

***MARGARET WADE
CAMPBELL
DELAND***



***THE RISING
TIDE***

Margaret Wade Campbell Deland

The Rising Tide

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CHAPTER I

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A single car-track ran through Payton Street, and over it, once in a while, a small car jogged along, drawn by two mules. Thirty years ago Payton Street had been shocked by the intrusion upon its gentility of a thing so noisy and vulgar as a street-car; but now, when the rest of the town was shuttled with trolleys and clamorous with speed, it seemed to itself an oasis of silence. Its gentility had ebbed long ago. The big houses, standing a little back from the sidewalk, were given over to lodgers or small businesses. Indeed, the Paytons were the only people left who belonged to Payton Street's past—and there was a barber shop next door to them, and a livery-stable across the street.

"Rather different from the time when your dear father brought me here, a bride," Mrs. Payton used to say, sighing.

Her daughter agreed, dryly: "I hope so! Certainly nobody would live on Payton Street now, if they could afford to buy a lot in the cemetery."

Yet the Paytons, who could have bought several lots in the cemetery (or over on the Hill, either, which was where they belonged!), did not leave the old house—a big, brownstone cube, with a belvedere on top of it that looked like a bird-cage. The yard in front of the house was so shaded by ailanthus-trees that grass refused to grow there, and an iron dog, guarding the patch of bare earth, was spotted with mold.

The street was very quiet,—except when the barber's children squabbled shrilly, or Baker's livery-stable sent out a

few funeral hacks, or when, from a barred window in the ell of the Payton house, there came a noisy laugh. And always, on the half-hour, the two mules went tinkling along, their neat little feet cupping down over the cobblestones, and their trace-chains swinging and sagging about their heels. The conductor on the car had been on the route so long that he knew many of his patrons, and nodded to them in a friendly way, and said it was a good day, or too cold for the season; occasionally he imparted information which he thought might be of interest to them.

On this October afternoon of brown fog and occasional dashes of rain he enlightened a lady with a vaguely sweet face, who signaled him to stop at No. 15.

"Miss Payton's out," he said, pulling the strap over his head and bringing his car to a standstill; "but her ma's at home. I brought the old lady back on my last trip, just as Miss Freddy was starting off with that pup of hers."

"It's the 'old lady' I've come to see," his fare said, smiling, and, gathering up her skirts, stepped down into the Payton Street mud. The bell jangled and the mules went clattering off over the cobblestones.

Mrs. William Childs, picking her way to the sidewalk, said to herself that she almost wished Freddy and her dog were at home, instead of the "old lady."

"Poor dear Ellen," she thought, in amiable detachment from other people's troubles; "she's always asking me to sit in judgment on Fred—and there's nothing on earth I can do."

It occurred to her as she passed under the dripping ailanthus-trees and up the white marble door-steps that Payton Street was a gloomy place for a young creature like

Frederica to live. "Even my Laura would kick," she thought; her thoughts were often in her Laura's vernacular. In the dark hall, clutching at the newel-post on which an Egyptian maiden held aloft a gas-burner in a red globe, she extended a foot to a melancholy mulatto woman, who removed her rubbers and then hung her water-proof on the rack beside a silk hat belonging to the late Mr. Payton—kept there, Mrs. Childs knew, to frighten perennially expected burglars.

"Thank you, Flora," she said. "Has Mr. Weston come yet?" When Flora explained that Mr. Weston was not expected until later, she started up-stairs—then hesitated, her hand on the shoulder of the Egyptian maiden: "Mr. Mortimore—he's not about?"

"Land, no, Mis' Childs!" the woman reassured her; "he don't ever come down 'thout his ma or Miss Carter's along with him."

Mrs. Childs nodded in a relieved way, and went on up to the sitting-room where, as she had been warned, she and Mr. Arthur Weston, one of the trustees of what was popularly known as "the old Andy Payton estate," were to "sit in judgment." "It *is* hard for Fred to have Mortimore in the house," she thought, kindly; "poor Freddy!"

The sitting-room was in the ell, and pausing on the landing at the steps that led up to it, she looked furtively beyond it, toward another room at the end of the hall. "I wonder if Ellen ever forgets to lock the door on her side?" she thought;—"well, Nelly dear, how are you?" she called out, cheerfully.

Mrs. Payton, bustling forward to meet her, overflowed with exclamations of gratitude for her visit. "And such

unpleasant weather, too! I do hope you didn't get your feet damp? I always tell Freddy there is no surer way to take cold than to get your feet damp. Of course she doesn't believe me, but I'm used to that! Is William's cold better? I suppose he's glad of an excuse to stay indoors and read about Bacon and Shakespeare; which was which? I never can remember! Now sit right down here. No, take this chair!"

The caller, moving from one chair to another, was perfectly docile; it was Ellen's way, and Mrs. Childs had long ago discovered the secret of a peaceful life, namely, always, so far as possible, to let other people have their own way. She looked about the sitting-room, and thought that her sister-in-law was very comfortable. "Laura would have teased me to death if I had kept my old-fashioned things," she reflected. The room was feminine as well as old-fashioned; the deeply upholstered chairs and couches were covered with flounced and flowery chintz; on a green wire plant-stand, over-watered ferns grew daily more scraggy and anemic; the windows were smothered in lambrequins and curtains, and beadwork valances draped corner brackets holding Parian marble statuettes; of course there was the usual womanish clutter of photographs in silver frames. On the center-table a slowly evolving picture puzzle had pushed a few books to one side—pretty little books with pretty names, *Flowers of Peace* and *Messages from Heaven*, most of them with the leaves still uncut. It was an eminently comfortable room; indeed, next to her conception of duty, the most important thing in Mrs. Andrew Payton's life was comfort.

Just now, she was tenaciously solicitous for Mrs. Childs's ease; was she warm enough? Wasn't the footstool a little too high? And the fire—dear me! the fire *was* too hot! She must put up the screen. She wouldn't make tea until Mr. Weston came; yes, he had promised to come; she had written him, frankly, that he had simply got to do something about Freddy. "He's her trustee, as well as mine, and I told him he simply *must* do something about this last wild idea of hers. Now! isn't it better to have the screen in front of the fire?"

Mrs. Childs said the screen was most comfortable; then added, in uncertain reminiscence, "Wasn't Mr. Weston jilted ages ago by some Philadelphia girl?"

"Oh, dear, yes; so sad. Kate Morrison. She ran off with somebody else just a week before they were to be married. Horribly awkward for him; the invitations all out! He went to Europe, and was agent for Payton's until dear Andrew died. You are quite sure you are not too warm?"

"No, indeed!" Mrs. Childs said. "How is Mortimore?" It was a perfunctory question, but its omission would have pained Mortimore's mother.

"*Very well!*" Mrs. Payton said; her voice challenging any one to suspect anything wrong with Mortimore's health. "He knew Freddy to-day; he was in the hall when she went out; he can't bear her dog, and he—he scolded a little. I'm sure I don't blame him! I hate dogs, myself. But he knew her; Miss Carter told me about it when I came in. I was so pleased."

"That was very nice," her visitor said, kindly. There was a moment's silence; then, glancing toward a closed door that connected the sitting-room with that room at the end of the

ell, she said, hesitatingly: "Nelly dear, don't you think that perhaps Freddy wouldn't be so difficult, if poor Mortimore were not at home? William says he thinks—"

"My son shall never leave this house as long as I am in it myself!" Mrs. Payton interrupted, her face flushing darkly red.

"But it *is* unpleasant for Fred, and—"

"'Unpleasant' to have her poor afflicted brother in the house? Bessie, I wouldn't have thought such a thing of you! Let me tell you, once for all, as I've told you many, many times before—never, while I live, shall Mortimore be treated cruelly and turned out of his own home!"

"But William says they are not cruel, at—at those places; and Mortimore, poor boy! would never know the difference."

"He would! He would! Didn't I tell you he recognized his sister to-day? His sister, who cares more for her dog than she does for him! And he almost always knows me. Bessie, you don't understand how a mother feels—" she had risen and was walking about the room, her fat, worn face sharpening with a sort of animal alertness into power and protection. The claws that hide in every maternal creature slipped out of the fur of good manners: "We've gone all over this a hundred times; I know that you think I am a fool; and I think that you—well, never mind! The amount of it is, you are not a mother."

"My dear! What about my three children?"

"Three healthy children! What do you know of the real child, the afflicted child, like my Mortimore? Why, I'd see Freddy in her grave before I'd—" She stopped short. "I—I love both my children exactly the same," she ended, weakly.

Then broke out again: "You and I were brought up to do our duty, and not talk about it whether it was pleasant or unpleasant. And let me tell you, if Freddy would do her duty to her brother, as old Aunt Adelaide did to her invalid brother, she'd be a thousand times happier than she is now, mixing up with perfectly common people, and talking about earning her own living! Yes, that's the last bee in her bonnet,—Working! a girl with a good home, and nothing on earth to do but amuse herself. She uses really vulgar words about women who never worked for their living; you and me, for instance. 'Vermin'—no, 'parasites.' Disgusting! Yes; if Freddy was like her great-aunt Adelaide—" Mrs. Payton, sinking into a chair bubbly with springs and down, was calmer, but she wiped her eyes once or twice: "Aunt Adelaide gave up her life to poor Uncle Henry. Everybody says she had lots of beaux! I heard she had seven offers. But she never dreamed of getting married. She just lived for her brother. And they say *he* was dreadful, Bessie; whereas my poor Mortimore is only—not quite like other people." Mrs. Childs gasped. "When Morty was six months old," Mrs. Payton said, in a tense voice, "and we began to be anxious about him, Andrew said to the doctor, 'I suppose the brat' (you know men speak so frankly) 'has no brains?' and Dr. Davis said, 'The intellect is there, Mr. Payton, but it is veiled.' That has always been such a comfort to me; Morty's intellect is *there!* And besides, you must remember, Bessie, that even if he isn't—very intelligent, he's a *man*, so he's really the head of the family. As for Freddy, as I say, if she would follow her aunt Adelaide's example, instead of reading horrid books about things that when *I* was a young

lady, girls didn't know existed, she'd be a good deal more comfortable to live with. Oh, dear! what am I going to do about her? As I wrote to Mr. Weston, when I asked him to come in this afternoon, what are we going to do about her?"

"What has poor Fred done now?" Fred's aunt asked, trying patiently to shut off the torrent of talk.

Mrs. Payton drew a long breath; her chin was still unsteady. "It isn't so much this last performance, because, of course, in spite of what Mama says, everybody who knows Freddy, knows that there was—nothing wrong. But it's her ideas, and the way she talks. Really, Bessie—"

"My dear, they all talk most unpleasantly!"

Mrs. Payton shook her fair head. "Your Laura doesn't. I never heard Lolly say the sort of things Freddy does. She calls her father 'Billy-boy,' I know, but that's only fun—though in our day, imagine us calling our fathers by a nickname! No, Bessie, it's Freddy's taste. It's positively low! There is a Mrs. McKenzie, a scrubwoman out at the Inn, and she is—*you* know? It will be the seventh, and they really can hardly feed the six they have. And Freddy, *a young girl*, actually told Mrs. McKenzie she ought not to have so many children!"

"Well, Ellen, if there are too many now, it does seem—"

"But, Bessie! A girl to speak of such things! Why, you and I, before we were married, didn't know—still, there's no use harking back to our girlhood. And as for the things she says!... Yesterday I was speaking of the Rev. Mr. Tait, and she said: 'I haven't any use for Tait; he has no guts to him.'"

Mrs. Childs was mildly horrified. "But it's only bad taste," she excused her niece. She was fond of this poor, troubled

sister-in-law of hers—but really, what was the use of fussing so over mere bad taste? Over really serious things, such as keeping that dreadful Mortimore about, Ellen didn't fuss at all! "How queer she is," Mrs. Childs reflected, impersonal, but kindly; then murmured that if she had been unhappy about her children's slang, she'd have been in her grave by this time; "You should hear my boys! And, after all, Ellen, Fred's a good child, in spite of this thing she's done (you haven't told me what it is yet). She's merely like all the rest of them—thinks she knows it all. Well, we did, too, at her age, only we didn't say so. Sometimes I think they are more straightforward than we were. But I made up my mind, years ago, that there was no use trying to run the children on my ideas. Criticism only provoked them, and made me wretched, and accomplished nothing. So, as William says, why fuss?"

"Fred is my daughter, so I have to 'fuss.'"

"Well," said Mrs. Childs, patiently, "what is it?"

"Hasn't Laura told you? Mama says everybody is talking about it."

"No; she hasn't said anything."

"My dear, Freddy spent the night at the Inn, with Howard Maitland."

"*What!*"

"His car broke down—"

"Oh, an accident? You can't blame Fred for that. But why didn't they take the trolley?"

"They just missed the last car."

"Well, they were two careless children, but you wouldn't have had them walk into town, twelve miles, at twelve

o'clock at night?"

"I certainly would! Freddy is always telling me I ought to walk to keep my weight down—so why didn't she walk home? And as for their being children, she is twenty-five and I am sure he is twenty-seven."

She paused here to wonder about Mr. Maitland: curious that he liked to live alone in that big house on the hill! Pity he hadn't any relatives—a maiden aunt, or anybody who could keep house for him. His mother was a sweet little thing. Nice that he had money.

"He ought to marry," said Mrs. Childs.

"Of course," said Mrs. Payton; and dropped young Maitland to go back to the Inn escapade: "Mama was so shocked when she heard about it that she thought William ought to go and see Mr. Maitland and tell him he must marry her. Of course, that is absurd—Mama belongs to another generation. Freddy did take the trouble to telephone me; but Flora took the message—poor Flora! she's so dissatisfied and low-spirited. I wish she'd 'get religion'—that keeps servants contented. Miss Carter says she's in love with one of the men at the livery-stable. But he isn't very devoted. Well, I was in bed with a headache (I've been dreadfully busy this week, and pretty tired, and besides, I had worked all the evening on a puzzle, and I was perfectly worn out); so Flora didn't tell me, and I didn't know Freddy hadn't come home until the next morning. It appears she was advising Mrs. McKenzie as to the size of her family, and when Mr. Maitland found he couldn't make his motor go, and told her they must take the trolley, she just kept on instructing Mrs.

McKenzie! So they missed the car. She admitted that it was her fault. Well, then—oh, here is Mr. Weston!"

He came into the room, dusky with the fog that was pressing against the windows, like a slender shadow; a tall, rather delicate-looking man in the late forties, with a handsome, whimsical face, which endeavored, just now, to conceal its boredom.

"Criminal not present?" he said, shaking hands with the two ladies and peering near-sightedly about.

"Oh, she's off with her dog, walking miles and miles, to keep from getting fat," Mrs. Payton said. She sat down at her tea-table, and tried, fussily, to light the lamp under the kettle. "It's wicked to be fat, you know," she ended, with resentful sarcasm; "I wish you could hear Fred talk about it!"

"I wish I could," Frederica's man of business said, lifting a humorous eyebrow; "I always like to hear Fred talk. Let me fix that lamp for you, Mrs. Payton. I hope I'm thin enough to be moral?"

The two ladies regarded him with maternal eyes, and Mrs. Childs recommended a glass of milk at bedtime.

"Be sure it is pasteurized," she warned him; "my William always says it's perfect nonsense to fuss about that—but I say it's only prudent."

"Must I pasteurize my whisky, too?" he said, meekly; "I sometimes take that at bedtime." It occurred to him that when he had the chance he would tell Freddy that what with pasteurized milk, and all the other improvements upon Nature, her children would be supermen; "they'll say they were evolved from us," he reflected, sipping his tea, and

listening to his hostess's outpourings about her daughter, "as we say we were evolved from monkeys."

Not that Mrs. Payton—telling him, with endless illustrations, just how "impossible" her Freddy was—looked in the least like a monkey; she was a large, fair, dull lady, of fifty-seven or thereabouts, who never took any exercise, and credited the condition of her liver to Providence; but she was nearly as far removed from Miss Frederica Payton as she was from those arboreal ancestors, the very mention of whom would have shocked her religious principles, for Mrs. Payton was very truly and humbly religious.

"And church—Freddy never goes to church," she complained. "She plays tennis all Sunday morning. Rather different from our day, isn't it, Bessie? We children were never allowed even to read secular books on Sunday. Well, I think it was better than the laxity of the present. We always wore our best dresses to church, and—"

"May I have some more tea, Mrs. Payton?" her auditor murmured, and, the tide of reminiscence thus skilfully dammed, Freddy's offense was finally revealed to him. "Well," he said,— "yes, cream please; a great deal! I hope it's pasteurized?—they were stupid to lose the car. Fred told me all about it yesterday; it appears she was talking to some poor woman about the size of her family"—the two ladies exchanged horrified glances;—"of course, Maitland ought to have broken in on eugenics and hustled her off. But an accident isn't one of the seven deadly sins, and—"

"Oh," Fred's mother interrupted, "*of course* there was nothing wrong."

Mr. Weston looked at her admiringly; she really conceived it necessary to say such a thing! Those denied ancestors of hers could hardly have been more direct. It occurred to him, reaching for another lump of sugar, that Frederica came by her talent for free speech honestly. "With her mother, it is free thought. Fred goes one better, that's all," he reflected, dreamily. Once or twice, while the complaints flowed steadily on, he roused himself from his amused abstraction to murmur sympathetic disapproval: "Of course she ought not to say things like that—"

"She is impossible!" Mrs. Payton sighed. "Why, she said 'Damn,' right out, before the Rev. Mr. Tait!"

"Did she damn Tait? I know him, and really—"

"Well, no; I think it was the weather. But that is nothing to the way she talks about old people."

"About me, perhaps?"

"Oh no; really, no! About you?" Mrs. Payton stammered; "why—how could she say anything about you?"

Arthur Weston's eyes twinkled. ("I'll make her tell me what it was," he promised himself.)

"As for age," Mrs. Childs corroborated, "she seems to have no respect for it. She spoke quite rudely to her uncle William about Shakespeare and Bacon. She said the subject '*bored*' her."

Mr. Weston shook his head, speechless.

"And she said," Mrs. Childs went on, her usual detachment sharpening for a moment into personal displeasure, "she said the anti had no brains; and she knows I'm an anti!"

"Oh, my dear," Fred's mother condoled, "I'm an anti, and she says shocking things to me; once she said the antis were—I really can't say just what she said before Mr. Weston; but she implied they were—merely mothers. And as for her language! I was saying how perfectly shocked my dear old friend, Miss Maria Spencer, was over this Inn escapade; Miss Maria said that if it were known that Freddy had spent the night at the Inn with Mr. Maitland her reputation would be gone."

Mr. Weston's lips drew up for a whistle, but he frowned.

"I told Freddy, and what do you suppose she said? Really, I hesitate to repeat it."

"But dear Ellen," Mrs. Childs broke in, "it was horrid in Miss Spencer to say such a thing! I don't wonder Freddy was provoked."

"She brought it on herself," Mrs. Payton retorted. "Have another sandwich, Bessie? What she said is almost too shocking to quote. She said of my dear old friend—Miss Spencer used to be my school-teacher, Mr. Weston—'What difference does it make what she said about me? Everybody knows Miss Spencer is a silly old ass.' 'A silly old ass.' What do you think of *that*?" Mrs. Payton's voice trembled so with indignation that she did not hear Mr. Weston's gasp of laughter. But as she paused, wounded and ashamed, he was quick to console her:

"It was abominably disrespectful!"

"There is no such thing as reverence left in the world," said Mrs. Childs; "my William says he doesn't know what we are coming to."

"Youth is very cruel," Mr. Weston said.

Mrs. Payton's eyes filled. "Freddy is cruel," she said, simply. The wounded look in her worn face was pitiful. They both tried to comfort her; they denounced Freddy, and wondered at her, and agreed with Mr. Childs that "nobody knew what we were coming to." In fact, they said every possible thing except the one thing which, with entire accuracy, they might have said, namely, that Miss Spencer was a silly old ass.

"When I was a young lady," Mrs. Payton said, "respect for my elders would have made such words impossible."

"Even if you didn't respect them, you would have been respectful?" Mr. Weston suggested.

"We revered age because it was age," she agreed.

"Yes; in those happy days respect was not dependent upon desert," he said, ruefully. (Mrs. Childs looked at him uneasily; just what did he mean by that?) "It must have been very comfortable," he ruminated, "to be respected when you didn't deserve to be! This new state of things I don't like at all; I find that they size me up as I am, these youngsters, not as what they ought to think I am. One of my nephews told me the other day that I didn't know what I was talking about."

"Oh, my dear Mr. Weston, how shocking!" Mrs. Payton sympathized.

"Well, as it happened, I didn't," he said, mildly; "but how outrageous for the cub to recognize the fact."

"Perfectly outrageous!" said his hostess. "But it's just as Bessie says, they don't know the meaning of the word 'respect.' You should hear Freddy talk about her grandmother. The other day when I told her that my dear

mother said that if women had the ballot, chivalry would die out and men wouldn't take off their hats in elevators when ladies were present,—she said, 'Grandmother belongs to the generation of women who were satisfied to have men retain their vices, if they removed their hats.' What do you think of that! I'm sure I don't know what Freddy's father would have said if he had heard his daughter say such a thing about his mother-in-law."

Mr. Weston, having known the late Andy Payton, thought it unwise to quote the probable comment of the deceased. Instead, he tried to change the subject: "Howard Maitland is a nice chap; I wonder if—" he paused; there was a scuffle on the other side of the closed door, a bellowing laugh, then a whine. Mrs. Childs bit her lip and shivered. Mr. Weston's face was inscrutable. "I wonder," he continued, raising his voice—"if Fred will smile on Maitland? By the way, I hear he is going in for conchology seriously."

"Mortimore is nervous this afternoon," Mrs. Payton said, hurriedly; "that horrid puppy worried him. Conchology means shells, doesn't it? Freddy says he has a great collection of shells. I was thinking of sending him that old conch-shell I used to use to keep the parlor door open. Do you remember, Bessie? Yes, Mr. Maitland is attentive, but I don't know how serious it is. Of course, I'm the last person to know! Rather different from the time when a young man asked the girl's parents if he might pay his addresses, isn't it? Well, I want to tell you what she said when I spoke to her about this plan of earning her living (that's her latest fad, Mr. Weston), and told her that, as Mama says, it isn't *done*; she—"

"Oh, dear! There's the car coming," Mrs. Childs broke in, as the tinkle of the mules' bells made itself heard. "Do hurry and tell us, Nelly; I've got to go."

"But you mustn't! I want to know what you think about it all," Mrs. Payton said, distractedly; "wait for the next car."

"I'm so sorry, dear Ellen, but I really can't," her sister-in-law declared, rising. "Cheer up! I'm sure she'll settle down if she cares about Mr. Maitland. (I'm out of it!" she was thinking.) But even as she was congratulating herself, she was lost, for from the landing a fresh young voice called out:

"May I come in, Aunt Nelly? How do you do, Mr. Weston! Mama, I came to catch you and make you walk home. Mama has got to walk, she's getting so fat! Aunt Nelly, Howard Maitland is here; I met him on the door-step and brought him in."

CHAPTER II

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Laura Childs came into the quiet, fire-lit room like a little whirl of fresh wind. The young man, looming up behind her in the doorway, clean-shaven, square-jawed, honest-eyed, gave a sunshiny grin of general friendliness and said he hoped Mrs. Payton would forgive him for butting in, but Fred had told him to call for some book she wanted him to read, and the maid didn't know anything about it.

"I thought perhaps she had left it with you," he said.

Mrs. Payton, conscious, as were the other two, of having talked about the speaker only a minute before, expressed flurried and embarrassed concern. She was so sorry! She couldn't imagine where the book was! She got up, and fumbled among the *Flowers of Peace*. "You don't remember the title?"

He shook his head. "Awfully sorry. I'm so stupid about all these deep books Fred's so keen on. Something about birth-rate and the higher education, I think."

Mrs. Payton stiffened visibly. "I don't know of any such book," she said; then murmured, perfunctorily, that he must have a cup of tea.

Again Mr. Maitland was sorry,—“dreadfully sorry,”—but he had to go. He went; and the two ladies looked at each other.

"*Do* you suppose he heard us?"

"I don't believe he did!"

"Nice chap," said Mr. Weston.

On the way down-stairs the nice chap was telling Laura that he had caught on, the minute he got into that room, that it wasn't any social whirl, so he thought he'd better get out.

"They're sitting on Freddy, I'm afraid," Laura said, soberly; "poor old Fred!"

"Well, I put one over when I asked for that book! I bet even old Weston's never read it! Neither have I. But Fred can give us all cards and spades on sociology."

"She's great," Laura agreed; "but the book isn't so awfully deep. Well, I'm going back to root for her!"

She ran up to the sitting-room again, and demanded tea. Her face, under her big black hat, was like a rose, and her pleasant brown eyes glanced with all the sweet, good-natured indifference of kindly youth at the three troubled people about the tea-table. Somehow, quite unreasonably, their depression lightened for a moment....

"No! No sugar, Aunt Nelly."

"Do you want to be as thin as I am, Miss Laura?" Arthur Weston remonstrated, watching her rub her cool cheek against her mother's, and kiss her aunt, and "hook" a sandwich from the tea-table. One had to smile at Laura; her mother smiled, even while she thought of the walk home, and realized, despairingly, that the car was coming—coming—and would be gone in a minute or two!

"My dear, your father says all this fuss about exercise is perfect nonsense. Really, I think we'd better ride," she pleaded with the pretty creature, who was asking, ruthlessly, for lemon, which meant another delay.

"I'll ring, Auntie; Flora will get it in a minute. Mama, I bet you haven't walked an inch this day! I knew you'd take the car if I didn't come and drag you on to your legs," she ended, maliciously; but it was such pretty malice, and her face was so gayly amiable that her mother surrendered. "The only thing that reconciles me to Billy-boy's being too poor to give us an auto," Laura said, gravely, "is that Mama would weigh a ton if she rode everywhere. I bet you've eaten six cream-cheese sandwiches, Mama? You'll gain a pound for each one!"

"You'll be the death of me, Lolly," her mother sighed. "I only ate three. Well, I'll stay a little longer, Ellen, and walk part way home with this child. She's a perfect tyrant," she added, with tender, scolding pride in the charming young creature, whose arch impertinence was irresistible.

"Take off your coat, my dear," Mrs. Payton said, patting her niece's hand, "and go and look at my puzzle over on the table. Five hundred pieces! I'm afraid it will take me a week yet to work it out;"—then, in an aside: "Laura, I'm mortified that I should have asked Mr. Maitland the title of that book before you,"—Laura opened questioning eyes;—"so indelicate of Fred to tell him to read it! Oh, here's Flora with the lemon. Thank you, Flora.... Laura, do you know what Freddy is thinking of doing now?"

"Yes, the real-estate business. It's perfectly corking! Howard Maitland says he thinks she's simply great to do it. I only wish I could go into business and earn some money!"

"My dear, if you will save some money in your own home, you will be just as well off," Mrs. Childs said, dryly.

"Better off," Mr. Weston ventured, "but you won't have so much fun. This idea of Fred's is a pretty expensive way of earning money."

"You know about it?" Mrs. Payton said, surprised.

"Oh, yes; she broke it to me yesterday."

"Just what is her idea?" Mrs. Childs asked, with mild impatience.

"Let me explain it," Frederica's man of business said ... and proceeded to put the project into words of three letters, so to speak. Fred had hit on the fact that there are many ladies—lone females, Mr. Weston called them; who drift about looking for apartments;—"nice old maids. I know two of them at this minute, the Misses Graham, cousins of mine in Grafton. They are going to spend the winter in town, and they want a furnished apartment. It must be near a drug-store and far enough from an Episcopal church to make a nice walk on Sundays—*fair* Sundays. And it must be on the street-car line, so that they can go to concerts, with, of course, a messenger-boy to escort them; for they 'don't mean to be a burden to a young man'; that's me, I'll have you know! 'A young man'! When a chap is forty-six that sounds very well. Fred proposes to find shelters for just such people."



"LET ME EXPLAIN IT," FREDERICA'S MAN OF BUSINESS SAID ... AND PROCEEDED TO PUT THE PROJECT INTO WORDS OF THREE LETTERS

The two ladies were silent with dismay and ignorance. Laura, sucking a piece of lemon, and seeing a chance to "root," said, "How bully to have an office! I'm going to make her take me as office boy."

"The Lord only knows how she got the idea," Arthur Weston went on, "but it isn't entirely bad. I confess I wish her ambition would content itself with a post-office address, but nothing short of a real office will satisfy her. She has her eye on one in the tenth story of the Sturtevant Building; I am on the third, you know. But I think she can do it all on her allowance, though rent and advertising will use up just about all her income."

"I will never consent to it," Mrs. Payton said, angrily. "It is absurd, anyhow! Freddy, to hunt up houses for elderly ladies—*Freddy*, of all people! She knows no more about houses, or housekeeping, than—than that fire-screen! Just as an instance, I happened to tell her that I couldn't remember whether I had seventy-two best towels and eighty-four ordinary towels, or the other way round; I was really ashamed to have forgotten which it was, and I said that as soon as I got time I must count them. (Of course, I have the servants' towels, too; five dozen and four, with red borders to distinguish them.) And Freddy was positively insulting! She said women whose minds had stopped growing had to count towels for mental exercise. When I was a girl, I should have offered to count the towels for my mother! As for her finding apartments for elderly ladies, I would as soon trust a—a baby! Do you mean the Mason Grahams, Mr. Weston? Miss Eliza and Miss Mary? Mama knows them. You've met them, too, haven't you, Bessie? Well, I can only say that I should be exceedingly mortified to have the Misses Graham know that any Payton girl was behaving in such an extraordinary manner. The real-estate business! She might as well go out as a servant."

"She would make more money as a cook," he admitted. But he could not divert the stream of hurt and angry objections. Once Mrs. Childs said to tell Fred her uncle William would say it was perfect nonsense; and once Laura whispered to Mr. Weston that she thought it would be great sport to hunt flats for flatlings; to which he whispered back: "Shoal. 'Ware shoal, Laura."

There were many shoals in the distressed argument that followed, and even Arthur Weston's most careful steering could not save some bumps and crashes. In the midst of them the car came clattering down the street, and after a while went clattering back; and still the three elders wrangled over the outlaw's project, and Laura, sitting on the arm of her mother's chair, listened, giggling once in a while, and saying to herself that Mr. Weston was a perfect lamb—for there was no doubt about it, he, too, was "rooting" for Fred.

"I *must* go," Mrs. Childs said, at last, in a distressed voice. "No, Lolly, we haven't time to walk; we must take the car. Oh, Ellen, I meant to ask you: can't you join my bridge club? There's going to be a vacancy, and I'm sure you can learn—"

"Oh, my dear, I couldn't possibly! I'm so busy; I haven't a minute—"

"Well, think it over," Mrs. Childs urged. "And, Nelly dear, I know it will be all right about Fred. I'm sure William would say so. Don't worry!"

But when the door closed upon the escaping aunt and the sympathizing cousin, poor Mrs. Payton's worry overflowed into such endless details that at last her hearer gave up trying to comfort her. When he, too, made his escape, he was profoundly fatigued. His plea that Frederica should be allowed to burn her fingers so that she might learn the meaning of fire had not produced the slightest effect. To everything he said Mrs. Payton had opposed her outraged taste, her wounded love, her fixed belief in the duty of youth to age. When he ventured to quote that