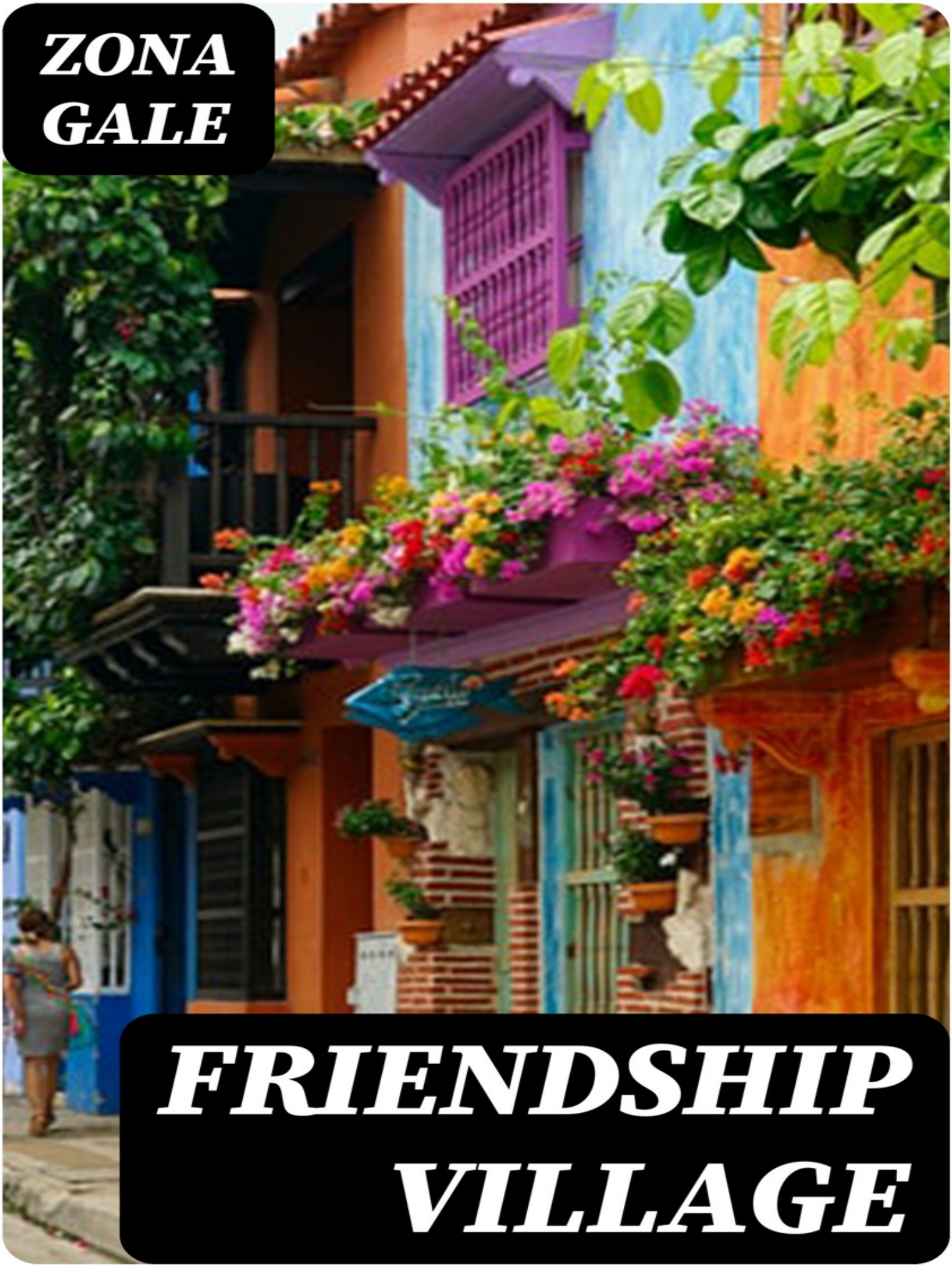
ZONA GALE



FRIENDSHIP VILLAGE

Zona Gale

Friendship Village

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THE SIDE DOOR

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It is as if Friendship Village were to say:—

"There is no help for it. A telephone line, antique oak chairs, kitchen cabinets, a new doctor, and the like are upon us. But we shall be mediæval directly—we and our improvements. Really, we are so now, if you know how to look."

And are we not so? We are one long street, rambling from sun to sun, inheriting traits of the parent country roads which we unite. And we are cross streets, members of the same family, properly imitative, proving our ancestorship in a primeval genius for trees, or bursting out in inexplicable weaknesses of Court-House, Engine-House, Town Hall, and Telephone Office. Ultimately our stock dwindles out in a slaughter-yard and a few detached houses of milkmen. The cemetery is delicately put behind us, under a hill. There is nothing mediæval in all this, one would say. But then see how we wear our rue:—

When one of us telephones, she will scrupulously ask for the number, not the name, for it says so at the top of every page. "Give me one-one," she will put it, with an impersonality as fine as if she were calling for four figures. And Central will answer:—

"Well, I just saw Mis' Holcomb go 'crost the street. I'll call you, if you want, when she comes back."

Or, "I don't think you better ring the Helmans' just now. They were awake 'most all night with one o' Mis' Helman's attacks."

Or, "Doctor June's invited to Mis' Sykes's for tea. Shall I give him to you there?"

The telephone is modern enough. But in our use of it is there not a flavour as of an Elder Time, to be caught by Them of Many Years from Now? And already we may catch this flavour, as our Britain great-great-lady grandmothers, and more, may have been conscious of the old fashion of sitting in bowers. If only they were conscious like that! To be sure of it would be to touch their hands in the margins of the ballad books.

Or we telephone to the Livery Barn and Boarding Stable for the little blacks, celebrated for their self-control in encounters with the Proudfits' motor-car. The stable-boy answers that the little blacks are at "the funeral." And after he has gone off to ask his employer what is in then, the employer, who in his unofficial moments is our neighbour, our church choir bass, our landlord even, comes and tells us that, after all, we may have the little blacks, and he himself brings them round at once,—the same little blacks that we meant all along. And when, quite naturally, we wonder at the boy's version, we learn: "Oh, why, the blacks was standin' just acrost the street, waitin' at the church door, hitched to the hearse. I took 'em out an' put in the bays. I says to myself: 'The corp won't care.'" Someway the Proudfits' car and the stable telephone must themselves have slipped from modernity to old fashion before that incident shall quite come into its own.

So it is with certain of our domestic ways. For example, Mis' Postmaster Sykes—in Friendship Village every woman assumes for given name the employment of her husband—has some fine modern china and much solid silver in extremely good taste, so much, indeed, that she is wont to confess to having cleaned forty, or sixty, or seventy-five pieces—"seventy-five pieces of solid silver have I cleaned this morning. You can say what you want to, nice things are a *rill* care." Yet—surely this is the proper conjunction—Mis' Sykes is currently reported to rise in the night preceding the days of her house cleaning, and to take her carpets out in the back yard, and there softly to sweep and sweep them so that, at their official cleaning next day, the neighbours may witness how little dirt is whipped out on the line. Ought she not to have old-fashioned silver and egg-shell china and drop-leaf mahogany to fit the practice? Instead of daisy and wild-rose patterns in "solid," and art curtains, and mission chairs, and a white-enamelled refrigerator, and a gas range.

We have the latest funeral equipment,—black broadcloth-covered supports, a coffin carriage for up-and-down the aisles, natural palms to order, and the pulleys to "let them down slow"; and yet our individual funeral capacity has been such that we can tell what every woman who has died in Friendship for years has "done without": Mis' Grocer Stew, her of all folks, had done without new-style flat-irons; Mis' Worth had used the bread pan to wash dishes in; Mis' Jeweller Sprague—the *first* Mis' Sprague—had had only six bread and butter knives, her that could get wholesale too.... And we have little maid-servants who answer our bells in caps and trays, so to say; but this savour of jestership is

authentic, for any one of them is likely to do as of late did Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss's maid,—answer, at dinner-with-guests, that there were no more mashed potatoes, "*or else*, there won't be any left to warm up for your breakfasts." ... And though we have our daily newspaper, receiving Associated Press service, yet, as Mis' Amanda Toplady observed, it is "only *very* lately that they have mentioned in the *Daily* the birth of a child, or anything that had anything of a *tang* to it."

We put new wine in old bottles, but also we use new bottles to hold our old wine. For, consider the name of our main street: is this Main or Clark or Cook or Grand Street, according to the register of the main streets of towns? Instead, for its half-mile of village life, the Plank Road, macadamized and arc-lighted, is called Daphne Street. Daphne Street! I love to wonder why. Did our dear Doctor June's father name it when he set the five hundred elms and oaks which glorify us? Or did Daphne herself take this way on the day of her flight, so that when they came to draught the town, they recognized that it *was* Daphne Street, and so were spared the trouble of naming it? Or did the Future anonymously toss us back the suggestion, thrifty of some day of her own when she might remember us and say, "*Daphne Street!*" Already some of us smile with a secret nod at something when we direct a stranger, "You will find the Telegraph and Cable Office two blocks down, on Daphne Street." "The Commercial Travellers' House, the Abigail Arnold Home Bakery, the Post-office and Armoury are in the same block on Daphne Street." Or, "The Electric Light Office is at the corner of Dunn and Daphne." It is not wonderful

that Daphne herself, foreseeing these things, did not stay, but lifted her laurels somewhat nearer Tempe,—although there are those of us who like to fancy that she is here all the time in our Daphne-street magic: the fire bell, the tulip beds, and the twilight bonfires. For how else, in all reason, has the name persisted?

Of late a new doctor has appeared—one may say, has abounded: a surgeon who, such is his zeal, will almost perform an operation over the telephone and, we have come somewhat cynically to believe, would prefer doing so to not operating at all. As Calliope Marsh puts it:—

"He is great on operations, that little doctor. Let him go into any house, an' some o' the family, seems though, has to be operated on, usually inside o' twelve hours. It'll get so that as soon as he strikes the front porch, they'll commence sterilizin' water. I donno but some'll go an' put on the tea-kettle if they even see him drive past."

Why within twelve hours, we wonder when we hear the edict? Why never fourteen hours, or six? How does it happen that no matter at what stage of the malady the new doctor is called, the patient always has to be operated on within twelve hours? Is it that everybody has a bunch and goes about not knowing it until he appears? Or is he a kind of basanite for bunches, and do they come out on us at the sight of him? There are those of us who almost hesitate to take his hand, fearing that he will fix us with his eye, point somewhere about, and tell us, "Within twelve hours, *if* you want your life your own." But in spite of his skill and his modernity, in our midst there persist those who, in a scientific night, would die rather than risk our advantages.

Thus the New shoulders the Old, and our transition is still swift enough to be a spectacle, as was its earlier phase which gave over our Middle West to cabins and plough horses, with a tendency away from wigwams and bob-whites. And in this local warfare between Old and New a chief figure is Calliope Marsh—who just said that about the new doctor. She is a little rosy wrinkled creature officially—though no other than officially—pertaining to sixty years; mender of lace, seller of extracts, and music teacher, but of the three she thinks of the last as her true vocation. ("I come honestly by that," she says. "You know my father before me was rill musical. I was babtized Calliope because a circus with one come through the town the day't I was born.") And with her, too, the grafting of to-morrow upon yesterday is unconscious; or only momentarily conscious, as when she phrased it:—

"Land, land, I like New as well as anybody. But I want it should be put in the Old kind o' gentle, like an *i*-dee in your mind, an' not sudden, like a bullet in your brain."

In her acceptance of innovations Calliope symbolizes the fine Friendship tendency to scientific procedure, to the penetration of the unknown through the known, the explication of mystery by natural law. And when to the bright-figured paper and pictures of her little sitting room she had added a print of the Mona Lisa, she observed:—

"She sort o' lifts me up, like somethin' I've thought of, myself. But I don't see any sense in raisin' a question about what her smile means. I told the agent so. 'Whenever I set for my photograph,' I says to him, 'I always have that same silly smile on my face.'"

With us all the Friendship idea prevails: we accept what Progress sends, but we regard it in our own fashion. Our improvements, like our entertainments, our funerals, our holidays, and our very loves, are but Friendship Village exponents of the modern spirit. Perhaps, in a tenderer significance than she meant, Calliope characterized us when she said:—

"This town is more like a back door than a front—or, givin' it full credit, *anyhow*, it's no more'n a side door, with no vines."

For indeed, we are a kind of middle door to experience, minus the fuss of official arriving and, too, without the old odours of the kitchen savoury beds; but having, instead, a serene side-door existence, partaking of both electric bells and of neighbours with shawls pinned over their heads.

Only at one point Calliope was wrong. There are vines, with tendrils and flowers and many birds.

II

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THE DÉBUT

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Mrs. Ricker, "washens, scrubben, work by the day or Our," as the sign of her own lettering announced, had come into a little fortune by the death of her first husband, Al Kitton, early divorced and late repentant. Just before my arrival in Friendship she had bought a respectable frame house in the heart of the village,—for a village will have a

heart instead of having a boulevard,—and with her daughter Emerel she had set up a modest establishment with Ingrain carpets and parlour pieces, and a bit of grass in front. Thus Emerel Kitton—we, in our simple, penultimate way, called it Kitten—became a kind of heiress. She had been christened Emma Ella, but her mother, of her love of order, had tidied the name to Emerel, and Friendship had adopted the form, perhaps as having about it something pleasing and jewel-like. Though Emerel was in the thirties at the time of her inheritance, she was still pretty, shy, conformable; and yet there was no disguising that she was nearly a spinster when, as soon as the white house was settled, Mrs. Ricker issued invitations to her daughter's coming-out party.

> You aRe Invite
> to A
> Comen Out Recep
> Next wenesday Night at eigt
> At Her Home
> Emma Ella Kitton
> Mrs. Ricker and Kitton
> Pa

the invitations said, and the "Pa" was divined to imply "Please answer."

"It's Kitton's money an' it's his daughter. I hed to hev him in it somehow," Mrs. Ricker explained her double signature. "You see," she added, "up till now I ain't never been situate' so's Emerel *could* come out. I've always wanted to give her things, too, but 't seems like when I've tried, everything's

shook its fist at me. It ain't too late. Emerel looks just like she did fifteen years ago, don't she?"

It was at once observed that if Emerel shared her mother's enthusiasm for the project, she did not betray it. But then no one knew much about Emerel save that she was engaged, and had been so for some years, to big Abe Daniel, the Methodist tenor, a circumstance wholly unconsidered in the scheme of her début.

Quite simply and with happy pride, Mrs. Ricker and Kitton issued her invitations to every one in the village who had ever employed her. And the village was divided against itself.

"How can we?" Mis' Postmaster Sykes demanded, "I ask you. There's things to omit an' there's things to observe. We should be The Laughing Stock."

"The Laughing Stock," variously echoed her followers.

On the other hand:—

"Land, o' course we'll all go," Mis' Amanda Toplady comfortably settled it, "an' take Emerel a deboo present, civilized. The dear child."

And to that many of us gladly assented, Timothy, big Amanda's little husband, going so far as to add:

"I do vum, the Sykeses feels the post-office like it was that much oats."

A day later Timothy's opinion seemed, he thought, to be verified. Mis' Postmaster Sykes issued "written invites to an evening party, hot supper and like that," as Friendship communicated it, to be given on the very night of Emerel's début.

Friendship was shaken. Never in the history of the village had two social affairs been set for the same hour. Indeed, more than one hostess had postponed an impending tea-party or thimble party or "afternoon coffee" or "five o'clock supper" on hearing that another was planned for the same day. And now, when there were those of us anxious to "do something nice" for hard-working little Mrs. Ricker, the Sykeses had deliberately sought the forbidden ground. And Society dare not deny Mis' Sykes, for besides "being who she was" ("She's the leader in Friendship if they *is* a leader," we said, emphatically implying that there was none), she kept two maids,—little young thing and a *rill* hired girl,—entertained "above the most," put out her sewing and wore, we kept in the back of our minds, a bar pin, solid, with "four solitaires" in it. And, "Oh, you know," Calliope Marsh admitted to me later, "Mis' Sykes is rilly a great society woman. They isn't anybody's funeral that she don't get to ride to the cemet'ry."

Mrs. Ricker and Kitton accepted the situation with fine philosophy.

"Of course," she said, "the whole town can dance to the Sykeses' fiddlin' if they want. But it's a pretty pass if they do let anybody step in before me that's washed for 'em an' cleaned their houses years on end."

My own course was pleasantly simple. Mrs. Ricker and Kitton had included me on her list, accredited, no doubt, because a few weeks earlier she had helped me to settle my belongings in Oldmoxon house, and since then had twice swept for me, and was to come in a day or two to do so again. As I had instantly accepted her invitation, I had no

choice when Mis' Sykes's "written invite" came, even though when it arrived Mis' Sykes herself was calling on me.

"Well said," she observed, when she saw a neighbour's little girl, her temporary servitor, coming up my walk with the invitations in a paper bag to be kept clean, "I meant to get my call made on you before your invite got here. I hope you'll overlook taking us both together. I've meant to call on you before, but I declare it looked like a mountain to me to get started out. Don't you find your calls a rill chore?"

But Mis' Sykes's visit was, she confessed, "Errand as well as Call."

"The Friendship Married Ladies' Cemetery Improvement Sodality," she told me, as she rose to go, "is to our wits' end to get up a new entertainment. We want to give something, and we want it should be rill new and spicey, but of course it has to be pretty quiet, owing to the Cause—the Dead, so. It bars us from home-talent evenings or festivals or like that. And the minute I saw the inside o' your house it come to me: of course you know your house is differ'nt from Friendship. If I'd been shot out of a gun into it, I wouldn't 'a' sensed I was in Friendship at all. You've got nice things, all carved an' hard to dust. The Oldmoxons use' to do a lot o' entertainin', an' everybody remembers it, an' the house has been shut quite some time. Well, now, you've been ask' to join the Sodality. An' if you was to announce an Evening Benefit for it, here in your home, the whole town'd come out to it hot-foot. We're owin' Zittelhof on Eph Cadoza's coffin yet, an' I shouldn't wonder an' that one evening would pay him all off *and*, same time, get you rill well acquainted. Don't you think it's a nice *i*-dea?"

As I had come to Friendship chiefly to get away from everywhere, I thought that I had never heard such a bad plan. But inasmuch as I was obliged to refuse outright one invitation of my visitor's, about the other I weakly temporized and promised to let her know. And she went away, deploring my hasty acceptance of Mrs. Ricker and Kitton, although, "How could you tell?" she strove to excuse me. "A person coming to a strange town so, *of course* they accept all their invitations good faith. And then her signing her name that way might mislead you. It gives a rill sensation of a hyphen. But still, the spelling—after all you'd ought—"

She looked at me with tardy suspicion.

"Some geniuses can't spell very well, you know," I defended my discrimination.

"That's so," she admitted brightly; "I see you're literary."

The next morning the other principal, Mrs. Ricker and Kitton, arrived to keep her engagement with me. She was a little woman, suggesting wire, which gave and sprang when she moved, and paper, which crackled when she laughed. Her speech was all independence, confidence, self-possession; but in her silences I have seldom seen so wistful a face as hers.

In response to my question:—

"Oh," Mrs. Ricker and Kitton said brightly, "everything's goin' fine. I s'pose the town's still decidin' between us, but up to now I ain't had but one regrets that can't come—that's Mis' Stew. She wrote it was on account o' domestic affliction, an' I hadn't heard what, so I went right down. 'Seems nobody had died—she ain't much of any family, anyway. But

she'd wrote her letter out of a letter book, an' the only one she could find regrettin' an invite give domestic affliction for the reason. She said she didn't know a letter like that hed to be true, an' I don't know as it does, either."

She stood silent for a moment, searching my face.

"Look-a-here," she said; "they's somethin' I thought of. Mebbe you've heard of it bein' done in the City somewheres. Do you s'pose folks'd be willin' to send Emerel's an' my funeral flowers to the comin' out party *instead*?"

"Funeral...?" I doubted.

"Grave flowers," she explained. "You know, they're a perfect waste so far's the General Dead is concerned. An' land knows, the fam'ly don't sense 'em much more. Anyway, Emerel an' I ain't got any fam'ly. An' if folks'd be willin' to send us what flowers they would send us if we died *now*, then they'd do us some good. We'll never want 'em more'n we do now, dead or alive. 'Least, I won't. Emerel, she don't seem to care. But do you think it'd be all right if I was to mention it out around?"

My desire to have this happen I did my best not to confuse with a disinterested opinion. But indeed Mrs. Ricker and Kitton was seldom in need of an opinion, as was proved that night by the appearance of this notice in the Friendship *Daily*:—

> All that would give flowers when dead please send same anyhow and not expected to send same if we do die afterwards.
>
> Mrs. Ricker and Kitton.

All of Friendship society which intended to accept Mis' Sykes's invitation hastened with relieved eagerness to follow with flowers its regrets to the "comen out recep." For every one was genuinely attached to the little laundress and interested in her welfare—up to the point of sacrificing social interests in the eyes of the Sykeses. Friendship gardens were rich with Autumn, cosmos and salvia and opulent asters, and on the morning of the two parties this store of sweetness was rifled for the débutante. By noon Mrs. Ricker and Kitton was saying in awe, "Nobody in Friendship ever had this many flowers, dead, or alive, or rich." And although some of us grieved that Mis' Postmaster Sykes had shown what she named her good-will by ordering from the town a pillow of white carnations (but with no "wording"), Mrs. Ricker and Kitton received even this suggestive token with simple-hearted delight.

"It'll look lovely on the lamp shelf," she observed. "I've often planned how nice my parlour'd trim up for a funeral."

In the preparation for the two events, the one unconcerned and unconsulted appeared to be the débutante herself. We never said "Emerel's party"; we all said "Mis' Ricker's party." We knew that Mrs. Ricker and Kitton was putting painstaking care on Emerel's coming-out dress, which was to be a surprise, but otherwise Emerel was seldom even mentioned in connection with her début. And whenever we saw her, it was as Friendship had seen her for two years,—walking quietly with Abe Daniel, her betrothed.

"It's doin' things kind o' backwards," Calliope Marsh said, "engaged first an' comin' out in society afterwards. But I donno as it's any more backwards than ridin' to the

cemet'ry feet first. What's what all depends on what you agree on for What. If it ain't your soul you mean about," she added cryptically.

The Topladys and others of us who united to uphold Emerel, and especially to uphold Emerel's mother, could not but realize that the majority of Friendship society had regretted to decline the début party, and had been pleased to accept the hospitality of the Postmaster Sykeses. I dare say that this may have been partly why, in the usual self-indulgence of challenge, I put on my prettiest frock for the party and prepared to set out somewhat early, hoping for the amusement of sharing in the finishing touches. But as I was leaving my house Calliope Marsh arrived, buttoned tightly in her best gray henrietta, her cheeks hot with some intense excitement.

"Well," she said without preface, "they've done it. Emerel Kitton's married. She's just married Abe at the parsonage to get out o' bein' debooed. They've gone to take the train now."

No one could fail to see what this would mean to Mrs. Ricker and Kitton, and, rather than the newly married Emerel, it was she who absorbed our speculation.

"Mis' Ricker just slimpsed," Calliope told me. "I says to her: 'Look here, Mis' Ricker, don't you go givin' in. Your kitchen's a sight with the good things o' your hand—think o' that,' I told her; 'think how you mortgaged your very funeral for to-night, an' brace yourself up,' An' she says, awful pitiful: 'I *can't*, Calliope,' she says. ''T seems like this slips the pins right out. They ain't nothin' to deboo with now, anyway,' she told me. 'How can I?'"

"Oh, poor Mrs. Ricker!" I exclaimed.

Calliope looked at me intently.

"Well," she said, "that's what I run in about. You're a stranger just fresh come here. You ain't met folks much yet. An' Mis' Sykes, she's just crazy to get a-hold o' you an' your house for the Sodality. An' the only thing I could think of for Mis' Ricker—well, would you stand up with Mis' Ricker to-night an' shake all their hands? An' sort o' leave her deboo for *you*, you might say?"

I think that I loved Calliope for this even before she understood my assent. But she added something which puzzled me.

"If I was you," she observed, "I'd do somethin' else to-night, too. You could do it—or I could do it for you. You don't expect to let Mis' Sykes hev the Sodality here, do you?"

"I might have had it here," I said impulsively, "if she had not done this to poor little Mrs. Ricker."

"Would—would you give me the lief to say that?" Calliope asked demurely.

I had no objection in the world to any one knowing my opinion of Mis' Postmaster Sykes's proceeding,—"one of her preposterousnesses," Calliope called it,—and I said so, and set off for Mrs. Ricker's, while Calliope herself flew somewhere else on some last mission. And, "Mis' Sykes'd ought to be showed," she called to me over-shoulder. "That woman's got a sinful pride. She'd wear fur in August to prove she could afford to hev moths!"

The Ricker parlour was a garden which sloped gently, as a garden should, for the house was old and the parlour floor sagged toward the entrance so that the front of the organ

was propped on wooden blocks. The room was bedizened with flowers, in dishes, tins, and gallon jars, so that it seemed some way an alien thing, like a prune horse. On the lamp shelf was the huge white carnation pillow, across which the hostess had inscribed "welcom," in stems.

Within ten minutes of the appointed hour all those who had been pleased to accept were in the rooms, and Mrs. Ricker and Kitton and I, standing among the funeral flowers, received the guests while Calliope, hovering at the door, gave the key with: "Ain't you heard? Emerel's a bride instead of a debbytant. Ain't it a rill joke? Married to-night an' we're here to celebrate. Throw off your things." Then she hopelessly involved them in a presentation to me, and between us we contrived to elide Mrs. Ricker and Kitton from all save her perfunctory office, until her voice and lips ceased their trembling. Poor little hostess, in her starched lawn which had seemed to her adequate for her unpretentious rôle of mother! All her humour and independence and self-possession had left her, and in their stead, on what was to have been her great night, had settled only the immemorial wistfulness.

Although I did not then foresee it, the guests that evening were destined to point me to many meanings, like sketches in the note-book of a patient Pen. I am fond of remembering them as I saw them first: the Topladys, that great Mis' Amanda, ponderous, majestic, and suggesting black grosgrain, her beaming way of whole-hearted approval not quite masking the critical, house-wife glances which she continually cast; and little Timothy, her husband, who, in company, went quite out of his head and could think

of nothing to say save "Blisterin' Benson, what I think is this: ain't everything movin' off nice?" Dear Doctor June, pastor emeritus of Friendship, since he was so identified with all the village interests that not many could tell from what church he had retired. (At each of the three Friendship churches he rented a pew, and contributed impartially to their beneficences; and, "seems to me the Lord would of," he sometimes apologized for this.) Photographer Jimmy Sturgis, who stood about with one eye shut, and who drove the 'bus, took charge of the mail-bags, conducted a photograph gallery, and painted portraits. ("The Dead From Photos a specialty," was tacked on the risers of the stairs leading to his studio.) And Mis' Photographer Sturgis, who was an invalid and "very, very seldom got out." (Not, I was to learn, an invalid because of ill health, but by nature. She was an invalid as other people are blond or brunette, and no more to be said about it.) Miss Liddy Ember, the village seamstress, and her beautiful sister Ellen, who was "not quite right," and whom Miss Liddy took about and treated like a child until the times when Ellen "come herself again," and then she quite overshadowed in personality little busy Miss Liddy. Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, and Eppleby Holcomb, and the "Other" Holcombs; Mis' Doctor Helman, the Gekerjecks, who "kept the drug store," and scented the world with musk and essences. ("Musk on one handkerchief and some kind o' flower scent on your other one," Mis' Gekerjeck was wont to say, "then you can suit everybody, say who who will.")—These and the others Mrs. Ricker and Kitton and I received, standing before the white carnation pillow. And I, who had come to Friendship to get away from

everywhere, found myself the one to whom they did honour, as they were to have honoured Emerel.

When the hour for supper came, Mrs. Ricker and Kitton excused herself because she must "see to gettin' it on to the plates," and Mis' Toplady, Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss, Calliope, and I "handed." We had all lent silver and dishes—indeed, save at Mis' Sykes's (and of course at the Proudfits' of Proudfit estate), there is rarely a Friendship party at which the pantries of the guests are not represented, an arrangement seeming almost to hold in anticipation certain social and political ideals. (If the telephone yields us an invitation from those whom we know best, we always answer: "Thank you. I will. What do you want me to send over?" Is there such a matter-of-course federation on any boulevard?) And after the guests had been served and the talk had been resumed, we four who had "handed" sat down, with Mrs. Ricker and Kitton, at meat, at a corner of the kitchen table.

"Everything tastes like so much chips to me when I hev company, anyhow," the hostess said sadly, "but to-night it's got the regular salt-pork taste. When I'm nervous or got delegates or comin' down with anything, I always taste salt pork."

"Well, everything's all of a whirl to me," Calliope confessed, "an' I should think your brains, Mis' Ricker, 'd be fair rarin' 'round in your head."

"Who didn't eat what?" Mrs. Ricker and Kitton asked listlessly. "I meant to keep track when the plates come out, but I didn't. Did they all take a-hold rill good?"

"They wa'n't any mincin' 't *I* see," Mis' Holcomb-that-was-Mame-Bliss assured her. "Everything you had was lovely, an' everybody made 'way with all they got."

We might have kept indefinitely on at these fascinating comparisons, but some unaccountable stir and bustle and rise of talk in the other rooms persuaded our attention. ("Can they be goin' *home*?" cried that great Mis' Amanda Toplady. "If they are, I'll go bail Timothy Toplady started it." And, "I bet they've broke the finger bowl," Mrs. Ricker and Kitton prophesied darkly.) And then we all went in to see what had happened, but it was what none of us could possibly have forecast: Crowding in the parlour, overflowing into the sitting room, still entering from the porch, were Postmaster and Mis' Postmaster Sykes and *all* their guests.

It was quite as if Wishes had gathered head and spirited them there. I remember the white little face of Mrs. Ricker and Kitton, luminously gratified to the point of triumph; and Mis' Sykes's brisk and cordial "No reason why we shouldn't go to two receptions in an evening, like they do in the City, Mis' Ricker, is they?" And the aplomb of the hostess's self-respecting, corrective "*An'* Kitton. 'Count of Al bein' so thoughtful in death." And then to my amazement Mis' Postmaster Sykes turned to me and held out both hands.

"I *am* so *glad*," she said, almost in the rhythm of certain exhausts, "that you've decided to hev Sodality at your house. You must just let me take a-hold of it for you and *run* it. And I'm going to propose your name the very next meeting we hev, can't I?"

I walked home with Calliope when we had left Mrs. Ricker and Kitton, tired but triumphant. ("Land," the hostess said, "now it's turned out so nice, I donno but I'm rill pleased Emerel's married. I'd hate to think o' borrowin' all them things over again for a weddin'.") And in the dark street Calliope said to me:—

"You see what I done, I guess. I told you Mis' Sykes was reg'lar up-in-arms about usin' your house—though I think the rill reason is she wants to get upstairs in it. You know how some are. So I marched myself up there before the party, an' I told her you wasn't goin' to hev Sodality sole because you thought she'd been so mean to Mis' Ricker. An' I give her to understand sharp off 't she'd better do what she did do if she wanted you in the Sodality at all. 'An',' s'I, 'I donno what she'll think o' you anyway, not knowin' enough to go to two companies in one evenin', like the City, even if one is your own.' She see reason. You know, Mis' Sykes an' I are kind o' connections, but you can make even your relations see sense if you go at 'em right. I donno," Calliope ended doubtfully, "but I done wrong. An' yet I feel good friends with my backbone too, like I'd done right!"

And it was so that having come to Friendship Village to get away from everywhere, I yet found myself abruptly launched in its society, committed to its Sodality, and, best of all, friends with Calliope Marsh.

III

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NOBODY SICK, NOBODY POOR

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Two days before Thanksgiving the air was already filled with white turkey feathers, and I stood at a window and watched until the loneliness of my still house seemed like something pointing a mocking finger at me. When I could bear it no longer I went out in the snow, and through the soft drifts I fought my way up the Plank Road toward the village.

I had almost passed the little bundled figure before I recognized Calliope. She was walking in the middle of the road, as in Friendship we all walk in winter; and neither of us had umbrellas. I think that I distrust people who put up umbrellas on a country road in a fall of friendly flakes.

Instead of inquiring perfunctorily how I did, she greeted me with a fragment of what she had been thinking—which is always as if one were to open a door of his mind to you instead of signing you greeting from a closed window.

"I just been tellin' myself," she looked up to say without preface, "that if I could see one more good old-fashion' Thanksgivin', life'd sort o' smooth out. An' land knows, it needs some smoothin' out for me."

With this I remember that it was as if my own loneliness spoke for me. At my reply Calliope looked at me quickly—as if I, too, had opened a door.

"Sometimes Thanksgivin' *is* some like seein' the sun shine when you're feelin' rill rainy yourself," she said thoughtfully.

She held out her blue-mittened hand and let the flakes fall on it in stars and coronets.