

floundered herself down into her chair with twice her usual contempt, scoffed openly at Mrs Groveland's neworgettes, and rated violets as "silly flowers." Mrs Groveland grew perfectly purple with indignation, and poor Mrs Lane snatched at her posies, and began to kiss them browningly, as though she thought their feelings might be hurt. Then someone stammered, "Isn't your husband coming down?" and Mrs Allerton snapped out, "My husband? No indeed!" and doused away the word with two full glasses of ice-water.

When I handed her the menu she glanced at it with a great air of scornful laziness, and then—all of a sudden—quicker than lightning—she went into the most violent attack of hysterics just because there were no soda biscuits on the bill of fare.

I suppose that seems funny to you? But it doesn't to us. We almost lost a lady in convulsions one day because the ice-cream was flavoured with pineapple instead of chocolate. Ladies with normal nerves, you know, don't need to go to sanatoriums. Why, it took two doctors and a nurse to get Mrs Allerton safely to her room!

There's no particular use in describing the confusion that it made. The ladies of course, were not startled—they are quite used to seeing things happen—but the gentlemen were indescribably shocked and puzzled. The confusion didn't bother me at all, though. In fact, nothing bothered me except Mrs Dicky Allerton herself. It was the first time in all those eleven weeks that I had ever seen her break, and up to that moment of breaking I had always hated her like poison. But now I dropped a pitcher of cream and a whole plate of bread just out of pity and wonder. If lack of soda-biscuits was the last straw, what was the first? And the second? And the twelfth and the hundredth and the thousandth? We can't help wondering about the patients, you know. They're just like damaged books come to be rebound. Sometimes in the rebounding we snatch very tantalizing glimpses of the plot.

I wondered about Mrs Dicky Allerton all through supper-time, and I wondered about her afterward when I was fixing

up the pretty tea-trays for the very sick ladies, who have to hold their brave remonions across broadcated bedsteads and clanking surgical mechanism. And I thought about her so hard when I was going to bed that I was glad, not mad, when the head nurse knocked at the door, and said: "Will you please go and sit with Mrs Allerton a while?"

She didn't need a real trained nurse, you know, but just someone with an oral diploma of common sense.

"But where is Mr Allerton? I asked suddenly, with a clutch at my unfastened collar.

The head nurse looked foolish. "Mr Allerton's gone," she said. "He went while Mrs Allerton was at supper." She's a nice head nurse, but she wouldn't think of gossiping with me when she has her cap on.

III.

I found Mrs Dicky Allerton in the palest kind of a pale pink dressing gown, kneeling on the rug before her cheval-mirror, studying her reflection violently, as though it were a strange, detested lesson. Her face was all crumpled up with her recent crying, but her big eyes were bright and even lively with the excitement of reaction. Hysterics never frightened me, anyway. They seem so reasonable—just a head-on collision between your sorrow and your sense of humour. How could your self-control help exploding, under the circumstances?

Of course, Mrs Allerton was embarrassed to be trapped so at her mirror, but with a little gesture of amusement she pulled me down beside her, snuggled her haggard cheek against mine, and continued to scrutinize the reflection.

Now my hair is yellow and wavy, my eyes are gray, my cheeks are round and pink as a baby's, and my mouth turns up quite perceptibly at the corners. I'm not good-looking at all the way a flower is, but a nervous-prostration patient told me once that I made her think of fresh, crisp lettuce. Anyway, Mrs Dicky Allerton was looking particularly jaded that evening, and she wasn't blind any more than I was.

"Great Heavens!" she cried out. "How old are you?"

"Thirty-four," I answered, quite frankly.

She sank back on her heels with a petulant wail of despair and stared at me.

"Thirty-four!" she exclaimed. "Why, so am I! And look at the difference between us!" She actually groaned, and then broke out again with: "Thirty-four, and fresh as a pink! And you have to earn your own living, too!"

I laughed. "Well, for the matter of that, I said, "as far as I can make out, it's a heap sight easier to have to earn your own living than to have to earn your own loving. Some lucky people seem to inherit fortunes, but most of us have to work pretty hard for whatever we get."

She puckered up her forehead in a puzzled sort of way and sank down into a chair before her mirror, and I went and got her brushes. Her hair was heavy as lead, and black as jet, and long—way down to her knees—and I brushed for half an hour before either of us spoke again. I brushed it coolly back from her worried forehead in great long strokes of regular rhythm and rest, and I stroked it blissfully down behind her ears, and I smoothed it up from the little nerves in the back of the neck where sorrow tugs like a demon, till at last, at the end of that half hour, she looked up at me in the glass and smiled.

"I've been thinking of what you said about 'earning your own loving,'" she murmured. "Have you been here long in the sanatorium? Eleven years? You must know a lot."

"I know a lot about husbands," I acknowledged grimly. "I've worked in just about every department of the sanatorium from the cellar to the roof, and what I know about husbands would fill a pretty good-sized book, though, of course, I'm perfectly willing to acknowledge that what I don't know would make a fairly sizable companion volume."

She laughed; then, "Did you see my husband to-night?" she asked abruptly, and a little whimper of pain went scudding across her face.

"Indeed, I saw him," I said. And,

"What an interesting face he has!"

She shrugged her shoulders wearily, and I went on with my work. It was fully twenty minutes before she spoke again, and my arms began to feel as though they were ripping out, but as long as they hung by a single thread nothing in the world could have made me stop brushing, for I could watch her reflection perfectly over the top of her head, and her face for those dragging twenty minutes was like a white screen for stereopticon thoughts.

"Don't you think," she said at last, "that people who tell their legitimate troubles or write to newspapers for domestic advice are awful fools? I hate and scorn and loathe them—and to-night I'm going to be just that sort of fool. I've kept my own counsel so long that I shall burst if I keep it a second longer. What did people say about me to-night?"

I braided her hair down to a point like the end of a pin, then I unravelled it out and fluffed it like a whisk-broom, then I tied it with a black bow in perfectly huge loops and no ends. Then I pulled the bow to pieces and started in all over again. And then I laughed.

"Why, they said," I acknowledged wryly, "that you were a—beast to come to supper alone!"

"A be-a-st!" Mrs. Allerton jumped to her feet in a fury and faced me like a tiger. That left me free to do what I pleased, and I sank most gratefully into a chair.

IV.

For a second Mrs. Allerton stared at me, then through me, and finally 'way past me.

When she began to talk she began abruptly.

"We were boy and girl," she said, "on neighbouring plantations. At first I was not strong enough to romp with the other children; Richard never was strong enough. After I got my health the other children's games seemed crude and paltry. Richard and I lived in a world of our own. We had all the queer old books in his father's library, we had all the wonderful clothes and heirlooms in my mother's attic.

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"The bottle of Bronchitis Cure I got from you was magical in its effects."  
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"Kindly forward another bottle of your famous Bronchitis Cure without delay, as I find it to be a most valuable medicine."  
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"Your Bronchitis and Asthma Cure has been more to me than money can ever pay. I am quite free from Asthma now, and feel very grateful to you."  
ISA S. FOSACHI,  
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"Please send me half-a-dozen of your Bronchitis Cure. This medicine cured me in the winter, and has now cured a friend of mine of a very bad Bronchitis."  
A. ALLEN,  
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"We, the undersigned, have had occasion to obtain Hearne's Bronchitis Cure, and we certify that it was perfectly and rapidly successful under circumstances which undoubtedly prove its distinct healing power." Signed by the Rev. JOHN SINCLAIR, Myers-st., Geelong, and 50 other leading residents.

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**Beware of Imitations!** The great success of HEARNE'S BRONCHITIS CURE, has induced a number of unprincipled persons to make imitations, each calling his medicine "Bronchitis Cure," with the object of deceiving the simple-minded, and so getting a sale for an imitation which has none of the beneficial effects that HEARNE'S BRONCHITIS CURE has. Consequently it has become necessary to draw your attention to this fact, and to request you in your own interests to be particular to ask for HEARNE'S and to see that you get it.

HEARNE'S BRONCHITIS CURE, Small Size, 2/6; Large Size, 4/6. Sold by Chemists and Medicine Vendors, and by the Proprietor, W. G. HEARNE, Chemist, Geelong, Victoria. Forwarded to any Address, when not obtainable locally.

**NOTICE.**—Hearne's Bronchitis Cure No. 1a does NOT contain any poison within the meaning of the Act. It is equally beneficial for the youngest child and the most aged person.