

Terry Carroll's  
Mary Jorjorian in Love

PART ONE



Setting:

Jacksonville, Florida

Opening Scene:

March 1, 1921

## Chapter One

Only minutes ago weary, now twenty-six-year-old Daniel Eli-seian enters smiling.

“Mr. E!” chimes Mary Jorjorian.

She’s why he’s smiling—and blushing.

(Good thing no one can tell.)

He’s found Mary, along with Mrs. Pappas, ending the day, dancing to “My Isle of Golden Dreams.” Daniel knew it before opening the door. He could hear the ladies’ laughter first, from out on the street in front of the shop; and then the sounds of the Victrola, as he entered the stairwell. Sweet and shimery, its lilting waltz causes the floorboards of the upstairs apartment to creak like a pier. Mary has declared the song be her new favorite. Now it’s his, too, oddly enough.

“Egishé!” squeals four-year-old Bedros, running to Daniel, using the family nickname.

“Good evening, everyone,” he proclaims, while looking only to Mary. “{Good evening},” he says in Greek to Mrs. Pappas, out of love for her language. She’s the rare non-Armenian of their group.

He kneels to greet Bedros, enveloping the boy in a hug and a kiss and a lift—glancing to again catch Mary’s eyes.

The poor fellow. He had not been prepared for falling in love with Agnes Kludjian’s twenty-year-old sister.

Bedros hangs Daniel’s boater on the hat rack for him. Then

he shows Daniel a small mechanical part he'd found outside, probably from the automobile shop around the corner.

Daniel has been like a live-in uncle to Bedros, Peter and Agnes's first born, since arriving in Jacksonville a year ago.

And it was that relationship between Daniel and Bedros that clinched Mary's quick comfort with him. She had arrived four months ago for the imminent birth of Agnes's new boy, baby Shavarsh. Daniel has been a friend of her older sister and her brother-in-law since Mary's high school days, back in New York. But Mary had never really taken notice of him. So she had dis-boarded her train in November with anxiety, having not given much thought as to who this Mr. Eliseian actually is. It was witnessing her nephew's daily adoration for "Egishé"—down here in Florida—that won Mary over to their friend.

Mrs. Pappas has no trouble imagining Daniel as a father. Her two-year-old daughter, Cecilia, also reveres Mr. Eliseian. And observing Mary standing enchanted in Daniel's gaze as he holds Bedros—who could pass as their own son, adjusting for age—it is easy to see who the mother of Daniel's children will be. They will be wed within the year, concludes Mrs. Pappas. She saw that the moment Mary had arrived.

"There they are," says Mary's sister Agnes, entering through the kitchen from the back stairs, referring to Daniel and Bedros.

"Mother, look," says Bedros, showing her what he was sharing with Daniel.

"HmMMM," responds Agnes, holding off conclusion on Bedros's grimy new toy. She lifts baby Shavarsh from the rug and asks Daniel, "Were you able to talk to Mr. Bianco today?"

"Today? No. That's the problem," he says. "He seems to never be in 'today.' It's always 'tomorrow,' but never 'today.'"

"Have you tried 'yesterday'?" Mary asks.

Daniel raises a finger to her good suggestion, and puts it in a

working sentence: "He will be in yesterday."

Mrs. Pappas is impressed with the conjugation, and nods with a laughing smile.

Agnes, however, ignores the grammar jokes, and announces, "We've got to get Peter on this."

"Peter on what?" asks Peter, arriving from his downstairs business, Jacksonville Oriental Rug Cleaners.

"BIANCO," Agnes, Mary, and Mrs. Pappas say in unison, while Daniel looks ashamed.

"Still nothing?" Peter asks.

Daniel shrugs, trying to hide it, as a woefulness settles into his face.

Once again, Daniel Eliseian feels stalled in his life. Fleeing Smyrna seven years ago brought him safety but not settlement, and certainly not enough advancement. Yes, he feels lucky to be alive. But as with so many of his brethren, simply living is now not enough. Success is a survivor's responsibility. Yet, Daniel has had so many interruptions and forced re-directions since getting from Smyrna to the west.

And, having moved down to Jacksonville specifically to form a partnership with Mr. Bianco, Daniel has worked tirelessly for more than a year, but to what end? Mr. Bianco has lent little to Daniel's growth in the tailoring trade, other than his name (which Daniel now questions) and capital (which Daniel has also found lacking). No, in Daniel's mind, Bianco had already put in less than the minimum for Bianco & Eliseian to succeed. And now this! Mr. Bianco has simply abandoned Daniel—leaving him to run the Bianco & Eliseian partnership by himself—as Mr. Bianco has, apparently, taken up full residence at his other tailoring firm, Bianco & Bro. It is an outrage. He's been sharing little or nothing with Daniel the past couple of weeks as to what it all means. So now Daniel is to do all the work, all the client engagement, all the collecting

of bills? And to pay whom?—his absentee senior partner? Indeed, it seems James Bianco has figured out the recipe for success: Daniel Eliseian will make him money and grow his business—and its reputation—without Mr. Bianco having to lift a finger, while he and his brother, Gino, play cards in the competing shop he also owns. Genius! And despicable.

In too many ways it is unacceptable, and outrageous. So, to Daniel's great regret—if not heartbreak—it is time to move on, once again. But he can't, not without working out a dissolution; and how can that transpire without the presence of the senior partner? He smiles to Mary for all the comfort she gives him.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Pappas has gathered up Cecilia and the rest of her belongings, and says goodbye for the day to Mr. & Mrs. Kludjian, and to Miss Jorjorian, and to Bedros and baby Shavarsh. "Good-bye," Mrs. Pappas says to all of them. And, "{Good evening}," she says in Greek to Mr. Eliseian, adding, with a theatrical wink, "{Until yesterday}," which gets a big laugh from Daniel, and language envy from Mary.

"It's been a long, productive day, Mrs. Pappas," says Peter at her departure. He understands Greek but not the joke. Meanwhile, Mrs. Pappas has an unusual talent mending rugs—almost like an Armenian. "On behalf of my clients," announces Peter, "I thank you." Then he turns to Daniel and asks, "Shall I intervene?"

"No. ... I don't know. {Bye}!" Daniel interrupts himself in Greek to see Mrs. Pappas off. Then he continues telling Peter, first in Armenian, "{I am frustrated}. You've done so much already. He's my business partner, regardless of his brother. I've got to work this out with James Bianco. It's bewildering and {mysterious}—what he is doing now."

"Okay," says Peter. It was Peter who first came to know Mr. Bianco, through Jacksonville business circles, and it was Peter

who first recommended Daniel to Mr. Bianco. "But don't be so respectful of him, my friend," Peter tells Daniel, then adds in Armenian, "{This is business.}"

Daniel is at a loss as to what Peter and the others ever saw in Mr. Bianco. But Peter's the rug man in a group of tailors— young Armenians who have made the move to Florida from New York. Daniel had been the last of their group to arrive in Florida, yet it seems he'll be the first to return. Compared to New York or Buenos Aires or Paris or Marseilles or, even (if not especially), Smyrna (which, set on the Aegean Sea, was one of the world's first truly international cities), Jacksonville is but an outpost, and is unworthy and un-supportive of Daniel's talent and potential.

Peter is, of course, one of Daniel's good friends from New York, who, along with Hrand Vakilian, and brothers George and Eddy Yeghoian, have also made the move south. Peter has been the most successful of the five. And while the others may be artisans of a finer sort, Peter's got the better business instincts. He's been making forays down here since 1916, staying with relatives, the Altoonjians, in St. Augustine, and he has associated himself with John Baylarian of Orlando. Mr. Baylarian is another rug man, who holds a wide reputation in northern Florida.

Daniel envies Peter's ability to develop strong, interlocking professional and familial relationships. By comparison, Daniel feels himself a drifter. In New York, Daniel had a rising master tailor and a good friend, Mehrand Merjanian, to work under. And, unlike Bianco, Mr. Merjanian is an Armenian— someone who holds a sense of loyalty and honor in business and community. He doesn't keep multiple partnerships. Daniel could kick himself for ever leaving the tutelage of Mr. Merjanian, to partner with a two-timer.

But just when Daniel's business partnership, if not his ca-

reer, is falling apart, and he finds himself a man of frightening uncertainty, Mary Jorjorian has further destabilized him from an entirely different direction. Her timing couldn't be worse.

"Time for bed," announces Agnes, referring to baby Shavarsh and young Bedros.

She and Mary put them down for the night.

When finished, Mary brings out the playing cards and chips, and asks "Mr. E" if he wouldn't enjoy a game. She's splaying and cutting the deck in her hands, cutting them, knocking their edges against the other.

"Oh, Miss Jorjorian," he exclaims. "I have so much to do tomorrow!"

"Half-an-hour," she says, shuffling the cards. "I'll go easy on you."

Doling out chips onto the carpet-covered dining table to the now-assembled foursome, Mary gives the deck one more shuffle, and she has Daniel cut the cards.

"Okay, Boss," he says, using his nickname for her, and he then takes but a single card off the top of the deck to make his cut, winking at her.

"That doesn't count!" announces Peter.

Daniel shrugs, and dutifully removes one more card, holding back his smile.

"Thank you, sir," Mary says to Daniel officiously, as though he's not a plant in a rigged game.

Agnes laughs, while Peter rolls his eyes, and Mary quickly deals out seven cards to each.

She's in an especially gay mood now, talking with each trade: "Mr. E is an enigma, with a two of diamonds and a king of clubs. Sis gets four, with a big pair of sevens, a jack and a three. Brother-in-law wants a trio, what can he get? One, two, three

strikes, is he out? And dealer's going to hold'em, sticking with what she's got." (She winks at Agnes.)

Everyone is having fun, including Daniel and Peter.

Peter is begrudging in his unspoken admiration for his young sister-in-law, Mary. In his mind, she is but a girl who runs through life as though it's a school yard. With her apple cheeks and smiling eyes, Mary has never had the poised, handsome beauty of her big sister Agnes ... his wife, the mother of his sons. But Peter also understands that that's part of Mary's attraction. Some men like to be entertained, and Mary even catches him off guard sometimes—with her quick wit and talents. And, here, everybody's having fun, so all will sleep better for it. And that's great. But she's young—nine years the junior of her sister Agnes—and no responsibilities. So youthful cheer comes easy to Mary.

When Peter's in-laws, the Jorjorians, arrived in America in 1901, Agnes was a decade into life and had already taken a responsible role with the family. Mary was a mere baby, whose first birthday was aboard ship, steaming westward. Agnes had to learn a new language, and adapt to a new country and to the strange ways of its people, guiding her parents while also helping raise young Mary. Mary was unaware of the deadly troubles the family escaped and of the lost siblings between them. She was able to absorb English as early as she learned Armenian. She then attended schools—tuition-free public schools—that are the envy of the world, institutions that were not even dreamed of back home in Sivas, Turkey.

And Peter had it even harder than Agnes. He arrived in America as a thirteen-year-old orphan, putatively in the care of his older sister, but practically a man, expected to behave like a man, work like a man, and make life-decisions like a man. That was 1904. Now, seventeen years later, Peter more than stands on his own. His English is excellent (having been

given a great boost by Agnes), and he provides leadership and guidance to a small community of Armenians down here in Jacksonville (which is also much the work of Agnes).

Maybe Peter doesn't give Mary enough credit for all the ways she is smart. But he will readily concede, if not dismissively, that she is book smart.

Mary earned her diploma from Wadleigh High School—possibly the top public school for girls in the nation, just north of Central Park, on West 114th Street, Manhattan. Wadleigh had been considered a radical nest of suffragettes when it opened. (And it was.) But in the dozen years, by the time Mary was choosing a high school, the institution had proven itself to be an equal in every way to the city's top boys schools, with a faculty worthy of a good preparatory academy. Families of means were anxious for their girls to be granted spots at Wadleigh, yet Hagop Jorjorian's daughter Mary got right in, on her own doing (with Agnes's guidance).

Mr. Jorjorian had been determined—all the way back in Sivas—that his daughters receive full educations, and not “{become rug weavers}.” So he was indeed proud to have his “{girl number two}” inhabit a nest of suffragettes. She would be learning French, Latin, history, science, and music—and would, therefore, be unavailable to all but the most successful men to possibly gain Mr. Jorjorian's consent to be a son-in-law.

And, if her father could have afforded it, Mary is certain she could have gotten into Hunter College—possibly with the help of a scholarship, she told him—for a career in teaching. Instead, she teaches Daniel—who is himself the graduate of Smyrna's fine Armenian schools. And though Daniel is now on his sixth language—with Mary's native English—he has yet to master its written form, or many of its intricacies, whys, and wherefores. Mary is eager and diligent in her role as tutor. In turn, Daniel has taken on Mary as a valued part-

time assistant at Bianco & Eliseian. He affectionately refers to her as “Boss,” but for good reason. Mary drafts all his correspondence, puts together advertisements, and provides general clerical and bookkeeping services.

Yet in the simplest form of communication, two weeks ago, on Valentine's Day, Mary seems to have presented Daniel with a card, left on his pillow, signed simply, “Yours.”

Agnes wins the hand, and with quiet glee she gathers in the winnings.

Despite the loss (or oblivious to it), Daniel is beaming. These past four months with Mary in the household have been utterly delightful for him. He loves his friends Peter and Agnes dearly; they've done so much to help him, to house him, to show patience with his struggles. But if they only knew: it was their bringing Mary into their home that has kept Daniel from the brink of despair. Mary Jorjorian is the most incandescent young lady he knows. She's a modern American female, the kind of individual the whole rest of the world is incapable of producing. And he has the privilege of being in her presence every day, within these walls and out in the world. He dreams of her, asleep and awake.

Agnes deals the next hand, but what of that Valentine card? Daniel is mystified by Mary's intent. Certainly, it has given him sudden strong, irrational thoughts of matrimony, but Daniel has difficulty imagining someone as free-spirited as Mary becoming any man's wife, let alone to a man as worried for the future as himself.

Mary gazes across the table at Daniel. She knows it's working. Daniel was thoroughly exhausted today—worse than even recent days. This morning, when she was in town running errands, she called on his shop, upstairs at 20 West Forsyth Street, but she could not find her friend. Instead, she did chance upon Hrand (“Randy”) Vakilian, who was looking for

Daniel as well. And the Yeghoian brothers—whose shop is on the same floor as Bianco & Eliseian—they hadn't seen Daniel, either. Finally, as Mary was out with Randy, they almost collided into Daniel, rounding the corner at Ocean Street. He looked very annoyed about something—most likely Bianco—almost mad with distraction. Randy teased him, and that didn't help. So Mary has made a point of ministering to Daniel this evening, keeping things light and tender for their beleaguered friend.

“Oh!—I'm ...?” Mary exclaims, suddenly realizing the cards she'd just played was a winning hand. She drags in the chips over the carpet top, with no sense of their value or how she now stacks up. Laughing, she shuffles, has Agnes cut, and deals a new hand.

Daniel has been so oddly attentive to Mary these past couple of weeks. (And nervous as well!) It's almost as though he is now romantically interested in her. She is at a loss for the sudden change in Daniel's disposition, especially the timing. He's been so otherwise distraught over business matters. Could it be that romance is serving as a diversion from his woes? Meanwhile, Daniel has been talking of late (as has Randy Vakilian) of returning to New York—possibly within the next month. But, in fact, so has Mary—except later this summer. The question then, is Daniel preparing to tender a change in their status in New York—from friends to lovers? Well, she couldn't imagine *him* doing anything so modern—thankfully! However, is he on the verge, possibly, of proposing marriage? If so, Mary has decided how she would respond. She would say yes.

Upon receiving four new cards in his dreamy draw from Mary, Daniel gives her a nod of appreciation. Yet, he barely contemplates what the new cards are.

And this goes on for well-more than the half-hour Mary had promised, as they play out the final cards, and, apparently, of

course, Peter—all business—comes up the winner. He prepares for bed, while Daniel—contrary to his earlier protests of a hard day ahead of him—lingers at the table.

Then Agnes announces it's time for Mary's Armenian lessons.

Mary can speak, read, and comprehend spoken Armenian passably well. However, in written Armenian she is practically a child. And for this evening's lessons ... Mary has not prepared.

So she asks Agnes for writing prompts.

Daniel joins the fun, turning the tables on his tutor. He begins walking about, pointing to various objects in the apartment, which Mary quickly states and writes without problem.

“Those are too easy,” Agnes objects. “She needs to write descriptively, not just the names of things.” Then Agnes looks to Daniel and says to Mary, “Describe Egishé” (using his household nickname—which is a reference to the great scholar from the early years of Armenian Christianity, and from which the name “Eliseian” is derived).

Mary looks at him ... and for a moment their eyes hold each other. Then she smiles, and quickly writes a brief phrase in Armenian, and turns the composition book to her sister.

Daniel rushes to read over Agnes's shoulder.

“‘{Mister Eliseian is other-worldly and admirable}’!” Agnes says in Armenian, deciphering Mary's clumsy use of the language's non-Latin alphabet.

Daniel stands back and looks to Mary with some astonishment, but also, mostly, gratitude. And he blushes once again.

“It's true!” states Mary.

The room goes quiet, and Agnes sees the sideboard clock. “Oh, my, look at the time!”

She announces that she is heading to bed, and Daniel concedes that he must, as well.

But he lingers.

As does Mary.

Seeing Agnes close her bedroom door, he lets Mary know how nice that was what she wrote. “That means a lot to me, you thinking that.” And he also tells her how much he enjoyed seeing her dancing earlier, “to that sweet song.”

“It’s my new favorite,” she says.

“Yes!”—he catches how loud he is, then says, “I told your sister that it should be called ‘*MARY*’s Isle of Golden Dreams.”

Mary laughs out loud, then looks to Agnes and Peter’s door, making a face of embarrassment. In a whisper, she then asks Daniel, “Would you care to dance, Mr. E?”

“Oh ... Miss Jorjorian ...,” he utters, startled, but is quickly intrigued, and just as quickly cautious. “It’s ... um, {very late}, and—”

“Oh, you,” she says. “Look how nervous you are!” Then she stands, holding out her hands, walking backward onto the rug. “It’s a waltz!”

“But, the {noise},” he insists, referring to the Victrola.

“We’ll make our own,” she tells him, and begins humming the tune.

Daniel looks to Agnes and Peter’s door once again. Then he steps to Mary, as she “stops” the song, as though she’s a gramophone. He elevates his posture, gently places a hand at her back, while suspending her right hand, and ...*One ... two ... three ...* they “re-start” the song:

—And ... they are dancing ... for the first time together!

Both are trying to act nonchalantly, as Mary continues “playing” the record’s melody and timbre with her voice ...*One ... two ... three ...* as if it is mere fun and games ... *Fun ... and ... games ...* as Mary twitters and trills through the tune’s bright spots, delighting Daniel with her nimble pitch and tempo control. ... *One ... two ... three ...* And it might indeed be fun

and games, but they have never been in such close and— ... *One ... two ... three ...* —purposeful proximity ... *Fun ... and ... games ...* their breasts heaving with shallow breaths ... *One ... two ... three ... One ... two ... three ... Fun ... and ... games ...*

While Peter sleeps, already snoring deeply, Agnes is at their door in her night dress, peering through the keyhole at her sister and Daniel, wondering if they might even kiss.

She is satisfied with her work. Leaving that Valentine card, “anonymously” for Mr. Eliseian, seems to have done the trick.

After breakfast, Mary accompanies Daniel down the stairs of the apartment and out onto Riverside Avenue to see him off.

“Don’t be afraid to demand what’s yours,” she tells him.

“Thank you, Miss Jorjorian,” he says. “Thank you, as always.”

So funny to see him nervous. Mary had been giving him a pep talk all morning, and advice on how to state his case with Mr. Bianco. As the tailoring firm’s office assistant, she knows the business well and can vouch for the imbalance in the partnership between work and profits.

“You’re in a difficult situation, Mr. E,” she says, wishing she were holding his hand right now, as they had done last night while dancing.

“Well, I really appreciate having you,” he says. “... Here to help me.”

“As do I. I appreciate having you here,” she says. She thinks about all they have together, and adds aloud, “And, now, as a dance partner!”

Daniel beams, blushing. He adores her forwardness. She says things most Armenian women probably don’t even entertain as thoughts. Yet, not only does Mary think it, she actually says it. And it was she who had invited him to dance. She emboldens him to say things like,

“Who knows where it will lead ...”

Mary acts embarrassed, “Mr. Eliseian!”

He’s proud to have embarrassed her, if only mutually in jest.

And off he goes, up to his shop in town—the place that was to be the producer of so many dreams, now the source of so many of his current disappointments. She stands, watching him stride with purpose, not bothering to wait for a streetcar. Daniel looks back, gets caught, smiles, and waves, continuing onward. *Mr. Eliseian!* Mary continues watching him, smiling, tickled at his look-back, and she takes pride in simply sending him off with his posture upright. He’s got a natural spring in his step, which matches his personality. That’s what Mary really enjoys in him. She does not care for slouchers. And to think he’s been so anxious and gloomy of late; she can’t allow that. She won’t. And for today, she hasn’t. And he seems to have taken note of it.

She waltzes her way back upstairs, humming, “My Isle of Golden Dreams.”

As sister Agnes takes care of baby Shavarsh, Mary escorts gleeful Bedros out the back porch door, at the top of the steps, reminding him to not cross the roadway to the river. But she can hear the neighbor boys, playing by the scrap heap at the end of the alley. That should keep them all occupied for a while. Mary knows that every household within range has women grateful at this very moment, for this peace and quiet they have mid-morning in which they can do their chores.

That much they have in common.

*Ah, but how many are right now thinking of the man they just might be in love with?*

One for sure.

Mary returns to her humming, as she stacks the plates and sorts the silverware into the dish pan in three-four time, with food scraps set aside for the neighbor’s chickens, to the rise and dip of her melody. Then she lifts and tips the kettle ... *One*

... *two ... three ...* swirling the steaming water over the tub, sudsing the soap into a cleansing froth. *Fun ... and ... games.*

As innocent as it might have seemed, had anyone witnessed it, Mary believes that dancing with Daniel last night was a momentous event in her life thus far. Without an orchestra or even a gramophone, they glided giddily on weak knees, each unable to believe the other had gone along with the unspoken wish.

Mary loves to dance. But it is music which propels her. And Daniel—as a skilled violinist—not only shares a love for music but leads the way for Mary, bringing her immense joy and satisfaction.

Mary has always been a good and dutiful student of piano, playful with her skills. She’s always *played* the piano. Her friend Anna Abajian—back in New York—is a conservatory-trained pianist, so Mary is intimately aware of her own amateurish plunking (despite Anna’s generous encouragement). But it wasn’t until she came to live in the same household as Daniel Eliseian that Mary actually found inspiration in her instrument.

Daniel isn’t a conservatory violinist. Rather, the violin serves his soul. At the age of nineteen, when he arrived in Buenos Aires in 1913, it was his violin that gave him comfort. (Of course, his fellow refugee and older brother, Levon, also gave him comfort; but Levon is not a musician, nor does he even appreciate music beyond what is minimally expected of a person of culture. Rather, as an architect, for Levon beauty is in the “science” of lines on paper determining spacial reality, rendered “physically, permanently” with stone and steel.) So while Daniel continued his training as a tailor, he poured his heart into, and through, his violin. He played not for his brother, but for their mother—far away, up in the northern hemisphere, across the wide Atlantic, out on the eastern side of the Medi-

terranean, tucked into the Aegean coast of Asia Minor.

And it was Mary's arrival in Agnes and Peter's household, witnessing Daniel's evening regimen—sometimes out on the back porch, sometimes down in Peter's shop, and sometimes, to the delight of all, in the parlor—for which she fell enchanted. Right away, he invited her to join him, accompanying on piano. It had embarrassed Mary at first, knowing full-well the gap between their skills. But Daniel encouraged her, worked with her, and, soon, they were collaborating. And every day, after he's made his way up into town and she has finished her morning round of chores, she's taken up a solid hour of focused practice. (Mary's friend Anna is going to be so proud.)

One evening, not too long ago—before his current wave of agitation—Daniel and Mary were working on their duet of “Meditation” from Massenet's opera, *Thaïs*. Mary's piano accompaniment felt mysteriously effortless to her, as her notes and chords folded perfectly to form steps for the tones projecting from Daniel's violin to climb—then sustaining ... and releasing ... as one. A stillness clung in the air at their completion, and she was suddenly fearful—as if her private imagination had just been acted out, revealing all.

“Bravo!” cheered Agnes and Peter, who had been in their bedroom with the door opened. Daniel held his eyes to Mary, even as Agnes came out into the parlor, clapping, announcing, “Oh, you've gotten so good together!”

And, with that, Mary wanted to continue playing this duet with Daniel for the rest of her life.

“Baby sleeps like a doll!” says Agnes, as she enters the kitchen from attending to Shavarsh. “And sometimes I am so pleased with Bedros's ability to simply take off—out to explore—without fuss.”

“Out back with the neighbor boys,” notes Mary. Then she

adds, “Speaking of exploration: I was thinking: Wouldn't it be fun if a group of us enjoyed an outing in Ortega this Sunday?”

Ortega is a neighborhood of Jacksonville, a leisurely street-car ride down the St. Johns River, situated on a small peninsula. It has beautiful parks and lovely homes, and features residents of some wealth, including many of the clients that the men of their group cater to.

“Mr. Eliseian sure needs some pepping-up—I would say. And so does Peter. The whole group of us should go—along with the Yeghoian brothers and Mr. Randy, us and the kids. Let's make it the whole group of us!”

“Oh, that's a wonderful idea!” says Agnes. She finds it sweet—her little sister being so protective of the comforts of their friend Daniel. Agnes is all the more pleased with how well her match-making is progressing. An outing with friends could be good for Egishé, and for Little Sister, and for all to be witness to their quickly blossoming situation.

“It could be like one last gathering of the Armenians before ...” Mary adds, and pauses ... “who-knows-where we end up next!”

It's a shame that Jacksonville isn't quite working for the whole group of them; Agnes wishes they would all give it a longer chance, and not be discouraged by a bad business cycle. Florida would seem to hold good future. Agnes has seen it in her cards, coffee grounds, and displayed in other telling signs, about town, as well as in her dreams. It isn't just the wealthy with their winter money who will be coming to Florida. Why live with the weather up north? And Florida isn't all the way across the continent and over rugged mountain ranges, like California is. But Florida isn't showing its growth right now—not to the impatient, nor to those who simply have needs right now. And, unfortunately for the timing of Daniel's career—compounded with a shamefully bad mixed partnership—mul-

multiple forces are now repelling him away from Florida, sooner rather than later. However, only geography and the calendar will be delaying the inevitable, which is for Daniel to be the husband of Mary. Agnes is certain of it.

From their past year of sharing a household, Peter counts few men on this earth as deep-down good as Daniel Eliseian. Yet, Peter had originally been wary of Daniel's generous spirit and optimistic outlook. Those traits aren't common—not among Armenians of the Ottoman Empire. Peter appreciates those whom he can trust but, conversely, he is suspicious of those who are too trusting of others. So, at first, back in 1916, when they met, Peter took him as naive. And, certainly, young—to Peter, who is three years older than Daniel. Soon enough, though, he recognized that Daniel wasn't naive. Rather, Daniel is deeply smart and a good reader of situations. And his outward optimism has worked well for most of his needs: he's gotten things done, made improvements, found trust in others, and has grown. If fortune comes by way of a cheerful disposition that others want to be around, so be it. Peter is nothing if not pragmatic.

And, so, last year, when word was getting around that master tailor J.A. Bianco was looking for a talented junior partner to help him establish a new firm, the consensus among the Armenians was that it was time to get their mutual favorite, Daniel Eliseian, down to Florida. Peter, the senior among them in Jacksonville, would act as the liaison, with his wife, Agnes, laying on the charm.

But now that Peter has witnessed the grinding effect that old man Bianco has had on their cheery friend, Peter has come to feel bitterness toward Bianco, and disappointment in himself for inviting his talented and trusting chum to be taken advantage of by a two-timing {non-Armenian}. If there is one

good thing to have come of all this, Peter has to admit that it is Agnes's bringing Mary out to Jacksonville. They certainly are fond of each other.

"You know what I think would be good for all of us?" Peter says to Agnes after agreeing to the Ortega plan. "I think we should get our friend out on the town tonight. Ask Mary if she knows of anything—a picture show, or whatever—that might be of interest to her fiancé."

"Peter!" Agnes shushes him for using that word, looking to the stairs, as though Mary, up in the apartment, might hear them. Then she whispers emphatically, "You didn't even think it would work!"

Peter laughs, tickled with what is taking place under his roof. "I've got to hand it to you, {Mother}. You know your sister, and you sometimes seem to know my friend, better than I do! ... I'm going to enjoy having him as a brother-in-law."

"Shhhhh," Agnes insists. Then she laughs, too. "It will be nice."

"Mis-ter E-li-sei-an," Mary sings as she enters his tailoring shop.

"Mary!" he exclaims, emerging from behind one of his cutting tables, disrupting several bolts of fabric that he had been piling and sorting. "Miss Jorjorian ..."

"I've come to get you," she says.

"Get me?"

"Yes, I'm going to get you!"

"Please do. What are you getting me for?"

"We're all going to the Imperial, and you're coming with us."

"Oh ... Miss Jorjorian ... I am so busy. I ... don't know ..."

"Sister and Peter and the boys are out front. We'll be seeing Clara Kimball Young in *Mid-Channel*. Bedros specifically requested you, 'Egishé.'"

“I really am so busy!”

“I can see. It’s like a hurricane swept through. It was only half this messy yesterday!”

“I’m organizing.”

“‘Organizing’ is the opposite of what you’re doing. Besides, right now I’m going to save the shop from more of your organizing, and get you outside before night falls, down the street and have you enjoy a picture with me and Bedros.” She lifts his jacket from the coat rack, and commands, “Come on.” Then she yells toward the back office, “Mr. Bianco!”

“He’s not here,” Daniel says.

“Didn’t think so.”

“He’s never here anymore”

“That’s the problem,” says Mary, echoing Daniel’s current refrain.

“So that’s what I’m doing,” he says emphatically, if vaguely. “This isn’t working.”

But he quickly settles down, realizes what he’s arguing against, and gives Mary a consenting smiling nod. “It’s good?—the picture you’re taking me to?”

“It’s new, with one of my old favorites—Clara Kimball Young.”

“So I will love it!” he says with a new-found smile.

“Our friend!” she says of Daniel to Daniel.

Thus, now enlivened, Daniel swings the pitcher over the basin and, into which, pours water in the same three-four time Mary had employed with her dishes this morning. He can almost be heard to be humming “My Isle of Golden Dreams.” He washes his hands and wets his face. Then he dries his palms across the mound of dark brown hair atop his head and slicks it all back with the comb from his vest. Finally, he pats his face with the hand towel, dimples revealing a smile behind the cloth. Already Daniel looks rested and refreshed.

He turns around from Mary so as to unbutton his trousers and properly tuck in his shirt. Then he allows Mary from behind to dress him into his jacket.

She rather likes that.

So does he.

Daniel reaches down for his leather satchel, takes a quick glance inside, and clasps it. He adjusts his hose and laces, and stands, straightening his tie. Finally, he smooths his mustache, places his hat on his head, and presents himself.

“Now there’s the handsome fellow I came calling on!”

Daniel removes his boater, takes Mary’s hand, and boldly kisses it—with “playful theatrically.” His mustache reaches her skin an instant before his moist lips.

He locks the studio and, as they’re walking toward the staircase, up come the Yeghoian brothers, George and Eddy.

“Eloping?” Eddy asks.

“Good afternoon, Miss Jorjorian,” says his older brother George.

“Mrs. Eliseian,” corrects Eddy.

“Oh, you two!” replies Mary.

“Not me!” protests George.

“So nice to see our friend smiling,” Eddy says of Daniel.

“Hello, boys,” Daniel finally says to them.

As with all the Armenians in Jacksonville, Daniel’s friendship with the Yeghoian brothers goes back to their years in New York. The Yeghoians are also tailors. George is a couple of years Daniel’s senior; Eddy is a year his junior. Prior to Mary’s arrival last November, the three were like a single unit, working in adjoining studios, going out for meals and shows together, wandering all over town and along the river in their spare time to explore their adopted Jacksonville (for which Peter dubbed them the “Three Muske-tailors”). They also discussed their ambitions and projected upon each other

their futures. The consensus seemed to be that young Eddy is overly interested in too many girls to ever find a suitable wife; George is too set in his ways to share his life with a woman and family; and, meanwhile, Daniel ... Daniel would be the first, and most successful, of all the Armenian men in Florida to leave their bachelor cohort—as soon as the right young lady came along. And George and Eddy both knew it was Mary the minute she arrived.

“He’s a man who is actually interested in what a woman says and thinks!” Mary once remarked to George, who was, at the time, dutifully lending her an interested ear.

“You treat her well, Danig,” says Eddy to Daniel, using the Armenian diminutive.

“I think that’s for her father to say,” adds George with a laugh.

“Now you?” Mary says to George.

He ducks timidly into his shoulders.

“And your family’s outside,” notes Eddy to Daniel, referring to Peter, Agnes, and the boys, as though they are his in-laws.

“We’ve got a show to catch,” says Mary, in part to change the subject.

“No sign of Bianco?” asks George.

“Well,” says Daniel to George, with resignation, prompting George to shake his head in disappointment.

“*Mid-Channel?*” asks Eddy of Mary.

“Clara Kimball Young!” Mary tells him, as though nothing more needs to be said.

Eddy swoons at hearing the actress’s name.

“Let us know how it is,” says George of *Mid-Channel*.

“I’ll be with Miss Jorjorian,” says Daniel, gazing at Mary. “So I already know,” he says, turning to Eddy: “It will be grand.”

“Ooooooh,” Eddy responds, wagging a finger at Daniel, who is beaming.

“It’s why he’s with her and I’m with you,” notes George.

“Gentlemen,” Daniel states, tipping his hat. And he and Mary leave with self-satisfied pride in the good-natured humor they’ve allowed to transpire, as they head to the stairwell.

“Race you!” she suddenly exclaims to Daniel—tearing off down the stairs, as he quickly tries to catch up. They continue down to the first-floor landing, laughing and giggling, and both almost fall into each other, in a tumble of joy, while he reaches out to the center of her back, to “catch” her—right where he had been holding last night during their silent dance.

As they hit the breezy fresh air, Bedros breaks loose from his mother and jumps into Daniel’s arms, laughing along with them. Agnes and Peter are delighted.

“Look, he’s happy!” Agnes announces.

“The Yeghoians said you weren’t,” Peter says.

Daniel glances to Mary at his side and makes a vocabulary joke in English: “I’m excercized.”

They walk up the block to the theater, and Mary tells Daniel of the plan to go to Ortega this Sunday.

“We can rent boats!” she says, to sweeten the offer.

As Peter is buying the tickets (over Daniel’s polite objections), and Agnes takes Bedros over to the posters for the show, Daniel pulls a small box from his satchel. “I’ve got something for you, Miss Jorjorian,” he says in a private whisper.

Mary’s heart nearly stops.

No, she did not mistake it for a ring box ... but it is obviously something special, something specifically for her from him.

“A manicure set!” she announces, upon opening it. And, after noting its quality, she states, “Oh, I will treasure it! A gift from my good friend from our days in Jacksonville.”

“How sweet!” declares Agnes, returning to see.

Daniel is now self-conscious, and wishes he’d waited until a more private moment—back at the apartment, perhaps—to

make his presentation to Mary.

“Oh, clippers,” says Peter, as he’s handing out tickets. “I could use a trim myself.”

Mary recoils, and Agnes socks Peter on the chest.

“It’s a joke!” exclaims Peter. Then, assessing the set, he says to Mary, “That’s very nice, Sis,” and to Daniel, “You’re a good man, Egishé.”

Daniel is embarrassed by all the attention. Mary is elated.

Inside the Imperial Theatre, little Bedros is squealing with joy as the performer on stage adds more items from his basket into the air. It is a continuous flow of balls and hoops and batons, some of which are at times missed on accident, sometimes missed on purpose, sometimes retired to the basket and replaced with another item. The man is quite talented, and the house organist is having fun, and is obviously inspired as well. The audience is very appreciative.

“That’s what Mr. Eliseian looked like at the shop earlier!” says Mary to Bedros, who is sitting between her and Daniel.

“It’s true!” Daniel agrees.

Bedros is impressed, and now imagines Mr. Eliseian to be an actual juggler.

The live act is then followed by a couple of movie shorts—a western and a comedy—which keep everyone engaged and entertained and the organist playing lively.

Before the newsreel comes on, Agnes hands baby Shavarsh to Mary and grabs young Bedros, taking the boy to the theater’s nursery.

“Oh, Sha-Sha,” coos Mary to her three-and-a-half-month-old nephew.

Cradled in her arms, she has turned him toward Daniel, who has taken Bedros’s seat.

Daniel leans in with his face to the baby’s, and Mary lifts Sha-

varsh further toward him. His mustache brushes Mary’s hand again, as she adjusts the swaddling, and his hand is now grasping her elbow, as though to hold the baby with her, together.

Peter interrupts their tender moment by expressing his displeasure with what’s on the screen. “*Boo-oo-oo!*” he says, loudly, along with much of the audience.

“Oh!” exclaims Mary—“President Roosevelt!”—as the late leader’s image flashes on the screen, with a segment on the laying of the cornerstone for the restoration of Mr. Roosevelt’s birthplace.

“Worst Republican ever,” Peter says in response.

“He was our greatest president since Lincoln,” states Daniel, quietly, to baby Shavarsh, who is smiling in trusting agreement.

“He was our greatest president since Lincoln!” Mary says aloud, echoing Daniel—who had merely been echoing her teachings.

“Fooley,” says Peter. “Roosevelt nearly destroyed this nation’s business capacity.”

“Gramercy,” Mary whispers to Daniel, pointing, upon realizing the neighborhood where the Roosevelt home is. That’s just a few blocks south of her aunt and uncle’s apartment, which is where Mary is set to live when she returns to New York.

“Near us,” Daniel responds, startling Mary. They’ll be living in the same neighborhood, when they’ve both returned to New York. That thrills Mary even more than the thought of living near where President Roosevelt grew up and getting to see its restoration. But even more-so is that Daniel has described them as an “us.” She rolls the phrase over in her head—near us—and it almost makes her dizzy with all that it could mean.

“Uh-oh—trouble,” says Daniel, breaking through Mary’s

thoughts, as Warren Harding comes on the screen.

“Things are finally going to be looking up!” says Peter. He states it with a bit of bombast, as the Southern Democrats in the audience voice their displeasure.

“Now, there’s a handsome man,” says Agnes of Mr. Harding, upon her return from having deposited little Bedros with all the other kids.

“See?” says Daniel, in parting words to Shavarsh, who is being handed back to Agnes. “Trouble.”

Mary would agree—on both counts. President-elect Harding is handsome. But she worries that the best years of her political life are over. From her childhood, all the way through, Mary believes she’s been blessed with having lived through one of the truly “revolutionary” eras in history. Yet, it all took place before she was an adult! And Mary fears it is now over, with Harding. With her youth, she had enjoyed the tenor of the times, and joined rallies in the streets, and cheered until she was hoarse when the Nineteenth Amendment was finally ratified.

Mary was always the political one in her family, and overtly progressive. She was accustomed to being out of step with most Armenians, especially the older generation. Except for opposing Prohibition and supporting the Bolsheviks, most Armenians have continued to be quite conservative in their politics in America.

Prohibition has been resisted by Armenians, much as it has by most of the newcomer groups. When you’ve lived among vineyards and orchards—for as long as there have been vineyards and orchards—wine and brandy is simply part of your life. And, for the Armenians in the old country, alcohol consumption also became an identifying trait that brought persecution, despite what the Ottomans claimed to “allow.” So, then, coming here to find Americans actually wanting to—

and succeeding—in doing the same thing was disconcerting. But Armenians are fully rewarded here for their business skills, so they accept the deal.

And, as business is business, Armenians supported the Bolsheviks because the Bolsheviks supported them. The Russian revolutionaries gave precious weapons to the besieged Armenians, who were fighting against the neighboring empire. But for Armenians to now be harassed as “socialists” is absurd. That’s the one thing Mary won’t miss about Woodrow Wilson, her otherwise-thoughtful professor president. His attorney general, A. Mitchell Palmer, has been as threatening to friends of Bolsheviks as the Anti-Salooners have been toward friends of wine.

*Oh, there’s President Wilson now!*

Wheeled across the screen in his chair with a blanket across his lap, Mary finds him grand, even in his frailty. He gave us the League of Nations and women the vote. When Mary was twelve, she had wanted the return of Roosevelt to the presidency, with his Bull Moose Party—which set off the beginning of her political disagreements with her father, who favored Taft. But she’s grown to be a big supporter of Mr. Wilson. Peter, meanwhile, is much like Mary’s father in his politics, only Peter has good command of English and knowledge of the issues, so Mary is glad she has found a political ally in Daniel.

Mary argued with Peter on the very day her future brother-in-law was presenting himself to the Jorjorians, taking the whole family on a ferry trip up the Hudson River. She simply refuses to allow him his self-serving opinions on matters of politics, history, even business, and, especially the rights of women—not without challenge. Peter liked what he saw in their mother, and in their father, from whom his bride-to-be seemed a perfect blend. Meanwhile, everybody could see—nay, hear—that the rub he’d be having with the Jorjorian fam-

ily would not be with Agnes's parents, but with her sister. *Sisters*, to tell the truth; for the next one in line, Sara, seemed to take delight in their sister Mary's impudence. But Peter retains that old notion, shared by his adoring father-in-law, that women's views are not to be considered, and so he freely employs bluster and ridicule in attempting to bat away a woman's verbal challenge—but with more skill and confidence than their dear old dad. It is a behavior that infuriates Mary.

So she treasures Daniel when he spars with Peter on issues. And, while Daniel doesn't have as much experience with American politics and history, nor even a fully fluent tongue in the subject's language, he can keep up with Peter—in large part because of Daniel's superb innate intellect. But it is also done on the simple basis of Peter giving Daniel the opening of due respect. Daniel is "allowed" to challenge Peter on matters philosophical, or practical, or even of minor details. Peter doesn't get angry with Daniel, as he does with Mary or, even, Agnes. And that infuriates Mary, as well. But it does allow "Mary's opinion" to get through, as Daniel holds their shared position—informed significantly by Mary's educated details of matters, tempered with Daniel's worldly insights—and he delivers it within the ethos of civilized, humorous banter. Mary doesn't like the rules, but she enjoys the outcome.

*Oh, how she is going to love her life with Daniel!*

For Daniel, watching photo-plays with Mary is to hear her voice, whispering in his ear, reading the cards' lines to him. He can, indeed, read in English, but not so quickly, nor as dramatically. Also, nothing compares for him the sweetness of her voice, at his shoulder, in a darkened theater.

The screen flickers back to life. The organist begins the score. Mary so desperately wants to hold Daniel's hand ...

And the feature begins.

Clara Kimball Young is a favorite film star for Mary, and

*Mid-Channel* is a serious domestic drama, giving Miss Young a nice opportunity to perform at her best. It was a hit play, a few years ago (with Ethel Barrymore, Mary could tell you), but the story is depressing. It's about a wealthy middle-age couple who are in a dark passage in their marriage. Mary wants to identify, or at least sympathize, with Miss Young's character, Zoe Blundell, but Zoe clashes with Mary's romantic notions of how her own matrimony might someday be. Mary can admire Zoe's defiant will as an independent-minded woman ... as well as her gorgeous wardrobe. But her behavior is reprehensible! And her poor abused husband!

Meanwhile, Agnes finds herself both shocked and actually engrossed by the movie: how Clara Kimball Young's character takes advantage of her husband's neglect—and their lack of children—by going out with other men to night clubs! She's a wanton adulteress! Agnes is aghast ... and fully absorbed.

Daniel takes the story as an obvious lesson: be an engaged, attentive husband. A man should listen to his wife—just as he listens to Mary, whispering in the darkness. And Clara Kimball Young provides a nice visual conveyance of that message.

Peter, on the other hand, is simply bored. Sure, Miss Young is good-looking, but he takes the opportunity to give thought to his business, mulling over possible strategies for growth.

"Didn't see that coming!" they all agree, out on Forsyth Street, its street lights now humming. The movie's big twist ending (of which Mary knew *something* was coming, but she didn't know *what* was coming: *It was all a book!*) caught everybody by surprise. Now they're all enjoying a good laugh, having just sat through an hour of growing tension, which seemed to end in a horrible tragedy, to then be delivered in its final two minutes—as Zoe closed the novel she'd been reading—back to a healthy state of marriage, with reconciliation, compromise,

and, indeed, love firmly in place.

“What a relief!” Mary exclaims for everybody.

It’s a short walk back to the streetcar stop, but it’s enough time for Peter to put a damper on things.

“I’m telling you, friend,” Peter tells him. “You’ve got to abandon this partnership, like Bianco’s abandoned you. He doesn’t deserve you.”

“He’s taking care of it, Peter,” Mary says. “In his own honorable way.”

“It’s business, Miss Jorjorian,” Peter interrupts. “You wouldn’t understand.”

“She understands,” Daniel says of Mary.

Peter ignores both of them, and continues: “Mr. Eliseian is being taken advantage of in a business matter. He moved down to Florida, leaving a top operation in New York, and is treated like an apprentice shop boy here in Jacksonville. Daniel, you’re better than Bianco.”

“She understands,” Daniel says again, not finished with that point.

“Vakilian’s going back,” Peter says of Randy, who has plans for a return to New York later this month. “You should go with him.”

“I know. I know,” Daniel protests. Peter is always repeating common knowledge as though it’s an original thought. “That’s what we’ve been talking about.”

“Okay, but you’ve got to get on it.”

“I know. I know.”

Mary clasps Daniel’s arm. He’s weary again.

Back at the apartment, after Agnes and Mary have cleared supper and have put the children to bed, and Agnes has joined Peter in their room, Mary sits down at the table with Dan-

iel. Its carpeted top is now brushed clean. It’s a task he’s has taken on without being asked—and no crumbs on the carpet below, either—like so many little things around the house he does that would never cross Peter’s mind. And, as she was approaching the table—just now—he greeted her with his eyes, and scooted his chair a bit in anticipation of her joining him. Would Peter have even looked up from his paper for Agnes?

“Your gift means a lot to me,” she tells him. “I think you know that. I hope you know that.”

“I do. I wasn’t sure if it was the right gift, but it was for ... the right person. I wanted to get you something nice, to show you ...”

She awaits him to say just what—exactly—it is he wanted to show her, but he can’t seem to state it. He glances nervously at his hands, with his long fingers, then across to hers, Mary’s compact hands, like shells.

They are both nervous now. However, while Daniel sometimes goes quiet when he’s got something to say, Mary too often finds something to say when things go quiet.

“I’ve decided ...” she suddenly announces.

He looks to her, both relieved and anxious.

“I’m going to move back to New York, too!” she says.

“When?” he wants to know.

“When you do.”

“Oh, Miss Jorjorian! No, no, no ...”

“Yes, yes, yes ...” she argues. Then she forms her rationale: “With you leaving, I’m left with no real employer. I need a job outside of the home. I don’t want to just do this,” she says emphatically, waving her hand in reference to Agnes and Peter’s household.

“I would love you in New York,” Daniel tells her. (He’s about to correct himself, to say, “I would love *having you* in New York,” but he decides to settle for the ambiguities of English

to communicate the range of possibilities.)

This time around in New York—now that they truly know each other, and share an actual fondness—they could begin an actual social courtship: out on “dates” to real theatre and true movie palaces, to the opera, to Central Park and along the Great White Way, to concerts and restaurants.

“Oh, New York will be grand with you, Mr. E!”

It was in New York, of course, where Daniel and Mary first met. But that was in 1916, just about five years ago, not long after Daniel had arrived from Buenos Aires. He was a young man—twenty-one—rough with English but talented with fabric, working for, and living with, Mr. Merjanian and his family. This was when everyone lived in New York: before Mary’s family moved to Fresno, and Peter and Agnes moved to Florida. In 1916, Mary was not yet sixteen, in high school at Wadleigh. Agnes and Peter were newly married (with the first signs of Bedros-to-be beginning to bulge in Agnes). And, even though people lived in different parts of the city, New York was like an Armenian village back then. Everybody knew everybody, and kept each other informed. (It was all about the war, focusing on what was happening in Asia Minor and the brutality of the Turks.)

Mary didn’t much care for Daniel in the beginning. He seemed polite, but not very interesting—as she mistook his rudimentary English for not having much to say. And, she being so young back then, of course she’d assumed he was a married man. (Plus, he wasn’t blond and athletic, as was her ideal at the time.) Meanwhile, Daniel had come to view Mary Jorjorian—Peter’s young sister-in-law—as an *intelligent* girl but certainly not as the dynamic young woman she was becoming. Instead, he remained focused on building his career as a tailor and to gain the status (already enjoyed by Mr. Merjanian, only two years Daniel’s senior) of master tailor.

And it almost ended at that.

Christmas before last—1919—Mary’s father returned from an exploratory rail expedition out to California, visiting the Fresno Jorjorians. He was more certain than ever that his own family needed to do as his cousins had done and give up city living (“{if it could be called ‘living’},” he stated in Armenian, sounding an awful lot like his uncle Kevoork). They needed to become a {proud} Armenian family who worked the earth, as Noah had intended when he landed the Ark on Mt. Ararat.

So that February (thirteen long months ago), Mary gave up the life she loved—all the people, institutions, culture, commerce, and, yes, the thorough lack of calm and quietude of New York City—the world’s greatest metropolis—and she moved with her family to a farm six miles from Fresno, on the outskirts of a small town called Clovis. It had its moments (spending time with her “twin cousin” Margaret, including swimming in the San Joaquin River, was fun), but ... mostly ... farm life, for Mary, was dreadful.

Therefore, last autumn, with the conclusion of harvest, Mary took to making her case that she should move to Jacksonville—to assist big sister Agnes with the coming of her parents’ second grand-child. It was Agnes’s idea, but she’d pitched it so expertly that she could quickly then play audience to little sister Mary’s selling it to herself and family. Agnes had more than a hunch with Daniel Eliseian, and she needed to convince Mary to move to Florida—and not back to New York—while not seeing it as an obvious matrimonial trap. Mary badly wanted to return to New York, but her sister had sold her so well on the loveliness of life down in Florida—as the passage-way to New York—and anything would beat living and working on a farm outside of Clovis, California! So Mary gave little critical thought to the household presence of Mr. Eliseian’s, other than hoping he didn’t have disagreeable habits or poor

personal hygiene, and that he would not be overly boring or stuffy. Mary had not a clue, as her sister lured her in.

Meanwhile, Daniel mostly saw right through Agnes's veiled plans. He had even threatened to write to Miss Jorjorian, personally, letting her know what her sister was hatching. (He didn't.) But he did object to Agnes, by telling her that she was wasting her time, that his life has been so delayed already that he had no responsibility engaging in romance. And, anyway, Who wouldn't want romance? But only when ones earned it. Consequently, Agnes "gave up" and, instead, took to selling to Daniel the general idea of Mary—not as a potential wife, but as someone to share a household with. Which was happening, regardless. She emphasized Mary's intelligence and wit, as well as her musical and theatrical interests, plus her mindfulness to details. And, maybe once or twice, Mrs. Kludjian referred to her little sister's "movie star" beauty. Even Peter—not one to associate much outside his own sex—admitted to Mary's many great qualities; quite book smart, but also talented.

Daniel would not be fooled. But, despite his need for a regular good night's sleep, he graciously gave up his room for Miss Jorjorian, and took up residence in the pantry, behind a folding partition.

Quickly, Mary found Daniel to be, in fact, actually charming and talented. ("He plays the violin and he loves opera!" she gushed to her big sister.) And, as Daniel had become much more fluent in English in the four years since her initial impression, she realized how truly intelligent and refined he was. She also quickly discovered that sunny disposition everyone seemed to so admire. The more they got to know each other—and after he hired her to be his clerical assistant for his tailoring business—the more she came to look up to him. At the same time, he came to cherish and respect her. Together they laughed at the absurd and held in awe the ingenious. With ev-

ery interaction and observation these past four months, Daniel and Mary seem to have found themselves repeatedly sharing a spot of overlapping agreement, comfort, and compatibility.

And now she's suggesting something possibly profound with her proposed early move back to New York, right on the heels of Daniel.

"Of course, the Armenians would all talk if I '{followed}' you," she says, half-jokingly, trying to figure out what her plan might, in fact, be.

"Let them talk," he says, reversing his position of only moments earlier.

Mary greets that statement with glee. It represents an attitude that is so closely paired with her own. But, also ... it seems that they're coming to some sort of bigger decision.

"Oh, the thought of you leaving us!" she cries.

"But you just said, you'll be coming, too!"

"Eventually. But I don't know when. Peter and Agnes still need me! And I've got no place to live in New York!"

"Your aunt and uncle," Daniel says.

"What if they don't want me?"

"But ... they've already told you they do!" Daniel states.

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know, I don't know!" Mary exclaims, growing agitated, uncertain if she really wants to live with her aunt and uncle, who are such an old couple.

"You probably think I'm such a silly fool!" she says, too loudly.

It's the sort of outburst that would normally make Daniel self-conscious, as would the whole tenor of this conversation. But he doesn't even glance toward Peter and Agnes's bedroom door. Instead, he holds his eyes to hers, leans forward, gently, and asks, "'Silly'?"

Then he feigns ignorance, seeking clarification in Armenian, "{What's that}?"

That makes Mary laugh.

He scoots his seat closer to her, his knees entangled in her skirt ... and grasps her hands.

“You ARE silly, Miss Jorjorian!” he laughs. “And intelligent ... and inventive ... and educated, and ... highly spirited.”

She laughs at his litany of high-minded English words. (And she can’t believe they’re holding hands yet again.)

“But ‘foolish’?” he continues. “Not—as Americans say—” he announces, while unintentionally releasing her hands to gesticulate—“in a million years.” And he adds, “Maybe I am the foolish one.” (And, indeed, he feels just that, having given up a cherished “innocent” hand hold.)

“I just worry so much about what’s going to happen if you leave and I stay!” she exclaims, looking to his hands, now gripping his trouser legs.

“But I’m not leaving just this minute. And you’re not staying forever,” he tells her, releasing the fabric to once again gesticulate, leaving his pant sides bunched and wrinkled beyond what is expected of the fashionable seersucker.

“But I do worry. I worry almost to the point of illness.” She sure wishes he would take that as a cue to grasp her hands again, or maybe simply embrace her.

“Well, don’t get yourself sick, Miss Jorjorian, otherwise none of us can go.” And, instead of embracing her, he embraces himself, folding his arms and now gripping the opposite sides of his vest.

They are both just wrecks, sitting facing each other, neither knowing what to do with their hands.

Nervously, Mary unwinds her hair. Then she struggles to twist it back into its horsetail bun, as her eyes well, and she feels on the verge of sobbing, ready to drop tears at any moment.

Instinctively, Daniel lets go of his vest (alarmed that he would be doing such a thing in the first place!) and produces

his handkerchief for her. However, with her hands occupied with hair wrangling, he recognizes the need, and he dabs her eyes for her. He’s back to his old self again. She can feel his fingertips behind the fabric.

“Thank you,” she says, and then takes the handkerchief to continue.

She wipes her eyes.

Then she blows her nose.

“Go right ahead,” he encourages, finding humorous comfort in her ease of behavior.

“Thank you,” she replies. Then she pretends she’s going to clean out her ears, too—as his grin widens. She’s back to her old self again.

They then sit, looking at each other. Two people, independently in love with the other. But neither is happy with what is transpiring, which Mary now acknowledges.

“You’re right,” she finally concludes, sniffing back residual tears.

He needs to start over again, out of Jacksonville, back in New York. And she knows it will probably be sometime this month when he does. And she knows her own departure will likely be—God forbid—as late as this summer. She simply needs to trust that her future and his are on ever-converging paths.

“Bianco’s making your life hard enough right now without me adding to it!”

“Adding to it,” he says, echoing her. “That’s what you do to my life. You add to it.”

There is a pause. Mary’s imagination scatters to all the possibilities.

“But you’re right—about Bianco,” he says, and sits back in his seat. “And so is Peter.”

“But, when?” she asks.

“I don’t know. I’ve got to get everything arranged. I’ve got to talk with Mr. Bianco and come to some sort of settlement.”

“But he’s never there,” says Mary.

“That’s the problem,” notes Daniel.

“And, until then?”

“Maybe we can dance again, Miss Jorjorian ... this time with actual music.” It is an ostensibly mischievous statement, but both can hear a sadness behind his optimism.

“Oh, Mr. E. I am going to miss you.”

“But: in *New York* ...”

“Yes: in *New York* ...”

“Well, then,” he concludes, getting up to prepare his pantry bedding. “I’ll see you in New York.”

“Daniel had to get an early start, dear,” Agnes tells Mary as she enters the kitchen the next morning.

“Oh,” states Mary, suddenly worried. “Maybe he’s got an appointment with Mr. Bianco.”

“I don’t know. I got up when I heard the front door. He’d had {a bite to eat}, and, of course, left a tidy set of dishes and utensils, cleaned and drying.”

“That’s our Mr. E,” says Mary, admiring his work. She glances to his space in the pantry, behind the partition, and can see it all put away and orderly. She hopes it isn’t Mr. Bianco that Daniel was heading off so early for. She selfishly wants that meeting to be delayed as long as possible.

“He’s a good man, Little Sis,” notes Agnes. “I hope everything works out for the two of you.”

Mary smiles, knowing it might be deeper than her big sister can imagine.

Indeed, Mary is on the verge of confessing to Agnes her love for Daniel, breaking the news of a possible engagement—pre-

maturely, maybe, though certainly not without foundation!—when Peter’s footfalls toward the kitchen impedes her haste. For that, Mary is quietly thankful. It is still too early for an announcement. And with this one, Mary wants to remain dignified. But won’t Agnes be surprised! All this time, right under her nose—in her own household—a romance was taking shape! So, with the thrill of an announcement pending, for the rest of the morning and into the afternoon, Mary finds herself floating in a dream state.

It might, indeed, be a slow start she and Daniel—“the Eli-seians”—get off to. But, eventually, with Daniel’s talent and determination and Mary’s intelligence and support, they will prosper.

Imagining their eventual home together, Mary envisions their book-lined study (filled with leather-bound volumes of classics, theology, science, and modern philosophy, as well as popular literature), with a desk for herself as well as for Daniel, and a reading stand between them for their many dictionaries and encyclopedias. There will be a large world globe and map drawers, and a table upon which to spread their maps. At one side of the room there will be a fireplace, with matching leather chairs and reading lamps, all sitting on a nice oriental carpet—purchased from Peter (of course). A gramophone will provide them with continuous, lovely music. But the piano in the corner and violin music stand will allow them to break from their studies (and their writing and their travel planning) to play their own music, at any time of their choosing.

Realistically, it won’t be a large house. Even with his coming success, Daniel will, after all, be a tailor not an industrialist. But Mary will be allowed to work out of the home, with a salary job at an office, so she will be able to contribute to their income, even though they won’t need it. Everyone sees his talents. And with their two children—the first two (a boy

and a girl)—they could get by with a modest home, but with nice features. A library would be nice—maybe a small one, in an alcove, for the children, too. Three bedrooms, plus that little library, a kitchen, a bathroom, a dining room, and a parlor. That’s seven-and-a-half rooms, plus an entryway. And a garage (to house their automobile, of course). Plus, a basement, a laundry porch, and an attic. And also a nice yard where Mary can grow flowers and vegetables. A big walnut tree, with a swing for the children—that would be sweet.

Indeed.

All day—as she does her chores, and in preparing noon-time dinner, cleaning up after dinner, preparing for supper, and then lying down for a nap—Mary is thinking of her life to come. “Mrs. Eliseian,” she imagines. “Mrs. Daniel G. Eliseian.” (She’s added the middle initial, as she fancies its ring—and because his family hails from Guren.) Oh, she wishes he would just go ahead and propose marriage now!—regardless of their living or his career circumstances. And the ceremony could be simple or, if necessary, it could be officiated by the municipal clerk in City Hall ... Manhattan. Young people today don’t need security. The old generations always made marriage about security. Love was not even a consideration. It was as if it were a business matter. The two families conferred. The two fathers met. Negotiations were made. Agreements were arrived at. The daughter was presented, and ownership was transferred. But here in the modern world—in America—it is about love. It is about free choice and self-determination. It is about the independent decision of two thinking adults, in love, seeking security between them. Security for Mary would come from the simple request and promise. “Will you marry me?” (“Yes! Yes! Yes!”) Love and commitment—*that* is security. Everything follows from that. Daniel worries about his partnership with Mr. Bianco, who won’t give Daniel the time

of day, but Mary ... Mary is all ears, awaiting to hear from her “mystery.”

And, at three o’clock, a telephone call comes into Peter’s shop downstairs. It is from Daniel.

“He’s getting his ticket!” Peter exclaims, with unusual urgency, having run upstairs to tell Mary and Agnes. “He—he will be leaving at 9:00 p.m.!”

“Tonight?!” Mary screams.

“Yes. He’s still on the line. He wants to talk to you.”

Mary hesitates, stunned, then shouts with anger and disbelief, “No! No! No! I will not speak to him! If he wants to leave ... LET HIM LEAVE!”

With Daniel now back at the house, he is gathering together all his possessions and packing his steamer trunk. Agnes is in the kitchen with Mary, silent and sullen. She is preparing supper, while Agnes pulls together a sack of food that Daniel can eat on the trip. Peter is standing around, talking business and strategy with Daniel. He has a sheet of paper and a pencil, writing down ideas—whom to contact in New York, what to say, and to whom, et cetera.

“No one but us should know your plans,” states Peter to Daniel and Agnes, as well as to Mary. “Not even to what city you’re headed. Not the Yegohians, not the Altoonjians, not Baylarian, and certainly not Vakilian.”

“Certainly not Hrand!” echoes Agnes, regarding their talkative friend.

“Not even Mrs. Pappas,” says Peter, continuing. “No one can know, or Bianco will come and get you, Dan. He will be furious. I guarantee it. Ooh, boy, he’s not going to like this one bit!”

“I’ve got to do it,” Daniel says.

“I know. I know. I’m not questioning your motives. And I’m

pretty damned impressed with your tactics. I'm just telling you: Bianco will be furious."

Meanwhile, Mary remains in the kitchen. She hasn't spoken a word—not a word—to Daniel since the announcement of his sudden departure.

"Will I be making your supper?" she asks him with a sneering flatness.

"Mary!" Agnes says. "Please."

"Just asking," she responds, then enumerates to Agnes her tasks: "Meals for you and Peter and your friend"—pointing—"And something for Bedros and myself. You'll be taking care of baby?"

"Mary," repeats Agnes.

Daniel is a nervous heap. He does not know what to say to Mary. When he arrived in the apartment an hour ago, he rushed directly to her room where she was lying down with baby Shavarsh. She had spent the time since his phone call crying herself to exhaustion. "I am sorry. I am so sorry," he said, over and over while she ignored him, her face turned toward the wall, stroking the baby's head.

Now, as he has cleaned out his sleeping space in the pantry, and with the partition folded and the mattress rolled, Daniel suddenly realizes he hasn't packed his violin. And he can't find it.

"My violin!"

Mary knows where it is. She had placed it under her bed, right after his call. She isn't sure what her plan was, but it was the only tangible thing she could grab and hold onto that meant so much to her. For Mary, Daniel's violin is almost the embodiment of Daniel himself. He was breaking her heart, so she was taking his violin.

From the kitchen, Mary hears Daniel and Agnes and Peter in the parlor consulting on the issue in Armenian.

"Mary ..." Agnes says, at the door of the kitchen. She does not need to state the situation. Agnes wordlessly pleads for her sister's surrender.

Mary's lower lip is quivering, as though on the verge of crying. She is the girl in the household right now, called on by the adults to not misbehave.

Mary leaves the kitchen and walks through the parlor, holding a level gaze of reddened eyes to Daniel, whose own eyes are red. At her bedroom door, she gestures for him to come with her.

Pulling out his violin, she stands and cradles it to herself, resuming her gaze.

"I'm sorry," he says.

She meets his apology with silence, then asks, "If I give it to you, do you promise we will resume when I move back?"

She is referring to their musical duets, of course. But she and he both recognize the broader notion.

"Of course," he says, in answer to both.

"Can I trust you?"

He sighs. He's actually quite flattered with how angry she is with him. "I'm not leaving you ... Mary .... I am leaving Bianco. You have made my life {very bright} here. So it saddens me, greatly, to leave you now. But it is the timing, remember?: Not 'if' but 'when.' Well, that man has ... {made it impossible} ... for me to continue here. I must return—to New York. And when we {re-unite}, we will resume. I promise."

Mary wants to continue being angry, but she takes it all in, considers it, thinks better of herself, and accepts.

If they were married—and she still wants to be married to him—she would be going with him, packing their things together, moving to a home together, living the rest of their lives together, no promises necessary. All the same, it is nice to hear him making actual commitments that involve her—in her

name—and not simply his career plans.

“To the future!” says Peter, making a toast over supper with the Armenian brandy he’s brought out from his Prohibition cabinet.

“No,” says Daniel. “First, to my friends. To the memories I will always have of this home we have shared ... as family.”

“Here’s to family,” Mary says, agreeing with Daniel—who put it all so well!—conceding that all is not lost: that her future with Daniel is merely delayed, not ended.

“To family!” they all toast, happy to see Mary regaining perspective.

Mary and Daniel clink their glasses and drink to each other through their reddened gaze. The brandy is hot on Mary’s throat and adds more color to her already glowing face. Peter and Agnes have a laugh at Mary’s inexperienced reaction, but Daniel nods in understanding. (And she will give the remainder of her brandy to Daniel to finish—to keep him warm for his “journey north.”)

It’s already after seven p.m. as they quickly conclude supper. Agnes relieves Mary of her domestic duties so that she can help to compose and pen Daniel’s final letter to Mr. Bianco.

By 8:30, Mary has completed their letter, for Daniel to sign, in its final form:

*March 3, 1921*

*Bianco & Eliseian  
20 West Forsyth Street  
Jacksonville, Florida*

*Mr. Bianco*

*Dear Sir:*

*I am going because I am tired. It is impossible for me to continue any longer. When we signed the partnership contract you promised that you would give half your time to the work and do your best to promote the business. But beginning with the first day, you forgot your promise. And you left the whole responsibility on me, without thinking that it would be too much for me to bear. I reminded you a few times of your promise, but you did not hear me at all. Just putting in the capital is not all. You have to give time and energy in a business like this, which needs all the energy of at least two men. I gave all my energy to the business, and we have almost succeeded. But I cannot endure it any longer, and your conduct has made me leave. I have collected about \$1,150. I have paid Rosenburg check of \$130, and have drawn the rest. We have gained about \$1200, as half of which is mine, \$600, and the balance of \$400 I have drawn as my rightful share for promoting the business. I am enclosing the rest of the bills for you to collect, and also the amount of work which we have done this week. The blanks are on the wall. You can collect the rent from Mr. Schwartz. I also owe Mr. A. Cramer \$50 for trimming and he owes the price of making one coat. Hope you will pardon me, and wishing you success.*

*Yours truly, D. Eliseian*

\* \* \*

Peter's rug truck is in the repair shop, so he uses his telephone downstairs to call for a taxi and helps Daniel and the driver place the steamer into the car's back seat.

"Friend," Peter tells him. "I've got to hand it to you for taking action. When you've made up your mind, you act. We're going to miss you, but the ladies are going to love getting their pantry back!"

"Oh, {Father}," says Agnes. Then to Daniel, "You can come stay whenever you want some fresh Florida air!"

"Have a good trip, Mr. Egishé," Bedros says, up past his bedtime for the departure. "Have a good trip, Aunt Mary!"

"Oh, I'll be back, sweetie," Mary says to Bedros.

"So will I!" says Daniel.

The drive to Union Depot is short—only a half-mile away. A train is already pulling into the station when they arrive. It is his train. Hurriedly, they get the steamer trunk out and onto a cart, with the help of a porter and the driver. Mary runs alongside Daniel, with the porter pushing the cart to its proper carriage. It's 9:20. The whistle blows, and the "All aboard!" is announced. Daniel climbs the first step to his carriage, with Mary right behind him. She releases the handrail as the train begins moving.

"{I'm sorry I've done it this way}," he says. "But I'll write when I get to New York."

"I'll be there before summer!"

"And we'll *rendezvous del norte*," he says, in English, French, and Spanish.

"I'll follow you as soon as I can," says Mary, "... so the Armenians can gossip all they want!"—she announces in simple "American."

At this point, they are both merely voices, shrouded in vapor.

\* \* \*

On the warm walk back, under a waning-crescent moon, with a breeze sweeping across the river, and the train whistle blowing into the northern distance, Mary is nearly blank in her thoughts. She is not sure what has transpired and what will now come.

"It should be called '*Mary's* Isle of Golden Dreams'"—she hears Daniel declaring. He was so sweet—going along with her play-dancing the other night. And, like an always wound Victrola, Mary now commences her humming, re-living their dance. As she waltzes herself up the causeway, she can feel Daniel's hand on her back again, tenderly, respectfully, guiding her. Such a wonderful man. So smart and so fun and good ... and ....

The sounds from the train yard, and of the harbor on the other side, echo across the river, interrupting Mary's melody. Besides—now she's thinking more than she's humming.

Then, one more time, the sound of Daniel's train can be heard, now curving into the horizon.

Already, it is too far away.