

**DIANTHA**

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**JULIET WILBOR TOMPKINS**

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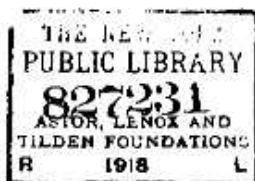
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## I

**T**HE curious thing was that, as babies, the twins had been so alike that even their mother had needed the pink and blue bows to distinguish them; and family tales lingered of a double feeding for Sylvia while Diantha went without, and of Diantha dosed for Sylvia's ailment. Indeed, later, Diantha would sometimes with grim naughtiness assert that they had been mixed and that she was really Sylvia, arousing a fine storm; for Sylvia did not want to be Diantha.

As tiny girls running about they were still perplexingly alike, fairy children of a delicate and haunting beauty that seemed to go down through their baby surfaces to their lovely little bones, and to promise brilliant futures. And then, out of sev-

eral half ailing years and a long, vague illness, the blight had fallen on Diantha. While Sylvia unfolded like a *Glory of Rosamund*, superfine and glowing, Diantha turned dingy and square, with dull locks and a round, dark face that stared back like a stolid Eskimo's from the nursery mirror. Her mother assured her that it made no difference how a little girl looked so long as she was good—this being the period when the thumping parental lie was still in force in the best homes. Diantha daily saw the whole world paying homage to Sylvia, strangers exclaiming over her, friends and relatives proud of her favor; and yet her faith in her mother was not wrecked—any more than the unmasking of Santa Claus had cost her her belief in her father. Children are less logical than educators. She merely decided within herself that there were things mothers did not understand and took pains to crawl under the guest-room sofa the next time she had to cry for her lost kingdom.

The twins had been born into affluence, which lasted until babyhood was well past. Then the

father died, and gradually the old house looked down upon the river with less of stateliness, as the paint faded and the veranda railings grew unsteady. The conservatories vanished, the stables were nailed up, the windows slowly shed their lace and satin and velvet; a trolley whirred past the gates; and, at last, tracts of lawn and shrubbery were lopped off on either side for shining Colonial or blue brick Elizabethan mansions, put up by no one knew whom. And yet the old place was not always sad. In the spring, with the syringa out, and the half acre or so of veranda hung with wistaria, and the lilac hedge a glory of plumes, it had a charm that made its trim, correct, expensive neighbors seem banal.

It was perhaps because the twins' birthday happened at this season that this one festival had never been allowed to lapse. The new neighbors were not asked, but carriages and motors came from up and down the river and over from the Sound, and far into the night the brave old polished floors reflected the feet of dancers dancing in tune. The