racing news. That part of it will be all right, if I can have him."

"If it is necessary—"

"I think it is, sir."

Emily moved slightly, pushing back her yellow-brown curls under the ribbon that bagged them. On a sudden impulse her uncle looked up at her.

"What is your opinion?" he questioned. "If Dick had been listening I should have asked his, and I fancy yours is fully as valuable. Come, shall we have this racing manager?"

Astonished, she looked from her uncle to the other man. And perhaps it was the real anxiety and suspense of Bailey's expression that drew her quick reply.

"Let us, uncle. Since we need him, let us have him."

"Very well," said Mr. French. "You hear, Bailey."

There was a long silence after the junior partner's withdrawal.

"Come where I can see you, Emily," her uncle finally demanded. "I liked your decided answer a few moments ago; you can reason. How long have you been a daughter in my house?"

"Six years," she responded, obediently moving to a low chair opposite. "I was fifteen when you took me from the convent—to make me very, very happy, dear."

"I sent for you when I sent for Dick—and for the same reason. I have tried three times to rear one of my name to fitness to bear it, and each one has failed except you. I wish you were a man, Emily; there is work for a French to do."

"When you say that, I wish I were. But—I'm not, I'm not." She flung out her slender, round arms in a gesture of helpless resignation. "I'm not even a strong-minded woman who might do instead. Uncle Ethan, may I ask—it was Mr. Bailey who made me think—my cousin whom I never saw, will he never come home?"

He voice faltered on the last words, frightened at her own daring. But her uncle answered evenly, if coldly:

"Never."

"He offended you so?"

"His whole life was an offense. School, college, at home, in each he went wrong. At twenty-one he left me and married a woman from the vaudeville stage. It is not of him you are to think, Emily, but of a substitute for him. For that I designed Dick; once I hoped you would marry him and sober his idleness."

"Please, no," she refused gently. "I am fond of Dick, but—please, no."

"I am not asking it of you. He is well enough, a good boy, but overwise, but not what is needed here. Failed, again; I am not fortunate. There is left only you."

"Me?"

Her startled dark eyes and his determined gray ones met, and so remained.

"You, and your husband. Are you going to marry a man who can take my place in this business, in the factory and the model village my brother and I built around it; a man whose name will be fit to join with ours and so in a fashion preserve it here? Will you wait until such a one is found and will you aid me to find him? Or will you too follow selfish, idle fancies of your own?"

"No!" she answered, quite pale. "I would not do that! I will try to help."

"You will take up the work the men of your name refuse, you will provide a substitute for them?"

Her earnestness sprang to meet his strength of will, she leaned nearer in her enthusiasm of self-abnegation, scarcely understood.

"I will find a substitute or accept yours. I indeed I will try not to fail."

It was characteristic that he offered neither praise nor caress.

"You have relieved my mind," said Ethan French, and turned his face once more to the fire.

CHAPTER III.

It was October when the consultation was held in the library of the old French house on the Hudson; December was very near on the sunny morning that Emily drove out to the factory and sought Bailey in his office.

"I wanted to talk with you," she explained, as that gentleman rose to receive her. "We have known each other for a long time, Mr. Bailey; ever since I came from the Sacred Heart to live with Uncle Ethan. That is a very long time."

"It's a matter of five or six years," agreed the charmed Bailey, contemplating her with affectionate pride in her prettiness and grace. "You used to drive out here with your pony and spend many an hour looking on and asking questions. You'll excuse me, Miss Emily, but there was many a man passed the whisper that you'd have made a fine master of the works."

She shook her head, folding her small gloved hands upon the edge of the desk at the opposite sides of which they were seated.

"At least I would have tried. I am quite sure I would have tried. But I am only a girl. I came to ask you something regardless that," she frowned her candid eyes to his, her soft color rising. "Do you know—have you ever met any men who cared and understood about such factories as this? Men who could take charge of a business, the manufacturing and racing and selling, like my uncles? I have a reason for asking."

"Sure thing," said Bailey, unexpectedly prompt. "I've met one man who knows how to handle this factory better than I do, and I've been at it twelve years. And there he is—" he turned in his revolving chair and rolled up the shade covering the glass set door into the next room, "my manager, Lestrange."

The scene thus suddenly opened to the startled Emily was sufficiently matter-of-fact, yet not lacking in a certain sober animation of its own. Around a drafting table central in the bare, systematic disorder of the apartment beyond, three or four blue-shirted men were grouped, bending over a set of drawings, which Lestrange was explaining. Explaining with a vivid interest in his task that sparkled over his clear face in a changing play of expression almost mesmeric. In its command of attention. The men watched and listened intently; they themselves no common laborers, but the intelligent workmen who were to carry out the ideas here set forth. Wherever Lestrange had been, he was coatless and the sleeves of his outing shirt, rolled back, leaving bare the arms whose smooth muscles revealed little of the racing driver's strength; his thick brown hair was rumpled into boyish waves and across his forehead a fine black streak wrote of recent personal encounter with things practical.

"Oh!" exclaimed Emily faintly. And after a moment, "Close the curtain, please."

None of the group in the next room had noticed the movement of the shade, absorbed in one another; any sound being muffled by the throb of adjacent machinery. Bailey obeyed the request, and leaned back in his chair.

"That's Darling Lestrange," he stated with satisfaction. "That's his own design for an oiling system he's busy with, and it's a beauty. He's entered for every big race coming this season, starting next week in Georgia, and meantime he oversees every department in every building as it never was done before. The man for me, he is."

Emily made an unenthusiastic sign of agreement.

"I meant a very different man from Mr. Lestrange," she replied, her dignity altogether French. "I have no doubt that he is all you say, but I was thinking of another class. I meant—well, I meant a gentleman."

"Oh, you meant a gentleman," replied Bailey, surveying her oddly. "I didn't know, you see. No; I don't know any one like that."

"Thank you. Then I will go. I—it does not matter."

She did not go, however, but remained leaning on the arm of her chair in troubled reverie, her long lashes lowered. Bailey sat as quietly, watching her and waiting.

The murmur of voices came dully through the closed door, one lighter and clearer in tone, most frequently rising above the roar pervading the whole building. It was not possible that Emily's glimpse of Lestrange across the glass should identify him absolutely with the man she had seen once in the flickering lights and shadows on the Long Island road; but he was not of a type easily forgotten, and she had been awakened to a doubting recognition.

Now, many little circumstances recurred to her; a strangeness in Dick's manner when the new manager was alluded to, the fact that her rescuer on that October night had been driving a racing car and had worn a racing costume; and lastly, when Bailey spoke of "Darling" Lestrange there had flashed across her mind the mechanician's ridiculous answer to the request to aid her chauffeur in changing a tire: "I'll do it for you, Darling." And listening to that dominant voice in the next room, she slowly grew crimson before a vision of herself in the middle of a country road, appealing to a stranger for succor, like the heroine of a melodramatic fiction. Decidedly she would never see Lestrange, never let him discover Miss French.

"I will go," she reiterated, rising impetuously.

The glass-set door opened with unwarning abruptness.

"I'll see Mr. Bailey," declared some one. "He'll know."

Helpless, Emily stood still, and straightway found herself looking directly into Lestrange's gray eyes as he halted on the threshold.

It was Bailey who upheld the moment, all unconsciously.

"Come in," he invited heartily. "Miss French, this is our manager, Mr. Lestrange; the man who's going to double our sales this year."

Emily moved, then straightened herself proudly, lifting her small head. Lestrange had recognized her, she felt; the call was to courage, not flight.

"I think I have already met Mr. Lestrange," she said composedly. "I am pleased to meet him again."

"Met him!" cried Bailey. "Met him? Why—"

Neither heeded him. A gleaming surprise and warmth lit Lestrange's always brilliant face.

"Thank you," he answered her. "You are more than good to recall me, Miss French. I owe an apology for breaking in this way, but I ran on Mr. Bailey alone and he spoke of—"

"It is nothing; I was about to go." She turned to give Bailey her hand, smiling involuntarily in her relief. With a glance, an inflection, Lestrange had stripped their former meeting of its embarrassment and unconventionality, how, she neither analyzed nor cared.

"Good morning," said Bailey. "Shall I take you through, or—"

But Lestrange was already holding open the door, with a bright unconcern as to his workmanlike costume which impressed Emily pleasantly. She wondered if Dick would have borne the situation as well, in the impossible event of his being found at work.

The two walked together down an aisle of the huge, machinery-crowded room, the grimy men lifting their heads to gaze after Emily as she passed. Once Lestrange paused to speak to a man who sat, notebook and pencil in hand, beside another who manipulated under a grinding wheel a delicate aluminum casting.

"Pardon," he apologized to Emily, who had lingered also. "Mathews would have let that go wrong in another moment. He," his smile glanced out, "he is not a Rupert at changing his tires, so to speak, but just a good chauffeur."

"I See Him Now and Then."

The gay and natural allusion delighted her. For the first time in her life Emily French laughed out in a genuine, mischievous sense of adventure.

"Yes! I wonder you could separate yourself from that Rupert in some way; he was a most bewildering person," she retorted.

"Separate from Rupert? Why, I would not think of racing a taxicab, as he would say, without Rupert beside me. He is here taking a post-graduate course in this type of car, in order to be up to his work when we go down to Georgia next week."

"Next week? You expect to win that race?"

"No. We are running a stock car against some heavy foreign racing machines; the chance of winning is slight. But I hope to outrun any other American car on the course, if nothing goes wrong."

She looked up.

"And if something does?" she wondered.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Pray be careful of those moving belts behind you, Miss French. If something does—there is a chance in every game worth playing."

"A chance!" her feminine nerves recoiled from the implied consequences. "But only a chance, surely. You were never in an accident, never were hurt?"

Lestrange regarded her in surprise mingled with a dawning raillery infinitely indulgent.

"I had no accident last October," he guardedly responded. "I've been quite lucky. At least Rupert and I play our game unhampered; there will be no broken hearts if we are picked up from under our car some day."

They had reached the door while he spoke; as he put his hand on the knob to open it, Emily saw a long, strong scar running up the extended arm from wrist to elbow, a mute commentary on the conversation. In silence she passed out across the courtyard to where her red-wheeled car waited. But when Lestrange had put her in and given her the reins, she held out her hand to him with more gravity.

"I shall wish you good luck for next week," she said.

Lestrange threw back his head, drawing a quick breath; here in the strong sunlight he showed even younger than she had thought him, young with a primitive intensity of just being alive.

"Thank you. I would like—if it were possible—to win this race."

"This one, especially?"

"Yes, because it is the next step toward a purpose I have set myself, and which I shall accomplish if I live. Not that I will halt if this step fails, no, not for a score of such failures, but I am anxious to go on and finish."

Up to Emily's face rushed the answering color, red fire to his strong, by the bond of mutual enemies she leaned nearer.

"You live to do something? So do I so do I! And every one else plays."

However Lestrange would have replied, he was checked by the crash of the engine's gate. Abruptly recalled to herself, Emily turned to see Dick French coming toward them.

Remembering how the three had last met, the situation suggested strain. But to Emily's astonishment the young men exchanged friendly nods, although Dick flushed pink.

"Good morning, Lestrange," he greeted. "I've just come up from the city, Emily, and there wasn't any carriage at the station, so when one of the testers told me you were here I came over to get a ride."

"I've been to see Mr. Bailey," she responded. "Get in."

As Dick climbed in beside her, she bent her head to Lestrange; if she had regretted her impulsive confidence, again the clear sanity and calm of the gray eyes she encountered established self-content.

When they were trotting down the road toward home, in the crisp air, Emily glanced at her cousin.

"I did not know you and Mr. Lestrange were so well acquainted," she remarked.

"I see him now and then," Dick answered uneasily. "He's too busy to want me bothering around him much. You—remembered him?"

"Yes."

He absently took the whip from its socket, flecking the horse with it as he spoke.

"It was awfully square of you, Emily, not to mention that night to Uncle Ethan. It wasn't like a girl, at all. I made an idiot of myself, and you've never said anything to me about it since. I never told you where Lestrange took me, because I didn't like to talk of the thing. I'm really awfully fond of you, cousin."

"Yes, Dickie," she said patiently.

"Well, Lestrange rubbed it in. Oh, he didn't say much. But he carried me down to where they were practicing for a road race. Such a jolly lot of fellows, like a bunch of kids, teasing and calling jokes back and forth at one another half the night until daybreak, everything raw and chilly. Busy, and their mechanics busy, and one after another swinging into his car and going off like a rocket. By the time Lestrange went off, I was as much stirred up as anybody. When he made a record circuit at seventy-seven miles an hour average, I was shouting over the rail like a good one. And then, while he was off again, a big blue car rolled in and its driver yelled that Lestrange had gone over on the Eastbury turn, and to send around the ambulance. It was like a nightmare; I sat down on a stone and felt sick."

"He—"

"He shook me up half an hour later, and stood laughing at me. 'Upset,' he said. 'No; we shed a tire and went off into a field, but it didn't hurt the machine, so we righted her and came in.' He was limping and bruised and scratched, but he was laughing, while a crowd of people were trying to shake hands with him and say things. I felt—funny; as if I wasn't much good. I never felt like that before. 'This is only practice,' he said, when I was about to go. 'The race tomorrow will do better.' We find it more exciting than cocktails.' That was all, but I knew what he meant, all right. I've been careful ever since. He won the race next day, too."

"Dick, didn't it ever occur to you that you as well as Mr. Lestrange might do real things?" she asked, after a moment.

He turned his round, good-humored face to her in boundless amazement.

"If I race cars and break my neck, and call it fun, like Lestrange? You're laughing at me, Emily."

"No, no," in spite of herself the picture evoked brought her smile. "Not like that. But you might be interested in the factory. You might learn from Mr. Bailey and take charge of the business with Uncle Ethan. It would please uncle, how it would please him, if you did!"

Dick stirred unhappily.

"It would take a lot of grind," he objected. "I haven't the head for it, really. I'm not such an awfully bad lot, but I hate work. Let's not be serious, cousin. How pretty the frosty wind makes you look!"

Emily tightened the reins with a brief sigh of resignation.

"Never mind, Dickie. I—uncle will find a substitute. Things must go on somehow, I suppose, even if we do not take the way."

But the way loomed distasteful that morning as never before.

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. French and his niece were at breakfast on the Sunday when the first account of the Georgia race reached Frenchwood.

"You will take fresh coffee," Emily was saying, the little silver pot poised in her hand, when the door burst open and Dick hurried, actually hurried, into the room.

"He's won! He's got it!" he cried.

"Impossible time for an American car with an American driver. And how he won it! He distanced every car on the track except the two big Italian and French machines. Those he couldn't get, of course; but the Frenchman went out in the fourth hour with a broken valve. Then he was set down for second place behind Italy, with every other big car in the country entered. They say he drove like like—I don't know what. A hundred and some miles an hour on the straight stretches."

"Oh," Emily faltered, setting down the coffee-pot in her plate.

He stopped her eagerly, half turning toward Mr. French, who had put on his pince-nez to contemplate his nephew in stupefaction, not at his statement, but at his condition.

"Wait. In the last hour, the Italian car lost its chain and went over into a ditch on a back stretch, three miles from a doctor. People around picked the men out of the wreck, and Lestrange came up to find that the driver was likely to die from a severed artery before help got there. Emily, he stopped, stopped, with victory in his hands, had the Italian lifted into the mechanician's seat, and Rupert held him in while they dashed around the course to the hospital. He got him there fifteen minutes before an ambulance could have reached him, and the man will get well. But Lestrange had lost six minutes. He had rushed straight to the doctor's, given them the man, and gone right on, but he had lost six minutes. When people realized what he'd done, they went wild. Every one thought he'd lost the race, but they cheered him until they couldn't shout. And he kept on driving. It's all here," he waved the gaudy sheet. "The paper's full of it. He had half an hour to make up six minutes, and he did it. He came in nineteen seconds ahead of the nearest car. The crowd swarmed out on the course and fell all over him. Old Bailey's nearly crazy."

To see Dick excited would have been marvel enough to hold his auditors mute, if the story itself had not possessed a quality to stir even nonsporting blood. Emily could only sit and gaze at the headlines of the extended newspaper, her dark eyes wide and shining, her soft lips apart.

"He telegraphed to Bailey," Dick added in the pause. "Ten words: 'First across line in Georgia race. Car in fine shape. Lestrange.' That was all."

Mr. French deliberately passed his coffee-pot to Emily.

"You had better take your breakfast," he advised. "It is unusual to see you noticing business affairs, Dick; I might say unprecedented. I am glad if Bailey's new man is capable of his work, at least. I suppose for the rest, that he could scarcely do less than take an injured person to the hospital. Why are you putting sugar in my cup, Emily?"

"I don't know," she acknowledged helplessly.

"I didn't mean to disturb any one," said Dick, sulky and resentful. "It'll be a big thing though for our cars, Bailey says. I didn't know you disliked Lestrange."

Mr. French stiffened in his chair.

"I have not sufficient interest in the man to dislike him," was the cold rebuke. "We will change the subject."

Emily bent her head, remedying her mistake with the coffee. She comprehended that her uncle had conceived one of his strong, silent antipathies for the young manager, and she was sorry. Sorry, although, remembering Bailey's unfortunate speech the night Lestrange's engagement was proposed, she was not surprised. But she looked across to Dick sympathetically. So sympathetically, that after breakfast he followed her into the library, the colored journals in his hand.

"What's the matter with the old gentleman this morning?" he complained. "He wants the business to succeed, doesn't he? If he does, he ought to like what Lestrange is doing for it. What's the matter with him?"

Emily shook back her yellow curls, turning her gaze on him.

"You might guess, Dickie. He is lonely."

"Lonely! He!"

All the feminine impulse to defend flared up.

"Why not?" she exclaimed with passion. "Who has he got? Who stands with him in his house? No wonder he can not bear the man who is hired to do what a French should be doing. It is not the racing driver he dislikes, but the manager. And do not you blame him, Dick French."

Quite aghast, he stared after her as she turned away to the nearest window. But presently he followed her over, still holding the papers.

"Don't you want to read about the race?" he ventured.

Smiling, though her lashes were damp, Emily accepted the peace offering.

"Never Mind Me; Let Us Read."

"Yes, please."

"You're not angry? You know I'm a stupid chump sometimes; I don't mean it."

This time she laughed outright.

"No; I am sorry I was cross. It is I who would like to shirk my work. Never mind me; let us read."

They did read, seated opposite each other in the broad window-seat and passing the sheets across as they finished them. Dick had not exaggerated, on the contrary he had not said enough. Lestrange and his car were the focus of the hour's attention. The daring, the reckless courage that risked life for victory, the generosity which could throw that victory away to aid a comrade, and lastly the determination and skill which had won the conquest after all—the whole formed a feat too spectacular to escape public hysteria. It was very doubtful indeed whether Lestrange liked his idolizing, but there was no escape.

The two who read were young.

"It was a splendid fight," sighed Dick, when they dropped the last page.

"Yes," Emily assented. "When he comes back, when you see him, give him my congratulations."

"When I see him? Why don't you tell him yourself?"

Something like a white shadow wiped the scarlet of excitement from her cheeks, as she averted her face.

"I shall not see him; I shall not go to the factory any more. It will be better, I am sure."

Vaguely puzzled and dismayed, Dick sat looking at her, not daring to question.

Emily kept her word during the weeks that followed. Through Dick and Bailey she heard of factory affairs; of the sudden increase of orders for the Mercury automobiles, the added prestige gained, and the public favor bestowed on the car. But she saw nothing of the man who was responsible for all this. Instead she went out more than ever before. Their social circle was too painfully exclusive to be large or gay.

Three times a week if was Mr. French's stately custom to visit the factory and inspect it with Bailey. At other times Bailey came up to the house, where affairs were conducted. But in neither place did Mr. French ever come into contact with his manager, during all the months while winter waxed and waned again to spring.

"That's Bailey's doing," chuckled Dick, when Emily finally wondered aloud at the circumstance. "He isn't going to risk losing Lestrange because our high and mighty uncle falls out with him. And it would be pretty likely to happen if they met. Lestrange has a temper, you know, even if it doesn't stick out all over him like a hedgehog; and a dozen other companies would give money to get him."

Emily nodded gravely. It was a sunny morning in the first of March, and the cousins were at the end of the old park surrounding Frenchwood, where they had strolled before breakfast.

"Mr. Bailey likes Mr. Lestrange," she commented.

"Likes him! He loves him. You know Lestrange lives with him; a bachelor household, cozy as grigs."

Just past here ran the road, beyond a high cedar hedge. While he was speaking, the irregular explosive reports of a motor had sounded down the valley, unmistakable to those familiar with the testing of the stripped cars, and rapidly approaching. Now, as Emily would have answered, the roar suddenly changed in character, an appalling series of explosions mingled with the grind of outraged machinery suddenly braked, and some one shouted above the din. The next instant a huge mass shot past the other side of the hedge and there followed a dull crash.

"That's one of our men!" gasped Dick, and plunged headlong through the shrubbery.

Dazed, momentarily, Emily stood, then caught up her skirts and ran after him. She knew well enough what the testers of the cars risked.

"Dick!" she appealed. "Dick!"

But it was not the wreck she anticipated that met her eyes as she came through the hedge. On the opposite side of the road a long low skeleton car was standing, one side lurched drunkenly down with two wheels in the gutter. Still in his seat, the driver was leaning over the steering-wheel, out of breath, but laughing a greeting to the astonished girl.

"A break in the steering-gear," he declared, by way of explanation. "I told Bailey it was a weak point; now, perhaps he'll believe me and strengthen it."

"You're not hurt," Dick interrupted.

"I think—she's not—a bit gone. Find anything wrong, Rupert?"

"Two tires off," said the laconic mechanician. "Two funerals postponed. That was a pretty piece of filing."

"Very," coolly agreed Lestrange, rising and removing his goggles. "What's the matter, French?"

"You frightened us out of our five sense, that's all. Do you usually practise for races out here?"

"I very respected Lestrange, and turning, saw the girl at the edge of the park. "Miss French, I beg your pardon!"

The swift change in his tone, the ease of deference with which he bared his head and motor caps not being readily donned or doffed, so remained bareheaded in the bright sunlight, savored of the Continent.

"It is too commonplace to say good morning," Emily replied, her color rising with her smile. "I am very glad you escaped. But that is common place, too, I'm afraid."

"Every one is commonplace before breakfast," reassured her cousin. "Honestly, Lestrange, do you practice racing here?"

"Hardly. I'm trying out the car; every car has to go through that before it is used. Don't you know that we've recently secured from the local authorities a permit to run at any speed over this road between four o'clock and eight in the morning? I thought all the countryside knew that."

"But we have a regiment of men to test cars."

Lestrange passed a caressing glance over the dingy-gray machine in its state of bareness that suggested indecorum.

"This is my car, the one I'll race this spring and summer. No one drives it but me. Besides, I have to have some diversion."

He stepped to the ground with the last word, and went around to where Rupert was on his knees beside the machine.

"Can you fix it here?" he demanded.

"Not precisely," was the drawled reply. "Back to camp for it with a horse in front."

"All right. You'll have to walk down and get a car from Mr. Bailey to tow it home."

Rupert got up, his dark, malign little face twisted.

"If I'd broken a leg they'd have sent a cart for me," he mourned. "Now I'll have to walk, and I ain't used to it. Hard luck!"

"If you go around to the stables they will give you my pony cart," Emily offered impulsively. "You," her dimpling smile gleamed out, "you once put a tire on for me, you know. Please let me return the service."

Rupert's black eyes opened, a slow grin of appreciation crinkled streaks of dust and oil as he surveyed the young girl.

"I'll put tires on every wheel you run into control, day and night shifts," he acknowledged with sweet cordiality. "But I'm no horse-chauffeur, thanks; I guess I'll walk."

"He is a gentle pony," We will remonstrated. "Any one can drive him."

He turned a side glance toward the motionless car.

"That's all right, but I'm used to being killed other ways. I'll be going."

"Jack Rupert, do you mean to tell me that you will race with Lestrange every season, and yet you're afraid to drive a fat cob?" cried the delighted Dick.

"I'm not telling anything. I had a cousin who was crippled out by horses he lost control of, and broke his neck. I'm taking no chances."

"How many men have you seen break their necks out of autos?"

"That's in business," pronounced Rupert succinctly. "I'm going on, Darling; it's only a two-mile run."

"Here, wait," Dick urged. "Emily, I'll stroll around to the stables with him and make one of the men drive him down. You don't mind my leaving you?"

"No," Emily answered. "I will wait for you."

She might have walked back alone, if she had chosen. But instead she sat down on a boulder near the hedge, folding her hands in her lap like a demure child. The house was so dull, so hopelessly monotonous contrasted with this fresh, wind-tossed outdoors and Lestrange in his vigor of life and glamour of ultra-modern adventure.

"You and Mr. French are very good," Lestrange said presently. "I am afraid I appreciate it more than Rupert, though."

"Is he really afraid of horses?"

"I should not wonder; I never tried him. But he is amazingly truthful."

Their eyes met across the strip of sunny road as they smiled; again Emily felt the sudden confidence, the falling away of all constraint before the direct clarity of his regard.

"You won your race," she said irrelevantly. "I was glad, since you [illegible]."

"Thank you," he returned with equal simplicity. "But I did not want it that way, so far as I was concerned."

"Yet, it was the next step."

"Yes, it was the next step. I meant that one does not care to be victor in a race if the leading cars were wrecked. There is no elation in defeating a driver who lies out on the course. But as you see, it helped my purpose, too," he hesitated for the right phrase, "you are most kind to recall that I have a purpose."

It was the convent-bred Emily who looked back at him, earnest-eyed, exaltedly serious.

"I have thought of it often. Every one else that I know just lives the way things happen—there are only a few people who grasp things and make them happen. That is real work; so many of us are just given work we do not want—" she broke off.

"If we do not want the work, it is probably not our own," said Lestrange. "Unless we have brought it on ourselves by a fault we must undo—I need not speak of that to you. One must not make the mistake of assuming some one else's work."

He spoke gently, almost as if with a clairvoyant reading of her tendency to self-immolation.

"But may not some one else's fault be given us to undo?" she asked eagerly. "May not their work be forced on us?"

"No," he answered.

"No?" he faltered.

"I don't think so. Each one of us has enough with his own, at least so it seems to me. Most of us die before we finish it."

"You Are Most Kind."

Emily paused, contending with the loneliness and doubts which impelled her to speech, the feminine yearning to let another decide her problems. This other's nonchalant strength of decision allured her uncertainty.

"I am discouraged," she confessed. "And tired. I—there is no reason why I should not speak of it. You know Dick, how he can do nothing in the factory or business, or in the places where a French should stand. All this must fall into the hands of strangers, to be broken and forgotten, when my uncle dies, for lack of some one who would care. And Uncle Ethan seems severe and hard; but it grieves him all the time. His only son was not a good man; he lives abroad with his wife, who was an actress before he married her. You knew that!" as he moved.

"I heard something of it in the village," Lestrange admitted gravely. "Please do not think me fond of gossip; I could not avoid it. But I should not have imagined this a family likely to make low marriages."

"It never happened before. I never saw that cousin, nor did Dick; but he was always a disappointment, always. Uncle Ethan has told me. And there he failed, and Dick fails, there is only me."

"You!"

She nodded, her lip quivering.

"Only me. Not as a substitute—I am not fit for that—but to find a substitute. I have promised my uncle to marry the first one who is able to be that."

The silence was absolute. Lestrange neither moved nor spoke, gazing down at her bent head with an expression blending many shades.

"It is a duty; there is no one except me," she added. "Only sometimes I grow—to dislike it too much. I am so selfish that sometimes I hope a substitute will never come."

Her voice died away. It was done; she, Emily French, had deliberately confided to this stranger that which an hour before she would have believed no one could force from her lips in articulate speech. And she neither regretted nor was ashamed; although there was time for full realization before Lestrange answered.

"I did not believe," he said, "that such things could be done. It is nonsense! It is the kind of situation, Miss French, where any man is justified in interfering. I beg you will leave the affair in my hands and think no more of such morbid self-sacrifice."

Stupefied, Emily flung back her head, staring at him.

"Since there are none better, it appears. Why," his vivid face questioned her full and straightly, "you didn't imagine that any man living could bear what you are doing, and—yes, on!"

"My uncle knows—"

"Your uncle—is not for me to criticize. But do not ask any other man to let you go on."

Her ideas reeling, she struggled for composition.

"You, what could you do?" she marveled. "The substitute—"

"There won't be any substitute," replied Lestrange with perfect coolness. "I shall train Dick French to do his work."

"You—"

"I can, and I will."

"He can not—"

"Oh, yes, he can; he is just idle and spoiled," the firm lips set more firmly. "He shall take his place. I can handle him."

Emily sat quite helplessly, her eyes black with excitement. Slowly recollection flowed back to her of a change in Dick since his light contact with Lestrange; his avoidance of even occasional highballs, his awakening interest in the clean sport of the races, and his half-wistful admiration for the virile driver-manager.

"I almost believe you could," she conceded.

"I can," repeated Lestrange. "Only," he openly smiled, "it will be hard on Dickie."

It was the touch needed the antidote to sentiment. Emily laughed with him, laughed in sheer mischief and relief and leap of youth.

"You will be gentle—poor Dickie!"

"I'll be gentle. He is coming now, I think." He took a step nearer her. "You will leave this in my care, wholly? You will not trouble about—a substitute?"

"I will leave it with you. But you are forgetting your own doctrine; you are taking some one else's work to do."

"Pardon, I am merely making French do his work. I have seen a little more of him than you perhaps know; I understand what I am undertaking. Moreover, I would forget a great many doctrines to set you free."

"Free!" she echoed; she had the sensation of being suddenly confronted with an open door into the unexpected.

"Free," he quietly reasserted. "Free to live your own life and draw unhampered breath, and to decide the great question when it comes, with thought only of yourself."

She drew back; a prescient dismay fell sharply across her late relief, a panic crossed with strange delight.

"He's off," called Dick, emerging from the park. "I made Anderson take him down with the limousine. At least, Rupert is driving while Anderson sits alongside and holds on; when they came to the turn in the avenue, your previous mechanician took it full speed and then apologized for going so slowly because, as he said, he was an amateur and likely to upset. Is he really a good driver, Lestrange."

"Pretty fair," returned Lestrange serenely, from his seat on the edge of the ditched machine. "When I'm not using him, he's employed as one of the factory car testers; and when we're racing I give him the wheel if I want to fix anything. However, I'm obliged to that steering-knuckle for breaking here, instead of leaving me to a long walt in the wilds. Come down to the shop tomorrow at six, and Rupert and I will even up by taking you for a ran."

"Who; me? You're asking me?"

"Why not? It's exhilarating."

Dick removed his hat and ran his fingers through his hair, gratification and alarm mingling in his expression with somewhat the effect of the smart box who is first invited into a game with his elder brother's clique.

"You—er, wouldn't smash me up?" he hesitated.

"I haven't smashed up Rupert, or myself, so far. If you feel timid, never mind, of course; I'll take my usual companion."

Dick flushed all over his plump face, the French blood up at last.

"I was only joking," he hastily explained. "I'll come. It's only that you're so confoundedly reckless sometimes, Lestrange, and— But I'll come."

Lestrange gave his fine, glinting smile as he rose to salute Emily.

"All right. If you don't get down to the factory in time, I'll call for you," he promised.

CHAPTER V.

There was a change in the French affairs, a lightening of the atmosphere, a vague quickening and stir of healthful labor in the days that followed. The somber master of the house met it in Bailey's undisguised elation and pride when they discussed the successful business now taxing the factory's resources, met it yet again in Emily's pretty gaiety and content. But most strikingly was he confronted with an alteration in Dick.

It was only a week after his first morning ride with Lestrange, that Dick electrified the company at dinner, by turning down the glass at his place and [illegible] it out of claret, and that took of thing," he announced. "It's bad for the nerves."

His three companions looked up in complete astonishment. It was Saturday night and by ancient custom Bailey was dining at the house.

"What has happened to you? Have you been attending a revival meeting?" the young man's uncle inquired with sarcasm.

"It's bad for the nerves," repeated Dick. "There isn't any reason why I shouldn't like to do anything other fellows do. Les—that is, none of the men who drive cars ever touch that stuff, and look at their nerve."

Mr. French contemplated him with the irritation usually produced by the display of ostentatious virtue, but found no comment. Emily gazed at the table, her red mouth curving in spite of all effort at seriousness.

"You're right, Mr. Dick," said Bailey dryly. "Stick to it."

And Dick stuck, without as much as a single lapse. Frenchwood saw comparatively little of him, as time went on; the village and factory knew him. He lost some weight and acquired a coat of reddish tan.

Emily watched and admired in silence. She had not seen Lestrange again, but it seemed to her that his influence overlay all the life of both house and factory. Sometimes this showed so plainly that she believed Mr. French must see, must feel the silent force at work. But either he did not see or chose to ignore. And Dick was incautious.

Met It Yet Again in Emily's Pretty Gaiety and Content.

"I'm going to buy one of our roadsters myself," he stated one day. "Can I have it at cost?"

Mr. French felt for his pince-nes.

"You? Why do you not use the limousine?"

"Because I don't want to go around in a box driven by a chauffeur. I want a classy car to run myself. I've been driving some of the stripped cars, lately, and I like it."

"I will give you a car, if you want one," answered his uncle, quite kindly. "Go select any you prefer."

"Thank you," Dick sat up, beaming. "But I'll have to wait my turn, we're orders ahead now. Lestrange says I've no right to come in and make some other fellow wait."

Mr. French slowly stiffened.

"We do not require lessons in ethics from this Lestrange," was the cold rebuke. "I shall telephone Bailey to send up your car at once."

Rupert brought the sixty-horse-power roadster to the door, three hours later. And Emily appreciated that Lestrange was discreet as well as compelling, when she found the black-eyed young mechanician was detailed to accompany Dick's maiden trip; which duty was fulfilled unhesitatingly, with the fine tact of a Richelieu.

In May there was a still greater accession of work at the factory. In ad-