

At Home  
on the  
Marcel Waves



suppose there were times when you could hear from far off the clump-clump of the advancing footsteps of your fates. Wouldn't you shiver a little, wondering? Perhaps that was why Miss Julia Trimble, of the Sunbeam Beauty Shoppe, shivered suddenly under her gray worsted shoulder cape, at just about the moment when the feet of Augusta McCann clumped down the gangplank from the Havana boat onto the municipal pier at Miami. Or perhaps it was only the rain.

It was raining on the municipal pier at Miami. It was raining, in black and tropic gusts, on winter fishermen teetering on the Gulf Stream. It was raining on the more often sunny sands of Miami Beach. It was raining also on Biscayne Bay, on the white yachts gleaming ghostly against chopped gray waters, on the shiny black beetles of automobiles scuttling furiously on the Causeway and through the smitten streets, on the shut-

tered houseboats, on the lashed palm fronds and on the waterfront hotels. The rain was showing the winter season just what a September tropic gale was like. It was a rainy day for real-estate men, chauffeurs, bathing girls, golfers, movie actresses, tea dancers, bootleggers, newspaper reporters, psychologists, grocery men, visiting authors, truck farmers, aviators, photographers, sign painters, and the rest of the ninety thousand. It was raining on Augusta McCann. But Augusta, plowing squarely through the bucketing gusts, with her small black satchel •rm in a mighty hand, was the only one of all these not to notice it. Augusta had known hurricanes from Jamaica to Singapore, and typhoons from the China Sea to the Cape of Good Hope. This was just a little familiar dampness, not interfering at all with the grim business in hand.

Now her battered sou'wester shunted the wet down on the broad petrolatum-colored shoulders of her ancient slicker. Her square, rosy face shone out serenely over the wadded collar. Her mild blue eyes were calm as she measured and probed this town. She moved upon it majestically as a ship under high piled canvas, this six feet of solid woman. Even the slicker could not hide from the world the soundness of her great body. She gave out the delicious sense of health that a fat rascal of a baby does. There radiated from her the peace that comes only from a body workable and hard as an engine, well oiled, immaculate, immensely fit.

But beneath that square-rigged exterior Augusta trod the earth warily. She might be bored with the excitements of ships. She might be following some dim instinct for new pastures after years of serving the rocking seas and the best passenger lines as the most dependable chief stewardess of them all. But it was serious business, this land. She stepped with caution. It was one thing to hold a callous basin to a green-cheeked landsman on a good understandable deck, but another to brave them, grown erect and confident and tricky, in their own complex cities. She didn't trust them a minute. Therefore she chose the side streets and the uncrowded pavements. She let the great hotels go by like looming icebergs. She was looking for a good, cheap, respectable boarding house and a job.

It was her instinct about the job that brought her up all standing. It was the same instinct that kept in her limp satchel, wrapped in her two last stewardess aprons, a precious piece of worn steel. Few men would recognize that potent instrument. But to hundreds of women its sizzling click

and bite have made ten years' difference in the eternal battle between looks and age. It was Augusta's marcel iron. You know, men. The things they make marcel waves with—those flat shiny ripples of hair you want to touch if unmarried, but which, once married, generally touch you first. It was because of that iron, when her slow gaze caught sight of a square of letter paper in a dim window, that her brain signaled half speed to her engine room, and she stopped. She saw written in a neat, delicate hand the words, "An expert marcel waver desired within." Augusta poked the bow of her sou'wester down close to the sign and read it. Then she drew her splendid height up again, while the stiff slicker crackled, and stared at the shop.

It was raining on Augusta McCann. But it was evidently a rainy day for the Sunbeam Beauty Shoppe. The rain dashed on a forlorn window. In front of the green burlap curtain that reached halfway up it, on a narrow table, were set three jars of dubious face cream and a vase containing five pink paper roses and one red one. Augusta thought the roses tasty but irrelevant, and cocked a knowing eye at the face cream. Four years ago, in Honolulu, somebody had tried to make her buy it to sell to her first-class passengers. Her gaze came back to the sign and paused there. The whole thing looked just miserable enough, not to be trying to take advantage of her, a stranger on the cold hard land. It looked miserable, and misery to Augusta was pure velvet.

The footsteps of Fate must have been sounding in the distracted ears of Miss Julia Trimble. Or else she mistook them for the postman, whose coming she had been waiting almost with hysteria. For at that moment, under the necessity of doing something to occupy her mind, she had seized her broom to sweep out the puddle glistening and growing dankly under the warped door. And because she was distracted she threw open the door with a violence very foreign to her, and with one wild swash of her broom hurled the entire puddle full into the face of Augusta McCann.

"Lady," said Augusta mildly. "Look what you done."

Julia Trimble fainted.

Augusta caught her with one easy motion, hitched the thin body up until it hung limply over one great arm, kicked open the door, threw her satchel in, slammed the door behind her and peered around in the dimness. Halfway down the room she saw a shampoo chair and eased Miss

Julia into it.

She let down the back until the head was lower than the body, slapped the sallow cheeks smartly, and let her alone. Augusta gazed around the place where she had just accepted a position.

There was little to be seen until she had clicked on a hanging electric light with faded petticoats of pink crepe paper, and then not such a lot more. The room was long and narrow and windowless, curtained off at the farthest end with a sleazy chintz curtain. The yellow-green walls, the color of pea soup, soaked in, rather than reflected, what light there was. There were two mirrors, one on each side wall, with shelves beneath where a full equipment for shampoo, marcel, facial massage and water waving should have been displayed abundantly, but was not. Insurance-company calendars and full-page illustrations from *The National Coiffure Gazette* were pinned up on the walls, obviously to hide stains. There was one manicure table, very tired. Beside one mirror was a white wall cabinet labeled Sterilizer, evidently having no effect at all on two brushes, six clean towels and a magazine. Opposite was a glass case on whose shelves were spread discouraged cold creams, hair tonics and a box of hair nets such as nobody wears any more.

Augusta, with no expression at all on her face, was just looking behind the chintz curtain, where a couch and a gas ring on a table showed how the proprietor of the Sunbeam Beauty Shoppe saved room rent, when the front door clicked, and it was the postman.

Augusta took in a letter and a circular and took off her crackling oilskins. Beneath them she was in shipshape blue serge.

Out of her satchel Augusta shook a great expanse of starched white apron, put on a narrow white collar, pinned a stiff cap over hair that was the color of much-pulled molasses taffy and was wound tight as sticking plaster around her head, and stood in the center of the shop, radiating competence.

Straight into her calm blue eyes, with the level mouth and the cheeks splashed with windy rose, Miss Julia stared. She sneezed, gasped and sat up. One hand pulled down her scant black skirt. She said, "Who—who are you? Did the postman come?"

Augusta reached her the mail. Then she picked up the satchel and strode behind the chintz curtain.

When she came out again, with a cup of boiling hot bouillon that sent up the most heavenly scent and steam through the half light, Miss Julia was a little heap in the chair, sobbing and gulping as only an elderly woman can sob and gulp when all hope has gone forever. Augusta slipped a hand under her chin, with a gesture of one wise in the ways of the seasick wiped the astonished face with a towel, and put the steaming cup into her hands.

“Here now,” she said, and her rich tones echoed down the bare room, “drink that and hold your head up. Nothing’s so bad as holding your head over that way. Drink it all up. It’s best-quality beef extract, and none of your eyewash.”

“But—” said Miss Julia weakly.

“Six thousand hurricanes, lady! Ju hear me? I said drink it.”

Miss Julia drank. A little color was in her cheeks when she looked up into the vigilant, calm face.

“I’m—I’m very much obliged to you,” she said, and blinked back the tears, not now of sorrow, but of scalding hot bouillon. “Please, who are you?”

“Me?” said Augusta, letting her face look surprised. “Why, I’m Augusta McCann. I just took that job of marcel waving you got. Who are you?”

“I’m Miss Julia Trimble. But—but, oh, dear; oh, I’m so sorry. I forgot I left that sign out.” Her pale eyes filled with the other kind of tears again. “I can’t keep you, and you’ve been so kind. I—”

All the reticence of old New England checked Miss Julia then. But something in Augusta’s steady blue look brought it all out with a rush.

“I’ve lost all my money,” she wailed. “All Great-aunt Julia’s legacy money, and I haven’t made any here and the rent is so high and it’s due and I can’t pay it, and now Cousin Lewis Smith says he won’t lend me any money because he doesn’t believe beauty parlors are moral, and I haven’t even carfare enough to get back to South Braintree. Oh, dear, oh, dear, I wish I was—”

Augusta grasped her shoulder, heaved her out of her chair and walked her down the room as one walks a collapsed passenger to the companion-way, braced a little on account of a possible following sea.

“You just better go below for a while, lady, and get you some good sound sleep.”

“Oh, no, no. You’re very kind, but I couldn’t possibly. I’ll have to see the

rent man, and I couldn't keep you. I—why, I haven't got any money at all to pay—”

Behind the chintz curtain Augusta began imperturbably undressing her in spite of her feeble shrinkings.

“Hold still,” she said sternly once. “How in the name of a heck do you expect I can take the collar off you with you wiggling?” And she actually shook the thin shoulders, a small peremptory shake. Miss Julia, with reddened eyes as wide as a scared child's, kept still. Augusta slipped her prim nightgown over her shoulders, braced her with one hand while she fixed the blankets with the other. Then with one unhurried sweep she picked her up bodily, laid her down, tucked her in. Miss Julia, the hot broth having its effect, collapsed on the pillow with a quivering sigh.

“I can't possibly pay you,” she said once.

“Holy hoptoads!” Augusta replied in the hushed voice of a sick state-room. “You go to sleep. I'm in charge now. Got a hot-water bag?”

So that shortly, resting on Augusta's rich contralto tones of command as a storm-beaten bird rests on a calm sea, Miss Julia sank into slumber, her feet scorching happily on a huge bottle of boiling water which Augusta had evolved out of the infinite.

It was just as well she slept, for her New England conscience would have scorched more quickly than her toes on the hot-water bottle, at the manner in which Augusta handled the rent agent.

The rent agent came in while Augusta was removing the damp green burlap, the vase of paper flowers and the three jars of cold cream from the window. It was only drizzling outside now, and the clearer light removed, with the curtain gone, any doubt there might have been about the dilapidated condition of the Sunbeam Beauty Shoppe.

The rent agent was the landlord's private secretary, in a green silk sweater, a plaited white silk sport skirt, three strings of pearl beads, too much lipstick where her mouth was, too much hair and earrings where her ears were, and the sophisticated expression of the round side of a pink-and-white china cup.

She gazed with a hard bright gaze at Augusta. She observed the cap of servitude before the line of the jaw, and made her first mistake.

“Listen here you,” she said, “where's Miss Trimble at?”

“Bed,” remarked Augusta, tearing down a calendar.

“Well, listen. You tell her Mr. Buell say she’s pos’tively got to pay her back rent. There’s tenants waiting for this place and he’ll simply just have to dispossess irregardless of the fac’ he dislikes taking steps with a lady. Listen, you tell her that, see?”

Augusta reached down another calendar. Her soldierly back was one solid silence. Petulance exploded behind her.

“Say, listen, are you or aren’t you going to tell Miss Trimble? Or aren’t you? Are you deaf or what?”

Augusta turned full around. Her voice was creamy and tender to the ear. She spoke:

“Well, of all the scabby little shrimps. Baby, your paint works is elegant but unconvincing. You come in here spilling useless talk words about rent, and your hair hasn’t been washed decent for months. And for the love of the holy Jerusha, what carpenter burned off your hair and called it a marcel? C’ mere.”

Under the hard, hard palm on her shoulder the astonished girl wiggled, opened her mouth three times like a dying fish, squeaked once and came.

“And you talking about rent for this mildewed hole that I bet your man persuaded her to take,” Augusta mused, spinning the helpless girl around to stare at her thoughtfully. “Looka the way your hair’s done. Looka the pimples under the whitewash. Looka the way you slump in the chest as if you was afraid somebody’d think God made you a woman. Here—”

A towel rubbed hard over the porcelain-finished face, a hand worked deftly at net and hairpins. The girl was jerked before a mirror. She stared woefully at hair singed and stringy, at the blotchy face, the wrong •gure. Over her loomed the Gibraltar of Augusta’s assurance.

“And you’ve got the copper-bottomed, brass-bound nerve to come here sniveling about kicking us out, when for five dollars I’d make a new woman outa you so some decent man could love you. Here,” she said with a sudden gesture that the girl shied from—“here’s a jar of bum cold cream. Do up your hair. Stick on your hat. Take this home and rub it into your face till it gets clean for once, and come back here Saturday at ten o’clock and I’ll put a new face on you and maybe fix up your figure so you can wear clothes instead of dishrags. Shut up that gab. Gimme that dispossess note.”

The torn pieces of paper fluttered to the floor. Then Augusta leaned nearer, murmuring, "You go back to your yella-livered boss and tell him to send down a painter and a carpenter to fix this place up so it will be worth a cent on the dollar or I'll break every chicken bone in your body. Let him get this place fixed up the way I say and we can talk business. When I say talk I mean talk. Looka that."

Augusta stripped up her skirt. On a cotton-stockinged leg like the limb of one of the leading Greek deities the shattered secretary observed a welt as thick as a baseball bat, but shorter. Augusta slapped it.

"That's money, and I reckon he can hear it when it speaks. Get out of my way now, and if you forget Saturday I'll send the sheriff after you. Just to see you going out of this place the way you come in it is bad business for us. Oh, stow that gab."

When Miss Julia struggled up from the depths of a sleep in which she had lain drowned for sixteen solid hours, there was a strange light all about her, or so it seemed to her. She had never seen such radiance in this little back room before. The froth of sleep was still thick in her mind and in her eyes. She rolled over, blinked, stared, and sat up. She remembered vaguely, as of things long ago, some colossal happening. It must still be happening.

This room was the same, but the chintz curtain was gone. In its place hung creamy folds of a stuff she first thought was white velvet. She looked closer. It was fine, stiff, snowy canvas, canvas of the heaviest. And the light about her certainly was different. If it snowed down here, which it didn't, she would have said it was the reflection of sun on thick snow outside. Timidly she put her head through the curtain. Before her astounded gaze stretched the place she had known as the Sunbeam Beauty Shoppe. But what a place now! The greeny-yellow walls were gone. The dismal fixtures were gone. The melancholy calendars and the optimistically impossible hairdressing designs were gone. And in their place, rich whiteness.

The walls gave out light, subdued and creamy. Along one wall curtains hung, of the same canvas that was like velvet. It hung in stately folds, impressive marble. Evidently it curtained off booths. Where the faded green burlap had been, and Miss Julia's attempt at window decoration, there were more straight folds of white canvas right against the glass,

through which the hot white sunshine of Florida winters, reborn after rain, fell on the bare floor in a shining soft glow. And all the rest of the place was bare—bare and white and empty, except for a long rope, clean, yellow, new rope, stretched like a life line along the bare wall. The simplicity and whiteness were at once stimulating and awe-inspiring. Miss Julia hardly knew whether to like it or not, and gazed timidly.

Augusta McCann, in her rattling white apron and cap, parted a canvas curtain and moved out on the scrubbed floor. Behind her darted a telephone man, with a loose handful of cord and a tool kit, looking subdued.

“And any time you or your putty-colored, cross-eyed, lantern-jawed telephone company think you can yank that telephone out again, you tell the president I’ll come up and curl his hair for him, myself in person.”

The mellow tones fell meltingly about the red ears of the telephone man, scurrying for the door. He shut it behind him very, very softly.

Augusta turned with her hands on her hips, surveying her work. Her red lips were calm and assured. She met the frightened gaze of Miss Julia and sauntered toward her down the scrubbed floor.

“Well there,” she said in tones of soft thunder, “that’s what I like to see. Fresh as new paint, aren’t you? It’s lovely weather. That squall passed us in the night and the wind’s flattening. Sun’s hot enough to scorch brasswork. Breakfast?”

“What—what has happened?” Miss Julia gasped, but Augusta was too busy with more beef tea to answer. It came out of a jar from her satchel and Miss Julia’s mouth watered again at its strong hot saltiness.

“Tuck that into you and you’ll be ready to begin on,” Augusta remarked, studying the little figure with the straggling gray hair hunched up on the side of the bed, sipping the boiling stuff. “I want to get you on the scales.”

Miss Julia spilled a scalding drop on her nightgowned knee. “On the what?”

“Scales.” Augusta was still thoughtful. “You’ll have to change the name of this place. This shoppy stuff isn’t shipshape. Sentimental as a third-class missionary prayer meeting. Got no guts to it. Want some more?”

“No, no more, thank you. What do you mean? What have you done? What about the rent? I—”

“Oh, stow that,” Augusta said, pulling her to her feet and flopping

the mattress over with the other hand. "The landlord apologized to you, the yella-livered old walrus. I told him he was making a mistake."

"But the paint, all this—how could you?"

"Can't work in a messy deck house," Augusta returned, towing her through the curtains. "Got to have good white paint and canvas. There was a marine-stores man that trusted me. I shipped once with an uncle of his to Rio. He was supercargo. Hurry up. I got to begin on you first before we get customers. You're poor advertising. Come in here."

Miss Julia's toes padded meekly across the floor. A curtain fell behind her.

"Now strip."

Never in her entire maidenly life had Miss Julia stood naked before the eyes of a single human being. In South Braintree one does not even keep a mirror in the bathroom which reveals anything more intimate than the point of the chin. Yet such was the effect of Augusta's imperial manner that Miss Julia Trimble actually saw herself from shrinking gray head to shrinking elderly toes, without a stitch to save her, in the long mirror on the wall. She looked and saw herself, and the blush that resulted turned all her scrawny flesh one hot pink.

Augusta remained calm. The same eye that had appraised the rent agent moved about Miss Julia. Then she was made to stand on scales. Then a tape measure was flicked about her. Then she was made to hop up and down violently while Augusta referred to a huge masculine wrist watch. At the last, when there seemed no end to the shamefulness, the panting, shaking Miss Julia was allowed to huddle herself into her decent thick nightgown, which she buttoned hurriedly clear to the neck. Her head was swimming.

As Augusta spoke Miss Julia flinched. "'Swat I thought," she said. "Underfed. No wind. Flabby. No resistance. Must have been regularly starving yourself. You haven't slept. You haven't exercised. You haven't taken care of yourself any more than a sick kitten. And then you try to run a beauty parlor! Just like you women after thirty or forty, you thin ones. You think it's decent and respectable being sallow and miserable. You think there's a special orchestra seat in heaven for old maids who neglect themselves to spite their neighbors

and onlookers. Why, hot hurricanes, woman—”

“Oh, do you have to swear that way? It—it’s dreadful.” Miss Julia clutched to herself the remnants of her dignity. After all, a New England ancestry must count for something.

“Huh?” said Augusta from the next booth. “C’ mere.”

The things that happened in the next half hour to Julia Trimble were epic. First she was made to take the nightgown off again and stand up in a collapsible canvas tub, while Augusta poured bucketfuls of hot salt water over her and lukewarm fresh water after that. Then there was a tremendous rubbing and kneading of her bony back and arms and legs while she tingled. She was allowed to dress herself, but, immediately after Augusta seized her again. This time she had to drink a quart of milk, slowly. Then her hair was shampooed, and while it was drying her face tapped, not rubbed, all over, with fingers like pink velvet and cream and electricity. Julia Trimble had no words, no thoughts, no protests left. She lay back unthinking, only feeling a new, quick warmth within her and outside, the enveloping quiet of Augusta.

At the very last Augusta plucked her own gleaming marcel iron from the heater and clicked it with that subdued rhythmical aplomb possible only to masters of that exotic craft. Miss Julia, whose short course in beauty culture at a cheap school had been left with only a fumbling ignorance of all such mysteries, knew artistry when she heard it. Out of those gleaming steel jaws fell waves exact, rippling, shining gray, proceeding about her head in an ordered fluting, sophisticated magic. Beyond her head in the mirror she could see the absorbed glance of Augusta, her cap as stiff, her breathing as placid, as if this whirlwind of action had never emanated from her. She had not spoken for hours, it seemed. Hers was the indwelling rapture of the creative artist.

Finally “Now,” she said; and Julia Trimble stood up.

“I—why, it isn’t me. You’ve put rouge on me.”

“Gaw, yes. You need it,” Augusta murmured.

Miss Julia stared harder. She saw herself, undoubtedly. She knew her faded gray eyes, the long face, the thin hair. But this woman’s eyes were warm and excited. She had dark eyelashes and eyebrows. When had Augusta done that? There was a flush like ashes of roses in her cheeks, and her mouth was faintly red. But her hair was the marvel. That

stringy hair, yellowy-gray before, was now soft silver, a coronal of gentle waves close about her forehead, heaped high and distinguished over the ears. Distinguished—yes, really. That is exactly what she looked. And recognizing that, proudly Miss Julia remembered the ancestor who had been a college president, and held her chin up.

“Your clothes are fair,” Augusta remarked behind her. “But you’ll have to get better ones, gray and white and soft colors. There was an old French countess on the Trieste boat. Well, c’ mere now.”

Miss Julia recognized Augusta’s key word for new disturbances. She was even a little curious. And she might well have been. For outside, in the long, bare half of the room, up and down the empty floor Augusta made her walk.

“Don’t throw your shoulders back like that,” she commanded. “Makes you look like a murderess in a strait-jacket. Hold your chest up and you can forget your shoulders. Make believe you’ve got a button on your chest and a rope from that to the ceiling. Hang up on it. Hang on it. Your chest; your chest, I said, not your shoulders. Hold your chin in. And for the love of the seven sacred cats yank your stummick in—in!”

Yes, she did too. Just like that. She said “stummick” to Julia Trimble; and Julia Trimble, scared eyes on the stern face down the room, drew in that hitherto unremarked part of her body politic, got angry and strode, actually strode, down the room, eyes flashing. Never in her life before had she felt so vital and dominating. She could almost have thrown Augusta out of the shop. Almost—but Augusta was speaking again.

“That’s more like a Christian. Now you’re a better ad for the business. Looka here. Here’s what you gotta do next. Here’s some names I cut outa the morning paper. Staying at the Great Biscayne. You go sit on the front piazza there and you find out who is which and you sit there and take them all in. Don’t miss anything. Take a paper and pencil and put down which ones are too fat and which ones are too thin and the ones with bad skin and their hair done wrong and don’t know how to walk or wear their clothes—everything like that. Walk out in the sun all the way and take deep breaths, and in an hour get a malted milk with two eggs in it. Don’t come back all afternoon. I got to be busy.”

For the first time since she had come south Julia Trimble spent an afternoon sitting on a hotel porch, gazing at women who were fascinating

to her because they lived in such hotels. She had walked slowly through the brisk crowded streets, slower yet up the avenue of queer feathery pines that reveal at a distance the reserved colonial yellow and white of the hotel itself. So that she sat, glad to sit, but feeling through her whole body a live vigor she had forgotten one could feel—a clean, scrubbed, massaged, well-cared-for feeling. She rejoiced in the knowledge that her cheeks were flushed and her eyes bright.

The long, gay piazzas with the flashing bay beyond, the palms, the flowers, the glistening automobiles and the drenching sunshine—above all, the grouped chattering people seemed to make it the pleasantest place in the world to be. Bewildered as she was, she wallowed in content. A comfortable fat woman beside her, doing intricate things with needles and rose-colored wool, obligingly told her who everybody was. One by one she checked off the names on her list. She had never noticed women so much before, in spite of her so-called course in beauty culture. Under the necessity of remembering all this to tell to Augusta, her wits and her powers of observation were unusually sharpened. She saw these women, not only as they were but as they might be if Augusta could get those two great hands on them. She found herself using Augusta herself as standard with which to measure these women, her radiant soundness, her great wholesome, splendidly carried body against their lumpiness and scrawniness. Of course there were many well-groomed, •nely healthy women dashing about, but too many oldish ones were too fat, with the tight, overstuffed look of the hotel dweller, thick thighs and hard, high bosoms in too elaborate sport clothes, or too thin, as she was, edged with unnecessary nerves that brought wrinkles and circles. There were women letting their—well, their abdomens slump; there were women waddling their hips. They pushed their shoulders too far back or they drooped them consumptively or they walked knock-kneed because of thick cushions of fat on the insides of their legs. And the ones with the most blatantly artificial complexions almost always lacked most that sense of thorough grooming. Hordes of women, all with something for Augusta to do to them.

Julia Trimble was thrilled. Going back, she sipped her milk and eggs with eyes wide and alert for the women in the drug store about her—the

girls behind the counter, the middle-aged customers before it. Going home to the Sunbeam Beauty Shoppe, she walked now almost instinctively as Augusta had shown her, pulling herself up sharply when she thought she was slumping. Why, she wouldn't be like one of those feeble, round-shouldered old things for anything.

All this was excellent preparation for the work which had kept Augusta busy all afternoon. Miss Julia hardly gasped at all over the revelation which the shop front held for her. She merely gasped in surprise that such color should exist. Outside the shop Augusta had painted the woodwork a strange blue-green, and the little door was blue-green. It was a strange color to her, and yet it went perfectly with the blazing tropic sky and the white buildings down the street. She could not guess that that was the color of Italian peasant houses around Genoa, that Augusta used to watch from some passing deck, a color splashed on the rough masonry by the copper sulphide sprayed on the grapevines over the house. She was more engrossed by the awning, which swung, a great descending sail, from the low roof to the standard over the curbstone. She could not know that Augusta had held that color in her eye ever since she had absorbed, from a ship out of Trieste, the color of the stained sails of Venetian farm boats •aming against the Adriatic. It was the same canvas, creamy at the top but shading through amber and apricot into clear flame, dripping almost to the sidewalk. Down the whole length of the street that canvas leaped and shouted and sang. Its flamboyance was marvelous advertising. Its rightness of color made the whole street an adventure. Once Miss Julia would have thought it loud. Now, shamefacedly, she rejoiced in it. She rejoiced also in the window, mysterious in the heavy white curtains which hung against it. On the right-hand curtain, gleaming wetly, had been painted in discreet blue letters the words, "Miss Trimble." She read it with eyes shining with excitement.

They had what seemed to Miss Julia like a perfectly enormous dinner, which Augusta made her eat of lavishly, and only pecked at herself. It was spread on the new white oilcloth of the little back room, which, with two cots instead of one, looked as compact and tidy as a stateroom. And later on, when she had been tucked early into her cot, with the sweet salt wind from the open window making her sleepy, she lay and watched Augusta

stitching a new white apron, and they talked. Augusta learned all about South Braintree and Greataunt Julia and cousin Lewis Smith and Miss Julia's lifelong secret ambition to come to Florida. Miss Julia, through Augusta's casual talk of strange seas and stranger ports, with liquid, far-off names, caught something of the inarticulate desire of Augusta which she had cherished secretly, with the marcel iron. Augusta had wanted to run a beauty parlor too. But hers was to be different. She explained it.

"It's women I get so sick of, the ones that aren't as the Lord intended them to be. Men are bad enough. But these namby-pamby females, too fat and too thin and delicate and no good to anybody, I hate 'em. They get green around the gills in any sort of sea and then I have to bring 'em the hot-water bag to save 'em from dying; or the doctor told them they had weak hearts and it's 'Go tell the captain the fowl at lunch was almost raw and the potatoes had lumps in them.' Fat and bloated like sea cows or thin as herrings, I've always had to jump around for them, and I've hungered for the time when I could get my hands on them and make them jump around. Not just marcel and •x them so their surface would be all right, but strip and overhaul them from the keel up. And then you seeming so forlorn and picked on, just set me off. I guess I can practice on you and that pink-candy baby that come in here for the rent. Of course you're the skipper, but I'll be a kind of •rst mate. Now tell about the women."

When Miss Julia drifted serenely off to sleep she was vaguely conscious of seeing Augusta scrubbing herself in cold water, her great body like that of some warm marble goddess come to life in the shadows. Funny, Miss Julia thought vaguely, in the idiom of New England, how only that morning she would have been ashamed to look at a bare-naked woman. Now she had to confess that it was sort of beautiful. But then, one looked at these things differently in Florida.

Truly, the next morning Augusta demonstrated to the still astonished Miss Julia, capable of more astonishment than she would have thought possible, further details of Augusta's own way of running a beauty-culture establishment. They had already accomplished the ritual of Miss Julia's rising, the hot salt bath, the cold shower, the thorough massage. This morning, in place of the shampoo and the wave, there were exercises.

Gentle exercises at first, Augusta explained gravely; mere nothings. She stood Miss Julia down the length of the long, cool room and watched her carefully trying to touch the floor with her finger tips ten times, ten times making waist rings that tweaked unmercifully at what Augusta called Miss Julia's flabby corset muscles; and ten times—but this was the thing Miss Julia protested vigorously against—ten times trying to kick higher than her head, clutching for dear life the rope looped along the wall for just such purpose. This last Miss Julia flatly balked at. She considered it, for a gentlewoman of her years, unnecessary, undignified and the next thing to indecent.

"Well, for the love heck," Augusta remarked, "you'd think you was a near relative of Methusalem. Get that leg up there now. Way up. Swing it good. Holy catnip, lady, when I say swing it, you swing it!" It is amazing what the human frame is capable of, Miss Julia found.

More massage for the muscles that might be a little stiff, a quick rubdown, and an enormous milk-and-eggs breakfast completed the ceremony. And then Augusta went to the telephone.

Her telephone voice was a rich bellow, fit for hailing passing vessels through a thick fog across rolling deeps. So that Miss Julia, making beds with tremendous vigor, could hardly have avoided hearing. Augusta had the telephone operator at the Great Biscayne Hotel.

"You get me Mrs. Peter Blair on her telephone, will you? Ye-ah. Mrs. Blair. Wants speak to her." A pause. "Hello—hello—oh, that you, Mrs. Blair? Say, Mrs. Blair, you're getting kind of too fat around the hips, Mrs. Blair, seems to me. And I guess you forgot you couldn't drink two cocktails before dinner without it showing on your face, did you? Well, I—What? Who, me? Why, I'm 'Gusta, Mrs. Blair." Pause. "Oh, yes, you do. That trip on the Kameha, the Royal Green line out of Honolulu five years ago—Honolulu, Yokohama and Singapore. The summer you was married. . . . Sure. You was sick. . . . Sure I'm 'Gusta. Next trip they made me head stewardess. I told you then you'd hafta watch out about getting too fat. Your husband don't like 'em fat. . . . Sure. Sure, you remember. . . . Well, listen, Mrs. Blair, I'm here now, and I can fix you up all right—skin, figure and everything. . . . Yes'm. I'm working to Miss Trimble's. . . . Well, I don't know where you've been, not to. Miss Trimble is the famous beauty culture and female rejuvenator. . . . Uh-huh. Right here in Miami. Her and I can fix you up good. . . . No, you can't come right over.

No, not tomorrow. Let's see. I want to give you a couple hours and go over you good. You've let yourself go somp'n awful. Come in at ten o'clock Thursday. And say, listen, that Mrs. Matthews that's with you. . . . Well, she was playing cards in the lobby with you yesterday. Well, you tell her to come in and see me three o'clock Thursday afternoon. She's worse than you are, even. Her hair needs attention and her stummick muscles have all give out. You tell her I said so. Augusta, at Miss Trimble's. Northwest Fifth Street, and look for the •ame-colored awning. . . . Uh-huh. Bye-bye."

In such fashion, therefore, Miss Julia found herself famous. In such fashion Augusta began her great campaign against the errors of female •esh. Miss Julia became background, figurehead and business department. She learned to carry herself superbly, wear exquisitely simple gray dresses with a manner, look aloof and distinguished, live with a regularity and efficiency that would have shamed the crew of a warship, and keep silent. Augusta did the rest.

Augusta was amazing. Her first boldness bore good fruit. Mrs. Peter Blair, at once outraged and impressed, had come and had been conquered. Two hours alone with Augusta, her scales, tape measure and calculating eye had rendered her as helpless as Miss Julia. Her diet, her habits of living, her exercise, almost her thoughts were exposed to Augusta's calm analysis and scorching tongue. She was put on rigid schedule, with a weekly bill that went higher the harder she had to work. She rose in the morning when Augusta told her to, reported it by telephone to Miss Trimble, who checked it on a neat card index. She came three times a week for exercises, rubdown and massage. Augusta took care of her face, hair and nails. Augusta sent her to a dentist and made her learn to swim. She caused her to give up afternoon bridge and play tennis. The hours of swimming and tennis, even the hours she danced in the evening, when she went to bed, and everything she ate, were all recorded and checked by Miss Trimble, to whom Mrs. Blair spoke respectfully. But Julia Trimble had no illusions. She knew that no one but Augusta, serene in her blue serge and white apron, striding about giving orders like a bucko mate of a tramp ship, could have done it, and lived.

The result was a glorified Mrs. Peter Blair. She had been, as Augusta had said, too fat, too rouged, too well padded with soft, mushy flesh,

too much the typical hotel-dwelling woman. Augusta called them sea cows, and if you have ever studied the sluggish fatness, the bloated lack of response to all stimuli but those relating to food, which is a sea cow, you would understand the cruel aptness of the illustration. But Miss Trimble's had changed all that. In three weeks the fat was melting away. In two months the Mrs. Peter Blair who swung down the street toward the familiar blue door was a sparkling-eyed, lithe, magnetic young thing whose thirty-seven years were a rosy twenty-two. Her chin was up. Her color was flashing. Her stomach muscles were •at and hard. She could wear clothes as the fashion magazines dream they should be worn. In Augusta's own words, she was a real he-man's female at last.

And what they had done for Mrs. Blair they did for crowds of other women, who by the third week were clamoring for appointments which were not always given them. Even the landlord's secretary, whose name turned out to be Della Mooney, had become, under Augusta's hard fist, a dewy-eyed lissom creature with personality, and she got engaged to a leading real-estate man almost immediately. And if that wasn't convincing, Augusta said, who was superbly unconscious of all men, then what could be?

Apparently there was nothing those hotel women would not do if Augusta, or rather, Miss Trimble's, would only make them slender and good-looking. And Augusta saw to it that they were kept busy. Miss Trimble had to enlarge the shop, spend money on better and more permanent fixtures. Augusta had a real gymnasium, with apparatus and a running track, where fat women panted and sweated all day in sweaters and in squads. There were hot and cold showers and massage rooms. There were more shampoo booths and expert marcel wavers and shampooers and manicure girls, on the more decorative side. They had to employ assistants. But the very girls who worked at Trimble's were a special lot, hand-picked by Augusta, trained by Augusta, disciplined by Augusta. They would no more have singed hair and ruined it to sell false hair goods, or applied cold creams which would ruin skins and grow hair, than they would have de•ed Augusta. They had a dormitory of their own. They were fed and dieted and exercised, had their swimming hours and their shampoo hours, their gym work, their dentistry and their manicures, as if they

were paying patrons. Under Miss Trimble's quiet influence they were well mannered, charming. That, of course, meant more publicity, more attention for Miss Trimble's remarkable establishment. And when one Trimble girl was starred in the movies and another married a millionaire, you can see for yourself that the place began to be as well known as the Gulf Stream or the climate itself. Women on hotel piazzas boasted daily of the hardships they suffered at Augusta's hand. "My dear, really," they said pityingly to newcomers, "you mustn't waste a minute. If you are staying here a month you will just have time to let Miss Trimble make you over. Put yourself entirely in her hands and let her take charge of you. And besides, you meet all the really smart women there." The watchword ran up and down the tea gardens and polo games and piazzas.

Only Augusta remained unchanged through all of this. Miss Trimble had her tiny but charming apartment. The Trimble girls grew beautiful and famous. The Trimble patrons came, and went glorified. But Augusta moved as usual, calm, radiating health, level-lipped, her cap as starched, her aprons as snowy, her blue serge as neat, her vocabulary as red-blooded. She lived in the little old back room of the original shop, got up at dawn, ate sparingly and never went anywhere. Her thrills came as they must come to the captain of a great ship, through constant vigilance, constant discipline, plain living and the satisfaction of bringing his ship, its cargo and its passengers safely into port every trip.

Of course, the establishment had been obliged to add what Augusta scornfully called eyewash. That became Miss Julia's part. By dint of visiting hotels, tea dances, tennis matches, polo games, as part of her tours of inspection, Miss Julia had developed rather a shrewdness in that respect. She had learned that it paid to be seen at smart places, but that it also paid to see. The comments and attention that marked the passing of her finely carried little figure, in soft gray silks, the aristocratic face with the rosy tint on the cheeks, the snapping gray eyes, the beautiful hair were all good publicity. But she picked up ideas that way, too, and the ideas helped carry on the unique reputation they were gaining all the way up and down the coast. She had guessed that fencing would be the next sport for women, long before anyone else, and her fencing master was very French and very much a success. She was the

one to suggest the sun bath in the patio, with exotically colored chaise lounges and Cuban tiles like the colors of faded roses in a rose jar. She served tea there at four every afternoon, from an elaborate silver tea service, to those patrons whose diet allowed them tea, instead of milk and eggs, or nothing. And that became a ceremony, too, to which women sought invitations—a ceremony at which only the most habitual of the patrons, clad in the rose silk scanty bathing suits prescribed for all Trimble activities, were permitted. Then Miss Julia, in gray crepe de chine, under the tropic loveliness of a lavender-blue and blossoming thunbergia vine, with the sun pouring on naked legs and arms, bosoms and backs, in the patio before her, was most transformed. Nowadays a leg was a leg to Miss Julia, something to be studied and worked on and charged for, and not at all an appendage for making a mock of modesty. She took all that as matter-of-factly as the parked limousines, sport cars and dowager landaulets before the •ame-colored awning, which now covered half a block.

It was on such an afternoon, late in such a tea hour, as Miss Julia sat breathing soft air and a great contented assurance that all was for the best in a rapidly improving world, that the one thing she could not possibly have believed could happen, happened. Augusta McCann fell in love. Little was Miss Julia aware of it. The sun, between the vine leaves, did not darken, but continued to fleck the silver with tiny points of dazzle. The silk-clad women lounging about her spoke in drowsy murmurs. It was all because of Augusta, Miss Julia was thinking. Her vigor, her passion for cleanliness and glowing good bodies, her wise, rigid discipline, pervaded everything, like the sun and the good wind. In fact, Miss Julia was so aware of Augusta in the abstract that she did not at •rst see Augusta herself standing by her elbow.

“Goodness, Augusta, how you startled me! What is it?”

Augusta was staring absently at the other wall. She gave no indication at all that she saw Mrs. Whiting steal a third lump of sugar, who should have had none. She remained oblivious of the fact that little Mrs. James Rutherford Duncan, 3d, was hiding out from a strenuous gymnasium appointment by pretending to be asleep over in the far corner. All that Augusta said, and to Miss Julia there was something hollow in the tone, was, “Is there any tea left?”

“Why, of course, Augusta. I didn’t know that Mrs. Watkins wanted

some or I would have had it sent in." Mrs. Watkins was the particular plush horse, in Augusta's words, then under private view.

"It isn't for Mrs. Watkins. It's for me."

"Well, of course. Sit right down. Is Mrs. Watkins gone?"

Augusta sat down and held her teacup in her lap, stirring and stirring it.

"I don't know," she said, stirring it more.

Miss Julia glanced at her, puzzled. There was certainly something unusual in Augusta's manner.

"Where were you last night?" Miss Julia asked idly. "I came over to show you those samples for the girls' new uniforms."

"I—" Augusta hesitated. "I guess I was to the band concert."

"The band conc—Well, I didn't know you liked music. Did you enjoy it?"

"Enjoy what?"

"Augusta, what's the matter with you?"

Augusta hesitated. "Miss Julia—ah—can I speak to you a minute? There's a—I got to ask you something. D'you think—I mean, wouldn't it be kind of a good idea to have a man around the place?"

"A what? What for, for mercy sake? Why, it wouldn't be decent."

"But I mean—well, but wouldn't you think we had something a man could do?"

"Have you got a brother or something?" Miss Julia gazed in suspicion and astonishment, to see the slow crimson spread from Augusta's firm cheek to her creamy throat.

"He—no'm, he isn't exactly a relative. He's a piccolo player."

"A—a what? For goodness mercy sake, what do we need a piccolo player around here for?"

"Well, you see, he hasn't got a job."

"But I thought you said he was a—"

"Well, he was, last night. He worked in the band that plays in the park. Only last night his boss said he played out of his turn, said he played so loud you couldn't hear anything else, and he wouldn't let him have a part by himself, and so he resigned on him. And now he needs something to do, and I thought—I thought maybe he could stand out in front and open automobiles for the women. He's too delicate for heavy work."

"But—but, Augusta—we can't—we don't—I don't see—what's his name?"

“His name’s Andrey Gobchek, and he’s waiting in your office now to see you.”

“In my—with that name? Why, Augusta, are you crazy? He might be a foreigner,” Miss Julia rose and then stood, looking down at Augusta. Something in the unaccustomed droop in the square shoulders gave her a chill of dreadful premonition.

“Augusta McCann, I do believe you are in love with this—this piccolo player.”

Augusta raised wide disturbed eyes to hers. Their steel blue was melted, suffused with a troubled moisture. The scarlet deepened on her cheek.

“Oh, Miss Julia, I—I don’t know as I ever felt anybody needed somebody to look after them the way he does. He’s so—so helpless.”

Miss Julia, with a dismayed exclamation, fled to her office on fearful toes, and stared at the man waiting in that blue and mauve and lemon taffeta sanctuary of her own. He got to his feet as she came in, and stood bowing. Augusta had said it. He certainly was helpless. He was the most helpless-looking object she had ever laid eyes on.

He was one of those slight, undersized, boyish-seeming male persons, with narrow shoulders and a thin white face made pathetic by enormous melancholy brown eyes, so liquid and appealing that she had to look twice to see that he, too, was not in tears. Standing half turned away from her, he was hardly as tall as she was, with a shock of silky black hair and a pathetic droop to his shoulders. Julia reflected sardonically that evidently Augusta had not ordered him to stiffen up his stummick muscles. He had a peaked narrow face with a skin so white it looked bluish in shadow, and his hand upon the corner of her desk was whiter and more fragile than her own. Yet she felt no warming rush of maternal interest in him, for all that. Rather she sat down behind her desk and looked with dislike at his slightly pouting red lips and his cream-colored silk suit with the miracle of peacock brocade that was his tie.

She said tartly, “I’m told you’re looking for work.”

He raised gentle, uncomplaining eyes to her. His voice was equally sweet and gentle. “If madame would be so very good.”

Miss Julia felt herself sinking in a morass of gentleness and helplessness. She began to see how he had secured his great effect with Augusta.

“I’m sure I can’t think of a thing we might need a man for, that a woman couldn’t do better,” she said resentfully. “Augusta did say something about standing on the curb and opening the doors of automobiles, but—”

“Oh, thank you, madame; thank you a thousand times,” he said quickly, and before she could prevent it he had stooped and was pressing kisses on her hand.

“Horrid wet, cold lips,” she thought afterward. “Made me creep all over as if I’d touched a lizard.”

But from that day forth Julia Trimble felt like a sailor sent to the masthead to keep a sharp lookout on the horizon, while the good ship of her establishment rode steadily on a seemingly calm sea, with no limit but the brilliant sky. Far down on the horizon she alone beheld a dark cloud rising, a cloud no larger than a man’s hand. And the hand was the hand of Andrey Gobchek, opening automobile doors.

He was, the customers declared, a markedly picturesque addition to the place. He did his work with the melancholy distinction of a minor poet or a younger brother of H. R. H. Hamlet. He had discarded the cream-colored silk suitings for crisp white linen, a narrow black tie that was no blacker or silkier than his gleaming black head or his eyelashes, and a came-colored cummerbund into which the tie tucked from a Byronic low collar. Under the came-colored awning, dazzling white and black in the dazzling white light, he was a thrillingly exotic figure, or so the dowagers thought whose car doors he opened with a languishing grace. The plumpest patrons leaned heavily on his frail, boyish arm and he gazed at them with lustrous orbs, to the great nausea of Miss Julia. Even when there were no approaching automobiles he would stand under the awning, one slender hand on his hip, the other stroking wearily his glossy hair, his cameolike profile tilted to gaze in an aristocratic abstraction heavenward, and there was a small suggestion that he was aware of what a picture he was making. Certainly the shy, wistful smile, the eloquent glance, with which he moved forward to meet some heavily freighted landaulet, became more and more personal, more and more directly applied, in exact ratio to the amount of income tax therein implied.

“Oh, Miss Trimble, your adorable Andrey has such chic!” the fluttered dowagers chorused. “Where did you ever find him? He is per-

fect Dresden china.”

To which Miss Julia’s polite smile was growing more and more acid. The cloud upon the horizon was growing rapidly more threatening. For if the enchanting porcelain helplessness of Andrey so affected the dowagers, it was devastating to Augusta, for whom a life on strenuous decks had held nothing like this. In all her stern years the sentimental pangs of first love could never have touched her great heartstrings. If it had been one of the manicure girls—but no manicure girl would have taken it like this.

Augusta’s forthright temperament took the malady as a strong man takes typhoid fever. Every keen, driving edge of her militant domination softened. Her eyes, with that troubled, hazy look in them, failed now to notice the little careless things which will happen in the best establishments if no one looks after them. She did not see them, because her softened gaze followed after the fragilities of Andrey.

She moved her desk near a window so that she could look out and watch him idling elegantly on the pavement. Miss Julia found her sitting there often, staring out with an absorbed, adoring gaze, while beyond, in the shampoo booths, in the gymnasium, in the baths, at the manicure tables, confusion left its untidy finger marks. Augusta seemed unconscious of a hundred matters needing her firm, hard hand. Even her cap and apron seemed not to be quite so starched. She called Andrey in for a brimming glass of eggs and milk in the middle of the morning. His tea in the afternoon, in her office, was glorified with special cakes and honey and crumpets. She cooked enormous dinners for him in her own little back room, and haunted him with hot milk and quinine when it rained. Evenings, Julia found them often in Augusta’s office together, the curtains drawn, and Andrey tootling away plaintively upon his piccolo, while Augusta, otherwise a stranger to all music, let her hands drop from darning his silk socks to gaze at him enraptured. Miss Julia suspected that Augusta loaned or gave him money, for certainly they did not pay him enough to warrant the expensive room he occupied or the array of clothing he displayed. Yet she could say nothing to Augusta, who was the complete picture of the embattled maternal at the slightest suggestion that the exquisite Andrey really did not need all the pampering he got.

If it had been a matter only of Augusta’s personal feelings! But the

softening of her fighting edge was affecting all Miss Trimble's. Augusta's discipline, her unique personality, had made the establishment. But the day she saw Andrey kiss Mrs. Watkins' hand she forgot to discharge an incompetent and insolent manicure girl, who promptly inoculated the rest with the same virus. The day he was sick in bed with a cold she forgot two important appointments.

The afternoon when Andrey called her "Augusta darling" and borrowed fifty dollars she moved about in a starry-eyed rapture, and spoke meekly to a wealthy patron who should have been withered and reduced to discipline. As a result the woman organized a diet rebellion, with two others in the same stout class, and to their own complete astonishment succeeded in getting Augusta to agree with them. Later they stopped coming to Miss Trimble's. The saying began to move about the hotel piazzas that Miss Trimble's really was not what it used to be. And if there is any more damaging phrase for a business than that, Miss Julia did not want to know it. The patronage began to decrease alarmingly. The stout vessel of Augusta's piloting was drifting dangerously near the bursting thunder of the rocks.

And all the while Andrey Gobchek, the lily-cheeked little lost prince of fashion, was posing upon her pavement, under Augusta's devoted eye. The only comfort Julia Trimble had was in the knowledge that Andrey had not once spoken of love, engagement or marriage.

"All he wants from her is just what he's getting," Miss Julia thought. "Somebody to make a fuss over him and give him money. I'd like to have him kidnapped."

There were only two things Julia Trimble could think of to help the situation. The first was by some hook or crook to disillusion Augusta. Miss Julia was not accustomed to intrigue. Now she moved about with her head buzzing with dark schemes whose only result was a headache. She knew Andrey must not be made to look any more pitiful or helpless, or Augusta would marry him by force, out of sheer protective passion. But if only she could discover in him some unguessed, by Augusta, criminality. She watched him with a grim and suspicious glance. In a dark veil she walked by his lodging house of evenings. She investigated Augusta's closet, where he kept his coats. She was tremendously disappointed with results. He seemed to live a suspiciously innocuous existence. He spent money lavishly only on clothes and jewelry for himself. His habits were

regular. He went often to the movies. He went to bed early. His only friend seemed to be a slightly taller, much more vigorous young man who wore constantly a bright green belted coat, a checked cap, and carried the only suspicious thing Miss Julia could note, a heavy black box with a handle, and occasionally a tripod. In Andrey's closet there were some jars of face cream and an eyebrow pencil. Miss Julia sniffed bitterly at discovering him apparently harmless, if inordinately vain.

The other thing by which she tried to help business was the patronage, for Trimble's, of Marie-Élise, Duchesse d'Amboise. It was the first time Miss Trimble had deliberately gone out to bring in a customer. She had been very careful about it, of course. She was correctly and adequately presented. She made her little plea like a gentlewoman, and she had been successful. For at last Marie-Élise, Duchesse d'Amboise, was actually within the walls of the establishment Trimble, having her hair washed.

It was known everywhere. Three new patrons had followed her. You can imagine the flutter within the aristocracy of Andrey Gobchek, bowing forward the dark, simply dressed young woman who was actually a duchess.

Miss Julia sat in the patio, scatteringly filled with rose-silk-clad figures reclining in the long chairs, waiting for the tea things to be brought in, not at all with her one-time glow of contentment. If the duchess would only come regularly. If Augusta would only take her properly in hand. The duchess' skin was altogether too sallow, and her hair looked as if it were falling out badly. Apparently duchesses were just potential customers, after all. Miss Julia let her eyes lift contemptatively skyward.

It was an exquisite sky, the color of warm larkspur blossoms, pulsating with brilliant white light. Nearer her the pale lavender-blue of the thunbergia and the green leaves were outlined softly against it, as they hung on the tiles of the roof edge. Sky and blossoms were all she could see that way, except a glimpse of a higher neighboring roof which overlooked her patio. Afternoon wind from the sea and the distant fragrance of jessamine were all that she could smell. Yet suddenly something else twitched at her nostrils.

Mercy, someone must be burning a customer's head clean off! She hoped it wasn't the duchess'. But no, that was not quite the smell of

burning hair. But it was the smell of something burning, and right within her own doors. Before she could move to investigate, a bluish haze puffed between her and that admirable sky. It turned darker. It was smoke.

It was difficult for her to thread her way among the long chairs with any sort of swiftness, without alarming the women drowsing in them. Yet the smoke was growing in terrifying volume. There were a number of doors and windows, from the booths and offices, opening on the wide patio. The smoke was coming from the two windows of the door nearest Augusta's office. The place—why, the whole place must have burst into flame. Even as frantic fear tore at her, she had a queer wonder that any building of hers could produce so rich and black a conflagration.

Then a woman behind her screamed. There were screams within. Faces came to windows peering out at the smoke, now pouring in a slow, majestic column skyward. Miss Julia turned back to quiet the screaming half-clad women in the patio, urging them to drag the innumerable wicker chairs to the farther corner. From within a panicky manicure girl slashed a window screen and climbed out to the pavement, crying in a choked, faint voice, "Fire! Help! Police! Fire!" Two customers in starched dressing cloths, their hair a foamy mass of soapsuds, scrambled after her. From another door came a stream of expensive patrons, some masked with cold cream or face packs and crying, some with their hair in half finished waves, breathing deeply but silent. The hubbub of running feet and lifted voices continued within, while Miss Julia was crowded back in the corner by the press of queerly arrayed, unshowered patrons. She tried frantically to pass through them, while knowing relief that few of her well-trained girls had joined the panic.

"Where's the fire? Where's the fire?"

"The front office is a mass of flame."

"No, it's in the permanent booth."

"It's the gymnasium."

"Why don't they send for the department?"

"Oh, I'm going to faint."

"Help! Fire! Fire!"

"Will you keep quiet!" Miss Julia heard herself panting, as she edged her way forward.

And then she stopped, and everybody shrieked and stared. For in the end doorway, where the smoke clouds were billowing the thickest, appeared a heart-lifting and heroic spectacle. Andrey Gobchek, coatless, in gleaming white against that dark, his immaculate shirt open at the rounded throat, his dark hair picturesquely disarranged, staggered into the open air, bearing across one shoulder the unmistakable figure of Marie-Élise, Duchesse d'Amboise. She was swathed in a dressing cloth, her hair was dripping inelegantly down her own and Andrey's neck, and it must be admitted that she was kicking and protesting most emphatically. But he strode with her full into the sunlight and continued to hold her, the black smoke curling behind his brilliant figure, his inflated chest, his noble, his heroically pallid countenance. It was a perfect picture, as the patrons around Miss Julia evidently felt, for three began sobbing wildly and rushed to embrace him. The duchess naturally struggled from his arms and pushed free, in a very bad temper. More women scrambled through windows. More women ran to Andrey. It was a confusion which he mightily dominated, having discarded all fragility. He lifted his arms in a noble gesture.

"Ladies, ladies!" he cried. "Be calm, I beg you. It is nothing. I will save you. I will save every one of you personally."

And while they gasped in awe and several protested with screams, he turned to dash back through the very door by which the smoke was rolling. But he made only three steps toward it.

The reason why he did not go any farther was that the smoke seemed to be getting very much thicker. And the reason why it was getting thicker was that Augusta was stalking through the doorway, carrying in each hand a galvanized iron pail, from which the smoke issued, oily and black and sluggish. It was not half so picturesque an entrance as Andrey's had been. There was a smudge on her nose, her cap was awry, and her nose was twisted in disgust as far away from the enveloping smoke wreaths as possible. Yet out of the smoke she loomed, as he could not, portentous, calm, vibrant with authority. Her very cap, one-sided as it was, fairly crackled with domination. In a silence broken only by the deep relaxing breaths of the customers, she moved to the middle of the tiles and dumped out the smoldering contents of the

smudge pails. From within the building no more smoke came. Behind her a tall calm girl, in the immaculate uniform of Miss Trimble's, inverted a patent fire extinguisher hissingly on the smolder. The charred rags were scattered. The fire was out.

Not until then did Augusta straighten herself slowly upward, a towering figure with the head of a stern peasant goddess.

"Show me," she said, in her quarter-deck voice that might have boomed across thundering seas or stopped a riot at the lifeboats—"show me the double-dyed, crazy-brained, cockeyed descendant of four million prize idiots who put those smudge buckets in my closet."

No one spoke. There was only the deep breathing of half-clad patrons regaining their lost aplomb. Several, with hair scattering blobs of soapsuds, slipped through the open doorways to the soothing hands of operators. Miss Julia, with an exultant leap of her heart at Augusta's beloved old fighting voice, moved over to the duchess, who was sitting bolt upright on a chair edge, her dressing cloth tight about her under her folded arms, eyeing Augusta, the crowd and the empty iron pails with an enigmatic expression. Only Andrey Gobchek held his pose of heroism, his chest arched, his noble head high. There was certainly nothing of dependence about him now.

Something in Augusta's glance as her eyes fell on him altered for a moment. For a moment it seemed to the agonized Miss Julia that her gaze was going to soften. But it did not soften. It grew hard, grew chilly, grew icy, pierced like gimlets. Her hands went to her hips, her chin lowered, her eyes narrowed.

"So we have with us the boy hero, have we?" she remarked, and beneath the dragging calm of her tone there was the savage edge of the woman who learns that she has been duped. "All fixed up to save the lovely ladies from the hellish holocaust, hey? Yay-ah, you got over bein' helpless in a hurry when there was a way of being a hero, didn't you? Gaw, how I hate a hero! C'mere," she said, and shot out a long arm. Her hand closed on the shoulders of Andrey Gobchek, who made the mistake of defying her with a fiery glance. She shook him as one would shake an exasperating urchin. "Now you get down and clean up that mess on our good tiles. I guess I know all about those smudge pails. You been using that closet a lot lately, haven't you?"

Now get busy. Ladies, you can all go back, and the girls will finish you up. There isn't any fire, there won't be any fire, there never was any fire. Everything you're having now is on the house, on account of us letting you get scared this way. But everybody that is on schedule tomorrow better not forget it, because I'm going to give everybody a thorough inspection. People have been getting so absolutely cock-eyed careless around here. And the next time any employee of this place even thinks fire, by the living Lord Harry, I'll—"

Augusta stopped. She had lifted her eyes to heaven to improve her vehemence. And now her glance rested upward, fixed and staring. Julia Trimble and the duchess and the silk-clad patrons who remained in the patio turned their eyes to stare as she did. All but Andrey, who now resumed his gentle fragility and edged hurriedly toward the door.

But Augusta reached a long arm and caught him, dragging him back while she stared. "You, up there on the roof," she called suddenly, "you slide down here, and bring that camera, you hear me?"

Subdued shrieks came from the less clad customers. For high on the overhanging roof, partially screened by tree branches, and now struggling frantically with a jammed tripod, was a young man in a bright green belted suit and a checked cap reversed upon his heated brow. As Augusta's regal tones carried up to him he had just unscrewed his camera. He looked down with a bland and surprised countenance.

"Ma'm?" he inquired innocently. "Speakin' to me?"

Augusta's grip tightened on the squirming Andrey. She crooked his arm behind him, held him and it with competent muscular hands.

"You come down here with that camera or I'll break your friend's arm here, and you needn't be afraid I won't, either."

Andrey yelped as she tightened a little on the hammer lock. His friend in the green suit looked uncertain. But Augusta's expression was not one to be doubted. Leaving his tripod jammed like an injured spider in the roof gutter, he scraped and slid to the patio roof, swung and landed on the tiling, his heavy moving-picture camera under one arm.

"Bring it here," Augusta ordered.

She released Andrey to seize it. And then with competent fingers she opened it, tore out the drum of narrow film and dropped the camera,

which the young man seized. She held out the roll of film to the duchess.

“Here you are, duchess,” she said, and good humor was victorious in her voice. “I bet you never had a picture of yourself like that before. Guess maybe they thought they’d put something over on you and us, the crazy pink-eyed idiots. That picture would go big, wouldn’t it? You better keep it hid, with Miss Trimble’s compliments. It isn’t the kind of publicity she wants.”

Behind her the two men slipped unobtrusively to the door and were allowed to go. The sounds of the usual peaceful activity of Miss Trimble’s were coming through the doorway. The silk-clad patrons in the patio were either going in to dress or remaining to shape their conduct on the attitude of the duchess. Julia Trimble, looking on, felt the whole of their future depend upon the facial expression of their distinguished guest.

She looked up into Augusta’s calm blue gaze. Suddenly a little gasp of mirth came from her lips, her eyes crinkled with delight. She put out one hand for the film drum and rocked herself with an uncontrolled crow of laughter.

“Oh, you funny Americans!” she cried, wiping her eyes. “I never acted in anything so droll in my life. I shall show the picture to all of my friends, all. But you, my dear woman, you were superb, you were magnificent. I only hope he got your picture too.”

Everybody burst into delighted laughter with the duchess. Julia Trimble sighed happily, a long, long sigh of relief. Now they would all take it as the finest joke in the world. How amazingly lucky!

But Augusta, standing before the shaking duchess, had already snapped back, as if no mere male had ever been, into the serious business of life.

“Looka here, duchess,” she said abruptly, “it isn’t only a shampoo you need. Your skin is altogether too sallow. I bet you’ve been real careless with your diet. I don’t think you hold your shoulders right either. You better just come in here with me and I’ll give you a thorough going over and see what you need. Hurry up, it’s getting late.”

And the still mirthful duchess, clutching her roll of film and her dressing cloth to a shaking bosom, obediently moved behind Augusta’s invincible back. Miss Julia smiled pleasantly at her remaining patrons, ordered tea. All was well with her once more in a rapidly improving world.