

and I don't believe the directors themselves know who will get the work. And Donohue is here, too?"

"I'm sure he is," Mrs. Conover put in, "I saw Mrs. Donohue in the hall when we came in."

Ralph Conover walked over to the window and gazed out over the long stretches of lawn that were terraced down from the Severance dwelling to the ocean. Outside, the weather was only pleasantly cool, one of those lapses in late winter when spring seems to anticipate herself. It would be moonlight later and the landscape was not totally dark. Ralph mechanically followed the row of lights that outlined the winding driveway and then trailed off into the ocean, where the tossing black water was suggested rather than revealed.

His mind was busy with the contract. Why had he been asked to the Severance home? He knew Henry Severance in a business way and had met his wife a few times, casually, at social gatherings. Surely these meetings, of themselves, would not explain Severance's invitation. And Donohue, Conover believed, knew the Severance family less intimately than he. Yet both were guests.

"Is the contract so important?" Mrs. Conover asked.

"It is the most important contract I have figured on. If I get it, my future is assured. I have done some good work before, but never on any such scale as this calls for. The profit on it means new gowns for you, it means a new automobile—many of the things you have wanted. For me it will be the beginning of my real career. I have figured out every detail and know that I can do the work properly."

"So there is a great deal more to this than a mere invitation to a week end party. It may be the turning point with me, and I want you—" here Ralph Conover put his arm about his wife's shoulder—"to do what you can to help me."

"Of course I will; but if you expect me to help you, we must get down in time for dinner."

Through the centre of the Severance home ran a long hall, flanked at either side with pillars of dark wood. At one end were the glass doors of the main entrance, at the other a recess where a marble statue stood out against a red velvet background in the reflection of hidden electric lights. Reception rooms, living-room, library and dining-hall opened into this long foyer. Each room had been finished in a different sort of wood, and it was this fine selection of rare woods that gave the Severance cottage distinction in a neighborhood of pretentious residences.

The guests at the house party were talking in groups in the big hall when Mr. and Mrs. Conover rounded the last landing of the staircase. Their host and hostess met them and saw that they were introduced to the few they did not know.

Mabel Conover carried herself with perfect self-possession. The simplicity of her gown, in sharp contrast to the overdone elegance of several of the other women's costumes, served to emphasise her natural beauty.

"I never realised how good looking your wife is," Donohue remarked, edging up to Conover.

"I always did; but even a diamond looks better in an artistic setting."

"Say," Donohue asked in a whisper, "why do you suppose Severance asked us here?"

"How should I know? I don't feel out of place, do you?"

"No, but—"

Ralph Conover was mentally casting about to avoid the man's questions without being rude. He had made up his mind not to talk of business matters, and particularly not to mention the contract. He knew that he had all the data which Donohue possessed, and perhaps more. He was not certain that Donohue was aware that he, too, had made a bid for the work. He had no intention of offering any information.

There was no need for diplomacy, however, as the butler had now thrown open the doors to the dining-room and was standing, stiff and formal, mutely announcing that dinner was ready. Mrs. Severance knew how to choose the members of her party so that all should be congenial. There was no superciliousness

in the group she had selected for this occasion and no posing; nearly every one of the dozen gathered about the beautiful table was distinguished either by social position or ability. Mr. Severance directed the general conversation but never monopolised it.

The talk of those seated near Ralph Conover drifted to a discussion of the spectacle before the public at the moment of a very wealthy man, recently divorced, who had scandalised the community by rushing from State to State trying to bribe ministers to marry him and his latest affinity, although the terms of his divorce decree forbade his remarriage.

"I believe that if a couple cannot agree, and living together means certain wretchedness to them both, they ought to be allowed to seek a divorce and find happiness in another alliance. Don't you, Mr. Conover?" said the woman at Ralph's left.

"After all, isn't it the general good we should seek? I grant that certain individuals must suffer from hasty and unconsidered marriages; but should the hardship of a few individuals be a valid argument for a system that undermines the family—the foundation on which our social organisation is built? This, it seems to me, aside from any religious consideration, ought to be taken into account by those who plead for looser divorce laws," Ralph replied.

Mrs. Conover, at her husband's right, leaned nearer and spoke in an undertone:

"This is no time to talk religion. Do you want to spoil it all?"

But Ralph's table partner was one of the multitude of those who like to talk and hate to listen, so his answer to her query passed unheeded. The lady was already giving her opinion of the new style of dancing and had forgotten the subject of a moment before.

Views about the war, politics, and the theatre carried the conversation through the remainder of the dinner, and when they left the table newer guests, asked for the latter part of the evening, were already arriving. When those at the dinner sauntered back into the long hall, they found the rugs rolled back and a small orchestra stationed near the stairway.

Both Ralph Conover and his wife were good dancers. The crowd of young people, the dancing set of Long Island, took them into their ranks at once.

"I'd love to have a house like this and give a party," Mrs. Conover said to her husband during one of the few dances they had together.

"If I get the contract, we will be well started on the way toward having one."

After the last automobile load of young folks had whirled away from the house, Conover and his wife talked over the events of the evening.

"I'm sure of one thing," Ralph yawned—"if I don't stop gossiping about my neighbors and go to sleep, I'll never be up in time for church in the morning."

"Church?" Mrs. Conover started.

"Surely. The church here is around the turn in the road, at the left of the monument we passed on our way here. The late Mass begins at 10 o'clock, which will give us plenty of time if we don't stay awake all night talking."

"But, Ralph, the people here! We are the only Catholics in the house, and you don't want to be conspicuous. Did Henry Severance or his wife say anything to you about going to church?"

"No."

"Then, Ralph, why are you so determined to go? It is going to be a grave inconvenience to us and to our host, if we make ourselves singular in this way. You said yourself that a lot depends on our making a good impression here, and now you are planning to upset it all. Have you forgotten about the contract?"

"That is one of the reasons I am surely going to Mass," Ralph replied gravely. "I am certain that Henry Severance knows that I am a Catholic; the first time I met him was at a reception to the Cardinal. He understands, as every well-informed Protestant does, that a Catholic's obligation to assist at Mass is more binding than a non-Catholic's duty to attend his church on Sunday. We are Catholics and understood to be Catholics. There will be more than one member of