

DOROTHEA'S AUNT JANE

By Ruth Kimball Gardiner

CONVENTION has neglected to appoint a day on which youth must be definitely doffed, and middle age as definitely assumed, as straw hats are retired on the fifteenth of September, and felts brought out. The omission gives life to the masseuse and to the Woman's Page, but exposes us all to the humiliation of waking up suddenly some day in November, and perceiving ourselves utterly ridiculous in our faded straw hats. One could accept middle age with dignity, if one but knew exactly when to do it. If it were agreed that the first gray hair, now, meant that youth was gone—but the first gray hair is no more than a stray crimson leaf in August. It is a mere accident. Furthermore, one may be grizzled at twenty-five, and another raven-tressed at five-and-forty, while a third smiles on sixty years under Titian locks that were brown at thirty. The first gray hair conveys no hint whatever.

Mrs. Torrington was twenty-eight when she found hers. It made her feel like a child in her grandmother's bonnet, for she was, and had always been, absurdly young. Even when the white hair had been multiplied tenfold, she regarded the matter as unimportant. She had been precocious as a child, and admired for it. She was merely being precocious now. She had been married at seventeen to her father's partner. For five years she was accustomed to be mistaken for the daughter of her husband. Widowhood made her younger than is normal at twenty-two. Her marriage had been one without the slightest tinge of romance. The late Mr. Torrington was

a dyspeptic first and a man afterward. His claim to amiability might be classed with that of an Indian to goodness. However, he preserved for his widow her youth by sparing her a lasting grief.

At twenty-eight, Mrs. Torrington was absolutely young. Only her enemies spoke of her as still young. She was short of stature, and her face had been cast in a girlish mold. She had no child for the world to date her by, elderly men still admired her, and tradesmen invariably called her "Miss." She had always been well-groomed. If the masseuse visited her now, it was merely because massage had become a part of the grooming process of every woman. If creams and lotions multiplied on her dressing-table, they expressed simply the advance of the chemist's art. Mrs. Torrington reveled in the undisturbed possession of her youth till she was thirty-three.

Then two startling things happened. Her hair-dresser suggested a tonic—purely vegetable, merely to restore the original tint—and Dorothea announced her return from Paris. It is immaterial who the hair-dresser was, but Dorothea was the late Mr. Torrington's niece. She had been graduated from a woman's college *summa cum laude*, and she had gone abroad for post-graduate work in her favorite subject, which was sociology. She was an athlete, and she gloried in her physique in much the same way that Mrs. Torrington took pride in a figure. Dorothea wore all her garments suspended from her shoulders, and had views.

Mrs. Torrington had always trembled before her. Dorothea was the only person on earth who remembered her baptismal name. To all her friends Mrs. Torrington was Tina. Dorothea called her Aunt Jane. It had been amusing from Dorothea at nine, to Tina at seventeen. It was vaguely annoying when Dorothea was twenty. Tina felt that it would be crushing from Dorothea at five-and-twenty. Nobody could be Aunt Jane to a sociologist and be anything else than elderly.

During Dorothea's years abroad it had been generally understood that Tina meant to bring her out when she came home.

"Fancy you with a grown-up niece!" people used to say.

Whenever she forgot what Dorothea was, Tina enjoyed the saying. As a chaperon she would be piquantly young against a background of middle-aged mothers. When she remembered what Dorothea was her blood ran cold. Dorothea was not a girl one could bring out. On the contrary, she would bring Tina in, and put her in her proper place as Aunt Jane. Her letters left no room for doubt. Mrs. Torrington grew positively morbid on the subject. She had hesitated to confess to herself that she was thirty-three. Now, she clung desperately to thirty-three. It was so young compared to the at least fifty-six Dorothea's Aunt Jane would be obliged to be.

Dorothea's last letter from Paris was not pleasant reading. She wrote:

Saw Baer Mitchell at the Van Arsdales. He is as gray as a badger. He asked after you, and if you were as young as ever. Asked me why I didn't dance, and said you used to be keen on dancing in your day. He is coming home about the time I sail. He seems to have no definite purpose in life, but—

Tina did not read beyond the "but." For the first time her "day" had been referred to as a thing of the past, and by that little wretch, Baer Mitchell! Baer had been a page at her wedding, and had informed her later that the ceremony cut him to the quick.

"I don't want anything to happen to

Mr. Torrington," he said, "but I can always hope."

He had written her a formal proposal in the first month of her widowhood.

You'll have to wait some time, but I am going to be true as steel. I'd like for you to tell me would you want me to be a cowboy, because father says I have to go to college, which is useless for a cowboy.

Tina pronounced against the cowboy scheme, and kissed Master Baer good-bye when he went away to preparatory school. She had not seen him since then, and had discouraged his efforts at keeping up a correspondence. Now he was coming home from his *Wanderjahr*. He must be twenty-six, and he was gray. No one can cling to the fiction of youth when the page at one's wedding has come to six-and-twenty years. Tina felt that what Dorothea could not do, Baer would. Together they would make her Aunt Jane in spite of herself.

Flight seemed the only refuge. Dorothea had expressed a determination to live in a college settlement, or to have a college settlement live with her, Tina was not quite sure which. At any rate, Dorothea was capable of taking care of herself. Tina gladly left the house to her, and ran away. It was February, and all right-minded people were going South, anyway. Tina coughed twice for her physician, and telegraphed her agent in Bienville to put her cottage in readiness. She was not in a mood for the Florida east coast. People there might wonder what had become of Dorothea. Bienville was on the Gulf coast. The late Mr. Torrington had selected it because it was a quiet place, and, the water being remarkably unpalatable, he was certain it must be good for the health.

Tina's letter awaited Dorothea on her arrival. The next post carried her answer. She wrote:

I'm glad you're in a real Southern town, not one of the show places. I have been wanting to study the race question. Expect me next week. I'm bringing Baer Mitchell with me. Hope you can put him up.

Tina recognized that it was useless to struggle against Aunt Janedom

any longer, but in the midst of her despair a comforting thought came to her. Dorothea held advanced views on the Mission of Woman. She understood scientific child-culture, and considered it the duty of every college woman to marry.

"Eureka!" said Tina to herself. "She shall marry Baer Mitchell."

Bienville was just the place for the making of such a match. Dorothea could not escape Baer if she would, and if Baer had wanted to escape Dorothea he would not have been trailing after her. With Dorothea married, the ghost of Aunt Jane would be laid forever. Dorothea might call her Aunt Jane when they met. She could not live with her and force her to be Aunt Jane. Tina laid her plans.

To begin with, she sent the station wagon to meet Dorothea and Baer, and stayed at home herself. First impressions of Bienville, undisturbed by a third person, would form an initial bond. She hoped that Paris had influenced Dorothea to wear her clothes, instead of suspending them, but a first glance at Dorothea as the hall door opened to admit her showed that Paris had failed. There was in the girl's attire merely a difference without distinction. London had tailored Dorothea. Tina went forward to meet her bravely. Dorothea kissed her.

"Well, Aunt Jane!" she said.

Baer stepped forward out of the shadow. The height of him and the gray hair amazed Tina.

"Tina!" he cried, seizing both her hands. "Tina, you little wonder!"

Tina felt in him an ally against Dorothea and Aunt Jane. At the same time, she hoped her manner was sufficiently dampening to put him in his proper place. She was not yet old enough to flirt with a mere boy. Besides, he was to marry Dorothea, and the sooner the better.

"Don't be silly," she said sternly.

"That's just the way you used to say it," he laughed. "You haven't changed a bit."

"I've grown ten years older," she reminded him.

"I know it. So have I."

Clearly, the conversation was not leading in the right direction. Tina pretended to detect signs of fatigue in Dorothea. She must go to bed at once. Tina made the suggestion tentatively, fearfully. If she could assert her authority over Dorothea, perhaps Aunt Janedom might be fought off a little longer.

"Very well," said Dorothea. "I do feel a bit done up, Aunt Jane."

It was, as one may say, a draw. Dorothea had yielded, but she had asserted the Aunt Jane.

Next morning, Dorothea's sway began. She moved the breakfast-time an hour earlier. Tina protested weakly that in Bienville one took coffee and a roll early, and breakfasted when one chose. "Just as they do in Paris," she explained.

"I never did it in Paris," said Dorothea. "I don't approve of it at all. Coffee in the morning is bad for anyone, and one needs a hearty breakfast at a regular hour."

Tina breakfasted thereafter at half-past seven, and became more determined than ever to marry Dorothea to Baer. She opened her campaign after the first breakfast.

"I want you and Baer to go for the mail," she announced.

Dorothea acquiesced. "I suppose you'll want me to do the marketing, too," she said. "Does your cook make out a list every day of what is wanted, or do you do the marketing twice a week yourself?"

"I don't know," said Tina. "I don't believe she can write. I think she orders things from the boy that comes around. Of course," she added hastily, "I often tell her what I want."

Dorothea's face expressed disapproval.

"It's time somebody took hold, if that's the way you do," she said. "I'll go and interview cook now."

Tina, a little blankly, watched her disappear. Then she turned to Baer determinedly.

"Dorothea is so systematic," she

said. "She really has remarkable executive ability."

"Tina," asked Baer, "is that powder, or is your hair really gray?"

"It's not powder," Tina answered. "It's age."

Baer touched the soft waves gently.

"It's no end becoming," he said.

Tina stepped out on the gallery and stood resolutely in the full glare of the sun.

"We have a charming view, I think," she said.

"I don't want to look at the view," said Baer. "I want to look at you."

"At my age it isn't pleasant to be stared at in such a light as this," Tina replied.

"I wonder if the live-oak over there isn't still more sensitive about it," Baer laughed. "He must be quite as old as you are, and I'm the grayest one of the three. You're such a kid, Tina."

Tina was glad of the return of Dorothea. She hoped that Baer hadn't a critical taste in hats. Dorothea's skin was perfect, and her color radiant, in spite of the hat.

"I had a time with cook," Dorothea said complacently, "but one always does at first. She'll fall into my ways soon."

Her eye fell upon the smart cart and the big bay horse.

"Loosen that check-rein," she said to Jules, Tina's stableman, gardener and factotum. "Now, hop in, Baer."

Tina, with a feeling that was not altogether elation, watched them drive off. If only Dorothea wouldn't be quite so masterful! Baer would have to stand up for his rights after they were married, and Baer was such a dear boy. She felt very much drawn to him. She could see that Dorothea's attitude would make her still more drawn to him. They would be in the same boat—a sort of pair of Aunt Janes. She almost regretted that it was necessary to sacrifice him, but she felt the shadowy touch of Aunt Jane's cap on her head.

On the very spot where she felt its weight she presently pinned a scarlet

beret, and went down to the pier to amuse herself catching crabs. It was a very childish amusement, and one she felt Dorothea would not approve. She did not care for the crab as an article of food, but the crab as a plaything amused her immensely. She enjoyed sitting in the sun and dangling over the edge of the pier a bit of meat tied to a string. It delighted her to see the crabs clinging desperately to the bait as she drew it up. After she had landed her prey she took a stick and pushed them off the other side of the pier into the water. Crabs were plentiful in the shallow bay, and the occasional splash of one returned to its native element never seemed to disturb its fellows. They took the bait every time, and when Tina had amused herself long enough it was her habit to drop the meat into the water and let them have it.

This morning she was so absorbed in her game that she forgot all about Dorothea till Baer's step on the pier behind her roused her.

"Where is Dorothea?" she asked.

"Dorothea," said Baer, "is having rather a time with the butcher. He seemed to be slow about falling into her ways, so I walked home. What are you doing?"

"Catching crabs for luncheon," said Tina. "They are very good fried—untidy to eat, but pleasing to the palate."

"How many have you caught?"

"None yet," she admitted.

"I suppose those you throw back are too young to be torn from their mothers. When you catch large ones, do you mean to carry them home in your hanky? I've been watching you fifteen minutes."

Tina bubbled into a laugh.

"They do look so funny," she said. "I like to see them squirm."

"What on earth would Dorothea say if she saw you?"

"I know," she hastened to answer, "it is silly. Dorothea wouldn't waste time so foolishly. That's why she accomplishes so much. Just think how

much she has accomplished! She's really wonderful!"

"She is indeed," Baer assented. "She is a perfect example of what the higher education can do for a woman."

Tina felt that his tone lacked enthusiasm.

"She's so clever," she said.

"And systematic," said Baer.

"And so thoroughly poised."

"And purposeful."

"And such a mind!"

"And so awfully conscientious."

"And—and—" she hesitated.

"Go on," said Baer. "It's your turn. We haven't exhausted her yet."

"No, she's inexhaustible," said Tina. "But I'm going back to the house now. You'd better stroll along and meet her."

She scrambled to her feet and threw the bait into the water.

"What pretty shoes you wear, Tina," said Baer.

Tina assumed an air of dignity.

"I think I ought to tell you that it isn't the thing to pay such bald compliments," she said. "Young girls may like them, but women of my age find them anything but amusing."

"What a foolish way to talk!" said Baer. "You always did wear pretty shoes, and you always liked to have me say so."

"There's Dorothea," said Tina, with relief. "Now run along and play with her. I have a great many letters to write this morning. One of them is to your father, by the way."

"Dad's great on letters," said Baer. "Dorothea got one from him this morning. I think he means to come down here."

"I hope he will come. We've been friends so many years. I helped him bring you up, you know."

"Good job, too, I say," he responded. "Not many women could have turned me out gray-haired at twenty-six."

Dorothea's crisp voice broke in.

"Well, Aunt Jane," she said, "I've attended to everything."

Tina spent the rest of the day in her room. Baer and Dorothea must be left alone together as much as possible.

That night she discussed the situation with her image in the glass. She felt that Baer was a little inclined to be flippant. He was not so attached to Dorothea as she had hoped to find him, but perhaps Dorothea had been a little too cavalier in her treatment of him.

"I wonder," she said to herself, "whether Dorothea means to marry him or not. If she does, of course he'll have to give in. If she doesn't—"

Dorothea tapped on the door.

"May I come in, Aunt Jane?" she asked.

Tina opened the door which communicated with Dorothea's bedroom.

"Come in," she said. "Let's talk."

Dorothea came in. She held a hairbrush in one hand, and her heavy hair fell over the shoulders of a red eiderdown bath-robe. On her feet were shapeless knitted slippers. Tina hoped that the house would not catch fire at night before Baer went away.

"You'd better get into bed," Dorothea commanded. "You'll catch your death on these cold floors in those jiggeree things you have on your feet. I wish I'd brought you some warm bedroom slippers."

Tina kicked off the pink mules and snuggled down under the covers. Bedroom slippers like Dorothea's! Probably Aunt Jane would have to wear a frightful red eiderdown bath-robe, too. She groaned inwardly. Dorothea curled up on the foot of the bed.

"Do you mean to tell me that's what you wear to sleep in?" she asked, eying Tina severely.

Tina pulled her lace-edged sleeve almost down to her elbow.

"Of course it is," she said stoutly.

"I never catch cold."

"Still, you oughtn't to run risks," said Dorothea. "Outing flannel would be a great deal better for you. I'll lend you some of mine. You really do need somebody to look after you, Aunt Jane."

"I'm not so old as that yet," Tina protested.

"It isn't altogether a matter of age,"

said Dorothea. "It's temperament. You do need someone."

"I have you," said Tina, with a deceitful air of being glad of it.

"Yes, you'll always have me."

"But suppose—" Tina hesitated. "I don't say you're thinking of it, at all, but you might, some day, you know—marry, I mean."

Dorothea hugged her knees thoughtfully.

"I have been thinking of it," she admitted. "Of course I expect to marry, but even then I'll be in a position to look after you. How, by the way, do you like Baer?"

Dorothea's train of thought was as plain to be seen as an open book. Tina wriggled with delight.

"He's adorable," she said. "I don't believe any woman could ask for a better husband."

"I'm glad to hear you say so," said Dorothea. "Was his father a good husband?"

"I never knew Baer's mother. She died when he was a baby," Tina answered. "But I've understood that they were very happy. I remember he told me once that he had yet to see another woman who could be as dear to him as she was."

"When did he say that?" asked Dorothea.

"Oh, years ago. I haven't seen him often in late years."

"I met him in Paris," said Dorothea. "He crossed with us. If Baer is like his father, I'm sure he'll make a good husband."

"I know he will," Tina assented. "Any woman would be glad to marry him."

"That's what I think. He's splendid. I don't believe he's ever flirted with anybody in his life. He strikes me as being one of those men who never love but once."

Really, Dorothea's complacency was irritating.

"I have never happened to meet a man of that kind," said Tina, "but I do think one could trust Baer."

"I'm afraid I can't say as much for

your cook," said Dorothea, changing the subject.

"Don't you like her cooking?"

"I don't mean her cooking. I mean her ethical conceptions, her principles. One of her children was here today, and she gave him a basketful of things to carry home."

"I know," said Tina. "You see, she has three children, and they have to eat."

"Do you mean to say you don't know how much goes out of your kitchen?"

"The bills aren't large, or at least they weren't when I was here before," protested Tina. "She cooked for me then. I told her to take what she needed for the children."

"She'd probably have done it without telling," commented Dorothea.

"That's why I told her. I wanted to keep her honest. I like her children. I couldn't take their mother away from them to cook for me and not do something for them, could I? Her smallest boy comes every morning and builds my fire for me."

"Yes, and you pay him for it."

"Only two bits a time. I gave him fifty cents once, and he said, 'I hates to take it. You sure is imposing on me.'"

"You're so unsystematic," sighed Dorothea. "I dare say the woman's husband lives on you, too. I asked her today if she was a widow. She said no. Then I asked her what her husband does for a living, and she gave me a very evasive answer."

"What did she say?" chuckled Tina.

"She said, 'Ah, g'wan, honey.' I told Baer what she said. He said he fancied her husband must be a cabin-boy in the Swiss navy. I suppose he meant by that that the man has no occupation."

"Maybe he meant it as a joke," said Tina gleefully. "He has a sense of humor at times."

"A very keen one," said Dorothea, forgetting the mythical cabin-boy in her eagerness to defend Baer. "He's serious at heart, though. Do you know, he always seems to me as old as you are."

"I always think of him as being just your age," said Tina. "You seem so congenial."

"He takes a very deep interest in you. We were talking about you this afternoon. He thinks, as I do, that you need someone to take care of you."

"I wish you wouldn't go on saying that," Tina complained. "You act as if I were in my second childhood."

"I'm glad I came," said Dorothea irrelevantly. "It gives me such a good chance to see how you and Baer get along together."

"It's really more important to see how you and he get on together," said Tina. "It doesn't make much difference about me, you know."

Dorothea uncurled herself from the foot of the bed. She stood looking down at Tina, and her manner was uncommonly diffident—for Dorothea.

"Aunt Jane," she said softly, "I do hope Baer is going to be very fond of me."

"He's in love with you this very minute," said Tina. "He can't help showing it."

Dorothea looked down with a sudden change of expression. It was almost a stare. Then she walked slowly to the door. On the way she stopped to adjust a pillow in Tina's lounging-chair. An instant later the pillow flew across the room, and landed on the amazed Tina.

"Take that!" shouted Dorothea in a gale of laughter. "It's too funny for words!"

Tina sat up in bed and stared at the door closing on Dorothea's hilarity. What on earth had happened to the girl? Dorothea had never thrown a pillow at anyone before in all her life. What could be the matter with her? Did she laugh at the futility of Tina's hope of escape from Aunt Janedom by marrying her to Baer? Was she going to marry him, and did she laugh at Tina for urging what was already a foregone conclusion? That must be it. Of course she meant to marry Baer. She had practically admitted it. But

why should she laugh? Why on earth should Dorothea laugh?

Tina awoke next morning still puzzled. Baer and Dorothea were nowhere to be seen when she stepped out on the gallery, but presently they came racing up from the pier with a string of fish. They looked so well together, Tina thought, as she watched them come. Something in the sight stirred a strain of sadness in her. At Dorothea's age, she had been already two years a widow. She seemed to realize for the first time that she had been cheated of her girlhood.

"Just up?" called Dorothea as she strode along the violet-bordered walk. "We've been up hours. You ought to take a walk before breakfast, Aunt Jane. It would do you a world of good."

"I detest things that do me good," said Tina, none too amiably. "Breakfast will be ready in ten minutes."

"I'll take the fish to cook," said Dorothea, disappearing.

Tina lifted the trail of her morning-gown and went down the steps, about her usual morning occupation of cutting roses. Baer followed with her basket.

"I wish you'd cut a rose for me," he said.

"As many as you like. What kind will you have? Think of American beauties this size!"

She bent above the huge blossoms.

"Not those," said Baer. "They look like red cabbages. You plant a hundred-dollar bill, and one of those overgrown things comes up. Haven't you a Maréchal Niel anywhere?"

"Dozens," said Tina.

"They used to be your favorites."

"How did you know that?" she asked, surprised.

"You told me so. Don't you remember when I came to say good-bye before I went away to school? You had a great bowl of Maréchal Niels on the piano, and you were wearing a gown just the color of them."

"What a memory you have!" she said lightly. Surely Baer was not

going to ask her to remember the good-bye kiss, and the rest of all his nonsense!

"I never forget anything," he said. "You told me to be a good boy, and——"

"And you are a good boy?" she interrupted.

"I am," he answered seriously.

"Sha'n't we take some violets, too?" she asked, a little hastily. "Gather a handful for Dorothea. She's so fond of them."

"She told me she wanted bait," said Baer. "I think she said shrimp. Is the shrimp bush in bloom anywhere near? She's going to take me fishing again after breakfast."

"Dear Dorothea!" said Tina.

"She's an awfully good sort," said Baer heartily. "She's so sensible."

"I consider her handsome."

"She has nice hair, and she is kind to her Aunt Jane," said Baer, "and I am fonder of her than of any other girl I know."

Baer had confessed it. Tina found herself by no means so pleased as she had expected to be.

"I am very glad to hear you say so," she said.

After all, it is only the woman who is herself matched that really enjoys matchmaking. To most women nothing is less interesting than looking on at a love affair. One must be very young, in which case one sees in it a promise of the future, or very old, in which case one sees in it the reminiscence of a rosy past, thoroughly to enjoy it; and Tina was neither. She had no wooing of her own by which to measure Dorothea's. She had suitors during her widowhood, but she had no girlhood romance to remember. She hoped the matter of Dorothea's future would soon be settled. It was a strain on her. Dorothea was so exasperatingly sure that Baer had never loved before. And Baer's hints at his old-time fondness were such proof that he saw it for what it was—a mere case of calf-love, and there was a sting in that. Tina avoided them both as much as she could. Why didn't they

announce their engagement and be done with it? She wanted to be rid of them both. Baer was going to be thrown away on Dorothea. If he had only been ten years older——

"Nonsense!" said Tina firmly to herself.

She was saying this as she came out on the gallery one afternoon, book in hand. Baer had gone to the village with Dorothea after luncheon, but Tina found him sitting on the steps, playing with the setter pup.

"Where is Dorothea?" she asked.

"Captain Ryan is her keeper at present. She has taken him fishing. I didn't want to go."

"Oh," said Tina. "Have you had a quarrel?"

"We never quarrel. I stayed at home to talk to you."

"About what?" she asked.

"Myself," he answered. "You haven't treated me well, Tina."

"Nonsense!" said Tina.

"You haven't," he insisted. "You haven't given me any of your attention since I've been here. If it hadn't been for Dorothea I'd have had a very lonely time of it. Dorothea is very interesting, but I'd like a little of you, too."

"Well?" said Tina.

"Don't you like me as well as you did when I was a boy?"

"Better," she answered.

"I don't believe that you realize I'm a man," he said. "You think I'm still a boy."

"Nonsense!" said Tina again.

Baer rose to his feet.

"Tina," he said, "I want you to know something. When I went away to school you kissed me good-bye. Well—it sounds a silly sort of thing to say, but it's true. I've never kissed another woman. I always meant to tell you some day, and now that——" he paused. "I promised not to say anything till Dorothea told you, but——"

"I understand," said Tina softly.

Poor Baer! How hard he was trying to show her that he was worthy of Dorothea! How utterly wasted he was going to be on Dorothea!

"Did she tell you?" he asked.

"Not in so many words," Tina answered; "but I think she meant me to understand. I am very glad."

"It began in Paris," said Baer. "I'm glad, too. I think we're all going to be very happy."

The jangle of the telephone bell broke in on their talk. Never was interruption more welcome to Tina. She felt that she could not have endured another word. Baer went in to answer the call. When he came out it was to say that his father had telegraphed from New Orleans his arrival by the next train. The necessity of making preparations for him afforded Tina an excuse for escape. She did not appear again until dinner-time. Dorothea had not yet returned from the fishing trip.

"You must stay here and have dinner with her," Tina said to Baer. "I'm going to drive to the station to meet your father."

"Let me go, too," said Baer.

"And leave Dorothea alone? Never. I'm going to take the cart, and there's only room for two."

Two unexpected things happened. The train was on time, and Tina absent-mindedly took a turning which made her drive longer by half a mile. When she reached the station Mr. Mitchell had already started for Three Oaks in a station hack.

Tina drove home slowly. The night was sweet with the scent of roses. Out on the bay the moon-trail stretched wide and silver, straight away into the country of dreams. Off in the bayou the frogs were in the full swing of a chorus. Half heard, it sounded like mandolins and guitars playing an elfin two-step. On the gallery of one of the cabins which she passed someone was singing, "*Il va partir.*"

Why did people choose songs like that for moonlight nights, when one felt blue and lonely enough already? Her head ached. She meant to go straight to bed the instant she reached home. Baer and Dorothea could entertain Mr. Mitchell. She was in no mood to break in on their family party. She

turned off the road and drove across the pine barrens. She could reach the stable unseen that way, and then she might make her excuses through Liane, her maid. She threw the reins to Jules and stepped down wearily.

As she came nearer the house she caught sight of Dorothea's white gown moving in the rose garden. Dorothea's face was returned to her companion, and—yes, he had taken her in his arms. It was Dorothea's kiss Baer would remember now.

Tina crossed a moonlit space and found her way to a rustic seat under a live-oak. The meaning of it all swept over her. She was thirty-three, and there had never been moonlight and a rose garden for her. To be a girl again! To be—yes, to be Dorothea there with Baer. She saw herself ridiculous—the sort of woman the world laughs at. She had always left love out of her plans for herself, and now it was Baer—Dorothea's Baer, out there in the rose garden, and she was alone with the emptiness of thirty-three un-lived years—alone and old.

She understood now why she had clung to her youth. It was because she had had none of youth's rights. Dorothea had everything—youth, and love, and Baer. She laid her arms along the back of the seat, and hid her face against them.

She heard a step on the path, but she did not move. Mr. Mitchell was near-sighted. In the deep shadow he could not see her. Tomorrow he would rally her about her match-making—talk to her of the "young people."

"Why, Tina, what on earth are you crying about?"

Baer sat down beside her and gathered her in his arms.

"Don't cry, little one," he begged. "Tell me what the trouble is. Don't you want dad to have Dorothea? Why, I——"

"Your father!" gasped Tina. "Is that who she's with?"

"Why, of course," said Baer. "I told you about it."

Tina drew a little away from him.

"I expected her to marry you," she said.

Baer laughed softly.

"I didn't," he said. "She knew all along I was going to marry you. She's been doing all she could to make the match. I asked you to marry me years and years ago."

"How absurd!" said Tina unsteadily. "Why, I—why, I—"

"I know, dearest," he interrupted. "You needn't waste time telling me. You're ever so much older than I am, and I love you. I've loved you ever since I was a little boy."

"Oh, but Baer, it's so ridiculous!

You'll be my grandnephew," Tina protested. "I'll be your father's aunt."

"No," he chuckled, "I'll be my father's uncle. My niece will be your mother-in-law. Don't you see how suitable that's going to make it?"

"It's so——"

"Dear heart, it's the one beautiful thing I've lived for ever since I can remember. Will you kiss me again now—not good-bye, but home forever!"

Dorothea's voice floated from the gallery:

"Where on earth is Aunt Jane? She really ought to have someone to look after her."



A SONG AT EVENING

CHILD of the sunrise, you;
A lonely singer, I;
Yet a song I weave of the dark and dew,
For you paused ere you passed me by.

Fair is a rose of June,
But keener the autumn rain;
Sweeter than morning's lilting tune
Is the threnody of pain.

For you morn's meadows wait—
Go, ere night's shadows are;
For though I pass not dawn's white gate,
I have known dusk's perfect star!

VIRGINIA WOODWARD CLOUD.



HIS SENSITIVE POINT

LEADER OF SCHOOL OF LITTLE FISHES—Come on, fellers, let's go and jolly the old octopus.

NEW LITTLE FISH—That'll be fun. How do you do it?

"Oh, we all get round him, and point our fins at him, and yell 'Trust!' It makes him crazy."