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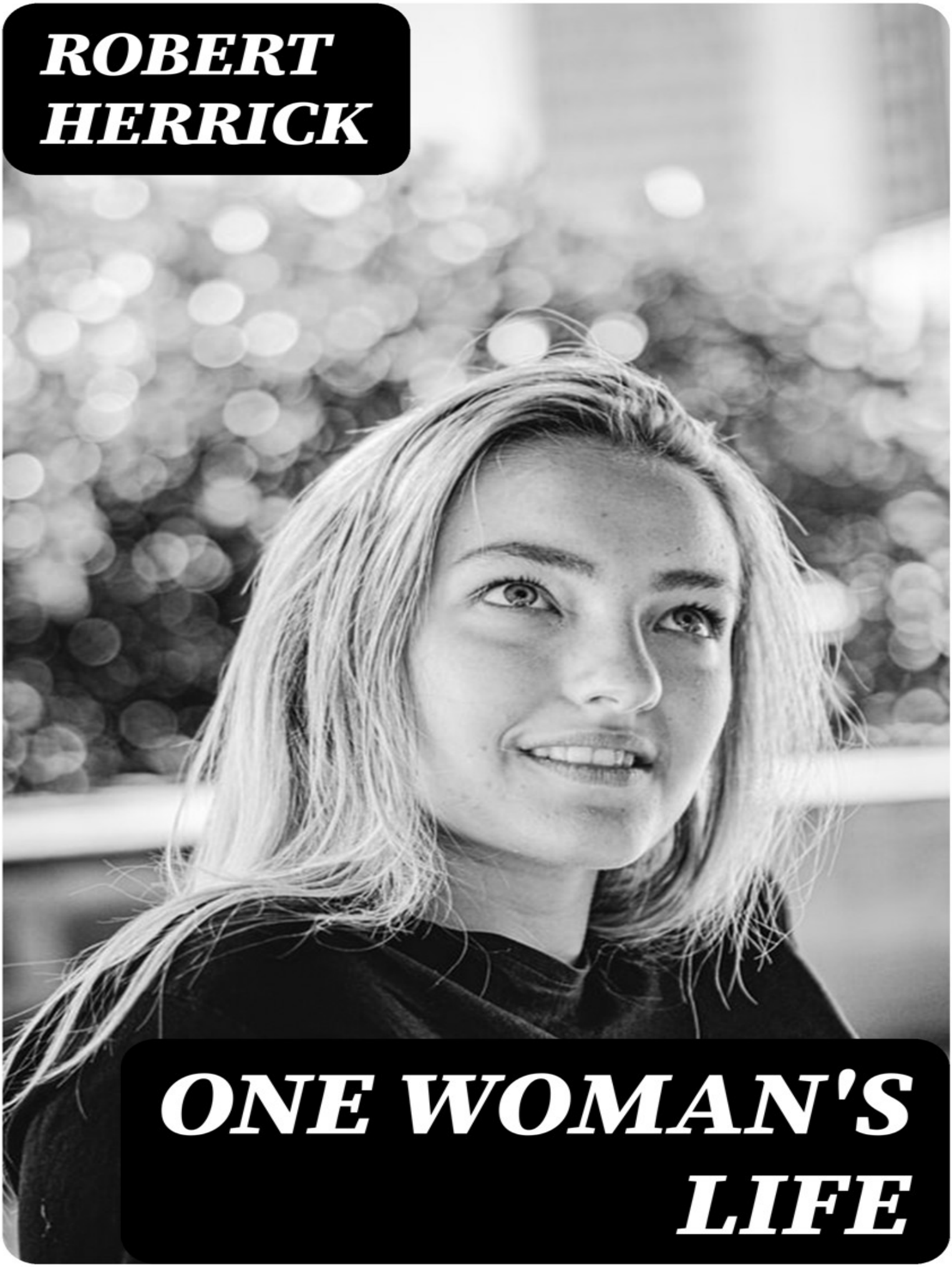

ONE WOMAN'S LIFE

Robert Herrick

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THE NEW HOME

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"Is *that* the house!" Milly Ridge exclaimed disapprovingly.

Her father, a little man, with one knee bent against the unyielding, newly varnished front door, glanced up apprehensively at the figures painted on the glass transom above. In that block of little houses, all exactly alike, he might easily have made a mistake. Reassured he murmured over his shoulder,—"Yes—212—that's right!" and he turned the key again.

Milly frowning petulantly continued her examination of the dirty yellow brick face of her new home. She could not yet acquiesce sufficiently in the fact to mount the long flight of steps that led from the walk to the front door. She looked on up the street, which ran straight as a bowling-alley between two rows of shabby brick houses,—all low, small, mean, unmistakably cheap,—thrown together for little people to live in. West Laurence Avenue was drab and commonplace,—the heart, the crown, the apex of the commonplace. And the girl knew it.... The April breeze, fluttering carelessly through the tubelike street, caught her

large hat and tipped it awry. Milly clutched her hat savagely, and something like tears started to her eyes.

"What did you expect, my dear?" Grandmother Ridge demanded with a subtle undercut of reproof. The little old lady, all in black, with a neat bonnet edged with white, stood on the steps midway between her son and her granddaughter, and smiled icily at the girl. Milly recognized that smile. It was more deadly to her than a curse—symbol of mocking age. She tossed her head, the sole retort that youth was permitted to give age.

Indeed, she could not have described her disappointment intelligibly. All she knew was that ever since their hasty breakfast in the dirty railroad station beside the great lake her spirits had begun to go down, and had kept on dropping as the family progressed slowly in the stuffy street-car, mile after mile, through this vast prairie wilderness of brick buildings. She knew instinctively that they were getting farther and farther from the region where "nice people" lived. She had never before been in this great city, yet something told her that they were journeying block by block towards the outskirts,—the *hinterland* of the sprawling city. (Only Milly didn't know the word *hinterland*.) She had gradually ceased to reply to her father's cheerful comments on the features of the West Side landscape. And now she was very near tears.

She was sixteen—it was the spring of '86. Ever since her mother's death, two years before, the family had done "light housekeeping" in three rooms in St. Louis. This 212 West Laurence Avenue, Chicago, was to be her first home—this slab of a dirty yellow wall!

"There!" her father muttered with satisfaction, as, after a last twist of key and thump of knee, he effected an entrance. Grandma Ridge moved up the flight of steps, the girl following reluctantly.

"See, mother," little Horatio Ridge said, jingling his keys, "it's fresh and clean!"

The new varnish smelt poignantly. The fresh paint clung insidiously to the feet.

"And it's light too, mother, isn't it?" He turned quickly from the cavernous gloom of the rear rooms and pointed to a side window in the hall where one-sixteenth of the arc of the firmament was visible between the brick walls of the adjoining houses.

"The dining-room's downstairs—that makes it roomier," he continued, throwing open at random a door. "There's more room than you'd think from the outside."

Milly and her grandmother peered downwards into the black hole from which came a mouldy odor.

"Oh, father, why did you come 'way out here!" Milly wailed.

"Why not?" Horatio retorted defensively. "You didn't expect a house on the lake front, did you?"

Just what she had expected from this new turn in the family destiny was not clear to herself. But ever since it had been decided that they were to have a house of their own in Chicago—her father having at last secured a position that promised some permanence—the girl's buoyant imagination had begun to soar, and out of all the fragments of her experience derived by her transient residence in Indianapolis, Kansas City, and Omaha—not to mention St.

Louis—she had created a wonderful composite—the ideal American home, architecturally ambitious, suburban in tone. In some of the cities where she had lived the Ridges had tarried as long as three years, and each time, since she was a very little girl in short dresses and had left Indianapolis crying over the doll in her arms, she had believed they were permanently settled: this was to be their home for always.

Her mother had had the same forlorn, homesick hope, but each time it was doomed to disappointment. Always they had had to move on,—to make a new circle of temporary acquaintances, to learn the ropes of new streets and shops and schools all over again. Always it was "business" that did the mischief,—the failure of "business" here or the hope of better "business" somewhere else that had routed them out of their temporary shelter. Horatio Ridge was "travelling" for one firm or another in drugs and chemicals: he was of an optimistic and sanguine temperament. Milly's mother, less hopeful by nature, had gradually succumbed under the perpetual tearing up of her thin roots, and finally faded away altogether in the light housekeeping phase of their existence in St. Louis.

Milly was sanguine like her father, and she had the other advantage of youth over her mother. So she had hoped again—overwhelmingly—of Chicago. But as she gazed at the row of pallid houses and counted three "To rent" signs in the cobwebby front windows opposite, she knew in her heart that this was not the end—not this, for her! It was another shift, another compromise to be endured, another disappointment to be overcome.

"Well, daughter, what d'ye think of your new home?" Little Horatio's blustering tone betrayed his timidity before the passionate criticism of youth. Milly turned on him with flashing blue eyes.

"I think, my dear," her grandmother announced primly, "that instead of finding fault with your father's selection of a home, you had better look at it first."

Grandma Ridge was a tiny lady, quite frail, with neat bands of iron-gray hair curling over well-shaped ears. Her voice was soft and low,—the kind of voice which her generation described as "ladylike." But Milly knew what lay beneath its gentle surface. Milly did not love her grandmother. Milly's mother had not loved the little old lady. It was extremely doubtful if any one had ever loved her. Mrs. Ridge embodied unpleasant duties; she was a vessel of unwelcome reproof that could be counted upon to spill over at raw moments, like this one.

"You'll like it first rate, Milly," her father continued robustly, "once you get settled in it. It's a great bargain, the real estate man said so, almost new and freshly painted and papered. It's close to the cars and Hoppers'"—Hoppers' was the Chicago firm that had offered Horatio his latest opportunity. "And I don't care about travelling all over Illinois to get to my work...."

Curiosity compelled Milly to follow the others up the narrow stairs that reached from the hall to the floor above. Milly was a tall, well-developed girl for sixteen, already quite as large as her father and enough of a woman physically to bully the tiny grandmother when she wished to. Her face was now prettily suffused with color due to her resentment,

and her blue eyes moist with unshed tears. She glanced into the small front chamber which had been decorated with a pink paper and robin's-egg blue paint.

"Pretty, ain't it?" Horatio observed, seeking his crumb of appreciation.

"It's a very nice home, Horatio—I'm sure you displayed excellent taste in your choice," his mother replied.

"Pretty? ... It's just awful!" Milly burst forth, unable to control herself longer. She felt that she should surely die if she were condemned to sleep in that ugly chamber even for a few months. Yet the house was on the whole a better one than any that the peripatetic Ridges had thus far achieved. It was fully as good as most of those that her acquaintances lived in. But it cruelly shamed Milly's expectations.

"It's perfectly horrid,—a nasty, cheap, ugly little box, and 'way out here on the West Side." Somehow Milly had already divined the coming degradation of the West Side. "I don't see how you can tell father such stories, grandma.... He ought to have waited for us before he took a house."

With that she turned her back on the whole affair and whisked down the narrow stairs, leaving her elders to swallow their emotions while inspecting the tin bath-tub in the closet bath-room.

"Milly has her mother's temper," Mrs. Ridge observed sourly.

"She'll come 'round all right," Horatio replied hopefully.

Milly squirmed, but on the whole she "took her medicine" as well as most human beings....

Meantime she stood before the dusty window in the front room eyeing the dirty street, dabbing the tears from her

eyes with her handkerchief, welling with resentment at her fate.

Years later she remembered the fierce emotions of that dreary April day when she had first beheld the little block house on West Laurence Avenue, recalling vividly her rage of rebellion at her father and her fate, the hot disgust in her soul that she should be forced to endure such mean surroundings. "And," she would say then to the friend to whom she happened to be giving a vivacious account of the incident, "it was just as mean and ugly and depressing as I thought it.... I can see the place now—the horror of that basement dining-room and the smells! My dear, it was just common West Side, you know."

But how did Milly Ridge at sixteen perceive all this? What gave her the sense of social distinctions,—of place and condition,—at her age, with her limited, even if much-travelled experience of American cities? To read this mystery will be to understand Milly Ridge—and something of America as well.

II

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A VICTORY FOR MILLY

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The lease for the house had been signed, however, and for a five years' term. The glib agent had taken advantage

of Horatio's new fervor for being settled, as well as his ignorance of the city. The lease was a fact that even Milly's impetuous will could not surmount—for the present.

Somehow during the next weeks the Ridge furniture was assembled from the various places where it had been cached since the last impermanent experiment in housekeeping. It was a fantastic assortment, as Milly realized afresh when it was unpacked. As a basis there were a few pieces of old southern mahogany, much battered, but with a fine air about them still. These were the contributions of Milly's mother, who had been of a Kentucky family. To these had been added here and there pieces of many different styles and shades of modern inelegance. One layer of the conglomerate was specially distasteful to Milly. That was the black-walnut "parlor set," covered with a faded green velvet, the contribution of Grandma Ridge from her Pennsylvania home. It still seemed to the little old lady of the first water as it had been when it adorned Judge Ridge's brick house in Euston, Pa. Milly naturally had other views of this treasure. Somewhere she had learned that the living room of a modern household was no longer called the "parlor," by those who knew, but the "drawing-room," and with the same unerring instinct she had discovered the ignominy of this early Victorian heritage. She did not loathe the shiny "quartered oak" dining-room pieces—her father's venture in an opulent moment—nor the dingy pine bedroom sets, nor even the worn "ingrain" carpets, as she did these precious relics of her grandmother's home.

Over them she fought her first successful battle with the older generation for her woman's rights—and won. She

directed the colored men who were hired to unpack the household goods to put the green velvet horrors in the obscure rear parlor. In the front room she had placed the battered mahogany, and had just rejected the figured parlor carpet when her grandmother came upon her unawares. The old lady had slipped in noiselessly through the area door.

"My dear!" she remarked softly, a deceitful smile on her thin lips. "Why, my dear!" Milly hated this tender appellation, scenting the hypocrisy in it. "Haven't you made a mistake? I *think* this is the parlor."

"Of course it is the parlor," Milly admitted briskly, wheeling to meet the cold gray eyes that were fixed on her.

"Then why, may I ask, is the parlor furni—"

"Because I am doing this to suit myself," the girl promptly explained. "In *this* house, I mean to have things suit *me*, grandma," she added firmly. It was just as well to settle the matter at once.

"But, my dear," the old lady stammered, helpless before the audacity of the revolt. "I'm sure nobody wants to cross you—but—but—where's the carpet?"

"I'm not going to have that ugly green rag staring at me any longer!"

"My dear—"

"Don't 'my dear' me any more, grandma, please!"

Mrs. Ridge gasped, closed her thin lips tightly, then emitted,—

"Mildred, I'm afraid you are not quite yourself to-day," and she retreated to the rear room, where in the gloom were piled her rejected idols.

After an interval she returned to the fight, gliding noiselessly forth from the gloom. She was a very small and a very frail little body, and as Milly put it she was "always sneaking about the house like a ghost."

"I see that the kitchen things have not been touched, and the dining-room furniture—"

"And they won't be—until I have this room to suit me.... Sam, please move that desk a little nearer the window.... There!"

It was characteristic of Milly to begin with the show part of the premises first and then work backwards to the fundamentals, pushing confusion slowly before her. The old lady watched the colored man move the rickety mahogany back and forth under Milly's orders for a few more minutes, then her thin lips tightened ominously.

"I think your father may have something to say about this, Mildred!"

"He'll be all right if you don't stir him up," the girl replied with assurance. She walked across the room to her grandmother. "See here, grandma, I'm 'most seventeen now and big for my age—"

"Please-say 'large,' Mildred."

"Large then—'most a woman. And this is my father's home—and *mine*—until he gets married again, which of course he won't do as long as I am here to look after him.... And, grandma, I mean to be the head of this house."

The old lady drooped.

"Very well, my dear, I see only too plainly the results of your poor mother's—"

"Grandma!" the girl flashed warningly.

"If I'm not wanted here—"

"You're not—now! The best thing for you to do is to go straight back to the boarding-house and read your *Christian Vindicator* until I'm ready for you to move in."

"At the rate you are going it will be some days before your father can have the use of his home."

"A week at least I should say."

"And he must pay board another week for all of us!"

"I suppose so—we must live somewhere, mustn't we?" Milly remarked sweetly.

So with a final shrug of her tiny shoulders the little old lady let herself out of the front door, stealthily betook herself down the long flight of steps and, without a backward glance, headed for the boarding-house. Milly watched her out of sight from the front window.

"Thank heaven, she's really gone!" she muttered. "Always snooping about like a cat,—prying and fussing. She's such a nuisance, poor grandma."

It was neither said nor felt ill-naturedly. Milly was generous with all the world, liked everybody, including her grandmother, who was a perpetual thorn,—liked her least of anybody in the world because of her stealthy ways and her petty bullying, also because of the close watch she kept over the family purse when Milly wished to thrust her prodigal hand therein. She made the excuse to herself when she was harsh with the old lady,—"And she was so mean to poor mama,—" that gentle, soft, weak southern mother, whom Milly had abused while living and now adored—as is the habit of imperfect mortals....

So with a lighter heart, having routed the old lady, at least for this afternoon, Milly continued to set up the broken and shabby household goods to suit herself. She coaxed the colored boys into considerable activity with her persuasive ways, having an inherited capacity for getting work out of lazy and emotional help, who respond to the personal touch. By dusk, when her father came, she had the two front rooms arranged to her liking. Sam was hanging a bulky steel engraving—"Windsor Castle with a View of Eton"—raising and lowering it patiently at Milly's orders. It was the most ambitious work of art that the family possessed, yet she felt it was not really suited, and accepted it provisionally, consigning it mentally to the large scrap-heap of Ridge belongings which she had already begun in the back yard.

"Well, daughter," Mr. Ridge called out cheerily from the open door, "how you're getting on?"

"Oh, papa!" (Somewhere in the course of her wanderings Milly had learned not to say "paw.")

She flew to the little man and hugged him enthusiastically.

"I'm so dead tired—I've worked every minute, haven't I, Sam?"

"She sure has," the boy chuckled admiringly, "kep us all agoin' too!"

"How do you like it, papa?"

Milly led the little man into the front room and waited breathlessly for his approbation. It was her first attempt in the delicate art of household arrangement.

"It's fine—it's all right!" Horatio commented amiably, twisting an unlighted cigar between his teeth and surveying

the room dubiously. His tone implied bewilderment. He was a creature of habits, even if they were peripatetic habits: he missed the parlor furniture and the green rug. They meant home to him. Looking into the rear cavern where Milly had thrust all the furniture she had not the courage to scrap, he observed slyly,—"What'll your grandmother say?"

"She's said it," Milly laughed.

Horatio chuckled. This was woman's business, and wise male that he was he maintained an amused neutrality.

"Ain't you most unpacked, Milly? I'm getting dead tired of boarding."

"Oh, I've just begun, really! You don't know what time it takes to settle a house properly."

"Didn't think we had so much stuff."

"We haven't *anything* fit to use—that's the trouble. We must get some new things right away. I want a rug for this room first."

"Isn't there a carpet?"

"A carpet! Papa, they don't use carpets any more. A nice, soft rug, with a border 'round it...."

Horatio retreated towards the door. But before they had reached the boarding-house, the first advance towards Milly's Ideal of the New Home had been plotted. The rug was settled. Milly was to meet her father in the city at noon on the morrow and select one. Arm in arm, father and daughter came up the steps,—charming picture of family intimacy.

"So nice to see father and daughter such friends!" one of the boarding-house ladies observed to Grandma Ridge.

"Oh, yes," the old lady admitted with a chilly smile. She knew what these demonstrations cost in cash from her son's

leaky pockets. If she had lived later, doubtless she would have called Milly a cunning grafter.

Milly smiled upon the interested stranger, good humoredly, as she always smiled. She was feeling very tired after her day's exertions, but happily content with her first efforts to realize her ambition,—to have "some place for herself." What she meant by having a place for herself in the world she did not yet understand of course. Nor what she could do with it, having achieved it. It was an instinct, blind in the manner of instincts, of her dependent womanhood. She was quite sure that something must happen,—a something that would give her a horizon more spacious than that of the West Side.

Meantime she ate the unappetizing food put before her with good grace, and smiled and chatted with all the dreary spinsters of the boarding-house table.

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MILLY GOES TO CHURCH

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The ugly little house was at last got to rights, at least as much so as Milly's limited means permitted. Horatio's resources were squeezed to the last dollar, and the piano came in on credit. Then the family moved in, and soon the girl's restless gaze turned outwards.

She must have people for her little world,—people to visit with, to talk to. From her doll years Milly had loved people indiscriminately. She must have them about her, to play with, to interest, to arouse interest in herself. Wherever she derived this social passion—obviously not from Grandma Ridge—it had been and would always be the dominant note of her life. Later, in her more sophisticated and more introspective phase, she would proclaim it as a creed: "People are the most interesting thing in life—just humans!" And she would count her gregariousness as a virtue. But as yet it was unconscious, an animal instinct for the herd. And she was lonely the first days at West Laurence Avenue.

Everywhere the family had put foot to earth in its wanderings, Milly had acquired friends easily,—at school, in church, among the neighbors,—what chance afforded from the mass. She wept even on her departure from St. Louis, which she had hated because of the light housekeeping, at the thought of losing familiar faces. A number of her casual friends came to the station to see her off, as they always did. She kissed them all, and swore to each that she would write, which she promptly forgot to do. But she loved them all, just the same. And now that the Ridge destiny seemed to be settled with fair prospects of permanency in this new, untried prairie city,—a huddle of a million or more souls,—she cast her eager eyes about for the conquest that must be made....

The social hegira from the West Side of the city had already begun: the more prosperous with social aspirations were dropping away, moving to the north or the south, along the Lake. Some of the older families still lingered,

rooted in associations, hesitant before new fashions, and these, Milly at once divined, lived in the old-fashioned brick and stone houses along the Boulevard that crossed West Laurence Avenue just below the Ridge home. These seats of the mighty on Western Boulevard might not be grand, but they alone of all the neighborhood had something of the aristocratic air.

This spacious boulevard was the place she chose for her daily stroll with her grandmother, taking the old lady, who had betrayed an interest in a cemetery, up and down Western Boulevard, past the large houses where the long front windows were draped with spotless lace curtains. She learned somehow that the old-fashioned brick house, with broad eaves and wooden pillars, belonged to the Claxtons. The grounds about the house ran even to the back yards of the West Laurence Avenue block,—indeed had originally included all that land,—for the Claxtons were an old family as age went in Chicago, and General Claxton was a prominent man in the state. She also knew that the more modern stone house on the farther corner was occupied by the Walter Kemps; that Mrs. Kemp had been a Claxton; and that Mr. Kemp was a rising young banker in the city. How Milly had found out all this in the few days she had lived in the neighborhood would be hard to explain: such information she acquired unconsciously, as one does the character of the weather....

On the next corner north of the Claxton place was a large church, with a tall spire, and an adjoining parish house. They were built of the same cream-colored stone, which had grown sallow under the smoke, with chocolate-brown

trimmings, like a deep edging to a mourning handkerchief. Its appearance pleased Milly. She felt sure that the best people of the neighborhood worshipped here, and so to this dignified edifice she led her father and grandmother the first Sunday after they were installed in their new home.

It proved to be the Second Presbyterian Church. The Ridges were orthodox, *i.e.* Congregational: the judge had been deacon in Euston, Pa., and Mrs. Ridge talked of "sending for her papers" and finding the nearest congregation of her old faith. But Milly promptly announced that "everybody went to the Presbyterian church here." She was satisfied with the air and the appearance of the congregation that first Sunday and made her father promise to take seats for the family. The old lady, content to have the wayward Horatio committed to any sort of church-going, made slight objection. It mattered little to Horatio himself. In religion he was catholic: he was ready to stand up in any evangelical church, dressed in his best, and boom forth the hymns in his bass voice. The choice of church was a matter to be left to the women, like the color of the wallpaper, or the quality of crockery,—affairs of delicate discrimination. Moreover, he was often out of the city over Sunday on his business trips and did not have to go to church.

It was impossible that Milly, dressed very becomingly in her new gray suit, should escape notice after the first Sunday. Her lovely bronze hair escaped from her round hat engagingly. Her soft blue eyes looked up at the minister appealingly. She had the attractive air of youth and health and good looks. The second Sunday the minister's wife, prompted by her husband, spoke to Mrs. Ridge and called

soon after. She liked Milly—minister's wives usually did—and she approved of the grandmother, who had an aristocratic air, in her decent black, her thin, gray face. "They seem really nice people," Mrs. Borland reported to her husband, "but a very ordinary home. He travels for the Hoppers'. Her mother was a southerner." (Milly had got that in somehow, —"My mother's home was Kentucky, you know.")... So, thanks to the church, here was Milly at last launched on the West Side and in a fair way of knowing people.

She began going to vespers—it was a new custom then, during Lent—and she was faithful at the Wednesday evening prayer meetings. The Borlands had a daughter, of about Milly's age,—a thin, anæmic girl who took to Milly's warmth and eagerness at once. As Milly succinctly summed up the minister's family,—"They're from Worcester, Mass." To come from New England seemed to Milly to give the proper stamp of respectability, while Virginia gave aristocracy.

Mrs. Borland introduced Milly to Mrs. Walter Kemp after the service one Sunday. Milly knew, as we have seen, that Mrs. Kemp had been a Claxton, and that the general still lived in the ample mansion which he had built in the early fifties when he had transferred his fortunes from Virginia to the prairie city. They were altogether the most considerable people Milly had ever encountered. And so when Eleanor Kemp called at the little West Laurence Avenue house, Milly was breathless. Not that Milly was a snob. She was as kind to the colored choreman as to the minister's wife, smiling and good-humored with every one. But she had a keen sense of differences. Unerringly she reached out her hands to the "best" as she understood the best,—the men and

women who were "nice," who were pleasant to know. And Mrs. Kemp, then a young married woman of twenty-seven or eight, seemed to the enthusiastic girl quite adorable. She was tall and slender, with fine oval features and clear brown skin and dark hair. Her manner was rather distant at first and awed Milly.

"Oh, you're so beautiful,—you don't mind my saying it!" she exclaimed the first time they were alone in the Kemp house.

"You funny child!" the older woman laughed, quite won. And that was the phrase she used invariably of Milly Ridge, —"That funny child!" varied occasionally by "That astonishing child!" even when the child had become a woman of thirty. There would always be something of the breathless, impulsive child in Milly Ridge.

After that first visit Milly went home to arrange a tea-table like Eleanor Kemp's. She found among the discarded remnants of the family furniture a small round table without a leg. She had it repaired and set up her tea-table near the black marble fireplace. The next time the banker's wife came to call she was able to offer her a cup of tea, with sliced lemon, quite as a matter of course, after the manner that Mrs. Kemp had handed it to her the week before. Milly was not crudely imitative: she was selectively imitative, and for the present she had chosen Mrs. Kemp for her model.

For the most part they met at the Kemp house. The young married woman liked her new rôle of guide and experienced friend to Milly; she also liked the admiration that Milly sincerely, copiously poured forth on all occasions. When Milly praised the ugly house and its furniture, she

might smile in a superior way, for she was "travelled," had visited "the chief capitals of Europe,"—as well as Washington and New York,—and knew perfectly well that the solid decoration of her library and drawing-room was far from good style. The Kemps had already secured their lot on the south side of the city near the Lake. The plans for their new house were being drawn by a well-known eastern architect, and they were merely waiting before building until Mr. Kemp should find himself sufficiently prosperous to maintain the sort of house that the architect had designed for a rising young western banker.

"Oh, dear," Milly sighed, "you will be moving soon—and there'll be nobody left around here for me to know."

Eleanor Kemp smiled.

"You know what I mean!... People like you and your mother."

"You may not live here always," her friend prophesied.

"I hope not. But papa seems perfectly content—he's taken a five years' lease of that horrid house. I just knew it wasn't the right place as soon as I saw it!"

The older woman laughed at Milly's despair.

"There's time yet for something to happen."

Milly blushed happily. There was only one sort of something to happen for her,—the right sort of marriage. Milly, as Mrs. Kemp confided to her husband, was a girl with a "future," and that future could be only a matrimonial one. Her new friend good naturedly did what she could for Milly by putting her in the way of meeting people. At her own house and her mother's, across the street, Milly saw a number of people who came into her life helpfully later on.

General Claxton was still at that time a considerable political figure in the middle west, had been congressman and was spoken of for Senator. Jolly, plump Mrs. Claxton maintained a large, informal hospitality of the Virginia sort, and to the big brick house came all kinds of people,—southerners with quaint accents and formal manners, young Englishmen on their way to the wild northwest, down-state politicians, as well as the merchant aristocracy of the city. Thus Milly as a mere girl had her first opportunity of peeping at the larger world in the homely, high-studded rooms and on the generous porches of the Claxton house, and enjoyed it immensely.

The church had thus far done a good deal for Milly.

For some time it remained the staple of her social existence,—that sallow, cream-colored pile, in which the congregation had already so shrunken by removals that the worshippers rattled around in the big building like dried peas in a pod. Milly became a member of the pastor's Bible class and an ardent worker in the Young Women's Guild. She was looked upon favorably as a right-minded and religious young woman. She had joined the church some years before, shortly after the death of her mother. Her first religious fervor lasted rather more than a year and was dying out when the family moved from St. Louis. Its revival at the Second Presbyterian was of a purely institutional character. Although even Grandma Ridge called her a "good girl," Milly was too healthy a young person to be really absorbed by questions of salvation. Her religion was a social habit, like the habit of wearing fresh underclothes and her best dress on the seventh day, having a late breakfast and

responding to the din of the church bells with other ceremonially dressed folk. She believed what she heard in church as she believed everything that was spoken with authority. It would have seemed to her very dreadful to question the great dogmas of Heaven, Hell, the Atonement, the Resurrection, etc. But they meant absolutely nothing to her: they did not come into practical relation with her life as did the ugly little box of her home and the people she knew, and she had no taste for abstractions.

Milly was "good." She tried to have a helpful influence upon her companions, especially upon young men who seemed to need an influence more than others: she wanted to induce them not to swear, to smoke, to drink—or be "bad,"—a vague state of unrealized vice. She encouraged them to go to church by letting them escort her. It was the proper way of displaying right intentions to lead good lives. When one young man who had been a member of the Bible class was found to have taken money from Mr. Kemp's bank, where he was employed, and indulged in riotous living with it, Milly felt depressed for several days,—accused herself of not having done her utmost to bring this lost soul to the Saviour.

Yet Milly was no prig,—at least not much of a one. For almost all her waking hours her mind was occupied with totally mundane affairs, and she was never much concerned about her own salvation. It seemed so far off—in the hazy distances of stupid middle age or beyond. So, like thousands upon thousands of other young women of her day, she appeared at the Second Presbyterian every Sunday

morning, looking her freshest and her best, and with engaging zest, if with a somewhat wandering mind, sang,—

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord!"

It was a wholly meaningless social function, this, and useful to the girl. Later charity might take its place. Horatio Ridge, who had never qualified as a church member while his wife lived, knowing his own unregenerate habits and having a healthy-minded male's aversion to hypocrisy, now went to church with his daughter quite regularly. He felt that it was a good thing,—the right thing for the girl, in some way insuring her woman's safety in this wicked world, if not her salvation in the next.

They made a pretty picture together, father and daughter,—the girl with the wide blue eyes and open mouth, standing shoulder to shoulder with the little man, each with one gloved hand grasping an edge of the hymn-book and singing, Milly in a high soprano,—

"Nearer, my God, to Thee!"

and Horatio, rumbling behind a little uncertainly,—

"Nearer to Thee—to THEE!"

IV

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MILLY COMPLETES HER EDUCATION

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