BOOK II

CHAPTER I

The first evening after the marriage night Saxon met Billy at the door as he came up the front steps. After their embrace, and as they crossed the parlor hand in hand toward the kitchen, he filled his lungs through his nostrils with audible satisfaction.

"My, but this house smells good, Saxon! It ain't the coffee--I can smell that, too. It's the whole house. It smells... well, it just smells good to me, that's all."

He washed and dried himself at the sink, while she heated the frying pan on the front hole of the stove with the lid off. As he wiped his hands he watched her keenly, and cried out with approbation as she dropped the steak in the fryin pan.

"Where'd you learn to cook steak on a dry, hot pan? It's the only way, but darn few women seem to know about it."

As she took the cover off a second frying pan and stirred the savory contents with a kitchen knife, he came behind her, passed his arms under her arm-pits with down-drooping hands upon her breasts, and bent his

head over her shoulder till cheek touched cheek.

"Um-um-um-m-m! Fried potatoes with onions like mother used to make. Me for them. Don't they smell good, though! Um-um-m-m-m!"

The pressure of his hands relaxed, and his cheek slid caressingly past hers as he started to release her. Then his hands closed down again. She felt his lips on her hair and heard his advertised inhalation of delight.

"Um-um-m-m-m! Don't you smell good--yourself, though! I never understood what they meant when they said a girl was sweet. I know, now. And you're the sweetest I ever knew."

His joy was boundless. When he returned from combing his hair in the bedroom and sat down at the small table opposite her, he paused with knife and fork in hand.

"Say, bein' married is a whole lot more than it's cracked up to be by most married folks. Honest to God, Saxon, we can show 'em a few. We can give 'em cards and spades an' little casino an' win out on big casino and the aces. I've got but one kick comin'."

The instant apprehension in her eyes provoked a chuckle from him.

"An' that is that we didn't get married quick enough. Just think. I've

lost a whole week of this."

Her eyes shone with gratitude and happiness, and in her heart she solemnly pledged herself that never in all their married life would it be otherwise.

Supper finished, she cleared the table and began washing the dishes at the sink. When he evinced the intention of wiping them, she caught him by the lapels of the coat and backed him into a chair.

"You'll sit right there, if you know what's good for you. Now be good and mind what I say. Also, you will smoke a cigarette.--No; you're not going to watch me. There's the morning paper beside you. And if you don't hurry to read it, I'll be through these dishes before you've started."

As he smoked and read, she continually glanced across at him from her work. One thing more, she thought--slippers; and then the picture of comfort and content would be complete.

Several minutes later Billy put the paper aside with a sigh.

"It's no use," he complained. "I can't read."

"What's the matter?" she teased. "Eyes weak?"

"Nope. They're sore, and there's only one thing to do 'em any good, an' that's lookin' at you."

"All right, then, baby Billy; I'll be through in a jiffy."

When she had washed the dish towel and scalded out the sink, she took off her kitchen apron, came to him, and kissed first one eye and then the other.

"How are they now. Cured?"

"They feel some better already."

She repeated the treatment.

"And now?"

"Still better."

"And now?"

"Almost well."

After he had adjudged them well, he ouched and informed her that there was still some hurt in the right eye.

In the course of treating it, she cried out as in pain. Billy was all alarm.

"What is it? What hurt you?"

"My eyes. They're hurting like sixty."

And Billy became physician for a while and she the patient. When the cure was accomplished, she led him into the parlor, where, by the open window, they succeeded in occupying the same Morris chair. It was the most expensive comfort in the house. It had cost seven dollars and a half, and, though it was grander than anything she had dreamed of possessing, the extravagance of it had worried her in a half-guilty way all day.

The salt chill of the air that is the blessing of all the bay cities after the sun goes down crept in about them. They heard the switch engines puffing in the railroad yards, and the rumbling thunder of the Seventh Street local slowing down in its run from the Mole to stop at West Oakland station. From the street came the noise of children playing in the summer night, and from the steps of the house next door the low voices of gossiping housewives.

"Can you beat it?" Billy murmured. "When I think of that six-dollar furnished room of mine, it makes me sick to think what I was missin' all the time. But there's one satisfaction. If I'd changed it sooner

I wouldn't a-had you. You see, I didn't know you existed only until a couple of weeks ago."

His hand crept along her bare forearm and up and partly under the elbow-sleeve.

"Your skin's so cool," he said. "It ain't cold; it's cool. It feels good to the hand."

"Pretty soon you'll be calling me your cold-storage baby," she laughed.

"And your voice is cool," he went on. "It gives me the feeling just as your hand does when you rest it on my forehead. It's funny. I can't explain it. But your voice just goes all through me, cool and fine. It's like a wind of coolness--just right. It's like the first of the sea-breeze settin' in in the afternoon after a scorchin' hot morning. An' sometimes, when you talk low, it sounds round and sweet like the 'cello in the Macdonough Theater orchestra. And it never goes high up, or sharp, or squeaky, or scratchy, like some women's voices when they're mad, or fresh, or excited, till they remind me of a bum phonograph record. Why, your voice, it just goes through me till I'm all trembling--like with the everlastin' cool of it. It's it's straight delicious. I guess angels in heaven, if they is any, must have voices like that."

After a few minutes, in which, so inexpressible was her happiness that

she could only pass her hand through his hair and cling to him, he broke out again.

"I'll tell you what you remind me of. Did you ever see a thoroughbred mare, all shinin' in the sun, with hair like satin an' skin so thin an' tender that the least touch of the whip leaves a mark--all fine nerves, an' delicate an' sensitive, that'll kill the toughest bronco when it comes to endurance an' that can strain a tendon in a flash or catch death-of-cold without a blanket for a night? I wanta tell you they ain't many beautifuler sights in this world. An' they're that fine-strung, an' sensitive, an' delicate. You gotta handle 'em right-side up, glass, with care. Well, that's what you remind me of. And I'm goin' to make it my job to see you get handled an' gentled in the same way. You're as different from other women as that kind of a mare is from scrub work-horse mares. You're a thoroughbred. You're clean-cut an' spirited, an' your lines...

"Say, d'ye know you've got some figure? Well, you have. Talk about Annette Kellerman. You can give her cards and spades. She's Australian, an' you're American, only your figure ain't. You're different. You're nifty--I don't know how to explain it. Other women ain't built like you. You belong in some other country. You're Frenchy, that's what. You're built like a French woman an' more than that--the way you walk, move, stand up or sit down, or don't do anything."

And he, who had never been out of California, or, for that matter, had

never slept a night away from his birthtown of Oakland, was right in his judgment. She was a flower of Anglo-Saxon stock, a rarity in the exceptional smallness and fineness of hand and foot and bone and grace of flesh and carriage--some throw-back across the face of time to the foraying Norman-French that had intermingled with the sturdy Saxon breed.

"And in the way you carry your clothes. They belong to you. They seem just as much part of you as the cool of your voice and skin. They're always all right an' couldn't be better. An' you know, a fellow kind of likes to be seen taggin' around with a woman like you, that wears her clothes like a dream, an' hear the other fellows say: 'Who's Bill's new skirt? She's a peach, ain't she? Wouldn't I like to win her, though.' And all that sort of talk."

And Saxon, her cheek pressed to his, knew that she was paid in full for all her midnight sewings and the torturing hours of drowsy stitching when her head nodded with the weariness of the day's toil, while she recreated for herself filched ideas from the dainty garments that had steamed under her passing iron.

"Say, Saxon, I got a new name for you. You're my Tonic Kid. That's what you are, the Tonic Kid."

"And you'll never get tired of me?" she queried.

"Tired? Why we was made for each other."

"Isn't it wonderful, our meeting, Billy? We might never have met. It was just by accident that we did."

"We was born lucky," he proclaimed. "That's a cinch."

"Maybe it was more than luck," she ventured.

"Sure. It just had to be. It was fate. Nothing could a-kept us apart."

They sat on in a silence that was quick with unuttered love, till she felt him slowly draw her more closely and his lips come near to her ear as they whispered: "What do you say we go to bed?"

Many evenings they spent like this, varied with an occasional dance, with trips to the Orpheum and to Bell's Theater, or to the moving picture shows, or to the Friday night band concerts in City Hall Park. Often, on Sunday, she prepared a lunch, and he drove her out into the hills behind Prince and King, whom Billy's employer was still glad to have him exercise.

Each morning Saxon was called by the alarm clock. The first morning he had insisted upon getting up with her and building the fire in the kitchen stove. She gave in the first morning, but after that she laid

the fire in the evening, so that all that was required was the touching of a match to it. And in bed she compelled him to remain for a last little doze ere she called him for breakfast. For the first several weeks she prepared his lunch for him. Then, for a week, he came down to dinner. After that he was compelled to take his lunch with him. It depended on how far distant the teaming was done.

"You're not starting right with a man," Mary cautioned. "You wait on him hand and foot. You'll spoil him if you don't watch out. It's him that ought to be waitin' on you."

"He's the bread-winner," Saxon replied. "He works harder than I, and I've got more time than I know what to do with--time to burn. Besides, I want to wait on him because I love to, and because... well, anyway, I want to."

CHAPTER II

Despite the fastidiousness of her housekeeping, Saxon, once she had systematized it, found time and to spare on her hands. Especially during the periods in which her husband carried his lunch and there was no midday meal to prepare, she had a number of hours each day to herself. Trained for years to the routine of factory and laundry work, she could not abide this unaccustomed idleness. She could not bear to sit and do nothing, while she could not pay calls on her girlhood friends, for they still worked in factory and laundry. Nor was she acquainted with the wives of the neighborhood, save for one strange old woman who lived in the house next door and with whom Saxon had exchanged snatches of conversation over the backyard division fence.

One time-consuming diversion of which Saxon took advantage was free and unlimited baths. In the orphan asylum and in Sarah's house she had been used to but one bath a week. As she grew to womanhood she had attempted more frequent baths. But the effort proved disastrous, arousing, first, Sarah's derision, and next, her wrath. Sarah had crystallized in the era of the weekly Saturday night bath, and any increase in this cleansing function was regarded by her as putting on airs and as an insinuation against her own cleanliness. Also, it was an extravagant misuse of fuel, and occasioned extra towels in the family wash. But now, in Billy's house, with her own stove, her own tub and towels and soap, and no one to say her nay, Saxon was guilty of a daily orgy. True, it was only a common washtub that she placed on the kitchen floor and filled by hand;

but it was a luxury that had taken her twenty-four years to achieve. It was from the strange woman next door that Saxon received a hint, dropped in casual conversation, of what proved the culminating joy of bathing. A simple thing--a few drops of druggist's ammonia in the water; but Saxon had never heard of it before.

She was destined to learn much from the strange woman. The acquaintance had begun one day when Saxon, in the back yard, was hanging out a couple of corset covers and several pieces of her finest undergarments. The woman leaning on the rail of her back porch, had caught her eye, and nodded, as it seemed to Saxon, half to her and half to the underlinen on the line.

"You're newly married, aren't you?" the woman asked. "I'm Mrs. Higgins. I prefer my first name, which is Mercedes."

"And I'm Mrs. Roberts," Saxon replied, thrilling to the newness of the designation on her tongue. "My first name is Saxon."

"Strange name for a Yankee woman," the other commented.

"Oh, but I'm not Yankee," Saxon exclaimed. "I'm Californian."

"La la," laughed Mercedes Higgins. "I forgot I was in America. In other lands all Americans are called Yankees. It is true that you are newly married?"

Saxon nodded with a happy sigh. Mercedes sighed, too.

"Oh, you happy, soft, beautiful young thing. I could envy you to hatred--you with all the man-world ripe to be twisted about your pretty little fingers. And you don't realize your fortune. No one does until it's too late."

Saxon was puzzled and disturbed, though she answered readily:

"Oh, but I do know how lucky I am. I have the finest man in the world."

Mercedes Higgins sighed again and changed the subject. She nodded her head at the garments.

"I see you like pretty things. It is good judgment for a young woman. They're the bait for men--half the weapons in the battle. They win men, and they hold men--" She broke off to demand almost fiercely: "And you, you would keep your husband?--always, always--if you can?"

"I intend to. I will make him love me always and always."

Saxon ceased, troubled and surprised that she should be so intimate with a stranger.

"'Tis a queer thing, this love of men," Mercedes said. "And a failing of

all women is it to believe they know men like books. And with breaking hearts, die they do, most women, out of their ignorance of men and still foolishly believing they know all about them. Oh, la la, the little fools. And so you say, little new-married woman, that you will make your man love you always and always? And so they all say it, knowing men and the queerness of men's love the way they think they do. Easier it is to win the capital prize in the Little Louisiana, but the little new-married women never know it until too late. But you--you have begun well. Stay by your pretties and your looks. 'Twas so you won your man, 'tis so you'll hold him. But that is not all. Some time I will talk with you and tell what few women trouble to know, what few women ever come to know.--Saxon!--'tis a strong, handsome name for a woman. But you don't look it. Oh, I've watched you. French you are, with a Frenchiness beyond dispute. Tell Mr. Roberts I congratulate him on his good taste."

She paused, her hand on the knob of her kitchen door.

"And come and see me some time. You will never be sorry. I can teach you much. Come in the afternoon. My man is night watchman in the yards and sleeps of mornings. He's sleeping now."

Saxon went into the house puzzling and pondering. Anything but ordinary was this lean, dark-skinned woman, with the face withered as if scorched in great heats, and the eyes, large and black, that flashed and flamed with advertisement of an unquenched inner conflagration. Old she was--Saxon caught herself debating anywhere between fifty and seventy;

and her hair, which had once been blackest black, was streaked plentifully with gray. Especially noteworthy to Saxon was her speech. Good English it was, better than that to which Saxon was accustomed. Yet the woman was not American. On the other hand, she had no perceptible accent. Rather were her words touched by a foreignness so elusive that Saxon could not analyze nor place it.

"Uh, huh," Billy said, when she had told him that evening of the day's event. "So SHE'S Mrs. Higgins? He's a watchman. He's got only one arm. Old Higgins an' her--a funny bunch, the two of them. The people's scared of her--some of 'em. The Dagoes an' some of the old Irish dames thinks she's a witch. Won't have a thing to do with her. Bert was tellin' me about it. Why, Saxon, d'ye know, some of 'em believe if she was to get mad at 'em, or didn't like their mugs, or anything, that all she's got to do is look at 'em an' they'll curl up their toes an' croak. One of the fellows that works at the stable--you've seen 'm--Henderson--he lives around the corner on Fifth--he says she's bughouse."

"Oh, I don't know," Saxon defended her new acquaintance. "She may be crazy, but she says the same thing you're always saying. She says my form is not American but French."

"Then I take my hat off to her," Billy responded. "No wheels in her head if she says that. Take it from me, she's a wise gazabo."

"And she speaks good English, Billy, like a school teacher, like what I

guess my mother used to speak. She's educated."

"She ain't no fool, or she wouldn't a-sized you up the way she did."

"She told me to congratulate you on your good taste in marrying me," Saxon laughed.

"She did, eh? Then give her my love. Me for her, because she knows a good thing when she sees it, an' she ought to be congratulating you on your good taste in me."

It was on another day that Mercedes Higgins nodded, half to Saxon, and half to the dainty women's things Saxon was hanging on the line.

"I've been worrying over your washing, little new-wife," was her greeting.

"Oh, but I've worked in the laundry for years," Saxon said quickly.

Mercedes sneered scornfully.

"Steam laundry. That's business, and it's stupid. Only common things should go to a steam laundry. That is their punishment for being common. But the pretties! the dainties! the flimsies!--la la, my dear, their washing is an art. It requires wisdom, genius, and discretion fine as the clothes are fine. I will give you a recipe for homemade soap. It

will not harden the texture. It will give whiteness, and softness, and life. You can wear them long, and fine white clothes are to be loved a long time. Oh, fine washing is a refinement, an art. It is to be done as an artist paints a picture, or writes a poem, with love, holily, a true sacrament of beauty.

"I shall teach you better ways, my dear, better ways than you Yankees know. I shall teach you new pretties." She nodded her head to Saxon's underlinen on the line. "I see you make little laces. I know all laces--the Belgian, the Maltese, the Mechlin--oh, the many, many loves of laces! I shall teach you some of the simpler ones so that you can make them for yourself, for your brave man you are to make love you always and always."

On her first visit to Mercedes Higgins, Saxon received the recipe for home-made soap and her head was filled with a minutiae of instruction in the art of fine washing. Further, she was fascinated and excited by all the newness and strangeness of the withered old woman who blew upon her the breath of wider lands and seas beyond the horizon.

"You are Spanish?" Saxon ventured.

"No, and yes, and neither, and more. My father was Irish, my mother Peruvian-Spanish. 'Tis after her I took, in color and looks. In other ways after my father, the blue-eyed Celt with the fairy song on his tongue and the restless feet that stole the rest of him away to

far-wandering. And the feet of him that he lent me have led me away on as wide far roads as ever his led him."

Saxon remembered her school geography, and with her mind's eye she saw a certain outline map of a continent with jiggly wavering parallel lines that denoted coast.

"Oh," she cried, "then you are South American."

Mercedes shrugged her shoulders.

"I had to be born somewhere. It was a great ranch, my mother's. You could put all Oakland in one of its smallest pastures."

Mercedes Higgins sighed cheerfully and for the time was lost in retrospection. Saxon was curious to hear more about this woman who must have lived much as the Spanish-Californians had lived in the old days.

"You received a good education," she said tentatively. "Your English is perfect."

"Ah, the English came afterward, and not in school. But, as it goes, yes, a good education in all things but the most important--men. That, too, came afterward. And little my mother dreamed--she was a grand lady, what you call a cattle-queen--little she dreamed my fine education was to fit me in the end for a night watchman's wife." She laughed genuinely

at the grotesqueness of the idea. "Night watchman, laborers, why, we had hundreds, yes, thousands that toiled for us. The peons--they are like what you call slaves, almost, and the cowboys, who could ride two hundred miles between side and side of the ranch. And in the big house servants beyond remembering or counting. La la, in my mother's house were many servants."

Mercedes Higgins was voluble as a Greek, and wandered on in reminiscence.

"But our servants were lazy and dirty. The Chinese are the servants par excellence. So are the Japanese, when you find a good one, but not so good as the Chinese. The Japanese maidservants are pretty and merry, but you never know the moment they'll leave you. The Hindoos are not strong, but very obedient. They look upon sahibs and memsahibs as gods! I was a memsahib--which means woman. I once had a Russian cook who always spat in the soup for luck. It was very funny. But we put up with it. It was the custom."

"How you must have traveled to have such strange servants!" Saxon encouraged.

The old woman laughed corroboration.

"And the strangest of all, down in the South Seas, black slaves, little kinky-haired cannibals with bones through their noses. When they did not

mind, or when they stole, they were tied up to a cocoanut palm behind the compound and lashed with whips of rhinoceros hide. They were from an island of cannibals and head-hunters, and they never cried out. It was their pride. There was little Vibi, only twelve years old--he waited on me--and when his back was cut in shreds and I wept over him, he would only laugh and say, 'Short time little bit I take 'm head belong big fella white marster.' That was Bruce Anstey, the Englishman who whipped him. But little Vibi never got the head. He ran away and the bushmen cut off his own head and ate every bit of him."

Saxon chilled, and her face was grave; but Mercedes Higgins rattled on.

"Ah, those were wild, gay, savage days. Would you believe it, my dear, in three years those Englishmen of the plantation drank up oceans of champagne and Scotch whisky and dropped thirty thousand pounds on the adventure. Not dollars--pounds, which means one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. They were princes while it lasted. It was splendid, glorious. It was mad, mad. I sold half my beautiful jewels in New Zealand before I got started again. Bruce Anstey blew out his brains at the end. Roger went mate on a trader with a black crew, for eight pounds a month. And Jack Gilbraith--he was the rarest of them all. His people were wealthy and titled, and he went home to England and sold cat's meat, sat around their big house till they gave him more money to start a rubber plantation in the East Indies somewhere, on Sumatra, I think--or was it New Guinea?"

And Saxon, back in her own kitchen and preparing supper for Billy, wondered what lusts and rapacities had led the old, burnt-faced woman from the big Peruvian ranch, through all the world, to West Oakland and Barry Higgins Old Barry was not the sort who would fling away his share of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, much less ever attain to such opulence. Besides, she had mentioned the names of other men, but not his.

Much more Mercedes had talked, in snatches and fragments. There seemed no great country nor city of the old world or the new in which she had not been. She had even been in Klondike, ten years before, in a half-dozen flashing sentences picturing the fur-clad, be-moccasined miners sowing the barroom floors with thousands of dollars' worth of gold dust. Always, so it seemed to Saxon, Mrs. Higgins had been with men to whom money was as water.

CHAPTER III

Saxon, brooding over her problem of retaining Billy's love, of never staling the freshness of their feeling for each other and of never descending from the heights which at present they were treading, felt herself impelled toward Mrs. Higgins. SHE knew; surely she must know. Had she not hinted knowledge beyond ordinary women's knowledge?

Several weeks went by, during which Saxon was often with her. But Mrs. Higgins talked of all other matters, taught Saxon the making of certain simple laces, and instructed her in the arts of washing and of marketing. And then, one afternoon, Saxon found Mrs. Higgins more voluble than usual, with words, clean-uttered, that rippled and tripped in their haste to escape. Her eyes were flaming. So flamed her face. Her words were flames. There was a smell of liquor in the air and Saxon knew that the old woman had been drinking. Nervous and frightened, at the same time fascinated, Saxon hemstitched a linen handkerchief intended for Billy and listened to Mercedes' wild flow of speech.

"Listen, my dear. I shall tell you about the world of men. Do not be stupid like all your people, who think me foolish and a witch with the evil eye. Ha! ha! When I think of silly Maggie Donahue pulling the shawl across her baby's face when we pass each other on the sidewalk! A witch I have been, 'tis true, but my witchery was with men. Oh, I am wise, very wise, my dear. I shall tell you of women's ways with men, and of men's ways with women, the best of them and the worst of them. Of the

brute that is in all men, of the queerness of them that breaks the hearts of stupid women who do not understand. And all women are stupid. I am not stupid. La la, listen.

"I am an old woman. And like a woman, I'll not tell you how old I am. Yet can I hold men. Yet would I hold men, toothless and a hundred, my nose touching my chin. Not the young men. They were mine in my young days. But the old men, as befits my years. And well for me the power is mine. In all this world I am without kin or cash. Only have I wisdom and memories--memories that are ashes, but royal ashes, jeweled ashes. Old women, such as I, starve and shiver, or accept the pauper's dole and the pauper's shroud. Not I. I hold my man. True, 'tis only Barry Higgins--old Barry, heavy, an ox, but a male man, my dear, and queer as all men are queer. 'Tis true, he has one arm." She shrugged her shoulders. "A compensation. He cannot beat me, and old bones are tender when the round flesh thins to strings.

"But when I think of my wild young lovers, princes, mad with the madness of youth! I have lived. It is enough. I regret nothing. And with old Barry I have my surety of a bite to eat and a place by the fire. And why? Because I know men, and shall never lose my cunning to hold them. 'Tis bitter sweet, the knowledge of them, more sweet than bitter--men and men and men! Not stupid dolts, nor fat bourgeois swine of business men, but men of temperament, of flame and fire; madmen, maybe, but a lawless, royal race of madmen.

"Little wife-woman, you must learn. Variety! There lies the magic. 'Tis the golden key. 'Tis the toy that amuses. Without it in the wife, the man is a Turk; with it, he is her slave, and faithful. A wife must be many wives. If you would have your husband's love you must be all women to him. You must be ever new, with the dew of newness ever sparkling, a flower that never blooms to the fulness that fades. You must be a garden of flowers, ever new, ever fresh, ever different. And in your garden the man must never pluck the last of your posies.

"Listen, little wife-woman. In the garden of love is a snake. It is the commonplace. Stamp on its head, or it will destroy the garden. Remember the name. Commonplace. Never be too intimate. Men only seem gross. Women are more gross than men.--No, do not argue, little new-wife. You are an infant woman. Women are less delicate than men. Do I not know? Of their own husbands they will relate the most intimate love-secrets to other women. Men never do this of their wives. Explain it. There is only one way. In all things of love women are less delicate. It is their mistake. It is the father and the mother of the commonplace, and it is the commonplace, like a loathsome slug, that beslimes and destroys love.

"Be delicate, little wife-woman. Never be without your veil, without many veils. Veil yourself in a thousand veils, all shimmering and glittering with costly textures and precious jewels. Never let the last veil be drawn. Against the morrow array yourself with more veils, ever more veils, veils without end. Yet the many veils must not seem many. Each veil must seem the only one between you and your hungry lover who

will have nothing less than all of you. Each time he must seem to get all, to tear aside the last veil that hides you. He must think so. It must not be so. Then there will be no satiety, for on the morrow he will find another last veil that has escaped him.

"Remember, each veil must seem the last and only one. Always you must seem to abandon all to his arms; always you must reserve more that on the morrow and on all the morrows you may abandon. Of such is variety, surprise, so that your man's pursuit will be everlasting, so that his eyes will look to you for newness, and not to other women. It was the freshness and the newness' of your beauty and you, the mystery of you, that won your man. When a man has plucked and smelled all the sweetness of a flower, he looks for other flowers. It is his queerness. You must ever remain a flower almost plucked yet never plucked, stored with vats of sweet unbroached though ever broached.

"Stupid women, and all are stupid, think the first winning of the man the final victory. Then they settle down and grow fat, and state, and dead, and heartbroken. Alas, they are so stupid. But you, little infant-woman with your first victory, you must make your love-life an unending chain of victories. Each day you must win your man again. And when you have won the last victory, when you can find no more to win, then ends love. Finis is written, and your man wanders in strange gardens. Remember, love must be kept insatiable. It must have an appetite knife-edged and never satisfied. You must feed your lover well, ah, very well, most well; give, give, yet send him away hungry to come

back to you for more."

Mrs. Higgins stood up suddenly and crossed out of the room. Saxon had not failed to note the litheness and grace in that lean and withered body. She watched for Mrs. Higgins' return, and knew that the litheness and grace had not been imagined.

"Scarcely have I told you the first letter in love's alphabet," said Mercedes Higgins, as she reseated herself.

In her hands was a tiny instrument, beautifully grained and richly brown, which resembled a guitar save that it bore four strings. She swept them back and forth with rhythmic forefinger and lifted a voice, thin and mellow, in a fashion of melody that was strange, and in a foreign tongue, warm-voweled, all-voweled, and love-exciting. Softly throbbing, voice and strings arose on sensuous crests of song, died away to whisperings and caresses, drifted through love-dusks and twilights, or swelled again to love-cries barbarically imperious in which were woven plaintive calls and madnesses of invitation and promise. It went through Saxon until she was as this instrument, swept with passional strains. It seemed to her a dream, and almost was she dizzy, when Mercedes Higgins ceased.

"If your man had clasped the last of you, and if all of you were known to him as an old story, yet, did you sing that one song, as I have sung it, yet would his arms again go out to you and his eyes grow warm with

the old mad lights. Do you see? Do you understand, little wife-woman?"

Saxon could only nod, her lips too dry for speech.

"The golden koa, the king of woods," Mercedes was crooning over the instrument. "The ukulele--that is what the Hawaiians call it, which means, my dear, the jumping flea. They are golden-fleshed, the Hawalians, a race of lovers, all in the warm cool of the tropic night where the trade winds blow."

Again she struck the strings. She sang in another language, which Saxon deemed must be French. It was a gayly-devilish lilt, tripping and tickling. Her large eyes at times grew larger and wilder, and again narrowed in enticement and wickedness. When she ended, she looked to Saxon for a verdict.

"I don't like that one so well," Saxon said.

Mercedes shrugged her shoulders.

"They all have their worth, little infant-woman with so much to learn. There are times when men may be won with wine. There are times when men may be won with the wine of song, so queer they are. La la, so many ways, so many ways. There are your pretties, my dear, your dainties. They are magic nets. No fisherman upon the sea ever tangled fish more successfully than we women with our flimsies. You are on the right path.

I have seen men enmeshed by a corset cover no prettier, no daintier, than these of yours I have seen on the line.

"I have called the washing of fine linen an art. But it is not for itself alone. The greatest of the arts is the conquering of men. Love is the sum of all the arts, as it is the reason for their existence. Listen. In all times and ages have been women, great wise women. They did not need to be beautiful. Greater then all woman's beauty was their wisdom. Princes end potentates bowed down before them. Nations battled over them. Empires crashed because of them. Religions were founded on them. Aphrodite, Astarte, the worships of the night--listen, infant-woman, of the great women who conquered worlds of men."

And thereafter Saxon listened, in a maze, to what almost seemed a wild farrago, save that the strange meaningless phrases were fraught with dim, mysterious significance. She caught glimmerings of profounds inexpressible and unthinkable that hinted connotations lawless and terrible. The woman's speech was a lava rush, scorching and searing; and Saxon's cheeks, and forehead, and neck burned with a blush that continuously increased. She trembled with fear, suffered qualms of nausea, thought sometimes that she would faint, so madly reeled her brain; yet she could not tear herself away, sad sat on and on, her sewing forgotten on her lap, staring with inward sight upon a nightmare vision beyond all imagining. At last, when it seemed she could endure no more, and while she was wetting her dry lips to cry out in protest, Mercedes ceased.

"And here endeth the first lesson," she said quite calmly, then laughed with a laughter that was tantalizing and tormenting. "What is the matter? You are not shocked?"

"I am frightened," Saxon quavered huskily, with a half-sob of nervousness. "You frighten me. I am very foolish, and I know so little, that I had never dreamed... THAT."

Mercedes nodded her head comprehendingly.

"It is indeed to be frightened at," she said. "It is solemn; it is terrible; it is magnificent!"

CHAPTER IV

Saxon had been clear-eyed all her days, though her field of vision had been restricted. Clear-eyed, from her childhood days with the saloonkeeper Cady and Cady's good-natured but unmoral spouse, she had observed, and, later, generalized much upon sex. She knew the post-nuptial problem of retaining a husband's love, as few wives of any class knew it, just as she knew the pre-nuptial problem of selecting a husband, as few girls of the working class knew it.

She had of herself developed an eminently rational philosophy of love. Instinctively, and consciously, too, she had made toward delicacy, and shunned the perils of the habitual and commonplace. Thoroughly aware she was that as she cheapened herself so did she cheapen love. Never, in the weeks of their married life, had Billy found her dowdy, or harshly irritable, or lethargic. And she had deliberately permeated her house with her personal atmosphere of coolness, and freshness, and equableness. Nor had she been ignorant of such assets as surprise and charm. Her imagination had not been asleep, and she had been born with wisdom. In Billy she had won a prize, and she knew it. She appreciated his lover's ardor and was proud. His open-handed liberality, his desire for everything of the best, his own personal cleanliness and care of himself she recognized as far beyond the average. He was never coarse. He met delicacy with delicacy, though it was obvious to her that the initiative in all such matters lay with her and must lie with her always. He was largely unconscious of what he did and why. But she knew

in all full clarity of judgment. And he was such a prize among men.

Despite her clear sight of her problem of keeping Billy a lover, and despite the considerable knowledge and experience arrayed before her mental vision, Mercedes Higgins had spread before her a vastly wider panorama. The old woman had verified her own conclusions, given her new ideas, clinched old ones, and even savagely emphasized the tragic importance of the whole problem. Much Saxon remembered of that mad preachment, much she guessed and felt, and much had been beyond her experience and understanding. But the metaphors of the veils and the flowers, and the rules of giving to abandonment with always more to abandon, she grasped thoroughly, and she was enabled to formulate a bigger and stronger love-philosophy. In the light of the revelation she re-examined the married lives of all she had ever known, and, with sharp definiteness as never before, she saw where and why so many of them had failed.

With renewed ardor Saxon devoted herself to her household, to her pretties, and to her charms. She marketed with a keener desire for the best, though never ignoring the need for economy. From the women's pages of the Sunday supplements, and from the women's magazines in the free reading room two blocks away, she gleaned many ideas for the preservation of her looks. In a systematic way she exercised the various parts of her body, and a certain period of time each day she employed in facial exercises and massage for the purpose of retaining the roundness and freshness, and firmness and color. Billy did not know. These

intimacies of the toilette were not for him. The results, only, were his. She drew books from the Carnegie Library and studied physiology and hygiene, and learned a myriad of things about herself and the ways of woman's health that she had never been taught by Sarah, the women of the orphan asylum, nor by Mrs. Cady.

After long debate she subscribed to a woman's magazine, the patterns and lessons of which she decided were the best suited to her taste and purse. The other woman's magazines she had access to in the free reading room, and more than one pattern of lace and embroidery she copied by means of tracing paper. Before the lingerie windows of the uptown shops she often stood and studied; nor was she above taking advantage, when small purchases were made, of looking over the goods at the hand-embroidered underwear counters. Once, she even considered taking up with hand-painted china, but gave over the idea when she learned its expensiveness.

She slowly replaced all her simple maiden underlinen with garments which, while still simple, were wrought with beautiful French embroidery, tucks, and drawnwork. She crocheted fine edgings on the inexpensive knitted underwear she wore in winter. She made little corset covers and chemises of fine but fairly inexpensive lawns, and, with simple flowered designs and perfect laundering, her nightgowns were always sweetly fresh and dainty. In some publication she ran across a brief printed note to the effect that French women were just beginning to wear fascinating beruffled caps at the breakfast table. It meant

nothing to her that in her case she must first prepare the breakfast. Promptly appeared in the house a yard of dotted Swiss muslin, and Saxon was deep in experimenting on patterns for herself, and in sorting her bits of laces for suitable trimmings. The resultant dainty creation won Mercedes Higgins' enthusiastic approval.

Saxon made for herself simple house slips of pretty gingham, with neat low collars turned back from her fresh round throat. She crocheted yards of laces for her underwear, and made Battenberg in abundance for her table and for the bureau. A great achievement, that aroused Billy's applause, was an Afghan for the bed. She even ventured a rag carpet, which, the women's magazines informed her, had newly returned into fashion. As a matter of course she hemstitched the best table linen and bed linen they could afford.

As the happy months went by she was never idle. Nor was Billy forgotten. When the cold weather came on she knitted him wristlets, which he always religiously wore from the house and pocketed immediately thereafter. The two sweaters she made for him, however, received a better fate, as did the slippers which she insisted on his slipping into, on the evenings they remained at home.

The hard practical wisdom of Mercedes Higgins proved of immense help, for Saxon strove with a fervor almost religious to have everything of the best and at the same time to be saving. Here she faced the financial and economic problem of keeping house in a society where the cost of

living rose faster than the wages of industry. And here the old woman taught her the science of marketing so thoroughly that she made a dollar of Billy's go half as far again as the wives of the neighborhood made the dollars of their men go.

Invariably, on Saturday night, Billy poured his total wages into her lap. He never asked for an accounting of what she did with it, though he continually reiterated that he had never fed so well in his life. And always, the wages still untouched in her lap, she had him take out what he estimated he would need for spending money for the week to come. Not only did she bid him take plenty but she insisted on his taking any amount extra that he might desire at any time through the week. And, further, she insisted he should not tell her what it was for.

"You've always had money in your pocket," she reminded him, "and there's no reason marriage should change that. If it did, I'd wish I'd never married you. Oh, I know about men when they get together. First one treats and then another, and it takes money. Now if you can't treat just as freely as the rest of them, why I know you so well that I know you'd stay away from them. And that wouldn't be right... to you, I mean. I want you to be together with men. It's good for a man."

And Billy buried her in his arms and swore she was the greatest little bit of woman that ever came down the pike.

"Why," he jubilated; "not only do I feed better, and live more

comfortable, and hold up my end with the fellows; but I'm actually saving money--or you are for me. Here I am, with furniture being paid for regular every month, and a little woman I'm mad over, and on top of it money in the bank. How much is it now?"

"Sixty-two dollars," she told him. "Not so bad for a rainy day. You might get sick, or hurt, or something happen."

It was in mid-winter, when Billy, with quite a deal of obvious reluctance, broached a money matter to Saxon. His old friend, Billy Murphy, was laid up with la grippe, and one of his children, playing in the street, had been seriously injured by a passing wagon. Billy Murphy, still feeble after two weeks in bed, had asked Billy for the loan of fifty dollars.

"It's perfectly safe," Billy concluded to Saxon. "I've known him since we was kids at the Durant School together. He's straight as a die."

"That's got nothing to do with it," Saxon chided. "If you were single you'd have lent it to him immediately, wouldn't you?"

Billy nodded.

"Then it's no different because you're married. It's your money, Billy."

"Not by a damn sight," he cried. "It ain't mine. It's ourn. And I

wouldn't think of lettin' anybody have it without seein' you first."

"I hope you didn't tell him that," she said with quick concern.

"Nope," Billy laughed. "I knew, if I did, you'd be madder'n a hatter. I just told him I'd try an' figure it out. After all, I was sure you'd stand for it if you had it."

"Oh, Billy," she murmured, her voice rich and low with love; "maybe you don't know it, but that's one of the sweetest things you've said since we got married."

The more Saxon saw of Mercedes Higgins the less did she understand her. That the old woman was a close-fisted miser, Saxon soon learned. And this trait she found hard to reconcile with her tales of squandering. On the other hand, Saxon was bewildered by Mercedes' extravagance in personal matters. Her underlinen, hand-made of course, was very costly. The table she set for Barry was good, but the table for herself was vastly better. Yet both tables were set on the same table. While Barry contented himself with solid round steak, Mercedes ate tenderloin. A huge, tough muttonchop on Barry's plate would be balanced by tiny French chops on Mercedes' plate. Tea was brewed in separate pots. So was coffee. While Barry gulped twenty-five cent tea from a large and heavy mug, Mercedes sipped three-dollar tea from a tiny cup of Belleek, rose-tinted, fragile as all egg-shell. In the same manner, his twenty-five cent coffee was diluted with milk, her eighty cent Turkish

with cream.

"'Tis good enough for the old man," she told Saxon. "He knows no better, and it would be a wicked sin to waste it on him."

Little traffickings began between the two women. After Mercedes had freely taught Saxon the loose-wristed facility of playing accompaniments on the ukulele, she proposed an exchange. Her time was past, she said, for such frivolities, and she offered the instrument for the breakfast cap of which Saxon had made so good a success.

"It's worth a few dollars," Mercedes said. "It cost me twenty, though that was years ago. Yet it is well worth the value of the cap."

"But wouldn't the cap be frivolous, too?" Saxon queried, though herself well pleased with the bargain.

"'Tis not for my graying hair," Mercedes frankly disclaimed. "I shall sell it for the money. Much that I do, when the rheumatism is not maddening my fingers, I sell. La la, my dear, 'tis not old Barry's fifty a month that'll satisfy all my expensive tastes. 'Tis I that make up the difference. And old age needs money as never youth needs it. Some day you will learn for yourself."

"I am well satisfied with the trade," Saxon said. "And I shall make me another cap when I can lay aside enough for the material."

"Make several," Mercedes advised. "I'll sell them for you, keeping, of course, a small commission for my services. I can give you six dollars apiece for them. We will consult about them. The profit will more than provide material for your own."

CHAPTER V

Four eventful things happened in the course of the winter. Bert and Mary got married and rented a cottage in the neighborhood three blocks away. Billy's wages were cut, along with the wages of all the teamsters in Oakland. Billy took up shaving with a safety razor. And, finally, Saxon was proven a false prophet and Sarah a true one.

Saxon made up her mind, beyond any doubt, ere she confided the news to Billy. At first, while still suspecting, she had felt a frightened sinking of the heart and fear of the unknown and unexperienced. Then had come economic fear, as she contemplated the increased expense entailed. But by the time she had made surety doubly sure, all was swept away before a wave of passionate gladness. HERS AND BILLY'S! The phrase was continually in her mind, and each recurrent thought of it brought an actual physical pleasure-pang to her heart.

The night she told the news to Billy, he withheld his own news of the wage-cut, and joined with her in welcoming the little one.

"What'll we do? Go to the theater to celebrate?" he asked, relaxing the pressure of his embrace so that she might speak. "Or suppose we stay in, just you and me, and... and the three of us?"

"Stay in," was her verdict. "I just want you to hold me, and hold me, and hold me."

"That's what I wanted, too, only I wasn't sure, after bein' in the house all day, maybe you'd want to go out."

There was frost in the air, and Billy brought the Morris chair in by the kitchen stove. She lay cuddled in his arms, her head on his shoulder, his cheek against her hair.

"We didn't make no mistake in our lightning marriage with only a week's courtin'," he reflected aloud. "Why, Saxon, we've been courtin' ever since just the same. And now... my God, Saxon, it's too wonderful to be true. Think of it! Ourn! The three of us! The little rascal! I bet he's goin' to be a boy. An' won't I learn 'm to put up his fists an' take care of himself! An' swimmin' too. If he don't know how to swim by the time he's six..."

"And if HE'S a girl?"

"SHE'S goin' to be a boy," Billy retorted, joining in the playful misuse of pronouns.

And both laughed and kissed, and sighed with content. "I'm goin' to turn pincher, now," he announced, after quite an interval of meditation. "No more drinks with the boys. It's me for the water wagon. And I'm goin' to ease down on smokes. Huh! Don't see why I can't roll my own cigarettes. They're ten times cheaper'n tailor-mades. An' I can grow a beard. The

amount of money the barbers get out of a fellow in a year would keep a baby."

"Just you let your beard grow, Mister Roberts, and I'll get a divorce," Saxon threatened. "You're just too handsome and strong with a smooth face. I love your face too much to have it covered up.--Oh, you dear! you dear! Billy, I never knew what happiness was until I came to live with you."

"Nor me neither."

"And it's always going to be so?"

"You can just bet," he assured her.

"I thought I was going to be happy married," she went on; "but I never dreamed it would be like this." She turned her head on his shoulder and kissed his cheek. "Billy, it isn't happiness. It's heaven."

And Billy resolutely kept undivulged the cut in wages. Not until two weeks later, when it went into effect, and he poured the diminished sum into her lap, did he break it to her. The next day, Bert and Mary, already a month married, had Sunday dinner with them, and the matter came up for discussion. Bert was particularly pessimistic, and muttered dark hints of an impending strike in the railroad shops.

"If you'd all shut your traps, it'd be all right," Mary criticized. "These union agitators get the railroad sore. They give me the cramp, the way they butt in an' stir up trouble. If I was boss I'd cut the wages of any man that listened to them."

"Yet you belonged to the laundry workers' union," Saxon rebuked gently.

"Because I had to or I wouldn't a-got work. An' much good it ever done me."

"But look at Billy," Bert argued "The teamsters ain't ben sayin' a word, not a peep, an' everything lovely, and then, bang, right in the neck, a ten per cent cut. Oh, hell, what chance have we got? We lose. There's nothin' left for us in this country we've made and our fathers an' mothers before us. We're all shot to pieces. We Can see our finish--we, the old stock, the children of the white people that broke away from England an' licked the tar outa her, that freed the slaves, an' fought the Indians, 'an made the West! Any gink with half an eye can see it comin'."

"But what are we going to do about it?" Saxon questioned anxiously.

"Fight. That's all. The country's in the hands of a gang of robbers. Look at the Southern Pacific. It runs California."

"Aw, rats, Bert," Billy interrupted. "You're takin' through your lid. No

railroad can ran the government of California."

"You're a bonehead," Bert sneered. "And some day, when it's too late, you an' all the other boneheads'll realize the fact. Rotten? I tell you it stinks. Why, there ain't a man who wants to go to state legislature but has to make a trip to San Francisco, an' go into the S. P. offices, an' take his hat off, an' humbly ask permission. Why, the governors of California has been railroad governors since before you and I was born. Huh! You can't tell me. We're finished. We're licked to a frazzle. But it'd do my heart good to help string up some of the dirty thieves before I passed out. D'ye know what we are?--we old white stock that fought in the wars, an' broke the land, an' made all this? I'll tell you. We're the last of the Mohegans."

"He scares me to death, he's so violent," Mary said with unconcealed hostility. "If he don't quit shootin' off his mouth he'll get fired from the shops. And then what'll we do? He don't consider me. But I can tell you one thing all right, all right. I'll not go back to the laundry." She held her right hand up and spoke with the solemnity of an oath. "Not so's you can see it. Never again for yours truly."

"Oh, I know what you're drivin' at," Bert said with asperity. "An' all I can tell you is, livin' or dead, in a job or out, no matter what happens to me, if you will lead that way, you will, an' there's nothin' else to it."

"I guess I kept straight before I met you," she came back with a toss of the head. "And I kept straight after I met you, which is going some if anybody should ask you."

Hot words were on Bert's tongue, but Saxon intervened and brought about peace. She was concerned over the outcome of their marriage. Both were highstrung, both were quick and irritable, and their continual clashes did not augur well for their future.

The safety razor was a great achievement for Saxon. Privily she conferred with a clerk she knew in Pierce's hardware store and made the purchase. On Sunday morning, after breakfast, when Billy was starting to go to the barber shop, she led him into the bedroom, whisked a towel aside, and revealed the razor box, shaving mug, soap, brush, and lather all ready. Billy recoiled, then came back to make curious investigation. He gazed pityingly at the safety razor.

"Huh! Call that a man's tool!"

"It'll do the work," she said. "It does it for thousands of men every day."

But Billy shook his head and backed away.

"You shave three times a week," she urged. "That's forty-five cents. Call it half a dollar, and there are fifty-two weeks in the year.

Twenty-six dollars a year just for shaving. Come on, dear, and try it. Lots of men swear by it."

He shook his head mutinously, and the cloudy deeps of his eyes grew more cloudy. She loved that sullen handsomeness that made him look so boyish, and, laughing and kissing him, she forced him into a chair, got off his coat, and unbuttoned shirt and undershirt and turned them in.

Threatening him with, "If you open your mouth to kick I'll shove it in," she coated his face with lather.

"Wait a minute," she checked him, as he reached desperately for the razor. "I've been watching the barbers from the sidewalk. This is what they do after the lather is on."

And thereupon she proceeded to rub the lather in with her fingers.

"There," she said, when she had coated his face a second time. "You're ready to begin. Only remember, I'm not always going to do this for you. I'm just breaking you in, you see."

With great outward show of rebellion, half genuine, half facetious, he made several tentative scrapes with the razor. He winced violently, and violently exclaimed:

"Holy jumping Jehosaphat!"

He examined his face in the glass, and a streak of blood showed in the midst of the lather.

"Cut!--by a safety razor, by God! Sure, men swear by it. Can't blame 'em. Cut! By a safety!"

"But wait a second," Saxon pleaded. "They have to be regulated. The clerk told me. See those little screws. There.... That's it... turn them around."

Again Billy applied the blade to his face. After a couple of scrapes, he looked at himself closely in the mirror, grinned, and went on shaving. With swiftness and dexterity he scraped his face clean of lather. Saxon clapped her hands.

"Fine," Billy approved. "Great! Here. Give me your hand. See what a good job it made."

He started to rub her hand against his cheek. Saxon jerked away with a little cry of disappointment, then examined him closely.

"It hasn't shaved at all," she said.

"It's a fake, that's what it is. It cuts the hide, but not the hair. Me for the barber."

But Saxon was persistent.

"You haven't given it a fair trial yet. It was regulated too much. Let me try my hand at it. There, that's it, betwixt and between. Now, lather again and try it."

This time the unmistakable sand-papery sound of hair-severing could be heard.

"How is it?" she fluttered anxiously.

"It gets the--ouch!--hair," Billy grunted, frowning and making faces. "But it--gee!--say!--ouch!--pulls like Sam Hill."

"Stay with it," she encouraged. "Don't give up the ship, big Injun with a scalplock. Remember what Bert says and be the last of the Mohegans."

At the end of fifteen minutes he rinsed his face and dried it, sighing with relief.

"It's a shave, in a fashion, Saxon, but I can't say I'm stuck on it. It takes out the nerve. I'm as weak as a cat."

He groaned with sudden discovery of fresh misfortune.

"What's the matter now?" she asked.

"The back of my neck--how can I shave the back of my neck? I'll have to pay a barber to do it."

Saxon's consternation was tragic, but it only lasted a moment. She took the brush in her hand.

"Sit down, Billy."

"What?--you?" he demanded indignantly.

"Yes; me. If any barber is good enough to shave your neck, and then I am, too."

Billy moaned and groaned in the abjectness of humility and surrender, and let her have her way.

"There, and a good job," she informed him when she had finished. "As easy as falling off a log. And besides, it means twenty-six dollars a year. And you'll buy the crib, the baby buggy, the pinning blankets, and lots and lots of things with it. Now sit still a minute longer."

She rinsed and dried the back of his neck and dusted it with talcum powder.

"You're as sweet as a clean little baby, Billy Boy."

The unexpected and lingering impact of her lips on the back of his neck made him writhe with mingled feelings not all unpleasant.

Two days later, though vowing in the intervening time to have nothing further to do with the instrument of the devil, he permitted Saxon to assist him to a second shave. This time it went easier.

"It ain't so bad," he admitted. "I'm gettin' the hang of it. It's all in the regulating. You can shave as close as you want an' no more close than you want. Barbers can't do that. Every once an' awhile they get my face sore."

The third shave was an unqualified success, and the culminating bliss was reached when Saxon presented him with a bottle of witch hazel. After that he began active proselyting. He could not wait a visit from Bert, but carried the paraphernalia to the latter's house to demonstrate.

"We've ben boobs all these years, Bert, runnin' the chances of barber's itch an' everything. Look at this, eh? See her take hold. Smooth as silk. Just as easy.... There! Six minutes by the clock. Can you beat it? When I get my hand in, I can do it in three. It works in the dark. It works under water. You couldn't cut yourself if you tried. And it saves twenty-six dollars a year. Saxon figured it out, and she's a wonder, I tell you."

CHAPTER VI

The trafficking between Saxon and Mercedes increased. The latter commanded a ready market for all the fine work Saxon could supply, while Saxon was eager and happy in the work. The expected babe and the cut in Billy's wages had caused her to regard the economic phase of existence more seriously than ever. Too little money was being laid away in the bank, and her conscience pricked her as she considered how much she was laying out on the pretty necessaries for the household and herself. Also, for the first time in her life she was spending another's earnings. Since a young girl she had been used to spending her own, and now, thanks to Mercedes she was doing it again, and, out of her profits, assaying more expensive and delightful adventures in lingerie.

Mercedes suggested, and Saxon carried out and even bettered, the dainty things of thread and texture. She made ruffled chemises of sheer linen, with her own fine edgings and French embroidery on breast and shoulders; linen hand-made combination undersuits; and nightgowns, fairy and cobwebby, embroidered, trimmed with Irish lace. On Mercedes' instigation she executed an ambitious and wonderful breakfast cap for which the old woman returned her twelve dollars after deducting commission.

She was happy and busy every waking moment, nor was preparation for the little one neglected. The only ready made garments she bought were three fine little knit shirts. As for the rest, every bit was made by her own hands--featherstitched pinning blankets, a crocheted jacket and cap,

knitted mittens, embroidered bonnets; slim little princess slips of sensible length; underskirts on absurd Lilliputian yokes; silk-embroidered white flannel petticoats; stockings and crocheted boots, seeming to burgeon before her eyes with wriggly pink toes and plump little calves; and last, but not least, many deliciously soft squares of bird's-eye linen. A little later, as a crowning masterpiece, she was guilty of a dress coat of white silk, embroidered. And into all the tiny garments, with every stitch, she sewed love. Yet this love, so unceasingly sewn, she knew when she came to consider and marvel, was more of Billy than of the nebulous, ungraspable new bit of life that eluded her fondest attempts at visioning.

"Huh," was Billy's comment, as he went over the mite's wardrobe and came back to center on the little knit shirts, "they look more like a real kid than the whole kit an' caboodle. Why, I can see him in them regular manshirts."

Saxon, with a sudden rush of happy, unshed tears, held one of the little shirts up to his lips. He kissed it solemnly, his eyes resting on Saxon's.

"That's some for the boy," he said, "but a whole lot for you."

But Saxon's money-earning was doomed to cease ignominiously and tragically. One day, to take advantage of a department store bargain sale, she crossed the bay to San Francisco. Passing along Sutter Street,

her eye was attracted by a display in the small window of a small shop. At first she could not believe it; yet there, in the honored place of the window, was the wonderful breakfast cap for which she had received twelve dollars from Mercedes. It was marked twenty-eight dollars. Saxon went in and interviewed the shopkeeper, an emaciated, shrewd-eyed and middle-aged woman of foreign extraction.

"Oh, I don't want to buy anything," Saxon said. "I make nice things like you have here, and I wanted to know what you pay for them--for that breakfast cap in the window, for instance."

The woman darted a keen glance to Saxon's left hand, noted the innumerable tiny punctures in the ends of the first and second fingers, then appraised her clothing and her face.

"Can you do work like that?"

Saxon nodded.

"I paid twenty dollars to the woman that made that." Saxon repressed an almost spasmodic gasp, and thought coolly for a space. Mercedes had given her twelve. Then Mercedes had pocketed eight, while she, Saxon, had furnished the material and labor.

"Would you please show me other hand-made things nightgowns, chemises, and such things, and tell me the prices you pay?"

"Can you do such work?"

"Yes."

"And will you sell to me?"

"Certainly," Saxon answered. "That is why I am here."

"We add only a small amount when we sell," the woman went on; "you see, light and rent and such things, as well as a profit or else we could not be here."

"It's only fair," Saxon agreed.

Amongst the beautiful stuff Saxon went over, she found a nightgown and a combination undersuit of her own manufacture. For the former she had received eight dollars from Mercedes, it was marked eighteen, and the woman had paid fourteen; for the latter Saxon received six, it was marked fifteen, and the woman had paid eleven.

"Thank you," Saxon said, as she drew on her gloves. "I should like to bring you some of my work at those prices."

"And I shall be glad to buy it... if it is up to the mark." The woman looked at her severely. "Mind you, it must be as good as this. And if it

is, I often get special orders, and I'll give you a chance at them."

Mercedes was unblushingly candid when Saxon reproached her.

"You told me you took only a commission," was Saxon's accusation.

"So I did; and so I have."

"But I did all the work and bought all the materials, yet you actually cleared more out of it than I did. You got the lion's share."

"And why shouldn't I, my dear? I was the middleman. It's the way of the world. 'Tis the middlemen that get the lion's share."

"It seems to me most unfair," Saxon reflected, more in sadness than anger.

"That is your quarrel with the world, not with me," Mercedes rejoined sharply, then immediately softened with one of her quick changes. "We mustn't quarrel, my dear. I like you so much. La la, it is nothing to you, who are young and strong with a man young and strong. Listen, I am an old woman. And old Barry can do little for me. He is on his last legs. His kidneys are 'most gone. Remember, 'tis I must bury him. And I do him honor, for beside me he'll have his last long steep. A stupid, dull old man, heavy, an ox, 'tis true; but a good old fool with no trace of evil in him. The plot is bought and paid for--the final installment

was made up, in part, out of my commissions from you. Then there are the funeral expenses. It must be done nicely. I have still much to save. And Barry may turn up his toes any day."

Saxon sniffed the air carefully, and knew the old woman had been drinking again.

"Come, my dear, let me show you." Leading Saxon to a large sea chest in the bedroom, Mercedes lifted the lid. A faint perfume, as of rose-petals, floated up. "Behold, my burial trousseau. Thus I shall wed the dust."

Saxon's amazement increased, as, article by article, the old woman displayed the airiest, the daintiest, the most delicious and most complete of bridal outfits. Mercedes held up an ivory fan.

"In Venice 'twas given me, my dear.--See, this comb, turtle shell; Bruce Anstey made it for me the week before he drank his last bottle and scattered his brave mad brains with a Colt's 44.--This scarf. La la, a Liberty scarf--"

"And all that will be buried with you," Saxon mused, "Oh, the extravagance of it!"

Mercedes laughed.

"Why not? I shall die as I have lived. It is my pleasure. I go to the dust as a bride. No cold and narrow bed for me. I would it were a coach, covered with the soft things of the East, and pillows, pillows, without end."

"It would buy you twenty funerals and twenty plots," Saxon protested, shocked by this blasphemy of conventional death. "It is downright wicked."

"'Twill be as I have lived," Mercedes said complacently. "And it's a fine bride old Barry'll have to come and lie beside him." She closed the lid and sighed. "Though I wish it were Bruce Anstey, or any of the pick of my young men to lie with me in the great dark and to crumble with me to the dust that is the real death."

She gazed at Saxon with eyes heated by alcohol and at the same time cool with the coolness of content.

"In the old days the great of earth were buried with their live slaves with them. I but take my flimsies, my dear."

"Then you aren't afraid of death?... in the least?"

Mercedes shook her head emphatically.

"Death is brave, and good, and kind. I do not fear death. 'Tis of men I

am afraid when I am dead. So I prepare. They shall not have me when I am dead."

Saxon was puzzled.

"They would not want you then," she said.

"Many are wanted," was the answer. "Do you know what becomes of the aged poor who have no money for burial? They are not buried. Let me tell you. We stood before great doors. He was a queer man, a professor who ought to have been a pirate, a man who lectured in class rooms when he ought to have been storming walled cities or robbing banks. He was slender, like Don Juan. His hands were strong as steel. So was his spirit. And he was mad, a bit mad, as all my young men have been. 'Come, Mercedes,' he said; 'we will inspect our brethren and become humble, and glad that we are not as they--as yet not yet. And afterward, to-night, we will dine with a more devilish taste, and we will drink to them in golden wine that will be the more golden for having seen them. Come, Mercedes.'

"He thrust the great doors open, and by the hand led me in. It was a sad company. Twenty-four, that lay on marble slabs, or sat, half erect and propped, while many young men, bright of eye, bright little knives in their hands, glanced curiously at me from their work."

"They were dead?" Saxon interrupted to gasp.

"They were the pauper dead, my dear. 'Come, Mercedes,' said he. 'There is more to show you that will make us glad we are alive.' And he took me down, down to the vats. The salt vats, my dear. I was not afraid. But it was in my mind, then, as I looked, how it would be with me when I was dead. And there they were, so many lumps of pork. And the order came, 'A woman; an old woman.' And the man who worked there fished in the vats. The first was a man he drew to see. Again he fished and stirred. Again a man. He was impatient, and grumbled at his luck. And then, up through the brine, he drew a woman, and by the face of her she was old, and he was satisfied."

"It is not true!" Saxon cried out.

"I have seen, my dear, I know. And I tell you fear not the wrath of God when you are dead. Fear only the salt vats. And as I stood and looked, and as he who led me there looked at me and smiled and questioned and bedeviled me with those mad, black, tired-scholar's eyes of his, I knew that that was no way for my dear clay. Dear it is, my clay to me; dear it has been to others. La la, the salt vat is no place for my kissed lips and love-lavished body." Mercedes lifted the lid of the chest and gazed fondly at her burial pretties. "So I have made my bed. So I shall lie in it. Some old philosopher said we know we must die; we do not believe it. But the old do believe. I believe.

"My dear, remember the salt vats, and do not be angry with me because my commissions have been heavy. To escape the vats I would stop at nothing

steal the widow's mite, the orphan's crust, and pennies from a dead man's eyes."

"Do you believe in God?" Saxon asked abruptly, holding herself together despite cold horror.

Mercedes dropped the lid and shrugged her shoulders.

"Who knows? I shall rest well."

"And punishment?" Saxon probed, remembering the unthinkable tale of the other's life.

"Impossible, my dear. As some old poet said, 'God's a good fellow.' Some time I shall talk to you about God. Never be afraid of him. Be afraid only of the salt vats and the things men may do with your pretty flesh after you are dead."

CHAPTER VII

Billy quarreled with good fortune. He suspected he was too prosperous on the wages he received. What with the accumulating savings account, the paying of the monthly furniture installment and the house rent, the spending money in pocket, and the good fare he was eating, he was puzzled as to how Saxon managed to pay for the goods used in her fancy work. Several times he had suggested his inability to see how she did it, and been baffled each time by Saxon's mysterious laugh.

"I can't see how you do it on the money," he was contending one evening.

He opened his mouth to speak further, then closed it and for five minutes thought with knitted brows.

"Say," he said, "what's become of that frilly breakfast cap you was workin' on so hard, I ain't never seen you wear it, and it was sure too big for the kid."

Saxon hesitated, with pursed lips and teasing eyes. With her, untruthfulness had always been a difficult matter. To Billy it was impossible. She could see the cloud-drift in his eyes deepening and his face hardening in the way she knew so well when he was vexed.

"Say, Saxon, you ain't... you ain't... sellin' your work?"

And thereat she related everything, not omitting Mercedes Higgins' part in the transaction, nor Mercedes Higgins' remarkable burial trousseau. But Billy was not to be led aside by the latter. In terms anything but uncertain he told Saxon that she was not to work for money.

"But I have so much spare time, Billy, dear," she pleaded.

He shook his head.

"Nothing doing. I won't listen to it. I married you, and I'll take care of you. Nobody can say Bill Roberts' wife has to work. And I don't want to think it myself. Besides, it ain't necessary."

"But Billy--" she began again.

"Nope. That's one thing I won't stand for, Saxon. Not that I don't like fancy work. I do. I like it like hell, every bit you make, but I like it on YOU. Go ahead and make all you want of it, for yourself, an' I'll put up for the goods. Why, I'm just whistlin' an' happy all day long, thinkin' of the boy an' seein' you at home here workin' away on all them nice things. Because I know how happy you are a-doin' it. But honest to God, Saxon, it'd all be spoiled if I knew you was doin' it to sell. You see, Bill Roberts' wife don't have to work. That's my brag--to myself, mind you. An' besides, it ain't right."

"You're a dear," she whispered, happy despite her disappointment.

"I want you to have all you want," he continued. "An' you're goin' to get it as long as I got two hands stickin' on the ends of my arms. I guess I know how good the things are you wear--good to me, I mean, too. I'm dry behind the ears, an' maybe I've learned a few things I oughtn't to before I knew you. But I know what I'm talkin' about, and I want to say that outside the clothes down underneath, an' the clothes down underneath the outside ones, I never saw a woman like you. Oh--"

He threw up his hands as if despairing of ability to express what he thought and felt, then essayed a further attempt.

"It's not a matter of bein' only clean, though that's a whole lot. Lots of women are clean. It ain't that. It's something more, an' different. It's... well, it's the look of it, so white, an' pretty, an' tasty. It gets on the imagination. It's something I can't get out of my thoughts of you. I want to tell you lots of men can't strip to advantage, an' lots of women, too. But you--well, you're a wonder, that's all, and you can't get too many of them nice things to suit me, and you can't get them too nice.

"For that matter, Saxon, you can just blow yourself. There's lots of easy money layin' around. I'm in great condition. Billy Murphy pulled down seventy-five round iron dollars only last week for puttin' away the Pride of North Beach. That's what ha paid us the fifty back out of."

But this time it was Saxon who rebelled.

"There's Carl Hansen," Billy argued. "The second Sharkey, the alfalfa sportin' writers are callin' him. An' he calls himself Champion of the United States Navy. Well, I got his number. He's just a big stiff. I've seen 'm fight, an' I can pass him the sleep medicine just as easy. The Secretary of the Sportin' Life Club offered to match me. An' a hundred iron dollars in it for the winner. And it'll all be yours to blow in any way you want. What d'ye say?"

"If I can't work for money, you can't fight," was Saxon's ultimatum, immediately withdrawn. "But you and I don't drive bargains. Even if you'd let me work for money, I wouldn't let you fight. I've never forgotten what you told me about how prizefighters lose their silk. Well, you're not going to lose yours. It's half my silk, you know. And if you won't fight, I won't work--there. And more, I'll never do anything you don't want me to, Billy."

"Same here," Billy agreed. "Though just the same I'd like most to death to have just one go at that squarehead Hansen." He smiled with pleasure at the thought. "Say, let's forget it all now, an' you sing me 'Harvest Days' on that dinky what-you-may-call-it."

When she had complied, accompanying herself on the ukulele, she suggested his weird "Cowboy's Lament." In some inexplicable way of love, she had come to like her husband's one song. Because he sang it, she

liked its inanity and monotonousness; and most of all, it seemed to her, she loved his hopeless and adorable flatting of every note. She could even sing with him, flatting as accurately and deliciously as he. Nor did she undeceive him in his sublime faith.

"I guess Bert an' the rest have joshed me all the time," he said.

"You and I get along together with it fine," she equivocated; for in such matters she did not deem the untruth a wrong.

Spring was on when the strike came in the railroad shops. The Sunday before it was called, Saxon and Billy had dinner at Bert's house. Saxon's brother came, though he had found it impossible to bring Sarah, who refused to budge from her household rut. Bert was blackly pessimistic, and they found him singing with sardonic glee:

"Nobody loves a mil-yun-aire. Nobody likes his looks. Nobody'll share his slightest care, He classes with thugs and crooks. Thriftiness has become a crime, So spend everything you earn; We're living now in a funny time, When money is made to burn."

Mary went about the dinner preparation, flaunting unmistakable signals of rebellion; and Saxon, rolling up her sleeves and tying on an apron, washed the breakfast dishes. Bert fetched a pitcher of steaming beer from the corner saloon, and the three men smoked and talked about the coming strike.

"It oughta come years ago," was Bert's dictum. "It can't come any too quick now to suit me, but it's too late. We're beaten thumbs donn. Here's where the last of the Mohegans gets theirs, in the neck, ker-whop!"

"Oh, I don't know," Tom, who had been smoking his pipe gravely, began to counsel. "Organized labor's gettin' stronger every day. Why, I can remember when there wasn't any unions in California, Look at us now--wages, an' hours, an' everything."

"You talk like an organizer," Bert sneered, "shovin' the bull con on the boneheads. But we know different. Organized wages won't buy as much now as unorganized wages used to buy. They've got us whipsawed. Look at Frisco, the labor leaders doin' dirtier polities than the old parties, pawin' an' squabblin' over graft, an' goin' to San Quentin, while--what are the Frisco carpenters doin'? Let me tell you one thing, Tom Brown, if you listen to all you hear you'll hear that every Frisco carpenter is union an' gettin' full union wages. Do you believe it? It's a damn lie. There ain't a carpenter that don't rebate his wages Saturday night to the contractor. An' that's your buildin' trades in San Francisco, while the leaders are makin' trips to Europe on the earnings of the tenderloin--when they ain't coughing it up to the lawyers to get out of wearin' stripes."

"That's all right," Tom concurred. "Nobody's denyin' it. The trouble is

labor ain't quite got its eyes open. It ought to play politics, but the politics ought to be the right kind."

"Socialism, eh?" Bert caught him up with scorn. "Wouldn't they sell us out just as the Ruefs and Schmidts have?"

"Get men that are honest," Billy said. "That's the whole trouble. Not that I stand for socialism. I don't. All our folks was a long time in America, an' I for one won't stand for a lot of fat Germans an' greasy Russian Jews tellin' me how to run my country when they can't speak English yet."

"Your country!" Bert cried. "Why, you bonehead, you ain't got a country. That's a fairy story the grafters shove at you every time they want to rob you some more."

"But don't vote for the grafters," Billy contended. "If we selected honest men we'd get honest treatment."

"I wish you'd come to some of our meetings, Billy," Tom said wistfully. "If you would, you'd get your eyes open an' vote the socialist ticket next election."

"Not on your life," Billy declined. "When you catch me in a socialist meeting'll be when they can talk like white men."

Bert was humming:

"We're living now in a funny time, When money is made to burn."

Mary was too angry with her husband, because of the impending strike and his incendiary utterances, to hold conversation with Saxon, and the latter, bepuzzled, listened to the conflicting opinions of the men.

"Where are we at?" she asked them, with a merriness that concealed her anxiety at heart.

"We ain't at," Bert snarled. "We're gone."

"But meat and oil have gone up again," she chafed. "And Billy's wages have been cut, and the shop men's were cut last year. Something must be done."

"The only thing to do is fight like hell," Bert answered. "Fight, an' go down fightin'. That's all. We're licked anyhow, but we can have a last run for our money."

"That's no way to talk," Tom rebuked.

"The time for talkin' 's past, old cock. The time for fightin' 's come."

"A hell of a chance you'd have against regular troops and machine guns,"

Billy retorted.

"Oh, not that way. There's such things as greasy sticks that go up with a loud noise and leave holes. There's such things as emery powder--"

"Oh, ho!" Mary burst out upon him, arms akimbo. "So that's what it means. That's what the emery in your vest pocket meant."

Her husband ignored her. Tom smoked with a troubled air. Billy was hurt. It showed plainly in his face.

"You ain't ben doin' that, Bert?" he asked, his manner showing his expectancy of his friend's denial.

"Sure thing, if you wont to know. I'd see'm all in hell if I could, before I go."

"He's a bloody-minded anarchist," Mary complained. "Men like him killed McKinley, and Garfield, an'--an' an' all the rest. He'll be hung. You'll see. Mark my words. I'm glad there's no children in sight, that's all."

"It's hot air," Billy comforted her.

"He's just teasing you," Saxon soothed. "He always was a josher."

But Mary shook her head.

"I know. I hear him talkin' in his sleep. He swears and curses something awful, an' grits his teeth. Listen to him now."

Bert, his handsome face bitter and devil-may-care, had tilted his chair back against the wall and was singing

"Nobody loves a mil-yun-aire, Nobody likes his looks, Nobody'll share his slightest care, He classes with thugs and crooks."

Tom was saying something about reasonableness and justice, and Bert ceased from singing to catch him up.

"Justice, eh? Another pipe-dream. I'll show you where the working class gets justice. You remember Forbes--J. Alliston Forbes--wrecked the Alta California Trust Company an' salted down two cold millions. I saw him yesterday, in a big hell-bent automobile. What'd he get? Eight years' sentence. How long did he serve? Less'n two years. Pardoned out on account of ill health. Ill hell! We'll be dead an' rotten before he kicks the bucket. Here. Look out this window. You see the back of that house with the broken porch rail. Mrs. Danaker lives there. She takes in washin'. Her old man was killed on the railroad. Nitsky on damages--contributory negligence, or fellow-servant-something-or-other flimflam. That's what the courts handed her. Her boy, Archie, was sixteen. He was on the road, a regular road-kid. He blew into Fresno an' rolled a drunk. Do you want to know how much he got? Two dollars

and eighty cents. Get that?--Two-eighty. And what did the alfalfa judge hand'm? Fifty years. He's served eight of it already in San Quentin. And he'll go on serving it till he croaks. Mrs. Danaker says he's bad with consumption--caught it inside, but she ain't got the pull to get'm pardoned. Archie the Kid steals two dollars an' eighty cents from a drunk and gets fifty years. J. Alliston Forbes sticks up the Alta Trust for two millions en' gets less'n two years. Who's country is this anyway? Yourn an' Archie the Kid's? Guess again. It's J. Alliston Forbes'--Oh:

"Nobody likes a mil-yun-aire, Nobody likes his looks, Nobody'll share his slightest care, He classes with thugs and crooks."

Mary, at the sink, where Saxon was just finishing the last dish, untied Saxon's apron and kissed her with the sympathy that women alone feel for each other under the shadow of maternity.

"Now you sit down, dear. You mustn't tire yourself, and it's a long way to go yet. I'll get your sewing for you, and you can listen to the men talk. But don't listen to Bert. He's crazy."

Saxon sewed and listened, and Bert's face grew bleak and bitter as he contemplated the baby clothes in her lap.

"There you go," he blurted out, "bringin' kids into the world when you ain't got any guarantee you can feed em.

"You must a-had a souse last night," Tom grinned.

Bert shook his head.

"Aw, what's the use of gettin' grouched?" Billy cheered. "It's a pretty good country."

"It WAS a pretty good country," Bert replied, "when we was all Mohegans. But not now. We're jiggerooed. We're hornswoggled. We're backed to a standstill. We're double-crossed to a fare-you-well. My folks fought for this country. So did yourn, all of you. We freed the niggers, killed the Indians, an starved, an' froze, an' sweat, an' fought. This land looked good to us. We cleared it, an' broke it, an' made the roads, an' built the cities. And there was plenty for everybody. And we went on fightin' for it. I had two uncles killed at Gettysburg. All of us was mixed up in that war. Listen to Saxon talk any time what her folks went through to get out here an' get ranches, an' horses, an' cattle, an' everything. And they got 'em. All our folks' got 'em, Mary's, too--"

"And if they'd ben smart they'd a-held on to them," she interpolated.

"Sure thing," Bert continued. "That's the very point. We're the losers. We've ben robbed. We couldn't mark cards, deal from the bottom, an' ring in cold decks like the others. We're the white folks that failed. You see, times changed, and there was two kinds of us, the lions and the

plugs. The plugs only worked, the lions only gobbled. They gobbled the farms, the mines, the factories, an' now they've gobbled the government. We're the white folks an' the children of white folks, that was too busy being good to be smart. We're the white folks that lost out. We're the ones that's ben skinned. D'ye get me?"

"You'd make a good soap-boxer," Tom commended, "if only you'd get the kinks straightened out in your reasoning."

"It sounds all right, Bert," Billy said, "only it ain't. Any man can get rich to-day--"

"Or be president of the United States," Bert snapped. "Sure thing--if he's got it in him. Just the same I ain't heard you makin' a noise like a millionaire or a president. Why? You ain't got it in you. You're a bonehead. A plug. That's why. Skiddoo for you. Skiddoo for all of us."

At the table, while they ate, Tom talked of the joys of farm-life he had known as a boy and as a young man, and confided that it was his dream to go and take up government land somewhere as his people had done before him. Unfortunately, as he explained, Sarah was set, so that the dream must remain a dream.

"It's all in the game," Billy sighed. "It's played to rules. Some one has to get knocked out, I suppose."

A little later, while Bert was off on a fresh diatribe, Billy became aware that he was making comparisons. This house was not like his house. Here was no satisfying atmosphere. Things seemed to run with a jar. He recollected that when they arrived the breakfast dishes had not yet been washed. With a man's general obliviousness of household affairs, he had not noted details; yet it had been borne in on him, all morning, in a myriad ways, that Mary was not the housekeeper Saxon was. He glanced proudly across at her, and felt the spur of an impulse to leave his seat, go around, and embrace her. She was a wife. He remembered her dainty undergarmenting, and on the instant, into his brain, leaped the image of her so appareled, only to be shattered by Bert.

"Hey, Bill, you seem to think I've got a grouch. Sure thing. I have. You ain't had my experiences. You've always done teamin' an' pulled down easy money prizefightin'. You ain't known hard times. You ain't ben through strikes. You ain't had to take care of an old mother an' swallow dirt on her account. It wasn't until after she died that I could rip loose an' take or leave as I felt like it.

"Take that time I tackled the Niles Electric an' see what a work-plug gets handed out to him. The Head Cheese sizes me up, pumps me a lot of questions, an' gives me an application blank. I make it out, payin' a dollar to a doctor they sent me to for a health certificate. Then I got to go to a picture garage an' get my mug taken for the Niles Electric rogues' gallery. And I cough up another dollar for the mug. The Head Squirt takes the blank, the health certificate, and the mug, an' fires

more questions. DID I BELONG TO A LABOR UNION?--ME? Of course I told'm the truth I guess nit. I needed the job. The grocery wouldn't give me any more tick, and there was my mother.

"Huh, thinks I, here's where I'm a real carman. Back platform for me, where I can pick up the fancy skirts. Nitsky. Two dollars, please. Me--my two dollars. All for a pewter badge. Then there was the uniform--nineteen fifty, and get it anywhere else for fifteen. Only that was to be paid out of my first month. And then five dollars in change in my pocket, my own money. That was the rule.--I borrowed that five from Tom Donovan, the policeman. Then what? They worked me for two weeks without pay, breakin' me in."

"Did you pick up any fancy skirts?" Saxon queried teasingly.

Bert shook his head glumly.

"I only worked a month. Then we organized, and they busted our union higher'n a kite."

"And you boobs in the shops will be busted the same way if you go out on strike," Mary informed him.

"That's what I've ben tellin' you all along," Bert replied. "We ain't got a chance to win."

"Then why go out?" was Saxon's question.

He looked at her with lackluster eyes for a moment, then answered

"Why did my two uncles get killed at Gettysburg?"

CHAPTER VIII

Saxon went about her housework greatly troubled. She no longer devoted herself to the making of pretties. The materials cost money, and she did not dare. Bert's thrust had sunk home. It remained in her quivering consciousness like a shaft of steel that ever turned and rankled. She and Billy were responsible for this coming young life. Could they be sure, after all, that they could adequately feed and clothe it and prepare it for its way in the world? Where was the guaranty? She remembered, dimly, the blight of hard times in the past, and the plaints of fathers and mothers in those days returned to her with a new significance. Almost could she understand Sarah's chronic complaining.

Hard times were already in the neighborhood, where lived the families of the shopmen who had gone out on strike. Among the small storekeepers, Saxon, in the course of the daily marketing, could sense the air of despondency. Light and geniality seemed to have vanished. Gloom pervaded everywhere. The mothers of the children that played in the streets showed the gloom plainly in their faces. When they gossiped in the evenings, over front gates and on door stoops, their voices were subdued and less of laughter rang out.

Mary Donahue, who had taken three pints from the milkman, now took one pint. There were no more family trips to the moving picture shows. Scrap-meat was harder to get from the butcher. Nora Delaney, in the third house, no longer bought fresh fish for Friday. Salted codfish, not

of the best quality, was now on her table. The sturdy children that ran out upon the street between meals with huge slices of bread and butter and sugar now came out with no sugar and with thinner slices spread more thinly with butter. The very custom was dying out, and some children already had desisted from piecing between meals.

Everywhere was manifest a pinching and scraping, a tightning and shortening down of expenditure. And everywhere was more irritation. Women became angered with one another, and with the children, more quickly than of yore; and Saxon knew that Bert and Mary bickered incessantly.

"If she'd only realize I've got troubles of my own," Bert complained to Saxon.

She looked at him closely, and felt fear for him in a vague, numb way. His black eyes seemed to burn with a continuous madness. The brown face was leaner, the skin drawn tightly across the cheekbones. A slight twist had come to the mouth, which seemed frozen into bitterness. The very carriage of his body and the way he wore his hat advertised a recklessness more intense than had been his in the past.

Sometimes, in the long afternoons, sitting by the window with idle hands, she caught herself reconstructing in her vision that folk-migration of her people across the plains and mountains and deserts to the sunset land by the Western sea. And often she found herself

dreaming of the arcadian days of her people, when they had not lived in cities nor been vexed with labor unions and employers' associations. She would remember the old people's tales of self-sufficingness, when they shot or raised their own meat, grew their own vegetables, were their own blacksmiths and carpenters, made their own shoes--yes, and spun the cloth of the clothes they wore. And something of the wistfulness in Tom's face she could see as she recollected it when he talked of his dream of taking up government land.

A farmer's life must be fine, she thought. Why was it that people had to live in cities? Why had times changed? If there had been enough in the old days, why was there not enough now? Why was it necessary for men to quarrel and jangle, and strike and fight, all about the matter of getting work? Why wasn't there work for all?--Only that morning, and she shuddered with the recollection, she had seen two scabs, on their way to work, beaten up by the strikers, by men she knew by sight, and some by name, who lived in the neighhorhood. It had happened directly across the street. It had been cruel, terrible--a dozen men on two. The children had begun it by throwing rocks at the scabs and cursing them in ways children should not know. Policemen had run upon the scene with drawn revolvers, and the strikers had retreated into the houses and through the narrow alleys between the houses. One of the scabs, unconscious, had been carried away in an ambulance; the other, assisted by special railroad police, had been taken away to the shops. At him, Mary Donahue, standing on her front stoop, her child in her arms, had hurled such vile abuse that it had brought the blush of shame to Saxon's cheeks. On the

stoop of the house on the other side, Saxon had noted Mercedes, in the height of the beating up, looking on with a queer smile. She had seemed very eager to witness, her nostrils dilated and swelling like the beat of pulses as she watched. It had struck Saxon at the time that the old woman was quite unalarmed and only curious to see.

To Mercedes, who was so wise in love, Saxon went for explanation of what was the matter with the world. But the old woman's wisdom in affairs industrial and economic was cryptic and unpalatable.

"La la, my dear, it is so simple. Most men are born stupid. They are the slaves. A few are born clever. They are the masters. God made men so, I suppose."

"Then how about God and that terrible beating across the street this morning?"

"I'm afraid he was not interested," Mercedes smiled. "I doubt he even knows that it happened."

"I was frightened to death," Saxon declared. "I was made sick by it. And yet you--I saw you--you looked on as cool as you please, as if it was a show."

"It was a show, my dear."

"Oh, how could you?"

"La la, I have seen men killed. It is nothing strange. All men die. The stupid ones die like oxen, they know not why. It is quite funny to see. They strike each other with fists and clubs, and break each other's heads. It is gross. They are like a lot of animals. They are like dogs wrangling over bones. Jobs are bones, you know. Now, if they fought for women, or ideas, or bars of gold, or fabulous diamonds, it would be splendid. But no; they are only hungry, and fight over scraps for their stomach."

"Oh, if I could only understand!" Saxon murmured, her hands tightly clasped in anguish of incomprehension and vital need to know.

"There is nothing to understand. It is clear as print. There have always been the stupid and the clever, the slave and the master, the peasant and the prince. There always will be."

"But why?"

"Why is a peasant a peasant, my dear? Because he is a peasant. Why is a flea a flea?"

Saxon tossed her head fretfully.

"Oh, but my dear, I have answered. The philosophies of the world can

give no better answer. Why do you like your man for a husband rather than any other man? Because you like him that way, that is all. Why do you like? Because you like. Why does fire burn and frost bite? Why are there clever men and stupid men? masters and slaves? employers and workingmen? Why is black black? Answer that and you answer everything."

"But it is not right That men should go hungry and without work when they want to work if only they can get a square deal," Saxon protested.

"Oh, but it is right, just as it is right that stone won't burn like wood, that sea sand isn't sugar, that thorns prick, that water is wet, that smoke rises, that things fall down and not up."

But such doctrine of reality made no impression on Saxon. Frankly, she could not comprehend. It seemed like so much nonsense.

"Then we have no liberty and independence," she cried passionately. "One man is not as good as another. My child has not the right to live that a rich mother's child has."

"Certainly not," Mercedes answered.

"Yet all my people fought for these things," Saxon urged, remembering her school history and the sword of her father.

"Democracy--the dream of the stupid peoples. Oh, la la, my dear,

democracy is a lie, an enchantment to keep the work brutes content, just as religion used to keep them content. When they groaned in their misery and toil, they were persuaded to keep on in their misery and toil by pretty tales of a land beyond the skies where they would live famously and fat while the clever ones roasted in everlasting fire. Ah, how the clever ones must have chuckled! And when that lie wore out, and democracy was dreamed, the clever ones saw to it that it should be in truth a dream, nothing but a dream. The world belongs to the great and clever."

"But you are of the working people," Saxon charged.

The old woman drew herself up, and almost was angry.

"I? Of the working people? My dear, because I had misfortune with moneys invested, because I am old and can no longer win the brave young men, because I have outlived the men of my youth and there is no one to go to, because I live here in the ghetto with Barry Higgins and prepare to die--why, my dear, I was born with the masters, and have trod all my days on the necks of the stupid. I have drunk rare wines and sat at feasts that would have supported this neighborhood for a lifetime. Dick Golden and I--it was Dickie's money, but I could have had it Dick Golden and I dropped four hundred thousand francs in a week's play at Monte Carlo. He was a Jew, but he was a spender. In India I have worn jewels that could have saved the lives of ten thousand families dying before my eyes."

"You saw them die?... and did nothing?" Saxon asked aghast.

"I kept my jewels--la la, and was robbed of them by a brute of a Russian officer within the year."

"And you let them die," Saxon reiterated.

"They were cheap spawn. They fester and multiply like maggots. They meant nothing--nothing, my dear, nothing. No more than your work people mean here, whose crowning stupidity is their continuing to beget more stupid spawn for the slavery of the masters."

So it was that while Saxon could get little glimmering of common sense from others, from the terrible old woman she got none at all. Nor could Saxon bring herself to believe much of what she considered Mercedes' romancing. As the weeks passed, the strike in the railroad shops grew bitter and deadly. Billy shook his head and confessed his inability to make head or tail of the troubles that were looming on the labor horizon.

"I don't get the hang of it," he told Saxon. "It's a mix-up. It's like a roughhouse with the lights out. Look at us teamsters. Here we are, the talk just starting of going out on sympathetic strike for the mill-workers. They've ben out a week, most of their places is filled, an' if us teamsters keep on haulin' the mill-work the strike's lost."

"Yet you didn't consider striking for yourselves when your wages were cut," Saxon said with a frown.

"Oh, we wasn't in position then. But now the Frisco teamsters and the whole Frisco Water Front Confederation is liable to back us up. Anyway, we're just talkin' about it, that's all. But if we do go out, we'll try to get back that ten per cent cut."

"It's rotten politics," he said another time. "Everybody's rotten. If we'd only wise up and agree to pick out honest men--"

"But if you, and Bert, and Tom can't agree, how do you expect all the rest to agree?" Saxon asked.

"It gets me," he admitted. "It's enough to give a guy the willies thinkin' about it. And yet it's plain as the nose on your face. Get honest men for politics, an' the whole thing's straightened out. Honest men'd make honest laws, an' then honest men'd get their dues. But Bert wants to smash things, an' Tom smokes his pipe and dreams pipe dreams about by an' by when everybody votes the way he thinks. But this by an' by ain't the point. We want things now. Tom says we can't get them now, an' Bert says we ain't never goin' to get them. What can a fellow do when everybody's of different minds? Look at the socialists themselves. They're always disagreeing, splittin' up, an' firin' each other out of the party. The whole thing's bughouse, that's what, an' I almost get

dippy myself thinkin' about it. The point I can't get out of my mind is that we want things now."

He broke off abruptly and stared at Saxon.

"What is it?" he asked, his voice husky with anxiety. "You ain't sick... or... or anything?"

One hand she had pressed to her heart; but the startle and fright in her eyes was changing into a pleased intentness, while on her mouth was a little mysterious smile. She seemed oblivious to her husband, as if listening to some message from afar and not for his ears. Then wonder and joy transfused her face, and she looked at Billy, and her hand went out to his.

"It's life," she whispered. "I felt life. I am so glad, so glad."

The next evening when Billy came home from work, Saxon caused him to know and undertake more of the responsibilities of fatherhood.

"I've been thinking it over, Billy," she began, "and I'm such a healthy, strong woman that it won't have to be very expensive. There's Martha Skelton--she's a good midwife."

But Billy shook his head.

"Nothin' doin' in that line, Saxon. You're goin' to have Doc Hentley. He's Bill Murphy's doc, an' Bill swears by him. He's an old cuss, but he's a wooz."

"She confined Maggie Donahue," Saxon argued; "and look at her and her baby."

"Well, she won't confine you--not so as you can notice it."

"But the doctor will charge twenty dollars," Saxon pursued, "and make me get a nurse because I haven't any womenfolk to come in. But Martha Skelton would do everything, and it would be so much cheaper."

But Billy gathered her tenderly in his arms and laid down the law.

"Listen to me, little wife. The Roberts family ain't on the cheap. Never forget that. You've gotta have the baby. That's your business, an' it's enough for you. My business is to get the money an' take care of you. An' the best ain't none too good for you. Why, I wouldn't run the chance of the teeniest accident happenin' to you for a million dollars. It's you that counts. An' dollars is dirt. Maybe you think I like that kid some. I do. Why, I can't get him outa my head. I'm thinkin' about'm all day long. If I get fired, it'll be his fault. I'm clean dotty over him. But just the same, Saxon, honest to God, before I'd have anything happen to you, break your little finger, even, I'd see him dead an' buried first. That'll give you something of an idea what you mean to me.

"Why, Saxon, I had the idea that when folks got married they just settled down, and after a while their business was to get along with each other. Maybe it's the way it is with other people; but it ain't that way with you an' me. I love you more 'n more every day. Right now I love you more'n when I began talkin' to you five minutes ago. An' you won't have to get a nurse. Doc Hentley'll come every day, an' Mary'll come in an' do the housework, an' take care of you an' all that, just as you'll do for her if she ever needs it."

As the days and weeks pussed, Saxon was possessed by a conscious feeling of proud motherhood in her swelling breasts. So essentially a normal woman was she, that motherhood was a satisfying and passionate happiness. It was true that she had her moments of apprehension, but they were so momentary and faint that they tended, if anything, to give zest to her happiness.

Only one thing troubled her, and that was the puzzling and perilous situation of labor which no one seemed to understand, her self least of all.

"They're always talking about how much more is made by machinery than by the old ways," she told her brother Tom. "Then, with all the machinery we've got now, why don't we get more?"

"Now you're talkin'," he answered. "It wouldn't take you long to

understand socialism."

But Saxon had a mind to the immediate need of things.

"Tom, how long have you been a socialist?"

"Eight years."

"And you haven't got anything by it?"

"But we will... in time."

"At that rate you'll be dead first," she challenged.

Tom sighed.

"I'm afraid so. Things move so slow."

Again he sighed. She noted the weary, patient look in his face, the bent shoulders, the labor-gnarled hands, and it all seemed to symbolize the futility of his social creed.

CHAPTER IX

It began quietly, as the fateful unexpected so often begins. Children, of all ages and sizes, were playing in the street, and Saxon, by the open front window, was watching them and dreaming day dreams of her child soon to be. The sunshine mellowed peacefully down, and a light wind from the bay cooled the air and gave to it a tang of salt. One of the children pointed up Pine Street toward Seventh. All the children ceased playing, and stared and pointed. They formed into groups, the larger boys, of from ten to twelve, by themselves, the older girls anxiously clutching the small children by the hands or gathering them into their arms.

Saxon could not see the cause of all this, but she could guess when she saw the larger boys rush to the gutter, pick up stones, and sneak into the alleys between the houses. Smaller boys tried to imitate them. The girls, dragging the tots by the arms, banged gates and clattered up the front steps of the small houses. The doors slammed behind them, and the street was deserted, though here and there front shades were drawn aside so that anxious-faced women might peer forth. Saxon heard the uptown train puffing and snorting as it pulled out from Center Street. Then, from the direction of Seventh, came a hoarse, throaty manroar. Still, she could see nothing, and she remembered Mercedes Higgins' words "THEY ARE LIKE DOGS WRANGLING OVER BONES. JOBS ARE BONES, YOU KNOW"

The roar came closer, and Saxon, leaning out, saw a dozen scabs,

conveyed by as many special police and Pinkertons, coming down the sidewalk on her side of the street. They came compactly, as if with discipline, while behind, disorderly, yelling confusedly, stooping to pick up rocks, were seventy-five or a hundred of the striking shopmen. Saxon discovered herself trembling with apprehension, knew that she must not, and controlled herself. She was helped in this by the conduct of Mercedes Higgins. The old woman came out of her front door, dragging a chair, on which she coolly seated herself on the tiny stoop at the top of the steps.

In the hands of the special police were clubs. The Pinkertons carried no visible weapons. The strikers, urging on from behind, seemed content with yelling their rage and threats, and it remained for the children to precipitate the conflict. From across the street, between the Olsen and the Isham houses, came a shower of stones. Most of these fell short, though one struck a scab on the head. The man was no more than twenty feet away from Saxon. He reeled toward her front picket fence, drawing a revolver. With one hand he brushed the blood from his eyes and with the other he discharged the revolver into the Isham house. A Pinkerton seized his arm to prevent a second shot, and dragged him along. At the same instant a wilder roar went up from the strikers, while a volley of stones came from between Saxon's house and Maggie Donahue's. The scabs and their protectors made a stand, drawing revolvers. From their hard, determined faces--fighting men by profession--Saxon could augur nothing but bloodshed and death. An elderly man, evidently the leader, lifted a soft felt hat and mopped the perspiration from the bald top of his head.

He was a large man, very rotund of belly and helpless looking. His gray beard was stained with streaks of tobacco juice, and he was smoking a cigar. He was stoop-shouldered, and Saxon noted the dandruff on the collar of his coat.

One of the men pointed into the street, and several of his companions laughed. The cause of it was the little Olsen boy, barely four years old, escaped somehow from his mother and toddling toward his economic enemies. In his right he bore a rock so heavy that he could scarcely lift it. With this he feebly threatened them. His rosy little face was convulsed with rage, and he was screaming over and over "Dam scabs! Dam scabs! Dam scabs!" The laughter with which they greeted him only increased his fury. He toddled closer, and with a mighty exertion threw the rock. It fell a scant six feet beyond his hand.

This much Saxon saw, and also Mrs. Olsen rushing into the street for her child. A rattling of revolver-shots from the strikers drew Saxon's attention to the men beneath her. One of them cursed sharply and examined the biceps of his left arm, which hung limply by his side. Down the hand she saw the blood beginning to drip. She knew she ought not remain and watch, but the memory of her fighting forefathers was with her, while she possessed no more than normal human fear--if anything, less. She forgot her child in the eruption of battle that had broken upon her quiet street. And she forgot the strikers, and everything else, in amazement at what had happened to the round-bellied, cigar-smoking leader. In some strange way, she knew not how, his head had become

wedged at the neck between the tops of the pickets of her fence. His body hung down outside, the knees not quite touching the ground. His hat had fallen off, and the sun was making an astounding high light on his bald spot. The cigar, too, was gone. She saw he was looking at her. One hand, between the pickets, seemed waving at her, and almost he seemed to wink at her jocosely, though she knew it to be the contortion of deadly pain.

Possibly a second, or, at most, two seconds, she gazed at this, when she was aroused by Bert's voice. He was running along the sidewalk, in front of her house, and behind him charged several more strikers, while he shouted: "Come on, you Mohegans! We got 'em nailed to the cross!"

In his left hand he carried a pick-handle, in his right a revolver, already empty, for he clicked the cylinder vainly around as he ran. With an abrupt stop, dropping the pick-handle, he whirled half about, facing Saxon's gate. He was sinking down, when he straightened himself to throw the revolver into the face of a scab who was jumping toward him. Then he began swaying, at the same time sagging at the knees and waist. Slowly, with infinite effort, he caught a gate picket in his right hand, and, still slowly, as if lowering himself, sank down, while past him leaped the crowd of strikers he had led.

It was battle without quarter--a massacre. The scabs and their protectors, surrounded, backed against Saxon's fence, fought like cornered rats, but could not withstand the rush of a hundred men.

Clubs and pick-handles were swinging, revolvers were exploding, and cobblestones were flung with crushing effect at arm's distance. Saxon saw young Frank Davis, a friend of Bert's and a father of several months' standing, press the muzzle of his revolver against a scab's stomach and fire. There were curses and snarls of rage, wild cries of terror and pain. Mercedes was right. These things were not men. They were beasts, fighting over bones, destroying one another for bones.

JOBS ARE BONES; JOBS ARE BONES. The phrase was an incessant iteration in Saxon's brain. Much as she might have wished it, she was powerless now to withdraw from the window. It was as if she were paralyzed. Her brain no longer worked. She sat numb, staring, incapable of anything save seeing the rapid horror before her eyes that flashed along like a moving picture film gone mad. She saw Pinkertons, special police, and strikers go down. One scab, terribly wounded, on his knees and begging for mercy, was kicked in the face. As he sprawled backward another striker, standing over him, fired a revolver into his chest, quickly and deliberately, again and again, until the weapon was empty. Another scab, backed over the pickets by a hand clutching his throat, had his face pulped by a revolver butt. Again and again, continually, the revolver rose and fell, and Saxon knew the man who wielded it--Chester Johnson. She had met him at dances and danced with him in the days before she was married. He had always been kind and good natured. She remembered the Friday night, after a City Hall band concert, when he had taken her and two other girls to Tony's Tamale Grotto on Thirteenth street. And after that they had all gone to Pabst's Cafe and drunk a glass of beer before

they went home. It was impossible that this could be the same Chester Johnson. And as she looked, she saw the round-bellied leader, still wedged by the neck between the pickets, draw a revolver with his free hand, and, squinting horribly sidewise, press the muzzle against Chester's side. She tried to scream a warning. She did scream, and Chester looked up and saw her. At that moment the revolver went off, and he collapsed prone upon the body of the scab. And the bodies of three men hung on her picket fence.

Anything could happen now. Quite without surprise, she saw the strikers leaping the fence, trampling her few little geraniums and pansies into the earth as they fled between Mercedes' house and hers. Up Pine street, from the railroad yards, was coming a rush of railroad police and Pinkertons, firing as they ran. While down Pine street, gongs clanging, horses at a gallop, came three patrol wagons packed with police. The strikers were in a trap. The only way out was between the houses and over the back yard fences. The jam in the narrow alley prevented them all from escaping. A dozen were cornered in the angle between the front of her house and the steps. And as they had done, so were they done by. No effort was made to arrest. They were clubbed down and shot down to the last man by the guardians of the peace who were infuriated by what had been wreaked on their brethren.

It was all over, and Saxon, moving as in a dream, clutching the banister tightly, came down the front steps. The round-bellied leader still leered at her and fluttered one hand, though two big policemen were

just bending to extricate him. The gate was off its hinges, which seemed strange, for she had been watching all the time and had not seen it happen.

Bert's eyes were closed. His lips were blood-flecked, and there was a gurgling in his throat as if he were trying to say something. As she stooped above him, with her handkerchief brushing the blood from his cheek where some one had stepped on him, his eyes opened. The old defiant light was in them. He did not know her. The lips moved, and faintly, almost reminiscently, he murmured, "The last of the Mohegans, the last of the Mohegans." Then he groaned, and the eyelids drooped down again. He was not dead. She knew that, the chest still rose and fell, and the gurgling still continued in his throat.

She looked up. Mercedes stood beside her. The old woman's eyes were very bright, her withered cheeks flushed.

"Will you help me carry him into the house?" Saxon asked.

Mercedes nodded, turned to a sergeant of police, and made the request to him. The sergeant gave a swift glance at Bert, and his eyes were bitter and ferocious as he refused.

"To hell with'm. We'll care for our own."

"Maybe you and I can do it," Saxon said.

"Don't be a fool." Mercedes was beckoning to Mrs. Olsen across the street. "You go into the house, little mother that is to be. This is bad for you. We'll carry him in. Mrs. Olsen is coming, and we'll get Maggie Donahue."

Saxon led the way into the back bedroom which Billy had insisted on furnishing. As she opened the door, the carpet seemed to fly up into her face as with the force of a blow, for she remembered Bert had laid that carpet. And as the women placed him on the bed she recalled that it was Bert and she, between them, who had set the bed up one Sunday morning.

And then she felt very queer, and was surprised to see Mercedes regarding her with questioning, searching eyes. After that her queerness came on very fast, and she descended into the hell of pain that is given to women alone to know. She was supported, half-carried, to the front bedroom. Many faces were about her--Mercedes, Mrs. Olsen, Maggie Donahue. It seemed she must ask Mrs. Olsen if she had saved little Emil from the street, but Mercedes cleared Mrs. Olsen out to look after Bert, and Maggie Donahue went to answer a knock at the front door. From the street came a loud hum of voices, punctuated by shouts and commands, and from time to time there was a clanging of the gongs of ambulances and patrol wagon's. Then appeared the fat, comfortable face of Martha Shelton, and, later, Dr. Hentley came. Once, in a clear interval, through the thin wall Saxon heard the high opening notes of Mary's hysteria. And, another time, she heard Mary repeating over and over.

"I'll never go back to the laundry. Never. Never."

CHAPTER X

Billy could never get over the shock, during that period, of Saxon's appearance. Morning after morning, and evening after evening when he came home from work, he would enter the room where she lay and fight a royal battle to hide his feelings and make a show of cheerfulness and geniality. She looked so small lying there so small and shrunken and weary, and yet so child-like in her smallness. Tenderly, as he sat beside her, he would take up her pale hand and stroke the slim, transparent arm, marveling at the smallness and delicacy of the bones.

One of her first questions, puzzling alike to Billy and Mary, was:

"Did they save little Emil Olsen?"

And when she told them how he had attacked, singlehanded, the whole twenty-four fighting men, Billy's face glowed with appreciation.

"The little cuss!" he said. "That's the kind of a kid to be proud of."

He halted awkwardly, and his very evident fear that he had hurt her touched Saxon. She put her hand out to his.

"Billy," she began; then waited till Mary left the room.

"I never asked before--not that it matters... now. But I waited for you

to tell me. Was it...?"

He shook his head.

"No; it was a girl. A perfect little girl. Only... it was too soon."

She pressed his hand, and almost it was she that sympathized with him in his affliction.

"I never told you, Billy--you were so set on a boy; but I planned, just the same, if it was a girl, to call her Daisy. You remember, that was my mother's name."

He nodded his approbation.

"Say, Saxon, you know I did want a boy like the very dickens... well, I don't care now. I think I'm set just as hard on a girl, an', well, here's hopin' the next will be called... you wouldn't mind, would you?"

"What?"

"If we called it the same name, Daisy?"

"Oh, Billy! I was thinking the very same thing."

Then his face grew stern as he went on.

"Only there ain't goin' to be a next. I didn't know what havin' children was like before. You can't run any more risks like that."

"Hear the big, strong, afraid-man talk!" she jeered, with a wan smile. "You don't know anything about it. How can a man? I am a healthy, natural woman. Everything would have been all right this time if... if all that fighting hadn't happened. Where did they bury Bert?"

"You knew?"

"All the time. And where is Mercedes? She hasn't been in for two days."

"Old Barry's sick. She's with him."

He did not tell her that the old night watchman was dying, two thin walls and half a dozen feet away.

Saxon's lips were trembling, and she began to cry weakly, clinging to Billy's hand with both of hers.

"I--I can't help it," she sobbed. "I'll be all right in a minute.... Our little girl, Billy. Think of it! And I never saw her!"

She was still lying on her bed, when, one evening, Mary saw fit to break

out in bitter thanksgiving that she had escaped, and was destined to escape, what Saxon had gone through.

"Aw, what are you talkin' about?" Billy demanded. "You'll get married some time again as sure as beans is beans."

"Not to the best man living," she proclaimed. "And there ain't no call for it. There's too many people in the world now, else why are there two or three men for every job? And, besides, havin' children is too terrible."

Saxon, with a look of patient wisdom in her face that became glorified as she spoke, made answer:

"I ought to know what it means. I've been through it, and I'm still in the thick of it, and I want to say to you right now, out of all the pain and the ache and the sorrow, that it is the most beautiful, wonderful thing in the world."

As Saxon's strength came back to her (and when Doctor Hentley had privily assured Billy that she was sound as a dollar), she herself took up the matter of the industrial tragedy that had taken place before her door. The militia had been called out immediately, Billy informed her, and was encamped then at the foot of Pine street on the waste ground next to the railroad yards. As for the strikers, fifteen of them were in

jail. A house to house search had been made in the neighborhood by the police, and in this way nearly the whole fifteen, all wounded, had been captured. It would go hard with them, Billy foreboded gloomily. The newspapers were demanding blood for blood, and all the ministers in Oakland had preached fierce sermons against the strikers. The railroad had filled every place, and it was well known that the striking shopmen not only would never get their old jobs back but were blacklisted in every railroad in the United States. Already they were beginning to scatter. A number had gone to Panama, and four were talking of going to Ecuador to work in the shops of the railroad that ran over the Andes to Quito.

With anxiety keenly concealed, she tried to feel out Billy's opinion on what had happened.

"That shows what Bert's violent methods come to," she said.

He shook his head slowly and gravely.

"They'll hang Chester Johnson, anyway," he answered indirectly. "You know him. You told me you used to dance with him. He was caught red-handed, lyin' on the body of a scab he beat to death. Old Jelly Belly's got three bullet holes in him, but he ain't goin' to die, and he's got Chester's number. They'll hang'm on Jelly Belly's evidence. It was all in the papers. Jelly Belly shot him, too, a-hangin' by the neck on our pickets."

Saxon shuddered. Jelly Belly must be the man with the bald spot and the tobacco-stained whiskers.

"Yes," she said. "I saw it all. It seemed he must have hung there for hours."

"It was all over, from first to last, in five minutes."

"It seemed ages and ages."

"I guess that's the way it seemed to Jelly Belly, stuck on the pickets," Billy smiled grimly. "But he's a hard one to kill. He's been shot an' cut up a dozen different times. But they say now he'll be crippled for life--have to go around on crutches, or in a wheel-chair. That'll stop him from doin' any more dirty work for the railroad. He was one of their top gun-fighters--always up to his ears in the thick of any fightin' that was goin' on. He never was leery of anything on two feet, I'll say that much for'm."

"Where does he live?" Saxon inquired.

"Up on Adeline, near Tenth--fine neighborhood an' fine two-storied house. He must pay thirty dollars a month rent. I guess the railroad paid him pretty well."

"Then he must be married?"

"Yep. I never seen his wife, but he's got one son, Jack, a passenger engineer. I used to know him. He was a nifty boxer, though he never went into the ring. An' he's got another son that's teacher in the high school. His name's Paul. We're about the same age. He was great at baseball. I knew him when we was kids. He pitched me out three times hand-runnin' once, when the Durant played the Cole School."

Saxon sat back in the Morris chair, resting and thinking. The problem was growing more complicated than ever. This elderly, round-bellied, and bald-headed gunfighter, too, had a wife and family. And there was Frank Davis, married barely a year and with a baby boy. Perhaps the scab he shot in the stomach had a wife and children. All seemed to be acquainted, members of a very large family, and yet, because of their particular families, they battered and killed each other. She had seen Chester Johnson kill a scab, and now they were going to hang Chester Johnson, who had married Kittie Brady out of the cannery, and she and Kittie Brady had worked together years before in the paper box factory.

Vainly Saxon waked for Billy to say something that would show he did not countenance the killing of the scabs.

"It was wrong," she ventured finally.

"They killed Bert," he countered. "An' a lot of others. An' Frank Davis.

Did you know he was dead? Had his whole lower jaw shot away--died in the ambulance before they could get him to the receiving hospital. There was never so much killin' at one time in Oakland before."

"But it was their fault," she contended. "They began it. It was murder."

Billy did not reply, but she heard him mutter hoarsely. She knew he said "God damn them"; but when she asked, "What?" he made no answer. His eyes were deep with troubled clouds, while the mouth had hardened, and all his face was bleak.

To her it was a heart-stab. Was he, too, like the rest? Would he kill other men who had families, like Bert, and Frank Davis, and Chester Johnson had killed? Was he, too, a wild beast, a dog that would snarl over a bone?

She sighed. Life was a strange puzzle. Perhaps Mercedes Higgins was right in her cruel statement of the terms of existence.

"What of it," Billy laughed harshly, as if in answer to her unuttered questions. "It's dog eat dog, I guess, and it's always ben that way. Take that scrap outside there. They killed each other just like the North an' South did in the Civil War."

"But workingmen can't win that way, Billy. You say yourself that it spoiled their chance of winning."

"I suppose not," he admitted reluctantly. "But what other chance they've got to win I don't see. Look at 'us. We'll be up against it next."

"Not the teamsters?" she cried.

He nodded gloomily.

"The bosses are cuttin' loose all along the line for a high old time. Say they're goin' to beat us to our knees till we come crawlin' back a-beggin' for our jobs. They've bucked up real high an' mighty what of all that killin' the other day. Havin' the troops out is half the fight, along with havin' the preachers an' the papers an' the public behind 'em. They're shootin' off their mouths already about what they're goin' to do. They're sure gunning for trouble. First, they're goin' to hang Chester Johnson an' as many more of the fifteen as they can. They say that flat. The Tribune, an' the Enquirer an' the Times keep sayin' it over an over every day. They're all union-hustin' to beat the band. No more closed shop. To hell with organized labor. Why, the dirty little Intelligencer come out this morning an' said that every union official in Oakland ought to be run outa town or stretched up. Fine, eh? You bet it's fine.

"Look at us. It ain't a case any more of sympathetic strike for the mill-workers. We got our own troubles. They've fired our four best men--the ones that was always on the conference committees. Did it

without cause. They're lookin' for trouble, as I told you, an' they'll get it, too, if they don't watch out. We got our tip from the Frisco Water Front Confederation. With them backin' us we'll go some."

"You mean you'll... strike?" Saxon asked.

He bent his head.

"But isn't that what they want you to do?--from the way they're acting?"

"What's the difference?" Billy shrugged his shoulders, then continued. "It's better to strike than to get fired. We beat 'em to it, that's all, an' we catch 'em before they're ready. Don't we know what they're doin'? They're collectin' gradin'-camp drivers an' mule-skinners all up an' down the state. They got forty of 'em, feedin' 'em in a hotel in Stockton right now, an' ready to rush 'em in on us an' hundreds more like 'em. So this Saturday's the last wages I'll likely bring home for some time."

Saxon closed her eyes and thought quietly for five minutes. It was not her way to take things excitedly. The coolness of poise that Billy so admired never deserted her in time of emergency. She realized that she herself was no more than a mote caught up in this tangled, nonunderstandable conflict of many motes.

"We'll have to draw from our savings to pay for this month's rent," she

said brightly.

Billy's face fell.

"We ain't got as much in the bank as you think," he confessed. "Bert had to be buried, you know, an I coughed up what the others couldn't raise."

"How much was it?"

"Forty dollars. I was goin' to stand off the butcher an' the rest for a while. They knew I was good pay. But they put it to me straight. They'd been carryin' the shopmen right along an was up against it themselves. An' now with that strike smashed they're pretty much smashed themselves. So I took it all out of the bank. I knew you wouldn't mind. You don't, do you?"

She smiled bravely, and bravely overcame the sinking feeling at her heart.

"It was the only right thing to do, Billy. I would have done it if you were lying sick, and Bert would have done it for you an' me if it had been the other way around."

His face was glowing.

"Gee, Saxon, a fellow can always count on you. You're like my right

hand. That's why I say no more babies. If I lose you I'm crippled for life."

"We've got to economize," she mused, nodding her appreciation. "How much is in bank?"

"Just about thirty dollars. You see, I had to pay Martha Skelton an' for the... a few other little things. An' the union took time by the neck and levied a four dollar emergency assessment on every member just to be ready if the strike was pulled off. But Doc Hentley can wait. He said as much. He's the goods, if anybody should ask you. How'd you like'm?"

"I liked him. But I don't know about doctors. He's the first I ever had--except when I was vaccinated once, and then the city did that."

"Looks like the street car men are goin' out, too. Dan Fallon's come to town. Came all the way from New York. Tried to sneak in on the quiet, but the fellows knew when he left New York, an' kept track of him all the way acrost. They have to. He's Johnny-on-the-Spot whenever street car men are licked into shape. He's won lots of street car strikes for the bosses. Keeps an army of strike breakers an' ships them all over the country on special trains wherever they're needed. Oakland's never seen labor troubles like she's got and is goin' to get. All hell's goin' to break loose from the looks of it."

"Watch out for yourself, then, Billy. I don't want to lose you either."

"Aw, that's all right. I can take care of myself. An' besides, it ain't as though we was licked. We got a good chance."

"But you'll lose if there is any killing."

"Yep; we gotta keep an eye out against that."

"No violence."

"No gun-fighting or dynamite," he assented. "But a heap of scabs'll get their heads broke. That has to be."

"But you won't do any of that, Billy."

"Not so as any slob can testify before a court to havin' seen me." Then, with a quick shift, he changed the subject. "Old Barry Higgins is dead. I didn't want to tell you till you was outa bed. Buried'm a week ago. An' the old woman's movin' to Frisco. She told me she'd be in to say good-bye. She stuck by you pretty well them first couple of days, an' she showed Martha Shelton a few that made her hair curl. She got Martha's goat from the jump."

CHAPTER XI

With Billy on strike and away doing picket duty, and with the departure of Mercedes and the death of Bert, Saxon was left much to herself in a loneliness that even in one as healthy-minded as she could not fail to produce morbidness. Mary, too, had left, having spoken vaguely of taking a job at housework in Piedmont.

Billy could help Saxon little in her trouble. He dimly sansed her suffering, without comprehending the scope and intensity of it. He was too man-practical, and, by his very sex, too remote from the intimate tragedy that was hers. He was an outsider at the best, a friendly onlooker who saw little. To her the baby had been quick and real. It was still quick and real. That was her trouble. By no deliberate effort of will could she fill the aching void of its absence. Its reality became, at times, an hallucination. Somewhere it still was, and she must find it. She would catch herself, on occasion, listening with strained ears for the cry she had never heard, yet which, in fancy, she had heard a thousand times in the happy months before the end. Twice she left her bed in her sleep and went searching--each time coming to herself beside her mother's chest of drawers in which were the tiny garments. To herself, at such moments, she would say, "I had a baby once." And she would say it, aloud, as she watched the children playing in the street.

One day, on the Eighth street cars, a young mother sat beside her, a crowing infant in her arms. And Saxon said to her:

"I had a baby once. It died."

The mother looked at her, startled, half-drew the baby tighter in her arms, jealously, or as if in fear; then she softened as she said:

"You poor thing."

"Yes," Saxon nodded. "It died."

Tear's welled into her eyes, and the telling of her grief seemed to have brought relief. But all the day she suffered from an almost overwhelming desire to recite her sorrow to the world--to the paying teller at the bank, to the elderly floor-walker in Salinger's, to the blind woman, guided by a little boy, who played on the concertina--to every one save the policeman. The police were new and terrible creatures to her now. She had seen them kill the strikers as mercilessly as the strikers had killed the scabs. And, unlike the strikers, the police were professional killers. They were not fighting for jobs. They did it as a business. They could have taken prisoners that day, in the angle of her front steps and the house. But they had not. Unconsciously, whenever approaching one, she edged across the sidewalk so as to get as far as possible away from him. She did not reason it out, but deeper than consciousness was the feeling that they were typical of something inimical to her and hers.

At Eighth and Broadway, waiting for her car to return home, the policeman on the corner recognized her and greeted her. She turned white to the lips, and her heart fluttered painfully. It was only Ned Hermanmann, fatter, bronder-faced, jollier looking than ever. He had sat across the aisle from her for three terms at school. He and she had been monitors together of the composition books for one term. The day the powder works blew up at Pinole, breaking every window in the school, he and she had not joined in the panic rush for out-of-doors. Both had remained in the room, and the irate principal had exhibited them, from room to room, to the cowardly classes, and then rewarded them with a month's holiday from school. And after that Ned Hermanmann had become a policeman, and married Lena Highland, and Saxon had heard they had five children.

But, in spite of all that, he was now a policeman, and Billy was now a striker. Might not Ned Hermanmann some day club and shoot Billy just as those other policemen clubbed and shot the strikers by her front steps?

"What's the matter, Saxon?" he asked. "Sick?"

She nodded and choked, unable to speak, and started to move toward her car which was coming to a stop.

"I'll help you," he offered.

She shrank away from his hand.

"No; I'm all right," she gasped hurriedly. "I'm not going to take it. I've forgotten something."

She turned away dizzily, up Broadway to Ninth. Two blocks along Ninth, she turned down Clay and back to Eighth street, where she waited for another car.

As the summer months dragged along, the industrial situation in Oakland grew steadily worse. Capital everywhere seemed to have selected this city for the battle with organized labor. So many men in Oakland were out on strike, or were locked out, or were unable to work because of the dependence of their trades on the other tied-up trade's, that odd jobs at common labor were hard to obtain. Billy occasionally got a day's work to do, but did not earn enough to make both ends meet, despite the small strike wages received at first, and despite the rigid economy he and Saxon practiced.

The table she set had scarcely anything in common with that of their first married year. Not alone was every item of cheaper quality, but many items had disappeared. Meat, and the poorest, was very seldom on the table. Cow's milk had given place to condensed milk, and even the sparing use of the latter had ceased. A roll of butter, when they had it, lasted half a dozen times as long as formerly. Where Billy had been used to drinking three cups of coffee for breakfast, he now drank one.

Saxon boiled this coffee an atrocious length of time, and she paid twenty cents a pound for it.

The blight of hard times was on all the neighborhood. The families not involved in one strike were touched by some other strike or by the cessation of work in some dependent trade. Many single young men who were lodgers had drifted away, thus increasing the house rent of the families which had sheltered them.

"Gott!" said the butcher to Saxon. "We working class all suffer together. My wife she cannot get her teeth fixed now. Pretty soon I go smash broke maybe."

Once, when Billy was preparing to pawn his watch, Saxon suggested his borrowing the money from Billy Murphy.

"I was plannin' that," Billy answered, "only I can't now. I didn't tell you what happened Tuesday night at the Sporting Life Club. You remember that squarehead Champion of the United States Navy? Bill was matched with him, an' it was sure easy money. Bill had 'm goin' south by the end of the sixth round, an' at the seventh went in to finish 'm. And then--just his luck, for his trade's idle now--he snaps his right forearm. Of course the squarehead comes back at 'm on the jump, an' it's good night for Bill. Gee! Us Mohegans are gettin' our bad luck handed to us in chunks these days."

"Don't!" Saxon cried, shuddering involuntarily.

"What?" Billy asked with open mouth of surprise.

"Don't say that word again. Bert was always saying it."

"Oh, Mohegans. All right, I won't. You ain't superstitions, are you?"

"No; but just the same there's too much truth in the word for me to like it. Sometimes it seems as though he was right. Times have changed. They've changed even since I was a little girl. We crossed the plains and opened up this country, and now we're losing even the chance to work for a living in it. And it's not my fault, it's not your fault. We've got to live well or bad just by luck, it seems. There's no other way to explain it."

"It beats me," Billy concurred. "Look at the way I worked last year. Never missed a day. I'd want to never miss a day this year, an' here I haven't done a tap for weeks an' weeks an' weeks. Say! Who runs this country anyway?"

Saxon had stopped the morning paper, but frequently Maggie Donahue's boy, who served a Tribune route, tossed an "extra" on her steps. From its editorials Saxon gleaned that organized labor was trying to run the country and that it was making a mess of it. It was all the fault of domineering labor--so ran the editorials, column by column, day by day;

and Saxon was convinced, yet remained unconvinced. The social puzzle of living was too intricate.

The teamsters' strike, backed financially by the teamsters of San Francisco and by the allied unions of the San Francisco Water Front Confederation, promised to be long-drawn, whether or not it was successful. The Oakland harness-washers and stablemen, with few exceptions, had gone out with the teamsters. The teaming firm's were not half-filling their contracts, but the employers' association was helping them. In fact, half the employers' associations of the Pacific Coast were helping the Oakland Employers' Association.

Saxon was behind a month's rent, which, when it is considered that rent was paid in advance, was equivalent to two months. Likewise, she was two months behind in the installments on the furniture. Yet she was not pressed very hard by Salinger's, the furniture dealers.

"We're givin' you all the rope we can," said their collector. "My orders is to make you dig up every cent I can and at the same time not to be too hard. Salinger's are trying to do the right thing, but they're up against it, too. You've no idea how many accounts like yours they're carrying along. Sooner or later they'll have to call a halt or get it in the neck themselves. And in the meantime just see if you can't scrape up five dollars by next week--just to cheer them along, you know."

One of the stablemen who had not gone out, Henderson by name, worked at

Billy's stables. Despite the urging of the bosses to eat and sleep in the stable like the other men, Henderson had persisted in coming home each morning to his little house around the corner from Saxon's on Fifth street. Several times she had seen him swinging along defiantly, his dinner pail in his hand, while the neighborhood boys dogged his heels at a safe distance and informed him in yapping chorus that he was a scab and no good. But one evening, on his way to work, in a spirit of bravado he went into the Pile-Drivers' Home, the saloon at Seventh and Pine. There it was his mortal mischance to encounter Otto Frank, a striker who drove from the same stable. Not many minutes later an ambulance was hurrying Henderson to the receiving hospital with a fractured skull, while a patrol wagon was no less swiftly carrying Otto Frank to the city prison.

Maggie Donahue it was, eyes shining with gladness, who told Saxon of the happening.

"Served him right, too, the dirty scab," Maggie concluded.

"But his poor wife!" was Saxon's cry. "She's not strong. And then the children. She'll never be able to take care of them if her husband dies."

"An' serve her right, the damned slut!"

Saxon was both shocked and hurt by the Irishwoman's brutality. But

Maggie was implacable.

"'Tis all she or any woman deserves that'll put up an' live with a scab. What about her children? Let'm starve, an' her man a-takin' the food out of other children's mouths."

Mrs. Olsen's attitude was different. Beyond passive sentimental pity for Henderson's wife and children, she gave them no thought, her chief concern being for Otto Frank and Otto Frank's wife and children--herself and Mrs. Frank being full sisters.

"If he dies, they will hang Otto," she said. "And then what will poor Hilda do? She has varicose veins in both legs, and she never can stand on her feet all day an' work for wages. And me, I cannot help. Ain't Carl out of work, too?"

Billy had still another point of view.

"It will give the strike a black eye, especially if Henderson croaks," he worried, when he came home. "They'll hang Frank on record time. Besides, we'll have to put up a defense, an' lawyers charge like Sam Hill. They'll eat a hole in our treasury you could drive every team in Oakland through. An' if Frank hadn't ben screwed up with whisky he'd never a-done it. He's the mildest, good-naturedest man sober you ever seen."

Twice that evening Billy left the house to find out if Henderson was dead yet. In the morning the papers gave little hope, and the evening papers published his death. Otto Frank lay in jail without bail. The Tribune demanded a quick trial and summary execution, calling on the prospective jury manfully to do its duty and dwelling at length on the moral effect that would be so produced upon the lawless working class. It went further, emphasizing the salutary effect machine guns would have on the mob that had taken the fair city of Oakland by the throat.

And all such occurrences struck at Saxon personally. Practically alone in the world, save for Billy, it was her life, and his, and their mutual love-life, that was menaced. From the moment he left the house to the moment of his return she knew no peace of mind. Rough work was afoot, of which he told her nothing, and she knew he was playing his part in it. On more than one occasion she noticed fresh-broken skin on his knuckles. At such times he was remarkably taciturn, and would sit in brooding silence or go almost immediately to bed. She was afraid to have this habit of reticence grow on him, and bravely she bid for his confidence. She climbed into his lap and inside his arms, one of her arms around his neck, and with the free hand she caressed his hair back from the forehead and smoothed out the moody brows.

"Now listen to me, Billy Boy," she began lightly. "You haven't been playing fair, and I won't have it. No!" She pressed his lips shut with her fingers. "I'm doing the talking now, and because you haven't been doing your share of the talking for some time. You remember we agreed

at the start to always talk things over. I was the first to break this, when I sold my fancy work to Mrs. Higgins without speaking to you about it. And I was very sorry. I am still sorry. And I've never done it since. Now it's your turn. You're not talking things over with me. You are doing things you don't tell me about.

"Billy, you're dearer to me than anything else in the world. You know that. We're sharing each other's lives, only, just now, there's something you're not sharing. Every time your knuckles are sore, there's something you don't share. If you can't trust me, you can't trust anybody. And, besides, I love you so that no matter what you do I'll go on loving you just the same."

Billy gazed at her with fond incredulity.

"Don't be a pincher," she teased. "Remember, I stand for whatever you do."

"And you won't buck against me?" he queried.

"How can I? I'm not your boss, Billy. I wouldn't boss you for anything in the world. And if you'd let me boss you, I wouldn't love you half as much."

He digested this slowly, and finally nodded.

"An' you won't be mad?"

"With you? You've never seen me mad yet. Now come on and be generous and tell me how you hurt your knuckles. It's fresh to-day. Anybody can see that."

"All right. I'll tell you how it happened." He stopped and giggled with genuine boyish glee at some recollection. "It's like this. You won't be mad, now? We gotta do these sort of things to hold our own. Well, here's the show, a regular movin' picture except for file talkin'. Here's a big rube comin' along, hayseed stickin' out all over, hands like hams an' feet like Mississippi gunboats. He'd make half as much again as me in size an' he's young, too. Only he ain't lookin' for trouble, an' he's as innocent as... well, he's the innocentest scab that ever come down the pike an' bumped into a couple of pickets. Not a regular strike-breaker, you see, just a big rube that's read the bosses' ads an' come a-humpin' to town for the big wages.

"An' here's Bud Strothers an' me comin' along. We always go in pairs that way, an' sometimes bigger bunches. I flag the rube. 'Hello,' says I, 'lookin' for a job?' 'You bet,' says he. 'Can you drive?' 'Yep.' 'Four horses!' 'Show me to 'em,' says he. 'No josh, now,' says I; 'you're sure wantin' to drive?' 'That's what I come to town for,' he says. 'You're the man we're lookin' for,' says I. 'Come along, an' we'll have you busy in no time.'

"You see, Saxon, we can't pull it off there, because there's Tom Scanlon--you know, the red-headed cop only a couple of blocks away an' pipin' us off though not recognizin' us. So away we go, the three of us, Bud an' me leadin' that boob to take our jobs away from us I guess nit. We turn into the alley back of Campwell's grocery. Nobody in sight. Bud stops short, and the rube an' me stop.

"'I don't think he wants to drive,' Bud says, considerin'. An' the rube says quick, 'You betcher life I do.' 'You're dead sure you want that job?' I says. Yes, he's dead sure. Nothin's goin' to keep him away from that job. Why, that job's what he come to town for, an' we can't lead him to it too quick.

"'Well, my friend,' says I, 'it's my sad duty to inform you that you've made a mistake.' 'How's that?' he says. 'Go on,' I says; 'you're standin' on your foot.' And, honest to God, Saxon, that gink looks down at his feet to see. 'I don't understand,' says he. 'We're goin' to show you,' says I.

"An' then--Biff! Bang! Bingo! Swat! Zooie! Ker-slambango-blam! Fireworks, Fourth of July, Kingdom Come, blue lights, sky-rockets, an' hell fire--just like that. It don't take long when you're scientific an' trained to tandem work. Of course it's hard on the knuckles. But say, Saxon, if you'd seen that rube before an' after you'd thought he was a lightnin' change artist. Laugh? You'd a-busted."

Billy halted to give vent to his own mirth. Saxon forced herself to join with him, but down in her heart was horror. Mercedes was right. The stupid workers wrangled and snarled over jobs. The clever masters rode in automobiles and did not wrangle and snarl. They hired other stupid ones to do the wrangling and snarling for them. It was men like Bert and Frank Davis, like Chester Johnson and Otto Frank, like Jelly Belly and the Pinkertons, like Henderson and all the rest of the scabs, who were beaten up, shot, clubbed, or hanged. Ah, the clever ones were very clever. Nothing happened to them. They only rode in their automobiles.

"'You big stiffs,' the rube snivels as he crawls to his feet at the end," Billy was continuing. "'You think you still want that job?' I ask. He shakes his head. Then I read'm the riot act 'They's only one thing for you to do, old hoss, an' that's beat it. D'ye get me? Beat it. Back to the farm for YOU. An' if you come monkeyin' around town again, we'll be real mad at you. We was only foolin' this time. But next time we catch you your own mother won't know you when we get done with you.'

"An'--say!--you oughta seen'm beat it. I bet he's goin' yet. Ah' when he gets back to Milpitas, or Sleepy Hollow, or wherever he hangs out, an' tells how the boys does things in Oakland, it's dollars to doughnuts they won't be a rube in his district that'd come to town to drive if they offered ten dollars an hour."

"It was awful," Saxon said, then laughed well-simulated appreciation.

"But that was nothin'," Billy went on. "A bunch of the boys caught another one this morning. They didn't do a thing to him. My goodness gracious, no. In less'n two minutes he was the worst wreck they ever hauled to the receivin' hospital. The evenin' papers gave the score: nose broken, three bad scalp wounds, front teeth out, a broken collarbone, an' two broken ribs. Gee! He certainly got all that was comin' to him. But that's nothin'. D'ye want to know what the Frisco teamsters did in the big strike before the Earthquake? They took every scab they caught an' broke both his arms with a crowbar. That was so he couldn't drive, you see. Say, the hospitals was filled with 'em. An' the teamsters won that strike, too."

"But is it necessary, Billy, to be so terrible? I know they're scabs, and that they're taking the bread out of the strikers' children's mouths to put in their own children's mouths, and that it isn't fair and all that; but just the same is it necessary to be so... terrible?"

"Sure thing," Billy answered confidently. "We just gotta throw the fear of God into them--when we can do it without bein' caught."

"And if you're caught?"

"Then the union hires the lawyers to defend us, though that ain't much good now, for the judges are pretty hostyle, an' the papers keep hammerin' away at them to give stiffer an' stiffer sentences. Just the same, before this strike's over there'll be a whole lot of guys

a-wishin' they'd never gone scabbin'."

Very cautiously, in the next half hour, Saxon tried to feel out her husband's attitude, to find if he doubted the rightness of the violence he and his brother teamsters committed. But Billy's ethical sanction was rock-bedded and profound. It never entered his head that he was not absolutely right. It was the game. Caught in its tangled meshes, he could see no other way to play it than the way all men played it. He did not stand for dynamite and murder, however. But then the unions did not stand for such. Quite naive was his explanation that dynamite and murder did not pay; that such actions always brought down the condemnation of the public and broke the strikes. But the healthy beating up of a scab, he contended--the "throwing of the fear of God into a scab," as he expressed it--was the only right and proper thing to do.

"Our folks never had to do such things," Saxon said finally. "They never had strikes nor scabs in those times."

"You bet they didn't," Billy agreed "Them was the good old days. I'd liked to a-lived then." He drew a long breath and sighed. "But them times will never come again."

"Would you have liked living in the country?" Saxon asked.

"Sure thing."

"There's lots of men living in the country now," she suggested.

"Just the same I notice them a-hikin' to town to get our jobs," was his reply.

CHAPTER XII

A gleam of light came, when Billy got a job driving a grading team for the contractors of the big bridge then building at Niles. Before he went he made certain that it was a union job. And a union job it was for two days, when the concrete workers threw down their tools. The contractors, evidently prepared for such happening, immediately filled the places of the concrete men with nonunion Italians. Whereupon the carpenters, structural ironworkers and teamsters walked out; and Billy, lacking train fare, spent the rest of the day in walking home.

"I couldn't work as a scab," he concluded his tale.

"No," Saxon said; "you couldn't work as a scab."

But she wondered why it was that when men wanted to work, and there was work to do, yet they were unable to work because their unions said no. Why were there unions? And, if unions had to be, why were not all workingmen in them? Then there would be no scabs, and Billy could work every day. Also, she wondered where she was to get a sack of flour, for she had long since ceased the extravagance of baker's bread. And so many other of the neighborhood women had done this, that the little Welsh baker had closed up shop and gone away, taking his wife and two little daughters with him. Look where she would, everybody was being hurt by the industrial strife.

One afternoon came a caller at her door, and that evening came Billy with dubious news. He had been approached that day. All he had to do, he told Saxon, was to say the word, and he could go into the stable as foreman at one hundred dollars a month.

The nearness of such a sum, the possibility of it, was almost stunning to Saxon, sitting at a supper which consisted of boiled potatoes, warmed-over beans, and a small dry onion which they were eating raw. There was neither bread, coffee, nor butter. The onion Billy had pulled from his pocket, having picked it up in the street. One hundred dollars a month! She moistened her lips and fought for control.

"What made them offer it to you?" she questioned.

"That's easy," was his answer. "They got a dozen reasons. The guy the boss has had exercisin' Prince and King is a dub. King has gone lame in the shoulders. Then they're guessin' pretty strong that I'm the party that's put a lot of their scabs outa commission. Macklin's ben their foreman for years an' years--why I was in knee pants when he was foreman. Well, he's sick an' all in. They gotta have somebody to take his place. Then, too, I've been with 'em a long time. An' on top of that, I'm the man for the job. They know I know horses from the ground up. Hell, it's all I'm good for, except sluggin'."

"Think of it, Billy!" she breathed. "A hundred dollars a month! A hundred dollars a month!"

"An' throw the fellows down," he said.

It was not a question. Nor was it a statement. It was anything Saxon chose to make of it. They looked at each other. She waited for him to speak; but he continued merely to look. It came to her that she was facing one of the decisive moments of her life, and she gripped herself to face it in all coolness. Nor would Billy proffer her the slightest help. Whatever his own judgment might be, he masked it with an expressionless face. His eyes betrayed nothing. He looked and waited.

"You... you can't do that, Billy," she said finally. "You can't throw the fellows down."

His hand shot out to hers, and his face was a sudden, radiant dawn.

"Put her there!" he cried, their hands meeting and clasping. "You're the truest true blue wife a man ever had. If all the other fellows' wives was like you, we could win any strike we tackled."

"What would you have done if you weren't married, Billy?"

"Seen 'em in hell first."

"Than it doesn't make any difference being married. I've got to stand by you in everything you stand for. I'd be a nice wife if I didn't."

She remembered her caller of the afternoon, and knew the moment was too propitious to let pass.

"There was a man here this afternoon, Billy. He wanted a room. I told him I'd speak to you. He said he would pay six dollars a month for the back bedroom. That would pay half a month's installment on the furniture and buy a sack of flour, and we're all out of flour."

Billy's old hostility to the idea was instantly uppermost, and Saxon watched him anxiously.

"Some scab in the shops, I suppose?"

"No; he's firing on the freight run to San Jose. Harmon, he said his name was, James Harmon. They've just transferred him from the Truckee division. He'll sleep days mostly, he said; and that's why he wanted a quiet house without children in it."

In the end, with much misgiving, and only after Saxon had insistently pointed out how little work it entailed on her, Billy consented, though he continued to protest, as an afterthought:

"But I don't want you makin' beds for any man. It ain't right, Saxon. I oughta take care of you."

"And you would," she flashed back at him, "if you'd take the foremanship. Only you can't. It wouldn't be right. And if I'm to stand by you it's only fair to let me do what I can."

James Harmon proved even less a bother than Saxon had anticipated. For a fireman he was scrupulously clean, always washing up in the roundhouse before he came home. He used the key to the kitchen door, coming and going by the back steps. To Saxon he barely said how-do-you-do or good day; and, sleeping in the day time and working at night, he was in the house a week before Billy laid eyes on him.

Billy had taken to coming home later and later, and to going out after supper by himself. He did not offer to tell Saxon where he went. Nor did she ask. For that matter it required little shrewdness on her part to guess. The fumes of whisky were on his lips at such times. His slow, deliberate ways were even slower, even more deliberate. Liquor did not affect his legs. He walked as soberly as any man. There was no hesitancy, no faltering, in his muscular movements. The whisky went to his brain, making his eyes heavy-lidded and the cloudiness of them more cloudy. Not that he was flighty, nor quick, nor irritable. On the contrary, the liquor imparted to his mental processes a deep gravity and brooding solemnity. He talked little, but that little was ominous and oracular. At such times there was no appeal from his judgment, no discussion. He knew, as God knew. And when he chose to speak a harsh thought, it was ten-fold harsher than ordinarily, because it seemed to proceed out of such profundity of cogitation, because it was as

prodigiously deliberate in its incubation as it was in its enunciation.

It was not a nice side he was showing to Saxon. It was, almost, as if a stranger had come to live with her. Despite herself, she found herself beginning to shrink from him. And little could she comfort herself with the thought that it was not his real self, for she remembered his gentleness and considerateness, all his finenesses of the past. Then he had made a continual effort to avoid trouble and fighting. Now he enjoyed it, exulted in it, went looking for it. All this showed in his face. No longer was he the smiling, pleasant-faced boy. He smiled infrequently now. His face was a man's face. The lips, the eyes, the lines were harsh as his thoughts were harsh.

He was rarely unkind to Saxon; but, on the other hand he was rarely kind. His attitude toward her was growing negative. He was disinterested. Despite the fight for the union she was enduring with him, putting up with him shoulder to shoulder, she occupied but little space in his mind. When he acted toward her gently, she could see that it was merely mechanical, just as she was well aware that the endearing terms he used, the endearing caresses he gave, were only habitual. The spontaneity and warmth had gone out. Often, when he was not in liquor, flashes of the old Billy came back, but even such flashes dwindled in frequency. He was growing preoccupied, moody. Hard times and the bitter stresses of industrial conflict strained him. Especially was this apparent in his sleep, when he suffered paroxysms of lawless dreams, groaning and muttering, clenching his fists, grinding his teeth,

twisting with muscular tensions, his face writhing with passions and violences, his throat guttering with terrible curses that rasped and aborted on his lips. And Saxon, lying beside him, afraid of this visitor to her bed whom she did not know, remembered what Mary had told her of Bert. He, too, had cursed and clenched his fists, in his nights fought out the battles of his days.

One thing, however, Saxon saw clearly. By no deliberate act of Billy's was he becoming this other and unlovely Billy. Were there no strike, no snarling and wrangling over jobs, there would be only the old Billy she had loved in all absoluteness. This sleeping terror in him would have lain asleep. It was something that was being awakened in him, an image incarnate of outward conditions, as cruel, as ugly, as maleficent as were those outward conditions. But if the strike continued, then, she feared, with reason, would this other and grisly self of Billy strengthen to fuller and more forbidding stature. And this, she knew, would mean the wreck of their love-life. Such a Billy she could not love; in its nature such a Billy was not lovable nor capable of love. And then, at the thought of offspring, she shuddered. It was too terrible. And at such moments of contemplation, from her soul the inevitable plaint of the human went up: WHY? WHY? WHY?

Billy, too, had his unanswerable queries.

"Why won't the building trades come out?" he demanded wrathfuly of the obscurity that veiled the ways of living and the world. "But no; O'Brien

won't stand for a strike, and he has the Building Trades Council under his thumb. But why don't they chuck him and come out anyway? We'd win hands down all along the line. But no, O'Brien's got their goat, an' him up to his dirty neck in politics an' graft! An' damn the Federation of Labor! If all the railroad boys had come out, wouldn't the shop men have won instead of bein' licked to a frazzle? Lord, I ain't had a smoke of decent tobacco or a cup of decent coffee in a coon's age. I've forgotten what a square meal tastes like. I weighed myself yesterday. Fifteen pounds lighter than when the strike begun. If it keeps on much more I can fight middleweight. An' this is what I get after payin' dues into the union for years and years. I can't get a square meal, an' my wife has to make other men's beds. It makes my tired ache. Some day I'll get real huffy an' chuck that lodger out."

"But it's not his fault, Billy," Saxon protested.

"Who said it was?" Billy snapped roughly. "Can't I kick in general if I want to? Just the same it makes me sick. What's the good of organized labor if it don't stand together? For two cents I'd chuck the whole thing up an' go over to the employers. Only I wouldn't, God damn them! If they think they can beat us down to our knees, let 'em go ahead an' try it, that's all. But it gets me just the same. The whole world's clean dippy. They ain't no sense in anything. What's the good of supportin' a union that can't win a strike? What's the good of knockin' the blocks off of scabs when they keep a-comin' thick as ever? The whole thing's bughouse, an' I guess I am, too."

Such an outburst on Billy's part was so unusual that it was the only time Saxon knew it to occur. Always he was sullen, and dogged, and unwhipped; while whisky only served to set the maggots of certitude crawling in his brain.

One night Billy did not get home till after twelve. Saxon's anxiety was increased by the fact that police fighting and head breaking had been reported to have occurred. When Billy came, his appearance verified the report. His coatsleeves were half torn off. The Windsor tie had disappeared from under his soft turned-down collar, and every button had been ripped off the front of the shirt. When he took his hat off, Saxon was frightened by a lump on his head the size of an apple.

"D'ye know who did that? That Dutch slob Hermanmann, with a riot club. An' I'll get'm for it some day, good an' plenty. An' there's another fellow I got staked out that'll be my meat when this strike's over an' things is settled down. Blanchard's his name, Roy Blanchard."

"Not of Blanchard, Perkins and Company?" Saxon asked, busy washing Billy's hurt and making her usual fight to keep him calm.

"Yep; except he's the son of the old man. What's he do, that ain't done a tap of work in all his life except to blow the old man's money? He goes strike-breakin'. Grandstand play, that's what I call it. Gets his name in the papers an makes all the skirts he runs with fluster up an'

say: 'My! Some bear, that Roy Blanchard, some bear.' Some bear--the gazabo! He'll be bear-meat for me some day. I never itched so hard to lick a man in my life.

"And--oh, I guess I'll pass that Dutch cop up. He got his already. Somebody broke his head with a lump of coal the size of a water bucket. That was when the wagons was turnin' into Franklin, just off Eighth, by the old Galindo Hotel. They was hard fightin' there, an' some guy in the hotel lams that coal down from the second story window.

"They was fightin' every block of the way--bricks, cobblestones, an' police-clubs to beat the band. They don't dast call out the troops. An' they was afraid to shoot. Why, we tore holes through the police force, an' the ambulances and patrol wagons worked over-time. But say, we got the procession blocked at Fourteenth and Broadway, right under the nose of the City Hall, rushed the rear end, cut out the horses of five wagons, an' handed them college guys a few love-pats in passin'. All that saved 'em from hospital was the police reserves. Just the same we had 'em jammed an hour there. You oughta seen the street cars blocked, too--Broadway, Fourteenth, San Pablo, as far as you could see."

"But what did Blanchard do?" Saxon called him back.

"He led the procession, an' he drove my team. All the teams was from my stable. He rounded up a lot of them college fellows--fraternity guys, they're called--yaps that live off their fathers' money. They come to

the stable in big tourin' cars an' drove out the wagons with half the police of Oakland to help them. Say, it was sure some day. The sky rained cobblestones. An' you oughta heard the clubs on our heads--rat-tat-tat-tat, rat-tat-tat-tat! An' say, the chief of police, in a police auto, sittin' up like God Almighty--just before we got to Peralta street they was a block an' the police chargin', an' an old woman, right from her front gate, lammed the chief of police full in the face with a dead cat. Phew! You could hear it. 'Arrest that woman!' he yells, with his handkerchief out. But the boys beat the cops to her an' got her away. Some day? I guess yes. The receivin' hospital went outa commission on the jump, an' the overflow was spilled into St. Mary's Hospital, an' Fabiola, an' I don't know where else. Eight of our men was pulled, an' a dozen of the Frisco teamsters that's come over to help. They're holy terrors, them Frisco teamsters. It seemed half the workingmen of Oakland was helpin' us, an' they must be an army of them in jail. Our lawyers'll have to take their cases, too.

"But take it from me, it's the last we'll see of Roy Blanchard an' yaps of his kidney buttin' into our affairs. I guess we showed 'em some football. You know that brick buildin' they're puttin' up on Bay street? That's where we loaded up first, an', say, you couldn't see the wagon-seats for bricks when they started from the stables. Blanchard drove the first wagon, an' he was knocked clean off the seat once, but he stayed with it."

"He must have been brave," Saxon commented.

"Brave?" Billy flared. "With the police, an' the army an' navy behind him? I suppose you'll be takin' their part next. Brave? A-takin' the food outa the mouths of our women an children. Didn't Curley Jones's little kid die last night? Mother's milk not nourishin', that's what it was, because she didn't have the right stuff to eat. An' I know, an' you know, a dozen old aunts, an' sister-in-laws, an' such, that's had to hike to the poorhouse because their folks couldn't take care of 'em in these times."

In the morning paper Saxon read the exciting account of the futile attempt to break the teamsters' strike. Roy Blanchard was hailed a hero and held up as a model of wealthy citizenship. And to save herself she could not help glowing with appreciation of his courage. There was something fine in his going out to face the snarling pack. A brigadier general of the regular army was quoted as lamenting the fact that the troops had not been called out to take the mob by the throat and shake law and order into it. "This is the time for a little healthful bloodletting," was the conclusion of his remarks, after deploring the pacific methods of the police. "For not until the mob has been thoroughly beaten and cowed will tranquil industrial conditions obtain."

That evening Saxon and Billy went up town. Returning home and finding nothing to eat, he had taken her on one arm, his overcoat on the other. The overcoat he had pawned at Uncle Sam's, and he and Saxon had eaten drearily at a Japanese restaurant which in some miraculous way managed

to set a semi-satisfying meal for ten cents. After eating, they started on their way to spend an additional five cents each on a moving picture show.

At the Central Bank Building, two striking teamsters accosted Billy and took him away with them. Saxon waited on the corner, and when he returned, three quarters of an hour later, she knew he had been drinking.

Half a block on, passing the Forum Cafe, he stopped suddenly. A limousine stood at the curb, and into it a young man was helping several wonderfully gowned women. A chauffeur sat in the driver's sent. Billy touched the young man on the arm. He was as broad-shouldered as Billy and slightly taller. Blue-eyed, strong-featured, in Saxon's opinion he was undeniably handsome.

"Just a word, sport," Billy said, in a low, slow voice.

The young man glanced quickly at Billy and Saxon, and asked impatiently:

"Well, what is it?"

"You're Blanchard," Billy began. "I seen you yesterday lead out that bunch of teams."

"Didn't I do it all right?" Blanchard asked gaily, with a flash of

glance to Saxon and back again.

"Sure. But that ain't what I want to talk about."

"Who are you?" the other demanded with sudden suspicion.

"A striker. It just happens you drove my team, that's all. No; don't move for a gun." (As Blanchard half reached toward his hip pocket.) "I ain't startin' anythin' here. But I just want to tell you something."

"Be quick, then."

Blanchard lifted one foot to step into the machine.

"Sure," Billy went on without any diminution of his exasperating slowness. "What I want to tell you is that I'm after you. Not now, when the strike's on, but some time later I'm goin' to get you an' give you the beatin' of your life."

Blanchard looked Billy over with new interest and measuring eyes that sparkled with appreciation.

"You are a husky yourself," he said. "But do you think you can do it?"

"Sure. You're my meat."

"All right, then, my friend. Look me up after the strike is settled, and I'll give you a chance at me."

"Remember," Billy added, "I got you staked out."

Blanchard nodded, smiled genially to both of them, raised his hat to Saxon, and stepped into the machine.

CHAPTER XIII

From now on, to Saxon, life seemed bereft of its last reason and rhyme. It had become senseless, nightmarish. Anything irrational was possible. There was nothing stable in the anarchic flux of affairs that swept her on she knew not to what catastrophic end. Had Billy been dependable, all would still have been well. With him to cling to she would have faced everything fearlessly. But he had been whirled away from her in the prevailing madness. So radical was the change in him that he seemed almost an intruder in the house. Spiritually he was such an intruder. Another man looked out of his eyes--a man whose thoughts were of violence and hatred; a man to whom there was no good in anything, and who had become an ardent protagonist of the evil that was rampant and universal. This man no longer condemned Bert, himself muttering vaguely of dynamite, end sabotage, and revolution.

Saxon strove to maintain that sweetness and coolness of flesh and spirit that Billy had praised in the old days. Once, only, she lost control. He had been in a particularly ugly mood, and a final harshness and unfairness cut her to the quick.

"Who are you speaking to?" she flamed out at him.

He was speechless and abashed, and could only stare at her face, which was white with anger.

"Don't you ever speak to me like that again, Billy," she commanded.

"Aw, can't you put up with a piece of bad temper?" he muttered, half apologetically, yet half defiantly. "God knows I got enough to make me cranky."

After he left the house she flung herself on the bed and cried heart-brokenly. For she, who knew so thoroughly the humility of love, was a proud woman. Only the proud can be truly humble, as only the strong may know the fullness of gentleness. But what was the use, she demanded, of being proud and game, when the only person in the world who mattered to her lost his own pride and gameness and fairness and gave her the worse share of their mutual trouble?

And now, as she had faced alone the deeper, organic hurt of the loss of her baby, she faced alone another, and, in a way, an even greater personal trouble. Perhaps she loved Billy none the less, but her love was changing into something less proud, less confident, less trusting; it was becoming shot through with pity--with the pity that is parent to contempt. Her own loyalty was threatening to weaken, and she shuddered and shrank from the contempt she could see creeping in.

She struggled to steel herself to face the situation. Forgiveness stole into her heart, and she knew relief until the thought came that in the truest, highest love forgiveness should have no place. And again she cried, and continued her battle. After all, one thing was incontestable:

THIS BILLY WES NOT THE BILLY SHE HAD LOVED. This Billy was another man, a sick man, and no more to be held responsible than a fever-patient in the ravings of delirium. She must be Billy's nurse, without pride, without contempt, with nothing to forgive. Besides, he was really bearing the brunt of the fight, was in the thick of it, dizzy with the striking of blows and the blows he received. If fault there was, it lay elsewhere, somewhere in the tangled scheme of things that made men snarl over jobs like dogs over bones.

So Saxon arose and buckled on her armor again for the hardest fight of all in the world's arena--the woman's fight. She ejected from her thought all doubting and distrust. She forgave nothing, for there was nothing requiring forgiveness. She pledged herself to an absoluteness of belief that her love and Billy's was unsullied, unperturbed--severe as it had always been, as it would be when it came back again after the world settled down once more to rational ways.

That night, when he came home, she proposed, as an emergency measure, that she should resume her needlework and help keep the pot boiling until the strike was over. But Billy would hear nothing of it.

"It's all right," he assured her repeatedly. "They ain't no call for you to work. I'm goin' to get some money before the week is out. An' I'll turn it over to you. An' Saturday night we'll go to the show--a real show, no movin' pictures. Harvey's nigger minstrels is comin' to town. We'll go Saturday night. I'll have the money before that, as sure as

beans is beans."

Friday evening he did not come home to supper, which Saxon regretted, for Maggie Donahue had returned a pan of potatoes and two quarts of flour (borrowed the week before), and it was a hearty meal that awaited him. Saxon kept the stove going till nine o'clock, when, despite her reluctance, she went to bed. Her preference would have been to wait up, but she did not dare, knowing full well what the effect would be on him did he come home in liquor.

The clock had just struck one, when she heard the click of the gate. Slowly, heavily, ominously, she heard him come up the steps and fumble with his key at the door. He entered the bedroom, and she heard him sigh as he sat down. She remained quiet, for she had learned the hypersensitiveness induced by drink and was fastidiously careful not to hurt him even with the knowledge that she had lain awake for him. It was not easy. Her hands were clenched till the nails dented the palms, and her body was rigid in her passionate effort for control. Never had he come home as bad as this.

"Saxon," he called thickly. "Saxon."

She stired and yawned.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Won't you strike a light? My fingers is all thumbs."

Without looking at him, she complied; but so violent was the nervous trembling of her hands that the glass chimney tinkled against the globe and the match went out.

"I ain't drunk, Saxon," he said in the darkness, a hint of amusement in his thick voice. "I've only had two or three jolts ... of that sort."

On her second attempt with the lamp she succeeded. When she turned to look at him she screamed with fright. Though she had heard his voice and knew him to be Billy, for the instant she did not recognize him. His face was a face she had never known. Swollen, bruised, discolored, every feature had been beaten out of all semblance of familiarity. One eye was entirely closed, the other showed through a narrow slit of blood-congested flesh. One ear seemed to have lost most of its skin. The whole face was a swollen pulp. His right jaw, in particular, was twice the size of the left. No wonder his speech had been thick, was her thought, as she regarded the fearfully cut and swollen lips that still bled. She was sickened by the sight, and her heart went out to him in a great wave of tenderness. She wanted to put her arms around him, and cuddle and soothe him; but her practical judgment bade otherwise.

"You poor, poor boy," she cried. "Tell me what you want me to do first. I don't know about such things."

"If you could help me get my clothes off," he suggested meekly and thickly. "I got 'em on before I stiffened up."

"And then hot water--that will be good," she said, as she began gently drawing his coat sleeve over a puffed and helpless hand.

"I told you they was all thumbs," he grimaced, holding up his hand and squinting at it with the fraction of sight remaining to him.

"You sit and wait," she said, "till I start the fire and get the hot water going. I won't be a minute. Then I'll finish getting your clothes off."

From the kitchen she could hear him mumbling to himself, and when she returned he was repeating over and over:

"We needed the money, Saxon. We needed the money."

Drunken he was not, she could see that, and from his babbling she knew he was partly delirious.

"He was a surprise box," he wandered on, while she proceeded to undress him; and bit by bit she was able to piece together what had happened. "He was an unknown from Chicago. They sprang him on me. The secretary of the Acme Club warned me I'd have my hands full. An' I'd a-won if I'd been in condition. But fifteen pounds off without trainin' ain't

condition. Then I'd been drinkin' pretty regular, an' I didn't have my wind."

But Saxon, stripping his undershirt, no longer heard him. As with his face, she could not recognize his splendidly muscled back. The white sheath of silken skin was torn and bloody. The lacerations occurred oftenest in horizontal lines, though there were perpendicular lines as well.

"How did you get all that?" she asked.

"The ropes. I was up against 'em more times than I like to remember. Gee! He certainly gave me mine. But I fooled 'm. He couldn't put me out. I lasted the twenty rounds, an' I wanta tell you he's got some marks to remember me by. If he ain't got a couple of knuckles broke in the left hand I'm a geezer.--Here, feel my head here. Swollen, eh? Sure thing. He hit that more times than he's wishin' he had right now. But, oh, what a lacin'! What a lacin'! I never had anything like it before. The Chicago Terror, they call 'm. I take my hat off to 'm. He's some bear. But I could a-made 'm take the count if I'd ben in condition an' had my wind.--Oh! Ouch! Watch out! It's like a boil!"

Fumbling at his waistband, Saxon's hand had come in contact with a brightly inflamed surface larger than a soup plate.

"That's from the kidney blows," Billy explained. "He was a regular devil

at it. 'Most every clench, like clock work, down he'd chop one on me. It got so sore I was wincin'... until I got groggy an' didn't know much of anything. It ain't a knockout blow, you know, but it's awful wearin' in a long fight. It takes the starch out of you."

When his knees were bared, Saxon could see the skin across the knee-caps was broken and gone.

"The skin ain't made to stand a heavy fellow like me on the knees," he volunteered. "An' the rosin in the canvas cuts like Sam Hill."

The tears were in Saxon's eyes, and she could have cried over the manhandled body of her beautiful sick boy.

As she carried his pants across the room to hang them up, a jingle of money came from them. He called her back, and from the pocket drew forth a handful of silver.

"We needed the money, we needed the money," he kept muttering, as he vainly tried to count the coins; and Saxon knew that his mind was wandering again.

It cut her to the heart, for she could not but remember the harsh thoughts that had threatened her loyalty during the week past. After all, Billy, the splendid physical man, was only a boy, her boy. And he had faced and endured all this terrible punishment for her, for the

house and the furniture that were their house and furniture. He said so, now, when he scarcely knew what he said. He said "WE needed the money." She was not so absent from his thoughts as she had fancied. Here, down to the naked tie-ribs of his soul, when he was half unconscious, the thought of her persisted, was uppermost. We needed the money. WE!

The tears were trickling down her checks as she bent over him, and it seemed she had never loved him so much as now.

"Here; you count," he said, abandoning the effort and handing the money to her. "... How much do you make it?"

"Nineteen dollars and thirty-five cents."

"That's right... the loser's end... twenty dollars. I had some drinks, an' treated a couple of the boys, an' then there was carfare. If I'd a-won, I'd a-got a hundred. That's what I fought for. It'd a-put us on Easy street for a while. You take it an' keep it. It's better 'n nothin'."

In bed, he could not sleep because of his pain, and hour by hour she worked over him, renewing the hot compresses over his bruises, soothing the lacerations with witch hazel and cold cream and the tenderest of finger tips. And all the while, with broken intervals of groaning, he babbled on, living over the fight, seeking relief in telling her his trouble, voicing regret at loss of the money, and crying out the hurt

to his pride. Far worse than the sum of his physical hurts was his hurt pride.

"He couldn't put me out, anyway. He had full swing at me in the times when I was too much in to get my hands up. The crowd was crazy. I showed 'em some stamina. They was times when he only rocked me, for I'd evaporated plenty of his steam for him in the openin' rounds. I don't know how many times he dropped me. Things was gettin' too dreamy....

"Sometimes, toward the end, I could see three of him in the ring at once, an' I wouldn't know which to hit an' which to duck....

"But I fooled 'm. When I couldn't see, or feel, an' when my knees was shakin an my head goin' like a merry-go-round, I'd fall safe into clenches just the same. I bet the referee's arms is tired from draggin' us apart....

"But what a lacin'! What a lacin'! Say, Saxon... where are you? Oh, there, eh? I guess I was dreamin'. But, say, let this be a lesson to you. I broke my word an' went fightin', an' see what I got. Look at me, an' take warnin' so you won't make the same mistake an' go to makin' an' sellin' fancy work again....

"But I fooled 'em--everybody. At the beginnin' the bettin' was even. By the sixth round the wise gazabos was offerin' two to one against me. I was licked from the first drop outa the box--anybody could see that;

but he couldn't put me down for the count. By the tenth round they was offerin' even that I wouldn't last the round. At the eleventh they was offerin' I wouldn't last the fifteenth. An' I lasted the whole twenty.
But some punishment, I want to tell you, some punishment.

"Why, they was four rounds I was in dreamland all the time... only I kept on my feet an' fought, or took the count to eight an' got up, an' stalled an' covered an' whanged away. I don't know what I done, except I must a-done like that, because I wasn't there. I don't know a thing from the thirteenth, when he sent me to the mat on my head, till the eighteenth.

"Where was I? Oh, yes. I opened my eyes, or one eye, because I had only one that would open. An' there I was, in my corner, with the towels goin' an' ammonia in my nose an' Bill Murphy with a chunk of ice at the back of my neck. An' there, across the ring, I could see the Chicago Terror, an' I had to do some thinkin' to remember I was fightin' him. It was like I'd been away somewhere an' just got back. 'What round's this comin'?' I ask Bill. 'The eighteenth,' says he. 'The hell,' I says.
'What's come of all the other rounds? The last I was fightin' in was the thirteenth.' 'You're a wonder,' says Bill. 'You've ben out four rounds, only nobody knows it except me. I've ben tryin' to get you to quit all the time.' Just then the gong sounds, an' I can see the Terror startin' for me. 'Quit,' says Bill, makin' a move to throw in the towel. 'Not on your life,' I says. 'Drop it, Bill.' But he went on wantin' me to quit.
By that time the Terror had come across to my corner an' was standin'

with his hands down, lookin' at me. The referee was lookin', too, an' the house was that quiet, lookin', you could hear a pin drop. An' my head was gettin' some clearer, but not much.

"'You can't win,' Bill says.

"'Watch me,' says I. An' with that I make a rush for the Terror, catchin' him unexpected. I'm that groggy I can't stand, but I just keep a-goin', wallopin' the Terror clear across the ring to his corner, where he slips an' falls, an' I fall on top of 'm. Say, that crowd goes crazy.

"Where was I?--My head's still goin' round I guess. It's buzzin' like a swarm of bees."

"You'd just fallen on top of him in his corner," Saxon prompted.

"Oh, yes. Well, no sooner are we on our feet--an' I can't stand--I rush 'm the same way back across to my corner an' fall on 'm. That was luck. We got up, an' I'd a-fallen, only I clenched an' held myself up by him. 'I got your goat,' I says to him. 'An' now I'm goin' to eat you up.'

"I hadn't his goat, but I was playin' to get a piece of it, an' I got it, rushin' 'm as soon as the referee drags us apart an' fetchin' 'm a lucky wallop in the stomach that steadied 'm an' made him almighty careful. Too almighty careful. He was afraid to chance a mix with me. He thought I had more fight left in me than I had. So you see I got that

much of his goat anyway.

"An' he couldn't get me. He didn't get me. An' in the twentieth we stood in the middle of the ring an' exchanged wallops even. Of course, I'd made a fine showin' for a licked man, but he got the decision, which was right. But I fooled 'm. He couldn't get me. An' I fooled the gazabos that was bettin' he would on short order."

At last, as dawn came on, Billy slept. He groaned and moaned, his face twisting with pain, his body vainly moving and tossing in quest of easement.

So this was prizefighting, Saxon thought. It was much worse than she had dreamed. She had had no idea that such damage could be wrought with padded gloves. He must never fight again. Street rioting was preferable. She was wondering how much of his silk had been lost, when he mumbled and opened his eyes.

"What is it?" she asked, ere it came to her that his eyes were unseeing and that he was in delirium.

"Saxon!... Saxon!" he called.

"Yes, Billy. What is it?"

His hand fumbled over the bed where ordinarily it would have encountered

her.

Again he called her, and she cried her presence loudly in his ear. He sighed with relief and muttered brokenly:

"I had to do it.... We needed the money."

His eyes closed, and he slept more soundly, though his muttering continued. She had heard of congestion of the brain, and was frightened. Then she remembered his telling her of the ice Billy Murphy had held against his head.

Throwing a shawl over her head, she ran to the Pile Drivers' Home on Seventh street. The barkeeper had just opened, and was sweeping out. From the refrigerator he gave her all the ice she wished to carry, breaking it into convenient pieces for her. Back in the house, she applied the ice to the base of Billy's brain, placed hot irons to his feet, and bathed his head with witch hazel made cold by resting on the ice.

He slept in the darkened room until late afternoon, when, to Saxon's dismay, he insisted on getting up.

"Gotta make a showin'," he explained. "They ain't goin' to have the laugh on me."

In torment he was helped by her to dress, and in torment he went forth from the house so that his world should have ocular evidence that the beating he had received did not keep him in bed.

It was another kind of pride, different from a woman's, and Saxon wondered if it were the less admirable for that.

CHAPTER XIV

In the days that followed Billy's swellings went down and the bruises passed away with surprising rapidity. The quick healing of the lacerations attested the healthiness of his blood. Only remained the black eyes, unduly conspicuous on a face as blond as his. The discoloration was stubborn, persisting half a month, in which time happened divers events of importance.

Otto Frank's trial had been expeditious. Found guilty by a jury notable for the business and professional men on it, the death sentence was passed upon him and he was removed to San Quentin for execution.

The case of Chester Johnson and the fourteen others had taken longer, but within the same week, it, too, was finished. Chester Johnson was sentenced to be hanged. Two got life; three, twenty years. Only two were acquitted. The remaining seven received terms of from two to ten years.

The effect on Saxon was to throw her into deep depression. Billy was made gloomy, but his fighting spirit was not subdued.

"Always some men killed in battle," he said. "That's to be expected. But the way of sentencin' 'em gets me. All found guilty was responsible for the killin'; or none was responsible. If all was, then they should get the same sentence. They oughta hang like Chester Johnson, or else he oughtn't to hang. I'd just like to know how the judge makes up his mind.

It must be like markin' China lottery tickets. He plays hunches. He looks at a guy an' waits for a spot or a number to come into his head. How else could he give Johnny Black four years an' Cal Hutchins twenty years? He played the hunches as they came into his head, an' it might just as easy ben the other way around an' Cal Hutchins got four years an' Johnny Black twenty.

"I know both them boys. They hung out with the Tenth an' Kirkham gang mostly, though sometimes they ran with my gang. We used to go swimmin' after school down to Sandy Beach on the marsh, an' in the Transit slip where they said the water was sixty feet deep, only it wasn't. An' once, on a Thursday, we dug a lot of clams together, an' played hookey Friday to peddle them. An' we used to go out on the Rock Wall an' catch pogies an' rock cod. One day--the day of the eclipse--Cal caught a perch half as big as a door. I never seen such a fish. An' now he's got to wear the stripes for twenty years. Lucky he wasn't married. If he don't get the consumption he'll be an old man when he comes out. Cal's mother wouldn't let 'm go swimmin', an' whenever she suspected she always licked his hair with her tongue. If it tasted salty, he got a beltin'. But he was onto himself. Comin' home, he'd jump somebody's front fence an' hold his head under a faucet."

"I used to dance with Chester Johnson," Saxon said. "And I knew his wife, Kittie Brady, long and long ago. She had next place at the table to me in the paper-box factory. She's gone to San Francisco to her married sister's. She's going to have a baby, too. She was awfully

pretty, and there was always a string of fellows after her."

The effect of the conviction and severe sentences was a bad one on the union men. Instead of being disheartening, it intensified the bitterness. Billy's repentance for having fought and the sweetness and affection which had flashed up in the days of Saxon's nursing of him were blotted out. At home, he scowled and brooded, while his talk took on the tone of Bert's in the last days ere that Mohegan died. Also, Billy stayed away from home longer hours, and was again steadily drinking.

Saxon well-nigh abandoned hope. Almost was she steeled to the inevitable tragedy which her morbid fancy painted in a thousand guises. Oftenest, it was of Billy being brought home on a stretcher. Sometimes it was a call to the telephone in the corner grocery and the curt information by a strange voice that her husband was lying in the receiving hospital or the morgue. And when the mysterious horse-poisoning cases occurred, and when the residence of one of the teaming magnates was half destroyed by dynamite, she saw Billy in prison, or wearing stripes, or mounting to the scaffold at San Quentin while at the same time she could see the little cottage on Pine street besieged by newspaper reporters and photographers.

Yet her lively imagination failed altogether to anticipate the real catastrophe. Harmon, the fireman lodger, passing through the kitchen on his way out to work, had paused to tell Saxon about the previous day's

train-wreck in the Alviso marshes, and of how the engineer, imprisoned under the overturned engine and unhurt, being drowned by the rising tide, had begged to be shot. Billy came in at the end of the narrative, and from the somber light in his heavy-lidded eyes Saxon knew he had been drinking. He glowered at Harmon, and, without greeting to him or Saxon, leaned his shoulder against the wall.

Harmon felt the awkwardness of the situation, and did his best to appear oblivious.

"I was just telling your wife--" he began, but was savagely interrupted.

"I don't care what you was tellin' her. But I got something to tell you, Mister Man. My wife's made up your bed too many times to suit me."

"Billy!" Saxon cried, her face scarlet with resentment, and hurt, and shame.

Billy ignored her. Harmon was saying:

"I don't understand--"

"Well, I don't like your mug," Billy informed him. "You're standin' on your foot. Get off of it. Get out. Beat it. D'ye understand that?"

"I don't know what's got into him," Saxon gasped hurriedly to the

fireman. "He's not himself. Oh, I am so ashamed, so ashamed."

Billy turned on her.

"You shut your mouth an' keep outa this."

"But, Billy," she remonstrated.

"An' get outa here. You go into the other room."

"Here, now," Harmon broke in. "This is a fine way to treat a fellow."

"I've given you too much rope as it is," was Billy's answer.

"I've paid my rent regularly, haven't I?"

"An' I oughta knock your block off for you. Don't see any reason I shouldn't, for that matter."

"If you do anything like that, Billy--" Saxon began.

"You here still? Well, if you won't go into the other room, I'll see that you do."

His hand clutched her arm. For one instant she resisted his strength; and in that instant, the flesh crushed under his fingers, she realized

the fullness of his strength.

In the front room she could only lie back in the Morris chair sobbing, and listen to what occurred in the kitchen. "I'll stay to the end of the week," the fireman was saying. "I've paid in advance."

"Don't make no mistake," came Billy's voice, so slow that it was almost a drawl, yet quivering with rage. "You can't get out too quick if you wanta stay healthy--you an' your traps with you. I'm likely to start something any moment."

"Oh, I know you're a slugger--" the fireman's voice began.

Then came the unmistakable impact of a blow; the crash of glass; a scuffle on the back porch; and, finally, the heavy bumps of a body down the steps. She heard Billy reenter the kitchen, move about, and knew he was sweeping up the broken glass of the kitchen door. Then he washed himself at the sink, whistling while he dried his face and hands, and walked into the front room. She did not look at him. She was too sick and sad. He paused irresolutely, seeming to make up his mind.

"I'm goin' up town," he stated. "They's a meeting of the union. If I don't come back it'll be because that geezer's sworn out a warrant."

He opened the front door and paused. She knew he was looking at her. Then the door closed and she heard him go down the steps.

Saxon was stunned. She did not think. She did not know what to think. The whole thing was incomprehensible, incredible. She lay back in the chair, her eyes closed, her mind almost a blank, crushed by a leaden feeling that the end had come to everything.

The voices of children playing in the street aroused her. Night had fallen. She groped her way to a lamp and lighted it. In the kitchen she stared, lips trembling, at the pitiful, half prepared meal. The fire had gone out. The water had boiled away from the potatoes. When she lifted the lid, a burnt smell arose. Methodically she scraped and cleaned the pot, put things in order, and peeled and sliced the potatoes for next day's frying. And just as methodically she went to bed. Her lack of nervousness, her placidity, was abnormal, so abnormal that she closed her eyes and was almost immediately asleep. Nor did she awaken till the sunshine was streaming into the room.

It was the first night she and Billy had slept apart. She was amazed that she had not lain awake worrying about him. She lay with eyes wide open, scarcely thinking, until pain in her arm attracted her attention. It was where Billy had gripped her. On examination she found the bruised flesh fearfully black and blue. She was astonished, not by the spiritual fact that such bruise had been administered by the one she loved most in the world, but by the sheer physical fact that an instant's pressure had inflicted so much damage. The strength of a man was a terrible thing. Quite impersonally, she found herself wondering if Charley Long were as

strong as Billy.

It was not until she dressed and built the fire that she began to think about more immediate things. Billy had not returned. Then he was arrested. What was she to do?--leave him in jail, go away, and start life afresh? Of course it was impossible to go on living with a man who had behaved as he had. But then, came another thought, WAS it impossible? After all, he was her husband. FOR BETTER OR WORSE--the phrase reiterated itself, a monotonous accompaniment to her thoughts, at the back of her consciousness. To leave him was to surrender. She carried the matter before the tribunal of her mother's memory. No; Daisy would never have surrendered. Daisy was a fighter. Then she, Saxon, must fight. Besides--and she acknowledged it--readily, though in a cold, dead way--besides, Billy was better than most husbands. Better than any other husband she had heard of, she concluded, as she remembered many of his earlier nicenesses and finenesses, and especially his eternal chant: NOTHING IS TOO GOOD FOR US. THE ROBERTSES AIN'T ON THE CHEAP.

At eleven o'clock she had a caller. It was Bud Strothers, Billy's mate on strike duty. Billy, he told her, had refused bail, refused a lawyer, had asked to be tried by the Court, had pleaded guilty, and had received a sentence of sixty dollars or thirty days. Also, he had refused to let the boys pay his fine.

"He's clean looney," Strothers summed up. "Won't listen to reason. Says he'll serve the time out. He's been tankin' up too regular, I guess.

His wheels are buzzin'. Here, he give me this note for you. Any time you want anything send for me. The boys'll all stand by Bill's wife. You belong to us, you know. How are you off for money?"

Proudly she disclaimed any need for money, and not until her visitor departed did she read Billy's note:

Dear Saxon--Bud Strothers is going to give you this. Don't worry about me. I am going to take my medicine. I deserve it--you know that. I guess I am gone bughouse. Just the same, I am sorry for what I done. Don't come to see me. I don't want you to. If you need money, the union will give you some. The business agent is all right. I will be out in a month. Now, Saxon, you know I love you, and just say to yourself that you forgive me this time, and you won't never have to do it again.

Billy.

Bud Strothers was followed by Maggie Donahue, and Mrs. Olsen, who paid neighborly calls of cheer and were tactful in their offers of help and in studiously avoiding more reference than was necessary to Billy's predicament.

In the afternoon James Harmon arrived. He limped slightly, and Saxon divined that he was doing his best to minimize that evidence of hurt. She tried to apologize to him, but he would not listen.

"I don't blame you, Mrs. Roberts," he said. "I know it wasn't your doing. But your husband wasn't just himself, I guess. He was fightin' mad on general principles, and it was just my luck to get in the way, that was all."

"But just the same--"

The fireman shook his head.

"I know all about it. I used to punish the drink myself, and I done some funny things in them days. And I'm sorry I swore that warrant out and testified. But I was hot in the collar. I'm cooled down now, an' I'm sorry I done it."

"You're awfully good and kind," she said, and then began hesitantly on what was bothering her. "You... you can't stay now, with him... away, you know."

"Yes; that wouldn't do, would it? I'll tell you: I'll pack up right now, and skin out, and then, before six o'clock, I'll send a wagon for my things. Here's the key to the kitchen door."

Much as he demurred, she compelled him to receive back the unexpired portion of his rent. He shook her hand heartily at leaving, and tried to get her to promise to call upon him for a loan any time she might be in need.

"It's all right," he assured her. "I'm married, and got two boys. One of them's got his lungs touched, and she's with 'em down in Arizona campin' out. The railroad helped with passes."

And as he went down the steps she wondered that so kind a man should be in so madly cruel a world.

The Donahue boy threw in a spare evening paper, and Saxon found half a column devoted to Billy. It was not nice. The fact that he had stood up in the police court with his eyes blacked from some other fray was noted. He was described as a bully, a hoodlum, a rough-neck, a professional slugger whose presence in the ranks was a disgrace to organized labor. The assault he had pleaded guilty of was atrocious and unprovoked, and if he were a fair sample of a striking teamster, the only wise thing for Oakland to do was to break up the union and drive every member from the city. And, finally, the paper complained at the mildness of the sentence. It should have been six months at least. The judge was quoted as expressing regret that he had been unable to impose a six months' sentence, this inability being due to the condition of the jails, already crowded beyond capacity by the many eases of assault committed in the course of the various strikes.

That night, in bed, Saxon experienced her first loneliness. Her brain seemed in a whirl, and her sleep was broken by vain gropings for the form of Billy she imagined at her side. At last, she lighted the lamp

and lay staring at the ceiling, wide-eyed, conning over and over the details of the disaster that had overwhelmed her. She could forgive, and she could not forgive. The blow to her love-life had been too savage, too brutal. Her pride was too lacerated to permit her wholly to return in memory to the other Billy whom she loved. Wine in, wit out, she repeated to herself; but the phrase could not absolve the man who had slept by her side, and to whom she had consecrated herself. She wept in the loneliness of the all-too-spacious bed, strove to forget Billy's incomprehensible cruelty, even pillowed her cheek with numb fondness against the bruise of her arm; but still resentment burned within her, a steady flame of protest against Billy and all that Billy had done. Her throat was parched, a dull ache never ceased in her breast, and she was oppressed by a feeling of goneness. WHY, WHY?--And from the puzzle of the world came no solution.

In the morning she received a visit from Sarah--the second in all the period of her marriage; and she could easily guess her sister-in-law's ghoulish errand. No exertion was required for the assertion of all of Saxon's pride. She refused to be in the slightest on the defensive. There was nothing to defend, nothing to explain. Everything was all right, and it was nobody's business anyway. This attitude but served to vex Sarah.

"I warned you, and you can't say I didn't," her diatribe ran. "I always knew he was no good, a jailbird, a hoodlum, a slugger. My heart sunk into my boots when I heard you was runnin' with a prizefighter. I

told you so at the time. But no; you wouldn't listen, you with your highfalutin' notions an' more pairs of shoes than any decent woman should have. You knew better'n me. An' I said then, to Tom, I said, 'It's all up with Saxon now.' Them was my very words. Them that touches pitch is defiled. If you'd only a-married Charley Long! Then the family wouldn't a-ben disgraced. An' this is only the beginnin', mark me, only the beginnin'. Where it'll end, God knows. He'll kill somebody yet, that plug-ugly of yourn, an' be hanged for it. You wait an' see, that's all, an' then you'll remember my words. As you make your bed, so you will lay in it"

"Best bed I ever had," Saxon commented.

"So you can say, so you can say," Sarah snorted.

"I wouldn't trade it for a queen's bed," Saxon added.

"A jailbird's bed," Sarah rejoined witheringly.

"Oh, it's the style," Saxon retorted airily. "Everybody's getting a taste of jail. Wasn't Tom arrested at some street meeting of the socialists? Everybody goes to jail these days."

The barb had struck home.

"But Tom was acquitted," Sarah hastened to proclaim.

"Just the same he lay in jail all night without bail."

This was unanswerable, and Sarah executed her favorite tactic of attack in flank.

"A nice come-down for you, I must say, that was raised straight an' right, a-cuttin' up didoes with a lodger."

"Who says so?" Saxon blazed with an indignation quickly mastered.

"Oh, a blind man can read between the lines. A lodger, a young married woman with no self respect, an' a prizefighter for a husband--what else would they fight about?"

"Just like any family quarrel, wasn't it?" Saxon smiled placidly.

Sarah was shocked into momentary speechlessness.

"And I want you to understand it," Saxon continued. "It makes a woman proud to have men fight over her. I am proud. Do you hear? I am proud. I want you to tell them so. I want you to tell all your neighbors. Tell everybody. I am no cow. Men like me. Men fight for me. Men go to jail for me. What is a woman in the world for, if it isn't to have men like her? Now, go, Sarah; go at once, and tell everybody what you've read between the lines. Tell them Billy is a jailbird and that I am a bad

woman whom all men desire. Shout it out, and good luck to you. And get out of my house. And never put your feet in it again. You are too decent a woman to come here. You might lose your reputation. And think of your children. Now get out. Go."

Not until Sarah had taken an amazed and horrified departure did Saxon fling herself on the bed in a convulsion of tears. She had been ashamed, before, merely of Billy's inhospitality, and surliness, and unfairness. But she could see, now, the light in which others looked on the affair. It had not entered Saxon's head. She was confident that it had not entered Billy's. She knew his attitude from the first. Always he had opposed taking a lodger because of his proud faith that his wife should not work. Only hard times had compelled his consent, and, now that she looked back, almost had she inveigled him into consenting.

But all this did not alter the viewpoint the neighborhood must hold, that every one who had ever known her must hold. And for this, too, Billy was responsible. It was more terrible than all the other things he had been guilty of put together. She could never look any one in the face again. Maggie Donahue and Mrs. Olsen had been very kind, but of what must they have been thinking all the time they talked with her? And what must they have said to each other? What was everybody saying?--over front gates and back fences,--the men standing on the corners or talking in saloons?

Later, exhausted by her grief, when the tears no longer fell, she grew

more impersonal, and dwelt on the disasters that had befallen so many women since the strike troubles began--Otto Frank's wife, Henderson's widow, pretty Kittie Brady, Mary, all the womenfolk of the other workmen who were now wearing the stripes in San Quentin. Her world was crashing about her ears. No one was exempt. Not only had she not escaped, but hers was the worst disgrace of all. Desperately she tried to hug the delusion that she was asleep, that it was all a nightmare, and that soon the alarm would go off and she would get up and cook Billy's breakfast so that he could go to work.

She did not leave the bed that day. Nor did she sleep. Her brain whirled on and on, now dwelling at insistent length upon her misfortunes, now pursuing the most fantastic ramifications of what she considered her disgrace, and, again, going back to her childhood and wandering through endless trivial detail. She worked at all the tasks she had ever done, performing, in fancy, the myriads of mechanical movements peculiar to each occupation--shaping and pasting in the paper box factory, ironing in the laundry, weaving in the jute mill, peeling fruit in the cannery and countless boxes of scalded tomatoes. She attended all her dances and all her picnics over again; went through her school days, recalling the face and name and seat of every schoolmate; endured the gray bleakness of the years in the orphan asylum; revisioned every memory of her mother, every tale; and relived all her life with Billy. But ever--and here the torment lay--she was drawn back from these far-wanderings to her present trouble, with its parch in the throat, its ache in the breast, and its gnawing, vacant goneness.

CHAPTER XV

All that night Saxon lay, unsleeping, without taking off her clothes, and when she arose in the morning and washed her face and dressed her hair she was aware of a strange numbness, of a feeling of constriction about her head as if it were bound by a heavy band of iron. It seemed like a dull pressure upon her brain. It was the beginning of an illness that she did not know as illness. All she knew was that she felt queer. It was not fever. It was not cold. Her bodily health was as it should be, and, when she thought about it, she put her condition down to nerves--nerves, according to her ideas and the ideas of her class, being unconnected with disease.

She had a strange feeling of loss of self, of being a stranger to herself, and the world in which she moved seemed a vague and shrouded world. It lacked sharpness of definition. Its customary vividness was gone. She had lapses of memory, and was continually finding herself doing unplanned things. Thus, to her astonishment, she came to in the back yard hanging up the week's wash. She had no recollection of having done it, yet it had been done precisely as it should have been done. She had boiled the sheets and pillow-slips and the table linen. Billy's woolens had been washed in warm water only, with the home-made soap, the recipe of which Mercedes had given her. On investigation, she found she had eaten a mutton chop for breakfast. This meant that she had been to the butcher shop, yet she had no memory of having gone. Curiously, she went into the bedroom. The bed was made up and everything in order.

At twilight she came upon herself in the front room, seated by the window, crying in an ecstasy of joy. At first she did not know what this joy was; then it came to her that it was because she had lost her baby. "A blessing, a blessing," she was chanting aloud, wringing her hands, but with joy, she knew it was with joy that she wrung her hands.

The days came and went. She had little notion of time. Sometimes, centuries agone, it seemed to her it was since Billy had gone to jail. At other times it was no more than the night before. But through it all two ideas persisted: she must not go to see Billy in jail; it was a blessing she had lost her baby.

Once, Bud Strothers came to see her. She sat in the front room and talked with him, noting with fascination that there were fringes to the heels of his trousers. Another day, the business agent of the union called. She told him, as she had told Bud Strothers, that everything was all right, that she needed nothing, that she could get along comfortably until Billy came out.

A fear began to haunt her. WHEN HE CAME OUT. No; it must not be. There must not be another baby. It might LIVE. No, no, a thousand times no. It must not be. She would run away first. She would never see Billy again. Anything but that. Anything but that.

This fear persisted. In her nightmare-ridden sleep it became an

accomplished fact, so that she would awake, trembling, in a cold sweat, crying out. Her sleep had become wretched. Sometimes she was convinced that she did not sleep at all, and she knew that she had insomnia, and remembered that it was of insomnia her mother had died.

She came to herself one day, sitting in Doctor Hentley's office. He was looking at her in a puzzled way.

"Got plenty to eat?" he was asking.

She nodded.

"Any serious trouble?"

She shook her head.

"Everything's all right, doctor… except…"

"Yes, yes," he encouraged.

And then she knew why she had come. Simply, explicitly, she told him. He shook his head slowly.

"It can't be done, little woman," he said

"Oh, but it can!" she cried. "I know it can."

"I don't mean that," he answered. "I mean I can't tell you. I dare not. It is against the law. There is a doctor in Leavenworth prison right now for that."

In vain she pleaded with him. He instanced his own wife and children whose existence forbade his imperiling.

"Besides, there is no likelihood now," he told her.

"But there will be, there is sure to be," she urged.

But he could only shake his head sadly.

"Why do you want to know?" he questioned finally.

Saxon poured her heart out to him. She told of her first year of happiness with Billy, of the hard times caused by the labor troubles, of the change in Billy so that there was no love-life left, of her own deep horror. Not if it died, she concluded. She could go through that again. But if it should live. Billy would soon be out of jail, and then the danger would begin. It was only a few words. She would never tell any one. Wild horses could not drag it out of her.

But Doctor Hentley continued to shake his head. "I can't tell you, little woman. It's a shame, but I can't take the risk. My hands are

tied. Our laws are all wrong. I have to consider those who are dear to me."

It was when she got up to go that he faltered. "Come here," he said. "Sit closer."

He prepared to whisper in her ear, then, with a sudden excess of caution, crossed the room swiftly, opened the door, and looked out. When he sat down again he drew his chair so close to hers that the arms touched, and when he whispered his beard tickled her ear.

"No, no," he shut her off when she tried to voice her gratitude. "I have told you nothing. You were here to consult me about your general health. You are run down, out of condition--"

As he talked he moved her toward the door. When he opened it, a patient for the dentist in the adjoining office was standing in the hall. Doctor Hentley lifted his voice.

"What you need is that tonic I prescribed. Remember that. And don't pamper your appetite when it comes back. Eat strong, nourishing food, and beefsteak, plenty of beefsteak. And don't cook it to a cinder. Good day."

At times the silent cottage became unendurable, and Saxon would throw a shawl about her head and walk out the Oakland Mole, or cross the

railroad yards and the marshes to Sandy Beach where Billy had said he used to swim. Also, by going out the Transit slip, by climbing down the piles on a precarious ladder of iron spikes, and by crossing a boom of logs, she won access to the Rock Wall that extended far out into the bay and that served as a barrier between the mudflats and the tide-scoured channel of Oakland Estuary. Here the fresh sea breezes blew and Oakland sank down to a smudge of smoke behind her, while across the bay she could see the smudge that represented San Francisco. Ocean steamships passed up and down the estuary, and lofty-masted ships, towed by red-stacked tugs.

She gazed at the sailors on the ships, wondered on what far voyages and to what far lands they went, wondered what freedoms were theirs. Or were they girt in by as remorseless and cruel a world as the dwellers in Oakland were? Were they as unfair, as unjust, as brutal, in their dealings with their fellows as were the city dwellers? It did not seem so, and sometimes she wished herself on board, out-bound, going anywhere, she cared not where, so long as it was away from the world to which she had given her best and which had trampled her in return.

She did not know always when she left the house, nor where her feet took her. Once, she came to herself in a strange part of Oakland. The street was wide and lined with rows of shade trees. Velvet lawns, broken only by cement sidewalks, ran down to the gutters. The houses stood apart and were large. In her vocabulary they were mansions. What had shocked her to consciousness of herself was a young man in the driver's seat of a

touring car standing at the curb. He was looking at her curiously and she recognized him as Roy Blanchard, whom, in front of the Forum, Billy had threatened to whip. Beside the car, bareheaded, stood another young man. He, too, she remembered. He it was, at the Sunday picnic where she first met Billy, who had thrust his cane between the legs of the flying foot-racer and precipitated the free-for-all fight. Like Blanchard, he was looking at her curiously, and she became aware that she had been talking to herself. The babble of her lips still beat in her ears. She blushed, a rising tide of shame heating her face, and quickened her pace. Blanchard sprang out of the car and came to her with lifted hat. "Is anything the matter?" he asked.

She shook her head, and, though she had stopped, she evinced her desire to go on.

"I know you," he said, studying her face. "You were with the striker who promised me a licking."

"He is my husband," she said.

"Oh! Good for him." He regarded her pleasantly and frankly. "But about yourself? Isn't there anything I can do for you? Something IS the matter."

"No, I'm all right," she answered. "I have been sick," she lied; for she never dreamed of connecting her queerness with sickness.

"You look tired," he pressed her. "I can take you in the machine and run you anywhere you want. It won't be any trouble. I've plenty of time."

Saxon shook her head.

"If... if you would tell me where I can catch the Eighth street cars. I don't often come to this part of town."

He told her where to find an electric car and what transfers to make, and she was surprised at the distance she had wandered.

"Thank you," she said. "And good bye."

"Sure I can't do anything now?"

"Sure."

"Well, good bye," he smiled good humoredly. "And tell that husband of yours to keep in good condition. I'm likely to make him need it all when he tangles up with me."

"Oh, but you can't fight with him," she warned. "You mustn't. You haven't got a show."

"Good for you," he admired. "That's the way for a woman to stand up for

her man. Now the average woman would be so afraid he was going to get licked--"

"But I'm not afraid... for him. It's for you. He's a terrible fighter. You wouldn't have any chance. It would be like... like..."

"Like taking candy from a baby?" Blanchard finished for her.

"Yes," she nodded. "That's just what he would call it. And whenever he tells you you are standing on your foot watch out for him. Now I must go. Good bye, and thank you again."

She went on down the sidewalk, his cheery good bye ringing in her ears. He was kind--she admitted it honestly; yet he was one of the clever ones, one of the masters, who, according to Billy, were responsible for all the cruelty to labor, for the hardships of the women, for the punishment of the labor men who were wearing stripes in San Quentin or were in the death cells awaiting the scaffold. Yet he was kind, sweet natured, clean, good. She could read his character in his face. But how could this be, if he were responsible for so much evil? She shook her head wearily. There was no explanation, no understanding of this world which destroyed little babes and bruised women's breasts.

As for her having strayed into that neighborhood of fine residences, she was unsurprised. It was in line with her queerness. She did so many things without knowing that she did them. But she must be careful. It

was better to wander on the marshes and the Rock Wall.

Especially she liked the Rock Wall. There was a freedom about it, a wide spaciousness that she found herself instinctively trying to breathe, holding her arms out to embrace and make part of herself. It was a more natural world, a more rational world. She could understand it--understand the green crabs with white-bleached claws that scuttled before her and which she could see pasturing on green-weeded rocks when the tide was low. Here, hopelessly man-made as the great wall was, nothing seemed artificial. There were no men here, no laws nor conflicts of men. The tide flowed and ebbed; the sun rose and set; regularly each afternoon the brave west wind came romping in through the Golden Gate, darkening the water, cresting tiny wavelets, making the sailboats fly. Everything ran with frictionless order. Everything was free. Firewood lay about for the taking. No man sold it by the sack. Small boys fished with poles from the rocks, with no one to drive them away for trespass, catching fish as Billy had caught fish, as Cal Hutchins had caught fish. Billy had told her of the great perch Cal Hutchins caught on the day of the eclipse, when he had little dreamed the heart of his manhood would be spent in convict's garb.

And here was food, food that was free. She watched the small boys on a day when she had eaten nothing, and emulated them, gathering mussels from the rocks at low water, cooking them by placing them among the coals of a fire she built on top of the wall. They tasted particularly good. She learned to knock the small oysters from the rocks, and once

she found a string of fresh-caught fish some small boy had forgotten to take home with him.

Here drifted evidences of man's sinister handiwork--from a distance, from the cities. One flood tide she found the water covered with muskmelons. They bobbed and bumped along up the estuary in countless thousands. Where they stranded against the rocks she was able to get them. But each and every melon--and she patiently tried scores of them--had been spoiled by a sharp gash that let in the salt water. She could not understand. She asked an old Portuguese woman gathering driftwood.

"They do it, the people who have too much," the old woman explained, straightening her labor-stiffened back with such an effort that almost Saxon could hear it creak. The old woman's black eyes flashed angrily, and her wrinkled lips, drawn tightly across toothless gums, wry with bitterness. "The people that have too much. It is to keep up the price. They throw them overboard in San Francisco."

"But why don't they give them away to the poor people?" Saxon asked.

"They must keep up the price."

"But the poor people cannot buy them anyway," Saxon objected. "It would not hurt the price."

The old woman shrugged her shoulders.

"I do not know. It is their way. They chop each melon so that the poor people cannot fish them out and eat anyway. They do the same with the oranges, with the apples. Ah, the fishermen! There is a trust. When the boats catch too much fish, the trust throws them overboard from Fisherman Wharf, boat-loads, and boat-loads, and boatloads of the beautiful fish. And the beautiful good fish sink and are gone. And no one gets them. Yet they are dead and only good to eat. Fish are very good to eat."

And Saxon could not understand a world that did such things--a world in which some men possessed so much food that they threw it away, paying men for their labor of spoiling it before they threw it away; and in the same world so many people who did not have enough food, whose babies died because their mothers' milk was not nourishing, whose young men fought and killed one another for the chance to work, whose old men and women went to the poorhouse because there was no food for them in the little shacks they wept at leaving. She wondered if all the world were that way, and remembered Mercedes' tales. Yes; all the world was that way. Had not Mercedes seen ten thousand families starve to death in that far away India, when, as she had said, her own jewels that she wore would have fed and saved them all? It was the poorhouse and the salt vats for the stupid, jewels and automobiles for the clever ones.

She was one of the stupid. She must be. The evidence all pointed that

way. Yet Saxon refused to accept it. She was not stupid. Her mother had not been stupid, nor had the pioneer stock before her. Still it must be so. Here she sat, nothing to eat at home, her love-husband changed to a brute beast and lying in jail, her arms and heart empty of the babe that would have been there if only the stupid ones had not made a shambles of her front yard in their wrangling over jobs.

She sat there, racking her brain, the smudge of Oakland at her back, staring across the bay at the smudge of Ban Francisco. Yet the sun was good; the wind was good, as was the keen salt air in her nostrils; the blue sky, flecked with clouds, was good. All the natural world was right, and sensible, and beneficent. It was the man-world that was wrong, and mad, and horrible. Why were the stupid stupid? Was it a law of God? No; it could not be. God had made the wind, and air, and sun. The man-world was made by man, and a rotten job it was. Yet, and she remembered it well, the teaching in the orphan asylum, God had made everything. Her mother, too, had believed this, had believed in this God. Things could not be different. It was ordained.

For a time Saxon sat crushed, helpless. Then smoldered protest, revolt. Vainly she asked why God had it in for her. What had she done to deserve such fate? She briefly reviewed her life in quest of deadly sins committed, and found them not. She had obeyed her mother; obeyed Cady, the saloon-keeper, and Cady's wife; obeyed the matron and the other women in the orphan asylum; obeyed Tom when she came to live in his

house, and never run in the streets because he didn't wish her to.
At school she had always been honorably promoted, and never had her deportment report varied from one hundred per cent. She had worked from the day she left school to the day of her marriage. She had been a good worker, too. The little Jew who ran the paper box factory had almost wept when she quit. It was the same at the cannery. She was among the high-line weavers when the jute mills closed down. I And she had kept straight. It was not as if she had been ugly or unattractive. She had known her temptations and encountered her dangers. The fellows had been crazy about her. They had run after her, fought over her, in a way to turn most girls' heads. But she had kept straight. And then had come Billy, her reward. She had devoted herself to him, to his house, to all that would nourish his love; and now she and Billy were sinking down into this senseless vortex of misery and heartbreak of the man-made world.

No, God was not responsible. She could have made a better world herself--a finer, squarer world. This being so, then there was no God.
God could not make a botch. The matron had been wrong, her mother had been wrong. Then there was no immortality, and Bert, wild and crazy Bert, falling at her front gate with his foolish death-cry, was right.
One was a long time dead.

Looking thus at life, shorn of its superrational sanctions, Saxon floundered into the morass of pessimism. There was no justification for right conduct in the universe, no square deal for her who had earned

reward, for the millions who worked like animals, died like animals, and were a long time and forever dead. Like the hosts of more learned thinkers before her, she concluded that the universe was unmoral and without concern for men.

And now she sat crushed in greater helplessness than when she had included God in the scheme of injustice. As long as God was, there was always chance for a miracle, for some supernatural intervention, some rewarding with ineffable bliss. With God missing, the world was a trap. Life was a trap. She was like a linnet, caught by small boys and imprisoned in a cage. That was because the linnet was stupid. But she rebelled. She fluttered and beat her soul against the hard face of things as did the linnet against the bars of wire. She was not stupid. She did not belong in the trap. She would fight her way out of the trap. There must be such a way out. When canal boys and rail-splitters, the lowliest of the stupid lowly, as she had read in her school history, could find their way out and become presidents of the nation and rule over even the clever ones in their automobiles, then could she find her way out and win to the tiny reward she craved--Billy, a little love, a little happiness. She would not mind that the universe was unmoral, that there was no God, no immortality. She was willing to go into the black grave and remain in its blackness forever, to go into the salt vats and let the young men cut her dead flesh to sausage-meat, if--if only she could get her small meed of happiness first.

How she would work for that happiness! How she would appreciate it, make

the most of each least particle of it! But how was she to do it. Where was the path? She could not vision it. Her eyes showed her only the smudge of San Francisco, the smudge of Oakland, where men were breaking heads and killing one another, where babies were dying, born and unborn, and where women were weeping with bruised breasts.

CHAPTER XVI

Her vague, unreal existence continued. It seemed in some previous life-time that Billy had gone away, that another life-time would have to come before he returned. She still suffered from insomnia. Long nights passed in succession, during which she never closed her eyes. At other times she slept through long stupors, waking stunned and numbed, scarcely able to open her heavy eyes, to move her weary limbs. The pressure of the iron band on her head never relaxed. She was poorly nourished. Nor had she a cent of money. She often went a whole day without eating. Once, seventy-two hours elapsed without food passing her lips. She dug clams in the marsh, knocked the tiny oysters from the rocks, and gathered mussels.

And yet, when Bud Strothers came to see how she was getting along, she convinced him that all was well. One evening after work, Tom came, and forced two dollars upon her. He was terribly worried. He would like to help more, but Sarah was expecting another baby. There had been slack times in his trade because of the strikes in the other trades. He did not know what the country was coming to. And it was all so simple. All they had to do was see things in his way and vote the way he voted. Then everybody would get a square deal. Christ was a Socialist, he told her.

"Christ died two thousand years ago," Saxon said.

"Well?" Tom queried, not catching her implication.

"Think," she said, "think of all the men and women who died in those two thousand years, and socialism has not come yet. And in two thousand years more it may be as far away as ever. Tom, your socialism never did you any good. It is a dream."

"It wouldn't be if--" he began with a flash of resentment.

"If they believed as you do. Only they don't. You don't succeed in making them."

"But we are increasing every year," he argued.

"Two thousand years is an awfully long time," she said quietly.

Her brother's tired face saddened as he noted. Then he sighed:

"Well, Saxon, if it's a dream, it is a good dream."

"I don't want to dream," was her reply. "I want things real. I want them now."

And before her fancy passed the countless generations of the stupid lowly, the Billys and Saxons, the Berts and Marys, the Toms and Sarahs. And to what end? The salt vats and the grave. Mercedes was a hard and wicked woman, but Mercedes was right. The stupid must always be under

the heels of the clever ones. Only she, Saxon, daughter of Daisy who had written wonderful poems and of a soldier-father on a roan war-horse, daughter of the strong generations who hall won half a world from wild nature and the savage Indian--no, she was not stupid. It was as if she suffered false imprisonment. There was some mistake. She would find the way out.

With the two dollars she bought a sack of flour and half a sack of potatoes. This relieved the monotony of her clams and mussels. Like the Italian and Portuguese women, she gathered driftwood and carried it home, though always she did it with shamed pride, timing her arrival so that it would be after dark. One day, on the mud-flat side of the Rock Wall, an Italian fishing boat hauled up on the sand dredged from the channel. From the top of the wall Saxon watched the men grouped about the charcoal brazier, eating crusty Italian bread and a stew of meat and vegetables, washed down with long draughts of thin red wine. She envied them their freedom that advertised itself in the heartiness of their meal, in the tones of their chatter and laughter, in the very boat itself that was not tied always to one place and that carried them wherever they willed. Afterward, they dragged a seine across the mud-flats and up on the sand, selecting for themselves only the larger kinds of fish. Many thousands of small fish, like sardines, they left dying on the sand when they sailed away. Saxon got a sackful of the fish, and was compelled to make two trips in order to carry them home, where she salted them down in a wooden washtubs.

Her lapses of consciousness continued. The strangest thing she did while in such condition was on Sandy Beach. There she discovered herself, one windy afternoon, lying in a hole she had dug, with sacks for blankets. She had even roofed the hole in rough fashion by means of drift wood and marsh grass. On top of the grass she had piled sand.

Another time she came to herself walking across the marshes, a bundle of driftwood, tied with bale-rope, on her shoulder. Charley Long was walking beside her. She could see his face in the starlight. She wondered dully how long he had been talking, what he had said. Then she was curious to hear what he was saying. She was not afraid, despite his strength, his wicked nature, and the loneliness and darkness of the marsh.

"It's a shame for a girl like you to have to do this," he was saying, apparently in repetition of what he had already urged. "Come on an' say the word, Saxon. Come on an' say the word."

Saxon stopped and quietly faced him.

"Listen, Charley Long. Billy's only doing thirty days, and his time is almost up. When he gets out your life won't be worth a pinch of salt if I tell him you've been bothering me. Now listen. If you go right now away from here, and stay away, I won't tell him. That's all I've got to say."

The big blacksmith stood in scowling indecisions his face pathetic in its fierce yearning, his hands making unconscious, clutching contractions.

"Why, you little, small thing," he said desperately, "I could break you in one hand. I could--why, I could do anything I wanted. I don't want to hurt you, Saxon. You know that. Just say the word--"

"I've said the only word I'm going to say."

"God!" he muttered in involuntary admiration. "You ain't afraid. You ain't afraid."

They faced each other for long silent minutes.

"Why ain't you afraid?" he demanded at last, after peering into the surrounding darkness as if searching for her hidden allies.

"Because I married a man," Saxon said briefly. "And now you'd better go."

When he had gone she shifted the load of wood to her other shoulder and started on, in her breast a quiet thrill of pride in Billy. Though behind prison bars, still she leaned against his strength. The mere naming of him was sufficient to drive away a brute like Charley Long.

On the day that Otto Frank was hanged she remained indoors. The evening papers published the account. There had been no reprieve. In Sacramento was a railroad Governor who might reprieve or even pardon bank-wreckers and grafters, but who dared not lift his finger for a workingman. All this was the talk of the neighborhood. It had been Billy's talk. It had been Bert's talk.

The next day Saxon started out the Rock Wall, and the specter of Otto Frank walked by her side. And with him was a dimmer, mistier specter that she recognized as Billy. Was he, too, destined to tread his way to Otto Frank's dark end? Surely so, if the blood and strike continued. He was a fighter. He felt he was right in fighting. It was easy to kill a man. Even if he did not intend it, some time, when he was slugging a scab, the scab would fracture his skull on a stone curbing or a cement sidewalk. And then Billy would hang. That was why Otto Frank hanged. He had not intended to kill Henderson. It was only by accident that Henderson's skull was fractured. Yet Otto Frank had been hanged for it just the same.

She wrung her hands and wept loudly as she stumbled among the windy rocks. The hours passed, and she was lost to herself and her grief. When she came to she found herself on the far end of the wall where it jutted into the bay between the Oakland and Alameda Moles. But she could see no wall. It was the time of the full moon, and the unusual high tide covered the rocks. She was knee deep in the water, and about her knees swam scores of big rock rats, squeaking and fighting, scrambling to

climb upon her out of the flood. She screamed with fright and horror, and kicked at them. Some dived and swam away under water; others circled about her warily at a distance; and one big fellow laid his teeth into her shoe. Him she stepped on and crushed with her free foot. By this time, though still trembling, she was able coolly to consider the situation. She waded to a stout stick of driftwood a few feet away, and with this quickly cleared a space about herself.

A grinning small boy, in a small, bright-painted and half-decked skiff, sailed close in to the wall and let go his sheet to spill the wind.
"Want to get aboard?" he called.

"Yes," she answered. "There are thousands of big rats here. I'm afraid of them."

He nodded, ran close in, spilled the wind from his sail, the boat's way carrying it gently to her.

"Shove out its bow," he commanded. "That's right. I don't want to break my centerboard.... An' then jump aboard in the stern--quick!--alongside of me."

She obeyed, stepping in lightly beside him. He held the tiller up with his elbow, pulled in on the sheet, and as the sail filled the boat sprang away over the rippling water.

"You know boats," the boy said approvingly.

He was a slender, almost frail lad, of twelve or thirteen years, though healthy enough, with sunburned freckled face and large gray eyes that were clear and wistful.

Despite his possession of the pretty boat, Saxon was quick to sense that he was one of them, a child of the people.

"First boat I was ever in, except ferryboats," Saxon laughed.

He looked at her keenly. "Well, you take to it like a duck to water is all I can say about it. Where d'ye want me to land you?"

"Anywhere."

He opened his mouth to speak, gave her another long look, considered for a space, then asked suddenly: "Got plenty of time?"

She nodded.

"All day?"

Again she nodded.

"Say--I'll tell you, I'm goin' out on this ebb to Goat Island for

rockcod, an' I'll come in on the flood this evening. I got plenty of lines an' bait. Want to come along? We can both fish. And what you catch you can have."

Saxon hesitated. The freedom and motion of the small boat appealed to her. Like the ships she had envied, it was outbound.

"Maybe you'll drown me," she parleyed.

The boy threw back his head with pride.

"I guess I've been sailin' many a long day by myself, an' I ain't drowned yet."

"All right," she consented. "Though remember, I don't know anything about boats."

"Aw, that's all right.--Now I'm goin' to go about. When I say 'Hard a-lee!' like that, you duck your head so the boom don't hit you, an' shift over to the other side."

He executed the maneuver, Saxon obeyed, and found herself sitting beside him on the opposite side of the boat, while the boat itself, on the other tack, was heading toward Long Wharf where the coal bunkers were. She was aglow with admiration, the more so because the mechanics of boat-sailing was to her a complex and mysterious thing.

"Where did you learn it all?" she inquired.

"Taught myself, just naturally taught myself. I liked it, you see, an' what a fellow likes he's likeliest to do. This is my second boat. My first didn't have a centerboard. I bought it for two dollars an' learned a lot, though it never stopped leaking. What d 'ye think I paid for this one? It's worth twenty-five dollars right now. What d 'ye think I paid for it?"

"I give up," Saxon said. "How much?"

"Six dollars. Think of it! A boat like this! Of course I done a lot of work, an' the sail cost two dollars, the oars one forty, an' the paint one seventy-five. But just the same eleven dollars and fifteen cents is a real bargain. It took me a long time saving for it, though. I carry papers morning and evening--there's a boy taking my route for me this afternoon--I give 'm ten cents, an' all the extras he sells is his; and I'd a-got the boat sooner only I had to pay for my shorthand lessons. My mother wants me to become a court reporter. They get sometimes as much as twenty dollars a day. Gee! But I don't want it. It's a shame to waste the money on the lessons."

"What do you want?" she asked, partly from idleness, and yet with genuine curiosity; for she felt drawn to this boy in knee pants who was so confident and at the same time so wistful.

"What do I want?" he repeated after her.

Turning his head slowly, he followed the sky-line, pausing especially when his eyes rested landward on the brown Contra Costa hills, and seaward, past Alcatraz, on the Golden Glate. The wistfulness in his eyes was overwhelming and went to her heart.

"That," he said, sweeping the circle of the world with a wave of his arm.

"That?" she queried.

He looked at her, perplexed in that he had not made his meaning clear.

"Don't you ever feel that way?" he asked, bidding for sympathy with his dream. "Don't you sometimes feel you'd die if you didn't know what's beyond them hills an' what's beyond the other hills behind them hills? An' the Golden Gate! There's the Pacific Ocean beyond, and China, an' Japan, an' India, an'... an' all the coral islands. You can go anywhere out through the Golden Gate--to Australia, to Africa, to the seal islands, to the North Pole, to Cape Horn. Why, all them places are just waitin' for me to come an' see 'em. I've lived in Oakland all my life, but I'm not going to live in Oakland the rest of my life, not by a long shot. I'm goin' to get away... away...."

Again, as words failed to express the vastness of his desire, the wave of his arm swept the circle of the world.

Saxon thrilled with him. She too, save for her earlier childhood, had lived in Oakland all her life. And it had been a good place in which to live... until now. And now, in all its nightmare horror, it was a place to get away from, as with her people the East had been a place to get away from. And why not? The world tugged at her, and she felt in touch with the lad's desire. Now that she thought of it, her race had never been given to staying long in one place. Always it had been on the move. She remembered back to her mother's tales, and to the wood engraving in her scrapbook where her half-clad forebears, sword in hand, leaped from their lean beaked boats to do battle on the blood-drenched sands of England.

"Did you ever hear about the Anglo-Saxons?" she asked the boy.

"You bet!" His eyes glistened, and he looked at her with new interest. "I'm an Anglo-Saxon, every inch of me. Look at the color of my eyes, my skin. I'm awful white where I ain't sunburned. An' my hair was yellow when I was a baby. My mother says it'll be dark brown by the time I'm grown up, worse luck. Just the same, I'm Anglo-Saxon. I am of a fighting race. We ain't afraid of nothin'. This bay--think I'm afraid of it!" He looked out over the water with flashing eye of scorn. "Why, I've crossed it when it was howlin' an' when the scow schooner sailors said I lied an' that I didn't. Huh! They were only squareheads. Why, we licked their

kind thousands of years ago. We lick everything we go up against. We've wandered all over the world, licking the world. On the sea, on the land, it's all the same. Look at Ivory Nelson, look at Davy Crockett, look at Paul Jones, look at Clive, an' Kitchener, an' Fremont, an' Kit Carson, an' all of 'em."

Saxon nodded, while he continued, her own eyes shining, and it came to her what a glory it would be to be the mother of a man-child like this. Her body ached with the fancied quickening of unborn life. A good stock, a good stock, she thought to herself. Then she thought of herself and Billy, healthy shoots of that same stock, yet condemned to childlessness because of the trap of the manmade world and the curse of being herded with the stupid ones.

She came back to the boy.

"My father was a soldier in the Civil War," he was telling her, "a scout an' a spy. The rebels were going to hang him twice for a spy. At the battle of Wilson's Creek he ran half a mile with his captain wounded on his back. He's got a bullet in his leg right now, just above the knee. It's been there all these years. He let me feel it once. He was a buffalo hunter and a trapper before the war. He was sheriff of his county when he was twenty years old. An' after the war, when he was marshal of Silver City, he cleaned out the bad men an' gun-fighters. He's been in almost every state in the Union. He could wrestle any man at the railings in his day, an' he was bully of the raftsmen of the

Susquehanna when he was only a youngster. His father killed a man in a standup fight with a blow of his fist when he was sixty years old. An' when he was seventy-four, his second wife had twins, an' he died when he was plowing in the field with oxen when he was ninety-nine years old. He just unyoked the oxen, an' sat down under a tree, an' died there sitting up. An' my father's just like him. He's pretty old now, but he ain't afraid of nothing. He's a regular Anglo-Saxon, you see. He's a special policeman, an' he didn't do a thing to the strikers in some of the fightin'. He had his face all cut up with a rock, but he broke his club short off over some hoodlum's head."

He paused breathlessly and looked at her.

"Gee!" he said. "I'd hate to a-ben that hoodlum."

"My name is Saxon," she said.

"Your name?"

"My first name."

"Gee!" he cried. "You're lucky. Now if mine had been only Erling--you know, Erling the Bold--or Wolf, or Swen, or Jarl!"

"What is it?" she asked.

"Only John," he admitted sadly. "But I don't let 'em call one John. Everybody's got to call me Jack. I've scrapped with a dozen fellows that tried to call me John, or Johnnie--wouldn't that make you sick?--Johnnie!"

They were now off the coal bunkers of Long Wharf, and the boy put the skiff about, heading toward San Francisco. They were well out in the open bay. The west wind had strengthened and was whitecapping the strong ebb tide. The boat drove merrily along. When splashes of spray flew aboard, wetting them, Saxon laughed, and the boy surveyed her with approval. They passed a ferryboat, and the passengers on the upper deck crowded to one side to watch them. In the swell of the steamer's wake, the skiff shipped quarter-full of water. Saxon picked up an empty can and looked at the boy.

"That's right," he said. "Go ahead an' bale out." And, when she had finished: "We'll fetch Goat Island next tack. Right there off the Torpedo Station is where we fish, in fifty feet of water an' the tide runnin' to beat the band. You're wringing wet, ain't you? Gee! You're like your name. You're a Saxon, all right. Are you married?"

Saxon nodded, and the boy frowned.

"What'd you want to do that for. Now you can't wander over the world like I'm going to. You're tied down. You're anchored for keeps."

"It's pretty good to be married, though," she smiled.

"Sure, everybody gets married. But that's no reason to be in a rush about it. Why couldn't you wait a while, like me, I'm goin' to get married, too, but not until I'm an old man an' have been everywheres."

Under the lee of Goat Island, Saxon obediently sitting still, he took in the sail, and, when the boat had drifted to a position to suit him, he dropped a tiny anchor. He got out the fish lines and showed Saxon how to bait her hooks with salted minnows. Then they dropped the lines to bottom, where they vibrated in the swift tide, and waited for bites.

"They'll bite pretty soon," he encouraged. "I've never failed but twice to catch a mess here. What d'ye say we eat while we're waiting?"

Vainly she protested she was not hungry. He shared his lunch with her with a boy's rigid equity, even to the half of a hard-boiled egg and the half of a big red apple.

Still the rockcod did not bite. From under the stern-sheets he drew out a cloth-bound book.

"Free Library," he vouchsafed, as he began to read, with one hand holding the place while with the other he waited for the tug on the fishline that would announce rockcod.

Saxon read the title. It was "Afloat in the Forest."

"Listen to this," he said after a few minutes, and he read several pages descriptive of a great flooded tropical forest being navigated by boys on a raft.

"Think of that!" he concluded. "That's the Amazon river in flood time in South America. And the world's full of places like that--everywhere, most likely, except Oakland. Oakland's just a place to start from, I guess. Now that's adventure, I want to tell you. Just think of the luck of them boys! All the same, some day I'm going to go over the Andes to the headwaters of the Amazon, all through the rubber country, an' canoe down the Amazon thousands of miles to its mouth where it's that wide you can't see one bank from the other an' where you can scoop up perfectly fresh water out of the ocean a hundred miles from land."

But Saxon was not listening. One pregnant sentence had caught her fancy. Oakland just a place to start from. She had never viewed the city in that light. She had accepted it as a place to live in, as an end in itself. But a place to start from! Why not! Why not like any railroad station or ferry depot! Certainly, as things were going, Oakland was not a place to stop in. The boy was right. It was a place to start from. But to go where? Here she was halted, and she was driven from the train of thought by a strong pull and a series of jerks on the line. She began to haul in, hand under hand, rapidly and deftly, the boy encouraging her, until hooks, sinker, and a big gasping rockcod tumbled into the bottom

of the boat. The fish was free of the hook, and she baited afresh and dropped the line over. The boy marked his place and closed the book.

"They'll be biting soon as fast as we can haul 'em in," he said.

But the rush of fish did not come immediately.

"Did you ever read Captain Mayne Reid?" he asked. "Or Captain Marryatt? Or Ballantyne?"

She shook her head.

"And you an Anglo-Saxon!" he cried derisively. "Why, there's stacks of 'em in the Free Library. I have two cards, my mother's an' mine, an' I draw 'em out all the time, after school, before I have to carry my papers. I stick the books inside my shirt, in front, under the suspenders. That holds 'em. One time, deliverin' papers at Second an' Market--there's an awful tough gang of kids hang out there--I got into a fight with the leader. He hauled off to knock my wind out, an' he landed square on a book. You ought to seen his face. An' then I landed on him. An' then his whole gang was goin' to jump on me, only a couple of iron-molders stepped in an' saw fair play. I gave 'em the books to hold."

"Who won?" Saxon asked.

"Nobody," the boy confessed reluctantly. "I think I was lickin' him, but the molders called it a draw because the policeman on the beat stopped us when we'd only teen fightin' half an hour. But you ought to seen the crowd. I bet there was five hundred--"

He broke off abruptly and began hauling in his line. Saxon, too, was hauling in. And in the next couple of hours they caught twenty pounds of fish between them.

That night, long after dark, the little, half-decked skiff sailed up the Oakland Estuary. The wind was fair but light, and the boat moved slowly, towing a long pile which the boy had picked up adrift and announced as worth three dollars anywhere for the wood that was in it. The tide flooded smoothly under the full moon, and Saxon recognized the points they passed--the Transit slip, Sandy Beach, the shipyards, the nail works, Market street wharf. The boy took the skiff in to a dilapidated boat-wharf at the foot of Castro street, where the scow schooners, laden with sand and gravel, lay hauled to the shore in a long row. He insisted upon an equal division of the fish, because Saxon had helped catch them, though he explained at length the ethics of flotsam to show her that the pile was wholly his.

At Seventh and Poplar they separated, Saxon walking on alone to Pine street with her load of fish. Tired though she was from the long day, she had a strange feeling of well-being, and, after cleaning the fish, she fell asleep wondering, when good times came again, if she could

persuade Billy to get a boat and go out with her on Sundays as she had gone out that day.

CHAPTER VII

She slept all night, without stirring, without dreaming, and awoke naturally and, for the first time in weeks, refreshed. She felt her old self, as if some depressing weight had been lifted, or a shadow had been swept away from between her and the sun. Her head was clear. The seeming iron band that had pressed it so hard was gone. She was cheerful. She even caught herself humming aloud as she divided the fish into messes for Mrs. Olsen, Maggie Donahue, and herself. She enjoyed her gossip with each of them, and, returning home, plunged joyfully into the task of putting the neglected house in order. She sang as she worked, and ever as she sang the magic words of the boy danced and sparkled among the notes: OAKLAND IS JUST A PLACE TO START FROM.

Everything was clear as print. Her and Billy's problem was as simple as an arithmetic problem at school: to carpet a room so many feet long, so many feet wide, to paper a room so many feet high, so many feet around. She had been sick in her head, she had had strange lapses, she had been irresponsible. Very well. All this had been because of her troubles--troubles in which she had had no hand in the making. Billy's case was hers precisely. He had behaved strangely because he had been irresponsible. And all their troubles were the troubles of the trap. Oakland was the trap. Oakland was a good place to start from.

She reviewed the events of her married life. The strikes and the hard times had caused everything. If it had not been for the strike of the

shopmen and the fight in her front yard, she would not have lost her baby. If Billy had not been made desperate by the idleness and the hopeless fight of the teamsters, he would not have taken to drinking. If they had not been hard up, they would not have taken a lodger, and Billy would not be in jail.

Her mind was made up. The city was no place for her and Billy, no place for love nor for babies. The way out was simple. They would leave Oakland. It was the stupid that remained and bowed their heads to fate. But she and Billy were not stupid. They would not bow their heads. They would go forth and face fate.--Where, she did not know. But that would come. The world was large. Beyond the encircling hills, out through the Golden Gate, somewhere they would find what they desired. The boy had been wrong in one thing. She was not tied to Oakland, even if she was married. The world was free to her and Billy as it had been free to the wandering generations before them. It was only the stupid who had been left behind everywhere in the race's wandering. The strong had gone on. Well, she and Billy were strong. They would go on, over the brown Contra Costa hills or out through the Golden Gate.

The day before Billy's release Saxon completed her meager preparations to receive him. She was without money, and, except for her resolve not to offend Billy in that way again, she would have borrowed ferry fare from Maggie Donahue and journeyed to San Francisco to sell some of her personal pretties. As it was, with bread and potatoes and salted sardines in the house, she went out at the afternoon low tide and dug

clams for a chowder. Also, she gathered a load of driftwood, and it was nine in the evening when she emerged from the marsh, on her shoulder a bundle of wood and a short-handled spade, in her free hand the pail of clams. She sought the darker side of the street at the corner and hurried across the zone of electric light to avoid detection by the neighbors. But a woman came toward her, looked sharply and stopped in front of her. It was Mary.

"My God, Saxon!" she exclaimed. "Is it as bad as this?"

Saxon looked at her old friend curiously, with a swift glance that sketched all the tragedy. Mary was thinner, though there was more color in her cheeks--color of which Saxon had her doubts. Mary's bright eyes were handsomer, larger--too large, too feverish bright, too restless. She was well dressed--too well dressed; and she was suffering from nerves. She turned her head apprehensively to glance into the darkness behind her.

"My God!" Saxon breathed. "And you..." She shut her lips, then began anew. "Come along to the house," she said.

"If you're ashamed to be seen with me--" Mary blurted, with one of her old quick angers.

"No, no," Saxon disclaimed. "It's the driftwood and the clams. I don't want the neighbors to know. Come along."

"No; I can't, Saxon. I'd like to, but I can't. I've got to catch the next train to F'risco. I've ben waitin' around. I knocked at your back door. But the house was dark. Billy's still in, ain't he?"

"Yes, he gets out to-morrow."

"I read about it in the papers," Mary went on hurriedly, looking behind her. "I was in Stockton when it happened." She turned upon Saxon almost savagely. "You don't blame me, do you? I just couldn't go back to work after bein' married. I was sick of work. Played out, I guess, an' no good anyway. But if you only knew how I hated the laundry even before I got married. It's a dirty world. You don't dream. Saxon, honest to God, you could never guess a hundredth part of its dirtiness. Oh, I wish I was dead, I wish I was dead an' out of it all. Listen--no, I can't now. There's the down train puffin' at Adeline. I'll have to run for it. Can I come--"

"Aw, get a move on, can't you?" a man's voice interrupted.

Behind her the speaker had partly emerged from the darkness. No workingman, Saxon could see that--lower in the world scale, despite his good clothes, than any workingman.

"I'm comin', if you'll only wait a second," Mary placated.

And by her answer and its accents Saxon knew that Mary was afraid of this man who prowled on the rim of light.

Mary turned to her.

"I got to beat it; good bye," she said, fumbling in the palm of her glove.

She caught Saxon's free hand, and Saxon felt a small hot coin pressed into it. She tried to resist, to force it back.

"No, no," Mary pleaded. "For old times. You can do as much for me some day. I'll see you again. Good bye."

Suddenly, sobbing, she threw her arms around Saxon's waist, crushing the feathers of her hat against the load of wood as she pressed her face against Saxon's breast. Then she tore herself away to arm's length, passionate, queering, and stood gazing at Saxon.

"Aw, get a hustle, get a hustle," came from the darkness the peremptory voice of the man.

"Oh, Saxon!" Mary sobbed; and was gone.

In the house, the lamp lighted, Saxon looked at the coin. It was a five-dollar piece--to her, a fortune. Then she thought of Mary, and

of the man of whom she was afraid. Saxon registered another black mark against Oakland. Mary was one more destroyed. They lived only five years, on the average, Saxon had heard somewhere. She looked at the coin and tossed it into the kitchen sink. When she cleaned the clams, she heard the coin tinkle down the vent pipe.

It was the thought of Billy, next morning, that led Saxon to go under the sink, unscrew the cap to the catchtrap, and rescue the five-dollar piece. Prisoners were not well fed, she had been told; and the thought of placing clams and dry bread before Billy, after thirty days of prison fare, was too appalling for her to contemplate. She knew how he liked to spread his butter on thick, how he liked thick, rare steak fried on a dry hot pan, and how he liked coffee that was coffee and plenty of it.

Not until after nine o'clock did Billy arrive, and she was dressed in her prettiest house gingham to meet him. She peeped on him as he came slowly up the front steps, and she would have run out to him except for a group of neighborhood children who were staring from across the street. The door opened before him as his hand reached for the knob, and, inside, he closed it by backing against it, for his arms were filled with Saxon. No, he had not had breakfast, nor did he want any now that he had her. He had only stopped for a shave. He had stood the barber off, and he had walked all the way from the City Hall because of lack of the nickel carfare. But he'd like a bath most mighty well, and a change of clothes. She mustn't come near him until he was clean.

When all this was accomplished, he sat in the kitchen and watched her cook, noting the driftwood she put in the stove and asking about it. While she moved about, she told how she had gathered the wood, how she had managed to live and not be beholden to the union, and by the time they were seated at the table she was telling him about her meeting with Mary the night before. She did not mention the five dollars.

Billy stopped chewing the first mouthful of steak. His expression frightened her. He spat the meat out on his plate.

"You got the money to buy the meat from her," he accused slowly. "You had no money, no more tick with the butcher, yet here's meat. Am I right?"

Saxon could only bend her head.

The terrifying, ageless look had come into his face, the bleak and passionless glaze into his eyes, which she had first seen on the day at Weasel Park when he had fought with the three Irishmen.

"What else did you buy?" he demanded--not roughly, not angrily, but with the fearful coldness of a rage that words could not express.

To her surprise, she had grown calm. What did it matter? It was merely what one must expect, living in Oakland--something to be left behind when Oakland was a thing behind, a place started from.

"The coffee," she answered. "And the butter."

He emptied his plate of meat and her plate into the frying pan, likewise the roll of butter and the slice on the table, and on top he poured the contents of the coffee canister. All this he carried into the back yard and dumped in the garbage can. The coffee pot he emptied into the sink. "How much of the money you got left?" he next wanted to know.

Saxon had already gone to her purse and taken it out.

"Three dollars and eighty cents," she counted, handing it to him. "I paid forty-five cents for the steak."

He ran his eye over the money, counted it, and went to the front door. She heard the door open and close, and knew that the silver had been flung into the street. When he came back to the kitchen, Saxon was already serving him fried potatoes on a clean plate.

"Nothin's too good for the Robertses," he said; "but, by God, that sort of truck is too high for my stomach. It's so high it stinks."

He glanced at the fried potatoes, the fresh slice of dry bread, and the glass of water she was placing by his plate.

"It's all right," she smiled, as he hesitated. "There's nothing left

that's tainted."

He shot a swift glance at her face, as if for sarcasm, then sighed and sat down. Almost immediately he was up again and holding out his arms to her.

"I'm goin' to eat in a minute, but I want to talk to you first," he said, sitting down and holding her closely. "Besides, that water ain't like coffee. Gettin' cold won't spoil it none. Now, listen. You're the only one I got in this world. You wasn't afraid of me an' what I just done, an' I'm glad of that. Now we'll forget all about Mary. I got charity enough. I'm just as sorry for her as you. I'd do anything for her. I'd wash her feet for her like Christ did. I'd let her eat at my table, an' sleep under my roof. But all that ain't no reason I should touch anything she's earned. Now forget her. It's you an' me, Saxon, only you an' me an' to hell with the rest of the world. Nothing else counts. You won't never have to be afraid of me again. Whisky an' I don't mix very well, so I'm goin' to cut whisky out. I've been clean off my nut, an' I ain't treated you altogether right. But that's all past. It won't never happen again. I'm goin' to start out fresh.

"Now take this thing. I oughtn't to acted so hasty. But I did. I oughta talked it over. But I didn't. My damned temper got the best of me, an' you know I got one. If a fellow can keep his temper in boxin', why he can keep it in bein' married, too. Only this got me too sudden-like. It's something I can't stomach, that I never could stomach. An' you

wouldn't want me to any more'n I'd want you to stomach something you just couldn't."

She sat up straight on his knees and looked at him, afire with an idea.

"You mean that, Billy?"

"Sure I do."

"Then I'll tell you something I can't stomach any more. I'll die if I have to."

"Well?" he questioned, after a searching pause.

"It's up to you," she said.

"Then fire away."

"You don't know what you're letting yourself in for," she warned. "Maybe you'd better back out before it's too late."

He shook his head stubbornly.

"What you don't want to stomach you ain't goin' to stomach. Let her go."

"First," she commenced, "no more slugging of scabs."

His mouth opened, but he checked the involuntary protest.

"And, second, no more Oakland."

"I don't get that last."

"No more Oakland. No more living in Oakland. I'll die if I have to. It's pull up stakes and get out."

He digested this slowly.

"Where?" he asked finally.

"Anywhere. Everywhere. Smoke a cigarette and think it over."

He shook his head and studied her.

"You mean that?" he asked at length.

"I do. I want to chuck Oakland just as hard as you wanted to chuck the beefsteak, the coffee, and the butter."

She could see him brace himself. She could feel him brace his very body ere he answered.

"All right then, if that's what you want. We'll quit Oakland. We'll quit it cold. God damn it, anyway, it never done nothin' for me, an' I guess I'm husky enough to scratch for us both anywheres. An' now that's settled, just tell me what you got it in for Oakland for."

And she told him all she had thought out, marshaled all the facts in her indictment of Oakland, omitting nothing, not even her last visit to Doctor Hentley's office nor Billy's drinking. He but drew her closer and proclaimed his resolves anew. The time passed. The fried potatoes grew cold, and the stove went out.

When a pause came, Billy stood up, still holding her. He glanced at the fried potatoes.

"Stone cold," he said, then turned to her. "Come on. Put on your prettiest. We're goin' up town for something to eat an' to celebrate. I guess we got a celebration comin', seein' as we're going to pull up stakes an' pull our freight from the old burg. An' we won't have to walk. I can borrow a dime from the barber, an' I got enough junk to hock for a blowout."

His junk proved to be several gold medals won in his amateur days at boxing tournaments. Once up town and in the pawnshop, Uncle Sam seemed thoroughly versed in the value of the medals, and Billy jingled a handful of silver in his pocket as they walked out.

He was as hilarious as a boy, and she joined in his good spirits. When he stopped at a corner cigar store to buy a sack of Bull Durham, he changed his mind and bought Imperials.

"Oh, I'm a regular devil," he laughed. "Nothing's too good to-day--not even tailor-made smokes. An' no chop houses nor Jap joints for you an' me. It's Barnum's."

They strolled to the restaurant at Seventh and Broadway where they had had their wedding supper.

"Let's make believed we're not married," Saxon suggested.

"Sure," he agreed, "--an' take a private room so as the waiter'll have to knock on the door each time he comes in."

Saxon demurred at that.

"It will be too expensive, Billy. You'll have to tip him for the knocking. We'll take the regular dining room."

"Order anything you want," Billy said largely, when they were seated. "Here's family porterhouse, a dollar an' a half. What d'ye say?"

"And hash-browned," she abetted, "and coffee extra special, and some oysters first--I want to compare them with the rock oysters."

Billy nodded, and looked up from the bill of fare.

"Here's mussels bordelay. Try an order of them, too, an' see if they beat your Rock Wall ones."

"Why not?" Saxon cried, her eyes dancing. "The world is ours. We're just travelers through this town."

"Yep, that's the stuff," Billy muttered absently. He was looking at the theater column. He lifted his eyes from the paper. "Matinee at Bell's. We can get reserved seats for a quarter.--Doggone the luck anyway!"

His exclamation was so aggrieved and violent that it brought alarm into her eyes.

"If I'd only thought," he regretted, "we could a-gone to the Forum for grub. That's the swell joint where fellows like Roy Blanchard hangs out, blowin' the money we sweat for them."

They bought reserved tickets at Bell's Theater; but it was too early for the performance, and they went down Broadway and into the Electric Theater to while away the time on a moving picture show. A cowboy film was run off, and a French comic; then came a rural drama situated somewhere in the Middle West. It began with a farm yard scene. The sun blazed down on a corner of a barn and on a rail fence where the ground

lay in the mottled shade of large trees overhead. There were chickens, ducks, and turkeys, scratching, waddling, moving about. A big sow, followed by a roly-poly litter of seven little ones, marched majestically through the chickens, rooting them out of the way. The hens, in turn, took it out on the little porkers, pecking them when they strayed too far from their mother. And over the top rail a horse looked drowsily on, ever and anon, at mathematically precise intervals, switching a lazy tail that flashed high lights in the sunshine.

"It's a warm day and there are flies--can't you just feel it?" Saxon whispered.

"Sure. An' that horse's tail! It's the most natural ever. Gee! I bet he knows the trick of clampin' it down over the reins. I wouldn't wonder if his name was Iron Tail."

A dog ran upon the scene. The mother pig turned tail and with short ludicrous jumps, followed by her progeny and pursued by the dog, fled out of the film. A young girl came on, a sunbonnet hanging down her back, her apron caught up in front and filled with grain which she threw to the buttering fowls. Pigeons flew down from the top of the film and joined in the scrambling feast. The dog returned, wading scarcely noticed among the feathered creatures, to wag his tail and laugh up at the girl. And, behind, the horse nodded over the rail and switched on. A young man entered, his errand immediately known to an audience educated in moving pictures. But Saxon had no eyes for the love-making, the

pleading forcefulness, the shy reluctance, of man and maid. Ever her gaze wandered back to the chickens, to the mottled shade under the trees, to the warm wall of the barn, to the sleepy horse with its ever recurrent whisk of tail.

She drew closer to Billy, and her hand, passed around his arm, sought his hand.

"Oh, Billy," she sighed. "I'd just die of happiness in a place like that." And, when the film was ended. "We got lots of time for Bell's. Let's stay and see that one over again."

They sat through a repetition of the performance, and when the farm yard scene appeared, the longer Saxon looked at it the more it affected her. And this time she took in further details. She saw fields beyond, rolling hills in the background, and a cloud-flecked sky. She identified some of the chickens, especially an obstreperous old hen who resented the thrust of the sow's muzzle, particularly pecked at the little pigs, and laid about her with a vengeance when the grain fell. Saxon looked back across the fields to the hills and sky, breathing the spaciousness of it, the freedom, the content. Tears welled into her eyes and she wept silently, happily.

"I know a trick that'd fix that old horse if he ever clamped his tail down on me," Billy whispered.

"Now I know where we're going when we leave Oakland," she informed him.

"Where?"

"There."

He looked at her, and followed her gaze to the screen. "Oh," he said, and cogitated. "An' why shouldn't we?" he added.

"Oh, Billy, will you?"

Her lips trembled in her eagerness, and her whisper broke and was almost inaudible "Sure," he said. It was his day of royal largess.

"What you want is yourn, an' I'll scratch my fingers off for it. An' I've always had a hankerin' for the country myself. Say! I've known horses like that to sell for half the price, an' I can sure cure 'em of the habit."

CHAPTER XVIII

It was early evening when they got off the car at Seventh and Pine on their way home from Bell's Theater. Billy and Saxon did their little marketing together, then separated at the corner, Saxon to go on to the house and prepare supper, Billy to go and see the boys--the teamsters who had fought on in the strike during his month of retirement.

"Take care of yourself, Billy," she called, as he started off.

"Sure," he answered, turning his face to her over his shoulder.

Her heart leaped at the smile. It was his old, unsullied love-smile which she wanted always to see on his face--for which, armed with her own wisdom and the wisdom of Mercedes, she would wage the utmost woman's war to possess. A thought of this flashed brightly through her brain, and it was with a proud little smile that she remembered all her pretty equipment stored at home in the bureau and the chest of drawers.

Three-quarters of an hour later, supper ready, all but the putting on of the lamb chops at the sound of his step, Saxon waited. She heard the gate click, but instead of his step she heard a curious and confused scraping of many steps. She flew to open the door. Billy stood there, but a different Billy from the one she had parted from so short a time before. A small boy, beside him, held his hat. His face had been fresh-washed, or, rather, drenched, for his shirt and shoulders were

wet. His pale hair lay damp and plastered against his forehead, and was darkened by oozing blood. Both arms hung limply by his side. But his face was composed, and he even grinned.

"It's all right," he reassured Saxon. "The joke's on me. Somewhat damaged but still in the ring." He stepped gingerly across the threshold. "--Come on in, you fellows. We're all mutts together."

He was followed in by the boy with his hat, by Bud Strothers and another teamster she knew, and by two strangers. The latter were big, hard-featured, sheepish-faced men, who stared at Saxon as if afraid of her.

"It's all right, Saxon," Billy began, but was interrupted by Bud.

"First thing is to get him on the bed an' cut his clothes off him. Both arms is broke, and here are the ginks that done it."

He indicated the two strangers, who shuffled their feet with embarrassment and looked more sheepish than ever.

Billy sat down on the bed, and while Saxon held the lamp, Bud and the strangers proceeded to cut coat, shirt, and undershirt from him.

"He wouldn't go to the receivin' hospital," Bud said to Saxon.

"Not on your life," Billy concurred. "I had 'em send for Doc Hentley. He'll be here any minute. Them two arms is all I got. They've done pretty well by me, an' I gotta do the same by them.--No medical students a-learnin' their trade on me."

"But how did it happens" Saxon demanded, looking from Billy to the two strangers, puzzled by the amity that so evidently existed among them all.

"Oh, they're all right," Billy dashed in. "They done it through mistake. They're Frisco teamsters, an' they come over to help us--a lot of 'em."

The two teamsters seemed to cheer up at this, and nodded their heads.

"Yes, missus," one of them rumbled hoarsely. "It's all a mistake, an'... well, the joke's on us."

"The drinks, anyway," Billy grinned.

Not only was Saxon not excited, but she was scarcely perturbed. What had happened was only to be expected.

It was in line with all that Oakland had already done to her and hers, and, besides, Billy was not dangerously hurt. Broken arms and a sore head would heal. She brought chairs and seated everybody.

"Now tell me what happened," she begged. "I'm all at sea, what of you two burleys breaking my husband's arms, then seeing him home and holding a love-fest with him."

"An' you got a right," Bud Strothers assured her. "You see, it happened this way--"

"You shut up, Bud," Billy broke it. "You didn't see anything of it."

Saxon looked to the San Francisco teamsters.

"We'd come over to lend a hand, seein' as the Oakland boys was gettin' some the short end of it," one spoke up, "an' we've sure learned some scabs there's better trades than drivin' team. Well, me an' Jackson here was nosin' around to see what we can see, when your husband comes moseyin' along. When he--"

"Hold on," Jackson interrupted. "Get it straight as you go along. We reckon we know the boys by sight. But your husband we ain't never seen around, him bein'..."

"As you might say, put away for a while," the first teamster took up the tale. "So, when we sees what we thinks is a scab dodgin' away from us an' takin' the shortcut through the alley--"

"The alley back of Campbell's grocery," Billy elucidated.

"Yep, back of the grocery," the first teamster went on; "why, we're sure he's one of them squarehead scabs, hired through Murray an' Ready, makin' a sneak to get into the stables over the back fences."

"We caught one there, Billy an' me," Bud interpolated.

"So we don't waste any time," Jackson said, addressing himself to Saxon. "We've done it before, an' we know how to do 'em up brown an' tie 'em with baby ribbon. So we catch your husband right in the alley."

"I was lookin' for Bud," said Billy. "The boys told me I'd find him somewhere around the other end of the alley. An' the first thing I know, Jackson, here, asks me for a match."

"An' right there's where I get in my fine work," resumed the first teamster.

"What?" asked Saxon.

"That." The man pointed to the wound in Billy's scalp. "I laid 'm out. He went down like a steer, an' got up on his knees dippy, a-gabblin' about somebody standin' on their foot. He didn't know where he was at, you see, clean groggy. An' then we done it."

The man paused, the tale told.

"Broke both his arms with the crowbar," Bud supplemented.

"That's when I come to myself, when the bones broke," Billy corroborated. "An' there was the two of 'em givin' me the ha-ha. 'That'll last you some time,' Jackson was sayin'. An' Anson says, 'I'd like to see you drive horses with them arms.' An' then Jackson says, 'let's give 'm something for luck.' An' with that he fetched me a wallop on the jaw--"

"No," corrected Anson. "That wallop was mine."

"Well, it sent me into dreamland over again," Billy sighed. "An' when I come to, here was Bud an' Anson an' Jackson dousin' me at a water trough. An' then we dodged a reporter an' all come home together."

Bud Strothers held up his fist and indicated freshly abraded skin.

"The reporter-guy just insisted on samplin' it," he said. Then, to Billy: "That's why I cut around Ninth an' caught up with you down on Sixth."

A few minutes later Doctor Hentley arrived, and drove the men from the rooms. They waited till he had finished, to assure themselves of Billy's well being, and then departed. In the kitchen Doctor Hentley washed his hands and gave Saxon final instructions. As he dried himself he sniffed

the air and looked toward the stove where a pot was simmering.

"Clams," he said. "Where did you buy them?"

"I didn't buy them," replied Saxon. "I dug them myself."

"Not in the marsh?" he asked with quickened interest.

"Yes."

"Throw them away. Throw them out. They're death and corruption. Typhoid--I've got three cases now, all traced to the clams and the marsh."

When he had gone, Saxon obeyed. Still another mark against Oakland, she reflected--Oakland, the man-trap, that poisoned those it could not starve.

"If it wouldn't drive a man to drink," Billy groaned, when Saxon returned to him. "Did you ever dream such luck? Look at all my fights in the ring, an' never a broken bone, an' here, snap, snap, just like that, two arms smashed."

"Oh, it might be worse," Saxon smiled cheerfully.

"I'd like to know how. It might have been your neck."

"An' a good job. I tell you, Saxon, you gotta show me anything worse."

"I can," she said confidently.

"Well?"

"Well, wouldn't it be worse if you intended staying on in Oakland where it might happen again?"

"I can see myself becomin' a farmer an' plowin' with a pair of pipe-stems like these," he persisted.

"Doctor Hentley says they'll be stronger at the break than ever before. And you know yourself that's true of clean-broken bones. Now you close your eyes and go to sleep. You're all done up, and you need to keep your brain quiet and stop thinking."

He closed his eyes obediently. She slipped a cool hand under the nape of his neck and let it rest.

"That feels good," he murmured. "You're so cool, Saxon. Your hand, and you, all of you. Bein' with you is like comin' out into the cool night after dancin' in a hot room."

After several minutes of quiet, he began to giggle.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Oh, nothin'. I was just thinkin'--thinking of them mutts doin' me up--me, that's done up more scabs than I can remember."

Next morning Billy awoke with his blues dissipated. From the kitchen Saxon heard him painfully wrestling strange vocal acrobatics.

"I got a new song you never heard," he told her when she came in with a cup of coffee. "I only remember the chorus though. It's the old man talkin' to some hobo of a hired man that wants to marry his daughter. Mamie, that Billy Murphy used to run with before he got married, used to sing it. It's a kind of a sobby song. It used to always give Mamie the weeps. Here's the way the chorus goes--an' remember, it's the old man spielin'."

And with great solemnity and excruciating Batting, Billy sang:

"O treat my daughter kind-i-ly; An' say you'll do no harm, An' when I die I'll will to you My little house an' farm--My horse, my plow, my sheep, my cow, An' all them little chickens in the ga-a-rden.

"It's them little chickens in the garden that gets me," he explained. "That's how I remembered it--from the chickens in the movin' pictures yesterday. An' some day we'll have little chickens in the garden, won't

we, old girl?"

"And a daughter, too," Saxon amplified.

"An' I'll be the old geezer sayin' them same words to the hired man," Billy carried the fancy along. "It don't take long to raise a daughter if you ain't in a hurry."

Saxon took her long-neglected ukulele from its case and strummed it into tune.

"And I've a song you never heard, Billy. Tom's always singing it. He's crazy about taking up government land and going farming, only Sarah won't think of it. He sings it something like this:

"We'll have a little farm, A pig, a horse, a cow, And you will drive the wagon, And I will drive the plow."

"Only in this case I guess it's me that'll do the plowin'," Billy approved. "Say, Saxon, sing 'Harvest Days.' That's a farmer's song, too."

After that she feared the coffee was growing cold and compelled Billy to take it. In the helplessness of two broken arms, he had to be fed like a baby, and as she fed him they talked.

"I'll tell you one thing," Billy said, between mouthfuls. "Once we get settled down in the country you'll have that horse you've been wishin' for all your life. An' it'll be all your own, to ride, drive, sell, or do anything you want with."

And, again, he ruminated: "One thing that'll come handy in the country is that I know horses; that's a big start. I can always get a job at that--if it ain't at union wages. An' the other things about farmin' I can learn fast enough.--Say, d'ye remember that day you first told me about wantin' a horse to ride all your life?"

Saxon remembered, and it was only by a severe struggle that she was able to keep the tears from welling into her eyes. She seemed bursting with happiness, and she was remembering many things--all the warm promise of life with Billy that had been hers in the days before hard times. And now the promise was renewed again. Since its fulfillment had not come to them, they were going away to fulfill it for themselves and make the moving pictures come true.

Impelled by a half-feigned fear, she stole away into the kitchen bedroom where Bert had died, to study her face in the bureau mirror. No, she decided; she was little changed. She was still equipped for the battlefield of love. Beautiful she was not. She knew that. But had not Mercedes said that the great women of history who had won men had not been beautiful? And yet, Saxon insisted, as she gazed at her reflection, she was anything but unlovely. She studied her wide gray eyes that were

so very gray, that were always alive with light and vivacities, where, in the surface and depths, always swam thoughts unuttered, thoughts that sank down and dissolved to give place to other thoughts. The brows were excellent--she realized that. Slenderly penciled, a little darker than her light brown hair, they just fitted her irregular nose that was feminine but not weak, that if anything was piquant and that picturesquely might be declared impudent.

She could see that her face was slightly thin, that the red of her lips was not quite so red, and that she had lost some of her quick coloring. But all that would come back again. Her mouth was not of the rosebud type she saw in the magazines. She paid particular attention to it. A pleasant mouth it was, a mouth to be joyous with, a mouth for laughter and to make laughter in others. She deliberately experimented with it, smiled till the corners dented deeper. And she knew that when she smiled her smile was provocative of smiles. She laughed with her eyes alone--a trick of hers. She threw back her head and laughed with eyes and mouth together, between her spread lips showing the even rows of strong white teeth.

And she remembered Billy's praise of her teeth, the night at Germanic Hall after he had told Charley Long he was standing on his foot. "Not big, and not little dinky baby's teeth either," Billy had said, "... just right, and they fit you." Also, he had said that to look at them made him hungry, and that they were good enough to eat.

She recollected all the compliments he had ever paid her. Beyond all treasures, these were treasures to her--the love phrases, praises, and admirations. He had said her skin was cool--soft as velvet, too, and smooth as silk. She rolled up her sleeve to the shoulder, brushed her cheek with the white skin for a test, with deep scrutiny examined the fineness of its texture. And he had told her that she was sweet; that he hadn't known what it meant when they said a girl was sweet, not until he had known her. And he had told her that her voice was cool, that it gave him the feeling her hand did when it rested on his forehead. Her voice went all through him, he had said, cool and fine, like a wind of coolness. And he had likened it to the first of the sea breeze setting in the afternoon after a scorching hot morning. And, also, when she talked low, that it was round and sweet, like the 'cello in the Macdonough Theater orchestra.

He had called her his Tonic Kid. He had called her a thoroughbred, clean-cut and spirited, all fine nerves and delicate and sensitive. He had liked the way she carried her clothes. She carried them like a dream, had been his way of putting it. They were part of her, just as much as the cool of her voice and skin and the scent of her hair.

And her figure! She got upon a chair and tilted the mirror so that she could see herself from hips to feet. She drew her skirt back and up. The slender ankle was just as slender. The calf had lost none of its delicately mature swell. She studied her hips, her waist, her bosom, her neck, the poise of her head, and sighed contentedly. Billy must be

right, and he had said that she was built like a French woman, and that in the matter of lines and form she could give Annette Kellerman cards and spades.

He had said so many things, now that she recalled them all at one time. Her lips! The Sunday he proposed he had said: "I like to watch your lips talking. It's funny, but every move they make looks like a tickly kiss." And afterward, that same day: "You looked good to me from the first moment I spotted you." He had praised her housekeeping. He had said he fed better, lived more comfortably, held up his end with the fellows, and saved money. And she remembered that day when he had crushed her in his arms and declared she was the greatest little bit of a woman that had ever come down the pike.

She ran her eyes over all herself in the mirror again, gathered herself together into a whole, compact and good to look upon--delicious, she knew. Yes, she would do. Magnificent as Billy was in his man way, in her own way she was a match for him. Yes, she had done well by Billy. She deserved much--all he could give her, the best he could give her. But she made no blunder of egotism. Frankly valuing herself, she as frankly valued him. When he was himself, his real self, not harassed by trouble, not pinched by the trap, not maddened by drink, her man-boy and lover, he was well worth all she gave him or could give him.

Saxon gave herself a farewell look. No. She was not dead, any more than was Billy's love dead, than was her love dead. All that was needed was

the proper soil, and their love would grow and blossom. And they were turning their backs upon Oakland to go and seek that proper soil.

"Oh, Billy!" she called through the partition, still standing on the chair, one hand tipping the mirror forward and back, so that she was able to run her eyes from the reflection of her ankles and calves to her face, warm with color and roguishly alive.

"Yes?" she heard him answer.

"I'm loving myself," she called back.

"What's the game?" came his puzzled query. "What are you so stuck on yourself for!"

"Because you love me," she answered. "I love every bit of me, Billy, because... because... well, because you love every bit of me."

CHAPTER XIX

Between feeding and caring for Billy, doing the housework, making plans, and selling her store of pretty needlework, the days flew happily for Saxon. Billy's consent to sell her pretties had been hard to get, but at last she succeeded in coaxing it out of him.

"It's only the ones I haven't used," she urged; "and I can always make more when we get settled somewhere."

What she did not sell, along with the household linen and hers and Billy's spare clothing, she arranged to store with Tom.

"Go ahead," Billy said. "This is your picnic. What you say goes. You're Robinson Crusoe an' I'm your man Friday. Make up your mind yet which way you're goin' to travel?"

Saxon shook her head.

"Or how?"

She held up one foot and then the other, encased in stout walking shoes which she had begun that morning to break in about the house. "Shank's mare, eh?"

"It's the way our people came into the West," she said proudly.

"It'll be regular trampin', though," he argued. "An' I never heard of a woman tramp."

"Then here's one. Why, Billy, there's no shame in tramping. My mother tramped most of the way across the Plains. And 'most everybody else's mother tramped across in those days. I don't care what people will think. I guess our race has been on the tramp since the beginning of creation, just like we'll be, looking for a piece of land that looked good to settle down on."

After a few days, when his scalp was sufficiently healed and the bone-knitting was nicely in process, Billy was able to be up and about. He was still quite helpless, however, with both his arms in splints.

Doctor Hentley not only agreed, but himself suggested, that his bill should wait against better times for settlement. Of government land, in response to Saxon's eager questioning, he knew nothing, except that he had a hazy idea that the days of government land were over.

Tom, on the contrary, was confident that there was plenty of government hand. He talked of Honey Lake, of Shasta County, and of Humboldt.

"But you can't tackle it at this time of year, with winter comin' on," he advised Saxon. "The thing for you to do is head south for warmer weather--say along the coast. It don't snow down there. I tell you what

you do. Go down by San Jose and Salinas an' come out on the coast at Monterey. South of that you'll find government land mixed up with forest reserves and Mexican rancheros. It's pretty wild, without any roads to speak of. All they do is handle cattle. But there's some fine redwood canyons, with good patches of farming ground that run right down to the ocean. I was talkin' last year with a fellow that's been all through there. An' I'd a-gone, like you an' Billy, only Sarah wouldn't hear of it. There's gold down there, too. Quite a bunch is in there prospectin', an' two or three good mines have opened. But that's farther along and in a ways from the coast. You might take a look."

Saxon shook her head. "We're not looking for gold but for chickens and a place to grow vegetables. Our folks had all the chance for gold in the early days, and what have they got to show for it?"

"I guess you're right," Tom conceded. "They always played too big a game, an' missed the thousand little chances right under their nose. Look at your pa. I've heard him tell of selling three Market street lots in San Francisco for fifty dollars each. They're worth five hundred thousand right now. An' look at Uncle Will. He had ranches till the cows come home. Satisfied? No. He wanted to be a cattle king, a regular Miller and Lux. An' when he died he was a night watchman in Los Angeles at forty dollars a month. There's a spirit of the times, an' the spirit of the times has changed. It's all big business now, an' we're the small potatoes. Why, I've heard our folks talk of livin' in the Western Reserve. That was all around what's Ohio now. Anybody could get a farm

them days. All they had to do was yoke their oxen an' go after it, an' the Pacific Ocean thousands of miles to the west, an' all them thousands of miles an' millions of farms just waitin' to be took up. A hundred an' sixty acres? Shucks. In the early days in Oregon they talked six hundred an' forty acres. That was the spirit of them times--free land, an' plenty of it. But when we reached the Pacific Ocean them times was ended. Big business begun; an' big business means big business men; an' every big business man means thousands of little men without any business at all except to work for the big ones. They're the losers, don't you see? An' if they don't like it they can lump it, but it won't do them no good. They can't yoke up their oxen an' pull on. There's no place to pull on. China's over there, an' in between's a mighty lot of salt water that's no good for farmin' purposes."

"That's all clear enough," Saxon commented.

"Yes," her brother went on. "We can all see it after it's happened, when it's too late."

"But the big men were smarter," Saxon remarked.

"They were luckier," Tom contended. "Some won, but most lost, an' just as good men lost. It was almost like a lot of boys scramblin' on the sidewalk for a handful of small change. Not that some didn't have far-seein'. But just take your pa, for example. He come of good Down East stock that's got business instinct an' can add to what it's got.

Now suppose your pa had developed a weak heart, or got kidney disease, or caught rheumatism, so he couldn't go gallivantin' an' rainbow chasin', an' fightin' an' explorin' all over the West. Why, most likely he'd a settled down in San Francisco--he'd a-had to--an' held onto them three Market street lots, an' bought more lots, of course, an' gone into steamboat companies, an' stock gamblin', an' railroad buildin', an' Comstock-tunnelin'.

"Why, he'd a-become big business himself. I know 'm. He was the most energetic man I ever saw, think quick as a wink, as cool as an icicle an' as wild as a Comanche. Why, he'd a-cut a swath through the free an' easy big business gamblers an' pirates of them days; just as he cut a swath through the hearts of the ladies when he went gallopin' past on that big horse of his, sword clatterin', spurs jinglin', his long hair flyin', straight as an Indian, clean-built an' graceful as a blue-eyed prince out of a fairy book an' a Mexican caballero all rolled into one; just as he cut a swath through the Johnny Rebs in Civil War days, chargin' with his men all the way through an' back again, an' yellin' like a wild Indian for more. Cady, that helped raise you, told me about that. Cady rode with your pa.

"Why, if your pa'd only got laid up in San Francisco, he would a-ben one of the big men of the West. An' in that case, right now, you'd be a rich young woman, travelin' in Europe, with a mansion on Nob Hill along with the Floods and Crockers, an' holdin' majority stock most likely in the Fairmount Hotel an' a few little concerns like it. An' why ain't you?

Because your pa wasn't smart? No. His mind was like a steel trap. It's because he was filled to burstin' an' spillin' over with the spirit of the times; because he was full of fire an' vinegar an' couldn't set down in one place. That's all the difference between you an' the young women right now in the Flood and Crocker families. Your father didn't catch rheumatism at the right time, that's all."

Saxon sighed, then smiled.

"Just the same, I've got them beaten," she said. "The Miss Floods and Miss Crockers can't marry prize-fighters, and I did."

Tom looked at her, taken aback for the moment, with admiration, slowly at first, growing in his face.

"Well, all I got to say," he enunciated solemnly, "is that Billy's so lucky he don't know how lucky he is."

Not until Doctor Hentley gave the word did the splints come off Billy's arms, and Saxon insisted upon an additional two weeks' delay so that no risk would be run. These two weeks would complete another month's rent, and the landlord had agreed to wait payment for the last two months until Billy was on his feet again.

Salinger's awaited the day set by Saxon for taking back their furniture.

Also, they had returned to Billy seventy-five dollars.

"The rest you've paid will be rent," the collector told Saxon. "And the furniture's second hand now, too. The deal will be a loss to Salinger's' and they didn't have to do it, either; you know that. So just remember they've been pretty square with you, and if you start over again don't forget them."

Out of this sum, and out of what was realized from Saxon's pretties, they were able to pay all their small bills and yet have a few dollars remaining in pocket.

"I hate owin' things worse 'n poison," Billy said to Saxon. "An' now we don't owe a soul in this world except the landlord an' Doc Hentley."

"And neither of them can afford to wait longer than they have to," she said.

"And they won't," Billy answered quietly.

She smiled her approval, for she shared with Billy his horror of debt, just as both shared it with that early tide of pioneers with a Puritan ethic, which had settled the West.

Saxon timed her opportunity when Billy was out of the house to pack the chest of drawers which had crossed the Atlantic by sailing ship and the

Plains by ox team. She kissed the bullet hole in it, made in the fight at Little Meadow, as she kissed her father's sword, the while she visioned him, as she always did, astride his roan warhorse. With the old religious awe, she pored over her mother's poems in the scrap-book, and clasped her mother's red satin Spanish girdle about her in a farewell embrace. She unpacked the scrap-book in order to gaze a last time at the wood engraving of the Vikings, sword in hand, leaping upon the English sands. Again she identified Billy as one of the Vikings, and pondered for a space on the strange wanderings of the seed from which she sprang. Always had her race been land-hungry, and she took delight in believing she had bred true; for had not she, despite her life passed in a city, found this same land-hunger in her? And was she not going forth to satisfy that hunger, just as her people of old time had done, as her father and mother before her? She remembered her mother's tale of how the promised land looked to them as their battered wagons and weary oxen dropped down through the early winter snows of the Sierras to the vast and flowering sun-land of California: In fancy, herself a child of nine, she looked down from the snowy heights as her mother must have looked down. She recalled and repeated aloud one of her mother's stanzas:

"'Sweet as a wind-lute's airy strains Your gentle muse has learned to sing And California's boundless plains Prolong the soft notes echoing.'"

She sighed happily and dried her eyes. Perhaps the hard times were past. Perhaps they had constituted HER Plains, and she and Billy had won safely across and were even then climbing the Sierras ere they dropped

down into the pleasant valley land.

Salinger's wagon was at the house, taking out the furniture, the morning they left. The landlord, standing at the gate, received the keys, shook hands with them, and wished them luck. "You're goin' at it right," he congratulated them. "Sure an' wasn't it under me roll of blankets I tramped into Oakland meself forty year ago! Buy land, like me, when it's cheap. It'll keep you from the poorhouse in your old age. There's plenty of new towns springin' up. Get in on the ground floor. The work of your hands'll keep you in food an' under a roof, an' the lend 'll make you well to do. An' you know me address. When you can spare send me along that small bit of rent. An' good luck. An' don't mind what people think. 'Tis them that looks that finds."

Curious neighbors peeped from behind the blinds as Billy and Saxon strode up the street, while the children gazed at them in gaping astonishment. On Billy's back, inside a painted canvas tarpaulin, was slung the roll of bedding. Inside the roll were changes of underclothing and odds and ends of necessaries. Outside, from the lashings, depended a frying pan and cooking pail. In his hand he carried the coffee pot. Saxon carried a small telescope basket protected by black oilcloth, and across her back was the tiny ukulele case.

"We must look like holy frights," Billy grumbled, shrinking from every gaze that was bent upon him.

"It'd be all right, if we were going camping," Saxon consoled. "Only we're not."

"But they don't know that," she continued. "It's only you know that, and what you think they're thinking isn't what they're thinking at all. Most probably they think we're going camping. And the best of it is we are going camping. We are! We are!"

At this Billy cheered up, though he muttered his firm intention to knock the block off of any guy that got fresh. He stole a glance at Saxon. Her cheeks were red, her eyes glowing.

"Say," he said suddenly. "I seen an opera once, where fellows wandered over the country with guitars slung on their backs just like you with that strummy-strum. You made me think of them. They was always singin' songs."

"That's what I brought it along for," Saxon answered.

"And when we go down country roads we'll sing as we go along, and we'll sing by the campfires, too. We're going camping, that's all. Taking a vacation and seeing the country. So why shouldn't we have a good time? Why, we don't even know where we're going to sleep to-night, or any night. Think of the fun!"

"It's a sporting proposition all right, all right," Billy considered.

"But, just the same, let's turn off an' go around the block. There's some fellows I know, standin' up there on the next corner, an' I don't want to knock THEIR blocks off."