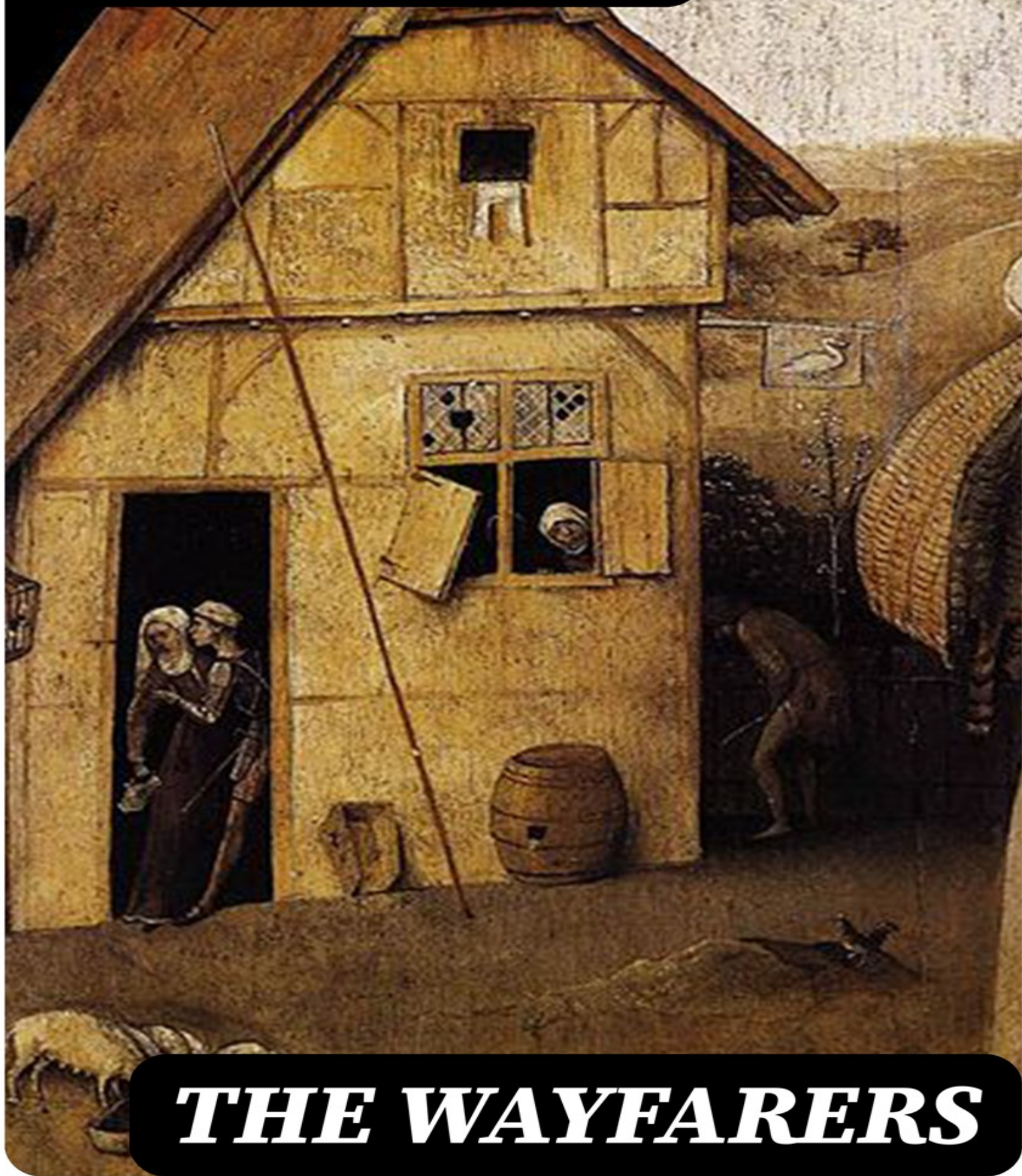


**MARY STEWART
CUTTING**



THE WAYFARERS

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Mary Stewart Cutting

The Wayfarers

EAN 8596547090915

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CHAPTER ONE

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There is no sight more uninspiring than a ferry-boat crowded with human beings at a quarter of six o'clock in the evening, when the great homeward rush from the offices and commercial houses sets in. At that time, although there are some returning shoppers and women type-writers and clerks, the larger number of the passengers are men, sitting in slanting rows to catch the light on the evening paper, or wedged in an upright mass at the forward end of the boat. It is noticeable that, with a few exceptions, those who have gone forth in the morning distinct individuals, well dressed, freshly shaven, with clean linen, an animated manner, a brisk step, and an eager-eyed disposition toward the labors of the day, seem, as they return at night, to be only component parts of a shabby crowd in indistinguishable apparel, and worn to a uniform dullness not only of appearance but of attitude and expression. The hard day's work is over, but the rest is not yet attained. We all know that between the darkness and the dawn comes the period when vitality is at its lowest ebb, and in all transition periods there is a subtle withdrawing of the old force before the new fills its place. In that temporary collapse in the daily adjustment between two lives, the business and the domestic, many a man with overwrought brain and tired body feels that what he has been looking forward to as a happy rest appears to him now momentarily as an unavoidable and wearying need for further effort. The demand upon him varies in kind, but it is still there.

Men in a mass are neither beautiful nor impressive to look at in the modern black or sad-colored raiment of everyday custom, and it is difficult, as the eyes rest on the faces in these commonplace rows, to realize the space which love inevitably fills in these lives, so far apart from romance do they seem, forgetful as we are of the worn truth that romance is a flowering weed which grows in any soil. For three fourths of these men some woman waits. Those dull eyes can gleam, those set lips can kiss; these be heroes, handsome men, arbiters of destiny! There is positive grotesqueness in the idea, seen in this obliterating haze of fatigue that so maliciously dwarfs and slurs. That man over there with the long upper lip and closed lids has an episode in his middle-aged existence to match any in the annals of fiction. That other beside him, short, fat, with kind eyes and a stubby brown beard, is the sum of all that is good and beautiful to the wife for whom his homecoming continues to be the poignant event of the day. This man with the long, thin face is a modern martyr working himself to death for his family; this one was in the newspapers last week in a connection best not remembered. This one—you would pick him out at once from among the rest—is to be married tomorrow. This man, and this, and this, while presently unconscious of the great law, are still living under it. Not only to youth is the promise given; it becomes a larger and more vital thing as the opportunities of life increase, further spreading in its fostering of good or evil—a thread so deeply interwoven on the under side of the fabric that we forget to look for it.

In every case is a character to be made or marred, not only by the large molding, but by the infinitesimal touches of that love whose influence we conventionally limit to young and unmarried persons—while knowing, whether we acknowledge it or not, that it is the one eternally powerful element in life.

Even in a far-off reflex action, this is shown on the ferry-boat in the fact that when one of this blended concourse of men meets a woman he instantly regains an individuality; he pulls himself together, his eyes become bright, his manner concentrated, his clothes set well on him. He is no longer one of the crowd, but himself.

Tireless youth may achieve the same individual effect, or unusual personal beauty, or great happiness, or the possession of a dominant idea. A number of people, as they came forward on the boat, turned to look back at two men sitting by the narrow passageway, who in the midst of the general indifference were talking in a low tone, with obviously intense earnestness. Those who looked once usually turned a second time to gaze on the face of one.

Many a man who has an upright nature and a good disposition fails to show these facts patently to the casual observer. To Justin Alexander had been given the grace of a singularly attractive countenance. He was of a fair complexion, with light hair, a good nose slightly aquiline, and a well-shaped mouth and chin; but his charm was irrespective of feature. No one could look at him and not know him to be a man of sweet and fine honor. The gaze of his keen blue eyes—clear, though not very large—carried conviction to whomsoever it rested on that a clean and

honest soul dwelt therein. Although he did not in the least realize it, this had been one of the greatest factors in any success that he had ever had, joined as it was to good judgment and great physical energy. Everyone liked him, not for what he said or did, but for what he was, and for the encouragement of his bright glance, which had a convincing and magnetic quality in it. He talked intelligently and well, although not a great deal, and among the many people who were drawn toward him a corresponding liking on his part was easily inferred. Yet he was, in fact, innately although dumbly critical; a reticent man as to his own thoughts and opinions, he took an inward measurement of persons and circumstances often the very reverse of what was supposed. This attitude of his was in no sense of the word hypocritical, it came instead from a constitutional dislike of voicing his innermost feelings. It somehow hurt him to acknowledge defects in others, and he had also an impersonal sense of justice which allowed for good qualities in those who were uncongenial to him; he did not really like the man who sat beside him, and with whom he had the prospect of being intimately associated, but even his wife had hardly divined this; certainly Joseph Leverich himself, large, jovial, and shrewd-eyed, would have been the last to suspect it.

“The gist of the matter is this, Alexander,” he was saying, as he hit one hand heavily with the large forefinger of the other, “we want a man capable not only of overseeing the works,—Harker understands that pretty well,—but of managing the real business of the factory and representing it with business men; neither Foster nor I can attend to it—Great Scott, I wish we could! We haven’t the time. We

bought the whole outfit a couple of years ago; it's only one of twenty other irons we have in the fire."

"I know that your interests are large," said Alexander, as Leverich paused.

"The great drawback to having large interests is that you have to delegate so much of the management to others. When we took up this, it ran itself, after a fashion; but since that a dozen other people are making the same thing—of course, with slight variations, but practically the same thing. Patents don't really protect you much. Now we want our machine pushed; but neither Foster nor I, for different reasons, can do this. The fact is, we don't want to appear at all. And we've had our eye on you for some time."

"This is news to me," said Alexander.

"Now the control of the factory has to be settled suddenly, out of hand; somebody has got to take hold. So we make you the offer. We will deposit fifty thousand to your credit, to be used as working capital—you can't branch out with less; you've got to be able to work to advantage. The days have gone when a business could be set going on a couple of thousand and worked up with industry and frugality, as the copy-books say, into the millions. Small concerns nowadays go to the wall—and serve 'em right, I say; only fools believe in success without money. We'll see to your backing! Of course, the interest will be paid out of the business, you don't undertake it individually. At the end of two years more we ought to have a big thing."

"And if we don't?" said Alexander.

The other's dim gooseberry eyes suddenly flashed. "If you think we will not, you are not the man we want—he's

got to have the courage of his convictions to be worth his salt. But you can't put me off this way—I know you. Take up the project or leave it—I say this, but in reality you can't leave it, and you know it. A man doesn't get a chance like this twice. Hamilton came to us the other day for the position, and we refused him, although he had capital and we wouldn't have had to advance a cent of the money we're willing to put up for you."

"But why are you willing to?" Justin looked with his bright eyes at the other.

"Because you are the man we want!" Leverich leaned forward eagerly, and shifted his large frame so as to put each muscle into an easier position. "Don't let's go over that old ground again. You've had just the experience in the old company that we need; but it's your wide acquaintance that tells, and it's that that we're willing to buy. We believe you can make a market for our goods."

"It is an important step," said the other thoughtfully, "to leave a certainty for an uncertainty—not that I should regard it as an uncertainty if I took it," he added, with a smile.

"I know it's hard to break away and start out for yourself when you have a family; lots of men go all their lives in a rut because they haven't the courage to take the plunge. But you don't want to work for somebody else all your life; you don't want to feel that you're wasting all your best years. By and by it will be too late. And a growing family takes more money each year, instead of less—you've got to think of that, too. It's a terrible thing to be always cramped, and know there's no way out of it in this world."

"You don't need to tell me all this, Leverich," said Justin coolly.

"No, I know I don't; but I want you to realize that you have your chance now—one in a million. I'm sorry to hurry you, but you see the way we're fixed. Say the word now! Get it off your mind and you'll sleep easier. I know what your word is—as good as your bond. *I'd* take it! You can give any formal decision later."

Justin still smiled, but he shook his head; though capable of quick decision when necessary, it was yet impossible to hurry him; his actions in every case depended on his own thought, and gained no volition from outside influences, which might indeed retard but could never compel. Virtually he had concluded to accept Leverich's offer, but he would take his own time about saying so; he felt the haste of the other man to be somewhat of an offense against decency.

"Well!" Leverich shrugged his heavy shoulders at the bright impenetrableness that was like a shining armor. "We said we'd give you until Wednesday, so of course we will. We will bring the books around to-night anyway, and go over them, as we planned; you can't afford to lose any time. And talk to your wife about it, she's a sensible woman—and one who longs, like all the rest of 'em, for more than she's got," he added to himself, with cynical satisfaction.

"Martin is watching us now," he continued, waving his hand over toward the other side of the boat, where a slight, insignificant-looking man with small features and a large, bulging forehead lifted his hand in an answering gesture. "You'd never think, to look at him, that he was what he is; he has more brains in his little finger than I have in my

whole head.” Leverich spoke with evident sincerity. “I’m just a plain man of business, but Foster’s a genius. He fixed on you from the start. Hello, we’re ’most in already.”

The crowd from the rear cabin had begun to push through the passageway and surge to the front of the boat, which was still some distance from the dock. The man next them folded up his paper, and Justin and Leverich rose mechanically and stood amid the throng, which became more and more compact every moment.

Suddenly both men started as they looked back at the fresh accessions to the crowd, and pushed sideways, falling behind a little to get in line with a tall and slender young woman with pink roses in a black hat, and a dotted veil that emphasized her rich coloring. She raised her head as a voice beside her said:

“Good evening, Mrs. Alexander!”

“Oh, is that you, Mr. Leverich? How do you do? I haven’t met a soul I knew on the boat until this moment, and now I see six people. Oh, Justin!” She had faced around as a hand was laid on her arm, and stood looking up at him with happily surprised eyes, while he smiled back at her with a slight flush on his own cheek. “I was looking for you all the time,” she said.

The sudden and unexpected meeting of husband and wife has a singular element in it—it is somewhat like unconsciously approaching a mirror in which one views a stranger who turns out to be one’s self. That swift and impersonal view gives an impression as a whole that can be reached in no other way. Lois Alexander noticed at once that her husband’s clothes needed brushing, and that the velvet

collar of his overcoat was worn at the edges—she had hardly seen the coat this year except as he was putting it on or taking it off. It gave her a slight shock to see that the tired lines around his eyes made his face look older than she was accustomed to think of it. He, for his part, experienced the same slight shock in looking at her; he saw the little imperfections in her face, and the roses in her hat appeared to him perhaps too pink and girlish. Yet through all this there was an indescribable thrill of happy possession and loving admiration of each other, touchingly sweet, and all the tenderer for the hint of passing years. Among all the men around, Justin was the king; among all women, she was the most desirable.

After the expected sensations of the usual home greeting and the accustomed kiss, it gave a spice to intimacy to meet perforce as strangers. She leaned partly against him as she talked to Mr. Leverich, and he pressed her arm with his strong fingers under cover of her cloak and made the color come and go in her cheek; her eyes mutely implored him to stop, and he enjoyed her confusion. Husband and wife looked well together, in a certain vitality of movement and expression common to both which made others instinctively turn to observe them.

“I have been trying to discover my husband all the way across,” she complained to Leverich. “I was sure that he was on this boat. Why didn’t you look out for me, Justin?”

“You didn’t say you were going in town to-day,” he expostulated.

“How often have I told you to look out for me? I am likely to go in at any time. I had to get some things for the

children. Have you—have you seen anyone to-day?" She spoke disconnectedly, as conscious as a girl of the disconcerting pressure on her arm.

"No—oh, yes; I saw Eugene Larue this morning, he's back from the other side."

"Did he say when he would be out?"

"No."

"Did you ask him?"

"No. The fact is, Lois, I only saw him for a moment and I never thought about it."

"Oh, it doesn't make any difference. I wanted to speak to you about Theodosia; I've had a letter, and she's coming. We are going to have a young lady as a visitor this winter," she added formally in explanation to Mr. Leverich, who still stood at her elbow. "She's coming up North to study music; she's very pretty, I believe, and clever."

"A relation?" hazarded Mr. Leverich.

"Yes; she's a young cousin of mine—I haven't seen her since she was a child. It will be so pleasant to have a girl in the house."

"You like company," he returned approvingly, "my wife does, too; we always have a houseful. She says I show off better when we have visitors—can't let my angry passions rise. By the way, Alexander, what time shall I bring the books over to-night?"

Lois Alexander's startled, questioning glance sought her husband's, and his gave a gravely confidential assent before he answered:

"Any time you say."

"Will eight o'clock be too early?"

"No, that will suit me very well."

"Well, good-by!" He took off his hat in farewell to Lois, and disappeared in the crowd, as his broad shoulders forced a sinuous passage through the throng.

"How are the children?" Justin asked his wife.

"They're all right." She paused, and then said: "If you are to look over those books, I suppose we can't go to the Calenders' to-night."

"No." The dark line of the pier struck athwart the dusky light and divided the windows in two. "At least, I cannot, but there's no reason why you shouldn't go."

"You know that I will not go without you."

"Other women do."

"Well, / will not."

"What a foolish girl!" His tone was fond. "Then—*take care!*" The boat had bumped into the dock; in the struggling press of the stampeding crowd, Lois clung to her husband's arm and he strove to ward off the crush from her. When they were at last over the gang-plank, joining in the hurrying, straggling procession toward the train, he looked at her with tender solicitude.

"You shouldn't come out on the boat so late as this. Was it too much for you?"

"Oh, no, no! I do this alone lots of times." She felt so vividly happy that her breathlessness was hardly an annoyance as they dodged in front of the incoming drays of another boat and waved aside the impeding newsboys crying the evening papers.

She foresaw that they would be separated in the train, and found voice enough to whisper to him:

"Are you to decide to-night?"

"I have virtually decided now."

"To accept?"

"Yes."

Her breath came suddenly; with the monosyllable an electric wave had set the pulses of both tingling. The spoken word had not failed of its wonted power; it had at this moment opened a gate hitherto closed. Both husband and wife felt their feet at last set on the great highroad of modern romance, the road to wealth, along which ride daily, as of old, knights in armor, duly caparisoned, with shield and spear, bent, not on deeds of chivalry, but on one glittering quest—a grim pathway, veiled by a golden haze.

CHAPTER TWO

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It was a mighty hour. Justin, sitting by the open window with his head upon his hand, looking out into the night, saw but dimly the pale shining of the familiar stars, in the search for the rising star of his own future. It was far on in the small hours, and he had not yet slept, although he had come upstairs at twelve o'clock with the firm intention of undressing and going to bed at once. He had, instead, dropped down into the wicker chair in the unlighted sitting-room to think for a few moments—and a few moments—and a few moments more.

The dining-table which he had left was filled with sheets of paper covered with fine figures, and his mind at first continually reverted to them, multiplying, subtracting, and correcting with keen facility, and with infinitesimal changes in the final result, which he knew, notwithstanding, could be only approximate, no matter how painstakingly his fancy strove to render it exact.

After a while, however, other thoughts asserted themselves. The vast influences of the night were around him as from the deep places of the universe—the depth of dusky gloom, the depth of silence. The window looked out over a garden, but in this dusky gloom it had lost the semblance of earth and seemed, instead, but the under part of an enveloping cloud in which he was the only breathing human life. The vague dark branches of the trees waving across the lesser darkness spoke of even deeper mystery in

their mute witness to that breath from the unseen which moved them.

It was not the problem of the universe of which all this spoke to Justin Alexander, though as such it had been part and parcel of his questioning youth. The days when he might have sung with Omar were gone with those speculative midnight hours, the foregathering with death, the conscious search for higher meanings, the effort to solve the unknowable; whatever philosophy was evolved from those journeys into the dark was labeled and put away on a remote shelf, where the mind occasionally reverted to it with a sigh of thoughtful possession, but for which there was no longer any daily use. There was even a chance that on bringing the precious package out into the modern daylight it might be found to have changed its color entirely.

The problem of his own life was what this hour held in its shifting hold for Justin, the wavering veiled outlines on which he gazed seemed to prefigure the uncertain boundaries of his own future. To a man who has a family, the leaving of a certain occupation for an uncertain one, even though it promise much, is like taking a leap off into space.

The opportunity for which he had been longing indefinitely any time for six years back had come at last, but it had brought with it at this moment a strange and unanticipated sadness, after the absorbing calculations of the evening; the natural buoyancy of a mind pleased with a new undertaking and eager for power had given place to a weight of responsibility and foreboding. How much, and how much, and yet how much, depended on his efforts! He must

not, could not, fail; and yet, when he had succeeded, what would success bring him individually that he had not now? Where would be his real and vital compensation? The toil of years piled up before him, with the pain of satisfied ambition at the end of it.

In the loneliness of the hour the loneliness of his soul stood confessed before him. He yearned at the moment unutterably, and with a mighty longing, for another to be as one with that soul in the comprehension of mood and aim and means and accomplishment which is in itself the deepest sympathy. His wife—she was very sweet, she was very beloved, but her utmost understanding of this life of his was the conscious effort of one who lived in an alien sphere. His children—he loved them fondly, but the responsibility of their future years weighed upon him; as long as he could foresee, the eyes of all would still wait upon him in his rôle of provider—neither in body nor in spirit could he ever again have the rest of freedom.

Then there came to him, swiftly and inexplicably, and in spite of the inner knowledge of true love for the bonds that held him, a wild desire for the untrammelled liberty of his boyish days. If he could take his fishing-rod and tramp off through the woods by himself, or lie on a bank under the green trees and dabble his bare feet in the brown pools of the brook that flowed beneath the bank, with none to look for him or question why, and have neither yesterday nor tomorrow to hamper him, but only the joy of living! To saunter back to the house late in the warm afternoon with a string of fish over his shoulder and a book under his arm! He knew how the cold draught of buttermilk tasted after the long and

dusty walk, when he dipped it up with a china cup out of the stone crock on the wooden bench in the cool cellar. Oh, the happy, careless day!

The primeval, savage spirit of man awoke now and grew uppermost in him to escape from civilization and wander as he would upon the brown earth, without let or hindrance! In those far-off wilds where men tracked beasts to their lair he might leave his footsteps in the hot sands also, and joy in the fierce delight of killing. He had lost all connection now with his environment. The air that blew down from the hills and touched his cheek might have come over the burning desert, or have been freighted with the warm salt spray from wide tropical seas on which he sailed, never to return. Dark and darker thoughts possessed him now. His roaming fancy——

“Are you up still?”

Justin started—it was the voice of his wife. He came back to the familiar region of warm human love with a glad bound of relief so instantaneous that he had not even shame for his abnormal wanderings; they became already as though they had never been as he answered:

“Yes; I couldn’t have slept if I had gone to bed.”

“But you’re all cold sitting by that window, with the night air blowing in on you!”

Her hands had found out that fact in the darkness as they closed around his neck.

“Shut the window at once! You’re so imprudent. You must remember that it isn’t summer now.”

She lent herself to his embrace for a moment.

“Do you know how late it is?”

“No, and I don’t want to. Let’s sit here together for a little while, I’m unspeakably wide awake! I’ll make up a little fire for a few minutes and we’ll have a midnight talk.”

She laughed with evident pleasure. “Well!”

He took a match out of his pocket and, kneeling down on the hearth, lighted the small pine logs which were piled up there. A sudden flame brought into bold relief his sinewy frame and clear-cut features as he leaned forward—the light, waving hair pushed upward, and the strong set mouth and chin. His wife drew a low chair forward by him and put out her bare feet in their pink Turkish slippers to catch the warmth. When he turned, the flame had caught her also in its flaring light, and rose and wavered and fell around her.

It used to be the fashion in the old story-books to represent the parents of even the youngest infant as people of mature age and didactic wisdom; to be a mother was to be removed forever from the precincts of social vanities or young and active living. One can find in the books of fifty years ago the picture of a woman, austere middle-aged, with banded hair, a cap, a long nose, and a kerchief, dispensing advice to abnormally small children in trousers and pinafores who cluster at her knees. Lois Alexander would have been a revelation to that epoch; with her white lace-frilled draperies wrapped around her and her pink-slippered feet, she might have served as a distinctly modern illustration of youthful motherhood.

She was not very tall, but gave the effect of height in her bearing. Her form was beautifully rounded and her throat and neck were of a soft whiteness peculiarly their own. Everything about her was richly colored—her lips, her

cheeks, her blue eyes, which had a certain rayed starriness in them, and her brown hair, which, when it lay, as now, unfastened, fell in large loose curls upon her bosom. Her usual expression was somewhat pensive and absorbed, as if she were thinking of herself; but when she smiled she seemed to think only of you.

She put a soft detaining hand on his shoulder as he bent forward watching the blaze in a new absorption.

"I know you're thinking of the new venture."

"Yes; it's a good deal to think of."

"I should say so!" She caught her breath admiringly. "I listened to you and those men talking to-night until I couldn't stand it a moment longer. I should think those figures would drive you crazy!"

"They won't drive me crazy if I can make them come out as I wish," said Justin emphatically.

"But I thought it was all settled that you *could*!"

"Oh, yes—on paper. Everything looks all right there—and it shall be, too! But when you get to working things out in real life you must allow for differences. I know the machine is good—I don't take any chances on that, as I told you before; but there are new machines put on the market all the time to compete with; we haven't a monopoly."

"Well, you can make your prices lower than the others," she suggested brightly.

"Oh, yes, of course," he explained with patience, "but if we put prices too low there's no profit. We may have to do it for a while, though; we've got to be seen doing business, even if it's at a loss. That's what the fifty thousand's for—to tide us over just such a time."

"It is a great deal to have to pay back," she said anxiously, leaning forward to throw a small log on the fire. "I don't like you to saddle yourself with such a debt. I don't like it!"

What weighed on him most—the personal care and responsibility—made no impression on her; she had a loyal and wifely faith in his large ability; but the thought of the money, which filled him only with the exhilaration of sufficient capital, made her uneasy. She had all a woman's horror of debt. What is to a man a very usual and legitimate business resource seemed to her almost a disgrace.

"I wish you could get along without the money."

"I'm glad enough to have it," he replied. "Rest assured, Lois, if they didn't think me worth it they wouldn't lend it to me—they expect big interest on their investment."

"And is our living to come out of it, too?"

"Oh, yes—until there's an income."

"How much will you take?"

"Oh, no fixed sum—just as little as we can get along with at present. We'll go slowly, Lois, and economize all we can, until we get on our feet."

"Indeed, I'll economize!" She clasped her hands earnestly. "There are only a few things to be bought first; things, you know, that we can't do without. After that we'll need next to nothing. This rug, for instance—it's in rags, I'm ashamed to bring anyone up here—but that won't cost much, and we've *got* to get one for the front hall; it isn't decent. And I'll have to buy the children's winter clothing before it gets too cold. Zaidee needs a new coat. She has such long legs, her last year's coat looks like a ruffle."

“Oh, of course, get what is needed,” said the father resignedly. “Some money will have to be spent, necessarily, but make it as little as you can.”

She felt the cessation of interest in his tone, and tried to get back her lost ground.

“Ah, don’t let’s leave the fire yet,” she pleaded, as he made a motion to rise. “I want to sit here a few minutes more, and it’s going to blaze up so beautifully! It’s so seldom that we ever really get a chance to talk together. It seems wonderful that everything is to change in this way. I’ve hated so to think of you tied to that old treadmill—a man with your capabilities! I knew that if it had not been for the children and for me you would have left the place long ago.”

“If it were not for the children and for you I might not be leaving it now,” he answered gently.

“Yes, I know. It’s been dreadfully hard to make both ends meet lately, I’ve seen how worried you were. Dear, I don’t want to be a drag; I want to be an inspiration. Promise to let me help you all I can.”

“You always help me.”

“Ah, no, I don’t; / feel it, though you may not.” She paused, and went on again with a tremulous note in her voice: “Justin, I miss you so much sometimes; there are days and days when I feel as if I hadn’t seen you at all!”

“You see all there is of me,” said Justin tersely. “How many times a year do I go out of an evening without you?”

“Yes, I know that; but when I am alone all day with the children and the servants, I think of so many things that I want to say to you when you come home, and then you are

tired, or sleepy, or want to read, and I don't get any chance at all. You *never* ask me anything, or notice when I don't feel well; yesterday I had such a headache I could hardly sit up, and you never noticed. Do you think, Justin, that you could feel ill and I not know it?"

"No, I suppose not," said Justin. "But I'm afraid you'll have another headache to-morrow if you sit up any longer, Lois."

"No, I will not!" She tossed her head gayly, and also tossed away a bright tear that was ready to fall. Her husband hated to see her cry, it filled him with a cold and unreasoning wrath at which she blindly wondered but was forced to accept as a fact. She knew that she had broken up many happy hours by weeping inopportunately.

She tried to speak evenly as she said: "I didn't mean that to sound as if I were complaining. I think and think how I can make things—different."

She pushed her white, blue-veined feet, in their pink slippers, nearer to the blaze, and he put his hand over them protectingly. Although she had been married for nearly eight years, she had not lost a certain girlish trick of modesty, and blushed sweetly at his action and his gaze.

It was a remarkable thing that while marriage after any term of years seemed as though it could be only an antique and commonplace thing, it still held for them the essence of novelty; they were only beginning to act in the great drama, and not at all sure of their parts in it yet. To live one's own life is a matter of such poignant and absorbing interest that it insensibly creates an individual atmosphere which obscures the large known phenomena of nature.

Lois remembered once looking upon a man who had lost his wife after ten years of wedded happiness, and rather wondering at the pity bestowed upon him. Ten years! Why, it seemed like half a century—life must be nearly over, anyway. She was beginning to realize now, with a sort of wonder, that, as the years lengthened, one's inner limit of youth lengthened also; even after a decade they might still think of themselves as young married people with a future all to come.

The tender proprietorship of Justin's caress was more comforting to Lois than words. They both sat dreamily watching the blue pinnacle of flame as they rose from the red heart of the fire, her arm across his shoulders as he leaned backward, together, yet each with a mind preoccupied with divergent claims.

The fitful light revealed a tiny apartment, half sitting-room, half nursery, crowded with many things, the overflow of a small household. It was not in the least as Lois would have liked it to be, but she always felt that it was only a temporary arrangement. There was hardly space to walk between the wicker chairs, the sewing-table, and the covered box by the window that served both as a seat and as a receptacle for toys—a doll's cradle and a horse on wheels taking up two of the corners by the window. Across the back of one chair hung a pair of diminutive stockings, and a basket filled with work stood on the table. The utter domesticity of the room was hardly relieved by an unframed engraving of the Madonna della Sedia over the wooden mantelpiece, with a heterogeneous collection of china ornaments, nursery properties, and a silent white clock

below it. The other pictures were photographs, more or less the worse for wear, and two colored lithographs pinned to the wall; one of a horse carrying a boy on his back, and the other of a bright blue-and-yellow child feeding ducks. Lying on table and floor were picture-books and a fashion magazine. There was nothing to speak of the spirit but the beautiful flame, a mysterious power which the hand of man had wrested ignorantly from the elements, to burn and leap and soar upon his hearthstone.



They both sat dreamily watching the blue pinnacle of flame

Lois had married her husband because of the bright honor and force of character which attracted others, and because of his conquering love for her. She would have felt it impossible for any girl in her senses not to have loved Justin if he wanted her to, although he was the most unconscious of men as to his powers in that way. She had exulted in the thought that when other women were satisfied with mere half-men, her lover was a Saul among his brethren; and she was not deceived in her estimate of him—the honor, the sweetness, the force, the nobility of disposition which made it a pain for him to make note of the defects of those he liked, the love of her—all were there; but she was beginning gradually to find out, after all these years, that inside that shining outer circle of character was a whole world of thought and feeling and preference and habit

of which she knew nothing—only as time went on did she begin to perceive the extent of it.

Those disappointing moments when they were not in accord—whole days sometimes dropped out of the week—left a void which no caresses filled. It hurts a woman to be forgotten both before and after she is kissed. Lois had discovered with resentful surprise that her husband was one of those men to whom women, in spite of the companionship of wedlock, are a thing apart, to be mentally left and returned to. Those disappointing moments and days were not the intimation of a transitory feeling, but evidences of a permanent quality that grew instead of lessening. She could hardly believe this, although she felt it, and was continually seeking for disclaimers of what she knew. Barred indefinitely from some larger interest, her efforts to reach her husband on the known lines became more and more trivial, more and more futile. The first years had held a certain floridity of living, of affection, in which one was always striving in some way to keep up the first feelings; everything was more or less upsetting,—marriage, babies, sickness, housekeeping,—years when domestic situations changed their shape daily, an evening together depending on whether the baby slept or waked; an entertainment abroad depending not only on that, but on the event of the servants being in or out, or on the event of having any at all. There were summer afternoons when Lois had wept because her husband had gone to the tennis courts, without her, and days when she had gone with him, after elaborately arranging babies and household matters to that end; when she had kept him waiting while she dressed, and