Our Street A Story of the Bachelor and the Elusive Overhead Lodger

THE thought has occurred to me of late, with such frequency and with so much insistence, that I am strongly inclined to believe that it must have always lain dormant somewhere in one of the cells of my brain. As a child, and later as a young man, enjoyed the same moderate exhilaration which all sty-bred folk seem to feel for the clean air, the blue sky, the flowered fields, and the sheltering forests of the country; but according to this theory, of late so constantly before me, I can not well but believe that the original intention of Fate was that I should live my little span of years on a well-watered, well-wooded farm; that such a mind as had been allotted to me should ripen under broad skies and a blasing sun; that my body should grow strong in the open fields; that the horse munching his oats in his stall, the fat pink pig in his sty, the chickens and geese and the turkeys, in the farmyard, I should count among my intimates. Just as sure as I am that I should have broadened in the pure air and developed on the simple product of the farm, just so sure am i that under the same benign influences I; should have mellowed in soul and body and some of these days withered away in the twilight, as it fell over the fields and gradually darkened into the purple night. But things do not always happen as they were intended. Just as Fate was about to leave me in peace at a nice old farmhouse, somebody seems to have nudged Fate's elbow, and I was inadvertently dropped into a threeroom bachelor flat on a side street between Broadway and Fifth avenue, although I must confess my immediate neighborhood is more redolent of the former thoroughfare-the moral tone of the little street improv-

ing greatly as it approaches the more aristocratic avenue. Below me, on the street floor, there is a shop where guests from the nearby hotels and many ladies of the tage have their solled gloves and lingerie shirt waists cleaned, and just over this there is a more ornately secorated floor where Madame Quelquechose sells Paris lats and mantesux to a most exclusive carriage trade. Above me there is one more three-room apartment, very much like my own, occupied at various times by various neighbors (names unknown) who glower at me and then hurry on through the ill-lit hallways. Across the street, just opposite, there is the stage door of a theater much given over to comic operas, and in front of this there is an iron railing enclosing a small yard where the surly doorkeeper sits all day and most of the night playing with a black cat; and here it is that the chorus girls linger for a last word with the men friends who modestly accompany them afoot or more ostentatiously whirl them up in dark, silent hansoms or in glistening, olsy, brass-bound automobiles.

At the Fifth avenue end of the street there is a most stately looking and somewhat old-fashioned apartment house; next to this two fine examples of the old-time New York homes still occupied by descendants of the original Dutch families who built them. Both sides of our street are faced with shops much like those under my own modest home, and above these there are many hives for men and women bachelors. Of my neighbors I know, or the world at large knows, but little-the blinds are down and the curtains drawn except on such occasions as when a fire-engine clangs by or a parade with a blaring band passes along Fifth avenue.

Bo far as I can judge, most of us on this particular side street, always excepting those at the two homes of the aristocrats, lead pretty much the same kind of iMe -that is, so far as our meals are concerned. For breakfast we depend on our "visiting valets" and colored maids, and for luncheon and dinner we go to the Hofbrauhaus or to the restaurant around the corner on Broadway. Of course there are many and brilliant exceptions to this regime; quite frequently at night a grande dame, usually accompanied by a jeune fille, from one of the two exclusive homes, drives away in the family coach, and hardly a night passes that a hansom or a glistening brougham does not dash around the corner at our end of the street and stop before one or another of the dark, foreboding, brownstone fronts. A young man, in evening clothes, jumps lightly out, throws away his cigarette, and disappears in the dark vestibule at the top of the brownstone steps; but we all continue to peek out from behind our green holland shades, for we know that the best part is yet to come. Sometimes she keeps us waiting a long time, but it is Sometimes she keeps us waiting a long time, but it is well worth the while, for she is always looking quite lovely in her diaphanous filmy clothes and a lace coat and a big hat (generally black), a mass of gold trinkets at her waist, and a square gold purse swinging from her white-gloved hand. As they pass we can see the glow of the girl's dress and the man's broad shirt front and the little red light from his cigarette. It is not difficult for us less fortunate ones to imagine that not difficult for us less fortunate ones to imagine that we can even detect the smiling features of the callow youth and hear the low laughter of the girl, for we know that they are off to the gay world of red lamp-shades and Hungarian bands, of vintage wines and the of the many lodgers who have occupied the rooms Or the many lodgers who have occupied the rooms over my own I cannot recall any one who was the im-mediate cause of hansoms or highly burnished broug-hams blocking our thoroughfare. Of the personality of these various lodgers, I have, as a rule, been wholly ignorant. At intervals I have met them on the stairway; once there was a ditta child who played about the stairway; ce there was a little child who played about the hallways in a ionely sort of way and with whom I exchanged greetings, but for the most part my acquaint-ance has extended no further than a passing glance at the new and unknown name over the letter-bex next to falls overhead. I was a little surprised—not a little annoyed, too-one afternoon, to have my nap interrupted by a sharp rapping at my bedroom door. Although rather inade-guately clad, I opened the door and saw a messenger boy standing in the dimly lit hallway. With one hard offered me a telegram and with the other the book leh he wished me to sign. The light was bad, and which he wished me to sign. The light was bad, and my eyes were still heavy with sleep, and, at the first glance, I failed to see my name on the soiled page at which the record was opened. "Sign it yourself," I said in a most peevish manner, and, talking the telegram from him, I slammed the door in his face. Still calling down curses on the correspondent who Still calling down curses on the correspondent who had so thoughtlessly interrupted my nap. I switched en the light and glanced at the writing on the envelope. The name was that of a woman, and one which I had never met with before. I hurriedly opened the door and called down the stairway; but the messenger had dis-As the name on the telegram was not that of either of the occupants of the two shore believe that of either appeared. As the name on the treerain was not that or either of the occupants of the two shops below me, I at once reached the logical conclusion that it must be that of my unknown neighbor overhead. Without more ado, 1 got into my bathroom slippers, pulled on a long overcost, and started up the stairs leading to the apartment aboye. In answer to my knock the door was opened by a In answer to my knock the door was opened by a soung girl, and, in the subdued light of the room back of her, it scened to me the brilliancy of her beauty was quite spectacular and almost too wonderful to be of this workaday world. In any case, I know that the drowsiness from which I had been suffering left me as suddenly and as completely as if I had been thrust into a cold plunge. The girl's costume is not easy for me to describe but, apparently, it consisted of yards of himy lace, with many blue bows sewn on it, and endless narrow blue ribbons running through it. On the whole, so far as On the whole, so far as quantity went, with the exception of the bare arms and throat, she was fairly well concealed. Barring the strip of bare ankies, showing between the bottom of my overcoat and my bath slippers. I might safely make the same claim for my own appearance. The girl was quite with-out embarrassment, and for a moment stood at the door

her small, piquant face, with its deep. warm coloring, half turned toward me; the soft golden light fell full on a great mass of wavy bronze hair, the well-rounded throat, and the wonderfully pik-and-white arms. I could not help wondering if I should ever see them again. In all ways she was the embodiment of youth and health and condition, and yet the very brilliancy of her beauty seemed to surround her with a certain glow which set her apart from the ordinary human, and I was immensely impressed, too, by the fact, both at the time and afterward, that when she walked the soles of her tiny Turkish slippers left no mark on the dusty floer,

When the girl had finished reading the telegram, she put it back into its envelope and held it toward me. "This is not for me," she said.

"Then why did you read it?" I gasped, out of pure surprise.

"Because I wanted to know what was in it."

"Do you consider it your right to know everything that is in every telegram or letter?" I asked. "I should think your curiosity might lead you into considerable trouble.'

She smiled at me pleasantly enough, but it was the kind of smile that a mother might vouchsafe her wayward child

"My interest," she said, "extends no father than Our Street. That is my province."

"If that is your province, then," said, "where may I find the lady to whom this is addressed?"

"She is a vendeuse in the hatshop of Madame Quelquechose, on

the second floor." I bowed my thanks, and as there seemed no further excuse for me to remain. I started toward the door, when I conceived what at the time I considered a splendid idea and a subtle piece of detective work.

"Will you not write 'opened by mistake' on this?" I asked, "and sigh your name?"

Again she looked at me with the same sweet, superior smile, and, with a knowing look in her big eyes, slowly shook her head.

"I am sorry," she said. "You know you were really very kind to bring me the telegram. Goodby." "Goodby," 1 repeated, "seems

hardly neighborly. Might it not rather be au revoir?"

"No," she caid, smilling, "I fear it might not. Neighbors are, after all, but a question of geography, and the result of a certain sameness of income. An enforced meeting over a stray telegram can hardly be said to constitute an introduction."

For the first time the tone of indifference, the almost severity of her language, brought to me a painful consciousness of my bare ankles and my otherwise somewhat informal garb, and I clumsify started to back toward the door.

"Oh, very well," I said, assuming a manner as flippant as I could well master under the circumstances. "if you prefer it that way-our happy meeting will be just as if it never Was.'

She slightly inclined her pretty head. "Just as if it never was," she repeated.

When I reached the door I bowed low, trying my best to be gracious, and, at the same time, to conceal my bare ankles. "I can only trust, then," I added as a parting word, "that fate will be so kind as to once more throw us together in our very narrow hallway."

miss him." "I don't think 1 ever saw him," I said. "He had

wife, I believe," The girl shook her head. "Perbaps-but I never saw

her. I rather imagined he was slone. A colored girl used to clean up and cook for him. I think."

I chose the silk for several ties, and, having given my order, bia Miss Dawson good night. It was quite evident that I could learn but little of the beautiful lady overhead from my neighbors across the street, and it was equally apparent that, for one reason or another, she chose 'to confine her operations to the near of the apartment. For the next few days my ears were forever listening for a noise of any kind from overhead, but I could hear nothing. The girl neither seemed to come nor go, at least by the stafrcase, her letter-box remained stuffed with circulars, and the window-sills of her front windows begrimed in dust. If she left or entered the house, at least while I was in it, then I was convinced that she did so by way of the fire-escape In the rear.

The days and nights passed on, and I heard or saw nothing of her, and I admit that I became restless,



noon smoking a pipe just about this time. I quite and rather worldly-"but you can't blame me, can you? in five minutes of the same hour every morning of the Ever since father lost his fortune in a wheat deal, the flat uptown is so terribly dull-and I do like a good dinner after sitting about all day really doing nothing. And then it isn't as if I didn't call on my people every few days and spend a month during the summer with them-is it?" She sighed at her own filial devotion. "Do you suppose the people on Our Street," I asked, "know just when you are starting out to visit your folks

and just when you are off to a matines?" "I wonder," she said, with a slight contraction of her delicate eyebrows, "I wonder. But I do so love these

occasional dips into Bohemia." "The threads which draw you back to the shores of comparative respectability after these dips," I suggested, "are, in reality, but slight. Be careful they don't snap some day, and leave you floundering about and calling for help.

The girl smiled most cheerfully. "I could get help all right in Bohemia. It's being left to floundar on the shores of the dead sea of respectability that I fear. They so love to see one of their own gasping for life on the hot sands."

"Well enough for the present," I said, "but how about the future? Now you have

health and beauty and the capacity of youth for pleasure, but that won't last always. Some day the shadows and the grow's-feet and the creases will come, and the young men will stay away-that is, if they baven't already married young women who live with their folks. For some reason young men seem to prefer young women for wives who live with their folks-no?"

The girl made a little grimace at me by way of the mirror, and swung herself about so that she could better see the hang of her lace coat in the back. "Perhaps," she said, 'Sut, you see, I've really had no experience. Now, you're awfully old, and you no doubt have watched the people on Our Street grow up, and it has made you sour and discontented and cynical. You forget the day you came to Our Street. I wager you you had no thought of crow's-feet and wrinkles then. I doubt if you knew a natural complaxion from rouge, or even enamel, in those days."

"Quite right, my dear," I saidand the fact that I said "my dear" was admission enough that her suppositions were perfectly correct-"I came here twenty years ago, and every woman was beautiful then, and every complexion was the work of God. But now!"-I threw up my hands in mock horror.

She turned and looked down on me, wide-eyed, and slowly shook her head. "Twenty years on a side street in New York!" she said. "What a life-what a life! You are, of course, the oldest inhabitant, and your constitution must be a marvelous affair to have kept you going all that time. You should have crawled off to die in your native town long before this. A refuge for reclaimed women or an inebriates' home should have had your name carved over its door years ago. Just think of your spending your own money for twenty yearsit's shocking! Don't you really feel

year. You should apply to the nearest hospital for a trained nurse, not at one of our oldest homes for a child-wife."

"You're very discouraging," I said. "You forget that a bachelor's passion for a quiet married life is dearer to him than anything, except his love of freedom. Can't you play you are somebody else?"

"Surely." the girl answered, in a most flippant manner. She threw the chaste white cape over the nearest chair, and, returning to the showcase, took down a most bewildering affair, which, with a proper spirit of awe, I draped about her white shoulders. It was a wrap of great intrinsic worth and of superlative beauty. atl of gold-spangled net, over rose-golored chiffon, with very large ruffied sleeves and an immense fichu of ohiffon and lace. From one of the stands she took a broad felt hat with a heavy binding and drooping plumes, all of the most exquisite shade of, domingo pink, and, going back to the mirror, placed it with much care over the mass of bronze curls. With her hands on her hips, she turned and twisted before the pier-glass, until she was, to all appearances, quite satisfied that the girl and hat and wrap were a combination of nature and artifice at its very best. With a broad sweep of the mantle, a riot of gorgeous color bewildering in its very audacity, she took a few steps toward the chair to which I had returned, and courtested low before me. There was no further any attempt to conceal the knowledge in her soul. It shone brazenly now through the big meaning eyes, and about the arched lips there was the suggestion of a most knowing smile.

"Charming," I said, "quite charming!" and I drew my coat over my broad shirt-bosom as if her very presence chilled me. "But what a wicked, cruel little smile, Whom does it belong to?" "My idea," she said, looking at herself in the mirror

with the most frank smile of adulation over her own beauty, "was to be fascinating rather than cruel. It pleases me to think that I am the Show Girl who has sublet the apartment from the gipl in No. 37, the one who has gone on the road with 'The Maid and the Mandarin."

"A show girl," I mused aloud. "Personally, I do not like the type. I have often seen you trail the balayeuse of your silken skirts across the pavement on your way to and from your electric cab, but so far you have been a stranger to me, I have even been urged to attend your supper parties, and each time I have refused. So you see, my young friend, there is one crime on the calendar of Our Street of which I am still innocent."

"Still innocent!" she laughed at me, and I hated her, for her laughter seemed so very hard and had a metallic ring. "Still innocent! Quite right. I am a bird of plumage, whose brilliancy dazzles only the untrained eye of the very young or the fading sight of the very old. Soggy, middle-aged respectability knows me for what I am, a mummy dressed by Paquin. Escaped me in your youth perhaps you have, but, after all, that is long since, and I am a product of the present century. But, I wager you, the swish of these silken skirts will yet be music to your faded hearing, and some day, believe me, you will be a willing and an honored guest at my supper table."

"As well say," I protested, "that I will ask the very pretty vendeuze who is forever leaning against the door-frame of No. 42 to dine at Sherry's, or that I will put up at my club the haberdasher's clerk across the WRY.

"Pardon me," said the girl haughtily, tilting her dimpled chin in the most charming fashion, and as if my last remark had given serious offense. "You are quite wrong to mix the social and commercial life of Our Street. The Vendeuse and the Haberdasher's Clerk, however worthy, have not even the status of the Extra Girl and the Chorus Man who use the stagedoor opposite; or of Carlo the bootblack, who knows the inside story of every pair of shoes on the block; or even of the Telephone Girl at the corner drugstore, who can ring any of us up without looking in the book. Believe me, the persons you mentioned have no standing whatever-and heaven forbid that they should have any effect on our life. They are but transients, at best, and have no more intercourse with the people of Our Street than they do with the casual shoppers from Broadway or Fifth avenue." "I like that," I said. "Do you consider yourself one of us just because you have subleased an apartment for mind confessing that I have been , a few months?" In some nook or corner of the shop my beautiful neighbor had discovered a curtain-rod painted white, and, using it as a staff, such as the ladies affected at the time of the empire, she proceeded to parade slowly up and down in front of the mirrors, and smile and bow with much conde row of bow with much condescension at her reflections, just as if she were greeting her lady friends in some royal gardens. She really seemed to friends in some royal gardens. She really seemed to have forgotten me entirely, and I found it necessary to have forgotten me entirely, and I found it necessary to repeat my remark. "Because you have rented an apartment in the neighborhood," I said, "during the short run in New York of the company of which you are a member, does that make you one of us?" "It makes no difference," she said slowly, stalking with a great manner up and down before the mirrors, "whether I or another show girl occupies the room. "The character of the tenants never varies on Our Street." The character of the tenants never varies on Our Street. The girl who sublet her apartments to me used the same sachet powder in the bureau drawers as I do, and the same violet ammonia tablets for her bath-the and the same violet ammonia tablets for her bath-the scent was unmistakable in both cases. Should your ghost dare the natural hazards of Our Street and return here after your demise, it would find another bachelor ensconced and very much like yourself. There would be a different brand of Scotch on the sideboard, per-haps, and a new face on the bureau-top, surely, but the general effect would be quite the same." ''You are terribly cynical for one so young," I said "Do you even consider yourself a fair example of your type? Do you really for one moment think yourself typical of a kind of neighbor with whom I must one day be neighborly? Even M flowered fields and run-ning brooks are not for me, surely do not tell me that ning brooks are not for me, surely do not tell me that one day I must kneel to you and your cape of gold. Because I have tasted sherry in my youth, must I turn to brandy in my old age? If, from mere exhaustion, one drops out of the rush of a great city, is it necessary to look on such beauty as yours before I can return to action?" The soll stopped in front of a mirror, and, drawing herself to her full height, grasped her staff in both hands and looked steadfastly into the glass, as if she were posing for a portrait by some great master. Then in answer to my question, she slightly inclined her head toward the image in the glass. "I am typical of my class, and I am typical of the pleasures of your city. I am for show, and I dine with the one who considers it most worth his while to pay for my presence—the pleasure of dining opposite so much beauty and such fine clothes. It is only a quesmuch tion of time when most of you come to paying for your pleasures—you love your restaurants better than your own dining rooms and your theaters better than your owh dining rooms and your theaters better than your libraries. Believe me, yours is the city of boughten happiness. You ask me if I am typical of my class. I am no more typical of my class than you are of yours -ne more typical than Carlo the bootblack, or the Girl Who Makes Silk Ties for extra money with which to buy theater tickets, or the Jeune Fille who is stranded at the end of the block, or the Bachelor Maid across the way who doesn't live with her folks, or the Decayed Gentiswoman who runs the lingerie shop at No. 29 or the Telephone Girl at the corner drugstore. across the way who doesn't live with her folks, or the Decayed Gentiswoman who runs the lingerie shop at No. 22, or the Telephone Girl at the corner drugstore, or the other denizens of the wide streets, who, behind drawn shades, watch the life of the city rush on through its great thoroughfares. Do any of us of the side street ever run for public office or corner a wheat deal and become famous in a night, or do any of us fail and hang out the red flag of the auctioneer? Not we-we take the middle course and live on the safe, easy banks of the stream, and watch the ebb and flow of the tide-and wait." of the tide-and wait." The girl laid aside her improvised wand, took off the plumed hat, and hung the spangled wrap in the mirrored case. Together we rearranged the shop as we had found it, locked the deor and hid the key under the mat. Slowly I followed her up to the landing be-fore my door. With one step on the stairway leading to the floor above, she stopped and held out her hand

By Charles Belmont Davis

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out embarrassment, and for a moment stood at the door smiling at my confusion. "Won't you come in?" she said at last, and I fol-lowed her on to the center of the room. My neighbor was undoubtedly an artist, and I had evidently stimbled into her workshop. Through a dim orange light I noted that the tinted walls were pardraped with pleces of tapestry, ornately embroid-copes and stoles from the Italian churches of the ered copes and stoles from the Italian churches of the early part of the last century were thrown over the backs of some splendid pieces of old furniture, and many half-finished sketches and unframed portraits stood about on easels and against the walls of the room in great confusion. I must confess that the condition of the room did not speak well for my neighbor in her capacity of housekeeper. The pictures, the draperies, the furniture-even the floor-were covered with a thick layer of dust, which apparently had been allowed to accumulate for weeks, and was in the most extraoraccumulate for weeks, and was in the most extraor-dinary contrast to the spiritual, almost eery, beauty of the girl and the glistening freshness of her volumi-

of the girl and the glistening freshness of her volumi-nous lace petiticoats. "I am very sorry to disturb you," I said, "but I have brought you a telegram, which was left me by mistake. You must pardon my dress, or rather the lack of it, but the messenger interrupted my forty-winks." "Forty-winks?" she repeated, and shrugged her pretiy shoulders. "That's what it used to be a long time ago, but now it is fairly an orgy of sleep. You can not deny that, when you were young, an alarm clock suf-lised, but today it is necessary for your man to wake you in time for your dinner hour."

lised, but today it is necessary for your man to wake you in time for your dinner hour." "My unknown neighbor looked at me with a curious little wistful smile, as if she were quite out of humor with my bachelor ways; sighed, crossed the room to where a high lamp stood, looked at the address on the telegram, and then carefully tore off the end of the envelope. She stood under the broad orange lamp-shade,

I was well on my way down the stairway when I felt conscious of the girl having followed me to her doorway. As I turned she leaned over the

banister and whispered: "And you needn't look for my name in the letter-box in the hall; it isn't there, really. name in Goodby.

Goodby." I returned to my room, where I found my breakfast waiting for me, but for the rolls that had stood the test of fifteen years I had no appetite; and the cream too struck me as unusually sour. I read my morning paper, and, although I learned on the very first page that one near friend had been thrown from his automo-bile and another had had his head cracked open at polo. I could not switch my thoughts from the young woman overhead Here was beauty and health and condition enough to make the front page of any newspaper seem dull enough, and I confess that her indifference, which might have been construed by the more fastidious as might have been construed by the more fastidious as crass rudeness, annoyed me a good deal. Before my cigar was half-finished. I threw aside the papers and, hurriedly finishing my dressing, went down to the ves-fibule on the lower floor. She was quite right; the little brass letter-loss next my own bore the name of a man, and, judging from the fact that it was stuffed full of advertisements of new cheap restaurants and "home" laundries, it had evidently not been used for a long time. As soon as I reached my office I called up the a, ent from whom I rented my apartment. The agent was a personal friend-by disposition, a cotilon leader, but by inneritance the owner and agent of many houses. but by inneritance the owner and agent of many houses, which mine was

which mine was one. "Pardon me, Grayson," I said, as soon as I could get hun to the telephone, "but I believe I have been a pretty good tenant, have paid my rent the first day of every month, and never complained about my neighbors." "You are in all things," Grayson drawled, "the per-

fect tenant. 'Good!'' said I. "Now, after fifteen years, I am going to ask you a favor."

"Is it a plumber or the man with the white enamel paint? It's always one or the other with you tenants." "Neither." said I. "but I want to know all you know about the beautiful young person that lives in the apart-

ment over mine?

"Nothing at all, personally," said Grayson; "but I'll ask somebody in the office here." There was a few moments' delay, broken by the rumblings of an indistinguishable conversation through

the telephone, and then Grayson began again; That apartment was rented to an artist chap named Hoffmeyer for six months on an unexpired lease. He

said that, as he was away from town sometimes for quite a long while, painting portraits, he would pay in advance, which he did. That's all I know." "Do you suppose the beautiful person is Mrs. Hoff-meyer?" I asked.

'How should I know?" said Grayson. "Why don't

you run upstairs and ask her yourself?" "Are you aware." I continued, somewhat aggrieved at Grayson's ignorance and indifference, "that the platform of the fire-escape on that top floor extends to the build-ings on either side, and, if the rear windows should be left unlatched, any one could enter the back room of the

apartment either, from the fire-escape or even the roof?" "To you who live there," said Grayson, with a most aggravating nasal inflection. "I have no doubt that those are most filuminating and stirring facts, but to a com-muter from irvington, like myself, believe me, they are wholly without interest. I know or care nothing about your beautiful neighbor. However, in a general way, I would take a commuter's advice-'Stop, look, hsten!''

I have said that I did not know my neighbors, which is quite true, but I did know something about one of them, who happened to live almost directly opposite me. and eked out a rather miserable existence by neckties for a very limited trade at night. the day and making necktles for a very limited trade at may her watched for her the next afternoon until I saw her enter the house opposite, and a few minutes later open ther apartment. I hurried over

one of the windows of her apartment. I hurried over and was at once admitted to her little sitting-room, which looked out over the street. I told her the osten-tible object of my visit and the name of the client who had recommended her. With a show of much pleasure she brought out a great variety of silk stuffs from which the ties were to be made. Pleading a lack of light with which to see the colors. I carried the silk to the window. Then, casually. I looked at the windows of the apartment over my own, and saw that they were not only closed and casually. I looked at the windows of the apartment over my own, and saw that they were not only closed and the shades down, but apparently the window-sills and the windows themselves were gray with dirt and dust. "I live directly opposite." I seld, "in No. 14. Appar-ently my neighbor in the apartment over my own is away. One must cross the street to really learn what

oing on in one's own house." 'I never thought of that," said Miss Dawson, "but !

"I never thought of that," said Miss Dawson, "Dut I believe I do know more about my neighbors across the street than of my own fellow lodgers. You must be quits alone at night now in your building-those win-dows have not been opened for a long time?" "You are sure!" I asked. "Oh, yes," she said, "I am quite sure, because a Ger-man-looking young man used to sit there every after-

"Smiled and bowed with much condescension at her reflection"

peevish with my friends, and very ill at ease. There were times when a glance and a few words from a pretty neighbor would have passed almost unnoticed, and have been at once overwhelmed in the swirl of other things. But there was not so much of a swirl to my life these days-it was much more orderly and more carefully regulated in every way, and not nearly so full of incident or adventure. I now preferred a quiet dinner at my club adventure. I now preferred a quiet dinner at my club to the noise and gayety of the restaurant; and whereas I had formerly been a most persistent theatergoer, at present I found it difficult to sit through any play, how-ever worthy. Formal calls and parties I had given up entirely, and the women I had, grown up with and knew really well. I found just a little old and a little top devoted to home interests and their daughters' social successes. Of course, as the mothers were a little too old, the daughters themselves were just a little too young; so there I was, a human pendulum swinging between the two generations-and the pendulum swinging a little

Two generations—and the pendulum swinging a little more slowly every year. It was, perhaps, a week after my interview with my neighbor when 1 saw her again. I had returned from a supper party after the play, and, although it was late, I picked up a book and, dropping into an easy chair, prepared for an hour's quiet reading before going to bed. I had barely become really interested when I heard the door of the apartment overhead close, and, a few moments later, a creak from the shaky banisters told me that some one was coming downstairs. As noiselestly me that some one was coming downstairs. As noiselessly as possible i stole across my sitting-room, and, pulling aside the silk curtain a very little, peeped out through the slass in the door leading to the hall, and saw the stri cautiously tiptoeing her way down the stairs. She was apparently dressed very much as I had seen her before but her voluminous and headbhond efore, but her voluminous and beribboned petticoats were partially concealed by a wonderful pink affair of before lace and diaphanous silk-a most extraordinary garment, I thought, for a young woman to choose for street wear at 1 o'clock in the morning. She wore no hat, nor headcovering of any kind, but the bronze-colored hair had apparently been arranged with the greatest possible care. Even in the dim light of the hall she appeared most lovely, and from my hiding-place I watched her until she disappeared down the staircase leading to the shops and the street. The front door is a heavy one, with a stiff lock, and it is impossible to open and shut it without making a considerable noise. I stood in the center of my room, waiting for some moments, but, hearing no noise of any kind. I opened my door and waiked down the haliway to the head of the stairs. They were quite deserted, but a shaft of strong white light fell across

deserted, but a shafa of strong white light fell across the haliway from the open door of the shop of Madame Quelquechose. I. cautiously stole down the steps and gently knocked on the door-frame. "Come in," said the voice of my neighbor from the far end of the shop. It was a long, narrow room, the walls covered with pluk brocade, and at regular dis-tances there were white-and-gold showcases, with long mirrored doors; the floor was carpeted in dark green, and standing about in carefully arrayed confusion were and standing about in carefully arrayed confusion were a number of gilded, spindle-legged chairs and many tail delicately stemmed stands, topped by gorgeously flowered and beribboned hats. The girl had already opened several of the showcases, and I saw bewildering rows of lace coats and cloth wraps of many delicate shades. My neighbor was standing before a mirror; a heavy lace coat fell from her shoulders, and she was carafully placing on her well-poised head a bread, black hat with a great bow of dark green velvet on the side. "Do you like it?" she asked, softly patting the bronze curls over her forchead

curls over her forehead. "Beautiful!" said I, "How did you get in?" "It's very simple. When Madame Quelquechose stays

late at night, she leaves the key under the door-mat, so that the boy can open the shop in the morning. It is perfectly safe except from you and me. I stumbled over the key quite by accident."

the key quite by accident." I carefully removed several marvelously plumed hats from one of the spindle-legged chairs and sat down. "Do you come here often of nights?" I asked. The girl surveyed harself critically in the glass, and pushed the hat forward over her forehead and the bronze curls. "Quite often," she said. "It's rather an amusing game. You see I flay I'm different people on Our Street."

"Splendid!" I said. "Who do you think you are now ?"

now?" She glanced in the mirror at the reflection of the spreading hat, with its dash of brilliant color, and then down at the loosely hanging jace coat, reaching almost to her patent-leather slippers. "Who do you think I am now?" she repeated. "Now I am the Bachelor Girl across the street-hardly the person you would introduce to your mother-although. perhaps you might to your sister. Respectable, maybe, person you would introduce to your mother-although, perhaps, you might to your sister. Respectable, maybe, but, after all, I am a little young and a triffe pretty, perhaps, to live alone: and, when a girl does that with a family in Hariem, the neighbors will talk. And then I constantly dine with men alone"-the girl turned and shook her pretty head at me, but the smile that played about her red lips seemed just a triffe knowing

like dving? I should think your aches and pains would be quite unbearable."

I slowly stuck my legs out before me and stretched my arms above my head. "You see," I said. "I am still quite strong. I admit that I am somewhat more temperate in my habits, and now that you mention the fact that I am awfully old, I don't thinking a great deal of late of moving to a home in the

country." The girl turned sharply from the mirror to which she had returned and looked down at me, as if to sat-isfy herself that I was quite serious. Finding that I was, she broke into such loud and merry peals of laughter that the broad hat wabbled on her head until it was necescountry. sary to hold it on with both hands. "You"-she said, with real tears of laughter glisten-

ing in her eyes." a country squire. You would die of ennui in a week!"

I admit that her laughter annoyed me, although I confess her youthful beauty more than made up for this, for it seemed to radiate the more brilliantly every

"You don't understand," I said with considerable asperity, "You're only a child and can't appreciate the beauties of nature-the passion of the middle-aged for the blossoming flower of the fields and the love we feel

The blossoning howser of the heads and the love we feel for the shadows in a crystal stream." She ceased her laughter and sat down on a chair facing my own and interlaced her long pink fingers behind the back of her pretty head. "Don't lose your sense of humor," she said..." blossoming plants and crys-tal streams, fiddlesticks! Of course I can appreciate sense of humor," she said-"blossoming plants and crys-tal streams, fiddlesticks! Of course I can appreciate the beauties of nature, I could leave all this tomorrow and never come back. I could leave all this tomorrow and dream away my life under an apple tree, with only the birds and insects for my friends, but I am young and still sensitive to beautiful things; my pulse is fresh and strong and my lungs are yet free from the tainted air of your great city. Should you, for instance, draw a breath of perfectily good air into your lungs, you would probably collapse entirely. And if you didn't, you would grope your way back to this-and-and-rejuvenate. My dear, good old man-" "I am just turned forty," I interrupted. "My dear, good old man," she continued, "you may dream of blossoming plants and crystal streams, but the poison of the town is in your yelns. A man who has driven a racing car over olled roads never returns to a top buggy. The rooms overhead, believe me, will know you until the end." "Knowing this." I said, "and with your lungs and your heart, no doubt, still se pure, why do you not go

your heart, no doubt, still so pure, why do you not go at once to your apple tree and your birds and your insects?"

insect?" "Why?" she asked me. "Because the power to go is still mine. I am just looking in at the door of Our Street, and I confess that it looks warm and comfort-able enough. I am like one of my insect friends if you will, fluttering in a circle about the flame you love so well, but the circle is yet a large one, my wings are still intact, and I can fly away should I so will it. Be-udes all the women on Our Street do not will it. Bestides, all the woman on Our Street do not wear lace coats."-She put aside the broad hat and the long coat, and going over to the mirrored case, took down a white

and going over to the mirrored case, took down a white cloth cape, exquisite in its simplicity, and drew it closely about her slim figure. "And now?" I asked. "Now I am the Jeune Fille at the end of the street" -at the moment it seemed to me that her whole ex-pression had softened materially, and there was a timid, almost shy, hook in the big eyes. "Poor, if you will," she continued, "and left behind; ashamed of my address, but still proud of my name. My chances are dimmed, of course, by the daughters of the trust kings from the middle west, but I have still a few relatives who live about Washington Square and a few soattered along the right side of the park. They give me teas when I come out and ask me to their large dances in winter and their country places in the summer. And I am always carefully chaperoned."

carefully chaperoned.". "And you get money presents at Christmas?" I sug-gested, "and your rich relatives speak of your poverty as if it was inherited tuberculosis."

gested, and your rich relatives speak of your poverty as if it was inherited tuberculosis." The girl sighed, but went back to the mirror, and with a smile of pleasure noted how charming her piquant face looked peeping out from the high braided collar of the white cloth mantle. "It's an awful struggle, I know," she sighed, nod-ding her head at the face in the mirror, "to be so wise in the ways of the world and yet to look on at it all with innocent, meaningless eyes, and then, dear mother is so difficult. She cannot understand why money should rank above beauty and pure worth, and why the price of eggs and butter go up while the morals of the young men go down. She insists that I marry in old man like yourself, whose securities have with stood the panics of twenty years, and whose wild oats have been garnered long ago and forgotten under the dust of the law of limitations." "A horrible alternative," I said, turning just far enough to see myself in the mirror of a neighborly showcase. "And yet my hair is not oven gray. I

"A horrible alternative," I said, turning just far enough to see myself in the mirror of a neighborly showcase. "And yet my bair is not even gray. I admit that I have recently regarded marriage as a remote possibility, but-" "A remote possibility?" she echoed. "A man so set in his ways! You're really too absurd. Wmy, I'm sure sou have your bath drawn and your coffee served with-

"Goodby!" she said, "and for the last time." "Surely not that?" I urged. "I don't even know r name."

"Surely not that?" I urged. "I don't even know your name." "My name," she said. "my name is Youth." "Youth?" I repeated. "Youth if you will." she said. "I am the spirit of the cross-town streets—I am the writing on the wall— I am the grist ready for the mill—you are the chaff ready for the winds." She started up the stairs, but after she had taken a few steps turned, and, with the same wistful smile I had loved so much, looked back at me over her shoulder.

I had loved so intell, boats whispered; "goodby!" "Goodby, old man." she whispered; "goodby!" "Good by! Youth." I said. "We've had some good times together, you and I. Here's God speed to you, whichever path you choose!" The girl smiled back at me, hesitated for a mo-ment, and then with no more words ran lightly up the stairs, and I heard the door close sharply behind her.