# CHAPTER XI

## MR. PILKINGTON'S LOVE LIGHT

### I

The rehearsals of a musical comedy--a term which embraces "musical fantasies"--generally begin in a desultory sort of way at that curious building, Bryant Hall, on Sixth Avenue just off Forty-second Street. There, in a dusty, uncarpeted room, simply furnished with a few wooden chairs and some long wooden benches, the chorus--or, in the case of "The Rose of America," the ensemble--sit round a piano and endeavour, with the assistance of the musical director, to get the words and melodies of the first-act numbers into their heads. This done, they are ready for the dance director to instil into them the steps, the groupings, and the business for the encores, of which that incurable optimist always seems to expect there will be at least six. Later, the principals are injected into the numbers. And finally, leaving Bryant Hall and dodging about from one unoccupied theatre to another, principals and chorus rehearse together, running through the entire piece over and over again till the opening night of the preliminary road tour.

To Jill, in the early stages, rehearsing was just like being back at school. She could remember her first schoolmistress, whom the musical

director somewhat resembled in manner and appearance, hammering out hymns on a piano and leading in a weak soprano an eager, baying pack of children, each anxious from motives of pride to out-bawl her nearest neighbour.

The proceedings began on the first morning with the entrance of Mr. Saltzburg, the musical director, a brisk, busy little man with benevolent eyes behind big spectacles, who bustled over to the piano, sat down, and played a loud chord, designed to act as a sort of bugle blast, rallying the ladies of the ensemble from the corners where they sat in groups, chatting. For the process of making one another's acquaintance had begun some ten minutes before with mutual recognitions between those who knew each other from having been together in previous productions. There followed rapid introductions of friends. Nelly Bryant had been welcomed warmly by a pretty girl with red hair, whom she introduced to Jill as Babe; Babe had a willowy blonde friend, named Lois, and the four of them had seated themselves on one of the benches and opened a conversation; their numbers being added to a moment later by a dark girl with a Southern accent and another blonde. Elsewhere other groups had formed, and the room was filled with a noise like the chattering of starlings. In a body by themselves, rather forlorn and neglected, half a dozen solemn and immaculately dressed young men were propping themselves up against the wall and looking on, like men in a ball-room who do not dance.

Jill listened to the conversation without taking any great part in it

herself. She felt as she had done on her first day at school, a little shy and desirous of effacing herself. The talk dealt with clothes, men, and the show business, in that order of importance. Presently one of the young men sauntered diffidently across the room and added himself to the group with the remark that it was a fine day. He was received a little grudgingly, Jill thought, but by degrees succeeded in assimilating himself. A second young man drifted up; reminded the willowy girl that they had worked together in the western company of "You're the One"; was recognized and introduced, and justified his admission to the circle by a creditable imitation of a cat-fight. Five minutes later he was addressing the Southern girl as "honey," and had informed Jill that he had only joined this show to fill in before opening on the three-a-day with the swellest little song-and-dance act which he and a little girl who worked in the cabaret at Geisenheimer's had fixed up.

On this scene of harmony and good-fellowship Mr. Saltzburg's chord intruded jarringly. There was a general movement, and chairs and benches were dragged to the piano. Mr. Saltzburg causing a momentary delay by opening a large brown music-bag and digging in it like a terrier at a rat-hole, conversation broke out again.

Mr. Saltzburg emerged from the bag, with his hands full of papers, protesting.

"Childrun! Chil-drun! If you please, less noise and attend to me!"

He distributed sheets of paper. "Act One, Opening Chorus. I will play the melody three--four times. Follow attentively. Then we will sing it la-la-la, and after that we will sing the words. So!"

He struck the yellow-keyed piano a vicious blow, producing a tinny and complaining sound. Bending forward with his spectacles almost touching the music, he plodded determinedly through the tune, then encored himself, and after that encored himself again. When he had done this, he removed his spectacles and wiped them. There was a pause.

"Izzy," observed the willowy young lady chattily, leaning across Jill and addressing the Southern girl's blonde friend, "has promised me a sunburst!"

A general stir of interest and a coming close together of heads.

"What! Izzy!"

"Sure, Izzy."

"Well!"

"He's just landed the hat-check privilege at the St. Aurea!"

"You don't say!"

"He told me so last night and promised me the sunburst. He was," admitted the willowy girl regretfully, "a good bit tanked at the time, but I guess he'll make good." She mused awhile, a rather anxious expression clouding her perfect profile. She looked like a meditative Greek goddess. "If he doesn't," she added with maidenly dignity, "it's the last time I go out with the big stiff. I'd tie a can to him quicker'n look at him!"

A murmur of approval greeted this admirable sentiment.

"Childrun!" protested Mr. Saltzburg. "Chil-drun! Less noise and chatter of conversation. We are here to work! We must not waste time! So! Act One, Opening Chorus. Now, all together. La-la-la...."

"La-la-la...."

"Tum-tum-tumty-tumty...."

"Tum-tum-tumty...."

Mr. Saltzburg pressed his hands to his ears in a spasm of pain.

"No, no, no! Sour! Sour! Sour!... Once again. La-la-la...."

A round-faced girl with golden hair and the face of a wondering cherub interrupted, speaking with a lisp.

"Mithter Thalzburg."

"Now what is it, Miss Trevor?"

"What sort of a show is this?"

"A musical show," said Mr. Saltzburg severely, "and this is a rehearsal of it, not a conversazione. Once more, please."

The cherub was not to be rebuffed.

"Is the music good, Mithter Thalzburg?"

"When you have rehearsed it, you shall judge for yourself. Come now...."

"Is there anything in it as good as that waltz of yours you played us when we were rehearthing 'Mind How You Go?' You remember. The one that went...."

A tall and stately girl, with sleepy brown eyes and the air of a duchess in the servants' hall, bent forward and took a kindly interest in the conversation.

"Oh, have you composed a varlse, Mr. Saltzburg?" she asked with

pleasant condescension. "How interesting, really! Won't you play it for us?"

The sentiment of the meeting seemed to be unanimous in favour of shelving work and listening to Mr. Saltzburg's waltz.

"Oh, Mr. Saltzburg, do!"

"Please!"

"Some one told me it was a pipterino!"

"I cert'nly do love waltzes!"

"Please, Mr. Saltzburg!"

Mr. Saltzburg obviously weakened. His fingers touched the keys irresolutely.

"But, childrun!"

"I am sure it would be a great pleasure to all of us," said the duchess graciously, "if you would play it. There is nothing I enjoy more than a good varlse."

Mr. Saltzburg capitulated. Like all musical directors he had in his

leisure moments composed the complete score of a musical play and spent much of his time waylaying librettists on the Rialto and trying to lure them to his apartment to listen to it, with a view to business. The eternal tragedy of a musical director's life is comparable only to that of the waiter who, himself fasting, has to assist others to eat. Mr. Saltzburg had lofty ideas on music, and his soul revolted at being compelled perpetually to rehearse and direct the inferior compositions of other men. Far less persuasion than he had received to-day was usually required to induce him to play the whole of his score.

"You wish it?" he said. "Well, then! This waltz, you will understand, is the theme of a musical romance which I have composed. It will be sung once in the first act by the heroine, then in the second act as a duet for heroine and hero. I weave it into the finale of the second act, and we have an echo of it, sung off stage, in the third act. What I play you now is the second act duet. The verse is longer. So! The male voice begins."

A pleasant time was had by all for ten minutes.

"Ah, but this is not rehearsing, childrun!" cried Mr. Saltzburg remorsefully at the end of that period. "This is not business. Come now, the opening chorus of Act One, and please this time keep on the key. Before, it was sour, sour Come! La-la-la...."

"Mr. Thalzburg!"

"Miss Trevor?"

"There was an awfully thweet fox-trot you used to play us. I do wish...."

"Some other time, some other time! Now we must work. Come! La-la-la...."

"I wish you could have heard it, girls" said the cherub regretfully. "Honetht, it was lalapalootha!"

The pack broke into full cry.

"Oh, Mr. Saltzburg!"

"Please, Mr. Saltzburg!"

"Do play the fox-trot, Mr. Saltzburg!"

"If it is as good as the varlse," said the duchess, stooping once more to the common level, "I am sure it must be very good indeed." She powdered her nose. "And one so rarely hears musicianly music nowadays, does one?"

"Which fox-trot?" asked Mr. Saltzburg weakly.

"Play 'em all!" decided a voice on the left.

"Yes, play 'em all," bayed the pack.

"I am sure that that would be charming," agreed the duchess, replacing her powder-puff.

Mr. Saltzburg played 'em all. This man by now seemed entirely lost to shame. The precious minutes that belonged to his employers and should have been earmarked for "The Rose of America" flitted by. The ladies and gentlemen of the ensemble, who should have been absorbing and learning to deliver the melodies of Roland Trevis and the lyrics of Otis Pilkington, lolled back in their seats. The yellow-keyed piano rocked beneath an unprecedented onslaught. The proceedings had begun to resemble not so much a rehearsal as a happy home evening, and grateful glances were cast at the complacent cherub. She had, it was felt, shown tact and discretion.

Pleasant conversation began again.

"... And I walked a couple of blocks, and there was exactly the same model in Schwartz and Gulderstein's window at twenty-six fifty...."

"... He got on Forty-second Street, and he was kinda fresh from the

start. At Sixty-sixth he came sasshaying right down the car and said 'Hello, patootie!' Well, I drew myself up...."

"... Even if you are my sister's husband,' I said to him. Oh, I suppose I got a temper. It takes a lot to arouse it, y'know, but I c'n get pretty mad...."

"... You don't know the half of it, dearie, you don't know the half of it! A one-piece bathing suit! Well, you could call it that, but the cop of the beach said it was more like a baby's sock. And when...."

"... So I said 'Listen, Izzy, that'll be about all from you! My father was a gentleman, though I don't suppose you know what that means, and I'm not accustomed....'"

"Hey!"

A voice from the neighbourhood of the door had cut into the babble like a knife into butter; a rough, rasping voice, loud and compelling, which caused the conversation of the members of the ensemble to cease on the instant. Only Mr. Saltzburg, now in a perfect frenzy of musicianly fervour, continued to assault the decrepit piano, unwitting of an unsympathetic addition to his audience.

"What I play you now is the laughing trio from my second act. It is a building number. It is sung by tenor, principal comedian, and

soubrette. On the second refrain four girls will come out and two boys. The girls will dance with the two men, the boys with the soubrette. So! On the encore four more girls and two more boys. Third encore, solo-dance for specialty dancer, all on stage beating time by clapping their hands. On repeat, all sing refrain once more, and off. Last encore, the three principals and specialty dancer dance the dance with entire chorus. It is a great building number, you understand. It is enough to make the success of any musical play, but can I get a hearing? No! If I ask managers to listen to my music, they are busy! If I beg them to give me a libretto to set, they laugh--ha! ha!" Mr. Saltzburg gave a spirited and lifelike representation of a manager laughing ha-ha when begged to disgorge a libretto. "Now I play it once more!"

"Like hell you do!" said the voice. "Say, what is this, anyway? A concert?"

Mr. Saltzburg swung round on the music-stool, a startled and apprehensive man, and nearly fell off it. The divine afflatus left him like air oozing from a punctured toy-balloon, and, like such a balloon, he seemed to grow suddenly limp and flat. He stared with fallen jaw at the new arrival.

Two men had entered the room. One was the long Mr. Pilkington. The other, who looked shorter and stouter than he really was beside his giraffe-like companion, was a thick-set, fleshy man in the early

thirties with a blond, clean-shaven, double-chinned face. He had smooth, yellow hair an unwholesome complexion, and light green eyes, set close together. From the edge of the semi-circle about the piano, he glared menacingly over the heads of the chorus at the unfortunate Mr. Saltzburg.

"Why aren't these girls working?"

Mr. Saltzburg, who had risen nervously from his stool, backed away apprehensively from his gaze, and, stumbling over the stool, sat down abruptly on the piano, producing a curious noise like Futurist music.

"I--We--Why, Mr. Goble...."

Mr. Goble turned his green gaze on the concert audience, and spread discomfort as if it were something liquid which he was spraying through a hose. The girls who were nearest looked down flutteringly at their shoes: those further away concealed themselves behind their neighbours. Even the duchess, who prided herself on being the possessor of a stare of unrivalled haughtiness, before which the fresh quailed and those who made breaks subsided in confusion, was unable to meet his eyes: and the willowy friend of Izzy, for all her victories over that monarch of the hat-checks, bowed before it like a slim tree before a blizzard.

Only Jill returned the manager's gaze. She was seated on the outer rim

of the semi-circle, and she stared frankly at Mr. Goble. She had never seen anything like him before, and he fascinated her. This behaviour on her part singled her out from the throng, and Mr. Goble concentrated his attention on her.

For some seconds he stood looking at her; then, raising a stubby finger, he let his eye travel over the company, and seemed to be engrossed in some sort of mathematical calculation.

"Thirteen," he said at length. "I make it thirteen." He rounded on Mr. Pilkington. "I told you we were going to have a chorus of twelve."

Mr. Pilkington blushed and stumbled over his feet.

"Ah, yes ... yes," he murmured vaguely. "Yes!"

"Well, there are thirteen here. Count 'em for yourself." He whipped round on Jill. "What's your name? Who engaged you?"

A croaking sound from the neighbourhood of the ceiling indicated the clearing of Mr. Pilkington's throat.

"I--er--I engaged Miss Mariner, Mr. Goble."

"Oh, you engaged her?"

He stared again at Jill. The inspection was long and lingering, and affected Jill with a sense of being inadequately clothed. She returned the gaze as defiantly as she could, but her heart was beating fast. She had never yet been frightened of any man, but there was something reptilian about this fat, yellow-haired individual which disquieted her, much as cockroaches had done in her childhood. A momentary thought flashed through her mind that it would be horrible to be touched by him. He looked soft and glutinous.

"All right," said Mr. Goble at last, after what seemed to Jill many minutes. He nodded to Mr. Saltzburg. "Get on with it! And try working a little this time! I don't hire you to give musical entertainments."

"Yes, Mr. Goble, yes. I mean no, Mr. Goble!"

"You can have the Gotham stage this afternoon," said Mr. Goble. "Call the rehearsal for two sharp."

Outside the door, he turned to Mr. Pilkington.

"That was a fool trick of yours, hiring that girl. Thirteen! I'd as soon walk under a ladder on a Friday as open in New York with a chorus of thirteen. Well, it don't matter. We can sack one of 'em after we've opened on the road." He mused for a moment. "Darned pretty girl, that!" he went on meditatively. "Where did you get her?"

"She--ah--came into the office, when you were out. She struck me as being essentially the type we required for our ensemble, so I--er--engaged her. She--" Mr. Pilkington gulped. "She is a charming, refined girl!"

"She's darned pretty," admitted Mr. Goble, and went on his way wrapped in thought, Mr. Pilkington following timorously. It was episodes like the one that had just concluded which made Otis Pilkington wish that he possessed a little more assertion. He regretted wistfully that he was not one of those men who can put their hat on the side of their heads and shoot out their chins and say to the world "Well, what about it!" He was bearing the financial burden of this production. If it should be a failure, his would be the loss. Yet somehow this coarse, rough person in front of him never seemed to allow him a word in the executive policy of the piece. He treated him as a child. He domineered and he shouted, and behaved as if he were in sole command. Mr Pilkington sighed. He rather wished he had never gone into this undertaking.

Inside the room, Mr. Saltzburg wiped his forehead, his spectacles, and his hands. He had the aspect of one who wakes from a dreadful dream.

"Childrun!" he whispered brokenly. "Childrun! If you please, once more. Act One, Opening Chorus. Come! La-la-la!"

"La-la-la!" chanted the subdued members of the ensemble.

II

By the time the two halves of the company, ensemble and principals, melted into one complete whole, the novelty of her new surroundings had worn off, and Jill was feeling that there had never been a time when she had not been one of a theatrical troupe, rehearsing. The pleasant social gatherings round Mr. Saltzburg's piano gave way in a few days to something far less agreeable and infinitely more strenuous, the breaking-in of the dances under the supervision of the famous Johnson Miller. Johnson Miller was a little man with snow-white hair and the india-rubber physique of a juvenile acrobat. Nobody knew actually how old he was, but he certainly looked much too advanced in years to be capable of the feats of endurance which he performed daily. He had the untiring enthusiasm of a fox-terrier, and had bullied and scolded more companies along the rocky road that leads to success than any half-dozen dance-directors in the country, in spite of his handicap in being almost completely deaf. He had an almost miraculous gift of picking up the melodies for which it was his business to design dances, without apparently hearing them. He seemed to absorb them through the pores. He had a blunt and arbitrary manner, and invariably spoke his mind frankly and honestly--a habit which made him strangely popular in a profession where the language of equivoque is cultivated almost as sedulously as in the circles of international diplomacy. What Johnson Miller said to your face was official, not

subject to revision as soon as your back was turned, and people appreciated this.

Izzy's willowy friend summed him up one evening when the ladies of the ensemble were changing their practice-clothes after a particularly strenuous rehearsal, defending him against the Southern girl, who complained that he made her tired.

"You bet he makes you tired," she said. "So he does me. I'm losing my girlish curves, and I'm so stiff I can't lace my shoes. But he knows his business and he's on the level, which is more than you can say of most of these guys in the show business."

"That's right," agreed the Southern girl's blonde friend. "He does know his business. He's put over any amount of shows which would have flopped like dogs without him to stage the numbers."

The duchess yawned. Rehearsing always bored her, and she had not been greatly impressed by what she had seen of "The Rose of America."

"One will be greatly surprised if he can make a success of this show! I confess I find it perfectly ridiculous."

"Ithn't it the limit, honetht!" said the cherub, arranging her golden hair at the mirror. "It maketh me thick! Why on earth ith Ike putting it on?"

The girl who knew everything--there is always one in every company--hastened to explain.

"I heard all about that. Ike hasn't any of his own money in the thing. He's getting twenty-five per cent of the show for running it. The angel is the long fellow you see jumping around. Pilkington his name is."

"Well, it'll need to be Rockefeller later on," said the blonde.

"Oh, they'll get thomebody down to fixth it after we've been out on the road a couple of days," said the cherub, optimistically. "They alwayth do. I've seen worse shows than this turned into hits. All it wants ith a new book and lyrics and a different thcore."

"And a new set of principals," said the red-headed Babe. "Did you ever see such a bunch?"

The duchess, with another tired sigh, arched her well-shaped eyebrows and studied the effect in the mirror.

"One wonders where they pick these persons up," she assented languidly. "They remind me of a headline I saw in the paper this morning--'Tons of Hams Unfit for Human Consumption.' Are any of you girls coming my way? I Can give two or three of you a lift in my

limousine."

"Thorry, old dear, and thanks ever so much," said the cherub, "but I instructed Clarence, my man, to have the street-car waiting on the corner, and he'll be too upset if I'm not there."

Nelly had an engagement to go and help one of the other girls buy a Spring suit, a solemn rite which it is impossible to conduct by oneself: and Jill and the cherub walked to the corner together. Jill had become very fond of the little thing since rehearsals began. She reminded her of a London sparrow. She was so small and perky and so absurdly able to take care of herself.

"Limouthine!" snorted the cherub. The duchess' concluding speech evidently still rankled. "She gives me a pain in the gizthard!"

"Hasn't she got a limousine?" asked Jill.

"Of course she hasn't. She's engaged to be married to a demonstrator in the Speedwell Auto Company, and he thneaks off when he can get away and gives her joy-rides. That's all the limouthine she's got. It beats me why girls in the show business are alwayth tho crazy to make themselves out vamps with a dozen millionaires on a string. If Mae wouldn't four-flush and act like the Belle of the Moulin Rouge, she'd be the nithest girl you ever met. She's mad about the fellow she's engaged to, and wouldn't look at all the millionaires in New York if

you brought 'em to her on a tray. She's going to marry him as thoon as he's thaved enough to buy the furniture, and then she'll thettle down in Harlem thomewhere and cook and mind the baby and regularly be one of the lower middle classes. All that's wrong with Mae ith that she's read Gingery Stories and thinkth that's the way a girl has to act when she'th in the chorus."

"That's funny," said Jill. "I should never have thought it. I swallowed the limousine whole."

The cherub looked at her curiously. Jill puzzled her. Jill had, indeed, been the subject of much private speculation among her colleagues.

"This is your first show, ithn't it?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Thay, what are you doing in the chorus, anyway?"

"Getting scolded by Mr. Miller mostly, it seems to me.

"Thcolded by Mr. Miller! Why didn't you say 'bawled out by Johnny'? That'th what any of the retht of us would have said."

"Well, I've lived most of my life in England. You can't expect me to

talk the language yet."

"I thought you were English. You've got an acthent like the fellow who plays the dude in thith show. Thay, why did you ever get into the show business?"

"Well ... well, why did you? Why does anybody?"

"Why did I? Oh, I belong there. I'm a regular Broadway rat. I wouldn't be happy anywhere elthe. I was born in the show business. I've got two thithters in the two-a-day and a brother in thtock in California and dad's one of the betht comedians on the burlethque wheel. But any one can thee you're different. There's no reathon why you should be sticking around in the chorus."

"But there is. I've no money, and I can't do anything to make it."

"Honetht?"

"Honest."

"That's tough." The cherub pondered, her round eyes searching Jill's face. "Why don't you get married?"

Jill laughed.

"Nobody's asked me."

"Somebody thoon will. At least, if he's on the level, and I think he is. You can generally tell by the look of a guy, and, if you ask me, friend Pilkington's got the licence in hith pocket and the ring all ordered and everything."

"Pilkington!" cried Jill aghast.

She remembered certain occasions during rehearsals, when, while the chorus idled in the body of the theatre and listened to the principals working at their scenes, the elongated Pilkington had suddenly appeared in the next seat and conversed sheepishly in a low voice. Could this be love? If so, it was a terrible nuisance. Jill had had her experience in London of enamoured young men who, running true to national form, declined to know when they were beaten, and she had not enjoyed the process of cooling their ardour. She had a kind heart, and it distressed her to give pain. It also got on her nerves to be dogged by stricken males who tried to catch her eye in order that she might observe their broken condition. She recalled one house-party in Wales where it rained all the time and she had been cooped up with a victim who kept popping out from obscure corners and beginning all his pleas with the words "I say, you know...!" She trusted that Otis Pilkington was not proposing to conduct a wooing on those lines. Yet he had certainly developed a sinister habit of popping out at the theatre. On several occasions he had startled her by appearing at her side as if

he had come up out of a trap.

"Oh, no!" cried Jill.

"Oh, yeth!" insisted the cherub, waving imperiously to an approaching street-car. "Well, I must be getting up-town. I've got a date. Thee you later."

"I'm sure you're mistaken."

"I'm not."

"But what makes you think so?"

The cherub placed a hand on the rail of the car, preparatory to swinging herself on board.

"Well, for one thing," she said, "he'th been stalking you like an Indian ever since we left the theatre! Look behind you. Good-bye, honey. Thend me a piece of the cake!"

The street-car bore her away. The last that Jill saw of her was a wide and amiable grin. Then, turning, she beheld the snake-like form of Otis Pilkington towering at her side.

Mr. Pilkington seemed nervous but determined. His face was half hidden

by the silk scarf that muffled his throat, for he was careful of his health and had a fancied tendency to bronchial trouble. Above the scarf a pair of mild eyes gazed down at Jill through their tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles. It was hopeless for Jill to try to tell herself that the tender gleam behind the glass was not the love light in Otis Pilkington's eyes. The truth was too obvious.

"Good evening, Miss Mariner," said Mr. Pilkington, his voice sounding muffled and far away through the scarf. "Are you going up-town?"

"No, down-town," said Jill quickly.

"So am I," said Mr. Pilkington.

Jill felt annoyed, but helpless. It is difficult to bid a tactful farewell to a man who has stated his intention of going in the same direction as yourself. There was nothing for it but to accept the unspoken offer of Otis Pilkington's escort. They began to walk down Broadway together.

"I suppose you are tired after the rehearsal?" enquired Mr. Pilkington in his precise voice. He always spoke as if he were weighing each word and clipping it off a reel.

"A little. Mr. Miller is very enthusiastic."

"About the piece?" Her companion spoke eagerly.

"No; I meant hard-working."

"Has he said anything about the piece?"

"Well, no. You see, he doesn't confide in us a great deal, except to tell us his opinion of the way we do the steps. I don't think we impress him very much, to judge from what he says. But the girls say he always tells every chorus he rehearses that it is the worst he ever had anything to do with."

"And the chor--the--er--ladies of the ensemble? What do they think of the piece?"

"Well, I don't suppose they are very good judges, are they?" said Jill diplomatically.

"You mean they do not like it?"

"Some of them don't seem quite to understand it."

Mr. Pilkington was silent for a moment.

"I am beginning to wonder myself whether it may not be a little over the heads of the public," he said ruefully. "When it was first

performed...."

"Oh, has it been done before?"

"By amateurs, yes, at the house of my aunt, Mrs. Waddesleigh Peagrim, at Newport, last summer. In aid of the Armenian orphans. It was extraordinarily well received on that occasion. We nearly made our expenses. It was such a success that--I feel I can confide in you. I should not like this repeated to your--your--the other ladies--it was such a success that, against my aunt's advice, I decided to give it a Broadway production. Between ourselves, I am shouldering practically all the expenses of the undertaking. Mr. Goble has nothing to do with the financial arrangements of 'The Rose of America.' Those are entirely in my hands. Mr. Goble, in return for a share in the profits, is giving us the benefit of his experience as regards the management and booking of the piece. I have always had the greatest faith in it. Trevis and I wrote it when we were in college together, and all our friends thought it exceptionally brilliant. My aunt, as I say, was opposed to the venture. She holds the view that I am not a good man of business. In a sense, perhaps, she is right. Temperamentally, no doubt, I am more the artist. But I was determined to show the public something superior to the so-called Broadway successes, which are so terribly trashy. Unfortunately, I am beginning to wonder whether it is possible, with the crude type of actor at one's disposal in this country, to give a really adequate performance of such a play as 'The Rose of America.' These people seem to miss the spirit of the piece,

its subtle topsy-turvy humour, its delicate whimsicality. This afternoon," Mr. Pilkington choked. "This afternoon I happened to overhear two of the principals, who were not aware that I was within earshot, discussing the play. One of them--these people express themselves curiously--one of them said that he thought it a quince: and the other described it as a piece of gorgonzola cheese! That is not the spirit that wins success!"

Jill was feeling immensely relieved. After all, it seemed, this poor young man merely wanted sympathy, not romance. She had been mistaken, she felt, about that gleam in his eyes. It was not the lovelight: it was the light of panic. He was the author of the play. He had sunk a large sum of money in its production, he had heard people criticizing it harshly, and he was suffering from what her colleagues in the chorus would have called cold feet. It was such a human emotion and he seemed so like an overgrown child pleading to be comforted that her heart warmed to him. Relief melted her defences. And when, on their arrival at Thirty-fourth Street Mr. Pilkington suggested that she partake of a cup of tea at his apartment, which was only a couple of blocks away off Madison Avenue, she accepted the invitation without hesitating.

On the way to his apartment Mr. Pilkington continued in the minor key. He was a great deal more communicative than she herself would have been to such a comparative stranger as she was, but she knew that men were often like this. Over in London, she had frequently been made the

recipient of the most intimate confidences by young men whom she had met for the first time the same evening at a dance. She had been forced to believe that there was something about her personality that acted on a certain type of man like the crack in the dam, setting loose the surging flood of their eloquence. To this class Otis Pilkington evidently belonged, for, once started, he withheld nothing.

"It isn't that I'm dependent on Aunt Olive or anything like that," he vouchsafed, as he stirred the tea in his Japanese-print hung studio. "But you know how it is. Aunt Olive is in a position to make it very unpleasant for me if I do anything foolish. At present, I have reason to know that she intends to leave me practically all that she possesses. Millions!" said Mr. Pilkington, handing Jill a cup. "I assure you, millions! But there is a hard commercial strain in her. It would have the most prejudicial effect upon her if; especially after she had expressly warned me against it, I were to lose a great deal of money over this production. She is always complaining that I am not a business man like my late uncle. Mr. Waddesleigh Peagrim made a fortune in smoked hams." Mr. Pilkington looked at the Japanese prints, and shuddered slightly. "Right up to the time of his death he was urging me to go into the business. I could not have endured it. But, when I heard those two men discussing the play, I almost wished that I had done so."

Jill was now completely disarmed. She would almost have patted this unfortunate young man's head, if she could have reached it.

"I shouldn't worry about the piece," she said. "I've read somewhere or heard somewhere that it's the surest sign of a success when actors don't like a play."

Mr. Pilkington drew his chair an imperceptible inch nearer.

"How sympathetic you are!"

Jill perceived with chagrin that she had been mistaken after all. It was the love light. The tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles sprayed it all over her like a couple of searchlights. Otis Pilkington was looking exactly like a sheep, and she knew from past experience that that was the infallible sign. When young men looked like that, it was time to go.

"I'm afraid I must be off," she said. "Thank you so much for giving me tea. I shouldn't be a bit afraid about the play. I'm sure it's going to be splendid. Good-bye."

"You aren't going already?"

"I must. I'm very late as it is. I promised...."

Whatever fiction Jill might have invented to the detriment of her soul was interrupted by a ring at the bell. The steps of Mr. Pilkington's

Japanese servant crossing the hall came faintly to the sitting-room.

"Mr. Pilkington in?"

Otis Pilkington motioned pleadingly to Jill.

"Don't go!" he urged. "It's only a man I know. He has probably come to remind me that I am dining with him to-night. He won't stay a minute. Please don't go."

Jill sat down. She had no intention of going now. The cheery voice at the front door had been the cheery voice of her long-lost uncle, Major Christopher Selby.