

expression. Rachel was stirred as she listened. All day she had been conscious of a vague exasperation with the switchboard, such as she remembered she had once felt toward a talking doll. Now the thing seemed a throbbing medium that connected this lonely woman before her with the lives and hearts of her fellows. Mrs. Deane straightened a tangle here, smoothed a rough place there; it was as if her small, knotted hands were weaving upon some busy loom, spinning a web over space.

Worker and watcher started simultaneously when Miss Lydia flung the door open, and then turned with a little provoked cry: 'Chloe, will you look at mother?'

As the wheel-chair disappeared into the bedroom, guided on either side by an aggrieved daughter, Rachel caught the sound of a quick sigh, a breath of combined exultation and disappointment. 'What,' Miss Chloe demanded, 'will the doctor say to this?' And the old lady's answer came, defiant, 'Tom Bruce can say on.'

The girl turned to her task. Over the buzzing wire a faint, incoherent speech came to her ear, an insistent call of which she could make nothing. Again and again she asked what was wanted, and she was almost in despair, when Mrs. Deane's voice rose clearly:

'Chloe, quarrel if you want to, but help me out of this bed. Yonder's little Harry Wilkins trying to call his mother. I know by the way Rachel answers. They've sent him away because of the children's scarlet fever, and this time every night he gets homesick. I let him talk to his ma five minutes, and then he goes to sleep. But it takes me to get her past that trained nurse. Hand me my bedroom slippers.'

When the patient had had her way, and Miss Chloe was putting her to bed again with the air of one recapturing a prisoner, Rachel gave her place to Miss Lydia, and slipped softly out of the house. Her day's work was done, all but one task.

'If I don't run,' she said to herself, sharply, 'I'll back down before I get there.'

The windows of Doctor Bruce's little office were mellow with light when Rachel reached it, and the doctor was inside, stretched out comfortably in his chair for a brief rest in the early dark.

'Well, Ray McCoy,' he said, as the girl slid down on a hassock beside him, and he put a hand on her fluffy hair. Many a burden Rachel had unloaded at the feet of the stalwart old doctor, physician to hearts as well as to bodies.

'I'm just from the Deane's,' she began.

'And how's the invalid? Have Chloe and Lydia conquered her yet? I don't know how it is, but there's the smoke of battle in the air every time I call.'

Rachel struggled with a laugh that rang feebly. 'Why, my sakes,—the doctor's hand went under her chin,—is your job too heavy for you, Miss Operator?'

'Doctor Tom, what's the matter with old Mrs. Deane?'

'Now there you have me.' The doctor grew serious. 'She's hale and hearty as a winter apple, naturally; she never had a nerve in her life. Now those girls, they're sure as daylight it's nervous prostration, and I might as well be talking to two deaf adders. But it's not body, and not nerves, and Doctor Bruce has struck a snag, that's all.'

Rachel raised her head and looked at the doctor. 'I can tell you what the matter is with Mrs. Deane,' she said.

The doctor chuckled. 'Let's have the diagnosis, Doctor McCoy.'

'She's pining to get back to that telephone. She's run it fifteen years, ever since she stopped walking. She's been at it the first thing in the morning and the last at night, and she hated to let the others take their turn.'

Rachel told in detail the story of that afternoon, and her companion listened silently.

'I know,' he said, slowly, as if to himself, when she stopped. 'I remember. Weddings and funerals and births, goings and comings, formulas and receipts, and all the news of the four winds. Never talked it round, though; true to her trust. But it kept her in with the others. Loss of appetite, weakness, depression—h'm! 'Twas the breath of life, sure enough. Don't

see why I didn't understand. Taking away her bread and butter, and then standing back to watch her perk up.' He stroked Rachel's hair absently. 'Well, I'll change the prescription, doctor,' he remarked, as she got to her feet. 'But look here, Ray McCoy! I did a lot of thinking while you were talking. The medicine I take away from her you'll have to swallow. How about that?'

Rachel's answer was only a murmur.

'How about the musical career?'

'Why, nothing about it,' she replied, stoutly; then as she went out, she turned to thrust her head back through the door. 'Next time you're baffled in a case, Doctor Bruce,' she said, saucily. 'I'm at your service.'

The following morning, when Doctor Bruce came softly up the Deane steps, he almost stumbled over the wheel-chair on the verandah. Mrs. Deane was sitting idle; the untouched sewing had slid from her hands; in her old eyes, fixed on the far distance, was a look of listless indifference.

The sight smote him. 'Martha,' he said, as he steered the chair into the house, 'I've come to change your treatment.'

From a corner of the telephone-room Miss Chloe looked up with puckered brow and poised needle. 'There! I had just settled mother out where it was cool!'

'And we were going out presently to show her that lovely fancy stitch she's forgotten,' Miss Lydia chimed in.

'She doesn't want to remember any fancy stitch,' said the doctor, brusquely. 'Get up, Rachel.' He leaned over the wheel-chair, and lifting Mrs. Deane bodily, placed her in the chair that Rachel had left. 'Now,' he remarked in a satisfied tone, as he fitted the ear-piece clumsily over the willing head, 'I've changed your medicine. One dose every morning for three hours, and every evening, late, for one.'

The sisters were astonished, they were outraged; they doubted his sanity.

'Look here, girls,' commanded Doctor Bruce, when they were at last speechless. He had seen them both open their eyes to the light of day, and when he said 'Look,' they usually looked. 'Whose case is this?'

Miss Chloe sniffed a little. 'But now, when there's no necessity for it any more,' she began, 'and when mother's sick from it, anyway—'

'There is necessity,' the doctor asserted, 'and she's not sick from it, she's sick for it.'

Miss Lydia, with two bright spots in her cheeks, rushed into the fray. 'Crippled, too,' she began.

'It's not Martha that's crippled, and, anyway, she doesn't work the switch-board with her feet; it's this town that's crippled for lack of telephone service. Ray, here, would make a first-rate pianoforte-tinkler, but Martha's got telephoning down to an art. Ashton's been demoralised ever since you two well-meaning blunderbusses drove her out of her corner. I can't and won't stand being rung up at all hours to tell the price of eggs, or whether I have fresh butter for sale any longer.'

Rachel laughed.

'After consulting with another authority,' the doctor continued, soberly, 'I knew this to be the best course.'

The two daughters were slightly mollified. After all, had he not brought the family back safely, for two generations, through a sea of ailments?

'You will have to shoulder the responsibility,' Miss Chloe said, grudgingly, after a moment.

That evening Rachel turned reluctantly into the doctor's little office when he hailed her. The day had seemed long since the hard hour of making explanations to her surprised family at the dinner-table. She had told her story briefly, without comment or complaint, and they, divining her state of mind, had received it, for the most part, in sympathetic silence. But it was impossible not to hear, as she left the room, Jimmie's 'Ho, the bounce has gone out of poor old Ray!' and her mother's gentle murmur. She decided instantly that the 'bounce' should come back, but the business