

BRIDGING THE YEARS

by Kathleen Norris

The rain had stopped; and after long days of downpour, there seemed at last to be a definite change. Anne Warriner, standing at one of the dining-room windows, with the tiny Virginia in her arms, could find a decided brightening in the western sky. Roofs--the roofs that made a steep sky-line above the hills of old San Francisco--glinted in the light. The glimpse of the bay that had not yet been lost



between the walls of fast-encroaching new buildings, was no longer dull, and beaten level by the rain, but showed cold, and ruffled, and steely-blue; there was even a whitecap or two dancing on the crests out toward Alcatraz. A rising wind made the ivy twinkle cheerfully against the old-fashioned brick wall that bounded the Warriners' backyard.

"I believe the storm is really over!" Anne said, thankfully, half aloud, "to-morrow will be fair!"

"Out to-morrow?" said Diego, hopefully. He was wedged in between his mother and the window-sill, and studying earth and sky as absorbedly as she.

"Out to-morrow, sweetheart," his mother promised. And she wondered if it was too late to take the babies out to-day.

But it was nearly four o'clock now; even the briefest airing was out of the question. By the time the baby was dressed, coated, and hooded, and little Diego buttoned into gaiters and reefer, and Anne herself had changed her house gown for street wear, and pinned on her hat and veil, and Helma, summoned from her ironing, had bumped Virginia's coach down the back porch steps, and around the wet garden path to the front door,--by the time all this was accomplished, the short winter daylight would be almost gone, she knew, and the crowded hour that began with the children's baths, and that ended their little day with bread-and-milky kisses to Daddy when he came in, and prayers, and cribs, would have arrived.

Anne sighed. She would have been glad to get out into the cool winter afternoon, herself, after a long, quiet day in the warm house. It was just the day and hour for a brisk walk, with one's hands plunged deep in the pockets of a heavy coat, and one's hat tied snugly against the wind. Twenty minutes of such walking, she thought longingly, would have shaken her out of the little indefinable mood of depression that had been hanging over her all day. She could have climbed the steep street on which the cottage faced, and caught the freshening ocean breeze full in her face at the corner; she could have looked down on the busy little thoroughfares of the Chinese quarter just below, and the swarming streets of the Italian colony beyond, and beyond that again to the bay, dotted now with the brown sails of returning fishing smacks, and crossed and recrossed by the white wakes of ferry-boats. For the Warriners' cottage clung to the hill just above the busy, picturesque foreign colonies, and the cheerful unceasing traffic of the piers. It was in a hopelessly unfashionable part of the city now; its old, dignified neighbors--French and Spanish houses of plaster and brick, with deep gardens where willow and pepper trees, and fuchsias, and great clumps of calla lilies had once flourished-- were all gone, replaced by modern apartment houses. But it had been one of the city's show places fifty years before, when its separate parts had been brought whole "around the Horn" from some much older city, and when homesick pioneer wives and mothers had climbed the board-walk that led to its gate, just to see, and perhaps to cry over, the painted china door-knobs, the colored glass fan-light in the hall, the iron-railed balconies, and slender, carved balustrade that took their hungry hearts back to the decorous, dear old world they had left so far behind them.

Jimmy and Anne Warriner had stumbled upon the Jackson Street cottage five years ago, just before their marriage, and after an ecstatic, swift inspection of it, had raced like children to the agent, to crowd into his willing hand a deposit on the first month's rent. Anne had never kept house before, she had no eyes for obsolete plumbing, uneven floors, for the dark cellar sacred to cats and rubbish. She and Jim chattered rapturously of French windows, of brick garden walks, of how plain little net curtains and Anne's big brass bowl full of nasturtiums would look on the landing of the absurd little stairway that led from the square hall to two useless little chambers above.

"Jimski--this floor oiled, and the rug laid cross-wise! And old tapestry papers from Fredericks! And the spindle-chair and Fanny's clock in the hall!"

"And the davenport in the dining-room, Anne,--there's no room in here, and your tea-table at the fireplace, with your copper blazer on it!"

"Oh, Jim, we'll have a place people will talk about!" Anne would sigh happily, after one of these outbursts. And when they made their last inspection before

really coming to take possession of the cottage, she came very close to him, --Anne was several inches shorter than her big husband-to-be, and when she got as close as this to Jim she had to tip her serious little face up quite far, which Jim found attractive,--and said, in a little, breathless voice:

"It's going to be like a home from the very start, isn't it, Jim? And aren't you glad, Jim, that we aren't doing *exactly* what every one else does, that you and I, who *are* a little different, Jim, are going to *keep* a little different? I mean that you really did do unusual work at college, and you really are of a fine family, and I am a Pendeering, and have travelled a lot, and been through Vassar,--don't you know, Jim? You don't think it's conceited for us to think we aren't quite the usual type, just between ourselves? Do you?"

Jim implied wordlessly that he did not. And whatever Jim thought himself, he was quite sincere in saying that he believed Anne to be peerless among her kind.

So they came to Jackson Street, and Anne made it quite as quaint and charming as her dreams. For a year they could not find a flaw in it.

Then little enchanting James Junior came, nick-named Diego for convenience, who fitted so perfectly into the picture, with his checked gingham, and his mop of yellow hair. Anne gallantly went on with her little informal luncheons and dinners, but she had to apologize for an untrained maid now, and interrupt these festivities with flying visits to the crib in the big bedroom that opened out of the dining-room. And then, very soon after Diego, Virginia was born--surely the most radiant, laughing baby that ever brought her joyous little presence into any home anywhere. But with Virginia's coming, life grew very practical for Anne, very different from what it had been in her vague hopes and plans of years ago.

The cottage was no longer quite comfortable, to begin with. The garden, shadowed heavily by buildings on both sides, was undeniably damp, and the fascinating railing of the little balconies was undeniably mouldy. The bath-room, despite its delightful size, and the ivy that rapped outside its window, was not a modern bath-room. The backyard, once sacred to geraniums and grass, and odd pots of shrubs, was sunny for the children's playing, to be sure, but no longer picturesque after their sturdy little boots had trampled it down, and with lines of their little clothes intersecting it. Anne began to think seriously of the big apartments all about, hitherto regarded as enemies, but perhaps the solution, after all. The modern flats were delightfully airy, high up in the sun, their floors were hard-wood, their bath-rooms tiled, their kitchens all tempting enamel, and nickel plate, and shining new wood. One had gas to cook with, furnace heat, hall service, and the joy of the lift.

"What if we do have to endure a dining-room with red paper and black woodwork, Jim," she would say, "and have near-Tiffany shades and a hall two feet square? It would be so *comfortable!*"

But if Jim agreed,--"we'll have a look at some of them on Sunday," Anne would hesitate.

"They're so horribly commonplace; they're just what every one else has!" she would mourn.

Commonplace,--Anne said the word over to herself sometimes, in the long hours that she spent alone with the children. That was what her life had become. The inescapable daily routine left her no time for unnecessary prettiness. She met each day bravely, only to find herself beaten and exhausted every night. It was puzzling, it was sometimes a little depressing. Anne reflected that she had always been busy, she was indeed a little dynamo of energy, her college years and the years of travel had been crowded with interests and enterprises. But she had never been tired before; she had never felt, as she felt now, that she could fall asleep at the dinner table for sheer weariness, and that no trial was more difficult to bear than Jim's cheerful announcement that the Deanes might be in later for a call, or the Weavers wanted them to come over for a game of bridge.

And what did she accomplish, after all? she thought sometimes. What mark did her busy days leave upon her life? She dressed and undressed the children, she bathed, rocked, amused them; indeed, she was so adoring a mother that sometimes whole precious fractions of hours slipped by while she was watching them, laughing at them, catching the little unresponsive soft cheeks to hers for the kisses that interfered so seriously with their important little goings and comings. She sewed on buttons and made puddings for Jim, she went for aimless walks, pushing Jinny before her in the go-cart, and guiding the chattering Diego with her free hand. She paused long in the market, uncomfortably undecided between the expensive steak Jim liked so much, and the sausages that meant financial balm to her own harassed soul. She commenced letters to her mother that drifted about half-written until Jinny captured and destroyed them. She sewed up rents in cloth lions and elephants, and turned page after page of the children's cloth books. Same and eventless, the months went by,--it was March, and the last of the rains,--it was July, and she and Jim were taking the children off for long Sundays in Sausalito, or on the Piedmont hills,--it was October, with the usual letter from Mother about Thanksgiving,--it was Christmas-time again! The seasons raced through their familiar surprises, and were gone. Anne had a desperate sense of wanting to halt them; just to think, just to realize what life meant, and what she could do to make it nearer her dreams.

So the first five years of their marriage slipped by, but toward the end with a perceptible brightening of the prospect in every direction. Not in one day, nor in one week, did the change come; it was just that things went well for Jim at the office, that the children were daily growing less helpless and more enchanting, that Anne was beginning to take an interest in the theatre again, and was charming in a new suit and a really extravagant hat. The Warriners began to spend their Sunday afternoons with real estate agents in Berkeley--not this year, perhaps, but certainly next, they told each other, they could *consider* that lovely one, with the two baths, and such a view, or the smaller one, nearer the station, don't you remember, Jim? where there was a sleeping-porch, and the garden all laid out? They would bring the children up in the open air and sunshine, and find neighbors, and strike roots, in the lovely college town.

Then suddenly, there were hard times again. Anne's health became poor, she was fitful and depressed, quite unlike her usual sunshiny self. Sometimes Jim found her in tears,--"It's nothing, dearest! Only I'm so *miserable* all the time!" Sometimes she--Anne, the hopeful!--was filled with forebodings for herself and the child that was to come. No unnecessary expense could be incurred now, with this fresh, inevitable expense approaching. Especial concessions must be made to Helma, should Helma really stay; the whole little household was like a ship that shortens sail, and makes all snug against a storm. As a further complication, business matters began to go badly for Jim. Salaries were cut, new rules made, and an unpopular manager installed at the office. Anne struggled bravely to hide her mental and physical discomfort from Jim. Jim, cut to the heart to have to add anything to her care just now, touched her with a thousand little tendernesses; a joke over the burned pudding, a little name she had not heard since honeymoon days, a hundred barefoot expeditions about the bedroom in the dark, when Jinny awoke crying in the night, or Diego could not sleep because he was so "firsty." Tender and intimate days these, but the strain of them told on both husband and wife.

Things were at this point on the particular dark afternoon that found Anne with the two children at the window. All three were still staring out into the early dusk when Helma came in from the kitchen with an armful of damp little garments:

"Ef aye sprad dese hare, dey be dray en no tayme?" suggested Helma.

"Oh, yes! Spread them here by all means; then you can get a good start with your ironing to-morrow!" Anne agreed, rousing herself from her revery. "Put them all around the fire. And I *must* straighten this room!" she said, half to herself; "it's getting on to five!"

Followed by the stumbling children, she went briskly about the room, reducing it to order with a practised hand. Toys were piled in a large basket, scraps tossed into the fire, sewing materials gathered together and put out of sight, the rugs laid smoothly, the window-shades drawn. Anne "brushed up" the floor, pushed chairs against the wall, put a shovelful of coals on the fire, and finally took her rocker at the hearth, and sat with Virginia in her arms, and Diego beside her, while two silver bowls of bread and milk were finished to the last drop.

"There!" said she, pleasantly warmed by these exertions, "now for nighties! And Daddy can come as soon as he likes."

But Virginia was fretful and sleepy now, and did not want to be put down. So Diego manfully departed kitchenward with the empty bowls, and Anne, baby, rocker, and all, hitched her way across the room to the old chest of drawers by the hall door, and managed to secure the small sleeping garments with the little daughter still in her arms. She had hitched her way back to the fireplace again, and was very busy with buttons and strings, when Helma, appearing in the doorway, announced a visitor.

"Who?" said Anne, puzzled. "Did the bell ring? I didn't hear it. What is it?"

"Jantl'man," said Helma.

"A gentleman?" Anne, very much at a loss, got up, and carrying Jinny, and followed by the barefoot Diego, went to the door. She had a reassuring and instant impression that it was a very fine--even a magnificent--old man, who was standing in the twilight of the little hall. Anne had never seen him before, but there was no question in her heart as to his reception, even at this first glance.

"How do you do?" she said, a little fluttered, but cordial, too. "Will you come in here by the fire? The sitting-room is so cold."

"Thank you," said her caller, easily, with a little inclination of his head that seemed to acknowledge her hospitality. He put his hat, a shining, silk hat, upon the hall table, and followed her into the dining-room. Anne found, when she turned to give him the big chair, that he had pulled off his big gloves, too, and that Diego had put a confident, small hand into his.

He sat down comfortably, a big, square-built man, with rosy color, hair that was already silvered, and a fast-silvering mustache, and keen, kind eyes as blue as Virginia's. In the expression of these eyes, and in the lines about his fine mouth, was that suggestion of simple friendliness and sympathy that no man, woman, or child can long resist. Anne found herself already deciding that she *liked* this man. She went on with Jinny's small toilet, even while she

wondered about her caller, and while she decided that Jim should have an overcoat of exactly this big, generous cut, and of exactly this delightful, warm-looking rough cloth, some day.

"Perhaps this is a bad hour to disturb these little people?" said the caller, smiling, but with something in his manner and in his rather deliberate and well-chosen speech, of the dignity and courtesy of an older generation.

"Oh, no, indeed!" Anne assured him. "I'm going right on with them, you see!"

Jinny, deliciously drowsy, gave the stranger a slow yet approving smile, from the safety of Anne's arms. Diego went to lay a small hand upon the gentleman's knee.

"This is my shoe," said Diego, frankly exhibiting a worn specimen, "and Baby has shoes, too, blue ones. And Baby cried in the night when the mirror fell down, didn't she, mother? And she broke her bowl, and bit on the pieces, and blood came down on her bib--"

"All our tragedies!" laughed Anne.

"Didn't that hurt her mouth?" said the caller, interestedly, lifting Diego into the curve of his arm.

Diego rested his golden mop comfortably against the big shoulder.

"It hurt her teef," he said dreamily, and subsided.

As if it were quite natural that the child should be there, the gentleman eyed Anne over the little head.

"I've not told you my name, madam," said he. "I am Charles Rideout. Not that that conveys anything to you, I suppose--?"

"But it does, as it happens!" Anne said, surprised and pleased. "Jim--my husband, is with the Rogers-Wiley Company, and I think they do a good deal of cement work for Rideout & Company."

"Surely," assented the man, "and your husband's name is--?"

"Warriner,--James Warriner," Anne supplied.

"Ah--? I don't place him," Mr. Rideout said thoughtfully. "There are so many. Well, Mrs. Warriner," he turned his smiling, bright eyes to her again, from the fire, "I am intruding on you this afternoon for a reason that I hope you will find easy to forgive in an old man. I must tell you first that my wife and I used to live in this house, a good many years ago. We moved away from it--let me see--we left this house something like twenty-six or--eight years ago. But we've talked a hundred times of coming back here some day, and having a

little look about 'little Ten-Twelve,' as we always used to call it. I see your number's changed. But"--his gesture was almost apologetic--"we are busy people. Mrs. Rideout likes to live in the country a great part of the time; this neighborhood is inaccessible now--time goes by, and, in short, we haven't ever come back. But this was home to us for a good many years." He was speaking in a lower voice now, his eyes on the fire. "Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am," he said gently, "I brought Rose here a bride--thirty-three years ago."

"Well, but fancy!" said Anne, her face radiant, "just as we did! No wonder we said the house looked as if people had been happy in it!"

"There was a Frenchwoman here then," said Mr. Rideout, thoughtfully, "a queer woman! She played fast and loose until I didn't know whether we'd ever really get the place or not. This neighborhood was full of just such houses then, although I remember Rose used to make great capital out of the fact that ours was the only brick one among them. This house came around the Horn from Philadelphia, as a matter of fact, and"--his eyes, twinkling with indulgent amusement, met Anne's,--"and you know that before a lady has got a baby to boast of, she's going to do a little boasting about her new house!"

Anne laughed. "Perhaps she boasted about her husband, too," she said, "as I do, when Jimmy isn't anywhere around."

She liked the tender look, that had in it just a touch of pleased embarrassment with which he shook his head.

"Well, well, perhaps she did. Perhaps she did. She was very merry; pleased with everything; to this day my wife always sees the cheerful side of things first. A great gift, that. She danced about this house as if it were another toy, and she a little girl. We thought it a very, very lovely little home." His eyes travelled about the low walls. "I got to thinking of it to-day, wondered if it were still standing. I stood at your gate a little while,--the path is the same, and the steps, and some of the old trees,--a japonica, I remember, and the lemon verbenas. Finally, I found myself ringing your bell."

"I'm so glad you did!" Anne said. "There are lots of old trees and shrubs in the backyard, too, that you and your wife might remember. We think it is the dearest little house in the world, except that now we are rather anxious to get the children out of the city."

"Yes, yes," he agreed with interest, "much better for them somewhere across the bay. I remember that finally we moved into the country--Alameda. The boy was a baby, then, and the two little girls very small. It was quite a move! Quite a move! We got one load started, and then had to wait and wait here--it was raining, too!--for the men to come for the other load. My wife's sister had gone

ahead with the girls, but I remember Rose and I and the baby waiting and waiting,--with the baby's little coat and cap on top of a box, ready to be put on. Finally, I got Rose a carriage, to go to the ferry,--quite a luxury in those days!" he interrupted himself, with a smile.

"And did the children love it,--the country?" said Anne, wistfully.

"Made them over!" said he, nodding reflectively. "Yes. I remember that the day after we moved was a Sunday, and we had quite a patch of lawn over there that I thought needed cutting. I shall never forget those little girls tumbling about in the cut grass, and Rose watching from the steps, with the baby in her lap. It made us all over." His voice fell again, and he stared smilingly into the fire.

"The children were born here, then?" said Anne.

"The little girls, yes. And the oldest boy. Afterward there was another boy, and a little girl--" he paused. "A little girl whom we lost," he finished gravely.

"Both these babies were born here," Anne said, after a moment. Her caller looked from one child to the other with an expression of interest and understanding that no childless man can ever wear.

"Our Rose was born here, our first girl," he said. "Sometimes a foggy morning even now will bring that morning back to me. My wife was very ill, and I remember creeping out of her room, when she had gone to sleep, and hearing the fog-horns outside,--it was early morning. We had an old woman taking care of her,--no trained nurses in those days!--and she was sitting here by this fireplace, with the tiny girl in her lap. Do you know--" his smile met Anne's-- "do you know, I was so tired, and we had been so frightened for Rose, and it seemed to me that I had been up and moving about through unfamiliar things for so many, many hours, that I had almost forgotten the baby! I remember that it came to me with a shock that Rose was safe, and asleep, and that morning had come, and breakfast was ready, and here was the baby, the same baby we had been so placidly expecting and planning for, and that, in short, it was all right, and all over!"

"Oh, I *know*!" Anne laid an impulsive hand for a second on his, and the eyes of the young wife, and of the man who had been a young father thirty years before, met in wonderful understanding. "That's--that's the way it is," said Anne, a little lamely, with a swift thought for another foggy morning, when the familiar horn, the waking noises of the city, had fallen strangely on her own senses, after the terror and triumph of the night. Neither spoke for a moment. Diego's voice broke cheerily into the pause.

"I can undress myself," he announced, with modest complacency.

"Can you?" said Charles Rideout. "How about buttons?"

"I can't do buttons," Diego qualified firmly.

"Well, I think--I can--remember--how to unbutton--a boy!" said the man, with his pleasant deliberation, as he began on the button that was always catching itself on Diego's hair. Diego cheerfully extended little arms and legs in turn for the disrobing process. Presently a small heap of garments lay on the floor, and the children were quite delicious in baggy blue flannels. All the four were laughing and absorbed, when James Senior came in a few minutes later, and found them.

"Jim," said his wife, eagerly, rising to greet him, and to bring him, cold and ruddy, to the fireplace, "this is Mr. Rideout, dear!"

"How do you do, sir?" said Jim, stretching out his hand, and with a smile on his tired, keen, young face. "Don't get up. I see that my boy is making himself at home."

"Yes, sir; we've been having a great time getting undressed," said the visitor.

"Jim," Anne went on radiantly, "Mr. Rideout and *his* wife lived here years ago, when *they* were just married, and their children were born here too!"

"No--is that so!" Jim was as much pleased and surprised as Anne, as he settled himself with Virginia's web of silky hair against his shoulder. "Built it, perhaps, Mr. Rideout?"

"No. No, it was eight or ten years old, then. I used to pass it, walking to the office. We had a little office down on Meig's pier then. As a matter of fact, my wife never saw it until I brought her home to it. She was the only child of a widow, very formal Southern people, and we weren't engaged very long. So my brother and I furnished the house; used--" his eyes twinkled--"used to buy our pictures in a lump. We decided we needed about four to each room, and we'd go to a dealer's, and pick out a dozen of 'em, and ask him to make us a price!"

"Just like men!" said the woman.

"I suppose so. I know that some of those pictures disappeared after Rose had been here a while! And we had linen curtains--"

"Not linen!" protested Anne.

"Very--pretty--little--ruffled--curtains they were," he affirmed seriously. "Linen, with blue bands, in this bedroom, and red bands upstairs. And things--things--" he made a vague gesture--"things on the dressing-tables and bed to match 'em! I remember that on our wedding day, when I brought Rose home, we had

a little maid here, and dinner was all ready, but no, Rose must run up and down stairs looking at everything in her little wedding dress--" Suddenly came another pause. The room was dark now, but for the firelight. Little Jinny was asleep in her father's arms, Diego blinking manfully. Neither husband nor wife, whose hands had found each other, cared to break the silence. But after a while Anne said:

"What was her wedding dress?"

Instantly roused, the guest raised bright, pleased eyes.

"The ladies' question, Warriner," said he. "It was silk, my dear, her first silk gown. Yellowish, or brownish, it was. And she had one of those little ruffled capes the ladies used to wear. And a little bonnet--"

"A *bonnet!*"

"A bonnet she had trimmed herself. I remember watching her, when we were engaged, making that trimming. You don't see it any more, but that year all the girls were making it. They made little bunches of grapes out of dried peas covered with chamois skin--"

"Oh, not really!" ejaculated Anne.

"Indeed, they did. Then they covered their bonnets with them, and with leaves cut out of the chamois skin. They were charming, too. My wife wore that bonnet a long time. She trimmed it over and over." He sighed, but there was a shade of longing as well as pity in his eyes. "We were young," he said thoughtfully; "I was but twenty-five; we had our hard times. The babies came pretty fast. Rose wasn't very strong. I worked too hard, got broken down a little, and expenses went right on, you know--"

"You bet I know!" Jim said, with his pleasant laugh, and a glance for Anne.

"Well," said Charles Rideout, looking keenly from one to the other, "thank God for it, you young people! It never comes back! The days when you shoulder your troubles cheerfully together,--they come to their end! And they are"--he shook his head--"they are very wonderful to look back to! I remember a certain day," he went on reminiscently, "when we had paid the last of the doctor's bills, and Rose met me down town for a little celebration. We had had five or six years of pretty hard sailing then. We bought her new gloves that day, I remember, and--shoes, I think it was, and I got a hat, and a book I'd been wanting. We went to a little French restaurant to dinner, with all our bundles. And that, that, my dear,--"he said, smiling at Anne,--"seemed to be the turning point. We got into the country next year, picked out a little house. And then, the rest of it all followed; we had two maids, a surrey, I was put into the

superintendent's place--" a sweep of the fine hand dismissed the details. "No man and wife, who do what we did," said he, gravely, "who live modestly, and work hard, and love each other and their children, can *fail*. That's one of the blessed things of life."

Jim cleared his throat, but did not speak. Anne was frankly unable to speak.

"And now I mustn't keep these children out of bed any longer," said the older man. "This has been a--a lovely afternoon for me. I wish Mrs. Rideout had been with me." He stood up. "Shall I give you this little fellow, Mrs. Warriner?"

"We'll put the babies down," said Jim, rising, too, "and then, perhaps, you'd like to look about the house, Mr. Rideout?"

"But I know how a lady feels about having her house inspected--" hesitated the caller, with his bright, fatherly look for Anne.

"Oh, please do!" she urged them.

So the gas was lighted, and they all went into the bedroom, where Anne tucked the children into their cribs. She stayed there while the others went on their tour of inspection, patting her son's small, warm body in the darkness, and listening with a smile to the visitor's cheerful comments in kitchen and hallway, and Jim's answering laugh.

When she came blinking out into the lighted dining-room, the men were upstairs, and Helma, to Anne's astonishment, was showing in another caller, --and another Charles Rideout, as Anne's puzzled glance at the card in her hand, assured her. This was a tall young man, a little dishevelled, in a big storm coat, and with dark rings about his eyes.

"I beg your pardon, madam," said he, abruptly, "but was my father, Mr. Charles Rideout, here this afternoon?"

"Why, he's upstairs with my husband now!" Anne said, strangely disquieted by the young man's manner.

"Thank God!" said the newcomer, briefly. And he wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, and drew a deep short breath.

"He--I must apologize to you for breaking in upon you this way," said young Rideout, "but he came out in the car this afternoon, and we didn't know where he had gone. He made the chauffeur wait at the corner at the bottom of the hill, and the fool man waited an hour before it occurred to him to telephone me at the house. I came at once."

"He's been here all that time," Anne said. "He's all right. Your mother and father used to live here, you know, years ago. In this same house."

"Yes, I know we did. I think I was born here," said Charles Rideout, Junior. "I had a sort of feeling that he had come here, as soon as Bates telephoned. Dear old dad! He and mother have told us about this place a hundred times! They were talking about it for a couple of hours a few nights ago." He looked about the room as his father had done.

"They were very happy here. There --" he smiled a little bashfully at Anne-- "there never was a pair of lovers like mother and dad!" he said. Then he cleared his throat. "Did my father tell you--?" he began, and stopped.

"No," Anne said, troubled. He had told them a great deal, but not-- she felt sure--not this, whatever it was.

"That's why we worried about him," said his son, his honest, distressed eyes meeting hers. "You see--you see--we're in trouble at the house--my mother--my mother left us, last night--"

"Dead?" whispered Anne.

"She's been ill a good while," said the young man, "but we thought-- She's been so ill before! A day or two ago the rest of us knew it, and we wired for my married sister, but we couldn't get dad to realize it. He never left her, and he's not been eating, and he'd tell all the doctors what serious sicknesses she'd gotten over before--" And with a suddenly shaking lip and filling eyes, he turned his back on Anne, and went to the window.

"Ah!" said Anne, pitifully. And for a full moment there was silence.

Then Charles Rideout, the younger, came back to her, pushing his handkerchief into his coat pocket; and with a restored self-control.

"Too bad to bother you with our troubles," he said, with a little smile like his father's. "To us, of course, it seems like the end of the world, but I am sorry to distress *you*! Dad just doesn't seem to grasp it, he hasn't been excited, you know, but he doesn't seem to understand. I don't know that any of us do!" he finished simply.

"Here they are!" Anne said warningly, as the two other men came down the stairs.

"Hello, Dad!" said young Rideout, easily and cheerfully, "I came to bring you home!"

"This is *my* boy, Mrs. Warriner," said his father; "you see he's turned the tables, and is looking after me! I'm glad you came, Charley. I've been telling your good husband, Mrs. Warriner," he said, in a lower tone, "that we--that I--"

"Yes, I know!" Anne said, with her ready tenderness, and a little gasp like a child's.

"So you will realize what impulse brought me here to-day," the older man went on; "I was talking to my wife of this house only a day or two ago." His voice had become almost inaudible, and the three young people knew he had forgotten them. "Only a day or two ago," he repeated musingly. And then, to his son, he added wistfully, "I don't seem to get it through my head, my boy. For a while to-day, I forgot--I forgot. The heart--" he said, with his little old-world touch of dignity--"the heart does not learn things as quickly as the mind, Mrs. Warriner."

Anne had found something wistful and appealing in his smile before, now it seemed to her heartbreaking. She nodded, without speaking.

"Dear old Dad," said Charles Rideout, affectionately. "You are tired out. You've been doing too much, sir, you want sleep and rest."

"Surely--surely," said his father, a little heavily. Father and son shook hands with Jim and Anne, and the older man said gravely, "God bless you both!" as he and his son went down the wet path, in the shaft of light from the hall door. At the gate the boy put his arm tenderly about his father's shoulders.

"Oh, Anne, Anne," said her husband as she clung to him when the door was shut, "I couldn't live one day without *you*, my dearest! But don't--don't cry. Don't let it make you blue,--he *had* his happiness, you know,--he has his children left!"

Anne tightened her arms about his neck.

"I am crying a little for sorrow, Jim, dearest!" she sobbed, burying her face in his shoulder. "But I believe it is mostly--mostly for joy and gratitude, Jim!"