind, concentrating its strength for a mighty blow, rushed at the window of the basement and scattered a shower of glass at the feet of Michael Flynn. He cried out as he saw the flood of waters, waiting for release, pour into the basement, the floor of which was already covered with the muddy waste. Alone, furiously battling with the elements that threatened to destroy his handiwork, Michael Flynn climbed on one of the wine casks and made a futile attempt to wall up the gaping window. But the wind beat him back. Inch by inch the water crept to the sputtering gas jets under the giant heaters. If these were clogged with debris, they could never be repaired to look like new. A cloudburst roared down the mountainside. Great sweeps of water poured into every pocket of the earth. One newly fashioned river found the snug basement of the Carlton home, and entered, unmoved by an old man's broken cries and curses.

For hours Michael Flynn worked, bailing, bailing, bailing the muddy waters. By midnight he could not check the swell-

ing rise. He stood there in nipping rain water to his knees, wringing his hands, the tears streaming down his face. Geysers of mud choked first the gas heaters, then the water heaters; about him this work which was his life's work lay in ruins.

At two o'clock in the morning, the flood had risen to his waist, but still he was bailing. The guests, complaining bitterly of the cold, left hastily. Carlton, irritated, whispered to Minnie. "I suppose the old fool went to sleep on the job."

"What old fool?" asked Minnie. In the excitement she had forgotten her father, the only member of her family who had been afraid to come to the dinner party.

§ 3

When Michael Flynn lay seriously ill of pneumonia, Minnie pleaded with Dr. Willet to call in all the best known specialists in Los Angeles. "Pay them anything—anything," she sobbed, "papa's got to be saved!"

"Paying them has nothing to do with it," replied Dr. Willet grimly.

"Send to San Francisco if they haven't got anybody here who can help him," with rising hysteria. "Is this all the medicines that you're going to give him?" she cried with agony as she pointed to the few bottles on a tray being carried into the sick room. "He should be getting twice as much as that! Don't spare anything, I beg of you. If there's anything you need, I'll go and get it. Let *me* be the nurse and take care of him. I'm almost crazy, I tell you!"

For one week they crouched in the hall outside of Michael Flynn's room. The specialists had come and gone. They could make no promises.

The late afternoon of the tenth day, Doctor Willet met

Minnie in the hall. He smiled after he left the house in remembrance of her melodramatic outcry when he had warned her to hope no longer. "Movies! Not a red corpuscle left in their artificial bodies," he said to himself, glancing back at the silhouette of the huge, ungainly, brilliantly lighted mansion. There was even a bright light in the window of the ornate bedroom where Michael Flynn lay. "Grotesque, Aladdin Lamp stuff. No 'Arabian Nights' fairy tale to match it!"

In the upper hall, Minnie lay sobbing where she had fallen after the doctor had left her, her tears deepening the rose in the Chinese rug. Jimmy found her lying there. He was drunk and teetered back and forth when he laughed. He said: "Hotsie-totsie, sis! What's the idea of all the Bernhardt stuff?" and lost his balance, falling to his knees when he reached over to help her.

"Oh, Jimmy—papa is dying!"

It sobered him for a moment.

"Doctor Willet says so. Oh, God, Jimmy, and we almost forgot about papa—he's been so quiet around here. And now we're going to lose him. I tell you, Jimmy, it's a punishment upon us for neglecting him. I tell you it is, Jimmy!"

Jimmy's face had gone pale, and he reached out to catch hold of the balustrade. When he had steadied himself he said with little conviction, "Don't believe anything these docs say, hon. You know the way they hang around you and pull a lot of crape to make you think you owe 'em your life. A thousand dollars for taking out Net's adenoids! Outrage, hon, oughtn't to charge that much for taking out your whole insides!"

Minnie knew that Jimmy was drunk. He had been on a party for several days, but his words comforted her. She thought maybe he was right about the doctor; Willet wanted

to frighten her so that when her father pulled through he could send her a bill out of all proportion to his services.

"Jimmy, if papa died I don't think I could stand it."

"Come on, hon, stop bawlin'. Nose is all shiny! The ole man's good for twenty years!"

She rose and threw her arms around his neck. They rocked together. "Jimmy darling, where have you been for the last three days? Not even telephoning me when you know how I worry about you!"

Jimmy was fumbling for a cigarette in the platinum case Minnie had given him for his birthday. He answered with a reminiscent chuckle: "It started at Alicia's party. Ev'body drunk and happy, when some little ole wise-cracker says, 'How about Al Morton's yacht?' And no sooner said than done, Minnie. You know how 'tis!"

She drew her hand over his forehead and lightly brushed into place a strand of his oiled straight hair. Minnie loved the shape of his head—it was so round and sleek. Her arm fell upon his shoulder as her eyes eagerly searched his face. She noticed the deepening grooves around his mouth, the pinched look to his nose. Puffs of flesh were bagging under his eyes. "Jimmy, you're going the pace too hard!" she cried, suddenly panic-stricken. "It's beginning to show on you."

"I ain't going it any harder than you are, sis."

She broke away from him and leaned swiftly toward the mirror in the hall. An overhead light threw cruel shadows upon her face. "It's because I'm worn out and I've been crying." Her voice had a metallic ring when she spoke aloud, addressing her reflection in the mirror. And she was terrified for she saw the ravages of time and dissipation as definitely marked on her own face as they were scarred upon Jimmy's.

§ 4

The door of Michael Flynn's bedroom opened and the nurse came stealthily down the hall. Jimmy flung his arms around the newel post and steadied his voice by coughing several times before he asked: "How's the ole man tonight, Miss Lowry?"

"How is my father?" Minnie asked at the same time.

The nurse looked at them gravely. "He was talking a few moments ago. He wants to speak to his children."

Minnie went white and Jimmy's bloodshot eyes filled with tears. He collapsed against the newel post and hung there limply. "It's the curse of God," he was muttering to himself. "Just as Minnie said it was!"

The nurse was looking from one to the other. Her calm, detached expression revealed nothing of what she was thinking. Death seldom stirred her. It came so often as a welcome release to tired, sick bodies. Grief in so many cases was an artificial emotion.

"He wants to see his children," Minnie was saying brokenly. "Do you hear that, Jimmy? Oh, Miss Lowry," pressing the nurse's hand spasmodically, "are you trying to tell me that what the doctor says is true—that papa . . . papa. . . ." Her voice broke and trailed off in a pitiful whimper.

Miss Lowry cautioned: "You'll have to compose yourself, Miss Day. Any little excitement runs up his temperature. Your mother broke down in the room this morning and his fever went up so quickly after that, he was unconscious almost all afternoon. You'd better go in there very quietly. I came out to find you. He asked for you particularly, Miss Day, and for Mr. Jimmy Day." She had nothing more to say, so she moved away from them, walking with quick, quiet steps down the stairway to the floor below.

Minnie faced her brother. The tears were coursing down her cheeks. "Oh, Jimmy!" she said reproachfully in a stunned voice, "at a time like this, and here you've been drinking! Jimmy, if papa detects it, it's going to kill him. You know how he feels about you and me getting drunk. It isn't as if it were Pete—we're his babies, Jimmy. Go quickly to the bathroom, run cold water over your face and wrists, and put your finger down your throat." Then with a wild outcry, "Oh, Jimmy, if papa should die I simply couldn't bear it!"

Jimmy walked solemnly across the hall to his bedroom. Minnie faced the mirror, swiftly adjusted her tousled hair, blew her nose violently, pressed her hand over her heart, for she felt as if a weight were upon it, then ran on her toes to the door of her father's room.

She entered.

Michael Flynn's small, gray face was the only uncolored object in the brilliant, garish room. It looked like a death mask.

The gold lacquer bed, heavily draped in purple silk hangings, was set upon a dais. Festoons of drapes from the canopy overhead were looped to huge brass rings and fell to the ground in graceful folds. The walls had been covered with a heavy flowered silk. The carpet, an inch thick, was a deep rich maroon. Two heavy chairs were set diagonally to the fireplace. They were of solid mahogany and carved on them were huge crests in gold leaf and purple. A portrait of Napoleon, framed in a heavy carved shadow box hung over the fireplace. A desk in one corner of the room well away from the light; over it a bookcase. Books, rare bindings, gilt edge leaves that were never to be opened; the classics, recommended to Miss Day by the interior decorator. A huge dresser of the Napoleonic period. A set of purple enameled toilet articles, the only ornaments on the gold brocade dresser cover. . . . That

was the way Minnie had furnished her father's room—"a room fit for a king!"

Michael Flynn lay there, his eyes closed, his lids fluttering restlessly. His feverish mind was at work calling his children to him. He saw Pete and Nettie come tripping toward his bed, hand in hand, swinging their schoolbooks. Jimmy was toddling after them. Minnie, the baby, lay on her mother's breast, her round dimpled face flushed with sleep. Michael Flynn owned his own plumbing shop . . . his name was over the door. His wife was calling from the kitchen, "Get up, Michael Flynn! Put your shoes on and come in to dinner. . . ." He struggled to get up and fell back under the weight of two satin, eiderdown quilts, a purple one and a gold one.

"Oh, papa, you're awake! You—you frightened me so. You were lying there so still I thought—I thought I'd scream! Papa darling——"

His heavy gasping breath almost drowned out her voice. He didn't know what she was saying, but he knew it was Minnie. Laboriously he drew his hand from under the covers and felt for her. She seized the light hand and pressed it to her tear-wet face. Michael Flynn sighed. Twisting, turning meteoric years, pulling the roots of their being out of his very heart, had left him numbed with pain and emptiness. He was trying to say aloud, "Annie, bring the children to me." Consciousness was fighting to pull away the veil that fogged the present, making memories more poignant than realities.

"Papa, speak to me!" The shrillness of Minnie's voice was like a tongue of flame that shot out and penetrated his mind.

"Minnie," came from him at last. And a long time later, "Papa's little girl."

She forced a hollow, choking laugh to hide the struggling tears that clutched at her throat. She said to him, "You've

got to hurry up and get well, papa darling. What do you suppose we're going to do without you, with you sick, and nobody to look after the new gas furnace?"

Michael Flynn smiled with wan pride. The tears welling up in Minnie's eyes splashed upon the satin coverlet. She was crying within, "he would never have been ill if it hadn't been for that rotten new heater. . . . Oh, papa, it's my fault, letting you go down into the basement. I'm just a miserable, selfish creature, who doesn't deserve anyone like you. . . ." Now she was whispering convulsively: "Dear God, hallowed be Thy name! Bless my father and make him well again. . . . Oh, papa, I love you so! I love you!"

He smiled again as he glanced slowly around the room, but his eyes seemed to see beyond the gold and purple. His restless gaze lingered upon the dresser. Then he made a feeble gesture, pointing to it. "Second drawer, Minnie," he finally managed to say.

Minnie fumbled through the drawer until in one corner she found the sock which had been Michael Flynn's bank for fifteen years. She knew this was what he wanted her to bring him. It was apparently so filled with money and little souvenirs that it looked as if Michael Flynn's knotty, twisted foot were in it.

"Here it is, papa dear. I'll put two nice, crisp one hundred dollar bills in it tomorrow," she said as she folded his hand over it.

A few moments before he could speak, and then in a thinning voice, "Hide it, Minnie—it's a nest egg—for you and mama—some day——"

She knelt beside the bed so her father could lay his cheek against her clasped hands. "Ssh—Minnie, don't cry," he said, "papa's very tired."

"Go to sleep, darling. June is right here close to you,—she won't let anyone disturb you."

"Who's here?"

"Me, papa—*Minnie*."

"I thought you said somebody else."

"Nobody else, darling, we're alone together."

His hands were fumbling with the sock. "Untie the knot," he said faintly.

Minnie's hands were as awkward as his, a terrifying weakness had laid hold of them.

She read in his eyes that he wanted her to raise the pillow so he could see his treasures. "A nest egg for you and mama," he kept repeating, "hide it—I'm afraid—Pete was lookin' in my drawer—last night—six hundred dollars—rainy day—baby——"

He concentrated all his strength to draw out the contents of the sock, and raised them to his dimming eyes. His frightful convulsive start shook the bed—a scream tore out of him: "Gone! Gone! Oh, my God . . . where are you . . ."

In place of the bills were wads of tissue paper. They had to pry them loose from his stilled blue hands.

§ 5

June Day's father had a magnificent funeral. His picture was in the evening paper under a new, large one of his daughter. A reporter, one of the mob who had waited outside the church to see the distinguished funeral procession, had caught Minnie just as she was stepping into her limousine. She wore heavy mourning, relieved by a corsage of orchids. Pete raised the devil with the editor for publishing the photograph, because Minnie looked so ugly in it. Her face was swollen from weeping.

A slight accident almost marred the somber dignity of the funeral. As the newspapers had carried the story of how many of the moving picture colony were to be at the church, a great crowd gathered outside. Four of the pall bearers were famous stars. When the doors of the church opened, the eager, restless crowd surged forward. The pall bearers, carrying their light burden, felt the pressure of many hands upon their arms. They heard their names called by hundreds of throats. But theirs was a solemn job, and they were determined to look straight ahead and permit no interference to spoil their scene. The crowd cleft to let a man carry away a girl who had fainted. This threw a dozen elbows into the pall bearers. They swerved, the coffin tilted and almost slipped from their hands.

Minnie screamed.

"Look, look!" cried the mob, "that's June Day under the long, black veil. Lift up your veil—oh, go *on*, June! Don't be a piker—one little peek."

She lifted her veil to step into the limousine. Her mother, Nettie, Jimmy and Pete followed her. They, too, had been weeping, though Mrs. Flynn knew who had sent flowers and had already estimated their cost. She and Nettie whispered about it. On the way to the cemetery Pete was thinking that Minnie had gone too far to pay so much for a marble mausoleum for her father, although it wasn't such a bad press story: "June Day's beautiful devotion to her father's memory." Pete was sorry the old man had "kicked the bucket," but he couldn't let his grief carry him to extremes as it did Minnie. He smiled as this thought filtered through his mind . . . his father's expression, if he had been told that his final resting place was to cost three thousand dollars. "I'll bet the old man would turn in his grave," he said to himself with grim humor.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

§ 1

CAMILLE, the rôle selected for Minnie, proved to be an unhappy choice. The part of the courtesan seemed the index of her own character, and the public read into this portrayal a flaunting insolence, a brazen acknowledgment of the unsavory rumors that were rife about her. Many of the critics praised the beautifully done picture. But their small voices were lost in the storm of protest. The picture whipped its way across the continent like a bird with a broken wing.

"The public doesn't want classics," Minnie cried in despair. "We've got to make a more popular type of story."

"A mother love yarn seems to pull in the shekels," said Watson, "a picture sticky with drool."

Minnie looked at him sharply. "I'm not going to start in playing mother rôles at *my* age, Watson. That *would* be my finish."

"What do you want to do?" asked Binns quietly. "I think Watson is right, but after all, you're the voice of this company."

Minnie pondered a few moments over the list of stories Binns had submitted. "Why not a good, swift-moving jazz picture," she asked, "one of these flapper stories?" She glanced quickly into the mirror. "I've always been crazy to play a wild, harum-scarum flapper. If I do I'll bob my hair, diet to get off some of this weight, then I'll look ever so much

younger. If some of these other stars, older than I am, can get away with it, why not me?"

Binns stirred uneasily. "It may not be such a good idea, Mineola, to compete with all the youngsters. Any effect you strive for always seems forced, unnatural. A mother-love story would give you a chance to play a sympathetic, emotional rôle."

Minnie brought the palm of her hand down on the desk. "That's enough!" she said, inwardly raging, "this is my company and I'm not going to be dictated to. A woman knows what she can get away with. I'll take five years off my age the minute I get this mop of hair bobbed. Look here, Sam, I'm worried enough without your subtle allusions to my age. You'd think I was sixty to hear you talk. A woman's as old as she feels. It's a wonder you don't present me with crutches and a pass to the Old Ladies' Home."

One sentence summed up the picture they called "The Jazz Baby": "What is more distressing than to see a woman, a tired, troubled woman, playing the rôle of a naïve young girl?"

"The devil with trying to please them!" Minnie cried, now panic-stricken.

Binns closed the door of his office and faced her. He was pale with worry. "Look here, I think we've got to watch our step on this next production. The backers are getting uneasy. They took their losses on 'Camille' pretty well, but they sent an auditor to go over the books when the 'Jazz Baby' flopped through the country."

"You don't mean—they can't renig?"

"Watson has nothing on paper. These men, although some of them are very rich, aren't going to pour water into a sieve. We've got to have a success this time."

"What do you suggest?"

"A mother-love picture."

She rose angrily. "I thought we covered that pretty thoroughly in our conference three months ago, so let's not discuss it again, Sam."

"The decision is up to you, Mineola."

Minnie chose a daring triangle story. "Sex is the lure," she insisted to Binns. "I'll get them into the theater this time if I have to pose as Aphrodite without any nightie."

Binns wanted to tell her she was like a squirrel in a cage; in her eagerness to run away from danger she was only standing still and spinning the wheel under her.

They bought a salacious story and started production.

Before it was finished, the stockholders, refusing to pay the assessments leveled on them by Horace G. Watson, sacrificed their holdings in the company rather than go on with a proposition that was bringing no harvest.

Watson called Minnie and Pete into his office and told them that all production must cease, the June Day Company was on the rocks.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Horace G. Watson, smiling, "the final curtain is rung down. Finis." Watson was smiling because he was thinking about his forty thousand dollars in the bank.

In the silence that followed, Minnie thought she heard her own heart thumping. She was violently startled when Pete brought his fist down upon the table. "You're a pack of crooks!" he yelled, his face twisted and livid. "I'll run every-one of you to jail."

Watson rose unsteadily. "Look here, Day," he warned, "I won't stand for any of your insults. I can't do it myself, but there are others here who will throw you out of my office."

Minnie turned to Pete: "Be quiet," she ordered, in a strange, choking voice. "This concerns me more than it does you."

"Like hell it does!"

She pointed to the door. "Please leave this office, Pete," she said in a calm that was compelling. She turned to the group of men sitting there. "Would you gentlemen kindly confer with my brother in his office?" she asked. "I want to be alone with Mr. Watson and Mr. Binns."

When Pete rose, he kicked the chair to one side. "Very well, young lady," he said in even tones, "you've played your last card with me, and now I'll get out and leave you flat. At the mercy of these dirty crooks," he added when he reached the door, "and we'll see what happens to you!"

She made a nervous gesture toward the door to recall Pete, then collapsed into the chair as if the life fluids had suddenly drained from her limbs. So long had she leaned upon others that each prop taken away from her left her weakly groping for support.

"I'm glad we're alone," Binns said. "We might be able to plan some way out of this for you."

Minnie was staring dumbly into space, her brain whipped by harassing fears. She was aroused only when she heard Gilbert's laughter ringing through the long corridor. "Oh, my God," she cried aloud.

Binns was pouring her a glass of water. "What is it, Mineola? Your voice startled me so."

She leaned forward and bent her eyes upon Watson. "Does my husband know we've gone on the rocks?" she asked him. "Does—does he even suspect?"

He shook his head apologetically. "No one has been told. You see, Miss Day, we were hoping to succeed in getting a loan so we could go on. We expected to use our last picture as collateral. When that was taken over for debts, we had nothing—nothing left."

She turned miserably toward Binns. "*You* had some inkling of this, and yet you said nothing to me."

Sam Binns shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

Again she was thinking aloud, "Oh, what will I do—*what* will I do?"

Watson was exceedingly nervous. "I'm sure *you* will have no difficulty," he said with a clumsy attempt at flattery. "You were such a well-known star, Miss Day."

"These pictures I have made are horrible failures." She spoke bluntly, telescoping her words, always half talking to herself. "I know I wanted to play in them—but it's too late now—those newspapers ridiculing me—*that's* what has hurt me more than if they had condemned me. The business is changing so. My type seems to have lost its appeal—they want new faces—oh, don't try to convince me they don't," when she caught Watson's protesting gesture. "I'm not so blind as you think I am. Look here, Sam Binns, what do *you* think I'd better do? Couldn't we keep this whole affair hushed up?"

He was remembering the little girl who had signed her name on the index card, "Mineola Flynn," so many years ago, and he was deeply touched by the woman who sat before him.

"I'm sorry, but we'll never be able to keep it quiet. Reporters have been trying to get me on the phone for two days. The company will be in the hands of the receivers by Saturday."

Watson's secretary entered and called him into the outer office. Minnie was glad to be alone with Binns. She rose suddenly and seized his outstretched hand. "Listen, Sam, I'm going to speak frankly to you. If the other companies know how up against it I am—so terribly in debt, you understand—they won't offer me a worth-while contract—but I'll have to accept contracts by the picture."

"That might be the wisest thing to do," urged Binns.

"Take the first chance that comes along to work in a picture where you'll have a strong rôle to play, under a good director."

Minnie had steadied herself. "Sam," she said quietly, "I know what you were thinking, and how sorry you feel for me. Your advice betrays you. You're trying to keep from telling me that you think I'm through. I've reached my heights—and now I'm going to start sliding down. Am I right?"

He evaded an answer. Her eyes narrowed, her breath came in frosted jets from her lips, white where the vermilion rouge did not cover them. "But they're *not* going to lick me," she was saying. "I *won't* step down without putting up a fight. You know if I accept a one picture contract, I cease to be a star and become a featured player. Before long they'll be asking me to co-star with some rising young actor, and then—the next downward step is to be only the leading woman in support of a male star. Oh, no! I *won't* give in—I'll put up such a fight, I'll——"

"What will you do?" he interrupted, his fear for her mounting. He knew that she would accept no advice from him, though his judgment, sane and unbiased, might save her.

"Let me see, let me see——" She sank down in the chair, her foot tapping the floor, her fingers strumming the arms, "Let me see."

Binns wanted to hold out some hope for her. "Where is Hal now?" he asked. "He'd be the one to help you. If he would make a picture with you——"

Minnie dismissed this idea at once, she was afraid of Deane now. The public had begun to believe she was helpless without him. No, she would have to stand on her own legs and fight. *Fight*, with her intangible enemy, public favor!

"Sam, I'm going to make a complete confession to you: I'm thousands of dollars in debt."

"I'm in debt?" he asked. "How much?"

"Here's the situation: I want your advice on this. I don't think I can meet the next payment on the house."

"How much is already paid on it?"

"Thirty thousand."

He smiled encouragingly. "You're safe there. When's the payment due?"

"It's past due—ten thousand dollars."

"What other assets have you?"

"My cars—but the Rolls-Royce isn't paid for—in fact—well, I guess we'll have to turn it back."

"How about your jewelry?"

Her eyes brightened. "Alicia Adams offered me six thousand dollars for my emerald. It's worth more, but she said cash."

"I'd take it. What can you get for that bracelet?" pointing to the diamond and sapphire bracelet on her wrist.

"Oh, I couldn't sell *that*. Gilbert gave it to me."

"Couldn't you pawn it?" he asked. "Here's the idea—you've got to raise enough to make the payment on the house. Hollywood real estate is booming now. You paid too much for the house in the first place, but you can realize something on it at that. Put it up at once for sale. To lose it would be to let the world know the low ebb of your finances. You can say you're selling it to buy an estate in Beverly. Don't you see?"

"Yes, I do!" A faint color had come to her cheeks, "And then?"

"The loss of the Rolls-Royce won't cause any gossip—the stars are buying, exchanging, selling their cars every day. You've still got the limousine."

"And two open cars. Then there's Gilbert's sedan—and Jimmy's roadster, and Nettie's coupé——"

"Try to get rid of half of them. You can't support a garage, it's expensive business."

She was wondering why he seemed to entirely exclude Gilbert from their conversation.

"Fortunately there's Gilbert's salary," she was saying. "He's been offered leads with every other star in the business. He could get lots more than he does with me."

Binns evidently didn't hear. He seemed absorbed with the little figures he was drawing on the tablet he held on his lap. "Once you get free from these debts, you can look around, all caution for your next move," he continued as if there had been no interruption. "Your health won't stand too many strains. There's nothing so hard on a woman as money worries."

"Do you know, Sam, that if I made one of those old sentimental comedy-dramas again, I think I could snap right back into public favor. They loved me in those chorus, country, shop-girl rôles. Hal was right, I never should have discarded them; but it isn't too late."

"It's never too late," he replied with betraying reluctance.

"I wish our last picture were on that order. When it does get to the public, I'm afraid it's going to hurt me. There's too much sex in it."

"It *wasn't* a very sympathetic rôle for you, June, and Gilbert is the whole picture. But that's over with now—we're talking about the future."

The color had reached her temples. Her hands were hot and damp with fever. "I've got it!" she cried. "I know what I'm going to do," her voice rising in hysterical crescendo. "I'm going to make a picture with my own money!"

He stared at her aghast. "*What* money?"

"Following up on your idea of selling the house—this is how I see it. I'll probably get forty thousand dollars cash down, now the boom is on. The furniture can be auctioned—ought to get at least twenty-five thousand for it—my sable

coat, four thousand more—the chinchilla coat, thirty-five hundred—the ermine twenty-five hundred. You see, Sam, I'm figuring everything at half of what it's worth. I've got loads of trinkets and gowns the picture girls will be glad to buy—well, it won't be any trick at all to raise seventy-five or eighty thousand cash, and then——”

He brushed the black lock from his forehead, and his whole face seemed merged into two dark eyes which were focused upon her, their expression of contempt mingled with pity. “If you do that, Mineola, you *are* lost.”

Minnie recoiled slightly. “I don't see why,” she argued. “I think it would be my salvation. A Cinderella picture is nearly always a box office success. And it will have double drawing power with me in it.”

“We are passing through a jazz phase, now—Cinderella is taboo.”

“Not with *me* in it,” she repeated, as if her little fling of vanity gave her renewed courage. “I'll spend ten thousand in publicity, exploiting my return to the old rôles, get a good, sympathetic director, pick out a nice, sentimental yarn, and if I don't come back, I'll—I'll——” She ended with a nervous, self-conscious laugh. “Well, I just *can't fail!*”

Binns saw that no argument would change her: He determined to telegraph Hal Deane and see if his advice would keep Minnie from utter failure.

But Hal Deane had gone to England to make a special production for Beauregard, who had successfully drawn substantial English capital into his organization.

§ 2

Deane knew nothing of the collapse of the June Day Productions until he read of it in the American trade papers. A

month later he was troubled when he read that June Day was to finance her own productions. The announcement absorbed three pages in the advertising section of the American picture magazines: *her* money had paid for them. In the editorial columns there were adroitly written humorous allusions to her new venture. The advertisements carried a photograph of Minnie, and Deane sat there a long time studying it. She had been posed after the fashion of her first photographs—a smiling face peering from under a gingham sun bonnet, long dark curls carefully draped over her shoulders. Resting on the finger of her right hand, so its bill caressed her cheek, was a stuffed white dove. The text read: "June Day returns in one of the old stories which made her beloved by her dear public." In the same issue of the magazine, Deane saw a photograph, taken during the making of the last picture she had done for the June Day Productions. It showed her in an elaborate evening gown, revealing arms and shoulders grown too plump. He noticed a decided pad of flesh under her chin which had been carefully retouched in the advertising photographs. It was evident that Minnie's hair was bobbed, although it was almost hidden under an elaborate hairdress of rhinestones and aigrettes. That moving picture had been bought by one of the minor firms, had been advertised as one of the greatest sex dramas ever made, had been given the glaring title of "Passionate Virgins," and was being released to the public through a second-rate company that dealt only in commercial monstrosities.

"It has come," Deane said to himself, "sooner than I expected. Poor little kid."

When Beauregard came into his office, Deane slipped the magazine into the drawer. He didn't want Beauregard to gloat over Minnie's defeat. But Beauregard had already seen the notices, and that was why he entered the office laughing.

"Funny how little sense they have," he chuckled. "I told that young lady once she'd be eating out of my hand before she got through. Glad to hang around for any old job that I'd throw her way." He sat on Deane's desk and drew a letter from his pocket. "Alicia's written all the dirt from Hollywood. June's having a sweet time with Gilbert, and it looks like a break. I don't know whether Alicia is trying to kid me into being jealous or not, but she swears that Gilbert is madly in love with her." He tossed the letter toward Deane. "There's lots of laughs in it. You can read it if you want to."

"Thanks—I don't want to."

Beauregard laughed. "What's the matter, Hal, still kind of stuck on her yourself? Hurts to see the skids rolled under her?"

"Yes, it does. I feel sorry for her."

"You're a queer duck, Hal," he said some time later. "I'm not so sure you *have* forgotten how much you loved her."

Hal Deane didn't answer. He was thinking that perhaps Beauregard was right.

CHAPTER TWENTY

§ 1

MINNIE'S heart was heavy with the grief and worries that piled up relentlessly, and while she was making her picture it was more of a struggle than ever to act the rôle of an innocent, happy young girl. Her enthusiasms and animations seemed utterly artificial. Even Minnie, when she watched herself upon the screen, was afraid the audiences would perceive the effort that went into her dancing steps and too animated smiles. Her close-ups were taken over and over again. All the skill of the cameraman was called upon to photograph Minnie so she would look like a sixteen-year-old girl. The wig of curls helped disguise her coarsening neck, but the unmistakable signs of a too full chin, and the sagging pockets at the corners of her mouth and under her eyes betrayed her. The expression of her eyes which had so characterized her youth, lacked resilience, and in repose a dull, sad look would come into them. Her full lips had thickened and turned slightly down at the corners. Only the delicate sensitive modeling of her nose seemed unchanged—it was almost too finely drawn for the rest of her face.

When her studio make-up was taken off, she put on a street make-up almost as grotesque. It was the fad to look like an apricot, with all nature's colors hidden under a thick coating of apricot rouge. Minnie thought the blue powder over her lids masked the finely wrinkling puffs of flesh that had once been firm pink eyelids. "Youth is a tight skin," she remembered Deane saying one morning many years ago when she had been unafraid to stand in the bright sunlight. Her skin was dry now and pleating around her eyes and

mouth. In another year or so it would be necessary to have her face skinned. Thank goodness, there were scientists who had discovered new skins under old, and who were giving women back their precious youth. If they could only give them back the indomitable and courageous spirit of youth, too.

During the making of this picture, Minnie was thrown into a panic as she watched the drain on her money. It seemed endless. For the first time she chafed under the many useless and trying delays, which cost so much. She became conscious of the clock. *Tick-tock—tick-tock . . .* and there the company stood around, using any excuse to idle the time away. *Tick-tock, tick-tock.* Why so many extravagant expenditures, and so much prodigal waste that could be avoided, she pleaded with Binns, who had accepted her offer as manager only to help her. When she was not on the stage, she spent her time in his office checking over the voucher slips, asking with persistent irritation, "Is it necessary to spend all this for a day's trip to the mountain location? Is it necessary to put such a high-priced actor in this or that part? And couldn't we cut out some of the scenes, or not have a hundred people in the street set, so many extras at so much a head?"

Binns warned her that if they cut corners too close, the production would suffer: she was making a mistake to weaken her support. But the thousands already spent assumed such terrifying proportions, that she lost all intelligent judgment, and made unwise economical moves which proved later to be ugly, sharp-edged boomerangs.

At night she tossed and turned in burning fever. Often she would rise, switch on the lights and pour herself a glass of whisky. Strong, biting whisky that Pete was getting from the Hollywood bootleggers. She didn't want to touch any of the cases of Gilbert's Scotch. He was so fond of it, and when it was gone it would be impossible to get the same fine brand.

The whisky made her sleep; but in the mornings her head would pound and ache so badly not even an absinthe frappe would relieve it.

Gilbert's lack of sympathy and understanding hurt her deeply. They never saw each other during the days after he ceased having luncheon in her dressing room. In the evenings he was seldom home. For a long time she believed him when he said that he had been at the Athletic Club with the boys. Then Jimmy told her the truth: Gilbert was with Alicia Adams. Everybody in Hollywood knew it but June. Was she blind that she hadn't seen?

Minnie went to her room and closed the door. There she sat long after night had come and merged the shadows. She had reached the peak of suffering, and yet with that lying hope that keeps a semblance of life in our hearts, she wanted to believe that it was all a lie and that Gilbert still loved her.

He telephoned that he wouldn't be home for dinner; he was working that evening. She knew without getting in touch with the studio that he was lying. At eleven o'clock she called for her car, then drove to a corner near Alicia Adams's home. She walked noiselessly through the garden. As she approached the house, she heard the scuffling of dancing feet, a victrola playing a popular jazz number. The tears sprang to her eyes. "Thank heavens, it's a party," she said almost aloud. "I was afraid I'd find them alone."

Peering through the trees, she saw Gilbert's car, but her heart was beating more steadily now. The sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach had lessened. It was suddenly released when she heard the dancers laughing heartily.

A wave of tenderness swept over her. "Poor boy, I don't blame him looking for a good time away from home. I'm so up to my ears in work and worry, I guess I'm not the liveliest companion in the world." Suddenly there came over her a

longing to see him, laughing with the others, dancing—what a perfect dancer he was—and if she could only see Alicia, she would seem less formidably attractive than the haunting memories she had of her. So she tiptoed to the window. The shades were slightly drawn. Alicia was in Gilbert's arms, and they were dancing the slow, intimate measures of a one-step. The music ceased and laughing, always laughing, Gilbert drew Alicia away from the others. Minnie heard a door slam. Then their voices suddenly exploded at her elbow! They had come onto the vine-masked veranda. Minnie thought they would surely hear the wild beating of her heart, though she knew the shadows enveloped her, and she could not be seen by them. The pulses in her ears were strumming on her drums, and for several minutes she could not hear what they were saying. Then Gilbert was speaking, and his low resonant voice rose and fell in the old familiar caress she knew so well. When she leaned stiffly forward, she saw Alicia fling herself into Gilbert's arms in a long, passionate embrace.

"Oh, my God!" Minnie cried out in a voice unfamiliar to her own ears. "Gilbert!"

They sprang apart as if a shot had been fired, and stood there defiant yet plainly terrified by Minnie who was staring at Gilbert, her starkly, wide-open eyes fixed upon him, her mouth twitching, her hands beating together. "You—you liar!" she cried out. "You cheat! And I loved you so and trusted you! And I'm working like a dog—*sick*, I tell you—but what do you care, you miserable, worthless bum!" Her teeth were chattering so that her words were scarcely articulate. "Oh, Gilbert, how *could* you when you know how I love you!"

Alicia took one step toward the door. The moonlight falling upon the brilliant sequin gown lent a splendid radiance to the skulking figure. It caught Minnie's eye. She darted toward

her with the same direct flight that a hawk takes in his certain felling of a wild canary. "Damn you!" she screamed, as she caught her, digging her nails into Alicia's soft flesh. Her screams stopped only when her teeth sank into the struggling arms that were beating her off.

Gilbert felt himself jostled by the crowd who had rushed to the veranda at the first outcry. Maddened by his embarrassment, he struck blindly right and left, beating back the men who would interfere. Alicia's face appeared for a moment, green in the moonlight. Then Minnie's face emerged from the shadows, blood-red and distorted.

Alicia, screaming for help, fled into the house. The garden paths drummed under running feet: attracted by the screams, the curious outside world had pushed past the iron gates into the garden.

"What's happened?" they cried when Minnie stepped into the light, still jabbering incoherently, tiny bubbles of blood foaming to her chattering lips. Gilbert was dragging her by the arm toward her car as the chauffeur, recognizing her voice, drove into the garden.

"Get out of the way!" Gilbert called as they crowded around him jostling his elbow. "It's nothing!"

"What's the matter—what's the matter?" in one voice.

Gilbert opened the door of the car, and threw her in a crumpled heap onto the floor of the tonneau. He tucked her legs under her, then slammed the door. "It's nothing, I tell you—the girl's drunk too much—she's ginny—some of your lousy Hollywood bootleggers. *Now* are you satisfied?"

Gilbert's rage was tempered by the consciousness of his triumph that he had a good excuse to get rid of Minnie without laying himself open to criticism. His guilt in the affair never occurred to him, he was confident that Minnie,

because she had made a public show of herself, alone would be condemned.

He whetted his anger as he drove home, and during the hour that it took to pack his trunks. Quite often he stopped at Minnie's door. No sounds other than the heavy breathing of the Pekinese dog, the intermittent chimes of the clock. She was there because he saw her cape in the lower hallway. She could be asleep or dead, for all he cared.

Minnie was standing there close to his door. That hatred which is so allied to love seemed to have frozen her very heart. She listened to the mechanical business of packing, followed his gestures, saw his face before her as clearly as if there was no wall between them. There came moments of intense relief when she thought, "I'm glad to get rid of him, he's brought me nothing but unhappiness. I despise him. . . ." But always creeping back came memories of the ecstasy she had found in his caresses, her pride in his good looks, the stunning broad shoulders, how well he dressed, how charming and tender he could be when they were drawn together by their mutual desires, and how empty a future if love were to be taken from her, especially at a time like this when her success seemed to be on the wane. Gilbert was her husband, and he would always have to provide for her, he *couldn't* desert her at a time like this. . . . Why did she find herself saying over and over again "*at a time like this. . . ?*" She was in no dire predicament—this picture she was making would put her right back where she had been, once more the biggest star in the business, and Gilbert would come crawling back to her. So she mustn't cry, she *mustn't* cry, and let her face get all swollen, because the wrinkles were milestones, and she must look young and beautiful if she wanted to win back her public—and Gilbert—no, she must not lose her head at a crucial time like this!

Gilbert pretended to be so occupied with the strapping of his suitcases, that he wasn't aware of her entrance until her voice, dull in its attempt to appear calm, was saying, "We'd be making a terrible mistake to part like this, Gilbert. Don't go away tonight, let's not make any hasty decision."

He wheeled around and faced her, his narrowed eyes sweeping her scornfully. "Oh, *we'd* be making a terrible mistake—what do you mean—*we*? You've made the last God-awful mistake, and I wouldn't forgive you if you crawled on your knees from here to Calvary."

"Don't talk like that, Gilbert, it's blasphemous."

A foul oath fell from his lips.

"Don't look at me—as—as if you hated me. Oh, Gilbert!"

The moment he turned his back, all her resolves to control her emotions were forgotten, her passionate love for him wrought a havoc in her heart, terror of losing him stayed all reason—sobbing, she flung herself upon him, locking her arms around his waist, her tears gushing down the pale gray suit, falling upon his hands as they tore at hers for release.

"For God's sake, Gilbert, have pity upon me! I'll die if you leave me at a time like this!"

He was striking at her clenched hands. "Let me go, or I'll break every damn bone in your body!"

"Listen to me, Gilbert. Don't scream so, the servants will hear you. I'm sorry for what I did tonight, and yet you're to blame for it. You drove me almost crazy when I saw her in your arms. And I've always been such a good wife to you."

"Oh, listen to her!" And his laughter was bitter denunciation. "Good wife—you've got your nerve to pull anything like that on me, when I caught you and Hal Deane holding hands on our wedding night! How do I know what you've been getting away with since then?"

"As God is my judge, you're the only man I've ever loved."

He knew his mocking laughter cut deepest. "I suppose you said the same thing to your first husband when you kicked him out—and all your lovers since then."

She unlocked her hands and reeled back. When she stumbled against a chair his cane fell to the floor with a light clatter. Slowly Minnie leaned down, picked it up, and before Gilbert could sidestep it whistled through the air and fell upon him with a stinging, glancing blow. Then his fist shot out . . . and she found herself groping through engulfing darkness, the roar of a terrifying vacuum in her ears. . . . Against the chaotic, intangible sounds, the sharp, clear fall of Gilbert's footsteps on the stairs—on the steps outside—the whir of the motor on his car—the far away exchange of horns as two cars rounded the corner. He was gone—forever!

She lay there certain that death would soon relieve her, no human body could survive the pain; her semi-consciousness had not lessened the fierce, pulsing ache of her crushed cheek, the open wound that was her heart. And she was glad to die; life was a rotten, endless struggle—you never knew that you had passed all the real things by until it was too late.

Sometimes Gilbert's face loomed before her in the grotesque distortion of a nightmare. But there was another face that faded in and out of the shadows. Through the darkness she was trying to see it—could it be Billy MacNally—was it possible that *he* had suffered even as she was suffering?—Oh, no, nobody had ever been so wracked with pain. Gilbert had beaten her, and she had known only shame and humiliation—not ecstasy at such brutal possession as she had once dreamed of. . . . *Dreamed of*. . . . Why, of course, she was only dreaming. . . . Back in Schultz's boarding house. . . . It wasn't she who was beaten, but Elsie—and she was sitting on the bed listening to Elsie and saying, "Billy's the kind of a guy that

wouldn't lay his hands on a woman. I—I guess I ain't gonna get much of a kick out o' Billy MacNally."

Telephone bells were ringing, their sharp echoes brought Minnie to sudden consciousness. She groped her way to the table. "Gilbert!" she cried out as she took the receiver off the hook.

"June, it's mama," came Mrs. Flynn's voice. "I'm sorry to wake you up, dearie, but I got good news for you."

"Good news—Oh, *what* good news?"

"The baby's come—nine pounds! It's a boy, Minnie. Net had a hard time, but she's doin' grand. Run over the first thing in the morning, dear. I'm all wore out, so you telegraph Al for me. You know how I hate to figure out telegrams. He's playing Kansas City this week."

"All right, mama—tell Net I'm glad it's over with. I've got to hang up,—I—my head's aching something fierce."

"You ain't been drinkin' again?"

"No, mama, don't worry."

"I do, dearie."

"Ssh—mama, I'm awfully tired. I must get back into bed." If only Minnie could have cried!

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

§ 1

A YEAR of hardships followed. For weeks before Minnie's picture, which she called "The Idyls of Youth," reached the public, the newspapers carried the scandal of her second divorce. Stories of her dissipations had been so broadcast the audiences resented what seemed in her picture a sly masking of her true character. Some of the theater-owners in the small towns refused to show the picture. One whole state barred it.

Hollywood buzzed with the gossip of Minnie's downfall. When she moved into an apartment, and sold all her cars but one, they felt sorry for her, but in their hectic, busy fight for success, they had little time even for sympathy.

False pride had always played such a sinister part in Minnie's life. Her determination not to let Gilbert know how she was suffering, once she was certain she had lost him, drove her to vulgar stupidities. She was seen often in public, always in fast, dissipated company, the gayest, the noisiest in the party. All the cafés rang with her hollow laughter, the money she earned as she went from one studio to another was prodigally spent in bizarre entertainment. The "nice" people of the studios no longer knew her, but there were always parasites ready to be fed so long as she had anything to offer.

Pete was making money as a bootlegger. Sometimes he paid Minnie a commission when a friend of hers gave him an order; but he never had any money to lend her. He needed it, now that his pal, an ex-racetrack tout, had introduced him into a poker club that held long sessions in the guarded room of a Main Street pool hall.

Nettie had left to join Al on his tour, leaving the baby with her mother. Minnie couldn't afford the expense of a separate establishment, so they crowded into her apartment. A sickly baby, whose incessant crying made the nights seem a broken chain of leaden hours. She could hear her mother's weary voice whining the songs Minnie traced back to her own childhood. She felt sorry for her mother; to think that in her old age she might have to revert to the drab, sordid, commonplace things of her former life.

The day Gilbert left Hollywood for New York, to play opposite Alicia Adams in the advertised "Colossal Photo Drama," which she was making for a new company, Minnie gave the wildest party ever held in a beach roadhouse. Only the sporting element of the studios attended, and a few outsiders who came out of curiosity, hoping for the worst. She had made a thousand dollars playing the part of an unregenerated girl in a picture whose story was a parallel of her own life. She had so fitted the rôle that the managers of the studio were unstinted in their praise. They promised her another good part as soon as they found another one into which she fitted. Every word of praise flung to her kindled her lagging hope. No one was through until she was dead, she tried to convince herself. The praise of her work sustained her from the shock of Gilbert's departure. She had seen him only as he darted in and out of studios and cafés to avoid her, but his actual departure from Hollywood seemed to take from her the last hope of a reconciliation.

To be hostess at a wild party, "where wine runs like water," would help her forget. What a fool she was still to grieve over Gilbert when there were a dozen men she could choose from, two of them rising young actors, one who was certainly madly in love with her.

As she was leaving her apartment, she was called to the

telephone by Beauregard, who had just arrived in Hollywood. The sound of an old familiar voice was so good to her ears she instantly magnified her friendship for him, and cried out, "Oh, George, I can't tell you how happy I am that you're back here again—don't let's wait until tomorrow to see each other—I'm giving a perfectly wonderful party tonight—you've just *got* to come—break the stupid old business engagement. Tell me, George dear, aren't you just a little bit eager to see *me* too?"

He answered "yes," but he was only curious. They had told him how she had changed. He had seen for himself on the screen the cruel tricks maturity was going to play on her, but he wanted to discover for himself the actual extent of its ravages.

There were moments in Minnie's life when her beauty did not seem to be lost. Excessive animation lifted her flesh and put a transient sparkle into her eyes. Brilliantine added luster to her dulling red hair, and gave its undulations an alive high light. A becoming headdress made her seem taller and more slender. Straight lines of a gown hid her splaying hips, the low-cut bodice of a gown revealed her arms and shoulders, still white and smooth.

When Beauregard saw her, he laughed at all accounts he had heard of her lost beauty. More mature, of course, but there was an alluring voluptuousness to maturity that held its potent charms for him. And Minnie read in Beauregard's eyes this rekindling infatuation. Another chance! What did it matter if she had to pay for it? "Rotten salvage," Hal Deane always called the blind bargains made between Beauregard and his women. What had she to lose *now*—when there was everything to be gained. She persuaded herself she wasn't immoral, but she was desperate—and if here was her chance, she'd be a fool not to make the best of it.

The roadhouse resounded with pyramidding noise as the hours passed midnight. "Wine like water." Men and girls too drunk to dance. Lewd songs bawled from the entertainers' throats. Minnie, quite sober, listening to Beauregard's promises of all he would do for her; how he was going to find the best story on the market, engage the best director, make another picture with her.

"A Colossal Photo Drama?"

He laughed, "All right, little grabby baby—A Colossal Photo Drama."

And he went on to say that if that didn't bring her back, she had better settle right down to being somebody's good little pal, and forget about the movies before she was forced into playing second-rate parts in third-rate pictures.

His suave, persuasive voice was intoning caresses, more soothing than the play of his fingers upon her arm. Minnie thought she heard the faraway cries of a baby, and her mother's whining voice.

"George, if I'm going to start in to do any serious work again, I've got to get away by myself. I'm living in an apartment with the family—it's terrible—I never seem to get any sleep—I——"

Beauregard settled comfortably in his chair and folded his fat hands. When he smiled he dropped his lids over his protruding eyeballs. "I think I understand you," he said laughing. "You'll be out of there tomorrow, you—cute little C. O. D. baby, you."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

§ 1

DEANE was packed and ready to leave for California when he heard of Minnie's contract to make two pictures for Beauregard. *He knew.* The letter he had just written telling her he was coming to help and guide her lay on the desk before him, a vain tribute to his friendship. He was conscious of angry resentment that she had not called upon him, that she had wantonly brushed him aside for a man like Beauregard whose evil intent was as obvious to the world as to himself. Futile and terrible sacrifice! The thought of her having fallen so low sickened him, and for weeks he walked abroad in a fever of spiritual rebellion. Why did so many of the women about him lose their balance and throw away their birthright for the evanescent things of life? Why did their instincts trick them, couldn't they realize that indiscrimination would only mar, and eventually destroy them? Lying, cheap returns for their sacrifices. He was haunted by the Minnie Flynns who passed each day, like wraiths of thin vapor before him.

"I'm becoming a damned moralist," he wrote in his letter to Sam Binns, "but sometimes I feel as if I were moving through a dead city, surrounded as we are by so many ghosts of women, who have bartered their very souls. Minnie isn't the only one whose short-sightedness has tricked her into seeing a mirage. Hell, Sam, I'm getting maudlin. Immorality of others never troubles a man until it is focused down to some

individual he cares for. Then he becomes unbalanced, and wants to start out reforming the world!

"A last favor—keep your eye on the little girl and help her when she needs it. You and I can settle the accounts, material and spiritual, when we meet again. I've changed my plans about going West. An Italian company has offered me a picture to make in Rome. Write me there, care of the American Express. I'll want to know. Can't help it, Sam. Life plays ironical tricks on us, doesn't it?"

It was several months before Deane heard from Sam Binns. The letter had followed him through Spain and into Morocco, where he had been taking scenes at Tangiers. "Hal," the letter ran, "I've just left Mineola, and the poor girl's had a tough time of it. We discussed a possible out for her, but I'm afraid there isn't much hope. You probably know by now that the pictures Beauregard made with her were only fair, not good enough to help her. He gave her no contract, and lied about starring her. Jack Marvin had been her leading man in her first picture. Just before it was released, they launched 'The Iron Man,' that ten reel knock-out of the new independent company. Marvin made one of those over-night triumphs in the leading rôle. Beauregard took advantage of the advertising the other company had given Marvin, and starred him in the picture instead of Mineola. She was only mentioned as one of the supporting cast. This was the last blow, and she was powerless to protest. No contract, and everybody knowing her relationship with Beauregard. That ménage didn't last four months. She began to dissipate like the devil, blind drunk to shut out the sight of old Beauregard, I guess; wild parties, the scum of Hollywood there, and one night a raid. Her brother, Pete, was arrested. They landed him, dead to rights, as a bootlegger. It was a filthy mess. I know the trial cost her plenty, she had the best de-

fense she could buy for him, but he was sent up. Got a heavy sentence for assaulting the officers who arrested him. I assure you, Hal, I did the best I could to help her. But she wouldn't take much, accepted only a small loan, which she returned a few months later. The last time I saw her she was taking care of Pete's wife, Elsie, who collapsed after the sentence. Horrible sick thing, this woman. I begged Mineola to send her to a county hospital. Couldn't see why she should carry this burden, but was told to mind my own business.

"Come home, Hal, if you want to help her. She needs it now. I really don't know which way she is going to turn. She won't listen to me. It would take someone of your driving strength to set her on her feet again. You can't use any far-distanced influence with the producers to find work for her. They won't pay much attention to it. They give her all the opportunities they can, but her pathetic, arrogant vanity alone remains unperturbed. In spite of all she has been through, Hal, she can't *see*—but goes on blindly struggling. Is ready now to grasp at any straw—her resistance weakened beyond all hope of control."

The letter was written in November. It was already February. Deane had just begun a new picture which would take him to Egypt. He was obligated to finish it. Ten weeks before the final scene would be shot, three weeks longer before the picture was ready for the market. Frantically he cabled Binns, "Cabling money Hollywood Trust provide Minnie sufficient funds returning late summer writing."

The money remained untouched in the bank, slowly accumulating interest.

Sam Binns' company moved to New York, and the last link between Minnie and Deane was broken. Others wrote to him but no word from her. What had become of her? Why had she refused his help? Could it possibly be that she had

at last saved herself? No, not possible, the timbre of her being was too frail. Where was the divine justice of piling too many temptations upon shoulders too weak to carry them? Why all this mawkish cant on his part, why not action? Had *he* failed her, too?

§ 2

For months Deane lay ill of a fever in Marseilles; typhoid, contracted on the Mediterranean boat that he had taken from Egypt. Terrible weeks that dragged by bringing him no word of Minnie. He tore at his mail searching eagerly for news of her, but no one answered his feverish queries. Minnie was forgotten. He found an occasional paragraph in the Los Angeles paper he had ordered sent to him; her name infrequently mentioned as one of the cast supporting some star. A report of her broken engagement with an assistant director. Her broken engagement with a character actor. A reputed engagement to a man known in the studios as Harry LeVere. Deane remembered him, a rat-eyed, loose-jowled dancing man. He had used him in pictures. LeVere, one of the men employed by cheap cafés as professional dancer to amuse the mentally sick women who spent their afternoons in aimless search for pleasure. Men had a nasty word to describe him. Deane stared at the paper. A reported engagement to Harry LeVere! Some mistake, no doubt. He was certain that Minnie wasn't going around with that class of man. He searched through the magazines for further news. He wrote to her again and again. He tried to visualize what she looked like. What she was doing.

Then a pitiful note came from her. "I was all broken up when your letter reached me telling me about your terrible illness. I can't write to you, Hal. Try to understand. Don't

come to California, but for God's sake, don't forget me. You are all I have left. Mama is with Nettie and Al in Chicago, where he's got a pretty good job in a stock company. I don't know where Jimmy is, I haven't heard from him for a year. He went off to Paris with some woman lots older than him. You know how I loved that kid; oh, Hal, my heart is simply broken. Elsie died in the county hospital when Pete got five years added for trying to break jail. Kind of a rotten exit for the Flynnns, isn't it? But it's all in a lifetime, I guess. I won't write again. I'm not much of a hand at writing. You know I will never forget you. God bless you, Hal, and make you well again."

"Minnie, Minnie!" he cried, his voice echoing through the vaulted room of the old château where he had lain for weeks, slowly recuperating from his long illness.

"You call for me to come?" asked the French nurse. "Yes?"

"Yes! Help me get dressed! I'm well enough to get out now. I'm going to leave for America!"

"Ah, I am suspicion. Monsieur loves someone American. Yes?"

"Yes, I do! And she needs me."

While he was packing, the strip of newspaper fell to the floor: "Reported engagement ex-star to Harry LeVere, dancer." He must hurry. What was Minnie doing? Where was she now?

It was well he could not see her, standing outside of a Los Angeles dance hall waiting for Harry LeVere.

§ 3

When the doors opened to admit a pushing group, Minnie could hear above the shuffling of feet the arpeggios of nasal

voiced instruments; the lugubrious whining of the saxophones and the persistent emphases of drums. Stirred within her a spirit of the old Minnie Flynn. She longed for a carefree moment when she could again know the lethe of the dance, nor care whose arms held her, whose body swayed in synchronism with hers. Only to dance. *One*, two, three; *one*, two, three. Lights winking and blinking as she whirled toward them and was swirled away from them. Jazz music. Girls whose painted white faces were ghastly blue in the mantled light. Warm, moist men.

When the doors pounded together and the music became a muted echo, Minnie was conscious of physical loss, as if a warm cloak had been suddenly whipped from off her shoulders. She shuddered and leaned against the ornate post. No one passing could perceive her now.

A brisk wind blowing across the ocean sent its long streamers of mist over the city. They hung like light banners of chiffon upon the tall sycamores and the uneven skyline of the buildings hemming in the dusky square. They softened the cruel outlines and filmed the deep blue-black shadows. Lights twinkled under them like sharp, peering eyes through a gray silk veil. Jagged corners so sharp and sinister only a few moments before now merged into the misty pall. So low and far-flung these ribbons of chiffon that faces emerging into the bright cones of light seemed softened and ephemeral. The eddies of wind whirling into the gaping doorway of the Cinderella Dance Hall caught and moored these fleeting mist gauzes and festooned them along her portals. They enfolded Minnie and she found their visible but elusive contacts stark cold and strangely terrifying. With a shudder she put her bare hands into the pockets of her coat. Her hands clammy with cold felt the pawn ticket and the twenty dollar bill.

Twenty dollars. It made her sick all over. After that—*what?*

A little man, gray and round-shouldered, stopped under the portico to light a cigarette. His coat was shabby and he wore no gloves. His hands had large gnarled veins in them. The nails were torn to their quicks and badly stained. A man who labored. Perhaps a plumber. Above a shabby collar protruded his neck, red grooved, with sparse, mouse-colored hair growing unkempt upon it. So like Michael Flynn. His shoes were shabby, too. Under one arm he carried an umbrella. It was grotesquely bright and shiny against the frayed coat. "Oh, papa!" Minnie cried aloud, lifted by swift emotion out of her surroundings into the past, which this stranger made so terrifyingly incarnate.

The voice startled him. The match fell from his hands. He peered around through watery blue eyes, red-rimmed, his head cocked on one side in a timid, querulous attitude.

"Papa!" but the cry was choked this time in Minnie's heart and the blinding tears that sprang to her eyes distorted the form before her out of all semblance to her haunting memory. The man saw coming from the shadows the swaying figure of a woman. It was she who had spoken, no doubt, because her hands were outstretched. And when a shaft of light slanted across her face, he saw a smile. He saw her eyes, blurred, but focused intently upon him. And the same voice, less sharp, was mumbling to him, "Say, I bet I gave you a start, but I took you for somebody I used to know."

A high, staccato laugh broke suddenly from the little man. All his energy seemed merged into the shrill jabs of this quixotic laughter. He took one step toward her and leered into her face, now frozen with horror at what she had read in the man's eyes. And he said, "Not tonight, Josephine!" in a flat, nasal voice that physically struck her. As he hurried

to mingle with the passersby, Minnie stood staring after him, his laughter prisoned in her ears, like the voice of the sea in a shell.

It was as if her own father had hurt her, as if his arms that had been her only haven, had struck her away from him. And she found herself crying with bitter reproach, "Oh, papa, how could you!" and then, "Oh, papa, where are you? I want you—I need you so!"

The night was full of ghosts and there rose before Minnie the white sepulcher where Michael Flynn rested upon a pillow of carved onyx.

During these last years no one had thought of this holding, all that was left of Minnie's transient fortune. The mausoleum was still there. Her father slept undisturbed under the weight of glittering marble, in a white house at the end of the long line of drooping pepper trees. Stillness and peace, in a quiet corner against the warm shoulder of a mountain.

Minnie thought of this and a new vision came to wipe out and destroy the ugliness of the live thing's face. She saw her father lying there, timidly important in death, he alone of all the Flynn's to repose in state, secure and protected against the ill winds of life. Dreamless, uncomplaining dust.

And there rested lightly upon Minnie, as lightly as the mist chiffons upon the waving plumes of the eucalyptus trees, the lulling, singing thought of death. All its mysteries. Silence and everlasting peace. Life was turbulent, cruel, uncompromising.

How terrible the night was. When the doors opened and closed, the yawning mouth breathed its cold, sharp breath upon her. It made her draw her coat around her. Her blue ungloved hands fumbled with the buttons. They sought the refuge of those gaping pockets. The twenty dollar bill and the pawn ticket.

Harry LeVere came swinging around the corner with the quick, springing step, which so characterized him. "Hello, hon," he cried when he caught sight of her, standing there looking up at the interlacing mist streamers, "Star gazin'?"

"Oh, Harry!" and when she felt the quick pressure of his arm as it linked hers, "I don't want to go in and dance tonight—really, I don't."

"Don't be an egg, hon. Come on, now, remember what you promised me."

"Harry, I don't want to go—really, I don't."

His hand groping for hers in the wide pocket found the twenty dollar bill. He pulled it out and with an eager gesture held it up to the electric light. A long shrill whistle followed, "Boy!" he cried, slapping her a resounding whack between the shoulder blades, "We'll knock 'em for a goal tonight. Come on in, hon, we'll knock 'em dead!"

The doors yawned like a huge mouth when they opened and closed again.

"Yeh, we'll knock 'em for a loop tonight, honey girl, feel my hip pocket!"

"Gee, Harry!"

"The real stuff too! How I got it is goin' to hand you a million laughs. Swiped a bottle of Scotch off your ex. Was up to his place this afternoon. I mentioned you and he says——"

He leaned over and whispered in Minnie's ear. And then both laughed, but Minnie's laughter was hollow. It echoed through her own ears. It made a sound that was strangely familiar to her. As she walked up the stairs into the dance hall, she remembered what it was. When she was a little girl her father had run a rosined string through an empty can and showed her how to make hollow sounds rise out of it. "Ghost laughter," he had called it then.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

§ 1

THE iron gates of the huge Western Studio were swung open, and a motley crowd flowed through them. Deane stood beside the watchman, searching among the unfamiliar faces for Minnie. He had a feeling that hers would be unfamiliar, too, that he would have to look twice, sharply into her eyes, before he recognized her. The human tide ebbed past him, a thousand painted faces, hers not among them. Clowns, cowboys, old men, convicts, children, wankers, preachers, models. A dull drone of voices, then sudden silence. Noon hour was scattering the extras to the nearby cafés, cafeterias, lunch counters, lunch wagons. Only late stragglers hurried past him, casting sidelong glances at him, for the face of Hal Deane was well known to them. There were flashing, beckoning smiles for him, for he was a great, influential director and each hoped to make an indelible impression on his mind. He was perhaps searching for types, or why did he bend his eager, penetrating gaze upon each up-turned face that smiled at him?

Where was Minnie Flynn? What channel of escape had she chosen? They had told him he would find her among the crowd. Had she passed him by?

Minnie was playing a small part in Bacon's picture. Bacon had dismissed the people from his set a few minutes before Deane's arrival. Letcher, fat, laughing Letcher, was still the assistant director. It galled Deane to see him unchanged. Why did Life beat its ugly bruises upon the bodies and souls of some, and pass others by?

"For the love of heaven, Deane," Letcher had said. "I didn't suppose you'd even remember her. Wait till you see her! Hand you a laugh! Looks like the breaking up of a hard winter!" When he saw Deane's face darkening, "Poor old girl, we slip her a part once in a while, but she's always kicking up a row. What do you think her latest stunt was?—sore because she couldn't have her own dressing room. Didn't want to hang out with the gang!" He laughed. "Time sure sticks a pin in their toy balloons, all right, all right. The gas can't hold out forever. They come and go. There's Alicia Adams, you remember her back in the old days. Look at her now—the talk of the whole country! Got a wise head on her, too. They say she's begun saving for a wintry day. June's finish gave her an idea to pull in the reins. When she caught Carlton cheating at cards, she kicked him out. He's been bumming around ever since, but he'll make his way— How the women do fall for those tapering legs of his, and that juicy line of bull! Adams is here. Just bought the old Day place. Bacon got a bid to some swell party she's giving—to royalty! She danced with the Prince of Wales when he was out here. Had a slant at her yet?"

Deane had seen her, but he didn't answer, he turned away to check an inclination to bury his fist in Letcher's throat and stop that idiotic laughter. As he walked hurriedly through the studio yards, he side-stepped swiftly to avoid being struck by a car, a canary yellow Rolls-Royce with a crest on the door—Alicia Adams!

§ 2

Minnie hated the studio lunch room. She seldom went there because it was filled with people she *had* known. She hated the cafeterias; the burden of carrying her own tray, light as it was, seemed too much for her tired arms. Lunch coun-

ters—eating beside the extras—could she afford to do that, to make herself one of them, and acknowledge to everybody that her position was entirely lost?

Not far from the studio was a Chinese chop suey parlor. The main room was a dingy rococo affair, noisy with the clatter of many alien tones, but there were dark booths in back of that room curtained off by swaying rice screens. One of these booths was reserved every noon for Minnie.

"Good Chinky," she said to Tim Gow, the proprietor, "I'll give you a quarter if you'll keep the piano quiet while I'm having lunch here. Gets on my nerves, savvy?"

She was always alone, except on the days when she wasn't working. Then she couldn't afford to be alone; somebody came with her to pay the bill. How grateful she was for work, for that quiet hour in this isolated retreat. In the dark corner of the booth she could relax and think, though thoughts were cruel, mocking, half-formed things that never lived beyond their chrysalis. She liked to be there, sipping the acrid, stimulating tea, tempting her lagging appetite with pungent Chinese foods. Tim Gow often talked to her. He meant well, good fat old man, with a sagging head and inscrutable eyes lit with fanatical mysticism. Tim Gow *knew*. He brought every day to her table a fortune-telling game that came from Hongkong, his native home. She shook the long, bamboo shafts and let them fall one by one upon the table in front of her.

"Well, Chinky, what do you see in your silly old bamboos for me today? Plenty good luck, eh?"

"Heap plenty good luck bimeby. Maybe."

"Always maybe."

"Velly solly. Heap luck come bimeby. Bamboo say catchem velly good man. You savvy velly good man?"

"If I ever saw a good man again, Chinky, I'd drop dead.

They don't make 'em good these days, somebody broke the mold."

"No savvy. Bamboo, he say, velly good man, him come. China bamboo, him no tell lie. Missy wait, him come. Likee noodle? I catchem good noodle now—sub gum."

"All right, and lots of tea, Chinky. Don't forget, quarter if you keep that damned piano off. I'm nervous today, savvy?"

When Tim Gow slipped softly away from her she leaned wearily against the cool wall. A strange disordered figure. Close to her the hum of voices, yet how remote they seemed. Every living thing now seemed remote to Minnie Flynn. Footsteps, passing and repassing her hiding place, but no one would ever stop outside her door and knock, demanding friendly hospitality; she had nothing to give, nothing.

The bamboo shafts lay scattered upon the table before her. Fortune tellers' witchcraft, but not more obscure than life itself. What had been more uncertain than the tumbling promising thin shafts of years that had fallen to such lowly fortune?

Minnie was conscious of a slight effort to raise the gay blue bowl to her lips. "How tired I am." She scarcely glanced up when Tim Gow entered. "What you want, Chinky?"

There was a musical cadence in Tim Gow's thin voice, like half-notes on a Chinese reed harp. "Missy Day, man him come. Him askee, Missy Day. Me say, bimeby, she come, maybe. Tim Gow come fetchum say-so, Missy Day. Tell man go? Tell man come? Maybe lich, him pay. How you wantem?"

"Oh, Lord, I don't want to see anybody. Is it one of the gang, Chinky?"

"No, Missy Day."

"You didn't think to ask his name? What in the devil do you suppose he wants of me? Did he look like one of those yellow belly collectors, you know, Chinky, man comes, get money pronto! Talkee loud voice."

Tim Gow beamed. "Man say, name Bean."

"Bean? Bean? I don't know anybody by that fool name." Then she went white. "It's not—Deane!"

Tim Gow's smile widened until it closed his oblique eyes. "Him Bean. Melican Bean. Savvy? Me ketchum now?"

She sprang to her feet. Her hands swept out, the blue bowl spilled its tea, rolled and fell clattering to the floor. "For God's sake, Chinky, don't let him know I'm here. I don't want to see him. Send him away!"

Tim Gow was picking up the fragments of the broken bowl. He did not answer.

"Send him away, I tell you!" She was rummaging in her frayed pocketbook for her powder puff and rouge box. "I don't want to see him! Hal Deane! I look like a fright! Chinky, push this damn table over, I want to see in the mirror."

Tim Gow's movements were slow with a heavy grace. "Hurry up, he'll get out of here! Oh, this rotten unbecoming hat! No, I don't want to see him! Swing that lantern around, Chinky, throw more light on the mirror."

How kind the soft-glowing yellow lanterns were. "I'm glad he didn't get me out in the sunlight! Take a look, Chinky. He's still there, isn't he?"

With exaggerated caution Tim Gow parted the shimmering rice curtains. He nodded, smiling with his infinite wisdom of human nature. The man who wanted to see her would never leave until he had found her, there was longing like pain in the man's eyes as they searched for her. The good man, whose footsteps crossed the threshold of Tim

Gow's chop suey parlor, had been promised by the light shadows of tumbling bamboo shafts.

Tim Gow felt a great compassion for this wretched white girl whose tears had fallen upon the little inlaid mother-of-pearl table he had carried to brighten the booth. Whose tears had wetted the gay paper napkins.

"Do I look like a fright? This lipstick's no good. Bring me another pot of tea before you tell him I'm here, savvy, Chinky? Got a cigarette?"

Deane came into the booth, saw the girl that was Minnie Flynn, gathered her into his arms and held her close until, exhausted by sobbing, he felt her weakening, then he lowered her quietly onto the stool. "Don't cry like that, Minnie, my poor little Minnie. Don't cry, sweetheart. We've found each other at last."

Long, throbbing minutes with no words spoken between them, Deane's arms aching because of the unreleased desire to crush her to him in cruel ecstasy—she was his at last!

"Minnie, darling, I love you. What does it matter what the years have done to you—or me. I love you. I want you—to protect you, my darling. Oh, God, why have I left you so alone—so long! Minnie, say that you forgive me."

She began laughing, an unnatural choking sound as if hands were closing on her throat. "Oh, Hal, what a fool I am, going all to pieces like this. I didn't dream I'd be such an idiot, but when I saw you, I don't know why, but I expected *you* to be changed, too, and when you came in you looked—just like you did years ago—and the past came back so vividly—the rush of years—you—I—I just lost my balance, Hal." She buried her face in her hands and sagged against the wall. "Don't look at me," she cried suddenly. "No—no, I can't bear to have you look at me!"

He sat there silent, uneasy before the challenge of his

own conscience, and *looked* at her, seeing beyond the crumbling, material shell, the crushed, bruised spirit of Minnie Flynn. There was something pitifully childlike about a failure. He had a feeling that he should talk to her as if she were a very little girl. He would have liked to rock her in his arms, croon to her. But he could think of nothing kind enough to ease her heartache.

Tim Gow, wagging his head, smiling as he communed with his thoughts on the great prophetic wisdom of bamboos, entered the booth and set his most ornate tea service before them. He brought them bowls of white rice, pineapple and mushroom chop suey, sweet almond and rice cakes, and lichee nuts. It was a farewell feast to Missy Day, for she would never come again to his chop suey parlor. He knew, he had studied the meager gestures of humanity, their moves were as transparent to him as her tears that had lain upon his table. The man would take her away with him, the man's eyes were covering her with a veil of love, so the world would never see her again, and she would be hidden from all eyes save his.

"Take it away!" Minnie said to him. "We don't want any food, Chinky. Bring us tea—fresh and strong."

Tim Gow bowed and left them. But he didn't take the feast away with him, he knew that life must be fed, and hunger which always mocks at emotions would make her taste of these dishes which he had prepared with his own hands.

After she had eaten, she felt as if she had a saner grip on herself. She wanted to talk to Hal, about everything, not so much of the past, but of the future which stretched out before her like the road to Calvary. *Calvary*. What was it that Gilbert Carlton had said to her so many years ago? . . . He wouldn't forgive her if she crawled on her knees clear to Calvary.

"I don't have to go over it all, Hal. You know what's happened. But *what* does the future hold for me?"

"*Me*, dear," with a smile, trying to speak lightly so the situation would seem less hectic. "It's not much to offer, but it's all I've got. I'm a pretty important person to *me*! Not touched the heights that my youthful vanity pointed out as my pinnacle, but keeping my head up—and my feet on the ground."

He held her hand in both of his. It was damp and cold. She was smiling wanly. "A man thinks he's darned sufficient unto himself," said Deane, still trying to keep up the pretense of perfect ease in the presence of Minnie, who grew each long minute more of a stranger to him. "It hurts his vanity when he realizes that his lack of real success in life is because it takes two to make him a perfect unit. I've gone on alone so long, I've gotten in a rut. Only half of me is working. The batteries are running down. I can no longer find stimulus in my own self. Thank God, Minnie, you've come along in time to save me. We'll work this thing out together, I can amount to something with your help."

He saw a fierce spasm of pain pass through her. What he had said was cruel, and he had meant to be kind. Dismissing any hope for her, he had acknowledged to her that there was no hope other than the serving of his future. "Minnie, dear, forgive me. I've been talking at random. I believe I'm more hysterical than you are, and all I want to say is that I've always loved you, and will always love you, and that we need each other. Let us be married today."

She sat there transfixed, staring straight ahead, dry-eyed. She was weeping, but the tears within were dripping onto her heart. Nature was cruel to give them no release.

"Marry me, sweetheart." Deane was pleading with her.

"And we'll clear out of Hollywood. Forget it. Shake it like dust off our feet. We can take the train to San Francisco tonight, boats leave there every few days for Honolulu, the Philippines, China. . . . Think of it, Minnie—all the golden romance and mystery of old China will be ours. We'll go on to Java, India, Egypt. I know Egypt now. I'll lead you out to the vast desert into sunsets that are more fiery than the very crucibles of life. We'll find a little boat and drift down the Nile on those silvered, moonlight nights of Egypt. When spring comes, we'll cross the Mediterranean into Spain and see April burst into blossoms under the very ivory walls of the Alhambra. Minnie, my darling, there is so much beauty in the world for eyes that can see it, we can't go groping through the darkness forever. You believe your world has tumbled upon you, just because the dust from these crumbling ruins are in your eyes. But life is infinite, Minnie—it can't be penned up in the narrow confines of one little house. Hollywood is a little, narrow house, Minnie, and some of us have made of it a cell."

His words came breathlessly, mounting and falling with the beating of his heart, strange words filled with poetic imagery that had ever been a part of his latent dreams, but never before a part of his cryptic, colorless speech.

"There are the blue skies of Italy, Minnie dear, skies that seem so close to you, so deep and transparent, you can almost see God's face shining upon you. When summer comes, we will run away to Switzerland, and you will laugh with joy at the little, precise farms, the quaint, intimate villages huddled together like gnarled old peasant women, gossiping about the white-haired men mountains above them."

When Minnie laughed, something gripped Deane's heart. She was opening her eyes to see the beauty of the pictures he was painting. Thank God, the sight was not gone.

"—Like old peasant woman gossiping," she repeated in a dazed, far-away voice, as if it were an echo from her thoughts which had traversed the world in the wake of Hal Deane. "I've seen those little leaning houses in studio sets, with swinging shutters and roofs like shaggy, grass hats. There's one village over in the Pickford Studio—I was working there, doing a little bit in Mary's picture last week, and I said to mama,—she was doing some extra work—how I wished I could travel and see the world before I died." Her face lighting, she bent forward, "Tell me, Hal, is England wonderful?"

He wanted to draw Minnie into his arms, but he was afraid a sympathetic touch, tinged with pity as it would be, might arouse her from the peace of this moment's detachment.

"Wonderful, Minnie dear! The meadows, the vast estates—there is something so charming about the polite little towns that fringe the Thames. And London, Minnie! You won't love it until you know it. London is like the beautifully, ugly face of Abraham Lincoln. Tremendous features, massive, imposing, but not until you look deep into the eyes of London will you find the twinkling humor emanating from a poet's heart."

"Wonderful!" echoed Minnie. "Think of it, Hal. To be married to you, to travel away, far away."

"And I'll teach you to love me, sweetheart."

She leaned wearily against him. "I have always loved you," she said simply. "Not until we have suffered much do we know the real meaning of love. I've been a fool, Hal. I thought it was only friendship."

"Friendship and love and companionship, they will sustain us through the long life ahead of us, for we're still young, Minnie, we've lived only a little span——"

"But it was our youth," she interrupted, the bitterness creeping back, "the cream of our lives—soured, and *spilled*. Ugh!" she shuddered, then shook herself as though awakening from a heavy sleep. "That thought brings me back to earth again!" She faced him, her restless, burning eyes plunging into his. "Hal!" she cried out, "I *can't* marry you! I *won't* marry you! I—I've got nothing to give in return for your love."

"Yes, you have, Minnie, *your* love. You have just told me that you loved me."

"I do, Hal—I love you so much I'll never let you make the sacrifice you're willing to."

"Don't speak of it as a sacrifice—it makes so little of a great passion."

"Oh, yes, it *is* sacrifice. And all through the years those nasty memories in my past will rise up between us like fearful ghosts—phantoms more tangible than even you or me."

"The past is forgotten, Minnie. I know all you've been through—the ugly things—I'm more to blame than you, knowing the pitfalls, always being away at those moments when you needed me most."

Minnie closed her eyes. How sweet it would be to lay the ghosts of yesterday, to fly from the old life as if from the plague, to be the wife of a man who loved you, whose protection would forever shut away the sordid contacts that had so scarred the past. To find peace.

But what right had she to peace? she asked herself. To contentment? To forgiveness? Had she ever done anything to earn this respite? She who had met all blessings so carelessly, who had gone on so ruthlessly passing the fine things by, living only for greed, and gain, and wanton pleasures, and satisfied desires. Deane would never know all she had

been through—he believed he *knew*—but he didn’t—she realized that he was thinking only of Beauregard . . . but what of the others? He would never know about the other men unless she told him—told him how she had broken off her life, piece by piece, and given to so many men to devour—men she had looked upon as steps that would help her climb back to the mocking goal reaching high above her. And they had proven steps, but steps that had led her down, down, down. . . .

Above the weaving of her conscience she heard Deane’s voice saying brokenly, “I knew you needed me—I feared for you when Beauregard left for the coast—I betrayed my trust and stayed away from you—how easy to make mistakes when we are forsaken. Poor little Minnie.”

She never knew until her confession poured out of her, how much she loved Hal Deane. But she told him, unfalteringly, with a courage born of her awakened love, of each bitter, heart-breaking step downward.

“After Beauregard— How I hated him!—it—it wasn’t so difficult to yield—it seemed as if I had given my soul away to him—after that, what did it matter what became of the empty shell? Giving for a single jewel—for a transient position—for an unpaid bill—for money enough to pay our rent—for just a job!”

“Oh, my God, Minnie, don’t tell me that! I can’t bear it—I can’t—you’re lying to me!”

“It’s the truth, Hal, as only a great love can make you unafraid of truth.”

“You’re telling me this because you want to send me away—No, Minnie, no—it can’t be true. You’re mad—you’re drugged by your own emotions. Tell me that you’re lying to me.”

She was thinking it was strange that it should now be

she who was reaching out her arms in pitying comfort. She saw him standing there weeping amid the ruins of his fallen ideals, crushed under them. "Hal, darling, don't feel like that, I can't bear it. I love you so. . . . I wanted you to know the truth only because of my love. The truth—coming through clean—before—before I had lost my courage. It's so little—so terribly little—but it is all I have to give. Can you forgive me?"

That she should ask his forgiveness when he believed himself to blame——

They clung to each other. "It's dreadful, Minnie. I feel as if something inside of me had died—but it isn't my love. That still lives. I'm not a coward, Minnie, neither am I a brave man. But I'm strong enough to fight, fight for my happiness and yours. I'm still asking you to be my wife."

She did not answer, but leaned over and rang the tinkling bell that would summon Tim Gow. "Hand me my hat, Hal, and my pocketbook. My face must be shining like an apple."

"Minnie, you haven't answered me."

She was searching through her pocketbook for the mirror. "I will never marry you, Hal. I couldn't do it and keep faith with my love, which is the only holy thing left me. If you care deeply as you say you do, please do not speak of it again. I cannot bear any more pain."

Deane stared at her as she pulled the turban over her bobbed hair, now graying at the temples. He sat there in strange quiet, while she drew a powder puff over her face, whiter than the powder itself, and painted scarlet lips upon her mouth. And he knew by the look in her eyes that no pleading would swerve her from her self-sacrifice. He knew also that never again would they speak of their love, but would count their friendship the holy thing that would ever

inspire and sustain them. He reached out and kissed her upon the lips, and that caress was a bond they would carry to eternity.

Tim Gow slipped softly into the room. He smiled. He saw writ in the woman's eyes her exaltation. Only her voice, husky, sometimes inarticulate, remained unchanged.

"Bring us the bill, Chinky, we've got to toddle along."

Tim Gow told her there was to be no bill, it was his gift of farewell to his patron, Missy Day.

"Oh, don't worry about it's being my last meal here, Chinky. You're wrong about that. I'll be in tomorrow, and the next day, and the next day."

Why was she laughing? Tim Gow wondered.

"Catchem noodles the same hour every day, do you savvy, Chinky? So hand us over the bill. I can't ride along on any more false pretenses."

Deane left while Tim Gow was still there piling up the little gay bowls. Minnie's eyes had begged him to leave then. He understood. He wanted to spare her the pain of parting.

When he was gone, her eyes closed wearily, and her arms fell heavily upon the table. . . They scattered the bamboo shafts still lying there. Tim Gow picked up the fallen ones that had sifted to the floor under Minnie's feet. "China bamboo no lie. Missy Day catchem good man. Velly good man. Missy Day got happy look in eye. Tim Gow, him got Melican dolla. You get China bamboos tellum tomorrow, maybe?"

"Tomorrow—maybe. . . ."

Minnie sat there a long time in a stupor looking at Deane's card lying on the table. His address. And under it written: "Come to me when you need me. I will be always waiting."

THE END

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