

DR. SLOPER. Good! Now, my dear, if you will excuse me, I must register Mr. Garrison Junior. *(He starts to study, but half-way turns back to her.)* Help her to be clever, Lavinia. I should so like her to be a clever woman.

MRS. PENNIMAN. But she is so gentle and good!

DR. SLOPER. *(At door.)* You are good for nothing unless you are clever! *(He exits. Left alone, MRS. PENNIMAN goes over to window and stares out. As she is thus occupied, CATHERINE SLOPER descends stairs and enters room. She is a healthy, quiet girl in her late twenties. She is dressed in an over-elaborate red satin gown with gold trimmings.)*

MRS. PENNIMAN. Catherine. *(She turns into room.)* Ah, you've got it on!

CATHERINE. Yes. Do you like the color?

MRS. PENNIMAN. Yes, it's extremely rich.

CATHERINE. Do you think Father will like it?

MRS. PENNIMAN. He's bound to. You know, one of the last times I ever saw your poor mother, Catherine, she had the most delicious little bows of that color in her hair.

CATHERINE. Yes, Aunt, I know. You said they were cherry red.

MRS. PENNIMAN. So they were.

CATHERINE. I picked it up at the dressmaker's on my way to the Hospital Committee this afternoon. The ladies all thought it was a lovely color.

MRS. PENNIMAN. Oh, tell me about the meeting! Did you have a nice time? *(She sits at C. table.)*

CATHERINE. Some of the women are so foolish that they are funny. They think it ill-bred to know anything about food, so they are useless on the Committee. One girl asked me today if veal was the front or hind part of the cow.

MRS. PENNIMAN. *(Smiling.)* What did you tell her?

CATHERINE. *(With humor.)* Well, Aunt, I told her the truth. I said it was a nursing calf, and just when it was most adorable, most touching . . . we eat it!

MRS. PENNIMAN. *(Laughs.)* Such airs and graces! When I was young we took pride in our housewifery. My, when I think of the meals I used to set before the Reverend Penniman . . .

CATHERINE. *(Teasing.)* Then you have deceived me, Aunt!

MRS. PENNIMAN. *(Surprised.)* How so?

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DR. SLOPER. Well, that's necessary work. (He indicates her embroidery.) Are you starting another one of those samplers?

CATHERINE. Why, yes, Father. I find it a most agreeable pastime.

DR. SLOPER. Don't let it turn into a life work, Catherine.

MRS. PENNIMAN. (Again stepping into the breach.) Catherine had a very amusing experience at the Hospital this afternoon. (Turns to her.) Catherine, dear, tell your father about that young woman. Tell him just the way you told me.

DR. SLOPER. (With an expectant smile.) Yes, please do.

CATHERINE. Well . . . er . . . there was a young woman—er—also on the Committee and she asked me about veal—

DR. SLOPER. Yes?

CATHERINE. Well—she didn't know what it was.

DR. SLOPER. I see . . . ?

MRS. PENNIMAN. (Eagerly.) She thought it was part of the cow, didn't she, Catherine?

CATHERINE. Yes . . . I mean she didn't know it was calf.

DR. SLOPER. She didn't?

CATHERINE. (Struggling.) She didn't know any of the cuts of beef.

DR. SLOPER. (Waiting.) I see . . . ?

MRS. PENNIMAN. You see, Austin, Catherine told her it was a young cow.

DR. SLOPER. Yes . . . ?

CATHERINE. (Lost.) Well, I just thought that—that she might not have liked it.

DR. SLOPER. Ah . . . (Indicating her position as she sews.) That is not a very good light for sewing, Catherine, you might hurt your eyes. (Doorbell rings.)

CATHERINE. Yes, Father. (MARIA crosses hall to front door. MRS. PENNIMAN rises.)

MRS. PENNIMAN. There they are! (She goes into hall.)

MARIA. (In hall we hear her voice as she admits guests.) Good evening, Mrs. Almond.

MRS. ALMOND. (A voice in hall.) Good evening, Maria . . . Livvie!

MRS. PENNIMAN. (A voice in hall.) Lizzie!

MARIA. (Voice in hall.) Good evening, Miss Marian. (MRS. ALMOND, a handsome woman in her forties, appears in archway.)

MRS. ALMOND. Good evening, Austin. . . . Hello, Catherine dear.

DR. SLOPER. How nice to see you, Liz. (He draws her into room.)

MRS. PENNIMAN. Oh, dear girl, why were you not a little more clever? (*Sits on chair near windows.*)

CATHERINE. Clever? About what?

MRS. PENNIMAN. About your father's money—about Morris ——? Oh, Catherine, if you have spoiled this opportunity . . .

CATHERINE. Spoiled! In about one hour from now Morris and I will be married. (*Rises and goes to mantel.*)

MRS. PENNIMAN. I hope so, dear.

CATHERINE. *Hope!* (*With a nervous laugh.*) Ah, Aunt, he is— (*She looks at clock.*) he is only fifteen minutes late! You are ridiculous!

MRS. PENNIMAN. No, I am not, Catherine. I know him so well . . .

CATHERINE. (*Outraged.*) You know him! I love him!

MRS. PENNIMAN. Morris would not want to be the cause of your losing your natural inheritance. He could not see you impoverished.

CATHERINE. We shan't be impoverished! I have ten thousand a year!

MRS. PENNIMAN. (*Explaining uneasily.*) For some people ten would be a great come-down. It would be like . . . like having none.

CATHERINE. (*Bewildered.*) How could it be? It is a great deal of money!

MRS. PENNIMAN. Not when one has expected thirty.

CATHERINE. He has expected nothing! (*Desperately trying to explain it.*) He loves me! He wants me for his wife!

MRS. PENNIMAN. He would never want a wife of his to live in an undignified manner.

CATHERINE. (*Rebelliously.*) What is undignified about it? We have more than Marian and Arthur had.

MRS. PENNIMAN. Yes, Catherine, but Marian was one of the most popular girls of her year . . . She was a beauty . . . She was a belle . . .

CATHERINE. (*Outraged.*) You think what my father thinks! You think I am dull and ugly! Well, you are wrong! Morris loves me! (*As if quoting.*) I am everything he ever yearned for in a woman.

MRS. PENNIMAN. (*Sympathetically.*) Oh, Catherine . . .

CATHERINE. (*Crossing to MRS. PENNIMAN.*) I am! I am! He has told me so! He thinks I am pretty! He wants me! He could not wait for tomorrow night! He said we must go tonight! . . . (*She remembers the truth with anguish.*) No—I said that, didn't I? I

(frame and sits down at it. She picks up her needle.) Oh, dear, you haven't time for that!

CATHERINE. I am working on the "Z."

MRS. PENNIMAN. Yes, I know, but don't do it now!

CATHERINE. *(Sewing.)* I have only a few more stitches.

MRS. PENNIMAN. You will finish it afterwards.

CATHERINE. I must finish it now, for I shall never do another.

MRS. PENNIMAN. That's right! You have better things to do.

CATHERINE. I have indeed! I can do anything now!

MRS. PENNIMAN. *(Coaxing.)* Come upstairs with me now, dear, you must look your prettiest.

CATHERINE. Sit down, Aunt.

MRS. PENNIMAN. Oh, no —

CATHERINE. Sit down!

MRS. PENNIMAN. But, Catherine, Morris will be here . . .

CATHERINE. Morris will have to wait.

MRS. PENNIMAN. What!

CATHERINE. He came back with the same lies, the same silly phrases. . . . He thought I was so stupid that I would not detect his falseness. That means that it is *he* who is stupid, not *I*!

MRS. PENNIMAN. *(Horried.)* No, no, Catherine! That is not true!

CATHERINE. He has grown greedier with the years. The first time he only wanted my money, now he wants my love, too. Well, he came to the wrong house, and he came twice. I shall see that he never comes a third time.

MRS. PENNIMAN. *(Stricken.)* Catherine, do you know what you're doing?

CATHERINE. Yes.

MRS. PENNIMAN. *(Moaning.)* Poor Morris, poor Morris . . .

CATHERINE. If I ever hear you mention his name again, Aunt Penniman, should you even whisper it, I will understand that you wish to live alone.

MRS. PENNIMAN. Catherine!

CATHERINE. It will be a sign to me that you are leaving Washington Square forever.

MRS. PENNIMAN. *(Frightened.)* Catherine, can you be so cruel?

CATHERINE. Yes, I can be cruel. I have been taught by masters!

MRS. PENNIMAN. *(After a pause.)* My dear, life can be very long for a woman alone—I am twice your age, and even I . . . even I . . .