

need, a cry within her for something to love; something to expend herself upon; somebody to help; she wanted passionately to be a necessity in somebody's life.

A sobering thought came. In her marriage with George she had never thought of helping him; just taking and resenting, never coming to any fine understandings. But would George have been capable of understanding! That she had never tried to discover.

It was all too perplexing, this finding herself at the mercy of life, and she was relieved when Nell came sweeping in. She ran at once to Daphne and began to speak quickly, as thought fires consumed her. The rays from the guttering candle fell upon her as she stood, lending a tint of amber to the white dress of marquise, with its wide silk girdle.

"Oh, Daphne, you know my secret now!" she cried.

"Sit down, Nell. Draw that chair up close. Now what have I discovered?"

"That Karl and I have been friends, dear friends, since I met him at the Benderlys' attic. This is the first time he has been here, but we've been many places together. Once we took a long, long ride away out into the country together. He is wonderful!"

Daphne looked surprised, tried not to appear condemning, since thoughts of Rachel Sayre would intrude—all that Rachel Sayre had borne and sacrificed for this boy with the big gift.

"It's a surprise, Nell. Tell me about it all, if you wish."

"Oh, there's so much words can't tell," said Nell as she sank on a footstool near Daphne. She seemed wrapped in a tender egotism at what proudly she wanted to tell. "We were drawn together that first evening. He played to me alone, but of course nobody else guessed that. He telephoned me one evening when you were out, and I met him and we dined together."

"And then?"

"Just one meeting after another, going to plays, listening to music. And oh, Daphne, some day he's going to be a great artist. And he finds in me his greatest inspiration. It's all been too sacred to talk about." Her voice fell.

Nell's hand reached out and found Daphne's. Daphne hated to spoil the moment, but the words were at her lips.

"And what of Rachel Sayre? She's helped him since first he came to New York, penniless, unknown. She loves him."

"And he loved her at first, Daphne, and he's grateful to her; truly he is. But she doesn't understand him. He's very sensitive and he shrivels under her rough handling. She wants to push him forward when he realizes that it's a matter of slow growth and some one near to help and encourage him and be with him in his let-down moments."

Daphne concluded to speak bluntly. So: "You don't love him, do you, Nell?"

"You shock me, Daphne. It's too high, too pure a thing, this rare association, to designate by ordinary terms." She continued, musingly, after a moment of quiet while the light went on calmly flickering to its end: "You know it's something to look forward to after a day's grind—the meeting a man with a fine soul. And one who needs you, to whom the very fact of your living means music—to give out to the world. And now, Daphne, has come the greatest of all!"

She leaned nearer, spoke almost in a whisper: "He has written something for me alone. And tomorrow night he is to play it to me—all alone!"

"All alone?"

"Yes; in his rooms, after we've dined together. His place is beautiful as though, he says, he had built into it a dream of me. He says I will love his studio; that I will fill it with grace, call forth the spirit of harmony, of great melodies." Nell had forgotten Daphne really in her repetitions; she was saying them over for herself.

"I've heard of his rooms. Rachel

Sayre fitted them out for him. She believed in his talent and she'd made a good bit of money out of her garden illustrations. But, Nell, his rooms alone at night?"

Nell flashed a scornful look at her friend. "Daphne! And that after all your talk of freedom and going your own way. If I cannot do as I wish to do I might as well have stayed with Bob!"

So Daphne said no more.

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XIV.

NELL, beautiful with the thought of her great service upon her, left Daphne the next night to meet Karl.

Shielded by the thoughtful screen, he bent and kissed her.



Daphne was remaining at home to write.

Nell wore a green dress, a soft olive with a cream lace collar high in the neck and rolling to a point in front, revealing lovely lines and white skin.

"You look like a high priestess," said Daphne.

Nell didn't like the teasing remark. She said good-by rather coldly and went out to her tryst.

Daphne wrote a page. Then the telephone rang and she knew Billy was calling her. She went out into the hall to answer him.

Billy's cheerful voice really came singing over the wires. She refused at once his request to go out with him; or to let him call. She didn't want to see Billy. She told him so, and he laughed in disbelief. And while he was still trying to persuade her, she cut him off. A half hour later a messenger brought her a letter. Despite her efforts at mastery, her hands trembled as she tore open the envelope.

Billy had written:

I'm surprised at myself that I'm not completely bowled over by love of you. But let's talk things out a bit more. You didn't give me half a chance last night. I know I'm more than terribly fond of you, Daphne. I'd do a great deal for you. You attracted me strongly the first time I met you, with your eyes the color of my favorite marble when I was 10. That's something, isn't it? Brown that marble was, with deep gold sparkles in it. Lord, how I loved and cherished it! And your lips, that lure one. I even remember the black dress, with the white collar. It wasn't smart, but

it had an air. Do let me see you, girl, for remember, I'd sacrifice a great deal for you. BILLY.

Daphne carefully folded the letter and tore it into little bits, which she dropped into her waste basket and let her mind dwell on the thought of the few weeks of undoubted happiness she'd experience being every day with Billy, waiting for Billy in the evenings, reading with Billy, listening to Billy's exquisitely funny deductions on woman. She didn't scold herself for the digression.

"After all," she mused, "I have grown some. If I hadn't, I'd just proceed to captivate Billy, fill his imagination and marry him as soon as legally possible; though all the time I'd sense deep in my heart the ultimate pain I'd know."

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SO SHE flung up her head and went back deliberately and with firm hand and brave spirit to work.

At 10 a gloved hand that shook opened the door. Daphne, now writing madly, looked up.

Nell it was who stumbled in. And at sight of her face, drenched of all its lights, Daphne started forward.

"Don't look at me, Daphne!" Nell cried. "Please!"

So Daphne forebore, and Nell went on into the alcove. Daphne heard her moving about swiftly, and then silence, a long silence.

Daphne finally could no longer stand that silence. So she went softly into the inner room. Nell was sitting on the edge of the bed, looking straight before her. She had attempted no light. She did not turn as Daphne came in.

Daphne went and stood close to her. "And so that is how it came out, little

girl?" she said very lovingly and very understandingly.

"That is how it came out, Daphne," Nell repeated. "He said of course he thought I understood. I—I cried and he held me and tried to soothe me, but he couldn't soothe the hurt he'd given me. I'd dreamed of being a white light to him, with no thought of passion—and baser things."

Daphne spoke sharply, letting her hand fall on Nell's shoulder. "Nell," she cried, "try to be honest—with yourself!"

Nell shrank as though a lash had scourged her. She made to move from under Daphne's touch, tried to show forth her indignation at Daphne's brutality. But she felt the direct gaze above her piercing into her, unwavering. At last, after a long time, she spoke in a voice scarcely audible.

"I couldn't think, Daphne, that he regarded me so lightly. It was terrible to me when the realization came. Why, he had white roses all about, and he played to me with the lights turned low—and there was the fragrance of the flowers, the long echoes of the wonderful music. I felt like the one woman in all the world to him."

"But you did understand yourself, didn't you?" came from Daphne, inexorably.

Nell rose from the bed. She stood in the dark save for the gleam that came through from the larger room.

"Oh, Daphne, yes—why do you drag me out before myself? Yes, yes, yes! I knew all the time it was one way of playing at love. I'm shamed, shamed now. But work like mine isn't enough to fill up life. And when Karl came he met my need for light and change and