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***AILSA
PAIGE***

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Ailsa Paige

A Novel

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PREFACE

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Among the fifty-eight regiments of Zouaves and the seven regiments of Lancers enlisted in the service of the United States between 1861 and 1865 it will be useless for the reader to look for any record of the 3d Zouaves or of the 8th Lancers. The red breeches and red fezzes of the Zouaves clothed many a dead man on Southern battlefields; the scarlet swallow-tailed pennon of the Lancers fluttered from many a lance-tip beyond the Potomac; the histories of these sixty-five regiments are known. But no history of the 3d Zouaves or of the 8th Lancers has ever been written save in this narrative; and historians and veterans would seek in vain for any records of these two regiments—regiments which might have been, but never were.

AILSA PAIGE

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CHAPTER I

The butler made an instinctive movement to detain him, but he flung him aside and entered the drawing-room, the servant recovering his equilibrium and following on a run. Light from great crystal chandeliers dazzled him for a moment; the butler again confronted him but hesitated under the wicked glare from his eyes. Then through the brilliant vista, the young fellow caught a glimpse of a dining-room, a table where silver and crystal glimmered, and a great gray man just lowering a glass of wine from his lips to gaze at him with quiet curiosity.

The next moment he traversed the carpeted interval between them and halted at the table's damask edge, gazing intently across at the solitary diner, who sat leaning back in an arm-chair, heavy right hand still resting on the stem of a claret glass, a cigar suspended between the fingers of his left hand.

"Are you Colonel Arran?"

"I am," replied the man at the table coolly. "Who the devil are you?"

"By God," replied the other with an insolent laugh, "that's what I came here to find out!"

The man at the table laid both hands on the edge of the cloth and partly rose from his chair, then fell back solidly, in silence, but his intent gaze never left the other's bloodless face.

"Send away your servants, Colonel Arran!" said the young man in a voice now labouring under restraint. "We'll settle this matter now."

The other made as though to speak twice; then, with an effort, he motioned to the butler.

What he meant by the gesture perhaps he himself scarcely realised at the moment.

The butler instantly signalled to Pim, the servant behind Colonel Arran's chair, and started forward with a furtive glance at his master; and the young man turned disdainfully to confront him.

"Will you retire peaceably, sir?"

"No, but you will retire permanently if you touch me. Be very careful."

Colonel Arran leaned forward, hands still gripping the table's edge:

"Larraway!"

"Sir?"

"You may go."

The small gray eyes in the pock-pitted face stole toward young

Berkley, then were cautiously lowered.

"Very well, sir," he said.

"Close the drawing-room doors. No—this way. Go out through the pantry. And take Pim with you."

"Very well, sir."

"And, Larraway!"

"Sir?"

"When I want you I'll ring. Until then I don't want anybody or anything. Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is all."

"Thank you, sir."

The great mahogany folding doors slid smoothly together, closing out the brilliant drawing-room; the door of the butler's pantry clicked.

Colonel Arran slowly wheeled in his place and surveyed his unbidden guest:

"Well, sir," he said, "continue."

"I haven't yet begun."

"You are mistaken, Berkley; you have made a very significant beginning. I was told that you are this kind of a young man."

"I *am* this kind of a young man. What else have you been told?"

Colonel Arran inspected him through partly closed and heavy eyes; "I am further informed," he said, "that at twenty-four you have already managed to attain bankruptcy."

"Perfectly correct. What other items have you collected concerning me?"

"You can retrace your own peregrinations if you care to. I believe they follow a vicious circle bisecting the semi-fashionable world, and the—other. Shall we say that the expression, unenviable notoriety, summarises the reputation you have acquired?"

"Exactly," he said; "both kinds of vice, Colonel Arran—respectable and disreputable."

"Oh! And am I correct in concluding that, at this hour, you stand there a financially ruined man—at twenty-four years of age——"

"I do stand here; but I'm going to sit down."

He did so, dropped both elbows on the cloth, and balancing his chin on the knuckles of his clasped hands,

examined the older man with insolent, unchanging gaze.

"Go on," he said coolly, "what else do you conclude me to be?"

"What else is there to say to you, Berkley? You have evidently seen my attorneys."

"I have; the fat shyster and the bow-legged one." He reached over, poured himself a glass of brandy from a decanter, then, with an unpleasant laugh, set it aside untasted.

"I beg your pardon. I've had a hard day of it. I'm not myself," he said with an insolent shrug of excuse. "At eleven o'clock this morning Illinois Central had fallen three more points, and I had no further interest in the market. Then one of your brokers—" He leaned farther forward on the table and stared brightly at the older man, showing an edge of even teeth, under the receding upper lip:

"How long have your people been watching me?"

"Long enough to give me what information I required."

"Then you really *have* had me watched?"

"I have chosen to keep in touch with your—career, Berkley."

Berkley's upper lip again twitched unpleasantly; but, when at length he spoke, he spoke more calmly than before and his mobile features were in pallid repose.

"One of your brokers—Cone—stopped me. I was too confused to understand what he wanted of me. I went with him to your attorneys—" Like lightning the snarl twitched his mouth again; he made as though to rise, and controlled himself in the act.

"Where are the originals of those letters?" he managed to say at last.

"In this house."

"Am I to have them?"

"I think so."

"So do I," said the young man with a ghastly smile. "I'm quite sure of it."

Colonel Arran regarded him in surprise.

"There is no occasion for violence in this house, Berkley."

"Where are the letters?"

"Have you any doubts concerning what my attorneys have told you?

The originals are at your immediate disposal if you wish."

Then Berkley struck the table fiercely, and stood up, as claret splashed and trembling crystal rang.

"That's all I want of *you*!" he said. "Do you understand what you've done? You've killed the last shred of self-respect in me! Do you think I'd take anything at *your* hands? I never cared for anybody in the world except my mother. If what your lawyers tell me is true—" His voice choked; he stood swaying a moment, face covered by his hands,

"Berkley!"

The young man's hands fell; he faced the other, who had risen to his heavy six-foot height, confronting him across the table.

"Berkley, whatever claim you have on me—and I'm ignoring the chance that you have none——"

"By God, I tell you I have none! I want none! What you have done to her you have done to me! What you and your conscience and your cruelty and your attorneys did to her

twenty-four years ago, you have done this day to me! As surely as you outlawed her, so have you outlawed me today. That is what I now am, an outlaw!"

"It was insulted civilisation that punished, not I, Berkley ——"

"It was you! You took your shrinking pound of flesh. I know your sort. Hell is full of them singing psalms!"

Colonel Arran sat silently stern a moment. Then the congested muscles, habituated to control, relaxed again. He said, under perfect self-command:

"You'd better know the truth. It is too late now to discuss whose fault it was that the trouble arose between your mother and me. We lived together only a few weeks. She was in love with her cousin; she didn't realise it until she'd married me. I have nothing more to say on that score; she tried to be faithful, I believe she was; but he was a scoundrel. And she ended by thinking me one.

"Even before I married her I was made painfully aware that our dispositions and temperaments were not entirely compatible. I think," he added grimly, "that in the letters read to you this afternoon she used the expression, 'ice and fire,' in referring to herself and me."

Berkley only looked at him.

"There is now nothing to be gained in reviewing that unhappy affair," continued the other. "Your mother's family are headlong, impulsive, fiery, unstable, emotional. There was a last shameful and degrading scene. I offered her a separation; but she was unwisely persuaded to sue for divorce."

Colonel Arran bent his head and touched his long gray moustache with bony fingers.

"The proceeding was farcical; the decree a fraud. I warned her; but she snapped her fingers at me and married her cousin the next day. . . . And then I did my duty by civilisation."

Still Berkley never stirred. The older man looked down at the wine-soiled cloth, traced the outline of the crimson stain with unsteady finger. Then, lifting his head:

"I had that infamous decree set aside," he said grimly. "It was a matter of duty and of conscience, and I did it without remorse. . . . They were on what they supposed to be a wedding trip. But I had warned her." He shrugged his massive shoulders. "If they were not over-particular they were probably happy. Then he broke his neck hunting—before you were born."

"Was he my father?"

"I am taking the chance that he was not."

"You had reason to believe——"

"I thought so. But—your mother remained silent. And her answer to my letters was to have you christened under the name you bear to-day, Philip Ormond Berkley. And then, to force matters, I made her status clear to her. Maybe—I don't know—but my punishment of her may have driven her to a hatred of me—a desperation that accepted everything—even *you*!"

Berkley lifted a countenance from which every vestige of colour had fled.

"Why did you tell me this?"

"Because I believe that there is every chance—that you may be legally entitled to my name. Since I have known who you are, I—I *have* had you watched. I have hesitated—a long while. My brokers have watched you for a year, now; my attorneys for much longer. To-day you stand in need of me, if ever you have stood in need of anybody. I take the chance that you have that claim on me; I offer to receive you, provide for you. That is all, Berkley. Now you know everything."

"Who else—knows?"

"Knows what?"

"Knows what you did to my mother?"

"Some people among the families immediately concerned," replied Colonel Arran coolly.

"Who are they?"

"Your mother's relatives, the Paiges, the Berkleys—my family, the Arrans, the Lents——"

"What Lents?" interrupted the young man looking up sharply.

"They live in Brooklyn. There's a brother and a sister, orphans; and an uncle. Captain Josiah Lent."

"Oh. . . . Who else?"

"A Mrs. Craig who lives in Brooklyn. She was Celia Paige, your mother's maid of honour."

"Who else?"

"A sister-in-law of Mrs. Craig, formerly my ward. She is now a widow, a Mrs. Paige, living on London Terrace. She, however, has no knowledge of the matter in question; nor

have the Lents, nor any one in the Craig family except Mrs. Craig."

"Who else?"

"Nobody."

"I see. . . . And, as I understand it, you are now stepping forward to offer me—on the chance of—of——"

"I offer you a place in this house as my son. I offer to deal with you as a father—accepting that belief and every responsibility, and every duty, and every sacrifice that such a belief entails,"

For a long time the young fellow stood there without stirring, pallid, his dark, expressionless eyes, fixed on space. And after a while he spoke.

"Colonel Arran, I had rather than all the happiness on earth, that you had left me the memory of my mother. You have chosen not to do so. And now, do you think I am likely to exchange what she and I really are, for anything more respectable that you believe you can offer?"

"How, under God, you could have punished her as you did—how you could have reconciled your conscience to the invocation of a brutal law which rehabilitated you at the expense of the woman who had been your wife—how you could have done this in the name of duty and of conscience, I can not comprehend.

"I do not believe that one drop of your blood runs in my veins."

He bent forward, laying his hands flat on the cloth, then gripping it fiercely in clenched fists:

"All I want of you is what was my mother's. I bear the name she gave me; it pleased her to bestow it; it is good

enough for me to wear. If it be hers only, or if it was also my father's, I do not know; but that name, legitimate or otherwise, is not for exchange! I will keep it, Colonel Arran. I am what I am."

He hesitated, rigid, clenching and unclenching his hands—then drew a deep, agonised breath:

"I suppose you have meant to be just to me, I wish you might have dealt more mercifully with my mother. As for what you have done to me—well—if she was illegally my mother, I had rather be her illegitimate son than the son of any woman who ever lived within the law. Now may I have her letters?"

"Is that your decision, Berkley?"

"It is. I want only her letters from you—and any little keepsakes—relics—if there be any——"

"I offer to recognise you as my son."

"I decline—believing that you mean to be just—and perhaps kind—God knows what you do mean by disinterring the dead for a son to look back upon——"

"Could I have offered you what I offer, otherwise?"

"Man! Man! *You* have nothing to offer *me*! Your silence was the only kindness you could have done me! You have killed something in me. I don't know what, yet—but I think it was the best part of me."

"Berkley, do you suppose that I have entered upon this matter lightly?"

Berkley laughed, showing his teeth. "No. It was your damned conscience; and I suppose you couldn't strangle it. I am sorry you couldn't. Sometimes a strangled conscience makes men kinder."

Colonel Arran rang. A dark flush had overspread his forehead; he turned to the butler.

"Bring me the despatch box which stands on: my study table."

Berkley, hands behind his back, was pacing the dining-room carpet.

"Would you accept a glass of wine?" asked Colonel Arran in a low voice.

Berkley wheeled on him with a terrible smile.

"Shall a man drink wine with the slayer of souls?" Then, pallid face horribly distorted, he stretched out a shaking arm. "Not that you ever could succeed in getting near enough to murder *hers*! But you've killed mine. I know now what died in me. It was that! . . . And I know now, as I stand here excommunicated by you from all who have been born within the law, that there is not left alive in me one ideal, one noble impulse, one spiritual conviction. I am what your righteousness has made me—a man without hope; a man with nothing alive in him except the physical brute. . . . Better not arouse that."

"You do not know what you are saying, Berkley"—Colonel Arran choked; turned gray; then a spasm twitched his features and he grasped the arms of his chair, staring at Berkley with burning eyes.

Neither spoke again until Larraway entered, carrying an inlaid box.

"Thank you, Larraway. You need not wait."

"Thank *you*, sir."

When they were again alone Colonel Arran unlocked and opened the box, and, behind the raised lid, remained

invisibly busy for some little time, apparently sorting and re-sorting the hidden contents. He was so very long about it that Berkley stirred at last in his chair; and at the same moment the older man seemed to arrive at an abrupt decision, for he closed the lid and laid two packages on the cloth between them.

"Are these mine?" asked Berkley.

"They are mine," corrected the other quietly, "but I choose to yield them to you."

"Thank you," said Berkley. There was a hint of ferocity in his voice. He took the letters, turned around to look for his hat, found it, and straightened up with a long, deep intake of breath.

"I think there is nothing more to be said between us, Colonel Arran?"

"That lies with you."

Berkley passed a steady hand across his eyes. "Then, sir, there remain the ceremonies of my leave taking—" he stepped closer, level-eyed—"and my very bitter hatred."

There was a pause. Colonel Arran waited a moment, then struck the bell:

"Larraway, Mr. Berkley has decided to go."

"Yes, sir."

"You will accompany Mr. Berkley to the door."

"Yes, sir."

"And hand to Mr. Berkley the outer key of this house."

"Yes, sir."

"And in case Mr. Berkley ever again desires to enter this house, he is to be admitted, and his orders are to be obeyed

by every servant in it."

"Yes, sir."

Colonel Arran rose trembling. He and Berkley looked at each other; then both bowed; and the butler ushered out the younger man.

"Pardon—the latch-key, sir."

Berkley took it, examined it, handed it back.

"Return it to Colonel Arran with Mr. Berkley's undying—compliments," he said, and went blindly out into the April night, but his senses were swimming as though he were drunk.

Behind him the door of the house of Arran clanged.

Larraway stood stealthily peering through the side-lights; then tiptoed toward the hallway and entered the dining-room with velvet tread.

"Port or brandy, sir?" he whispered at Colonel Arran's elbow.

The Colonel shook his head.

"Nothing more. Take that box to my study."

Later, seated at his study table before the open box, he heard Larraway knock; and he quietly laid away the miniature of Berkley's mother which had been lying in his steady palm for hours.

"Well?"

"Pardon. Mr. Berkley's key, with Mr. Berkley's compliments, sir."

And he laid it upon the table by the box.

"Thank you. That will be all."

"Thank *you*, sir. Good night, sir."

"Good night."

The Colonel picked up the evening paper and opened it mechanically:

"By telegraph!" he read, "War inevitable. Postscript! Fort Sumter! It is now certain that the Government has decided to reinforce Major Andersen's command at all hazards——"

The lines in the *Evening Post* blurred under his eyes; he passed one broad, bony hand across them, straightened his shoulders, and, setting the unlighted cigar firmly between his teeth, composed himself to read. But after a few minutes he had read enough. He dropped deeper into his arm-chair, groping for the miniature of Berkley's mother.

As for Berkley, he was at last alone with his letters and his keepsakes, in the lodgings which he inhabited—and now would inhabit no more. The letters lay still unopened before him on his writing table; he stood looking at the miniatures and photographs, all portraits of his mother, from girlhood onward.

One by one he took them up, examined them—touched them to his lips, laid each away. The letters he also laid away unopened; he could not bear to read them now.

The French clock in his bedroom struck eight. He closed and locked his desk, stood looking at it blankly for a moment; then he squared his shoulders. An envelope lay open on the desk beside him.

"Oh—yes," he said aloud, but scarcely heard his own voice.

The envelope enclosed an invitation from one, Camilla Lent, to a theatre party for that evening, and a dance

afterward.

He had a vague idea that he had accepted.

The play was "The Seven Sisters" at Laura, Keene's Theatre. The dance was somewhere—probably at Delmonico's. If he were going, it was time he was afoot.

His eyes wandered from one familiar object to another; he moved restlessly, and began to roam through the richly furnished rooms. But to Berkley nothing in the world seemed familiar any longer; and the strangeness of it, and the solitude were stupefying him.

When he became tired trying to think, he made the tour again in a stupid sort of way, then rang for his servant, Burgess, and started mechanically about his dressing.

Nothing any longer seemed real, not even pain.

He rang for Burgess again, but the fellow did not appear. So he dressed without aid. And at last he was ready; and went out, drunk with fatigue and the reaction from pain.

He did not afterward remember how he came to the theatre. Presently he found himself in a lower tier box, talking to a Mrs. Paige who, curiously, miraculously, resembled the girlish portraits of his mother—or he imagined so—until he noticed that her hair was yellow and her eyes blue. And he laughed crazily to himself, inwardly convulsed; and then his own voice sounded again, low, humorous, caressingly modulated; and he listened to it, amused that he was able to speak at all.

"And so you are the wonderful Ailsa Paige," he heard himself repeating. "Camilla wrote me that I must beware of my peace of mind the moment I first set eyes on you——"

"Camilla Lent is supremely silly, Mr. Berkley——"

"Camilla is a sibyl. This night my peace of mind departed for ever."

"May I offer you a little of mine?"

"I may ask more than that of you?"

"You mean a dance?"

"More than one."

"How many?"

"All of them. How many will you give me?"

"One. Please look at the stage. Isn't Laura Keene bewitching?"

"Your voice is."

"Such nonsense. Besides, I'd rather hear what Laura Keene is saying than listen to you."

"Do you mean it?"

"Incredible as it may sound, Mr. Berkley, I really do."

He dropped back in the box. Camilla laid her painted fan across his arm.

"Isn't Ailsa Paige the most enchanting creature you ever saw? I told you so! *Isn't* she?"

"Except one. I was looking at some pictures of her a half an hour ago."

"She must be very beautiful," sighed Camilla.

"She was."

"Oh. . . . Is she dead?"

"Murdered."

Camilla looked at the stage in horrified silence. Later she touched him again on the arm, timidly.

"Are you not well, Mr. Berkley?"

"Perfectly. Why?"

"You are so pale. Do look at Ailsa Paige. I am completely enamoured of her. Did you ever see such a lovely creature in all your life? And she is very young but very wise. She knows useful and charitable things—like nursing the sick, and dressing injuries, and her own hats. And she actually served a whole year in the horrible city hospital! Wasn't it brave of her!"

Berkley swayed forward to look at Ailsa Paige. He began to be tormented again by the feverish idea that she resembled the girl pictures of his mother. Nor could he rid himself of the fantastic impression. In the growing unreality of it all, in the distorted outlines of a world gone topsy-turvy, amid the deadly blurr of things material and mental, Ailsa Paige's face alone remained strangely clear. And, scarcely knowing what he was saying, he leaned forward to her shoulder again.

"There was only one other like you," he said. Mrs. Paige turned slowly and looked at him, but the quiet rebuke in her eyes remained unuttered.

"Be more genuine with me," she said gently. "I am worth it, Mr.

Berkley."

Then, suddenly there seemed to run a pale flash through his brain,

"Yes," he said in an altered voice, "you are worth it. . . . Don't drive me away from you just yet."

"Drive you away?" in soft concern. "I did not mean——"

"You will, some day. But don't do it to-night." Then the quick, feverish smile broke out.

"Do you need a servant? I'm out of a place. I can either cook, clean silver, open the door, wash sidewalks, or wait on the table; so you see I have every qualification."

Smilingly perplexed, she let her eyes rest on his pallid face for a moment, then turned toward the stage again.

The "Seven Sisters" pursued its spectacular course; lone Burke, Polly Marshall, and Mrs. Vining were in the cast; tableau succeeded tableau; "I wish I were in Dixie," was sung, and the popular burlesque ended in the celebrated scene, "The Birth of the Butterfly in the Bower of Ferns," with the entire company kissing their finger-tips to a vociferous and satiated audience.

Then it was supper at Delmonico's, and a dance—and at last the waltz promised him by Ailsa Paige.

Through the fixed unreality of things he saw her clearly, standing, awaiting him, saw her sensitive face as she quietly laid her hand on his—saw it suddenly alter as the light contact startled both.

Flushed, she looked up at him like a hurt child, conscious yet only of the surprise.

Dazed, he stared back. Neither spoke; his arm encircled her; both seemed aware of that; then only of the swaying rhythm of the dance, and of joined hands, and her waist imprisoned. Only the fragrance of her hair seemed real to him; and the long lashes resting on curved cheeks, and the youth of her yielding to his embrace.

Neither spoke when it had ended. She turned aside and stood motionless a moment, resting against the stair rail as though to steady herself. Her small head was lowered.

He managed to say: "You will give me the next?"

"No."

"Then the next——"

"No," she said, not moving.

A young fellow came up eagerly, cocksure of her, but she shook her head—and shook her head to all—and Berkley remained standing beside her. And at last her reluctant head turned slowly, and, slowly, her gaze searched his.

"Shall we rest?" he said.

"Yes. I am—tired."

Her dainty avalanche of skirts filled the stairs as she settled there in silence; he at her feet, turned sideways so that he could look up into the brooding, absent eyes.

And over them again—over the small space just then allotted them in the world—was settling once more the intangible, indefinable spell awakened by their first light contact. Through its silence hurried their pulses; through its significance her dazed young eyes looked out into a haze where nothing stirred except a phantom heart, beating, beating the reveille. And the spell lay heavy on them both.

"I shall bear your image always. You know it."

She seemed scarcely to have heard him.

"There is no reason in what I say. I know it. Yet—I am destined never to forget you."

She made no sign.

"Ailsa Paige," he said mechanically.

And after a long while, slowly, she looked down at him where he sat at her feet, his dark eyes fixed on space.

CHAPTER II

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All the morning she had been busy in the Craig's backyard garden, clipping, training, loosening the earth around lilac, honeysuckle, and Rose of Sharon. The little German florist on the corner had sent in two loads of richly fertilised soil and a barrel of forest mould. These she sweetened with lime, mixed in her small pan, and applied judiciously to the peach-tree by the grape-arbour, to the thickets of pearl-gray iris, to the beloved roses, prairie climber, Baltimore bell, and General Jacqueminot. A neighbour's cat, war-scarred and bold, traversing the fences in search of single combat, halted to watch her; an early bee, with no blossoms yet to rummage, passed and repassed, buzzing distractedly.

The Craig's next-door neighbour, Camilla Lent, came out on her back veranda and looked down with a sleepy nod of recognition and good-morning, stretching her pretty arms luxuriously in the sunshine.

"You look very sweet down there, Ailsa, in your pink gingham apron and garden gloves."

"And you look very sweet up there, Camilla, in your muslin frock and satin skin! And every time you yawn you resemble a plump, white magnolia bud opening just enough to show the pink inside!"

"It's mean to call me plump!" returned Camilla reproachfully. "Anyway, anybody would yawn with the Captain keeping the entire household awake all night. I vow, I haven't slept one wink since that wretched news from Charleston. He thinks he's a battery of horse artillery now; that's the very latest development; and I shed tears and the chandeliers shed prisms every time he manoeuvres."

"The dear old thing," said Mrs. Paige, smiling as she moved among the shrubs. For a full minute her sensitive lips remained tenderly curved as she stood considering the agricultural problems before her. Then she settled down again, naively—like a child on its haunches—and continued to mix nourishment for the roses.

Camilla, lounging sideways on her own veranda window sill, rested her head against the frame, alternately blinking down at the pretty widow through sleepy eyes, and patting her lips to control the persistent yawns that tormented her.

"I had a horrid dream, too," she said, "about the 'Seven Sisters.' I was *Pluto* to your *Diavoline*, and Philip Berkley was a phantom that grinned at everybody and rattled the bones; and I waked in a dreadful fright to hear uncle's spurred boots overhead, and that horrid noisy old sabre of his banging the best furniture.

"Then this morning just before sunrise he came into my bedroom, hair and moustache on end, and in full uniform, and attempted to read the Declaration of Independence to me—or maybe it was the Constitution—I don't remember—but I began to cry, and that always sends him off."

Ailsa's quick laugh and the tenderness of her expression were her only comments upon the doings of Josiah Lent,

lately captain, United States dragoons.

Camilla yawned again, rose, and, arranging her spreading white skirts, seated herself on her veranda steps in full sunshine.

"We did have a nice party, didn't we, Ailsa?" she said, leaning a little sideways so that she could see over the fence and down into the Craig's backyard garden.

"I had such a good time," responded Ailsa, looking up radiantly.

"So did I. Billy Cortlandt is the most divine dancer. Isn't Evelyn Estcourt pretty?"

"She is growing up to be very beautiful some day. Stephen paid her a great deal of attention. Did you notice it?"

"Really? I didn't notice it," replied Camilla without enthusiasm. "But," she added, "I *did* notice you and Phil Berkley on the stairs. It didn't take you long, did it?"

Ailsa's colour rose a trifle.

"We exchanged scarcely a dozen words," she observed sedately.

Camilla laughed.

"It didn't take you long," she repeated, "either of you. It was the swiftest case of fascination that I ever saw."

"You are absurd, Camilla."

"But *isn't* he perfectly fascinating? I think he is the most romantic-looking creature I ever saw. However," she added, folding her slender hands in resignation, "there is nothing else to him. He's accustomed to being adored; there's no heart left in him. I think it's dead."

Mrs. Paige stood looking up at her, trowel hanging loosely in her gloved hand.

"Did anything—kill it?" she asked carelessly.

"I don't think it ever lived very long. Anyway there is something missing in the man; something blank in him. A girl's time is wasted in wondering what is going on behind those adorable eyes of his. Because there is nothing going on—it's all on the surface—the charm, the man's engaging ways and manners—all surface. . . . I thought I'd better tell you, Ailsa."

"There was no necessity," said Ailsa calmly. "We scarcely exchanged a dozen words."

As she spoke she became aware of a shape behind the veranda windows, a man's upright figure passing and repassing. And now, at the open window, it suddenly emerged into full sunlight, a spare, sinewy, active gentleman of fifty, hair and moustache thickly white, a deep seam furrowing his forehead from the left ear to the roots of the hair above the right temple.

The most engaging of smiles parted the young widow's lips.

"Good morning, Captain Lent," she cried gaily. "You have neglected me dreadfully of late."

The Captain came to a rigid salute.

"April eleventh, eighteen-sixty-one!" he said with clean-cut precision. "Good morning, Mrs. Paige! How does your garden blow? Blow—blow ye wintry winds! Ahem! How have the roses wintered—the rose of yesterday?"

"Oh, I don't know, sir. I am afraid my sister's roses have not wintered very well. I'm really a little worried about

them."

"I am worried about nothing in Heaven, on Earth, or in Hell," said the Captain briskly. "God's will is doing night and day, Mrs. Paige. Has your brother-in-law gone to business?"

"Oh, yes. He and Stephen went at eight this morning."

"Is your sister-in-law well. God bless her!" shouted the Captain.

"Uncle, you *mustn't* shout," remonstrated Camilla gently.

"I'm only exercising my voice,"—and to Ailsa:

"I neglect nothing, mental, physical, spiritual, that may be of the slightest advantage to my country in the hour when every respiration, every pulse beat, every waking thought shall belong to the Government which I again shall have the honour of serving."

He bowed stiffly from the waist, to Ailsa, to his niece, turned right about, and marched off into the house, his white moustache bristling, his hair on end.

"Oh, dear," sighed Camilla patiently, "isn't it disheartening?"

"He is a dear," said Ailsa. "I adore him."

"Yes—if he'd only sleep at night. I am very selfish I suppose to complain; he is so happy and so interested these days—only—I am wondering—if there ever *should* be a war—would it break his poor old heart if he couldn't go? They'll never let him, you know."

Ailsa looked up, troubled:

"You mean—*because!*" she said in a low voice.

"Well I don't consider him anything more than delightfully eccentric."

"Neither do I. But all this is worrying me ill. His heart is so entirely wrapped up in it; he writes a letter to Washington every day, and nobody ever replies. Ailsa, it almost terrifies me to think what might happen—and he be left out!"

"Nothing will happen. The world is too civilised, dear."

"But the papers talk about nothing else! And uncle takes every paper in New York and Brooklyn, and he wants to have the editor of the *Herald* arrested, and he is very anxious to hang the entire staff of the *Daily News*. It's all well enough to stand there laughing, but I believe there'll be a war, and then my troubles will begin!"

Ailsa, down on her knees again, dabbled thoughtfully in the soil, exploring the masses of matted spider-wort for new shoots.

Camilla looked on, resignedly, her fingers playing with the loosened masses of her glossy black hair. Each was following in silence the idle drift of thought which led Camilla back to her birthday party.

"Twenty!" she said still more resignedly—"four years younger than you are, Ailsa Paige! Oh dear—and here I am, absolutely unmarried. That is not a very maidenly thought, I suppose, is it Ailsa?"

"You always were a romantic child," observed Ailsa, digging vigorously in the track of a vanishing May beetle. But when she disinterred him her heart failed her and she let him scramble away.

"There! He'll probably chew up everything," she said. "What a sentimental goose I am!"

"The first trace of real sentiment I ever saw you display," began

Camilla reflectively, "was the night of my party."

Ailsa dug with energy. "*That* is absurd! And not even funny."

"You *were* sentimental!"

"I—well there is no use in answering you," concluded Ailsa.

"No, there isn't. I've seen women look at men, and men look back again—the way *he* did!"

"Dear, please don't say such things!"

"I'm going to say 'em," insisted Camilla with malicious satisfaction. "You've jeered at me because I'm tender-hearted about men. Now my chance has come!"

Ailsa began patiently: "There were scarcely a dozen words spoken——"

Camilla, delighted, shook her dark curls.

"You've said that before," she laughed. "Oh, you pretty minx!—you and your dozen words!"

Ailsa Paige arose in wrath and stretched out a warning arm among her leafless roses; but Camilla placed both hands on the fence top and leaned swiftly down from the veranda steps,

"Forgive me, dear," she said penitently. "I was only trying to torment you. Kiss me and make up. I know you too well to believe that you could care for a man of that kind."

Ailsa's face was very serious, but she lifted herself on tiptoe and they exchanged an amicable salute across the fence.

After a moment she said: "What did you mean by 'a man of *that* kind'?"