

"Lost and Found" by Elizabeth Robins

Harper's Magazine: Volume 131 (1915), pages 500-511.

Google books search for "Lost and Found" by Elizabeth Robins yields this text:

http://books.google.com/books?id=u2AwAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA500&lpg=PA500&dq=lost+and+found+by+elizabeth+robins&source=bl&ots=1Qwwzt0c2j&sig=GfvLu3z5Ex6u_xpEfbrfHs43lEE&hl=en&sa=X&ei=ICkcULXkLcrj0QGoj4CQDw&ved=0CDkQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=lost%20and%20found%20by%20elizabeth%20robins&f=false

The following twelve pages are the re-scan of the 12 pages of Google's complete volume.

Citation:

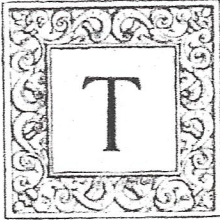
**Robins, Elizabeth. "Lost and Found." *Harper's Monthly Magazine* 131.784
(September 1915): 500-511.**

This extraction from the longer work is now part of *The Elizabeth Robins Web* and use of the document for educational and academic purposes presumes not to violate existent copyright on the material.

The Elizabeth Robins Web Project Director: Dr. Joanne E. Gates, Jacksonville State University.

Lost and Found

BY ELIZABETH ROBINS



THE Hon. Mrs. David McAlpin watched her on that raw spring morning—a trim, competent figure in the blue cotton gown and all-enveloping white apron, moving about the bed of a bronchial-pneumonia patient brought in a few days before. Mrs. McAlpin glanced with less satisfaction at the small helmet-like linen cap above the glimpse of banded brown hair. Yet the costume had been of Mrs. McAlpin's own choosing. "No reason that I can see," she had said, with the liberality of the woman who has herself some claim to good looks—"no reason why foundlings should be turned into frights." But that was thirty years ago. There were wild forces abroad in the world to-day that made any hint of even an archaic, Minervan militancy in one of the "Mary Eleanor" girls repugnant to their patron. Under the little white helmet this particular face—though the first thing you noticed about it was the babyish "dent" in the chin—could wear a look undeniably disquieting. Not to-day. The laughing eyes, very grave. The mouth, distractingly "nicked out" at the corners (a mouth that fell too easily from firmness to mutiny) was gentle enough this morning, though slightly wrested from its purity of outline by an outward thrust of the under lip—a mark with Ruth of absorption in some business to her mind.

Ruth was always a better girl at times like this. According to the matron, when nobody was seriously ill, when there was only routine work to do, Ruth was now and then a problem. Absent-minded, restive under reproof, of late downright disobedient. She was—yes, no use blinking the fact—Ruth was growing up a rather moody young woman, except, as Matron Gillies said, when there was a case in the infirmary

serious enough to bring into the girl's face that look it wore to-day, not gravely happy, merely, but lit with a kind of protecting valiancy. Never at such times would the thought occur to any one that Ruth herself was a friendless, nameless foundling, dependent on chance kindness. Rather, you saw in her one called to succor others, a soldier spirit looking out of steady eyes; if you please, a sort of Jeanne d'Arc of the sick-room—in shining armor of all-enveloping white apron and helmet cap.

Oh yes, undeniably a fine specimen—worth taking some trouble about. And to take trouble about Ruth was precisely what had brought Mrs. McAlpin to the Home that day. Fully a fortnight ago she had been asked by the matron to speak to Ruth. Now, personal remonstrance from Mrs. McAlpin was accounted a drastic measure, and seldom called for. What form should it take, that lady asked herself as she moved about, saying a word to another patient while keeping a speculative eye on Ruth. A moment like this was often the turning-point in a girl's life. Yet Mrs. McAlpin found her concern about the girl merging in the wish that the lumping nieces who had to be asked to her husband's shooting-parties, and the kinswomen she from time to time felt called on to present at court—would that those well-born damsels bore themselves like Ruth Aberdeen!

Another nurse, followed hurriedly by the matron, came in to relieve Ruth. Matron Gillies, a comfortable, sonsy spinster with a square figure and winter-apple cheeks, was a little breathless this morning. She cut short her greeting to inquire deferentially whether Mrs. McAlpin had said anything to Ruth.

"Only about the pneumonia case."

"Oh, the pneumonia case is going on all right!"

"I guessed that much—from Ruth's face."

"Ruth's face. Yes, there's another reason for *that*!" With an air of cheerful mystery Miss Gillies led the way into her private room. A place of bald utility, with horsehair chairs ranged against the wall, a baize-covered table in the middle with an ink-pot, pens, and blotter, a telephone near the window, and on the hearth a gas fire.

Miss Gillies drew up a chair to the table, and Mrs. McAlpin sat down in it. Invariably in these interviews Miss Gillies stood. She began by saying it was curious that after bearing with Ruth's moods for over a year, and at last bringing herself to recommend that the girl should be spoken to, she had come to feel it wasn't necessary just now.

"Excellent!" Mrs. McAlpin made a motion to rise.

But Miss Gillies put out an arresting hand. "At least not about *that*," she said. "Just after you were here last she was rather worse, if anything. Went about in one of her hard, dumb moods. Eyes that didn't see you, but always looking for something. And when she was forced to speak, bitter-tongued. The servants complained. I sent for her one night and spoke to her alone. Oh! she was hard enough. Defiant. I told her I had been obliged to tell you. Quite suddenly she put her two hands up over her face like this. And when she took them away her face was wet."

"Ruth? I haven't seen Ruth cry since she was six."

"Not the weepy sort, anyway. It astonished me to see her cry. But it astonished me more when she came out with: 'Oh, if I had anybody to help me!' I told her I was ashamed of her saying that. Weren't we all—hadn't we been helping her for years? Not about what she cares most for, she said."

"Well, what is it she cares most for?" demanded Mrs. McAlpin, with scant show of sympathy. "To marry one of the young tradesmen—or—?"

"No, no; it isn't anything like that—"

In the pause memories rose up of Mary Eleanor orphans who would make good kitchen maids yearning to learn millinery, to go on the stage, to go to America. . . .

"She wants us," said Miss Gillies, "'to help her to find her people.'"

"*Her people?* Surely she's intelligent enough to know that's the last thing—"

"First or last, she thinks of nothing else."

Mrs. McAlpin's hands went up under her sables. She drew the long gray coat together at the throat—the action of one who has finished her business for that day. But the matron still stood there with an expression her employer had never seen in the ruddy face before.

"I've wondered," she began, "if, after all, you wouldn't see Ruth."

"But you say there's no need now—she's behaving well."

"I think that's because I told her I—I'd ask you—if you could suggest anything."

"Certainly I can't suggest anything." And still Miss Gillies stood there. "Oh, very well—if she needs to be convinced—send her here."

Mrs. McAlpin sat down and unbuttoned her coat. She turned her watch on her wrist—the half-instinctive action of the sort of optimist who feels that somewhere in the world there is enough of everything except time, and grudges ten minutes wasted in pursuit of anybody's chimera. The door opened and shut softly. Ruth Aberdeen stood there.

Deliberately Mrs. McAlpin stretched the girl on the rack of several moments' silence. Then: "You have been asking the matron, I hear, to help you in a quite useless quest." The cleft chin dropped on the shining collar. The girl looked down at her locked fingers. The knuckles showed white. "You know the story of the woman who brought you here. That you were left with her, a baby of six months—"

"That isn't true."

"Since you can't be sure what happened afterward, how can you know what happened when you were six months old?"

There seemed to be no answer to that.

"Your mother had walked with you in her arms from Aberdeen. She was taken in penniless, apparently dying, nursed till she was better, and then disappeared."

"I don't believe that story!" said the girl, defiantly.

"Oh, I dare say—" but Mrs. McAlpin had never heard just that accent before,

accustomed as she was to the imaginary stories with which the nameless will sometimes fill out the unendurable blank of the past. She knew the enervating effect of these baseless hopes that clog the feet of action. "My child, you are young. You probably have some romantic notion about your mother—and your father." She shook her head. "If you knew—when they *can* be unraveled—how ugly and sordid these mysteries are!"

The cleft chin lifted and the foundling looked in the great lady's eyes: "I dare say when I know the truth I sha'n't like it. All the same, *whatever* it is"—the firm Scots accent fell to trembling—"I want to know."

"You might as well say you want—" Through the ceiling and the mask of daylight Mrs. McAlpin's eyes seemed to seek the unattainable moon.

"I shall never rest till I know who my people—"

"You must know already that if 'your people' . . ." Under Mrs. McAlpin's accent the girl winced. It was like a reference to stolen goods. Ruth of Aberdeen had laid claim to "people." And she hadn't any. She stood there in the slight pause, flushed, silent, shamed. "I am sorry to hear you mind so much. That will pass, you'll find. But the essence of your situation is that if they—'your people,' as you say—wanted you, you wouldn't be here."

Ruth's eyes shone steady through tears of humiliation: "You don't suppose I want to trouble them. I don't want any mortal thing from them—*except to know!*"

Much of Mrs. McAlpin's success in life lay not only in her disinclination to run her head against a stone wall, but in her power to recognize a stone wall when she came to one.

Ruth's demand was hopeless, but was it unreasonable? Didn't Mrs. McAlpin herself feel the prick of wonder as to what manner of man and woman were responsible for this young life—this young misery? The look in the face before her stirred the woman's old unregenerate rage against those who were responsible—the shirkers. Those cowards who clapped their burdens on the backs of little children and then fled.

It was foolish, pitiable, anything you like, but this otherwise reasonable young creature was actually saying to herself that before she could feel sure to what end her life should be shaped she must, *must* know where it took its beginnings, "—or else, don't you see," she found at last a way to put it, "I sha'n't ever know I'm steering straight—going the way I was born to go."

"There are other ways of finding that out, as you will discover. But meanwhile Miss Gillies tells me you have one or two vague recollections—nothing of any use, she says, but all the same—" Mrs. McAlpin made that out-and-over movement of the wrist that brought up the face of her watch. "I think I'll wait and go through the kitchens this time." She clicked open her bag, took out a letter, and tore off the blank half-sheet. "There"—she threw it on the table—"write out those two or three faint impressions. Write everything you can remember—" She stopped short at the astonishing change in the girl's face. "No, no. Understand, child, that all I expect to be able to do is to convince you as a reasonable being that what you want to know isn't to be found out." She knew she spoke to deaf ears, and turned with a pang from the sight of the face bent over the half-sheet that was all too large for those foundling's "memories," faint and few.

The look pursued Mrs. McAlpin flight after flight to the basement floor. If she had such a daughter! To think that somewhere was perhaps a woman who had the right to call that shining spirit "mine."

Twenty minutes later once again Ruth stood before her, this time in the reception-room down-stairs, holding out the half-sheet. Mrs. McAlpin lifted the eyeglass on the chain and read in Ruth's small, neat hand:

The woman did not speak the truth when she said she had had me since I was a baby. I am sure I lived in a little house with a man and his wife. I played in the street with their children—a boy and a girl. The place was called Birdsigh, or some such name. What I am sure is the people's name was Minnyfah, though that doesn't sound like anybody's name. A tall man came and took me away to a great house with many win-

dows and where bells kept ringing. It was opposite a railway station. I cried. The tall man didn't like it. The next morning we met a woman at the station. She took me away in a train. It wasn't the woman I had been living with who brought me here.

RUTH ABERDEEN.

"Yes, I'm afraid"—the girl replied to the look on her patron's face as though it had been an observation—"I'm afraid it's not a great deal."

"It is practically nothing."

She did not contest this, but her confident eyes troubled Mrs. McAlpin.

"I have told you it's all too vague. Yet to look at you, one might suppose I'd already been able to do something."

"Oh, you have. The difference! To know that some one—you, of all people!—are trying to find my—" she colored suddenly and looked down—"them. You'll see, I sha'n't ever forget." She raised her eyes. "Miss Gillies won't be coming with complaints about me any more."

Mrs. McAlpin left the girl at the door with that lifted look.

The scant information was placed in expert hands, and the weeks went by. A final report came from the agency within a few days of the McAlpins' annual visit to Marienbad, "Clues insufficient."

The lady found herself regretting the necessity that took her, on the day before she left Scotland, to that one of the Mary Eleanor Homes which was Ruth's. Only the girl's eyes asked, "News?" And when she was told, "Nothing," the eyes that had questioned turned gently, faithfully back to her task. Plain to see the poor child still hoped all things.

She was doing well, the matron reported. An outbreak of low fever among the children in the head nurse's absence left Ruth practically in charge of the infirmary. "Oh, indefatigable!"

While the McAlpins were at Bagnolles came the staggering calamity of the German declaration of war and invasion of Belgium. Like millions of others, the McAlpins went to sleep one night at peace with all mankind and woke next day to a world in arms. They returned to England to find London swarming

with nephews and cousins—their own and other people's—about to leave England, so their relations whispered. An astonishing majority of the civil population fell simultaneously under the spell of a passion for service to the nation—the other side, perhaps, of that shield, voluntary military service. Such an unsolicited outpouring of money and of active private aid the world had not yet seen. To give became the one common need, the unifying passion.

Level-headed people like Mrs. David McAlpin, while performing prodigies of organization in Red Cross and relief work, kept well before them the danger of forgetting sufferers at home, in all this enthusiasm for soldiers in the field and for those piteous refugees out of the desolation that was Belgium.

Hospitals were closing their wards to the civilian sick, and many an antebellum charity fell on evil days.

The Hon. David McAlpin, accompanied by his wife, was on his way back to parliamentary duties in London just after the fall of Antwerp. The huge preoccupation of those days did not minimize Mrs. McAlpin's concern over the plight of a little hospital for destitute women and children at Castleborough. Those unfortunates must not be forgotten because others needed help of the sort that touches the imagination and fires the heart. Mrs. McAlpin arranged to stop over for a night at Castleborough Junction and see what could be done.

Between the porter and her maid the lady picked her way across the tram-lines toward the great Station Hotel that took the broadside of the afternoon sun on its flaming panes of glass.

"Many windows."

She smiled at the inconsequence in the trick of memory which brought the phrase to mind. But the thought which had slipped so lightly into her head was not so easily evicted.

"Do you know," she asked the porter, "of any suburb of this place, or any village hereabouts, called Birdsign?"

"No, m' lady," said the porter.

It was a silly question, she decided, and by way of redressing the balance and planning something practical in the direction of keeping faith with Ruth Aberdeen, Mrs. McAlpin promised her—

self that, however preoccupied in London with other things, she would go to Scotland Yard and make some inquiries in person.

Birdsigh! Birdsigh! The word dinned at her ears. It seemed more this newly conceived errand to the elusive village of Birdsigh than the opening of Parliament that was taking her to town tomorrow.

"Yes, a taxi"; and as she waited for it she put again the question, "Do you know anything of a suburb or a village called Birdsigh?"

No, the commissioner had never heard of such a place.

The hospital was a long way out. Her business ended, she drove back a different way and yet the same, through those miles of mean streets that made up the manufacturing quarter. She was tired, as her attitude betrayed, leaning forward over folded arms, staring out at the bleak spectacle of the poor tenements in a Northern city. She looked into gray, hopeless faces till she felt her own courage lowered. At last, to shut out the unendurable plight of the children, she closed her eyes, trying to comfort herself with the thought of Mary Eleanor girls, of Ruth—the child who had played in the streets of Birdsigh.

The taxi put on speed. He was driving recklessly, this man. Mrs. McAlpin opened her eyes, put her head out of the window, and hung there for several seconds, looking back. Then, instead of admonishing the man to drive more carefully, "Stop!" she cried, sharply. "Stop! I want to go back to Birdseye Street." The driver slowed. He didn't know any Birdseye Street—there was a Birdseye Lane back there. He said it in a tone that implied "and no place for a fare like mine."

"That's where I'm going," said the lady. "Birdseye Lane!"—a plan at which the very taxi revolted. An explosion of anger sounded from a punctured tire and the drive came to an end. No other taxi in sight. The man promised to send one after the lady to the lane of doubtful renown.

A very long lane and no turning. The woman of sixty who had already put in a strenuous day was wearily conscious

of the fact before she reached the *cul de sac* at the end of a double row of little smoke-stained houses.

More and more wearily she went on, looking back now and then for the rescuing taxi. No policeman. No shop where inquiry might be made. Mrs. McAlpin was not, she told herself with the impatience born of weariness, so besotted about Ruth Aberdeen (nor even about justice in general to babies and deserted women—those clients of hers more than ever disregarded in war times) as to go from house to house making the futile inquiry, "Are you by chance the foster-mother of a little girl of five or six taken twelve years ago to the Mary Eleanor Home at . . .?"

She paused out of sheer exhaustion. The children playing here struck her as better cared for, the houses cleaner. Actually a white curtain at the window of one. She opened her purse and called to a boy of ten or twelve. Did he know where to go and telephone for a cab? While she talked the door in the white-curtained house opened, and a short, stout woman with a good-humored face looked out. "Jim!" she called. Jim explained the lady's demand. His mother nodded, "All right. Look sharp—tea's ready." And she stood there.

Tea! It was what Mrs. McAlpin wanted at that moment more even than a taxi. Was there a cook-shop anywhere near by, she asked.

Not near, the woman said. But if the lady liked she could come in here and wait. There was tea, too, just that minute made.

A little room, clean and tidy, and many a worse cup of tea had the seasoned traveler tasted.

They talked about Jim. It was "a good step" to the post-office, and the taxi would come off the rank in the market-place.

"You would be amused," said the lady, looking into the capable, pleasant face, "if you knew what brought me to Birdseye Lane."

"I was just wondering," said the woman, with candor.

"Well, I am looking for traces of a family of some name like Minnyfah who used to live in a place called Birdseye—"

"Minifer? There's Minifers lives

here, too," said the woman, as though jealous for the renown of Birdseye Lane. "The Minifers and my husband's mother has been here longer than anybody in the Lane. Yes'm. The Minifers has two children. The girl works in the factory, and the boy he's gone for a soldier." She got up, saying that grandmother might know if Minifers had ever had a little girl that wasn't theirs. "Granny!"—she opened a door. From where she sat Mrs. McAlpin could see the kitchen beyond, and the kerchiefed head of an old woman knitting by the window. "Did the Minifers ever have a little girl to live with 'em, granny?"

No answer for several moments. The old woman slowly turned her head, and the light glanced across horn spectacles. "Yes, there used to be a little girl—and well paid for keeping her, too!" said the old voice, very deep and hoarse. "Oh, they made a good bit out of it." No, she couldn't remember the child's name. "They made a pretty penny." She didn't grudge it. "They did well by the bairn."

As Mrs. McAlpin crossed the street she was conscious of an air of animation in Birdseye Lane. By that wireless telegraphy which serves the close-knit poor word had gone forth of an unusual Presence. What was the tall lady in gray silk "after"? The Lane-ites stood speculating in their doorways, leaning out of windows. Only at Minifers' no sign of life. Mrs. McAlpin knocked. A sound of sobbing came out as a middle-aged man opened the door—a sturdy workman in corduroys, his red face framed in an aggressive fringe of gray whisker—the veritable Newcastle frill.

"Minifer? Yes. That 'll be my name. No, my missus ain't able to see nobody." Mrs. McAlpin explained the urgent nature of her errand, through the deep, choking sobs from a woman in the front room.

"Only two words with Mrs. Minifer," she begged.

The man broke in. "The missus couldn't tell ye nobbut what I could myself. He was a doctor up at the hospital. One o' the nurses told him about us. He brought the little gal here hisself and he came hisself and took her away. A rare foos she made, too, and not a sign

since of either of 'em. I never thought well o' the mon for that."

"What was his name?"

"Oh, it was young Dr. Orkney from ower hospital. But he 'ain't been there this long while."

"There's a well-known doctor in London of that name."

"Oh, belike."

"If only you would tell Mrs. Minifer, maybe she—"

"Na, na, I'll tell her nowt. She's had enough for one while." He looked round uneasily as the crying rose again. "We joost seen our lad go for a soldier. I says to her, 'We mun all do summat.' 'Yes,' says she, 'so I'll be cryin' a spell.'"

The long-awaited taxi, with Jim triumphant on the footboard, came tearing down the street while Minifer gave approximate dates and a not very adequate description. "Oh, aye, a long body he was, an' awfu' solemn. Never liked him mooch mysel'. But the little gal"—his eyes grew kind—"nothin' wrong wi' the little gal. Yes, blue eyes, and a line down her chin. An' after all my missus done—never a word from that day to this."

From her London house the next day Mrs. McAlpin telephoned the great Dr. Orkney for an appointment. No easy matter to arrange in the short time before her return to Scotland. But Mrs. McAlpin was quietly emphatic with the secretary at the doctor's end of the line: "A case of unusual urgency, though it need not keep Dr. Orkney long."

Mrs. McAlpin was a personage in London as well as in Scotland. Some readjustments were made, and a little after four on the following day the wife of the well-known Scots magnate was admitted to the waiting-room of the famous Harley Street consultant. He seldom saw patients as late as this, but two young women and a man in khaki uniform with a row of reduced medals across his breast sat near the round table covered with the usual literature. Mrs. McAlpin took up one of the extra war editions of an afternoon paper and glanced at news already no news to one who had scanned the bulletins as she drove through the khaki-dappled streets. Unconsciously her mind wandered to the

women next her—one a girl, the other thirty-odd, talking in half-whispers the commonplace of the day, about somebody "leaving to-morrow for the front."

"I should say a man like your cousin can do the country more good at home." The older woman did not oppose that view. She glowed as she spoke of "him."

"You said he was married?" the young girl pursued.

"Oh, very much!" A laugh, and then: "After all, *she's* a kind of heroine, too, to let him go. Some say she'll never live to see him come back. . . ." Their voices sank.

A white-capped maid opened the door. The talkative lady rose briskly. With an air of being a good deal at home there, she pounced on the maid, "I'm so anxious my friend shouldn't miss seeing the doctor."

The maid shook her head. "As I said, Miss Edith—without an appointment—"

"Yes, yes—but when this is our only chance. And we've waited two hours—"

"I'm sorry, miss." The maid was showing out a soldier.

The conference at the round table went on in whispers. "My cousin—" Mrs. McAlpin looked at the clock and turned her newspaper with an impatient rustle. Fragments of the talk still reached her from time to time as the minutes dragged.

"—none of us dreamed she'd let him go." "Yes, like signing her own death-warrant—" "Why, she's alive to-day only because he wouldn't *let* her die. But when she got it into her head that he must give to the country what he'd been giving to her, a kind of queer rivalry sprang up between them. He determined in that iron way of his to stay and take care of her—oh yes, and of all the rest, too!"—she laughed—"and the whole time *hating* to be stuck here at home. Haven't I seen his face when other men were talking about going to the front—"

"Mrs. McAlpin!"—the white-capped maid was holding open the door.

He stood there in the room across the hall, back to the light, holding out his hand—a man of forty-odd, tall, not thin, but with a look of physical fitness

about his compact frame and long, clean-cut face; a brown mustache clipped close to lips that seemed themselves to have been razored into their firm outlines; hair of a darker brown, graying at the temples; eyes that quietly took you in and dropped you out as though your case interested him less than the one preceding and that to follow.

Mrs. McAlpin made no motion to take the outstretched hand. He glanced at her a second time with a quick wink of the small blue-gray eyes, and turned his proffered handshake into an indication of "the patient's chair." Mrs. McAlpin seated herself and opened her bag. He waited.

"How much time do you usually devote to a new patient?"

He stared, settled his fine shoulders back, and with a trace of hauteur, "As long as the diagnosis requires," he said.

"Seldom less, I imagine, than fifteen minutes for a first consultation."

His fixed look seemed to speculate: "Is this a case for my neighbor the alienist?"

"I think," she said, "ten minutes will do for what may be called 'my case.' It is really yours."

She had all his attention now, as she recognized in the wary look bent upon her the crystallizing of that doubt as to her mental condition.

"What is your trouble?" he said, quietly.

"I will tell you what the trouble is, but while I shall not exceed the time"—a downward glance of eye and a turn of the watch on her wrist—"I will tell you in my own way." She spoke briefly of her work for women and girls.

"It is well known." He would have dismissed it. She held him, as she never had held any one before to that particular theme, while she touched with the caustic of her tongue upon the wrong done these foundlings; upon that debt never to be paid in full, heaped up by the merely ignorant, added to by the craven women and criminal men responsible for—she hesitated a second—"for the nameless children we help to bear the irreparable loss of even the poorest home."

Dr. Orkney leaned his elbows on the

arms of his chair, fitted finger-tip to finger-tip, and over the acute angle watched the eccentric great lady.

"An instance—a girl we call Ruth Aberdeen." A few swift sentences placed the girl before him. An echo of that cry of hers vibrated on the quiet professional air, "Help me to find my people!" And then silence.

"Yes?"

"I promised I would try. I have succeeded. At least"—she fixed him—"my impression is I have found the father."

Dr. Orkney bent his head. Was it faint encouragement or perfunctory congratulation?

Out of the gaping bag on her lap Mrs. McAlpin took Ruth's half-sheet of paper and laid it on the writing-table.

His finger-tips still in delicate contact maintained their angle. Only the body leaned closer to the table, bringing under the unemotional eyes Ruth's clear, small writing.

Not a sound. Not a tremor. He might have been reading a prescription. When he came to the end he sat back and laid those fine surgeon's hands of his along the arms of the chair. Were his withers as all unwrung as he gave out? Or was he merely the most astute of men? A feeling to which she was little accustomed seized Mrs. McAlpin. A sense of helpless depression, of defeat. She had leaned on the belief that Orkney was an uncommon name. Now she was sure there were as many families of Orkney as islands: typical Scots families of ten or a dozen children—half of them doctors in the middle-class Scots fashion—one-third, maybe, dead. If responsibility for Ruth lay morally at the door of the Orkney before her, so much the worse for Ruth. This was a man to fight to the last ditch against a repudiated claim.

A mad errand, this. She held out her hand for the half-sheet. "I found Minifer," she said by way of self-justification. "He gave me your name."

"My name?" The voice was level and unjarred.

"Not in full, I admit. They didn't know your Christian name. But they knew—"

"What are you going to do?"

The interruption was neither angry nor alarmed. But it was delivered with a curious flatness of tone that made the woman's pulses beat. No, that wasn't it. The reason her pulses hammered was that the light, falling on the long visage tilted at a different angle, now showed faintly a cleft, the same that was carved more wilfully in the chin of the little foundling far away.

"What am I going to do? *See justice done.*"

"Are you sure?"

"To the best of my power."

"Whatever is just—that you will do?"

Instead of answering she looked at him, and then instinctively turned away from what she saw. Few people are easy under the responsibility of bringing a look like that into human eyes.

"I have a wife up-stairs."

It struck her queerly that he presented the fact to her as a part of *her*, Teresa McAlpin's, problem. Justice, mind you. He rose and went to the window, presenting his profile. He nodded to some one out there. Mrs. McAlpin, looking through the companion window on her side of the writing-table, saw a chauffeur touch his cap. Orkney drew out his watch and wheeled about. He crossed the room at double-quick and opened a door. "One moment."

A young woman entered, wearing glasses—a trim, refined creature. She held a note-book in one hand and pencil ready for note-taking. He made a gesture. "Not that. Go up, will you, and just say I shall be too late. No use to wait any longer."

The young woman hesitated. In a half-whisper she began, apologetically, "You don't think that Mrs. Orkney—your very last day!"

"It can't be helped. She will understand."

"Oh, I'll tell her! But"—the low voice sank under a weight of reproachful wonder—"you won't blame me when I fail. She'll never go without you. Not *to-day.*"

He followed her to the door. "Tell her—" He broke off. "Do what you can." He cleared his throat as the young woman went out, and called after her, "If my cousin is still in there—"

"Miss Edith?"

He nodded. "Tell her not to wait. No use." He shut the door. As he passed Mrs. McAlpin, "I am going over to France to-morrow," he said.

"Then I'm only just in time."

"Oh, you're in time," he agreed, bitterly.

She looked away from him with a sense of uneasiness—a dread lest she might be caught sympathizing with this callous shirker.

He sat down and leaned forward; the watch still in his hands dropped between his knees. "My wife," he began, and stopped. "*Is* she my wife?" The eyes, appalled—no doubt about that now—looked up at his visitor. But he went on speaking like one in a passion of haste to have done: "Seventeen years ago I was a student in Edinburgh. I lodged over a tobacco-shop. I ate oatmeal, chiefly, and when I was tired of that and still hungry, I smoked. I worked as only a Scots student will work—*can* work and live. Under my attic was the tobacconist, his two boys, and his stepdaughter." Orkney hesitated. The next words dropped out with a cold bitterness that told the listener more than a storm of obloquy. "The woman was nine years older than I. She used to come. . . . But it was, of course, my own doing. The year before I graduated I married her. The year I got my first hospital appointment at Castleborough she went off with a traveling-salesman. I have never seen her since. I don't know—" He made an upward motion of returning energy like the spent swimmer suddenly discovering strength to catch at a spar. "Perhaps *you* know whether she is dead?"

Mrs. McAlpin tightened her lips.

"It doesn't matter." He settled down again, and his shoulder-line sagged. "She left me with a baby. The old man failed in business, failed in health. The sons took him away to Perth. I don't know what became of them, either. I found a woman near Castleborough Junction to take care of the child." His eyes went back to the paper. "Yes, Birdseye Lane. I didn't use to see the child. I didn't use to see anybody outside the treadmill. Two years later—offer of a hospital in London. Freedom.

The great opportunity! What to do about the child. I had been too poor to buy books, instruments. The little I made—it all went in supporting myself and paying for the child. A friend lent me two hundred pounds. I heard of a woman, a decent woman, who was willing to take the child away and bring it up as her own. I took her from the Minifers to the Railway Hotel. Yes"—his look fell on the paper—"of 'many windows'—and stayed the night. I shall never forget—" The gesture of impotence of a man alone, helpless, with a crying child. "The next morning I took her to meet the train from the north. It brought the woman as arranged. I gave her the child and I gave her one hundred and ninety pounds." He stopped for breath.

"And that, you thought, would be the end."

"The end—*of all that?* God!—yes."

"Well, it wasn't the end. It was the beginning, for your daughter. What are you willing to do for her?"

He leaned back and looked straight before him—at nothing. "Anything I may do will be on one condition. You can guess what that is."

"She—your wife—is not to know."

Instead of replying to that he said, in a perfectly commonplace tone, that he was expecting his lawyer that evening. He was ready to deposit a sum—he named it.

His visitor opened her eyes—a sum far in excess of what was needed or desirable for a girl brought up to work.

"—in trust to you," he went on, "for your orphanages. Apply it as you like—on a condition not to be stated in the instrument, but fully understood here and now." The condition was that neither he nor any one belonging to him was ever to be approached on the subject again.

"If only you could see her!"

The man was on his feet. He stood gripping the corner of the table. He would never see her! Never!

"But Ruth—your daughter will want to know whom her money comes from."

"Give her as little or as much as you like. It comes from you." Mrs. McAlpin shook her head. "Or it comes however you like, so she never hears my

name. Either what I offer on the terms I state—or nothing."

When Mrs. McAlpin came in to luncheon the next day she brought the letters off a table in the hall. Over her solitary meal she opened the envelope of legal length and read that Ruth Aberdeen was independent for life. Through invitations and appeals Mrs. McAlpin made her way absent-mindedly till she glanced at the signature of a note in a hand vaguely familiar. How that girl haunted one.

THE HON. MRS. DAVID MCALPIN:

DEAR MADAM,—Matron says I may write to you about the wonderful thing that has happened. I specially wanted to tell you on account of what you promised me. There is no need to trouble about that any more. I haven't a bit of doubt now what I must be doing, and I am very, very happy. One of the old Mary Eleanor girls, Julia Cautley—she says you will remember—well, she is here, ill. She was nursing at a military hospital and a piece of shrapnel blinded her. She has helped matron to arrange for me to go to France. Isn't that very wonderful, dear madam? On Thursday afternoon I shall go over to Paris with one of the lady doctors. Thanking you for everything,

I am your obedient and grateful
RUTH ABERDEEN.

Mrs. McAlpin was the last to leave the train at Folkestone. While others gathered coats and bags and bustled out, she moved quietly to the window, keeping shrewd watch on the faces that went by, and on those few coming up from the carriages in front. Travel in this direction was light. No rush, no crowding. Ruth went by radiant, between two women; never a glance to right or left; forward-looking to that service which had put doubts and questioning to sleep.

"All out!" called out a porter. "Luggage, lady?"

Every one else had moved on toward the landing-stage. Mrs. McAlpin stepped from her compartment with a feeling of intense relief. Either Dr. Orkney had changed his plans or missed his train. As she went toward the booking-office to get her return ticket a fleeting glimpse of a man behind an immense truck-load held the woman fast. The truck moved

toward the dock and unmasked two figures—Orkney and another, who might be a young doctor, but was certainly a friend. They followed the luggage, Orkney talking earnestly, his hand on his companion's arm.

Mrs. McAlpin came up with them on the fringe of the group about the gangway. "Just a word—"

Orkney turned with an aggressive sharpness. The younger man stared.

"I tried to telephone," she began, "to catch you before—" James Orkney's look would have intimidated many women. "It is because I *haven't* broken my word," said Mrs. McAlpin, drawing herself up, "that I am here."

He hesitated the fraction of a minute, then thrust a hand in his breast pocket. "Just get this off, will you?" He held out a folded telegraph form. The young man vanished. Orkney stood planted, his inimical eyes on Mrs. McAlpin.

"You have only to wait over for the next boat. Then you won't run a risk"—she nodded toward the ship—"even of brushing shoulders in the crowd with—with—you know whom I mean."

The tight lips parted to demand, "Am I to understand—" Again the look of loathing he had worn the day before when he said: "The end of *all that*? God!—Yes."

Mrs. McAlpin met him squarely: "She is going over to nurse. I heard of the plan half an hour before your train (and hers) left Charing Cross."

His eyes abandoned their angry scrutiny of Mrs. McAlpin. They swept the gangway. They ran along the scantily peopled deck. With a faint jerk of the head, the eyes, the whole figure of the man, settled to a rigid stillness. Mrs. McAlpin knew before she glanced up what vision had fixed such a look on James Orkney's face. No miracle of recognition, either. In days like these many thousands of young women from the Continent sought refuge in England. Few were traveling to France. Ruth Aberdeen was the only girl in sight. Between her two companions she leaned over the rail of the upper deck with more color in her face than any one had ever seen there, frankly excited, very guileless-looking, smiling down upon the world, and making little signs that

seemed to say, "Oh, do look up and see how happy I am!"

What James Orkney saw was a face looking down at him with eyes he knew—the eyes of his young sister who was dead.

Ruth's face smiled and sobered, and still to the pitch of poignancy it wore for him "the family look." No eloquence of tongue, nothing that stands written in any book, may sway the heart as does that elusive quality—the Race Mark in a face. And this is true less of the obvious physical aspect than of its thousand secret connotations. All the world knows the Hapsburg lip, the jaw-line of the Bonapartes; the subtler marks of clanship keep their eloquence for their own. Consciously or not, each family group stands before these symbols as the small company of the learned might before some inscription on a desert ruin. Mere strokes and scratches to you and me. To the few who understand here is the key that unlocks the past.

So, the family look. In the arch of an eye-orbit, the curve of chin, we read the signature of race. Chance imprint, maybe; maybe seal of some struggle so profound as to have set our lips at this particular angle, or through dimming attenuations to perpetuate a gesture born a thousand years ago in joy or in some stark agony of body or of soul.

The family look. The first we remember, the last we shall forget.

She was all Orkney.

All? Quickly as recognition had come, came remembrance. This girl looking down with his dead sister's eyes was the tobacconist's grandchild and daughter of the woman who had poisoned James Orkney's youth.

She was asking something. She turned from one woman to the other, pleading. The elder put a question to a passing official in blue and brass. He looked at Ruth and smiled. She took his permission, flying down the gangway. Orkney's tall figure half turned to beat retreat before her advance, halted as though he had forgotten what he meant to do.

"Oh, please." Ruth was holding out her hands in front of Mrs. McAlpin. "Are you coming, too?"

"No, I am not coming. I am seeing some one off."

"I did so hope you might— No, I don't," she interrupted herself. "I'm glad you'll be safe over here." She dropped her voice. "I never told you in my letter how happy I was."

"Yes, you did."

"Not really. I didn't know then—" the words tumbled over one another, her excitement burning through the old barrier of shyness between her and her benefactress. "They are so kind"—she made a motion toward the women on the deck. "Dr. Janet McBride knew our 'Mary Eleanor' nurse in Paris." She gave the commonplace-sounding information with bated breath. Again that action of reference to the women on deck. "They've been telling me, too, about things over there." She stopped short, abashed, as she caught the sharp intensity of the examination bent on her by the gentleman Mrs. McAlpin had been seeing off.

"Don't they tell you," Orkney demanded, sternly, "there are more nurses now in Paris than there's work for?"

Ruth stared from the strange man to her friend. But the girl was forced to come to her own rescue with, "Some think there will soon be more work than nurses."

"It's a craze," he burst out. "Every young woman in the United Kingdom wanting to nurse a wounded hero! Kitchener's had to put down his foot. He says it's far more trouble to keep the women back than to bring on the men."

"Can you wonder?" the girl asked, gravely, "when we hear how our soldiers—" Her voice wavered a little. "Perhaps you haven't heard—" She stopped again, and a wave of pitiful color swept her face. "We know. One of our women is over there. The things she's seen—" Ruth bit her lip. But the upward-welling compassion reached her eyes and swam there.

Orkney turned on his heel. That's the last of him, thought Mrs. McAlpin, with relief. But he let the few remaining passengers go by him, and stood looking blindly at the ship.

"There isn't time to tell you," Ruth whispered to her protectress. "But

don't believe him. You see, *he* doesn't know!"

"She says you don't know."

Orkney turned a set face over his shoulder and a look passed between him and Mrs. McAlpin. Something in it roused Ruth like a challenge. "There are more cities than Paris," she said. "And even if they all have more nurses than they need, one thing is sure—there aren't too many of us near the fighting."

"Only people of experience are allowed at the base hospitals," he said.

A quick fear fluttered into the eyes that were the eyes of the girl who was dead. "I am experienced." A little motion of her hand prayed Mrs. McAlpin to support the assertion.

"You don't look it," said the stranger, brutally. "They'll send you back."

"Send me back!" she gasped. Why was this man her enemy? "If they won't let me nurse just at first, I can prepare bandages. I can—"

"Anybody can prepare bandages. Plenty of French girls—"

"Then I shall be a stretcher-bearer!"

"Stretcher-bearers must be strong. Men for that."

Was this ruthless stranger trying to get her recalled at the eleventh hour?

He addressed himself again to Mrs. McAlpin. "You shouldn't allow your protégée—" Ruth turned in agitation to the gangway. Her enemy stood there, barring the entrance. She turned to her friend, fighting a terror of apprehension. "I shouldn't like going against your will," she said, pointedly, to the great lady.

"But," Mrs. McAlpin finished the sentence for her, "you'd go!"

The girl's eyes prayed forgiveness. "If you'd heard how they need us." She stopped with a catch in her throat. The man still stood there between Ruth Aberdeen and her goal, as if he—a person she had never seen in her life before—had power to shape her destiny.

"The doctors over there know what the need is," she said to him, trying to keep her voice steady. "Ask any R.A.M.C. man. They'll tell you," she insisted, proudly, "there was never a war before where soldiers were taken such care of; where nurses—doctors, too—ran such risks."

"Doctors, too, eh?"

Oh, terribly hard to move, this man at the gangway. She bit her lip to still its trembling. "Maybe you didn't read in the paper about wanting to prevent our doctors and nurses from running such risks?" Because—she was good enough to explain—at this rate there soon won't be enough. "I don't expect the doctors will pay any attention to that—any more," she added, with her chin in the air, "than the nurses will. When they're—done for, you can see . . . oh, *can't* you see others must be ready!"

There was an odd expression on his face as he took his hands off the gangway rail. Why was he looking at her like that—so—yes, quite gently, as if he were glad to let her pass?

"The steward's been hunting for you, doctor," the young man said over Orkney's shoulder. "Any answer?" He held out a telegram. As Orkney tore open the envelope a voice shouted, "All aboard!" A bell clanged.

Mrs. McAlpin did what she had never done before. She kissed Ruth. "Good-by, child. Let me hear . . ."

The girl clung to her an instant. "A doctor!" she said. "Maybe he'd say a word for me if you—"

Mrs. McAlpin shook her head.

Ruth dropped her hand. "Very well. As soon as we have started I shall ask him myself."

Mrs. McAlpin seemed strangely shocked at the suggestion, "You could do *that*?"

"When I think about our soldiers. . . . Yes!"

Through the clangor of the bell: "Come," said the great surgeon. "We mustn't be left behind—you and I." For a single instant Ruth hung there, choking down her tears. Why didn't they go on and get out of her way?—this surgeon and the lucky young man, so safe and proud with "you and I." She lifted her eyes and met the surgeon's. He was waiting for her. You and I! It echoed still above the clanging bell. He never could have meant—

"Come, child!"

As she passed between the two men, James Orkney's grave gesture introduced the girl while he motioned her on. "One of our nurses," he said.