

The big, mud-spattered touring car, which for the past hour had been plowing its way steadily northward from the city of Washington, hesitated for a moment before the gateway which marked the end of the well kept drive, then swept on to the house.

A man, stoutly built, keen of eye, showing haste in his every movement, sprang from the machine and ascended the veranda steps.

"Does Richard Duvall live here?" he inquired, curtly, of the smiling old colored woman who came to the door.

"'Deed he do, suh. Does you want to see him?"

"Yes. At once, please. Tell him it is most important. My name is Hodgman."

The servant eyed him with cool disfavor. "Set down, suh," she remarked stiffly. "I'll tell him you is here."

The caller watched her, as she disappeared into the house, then cast himself impatiently into a chair and lit a cigar.

He paid no attention to the attempts of two clumsy collie puppies to attract his favorable notice, but contented himself with making a quick survey of the wide comfortable veranda, with its big roomy chairs, the wicker table, bearing a great jar of red peonies, the smooth green lawns, swept by the late afternoon sun.

"Fine old place," he muttered to himself. "Wonder if I can persuade him to go?"

As the car which had brought Mr. Hodgman on his hasty trip from Washington dashed up to the front of the house, Grace Duvall, looking very charming in a blue linen dress, was just approaching it from the rear.

She held a pair of shears in her hand, and her apron was filled to overflowing with hundred-leaf roses. "Dick--oh, Dick!" she called, as she came down the long avenue of syringas and lilacs which led to the house. "The sweet peas are nearly ready to bloom."

Richard Duvall, looking as simply pastoral as though he had never tracked an international crook to cover, raised his head from the flower bed, in which he had been carefully setting out circle after circle of geranium plants.

"Are they?" he laughed. "That's good. Now all we need is a few good hot days." He gathered up his trowel and rake, and started toward the barn.

Grace put her arm through her husband's and together they strolled across the springy green turf, their faces smiling and happy. The honeymoon showed no signs of waning.

This lovely old country place, in southern Maryland, had been one of Richard Duvall's dreams for many years, and after his marriage to Grace Ellicott, in Paris, it had become hers, as well. It was but a short time after their return to America that they decided to make it a reality.

Grace had encouraged her husband in the plan of giving up, for a time at least, his warfare against crime, his pursuit of criminals of the higher and more dangerous type, and had persuaded him to buy the farm which had once belonged to his mother's people, and settle down to the life of a country gentleman.

His office was still maintained, under the able direction of one of his assistants, but Duvall gave little or no attention to its affairs. He was glad to withdraw, for the first time in over nine years, from active work, and devote his energies to early potatoes, prize dogs, hunters, and geranium plants--and, above all, to the peaceful enjoyment of his honeymoon, and the making of Grace the happiest woman in the world.

She, on her part, found in their present situation all the joys of existence for which she had longed. With little or no liking for the monotonous round of society and its duties, and a passionate love of nature, she found in the many and complex duties of managing her part of their extensive estate a far greater happiness than any which city life could have offered her.

The considerable fortune which her husband's clever work while in Paris had restored to her, had been safely invested in well paying securities, and she found her greatest joy in utilizing at least a part of her income in beautifying their new home.

Richard had steadily refused to make any use of the money. It was a matter of pride with him, that his own savings had enabled him to purchase the property; but when Grace proposed to build an addition to the house, to provide him with a more comfortable library and work room, or insisted upon having the roads throughout the place elaborately macadamized, he was obliged to submit to her wishes. In this way, they planned and built for the future, together.

The farm was a large one, comprising some two hundred acres, and the old stone house surrounded by white oaks and tulip poplars had once been a show place, before the declining fortunes of its former owners had caused it to fall into a state of mellow and time-honored decay. Now all was changed. Grace, with the able assistance of old Uncle Abe Turner, a relic of ante bellum times, spent hours daily in bringing order out of the chaos of tangled myrtle and ivy, overgrown box and hedge, thickets of syringa and lilac bushes and weed-grown lawns.

It was a gigantic task, yet a joyous one--as it ever is, to those who came to it with the love of nature in their hearts. To Grace, the plants and shrubs, the great strong oaks, the towering poplars, each seemed to have a distinct personality. Under her energetic hand, the place once more took on the aspect of well kept and orderly beauty which was such a contrast to its former down-at-the-heels appearance. It seemed as though the growing things realized the personal interest she took in them, and responded as they never respond to the ignorant or unsympathetic.

Richard was concerned with his fields of timothy and clover, his early corn, his berries and fruit trees, to say nothing of his collies, his prize cows and Kentucky horses. In such a life, time never hangs heavy--he was busy studying, planning, working, from morning to night, and his active mind soon convinced his capable overseer and the farm hands as well that, although Richard Duvall was by no means a professional farmer, he could still show them a thing or two when it came to the rotation of crops, the spraying of fruit trees, or the proper treatment of worn out soils. These were aspects of farming life which the hide-bound conservatism of the local farmers caused them to jeer at, as newfangled notions gotten from books. Later when they saw the man who farmed with his head as well as his hands gather in two bushels where they had barely been able to secure one, they began to sit up and take notice.

"I got the new hedges all set out today," Grace went on, as she patted her husband's rather grimy hand. "They will be charming, against the gray stone of the wall. But we must have new gate posts. The old ones are likely to tumble into the road at any moment."

"I'll have Martin come out tomorrow and look them over. There's plenty of stone--down in the lower pasture. Why not carry the wall right along the whole front of the property? It ought not to cost a great deal."

"We will. And I'm going to have a new spring house built, too. The old one is falling to pieces." She looked up at her husband as he deposited the rake in the tool room and they started up the shaded walk toward the house. "Aren't you glad, Dick, that we're _alive_?"

He pressed her arm. "Well--I should say so, little girl! Why do you ask me that?"

"Oh--you know what your friends all said--that a man might as well be dead, as buried out here in the country. I think they are the ones who are not alive--cooped up in the city. Don't you?"

Richard nodded. He was thinking for the moment of his former active life--when some battle of wits with a noted crook had kept him sleepless for nights. "It's--rather different," he laughed. "Isn't it?"

"Yes--and much better. Don't you think so, dear? You wouldn't want to go back to it--would you?"

"Not for anything in the world," he assured her, as he swept the newly seeded lawns with a contented glance. "I liked the other life, of course--the excitement, the danger of it; but this is better--much better. Here, Don!" he called to a graceful collie which was barking vociferously at some distant vehicle in the road. "Come here and be quiet." He turned with Grace to the great vine-covered side porch and sank contentedly into a rocking chair. "Well, little girl--it's been a busy day, and I'm tired. We got the early rye all cut on the lower field today. Guess we'll put in late potatoes, after it's plowed. Here, Don--come back here! What's the matter with you?" He rose and whistled to the dog, which was bounding across the lawn in the direction of the road. "Come back, I say!"

"It's someone coming in," said Grace, uneasily. "In a machine. I wonder who it can be?"

"Possibly Hudson, the veterinary. He was coming today, to look at that heifer."

"He hasn't a machine like that. This is a big touring car." She turned to her husband. "Hadn't you better go in and fix up a bit, Dick? It may be company."

Duvall laughed. "If it is, they'll have to take me as I am," he said; then again called to the dog.

A moment later the servant, who had interviewed the caller at the front door, came out to the side porch. "Gentleman to see you, Mr. Duvall," she said. "Seems to be in a powerful hurry, too."

"All right, Aunt Lucy," said Duvall as he made his way to the front of the house.

"Is this Richard Duvall?" the visitor asked, in a quick, almost peremptory tone, as the detective joined him.

"Yes. That is my name. What can I do for you?"

The newcomer rose nervously from his chair and began chewing upon his half-smoked cigar. "Had the devil of a time to find you, Mr. Duvall."

"You came out from Washington, I suppose," remarked the detective, wondering what his visitor could want with him.

"Yes. Got your address from Hicks, of the Treasury Department. He said you were about twelve miles out. I seem to have come about twenty."

"Perhaps you went around by way of Laurel. It's much further, that way. What can I do for you, Mr.----" He paused interrogatively.

The man looked up at him quickly. "My name's Hodgman--Thomas Hodgman--of New York. I represent John Stapleton."

"John Stapleton, the banker?" asked Duvall, surprised.

"Yes. You know him, don't you?"

"Yes. Quite well. I handled a case for him once--some years ago. why?" Duvall's face became grave. He began to realize that the interview was likely to become suddenly important. John Stapleton, the

multi-millionaire banker, was not in the habit of sending messengers to anyone, without good reason.

"So he said," went on Mr. Hodgman, resuming his chair. "That's why I'm here. He wants you to take another--"

"Another?"

"Yes. Another case. Quick."

"It's quite out of the question."

"Nonsense! This is important. Money's no object; name your own terms."

"It isn't a question of terms, Mr. Hodgman. I have withdrawn, for the time being at least, from active professional work."

"I know." The visitor flicked the ashes impatiently from his cigar and sought nervously in his pockets for a match. "That's what they told me at your office, in New York. Said you were on your honeymoon, and didn't want to be bothered."

"That's true. I don't."

"I told Mr. Stapleton that. He sent me to see you; said you might change your mind, when you heard about the case."

"It is quite impossible. I do not care to take up any detective work at present."

Mr. Hodgman fidgeted nervously in his chair. "You must listen to what I have to say, Mr. Duvall, at any rate. Mr. Stapleton would not hear to my returning, after seeing you, without having explained to you the nature of the case."

Duvall leaned back, and began to fondle the long moist nose of the collie which sat beside his chair. "If you insist, Mr. Hodgman, I will listen, of course; but I assure you it will be quite useless."

"I hope not. The case is most distressing. Mr. Stapleton's only child has been kidnapped!"

"Kidnapped!" Duvall sat up with a start, every line of his face tense with professional interest. "When? Where?"

"In Paris. The cablegram arrived this morning. I don't know the details. Mrs. Stapleton has been spending the winter abroad. Mr. Stapleton was to join her this month. She is living at their house in the Avenue Kleber, Paris. The child was out walking with a nurse. It has been stolen. That's all I know."

"When did it happen?"

"Yesterday morning. Mrs. Stapleton did not cable at first, believing that the boy would be found during the course of the day. Naturally she did not wish to alarm her husband needlessly, and the Prefect of Police, it seems, had assured her that the child would undoubtedly be recovered before night. It wasn't. This morning Mr. Stapleton got a long cablegram from his wife, telling him of the boy's disappearance. He's half crazy over the thing."

"What is he going to do?"

"I don't know. He sent me to see you at once. I'm his secretary, you know. When I couldn't find you in New York, he told me to come here. I arrived in Washington an hour ago, and came right out. Mr. Stapleton said if any man on earth could find his boy for him, you could."

"I suppose the thing is a matter of blackmail--ransom--"

"Very likely. They will probably demand a huge sum. No requests have

been made, as yet, so far as I know. These fellows usually wait a week or two, before showing their hand, to give the unfortunate parents a chance to worry themselves half to death. I suppose they figure that then they'll be more likely to come across with the money."

"Yes. That's the scheme. A rotten business, too. Hanging is too good for such wretches!"

"That's what I say. Of course you can understand how Mr. Stapleton feels."

"Of course. He will sail at once, I suppose."

"That's the worst of it. He can't go till Saturday. Tomorrow's Thursday--that's three days off. There's a deal on here involving millions--something he's been working to put through for months. Of course he doesn't consider anything like that, when it comes to his child; but he's got to think of his associates--men who have intrusted their money to him. He can't possibly sail before Saturday. He wants you to go ahead of him. There's a fast boat leaving in the morning. You could take that. We can have a conference tonight. It will mean mighty quick work, though." He glanced at his watch. "After six now. There's no train till midnight--the sleeper. But Mr. Stapleton told me to charter a special. We can be in New York by one o'clock in the morning, if we start right now." He looked at Duvall in eager expectancy.

The latter frowned, his gaze wandering off to the distant fields, where the newly plowed earth reminded him of his plans for the morrow. Yet here was a man, a friend, who had helped him much, in the earlier days of his career, begging him to come to his assistance in a matter almost of life or death. It was a difficult decision that he was called upon to make. The thought of leaving Grace hurt him deeply; yet she would prefer to stay behind, in case he should go, to look after the affairs of the place. With the assistance of the overseer and the hands, he knew that she could manage everything during a brief absence on his part--it seemed unlikely that the matter would require more than three or four weeks, at the outside.

Mr. Hodgman broke in upon his thoughts. "You'll go, Mr. Duvall? Mr. Stapleton is depending on you. He has the utmost faith in your abilities. He knows your familiarity with Paris--the work you have done there, in the past. He believes that, by intrusting the matter to a fellow countryman, he will get his boy back again. He hasn't much faith in foreign detectives. He's set his heart on having you start for Paris at once. I can't go back and tell him that you have refused." Mr. Hodgman spoke in a loud and earnest voice, due to his very evident excitement. Neither he nor Duvall noticed that Grace had approached them, and was standing in the open doorway of the house.

Before the detective had an opportunity to reply, Grace spoke. "What is it, Richard?" she inquired, quietly.

Duvall rose, presented Mr. Hodgman to his wife, and bade her sit down. Then, in a few words, he acquainted her with the circumstances which led to the latter's visit.

"Think of that poor mother, alone there in Paris," Hodgman supplemented. "Think of her suffering, her anxiety. I realize how much we are asking, to take Mr. Duvall away from you, especially at this time; but, it is Mr. Stapleton's only child--a boy of six. You can understand how he must feel."

Grace nodded. "Yes, I can understand," she said, slowly, then turned to her husband.

"What do you think, dear?" he asked her.

"I think, Richard, that you had better go."

Mr. Hodgman sprang to his feet, and, coming over to Grace, took her hand. He knew that his battle was won. "I thank you, Mrs. Duvall," he

said, "on Mr. Stapleton's account, as well as on my own. He will appreciate deeply what you have done, the sacrifice you are making, and he will not forget it." He looked again at his watch nervously, the anxiety he felt clearly evident in his every movement. "We had best start at once, Mr. Duvall."

Duvall rose. "I will join you in a short while, Mr. Hodgman. I wish to say a few words to my wife." He took Grace's arm and drew her within the house, leaving Mr. Hodgman pacing nervously up and down the veranda.

The conference between Grace and her husband was short. Each realized the distress which tore at the other's heart, as well as the dangers he would in all probability be called upon to face; yet they met the situation calmly. "You will not be gone long," she told him. "I can manage very well."

"I know you can, dear," he said, pressing her to him. "I'm not worried about the place. You can run that as well as I can. It's you, I'm worried about--leaving you"--

"I'll be all right," she assured him, in spite of her tears. "I have Aunt Lucy, and old Uncle Abe, and Rose, and Jennie. I won't be so very lonely. And you will be very careful--and--and come back soon--won't you?"

"Of course, dear. Very soon. Now I'd better get a few things together."

Fifteen minutes later Grace Duvall stood on the steps of the veranda, watching the flying automobile as it rapidly became a little red blur in the distant road. It was nearly dark. The frogs in the patch of marsh in the meadow were piping dismally. She shivered, and a great sense of desolation came over her. She sank into a chair and wept, while Don, inserting his long white muzzle between her hands, strove to lick away her tears.

She heard Aunt Lucy, the old negro cook, singing away at her work in the kitchen, accompanied by Uncle Abe, who occupied a bench on the back porch. Everything seemed strangely peaceful, and lonely, too, now that Richard had gone. She patted the eager head of the collie. "We'll have to make the best of it, Don," she said, and rose to enter the house.

Suddenly far down the road she heard the chugging of an automobile. They were not frequent visitors, upon this country road. Could it be Richard, she wondered, returning for something he had forgotten?

She stood, straining her eyes into the dusk, waiting, while with one hand she restrained the eager dog.

Presently she saw that the machine was not a red one. It was not Richard. She was about to enter the house, when she realized that the rapidly moving car had entered the grounds. She turned on the lights in the hallway and stood, waiting, the dog at her side bristling with anger.

In a moment the automobile had stopped, and almost before she realized it, a small, foreign-looking man stood on the doorstep before her. "Madame Duvall?" he inquired, quickly, in a voice which showed plainly his nationality.

"Yes," she replied.

"Your husband! May I see him?"

"He is not at home."

The newcomer seemed greatly disturbed. "Then I fear, Madame, that I shall be obliged to wait until he returns."

"He will not return. He has gone away for sometime."

"Ah! That is indeed a calamity!" The man's face showed the keenest

disappointment. "May I ask where I can find him?"

"It will be quite impossible." Grace had no intention of telling her visitor where her husband had gone. She knew too well the intricacies of his profession, for that. "You cannot find him." She made as though to close the door, and thereby terminate the interview.

The newcomer realized her intention. Slowly he raised his hand, in the palm of which showed the seal of a ring, turned inward. It was of silver, with curious figures worked into it in gold. The man glanced from the ring to Grace, eyeing her steadily. "I think, Madame," he said, with a meaning smile, "that you can trust me."

Grace recognized the ring at once. It was similar to one she herself had worn, while engaged in the memorable search for the ivory snuff box for Monsieur Lefevre, Prefect of Police of Paris. Dear old Lefevre--the friend of Richard's, and of her own! This man who stood before her must be a messenger from him.

"Come in, please," she said, quietly, and led the way to the library.

The man followed her, calling out a few words to his chauffeur as he did so. No sooner had they reached the great book-lined room, than he drew from his pocket a sealed envelope.

"Madame Duvall," he said, earnestly, "Monsieur Lefevre has cabled to his representatives in Washington a message. That message is contained in this envelope. I have instructions to deliver it to your husband immediately. In case I could not find him, I am to hand it to you. Permit, me, Madame." With a bow, he placed the message in her hand.

Grace took the envelope, broke the heavy seal which it bore, and drawing out a slip of paper, hastily read the contents. The message was from Monsieur Lefevre. It said:

My dear Duvall:

You promised, on the occasion of our last meeting, to come to me should I ever need you. I need you badly, my friend. Come at once, both you, and your dear wife. LEFEVRE.

Grace looked up at the man before her, the letter crumpled in her hand. Here was a message the urgency of which could not be denied. She knew that, had Richard been at home, he would have gone to Paris at once in response to it; for it was to Monsieur Lefevre that they in reality owed all their happiness. She recalled vividly their wedding, with the lovable old Frenchman, acting as her father for the occasion, giving away the bride. She remembered the farewell dinner at the Prefect's house, and the beautiful gift he had given her on that occasion. Evidently Monsieur Lefevre desired Richard's presence very greatly, and her own as well. The thought suddenly came to her--why not go to him?

True, Richard had left her in charge of things at home; but she knew that, for a reasonable time, at least, they would go on smoothly enough without her. Hendricks, the overseer, was a capable and honest man, devoted to her and to her husband.

She could safely leave matters in his charge. Then, too, the thought of surprising Richard on the steamer sailing the next day appealed to her sense of mischief. How astounded he would be, to find her strolling along the deck! And how delighted, too! She wondered that the thought of accompanying him had not occurred to her more strongly before. She turned to the man, who stood watching her narrowly.

"You know the contents of this message?"

"Yes, Madame," he bowed. "It came to us by cable--in cipher."

"There is a train for New York at midnight, and a steamer tomorrow morning."

"Yes, Madame."

"Can you drive me to Washington in your car?"

"I shall be delighted, Madame." The fellow's eyes sparkled with satisfaction.

"Very well. Mr. Duvall is in New York. I will take the message to him. Wait here, please, until I get some clothes together and give some orders to my servants."

In half an hour, the thing was done. Hendricks, the overseer, had been given full instructions regarding taking charge of the place, with provision for his needs in the way of money, etc., and by ten o'clock, at which time the New York sleeper was open, Grace was at the station, purchasing her ticket.

The obliging Frenchman gave her every assistance, and bade her *_bon voyage_* smilingly as he helped her aboard the train. She retired at once, and lay in her berth, reading a magazine, and picturing to herself Richard's mingled astonishment and joy at their meeting in the morning. This time, she was determined that their honeymoon should not be interrupted.

After a time, she fell asleep, and dreamed that she and Richard were sailing gaily toward Paris, in a large red touring car.

In the morning, she ate a hasty breakfast in the railway station, and took a taxicab for the steamship offices. By great good fortune, she was able to secure a cabin. Then she hastily visited a banking house where she was well known, provided herself with funds, and drove to the dock.

It wanted but half an hour till sailing time. Grace hastened to her stateroom, and busied herself in effacing the stains of her night of travel. She was determined to meet Richard looking her best.

It was not until the big steamer was passing through the Narrows that she came on deck, and began looking about for her husband. In all that crowd, she knew it would take time to find him. After searching for an hour, she felt somewhat surprised at not seeing him. After another hour had passed, her surprise turned to alarm. A hasty visit to the purser, and an examination of the sailing list, showed her the astonishing truth. Richard was not on board!

The big, mud-spattered touring car, which for the past hour had been plowing its way steadily northward from the city of Washington, hesitated for a moment before the gateway which marked the end of the well kept drive, then swept on to the house.

A man, stoutly built, keen of eye, showing haste in his every movement, sprang from the machine and ascended the veranda steps.

"Does Richard Duvall live here?" he inquired, curtly, of the smiling old colored woman who came to the door.

"'Deed he do, suh. Does you want to see him?"

"Yes. At once, please. Tell him it is most important. My name is Hodgman."

The servant eyed him with cool disfavor. "Set down, suh," she remarked stiffly. "I'll tell him you is here."

The caller watched her, as she disappeared into the house, then cast himself impatiently into a chair and lit a cigar.

He paid no attention to the attempts of two clumsy collie puppies to attract his favorable notice, but contented himself with making a quick survey of the wide comfortable veranda, with its big roomy chairs, the wicker table, bearing a great jar of red peonies, the smooth green

lawns, swept by the late afternoon sun.

"Fine old place," he muttered to himself. "Wonder if I can persuade him to go?"

As the car which had brought Mr. Hodgman on his hasty trip from Washington dashed up to the front of the house, Grace Duvall, looking very charming in a blue linen dress, was just approaching it from the rear.

She held a pair of shears in her hand, and her apron was filled to overflowing with hundred-leaf roses. "Dick--oh, Dick!" she called, as she came down the long avenue of syringas and lilacs which led to the house. "The sweet peas are nearly ready to bloom."

Richard Duvall, looking as simply pastoral as though he had never tracked an international crook to cover, raised his head from the flower bed, in which he had been carefully setting out circle after circle of geranium plants.

"Are they?" he laughed. "That's good. Now all we need is a few good hot days." He gathered up his trowel and rake, and started toward the barn.

Grace put her arm through her husband's and together they strolled across the springy green turf, their faces smiling and happy. The honeymoon showed no signs of waning.

This lovely old country place, in southern Maryland, had been one of Richard Duvall's dreams for many years, and after his marriage to Grace Ellicott, in Paris, it had become hers, as well. It was but a short time after their return to America that they decided to make it a reality.

Grace had encouraged her husband in the plan of giving up, for a time at least, his warfare against crime, his pursuit of criminals of the higher and more dangerous type, and had persuaded him to buy the farm which had once belonged to his mother's people, and settle down to the life of a country gentleman.

His office was still maintained, under the able direction of one of his assistants, but Duvall gave little or no attention to its affairs. He was glad to withdraw, for the first time in over nine years, from active work, and devote his energies to early potatoes, prize dogs, hunters, and geranium plants--and, above all, to the peaceful enjoyment of his honeymoon, and the making of Grace the happiest woman in the world.

She, on her part, found in their present situation all the joys of existence for which she had longed. With little or no liking for the monotonous round of society and its duties, and a passionate love of nature, she found in the many and complex duties of managing her part of their extensive estate a far greater happiness than any which city life could have offered her.

The considerable fortune which her husband's clever work while in Paris had restored to her, had been safely invested in well paying securities, and she found her greatest joy in utilizing at least a part of her income in beautifying their new home.

Richard had steadily refused to make any use of the money. It was a matter of pride with him, that his own savings had enabled him to purchase the property; but when Grace proposed to build an addition to the house, to provide him with a more comfortable library and work room, or insisted upon having the roads throughout the place elaborately macadamized, he was obliged to submit to her wishes. In this way, they planned and built for the future, together.

The farm was a large one, comprising some two hundred acres, and the old stone house surrounded by white oaks and tulip poplars had once been a show place, before the declining fortunes of its former owners had caused it to fall into a state of mellow and time-honored decay. Now all was changed. Grace, with the able assistance of old Uncle Abe Turner, a

relic of ante bellum times, spent hours daily in bringing order out of the chaos of tangled myrtle and ivy, overgrown box and hedge, thickets of syringa and lilac bushes and weed-grown lawns.

It was a gigantic task, yet a joyous one--as it ever is, to those who came to it with the love of nature in their hearts. To Grace, the plants and shrubs, the great strong oaks, the towering poplars, each seemed to have a distinct personality. Under her energetic hand, the place once more took on the aspect of well kept and orderly beauty which was such a contrast to its former down-at-the-heels appearance. It seemed as though the growing things realized the personal interest she took in them, and responded as they never respond to the ignorant or unsympathetic.

Richard was concerned with his fields of timothy and clover, his early corn, his berries and fruit trees, to say nothing of his collies, his prize cows and Kentucky horses. In such a life, time never hangs heavy--he was busy studying, planning, working, from morning to night, and his active mind soon convinced his capable overseer and the farm hands as well that, although Richard Duvall was by no means a professional farmer, he could still show them a thing or two when it came to the rotation of crops, the spraying of fruit trees, or the proper treatment of worn out soils. These were aspects of farming life which the hide-bound conservatism of the local farmers caused them to jeer at, as newfangled notions gotten from books. Later when they saw the man who farmed with his head as well as his hands gather in two bushels where they had barely been able to secure one, they began to sit up and take notice.

"I got the new hedges all set out today," Grace went on, as she patted her husband's rather grimy hand. "They will be charming, against the gray stone of the wall. But we must have new gate posts. The old ones are likely to tumble into the road at any moment."

"I'll have Martin come out tomorrow and look them over. There's plenty of stone--down in the lower pasture. Why not carry the wall right along the whole front of the property? It ought not to cost a great deal."

"We will. And I'm going to have a new spring house built, too. The old one is falling to pieces." She looked up at her husband as he deposited the rake in the tool room and they started up the shaded walk toward the house. "Aren't you glad, Dick, that we're alive?"

He pressed her arm. "Well--I should say so, little girl! Why do you ask me that?"

"Oh--you know what your friends all said--that a man might as well be dead, as buried out here in the country. I think they are the ones who are not alive--cooped up in the city. Don't you?"

Richard nodded. He was thinking for the moment of his former active life--when some battle of wits with a noted crook had kept him sleepless for nights. "It's--rather different," he laughed. "Isn't it?"

"Yes--and much better. Don't you think so, dear? You wouldn't want to go back to it--would you?"

"Not for anything in the world," he assured her, as he swept the newly seeded lawns with a contented glance. "I liked the other life, of course--the excitement, the danger of it; but this is better--much better. Here, Don!" he called to a graceful collie which was barking vociferously at some distant vehicle in the road. "Come here and be quiet." He turned with Grace to the great vine-covered side porch and sank contentedly into a rocking chair. "Well, little girl--it's been a busy day, and I'm tired. We got the early rye all cut on the lower field today. Guess we'll put in late potatoes, after it's plowed. Here, Don--come back here! What's the matter with you?" He rose and whistled to the dog, which was bounding across the lawn in the direction of the road. "Come back, I say!"

"It's someone coming in," said Grace, uneasily. "In a machine. I wonder who it can be?"

"Possibly Hudson, the veterinary. He was coming today, to look at that heifer."

"He hasn't a machine like that. This is a big touring car." She turned to her husband. "Hadn't you better go in and fix up a bit, Dick? It may be company."

Duvall laughed. "If it is, they'll have to take me as I am," he said; then again called to the dog.

A moment later the servant, who had interviewed the caller at the front door, came out to the side porch. "Gentleman to see you, Mr. Duvall," she said. "Seems to be in a powerful hurry, too."

"All right, Aunt Lucy," said Duvall as he made his way to the front of the house.

"Is this Richard Duvall?" the visitor asked, in a quick, almost peremptory tone, as the detective joined him.

"Yes. That is my name. What can I do for you?"

The newcomer rose nervously from his chair and began chewing upon his half-smoked cigar. "Had the devil of a time to find you, Mr. Duvall."

"You came out from Washington, I suppose," remarked the detective, wondering what his visitor could want with him.

"Yes. Got your address from Hicks, of the Treasury Department. He said you were about twelve miles out. I seem to have come about twenty."

"Perhaps you went around by way of Laurel. It's much further, that way. What can I do for you, Mr.----" He paused interrogatively.

The man looked up at him quickly. "My name's Hodgman--Thomas Hodgman--of New York. I represent John Stapleton."

"John Stapleton, the banker?" asked Duvall, surprised.

"Yes. You know him, don't you?"

"Yes. Quite well. I handled a case for him once--some years ago. Why?" Duvall's face became grave. He began to realize that the interview was likely to become suddenly important. John Stapleton, the multi-millionaire banker, was not in the habit of sending messengers to anyone, without good reason.

"So he said," went on Mr. Hodgman, resuming his chair. "That's why I'm here. He wants you to take another--"

"Another?"

"Yes. Another case. Quick."

"It's quite out of the question."

"Nonsense! This is important. Money's no object; name your own terms."

"It isn't a question of terms, Mr. Hodgman. I have withdrawn, for the time being at least, from active professional work."

"I know." The visitor flicked the ashes impatiently from his cigar and sought nervously in his pockets for a match. "That's what they told me at your office, in New York. Said you were on your honeymoon, and didn't want to be bothered."

"That's true. I don't."

"I told Mr. Stapleton that. He sent me to see you; said you might change your mind, when you heard about the case."

"It is quite impossible. I do not care to take up any detective work at present."

Mr. Hodgman fidgeted nervously in his chair. "You must listen to what I have to say, Mr. Duvall, at any rate. Mr. Stapleton would not hear to my returning, after seeing you, without having explained to you the nature of the case."

Duvall leaned back, and began to fondle the long moist nose of the collie which sat beside his chair. "If you insist, Mr. Hodgman, I will listen, of course; but I assure you it will be quite useless."

"I hope not. The case is most distressing. Mr. Stapleton's only child has been kidnapped!"

"Kidnapped!" Duvall sat up with a start, every line of his face tense with professional interest. "When? Where?"

"In Paris. The cablegram arrived this morning. I don't know the details. Mrs. Stapleton has been spending the winter abroad. Mr. Stapleton was to join her this month. She is living at their house in the Avenue Kleber, Paris. The child was out walking with a nurse. It has been stolen. That's all I know."

"When did it happen?"

"Yesterday morning. Mrs. Stapleton did not cable at first, believing that the boy would be found during the course of the day. Naturally she did not wish to alarm her husband needlessly, and the Prefect of Police, it seems, had assured her that the child would undoubtedly be recovered before night. It wasn't. This morning Mr. Stapleton got a long cablegram from his wife, telling him of the boy's disappearance. He's half crazy over the thing."

"What is he going to do?"

"I don't know. He sent me to see you at once. I'm his secretary, you know. When I couldn't find you in New York, he told me to come here. I arrived in Washington an hour ago, and came right out. Mr. Stapleton said if any man on earth could find his boy for him, you could."

"I suppose the thing is a matter of blackmail--ransom--"

"Very likely. They will probably demand a huge sum. No requests have been made, as yet, so far as I know. These fellows usually wait a week or two, before showing their hand, to give the unfortunate parents a chance to worry themselves half to death. I suppose they figure that then they'll be more likely to come across with the money."

"Yes. That's the scheme. A rotten business, too. Hanging is too good for such wretches!"

"That's what I say. Of course you can understand how Mr. Stapleton feels."

"Of course. He will sail at once, I suppose."

"That's the worst of it. He can't go till Saturday. Tomorrow's Thursday--that's three days off. There's a deal on here involving millions--something he's been working to put through for months. Of course he doesn't consider anything like that, when it comes to his child; but he's got to think of his associates--men who have intrusted their money to him. He can't possibly sail before Saturday. He wants you to go ahead of him. There's a fast boat leaving in the morning. You could take that. We can have a conference tonight. It will mean mighty quick work, though." He glanced at his watch. "After six now. There's no train till midnight--the sleeper. But Mr. Stapleton told me to charter a special. We can be in New York by one o'clock in the morning, if we start right now." He looked at Duvall in eager expectancy.

The latter frowned, his gaze wandering off to the distant fields, where the newly plowed earth reminded him of his plans for the morrow. Yet here was a man, a friend, who had helped him much, in the earlier days of his career, begging him to come to his assistance in a matter almost of life or death. It was a difficult decision that he was called upon to make. The thought of leaving Grace hurt him deeply; yet she would prefer to stay behind, in case he should go, to look after the affairs of the place. With the assistance of the overseer and the hands, he knew that she could manage everything during a brief absence on his part--it seemed unlikely that the matter would require more than three or four weeks, at the outside.

Mr. Hodgman broke in upon his thoughts. "You'll go, Mr. Duvall? Mr. Stapleton is depending on you. He has the utmost faith in your abilities. He knows your familiarity with Paris--the work you have done there, in the past. He believes that, by intrusting the matter to a fellow countryman, he will get his boy back again. He hasn't much faith in foreign detectives. He's set his heart on having you start for Paris at once. I can't go back and tell him that you have refused." Mr. Hodgman spoke in a loud and earnest voice, due to his very evident excitement. Neither he nor Duvall noticed that Grace had approached them, and was standing in the open doorway of the house.

Before the detective had an opportunity to reply, Grace spoke. "What is it, Richard?" she inquired, quietly.

Duvall rose, presented Mr. Hodgman to his wife, and bade her sit down. Then, in a few words, he acquainted her with the circumstances which led to the latter's visit.

"Think of that poor mother, alone there in Paris," Hodgman supplemented. "Think of her suffering, her anxiety. I realize how much we are asking, to take Mr. Duvall away from you, especially at this time; but, it is Mr. Stapleton's only child--a boy of six. You can understand how he must feel."

Grace nodded. "Yes, I can understand," she said, slowly, then turned to her husband.

"What do you think, dear?" he asked her.

"I think, Richard, that you had better go."

Mr. Hodgman sprang to his feet, and, coming over to Grace, took her hand. He knew that his battle was won. "I thank you, Mrs. Duvall," he said, "on Mr. Stapleton's account, as well as on my own. He will appreciate deeply what you have done, the sacrifice you are making, and he will not forget it." He looked again at his watch nervously, the anxiety he felt clearly evident in his every movement. "We had best start at once, Mr. Duvall."

Duvall rose. "I will join you in a short while, Mr. Hodgman. I wish to say a few words to my wife." He took Grace's arm and drew her within the house, leaving Mr. Hodgman pacing nervously up and down the veranda.

The conference between Grace and her husband was short. Each realized the distress which tore at the other's heart, as well as the dangers he would in all probability be called upon to face; yet they met the situation calmly. "You will not be gone long," she told him. "I can manage very well."

"I know you can, dear," he said, pressing her to him. "I'm not worried about the place. You can run that as well as I can. It's you, I'm worried about--leaving you"--

"I'll be all right," she assured him, in spite of her tears. "I have Aunt Lucy, and old Uncle Abe, and Rose, and Jennie. I won't be so very lonely. And you will be very careful--and--and come back soon--won't you?"

"Of course, dear. Very soon. Now I'd better get a few things together."

Fifteen minutes later Grace Duvall stood on the steps of the veranda, watching the flying automobile as it rapidly became a little red blur in the distant road. It was nearly dark. The frogs in the patch of marsh in the meadow were piping dismally. She shivered, and a great sense of desolation came over her. She sank into a chair and wept, while Don, inserting his long white muzzle between her hands, strove to lick away her tears.

She heard Aunt Lucy, the old negro cook, singing away at her work in the kitchen, accompanied by Uncle Abe, who occupied a bench on the back porch. Everything seemed strangely peaceful, and lonely, too, now that Richard had gone. She patted the eager head of the collie. "We'll have to make the best of it, Don," she said, and rose to enter the house.

Suddenly far down the road she heard the chugging of an automobile. They were not frequent visitors, upon this country road. Could it be Richard, she wondered, returning for something he had forgotten?

She stood, straining her eyes into the dusk, waiting, while with one hand she restrained the eager dog.

Presently she saw that the machine was not a red one. It was not Richard. She was about to enter the house, when she realized that the rapidly moving car had entered the grounds. She turned on the lights in the hallway and stood, waiting, the dog at her side bristling with anger.

In a moment the automobile had stopped, and almost before she realized it, a small, foreign-looking man stood on the doorstep before her. "Madame Duvall?" he inquired, quickly, in a voice which showed plainly his nationality.

"Yes," she replied.

"Your husband! May I see him?"

"He is not at home."

The newcomer seemed greatly disturbed. "Then I fear, Madame, that I shall be obliged to wait until he returns."

"He will not return. He has gone away for sometime."

"Ah! That is indeed a calamity!" The man's face showed the keenest disappointment. "May I ask where I can find him?"

"It will be quite impossible." Grace had no intention of telling her visitor where her husband had gone. She knew too well the intricacies of his profession, for that. "You cannot find him." She made as though to close the door, and thereby terminate the interview.

The newcomer realized her intention. Slowly he raised his hand, in the palm of which showed the seal of a ring, turned inward. It was of silver, with curious figures worked into it in gold. The man glanced from the ring to Grace, eying her steadily. "I think, Madame," he said, with a meaning smile, "that you can trust me."

Grace recognized the ring at once. It was similar to one she herself had worn, while engaged in the memorable search for the ivory snuff box for Monsieur Lefevre, Prefect of Police of Paris. Dear old Lefevre--the friend of Richard's, and of her own! This man who stood before her must be a messenger from him.

"Come in, please," she said, quietly, and led the way to the library.

The man followed her, calling out a few words to his chauffeur as he did so. No sooner had they reached the great book-lined room, than he drew from his pocket a sealed envelope.

"Madame Duvall," he said, earnestly, "Monsieur Lefevre has cabled to his

representatives in Washington a message. That message is contained in this envelope. I have instructions to deliver it to your husband immediately. In case I could not find him, I am to hand it to you. Permit, me, Madame." With a bow, he placed the message in her hand.

Grace took the envelope, broke the heavy seal which it bore, and drawing out a slip of paper, hastily read the contents. The message was from Monsieur Lefevre. It said:

My dear Duvall:

You promised, on the occasion of our last meeting, to come to me should I ever need you. I need you badly, my friend. Come at once, both you, and your dear wife. LEFEVRE.

Grace looked up at the man before her, the letter crumpled in her hand. Here was a message the urgency of which could not be denied. She knew that, had Richard been at home, he would have gone to Paris at once in response to it; for it was to Monsieur Lefevre that they in reality owed all their happiness. She recalled vividly their wedding, with the lovable old Frenchman, acting as her father for the occasion, giving away the bride. She remembered the farewell dinner at the Prefect's house, and the beautiful gift he had given her on that occasion. Evidently Monsieur Lefevre desired Richard's presence very greatly, and her own as well. The thought suddenly came to her--why not go to him?

True, Richard had left her in charge of things at home; but she knew that, for a reasonable time, at least, they would go on smoothly enough without her. Hendricks, the overseer, was a capable and honest man, devoted to her and to her husband.

She could safely leave matters in his charge. Then, too, the thought of surprising Richard on the steamer sailing the next day appealed to her sense of mischief. How astounded he would be, to find her strolling along the deck! And how delighted, too! She wondered that the thought of accompanying him had not occurred to her more strongly before. She turned to the man, who stood watching her narrowly.

"You know the contents of this message?"

"Yes, Madame," he bowed. "It came to us by cable--in cipher."

"There is a train for New York at midnight, and a steamer tomorrow morning."

"Yes, Madame."

"Can you drive me to Washington in your car?"

"I shall be delighted, Madame." The fellow's eyes sparkled with satisfaction.

"Very well. Mr. Duvall is in New York. I will take the message to him. Wait here, please, until I get some clothes together and give some orders to my servants."

In half an hour, the thing was done. Hendricks, the overseer, had been given full instructions regarding taking charge of the place, with provision for his needs in the way of money, etc., and by ten o'clock, at which time the New York sleeper was open, Grace was at the station, purchasing her ticket.

The obliging Frenchman gave her every assistance, and bade her bon voyage smilingly as he helped her aboard the train. She retired at once, and lay in her berth, reading a magazine, and picturing to herself Richard's mingled astonishment and joy at their meeting in the morning. This time, she was determined that their honeymoon should not be interrupted.

After a time, she fell asleep, and dreamed that she and Richard were sailing gaily toward Paris, in a large red touring car.

In the morning, she ate a hasty breakfast in the railway station, and took a taxicab for the steamship offices. By great good fortune, she was able to secure a cabin. Then she hastily visited a banking house where she was well known, provided herself with funds, and drove to the dock.

It wanted but half an hour till sailing time. Grace hastened to her stateroom, and busied herself in effacing the stains of her night of travel. She was determined to meet Richard looking her best.

It was not until the big steamer was passing through the Narrows that she came on deck, and began looking about for her husband. In all that crowd, she knew it would take time to find him. After searching for an hour, she felt somewhat surprised at not seeing him. After another hour had passed, her surprise turned to alarm. A hasty visit to the purser, and an examination of the sailing list, showed her the astonishing truth. Richard was not on board!

The big, mud-spattered touring car, which for the past hour had been plowing its way steadily northward from the city of Washington, hesitated for a moment before the gateway which marked the end of the well kept drive, then swept on to the house.

A man, stoutly built, keen of eye, showing haste in his every movement, sprang from the machine and ascended the veranda steps.

"Does Richard Duvall live here?" he inquired, curtly, of the smiling old colored woman who came to the door.

"'Deed he do, suh. Does you want to see him?"

"Yes. At once, please. Tell him it is most important. My name is Hodgman."

The servant eyed him with cool disfavor. "Set down, suh," she remarked stiffly. "I'll tell him you is here."

The caller watched her, as she disappeared into the house, then cast himself impatiently into a chair and lit a cigar.

He paid no attention to the attempts of two clumsy collie puppies to attract his favorable notice, but contented himself with making a quick survey of the wide comfortable veranda, with its big roomy chairs, the wicker table, bearing a great jar of red peonies, the smooth green lawns, swept by the late afternoon sun.

"Fine old place," he muttered to himself. "Wonder if I can persuade him to go?"

As the car which had brought Mr. Hodgman on his hasty trip from Washington dashed up to the front of the house, Grace Duvall, looking very charming in a blue linen dress, was just approaching it from the rear.

She held a pair of shears in her hand, and her apron was filled to overflowing with hundred-leaf roses. "Dick--oh, Dick!" she called, as she came down the long avenue of syringas and lilacs which led to the house. "The sweet peas are nearly ready to bloom."

Richard Duvall, looking as simply pastoral as though he had never tracked an international crook to cover, raised his head from the flower bed, in which he had been carefully setting out circle after circle of geranium plants.

"Are they?" he laughed. "That's good. Now all we need is a few good hot days." He gathered up his trowel and rake, and started toward the barn.

Grace put her arm through her husband's and together they strolled across the springy green turf, their faces smiling and happy. The honeymoon showed no signs of waning.

This lovely old country place, in southern Maryland, had been one of Richard Duvall's dreams for many years, and after his marriage to Grace Ellicott, in Paris, it had become hers, as well. It was but a short time after their return to America that they decided to make it a reality.

Grace had encouraged her husband in the plan of giving up, for a time at least, his warfare against crime, his pursuit of criminals of the higher and more dangerous type, and had persuaded him to buy the farm which had once belonged to his mother's people, and settle down to the life of a country gentleman.

His office was still maintained, under the able direction of one of his assistants, but Duvall gave little or no attention to its affairs. He was glad to withdraw, for the first time in over nine years, from active work, and devote his energies to early potatoes, prize dogs, hunters, and geranium plants--and, above all, to the peaceful enjoyment of his honeymoon, and the making of Grace the happiest woman in the world.

She, on her part, found in their present situation all the joys of existence for which she had longed. With little or no liking for the monotonous round of society and its duties, and a passionate love of nature, she found in the many and complex duties of managing her part of their extensive estate a far greater happiness than any which city life could have offered her.

The considerable fortune which her husband's clever work while in Paris had restored to her, had been safely invested in well paying securities, and she found her greatest joy in utilizing at least a part of her income in beautifying their new home.

Richard had steadily refused to make any use of the money. It was a matter of pride with him, that his own savings had enabled him to purchase the property; but when Grace proposed to build an addition to the house, to provide him with a more comfortable library and work room, or insisted upon having the roads throughout the place elaborately macadamized, he was obliged to submit to her wishes. In this way, they planned and built for the future, together.

The farm was a large one, comprising some two hundred acres, and the old stone house surrounded by white oaks and tulip poplars had once been a show place, before the declining fortunes of its former owners had caused it to fall into a state of mellow and time-honored decay. Now all was changed. Grace, with the able assistance of old Uncle Abe Turner, a relic of ante bellum times, spent hours daily in bringing order out of the chaos of tangled myrtle and ivy, overgrown box and hedge, thickets of syringa and lilac bushes and weed-grown lawns.

It was a gigantic task, yet a joyous one--as it ever is, to those who came to it with the love of nature in their hearts. To Grace, the plants and shrubs, the great strong oaks, the towering poplars, each seemed to have a distinct personality. Under her energetic hand, the place once more took on the aspect of well kept and orderly beauty which was such a contrast to its former down-at-the-heels appearance. It seemed as though the growing things realized the personal interest she took in them, and responded as they never respond to the ignorant or unsympathetic.

Richard was concerned with his fields of timothy and clover, his early corn, his berries and fruit trees, to say nothing of his collies, his prize cows and Kentucky horses. In such a life, time never hangs heavy--he was busy studying, planning, working, from morning to night, and his active mind soon convinced his capable overseer and the farm hands as well that, although Richard Duvall was by no means a professional farmer, he could still show them a thing or two when it came to the rotation of crops, the spraying of fruit trees, or the proper treatment of worn out soils. These were aspects of farming life which the hide-bound conservatism of the local farmers caused them to jeer at, as newfangled notions gotten from books. Later when they saw the man who farmed with his head as well as his hands gather in two bushels where they had barely been able to secure one, they began to sit

up and take notice.

"I got the new hedges all set out today," Grace went on, as she patted her husband's rather grimy hand. "They will be charming, against the gray stone of the wall. But we must have new gate posts. The old ones are likely to tumble into the road at any moment."

"I'll have Martin come out tomorrow and look them over. There's plenty of stone--down in the lower pasture. Why not carry the wall right along the whole front of the property? It ought not to cost a great deal."

"We will. And I'm going to have a new spring house built, too. The old one is falling to pieces." She looked up at her husband as he deposited the rake in the tool room and they started up the shaded walk toward the house. "Aren't you glad, Dick, that we're alive?"

He pressed her arm. "Well--I should say so, little girl! why do you ask me that?"

"Oh--you know what your friends all said--that a man might as well be dead, as buried out here in the country. I think they are the ones who are not alive--cooped up in the city. Don't you?"

Richard nodded. He was thinking for the moment of his former active life--when some battle of wits with a noted crook had kept him sleepless for nights. "It's--rather different," he laughed. "Isn't it?"

"Yes--and much better. Don't you think so, dear? You wouldn't want to go back to it--would you?"

"Not for anything in the world," he assured her, as he swept the newly seeded lawns with a contented glance. "I liked the other life, of course--the excitement, the danger of it; but this is better--much better. Here, Don!" he called to a graceful collie which was barking vociferously at some distant vehicle in the road. "Come here and be quiet." He turned with Grace to the great vine-covered side porch and sank contentedly into a rocking chair. "Well, little girl--it's been a busy day, and I'm tired. We got the early rye all cut on the lower field today. Guess we'll put in late potatoes, after it's plowed. Here, Don--come back here! What's the matter with you?" He rose and whistled to the dog, which was bounding across the lawn in the direction of the road. "Come back, I say!"

"It's someone coming in," said Grace, uneasily. "In a machine. I wonder who it can be?"

"Possibly Hudson, the veterinary. He was coming today, to look at that heifer."

"He hasn't a machine like that. This is a big touring car." She turned to her husband. "Hadn't you better go in and fix up a bit, Dick? It may be company."

Duvall laughed. "If it is, they'll have to take me as I am," he said; then again called to the dog.

A moment later the servant, who had interviewed the caller at the front door, came out to the side porch. "Gentleman to see you, Mr. Duvall," she said. "Seems to be in a powerful hurry, too."

"All right, Aunt Lucy," said Duvall as he made his way to the front of the house.

"Is this Richard Duvall?" the visitor asked, in a quick, almost peremptory tone, as the detective joined him.

"Yes. That is my name. What can I do for you?"

The newcomer rose nervously from his chair and began chewing upon his half-smoked cigar. "Had the devil of a time to find you, Mr. Duvall."

"You came out from Washington, I suppose," remarked the detective, wondering what his visitor could want with him.

"Yes. Got your address from Hicks, of the Treasury Department. He said you were about twelve miles out. I seem to have come about twenty."

"Perhaps you went around by way of Laurel. It's much further, that way. What can I do for you, Mr.----" He paused interrogatively.

The man looked up at him quickly. "My name's Hodgman--Thomas Hodgman--of New York. I represent John Stapleton."

"John Stapleton, the banker?" asked Duvall, surprised.

"Yes. You know him, don't you?"

"Yes. Quite well. I handled a case for him once--some years ago. why?" Duvall's face became grave. He began to realize that the interview was likely to become suddenly important. John Stapleton, the multi-millionaire banker, was not in the habit of sending messengers to anyone, without good reason.

"So he said," went on Mr. Hodgman, resuming his chair. "That's why I'm here. He wants you to take another--"

"Another?"

"Yes. Another case. Quick."

"It's quite out of the question."

"Nonsense! This is important. Money's no object; name your own terms."

"It isn't a question of terms, Mr. Hodgman. I have withdrawn, for the time being at least, from active professional work."

"I know." The visitor flicked the ashes impatiently from his cigar and sought nervously in his pockets for a match. "That's what they told me at your office, in New York. Said you were on your honeymoon, and didn't want to be bothered."

"That's true. I don't."

"I told Mr. Stapleton that. He sent me to see you; said you might change your mind, when you heard about the case."

"It is quite impossible. I do not care to take up any detective work at present."

Mr. Hodgman fidgeted nervously in his chair. "You must listen to what I have to say, Mr. Duvall, at any rate. Mr. Stapleton would not hear to my returning, after seeing you, without having explained to you the nature of the case."

Duvall leaned back, and began to fondle the long moist nose of the collie which sat beside his chair. "If you insist, Mr. Hodgman, I will listen, of course; but I assure you it will be quite useless."

"I hope not. The case is most distressing. Mr. Stapleton's only child has been kidnapped!"

"Kidnapped!" Duvall sat up with a start, every line of his face tense with professional interest. "When? Where?"

"In Paris. The cablegram arrived this morning. I don't know the details. Mrs. Stapleton has been spending the winter abroad. Mr. Stapleton was to join her this month. She is living at their house in the Avenue Kleber, Paris. The child was out walking with a nurse. It has been stolen. That's all I know."

"When did it happen?"

"Yesterday morning. Mrs. Stapleton did not cable at first, believing that the boy would be found during the course of the day. Naturally she did not wish to alarm her husband needlessly, and the Prefect of Police, it seems, had assured her that the child would undoubtedly be recovered before night. It wasn't. This morning Mr. Stapleton got a long cablegram from his wife, telling him of the boy's disappearance. He's half crazy over the thing."

"What is he going to do?"

"I don't know. He sent me to see you at once. I'm his secretary, you know. When I couldn't find you in New York, he told me to come here. I arrived in Washington an hour ago, and came right out. Mr. Stapleton said if any man on earth could find his boy for him, you could."

"I suppose the thing is a matter of blackmail--ransom--"

"Very likely. They will probably demand a huge sum. No requests have been made, as yet, so far as I know. These fellows usually wait a week or two, before showing their hand, to give the unfortunate parents a chance to worry themselves half to death. I suppose they figure that then they'll be more likely to come across with the money."

"Yes. That's the scheme. A rotten business, too. Hanging is too good for such wretches!"

"That's what I say. Of course you can understand how Mr. Stapleton feels."

"Of course. He will sail at once, I suppose."

"That's the worst of it. He can't go till Saturday. Tomorrow's Thursday--that's three days off. There's a deal on here involving millions--something he's been working to put through for months. Of course he doesn't consider anything like that, when it comes to his child; but he's got to think of his associates--men who have intrusted their money to him. He can't possibly sail before Saturday. He wants you to go ahead of him. There's a fast boat leaving in the morning. You could take that. We can have a conference tonight. It will mean mighty quick work, though." He glanced at his watch. "After six now. There's no train till midnight--the sleeper. But Mr. Stapleton told me to charter a special. We can be in New York by one o'clock in the morning, if we start right now." He looked at Duvall in eager expectancy.

The latter frowned, his gaze wandering off to the distant fields, where the newly plowed earth reminded him of his plans for the morrow. Yet here was a man, a friend, who had helped him much, in the earlier days of his career, begging him to come to his assistance in a matter almost of life or death. It was a difficult decision that he was called upon to make. The thought of leaving Grace hurt him deeply; yet she would prefer to stay behind, in case he should go, to look after the affairs of the place. With the assistance of the overseer and the hands, he knew that she could manage everything during a brief absence on his part--it seemed unlikely that the matter would require more than three or four weeks, at the outside.

Mr. Hodgman broke in upon his thoughts. "You'll go, Mr. Duvall? Mr. Stapleton is depending on you. He has the utmost faith in your abilities. He knows your familiarity with Paris--the work you have done there, in the past. He believes that, by intrusting the matter to a fellow countryman, he will get his boy back again. He hasn't much faith in foreign detectives. He's set his heart on having you start for Paris at once. I can't go back and tell him that you have refused." Mr. Hodgman spoke in a loud and earnest voice, due to his very evident excitement. Neither he nor Duvall noticed that Grace had approached them, and was standing in the open doorway of the house.

Before the detective had an opportunity to reply, Grace spoke. "What is it, Richard?" she inquired, quietly.

Duvall rose, presented Mr. Hodgman to his wife, and bade her sit down. Then, in a few words, he acquainted her with the circumstances which led to the latter's visit.

"Think of that poor mother, alone there in Paris," Hodgman supplemented. "Think of her suffering, her anxiety. I realize how much we are asking, to take Mr. Duvall away from you, especially at this time; but, it is Mr. Stapleton's only child--a boy of six. You can understand how he must feel."

Grace nodded. "Yes, I can understand," she said, slowly, then turned to her husband.

"What do you think, dear?" he asked her.

"I think, Richard, that you had better go."

Mr. Hodgman sprang to his feet, and, coming over to Grace, took her hand. He knew that his battle was won. "I thank you, Mrs. Duvall," he said, "on Mr. Stapleton's account, as well as on my own. He will appreciate deeply what you have done, the sacrifice you are making, and he will not forget it." He looked again at his watch nervously, the anxiety he felt clearly evident in his every movement. "We had best start at once, Mr. Duvall."

Duvall rose. "I will join you in a short while, Mr. Hodgman. I wish to say a few words to my wife." He took Grace's arm and drew her within the house, leaving Mr. Hodgman pacing nervously up and down the veranda.

The conference between Grace and her husband was short. Each realized the distress which tore at the other's heart, as well as the dangers he would in all probability be called upon to face; yet they met the situation calmly. "You will not be gone long," she told him. "I can manage very well."

"I know you can, dear," he said, pressing her to him. "I'm not worried about the place. You can run that as well as I can. It's you, I'm worried about--leaving you"--

"I'll be all right," she assured him, in spite of her tears. "I have Aunt Lucy, and old Uncle Abe, and Rose, and Jennie. I won't be so very lonely. And you will be very careful--and--and come back soon--won't you?"

"Of course, dear. Very soon. Now I'd better get a few things together."

Fifteen minutes later Grace Duvall stood on the steps of the veranda, watching the flying automobile as it rapidly became a little red blur in the distant road. It was nearly dark. The frogs in the patch of marsh in the meadow were piping dismally. She shivered, and a great sense of desolation came over her. She sank into a chair and wept, while Don, inserting his long white muzzle between her hands, strove to lick away her tears.

She heard Aunt Lucy, the old negro cook, singing away at her work in the kitchen, accompanied by Uncle Abe, who occupied a bench on the back porch. Everything seemed strangely peaceful, and lonely, too, now that Richard had gone. She patted the eager head of the collie. "We'll have to make the best of it, Don," she said, and rose to enter the house.

Suddenly far down the road she heard the chugging of an automobile. They were not frequent visitors, upon this country road. Could it be Richard, she wondered, returning for something he had forgotten?

She stood, straining her eyes into the dusk, waiting, while with one hand she restrained the eager dog.

Presently she saw that the machine was not a red one. It was not Richard. She was about to enter the house, when she realized that the rapidly moving car had entered the grounds. She turned on the lights in the hallway and stood, waiting, the dog at her side bristling with

anger.

In a moment the automobile had stopped, and almost before she realized it, a small, foreign-looking man stood on the doorstep before her. "Madame Duvall?" he inquired, quickly, in a voice which showed plainly his nationality.

"Yes," she replied.

"Your husband! May I see him?"

"He is not at home."

The newcomer seemed greatly disturbed. "Then I fear, Madame, that I shall be obliged to wait until he returns."

"He will not return. He has gone away for sometime."

"Ah! That is indeed a calamity!" The man's face showed the keenest disappointment. "May I ask where I can find him?"

"It will be quite impossible." Grace had no intention of telling her visitor where her husband had gone. She knew too well the intricacies of his profession, for that. "You cannot find him." She made as though to close the door, and thereby terminate the interview.

The newcomer realized her intention. Slowly he raised his hand, in the palm of which showed the seal of a ring, turned inward. It was of silver, with curious figures worked into it in gold. The man glanced from the ring to Grace, eyeing her steadily. "I think, Madame," he said, with a meaning smile, "that you can trust me."

Grace recognized the ring at once. It was similar to one she herself had worn, while engaged in the memorable search for the ivory snuff box for Monsieur Lefevre, Prefect of Police of Paris. Dear old Lefevre--the friend of Richard's, and of her own! This man who stood before her must be a messenger from him.

"Come in, please," she said, quietly, and led the way to the library.

The man followed her, calling out a few words to his chauffeur as he did so. No sooner had they reached the great book-lined room, than he drew from his pocket a sealed envelope.

"Madame Duvall," he said, earnestly, "Monsieur Lefevre has cabled to his representatives in Washington a message. That message is contained in this envelope. I have instructions to deliver it to your husband immediately. In case I could not find him, I am to hand it to you. Permit, me, Madame." With a bow, he placed the message in her hand.

Grace took the envelope, broke the heavy seal which it bore, and drawing out a slip of paper, hastily read the contents. The message was from Monsieur Lefevre. It said:

My dear Duvall:

You promised, on the occasion of our last meeting, to come to me should I ever need you. I need you badly, my friend. Come at once, both you, and your dear wife. LEFEVRE.

Grace looked up at the man before her, the letter crumpled in her hand. Here was a message the urgency of which could not be denied. She knew that, had Richard been at home, he would have gone to Paris at once in response to it; for it was to Monsieur Lefevre that they in reality owed all their happiness. She recalled vividly their wedding, with the lovable old Frenchman, acting as her father for the occasion, giving away the bride. She remembered the farewell dinner at the Prefect's house, and the beautiful gift he had given her on that occasion. Evidently Monsieur Lefevre desired Richard's presence very greatly, and her own as well. The thought suddenly came to her--why not go to him?

True, Richard had left her in charge of things at home; but she knew that, for a reasonable time, at least, they would go on smoothly enough without her. Hendricks, the overseer, was a capable and honest man, devoted to her and to her husband.

She could safely leave matters in his charge. Then, too, the thought of surprising Richard on the steamer sailing the next day appealed to her sense of mischief. How astounded he would be, to find her strolling along the deck! And how delighted, too! She wondered that the thought of accompanying him had not occurred to her more strongly before. She turned to the man, who stood watching her narrowly.

"You know the contents of this message?"

"Yes, Madame," he bowed. "It came to us by cable--in cipher."

"There is a train for New York at midnight, and a steamer tomorrow morning."

"Yes, Madame."

"Can you drive me to Washington in your car?"

"I shall be delighted, Madame." The fellow's eyes sparkled with satisfaction.

"Very well. Mr. Duvall is in New York. I will take the message to him. Wait here, please, until I get some clothes together and give some orders to my servants."

In half an hour, the thing was done. Hendricks, the overseer, had been given full instructions regarding taking charge of the place, with provision for his needs in the way of money, etc., and by ten o'clock, at which time the New York sleeper was open, Grace was at the station, purchasing her ticket.

The obliging Frenchman gave her every assistance, and bade her bon voyage smilingly as he helped her aboard the train. She retired at once, and lay in her berth, reading a magazine, and picturing to herself Richard's mingled astonishment and joy at their meeting in the morning. This time, she was determined that their honeymoon should not be interrupted.

After a time, she fell asleep, and dreamed that she and Richard were sailing gaily toward Paris, in a large red touring car.

In the morning, she ate a hasty breakfast in the railway station, and took a taxicab for the steamship offices. By great good fortune, she was able to secure a cabin. Then she hastily visited a banking house where she was well known, provided herself with funds, and drove to the dock.

It wanted but half an hour till sailing time. Grace hastened to her stateroom, and busied herself in effacing the stains of her night of travel. She was determined to meet Richard looking her best.

It was not until the big steamer was passing through the Narrows that she came on deck, and began looking about for her husband. In all that crowd, she knew it would take time to find him. After searching for an hour, she felt somewhat surprised at not seeing him. After another hour had passed, her surprise turned to alarm. A hasty visit to the purser, and an examination of the sailing list, showed her the astonishing truth. Richard was not on board!

The big, mud-spattered touring car, which for the past hour had been plowing its way steadily northward from the city of Washington, hesitated for a moment before the gateway which marked the end of the well kept drive, then swept on to the house.

A man, stoutly built, keen of eye, showing haste in his every movement, sprang from the machine and ascended the veranda steps.

"Does Richard Duvall live here?" he inquired, curtly, of the smiling old colored woman who came to the door.

"'Deed he do, suh. Does you want to see him?"

"Yes. At once, please. Tell him it is most important. My name is Hodgman."

The servant eyed him with cool disfavor. "Set down, suh," she remarked stiffly. "I'll tell him you is here."

The caller watched her, as she disappeared into the house, then cast himself impatiently into a chair and lit a cigar.

He paid no attention to the attempts of two clumsy collie puppies to attract his favorable notice, but contented himself with making a quick survey of the wide comfortable veranda, with its big roomy chairs, the wicker table, bearing a great jar of red peonies, the smooth green lawns, swept by the late afternoon sun.

"Fine old place," he muttered to himself. "Wonder if I can persuade him to go?"

As the car which had brought Mr. Hodgman on his hasty trip from Washington dashed up to the front of the house, Grace Duvall, looking very charming in a blue linen dress, was just approaching it from the rear.

She held a pair of shears in her hand, and her apron was filled to overflowing with hundred-leaf roses. "Dick--oh, Dick!" she called, as she came down the long avenue of syringas and lilacs which led to the house. "The sweet peas are nearly ready to bloom."

Richard Duvall, looking as simply pastoral as though he had never tracked an international crook to cover, raised his head from the flower bed, in which he had been carefully setting out circle after circle of geranium plants.

"Are they?" he laughed. "That's good. Now all we need is a few good hot days." He gathered up his trowel and rake, and started toward the barn.

Grace put her arm through her husband's and together they strolled across the springy green turf, their faces smiling and happy. The honeymoon showed no signs of waning.

This lovely old country place, in southern Maryland, had been one of Richard Duvall's dreams for many years, and after his marriage to Grace Ellicott, in Paris, it had become hers, as well. It was but a short time after their return to America that they decided to make it a reality.

Grace had encouraged her husband in the plan of giving up, for a time at least, his warfare against crime, his pursuit of criminals of the higher and more dangerous type, and had persuaded him to buy the farm which had once belonged to his mother's people, and settle down to the life of a country gentleman.

His office was still maintained, under the able direction of one of his assistants, but Duvall gave little or no attention to its affairs. He was glad to withdraw, for the first time in over nine years, from active work, and devote his energies to early potatoes, prize dogs, hunters, and geranium plants--and, above all, to the peaceful enjoyment of his honeymoon, and the making of Grace the happiest woman in the world.

She, on her part, found in their present situation all the joys of existence for which she had longed. With little or no liking for the monotonous round of society and its duties, and a passionate love of nature, she found in the many and complex duties of managing her part of their extensive estate a far greater happiness than any which city life could have offered her.

The considerable fortune which her husband's clever work while in Paris had restored to her, had been safely invested in well paying securities, and she found her greatest joy in utilizing at least a part of her income in beautifying their new home.

Richard had steadily refused to make any use of the money. It was a matter of pride with him, that his own savings had enabled him to purchase the property; but when Grace proposed to build an addition to the house, to provide him with a more comfortable library and work room, or insisted upon having the roads throughout the place elaborately macadamized, he was obliged to submit to her wishes. In this way, they planned and built for the future, together.

The farm was a large one, comprising some two hundred acres, and the old stone house surrounded by white oaks and tulip poplars had once been a show place, before the declining fortunes of its former owners had caused it to fall into a state of mellow and time-honored decay. Now all was changed. Grace, with the able assistance of old Uncle Abe Turner, a relic of ante bellum times, spent hours daily in bringing order out of the chaos of tangled myrtle and ivy, overgrown box and hedge, thickets of syringa and lilac bushes and weed-grown lawns.

It was a gigantic task, yet a joyous one--as it ever is, to those who came to it with the love of nature in their hearts. To Grace, the plants and shrubs, the great strong oaks, the towering poplars, each seemed to have a distinct personality. Under her energetic hand, the place once more took on the aspect of well kept and orderly beauty which was such a contrast to its former down-at-the-heels appearance. It seemed as though the growing things realized the personal interest she took in them, and responded as they never respond to the ignorant or unsympathetic.

Richard was concerned with his fields of timothy and clover, his early corn, his berries and fruit trees, to say nothing of his collies, his prize cows and Kentucky horses. In such a life, time never hangs heavy--he was busy studying, planning, working, from morning to night, and his active mind soon convinced his capable overseer and the farm hands as well that, although Richard Duvall was by no means a professional farmer, he could still show them a thing or two when it came to the rotation of crops, the spraying of fruit trees, or the proper treatment of worn out soils. These were aspects of farming life which the hide-bound conservatism of the local farmers caused them to jeer at, as newfangled notions gotten from books. Later when they saw the man who farmed with his head as well as his hands gather in two bushels where they had barely been able to secure one, they began to sit up and take notice.

"I got the new hedges all set out today," Grace went on, as she patted her husband's rather grimy hand. "They will be charming, against the gray stone of the wall. But we must have new gate posts. The old ones are likely to tumble into the road at any moment."

"I'll have Martin come out tomorrow and look them over. There's plenty of stone--down in the lower pasture. Why not carry the wall right along the whole front of the property? It ought not to cost a great deal."

"We will. And I'm going to have a new spring house built, too. The old one is falling to pieces." She looked up at her husband as he deposited the rake in the tool room and they started up the shaded walk toward the house. "Aren't you glad, Dick, that we're _alive_?"

He pressed her arm. "Well--I should say so, little girl! why do you ask me that?"

"Oh--you know what your friends all said--that a man might as well be dead, as buried out here in the country. I think they are the ones who are not alive--cooped up in the city. Don't you?"

Richard nodded. He was thinking for the moment of his former active life--when some battle of wits with a noted crook had kept him sleepless for nights. "It's--rather different," he laughed. "Isn't it?"

"Yes--and much better. Don't you think so, dear? You wouldn't want to go back to it--would you?"

"Not for anything in the world," he assured her, as he swept the newly seeded lawns with a contented glance. "I liked the other life, of course--the excitement, the danger of it; but this is better--much better. Here, Don!" he called to a graceful collie which was barking vociferously at some distant vehicle in the road. "Come here and be quiet." He turned with Grace to the great vine-covered side porch and sank contentedly into a rocking chair. "Well, little girl--it's been a busy day, and I'm tired. We got the early rye all cut on the lower field today. Guess we'll put in late potatoes, after it's plowed. Here, Don--come back here! What's the matter with you?" He rose and whistled to the dog, which was bounding across the lawn in the direction of the road. "Come back, I say!"

"It's someone coming in," said Grace, uneasily. "In a machine. I wonder who it can be?"

"Possibly Hudson, the veterinary. He was coming today, to look at that heifer."

"He hasn't a machine like that. This is a big touring car." She turned to her husband. "Hadn't you better go in and fix up a bit, Dick? It may be company."

Duvall laughed. "If it is, they'll have to take me as I am," he said; then again called to the dog.

A moment later the servant, who had interviewed the caller at the front door, came out to the side porch. "Gentleman to see you, Mr. Duvall," she said. "Seems to be in a powerful hurry, too."

"All right, Aunt Lucy," said Duvall as he made his way to the front of the house.

"Is this Richard Duvall?" the visitor asked, in a quick, almost peremptory tone, as the detective joined him.

"Yes. That is my name. What can I do for you?"

The newcomer rose nervously from his chair and began chewing upon his half-smoked cigar. "Had the devil of a time to find you, Mr. Duvall."

"You came out from Washington, I suppose," remarked the detective, wondering what his visitor could want with him.

"Yes. Got your address from Hicks, of the Treasury Department. He said you were about twelve miles out. I seem to have come about twenty."

"Perhaps you went around by way of Laurel. It's much further, that way. What can I do for you, Mr.----" He paused interrogatively.

The man looked up at him quickly. "My name's Hodgman--Thomas Hodgman--of New York. I represent John Stapleton."

"John Stapleton, the banker?" asked Duvall, surprised.

"Yes. You know him, don't you?"

"Yes. Quite well. I handled a case for him once--some years ago. Why?" Duvall's face became grave. He began to realize that the interview was likely to become suddenly important. John Stapleton, the multi-millionaire banker, was not in the habit of sending messengers to anyone, without good reason.

"So he said," went on Mr. Hodgman, resuming his chair. "That's why I'm here. He wants you to take another--"

"Another?"

"Yes. Another case. Quick."

"It's quite out of the question."

"Nonsense! This is important. Money's no object; name your own terms."

"It isn't a question of terms, Mr. Hodgman. I have withdrawn, for the time being at least, from active professional work."

"I know." The visitor flicked the ashes impatiently from his cigar and sought nervously in his pockets for a match. "That's what they told me at your office, in New York. Said you were on your honeymoon, and didn't want to be bothered."

"That's true. I don't."

"I told Mr. Stapleton that. He sent me to see you; said you might change your mind, when you heard about the case."

"It is quite impossible. I do not care to take up any detective work at present."

Mr. Hodgman fidgeted nervously in his chair. "You must listen to what I have to say, Mr. Duvall, at any rate. Mr. Stapleton would not hear to my returning, after seeing you, without having explained to you the nature of the case."

Duvall leaned back, and began to fondle the long moist nose of the collie which sat beside his chair. "If you insist, Mr. Hodgman, I will listen, of course; but I assure you it will be quite useless."

"I hope not. The case is most distressing. Mr. Stapleton's only child has been kidnapped!"

"Kidnapped!" Duvall sat up with a start, every line of his face tense with professional interest. "When? Where?"

"In Paris. The cablegram arrived this morning. I don't know the details. Mrs. Stapleton has been spending the winter abroad. Mr. Stapleton was to join her this month. She is living at their house in the Avenue Kleber, Paris. The child was out walking with a nurse. It has been stolen. That's all I know."

"When did it happen?"

"Yesterday morning. Mrs. Stapleton did not cable at first, believing that the boy would be found during the course of the day. Naturally she did not wish to alarm her husband needlessly, and the Prefect of Police, it seems, had assured her that the child would undoubtedly be recovered before night. It wasn't. This morning Mr. Stapleton got a long cablegram from his wife, telling him of the boy's disappearance. He's half crazy over the thing."

"What is he going to do?"

"I don't know. He sent me to see you at once. I'm his secretary, you know. When I couldn't find you in New York, he told me to come here. I arrived in Washington an hour ago, and came right out. Mr. Stapleton said if any man on earth could find his boy for him, you could."

"I suppose the thing is a matter of blackmail--ransom--"

"Very likely. They will probably demand a huge sum. No requests have been made, as yet, so far as I know. These fellows usually wait a week or two, before showing their hand, to give the unfortunate parents a chance to worry themselves half to death. I suppose they figure that then they'll be more likely to come across with the money."

"Yes. That's the scheme. A rotten business, too. Hanging is too good for such wretches!"

"That's what I say. Of course you can understand how Mr. Stapleton feels."

"Of course. He will sail at once, I suppose."

"That's the worst of it. He can't go till Saturday. Tomorrow's Thursday--that's three days off. There's a deal on here involving millions--something he's been working to put through for months. Of course he doesn't consider anything like that, when it comes to his child; but he's got to think of his associates--men who have intrusted their money to him. He can't possibly sail before Saturday. He wants you to go ahead of him. There's a fast boat leaving in the morning. You could take that. We can have a conference tonight. It will mean mighty quick work, though." He glanced at his watch. "After six now. There's no train till midnight--the sleeper. But Mr. Stapleton told me to charter a special. We can be in New York by one o'clock in the morning, if we start right now." He looked at Duvall in eager expectancy.

The latter frowned, his gaze wandering off to the distant fields, where the newly plowed earth reminded him of his plans for the morrow. Yet here was a man, a friend, who had helped him much, in the earlier days of his career, begging him to come to his assistance in a matter almost of life or death. It was a difficult decision that he was called upon to make. The thought of leaving Grace hurt him deeply; yet she would prefer to stay behind, in case he should go, to look after the affairs of the place. With the assistance of the overseer and the hands, he knew that she could manage everything during a brief absence on his part--it seemed unlikely that the matter would require more than three or four weeks, at the outside.

Mr. Hodgman broke in upon his thoughts. "You'll go, Mr. Duvall? Mr. Stapleton is depending on you. He has the utmost faith in your abilities. He knows your familiarity with Paris--the work you have done there, in the past. He believes that, by intrusting the matter to a fellow countryman, he will get his boy back again. He hasn't much faith in foreign detectives. He's set his heart on having you start for Paris at once. I can't go back and tell him that you have refused." Mr. Hodgman spoke in a loud and earnest voice, due to his very evident excitement. Neither he nor Duvall noticed that Grace had approached them, and was standing in the open doorway of the house.

Before the detective had an opportunity to reply, Grace spoke. "What is it, Richard?" she inquired, quietly.

Duvall rose, presented Mr. Hodgman to his wife, and bade her sit down. Then, in a few words, he acquainted her with the circumstances which led to the latter's visit.

"Think of that poor mother, alone there in Paris," Hodgman supplemented. "Think of her suffering, her anxiety. I realize how much we are asking, to take Mr. Duvall away from you, especially at this time; but, it is Mr. Stapleton's only child--a boy of six. You can understand how he must feel."

Grace nodded. "Yes, I can understand," she said, slowly, then turned to her husband.

"What do you think, dear?" he asked her.

"I think, Richard, that you had better go."

Mr. Hodgman sprang to his feet, and, coming over to Grace, took her hand. He knew that his battle was won. "I thank you, Mrs. Duvall," he said, "on Mr. Stapleton's account, as well as on my own. He will appreciate deeply what you have done, the sacrifice you are making, and he will not forget it." He looked again at his watch nervously, the anxiety he felt clearly evident in his every movement. "We had best start at once, Mr. Duvall."

Duvall rose. "I will join you in a short while, Mr. Hodgman. I wish to

say a few words to my wife." He took Grace's arm and drew her within the house, leaving Mr. Hodgman pacing nervously up and down the veranda.

The conference between Grace and her husband was short. Each realized the distress which tore at the other's heart, as well as the dangers he would in all probability be called upon to face; yet they met the situation calmly. "You will not be gone long," she told him. "I can manage very well."

"I know you can, dear," he said, pressing her to him. "I'm not worried about the place. You can run that as well as I can. It's you, I'm worried about--leaving you"--

"I'll be all right," she assured him, in spite of her tears. "I have Aunt Lucy, and old Uncle Abe, and Rose, and Jennie. I won't be so _very_ lonely. And you will be very careful--and--and come back soon--won't you?"

"Of course, dear. Very soon. Now I'd better get a few things together."

Fifteen minutes later Grace Duvall stood on the steps of the veranda, watching the flying automobile as it rapidly became a little red blur in the distant road. It was nearly dark. The frogs in the patch of marsh in the meadow were piping dismally. She shivered, and a great sense of desolation came over her. She sank into a chair and wept, while Don, inserting his long white muzzle between her hands, strove to lick away her tears.

She heard Aunt Lucy, the old negro cook, singing away at her work in the kitchen, accompanied by Uncle Abe, who occupied a bench on the back porch. Everything seemed strangely peaceful, and lonely, too, now that Richard had gone. She patted the eager head of the collie. "We'll have to make the best of it, Don," she said, and rose to enter the house.

Suddenly far down the road she heard the chugging of an automobile. They were not frequent visitors, upon this country road. Could it be Richard, she wondered, returning for something he had forgotten?

She stood, straining her eyes into the dusk, waiting, while with one hand she restrained the eager dog.

Presently she saw that the machine was not a red one. It was not Richard. She was about to enter the house, when she realized that the rapidly moving car had entered the grounds. She turned on the lights in the hallway and stood, waiting, the dog at her side bristling with anger.

In a moment the automobile had stopped, and almost before she realized it, a small, foreign-looking man stood on the doorstep before her. "Madame Duvall?" he inquired, quickly, in a voice which showed plainly his nationality.

"Yes," she replied.

"Your husband! May I see him?"

"He is not at home."

The newcomer seemed greatly disturbed. "Then I fear, Madame, that I shall be obliged to wait until he returns."

"He will not return. He has gone away for sometime."

"Ah! That is indeed a calamity!" The man's face showed the keenest disappointment. "May I ask where I can find him?"

"It will be quite impossible." Grace had no intention of telling her visitor where her husband had gone. She knew too well the intricacies of his profession, for that. "You cannot find him." She made as though to close the door, and thereby terminate the interview.

The newcomer realized her intention. Slowly he raised his hand, in the palm of which showed the seal of a ring, turned inward. It was of silver, with curious figures worked into it in gold. The man glanced from the ring to Grace, eyeing her steadily. "I think, Madame," he said, with a meaning smile, "that you can trust me."

Grace recognized the ring at once. It was similar to one she herself had worn, while engaged in the memorable search for the ivory snuff box for Monsieur Lefevre, Prefect of Police of Paris. Dear old Lefevre--the friend of Richard's, and of her own! This man who stood before her must be a messenger from him.

"Come in, please," she said, quietly, and led the way to the library.

The man followed her, calling out a few words to his chauffeur as he did so. No sooner had they reached the great book-lined room, than he drew from his pocket a sealed envelope.

"Madame Duvall," he said, earnestly, "Monsieur Lefevre has cabled to his representatives in Washington a message. That message is contained in this envelope. I have instructions to deliver it to your husband immediately. In case I could not find him, I am to hand it to you. Permit, me, Madame." With a bow, he placed the message in her hand.

Grace took the envelope, broke the heavy seal which it bore, and drawing out a slip of paper, hastily read the contents. The message was from Monsieur Lefevre. It said:

My dear Duvall:

You promised, on the occasion of our last meeting, to come to me should I ever need you. I need you badly, my friend. Come at once, both you, and your dear wife. LEFEVRE.

Grace looked up at the man before her, the letter crumpled in her hand. Here was a message the urgency of which could not be denied. She knew that, had Richard been at home, he would have gone to Paris at once in response to it; for it was to Monsieur Lefevre that they in reality owed all their happiness. She recalled vividly their wedding, with the lovable old Frenchman, acting as her father for the occasion, giving away the bride. She remembered the farewell dinner at the Prefect's house, and the beautiful gift he had given her on that occasion. Evidently Monsieur Lefevre desired Richard's presence very greatly, and her own as well. The thought suddenly came to her--why not go to him?

True, Richard had left her in charge of things at home; but she knew that, for a reasonable time, at least, they would go on smoothly enough without her. Hendricks, the overseer, was a capable and honest man, devoted to her and to her husband.

She could safely leave matters in his charge. Then, too, the thought of surprising Richard on the steamer sailing the next day appealed to her sense of mischief. How astounded he would be, to find her strolling along the deck! And how delighted, too! She wondered that the thought of accompanying him had not occurred to her more strongly before. She turned to the man, who stood watching her narrowly.

"You know the contents of this message?"

"Yes, Madame," he bowed. "It came to us by cable--in cipher."

"There is a train for New York at midnight, and a steamer tomorrow morning."

"Yes, Madame."

"Can you drive me to Washington in your car?"

"I shall be delighted, Madame." The fellow's eyes sparkled with satisfaction.

"Very well. Mr. Duvall is in New York. I will take the message to him. Wait here, please, until I get some clothes together and give some orders to my servants."

In half an hour, the thing was done. Hendricks, the overseer, had been given full instructions regarding taking charge of the place, with provision for his needs in the way of money, etc., and by ten o'clock, at which time the New York sleeper was open, Grace was at the station, purchasing her ticket.

The obliging Frenchman gave her every assistance, and bade her *_bon voyage_* smilingly as he helped her aboard the train. She retired at once, and lay in her berth, reading a magazine, and picturing to herself Richard's mingled astonishment and joy at their meeting in the morning. This time, she was determined that their honeymoon should not be interrupted.

After a time, she fell asleep, and dreamed that she and Richard were sailing gaily toward Paris, in a large red touring car.

In the morning, she ate a hasty breakfast in the railway station, and took a taxicab for the steamship offices. By great good fortune, she was able to secure a cabin. Then she hastily visited a banking house where she was well known, provided herself with funds, and drove to the dock.

It wanted but half an hour till sailing time. Grace hastened to her stateroom, and busied herself in effacing the stains of her night of travel. She was determined to meet Richard looking her best.

It was not until the big steamer was passing through the Narrows that she came on deck, and began looking about for her husband. In all that crowd, she knew it would take time to find him. After searching for an hour, she felt somewhat surprised at not seeing him. After another hour had passed, her surprise turned to alarm. A hasty visit to the purser, and an examination of the sailing list, showed her the astonishing truth. Richard was not on board!

The big, mud-spattered touring car, which for the past hour had been plowing its way steadily northward from the city of Washington, hesitated for a moment before the gateway which marked the end of the well kept drive, then swept on to the house.

A man, stoutly built, keen of eye, showing haste in his every movement, sprang from the machine and ascended the veranda steps.

"Does Richard Duvall live here?" he inquired, curtly, of the smiling old colored woman who came to the door.

"'Deed he do, suh. Does you want to see him?"

"Yes. At once, please. Tell him it is most important. My name is Hodgman."

The servant eyed him with cool disfavor. "Set down, suh," she remarked stiffly. "I'll tell him you is here."

The caller watched her, as she disappeared into the house, then cast himself impatiently into a chair and lit a cigar.

He paid no attention to the attempts of two clumsy collie puppies to attract his favorable notice, but contented himself with making a quick survey of the wide comfortable veranda, with its big roomy chairs, the wicker table, bearing a great jar of red peonies, the smooth green lawns, swept by the late afternoon sun.

"Fine old place," he muttered to himself. "Wonder if I can persuade him to go?"

As the car which had brought Mr. Hodgman on his hasty trip from Washington dashed up to the front of the house, Grace Duvall, looking

very charming in a blue linen dress, was just approaching it from the rear.

She held a pair of shears in her hand, and her apron was filled to overflowing with hundred-leaf roses. "Dick--oh, Dick!" she called, as she came down the long avenue of syringas and lilacs which led to the house. "The sweet peas are nearly ready to bloom."

Richard Duvall, looking as simply pastoral as though he had never tracked an international crook to cover, raised his head from the flower bed, in which he had been carefully setting out circle after circle of geranium plants.

"Are they?" he laughed. "That's good. Now all we need is a few good hot days." He gathered up his trowel and rake, and started toward the barn.

Grace put her arm through her husband's and together they strolled across the springy green turf, their faces smiling and happy. The honeymoon showed no signs of waning.

This lovely old country place, in southern Maryland, had been one of Richard Duvall's dreams for many years, and after his marriage to Grace Ellicott, in Paris, it had become hers, as well. It was but a short time after their return to America that they decided to make it a reality.

Grace had encouraged her husband in the plan of giving up, for a time at least, his warfare against crime, his pursuit of criminals of the higher and more dangerous type, and had persuaded him to buy the farm which had once belonged to his mother's people, and settle down to the life of a country gentleman.

His office was still maintained, under the able direction of one of his assistants, but Duvall gave little or no attention to its affairs. He was glad to withdraw, for the first time in over nine years, from active work, and devote his energies to early potatoes, prize dogs, hunters, and geranium plants--and, above all, to the peaceful enjoyment of his honeymoon, and the making of Grace the happiest woman in the world.

She, on her part, found in their present situation all the joys of existence for which she had longed. With little or no liking for the monotonous round of society and its duties, and a passionate love of nature, she found in the many and complex duties of managing her part of their extensive estate a far greater happiness than any which city life could have offered her.

The considerable fortune which her husband's clever work while in Paris had restored to her, had been safely invested in well paying securities, and she found her greatest joy in utilizing at least a part of her income in beautifying their new home.

Richard had steadily refused to make any use of the money. It was a matter of pride with him, that his own savings had enabled him to purchase the property; but when Grace proposed to build an addition to the house, to provide him with a more comfortable library and work room, or insisted upon having the roads throughout the place elaborately macadamized, he was obliged to submit to her wishes. In this way, they planned and built for the future, together.

The farm was a large one, comprising some two hundred acres, and the old stone house surrounded by white oaks and tulip poplars had once been a show place, before the declining fortunes of its former owners had caused it to fall into a state of mellow and time-honored decay. Now all was changed. Grace, with the able assistance of old Uncle Abe Turner, a relic of ante bellum times, spent hours daily in bringing order out of the chaos of tangled myrtle and ivy, overgrown box and hedge, thickets of syringa and lilac bushes and weed-grown lawns.

It was a gigantic task, yet a joyous one--as it ever is, to those who came to it with the love of nature in their hearts. To Grace, the plants and shrubs, the great strong oaks, the towering poplars, each seemed to

have a distinct personality. Under her energetic hand, the place once more took on the aspect of well kept and orderly beauty which was such a contrast to its former down-at-the-heels appearance. It seemed as though the growing things realized the personal interest she took in them, and responded as they never respond to the ignorant or unsympathetic.

Richard was concerned with his fields of timothy and clover, his early corn, his berries and fruit trees, to say nothing of his collies, his prize cows and Kentucky horses. In such a life, time never hangs heavy--he was busy studying, planning, working, from morning to night, and his active mind soon convinced his capable overseer and the farm hands as well that, although Richard Duvall was by no means a professional farmer, he could still show them a thing or two when it came to the rotation of crops, the spraying of fruit trees, or the proper treatment of worn out soils. These were aspects of farming life which the hide-bound conservatism of the local farmers caused them to jeer at, as newfangled notions gotten from books. Later when they saw the man who farmed with his head as well as his hands gather in two bushels where they had barely been able to secure one, they began to sit up and take notice.

"I got the new hedges all set out today," Grace went on, as she patted her husband's rather grimy hand. "They will be charming, against the gray stone of the wall. But we must have new gate posts. The old ones are likely to tumble into the road at any moment."

"I'll have Martin come out tomorrow and look them over. There's plenty of stone--down in the lower pasture. Why not carry the wall right along the whole front of the property? It ought not to cost a great deal."

"We will. And I'm going to have a new spring house built, too. The old one is falling to pieces." She looked up at her husband as he deposited the rake in the tool room and they started up the shaded walk toward the house. "Aren't you glad, Dick, that we're _alive_?"

He pressed her arm. "Well--I should say so, little girl! Why do you ask me that?"

"Oh--you know what your friends all said--that a man might as well be dead, as buried out here in the country. I think they are the ones who are not alive--cooped up in the city. Don't you?"

Richard nodded. He was thinking for the moment of his former active life--when some battle of wits with a noted crook had kept him sleepless for nights. "It's--rather different," he laughed. "Isn't it?"

"Yes--and much better. Don't you think so, dear? You wouldn't want to go back to it--would you?"

"Not for anything in the world," he assured her, as he swept the newly seeded lawns with a contented glance. "I liked the other life, of course--the excitement, the danger of it; but this is better--much better. Here, Don!" he called to a graceful collie which was barking vociferously at some distant vehicle in the road. "Come here and be quiet." He turned with Grace to the great vine-covered side porch and sank contentedly into a rocking chair. "Well, little girl--it's been a busy day, and I'm tired. We got the early rye all cut on the lower field today. Guess we'll put in late potatoes, after it's plowed. Here, Don--come back here! What's the matter with you?" He rose and whistled to the dog, which was bounding across the lawn in the direction of the road. "Come back, I say!"

"It's someone coming in," said Grace, uneasily. "In a machine. I wonder who it can be?"

"Possibly Hudson, the veterinary. He was coming today, to look at that heifer."

"He hasn't a machine like that. This is a big touring car." She turned to her husband. "Hadn't you better go in and fix up a bit, Dick? It may be company."

Duvall laughed. "If it is, they'll have to take me as I am," he said; then again called to the dog.

A moment later the servant, who had interviewed the caller at the front door, came out to the side porch. "Gentleman to see you, Mr. Duvall," she said. "Seems to be in a powerful hurry, too."

"All right, Aunt Lucy," said Duvall as he made his way to the front of the house.

"Is this Richard Duvall?" the visitor asked, in a quick, almost peremptory tone, as the detective joined him.

"Yes. That is my name. What can I do for you?"

The newcomer rose nervously from his chair and began chewing upon his half-smoked cigar. "Had the devil of a time to find you, Mr. Duvall."

"You came out from Washington, I suppose," remarked the detective, wondering what his visitor could want with him.

"Yes. Got your address from Hicks, of the Treasury Department. He said you were about twelve miles out. I seem to have come about twenty."

"Perhaps you went around by way of Laurel. It's much further, that way. What can I do for you, Mr.-----" He paused interrogatively.

The man looked up at him quickly. "My name's Hodgman--Thomas Hodgman--of New York. I represent John Stapleton."

"John Stapleton, the banker?" asked Duvall, surprised.

"Yes. You know him, don't you?"

"Yes. Quite well. I handled a case for him once--some years ago. Why?" Duvall's face became grave. He began to realize that the interview was likely to become suddenly important. John Stapleton, the multi-millionaire banker, was not in the habit of sending messengers to anyone, without good reason.

"So he said," went on Mr. Hodgman, resuming his chair. "That's why I'm here. He wants you to take another--"

"Another?"

"Yes. Another case. Quick."

"It's quite out of the question."

"Nonsense! This is important. Money's no object; name your own terms."

"It isn't a question of terms, Mr. Hodgman. I have withdrawn, for the time being at least, from active professional work."

"I know." The visitor flicked the ashes impatiently from his cigar and sought nervously in his pockets for a match. "That's what they told me at your office, in New York. Said you were on your honeymoon, and didn't want to be bothered."

"That's true. I don't."

"I told Mr. Stapleton that. He sent me to see you; said you might change your mind, when you heard about the case."

"It is quite impossible. I do not care to take up any detective work at present."

Mr. Hodgman fidgeted nervously in his chair. "You must listen to what I have to say, Mr. Duvall, at any rate. Mr. Stapleton would not hear to my returning, after seeing you, without having explained to you the nature

of the case."

Duvall leaned back, and began to fondle the long moist nose of the collie which sat beside his chair. "If you insist, Mr. Hodgman, I will listen, of course; but I assure you it will be quite useless."

"I hope not. The case is most distressing. Mr. Stapleton's only child has been kidnapped!"

"Kidnapped!" Duvall sat up with a start, every line of his face tense with professional interest. "When? Where?"

"In Paris. The cablegram arrived this morning. I don't know the details. Mrs. Stapleton has been spending the winter abroad. Mr. Stapleton was to join her this month. She is living at their house in the Avenue Kleber, Paris. The child was out walking with a nurse. It has been stolen. That's all I know."

"When did it happen?"

"Yesterday morning. Mrs. Stapleton did not cable at first, believing that the boy would be found during the course of the day. Naturally she did not wish to alarm her husband needlessly, and the Prefect of Police, it seems, had assured her that the child would undoubtedly be recovered before night. It wasn't. This morning Mr. Stapleton got a long cablegram from his wife, telling him of the boy's disappearance. He's half crazy over the thing."

"What is he going to do?"

"I don't know. He sent me to see you at once. I'm his secretary, you know. When I couldn't find you in New York, he told me to come here. I arrived in Washington an hour ago, and came right out. Mr. Stapleton said if any man on earth could find his boy for him, you could."

"I suppose the thing is a matter of blackmail--ransom--"

"Very likely. They will probably demand a huge sum. No requests have been made, as yet, so far as I know. These fellows usually wait a week or two, before showing their hand, to give the unfortunate parents a chance to worry themselves half to death. I suppose they figure that then they'll be more likely to come across with the money."

"Yes. That's the scheme. A rotten business, too. Hanging is too good for such wretches!"

"That's what I say. Of course you can understand how Mr. Stapleton feels."

"Of course. He will sail at once, I suppose."

"That's the worst of it. He can't go till Saturday. Tomorrow's Thursday--that's three days off. There's a deal on here involving millions--something he's been working to put through for months. Of course he doesn't consider anything like that, when it comes to his child; but he's got to think of his associates--men who have intrusted their money to him. He can't possibly sail before Saturday. He wants you to go ahead of him. There's a fast boat leaving in the morning. You could take that. We can have a conference tonight. It will mean mighty quick work, though." He glanced at his watch. "After six now. There's no train till midnight--the sleeper. But Mr. Stapleton told me to charter a special. We can be in New York by one o'clock in the morning, if we start right now." He looked at Duvall in eager expectancy.

The latter frowned, his gaze wandering off to the distant fields, where the newly plowed earth reminded him of his plans for the morrow. Yet here was a man, a friend, who had helped him much, in the earlier days of his career, begging him to come to his assistance in a matter almost of life or death. It was a difficult decision that he was called upon to make. The thought of leaving Grace hurt him deeply; yet she would prefer to stay behind, in case he should go, to look after the affairs of the

place. With the assistance of the overseer and the hands, he knew that she could manage everything during a brief absence on his part--it seemed unlikely that the matter would require more than three or four weeks, at the outside.

Mr. Hodgman broke in upon his thoughts. "You'll go, Mr. Duvall? Mr. Stapleton is depending on you. He has the utmost faith in your abilities. He knows your familiarity with Paris--the work you have done there, in the past. He believes that, by intrusting the matter to a fellow countryman, he will get his boy back again. He hasn't much faith in foreign detectives. He's set his heart on having you start for Paris at once. I can't go back and tell him that you have refused." Mr. Hodgman spoke in a loud and earnest voice, due to his very evident excitement. Neither he nor Duvall noticed that Grace had approached them, and was standing in the open doorway of the house.

Before the detective had an opportunity to reply, Grace spoke. "What is it, Richard?" she inquired, quietly.

Duvall rose, presented Mr. Hodgman to his wife, and bade her sit down. Then, in a few words, he acquainted her with the circumstances which led to the latter's visit.

"Think of that poor mother, alone there in Paris," Hodgman supplemented. "Think of her suffering, her anxiety. I realize how much we are asking, to take Mr. Duvall away from you, especially at this time; but, it is Mr. Stapleton's only child--a boy of six. You can understand how he must feel."

Grace nodded. "Yes, I can understand," she said, slowly, then turned to her husband.

"What do you think, dear?" he asked her.

"I think, Richard, that you had better go."

Mr. Hodgman sprang to his feet, and, coming over to Grace, took her hand. He knew that his battle was won. "I thank you, Mrs. Duvall," he said, "on Mr. Stapleton's account, as well as on my own. He will appreciate deeply what you have done, the sacrifice you are making, and he will not forget it." He looked again at his watch nervously, the anxiety he felt clearly evident in his every movement. "We had best start at once, Mr. Duvall."

Duvall rose. "I will join you in a short while, Mr. Hodgman. I wish to say a few words to my wife." He took Grace's arm and drew her within the house, leaving Mr. Hodgman pacing nervously up and down the veranda.

The conference between Grace and her husband was short. Each realized the distress which tore at the other's heart, as well as the dangers he would in all probability be called upon to face; yet they met the situation calmly. "You will not be gone long," she told him. "I can manage very well."

"I know you can, dear," he said, pressing her to him. "I'm not worried about the place. You can run that as well as I can. It's you, I'm worried about--leaving you"--

"I'll be all right," she assured him, in spite of her tears. "I have Aunt Lucy, and old Uncle Abe, and Rose, and Jennie. I won't be so _very_ lonely. And you will be very careful--and--and come back soon--won't you?"

"Of course, dear. Very soon. Now I'd better get a few things together."

Fifteen minutes later Grace Duvall stood on the steps of the veranda, watching the flying automobile as it rapidly became a little red blur in the distant road. It was nearly dark. The frogs in the patch of marsh in the meadow were piping dismally. She shivered, and a great sense of desolation came over her. She sank into a chair and wept, while Don, inserting his long white muzzle between her hands, strove to lick away

her tears.

She heard Aunt Lucy, the old negro cook, singing away at her work in the kitchen, accompanied by Uncle Abe, who occupied a bench on the back porch. Everything seemed strangely peaceful, and lonely, too, now that Richard had gone. She patted the eager head of the collie. "We'll have to make the best of it, Don," she said, and rose to enter the house.

Suddenly far down the road she heard the chugging of an automobile. They were not frequent visitors, upon this country road. Could it be Richard, she wondered, returning for something he had forgotten?

She stood, straining her eyes into the dusk, waiting, while with one hand she restrained the eager dog.

Presently she saw that the machine was not a red one. It was not Richard. She was about to enter the house, when she realized that the rapidly moving car had entered the grounds. She turned on the lights in the hallway and stood, waiting, the dog at her side bristling with anger.

In a moment the automobile had stopped, and almost before she realized it, a small, foreign-looking man stood on the doorstep before her. "Madame Duvall?" he inquired, quickly, in a voice which showed plainly his nationality.

"Yes," she replied.

"Your husband! May I see him?"

"He is not at home."

The newcomer seemed greatly disturbed. "Then I fear, Madame, that I shall be obliged to wait until he returns."

"He will not return. He has gone away for sometime."

"Ah! That is indeed a calamity!" The man's face showed the keenest disappointment. "May I ask where I can find him?"

"It will be quite impossible." Grace had no intention of telling her visitor where her husband had gone. She knew too well the intricacies of his profession, for that. "You cannot find him." She made as though to close the door, and thereby terminate the interview.

The newcomer realized her intention. Slowly he raised his hand, in the palm of which showed the seal of a ring, turned inward. It was of silver, with curious figures worked into it in gold. The man glanced from the ring to Grace, eyeing her steadily. "I think, Madame," he said, with a meaning smile, "that you can trust me."

Grace recognized the ring at once. It was similar to one she herself had worn, while engaged in the memorable search for the ivory snuff box for Monsieur Lefevre, Prefect of Police of Paris. Dear old Lefevre--the friend of Richard's, and of her own! This man who stood before her must be a messenger from him.

"Come in, please," she said, quietly, and led the way to the library.

The man followed her, calling out a few words to his chauffeur as he did so. No sooner had they reached the great book-lined room, than he drew from his pocket a sealed envelope.

"Madame Duvall," he said, earnestly, "Monsieur Lefevre has cabled to his representatives in Washington a message. That message is contained in this envelope. I have instructions to deliver it to your husband immediately. In case I could not find him, I am to hand it to you. Permit, me, Madame." With a bow, he placed the message in her hand.

Grace took the envelope, broke the heavy seal which it bore, and drawing out a slip of paper, hastily read the contents. The message was from

Monsieur Lefevre. It said:

My dear Duvall:

You promised, on the occasion of our last meeting, to come to me should I ever need you. I need you badly, my friend. Come at once, both you, and your dear wife. LEFEVRE.

Grace looked up at the man before her, the letter crumpled in her hand. Here was a message the urgency of which could not be denied. She knew that, had Richard been at home, he would have gone to Paris at once in response to it; for it was to Monsieur Lefevre that they in reality owed all their happiness. She recalled vividly their wedding, with the lovable old Frenchman, acting as her father for the occasion, giving away the bride. She remembered the farewell dinner at the Prefect's house, and the beautiful gift he had given her on that occasion. Evidently Monsieur Lefevre desired Richard's presence very greatly, and her own as well. The thought suddenly came to her--why not go to him?

True, Richard had left her in charge of things at home; but she knew that, for a reasonable time, at least, they would go on smoothly enough without her. Hendricks, the overseer, was a capable and honest man, devoted to her and to her husband.

She could safely leave matters in his charge. Then, too, the thought of surprising Richard on the steamer sailing the next day appealed to her sense of mischief. How astounded he would be, to find her strolling along the deck! And how delighted, too! She wondered that the thought of accompanying him had not occurred to her more strongly before. She turned to the man, who stood watching her narrowly.

"You know the contents of this message?"

"Yes, Madame," he bowed. "It came to us by cable--in cipher."

"There is a train for New York at midnight, and a steamer tomorrow morning."

"Yes, Madame."

"Can you drive me to Washington in your car?"

"I shall be delighted, Madame." The fellow's eyes sparkled with satisfaction.

"Very well. Mr. Duvall is in New York. I will take the message to him. Wait here, please, until I get some clothes together and give some orders to my servants."

In half an hour, the thing was done. Hendricks, the overseer, had been given full instructions regarding taking charge of the place, with provision for his needs in the way of money, etc., and by ten o'clock, at which time the New York sleeper was open, Grace was at the station, purchasing her ticket.

The obliging Frenchman gave her every assistance, and bade her *bon voyage* smilingly as he helped her aboard the train. She retired at once, and lay in her berth, reading a magazine, and picturing to herself Richard's mingled astonishment and joy at their meeting in the morning. This time, she was determined that their honeymoon should not be interrupted.

After a time, she fell asleep, and dreamed that she and Richard were sailing gaily toward Paris, in a large red touring car.

In the morning, she ate a hasty breakfast in the railway station, and took a taxicab for the steamship offices. By great good fortune, she was able to secure a cabin. Then she hastily visited a banking house where she was well known, provided herself with funds, and drove to the dock.

It wanted but half an hour till sailing time. Grace hastened to her

stateroom, and busied herself in effacing the stains of her night of travel. She was determined to meet Richard looking her best.

It was not until the big steamer was passing through the Narrows that she came on deck, and began looking about for her husband. In all that crowd, she knew it would take time to find him. After searching for an hour, she felt somewhat surprised at not seeing him. After another hour had passed, her surprise turned to alarm. A hasty visit to the purser, and an examination of the sailing list, showed her the astonishing truth. Richard was not on board!