

***CLARA LOUISE
BURNHAM***

***INSTEAD
OF THE THORN***

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Clara Louise Burnham

Instead of the Thorn

A Novel

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CHAPTER I

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AT THE SOUTH SHORE

On a June evening, Mr. and Mrs. Radcliffe were entertaining their New York friends the Lindsays at dinner at the South Shore Club. The dining-room, with its spacious semicircle of glass, is a place where Chicago may entertain New York with complacency, for the windows give upon Lake Michigan, whose billows break so close to the border of velvety grass that the effect is of dining on a yacht.

The Lindsays were enamored of the great marine view, lovely in the long June evening, and with many an admiring comment watched the white gulls hover and wheel above the sunset water.

Mrs. Radcliffe was a stout, white-haired woman, costumed with disregard of expense, and she habitually wore an expression of countenance which betokened general optimism.

Mrs. Lindsay, of about her friend's age, was spare and lined of face, offering a contrast to the hostess's plump smoothness. She again raised a jeweled lorgnette to watch the wheeling gulls.

"Oh, Chicago wouldn't be anything without the lake," remarked Mrs. Radcliffe complacently.

"And this clubhouse is such a perfect place to watch it," returned her friend.

"We have a very charming ballroom here," said Mrs. Radcliffe. "I'm sorry it isn't a formal dance night."

The orchestra was playing a Hesitation Waltz, which reminded her. For the Hesitation had not yet been driven from the field by troops who cantered, and those strains were always sufficient to people the spacious ballroom until it was alive with dancers, old and young. Indeed, as one comic paper had it that season, "He who does not hesitate is lost." Just when or why silver threads among the gold ceased to relegate advancing years to a shelf above the dancers, it would be hard to say; but certain it is that the rosy walls behind the pure white columns in the popular ballroom threw their diffused and becoming light that season upon sometimes agile but always determined middle age, as well as upon slender youth.

There is a point, however, where Terpsichore stands inexorably and says, "Thus far and no farther": a point where the wistful dancer realizes that all is Hesitation, and the Waltz balks. This is reached in the matron at the weight of two hundred pounds, and Mrs. Radcliffe had arrived there; so, like the spinster of the story, who settled down to contentment with her lot when she had "stopped strugglin'," Mrs. Radcliffe enjoyed peacefully her visits to the club, and invaded the ballroom only as a spectator.

She looked up now at her friend. "Have you and Mr. Lindsay joined the one-stepping legion?" she asked.

"No, we have not. We have children and rheumatism. You know that does make a difference." Mrs. Lindsay's bright, nervous eyes snapped, and she showed a set of artistic teeth.

Mrs. Radcliffe shrugged a comfortable shoulder. "Well, I have one child, but that wouldn't stop me. He has a child of

his own. Let him attend to his own affairs. I haven't the rheumatism, but neither have I any breath to spare. You look at me and you see that."

The two ladies laughed and sipped their coffee. Their husbands, with chairs moved sidewise, were talking in low tones over their cigarettes.

"We have such a charming ballroom!" repeated the hostess. "It makes me hate my flesh to go in there; but Mr. Radcliffe says it's the terror of his life that I may lose an ounce and want to dance, and he is always urging delicious salads on me." The plump speaker shook again, till the diamonds on her ample breast scintillated. "He's the laziest man in Chicago. I suppose I ought to be thankful that he doesn't improve his slimness and the shining hour by coming and dancing with these buds. Lots of other gray heads do, and the buds can't help themselves, poor little things. Isn't that an attractive nosegay over there?" The speaker indicated the spot where twenty-four young girls and men were gayly dining at a round table, whose roses, violets, and lilies-of-the-valley strove with the material feast.

"My daughter-in-law, Harriet, is giving that dinner for her sister, who has just graduated from our University. If you want to see a spoiled child of fortune, look at Linda Barry now. That is she, holding up the glass of grape-juice. Aren't her dimples wonderful? Look at those brown eyes sparkle. Doesn't her very hair look as if electricity were running through the locks? I tell you she's a handful! I've always been so thankful that Henry chose her sister Harriet. Such a quiet, sensible young woman, Harriet is. She wouldn't let them have any wine, you see. She says it sounds like Fourth

of July all the year around at this club, and she's terribly particular about Henry. That's Harriet, sitting with her back to us: the one with the velvet around her throat. I admire my daughter-in-law, but I always feel she thinks I'm too frivolous, and spend too much time playing cards."

The speaker's husband caught a part of what she was saying.

"Yes, Lindsay," he said. "You knew one of Barry's daughters married my boy, didn't you? That's the other one facing us."

Mr. Lindsay turned his iron-gray head until he could observe the smiling girl, offering a grape-juice toast. The family of the head of the firm of Barry & Co. was of interest to him.

Some one had stuck a spray of leaves in the thick, bright waves of her hair.

"Make a corking study of a Bacchante, if some one should paint her just as she is," remarked the New York man.

"Shades of my daughter-in-law—if she should hear you! She'd say that Linda had outwitted her after all." Mr. Radcliffe smiled across at his wife. "Harriet is the modern progressive woman,—goes in for Suffrage and Eugenics and all that; but with the reserve and quiet of a Puritan. She can't understand Linda, who is athletic, a comrade of boys, the idol of her father, and a law unto herself."

Mr. Lindsay was regarding the girl, who was smiling confidently and making a speech inaudible from the distant corner. "She looks as if she had the world by the tail," he remarked.

"That about describes her state of mind," responded the other. "Life has been a triumphal progress for her, so far. She hasn't had a mother for ten years, and her father couldn't spare her to go away to school, so here she has been educated, right in our burg, though she's a millionaire's daughter. You've been in that old-fashioned stone pile of a house of Barry's up there on Michigan Avenue? I should think Barry'd be sick of keeping a boarding-house for servants, and I've told him so."

"He's sick of something," returned Mr. Lindsay quietly, "or so it seemed to my wife and me. We dined there last night."

"Oh, you did?"

"Yes. The daughter wasn't there. Her father said she was away at one of her graduation festivities. What's the matter with Barry?"

The speaker's eyes left the dimpling girl with the dancing eyes and came back to his friend as he asked the quiet question.

"Why, nothing that I know of," replied the other, surprised. "Cares of state, I suppose."

"No rumors on the street?" The slow question was put in a still lower tone.

"Haven't heard any," was the quick reply.

The other nodded. "Good," he said.

"Why, have you?"

"There's some talk in the East about the Antlers project. Probably nothing but gossip."

"Nothing else, I'm sure. All these big irrigation deals have something of a black eye just now, but Barry & Co. know what they're about. They never buy a pig in a poke."

"What are you saying about pigs, Cyrus?" asked Mrs. Radcliffe smartly. "You know it's a tabooed subject in our best families."

Mr. Radcliffe paid no attention to her in his disturbance. "You know my nephew, Bertram King? He came straight out of college into that bank, and has been there nearly ten years. Barry likes him, and he's had good luck, and I think another year'll see him in the firm. Everybody believes that Barry doesn't go into any big deal unless King approves. I see Bertram quite often. He's over there in that dinner party now: sitting on Harriet's right. You've met my daughter-in-law?"

"Oh, yes, and King, too. He dined with us last night. Seemed to be a brainy chap."

"Oh, he's sedate as they make 'em. I often think he's the one that ought to have married Harriet. See Henry sitting between those pink and blue girls, and keeping 'em in a roar? He gets his frivolity from his mother."

Mrs. Radcliffe drew down the corners of her lips. "Frivolity that captured Harriet Barry, you'll notice. There they go," she added, as the gay young people at the round table pushed back their chairs; "there they go to their dance. Happy young things!" Mrs. Radcliffe sighed. "With all their troubles before them," she added, and the perfunctoriness of the addition made Mr. Lindsay smile.

"I hope they all weather it as well as you have, Mrs. Radcliffe," he said.

The host smiled too as they rose from the table.

"So say we all of us," he remarked. "Let's go and have a game. Do you play nullo, Mrs. Lindsay?"

"I play everything I can get my hands on," she returned promptly.



CHAPTER II

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HOT TEA

Linda Barry was looking in the glass. She liked her own reflection, and no wonder. She was coolly critical of her own appearance, however, and granted it her approval only when her costume and coiffure reached the standard of her own prescription. Whether any one else criticized her was a matter of profound indifference. She had been known in her class in the University as a good fellow, a good sport, carelessly generous, and confident of her own powers, physical and mental.

Emerson says, if you would have friends you must know how to do without them. Linda Barry was a born leader and took her friends for granted. She never went out of her way to make one. That sort of girl always has some enemies, impotently resenting all that she arrogates to herself and that her admirers grant to her. But such clashes as had taken place left no mark on Linda. Triumphant and careless of triumph, she emerged from college life and asked of an obliging world, "What next?"

She was looking in the glass now, this Sunday afternoon, because she had been romping with her nephew, aged five, and he had pulled her hat awry.

She had dropped in for tea at her sister's apartment by the lake. It was two days after the dinner dance, and she was still feeling high approval of Harriet for the way in which she had managed the whole affair.

Bertram King was sitting opposite her now, holding the panting small boy, whose cheeks were red with exertion, and who chuckled with joy at having won a sudden and tempestuous battle by the simple move of jerking his aunt's hat over her eyes.

"I beated Aunt Linda. I beated her," he shrieked gayly.

"Hush, hush, Harry dear," said his mother from the tea-table. "Aunt Linda lets you get too excited."

Aunt Linda, whose very presence was suggestive of intoxicating rough and tumble to her nephew, winked and nodded at him from the glass.

"I'll catch you alone some day," she said, with a significance which filled him with ecstatic terror.

He jumped up and down in the encircling arms.

"No, you won't, no, you won't!" he shouted. "Uncle Bertram won't let you." The child's active arms caught the ribbon that held his protector's eyeglasses, and jerked them from his nose.

"Now, Linda, Linda," protested the mother, looking proudly at the lusty youngster, whose rumpled hair and floating tie-ends told of the bout just finished. "Listen, Harry, there's father coming. If I let you take him his tea, will you be very careful?"

Linda, rehabilitated, turned from the mirror and seated herself near the window.

"Let him bring me *my* tea," she said, gazing at the child with eyes that set him again to effervescing with delicious apprehension.

"No, *no*, she'll grab me!" yelled the boy, on a yet higher pitch of joy.

"Linda dear, it's Sunday. Let's have a little quiet," pleaded her sister.

At this moment, the head of the house entered, and his hopeful broke his bonds and, rushing to meet him, was lifted to a safe perch from which he looked down in rosy triumph on his dearest foe.

"Hello, everybody," said Henry Radcliffe. "If there isn't the girl that knows everything—including how to dance! You're a bird, Linda. How are you, Bertram?" The men shook hands, then the host approached the tea-table and kissed his wife.

"Put Harry right down here, dear. He's going to be a little gentleman and pass the tea."

"But not to Aunt Linda," shouted the child.

"No, no," agreed his mother pacifically. "You can take her tea to Uncle Bertram, and he'll pass it."

"Look out, Uncle Bertram, she'll tickle you," advised the boy out of long experience.

Linda, leaning lazily back in her armchair, met King's gray eyes and gave a low laugh.

"Just imagine such *lèse majesté*," she said, and the provoking arch of her lips made Bertram feel, as he always did, that she was laughing at him, not with him. He was too used to it to be disconcerted. He had a serious, even-featured, smooth-shaven face, light hair which would have liked to wave had its owner been willing, and short-sighted eyes, which, nevertheless, saw far enough to understand Linda Barry and deplore her.

"She'll catch your heels, too, if you go upstairs in front of her," continued the small boy, chuckling breathlessly as he

watched his lazily reclining adored one, the sparks in whose eyes gave every hope that she was as ready as ever to spring.

"That sort of thing isn't good for a child. It overexcites him," remarked Bertram, unsmiling, dangling his eyeglasses by the ribbon.

"Dear, dear," said Linda. "Excuse me! I meant, Hear, hear!"

"Now, Harry darling," said Mrs. Radcliffe, "can you be careful? Father will sit between you and Aunt Linda, and don't go the other side of him *at all*. Do you understand?" Then to her sister, "You know how I value these cups, Linda. Please be good."

Linda stifled a yawn behind her white-gloved hand and looked very good indeed.

"Henry and I," went on the hostess complacently, "think we can't begin any too soon to make Harry at home in the drawing-room. Why, already he can stand and drink his cambric tea, and manage his cup as well as any of you, can't you, dear?"

Harry, finding himself under discussion, ceased smiling and scuffed violently across the rug.

"That isn't pretty, darling. Now, this is for Uncle Bertram to take to Aunt Linda. Come here. Now, be careful."

Henry Radcliffe took a seat near his wife's table, and the little boy seized a lettuce sandwich and took a bite of it before he attempted the cup.

"Oh, oh, put that down, Harry. You can have it in a minute." The mother laughed as she placed the cup in the child's hands. "He wouldn't eat a bit of lettuce at his own

supper, but because grown-ups are having it he wants it!" she remarked. "That's a good boy," as the transit of the cup was made safely. "Now, come here and get one for Uncle Bertram."

As the child obeyed, his mother continued: "I must tell you a very good joke Harry made the other day. He was playing with the cat, and she stretched herself out on the rug, and he lay down with his head on her and said, 'This is my caterpillar.' Wasn't that clever?"

Harry glanced around the assembly rather sheepishly.

"Bully for the boy!" laughed his father. "Come here, Turk."

"Now, don't romp, Henry," pleaded his wife. "Here's Father's tea, Harry dear. Take it nicely. He's learning such a number of German words these days. Fräulein says he has a real talent for languages." The mother regarded her darling fondly. The child's gayety had entirely subsided, and he took his father's cup stolidly. Mrs. Radcliffe gave a low laugh as she continued, "*Now*, whenever he uses a big word in English and isn't quite sure that it is right, he says very carelessly, 'Oh, I said that in Germany.'" The soft laugh increased in merriment, and the speaker looked at her sister and King for appreciation. Linda laughed.

The subject of her remarks, having landed his father's cup safely in the paternal hands, eased his embarrassment by stamping again up and down the rug, making guttural noises in his throat.

"Now, dear, if you're going to do that you'll have to go away," said his mother, and, the German nurse appearing at that moment in the doorway, she accosted her: "Is Harry's supper ready? Yes? All right. Go on, then, darling, we'll

excuse you. Fräulein has your nice supper all ready. I'll come and see you in a little while."

When the child, too self-conscious even to exchange parting hostilities with Aunt Linda, had left the room, Bertram King looked up from stirring his tea.

"Henry," he said shortly, "have I your leave to lecture Harriet?"

"Dear me, Bertram," ejaculated Linda, "are you going to take on another? You'll soon not have time to go the rounds, and the world will go to smash!"

King didn't look at her.

Henry Radcliffe closed his hand over his wife's as it rested on the handle of the teapot.

"Certainly, if you can think of anything to lecture her about."

"Can't *you*?" As King asked it he rose and, coming to the tea-table, took a plate of sandwiches and carried them to Linda, and then back to Henry, finally setting them on the table and helping himself.

His cousin shook his head. "Rather not!" he ejaculated. "I hope I know my place. I trip after Harriet at a respectful distance." This time he picked up his wife's hand and kissed it.

"This is fulsome," murmured Linda from her armchair.

"Then you share the lecture, that's all," returned King firmly, resuming his seat. "Here's my text: 'No one should ever talk about a child before him—or her.'"

"Harriet has only one, please remember, Bertram," protested Linda kindly.

Mrs. Radcliffe set down her teacup, and color began to come up in her cheeks as she regarded King. "Bertram, I never—" she began, for he paused. "It's the rarest thing! But here where we're all Harry's own people"—a little rigidity crept into the speaker's voice—"I didn't mean to bore anybody. Don't you"—with defiance—"don't you think that was very witty for a child of his age, that about the caterpillar? I keep his sayings in a book, and he's really a remarkable baby. It isn't at all because he's ours, is it, Henry? Oh"—with sudden impatience—"it's foolish of me to talk to you about it, Bertram. What do you know about children!"

"I've been one; and I see one occasionally; and I marvel to Heaven to see how parents cut themselves out of half the fun they might have with them. You don't seem to have grasped my text. People shouldn't talk *about* children *before* them."

"Of course, I wouldn't *scold* a child before others," said Harriet, with some excitement. "Now, Bertram, you know a lot about bonds that I don't, but I know a lot about children that you don't. I'm not just an animal mother. I've looked into pedagogy and kindergarten principles. Harry can work beautifully in cardboard already; but, of course, if it bores you to hear about him—"

"Yes," interrupted King, "parents should also take into consideration that the general public doesn't care a copper to hear anything about their children; but I'm not the general public where Harry is concerned. I'll guarantee to sit between you and Henry and listen to an antiphonal recital of

everything Harry has said and done since he was born, and not yawn once—with one provision."

Harriet flashed him a look. "I don't care to hear your provision. You'll not be called to the martyrdom."

"And the provision is," went on Bertram equably, "that Harry shall not be present. Now, Henry, if you will kindly place your hand over Harriet's mouth, I will proceed."

Linda stirred. There was something about Bertram King's arrogation of superiority that always exasperated her.

"How about my placing my hand kindly over *your* mouth?" she suggested.

He turned and looked directly at her. "I should enjoy that very much," he returned.

Linda was disconcerted for only a moment, then her provoking smile shone.

"Wonderful facilities for biting me, I suppose," she remarked.

"Now, if the children will all be quiet a moment," said Bertram, turning back, "I will take up the cudgels for the rising generation. One of the most charming things on earth, probably the most charming, is a child, unconscious of itself; the most graceful, the most winning; untrammelled in their little speeches as in their movements. Then some grown-up discusses them in their presence, no matter whether flatteringly or not. Their grace changes to awkwardness, their unconsciousness to embarrassment, their freedom to reserve or to resentful, meaningless noises such as those with which Harry lately favored the company. Under moments of flattery they show some chestiness and conceit at times, but for the most part they're stolid under

the infliction, and their parents and friends have lost all the joy of their charm until they can forgive by forgetting. One of the bitterest leaves of their tree of knowledge is discovering that the well-meaning giants around them are laughing at them, not with them."

"Say, there's something in that, Harriet," remarked her husband good-naturedly. "Harry grew as red as a turkey-cock when you told about his excusing himself for using wrong words. I noticed it."

Linda nodded in King's direction. "It's surely a duty Bertram owes to a benighted world to marry."

He turned to her again with the same direct, quick movement as before.

"Very well. Will you have me, Linda?"

She met his gaze, finding some difficulty in giving her own just the right proportion of light scorn.

"I should like to see myself married to you!" she exclaimed slowly.

"Would you?" he responded with lively interest, and rising, strode across to her, while she retreated to the furthest corner of her chair. "Then we're of the same mind for once." He seized her hand, while the teacup in the other rocked and tinkled in a manner to cause the liveliest apprehension in its owner. "Witness, both of you. Linda and I are engaged."

The girl's strong heart pounded violently as she found that vigorous efforts could not free her hand. Color burned her cheeks. Her father's factotum had never seemed to consider her affairs or herself as of any importance, and her

habit of thought toward him was an effort to assure him of absolute reciprocation.

"Let me go," she said sharply. "Don't be silly."

"Come on," he urged. "Let's give your father a pleasant surprise. Henry, Harriet, speak up. Tell her what's for her good."

Harriet, the conventional, was anxious under the growing anger in her sister's dark eyes.

"Behave, Bertram," she said severely. "I don't like joking on those subjects. Go back to your chair and I'll give you a lecture much more sensible than yours to me."

"I'm not joking. I believe I could make something fine out of Linda." He gazed down into the girl's face as he spoke.

Henry Radcliffe laughed derisively. "You poor nut," he remarked. "Better not try the Cave-Dweller stunt on Linda. The club would be likely to change hands."

The captured fingers struggled a moment more, while the two pairs of eyes exchanged their combative gaze.

There had never been any jocose passages between the girl and her father's favorite co-worker. There had been moments when she had even felt desire for his approval. The present audacity amazed and disconcerted her, and coercion was simply hateful.

Finding effort to free herself futile, she set her tea down on the arm of her chair, and quickly taking up the cup, deliberately poured the hot, creamy liquid over as much of her captor's cuff as was visible. The cuff collapsed, the tea was hot. King abruptly dropped the girl's hand, and set himself to wiping his own with his handkerchief.

"Now, will you be good?" laughed Henry; but Harriet fixed anxious eyes on the arm of the chair, hoping that Bertram's hand and cuff had received the whole of the baptism, and groaned within herself over the talents of her young sister as a trouble-maker.

"And who calls it 'the cup that cheers'?" remarked King drily.

CHAPTER III

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COLD WATER

June heat dropped down on Chicago promptly that year and caused the Barrys to plan to leave town earlier than it suited the banker to go. Indeed, no weather condition ever made Linda's father willing to leave business.

One evening, a few days before their intended departure, Bertram King came to the house to see his employer. The heavy door stood open after the hot day, and with the familiarity of an intimate he stepped inside, intending to take his way to his old friend's den, but in the hall he met Linda: Linda, blooming, dressed in white, and altogether lovely to look upon. Over her arm she carried a silk motor coat and a chiffon veil.

The young man's face looked haggard by comparison with her fresh beauty, and he smiled unconscious admiration as he greeted the exhilaration of her breezy appearance.

"Father is out," she said, "and I'm so glad!"

"Why? Did you want to see me alone?"

"I can't see you at all. I'm going out."

"But he hasn't come yet."

"Who?"

"Your motoring friend. Why are you glad your father is out?"

"Because I think he sees enough of you in the daytime. Too much. Father's very tired. Can't you see it? I'm going to

run away with him on Saturday."

"So I hear.—I'm somewhat seedy myself. I think I'll accept your urgent invitation to sit down until he comes."

"He isn't coming. He'll be out all the evening."

"I'm talking about your beau." There was an empty, nerveless quality to the visitor's voice which began to impress his companion.

"Let's set a spell, as they say in Maine," he added. "I've been thinking about Maine to-day."

Linda followed his lead into a reception room, where they sat down.

"A pretty good place to think about, when Lake Michigan sizzles," she replied; "but I've chosen Colorado. We're going to Estes Park."

"Yes, so Mr. Barry told me. I should like to go there too." King's tone was wistful.

"Perish the thought!" returned Linda devoutly. "I wouldn't have you within a thousand miles of father."

"That's what the doctor says," remarked King, his pensive gaze bent on the ribbon bordering of Linda's thin frock.

She started and leaned toward him. "The doctor!" she repeated. "Has Doctor Flagg been talking to you about father? Is he—is he worried about him?"

King shook his head. "I didn't go to Doctor Flagg. I went to Doctor Young. We've been getting some golf together lately, and he's a good sort."

"What's the matter with *you*, Bertram?" Linda sat up again, and her voice and manner cooled. "What do you want of a doctor?"

King shook his head. "Never in my life before: first offense. Everything seemed to go back on me all of a sudden. Sleeping, eating, and all the rest of it." The speaker scowled. "The mischief of it is, Young says I've got to get away for a month at least. He says—Oh, you don't care what he says."

Linda regarded the downcast one. He was speaking to her as to an equal, not, as usual, with tacit rebuke for some misdemeanor. This blunt reproach, if it were reproach, merely referred casually to her indifference.

"I care a great deal," she returned, with spirit. "I'm sure it will make my father very anxious to have you away at the same time he is."

King lifted his weary eyes to hers, eager and bright.

"I'm sure Doctor Flagg could give you a tonic or something to tide you over till we return in September," she went on. "You could go then."

Her companion leaned back in his chair with a long, inaudible breath. "We have arranged all that. Mr. Barry wants me to go."

The speaker did look rather cadaverous. Linda realized it now. It was a strange thing to have in any degree a sense of compassion for him: this masterful man on whom her father leaned, the man who alone in all the world had a hundred times without a word put her in the wrong, and whom as often she had fervently wished she might never see again. She had chafed against that chain of her father's reliance which bound herself as well. There was no escaping King, and when in her busy college life she thought of him at all, it was as a presumptuous creature who was continually

making good his presumption; and what could be more exasperating than that?

King was a self-made man, one with few connections in Chicago, one of whom was Linda's voice teacher, Mrs. Porter. The girl never had exactly understood this relationship, but the fact that some of Mrs. Porter's blood ran in his veins constituted Bertram's only redeeming trait in the eyes of that lady's adorer. Now as she regarded him, staring with discontented eyes at the rug, a sense came over her for the first time that King was a lonely figure. It was all very well for a man in health to live at the University Club and have his mind and life entirely wrapped up in business; but when eating and sleeping became difficult and the brain was over-weary, the evenings might seem rather long to him.

"It serves a young man right," thought Linda, "when he will bind himself on the wheel of business and act as if there was not one thing in the world worth having but money!" Hadn't she seen to what such a course had brought her father? She spoke:—

"There's a lot of nonsense in all this kow-towing to business," she said. "Why do men make such slaves of themselves?"

"So their women can have a house like this, several gowns like yours, and a motor like the one you're going out in," responded King dully.

Linda's rosy lips curled. "Fred Whitcomb's motor is last year's model."

Her companion smiled.

"There, you see!" he remarked. "There's nothing for me to do but to keep on hustling so you can always have the latest."

Color flashed over Linda's face, but she shrugged carelessly.

"Oh, of course," she retorted, "everything is Eve's fault."

"Pretty sure to be," returned King, nodding slowly. "*Cherchez la femme. Toujours cherchez la femme.*" He regarded her for a moment of silence, during which she was so uncomfortable that she raised both hands to arrange an imaginary hairpin at the back of her head.

"Where have you decided to go?" she asked at last, continually warmer under his eyes, and wondering if Fred Whitcomb had had a puncture.

"Why, I thought it would be great to spend long Colorado days in the saddle with you."

"Did you really?" Linda's little laugh had a most discouraging note.

"Yes, but Dr. Young jumped on that. He said I mustn't go within gunshot of your father."

Linda shook her head. "I should advise you not to myself. I'm a pretty good shot."

King looked up. "It would be great, though. Think of having you through with all this college foolery, and having plenty of time to talk to you."

The girl's eyes brightened. "Pray, did you consider Yale foolery?"

"A lot of it, yes," replied King, wearily; "but never mind, Linda, we're through with all that. I thought of the long days out there in Estes Park, the divine air, 'the dark pilasters of