SHORT STORY AMERICA

ONE OF THOSE IMPOSSIBLE AMERICANS

SUSAN GLASPELL

"N'avez-vous pas--" she was bravely demanding of the clerk when she saw that the bulky American who was standing there helplessly dangling two flaming red silk stockings which a copiously coiffured young woman assured him were *bien chic* was edging nearer her. She was never so conscious of the truly American quality of her French as when a countryman was at hand. The French themselves had an air of "How marvellously you speak!" but fellow Americans listened superciliously in an "I can do better than that myself" manner which quite untied the Gallic twist in one's tongue. And so, feeling her French was being compared, not with mere French itself, but with an arrogant new American brand thereof, she moved a little around the corner of the counter and began again in lower voice: "*Mais, n'avez*--"

"Say, Young Lady," a voice which adequately represented the figure broke in, "*you*, aren't French, are you?"

She looked up with what was designed for a haughty stare. But what is a haughty stare to do in the face of a broad grin? And because it was such a long time since a grin like that had been grinned at her it happened that the stare gave way to a dimple, and the dimple to a laughing: "Is it so bad as that?"

"Oh, not your French," he assured her. "You talk it just like the rest of them. In fact, I should say, if anything--a little more so. But do you know,"--confidentially--"I can just spot an American girl every time!"

"How?" she could not resist asking, and the modest black hose she was thinking of purchasing dangled against his gorgeous red ones in friendliest fashion.

"Well, Sir--I don't know. I don't think it can be the clothes,"--judicially surveying her.

"The clothes," murmured Virginia, "were bought in Paris."

"Well, you've got *me*. Maybe it's the way you wear 'em. Maybe it's 'cause you look as if you used to play tag with your brother. Something--anyhow--gives a fellow that 'By jove there's an American girl!' feeling when he sees you coming round the corner."

"But why--?"

"Lord--don't begin on *why*. You can say *why* to anything. Why don't the French talk English? Why didn't they lay Paris out at right angles? Now look here, Young Lady, for that matter--*why* can't you help me buy some presents for my wife? There'd be nothing wrong about it," he hastened to assure her, "because my wife's a mighty fine woman."

The very small American looked at the very large one. Now Virginia was a well brought up young woman. Her conversations with strange men had been confined to such things as, "Will you please tell me the nearest way to--?" but preposterously enough--she could not for the life of her have told why--frowning upon this huge American--fat was the literal word--who stood there with puckered-up face swinging the flaming hose would seem in the same shameful class with snubbing the little boy who confidently asked her what kind of ribbon to buy for his mother.

"Was it for your wife you were thinking of buying these red stockings?" she ventured.

"Sure. What do you think of 'em? Look as if they came from Paris all right, don't they?"

"Oh, they look as though they came from Paris, all right," Virginia repeated, a bit grimly. "But do you know"--this quite as to that little boy who might be buying the ribbon--"American women don't always care for all the things that look as if they came from Paris. Is your wife--does she care especially for red stockings?"

"Don't believe she ever had a pair in her life. That's why I thought it might please her."

Virginia looked down and away. There were times when dimples made things hard for one.

Then she said, with gentle gravity: "There are quite a number of women in America who don't care much for red stockings. It would seem too bad, wouldn't it, if after you got these clear home your wife should turn out to be one of those people? Now, I think these grey stockings are lovely. I'm sure any woman would love them. She could wear them with grey suede slippers and they would be so soft and pretty."

"Um--not very lively looking, are they? You see I want something to cheer her up. She--well she's not been very well lately and I thought something--oh something with a lot of *dash* in it, you know, would just fill the bill. But look here. We'll take both. Sure--that's the way out of it. If she don't like the red, she'll like the grey, and if she don't like the--You like the grey ones, don't you? Then here"--picking up two pairs of the handsomely embroidered grey stockings and handing them to the clerk--"One," holding up his thumb to denote one--"me,"--a vigorous pounding of the chest signifying me. "One"--holding up his forefinger and pointing to the girl--"mademoiselle."

"Oh no--no--no!" cried Virginia, her face instantly the colour of the condemned stockings. Then, standing straight: "Certainly *not*."

"No? Just as you say," he replied good humouredly. "Like to have you have 'em. Seems as if strangers in a strange land oughtn't to stand on ceremony."

The clerk was bending forward holding up the stockings alluringly. "*Pour mademoiselle, n'est-ce-pas*?"

"*Mais--non!*" pronounced Virginia, with emphasis.

There followed an untranslatable gesture. "How droll!" shoulder and outstretched hands were saying. "If the kind gentleman *wishes* to give mademoiselle the *joli bas*--!"

His face had puckered up again. Then suddenly it unpuckered. "Tell you what you might do," he solved it. "Just take 'em along and send them to your mother. Now your mother might be real glad to have 'em."

Virginia stared. And then an awful thing happened. What she was thinking about was the letter she could send with the stockings. "Mother dear," she would write, "as I stood at the counter buying myself some stockings to-day along came a nice man--a stranger to me, but very kind and jolly--and gave me--"

There it was that the awful thing happened. Her dimple was showing--and at thought of its showing she could not keep it from showing! And how could she explain why it was showing without its going on showing? And how--?

But at that moment her gaze fell upon the clerk, who had taken the dimple as signal to begin putting the stockings in a box. The Frenchwoman's eyebrows soon put that dimple in its proper place. "And so the *petite Americaine* was not too--oh, not *too*--" those French eyebrows were saying.

All in an instant Virginia was something quite different from a little girl with a dimple. "You are very kind," she was saying, and her mother herself could have done it no better, "but I am sure our little joke had gone quite far enough. I bid you good-morning". And with that she walked regally over to the glove counter, leaving red and grey and black hosiery to their own destinies.

"I loathe them when their eyebrows go up," she fumed. "Now *his* weren't going up--not even in his mind."

She could not keep from worrying about him. "They'll just 'do' him," she was sure. "And then laugh at him in the bargain. A man like that has no *business* to be let loose in a store all by himself."

And sure enough, a half hour later she came upon him up in the dress department. Three of them had gathered round to "do" him. They were making rapid headway, their smiling deference scantily concealing their amused contempt. The spectacle infuriated Virginia. "They just think they can *work* us!" she stormed. "They think we're *easy*. I suppose they think he's a *fool*. I just wish they could get him in a business deal! I just wish--!"

"I can assure you, sir," the English-speaking manager of the department was saying, "that this garment is a wonderful value. We are able to let you have it at so absurdly low a figure because--"

Virginia did not catch why it was they were able to let him have it at so absurdly low a figure, but she did see him wipe his brow and look helplessly around. "Poor *thing*," she murmured, almost tenderly, "he doesn't know what to do. He just *does* need somebody to look after him." She stood there looking at his back. He had a back a good deal like the back of her chum's father at home. Indeed there were various things about him suggested "home." Did one want one's own jeered at? One might see crudities one's self, but was one going to have supercilious outsiders coughing those sham coughs behind their hypocritical hands?

"For seven hundred francs," she heard the suave voice saying.

Seven hundred francs! Virginia's national pride, or, more accurately, her national rage, was lashed into action. It was with very red cheeks that the small American stepped stormily to the rescue of her countryman.

"Seven hundred francs for *that*?" she jeered, right in the face of the enraged manager and stiffening clerks. "Seven hundred francs--indeed! Last year's model--a hideous colour, and "--picking it up, running it through her fingers and tossing it contemptuously aside--"abominable stuff!"

"Gee, but I'm grateful to you!" he breathed, again wiping his brow. "You know, I was a little leery of it myself."

The manager, quivering with rage and glaring uglily, stepped up to Virginia. "May I ask--?"

But the fat man stepped in between--he was well qualified for that position. "Cut it out, partner. The young lady's a friend of *mine*--see? She's looking out for me--not you. I don't want your stuff, anyway." And taking Virginia serenely by the arm he walked away.

"This was no place to buy dresses," said she crossly.

"Well, I wish I knew where the places *were* to buy things," he replied, humbly, forlornly.

"Well, what do you want to buy?" demanded she, still crossly.

"Why, I want to buy some nice things for my wife. Something the real thing from Paris, you know. I came over from London on purpose. But Lord,"--again wiping his brow--"a fellow doesn't know where to *go*."

"Oh well," sighed Virginia, long-sufferingly, "I see I'll just have to take you. There doesn't seem any way out of it. It's evident you can't go *alone*. *Seven hundred francs*!"

"I suppose it was too much," he conceded meekly. "I tell you I *will* be grateful if you'll just stay by me a little while. I never felt so up against it in all my life."

"Now, a very nice thing to take one's wife from Paris," began Virginia didactically, when they reached the sidewalk, "is lace."

"L--ace? Um! Y--es, I suppose lace is all right. Still it never struck me there was anything so very *lively* looking about lace."

"'Lively looking' is not the final word in wearing apparel," pronounced Virginia in teacher-to-pupil manner. "Lace is always in good taste, never goes out of style, and all women care for it. I will take you to one of the lace shops."

"Very well," acquiesced he, truly chastened. "Here, let's get in this cab."

Virginia rode across the Seine looking like one pondering the destinies of nations. Her companion turned several times to address her, but it would have been as easy for a soldier to slap a general on the back. Finally she turned to him.

"Now when we get there," she instructed, "don't seem at all interested in things. Act--oh, bored, you know, and seeming to want to get me away. And when they tell the price, no matter what they say, just--well sort of groan and hold your head and act as though you are absolutely overcome at the thought of such an outrage."

"U--m. You have to do that here to get--lace?"

"You have to do that here to get *anything*---at the price you should get it. You, and people who go shopping the way you do, bring discredit upon the entire American nation."

"That so? Sorry. Never meant to do that. All right, Young Lady, I'll do the best I can. Never did act that way, but suppose I can, if the rest of them do."

"Groan and hold my head," she heard him murmuring as they entered the shop.

He proved an apt pupil. It may indeed be set down that his aptitude was their undoing. They had no sooner entered the shop than he pulled out his watch and uttered an exclamation of horror at the sight of the time. Virginia could scarcely look at the lace, so insistently did he keep waving the watch before her. His contempt for everything shown was open and emphatic. It was also articulate. Virginia grew nervous, seeing the real red showing through in the Frenchwoman's cheeks. And when the price was at last named--a price which made Virginia jubilant--there burst upon her outraged ears something between a jeer and a howl of rage, the whole of it terrifyingly done in the form of a groan; she looked at her companion to see him holding up his hands and wobbling his head as though it had been suddenly loosened from his spine, cast one look at the Frenchwoman--then fled, followed by her groaning compatriot.

"I didn't mean you to act like *that*!" she stormed.

"Why, I did just what you told me to! Seemed to me I was following directions to the letter. Don't think for a minute *I'm* going to bring discredit on the American nation! Not a bad scheme--taking out my watch that way, was it?"

"Oh, beautiful *scheme*. I presume you notice, however, that we have no lace."

They walked half a block in silence. "Now I'll take you to another shop," she then volunteered, in a turning the other cheek fashion, "and here please do nothing at all. Please just--sit."

"Sort of as if I was feeble-minded, eh?"

"Oh, don't *try* to look feeble-minded," she begged, alarmed at seeming to suggest any more parts; "just sit there--as if you were thinking of something very far away."

"Say, Young Lady, look here; this is very nice, being put on to the tricks of the trade, but the money end of it isn't cutting much ice, and isn't there any way you can just *buy* things--the way you do in Cincinnati? Can't you get their stuff without making a comic opera out of it?"

"No, you can't," spoke relentless Virginia; "not unless you want them to laugh and say 'Aren't Americans fools?' the minute the door is shut."

"Fools--eh? I'll show them a thing or two!"

"Oh, please show them nothing here! Please just--sit."

While employing her wiles to get for three hundred and fifty francs a yoke and scarf aggregating four hundred, she chanced to look at her American friend. Then she walked rapidly to the rear of the shop, buried her face in her handkerchief, and seemed making heroic efforts to sneeze. Once more he was following directions to the letter. Chin resting on hands, hands resting on stick, the huge American had taken on the beatific expression of a seventeen-year-old girl thinking of something "very far away." Virginia was long in mastering the sneeze.

On the sidewalk she presented him with the package of lace and also with what she regarded the proper thing in the way of farewell speech. She supposed it *was* hard for a man to go shopping alone; she could see how hard it would be for her own father; indeed it was seeing how difficult it would be for her father had impelled her to go with him, a stranger. She trusted his wife would like the lace; she thought it very nice, and a bargain. She was glad to have been of service to a fellow countryman who seemed in so difficult a position.

But he did not look as impressed as one to whom a farewell speech was being made should look. In fact, he did not seem to be hearing it. Once more, and in earnest this time, he appeared to be thinking of something very far away. Then all at once he came back, and it was in anything but a far-away voice he began, briskly: "Now look here, Young Lady, I don't doubt but this lace is great stuff. You say so, and I haven't seen man, woman or child on this side of the Atlantic knows as much as you do. I'm mighty grateful for the lace--don't you forget that, but just the same--well, now I'll tell you. I have a very special reason for wanting something a little livelier than lace. Something that seems to have Paris written on it in red letters--see? Now, where do you get the kind of hats you see some folks wearing, and where do you get the dresses--well, it's hard to describe 'em, but the kind they have in pictures marked 'Breezes from Paris'? You see--*S-ay!--what* do you think of *that?*"

"That" was in a window across the street. It was an opera cloak. He walked toward it, Virginia following. "Now *there*," he turned to her, his large round face all aglow, "is what I want."

It was yellow; it was long; it was billowy; it was insistently and recklessly regal.

"That's the ticket!" he gloated.

"Of course," began Virginia, "I don't know anything about it. I am in a very strange position, not knowing what your wife likes or--or has. This is the kind of thing everything has to go *with* or one wouldn't--one couldn't--"

"Sure! Good idea. We'll just get everything to go with it."

"It's the sort of thing one doesn't see worn much outside of Paris--or New York. If one is--now my mother wouldn't care for that coat at all." Virginia took no little pride in that tactful finish.

"Can't sidetrack me!" he beamed. "I *want* it. Very thing I'm after, Young Lady."

"Well, of course you will have no difficulty in buying the coat without me," said she, as a dignified version of "I wash my hands of you." "You can do here as you said you wished to do, simply go in and pay what they ask. There would be no use trying to get it cheap. They would know that anyone who wanted it would"--she wanted to say "have more money than they knew what to do with," but contented herself with, "be able to pay for it."

But when she had finished she looked at him; at first she thought she wanted to laugh, and then it seemed that wasn't what she wanted to do after all. It was like saying to a small boy who was one beam over finding a tin horn: "Oh well, take the horn if you want to, but you can't haul your little red waggon while you're blowing the horn." There seemed something peculiarly inhuman about taking the waggon just when he had found the horn. Now if the waggon were broken, then to take away the horn would leave the luxury of grief. But let not shadows fall upon joyful moments.

With the full ardour of her femininity she entered into the purchasing of the yellow opera cloak. They paid for that decorative garment the sum of two thousand five hundred francs. It seemed it was embroidered, and the lining was--anyway, they paid it.

And they took it with them. He was going to "take no chances on losing it." He was leaving Paris that night and held that during his stay he had been none too impressed with either Parisian speed or Parisian veracity.

Then they bought some "Breezes from Paris," a dress that would "go with" the coat. It was violet velvet, and contributed to the sense of doing one's uttermost; and hats--"the kind you see some folks wearing." One was the rainbow done into flowers, and the other the kind of black hat to outdo any rainbow. "If you could just give me some idea what type your wife is," Virginia was saying, from beneath the willow plumes. "Now you see this hat quite overpowers me. Do you think it will overpower her?"

"Guess not. Anyway, if it don't look right on her head she may enjoy having it around to look at."

Virginia stared out at him. The *oddest* man! As if a hat were any good at all if it didn't look right on one's head!

Upon investigation--though yielding to his taste she was still vigilant as to his interests--Virginia discovered a flaw in one of the plumes. The sylph in the trailing gown held volubly that it did not *fait rien*; the man with the open purse said he couldn't see that it figured much, but the small American held firm. That must be replaced by a perfect plume or they would not take the hat. And when she saw who was in command the sylph as volubly acquiesced that *naturellement* it must be *tout a fait* perfect. She would send out and get one that would be oh! so, so, *so* perfect. It would take half an hour.

"Tell you what we'll do," Virginia's friend proposed, opera cloak tight under one arm, velvet gown as tight under the other, "I'm tired--hungry--thirsty; feel like a ham sandwich--and something. I'm playing you out, too. Let's go out and get a bite and come back for the so, so, *so* perfect hat."

She hesitated. But he had the door open, and if he stood holding it that way much longer he was bound to drop the violet velvet gown. She did not want him to drop the velvet gown and furthermore, she *would* like a cup of tea. There came into her mind a fortifying thought about the relative deaths of sheep and lambs. If to be killed for the sheep were indeed no worse than being killed for the lamb, and if a cup of tea went with the sheep and nothing at all with the lamb--?

So she agreed. "There's a nice little tea-shop right round the corner. We girls often go there."

"Tea? Like tea? All right, then"--and he started manfully on.

But as she entered the tea-shop she was filled with keen sense of the desirableness of being slain for the lesser animal. For, cosily installed in their favourite corner, were "the girls."

Virginia had explained to these friends some three hours before that she could not go with them that afternoon as she must attend a musicale some friends of her mother's were giving. Being friends of her mother's, she expatiated, she would have to go.

Recollecting this, also for the first time remembering the musicale, she bowed with the *hauteur* of self-consciousness.

Right there her friend contributed to the tragedy of a sheep's death by dropping the yellow opera cloak. While he was stooping to pick it up the violet velvet gown slid backward and Virginia had to steady it until he could regain position. The staring in the corner gave way to tittering--and no dying sheep had ever held its head more haughtily.

The death of this particular sheep proved long and painful. The legs of Virginia's friend and the legs of the tea-table did not seem well adapted to each other. He towered like a human mountain over the dainty thing, twisting now this way and now that. It seemed Providence--or at least so much of it as was represented by the management of that shop--had never meant fat people to drink tea. The table was rendered further out of proportion by having a large box piled on either side of it.

Expansively, and not softly, he discoursed of these things. What did they think a fellow was to do with his *knees*? Didn't they sell tea enough to afford any decent chairs? Did all these women pretend to really *like* tea?

Virginia's sense of humour rallied somewhat as she viewed him eating the sandwiches. Once she had called them doll-baby sandwiches; now that seemed literal: tea-cups, *petit gateau*, the whole service gave the fancy of his sitting down to a tea-party given by a little girl for her dollies.

But after a time he fell silent, looking around the room. And when he broke that pause his voice was different.

"These women here, all dressed so fine, nothing to do but sit around and eat this folderol, *they* have it easy--don't they?"

The bitterness in it, and a faint note of wistfulness, puzzled her. Certainly *he* had money.

"And the husbands of these women," he went on; "lots of 'em, I suppose, didn't always have so much. Maybe some of these women helped out in the early days when things weren't so easy. Wonder if the men ever think how lucky they are to be able to get it back at 'em?"

She grew more bewildered. Wasn't he "getting it back?" The money he had been spending that day!

"Young Lady," he said abruptly, "you must think I'm a queer one."

She murmured feeble protest.

"Yes, you must. Must wonder what I want with all this stuff, don't you?"

"Why, it's for your wife, isn't it?" she asked, startled.

"Oh yes, but you must wonder. You're a shrewd one, Young Lady; judging the thing by me, you must wonder."

Virginia was glad she was not compelled to state her theory. Loud and common and impossible were terms which had presented themselves, terms which she had fought with kind and good-natured and generous. Their purchases she had decided were to be used, not for a knock, but as a crashing pound at the door of the society of his town. For her part, Virginia hoped the door would come down.

"And if you knew that probably this stuff would never be worn at all, that ten to one it would never do anything more than lie round on chairs--then you *would* think I was queer, wouldn't you?"

She was forced to admit that that would seem rather strange.

"Young Lady, I believe I'll tell you about it. Never do talk about it to hardly anybody, but I feel as if you and I were pretty well acquainted--we've been through so much together."

She smiled at him warmly; there was something so real about him when he talked that way.

But his look then frightened her. It seemed for an instant as though he would brush the tiny table aside and seize some invisible thing by the throat. Then he said, cutting off each word short: "Young Lady, what do you think of this? I'm worth more 'an a million dollars--and my wife gets up at five o'clock every morning to do washing and scrubbing."

"Oh, it's not that she *has* to," he answered her look, "but she *thinks* she has to. See? Once we were poor. For twenty years we were poor as dirt. Then she did have to do things like that. Then I struck it. Or rather, it struck me. Oil. Oil on a bit of land I had. I had just sense enough to make the most of it; one thing led to another--well, you're not interested in that end of it. But the fact is that now we're rich. Now she could have all the things that these women have--Lord A'mighty she could lay abed every day till noon if she wanted to! But--you see?--it *got* her--those hard, lonely, grinding years *took* her. She's"--he shrunk from the terrible word and faltered out--"her mind's not--"

There was a sobbing little flutter in Virginia's throat. In a dim way she was glad to see that the girls were going. She *could* not have them laughing at him--now.

"Well, you can about figure out how it makes me feel," he continued, and looking into his face now it was as though the spirit redeemed the flesh. "You're smart. You can see it without my callin' your attention to it. Last time I went to see her I had just made fifty thousand on a deal. And I found her down on her knees thinking she was scrubbing the floor!"

Unconsciously Virginia's hand went out, following the rush of sympathy and understanding. "But can't they--restrain her?" she murmured.

"Makes her worse. Says she's got it to do--frets her to think she's not getting it done."

"But isn't there some *way*?" she whispered. "Some way to make her *know*?"

He pointed to the large boxes. "That," he said simply, "is the meaning of those. It's been seven years--but I keep on trying."

She was silent, the tears too close for words. And she had thought it cheap ambition!--vulgar aspiration--silly show--vanity!

"Suppose you thought I was a queer one, talking about lively looking things. But you see now? Thought it might attract her attention, thought something real gorgeous like this might impress money on her. Though I don't know,"--he seemed to grow weary as he told it; "I got her a lot of diamonds, thinking they might interest her, and she thought she'd stolen 'em, and they had to take them away."

Still the girl did not speak. Her hand was shading her eyes.

"But there's nothing like trying. Nothing like keeping right on trying. And anyhow--a fellow likes to think he's taking his wife something from Paris."

They passed before her in their heartbreaking folly, their tragic uselessness, their lovable absurdity and stinging irony--those things they had bought that afternoon: an *opera cloak*--a *velvet dress--those hats--red silk stockings*.

The mockery of them wrung her heart. Right there in the tea-shop Virginia was softly crying.

"Oh, now that's too bad," he expostulated clumsily. "Why, look here, Young Lady, I didn't mean you to take it so hard."

When she had recovered herself he told her much of the story. And the thing which revealed him--glorified him--was less the grief he gave to it than the way he saw it. "It's the cursed unfairness of it," he concluded. "When you consider it's all because she did those things--when you think of her bein' bound to 'em for life just because she was *too faithful doin' 'em*--when you think that now--when I could give her everything these women have got!--she's got to go right on worrying about baking the bread and washing the dishes--did it for me when I was poor--and now with me rich she can't get *out* of it--and I *can't reach* her--oh, it's *rotten!* I tell you it's *rotten!* Sometimes I can just hear my money *laugh* at me! Sometimes I get to going round and round in a circle about it till it seems I'm going crazy myself."

"I think you are a--a noble man," choked Virginia.

That disconcerted him. "Oh Lord--don't think that. No, Young Lady, don't try to make any plaster saint out of *me*. My life goes on. I've got to eat, drink and be merry. I'm built that way. But just the same my heart on the inside's pretty sore, Young Lady. I want to tell you that the whole inside of my heart is _sore as a boil_!"

They were returning for the hats. Suddenly Virginia stopped, and it was a soft-eyed and gentle Virginia who turned to him after the pause. "There are lovely things to be bought in Paris for women who aren't well. Such soft, lovely things to wear in your room. Not but what I think these other things are all right. As you say, they may--interest her. But they aren't things she can use just now, and wouldn't you like her to have some of those soft lovely things she could actually wear? They

might help most of all. To wake in the morning and find herself in something so beautiful--"

"Where do you get 'em?" he demanded promptly.

And so they went to one of those shops which have, more than all the others, enshrined Paris in feminine hearts. And never was lingerie selected with more loving care than that which Virginia picked out that afternoon. A tear fell on one particularly lovely _robe de nuit_--so soothingly soft, so caressingly luxurious, it seemed that surely it might help bring release from the bondage of those crushing years.

As they were leaving they were given two packages. "Just the kimona thing you liked," he said, "and a trinket or two. Now that we're such good friends, you won't feel like you did this morning."

"And if I don't want them myself, I might send them to my mother," Virginia replied, a quiver in her laugh at her own little joke.

He had put her in her cab; he had tried to tell her how much he thanked her; they had said good-bye and the *cocher* had cracked his whip when he came running after her. "Why, Young Lady," he called out, "we don't know each other's *names*."

She laughed and gave hers. "Mine's William P. Johnson," he said. "Part French and part Italian. But now look here, Young Lady--or I mean, Miss Clayton. A fellow at the hotel was telling me something last night that made me *sick*. He said American girls sometimes got awfully up against it here. He said one actually starved last year. Now, I don't like that kind of business. Look here, Young Lady, I want you to promise that if you--you or any of your gang--get up against it you'll cable William P. Johnson, of Cincinnati, Ohio."

The twilight grey had stolen upon Paris. And there was a mist which the street lights only penetrated a little way--as sometimes one's knowledge of life may only

penetrate life a very little way. Her cab stopped by a blockade, she watched the burly back of William P. Johnson disappearing into the mist. The red box which held the yellow opera cloak she could see longer than all else.

"You never can tell," murmured Virginia. "It just goes to show that you never can tell."

And whatever it was you never could tell had brought to Virginia's girlish face the tender knowingness of the face of a woman.